

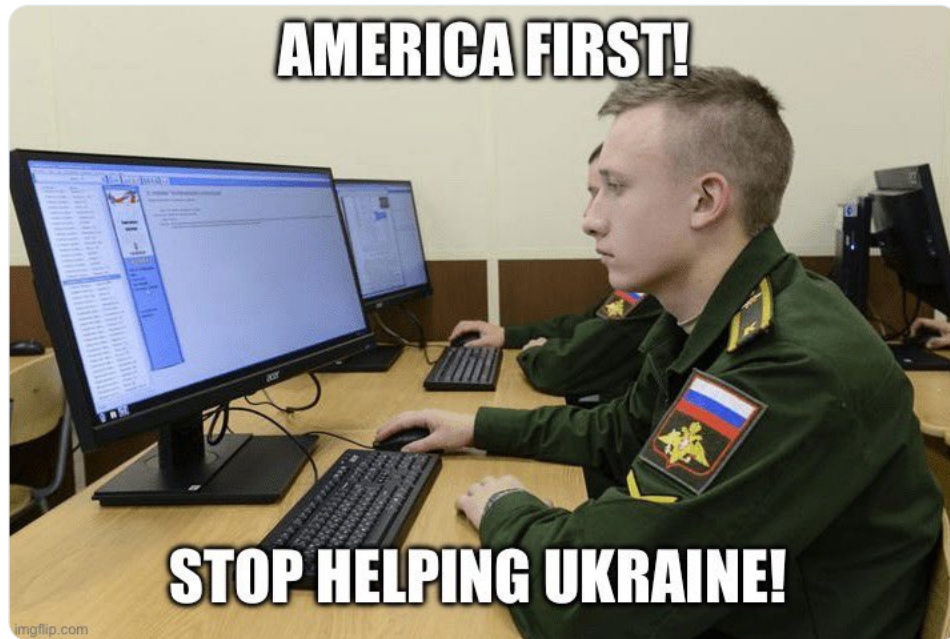


Pekka Kallioniemi @P_Kallioniemi

Feb 14, 2025 · 21 tweets · [P_Kallioniemi/status/1890380049200676914](#)

In today's Vatnik Soup, I'll introduce the Russian disinformation network "Doppelgänger". Doppelgänger is an influence and hybrid operation spreading Kremlin propaganda via AI-generated fake news websites and social media sites, especially X.

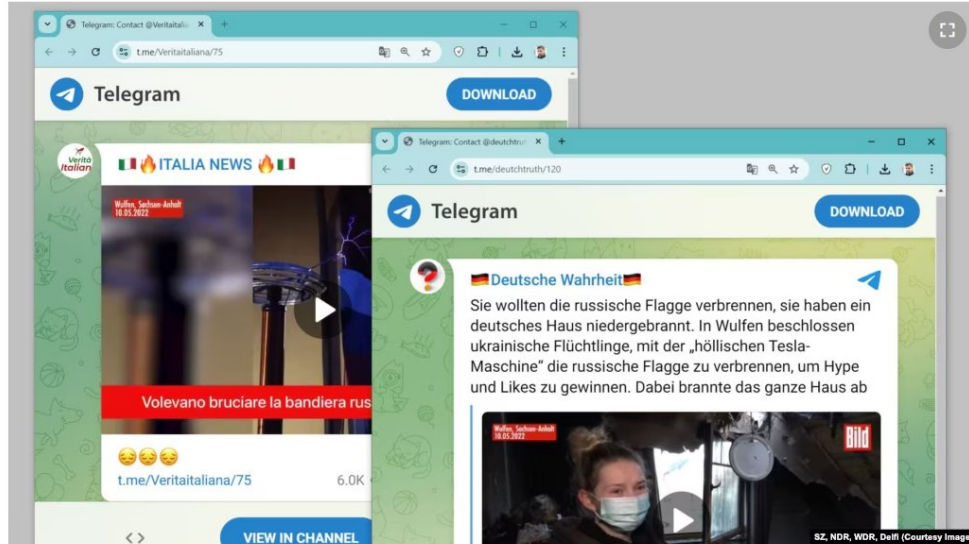
1/20



Doppelgänger is a massive influence operation that was initially exposed back in 2022. Their modus operandi is to create near-identical copies of large, legitimate Western news outlets to spread anti-Ukraine, anti-Western and anti-NATO narratives.

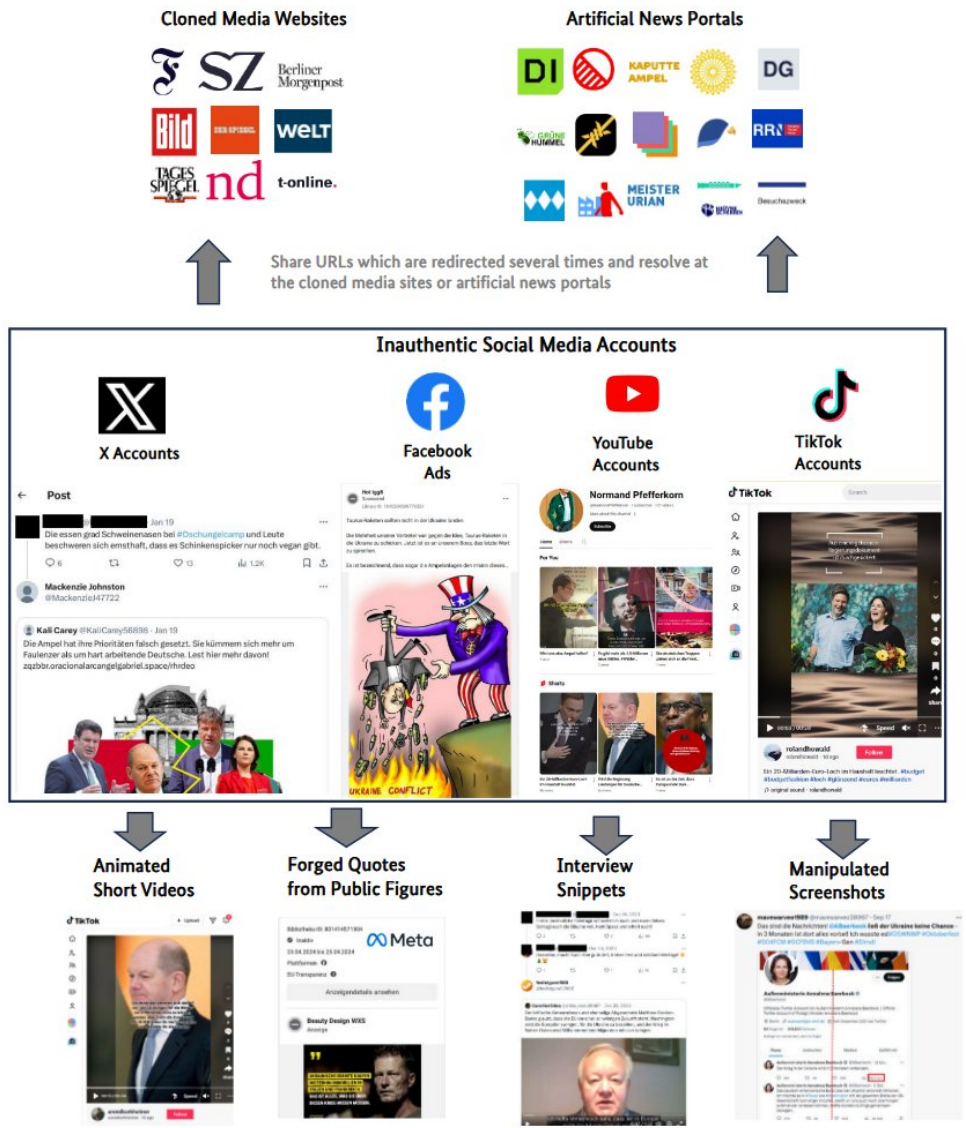
2/20

Leaked Records Detail Vast Russian Influence Campaign Targeting Ukraine, EU



A composite image of some of the fake social media posts generated as part of a disinformation campaign linked to the Moscow-based Social Design Agency.

Overview: Modus Operandi of the German-Language “Doppelgänger” Campaign



The operation, overseen by Putin’s top aide Sergei Kiriyenko (who’s reportedly communicated with Elon), uses Russian firms like Social Design Agency (SDA) to create fake news sites that mimic legitimate media like The Washington Post, The Guardian, Bild and Fox News.



Who is Sergei Kiriyenko, Russian hawk reportedly in touch with Elon Musk?

by Katie Marie Davies · October 29, 2024 8:48 PM · 9 min read

VSQUARE

#DISINFORMATION
LEAKED FILES FROM PUTIN'S TROLL FACTORY: HOW RUSSIA MANIPULATED EUROPEAN ELECTIONS

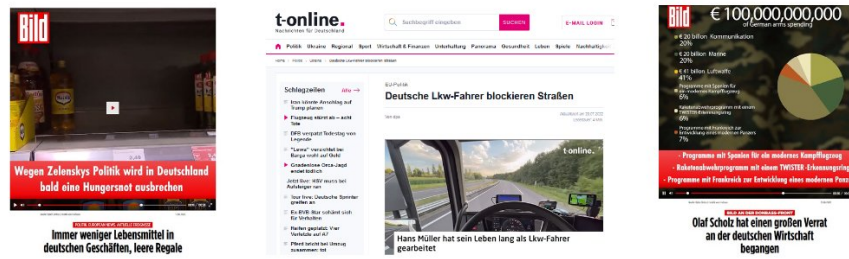
 Leaked internal documents from a Kremlin-controlled propaganda center reveal how a well-coordinated Russian campaign supported far-right parties in the European Parliament elections — and planted disinformation across social media platforms to undermine Ukraine.

Martin Laine (Delfi Estonia),
Anastasiia Morozova (VSquare,
FRONTSTORY.PL)

 [Listen to this article](#) voiced by AI

These fake sites publish pro-Russian propaganda disguised as real news, complete with stolen trademarks, journalist bylines, and nearly identical website designs. The sites use slightly altered web addresses, tricking readers into believing they're legitimate.

The fake content on the “Doppelgänger” sites predominantly consists of text articles accompanied by stock photos. Occasionally, the campaign has also imitated the websites’ media libraries with manipulated videos^{14,15,16}.

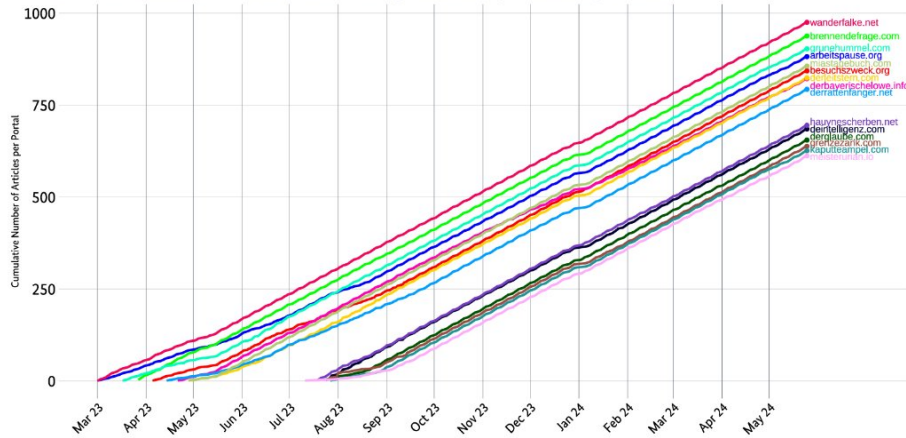


In addition to cloning news websites, the campaign also directly imitates established media brands on social media platforms. On X, inauthentic accounts have spread image tiles with purported short news stories designed to visually resemble the respective media brands. This technique also affects other media outlets (such as Hamburger Abendblatt and Berliner Zeitung), as well as (non-existent) German-language editions of English-language media like the Washington Post, Bloomberg and the BBC.



Cumulative Number of Articles per Artificial News Portal

12,970 articles between 1.3.23 and 25.5.24 (on average, one article is published every 50 minutes)



This is not the
real Bild
website,
which is on
www.bild.de

MEDIATHEK

STARTSEITE TV-STREAM DOKUS PODCASTS



Bild

**Olaf Scholz hat die deutsche
Wirtschaft verraten**

00:36 / 00:00

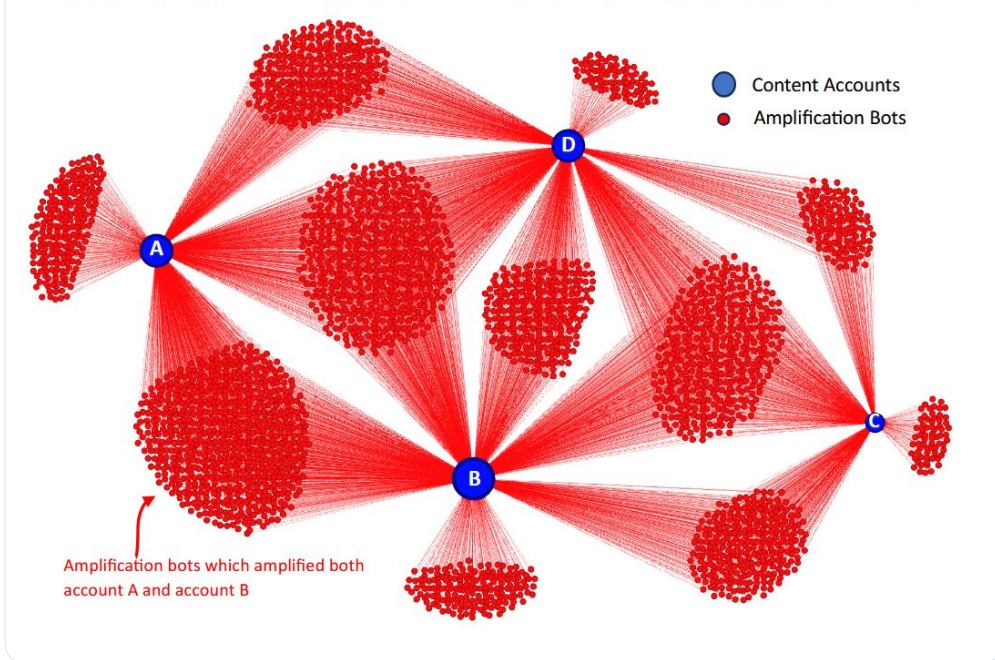
bild.de ← link preview can be misleading.

Olaf Scholz hat einen großen Verrat an der deutschen Wirtschaft beg...



After publishing fake news, Doppelgänger amplifies the content using thousands of social media accounts, forums, and even email campaigns. The goal is to make the disinformation seem organic and credible. Much of this activity has been automated with generative AI.

Exemplary Extract from the Amplification Network (4 Content Accounts + Amplification Bots)



Doppelgänger’s core narratives range from anti-Ukraine content to allegations of “elite governments” neglecting their own people, claims that the sanctions against Russia are ineffective, calls for peace negotiations and calls to end weapons deliveries to Ukraine.

3.1 Creating a Contrast between Support for Ukraine and the Domestic Economic Situation

One of the narratives most frequently spread by the campaign is an alleged direct connection between German support for Ukraine and the economic situation in Germany^{30,31}. In this context, the fake profiles often use first-person phrases like “It makes me angry”, “I can no longer afford food”, or “I fear for my job” to play the two issues off against each other.



3.2 Allegation that the Federal Government is Neglecting its Own Population

Another frequently spread narrative is the claim that the Federal Government is deliberately neglecting its own population to support Ukraine^{32,33}. There are thousands of instances of fake X accounts using identical phrases such as “While financial support for Ukraine is important, we should not forget that Germans also need support” or “The growing homelessness and mortality in Germany should not be ignored. Our Government should take better care of its own citizens”.



3.3 Alleged Ineffectiveness of or Harm Caused to Germany by Sanctions on Russia
 Another prominent narrative spread by thousands of articles^{34,35} and posts is the claim that the sanctions imposed on Russia are ineffective and harm Germany more than they help. The fake accounts use charged rhetoric with phrases like “It’s a wake-up call for the EU”, “This is truly concerning” or “It’s a sad reality”, and repeatedly call for the lifting of the sanctions.



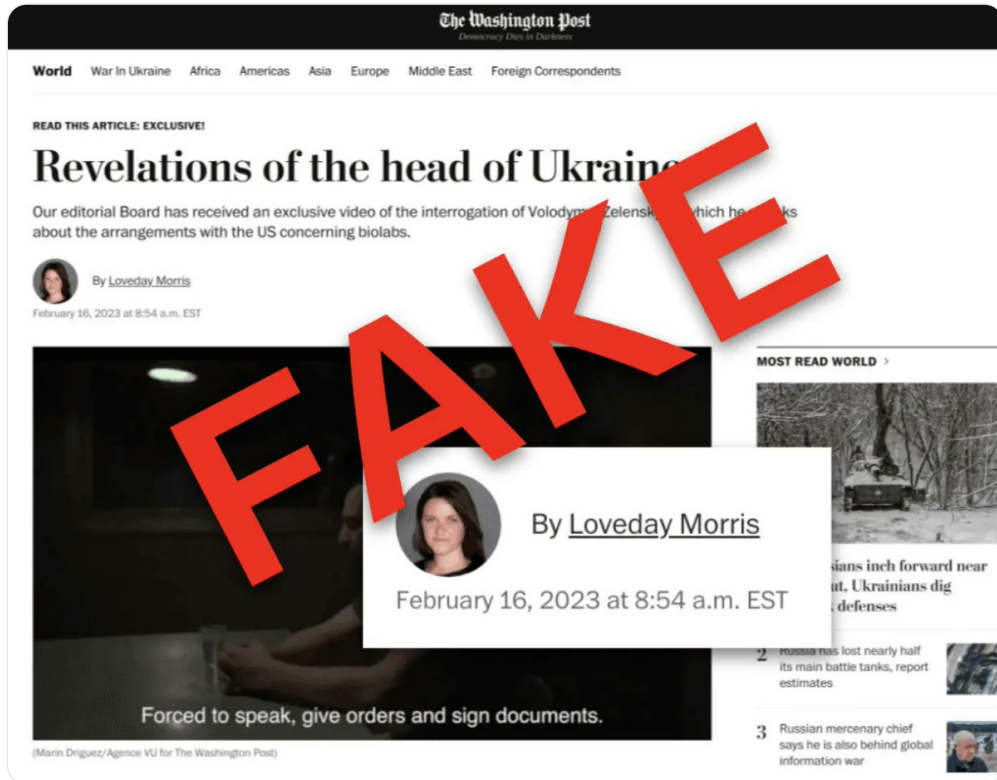
3.4 Rejection of Arms Deliveries and Calls for Negotiations
 The inauthentic social media accounts further amplify articles^{36,37} and posts that reject Western arms deliveries to Ukraine (“And we keep sending money and weapons there? It’s time for a new strategy!”) and call for negotiations. Alongside the demand for negotiations, the narratives emphasise that Russia is an important partner for Germany, so a negotiated solution is in Germany’s interest. For Ukraine, an article in the astrology portal “Der Leitstern” claims, an “unjust peace is better than a just war”³⁸.



One major narrative pushed by Doppelgänger is that Western aid to Ukraine is a waste, that it goes in the pockets of corrupt officials, or that it fuels global instability. This aligns perfectly with the Kremlin’s goal of weakening Western support for Ukraine and Zelenskyy.

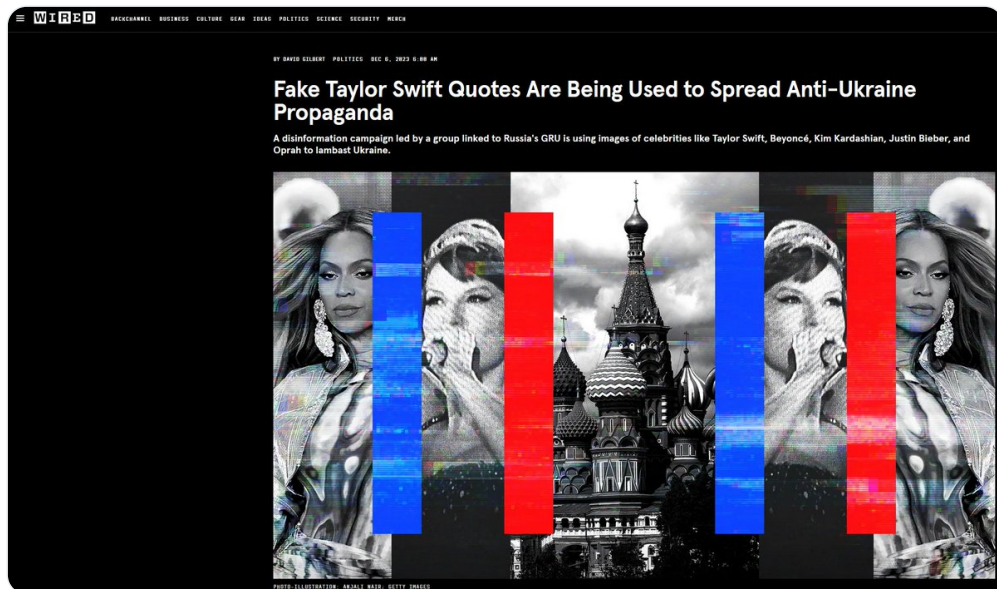
7/20





Doppelgänger's reach extends far beyond websites. The group uses fake social media profiles posing as Americans and other Western citizens to share links to their content, amplifying the impact. The campaign also buys targeted social media ads to push these narratives.

8/20



FBI investigators found records of strategy meetings where Kiriyenko (who, again, was allegedly in contact with Elon) and other Kremlin officials directed the operation, prioritizing anti-Ukraine, pro-Kremlin messaging and efforts to undermine NATO and Western

governments.

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Bloomberg


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Politics

The Evolution of Putin's Aide Accused of Gaming the US Election

- Sergei Kiriyenko served as Russia's youngest prime minister
- 'Doppelgänger' propaganda spreads anti-US, Ukraine narratives



Sergey Kiriyenko Photographer: Getty Images

By Bloomberg News
September 6, 2024 at 1:30 PM GMT+3
Updated on September 6, 2024 at 7:49 PM GMT+3

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In addition to the US, Doppelgänger also runs influence campaigns targeting Germany, France, Israel, and Mexico, with the intent not only of indirectly shaping US politics through diaspora communities, but also pushing pro-Kremlin policies within these countries.

10/20

4. Targeting the U.S. by Influencing Other Countries.

74. SDA records also revealed its planning of campaigns targeting foreign countries, including Mexico and Israel, with the intent that those efforts would influence associated ethnic or religious groups residing in the United States. The goal of these campaigns was twofold: (1) to influence each countries' populace; and (2) to influence the U.S. 2024 Presidential Election. A Presidential Administration meeting note from January 13, 2023, revealed that one of the objectives of the campaign, which had been assigned to GAMBASHIDZE, was to "draft a media plan for work through expat community media outlets (Armenia--France; Turkey--Germany, Israel--USA)" and to "compile a list of scenarios for stirring inter-ethnic, religious, racial, and political conflicts in 'focus countries'."

EU & US officials along with cybersecurity firms, like Meta's Threat Intelligence team, have been actively taking down Doppelgänger-linked websites, but new domains & accounts pop up constantly, keeping the operation alive. Today, the campaign is bigger than ever before.

For example, the “Doppelganger” network actively exploited gaps in domain registration systems by setting up web addresses that were almost identical to those of major news outlets (such as bild[.]pics instead of bild[.]de), and creating sophisticated websites that spoofed those outlets’ appearance. According to public reporting by [EU DisinfoLab](#), this network also restricted access to some of its domains, so that only people in the target country could view them. This is likely in an attempt to make the deceptive inauthentic networks harder to detect. Both Doppelganger and Cyber Front Z targeted many social media platforms, including Telegram, TikTok, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, VKontakte and Odnoklassniki.

In response to our takedowns, each of these unconnected networks tried aggressively to rebuild their operations across the internet – much more so than has been usual for covert influence operations from Russia. Our teams have continued to detect and enforce against thousands of attempts to create fake accounts. After our initial enforcement against the spoofed domains, we’ve blocked hundreds more of them from being shared on our platforms, and shared them publicly so that other platforms and researchers can study them and take action, as appropriate.

Q4 2022 ADVERSARIAL THREAT REPORT 8

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IMAGE: ATTORNEY GENERAL MERRICK GARLAND DISCUSSES THE RUSSIAN INFLUENCE OPERATION DURING A PRESS CONFERENCE. CREDIT: DOJ

Jonathan Greig
September 4th, 2024

News

Government

Elections



DOJ seizes dozens of domains used in Russian influence campaigns targeting swing states

The U.S. Justice Department announced on Wednesday it has taken action against a Russian government influence operation trying to spread disinformation and undermine confidence in the upcoming U.S. elections.

Attorney General Merrick Garland and FBI Director Christopher Wray said 32 internet domains were seized after investigators found that they were used by Russian companies as part of an operation known as “Doppelganger.”

Russia’s disinformation machine also adapts quickly. After being exposed, Doppelgänger shifted their focus to X, Telegram, WhatsApp, and fringe platforms where fact-checking is minimal or non-existent.

Today, their favorite and preferred platform is of course X.

12/20



Meta

“Adversarial Threat Report”

August 2023

“Launched soon after Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, *Doppelganger* created a huge number of fake websites that spoofed the appearance of mainstream European news outlets, and then posted links to those sites using fake accounts on many social media platforms, including *Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, X* (formerly *Twitter*), and even *LiveJournal*, among others.”

Another key tactic the group uses is “information laundering”. Russian state media outlets like RT and Sputnik amplify Doppelgänger’s stories, making them seem more credible. But they’re also spread by large, often conspiracy theory and MAGA related social media accounts.

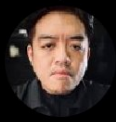
13/20

T H E _ B Y T E .

THAT'S A K FOR KREMLIN

**GULLIBLE ELON MUSK GOT FOOLED
INTO SHARING PUTIN-BACKED
PROPAGANDA MEME
AGAIN?**

GETTY / FUTURISM



Ian Miles Cheong  

@stillgray


Replying to [@youcantrybut](#)

Zelensky is a coke fiend who's literally backed by the biggest superpower in the world. Russia is very much the underdog in this case.

3:49 · 25 May 23 · **179** Views

1 Like



Aaron Maté  @aaronjmate · Jan 27


At a Senate hearing, top US diplomat Victoria Nuland celebrated the Nord Stream 2 pipeline bombing:

"Senator Cruz, like you, I am, and I think the administration is, very gratified to know that Nord Stream 2 is now, as you like to say, a hunk of metal at the bottom of the sea."



966 4,739 7,437 2.6M



Kim Dotcom  @KimDotcom

Nuland laid the foundation for the war in Ukraine and is responsible for every person who died in this war as a result of the coup d'etat she managed with the CIA and Nazi militias. She's a disgrace for the human race. History won't be kind to this specimen of pure evil.

8:47 AM · Jan 27, 2023 · **87.1K** Views

878 Retweets **58** Quotes **3,519** Likes **58** Bookmarks

Tommy Robinson  
@TRobinsonNewEra

ISIS are embedded and have been embedded in Ukraine for a long time.

And if the reports of some of these ISIS terrorists heading towards the Ukrainian border are true then this bad actor Zelensky has some explaining to do.

This whole thing stinks.



Last edited 1:56 PM · Mar 26, 2024 · **37.3K** Views

Doppelgänger is by no means a new operation – it was first reported on in Aug 2022, and since then, there have been over 20 reports and hundreds of articles about the group.

Yet, Doppelgänger perseveres, which just shows how difficult it is to combat this problem.

Infokrieg

Putins Troll-Armee greift Deutschland an

Wir sind t-online
Mehr als 150 Journalistinnen und Journalisten berichten rund um die Uhr für Sie über das Geschehen in Deutschland und der Welt.
[Zum journalistischen Leitbild von t-online.](#)

Von L. Wienand, S. Steurethaler und S. Loelke
Aktualisiert am 30.08.2022
Lesedauer: 8 Min.

Hier klicken zum Abspielen

t-online.

Fake-News-Kampagne: So sehen die nachgemachten Fake-Videos von t-online, "Spiegel" und "Bild" aus und so erkennen Sie sie. (Quelle: t-online)

Doppelgänger's operations often peak around major geopolitical events like NATO summits or Ukraine aid votes, when public opinion is most vulnerable to manipulation. Recently, they've been spreading disinformation around the German elections taking place on 23 Feb 2025.

15/20

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Research (Insikt)

Sombres Influences: Russian and Iranian Influence Networks Target French Elections

Posted: 28th June 2024 By: Insikt Group®

NEWS > POLITICS

Putin's bot army tries to swing German election

A Kremlin-backed campaign is trying to influence voters ahead of Feb. 23 poll, according to government report obtained by POLITICO.

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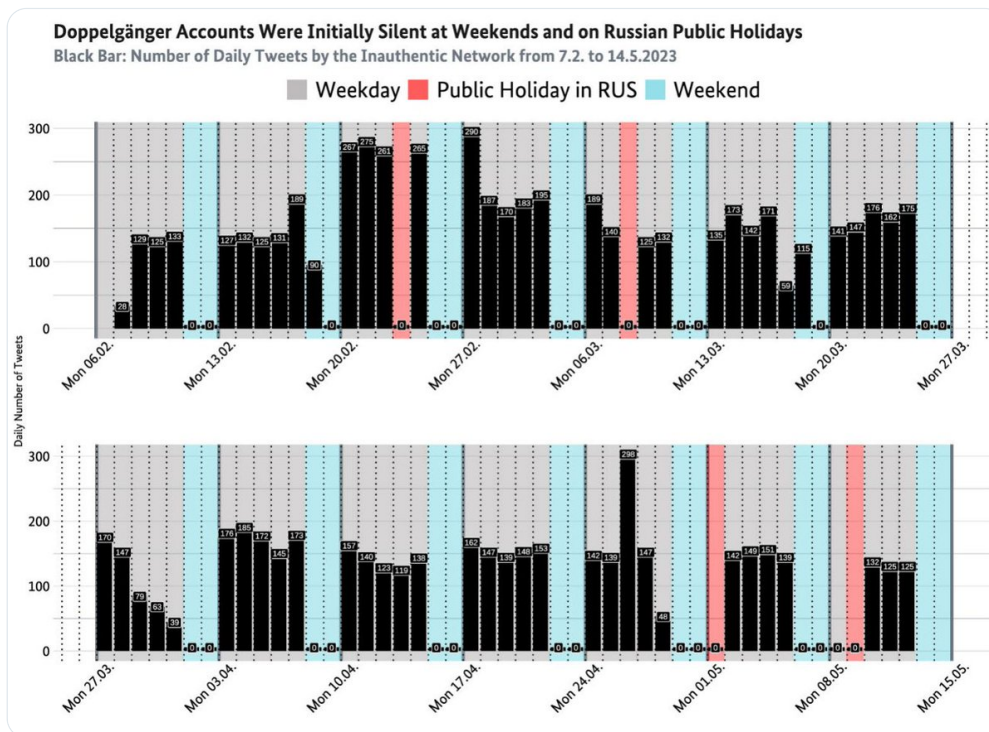


Russian bots have driven a dramatic surge of disinformation on the social media platform X days before Germany's election. |

Sean Gallup/Getty Images

FEBRUARY 6, 2025 9:23 PM CET

BY CHRIS LUNDAY



Russian bots are flooding X with disinformation on a daily basis ahead of the election. The strategy is the same as before: use of fake news sites and AI-generated content to undermine trust in Western institutions and sway public opinion in favor of Russia.

16/20

Ghost accounts

Doppelgänger-linked websites have previously cloned outlets like Der Spiegel, altering domain names just slightly to deceive unsuspecting readers.

The clearest sign of escalation is on Musk's X platform, formerly Twitter.

The report, reviewed by POLITICO, shows a sharp increase in posts from ghost accounts, with activity spiking beyond 3,000 posts in a single day in late January. For much of November and December, activity remained relatively low, rarely exceeding 50 posts a day. But in early January, coordinated disinformation posts began appearing at a much higher frequency.

This "overload" technique — flooding social media with rapid waves of posts to manufacture the illusion of viral traction — is characteristic of Russian disinformation campaigns.

German authorities have identified over 100 sites that were inactive for months but are now spreading Kremlin-aligned bullshit. These sites are carbon copies of real media, blending

generic and false content to mislead voters on issues like Ukraine and domestic politics.

17/20

German officials identified more than 100 pseudo-news websites quietly accumulating content for months, according to officials.

“These platforms are structured similarly, filled with generic, often AI-generated articles,” one official told POLITICO, on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter. “At a chosen moment, a fabricated story is inserted and then rapidly spread via social media and influencers. We must assume these sites were prepared to be activated in the run-up to the Bundestag election.”

The campaign focuses on X, as almost none of its moderation policies are enforced, and there is no effective bot detection in place. Previous exposés have shown that Russians prefer X due to its inability – or its leadership’s lack of motivation – to combat bots & trolls.

18/20

FORBES > INNOVATION > CONSUMER TECH

X's Latest Content Findings Reveal Troubling Trends In AI Moderation

Anisha Sircar Contributor

Anisha Sircar is a journalist covering tech, finance and society.

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Oct 18, 2024, 03:21am EDT

Updated Oct 18, 2024, 10:41am EDT



US online social media and social networking site 'X' (formerly known as Twitter) displayed on a ...
[+] GETTY IMAGES

 **Elon Musk**  
@elonmusk Subscribe  ...

Where is all this pro-Russia propaganda? We don't see it.

12:36 PM · Sep 8, 2023 · 1.2M Views

Perhaps due to this campaign, German courts recently ordered X to hand over all election-related data. This order will be the first real test of the effectiveness of the EU's Digital Services Act, which aims to shift more responsibility onto big tech giants.

NEWS > POLITICS

German court orders X to hand over election data in legal blow to Musk's platform

Researchers win a legal battle against the platform formerly known as Twitter, securing crucial access to social media data to probe potential election interference.

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The case adds to mounting tensions between European regulators and Musk's social media platform over its rolling back of content moderation and refusal to accede to data access demands. | Kevin Lamarque/Pool via Getty Images

FEBRUARY 7, 2025 6:08 PM CET
BY CHRIS LUNDAY AND ELIZA GKRTSI

To conclude: Doppelgänger isn't the only Russian disinformation operation, but it's one of the most dangerous due to its scale and sophistication. Their goal is simple: stop any support for Ukraine, erode trust in Western institutions and polarize societies.

NEWS

Kremlin-run bot network Doppelgänger spreads AI-generated Little Big-style video calling for sanctions against Russia to be lifted


The Insider
4 February 2025 20:54



You can now pre-order the 2nd edition of “Vatnik Soup — The Ultimate Guide to Russian Disinformation”! This updated version, featuring pre-order extras, will be released on the 15th of February 2025.

Pre-order your copy here:

**THE ULTIMATE GUIDE
TO RUSSIAN DISINFORMATION**



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<https://www.kleart.eu/webshop/p/vatnik-soup>

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