



Justinian Emperor Building 3, 3rd floor, No. 8
10000 Pristina
Republic of Kosovo
Tel: +383 (0) 48 345 545
www.octopusinstitute.org
www.octopusinstitute.com
Email: info@octopusinstitute.org

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DoppelGanger campaign: How Russia creates fake pages of media or officials and manipulates people

*Author: Iryna Synelnyk –Volunteer Cooperation**

Institute for Studying Hybrid Warfare “Octopus” has prepared a summary of the ongoing Russian disinformation campaign DoppelGanger, which is shared in the USA and European countries. We do not know of any Balkan cases of this campaign, but do not rule out such possibility as given the close cooperation between Russia and Serbia.

This report includes a review about the campaign and its dangers, some examples from Ukraine and other countries.

Ongoing disinformation campaign

DoppelGanger, also known as **Recent Reliable News (RRN)**, is a Russian disinformation campaign established in 2022. The primary goal of DoppelGänger is to diminish the western support for Ukraine after the Russian full-scale invasion. The second goal for the propaganda articles is to be quoted and picked up by Russian



media in order to reach the Russian population through the alternative reality that Russian power is trying to maintain about the war in Ukraine.

By the way, it targets audiences in France, Germany, Ukraine, and the United States, but also in the United Kingdom, Lithuania, Switzerland, Slovakia, Israel and Italy. In 2023, [the EU DisinfoLab](#) team reported discovering an advertising network of at least 242,000 fake Facebook pages. The ads propagated by the network across the European Union promote both Russian propaganda and consumer scams, suggesting that the advertising network operates for pay.

Famous media and officials websites is targeting by DoppelGanger

Campaign is based on a network of news websites to spread disinformation articles. Articles are published on various types of websites, and then shared and amplified by inauthentic social media accounts to reach as wide an audience as possible.

Doppelganger relies on fake websites that mimic the appearance of existing news sources, such as [Der Spiegel](#), [Le Parisien](#), [Fox News](#) and [The Washington Post](#).

In June 2023, French authorities announced they had uncovered a Doppelganger campaign to target several French daily newspapers such as [Le Figaro](#), [Le Monde](#) and [20 minutes](#), as well as the [Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#). The colors, fonts, design and visuals of these fake sites are the same as original. They were professionally produced but information repeats the Russian narratives.

In 2024, [new research](#) by not-for-profit research group [AI Forensics](#) showed the operation is not only active but growing, reaching five to 10 times more people than previously thought.



Ukrainians cases

Ukrainian media lawyer [Igor Rozkladai](#) noted that Internet technology is a popular tool in Russia's propaganda that a copy of popular websites or the section that is supposed to be simulated is falsified. If you go to the site, all the links are real(!) Even if you go to the links within the page, you can go to the original site and the author's page. The only thing that makes it obvious that it is fake is the extension of the domain name. For instance, [www.unian.org](#) instead of [www.unian.ua](#).

The main purpose of this cloning is to discredit the Ukrainian media and the journalist by luring people to a false publication. Because these clones have been shared on Facebook as an advertisement. Not only UNIAN had a fake site, but also other Ukrainian media such as the Ukrainian Pravda, UNN, RBK - Ukraine, Obozrevatel etc. The articles were written by someone fluent in Ukrainian, so it isn't a Google translation. In the early days of the war, Russian propaganda materials were translated by Google's translation tools, and they contained many errors and ambiguities. Now the use of artificial intelligence by creators of faking pages isn't excluded.

In general cases, the fake sites were focused on problems in the Ukrainian army and the negotiations with Russia. There were also reports about the black-market trade in Ukraine children's organs, corruption in Ukraine and the cessation of arms supplies by Western allies. These are very sensitive issues that affect not only Ukrainians but Europeans as well.



The narratives of the campaign are all aligned with Russian propaganda. Despite the efforts of fact-checkers in different countries the Doppelgänger operators remained unidentified for a long time. But according to [the Sekoia SOC Platform](#), this disinformation campaign is attributed to the Structura National Technologies (Structura) and the Social Design Agency (SDA), which are two Russian entities.

Conclusions:

Russian propaganda works well and they do not hesitate to use any methods or tools. While simple lies are fine for local audiences, for Ukrainians and Europeans they are keen on more sophisticated methods of manipulation. Bright example of these methods is the disinformation campaign DoppelGänger. This type of operation consists of intentionally spreading false or inaccurate information for malicious purposes.

It includes a variety of articles and videos in English, German, French, Hebrew, and Ukrainian to undermine support for Ukraine's government. The promoted narratives aim firstly at **sowing doubts among Western public opinion** about helping Kyiv and sending military and financial support regarding the impact on their own living conditions. Secondly, the narratives try to **erode confidence in institutions**, amplifying criticism of the leaders/institutions/governments' decisions. Finally, the campaign plays on **political, societal, religious divisions** to increase its impact and weaken solidarity and support among Western countries.

In 2024, an election year in which more than 54% of the world's population will be called to the polls, the pro-Russian influence campaign DoppelGänger has



been given special attention by Western democracies. So that not only journalists, but everyone needs to pay attention to details and research primary sources.

While the DoppelGanger is going on, people and media in Kosovo should realize the danger of being involved in the disinformation campaign. Because it is possible that at one point of time that campaign would influence Balkan countries. First of all, media literacy and critical thinking are effective tools of struggle against Russian and Serbian propaganda.



**Iryna Synelnyk is a seasoned freelance reporter based in Chernihiv, Ukraine, with extensive experience in journalism and public relations. She has been contributing to UNIAN, a prominent news agency in Kiev, since 2005, focusing on news and feature articles. In 2022, she took on the role of Regional Manager for a UNICEF project, where she facilitated cooperation with*

local governments and hospitals in Ukraine.

Iryna holds a PhD in History from the Institute of History of Ukraine and a Master of Public Administration from the National Academy of Management at the President of Ukraine. Her educational background is complemented by various professional internships in countries like Estonia, London, and Poland, where she honed her skills in digital journalism and public politics. In addition to her journalistic endeavors, Iryna is actively involved in public initiatives, including a program for the professional safety of Ukrainian journalists in Kosovo. She is also a published novelist, with works featured in local literary magazines. Fluent in English and Ukrainian, Iryna continues to contribute to various media platforms, including "Чернігівські відомості" and the Human Rights Information Centre.