

Russian Misinformation Seeks to Confound, Not Convince | Scientific American

By David Robert Grimes

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As war envelops Ukraine, Russian sources have strived to create a miasma of disinformation about the invasion. Among ample efforts to distort reality, the Russian Ministry of Defense asserted recently that U.S.-backed labs in Ukraine have been developing bioweapons. Outlandish as this falsehood may be, Fox's Tucker Carlson gave it credence by arguing that the U.S. government's response was a "cover-up."

As the Russia-Ukraine war intensifies, so too will the flow of disinformation. This is an age-old strategy Russia has long history of employing, and a playbook that others, most notably anti-vaccine activists, have borrowed from liberally. Yet, rather than focusing effort on convincing people of a falsehood, the Russian strategy takes a tack reminiscent of a strategy long employed by the tobacco industry: to sow so much doubt about what is true that it sends people into decision paralysis. Faced with a cacophony of wild and conflicting claims, people do nothing, unsure of what is right.

Despite constituting only a small part of our media diet, disinformation campaigns, in our digital world, can be devastatingly effective. We are intrinsically biased towards information that is emotionally visceral.

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