

Combating the Russian State Propaganda Machine: Strategies of Information Resistance

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Abstract: This article provides a preliminary survey of key strategies of information resistance that emerged in 2013-14 with the aim of combating Russian propaganda and disinformation and meeting the demand for independent sources of information on events in Ukraine. It focuses in particular on volunteer initiatives that have emerged spontaneously from below with the aim of withstanding Russian information aggression. The article begins by sketching out the basic contours of the Russian-Ukrainian information war and surveying key features of the pro-Russian media discourse, before moving on to examine four main categories of grass-roots information resistance, namely: online initiatives aimed at combating disinformation; online initiatives aimed at providing reliable independent information; literary interventions; and carnivalesque responses such as the obscene anti-Putin chant that went “viral” in the summer of 2014.

Introduction

Ever since the current Russian-Ukrainian conflict began, analysts and commentators have struggled to find a language to define and describe it. The conflict has been variously labeled a “hybrid war”;¹

1 See for example Aleksandr Leonov, “Ukraina i gibridnaia ‘voina’: deistvovat’ na operezhnenie”, *Informatsionnoe soprotivlenie*, 8 August 2014, <http://sprotyv.info/ru/news/3276-ukraina-i-gibridnaya-voyna-deystvovat-na-operezhnenie>. All translations are by Mikhail Bonch-Osmolovskiy and the author of this paper; all Internet sources were last checked on 7 April 2015.