THE TERMINOLOGICAL CONUNDRUM REGARDING INFORMATION WEAPONISATION

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Abstract: *The phenomenon of information weaponisation has become a pressing challenge of our times, having multiple and pervasive effects with security implications, negatively impacting democratic processes such as elections, and even everyday life within the society. The multitude of terms to express the use of information as a weapon and the information disorder have resulted in a terminological conundrum. Studying the literature, inconsistencies unveiled regarding the definition and usage of key terms. This aspect may pose a problem for people studying the phenomenon, as well as for experts and decision makers, and last but not least the public opinion, since a common understanding and a consistent use of key notions are crucial with regard to acknowledging various types of information manipulation and being able to counter this scourge.*
The current paper has two main research objectives, namely to bring forward and illustrate the inconsistencies identified in the study of the literature regarding the definition and use of key concepts, as well as to provide some possible explanations for the challenges they pose. Thus, the study focuses on the systemic and punctual analysis of the literature, the theoretical and practical intersection related to terminology, and the terminological study problematisation.

Keywords: *information weaponisation; information disorder; disinformation; fake news; misinformation; information warfare.*

1. Preliminary aspects – key information-related concepts and security challenges[*]

Information has a complexity and dynamics of its own, having a dedicated field of study, i.e. *information science*. Information is designed, disseminated and consumed within the *information environment*, which comprises individuals, organisations, and systems that collect, process, disseminate, or act on information (CSRC n.d.). This term is used in the field of information technology, in security and defence, but also in communication papers. A more specific term, to a certain extent similar, is the *information ecosystem* (Wardle and Derakhshan 2018; UNESCO 2018; DOMINOES Project n.d.), comprising "all structures, entities, and agents related to the flow of semantic information relevant to a research domain, as well as the information itself" (Kuehn 2023). The information ecosystem, as any other system, can be characterised by disorder. In this context, communication specialists and professional journalists use the phrase *information disorder*[16] (Wardle and Derakhshan 2018; UNESCO 2018; Aïmeur 2023; Aspen n.d.; Bârgăoanu 2021). Information disorder can generate security challenges and even threats that can be multiplied in geometric progression, considering the existence of a multitude of online means of information – news websites and social media platforms (also called Online social networks – OSNs), providing almost instant dissemination of (dis)information.

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[16] A.N.: Some authors and journals also mention the term *disinformation disorder* (Taddeo, de-Frutos-Torres and Alvarado 2022; Durach, Bârgăoanu and Nastasiu 2020; EastAsiaForum n.d.).

Generally, information can be used as a weapon in two manners, from a qualitative and from a quantitative point of view. The *qualitative* manner refers to manipulating information by using propaganda, disinformation, malinformation and censorship. The *quantitative* manner of weaponising information may be referred to as *infodemic*. Information in huge amounts becomes difficult to digest and also difficult to track down when it comes to its (in)accuracy, thus, it is a manner of promoting disinformation. In these circumstances, distinguishing truth from falsehood has become a difficult task, moreover so when the context entails a high level of unpredictability and fear, which is a characteristic of the present, considering the recent COVID-19 pandemic, the ongoing conflicts and wars (e.g. Africa, Western Balkans, Ukraine, the Middle East), as well as the economic crisis. The mentioned phenomenon has led to a *dilution of truth* or *truth decay* (Kavanagh and Rich 2018) which, in turn, affects the credibility of the media, especially social media (Edelman 2024, 43; 53-54; Statista 2024) and, implicitly, of the public discourse. As it can be easily noticed, challenges are present in all the five sectors of security: economic, societal, military, political and environmental[17]. Moreover, some of these challenges are interconnected and they need a timely and special address. Out of them, (dis)information-related ones, mainly information weaponisation (CAPS, IRSEM 2018, 36; Espaliú-Berdud 2023), are distinguished as trans-sectoral, taking into account not only their intrinsic nature but also their correlation to the societal sector; this aspect has been highlighted throughout history, being differently expressed, according to cultural development.

Thus, the first recorded propaganda campaign dates as back as year 44 B.C. and was made by Octavian against Anthony (Posetti and Matthews 2018). The ancient famous Chinese military strategist and philosopher Sun Tzu showed that it was not a great skill "to win one hundred victories in one hundred battles", but "to subdue the enemy without fighting" (Oxford 2017, Tzu n.d.). More recently, the so-called Gerasimov doctrine (Gerasimov 2014, Military Review 2016) refers to a new type of war, going "way beyond the use of military hardware alone", in other words, "a shift towards the use of non-military means and non-traditional domains, such as youth groups, cyber-attacks, civil media and proxy forces" (Selhorst 2016). In this context, information warfare is considered to be "the starting point of every action now called the new type of warfare, or hybrid war, in which broad use will be made of the mass media" (Chekinov and Bogdanov 2015 apud Giles and Seaboyer 2019, 6). Even much more recently, especially since the 2016 US presidential election campaign, the term *fake news* has been added to the panoply, becoming widely popular nowadays. Therefore, we can see that civil and social media can be used for strategic and military purposes as well, by weaponising information. Moreover, being a cheap resource and having the quality of being rapidly disseminated worldwide, especially by means of the internet, information is efficiently used by state and non-state actors both during wars as well as in peacetime (Burutin 2008 apud Giles and Seaboyer 2019, 10; Jowett and O'Donnell 2014, 4) in order to obtain certain strategic advantages of political, military, economic or other nature. It is possible admitting that any communication is an attempt to influence the receiver/target audience, influence, persuasion, propaganda and manipulation being homogenous (Mucchielli 2016, 191).

Having mentioned the key concepts related to the theme and showing the reasons why they are connected to the security environment, we highlight the fact that the present paper has two main research objectives, namely to bring forward and illustrate the inconsistencies and challenges identified in the study of the literature regarding the definition and use of key concepts, as well as to provide some possible explanations for the exposed challenges they pose. Thus, the study focuses on the systemic and punctual analysis of the literature, the theoretical and practical intersection related to terminology, and the terminological study problematisation.

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[17] According to the Copenhagen School approach, belonging to the Constructivist theory of IR (Buzan, Wæver and Wilde 1998).

2. Inconsistencies regarding the definition and use of key concepts

Information disorder and the use of information as a weapon are described by a rich terminology, which is not standardised; thus, we are confronted with a terminological conundrum, marked by both the definition and the use of terms and concepts. We could thus argue that, somehow paradoxically, the disorder of information is reflected in an inconsistent use of some terms related to this phenomenon, which may generate confusion. That is why the rationale behind our study is that, in order to identify and thoroughly understand a particular phenomenon and its implications – in this case, information weaponisation – and also to be able to find means to counter and even to prevent it, one needs to clearly grasp and fully acknowledge the meaning of key-concepts, as well as the relationship between them.

In this context, our view on conceptual and terminology incongruences in the field of information weaponisation, regarding both definition and use, is shared by several scholars (Liew 2007; Aïmeur 2023; Buluc, et al. 2019, 88; Giles and Seaboyer 2019). For example, it is emphasised the "vagueness and confusion commonly associated" with the key terms *data, information* and *knowledge*, showing that it "seems to be a lack of a clear and complete picture of what they are and the relationships between them" (Liew 2007). In addition, when referring to NATO terminology related to strategic communications, it is acknowledged that «many concepts and terms […] are complex, fluid, and "messy" and have a long history of philosophical debate» as particular terms "cause confusion and misunderstanding" (NATO StratCom CoE 2019, 19). Also, in relation with NATO terminology to express "the strategic application of power in the information domain", some critics observed "a lack of consensus" when it comes to defining all the elements (Brangetto and Veenendaal 2016 apud Giles and Seaboyer 2019, 9).

Under such circumstances, in connection to the objectives of this paper, we observed that most, if not all of the studied literature provides a rather single-angled approach, either from a military perspective or from the lens of communication and journalism. Our opinion is that a proper approach to security studies would be the combination of the two perspectives in order to better understand the phenomenon of information weaponisation. In other words, to understand how influence activities operate within mass-media and social media (subjects of strategic and military interest being reflected within), and how they affect communication. Thus, both the definition and use of related terminology will be briefly analysed.

2.1. Inconsistencies regarding the definition of key concepts
The literature study has revealed that while most definitions are relevant, some of them bear one or more types of drawbacks, contributing to the mentioned conundrum, which are presented as follows.

Circular definitions, exposing one of the four situations:
- A term is defined by itself. E.g.: *information* is "an instance of an *information* type" (NIST 2008, A-4 apud CSRC n.d.).
- A term is defined by another form of the same word. E.g.: *communication* is the act or process of *communicating*, the fact of being *communicated* (Webster 2010); *manipulation*, defined as "the act or practice of *manipulating"* and/or "the state of being *manipulated"* (American Heritage 2016).
- A compound term is defined by one of the terms in its composition. E.g.: "*Information science* is the systematic and scholarly study of a concept called *information*" (Seadle and Havelka 2023).
- Terms are defined with each other. An example is the case of *information* and *communication*. *Information* is defined as "any *communication* or representation of knowledge…"

(NIST 2011 apud CSRC n.d.). On the other hand, *communication* is "the imparting or exchanging of *information* by speaking, writing, or using some other medium" (Oxford Dictionary apud NATO 2017, 1-1). Furthermore, *communications* are "the means of sending or receiving *information*, such as telephone lines or computers" (ibidem).

While this practice of defining terms with each other is useful for describing the relationships between them, in connection to definitions, it is a logical fallacy (Liew, 2007).

Incomplete definitions, omitting part of the meaning of a notion.

An illustration is provided by the term *misinformation*, which is defined by some dictionaries as "incorrect information" (Farlex n.d.); "the act of giving wrong information"; "wrong information" (Oxford U.P. 2024), without mentioning intentionality or purpose; thus, the definition is incomplete and presents an ambiguous character. Since there are many terms expressing different types of incorrect/wrong information, more details are needed in order to understand the full meaning of the concept to be able to distinguish it from others.

Different meanings conveyed to a concept, in other words, a concept that is interpreted and used in different ways.

This situation can be illustrated by concepts such as *fake news* and *infodemic*. For example, *fake news* is reported to having "started to mean different things to different people" (Nakov 2020, 2 apud Aïmeur 2023, 7). *Infodemic*, a clipped term, resulted from the combination of the words *information* and *epidemic* is a derived form of the word *infodemiology*. The term became widely used during the COVID-19 pandemic, following the World Health Organisation reference to it in 2020 (WHO 2020), being defined as "too much information including false or misleading information in digital and physical environments during a disease outbreak", causing "confusion and risk-taking behaviours that can harm health" (WHO n.d.). However, there is a current understanding of the term *infodemic* referring to a huge flow of both true and false information on a certain subject spreading rapidly (Dictionary.com 2024), just like a virus, within the society, triggering negative impact not only on the public opinion, but possibly affecting certain industries (Simon and Camargo 2021). Thus, one can see that the term is used as a metaphor, the word *epidemic* in the composition of the term referring to the rapid spread of information and not restrictively to a disease. In fact, the form *infodemic* is generally attributed to David Rothkopf, who used it in 2003, in a short article for *Washington Post* in relation to SARS outbreak. Rothkopf defined the term as "a few facts, mixed with fear, speculation and rumour, amplified and relayed swiftly worldwide by modern information technologies" that affect "national and international economies, politics and even security in ways that are utterly disproportionate with the root realities" (ibidem). As for the word *infodemiology*, according to the quoted study, the author generally recognised to have created it in 2002 is G. Eysenbach. He defined it as «the study of "the determinants and distribution of health information and misinformation"» (ibidem) and also, a few years later, as "attempts at digital disease detection" (ibidem). This example shows us how a word or phrase may come to have an unexpected evolution of its own, to an extent different from what it was intended to mean originally. To be noted, there is another term, to a degree similar to *infodemic*, although not as popular in use[18]: *disinfodemic*, simply defined as a "pandemic of disinformation that directly impacts lives and livelihoods around the world", in the context of COVID-19 (UNESCO n.d.). This term is also used as a metaphor, referring to a context more extended than the disease itself. E.g. "political disinfodemic" (Carley 2022).

Contradictory definitions in reference to an essential characteristic of the notion

In the case of *misinformation*, the meanings attributed to this concept are not merely different, but come into contradiction with one another regarding presence or lack of intentionality. First, there is the definition included above, stating that *misinformation* is simply

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[18] A.N.: Google returned about 873,000 occurrences of *infodemic* and 11,600 occurrences of *disinfodemic* (February 2024).

incorrect/ wrong information (Farlex n.d.; Oxford U.P. 2024). Secondly, according to Collins Cobuild Dictionary, *misinformation* is "wrong information which is given to someone, often *in a deliberate attempt* to make them believe something which is not true" (Collins 2024). And thirdly, a Report authored by specialists Wardle C. and Derakhshan H. for the Council of Europe argues that, in the case of *misinformation* "false information is shared, but *no harm is meant*" (Wardle and Derakhshan 2018, 5). In regard to the aspect of intentionality representing the core of the conflicting definitions, *UNESCO Handbook for Journalism Education and Training* states that *misinformation* "is generally used to refer to misleading information created or disseminated *without manipulative or malicious intent*" (UNESCO 2018, 7). As it can be seen, language dictionaries either provide a very general, incomplete definition or attribute intentionality to deceive to the notion, while specialists in communication and journalism specify that there is no intention to manipulate. Moreover, from a linguistic point of view, the prefix *mis-* signifies *wrong, bad, or erroneous, ill, mistaken, incorrect*, entering the formation of words such as: *misunderstanding; misfortune; misspelling; mistreat; mislead* and also *negation* or *lack of*, as in *mistrust, mistrial; misprint* (Collins 2012; Merriam-Webster n.d.). Misinformation can thus have one of the following causes: "poor journalistic skills […], the intent to provoke […], or strong personal conviction in a specific matter (i.e.) partisanship" (Wilke 2020, 45).

Definitions or classifications attributing common meanings or features to various terms

In the literature, there are cases in which a synonymic or partial synonymic relationship is attributed to fundamental concepts. Examples in this regard are *misinformation* and *disinformation*. Moreover, *disinformation* is often equated with *fake news*. It sometimes leads to an interchanged use of these terms, *disinformation* being often substituted with *fake news* or with *misinformation*. In some cases, other terms, as those used in the military field – *information warfare*, *influence campaigns* and so on, are substituted with *disinformation*. To them, *false news* and *false information* can be added.

Disinformation is "false information … knowingly shared to cause harm" (Wardle and Derakhshan 2018, 5). As for the pair *disinformation* and *fake news*, the latter is often associated or used instead of *disinformation*, part of the literature putting an equal between the two notions, as some scholars acknowledge (Buluc, et al. 2019, 3).

Of the two, *fake news* has been granted many different meanings in the literature, in the media as well as in the public discourse, especially politics. It is defined as "false, often sensational, information disseminated under the guise of news reporting" (Collins 2024). Another definition exposes the ways in which *fake news* is constructed: "manipulation of information that can be carried out through the production of false information, or the distortion of true information" (Aïmeur 2023, 30). A Springer published study of the literature shows that "some consider *fake news* as a type of misinformation", "as a type of disinformation", "while others associate the term with both disinformation and misinformation" and, additionally, "some prefer to differentiate fake news from both terms" (Aïmeur et al. 2023, 7). In a comprehensive glossary published in 2023 by the European External Action Service (EEAS), including over 150 terms related to disinformation, *fake news* is defined as "false or misleading information presented as news", and moreover, two other mentions are made, one regarding its association with *disinformation*: "it can be *inaccurately* used *as a synonym* of *disinformation*", and that it "has been popularised by Donald Trump, who exploited it to cast doubt upon credible news" (EU DisinfoLab 2023). This last mention, although is a known fact, could have been eluded, in our opinion, from the definition, as it is not a defining characteristic nor is it objectively and elegantly expressed. As known, *fake news* has been a buzzword; however, reliable scholars, as well as journalists advocate against its use (UNESCO 2018, 14; Wilke 2020, 45, Wardle and Derakhshan 2018, 16), for several reasons. A first argument is that, from

a linguistic point of view, the phrase is an oxymoron, the word *fake* opposing in its semantics the word 'news', which means "verifiable information in the public interest" (UNESCO 2018, 7). In this way, *fake news* challenges the trustworthiness of information that is verifiable and can be labelled as *real* news. Thus, information that does not fulfil these criteria should not be called *news* (ibidem). Moreover, it is considered "inadequate to describe the complex phenomena of information pollution" as the phrase "has become an emotional, weaponised term used to undermine and discredit journalism" (ibidem). Thus, it is recommendable to use the terms *misinformation*, *disinformation* and *malinformation*, these three instances making out the *information disorder*, as suggested by Wardle and Derakhshan (ibidem, 14, 43, Module 2).

From a linguistic point of view, *false* and *fake* are synonyms. However, they are not perfect equivalents. *Fake* is defined as "not what somebody claims it is; appearing to be something it is not; synonym – counterfeit"; "made to look like something else; synonyms – imitation, artificial" (Oxford U.P. 2024) and, also, as "having a *false* or misleading appearance; fraudulent" (American Heritage 2016). As for *false*, some language dictionaries define it as "not correct or true; not natural; not real; wrong/not accurate; not sincere" (Oxford U.P. 2024), while other dictionaries also include intentionality: "deliberately untrue; intentionally deceptive" (American Heritage 2016), "being or intended to be misleading or deceptive" (Collins 2014). So, comparing the meanings of *false* and *fake*, it can be seen that while *false* may include intention or not, *fake* is consistently defined as having a deliberate character. However, in the BBC *Fake news glossary* comprising 18 "top keywords to know", the term *fake news* is included, but *false news* and *false information* are not (BBC n.d.). The same goes for the EEAS disinformation glossary, where there is no inclusion of *false news* or *false information* as a term (EU DisinfoLab 2023).

2.2. Inconsistencies regarding the use of key concepts

Having studied the literature, in relation to information disorder and information weaponisation, we have identified three types of situations of inconsistent use of terms, as follows:

Some terms are used interchangeably, as a result of being attributed common meanings or common features to certain concepts. For instance, *fake news* and *disinformation* are *often* used in this way. Also, *misinformation* is quite commonly used instead of *disinformation* in mass-media and also in some scholarly articles. Another case is that in which *disinformation* is sometimes used in mass-media to reflect the *information war(fare)*, proliferated by the Russian Federation, especially since 2014 (Giles and Seaboyer 2019, 12).

A wrong form of a word is used in compound terms

An inconsistent use of compound terms relating to and having in their composition the word *information* can be seen in the literature, as well as in mass-media. Specialised compound terms in English related to *information* are built using the noun form. Here are some examples of widely accepted terminology, according to NATO doctrine and international expert-level reports and glossaries: *information capabilities, information conflict, information domain, information environment, information infrastructure, information operation, information security, information space, information superiority, information system, information war(fare)* (Godwin III, et al. 2014; NATO doctrine n.d.). On the other hand, the adjective *informational*, signifying "relating to [information] or having the nature of information" (Farlex n.d.), is used in phrases such as *informational measures*, i.e. measures related to information, *informational impact*, *informational influence*. The inconsistent use of some of the mentioned compound terms may reside in the fact that the adjective *informational* is often used[19] instead of the noun *information*.

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[19] A.N.: Upon Google search of the syntagm "informational superiority", limiting the query to the field of security, we get over 3,200 results (February 2024)

Disuniform use of correct and wrong term(s) to express a concept within a paper
Within some papers, there can be seen an inconsistent use of both correct and incorrect terms. A very common case refers to misuse of compound terms having in their structure the word *information*. Thus, within a paper, there can be seen usage of both *information war/warfare* and *information*al *war/warfare* or of other compounds made with the word *information/-al*. As shown, in compound terms, the noun *information* is used. The study has found that terms are also used inconsistently even within a publication belonging to the same author or group of authors. A few exemplifications for the invoked situations are provided in *Table no. 1.*

Table no. 1: Illustrations regarding the inconsistent use of terms

Situation and explanation	*Contextual use*
Terms used interchangeably*: misinformation* instead of *disinformation*	"China Flexes its *Misinformation* Muscle: Until recently, we found that China rarely used social media to manipulate public opinion in other countries" (Bradshaw and Howard 2019, 2)
	1."Depleted tech platforms, AI-enabled *misinformation*, and more than 50 countries voting in 2024" (Foreign Policy 2024); 2. "platforms tend to have even less cover outside the West, with major blind spots in local languages and context making *misinformation* and hate speech not only more pervasive but also more dangerous" (ibidem); 3. "*misinformation* shared both privately and publicly – much of it by political parties" (ibidem); 4. "said Sumitra Badrinathan, a professor at American University who studies political *misinformation* in India" (ibidem)
Disuniform use of correct and incorrect terms within the deliverables of a project, authored by contributors from different countries. Correct use of terms (examples 1-4): *information environment;* *information warfare;* *information space;* *information technology* *information ecosystem* Incorrect use of a term (examples 5, 6): *informational environment*	1."Conflict and its manifestation in the *information environment*: hybrid warfare/threats, cognitive and *information warfare*" (DOMINOES Project 2023, title); 2. "relatively objective principles such as history, scientific knowledge, and territorial boundaries are being disputed in the *information space* by revisionist powers" (ibidem, 8); 3. "It uses *information technology* and the tools, machines, networks, and systems that come with it" (ibidem, 38); 4. "the major impact that digital platforms have on the *information ecosystem*" (DOMINOES Project n.d., 11); 5. "The research contained in this handbook focuses on six aspects. The first chapter examines the current trends in the *informational environment*, the evolution of mainstream media and social media […]"; (ibidem, 2); 6. "The first chapter of the Dominoes Handbook sets out to map the main current developments in the *informational environment* so as to better understand and lay the foundation for the most efficient and effective means of countering disinformation. (ibidem, 9)
Disuniform use of correct and wrong terms within a paper Correct use of terms (examples 1-5, 7): *information warfare; information environment;*	1."The development and innovation of military technologies and the professionalization of soldiers are not enough to fight in *information warfare*" (Radu 2022, abstract); 2. «The U.S. Department of Defense defines cyberspace as "an overarching domain in the *information environment* consisting of interdependent networks of *information technology infrastructure* and user data» (ibidem, 534); 3. "In order to achieve this goal, I suggest 3 other objectives: – analysis of concepts such as cyberspace and *information space*" (ibidem, 534); 4. "It has also used

Situation and explanation	*Contextual use*
information infrastructure; information technology infrastructure; information space; information operations information-technological warfare Incorrect use of terms (examples 5, 6, 8): *informational; informational confrontation; informational superiority*	*information operations* outside its territories to spread panic among its opponents" (ibidem, 535); 5. «The Russian Ministry of Defense describes *informational confrontation* as "the clash of national interests and ideas, where superiority is sought by targeting the adversary's *information infrastructure* while protecting its own objects from similar influence"» (ibidem, 535); 6. «instead of "cyber", the Russians use the term "*informational*"» (ibidem, 535); 7. «However, the most important divergence is the term "cyber warfare", or the Russian equivalent "*information-technological warfare*"', which is only part of the concept of "*informational confrontation*"» (ibidem, 535); 8. «According to Russian cyber researchers, the *informational confrontation* is ongoing, with Russia using every tactic, technique, and procedure to gain *informational superiority* in this competition» (ibidem, 536)
Disuniform use of correct and wrong terms to express a concept within a paper: *a.*Correct term (example 1): *information warfare* b. Incorrect use of term (example 2): *information*al war	1. "Ukraine conflict: the challenge of *Informational War*" (Stănescu 2022, title); 2. "Like classic combat in theatres of operations, *information warfare* aims to destabilize society by bringing information with a strong emotional impact to the fore" (ibidem).
Disuniform use of correct and wrong terms to express a concept within a paper: Correct term: *information disorder* (examples 1,2) Incorrect term: *disinformation disorder* (examples 3,4)	1. "Creators and spectators facing online *information disorder*. Effects of digital content production on information skills" (Taddeo, de-Frutos-Torres and Alvarado 2022, title); 2. "Social media, disinformation, *information disorder*" (ibidem, keywords); 3. «According to the research "The global *disinformation disorder*" (Bradshaw & Howard, 2019), there is, in fact, evidence of organized social media manipulation campaigns in 48 countries […]» (ibidem); 4. «Among the strategies to contrast "global *disinformation disorder*", media and information literacy have a pivotal role» (ibidem).
Wrong term to express a concept within a paper. Correct term: *information disorder*; Incorrect term: *disinformation disorder*	"This is consistent with the role of internet users in the generation and propagation of *disinformation disorder* (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017)[20] and confirms their status as prosumers of information, but also disinformation" (Malquín-Robles and Gamir-Ríos 2023).

The examples provided illustrate obviously mistaken use of terms. However, if we think of the associations made between *fake news* and *disinformation* and *misinformation* that we referred to earlier in the paper, misuse of terms would be not as easy to identify.

2.3. Possible explanations for the challenges posed by the misuse of key concepts

Briefly, four main factors have been identified as possible explanations for the inconsistencies exposed, as follows: relatively recent and constantly developing study of the phenomenon; interdisciplinarity; different perspectives when defining certain concepts (historic and cultural aspects are to be taken into consideration); the language factor.

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[20] A.N. The report of Wardle & Derakhshan does not contain any occurrence of the term disinformation disorder (search performed automatically within the document).

The first factor refers to the fact that information disorder and information weaponisation have only recently become a research corpus. Although influence activities such as propaganda and disinformation have been used since ancient times, the interest in this phenomenon as the object of a field of study has grown since 2014, in the context of the pervasive information campaigns led by the Russian Federation upon annexation of Crimea. Moreover, having in mind the rapid technological progress, the phenomenon of disinformation has acquired new means and modalities of reaching the public, thus making room for new terms to express these aspects. In this context, scholarly as well as expert-level endeavours are necessary in order to define and operationalise some of the working concepts, an idea supported by many researchers in the field who consider that it is natural for the terms related to new phenomena with a multitude of manifestations and many connexions, such as *fake news*, to have a variable, yet not well-fixed definition (Buluc, et al. 2019, 88).

The second factor is interdisciplinarity. From the study of the literature, a first aspect to be mentioned is the rich terminology of this specific field of study, that brings together theories and concepts from various domains, such as communication and journalism, military science, psychology, sociology and information technology (IT), the latter having known an intensive development in the past years, as it includes the cyber component and social networks. Thus, it can be stated that there is an interdisciplinary approach to the study of information manipulation, having in mind its relevance for strategic and military purposes.

The third factor refers to different objectives and perspectives upon defining specific concepts. For instance, definitions can be of several types – conceptual definitions, for scholarly purpose, and merely functional or contextual, for journalistic purpose. Difference of perspectives when defining a term may also refer to dissimilar understanding and usage of a concept, e.g. *information war(fare)* by two schools of thought such as the Western view, to include NATO, as compared to the Russian (Giles and Seaboyer, 2019).

The fourth factor refers to the specificity of each language. As researchers and experts using English as a foreign language develop various forms of papers, they may be under the influence of their native language, or can simply use mistakenly some concepts, as illustrated. Having in mind the discrepant understanding of the meaning of some key concepts and the subsequent inconsistent use of some terms, the relevance of some studies or of specific parts of them may be subject to questioning. Apart from a possible impact on further research in the field by proliferating inaccurate knowledge, it could also have implications on societal security, as a lack in common understanding regarding the specific meaning of key terms may lead to their misleading use, resulting in inappropriate decisions in connection to countering the phenomenon of information weaponisation.

Conclusions

The current study started from the premise that information can be used as a weapon both in wartime and in peacetime. As seen from the analysis, the information disorder has a two-folded nature: on the one hand, there is the multitude of false, fake, manipulated content – each actor wishing to present facts as they best serve their strategic interests, aiming to influence the target audience behaviour, especially by appealing to emotions, and, on the other hand, there are inconsistencies regarding both the definition and use of key concepts. In this respect, the study of the literature revealed interesting and challenging aspects, the paper providing a series of illustrations and examples.

Following the analysis, we conclude that, in the field of security studies, it is necessary to combine the communication and journalistic perspective with the military perspective when it comes to analyse influence activities and discuss related concepts and terminology. Also, we

believe that standardisation of key concepts is essential, as different understandings lead to ambiguous use and even misuse in the mass-media, and in official documents that aim to expose or to counter the phenomenon of information weaponisation. This may also trigger possible consequences for the decision-making process in security-related fields.

Thus, the relevance and usefulness of the discussed aspects regarding terminology is not overstated, having in mind that various forms of disinformation affect the society at large, information being weaponised concerning security-related matters, such as conflicts, wars and electoral processes. Last but not least, standardisation of key concepts related to disinformation and information weaponisation may contribute in creating and consolidating media literacy, as well as the security culture.

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