Abstract

Russian disinformation continues to be an ongoing issue in the present security environment. International organisations (e.g. EU) and researchers highlight that emotional appeals (mostly related to fear, anger, and prejudice) in Russian disinformation are used to deepen social division and increase polarisation surrounding a particular issue (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2019; Sivek, 2018; Nisbet & Kamenchuk, 2019; Asmolov, 2018; Bennet & Livingston, 2018; Schmitt, 2018; Karlsen, 2016). While the acknowledgement of emotional appeals in the disinformation literature is common, research into these appeals is sparse. The present study provides an overview of both emotion and disinformation literature and aims to answer three research questions: what emotions are present in Russian disinformation, are some emotions more common than others, and does disinformation communicate specific topics through discrete emotions? Through emotion (sentiment) analysis we found presence of all 8 of Plutchik's emotions in a Russian disinformation tweet dataset; fear, anger, trust, anticipation, sadness, joy, disgust, and surprise. Within the tweet corpus, approximately 5% of tweets belonged to a discrete emotional frame, with fear and anger the most prevalent by a large margin. Specific emotion categories contained 'crime,' 'politics,' and 'patriotism' as prominent themes. This study paves the way for more research into the use of emotional appeals in Russian disinformation.