



Baltic Engagement
Centre for Combating
Information Disorders

HOT REPORT

HOW RUSSIA USES VIDEO GAMES TO SPREAD PROPAGANDA

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THIS REPORT IS BASED ON AN ARTICLE BY ARTJOMS LIPINS (TVNET) PUBLISHED BY RE:BALTICA HOW RUSSIA USES VIDEO GAMES FOR PROPAGANDA

WHAT'S HOT?

Russia is using video games as soft-power tools to promote pro-Kremlin narratives, glorify militarism, distort history, and emotionally engage users, especially youth. From polished blockbuster games with subtle ideological cues to poorly executed state-funded failures, video games have become part of Russia's hybrid propaganda arsenal.

What Do We See?

Russia is using video games as soft-power tools to promote pro-Kremlin narratives, glorify militarism, distort history, and emotionally engage users, especially youth. From polished blockbuster games with subtle ideological cues to poorly executed state-funded failures, video games have become part of Russia's hybrid propaganda arsenal.

- **Blurring fiction and ideology:** “Atomic Heart” presents a stylised Soviet utopia. Though not overt propaganda, it romanticises Soviet aesthetics and includes suggestive symbols like drones named after real Russian weapons used in Ukraine.
- **State-backed historical revisionism:** “Smuta,” funded by the Kremlin-linked Internet Development Institute (IID), is a historical game set in 1612 that vilifies Western powers and echoes present-day Russian propaganda, including transphobic and ultranationalist themes.
- **Direct war glorification:** “Unit 22: ZOV” explicitly promotes Russia's invasion of Ukraine, presenting Russian troops as heroes. Developed in consultation with Russian military and separatists, the game excludes any Ukrainian perspective.
- **Quality as a vector:** Even when not state-financed, high production value games like Atomic Heart can serve propaganda purposes simply by reaching global audiences and subtly embedding ideological symbols.
- **Global trend, local twist:** Russia is not alone. Other countries, including the US and China, have used games for military recruitment or nationalistic messaging. What's new is Russia's use of games under sanctions and censorship bans to bypass information controls abroad.

Why Does It Work?

Games are immersive: They bypass rational filters and appeal to emotion, identity, and loyalty.

Symbolism is deniable: Developers can embed ideological content without overt messaging.

Access is global: Even sanctioned regimes can distribute games on international platforms.

Youth outreach: Games reach hard-to-engage demographics, particularly younger audiences.

RISK ASSESSMENT: MEDIUM TO HIGH

Information laundering: Ideological messages are blended with entertainment, making them harder to identify or counter.

Narrative control: Games can shape perceptions of history, war, and national identity.
Regulatory blind spot: While media and social platforms are regulated, video games remain largely unchecked in the EU.

Financial support: Even commercial success (e.g., Atomic Heart) can indirectly fund Russia's war economy.

How to Respond?

For Policymakers and Regulators

- Include video games in media literacy and information security frameworks.
- Monitor and evaluate state-linked game content similarly to other foreign influence tools.
- Engage with platforms (e.g., Steam) to flag ideologically problematic content.

For Educators and Parents

- Promote critical gaming literacy: Who made the game? What narratives are embedded?
- Encourage discussions around media ethics and political symbolism in games.
- Provide alternative digital engagement tools and history education.

For Civil Society and Media

- Investigate and expose propaganda in gaming through reporting and watchdog activities.



- Translate findings into accessible formats to raise public awareness.
- Support the development of non-authoritarian, fact-based games with civic learning goals.

FURTHER READING

- Research article [Disinformation tackling in the metaverse and the Digital Services Act](#)
- [Handbook Against Disinformation: Recognise and Resist](#)

What is BECID?

BECID – the Baltic Engagement Centre for Combating Information Disorders – brings together expertise in fact-checking, media literacy, and journalism across the Baltics. We conduct fact-checks in collaboration with Delfi/Delfi Meedia, monitor disinformation narratives and campaigns under the leadership of investigative journalism organisation Re:Baltica, and promote media literacy through the Baltic Centre for Media Literacy (BCME). We also develop methodologies to effectively counter disinformation. Learn more: becid.ut.ee

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