

MECHANISMS FOR PREVENTING DISINFORMATION IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION: CURRENT ISSUES

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Abstract

The article examines the current mechanisms of combating disinformation in public administration and suggests ways to improve them. The purpose of the article is to research and improve the mechanisms of combating disinformation in the field of public administration. During the research, the authors used special and general scientific research methods, such as: generalization, abstraction, specification, systematization, analysis and synthesis, graphic. The essence and main trends of the development of the phenomenon of disinformation were identified, and the approaches to combating disinformation in the current political environment were highlighted. Components for the information countermeasure mechanisms' formation in the field of public administration in Ukraine are proposed. The organizational, legal and economic mechanisms for countering disinformation are described. The European experience of forming mechanisms for countering disinformation is considered. It is proposed to use the public-private partnership tool as a component of the mechanism for countering disinformation in public administration. The main purpose of the use of public-private partnership is proposed to expand the cooperation of public authorities with private scientific institutions, public organizations in the field of information protection, fact-finding, monitoring of information sources and implementation of the policy of countering disinformation. The main forms of implementation of public-private partnership in the field of combating disinformation are highlighted.

Keywords: *disinformation, public administration, mechanism, cyber security, information, communication, media literacy.*

JEL Codes: *E65, H56, H73.*

Introduction

Disinformation communications gained momentum during the COVID-19 pandemic, when quarantine restrictions made it impossible for large numbers of people to gather in all areas of public life, including public administration. Starting from March 2020, a significant part of communication in public authorities takes place through online meetings, communication in social networks, as this allows access to a wide audience. Thus,

Internet sources became the leading source of communication, distribution and obtaining of information. Currently, taking into account the aggression of the Russian Federation, which, in addition to military actions, is accompanied by destructive actions in the information space, the spread of information and psychological operations in all media sources, the relevance of research and improvement of existing mechanisms for countering disinformation in the context of public administration is unquestionable.

The purpose of the article is to research and improve the mechanisms of combating disinformation in the field of public administration.

Literature review

Issues of countering disinformation processes' management are in the focus of attention of many researchers. In recent years, the majority of studies on countering disinformation and combating cyberthreats have been conducted in the USA and Western European countries. Among the leading researchers should be named H. Fox (1983), J. Martin (1982), L. Floridi (2005), who consider the conceptual issues of the emergence and spread of disinformation.

Publications of such scientists as Kudrana Jan. (2022), Leite S.N. et al. (2021), Bhatia K. et al. (2023), Pansieri Flávio et al. (2021), Tulchynska S., et al. (2021), Nikiforov P. et al. (2022) are devoted to the development of current problems of countering disinformation in public administration.

Despite the relevance of the mentioned issues, the development of approaches and mechanisms for combating disinformation, taking into account the current realities of the social and political life of Ukraine in the context of the public administration system's development, is an insufficiently researched issue in domestic science and requires further study and analysis.

Methodical approach

A systematic approach allows to achieve a synergistic effect in the study of issues related to the formation of mechanisms for countering disinformation in public administration. During the research, the authors used special and general scientific research methods.

Methods of generalization, specification - when analyzing existing mechanisms for countering disinformation in public administration; abstraction - when examining the essence and identifying the main trends in the development of the phenomenon of disinformation, as well as analyzing approaches to countering disinformation in the

current political environment; analysis and synthesis - in the formation of information countermeasures in the field of public administration in Ukraine and the study of European experience in the formation of disinformation countermeasures; systematization - when identifying the main forms of implementation of public-private partnership in the field of countering disinformation; graphic - for a visual presentation of research results.

Results

To analyze the situation with regard to the existing mechanisms for combating disinformation, we consider it necessary to consider the main approaches to the interpretation of the term "disinformation". Basic research on this issue is conducted by foreign scientists. Thus, H. Fox considers disinformation as misleading information, while it has a public nature and is most often the result of a leak by government officials or intelligence representatives (Fox C. J., 1983). Another researcher of this phenomenon, J. Martin, believes that disinformation is a form of propaganda based on legitimate action or false information (Martin L. J., 1982). A large amount of work in this direction belongs to L. Floridi, who in his work from 2005 noted that misinformation arises on the basis of poor information processing, while the source of misinformation must be aware of its "deceptive nature" (Floridi L., 2005). Generalizing is the definition provided by the Oxford English Dictionary, namely: disinformation is the deliberate dissemination of false information ("the dissemination of deliberately false information").

The European Commission, taking into account the urgency of the mentioned problem and based on the importance of political response to disinformation processes, also considers disinformation from the point of view of its deceptiveness, fallacy and inaccuracy and in the context of its direction to the task of public harm.

The approach to the definition of information by the American researcher Fellis D. (2015) is complex. Thus, in his

writings he singles out the following features of disinformation:

- disinformation is a type of information;
- misinformation is misleading information,

even when the purpose of misleading is not achieved;

- disinformation is always intentional (Fallis D., 2015).

Therefore, a review of the most common interpretations of disinformation allows us to conclude that, as a rule, disinformation concerns issues of public interest, namely issues of national security, territorial integrity, the state of the environment, election campaigns, etc. Based on the analysis, we propose to highlight the following characteristics of disinformation:

- the importance of disinformation for the target audience;
- a specially formed concept of disinformation;
- deliberate and purposeful dissemination of disinformation;
- relevance and timeliness;
- belief in the veracity of the disseminated information may lead to public harm;
- targeting a specific consumer of disinformation.

Existing approaches to combating disinformation are currently classified as follows:

- at the international level - the introduction of sanctions;
- at the level of public administration bodies – monitoring of disinformation, carrying out educational activities in the field of increasing media literacy of the population, formation of specialized structures;
- at the media level – mass media control, monitoring of political advertising (Fried D., Polyakova A., 2018).

Based on the study of existing approaches, it is advisable to propose the following components for the formation of information countermeasures in the field of public administration in Ukraine:

- use of tools for consistently refuting misinformation;
- taking into account the possibility of discrediting a data resource that spreads disinformation;

- the use of counternarratives capable of displacing disinformation;

- legitimate use of information filtering algorithms;

- achieving a balance between the restriction of the right to freedom of speech and regulatory regulation of speech and media work;

- centralized media control.

Attention should be paid to such an effective tool for combating disinformation as media literacy. In the context of the importance of countering disinformation, information literacy of civil servants and representatives of public authorities is a priority area. This tool should be classified as a long-term tool. For example, in many European countries, media literacy is integrated both into the learning process in secondary and higher education institutions, and directly into the educational process of civil servants.

In April 2022, the UN Human Rights Council adopted the resolution “The role of states in countering the negative impact of disinformation on the observance and realization of human rights”, which provides for strategic and tactical directions in the field of countering disinformation. At the same time, priority is given to strengthening cooperation between international organizations, civil society, stakeholders, media, and business. In August 2023, the law on digital services entered into force in the European Union, which defined new obligations for the popular Internet platforms Facebook and the Apple Store.

The experience of European countries shows the use of economic tools to counter disinformation, which prove their effectiveness based on the implementation of the following directions (Fig. 1):

- economic stimulation of independent media through the implementation of grant projects, provision of financial state support in order to promote the coverage of objective information;

- the development of fact-catching as an effective tool for countering disinformation;

- state financial support for promoting the development and implementation of disinformation recognition algorithms;

- economic stimulation of educational programs in the field of combating disinformation;

- policies of economic sanctions and obstacles.

The organizational and legal mechanism for combating disinformation in Ukraine is implemented through the development and implementation of normative legal acts and the functioning of relevant state institutions. Information countermeasure processes in

Ukraine are implemented on the basis of the Constitution of Ukraine (1996), the laws of Ukraine “On the National Security of Ukraine” (2018), “On the Basic Principles of Ensuring Cyber Security of Ukraine” (2017), the Decree of the President of Ukraine “Issues of the Center for Countering Disinformation” (2021). Thus, the Constitution of Ukraine defines that “protecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, ensuring its information security are the most important functions of the state, the business of the entire Ukrainian people” (1996, art.17).

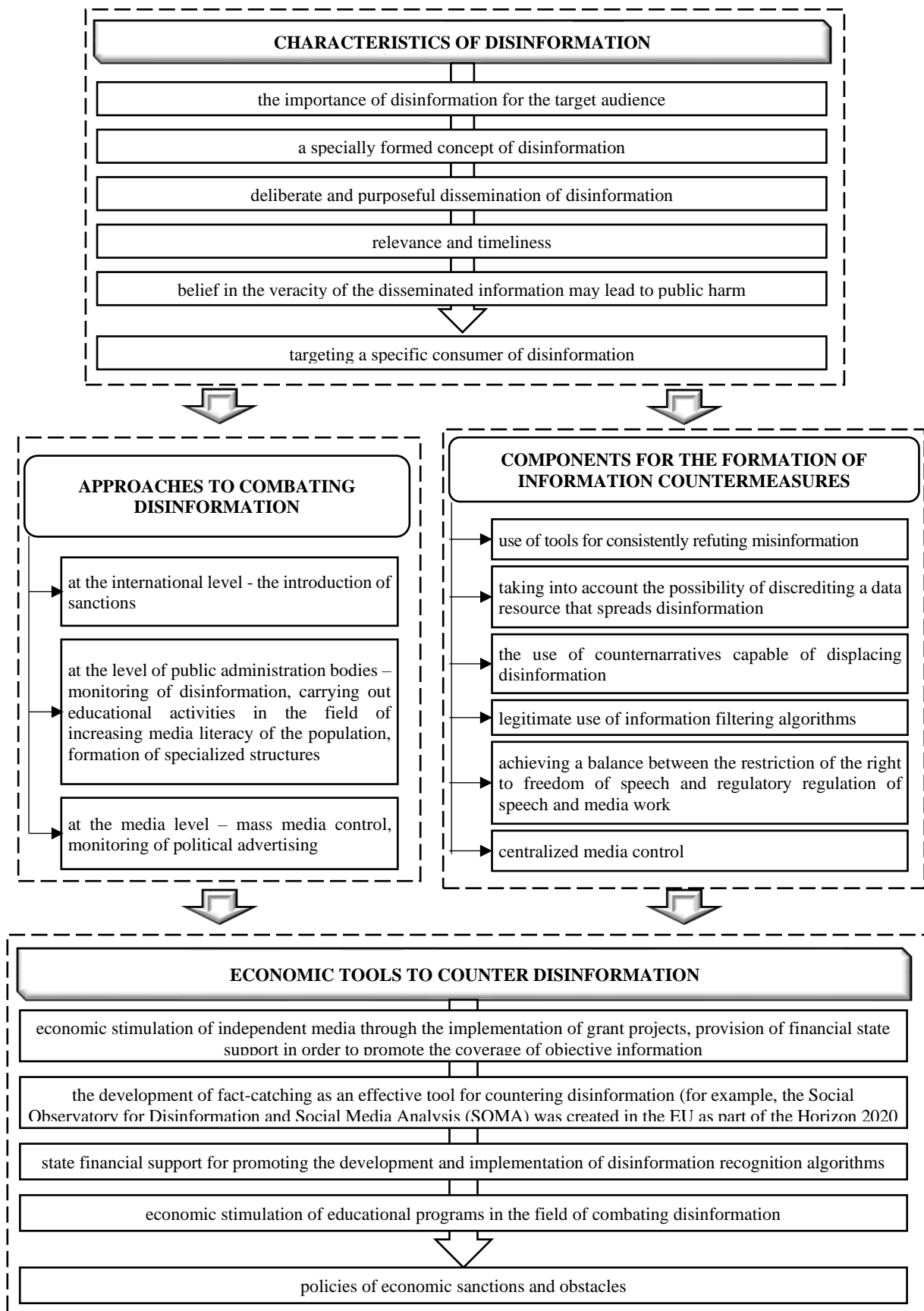


Figure 1. Peculiarities of combating disinformation in public administration

*Source: developed by the authors.

The study of the specified organizational mechanism indicates a focus on the strategic nature of disinformation countermeasures in the context of ensuring the country's information security, long-term planning of countermeasures, determination of resources and approaches to their implementation. The main actors in the field of combating disinformation are the President of Ukraine, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine, as well as the Information Countermeasure Center. Thus, the creation of the Center in 2021 was a timely response to the threat of disinformation, which made it possible to start effective work on protecting the information space from distortions and distortions. The main directions of the Center's work are defined as follows:

- building effective strategic communications based on the development of Russian counter-narratives, promotion of Ukrainian narratives to the daily communication process between public authorities at all levels;
- introduction of an online resource that should act as an active tool against cyberattacks;
- development of joint mechanisms for combating information and cyber security issues with foreign partners (Counter Information Center).

In December 2021, the relevant Presidential Decree adopted the decision of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine "On Information Security Strategy", which defines the directions, goals and objectives of countering Russian disinformation. The importance of the Strategy is confirmed by the fact that, on the one hand, it provides for preventive and defensive measures, and on the other hand, it contains directions aimed at the development of culture, art, increasing the level of media literacy among different segments of the population and representatives of various social groups, improving the strategic communications in the system of public administration (2021). The formation of an effective organizational and legal mechanism for combating disinformation should be carried out on the democratic principles of freedom of speech, taking into account the requirements of

the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Therefore, the relationship between economic instruments and state regulatory policy can be used as a powerful basis for the effective state mechanism's formation for countering disinformation. However, it is the organizational and legal mechanism that has the greatest significance. For example, a sufficiently large number of normative legal acts and resolutions were adopted, but their implementation takes place in the conditions of a changing internal and external environment. The need for rapid adaptation requires the comprehensive development of new mechanisms to prevent the destructive impact of disinformation based on the creation of new institutions of public administration, the development of approaches to the formation of communications between public authorities and the public based on modern tools for combating fake information that is distributed both on the Internet and in all available mass media. At the same time, the concept of building mechanisms to counter disinformation in public administration should be formed on the basis of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU of 2000, which provides for freedom of speech, the possibility of free expression of views and beliefs (2001).

An important role in the implementation of state policy in the field of combating disinformation is played by cooperation with international partners, the signing of relevant memoranda, joint consultations. Thus, in 2017, a bilateral dialogue on cyber security and countering disinformation was launched. In particular, the United States is committed to providing support to Ukraine to protect government computer networks from malicious cyber intrusions, including systems, which protect the critical infrastructure of Ukraine; to reduce dependence on Russian information and communication technologies. Also, one of the directions of cooperation is the development of scientific and technical potential (2017).

For example, if we compare the policies in the field of combating disinformation in Ukraine and the USA, it should be noted that

the public authorities in Ukraine use broader constitutional prerequisites to protect the interests of information security, which is primarily related to the level of implementation of democratic values and the principle of freedom of speech. On the one hand, anti-disinformation campaigns violate some democratic norms regarding freedom of speech, but in the interests of national security, strengthening state regulation in this area is necessary in many cases.

One of the current tools used by leading countries in the field of countering disinformation in public administration is the public-private partnership (PPP). The main purpose of using public-private partnership is to determine the expansion of cooperation between public authorities and private scientific institutions, public organizations in the field of information protection, fact-finding, monitoring of information sources and implementation of the policy of combating disinformation. Cooperation may also include the training of qualified personnel in this field and raising the level of media literacy of civil servants. The strategic direction of the public-private partnership is to encourage cooperation between state institutions and businesses with the aim of introducing innovative products,

services and software in the field of countering disinformation.

The implementation of public-private partnership in the field of combating disinformation should be based on the development of an appropriate strategic document, namely a comprehensive Public-Private Partnership Strategy, which will include fundamental principles, goals and objectives aimed at:

- strengthening information security of public administration;
- creation of regional level structures that will carry out regulation in the field of information security and countering disinformation, to improve cooperation between the public and private sectors;
- promotion of international coordination of combating disinformation;
- implementation of innovative projects in the IT industry;
- training of qualified personnel in the field of combating disinformation and IT technologies.

The conceptual principles of the formation of a mechanism for combating disinformation in the public administration system based on public-private partnership are shown in Fig. 2.

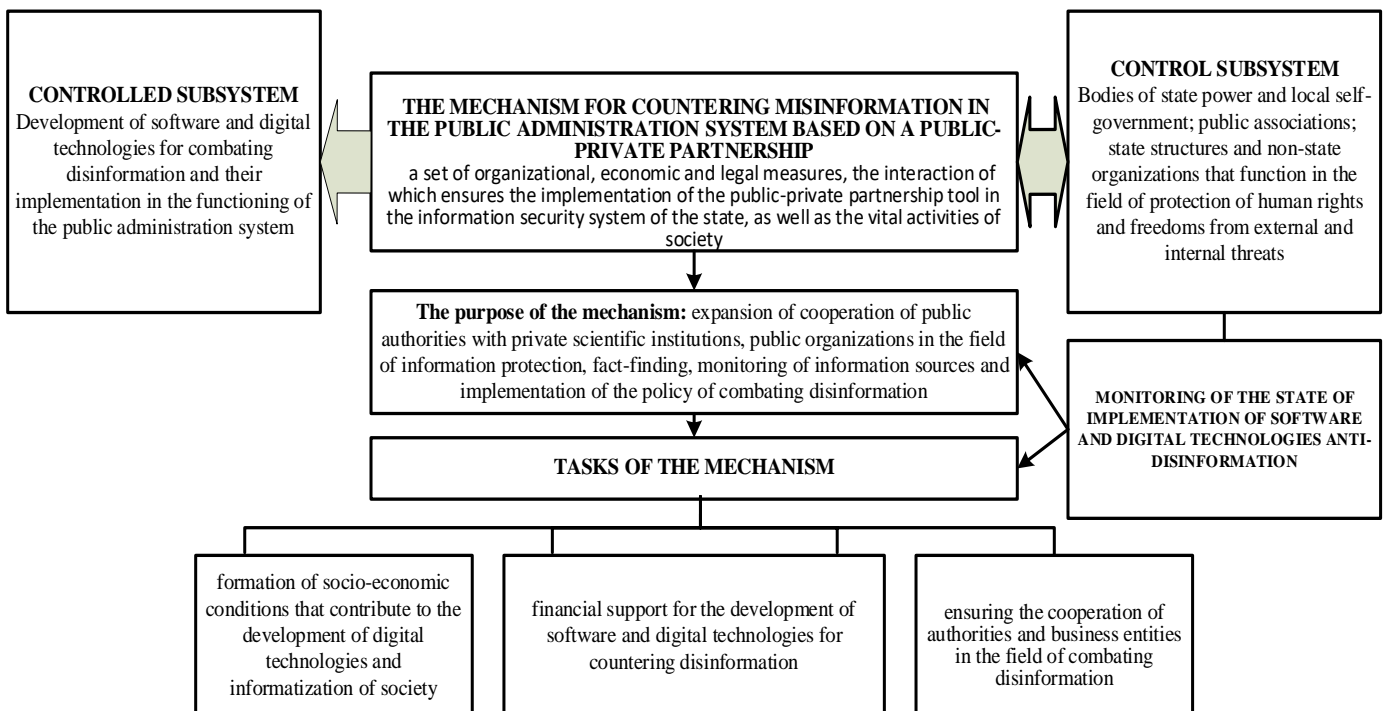


Figure 2. Formation of a mechanism for combating disinformation in the public administration system on the basis of public-private partnership

**Source: developed by the authors.*

There are many companies operating in the domestic space of IT technologies that have considerable experience in countering disinformation, detecting cyber threats, and conducting investigations of cyber incidents. The mentioned companies occupy quite strong positions, have considerable experience in conducting research and implementing the development of innovative products and technologies, have formed a staff of qualified specialists, and have ambitions to expand their activities to new market segments. Such institutions should be actively connected to the system of combating disinformation in Ukraine, provided that the function of the main regulator is preserved by public administration bodies in the context of ensuring a balance between the protection of the interests of society, the individual and the state.

At the same time, we offer the following forms of implementation of public-private partnership:

1. Contracts for cooperation in the field of performance of works and provision of services in the field of combating disinformation.

2. Conducting mutual consultations between state and local self-government bodies and business.

3. Conducting an independent examination of regulatory projects and legal acts.

4. State support for IT business companies engaged in the development of innovative software products in the field of combating decryption, implementation of state policy in cyberspace, and protection of the internal IT market.

5. Information provision of state structures, public associations on issues of media literacy, ensuring cyber security and countering cyber threats.

The main areas of partnership agreements' development between public administration structures, domestic IT companies and research institutions are expedient to propose the following:

1. Implementation of projects in the direction of conducting computer and software examinations of state authorities' and local governments' information support. The specified direction requires the involvement of experts with special training and specialized

equipment, which is possible only in the case of cooperation with private companies.

2. Examination of computer systems, collection and analysis of received data for the purpose of checking them for external interference. A similar direction can be used as digital evidence in the event of a criminal case related to a cyber incident. The development of this type of cooperation makes it possible to make the work on the investigation of cyber attacks faster and more qualitative in the future.

3. Development and implementation of specialized software to prevent threats and cyberattacks. This direction is preventive and can be effectively implemented by public authorities at all levels, as domestic IT companies are constantly working on improving software products for the detection and prevention of cyber threats. The use of such high-tech products will contribute to increasing the stability of the functioning of the information system.

4. Implementation of projects in the field of information environment monitoring.

This direction sets before itself the task of identifying information of operational significance in the cyberspace of a specific authority. As a result of monitoring, it becomes possible to perform an automated search for resources containing prohibited and fake information; analysis of materials from high-risk resources; surveillance of communications in a network environment.

Partnership interaction in the field of combating disinformation between public authorities and private structures will allow to form a more complete picture of the current situation in the field of spreading fakes, cyber

threats, etc. Accordingly, the existing organizational and legal mechanisms for combating disinformation should be improved through the emergence of new legal norms that expand the rights and obligations of business companies in the collection and analysis of digital data, their processing and further use. Thus, the state can legally transfer part of the authority to carry out certain actions to large private partners, which can strengthen the joint fight against the spread of disinformation.

Conclusions

The realities of today, in which society functions in Ukraine, testify to the active use of information as a weapon of mass destruction. This requires immediate steps in the direction of improving the existing information countermeasure mechanisms used by the state authorities and local self-government bodies, in order to guarantee the information security of Ukraine. The specified mechanism should include, firstly, a technological component, which involves the formation of a powerful software and technological base; secondly, the organizational and legal component, which will include the expansion of institutional influence through the implementation of the public-private partnership tool; thirdly, the political component, since the implementation of the mechanism will not be effective without a balanced policy of ensuring information security. Information countermeasures should be managed in cooperation with other states and international organizations. An important role is played by the partnership between state authorities, mass media and civil society.

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