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Russia to Use Social Media in Fight Against Pseudoscience, Report Says

By Alexey Eremenko

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The Russian government allotted 30 million rubles ($750,000) for a social media campaign to combat rampant pseudoscience, Izvestia reported Tuesday.

The money, which will go toward a campaign on popular social media sites LiveJournal, Twitter, Facebook and VKontakte, is also meant to fund publications in the mass media and leaflets against pseudoscience, as well as lessons and journalistic workshops for students, the newspaper said, citing the Education and Science Ministry.

The Russian Academy of Sciences has long lambasted the reported rise of pseudoscience in Russia after the Soviet Union's downfall, often blaming it on a degradation of the educational system.

Television shows on the paranormal far outweigh educational programs on the mostly state-run national television channels, State Duma lawmaker Dmitry Novikov was cited as saying

by Izvestia.

No direct statistics are available for pseudoscience in Russia, but 45 percent of the population believe in the existence of a global conspiracy to run the planet, state-run pollster VTsIOM said last month.

Russian non-fiction bestseller lists are regularly dominated by titles seeking to prove the existence of mythical worlds like Shambala, Atlantis or Middle-Earth. Books declaring most of world history a fraud are also popular.

Curiously, 45 percent of respondents admitted to believing in the supernatural in a 2013 poll by the state-run Public Opinion Foundation — the same number as conspiracy theorists. It was unclear to what extent the two groups overlap.

As of 2010, the occult services and alternative medicine industry in Russia was worth at least $2 billion and employed 800,000 people, according to the State Duma.

The Duma itself almost fell prey to an alleged proponent of pseudoscience in 2010, when it almost endorsed a nationwide program worth up to $14 billion to install "unique" water filters by self-proclaimed inventor Viktor Petrik. The program was scrapped after the Academy of Sciences proved the filters did absolutely nothing to improve water quality.

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