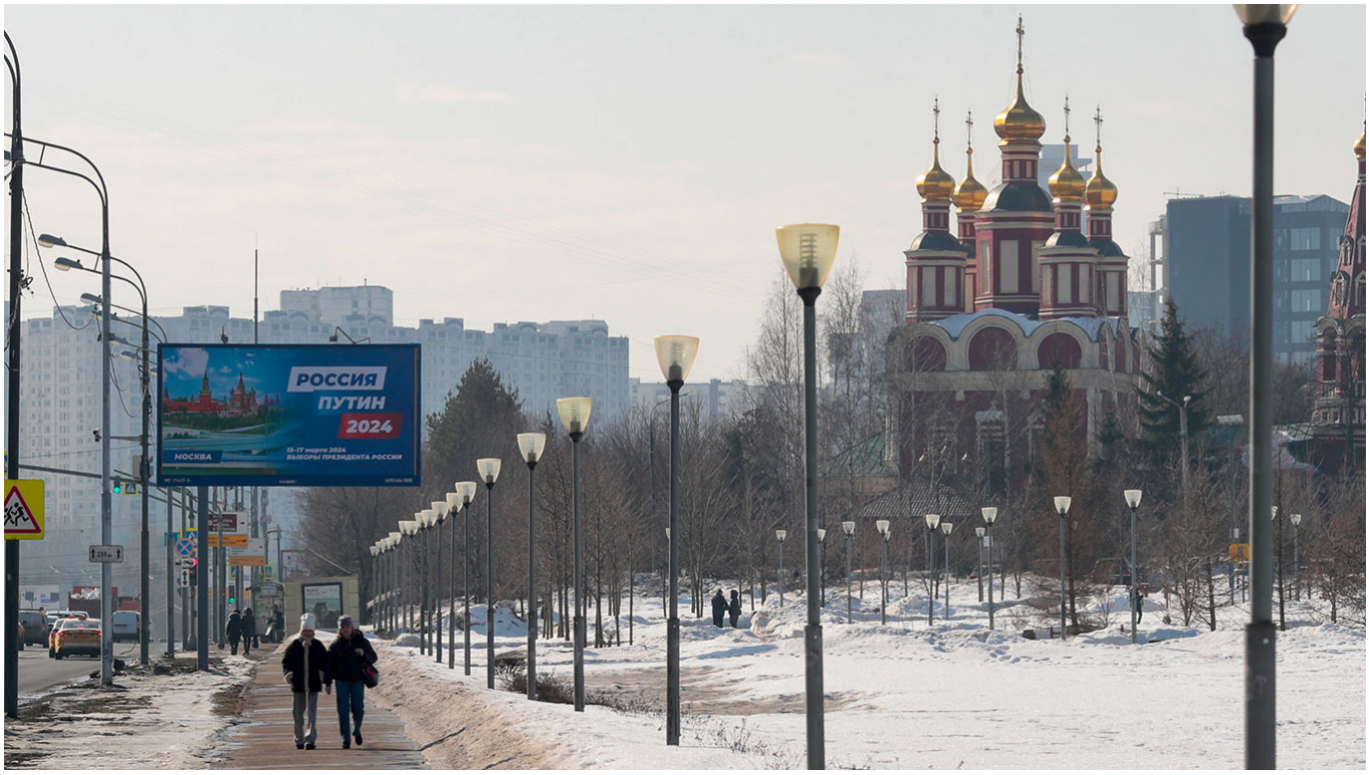
The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Chat Bot Aims to Convince Pro-Putin Russians to See Through Propaganda

By Camilla Bell-Davies

March 17, 2024



Election campaigning for Putin in Moscow. **Vasily Kuzmichenok / Moskva News Agency**

A group of Russian anti-war organizations has created a Telegram bot aimed at helping people convince their loved ones to see through Kremlin propaganda amid the country's presidential election.

The bot, named MOST (Russian for "bridge"), debunks the most common pro-regime arguments with rebuttals written by journalists, psychologists, and historians.

The developers include the Relocation Guide, the XZ Foundation, and other volunteers. A month after the bot was launched in September 2023, it had 20,000 users.

Ilya Inozemtsev from Relocation Guide said the bot was inspired by the movie "Broken Ties," about how differing views on the war divide families. For example, it included the story of a daughter who began tweaking her father's YouTube recommendations until he started having

opposing views to the regime.

“Many of my acquaintances said that they were out of arguments while dealing with their families but still wanted to communicate with them. This applies to those who left Russia and those who stayed,” Inozemtsev said.

Related article: Live: Russians Protest Putin in Final Day of Voting

The MOST website describes the bot as a way to "practice non-toxic and empathic communication and re-establish contact." It encourages users to talk to their loved ones, "not to the TV they are parroting."

Responding to arguments parroted by pro-regime Russians, such as "If not Putin, then who?" or "It’s bad to change president during a time of war,” the bot encourages users to say they relate to their family members to understand them.

These are followed by counterarguments that emphasize unity rather than division, such as by asking "Aren’t we all experiencing fatigue from the war and Putin’s policies?"

MOST ends each prompt with a searching question to encourage further discussion, such as “Maybe you can tell me what scares you about a change of power?”

An advert for the bot is circulating in anti-war Telegram groups. It is being used alongside the #NoonAgainstPutin campaign which encouraged Russians to go to their polling place at midday on March 17 to show opposition to the Kremlin.

Similar bots were created after the outbreak of war but failed to take off. MOST’s creators say it is more effective because it regularly updates its arguments, responds quickly to prompts and is very interactive.

As well as scenarios with talking points, and arguments broken down into themes and materials like memes, users can also add their own statements.

Konstantin, an IT worker from St. Petersburg, tried the bot. But he said he still preferred natural conversations with his family.

"I prefer to speak with my relatives directly. Besides, my relationship with them is not so bad and I definitely know that they won’t change their positions [if they’re pro-Putin]," he said. "But most of them will vote against Putin or not vote at all."

Logging into the MOST bot on Telegram brings up the message: “Propaganda has taken too much from us: a bright future, a good name. Don't give up your family and those you care about.”

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2024/03/17/chat-bot-aims-to-convince-pro-putin-russians-to-see-through-propaganda-a84485