The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russia Ramps up Disinformation War Ahead of Paris Games – Microsoft

By AFP

June 04, 2024



Signs of Paris 2024 Olympic Games are seen on the facade of the Hotel de Ville in Paris. **Farzaneh Khademian / ABACA / TASS**

Russia is waging an intense disinformation campaign aimed at tarnishing the reputation of the International Olympic Committee and stoking fears of violence at this summer's games in Paris, according to a new report from Microsoft's Threat Analysis Center.

According to Microsoft, the influence operations use a potent mix of fake videos, fictitious news stories, and AI-generated impersonations, including the faked voice of Hollywood star Tom Cruise.

"Russia is ramping up these malign campaigns against France, President (Emmanuel) Macron, the IOC, and the Paris Olympics," said Clint Watts, general manager of the Microsoft Threat Analysis Center, in a blog post Sunday.

"While Russia has a decades-long history of targeting the Olympic Games, the Microsoft Threat Analysis Center has observed old tactics blending with artificial intelligence...that may intensify as the 2024 Paris opening ceremony approaches," he added.

The report revealed that two prolific Russian cyber-actor groups, Storm-1679 and Doppelganger, have pivoted operations over the past year to target the Olympics directly.

Their malicious activities escalated in June 2023 with the release on Telegram of a feature-length fake documentary titled "Olympics Has Fallen."

Using AI-generated audio impersonating "Top Gun" actor Cruise, slick computer graphics, and a sophisticated marketing rollout, the film disparages the IOC in an apparent bid to erode global public support of the Games.

Storm-1679 has also repeatedly produced and amplified fictionalized news clips, videos and press statements falsely claiming that fears of terrorism have sparked a wave of ticket cancellations and property insurance purchases among Parisians.

Meanwhile, threat group Doppelganger intensified anti-Olympics messaging across its network of 15 disinformation websites and forged content claiming to be from French news outlets, like Le Parisien, to smear Macron.

Related article: Putin Rejects Macron Call for Ukraine Ceasefire During Olympics

Microsoft said it suspected that Russian groups were also behind the circulation of fake images of graffiti threatening a repeat of the 1972 Munich Olympic massacre of Israeli athletes by Palestinian militants.

As the July 26 Opening Ceremony looms, Microsoft anticipates the Russian disinformation blitz will intensify across more languages and media formats.

Watts warned the campaigns could even attempt real-world provocations near Olympic venues to sow further chaos.

The campaign is not unexpected.

Macron in April said he had "no doubt" Russia was targeting the Paris Olympics, including with disinformation.

The Kremlin "is feeding every day the idea that we can't do this or that, that there's a risk," he said.

The Kremlin dismissed the "absolute slander".

"This constitutes absolute slander and nothing more. It has nothing to do with reality," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2024/06/04/russia-ramps-up-disinformation-war-ahead-of-paris-ga

mes-microsoft-a85309