MANIPULATIVE STRATEGIES OF ENVIRONMENTAL DISINFORMATION: CLASSIFICATION AND ANALYSIS OF EXAMPLES

Takhmina MAMADALIYEVA
Lecturer at the Department of Social Sciences, Tashkent State Transport University, Tashkent, Uzbekistan
mishel.96@bk.ru

Abstract. *The article examines manipulative strategies of environmental disinformation, their classification, and an analysis of specific examples. It discusses the difference between disinformation and unintentional errors, as well as the impact of disinformation on public perception of environmental issues. The study analyzes the mechanisms of spreading false information and its use for political and economic interests.*

Keywords: *environmental disinformation, manipulative strategies, classification, environmental risks, public opinion, political interests, data falsification.*

Introduction. Environmental disinformation refers to the deliberate dissemination of distorted or knowingly false information related to environmental issues. Unlike unintentional errors and misconceptions (misinformation), disinformation is intentional and used in the interests of specific political, economic, or other groups to influence public perception of environmental risks and threats.[9]

In international academic practice, disinformation is defined as "the deliberate and coordinated dissemination of false information, motivated by strategic interests.".[10] In contrast, misinformation is characterized as the unintentional spread of inaccurate information caused by sender errors or a lack of knowledge on a specific issue. [11] Thus, disinformation not only misleads the public but can also be used as a tool of geopolitical or economic pressure.

The relevance of the problem of environmental disinformation is confirmed by the rapid growth in the number of fake and manipulative messages in the media space. According to analytical research, in 2023, approximately 87,000 false publications on environmental topics were recorded in the Russian-speaking segment of the internet, with 17% of them having a clearly conspiratorial or anti-scientific nature.[12]

[9] См. Hall, S. (2020). *The Politics of Environmental Information: Disinformation and Climate Change*. Oxford University Press.

[10] European Commission (2021). *Tackling Disinformation: European Framework for Environmental Communication*. Brussels.

[11] Wardle, C., Derakhshan, H. (2018). *Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policy Making*. Council of Europe.

[12] Sustainability Directory (2023). *Analysis of Environmental Disinformation Trends*. Retrieved from sustainability-directory.com

Manipulative strategies in the field of ecology encompass a wide range of techniques—from outright denial of existing environmental threats to the use of "green camouflage" (greenwashing) tactics in the corporate sector. Among the most common forms of environmental manipulation are denial of scientific facts, distortion of information and emphasis on uncertainty, disinformation disguised as concern, attacks on information sources, greenwashing, astroturfing, and false expert opinions. All these strategies are aimed at manipulating public perception of environmental issues in the interests of various actors—from industrial lobbies to political influence groups. As a result, environmental disinformation becomes a tool not only of economic but also geopolitical confrontation.

The purpose of this study is to systematize the types of environmental disinformation and analyze its impact on public perception of environmental issues and on the processes of environmental policymaking. The research is based on the hypothesis that environmental disinformation significantly distorts public understanding of ecological problems, forming false narratives and hindering the implementation of effective environmental policies.

This study is based on an interdisciplinary approach that combines qualitative content analysis and discourse analysis. The integrated use of these methods makes it possible to identify the mechanisms behind the formation and dissemination of environmental disinformation, as well as to assess its impact on public perception and environmental policy. In parallel, discourse analysis was conducted to identify the rhetorical strategies and ideological frameworks underlying environmental disinformation. Particular attention was paid to how conspiracy theories are integrated into environmental discourse. For example, the study examined claims that the climate agenda is a “conspiracy” of global elites, as well as the ways in which linguistic techniques—such as appeals to emotion, the use of pseudo-scientific terminology, and false patriotic arguments—enhance the persuasiveness of disinformation.[13]

The analysis identified several key categories of manipulative strategies in the environmental sphere. These strategies differ in their methods of information distortion, but all serve the purpose of undermining the environmental agenda.

One of the most widespread strategies is problem denial. This involves the direct rejection of scientific data and the very existence of the issue. A classic example of this approach is climate skepticism, which asserts that global warming is either not occurring or is not of anthropogenic origin. This type of manipulation relies on the tactic of direct refutation of scientific consensus. A historical precedent for such a strategy is the tobacco industry's campaign denying the link between smoking and cancer. The goal of this

[13] EUvsDisinfo (2023). *Disinformation Narratives in Environmental Policy*. European External Action Service.

strategy is to sow doubt about the existence of the problem, thereby reducing public demand for environmental action.

Another common strategy is minimization and distraction. This tactic is based on acknowledging the existence of a problem while simultaneously downplaying its significance or diverting attention to false or secondary factors. This approach often employs cherry-picking and data manipulation to create an illusion of uncertainty or threat minimization.

A typical example of this strategy is the appeal to temporary climate fluctuations. Disinformers may point to isolated periods of local cooling, presenting them as "refutations" of the broader trend of global warming. At the same time, long-term trends supported by scientific evidence are deliberately ignored. Furthermore, this strategy often involves exaggeration of the economic costs of environmental policies. For example, it is claimed that the transition to renewable energy sources (RES) will lead to economic crises, job losses, and increased energy prices, while the long-term benefits of environmental transformation are either downplayed or dismissed as "unrealistic expectations."

The main objective of this strategy is to convince the public that radical measures are unnecessary and that environmental reforms can either be postponed or limited to minimal changes. This approach contributes to delays in making environmentally significant decisions and weakens public pressure on policymakers and businesses.

The Tactic of False Balance. This tactic involves creating the illusion of scientific debate in public discourse where a strong scientific consensus already exists. It is achieved by promoting pseudo-experts—individuals without relevant qualifications—whose opinions are presented as equivalent to the findings of reputable specialists.

A classic example of this approach is the participation of so-called "climate skeptics" in media outlets, whose statements are positioned in opposition to the research of climate scientists.[14] This manner of presenting information misleads the audience by creating the impression that there is no consensus within the scientific community on climate change. As a result, trust in reliable sources is undermined, and the public is left uncertain about whom to believe, which complicates the process of making environmentally significant decisions.

A distinct category of manipulation is greenwashing, or "green camouflage." This is a strategy widely used in the corporate sector, where a company creates the image of being environmentally responsible through marketing and PR, while its actual operations remain polluting or unsustainable. The analysis identified several key greenwashing tactics. One of the most common is paltering—the use of partial truths—where a company highlights minor environmental initiatives while concealing the major damage it causes to the environment.

[14] Lewandowsky, S., Cook, J. (2020). *The Conspiracy Theory Handbook*. George Mason University.

Another tactic involves fictitious carbon offsets, where companies claim to have "neutralized" emissions without actually reducing their volume. Companies also widely use vague green terms such as “eco-friendly,” “natural,” or “sustainable” without substantiating these claims with specific data.

Double standards are also employed, where symbolic eco-programs coexist with a core business that remains highly polluting. For example, oil and gas companies may sponsor environmental initiatives while simultaneously increasing fossil fuel extraction.

The proposed classification covers the main mechanisms of environmental disinformation identified in the course of the study. Each strategy is supported by specific examples, allowing for a systematic approach to the study of manipulation within environmental discourse.

This study has examined the phenomenology of environmental disinformation. The results allow us to formulate the following key conclusions: first, environmental disinformation constitutes a deliberate information strategy aimed at distorting environmental knowledge. Its manifestations are diverse—from the outright denial of scientifically established facts to corporate greenwashing—yet they all share a common feature: they serve the interests of groups seeking to maintain the status quo or profit at the expense of misinforming the public. Secondly, a classification of manipulative strategies was developed, including such key tactics as problem denial, minimization of consequences, pseudoscientific explanations, expert discreditation, greenwashing, and others.

The problem of environmental disinformation is global and interdisciplinary in nature, and addressing it requires ongoing research. Coordinated efforts are needed to increase environmental literacy among the population, to strengthen the presence of scientifically grounded information in the media space, and to rapidly debunk false environmental narratives.

LITERATURE:

1. См. Hall, S. (2020). *The Politics of Environmental Information: Disinformation and Climate Change*. Oxford University Press.
2. European Commission (2021). *Tackling Disinformation: European Framework for Environmental Communication*. Brussels.
3. Wardle, C., Derakhshan, H. (2018). *Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policy Making*. Council of Europe.
4. Sustainability Directory (2023). *Analysis of Environmental Disinformation Trends*. Retrieved from sustainability-directory.com
5. «Лапша Медиа» (2023). *Фейки об экологии в российских СМИ и социальных сетях*. Retrieved from meteovesti.ru

6. Climate Fact Check (2023). *Tracking Climate Misinformation Across Media Platforms*. Retrieved from climatefactcheck.org

7. EUvsDisinfo (2023). *Disinformation Narratives in Environmental Policy*. European External Action Service.

8. Lewandowsky, S., Cook, J. (2020). *The Conspiracy Theory Handbook*. George Mason University.

9. PMC (2024). *Analysis of Environmental Disinformation Sources*. Retrieved from pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov.