Russia preys on the unrest in France with speedy and spillover consequences

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by Stephanie Lecocq, Reuters

A Russian network has installed its influence through social media into the on-going unrest in France. It is possible for this influence travelling the southern Europe as other unrests are seen. France 24 reported, " The European Union analysis found that a covert Russian network known as "Operation Overload" spread videos impersonating Western media outlets to target French audiences – some falsely claiming migrants had raped protesters or terrorist attacks were imminent ." This is spreading of disinformation. "The EU analysis, which covers the period from October 7 to 21, found that Russia sought to "depict the French leadership as weak and increasingly authoritarian "." At least, this can destabilize one of the major powers in Europe against Russia.

The coverage of this disinformation is 49 million views in the top 10 X posts in France while population of France is close to 70 million. On a particular day of protest at the end of October, Newsweek reported that at least half a million people was on the street.

The network being active since September 2023 is likely more relevant to the Russia-Ukraine war from 2022 for Russia than others. This incident reminds the importance of source criticism used by historians for fact checking from three independent sources. This may not be feasible for the public in terms of expertise, time and resources. Nevertheless, the public is already engaged for manipulated activities within a period as short as a matter of days. Governments cannot readily respond to that speedy public reaction from media. This implies the roles and investment from governments with private media providers to use source criticism and announce quickly this kind of massive disinformation. The effect is to reduce the spread and associated conflicts attributed by hidden agenda from major disputes.

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