



BUILDING RESILIENCE

TO DISINFORMATION

IN UKRAINE

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MOONSHOTTEAM.COM



Executive summary

In July 2024, Moonshot, Google and Jigsaw launched a groundbreaking prebunking campaign in Ukraine. We used humor and local influencers to teach residents to spot three manipulation techniques commonly used in Russian disinformation: emotional manipulation, decontextualization, and astroturfing.

The initiative was particularly unique as it succeeded during active wartime, reaching a population already saturated with disinformation, and facing constant information warfare alongside military attacks by Russia. It achieved the largest field effect sizes recorded for a prebunking intervention, building individuals' ability to detect common disinformation techniques.

The campaign initially targeted Ukrainians aged 18-55 before expanding to include those 55+ to reach the general population. Videos were designed to resonate with war-weary audiences through relatable scenarios - family conversations in the kitchen - and Ukrainian humor, while providing practical tools to identify manipulation online during moments of crisis, when accurate information is scarce.

Results



We equipped over 495,000 Ukrainians to resist disinformation: Given the reach of the campaign on YouTube, we can estimate that the videos improved almost half a million Ukrainians' ability to detect manipulation techniques.



We recorded remarkable improvements in detection: After watching a video, viewers' ability to recall a manipulation technique and apply it to a manipulative news headline improved by 8.7% on average. Viewers of our [Astroturfing](#) video reached 17.8%.



These were the highest field effect sizes achieved in Moonshot and Google's global prebunking campaigns: surpassing a 5.4% average in [Germany](#) (2023), 1.8% in Indonesia (2023) and 1.5% in Germany, France, Italy, Belgium and Poland (2024).



We built resilience at scale during wartime: successfully improving citizens' disinformation resilience in an active conflict zone, where they face coordinated campaigns during military operations, including missile and drone strikes.



Amplifying local influencers as narrators was particularly effective in prebunking: their humor, warmth and authenticity normalized this topic, built our audience's trust, and gave them a clear call to action.



We celebrated media literacy as a civic virtue: Supported by a network of local partners and the creative agency [banda](#), the campaign succeeded in leveraging positive Ukrainian national identity and solidarity. We strengthened social cohesion against divisive disinformation tactics, and emphasized the value of protecting others from hostile state disinformation.

The challenge

Ukraine faces persistent online influence campaigns to advance Russian interests. Attacks often leverage emerging disinformation tactics, such as using [generative AI tools](#) to impersonate Ukrainians and fake grassroots opinion, and [Telegram bots](#) to influence residents of Russian-occupied territories. Russian state-aligned actors also spread false stories in [coordination with massive missile strikes](#), inciting panic and demoralizing Ukrainians in moments of crisis or military action, when accurate information is not yet available.

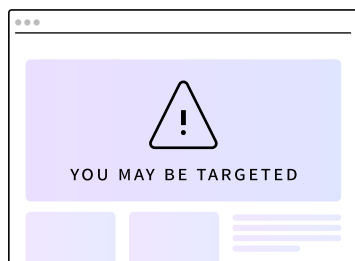
Russia frequently exploits Ukraine's internal divisions, particularly during periods of political tension. Disinformation undermines support for Ukraine's government and fosters distrust in democratic processes both [within Ukraine and across the European Union](#). Recent trends suggest an emphasis on leveraging emotional triggers and exploiting war fatigue.

The response

Strengthening resilience against disinformation requires efforts beyond debunking and fact-checking. Psychological inoculation campaigns targeting online manipulation tactics can significantly counteract this threat. Prebunking is a proven communication technique designed to help audiences identify and reject attempts to manipulate them in the future. By forewarning people, and equipping them to spot and refute misleading arguments, they gain resilience to being misled.

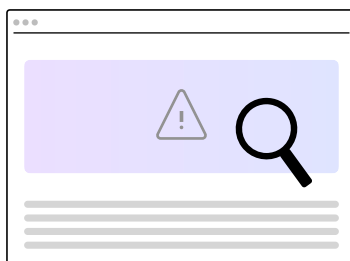
To launch a Ukraine-wide prebunking initiative to tackle disinformation, Moonshot partnered with Google, Jigsaw, and expert local and international organizations. These included Vox Ukraine, StopFake, and Detector Media, Ukraine's public broadcaster, Suspilne Media, Ukraine's Center for Countering Disinformation (CCD), and BBC Media Action.

Prebunking contains three components that work in conjunction:



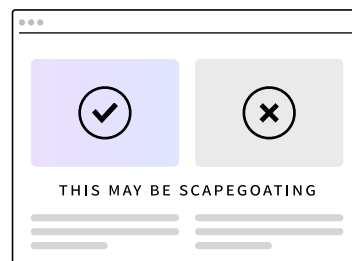
Forewarning

Users are alerted that there are impending “attacks” to manipulate them.



Stimulus

Users see example(s) of manipulative messaging to identify it in the future.



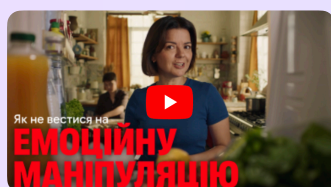
Refutation

Users are equipped to spot and refute a manipulative message.

We used video ads to build Ukrainians' resilience to three common disinformation techniques:

Emotional Manipulation

leveraging a range of emotions, such as sadness, hopelessness, and exhaustion, to exploit the psychological exhaustion resulting from the conflict.



[Emotional Manipulation video](#)

Decontextualization

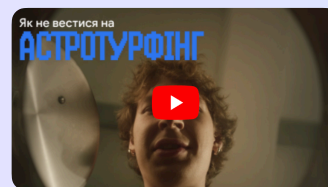
the practice of taking information out of its original context to create false or misleading narratives.



[Decontextualization video](#)

Astroturfing

fabricating the appearance of grassroots movements through coordinated, inauthentic behavior (CIB), typically employed for targeted harassment or to artificially suppress or amplify specific narratives.

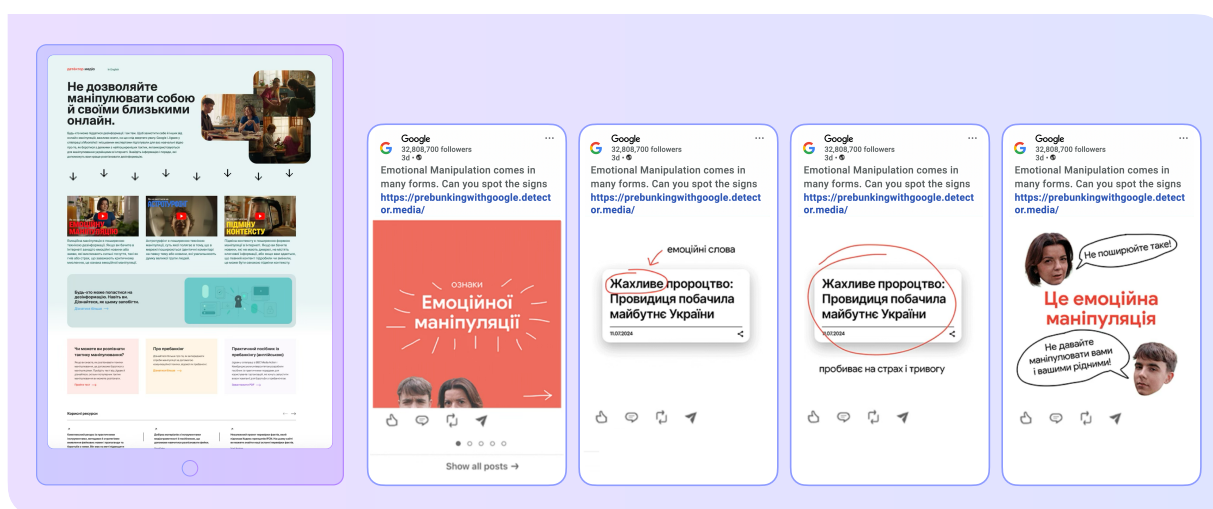


[Astroturfing video](#)

Our [landing page](#) was hosted by Detector Media, and served as a wider call to action for Ukrainians to investigate what they see online.

Fact-checkers, government organisations and media outlets joined the wider campaign, contributing educational resources, media literacy tools, and fact checks.

We also built a toolkit of assets to help influencers and partners share prebunking content online.





Impact

We launched three video ads on YouTube and Meta in July 2024. These were further shared by Ukrainian influencers and partners across Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, X, Viber and Telegram. The campaign targeted Ukrainians aged 18-55, before expanding to reach the general population. It achieved significant reach among our target audience. Using randomized surveys on YouTube and Meta, which assessed viewers' ability to recall the techniques they had learned about, we were able to estimate at least **495,000 Ukrainians improved their ability to detect key disinformation techniques.**

6.5M+



Viewers in our target audience reached with YouTube, Facebook and Instagram ads.

8.7%

Average increase in our target audience's ability to recognize a manipulation technique after watching one of the YouTube videos.

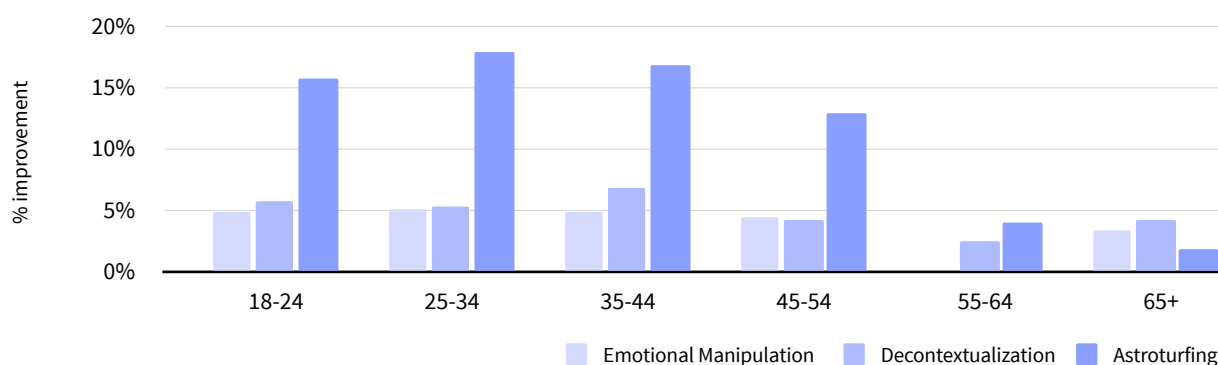
UP TO

17.8%

Increase in viewers' ability to recognize manipulation techniques after watching our most effective prebunking video (Astroturfing).

Over the entire campaign, viewers retained the knowledge we shared and were able to recognize signs of online manipulation techniques. All age groups improved technique detection skills, demonstrating how prebunking can prevent the spread of disinformation by building resilience to common forms of persuasion.

▼ % increase in technique detection, by age and video





Insights

📌 Pinpointing relevant manipulation techniques may enhance prebunking's effects

We gave citizens terminology to identify common manipulation techniques online. This new, standardized vocabulary makes it easier to remember in the future when they encounter manipulative content again.

This may be why explicit discernment of Astroturfing appeared to have an outsized effect. It is especially prevalent in the context of Russia's invasion, and our campaign provided a helpful label for this phenomenon.

📌 Influencers made our message more locally resonant and effective

Influencers were critical in shaping perceptions around the issue of misinformation in Ukraine, and modeling real conversations with family members.

During the campaign, influencers leveraged humour, warmth and relatability to explain common techniques in everyday settings. This normalized the topic, built our audience's trust, and gave them a clear call to action.

📌 Use positive, trustworthy, and pro-social messaging

Our videos emphasized national identity, cultural unity, family values, and individuals' ability to protect their peers and loved ones online. This may in turn have increased the impact of prebunking in Ukraine, because we focused so explicitly on social cohesion.

Research on Ukrainians' social media behaviour found that post-invasion messages about ingroup solidarity (support for Ukraine and Ukrainians) received [significantly more online engagement](#) than posts about outgroup hostility to Russian aggression. In line with these findings, our message of solidarity may have elicited higher engagement online and further strengthened group cohesion.

Future campaigns can replicate this by emphasizing the impact of disinformation on communities, the value of thinking critically about online content before sharing it, and empathy, care and responsibility towards others.

Forward look: protecting the public

- **Prebunking campaigns can make foreign information manipulation and interference less persuasive** and empower citizens to resist false content online.
- **Prebunking can also play a critical role in protecting the physical and psychological safety of populations under military attack.** In the Ukraine conflict, Russian disinformation has been used to keep residents from seeking safety.
- **These interventions are scalable and can be applied in different information environments,** in response to online disinformation threats in 2023 and 2024, Moonshot, Google and Jigsaw delivered successful prebunking campaigns in [Germany](#), [Indonesia](#), and across the [European Union](#), reaching over 170M citizens around election periods and supporting democratic processes.
- **Prebunking is platform agnostic.** It can be deployed on the most relevant, high impact surface for any given audience or threat.

6w

[Original] Гарна тема, таке пора в школі викладати. Я б додав ще що успішні фейки викликають швидку бурхливу реакцію яка не дає місця логіці

1 like Reply See translation

[Translation] It's a great topic—this should be taught in schools. I would also add that successful fakes provoke a rapid, emotional reaction that leaves no room for logic.

7w

[Original] ого ну це тупо нетфлікс, прям анти-іпсо едюкейшн ! 🤘💕

6 likes Reply See translation

[Translation] Whoa, this is basically Netflix, like anti-PSYOP education! 🤘💕

Audience feedback on our "Decontextualization" video.

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About Moonshot

Moonshot is a social impact business with a mission to end online harms, applying evidence, ethics and human rights. We deliver global initiatives to empower the public to keep themselves safe from online threats, reaching over 300 million people across the globe. Moonshot additionally delivers a proven violence prevention model to connect people in need with life-saving services online. Our work is rooted in the fundamental belief that change is possible. Moonshot operates globally from four offices: Dublin, London, Toronto, and Washington D.C.

