

INFODEMIC IN GEORGIA





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INTRODUCTION

An infodemic, as defined by the World Health Organization, is an overabundance of information, both online and offline. It includes **deliberate** attempts to disseminate wrong information to undermine the public **health response** and **advance alternative agendas** of groups or individuals. Mis- and disinformation can be harmful to people's physical and mental health; increase stigmatization; threaten precious health gains; and lead to poor observance of public health measures, thus reducing their effectiveness and endangering countries' ability to stop the pandemic.

This study, which involves monitoring of traditional and social media in 2020, aims at identifying key messages and false information concerning the pandemic as well as mapping sources, including antivaxxer groups and channels of dissemination of information.

The introductory part of the report reflects key findings of the study. Infodemic-related main messages, identified in Georgian-language media, are provided in the first part while messages conveyed through Sputnik, an online media outlet established by the Russian government, are provided in the second part. The third part of the report discusses fake news and manipulative content. The final part of the report describes sources as well as modus operandi of various interest groups and also, provides information about main antivaxxer groups that operate in social networks and are often cited by media outlets with political agenda.

The report also contains data revealed by Myth Detector within the framework of Facebook's fact checking program.¹The study has used Facebook's analytical tool Crowdtangle.

Maltego – open source intelligence (OSINT) software is used for data visualisation.

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¹ Facebook's Third-Party Fact-Checking Program; <https://www.facebook.com/journalismproject/programs/third-party-fact-checking>

MONITORING METHODOLOGY

The report employs a mixed methodology: content analysis of traditional media and social media monitoring to reveal false information.

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF TRADITIONAL MEDIA. To identify main messages and their sources, the monitoring was carried out on the following media outlets:

- **16 nationwide media outlets:** Daily prime-time news and weekly analytical programs on four TV channels: Georgian Public Broadcaster (Moambe; Akhali Kvira); Mtavari Channel (Mtavari, Post Factum); Imedi (Qronika; Imedis Kvira); Obieqtivi TV (Akhali Ambebi). Talk-shows of five TV channels: Georgian Public Broadcaster (Kviris Interviu); Mtavari Channel (Gamis Mtavari); Imedi (Arena); Obieqtivi (Ghamis Studia; Dghis Bolos); Kavkasia (Barieri; Spektri). Seven online media outlets: Sakinformi, Netgazeti, Interpressnews, Georgia & World, PIA, Marshalpress, News Front. Four newspapers: Rezonansi, Kviris Palitra, Asaval-Dasavali, Alia.
- **Media outlets established by Russian government:** Georgian-language sputnik-georgia.com and Russian-language sputnik-georgia.ru, sputnik-ossetia.ru, sputnik-abkhazia.ru.

MONITORING OF SOCIAL MEDIA TO IDENTIFY FAKE NEWS AND ANTIVAXXER GROUPS. As many as 259 Facebook pages and 69 groups were monitored through Facebook analytical tool, Crowdtangle. Furthermore, additional information was collected by means of Crowdtangle search system, also based on the data obtained within the Facebook's fact checking program. Additionally, wrong information provided by readers was checked, where instead of regular monitoring, examples and their sources were selected randomly. It should be noted that the social media user database has been regularly updated.

With regard to antivaxxer groups, Facebook accounts, including fake accounts were explored and their behavior monitored.

The monitoring covered the period between 1 January 2020 and 1 January 2021.

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KEY FINDINGS

THE MEDIA MONITORING DATA REVEALED THE FOLLOWING TRENDS:

- Five main topics were identified in traditional Georgian media in terms of infodemic. They are: 1. Denial of pandemic/coronavirus and conspiracy theories about the origin of the virus; 2. Vaccine hesitancy; 3. Authoritarian countries (Russia/China) vs the West; 4. Religion and identity; 5. Diagnosing, regulations, etc.
- The leading among five themes was the denial of coronavirus and conspiracy theories about the origin of the virus, followed by messages conveying vaccine hesitancy, which increased gradually in parallel to the development of vaccines.

CORONAVIRUS, NEW WORLD ORDER, CLOSURE OF BORDERS

- The coronavirus was presented as something that was introduced for the aim of establishing global control and new world order, that was man-made and spread artificially to establish digital dictatorship.
- Closure of borders due to the pandemic was portrayed as a positive possibility of stopping migration and expansion of foreign countries by ultranationalist groups.
- Closure of borders due to the pandemic was demanded by far-right Georgian March (with Iran and China) as well as by the founder of the United National Movement and former President Mikheil Saakashvili (with China).
- Besides xenophobic context, far-right groups perceived pandemic in anti-Western context, viewing the coronavirus as the divine retribution for sins which stem from liberalism and the Western lifestyle.

VACCINATION, RELIGION AND IDENTITY

- With regard to vaccination, the most widely circulating message concerned conspiracy theories about implanting chips and Bill Gates' plans to depopulate the world; another dominating opinion was that vaccines/medications were tested on Third World countries like Georgia.
- Clergy as well as a segment of journalists and politicians justified vaccine hesitancy by invoking religious motive and were promoting the idea that salvation from the coronavirus is in God. An exceptional quality of the Georgian DNA to resist the coronavirus was promoted in certain cases too.

RUSSIAN VACCINE VS WESTERN

- In certain cases, those who opposed the vaccination simultaneously emphasized the advantage of the Russian vaccine, which indicates that the issue of human health was discussed through the lens of politics and such discourse was most clearly observed in media outlets linked to the Kremlin.
- The Kremlin founded news agency Sputnik tried to help the Russian vaccine secure its place on the market by promoting it, on the one hand, and portraying Western vaccines as unsuccessful and unreliable on the other hand and claiming that the Russian vaccine is rejected on political grounds.

AUTHORITARIAN COUNTRIES VS THE WEST

- Much like the Russian-government-owned news agency Sputnik, Georgian-language pro-Kremlin media outlets created a dichotomy whereby Russia and China were leaders in the fight against the pandemic, providing help to other countries, while the West did not show solidarity with others and failed to cope with the pandemic.
- Based on Chinese and Russian examples attempts to portray the socialist system in the positive light, on the one hand, and on the other hand, to fan skepticism about Euro-Atlantic institutions also were revealed.

FAKE AND MANIPULATIVE CONTENT

- During the year, the fact checking portal, Myth Detector, produced the total of 233 explanatory articles debunking fake and manipulative information about the novel coronavirus, and most of them were dedicated to vaccination.
- From factchecked materials, the largest share accounted for fake news, followed by conspiracy theories and manipulative content. With regard to visual manipulations, 20 were photo and 9 video manipulations.
- Fake and manipulative content most frequently concerned the USA followed by separate EU countries.

SOURCES

- Three interest-groups were identified during the reporting period, which regularly posted fake or misleading information about the coronavirus. These groups are: political, antiliberal, economic.
- In addition to Russian state news agency, Sputnik, and other Russian media outlets, the position of the Kremlin, in the process of infodemic, was also promoted by Georgian-language media with direct or indirect ties to Russia (Georgia and World, News Front Georgia, tvalsazrasi.ge, Sakinformi and Obieqtivi TV).
- From anti-Western editions, two newspapers – Asaval-Dasavali and Alia – published false and misleading materials about the pandemic.
- From among **clickbait websites**, which are mainly focused on economic gains, some published disinformation of political content; some of them have IP addresses in Russia, including cloned pages of respected Western media outlets such as CNN and BBC.
- Antivaxxers were among political as well as antiliberal groups, though they existed somewhat separately from those groups and were mainly active in various Facebook groups.

- A number of fake Facebook accounts might be linked to Russia; this could be inferred from the URL address of one account and messages posted by these accounts which coincided with those of actors engaged in the Kremlin propaganda against the Lugar Lab, also released identical documents that were leaked as a result of cyberattack on the Lugar.
- Fourteen Facebook accounts are administered by several antivaxxers. Not all accounts contain the word “pandemic” or “coronavirus” in their names; some of them had been created before the pandemic broke out, but their names were changed later.
- As many as 30 fake profiles were revealed; seven of them are administrators of separate antivaxxer groups, while the remaining 23 limit themselves to sharing or commenting antivaccination posts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is important to continue the monitoring of information flows and sources as this will help identify problems and respond to them by applying effective strategic communication.
- A mechanism of cooperation needs to be set up between state and non-state actors to facilitate the exchange of information, on the one hand, and rapid response to disinformation flows, on the other hand.
- Such cooperation is especially important in the process of vaccination in order to promptly provide media and fact-checking organizations with information about individual cases, ensure medical assessment of those cases and avoid various interpretations, as it happened during the vaccination in Western countries.
- Planning and implementation of strategic communication must involve organizations working on issues of communication and exposing fake news, also cooperating with Facebook.
- When planning strategic communication, one should consider political topics and delivery of information to the public on them, as well as antiliberal discourse, which, inter alia, implies cooperation with clergy in the area of information exchange and involvement of clergy in awareness raising campaigns.
- There is a need to incorporate issues of infodemic in media literacy programs and to train not only youth but also teachers and medical personnel as well as other groups on fact-checking tools.

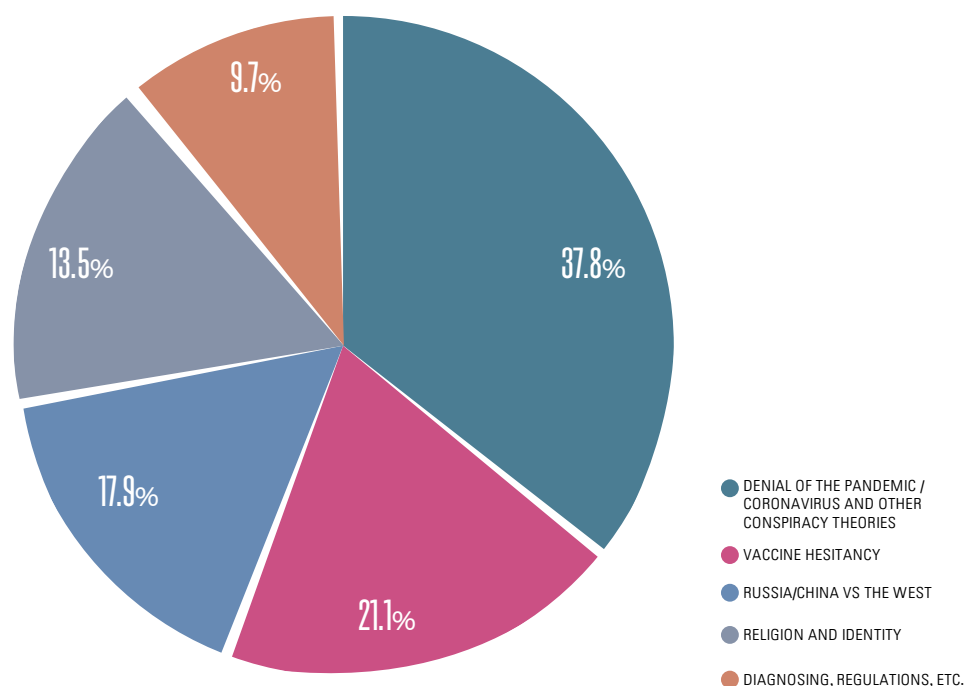
I. INFODEMIC MESSAGES

TOTAL QUANTITATIVE DATA. Messages concerning the coronavirus were grouped into five main categories:

1. Denial of the pandemic/coronavirus and other conspiracy theories about origin of the virus (283 – 37.8%);
2. Vaccine hesitancy (158 – 21.51%);
3. Russia/China vs the West (134 – 17.9%);
4. Religion and identity (101 – 13.5%);
5. Diagnosing, regulations, etc. (73 – 9.7%).

As Figure 1 shows, the leader among these five categories was the denial of coronavirus and conspiracy theories about the origin of the virus. This is followed by messages conveying vaccine hesitancy, which increased gradually in parallel to the development of vaccines; and messages discussing the pandemic through the lens of politics, which lagged a little behind.

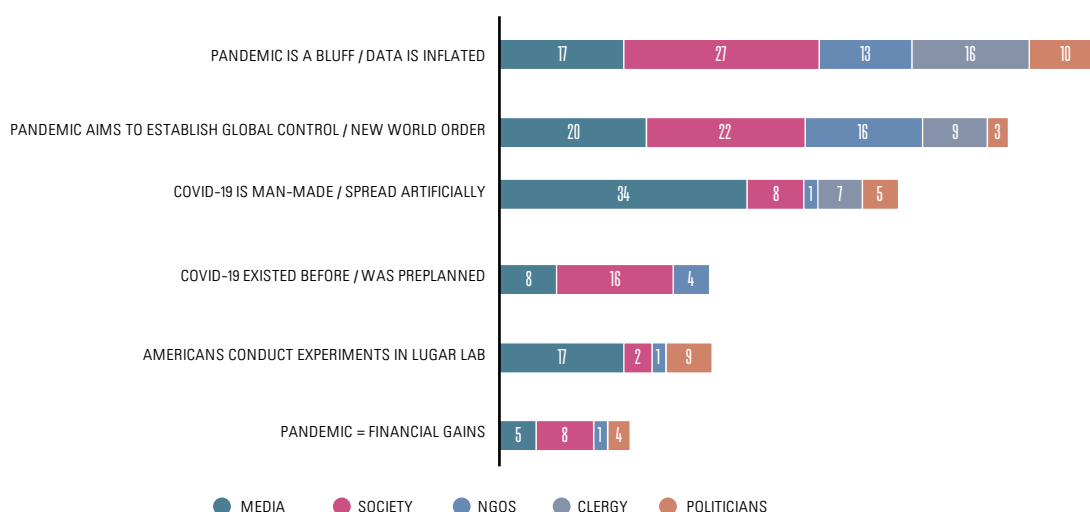
FIGURE 1. INFODEMIC MESSAGES BY TOPICS



1. DENIAL OF THE PANDEMIC / CORONAVIRUS AND OTHER CONSPIRACY THEORIES ABOUT IT

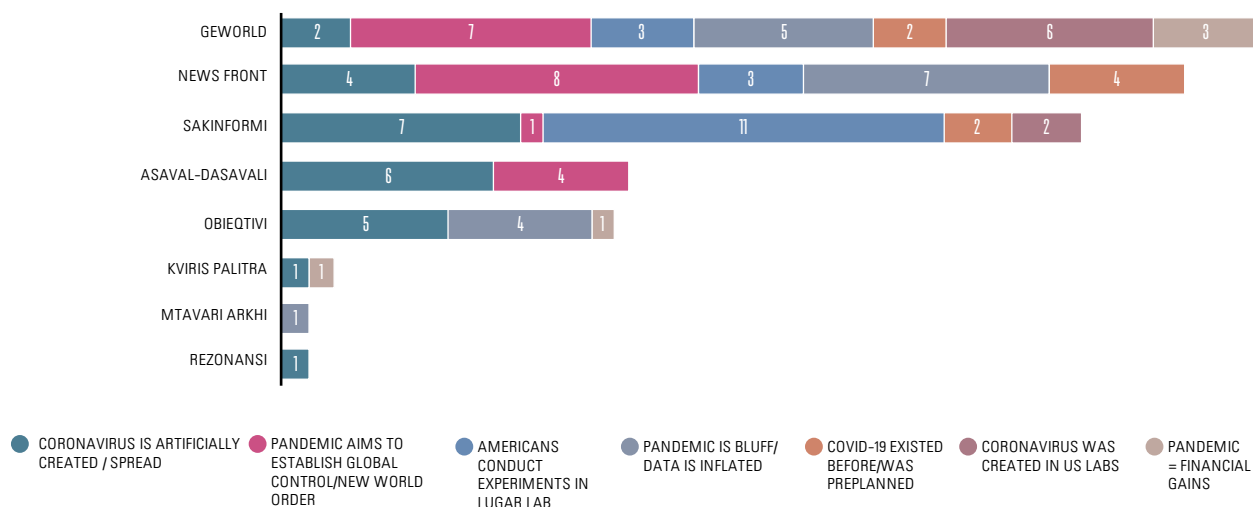
This category was dominated by the allegation whereby the pandemic was a bluff while the data on virus-infected people inflated (83). The coronavirus was presented as something that was introduced for the aim of establishing global control and new world order (70) and that was man-made and spread artificially (54). Other frequent messages involved conspiracy theories about Americans conducting suspicious experiments in the Lugar Laboratory operating in Tbilisi (20), also theories that Covid-19 existed in the past and the pandemic was preplanned (28). Less frequent was the allegation that the pandemic was declared for financial gains, not for preventing the spread of the virus (18).

FIGURE 2. DENIAL OF THE PANDEMIC / CORONAVIRUS AND OTHER CONSPIRACY THEORIES BY SOURCES



Conspiracy theories about non-existence or artificial outbreak of the pandemic, and conduct of suspicious experiments in the Lugar Lab were most frequently reported by online outlets having close ties with the Kremlin: Georgia and World (Geworld.ge) (28), News Front Georgia (26) and Sakinformi (32). Similar messages were promoted by the Obieqtivi TV broadcaster (10) which is associated with a pro-Russian political party, Alliance of Patriots, and the Asaval-Dasavali newspaper which pursues ethno-nationalistic editorial policy (10).

FIGURE 3. DENIAL OF THE PANDEMIC / CORONAVIRUS AND OTHER CONSPIRACY THEORIES BY MEDIA OUTLETS



Plans of Masons and the intention to annihilate males of the Mongoloid race were cited as causes behind the artificial creation of the coronavirus by the pro-Kremlin news agency News Front and Asaval-Dasavali, respectively:

NEWS FRONT: “Sphinxes of Masons, Satanic castes having created a global world, also created the coronavirus to suppress sacred reason – to get rid of the older generation once and for all.”²

ASAVAL-DASAVALI: “Coronavirus is a military virus which was artificially created in a secret laboratory of Canada to annihilate males of Mongoloid race.”³

As Figure 3 shows, this category includes separate examples of problematic coverage by mainstream media too. Namely:

- In its program “Mtavari Shabats,” the TV company, Mtavari Arkhi, aired a report titled “Diagnosis bought for GEL 1000 – the government artificially inflates Covid-19 death statistics” alleging, based on a comment of a single source, that the coronavirus statistics is artificially inflated.⁴
- A journalist of Kviris Palitra raised doubts that the coronavirus might be linked to biological terrorism or interests of pharmaceutical companies: “In addition to the information war that has been waged across the world, a new ‘cold war’ has also broken out and many countries would not be against using secretly a ‘biological weapon’ to deliver a blow to the economy of unfriendly country or to create a new market for the sale of new medications treating the disease which they themselves have spread.”⁵

Apart from media, conspiracy theories about artificial origin of the virus to impose a global control were promoted by clergy as well as representatives of the pro-Kremlin political parties and public organizations:

VAZHA OTARASHVILI, ALLIANCE OF PATRIOTS: “It has been artificially introduced.”⁶ “Their main goal in this case is to strip people of their spiritual food, estrange people from the God and turn them into inanimate hard-wired objects that will be subjugated to a total control of the world’s globalist forces forever.”⁷

DAVIT ISAKADZE, ARCHPRIEST: “Yes, Covid-19 exists, but it has been artificially created to kill a segment of the world population and to turn the survivors into slaves of a new world order!”⁸

DIMITRI LORTKIPANIDZE, THE PRIMAKOV GEORGIAN-RUSSIAN PUBLIC CENTER: “The Covid pandemic is the beginning of digital dictatorship!... It is a crowning phase of globalization, which means that the control over the world population will further enhance.”⁹

² Koba Arabuli, writer, News Front, 18 September, <https://bit.ly/2ZqClhj>

³ Jaba Tkemaladze, Asaval-Dasavali, 2-8 March.

⁴ Myth Detector, 23 June, 2020. Sensationalism and Unfounded Information at Mtavari Arkhi TV about Coronavirus. <http://mythdetector.ge/en/myth/sensationalism-and-unfounded-information-mtavari-arkhi-tv-about-coronavirus>

⁵ Kviris Palitra, 3 February 2020. “Chinese coronavirus – yet another pandemic or a new type of biological weapon?” <https://bit.ly/3tW2NNT>

⁶ Obieqtivi TV, Ghamis Studia, 24 September, <https://www.myvideo.ge/v/3970063>

⁷ Georgia and World, 6 May, <https://bit.ly/2WcuJhT>

⁸ Asaval-Dasavali, 14-20 December.

⁹ Asaval-Dasavali, 28 September – 4 October.

2. VACCINE HESITANCY

Vaccine hesitancy that enhanced especially after the creation of vaccines against the Covid-19, were most frequently exhibited by society (64), media (57) and the clergy (31). Dominating opinions were that:

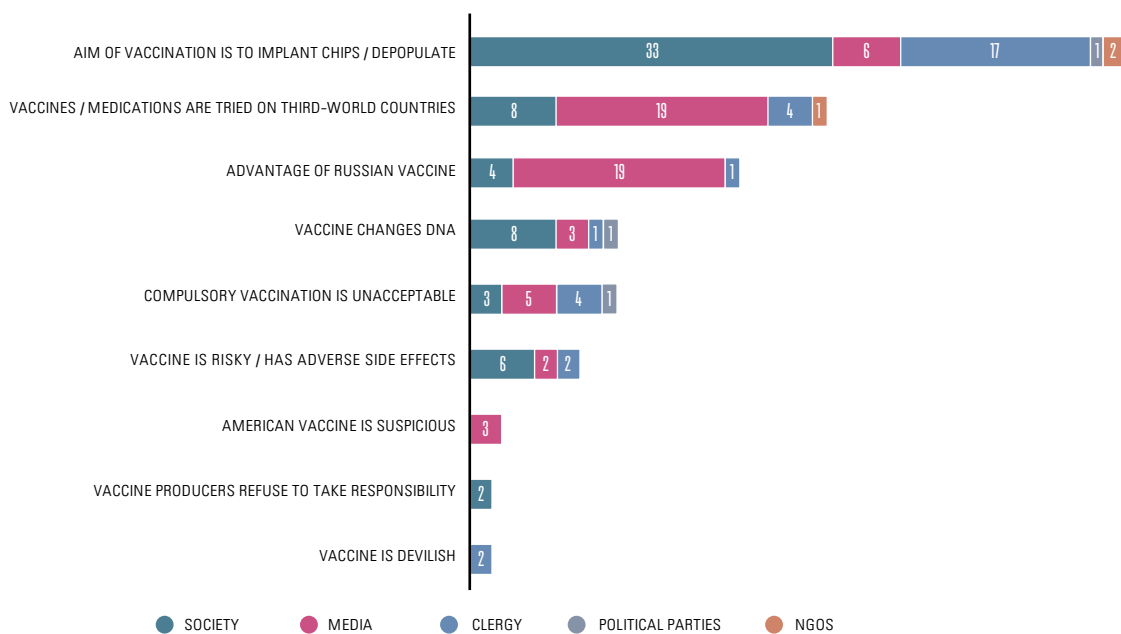
- The aim of vaccination is to implant chips into people and to depopulate the world (59), with Bill Gates mainly seen behind this conspiracy theory;
- Vaccines/medications are mainly tried on third-world countries (32).

Furthermore, those who opposed the vaccination simultaneously emphasized the advantage of the Russian vaccine (24), which indicates that the issue of human health was discussed through the lens of politics and such discourse was most clearly observed in media outlets linked to the Kremlin.

Other opinions also were that:

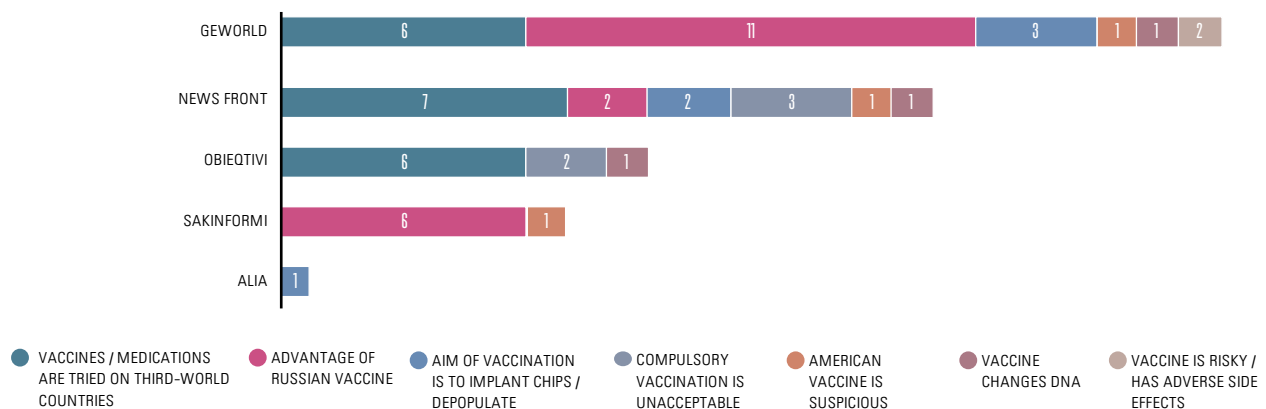
- Vaccine will change DNA (13),
- Compulsory vaccination is tantamount to acting against the free will of people (13).
- Vaccination is risky and has serious adverse effects (10), etc.

FIGURE 4. VACCINE HESITANCY BY SOURCES



Most vocal in the above allegations were the media outlets with direct or indirect links with the Kremlin: Ge-world.ge (24), News Front (16), Obieqtivi TV (9) and Sakinformi (7). Furthermore, against the backdrop of general anti-vaccination sentiments, Ge-world.ge (24), Sakinformi (7) and News Front (16) were most actively engaged in convincing the audience of the advantage of Russian vaccine.

FIGURE 5. VACCINE HESITANCY BY MEDIA OUTLETS



From among the clergy, the only statement promoting the Russian vaccine as the alternative to Western produced vaccines was made by the same priest who portrayed Western vaccines as a threat and a tool for experiments.

OPPOSING WESTERN VACCINE	SUPPORTING RUSSIAN VACCINE
<p>GIORGI RAZMADZE, PRIEST: “Georgia will become a biological testing ground, which will first be brought to its knees by the scale of pandemic and then, will be supplied, through the UN, with experimental vaccine.”</p>	<p>GIORGI RAZMADZE, PRIEST: “Around two months ago, Russia announced that it had already created a vaccine and, if my memory serves me right, several large countries declared that they had already purchased it. Why are they [healthcare authorities] silent and say nothing? The other day, Amiran Gamkrelidze said that the Russian vaccine had not been tested in international scientific labs. Has the vaccine offered by the UN been tested?!”¹⁰</p>

Clergy as well as a segment of journalists and politicians justified vaccine hesitancy by invoking religious motive, and alleging that the vaccination was intended for putting people under complete control through depopulation, change of human DNA and implantation of chips.

DAVIT SULASHVILI, ARCHPRIEST: “That conference [in the Pentagon] was attended by Bill Gates and he proposed the Pentagon to create a virus that would be introduced into people to turn religious fundamentalists into loyalists to the USA.... During another speech, Bill Gates announced the creation of a vaccine that would help solve the problem of excess population in the world. Targets would, of course, be developing countries.”¹¹

DAVIT KVLIVIDZE, ARCHPRIEST: “The key and final goal is the rise of the Antichrist ... Once you are implanted with that chip, you no longer belong to yourself... Those with embedded chips, who will allow chips to be implanted at the time of Antichrists, will no longer be saved.”¹²

¹⁰ Georgia and World, 15 September, “UNICEF starts distributing trial vaccines against Covid-19 across countries.” <https://bit.ly/3djHpMC>

¹¹ News Front, 26 October. <https://bit.ly/2ZqPbfy>

¹² Facebook page of the Orthodox Parents’ Union, 26 May, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=606000250272012>

ARCHBISHOP SPIRIDON: “Bill Gates who finances this system, speaks publicly that they will affect DNA and brain cells to form a type of people they want.”¹³

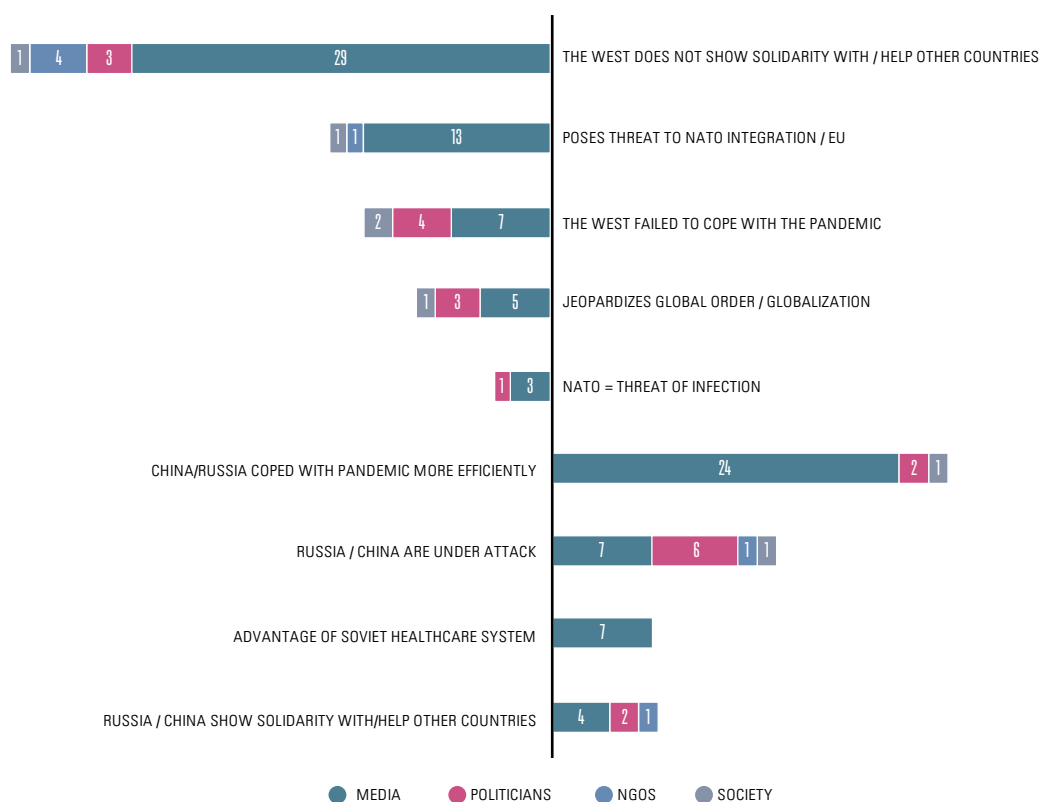
VAZHA OTARASHVILI, ALLIANCE OF PATRIOTS: “They are going to create the vaccine that will affect genetics, human genetics and actually, annihilate the mankind as reasoning beings and creations of God.”¹⁴

NINO RATISHVILI, PRESENTER: “It [vaccine] is not from the God, is it?! It is something created artificially and we know that something artificial is not provided by God... It is not its creation and therefore, I am exiting the realm created by God, am I not? And whose hands I, having become healthier, prettier and younger, am falling into?”¹⁵

3. RUSSIA / CHINA VS THE WEST

Much like the Russian-government-owned news agency Sputnik (see, Sputnik, page 24), Georgian-language pro-Kremlin media outlets created a dichotomy whereby Russia and China were leaders in the fight against the pandemic (27), providing help to other countries, including Italy (7) while the West did not show solidarity with other countries (37) and failed to cope with the pandemic (13). Their reporting also echoed Sputnik’s messages alleging that the pandemic impedes integration into NATO while jeopardizing the unity of the EU (15), and portraying NATO as a hot spot of the Covid-19 infection (4).

FIGURE 6. RUSSIA / CHINA VS THE WEST BY SOURCES



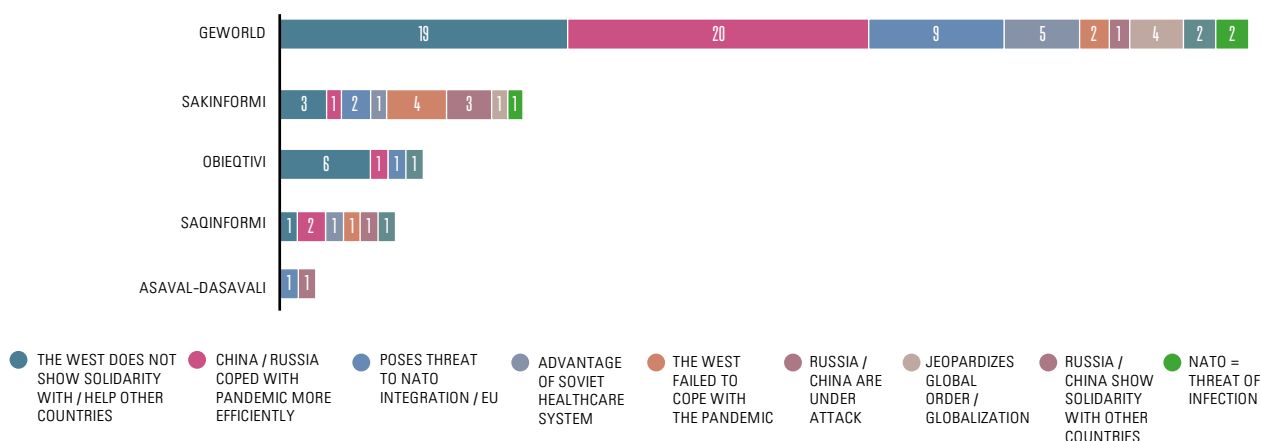
¹³ qadageba.ge, 25 January. <https://www.facebook.com/Qadagebage/videos/1774129289420973/>

¹⁴ Obieqtivi TV, Ghamis Studia, 24 September, <https://www.myvideo.ge/v/3970063>

¹⁵ Obieqtivi TV, Ghamis Studia, 26 August, <https://www.myvideo.ge/v/3961523>

Most active in discussing pandemic from the standpoint of foreign policy directions was Geworld.ge (64), followed by Sakinformi (16) and Obieqtivi TV (9).

FIGURE 7. RUSSIA / CHINA VS THE WEST BY MEDIA OUTLETS



Examples provided below illustrate attempts to portray the socialist system and actions in Russia and China in the positive light, on the one hand, and on the other hand, to fan skepticism about Euro-Atlantic institutions:

RUSSIA / CHINA	EU / USA	NATO
<p>VALERI KVARATSKHELIA, PRESENTER: “Italy is among those countries that always supports sanctioning of Russia by the EU and the USA. But who lent a helping hand when it faced difficulty? Russia, China... Americans did not do anything, let alone the EU.”¹⁶</p>	<p>DIMITRI LORTKIPANIDZE, THE PRIMAKOV GEORGIAN-RUSSIAN PUBLIC CENTER: “Society... shall not get cheated by mottos that the EU is our future. The EU is not the future of Europe itself, and this has been proved by the pandemic.”¹⁷</p> <p>GIGI MAGHLAKELIDZE, ALLIANCE OF PATRIOTS: “The nature terminated that visa liberalization, much-talked visa liberalization...”¹⁸</p>	<p>JABA KHUBUA, JOURNALIST: “A panic fear of spread of the coronavirus and self-isolation is precisely the most loyal, natural and strategic ally of the government of Georgia now, not the military force of NATO or statements of Congressman Adam Kinzinger who changes his stance depending on circumstances at a given moment!”¹⁹</p>
<p>VALERI KVARATSKHELIA, AUTHOR: “In the process of fighting against the coronavirus the socialist China achieved amazing success whereas the capitalist West displayed total helplessness. Moreover, Russia looks, so far, more efficient in coping with the pandemic than the West.”²⁰</p>	<p>SAKINFROMI: “Democracy has also failed to protect us from the coronavirus – quite the contrary, the stronger the democracy in the country the higher the spread of the coronavirus, which has been proved by the example of the USA.”²¹</p>	<p>GEWORLD.GE: “NATO – the organization that had always been in the lead, declaring it was the most powerful military alliance and warning everyone against daring to challenge it, has been left without a function.”²²</p>

¹⁶ Obieqtivi TV, Ghamis Studia, 24 March. <https://www.myvideo.ge/v/391681>

¹⁷ Georgia and World, 13 May. <https://bit.ly/3fHENXD>

¹⁸ Obieqtivi TV, Ghamis Studia, 30 April. <https://www.myvideo.ge/v/3928478>

¹⁹ Asaval-Dasavali, 16-22 March.

²⁰ Georgia and World, 29 April. <https://bit.ly/2KKAFI8>

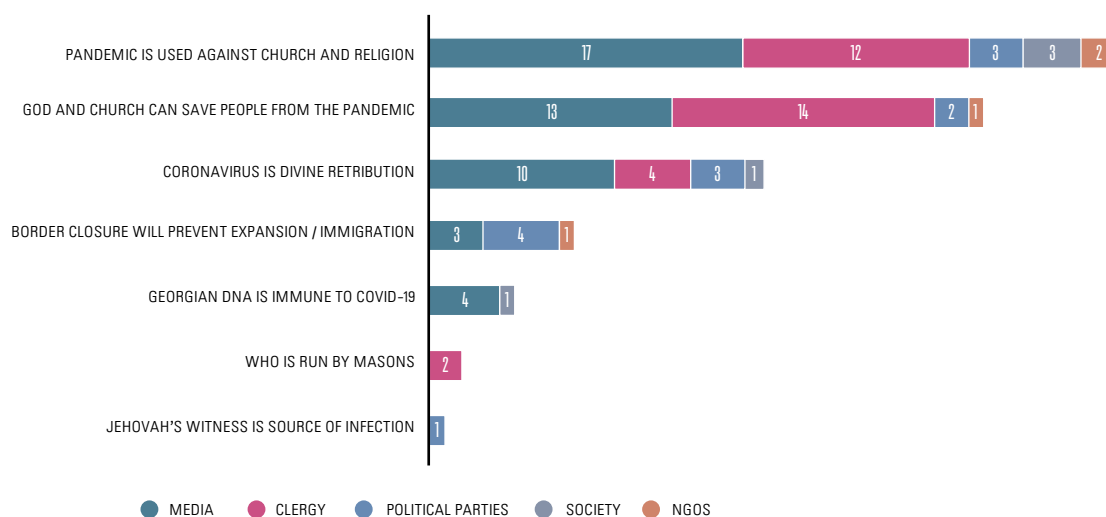
²¹ 31 December. <https://bit.ly/2NqgJ26>

²² <https://bit.ly/2wpwloT>

4. RELIGION AND IDENTITY

In the category of religion, a dominating opinion was that liberals fight against church and religion (37), which was related to criticism expressed about the conduct of liturgy and giving holy communion with a shared spoon during religious holidays. Opinions that only God is able to protect people from the coronavirus was promoted by clergy (14) as well as media (30), and that the coronavirus was a punishment for human sins (18). Closure of borders due to the pandemic was portrayed as a positive possibility of stopping migration and expansion of foreign countries by several sources (8), while genetics of Georgians was hailed as exceptional and coronavirus-resistant mainly by media (5).

FIGURE 8. RELIGION AND IDENTITY BY SOURCES



Closure of borders due to the pandemic was demanded by Georgian March (with Iran and China) as well as by the founder of the United National Movement and former President Mikheil Saakashvili (with China). Furthermore, Georgian March viewed the coronavirus as the divine retribution for sins which stem from liberalism and the Western lifestyle:

SANDRO BREGADZE, GEORGIAN MARCH: “This cluster of infidels [liberast-Sorosians] must be uprooted politically from Georgian life, destroyed morally and defeated because they precisely have caused the coronavirus pandemic in Georgia and across the world!... Indeed, the coronavirus pandemic is the divine retribution and those who deny this are infidels and unbelievers!... If the mankind does not improve and does not stop committing killing, Sodom-Gomorrah and many other sins that plague the world and Georgia today, we will come to face worse and the God will punish us more severely!... Subjugated to the liberast dictatorship, Europe is today covered with corpses and this is precisely a proof of the fiasco of liberalism!”²³

From among media outlets, Sakinformi (7) and Obieqtivi TV (5) were the ones that most frequently sought salvation from the coronavirus in God and church. An exceptional quality of the Georgian DNA to resist the coronavirus was promoted not only by Obieqtivi TV and Asaval-Dasavali but was discussed by the TV company Mtavari Arkhi too:

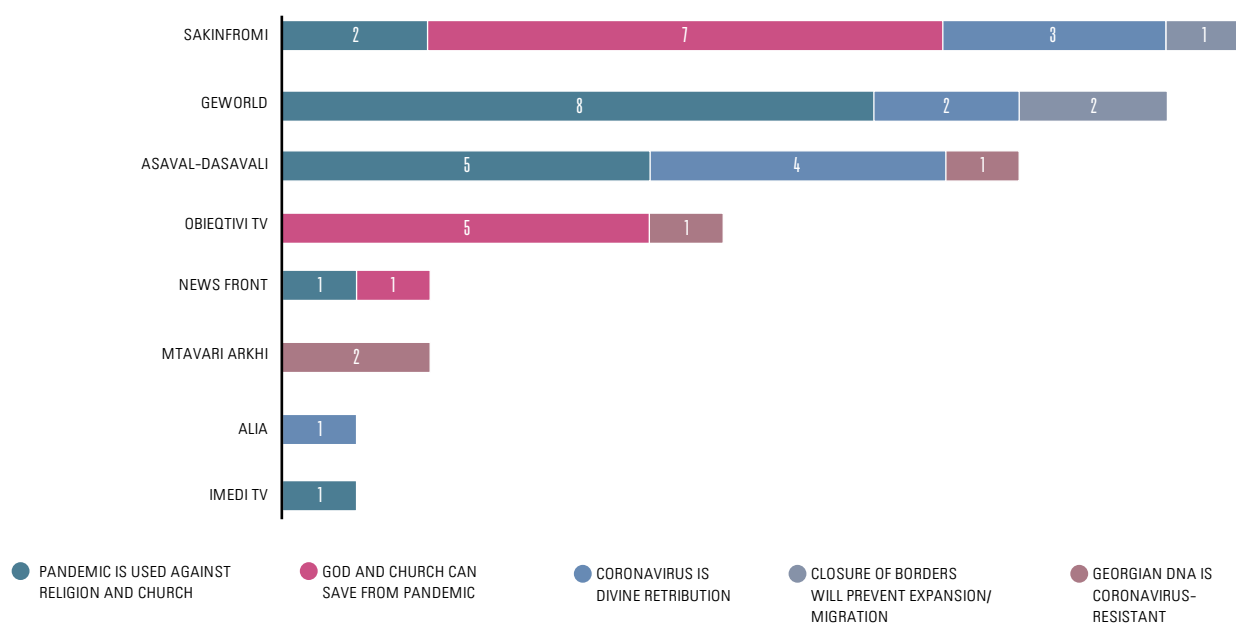
²³ Asaval-Dasavali, 4-10 May.

GIORGI GIGAURI, JOURNALIST: “You should view the coronavirus as the global judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah, which was delivered by God in the city indulged in obscenity!... I will say nothing about Italy, France, Spain that legalized gay marriage or the sins of others. We’d better take care of our sins!”²⁴

NINO RATISHVILI, PRESENTER: “Not only the entire Europe but the entire Christendom told the God – yes, we believe in you God, but don’t take it as offence that we are more afraid of the coronavirus; in such a situation the Georgian Orthodox Church was one of those, if not the only, that told the God that it believes only in God and entrusts itself to the God.”²⁵

GIORGI GABUNIA, PRESENTER: “A large group of Georgian scientists suggest that we, the Georgians, carry such DNA that can cope with Covid-19 easier than others.”²⁶

FIGURE 9. RELIGION AND IDENTITY BY MEDIA OUTLETS



On the one hand, clergy promoted the opinion that the coronavirus is the divine retribution, while on the other hand, maintained that only belief and church may save people from the virus and those who advocate for the change in the rules of giving holy communion with a shared spoon and liturgy must be punished for blasphemy:

SHALVA KEKELIA, ARCHPRIEST: “After this virus, some will get a crown from the God while others will get a crown from the Satan.”²⁷

PETRE KVARATSKHELIA, ARCHPRIEST: “Perhaps, Covid-19 is the rehearsal for the Second Coming.”²⁸

SPIRIDON ABULADZE, BISHOP OF SKHALTA: “Where there is Christ, how can there be corona and wickedness?!”²⁹

²⁴ Asaval-Dasavali, 23-29 March.

²⁵ Obieqtivi TV, Ghamis Studia, 30 March. https://www.myvideo.ge/?video_id=3918386

²⁶ Mtavari Arkhi, Post Factum, 5 April. <https://www.myvideo.ge/v/3920518>

²⁷ Prime-Time, 2 April. <https://bit.ly/3dqBm9g>

²⁸ Prime-Time, 11 April. <https://primetime.ge/iqneb-kovidi-meored-mosvlis-repetitsiaa-petre-kolkhi/>

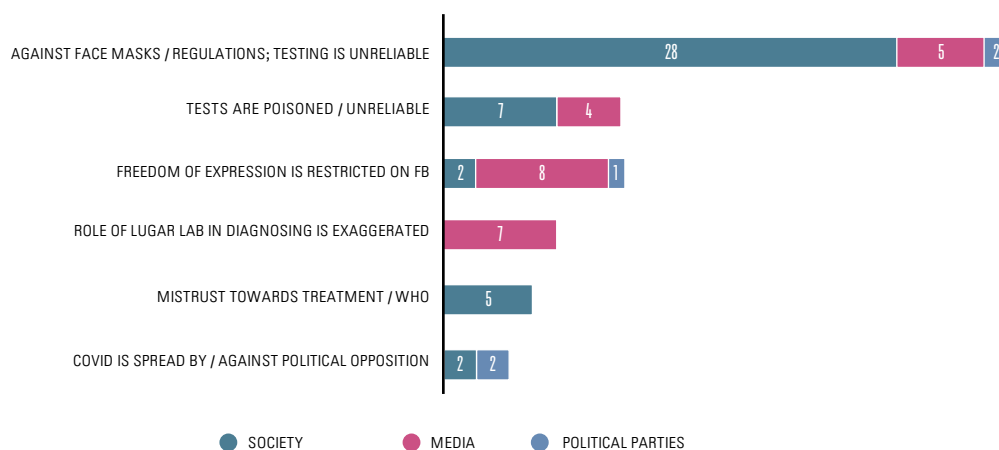
²⁹ Mtavari Arkhi, Mtavari, 7 December. <https://www.myvideo.ge/v/3992085>

KONSTANTINE JINCHARADZE, ARCHPRIEST: “Those – be they Orthodox Christians, members of the Church – who do not believe and question that the blood and flesh of Christ may instead of healing introduce the virus, and allow such blasphemy to come to their mind, do not deserve holy communion, and they must admit this in their confessions and must abide by a certain law of prohibition for a certain period... This is a method of current fight of the evil against the Church.”³⁰

5. DIAGNOSING, REGULATIONS, ETC.

Messages concerning diagnosing, regulations as well as other issues were relatively less frequent (73), compared to other categories. The highest number of statements in this category was made against face masks and regulations (35); in case of face masks, this category includes only those comments that concerned the suitability of wearing them, not conspiracy theories whereby face masks were seen as a symbol of enslaving people and global control, which are included in the category of denial of coronavirus and various conspiracy theories. Opinions that testing was an unreliable method of diagnosing (11) were complemented with the views that the Lugar research Center was an ordinary laboratory and its role in diagnosing the virus was exaggerated (7). Regulations for flagging information about coronavirus as false within the framework of Facebook’s “Third party fact-checking program” were sometimes assessed as the restriction of freedom of expression (11). This category also includes messages concerning internal political process: allegations that there were plans to infect political opposition, namely, Alliance of Patriots, with covid-19; also statements that the political opposition facilitated the spread of coronavirus.

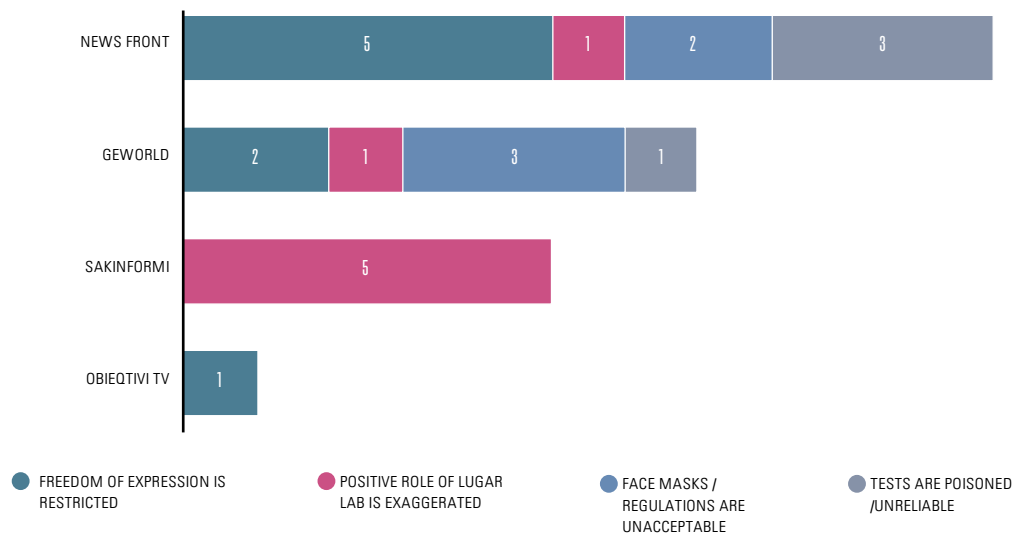
FIGURE 10. DIAGNOSING, REGULATIONS, ETC. BY SOURCES



Among media outlets, the role of the Lugar Lab in diagnosing was most frequently diminished by pro-Kremlin news agencies Sakinformi (5), News Front (1) and Geworld.ge (1).

³⁰ xareba.net, 15 March. <https://bit.ly/2NFwr9t>

FIGURE 11. DIAGNOSING, REGULATIONS, ETC. BY MEDIA OUTLETS



Regulations introduced as a result of the pandemic were criticized not only for the restriction of rights or inadvisability from the health standpoint, but they were seen, in certain cases, as part of plan of Masons to undermine traditions:

RAMAZ GAGNIDZE, GEORGIAN MISSION: “prohibited numerous traditional rituals – funerals, wakes, weddings... People were estranged from one another. Parents cannot meet their children... These are nothing but the disruption of traditions and this is precisely part of the plan of globalists, Masons.”³¹

³⁰ xareba.net, 15 March. <https://bit.ly/2NFwr9t>

³¹ Alia, 30 November–6 December

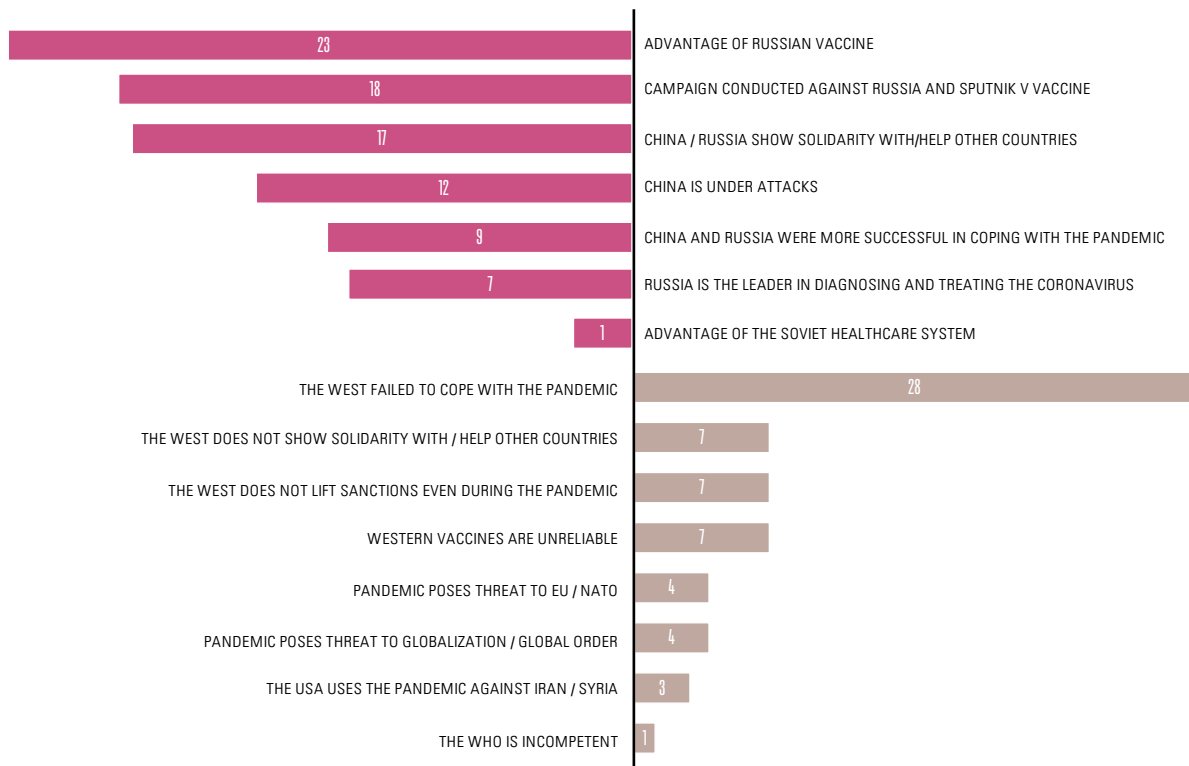
II. MESSAGES BY RUSSIAN GOVERNMENT SPONSORED “SPUTNIK”

This chapter presents the data of four different platforms of Russian state-owned news agency Sputnik, operating in Georgia. They are: Georgian-language sputnik-Georgia.com and Russian-language sputnik-georgia.ru, sputnik-ossetia.ru, sputnik-abkhazia.ru. As the editorial policies of these platforms do not differ in qualitative terms, the data of all the four outlets is provided below as aggregate.

QUANTITATIVE DATA. The analysis of 2020 data shows that Sputnik tried to support the marketing of the Russian Covid-19 vaccine by advertising advantages of Sputnik V (23) and promoting the opinion that the Western vaccines are unreliable (7) while the Russian vaccine is rejected on political grounds and an aggressive information campaign is underway against it (18).

Furthermore, Sputnik created a dichotomy whereby Russia and China were leaders in the fight against the pandemic (9), demonstrating solidarity with other countries and helping them (17) while the West failed to cope with challenges of the pandemic (28) and did not show solidarity with other countries or help them (7). Sputnik discussed political issues through the lens of pandemic too, criticizing the West for not reviewing a decision about imposing sanctions on Russia (7) and for using the pandemic against Iran and Syria (3). It also tried to promote the idea that the pandemic posed threat to the European Union (4), globalization and global order (4).

FIGURE 12. RUSSIA VS THE WEST IN THE FIGHT AGAINST THE PANDEMIC
 SPUTNIK-GEORGIA.COM, SPUTNIK-GEORGIA.RU, SPUTNIK-OSSETIA.RU, SPUTNIK-ABKHAZIA.RU



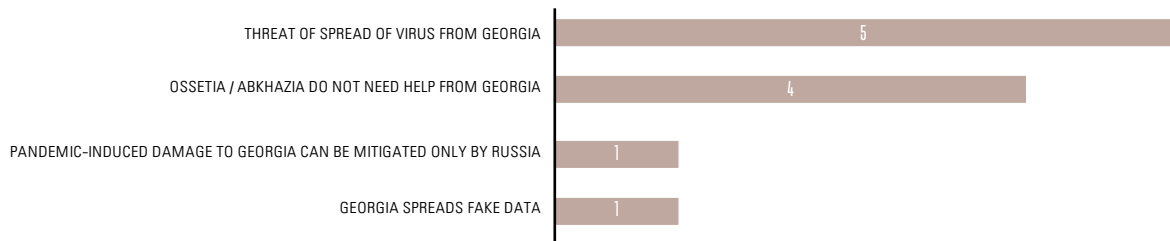
In addition to messages raising doubt about a natural origin of the coronavirus, including its spread (10) allegations were made about Americans conducting biological experiments and collecting biological data, including in the Lugar Lab (4).

FIGURE 13. ORIGIN OF THE CORONAVIRUS AND SUSPICIOUS EXPERIMENTS
 SPUTNIK-GEORGIA.COM, SPUTNIK-GEORGIA.RU, SPUTNIK-OSSETIA.RU, SPUTNIK-ABKHAZIA.RU



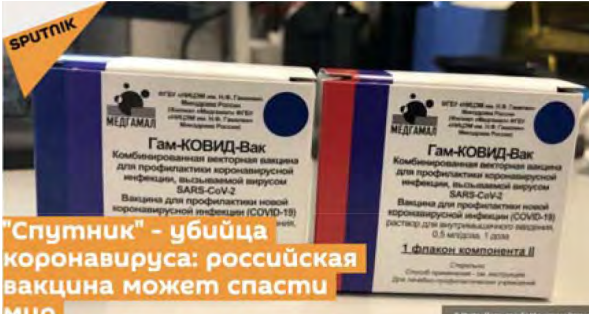



Information about the threat of spread of the virus from Georgia (5) was mainly published by sputnik-ossetia.ru, while statements that Ossetia and Abkhazia did not require any assistance from Georgia (4) were released by sputnik-ossetia.ru as well as sputnik-abkhazia.ru.

FIGURE 14. GEORGIA AND THE OCCUPIED REGIONS DURING THE PANDEMIC
 SPUTNIK-GEORGIA.COM, SPUTNIK-GEORGIA.RU, SPUTNIK-OSSETIA.RU, SPUTNIK-ABKHAZIA.RU







QUALITATIVE DATA. Pandemic-related issues were mainly covered through the prism of politics, which was in conformity to the agenda of the Russian government and apparent from titles chosen for stories and messages contained therein. The news agency tried to help the Russian vaccine secure its place on the market by promoting it and portraying Western vaccines as unsuccessful and unreliable, on the one hand, and on the other hand, by voicing skepticism sowed doubts about the future of the West and the Western institutions.

■ The “Russian vaccine vs the Western vaccine” dichotomy was most conspicuous in titles chosen by Sputnik for stories. The titles are provided in the table below:

RUSSIAN VACCINE	WESTERN VACCINES
<p>“Sputnik’ – a killer of coronavirus: the Russian vaccine can save the world” (“Спутник” – убийца коронавируса: российская вакцина может спасти мир)³²</p>  <p>“Спутник” - убийца коронавируса: российская вакцина может спасти мир</p>	<p>“The USA fails to create a vaccine against the coronavirus – who is to be blamed?” (У США не получается создать вакцину от коронавируса – кто виноват?)³³</p>  <p>ПЛОХОМУ ТАНЦОРУ...</p>
<p>“What do ‘Sputnik V’ and Kalashnikov rifle have in common?” (Что общего у вакцины “Спутник V” и автомата Калашникова?)³⁴</p>  <p>Что общего у вакцины “Спутник V” и автомата Калашникова?</p>	<p>“Why the West is losing the vaccine race: Russia has already been exposed” (Почему Запад проигрывает в вакцинной гонке: Россию уже разоблачили)³⁵</p>  <p>Почему Запад проигрывает в вакцинной гонке: Россию уже разоблачили</p>

³² Sputnik-ossetia, 16 August, 2020. <https://bit.ly/39UzyOP>
³³ Sputnik-georgia.ru, 10 October, 2020. <https://bit.ly/2OirjbJ>
³⁴ Sputnik-ossetia, 21 November, 2020. <https://bit.ly/3cNlw6X>
³⁵ Sputnik-abkhazia, 10 September, 2020. <https://bit.ly/3rqUMyg>

RUSSIAN VACCINE	WESTERN VACCINE
<p>“Coronavirus hit the G20 summit. But the West will not tolerate Russian vaccines” (Коронавирус поразил саммит G20. Но Запад не потерпит российской вакцины)³⁶</p> 	<p>“War against the vaccine, not the virus” (Война с вакциной, а не с вирусом)³⁷</p> 
<p>“Russian vaccine against the coronavirus: simple as everything ingenious” (Российская вакцина от коронавируса: просто, как все гениальное)³⁸</p> 	<p>“How dangerous is vaccine: the USA demands answer, Europe calculates profits”³⁹</p> 

■ Euro-Atlantic skepticism: Coronavirus poses threat to NATO/US armed forces and the EU:

1. “Good news: NATO cancels military exercises due to coronavirus” (Хорошая новость: НАТО отменяет военные учения из-за коронавируса); “Coronavirus disrupts NATO plans” (Коронавирус срывает планы НАТО)⁴⁰.

³⁶ Sputnik-georgia.ru, 23 November, 2020 <https://bit.ly/2Zc0W9A>
³⁷ <https://bit.ly/3jNg6vf>
³⁸ Sputnik-abkhazia, 12 August, 2020 <https://bit.ly/3jEJ00C>
³⁹ Sputnik-georgia, 29 September, 2020. <https://bit.ly/3tCIKnC>
⁴⁰ Sputnik-abkhazia, 13 March, 2020. <https://bit.ly/3ddUg2S>



- The article titled “Coronavirus attacks fleets and armies of the world”⁴¹ is illustrated with a photo from 2016,⁴² showing a US military vessel participating in the NATO exercise, while the lead of the article reads that the collective West faces a problem in health care provision and military organization:

“A significant number of coronavirus infected personnel in the navy and ground troops of the United States and other NATO countries is evidence of weak health care provision and military organizations.”



⁴¹ Sputnik-georgia.ru, 10 April, 2020. <https://bit.ly/37tmJyf>

⁴² Foxnews, June 2016. Russian spy ships ‘shadowing’ US Navy during large NATO exercise, Navy admiral says <https://www.foxnews.com/world/russian-spy-ships-shadowing-us-navy-during-large-nato-exercise-navy-admiral-says>

2. “Europe will survive the epidemic. But will the EU be able to survive it?” (Европа переживет эпидемию. А вот сможет ли Евросоюз?)⁴³

“The decision of Brussels [to suspend the Stability and Growth Pact] looks more like official admittance by the EU to its helplessness and a proof of grave crisis of its unity, rather than the manifestation of the will to overcome a difficult period.”



- Coronavirus is man-made/Americans conduct biological experiments: Allegations based on various studies and opinions that the coronavirus was artificially created were most frequently published by sputnik-georgia (“‘Spread of Covid-19 is a rehearsal for a biological warfare’ – opinion of a renowned doctor,”⁴⁴ “Doubts have heightened: a new study indicates to artificial creation of the coronavirus,”⁴⁵) while the Lugar Lab was most frequently portrayed as a testing ground for experiments by sputnik-ossetia (“Bacteriological weapon is created in Georgia – expert.”⁴⁶).

⁴³ Sputnik-ossetia, 26 March, 2020. <https://bit.ly/3pkATaR>

⁴⁴ Sputnik-georgia, 24 March, 2020. <https://bit.ly/3jKMoqZ>

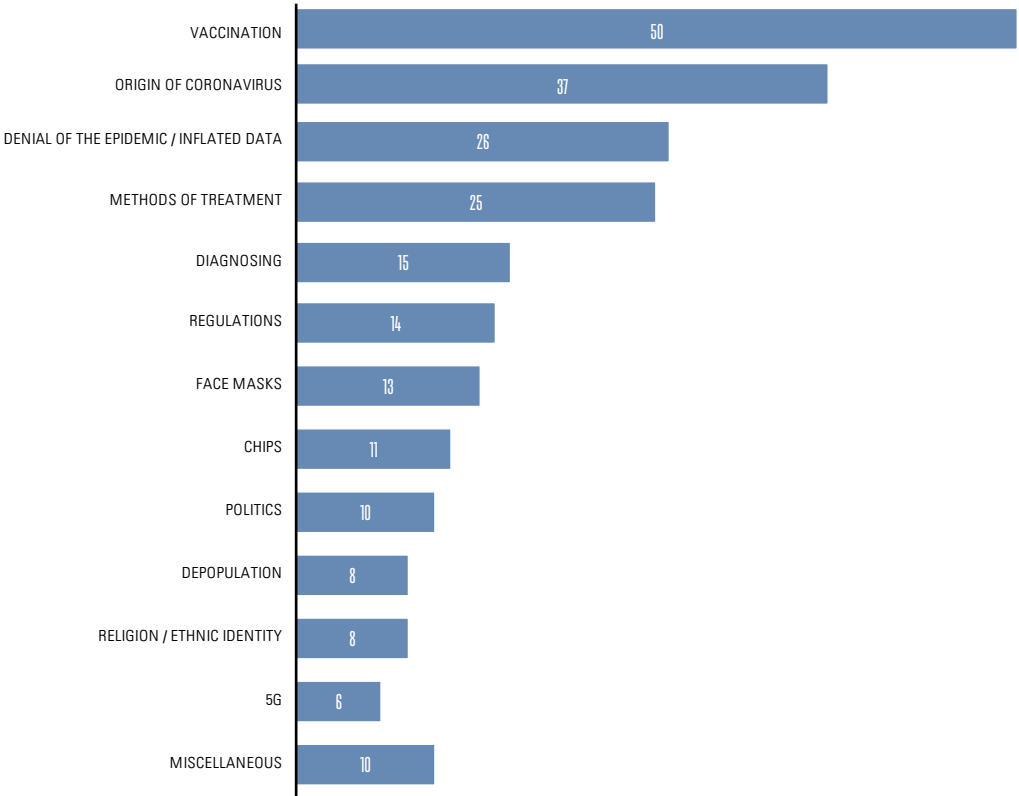
⁴⁵ Sputnik-georgia, 27 May, 2020. <https://bit.ly/3aXVqwM>

⁴⁶ Sputnik-ossetia, 29 September, 2020. <https://bit.ly/3ai7KsF>

III. FAKE AND MANIPULATIVE CONTENT

During the year, the fact checking portal, Myth Detector, produced the total of 233 explanatory articles debunking fake and manipulative information about the novel coronavirus, which circulated in traditional media and Facebook. Debunking articles were most frequently produced on the following topics: vaccination (50), origin of the Covid-19, including stories about the artificial creation of the virus (37), denial of the epidemic and inflated data (26), methods of treatment (25).

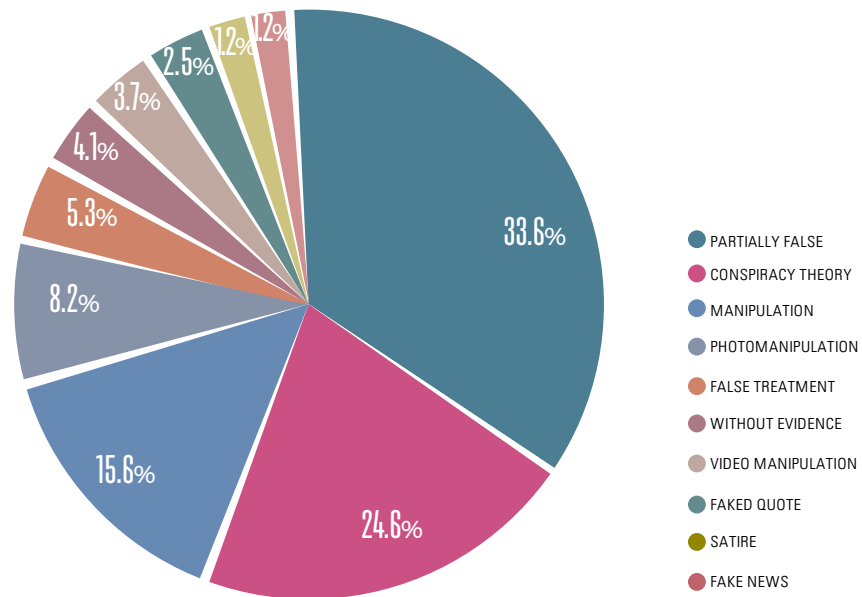
FIGURE 15. FAKE AND MANIPULATIVE CONTENT BY TOPICS



It should be noted that Myth Detector, within the framework of Facebook’s “Third party fact-checking program” which Myth Detector joined in September 2020, prepared 105 debunking articles till the end of the year. With those articles, it flagged 331 Facebook posts, the majority of which (141) concerned vaccination.

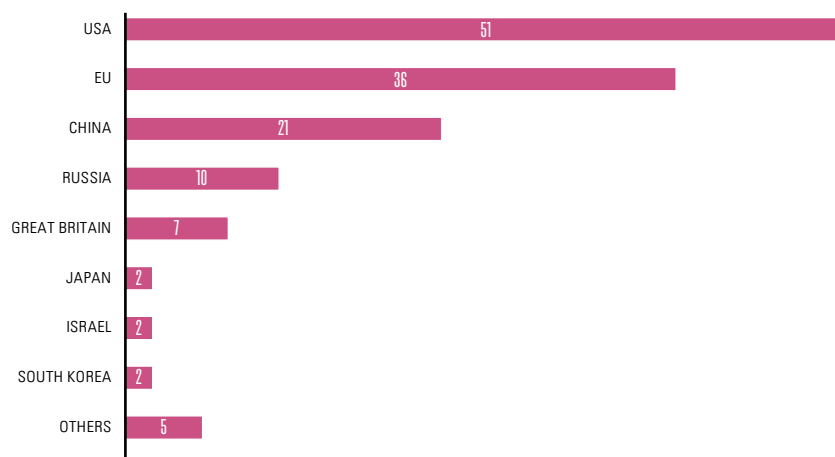
From factchecked materials, the largest share accounted for fake news (82), followed by conspiracy theories (60) and manipulative content (38). With regard to visual manipulations, 20 were photo and 9 video manipulations. There were 13 items concerning false methods of treatment, 10 items lacking any evidence, and six instances of faking quotes. Information published by satirical pages was offered as true information on three occasions while partially false data was provided on three occasions too.

FIGURE 16. TYPOLOGY OF FAKE AND MANIPULATIVE CONTENT



Fake and manipulative content most frequently concerned the USA (51) and separate EU countries (37). Among the EU countries, such information was most frequently published about Italy (8), Spain (8) and Germany (7). As the Figure below shows, in terms of frequency, the EU was followed by China (21), Russia (10) and Great Britain (7).

FIGURE 17. FAKE AND MANIPULATIVE CONTENT BY COUNTRIES



DISINFORMATION. After the vaccination rollout, fake news mainly concerned adverse effects or lethality of vaccines, referring to individual cases. One of first examples of such disinformation was the news about the death of American nurse, Tiffany Dover, which went viral globally and was instantly exploited by Georgian antivaxxers.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Myth Detector, 22 December 2020. What scheme was used to virally spread false information about the death of an American nurse? <https://bit.ly/20tFA5Y>

CONSPIRACY THEORIES. In addition to well-known conspiracy theories about chipping and depopulating, a conspiracy theory, based on Father Kleomenis, was that the vaccine contained Luciferin and hence, linked to Lucifer, which represented part of Antichrist plan to establish a new world order.⁴⁸

VISUAL MANIPULATION. To support conspiracy theories that the coronavirus pursued the aim of establishing a new world order and face masks were engraved with signs of Antichrist, there were released several photoshopped visual manipulations of Western leaders.⁴⁹



Various paintings⁵⁰ and video material⁵¹ were also posted to illustrate a prophecy about the coronavirus. Video footage taken in a metro station in Bucharest, which featured the intervention of police in the brawl between football club fans, was presented as a forceful detention of people by police officers in the metro station because they violated the rule of wearing face masks.⁵²

⁴⁸ Myth Detector, 11 December 2020. Luciferin – a dark conspiracy or a bright biochemical reaction? <https://bit.ly/3lj7oWq>
⁴⁹ Myth Detector, 1 December 2020. New World Order (NWO) or British National Health Service (NHS)? <https://bit.ly/3tB6pnJ>;
 2 December 2020. Disinformation Related to COVID-19 Pandemic Spreads along with Biden’s Fake Image. <https://bit.ly/3elqdkM>
⁵⁰ Myth Detector, 30 September, 2020. Did Italian painter predict pandemic 60 years ago? <https://bit.ly/30PbvQC>; 23 October 2020. Denver airport in 1995 or 2020 painting of Philipino painter? <https://bit.ly/3qRR9ke>
⁵¹ Myth Detector, 11 May, 2020. What Links “Исцели Себя Сам” to 2012 London Olympics and Coronavirus? <https://www.mythdetector.ge/en/myth/what-links-isceli-seba-sam-2012-london-olympics-and-coronavirus>
⁵² Myth Detector, 2 November, 2020. Is a Clash between Steaua and Dinamo Fans Linked to Face Masks? <http://mythdetector.ge/en/myth/clash-between-steaua-and-dinamo-fans-linked-face-masks>

FAKED QUOTES. Apart from faked quote attributed to Henry Kissinger about mandatory vaccination as a mechanism to control people,⁵³ various scientists were misquoted as saying that coronavirus was man-made⁵⁴ and vaccination aimed at controlling people through implanting chips.⁵⁵

SATIRE. Georgian-language media published information based on satirical outlets, the Russian-language Panorama.pub and the English-language World News Daily Report, without indicating that the sources of the information were satirical editions, therewith misleading the audience. The following fake stories were published about the pandemic based on these sources:

SOURCE	FAKE NEWS
Progressnews megatv.ge	Switzerland banned vaccine ⁵⁶
Progressnews	WHO top official died after choking on broccoli – Ryan Paterson intended to disclose sensational information about COVID-19 ⁵⁷
ქართულმა აზრმა, itar.ge , n.videosports.ge , arxi.ge	Pope of Rome calls on people to get chipped ⁵⁸
presa.ge , progressnews.ge , marshalpress.ge , readtime.ge , Newpost.ge , alia.ge , For.ge , info9.ge , msoflio.ru	Belgium banned sex during the pandemic ⁵⁹

⁵³ Myth Detector, 30 November, 2020. Do words about mandatory vaccination belong to Henry Kissinger?
<https://www.mythdetector.ge/en/myth/do-words-about-mandatory-vaccination-belong-henry-kissinger>

⁵⁴ Myth Detector, 6 December, 2020. Report as if Japanese scientist speaks about manufactured coronavirus is fake.
<https://www.mythdetector.ge/en/myth/report-if-japanese-scientist-speaks-about-manufactured-coronavirus-fake>

⁵⁵ Myth Detector, 7 December, 2020. Georgian Anti-vaxxers Spread American Virologist’s Fake Quote in Campaign against 5G and Vaccination. <https://bit.ly/3lh3kp0>

⁵⁶ Myth Detector, 19 May, 2020. Did Switzerland Ban Vaccination and who is Father Escobar?
<http://mythdetector.ge/en/myth/did-switzerland-ban-vaccination-and-who-father-escobar>

⁵⁷ Myth Detector, 13 April 2020. Did WHO Top Official Die after Choking on Broccoli?
<http://mythdetector.ge/en/myth/did-who-top-official-die-after-choking-broccoli>

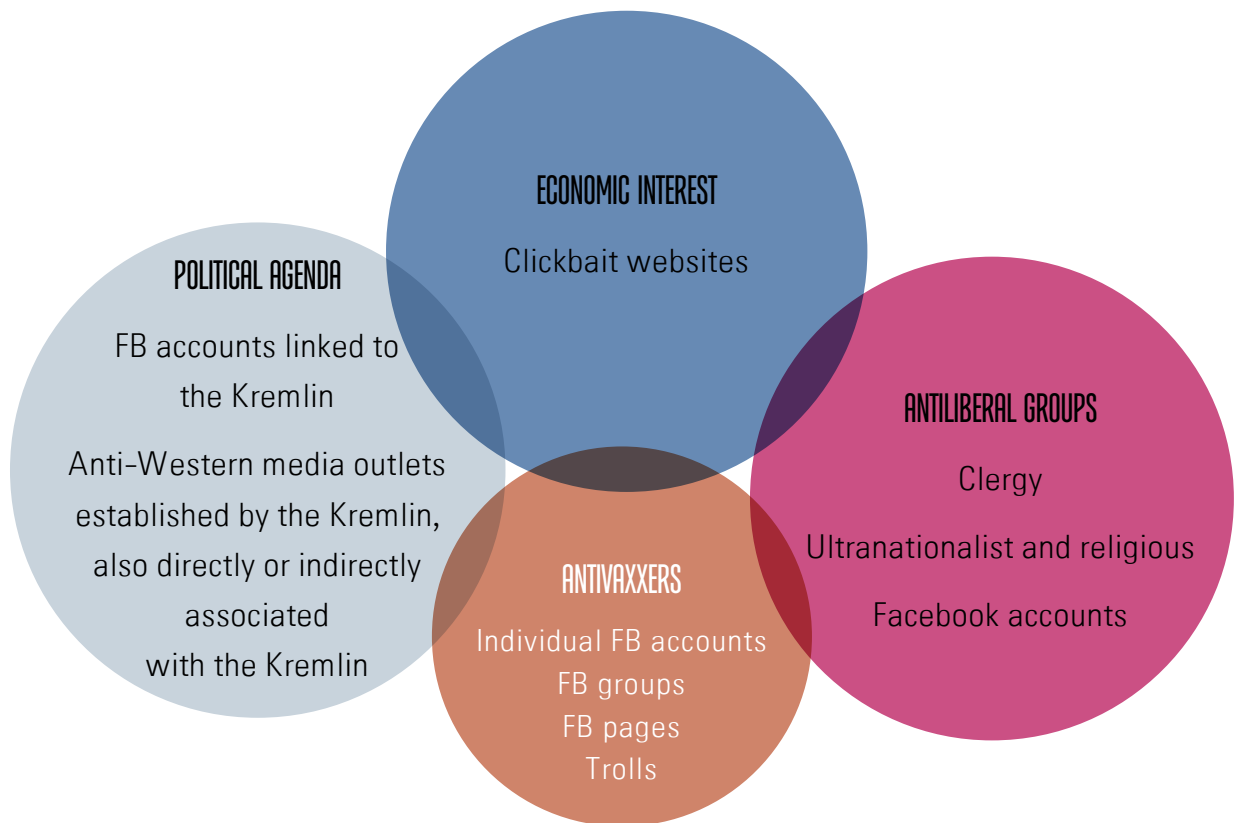
⁵⁸ Myth Detector, 11 May 2020. What Scheme was Used to Spread Conspiracy Theories about Pope Francis and Chips?
<https://bit.ly/2PYZVjl>

⁵⁹ Myth Detector, 26 March 2020. 26 Has Group Sex been Banned in Belgium due to Coronavirus?
<http://mythdetector.ge/en/myth/has-group-sex-been-banned-belgium-due-coronavirus>

IV. SOURCES: POLITICAL, ANTILIBERAL AND ANTIVAXXER GROUPS

Three interest-groups (of political, antiliberal, economic nature) were identified during the reporting period, which regularly posted fake or misleading information about the coronavirus. It should be noted that there were antivaxxers among political as well as antiliberal groups, though they existed somewhat separately from those groups and were mainly active in various Facebook groups. Meanwhile, their activity in social networks gradually captured the interest of pro-Kremlin media outlets which, by the end of the year, allocated increasingly greater space to antivaxxer opinions than to political issues. These groups are:

FIGURE 18. SOURCES OF INFODEMIC BY VARIOUS INTERESTS



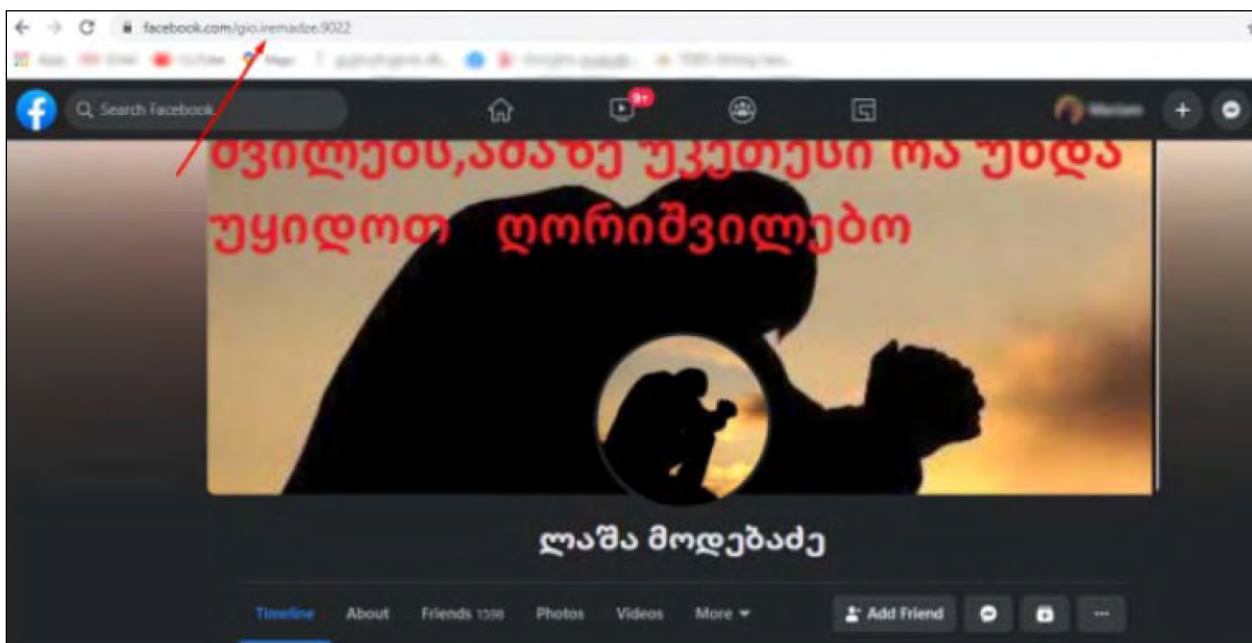
4.1. NARRATORS OF RUSSIA'S POLITICAL AGENDA

In the process of infodemic, the Kremlin tried to implement its political agenda through various actors:

Fake Facebook accounts + trolls; foreign journalist releasing documents leaked as a result of cyberattack on the Lugar Laboratory	Kremlin news agencies plus Georgian-language traditional media linked to Russia	Cloned clickbait websites
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FAKE ACCOUNTS. One of fake accounts that has been targeting the Richard Lugar Public Health Research Center is Lasha Modebadze whose previous profiles⁶⁰ were deleted by Facebook. Most recent account of Lasha Modebadze was created on 18 January 2021, while its first URL address contained the name Gio Iremadze:

www.facebook.com/gio.iremadze9022	Deleted
www.facebook.com/lasha.modebadze.982 Archive link: https://archive.ph/6Cgyl	Deleted
www.facebook.com/lasha.modebadze.1213	Acting



Several features indicate about the links between this account and the Kremlin:

1. **IDENTICAL NAME IN URL:** The name, Gio Iremadze, indicated in the URL, could be linked to Giorgi Iremadze, founder of pro-Kremlin channel Patriot TV and the president⁶¹ of Young Eurasian Union, who is one of frequent respondents seen in reports against the Lugar Lab.

⁶⁰ Myth Detector, 13 October 2020. "Дядя Вася and other trolls promote a conspiracy theory about the US Embassy's training program." <https://bit.ly/3dUByh9>

⁶¹ <https://bit.ly/3r1E9cY>

2. **INVOLVEMENT IN THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE LUGAR LAB:** Three documentaries were produced against the Lugar Lab. One of them was produced by Patrioti TV; the second documentary by a Bulgarian journalist Diliana Gaitanjiieva who is closely linked to the Kremlin was produced for a pro-Hezbollah TV channel *Al-Mayadeen*. Both these documentaries feature the same respondents, including Giorgi Iremadze, promoting identical conspiracy theories about the Lugar Lab.⁶² The third documentary, which was produced by the South Ossetian's TV channel *ТРК ИР*, includes a fragment from *Al-Mayadeen's* documentary, which contains Giorgi Iremadze's comment.⁶³ Conspiracy theories about alleged connection of the coronavirus to the Lugar Lab were posted and shared by Facebook accounts of Iremadze and Lasha Modebadze.

George Iremadze
21 June 2020 · 🌐

მსოფლიოში კორონავირუსით გამოწვეული პანდემიის ფონზე უამრავი სენსაციური ინფორმაცია ვრცელდება. მაგალითად, მსოფლიო ჯანდაცვის ორგანიზაციის არაკომპეტენტობაზე, ბილ გეტსის თაოსნობით მასობრივ სასიკვდილო ვაქცინაციაზე და ა.შ. ამიტომ აუცილებელია, გავერკვეთ, რა ნდება მსოფლიოში, ქართველი საზოგადოებისთვის კი, ალბათ, ყველაზე საინტერესო იქნება იმის გარკვევა, რა ნდება თბილისთან არსის მდებარე ლუგარის ლაბორატორიაში, რომლის მიმართაც უამრავი პასუხგაუცემელი კითხვაა. ზუსტად ამიტომ გადავწყვიტე, კიდევ ერთი ვრცელი სტატია მივუძღვნა ლუგარის ცენტრს, კერძოდ, იმ კითხვების ერთობლიობის სახით, რომელიც ყველაზე მეტადაა აქტუალური:



GEWORLD.GE
რამდენიმე კითხვა ლუგარის ლაბორატორიაზე
მსოფლიოში კორონავირუსით გამოწვეული პანდემიის ფონ...

21 3 shares

Lasha Modebadze edited a doc in the group:
პლუტოკრატია და ახალი მსოფლიო წესრიგი.
February 12 at 6:26 AM · 🌐



ბიოლოგიური იარაღი, ლუგარის ლაბორატორია და პენტაგონი
ამჟამ-ს არმია რეგულარულად აწარმოებს სასიკვდილო ვირუსებს, ბაქტერიებსა და ტოქსინებს, რაც პირდაპირ არღვევს გაუროს კონვენციას ბიოლოგიური იარაღის აკრძალვის შესახებ. ამის შედეგად, მრავალი ასეული ათასი უნებლი

See More

საბრძანებლობა



გიორგი ირემადის 10 კითხვა ლუგარის ლაბორატორიასთან დაკავშირებით:

Zura · 01:52 ოთხშაბათი, 17 ივნისი, 2020

საინფორმაციო სააგენტო "პატრიოტის" შთავარი რედაქტორი გიორგი ირემადე ლუგარის ლაბორატორიის გარშემო 10 სკანდალურ კითხვას სვამს: მსოფლიო პანდემიის ფონზე, უამრავი ინფორმაცია ვრცელდება, სენსაციებიც ბევრია, მაგალითად, მსოფლიო ჯანდაცვის...

ბილიმინა



არის თუ არა ლუგარის ლაბორატორია კორონავირუსის "პანდემიასთან" კავშირში?? – ლაშა მოდებაძე:

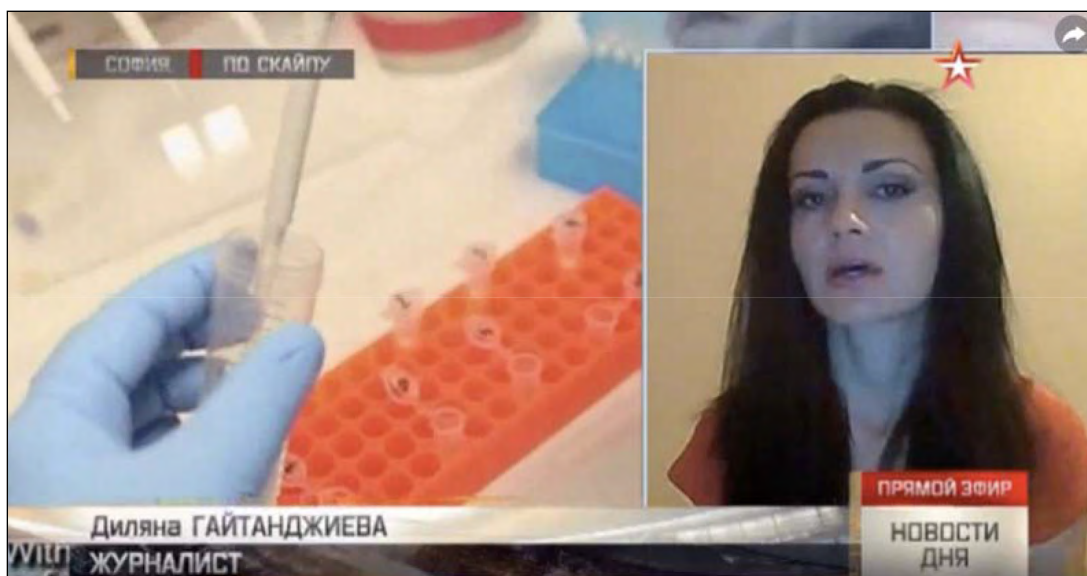
Zura · 10:37 ორშაბათი, 8 თებერვალი, 2021

ფეისბუქმომხმარებელი ლაშა მოდებაძე ფეისბუქის საკუთარ გვერდზე სკანდალურ ვრცელ ანალიზს აქვეყნებს: ინტერნეტში მღვა მასალის გაცნობის შემდეგ კორონავირუსთან დაკავშირებით, დავრწმუნდი, რომ დღევანდელი პანდემია დიდი ხნის წინ დაწერილი, კარგად...

⁶² Myth Detector, 28 January 2019. What Particular Sources Does the Kremlin Cite for Spreading Conspiracy Theories about Lugar Lab? <https://bit.ly/3eRn2HA>

⁶³ Myth Detector, 9 July 2020. Who Voices Disinformation about Lugar Lab in South Ossetian TV Channel's Propaganda Film? <https://bit.ly/2OJEanJ>

3. **COMMON RUSSIAN MEDIA PLATFORMS.** Both Giorgi Iremadze and Diliana Gaitanjieva are seen on the TV channel of the Russian armed forces, Zvezda, as respondents in the campaign conducted against the Lugar Lab.⁶⁴



4. **ACCESS TO IDENTICAL DOCUMENTS OBTAINED AS A RESULT OF CYBER-ATTACK.** After a cyber attack on the Lugar Lab in September 2020, which is thought to be organized by the Russian special services,⁶⁵ Lasha Modebadze and Diliana Gaitanjieva published documents belonging to the Lab, which means that both of them had access to documents that had been illegally obtained from the Lab.⁶⁶
5. **ACCESS TO OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS.** Disinformation that the tests, conducted on bats in the Lugar Lab in 2014, proved the creation of biological weapon by the USA was enclosed with confidential data about the remuneration

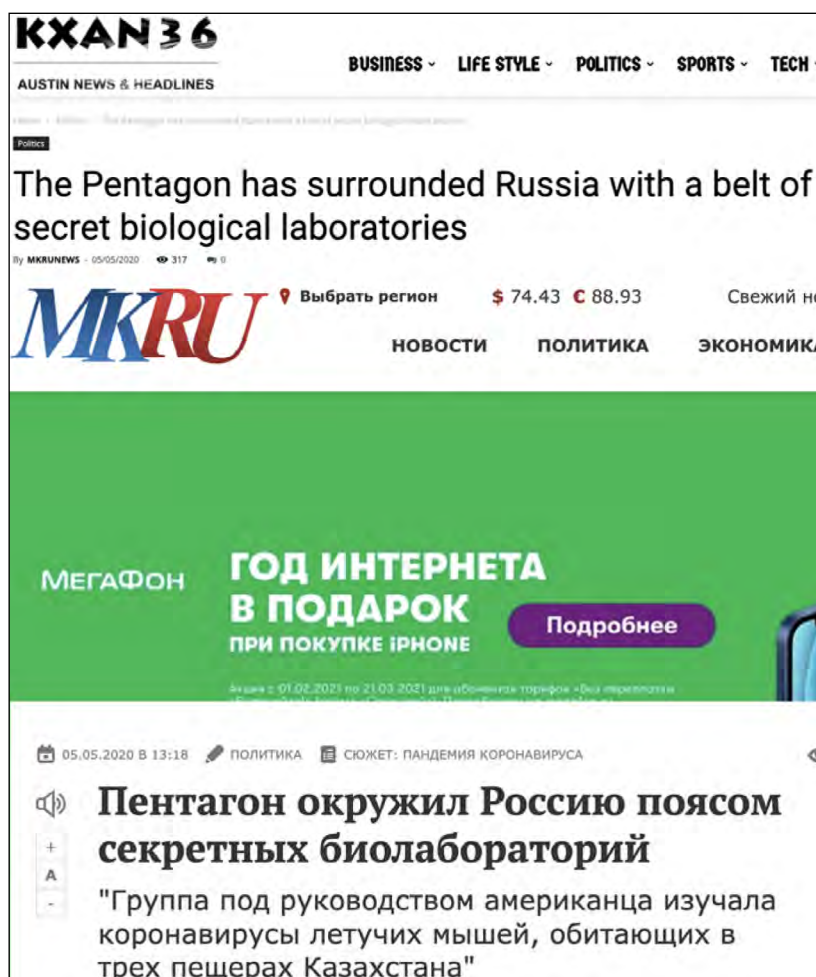
⁶⁴ «Телерадиокомпания Вооруженных Сил Российской Федерации «ЗВЕЗДА», 15.01. 2019. “ В Грузии связали вспышку свиного гриппа с деятельностью лаборатории Лугара”, https://tvzvezda.ru/news/vstrane_i_mire/content/201901151124-1eu7.htm Giatnjieva’s profile <http://mythdetector.ge/en/profile/gaytandzhieva-dilyana>

⁶⁵ Georgian Public Broadcaster, 3 September 2020. Irakli Sesiashvili – it is highly probable that cyber-attacks on the Lugar Lab are organized by the Russian special services. <https://bit.ly/3sB7AmA>

⁶⁶ Myth Detector, 7 December 2020. Troll and Kremlin-affiliated Journalist Manipulatively Spread Documents Leaked from Lugar Lab. <https://bit.ly/30TKvja> 17 February 2021. Московский Комсомолец from Pennsylvania against Lugar Lab <https://bit.ly/3tzgwsP>

of researchers involved in the study; this data was posted both by Gaitanjieva⁶⁷ and Lasha Modebadze's facebook account.⁶⁸

6. **IDENTICAL MESSAGES ABOUT HEPATITIS C ELIMINATION PROGRAM.** Hepatitis C elimination program, implemented by the Georgian government with the assistance from the US government, became a target of attacks from the Kremlin as early as in 2018. Those attacks involved allegations made by the former security minister of Georgia Igor Giorgadze,⁶⁹ which were followed by comments on this topic by President Putin.⁷⁰ The topic of Hepatitis C program was also exploited during the coronavirus pandemic and this discreditation campaign involved various actors, including the fake account of Lasha Modebadze.
7. **CITING GAITANJIEVA AND DISGUISED RUSSIAN PAGES AS SOURCES BY THE TROLL.** In Facebook posts about the Lugar Lab, the Lasha Modebadze account often cited Gaitanjieva's blog as a source.⁷¹ An instance of citing a defunctive source was also observed in 2021, when a cited US source of information about the Lugar Lab, in reality, proved to be a translated publication of Московский Комсомолец.⁷²



⁶⁷ Myth Detector, 3 June 2020. How did official documents leak and what experiments are Georgian scientists carrying out on bats? <https://bit.ly/3twyUTq>

⁶⁸ Tvalsazrisi.ge, 9 February 2021. "Is there any link between the Lugar Lab coronavirus 'pandemic'?? – Lasha Modebadze." <https://bit.ly/37Tf0ta>

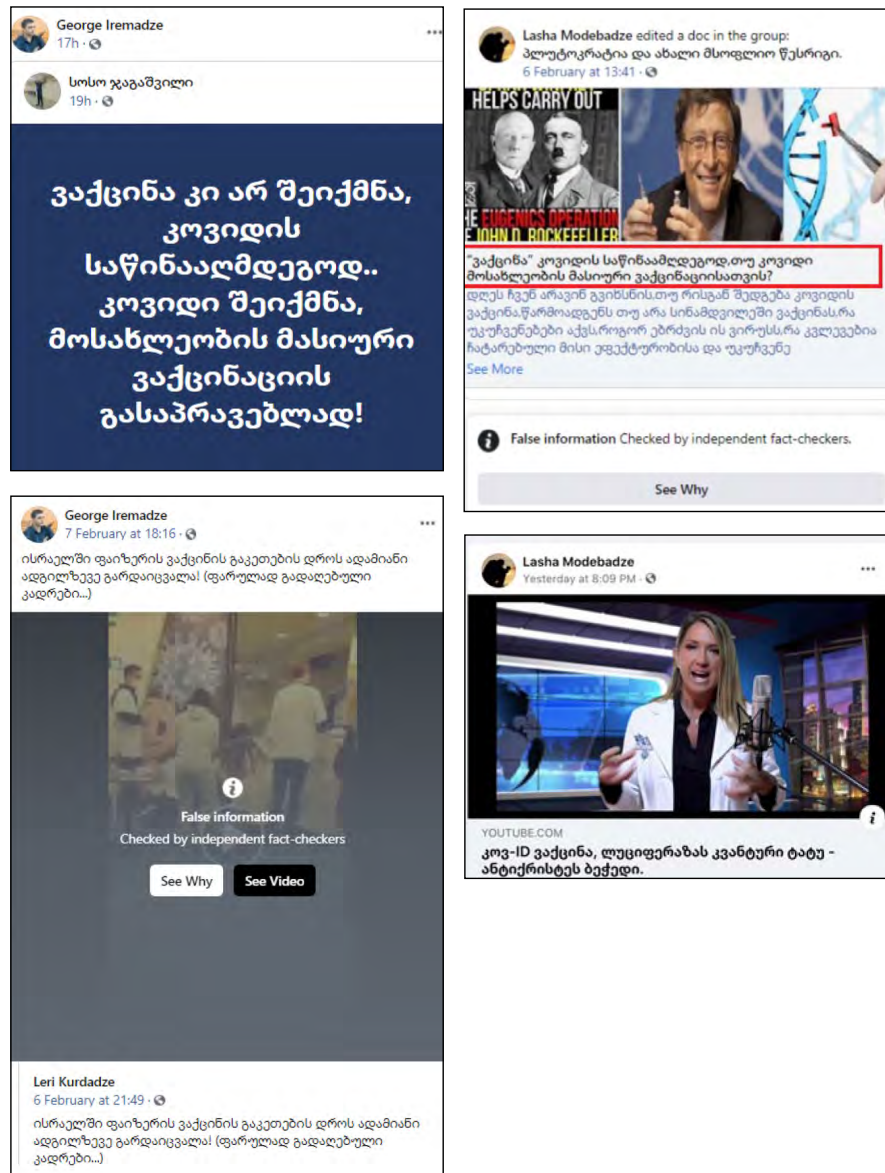
⁶⁹ Myth Detector, 27 September, 2018. How Kremlin Tries to Cover up Russian Trace in Skripal Case with Lugar Laboratory. <https://bit.ly/3Is3yKA>

⁷⁰ Myth Detector, 22 October, 2018. Putin calls as dangerous for Georgians the medication which is among the vital medications in Russia since 2016. <https://bit.ly/3Iskd09>

⁷¹ Dilyana Gaytandzhieva, 29.04.2018. The Pentagon Bio-weapons. <https://bit.ly/304Qv81>

⁷² Myth Detector, 17 February 2021. Московский Комсомолец from Pennsylvania against Lugar Lab. <http://mythdetector.ge/en/myth/moskovskii-komsomolec-pennsylvania-against-lugar-lab>

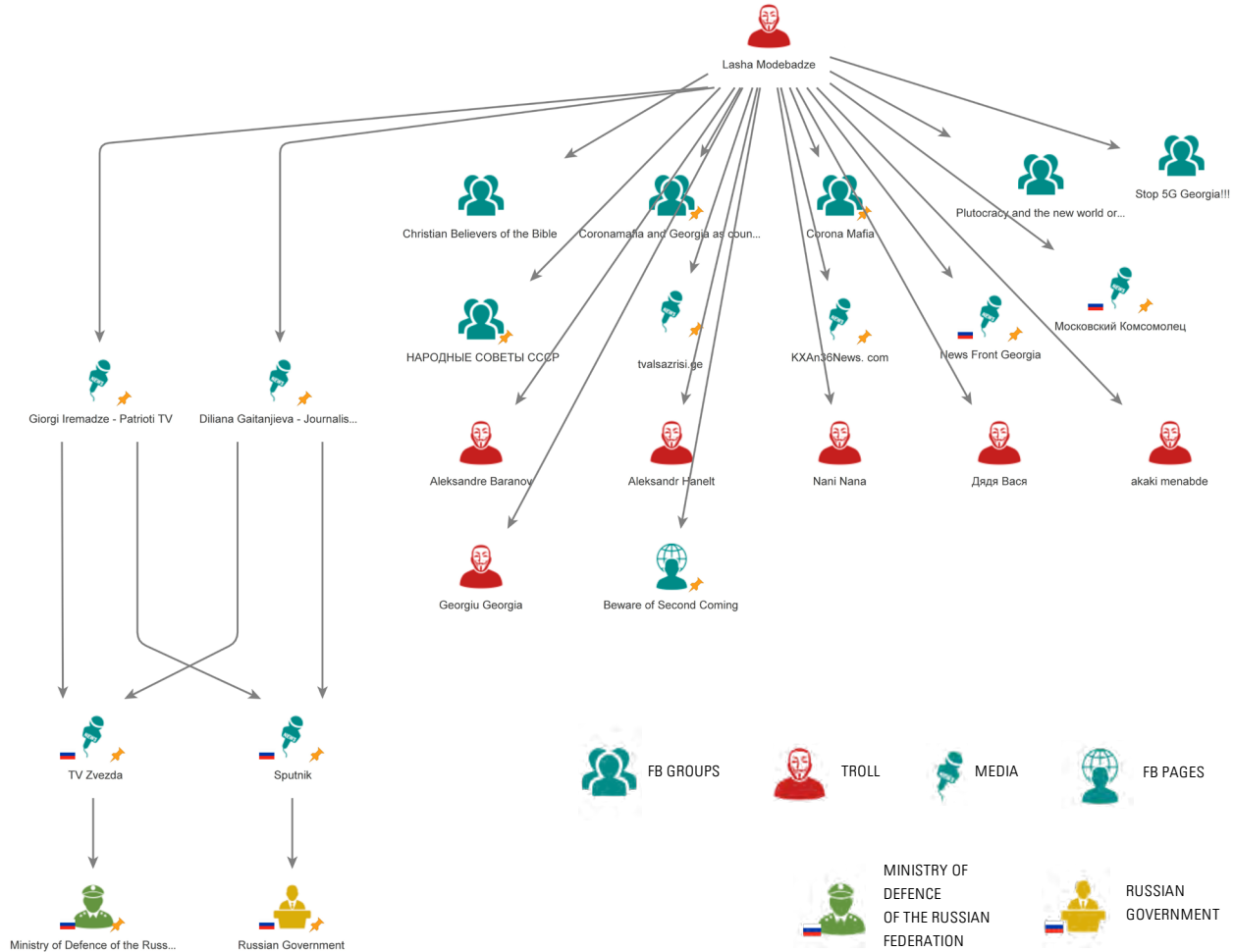
Furthermore, commonalities are observed in treating vaccine hesitancy and conspiracy theories about the origin of the coronavirus: Giorgi Iremadze and Lasha Modebadze profiles share posts alleging that the coronavirus was artificially created to carry out a universal vaccination:



FB ACCOUNTS RELATED TO THE TROLL AND OTHER MEDIA OUTLETS. Before the previous accounts were deleted, Lasha Modebadze account had been one of the administrators of several antivaxxer groups, including STOP 5G Georgia!!! that has been already deleted and other acting groups: კორონა მაფია [Corona Mafia], კორონამაფია და საქართველო როგორც საექსპერიმენტო ქვეყანა [Coronamafia and Georgia as country for experiments]. At present, he is the administrator of a new group – პლუტოკრატია და ახალი მსოფლიო წესრიგი [Plutocracy and the new world order], which was created on 23 January 2021. Lasha Modebadze is linked to other accounts: ბიბლიის მორწმუნე ქრისტიანები [Christian Believers of the Bible] which has active interaction with Lasha Modebadze by means of sharing posts and commenting on published posts; ბოლო ჟამია იფხიბლეთ [Beware of Second Coming] and НАРОДНЫЕ СОВЕТЫ СССР [People’s Councils of the USSR] sharing and posting Lasha Modebadze’s antivaxxer posts. It should be noted that the content shared by these two accounts is similar (conspiracy theories about a new world order, Rothschilds, Rockefellers and Bill Gates). Also, several trolls are linked to Lasha Modebadze, who share posts or comment on posts of the account (Aleksandr Hanelt =

მახ.უაროვ, Дядя Вася, Akaki Menabde uses image of макарян григор who lives in Sochi, Aleksandre Baranov, Georgiu Georgia, Nani Nana). Pro-Kremlin media outlets (tvalsazrиси.ge, News Front) frequently publish posts of Lasha Modebadze as pieces of information.

FIGURE 19. FACEBOOK ACCOUNTS AND MEDIA OUTLETS LINKED TO THE TROLL



FACEBOOK PAGES AND GROUPS. Disinformation about the coronavirus was posted through pro-Kremlin Facebook pages and groups, the majority of which are interconnected:

TABLE 1. PRO-KREMLIN FACEBOOK PAGES AND GROUPS

FB PAGES	ABOUT THE PAGE	FB GROUPS	ABOUT THE GROUP
ევრაზია – საინფორმაციო სააგენტო / Eurasia – Information Agency	Subscribers: 12,157. Shares anti-Western, antiliberal content of Tvalsazrиси.ge and geworld.ge, as well as posts of the FB group of Kote Chikviladze and Gulbaat Rtskhiladze. The latter is the founder of the agency and the Eurasian Institute.	კოტე ჩიკვილადის და გულბათ რცხილადის თანამოაზრეების ჯგუფი: Россия и Грузия [Group of Followers of Kote Chikviladze and Gul- baat Rtskhiladze: Russia and Georgia]	Members: 15,377 Initial name was Kido- bani, later the name changed to Россия и Грузия-дружба навеки! [Russia and Georgia – Eternal Friendship!] Admins: Kote Chikviladze, FB page Georgia and World

FB PAGES	ABOUT THE PAGE	FB GROUPS	ABOUT THE GROUP
			Shares a new version of Sakinfromi which redirects users to the News Front page to bypass the restrictions put in place after the deletion of News Front accounts from Facebook
<p><u>საქართველო და მსოფლიო</u> [Georgia and World]</p>	<p>Subscribers: 22,176</p> <p>During the pandemic, this outlet published the highest number of conspiracy theories often based on Russian sources, including <u>fondsk.ru – Фонд стратегической культуры</u>. [Foundation of Strategic Culture]</p>	<p><u>СТАЛИН ВЕЛИКИЙ УЧИТЕЛЬ</u> [Stalin Great Teacher]</p>	<p>Members: 5,214</p> <p>Admin: Gocha Kavrelishvili</p> <p>Shares a new version of Sakinfromi which redirects users to the News Front page, also Russian-language materials</p>
<p><u>Tvalsazrishi.ge</u></p>	<p>Subscribers: 11,367</p> <p>Shares online content about coronavirus, referring citing Lasha Modebadze and Giorgi Iremadze as sources, also, publications of other antivaxxers.</p>	<p><u>НАРОДНЫЕ СОВЕТЫ СССР</u> [People’s Councils USSR]</p>	<p>Members: 599</p> <p>Admin: Art</p> <p>Shares materials of the troll Lasha Modebadze, media outlets: tvasarishi.ge, Obieqtivi TV</p>
<p><u>სტალინი</u> [Stalin]</p>	<p>Subscribers: 12,002</p> <p>Shares content of Georgia and World</p>		

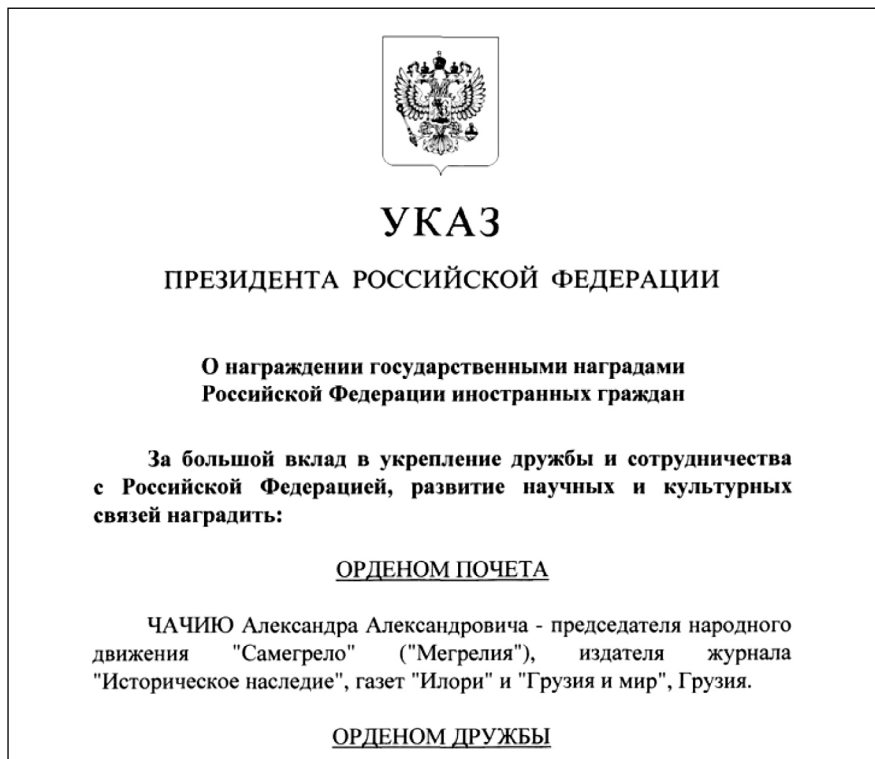
SIMILAR MESSAGES OF RUSSIAN- AND GEORGIAN-LANGUAGE MEDIA, CLICKBAIT WEBSITES. In addition to Russian state news agency, Sputnik, and other Russian media outlets, the position of the Kremlin, in the process of infodemic, was also promoted by Georgian-language media with direct or indirect ties to Russia. Furthermore, political information and conspiracy theories were, on certain occasions, released via clickbait websites. The table below shows separate examples of similar misinforming messages of political content by sources:

TABLE 2. SIMILAR MESSAGES OF RUSSIAN- AND GEORGIAN-LANGUAGE MEDIA, CLICKBAIT WEBSITES

MESSAGE	RUSSIAN-LANGUAGE SOURCES		GEORGIAN-LANGUAGE SOURCES		
	KREMLIN-CONTROLLED MEDIA	RESPONDENTS	PRO-KREMLIN ANTI-WESTERN MEDIA	CLICKBAIT SITES	MISCELLANEOUS
<u>Coronavirus is manufactured by the USA</u>	Россия 1 Russia Today	Sergey Kurgin-uan, movement “Суть времени” [Essence of Time]	TV Obieqtivi Georgia and World News Front Georgia		
<u>US professor arrested for Creating COVID-19 for China</u>	Комсомольской правда bbcnewss.ru ipne.ws asia-times.org press.cnnnews.ru yandex.ru/news qazweek.kz/ru rua.gr barometr.info smi2.ru evening-mail.ru alternathistory.com pikabu.ru amediainfo.ru			geoposts.ge geonewest.ge abcnews.com.ge viki.ge	exclusivenews.ge
<u>Coronavirus is created in Lugar Lab</u>	Ren TV	Igor Nikulin, military expert	Georgia and World News Front Georgia		
<u>Eurocepticism: The EU abandoned Italy</u>	Sputnik-Georgia Sputnik-Ossetia		News Front Georgia and World Politikano Obieqtivi TV		Gulbaat Rtskhilladze, Eurasian Institute
<u>Eurocepticism: EU flags are removed in Italy and France</u>	Российская газета life.ru				Kardhu
<u>Only authoritative countries can deal with coronavirus (Russia, China)</u>	Россия 1 РЕН ТВ		Georgia and World News Front Georgia TV Obieqtivi		Gulbaat Rtskhilladze, Eurasian Institute Victor Hugo Vika (TV Obieqtivi)

From traditional media, five media outlets with close ties to the Kremlin were identified, which most frequently published disinformation about the pandemic.

GEORGIA AND WORLD (GEWORLD.GE)⁷³ – publisher is Historical Heritage; a member of its Public Council is a Moscow-based political analyst Alexander Chachia. In 2014, Russian President Vladimir Putin awarded the Order of Honor to Chachia for “great contribution to strengthening friendship and cooperation with the Russian Federation.” The text of the decree of award mentions the newspaper “Georgia and World.”⁷⁴ Authors of the outlet are representatives of pro-Russian organizations, including members of Eurasian Institute. One of the authors of the outlet, Konstantine Chikhviladze, simultaneously administers the FB page of Georgia and World and FB groups related to the Eurasian Institute; he was also the administrator the News Front FB page⁷⁵ before accounts linked to this news agency were deleted by Facebook.



NEWS FRONT⁷⁶ – was registered on Russian web hosting server reg.ru in November 2014. The website’s IP address is located in the Russian city of Rostov. The news agency publishes stories in nine languages. The Georgian-language website was created in October 2019. News Front recognizes the independence of the territories of Donbas, Luhansk and Crimea in Ukraine and pursues the editorial policy that is identical to the Kremlin’s agenda. The news agency has links to Georgia and World and the Eurasian Institute while its content is shared on pro-Russian Facebook groups. In April 2020, Facebook administration deleted a network News Front accounts. The news agency publishes posts of the troll Lasha Modebadze⁷⁷ and is engaged in the campaign against the Lugar Lab.

⁷³ Georgia and World, profile: <http://mythdetector.ge/en/profile/geworldge>

⁷⁴ <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/acts/files/0001201402130018.pdf>

⁷⁵ Myth Detector, 1 November 2019, News Front Georgia – Kremlin’s New Information Front in Georgia. <http://mythdetector.ge/en/myth/news-front-georgia-kremlins-new-information-front-georgia>

⁷⁶ News Front, profile, <http://mythdetector.ge/en/profile/news-front>

⁷⁷ <https://bit.ly/2MB6nfC>

TVALSAZRISI.GE domain was registered on 30 April 2019; its IP address is located in Germany. The media outlet often publishes materials about the pandemic based on posts of fake FB account Lasha Modebadze,⁷⁸ also disinformation aimed at triggering confrontation on religious grounds, which is spread by Russian sources.⁷⁹

SAKINFORMI is fully owned by the editor-in-chief Arno Khidirbegishvili who is a frequent respondent of other Kremlin-controlled outlets: Georgia and World, News Front, Sputnik and sometimes, authors publications in them. He is also quoted by the ethno-nationalist newspaper Asaval-Dasavali.

OBIEQTIVI TV is a broadcaster linked to pro-Russian political party, the Alliance of Patriots. For many years now, it has aired misinforming reports about the Lugar Lab, produced by Russian TV channels.⁸⁰ During the pandemic, the TV channel mainly promoted antivaccination sentiments, and spread conspiracy theories about artificial origin of the coronavirus.

From anti-Western editions, two newspapers – Asaval-Dasavali and Alia – published false and misleading materials about the pandemic.

From among **clickbait websites**, which are mainly focused on economic gains, some published disinformation of political content; some of them have IP addresses in Russia,⁸¹ including cloned pages of respected Western media outlets such as CNN and BBC (See more details. Economic benefits of clickbait websites, page 46).

Whois Record for CnnNews.ru.com		Whois Record for BbcNewSs.website	
Domain Profile		Domain Profile	
Proximity Score	27	Proximity Score	27
Email	abuse@reg.ru is associated with ~907,238 domains cnnnews.ru.com@regprivate.ru	Email	abuse@reg.ru is associated with ~907,238 domains bbcnewss.website@regprivate.ru
Registrar	Registrar of Domain Names REG.RU, LLC IANA ID: 1606 URL: https://www.reg.ru/ Whois Server: whois.reg.ru abuse@reg.ru (p) 74955801111	Registrar	Registrar of Domain Names REG.RU, LLC IANA ID: 1606 URL: https://www.reg.ru/ Whois Server: whois.reg.ru abuse@reg.ru (p) 74955801111
Registrar Status	ok	Registrar Status	ok
Dates	344 days old Created on 2020-04-03 Expires on 2021-04-03 Updated on 2020-04-08	Dates	353 days old Created on 2020-03-25 Expires on 2021-03-25 Updated on 2020-03-30
Name Servers	NS1.BEGET.COM (has 548,947 domains) NS2.BEGET.COM (has 548,947 domains)	Name Servers	NS1.BEGET.COM (has 548,947 domains) NS1.BEGET.PRO (has 108,679 domains) NS2.BEGET.COM (has 548,947 domains) NS2.BEGET.PRO (has 108,679 domains)
IP Address	5.101.152.189 - 7,523 other sites hosted on this server	IP Address	87.236.16.134 - 2,817 other sites hosted on this server
IP Location	🇷🇺 - Sankt-peterburg - Saint Petersburg - Beget LLC	IP Location	🇷🇺 - Sankt-peterburg - Saint Petersburg - Beget LLC
ASN	🇷🇺 AS198610 BEGET-AS, RU (registered Jun 25, 2012)	ASN	🇷🇺 AS198610 BEGET-AS, RU (registered Jun 25, 2012)
Domain Status	Registered And Parked Or Redirected	Domain Status	Registered And Active Website
Whois History	8 records have been archived since 2020-04-03		
IP History	4 changes on 4 unique IP addresses over 1 years		

⁷⁸ Lasha Modebadze on “tvalsazrisi” webpage. <https://bit.ly/3uTCuZ5>

⁷⁹ Myth Detector, 16 June 2019. Disinformation, as if Turkish government is going to help Adjarian Muslims to gain independence. <https://bit.ly/3tBSpdn>

⁸⁰ MDF, 2019. Anti-Western Propaganda. <http://mdfgeorgia.ge/eng/view-library/173/>

⁸¹ Myth Detector, 15 April 2020. “Russian Cluster” of disinformation and its “internal spread” in Georgia. <http://mythdetector.ge/en/myth/russian-cluster-disinformation-and-its-internal-spread-georgia>

4.2. ANTILIBERAL GROUPS

Antiliberal groups mainly represent a territory for the activity of clergy and various Facebook pages and groups. Most active among religious servants was Davit Isakadze. This category also included eleven Facebook pages, three individual Facebook accounts (**Levan Chachua, leader of political party “Georgian Idea”, Zviad Tomaradze, executive of the organization “Nation and State and Khatuna Saginashvili, editor of religious magazine “Kvarkhedi”**) and five Facebook groups of which one was deleted.

TABLE 3. ANTI-LIBERAL FACEBOOK PAGES, GROUPS AND INDIVIDUAL ACCOUNTS

CLERGY		FB PAGES AND ACCOUNTS	FB GROUPS
Davit Isakadze	13	qadageba.ge Subscribers: 81,294	Photo-Fact GEORGIA Members: 15,834
Giorgi Razmadze	8	დედაქალაქი [Capital] Subscribers: 81,294	ანტი-მასონობა „ანტიქრისტეს“ ახალი მსოფლიო წესრიგი (NWO); ანტი-ეკუმენიზმი [Anti-masonry. ‘Antichrist’s’ New World Order (NWO); Anti-ecumenism] Members: 4,963
Spirido Abuladze	7	კარდჰუ [Kardhu] Subscribers: 45,298	საქართველო უპირველეს ყოფლისა! 6504 ძვ წ [Georgia First of All] Members: 1,992
Konstantine Jincharadze	7	ახალგაზრდული [Youth] Subscribers: 23,329	GEპროქართულიGE [Pro Georgian] Members: 1,332
Shalva Kekelia	6	წინაპართა ნაკვალევზე [Trodden path of ancestors] Subscribers: 22,302	Antiliberal Space (Deleted)
Ilia Chikvaide	5	მოძრაობა ძლევაი საკვირველი [Movement great victory] Subscribers: 19,621	
lobi	5	Zneoba.ge Subscribers: 20,152 zneoba.ge.new Subscribers: 3,574	
Davit Kvlividze	5	საქართველო უპირველეს ყოფლისა [Georgia First of All] Subscribers: 14,460	













CLERGY		FB PAGES AND ACCOUNTS	FB GROUPS
Davit Sulashvili	4	<u>მართლმადიდებელ მშობელთა კავშირი</u> [Union of Orthodox Parents] Subscribers: 3,528	
Basil Mkalavishvili	4	<u>Qvakutxedi ქვაკუთხედი</u> Subscribers: 11,134	
Guram Gamtsemlidze	3	<u>Khatuna Saginashvili</u>	
Saba Gigiberia	3	<u>Zviad Tomaradze , Nation and State</u>	
Saba Chikaidze	3	<u>Levan Chachua, Georgian Idea</u>	
Atanase Khabeishvili	3	<u>ბოლო ჟამია იფხიზლეთ</u> [Beware of Second Coming]	

4.3. ECONOMIC BENEFIT OF CLICKBAIT WEBSITES

Clickbait websites attract the attention of users by sensational, misleading headlines and visual effects. The higher the number of clicks, the larger the audience of a webpage and consequently, the greater likelihood of the website to earn income. Therefore, such websites are mainly profit-oriented and they may also cover political topics.

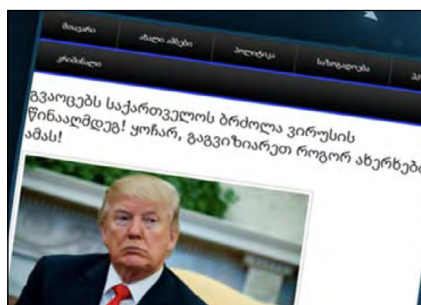
As many as 20 clickbait sites publishing disinformation about the coronavirus were revealed. Eight of these 20 sites have domains or IP addresses registered in Russia; the registrant of five websites is Sabir Qiarimovi with the IP address in Germany, but none of them is operational now; information about registrants of some webpages is not available. It is also worth to note that 13 of these 20 websites were registered in 2020.

TABLE 4. CLICKBAITS

RUSSIAN DOMAINS OR IP ADDRESSES	SABIR QIARIMОВI	VARIOUS REGISTRANTS	UNDISCLOSED REGISTRANTS
<u>press.cnnnews.ru.com</u> 3 April 2020 <u>www.reg.ru</u> IP:  Sankt-peterburg – Beget Llc	<u>gadacema.ge</u> (not operational) 2 March 2020 proservice ltd IP:  Bayern – Nuremberg – Hetzner Online Ag	<u>Abcnews.com.ge</u> 20 March, 2020  – Serv.ge Ltd owned: <u>newpost.com.ge</u> <u>timesnews.ge</u>	<u>fbmediatv.com</u> 21 July 2019 IP:  Hauts-de-france
<u>bbcnewss.website</u> 25 March 2020 <u>www.reg.ru</u> IP:  Sankt-peterburg – Beget Llc	<u>gasagebia.ge</u> (not operational) 4 March, 2020 proservice ltd IP:  Bayern – Nuremberg – Hetzner Online Ag	<u>wnews.ge</u> – giorgi kheTaguri 6 November 2019 proservice ltd IP:  Hauts-de-france	<u>geovips.com</u> 10 November, 2019 IP:  Bayern – Nuremberg – Hetzner Online Ag
<u>msoflio.ru</u> (not operational) REGRU-RU IP:  Moskva – Moscow – Domain Names Registrar Reg.ru Ltd	<u>arxi.ge</u> (not operational) 22 April, 2020 proservice ltd IP:  Bayern – Nuremberg – Hetzner Online Ag	<u>Cyc.ge</u> – Nodar Inaneishvili 8 August, 2017  – Tbilisi – Tbilisi – Cloud 9 Ltd.	<u>Hotnews.ge</u> 6 July, 2017 IP:  Noord-holland – Amsterdam – Godaddy.com Llc

RUSSIAN DOMAINS OR IP ADDRESSES	SABIR QIARIMOV	VARIOUS REGISTRANTS	UNDISCLOSED REGISTRANTS
<p>InfocoVid-19.ru 23 March 2020 REGRU-RU IP:  Moskva – Web-host Llc</p>	<p>shedevri.ge (not operational) proservice ltd IP:  Bayern – Nuremberg – Hetzner Online Ag</p>		<p>viki.ge (not operational) 28 January, 2020</p>
<p>ntv.ge 26 April 2020 Domenebi.ge IP:  Sankt-peterburg – Sprinhost.ru Llc</p>	<p>yvela.ge (not operational) 30 April, 2020 proservice ltd IP:  Bayern – Nuremberg – Hetzner Online Ag</p>		
<p>geoposts.ge 4 August 2020 proservice ltd IP:  Moskva-Web-host Llc</p>			
<p>geonewest.com 24 February 2020 PublicDomainRegistry.com IP:  Sankt-peterburg – Timeweb Ltd.</p>			
<p>videosports.ge 22 June 2019  Domenebi.ge  Moskva – Webhost Llc</p>			

Although clickbait sites mainly published information about false cure methods or artificial creation of the coronavirus, several clickbait sites, sometimes, disseminated manipulative content with domestic as well as foreign political connotation. For example, a cloned website [abcnews.com.ge](#), which uses the name of a famous American media outlet, published information as if President Trump was impressed by Georgia’s success in fighting the pandemic.⁸² The same outlet was the source of a conspiracy theory about artificial creation of the coronavirus by a Harvard professor⁸³ and covered President Putin’s role in conflict resolution in the positive light.⁸⁴



⁸² Myth Detector, 1 April 2020. Is Trump impressed by Georgia’s outcome in the fight against coronavirus? <http://www.mythdetector.ge/en/myth/trump-impressed-georgias-outcome-fight-against-coronavirus>

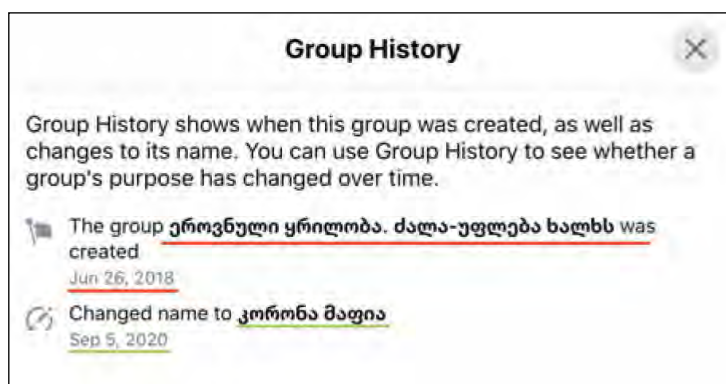
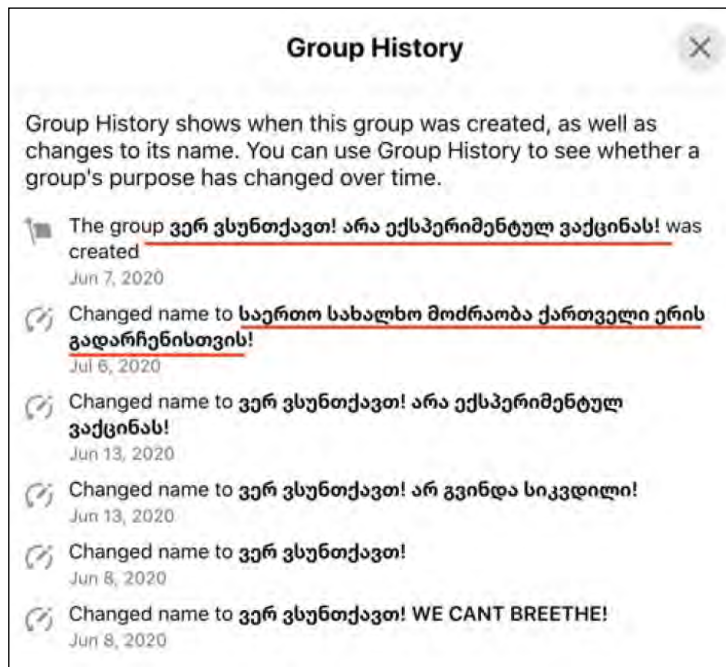
⁸³ Myth Detector, 8 April 2020. Disinformation by Fake BBC, CNN, ABC about Harvard Professor Allegedly Arrested for Creating COVID-19. <https://bit.ly/3qXHKrm>

⁸⁴ Myth Detector, 29 April 2020. “Clickbait Putin” and other clickbaits that promise the return of Abkhazia and Samachablo. <https://bit.ly/3bTzip1>

4.4. ANTIVAXXER FACEBOOK ACCOUNTS

During the reporting period, 233 fake stories, debunked by Myth Detector, were shared by various types of FB accounts. These accounts are: individual Facebook accounts – 229; Facebook groups – 287, FB pages – 138

Most active antivaxxer groups (14) mainly sharing posts concerning the coronavirus as well as individual antivaxxers are listed in the table provided below. It should also be noted that names of all groups do not contain the word “pandemic” or “coronavirus”; some of them had been created before the pandemic broke out, but they changed their names later. For example, “National Forum – Power to People” was created in 2018 and renamed “Corona Mafia” in 2020; “Democratic Movement Proper” was created in 2019. The page “We Cannot Breathe! No to Experimental Vaccine!” was created in 2020 but within a month changed its name to “United Popular Movement for Saving Georgian People!”



Furthermore, several groups administered by antivaxxers did not limit themselves to topics of the pandemic but were also active in discussing ongoing political processes. Among administrators and moderators of several groups one can see trolls, including such accounts that are linked to separate services (for example, ბიზნეს ბიზნეს კლასის მიკროავტობუსით მომსახურება [Service by Business-Class Minivan] which shared posts of antiliberal groups and accounts).

TABLE 5. ANTIVAXXER'S FACEBOOK GROUPS AND INDIVIDUAL ACCOUNTS

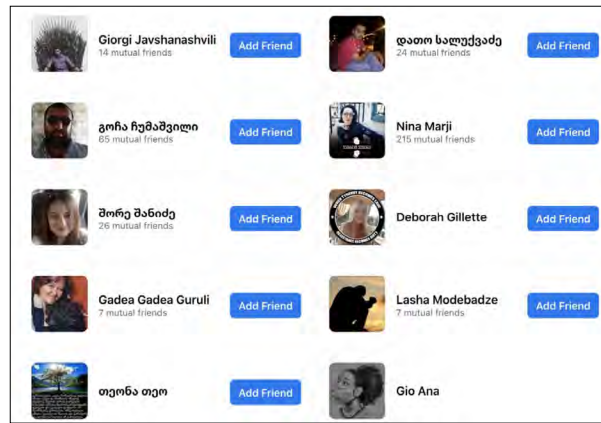
GROUPS	INDIVIDUAL ANTIVAXXERS
<p>კორონა მათია = National Forum Power to People [Corona Mafia] Members: 6,157 Administered by troll: Giorgi Dolodze, ბიზნეს კლასის მიკროავტობუსით მომსახურება [Service by Business-Class Minivan] Year: 2018</p>	<p>Shore Shanidze Group admins and moderators: კოვიდ-ფაშიზმის საწინააღმდეგო მოძრაობა, კორონამათია და საქართველო როგორც საექსპერიმენტო ქვეყანა, “!!!დედათა ლაშქარი!!!”, ბედნიერი ერი [Movement Against Covid-Fascism, Coronamafia and Georgia as country for experiments, Army of Mothers, Happy Nation] Media platforms: News Front, tvalsazrиси.ge.</p>
<p>საერთო სახალხო მოძრაობა ქართველი ერის გადარჩენისთვის! = We Cannot Breathe! No to Experimental Vaccine! [United Popular Movement for Saving Georgian Nation] Members: 3,956 Year: June 2020</p>	<p>Nina Marji Group admins and moderators: უშუალოდ დემოკრატიული მოძრაობა, Stop Fake Pandemic, COVID 19 – თამაში დამთავრებულია [Democratic Movement Proper]</p>
<p>კოვიდ-ფაშიზმის საწინააღმდეგო მოძრაობა !!! = Corona Bluff [Movement Against Covid-Fascism] Members: 4,161 Administered by troll: Aqilevsi Aqilevsi Year: September 2020</p>	<p>Nona Agdgomelashvili, doctor Group admins and moderators: კორონა მათია, საერთო სახალხო მოძრაობა ქართველი ერის გადარჩენისთვის!, “!!!დედათა ლაშქარი!!!” [Corona Mafia, !!!Army of Mothers!!!] Media platforms: Obieqtivi TV, Geowrld.ge, tvalsazrиси.ge, News Front.</p>
<p>ახალი მსოფლიო წესრიგი და კორონა აფიორა! [New World Order and Corona Scam!] Members: 1,633 Administered by troll: Giorgi Giorgi Year: November 2020</p>	<p>Mano Beridze Group admins and moderators: კორონა მათია, კორონამათია და საქართველო როგორც საექსპერიმენტო ქვეყანა, COVID 19 – თამაში დამთავრებულია [Corona Mafia, Coronamafia and Georgia as country for experiments, Covid-19 – Game Is Over] Media platforms: tvalsazrиси.ge, Newsfront.</p>
<p>კორონამათია და საქართველო როგორც საექსპერიმენტო ქვეყანა [Coronamafia and Georgia as country for experiments] Members: 1,517 Year: October 2020</p>	<p>Vitalia Kardava Group admins and moderators: კორონამათია და საქართველო როგორც საექსპერიმენტო ქვეყანა, Stop Fake Pandemic [Coronamafia and Georgia as country for experiments, Stop Fake Pandemic]</p>
<p>პლუტოკრატია და ახალი მსოფლიო წესრიგი [Plutocracy and the new world order] Members: 215 Administered by troll: Iasha modebadze Year: January 2021</p>	<p>Tina Topuria, ჰომეოპათი Media platforms: Obieqtivi TV, Saerto Gazeti, News Front, tvalsazrაცი.ge</p>

GROUPS	INDIVIDUAL ANTIVAXXERS
<p><u>Covidmuseum</u> Members: 3,295 Russian- and English-language group joined by Georgian antivaxxers too, who share posts Year: August 2020</p>	<p><u>Mia Milion</u> Group admins and moderators: კორონა მაფია, Stop Fake Pandemic [Corona Mafia, Stop Fake Pandemic]</p>
<p><u>Stop Fake Pandemic</u> Members: 223 Russian- and English-language group whose admins and moderators include four Georgian antivaxxers: <u>Mia Milion</u>, <u>მიშო ლტიაშვილი</u>, <u>Vitalia Kardava</u>, <u>Nina Marji</u> Year: November 2020</p>	<p><u>Misho Otiashvili</u> Group admins and moderators: კორონა მაფია, Stop Fake Pandemic [Corona Mafia, Stop Fake Pandemic]</p>
<p><u>STOP 5G in Georgia!</u> Members: 7 444 Year: April 2020</p>	<p><u>Larisa Tsitlanadze</u> Group admins and moderators: საერთო სახალხო მოძრაობა ქართველი ერის გადარჩენისთვის, “!!!დედათა ლაშქარი!!!” [United Popular Movement for Saving Georgian Nation, “!!! Army of Mothers!!!”]</p>
<p><u>STOP 5G Georgia!!!</u> Deleted Members: 13, 018 Year: April 2020</p>	<p><u>Giorgi Javshanashvili</u> Group admins and moderators: კოვიდ-ფაშიზმის საწინააღმდეგო მოძრაობა, STOP 5G Georgia!!! Currently deleted⁸⁵ [Movement Against Covid-Fascism, STOP 5G Georgia!!! Currently deleted]</p>
<p><u>COVID 19 – Game Is Over</u> Members: 117 Year: November 2020</p>	<p><u>Gadea Gadea Guruli</u> Group admin and moderator: კორონა მაფია [Corona Mafia]</p>
<p><u>Happy Nation</u> Members: 789 Year: April 2020</p>	<p><u>Davit Giorgobiani</u> Media platforms: Royal Channel, tvalsazrisi.ge Nino Gaprindashvili</p>
<p><u>“!!!Army of Mothers!!!”</u> Members: 471 Administered by troll: Eda Eda Year: December 2020</p>	<p><u>Gocha Chumashvili</u> Media platform: tvalsazrisi.ge Gocha Kartveli</p>
<p><u>Democratic Movement Proper</u> Members: 432 Year: November 2019</p>	<p><u>Lela Kikilashvili</u> Share antivaxxers’ posts in various groups</p>

It should be noted that a number of antivaxxers engaged in the campaign are among the friends of individual Facebook account ბიბლიის მორწმუნე ქრისტიანები [Christian Believers of the Bible] which is linked to a pro-Russian troll Lasha Modebadze.⁸⁶

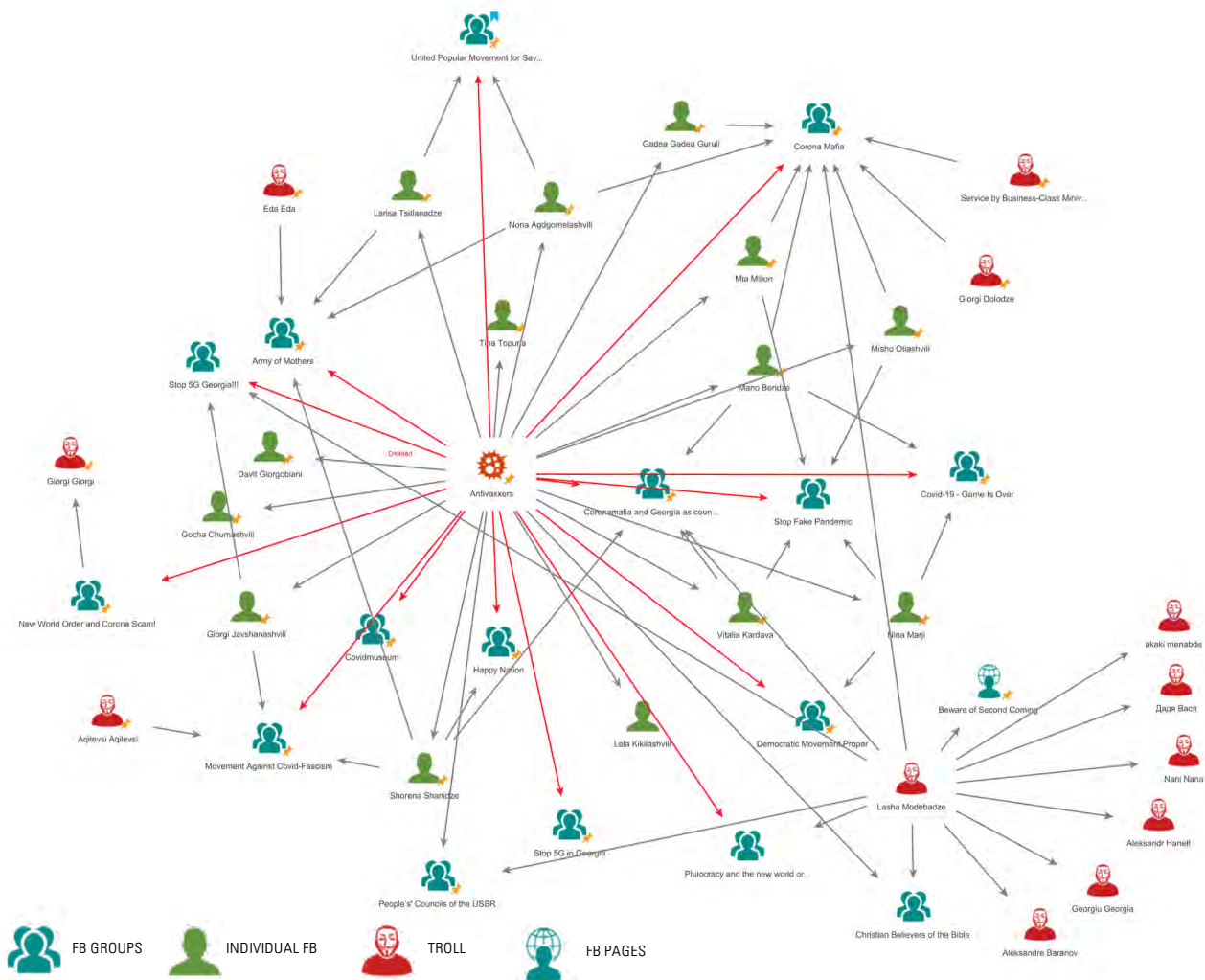
⁸⁵ Myth Detector, 23 April 2020. STOP 5G GEORGIA, George Soros and Troll Using Grigol Makaryan’s Photo. <http://mythdetector.ge/en/myth/stop-5g-georgia-george-soros-and-troll-using-grigol-makaryans-photo>

⁸⁶ Christian Believers of the Bible <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100025604376271&sk=friends>



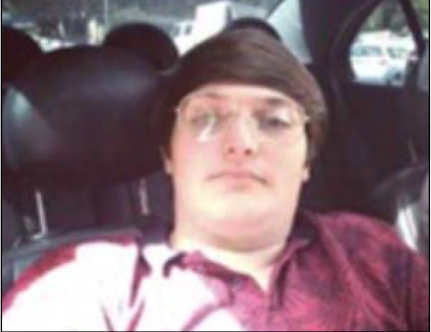


Antivaccination posts were seen in such neutral groups that aim to support exchange of information and help patients during the pandemic; for example, კორონავირუსი/COVID-19 ერთად დავამარცხოთ [Let's Beat Coronavirus/COVID-19 Together], ერთად დავამარცხოთ covid-19, [Let's Beat Covid-19 Together] which may be explained by the fact that the groups do not have internal regulations concerning the infodemic. The same problem is observed among supporter groups of the ruling party Georgian Dream, which are open platforms and allow to share various content; for example, პრემიერ-მინისტრი გიორგი გახარია, კახა კალაძე თბილისის მერი, ბიძინა ივანიშვილის მეგობრები ფეისბუქზე [Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia, kakha Kaladze-Tbilisi Mayor, Bidzina Ivanishvili's Friends on Facebook].

FIGURE 20. ANTIVAXXER FACEBOOK ACCOUNTS AND THEIR CONNECTIONS

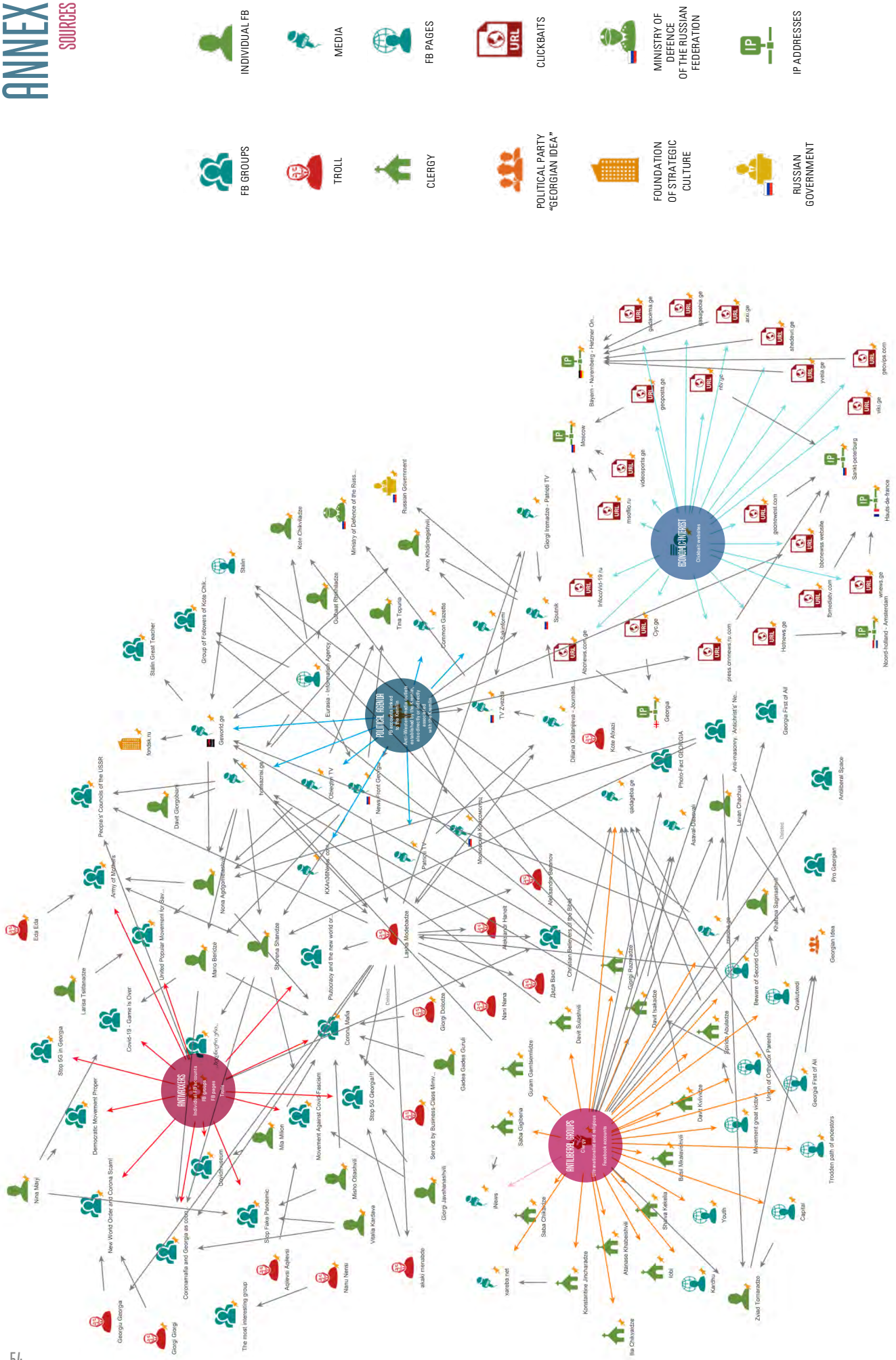


TROLLS. As many as 30 fake profiles were revealed; seven of them are administrators of separate antivaxxer groups, while the remaining 23 limit themselves to sharing or commenting antivaccination posts. Three fake accounts used photos of other persons; URL addresses of four fake accounts contained names of other persons; one fake account had such URL address in its cancelled profile, which is an indication that the URL link might show a real identity of a person or additionally, another identity.

TABLE 6. FAKE ACCOUNTS

TROLLS ADMINISTERING FB GROUPS	OTHER FAKE ACCOUNTS
<p>1. Troll: <u>Aqilevsi Aqilevs</u> Group: <u>Movement Against Covid-Fascism</u></p>	<p>8. <u>Akaki Menabde</u> uses stolen photo from Sochi resident <u>макарян григор</u></p> 
<p>2. Troll: <u>Giorgi Dolodze = saba. kalatizishvili</u> Group: <u>კორონა მადია</u> [Corona Mafia]</p>	<p>9. <u>Lizy Khidesheli</u> uses stolen photo from the profile of VK account <u>Elizaveta Voronova</u>, however, various Russian citizens, found with the <u>yandex</u> browser, use this photo.</p> 
<p>3. Troll: <u>ბიზნესის კლასის მიკროავტობუსების მომსახურება</u> [Service by Business-Class Minivan] Group: <u>კორონა მადია</u> [Corona Mafia]</p>	<p>10. <u>Levan Dachipuli</u> renamed “Leval, Levan”, which was created in March 2020, uses image of a fashion model as its profile photo</p> 
<p>4. Troll: <u>Giorgi Giorgi = mariami.davitadze.56</u> Group: <u>New World Order and Corona Scam!</u></p>	<p>11. <u>Xatuna Xatuna = mari.mikhelidze</u></p>
<p>5. Troll: <u>Eda Eda</u> Group: <u>“!!!Army of Mothers!!!”</u></p>	<p>12. <u>Beware of Second Coming = kristo.imedadze</u></p>

TROLLS ADMINISTERING FB GROUPS	OTHER FAKE ACCOUNTS
<p>6. Troll: <u>Nanu Nancy</u> = merwyuli688 Group: https://www.facebook.com/groups/300757730782296</p>	<p>13. <u>Aleksandr Hanelt</u> = max.uvarov.71 14. <u>Giorgi Kolkhi</u> = gio.macharashvili.758</p>
<p>7. Troll: <u>Lasha Modebadze</u> = gio.iremادze Group: <u>Plutocracy and the new world order</u></p>	<p>15. <u>Дядя Вася</u> 16. <u>Aleksandre Baranov</u> 17. <u>Kote Afxazi</u> 18. <u>Zaur Fiodorovich</u> 19. <u>Maia Maia</u> 20. <u>Georgiu Georgia</u> 21. <u>Giorgi Akauri</u> 22. <u>Dante Kartveli</u> 23. <u>Slr MClaren Stirling Moss</u> 24. <u>Nani Nana</u> – Deleted 25. <u>Davita Datodato</u> 26. <u>Elen Elen</u> 27. <u>Universe Universe</u> 28. <u>Righteous person</u> 29. <u>Irakli Kandelaki</u> – Deleted 30. <u>Baia Baiadze</u> id100017001633186 – Deleted</p>



INDIVIDUAL FB



FB GROUPS



MEDIA



FB PAGES



URL



CUCKBAITS



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION



IP ADDRESSES



TROLL



CLERGY



POLITICAL PARTY "GEORGIAN IDEA"



FOUNDATION OF STRATEGIC CULTURE



RUSSIAN GOVERNMENT



B | S | T The Black Sea Trust
for Regional Cooperation
A PROJECT OF THE GERMAN MARSHALL FUND



