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ceo@apr.agencyEmail: - jprr@epra.org.eg

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Phone: (+2) 0114 -15 -14 -157 - (+2) 0114 -15 -14 -151 - (+2) 02-376-20 -818

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PR goes to War: Warfare Tactics Utilized Amidst Russia Ukraine Conflict (*)

Dr. Iman M. Zahra (**)

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(**) Associate Professor of IMC, Faculty of Mass Communication - Cairo University.



PR goes to War: Warfare Tactics Utilized Amidst Russia Ukraine Conflict

Dr. Iman M. Zahra

imy_zahra@cu.edu.eg

*Associate Professor of IMC,
Faculty of Mass Communication,
Cairo University*

Abstract

Public Relations is an essential part of modern warfare as Hiebert (1991) stated, and the war in the Arabian Gulf provided - at the time - an excellent Public Relations case study of its successful use. The war to win people's minds over, insinuates that PR mutates into propaganda. Propaganda is all about a conscious way to shape, influence or transform the way people think and act and is greatly disseminated nowadays through social media. Sharing videos, tweets and posts have ensured that news spreads faster than wildfire and can quickly mobilise public opinion.

Propaganda has always been used by military as a strategy, therefore as Russia waged war against the country, President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine has been releasing a series of videos via social media which have been seeking support from the international community. They helped throw the spotlight on Ukrainians, and the international community warmed up to them as Russia was seen as the big aggressor.

The current study aims at amalgamating the power of the two most important strategies of modern warfare, Public Relations and social media. Uncovering PR strategies and tactics utilized via social media platforms amidst the Russian Ukraine conflict, through submitting presidential videos and verified twitter accounts to thorough investigation, reveals that warfare tactics have taken a drastic turn in this era. To achieve that end, a quick review of the history of the Russian Ukraine Conflict since its escalation in 2014 will be presented followed by the role of Public Relations and social media as strategic PR tools in warfare situations and propaganda mutations. Review of the most important studies tackling the conflict via various social media platforms will follow. Three models of communication and PR strategies and tactics utilized in drastic escalations from crises to conflicts will be applied in this study followed by the most important findings and recommendations pertaining to PR ethics.

Keywords: Public Relations, Propaganda, Social Media, warfare tactics, PR ethics.

Introduction:

When nations go to war, their citizens go with them. Traditional warfare, which pits one nation's armed forces against another's, requires the commitment of a nation's resources and the sacrifice and support of its population. For these reasons, Public Relations strategies and tactics have long been associated with waging war. As contemporary conflicts spawned unconventional warfare, Public Relations strategies and tactics evolved as well (Encyclopedia of Public Relations, 2013). In this era of information warfare, PR communication practitioners are constantly dealing with the increasingly complicated structure of information campaigns. At the same time, they have to respond to communication challenges faster, take quicker decisions on improving the campaign plan, having considered the opponents' actions and changes in the external information background, thus undergoing immediate adjustment of the PR tactics and strategies. Warfare messages are disseminated in the media according to the media logic or employing the planted stories, and also in social networks according to the social media logic (Zakharchenko, 2022).

Historically, the rise of the modern Public Relations practice throughout the 20th century is intimately connected to warfare. Starting in the US, President Woodrow Wilson formed the Committee on Public Information (CPI) during World War I. More commonly known as the Creel Committee—the CPI was made up of leading newspaper editors, advertising writers and several figures in the nascent Public Relations field. The Creel Committee's campaign in support of America's involvement in the war was among the first Public Relations efforts to utilize a comprehensive range of communication tactics to achieve its aims, from newspaper articles, editorials, and advertisements. During World War II, the U.S. effort to gain support for the war was directed by the Office of War Information (OWI), which served functions like the Creel Committee. The OWI had more media tools, including feature-length motion pictures, newsreels, and radio broadcasts. Despite PR efforts exerted by the Department of Defence, the Vietnam War was largely seen as both a military and a Public Relations failure (Encyclopedia of Public Relations, 2013).

In 1991, Hiebert published his seminal article in the PR review; asserting that Public Relations is an essential part of modern warfare as Hiebert stated, and the war in the Arabian Gulf provided - at the time - an excellent Public Relations case study of its successful use. The author argues that in the war either history's most impressive use of military weapons, or history's most thorough use of words and images are utilized as weapons of war, or both are witnessed. To win the minds at home in the Gulf War, the American government launched a Public Relations campaign on an unprecedented scale, and with unprecedented success. The author indicated that the smart bombs of the war succeeded in part because of smart words.



Moving to the turn of the century, the phenomena of social media prevailed and have been used in all types of mobilization purposes. Öztemel (2022) contends that since the US Presidential Elections in 2008, social media and the internet have started to be used for political purposes. With the start of the Arab Spring events, the sphere of influence of such politically oriented movements on the internet became international. Social media, the internet, and misinformation started to be used directly for foreign policy interests.

Problem Statement and Research Question:

The current study aims at amalgamating the power of the two most important strategies of modern warfare, Public Relations, and social media. Uncovering PR strategies and tactics utilized via social media platforms amidst the Russian Ukrainian conflict, through submitting presidential videos and verified X (twitter) accounts to thorough investigation, reveals that warfare tactics has taken a drastic turn in this era. To achieve that end, a quick review of the history of the Russian Ukrainian Conflict since its escalation in 2014 will be presented followed by the role of Public Relations and social media as a strategic PR tool in warfare situations. Review of the most important studies tackling the conflict via various social media platforms will follow. Three models of communication and PR strategies and tactics utilized in drastic escalations from crises to conflicts will be applied in this study followed by the most important findings and recommendations pertaining to PR ethics.

The current study tends to answer one research question, that is:

How is the process of mutation of PR tactics into propaganda tactics is a well proven strategy in the case of Russian Ukrainian Conflict?

Background of the Conflict: Global Consequences and Tracks of Prior Research:

The ongoing Russian-Ukrainian War (RUW) has become one of the biggest armed conflicts since 1945 in Europe. On 24 February 2022, Russia started marching on the lands of Ukraine to invade and begin the war by attacking major cities such as Chernihiv, Berdyansk, Odesa, Sumy, and Kyiv, a major escalation in Russia's hostile activity that began in 2014 (Vyas et al., 2023). Russia claimed defending the country's security from the threat of Ukraine. Russia was trying to limit Ukraine's proximity to the European Union and NATO to safeguard its security from the threat of the western block and influence of the United States and maintain Russia's close relations with the former Soviet Union. It is related to the position of the territory of the Ukrainian state, which is directly adjacent to Russia, so if Ukraine joins NATO, there will

no longer be a barrier between Russia and NATO, which is a threat to Russia (Julianto et al., 2022).

NATO is a group of 30 countries in a security alliance and, according to “NATO’s fundamental goal is to safeguard the Allies’ freedom and security by political and military means”. Therefore, Ukraine’s prospective intentions and NATO’s foreseen expansion for European security turned this political clash into an armed battle (Vyas et al., 2023). Pro-Russian propaganda argues that the West has no moral high ground to condemn the invasion and nations such as Canada, the US, and the UK are trying to force Europe into this conflict to benefit materially (Boucher et al., 2022).

The RUW is not only affecting eastern Europe but also damaging living standards in the whole world. The war has shocked the entire globe in many ways. The global inflation rate has increased by 3% and the world’s gross domestic product (GDP) growth reduced by 1.44%, and the USA alone saw its GDP fall by 1.28% since the war began. The RUW has increased global energy prices and exacerbated issue with energy security investments. Global politics concentrated on the short-term, ostensibly speedier remedies, such as preserving the status quo of the energy sector to stabilize the economy. The RUW has several detrimental socioeconomic effects that are currently being felt worldwide and might get worse, especially for global food security, as it is a confrontation between two significant agricultural powers. Food prices were already soaring due to supply chain disruptions brought on by the COVID-19 epidemic, but the simultaneous occurrence of the RUW caused a deterioration in the world’s food markets. The dispute between Russia and Ukraine has had repercussions around the globe. Major commodity markets (oil, gas, platinum, gold, and silver) have seen significant changes in supply and price. (Vyas et al. 2023) demonstrated that during this invasion, the stock markets of the United States, Canada, China, and Brazil, as well as gold and silver, received shocks from the other commodities and markets.

Sanctions were imposed on all Russian reserves, and most of all, Russian media were banned. On 2 March 2022, next to the military operation, an information operation initiated that sought to justify the incursion as a ‘special military operation’ that aimed to denazify the country and protect the eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, which Russia had recognised as independent few days before. In response to these developments, the Council of the European Union announced that it would be legally banning two Russian state-sponsored media outlets: RT (formerly Russia Today) and Sputnik, within EU borders. In a statement President of the European Union Ursula von der Leyen said that the ban was to prevent the outlets from ‘spreading their lies to justify Putin’s war and to sow division in the Union’. As a justification, the Council referred to the control the Kremlin has over Russian media outlets, and how ‘disinformation, information manipulation and distortion of facts’ are used as strategic tools to destabilise targeted European states. More specifically, RT and



Sputnik were said to be explicitly used to justify Russia's war in Ukraine. Hoyle and Pijpers (2022) argue that while the decision to ban RT and Sputnik is legally sound, the justification for the decision would benefit from a more elaborate explanation of balancing the different fundamental rights.

Antecedents to the RUW were witnessed in multiple research trends focusing on the points of escalation in 2014. The social media research trend was more visible amongst various researchers and investigated the use of social media for visual framing of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine. Using a large set of visual data from a popular social networking site, V Kontakte, the authors employed content analysis to examine how the conflict was represented and interpreted in pro-Ukrainian and pro-Russian online communities during the peak of violence in summer 2014. The findings pointed to the existence of profound differences in framing the conflict among pro-Ukrainian and pro-Russian online communities (Makhortykh and Sydorov, 2017).

The EU-Ukraine Summit in July 2018 demonstrated that the leaders of the EU and Ukraine have committed to further deepening the political association and economic integration of Ukraine with the EU. Yet, this "strong partnership," at the time based on a joint association agreement, has been overshadowed by Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and its instigation of the war in Donbas. Given that Ukraine is an important geopolitical neighbour for both the EU and Russia, the EU and its Member States – especially Germany and France – have taken on the role of mediators in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Knodt et al. (2018) focused on the image of the EU-Ukraine relationship as a unique and outstanding case in German and Russian print media. At that time, Ukraine's close ties with Russia appeared to be waning, however, the more Ukraine tried to strengthen its ties with the EU, the more Russia seemed to resist. Within the same period, the patterns of interaction between the EU and Ukraine, evolving within European Neighbourhood Policy and Eastern Partnership, were depicted as far more cooperative in the German press, whereas Russia's print media naturally portrayed EU-Ukraine relations as increasingly negative and more conflicting over the years.

The previous research samples, asserted that the ongoing conflict between Ukraine and Russia provided many examples of using all sorts of media, including social media, to conduct information warfare. Lots of studies focused on the issue of the importance of digital media in the context of war in Eastern Ukraine and socio-political protests (2013/2014) that preceded the armed conflict. Mickiewicz and Nesteriak in 2019 analysed the methods of instrumental usage of digital media by Russia as the dominant entity in conducting aggressive information warfare against Ukraine as well as investigating civic actions on the Ukrainian side aimed at counteracting Russian propaganda. The results showed that, in the times of the mediatization of war, different entities tended to actively use both traditional media and social media. The researchers complemented the debate on the conflict between Ukraine and

Russia by highlighting the role of digital media in the context of information warfare and by showing that digital media, especially social media, can be a platform well adopted and utilized by state actors and citizens.

Since the prior research demonstrated the vital salience of all social media platforms in escalating the RU conflict, depicted nowadays as RUW, and because social media is a major strategic tool utilized by PR, the current study demonstrates next the role of social media as a Public Relations strategic tool in warfare. Public Relations does not normally utilize misinformation and disinformation tactics. Instead, it gains a lot of importance to build and enhance image and manage perceptions, seeking out new allies and undergoing reputation management. *During war times, PR mutates into propaganda.* Propaganda is all about a conscious way to shape, influence or transform the way people think and act (Catalyst, 2022). Mainly disseminated via social media in times of crisis, conflicts and disseminated turmoil, videos, tweets and posts have ensured that news spreads faster than wildfire and can quickly mobilise public opinion.

PR goes to war: Wearing the Cloak of Hybrid Warfare Propaganda:

Mitrović (2018) tackled the role of propaganda in hybrid warfare through the efforts of strategic communication (Public Relations), communications management, propaganda and mass media; thus, shaping public opinion and social engineering became more devastating lethal weapons than tanks or rockets. Strategic communication encompasses the management of information campaigns, media and Internet use or abuse. The essential aim of this pillar is to impact public opinion, attitude deviation, change the existence or adoption of new attitudes, as well as the introduction of doubt, uncertainty and fear. Campaigns are being carried out by the usage of all propaganda instruments aka: launching half-truths, unchecked sensations and media manipulation. The strong performance of creating public opinion significantly contributes to achieve the strategic dominance in a particular region.

Having in mind the framework of the hybrid warfare concept in which an organization strives to achieve certain objectives, Mitrović (2018) concluded that communication that is performed by special social media manipulation, has significant contribution for an organization. The most important communication model, which is indicated as powerful hybrid warfare concept, is propaganda. Marlin (2013: 12) defines propaganda as: “the organized attempt through communication to affect belief or action or inculcate attitudes in a large audience in ways that circumvent or suppress an individual’s adequately, informed, rational, reflective judgements.



Social media from the viewpoint of Erbschloe and Raton (2017) gives evil people in the world access to similar weapons. Although propaganda and its strategies have maintained stable characteristics over time, the media, structures, and platforms through which they can communicate have diversified and massified alongside technological development. Warfare tactics utilized by social media include *deception, confusion, divisiveness, exposure, nullifying opponents, trolling, relationship building and blended tactics*.

PR has always disguised into propaganda in war times, whether traditional or unconventional. Traditional warfare and Public Relations strategies in the US serve three purposes in wartime: building domestic public support for the war; communicating U.S. intentions to foreign nations, with the aim of building support among allies and acquiescence among enemies; and controlling the flow of information reaching the media and, by extension, the public. The remains of the Twin Towers in New York and the Pentagon could still be seen in flames from the events of 9/11, and Public Relations experts at the Department of Défense in Washington were already discussing the name of the military operation that the United States would conduct in response to the terrorist attack, i.e. PR in the new war against terrorism. The goal was to support and protect more Islamic countries against the terrorist Osama bin Laden and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. So much discussion around war branding was no coincidence: the US government knew that this war, like few wars so far, would either be won or lost through the media, the means that served to win the minds and hearts of Americans, Western allies, third world countries, and moderate Arab countries (Nartya, 2022). Prior to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, U.S. claimed Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein had developed weapons of mass destruction and supported 9/11 terrorist attacks. The United States ran ads in Muslim countries at the start of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, attempting to reassure those countries that wars were not about religion. Like corporations, military planners had to cope with the loss of control over messages engendered by the rise in social media and mobile technology (Encyclopedia of Public Relations, 2013).

During the early part of the 21st century, there was a shift in the kind of wars that nations—or, more frequently, populations—fight. Social media, mobile technology, and the Internet all played a role in accelerating these trends. For Public Relations strategy, the impact is twofold. First, factions that can control the media in a region influence local opinion about the war and rally one faction to take up arms against another. The governments of Iran in 2009 and Egypt in 2011 blocked Internet and wireless access to their countries during protests. Second, the factions in these conflicts attempt to appeal to the media to bring international pressure to bear on their opponents. During the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011, citizens used Twitter, Facebook, and text messages to

organize rallies and spread news about government resistance to the popular uprisings. International media outlets broadcast these images, and pressure for international intervention increased (Encyclopedia of Public Relations, 2013).

Another earlier manifestation of PR warfare comes from Britain. D. Grierson is considered one of the largest representatives and the actual founder of British PR. It is he who actively promotes the idea of using documentary films to shape public opinion. The next impetus to the development of British PR is received after the war when numerous propaganda specialists were involved in solving the problem of the employment of war veterans. As a result, PR services are formed at all levels of government, from central to local government.

Political PR of power structures aims to create positive images of political leaders and parties in power while ignoring the opposition. In achieving this goal, the administration plays a significant role, because the ruling party or a representative of the country's leadership has much more newsworthy issues than their political rivals. This practice was widely used by the government of M. Thatcher, which allowed the conservatives to stay in power for 18 years (Nartya, 2022).

Thus, for the unconventional warfare, social media as a PR strategy plays the main role. Major countries are using both territory and information on social media as part of the war effort. Such social media information dispersion usually turns into information warfare between citizens and politicians of countries participating in the war. People invest a lot of time in various online tasks due to the growing popularity of social media, and a significant portion of the data they submit are in the form of text messages. Thus, it is important to understand the social media analysis literature base, in general, to further understand the RUW-related social media analysis knowledge base in existing studies (Vyas et al., 2023).

The current research considers social media as the new battleground of PR RUW warfare strategies. The upcoming lines present a discussion of the most recent literature review pertaining to representations of RUW in social media studies.

Review of Literature on Social Media as the New Propaganda Battlefield:

In the past, wars occurred in the real world physically on the battlefield, but now wars occur in the digital world through social media as a propaganda field. Social media has quite a role in the running of the conflict as well as being the main source of information for people who are hunting for news from around the world. The digital community uses social media to become a reliable medium for obtaining information easily and quickly. Social media platforms have become a major source of information for news-hungry audiences around the world trying to understand the RUW. Various social media platforms such



as Instagram, Facebook, and X (Twitter) have been used by the global community. The three platforms are also the most commonly used platforms for sharing political and other content. Social media is one of the mainstays of information channels regarding news of the armed conflict between Ukraine and Russia. However, it should be noted that this platform is one of the information battlegrounds (Astuti et al., 2022).

The 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine emphasises the role social media plays in modern day warfare, with conflict occurring in both in real time and information. Social media is a critical tool in information warfare, playing a large role in the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. A relative newcomer in this space – X (Twitter) – has already been extensively used for such purposes during military conflicts. Russian social media pushes narratives around their motivation, and Ukrainian social media aims to foster and maintain external support from Western countries, as well as promote their military efforts while undermining the perception of the Russian military. Examples of these narratives include allegations: that Ukraine was developing biological weapons and that President Volodymyr Zelensky had surrendered, amongst many narratives. Some of the information being pushed is genuine, and some is malicious. It is not easy to discriminate which is which (Smart et al., 2022).

It is worth mentioning that Ukrainian President Zelensky is well-informed about social media management from his early career and victory in the Presidential Elections of 2019. In the light of this, he called for the usage of any platform to declare Ukraine's claims. For instance, in one of his speeches, he appealed to 'Tiktokers' as they might help end the war. In addition, on a Russian-originated platform, Telegram, serious reflections of the war can be seen. Ukraine's Security Service tweeted that the live monitoring and release of what Russian troops were doing on the field by Ukrainian civilians on the Telegram chatbot helped them to target the enemy. So, the agency called on ordinary citizens to act like war correspondents and 'join the information front' of the war (Öztemel, İ. Ş., 2022).

Nevertheless, information is not the only product sought by audience amidst RUW, as social networks are becoming an echo chamber of the conflict on the ground, a huge theatre of battle, where different versions of reality are confronted to gain popularity. Digital memes are a highly visible product of contemporary digital culture and could not escape the mobilization process triggered by RUW as well (Petru-Ioan, 2023).

The upcoming lit review discusses the most used social media platform, i.e. X (Twitter), followed by Facebook and Instagram. Surprisingly, TikTok and Telegram are playing a main role as new battlegrounds.

Literature Review on X (Twitter) as the Dominant Propaganda Battlefield:

The year 2022 marked positioning X (Twitter) as the main battlefield of the PR/Propaganda war. Not only Twitter was the most studied, but also it was mostly analysed through AI techniques, especially sentiment analysis, one of the prominent Artificial intelligence techniques, thus AI went to war as well not only via bots, but sentiment analysis AI techniques as well.

Smart et al. (2022) employed a variety of techniques including information theoretic measures, sentiment and linguistic analysis, and time series techniques to understand how bot activity influences wider online discourse. Results asserted that pro-Russian non-bot accounts are most influential overall, with information flows to a variety of other account groups. No significant outward flows exist from pro-Ukrainian non-bot accounts, with significant flows from pro-Ukrainian bot accounts into pro-Ukrainian non-bot accounts. Bot activity drives an increase in conversation surrounding.

A very interesting study tackling the sentiment analysis of twitter's opinion on the Russia and Ukraine War using Bert, was conducted by Julianto et al. (2022), and defined sentiment analysis as a process of identifying and making sentiment categories computationally. The sentiment analysis process is also intended to make computers understand the meaning of human sentences by processing algorithms. This research uses the deep learning method of the BERT (Bidirectional Encoder Representation Form Transform) model language to analyse the sentiments in the tweets written about the wars between Russia and Ukraine by Twitter social media users. The sentiment was divided into positive, neutral, and hostile.

Logan (2022) utilised digital humanities methods via modest data-collection tools to quantify and study the online discussion involving Russia and Ukraine online. The research applies sentiment analysis to Twitter data to understand the general divisiveness online relating to the war in Ukraine. The research also depended on two external studies to contrast the findings. Results quantified the total number of tweets produced globally during the period of the deepfake of president Zelensky. Despite being in its infancy, the study ultimately argues that artificial intelligence shall become more ubiquitous as catalysts of disinformation.

The year 2023 witnessed the seminal work of Vyas et al., on sentiment analysis as well. It is important to analyse people's emotions toward the RUW. This paper therefore aims to provide the framework for automatically classifying the distinct societal emotions on Twitter, utilizing the amalgamation of Emotion Robustly Optimized Bidirectional Encoder Representations from the

transformers pre-training approach (Emoroberta) and machine-learning (ML) techniques. This combination shows the originality of the proposed framework, i.e., Russia-Ukraine War emotions (RUemo), in the context of the RUW. Researchers have utilized the Twitter dataset related to the RUW available on Kaggle.com. The RUemo framework can extract the 27 distinct emotions of Twitter users that are further classified by ML techniques. Findings asserted that 81% of Twitter users in the survey show a neutral position toward RUW. There is evidence of social bots posting RUW-related tweets. Overall, the majority of tweets describe the RUW in key terms related more to Ukraine than to Russia.

In 2023, utilizing sentiment analysis via BERT persisted, as Vahdat-Nejad et al. (2023) investigated English tweets on the Russia-Ukraine war to analyse trends reflecting users' opinions and sentiments regarding the conflict. The tweets' positive and negative sentiments were analysed using a BERT-based model, and the time series associated with the frequency of positive and negative tweets for various countries. The clustering results provided valuable insight into public opinion regarding this conflict, including similar thoughts of users from the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and most Western European countries versus the shared views of Eastern European, Scandinavian, Asian, and South American nations toward the conflict.

Following a similar method, Ramos and Chang (2023) analysed sentiments in tweets related to the armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine. The analysed dataset was collected using event-related hashtags. In total, 603,552 tweets in English and 1,664 in Russian were analysed. To perform emotion classification, DistilRoBERTa variant and the pre-trained XLM-RoBERTa-Base model were used, respectively. English tweets were classified into seven emotions: anger, disgust, fear, joy, neutral, sadness, and surprise. Russian tweets were classified into positive, negative, and neutral polarities. The results showed that most English tweets conveyed fear and anger as predominant feelings. Regarding tweets in Russian, the majority presented negative polarity. Some of the most recurrent phrases in the analysis supported Ukraine and call for a halt to the war.

Disinformation was a prevailing topic on twitter as well in 2023, pertaining to RUW, as Dastgeer & Thapaliya (2023) analysed information and disinformation concerning the war in Ukraine. Like all social media networks, the Twitter networks on the war in Ukraine were divided, not centralized, and had low levels of reciprocity. A total of 3,275 unique tweets and retweets were quantitatively examined from 104 countries and found a significant increase in the percentage of opinion and a significant decrease in percentage of disinformation. While support for Ukraine decreased significantly near the end of 2022, the percentage of tweets taking no sides in the war significantly

increased. Politicians, organizations, and news media in pro-Ukraine countries were more outspoken about the war in Ukraine than pro-Russia countries.

La Gatta et al. (2023) initiated a public repository of fact-checked claims to build a methodological framework for automatically identifying false and unsubstantiated claims spreading on Twitter during the war. The framework consists of two sequential models: First, the claim detection model identifies whether tweets incorporate a (false) claim. Then, the claim retrieval model matches the tweets with fact-checked information by ranking verified claims according to their relevance. Using a text classification task, 5.872 tweets were analysed. Results highlighted how social media providers could effectively leverage semi-automated approaches to identify, track, and eventually moderate false information that spreads on the platform.

Literature Review on Facebook as a Secondary Propaganda Battlefield:

Due to the nature of Facebook, the RUW studies utilizing the platform weren't quite abundant. An interesting study by Zasiakin et al. (2022) was among a few. In light of the Russia-Ukraine war, traumatic stress in civilian Ukrainians is a critical issue for psychological science to examine. Social media is often viewed as a tribune for authors' self-expressing and shared stories on the war's impact upon their lives. The goal of the study is to examine how the personal experience of the Russia-Ukraine war 2022 is narrated on Facebook as a popular social media venue. The study uses a sample of 316 written testimonies collected on Facebook from witnesses of the Russia-Ukraine war. Findings identified psychological and linguistic categories that characterized the war narratives and distinguished them from the literary reference corpus. For instance, the style of Facebook testimonies would be significantly less narrative and more analytic compared to literary writings. Therefore, writers in social media focus more on cognitive reappraisal of the tragic events, i.e., a strategy known to lead to a reduction of stress and trauma.

In 2023, Winiker addressed a different topic related to critical discourse analysis of comments about the Russia Ukraine war on Facebook and Instagram from February 2022 until March 2023 and pointed out topics that are dominantly discussed and stereotypes that are used in connection to the war. Furthermore, the users' emotional connection to topics and stereotypes was established by conducting a sentiment analysis with the help of a word-emotion association lexicon. Results suggested that online users judged individuals and groups of people, such as refugees and whole nations in predictable, simple, often negative categories or stereotypes Whereas users express solidarity and love towards Ukrainians who stay in the country and fight bravely against the aggressor Russia in the beginning of the war, negative views are expressed

towards Ukraine refugees and refugees in general who flee to Europe. Thereby, users make use of irony in comments about scenarios such as facing a possible Third World War with nuclear strikes.

Literature Review on Tiktok and Telegram as New Forceful Players in the Propaganda Battlefield:

Although TikTok is an entertainment and advertising platform, studies considered it a battleground as well, to the extent that *Kavenius (2023) branded RUW as the first TikTok war*. Zelensky appealed to Tiktokers' as they might help end the war Öztemel, İ. Ş., (2022), and the literature review depicted on Interpretative struggles of global crises and how they are increasingly being reflected on social media networks. TikTok is a relatively new social media platform that has achieved substantial popularity among young people in many parts of the world and is now being used to disseminate and make sense of information about the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Through a user-centered sampling approach, Primig et al. (2023) collected 62 TikTok videos and conducted an in-depth qualitative analysis of them and their uploading profiles to explore how the war was being represented on the platform. The analysis revealed a strong prevalence of remixing practices among content creators; that is, they recontextualise images, sounds and embodied self-performance within the platform.

Telegram, a social media platform and the instant messaging app, was created by Pavel Durov, a Russian tech entrepreneur. He left Russia in 2014 after his previous project, VKontakte, was taken over by bodies related to the Russian government. Durov created Telegram as a private company based in the United Arab Emirates. The app could be considered quite liberal regarding terms of use and regulations, and it is arguably among the most encrypted and secured platforms. It is also much more difficult to block and can be used anonymously (Nazaruk, 2022). Telegram is one of the most popular social media platforms in Russia and Ukraine, it is a source of news for many people in both countries, and it had been used for propaganda before. This makes the Telegram news channels a relevant research topic in light of the fact that the war still continues (Volkohon, 2022).

Karl Volkohon (2022) tackled how the most popular Telegram news channels in Russia and Ukraine framed the Russia-Ukraine war during the first weeks of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The study used framing analysis to find the specific frames of the war. This work partially detected the war-related frames which were used in other military conflicts. Moreover, it found new frames which were unique for the Russia-Ukraine war. The findings showed that most of the used frames are different between the

countries, like framing the war as a necessity in the Russian case and a judgemental style of writing in Ukrainian case. However, there are some similar frames which are still used differently by the sides, like dehumanizing strategies to describe the enemy or historical narratives.

Another study on Telegram is that of Nazaruk, T. (2022). Telegram has become an everyday go-to app for millions of Ukrainians since the full-scale invasion. The social media platform does not only reflect on current developments but also affects the warfare and wartime experiences directly. With no definitive methodological answers but as an emergency effort, the Centre for Urban History launched this archiving initiative to preserve the social media practices of the war in Ukraine. This paper is a self-reflection of a 5-month archiving initiative that started as a civilian response to the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. Telegram channels and chats became an integral part of the warfare as air raid sirens, open source and crowdsourcing intelligence, lists of casualties and missing people and Russian disinformation networks to justify airstrikes on civilian objects. Also, they facilitated emergency communication in local horizontal networks as evacuation from occupied territories, checkpoints and border crossings, mobilisation notices, petrol availability, rocket launches, and apartment house chats.

In 2023, Nemkova et al. discussed social media as an indispensable lifeline in the conflict zones in monitoring and documenting Human Rights Violations (HRV). The research focused on the analysis of data from Telegram, the leading social media platform for reading independent news in post-Soviet regions. Researchers gathered a dataset of posts sampled from 95 public Telegram channels that cover politics and war news, which they have utilized to identify potential occurrences of HRV. Employing a mBERT-based text classifier, they have conducted an analysis to detect any mentions of HRV in the Telegram data in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war. Findings held significant implications for NGOs, governments, and researchers by providing a means to detect and document possible human rights violations.

Digital social platforms provide venues for ordinary people to disseminate political information and conduct political discussions. Accordingly, the ICT is a way to bridge the gap between the government and the people in terms of political information (Lang Cheng & Ran Bao, 2022). The past review highlights the idea that information realm constitutes one of the battlefields of the war. It is closely tied with what strategic narratives about the conflict prevail, both in specific countries and globally (Parizek, 2023).

Perhaps the most related study to the current research is entitled “Digital Media and War: Social Media as a Propaganda Tool for the Russia-Ukraine



Conflict in the Post-truth Era” by Astuti et al. (2022). The importance of this study is derived from detecting nine propaganda tactics utilized by social media in RUW, and for the current study propaganda is the representation of PR in war and this proves the viewpoint of Litvinenko (2022) by insinuating that the RUW is a *propaganda on demand war*.

Social media have been transformed into an information battleground over the Russia and Ukraine war by manipulating it into disinformation and bias. The conflict that should have subsided, instead made things worse by spreading disinformation. Russia and Ukraine both use social media to bring each other down as well as to win public opinion. This research uses a qualitative descriptive approach with an analysis of discourse and language reconstruction. The social media analyses were random choices sourced from social media directories as well as findings from credible institutions that broadcast disinformation related to the Russian-Ukrainian war conflict in February and March 2022. The results revealed that social media has become a digital propaganda field in the Ukraine-Russia conflict. Social media has become a means of forming public opinion, seeking global support, and the spread of disinformation. Therefore, the public needs to equip themselves with digital literacy skills, namely the ability to sort information on social media so that they are not easily trapped in misleading information to shape public opinion. Propaganda for Astuti et al. (2022) is a means of communication used to manipulate or influence the opinions of individuals or groups to support certain goals or beliefs. Astuti et al. revealed nine propaganda tactics used by the study sample, namely: giving nicknames or name-calling, using glittering generalities, transfers, testimonials, plain folks, bandwagons, card stacking, emotional stereotypes, and rhetoric. On social media, Putin is described as a dashing and charismatic figure while Zelensky is described as a comedian. The narrative displayed on social media that Putin is pro-Islam and Zelensky’s background is Jewish, so this makes Muslims more inclined to support Russia. This is one of the threats to society in the post-truth era, namely a condition where objective facts no longer have a major influence in shaping public opinion, instead, personal beliefs and emotional attachments get the most support from the community.

Having proved the study’s viewpoint, that in times of crises and hybrid warfare, PR organizational efforts mutates into propaganda tactics that are being executed in the social media battlefield; the upcoming aspect dwells upon three models utilized as the study’s theoretical framework that have proven liable in depicting on warfare organizational tactics in RUW.

Analysis Framework of the Study Sample:

The RUW and prior long-term conflict stress the necessity of utilizing pre-designed PR and communication frameworks that have been executed in times of crises, conflicts, and wars. The current study resides to three models that have been tested and proven reliable. Communication via social media in Asymmetric conflicts (Hirschberger, 2021) presents the two major strategies encompassing the official activity of the conflict parties on social media. Posts, tweets and videos of RUW would be analysed in light of branding vs shaming strategies. In times of crises campaigning model by Smith is utilized pertaining to its seven major tactics (Smith, 2013; Zahra, 2018); and finally, PR message analysis and tactics pertaining to one of the conflict parties (Zakharchenko, 2022) is merged with the former model to demonstrate more tactics.

Communication via social media in Asymmetric conflicts:

(Hirschberger, 2021) published his breakthrough work on asymmetric conflicts, where the adversaries don't have equal power amidst the conflict. In the following lines, strategies and tactics in dealing with social media in such case will be detailed and adapted to the current analysis.

For the external communication of conflict parties involved in asymmetric conflicts, a selection of strategies of external communication varying strongly from what has been predicted by all of the established theories are chosen: the external communication of powerful actors to be dominated by branding strategy and the external communication of less powerful actors to be dominated by shaming strategy.

A shaming message contains a description of a perceived negative experience, e.g. an experience of a loss or harm. On the other hand, an attribution of the negative experience to another actor is made. The negative experience is portrayed as avoidable or someone else's fault and another actor is depicted as responsible for either causing or failing to prevent this negative experience (i.e., the actor is depicted as a perpetrator, offender, or culprit). The element of identifying and recognizing an experience as injurious or harmful has partially also been separately labelled as "naming". While attributions can theoretically be undetermined or implicit, typically the (alleged) perpetrator is mentioned explicitly. Optionally, the (alleged) victim(s) can also be described. The rationale of shaming is to damage the image of the opponent and/or to shift blame away from oneself. Successful shaming manages to present its accusations credibly for either the decision-makers in the targeted third-party country, for the civil society and the public of the targeted country (or at least



certain influential and/or powerful constituencies) or even for both. In any case, damaging the image of the shamed actor can trigger actions (Hirschberger, 2021).

Altogether, shaming is a highly attractive and powerful strategy of external communication. Reflecting upon the common use of external communication, mass media and social media, raise the question of whether shaming is indeed the only existing strategy of external communication that has the potential to be helpful for conflict parties. Looking at the private use of social media or at practices of marketing, it can be observed that this communication is dominated more by positive self-representation and promotion rather than by shaming. Considering their success in marketing and in everyday media and social media communication, such tactics focusing on positive communication could be a second particularly promising strategy for the external communication of conflict parties.

Conflict parties cannot merely just influence how they and the context in which they operate are perceived abroad by shaming their opponents –they can also use more positive forms of communication and focus on improving their own image. Such acts of communication in which an actor depicts himself in a positive way is known as a strategy of “branding”. Kalpokas (2017) employed this perspective informed by brand management in his research, that aimed at understanding information warfare operations in social media. The state, seen as brand, must project an image of itself to both internal and foreign audiences to unite the domestic audience and/or attract global support.

Rhetorical structure of branding has two core elements which can be defined as follows: a branding message contains a reference to a subject that is assumed by the communicating actor to be perceived by the target audience as positive. On the other hand, branding also requires an attribution; it needs to name an actor which the positive experience shall be attributed. In the case of branding the communicating actor depicts itself, someone or something related to itself as the target of the attribution and thereby claims the positive experience for itself. This means that structurally branding is the opposite of shaming, as it is concerned with the target of the attribution (“self” not “other”) as well as the ascribed value of the described experience (“positive” instead of “negative”) (Hirschberger, 2021: 19-30).

An “asymmetric conflict” can be characterized as a violent, armed conflict in which very unequal opponents are opposing each other: A far more powerful “topdog” is confronted by one or more far less powerful “underdog(s)”. The asymmetric distribution of power capabilities amongst the different conflict parties in asymmetric conflicts shapes the different interests of the different types of conflict parties and thus creates different opportunities for their

external communication. It, therefore, determines which communication strategies are promising and which are then selected by the strategically thinking conflict parties for this reason.

Three aspects are considered in this theory: military capabilities, economic and financial, and social/institutional capabilities as shown in the table below.

Table (1)
Top Dogs vs Underdogs ((Hirschberger, 2021: 31)

		“Topdog”	“Underdog”
Hard power	Military capabilities	Superior <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>High manpower</i> • <i>High-tech equipment</i> 	Inferior <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Limited personnel</i> • <i>Simple equipment</i>
	Financial / economic capabilities	Superior <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>High budget</i> • <i>Strong economy</i> • <i>Various trade relations</i> 	Inferior <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Low budget</i> • <i>Small economy</i> • <i>Few (regular) trade relations</i>
Status & governance structures	Social / institutional capabilities	Superior (“State”) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Recognized statehood</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ <i>As state full member of the international community</i> ➔ <i>Full sovereignty</i> ➔ <i>Good access to diplomatic arenas</i> • <i>Cohesive organization, fully developed state structures</i> 	Inferior (“non-state actor” / “not yet state”) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>No or incomplete recognition</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ <i>Not a full member of the international community</i> ➔ <i>No full sovereignty</i> ➔ <i>Limited access to diplomatic arenas</i> • <i>Less cohesive form of organization, possibly developing state structures</i>

It might be harmful to topdogs to use shaming, but it can even be harmful to them not to use branding. As shaming is consequently the ideal strategy for underdogs and branding is the ideal strategy for the topdogs from the point of view of their interests, it can be expected that they select the corresponding tactics and that the external communication of underdogs, therefore, is dominated by shaming and the communication of topdogs by branding.

Following the previous reasoning, the upcoming analysis of Putin vs Zelensky YouTube videos would uncover branding vs shaming strategies and related tactics of top dogs and underdogs.

PR Strategies in times of Crisis:

Reactive strategies and tactics are utilized in planning a post crisis campaign as defined by (Smith, 2013: 144). Seven reactive strategies respond to influences

and opportunities from an organization's environment. In responding to outside forces, organizations should develop objectives such as gaining public understanding, maintaining, and restoring reputation and rebuilding trust and support.

Surprisingly, PR message analysis and tactics pertaining to one of the conflict parties, which is the third analysis model (Zakharchenko, 2022) shares almost the same structure as that of Smith (2013), but with different terminology. An example lies in the term reversal in Smith's analysis and counterattack in Zakharchenko's analysis, that share different terms but a similar definition. That's why the current research preferred merging the two PR strategies and related tactics into one table and add the two Zakharchenko's different strategies and related tactics in the end, i.e. expert opinion and factors, thus nine strategies will be presented hereafter.

The following table demonstrates the model of Analysis as follows:

Table (2)

Crisis strategies and Tactics (Adapted from: Smith, 2013: 144-171)

PR message analysis and tactics pertaining to one of the conflict parties (Adapted from: Zakharchenko, 2022: 48-51)

Strategy	Related Tactics	Elaboration
Pre-emptive Action	Tactics before the opposition launches its first charge against the organization	
Offensive Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Attack: the accuser is negligent or malicious, thus encouraging an opponent to retreat or at least to refrain from future criticism. - Embarrassment: an organization tries to lessen an opponent's influence by using shame or humiliation. - Shock: is the deliberate agitation of the mind or emotions, particularly through the use of surprise, disgust or some other strong and unexpected stimulus. - Threat: involves the promise that harm will come to the accuser. 	Used in response to criticism
Defensive Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Denial -Excuse or justification -Reversal: turning the tables, weakened party becomes the stronger one. 	the organization reacts less aggressively to criticism or turns the table of criticism and gains the upper hand.
Diversionsary Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - concessions - ingratiation - disassociation - relabeling 	attempts to shift the gaze of the publics from the problem associated with the organization.
Vocal Commiseration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - concern - condolence 	the organization expresses empathy and understanding about

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - regret - apology 	the misfortune suffered by its public.
Rectifying Behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - investigation - corrective action -restitution - repentance. 	A positive response to opposition and criticism involves rectifying behavior, as the organization does something to repair the damage done to its public
Deliberate Inaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - silence - ambiguity -inaction 	The final category of Public Relations responses involves deliberate inaction, the considered decision by an organization under siege to offer no substantive comment.
Expert opinion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -circumstances - methods - causes - consequences 	Opinion about the course of the organizational campaign.
Reputation and Relationship Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - innovation - leadership - performance - citizenship - workplace - interaction - trust - commitment - pleasure - mutual benefit - social responsibility 	

The current study is confined to analysing the official communication of the major conflict parties, i.e. Russia and Ukraine via social media. You Tube – the video sharing platform- was searched to locate official videos by President Putin and President Zelensky since January 2023 until April 2023. The reason for choosing 2023 as the time frame relates to the focus of most researchers on the year 2022 when the war broke. 2023 might hold new propaganda findings since the turn of events. Chachko & Linos (2023) highlighted that one year after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the fog of war still obscures its full implications. It raised the specter of cyber war that threatens to draw other countries in. It once again highlighted the role of online disinformation in fuelling conflict. Ten videos were located and submitted to detailed scrutiny of the shaming vs branding rhetoric and the nine PR tactics subject to study.

The following table demonstrates details of the video sample:

Table (3)
Official YouTube Videos of the presidents of Russia and Ukraine marking the study sample

Title	Date	URL	Brief
VLADIMIR PUTIN TAKES AIM AT THE WEST IN NEW YEAR SPEECH	1/1/2023	https://youtu.be/13ojOrUdsCI	VLADIMIR PUTIN DEVOTED HIS ANNUAL NEW YEAR'S ADDRESS TO RALLYING THE RUSSIAN PEOPLE BEHIND HIS TROOPS FIGHTING IN UKRAINE AND PLEDGED VICTORY OVER UKRAINIAN "NEO-NAZIS"
PUTIN LAMBASTS GERMANY FOR ARMING UKRAINE IN FIERY SPEECH MARKING SOVIET WW2 VICTORY	2/2/2023	https://youtu.be/AanYQs1_WhQ	DURING A FIERY SPEECH ON THURSDAY, RUSSIAN PRESIDENT VLADIMIR PUTIN EVOKED THE SPIRIT OF THE SOVIET ARMY THAT DEFEATED NAZI GERMAN FORCES DURING THE BATTLE OF STALINGRAD DURING WWII, VOWING THAT MOSCOW WOULD DEFEAT UKRAINE IN THE GRIP OF "MODERN NAZISM."
VLADIMIR PUTIN WAVES AS FOREIGN BUSINESSES DEPART RUSSIA	9/2/2023	https://youtu.be/pCfppbBJzkk	THE RUSSIAN PRESIDENT BID A SARCASTIC FAREWELL TO BUSINESSES THAT HAVE LEFT THE COUNTRY OVER THE INVASION OF UKRAINE. PUTIN CLAIMED THEIR DEPARTURE WOULD BENEFIT RUSSIAN COMPANIES.
VLADIMIR PUTIN'S ADDRESS TO FEDERAL ASSEMBLY OF RUSSIA	21/2/2023	https://youtu.be/04p5plrO4Mk	THE RUSSIAN PRESIDENT REVIEWED THE RU CONFLICT SINCE 2014 AND WEST INTERVENTION IN A NEARLY 2 HOUR SPEECH.
THE KREMLIN IS WAITING FOR CHINA'S PRESIDENT TO VISIT, SAYS PUTIN	22/2/2023	https://youtu.be/2IU5nvCjArc	VLADIMIR PUTIN HAS MET CHINA'S TOP DIPLOMAT, WANG YI, TO DISCUSS COOPERATION BETWEEN BEIJING AND MOSCOW PRIOR A VISIT TO MOSCOW BY THE CHINESE PRESIDENT, XI JINPING.
NEW YEAR GREETINGS OF PRESIDENT OF UKRAINE VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY	1/1/2023	https://youtu.be/ANaVkrxDPCI	2022 STRUCK OUR HEARTS. WE CRIED OUT ALL THE TEARS. ALL THE PRAYERS WERE YELLED. 311 DAYS. WE HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY ABOUT EVERY MINUTE. BUT MOST WORDS ARE SUPERFLUOUS. SILENCE IS NEEDED TO HEAR. PAUSES ARE NEEDED TO REALIZE. WE DON'T KNOW FOR SURE WHAT NEW 2023 WILL BRING

			<p>US. I WANT TO WISH ALL OF US ONE THING – VICTORY. AND THAT'S THE MAIN THING. LET THIS YEAR BE THE YEAR OF RETURN. THE RETURN OF OUR PEOPLE. SOLDIERS – TO THEIR FAMILIES. PRISONERS – TO THEIR HOMES. IMMIGRANTS – TO THEIR UKRAINE. THE RETURN OF OUR LANDS. AND THE TEMPORARILY OCCUPIED WILL BECOME FOREVER FREE.</p>
SPECIAL ADDRESS BY VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY, PRESIDENT OF UKRAINE DAVOS 2023	18/1/2023	https://youtu.be/fOgJ-AfIF6w	<p>THE FORUM ENGAGES THE FOREMOST POLITICAL, BUSINESS, CULTURAL AND OTHER LEADERS OF SOCIETY TO SHAPE GLOBAL, REGIONAL AND INDUSTRY AGENDAS.</p>
PRESIDENT OF UKRAINE VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY ADDRESSES BOTH HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT	8/2/2023	https://www.youtube.com/live/3NeNZGs7p7s?feature=share	<p>THE PRESIDENT OF UKRAINE, VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY, ADDRESSED BOTH HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT IN WESTMINSTER HALL</p>
UKRAINE IS ALIVE': ZELENSKY SPEAKS AT CEREMONY ON ANNIVERSARY OF WAR	24/2/2023	https://youtu.be/R6vRa7hpszA	<p>THE UKRAINIAN PRESIDENT, VOLODYMYR ZELENSKIY, GATHERED WITH MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES AND A SMALL GROUP OF DIGNITARIES IN KYIV'S ST SOPHIA SQUARE ON FRIDAY TO MARK THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF RUSSIA'S INVASION.</p>
VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY PRESS CONFERENCE ON FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF UKRAINE'S WAR WITH RUSSIA.	24/2/2023	https://www.youtube.com/live/ZxxQlbiM8EM?feature=share	<p>AN INTRO AND REPLIES TO JOURNALISTS, REGARDING THE RU CONFLICT DEVELOPMENTS</p>
WOLF BLITZER PRESS ZELENSKY ON BAKHMUT STRATEGY	8/3/2023	https://youtube.com/shorts/TNok7hca_YQ?feature=share	<p>UKRAINIAN PRESIDENT VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY SPEAKS TO CNN'S WOLF BLITZER ABOUT HIS MILITARY STRATEGY AS RUSSIAN FORCES CONTINUE TO MAKE GRADUAL GAINS IN THE CITY OF BAKHMUT.</p>

To complete the analysis, the researcher decided to analyse the X (Twitter) verified accounts of both presidents, during a similar time span (1/1/2023-15/4/2023). Unfortunately, @KremlinRussia_E, that is the official account of

President Putin, didn't post new tweets since 15/2/2022, i.e. nearly three weeks after the war broke. On the contrary, President Zelensky's official X (Twitter) account @ZelenskyyUa is active daily and includes a massive number of live videos that are not even present on You Tube marking most recent events as: greetings for Orthodox Easter and a brief on French's President visit. Zelensky gives a daily briefing to his people via Twitter and always starts with the words: "Dear Ukrainians... I wish you good health" as if they are on equal footing. Past research proved that Zelensky is an expert of utilizing social media since the presidential elections in 2019.

As an alternative plan, the current study tends to analyse 2023 tweets in Russian and Ukrainian official verified accounts, through searching X (twitter) by the keywords: @Russia and @Ukraine. Hashtags are excluded from the current analysis, since they encompass all tweets from official accounts and followers on the RUW, and the current study tends to follow up organizational PR/propaganda efforts.

The current study seeks only "Grey Checkmark Verification". (<https://help.twitter.com/en/rules-and-policies/profile-labels>) indicates that grey checkmark represents an account of a government/multilateral organization or a government/multilateral official.

Eligible government organizations at the national level may include main executive office accounts, agency accounts overseeing specific areas of policy, main embassy and consulate accounts, and parliamentary or equivalent institutional and committee accounts. Eligible government organizations at the state and local level include main executive office accounts and main agency accounts overseeing crisis response, public safety, law enforcement, and regulatory issues.

Eligible government individuals may include Heads of state (presidents, monarchs and prime ministers), deputy heads of state (vice presidents, deputy prime ministers), national-level cabinet members or equivalent, the main official spokesperson for the executive branch or equivalent, and individual members of all chambers of national congress, parliament, or equivalent.

Eligible multilateral organizations may include: the main headquarters-level, regional-level, and country-level institutional accounts. Eligible multilateral individuals include: the head and deputy-head or equivalent of the multilateral organization.

Top findings utilizing the search word @Russia and @Ukraine on X (Twitter), resulted into the following accounts that are tweeting in 2023 and include English or Arabic material, as demonstrated in the following table in the order of search results for both countries:

Table (4)
Official Verified Twitter accounts as the study sample

Account	Date of Joining	No of Followers (By 4/23)	No of Tweets (By 4/23)
@Russia_AR	August 2015	143.3K	22.6K
@RussiaUN	August 2011	109.6K	40.7K
@RusEmbUSA	March 2013	118.2K	42.7K
@natomission ru	September 2010	556.3K	18.3K
@Ukraine	May2016	2.3M	1.943
@MFA Ukraine	May2010	461.9K	68.1K
@DefenseU	July2012	1.8M	15.4K
@TDF UA	April 2022	85.7K	1.412

Findings show that the study sample is comprised of 8 accounts, 4 belonging to the Russian government and four belonging to the Ukrainian government. The accounts subject to study tweet and retweet daily, either regarding RUW or other matters related to international relations, sovereignty and international bodies.

Major Findings:

Findings pertaining to the study sample are presented hereafter. The researcher will discuss first the categories of Asymmetrical conflict Model: Top Dog versus under Dog, followed by tactics derived from the study sample. The discussion will then emphasize the PR ethics in the propaganda cloak.

Branding of the Top Dog: The case of Russia:

Findings related to general observations and study sample reassure that Russia is positioning oneself as the Top Dog in RUW. Branding Strategies are used all along its communication either by the head of state President Putin or by the four official accounts of the study sample (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Russia’s mission to UN, Russian Embassy in the US and Russia’s NATO Account).

Russia has been using positive forms of communication and focusing on improving its own image Infront of international parties which matter for the country i.e., China, Arab Gulf States and Latin America. Such acts of communication in which an actor depicts himself in a positive way is known as a strategy of “branding”. Generally speaking, top dogs i.e., Putin, are dressed formal all the time and rarely seen outside their extravagant offices as a branding strategy of maintaining status. Also, unlike the Ukrainian president, Russia’s president personal account has stopped tweeting since RUW broke, insinuating self-confidence and focus on actions without the need to justify them to the world. A third general comment related to Russia represented in its



president as a Top Dog, is related to the length of the videos broadcast of Putin. The only video that was more than 90 minutes long was Putin's Address to Federal Assembly of Russia in which he retrieved the history of the conflict since 2014.

Top dogs always seem to set their priorities straight as one of their branding strategies. Foreign investments left Russia “which will make way for local investments”. Neo-Nazis are manifesting again, and Russia will defeat them as in WWII and Russian sovereignty on Donbass will be kept against all traitors and cowardness.

The positive image of Power prevails in all the videos and official accounts - whether true or pretence. Branding message contains a reference to a subject that is assumed by the communicating actor to be perceived by the target audience as positive. Retweets from different Russian embassies, economic treaties and glorious past dominate the social media messages.

On the other hand, branding also requires an attribution; Top dogs assign themselves worthy of the positive experience they are witnessing. Clearly, Russia’s rhetoric is mostly about “what I am doing” “not shaming other people for their wrong doings directed to me”. Nevertheless, Russia is open for discussions to preserve its borders and considers Ukraine a toy in the hands of the NATO.

Although Russia is represented in all the narratives as the top dog using the branding strategy, the official accounts portrayed the shaming strategy, normally utilized by underdogs in rare situations. One of those situations was blaming the UNSG for condemning the killing video of the POW of Ukraine and wondering about the Russian POWs? In another narrative, US and the EU are accused by Russian officials of Racial Cleansing in Donbass. Those rare situations are utilized by the Top dog to legitimize his actions and keep his allies intact. At the end Putin declares that they removed the threat away from their borders and Ukraine is the victim of the ideology of the West. Nothing in Russia is at stake, on the contrary education is building up talents and professionals, inflation will never hit Russia, foreign reserves were sanctioned, yet this is only a manoeuvre from the west to destroy well-being of the Russian citizens and that is never going to happen.

Shaming the Opponent: The case of Ukraine as the Underdog:

On the other hand, Ukraine is the typical Underdog utilizing the shaming strategy of the opponent in nearly all representations via social media. Not only because their territories were invaded by Russia, regardless of the 2014 conflict, but also shaming is always a winning strategy for the underdogs, driving sympathy, international aid and portraying the cause as more legitimate. Videos and sample accounts (@Ukraine, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of

Defence and Territorial Defence Forces of the Armed Forces of Ukraine) illustrate that fact.

A shaming message contains a description of a perceived negative experience, experience of a loss or harm. On the other hand, an attribution of the negative experience to another actor is made, that is the Russian aggressors. The negative experience is portrayed as someone else's fault and another actor is depicted as responsible for either causing or failing to prevent this negative experience. This is what the Ukrainian narrative has been working on from the start. The victimization is a well-known emotional strategy deeply utilized via social media. The rationale of shaming is to damage the image of the opponent, aka Russia. Successful shaming manages to present its accusations credibly for either the decision-makers in the target third-party country, aka US, EU and NATO, for the international society and the public of the target country or even for all. In any case, damaging the image of the shamed actor can trigger actions. Foreign aid for Ukraine, sanctions on Russia amongst other actions were witnessed.

The new year greetings of Zelensky as compared to that of Putin is the ultimate symbolization of the underdog. The briefing from You Tube together with the music and professional directing bring the shaming strategy to life. '2022 struck our hearts. We cried out all the tears. All the prayers were yelled. 311 days. We have something to say about every minute. But most words are superfluous. Silence is needed to hear. Pauses are needed to realize. We don't know for sure what new 2023 will bring us. I want to wish all of us one thing – victory. And that's the main thing. Let this year be the year of return. The return of our people. Soldiers – to their families. Prisoners – to their homes. Immigrants – to their Ukraine. The return of our lands. And the temporarily occupied will become forever free”.

Ukraine has been using the emotional appeal of shaming the opponent and focusing on the notion of victimization in the international society. Generally speaking, under dogs i.e., Zelensky are wearing the military uniform and mostly seen in the battlefield or seeking foreign aid for the country, at home or abroad. The Ukrainian president is tweeting all the time and uploading live videos, nearly daily in a smart move to keep shaming the opponent. A third general comment related to Ukraine represented in its president as an Under Dog is related to the length of the videos broadcast of Zelensky. Most videos are too long, some including SFXs and as an experienced user of social media, Zelensky is well aware of the significance of NVC on social media.

Under dogs always seem to set their priorities straight as one of their shaming sub strategies. Justification of “my stance and cynicism of opponents”,



“Putin is “wanted”, and he is teaching bullying 101 are being tweeted in official accounts.

Even the proverbs and sayings of the underdog are characterized by shaming the opponents. Freedom is our religion as the motto of the account of the ministry of defence is a manifestation of this case. Also, proverbs were tweeted along the accounts and proved the point of shaming as the proverb “fire doesn’t destroy, it hardens”. Against all odds, the underdog doesn’t forget his people, as celebrations of Ramadan and Easter mark the emotional messages that insinuate that life goes on.

At times, the underdog stops the emotional shaming and starts to utilize hidden threats, for example the number of enemy losses since the RUW broke have been posted on the official accounts of Ukraine. This is not considered branding or a manoeuvre to assume the position of the top dog, however it is a threat tactic that is mainly used by both parties.

Propaganda Tactics of the Top Dog:

The following lines will demonstrate the most salient PR/ propaganda tactics utilized by the Russian Top Dogs and were reflected in the videos and tweets subject to study:

- **Attack:** Russia used this tactic to attack the opponents, aka US and NATO for using the Ukrainian territory to carry out massive cyber attacks on the country. This is suitable to their rhetoric about using Ukraine as a toy to undermine Russia’s authority. Attack tactic was also used against the US and EU that have allegedly used Ukraine “as a tool to contain Russia via nurturing the Neo Nazi – Kiev regime, flooding it with attack weapons and pushing it to conduct ethnic cleansing among the people of Donbass” as tweeted by the Russian embassy in the USA.
- **Shock:** the top dog expressed shock via social media accounts because of attacks of the West on Syria. This is a disgust tactic and was also expressed upon bringing up the matter of ethnic cleansing in Donbass.
- **Denial:** the defensive response tactic was used by the top dog upon bringing up the OPCW report of the prohibition of chemical weapons in Russia.
- **Reversal:** reversal was the most used tactic as presented in the study sample (videos and accounts). This tactic is a defensive response which is named by other models as counterattack. After the West’s propaganda of the ailing economy in Russia, videos and tweets posted news on major collaborations with economic titans as Saudi Arabia, and also diplomatic ties were being strengthened with the GCC countries UAE, Bahrain and

Kuwait. The Chinese ties recently strengthened Russia's economic status and other strategic reserves. In another incident, the UN secretary general was worried about the prisoners of war of Ukraine. As a counter-attack Russia wondered about its own prisoners of war. Cyberattacks, hacking and trolls were among the accusations that the West pointed at Russia. However, as a counter-attack Russia accused the United States and NATO of attacking its cyberspace. Russia has always been accused of spreading fake news, however via social media the Russian embassy in the US accused the United States of spreading fake news about Russia. The Western Council of Europe and the NATO have been attacking Russia as the aggressor, nevertheless Russia has been counterattacking them instead via tweets and videos.

- **Ingratiation:** this tactic has been used by Putin in the video of the New Year's greeting accompanied by a prominent show of power with members of the military behind.
- **Relabelling:** Putin has relabelled Ukraine in all speeches and relevant tweets as Neo Nazi especially marking the celebrations of WWII, and since then the relabel has been used extensively on the tweets of all official accounts.
- **Inaction:** this tactic was extensively used by Russia to show a high degree of self-control. The state is running its affairs regardless of the RUW, as strengthening ties with Colombia, partnerships with all Latin America and strengthening international ties with Iran and Afghanistan.
- **Interaction:** Russia has been maintaining a solid reputation as a solid partner to China, Latin America, and some Arab countries as part of the reputation organizational strategy of the country. Leadership is a tactic that has been utilized in this regard as well.

Propaganda Tactics of the Under Dog:

The following lines will demonstrate the most salient PR/ propaganda tactics utilized by the Ukrainian Under Dogs and were reflected in the videos and tweets subject to study:

- **Attack:** Ukraine has been attacking the top dog for kidnapping Ukrainian minors, violation of international law and bombing civilians. In this regard, photos and videos have been extensively used on the accounts together with the official videos of Zelensky posted on YouTube.
- **Embarrassment:** embarrassment - by definition - is used when an entity tries to lessen an opponent's influence by using shame or humiliation. Since the underdog depends mainly on shaming the opponents by all possible means, shaming is considered the top tactic used by Ukraine. Shaming can take a direct form or an indirect form. The direct form

encompasses Russia for taking down civilians and violating international law, while the indirect form takes the shape of cynicism. Putin is “wanted” and an arrest warrant has been issued on his behalf from the International Criminal Court (ICC), and this was the subject of lots of humour on official accounts.

- **Threat:** threat is shaped in the Never Forget Never Forgive that is shared via social media when speaking of the history of the conflict since 2014. Social media also witnessed counting the enemy loses since the out break of the war and this is also considered a threat tactic.
- **Ingratiation:** Zelensky posted a video on YouTube on the occasion of the New Year that was very emotional and included names and locations of victims and consequences of destruction that happened because of RUW.
- **Concession:** a video showing Zelensky in a program with Wolf Blitzer on CNN, talking about withdrawing from Bakhmut for strategic reasons. The concession seemed strategic and planned, giving the concession tactic a new dimension.
- **Relabelling:** as Putin talked about the neo nazis of Kiev, Ukrainians talked about the aggressors which is the relabel of the Russian attacks.
- **Restitution:** Zelensky videos talk about freedom of Ukraine and social media presented freedom as the ideology of the country. This tactic called upon the international community to rectify things as they were.
- **Condolence:** this is a very strong tactic used by Zelensky every time he talked about casualties and lives lost especially from civilians. Standing up to commemorate their sacrifices was a very strong emotional tactic.
- **Consequences:** this is a tactic related to the expert opinion strategy. On the side lines of RUW, reports by American entities dwelt upon the suffering nature in Ukraine as a shortcoming of the war.
- **Leadership:** leadership is a very strong tactic utilized in all Ukrainian communication embodied in Zelensky the president of Ukraine. In every encounter he is dressed in the military uniform and projecting an encouraging image to his troops. All his speeches and press conferences reflect a charismatic character who is aware of the strength of the non-verbal communication and the power of social media.

Discussion:

The current study proved that mutation of PR into Propaganda and manipulation of public opinion is a well proven strategy in cases of conflict. Social media in general and X (Twitter) in particular have been the focus of scholarly assessments that have examined them as tools for information dissemination and communication in a variety of sectors, particularly with respect to political and social concerns. Findings illustrated dependence of the Top Dogs on the strong tactics of Reversal, counterattacks and inaction, in

trying to maintain the image of the strong-willed nation, that is striving against all odds and transforming every shortcoming into an opportunity. Under Dogs depend mostly on shaming and embarrassing of opponents, emotional manipulation and sticking to symbols, that are embodied in a charismatic leader in our case.

Nonetheless, the researcher stops to consider the ethical consequences of crossing the fine line between PR and propaganda. The Public Relations field's connection to warfare raises some critical ethical questions. To the extent that one views war as immoral, then Public Relations' involvement in promoting war becomes ethically questionable. These concerns are exacerbated when it is believed that the justifications for war are based on misleading or untruthful information. The line between Public Relations and propaganda is thin in these instances.

(Encyclopedia of Public Relations, 2013) recited examples when the press uncovered a number of inaccuracies in statements made to justify the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. Related to this concern, is the fact that the military generally enjoys greater freedom to restrict information to which the media—and, by extension, the public—has access. Free and open access to government information by the media has always been a contentious issue. The military can restrict information on the basis of national security, operational secrecy, and the safety of the personnel involved. However, the media contend that sometimes information that is unfavourable or embarrassing to the military and its government is hidden, thus pausing a big ethical dilemma.

Zaliznyak (2021) tackled the matter of ethics in relation to Russia's aggression in the era of controversial use of contemporary social media in local and global conflicts. He particularly focused on Russian hybrid warfare against Ukraine, the United States, and the West. His findings demonstrated how easily social media, which are used as effective drivers of positive change in some states, are becoming an instrument of propaganda, misinformation, and disorientation of the audience. He concluded that multiple audiences in other countries will be vulnerable to manipulation from Russia's Social Media Propaganda Warfare, same as the Ukrainian propaganda consolidated by the West.

In the RUW situation, PR ethics does not only encompass crossing the fine line between PR and propaganda and manipulating public opinion, through alleged legitimacy claims from both parties; but also, the involvement of third parties with whole conflicting interests, and that makes the situation even more complicated. Information Warfare, AI, Deepfakes, Cyberattacks, let go of the

fake news, misinformation and disinformation are escalating the incidents, and holding major consequences related to ethics.

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