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The Innovation Breakthrough in Digital and Disruptive Era
Misrepresentation of Russian Interests in the Russo–Ukrainian War: The Closure of News Offices in Russia

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ABSTRACT

The misrepresentation of Russian interests in the ongoing Russo–Ukrainian War has drawn extensive public criticism. Scholars have investigated the war between Russia and Ukraine using diverse perspectives and using various aspects. Few, however, have examined the mechanisms through which Russian interests have been misrepresented. This article, thus, uses media analysis to investigate the Russo–Ukrainian War, relying on a review of the literature (previous studies, books, and digital news articles) to obtain its data. This study of the misrepresentation of Russian interests in the Russo–Ukrainian War finds 1) American and Ukrainian media have highlighted the disarray of the Russian offensive; 2) the media has misrepresented Russia's interests; 3) Russia and Ukraine have presented different information regarding the Russia–Ukraine War; 4) throughout the Russo–Ukrainian War, Russia has employed a DIME (Diplomacy, Information, Military, and Economy) strategy for its international politics. This study contributes to an understanding of the misrepresentation of Russia's interests on social media during the Russo–Ukrainian War.

Keywords: Misrepresentation, Russian interests, Russo–Ukrainian War

I. Introduction

The new media era has been marked by increased reliance on technology during "war" and the international political contestations that occur during times of conflict. Communication technology and social media platforms have played an important role in the current Russo–Ukrainian War, particularly with Russia's political decision to close news offices in the company. For example, the Russian government chose to close the independent newspaper Novaya Gazeta because it was deemed too critical of the country's invasion of Ukraine. The country subsequently closed the Moscow office of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) and revoked the accreditation of its journalists; the German Deutsche Welle (DW) met a similar fate. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs also decided to block the satellite offices of Deutsche Welle. The management of Deutsche Welle decided to remain in the game by relying heavily on other broadcasting corporations, such as BBC and the Voice of America, that shared its mission; in this manner, it continued to convey information (Bogen et al., 1996; Mocatta & Hawley, 2020).

Throughout the Russo–Ukrainian War, many have relied on social media and instant messaging services to convey and receive messages (Talabi et al., 2022). This trend can be seen in the days before the invasion, as tensions between Russia and Ukraine were heating up (Tosun & Eshraghi, 2022). Intense fighting has had a dramatic and disastrous effect,
including on areas outside Ukraine (Pereira et al., 2022). Such media has become increasingly important with the closure of news offices in Russia, as well as the declaration that the Russo–Ukrainian War was a cyberwar (Lanza, 2022). Propaganda has become central to the conflict, and even annual commemorations of the end of World War II have been marked by military aggression and the revelation of new technologies. It has become a central pillar of the narrative, embraced with almost religious fervor (Borshchevskaya, 2020).

Russia's decision to invade Ukraine did not occur overnight; it emerged in response to Ukraine's years-long efforts to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in opposition to the nation (Qureshi et al., 2022). The invasion of Ukraine, which began on February 24, 2022, marked a sharp increase in geopolitical risks to the regional and international markets (Umar et al., 2022). Since the early 1990s, Ukraine has surrendered thousands of nuclear warheads that it had inherited from the Soviet Union to Russia in accordance with the treaty on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons (Umland, 2022). The conflict between Russia and Ukraine began in 1991, when the latter declared its independence from the Soviet Union, leading to a financial crisis (Osichuk & Shepotylo, 2018, 2020). Over time, Russia sought to use its control of resources such as natural gas to control Ukraine (Lee, 2017), which lacked significant reserves (Van de Graaf & Colgan, 2017). Between 2010 and 2013, President of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovych sought to restore close ties with Russia, resulting in months of demonstrations against his government. It is thought that social media and other communications technologies heavily influenced these demonstrations. Citizen journalists in Russia and Ukraine worked actively to produce and disseminate knowledge on government activities, thereby shaping public opinion—both positive and negative—on Russo–Ukrainian relations. However, with the closure of the news offices in Russia on May 19, 2022, Russian netizens were no longer able to participate in the cyberwar with Ukraine.

The latent conflict between Russia and Ukraine, according to Helmi Hamsyir, Budi Setyoko, and Marihot Marihot (2022), began as Russian and Ukrainian interests collided in Crimea in 2014. Russia sought to assert its geopolitical dominance over Ukraine, a former Soviet republic, and control its natural gasses and mineral resources. Tensions, however, could be traced back further, to Ukraine's secession from the Soviet Union in 1991. A timeline by Rahma Indina Harbani (2022) highlights several momentous events in the history of Ukraine–Russian relations since the independence of the former in 1991. For instance, between 2004 and 2008 there was conflict within the Ukrainian government between those who sought to restore strong ties with Russia and those who sought to distance themselves from Moscow by joining NATO; it is the latter who ultimately emerged victorious. Later, between 2010 and 2013, President Yanukovych again sought to restore Ukraine's ties with Moscow. This resulted in widespread demonstrations, thought to have been coordinated through social media, which led to Yanukovych's resignation after several months. Citizen journalists in Russia and Ukraine worked actively to produce and disseminate knowledge on government activities, thereby shaping public opinion—both positive and negative—on Russo–Ukrainian relations. However, with the closure of news offices in Russia on May 19, 2022, Russian netizens were no longer able to participate in the cyberwar with Ukraine.
This article seeks to contribute to the literature a new understanding of the role of communication technology in shaping the "face" of the Russo–Ukrainian War, a subject that has been conspicuously understudied. International relations have been instrumentalized as gadgets and digital technologies have been adopted around the world. This research seeks to answer three questions: (1) what has led to one-sided narratives of the Russo–Ukrainian War being presented by Western Media? (2) why have news stories been framed in a manner that puts Russia at fault?; (3) how has Russia been objectified as always at fault for international incidents? To answer these questions, this article seeks to expose the one-sided narratives of the Russo–Ukrainian War in Western Media and analyze their framing and objectification of Russia. Investigation of the closure of news offices in Russia will provide insight into the changes that are occurring in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

This article departs from the argument that Russia's closure of access to information and communications was a major blunder for Russia, as it provided pro-American Western media with opportunities to design and propagate coverage that criticized Russia. At the same time, Russia's closure of news offices promoting anti-Russian narratives has heavily restricted the mass media. This study investigates the misrepresentation of Russian interests in the Russo–Ukrainian War from a mass media perspective; in other words, the mass media can be politically beneficial or detrimental to Russian interests. In the literature, discussion tends to focus on "the shifting paradigms of war/conflict, between those nations that view conflict and war from a conventional perspective, as something that occurs when relations stall between nations, rather than viewing it as cyberwar and proxy war".

II. Method

This study employs a qualitative approach to obtain an in-depth understanding of how Western and Ukrainian media have benefitted from Russia's decision to close news offices in the country. Data were collected by reviewing news texts/stories to uncover the hidden and explicit meanings contained therein, including through photographs, videos, statements, and digital traces. These included not only the stories reported in mainstream media but also the (factual and non-factual) stories produced by citizen journalists in the field. Material Object (Unit of Analysis). The material object of this study is the news stories and texts produced and disseminated unilaterally by Ukraine, information produced by Western media, and the stories produced by citizen journalists. Such stories have been distributed using digital media since the beginning of the Russo–Ukrainian War, especially following the closure of news offices in Russia. Research Design. This article uses framing analysis to understand the news texts and stories produced by the Western and Ukrainian media, including citizen journalists, to cover the Russo–Ukrainian War between February 24, 2022, and June 22, 2022. Source of Information: texts, news stories, manuscripts. Data Collection Process. Observation and documentation were collected between February 24, 2022, when the invasion began, and June 22, 2022, when the President of Indonesia visited the region. This included the closure of news offices in Russia on May 19, 2022. Data collection was conducted intensely during this period, after which the writing process began. Data Analysis. For analysis, the authors used Entman's theory of framing and reality construction to investigate and analyze the messages presented and ignored by Western and
Ukrainian media (including citizen journalists) in their coverage of the Russo–Ukrainian War. This includes the closure of news offices in Russia.

III. Results

3.1. The War through a Western Lens

3.1.1. International Media

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Type of Social Media</th>
<th>Number of Users/Day</th>
<th>Percentage of Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Australian Media</td>
<td>Australian Associated Press</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Chinese Media</td>
<td>Xinhua (New China News Agency)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Associated Press</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>Malaysian National News Agency (BERNAMA)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>Agence France Presse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Digital Publication, 2022; We Are Social

The Russo–Ukrainian War has received extensive media coverage around the world, as it has not only captured the public imagination but also had far-reaching economic, security, and humanitarian effects.

3.1.2. Social Media

A. Digital Data, Ukraine

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Type of Social Media</th>
<th>Number of Users/Day</th>
<th>Percentage of Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>28 million</td>
<td>64.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>16 million</td>
<td>37.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>16 million</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>TikTok</td>
<td>11 million</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>900,000</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Digital Publication, 2022; We Are Social
As seen in Table 2, YouTube is the most popular social media platform in Ukraine, with 28 million daily users. Instagram and Facebook have similar user bases. TikTok is likewise popular in Ukraine. Finally, Twitter appears to have a limited user base, and thus has exclusive connotations. As such, Ukrainian social media users may choose from many platforms.

**B. Digital Data, Russia**

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Type of Social Media</th>
<th>Number of Users/Day</th>
<th>Percentage of Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>106 million</td>
<td>72.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>63 million</td>
<td>43.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>54.9 million</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>TikTok</td>
<td>8.6 million</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>3 million</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Digital Publication, 2022; We Are Social*

As seen in Table 3, there was significant interest in social media in Russia before news offices were closed. Particularly popular was YouTube, which was accessed by 72.7% of the population every day; this platform was popular due to its audio-visual content. Media users’ interest in Instagram and Facebook was likewise high.

### 3.1.3. Citizen Journalism

Several mass media outlets exist in Russia and Ukraine, as follows:

**A. Russian Mass Media**

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Echo Moskvy</td>
<td>Radio Station</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td><em>Novaya Gazeta</em></td>
<td>Newspaper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Moskovskiy Komsomolets (MK)</td>
<td>News Agency</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Digital Publication, 2022; We Are Social*

Mass media outlets such as these have been closed and citizen journalism has been given little space to publicize the situation in the country. Furthermore, the Russian government—through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs—has declared that any person who publishes false
information regarding the Russian military could be imprisoned for no more than fifteen years. In response, the Committee to Protect Journalists urged the Russian government to rescind this law, as the unilateral closure of news media would increase the risks faced by journalists. Through its closure of news media outlets, including the satellite offices of global agencies, the Russian government limited global access to information on the situation in the country. This decision did not only affect print and electronic media, but also all citizens who accessed digital media; consequently, citizen journalists had little ability to spread information, as they too would face ten to fifteen years imprisonment if they produced, disseminated, and influenced public opinion through information on the Russo–Ukrainian War. With the closure of Russia's decision to close its news agencies, citizen journalists received no space for their existence.

B. Ukrainian Mass Media

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Interfax-Ukraina</td>
<td>News Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Dzerkalo Tyzhnia</td>
<td>Newspaper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Zbru</td>
<td>Newspaper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Delovaya Stolitsa</td>
<td>Newspaper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>The Kiv Independent</td>
<td>Television</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Digital Publication, 2022; We Are Social

Unlike in Russia, electronic and mass media have continued to exist in Ukraine, so long as they agree with the government's policies. Media suspected of advancing Russian interests, conversely, have long been blocked and had their permits revoked. Important in Ukraine's continued campaign have been internet users, both within the country and abroad, who have acted as citizen journalists. These have included numerous Ukrainians who have evacuated the country, providing an effective means of spreading anti-Russian propaganda. See, for example, Figure 1 below:
Figure 1: Example of Citizen Journalism

This image, which was captured and disseminated by a Ukrainian internet user, depicts the distribution of food staples. It contains the implicit and explicit message that Russia's political decision to invade Ukraine has created great suffering. Such photojournalism has a clear and tangible psychological impact on consumers, who are driven to make social and political efforts to expedite the conclusion of hostilities.

3.2. Framing of News Stories and Blaming of Russia

In early February 2022, social media (particularly Twitter) was replete with stories that Russia had invaded Ukraine. Such stories were ostensibly supported by photographs and videos of Russian aircraft preparing to attack Ukraine. Fact-checking by the British Broadcasting Corporation found that these photographs and videos were hoaxes designed to mobilize public opinion against Russia.

3.2.1. Photographs as Evidence and Data

Figure 2: Photographs of the Russo-Ukrainian War, 2022–present

The following photograph was disseminated on social media, where it was mislabelled as depicting the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Figure 3: Photographs from the 2020 celebration of Victory Day in Moscow

Figure 4: Depicts a formation of fighter jets and bombers flying over an urban area; over the video, an air raid siren is heard. Fact-checking by the British Broadcasting Company found that this recording depicted a practice flight in advance of a military parade/flyby that had
occurred in 2020. The air raid siren was superimposed upon the video, muffling its original audio track.

From these images, it is evident that numerous photographs were distributed as misinformation to shape public opinion against Russia in the lead-up to the Russo–Ukrainian War in February 2022.

3.2.2. Statements that Blame Russia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Source:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Zelensky warned Putin of the potential for World War III should the two countries fail to reach an armistice. Russia and Ukraine have conducted negotiations several times, yet they have made no significant progress.</td>
<td>CNN International, March 20, 2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Russia was reported to intend to use chemical weapons in the war against Ukraine. Zelensky stated that the world must beware of Putin's changing tactics, including the potential for chemical warfare or using nuclear weapons.</td>
<td>CNBC Indonesia, May 7, 2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Amidst the Russian assault, Zelensky urged his soldiers and people to never surrender or retreat in the face of the Kremlin's forces.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>A number of Russian media outlets were reported to have been hacked, and the websites of at least three displayed messages condemning President Vladimir Putin. This cyberattack against Russian media as the Russian invasion of Ukraine was entering its fifth day.</td>
<td>CNN International, February 28, 2022</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2.3. Public Sentiments on Social Media
Negative sentiments emerged on social media regarding the reactions of other countries, including the United States and other members of NATO. The United States' response was not ignored by internet users, who commented extensively on the war between Russia and Ukraine. As a result, negative views of the United States were strengthened. This may be seen through the following analysis, by Netray.

Diagram 1. Peak Time, February 1 – March 31, 2022

This Peak Time Data shows that online discussions of the United States and the Russo–Ukrainian War increased rapidly with the commencement of military operations in February 2022.

Diagram 2: Trends in Public Sentiment, February 1 – March 31, 2022

Source: Netray through https://medium.com/@netrayID

Netray monitored online discussions between February 1 and March 23, 2022. It found that, of the 64,800 tweets monitored, 29,309 conveyed negative sentiments; only 5,697 tweets contained positive sentiments. This indicates not only that internet users were highly interested in the Russo–Ukrainian War, but also extensively commented on it (both positively and negatively). This also indicates the important role played by social media.
3.3. Russia as the Target of Blame

In various statements, photographs, and images disseminated through social media (including Twitter, YouTube, Telegram, and TikTok), there was a tendency to blame Russia for the ongoing war.

Figure 5: Illustration of the War in Ukraine

Source: Reuters/Alexander Ermochenko

Figure 5 presents an image that positions Russia as morally and materially responsible for the infrastructural damage experienced by Ukraine. Implicitly, Russia must not only repair the buildings it has destroyed but also make amends for the psychological damage experienced by Ukrainians since the invasion. Through these frames, Russia is held to blame for the war.

3.3.1. Shaping Public Opinion

Public opinion has been shaped through these frames. As the conflict escalated, both Sweden and Finland sought to align themselves with NATO. Although such discourses existed before the Russo–Ukrainian War, they became more commonplace and amplified afterward. Examples are provided below:

a. "The process of joining NATO was almost agreed upon when Russia attacked," said a former Finnish prime minister to CNN (April 8, 2022).

b. "If you look at public opinion in Finland and Sweden, as well as how opinions have changed drastically in the past six weeks, I think that is another example of how [the Russo–Ukrainian War] was a strategic blunder," said a former senior official with the United States’ Department of State.

c. Prime Minister of Finland Sanna Marin stated on Friday (April 8, 2022) that the National Parliament would discuss the possibility of joining NATO "in the coming weeks."

3.3.2. Digital Tracks and Artifacts
Looking at Figure 6, even without knowing what, how, and why the humanitarian crisis has occurred, one's emotions would be stirred. War always leaves marks, traces that cannot easily be understood by human beings. The current destruction experienced by Ukraine and the suffering of its people stems from decades of political events that began with Ukraine's secession from the Soviet Union in 1991. The ebb and flow of the conflict over three decades indicate how the current war traces its roots to Russia's desire to assert its influence in Ukraine and control the country's gas resources, as well as prevent Ukraine from becoming part of NATO. Russia was strongly opposed to NATO's presence in its former territory.

3.3.3. Propaganda from other Nations

Figure 7: Public acts of solidarity against the Russo–Ukrainian War, February 25, 2022.

With the closure of news offices in Russia, propaganda from Ukraine and the United States became the sole source of information for internet users. Coverage focused primarily
on the victims of the war, the elderly and children who fled the Russian border and sought refuge throughout Europe. Likewise, the destruction of Ukrainian infrastructure—including the healthcare system—was emphasized to show how the war had driven the collapse of Ukrainian society. Such coverage proved an effective means of attracting public sympathy through the reports of citizen journalists, who focused their propaganda efforts on the suffering attributed to the Russian attack.

IV. DISCUSSION

4.1. The War through a Western Lens

The particular frames of the Russo–Ukrainian War presented in media coverage and citizen journalism show a conscious effort to highlight the negative effects of Russia's decision to invade Ukraine. Physical conflict in the region can be traced back to 2014, when Russia showed interest in the contested Donbas region (Roman et al., 2021), and Putin made statements that Russia would be willing to take a peacekeeping role in Ukraine's internal conflict (Kozak, 2022). Over time, this conflict expanded, becoming a total war (Golovchenko, 2022). Today, the Russo–Ukrainian War is framed as not only endangering the future of the Ukrainian nation but also destabilizing the security of Europe itself (Perepelytsia, 2021; Chemshit et al., 2022).

With the closure of news offices in the country, the Russian government became unable to control the flow of information. Social media, having become the primary means for the dissemination of information, was used around the globe to place blame for the war on Russia. This allowed consumers few opportunities to access, evaluate, and utilize information (Ramaiah & Saraswati Rao, 2021). At the same time, disinformation was rampant on social media, as was misinformation—false information asserted with confidence by misinformed users (Jerit & Zhao, 2020). Ultimately, much misinformation was disseminated that was detrimental to Russia.

Citizen journalists took an active role in the Russo–Ukrainian War, collecting, analyzing, and conveying information and news through social media; as many studies have noted, this medium is prone to misinformation due to its limited concern with methodology and problem-solving (Suarez-Lledo & Alvarez-Galvez, 2021). Through citizen journalism, consumers around the world received information (including photographs and videos) from the field via social media platforms such as Twitter, TikTok, Telegram, and YouTube. Through social media, citizen journalists were able to surpass mainstream media outlets (both electronic and print) in their ability to shape public opinion regarding the Russo–Ukrainian War. Indeed, such "digital warfare" began even before Russia went to war against Ukraine. Such citizen journalism has shaped the very face of modern warfare.

4.2. Framing of News Stories and Blaming of Russia

The concept of framing was defined by Batterson (1995; in Sobur, 2001) as the conceptual structure or belief system that organized political views, policies, and discourses, and thereby created standard categories for appreciating reality. Goffman (1974), meanwhile, understands framing as strips of behavior that guide individuals in their understanding of reality (Ardianto, 2010). Severin and Tankard (2010) hold that framing operates through two processes, writ, everyday interactions with society and everyday interactions with the media.
Nonetheless, both processes are marked by similar activities: individuals pick up clues and interpret others' behavior to inform their own opinions, then convey certain ideas to others (Tamburaka, 2013: 59).

Entman's concept of framing can be used to understand how the process through which the media selects and emphasizes certain aspects of reality (Ardianto, 2010). Likewise, distinct frames have been offered by Western and Ukrainian media. Western media has sought to influence public opinion through claims that Russia has violated human rights and Ukraine's national sovereignty, while Ukrainian media has asserted that Russia has interfered in the country's national interests, including its desire to join NATO and its ability to manage its own natural resources.

These frames have been foundational for Western and Ukrainian coverage of the Russo–Ukrainian War, as outlets are free to make their claims without any clarification from Russian sources—particularly with the closure of Russian news outlets on May 19, 2022. Available information online, thus, continues to blame Russia.

4.2.1. Photographs as Evidence and Data

Of the photographs presented above, Figure 3 shows images that were spread by American and Ukrainian internet users as part of a misinformation campaign at the beginning of the Russo–Ukrainian War. These images, which were claimed to show a Russian attack on Ukraine, spread rapidly online. However, a fact-check by BBC found that these images were taken from a recording of Russian military activities held to commemorate Victory Day in 2020. Figure 5, likewise, shows an image that was mistakenly labeled as depicting a Russian assault on Ukraine. Depicting a Russian military flypast in 2020, this video was digitally edited to conceal the original audio with an air-raid siren. Only Figure 2 depicted Russia's initial assault on Ukraine.

From these examples, it is evident that many of the photographs that were disseminated on the internet were hoaxes designed to blame Russia for the Russo–Ukrainian War at its commencement. Such hoaxes, as argued by Entman's concept of framing, were specifically selected and identified to highlight certain aspects of reality. That certain elements were given greater emphasis than others (Ardianto, 2010) is undeniable.

4.2.2 Statements Blaming Russia

Looking at the above statements, it is evident that various statements on social media were used to blame Russia for the failure of diplomatic negotiations—even though, referring to the timeline of Russian–Ukrainian negotiations, internal strife in Ukraine was the primary factor in the collapse of negotiations. Ukraine has experienced weak leadership, and thus it has been easily swayed by outside interests. These leadership issues were the primary factors bringing the Ukrainian people to the nadir of human existence.

4.3 Russia as the Target of Blame

The closure of news offices in Russia resulted in serious excesses amongst citizen journalists in the United States, Ukraine, and around the world, as information has had only one source. Russia's movements and activities behind the frontlines have thus received little coverage. Likewise, ongoing counterespionage efforts have instilled bordering nations with
fear. As stated by Perepelytsia (2021) and Chemshit et al. (2022), the Russo–Ukrainian War threatens not only Ukraine but also European security. In asserting its interests, Russia has not only harmed Ukraine but also disrupted the world order. Countries as varied as India, Egypt, France, South Korea, Iran, Pakistan, Israel, Afghanistan, China, Russia, Syria, North Korea, the United Kingdom, and the United States would suffer greatly in the event of a third world war.

By closing foreign news offices, the Russian government has made it difficult for internet users—both in Ukraine and around the world—to obtain a deep understanding of the invasion. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that Russia's decision to close these news offices was part of a long-term political strategy. As stated by Pynnöniemi et al. (2016), Russia has historically sought to put its enemies on the defensive and give itself the element of surprise. Only through careful strategizing will Russia be able to control the battlefield, and this requires keeping NATO and Ukraine in the dark.

The information available to Western and Ukrainian media outlets following the closure of news offices in Russia has, in Russia's view, been worthless, false, and incorrect, and thus ill-suited to making strategic decisions. Russia does not perceive its marginalization as detrimental to its efforts to assert its interests.

On the surface, with the closure of news offices in Russia, the United States and Ukraine have not had to work hard to obtain information that suits their purposes. Internet users around the world have blamed Russia for the war. However, it is important to recognize that the Russo–Ukrainian War has deep roots, since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, and involved numerous peace agreements and armistices. Likewise, Russia's interest in Ukraine has specific motivations behind it (Jonsson & Seely, 2015), as does its desire for political control of the territory.

4.3.1 Shaping Public Opinion

Interestingly, as the Russo-Ukrainian War has continued, several countries—including Sweden and Finland—have expressed an interest in joining NATO. Without the current war, these Scandinavian nations would not be considering turning to NATO for protection. The deliberate shaping of public opinion, thus, has enabled Russia to identify its allies and opponents—including countries that were formerly part of the Soviet Union.

Russia's efforts to shape public opinion regarding its expansion to Ukraine reflect the argument that misrepresentation involves the deliberate misrepresentation of the facts in the field (Trigo et al., 2015). This has occurred in the Russo-Ukrainian War, where misrepresentation has occurred vis-à-vis Russia's interests in Ukrainian territory. This is part of Russia's political strategy to redirect public discourse while working to seize and control Ukrainian territory.

Over time, the shaping of public opinion had significant effects around the world. Moodley et al. (2021) argue that misrepresentation results in the spread of false information on social media and creates fear. As evident in the Russo–Ukrainian War, this strategy has created significant fear in countries that share land boundaries with Russia. Even before the closure of news offices, as argued by Pratiwi et al. (2016), misrepresentation was practiced through excommunication, marginalization, exclusion, and delegitimization (Pratiwi, 2016).
As such, the closure of news offices was part of a Russian strategy to misdirect the world—ordinary citizens, governments (particularly the United States and Ukraine), and NATO—and facilitate its interests in Ukraine. It implemented this strategy after diplomatic negotiations with Ukraine reached an impasse, and thus the manipulation of facts became necessary to achieve power.

4.3.2 Digital Tracks and Artifacts

The Russo-Ukrainian War differs significantly from conventional wars such as World War I and World War II. It involves volunteers, professional soldiers, and "digital" soldiers, all of whom have fought incessantly to achieve victory for their chosen side; this has been mentioned, for example, by Nova Poerwadi in a story written for VOA (March 16, 2022). In fact, the Foreign Secretary of the United Kingdom stated on May 1, 2022, that Russia had begun using troll factories to spread disinformation about the war in Ukraine on eight social media platforms, including Telegram, Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok; these trolls were primarily targeting politicians and other persons in positions of power in the United Kingdom and South Africa.

Trolls are defined as individuals who deliberately make insulting or provocative posts on the internet. The United Kingdom cited an unpublished study, funded by the United Kingdom, which found that the Kremlin had designed and initialized a disinformation campaign to manipulate public opinion regarding its invasion of Ukraine and garner support for its cause. The United Kingdom also asserted that Russian trolls had been using Telegram to recruit and coordinate supporters, with attacks being focused on high-profile social media users and Kremlin critics. These coordinated harassment campaigns were designed to elicit comments that supported President Vladimir Putin and the Russian war effort.

For Russia, the United Kingdom’s claims are groundless, as Russia has strategic and crucial interests in Ukraine as well as numerous long-term plans for the region. As argued by Jonsson and Seely (2015), Russia seeks political and territorial control of Ukraine.

Even before the closure of news offices in Russia, much false information, hoaxes, and disinformation were used by the United States, NATO, and Ukraine to twist the facts of the Russo–Ukrainian War, involving images, videos, and reports that were produced and disseminated by Ukrainian citizen journalists, internet users, and American news media.

As such, the flow of information during the Russo–Ukrainian War before and after the closure of news offices has been perceived by Russia as detrimental, as the United States, NATO, and Ukraine have sought to shape public opinion against Russia and blame it for the invasion. The international community has sought to marginalize Russia, to frame its sanctions as being an appropriate countermeasure to Russian aggression. Several nations have continued these sanctions, even as Russia has sought to counter foreign propaganda efforts through its DIME (Diplomacy, Information, Military, and Economy) strategy. Such digital facts, per Neuman’s spiral of silence theory, are used by the powerful majority to marginalize the minority and compel adherence to its standards. In this case, Russia has been marginalized and ostracized by the global community.

4.3.3 Propaganda from Other Nations
The Russo–Ukrainian War has shown a different side of war, involving not only conventional military action but also intensive cyberwarfare involving not only the belligerents but also (by proxy) powers such as the United States and NATO. Russia, as a global superpower, recognized the new reality of warfare. It has used the most advanced technologies to shape public opinion, even with the closure of foreign news offices. It has relied heavily on propaganda models akin to those used by Nazi Germany under Goebbels, seeking to counter the cyberwarfare conducted by Ukraine and the United States.

From the beginning, Russia has recognized the need to carefully manage the complexities of the Russo–Ukrainian War. Global politics have changed significantly since the fall of the Soviet Union, even though Russia has remained a global leader in international affairs. To counter the propaganda of other nations, Russia implemented its DIME strategy (DW, March 18, 2022). Russia used this strategy as part of its special operations, intended to avoid counterproductive activities and coordinate operations. DIME, a program that Aknolt (DW Indonesia, March 17, 2022) notes is not utilized by Ukraine or its supporters, has played a key role in influencing public opinion. Russia has presented itself as defending human rights in three parts of Ukraine, writ, Crimea, Donbas, and Luhansk. Aknolt also states that Russia has controlled the flow of information in Indonesia to shape public opinion.

Looking at the official Indonesian platform, focus has been given solely to the evacuation of Indonesian citizens. The situation in the field has received little discussion. Russia has presented itself as having close ties to the Islamic world through photographs and videos of its interactions with the Muslim world. For example, on July 7, 2022, President Putin wished a blessed Eid al-Adha to Indonesia's Muslims. Why? Simply put, Putin recognized the importance of religious sentiments on public opinion in Indonesia. Perhaps Indonesian internet users have forgotten how Putin laughed when the Russian Minister of Agriculture recommended exporting pork to Indonesia.

In this situation, Russia has taken advantage of the Indonesian public's perception that Russia is opposed to the United States, a country that is perceived as having waged war against the Muslim world through its activities in the Middle East, Afghanistan, and Palestine. Indeed, many Indonesians perceive the United States as anti-Muslim and unfriendly to Indonesia. It is not surprising, thus, that anti-American views have spread rapidly in Indonesia. Indonesians perceive the Russo–Ukrainian War as part of an ideological conflict between Russia and the United States.

Meanwhile, Indonesians have little knowledge of Ukraine. Few care for matters of wheat and soccer, and fewer still understand that Ukraine has not joined the European Union or NATO. As a result, through its DIMA strategy, Russia has been able to create a positive image of itself amongst Indonesian internet users. It has presented Putin as similar to former presidential candidate Prabowo Subianto, as a man who—like Indonesia's first president, Soekarno—had the strength to challenge the West and the United States. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, conversely, is depicted as a weak man, a former comedian with no leadership capacity who brought suffering upon the people of Ukraine. Such perceptions are commonly disseminated across Indonesian media platforms, including YouTube and TikTok.
For the people of Indonesia, the conflict in Eastern Europe is not a war between Russia and Ukraine, but a conflict between Russia and the West/United States. It is not surprising that a superpower like Russia has lengthy experience with propaganda and counter-propaganda, as well as the ability to implement it. In the Russo–Ukrainian War, the Russian government has continuously used its DIME program to counter the efforts of NATO, Ukraine, and the United States.

V. Conclusion

5.1. The Russo–Ukrainian War has not only been legitimized by power but modified by the media. Mass media and citizen journalists have created a frame that blames Russia, using photographs, videos, statements, and digital artifacts as evidence and data points. At the same time, Russia has long implemented active propaganda through its DIME (Diplomacy, Information, Military, and Economic) policy to anticipate propaganda efforts by the United States, NATO, Ukraine, and their allies. It has also been shown that these nations do not have their own DIME programs, unlike Russia, a superpower that has long anticipated the political activities of the United States and its allies.

5.2. Academic Contributions. This study has provided perspective on the misrepresentation of Russian interests in the Russo–Ukrainian War following the closure of foreign news offices. Conflict, conflict resolution, and war can be studied using diverse perspectives, including those of sociology, anthropology, social psychology, etc. A deeper insight into the misrepresentation of Russian interests will support the argument that the media has heavily influenced the course of the Russo–Ukrainian War and the global political climate.

5.3. Research Limitations: This article is limited in its data sources, as its data were derived solely from a review of the literature and media. As such, it cannot be generalized to describe the misrepresentation of Russian interests in the Russo–Ukrainian War. Policy development requires a more general understanding than that possible through this study. Further research into the misrepresentation of Russian interests is ongoing and will offer deeper insight into the situation. Further research, using new sources of information, will offer readers a broader wealth of knowledge.

References


