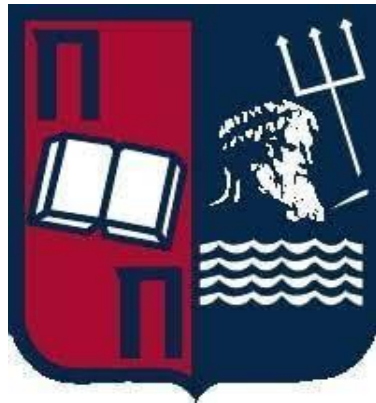


ILIAS BREZATIS - WEAPONIZATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN CONFLICT - THE HIGH LEVEL OF COORDINATION AND INTEGRATION BETWEEN THOSE ENGAGED IN PHYSICAL BATTLEFIELD WARFARE AND THOSE ENGAGED IN SOCIAL MEDIA OPERATIONS

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***TITLE: WEAPONIZATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN CONFLICT - THE HIGH LEVEL OF COORDINATION AND INTEGRATION BETWEEN THOSE ENGAGED IN PHYSICAL BATTLEFIELD WARFARE AND THOSE ENGAGED IN SOCIAL MEDIA OPERATIONS***

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## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

This paper is dedicated to my wife and my daughter Katerina, the princess of my life.

To my father and my mother with profound respect and gratitude.

Finally, I would like to thank the three-member Committee for the assistance and the valuable directions that I received.

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## **CHAPTER I. Introduction**

Social media has revolutionised the way that people communicate and access information. It has also become a critical component of modern warfare, with both governments and militaries leveraging its power to coordinate operations, spread propaganda, and shape public opinion. The connection between physical battlefields and social media has grown stronger, with each aspect influencing the other in significant ways.

The use of social media in warfare is not a new concept. In fact, it has been used in various forms since the early days of the internet. However, the proliferation of social media platforms and the widespread adoption of smartphones has made it easier for governments and militaries to reach a larger audience and have a greater impact.

One of the primary ways that governments and militaries use social media is for the coordination of operations. This can include everything from sharing intelligence and planning strategies to coordinating logistics and sending orders. Social media provides a quick and efficient way for military personnel to communicate and stay up-to-date on the latest developments.

One example of this phenomenon is the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, where social media has been weaponized by both sides to sway public sentiment and mould the conflict's storyline (Today.tamu.edu, 2022). The Russian concept of "information warfare (Ndc.nato.int, 2016)," which encompasses

the use of social media and other information technologies to achieve strategic objectives, has also gained attention in this context.

This thesis aims to examine the weaponization of social media in conflict, with a focus on the high level of coordination and integration between those engaged in physical battlefield warfare and those engaged in social media operations. It will explore the role of governments and militaries in coordinating social media operations, and will consider the impact of coordinated physical and social media warfare on conflict. Specifically, this thesis will examine the case of the conflict in Ukraine, as well as the Russian concept of information warfare, to illustrate the ways in which social media has been used as a weapon in modern conflict.

## **Definitions**

Before proceeding, it is important to define some key terms that will be used throughout this thesis.

Social media (Cambridge University Press, 2022) encompasses digital platforms and applications enabling users to generate, disseminate, and interchange thoughts, information, and materials. This category includes social networks (like Facebook and Twitter), microblogging services (like Tumblr and Instagram), and platforms for sharing multimedia (like YouTube and Vimeo).

Conflict: refers to a state of disagreement or disagreement, often resulting in violence or hostility. In the context of this thesis, conflict refers to armed conflict between nations or groups, as well as more diffuse forms of social conflict that may involve the use of social media (Nato.int, 2019) .

## **Overview of the role of social media in conflict**

The role of social media in conflict has gained significant attention in recent years, as governments and militaries have increasingly turned to these platforms as a tool for communication, propaganda, and influence. The integration of physical battlefield warfare with social media operations has reached a high level of coordination and integration, with those engaged in each holding a pivotal position in determining the ultimate outcome of a conflict, be it triumph or defeat.

In the context of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, for example, both sides have used social media to disseminate propaganda, recruit supporters, and shape public opinion. The Russian concept of "information warfare" has also gained attention in this context, as the Russian government and military have been accused of utilising social media along with various information technologies to meddle in the political affairs of foreign nations with the aim of realising strategic goals.

Overall, the weaponization of social media in conflict highlights the complex and evolving nature of modern warfare, as well as the central role that technology and information play in shaping conflicts and their outcomes.

## **CHAPTER II. The coordination and integration of physical and social media warfare.**

### **Examples of the integration of physical and social media warfare.**



This section will provide specific examples of conflicts or campaigns where physical battlefield warfare and social media operations were integrated and coordinated. These examples will illustrate the multiple methods through which social media has been wielded as an armament in times of conflict, and will highlight the importance of coordination between physical and social media operations.

In recent years, the integration of physical and social media warfare has reached a high level of coordination and integration, with those engaged in each acting as a decisive factor in the ultimate victory or defeat in a conflict scenario. Governments and militaries have increasingly turned to social media as a tool for communication, propaganda, and influence, and have integrated these operations with traditional physical warfare strategies (Jstor.org, 2020). The following are a few examples of conflicts or campaigns where physical battlefield warfare and social media operations were integrated and coordinated:

- 1) **Syrian Civil War:** The integration of physical and social media warfare has played a significant role in the Syrian conflict, with both the government and opposition using these platforms to promote their own narratives and mobilise support (Usip.org, 2013). The Syrian government has used state-controlled media outlets and social media to present a positive narrative of its actions and portray the opposition as terrorists, while opposition groups have used social media to coordinate operations and share intelligence.

The engagement with social media by ordinary people amidst persistent civil strife is an underexplored area in scholarly texts, and investigating this subject could unveil critical perspectives on how conflict molds social media practices and vice versa. For instance, an analysis of Twitter activity in Syria discovered that shifts in the conflict's landscape, like the cessation of the state-directed blockade in Aleppo in 2016, were synchronous with notable variations in the makeup of active user accounts in the region(Pomeps.org, n.d.).

The importance of social media in the Syrian conflict has also been recognized by the international community, with the United Nations issuing a report in 2018 on the role of social media in the conflict (Syria.un.org, 2018). The report highlighted the ways in which social media has served as a medium for disseminating propaganda and provoking aggression, and recruiting supporters, and called for greater efforts to counter these activities.

In summary, the amalgamation of tangible warfare and digital confrontations in the Syrian strife underscores the potency of these mediums in moulding public perception and steering the direction of a conflict. Further research into how social media is used in conflicts like the Syrian Civil War could provide important insights into how these platforms influence public opinion and shape the narrative of a conflict.

2) **Russian annexation of Crimea (2014):** Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 was marked by the extensive use of social media by the Russian government and military. Media entities under Russian state

control leveraged digital platforms to circulate propaganda favouring Russia and portray the annexation in a favourable light. Russian military personnel also used social media to coordinate operations and share intelligence. The Russian government and military's use of social media in the annexation of Crimea illustrates the various methods for utilising social media, influence public opinion and shape the narrative of a conflict (Nato.int, 2022).

3) **The Islamic State (ISIS)** made extensive use of social media in its rise to power and territorial expansion in the Middle East from 2014 to 2017. The group used platforms such as Twitter and Facebook to disseminate propaganda, recruit supporters, and coordinate operations. ISIS demonstrated advanced social media strategies, enabling them to disseminate their ideology efficiently and garner extensive support (Amble, 2012).

The integration of physical battlefield operations with social media operations played a key role in the group's success in the early stages of the conflict (Nato.int, 2016).

ISIS used social media to publicise its military operations and to showcase its brutality, which helped to attract new recruits and generate fear among its enemies. The group also used social media to disseminate its ideology and to communicate with its followers. ISIS's use of social media was highly effective, and the group was able to gain a large following on platforms such as Twitter (Govinfo.gov, 2020).

However, the group's use of social media was not without drawbacks. The group's social media campaigns were often criticised for their violent and extremist content, and many of its accounts were suspended or shut down by platform administrators. Additionally, the group's reliance on social media made it vulnerable to counter-propaganda efforts and to the disruption of its communication channels. Despite these challenges, ISIS's use of social media was crucial to the group's success in the early stages of the conflict and had a significant impact on the conflict dynamics in the region.

4) **The Arab Spring**, a succession of demonstrations and rebellions advocating for democracy that rapidly spread throughout the Middle East and North Africa from 2010 to 2011, was marked by the extensive use of social media by activists and protesters. These platforms, particularly Twitter and Facebook, played a key role in coordinating protests and sharing information about the movements of government forces (Aljazeera.com, 2020).

One of the most notable examples of the integration of physical and social media warfare amidst the Arab Spring involved the employment of social media platforms by activists in Tunisia to mobilise protests and shape public opinion. In December 2010, Mohamed Bouazizi, a street vendor from Tunisia, self-immolated as an act of defiance (Sites.stedwards.edu, 2020) of corruption and police brutality, sparking a wave of protests across the country. Activists used social media platforms to coordinate protests, share information about the movements of government forces, and bring international attention to the situation (Aljazeera.com, 2020).

Similarly, in Egypt, social media was used by activists to coordinate protests and share information about the movements of government forces (Washington.edu, 2011). During the 2011 Egyptian Revolution, activists used Twitter, Facebook, and other platforms to coordinate protests and share information about the whereabouts of government forces. The use of social media was crucial in mobilising large numbers of people and shaping public opinion during these events.

Overall, the integration of physical and social media warfare played a significant role in the Arab Spring uprisings, with social media platforms serving as key tools for activists and protesters to coordinate their efforts and shape public opinion. The role of social media platforms during the Arab Spring has had lasting effects, with many countries in the region still facing political instability and ongoing conflicts.

These instances demonstrate the diverse methods through which social media has been wielded as an instrument of conflict, and highlight the importance of coordination between physical and social media operations. In each case, the integration of physical and social media warfare held a pivotal position in determining the conflict's resolution. Social media has proven to be an effective tool for propaganda, recruitment, and coordination, and has the potential to greatly influence the outcome of a conflict.

### **The role of governments and militaries in coordinating social media operations**

This section will examine the role of governments and militaries in coordinating social media operations in conflict. It will explore the strategies and tactics that have been used by different actors, and will consider the challenges and opportunities of coordinating physical and social media warfare.

The integration of physical and social media warfare has become increasingly important in modern conflicts, with governments and militaries using social media as a tool for communication, propaganda, and influence (Ijoc.org, 2020). The coordination of physical and social media operations has therefore become a key aspect of modern warfare, and governments and militaries have developed strategies and tactics to effectively coordinate these operations.

One strategy that has been commonly used by governments and militaries is the use of state-controlled media outlets to disseminate propaganda and shape public opinion in favour of their side. This has been particularly evident in conflicts such as the Syrian civil war, where the Syrian government has used state-controlled media to present a positive narrative of its actions and portray the opposition as terrorists. Other governments and militaries, such as those of Russia and China, have also been accused of using state-controlled media to interfere in the politics of other countries and shape global public opinion.

An additional strategy employed by authorities and armed forces involves utilising social media for orchestrating maneuvers and disseminating information. For instance, in the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, both sides

have used social media to coordinate attacks and share intelligence with their allies and partners (Nytimes.com, 2022). The use of social media in this context allows for quick and efficient communication, and can greatly improve the coordination of physical operations.

However, the coordination of physical and social media warfare also presents a number of challenges and opportunities. One challenge is the risk of information overload, as the vast amount of information available on social media can make it difficult to identify and prioritise relevant information. Another challenge is the risk of cyber-attacks and disinformation, as governments and militaries can be targeted by hackers and enemy states seeking to disrupt their operations and spread false information.

On the other hand, the coordination of physical and social media warfare also presents a number of opportunities. By effectively using social media to communicate, coordinate, and influence, governments and militaries can gain a strategic advantage over their enemies. They can also use social media to build support and legitimacy for their actions, and to shape the narrative of a conflict in their favour. In addition, the integration of physical and social media warfare allows for greater transparency and accountability, as social media can serve as a platform for reporting on and documenting conflicts.

Overall, the role of governments and militaries in coordinating social media operations in conflict highlights the complex and evolving nature of

modern warfare, and the central role that technology and information play in shaping conflicts and their outcomes.

### **The impact of coordinated physical and social media warfare on conflict**

This segment will examine how synchronised efforts in physical and digital warfare influence the resolution of conflicts. It will consider the ways in which social media has been used to influence public opinion and shape the narrative of conflicts, as well as the ways in which it has been used to coordinate and support physical operations. This section will also consider the potential long-term consequences of integrating physical and social media warfare

The integration of physical and social media warfare has notably affected the resolutions of various conflicts in recent years (Nato.int, 2021). Social media has proven to be an effective tool for propaganda, recruitment, and coordination, and has the potential to greatly influence the outcome of a conflict.

One way in which social media has been used to influence public opinion and shape the narrative of conflicts is through the dissemination of propaganda and disinformation. Governments and militaries have used social media platforms to present a positive narrative of their actions and



portray their enemies as villains (JSTOR, 2020). This has been particularly evident in conflicts such as the Syrian civil war and the Russian annexation of Crimea, where media entities governed by the state, along with social media channels, have been instrumental in spreading propaganda and moulding international public perception.

In addition to influencing public opinion, social media has also been used to coordinate and support physical operations. For example, in the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, both sides have used social media to coordinate attacks and share intelligence with their allies and partners. The use of social media in this context allows for quick and efficient communication, and can greatly improve the coordination of physical operations.

However, the integration of physical and social media warfare also has the potential for long-term consequences. The weaponization of social media in conflict can lead to the erosion of trust in traditional sources of information, and can contribute to the polarisation and radicalization of societies. Employing social media for dissemination propaganda and disinformation can also have long-term consequences for global relations and security, as it can fuel conflicts and undermine international efforts to promote peace and stability (Europarl.europa.eu, 2021).

In summary, the influence of synchronised tangible and digital combat on conflict resolutions, highlights the complex and evolving nature of modern warfare, and the central role that technology and information play in shaping conflicts and their outcomes. The integration of physical and social media warfare has the potential to greatly influence the outcome of a

conflict, but it also carries the risk of long-term consequences for societies and international relations.

### **CHAPTER III. Social Media as a Tool of Hybrid Warfare In NATO**

The integration of social media into conflict and hybrid warfare strategies has significantly impacted the nature of modern conflicts. Both states and non-state actors are using hybrid approaches, mixing army actions with internet attacks, money and talk issues, and ad pushes. In new fights in Libya, Syria, and Ukraine, social media has been key in planning moves, collecting information, and influencing the beliefs and attitudes of target audiences. In response to this trend, **the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence (Stratcomcoe.org, 2018)** in Latvia (Riga) has been tasked with studying the ways in which the government and other groups use social media in fights and mixed-style wars.

#### **How social media can be used to support military operations**

NATO's proposed list of six ways social media can support military operations highlights the diverse and multifaceted role that social media can play in conflicts (Sotrender.com, 2016).

**1. Intelligence collection:** In the context of military operations, the collection of intelligence through social media involves the targeted search and studying data from social media sites and profiles (Cradpdf.drdc-rddc.gc.ca, n.d.). This can include examining content and conversations, as

well as various forms of analysis such as trend analysis, network analysis, sentiment analysis, and geo-location analysis. These operations can be performed transparently or in secrecy, playing a pivotal role in the dissection and understanding of the intended audience, bolstering endeavours in psychological warfare, or choosing specific targets for digital and real-world engagements. An in-depth scrutiny of social media platforms allows for the accumulation of comprehensive data concerning various networks, participants, and ensuing dialogues, which empowers military factions to grasp the nuances of the informational sphere and the circumstances facing a target demographic without the necessity for physical proximity. With sustained surveillance, social media becomes a reservoir for perceptual clarity regarding the current state of affairs and a beacon for preemptive alerts concerning impending tumultuous events. Nonetheless, the analytical journey through social media landscapes isn't without its hurdles and constraints, encompassing legal and moral dilemmas, an abundance of extraneous data that muddles the clarity of valuable insights, and the complexities involved in quantifying the repercussions of virtual interactions on tangible occurrences.

## **2. Targeting:**

Social media platforms, including Twitter, Facebook, and Google Maps, have been used by military forces to identify potential targets for attacks and to coordinate military actions. In the case of Libya, for example, regime positions were mapped using Google Maps and cell phones, and the information was passed on to NATO to be used in identifying targets and engaging them with air power. In another example, a NATO Air Force attack on a Daesh headquarters building was completed just twenty-two hours

after tracking Daesh social media posts (Gov.uk, 2016). These examples illustrate the ways in which social media is capable of bolstering the efforts undertaken in military operations, including targeting and intelligence collection. However, there are also challenges and limitations to using social media in this way, including legal and ethical considerations and the difficulty of differentiating valuable information from noise in the data stream.

### **3. Cyber operations:**

Cyber operations are a key aspect of how social media is being used in conflict situations. These operations can be either offensive or defensive in nature, and are often used to disrupt the communication and coordination efforts of opposing groups. For example, in the Ukraine conflict, Russian hackers have been known to target Ukrainian social media accounts and websites in order to disrupt their communication and spread disinformation (Csis.org, 2022). At the same time, Ukrainian groups have also used cyber operations to target Russian accounts and websites. Cyber operations can also have tangible real-life consequences, as demonstrated by the Syrian Electronic Army's false tweet about a bombing at the White House, which caused a significant dip in the stock market. It is important for both state and non-state actors to be aware of the potential for cyber operations in modern conflict situations, and to take appropriate measures to protect against them.

### **4. Defence:**

Defense on social media means keeping social media places, pages, and accounts safe at the tech level (Sto.nato.int, 2018). This might mean using

secret codes, software to stop tracking, and hiding IP addresses to keep accounts secure. Not caring enough about keeping operations secret and basic internet safety has led to many fighters, especially in Syria, losing their lives. Because of this, terror groups began to use chat places with secret codes to talk and make their followers more extreme. For instance, Daesh told their people about the risks of not following internet safety and set up an online place for help and a guide on how to stay safe while online (Unesdoc.unesco.org, n.d., 2022). Also, the hacker group Anonymous did something by breaking into Daesh's social media after the terror attacks in Paris and sent out a message on the chat app Telegram with advice on how not to get hacked.

#### **5. Command and control (C2):**

Command and Control (C2) involves using social media to talk within the group, share info, operate together, coordinate and line up actions (Sto.nato.int, 2014). This is really key for groups not linked to any government, like those fighting against it, particularly if they don't have an official organisation or if they're scattered across big spaces. Social media offers them a path to send messages and arrange their moves. Still, when they use social media, it lets spy groups see what these fighters are up to. Also, when these groups use social media for their C2- command and control, it's tricky for traditional military forces to hit their command networks because there isn't just one network, place, or actual thing to target (Nato.int, 2016). Using social media for "swarming" tactics, or sharing info to get groups not tied to a government but with the same goals to focus on one thing, was also something we saw in the Arab Spring uprisings and supposedly used by Iran's leaders to fight back. To stay safe, the terror

group Daesh does most of its command-and-control stuff in chat apps you need an invite for and places where people play games together, but there's been some planning spotted on places anyone can see, like Twitter (Issuu.com, 2016).

## **6. Inform and Influence:**

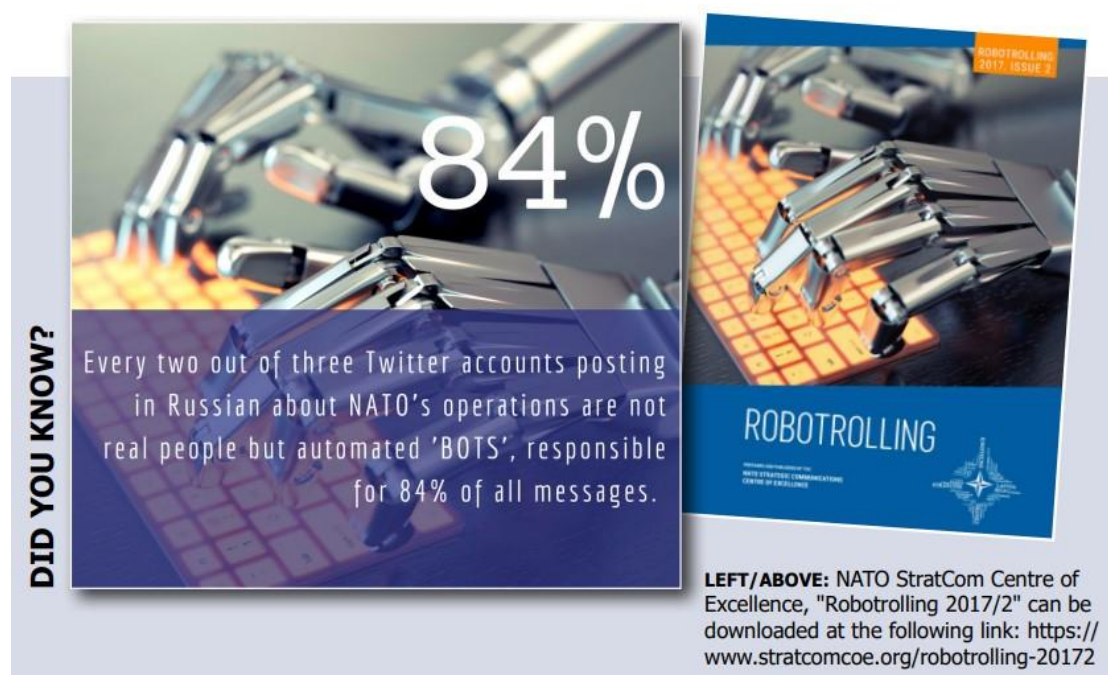
Inform and Influence, also known as psychological warfare (Rand.org, n.d, 2022), talks about using info to change what people find important (values) , what they think is true (beliefs), how they see things (perceptions), how they feel (emotions), and what makes them want to do something reasoning, and behaviour of a target audience. By using social media, armies can try to change, tell, affect, control, uncover, lessen, advertise, trick, force, discourage, get ready, or make people believe what they want. They can do this in clear ways, like making official profiles and websites, or in secret ways, like using fake names, groups of fake users, and trolling. You can use both clear and hidden ways together for information actions on social media.

But how various groups in a conflict use different methods to give information and affect people's thinking can be different. NATO rules don't let them secretly do things to change what people think or do. But terror groups and governments that don't let people have a say sometimes don't care about what's right or legal and use these tricks, even the hidden ones, to change how people think. In recent operations against Ukraine, Russian forces demonstrated the use of covert operations by disseminating massive amounts of propaganda, dishonesty and made-up stories on the internet using fake accounts, computer programs that act like people, and large groups of people who try to make trouble. These operations can blur

the line between peacetime and wartime and may not always be officially declared as war.

### **Social Media Trolling**

Trolling refers to a type of online conduct where individuals deliberately engage in disruptive behaviour with the intention of creating conflict and turmoil among those participating in online discussions. There are two types of trolling: "classic trolling," which is done for personal entertainment and has no apparent instrumental purpose, and "hybrid trolling, (Issuu.com, 2016) which is conducted according to the guidance and commands of a government or group to promote a particular ideology (Stratcomcoe.org, 2016). The use of trolling in conflict situations has been demonstrated in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, where pro-Russian comments were made in large numbers on social media sites in Russia, Ukraine, and other countries. These comments supported the Russian narrative and attacked those offering alternative interpretations of events. Trolling has been used to target specific vulnerabilities in different countries, with the objectives and messages varying based on the target audience.



### Image 1. NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence

[https://www.jwc.nato.int/images/stories/threeswords/NATO\\_STRATCOM\\_2018.pdf](https://www.jwc.nato.int/images/stories/threeswords/NATO_STRATCOM_2018.pdf)

The use of trolls and other influence techniques on social media has been a tactic employed by various actors in conflicts to shape public perception and achieve certain objectives. These techniques can vary depending on the target audience and the goals of the trolls. Regarding the Ukraine-Russia conflict, trolls who write in Russian often try to soothe the readers, distort facts about Russia's economy, and show strong support for the President and government. Trolls using Ukrainian aim to tarnish the reputation and embarrass the President and government of Ukraine. Meanwhile, those who write in Polish attempt to persuade internet users that the conflict in Ukraine doesn't concern them.

While analysing conversations on social media platforms used in Ukraine, Poland, and Russia concerning the Ukraine-Russia conflict, distinct trends in the use of influence methods became evident. These techniques include



aggression towards other participants, labelling, use of historical references, demonstrating superiority, use of irony and sarcasm, promotion of conspiracy theories, blaming other countries for conflict, redirecting discussion to other issues, emphasising Slavic unity, using social proof, portraying Russia as a powerful and unscrupulous country, dehumanising Ukrainians, and presenting large amounts of data without proper sources or verification. These techniques were used to influence the views and behaviours of the participants in the discussions.

### **The identification of trolls:**

The identification of trolls in social media and web comments can be difficult due to varying criteria. However, some indicators may serve as signals for trolling activity (Nato.int, 2020). These include posting a large number of comments, consistently pro-Russian content, references to websites supporting Russia or substantial portions of content copied from such websites, repetitive posting of the same message, lack of engagement in conversation with other users, and an absence of comments on non-political topics unless they are pro-Russian. In addition, trolls may exhibit illiteracy or spelling mistakes when operating in languages other than Russian.

While individual indicators may not be enough to conclusively identify someone as a troll, they can serve as red flags that prompt a more detailed investigation. It's crucial to analyse a user's behaviour comprehensively, considering the context and patterns of their online activity. This deeper analysis is necessary because trolling can be multifaceted and sometimes subtle, so snap judgments based on a few posts or comments can be

misleading. For those who are not experts in digital forensics or cyberpsychology, preliminary identification can be challenging.

Fortunately, resources like the basic trolling identification guide from the StratCom COE (NATO's Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence in Latvia) are invaluable. This guide provides practical steps for everyday internet users to begin differentiating typical online behaviour from potential trolling. It's an accessible starting point that helps users navigate the complex digital landscape, encouraging a more informed and cautious approach to interpreting online interactions

## INTERNET TROLLING IDENTIFICATION TUTORIAL



**Image 2. The simple trolling identification manual developed by the NATO StratCom COE (Stratcomcoe.org, 2016) study could help Internet users with preliminary identification**  
[https://stratcomcoe.org/pdfs/?file=/publications/download/full\\_report\\_trolling\\_25012016.pdf?zoom=page-fit](https://stratcomcoe.org/pdfs/?file=/publications/download/full_report_trolling_25012016.pdf?zoom=page-fit)

## **What measures can NATO and its members take to detect and mitigate the harmful exploitation of social media?**

The use of the internet and social media to conduct attacks on infrastructure and influence people's thoughts and behaviours in support of military activities is likely to continue and grow. The swift surge in internet usage, encompassing the utilisation of social media networks and mobile applications, has vividly showcased this progression. The tactics employed by entities like Russia to shape the perceptions of their desired audiences encompass a spectrum from transparent sharing of media and formal proclamations to secretive strategies such as sharing deceptive images, creating counterfeit profiles, spreading unfounded rumours, practising deceit, and deploying social manipulation.

These actors don't make a clear distinction between actions taken during peacetime and those during wartime, and they don't adhere to the same legal and moral principles that NATO and its member nations uphold. Non-government groups, in particular, can swiftly adjust to emerging prospects brought about by technological advancements, while states and organisations are slower and less effective in responding due to bureaucratic restraints and a lack of tolerance for mistakes by their communicators.

Attempts to curb the dissemination of terrorist propaganda or other harmful exploitation of social media via technological or policy limitations have proven to be ineffective (Nato.int, 2022). Instead, having a stronger presence on social media yields better results than trying to restrict the

circulation of content from other information sources. Ignorance and lack of engagement in social media are no longer viable options for decision-makers in NATO and its member states .

### **Procedures Inside NATO**

The targeted country has the primary responsibility for responding to hybrid threats or attacks. NATO Allies have strengthened their national resilience against such threats and have improved their ability to understand the threat picture across the Alliance (Nato.int, 2022) .

NATO is ready to support any member nation in countering hybrid threats as a component of collective defence and has devised a plan to tackle such threats. Since 2016, NATO has affirmed that hybrid activities targeting one or more member nations could trigger the activation of Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. In 2018, NATO leaders concurred on the creation of counter-hybrid support teams to offer customised aid to member nations upon their request.

The Alliance is also strengthening its coordination with partners, such as the European Union, in efforts to counter hybrid threats and actively counter disinformation with facts online, on air, and in print.

## **CHAPTER IV. Case studies**

### **Case 1: The integration of physical and social media warfare in Syrian Conflict**

The Syrian civil war, which began in 2011 and continues to this day, has been marked by the extensive use of social media by all sides involved in the conflict. The Syrian government, opposition groups, and various other actors have used social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to disseminate propaganda, recruit supporters, and shape public opinion (Unodc.org, 2012). The integration of physical and social media warfare has played a significant role in the Syrian conflict, with both the Syrian government and opposition groups using these platforms to coordinate attacks and share intelligence (Cfr.org, n.d, 2023).

One specific example of the integration of physical and social media warfare in the Syrian conflict is the use of social media by the Syrian government to disseminate propaganda and shape public opinion. The Syrian government has used state-controlled media outlets and social media platforms to present a positive narrative of its actions and portray the opposition as terrorists (Mercycorps.org, 2019). This has included the use of hashtags and social media campaigns to promote the government's narrative and mobilise support.

Another example is the use of social media by opposition groups to coordinate attacks and share intelligence. Opposition groups have used social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Telegram to communicate

with each other and coordinate operations. They have also used social media to share intelligence and information on the whereabouts and movements of government forces (Govinfo.gov, n.d, 2017). The integration of physical battlefield operations with social media operations has been instrumental in enabling the opposition to withstand the Syrian government's military offensive.

In this thesis, we have sought to understand the relationship between conflict dynamics in Syria and social media usage on Twitter from 2014 to 2017 (ResearchGate, 2022). Rather than analysing the content of posts, Our emphasis lies in observing alterations in account behaviour as a sign of real-world conflict developments. We assess the usage of Twitter in the Jebel Saman district, primarily controlled by rebels and encompassing Aleppo city, which bore the brunt of clashes and government offensives, with the pro-government Latakia district, which is home to Russian military bases and a majority Alawi population. Our findings indicate that shifts in the course of the conflict, such as the conclusion of the government-imposed siege on Aleppo in December 2016, align with notable alterations in the demographic makeup of active accounts in the area.

The use of social media by civilians during ongoing civil conflict has received limited attention in the literature, and this research aims to contribute to our understanding of this topic. Previous studies have primarily focused on the use of social media for awareness-raising campaigns or initial mobilisation, rather than examining its use beyond these initial stages. The utilisation of social media by civilians amidst an ongoing conflict can be

influenced by methodological challenges, such as overlooking shifts in the demographics of local users.

The importance of considering changes in the local composition of active accounts when interpreting geo-located social media posts about a conflict. This is especially relevant for scholars and practitioners who rely on these posts to make sense of a conflict. We present a detailed examination of the behavioural trends of Twitter users who specified Syria as their location from 2014 to 2017. This includes tracking the monthly count of newly established accounts and the number of recently inactive accounts (Pomeps.org, n.d. 2021).

Through lowering communication costs, speeding up information spread, and passively gauging the sentiments of conflict participants, social media has wielded significant influence across different stages of conflicts, spanning from individual protests to nationwide revolts and coordinated armed confrontations. Gaining a deeper comprehension of how civilians employ social media amid ongoing conflicts can furnish valuable perspectives into how the conflict influences social media dynamics and how, conversely, social media can impact the evolution of conflicts.

The Syrian civil war has been marked by an extensive use of social media, with all sides in the conflict using these platforms to communicate, spread propaganda and engage with both their domestic and international audiences. There are even claims suggesting that the internet has evolved into a tool of warfare in the Syrian conflict, often dubbed as the most heavily influenced civil conflict through social media in history (Alnap.org,

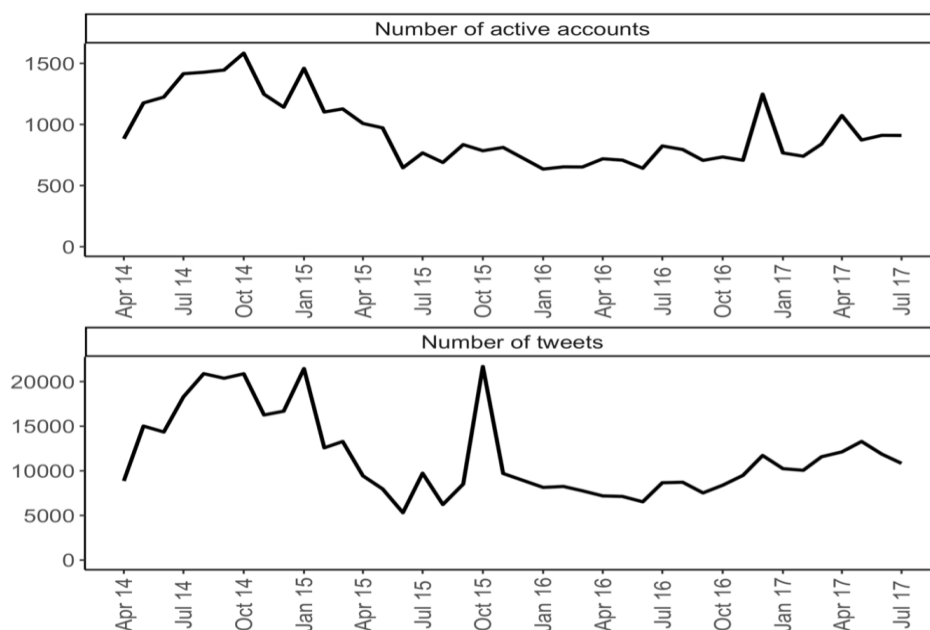


n.d, 2014). While the Syrian government has lifted its ban on social media platforms, internet access in the country remains highly controlled and surveilled. The abundance of social media data from the conflict has led to the development of creative approaches for researching the conflict from a distance, though some have warned that this data can provide only an illusion of complete information. There has been limited investigation into the impact of these constraints or distortions on the data, as well as how alterations in the conflict itself, like changes in territorial dominance or the composition of conflict participants, impact social media discourse.

To study the impact of conflict on social media behaviour, researchers have analysed geolocated tweets from Syria. These tweets were gathered in real-time using Twitter's POST statuses/filter endpoint, which acquires tweets that include longitude and latitude coordinates. While merely 2-3% of tweets worldwide include location information, an estimated 12.91% of Arabic tweets are geotagged (Developer.twitter.com, n.d, 2020). By querying the stored tweets for those sent from Syria between April 2014 and October 2017, we are able to gather a dataset of 474,223 tweets from 20,926 unique accounts. This dataset was used to calculate monthly metrics such as the number of tweets and active accounts, as well as indicators like the number of accounts created and accounts that became inactive (defined as accounts that stopped tweeting for at least three months).

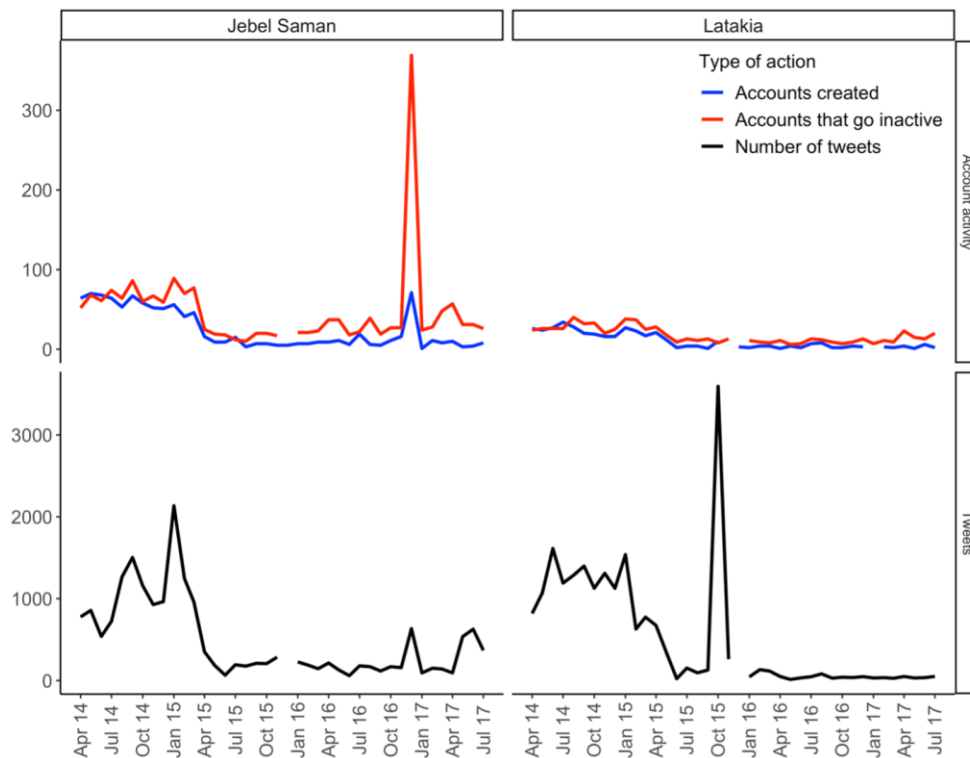
Images 3 and 4 show the number of active accounts and tweets from April 2014 to July 2017 in Syria, as well as account activity in the districts of Jebel Saman and Latakia.

The trends in the number of active accounts and tweets generally follow each other, with a surge in tweets occurring in October 2015 and an increase in account creation in December 2016 (Pomeps.org, n.d, 2020). These spikes correspond to important offline events, such as the beginning of the Russian military intervention in the conflict and the end of the siege in Aleppo. At the level of individual districts, the patterns occasionally align with national trends, while at other times, they diverge, with important offline events often corresponding with divergences. In December 2016, for example, There was a notable shift in the makeup of Twitter accounts at the local level in Jebel Saman, with a large increase in the number of inactive accounts and a smaller increase in the number of new accounts being created. This divergence from the national trend, which showed an increase in the number of active accounts, may be attributed to the events of the Aleppo siege.



**Image 3: Activity by accounts geo-located in Syria, April 2014 – July 2017**

<https://pomeps.org/changing-sources-social-media-activity-during-civil-war>



**Image 4: Changes in geo-located account activity, April 2014 – July 2017**

<https://pomeps.org/changing-sources-social-media-activity-during-civil-war>

It is estimated that approximately 2,585 accounts in Syria became inactive in December 2016, Meanwhile, 549 accounts were initiated during that period. A more detailed analysis of the accounts that became dormant in Jebel Saman during this timeframe, reveals that they are more popular and have a lower positive sentiment compared to those that remained active. These accounts also tend to tweet longer messages but use fewer positive words. The newly active accounts in Jebel Saman during this period are more likely to have English bios and convey less sentiment in their tweets,

despite posting longer messages. In contrast, the pattern of activity in Latakia in 2015 and 2016 differs significantly from that in Jebel Saman, with little variation in the number of active or inactive accounts and a sharp increase in tweet activity in October 2015 coinciding with the Russian intervention in the conflict. The divergent patterns of account activity in these two districts may be influenced by changes in user behaviour or population movements, as well as by the political and security context of the conflict.

**Case 2: The integration of physical and social media warfare in Ukraine Conflict - The Ukraine invasion isn't the inaugural conflict waged through social media, but it's undeniably the most viral.**

The role of social media in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine highlights the increasing importance of these e-Platforms in shaping public opinion and influencing the narrative of a conflict. The extensive use of social media by both sides has allowed for the dissemination of propaganda and the promotion of contrasting narratives about the war. The scale of information being uploaded on social media about the war is vast, with videos on TikTok alone accumulating billions of views in the first week of the war.



### **Image 5: Ukraine government official Twitter Post**

<https://x.com/ZelenskyUa/status/1503046528071618562?s=20>

The opposing narratives presented by Russia and Ukraine illustrate the power of social media in shaping the perceptions of a conflict. Russia portrays the war as a necessary defensive measure, while Ukraine portrays it as an act of aggression. The role of social media has also allowed for the coordination of operations and the sharing of intelligence by both sides.

In addition to Russia and Ukraine, other state actors such as China and Belarus have also engaged in efforts to portray the conflict on their own terms through coordinated disinformation campaigns on social media platforms (EUAA.europa.eu, 2022). These campaigns have further complicated the narrative of the war and have the potential to influence its outcome.

Overall, the use of social media in the Russia-Ukraine conflict highlights the increasing role of these platforms in shaping the dynamics of a conflict and influencing public opinion. Further research on the use of social media in conflicts like this one could provide valuable insights into the ways in which these platforms are used to shape the narrative of a conflict.

## **Example 1**

### **Use of social media by Russian-backed separatists**

One example of the integration of physical and social media warfare in the Ukraine conflict is the use of social media by Russian-backed separatists to coordinate military operations. In 2014, Russian-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine used social media platforms such as Vkontakte and Odnoklassniki to coordinate military operations, spread propaganda and recruit fighters.

Vkontakte and Odnoklassniki were two of the most widely-used social media platforms in Ukraine in 2014. Vkontakte, which means "in contact," was created as a Russian alternative to Facebook and offered a range of free entertainment options such as Russian movies, artists, and stand-up shows. It was launched in 2006 by Pavel Durov and became more popular than Odnoklassniki in 2008. Odnoklassniki, which translates to "classmates," is a social network designed to bring friends, loved ones, and professional contacts together. It was launched in March 2006 by Albert Popkov and had 100,000 accounts, which grew to 25 million by the time a

mobile version was launched in 2008. It was also in this year that groups could be created on the platform, such as for activists.

In response to the pervasive influence of disinformation campaigns, the Ukrainian authorities have initiated their own social media strategies to counteract misleading narratives. These efforts are not just about direct counter-messaging but also involve educating the populace to scrutinise the information they encounter online critically. This approach is vital in empowering citizens to resist manipulation and make informed decisions.

Concurrently, Russian-backed separatists leverage these digital platforms to disseminate their own version of events, aiming to sway public sentiment, especially among Russian-speaking communities. Their strategy relies heavily on exploiting linguistic and cultural ties to foster division and uncertainty. This complex information warfare underscores the critical need for digital literacy and robust counter-propaganda strategies in modern conflict

## Social Media Platforms Supporting Russia's Information Ecosphere

With most U.S.-based social media platforms now restricted, these domestic platforms are facilitating online communication within Russia.



### Vkontakte

Vkontakte (VK) is the most popular Russian social media platform with 100 million monthly users, and 50 million daily users. VK has been banned in Ukraine since 2017.



### Telegram

Since the start of the Russia-Ukraine war, Telegram's use has rapidly increased. In the first three weeks of the war, Telegram users increased by 46 percent and from February to April 2022 it was Russia's most downloaded app with 4.4 million downloads.



### Yandex

Yandex is Russia's most popular search engine, with a 60 percent market share. In April 2022, Yandex agreed to sell its news division to VK.

Data sources: WIRED, New York Times, Intellinews, The Economist, Coda Story

### Image 6: Social Media Platforms Supporting Russia's Ecosphere

<https://dev.ua/storage/images/15/58/91/80/derived/ddc1d27405d423106ad9b5d531544bcf.jpg>

### "Ukrainian soldiers are Nazis"

Russians used social media to spread rumours and fake news about Ukrainian soldiers being Nazis, particularly in the Donbas region (Oecd.org, 2022). These rumours were disseminated via conventional Russian media outlets as well as social media platforms like Vkontakte and Odnoklassniki.





**Conflict News**  
@Conflicts



#Azov battalion troops pose with a nazi and NATO flag in #Ukraine.

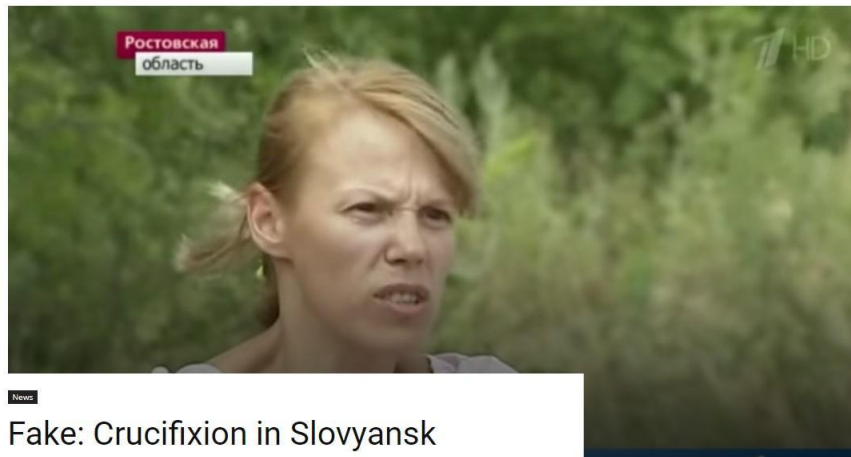


12:55 AM · Nov 28, 2014

**Image 7: Conflict News Twitter Post**

<https://x.com/Conflicts/status/538103872322289664?s=20>

They were characterised as "hate rumours" or "fear rumours" and were meant to exploit people's prejudices or fear. Examples of these rumours included the story of an emergency physician who was denied help to people who were burnt alive and a story about a three-year-old boy being crucified by Ukrainiansoldier.



**Image 8: Mother of three-year-old boy presented being crucified by a Ukrainian soldier**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xf8Gt2Wnv74&t=65s>

These rumours were used to target Russian-speaking audiences in Ukraine and created a challenge for the country in terms of countering Russian influence operations on social media.

In 2017, Ukraine decided to block Vkontakte and Odnoklassniki in an effort to limit the influence of Russian propaganda, but the challenges of bots and trolls have been more difficult to counter. In this context, educating citizens is crucial in order to reduce the attractiveness of Russian propaganda.

## **Example 2**

### **Use of social media by the Ukrainian government**

Another example of the integration of physical and social media warfare in the Ukraine conflict is the utilisation of social media by the Ukrainian government and military to counter Russian propaganda and influence public opinion. The Ukrainian government and military have used social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube to disseminate information about the conflict and counter Russian propaganda. This has included the use of hashtags and social media campaigns to raise awareness about the conflict and the actions of the Russian-backed separatists.

### **The "Don't be fooled" campaign**

The initiation of the 'Don't be deceived' campaign took place in 2015 by the Ukrainian government and military in an effort to counter Russian propaganda and disinformation tactics (Economist.com, 2017). The campaign aimed to educate Ukrainian citizens about how to identify and debunk false information, particularly information being spread on social networking platforms like Facebook and Twitter. The campaign utilised a variety of materials, including informational videos and infographics, in order to reach a wide audience and help them become more critical of the information they encountered online. By raising awareness about the tactics being used by Russia to influence public opinion and spread disinformation, the "Don't be fooled" campaign aimed to help Ukrainian citizens protect themselves from being swayed by false or misleading

information and to make more informed decisions about the conflict and its causes.

The utilisation of social media has had a notable impact on the Ukrainian government and military supporting Ukraine's cause. These factions have employed social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, to disseminate information about the conflict and counter Russian propaganda. Social media has also allowed for a productive exchange of content between Russian opposition and Western sources.

### **Example 3**

#### **Amplification of propaganda spreading through RU bots**

A third example of the integration of physical and social media warfare in the Ukraine conflict is the use of bot accounts in social media manipulation by Russians (Leics.police.uk, 2019)

We looked at the role of bots in the dissemination of Russian propaganda on social media, particularly in terms of how they contributed to the spread of pro-Russian hashtags and retweets of other accounts. We found that while bots made up only 20.28% of the accounts in our sample, they were responsible for a disproportionate amount of the retweets, accounting for 25.72% of them (Uk.Defence.Journal.org.uk, 2022). In contrast, bots were responsible for a smaller percentage of source tweets and likes, with 20.82% and 17.54%, respectively, being generated by bots. These results

suggest that bots played a significant role in amplifying Russian propaganda through retweeting. However, the majority of content generation and likes were done by human accounts.

In the midst of ongoing conflict in Ukraine, a bot farm has been discovered and dismantled by the country's state security service (SSU). The farm, located in Kyiv, Kharkiv, and Vinnytsia, was responsible for spreading disinformation through the use of 1,000,000 bots. To create these bots, the operators behind the farm utilized 5,000 SIM cards for the registration of fresh social media accounts, which were then managed through the use of custom software and 200 proxy servers that helped to conceal the fraudulent activity.

Disinformation campaigns such as these can be particularly effective during times of crisis, as people may be more susceptible to believing false information when they are already feeling uncertain or stressed. Russian actors have a long history of engaging in disinformation efforts, and have particularly targeted the Ukrainian population through the use of bot farms. In February 2022, Meta removed multiple sets of fraudulent Facebook accounts that were disseminating misleading information, and in March 2022, the SSU (Security Service of Ukraine) disclosed that it had discovered and shut down five bot farms with a total of 100,000 fake social media accounts.

Ukraine's President, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, has also been subjected to disinformation campaigns, involving the circulation of false information through deep fake videos on Facebook and cyberattacks on Ukrainian radio

stations, which have been attributed to Russian actors. In response, the SSU (Security Service of Ukraine) has detected and thwarted more than 1,200 cyberattacks against the government and other critical entities. They have also removed 500 YouTube channels with a combined subscriber base of 15 million. Additionally, the agency has reported and taken action against 1,500 Telegram channels and bots, as well as 1,500 Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok accounts responsible for disseminating Russian propaganda. The potential impact of fake news and disinformation is substantial, especially during times of conflict, and efforts to counter these activities continue.

An analysis by QUT disinformation expert Tim Graham (Arxiv.org, 2022) as found that thousands of suspicious accounts are boosting tweets from Russian government accounts spreading disinformation about the war in Ukraine. Graham found that over 800 accounts are almost certainly bot accounts, while thousands more are highly likely to be. The bot accounts are responsible for a disproportionate proportion of retweets, acting as amplifiers of Russian propaganda. Twitter has rejected Graham's conclusions, but claims to have removed over 75,000 spam accounts since the war in Ukraine began.

#### **Example 4**

##### **Use of messaging Apps (WhatsApp, Telegram) in conflict**

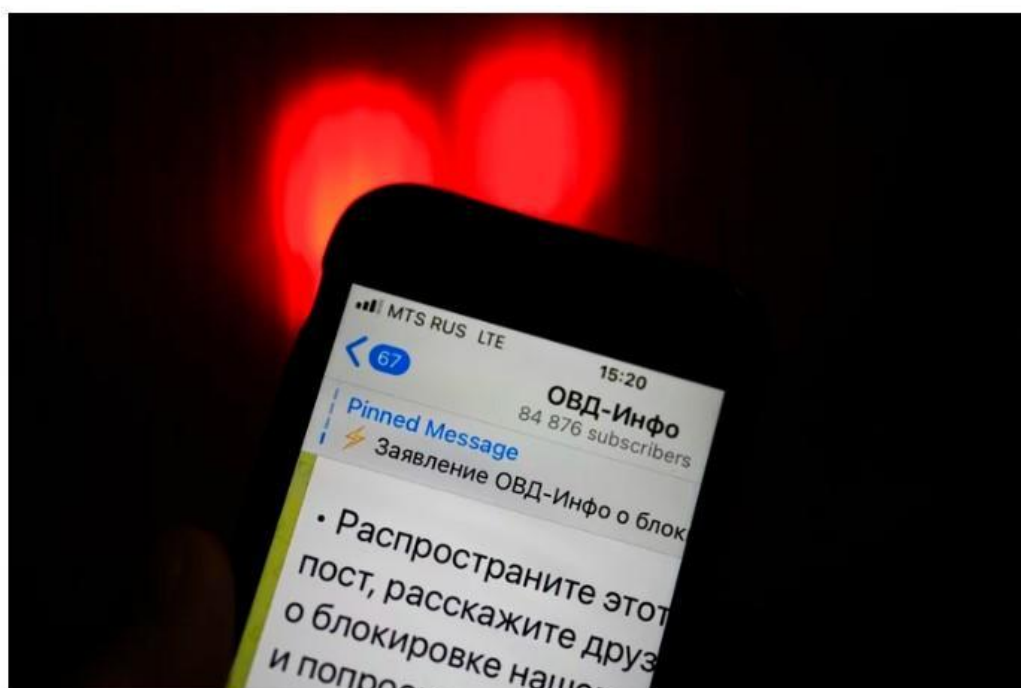
In the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, messaging apps like WhatsApp and Telegram have played a significant role in facilitating communication and

coordination among various parties involved in the conflict (Odessa-journal.com, 2022) . These apps have been used by both the Ukrainian military and separatist rebel groups to share information and coordinate operations on the battlefield.

One way in which these messaging apps have been used is for the sharing of intelligence and information about the movements and actions of enemy forces. Both sides have used these apps to communicate with their respective networks of informants and to share information about the whereabouts and activities of their opponents. This has allowed them to gain an advantage on the battlefield by staying informed about the enemy's movements and plans.

## Telegram is the app of choice in the war in Ukraine despite experts' privacy concerns

March 14, 2022 · 7:19 PM ET



An iPhone screen shows a Telegram account of OVD-Info, prominent legal aid group in Russia that tracks political arrests in Moscow.

Alexander Zemlianichenko/AP

### Image 9: Telegram role in War of Ukraine

<https://www.hrw.org/news?filter0=669&filter1=7&page=218>

Another way in which these messaging apps have been used is for the coordination of military operations. Both the Ukrainian military and separatist rebel groups have used these apps to communicate with their commanders and troops on the ground, allowing them to coordinate



attacks and other military actions. The ability to communicate quickly and securely has been essential for the successful execution of many military operations in the conflict.

In addition to their use by military forces, these messaging apps have also been used by civilians in Ukraine to stay informed about the conflict and to share information with each other. Many people in Ukraine have used these apps to stay in touch with their friends and family, as well as to share news and updates about the conflict with a wider audience. This has helped to keep the public informed about the situation on the ground, even in areas where traditional news sources are unavailable or unreliable.

Overall, the use of messaging apps like WhatsApp and Telegram in the conflict in Ukraine has played a significant role in facilitating communication and coordination among various parties involved in the conflict. These apps have allowed military forces to share intelligence and coordinate operations, and have also helped to keep the public informed about the situation on the ground. It is likely that the use of these and other communication technologies will continue to be an important factor in the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.

### **Example 5**

#### **The utilisation of social media platforms for recruitment purposes**

During the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, both sides have made use of social media platforms for recruitment purposes. This has included the use of Twitter, Facebook, and other platforms to spread propaganda, rally support, and attract new recruits to their cause (Research.qut.edu.au, n.d, 2022).



**Image 10. Twitter post on the official Page of Ukraine**  
(<https://x.com/Ukraine/status/1500063375035936768?s=20>)

One example of this is the utilization of social media by pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine. These groups have used Facebook, Twitter, and other platforms to spread their message, promote their cause, and recruit new members. This has included the use of hashtags, viral videos, and other tactics to spread their message and attract support.

The Ukrainian government and military have also made use of social media as a recruitment tool. They have used these platforms to present a positive narrative of the conflict, highlight their successes on the battlefield, and attract new recruits to their ranks. This has included the use of propaganda, as well as more subtle tactics such as highlighting the benefits of military service and the sense of national pride that comes with it.

Social media's use as a recruitment tool has proven to be successful for both sides, involved in the conflict. It allows them to reach a wide audience, including young people who may not otherwise be exposed to their message. It also allows them to bypass traditional media outlets, which may be controlled by the other side or present a more balanced view of the conflict.

The use of social media for recruitment has not been without controversy, however. Both sides have been accused of spreading misinformation and propaganda in an effort to recruit new members. There have also been concerns about the use of social media to radicalise and recruit young people into extremist groups.

In general, employing social media as a recruitment method in the Ukrainian conflict underscores the influence these platforms wield in moulding public sentiment and impacting the progression of the conflict. It also underscores the importance of responsible use of social media, and the need to ensure that these platforms are not used to spread misinformation or radicalise young people.

### **Comparison of the two case studies (Syria Vs Ukraine)**

Both the Syrian and Ukrainian conflicts have seen the utilisation of social media as a tool for spreading propaganda and disinformation. In the Syrian conflict, various parties, including the Syrian government, opposition groups, and foreign governments, have used social media platforms to disseminate their own narratives and manipulate public opinion. The utilisation of social media has had a substantial impact on moulding public perception of the conflict, with various parties using platforms such as Twitter and Facebook to spread misinformation and propaganda.

In the Ukrainian conflict, Russia has been accused of using social media to spread disinformation and sow discord among the Ukrainian population. Russian state-controlled media outlets and pro-Russian trolls have been active in spreading fake news and manipulating public opinion on social media platforms. The Ukrainian government has also been active in combating these efforts, with the Ukrainian security service (SSU) dismantling several bot farms that were used to spread Russian propaganda on social media.

Overall, the use of social media in both the Syrian and Ukrainian conflicts has highlighted the potential for these platforms to be weaponized and used as a tool for spreading propaganda and misinformation. Both conflicts have also seen efforts by various parties to counter these efforts and promote accurate information.

## **V. Conclusion**

### **Summary of key findings**

It seems that social media has had a notable role in both the Syrian and Ukrainian conflicts. In Syria, the government, opposition groups, and other actors have used social media platforms to disseminate propaganda, recruit supporters, and shape public opinion. Both the Syrian government and opposition groups have also used social media to coordinate attacks and share intelligence.

In Ukraine, pro-Russian actors have established botnets and used automated accounts to spread disinformation, while Russian trolls have used social media to create emotional tension and start campaigns or groups for people with similar opinions. In both conflicts, new technologies have facilitated strategies such as access to satellite internet and tracking of private jets. However, social media has also been used by civilians to communicate with each other, share information and personal stories, and seek help and support.

### **Implications for the future use of social media in conflict**

Increased integration of physical and social media warfare: As social media platforms continue to evolve and become more widely used, it is likely that they will become increasingly integrated with physical warfare. This could include the use of social media for intelligence gathering, coordination of attacks, and dissemination of propaganda.

Rising importance of social media in shaping public opinion: Social media has become a key platform for shaping public opinion, particularly during times of conflict. Governments and other actors will likely continue to use social media to shape the narrative and influence public opinion, both domestically and internationally.

Growing influence of social media on decision-making: The extensive use of social media by governments and other actors during times of conflict may lead to it playing a larger role in decision-making processes. This could include using social media to gather intelligence, assess public sentiment, and shape policy decisions.

Increased use of social media for recruitment and radicalization: Social media has become a key platform for recruitment by extremist and terrorist groups. This trend is likely to continue in the future, with groups using social media to target and radicalise individuals.

Enhanced role of social media in peacebuilding efforts: Social media can also be used as a tool for peacebuilding, particularly in post-conflict situations. It can be used to facilitate dialogue and reconciliation, as well as to disseminate information about peacebuilding efforts.

## **Recommendations for further research**

There are several recommendations for further research on the topic of the integration of physical and social media warfare in conflicts.

Firstly, there is a need for more comprehensive and longitudinal studies on the use of social media in conflicts, particularly those that go beyond initial mobilisation phases and examine the use of social media throughout the duration of the conflict. This would offer a more comprehensive comprehension of the changing role of social media in conflicts and how it is employed by different parties at varying phases of the conflict.

Secondly, there is a need for more in-depth analysis of the content of social media posts in conflict, including the types of messages and narratives being disseminated, as well as the sources and motivations behind these messages. This would provide a better understanding of the propaganda and disinformation campaigns being waged on social media and their impact on public opinion and the broader conflict.

Thirdly, there is a need for more research on the role of social media in shaping public opinion and mobilising support during conflicts. This could include studies on the influence of social media on public attitudes towards the conflict, as well as the ways in which social media is used to mobilise support for specific causes or groups.

Fourthly, there is a requirement for additional research on how social media influences the actions and choices of individuals engaged in

conflicts. This could include studies on the ways in which social media influences the strategies and tactics of various actors, as well as the role of social media in shaping the outcome of conflicts.

Finally, there is a need for more research on the role of social media in peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts in conflicts. This could include studies on the ways in which social media is used to facilitate dialogue and build bridges between conflicting parties, as well as the impact of social media on post-conflict reconciliation and rebuilding efforts.



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