Influence of Digital Images on the Propagation of Fake News on Twitter in Russia and Ukraine Crisis

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Abstract

Fake news, misinformation, and disinformation are problems in every country, especially during conflict. The Russian and Ukraine crisis witnessed an increased scope and impact of such fake images shared on Twitter to instigate the violence. Within this context, the study examines the influence of digital images on the propagation of fake news on Twitter in the Russia and Ukraine crisis. The objectives of the study are to (i) find out if fake digital images on Twitter are used as an attack tool (ii) to study digital images on Twitter as a platform for sharing fake news (iii) to investigate if digital images are used on Twitter as a pull prank, and (iv) to ascertain whether digital images on Twitter are used to derail the crisis. The theoretical lens of Technological Determinism and Visual Rhetoric Theories was used to serve the study goal. The study used Semiotic, and Qualitative Content Analysis as research methods. The population of the study consists of 10 fake images that were shared on Twitter with the period of the study. Purposive sampling was used to select eight images for analysis. The study discovered that fake digital images on Twitter were used as an attack tool. The findings of the study revealed that digital images on Twitter serve as a platform for sharing fake news. The study found that digital images are used on Twitter as a pull prank. Similarly, the findings of the study revealed that digital images on Twitter are used to derail the crisis. Based on the findings, the study concludes that the use of social media in spreading fake digital images in times of war like this should not be relied on as it will create more damage to such a crisis.

I. Introduction

Fake news has become one of the major issues in international debates in recent times. Existing studies show that fake news is not a new phenomenon. Scholars like Bauma, et al., (2017) remark that fake news has been in existence as far back as 1925, and gain prominence during the US presidential elections in 2016. Omar et al., (2022) observed that the significant point regarding fake news in contemporary society today is the speed at which it is diffused by people as occasioned by the internet and other social media like Twitter among others. A study by Wang et al (2022) suggest that the use of social media is often diffused by young people which may be susceptible to negative direction as a result of fake news (Owens-Ibie & Aondover, 2024).

The current Russia and Ukraine crisis has been associated with a lot of fake news of negative attributes to create potential panic, fear, and violence, among others. Given the negative outcomes of fake news on social media, especially Twitter on the Russia and Ukraine crisis called for serious action to address the issue of fake news,

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misinformation, and disinformation globally. The fight against fake news has become a global trend as a result of many technology companies like Twitter, WhatsApp, Facebook, Google, etc need to involve in the global fight against fake news (Ahmed & Msughter, 2022).

Fake news is a trending word not only in the field of journalism but across other professions. For instance, the *Washington Post* was also said to have over 7, 600 articles that contained fake news and images as of two years ago (Spectra, 2017). It remains one of the disturbing dilemmas in the 21st century in the media. As observed by Elele (2018) President Donald Trump brought the term to global notice during his electioneering campaign and his administration, and his tweets continued to increase its usage. Wang et al (2022) remark that Trump often used the term 'fake news' within the context of offensive phrases against his critics and other media conglomerates "while flooding communication networks with slander, evasions, and misinformation." She maintains that the popularisation of it by President Trump has accelerated the decline in the credibility of America on a global scene (Aondover et al., 2022).

Fake news is information that is deliberately calculated to mislead, or meant to be wholly false in content. Gallagher and Magid (2017) align with the description that the motivation for creating fake content is to cause harm and unrest. However, when it is mild, it is usually used as a prank. They maintain that others do it for financial gains, or for politically motivated reasons with the intention to deceive people. According to BBC (2022), lack of credibility of information in some cases has created a wide range of rumors. As observed by Pate (2021) the media need to verify and disseminate information on the basis of credibility, which should be based on truthfulness, competence, relevance, and dynamism. Similarly, Nigeria's Minister of Information, Lai Muhammed states that the campaign for fake news needs global attention, considering the dangers posed by such fake news. He reinstates that peace and security are the corporate existence of any nation, and each and every nation has a role to play in curtailing the spread of fake news.

Russia and Ukraine like any other country in the world are proliferated with a high level of fake news. This is evidence on Twitter in the recent prevalence of fake images in the crisis. Some of the fake images were shared on Twitter which is not connected to the recent development in the two countries (Olan et al., 2022). This indicates that fake news does not exist only in text. Images are often accompanied by fake news to enhance their believability. As observed by Pennycook and Rand (2021) the online anonymity space has created the habit of the internet to contribute to the escalation of fake news. Furthermore, fake news, misinformation, and disinformation circulating on social media serve as a 'looming danger' capable of destabilizing the collective peaceful coexistence of people (Pérez, 2020). The role of fake news in any country weakens the development initiative of any nation like in the case of what is happening in Russia and Ukraine now.

Within this context, there is an existing gap in the literature on the influence of digital images on the propagation of fake news on Twitter in the Russia and Ukraine crisis. To bridge this gap, new methodological and theoretical approaches must be put in place to address the issue of fake news. Because fake news has created confusion, restiveness, and apprehension, state of emergency, across countries and continents (*Premium Times,* 2018). Based on the propensity of fake news on Twitter that foments trouble in Russia and Ukraine recently, the need to examine digital images on the propagation of fake news on Twitter become apt.

1.1 Problem Statement

There have been scholarly interrogations on the context of fake news recently. One of the most credible ways to ascertain the credibility of a piece of information is by verifying, or scrutinizing digital images (Osuagwu, 2019). This reflects the axioms that say "seeing is believing" and "a picture is worth a thousand words." Incidentally, the progression in digital images on social media permits the manipulation of pictures, audio, or even videos. The guarantee of the authenticity of such images in the public domain is no longer visible. This has altered the fake representation of photographs, which posed a huge challenge of trust, and credibility on social media channels.

The spread of fake news all over the world has been associated with panic, restiveness, ethnic and intercommunion conflicts which often result in the destruction of lives and properties. Given the scenario of Russia and Ukraine, there is a need for a global response to address the issue of fake news. Interestingly, there have been global industry actions to curtail the spread of fake news. For instance, Google has set the pace by committing over 300 million dollars to fight fake news (BBC, 2017). Similarly, Twitter has taken about 70 fake news, Facebook 583 million fake accounts. Despite this, the spread of fake news goes unabated, and more still needs to be done to address the issue of fake news.

As noted by Singh and Sharma (2021) photos and stories that are published all over the world faced the challenge of authenticity. It is difficult to check the credibility of such stories and photos. The issue of fake news in image presentation has also posed a challenge to national development. The manifestations of these fake images on social media have a negative influence on the audience. To support this argument, a study carried out by BBC (2018) found that a significant amount of fake stories are been shared online, and most of them are not written text, but images and memes because people prefer images over words. Despite the popularity of fake news occasioned by social media in promoting fake digital images all over the world, adequate attention has not been properly given outside and within academia to address the issue. Al-Zaman (2021) observes that there is a need for academic interrogation into the issue of fake news, misinformation, and disinformation, which have provoked scientific inquiry on the influence of digital images on the propagation of fake news on Twitter in the Russia and Ukraine crisis.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine the influence of digital images on the propagation of fake news on Twitter in the Russia and Ukraine crisis. To achieve this broad aim as informed by the existing gap in the literature, the following specific objectives are set:
1. To find out if fake digital images on Twitter are used as an attack tool.
2. To study digital images on Twitter as a platform for sharing fake news.
3. To investigate if digital images are used on Twitter as a pull prank.
   To ascertain whether digital images on Twitter are used to derail the crisis.

II. Review of Literatures

2.1 Digital Image

It is apparent in the literature that digital images are two-dimensional images that are often represented in a binary form using social media. Some of these pictures are made by pixel which seems to be a short form of picture elements often organized in a rectangular shape. Some of them are also made in vector, or graphic images that are

mathematically defined by computer software. These images range from logos, diagrams, PowerPoint, and other graphics that could promote, or illustrate such purposes. According to Kurfi and Aondover (2021), it is the representation of images that can be stored, handled, and manipulated by a digital computer, which made the pixel of such images to be brightened by colors.

Osuagwu (2019) observes that digital images have some merits over traditional images because of the ability to convert them, transfer images from one medium to another, and to change them to one's choice, or need using photo editing software like Photo paint, the Gimp, and Photoshop are very easy. The use of such software can also change the shape and brightness of such images (Aondover et al., 2023). Most of these images are created to serve the intention of the producers. They can use color, delete the unwanted portion of the visible objects, or move, and merge such objects with several images. Osuagwu (2019) maintains that some of these fake edited images appear to be more real than normal pictures because of technological applications available in the digital age.

In the case of Russia and Ukraine for example, some of the images presented on Twitter are some of the incidences that have happened years ago. For instance, the emotions were running very high in the Russia and Ukraine crisis by some social media outlets like Twitter where footage of the unbelievable amount of fake images like the chemical explosion on August 12th,2015 in Tianjin, China was represented as the current image of Russia and Ukraine crisis. Another fake digital image spreading was the report of a picture of a father separating from his daughter on social media. According to the report, the father is a Ukrainian who was preparing to fight in the war against Russia, which seems to be a fake image. The fake image circulating on social media was taken on February 21, 2022, about twenty-four hours before the start of the war between Russia, and Ukraine (*The Hill,* 2022; Aondover et al., 2023).

2.2 Digital Images in News

Kurfi and Aondover (2021) are of the view that the role of images in news has always been viewed with mixed reactions, or feelings. Scholars like McQuail (2011) observed that images enhance the credibility of news. Osuagwu (2019) supported that access to information during a crisis is fundamental, especially visual images which are very imperative in handling crisis news (Aondover et al. 2022; Msughter et al., 2023). Such images have the power to shape news content based on the visual ability of such photos, with the assumption that pictures communicate more than words. The ability of images to convince audiences has a greater chance than words (Aondover et al., 2022; Idris & Msughter, 2022).

Salau (2013) notes that news in social media is often presented to be false most of the time on individuals, and the government. He notes that in the context of Nigeria, there have been false images circulating on social media about deaths and bomb threats on Twitter, which turn out to be hoaxes. Fake images have been used from time to time to propagate certain stereotypes like religious and ethnic bigotry, racism, tribal conflicts, among others. Maddens (2017) corroborates that the negative role digital communication has in terms of information dissemination is that of intentional hoaxes and misinformation (Msughter et al., 2022). She notes that images of the yesteryears are often used to reflect current scenes of crisis, and most of the images often give fake profiles of victims on social media (Maikaba & Msughter 2019; Kurfi et al., 2021).

Therefore, the use of fake digital images on social media in times of crisis is rampant globally. Such made-believe images are often created to influence people

negatively during a crisis. Considering the uniqueness of pictures in communication, the need to address the issue of digital fake images is fundamental to the productivity of any journalistic engagement (Maradun et al., 2021). Social media has come to stay in the 21stcentury, and new approaches by scholars to checkmate the activities of fake news on social media need to be intensified in communication scholarship.

2.3 Interrogating the Concept News and Fake News

There has been a consensus among communication scholars like Fry (2017); Sanda and Aondover (2018) that news is a recent account of an event that is of interest to the audience. It is a timely and unusual happening in society. However, the above definition seems to limit taking into cognizance the position of Fry (2017) who observed that the current digital environment often characterized by the proliferation of fake news on social media has redefined the traditional notion of news as the account of an unusual event. In McQuail's (2011) argument, the news is the main information about public events disseminated by all media platforms. Although he observed that one of the distinctive features of news is currency, which has to be based on a factual account (Mojaye & Aondover, 2022).

McQuail's position is in line with Pate (2021) who believes that news content should be based on the credibility of the source of the information. He argued that credibility can be located within the context of truthfulness, competence, relevance, and dynamism. This means a factual account of the event is what qualifies a news item. Incidentally, the era of social media has accentuated fake images of the happenings across countries, and continents. This could be the reason why Fry (2017) believes that the initial traditional notion of news is defeated by the current impositions of new media technologies. According to him, this can be seen in the collapse of the gatekeeping process as a unique feature of news, advertisement, and entertainment (Usman et al., 2022).

On the other hand, fake news is a deliberate fabrication of messages to deceive people. The aim is to create misleading content for believability. Today, a lot of fictions stories are on the increase which serves as a threat or pose danger to society. Nyhan and Jason (2015) note that fake news has a great danger as it can continue to affect attitude after being debunked. Scholars like Fry (2017) affirms the existence of fake news and argues that it is an old phenomenon in news citing the example of *New York Sum,* in 1835, and that of the fake drawings of Spanish officials strip-searching American women published by *Hearst's Morning Journal* that participated in the Spanish American war (Mukherjee, 2017).

Another instance of fake news is the narratives in the US presidential election, and that of the Referendum in Britain which are some of the obvious events that should be able to compare people to agree with the existence of fake news. The use of fake images in Russia and Ukraine is another notable example (Vitalis et al., 2023; Oreoluwa et al., 2024). It is on this note that Rubin et al (2015) note that three typologies of fake news exist which can be attributed to serious fabrications, fraudulent reporting (both in old and new media as yellow journalism), and sensationalism. It often thrives based on exaggeration, fabrication as well as falsification of information (Goldzwig, 2017).

2.4 Empirical Review

Aondover (2020) examines internet memes as a unique form of narratives to help avert the widespread of Covid-19 in Nigeria. The study captures and highlights the usage of photograph memes on Covid-19. The study employs semiotic and qualitative content analysis methods. The study found that Internet memes on Covid-19 explore issues that

contain visual metaphors aimed at establishing what Nigerians are passing through as well as stimulating government participation. Again, social media usage in connection with the pandemic in Nigeria is by creation, uploading, and sharing of images on Covid-19. The study established that internet memes served as an avenue for direct communication, which contributes to creating awareness on Covid-19 to the general public.

Kurfi and Aondover (2021) analyzed the contextual background of images of men's dance competition in Benue State. They study formal descriptions of the internet memes of men's dance competitions and examine iconographic of the internet memes of men's dance competitions in the state. The study espouses the Cultural Populism Theory and Visual Rhetoric Theory. The study adopts Semiotic Analysis (SA) and Text and Textual Analysis (TT). The study employs the purposive sampling technique in the selection of social media and pictures for analysis. The study discovered that visual imageries are used symbolically on social media to show the weakness of men in a dance competition in Benue State.

A study carried out by Duyile in Bello and Aleshinoloye (2019) holds that images could be regarded as significant contributors to the development of Nigerian media, particularly the newspapers. The study found that about two-thirds of the readers identified political cartoons, or images as one of their reasons for purchasing newspapers. Similarly, the study of Sani (2014) maintains that images or cartoons help to set the tone of public discussions on issues of national concern. The study concludes that images are very important as a safe and effective means of communication for print media operators, and therefore, images or cartoonists should be given the recognition they deserve by print media owners.

Ogbo and Nuhu (2016) in their study found that the images of corruption, official responsibility, political failure, and brutality are dominantly presented in that order. It is also clear in the literature that in terms of the portrayal of corruption, the anti-establishment posture of the cartoons or images is directed towards those who were formerly in government and allied institutions. Ogbo and Nuhu (2016) conclude that newspaper images or cartoons have used the instrument of satire to project what they perceived to be the dominant ills of society. Therefore, it is safe to argue that images are fundamental in terms of sharing information on issues affecting people in any society. Within this context, the above empirical studies are imperative because they examined the use of images or cartoons on societal issues, which are significant to this study.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

The study is guided on the theoretical lens of Technological Determinism Theory, and Visual Rhetoric Theory. Technological Determinism Theory as propounded by McLuhan in 1964 explains the change in media technology. He argued that media technology has changed the format of new production and dissemination, as people modify the messages they communicate. According to McLuhan, the medium is the message, and he explains the challenges the medium poses to people in the process of shaping their thoughts. McLuhan sees the new technology as having the capacity of uncontrollable influence in the sharing of messages, which can be manipulated in a mechanistic style just like in the case of Russia and Ukraine in terms of creating and sharing fake images using social media technology.

Technological Determinism Theory has also been criticized for being a media-centered theory with a single-factor explanation of the direct mechanistic effect of the new media. The theory neglect the variable of social and cultural media, which according to McQuail (2011), new media do not exist in isolation as it has convergence with the older media. Asemah in Osuagwu (2019) also affirms that the theory is self-opinionated and

lacks empirical support. Despite the shortcoming of the theory, this study still finds the theory relevant as its applicability in this context is valid. The new media technology serves as a platform for such fake images to be shared on social media like Twitter. As such, there is a nexus between the theory and the study.

Similarly, Visual Rhetoric Theory is an art of effective communication through images typography, and texts. Visual rhetoric encompasses the skill of visual literacy, and the ability to analyze images for their form and meaning. Drawing from the theoretical lens of rhetorical analysis, visual rhetoric examines the structure of an image and the consequent persuasive effects on an audience. Visual rhetoric implicates the use of images. Using images is sacrosanct to visual rhetoric because these visuals or images help in forming the case or arguing the point that the writer formulates. Similarly, visual rhetoric encompasses how people arrange segments of visual images on social media.

In the application of visual rhetoric, scholars like Gwandu (2019) and Aondover (2020) are of the view that the meaning should be deeper than the literal sense that a visual image holds. In this perspective, there is a need to dissect a visual image to understand the meaning behind the image or text. Analyzing a text that includes a photo, painting, or even cartoon of the bald eagle with additional written words, would bring to mind the conceptions of strength and freedom rather than merely a conception of a bird.

This includes an understanding of the image and rhetorical choices made with coloring, shaping, and object placement. Visual rhetoric views images as sensory expressions and contextual meaning, as opposed to purely aesthetic consideration. Visual rhetoric seeks to develop rhetorical theory in a way that is more comprehensive, and inclusive about images and their interpretations. Within this context, there is a nexus between the theory and the study as people used social media platforms to engage in sharing fake images during the Russia and Ukraine crisis.

III. Research Methods

This study used the Semiotic and Qualitative Content Analysis approach to examine the influence of digital images on the propagation of fake news on Twitter in the Russia and Ukraine crisis in 2022. Semiotic analysis is interested in the study of signs in images, and the method was adopted to answer the research questions based on the signs, and photographic images shared on Twitter. Aondover (2021) explained that the method offers a full box of analytical tools for taking an image apart and tracing how it works in broader systems of meaning. The major strength of semiotics is that it is a sophisticated analytical tool for explaining how signs and images make sense. In conducting the semiotic analysis, the study interpreted the photos by looking at the colors, angles, and background settings pose in the photos.

Aside from the photos, the study looked at the captions that accompanied the image to read the dominant, preferred ideology of the image. Because images can be polysemic and therefore open to interpretations, considering captions along with the image can help a researcher to find out which signs to read, and which signs are privileged.

Therefore, with the aid of qualitative content analysis, the study looked at the text to determine the dominant, preferred meaning of those images on Twitter. The population of the study consists of 10 images that were shared on Twitter on the Russia and Ukraine crisis within the period of the study. The study used a purposively selected sample to analyze eight images that are shared about Russia and Ukraine crises. What makes the sampling purposive is that there were many social media platforms that such images were used to share images on the Russia and Ukraine crisis in 2022. However,

Twitter appears to be predominantly used in sharing fake images on the crisis. The content categories of the study are similar to the proposition of Gwandu (2019) that images are used as attack tools, a platform for sharing sensitive ideas, or fake images, a tool for responding to previous posts, pulling a prank, and derailing a topic.

IV. Results and Discussion

Digital images that were used to propagate fake news on Twitter in Russia and Ukraine crisis are examined thus:

4.1 Fake Digital Images Used on Twitter as an Attack Tool

Source: Twitter 2022

Fake digital images were used on Twitter during the Russia and Ukraine crisis as an attack tool to attract attraction to the crisis on social media. The first step to any crisis is to get the attention of people by the kind of images, or footage that are created. Within this context, a lot of fake images were created to project the Ukraine Russia crisis so that people can reflect on it.

This fake image was created and shared on Twitter on the first day of the Ukraine conflict. Based on the available literature, it was impossible to verify the truth behind this post that went viral on social media. Within the context of the image, there is a missile being fired toward the residential area in Kyiv by one of the low-flying jets. The image was viewed by more than two million times on Twitter. Based on the image, it was very difficult to identify the aircraft because of the poor quality of the image, and the country's air force that the plane belongs to. Another issue is whether the residential area was targeted deliberately, or the missile was fired in the wrong direction. There are a lot of conflicting claims about the identity and the intention of the aircraft by authorities.

Based on the image, it is clear that during conflict, or war, misleading imagery does appear on social media that often misinform people to believe such images. Pennycook and Rand (2021) support that social media users normally used such images to spread fake news, or misinformation, which it becomes difficult to find out whether such images are

genuine, or not. Thus, during the conflict, the ability to check multiple trusted sources regarding such images before they are widely shared is apt.

Another fake digital image under this category is the image shared on Twitter with a caption: the U.S. imperial prophecy has finally come true, and Putin the Great (Russia) has still attacked Ukraine. Based on the findings by fact-checkers and researchers, this is a fake image that has nothing to do with Russia and Ukraine crisis. The image is that of an explosion in Beirut in 2020.

Source: Twitter 2022

Based on the image, it is safe to argue that misleading imagery inevitably appears on social media. It was shared on Twitter by those who believe that the images are genuine without fact-checking. Social media users like Twitter can limit the spread of fake news by fact-checking from genuine sources trusted by users. Some news organizations do go to great lengths to very such images before they report by checking with multiple trusted sources before sharing these images. Osuagwu (2019) corroborate that one of the most credible ways to ascertain the credibility of a piece of information is by fact-checking, verifying, or scrutinizing digital image.

4.2 Digital Images on Twitter as a Platform for Sharing Fake News

Source: Twitter 2022

Twitter as a social media platform was used by users to disseminate fake news during the Russian and Ukraine crisis. For instance, the aircraft in the picture shows the preparation for a military parade flypast in 2020. However, during the Russia and Ukraine crisis, the image went viral on Twitter to depict the scene of the current crisis. A check by the BBC found that the image was a preparation for a military parade in 2020. Thus, due to a lack of digital literacy, people often shared fake images on Twitter to describe the scenario in Russia and Ukraine crises. This is in line with the findings of Goldzwig (2017) who found that why fake news is thriving in Kenya, India, and Nigeria, people consumed legitimate and fake news equally. Fake news on terrorism and politics were prominent in the two African countries as a result of the low level of digital literacy.

Similarly, there was another fake image with different captions on Twitter like "Russia Fighter jet shot down by #Ukraine RussiaUkraineConflict#Russia #UkraineRussia. Based on BBC fact-checking, and researchers, the image was from Libya which is over 10 years old. Some of the BBC journalists have seen the images before Russia and Ukraine's current crisis.
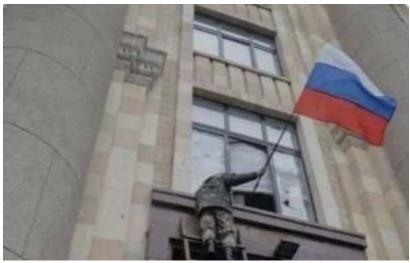

Source: Twitter 2022

Based on the fact-checking, the report shows that it is a Libyan government aircraft being shot down by rebels over Benghazi in 2011.

The report also revealed that some of the imagery does not show combat operations within the context of the crisis at all. Most of the images shared were on the Twitter account of former Ukrainian ambassador to the US, Volodymyr Yelchenko. Therefore, the progression in digital images on social media permits the manipulation of pictures, audio, or even videos. The guarantee of the authenticity of such images in the public domain is no longer visible. This has altered the fake representation of photographs, which posed a huge challenge of trust, and credibility on social media channels.

Singh and Sharma (2021) corroborate this argument that photos and stories that are published all over the world faced the challenge of authenticity. It is difficult to check the credibility of such stories and photos. The issue of fake news in image presentation has also posed a challenge to national development. The manifestations of these fake images on social media have a negative influence on the audience. To support this argument also, a study carried out by BBC (2018) found that a significant amount of fake stories are been shared online, and most of them are not written text, but images and memes because people prefer images over words.

4.3 Digital Images used on Twitter as a Pull Prank

Source: Twitter 2022

Fake digital images were used with a mildly mischievous, or malicious activity during the Russia and Ukraine crisis. Some of the fake images were shared on Twitter with the desire to cause more harm to the situation. For example, a tag on Twitter with the caption #Russian troops hoisting a flag on a public building in Kharkiv, Ukraine was depicted in an image.

Based on the fact-checking report by BBC, and other researchers, the image is from 2014. However, the caption is correct based on the report, but the image does not show Russians hoisting the flag on that building in Kharkiv. The revised image search tools further show that the event happened in 2014, during the period of unrest. This indicates that fake digital images were used on Twitter as a pull prank during the Russia and Ukraine crisis.

The findings, therefore, support the theoretical postulation of the Visual Rhetoric Theory, which is an art of effective communication through images typography, and texts. Visual rhetoric encompasses the skill of visual literacy, and the ability to analyze images for their form and meaning. Salau (2013) corroborated that fake images have been used from time to time to propagate certain stereotypes like religious and ethnic bigotry, racism, tribal conflicts, among others.

Source: Twitter 2022

Another image used on Twitter as a pull prank is that of an image of Russian military paratroopers' land in Ukraine, near Kharkiv. The fact-checking report revealed that these troops were not filmed parachuting into Ukraine. The findings also show that the image was viewed hundreds of thousands of times on Twitter, but this same image first appeared on the Russian-language internet in 2016. The image was accompanied by a short narrative on Twitter "Russian jet being shot down over Ukraine. This study armed with the existing findings by Fry (2017), who found that the current digital environment often characterized by the proliferation of fake news on social media has redefined the traditional notion of news as the account of an unusual event.

4.4 Digital Images on Twitter used to Derail the Crisis

Source: Twitter 2022

One of the images in this category was the image of the aircraft taking part in Victory Day celebrations over Moscow that was shared on Twitter in the Russia and Ukraine crisis. The image with a caption on Twitter "Russia invasion in Ukraine" has a misleading photograph. According to BBC (2022), lack of credibility of information in some cases has created a wide range of rumors. The report shows that most of the images shared on Twitter are previous conflicts in Ukraine, or elsewhere in the world, and they are images of troops on exercises. Based on the report, social media platforms like Twitter takes a proactive role in sharing fake images identified by fact-checkers, and researchers.

The phantom jets in the opening of the conflict were shared on Twitter to show how the Russian air force operating over Ukraine. The image went viral on social media with an accompanying caption which implies it was filmed in the current Ukraine crisis. Empirical evidence by Olan et al (2022) support that the use of images to propagate fake news is pervasive globally.

Source: Twitter 2022

Another digital image that was used to derail the crisis was the one with the caption "Russia began with an airstrike on Ukraine that caused a chain reaction at the Luhansk power plant, Ukraine." This post was incorrectly passed off the deadly Tianjin in China explosions and was uploaded as Ukraine crisis which was viewed by thousand people. The image was the event that happened on the 12th August 2015 in Tianjin blasts in China as a result of chemicals that led to the explosion.

It was reported that the blasts occurred when a shipment of explosives blew up in the port city. However, the same picture was reported on social media (Twitter), which showed flames lighting up the sky that damage nearby buildings in the current Russia and Ukraine crisis. This indicates fake images were used on social media to derail the crisis. Pérez (2020) corroborated that fake news, misinformation, and disinformation circulating on social media serve as a 'looming danger' capable of destabilizing the collective peace and coexistence in people's confidence in government. The role of fake news in any country weakens the development initiative of any nation like in the case of what is happening in Russia and Ukraine now.

V. Conclusion

This study examines digital images on the propagation of fake news on Twitter in the Russia and Ukraine crisis. Based on the findings, the study discovered that fake digital images on Twitter were used as an attack tool. The findings of the study revealed that digital images on Twitter serve as a platform for sharing fake news. The study found that digital images are used on Twitter as a pull prank. Similarly, the findings of the study revealed that digital images on Twitter are used to derail the Russia and Ukraine crisis within the period of the study. Within the context of the findings, the study concludes that the use of social media in spreading fake digital images in times of war like this should not be relied on as it will create more damage to such a crisis. Fact-checking and cross-checking such image to authenticate their credibility during the crisis is fundamental.

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