

The Hallmarks of War Propaganda: The Case of Russia-Ukraine Conflict

Authors : Veronika Solopova, Oana-Iuliana Popescu, Tim Landgraf, Christoph Benz Müller

Abstract : Beginning in 2014, slowly building geopolitical tensions in Eastern Europe led to a full-blown conflict between the Russian Federation and Ukraine that generated an unprecedented amount of news articles and data from social media data, reflecting the opposing ideologies and narratives as a background and the essence of the ongoing war. These polarized informational campaigns have led to countless mutual accusations of misinformation and fake news, shaping an atmosphere of confusion and mistrust for many readers all over the world. In this study, we analyzed scraped news articles from Ukrainian, Russian, Romanian and English-speaking news outlets, on the eve of 24th of February 2022, compared to day five of the conflict (28th of February), to see how the media influenced and mirrored the changes in public opinion. We also contrast the sources opposing and supporting the stands of the Russian government in Ukrainian, Russian and Romanian media spaces. In a data-driven way, we describe how the narratives are spread throughout Eastern and Central Europe. We present predictive linguistic features surrounding war propaganda. Our results indicate that there are strong similarities in terms of rhetoric strategies in the pro-Kremlin media in both Ukraine and Russia, which, while being relatively neutral according to surface structure, use aggressive vocabulary. This suggests that automatic propaganda identification systems have to be tailored for each new case, as they have to rely on situationally specific words. Both Ukrainian and Russian outlets lean towards strongly opinionated news, pointing towards the use of war propaganda in order to achieve strategic goals.

Keywords : linguistic, news, propaganda, Russia, ukraine

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