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Quantitative balance, qualitative dissonance? Multisource Telegram use in Russo-Ukrainian war news

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Abstract

This study examines the use of Telegram in coverage of the Russo-Ukrainian war through a content and image analysis of 100 news articles sourced from Google News. When cited, Telegram was cited frequently, appearing on average more than three times per article. Quantitative findings indicate that Telegram was used with comparable frequency for both Russian and Ukrainian sources — despite the asymmetry of the conflict, with Russia as the aggressor and Ukraine as the invaded. Telegram-based content provided unique contextual insights for on-the-ground reporting, and journalists employed verification strategies such as triangulation to assess credibility. However, some quotes originated from accounts that appeared institutionally trustworthy but lacked verifiable or reliable information, echoing concerns raised by prior scholarship advocating for values-based approaches to news sourcing. This study highlights how journalists are increasingly required to navigate complex sourcing practices through controversial platforms like Telegram in a fast-paced news cycles of high-stakes war reporting expectations such as speed and accuracy.

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Introduction

On 24 February 2022 Russia launched a full-scale invasion in Ukraine. This study focuses on the news outlets' efforts to mitigate credibility and trust in Telegram sources. We analyzed the content of the Telegram and the challenges of preserving eyewitness credibility and discursive authority (Vos and Thomas, 2019) through sourcing from online platforms — such as quotes, images, and social media embeddings — particularly when journalists are no longer able to report directly from Ukraine. This shift raises concerns about the reliability of social media–based information, including content disseminated via Telegram.

We specifically focused on: a) How Telegram is utilized as a source in news stories and what types of sources—elites or non-elites and it analyzes if Russian or Ukrainian sources are cited more predominantly; b) How Telegram as a source is contextualized by comparing it with other social media sources used alongside Telegram, including popular platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube; c) How Telegram usage compares with non-social media sourcing, such as image sourcing from traditional outlets. This comparison contextualizes how traditional sources compare social media platforms like Telegram, particularly in specific contexts and geopolitical conflicts where on-the-ground information is available, but journalists and news reporters are not permitted to conduct eyewitness or other types of typical sourcing such as images from news agencies.

This study responds to Lecheler and Kruikemeier's (2016) calls to better understand cross-platform social media dynamics and sourcing practices from a cross-national perspective, highlighting the use of Russian and Ukrainian social media sources. It explores unique ways in which Telegram sources are used for the news stories in addition to sourcing practices that reflect pre-social media norms. This analysis highlights some gaps in the journalistic practices for using institutional (but questionable) Telegram sources such as *Sputnik* or *Russia Today* or social media accounts of the officials that end up in the mainstream news stories such as sampled in this study, *i.e.*, the national official news outlets or known as legacy media around the globe that despite facing challenges of reputational attacks, are still prominent (Deacon, *et al.*, 2024).

Sourcing in the news

Sourcing is a key ingredient in journalism (Fisher, *et al.*, 2021). The 24-hour news cycle increases content demands and creates a tension between being fast and being right (Mujib, *et al.*, 2022). Online and social media sourcing face challenges like reliability and referencing due to the lack of established protocols and journalists often rely on gut feeling when selecting social media information (Springer, *et al.*, 2023). Journalists engage in news framing by selecting certain sources and making them more salient than others (Entman, 1993). Sourcing in journalism adheres to the practice of presenting information grounded in expertise, promising to provide audiences with facts, add credibility (Tandoc, 2019), and present objectivity (Boyce, 2006). Yet, not all sources are the same. Over the past decade, social media has transformed journalism as a field. Scholars like Hermida (2013) have argued that Twitter has normalized not only the networked content distribution that it affords for journalists and media companies to share content, but also its role in helping journalists find sources. Thus, in recent years, there has been a shift towards including online sources and social media in the news (Paulussen and Harder, 2014), which are particularly valued for accommodating the 24-hour news cycle (Lecheler and Kruikemeier, 2016).

Telegram app as a source in the Russo-Ukrainian war coverage

Telegram, which was launched in 2013, experienced a surge in users in 2022, reaching one billion users in 2025 with both Russian and Ukrainian governments posting information about the war (*Economic Times*, 2024). There is an ambivalent treatment of Telegram. On one hand, Telegram, as other social media platforms, has been considered useful not only to broadcast information (Ghasiya and Sasahara, 2023; Lou, *et al.*, 2021) but also for sourcing (Fernández-Castrillo and Ramos, 2023). It has been adopted and widely used by Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy (Ghasiya and Sasahara, 2023). Users report relying on Telegram for news due to accessibility, diverse news delivery modes, notifications, and simultaneity of activities provided by mobile devices, among other features (Lou, *et al.*, 2021). In turn, news outlets have utilized Telegram for war coverage in Russia and Ukraine (Fernández-Castrillo and Ramos, 2023; Udris, *et al.*, 2023) regardless of the fact that Telegram has often used for content redistribution, mainstream news in Ukraine and Russia have been using Telegram as a source. Telegram has a strong regional impact: Telegram has been reported as the most frequently used source for war coverage in the Ukrainian and Russian news coverage (Fernández-Castrillo and Ramos, 2023) constituting 48.15 percent of articles in *Ukrayinska Pravda* and 62.22 percent in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* with elite voices that constitute a "hierarchy of credibility" being dominant. Yet, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* was found to use sources from controversial pro-nationalist Telegram channels up to 36 percent, with national sources being used more often. However, one unique aspect of this work showed how visual authorship in particular lacked transparency.

On the other hand, despite being used for news sourcing, Telegram remains controversial for its use in supporting authoritarian regime agendas (*e.g.*, Ptaszek, *et al.*, 2024; Salikov, 2019; Trauthig, *et al.*, 2024). Salikov (2019) argued that Russian authorities continued to actively use Telegram channels for political communication and influencing public opinion. Telegram's political influence has been attested by authoritarian regimes beyond Russia. Telegram's relative secrecy, facilitated by its encrypted messaging infrastructure, has been shown to enable state-sponsored propaganda and support authoritarian practices. Prior research, based on interviews with experts in 11 countries across Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America by Trauthig, *et al.* (2024) revealed that encrypted apps could facilitate authoritarian consolidation where the large-scale spread of information was available through such apps but with few or no checks on the reliability or accuracy of content with the strategies of authentically-looking content. Considering Russia's invasion to Ukraine, such authoritarian concerns regarding Telegram are still valid: Ptaszek and colleagues (2024) documented how the Russian news agency RIA used Telegram to amplify the Kremlin's voice by emphasizing news stories and frames related to military issues and international rivalry. In contrast, the Ukrainian news agency utilized the platform to highlight challenges on the ground.

As a result, using Telegram as a journalistic source, poses issues of trust, particularly concerning disinformation and inaccuracy (Matheson, 2021). Scholars have concluded that Telegram can act as a false collective source with unverified content (Fernández-Castrillo and Ramos, 2023), as a platform for junk news (Negreira-Rey, *et al.*, 2017), and a disinformation (Ng, *et al.*, 2024) medium through which fringe radical communities organize and communicate (Hoseini, *et al.*, 2024; Stewart, *et al.*, 2023; Walther and McCoy, 2021). This ambivalent use of Telegram poses difficulties of selecting the right sources, especially for journalists who may lack firsthand knowledge of situations in a rapidly changing war environment. This study is interested to what extent and in which contexts news agencies incorporate Russian political elite accounts' that can potentially spread propagandistic content after Russia's invasion of Ukraine from social media content, including controversial apps such as Telegram.

Telegram source reliability. The difficulties of sourcing in war reporting are well-documented: Research into newsroom practices reveals that journalists are consistently tasked with verifying and discerning credible information under pressure to accurately report on the war in Ukraine (Springer, *et al.*, 2023). Despite the risks of war journalism, real-time eye witnessing continues to hold value, as it provides credibility (Brandtzaeg, *et al.*, 2016; Hermida, 2015). While identifying reliable sources is crucial and challenging for journalists covering ongoing conflicts, these sourcing ideals are reflected in the following journalistic practice: raising the significance of public perception regarding the war (Allan and Zelizer, 2004). Given that sourcing can become a vehicle for framing (Cozma, 2015), selecting types of sources and identifying meaningful narratives to represent the war is a challenging task. Similarly, readily available content from social media affects source verification (Bruno, 2011; Lecheler and Kruikemeier, 2016; Thurman and Walters, 2013; Vis, 2013). Thus, it is critical to understand how controversial apps such as Telegram are integrated to cover high-stakes topics such as the Russo-Ukrainian war coverage.

Sourcing of the images and Telegram. Questions of credibility are particularly relevant for images. While images serve as important sources to show events in conflicts, the reliability of pictures as sources has been contested, presenting a new challenge for journalists due to the lack of attribution (Pantti and Sirén, 2015). Telegram is found to be no-exception (Fern^ández-Castrillo and Ramos, 2023b). Thus, this study asks from which sources were the images sourced for news stories.

Sourcing challenges in war coverage

On-the-ground witnessing in war journalism has been a norm since the pre-social media era (Zelizer, 1990) especially in war coverage, as journalists have shifted their roles from gatekeepers to engaged mediators of narrated stories (Matheson, 2021). From the first weeks of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, journalists, especially international ones, became targets of Russian troops resulting in high fatalities for foreign, domestic reporters, and filmmakers where safety and security for war journalists became a paramount priority (Węglińska, *et al.*, 2024).

Social media sourcing mitigates the on-the-ground risks for journalists and still allows for fast content delivery in coverage. Today this can take place through social media posts narrated by regular people who post content regarding ongoing conflict and its consequences. Social media comments featured as sources in news stories provide a promise of a lowered barrier to entry for who can qualify as supplying evidence for a news story, thus, cited as a democratizing effect (Paulussen and Harder, 2014). Thus, social media allows for more non-elite voices to be featured.

Elites and non-elites

Unlike past conflicts, today's war coverage due to, for example social media sourcing, can include regular people who share their experiences. However, source types are not treated equally, even though there is potential for more non-elite voices to be included. A greater orientation towards elite sources has been linked to the perceived trustworthiness of these sources. Elites are defined as official/institutional sources (politicians, officials, governments) *e.g.*, ruling political elites, as defined by Splendore (2017). They are typically considered as authoritative voices within the context in which they operate and/or are backed by institutional credibility. In contrast non-elites are regular people, who do not hold official political roles or can be defined as public figures — expressing personal opinions regarding issues, *i.e.*, the majority of the social media users.

Typically, domestic elites are featured due to their accessibility (Tiffen, *et al.*, 2014) and the perceived reliability of official sources. National outlets exhibit higher diversity in sourcing, which has been attributed to their audience orientation, as they tend to reach more diverse audiences (Masini, *et al.*, 2018). Journalists strive to provide an array of non-elite sources, allowing for "pluralization" of sources (*e.g.*, Splendore, 2017). Thus, citizens' perspectives have been found to be included in news primarily as eyewitnesses (*e.g.*, Kleemans, *et al.*, 2017).

Sourcing, framing theory, and objectivity in journalism

This study draws on the theoretical framework of war framing when it comes to war coverage based on how Telegram sources have been presented, as in Cozma (2015). News framing is a process of organizing a news story thematically, stylistically, and factually to convey a specific story angle (Entman, 1993). The framing of war is important because the stakes are extremely high. Typically, war reporting centers on conflict representing key news value. It focuses on immediacy, *i.e.*, on visible on-the-ground developments and casualties (Allen and Seaton, 1999). War framing focuses on the visible effects of war (casualties, injuries, and damage to property). Framing is typically episodic rather than thematic, focusing primarily on the here and now and blaming a given party that "threw the first stone." We aimed at understanding if such frames have been used with Telegram app messages and images as sources.

In this study, we examine whose voices are included as sources, a topic closely related to one of the key contested concepts in journalism reporting: objectivity. Objectivity has been contextualized as a strategic ritual, particularly when addressing issues such as non-bias in representation (Tutchman, 1972). In war reporting, maintaining detachment from the scene remains a significant aspect of journalistic tradition. This approach is prevalent beyond the Anglo-Saxon journalism tradition (Van der Hoeven and Kester, 2022). However, while objectivity is one of the aspirational ideals of journalism (Mindich, 1998), it has been challenged on multiple grounds, such as an oversimplification of reporting by relying on elite sources and merely presenting opposing viewpoints (Cunningham, 2003). Objectivity in war coverage journalism has been contested as well. For example, McGoldrick (2006) illustrated how, due to the fear of being accused of bias, news organizations disproportionately reported on pro-war stories. This occurred even when 70 percent of people polled were against war, ultimately resulting in an overrepresentation of pro-war opinions. Thus, in this study we analyzed to what extend and how Russian and Ukrainian sources were presented in reporting.

Multisource journalism

In addition to the on-the-ground expectations for war journalists, there is an expectation for use of multiple sources in coverage. A multisource journalism approach, where multiple sources are used to illustrate a given news story, is treated as ideal as providing access to a diversity of points of view. Diversity of sources has been conceptualized from various perspectives: as source and topic diversity (Freudenthaler and Wessler, 2025), notwithstanding additional resources that diversity of sources requires, as argued by Hendrickx (2020). Thus, we aimed at analyzing if sources come from multiple platforms.

Research questions

Based on the previous literature on Telegram sourcing, we pose the following research questions:

RQ1: How is Telegram used in Russo-Ukrainian war coverage?
— *RQ1a*: What types of sourcing from Telegram are used most frequently?
— *RQ1b*: Is Telegram used in news stories to cover elite or non-elite voices?
— *RQ1c*: Is Telegram used in news stories to cover Russian or Ukrainian sources more frequently?
RQ2: How is Telegram used in conjunction with other social media sources?
RQ3: How is traditional sourcing, *i.e.*, images, complementing news stories that include information from Telegram and other social media platforms?

Data and methods

Data

To assess how journalists used Telegram as a source, we collected all news stories with the search keyword "Telegram" under the topic "Russo-Ukrainian war" for a period of six months in 2023 via Google News in English. Russia's invasion of Ukraine started on 24 February 2022. We started our data collection of news stories more than a year after the invasion with the expectation that by that time news organizations around the globe would have established practices collecting information from a contested platform such as Telegram.

The search resulted in 100 news articles (the earliest one was featured on 4 March and the latest one was collected on 3 October 2023). The initial dataset comprised 27 outlets. Based on the exclusion criteria [1], our final sample comprised 84 news stories from 16 news agencies. News agencies included 12 countries. Specifically, country representation of the news stories was as follows: USA news outlets' story count dominated the sample (40 or 43 percent) with CNN and CNBC being the main news outlets, followed by Qatari media (16 stories or 17 percent), dominated by *Al Jazeera* and U.K. with 14 (dominated by BBC) and Ukraine covering 13 news stories. Belgium, U.K., Cyprus, France, and India featured each one of the news stories, with Australia, Poland and Turkey containing two stories [2]. We chose Google News to locate a diverse news organization (geographically and ideologically) (Google News, 2025) for English-speaking readers. In this dataset, English-language news stories were included.

When it came to the types of stories captured in the news, the majority fell into the Live News category (*N*=18 or 19.4 percent), followed by World/Europe (*N*=9 or 9.7 percent), Live blog (*N*=6 or 6.5 percent), and Latest news Ukraine (*N*=6 or 6.5 percent). Russia-Ukraine war, Ukraine, World each featuring *N*=2 or 2.2 percent and News including one (1.1 percent) story, with 47 or (50.5 percent) no subcategory. The stories that did have a subcategory fell into "live News", "Live blog", or "latest news Ukraine" indicating

the "update" based nature of these stories. This indicates that the war coverage was treated as an ongoing event which was continuously updated and aptly named to indicate the importance of the unfolding nature of events.

Methods

This study was based on quantitative source (Telegram quotes, embeddings) content analysis and qualitative image analysis (as in Reynolds and Niedt, 2020). We manually grouped images into thematic categories based on their representations. Specifically, by using inductive analysis, we began by identifying whether the images depicted people, places, or other subjects. We then categorized these representations to determine if they featured objects, events, individuals (regular, military or elites), and identified the types of activities being portrayed. To address *RQ1*: How is Telegram used in the Russo-Ukrainian war coverage?; we assessed the modality of Telegram sources, coded the owner of the Telegram posts that were used as sources, and the source representation by country for public figures, when available. Specifically, to address *RQ1a*: What types of sourcing from Telegram are used most frequently?; we plotted the information of the modality by news portals. To analyze how Telegram app messages were used in the news outlet, we devised four types of sourcing, based on the ways in which outlets used Telegram: 1) embedding (when a screenshot of the Telegram message was original present); 2) citation (when the information from a Telegram message was translated and quoted directly or paraphrased); 3) image (when an image was attributed to Telegram as a source); 4) video (when a video was attributed to Telegram as a source).

To assess *RQ1b*: Is Telegram used in news stories to cover elite or non-elite voices? All sources were coded based on Telegram as a source account owner. We included information such as the name and country of a given owner, when it was present. Elite vs. non-elites were operationalized as follows: we assessed users from their Telegram accounts. We defined elites as per previous literature (see Splendore, 2017) who included politicians, officials, governments as elites; accounts from the public figures and organizations that pertained to a) politicians (national governance such as President Zelenskyy or a spokesperson; Russia's former president; Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman; local government body representatives such as a given city's mayor); b) official military representatives (*e.g.*, head of Kyiv's military administration); for organizations, we coded c) organizations and media representatives (journalist, media personalities). Non-elites included Telegram channels that were owned by a channel that did not pertain to elites such as regular people or channels that were not covered by (government or political) organizations as defined by Splendore (2017). Examples include references to sources as "Russian soldiers' Telegram", "Russian Telegram channel", or a user account, such as WarGonzo an account of a pro-Russian blogger Semyon Pegov.

To address *RQ1c*: Is Telegram used in news stories to cover Russian or Ukrainian sources more frequently? Telegram account user country was coded by assessing if the country of the Telegram source was present. When the country was not immediately clear, we further searched for information about specific account users to verify if they were Russian, Ukrainian (when they were public figures), or unidentifiable. The news source country was assessed by looking up the 'about' section of the news outlet. We further provided qualitative assessment of the ways in which Telegram sources were used by each country.

To assess *RQ2*: How is Telegram used in conjunction with other social media sources?; we counted the frequency of other types of social media used to assess multisourcing practices by news portals. To do so, we coded if Facebook, YouTube, or Twitter (or X) were present as sources in a given story.

To address *RQ3*: How is traditional sourcing, *i.e.*, images, complementing news stories that include information from Telegram and other social media platforms? We counted images based on their agency, which was presented as a manifest variable next to the image. Then, we qualitatively assessed the representation of the images.

Coding procedure. To address the research questions of this study we employed manual coding for all content categories. We then performed the same analyses on Telegram sourcing — for pictures, quotes, and

embeddings. For each coded category we created a codebook that outlined each coded category. To code for the news source, we used the news source presented in the title of the news story, date, and author. Coding was performed by two coders who engaged in an iterative coding practice for content categories that could be deemed more latent or provided more variation. Coding disagreements were discussed to achieve an acceptable intercoder reliability (more than 80 of Cohen's kappa).

Results

Telegram as a source

Results for *RQ1a* demonstrated the following trends. Telegram as a source was found to be used 264 times in 84 news stories (or on average 3.4 Telegram sources per story) as a quote, embedding and picture, yet no Telegram videos were featured:

Telegram Source Type	TOTAL news stories	Percentage by news portal	Telegram Quotes	Telegram Embedding	Telegram Picture	Telegram Video	Total sources
CNN	21	25.0 %	74	0	11	0	85
CNBC	13	15.5 %	52	0	5	0	57
Aljazeera	16	19.0 %	36	0	4	0	40
EUROMAIDAN Press	11	13.1 %	12	0	7	0	19
BBC	9	10.7 %	15	0	0	0	15
The Guardian	3	3.6 %	14	0	0	0	14
The Verge	1	1.2 %	8	0	0	0	8
Kyiv Post	2	2.4 %	2	5	0	0	7
Newsweek	1	1.2 %	2	1	2	0	5
Daily Express	1	1.2 %	3	0	1	0	4
The Telegraph	1	1.2 %	4	0	0	0	4
TVP World	1	1.2 %	2	0	0	0	2
Anadolu Agency	1	1.2 %	1	0	0	0	1
France 24	1	1.2 %	1	0	0	0	1
Politics Today	1	1.2 %	1	0	0	0	1
The Strategist	1	1.2 %	1	0	0	0	1
Total	84	100%	228	6	30	0	264

Table 1: Telegram multisourcing by modality.

Table 1 shows that CNN used the Telegram messages to support its news stories in the largest number of stories (25 percent of the corpus) and amounted to the largest number of sources. When it came to source type, Telegram was used most frequently as a quote in news stories, followed by a picture. Telegram pictures were used by CNN, CNBC, *Al Jazeera*, Euromaidan Press, *Newsweek*, and *Daily Express*. Telegram embeddings were used rarely, mostly by *Kyiv Post* and once by *Newsweek*.

Telegram sources in pictures. When it came to Telegram pictures use in news stories, there were 30 altogether. Eleven news stories of different media portals like *Al Jazeera*, CNN, Euromaidan Press, and CNBC included 11 stories of Telegram as pictures. CNN featured the highest number of stories (6), followed by *Al Jazeera* with (3) stories and CNBC and Euromaidan Press with one story. In the 11 stories, the number of pictures were mostly of firefighters, military officials, representations of explosions, and rescuers. In addition, there were examples of politicians and military personnel. Some examples featured victory or resilience with the Ukrainian flag on display: the capture of an image in a CNN story "Constant Russian air raids slow Ukraine's advance in southern Zaporizhzhia region, officer says" is: "A Ukrainian flag flies above a destroyed building in the settlement of Robotyne, Ukraine, in this screen grab taken from

a social media video released August 23. Valerii Zaluzhnyi/Telegram via Reuters" [3].

Telegram pictures also featured military officials and politicians. Some military members (in uniform) were shown taking selfies while local and foreign politicians were featured talking at a table (for example, CNBC story on Kim Jong Un's visit to Kremlin [4]).

Telegram pictures were used to depict eye-witnessing of war damage. Examples included pictures of devasted buildings, damaged bridges, explosions, and a war-affected area featuring a theme of destruction versus recovery. Destruction of buildings and other infrastructure were shown with rescuers at work; similarly, an explosion was featured.

Others showed rescuers working in a damaged area in Ukraine. There were images of explosions of bridges and buildings as well as repairing or clearing damaged areas by rescuers and firefighters or destroyed buildings where firefighters who were doing their work in the aftermath of attacks, dousing fires [5]. An image featured in stories appearing on *Al Jazeera* [6] and CNN [7] illustrated how rescuers operated in war-damaged areas. The image was labeled "Firefighters work on the site of a residential area hit by Russian military strike, amid of Russia's attack on Ukraine, in the town of Pavlohrad, Dmipropetrovsk region, Ukraine, is provided by the Governor of Dnipropetrovsk Regional Military-Civil Administration and its governor Serhii Lysak's Telegram and labeled as 'Handout via Reuters'."

Telegram as a source in embeddings. There were two news portals that used embeddings: The *Kyiv Post* and *Newsweek* provided a low prominence of such use of Telegram for sourcing. However, it is worth mentioning that there were several instances of atypical embeddings [8]. The Critical Threats Project used Telegram embedding as links to a bibliography. Telegram was used as a citation and hyperlinks to the Telegram post demonstrated the embedding of the original Telegram message in this CNN story passage:

> "Two men and a woman were killed in a barrage of 18 rockets fired on the village of Sobolevka, Gladkov said in a series of posts on his Telegram channel." [9]

The underlined text has been hyperlinked and led to an original post written by Belgorod's regional Governor Gladkov's Telegram post (Vvgladkov, 2024). Readers of the news story could click on the original Telegram post. Such a citation mode did not contain the evidence in the text but was linked through a hyperlink that led to the original Telegram post (mostly written in the original language — Ukrainian or Russian).

Elites vs. non-elites

To answer *RQ1b*: Is Telegram as a source used in the news stories to cover elite or non-elite voices? We analyzed how Telegram was used in a range of modalities: a) in quotes, b) in videos; c) in pictures; d) in embeddings.

Elites vs. non-elites in Telegram quotes The results for *RQ1b* demonstrated that out of 229 quotes from Telegram used in 84 stories, only 12 quotes (5.4 percent) in 10 stories were not pertaining to elites. Non-elite voices included two channels that were somewhat anonymous, the following mentions categories: soldiers and fighter Telegram citations; bloggers. In other cases, mentions only included abstract definitions such as "local channel" as in this CNN account:

> "A local Telegram channel in occupied Zaporizhzhia said the early voting for the elections of deputies to the Legislative Assembly and local self-government bodies is 'in full progress'." [10]

In other cases, there was a mention of a soldier without providing their specific Telegram account's name in

the news story:

> "One of the Russian soldiers fighting near Bakhmut wrote on Telegram that the Russian Army suffered heavy losses during such counterattacks. According to him, Bakhmut and its vicinities have become a trap for the Russian troops due to the effective work of Ukrainian artillery." [11]

In this story, readers could click on a link to access an embedded Telegram message, in Russian and included in the content.

News stories used Telegram without channel attribution as ways to gather intel. These unnamed sources were used four times, on three occasions in Euromaidan and once for the BBC. Euromaidan utilized undisclosed sources to share insider news from Russian Telegram channels that would otherwise not be publicly available, as demonstrated in this citation:

> "Ukrainian monitoring Telegram channels say Russian anti-aircraft defense forces mistakenly brought down one of their own fighter jets in the early hours of 29 September. A Russian Air Force-linked channel indirectly confirmed the report." [12]

Yet, after clicking on the link of the source, it provided more details about how these channels were sourced:

> "Meanwhile, the Russian Air Force-linked Telegram channel Fighterbomber posted a picture of a Su-35 along with the message, '*Eternal flight [to you], brother*,' offering no further information." [13]

In the same story, they provided additional channels from which they "triangulated" this information:

> "Overnight into 29 September, the Ukrainian Telegram channel 'monitor' initially reported the incident cautiously, stating, 'It's uneasy in Tokmak. Very preliminary: the downing of an enemy tactical aircraft. We await further details in the morning'." [14]

There were more examples of Telegram channels that created this sort of "triangulation" of information about enemy losses that Russian media would not otherwise report publicly. A BBC story provided a reference to an unnamed Russian channel where a reference was used to confirm a Ukrainian Telegram source cited earlier in an article:

> "A Russian Telegram channel had also reported of fighting in that area." [15]

Another non-elite use of quotes was in a story covered by EuroMaidan Press "Russian POW's wife flees Russia for Ukraine in first such case" that covered a story about a Russian woman, Iryna, the wife of Russian soldier prisoner of war Yevgeniy, who was the first to enter Ukraine through the "Want to Live" project after fleeing Russia. It included Telegram as a source but with no specifics to references to channels of it:

> "Yevgeniy was mobilized in September 2022 and captured in July 2023. After seeing her husband in Telegram channels, Iryna recorded an appeal with other wives that drew the

attention of Russian security services, she said." [16]

When it comes to elites, there were 166 names mentioned in the dataset. Twenty-three of these accounts were repeated more than once — with the highest repeats from the Governor of Odesa Oleg Kiper, along with Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy (8 times). Yevgeny Prigozhin, the founder of the Wagner Group, a Russian state-funded private military company, was featured on seven occasions. Yet, others who were cited multiple times, while not as frequently, were regional elites: governors or mayors such as Oleg Morgun — Mayor of Mariupol, Vitali Klitschko — Mayor of Kyiv, Roman Starovoit — Governor of Kursk Oblast or Sergey Sobyanin — Mayor of Moscow. When it comes to the overall count of unique Telegram accounts used for quotes, there were 62 unique Telegram accounts that could be labeled as elites. Out of 62, 34 (or 54 percent) quotes originated from governors' or city mayors' Telegram posts.

Yet, in addition to regional elites, national elites were also featured: Hanna Malyar — Deputy Minister of Defense of Ukraine, Valeriy Zaluzhnyi — Ambassador of Ukraine to the United Kingdom, Sergei Shoigu — Minister of Defense of Russia, Ramzan Kadyrov — Head of the Chechen Republic. Regional elites' remarks included reports about war casualties:

> "'Many missiles were shot down, but there were also hits in Lviv,' the city's Mayor Andriy Sadovyi said on the Telegram messaging app on Tuesday morning, adding that orders were given to evacuate at least one burning apartment building." [17]

Besides political elites, there were public figures featured in quotes, representing the military, academics, and journalists. For example, in a CNN story an unnamed military official was cited:

> "Kyiv was hit by an 'exceptional' dense attack early Tuesday, a senior Ukrainian military official said in a Telegram post." [18]

Elites vs. non-elites in Telegram pictures. Results for *RQ1b*: Is Telegram as a source used in the news stories to cover elite or non-elite voices? demonstrated that when it comes to accounts used for Telegram pictures, out of 31 picture references in 18 stories, only three were from non-elites sources. One such example was Telegram channel Grey Zone, which supports the pro-Russian Wagner mercenary group, where CNN not only provided an image with a caption referencing the channel but also provided information about the channel itself to contextualize the source to the readers, stating that it is pro-Russian [19]. The label to the broken bridge stated "A screengrab from a video shows damage to the Crimea bridge on Monday July 17. Telegram via @grey_zone" [20]. In this news story, the CNN staff who were on the ground pointed out that they were not able to confirm where the strikes landed or what were the targets. This source was not from an elite, as it belonged to a pro-Russian group.

Elite sources in Telegram pictures were coming from regional officials that were sourced from both Russian and Ukrainian sides. For example, a Telegram post by the Governor of the Russian Far Eastern region of Primorsky Krai, Oleg Kozhemyako, was cited by CNBC. The story — "North Korea's Kim Jong Un arrives in Russia; Moscow says it doesn't care about U.S. warnings over meeting" — included a picture sourced by Telegram. It included the caption: "In this photo taken from video released by governor of the Russian far eastern region of Primorsky Krai Oleg Kozhemyako telegram channel on Tuesday, Sept. 12, 2023, North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un, left, gestures as he speaks to Russian Minister of Natural Resources and Ecology Alexander Kozlov, right, after crossing the border to Russia at Khasan, about 127 km (79 miles) south of Vladivostok." [21] Vyacheslav Vladimirovich Gladkov is a Russian politician serving as the governor of Belgorod, located near the border with Ukraine. Telegram was cited in a CNN story "At least 2 people killed and 6 injured following shelling in Belgorod, governor says." [22]

Elites vs. non-elites in Telegram embeddings. The *Kyiv Post* provided a list of accounts to follow on Telegram — Ukrainian military brigades, independent journalist accounts, and an embedding with Zelenskyy's quote of their own *Kyiv Post* Telegram post. Ukrainian accounts cited on these Telegram

embeddings included: Third Separate Assault Brigade, The 47th Separate Mechanized Brigade, *Kyiv Post*, Operativniy ZSU (Military channel), and Astra (an independent journalist-run Telegram channel) [23].

Newsweek provided a video with a pro-Ukrainian stance, showing drone video footage in a story "Russian troops shelled in 'disastrous' broad daylight retreat: Video." The video illustrated Russian soldiers fleeing across a field, with the following description: "A 2-minute 20-second supercut of drone footage showing multiple strikes, allegedly with cluster munitions, on Russian soldiers as they run up a village road, was published on the Ukraine military-linked Operativno ZSU Telegram channel on Thursday." [24]. Hence, Ukrainian Telegram channels were used for embeddings, showcasing locally grounded military groups and an independent journalist organization. Both of these were non-elite sources.

Ukrainian vs. Russian sources in Telegram quotes. When it came to source types — *RQ1c*: Is Telegram as a source used in the news stories to cover Russian or Ukrainian sources more frequently? — in terms of the country that the accounts represented, the results are summarized as follows:

Media outlet	Ukraine and Russia	Ukraine	Russia	Ukraine and unknown	Russia and unknown	mixed and unknown	not mentioned	total
CNN	9	5	3	0	2	2	0	21
Aljazeera	4	6	2	0	1	1	0	14
CNBC	3	3	3	1	1	2	0	13
EUROMAIDAN press	0	6	3	0	1	0	0	10
BBC	2	2	5	0	0	0	0	9
The Guardian	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	3
Anadolu Agency	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Daily Express	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
FRANCE 24	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
KYIV POST	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Newsweek	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Politics Today	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
The Strategist	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
The Telegraph	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
The Verge	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
TVP World	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	23	22	20	2	6	6	1	80

Table 2: Telegram use as quotes based on geopolitical representation.

Table 2 shows that Telegram quotes were sourced from both Russian and Ukrainian Telegram accounts. Ukrainian and Russian sources together were used in 23 stories, with 23 stories using Ukrainian only and 20 stories using Russian only sources. There were stories that contained quotes from not mentioned country combinations that were predominantly used in Russian sources and mixed ones. To analyze if those accounts used elite voices or featured regular accounts to quote content, we assessed the channel's owner by counting the amounts of stories that mentioned Telegram.

While quantitative analysis noted a similar coverage of Russian (n=20) and Ukrainian (n=22) and both (n=23), qualitative assessment of this analysis demonstrated that sources were used to provide a more nuanced picture. While factual information — such as the effects of destruction on the ground or confirmation of specific war-related events—dominated sourcing, there were also instances where position-based narratives included sources. For example, in those stories a Russian-centered narrative of the war was quoted as an opinion or a personal position. For example, Margarita Simonyan, described in the article as Putin's ally and editor-in-chief of Russian state supported *Russia Today*, was describing drone attacks near her house, positioning her — and Russians — as victims, rather than as aggressors [25]. Similarly, Yuri Kotenok, who positions himself as a Russian military correspondent and blogger promoting an anti-Ukrainian stance, was quoted in the news story. His position was summarized in a quote taken from his

Telegram channel published in the news story entitled "Ukraine war: Who are Russia's war bloggers and why are they popular":

> "Even cancer can be cured, but Ukrainianism — never!" "It's a type of Satanism that can only be destroyed with one thing — fire! All-consuming fire that will cleanse this filth." [26]

Ukrainian vs. Russian sources in Telegram pictures. When it came to the country owner of sources of images — for *RQ1c*: Is Telegram as a source used in the news stories to cover Russian or Ukrainian sources more frequently? — the following results emerged, as shown in Table 3.

Media outlet	Ukraine and Russia	Ukraine	Russia	Ukraine and unknown	Russia and unknown	mixed and unknown	not mentioned	total
CNN	1	3	3	0	0	0	2	9
Aljazeera	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	3
CNBC	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	3
EUROMAIDAN press	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Daily Express	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Newsweek	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Total	1	6	6	0	1	0	4	18

Table 3: Telegram use as pictures based on geopolitical representation.

Table 3 provides details that Ukrainian and Russian sources were used similarly, yet, Euromaidan was offering Ukrainian-only accounts. It is worth mentioning that a large number of accounts included for news sourcing did not have an explicit mentioning of a country (or a side) that they were representing. *Al Jazeera* — in the story "Russians celebrate reports that 'fortress Bakhmut' has fallen" — posted an image of Russian soldiers waving a Russian flag with a caption "Wagner Group mercenary fighters claim full control of the Ukrainian city of Bakhmut [Press service of 'Concord'/Reuters]" [27].

Ukrainian vs. Russian sources in Telegram embeddings. When it came to source types — to answer *RQ1c*: Is Telegram as a source used in the news stories to cover Russian or Ukrainian sources more frequently? — in terms of the country that the accounts represent, the results can be summarized as follows. The *Kyiv Post* had one news story with five embeddings and all of the owners of these channels represented the Ukrainian side. *Newsweek* used a Ukraine military-linked Telegram Operativno ZSU account [28], representing the Ukrainian side.

Telegram use in conjunction with other social media

To address *RQ2* — How is Telegram used in conjunction with other social media sources? — we aimed at uncovering how multisource use occurred along with other types of social media, especially when Telegram was used. There were 16 news stories in our analysis that used Telegram adjacent with other social media sources — those included YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook.

News portal	Total stories	Types of Sources
Euromaidan Press	1	Facebook picture, Twitter Picture, Twitter embedding, Telegram quote (4 types of sources)
CNN	1	Twitter Picture, Telegram quote and pictures (3 types of sources)
CNN	1	Telegram Quote, Twitter picture (2 types of sources)
CNN (1 story); Al Jazeera (1 story)	2	Twitter Embedding, You Tube video, Telegram picture and quote (4 types of sources)
Al Jazeera (2 stories)	2	Twitter embedding and quote, Telegram quote (3 types of sources)
Al Jazeera (3 stories); CNBC (2 stories); Daily Express (1 story) Euromaidan Press (1)	7	Twitter embedding and Telegram quote (2 types of sources)
CNBC	1	Telegram embedding and Telegram pictures and quote (3 types of sources)
KYIV Post	1	Twitter embedding, You Tube video and Telegram quote (3 types of sources)

Table 4: Multiple sources of Telegram and use of other social media.

Table 4 demonstrates that the most frequently used multiple social media combinations were Twitter embeddings and a Telegram quote used in seven stories. There were news stories that used up to four types of social media source combinations. *Al Jazeera* had the largest number of stories that included multiple social media sources, combining Twitter pictures, Twitter embedding, YouTube videos, and Telegram pictures and quotes. It was followed by CNN, CNBC, Euromaidan and the *Daily Express*, as well as *Kyiv Post*. Twitter was the second most frequently used social media source after Telegram in our dataset, with Facebook being used the least.

Image sourcing

To further address sourcing practices, we aimed at analyzing how image sourcing complemented Telegram sourcing. To address *RQ3*: How is typical journalistic sourcing, *i.e.*, images, complementing news stories that include information from Telegram and other social media platforms? To answer this question, we identified sources of the images that did not use Telegram as a source.

We listed all of the stories (n=80) that contained images. Images were considered as everything except for maps or cartoons, given that they did not follow "attribution" to a news agency or other source. There were 12 accessible news stories that did not include what we considered images that were based not on Telegram or other social media source (maps were present in four news stories; cartoons were present in one news story; and the rest (7) had no images).

In the rest of the 80 news stories there were on average 7.5 images (that did not pertain to social media sources), totaling 553 images. We then labeled all the sources for each of the images and found a variety of agencies, as described in Table 5.

Agency	N	Percentage
Getty	299	54.07 %
Reuters	151	27.31 %
AP	48	8.68 %
No source	22	3.98 %
AFP	21	3.80 %
CNN	8	1.45 %
Other	4	0.73 %
Total	553	100.0 %

Table 5: Images as sourcing by news outlet.

The rest of the source agencies (0.73 percent) included agencies such as *Sputnik* (used in two *Al Jazeera* stories). This analysis shows that the majority of images that were not from social media came from two major agencies (Western): Getty images and Reuters, followed by Associated Press with 22 (or 3.9 percent) of images with no source agency attribution.

Diverse images beyond social media

When analyzing individuals presented in images, we classified all of the images (n=553) in the following categories: (political/celebrity) elites, general public, and military non elites, and others. Elite sources accounted for 200 or 43 percent of non-social media images (politicians of various ranks ranging from ministers, presidents, premiers, generals, secretaries, directors, celebrities such as Elon Musk, Yevgeny Prigozhin [head of the Wagner Group], and institutions such as EU and NATO). Non-elites comprised 92 or 20 percent of the individuals presented im images in Telegram posts, including rescuers, firefighters, police, general public, and buildings.

Military and war-related representations comprised 166 or 36 percent of examples, such as drones, soldiers, missiles, explosion, prisoners, tanks, combat vehicles, graves, dead, bombs, attack, strikes. Images with elites comprised the largest category of representation including high-level officials such as presidents, generals, or ministers. There was a range of military representations focusing on soldiers and war, with examples of destruction and equipment with the smallest category focused on the public.

Based on an analysis of user accounts, the results indicated that Russian accounts appeared 57 times (12 percent) and Ukrainian accounts 61 times (13 percent) in images not associated with social media sources.

Discussion

RQ1, which examined Telegram as a source, revealed that it was used frequently, more than three times per story on average. Officials representing local governments were frequently cited in quotes and with images from their Telegram accounts. Citing local governments via Telegram added credibility to a given story, eliminating a need for on-the-ground reporting, which certainly could be dangerous for journalists in war-torn Ukraine (Tiffen, *et al.*, 2014). This finding is consistent with regional media. For example, Swiss news relied mostly on government officials and military representatives for sources from Telegram (Udris, *et al.*,

2023). This practice of frequent Telegram sourcing from regional elites reflected typical practices by reporters relying on a regular supply of information furnished by institutional sources (Ericson, 1998).

Military brigade sources dominated Telegram embeddings, as these accounts could be perceived as showing on-the-ground situations, consistent with previous research on war journalism (Allen and Seaton, 1999). Most of the embeddings featured the Ukrainian side of the war coverage. At times, citing flags or victory could reflect a kind of patriotic journalism, used to appeal to public emotions, as in traditional war journalism (Springer, *et al.*, 2023). Findings of this study demonstrated that Telegram images and videos were used to reinforce a typical war framing of visible effects while using sources from a Telegram app (Allen and Seaton, 1999).

One could make an argument for contesting the accuracy of accounts from local government officials. Yet because of their elite status, they were automatically given credibility markers and featured as trusted sources. Although some have argued that elite accounts are not necessarily reliable (Parks, 2020a), journalists face difficult choices in assessing reliability of these elites.

It is worth pointing out that journalists were trying to mitigate credibility and trust in Telegram sources. For example, a story in *Kyiv Post* (Korshak, 2023) created a list of Telegram accounts as resources (with embeddings to provide access to visual representations of accounts) to follow for war coverage on the ground. Future studies could address ways to include more non-elite voices in war reporting and further increase trust in journalism, such as through community-based journalism (Wenzel, 2020). This balance between credibility and trust is similar to what is known in anthropology as positionality. Positionality refers to a level of distance or lack thereof in the coverage — whether it involves full embeddedness or observations from a distance. The issue of distance is related to a quest for what has been termed contextual objectivity in coverage, especially for war journalists (Iskandar and el-Nawawy, 2004) with resources that are available, even if online and controversial such as Telegram.

Relative to *RQ2*, Telegram quotes as sources were also used in unique ways, for example, in information triangulation. Telegram, being a contested source, was used alongside other sources to ‘triangulate’ between various Telegram accounts the reliability of a given story and thereby enhance trust. At the same time, this study found that by analyzing social media alone, news stories used multiple sources, compared to previous studies that reported that almost two-thirds of news stories contained simply one source (O’Neill and O’Connor, 2008).

When Telegram was used as the only source, it illustrated on-the-ground events and politicians (*e.g.*, soldiers, destruction, and restoration). Telegram, in conjunction with other social media sources, provided human interest stories, day-to-day lives of individuals and politicians, typical of war journalism. This study demonstrated that a multisource approach was prevalent in coverage of the Russo-Ukrainian war. Social media such as Telegram was used in different ways for quotes, images, and to some extent embeddings, while other social media, such as Twitter and YouTube, were marginal used. Credibility was generated by not only using a variety of sources but also by including different social media platforms. Even if each of the platforms could be contested for credibility, when used together, they represented source diversity, a core value in journalism (Mellado and Scherman, 2021).

For *RQ3* we found that established agencies, such as Getty Images, Reuters, and Associated Press, dominated as sources for images. In addition to a homogenization of sources due to competition and co-orientation of journalists using the same sources (as noted in earlier research; Boczkowski, 2010; Tiffen, *et al.*, 2014), we found that social media sources supplemented traditional sources but the agency (institutionally established) sources were integrated twice as frequently. We must acknowledge that traditional institutional norms such as using established news agencies (Reuters, Getty Images) for image generation prevailed in terms of the amount of images used. This situation reflected a potential tension between trust over sources (especially for images which are more difficult to verify) and a need for local insight, as secured via Telegram.

From a technological perspective, the implications of Telegram embedding point to a list of challenges that Telegram brings to current journalistic practices, requiring further investigation. Telegram was not frequently used in the form of embeddings, unlike other Western social media platforms such as X, where messages are typically embedded in news stories and serve as a visual element of the source. This choice could be interpreted in both technological and social contexts: embedding does not support in-text translation, leading journalists to prioritize language accessibility over credibility that embedding might provide since Telegram posts were typically written in Ukrainian or Russian, but an article appeared in English. Additionally, Western audiences — given that the dataset was drawn from English-language editions of newspapers — do not use Telegram as frequently as other social media platforms that are typically embedded. Sometimes, journalists offered a middle-ground solution by linking to a Telegram post rather than embedding it directly and translating or summarizing content. This finding supports the idea that social media and online sources overall have become integrated in journalistic practices. However, our sample was collected based on keywords such as Telegram in the Russo-Ukrainian news search section. Since other scholars have reported that in Swiss newspapers (Udris, *et al.*, 2023), for example, Telegram comprised 1.2 percent of sourcing and Twitter dominated sources (10 percent).

From a sociotechnical perspective, it is possible that Telegram embedding templates might not be available for all journalists to use readily. In other words, embeddings were not always embedded in the "correct way", as typical social media. There is a lack of a "standardized" practice or protocol, compared to Twitter (now X) or other social media platforms such as Instagram for Western media. Research into newsroom practices regarding the use of templates could illuminate some practical aspects of content integration.

Conclusions

This study highlighted how national news outlets integrated Telegram sources. While this study illustrated how Telegram, despite a variety of challenges, augmented the potential value of news sources by including raw material in near real-time, akin to what Hermida (2013) described for Twitter. Telegram was found to be predominantly used to provide elite perspectives, specifically regional and local representatives sourced from Telegram. These sources provided authoritative voices to journalists amidst myriad challenges of misinformation and disinformation.

Accounts from regional governors and mayors in Telegram were used in the global arena to report about on-the-ground events. In some ways, it resembled practices identified as proximity journalism (Camponez, 2002). At the same time, the use of verified accounts addressed challenges for newsrooms in covering Russia's invasion of Ukraine, such as a lack of verification protocols, reported, for example, in Swedish newsrooms (Springer, *et al.*, 2023).

Telegram sourcing in many instances was found to reinscribe existing frames in war coverage. These practices align with Hermida's (2013) observations on the early adoption of Twitter by journalists: Telegram was used by journalists to fit within prescribed conventions. Yet, Telegram use in this study also provided examples of what scholars have identified as "diffused war" (Hoskins and O'Loughlin, 2015) — where the Internet was used to provide insights into the on-the-ground reality of events and "arrested war", where military institutions control social media, employing them for their purposes and therefore creating coverage from their perspectives. Similarly, our findings confirm what McGoldrick (2006) described as the manner of the reporting, that is violence-, propaganda-, and elite-and-victory-orientated.

However, this study demonstrated the tension between a need to show on-the-ground events and sourcing from a contested platform such as Telegram. We found that elite sources were dominating coverage to demonstrate a form of content verification. We also found challenging practices related to objectivity where sources represented both Russian and Ukrainian representatives almost equally, but qualitatively they included Russian state-sponsored figures as sources. While the inclusion of contested sources was not

intended to function as endorsement, at times, it could serve this function for some audiences, given that it was hard to assume that for each story audiences had adequate knowledge about circumstances (Varelius, 2023) during the ongoing invasion. This argument reflected what Parks (2020b) noted about a need for journalists to go beyond precision journalism where facts were put at the forefront for audiences to interpret. As Parks [29] argued "values-based orientations toward news does not mean mainstream journalists must necessarily become overt referees of moral action." Other scholars, when discussing war representation, proposed a notion of moral muting which occurs when a message either blunts moral considerations or presents an equivocal moral meaning (Porpora and Nikolaev, 2008).

Furthermore, this study opens up a broader discussion on notions that media organizations are facing regarding bias and what media outlets should not sacrifice in the name of being perceived as unbiased. Criticism of news media bias have been reported as coming not only from non-democratic contexts — such as reproducing status quo narratives that constitute media bias — but also from and in democratic states — such as revisionist bias — as described by Baum and Zhukov (2015). Other types of bias include arguments for political attacks (Strömbäck and Åkerlund, 2025). Similarly, bias arguments are used by right-leaning media in order to discredit mainstream press not only in the West (Haller and Holt, 2019) but in India (Bhat and Chadha, 2020) and Brazil (Ozawa, *et al.*, 2024). At the same time, given a variety of attacks on journalism and a 'poisoning of the information well' (Tandoc, *et al.*, 2021), compromised Telegram sources can further decrease trust. It is difficult to place Telegram on par with other social media platforms, even if reporters are prevented from securing information on the ground due to safety issues.

Findings of this study demonstrated that while Ukrainian and Russian sources were used frequently in quotes and images, Ukrainian Telegram channels were more prevalent in embeddings. Media organizations may adopt a relatively balanced approach in their use of sources from both countries. News organizations examined in this study seemingly attempt to showcase objective (equal numerically) reporting in terms of the use of news sources, even when using Telegram, despite criticism of Telegram for a range of biases. Hence, using Telegram is challenging in understanding the nature of its accounts. This study found that Telegram sources featured Putin's allies promoted a Russian-biased view of the war. Similarly, institutional sources were obviously biased, such as *Russia Today* or *Sputnik*, promoting narratives in favor of Russian or, to a lesser degree, Ukrainian perspectives (Elswah and Howard, 2020). Nevertheless, institutional sources can be useful and even trustworthy in some cases. However, in other cases, institutional credibility signaled through an official account can lead to untrustworthy information, such as for *Russian Today* or *Sputnik*, as argued previously (*e.g.*, Parks, 2020a; Mujib, *et al.*, 2022).

Quantitative counts of Russian and Ukrainian Telegram sources appeared similar, suggesting objectivity. However, this form of objectivity has been criticized (Cunningham, 2003), where journalists demonstrate a dependency on official sources as a means to present both sides, ostensibly achieving balance. This tendency was evident in reporting on the war. There were few exceptions, such as the use of Ukrainian only sources for some forms of Telegram reporting in embeddings.

This study revealed how news organizations negotiated Telegram among other social media to compensate for the lack of on-the-ground reporting (Matheson, 2021). We found that Telegram was used by the news organizations in a similar way that the typical sources used. Yet, there were some unique practices of content verification that were uncovered where Telegram's sociotechnical elements shaped the way that journalists integrate it into news (Stijn, *et al.*, 2016). FM

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Notes

1. Seven news stories were excluded due to access issues, otherwise known as paywalls. This included an Israeli news portal story from *Haaretz*, two *New York Times* stories, and four *Washington Post* stories. We made this decision of exclusion not only because we lacked subscriptions but also an assumption was made that other readers who accessed news from Google News would be restricted as well. In one news story, Telegram as a source was mentioned as a false positive where a telegram was a message utilizing a telegraph, thus excluded from further analysis. Similarly, we excluded stories from the following news outlets: NPR (N=2); Critical Threats Project, *Cyprus Mail*, EUvsDiSiNFO, GNET, Pearls and Irritations, Times Now, *Vice*., each including one story. For example, the story from Times Now covered issues not related to the Russo-Ukrainian war where Telegram was mentioned without specific attribution, where users used Telegram to post disinformation. Other stories mentioned Telegram as a social media platform but were not using it as a source.

2. Inaccessible stories included *Haaretz*, an Israeli newspaper, that would not open the file. Four stories from the *Washington Post* (USA) and two from the *New York Times* (USA) were excluded due to the presence of a paywall. It is worth mentioning that there were only two Ukrainian sources included by Google News: *Euromaidan* source started to be included on 25 September 2023 and before that the *Kyiv Post* with two news stories (4 June 2023) was the only Ukrainian source that was included by Google News.

3. Kesaieva, 2023, paragraph 1.

4. Ellyatt, 2023, paragraph 8.

5. Knight and Pennington, 2023, paragraph 1; Mohamed, 2023, paragraph 1.

6. Mohamed, 2023, paragraph 1.

7. Knight and Pennington, 2023, paragraph 1.

8. The GNET story discusses Telegram not only as a platform used in the context of war information, but did not use specific sources. Similarly, NPR's story covered how Telegram, as a platform, can be harmful by spreading falsehoods. In *Cyprus Mail* story number 72 and *Al Jazeera* story number 73, there is one video referred to on Telegram, but there are no actual videos in the stories, but Telegram was mentioned.

9. Nechyporenko, *et al.*, 2023, paragraph 3.

10. Vlasova, 2023, paragraph 5.

11. Havrylets, 2023, paragraph 1.

12. Euromaidan Press staff, 2023, paragraph 2.

13. Zoria, 2023, paragraph 4.

14. Zoria, 2023, paragraph 1.

15. Guinto, 2023, paragraph 2.

16. Voichuk, 2023, paragraph 1.

17. *Al Jazeera* staff, 2023, paragraph 2.

18. Mogul, *et al.*, 2023, paragraph 1.

19. Voitovych and Krever, 2023, paragraph 1.

20. *Ibid*.

21. Ellyatt, 2023, paragraph 12.

22. Knight and Pennington, 2023, paragraph 2.

23. Korshak, 2023, paragraph 5.

24. Kuklychev, 2023, paragraph 1.

25. Appearing in a story "Putin ally delivers horror nuclear warning after 'attack drone' falls near home" — McNulty, *et al.*, 2023, paragraph 3.

26. Shevchenko, 2023, paragraph 6.

27. Vorobyov, 2023, paragraph 1.

28. Kuklychev, 2023, paragraph 1.

29. Parks, 2020b, p. 1,242.

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