



Jaime A. Teixeira da Silva¹

The use of stock photos in news reporting: A case in 2022 of the Russo-Ukrainian War

SUMMARY The ability to transmit accurate information that does not deceive its readership, and the use of images that reflects the truth of the fact that they are supposed to be representing, should be an important principle and basal tenet of any traditional or social media-based news or journalistic organization or platform. It is not uncommon to find images or photos that accompany the text of a news article, and the visual impact of an image, as is often expressed in a *cliché*, can sometimes add much more value than merely the text itself. Whereas some fake news is patently untrue, another gray zone of journalism that is affected by fake news may encompass bias, spin and deceit. Absent rigorous quality control and editing measures, a news source may inadvertently slip into this gray zone, which encompasses the use of stock photos to represent, or supplement, the text of news items. Focusing on photos by a pro-Ukrainian social media app-based news media outlet, this rather unusual case involves a highly topical personality, the President of Ukraine. This article points to how subtle “truth” can change through the use (or abuse) of stock photos. Several images covering May–September of 2022, specifically photos or videos of an unshaven President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in military attire that switch to images of a shaven individual in a suit, and back again, are examined from a single Telegram-based news source. This case notes, using a “soft” example, the risks of “massaging” truth using stock photos. In times of war, especially in the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian War, the accuracy of news, including the non-fictional imagery that accompanies it, is essential, so as to neither mislead nor bias the readership, and to portray the news as accurately and neutrally as possible.

KEYWORDS clickbait, credibility, media manipulation, misleading news, sensationalism, truth

¹ Jaime A. Teixeira da Silva, independent researcher, e-mail: jaimetex@yahoo.com, ORCID: 0000–0003–3299–2772.

Introduction: The power and importance of imagery in war reporting

The accuracy and reliability of information in the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian War is essential for the public to remain aware of current events, and how they might be impacted, directly or indirectly. Evidently, given that it is a war with opposing factions, bias, misinformation and disinformation are expected, perhaps even rife. Images play an essential part of this information or misinformation campaign, because they can easily sway the audience's emotions. As equally as readers might be shocked by the images emerging from this war, so too can images transmit subtle messages. In the former case, shocking imagery is generally used to sway opinion, and it is an effective way to achieve mass information "mobilization" because an image may be even more powerful than the written message or caption itself. In the case of the latter, manipulative imagery can be used to offer a slightly "dishonest" perspective of a news item, by not entirely representing the truth. Several of these themes are debated in more detail later on in this paper, which first introduces a rather unusual² case study.

Introducing the case protagonist: President Volodymyr Zelenskyy

In this case study, the focus is on the use of stock (or archived) photos³ to mischaracterize or "massage" the truth. The current President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, serves as the protagonist because he has become an individual of global influence, garnering multiple awards and decorations in 2022 alone⁴, as a result of his firm position and passionate leadership in the 2022 Russo-Ukrainian War, even becoming, by popular vote, *Time* magazine's 2022

² Some may even consider the topic to be trivial because it focuses only on facial hair and clothing, but it is precisely because of the trivial nature of this topic that it was selected, so as not to arouse too much controversy or conflict.

³ Stock photos have been defined as "professional images of common situation, people, events or places that are used for commercial design purposes" (Arielli, 2019, p. 32).

⁴ As verified on the Wikipedia page for the President: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Volodymyr_Zelenskyy

Person of the Year⁵. Consequently, the face and image of President Zelenskyy may be fairly well-known to the international public. As one example, a vividly striking and unforgettable image of President Zelenskyy was a photo on 4 April 2022 in Bucha, as can be appreciated on the *Time* magazine link above, in which a face of angst in seeing so much death and destruction was a far cry from the frequently calm and confident face that was often associated with the Ukrainian head of state just days or weeks earlier. President Zelenskyy, an economics graduate, but an actor and comedian by trade and profession, is surely no stranger to the subtleties and power of messaging conveyed through imagery.

This case revolves – with fullest respect and no disrespect intended – around the shaved versus unshaved face of President Zelenskyy, on 22 May 2022, when President Andrzej Duda – the President of Poland, and one of Ukraine’s staunchest allies and socio-economic and military allies in this war – addressed the Verkhovna Rada, i.e., the Ukrainian Parliament (NPR, 2022). That address was historical to some extent because it was the first time a foreign head of state had addressed the Verkhovna Rada since the start of the newest phase of the Russo-Ukrainian War, beginning on 24 February 2022 (Ukrinform, 2022). Avid or anxious followers of this war would have surely noted a characteristic, almost casual, visual appearance of President Zelenskyy, namely a khaki military T-shirt, slacks and sneakers, and an unshaven face. Precisely when President Duda visited Kyiv, a pro-Ukrainian Telegram messaging app-based news site (Telegram, *truexanewsua*⁶) not only displayed, in the time frame between 21 May and 23 May 2022, those images of casual attire (Fig. 1A, B, E, F, H, I), but also images of a clean-shaven President Zelenskyy dressed in a suit, welcoming President Duda to the presidential palace in Kyiv (Fig. 1C, D, G). Given the close relationship between Ukraine and Poland, and the historical importance of the address by President Duda, this sudden change in facial visual and attire by President Zelenskyy was not entirely unexpected. The likely assumption in the viewer’s or reader’s mind of this sudden change may have been that President Zelenskyy most likely wanted to present himself as respectfully as possible – including his shaved appearance and attire – to welcome President Duda in Kyiv. Also of note, a subtle discrepancy in attire by President Duda was also observed, namely that

⁵ <https://time.com/6177642/2022-time100-reader-poll-winner-volodymyr-zelensky/> (it is unclear if the spelling of President Zelenskyy as “Zelensky” constitutes a factual error, or if dual spelling for the same individual is acceptable in news outlets).

⁶ With 2.34 million subscribers; September 12, 2022.

he wore a tie when President Zelenskyy was dressed in a suit (Fig. 1D) but was tieless when President Zelenskyy used military-style attire (Fig. 1E, I).

To close followers of the news of this war, this apparent sudden change in physical appearance and attire may have been somewhat surprising, given that another head of state, the Prime Minister of Portugal, António Costa, had also visited Kyiv and met with President Zelenskyy just 24 hours prior, i.e., on 21 May 2022 (President.gov.ua, 2022). In that meeting, President Zelenskyy displayed an unshaven appearance and was dressed in his iconic informal military-style attire (Forces Penpals, 2022). However, during the 21–23 May 2022 period, multiple images (photos and videos) on the same news platform showed several interchanges between a clean-shaven, suit-wearing and an unshaven, military attire-wearing President Zelenskyy (Fig. 1). Evidently, since both realities cannot be true, this suggests that some of the images may have been fabricated (least likely explanation), or that stock photos of other times and/or events were used (a more likely explanation). In terms of plausibility, it is easier to conceive a shaven face after an unshaven one simply because the opposite is impossible⁷ to achieve within 24–48 hours.

It is noted that images of an unshaven President Zelenskyy also appeared, in the same time interval, on a post on a pro-Russian Telegram channel (Telegram, *RVvoenkor*), a Tweet from the Polish Presidential Chancellery (Twitter, *prezydentpl*), a post on the Telegram channel of a member of the Verkhovna Rada (Telegram, *mysiagin*), and a Telegram channel post of an advisor to the Ukrainian Ministry of Internal Affairs (Telegram, *pravdaGerashchenko_en*), as “independent control” samples, suggesting that this was likely the true visual appearance of President Zelenskyy during the visit by President Duda. It is also worth noting seemingly outdated photos in the mastheads of the Twitter accounts of both President Zelenskyy (Twitter, *ZelenskyyUa*) and President Duda (Twitter, *AndrzejDuda*), which could be construed as misrepresentation of the truth, in this case, age. Finally, so as not to give an apparent pro- or anti-Ukrainian or Russian impression, a pro-Russian Telegram channel also used a potential stock photo of the unshaved state of President Zelenskyy (Telegram, *workBrothers*)⁸, as did the above cited member of the Verkhovna Rada (Telegram, *mysiagin*).

⁷ If one considers the amount of stubble during the meeting with Prime Minister A. Costa just 24 hours prior.

⁸ <https://t.me/workBrothers/2763> (May 23, 05:01)

Relevance of this case (May 2022 photos): Triviality or subtle truth “massaging”?

Readers of this paper may arguably ask, “why focus on this triviality?” Actually, if all of the photos were factually true, and represented the reality in time and space, then the visual images of the shaved versus unshaved appearance of President Zelenskyy, either in a suit or in military attire, to meet President Duda, would have in itself been somewhat newsworthy. This is because it would have reflected a much greater level of attention, and in some ways respect, towards President Duda than towards other heads of state that had recently visited Kyiv, such as Prime Minister A. Costa, even days before the visit by President Duda. In political terms, such a subtlety would likely have carried a tremendous message and weighting, serving almost as a signal, by seemingly offering President Duda (and Poland) very special “treatment” and level of respect relative to other heads of state (in the case of Prime Minister A. Costa, Portugal), even though both are NATO members. Once again, if all photos were true, then such differential treatment between the heads of state of Portugal and Poland, the former being snubbed, might not have been unrealistic, if one considers the amount of humanitarian, economic and military support offered by Poland relative to Portugal (Antezza et al., 2022).

Having assumed that the unshaved and military attire images reflected the temporal reality of 22 May 2022, an initial search was conducted for the three apparent stock images (Fig. 1C, D, G), using the family names of both Presidents, alone and together, as well as in combination with other key words, on Alamy.com, Shutterstock.com and GettyImages.co.jp, as well as manual searches on Yahoo and/or Google images on 29–31 May 2022. Fig. 1C indicates the copyright holder in the bottom-right corner, Jakub Szymczuk / KPRP, who is the Polish Presidential Chancellery’s official photographer. A search for this name in Google images revealed a Wikipedia commons entry, dated 23 February 2022 (Wikimedia Commons). Regarding Fig. 1D, although not a perfect replica copy of the photo shown, a photo of a slightly different angle points towards the likely source, namely a meeting held on 27 January 2020, in Oswiecim (Malopolska, Poland) as indicated by photo #1197378670 in Getty Images. Tracing Fig. 1G was impossible, despite various searches with multiple key words. It is assumed that these images have digital IDs that are traceable by those with such IT skills.

Consequently, there is no additional newsworthy value or interpretation of this stock photo-related case to supplement President Duda's historical address to the Verkhovna Rada, hence the suggestion that some may find this case study to be trivial. However, there are some fundamental discussion points that can, and should, be raised regarding this event and situation, even if the case may seem trivial. Why would a fairly popular Ukrainian news site – at that time with about 1.9 million subscribers – use some stock photos to represent the meeting between President Zelenskyy and President Duda, rather than actual photos taken on the day? Superficially, it could be argued that the use of stock photos in this instance poses no ethical challenges, and that there are no deontological arguments, simply because their use was merely to illustrate a brief message that underlies each photo, namely the welcome of President Duda in Kyiv by President Zelenskyy. Yet, as has been briefly argued above, and as will be discussed in more detail below, even subtle manipulations in imagery, as occurred in this case with the use of stock (or archived) photos, have the ability to influence readers' perceptions, thereby biasing their take-away "feeling" regarding that particular news item and event, i.e., the address of the Verkhovna Rada by President Duda. Even though this case deals with a trivial issue⁹, namely the shaved versus unshaved face and formal suit versus informal military attire of President Zelenskyy, the apparently deliberate misuse of stock photos, leading to a visual manipulation of the facts, raises some concerns because it can be argued that the truth was "massaged". Additional hypothetical and literature-based arguments are presented next.

Other post-May 2022 photos

Among several news and social media sites that were monitored daily, the continued use of stock photos to misrepresent the image or other aspects of President Zelenskyy were used. In one example, a meeting was held with the President of Moldova, Maia Sandu in which a stock photo was used (Fig. 1J) as was an apparent photo of the actual event (Fig. 1K). In another stand-alone case, a stock photo depicts a physical meeting with the Secretary General of NATO, Jens Stoltenberg, when (in reality) the Ukrainian figure legend clearly indicates that a telephone conversation was held between the two and not an in-person meeting

⁹ Relative to more serious and somber aspects of the war such as death, destruction, displacement and economic strife.

as was depicted by the photo (Fig. 1L). These three photos were used on 28 June 2022. On 10 September 10 2022, a stock photo represented a clean-shaven President Zelenskyy signing a presidential decree to sanction 606 Russian officials (Fig. 1M), when in fact the President maintained his unshaved appearance, as evidenced by a meeting on that day with Haluk Bayraktar, the CEO of the Turkish unmanned combat aerial vehicle company “Baykar” (Fig. 1N). The use of stock photos to represent President Zelenskyy in news or social media was not examined after September 2022.

How serious is stock photo truth “massaging”? Some hypothetical arguments

What if the news story was more profound, for example, the scene of a bombing, or the claim of an attack on a city, hospital or specific group of individuals, such as children or hospital workers? Would the use of a stock photo that represents a completely different reality, showing a different city, children or hospital at a different time frame, be acceptable in social and journalistic standards? The same risk applies to imagery used to describe diseases, pandemics, or other health-related topics in which viewers might relate the written text message and image as being directly related. In natural disasters, such as earthquakes, floods, or other catastrophic events, when a stock photo is used, it fails to “personalise the hazard or give a true indication of the current and potential impact of the hazard” (Dootson et al., 2021, p. 5). The author is of the opinion that even such journalistic manipulation could be interpreted as one mechanism to stimulate misinformation, and thus misrepresent the truth, which should be a basic tenet not only of news reporting, but of journalism itself (Pavlik et al., 2020). It could also represent laziness, the lack of professionalism, fact cherry-picking, exaggerations or omissions, trolling or a host of other bias-inducing factors and habits that may accompany politically-related events (Hendricks & Vestergaard, 2019).

In the information wars that typically characterized misinformation during the COVID-19 pandemic (Raj & Meel, 2022), and in the war-related information wars that typify the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian War (Msughter & Yar’Adua, 2022), journalists need to be more conscientious of their actions and decisions, even those that pertain to the selection of photos to accompany the text that provide a factual summary of an event. The author is of the opinion that stock photos should not be used to represent factual news, and where photos do not

exist, then only text should be used. Moreover, where the use of a stock photo may be warranted, for example, to show the image of military hardware¹⁰, especially where a “live” image could not be obtained from the source in real-time, then the news outlet has the responsibility of informing readers that the photo is a stock photo, and indicating its source and date of publication, so as not to mislead or deceive readers.

What does the literature state about the use, or abuse, of stock photos?

To gain a better appreciation of the use of stock photos in news, and their potential misuse or manipulation, either to hype or skew the focus of the news, or to mislead the readership, Google Scholar searches were made (May, July, August 2022; August 2023) using key words “stock photos news” and “stock photos fake news”, to gain a crude appreciation of some of the views and arguments that scholars in this field of research are making. The search was limited to 2018–2023. Although several dozen papers of potential interest were initially identified, after reading those articles in detail, the ideas and opinions of only 22 are presented next.

Digital images are now widely available via online image banks, and in several cases, they are free of royalties, or may even have creative commons (CC) licenses, allowing for open, free and wide use, but subject to specific conditions depending on the CC license. While some proponents of the use of stock photos in politics- and military-related news may argue that their use is simply illustrative or symbolic, their use may amplify the credibility of an online news source even though such photos may – purposefully or inadvertently – falsely index a person or event (Arielli, 2019). Increased credibility (actual or perceived), whether deserved or manipulated, may also result in higher readership, as well as income where subscriptions are involved, so where journalistically suspect practices may be involved, it can be argued that inflated readership and/or subscriptions may be unfair gains. Moreover, the misattribution of a fact, by association with a stock photo from a different event and even time period, thereby creating a referent, aims to serve as a tool of “emblematic evidence”, i.e., “the creation of a deep link between two unrelated events” (Arielli, 2019, p. 29).

¹⁰ For general members of the public that are not familiar with different military ammunition, artillery, or heavy weapons used in this war, a stock photo may actually be useful and informative.

As Emanuele Arielli aptly points out, a stock “image could be sold several times and be used for different purposes” (Arielli, 2019, p. 32), and in the case of politics, war or health, this may have very negative consequences or associations, such as the use of a photo of violence by one group to characterize the behavior of another. In that sense, the abuse of stock photos may be iconically misleading, i.e., “these pre-formatted images contain tacit layers of meaning that are uncritically anthropocentric and accepting of inequalities” (Simonsen, 2022; p. 133), and when used with superimposed text messages, as “memes”, they can also be harmful (Arielli, 2019).

The recycling of photos, stock or other, to represent geographically and temporarily different events has been identified as one reason why some Twitter posts that used them may have been misleading (Boididou et al., 2018). In the context of urban lifestyle, the use of stock photos is a popular way to create ambience and a sense of “comforting familiarity” (Aiello, 2022). Similarly, the use of stock photos of smiling elders by European municipal authorities give the impression of a happier side of old age, ultimately serving to promote municipal services (Xu & Larsson, 2021). However, such photos might not reflect the real life scenario of an urbanization or municipality, or of a geriatric society, and may instead give a false impression of something “good” about a city or aspect of an urban lifestyle that might not necessarily be so, such as images of verdant greenery when in fact the city is mainly concrete buildings, or a happy face when in fact elders might not actually be feeling that way. News items that use images to support information but that do “not faithfully represent the event that it refers to” ultimately contribute to fake news (Cao et al., 2020, p. 142).

Even if stock photos are not purposefully doctored, such as manipulation using Photoshop, and even if they might not represent more serious facets of the fake news movement, such as deepfakes, including the manipulation of images of known public figures (Otrell-Cass & Fasching, 2021), their misrepresentation of a fact by using the visual representation of another distinct fact falls into the realm of misinformation. The misattribution of a fact through false imagery may impact an individual’s perception of an event (Greene et al., 2022), and reduce the credibility of the news source (Mortensen et al., 2023). Consequently, stock imagery as part of a news item may influence a reader’s perception of that news, even more so if that manipulation reflects personal ideologies or political preferences (Levitskaya & Fedorov, 2020). This creates a “truthiness effect” in which non-probative photos such as stock photos “bias people to believe that an associated claim is true, despite the fact that the photo

offers no diagnostic evidence for the claim's veracity" (Newman & Zhang, 2020, p. 90). In some ways, in terms of the shaven versus unshaven image of President Zelenskyy, it is conceivable that the use of photos in the shaven state would lead to an attempt to increase readers' likeability or positive perceptions of the photos' protagonists (President Zelenskyy and President Duda) rather than targeting the story and message's credibility (Salminen et al., 2020).

Given that online content that is false, fabricated, manipulated, and thus misleading forms part of the broader umbrella of "fake news" (Narwal, 2018; Billard & Moran, 2023), and that the use of manipulation may "hijack" information from its purported original purpose (Toma & Scripcariu, 2020), journalists that employ stock photos as a quick and easy way to represent an event with an image that in fact represents another event, need to rethink their journalistic practices. The effect and impact of the use of clickbait strategies, including content manipulation, to influence readership (Vultee et al., 2022) may be culturally or generationally biased (Trninić et al., 2022). In extreme cases, the knowing dissemination of fake information in the public domain carries legal and sometimes criminal liability (Nabiullina, 2021). However, in these turbulent times of war, who will hold news sites that use stock photos liable, ethically, legally, or otherwise?

A simple solution to losing credibility in a news item by employing a stock photo, and by not giving the impression of manipulation, is by clearly labeling that photo as being from another source, time period or event, as *The Wall Street Journal* did when it used a 2019 photo of President Zelenskyy in a 12 May 2022 article (WSJ, 2022).

Conclusion and limitations

The issue of accurate news reporting could not be more relevant, or pertinent, than in times of war, because they are so socially and politically charged. What undeniably characterizes the dynamics of this war, unlike wars of the 20th century, is the existence of the Internet, allowing for the rapid dissemination of news and information, social media, powerful tools like Photoshop to manipulate imagery, and a pandemic of fake news that underlies misinformation and disinformation in so many spheres of life and society today, including the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian War (Babacan & Tam, 2022). In this paper, which is a case study, the alternate use of real-time and stock (or archived) photos to represent the image of the current President of Ukraine, Zelenskyy, flipping between

an informal visual (unshaven in military attire) and a formal visual (shaven in a suit), serves to exemplify, in a “soft” manner, how truth can be “massaged” by offering, through manipulated visual images, a dual impression to readers. This paper not only argues that such manipulation of photos may range widely between trivial and untruthful, depending on the depth of the interpretation, but further argues that if such manipulation were to have been used in order to illustrate other, more “hardcore” issues, such as health, natural disasters, death, or war itself, in the latter serving as an information warfare tool (Krawczyk & Wiśnicki, 2022), then a public outcry might be expected. This is because stock photos are widely employed by fake news websites (Murphy, 2023). The topic of stock photos in news and journalism is receiving increasing attention within the context of a global fake news epidemic, but its use in academia and scholarly publishing – a topic that is not covered in this paper – is also worthy of exploration, for similar reasons that are argued in this paper. While this paper only deals with a single case – the visual appearance and attire of a highly popular public figure, President Zelenskyy – experts in this field of research would do well to explore the arguments made herein and apply them to a wider range of examples related to war, society, health, and other topical issues and from different news sources, to further appreciate the triviality, or seriousness, of what is being debated. Ultimately, society needs to appreciate the importance of this topic. If used occasionally, in moderation, and clearly labelled as such, stock photos actually bring some positive benefits such as a visual association to a fact, but if their use is excessive, uncontrolled, or manipulative, and if they are not clearly labelled as representing *de facto* other situations, then the long-term risk to that news source and news dissemination is the ultimate loss of trust among its readership (Ross Arguedas et al., 2023) since consumers of such information will no longer be able to comfortably, or confidently, distinguish true from fake images.

Additional information

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Fig. 1. A temporal sequence of screenshots of photos and video stills between approximately May 21 and 23, 2022 (A-I) in which the visual appearance (shaved versus unshaved) and attire (suit versus military-style clothing) of the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, changed a few times, during his meeting with the President of Poland, Andrzej Duda. Similar shaved (stock photo) (J) versus real time representation (K) in a meeting between President Zelenskyy and the President of Moldova (Maia Sandu) on June 28, 2022. A curious use of a stock photo to represent an in-person meeting with the Secretary General of NATO, Jens Stoltenberg, despite the Ukrainian figure legend indicating that the two had held a telephone conversation (L). On September 10, 2022, a stock photo of a clean shaven President Zelenskyy claimed that he had signed a presidential decree to sanction 606 Russian officials (M), even though on the same day, the President had an unshaved appearance, as evidenced by a meeting with Haluk Bayraktar, the CEO of the Turkish

unmanned combat aerial vehicle company “Baykar” (N). The visual images of shaved and suit likely reflect the use of stock photos.



Sources of screenshots:

(A) <https://t.me/truexanewsua/47698>; (B) <https://t.me/truexanewsua/47703>;
 (C) <https://t.me/truexanewsua/47837>; (D) <https://t.me/truexanewsua/47856>;
 (E) <https://t.me/truexanewsua/47871>; (F) <https://t.me/truexanewsua/47872>;
 (G) <https://t.me/truexanewsua/47885>; (H) <https://t.me/truexanewsua/47887>;
 (I) <https://t.me/truexanewsua/47898>; (J) <https://t.me/truexanewsua/52172>;
 (K) <https://t.me/RVvoenkor/17571>; (L) <https://t.me/truexanewsua/52253>;
 (M) <https://t.me/truexanewsua/59505>; (N) <https://t.me/truexanewsua/59521>.

Dates and times of screenshots (as indicated on Telegram) (all 2022): (A) May 21, 17:32; (B) May 21, 18:15; (C) May 22, 18:45; (D) May 22, 20:00; (E) May 22, 21:45; (F) May 22, 21:58; (G) May 22, 23:51; (H) May 23, 00:14; (I) May 23, 01:40; (J) June 28, 00:26; (K) June 28, 01:59; (L) June 28, 17:19; (M) September 10, 00:50; (N) September 10, 02:55. Notes and disclaimers: None of the images or text indicates, in the case of stock photos, the exact date, source, or location. Text in the original Telegram posts have been edited out; their written message in Ukrainian is irrelevant to this paper's discussion. During the preparation of photos to create the figure plate in Microsoft Powerpoint, some photos might not match the published image perfectly due to slight adjustment (trimming) or overlap with neighboring images. It cannot be ruled out, nor can it be stated with certainty, that any of the images of President Zelenskyy, unshaved and in military-style attire, are not themselves stock photos. Screenshots taken under a fair-use policy. Even though several of the indicated dates and times are stated with some precision above, in reality they might differ slightly, given the several-hour time difference between Japan – where the screenshots were taken by the author – and Ukraine, where the actual events occurred. All images are used under a fair-use policy for academic purposes.

Wykorzystanie zdjęć stockowych w doniesieniach prasowych: Przypadek wojny rosyjsko-ukraińskiej w 2022 r.

STRESZCZENIE Umiejętność przekazywania dokładnych informacji, które nie wprowadzają czytelników w błąd, oraz wykorzystanie obrazów, które odzwierciedlają prawdę o tym, co mają przedstawiać, powinna być ważną i podstawową zasadą wszelkich wiadomości przekazywanych w mediach tradycyjnych i społecznościowych, a także pochodzących z organizacji i platform informacyjnych lub dziennikarskich. Nierzadko można znaleźć obrazy lub zdjęcia towarzyszące tekstowi artykułu informacyjnego, gdzie wizualny wpływ obrazu może nieść znacznie większą wartość niż sam tekst. Podczas gdy niektóre fałszywe wiadomości są w oczywisty sposób nieprawdziwe, pozostała szara strefa dziennikarstwa, na którą wpływają fałszywe wiadomości, może obejmować stronniczość, technikę spin i oszustwa. Bez rygorystycznych środków kontroli jakości i edycji źródło wiadomości może przypadkowo znaleźć się w tej szarej strefie, która obejmuje wykorzystanie zdjęć stockowych do przedstawienia lub uzupełnienia tekstu wiadomości. W artykule skupiono się na umieszczonych w mediach społecznościowych zdjęciach przedstawiających prezydenta Ukrainy, autorstwa proukraińskiego serwisu informacyjnego. Niniejszy artykuł wskazuje, jak subtelna „prawda” może się zmienić poprzez użycie (lub nadużycie) zdjęć stockowych. Przeanalizowano kilka zdjęć z okresu maj–wrzesień 2022 r., a konkretnie zdjęcia lub filmy przedstawiające nieogolonego Wołodymyra Zelenskiego w mundurze wojskowym, występujące naprzemiennie z wizerunkiem ogolonego prezydenta w garniturze. Przypadek ten ilustruje, używając „miękkiego” przykładu, ryzyko „maskowania” prawdy przy użyciu zdjęć stockowych. W czasach wojny, zwłaszcza toczącej się wojny rosyjsko-ukraińskiej, dokładność wiadomości i towarzyszących im obrazów jest niezbędna, aby nie wprowadzać czytelników w błąd ani nic im nie sugerować, a także aby przedstawiać wiadomości tak dokładnie i neutralnie, jak to tylko możliwe.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE clickbait, wiarygodność, manipulacja medialna, wiadomości wprowadzające w błąd, sensacja, prawda

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