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Information Wars: A Look at the Role of Social Media in the 2014 Ukrainian Revolution

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at
Syracuse University

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and Renée Crown University Honors
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Abstract

Guided by American University Professor Rhonda Zaharna's previous works on narrative battles, this thesis examines the Facebook pages of four major players in the 2014 Ukrainian Revolution to determine how social media is used to create narratives during times of conflict. The paper argues that modern day wars are partially fought in virtual spaces and social media platforms serve as important battlegrounds for "information wars" between opponents. Over 300 Facebook posts from between November 2013 and May 2014 were collected from the Facebook pages representing the Euromaidan protestors, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the European Union in Ukraine and the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv. These posts were then analyzed in a coding sheet that included both quantitative and qualitative criteria. Through this analysis, it was determined what strategies each group used on Facebook and which groups were most successful at building persuasive narratives to influence their target audiences. This study emphasizes the growing importance of social media as a strategic tool in modern warfare and shows that narrative battles can now be fought and won on digital platforms.

Executive Summary

The 2014 Euromaidan protests and the subsequent Ukrainian revolution are undoubtedly a critical part of global history. The Ukrainian protestors' attempt to sever ties with Russia and align with the European Union sparked tensions between major world powers that still remain largely unresolved today. This paper examines how several of the key players in the 2014 Ukrainian revolution dealt with this conflict on social media. Studying the way social media was used during such a crucial historical event provides valuable insights that are shockingly relevant today, particularly in regards to current Russian social media manipulation.

There have been a number of studies about social media use during Euromaidan, but most of this existing research focuses on the way individuals used social media platforms to communicate with each other instead of looking at organizational use. Using American University Professor Rhonda Zaharna's 2016 paper "Reassessing 'Whose Story Wins': The Trajectory of Identity Resilience in Narrative Contests" as a framework, this study examines the Facebook accounts of four organizations during the 2014 Ukrainian Revolution to determine how social media can be used to control the narrative of a conflict.

The four accounts examined belonged to the Euromaidan protestors, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the United States Embassy in Kyiv and the European Union (EU) in Ukraine. Each of these groups had an interest in the conflict and a unique narrative they wanted to convey to the public. In addition, all four groups were active on Facebook during the protests. The Facebook pages studied were either organization or community pages maintained by a team of administrators, not Facebook accounts for individuals.

A list of relevant search terms was compiled and manually entered into Facebook's search function to identify posts from between November 2013 and May 2014, a time period that

encompasses the revolution. Through this method, over 300 Facebook posts were identified, which were then sorted into categories, organized into a coding sheet in Microsoft Excel, and analyzed for media usage, sentiment, engagement, response and content. This analysis made it possible to identify patterns in each group's Facebook use and determine what strategies page administrators were using and how these strategies may have contributed to each page's narrative.

The results of the study found that these groups were definitely engaged in narrative battles with each other during the conflict and were deliberately using social media to try and take control of these narratives. While it is difficult to determine whether or not each group's messages on social media had any effect on the outcome of the conflict, the study does show that organizations are strategic in their use of social media during times of conflict and highlights the importance of thinking critically about the intentions behind the content we see on social media. This is especially crucial today as social media platforms become increasingly complex with more opportunities for manipulation, including the use of bots and targeted advertisements. This study of historical social media use has heavy implications for the future of social media, suggesting that social media platforms have the potential to be used as a tool of war.

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Chapter 1:

Introduction

On February 19, 2014, the capital of Ukraine was on fire. Protestors gathered on *Maidan Nezalezhnosti* (Independence Square) in Kyiv had set the barricades surrounding their area ablaze to protect themselves from the advancing *berkut* (riot police), who used water cannons, tear gas and pressure grenades in an attempt to silence the crowd (Higgins & Kramer, 2014). Flames reached into the winter sky, devouring anything that stood in the way and covering the square with thick clouds of smoke. As the world around them burned, protestors cried out popular rallying chants such as “Glory to Ukraine!” and “Glory to the heroes!” (Blair, 2014). The raging fire perfectly symbolized the violence and destruction that had plagued Ukraine for months as protestors fought against a corrupt government. What started as a peaceful demonstration had erupted into a brutal and bloody conflict, leaving an unknown number¹ of people dead, wounded or missing. This conflict— stretching from November 2013 to February 2014— is called Euromaidan, and it began with a Facebook post.

“We are meeting at 22:30 under the Monument of Independence. Dress warm, bring umbrellas, tea, coffee, good mood and friends. Reposts are highly encouraged!” (Bohdanova, 2014).

¹ Various sources reported widely different death tolls, making it difficult to determine the exact number of people who died in the conflict.

This is the message *Ukrainska Pravda* journalist Mustafa Nayyem posted on his Facebook page on November 21, 2013, shortly after former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych announced his rejection of an anticipated Association Agreement with the European Union. Nayyem's post inspired a group of "around 200 politicians and civil society activists" to gather on Independence Square to peacefully protest Yanukovych's decision (Saryusz-wolski, 2014, p. 11). Within a week, the *berkut* began violently using batons and stun grenades on the protestors, causing more and more Ukrainians to flock to Kyiv to participate in the movement. Euromaidan eventually spread from Kyiv to include millions of protestors across 46 Ukrainian cities (Saryusz-wolski, 2014). Ukrainians found themselves fighting not only for European integration, but also for their fundamental human rights.

Much of this fight took place on social media, where Mustafa Nayyem first shared his uniting message. Platforms such as Facebook and Twitter served as a battleground for Euromaidan protestors to engage in a narrative battle with their oppressors. Narrative battles "contain intertwined elements of how an actor experiences itself (identity) and how it tries to project itself to others (image)" (Zaharna, 2016, p. 4408). In a political conflict, actors use narratives "to extend their influence, manage expectations, and change the discursive environment in which they operate" (Zaharna, 2016, p. 4409). In other words, narrative battles aim to control how the rest of the world views a conflict and persuade the public to take a side.

This paper examines the narrative battle that occurred during Euromaidan, specifically looking at how four major players in the conflict— the Euromaidan protestors, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the United States Embassy in Kyiv, and the European Union in Ukraine— utilized Facebook in their attempt to shape the narrative surrounding the protests and

control their public image. The study of these groups addresses the following research objectives:

- To compare the content published on the Facebook pages of each group between November 14, 2013 and May 13, 2014
- To identify the social media strategies employed by each group on Facebook
- To determine how each group used social media strategies to shape the narrative of the Euromaidan conflict and control the image of each group

The results of the study emphasize the growing importance of social media as a strategic tool in modern warfare. Narrative battles are often fought and won on digital platforms, and the content shared on social media can be as strategic and calculated as the moves made on a physical battleground. Examining how key players in a past conflict used social media to control narratives provides insight into the role social media may play in future wars. In this case, Russia's current social media and propaganda efforts toward the United States and Europe can be traced back to strategic disputes over the future of Ukraine, specifically the pivotal events of 2014. Looking at the origins of these practices provides the background needed to understand and respond to Russian aggression now and in the future, and the results of this study will only become more relevant as the world becomes increasingly digital.

Chapter 2:

Literature Review

Euromaidan's History

A review of Ukraine's complicated history explains what caused the terrible violence during Euromaidan and spurred the narrative battle examined in this paper. Before 1991, Ukraine belonged to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), a coalition of states governed by the Communist Party in Russia. Ukraine became an independent nation in 1991, following the collapse of the USSR, but remained controlled by a handful of businessmen and "old communist elite," who were invested in private industries and more interested in making money for themselves than developing a solid economic policy to strengthen the newly independent nation (Archambault & Ausland, 2015, p. 59–61). Poor leadership and a weak economic policy were driving Ukraine to bankruptcy and the country struggled to find its place on the international stage (Archambault & Ausland, 2015).

Ukrainians themselves were also divided on what it meant to be a Ukrainian. In his book "Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands," Richard Sakwa describes two models of Ukrainian statehood that emerged when Ukraine became independent. In the monist model (associated with Western Ukraine), people believe in a "monolingual, unitary and culturally specific" country that is completely distinct from Russia (Sakwa, 2015, p.15). This contrasts with the pluralist model (associated with Eastern Ukraine), which believes that Ukraine is home to many different peoples with different cultures and histories who "all share an orientation to a

civic Ukrainian identity” (Sakwa, 2015, p. 23). These ideologies mirror Ukraine’s geographic division; the West is more homogeneously Ukrainian, while Eastern Ukraine borders Russia and contains a slightly higher number of ethnic Russians.

In addition to its internal struggles, Ukraine faced several major conflicts with its neighbor to the east, Russia. One conflict emerged over natural gas, which Ukraine was importing from Russia at a low cost and reselling to large parts of Europe for a much higher rate (Archambault & Aslund, 2015). Putin began raising the price of gas, causing tension with Ukrainian leaders. In the winter of 2009, Russia went so far as to cut off all gas to Ukraine, leaving many people in Europe deprived of power (Archambault & Aslund, 2015).

Ukraine’s interest in joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) sparked another conflict with Russia. Putin viewed NATO as a major threat to Russian power and was strongly against Ukraine’s involvement. At the 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest, he made a chilling speech about Ukraine in which he said “its composition was artificial, its borders arbitrary, and the 1954 transfer of Crimea to Ukraine [was] illegal” (Archambault & Aslund, 2015, p. 77). The speech was seen as a threat to Ukrainian sovereignty, and many Ukrainians felt that Russia was bullying them.

The third major conflict with Russia was over Crimea, a peninsula that stretches into the Black Sea from the coast of Ukraine. Crimea has been called Russia’s “gateway to Europe” because its unique position between the east and west makes it ideal for “trade, migration and cultural exchange” (Kent, 2016, p. 2–9). Russia first annexed Crimea in 1783, and it served as an important warm-water port for the country for centuries (O’Neill, 2017).

Crimea’s strategic position made it the perfect location for the headquarters of the Black Sea Fleet, an important part of the Russian Navy, which has been based in the Crimean city of

Sevastopol since 1783 (Wood, Pomeranz, Merry, & Trudolyubov, 2016). When the USSR collapsed and Crimea officially joined a newly independent Ukraine, tensions flared between the two countries as leaders argued over whether or not Russia should still have access to the port in Sevastopol. Sevastopol and the Black Sea Fleet became “rallying cries for Russian nationalists” in the country who believed Crimea rightfully belonged to Russia (Archambault & Aslund, 2015, p. 67).

These conflicts quickly soured the relationship between Ukraine and Russia. By 2013, a significant portion of the Ukrainian population, including prominent figures such as former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, began pushing for better relations with the European Union. Groups in favor of European integration pressured President Viktor Yanukovych to sign an EU Association Agreement that would have been “a decisive step away from the centuries-long orientation toward Russia” (Diuk, 2014, p.10). The hope was that the EU Association Agreement would “[pave] the way for Ukraine’s integration into the Western community” (Pantti, 2016, p. XII).

The Russian government, hoping to maintain its ties to Ukraine, offered Yanukovych “\$15 billion in immediate support, and preferential gas tariffs” if he instead agreed to join the Eurasian Customs Union (EACU), a trade agreement between major Eurasian countries including Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia (Sakwa, 2015, p. 57). On November 21, 2013, Yanukovych announced that he would not be signing the Association Agreement, sparking the protests.

Media and Euromaidan

Traditional mainstream media in Ukraine has been plagued by “state ownership and state control, loyalty to censorship and lack of business management experience” since before the collapse of the USSR (Orlova, 2016, p. 443). When Yanukovich became president, Ukrainian and international journalists alike began “voicing alarm about the deterioration of media freedom in Ukraine” (Orlova, 2016, p. 447). In 2011, Freedom House, an organization that monitors threats to freedom and democracy around the world, changed the status of Ukraine from “free” to “partly free,” in part due to the lack of media freedom in the country (Orlova, 2016, p. 447). Public trust in traditional Ukrainian media was quite low. In a study done by Dr. Joanna Szostek, the majority of participants expressed the belief that news media “should be approached with caution and should never be fully trusted,” often citing the “vested interests of those who financed the media” as the source of their distrust (p. 19).

Censorship and conflicting narratives in mainstream media caused many people to turn to social media for credible information about what was happening with Euromaidan. Social media allowed people to share “information on avoiding police, maps of places to take shelter, and flyers to distribute around the city” (Surzhko-Harned & Zahuranec, 2017, p. 759). On popular platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, protesters on Independence Square were able to post in real time videos and images of what was actually happening, often capturing footage of violence that might have been censored by traditional media.

While social media can easily become oversaturated with too many posts, users are able to determine what information is important and “assign trustworthiness and credibility to the information” through likes, shares and comments (Surzhko-Harned & Zahuranec, 2017, 762). When liked or shared by a close friend, information on social media can easily be viewed as

more reliable than information from a traditional news outlet. It is not surprising that Euromaidan Facebook groups quickly racked up thousands of likes and shares as people around the world flocked to social media to see what was really happening on Independence Square.

Chapter 3:

Methodology

Selecting the Platform and Accounts

The Euromaidan protestors, the Russian Foreign Ministry, the European Union (EU) in Ukraine and the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv all had a presence on multiple social media platforms, but this paper will only discuss the strategies used on Facebook. Facebook was chosen as the primary social media platform to be examined because all parties have an active Facebook account with at least 20,000 followers. While other platforms such as Twitter or VKontakte (a Russian social media service) may have been used more frequently by these groups during the protests, Facebook is the only platform that was used consistently by all four. In addition, Facebook has an extensive post history and effective search function that made it possible to collect the substantial amount of data needed for a thorough analysis of social media strategy.

In terms of selecting which specific groups to examine, the Russian Foreign Ministry and Euromaidan protestors were chosen because of their direct role in the conflict. The EU also naturally became a player in the conflict because protestors were demanding European integration, a cause which started with Yanukovych's failure to sign the EU's Association Agreement. The United States may not have initially been part of the conflict, but the country's status as a major western power and its longstanding tensions with Russia provoked the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv to engage on social media in significant ways.

The verified accounts for the Russian Foreign Ministry¹, the United States Embassy in Kyiv² and the European Union in Ukraine³ were easily identified and selected for the paper. These accounts are listed as government organizations and verified by Facebook to confirm legitimacy. The Euromaidan protestors had no verified page, so an account was selected from Facebook's list of Euromaidan pages⁴. The account that was chosen has over 21,000 followers and posted relevant content on a regular basis, making it comparable to the other organizations' pages.

Collecting the Data

This study looks at content that was posted between November 14, 2013 and May 13, 2014. Although the height of the Euromaidan protests in Independence Square occurred between November 2013 and February 2014, smaller protests throughout Ukraine continued through May 2014 and the issues surrounding the conflict were still being discussed on social media after the events of February ended.

To collect posts, a list of relevant search terms was compiled, including "Euromaidan," "Independence Square" and "Yanukovych." For a full list of search terms, see Appendix A. These terms were manually entered into the search bar on each organization's Facebook page. Posts from the appropriate timeframe were copied into a running document for later analysis. In addition, all posts were saved via screenshot as backup in case the content was removed from Facebook. Every post that appeared using the list of search terms was saved, resulting in a total

¹ <https://www.facebook.com/MIDRussia/>

² <https://www.facebook.com/usdos.ukraine/>

³ <https://www.facebook.com/EUDelegationUkraine/>

⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/emaianua/>

of 326 posts. These posts were then sorted into separate documents based on the organization that posted them.

After all of the posts were gathered into documents, each one was read carefully for content. Posts that were irrelevant to the Euromaidan protests were removed from consideration. The remaining posts were then sorted into a coding sheet based on what topics they covered. The seven overarching themes that resulted from this process were “Live updates on protests,” “Yanukovych or Tymoshenko,” “Politician commentary,” “Disputing Russia’s claims,” “Missing persons,” “United for Ukraine contest,” and “Russian opinions.” Each of these topics had a minimum of 10 posts, with some having as many as 90. Each topic was given its own sheet in the Excel document, and posts were listed by organization with columns for the date posted and a link to the post.

Analyzing the Data

After the posts were organized in the coding sheet, columns were added with the criteria for both quantitative and qualitative analysis. The criteria by which every post was analyzed is detailed below:

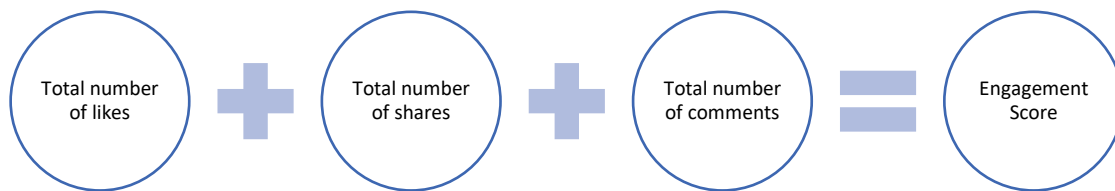
Media: The three types of media found in different posts were pictures, videos and links to outside webpages. If a post was text-only and did not contain any form of media, its media column was marked “N/A.” The purpose of recording media was to determine if there was any correlation between the type of media posted and the engagement and response from an organization’s followers.

Sentiment: The overall sentiment was recorded as either “negative,” “positive” or “neutral.” Words and phrases that helped determine the sentiment were recorded as well

for reference. It was noted if the post had a negative or positive tone towards a specific group or groups.

Engagement: Each post was given an engagement score, which was calculated by adding up the total number of likes, shares and comments the post received. Replies to individual comments were not counted in this score; it was based on the number of comments as listed by Facebook. If it was a shared post from another account, the likes, shares and comments on the original post were not considered.

Figure 1: The equation used to calculate the engagement scores.



Response: The purpose of this criteria is to determine how each organization’s audience reacted to a particular post. The comments on each post were carefully read and analyzed for content and overall sentiment. Samples of the comments were copied into the coding sheet. It was noted if comments on a post had an overwhelmingly negative or positive tone (i.e. posts that received heavy backlash and no supportive comments). For posts with no comments, the shares were checked to see if anyone added feedback when sharing the post. If not, the column was marked with “No response.”

Notes (Content): This column was used to keep notes about the specific content of each post for future reference. For example, a post with an image of Independence Square was

noted with, “Image of protestors gathered at Independence Square.” These notes made it easy to find posts with specific content while writing the paper. If the post contained a link to an external website, the link was copied into this column.

Posts that were written in Ukrainian or Russian were translated to English using Google Translate and quickly skimmed for the general theme before being sorted into categories. When it was time to analyze the posts, every post written in Ukrainian or Russian was sent to a native speaker of both Ukrainian and Russian to be manually translated into English. The online translation tool was suitable for quickly gauging the theme of a post, but in order to properly analyze each post it was important to ensure that the translations were as accurate as possible.

After the translations were complete, each post was analyzed according to the criteria above. The data was then reviewed for overarching trends in order to determine what each organization’s strategy was, why the organization might have chosen a particular approach, and what was most effective in molding a favorable narrative for the organization.

Chapter 4:

Results

Part I: Analyzing the Euromaidan Page

As the violence in Kyiv increased, news sources around the world began broadcasting what was happening on Independence Square. Pro-Russian media depicted protesters as “fascists, terrorists, and outlaws” and claimed Euromaidan was purely the result of pressure from the West (Moraski, 2016, p. 143). Yanukovych’s disregard of the EU Association Agreement was “framed as a legitimate foreign policy decision,” and those protesting against him were portrayed as illogical and unnecessarily aggressive (Surzhko-Harned & Zahuranec, 2017, p. 770). In contrast, Western media vilified Putin and depicted Russia as the “instigator of the protest,” which was viewed solely as “an attempt by Ukrainians to increase ties with the West” (Surzhko-Harned & Zahuranec, 2017, p. 769).

The Euromaidan protesters were caught in the center of this narrative battle and knew that something had to be done to ensure their stories were heard. They found the answer to their problem on social media. Pages created on various platforms began to share pictures and videos of the events on Independence Square in an attempt to combat the conflicting reports coming from around the globe. Protestors shared visuals without specific accusations. This allowed them to take control of the narrative and debunk the Russian government’s claims that they were angry, violent rebels, positioning themselves as victims of the conflict.

The Euromaidan Facebook page examined in this paper was created in November 2013 as an attempt to “quickly reach [an] English-speaking international audience and deliver up-to-date news from the Maidan... and all regions of Ukraine” (Facebook About page). The page has since gathered 21,747 likes and 20,317 followers. One of the earliest posts on the page explains that the group was created to dispel misinformation coming from a variety of news sources around the world:

“Yesterday our friend from Germany has told us that German press publish wrong things about #Євромайдан, #Euromaidan. For example, it writes that strikes were organized by opposition parties. We think it’s the best explanation why we start this blog. So please, follow us, share information to show the world what happens here.”

(Euromaidan Facebook page, November 28, 2013)

Page administrators attempted to serve as a reliable news source for an international audience by primarily posting straightforward updates about the events happening in Ukraine. All posts were written in English, and tone was carefully regulated to avoid alienating those who had not yet formed an opinion on the situation. Posts utilized a neutral tone with the goal of achieving credibility and not being perceived as overly emotional or biased. The majority of the posts on the page referenced or pulled text directly from articles published on outside news outlets, both Ukrainian and international. The few posts that did not cite outside sources typically contained no text or had a neutral sentiment.

In addition to a carefully controlled tone, the page incorporated images and videos in its posts. The strategy of using visual media is another means of gaining credibility by providing evidence. The page’s administrators wanted to establish the page as a source for people to find out the truth about what was happening in Kyiv, and sharing visuals was one of the best ways to

achieve this goal. Compelling visuals were also a good way to generate an emotional response and gain support for their cause.

Overview of the Euromaidan Page Results

A total of 60 posts dated between November 28, 2013 and March 5, 2014 were collected from the Euromaidan Facebook page and analyzed according to the criteria outlined in the first chapter. Overall summaries of the findings are stated below, followed by a more in-depth analysis throughout this chapter.

Media: The Euromaidan page utilized a wide range of media in its posts. Of the 60 posts examined, 10 contained videos, 27 contained images, 11 contained links and 12 contained no form of media.

Sentiment: The goal of the Euromaidan page was to report on what was happening during the protests. Administrators used a journalistic style and shared information in an unbiased way. Out of the examined posts, three had a negative tone, two were positive and 55 were neutral.

Engagement: Engagement scores were calculated by adding up the total number of likes, comments and shares on each post. Scores for the posts fell anywhere in the range from 2 to 3,911. Posts with images or videos tended to score higher than posts with links or no media. In addition, posts from the beginning of the protests and the end of the protests typically had a much lower engagement score than posts at the height of the conflict in February 2014.

Response: 43 of the 60 posts received a response from the page's followers. Many commenters offered support and thanked the page for sharing information about the protests. Posts about violence or death often received comments lamenting the situation and begging

foreign powers, such as the European Union, to take action. There were a few negative comments aimed at the protestors.

Notes (Content): The content of posts varied, but the two most common topics were live updates on the protests and discussions about Ukrainian leaders Yanukovych and Tymoshenko. Updates on the protests almost always featured videos or images of the events at Independence Square. Political cartoons and news articles about the situation in Ukraine were also frequently shared.

Visual Media on the Euromaidan Page

Visual media was an integral part of the Euromaidan group's Facebook strategy during the protests. Images and videos from Independence Square made posts more compelling, generated higher levels of engagement from followers, and helped establish the page's credibility.

The post with the highest engagement score (3,911) was a collection of 26 cartoons discussing what it was like to participate in the Euromaidan protests (see Figure 2). Each cartoon starts with the words “#Euromaidan is...” followed by an image and a sentence explaining what the protests were like for Ukrainians. All of the cartoons have a positive tone.

For example, one cartoon is captioned, “#Euromaidan is... when people you don't know really do care about you” and shows an image of a boy and girl sharing an umbrella to protect themselves from the rain. Another states, “#Euromaidan is... when you are cold, windy, tired and happy at the same time” and shows a girl in a coat and scarf smiling with a heart-shaped Ukrainian flag floating beside her. These cartoons received hundreds of likes and shares and an overwhelmingly positive response.



Figure 2: Cartoons from the Euromaidan Facebook page.

Another post that did very well– with an engagement score of 1,103– was a collection of images of a tribute in Kyiv to all the Ukrainians who died in the conflict (see Figure 3). The post was captioned with text from the Ukrainian news website *sensor.net*:

“Kiyvans covered Maidan, Hrushevskoho and Instytutska streets etc. with flowers – every single place where a hero died is marked with carnations, roses and candles... Ukrainians created a continuous path of honor made of flowers and candles. – *sensor.net.ua*”

The images in the post show flowers and candles covering Independence Square, along with people either lighting candles, laying flowers, or bowing their heads in respect. The comments on the post reflected sadness and wished for peace, with encouraging words such as, “Praying for Kyiv every single day. I pray now it is over!! What brave hearts stood so strong. Be very Proud!!” (Ellie Graves, February 24, 2014).



Figure 3: Flowers and candles laid out in tribute to deceased Euromaidan protestors.

Other posts that received fairly high levels of engagement include a long shot image of Independence Square before and after the start of the Euromaidan protests (see Figure 4), an album of images from Maidan during a particularly violent day of protests, and an image of a young woman kissing one of the *berkut* officers with the caption, “Love is all you need #euromaidan #Євромайдан” (see Figure 5).

Some of these posts created controversy. For example, a comment on the before-and-after image of Independence Square said the protest was a foolish battle of “Nazi extremists against Stalin revivalists” (Danny Rangel, February 21, 2014). However, the majority of comments were positive and expressed admiration and support for the efforts of the Ukrainian people.



Figure 4: Independence Square before and after Euromaidan.



Figure 5: A woman kissing a *berkut* officer.

These posts may have received such high levels of engagement because they show powerful images that evoke emotion, whether it is sadness, compassion, patriotism or anger. Compelling images generate a reaction, and people are more likely to share or comment on a post that makes them feel something.

The two posts that received the highest levels of engagement– the cartoons and the images of the tribute to the dead– contained a hopeful message. The cartoons successfully took the horrible circumstances in Kyiv– freezing cold temperatures, lack of sleep and violence– and showed how they can create a feeling of unity and hope amongst Ukrainians. The conditions at Independence Square were miserable, but these images show that the protestors were proud to be there fighting for their cause.

The images of flowers, candles, and people standing together in the post about the deceased protestors created a feeling of unity and pride. People lost their lives, but they were fighting for an important cause, and their deaths made that cause even more worthy. The post encouraged followers to keep fighting against the injustices taking place in Ukraine despite the tragic deaths.

Outside News Sources on the Euromaidan Page

Another element of the Euromaidan group's social media strategy was regularly linking to outside news stories rather than generating content themselves. This was likely done to help establish a reputation as an accurate source of information on the protests and avoid coming across as too opinionated or biased. Some of these posts generated controversy in the comments, but the administrators of the page avoided engaging in discussion in order to maintain their neutrality.

On February 22, 2014, the group shared text from the Ukrainian news site focus.ua about Yulia Tymoshenko, a controversial Ukrainian politician. The announcement stated that Tymoshenko had been set free after spending seven years in prison for alleged abuse of power and was coming to Independence Square to join the protests. It also stated that she had just announced her intent to run for president of Ukraine.

This post received a mixed response. Supporters shared comments such as, “Yulia, you have a beautiful image and symbol you carry... do the best you can to better the lives of Ukrainians!” (Mykola Shchur, February 22, 2014). Others criticized the announcement with remarks such as, “Christ, hope she doesn’t become president! The country will be going out of the frying pan and into the fire if she does!” (Nick Dawson, February 22, 2014). The page administrators did not engage in the discussion.

In another example, the page shared a video from Channel 5 News in Ukraine about snipers shooting protestors in Independence Square. The video shows victims being taken to a local hospital for treatment. The Euromaidan page captioned the post with text from the video explaining that the snipers were very precise and warning protestors to avoid the perimeter of the barricades in Independence Square.

This would have been an opportunity for the page to express an opinion and engage in a debate, as around this time the Russian government shared information on its own pages claiming that the snipers were from the European Union and had been hired by Maidan leaders to make the situation in Kyiv seem more desperate. The Euromaidan group simply shared the warning about the snipers and encouraged protestors to be safe instead of disputing the Russian government’s story.

The decision to share news directly from outside sources and avoid stating opinions on the situation was likely made to establish trust. It would be easy to get involved in a heated debate with Russia about where the snipers came from or to make a comment supporting or criticizing Yulia Tymoshenko. However, doing this could have caused the page to come across as biased and may have alienated followers. Therefore, administrators of the Euromaidan page chose to share information from a variety of news sources and allow people to form their own opinions.

Implications of the Euromaidan Page Analysis

The narrative battle between the protestors and the Russian government during Euromaidan is a classic example of a “victim-aggressor” struggle in which each side tries “to underscore its experience as the victim by portraying an image of the other as the aggressor” (Zaharna, 2016, p. 4421). These battles tend to become cyclical, with each attack on the opponent’s image only infuriating them and prompting a counterattack, and ultimately resulting in a series of attacks and counterattacks that “can cause the two sides to become more entrenched” in the conflict (Zaharna, 2016, p. 4426).

The Russian government called the protestors dangerous and unreasonable, branding them as fascist thugs. The Euromaidan group responded to this by sharing images of the protests that portrayed the pro-Russian Ukrainian government as the aggressor in the conflict by simply showing the devastation the *berkut* had caused. The page kept the messages behind these images neutral or positive, avoiding anger or indignation towards the Russian government. Any hostility could have validated the Russian government’s claims that the protestors were fanatical, making it difficult for the page’s administrators to achieve their goal of proving to an international

audience that the protestors were the victims in the conflict. Its posts were not trying to convince pro-Russian Ukrainians to sympathize with their cause, but rather to gain support of people around the world by showing the injustices happening in Ukraine.

The strategy of using candid imagery, links to outside news sources and a neutral tone proved to be very helpful in crafting this narrative. Posts with images from the conflict earned high levels of engagement and the page successfully attracted the attention of an international audience, receiving comments from around the world. The page arguably could have been more aggressive and taken a stronger stance on certain issues, but its consistency, neutral tone and strategic use of visuals helped it fulfill its goal of showing the world what happened in Ukraine and depicting the protestors as victims.

Part II: Analyzing the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Page

The Euromaidan group's primary opponent in its "victim-aggressor" battle was the Russian government, which tried to deflect blame by portraying the Euromaidan protestors as unreasonable. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), a government institution that handles international relations for Russia, shared numerous posts on its Facebook page that depicted the protestors as dangerous ultra-right criminals. These posts were the Russian MFA's attempt to invalidate complaints about the Russian and Ukrainian governments by claiming that the protestors were the true aggressors in the conflict.

The About section of the Russian MFA's Facebook page explains that the purpose of the page is to share "important and interesting information on topical issues of Russian's foreign policy and international relations" (Facebook About page, 2018). The page has over 370,000 likes and administrators post consistently, often more than twice a day. Despite this frequent posting, the page remained relatively silent about the Euromaidan conflict. Posts about Euromaidan began appearing at the height of the conflict in February—three months after the protesting started—and appeared sporadically until May 2014. This study found only 22 posts discussing Euromaidan on the Russian MFA page, which is significantly less than the number found on the pages of the Euromaidan protestors, the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv and the E.U. in Ukraine.

Overview of the Russian MFA Page Results

A total of 22 posts were pulled from the Russian MFA page from the time period between February 21, 2014 and May 13, 2014. These posts were analyzed according to the

original criteria detailed in the first chapter. The overall summary for each criteria is explained below, followed by a more in-depth look at the Russian MFA's social media strategy.

Media: Links were the primary form of media utilized by the Russian MFA. Of the 22 posts, 12 contained links to outside articles. Other forms of media were used sparingly. Three of the 22 posts contained images, one contained a video and six were text-only posts.

Sentiment: The majority of the posts were articles or opinion pieces shared from other pages, with almost none of the posts containing original content written by the Russian MFA administrators. However, the shared posts had an overwhelmingly negative tone towards both the Ukrainian protestors and the Western nations accused of blindly supporting them.

Engagement: Engagement scores for the posts ranged from 21 to over 4,000. The few posts that utilized images or video received higher engagement scores than other posts. In addition, many posts received a high volume of comments compared to the other groups in this study. Six of the 22 posts received over 100 comments, with one post receiving 628 comments.

Response: All but one of the posts received some kind of response, and the overwhelming majority of the posts received at least 10 comments. Almost all of the comments were written in Russian and expressed agreement with the posts, although there were a number of comments that sympathized with the Ukrainian protestors and encouraged the Russian government to work towards a peaceful solution for the conflict.

Notes (Content): Common topics of discussion included the Ukrainian protestors, Western involvement in the protests (specifically the involvement of the United States and the European Union), Crimea and statements from Russian officials about the situation in Ukraine. The majority of posts were shared opinion pieces written by others about the situation in Ukraine.

The Russian MFA's Strategic Silence

A key part of the Russian MFA's social media strategy during the Euromaidan protests was the strategic decision to post nothing at all. The page did not post about Ukraine in the early phases of the protests. It was not until late February that the Russian MFA first commented on the situation by sharing a link to an article from the International Business Times titled, "Euromaidan: The Dark Shadows Of The Far-Right In Ukraine" on February 21, 2014. The article claims that the protests in Ukraine were started by neo-Nazis and extremists. Some of the most violent fights of the Euromaidan protests occurred in Independence Square between February 18–20, so this may be why the Russian MFA decided to break their silence at this time.

Why be silent in the first place? It is impossible to determine the exact reasoning behind this decision, but there are a few potential explanations. The first possibility is that the Russian MFA wanted to remain distant from the conflict and make it appear that the Russian government was uninvolved. The Russian government wanted the rest of the world to believe that this was an extremist uprising against the legitimate Ukrainian government and Russia had nothing to do with it. Remaining silent until the peak of the conflict could have been an attempt by the Russian MFA to stay out of the spotlight and make it appear that the Russian government was not involved. When the protests began receiving international attention and it became necessary to take a stance, the page started crafting the narrative that the protestors were fanatical rebels.

Another possible explanation for the Russian MFA's initial social media silence is that they may have been trying to avoid commenting on the protests until the Russian government could determine the severity of the situation. The Russian government may have thought that the protests would quickly fade out. When the clash between the protestors and *berkut* happened in late February and it became evident that Euromaidan had become a serious conflict, the Russian

MFA realized it was necessary to comment on the events in an attempt to control Russia's global reputation.

These possible explanations for the Russian MFA's social media silence are purely speculative. What is clear is that the Russian MFA wanted to portray the protestors as the aggressors in the conflict. When the page administrators finally decided to break their silence, they did so by viciously attacking the reputation of the Ukrainian protestors.

The first post about Euromaidan on February 21, 2014 links to an article that essentially describes the Ukrainian protestors as dangerous extremists. However, one sentence in the article says, "...while groups like Svodoba are adamantly opposed to the pro-Russian policies of Yanukovych, they also find the 'pro-European,' pro-democracy stance of most other Euromaidan protestors anathema" (Ghosh, 2014). The Russian MFA makes a point of highlighting this sentence in their post, writing, "We would hardly back the sentence 'pro-Russian policies of Yanukovych' but it isn't the main topic of the article" (Facebook post, February 21, 2014). They are clearly trying to deny any kind of questionable involvement with the Ukrainian government and deflect the blame for the protests.

The page went so far as to accuse Euromaidan leaders of hiring snipers to shoot innocent protestors and blaming it on the Ukrainian government, while also claiming that EU leaders knew about these snipers and encouraged the decision. A post shared on March 5, 2014, boldly states, "EU knows that Maidan snipers were hired by Maidan leaders!" Stories like these attempted to sway the public's opinion about the conflict and tarnish the reputation of both the Euromaidan protestors and western powers.

Lack of Visual Media on the Russian MFA Page

Another aspect of the Russian MFA's social media strategy during the Euromaidan conflict was a lack of images and videos. Only four of the 22 posts examined included visual media; the rest were purely text-based or linked to outside articles.

The lack of media may be explained by the distance from the conflict. The Euromaidan page was maintained by people actively involved in the protests, while the Russian MFA page is run by employees in Moscow. The distance between Moscow and Kyiv made it difficult, if not impossible, for the Russian MFA page administrators to capture and create appropriate visuals for their posts.

In addition, images and videos from the conflict are difficult to control. The Russian MFA tried to portray the protestors as violent rebels and therefore wanted to avoid sharing visual media from Independence Square that might have contradicted this narrative. Of the three images shared on the page, two were headshots of Russian politicians. The other was an image of a *berkut* officer in Ukraine covered in flames with the text, "White Book on violations of human rights and the rule of law in Ukraine (November 2013–March 2014)" (see Figure 6). There is no explanation as to why the officer in the photo is on fire, but it seems to imply that the protestors in Ukraine were committing human rights violations against law enforcement.



WHITE BOOK

**ON VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS
AND THE RULE OF LAW
IN UKRAINE**

(NOVEMBER 2013 — MARCH 2014)

Figure 6: A *berkut* officer surrounded by flames.

The one video on the page is from a press conference with Sergey Lavrov, the Foreign Minister of Russia. In the video, Lavrov recaps a conversation he had with then US Secretary of State John Kerry about the situation in Ukraine, ultimately saying that western sanctions against Russia would be counterproductive and the US and Russia should work together on a solution to the conflict. The page shared no video footage or images from the protests in Independence Square.

Outside Opinions on the Russian MFA Page

The majority of the Russian MFA's posts about the Euromaidan conflict were outside opinion pieces, either in the form of links to news articles or shared posts from other Facebook pages. The shared posts and articles were written by influential Russians, such as diplomats, politicians and journalists. These people expressed the opinion that the Ukrainian protestors were dangerous ultra-right nationalists or made comments about western involvement in the protests, blaming the situation on either the EU or the United States.

The page shared multiple opinion posts from the personal page of Maria Zakharova, the director of the Department of Information and Press at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In one of these posts, Zakharova blames the protests on the European Union, claiming the EU's refusal to negotiate its Association Agreement with Ukraine left Yanukovich with no other choice than to reject the agreement. She finishes the post with, "Probably the whole situation was dramatically staged to arrange Yatsenyuk¹-Obama photo-opportunity?" The post received 136 likes and mixed comments, with some agreeing and others accusing Zakharova of spreading anti-Western propaganda.

Another shared post comes from Sergey Brileva, a Russian journalist and news presenter. The post includes a link to a video from the BBC titled, "Ukraine: Far-right armed with bats patrol Kyiv." Brileva writes that he is "a fan of the BBC" who has taken BBC courses while working in London. He goes on to say that he is "deeply impressed" by the BBC's report "on the ultra-right activists in Ukraine." The Russian MFA likely shared this post to show that a western news source acknowledged the "far-right" views of the protestors and to show that a Russian journalist with western experience supports this opinion.

Other shared posts commented on the unfair treatment of western Ukrainians compared to eastern Ukrainians. An interim government was established after President Yanukovich was overthrown and some Ukrainians protested this decision. In an opinion piece titled "Ukraine: Western double standards hit a new low," journalist Brendan O'Neil writes:

"...six months ago, western Ukrainians were camping out in squares in Kyiv, protesting against the then president of Ukraine, Victor Yanukovich, and occupying government buildings, they were hailed by the Western media as revolutionaries, democrats... But when eastern Ukrainians have done likewise... they've found

¹ Arseniy Yatsenyuk became Prime Minister of Ukraine in February 2014 after Yanukovich was overthrown by the protestors.

themselves denounced by Western observers as ‘rabble-rousers,’ ‘hysterics,’ ‘fanatics,’ ‘vandals.’”

These are just a few examples of the many opinion pieces shared on the Russian MFA page. The goal of sharing outside opinions instead of original content is to try and establish credibility by showing that a wide variety of experts share similar opinions on a situation. The Russian MFA wanted to show that numerous influential people viewed the Ukrainian protestors as rebels and neo-Nazis and believed that western nations were to blame for the violence and unrest in Ukraine.

However, some of the page’s followers saw through this strategy, noticing that the opinion pieces came from Russian journalists who wrote exclusively for pro-Russian news sources. For example, on a post containing an anti-Euromaidan opinion piece from a website called the Oriental Review, a man named Simon Gladin commented, “‘ORIENTAL REVIEW is an independent Moscow-based Internet journal’ – Nuff said....” (Simon Gladin, April 9, 2014).

Implications of the Russian MFA Page Analysis

The Russian MFA told a story of unruly Ukrainian rebels with no real grounds for protesting. They wanted the rest of the world to believe that they were not trying to control the Ukrainian people by interfering with their government, instead shifting the blame to the United States and the European Union, who were accused of supporting and encouraging the violence in Ukraine.

The Russian MFA’s initial strategy was to remain silent about the conflict, but when tensions peaked they began to create their narrative by sharing posts that spoke negatively about the protestors in Ukraine. By selectively choosing to share content that backed the Russian perspective and avoiding images and videos of the conflict, the Russian MFA was able to

successfully craft a narrative that, based on the reaction to their posts, many of the page's followers believed. The Russian government continued to propagate this narrative in many ways. One example of the Russian government's offline propaganda is a billboard that portrayed the 2014 Ukrainian Referendum¹ as a choice between a bright Russian Crimea and imprisonment in a Nazi state (See Figure 7). The billboard reads, "On March 16 we choose" and features two maps of Crimea with the word "or" between them. It is clear from examples such as this that, even beyond the realm of social media, the Russian government was blatantly trying to portray the protestors as fascists and neo-Nazis.



Figure 7: Palmer, E. (Photographer). (2014, March 10). *Crimean Referendum billboard* [digital image]. Retrieved from <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/crimea-referendum-on-russia-could-split-ukraine-regardless-of-us-european-protests/>

¹ The population of Crimea voted on whether or not the region should remain a part of Ukraine or join Russia. The vote was in favor of Russian integration, but many nations felt the results were illegitimate due to corruption during the voting process.

It is important to note that the vast majority of comments on all of the Russian MFA's posts were from Russians. The Euromaidan page received international attention, with comments from all over the world. If the Russian MFA's goal was to convince the world that the Euromaidan protestors were violent rebels, they might not have reached that target audience. However, their strategic use of content that backed the Russian government's perspective certainly made a strong impact domestically.

Part III: Analyzing the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv Page

Euromaidan protestors fought for European integration, seeking to weaken ties with Russia and become more closely aligned with the west. As a major western power, the United States wanted to both encourage the Euromaidan protestors and convince pro-Russian Ukrainians that the Russian government was lying about the conflict. The U.S. Embassy in Kyiv used Facebook to spread this message, making it clear that the U.S. strongly disagreed with Putin and Yanukovich's actions by sharing posts containing statements from U.S. officials. These posts helped the U.S. craft a narrative that simultaneously supported the story told by the Euromaidan group and rejected the one created by the Russian MFA.

The U.S. Embassy in Kyiv opened on January 22, 1992. Its mission has since been "to advance the interests of the United States, and to serve and protect U.S. citizens in Ukraine" (U.S. Embassy Kyiv, 2018). The embassy had a responsibility to keep United States citizens living in Ukraine and Ukrainian Americans living in the United States informed about what was going on during the Euromaidan conflict. To reach both English and Ukrainian-speaking audiences, most of the page's content was posted twice, once in each language. The embassy's Facebook page has approximately 93,127 followers.

The U.S. Embassy began posting about Euromaidan in early December and maintained a position that was sympathetic towards the Ukrainian protestors throughout the conflict. Compared to the other groups examined in this paper, the embassy's approach to social media was extremely organized. The posts about Euromaidan naturally fell into categories, as the U.S. Embassy created several different series of themed posts during the conflict. There were posts about missing persons, posts disputing Russia's claims, posts with statements from U.S. politicians and posts relating to a #UnitedforUkraine contest held by the embassy to show

solidarity with the Ukrainian people. Each of these separate categories had a distinct style compared to other posts on the page.

Breaking posts up into categories allowed the U.S. Embassy to share information on the protests in an organized and controlled way. It also helped establish the United States' position in the narrative battle between the Euromaidan protestors and the Russian MFA. Sharing supportive statements from U.S. politicians and launching the #UnitedforUkraine contest was a way for the U.S. Embassy to express encouragement for the protestors, while posts disputing Putin's lies firmly established the country's stance on the Russian government's role in the conflict and attempted to persuade pro-Russian Ukrainians by shedding light on the deception.

Overview of the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv Page Results

A total of 90 posts from December 5, 2013 to April 28, 2014 were gathered and analyzed according to the criteria outlined in the first chapter. A summary of the findings for each criterion are outlined below, followed by a more detailed analysis of the U.S. Embassy's strategy.

Media: The U.S. Embassy incorporated media into the majority of their posts, with 41 containing images, 7 containing links, 1 containing a video and 41 containing no form of media.

Sentiment: 47 of the posts maintained a neutral tone. 33 posts had a negative sentiment towards the violence in Independence Square, using terms such as "strongly condemns," "outraged" and "appalled." The series of posts disputing Russia's claims also took a negative and accusatory tone towards the Russian government. 10 posts had a positive sentiment towards the Ukrainian people, such as the #UnitedforUkraine posts which encouraged unity and expressed

support for Ukraine. Positive phrases about the protests included “courageous pursuit of human dignity” and “incredibly touched.”

Engagement: Engagement scores for the posts ranged between 8 and 1,326, with the majority of posts receiving scores over 100. As with the other groups examined, posts containing visual media generally received higher levels of engagement than text-only posts.

Response: 87 of the U.S. Embassy’s posts received some sort of response. While many of the comments on the posts were positive and thanked the United States for its support, there were a large number of comments that called for sanctions against Russia and expressed anger at the inaction from the United States government with comments such as, “All of your ‘condemning,’ ‘strong condemning,’ ‘considering,’ ‘urging’ and INACTION are contributing to the deaths of INNOCENTS. Take action” (Tania Janos, January 22, 2014).

Notes (Content): The U.S. Embassy focused on a few distinct topics, including commentary from prominent United States politicians, fact-checking Russia’s claims, missing persons and the #UnitedforUkraine contest.

Statements from U.S. Politicians on the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv Page

Of the 90 posts collected, 45 of them were transcripts of press conferences or interviews regarding the conflict in Ukraine with prominent U.S. politicians including former Secretary of State John Kerry, former U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt, former Vice President Joe Biden and former President Barack Obama. The statements made by these politicians often took a bold stance, emphasizing support and sympathy for the Ukrainian people and condemning the Russian government’s actions.

The posts were typically long and text-heavy, with the entire transcript of the conversation or speech copied directly into the body of the post and translated into Ukrainian as well as English. For this reason, many of these posts received low levels of engagement. The post with the highest engagement score was a short statement from Jen Psaki, State Department spokesperson, on May 2, 2014 (see Figure 8). In the statement, Psaki rejects the Russian claims “that the government in Kyiv is responsible for ‘egregious human rights violations’” and references the “pro-Russian thugs” responsible for a “sharp deterioration of law and order” in Ukraine. The post included an image of Psaki, making it more visually attention-grabbing than other posts from politicians with nothing but text.

The post gathered 604 likes, 463 shares and 28 comments that showed mixed reactions to the statement. Some thanked the U.S. government for the supportive language with comments such as, “Thank you for your strong and clear position on situation in Ukraine!” (Aleksandr Kaminsky, May 2, 2014). Others thought the statement fell flat, commenting, “This lady just doesn’t say anything.” (Roman Melnyk, May 2, 2014).



Figure 8: Image of Jen Psaki making a statement on the situation in Ukraine.

Another post that received a high engagement score (311) was a statement from Ambassador Pyatt made on February 19, 2014, shortly after one of the most violent days of the conflict. The post included an image of Pyatt and a brief transcript of a Q&A session. Ambassador Pyatt expressed condolences for those who lost their lives at Independence Square, briefly discussed the reasoning behind not passing stricter sanctions, and hinted at further announcements regarding sanctions. The mention of sanctions drew a large response from the page's followers, with comments such as, "Nice words, but where's the beef?" (Irene Van Winkle, February 19, 2014) and "ARE YOU KIDDING ME? Where are the sanctions against corruption and corrupted government?" (Oksana Sanaj Gruszka Harmouche, February 19, 2014).

Sanctions and action in general were a point of frustration for commenters. When a government official expressed sympathy or denounced Putin and the corrupt Ukrainian officials, the words were always met with some backlash claiming the U.S. was not doing enough. The U.S. Embassy page administrators chose not to address this backlash and continued posting similar statements from U.S. officials.

Disputing Russia's Claims

An interesting part of the U.S. Embassy's page is a series of posts that fact-check Russia's claims during the Ukrainian conflict. Some of these posts are text-only, while others include striking images, half overlaid in red (indicating the Russian claim that is being disputed), half in black-and-white (indicating the truth). The Russian claim is labeled "Putin's Fiction," while the dispute is labeled "The Facts" and includes a link at the bottom of the image where readers can learn more about the claim (see Figure 9). All of these posts were shared in both Ukrainian and English.



Figure 9: Graphic showing “Putin’s Fiction” and “The Facts.”

These posts received consistently high engagement due to the bold visuals and straightforward text. There was also significantly less backlash from commenters, with these posts receiving affirmative feedback such as, “Thank you for keeping me informed” (Elisabeth Martini, March 26, 2014) and “Russia – go home!” (Darius Furmonavicius, April 5, 2014).

Sharing the Stories of Missing Persons

The U.S. Embassy also made the decision to share the images and stories of individuals who went missing during the Euromaidan protests. These posts all occurred during the height of the Euromaidan conflict in February and included an image of the missing person, information about his or her disappearance and a statement urging the Ukrainian government to find them and bring justice to those who caused the disappearances (see Figure 10).

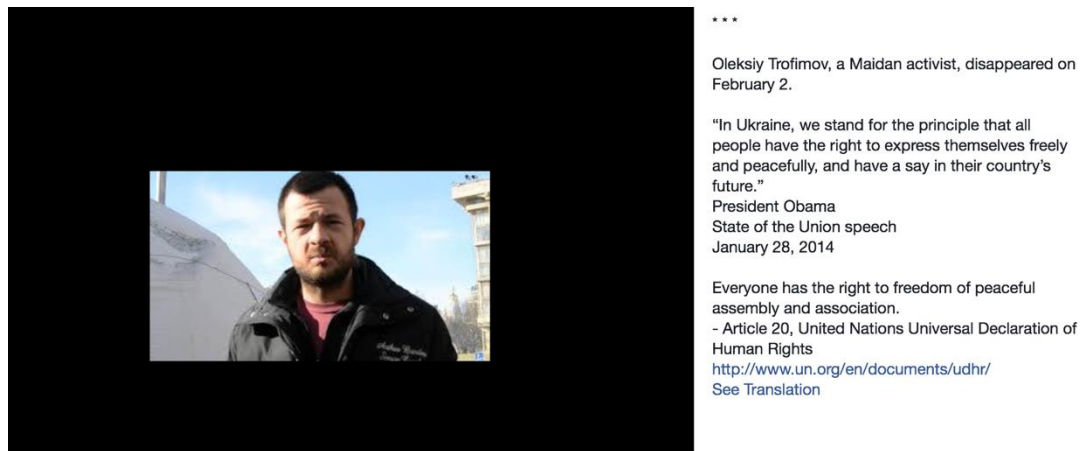


Figure 10: Image of a missing protestor.

These posts received consistently high levels of engagement and little to no backlash. Comments shared positive messages such as, “Remember, believe, mourn” (Ernest Zarins, February 5, 2014) and “Thank you for your generous heart, you do everything in your jurisdiction, and even more” (Oleg Vishnevskiy, February 7, 2014). There were still some comments criticizing the U.S., but for the most part the comments expressed gratitude for the U.S. Embassy’s dedication to sharing the faces of the missing Ukrainians and encouraging the Ukrainian government to work towards their safe return home.

The missing persons in the Euromaidan conflict were the victims of human rights violations, which is likely why the U.S. Embassy chose to get involved and share these images even though none of the missing persons were U.S. citizens. Their large platform allowed them to draw attention to the fact that multiple people were disappearing at the protests in Kyiv and highlight the Ukrainian government’s violations and lack of action.

#UnitedforUkraine Contest

Of the organizations examined, the U.S. Embassy was the only one to attempt to engage followers through a social media contest. The contest was originally announced on Twitter but spread to Facebook on April 1, 2014, when the embassy page posted a banner explaining the rules (see Figure 11). Participants were invited to share photos of themselves with the hashtag “#UnitedforUkraine” to show solidarity with the Ukrainian people. Entries were then collected from multiple social media platforms and shared on the U.S. Embassy’s various social media accounts. Although the contest was originally intended for Twitter, there were many Facebook participants as well. There were no winners or prizes for the contest, as the purpose was simply to spread awareness about the situation in Ukraine and show support.

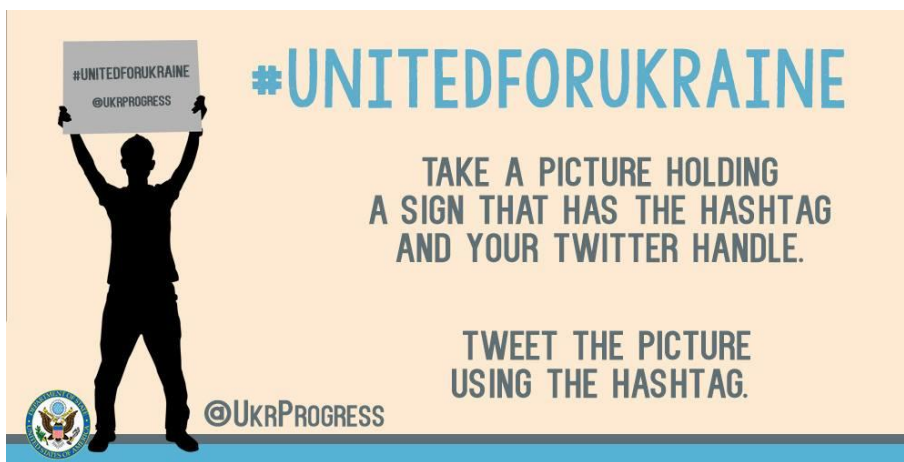


Figure 11: #UnitedforUkraine banner.

The Facebook posts relating to the contest generated high levels of engagement and plenty of positive feedback from followers, who appreciated the gesture of support and enjoyed looking at photos from around the world. The U.S. Embassy frequently shared collections of entries with uplifting captions such as, “#UnitedForUkraine! Ukrainians are united people,

united nation! Let's save United Ukraine!" The U.S. Embassy administrators would also comment on individual photos within these collections providing more context for the picture, such as the location of the photo. In the example below, the account writes, "Indian man supports Ukraine!" on an image of an Indian man holding a Ukrainian banner (see Figure 12).

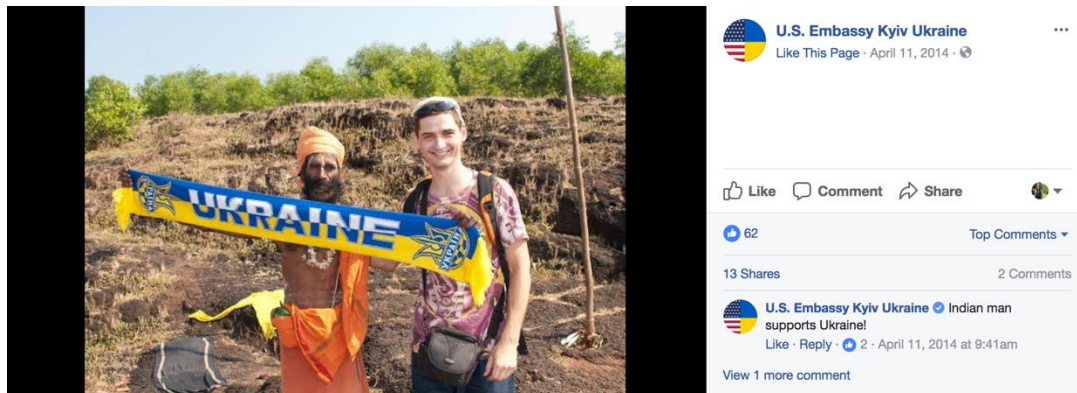


Figure 12: A photo submitted to the #UnitedforUkraine contest.

The photo contest was an excellent way to boost morale during a difficult time for the Ukrainian people and show that the rest of the world cared about their struggles. People participated from many different countries, including the U.S., India, France, Spain and more. There was even a surprising Russian participant– the Russian MFA. The organization tacked the hashtag onto the end of several of its tweets about the Ukrainian conflict in what appeared to be an attempt to mock the U.S. Embassy. In an interview with Ambassador Pyatt shared on the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv page, the interviewer asked Pyatt if he was aware that the Russian MFA was using the #UnitedforUkraine hashtag on its Twitter account. He responded, "I don't think they're living by their hashtag."

Implications of the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv Page Analysis

The U.S. Embassy's biggest strength was its ability to identify and share content that resonated with its audience. The embassy tried to simultaneously show pro-Euromaidan Ukrainians that the U.S. government was on their side and convince pro-Russian Ukrainians that Putin was untrustworthy. This goal was achieved through content that supported the protestors and blatantly attacked the narrative of the Russian government. The posts disputing the Russian government's claims and the images of the missing protestors took a firm stance on the situation in Ukraine that was appreciated by the page's followers, while the #UnitedforUkraine contest was a way to creatively engage people and spread messages of positivity and unity.

However, the page's long, text-heavy statements from U.S. politicians were often met with heavy backlash. People felt that these statements were repetitive and failed to adequately address the situation in Ukraine. U.S. officials frequently expressed their sympathy for the Ukrainian people and denounced the corruption of both the Russian and Ukrainian governments, but these statements were not followed by the concrete action that people wanted to see, such as sanctions against Russia. As a result, the U.S. Embassy received criticism every time a lengthy statement was posted. The embassy was unable to address these comments because the decision to take action in Ukraine was not within its jurisdiction. The page administrators' job was to keep their followers updated on what was happening in Washington, D.C. regarding the conflict, and so the embassy continued sharing statements from U.S. politicians as they were released.

Overall, the U.S. Embassy effectively shared engaging content that showed the United States' stance on the conflict in Ukraine. Having a few different series of posts with similar styles and messaging allowed the page to maintain consistency, and the highly-engaging #UnitedforUkraine social media contest was very successful in bringing people together to show

support for the Ukrainian people. Like every organization examined in this paper, the U.S. Embassy received backlash, but for the most part they did a successful job of using social media to keep their followers informed.

Part IV: Analyzing the European Union in Ukraine Page

The Delegation of the European Union (EU) to Ukraine opened in Kyiv in 1993 and primarily exists “to promote the political and economic relations between Ukraine and the European Union” (About the EU Delegation to Ukraine, 2016). The organization’s Facebook page has approximately 41,600 followers and posts on a daily basis. The EU in Ukraine caters to an international audience, so the page shares content in both English and Ukrainian.

The page’s Facebook strategy cannot be properly explored without an understanding of the uncomfortable position the EU was in during the Euromaidan protests. The protests began after Yanukovych’s refusal to sign the Association Agreement with the EU, which forced the EU into the center of the conflict. The Euromaidan protestors wanted Ukraine to westernize and join the EU. Welcoming Ukraine into the EU could have been favorable for the EU because of Ukraine’s abundant resources. However, the EU had to tread lightly with the Russian government, as Russia is a major world power that supplies European nations with important resources and has a strategic interest in preserving ties with Ukraine.

The EU was stuck between the conflicting tensions of the protestors’ disappointment over the rejection of the Association Agreement and anxiety about potentially provoking the Russian government, a position that caused them to take an extremely careful tone on social media. The narrative told by the EU was one of relative neutrality and diplomacy, with posts expressing support for the Euromaidan protestors while also announcing a desire to work together with the Russian government for a peaceful solution. The diplomatic tone and lack of action from the EU caused the page to receive heavy backlash from those who had hoped the EU would side with the Euromaidan protestors and stand up to the Russian government.

Overview of the EU in Ukraine Page Results

To fully analyze the EU in Ukraine's Facebook strategy, a total of 57 posts from November 21, 2013 to April 9, 2014 were collected and analyzed for media usage, sentiment, engagement, response and content. A summary of the findings is outlined below, followed by an in-depth analysis of the organization's social media strategy.

Media: The EU used some form of media in nearly every post. Of the 57 posts examined, 49 contained images, 5 contained videos and 2 contained links. The majority of images were of politicians either delivering speeches or visiting the protestors in Kyiv.

Sentiment: The EU maintained a neutral tone in its social media posts. A few posts had negative sentiments towards the violence or positive sentiments towards the Ukrainian people, using phrases such as "deeply concerned," "regrettable developments" or "deeply committed to the Ukrainian people."

Engagement: Engagement for posts on the EU page was relatively low when compared to the other groups examined, with scores falling within the range of 5 and 334. The majority of engagement scores were below 100.

Response: Some commenters were grateful to the EU for supporting Ukraine, but often the feedback on the posts was overwhelmingly negative. Commenters expressed frustration at the EU for its lack of action and repetitive, empty statements.

Notes (Content): Posts typically contained a speech or statement from an EU official along with an image of that person.

Sharing Statements from EU Officials

The EU in Ukraine was much less adventurous in terms of strategy and type of content posted than the other organizations examined in this paper. The page showed little variety, with nearly every post during the Euromaidan conflict containing a statement from an EU official in some form, whether it was a quote, interview, press conference or screenshot of a tweet. The strategy of consistently sharing statements from government officials was similar to the approach taken by the U.S. Embassy, but the EU's posts were much shorter and often included an image of the person behind the statement.

The page may have chosen to share only statements from officials because it was an easy way to provide accurate updates on the EU's stance on the situation in Ukraine. Other content might appear biased in one direction or the other; the EU was in a fragile position during this conflict and needed to be cautious. The statements were not very popular with the page's audience, often receiving backlash and low engagement.

The post with the highest level of engagement on the page was a statement from Catherine Ashton, then Commissioner of Trade for the EU's European Commission, during her visit to Kyiv in December of 2013 (see Figure 13). Ashton says she was "impressed by the determination of the Ukrainians" and that she "[observed] with sadness that police uses force to remove peaceful people from the centre of Kyiv." This statement came close to taking a stance on the conflict, although the language was still fairly diplomatic. The post was accompanied by a picture of Ashton surrounded by reporters as she made her way through the crowd in Independence Square. It received 106 likes, 200 shares and 28 comments, earning a total engagement score of 334.

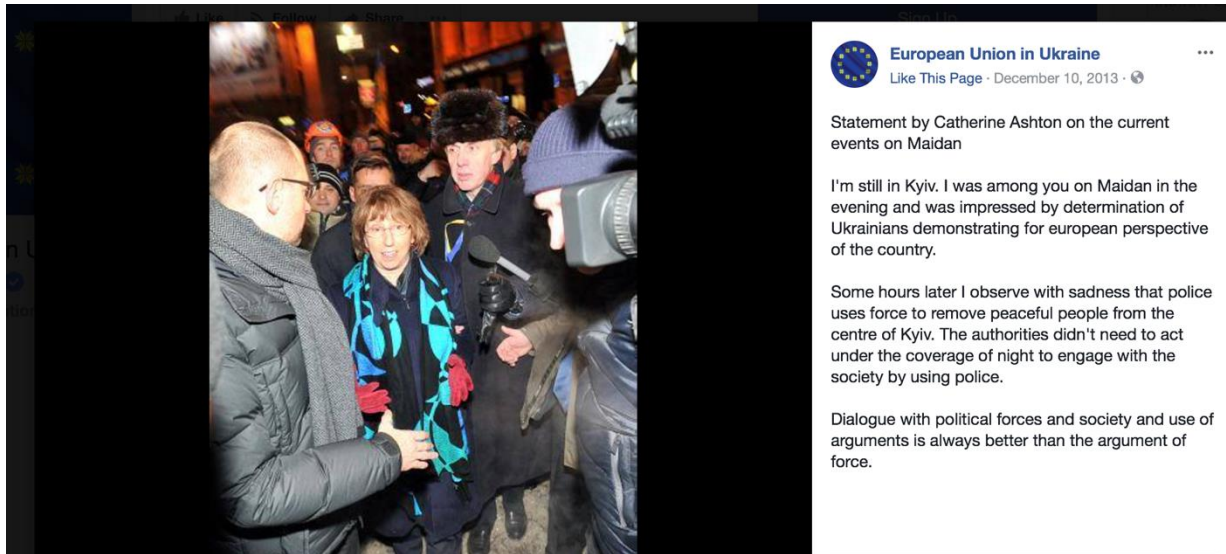


Figure 13: Catherine Ashton at Euromaidan.

It is difficult to determine why this post received such high levels of engagement compared to other posts on the page. It may have been because it was one of the first posts from Ashton's anticipated visit to Kyiv, or because it was one of the few statements that were not completely neutral. Either way, it received a lot of feedback from the page's followers. Unfortunately, the comments were overwhelmingly negative, e.g., "Dear Catherine! Please pack your suitcases, grab those pricks from Maidan and leave our country immediately" (Vitaliy Nikolaev, December 10, 2013) and "Stop observing and start acting please: announce sanctions against Yanukovich and his gang immediately! Is the whole Europe weaker than Putin alone?" (Lyudmila Glants-Lobas, December 10, 2013).

Other posts took a similar tone and received a similar response. The EU officials reaffirmed their desire to sign the Association Agreement and work with Ukraine in the future, with statements such as the following from Commissioner Füle: "It is deeply disappointing to see such a turn from the European path of Ukraine. We built this relationship and initialed the

Association Agreement for the benefit of the Ukrainian people. And we firmly stand behind this offer.” However, standing behind the agreement was not enough; people wanted to see the EU pass sanctions and denounce Yanukovych and Russia.

The only slight variation in content on the page occurred throughout December and January, when the EU in Ukraine posted several pictures of diplomats from numerous European countries visiting injured Ukrainian protestors in the hospital. Captions included, “The Ambassadors of the European Union, the United States of America, Sweden and Germany have visited Yuriy Lutsenko in the hospital today. The current situation and recent developments in Ukraine were discussed. The Ambassadors wished Yuriy Lutsenko fast recovery” (see Figure 14). These posts represented a nice gesture from international ambassadors to the Ukrainian people, but they were still met with heavy criticism. On one hospital post, a man named Steve Patriarca wrote, “Did they also reassure him that the EU would act against his oppressors and defend the people of Ukraine by outlawing the leaders of the regime and freezing their assets in Europe?” (January 26, 2014).



Figure 14: EU ambassadors visiting a wounded protestor in the hospital.

Tone of Posts

The primary characteristic of the EU in Ukraine's posts was a diplomatic tone towards the Russian and Ukrainian governments. While the U.S. Embassy took an exceptionally harsh tone towards Putin and Yanukovich, the EU expressed a desire to work with Russia in order to determine Ukraine's future. The page shared a transcript of a speech made by Commissioner Fule on February 26, 2014 at the European Parliament's Plenary Debate on Ukraine in Strasbourg, France. Regarding Russia, Fule said:

“Russia can only gain from Ukraine's success; and it risks losing heavily if Ukraine fails. We are ready to work very closely with Russia, the neighbour of our neighbour, to ensure it plays a constructive role in Ukraine's future— the future of a neighbour with whom Russia has traditional ties which we support.”

This diplomatic sentiment was echoed throughout the EU in Ukraine's posts. Even statements condemning the violence in Ukraine encouraged both sides to cooperate. On February 23, 2014, Catherine Ashton said, “I call on everyone to abide by the rule of the law and the Constitution.” Jose Manuel Barroso, former president of the European Commission, said on February 19, 2014, “We call on all sides to immediately put an end to the violence and engage in meaningful dialogue.”

The EU's diplomatic approach differed greatly from the one taken by the U.S. Embassy, the other major Western power in this conflict, which devoted an entire series of Facebook posts to disputing “Putin's fiction” and frequently used aggressive language when speaking about both the Russian and Ukrainian governments. The EU's diplomatic position towards the Russian government earned its page the largest amount of backlash out of all the groups examined.

Implications of the EU in Ukraine Page Analysis

The EU in Ukraine wanted to maintain a neutral tone on social media because of the delicate situation. If the EU had chosen to boldly speak out against Yanukovich and the Russian government too early and the protests had fizzled out after a few weeks, they would have made an enemy out of the Ukrainian and Russian governments. This was possibly the reason the page chose to keep posting repetitive statements from EU officials instead of addressing the commenters' concerns about the situation and the EU's lack of action. The EU in Ukraine is also just a delegation of the EU, and the page was certainly unable to comment on certain topics or take a stance without the approval of the EU.

The page could have included a wider variety of content. For example, the U.S. Embassy's #UnitedforUkraine contest was a great way of showing support for the Ukrainian people, and it received high levels of engagement and positive feedback from people around the world. If the EU had deviated from posting vague, repetitive statements from officials and instead shared some positive content that showed support for Ukraine as a nation, the page likely would have received more positive feedback from its followers.

Instead, the page received the lowest engagement scores, comments on its posts were consistently and overwhelmingly negative, and there was little to no variation in the content shared, which primarily consisted of diplomatic statements from EU officials. The EU attempted to portray itself as a peacemaker in the situation and encourage the Euromaidan protestors without displeasing the Russian government. However, the conflict proved to be too intense for neutrality and the strategy backfired, making the EU in Ukraine the least successful of the four groups in crafting a favorable narrative.

Chapter 5:

Conclusion

Social media played a crucial role in the Euromaidan protests and the entire Ukrainian revolution. The Euromaidan protestors, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv and the European Union (EU) in Ukraine utilized different social media strategies, but ultimately each had the same goal: to craft a favorable narrative and control the way target publics perceived the conflict.

The Russian MFA and the Euromaidan protestors sought to use social media to prove that the other group was the aggressor in the conflict. These two groups were directly involved in the conflict in ways that the EU and U.S. Embassy were not, with the Euromaidan protestors representing the Ukrainian people and the Russian MFA representing the interests of both the Russian government and the pro-Russian Ukrainian government that was in power at the time. The Euromaidan group targeted a global audience and focused on establishing credibility and trying to elicit sympathy for the protestors, using visual media to report on the events in Kyiv. The Russian MFA aimed to discredit the Ukrainian protestors, sharing opinion pieces from journalists and politicians who called the Euromaidan protestors violent, ultra-right fanatics.

The EU in Ukraine and the U.S. Embassy used social media to take a stance on the situation. The Euromaidan protestors were fighting to break ties with Russia and join the EU, hoping to make a switch from “east” to “west.” The rest of the world looked to both the U.S. and the EU to see what each major western power would have to say about the conflict. Would these

two powers support a struggling rebellion seeking democracy, or would they stay silent to avoid offending Russia?

The two groups took very different approaches. While both expressed sympathy for the protestors and denounced the violence, only the U.S. took a strong stance against the Russian and Ukrainian governments. The EU in Ukraine chose to be more diplomatic, trying to avoid getting too deeply involved in the conflict and provoking retaliation from the Russian government. The EU in Ukraine played it safe in terms of the content shared on its Facebook page, posting nothing but repetitive statements from EU officials. The U.S. Embassy chose to be bolder and more creative with its #UnitedforUkraine contest, images of missing persons and posts debunking Russia's claims.

The Euromaidan group, Russian MFA, the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv and the EU in Ukraine had similar but different objectives for using Facebook, and each group ultimately developed its own unique strategy for the platform. After examining all four groups, the question of which one had the most successful strategy naturally arises. This is a difficult question to answer holistically, as each group had its strengths and weaknesses. However, using the original criteria established in the first chapter that served as a guideline for examining each page, it is clear that some groups were more successful overall than others.

Organization	Media	Sentiment	Engagement	Response	Content
Euromaidan group (60 posts)	10 videos 27 images 11 links 12 text-only	3 negative 3 positive 55 neutral	Scores ranged from 2 to 3,911	43 received a response. Often positive.	Live updates on protests.

Russian MFA (22 posts)	1 video 3 images 12 links 6 text-only	15 negative 0 positive 7 neutral	Scores ranged from 21 to over 4,833	21 received a response. Often positive.	Protestors and Western involvement in Euromaidan.
U.S. Embassy in Kyiv (90 posts)	1 video 41 images 7 links 41 text-only	33 negative 10 positive 47 neutral	Scores ranged from 8 to 1,326	87 received a response. Some backlash.	Politician commentary and fact- checking Putin's claims.
EU in Ukraine (57 posts)	5 videos 49 images 2 links 1 text-only	5 negative 2 positive 50 neutral	Scores ranged from 5 to 334	44 received a response. Heavy backlash.	Statements from EU officials.

Figure 15: Table showing overview of the results of the study.

Media

All four groups incorporated some form of media into at least half of their posts. For the Euromaidan group, the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv and the EU in Ukraine, images were the most widely used form of media, while the Russian MFA relied heavily on links. Videos were fairly uncommon across all pages with the exception of the Euromaidan group, which had almost as many posts with videos as text-only posts or posts with links.

The Euromaidan group and the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv were the most successful at incorporating a variety of visual media into their posts. The EU in Ukraine also used a significant amount of visual media, with 49 of the 57 posts examined containing images. However, all of these images were repetitive shots of politicians, while the Euromaidan group and the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv shared a mix of images that included pictures of the protestors at Independence Square, infographics and the #UnitedforUkraine contest entries.

On the Euromaidan group and U.S. Embassy in Kyiv pages, posts containing some form of visual media tended to receive higher engagement scores than posts containing only text. The

Russian MFA page received consistently high levels of engagement despite utilizing almost no visual media in its posts, and the EU in Ukraine received low engagement and heavy backlash despite adding images to nearly every post. The mixed results across pages ultimately make it difficult to determine whether or not incorporating media into posts contributed to the engagement level and response posts received. The actual content of the post and the message behind it seem to be more significant in driving engagement than whether or not the post included some form of media.

Sentiment

The sentiment of posts is key to determining how each group was trying to portray itself in the conflict. The Euromaidan group and the EU in Ukraine both had significantly more neutral posts than positive or negative posts. For the Euromaidan group, this can be explained by the protestors' desire to avoid feeding into the Russian government's narrative that depicted them as angry, fascist rebels. The page attempted to show how the protestors were the victims of the conflict through neutral language and images of the violent protests. The EU in Ukraine's consistently neutral sentiment was caused by the EU's delicate position between the Euromaidan protestors and the Russian government. Maintaining a neutral stance was the EU's attempt to satisfy the Euromaidan protestors' pleas for support without offending Putin.

The Russian MFA and U.S. Embassy in Kyiv showed a bit more variety in the sentiment of their posts. Fifteen of the Russian MFA's 22 posts took a negative tone towards the Euromaidan protestors, calling them neo-Nazis and blaming them for the unrest in Ukraine. This deliberately aggressive approach attempted to deflect blame from the Russian government and paint the protestors as the true cause of the problem. The U.S. Embassy in Kyiv took a similarly

strong stance through its negative posts aimed at the Russian government. In these posts, the page debunked Putin's claims and condemned the human rights violations taking place in Ukraine in an attempt to convince any pro-Russian followers that the Russian government was untrustworthy.

Engagement

The posts from the EU in Ukraine consistently received the lowest engagement scores. Multiple posts on the other three pages reached scores of well over 1,000, while the EU only achieved a peak score of 334. The majority of the page's posts failed to reach scores of above 100, placing the EU in Ukraine solidly in last place for the amount of engagement received.

Determining which group was the most successful at engaging its followers is much more difficult. The Euromaidan group, Russian MFA and the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv all received high levels of engagement on certain posts and low levels on others. The Euromaidan group and the Russian MFA had the two highest scoring posts of the entire study, with scores of 3,911 and 4,833 respectively. The U.S. Embassy's highest post was significantly lower with a score of only 1,326. The Russian MFA and the U.S. Embassy had more consistent levels of engagement across time, receiving scores of over 100 on the majority of posts while the Euromaidan group saw a larger fluctuation in its scores.

On the other hand, the number of followers on each page must be considered when evaluating engagement. Currently, the Euromaidan group has 21,000 followers, the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv has 93,127 followers and the Russian MFA has 372,100 followers. The exact number of followers each page had during the protests is impossible to determine, but it is speculated that the proportions would have been similar, with the Euromaidan group having the

lowest number of followers due to the fact that it was the newest of all three pages. The lower number of followers on the Euromaidan page is a possible explanation for why its engagement was not as consistently high as the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv and the Russian MFA. The Euromaidan group's ability to create even a few posts that received as much engagement as the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv and Russian MFA despite having significantly fewer followers implies that it was still extremely successful.

Many different factors must be considered when looking at engagement, so it is impossible to say objectively which group was the most successful. However, it is possible to explain why three of the groups performed significantly better than the EU in Ukraine. The Russian MFA may have received such impressive levels of engagement simply because of its 372,100 followers. With three times as many followers as any other page in the study, its posts were naturally exposed to a larger audience and were more likely to receive likes, comments and shares. Beyond the large number of followers, it is hard to explain why the Russian MFA received so much engagement, as its posts were similar to the EU in Ukraine's— fairly repetitive and lacking in compelling visual media.

On the other hand, the U.S. Embassy and the Euromaidan group made similar strategic decisions that were intended to drive engagement. The U.S. Embassy actively sought to engage followers with its popular #UnitedforUkraine contest. In addition, the page posted a wide variety of content that catered to what followers cared about, such as the photos of missing protestors and the "Putin's fiction" series. The Euromaidan group also did an excellent job of varying the content of its posts and using emotionally-charged visual media to generate a response. This was the only group what was able to regularly share images and videos from Independence Square,

which were naturally more compelling to an audience seeking information about the protests than images of EU politicians.

The precise drivers of engagement are hard to determine, but posting a variety of content seems to be an indicator of success in this category. The EU in Ukraine's repetitive, text-heavy posts may have been one of the reasons why the page received low levels of engagement compared to the other groups.

Response

It is not surprising that all four groups received mixed responses. Comments both criticized and supported each group's position and actions in Ukraine, which is to be expected given the large number of followers on each page. However, the EU in Ukraine overwhelmingly received the most negative and critical comments, followed closely by the U.S. Embassy. This can be explained by the role these groups played in the conflict; as major western powers, many supporters of the Ukrainian protests looked to the EU and U.S. for support and action against the corruption of Yanukovych and the Russian government. When sanctions were not passed, these people felt frustrated and abandoned and took to social media to share their grievances.

The Euromaidan group and the Russian MFA also received a handful of critical comments. Harsh comments on posts from the Euromaidan group came from people who bought into the narrative that the protestors were violent rebels, while negative comments on the Russian MFA page came from Euromaidan sympathizers trying to point out Russia's lies.

The amount of negative feedback on the Russian MFA and Euromaidan pages was significantly lower than on the EU in Ukraine or U.S. Embassy pages, likely due to the audience each page attracted. The Euromaidan group was intended to be a news source for people who

were curious about the events in Euromaidan square and felt that major news outlets were not accurately covering the protests. Many of the followers sought out the page because they were supportive of the protests. The Russian MFA is a large government institution in Russia that deals with many nations besides Ukraine and is mostly followed by Russian citizens, explaining why many of the commenters on its posts agreed with the Russian position.

Regardless of whether feedback was negative or positive, none of the groups responded to the comments on their posts. This was a wise decision, as the issues surrounding the Euromaidan protests were complex and highly controversial, and engaging in a debate with any of the commenters would have been counterproductive.

Content

All four groups had to make strategic decisions throughout the conflict about what kind of content to post. For the Russian MFA, outside opinion pieces helped serve the purpose of discrediting the Euromaidan protestors. The Euromaidan group attempted to build its own credibility by sharing images and videos of the protests and citing international news stories to show that it was unbiased. The EU in Ukraine strictly shared statements from EU officials, likely seeing this as the best option for keeping followers updated on the opinion of the EU without accidentally sharing information that did not accurately reflect the views of the EU. The U.S. Embassy boasted the widest variety of content, ranging from photo contests to statements from politicians to images and stories of missing persons.

The type of content posted had a large influence on overall engagement and response from each page's followers. Visual media tended to receive better feedback than text-only posts or posts with links to articles. The sentiment of the post mattered as well, as posts with positive

or negative messages received better feedback overall than posts that took a neutral stance. This can be seen when comparing the EU in Ukraine and the U.S. Embassy. Both pages had a similar strategy of sharing statements from government officials, but the U.S. posted statements that took a stronger stance on the conflict, while the EU opted to remain neutral. Consequently, the EU received significantly more backlash than the U.S.

The U.S. Embassy and the Euromaidan group were the most successful in sharing a variety of content. Both groups published posts that discussed a range of topics and utilized visual media well. This contrasted with the Russian MFA and EU in Ukraine, both of which stuck to posting repetitive content. Varying their content allowed the U.S. Embassy and the Euromaidan group to more fully cover the events happening in Ukraine and effectively address the concerns of their followers.

Summary and Implications

The results of this study show that organizations have very different strategies when using social media to communicate during conflict and war. Some groups, such as the EU in Ukraine and the Russian MFA, opted for a more closed-off approach, with repetitive posts, little original content and long periods of silence. Other groups, such as the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv and the Euromaidan group, shared a variety of creative, thoughtful content.

All of these groups were using social media to communicate with and hopefully influence target audiences. During a time of uncertainty in Ukraine, social media became a major source of news and an excellent way to spread information. While some groups were more successful than others in creating believable narratives, all were able to use Facebook to spread their messages to a target audience.

Studying the way the Euromaidan protestors, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv and the European Union (EU) in Ukraine used social media in their attempts to control the narrative of a past revolution provides insight into how social media may be used in future conflicts. This study shows that social media is a strategic tool that can be utilized in modern warfare, and the narrative battles fought on these virtual platforms have the potential to influence the way global audiences perceive conflicts between nations. As social media platforms become more sophisticated and complex, it is increasingly important for users to think critically about social media and remember that the messages they read on these platforms have been crafted to serve the interests of the organizations creating the posts.

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Appendix A

Search terms:

Euromaidan

ЄвроМайдан

Maidan

Independence Square

Майдан Незалежності

Ukraine

Україна

Protests Kyiv

Yanukovych

Янукович

Appendix B

Sample of coding sheet:

Organization	Date	Link	Media (Picture/Video/Etc.)	Sentiment	Engagement (Likes + Shares + Comments)	Response	Notes
Euromaidan Group	24-Feb-14	https://www.facebook.com/emaiddanua/photos/a/550056355084044/1073741828549805628442450/593380934084919/?type=3&theater	Picture	Neutral; informative	9 (8 likes + 1 share)	No response	Discusses Ukraine naming Oleksandr Turchynov as interim president after the dismissal of Yanukovich. Also states that Yulia has expressed no desire to be prime minister ever again.
						Negative response. Most of the comments say that Tymoshenko should not become president. One comment says Tymoshenko is pro-Russian and can't be trusted: "(IMPORTANT: NOW THAT TYMOSHENKO HAS BEEN FREED (good on humanitarian and human rights grounds) Please remember and not forget about the role of TYMOSHENKO so that we don't make another mistake: PLEASE KEEP IN MIND THAT EVEN THOUGH TYMOSHENKO IS FREED, SHE WAS THE ORIGINAL PRO-RUSSIAN TRAITOR AND MADE MANY DEALS WITH RUSSIA TO SABOTAGE UKRAINE LEAVING UKRAINE TO BE SEIZED BY YANUKOVICH AND HIS CRIMINALS."	
Euromaidan Group	22-Feb-14	https://www.facebook.com/emaiddanua/posts/592439904179022	N/A	Neutral; informative	178 (106 likes + 55 shares + 17 comments)		Announces Yulia Tymoshenko's decision to run for president of Ukraine.