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**The Russian - Ukrainian  
War as a Launchpad and  
Organizing Logic for  
Dis/Misinformation in  
Africa: Contemporary  
War Propaganda Outside  
the Theatre of Conflict**

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**Abstract:** The increasing global impact of the Russian – Ukrainian war has likewise had a corresponding effect on the global information ecosystem, resulting to propaganda, disinformation, misinformation and fakes news. States have also seized the opportunity to spread dis/misinformation related and linked to the ongoing war. In Africa, there are instances where propaganda and misinformation have been

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peddled by adopting happenings in the war front of the Russian - Ukrainian conflict as a springboard to manipulate public information. To that end, this article explores cases where the Russian - Ukrainian war has been deployed as a launchpad and organizing logic for propaganda and misinformation. In researching the contours of contemporary war propaganda with the projection of crisis communication theory as a conceptual benchmark, this study raises two research puzzles: (a) how has African states' officials used the Russian - Ukrainian war to spread propaganda and disinformation? And (b), to what extent does this pattern echoes the globalization of war propaganda and crisis communication in an age of conflict and turbulence? Using previous studies, secondary documented official statements, and podcasts, we show in this article the different layers and contours of war propaganda in Africa, and conclude that : (a) Russia's deployment of propaganda, disinformation and information autocracy in Africa is aimed at counteracting the Washington - London - Brussels international world order spearheaded by Western hegemonic power, and most importantly (b), that African states have used the Russian – Ukrainian war as an organizing logic for dis/misinformation and public information manipulation targeted at African publics.

**Keywords:** Africa, disinformation, misinformation, Russian-Ukrainian conflict, war propaganda

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*La guerre russo-ukrainienne, rampe de lancement et logique organisatrice de la dés/misinformation en Afrique: la propagande de guerre contemporaine hors du théâtre des conflits*

**Résumé:** L'impact mondial croissant de la guerre russo-ukrainienne a également eu un effet correspondant sur l'écosystème mondial de l'information, entraînant la propagande, la désinformation, la misinformation et les fausses nouvelles. Les États ont également saisi l'opportunité de diffuser de la dés/misinformation liée à la guerre en cours. En Afrique, il y a des cas où la propagande et la désinformation ont été colportées en adoptant les événements sur le front de guerre du conflit russo-ukrainien comme tremplin pour manipuler l'information publique. À cette fin, cet article explore des cas où la guerre russo-ukrainienne a été déployée comme rampe de lancement et une logique d'organisation pour la propagande et la misinformation. En recherchant les contours de la propagande de guerre contemporaine avec la projection de la théorie de la communication de crise comme référence conceptuelle, cette étude soulève deux questions de recherche : (a) comment les responsables des États africains ont-ils utilisé la guerre russo-ukrainienne pour diffuser la propagande et la désinformation? Et (b), dans quelle mesure ce modèle fait-il écho à la mondialisation de la propagande de guerre et de la communication de crise à une époque de conflits et de turbulences? À l'aide d'études antérieures, de déclarations officielles documentées secondaires et de podcasts, nous montrons dans cet article les différentes couches et contours de la propagande de guerre en Afrique, et concluons que : (a) le déploiement par la Russie de la propagande, de la désinformation et de l'autocratie de l'information en Afrique

visé à contrer l'ordre mondial international Washington - Londres - Bruxelles dirigé par la puissance hégémonique occidentale, et (b) les États africains ont utilisé la guerre russo-ukrainienne comme logique d'organisation pour la dés/misinformation et la manipulation de l'information publique ciblant les publics africains.

**Mots-clés:** Afrique, désinformation, conflit russo-ukrainien, propagande de guerre

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### **Introduction**

Since the ideation and theorization of propaganda during the World War II as part of a significant component of communication studies, propaganda, disinformation, misinformation, deception, and information manipulation have all taken a new turn where they have formed a critical compass within the discursive space in our socio-political environment. Given that Lippmann (1922) first hypothesized the idea of war propaganda using the cascading experiences of the World War II, involving the American government under the Woodrow Wilson's administration and other allied forces, war propaganda now revolves far beyond the theatre of war and conflict to nations and societies far removed from the battlefield. This seeming trend of war propaganda intersects with both manipulative communication and globalization of disinformation, the post-truth phenomenon in the postmodern world and the mediated landscape. We are now in an era where every global incident is followed by an attendant pattern of deception and information manipulation tied to such event. This has become widespread in cases where the state has particular interest. More so, studies indicate that the spread of propaganda could help (de)legitimize and (de)securitize socio-political issues and policies, (Chernobrov & Briant 2022). With state-sponsored disinformation on the rise, the Russian – Ukrainian War also provides a veil in which some states in the Global South have relied upon to manipulate information, facts, and truth, creating more political and communicative disruptions.

Scholars focusing on propaganda from historical events like conflicts argued that war propaganda could be propagated to *manufacture consent, counterfeit of reality*, (Lippmann 1922), and that during the cold war, it was deployed through music and jamming of communications (Whitton 1951), and may somehow be organized to boost the morale of military troops and weaken that of the enemies' camp, (Scriver 2015). Despite the enormous research on war propaganda, studies on different contours of war propaganda, particularly, those focusing on the Global South, specifically, Africa, and outside the theatre of war are significantly limited. And as the world becomes more globalized (Stiglitz 2002; Sessan 2003) in the midst of technologically driven disinformation in the global public sphere (Bradshaw & Howard 2018; Woolley & Howard 2019), issues of fake news, propaganda, misinformation, deception, and information manipulation have become centralized according to a country's specific interactions with citizens, political environment, vibrancy of the mediated and digital technology ecosystem.

Although, Pasitseska (2022) stressed that the Russian - Ukrainian war propaganda is predominantly centred on the contextual priming of issues at country-level, the discursive and communicational deliberations of the war are now well entrenched beyond the borders of Russia and Ukraine to several countries far cut off from the battlefield. In fact, as CNN (2022) indicated, the communicational and information warfare of the Russian – Ukrainian conflict became a source of concern with Elon Musk’s SpaceX Satellite services becoming a topical issue. Woolley (2022) further argued that since Russian President, Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine, technologies and social media have played a significant role in cross-border disinformation, leading to a rise in politicized digital falsehoods. Thus, the Russian - Ukrainian war has reignited the spread of war propaganda, even far above the World War II era, involving America and allied forces; and also, the cold war period. In Russia for instance, the Kremlin is spreading disinformation about the war being a ‘special military operation’ or a ‘solution to the Ukrainian question’ where Russian Army is extending goodwill and charity to Ukrainians, (Foreign Policy 2022). And as states become purveyors of fake news, disinformation, and misinformation (Obi 2023), the Russian – Ukrainian war has summarily become a launchpad or pathway for some states in the Global South – Africa to spread disinformation and lied to their citizens and the rest of the world.

Instructively, there is a high turnout of Russian - Ukrainian war propaganda - which can be linked to other countries who are constantly using the conflict to propagate and propel disinformation, misinformation, and fake news. Considering the global impact of the Russian - Ukrainian war, resulting in what Akinteriwa (2022) called *bad diplomacy*, states have also seized the opportunity to spread disinformation that is related and linked to the ongoing war. In Africa, mostly with countries with economic and diplomatic ties with Russia and Ukraine, there are instances where propaganda, misinformation and disinformation have been peddled by adopting happenings at the war front of the Russian - Ukrainian conflict as the course of a policy flop in the home country, situating the war as a springboard for such national crisis. This form of war propaganda and disinformation can be unearthed given that some of these challenges were already in existence before Russia invaded Ukraine on the 26<sup>th</sup> of February 2022. Considering the globalized impact of the Russian – Ukrainian War, African states have somehow appropriated some of the effects as a consequence of home-grown crisis in narrating and communicating about policies and governance in their respective countries.

Critically, the discursive approaches that have characterized the Russian – Ukrainian conflict, and the attendant war propaganda has created different layers of narratives that are *particularistic* to respective countries and the ideological positioning of public information manipulation among African states. Lasswell (1927) at the earlier stages of propaganda studies, argued that, often, propaganda is geared towards targeting allies, enemies, and even those who fly around the neutrality flag in times of conflict. Many African countries have aligned themselves as being neutral to the Russian – Ukrainian War but have resorted to using the conflict as a

shield and escape route for policy flops in their home countries. This explains the contours and layers of war propaganda associated with the Russian – Ukrainian conflict.

This study therefore explores cases where the Russian - Ukrainian war has been deployed as a launchpad - an organizing logic for propaganda and misinformation. In researching the contours of war propaganda, we raise two research puzzles: (i) how have African state officials used the Russian - Ukrainian war to spread propaganda and misinformation? and (ii) to what extent does this pattern echo the *globalization* of war propaganda in an age of conflict and turbulence? Using previous studies, official statements, and secondary sources with crisis communication as a theoretical frame, we extrapolate in this study the different layers and contours of war propaganda, bringing to bear the manipulation of public information and attempts to link prevailing national crises to the Russian – Ukrainian war in a propagandist manner. We set out in this study to point out instances where state communication on national crisis is surreptitiously tied to the Russian – Ukrainian conflict even when subsisting crises are disentangled from the war. This study therefore lays out how African states are spreading dis/misinformation using the Russian - Ukrainian war in a whole new level within governmental circles. This study also highlights how the Russian - Ukrainian war is a drawback on public communication in view of the unravelling global information warfare and dis/misinformation sphere in a turbulent and conflict-ridden world.

### **1. Recentering Crisis Communication Theory: Exploring the Debate and Literature**

First, the rising wave of crises, conflicts globally, and the war in Europe – Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, has significantly re-enacted and recentered the debate on crisis communication theory around the world. More so, the epistemological elevation of crisis communication, particularly, with the current Russian – Ukrainian War has now become a topical scholarly preoccupation in research on how to grasp the fundamentals of communication in relation to conflicts. How then do we connect these crises with scholarly exploration of crisis communication theory? Often, theoretical interrogation of conflicts is inspired by the fact that crisis communication theory has the capacity to make us understand the role of communication in crises and conflicts situations, and how to construct our belief system. Sellnow and Seeger (2021) argue that crises are critical social and political forces, with the ability to enable constructive changes, and as well, reconfigure well-known belief systems. This is somehow liable to the social culture at play in a particular communication environment. Falkheimer and Heide (2006) focused on the dynamics of relational and situational approaches in the interrogation of crisis communication theory within the mediated multicultural conflicts ridden landscape. This school of thought could also align with the prevailing circumstances associated with the Russian – Ukrainian War,

and how different cultures and societies relate to the conflict through communicational lens in their relation with both Russia and Ukraine.

Yet, in relating crisis communication and disinformation, Pascan (2022) draws inferences to the fact that public communication in crisis times has to suffer in a way, mostly, due to panic – leading to viral information manipulation and disinformation. And in a world, where we live in risk society (Beck, 1992), risk provides the discursive context upon which crisis communication is fostered and understood (Heath & O’Hair, 2009). Thus, the risks and conflicts in faraway territories of Russia and Ukraine are now lending themselves to information and communication manipulation in Africa through acts of propaganda, fake news, and disinformation. As the war becomes the centerstage in the discursive narratives within the global public sphere and transnational arenas, effective communication devoid of manipulation is often obfuscated in the long run. Just like the war and conflict itself, what we now have beyond the Russian – Ukrainian territories is a full crisis communication fostered by dis/misinformation and expansive propagandistic tendencies.

Another important factor to consider is to look at the Russian – Ukrainian War from Boin and Rhinard’s (2008) idea of transboundary threats, imbuing crisis communication theory, and the deployment of disinformation and war propaganda tactics outside the theatre of conflict – Africa. Falkheimer (2014) likewise integrated transboundary concept in the study of crisis communication, far beyond the rationalistic and monophonic approaches. Hence, at the centre of the Russian – Ukrainian War is crisis communication that has taken deep roots within the transnational public sphere – alongside disruptions in disinformation, misinformation, propaganda, and fake news, far beyond the borders of the two countries. What theoretical concepts can we deploy to relate the contours of war propaganda with the Russian – Ukrainian conflict ladened disinformation in Africa?

## **2. Propaganda Theory, Disinformation, and Misinformation: The Dimensional Contours of Russian – Ukrainian War Propaganda in Africa**

Theoretically, propaganda has been seen from different perspectives, with the primary focus centred on the intent/goal, deliberateness, and target audience. It’s from this prism that propaganda can be well understood in the context of warfare – particularly, the Russian - Ukrainian War. Lippmann observed that propaganda involves the manufacture of consent and counterfeit of reality. Lasswell (1937) further hypothesized propaganda to be a ‘mere tool,’ while Taylor (1992) maintained that it is practical persuasion. Cunningham (2002) also stressed that it is the mistreatment of truth. The thematic grounding of the theory of propaganda is fore-grounded more in the deliberate activity – to persuade, manufacture, counterfeit, deceive and most importantly, propagate falsehood.

Scriver (2015, p. 2) argued that unpacking propaganda and defining the theme could pose some challenges, “propaganda serves as an essential purpose for war.” In wartime, information manipulation and propaganda tend to be used as instruments for warfare, such that, truth becomes an illusion in the communication process of the conflict at hand. As Lippmann (1922) explained, the objective of propaganda very often is to *manufacture consent* and *counterfeit reality* with the *buying public* as target audience. In war time, the counterfeit of reality takes different shapes and conceptualization, particularly, as technology and cyberspace are now democratizing propaganda and disinformation in a whole new level. (Woolley & Howard, 2018).

In distinguishing between propaganda and misinformation, Martin (1982) observes that falsification and intention tend to separate disinformation and misinformation from the run-of-the-mill propaganda and can only be spread by the state when truth and facts are staked against the state and governmental institutions. Within the context of the Russian – Ukrainian conflict and the contours of war propaganda, the Kremlin is spreading propaganda targeting African states and governments, (Blankenship & Ordu, 2022; DW, 2022); while African states in turn are rallying round the conflict, using it as an organizing logic to spread disinformation and misinformation primarily targeting their citizens.

The history of war propaganda in the African continent first became more prominent during the World War II, where wartime propaganda was deployed through mediated communication channels for politico-diplomatic, economic, and military agendas and the need to get a buy-in from the populace (Monama, 2014). Studies also abound, indicating a high turnover of war propaganda of that era – where wartime propaganda in Europe was also extended to Africa through imperial and colonial channels (Ibhawoh, 2007; Mordi, 2009). To some extent, there is some similarity where cases of conflicts and wars in Europe somehow become sources for organizing a propagandistic logic to propagate all forms of manipulative behaviour, disinformation, deception and even information autocracy (Alyukov, 2022).

More so, there are empirical cases where Russia – the Kremlin agents in Africa are also sowing propaganda and disinformation, to sway African states for support (Blankenship and Ordu, 2022; DW, 2022). The aim is to persuade African states away from the influence of Washington – London – Brussels narratives of the Western world and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) while projecting Russia to Africans as anti-colonialist/imperialist, (DW, 2022). Or, as Hill and Stent (2022, p.109) observe, Putin’s Russia “wants the West and the global South to accept Russia's predominant role.” While military cooperation and trade define Russia – African relations, with Russia being the highest military hardware supplier to Africa, (Arkhangelskaya & Dodd, 2016), the contest for global power with the West also remains a critical factor in the Kremlin’s relationship with Africa. In recent times, the rise of democratic recession, digital and electoral authoritarianism in Africa has been linked to the Russia and China’s models, (Polyakova & Meserole, 2019; Diamond, 2019 & 2022). Instructively, the contest for global power, in which, Russia and China are pushing for an onslaught against Anglo-American world can be theoretically and

empirically understood from Russia's information war mongering and propaganda in no other place than Africa. This, perhaps, provides a cogent theoretical concept for war propaganda and a conceptual frame for the study of war propaganda and information manipulation - disinformation and misinformation outside the theatre of conflict and battlefield. We thus extrapolate cases of disinformation and misinformation in Africa in relation to the Russian - Ukrainian War.

### **3. Cases of War Propaganda outside the Theatre of Conflict: The Russian-Ukrainian War**

#### *3.1. Method and Materials*

This study uses five countries – Cameroon, Egypt, Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa – as case studies to track the contours of the Russia-Ukraine war propaganda in Africa. The choice of the countries was primarily based on their manifest positions in the continent, and in connections with Russia and Ukraine. In other words, these countries are leading economies of their respective sub-regions in the continent, i.e., Central, North, East, West and Southern Africa respectively, by virtue of which they equally hold sizable political and economic exchanges with Russia and Ukraine as seen in their trade data, and diplomatic engagements.

For context, we analyse the trade volumes of these countries with Russia in 2020, where Egypt had \$4.5bn, South Africa - \$980m, Nigeria - \$461m, Kenya - \$322m, and Cameroon - \$124m. And with Ukraine, Egypt (\$1.91bn), South Africa (\$21.87m), Nigeria (\$153m), Kenya (between \$155m – \$217m), and Cameroon (\$99.5m) (Statista, 2020). Wheat, mineral fuel, fruits and organic chemicals are the leading traded products in this regard. In global representation, primarily at the United Nations (UN), these countries are equally influential African voices. This is in addition to the sizeable population of their citizens in both countries, e.g., students, that live, study and work in Russia and Ukraine. These factors amongst others support our use of the five countries as case studies for this research. Also, of importance is the repeated diplomatic shuttles one of the warring parties, Russia made to African countries seeking support and creating narratives in its favour.

Methodologically, we relied on news items (news reports, podcasts, talkshows), government statements and policies as case evidence to support our operationalization the research questions. We then use case description and thematic analytical strategies in the analysis of our case evidence and organization of our discussion which is followed by our contributions, and limitations. First, we monitored and collected news items from Africa-related broadcasts on the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). Altogether, we used the thematic analysis to analyze 29 BBC World Service news items including reports and podcasts related to the Russia-Ukraine war and Africa (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.83). With this approach, we allowed our data from the BBC programmes to generate for us themes we consider related to our object of study – propaganda. Second, we used the themes generated from the BBC to analyze country-specific accounts and comments on the war (local news, policy briefs, government



statements and directives) in Cameroon, Egypt, Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa. The country-specific accounts provided the study with deeper clarity of governance actors' (and by extension, countries') positions on the Russia-Ukraine war. The themes for analysis are organized to complement each other and respond adequately to the research questions: (i) how has African state officials used the Russian - Ukrainian war to spread propaganda and disinformation? and (ii) to what extent does this pattern echoes the *globalization* of war propaganda in an age of conflict and turbulence?

### 3.2. Empirical Materials and Results

#### 3.1.1. 29 BBC News Items (News, Podcasts, Interviews/Talkshows)

29 diverse news items from the BBC World Service were thematically analyzed, to concretely get an overview of the main concerns of the case studies. The themes identified provided the overarching framework for further analysis of in-country communication of the Russia-Ukraine war. Our choice of the BBC World Service as first level case evidence is validated by the BBC's longstanding influence in Africa's news broadcast landscape, which is today unparalleled among African and international media outlets (Temin, 2003). The BBC's coverage of Anglophone and non-Anglophone countries in Africa is wide. Mytton (2008) note that, "the largest BBC audience anywhere in the world outside the UK, as a percentage of the adult population, is found in Africa." Thus, this study familiarized with the 29 diverse BBC news items to make sense of their manifest contents (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The news items were collected between April and August 2022, with the keywords 'Russia-Ukraine War' 'Africa'. We tracked news bulletins (e.g., News Day, World Business Report), podcasts (e.g., Africa Today) and talkshows (e.g., Ukrainecast).

We then went on to analyze for themes that speak to the notion of contour of war propaganda outside of the theatre of conflicts. We identified and distilled 'grain supply blockade', 'food security dependency', 'COVID-19 after-effects on national economies', 'energy supply disruptions' and 'Western countries arm-twisting and lengthening of colonialism' as the themes from the BBC news items (see table 1 for description). We further iterated and distilled the themes into a dominant theme, '*food shortages across Africa*', which we used to operationalize our research questions because this theme connects with all the five identified themes. We then went further to use this theme in analysis of the country-specific study evidence.

**Table 1.** Dominant theme of food shortage found in empirical material

News	Podcast	Interviews/talkshows
“While someone, blocking the Black Sea, takes the lives of other countries, we are giving them opportunity to survive,” Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky	Mr Sergei Lavrov rejected the accusation that Russia was "exporting famine" and blamed it on Western propaganda.	Zelensky has called Africa “a hostage” of Russia's war during an address to the African Union (AU) on Monday. “Africa is actually a hostage... of those who unleashed war against our state”, Mr Zelensky said in his speech.

### 3.1.2. Country-specific Evidence

This paper’s second level analysis was based on country-specific evidence collected through news, policy briefs, government statements and directives. The analysis followed the overarching theme of *‘food shortages across Africa’* coded from the 29 analyzed BBC news items. Analyzing country-by-country, the study tracked and analyzed local news, policy briefs, government statements and directives within this main theme. It found that the theme was prevalent in governance discourse across the studied countries. The governments blamed the war for rising food inflation, and then, shortage. On the average, the continent’s food inflation rate in 2022 was 17.4 per cent (Statista, 2020). For example, in *Nigeria*, ‘food shortage’ was predominant in how the central government talked about the Russia-Ukraine war. This is seen in the country’s agriculture minister, Abubakar Mohammed expression in a national daily *Ripples Nigeria*, that the country’s double-digit food inflation is due to the Russia-Ukraine war. But also in early April 2022, the federal minister underscored Nigeria’s anxieties over ‘food shortage’ in a news report. TV station, report.

We have met about two to three times to discuss the issue of Ukraine. Yes, indeed, Nigeria imports grains and other agricultural input from Ukraine, we are making sure that we look inwards and outwards to make sure this conflict does not affect our agricultural sector. (Mohammed, Arise News April 2022)

The whole world is currently reeling out of COVID and now battling the consequences of the war in Ukraine and Russia, but things will stabilize, and the ministry of agriculture is doing everything possible in terms of addressing the problem; we are not relenting, so that the prices will come down faster. (Mohammed, Ripples Nigeria August 2022)

News report from the *Voice of America (VOA)* which was analyzed in the study, had the central government in *Cameroon* underscoring its anxiety over ‘food shortage’

thereby issuing a directive to the population to eat locally sourced food. The directive was a counter to protests over food shortages and price spikes which the government links to the Russia-Ukraine war.

Paul Biya, the country's president in the analyzed VOA news, ordered government ministers to 'explain' to the public that the food shortage and 60% price hike in commodities was because of Russia's Black Sea blockade, and not local taxes.

In *Kenya*, this study's analysis of the central government's engagements with the Russia-Ukraine war in news reports was from a national daily *Tuko*, where immediate past president, Uhuru Kenyatta, in April underlined the link between the war and rising food shortage in the country. Kenyatta implied that the food shortage is as a result of shortfalls in fuel supply.

Tuwaombe hawa wenzetu wawache hizo vita kwa sababu wa kuumia ni sisi (Let's pray for Russia and Ukraine to end the war). Residents of Asia, Africa and other continents who depend on oil are suffering. (Uhuru Kenyatta, in April 2022)

Similarly, Kenyan State House spokesperson, Kanze Dena, earlier in March linked the country's high cost of living to the Russia-Ukraine war, stating in a government statement that:

The rising cost of living is not exclusive to Kenya; it is a global phenomenon fuelled by numerous external factors, among them the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war which has led to a rise in the global price of petroleum, which is a key factor of production. (Kanze Dena, March 2022 statement)

*Egypt* relies on the warring countries for most of its wheat supply. In addition, the price of bread is political in the country where a good number of its population depend on subsidized bread (Salama 2012; Lofgren *et al* 2001; Adams, 2000; Ahmed *et al* 2003).

This study's analysis of news report from the *Middle East Eye*, showed the country's anxiety over shortage of subsidized bread for its population. Prime Minister, Mostafa Madbouly was quoted to have said that an increase in the price of a loaf of subsidized bread "will certainly happen".

In the same breadth, the Egyptian cabinet's spokesperson, Nader Saad, raised the alarm over the country's fears with its nine months' worth of wheat in silos, including five months of strategic reserves and four months of domestic production. Saad was also quoted to have indicated Egypt's inability to buy wheat at the price Russia offered it.

In *South Africa*, President Cyril Ramaphosa believed the war had eroded the progress made by his government and blamed it for food and petroleum products shortages. Local *SABC News*, which was analysed had him complaining about the events.

We see a number of these gains being eroded. We are moving backwards; this is not only because of COVID-19 but also global events. Right now, there is a huge war raging in Ukraine and Russia and the gains we have been making are going to be reversed because our fuel and food prices are going up. We are trying to determine ways to improve the country but the war in Ukraine is setting us back. Instead of moving forward, we are finding that we are moving back. These are external factors but there are also internal factors which are within our control. Internal factors. (President Cyril Ramaphosa, March 2022)

In addition to Ramaphosa's anxious statement, the South African parliament debated on the Russia-Ukraine war. The leader of the official opposition in the parliament (Democratic Alliance), John Steenhuisen, brought the debate to the floor. The debate underlined the rising prices of wheat, maize, and petrol from the war (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, 2020).

### 3.1.3. A Counter-narrative to the Contour

To gain a clearer understanding on how the Russia-Ukraine war has impacted Africa since it began, we further conducted a document analysis from the Beijing based *Development Reimagined* and found a counter-narrative to the contour of '*food shortages across Africa*'. We found from the unit of analyses – '*The Russia-Ukraine War: a new economic crisis for Africa?*' – that the propaganda deployed is rather farfetched. And, that the effects of the war on Africa could be said to be unprecedented given the continent's food consumption patterns.

Yes, the war affects and will continue to affect African countries, but we should be very cautious about overstating the impact the war is directly having on African countries, and certainly not to the same "alarmist" extent that other organizations have suggested.

Africa's marginalization and diversity (e.g., in consumption patterns) means that countries can be cushioned from shocks to global markets... There needs to be a deeper understanding of key commodities across the continent, and not a simplistic assumption that changes in trade for example will affect all African countries in the same way, affect all negatively, or indeed affect the African region in the same way that it will affect other parts of the world.

There is a sense that people assume a war such as this will inevitably deeply impact all of Africa. There is an image of Africans as being passive actors that are somehow incapable of responding to the impacts of war or other external shocks. The fact the African governments can react to these changes and deal in the same way that they were able to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic disproves this and shows the need for a deeper understanding. (Development Reimagined: The Russia-Ukraine War: a new economic crisis for Africa? 2022)

#### 4. Discussion

The increasing global impact of the Russian – Ukrainian war has had a corresponding effect on the global information ecosystem, resulting to propaganda, disinformation, misinformation, and fake news. States have considered this phenomenon and seized the opportunity to spread dis/misinformation that is related and linked to the ongoing war. In Africa, where we focused attention on countries we categorised as key partners to both warring parties, there have been instances where propaganda and misinformation were peddled by adopting happenings at the war front in Russia and Ukraine as a springboard to manipulate public information. To that end, we explored cases where the Russian - Ukrainian war were deployed as a launchpad and organizing logic for propaganda and misinformation. In researching the contours of contemporary war propaganda with the projection of crisis communication theory as a conceptual benchmark, this study raised two research puzzles; (a) how has African states' officials used the Russian - Ukrainian war to spread propaganda and disinformation? And (b), to what extent does this pattern echoes the globalization of war propaganda and crisis communication in an age of conflict and turbulence? It thus used previous studies, secondary official statements, and podcasts, to find the different layers and contours of war propaganda.

We thus identified '*food shortages across Africa*' as the dominant theme which African states used to spread war propaganda. We argue that the attempt to link food shortage in the continent wholly on the Russian - Ukrainian War, illustrates the contours of war propaganda in Africa (Monama, 2014). Though, there are instances where the Russian - Ukrainian War affected the supply of grains to Africa from Ukraine, we note that the ploy to put the blame entirely on the Russian - Ukrainian conflict is explained from two propaganda judgments: Russia-Ukraine on one side soliciting supports in whatever forms they desire, and governments of African countries on another shirking public blames on socio-economic downturns. Before and after the UN votes to call out Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Russia and Ukraine had deployed this theme – food shortage – in their diplomatic overtures to Africa. For example, Zelensky in an address to the African Union (AU) – a meeting that recorded a disappointing turnout of Africa presidents, accentuated Kyiv's propaganda that Africa's food security was under threat from Russia's war with it (Ibhawoh, 2007; Mordi, 2009; Alyukov, 2022; Blankenship and Ordu, 2022).

Zelensky's snub by Africa's presidents also underlined Kyiv's asymmetrical political stance with Russia in the continent. His struggles to get the continent behind Kyiv (which has just about 10 embassies, compared to Russia's 39 in the continent with 54 countries) was further defined by his claim of Africa being 'a hostage' of Russia's war with Ukraine. We argue that the phrase, 'a hostage', is part of a deliberate activity to persuade, manufacture, counterfeit, deceive and most importantly propagate falsehood (Cunningham, 2002; Taylor, 1992). On the other hand, Russia countered the propaganda that its invasion of Ukraine was accountable for food shortage in the continent, absolving itself of turning the continent 'a hostage'

of its war with Ukraine. In addition to rejecting the claims, Russia's foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov laid out alternative propaganda of Russia's objectives being to persuade Africa to join its contest of US and Europe's colonial tendencies, thus manufacturing consent and counterfeit of reality (Lippmann, 1922).

Amongst Africa's governments, the war however provided a perfect storm to dodge criticisms and culpability for imprudent public policies and management of national resources and economies. Especially coming off of the COVID-19 pandemic, governments in Africa obsessed with the propaganda of the war as the reason for '*food shortages*' whereas they hardly managed to plan strategically for life after COVID-19. For example, countries such as Nigeria and Cameroon with documented cases of long periods of internal security and displacement of food production, tended to leverage this to get off the hook of public slash and clapsbacks, just as South Africa and Kenya managed to adopt this to hide from the fallouts of their inefficient energy supply strategies. Egypt with its profoundly documented economic challenges which have threatened to disrupt its domestic economic and foreign policies, as well as deepening public distaste that could fuel social unrest (World Bank, 2021), also took advantage of the propaganda to hide from its poor and expensive economic strategy of relying wholly on food and fuel imports. We thus posit that these underlined that in the modern and contemporary history of war, governments often rely on propaganda, particularly magnified by the mass media, to mobilize, sustain and strengthen domestic and international support for war efforts (Monama, 2014).

### **Conclusion and Limitations**

This study sets out to connect the dots of Russian – Ukrainian conflict, with war propaganda and information manipulation in faraway Africa; and we have made efforts to herald with it, contemporary war propaganda and the contours of disinformation and misinformation within the ambits of crisis communication theory. Relating this to Russia's declaration of war on her neighbour, and invasion of Ukraine, we consider this a relevant effort in extending the sagacity of crisis communication and propaganda theories in understanding how public communication suffers in crisis times, mostly due to panic. Because of the trajectories and intersections of relations involving Russia on one hand; and Ukraine on the other hand with Africa, the informational and communicational approaches about the war – how the war is narrativized and communicated, and the effects on Africa has tended to be manipulative in nature. For instance, home grown national crises that predated the Russian – Ukrainian War have been escalated or linked to the conflict to deflate the blame and responsibility.

In unravelling the Russian - Ukrainian War as an organizing logic for war propaganda, disinformation and misinformation in Africa, Russia through its allies in the continent intends to counteract the influential powers of the Washington – London – Brussels international/world order and reassert its power in the continent. A model, China also pursues rigorously in the African continent. Categorically, the study is able

to (de)construct the contours of war propaganda – as an epistemic crisis communication phenomenon in Africa as a fallout of the Russian – Ukrainian War through two pre-eminent layers: (i) deployment of propaganda and disinformation by Russia itself to counter Western hegemonic power – led by United States and Europe, and (ii), the resort by African states – Cameroun, Egypt, Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa to use the Russian - Ukraine War as an organizing logic, decoy and launchpad for disinformation and misinformation.

By exploring media podcasts, official statements and information from African states and reconstructing the thematic focus in line with the theories of propaganda and crisis communication through the prisms of disinformation and misinformation, the study therefore, provides a lens to the never-ending discourse about Russia – Ukrainian war and its impact and influence on global information and communication ecosystem. In dissecting the Russian - Ukrainian war and its communication role outside the battlefield - Africa, we are able to underpin the footprints of Russia's information and communication autocracy - fostered by Russia herself and deployed by African states as an organizing logic for propagandist behaviour and counterfeiting of reality in a sense. While the research concentrated on African states and official communication centred on the Russian – Ukrainian war, further studies should endeavour to examine the ebb and flow of discourses of the conflict among the citizens and African publics and the role of the Kremlin, if any, in the rise of information and mediated autocracy in the continent.

Overall, this study enriches our understanding of war propaganda and crisis communication in a different perspective - outside the theatre of war. It also contributes to the growing pool of knowledge on propaganda, disinformation, and misinformation in troubling times, specifically, in the Global South. Although, the focus on the Kremlin's activities in Africa has been overtly reliant on military and trade standpoint, this research moves a bit further to locate global politics of information and communication as another key component of how Russia wants to be seen as a predominant player (Hill and Stent, 2022) by the West and in transitional democracies in Africa. Still, beyond the neutrality posturing of African states with regards to the Russian – Ukrainian War, the conflict has sort of provides a rallying logic that state officials can spin information, manipulate publics and resort to disinformation in a way. Critically, anyone interested in how Russia's cascading influence is spreading, should look no further, but on the spectacle of information autocracy, disinformation, propaganda, and misinformation with the Russian – Ukrainian war as a launchpad for disruptions and distortions of global information ecosystem, as crisis communication from the conflict spread around the world – Africa included.

We are aware that our choice of data collection may constitute a sort of limitation to this study, and thus state that we do not claim that we have engaged the most robust data collection process in this study; perhaps, such qualitative study could benefit from further data triangulation, e.g., combining semi-structured interviews to our data collection kit. Nevertheless, we believe in the validity of the empirical materials we

have used to respond to our research questions in this study, including the validity of our results. We thus encourage that future studies on this subject should look to triangulating data collection for richer outcomes.

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