LANGUAGE

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The Language of Manipulation: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Credible News Websites and Fake News Websites[1]

Abstract. In the contemporary digital media landscape marked by the presence of disinformation and fake news, the aim of this study is to perform a comparative analysis of credible news websites and fake news websites, and to identify the multimodal resources characteristic of them. In particular, the study focuses on newsbits and newsbites, because they arguably represent the most salient features of any news websites. A corpus of newsbits and newsbites was compiled using Chat GPT 4, to prevent selection bias, from credible news websites and fake news websites that meet the criteria of such websites defined in the study. In total, 6 newsbites and 2 newsbits were collected from 2 credible news websites and 2 fake news websites. The study primarily draws on Bednarek and Caple's approach to news discourse, which affords ways to perform a complex multimodal analysis of text and image, as well as explores the concepts of news values, parameters of newsworthiness, text-image relations, and communicative functions of images. As the primary objective of newsbits and newsbites is to entice readers to read the full article, the creation of compelling newsbits and newsbites is the shared goal of both credible news websites and fake news websites, even though their broader objectives or ethical standards may not align. The manipulative impact of linguistic modes is more pronounced in the case of fake news websites because they rely on attracting clicks through controversial evaluations or alternate perspectives of some existing news. On the other hand, credible news websites create more engaging and clickable newsbits and newsbites with higher emotional pull via the interplay of text and real-life images.

Keywords: credible news websites, fake news, comparative analysis, newsbits, newsbites, news values, evaluation

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1. Introduction

This paper studies news discourse which plays an important role in everyday lives of most people. Because people want to stay informed about international and home affairs or be entertained, people consume news through various channels. The news media produce texts in various categories that represent different types of genres which cover a variety of topics and can be characterized based on their informational value. The two main categories are soft news and hard news (Gans, 1979). Soft news report human interest stories (Hughes, 1980), whereas hard news is concerned with factual and direct reporting of newsworthy events.

According to Bednarek and Caple (2012, 6), news have "great potential to exert considerable influence over us as well as have the ability to shape our ideas, opinions, and behaviors.'' Not only that, "some news can be so ingenious, and so subtle in leading the reader to accept [the news producer's] side of the story that the reader may not even be aware of it'' (Mineshima, 2009, p. 2). This paper focuses on the digital channels of news discourse, namely websites, because they allow news to be disseminated not only easily and rapidly, but also globally through the internet, and with the rise of AI, this process can even be automated.

Since newsbits and newsbites (Knox 2007) are typically the first thing readers look at when they enter a news website, they should be crafted by utilizing a compelling interplay of linguistic and visual modes to make readers want to read the full article. Some linguists even argue that people are less likely to read the whole news but just the headline (Yoon et al. 2019), which is an integral component of both newsbits and newsbites. It is therefore necessary to compare the multimodal strategies used in newsbits and newsbites of fake news websites, whose purpose is to deceive the readers to shift their perception of certain people, or to influence the readers' beliefs (Molina 2019), with the multimodal strategies of credible news websites, whose purpose is "the provision of topics of general interest, that are oriented on facts, and published following professional rules'' (Holt, Figenschou & Frischlich 2019, 2), to discern approaches each employs to present information to public.

The paper juxtaposes fake news websites with credible news websites websites to perform a comparative qualitative analysis of newsbits and newsbites, and to study the interplay of the modes of language and image within them.

The study begins with a discussion of the theoretical framework, moves on to specify the analyzed materials and the strategies for their examination, and concludes with an introduction to the dataset.

The analysis shows that credible news websites often use real-life images known for their high engagement potential, while fake news websites tend to favor illustrative pictures or edited photo collages. This reflects their more editorial focus, which is less on reporting current events, and more on offering their own interpretations or alternative perspectives of existing news.

2. Theoretical Background

This paper draws on Bednarek and Caple's (2012) approach to news media which is based on social semiotics and draws on concepts from journalism studies, namely newsworthiness and news values. This approach considers news discourse as multi-modal or multisemiotic and in this paper it is used to investigate newsbits and news-bites in the category of hard news, because newsbits and newsbites create meanings through the use of language and image, and through their interplay. These concepts will be described in the following chapter.

To be considered a credible news websites, the website must have a large number of constant audience and be known among masses worldwide (Wimmer and Dominick 2013, 2). These news websites follow strict codes of practice and editorial standards, as well as list credible sources, and often go through the process of reviewing. According to Holt, Figenschou & Frischlich (2019, 2), "they provide topics of general interest, that are oriented on facts, selected by professional actors, and published following professional rules."

Fake news websites are perceived as containing misleading, fallacious, and purposely misinterpreted and exaggerated information (Greifeneder, 2021). Their purpose is to deliberately disinform, manipulate, and deceive the readers, to shift the readers' perception of certain people, or to influence the readers' beliefs (Molina, 2019). It is possible that this type of news is not always intended for informational purposes, because some of it is purely persuasive and intended to persuade, not inform. They often entail mass enticing aspects such as clickbaits or overly edited images to attract and gain attention of readers. "What sets fake news apart from news reports that are merely false is the intention to deceive" (Greifeneder et al. 2021, 2). As suggested above, fake news in their controversiality and unconventionality are more appealing to masses.

These websites often appear in the international fake news databases, and it is characteristic for them to utilize lexical devices that stir up strong emotional reactions within readers. Moreover, these websites are banned from sharing on most social media outlets, and it is hard to find them during organic web searches. Additionally, they do not list sources at all, or the sources listed are deliberately misinterpreted and exaggerated, or the sources are not credible. They also have issues on the level of lexicogrammar.

2.1. Newsbites And Newsbits

It is first necessary to define the type of material explored in the analysis – newsbites and newsbits. According to Knox (2007, 28), "newsbites and newsbits allow the reader of the online newspaper to scan the news and to read the news quickly, without the burden of scrolling through long texts." In a way, they are the first thing news readers see when they enter a news website to read news. It is essentially the cluster of an image, a headline, a lead, and a hyperlink that summarizes news, arguably, in a way that is clickable. Their social purpose is to present the focal point of a news story with immediacy and impact (Knox 2007, 26).
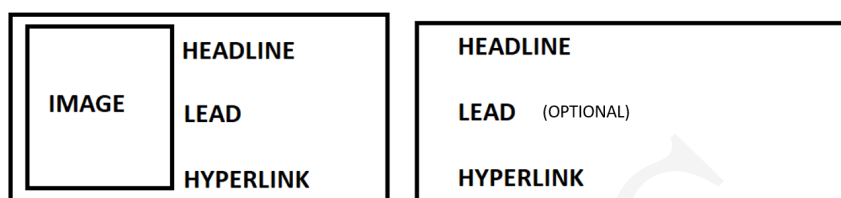
Figure 1. The structure of the newsbite (left) and the newsbit (right)

Although the approach adopted by Knox (2007) would not recognize the lead to be a part of newsbits, the approach used in this paper considers the lead as a component of both newsbites and newsbits; hence Figure 1 classifies it as "optional''. The meaning making potential of images plays a significant role in construing both newsworthiness and salience. Therefore, it is important to differentiate between the clusters of different elements into those that contain both visual and linguistic modes – newsbites, and those that contain only linguistic modes – newsbits.

2.2. News Values

News values, put simply, can be described as factors that transform events into news-worthy stories, and, according to Bell (1991, 155), they are "values by which one fact is judged more newsworthy than another.'' Bednarek and Caple (2012) argue that newsworthiness is in essence about reporting both destabilizing (negative) and stabilizing (positive) events. It is important to point out that newsworthiness can be inherent, but it can also be contrived. In other words, this means that it can be made newsworthy using language and image and their interplay, because, according to Rau (2010, 14), every news media producer has different interpretations of what is newsworthy, which also applies to the news readers.

To ensure that a relevant content is distributed to the right audiences, the production of news is usually targeted according to a number of social factors which include but are not limited to education, political views, gender, among other factors. That being said, the comparative qualitative analysis considers multiple interpretations. Based on the work of Bednarek and Cape (2012, 41) news values are:

Negativity – negative aspects of an event
Timeliness – the relevance of the event in terms of time
Proximity – the geographical and/or cultural nearness of the event
Prominence – quoted sources, high status individuals, organizations or nations.
Consonance – the extent to which aspects of a story fit in with stereotypes that people may hold about the events and people portrayed in it.
Impact – the effects or consequences of an event
Novelty – the unexpected aspects of an event
Superlativeness – the maximized or intensified aspects of an event
Personalization – the personal or human-interest aspects of an event.

These aspects provide the basis for news evaluation that are applied in the analysis. Initially the news values of image and text are identified independently, and then reassessed as a unit in newsbits and newbites.

2.3. Parameters Of Newsworthiness

According to Bednarek and Caple (2012, 139), "evaluation is one of the main ways in which newsworthiness is discursively construed in the news." It is an expression of subjectivity or opinion that the writers present to the readers in the news article. It can relate to meaning dimensions such as importance, unexpectedness, and Bednarek & Caple (2012, 139) follow Thompson and Hunston (2000) framework that calls such meaning dimensions "parameters of newsworthiness" which are listed and explained below.

The parameter of Un/importance – how important or unimportant?

The parameter of In/comprehensibility – how comprehensible or incomprehensible?

The parameter of In/possibility or In/ability – how possible or impossible?

The parameter of Un/necessity – how necessary or how unnecessary?

The parameter of Emotivity – how positive or negative?

The parameter of Un/genuineness or In/authenticity – how authentic or artificial?

The parameter of Reliability – how likely or unlikely?

The parameter of Un/expectedness – how expected or unexpected?

The parameter of Evidentiality – how do we know?

The parameter of Mental state – how do people feel about this?

In their approach, Bednarek and Caple apply the parameters of newsworthiness to transcribed texts from radio news discourse, hence "newsworthiness is discursively construed", and go on to state that "this framework is conceptualized as open-ended and organic, with clear potential for further redevelopment and refinements" (Bednarek and Caple, 2012, 139).

Consequently, this paper employs the parameters of newsworthiness as a means to analyze the semiotic landscapes of newsbites and newsbits. In other words, the parameters of newsworthiness are used to analyze the interplay of textual and visual modes as opposed to being restricted to written text only. The interplay of textual and visual modes within newsbites and newsbits is analyzed through the 'how' questions that correspond to each parameter of evaluation.

2.4. Communicative Function of Images

In the historical context of print news, there was a notable emphasis on text, and little attention was given to images and to their position and function. Nowadays, the news story structure changed, and images tend to dominate the verbal text, and in some cases, it is the image that propels a story into the news (Bednarek and Caple 2012).

There are 6 communicative functions of news images that have been ranked in this paper according to their assumed probability of sparking curiosity in readers. Their classification is provided below.

HIGH	NEUTRAL	LOW
Sensation	Icon	Aesthetic
Evaluation		Illustration
Evidence		

Figure 3. Communicative functions of images ranked according to their assumed probability of sparking curiosity or affective response in readers.

As stated, some images propel stories into the news; it is their newsworthiness that dictates whether they make it into the news. Hence, it is probable that the image as evidence has a high probability of sparking curiosity in readers because the images could portray people in distress or the aftermath of a natural disaster. "They stand in evidence of the existence of dire situations, but on the other hand, they also have the capacity to elicit strong affective response in the viewer" (Bednarek and Caple, 115). A photograph is a truthful representation and reflection of the events it depicts; hence it is objective.

The other communicative function, image as sensation, is represented by sensational and large images. These usually revolve around themes that construe negativity in terms of newsworthiness – violence, scandals, and accidents. For this reason, it is ranked with high probability of sparking curiosity in readers, because it is negativity that elicits affective responses.

In the case of image as evaluation, it is necessary to also look at the linguistic modes that accompany the image, because the interplay of modes is significant for realizing the author's intended evaluative stance. It is for this reason that the communicative function of evaluation in images is perceived with the high probability of sparking curiosity in readers as the images on their own may not be sufficient meaning-making units; thus, it is possible that the readers seek additional meanings.

The image as icon is defined through iconic images that function as representations of key moments in history – moments that have since become embedded in the national psyche (Bednarek and Caple, 116). There's one relevant example provided by Bednarek and Caple 'The Tank Man' of Tiananmen Square. Having said that, this image has since become embedded in the national psyche, it is to be assumed that with time it will no longer spark a high affective response in its readers. However, it is unlikely that this iconic image loses its original message and meaning completely. Therefore, the image as icon is classified as neutral.

In the image as illustration and aesthetic, the images are adjunct to verbal descriptions, because they would not spark curiosity or affective response in readers without being put into a broader context that encompasses more than the most salient modes of an article

such as the title or lead. Hence, image as illustration and aesthetic are characterized as having low perceived probability to spark curiosity or emotional affect within readers.

2.5. Text-Image Relations in Still Images

To study the text-image relations in news discourse, Bednarek and Caple draw on Mein-hof's (1994) research which takes three action components as the units of analysis: the actors, the actions, and the affected/effect/outcome, for which she then proposes three categories for relating these components to each other in the form of image and text rela-tions: overlap, displacement and dichotomy (Bednarek and Caple 2012, 120).

In overlap the image and the text represent the same action, either directly or met-onymically. For example, the headline and the lead of the article revolve around a pres-ident and the thumbnail shows the president in question. In the case of displacement, the image and the text represent different actions of the same event. For instance, the headline and the lead introduce a rally showing support for a president and the thumb-nail shows the president, not the rallying supporters. Lastly, in dichotomy the image and the text represent actions of different events. For instance, deforestation in the Amazon, and the picture is showing a tranquil, lush, preserved environment.

As stated above, newsworthiness is either inherent or contrived. Therefore, the writers' choices of linguistic and visual modes can shape the way the readers perceive the news. It is worth to explore displacement and dichotomy further as these text-im-age relation categories do not represent the same action in both text and image. In other words, the writer made a conscious, and perhaps deliberate, choice that the linguistic and visual modes will not refer to the same action.

3. Methodology

The dataset for the comparative qualitative analysis is compiled from 2 news websites, The Exposé and SHTF plan, representing the category of fake news and 2 news web-sites, The Guardian and Reuters, representing the category of credible news websites. The corpus comprises of 2 entries of newsbits and 2 entries of newsbites per website, which makes up a total of 2 newsbits and 6 newsbites. That is because in the random selection of the 2 fake news websites, no instances of newsbits were available; thus, newsbites were chosen for analysis instead. This may suggest a lower popularity in the use of newsbits in fake news media. The selection bias was addressed by employing AI (Chat GPT 4) to choose 4 websites and in total 8 newsbits and newsbites from a pool of 20 author pre-selected websites that fit the characteristics of credible news media and fake news outlet outlined earlier in the paper. The AI was instructed to only take into consideration 10 most recent news per website, totaling to 200 newsbits and newsbites. The analysis is based on 2 newsbites and 2 newsbits from credible news websites and 4 newsbites from fake news. The evaluation process of the data is performed utilizing

Bednarek & Caple's theoretical background as outlined in the chapters above. Namely, the data is analysed from the perspective of news values, parameters of newsworthiness, the communicative function of images, and the text-image relations.

The paper juxtaposes credible news websites with fake news, acknowledging their fundamentally different positions and intents. However, crafting compelling newsbits and newsbites, in the endeavor to capture reader interest and drive engagement through clicks, is where their multimodal strategies may align, despite the variance in their broader journalistic aims and ethical standards.

4. Analytical Part

The aim of the analytical part is to perform a qualitative comparative analysis of credible news websites and fake news websites, and to identify the multimodal resources utilized within newsbits and newsbites. The qualitative comparative analysis is conducted in line with the methodological framework of Bednarek and Caple 2012 introduced in the preceding chapter. It analyses the news values constructed in the selected newsbites and newsbits, their parameters of newsworthiness, the communicative function of the accompanying images, and the text-image relations in a corpus of 8 newsbits and newsbites taken from 2 webpages considered to be credible news websites and 2 webpages considered to be fake news.

4.1 Newsbits and Newsbites from Credible News Websites

Gaza evacuations suspended; Palestinian president presses US to secure Gaza ceasefire

Middle East · November 5, 2023 · 4:20 PM GMT+1 · 10 min ago

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken dismissed Arab leaders' calls for a ceasefire, saying it would allow Hamas to regroup. Israel's strikes on Gaza continued as violence mounted in the West Bank and on the Lebanese border.

Figure 4. Reuters, accessed on 5 November 2023

In this newsbite (Figure 4), the headline speaks of suspending evacuations and securing ceasefire in Gaza, while the image displays people searching for causalities. Moreover, the headline also mentions the Palestinian president and the US. Since the image and the text represent different actions of the same event, the text-image relations are displacement.

The image elicits a strong affective response as it shows many people fleeing in one direction, while the focus of the image is put on a man going in the opposite direction whilst being clearly in distress. The communicative function of the image is evidence, and it is ranked as high in this paper's scale of assumed probability of sparking curiosity or affective response in readers.

As for the parameters of newsworthiness, the fact that civilian lives are affected, as evident from both the text *evacuations suspended, violence mounted* and the image, conveys the parameter of importance. Moreover, the image has the potential to make readers feel sympathy for the affected civilians while also feeling some disinclination towards the US, because the US is being put in the role of an actor *dismissed Arab leaders' calls*, which construes the parameter of mental state.

The news values present in this newsbite can vary. The news value of impact is present as the newsbite speaks of consequences of an event, i.e. *evacuations suspended, preses US to secure Gaza ceasefire, calls for ceasefire*. If both text and image are considered, the news value is personalization as the text mentions the Palestinian President, Arab leaders and Anthony Blinken while the image shows civilians. If only the text was considered, it would convey the news value of prominence. And if only the image was considered, the news value would most likely convey negativity.

The unequivocal results obtained from examining all 4 aspects of the newsbite strongly suggest that it was intentionally crafted to evoke curiosity and elicit an emotional response from the reader.

World

Pakistan says Iran violated airspace, killing two children

Pakistan said neighbouring Iran has violated its airspace resulting in the death of two children, hours after Iranian state media said missiles targeted two bases of militant group Jaish al Adl on Tuesday.

8:49 AM GMT+1

Figure 5. Reuters, accessed on 17.01.2024

Newsbits, in contrast to newsbites, lack both salience and the meaning making potential due to their absence of images. This might lead to the assumption that newsbits

would employ more impactful linguistic strategies to make up for their limitations in conveying meaning and attracting attention. However, initial observations of Figure 5 reveal that this is not the case as a reporting verb is used which, in a way, hedges the message and adds a sense of untrustworthiness to it. What is more, the headline is considerably shorter and more limited than in the case of newsbites of the same news producer.

Since there are no images in newsbites, only two categories will be analysed in this example – news values and the parameters of newsworthiness. In terms of new values, the choice of the verbes *violated* and *killing'* construes negativity, and especially when it comes to children. These lexical devices also construe the news value of impact.

As for the parameters of newsworthiness, the parameters of reliability or evidentiality are the most prominent as the reporting verb *says* suggests that there is little to no evidence to back up what happened in Pakistan. Simply put, "Iran violated Pakistan's airspace, killing two children" sounds more definite, as opposed to the original statement.

Figure 6. The Guardian, accessed on 19.01.2024

Compared to Figure 4, The Guardian introduces a new layout that is vertical, as opposed to horizontal, in the newsbite in Figure 6. What is more, the headline appears to have two parts: one that is highlighted in red colour and the other that appears to be

a standard headline. This will be elaborated on in more detail during the analysis of Figure 7.

In the first part of the headline highlighted in red, a quote marked with single quotation marks conveys that Putin is a war criminal, and the second part of the headline adds that it is because of airstrikes. In terms of the constructed new values, this translates to negativity as it describes war, damage, and possible injuries or deaths of civilians as the term *war criminal* is used. The reference to an individual, in this case prominence, as we speak of the Russian president, is not what makes this story newsworthy, because the war is ongoing. Another aspect that makes this newsworthy is the impact that is construed through *reels under* which, in a way, personalizes the city of Kharkiv, bolstering how clickable the headline is.

The image portrays firemen assessing a building which appears to be struck by missiles, and there is also a crane in the background clearing out debris. It is a photo; thus, its communicative function is evidence that has the potential to spark affective response in readers, as they can envision themselves in the portrayed situation, having their homes destroyed.

As for the text-image relation, it is the example of dichotomy, because the headline conveys an ongoing action through *reels under*, and the lead states *has been under constant attack*, while the image depicts firemen assessing the aftermath of the airstrikes.

The parameters of newsworthiness present in this newsbite are enacted through emotivity as *reels under* carries a personalizing connotation. Moreover, the claim *It's the work of...* expresses certainty, which refers to the parameter of reliability that is connected to epistemic modality or modalization in systemic functional linguistics.

UK
Baby girl less than one hour old found in bag by dog walker, police say

2h ago

Figure 7. The Guardian, accessed on 19.01.2024

In Figure 7, the highlighted text in red colour is not part of the headline; it rather denotes the location where the news occurred. That is the difference between newsbits and newsbites from The Guardian and also Reuters which does not use such feature in its newsbits and newsbites.

What stands out the most about this newsbit is the seemingly deliberate choice of specific linguistic devices such as the gender of the baby, its age, and the term *dog walker*. It is to be assumed that by being overly specific, the author of the text aims to create trustworthiness. This is bolstered by the fact that *police say* is mentioned, enacting the parameter of evidentiality and suggesting the indefiniteness of the action such as was the case in Figure 5, but this could be attributed to the fact that the newsbit is 2 hours old and more information is to be added.

The news value of negativity is expressed in this newsbit through the fact that an abandoned newborn was found in a bag, which would surely result in its death if it was not found by the dog walker. Moreover, the linguistic over-specific unexpectedness of this event – an abandoned newborn in a bag – makes this also newsworthy through the value of novelty.

4.2 Newsbits and Newsbites from Fake News Websites

Figure 8. The Exposé, accessed on 27.10.2023

Analysing the first newsbite that represents the fake news websites dataset (Figure 8), the most prominent news value construed is negativity as the newsbite mentions death and the mortality rates which are associated with vaccination. This also construes the news value of impact because death is presented as the effect or consequence of vaccination. This fact is bolstered by the quantitative evaluation of risks exceeding 100 percent, which influences the perceived importance and urgency of the information, because it is relevant to human health. If this text was addressed for the target group of anti-vaccination advocates, rather than negativity, the text would construe a sense of relief.

As for the parameters of newsworthiness, the lead aims to establish a sense of authority and trustworthiness using statistical data and the reference to a government department which enacts the parameter of evidentiality, and potentially influences the reader's perception of the presented information. Moreover, because of the qualitative evaluation of risk, the inclusion of exact percentages and the phrase *more likely*, the parameter of reliability is also enacted. Besides, the parameter of un/genuineness should be considered, as the edited compilation of images does not appear genuine or real.

The accompanying image includes what seems to be a representation of the vaccine and a syringe against a backdrop of what might be virus as well as a human heart. The use of the heart image alongside a sharp medical instrument, such as syringe, may elicit an emotional response concerning health and mortality, which are critical issues that affect everyone. Based on that it is to be assumed that the function of the image is evaluation, and the relationship between the image and text appears to be overlap, as the meaning is expressed metonymically.

Figure 9. The Exposé, accessed on 19.01.2024.

In Figure 9, this example does not follow the usual newsbite format as it is missing a lead, and the headline is a part of the image itself.

The most prominent news value that is construed within the example is prominence, because it mentions *doctors and scientists*; this prominence is further bolstered by *the real*, suggesting that other doctors and scientists do not share the same expertise or knowledge. Additionally, the information about *a new virus* could potentially construe the news value of negativity as it is unknown information, sparking curiosity within readers.

The fact that the news value of prominence is most notable is reflected in the parameters of newsworthiness as it enacts evidentiality, especially because *the real* is used. This information surfacing in 2024 also construes the parameter of un/expectedness, because it covers a topic that is 4 years old and suggests that other doctors and scientists did not discover a new variety of a virus.

The relation between the image and text is a direct overlap. As for the communicative function of the image, it is thought to be an illustration, because the photo is an illustrative stock image downloaded from the internet. There is no evidence of the people depicted being actual scientists or doctors. As a result, the most prominent element of this newsbite is text.

Figure 10. SHTF plan, accessed on 19.01.2024.

Figure 10 construes the news values of prominence through the mention of Bill Gates as he is a high-profile figure or celebrity, and his involvement in any international event is inherently newsworthy. Negativity and unexpectedness are then construed through the suggestion of his ulterior motives, i.e., marketing vaccines at a climate summit, when he is typically known for philanthropy. Moreover, he is referred to as *sociopath*, and what is interesting is the usage of double quotation marks around the word *"vaccines"*, because in this context it can be interpreted as a scare quote, attacking the integrity of the word *vaccine* and questioning its use.

The image shows a photograph of Bill Gates with red eyes, suggesting his alleged ill intentions. This is reinforced by his being against the backdrop of flames, which is intended to portray him as evil. With that in mind, the communicative function of the image is evaluation with the text-image relations being overlap.

As for the parameters of newsworthiness, the edited image of Bill Gates against the backdrop of flames, his alleged ill intentions and vaccine being marked with scare quotes, invites to think whether the news is real or fake, suggesting the parameter of un/genuineness.

Figure 11. SHTF plan, accessed on 19.01.2024.

The headline communicates a potential shift in international relations and the possibility of change in the Ukraine war though the "direct" involvement of the US. Moreover, the statement is allegedly coming from the president of the US. The news values constructed in this newsbite are primarily negativity because the subject pertains to war. What is more, the US president is called a *warmonger*, there is *a risk* and a prospect of events being *stepped up a notch*. There is also some sense of immediacy as the headline suggests there is an imminent risk of the US being *pulled in directly*, construing the news value of timeliness.

The image portrays a pig wearing a French war uniform, almost representing Napoleon, due to the said uniform and especially its hat. Along with the pig, there are two Dobermans whose symbolism is hard to discern. The communicative function of

this image is either illustration or evaluation, and the text-image relations are either displacement or dichotomy. To elaborate, if the pig resembling Napoleon was a reference to *warmonger Joe Biden*, the communicative function was evaluation, and the relationship was displacement. In the second instance, if the image was perceived as illustration, its relationship to the text would be dichotomy.

Due to the used image, it is hard to attribute parameters of newsworthiness to this newsbit; however, the parameter of un/genuineness can be considered due to the attributed quote to President Biden that appears authentic, but because of the confusing choice of image and through the use *warmonger* and the informal *step it up a notch* it may raise questions about its actual authenticity. With that in mind, the parameter of in/comprehensibility can be also considered. Lastly, the parameter of un/importance, in this case, importance, is achieved through the prospect of the US actively entering a war, which would lead to a major shift in international relations.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to perform a comparative analysis of credible news websites and fake news websites, and to identify the multimodal resources characteristic of them. In particular, the study focused on newsbits and newsbites, which comprise clusters of headlines, leads, hyperlinks, and images. To analyze the newsbits and newsbites, the study drew on Bednarek and Caple's (2012) approach to news discourse, which affords ways to perform a complex multimodal analysis of text and image, as well as explores the concepts of news values, parameters of newsworthiness, text-image relations, and communicative functions of images.

To analyse credible news websites, an illustrative dataset of 4 newsbits and newsbites from 2 news websites (Reuters, The Guardian) was collected. The 2 analysed newsbites feature images classified as evidence that portray aftermath of actions; however, the headlines speak of ongoing actions. In this case, since the text and image do not overlap, the newsbites have much higher meaning potential as they introduce more and new information, as opposed to providing more context to the existing information. And since newsworthiness is either inherent or contrived, the writers' choices of linguistic and visual aspects can construct how clickable the newsbites are. On the other hand, newsbits with lower meaning making potential, due to their lack of imagery, are further made unobtrusive through the use of hedging or the indefinite reporting verbes "say". This makes it seem almost as if the information in them was yet to be confirmed, reinforcing the credible news websites outlet's role as a news producer. Contrary to fake news websites which attract clicks through interpretations of existing news. Within the examined websites, there is a possibility that the newsbits spotlight stories with lower news value, or they are in the preliminary stages of becoming newsbites, simply requiring more information.

To analyze fake news websites, a dataset of 4 newsbites from 2 websites (The Expose, SHTF plan) was collected. A notable characteristic setting fake news outlets apart from credible news websites is their exclusive focus on publishing newsbites. As stated before, newsbites contain pictures, which increases their meaning-making potential, and the potential to attract clicks. Moreover, unlike credible news websites that often use real-life images known for their high engagement potential, these sites tend to favour illustrative graphics or edited photo collages. This preference reflects their more editorial focus, which is less on reporting current events as they happen and more on offering their own interpretations or alternate perspectives of existing news. To support that, evaluative language is largely present in all analysed newsbites: *quietly published*, *shockingly revealed*, *the real doctors*, *sociopath Bill Gates*, *vaccines*, *warmonger Joe Biden*. Additionally, The Expose seems to be covering only health-related news, whereas SHTF plan covers only high-profile celebrities, as opposed to the credible news websites which are not limited to any topic.

Across all analysed newsbits and newsbites, the recurring, and arguably the most prominent, was the news value of negativity, possibly because such content tends to draw more reader interest and emotional involvement. On further examination, it seems that credible news websites are more adept at creating engaging and clickable newsbits and newsbites. This ability can be attributed to their thoughtful integration of text with real-life images. Conversely, fake news outlets appear to rely on attracting clicks through controversial evaluations or alternate perspectives of existing news.

A key limitation of the study is the small sample size, which may not fully reflect the content and the multimodal strategies of the selected websites. That being said, it is also a snapshot in time that does not consider how the multimodal strategies may evolve. Additionally, the study's focus is narrow, omitting wider range of topics that could exhibit varied presentation styles.

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