

Stance and Engagement in Participants' Response to the News of Russian War in Ukraine in Facebook Discussion

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Abstract: The 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine has continued for more than a year and has had a number of detrimental effects on both nations. The invasion has sparked a significant amount of discussions and arguments on social media. This study focuses on how Facebook users take diverse positions on the Russia-Ukraine war through their comments on war related news items on Facebook. 619 purposively selected readers' comments on news items posted on four conventional news media Facebook walls constituted the data for the study. Guided by stance and engagement theory on interaction, the readers' comments by participants were subjected to discourse analysis. Online users' opinions on the war reveal a variety of attitudes and judgment of the presidents of Russia and Ukraine. While some applaud the president of Ukraine for his valiant actions, others view him as a US puppet and consider his determination to keep the war going as detrimental to his citizens. The Russian president is in the same boat. Some believe he is "Hitler reincarnated," while others just regard him as a strong leader. Participants in the discourse used a variety of stances and engagement strategies to persuade other readers and express hope that the war will not turn out badly for either country.

Keywords: Comments, News items, Facebook Participants, Russia- Ukraine war, Stance and Engagement

1. Introduction

War, according to Howard (2001), has been the 'universal norm in human history'. In any society, conflict is inevitable. This stems from the fact that humans compete for the limited resources and disagree on certain issues. The apex manifestation of inability to resolve conflict is war. War has been a recurring element of human interaction, and a dominant theme of inter and intra-state interaction in the twentieth century (Devere, Mark & Verbitsky, 2011). Over the years, the world has witnessed unprecedented outbreak of war within and between countries of the world. One of the latest experiences of the world is the Russia-Ukraine war.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 is a recent and ongoing development in international relations. When the world was yet to recover fully from the aftermath of COVID-19, Russian invaded

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Ukraine in February, 2022. The invasion marked a dramatic escalation of the countries eight-year old conflict (Masters, 2022). Lin (2022) explained that it started in February 2014 in the wake of the Ukrainian Revolution with a focus on some recognized part of Ukraine, which is Crimea and Donbas. In 2021 and early 2022, Russia conducted a major military build-up on the Ukrainian border. On the 24th of February, 2022, Russia commenced a full scale military invasion of Ukraine, attacking major Ukrainian cities which have caused civilian deaths and injuries; and damaged civilian buildings, including hospitals, schools and homes. By the end of the first week of hostilities, over a million people in Ukraine had fled their homes in which many seek refuge in neighbouring countries (Mäenpää, 2022).

Although the reason for the invasion is unclear, Russian president Vladimir Putin in a news broadcast on the 25th of February gave a speech laying out a long list of reasons, justifications, and historical invocations, to motivate the Russian military troops, to outline his policy vision, to convince the international community of the legitimacy of his war, and to undermine the morals of the Ukrainian public and the Ukrainian armed forces (Hassan, 2022). While these justification included the long-simmering dispute over the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the shape of the post-Cold War security architecture in Europe, the speech centered fundamentally on Ukraine alliance with NATO which is seen as a threat to Russia, hence, the ‘operation’ is aimed to toppled the western aligned government of Volodymyr Zelensky with attempt to “de-militarise” and “de-nazify” Ukraine (Mankoff, 2022).

The outcome of the invasion has been drastic. The president of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky in response to the speech of the Russian president lamented that people had lost their loved ones, money, reputation, quality of life, freedom and above all, people had lost themselves. As at October, marking 8 months in the war, over six million Ukrainians have fled the country and thousands more have killed or injured. Also, Russia itself has suffered significant losses of both troops and materials (Mankoff, 2022). The office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) verified a total of 6,306 civilian deaths and 9,602 injured, including the documented death of 397 children as of October 16, 2022. However, OHCHR specified that the real number could be higher (Statista Research Development, 2022)

Since the beginning of the attack, the world’s attention has been on the invasion, the response from the international community and the enormous humanitarian crisis unfolding in Ukraine. According to Mankoff (2022), Ukraine invasion by Russia constitute the biggest threat to peace and security and ‘one of the bloodiest conflicts’ (Masters, 2022) in Europe since the end of the cold war.

1.1 Russian War in Ukraine and Digital Media

For over a decade, digital platforms have played an important and growing role in crises, conflicts, and war. As in Ethiopia, Iraq, Israel/Palestine, Libya, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Syria, among others, people use social media platforms to document human rights abuses in conflicts, condemn atrocities, appeal to the international community for action and crowd source relief and assistance (Q & A Report,

March 16, 2022). Social media has become a popular tool for information campaigns and other online activities such as information collection for intelligence purposes, propaganda, disinformation, deception, as well as recruitment and fundraising for particular activities (Hutchings and Szostek, 2015). Unlike the previous wars, social media has never been more prominent and powerful in war times like what have been observed in the Russian war in Ukraine.

Around two-third of the world's population which is about 4.9 billion people now have access to the internet and an estimated 4.4 to 4.9 billion of those population use social media such as Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, Instagram and Twitter (The Guardian, 2022). According to Pew Research Centre, in 2020, 71% of American get at least part of their news input from social media platforms. It is therefore possible to affirm that these platforms play a major role in the spread of information in the context of war (Al-Saied, 2023)

As news stories about the Russia-Ukraine war continue to dominate different platforms, the social media is a particular phenomenon of the 21st century where 'a single posting by an individual can become equally powerful and even more wide-spread than the information released by a state-controlled channel' (Riga, 2015). Eburuaja (2022) affirmed that social media increases the spread of information delivery and the size of its audience and empower individuals to share their own versions of events and experiences in the war. First hand testimonies and images of atrocities appear on social media feeds in real time. Users broadcast live around the world, taking photographs and videos of battles in progress, 'allowing users to have much fuller understanding of the field of war than ever before' (Adisti, Charima and Cahyono, 2023). Karin Wilkins, Dean of the School of Communication, University of Miami and an expert on global media acknowledged the importance of digital media in the war by asserting that various digital media have allowed people to witness the violence and resistance experienced by people around the world, thereby putting the invasion in Ukraine at the fingertips of the world.

Benjamin and Mustaffa (2022) observed that social media users do not just watch these events; they react to and interact with them. Gestures such as donating money, offering up their own homes to refugees and innovative fundraising methods spreading widely via online communities make engagement with war contents on social media real world consequence. Thus, Al-Saied (2023) opines that the focus on social media in the war as a channel of information demonstrates that the narrative built on them is essential to shape the response of the world to the conflict, boost or lower morale of troops and of civilians caught up in the fighting. More so, social media was utilized by the Ukrainians to amass large-scale support for Ukraine and promote ways for the citizens to back and resist the Russian invaders. Brown (2022) reported in April, 2022 that Ukrainian officials used Facebook to encourage its citizens to use Molotov cocktails against Moscow's soldiers and posted detailed instructions on how to make them. The former Ukrainian Prime Minister Volodymyr Groysman posted a two-minute video of himself making the improvised weapon. An urban warfare expert also shared a much-lauded thread giving advice to Ukrainian civilians on how to fight back against Russian troops.

It included tips on the best positions to shoot firearms from, how to use Molotov cocktails to destroy artillery, and how to strike fear into soldiers by feigning ownership of a snipe. Although, this is in contrary to the rules over what war content is permitted on the digital media. This is not only a breach of social media terms of service on violent threats but also incitement of violence (Meta, 2022)

While social media proved to be an invaluable source of information and live updates from Ukraine, experts have expressed concern over disinformation and misinformation on the social media. The fast-moving news reporting makes it difficult to differentiate between credible and incredible reports. This makes it easier for warring parties to spread fake and misleading material that could incite violence. Viral videos which originate from Libya, Lebanon and Palestine were falsely attributed to the Ukraine invasion. Some social media users doctored old audio in an attempt to create monetised livestreams by claiming to be in Ukraine (Brown, 2022; Kemmerer, 2022). Layla Mashkoo, associate editor at the Atlantic Council's digital forensic research lab commented that as is almost always the case in times of war, the online information environment becomes polluted incredibly quickly.

In order to stop the spread of misinformation, companies providing social media and messaging services have taken many steps in response to the war in Ukraine, most of them aimed at countering harmful disinformation, adding labels to or blocking state-sponsored or state-affiliated media, or introducing extra safety measures. Some of these measures apply to either Ukraine or Russia, some apply in the EU only, and some apply globally. Some decisions were made in response to government requests, some in defiance of government requests, and others in response to public pressure, or at the companies' own initiative. Some of the measures taken by social media platforms such as Facebook and Tiktok fact-checking posts and then restricting those outlets' accounts with false claims, images that are gore, hate speech or incite violence are deleted by moderators, using updated algorithms to identify previously posted videos following the emergence of war footage in previous years, in different countries and even from video games and made several dozens of content policy revisions to deal with the fast moving nature of posts about the war (Cadier, 2022; Al-Saied, 2023).

Nonetheless, the use of digital media spaces in the Russian war in Ukraine has justified the assertion of Singer and Brooking (2019) that social media is a powerful weapon in wartime. Digital platforms have become a key tool to control the narrative, domestically and internationally about the war effort and more importantly, it became a major tool for the public to express their propositions toward the war.

1.2. The Utilisation of Facebook in Russian war in Ukraine

Facebook, one of the popular digital media platforms has played active role in dissemination of information on the war to the world. Media agencies, independent organisations and concerned people publish daily updates covering key events related to the invasion. Facebook, like other media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter is full of photos and videos of shootings, explosions, and

burned-out Russian tanks and buildings. There are also videos of protests from Berlin to St. Petersburg, abandoned bodies of soldiers, and a stream of Ukrainian refugees flooding into surrounding countries (Eburuaja, 2022).

The invasion gave birth to different groups and pages on Facebook whose aim are to use the social media and other physical platforms to campaign against war and protester the invasion. Also, some groups that have been in existence prior to the war evolved into a place for free speech and support, sharing news and updates on the war to the community.

Among these platforms are

Ukraine Vs Russia	(5million members)
Russia Ukraine Updates	(103,000 members)
Russia & Ukraine war	(13, 000 member)
Russia Insider	(230,181 members)
Ukraine Today	(141, 920 members)
Ukraine Russia war news	(46,524 members)
War in Ukraine live update	(39, 069 members)
The Economist	(10million members)
CNN International	(19,051,370 members)

These groups have conglomeration of different people from around the globe as members. Some groups have bias for Ukraine, some for Russia and others open the group for people to participate in conversations and see happenings from both sides. These groups urge members to share current information, photos, and videos directly from events in Ukraine. Participants on these platforms express their views and thoughts about the devastation they are witnessing. People share videos of anti-conflict demonstrations there and openly discuss what their loved ones are currently going through in both Russia and Ukraine. Numerous posts in these groups discuss the causes of the war, the parties responsible, and requests for prayers. These opinions, pictures and videos attract different reactions from users who choose to comment about them.

Along with serving as forums for war-related talks, these Facebook groups are a focal point for advocacy and fundraising to support individuals those who have been displaced by the conflict. For instance, a member of the Facebook group "Russian Insider" said in a recent post that the community had donated hundreds of boxes filled with food, clothing, baby wipes, medical equipment, and other items.

Also, many conventional news publishers have integrated their news on Facebook to attract wider readership. On this popular social networking site, online news readers can contribute their comments to the news post and interact with their fellow readers. When members of these groups react to and interact with news, videos, articles posted on the war, they express different proposition towards the war. More so, these opinions attract even different reactions from users who choose to comment about them

Facebook participants react to the news of the events in the war in different ways by passing different comments on the war contents. The power of the social rather than the traditional media is seen at play. In the traditional media, the audience only consumes news items without having an appropriate forum for feedback, the electronic and social media give appropriate forum for the audience to give feedback (Osisanwo, 2017). Through the opportunity offered by Facebook Platforms, participants express their opinion and judgement about the war. Therefore, this study focus on the stance and engagement resources that Facebook participants employ in taking different stances on the Russia- Ukraine war, through their comments on war related news items on Facebook.

2. Literature Review

Since the renewed invasion of Ukraine by Russian in February, 2022, studies have been carried out by scholars from the social, political, economic and linguistics perspectives. Studies from linguistics perspectives have focused on media reportage and narratives (Sasse, 2022; Kolmogorova & Gornostaeva, 2022; Kryzhanivska, 2022, Lin, 2022; Alyahya, 2023), framing (Adisti, Charima and Cahyono, 2022), speeches (Hassan, 2022), discourse strategies (*Benjamin & Mustaffa, 2022*, Naeem and Jan, 2022; Mäenpää, 2022) and a few others. However, there is still a dearth of studies that needs to be carried out on the stances of the public about the war

Mäenpää (2022) utilizes a three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis to examine the discourse on Ukrainian refugees in Deutsche Welle and Aljazeera in the days following the start of the invasion. Poststructural theory of power and identity constructions is employed to uncover hidden assumptions and knowledge production in the discourse. The study argues clearly that the reporting on the Ukrainian refugees in the days after the Russian invasion has contributed to a discourse that withholds Eurocentric views of the identities of the actors involved. The need to clarify Ukraine as belonging to the in-group that shares the homogenous norms and values in Europe is a sign of the discursive struggle of European elites to make sure the regime overpowers the Russian regime.

Similarly, Lin (2022) compares the difference of framing in Chinese media represented by *China Daily* and the US media represented by *the Los Angeles Times*, covered the event of conflict between Russian and Ukraine. A qualitative disourse analysis of the 20 news reports, with 10 from each news site, showed that *China Daily and the LA Times* used different news frame in their narratives of this international conflict. While *China daily* presented leadership and responsibility frame, the *LA times* included economic and human interest frame. The ideology influence between two countries play an important role on the way they framed the news articles. The result showed that the media in both countries are under certain control of government, but the government control and political ideology has strong effects on the Chinese newspaper.

The most related study to the present is Eburuaja (2022) which applies the Relevance theory by Sperber and Wilson to analyse social media texts on the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. Four Facebook posts written on the Russian invasion of Ukraine formed were chosen as data for the study.

The study reveals that the writers of the various Facebook posts used different cohesive devices to tie their texts together and equally achieve coherence. And these cohesive devices helped them communicate relevant and sufficient information to their readers. The readers, on the other hand, were convinced that the writers helped them keep abreast of the political happenings in Ukraine by making posts that are relevant. Deviating from the cohesive devices used in Facebook posts on Russian-Ukraine war, this current study examine the elements participants employ to take stance in the war in Facebook platforms

3. Theoretical Framework

The study is guided by Hyland's (2005) stance and engagement theory. In interaction, authors or speakers construct arguments that clearly show them attempting to formulate a proposition, evaluate its plausibility, forge a sense of community and establish their credibility (Hyland 2008:6). The term "stance" describes the manner in which speakers, writers, or discourse participants communicate and convey their points of view, opinions, ideas, judgement and convictions regarding a specific subject. It is the intrusive ways that authors impose their own authority on their arguments. According to Biber and Finnegan (1989:124), "stance" is "the lexical and grammatical articulation of attitudes, feelings, judgments, or commitment to the propositional content of a communication. The concept of stance has been discussed by numerous academics using words like assessment, attitude, and evaluation, among others. Therefore, stance allows the speaker a chance to express his opinions on a propositional content. Elements of stance are the primary resources that enable stance to be realized; according to Hyland, these resources include Hedges, Boosters, Attitude Markers, and Self- Mention.

In contrast, Hyland (2005:176) defines engagement as "an alignment dimension where writers acknowledge and connect to others, recognising the presence of their readers, drawing them along with their argument, focusing their attention, acknowledging their uncertainties, including them as discourse participants, and guiding them to interpretations." As two sides of the same coin that contribute to the interpersonal component of discourse, Hyland agrees that stance and engagement are intertwined. Reader pronouns, Directives, Questions, Shared knowledge, and Personal asides are the key resources of fostering engagement that Hyland lists as the elements of engagement.

The ideas of stance and engagement, which are frequently interrelated, "recognize that statements need to both show the writer and his or her ideas as well as anticipate readers' anticipated objections and alternative positions, incorporating a suitable awareness of self and audience," (Hyland 2008:6). Both position and engagement resources aim to foster dialogue; make use of, anticipate, or adopt the voices and perspectives of potential readers (Bakhtin, 1986).

In relation to our data, readers are able to read news articles and share their position and opinions with other online users on their perceptions on the war or numerous war-related stories. This study identifies the linguistic choices and labels used by Facebook participants to express their attitudes toward the war in Ukraine, whether such attitudes are positive or negative.

4. Methodology

The data for this study were retrieved from Facebook. There were many groups that majored in news items on Russia-Ukraine war but in order to guide against unethical reports, conventional news media were used for the study. These media are the Economist, CNN international and Ukraine today. Five news items posted to these groups were used. Two news items posted to each of the three selected Facebook platforms between March and April, 2022 were used as data for the study. This was the period when the news of the world broke out and the world took different position on the war. Out of the 3698 comments to the news items, 619 comments were purposively selected because they reflect the various elements that participants used to express their opinion and positions on the war. The breakdown of the sample selection are given below

Table 1: Breakdown of the sample selection

News Media	News Article	Total Comments	Selected Comments
Economist	Vladimir Putin's nuclear threat shows how much is going wrong for him in Ukraine	2987	112
	More fires and destruction in latest satellite images from Mariupol	2134	101
CNN International	Protesters try to block yacht with ties to Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich from docking in Turkey	1987	98
	Zelensky thanks Pope Francis for his clear and strong position against the war	2332	110
Ukraine Today	UNIAN suspends work of its English-language editorial office	3876	198
Total		13,316	619

The analysis of data was guided by Hyland's stance and engagement theory of interaction. Emphasis is placed on the elements of stance and engagement in the data. 'FC' in the samples represents 'Facebook Comment'. Meanwhile, only very few samples, from the corpus, are reproduced in the analysis. The samples are representative of the larger data.

5. Results and Analysis

5.1 Various Aspects of Stance in Participants' Interaction

Stance, which is concerned with writer-oriented aspects of interaction and how personal thoughts and judgements are given with the purpose to persuade the reader to support the writer, also transmits the writer's attitude toward a particular piece of information (Osisanwo, 2017). Elements of stance deployed by Facebook participants in discourse on Russia-Ukraine war include hedges, boosters, attitude markers and self-mention. The frequency and distribution of each element are given below.

Table 2: Frequency of elements of stance

Stance and Participants' Interaction	Frequency	Percentage
Hedges	39	13.7%
Boosters	78	27.4%
Attitude Markers	112	39.3%
Self -Mention	56	19.6%
Total	285	100%

5.1.1 Hedging

Discussants often employ various devices to modify their assertions and tone down uncertain claims towards issues and proposition. This, according to Hyland (2005) is referred to as Hedging. In this study, hedging occurred 39 times, representing 13.7% of the stance elements used. This is employed by discourse participants to express uncertainty and avoid total commitment to propositions. Hedges, such as *hope*, *think*, *seems*, and *might* are used by participants to reduce the definitiveness of their proposition. The extracts below reveal this.

FC 1: Ukraine is leading by example. **I hope** they succeed in defending themselves as well as be an everlasting example to all countries.

FC 2: Who really sat with Putin and knows how it was supposed to go? **I hope** we are not putting false hope in Ukraine and provoke more destruction of their cities and death of more soldiers.

Both writers above make different propositions about Ukraine and strategically hedge from their opinions through the use of the word 'hope'. The writer in FC 1 acknowledges the effort of Ukraine to defend their territorial integrity from Russian attack but hedges his feelings for Ukraine

succeeding with the use of 'hope'. In FC 2, the writers use the *affect* component of stance to *hope* that the people's confidence on Ukraine winning the war doesn't lead to complete destruction of the country

FC 3: I **think** it's time to stop this war

FC 4: Nothing is going wrong for Russia when Bush attacked Iraq in 2003. Were there not civilian casualties? Can America allow China or Russia to have military bases in Mexico or Cuba? I humbly **think** that the west and America should be held responsible for not keeping their words

FC 5: What will you do when someone throws stones to hurt you and damage you homeland and the people. Safeguarding his people is the duty of a leader of the state. That us what I **think** Putin is doing.

FC 6: I don't know what in the future will happen but it **seems** we need to prepare for WW3 guys

FC 7: I feel USA **might be** the master- minder to this present war.... Ukrainians should be careful... However, I am happy the way they are defending their territory....

In FC 3-5, the participants hedge their opinion by the use of the word 'think' to emphasis personal interpretation, uncertainty and the absence of facts to support their assertions. The use of 'think' by the participant in FC 3 expresses his personal thought and tentativeness towards the proposition. Similarly, through the use of the word 'think', the participants in FC 4 and 5 present information on the causes of the war as personal reasoning rather than as validated fact. The participant in FC 6 used the word 'seems' to withhold his complete commitment to the proposition that the war between Russian and Ukraine could actually lead to world war 3. This is an indication that the statement was based on plausible reasoning rather than certain knowledge. To the participant in FC 7, it must have been foreseen that Ukraine joining NATO will trigger a repelling approach from Russia; hence the use of 'might' to tone down his confidence that USA is the master minder of the war

5.1.2Booster

Boosters, occurring 78 times (27.4%) are discourses devices participants deployed to sharpen the tone of their commitments to views and propositions. Words that participants employed to express the force of the convictions are superlative (most) and intensified adverbs (completely, strongly, definitely, wholeheartedly, and so on). These words are used to turn up their position on the war and show finality in their proposition on president Putin (Russia) and Zelensky (Ukraine). Consider the following excerpts:

FC 8: The invasion is such a **terrible** disaster

FC 9: Good one from the Pope but dialogue between President Putin and President Zelensky is **crucial and important** to resolve this **completely** senseless war

FC 10: Love from Australia to all people of Ukraine; we are **SO** sorry for what you are going through. May God protect you

Mainly emotive, the writers in FC 8 – 10 discuss their certainty on what war victims in Ukraine go through in the period. FC 8 describes the war as a *terrible disaster*. In FC 9, the writer sees the war as *completely senseless* and dialogue to resolve this was *crucial and important*. The commenter in FC 10 feels pity for the victims of war in Ukraine. Using self-mention, he felt **so sorry** partially because he wants to portray his understanding of the situation of the war and invoke the supreme power to protect them.

FC 11: I **wholeheartedly support** the deeds done by Putin. Because NATO has broken the rules of agreement. After expanding NATO's members, does it hope that Putin will sit silently knowing eminent invasion over Russia in near future?

FC 12: I **strongly** believe that Putin is control by the devil. He is **extremely** dangerous and is capable of the **most** inhumane and disgusting acts of extinction to mankind.

FC 13: Putin will **failed woefully** in Ukraine and they will **definitely** overcome this in Jesus name, I stand with Ukrainians

The writer in FC 11 expresses his support for Putin's decision to invade Ukraine. The writer says he **wholeheartedly support** the deeds done by Putin because Putin could not be expected to observe silently while the prospect of invasion to his own country looms. However, commenters in FC 12 and 13 take position that show finality of their opposition towards Putin's actions. While FC 12 describes Putin as **extremely dangerous and is capable of the most inhumane and disgusting acts of extinction to mankind**, the writer in FC 13 express his conviction that Putin will fail in Ukraine using words such as 'woefully' and 'definitely' to sharpen his confidence.

FC 14: With an **unprecedented and completely unfair** sacrifice, President Zelensky is about to save many lives. However, it is civilization that has been defeated by this **atrocious** invasion

FC 15: Ukraine is fighting the **most** ruthless of invaders to defend civilization. Ukrainian heroes face this challenge for every child, woman and man on the planet. All our values, all our hopes, everything we love **have been attacked with a ferocity never seen before...**

Here, in FC 14, the participants despite his support for President Zelensky fighting the war, sees the war as an **unprecedented and completely unfair** sacrifice and described Russian invasion as **atrocious**. In this case, the commenter sees Ukraine as victims and Russians as invaders. President Zelensky's effort to refute the Russian army is his way of saving many lives from being unfairly sacrificed and such war should never have happened in the civilized time. Similarly, describing the Russian as the *most* ruthless of invaders who attacked with unimaginable ferocity, the writer in FC 15 affirms his opinion that the resistance of Ukraine is to defend civilization which has been threatened. Hence, the writer sees Ukraine soldiers as heroes who fight for a just course and whose actions are for the survival of the nations' people, hopes and values.

5.1.3 Attitude Makers

The mostly deployed stance element which occurred 112 times, representing 39.3% is Attitude markers and is used to indicate affect stance to propositions. Attitude is mainly expressed by participants to take a stand and align self with others' propositions and discourses. Participants take different stand on the invasion of Russia under Putin's command and resistance of Ukraine under Zelensky's. Participants expressed judgment attitude on the presidents. While some praise the president of Ukraine as hero, others see him as a puppet of US. The same goes with president Putin, some see him as hitler reincarnated and others simply see him as the person that can take charge

FC 16: The sacrifice of the Ukrainian people is **enormous and their beautiful land is full of wounds.**

However, president Zelensky heroic resistance and the people's love for their country will always be remembered. And the history of civilization will change for the better.

Fc 17: Ukraine is **smoking** and you're depicting zelensky a hero, stop this war now, lives are being lost (to this person, celebrating the president as hero is unwanted when the country is under **heavy attack**)

Fc 18: Ukraine is a **joke of the millennium.** Continue hailing the **comedian** while his country is on fire

The writers in FC 16 to 18 appraised president Zelensky differently. In FC 16, the president is praised for his heroic resistance which will be remembered in history. However, to the writer in FC 17, celebrating the president as hero is unwanted when the country is under **attack** and similarly, the judgment of the writer in FC 18 shows the president as a joke and a comedian. This particularly could be due to the writers' judgement that the president cannot defeat Russian and his resistance is futile

FC 19: When America attacks Afghanistan, Pakistan and interfere in Libyan affairs, the world becomes quiet. But when Russia reacts because it's security is on the of threat, **then the world complains. Hippocrates and parasites.**

FC 20: Putin you are a man of my dreams. I love you and I will always stand with you and Russian Federation's...the rest of the world are gold digger.

FC 21: Putin is a paranoid narcissistic megalomaniac dwarf , egoistic and undiplomatic. Kick out this man from office. He is Hilter reborn

FC 22: There is no any definite reason to cause this havoc or loss of **innocent** lives. Economic or Political advantage would not even worth a **total devastation** like this! It's **really unfortunate** for the human kind to have an **irresponsible leader** like Vladir Putin

FC 23: The special military operation proved that Russia is a **terrible military power, and a country with morals and a deterrent force, the strongest of arrogance and child killers.....**

In the same vein, some participants judged the invasion of Russia as right decision. The writer in FC 19 makes reference to past antecedence to judge Russia's invasion as a right decision and described those who oppose the military action as Hippocrates and parasites. To the writer in FC 20, his appraisal of the situation shows that Putin is a man that is in control of the situation and the *rest of the world are gold digger*. However, some participants have different judgment of Putin's behavior. The writer's appraisal in FC 21 and 22 shows President Putin as egoistic, undiplomatic and Hitler reincarnated because the war, no matter how justified should have been avoided. Thus, the writer in FC 23 generalised his judgement on the whole Russia, describing the country as **arrogant and child killers**

FC 24: Put the Putin and Zelensky in the ring to fight and leave soldiers alone

FC 25: Death comes for everyone, rich, poor ,babies, youth , elders both great n small, no one can miss it .Let death come when it should come, not like this in a war Please Presidents of Russian Ukraine settle it over the table for peace.

FC 26: World War three is around the corner...

To the writer in FC 24, the fight is between the two presidents. This shows that the enmity is not between the countries but their leaders. In support of this proposition, the writer in FC 25 calls on both presidents to resolve their difference through dialogue, instead of war. In FC 26, the writer shows that the continuation of the war mean that another *World War is around the corner*. This occasionally spurs up emotional bleed from participants who consistently feel pity for the victims of war in Ukraine. The extracts below reveal this

FC 27: There are **guiltless** lives in this disaster area

FC 28: Imagine pregnant women in labour, imagine the helpless children, think of the defenseless men and women. It is terribly difficult to imagine. **Oh my heart bleeds**. Stop the war Please

FC 29: This display of astonishing and disgusting behavior has to stop. This is truly devastating and sad to witness. My true condolences go out to all the individuals experiencing such **horrific** loss. Vladimir Putin, Is a *true* sociopath.

FC 27 to 29 are representative of the attitude of participants which convey feelings of pity, frustration, sadness and plea rather than commitment. The *affect* in their appraisal are expressed through their choices of adjectives such as guiltless (FC 27), helpless, defenseless (FC 28), disgusting, devastating, horrific (FC 29); verbs such as bleeds, please (FC 28) and adverbs such as terribly (FC 28). Having appraised the situation, the writer in FC 27 described the men, women and children trapped in war areas in Ukraine as guiltless and undeserving of such condition. When the writer in FC 28 imagined the pregnant women in labour, helpless children, defenseless men and women in Ukraine, he was frustrated and pleaded for the war to stop. The appraisal of the writer in FC 29 show that the war would inflict horrible loss of lives and as a result, judged Putin a sociopath

5.1.4Self-Mention

Self-mention is another device through which discourse participants project themselves in the discourse. The technique of using first person pronouns (I and we) and possessive adjectives (my and our) are ways participants present information and signify their own position in the discourse. This occurs 56 times, representing 19.6% and ranking third in the corpus. Participants, consciously or otherwise employ the devices of self-mention to project their commitment and involvement in their propositions. More importantly, it enables discourse participants to represent self in the discourse. The self-presentation establishes the presence of the participants and their own stand in relation to the argument at hand. This is evident in the extracts below

FC 30: Ukraine, **I** am here with you and **I** stand with you. **We** shall overcome this war. **I** am ready to volunteer in the war until Ukraine wins this war. **I** am Babu Cha from Kenya.

FC 31: **I** am from Dubai with **my** sympathy and love. **I** am with Ukraine... **My** love for you all

FC 32: **I** am always praying for Ukraine and its people. May **our** Almighty God be with each one of them.

FC 33: When the West was killing people, they call that justice. As for me, **I'm** in support of the Russians. **My** full support is with Putin

FC 34: If USA won't allow Russia and China to have military bases in Cuba, they should accord Russia the same respect. **I** blame NATO for this war. If war is what needed to dismantle the Western and the NATO, LET IT BE!!!!. Go Russia

FC 35: Enough saying. Yes, Putin is Satanic. What he did is wrong and honestly, **I** want him to die and suffer same as the people in Ukraine but this won't solve anything. **I** pray to God almighty for peace all around the world.

FC 36: **We** stand with Z

FC 37: **We** are from the women union of America. **We** stand with Ukraine and here to help

In FC 30 to 37, there are indications of self-mention and self-presence across the propositions. This include the use of first person subjective exclusive 'I' (FC 30-35) first person plural subjective inclusive 'We' (36-37), first person possessive exclusive 'My' (31-33), and the first person plural possessive inclusive 'Our' (FC 32). All these extracts represent the voices, support and commitment of the discourse participants to the activities of war in Ukraine. For instance, in FC 30, the participant deploy the first person subjective exclusive 'I' to indicate where he stands in the war and later on use the first person plural subjective inclusive 'We' (**We** shall overcome this war) to show association and collectiveness. Similarly, the participants in FC 32 employed the first person subjective inclusive 'I' to establish his commitment by indicating his personal prayers for Ukraine and its people. The participant in FC 35 however prays for peace all around the world. In FC 34, the participant deployed the first person personal pronoun to present propositional information and identify with the argument he made.

Meanwhile, the participants in FC 36 and 37 employ the use of the inclusive ‘*We*’ to indicate collective stance on the position taken

5.2 Various Aspects of Engagement and Participants’ Interaction

Engagement, which is concerned with reader-oriented features, is the way a writer involves his audience in the discourse with a view to anticipating their potential objections and engaging them in appropriate ways. It is a process of audience evaluation that helps writers build an effective line of argument that demonstrates how language is related to particular cultural and institutional contexts (Hyland, 2001).

Elements of stance deployed by Facebook participants in discourse on Russia-Ukraine war include hedges, boosters, attitude markers and self-mention. By anticipating their potential objections and leading them to certain interpretations using questions, instructions, and allusions to prior knowledge, the tactics are also used to rhetorically position the audience and other participants. The frequency and distribution of each element in engagement are given below.

Table 3: Frequency of Elements of Engagement

Engagement and participants’ Interaction	Frequency	Percentage
Reader Pronoun	116	29.6%
Personal Aside	32	8.1%
Appeal to Shared Knowledge	52	13.2%
Directives	144	36.7%
Question	48	12.2%
Total	392	100%

5.2.1 Reader Pronoun

Occurring 116 times (29.6%) in the corpus, reader pronoun is an explicit way to bring audience into the discourse. The use of the second person ‘*you*’ and ‘*your*’ are the clearest way discourse participants invite reader or audience into the discourse or acknowledge their presence. As exemplified in FC 38-43, different people are brought into the discourse arena by *the use of the* second person subjective, objective and possessive pronouns.

- FC 38:** I don’t know anyone there but my Prayers belongs to all people there. My sympathy is with **your** country. I will always include **you** in my prayers
- FC 39:** Mr. Zelensky, **you’re** involving a lot of leaders in **your** battle, creating a larger scope of confrontations! If **you** believe **you’re** not capable of protecting the lives of **your** people anymore, why not swallow **your** pride and accept defeat NOW! The more **you** can become a Hero.
- FC 40:** Pres. zelensky, please surrender for **your** country men. The only way to stop war is to surrender for his countrymen. Russia is **your** neighborhood. Be friends. Don't be with NATO or any. Be neutral. **You** are working to **your** country. Being surrenderer is not being lose but for the love of **your** country men. **You** save many people's lives especially the innocent people like babies

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- FC 41:** Russia, Ukraine isn't **your** enemy - Putin is. If **you** do not destroy him, he will destroy **you** and **your** country. Now that is worth **your** fighting for.
- FC 42:** I'm angry with the President of Russia called Vladimir Putin. Putin is a Devil and God will judge **you** if **you** don't stop this war.
- FC 43:** Lord, please send **your** peace to **your** people.

The second person pronoun 'you' in FC 38, refers to Ukraine and its people. The writer expresses his sympathy and commitment by intending to always pray for them. The 'you' in FC 39 and 40 refers to the president of Ukraine Zelensky who is addressed as if present in the discourse. Both participants offer advice to the president on surrendering to Russia. The second person 'you' and possessive 'your' in FC 41 refers to people of Russia while 'you' in FC 42 addresses the President of Russia Vladimir Putin. The possessive 'your' in FC 43 is used to invoke the intervention of the mystical being by addressing God, whom is believed to be omnipotent and capable of ensuring peace between Russia and Ukraine

5.2.2 Personal Asides

Personal asides, which occur 32 (8.1%) times in our corpus, are used by participants to make very brief interruptions to offer a comment on assertions they have made. These intentional interruptions help to initiate a brief interpersonal dialogue and build up writer-reader relationship as illustrated in FC 44-49

- FC 44:** Prayer is more powerful than weapons
- FC 45:** Let's pray for the Prince of Peace, which is JESUS Christ to come Soon so that there shall be peace on earth and good will to all humanity
- FC 46:** Hhhh in remembrance of the two bombed cities Hiroshima and Nagasaki the US army which were destroyed completely by nuclear bombs.
- FC 47:** My heart goes to the good people of Ukraine over putins madness but not forget that Biafrans are going through the same in Nigeria but the world doesn't care cos it's in Africa
- FC 48:** Putin had a quite good reputation in my home country Austria. He just destroyed it within a few hours in the democratic world.
- FC 49:** "Older men declare war. But it is youth that must fight and die." Herbert Hoover.

In FC 44 & 45, the writers acknowledge prayer as a more potent weapon and Jesus as the prince of peace who can ascertain peace on earth. They engage in an aside to establish religiosity and proclaim the power of Jesus as a peace maker, thereby inviting others to partake in His power of peace. The writer in FBCM 46 specifically uses the situation of the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki which were completely destroyed by nuclear bombs to depict the effect of nuclear weapons. He attempts to invite readers to understand the destruction that could be caused if nuclear weapons should be used in the war. The participant in FC 47 offers personal asides by moving away from the war to discuss the experience in his own country. The writer quickly brings in the situation of Biafrans in Nigeria which he likens to the experience of Ukraine. FC 48 moves away from the current war to Putin's action in

Austria, indirectly deriding Putin as a destroyer and undemocratic. Quoting Herbert Hoover, the participant in FC 49 affirms that people who die most in war are the young.

5.2.3 Appeal to Shared Knowledge

Presupposing that their readers *share some certain values and ideas* with them, participants make use of some explicit markers to focus their readers' attention on those shared knowledge, and thereby bring them to an agreement with themselves. This occurs 52 times, representing 13.2% of the data corpus. Through this feature, readers are convinced about the uniqueness of the new opinion. Participants focus their readers' attention on those shared conditions on the war in order to bring them into their viewpoints. The notion of 'sharedness' is often invoked by writers to smuggle contested ideas into their argument seeking to position readers within apparently naturalized boundaries of disciplinary understandings (Hyland, 2005) where influential academics agreed upon. This is seen in FC 50–52.

FC 50: Ukraine is a sovereign, independent Country. The military attack unleashed by Vladimir Putin has no sanction from the Russian people. It is very very unfortunate that so many innocent lives are lost, hospitals are being bombed, maternity wards are being bombed, and so many children expired. This is sheer madness. Millions of Ukrainians are becoming refugees. Let us pray that Almighty God intervenes in this dark hour for Ukraine.

FC 51: If there is sth you should pray for, it is replacing their stupid leader Zelensky with someone who know politics. If you are next to a strong country, never be against them; be friend with everyone like Vietnam. Their stupidity of choosing NATO lead to the war...

FC 52: To me it is final assault of West (U.S) to Russia by provoking Russia through NATO. The very existence of NATO is because U.S.A having enmity with Russia. Russia alone can't face U.S.A in war leave alone 30+ countries who are part of NATO. Then why push Ukraine to be one more country added to NATO and rattle Russia for its own security against 30+ countries? If you provoke Russia by pushing and squeezing NATO countries' border and pointing 30+ countries' gun towards Russia then they will get triggered... Also, it should come to your notice that in current situation war crime is committed by U.S, E.U and Ukraine by sending innocent Ukrainian civilians to war who even don't know how to reload their gun. We have seen them in videos those poor people are just falling in front of armored vehicle to stop them. It is like sending them to die and it is no less than war crime but neither U.S is worried nor E.U. instead they are sending more weapons for civilians to fight. Isn't that a visible war crime?

Some of the appeals to shared knowledge in samples 50-52 serve to remind other participants of existing truth conditions about the situation and cause of the war. The writer in FC 50 deploys familiar conditions of war to breed the notion of sharedness and convergence among participants when he says *'Ukraine is a sovereign, independent Country... It is very unfortunate that so many innocent lives are lost, hospitals are being bombed, maternity wards are being bombed, and so many children*

expired. This is seer madness. Millions of Ukhrainians are becoming refugees..' In FC 51 and 52, the writers make use of familiar conditions to bring readers to an agreement with themselves on factors that could trigger the war. The writer in FC 51 says '*If you are next to a strong country, never be against them; be friend with everyone like Vietnam. Their stupidity of choosing NATO led to the war...*' Similarly, the participant in FC 52 says '*If you provoke Russia by pushing and squeezing NATO countries' border and pointing 30+ countries' gun towards Russia then they will get triggered..*' The participants in both 51 and 52 want readers to accept that the war could have been prevented but triggered by Ukraine's decision. This feature not only arouse emotional pity from participants who feel sorry for the Ukrainians but also attempt to suppress such emotional feelings by claiming they brought it on themselves

5.2.4 Directives

Directives, occurring 144 times (36.7%) involve passing instructions that the readers are expected to comply with in a way determined by the writer. This is mostly conveyed through *imperatives*, *obligation modals* and predicative adjectives. It is used to signal the readers to perform three main kinds of activity which are the textual, physical and cognitive acts. In the study, physical and cognitive act is visible in the corpus while textual act is largely absence.

FC 53: Pres. zelensky, please **surrender** for your country men. The only way to stop war is to surrender for his country men. Russia is your neighbour, be friends. **Don't be with NATO or any, be neutral....**

FC 54: The sacrifice of the Ukrainian people is enormous and their beautiful land is full of wounds. However, their heroic resistance, this love for their country will always be remembered. And the history of civilization will change for the better. **Each of us**, according to his possibilities, **must help and support** the Ukrainian people in every way, because their heroic defense is defense of the values on which civilization is founded

FC 55: Sit and have real talks. Make truce if need be to save lives

FC 56: At war, everyone loses both the attacker and one being attacked.... **Let them both reach for peace** negotiation..

In FC 53-56, the participants instruct readers and audience to perform some physical actions in the real-world. The specific action in FC 53 is surrender. It is a directive to the president of Ukraine to surrender for peace to reign. The participant further direct the president to uphold neutrality, that is, not be friends of all and enemy of none. The main function of the modal verb 'must' in FC 54 marks obligation. The participant is convinced that Ukraine is fighting for a just cause, hence directs the readers to support Ukraine with their maximum capabilities. Though the addressee is suppressed in FC 55, it is clear that the participant, through the use of imperative 'sit' is directing the two countries

(Russia and Ukraine) to make peace. Similarly, the participant in FC 56 directs the readers to pray for both countries while instruct the countries to reach for peace.

FC 57: **Let** the Ukrainian president **swallow** his pride en **seek** reconciliation otherwise Putin will finish the beautiful country

FC 58: If USA won't allow Russia and China to have military bases in Cuba, they **should accord** Russia the same respect...

FC 59: People in both countries are humans, so if anyone has humanity in them... **Pray for them** all to have peace All the nations **have to** pray seriously for Ukraine and Russian to have peace

In FC 57 – 59, especially in FC 57, the writers made a call to the president to allow humility to prevail. The writer in FC 58 specifically uses the situation to express what he believes in and how he wishes the audience to perceive the situation. The participant in FC 59 specifically directs all nations to pray for peace since supernatural intervention can lead to the achievement of peace between the two countries. The participants in FC 57 – 59 guide readers though a through a flow of reasoning and get them to understand the situation from the participants' lens

5.2.5 Question

One of the most important ways of achieving the interaction between the reader and writer is the use of questions (Fu, 2012). To Hylands (2002), it allows writers to invite readers into the dialogue by assigning them a role to evaluate the issues being discussed rather than expecting an answer. In this study, question occurred 48 times, representing 12.2 % of the data. Participants use questions to bring their readers or audience to their viewpoints and also arouse their curiosity. Both rhetorical and non-rhetorical questions are raised in the corpus are which are directed to the Ukraine president, western bodies and readers in general who are mostly expected to answer the questions. Participants bring readers into their perspectives by presenting an opinion as an interrogative such that the reader appears to be the judge

FC 60: So what's the plan, do you surrender directly or do you sacrifice your people for a war you can't win?

FC 61: I have a question to all those that think prayers can help. If you would have someone standing at your door and pointing a gun at your family - would you prefer to have prayers as a weapon or a gun to fight back?

FC 62: Putin is very right because if Russia wanted to put nuclear warhead in Cuba, the USA will not allow it, now why does USA want Ukraine to get in NATO knowing that Russia will not allow it???

FC 63: Where was humanity when America invaded Iraq, Syria, Libya, and Afghanistan? Where was humanity when the United States invaded Vietnam? Where is the humanity when the United

States is imposing sanctions on different countries? Why didn't western people's heart aches for people of Palestine, Syria, Yemen, Libya, Afghanistan and Kashmir? Everyone's humanity has awakened against Russia. Russia doesn't want to destroy Ukraine, it is for unity. Now why the humanity of Europe has suddenly awakened?

FC 64: We're all losers in war. Human kindness should lead. Peace is peace, no substitute. Lives lost can never be regained so why war war?

FC 65: Can someone tell me what the issues between these 2 countries are? please assist (his person doesn't even know the cause of war)

Participants in FC 60-65 asked different questions to engage and encourage readers and audience to follow the trend of argument. Through the use of reader pronoun, the participant in FC 60 brings the president of Ukraine into the discourse and directly questions his plan to continue the war. To the writer, it's a no win war for Ukraine. Another participant in FC 61 asked an analogical question from readers who preach prayer as solution to the war. The participant use the question to guide readers to a particular interpretation that war is eminent in the situation between Russian and Ukraine. While the questions of participants in FC 62 and 63 is essentially to bring readers to the perspective that Ukraine's action of joining NATO predetermined the war and the world ought to query them rather than blame Russia, the participant in FC 64 asked a rhetorical question to portray the needlessness of war. Arouse by participants' questions and propositions, the writer in FC 65 is tempted to seek assistance on clarification on the cause of war between Russia and Ukraine. He asks: *Can someone tell me what the issues between these 2 countries are?*

6. Conclusion

Facebook has provided an effective avenue for the public to express their opinion on social issues. This study has revealed that Facebook users deploy various linguistic tools to take different stances in the news of the Russian-Ukraine war. They have used several stance components, such as hedges, boosters, attitude markers, and self-mention to achieve their stance(s). They have also used a variety of engagement strategies, such as commands, reader pronouns, questions, personal asides, and references to previously shared information, to illustrate the sorrow of war. Online users' opinions on the war reveal a variety of attitudes and judgment of the presidents of Russia and Ukraine. While some applaud the president of Ukraine for his valiant actions, others view him as a US puppet and consider his determination to keep the war going as detrimental to his citizens. The Russian president was found in the same boat. Some believe he is "Hitler reincarnated," while others regard him as a strong leader. Participants in the discourse used a variety of stances and engagement strategies to persuade other readers and express hope that the war will not turn out badly for either country.

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