

The war in Ukraine through the prism of visual disinformation and the limits of specialized fact-checking. A case-study at *Le Monde*

ECREA Conference, 27 October 2024

Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022:

- First war in Europe in the age of social networks
- Proliferation of disinformation content on the internet
- Visual nature of disinformation (Perrot, 2022)



Study goals:

- Did the particular context of disinformation surrounding the war in Ukraine influence the forms of visual disinformation?
- How did fact-checkers select the content to verify ?
- How did they conduct these verifications?



CATEGORIZATION



SELECTION CRITERIA
&
PRACTICES



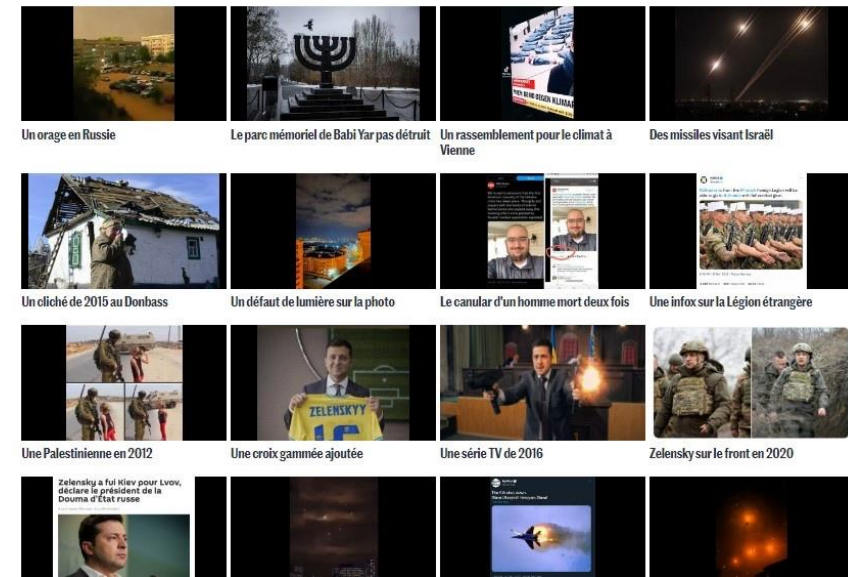
LES DÉCODEURS • GUERRE EN UKRAINE

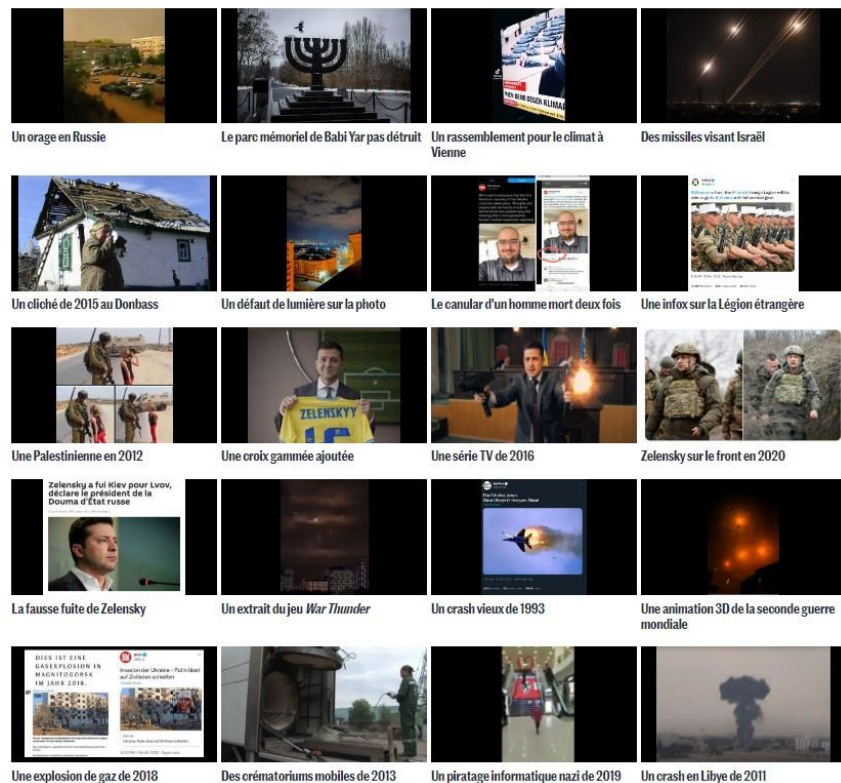
Guerre en Ukraine : parcourez les infox et les fausses images qui circulent depuis le début de l'offensive russe

Par Romain Geoffroy , Léa Sanchez (développement), Thomas Steffen (design), William Audureau et Assma Maad

Publié le 04 mars 2022 à 17h49, modifié le 07 juin 2023 à 17h17

- **Content Analysis:** 48 visual debunks related to the war in Ukraine, published on a single webpage by *Les Décodeurs* (the dedicated fact-checking department of *Le Monde*) between the start of the war and December 2022 (11 months).
- **Semi-structured Interviews** with *Les Décodeurs* (Nov 2022 – Feb 2023)





Informative title providing indications of the deception



Image of the fake visual or screenshot if a post on social media

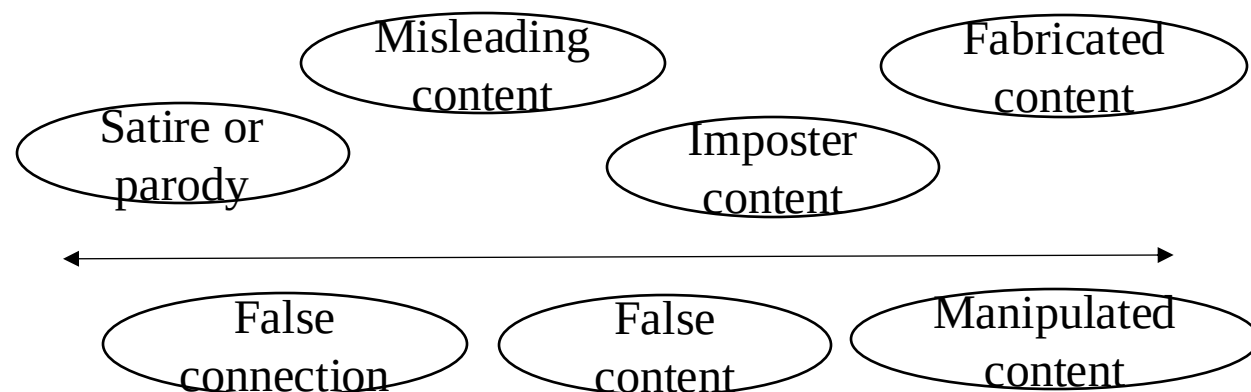
Brief descriptive text succinctly explaining the debunking

Verification date and source media/organization

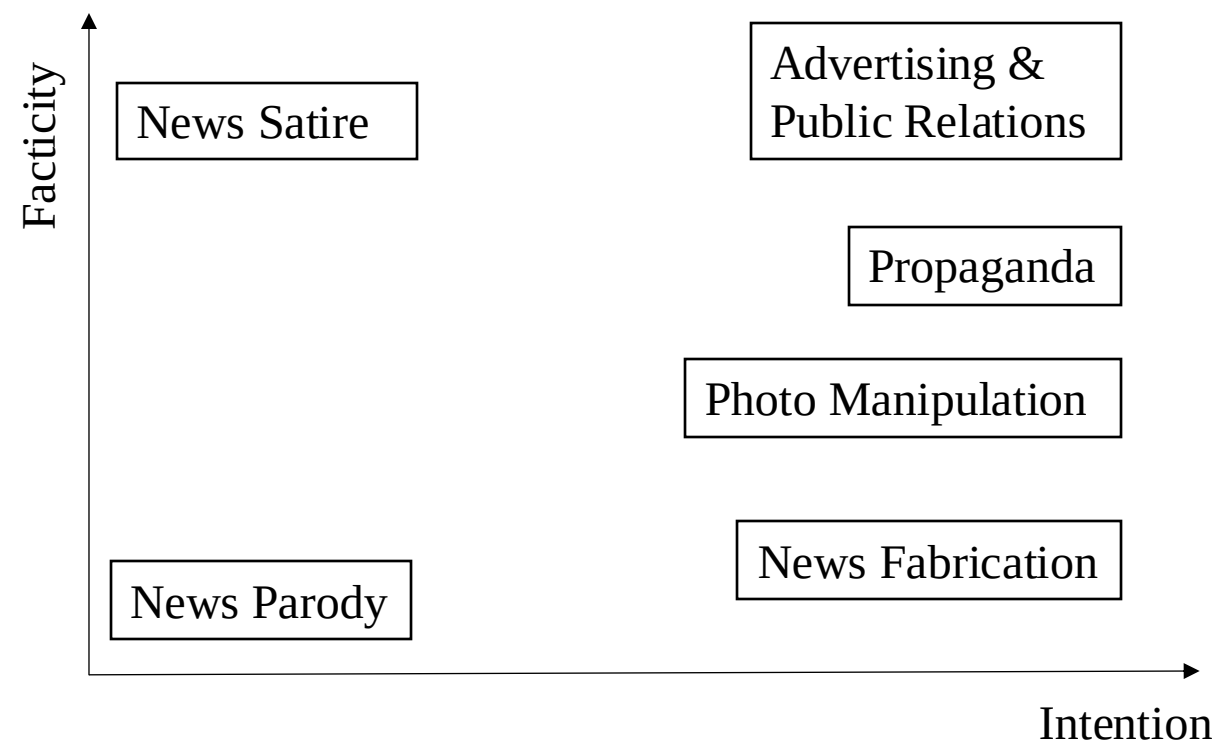
Tags

CATEGORIZATION

Wardle, 2018



Tandoc, Lim & Ling, 2018



CATEGORIZATION

		Photo	Video	Total
Photo manipulation	Imposter content	4	0	4
	Manipulated content	3	4	7
	Fabricated content	0	1	1
False context Missappropriation	Wrong temporality, wrong location, wrong interpretation	6	14	20
	Wrong temporality, related to the Russian- Ukrainien conflict (since 2014), wrong interpretation	3	2	5
	Correct temporality and location, wrong interpretation	8	3	11
				48

25%

75%

Tandoc et al. 2018

Wardle 2018

CATEGORIZATION

- Tandoc, Lim and Ling (2018) and Wardle (2018) categorizations encompass visual disinformation

BUT

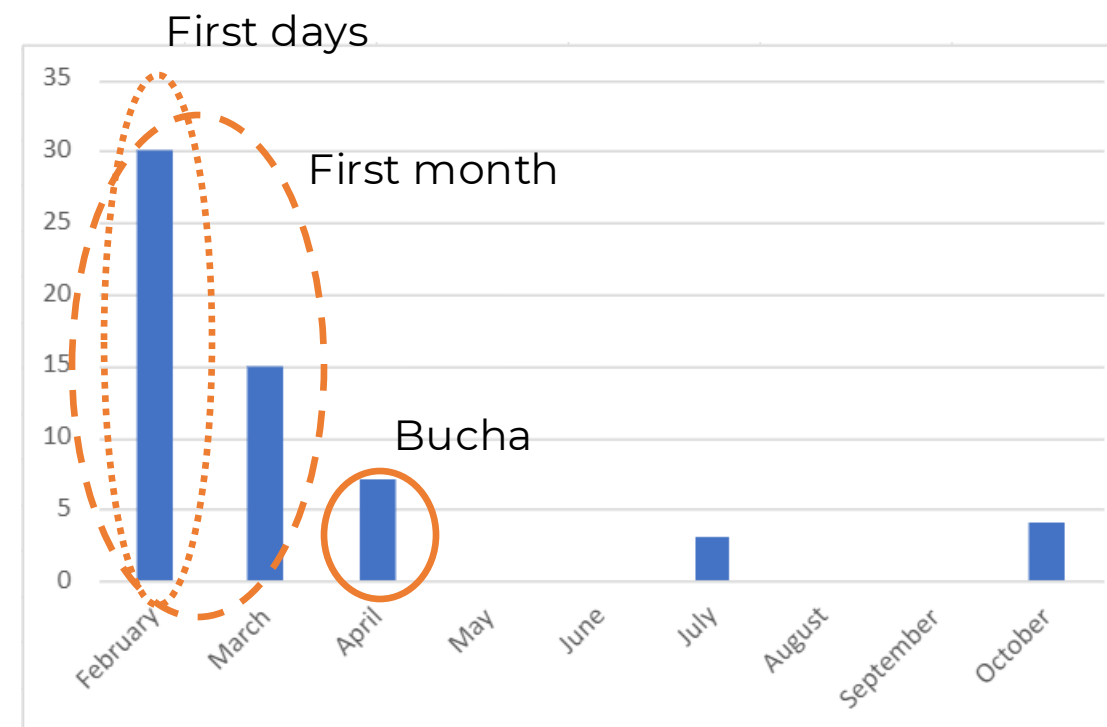
- Textual and visual (+ audio) elements interact closely forming multimodal disinformation
- The « false context » category can be refined by considering temporality, location and interpretation
- Some categories are non-exclusive and can overlap

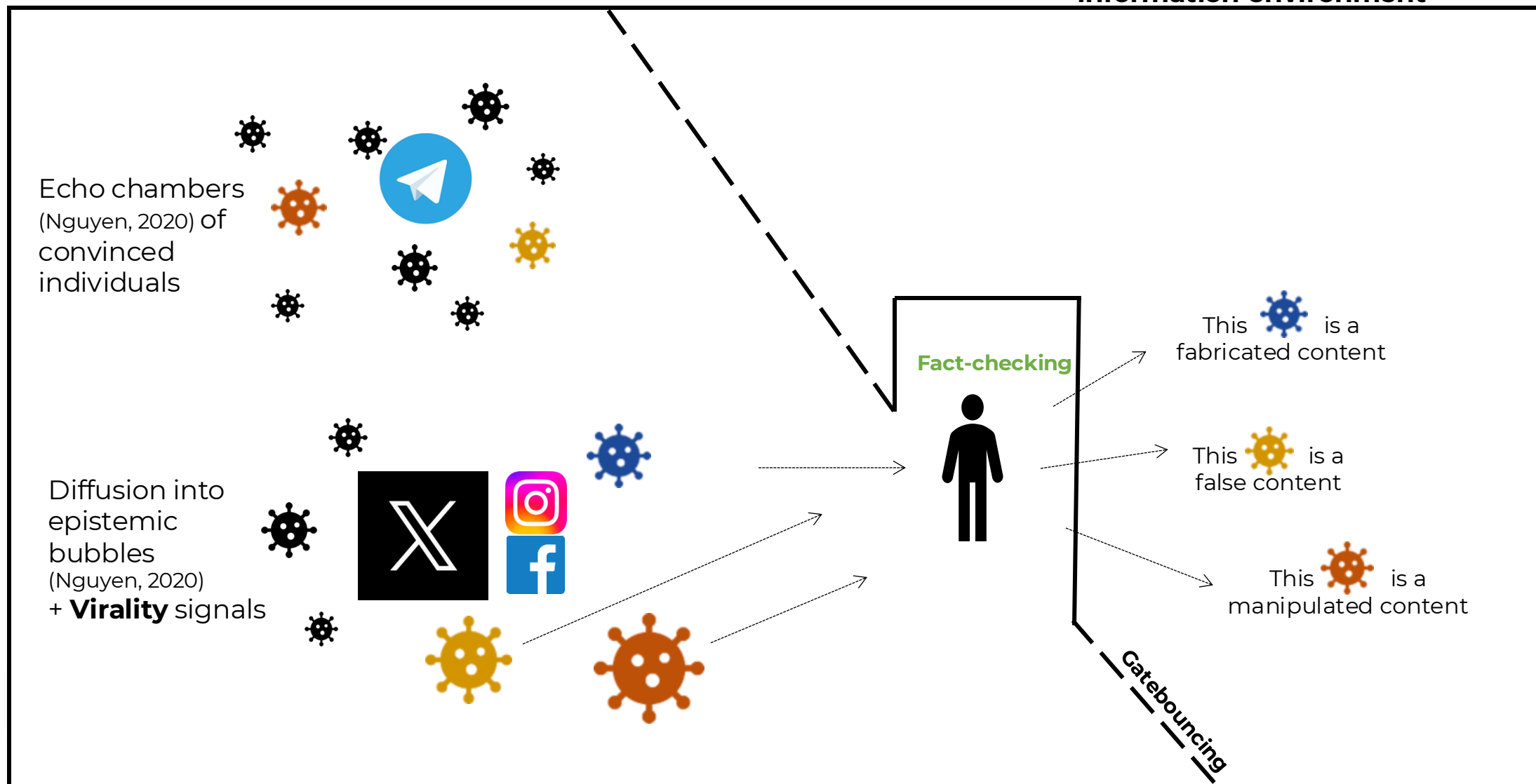


SELECTION CRITERIA & PRACTICES

Propagation date and publication of the debunk :

- Mode = 2 days
- Average = 2.5 days





SELECTION CRITERIA & PRACTICES

- Fact-checking journalists rely more on user's decision to give high visibility to a piece of 'news'
- The editorial necessity of debunking visual disinformation that might not be as viral as others but could be more vicious, shocking or sophisticated, is never taken into consideration
- The demobilization of the team after april 22 occurred without any real questioning about the medium-term coverage strategy



FINAL THOUGHTS

- Virality is important, but it does not necessarily imply representativeness
- The essential role of social media, especially Telegram
- The importance of understanding intra-organizational realities, values, routines and practices of fact-checkers
- Reevaluate the low use of AI-generated images

