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## Ukraine-Russia War: Nevada Twitter and Disinformation Trends

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## UKRAINE-RUSSIA WAR: NEVADA TWITTER AND DISINFORMATION TRENDS

Elections & Governance Fact Sheet No. 3 | March 2022

Prepared by: Mary Blankenship, Caitlin J. Saladino, and William E. Brown, Jr.

### PURPOSE:

This fact sheet analyzes responses to the ongoing Ukraine-Russia War posted on Twitter by users located in Nevada and identifies the most circulated narratives and disinformation topics.

### ABOUT THE DATA:

This study utilizes a collection of over 33 million tweets that discuss the Ukraine-Russia War generated from February 14th to March 9th, 2022. The author archived the tweets using the open-source program Twarc.<sup>1</sup> This fact sheet analyzes a sub-collection of 116,927 tweets that focuses on reactions originating from Nevada with locations that include one or more of the following terms: Vegas, Reno, Carson City, Elko, Nevada, LV, NV, Henderson, Summerlin, Churchill County, Clark County, Douglas County, Esmeralda County, Eureka County, Humboldt County, Lander County, Lincoln County, Lyon County, Mineral County, Nye County, Pershing County, Storey County, Washoe County, and White Pine County.

Each tweet contains more than 150 different data variables. This analysis focuses on the date and time the tweets were created, the time the user account was created, the location of the user, the full text of the tweet or retweet, and the source of the original tweet. Hashtag and emoji usages are extracted from the full text of the tweet. A greater discussion on the methodology can be found in “How misinformation spreads on Twitter.”<sup>2</sup>

### KEY FINDINGS:

1. In Nevada, 85 percent of the tweets on this topic are retweets. February 2022 saw a 141 percent increase in the creation of new twitter accounts compared to previous months.
2. Most tweets stand in solidarity with Ukraine and contain hashtags including: #standwithukraine, #stoprussia, #chefsforukraine, #ukraineunderattack, and #ukrainecrisis. The majority of yellow face emojis in tweets correspond to the negative emotions of anger, fear, and disgust.
3. Among the popular claims in NV tweets are text that state: the war is staged by the media and USA government; this war is a distraction to the ‘real war’ occurring in the United States; that Russia is not invading Ukraine and only conducting a military operation; and that Ukraine is filled with Nazis.

### OVERVIEW OF DISCUSSION:

The month of February 2022 saw a spike of 141 percent in new accounts created within Nevada that discuss the war compared to the monthly average from February 2021 to January 2022. The most retweeted sources in Nevada represent a diverse group. Out of the 116,927 tweets, 85 percent are retweets with popular Twitter users like Ukrainian journalists Veronika Melkozerova and Illia Ponomarenko, and media outlets including the Kyiv Independent, Occupy

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<sup>1</sup> DocNow. <https://www.docnow.io>

<sup>2</sup> Blankenship, M. (2020). How Misinformation Spreads Through Twitter. 1-28. Available at: [https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/brookings\\_capstone\\_studentpapers/6](https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/brookings_capstone_studentpapers/6)



Chart 1: Top 10 Emojis Used

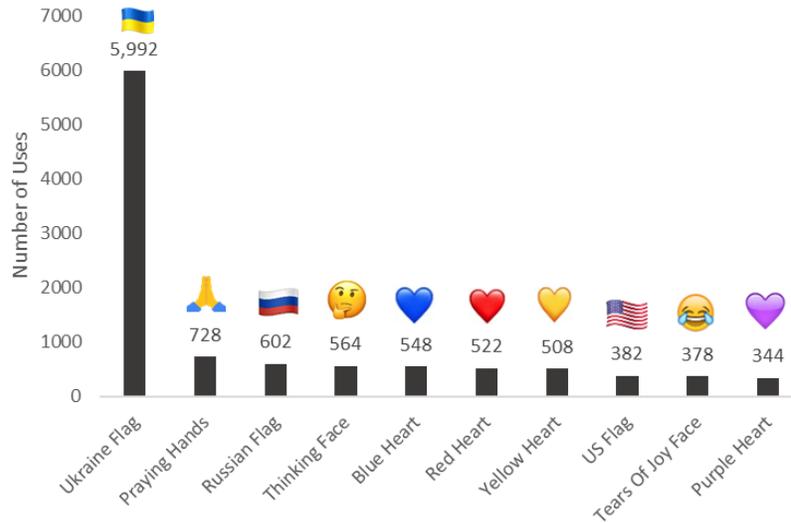
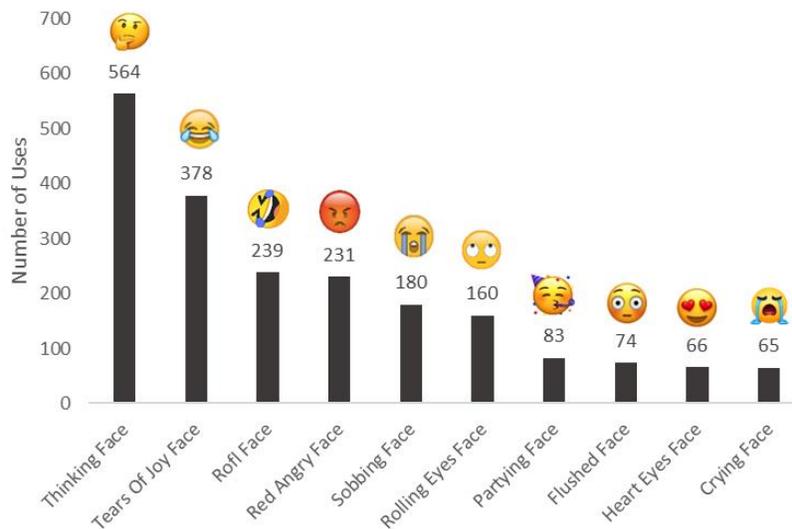


Chart 2 shows the top 10 overall yellow face emojis used within the Nevada collection. “Yellow face” emojis can be sorted into different emotion categories: happiness, surprise, sadness, disgust, fear, anger, and neutral. These categories are based on a psychology theory developed by Paul Ekman and Wallace V. Fesen that correlates facial expressions to six primary emotions that are expressed.<sup>5</sup> Some 36 percent of the emojis correlate to happy emotions while the 64 percent correspond to emotions of anger, fear, sadness, disgust, surprise, and neutral – most notably, fear.

Chart 2: Top 10 Yellow-Face Emojis Used



<sup>5</sup> Six Basic Emotions. In: ManagementMania.com [online]. Wilmington (DE) 2011-2022, 01/21/2016 [cit. 03/21/2022]. Available at: <https://managementmania.com/en/six-basic-emotions>

All of these and more emojis are present within discussions in Nevada. Three topics that have the greatest traction among residents are: (1) the war is staged by the media and U.S. government, (2) the conflict is a distraction to the “real war” within the United States, and (3) Russia is not invading Ukraine and only conducting a military operation, and that Ukraine is filled with Nazis.

Tweets claiming that the war is staged and used as a distraction are often paired with claims pertaining to domestic issues, including the claim by Donald Trump that Hillary Clinton spied on his campaign, that President Biden will not protect the southern border of the United States, and that this is a coverup for Hunter Biden’s laptop controversy. Some 17 of the top 25 users with the most reoccurring tweets have a bot score above 3.7, with an average bot score of 3.2.

The claim that the invasion is only a military drill/operation has other users trying to correct that claim. The tweets are mostly retweets of posts from accounts of news outlets and political officials. Tweets perpetuating the claim are also largely retweeting or posting links to news stories that mention Russia not invading Ukraine.

There are more tweets that appear to be supporting the claim that Ukrainians are Nazis than trying to correct or counter that accusation. The tweets supporting this claim most often are links to news stories that discuss this claim or are retweets of posts made by the Embassy of Russia account. The posts trying to counter the claim often discuss Russia’s own extremist groups, like the Wagner Group, and that Russia is waging genocide in Ukraine. Top reoccurring accounts within the two groups have similar overall bot scores (1.6 for those supporting claims and 1.9 for those trying to correct them) but tweets trying to perpetuate the claim are concentrated from fewer accounts and feature users that have since been suspended by the platform.