

Abstract

The 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine has given rise to an unprecedented scale of so-called citizen OSINT investigations. Private citizens from all over the world, organizing online, use publicly available information and data such as satellite imagery, social media, or flight tracking, to investigate human-rights violations, war crimes, misinformation campaigns and troop movements. But what is their role in a context of participative war? Through seven semi-structured interviews, this thesis explores and maps the role-orientation of citizen OSINT investigators in the context of the war in Ukraine, finding that they specifically value and try to follow self-imposed rules of verification, impartiality and responsibility towards themselves and others. Bringing together specialized skills, knowledge, and routines, the findings also point towards a community that consists of “unprofessional professionals”, bringing about a comparative advantage of the citizen OSINT community over legacy media. Moreover, based on the interviews, a typology of four different but intersecting cognitive role-orientations is suggested, contributing to the exploration of a phenomenon that yet needs to be examined academically.

Keywords

OSINT, open-source intelligence, citizen journalism, participative war, journalistic roles, journalistic role-orientation