

From Entertainment to Politics: The Power of Spectacularization in Zelensky's Public Image on Instagram during the Conflict

Social media platforms have played a significant role in the widespread dissemination of propaganda images during recent conflicts. This phenomenon underscores the importance of these tools as vehicles for the spread of political narratives, ideologies, and propaganda messages. This study aims to investigate the role of visual propaganda in the current era of social media, with a focus on the use of spectacularization as part of the communication strategy employed by the Ukrainian President, Volodymyr Zelensky, within the context of the Instagram platform. The objective of this analysis is to explore how Zelensky uses Instagram as a tool to spectacularize his political persona and promote his agenda. We examine the nature and mechanisms of spectacularization, with a specific focus on how the Ukrainian President constructs a public image that combines elements of entertainment and politics. To examine the use of Zelensky's public image and personal style in the ongoing conflict, we employed a combination of social media analysis tools. These platforms allowed us to monitor and delve into the effectiveness of Zelensky's public appearances from February 24, 2022, to February 24, 2023, providing us with a comprehensive overview of the current state of affairs. The collected data were analyzed using a multidisciplinary approach that combines political communication theory and media analysis. The results indicate that the President's personal style, characterized by a predominantly informal and de-institutionalized appearance, significantly impacts the public perception of his political persona. Within the landscape of social media-based information warfare, various issues are addressed and explored. Overall, this context highlights the importance of understanding how visual imagery is used as a tool of manipulation and persuasion within the dynamics of social media.

Introduction

Throughout history, war has consistently accompanied the evolution of various forms of government, significantly contributing to the formation of a wide repertoire of representations, symbols, and narratives that accompany them (Tzu, 2002; Sisti, 2022; Turchin, 2007). This phenomenon has played a crucial role in shaping the collective consciousness and the construction of national and state identities over time. Wars, in fact, have not only shaped political and social dynamics but have also given rise to discourses and images that reflect the ideology and identity of a nation or regime. This process of meaning-making through war has been extensively studied both in terms of the strategic role of war in history and in exploring the connections between armed conflict and political culture. Historically, armed conflict has marked a turning point that has delineated the transition between different historical periods, and

1 the current conflict is also chronologically situated within this progression. As
2 in any scenario characterized by rapid evolution, conducting sociological
3 research has progressively become an increasingly challenging task. The
4 example of the Ukrainian case highlights how social warfare has taken on
5 different characteristics in the current conflict, ceasing to be a mere appendage
6 of military strategy and becoming a distinct chapter. The use of modern media
7 provides the parties involved with a new weapon, represented by the
8 dissemination of propaganda, sometimes characterized by misinformation or
9 disinformation. The ongoing tension is just a fragment, moreover, of an ever-
10 changing communicative landscape that has emerged in recent years, with the
11 growing involvement of new media in documenting what is happening in the
12 world. In the context of the current media landscape, it is possible to observe
13 the incorporation of the logic of new media into a hybrid media ecosystem, as
14 described by Chadwick (2017). This phenomenon involves the introduction,
15 albeit not without controversy, of new channels, next-generation formats, and
16 recent languages that complement those typical of traditional media. The
17 exploration of the mechanisms offered by public media shows that social
18 media are the predominant tools, and at the same time, innovative new
19 strategies must be exploited in the field of political communication. Adaptation
20 to online technologies has led to a transformation of the media and the
21 audience (Diaz, 2010; Rodríguez-Martínez et al. 2012) and the conditions of
22 contemporary media ecology (Scolari et al. 2018). Web tools and current
23 communication strategies advance in this direction, proposing a system of
24 intercreativity (Fernández-Castrillo, 2014). In light of this overview and
25 considering what has been expressed, the Ukrainian situation cannot be
26 classified within the traditional canon of war. Instead, it is considered a social
27 war characterized by a subtle and unexpected form of conflict that unfolds
28 through the solid reinforced walls of digital consensus. This type of war relies
29 on sophisticated mechanisms that strategically utilize likes, influencers, shares,
30 and the evocation of emotions to shape public opinion. It is evident that
31 political dominion is not immune to the impact of ongoing transformations in
32 communication systems within global democracies. This brings to mind a
33 distant era when the introduction of television brought a wave of changes to the
34 political scene following World War II. It is interesting to observe how
35 politicians are now embracing various social media platforms, unlike in the
36 past when they were reluctant to do so (Bentivegna, 2014). Undoubtedly, over
37 time, there has been a transformation in the tools used for political
38 communication, and the current reality demonstrates that politics must
39 increasingly confront the challenge of the innovative media system. In this
40 case, the issue of fundamental importance is understanding how the
41 spectacularized social media culture proposed by the Ukrainian president can
42 influence narrative, codes, and communicative behaviours in relation to the
43 ongoing conflict.

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1 **Politics on Show: The Show on Instagram and the Zelensky Case**

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3 Contemporary political communication is characterized by a constant
4 process of change and evolution. In recent decades, we have witnessed
5 profound changes in the dynamics of political communication, primarily due to
6 the rise of social media platforms and the emergence of new practices in the
7 field of digital politics (Panagopoulos, 2009; Bennett & Pfetsch, 2018; Davis,
8 2019). These developments have created a political landscape where
9 communication is inherently intertwined with a variety of elements, including
10 citizen mobilization, campaign organization, direct communication with voters,
11 and even the governance process (Bruns & Burgess, 2015). This transformation
12 has made political communication an increasingly complex field of study and
13 practice in which digital media and social media play a central role in shaping
14 political strategies. Politicians and political actors must now face the
15 challenges and opportunities created by this new reality, striving to navigate the
16 digital landscape to effectively reach and engage the electorate.

17 From this perspective, contemporary political communication represents a
18 multidimensional challenge that requires an in-depth analysis of its dynamics,
19 effects, and implications for democracy and decision-making. Understanding
20 how digital technologies influence politics and society has become crucial for
21 researchers, political actors, and citizens themselves, as the power and impact
22 of political communication are increasingly connected to the digital
23 environment in which we live. In recent times, political communication has
24 been assimilated into a wide array of terms and expressions derived from the
25 world of entertainment. Indeed, for some time now, there has been a gradual
26 popularization of politics and its communication (Boni, 2002; Corner and Pels,
27 2003; Van Zoonen, 2005; Jones, 2005; Riegert, 2007; Mazzoleni & Sfondini,
28 2009). In this regard, it has been figuratively proposed that politics can be
29 considered as a form of representation, a drama in which different figures come
30 into play, guided by a script and a unique narrative that is staged to evoke
31 emotional reactions in an audience of spectators (Arroyo, 2012). Political
32 communication has, therefore, undergone a process of desacralization that
33 dates back a long time (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999), leading to an adaptation to
34 the norms of the media system, initially television. However, the need to adapt
35 to these changes has led politics to extend into various spheres, even becoming
36 an attraction for entertainment or a product of popular culture. In this new
37 arrangement, there is an adaptation of the language of politics to the language
38 of the media, as well as the importance of the personal sphere of the politician,
39 personalizing politics after dramatizing it (Battista, 2023a). In this context, the
40 audiovisual sector gains significant importance, closely connected to
41 communication, to create a mix that can engage a substantial portion of the
42 audience. Consequently, it follows that it is of great importance to analyze and
43 sift through what happens within the realm of Instagram. After all, political
44 communication is also evolving in an increasingly complex digital context,
45 where political leaders use social platforms and digital technologies to interact
46 with the public, create new forms of storytelling and participation to build a

1 constant and engaging presence (Sorice, 2020). It is in this context that social
 2 media content plays a crucial role in making political communication attractive
 3 and engaging, using innovative production and content techniques (Battista,
 4 2023b). In this article, therefore, we will explore the mechanisms that govern
 5 the new environment and aim to analyze how Zelensky has adapted to new
 6 technologies and digital platforms to promote his image and interact with the
 7 public in a continuously evolving political communication context. On the
 8 other hand, it should be emphasized that during this conflict, propaganda
 9 images disseminated through social media reached a wide audience, often
 10 surpassing geographical and linguistic barriers, and digital platforms provided
 11 conflict groups and actors with immediate and global online presence, allowing
 12 them to reach and engage with people directly without traditional filters or
 13 intermediaries. Furthermore, the visual and engaging nature of Instagram
 14 content, such as photos, videos, and graphics, amplified the impact of
 15 propaganda images during conflicts. These visual communication means can
 16 evoke intense emotions, manipulate perceptions, and influence public opinion.
 17 Images of atrocities, violence, or victims can be used to provoke outrage,
 18 solidarity, or fear, aiming to gain support or followers for a particular cause or
 19 ideology. Of course, in our case, there is a notable aspect to consider, as
 20 entering the agenda and the spotlight hinges on the leader and their personal
 21 traits, humanized stories, and spectacular anecdotes that break from the
 22 ordinary. The central role of the leader is indispensable; however, possessing a
 23 solid political background and competence in managing public resources alone
 24 is not sufficient to ensure success. It is also essential for the leader to possess
 25 refined communication skills, aesthetic charm, and the ability to masterfully
 26 handle political affairs. These communicative characteristics are easily
 27 recognizable in the broader context of the political environment and can be
 28 classified as a penetrating communicative profile due to its "close," "every
 29 day," and "accessible" nature for the vast audience (Bentivegna, 2014; De
 30 Rosa, 2014; Giansante, 2014). In the case of Zelensky, his remarkable success
 31 is based on a set of fundamental elements as described by Gutiérrez Rubí
 32 (2022). Firstly, his intrinsic personal story, which serves as the primary
 33 motivational driving force for him; secondly, his extraordinary command of
 34 language, allowing him to communicate effectively and persuasively; thirdly,
 35 his skill in staging, characterized by a heroic aesthetic that contributes to
 36 creating a strong emotional impact on the audience; fourth, his consistent use
 37 of live streaming through selfie videos, enabling him to maintain a constant
 38 and engaging online presence; and finally, projecting an image of a leader
 39 unusually close, differentiating himself from traditional stereotypes,
 40 establishing a connection and closeness with the audience. These five pillars
 41 form the basis of his extraordinary success and demonstrate the absolute
 42 centrality of Instagram in this arena. Therefore, it is imperative that political
 43 leaders possess communication skills, aesthetic charm, telegenic and rhetorical
 44 abilities, as well as other related qualities (Berrocal Gonzalo, 2004). It is
 45 evident that leaders themselves focus on their personal qualities of affability
 46 and likability, believing that emotional consensus can overcome the resistance

1 of an audience less attracted to formal politics (Langer, 2010). It is therefore
 2 understandable that some scholars use terms like "pop politics" (Mazzoleni &
 3 Sfardini, 2009) or "celebrity politics" (Richardson, 2015) to describe this
 4 communicative landscape. Online pop politics (Mazzoleni & Bracciale, 2019)
 5 represents an extension of this communicative style into the virtual sphere. In a
 6 hybrid communication context (Chadwick, 2017), where traditional media
 7 integrate and coexist with social networks, the latter have allowed many actors
 8 to gain autonomy and have a voice in the public sphere. Not only have citizens,
 9 who were once marginalized and relegated to a role of passive public, gained
 10 visibility using digital platforms, but political parties have also gained such
 11 visibility and learned to reach the electorate using these tools, especially since
 12 the 2008 US presidential election campaign (Bimber, 2014). All of this is done
 13 with the awareness of the clear transition from party democracy, where
 14 intermediaries favored citizens, to the democracy of the public (Manin, 1995),
 15 based on the direct, political, and communicative bond between leadership and
 16 citizens. The logic of representation is transformed into that of representation,
 17 where the depth of analysis and discussion typical of elected assemblies gives
 18 way to the pursuit of deliberative speed favored by the media (Sorice, 2009).
 19 The forms to create a sense of intimacy between politicians and supporters are
 20 based on visual aspects closely related to the use of images and videos (López-
 21 Rabadán & Doménech-Fabregat, 2021). In this overall scenario, Instagram
 22 maximizes the self-representation capacity of politicians and can easily convey
 23 their sensationalized image. In this social media platform, candidates can make
 24 themselves known professionally or from a personal perspective through the
 25 deliberate choice of elements they include in their images, such as symbols or
 26 locations (Bellido-Pérez & Gordillo-Rodríguez, 2022; Gordillo-Rodríguez &
 27 Bellido-Pérez, 2021). In this context, Instagram serves as a "virtual billboard"
 28 (Muñoz & Towner, 2017), where self-referential representation is manifested,
 29 privileging aesthetics and image over programmatic content (Ferré-Pavia &
 30 Codina, 2022). This is a communicative arena where visually appealing
 31 messages are conveyed, aiming to capture the audience's attention through
 32 engaging aesthetics and a distinctive visual identity. However, this emphasis on
 33 the visual aspect can lead to a reduction in programmatic content, as the
 34 primary goal becomes the creation of an imaginative and engaging narrative,
 35 rather than a detailed presentation of political programs and proposals. This
 36 confirms that the sharing of visual media has become a hallmark of
 37 contemporary internet culture (Mirzoeff, 2016). In conclusion, this war, which
 38 also takes place on social media, has opened new horizons for the
 39 dissemination of propaganda images during conflicts. The visual, engaging,
 40 and immediate nature of social media has made these platforms powerful
 41 communication tools for conflict actors, allowing them to reach a wide
 42 audience and influence public opinion. However, it will be crucial to critically
 43 evaluate such images, verify sources, and consider the context to avoid
 44 manipulation and the spread of misleading or distorted information. The
 45 current President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky, is a significant example of
 46 a leader who has effectively harnessed and leveraged social media from a

1 "spectacular" perspective, using it to further his political cause. This
 2 communicative strategy extends beyond the wartime context that characterizes
 3 our study period. It traces back to 2019 when Zelensky assumed the
 4 presidential office through national elections. These elections marked his
 5 political debut; up until that point, Zelensky was primarily known in his
 6 country for his work as a producer and actor, having starred in the hit series
 7 "Servant of the People," where he played the role of the president (Ryabinska,
 8 2020). Zelensky's media notoriety led to widespread support for his candidacy
 9 as the population appreciated the figure of an outsider at a time when
 10 traditional political parties were increasingly discredited (Rohozinska & Shpak,
 11 2019). This is how the fictional president became real, and the "Servant of the
 12 People" party transitioned from the small screen to governing a country,
 13 serving as a paradigm of celebrity politics and evoking the role of other figures
 14 in the international political landscape. Thus, Volodymyr Zelensky constitutes
 15 an interesting case of how humor linked to "spectacularization" can have a
 16 significant impact on politics. Going deeper, his brilliant performance
 17 represents an example of how these soft arguments, when coupled with a clear
 18 political strategy, can be used as an effective tool to engage and mobilize the
 19 public in politics, even in serious contexts like leading a nation (Battista,
 20 2023c). More recently, the outbreak of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in
 21 February 2022 brought Volodymyr Zelensky into the international spotlight.
 22 The war did not disrupt the connection between the president and his social
 23 media; on the contrary, it strengthened it, becoming Zelensky's preferred
 24 channel of communication with the population. Investigations conducted so far
 25 confirm that Instagram continues to be the most crucial platform in Zelensky's
 26 and his communication team's strategy. Through this tool, the president has
 27 raised awareness and mobilized citizens beyond Ukraine's borders, keeping the
 28 media and other politicians informed in real-time about the progress of the war
 29 and the decisions made. In short, he can control the narrative without
 30 intermediaries, on his terms, and with a high probability of it going viral
 31 (Olivares et al., 2022). Through the production of videos in which Zelensky
 32 displays emotions, empathy, and charisma, he has garnered widespread support
 33 in the international public opinion. He has encouraged the Ukrainian people to
 34 resist aggression and called for solidarity from other countries. In his speeches,
 35 Zelensky uses specific references to cities, towns, villages attacked, individuals
 36 killed, and their stories, using powerful words like "justice, truth, evil, courage,
 37 tyranny, democracy, power, leadership, friendship, betrayal, and God" (Dyczok
 38 & Chung, 2022) to create a sense of closeness. This communicative approach
 39 involves a blending that relies on facial expressions, gestures, and tone of
 40 voice, in addition to words, to create an engaging and persuasive
 41 communication experience. As demonstrated, this strategy aims to establish an
 42 emotional connection with the audience and convey a sense of authenticity and
 43 closeness between the leader and the citizens. In order to analyze the
 44 contemporary phenomenon of global war and its strong social media exposure,
 45 our case study will seek to highlight the process underscored by constant
 46 attention to the progression and expansion of mediatization in terms of war.

Methodology

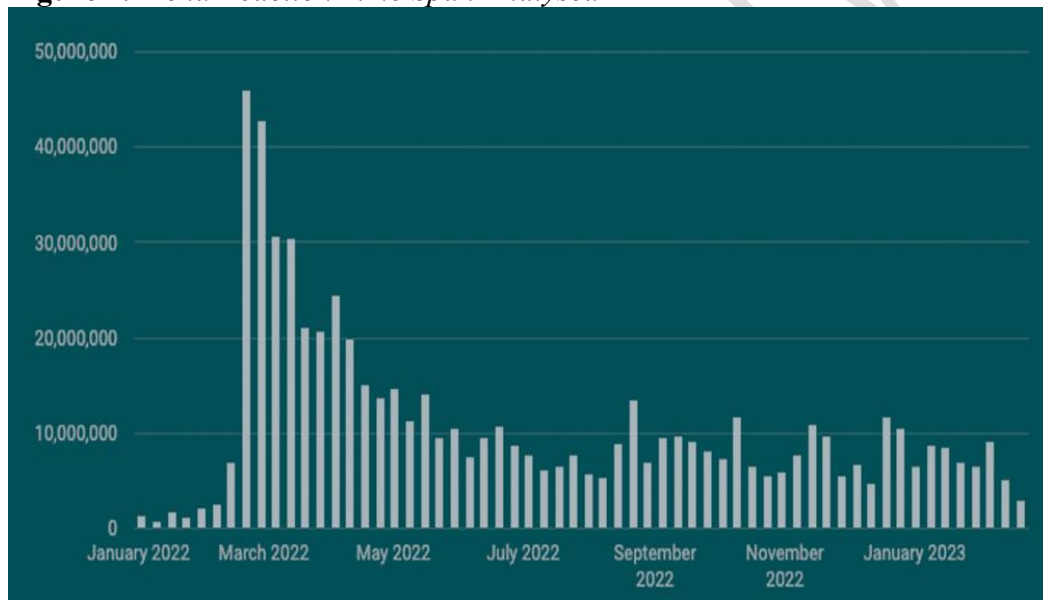
The primary objective of this research is to identify the characteristics of political spectacularization present in the videos published by Volodymyr Zelensky on Instagram. A secondary goal is to compare Zelensky's spectacularization strategy at the onset of the conflict and subsequently to assess if there is an evolution in his digital communication. Based on these premises, it was decided to approach the subject of the study through a quantitative research method. This approach allows for the systematic and objective collection of data and information, enabling a rigorous analysis of the features of the videos and any variations over time, and it allows us to uncover the DNA of media messages (Igartua, 2006). The proposed technique represents an approach that seeks to examine and analyze communication systematically, objectively, and quantitatively. This method relies on a detailed investigation of the characteristics and elements within the communicative process to gain a deeper understanding of communicative phenomena. It aims to translate qualitative aspects of communication into quantitative measures to identify trends, relationships, and patterns that might otherwise escape superficial observation. This data-driven approach enables the development of more robust models and theories in the field of communication. The protocol for the quantitative analysis of spectacularization in audiovisual messages on Instagram draws direct inspiration from the model proposed by López-Rabadán and Doménech-Fabregat in 2018, 2019, and 2021 for the study of political photography and videos on social networks. This protocol represents a methodological approach aimed at systematically and objectively examining and evaluating the level of spectacularization present in audiovisual messages shared on Instagram. The model developed by these two scholars has proven effective in studying political photography and videos on social networks, providing a solid foundation for analyzing and understanding the visual and narrative characteristics of such content. This analysis protocol relies on a set of indicators and criteria that allow for the assessment of the presence of spectacular elements within images and videos, enabling an objective and comparable measurement across different content. Applying this model to the context of audiovisual messages on Instagram involves using the same indicators and criteria to identify and measure the presence of spectacular elements within such content. This includes analyzing visual elements, such as the use of special effects, visual composition, and overall aesthetics, as well as the analysis of narrative strategies, such as tension-building and the use of emotional elements to capture users' attention. Through this analysis protocol, researchers are able to obtain objective data on the degree of spectacularization present in audiovisual messages on Instagram, allowing for comparative evaluation across different content and a deeper understanding of the communicative mechanisms used to attract and engage the audience. This methodological approach provides a structured and scientific framework for examining the presence of spectacular elements in audiovisual content on Instagram, enabling objective and comparative assessment that contributes to

1 the understanding of the role of spectacularization in social media
2 communication. Furthermore, what is proposed is based on the classic concept
3 of the "5W" in journalism, a methodological approach that aims to gather and
4 organize information comprehensively and exhaustively. The "5W,"
5 representing the fundamental questions of Who, What, When, Where, and
6 Why, constitute a widely adopted conceptual framework in journalism to
7 ensure comprehensive coverage of events and accurate presentation of
8 information. The application of the "5W" is extended to the analysis of
9 photographic, video, and audiovisual content on social media and in other
10 communicative contexts. This approach seeks to systematically identify and
11 understand the actors involved, the topics addressed, the timing and location of
12 events, as well as the underlying motivations for such representations. Using
13 this formula in this context allows for a critical examination of the nature and
14 communicative objectives of such content, thereby contributing to a deeper
15 understanding of emerging communicative dynamics in contemporary media.
16 It should be noted, however, that in this research, a significant modification
17 was made to the original model, wherein the "What" variable was eliminated.
18 This decision was made because the main theme of all the publications under
19 consideration directly related to the war itself. Additionally, some minor
20 adjustments were made to the original model to adapt the categories to the
21 peculiarities of the analyzed sample. As an example, a new category, namely
22 cinematic staging, was included, which proved relevant for the content
23 analysis. These adjustments to the original model have been made to ensure a
24 more accurate and relevant classification of the publications under
25 examination, taking into account the specificities and unique characteristics of
26 the studied sample. The object of the analysis consists of a sample composed of
27 312 recording units, represented by videos shared by President Zelensky on his
28 official personal Instagram profile (@zelenskiy_official). For the process of
29 extraction, loading, and management of the videos, a manual approach was
30 used using the Google Sheets tool. This tool was adopted as a means to
31 organize and manage the data systematically and structured. The extraction of
32 the videos was carried out by manually selecting and retrieving relevant
33 content from President Zelensky's official Instagram profile. Subsequently, the
34 videos were uploaded to a Google Sheets spreadsheet, allowing for the creation
35 of a centralized database. This manual approach provides greater flexibility and
36 control in the process of data extraction and management, enabling accurate
37 and detailed analysis of the selected videos for research. Concurrently, to gain
38 an overview, we used Fanpage Karma and Blogmeter Liveinsight to evaluate
39 the data collected from social media, such as the number of followers, reach,
40 and engagement of published content, as well as user interactions with brands
41 on social media. This approach also primarily constitutes quantitative research
42 but can be complemented by text analysis and sentiment analysis techniques to
43 understand the meaning and perception of the published content. Moreover,
44 Fanpage Karma and Blogmeter Liveinsight use tools that gather data from
45 various social platforms, providing analysis on content performance, reach, and
46 engagement.

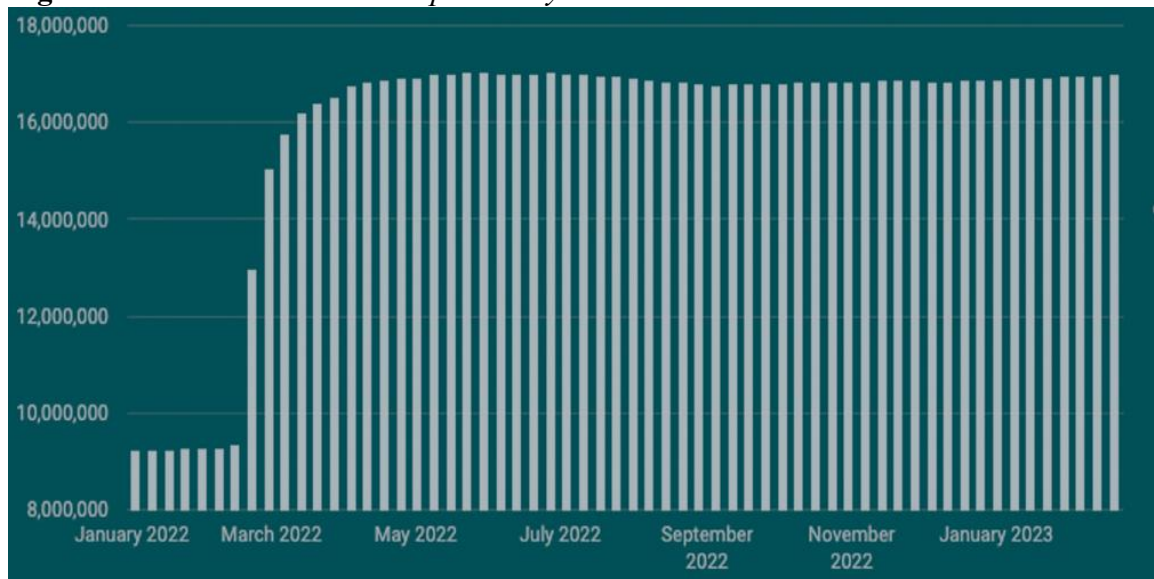
Results and Discussion

From February 24, 2022, to February 24, 2023, Zelensky posted a total of 2,567 times on his official Instagram account, which equates to an average of 3.4 posts per day. Out of these, 2,129 are videos, making up 52.17% of the publications during that period. The prominence of the video format increased as the war progressed; however, it is crucial to consider another aspect. The count of reactions collected from Zelensky's Instagram account stands as strong evidence to support the argument that the immersive narrative of the war from the warzone becomes central in the leveling of digital attention after the initial shock. Reactions, in fact, went from 46 million in the first week to 43 million in the second week, then dropped to 21 million in the fourth and fifth weeks since the beginning of the invasion (Fig. 1).

Figure 1. *Trend Reaction Time Span Analysed*



However, one result that can be easily explained by the dynamics of Instagram posts, which include features such as Reels that have a significantly higher engagement capacity. Moreover, out of the 2,500 and more posts made on the account, 1,694 are Reels, and 433 are carousels that combine multiple videos and images in a single announcement. In general, the Instagram account experienced abnormal growth in the initial weeks of the invasion. At the beginning of February last year, President Zelensky had a fandom of 9,284,998. The day after the invasion, there was the first million-fold increase, with followers reaching 10,869,941 on February 25th. By the end of the month, the number had risen to 13 million, with 13,359,798 followers, and on March 17th, the account surpassed 16 million followers, with 16,069,959, a number that has since then continued to grow slowly, reaching the threshold of 17 million followers in May 2022 (Fig. 2).

Figure 2. *Trend Follower Time Span Analysed*

Returning to the video content, it is easy to notice that, given the personalization of political messages as one of the characteristics associated with the spectacularization, the majority of the videos feature Zelensky himself (95.83%). Of these, the president shares the spotlight with foreign politicians or government members in only 5.8% of cases. The remaining small percentage of videos in which the Ukrainian president is absent showcases civil society (2.78%). All of this seems almost inevitable, considering that with the spectacularization and personalization of politics, there has been a strong acceleration that has led to the emphasis on the leader, configured as a true brand (Barile, 2014). Like many other political leaders, Zelensky has also employed a kind of ongoing narrative that unfolds through constant presence in the press, television, and social networks (Ventura, 2019). Moreover, contemporary politics increasingly seeks forms and figures, gestures and bodies, not just laws and decrees (Salmon, 2014), and this has also been influenced by the liquid society described by Bauman (Bauman, 2011). Continuing to delve into the results of the video analysis, it becomes apparent that President Zelensky primarily uses his Instagram profile to promote his professional life rather than a personal one. The analysis reveals that the President presents himself mainly as a statesman, accounting for 75.36% of the cases, through numerous speeches addressed to Ukraine and the world during the early days of the war. Furthermore, an image of heroism associated with the President is evident in 11.59% of cases, for example, by sharing selfies recorded on the streets to demonstrate to the population and Russia that he has no intention of leaving the country. Zelensky's unique ability lies in his capacity to engage his online audience absolutely in political decisions, thereby contributing to creating a new political paradigm and elevating his figure to that of a savior of the homeland (Moffitt, 2016). This emerging model is based on the possibility of interaction between Zelensky as a political actor and online citizens and manifests itself in the form of web politics (Mosca, 2012).

Web politics stands out for promoting interaction between citizens and political leaders through digital platforms, allowing them to actively participate in public discourse and engage more meaningfully in the political process. This new political paradigm is built on the belief that the interactivity and accessibility offered by digital media can promote broader citizen engagement and more inclusive participation in the political sphere. In this way, web politics plays a significant role in promoting citizens' political engagement and redefining the relationship between the leader in question and society, opening up new opportunities for a more participatory and democratic approach to managing this delicate phase. Other relevant attributes include that of protector, which emerges in 4.35% of cases when the President addresses civilians or sick soldiers, and that of communicator, highlighted in 8.70% of cases, especially in his interactions with the media. These attributes contribute to shaping the image and role that President Zelensky intends to convey through his Instagram videos during the period under consideration. Furthermore, since most of the videos from the earlier period are formal speeches, the staging is usually in accordance with institutional standards (79.17%), meaning Zelensky is shown well-framed, with a neutral angle and spotlights, in a classical political setting where official symbols typically appear. This professionalization contrasts with the significant presence of amateur videos (15.28%) recorded with a mobile phone, without editing or filters, and with reduced image quality. This scenario is characterized using immediate language that allows individuals to strengthen their image when communicating online (Novelli, 2018). In conclusion, the aspect considered integrates seamlessly with the profile we have sought to examine, and the confirmation is represented by the intensive use of the online platform, where political communication strategies are increasingly oriented towards a growing polarization around the leader and hybridize with daily life to bring the political actor closer to the population. This is not a recent phenomenon but is gradually shifting political communication to focus more and more on the personality of the leader, seeking to present them as one of the members of the audience and adopting a lifestyle-focused political approach (Giddens, 1997). Moreover, autonomous management of self-presentation on social networks has also allowed, in this case, to limit the mediation of professionals and mass communication bodies (Kruikemeier et al. 2016).

Conclusion

While politicians worldwide have leveraged social media for their election campaigns, it is only through the experience of Zelensky that we can identify a true ground zero for social communication in wartime (Pietrobon, 2022). In this context, social media takes on the connotation of a war machine, becoming a veritable battlefield between the two opposing political leaders and an objective of conquest. They transform into tools capable of mobilizing followers worldwide, engaging the entire international community. What makes this situation unique is that the war in Ukraine becomes the first war in history to be primarily fought

1 through the use of memes, virtual appeals, media propaganda, political marketing,
 2 and hashtags. In this new era of communication, social media not only serve as
 3 platforms for disseminating political ideas but become the primary instruments for
 4 influencing public opinion and mobilizing the masses. Politicians clash virtually,
 5 employing all available tactics of persuasion and manipulation on social media to
 6 win consensus and gain political advantages. The war shifts to a digital terrain,
 7 where communication strategies become crucial for political success. The use of
 8 memes, virtual appeals, media propaganda, political marketing, and hashtags
 9 becomes an integral part of this new form of conflict. Politicians seek to capture
 10 users' attention and support through creative use of images, persuasive messages,
 11 and engaging narratives. These tools allow them to convey political messages
 12 immediately, virally, and extensively, reaching a wide audience and influencing
 13 public opinion on a global scale. In this context, the war in Ukraine stands out as a
 14 significant case study, where social media plays a paramount role in shaping
 15 opinions and political mobilization. The extensive use of digital tools to promote
 16 one's political agenda and engage citizens reflects a radical shift in political
 17 communication and the dynamics of contemporary conflicts. Therefore,
 18 Zelensky's experience marks a turning point in political communication, paving
 19 the way for a new era in which social media assumes a central role in waging wars
 20 and manipulating public opinion. This phenomenon raises a series of reflections
 21 that now and in the future require critical consideration of the ethical and political
 22 responsibility associated with the use of social media as tools of propaganda and
 23 persuasion, as well as the need to develop new skills and strategies to navigate this
 24 complex communicative landscape. However, the use of social media and the
 25 importance of Instagram are subtly reflected in the words of Dalia Al-Aquidi, a
 26 Senior Fellow at the Center for Security Policy, who admitted during an
 27 interview that "*without Volodymyr Zelensky's media strategy, the situation in*
 28 *Ukraine could be much worse (...) Zelensky has literally transformed in our*
 29 *eyes as if, in a world heavily shaped by Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, Twitter,*
 30 *Facebook, and other platforms, the president spent much of his life rehearsing*
 31 *precisely for this moment.*" These words illustrate how Zelensky's career and
 32 his background as an entertainer have proven strategic in a dramatic situation,
 33 teetering between life and death, and how the spectacularization of events has
 34 created a sense of closeness to the Ukrainian people in the international
 35 community.

36 During the Russo-Ukrainian war, President Zelensky adopted a clearly
 37 spectacularized political style, also known as politainment, in his publications. By
 38 intensely, strategically, and successfully leveraging Instagram's visual potential,
 39 Zelensky promotes his image as a leader, communicates with citizens during
 40 emergency periods, provides war reports, internationalizes the conflict, persuades
 41 public opinion, mobilizes the Ukrainian and global population, criticizes the
 42 enemy, and requests assistance from other countries. The war thus becomes the
 43 central theme of his discourse, and Zelensky adopts a digital communication style
 44 that helps present him as a engaged and involved president in the wartime context.
 45 Using Instagram's specific features, such as its visual and immediate nature, the
 46 President fully exploits the platform to convey a strong leadership image and

emotionally engage the audience. Through posts, videos, and images, Zelensky is successfully communicating directly with citizens, providing real-time updates on the war situation, showing the consequences of the conflict, and seeking to evoke solidarity and support. The use of a spectacularized style in Zelensky's political communication on Instagram has proven effective in achieving several objectives: promoting his image as an engaged leader in the conflict, raising public awareness about the Russo-Ukrainian war, garnering support and solidarity both nationally and internationally, as well as conducting a campaign of persuasion and mobilization. In conclusion, Zelensky's spectacularized approach to political communication on Instagram during the Russo-Ukrainian war has allowed the president to present himself as a actively involved leader in the wartime context and to influence public opinion both in Ukraine and globally. The strategic use of visual media and the platform's specific features has enabled the conveyance of effective and engaging messages, solidifying his image and role in the narrative of the conflict.

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