The Evolution of Digital Communication: Zelensky and the Use of Instagram in Wartime

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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.

Keywords: *propaganda, spectacularization, communication strategies, Zelensky, Instagram*

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

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

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

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

From this perspective, contemporary political communication represents a multidimensional challenge that requires an in-depth analysis of its dynamics, effects, and implications for democracy and decision-making. Understanding how digital technologies influence politics and society has become crucial for researchers, political actors, and citizens themselves, as the power and impact of political communication are increasingly connected to the digital environment in which we live. In recent times, political communication has been assimilated into a wide array of terms and expressions derived from the world of entertainment. Indeed, for some time now, there has been a gradual popularization of politics and its communication (Boni 2002, Corner and Pels 2003, Van Zoonen 2005, Jones 2005, Riegert 2007, Mazzoleni and Sfardini 2009). In this regard, it has been figuratively proposed that politics can be considered as a form of representation, a drama in which different figures come into play, guided by a script and a unique narrative that is staged to evoke emotional reactions in an audience of spectators (Arroyo 2012). Political communication has, therefore, undergone a process of desacralization that dates back a long time (Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999), leading to an adaptation to the norms of the media system, initially television. However, the need to adapt to these changes has led politics to extend into various spheres, even becoming an attraction for entertainment or a product of popular culture. In this new arrangement, there is an adaptation of the language of politics to the language of the media, as well as the importance of the personal sphere of the politician, personalizing politics after dramatizing it (Battista 2023a). In this context, the audiovisual sector gains significant importance, closely connected to communication, to create a mix that can engage a substantial portion of the audience. Consequently, it follows that it is of great importance to analyze and sift through what happens within the realm of Instagram. After all, political communication is also evolving in an increasingly complex digital context, where political leaders use social platforms and digital technologies to interact with the public, create new forms of storytelling and participation to build a constant and engaging presence (Sorice 2020). It is in this context that social media content plays a crucial role in making political communication attractive and engaging, using innovative production and content techniques (Battista 2023b). In

this article, therefore, we will explore the mechanisms that govern the new environment and aim to analyze how Zelensky has adapted to new technologies and digital platforms to promote his image and interact with the public in a continuously evolving political communication context. On the other hand, it should be emphasized that during this conflict, propaganda images disseminated through social media reached a wide audience, often surpassing geographical and linguistic barriers, and digital platforms provided conflict groups and actors with immediate and global online presence, allowing them to reach and engage with people directly without traditional filters or intermediaries. Furthermore, the visual and engaging nature of Instagram content, such as photos, videos, and graphics, amplified the impact of propaganda images during conflicts. These visual communication means can evoke intense emotions, manipulate perceptions, and influence public opinion. Images of atrocities, violence, or victims can be used to provoke outrage, solidarity, or fear, aiming to gain support or followers for a particular cause or ideology. Of course, in our case, there is a notable aspect to consider, as entering the agenda and the spotlight hinges on the leader and their personal traits, humanized stories, and spectacular anecdotes that break from the ordinary. The central role of the leader is indispensable; however, possessing a solid political background and competence in managing public resources alone is not sufficient to ensure success. It is also essential for the leader to possess refined communication skills, aesthetic charm, and the ability to masterfully handle political affairs. These communicative characteristics are easily recognizable in the broader context of the political environment and can be classified as a penetrating communicative profile due to its "close," "every day," and "accessible" nature for the vast audience (Bentivegna 2014, De Rosa 2014, Giansante 2014). In the case of Zelensky, his remarkable success is based on a set of fundamental elements as described by Gutiérrez Rubí (2022). Firstly, his intrinsic personal story, which serves as the primary motivational driving force for him; secondly, his extraordinary command of language, allowing him to communicate effectively and persuasively; thirdly, his skill in staging, characterized by a heroic aesthetic that contributes to creating a strong emotional impact on the audience; fourth, his consistent use of live streaming through selfie videos, enabling him to maintain a constant and engaging online presence; and finally, projecting an image of a leader unusually close, differentiating himself from traditional stereotypes, establishing a connection and closeness with the audience. These five pillars form the basis of his extraordinary success and demonstrate the absolute centrality of Instagram in this arena. Therefore, it is imperative that political leaders possess communication skills, aesthetic charm, telegenic and rhetorical abilities, as well as other related qualities (Berrocal Gonzalo 2004). It is evident that leaders themselves focus on their personal qualities of affability and likability, believing that emotional consensus can overcome the resistance of an audience less attracted to formal politics (Langer 2010). It is therefore understandable that some scholars use terms like "pop politics" (Mazzoleni and Sfardini 2009) or "celebrity politics" (Richardson 2015) to describe this communicative landscape. Online pop politics (Mazzoleni and Bracciale 2019) represents an extension of this communicative style into the virtual sphere. In a hybrid communication context (Chadwick 2017), where traditional media integrate and coexist with social networks, the latter have allowed

many actors to gain autonomy and have a voice in the public sphere. Not only have citizens, who were once marginalized and relegated to a role of passive public, gained visibility using digital platforms, but political parties have also gained such visibility and learned to reach the electorate using these tools, especially since the 2008 US presidential election campaign (Bimber 2014). All of this is done with the awareness of the clear transition from party democracy, where intermediaries favored citizens, to the democracy of the public (Manin 1995), based on the direct, political, and communicative bond between leadership and citizens. The logic of representation is transformed into that of representation, where the depth of analysis and discussion typical of elected assemblies gives way to the pursuit of deliberative speed favored by the media (Sorice 2011). The forms to create a sense of intimacy between politicians and supporters are based on visual aspects closely related to the use of images and videos (López-Rabadán and Doménech-Fabregat 2021). In this overall scenario, Instagram maximizes the self-representation capacity of politicians and can easily convey their sensationalized image. In this social media platform, candidates can make themselves known professionally or from a personal perspective through the deliberate choice of elements they include in their images, such as symbols or locations (Bellido-Pérez and Gordillo-Rodríguez 2022, Gordillo-Rodríguez and Bellido-Pérez 2021). In this context, Instagram serves as a "virtual billboard" (Muñoz and Towner 2017), where self-referential representation is manifested, privileging aesthetics and image over programmatic content (Ferré-Pavia and Codina 2022). This is a communicative arena where visually appealing messages are conveyed, aiming to capture the audience's attention through engaging aesthetics and a distinctive visual identity. However, this emphasis on the visual aspect can lead to a reduction in programmatic content, as the primary goal becomes the creation of an imaginative and engaging narrative, rather than a detailed presentation of political programs and proposals. This confirms that the sharing of visual media has become a hallmark of contemporary internet culture (Mirzoeff 2016). In conclusion, this war, which also takes place on social media, has opened new horizons for the dissemination of propaganda images during conflicts. The visual, engaging, and immediate nature of social media has made these platforms powerful communication tools for conflict actors, allowing them to reach a wide audience and influence public opinion. However, it will be crucial to critically evaluate such images, verify sources, and consider the context to avoid manipulation and the spread of misleading or distorted information. The current President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky, is a significant example of a leader who has effectively harnessed and leveraged social media from a "spectacular" perspective, using it to further his political cause. This communicative strategy extends beyond the wartime context that characterizes our study period. It traces back to 2019 when Zelensky assumed the presidential office through national elections. These elections marked his political debut; up until that point, Zelensky was primarily known in his country for his work as a producer and actor, having starred in the hit series "Servant of the People," where he played the role of the president (Ryabinska 2020). Zelensky's media notoriety led to widespread support for his candidacy as the population appreciated the figure of an outsider at a time when traditional political parties were increasingly discredited (Rohozinska and Shpak 2019). This is how the fictional

president became real, and the "Servant of the People" party transitioned from the small screen to governing a country, serving as a paradigm of celebrity politics and evoking the role of other figures in the international political landscape. Thus, Volodymyr Zelensky constitutes an interesting case of how humor linked to "spectacularization" can have a significant impact on politics. Going deeper, his brilliant performance represents an example of how these soft arguments, when coupled with a clear political strategy, can be used as an effective tool to engage and mobilize the public in politics, even in serious contexts like leading a nation (Battista 2023c). More recently, the outbreak of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 brought Volodymyr Zelensky into the international spotlight. The war did not disrupt the connection between the president and his social media; on the contrary, it strengthened it, becoming Zelensky's preferred channel of communication with the population. Investigations conducted so far confirm that Instagram continues to be the most crucial platform in Zelensky's and his communication team's strategy. Through this tool, the president has raised awareness and mobilized citizens beyond Ukraine's borders, keeping the media and other politicians informed in real-time about the progress of the war and the decisions made. In short, he can control the narrative without intermediaries, on his terms, and with a high probability of it going viral (Olivares et al. 2022). Through the production of videos in which Zelensky displays emotions, empathy, and charisma, he has garnered widespread support in the international public opinion. He has encouraged the Ukrainian people to resist aggression and called for solidarity from other countries. In his speeches, Zelensky uses specific references to cities, towns, villages attacked, individuals killed, and their stories, using powerful words like "justice, truth, evil, courage, tyranny, democracy, power, leadership, friendship, betrayal, and God" (Dyczok and Chung 2022) to create a sense of closeness. This communicative approach involves a blending that relies on facial expressions, gestures, and tone of voice, in addition to words, to create an engaging and persuasive communication experience. As demonstrated, this strategy aims to establish an emotional connection with the audience and convey a sense of authenticity and closeness between the leader and the citizens. In order to analyze the contemporary phenomenon of global war and its strong social media exposure, our case study will seek to highlight the process underscored by constant 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 the understanding of the role of spectacularization in social media communication. Furthermore, what is proposed is based on the classic concept of the "5W" in journalism, a methodological approach that aims to gather and organize information comprehensively and exhaustively. The "5W," representing the fundamental questions of Who, What, When, Where, and Why, constitute a widely adopted conceptual framework in journalism to ensure comprehensive coverage of events and accurate presentation of information. The application of the "5W" is extended to the analysis of photographic, video, and audiovisual content on social media and in other communicative contexts. This approach seeks to systematically identify and understand the actors involved, the topics addressed, the timing and location of events, as well as the underlying motivations for such representations. Using this formula in this context allows for a critical examination of the nature and communicative objectives of such content, thereby contributing to a deeper

understanding of emerging communicative dynamics in contemporary media. It should be noted, however, that in this research, a significant modification was made to the original model, wherein the "What" variable was eliminated. This decision was made because the main theme of all the publications under consideration directly related to the war itself. Additionally, some minor adjustments were made to the original model to adapt the categories to the peculiarities of the analyzed sample. As an example, a new category, namely cinematic staging, was included, which proved relevant for the content analysis. These adjustments to the original model have been made to ensure a more accurate and relevant classification of the publications under examination, taking into account the specificities and unique characteristics of the studied sample. The object of the analysis consists of a sample composed of 312 recording units, represented by videos shared by President Zelensky on his official personal Instagram profile (@zelenskiy_official). For the process of extraction, loading, and management of the videos, a manual approach was used using the Google Sheets tool. This tool was adopted as a means to organize and manage the data systematically and structured. The extraction of the videos was carried out by manually selecting and retrieving relevant content from President Zelensky's official Instagram profile. Subsequently, the videos were uploaded to a Google Sheets spreadsheet, allowing for the creation of a centralized database. This manual approach provides greater flexibility and control in the process of data extraction and management, enabling accurate and detailed analysis of the selected videos for research. Concurrently, to gain an overview, we used Fanpage Karma and Blogmeter Liveinsight to evaluate the data collected from social media, such as the number of followers, reach, and engagement of published content, as well as user interactions with brands on social media. This approach also primarily constitutes quantitative research but can be complemented by text analysis and sentiment analysis techniques to understand the meaning and perception of the published content. Moreover, Fanpage Karma and Blogmeter Liveinsight use tools that gather data from various social platforms, providing analysis on content performance, reach, and 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 (Figure 1).

Figure 1. *Trend Reaction Time Span Analysed*
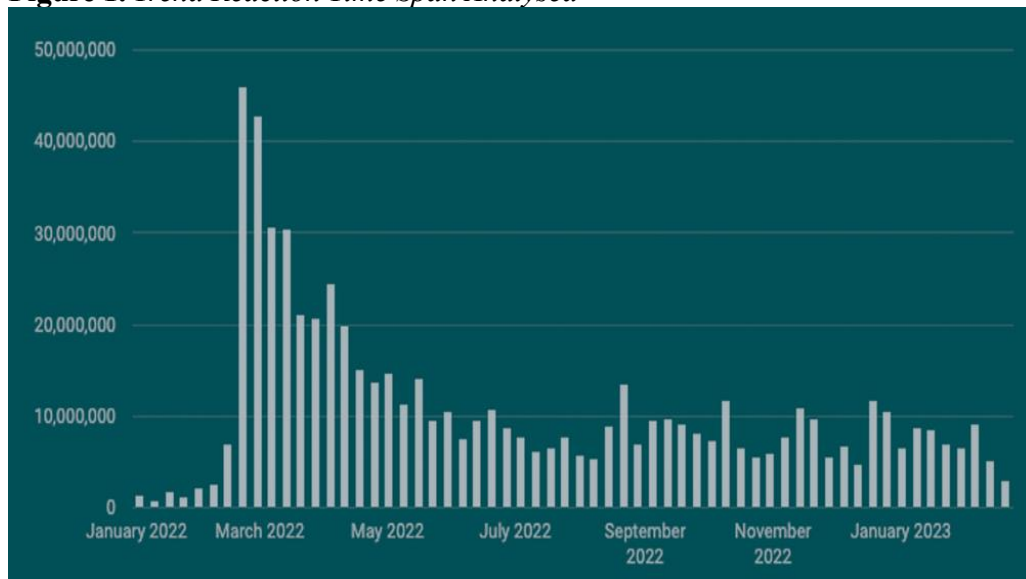
However, one result that can be easily explained by the dynamics of Instagram posts, which include features such as Reels that have a significantly higher engagement capacity. Moreover, out of the 2,500 and more posts made on the account, 1,694 are Reels, and 433 are carousels that combine multiple videos 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 (Figure 2).

Figure 2. *Trend Follower Time Span Analysed*
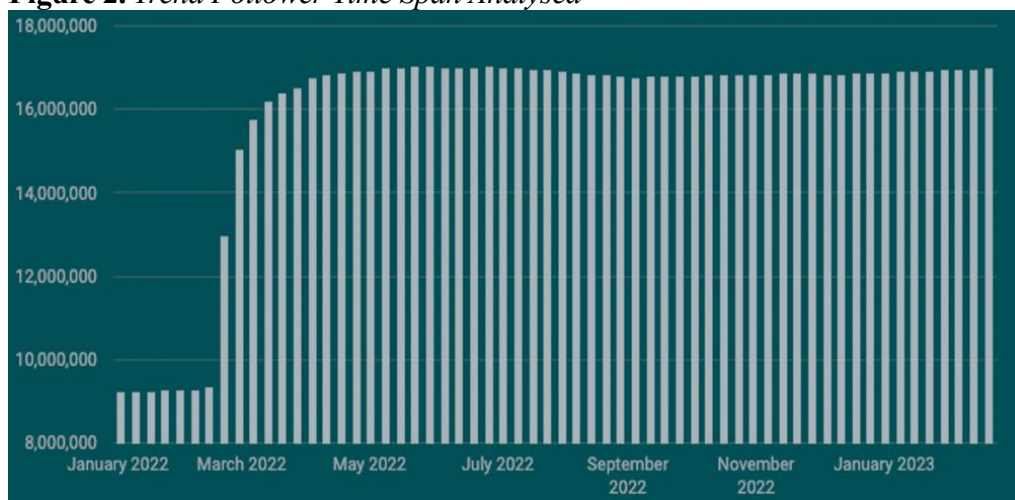
Returning to the video content, it is easy to notice that, given the personalization of political messages as one of the characteristics associated with the spectacularization, the majority of the videos feature Zelensky himself (95.83%). Of these, the president shares the spotlight with foreign politicians 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 through the use of memes, virtual appeals, media propaganda, political marketing, and hashtags. In this new era of communication, social media not only serve as platforms for disseminating political ideas but become the primary instruments for influencing public opinion and mobilizing the masses. Politicians clash virtually, employing all available tactics of persuasion and manipulation on social media to win consensus and gain political advantages. The war shifts to a digital terrain, where communication strategies become crucial for political success. The use of memes, virtual appeals, media propaganda, political marketing, and hashtags becomes an integral part of this new form of conflict. Politicians seek to capture users' attention and support through creative use of images, persuasive messages, and engaging narratives. These tools allow them to convey political messages immediately, virally, and extensively, reaching a wide audience and influencing public opinion on a global scale. In this context, the war in Ukraine stands out as a significant case study, where social media plays a paramount role in shaping opinions and political mobilization. The extensive use of digital tools to promote one's political agenda and engage citizens reflects a radical shift in political communication and the dynamics of contemporary conflicts. Therefore, Zelensky's experience marks a turning point in political communication, paving the way for a new era in which social media assumes a central role in waging wars and manipulating public opinion. This phenomenon raises a series of reflections that now and in the future require critical consideration of the ethical and political responsibility associated with the use of social media as tools of

propaganda and persuasion, as well as the need to develop new skills and strategies to navigate this complex communicative landscape. However, the use of social media and the importance of Instagram are subtly reflected in the words of Dalia Al-Aquidi, a Senior Fellow at the Center for Security Policy, who admitted during an interview that "without Volodymyr Zelensky's media strategy, the situation in Ukraine could be much worse (...) Zelensky has literally transformed in our eyes as if, in a world heavily shaped by Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, Twitter, Facebook, and other platforms, the president spent much of his life rehearsing precisely for this moment." These words illustrate how Zelensky's career and his background as an entertainer have proven strategic in a dramatic situation, teetering between life and death, and how the spectacularization of events has created a sense of closeness to the Ukrainian people in the international community.

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