Refrains of Solidarity – #StandWithUkraine on TikTok

Geboers, M.; Pilipets, E.

DOI
10.1515/9783111360874
10.1515/9783111360874-021

Publication date
2025

Document Version
Final published version

Published in
Geschichte auf Instagram und TikTok

Geschichte auf Instagram und TikTok

Perspektiven auf Quellen und Praktiken

Herausgegeben von
Mia Berg, Andrea Lorenz und Kristin Oswald

DE GRUYTER
OLDENBOURG

ISBN 978-3-11-135142-1
e-ISBN (PDF) 978-3-11-136087-4
e-ISBN (EPUB) 978-3-11-136135-2
ISSN 2569-7625
DOI https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111360874

Library of Congress Control Number: 2025930558

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über http://dnb.dnb.de abrufbar.

Einbandabbildung: Sarah Gorf-Roloff | Studio Ranokel
Translation of the illustration: „No, Grandma! Now again in 60 seconds for TikTok“
Satz: Integra Software Services Pvt. Ltd.
Druck und Bindung: CPI books GmbH, Leck

www.degruyter.com
Fragen zur allgemeinen Produktsicherheit:
productsafety@degruyterbrill.com

Marloes Geboers, Elena Pilipets

Refrains of Solidarity – #StandWithUkraine on TikTok

Abstract: Whereas hashtags on social media connect content to a wider audience in a technical sense, the connective fabric that binds people together is weaved by stories, experiences, and affective tensions.[1] Although these stories cannot be fully captured by hashtags retrospectively, hashtags still offer a glimpse into the contested engagements that weave semantic webs. In this chapter, we go beyond mapping hashtag-mediated discourses in order to explore webs of affective associations around #StandWithUkraine. These webs create a space for stories to be told, each with its own texture and tonality. Reflecting on #StandWithUkraine TikTok posts from 2022, we see them as "precipitates" of underlying structures of feeling.[2] We demonstrate how associated co-hashtagging creates a present that encompasses both past and future visions of a peaceful Ukraine. Amid a collapsed sense of temporality shaped by the Russian invasion, it is the hashtag's anticipatory nature that fuels collective storytelling and sustains hope. We also show that the *global* attention economy shapes the visible historical traces "left behind". These traces, centred on highly engaged posts, fit within TikTok's visibility logic, providing merely a snapshot of platform-mediated war history.

1 Introduction

> On May 8 [2022], Zelenskyy released a black-and-white video that I started watching but then paused indefinitely. I can no longer stomach all these more and more beautiful presidential videos. Something important is lost, precisely where he struggles to grasp your attention with that upgraded camerawork and his significantly improved speeches. The video tries to achieve the impossible – speaking to so many different audiences that it feels a little bit schizophrenic. We are burnout here, quite literally so. But the rest of the world is bored. Two months. This is how long it can pay attention to a war.[3]

1 Zizi Papacharissi, Affective Publics: Sentiment, Technology, and Politics, Oxford 2015.

2 Rebecca Coleman, Theorizing the present: Digital media, pre-emergence and infra-structures of feeling, in: Cultural Studies 32/4 (2018), p. 600–622, doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2017.1413121; Raymond Williams/Michael Orrom, Preface to Film (UK 1954), London 1954.

3 Svitlana Matviyenko, Dispatches from the Place of Immanence, part 10, in: Institute of Network Cultures (blog), 31.5.2022, networkcultures.org/blog/2022/05/31/dispatches-from-the-place-of-imminence-part-10/

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111360874-021

At the beginning of July 2022, the authors of this chapter were part of a collaborative data sprint hosted at the University of Amsterdam.[4] At that time, the full-scale invasion of Ukraine was ongoing for 4 months. The quote above, from media theorist Svitlana Matviyenko's war diary, was among many other things that were reaching us through global news headlines and social platforms. Matviyenko describes a sense of unease and tension when viewing the increasingly "beautiful" presidential videos designed to capture the public's attention, which is notoriously quick to wane. In an ephemeral media ecology, collective memories depend on the narratives that manage to stick and produce "a story" before they get forgotten. As war fatigue set in and news headlines were emerging, we engaged in a week-long cross-platform exploration of posts with the hashtag #StandWithUkraine with 14 international participants. Our reflection below focuses on the evolvement of "affective publics"[5] assembled through associated co-hashtags in the first 4 months (February 2022 to July 2022) of war reporting on TikTok – a platform that became crucial in mediating people's everyday lives during Russia's military invasion.

Dubbed "the first TikTok war",[6] TikTok's audience engagement with the war in Ukraine demands critical and ethical scrutiny. This is partly due to the collapse of contexts it entails, prompted through TikTok-specific vernaculars, which can both amplify and obscure the harsh realities of the conflict. The rise of TikTok during the COVID-19 lockdowns popularised the short video format, blending on-the-ground war reporting with influencer commentary and giving birth to terms like WarTok – a portmanteau of "TikTok" and "war", celebrating "TikTok's Amazing Russian-Ukraine War Videos".[7] In this chapter, we reflect on the stories some of these videos captured, suggesting a shift in focus from the sensationalist stance of WarTok to a situated account of networked audiencing practices[8] and "infra-structures of feeling"[9] that emerged through co-hashtagging. We believe this approach is not only useful for analysing events but also for researching them from a current as well as a historical perspective. By examining how present events are documented

4 The data sprint was part of the Digital Methods Initiative Summer School 2022, for project details, see: Marloes Geboers et al., How (long) do we #standwithukraine, in: digital methods initiative (blog), 11.8.2022, www.digitalmethods.net/Dmi/Summerschool2022Howlongdowestandwithukraine

5 Papacharissi, Affective publics.

6 Thomas L. Friedman, We have Never Been Here Before, in: The New York Times, 25.2.2022, www.nytimes.com/2022/02/25/opinion/putin-russia-ukraine.html

7 Matteo Mobilio, Welcome to WarTok, in: New York Magazine, 28.2.2022, nymag.com/intelligencer/2022/02/tiktok-ukraine-war-video.html

8 Gillian Rose, Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials, Oxford 2016.

9 Williams/Orrom, Preface to film; Coleman, Theorizing the present.

on TikTok and other platforms, we gain insights into how history is intertwined with online-mediated everyday experiences. As of Spring 2024, with the early months of the Ukraine war being considered history, we show how individual engagements with current events are constantly in flux, transforming into collective memories.

2 Digital Audiences in Times of War

Central to understanding the evolution of mediated war and its impact on memory construction is the early twenty-first-century shift from a monolithic "broadcast ecology",[10] in which narratives were controlled top-down by media and governments, to more diffuse participatory practices involved in the (re-)mediation of war. In contemporary digital spheres, numerous institutional and private actors are engaged in clicking, sharing, and generating war-related content. Decentralised forms of documentation and memory-making now supplement or even replace institutionally controlled narratives. Journalists, traditionally seen as agents of memory, are joined by "the many", who co-constitute the present and its remembrance through ongoing social media interactions. Thus, participatory environments of platforms that afford these interactions shape our perception of the past and the present by continuously updating, recommending, and moderating user-generated content. It is against this background that we follow Olga Boichak and Andrew Hoskins in suggesting that "digital connectivity, the explosion of information, and pervasive surveillance are the main mechanisms through which so many participants now have influence in war".[11]

On social media platforms, such influence often translates into visibility measured by the intensity of engagement around posts, accounts, and other forms of online presence. Participatory storytelling and engaging content thrive in a networked environment distinct from institutionally controlled information channels. TikTok, by mainstreaming the short-video format, has expanded conventional text- and image-based sharing practices.[12] Its multimodal affordances for memetic self-expression and combinatorial performance pull "onto the stage" TikTokers' bodies and intimate physical spaces: their houses, their neighbourhoods, their schools, their offices, and so on.[13] This logic of "getting to see everything" paves the

10 Olga Boichak/Andrew Hoskins, My War: Participation in Warfare, in: Digital War 3/1 (2022), p. 1–8, doi.org/10.1057/s42984-022-00060-7.

11 Ibid., S. 2.

12 D. Bondy Valdovinos Kaye et al., TikTok: Creativity and Culture in Short Video, New York 2022.

13 Trevor Boffone, TikTok Cultures in the United States, London 2022.

way for parasocial alliances with the audience. Providing a certain degree of intimacy, it is a logic that holds even when TikTokers post from a war zone. This culminates in a (weirdly fascinating) memetic juxtaposition that emerges when elements of warfare (a bomb shelter, the sound of a siren, etc.) disrupt TikTok's otherwise more conventional content recommendations – lip sync battles, comedy, and dance challenges. The affective force is evident in the popularity of posts featuring people in bathrobes packing emergency bags to the tune of a frivolous song or "dancing soldiers" in combat gear.[14]

Expanding on the platform's memetic logic and the mnemonic work of memes,[15] we argue that part of the sensationalist hype surrounding the "first TikTok war" was also rooted in the intensified convergence between top-down "big media" narratives and those coming from the so-called small media.[16] The new routine of "editing, posting, circulating, linking, liking, mixing, and remediating digital content" every day[17] is conceptualised in two ways: as potentially competing with the mass media coverage and as shaping the dominant Western narrative of the invasion from the outset. Rather than simply disrupting the news,[18] internet memes and traditional media narratives converged.

Against this background, while we emphasise the material affordances of TikTok, our study is primarily interested in the stories that connected pro-Ukrainian publics[19] in the first months of an ongoing struggle against Russian forces. Following Zizi Papacharissi,[20] we contend that while technologies network, it is the stories that *connect* people. In Papacharissi's work on social media as storytelling technologies, the hashtag is seen as an entity where the technology of connectivity and hypertextuality converges with semantic meaning-making. "More than words", hashtags are linguistic markers that function as inline metadata signifying the intent with which a person uploads content to platforms.[21] In this way, hash-

14 Marcus Bösch, Understanding TikTok, tiktoktiktoktiktok.substack.com/

15 Lisa Ellen Silvestri, Memeingful Memories and the Art of Resistance, in: New Media & Society 20/11(2018), p. 3997–4016.

16 Andrew Hoskins, A New Memory of War, in: Barbie Zelizier/Kennen Teneboim-Weinblatt (ed.), Journalism and Memory, London 2014, p. 179–191.

17 Hoskins, A new memory of war, p. 180–181.

18 Silvestri, Memeingful memories and the art of resistance.

19 Scholars studying the vernacular practices on TikTok that network pro-Russian publics include the authors Boris Noordenbos and Marc Tuters. See, for example Marc Tuters/Boris Noordenbos, Ambient propaganda on pro-Kremlin "WarTok": From unidirectional influence to multidirectional imitation (in preparation).

20 Papacharissi, Affective publics.

21 Michele Zappavigna, Ambient Affiliation: A Linguistic Perspective on Twitter, in: New Media & Society 13/5 (2011), p. 788–806.

tag-sharing gives rise to ambient forms of affiliation with user collectives sharing, for example, a political stance.

Treating hashtags as resources for sharing and storytelling we mapped engagement that co-occurred with #StandWithUkraine on TikTok between February and July 2022. This approach provides a temporal overview of the recorded networked conversation and reveals how solidarity memes contribute to constructing collective and situated memory. In our analysis, we put additional emphasis on how these storytelling affordances co-construct fluid boundaries between in-groups and work to "infra-structure" feelings about the past, the present, and the future.[22] In the case of #StandWithUkraine, a present is "produced" that subsumes both past and future imaginations of a peaceful Ukraine. Within a collapsed sense of temporality shaped by people's shared experience, it is the anticipatory stance of the hashtag that drives collective storytelling to sustain hope or what Papacharissi describes as the "not-yet-fully formed" possibilities and potentialities of affect.[23]

We regard the (oftentimes memetic[24]) posts networked through #StandWith Ukraine as precipitates of structures of feeling that were complicit in establishing expressive connections. The narrative demarcation is afforded by co-hashtagging. TikToks can be both conduits of affect and drivers of memetic engagement: their multimodal assembly works to inspire future contributions by building on already circulating content. The polysemous nature of memes allows users to transform and diversify the collective stories they tell, shaping also the collective memory. Working as participatory objects that capture collective imaginaries, memes can disrupt dominant narratives and modify how people relate to unfolding events. Within the demarcated space of solidarity and pro-Ukraine messages, memes come to serve as refrains of steadfastness and unwavering support.

22 Coleman, Theorizing the present.

23 Papacharissi, Affective publics, p. 14.

24 Memetic templates were found in the use of clips depicting farmer vehicles being used for military purposes, or the posts that are networked through the 2022 winning Eurovision song "Stefania" by Ukrainian participant, Kalush Orchestra, attaining the status of a so-called aural meme. However, many collected posts were also pertaining to edited remixes that, at least within our dataset, were not memetically tethered to other posts and, as such, can be seen as stand-alone posts within the collected dataset.

3 Presenting Solidarity in the Early Months of the Full-Scale War

We collected TikTok posts and metadata (play and like counts, account names, hashtags, captions, etc.) using the browser extension tool Zeeschuimer.[25] Querying the hashtag #StandWithUkraine during a period from February to early July 2022 gave us a dataset consisting of 967 posts. This number is by far not exhaustive, as browser-based tools are limited in what they can collect from the platform. The browser version of a platform will make a pre-curation of posts displayed when someone searches for a hashtag. This curation process is partly opaque and differs for each platform, but we can derive from post metadata that highly visible and recent posts are prioritised in the rankings of given search results on TikTok. The Zeeschuimer tool, collecting via the browser, can only collect data endpoints that are publicly available through the API, which can be seen as an interactive "filter" or layer between the user and the backend architecture of the platform. Based on a selection of post metadata, which includes the time of publication and co-hashtags, we generated a rankflow graph[26] using the 4CAT capture and analysis tool[27] to trace the evolution of hashtags that co-occurred with #StandWithUkraine over time. The visualisation shows the shifts in relation to relevance as it registers engagement of the top 25 most frequently used tags per month.

The platform's memetic logic seeps through especially in the most prominent hashtags entangled with #StandWithUkraine, such as #Meme, #Funny, and #Comedy (see Fig. 1). They allude to a vernacular wherein war converges with humour, garnering tension that is both uneasy and compelling. The platform-induced visuality of warfare was channelled through influential accounts of soldiers as well as of civilians, "crowding out" the accounts of news outlets in terms of audience engagement. The most liked and viewed videos were those from influencers, many of whom became TikTok stars early in the war. In contrast, news outlets, which had long ignored the platform, rushed to post videos but did not achieve the same level of success.[28]

---

25 Stijn Peeters, Zeeschuimer, in: GitHub (2021), github.com/digitalmethodsinitiative/zeeschuimer

26 A rankflow graph for social media posts is a visualisation that shows the performance and engagement of social media posts over time. Some aspects taken into account are the engagement rate with numbers of interactions, reach, development over time, and comparison of different posts.

27 Stijn Peeters/Sal Hagen, The 4CAT Capture and Analysis Toolkit: A Modular Tool for Transparent and Traceable Social Media Research, in: Computational Communication Research 4/2 (2022), computationalcommunication.org/ccr/article/view/120

28 Fred Skulthorp, The age of the news influencer, TikTok reveals a broader existential crisis facing the media and our consumption of the news, in: The Critic, 27.2.2024, thecritic.co.uk/the-age-of-the-news-influencer/

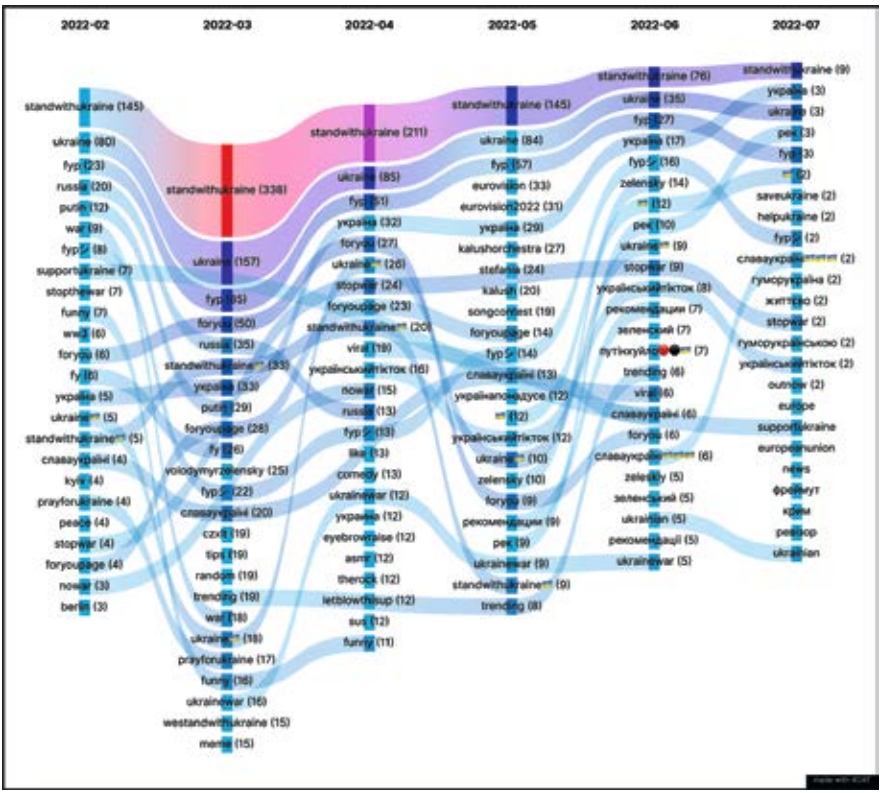

Fig. 1: This Rankflow depicts the top 25 most frequently used hashtags per month, spanning February 2022 to 8 July 2022.

As we collected posts until 8 July 2022, our data did not cover the entirety of that month, and because of the full-scale invasion starting towards the end of February, we decided to focus on the 4 months in between. For each month, we sampled #StandWithUkraine posts that were published with (at least) one of the most co-occurring hashtags. The decision to focus on the use of co-hashtags instead of studying dominant accounts and individual contributions is ethically grounded in our exploration of the means through which stories about the war were circulating on TikTok. When selecting hashtag combinations for deeper analysis, we prioritised narrative trajectories over common geographical tags like #Ukraine or #Russia. Popular tags like #fyp and #foryoupage and generic mentions of #memes, #like, #trending, and #ukrainewar were relevant in vernacular terms but not taken into account analytically. While #fyp hashtags can be attributed to users' post-based

virality ambitions, playing into the platform's visibility game,[29] #meme hashtags usually accompany satire focusing on specific events and figures. Our focus on the latter (e.g. #volodimyrzelensky) offers an entry point into emergent storytelling during the first months of the Russian invasion of Ukraine while paying attention to its contextual junctures (e.g. #eurovision). Instead of accounting for individual visible posts, we therefore identified specific hashtag co-occurrences to track their prominence and associations over time through thick descriptions of associated TikToks. This approach helped us understand how different themes and sentiments evolve and amplify the #StandWithUkraine message, relating to temporally situated discourses.

3.1 March: Zelenskyy and Memetic Templates

In March, dominant co-hashtags led us to focus on #VolodymyrZelensky[30] that ties together 26 posts, of which 15 were published by the same account, imitating Zelenskyy-associated posts on Instagram.[31] On both platforms, visual performativity requires personal disclosure so as to elevate the "construction of authenticity".[32] Content-wise, however, authenticity plays out differently on different platforms. Whereas Zelenskyy can be seen in almost all of the Instagram posts,[33] on TikTok, within the posts where #StandWithUkraine and #VolodymyrZelensky co-occur, he is often visually absent. However, he is mentioned in the caption, and often also in overlaid text on top of videos or in the audio of the post. Inherent to these logics of "self-referential staging" is the style-over-content rationale,[34] rendering polit-

29 Crystal Abidin, Grief Hypejacking: Influencers, #ThoughtsAndPrayers, and the Commodification of Grief on Instagram, in: The Information Society 38/3 (2022), p. 174–187, doi.org/10.1080/01972243.2022.2071212.

30 The hashtag #VolodymyrZelensky is spelled with one "y" at the end, while his name in Ukrainian is actually spelled with two. This is a commonplace digital phenomenon: when global digital publics use hashtags oblivious to exact spelling of names, a hashtag nonetheless will go viral and it will be repeated in its "misspelling". Many news outlets outside of Ukraine are even adopting this and use the single "y" version.

31 Maite Plazas-Olmedo/Pablo López-Rabadán, Selfies and Speeches of a President at War: Volodymyr Zelenskyy's Strategy of Spectacularization on Instagram, in: Media and Communication 11/2 (2023), p. 188–202, doi.org/10.17645/mac.v11i2.6366.

32 Mattias Ekman/Andreas Widholm, Political communication in an age of visual connectivity: Exploring Instagram practices among Swedish politicians, in: Northern Lights 15/1 (2017), p. 15–32.

33 Plazas-Olmedo, López-Rabadán, Selfies and speeches of a president at war.

34 Carme Pavia/Mariona Codina, Narrativa de Campaña en Instagram: Espectáculo y Autorrepresentación de Candidatos. El Caso de las Elecciones Generales 2019, in: Index Comunicación: Re-

ical programmes secondary to the personality of politicians. Plazas Olmedo and López-Rabadán[35] refer to four key features of Instagram that apply to TikTok as well: 1) the importance and focus given to the visual (the image); 2) the simplification of messages; 3) intense personalisation; and 4) the strategic use of private life.

TikTok's short video format enhances seriality and narrativity, emphasising personalisation, simplification, and celebritisation. This results in memetic micro-stories with punchlines that convey shared sentiments about Zelenskyy, reinforcing his image as a wartime leader. Zelenskyy's background as a comedian and an actor almost naturally fits the profile of a successful meme template, making his character adaptable to humorous memes, albeit with serious undertones. Thus, many posts tap into humour, an example being a post showing voters in a booth labelled "POV: Russian voters". An animated ballot shows someone trying to vote for Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, but as soon as the vote is submitted, the ticked box changes to Russian President Vladimir Putin. Set to the frivolous tune of "Monkeys Spinning Monkeys", the post has a light-hearted tone, though it conveys a grim message about the reality of Russian politics.

Further #VolodymyrZelensky videos published by the same account similarly provide critique and commentary on Russia and its lack of upholding democracy and democratic values. Many of these posts contain montage-style visual assemblies where the heads of state of Ukraine (as a democracy) are displayed parallel to those of Belarus and Russia, mocking the dictatorial character of both governments. Making such stories searchable by association with Zelenskyy, hashtags connect people and ideas in highly contested political contexts, amplifying the reach of content through "name dropping". They serve as framing devices that affiliate people with ideas.[36] Such collective affiliations allow crowds to be rendered into affective publics that weave a fabric on the basis of a shared sentiment or stance.[37] Signalling the presence of a crowd, hashtags get charged with affective investment of the many; mentioning the Zelenskyy hashtag in unrelated posts therefore ensures these micro-stories associate with his character and the democratic values his government upholds, contrasting with Putin's regime.

vista Científica en el Ámbito de la Comunicación Aplicada 12/1 (2022), p. 77–98, doi.org/10.33732/ixc/12/01Narrat.

35 Plazas-Olmedo, López-Rabadán, Selfies and speeches of a president at war.

36 Michele Zappavigna, Ambient affiliation, p. 789.

37 Papacharissi, Affective publics.

3.2 April: #українськийтікток, Humour, and Remix in Solidarity

#українськийтікток (#UkrainianTikTok), an emergent co-hashtag in April, marks a contextual junction from a global space of solidarity to a local space of humour and support. The 16 posts tagged with #StandWithUkraine and related hashtags in Ukrainian fall into two primary trajectories: humour and music. One track, associated with #українськийтікток, features humorous, light-hearted home comedy skits by aspiring Ukrainian influencers. These videos reinterpret daily conversations about the war, blending comedy and interactivity in staged settings. Unlike creators documenting the events on the ground (city streets, bomb shelters, soldiers in combat, etc.), these performers comment on breaking news from the perspective of those under attack, but with a vernacular twist. They use pointed humour, often enhanced with contextual video stickers, alongside common hashtags like #славаукраїні 🇺🇦🇺🇦🇺🇦 (#GloryToUkraine) and #українапонадусе 🙏🇺🇦♡ (#UkraineAboveAll). The presence of other significant hashtags in the top 25, such as #NoWar and #StopWar, underscores how humour intertwines with political stances.

Combining personal and collective storytelling, the videos shared with emojified hashtags create a sense of shared experience, enabling Ukrainian audiences to connect. The presence of comedy within this particular constellation may also be interpreted as a playful tactic of distraction from the atrocities of war. The juxtaposition of humour and the seriousness of the situation add complexity to the context, inviting various affective responses and spin-offs. The latter emphasise relatability amplified through TikTok's interactive features, while connecting with Ukrainian-speaking users through references to common traditions, social roles, and cultural values.[38] Encompassing different aspects of everyday life, the Ukrainian comedy space extends the performance of the self through a complex mix of well-recognisable contemporary cultural identity markers – babushkas (grandmothers) embodying traditional wisdom, stubbornness, and family values; farmers presented as hardworking and resilient; corrupt officials involved in bribery; activists fighting for civil society; etc. Similar to #VolodymyrZelensky memes, these videos embody what Jodi Dean,[39] borrowing from Walter J. Ong,[40] terms "secondary visuality" – a communicative style collapsing multiple meanings and layers of expression into a single, concise message to create a powerful and resonant narra-

38 Natalia Umansky/Christian Pipal, Dances, Duets, and Debates: Analysing Political Communication and Viewer Engagement on TikTok, in: OSF Preprints, 21.9.2023, osf.io/preprints/osf/g8dbu

39 Jodi Dean, Faces as Commons: The Secondary Visuality of Communicative Capitalism, in: Donatella Della Ratta et al. (ed.), The Aesthetics and Politics of the Online Self, Cham 2021, p. 357–370.

40 Walter Ong, Orality & literacy. The Technologizing of the Word, 2nd Ed., London/New York 2002.

tive. On TikTok, this expressive style, composed of emojis, images, music, hashtags, effects, and stickers, forms the main memetic unit of the platform: video posts that operate through multimodality and remix.

Along an alternative trajectory, the now-inaccessible *@luminous.music* account combined political hashtags with music-related ones to rally support from Ukrainian musicians. In addition to popular hashtags shown, the top 25 hashtags in Fig. 1, the account used less prominent hashtags such as #українськийконтент (#UkrainianContent), #нівійні (#NoWar), and #українськамузика (#UkrainianMusic). Although these co-occurring hashtags are not shown in the RankFlow due to frequency limits, they remain connected to #StandWithUkraine through co-occurrence with #українськийтікток. Video captions featuring popular song lyrics, such as "будь зі мною🫂" ("Be with me") by Ihor Grohotskyi, were frequently published in this space to accompany emotional performances. One of these performances by Andrii Khlyvnyuk, frontman of the Ukrainian band Boombox, turned the folk song "Ой у лузі червона калина" ("Oh, the Red Viburnum in the Meadow") into a viral sensation with an acapella adaptation originally posted on Instagram[41] and shared across other platforms, including TikTok[42] and YouTube,[43] during the early days of the war. Khlyvnyuk recorded the video while wearing combat attire, standing close to Sophia Square in Kyiv, producing material for what may be called "remix in solidarity". Around the world, Khlyvnyuk's acapella performance inspired original songs like Pink Floyd's "Hey, Hey, Rise Up!",[44] collective mashups, and instrumental tributes, while South African musician The Kiffness remixed the performance, donating all profits from the track to support Ukrainian Armed Forces.[45] Among the tributes, a rendition by Ukrainian singer Nataliia Mohylevska, featuring 15 performers singing alongside Khlyvnyuk in a Zoom-style tiled video, garnered over 35 million views on YouTube as of 18 March 2024.[46] As an independent national anthem banned in Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine, the song stands for resil-

41 @andriihorolski, "Маршируют наші добровольці. . .", Instagram-Post, 27.2.2022, www.instagram.com/p/Cae5TydPAxh/?hl=en

42 @lyuksi, "Маршируют наші добровольці. . .", TikTok-Video, 5.3.2022, www.tiktok.com/@lyuksi/video/7071548298473131269

43 @ProSerial, Андрій Хливнюк (Бумбокс) – Червона калина, YouTube-Video, 5.3.2022, www.youtube.com/watch?v=SCGhRdgtidM

44 @PinkFloyd, Hey Hey Rise Up (feat. Andriy Khlyvnyuk of Boombox), YouTube-Video, 7.4.2022, www.youtube.com/watch?v=saEpkcVi1d4

45 @TheKiffness, Ukrainian folk song UA Army remix | Andriy Khlyvnyuk x TheKiffness, YouTube-Video, 4.3.2022, www.youtube.com/watch?v=lu8m5FA2nL8

46 @Наталія Могилевська, Ой у лузі червона калина (концерт "Доброго вечора! Ми з України!"), YouTube-Video, 1.4.2022, www.youtube.com/watch?v=EV_vT0Vud5Q

ience and defiance against oppression, resonating deeply with Ukrainians and supporters worldwide.[47]

3.3 May: #eurovision and Aural Memes

#StandWithUkraine engagement with music peaked in May 2022 when Ukraine won the Eurovision Song Contest in Italy. Ukraine was represented by the hip-hop act Kalush Orchestra with the song "Stefania", a tribute to lead singer Oleh Psiuk's mother. Amid the war, the song became a tribute to all protectors of Ukraine, merging folklore with rap. Kalush Orchestra's Eurovision performance dominated engagement during this period, opening up multiple remix trajectories. The song went viral on TikTok in May, with nearly 300,000 videos celebrating Ukraine created since. Although it emerged within the global political theatre of the Eurovision Song Contest, with visible contributions from the highly engaged account *@eurovisionuaofficial*, it continues to be used in videos documenting and condemning the war. In May 2022, "Stefania" was celebrated as an act of national strength during the contest, with the most viewed and liked video showing participants from other countries singing the song as a sign of support. Subsequently, aural memes using "Stefania" both as a sound and as a hashtag emerged, using creative combinations of the song with other TikTok features. One particularly popular variation divided into two video frames shows how an elderly man in the upper frame sings "Stefania" after spitting on Putin shown giving a speech in the lower frame. The frame-trespassing spit effect became a recurring trend, highlighting TikTok's role in fostering creative and symbolic expressions of resistance.[48]

Building on Abidin and Kaye's[49] concept of "templatability", we understand such creative oral renditions in their capacity to prescribe replicable linkages between different layers of TikTok engagement. Aural linkages created through replicating or remediating someone else's sound can intersect with other layers of expression that reinforce memetic circulation: TikTok video effects, hashtags, and

47 Crimea Wedding Party Arrested, Fined For Playing Ukrainian Patriotic Song, in: The Moscow Times, 4.10.2022, www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/09/14/crimea-wedding-party-arrested-fined-for-playing-ukrainian-patriotic-song-a78790

48 @perm36_6, #втоп, TikTok-Video, 18.5.2022, www.tiktok.com/@perm36_6/video/7099103763591482626

49 Crystal Abidin/D. Bondy Valdovinus Kaye, Audio Memes, Earworms, and Templatability: The "Aural Turn" of Memes on TikTok, in: Chloe Arkenbout et al. (ed.), Critical Meme Reader: Global Mutations of the Viral Image, Amsterdam 2021, networkcultures.org/blog/publication/critical-meme-reader-global-mutations-of-the-viral-image/

overlaid stickers, among other elements, add a certain consistency to and expand expressive possibilities in user performances. Using on-spot multimodal editing, these vernacular interventions express user moods, without going into too much detail or opening up space for nuanced reflections.

3.4 June: The Surfacing of "In-Group Vernaculars"

As the international gaze shifted to other events and the Eurovision Song Contest, which had prolonged attention on the war, ended, more localised and tactical engagements began to emerge. The frequencies of cross-tagging between #StandWithUkraine and #VolodymyrZelensky (March), #UkrainianTikTok (April), and #Eurovision (May) point to the presence of a "global gaze" in these months. In June, presumably due to the shifting of this gaze, hashtag frequencies drop, and alongside this quantitative drop, there is also a qualitative, semantic shift visible in surfacing of hashtags that were present all along but that – now that attention is more dispersed – find their way into "hashtag popularity rankings". The hashflag[50] #путінхуйло 🔴⚫🇺🇦 (Putin-khuilo, or Putin is a dickhead) points to posts that are more localised in their communicative aim; these posts are targeted to in-groups who recognise symbols of belonging.

The hashtag #путінхуйло 🔴⚫🇺🇦, with seven posts, exemplifies what we have termed "memetic ball play", where slur-like tags aim to define belonging by provoking a reaction from others. Within TikTok imitation publics,[51] the cross-cultural exchange of artefacts and their relational assembly give rise to "trend-hijacking", meaning that particular memes such as "countryball" come to feature in other realms. The red-and-black balls in #путінхуйло 🔴⚫🇺🇦 reference the "countryballs meme", which originated on the anonymous image board platform Krautchan.[52] This meme features countryballs representing national stereotypes in geopolitical contexts. In the #StandWithUkraine space, flag ball emojis amplify and delineate national identity, functioning like flags to symbolise territorial victory and convey "with-ness" and "for-ness".[53] The red-and-black Bandera flag, rooted in Ukraine's fight for independence led by Stepan Bandera, symbolises land (black)

50 Tim Highfield, Emoji Hashtags//Hashtag Emoji: Of Platforms, Visual Affect, and Discursive Flexibility, in: First Monday, 9.8.2018, firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/9398/7569

51 Diana Zulli/David James Zulli, Extending the Internet meme: Conceptualizing Technological Mimesis and Imitation Publics on the TikTok Platform, in: New Media & Society 24/8 (2022), p. 1872–1890, doi.org/10.1177/1461444820983603.

52 Tomberry, Polandball, in: Know Your Meme, 7.1.2010, knowyourmeme.com/memes/polandball

53 Sara Ahmed, The Cultural Politics of Emotion, Edinburgh 2004, p. 74.

and the blood shed for freedom (red). This contrasts with Ukraine's official yellow-blue flag, which represents statehood and unity. The Bandera figure evokes the revolutionary spirit and collective memory of Ukraine's struggle for independence, overshadowing his historical association with Nazi Germany and highlighting contemporary resistance against Russian aggression.[54] Meanwhile, the Russian government uses the same figure in its propaganda narratives to justify the need for so-called denazification, further dividing supporters and detractors of Ukraine's national narrative. As a result, the colours associated with Bandera not only serve as symbols of Ukrainian struggle but also simultaneously reinforce and challenge pro-Russian propagandist narratives, eliciting strong reactions in both Russian and Ukrainian communities.

4 Refrains of Solidarity

This chapter has explored hashtag-mediated stories of Ukrainian resistance to the Russian invasion and their unfolding during the first months of the war. Attending to the contextually embedded practices of cross-hashtagging over time, we have traced the emergence of affective publics, in which borrowing, imitation, and adaptation allow users to express their belonging to a shared national identity. Showing support and solidarity, such cultural exchanges feed forward hope and secure attention in ephemeral spaces. Hashtags work as discursive and affective vectors that record and alter social memory by their associative affordances. Their polysemous and open-ended nature accelerates engagement flows pertinent to the attention economy of social platforms. At the same time, the fungibility of cross-hashtagging prevents the over-time solidification of shared memory. What remains for us to observe are what we call "refrains of solidarity" – reverberating interactions marked by strong resonance and frequent repetition.

As an assembly of records capturing users' shifting alignments, the hashtag-afforded storytelling practices on TikTok elevate both the audiences' collective stance and the memetic conventions of the platform. As a narrative device, #StandWithUkraine accumulates and networks charged contributions driven by real-time collective coping. The resilience and steadfastness expressed in people's engage-

54 For more on Bandera's controversial figure, see Olksandr Zaitsev, Demythologizing Bandera: Towards a scholarly history of the Ukrainian nationalist movement, in: Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society 1/2 (2016), p. 411–420; Maryna Shevtsova, Looking for Stepan Bandera: The myth of Ukrainian nationalism and the Russian 'Special Operation', in: Central European Journal of International and Security Studies 16/3 (2022), p. 132–150.

ment with war on TikTok animate collective anticipations of peace that allude both to past and present. Through these participatory refrains, the underlying context- and platform-specific dynamics become visible, materialising as infra-structures of feeling.[55] On social platforms, aspirations and stories materialise in a temporality of the "present moment when everything is fluid and in flux, or in solution".[56] The hashtag-mediated exchanges operating within this temporality combine seemingly contradictory elements of solidity in "structure" with something almost unfathomable such as "feeling". Within the *global* attention economy, #StandWithUkraine subsumes local storytelling under TikTok's visibility logic, providing merely a snapshot of platform-mediated war history.

Bibliography

Abidin, Crystal: Grief Hypejacking: Influencers, #ThoughtsAndPrayers, and the commodification of grief on Instagram, in: The Information Society 38/3 (2022), p. 174–187, doi.org/10.1080/01972243.2022.2071212 (21.10.2024).

Abidin, Crystal/Kaye, D. Bondy Valdovinus: Audio memes, earworms, and templatability: The "Aural Turn" of memes on TikTok, in: Arkenbout, Chloe/Wilson, Jack/Zeeuw, Daniel de (ed.): Critical meme reader: Global mutations of the viral image, Amsterdam 2021, networkcultures.org/blog/publication/critical-meme-reader-global-mutations-of-the-viral-image/ (22.7.2024).

Ahmed, Sara: The Cultural Politics of Emotion, Edinburgh 2004.

Boffone, Trevor: TikTok Cultures in the United States, London 2022.

Boichak, Olga/Hoskins, Andrew: My war: Participation in warfare, in: Digital War, 3/1 (2022), p. 1–8, doi.org/10.1057/s42984-022-00060-7 (21.10.2024).

Bösch, Marcus: Understanding TikTok, tiktoktiktoktiktok.substack.com/ (22.7.2024).

Coleman, Rebecca: Theorizing the present: Digital media, pre-emergence and infra-structures of feeling, in: Cultural Studies 32/4 (2018), p. 600–622, doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2017.1413121 (21.10.2024).

Dean, Jodi: Faces as commons: The secondary visuality of communicative capitalism, in: Della Ratta, Donatella/Lovink, Geert/Numerico, Teresa/Sarram, Peter (ed.): The aesthetics and politics of the online self, Cham 2021, p. 357–370.

Ekman, Mattias/Widholm Andreas: Political communication in an age of visual connectivity: Exploring Instagram practices among Swedish politicians, in: Northern Lights 15/1 (2017), p. 15–32.

Friedman, Thomas L.: We have never been here before, in: The New York Times, 25.2.2022, www.nytimes.com/2022/02/25/opinion/putin-russia-ukraine.html (22.7.2024).

Geboers, Marloes/Pilipets, Elena/Gheli, Francesca/Benedetti, Andrea/Li, Yuru/Sathish, Christa/Lajosi, Krisztina/Almada, Pablo/Xiao, Fan/Cano-Orón, Lorena/Espinzoa, Armando/Zihang, E/Kleszczyńska, Iga/Romansky, Sofia: How (long) do we #standwithukraine, in: digital methods

55 Coleman, Theorizing the present.

56 Williams/Orrom, Preface to film, p. 21.

initiative (blog), 11.8.2022, www.digitalmethods.net/Dmi/Summerschool2022Howlongdowest-andwithukraine (22.7.2024).
Highfield, Tim: Emoji hashtags//Hashtag emoji: Of platforms, visual affect, and discursive flexibility, in: First Monday, 9.8.2018, firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/9398/7569 (22.7.2024).
Hoskins, Andrew: A New Memory of War, in: Zelizier, Barbie/Teneboim-Weinblatt, Kennen (Ed.): Journalism and Memory, London 2014, p. 179–191.
Kaye, D. Bondy Valdovinos/Zeng, Jing/Wikstrom, Patrik: TikTok: Creativity and culture in short video, New York 2022.
Matviyenko, Svitlana: Dispatches from the place of immanence, part 10, in: Institute of Network Cultures (blog), 31.5.2022, networkcultures.org/blog/2022/05/31/dispatches-from-the-place-of-imminence-part-10/ (22.7.2024).
Mobilio, Matteo: Welcome to WarTok, in: New York Magazine, 28.2.2022, nymag.com/intelligencer/2022/02/tiktok-ukraine-war-video.html (21.10.2024).
Ong, Walter: Orality & literacy. The technologizing of the word, 2nd Ed., London/New York 2002.
Papacharissi, Zizi: Affective Publics: Sentiment, Technology, and Politics, Oxford 2015.
Pavia, Carme/Codina, Mariona: Narrativa de Campaña en Instagram: Espectáculo y Autorrepresentación de Candidatos. El Caso de las Elecciones Generales 2019, in: Index Comunicación: Revista Científica en el Ámbito de la Comunicación Aplicada 12/1 (2022), p. 77–98, doi.org./10.33732/ixc/12/01Narrat (21.10.2024).
Peeters, Stijn: Zeeschuimer, in: GitHub (2021), github.com/digitalmethodsinitiative/zeeschuimer (22.7.2024).
Peeters, Stijn/Hagen, Sal: The 4CAT capture and analysis toolkit: A modular tool for transparent and traceable social media research, in: Computational Communication Research 4/2 (2022), computationalcommunication.org/ccr/article/view/120 (22.7.2024).
Plazas-Olmedo, Maite/López-Rabadán, Pablo: Selfies and speeches of a president at war: Volodymyr Zelenskyy's strategy of spectacularization on Instagram, in: Media and Communication 11/2 (2023), p. 188–202, doi.org/10.17645/mac.v11i2.6366 (21.10.2024).
Rose, Gillian: Visual methodologies: An introduction to researching with visual materials, Oxford 2016.
Shevtsova, Maryna: Looking for Stepan Bandera: The myth of Ukrainian nationalism and the Russian 'Special Operation', in: Central European Journal of International and Security Studies 16/3 (2022), p. 132–150.
Silvestri, Lisa Ellen: Memeingful memories and the art of resistance, in: New Media & Society, 20/11 (2018), p. 3997–4016.
Skulthorp, Fred: The age of the news influencer, TikTok reveals a broader existential crisis facing the media and our consumption of the news, in: The Critic, 27.2.2024, thecritic.co.uk/the-age-of-the-news-influencer/ (22.7.2024).
s.N.: Crimea wedding party arrested, fined for playing Ukrainian patriotic song, in: The Moscow Times, 4.10.2022, www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/09/14/crimea-wedding-party-arrested-fined-for-playing-ukrainian-patriotic-song-a78790 (22.7.2024).
Tomberry: Polandball, in: Know Your Meme, 7.1.2010, knowyourmeme.com/memes/polandball (22.7.2024).
Tuters, Marc /Noordenbos, Boris: Ambient propaganda on pro-Kremlin "WarTok": From unidirectional influence to multidirectional imitation (in preparation).
Umansky, Natalia/Pipal, Christian: Dances, duets, and debates: Analysing political communication and viewer engagement on TikTok, in: OSF Preprints, 21.9.2023, osf.io/preprints/osf/g8dbu (22.7.2024).
Williams, Raymond/Orrom, Michael: Preface to Film (UK 1954), London 1954.

Zaitsev, Oleksandr: Demythologizing Bandera: Towards a scholarly history of the Ukrainian nationalist movement, Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society 1/2 (2016), p. 411–420.
Zappavigna, Michele: Ambient affiliation: A linguistic perspective on Twitter, in: New Media & Society, 13/5 (2011), p. 788–806.
Zulli, Diana/Zulli, David James: Extending the internet meme: Conceptualizing technological mimesis and imitation publics on the TikTok Platform, in: New Media & Society 24/8 (2022), p. 1872–1890, doi.org/10.1177/1461444820983603 (21.10.2024).

@andriihorolski: «Марширують наші добровольці. . .», Instagram-Post, 27.2.2022, www.instagram.com/p/Cae5TydPAxh/?hl=en (22.7.2024).
@TheKiffness: Ukrainian folk song UA Army remix | Andriy Khlyvnyuk x TheKiffness, YouTube-Video, 4.3.2022, www.youtube.com/watch?v=lu8m5FA2nL8 (22.7.2024).
@lyuksi: «Марширують наші добровольці. . .», TikTok-Video, 5.3.2022, www.tiktok.com/@lyuksi/video/7071548298473131269 (22.7.2024).
@perm36_6: #втоп, TikTok-Video, 18.5.2022, www.tiktok.com/@perm36_6/video/7099103763591482626 (22.7.2024).
@PinkFloyd: Hey Hey Rise Up (feat. Andriy Khlyvnyuk of Boombox), YouTube-Video, 7.4.2022, www.youtube.com/watch?v=saEpkcVi1d4 (22.7.2024).
@ProSerial: Андрій Хливнюк (Бумбокс) – Червона калина, YouTube-Video, 5.3.2022, www.youtube.com/watch?v=SCGhRdgtidM (22.7.2024).
@Наталія Могилевська: Ой у лузі червона калина (концерт “Доброго вечора! Ми з України!”), YouTube-Video, 1.4.2022, www.youtube.com/watch?v=EV_vT0Vud5Q (22.7.2024).