

Slava Ukraini! Side-taking in Internet Memes on the Russian Invasion of Ukraine

- Pro-Ukrainian Discourse on 9gag.com

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When Russia started its full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, Internet-meme-platforms, like 9gag.com, were dominated by posts concerning the war for months. Especially in times of crises like these, Internet memes as “beacons of public opinion [...] signify which collective and national identities receive approval” (Denisova 2019: 5) and therefore impact and shape public discourses.

This study draws on a corpus of over 3400 posts collected from 9gag.com in March 2023 and includes posts from the war’s beginning until the time of collection. The textual content of these posts goes beyond the classical text in *image macro memes* since 9gag-posts additionally contain a title and tags.

The analysis demonstrates a strong pro-Ukrainian stance, which is expressed both explicitly, e.g. by the prominent salute *Slava Ukraini* – ‘glory to Ukraine’, as well as more implicitly. Results show that less established, emerging memes tend to employ more linguistic features of side-taking to compensate for the lack of contextual information. In contrast, the more established memes, “which have been remixed, parodied [...] and iterated” (Wiggins & Bowers 2015: 1892), rely more on contextual information which is shared knowledge of experienced users.

The interdependence of textual and contextual, therefore also graphic, information in a meme exemplified in this study emphasizes the importance of *multimodality* in digital discourse and therefore memes, which has been focused on in recent research (cf. Herring 2019 25f.).

References:

- Bou Franch, Patricia, and Pilar Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (eds.). 2019. *Analyzing Digital Discourse: New Insights and Future Directions*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
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Wiggins, Bradley E., and G. Bret Bowers. 2015. "Memes as genre: A structurational analysis of the memescape." In: *New Media & Society* 17 (11): 1886–1906.