

“If it weren’t for Ukraine, we would have defeated NATO long ago”. Using internet memes to delegitimize Russian propaganda and narrate Ukrainian national identity

With the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24th February 2022, social media memes have once again reestablished themselves as a powerful tool for capturing reality, topicalizing political critique, and taking a stance. As memes are easily created, modified, and shared, they enable internet users to quickly react to ongoing events. Humor that feeds memes also serves as a tool of resistance in times of war (e.g., Bhungalia 2019; Noderer 2020) – to delegitimize a (political) person, phenomenon, or event and critically respond to them is seen as a common intention behind sarcasm, irony, and satire of internet memes (Ross and Rivers 2018: 289). Relying on CDA, this research demonstrates how Ukrainians use affordances of memes to narrate their national identity, delegitimize Russian media, and express despise toward the invader.

The data were obtained from the SUCHO website, which is committed to preserving widely circulated memes on the Russia-Ukraine war as part of Ukrainian cultural heritage. The archive features over 2000 memes (and still growing), of which the category titled “Russian propaganda and state media” (203 memes and still updated*) was selected for closer analysis. The findings show that there are a few topical categories that facilitate the process of constructing the national identity and draw extensively on the ‘we versus them’ dichotomy. The results also demonstrate that – in the context of this highly media-present war – it is essential to be alert to intertextuality and dark humor to not only find memes entertaining but also decode their underlying implications.

**The final corpus of this project will contain close to 300 memes*

Keywords: discourse analysis, multimodality, Russia-Ukraine war, memes.

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