

The Zelensky Mystique: An Analysis of Volodymyr Zelensky's Self-Presentation on
Instagram

Claire Seigmund, B.A.

A Thesis

In

Mass Communication

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of Texas Tech University in
Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for
the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Dr. Erik P. Bucy
Chair of the Committee

Dr. Miglena Sternadori

Dr. Kenton Wilkinson

Mark Sheridan, Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School

August, 2023

Copyright 2023, Claire Seigmund

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the members of this thesis committee, as this work would not have been possible without their helpful insight and encouragement throughout this process. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my thesis chair Dr. Erik Bucy for his invaluable guidance in the development of this study, his knowledge of visual framing and self-presentation, and his assistance during the intercoder reliability check. I am also extremely grateful to Dr. Miglena Sternadori, who generously provided her insight into the geopolitical background of Russia and Ukraine and equipped me with valuable literature relevant to this study. Lastly, this endeavor would not have been possible without Dr. Kenton Wilkinson, who helped guide me in the development of this study's theoretical background.

I would also like to extend my sincere thanks to Dr. Amber McCord, who assisted me with the development of the graphs used to visually display the findings of this study. Thanks should also go to members of my cohort for their help with the development of ideas for this study as well as their moral support.

Lastly, I would like to thank my parents for their continuous encouragement and support. Their belief in me has kept me motivated throughout this entire process. Lastly, I would be remiss in not mentioning my friends and loved ones for keeping my spirits high when it was needed most.

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Acknowledgments..... | ii |
| Abstract..... | v |
| List of Figures | vi |
| Chapter I: Introduction..... | 1 |
| Chapter II: Geopolitical Background of Russia and Ukraine | 4 |
| Russia and Ukraine | 4 |
| The Rise of Zelensky | 7 |
| Chapter III: Literature Review | 11 |
| Self-Presentation of Politicians..... | 11 |
| Social Media and the Rediscovery of the Middle Region | 13 |
| Globalization and the Mediatization of Politics and Conflict..... | 16 |
| Visual Political Communication on Instagram | 18 |
| Power, Authority, and Charismatic Leadership | 20 |
| Digital Media as a Display of Soft and Power..... | 22 |
| Semiology and Visual Characteristics | 25 |
| Visual Framing..... | 27 |
| Chapter IV: Methodology | 31 |
| Study Design..... | 31 |
| Sampling | 31 |
| Intercoder Reliability Check | 32 |
| Data Analysis | 33 |
| Chapter V: Results | 35 |
| Visual Characteristics | 35 |
| Visual Frames | 45 |

| | |
|--|----|
| Zelensky’s Self-Presentation | 47 |
| Chapter VI: Discussion and Conclusion | 48 |
| Visual Characteristics | 48 |
| Visual Frames | 54 |
| Zelensky’s Self-Presentation | 57 |
| Mediatization and Soft Power Efforts..... | 58 |
| Conclusion | 60 |
| Chapter VII: Limitations and Future Research | 63 |
| References..... | 65 |
| Appendices..... | 70 |
| A. Coding Scheme | 70 |
| B. Descriptive Results..... | 73 |
| C. Codebook | 83 |

Abstract

Since its invasion by Russian forces on February 24, 2022, Ukraine, and its president, have garnered large amounts of attention from around the world. Volodymyr Zelensky's unorthodox path to the presidency was paved by his performing background in *Servant of the People*, a television show in which he played a fictional Ukrainian president. This satirical stint motivated Zelensky to announce his candidacy on December 31, 2018, leading to his eventual election on April 21, 2019. Throughout his rise on the world stage, Zelensky has utilized his official Instagram account as a platform for compelling self-presentation while communicating a message of national unity and resolve. Employing a framing analysis of Zelensky's Instagram posts from his presidential campaign to the first anniversary of the Russian invasion, in this study I examine the Ukrainian leader's skillful use of visual and nonverbal messaging to project an image of an everyman president and, beginning with the 2022 invasion, soldier-in-chief. In this analysis, I also investigate how the use of specific visual appeals (e.g., facial expressions, Ukrainian symbols) and background settings influenced Zelensky's self-presentation style over time, and how this visual evolution incorporated soft power techniques to present Zelensky as a new kind of mediatized war-time leader.

Keywords: Zelensky, self-presentation, mediatization, soft power, visual framing, Ukraine

List of Figures

| | |
|---|----|
| 1. Zelensky's Instagram photos from the Candidate timeframe..... | 36 |
| 2. Zelensky's Instagram photos from the President time frame..... | 37 |
| 3. Zelensky's Instagram photos from the Soldier timeframe..... | 38 |
| 4. Frequency of type of people shown with Zelensky over time | 40 |
| 5. Frequency of visual characteristics shown in images over time..... | 41 |
| 6. Frequency of visual characteristics in images with and without Zelensky over time... | 43 |
| 7. Frequency of Zelensky's clothing style over time..... | 44 |
| 8. Frequency of Zelensky's grooming style over time..... | 44 |
| 9. Frequency of Zelensky's facial expressions over time..... | 45 |
| 10. Frequency of visual frames over time..... | 47 |

Chapter I

Introduction

Although the tensions between Russia and Ukraine have been a significant topic of discussion in the 20th and 21st centuries, Russia's recent invasion of Ukraine and subsequent war has dominated public discourse due to seemingly unprecedented media coverage of both the conflict at hand and the players involved. Since Russian President Vladimir Putin announced a special military operation in Ukraine on February 24, 2022, Ukraine has suffered "124,500 to 131,000 total casualties, including 15,500 to 17,500 killed in action and 109,000 to 113,500 wounded in action," with no projected end to the conflict in sight (Al Jazeera, 2023, para. 9). Although the death toll is increasing, the effects of this war have been amplified due to increased mediatization, which Hjarvard (2008) describes as the growing influence of media on key sectors of society.

Russia and Ukraine share many cultural and linguistic ties that date back centuries, yet the relationship between the two nations has been anything but peaceful in recent times. Russia's tyranny was manifested throughout the formation, existence, and subsequent fall of the Soviet Union, conflicts in Crimea and the Donbas region of Ukraine, and many other events resulting from Ukraine's attempt to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and Russia's disdain toward the union. Preceding the invasion, Putin gave a speech on February 21, 2022, that appeared to rationalize the so-called "special military operation" on Ukraine, insisting upon Ukraine's weak national identity and illegitimacy as an independent country (Mankoff, 2022). This special military operation included Russian missiles being launched into Ukraine, displacing

approximately 8 million people (about half the population of New York) since the invasion began (“Ukraine,” 2022).

Another reason why this conflict has been put under the spotlight is the stark contrast between the leaders involved. On one end of the spectrum, Putin is typically portrayed in a very cold, stoic, and authoritarian fashion that only seems to exist from behind a desk or on a national newscast. Troianovski and Sonne (2023) note that the extent of Putin’s public involvement in this conflict is undermining the legitimacy of Ukraine and avoiding any acknowledgment of Russia’s weaknesses. Existing on the other end of the spectrum is Volodymyr Zelensky, actor-turned-politician who has been the face of this conflict for the news media. No stranger to the camera, Zelensky’s active participation in this conflict has been broadcasted to the world through multiple forms of mass media, and he has garnered an abundance of support through his optimism and famous quotes such as “The fight is here; I need ammunition, not a ride,” when he was offered a safe passage out of Ukraine near the beginning of the conflict (The Associated Press, 2022, para. 2).

Mediatization, which Hjarvard (2008) describes as the growing influence of media on different aspects of society, has played a significant role in this war. Specifically, social media has provided different perspectives on the conflict than what is traditionally covered through the journalistic lens of traditional mass media. Social media has allowed citizen journalists to share alternative viewpoints and personalized experiences of the war (Roumelioti, 2023). Alternatively, Strömbäck (2008) notes that mediatization is incorporated into different aspects of society in phases, and, as the

process progresses, political actors can no longer ignore the power of mass media, so they adapt to the new mediated political environment.

However, citizens are not the only participants in restructuring a narrative once dominated by Putin. Zelensky's presence on social media, specifically Instagram, has served as a showcase of his personal life and family, his diplomatic behaviors, and soldier-in-chief persona resulting from the Russian invasion. This study employs a quantitative content analysis to examine the self-presentation style employed by Zelensky from his time as a television actor, to the President of Ukraine, to a wartime leader. Specifically, this study examines Zelensky's use of certain visual appeals and pre-defined visual frames, in addition to a newly found soldier-in-chief frame as methods of soft power.

Chapter II

Geopolitical Background of Russia and Ukraine

Russia and Ukraine

After decades of political and social tension between Russia and Ukraine, the conflict came to a head when Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered what he called a “special military operation,” thus ushering in Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022 (Mankoff, 2022, para. 1). Although significant violence and destruction have taken place since the invasion, the unease between the two countries dates back centuries (Masters, 2020).

Russia’s modern imperialism derives from the belief that Russians and Ukrainians, who share origins from the medieval Kyivan Rus commonwealth, “should share a political destiny both today and in the future” (Mankoff, 2022, para. 1). Russian leaders have said on numerous occasions that Ukraine is not a legitimate country and that it really belongs to Russia because of the cultural and linguistic ties between the countries, which has resulted in a critical territorial dispute that poses “the greatest security crisis in Europe since the Cold War” (Masters, 2020, p. 2).

After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, shortly followed by Ukraine’s independence from Moscow, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) began to grow. NATO, which is an international security alliance comprised of countries in North America and Europe, added Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, each a former Soviet republic (Masters, 2020). In 1991, Russia elected its first president, Boris Yeltsin. Yeltsin is credited with turning Russia into a representative democracy, and he contrasted former Soviet leaders with his pro-Western views. However, Russia’s imperialist ambitions

became manifest once again when Vladimir Putin, a former Soviet intelligence officer, was appointed Prime Minister in 1999 and eventually took over Yeltsin's position as president in 2000 (Shevtsova, 2001). Putin grew more concerned with Russia's potential loss of power as Western strength increased. When the discussion of Ukraine joining NATO in 2008 began, Russia began striving to increase its influence in Ukraine (Masters, 2020).

The pro-Western Viktor Yushchenko became President of Ukraine in 2005 and promised that these new alliances with the West would separate Ukraine from the Kremlin's power. Additionally, Yushchenko's term brought new sympathy from the West by portraying Ukraine as a European nation that Russia had historically oppressed. He was replaced by the pro-Russian Viktor Yanukovich in 2010 and revived Ukraine's economic ties with Russia. Massive political protests erupted in Kyiv in 2014, forcing Yanukovich to flee the country (Mankoff, 2022).

Russia's plan to gain more power over Ukraine advanced with the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Crimea had been transferred from the Russian Federation to Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1954 with the goal of strengthening the relationship between Russian and Ukrainian citizens. However, the annexation of Crimea was supported by Russian nationalists in both Russia and Ukraine after the fall of the Soviet Union. Russia's annexation of Crimea led to an increased Russian military presence and overall control of the peninsula and the Black Sea (Masters, 2020). Shortly following the situation in Crimea, a conflict arose in Ukraine's Donetsk Basin, otherwise known as the Donbas region, in April 2014. This conflict came to fruition when Russian-backed separatist forces seized control over territory in eastern Ukraine with the goal of

strengthening Russian power and influence in the region due to its position in Eastern Ukraine and high percentage of Russian speakers (Isachenkov, 2021).

Putin's justification for the 2022 invasion is rooted in claims of both Ukraine's illegitimacy as an independent nation and the West's aggressive goal "to use Ukraine as a springboard to invade and destroy Russia" (Fisher, 2022, para. 2). In his speech on February 21, 2022, Putin cited several falsehoods to frame the impending invasion as a protective measure to defend Russia from the West's intrusion. These pieces of misinformation included incorrect recounts of events in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine, claiming that the Ukrainian government had been engaging in genocide of Russian-speaking minorities since 2014 (Fisher, 2022).

Putin's argument for war largely focused on NATO's "plot to destroy Russia" (Fisher, 2022, para. 9). The end of the Cold War had led many countries in Eastern Europe to join NATO, strengthening the alliances of the West which Russia formerly had conflicts with. Additionally, Putin framed previous instances of NATO's involvement, such as the intervention in Serbia in 1999, as "bloody" operations (Fisher, 2022, para. 20). The Western military involvements in Iraq, Libya, and Syria were also cited as examples of the West's threatening aggression.

Putin also described the recent wave of cultural acceptance spreading throughout Europe as degrading toward human nature. The Western influence in Europe, which has recently revolved around the acceptance of LGBTQ individuals and largely conflicts with right-leaning Christian values, has been framed by Putin as an attack on Russia itself. Not only did Putin claim that embracing gender- and sexuality-related human rights is an aggressive attack on traditional Russian values, but he also argued that this Western

influence is equal to that of Nazi Germany preceding World War II, and that Ukraine operates under neo-Nazi leadership (Fisher, 2022). Therefore, Putin's solution has been to first make advances in Ukraine to preserve his authoritarian regime over Russia and defend it from Russia's perceived hostility and neonazism from the West. In his speech, Putin recognized that lives would be lost in these defensive efforts, but he argued that the blood would be on Ukraine's hands for not surrendering (Fisher, 2022; Mankoff, 2022).

Putin's goal of strengthening Russia's power and weakening the influence of NATO and the West has manifested as a devastating conflict, resulting in millions of Ukrainians deceased or displaced (Mankoff, 2022). Specifically, it has been estimated that Ukraine has suffered nearly 131,000 total casualties, 24,862 being civilian casualties, since the beginning of the conflict (Al Jazeera, 2023; "Ukraine:", 2023). Additionally, Russia has suffered 189,500 to 223,000 total casualties since the invasion (Al Jazeera, 2023). In the wake of this war, a new face has risen from the ashes as Ukraine's wartime leader, and as a result, Ukraine has gained a significant amount of international support.

The Rise of Zelensky

Although Ukraine was still facing conflicts of the past, its citizens elected a new kind of leader. In 2018, comedic actor Volodymyr Zelensky announced that he would run in Ukraine's 2019 presidential election. Although largely unexpected, Zelensky's aspirations to get into office served as an allusion to his previous work as a television actor. Beginning in 2015, Zelensky played Vasyl Holoborodko, a former history teacher turned president-elect of Ukraine in the satirical television show *Servant of the People* (Poniewozik, 2022). Zelensky's time as a comedic actor evolved into the political realm when he founded a political party of the same name in March 2018. Public attention on

the comedian-turned-politician grew as he officially announced his candidacy before the stroke of midnight on New Year's Eve on the *I+I* television channel, a time traditionally used by Ukrainian presidents to broadcast speeches (Alberti & De Serio, 2020; Marchenko, 2020).

On April 21, 2019, Zelensky lead with 73.2 percent against the incumbent, Petro Poroshenko, in a runoff election. Much of Zelensky's popularity was derived from his non-descript political campaigns on social media and citizens' eagerness for new representation. Zelensky's pro-European beliefs directly contradicted Putin's Russian nationalism and imperialism, and his mediatized campaign strategies starkly contrasted the methods of Poroshenko (Marchenko, 2020; Rohozinska & Shpak, 2019). Zelensky dedicated his diplomacy to initiating conversations about Ukraine joining NATO once again and strengthening Ukraine's image as an independent and unified nation (Marchenko, 2020).

Zelensky's campaign did not come without concerns from Ukraine's citizens. Although he ran a personal yet nondescript campaign and founded a political party called "Servant of the People," honoring his television show, criticisms arose from Zelensky's involvement with Igor Kolomoisky, a Ukrainian oligarch who owns the *I+I* television channel. Ukrainians were concerned that Zelensky would be controlled by Kolomoisky, who was known to be Poroshenko's enemy (Alberti & De Serio, 2020; Rohozinska & Shpak, 2019). However, Zelensky attempted to take control of this narrative in the media by rejecting these claims and pushing his "man of the people" persona, which served as a self-declaration of independence from the media oligarch and projection of his comedic, everyday-man image (Alberti & De Serio, 2020, p. 67).

The public was also initially concerned about Zelensky's lack of experience in politics but was reassured by its preference for an "inexperienced but honest citizen rather than an experienced and corrupt politician" (Alberti & De Serio, 2020, pp. 66-67). Lastly, Zelensky's campaign was unusual because he is not a native speaker of the Ukrainian language. Zelensky was raised speaking Russian, which ushered in national identity questions from supporters. However, he was able to use this potential weakness to his advantage by communicating with and gaining support from Ukraine's Russian-speaking regions. Speakers of the Ukrainian language came to admire Zelensky's efforts in learning their native tongue (France24, 2019).

Before Russia's invasion in February 2022, Zelensky's Instagram account was dedicated to posts ranging from wholesome family photos to promotional content for his entertainment ventures. When Zelensky took office, he had approximately 2.7 million Instagram followers. Since the invasion, his follower count has increased to 17.1 million as of June 2023. However, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has shifted Zelensky's Instagram use from a fun display of personal endeavors and institutional commitments to an exhibit of soft power in the wake of Russia's invasion.

Nye (1990) uses the term soft power to describe the co-optive process of gaining power through means of appeals. Soft power is a method of getting others to do what you want them to do without force, which differs from hard power, described by Nye (1990) as a method of forcing others to do what you want. The combination of the two creates smart power, which Nye (2009) states recognizes the strengths and weaknesses of both approaches. Smart power, described by Armitage and Nye (2007), as "an approach that underscores the necessity of a strong military, but also invests heavily in alliances,

partnerships, and institutions at all levels,” thus incorporating aspects of both hard and soft power (p. 7).

Although historical context and media coverage may lead most to believe that Ukraine is the obvious underdog in this conflict, Ukraine’s use of soft power within its public diplomacy efforts has been advantageous. Zelensky’s natural charisma, originating from his background as a television actor, combined with his new soldier-like appearance and hands-on approach to leadership has attracted positive attention in the West. This allied support has since resulted in Western assistance with weapons and other supplies, which has leveraged Ukraine to become a contender with the Russian military.

Chapter III

Literature Review

To examine the ways in which Zelensky presents himself on Instagram and the potential impacts of self-presentation, this study employs several bodies of literature that serve as an academic framework. First, this section will review Goffman's (1959) self-presentation framework and the presence of Meyrowitz's (1977) middle region in electronic media. This section will also review media globalization, the mediatization of politics and war, and visual communication on social media. This section also reviews multiple types of authority developed by Weber (1922/1978), political leadership, and displays of soft power. Lastly, this section reviews semiotics and visual framing to develop several research questions that guide this study.

Self-Presentation of Politicians

Goffman (1959) described the construction of a preferred and desirable image through visual self-presentation. People, referred to as actors in the self-presentation framework, perform front-stage and back-stage behaviors. Front-stage behavior is active and conscious, implying that the actor is putting on a performance of their desired image because they are aware that they are being observed. Featured in the front stage is the setting, which includes background items that form the scene. In addition to the physical elements that make up the setting, the front stage also includes a personal front, which includes the other items of expression. The personal front may include insignia, rank, clothing, sex, age, racial characteristics, size, posture, speech patterns, facial expressions, and bodily gestures. The elements that make up the personal front are closely associated

with the performer themselves, so much so that viewers naturally expect these elements when they see the performer (Goffman, 1959).

In contrast, back-stage behavior involves the actor without the façade. This region of an individual's life is not shown to the public and serves as an environment where the actor can privately adjust characteristics, correct flaws, and rehearse performances. The actor knows that the back stage is a space to which audience members have no access, thus guaranteeing that any out-of-character actions that take place in the back stage are not visible. In essence, the front stage hosts the performance and is specially crafted to be observed, whereas the back stage does not have an audience present (Goffman, 1959).

Goffman (1959) states that individuals in power act with a specific objective in mind, and assuming control over the behavior of others is deemed necessary in order to achieve such an objective. The literature suggests that control over others is “achieved largely by influencing the definition of the situation which the others come to formulate, and he can influence this definition by expressing himself in such a way as to give them a kind of impression that will lead them to act voluntarily in accordance with his own plan” (Goffman, 1959, p. 3).

Although much effort can be put into effectively organizing the front and back stages of an actor, another significant consideration in self-presentation is the relationship between the way the actor expresses themselves and how viewers are impressed by them. The front stage is a projected image to be disseminated to the target publics through the media. The projected image leads to the creation of a perceived image, which is the sense of reality formed by the recipients as a result of the projected image (Alberti & De Serio,

2020). When the audience's perception does not align with the actor's projected image, they experience a disruption that could potentially tarnish the performance. Therefore, actors must appropriately adjust their performances in the name of "saving the show" and achieving consistency throughout images (Goffman, 1959, p. 212).

Social Media and the Rediscovery of the Middle Region

Goffman's (1959) self-presentation theory has served as a useful analytical framework for how powerful figures organize front and back regions in an effort to control how they are perceived, and the evolution of mass communication and digital media has created a complex new stage for politicians to consider. Mass media channels put political figures under a figurative microscope, revealing even the most intimate details of their lives. According to Meyrowitz (1977), "We see a politician address a crowd of well-wishers then greet his wife and children 'in private.' We join a candidate as he speaks with his advisors, and we sit behind him as he watches conventions on television" (p. 135). Therefore, electronic media has introduced a phenomenon in which performances are no longer strictly bound to the front or back stages, thus ushering in the middle region (Meyrowitz, 1977).

Meyrowitz (1986) claims that electronic media have blurred the lines of once-distinct social roles, which in turn affects self-presentation in leadership. Building on Goffman's (1959) stage analogy, the middle region consists of a side stage view consisting of elements from both the front and back stages. Additionally, the middle region allows the audience to see the performer transition from region to region, which leads to a larger loss of control for the performer compared to the era of distinct regions (Meyrowitz, 1977).

Although Meyrowitz's (1977) middle region inspires the discussion of electronic media's role in self-presentation, the framework itself does not account for the recent rapid evolution of communication in regard to globalization. According to Dresner (2006), globalization is the process by which the world becomes more interconnected, specifically with the flow of information. The globalization processes have been expedited by the internet, and in turn, the internet has opened the world up to back regions that have been previously hidden. Specifically, the advent of social media platforms has brought on new behaviors of posting more personal, authentic content that blurs the lines between front and back regions, thus creating a middle region (Beltrán, 2009).

Globalization has put a larger emphasis on the function of the middle region, and politicians and other powerful personnel have realized that communication given locally has the potential to reach global audiences, and vice versa. Due to the possibility of an outsider listening in on communication, politicians utilize "double speak" to craft messages that are acceptable on both the back stage and the front stage, or in a diplomatic case, domestically or abroad. A message or speech may be crafted for a specific audience, but it is now a norm for communication to be formulated to not only be understood but also accepted universally (Dresner, 2006).

Additionally, globalization processes and the advent of the middle region have influenced perceptions of politicians' public images. Dresner (2006) states that this can result in two outcomes: a downward pull, in which the exposure of the back stage brings the politician down to the level of the public, or an upward pull, in which a politician is seen as more statesmanlike because they are perceived on a global scale. Nonetheless, the

middle region, enhanced by the evolving electronic communication landscape due to the newfound ability to post more personal content, introduces a newfound vulnerability for public figures when crafting their self-presentation style.

As social performances have evolved with new technological innovations, it is important to analyze the role of the middle region in self-presentation through social media platforms. Persson (2012) notes that social media poses a paradox regarding the user's self-presentation: users exist in a highly controlled environment where they can edit their expressions before sending them out, but they are more likely to overshare information. When users overshare, they make the backstage public. The author suggests that publicizing backstage behavior draws attention to the user, further emphasizing the presence of the middle region on social media.

As previously mentioned, Goffman's (1959) framework for self-presentation proposes front and back stages that host performances exclusive to the region, and Meyrowitz's (1977) middle region suggests that the evolving electronic media landscape has blurred the boundaries between the respective regions and their performances. Hogan (2010) further challenges the self-presentation framework by suggesting that the presentation of self on social media is not exactly a performance, but an exhibition. Once recorded and posted on a platform, content evolves from a performance to an exhibition because the act of recording alters the nature of the performance and gives a third party the power to distribute it and take it out of context. These third parties are known as curators of the digital content, and these exhibitions "allow a person to be found when others want to look rather than when the person is able to be present and perform" (Hogan, 2010, p. 384).

Wang (2022) focuses on the role of both the curators and the audience in regard to the dramaturgical theory in social media. The literature states that users become curators to create versions of themselves that they want to display online, which can easily be fabricated for the sake of forming an ideal character for other users to see and interact with on the platform. However, as Goffman (1959) also noted about performances, the curation is only as effective as the audience's perception of it.

In Beltrán's (2009) study on the presence of the middle region on Facebook, evidence suggests that presentation on the platform "is neither a front stage nor back stage, but instead, since there exists a blurring of behaviors there, it has become a middle region where conduct displayed through pictures, like nudity and drunkenness, is seen as appropriate" (pp. 66-67). This suggests that Facebook and other platforms allow users to show their genuine and authentic selves because they are presenting themselves in a way that transcends the boundaries of the front and back stages.

Globalization and the Mediatization of Politics and Conflict

Although the concept of globalization directly relates to multiple aspects of the ever-changing world, the evolution of technology and electronic media is particularly relevant. As previously mentioned by Dresner (2006), globalization is the process by which the world becomes more interconnected, particularly through the increased flow of information and access to electronic media. This interconnectedness is one of the antecedents of the so-called digital revolution, which has "added platforms, collapsed past distinctions between interpersonal and mass communication, and eroded the dichotomy between 'producers' and 'receivers'" (Flew & Waisbord, 2015, p. 624).

Like globalization, the concept of mediatization aids in explaining how the growth of certain processes influences society. According to Hjarvard (2008), mediatization should be examined from two angles: first, the media is its own institution that other institutions accommodate, and second, the media has become an incorporated aspect of other institutions, such as politics, entertainment, or religion. Strömbäck (2008) proposes that mediatization operates in four phases. The first phase is reached when the media constitute the dominant information on politics and political actors. The second phase involves the media becoming independent from political institutions, and the media logic overpowers political logic. The third phase of mediatization involves the increased independence between media and politics and even a degree of dominance of the media over political institutions, so much so that political and social actors must adapt to media logic. Finally, the fourth phase is accomplished when political and social actors adapt and internalize the media logic, which, in turn, becomes incorporated into governing processes. The processes highlighted in these phases emphasize the loss of independence of politics and society from the media.

Although analyses of all four phases of mediatization are necessary for the understanding of the process as a whole, the third phase proposed by Strömbäck (2008) is worthy of further consideration regarding the mediatization of politics. As the influence of the media grows, politicians can no longer ignore its significance, therefore they must adapt to the media logic. The campaign tactics of populist actors in particular have become intertwined with political mediatization. According to Mazzoleni (2014), populist actors possess a unique savviness that allows them to gain and keep media attention and an ability “to perfectly understand the imperatives of the media, what is

newsworthy and what is not” (p. 52). In essence, media has become a vital part of the political process, and populist figures use it to their advantage to gain visibility and support.

The growing use and popularity of social media platforms have contributed to the scholarly body of research on mediatization, specifically in relation to social media’s role in war and conflict. In Zhang’s (2021) case study of significant actors in the context of the Sino-Indian border crisis of 2017, the evidence indicated that social media had acquired a large role in covering conflicts and influencing public opinion. Additionally, social media platforms further mediatize wars and conflicts because they allow for both news organizations and users to interact in discussing the conflict at hand, which, in turn, increases the perceived value and effects of the social media network.

Visual Political Communication on Instagram

Although there are several factors that contribute to the public’s perception of political figures, previous research indicates that visual communication has the most significant role in 21st-century politics. According to Lilleker (2019), images can elicit a strong response from viewers because they act as mental shortcuts when making decisions, and “each image builds a schema around a candidature, the schema may form around strong associations with hope, unity, patriotism, economic stability, strength in foreign policy, protection against internal threats or a myriad other desires or threats citizens have internalized” (pp. 2-3).

In political communication, self-presentation had once undergone a transition from face-to-face communication to traditional media (Steffan, 2020). However, with the advent of digital communication, such as candidate websites and social media profiles,

visual political communication has recently found another avenue for reaching audiences: Instagram. Like many other social media platforms, Instagram can serve as a direct channel of communication between political actors and audiences. Without the journalistic intervention that traditionally accompanies political messaging, political actors are able to distribute their projected image without excessive mediation from a third party. As a result, audiences can make voting decisions based on the self-presentation of the politician they are observing without interference (Steffan, 2020). Known to be the most visual-centric platform, Instagram content consists of images and video clips with accompanying captions. The psychological resonance of images combined with the accessibility of Instagram creates a promising environment for politicians to craft narratives and presentation styles without the gatekeeping functions typically found in traditional media outlets (Mendonça & Caetano, 2021).

Due to the visual nature of Instagram, the platform provides an opportunity for populist political actors to showcase their authenticity to social media followers. The results of Olof Larsson's (2021) content analysis of Instagram usage of populist and non-populist politicians suggest that populist actors have more engagement with followers and utilize Instagram more compared to non-populist competitors. Due to its emphasis on images and audiovisual content, Instagram has surpassed platforms like Facebook and Twitter as a medium for seemingly authentic self-presentation for populist actors, thus supporting the notion that Instagram is an optimal platform for political communication and campaigning.

As personality and intimacy from leaders become more important to voters, political actors can incorporate Goffman's (1959) framework to influence audience

attraction and engagement on social media. Colliander et al. (2017) analyzed the self-presentation strategies of politicians on Twitter. The findings suggest that tweets containing a combination of front and back stage content increase voter interest more than tweets that only contain professional, front stage content. More interest and voter intention could be obtained by taking a balanced approach to self-presentation on social media rather than restricting posts to only professional content because followers are interested in and want to see aspects of politicians' private lives (Colliander et al., 2017).

Power, Authority, and Charismatic Leadership

In democratic politics, according to Moe (2005), “cooperation and power are two sides of the same coin: cooperation makes the exercise of power possible, and the exercise of power often motivates the cooperation” (p. 229). Although power is a popular term in political literature, it is important to differentiate between the different types of power, which figures obtain it, and their effects. Weber (1922/1978) developed three categories of legitimate rule: charismatic authority, traditional authority, and rational legal authority. Under charismatic authority, a leader acquires power through personality, seemingly obtaining supernatural qualities to gain attraction. Leaders utilizing traditional authority respect the establishment and let traditions and customs guide their decisions. Finally, rational legal authority concerns political order and decision-making based on sets of legal rules.

Although Weber (1922/1978) stated that the types of authority previously mentioned are ideal types of legitimate rule, significant consideration must be given to the notion of a charismatic leader. Coined by Carlyle (1841), the “great man” theory suggests that leaders possess certain qualities, such as genius and extreme charisma, that

are not found in all people. In essence, great leaders are born to lead because they come into the world with these natural leadership abilities, and in turn, these leaders rise to power when they are needed. This theory has prompted discourse on whether leaders are born, not made, and whether these specific qualities are unique and not found in ordinary individuals. Although titles or positions, such as president, are strongly associated with power and are attributed as such, a “great man” is much more than his position. His perceived extraordinariness derives from his extraordinary qualities alone.

However, critics of this theory argue that the role of context is largely ignored and that a “great man” is a product of an environment in which leadership qualities are learned (Villanova University, 2022). Specifically, Herbert Spencer (1873/2005) argued that the time in which a man lived should be considered when determining whether or not he is a “great man,” because historical and social contexts influence if a man has the capacity to lead. Therefore, the leadership capabilities of a modern “great man” should be assessed along with the role of mass media because of its vast influence in today’s society (Strömbäck, 2008).

Although there is a considerable amount of academic literature critiquing the notion of great leaders being born rather than being a product of their environment, the idea of the “great man” and charismatic leadership should not be discounted. Charismatic authority is dependent on the perception of legitimacy and credibility from the public, which derives from likeability, trustworthiness, knowledgeability, and the use of strong and symbolic language (Conger & Kanungo, 1987; Lundsckow, 1998). Additionally, charismatic leaders define and solve problems based on emotion. Ronald Reagan, the 40th president of the United States of America, is argued to be one of the best modern

examples of a charismatic leader due to his unique use of emotional appeals through the means of mass media. Never had an American president utilized mass information distribution in tandem with such unique charismatic traits, setting Reagan apart from other political figures (Lundskow, 1998).

In a case study on Reagan's charismatic leadership, Bell (2013) found that traits such as communication skills, articulation of a vision, the establishment of trust, impression management, expression of expertise, and utilization of situational contexts made him an exemplary communicator to the masses. This analysis of Reagan's charismatic leadership style is significant because it serves as a potential framework for other leaders, such as Zelensky, to gain power and attraction through means of charisma and larger soft power tactics.

Digital Media as a Display of Soft and Power

When a country has a goal in mind, the state may develop strategies to achieve certain objectives. While some strategies involve harsh tactics that force citizens to comply, others attempt to gain influence by winning over the hearts and minds of the people through the use of soft power. According to Nye (1990), soft power involves persuading and attracting without the use of force or coercion up to the international level. Soft power is "when one country gets other countries to want what it wants" (Nye, 1990, p. 166). Soft power involves cooption, which directly contrasts the coercion using force or threats involved in hard power. Countries can employ soft power with elements such as cultural attraction, which can be through means of cultural policy or media production exports, and shared ideologies to reduce dissonance and make other countries

more likely to follow without having to be forced (Esser et al., 2023). Certain leadership qualities, like charisma, also aid in gaining soft power.

Soft power also refers to “the construction of the nation brand, which in turn has political and economic impact by asserting status, boosting exports, attracting tourism and investment” (Esser et al., 2023, p. 62). In a study concerning young European’s access and attitudes toward digital content produced in the United Kingdom, Esser et al. (2023) found that the consumption of British screen content led to an increased interest in tourism and other British cultural products, further disseminating the nation's brand abroad. The dissemination of cultural products and the subsequential attraction to those products serve as a form of soft power because resources such as culture, values, and policies increase the appeal of the nation’s brand without the use of any excessive force (Esser et al., 2023).

However, utilizing soft power or hard power tactics separately may exhaust resources. Nye (2009) coined the term “smart power” as a combination of the two. Smart power uses both attractive emotional appeals and force to achieve a desired goal. The most effective elements of hard and soft power complement each other to not only mobilize audiences around certain agendas but make them want to take action through the emotional appeals of soft power.

In addition to resources such as culture, values, and policies, Roselle et al. (2014) argued, strategic narratives play a significant role in influencing publics without employing hard-power tactics. Fisher’s (1985) narrative paradigm theorizes that meaningful communication is accomplished through storytelling and that narratives are more compelling than an argument alone. Narratives, which have aided in understanding

the world around us for centuries, consist of characters or actors, a setting, a conflict or action, and a resolution. In the case of employing a strategic narrative as a method of soft power, the state acts as the character that belongs in a certain environment or stage, faces a conflict, and takes action toward a resolution. In essence, soft power can be strengthened when politicians employ the components of strategic narrative structure.

Soft power has recently taken a new shape with the advent of social media. According to Mendonça and Caetano (2021), the use of social media as a channel for political communication “reinforces the formation of affective communities based on feelings, and images play a relevant role in this regard” (p. 214). In the new age of digital diplomacy, a wide array of government and non-government actors have utilized social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter for mass influence. Citizens can use these platforms to rally for a common cause, and politicians and terrorist groups can share and frame information on a global scale to attract support (British Council, 2016).

Political influence on social media can reach publics both domestically and abroad, and factors such as substance and tone can determine a nation’s image and the effectiveness of its soft power. Collins and DeWitt (2023) conducted a study examining political communication on Twitter from Barack Obama and Donald Trump during their respective presidencies. The authors found that Obama’s tweets were largely statesmanlike and optimistic, and his usage of soft power-building attributes positively impacted the soft power and global image of the United States. However, Trump’s communication on Twitter conveyed a more hostile and arrogant tone, contributing to the disintegration of America’s soft power and global image. Although there is significant research conducted on the use of soft power through Twitter, more research is needed on

its implementation on additional social media platforms such as Instagram. Additionally, more audience-focused studies are needed to develop a better understanding of the impacts of soft power.

Semiology and Visual Characteristics

Images, and most importantly the elements within them, can elicit stronger reactions than text (Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011). This phenomenon can be explained through semiology, the study of signs. The dichotomous nature of semiology developed by Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure involves two key definitions. The signifier is the part of the sign that represents its physical, material form. The signifier is also the element that can be physically sensed. The signified, on the other hand, is the concept that the signifier refers to. The signified does not physically exist because it is the idea that is brought forth. These two elements have a complementary relationship and cannot exist without each other. This framework aids in explaining how both physical and intangible elements equally contribute to how humans communicate with each other (Yakin & Totu, 2014).

Certain signs within an image can contribute to perceptions of authenticity, and previous research has investigated the levels of personalization in Instagram content and how it influences user engagement. Specifically, Peng (2021) examines the visual Instagram content from United States politicians. The author found that more personalized images of politicians, such as images showing them in nonpolitical environments, images showing faces, and images displaying emotion have high audience engagement statistics. However, Instagram content of politicians that depicts traditional, professional, less-personalized activities generated less engagement than the former,

suggesting that audiences on social media are more likely to interact with personalized content over “politics-as-usual” content (Peng, 2021, p. 159).

The effects of the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine have been investigated from not only a political perspective but also a media perspective. Specifically, Makhortykh and Sydorova (2017) conducted a content analysis investigating the use of visual frames on social media posts that covered the conflict in Eastern Ukraine in 2014. The authors analyzed images to examine how the conflict was framed by pro-Ukrainian and pro-Russian online groups on Vkonakte, a social networking site. Classifying the content of the images through visual characteristics such as the presence of civilians and military personnel, military equipment, damage, dead bodies, and the perceived gender of people featured in the image, it was found that Pro-Ukrainian online groups framed the conflict in a patriotic manner, namely “the good war,” while the Pro-Russian groups framed the conflict as a destructive humanitarian crisis (Makhortykh & Sydorova, 2017, p. 376).

For the purpose of this study, visual characteristics will be defined as individual visual elements depicted within the images, such as people and Ukrainian symbolic items. The analysis of visual characteristics in this study will focus on both the physical elements shown in the images as well as the concepts they call forth. Considering the capability of Instagram to serve as a platform for political self-presentation through the application of various visual characteristics, this study’s research questions are:

RQ1a: *What are the visual characteristics of Volodymyr Zelensky’s Instagram photos before he was elected president?*

RQ1b: *What are the visual characteristics of Zelensky's Instagram photos when he was in office before the Russian invasion?*

RQ1c: *What are the visual characteristics of Zelensky's Instagram photos after the Russian invasion?*

Visual Framing

Interpretations of facts, stories, or people often depend on the way they are framed. According to Chong and Druckman (2007), framing theory involves “the process by which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue” (p. 104). In essence, the way in which something is presented to an audience influences the way in which they perceive and construct reality around it. Even the smallest of changes to the way someone or something is presented can have an effect on public opinion. Frames can manifest through words and images, which leads audiences to construct realities around certain issues or events (Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011).

Although text has traditionally been the easier option for framing analysis compared to visuals, photos, illustrations, and other types of visuals should not be ignored because they can also contain metaphors and symbols that suggest different frames. Therefore, visual framing refers to the process of certain visual elements within an image being amplified to increase their salience and representational meaning and the subsequent analysis of those representations. Further, frames are identified and examined through the use of symbols. Symbols can either be abstract, in which the symbols are shapes or objects that have meaning or value, or figurative, which represent people, places, and things with symbolic value. These visual symbols can effectively construct

narratives for audiences more than other types of frames because they are often rooted in culture (Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011; Yakin & Totu, 2014).

The self-presentation of political actors can be measured and categorized through visual frames. The ideal candidate frame consists of subdimensions such as statesmanship, which may depict politicians interacting with other elected officials, visual depictions of patriotic symbols and campaign paraphernalia, and compassion, which may feature visual linkages to family, women, children, and religious symbols. The populist campaigner frame consists of subdimensions like mass appeal, which includes visual linkages to celebrities or large, approving audiences, and ordinariness, which may depict the subject in informal attire, interactions with ordinary people, or participating in athletic activities (Grabe & Bucy, 2011).

In a quantitative content analysis, Steffan (2020) examined visual social media posts from politicians from seven Western democracies and investigated the role of visual frames in their self-presentation styles. The results suggest that Instagram is the ideal social media platform for self-presentation during campaigns. Additionally, the results of this analysis show that candidates were more likely to use the ideal candidate frame over other visual frames in their self-presentation on Instagram (Steffan, 2020).

Mendonça and Caetano (2021) conducted a content analysis of Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro's Instagram content to examine his visual self-presentation through the use of visual frames. They found that his Instagram content presents him as a mirror of the people, someone extraordinary, and quick to appropriate symbols of power. This analysis shows that Bolsonaro's self-presentation style is a "mimicry through hyperbole," thus creating a parody of the presidency that emphasizes his ordinariness and

provides the leverage he needs to be a successful populist figure (Mendonça & Caetano, 2021, p. 229).

Visual framing analyses can also be applied to images depicting war and conflict, and these mediatized war images can serve as strategic and symbolic tools with the power to influence and motivate audiences on a global scale. Parry (2011) conducted a visual framing analysis of images from various newspapers in the United Kingdom depicting the 2003 invasion of Iraq and found that repetitive portrayals of coalition involvement reinforced humanitarian frames and liberation narratives. Additionally, the author argues that visual frames have higher degrees of memorability and influence than textual frames.

For this study, visual frames will be determined and examined by aggregating certain visual characteristics within the images into larger visual frames using the framework developed by Grabe & Bucy (2011). Considering the capability of Instagram to serve as a platform for political self-presentation through the application of various visual frames, the following research questions are developed:

RQ2a: *What visual frames are featured in Volodymyr Zelensky's Instagram photos before he was elected president?*

RQ2b: *What visual frames are featured in Instagram photos when he was in office before the Russian invasion?*

RQ2c: *What visual frames are featured in Zelensky's Instagram photos after the Russian invasion?*

The previous sets of research questions aim to explore how the application of different visual characteristics and frames shown in Zelensky's Instagram photos change from his time as a television actor to wartime president. However, Zelensky's self-

presentation style in the midst of the current geopolitical conflict between Russia and Ukraine could produce implications in regard to soft power and the mediatization of politics and conflict. Therefore, a third research question is posed:

RQ3: *How did? Volodymyr Zelensky's self-presentation style on Instagram evolve from the time before he was elected to office to the Russian invasion?*

Chapter IV

Methodology

Study Design

To address each research question, a quantitative content analysis served as the method of data collection. The units of analysis for this study are still-image posts made on Zelensky's official Instagram account from May 19, 2018, to February 24, 2023. The coding scheme and codebook were developed after multiple iterations. The initial drafts were created after preliminary observations of the images on Zelensky's Instagram page took place. Additionally, the coding scheme and codebook were further developed using the coding framework from Makhortykh and Sydorova's (2017) content analysis of blog content during the Ukrainian conflicts in 2014. Lastly, the coding scheme and codebook were adapted and finalized when the coding process started, and additional variables of interest were identified. The coding scheme and codebook for this study are provided in Appendices A and C, respectively.

Sampling

The population of images will be categorized into three time frames, determined by the date the post was made. The first timeframe, Candidate, consists of 171 images posted from May 19, 2018, to May 19, 2019. The second timeframe, President, consists of 497 images posted from May 20, 2019, to February 23, 2022. Lastly, the third timeframe, Soldier, consists of 823 images posted from February 24, 2022, to February 24, 2023. The sampling frames for both President and Soldier will consist of images that were posted individually and the images that appear first in multi-image albums posted to Instagram. This criterion will not be applied for images within the Candidate time frame

due to the relatively small number of images compared to the other time frames. To conduct this quantitative content analysis, I employed a random sampling technique to randomly select 100 images from each time frame.

Intercoder Reliability Check

Intercoder reliability was established by coding 10% of the sample across each time period. The codebook was developed through a collaborative process involving the author and thesis chair identifying key features of each first image and assessing for consistency across images. Once the codebook was finalized, the author and the chair of this thesis committee independently coded 10 images from each of the study's three phases: before Zelensky was elected president, during his presidency but before the invasion, and during the invasion.

A detailed codebook with variable definitions was followed to document the presence or absence (1 = present, 0 = absent) of each defined category. Photographic features were documented at two levels of analysis: first, the photograph overall, and second, at the individual level of Zelensky. Variables at the level of the photograph included structural features such as shot length and camera angle, as well as elements within the shot including other people, their roles and estimated ages (see appendix for codebook definitions). Other visuals such as Ukrainian symbols and outcomes of war including ruins, casualties, military equipment and depictions of adversaries were also documented.

Variables unique to Zelensky's portrayals included whether the photo was a selfie and if he appeared alone in the shot, the percentage of the frame his image filled, and basic facial expressions – positive, negative, and neutral. Positive expressions (mostly

smiles) were categorized into natural and posed smiles. We documented who Zelensky was pictured with, including politicians, journalists, supporters, civilians, military, and family members. Coding also assessed his style of dress, grooming, and his level of agency or activity. Gestures were also coded for and categorized into agentic and defiant gestures. We also documented the type of activity Zelensky was participating in, including athletic activity, show business, volunteering, and addressing an audience. Lastly, visual characteristics determined if the images could be coded into visual frame subdimensions such as statesmanship, compassion, ordinariness, mass appeal, and a new “soldier-in-chief” frame.

Intercoder reliability was calculated using Freelon’s ReCal2 online tool for two coders. Because the variables coded were nominal, manifest, and non-normally distributed (showing low variability), percent agreement is reported instead of alpha reliability scores (see Feng, 2015). Although percent agreement does not make allowances for chance agreement, it is appropriate for nominally scaled coding under these conditions. The coding of all variables used in the analysis showed a high level of agreement. Across all 59 nominal variables in the dataset, minor disagreements only arose in five instances, resulting in 96.6% agreement in those cases. For all other nominal variables in the reliability coding, there was perfect agreement. For the single ordinal variable in the dataset (image setting), agreement was also 96.6%.

Data Analysis

Each statistical analysis conducted for this study was run on IBM SPSS Statistics, version 29. The first set of research questions asked what visual characteristics were in the still image posts on Zelensky’s Instagram before he was elected to office, when he

was in office before the Russian invasion, and after the Russian invasion. These questions were addressed by measuring the frequency of different visual characteristics, as well as cross-tabulations to compare the presence of different visual characteristics across the three time frames.

The second set of research questions asked what visual frames were in the still image posts on Zelensky's Instagram before he was elected to office, when he was in office before the Russian invasion, and after the Russian invasion. These questions were addressed by measuring the frequency of different visual frames, as well as cross-tabulations to compare the presence of different visual frames across the three time frames. Only images that featured Zelensky were subject to these analyses.

Lastly, the third research question considers the images that Zelensky is portraying on Instagram after the Russian invasion through self-presentation tactics. This question was addressed by measuring the frequency of different visual characteristics and visual frames in images posted after the Russian invasion.

Chapter V

Results

Visual Characteristics

To begin with, screen captures from each time period in the analysis are presented. Figure 1 shows the kinds of images Zelensky shared while running for office, Figure 2 shows the ways in which he portrayed himself during the early part of his presidency, and Figure 3 shows the dramatically different visual landscape of the third, war period. It quickly becomes evident that each time period is characterized by a markedly distinct presentational style. As a candidate, Zelensky is more candid and personal, while as president he quickly becomes more politically-involved and embraces his (now real) role of servant of the people. By the third period of the Russian invasion the tenor of imagery is much darker and destructive, showing a serious Zelensky embracing his new role as Soldier-in-Chief and defender of the national interest.

Figure 1

Zelensky's Instagram photos from the Candidate timeframe



Figure 2

Zelensky's Instagram photos from the President time frame



Figure 3

Zelensky's Instagram photos from the Soldier timeframe



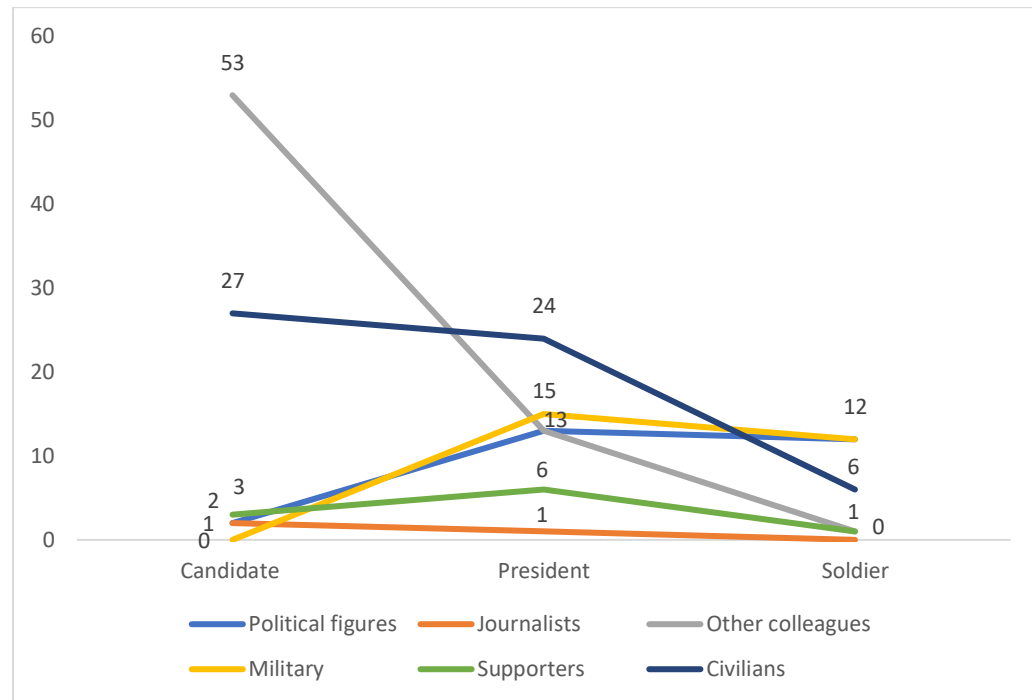
RQI asked what visual characteristics were present in Zelensky's Instagram posts before he was elected to office, during his presidency, and during the first year of the Russian invasion. To measure the presence of different visual characteristics across timeframes, frequency and cross-tabulations were conducted for each relevant variable. In the interest of providing parsimonious results, we limit our observations here to some

longitudinal trends over time. Detailed descriptive results for all variables are provided in Appendix B.

Of the 100 total images belonging to the Candidate time frame, Zelensky was featured in 93%. As time progresses, Zelensky is featured in fewer and fewer photos, and his focus transitions from himself and his own activities to that of other people, and in the Soldier time frame, the conflict with Russia. Although the proportion of civilians featured on Zelensky's Instagram stays relatively consistent over time, the presence of Zelensky interacting with them does not. As time evolves, Zelensky is shown with fewer civilians, supporters, journalists, and colleagues from entertainment projects. Instead, the proportion of images of Zelensky shown with political figures and members of the Ukrainian military increased over time. Specifically, the proportions of images showing Zelensky with political figures and military members are at their highest after the Russian invasion (Figure 4).

Figure 4

Frequency of type of people shown with Zelensky over time

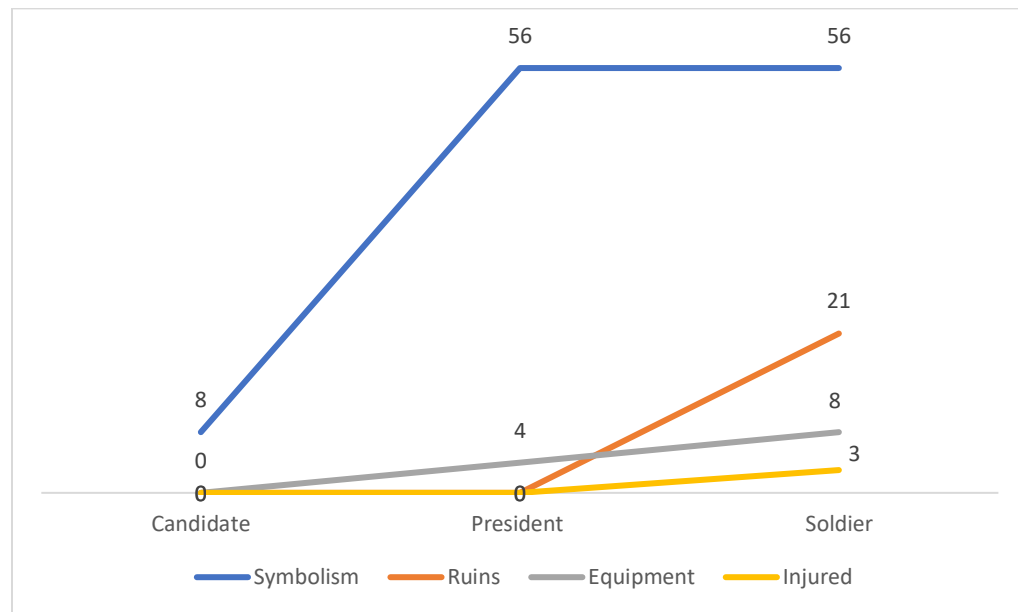


The presence of Ukrainian symbolism increases from 8% in the Candidate time frame to 56% in both President and Soldier time frames, suggesting that whether Zelensky is in the image, depictions of patriotism increase and then stay consistent over time. However, the proportion of Ukrainian symbolism in images with Zelensky increases from the Candidate time frame to the Soldier time frame. Injured individuals are only present after the invasion. Although images of ruins are only present in the Soldier time frame, none of these images feature Zelensky in them. All images in the President time frame that feature military equipment also feature Zelensky, but in the Soldier time frame, none of the images with military equipment feature Zelensky. There

are no images that feature enemy forces or dead individuals on Zelensky's Instagram, whether he is in the image or not (Figure 5).

Figure 5

Frequency of visual characteristics shown in images over time



The evolution of setting, activity, and physical appearance in Zelensky's Instagram photos is another characteristic to be considered when evaluating his self-presentation and mediatization. Of the 93 images in the Candidate time frame that featured Zelensky in them, 43.01% of images took place in a showbusiness setting and 50.54% of images depicted him acting or performing in front of an audience or participating in promotional activities for entertainment projects. Similarly, 11.82% show Zelensky in a gym, and 13.98% depict him participating in some sort of athletic activity. As shown in Figure 6, Zelensky's style of dress is mostly casual attire or costumes related to entertainment projects (Figure 7). His grooming style is overwhelmingly clean-shaven at 94.44%, the rest being fake facial hair as part of a costume (Figure 8). Nearly half of

the images with Zelensky depict agentic behavior, suggesting an active presence and dynamism. Lastly, Zelensky's facial expressions in the Candidate time frame are mostly positive (Figure 9). Zelensky's larger projected image in the Candidate time frame revolves around his position as a comedic television actor, assisted by portrayals of ordinariness and normalcy.

Zelensky's casualness and everyday portrayals of ordinariness transition to more diplomatic and traditional portrayals as he takes office. Of the 84 images in the President time frame that feature Zelensky, approximately a quarter of the images take place in a government building. He is also depicted in the streets and in nature. He begins to volunteer with civilians and military members and give speeches in front of audiences more frequently in this time frame. Agentic behavior, which is defined as physically active and dynamic behavior, is still present in 41.67% of the images with Zelensky, further indicating that he operates with an active presence. Additionally, Zelensky is mostly shown in formal attire, yet casual dress is still portrayed at 17.86% (Figure 7). His grooming style is overwhelmingly neat, yet neutral facial expressions become more prominent than in the Candidate time frame (Figures 8 and 9).

Once Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, 2022, Zelensky seemingly transformed from a president to a "soldier-in-chief." Of the 57 images in the Soldier time frame that feature Zelensky, nearly one-half depict him in his office while the other half are in another part of a government building. Although he is sitting rather still at his desk or calmly interacting with others, Zelensky is still depicted delivering speeches in 7 (12.28%) images and volunteering with injured or displaced civilians or members of the Ukrainian military in 5 (8.77%). Zelensky still shows dynamism in 40.35% of images

with him depicting agentic style. His attire transforms from shorts, t-shirts, and suits and ties to fatigues and military-style dress (Figure 7). His hair and beard are worn longer, and his facial expressions are nearly almost neutral or negative (Figures 8 and 9).

Figure 6

Frequency of visual characteristics in images with and without Zelensky over time

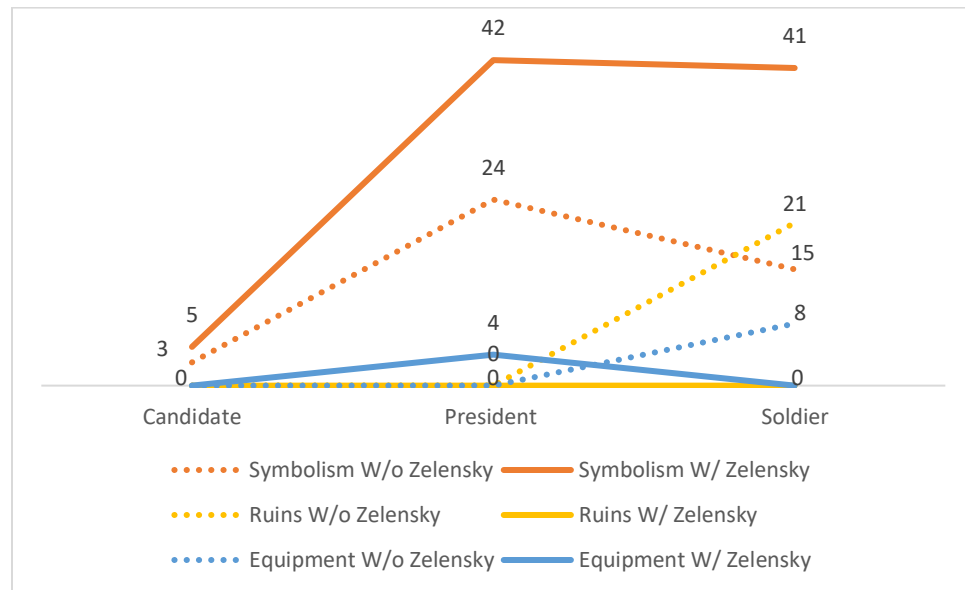


Figure 7

Frequency of Zelensky's clothing style over time

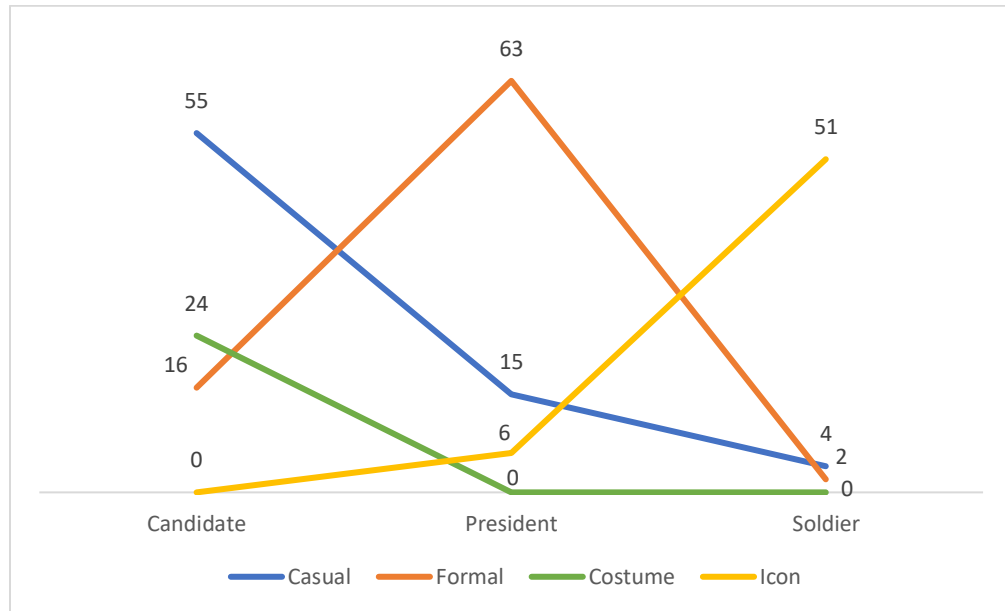


Figure 8

Frequency of Zelensky's grooming style over time

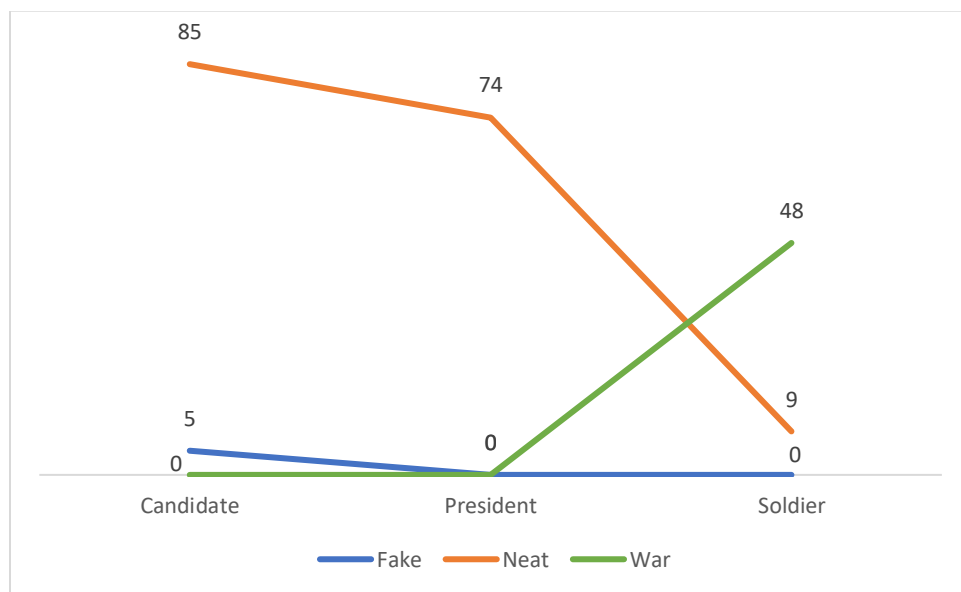
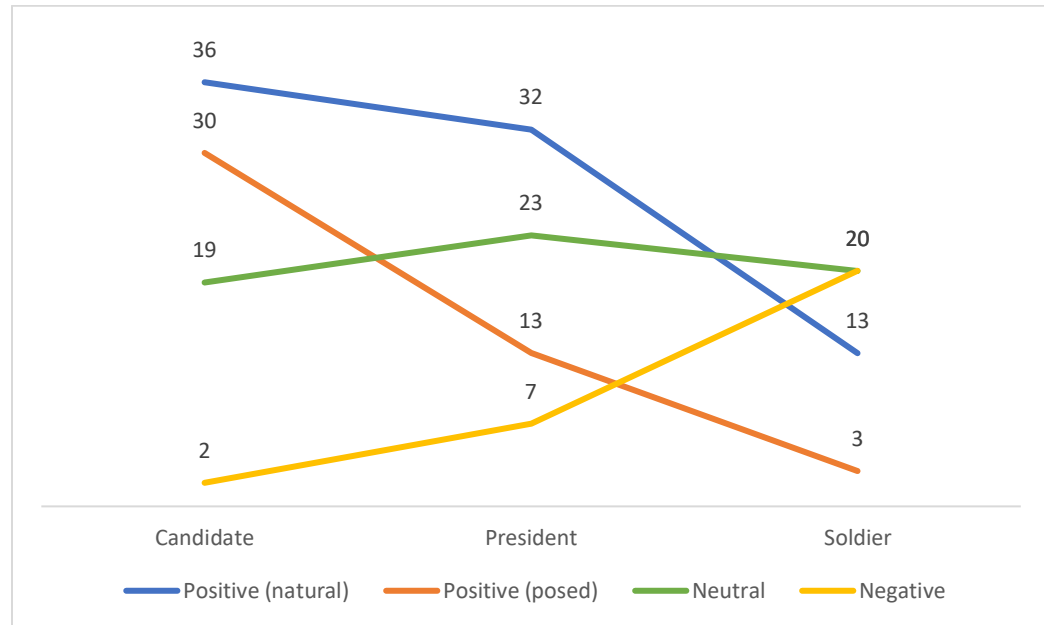


Figure 9

Frequency of Zelensky's facial expressions over time



Visual Frames

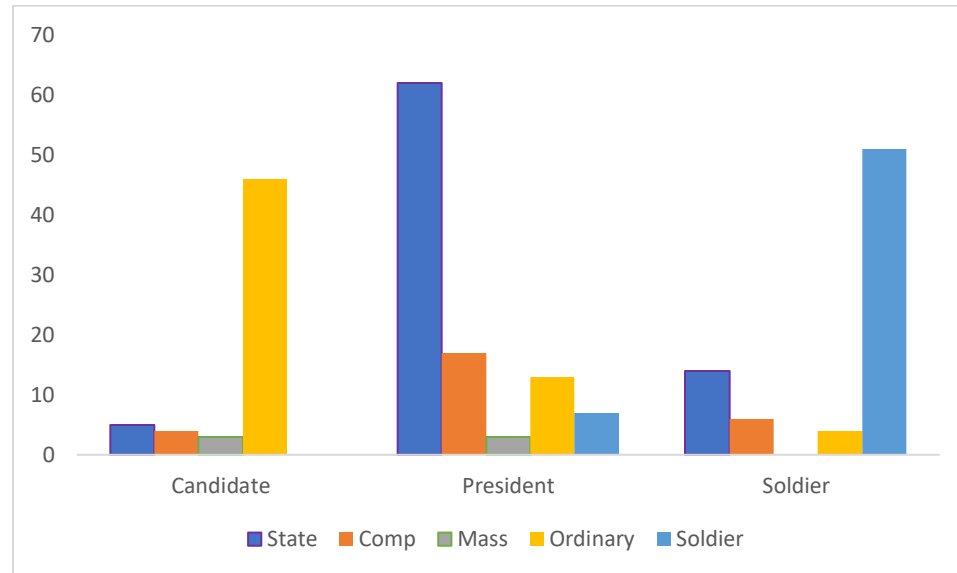
RQ2a asked what visual frames were present in Zelensky's still image posts on Instagram before and after he was elected to office. To measure the presence of different visual frames in images in the Candidate time frame, cross-tabulations were again conducted for each relevant frame variable. The frequency of certain visual frames differ before Zelensky was officially elected to office. For images containing Zelensky that fall into the Candidate time frame, 24 (49.46%) fit into the "ordinary" subdimension, followed by "celebrity campaigner (7.53%)," "statesmanship (5.37%)," "compassion (4.30%)," and "mass appeal (3.23%). No images within the Candidate time frame fit into the "soldier-in-chief" frame.

RQ2b asked what visual frames were present in Zelensky's still image posts on Instagram once elected to office but before the start of the Russian invasion. To measure the presence of visual frames in images in the President time frame, a cross-tabulation was conducted for each relevant variable. The frequency of visual frame subdimensions evolved to suggest a more official political presentation of Zelensky, with "statesmanship" (73.81%), "compassion" (20.24%), "ordinariness" (15.48%), "soldier-in-chief" (8.33%), and "mass appeal" (3.57%). No images within the President timeframe fit into the "celebrity campaigner" subdimension. Figure 10 shows the distribution of visual frames over time.

RQ2c asked what visual frames were present in Zelensky's still image posts on Instagram after the Russian invasion in 2022. To measure the presence of visual frames in images in the Soldier time frame, a cross-tabulation was conducted for each relevant variable. The "soldier-in-chief" frame was most evident with 89.47% of photos featuring Zelensky fitting into it, followed by "statesmanship (24.56%)," "compassion (10.53%)," and "ordinariness (7.02%). No images within the Soldier time frame fit into the "mass appeal" or "celebrity campaigner" subdimensions.

Figure 10

Frequency of visual frames over time



Zelensky's Self-Presentation

RQ3 asked how Zelensky's self-presentation on Instagram has changed since before his election to the Russian invasion. To operationalize self-presentation in images featuring Zelensky, frequency and cross-tabulations were conducted for the presence of front- and back-stage behavior. In the Candidate time frame, 56 (60.22%) of the images depict front region behavior, while 37 (39.78%) depict back region behavior. 38 (45.24%) images of Zelensky depicted front region behavior, while 46 (54.76%) images depicted back region behavior. Lastly, the results indicate that in the Soldier time frame, 19 (33.33%) images depicted Zelensky participating in front-stage behavior, while 38 (66.67%) depicted him participating in back-stage behavior.

Chapter VI

Discussion and Conclusion

This study explores and examines the visual characteristics and frames featured on Volodymyr Zelensky's Instagram. Specifically, this content analysis examines the presence of visual characteristics and frames in images from before he was elected to office to a year after the Russian invasion to analyze the evolution of Zelensky's self-presentation style from comedian and television actor to wartime president. This study offers a descriptive analysis of these visual appeals in relation to their effect on the soft power of Zelensky as a mediatized wartime leader possibly Ukraine as a whole.

Visual Characteristics

The frequency of the types of individuals featured on Zelensky's Instagram is significant to the evolution of his image over time. In the Candidate time frame, civilians were the most prominent type of individuals featured in the images. Politicians and members of the Ukrainian military were nearly nonexistent before Zelensky took office. Once he was elected, the frequency of civilians did not change significantly, but the frequency of politicians and military members increased. Finally, in the Soldier time frame, the number of politicians featured on Zelensky's Instagram decreased from what it was before the invasion and the number of civilians did not experience significant change, but the frequency of military members nearly doubled. These results suggest that as time passes, Zelensky is consistently concerned with depicting the actions of Ukrainian citizens. The presence of politicians becomes significant as he is elected to office, and military presence corresponds with rising geopolitical events, almost as if he is reporting what is happening on the front lines without actually being there.

The presence of Zelensky himself is also important to note. As time passes, Zelensky is featured in fewer and fewer photos, and his focus transitions from himself and his own activities to that of other people, and in the Soldier time frame, the conflict with Russia. Although the frequency of civilians featured on Zelensky's Instagram stays relatively consistent over time, the presence of Zelensky interacting with them does not. As time passes, Zelensky is shown with fewer civilians, supporters, journalists, and colleagues from entertainment projects. Instead, the proportion of images of Zelensky shown with political figures and members of the Ukrainian military increased over time. Specifically, the proportions of images showing Zelensky with political figures and military members are at their highest after the Russian invasion, suggesting that if Zelensky is going to show himself at all, he is going to show him working to help with the conflict. Similarly, any showcase of civilians in the Soldier time frame is reminiscent of journalistic reporting, showing what Ukrainian citizens are going through because of this war.

The presence of Ukrainian symbolism increases from 8% in the Candidate time frame to 56% in both President and Soldier time frames, suggesting that whether Zelensky is in the image, depictions of patriotism increase and then stay consistent over time. However, the proportion of Ukrainian symbolism in images with Zelensky increases from the Candidate time frame to the Soldier time frame, suggesting that direct visual linkages to Zelensky's own patriotism become more prominent with time. Using Saussure's framework, the depictions of Ukrainian symbolism are more than the signifier, which can include Zelensky simply holding a rectangular blue and gold piece of fabric. The signified, the mental concept brought forth, is what contributes to his

projected image. By appearing next to the national colors, this linkage to Ukrainian symbolism suggests that he is deeply connected to and has pride in Ukraine. This contributes to the formation of visual appeals that can increase Zelensky's soft power.

Although images of ruins are only present in the Soldier time frame, none of these images feature Zelensky in them. Additionally, all images in the President time frame that feature military equipment also feature Zelensky, but in the Soldier time frame, none of the images with military equipment feature Zelensky. There are no images that feature enemy forces or dead individuals on Zelensky's Instagram, whether he is in the image or not. This indicates that Zelensky is not necessarily shying away from the realities of this conflict, but the exclusion of the harsher elements shifts the focus in a comparatively positive direction, highlighting the Ukrainian military's efforts and progress in this war.

The sources of Zelensky's Instagram images over the three time frames also pose an interesting discussion. In the Candidate time frame, the sources are nearly split in half with 50% originating as promotional content for entertainment projects and 48% from Zelensky himself. As he transitions into office, most images originate from the Ukrainian government, while 15% still come from Zelensky and 15% come from news agencies. After Russia invades Ukraine, a little over half (57%) of the images originate from the Ukrainian government, while the rest come from news agencies. This evolution suggests a loss of personalization over time as images from Zelensky decrease and images from the Ukrainian government and news agencies increase. However, this also suggests that Zelensky is posting images in an effort to report on what is happening in the war, even if he is not physically there.

Regarding camera maneuvers, the images are consistently taken from either medium or long distances, but the 17% of close-ups in the Candidate time frame can be explained in part by the 15 images that were selfies. Additionally, images were mostly taken at a level angle consistently over the three time frames. As previously mentioned, the 15 selfies in the Candidate time frame can aid in explaining the 18 images taken from a high angle during the same time. Nearly half of the images in the Candidate time frame are set in a showbusiness setting, followed by nature or outside, streets, and gyms as the most prominent settings. When Zelensky is elected, offices and government buildings become more apparent. It is largely the same in the Soldier time frame, except 20% of the images are set in sites of rubble or destruction.

The evolution of setting, activity, and physical appearance in Zelensky's Instagram photos is another characteristic to be considered when evaluating his self-presentation and mediatization. Of the 93 images in the Candidate time frame that featured Zelensky in them, 43.01% of images took place in a showbusiness setting and 50.54% of images depicted him acting or performing in front of an audience or participating in promotional activities for entertainment projects. Similarly, 11.82% show Zelensky in a gym, and 13.98% depict him participating in some sort of athletic activity. In this time frame, Zelensky's style of dress is mostly casual attire or costumes related to entertainment projects, and his grooming style is overwhelmingly neat at 94.44%, the rest being fake facial hair as part of a costume. Nearly half of the images with Zelensky depict agentic behavior, suggesting an active presence and dynamism. Lastly, Zelensky's facial expressions in the Candidate time frame are mostly positive. Zelensky's larger projected image in the Candidate time frame revolves around his position as a comedic

television actor, assisted by portrayals of ordinariness and normalcy. It is important to note that this image remains consistent even though Zelensky announced his candidacy for president during this time frame.

Zelensky's casualness and everyday portrayals of ordinariness transition to more diplomatic and traditional portrayals as he takes office. Of the 84 images in the President time frame that feature Zelensky, approximately a quarter of the images take place in a government building. However, Zelensky is not stagnant in his office – he is also depicted in the streets and in nature. Although he is not depicted exercising or participating in athletic activities as much, he begins to volunteer with civilians and military members and give speeches in front of audiences more frequently in this time frame. Agency is still present in 41.67% of the images with Zelensky, further indicating that he operates with an active presence. Additionally, Zelensky is mostly shown in formal attire, yet casual dress is still portrayed at 17.86%. His grooming style is overwhelmingly neat, yet neutral facial expressions become more prominent than in the Candidate time frame. Zelensky's projected image in the President time frame, although more professional and diplomatic, is still not aloof or detached.

Once Russia invaded Ukraine in February of 2022, Zelensky seemingly transformed from a president to a “soldier-in-chief.” Of the 57 images in the Soldier time frame that feature Zelensky, nearly one-half depict him in his office while the other half are in another part of a government building. Although rather he is sitting rather still at his desk or calmly interacting with others, Zelensky is still depicted delivering speeches in 7 (12.28%) images and volunteering with injured or displaced civilians or members of the Ukrainian military in 5 (8.77%). Zelensky still shows dynamism in 40.35% of images

with him depicting agentic style. His attire transforms from shorts, t-shirts, and suits and ties to fatigues and military-style dress. His hair and beard are worn longer, and his facial expressions are nearly almost neutral or negative.

Looking at the combination of these visual characteristics in all images sampled for this analysis, it is important to summarize the prominent trends that appear over time. As time evolves, the images on Zelensky's Instagram transform from depictions of show business and personal life, to showcases of diplomacy, to a transition into wartime. Although there is no presence of enemy forces or dead individuals, politicians and military members become prominent features while civilians are consistently depicted. Ukrainian symbolism, depictions of ruins, military equipment, and injured individuals increase over time, with ruins suddenly appearing after the Russian invasion. As previously mentioned, these visual characteristics must be further discussed past their physical representation, the signifier. The mental concepts brought forth are what construct the meanings given to them by the audience. Ukrainian symbolism suggests patriotism and pride for one's own country, and the depictions of ruins, military equipment, and injured individuals paint the larger picture of Russia's relentless destruction and aggression toward Ukraine. Lastly, the setting evolves from stages and movie sets to offices and government buildings, to sites of rubble and destruction. Overall, Zelensky's Instagram evolves from a scrapbook of personal endeavors, perhaps with limited persuasive intent, to an exhibit of wartime events.

The evolution of the visual characteristics in images with Zelensky is also important to examine. Before his presidency, Zelensky is often depicted in show business settings and gyms, performing, exercising, and doing everyday activities. His appearance

is neat and casual, and his expressions are positive. He's often shown with colleagues and civilians. When he is elected to office, his appearance becomes more formal, he is more involved with other politicians, and he is often in his office or in a government building. His election led to more patriotism with more depictions of Ukrainian symbolism and military members. The Russian invasion introduces a harsh turn, and he is suddenly limited to his office and government buildings. Images of ruins, rubble, and destruction become more prominent, but they originate from news agencies and he is not in them. He dresses in military-style clothing, sports a slightly longer beard and a slightly disheveled look, and his expressions become more neutral and negative. He is shown with less citizens but more military members, and the presence of Ukrainian symbolism with Zelensky reaches its peak. Much like the evolution of overall trends on his Instagram at large, Zelensky's projected image transitions from a casual comedic actor to a soldier for the people.

Visual Frames

The presence and frequency of certain visual frames in images of Zelensky differ across the Candidate, President, and Soldier time frames. The results indicate that Zelensky's self-presentation greatly revolved around the depiction of normalcy with 46 (49.46%) images in the Candidate time frame depicting "ordinariness," which includes wearing informal attire or casual dress, participating in athletic activities, and interacting with ordinary people. Although the "populist campaigner" frame is comprised of both "mass appeal" and "ordinariness" subdimensions, only 3 (3.23%) images fit into the "mass appeal" category. It is interesting to note that Zelensky announced his presidential campaign during this time, yet only 5 (5.37%) images fit into "statesmanship" and 4

(4.30%) fit into “compassion,” the two subdimensions. that comprise the “ideal candidate” frame. Therefore, this analysis of the visual frames present in the Candidate time frame suggests that these images depicted ordinary, everyday elements of Zelensky’s life instead of the inner workings and efforts put towards his presidential campaign. However, it is important to note that the seemingly normal aspects of Zelensky’s life may not be “ordinary” for the average Eastern European. These portrayals of ordinariness, consisting of gym photos, nice athletic clothing, and trips to foreign countries with friends and families may attempt to project an image of normalcy, but they have the potential to be perceived as privileged and elite due to the contrast of the lives of average Ukrainian citizens.

In the President time frame, images featuring Zelensky become significantly more official and presidential as transitions from a television actor to the leader of Ukraine. The “ideal candidate” is dominant during this time, with “statesmanship” being present in 62 (73.81%) images and “compassion” being present in 17 (20.24%) images. These results indicate that a notable number of images featuring Zelensky in this time frame depict him with other leaders, dressed in formal attire, or surrounding by campaign paraphernalia and patriotic symbols, as well as interacting with family members, children, family members, or displaying religious symbolism. Interestingly, “ordinariness” is still present in 13 (15.48%) images, but Zelensky’s presentation on his Instagram takes a turn to display more traditional, diplomatic activities expected of someone in office.

In the Soldier time frame, the “soldier-in-chief” frame is most prominent in images featuring Zelensky. These 51 (89.47%) images depict Zelensky wearing a fatigue

or military-style garb, sporting a wartime grooming style, and interacting or volunteering with injured or displaced civilians or with Ukrainian military members on the front lines. “Statesmanship” is still present in 14 (24.56%) images depicting Zelensky interacting with other political leaders and sporting Ukrainian patriotic symbols. However, “ordinariness” reaches an all-time low at this point, suggesting that Zelensky aims to present himself with more stoicism during this war. However, it can also be argued that the images in the Soldier time frame are the most “ordinary” out of all the images because of his man-of-the-people appearance. In the Soldier time frame, Zelensky is dressed down to fatigues, and he is not always shown with an entourage as a president typically would be. Therefore, his projected image becomes much more convincingly ordinary than ever before.

In order to examine the portrayals of Zelensky on Instagram over time, it is important to compare the presence and frequencies of visual frames over the Candidate, President, and Soldier time frames. The results suggest that Zelensky’s Instagram posts of himself began as a personal display of everyday life, featuring him working out at the gym, wearing casual or leisurely clothing, and participating in everyday activities. “Ordinariness” was most frequent before Zelensky became president. As time progresses and Zelensky is elected to office, he develops into more of an “ideal candidate,” with elements of ordinariness still present in this time frame. It is important to note that the President time frame features the highest frequency of the “statesmanship” and “compassion” subdimensions. Additionally, “mass appeal” was only present in images of Zelensky before the Russian invasion. In the Soldier time frame, Zelensky becomes overwhelmingly soldier-presenting, with the “soldier-in-chief” frame increasing from

8.33% in the President time frame to 89.47% after the invasion. Much like the findings from the analyses of visual characteristics on Zelensky's Instagram, the visual frames reflect how his actions and appearance change with his position. A comedic actor is ordinary compared to a president, but Zelensky as a wartime leader is much more stoic and soldier-like than what constitutes an ideal candidate.

Zelensky's Self-Presentation

When considering Zelensky's self-presentation style over the course of the three time periods, the results of this analysis indicate an increased presence of back stage behavior over time. Of the images that feature Zelensky, the back stage gained prominence as time progressed, beginning with 39.78% of images in the Candidate time frame, to 54.76% in the President time frame, and 66.67% in the Soldier time frame. This suggests that Zelensky revealed more of his private life and glimpses into behind-the-scenes since he entered office. By increasingly showing an area of performance where "the vital secrets of a show" are kept, the back stage behavior presented by Zelensky gives him a more authentic appearance on the surface (Goffman, 1959, p. 113; Meyrowitz, 1977). This is also supported by the discussion of Zelensky actually projecting as more ordinary after the invasion due to his appearance and lack of entourage.

Although the presence of front and back region behavior on Zelensky's Instagram may be compelling, the presence of the middle region cannot be ignored. Meyrowitz (1977) claimed that the introduction of electronic media has blurred the lines between the front stage and back stage, thus ushering in a new region in which audiences have access to moments and behaviors that are traditionally kept out of view. The presence of images

showing Zelensky working in his office, volunteering on what seems to be the front lines, and participating in conversations with other politicians are portrayals of private activities. However, Zelensky's following and the social nature of social media give these traditionally private moments an opportunity to be broadcasted, therefore supporting Meyrowitz's (1977) claim that performances are not just restricted to either the front stage or back stage, but another region that is the product of the ever-evolving mass media landscape.

Additionally, performances are not always live or candid. They are often scheduled, crafted, rehearsed, and edited before the audience views them. Hogan (2010) notes that these performances are exhibitions put together by curators due to their deliberate formation and potential to be copied or replicated. Meyrowitz (1977) also states that the presentation of back stage behavior can project surface-level authenticity. Zelensky, in this case, can be named the curator. He is organizing and posting content that contains visual appeals to craft his projected image, and in turn, the audience develops its perceived image based on what they sense (Alberti & De Serio, 2020). These images, particularly those in the Soldier time frame, are not taken candidly. They are taken primarily by the Ukrainian government or photojournalists from news agencies and are intentionally gathered to report on what is happening in this war. In essence, the increasing curation of back stage behaviors aids projecting an authentic image, which works in tandem with the visual frames previously discussed.

Mediatization and Soft Power Efforts

According to Strömbäck (2008), the phenomenon of mediatization manifests through a series of stages. The first phase is reached when the media constitute the

dominant information on politics and political actors. The second phase involved the media becoming independent from political institutions, and the media logic overpowers political logic. The third phase of mediatization involves the increased independence of dominance of the media over political institutions, so much so that political and social actors must adapt to media logic. Finally, the fourth phase is accomplished when political and social actors both adapt and internalize the media logic, which in turn becomes incorporated into governing processes. The processes highlighted in these phases emphasize the loss of independence of politics and society from the media.

For the purpose of this analysis, it is important to apply Strömbäck's (2008) third and fourth phases of mediatization to Zelensky's presence on Instagram. This framework suggests that Zelensky has recognized that he cannot ignore the role mass media plays in society today. As a result, he has adopted this new communication channel as a medium of both self-expression and reporting details of the war. Using both avenues, Zelensky is able to craft not only an image on social media, but a narrative that has the potential to strengthen soft power (Roselle et al., 2014). This is important to note because, with his 17.1 million Instagram followers, these seemingly personalized reports of the conflict can have a wider reach. Zelensky has not only recognized that he cannot ignore the role of mass media, but he has also taken advantage of his mediatized environment to become a more effective leader (Spencer, 1873/2005).

Not only is Zelensky's following on Instagram a significant aspect but what he is sharing with followers is also important to consider. The results from this analysis suggest that Zelensky is no stranger to using visual appeals. He first gained attraction with the frequent depictions of ordinariness, humor, and positive expressions in the

Candidate frame. He was consistent in presenting his patriotism by posting Ukrainian national symbols and featuring civilians in images once he was elected to office. By building the foundation of his charismatic, everyday-man appearance in the earlier time frames, the attraction from people both in Ukraine and abroad was established before the Russian invasion. Therefore, when the conflict began and Zelensky needed to win over the hearts and minds of the world, he already had them.

As previously stated, Zelensky often featured visual characteristics and frames in his Instagram posts to gain power through attraction, otherwise known as soft power (Nye, 1990). Particularly, the mental concepts brought forth by the signifier, such as patriotism and pride resulting from visual linkages to Ukrainian symbolism, further contribute to that attraction. However, in a geopolitical conflict against Russia, soft power may not be enough for a country that has been literally and figuratively belittled by the opposing force. Therefore, Zelensky can use his current soft power tactics to receive aid from allied countries in the form of money and military equipment. By acquiring these hard power elements and combining them with his current strategy, he can achieve smart power, which efficiently utilizes the most effective elements of soft and hard power (Nye, 2009). Achieving smart power would not only give Ukraine a morale boost from abroad but also the assets needed to defend itself from Russian forces.

Conclusion

The primary purpose of this study is to analyze differences in the visual characteristics and visual frames of Zelensky's Instagram posts from his candidacy and election to his wartime self. The secondary purpose of this study is to analyze how the visual characteristics and visual frames on Zelensky's Instagram aid in crafting his self-

presentation style, and how the mediatization of a wartime leader influences soft power. The findings of this analysis indicate that Zelensky's projected image on Instagram has evolved from a casual comedic actor to a statesmanlike politician, to a mediatized wartime leader. To date, no study thus far has examined the influence of Zelensky's online self-presentation on the potential global perception of Zelensky's leadership style and soft power efforts. Additionally, the findings of this study contribute to the literature on self-presentation and the presence of the middle region in the evolving electronic media landscape.

This analysis provides a recent example of visual framing techniques, and more importantly, conceptualizes a frame for a new mediatized wartime leader. Therefore, the findings of this study also contribute to the conceptualization of mediatization of leadership, politics, and conflict. Zelensky utilizes Instagram, a visual-centric social media platform, to show that he is involved in this conflict with Russia. He may not always be out on the front, but his efforts and collaborations with global leaders and members of the Ukrainian military are posted for the world to see. His application of visual appeals and frames depicts him as a leader with charisma and care for his citizens, which further amplifies the soft power of both Zelensky and Ukraine as a whole.

Building on Spencer's (1873/2005) argument, the consideration of Zelensky's status as a "great man" can be attributed to his recognition and utilization of Instagram as a method of communicating his narrative to the world. If a leader can successfully win the hearts and minds of people domestically and abroad, as well as the support from other leaders and governments, soft power can lead to the acquisition of hard power resources. Zelensky, who famously said "I need ammunition, not a ride," is using these soft power

techniques to receive international support through means of money and military equipment (The Associated Press, 2022, para. 2). Therefore, with the combination of visual appeals, visual frames, self-presentation, and mediatization, Zelensky is on track to achieve smart power, giving Ukraine support needed to defeat Russia in the forms of morale boosts and ammunition.

Chapter VII

Limitations and Future Research

As discussed above, the results of this analysis contribute to the body of literature surrounding political self-presentation, visual framing, and soft power tactics. It also introduces new implications for political communication research, specifically regarding the role of mediatization in politics and conflict. The findings of this study illustrate how a politician can craft a visual strategic narrative amid war to attract and persuade key publics. However, this study had multiple limitations. First, the sample consists of only still images found on Zelensky's Instagram page, which excludes other content that could potentially aid in his soft power and self-presentation efforts. Specifically, because this study only analyzes visuals, the findings do not reflect the explicit message being put out by Zelensky through written captions or speeches delivered through video. Therefore, more research is needed to examine how and what Zelensky is communicating beyond visuals.

Secondly, this analysis examines nonverbal messaging in Zelensky's images through a Western lens. Even though he is actively trying to form alliances and communicate with the West through his soft power efforts, nonverbal elements in images can translate differently across cultures. Therefore, the interpretations elaborated on in this study may only apply and resonate with those of similar cultures to the author. This provides an opportunity to apply these frameworks and concepts to a future study employing different cultural interpretations. Lastly, this study is an analysis of one politician on one social media platform, so the findings of this study may not be applicable to other politicians and platforms. More research is needed to examine the

influence of self-presentation on soft power over time, considering that this geopolitical conflict between Russia and Ukraine has the potential to last indefinitely. The actions of world leaders cannot just be measured on a short-term basis because they have the potential to impact generations to come.

Despite these limitations, the current study provides an analysis of how and what Zelensky has been presenting on his Instagram from before he was elected to a year after the invasion. It also provides insight into new applications of the middle region, mediatization, and soft power in the age of this conflict. Although more research is needed to further investigate all messaging put out by Zelensky as well as the long-term effects of his soft power efforts, this study will give scholars an opportunity to further analyze Zelensky's role as a mediatized wartime leader through his self-presentation on social media. This study also creates an opportunity for research that applies different cultural perspectives to the theoretical frameworks. Because both of the coders that participated in the intercoder reliability check are of United States origin, coders from diverse cultural backgrounds could be employed to introduce broader perspectives. Additionally, conducting interviews or focus groups with participants of diverse backgrounds could provide insight into how Zelensky's self-presentation style resonates across cultures.

References

- Al Jazeera. (2023, April 12). *Ukraine war likely to stretch past 2023: Purported US documents*. Russia-Ukraine war News | Al Jazeera.
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/4/12/ukraine-war-likely-to-stretch-past-2023-purported-us-documents#:~:text=Ukraine%20has%20suffered%20124%2C500%20to,Assessed%20Combat%20Sustainability%20and%20Attrition%E2%80%9D>.
- Alberti, A., & De Serio, L. (2020a). Social Media and Politics: The case of Ukraine. *Geopolitical, Social Security and Freedom Journal*, 3(1), 65–86.
<https://doi.org/10.2478/gssfj-2020-0006>
- Armitage, R. L., & Nye, J. S. (2007). How America Can Become a Smarter Power. In *CSIS Commission on Smart Power: A smarter, more secure America* (pp. 5–14). essay, Center For Strategic & International Studies.
- Bell, R. M. (2013). Charismatic leadership case study with Ronald Reagan as exemplar. *Emerging Leadership Journeys*, 65(1), 83-91.
- Beltrán, A. (2009). *Facebook and its behavioral rules: The emergence of a middle region* [Master's thesis, Karlstad University].
- British Council. (2016, January). The soft power of Twitter. Retrieved April 27, 2023, from <https://www.britishcouncil.org/research-policy-insight/insight-articles/soft-power-twitter>
- Carlyle, T. (1841). *Heroes, hero worship, and the heroic in history*. Philadelphia, PA: Henry Altemus.
- Chong, D., & Druckman, J. N. (2007). Framing theory. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 10(1), 103–126.
<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.10.072805.103054>
- Colliander, J., Marder, B., Falkman, L. L., Madestam, J., Modig, E., & Sagfossen, S. (2017). The social media balancing act: Testing the use of a balanced self-presentation strategy for politicians using twitter. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 74, 277-285.
- Collins, S., & DeWitt, J. (2023). Words Matter: Presidents Obama and Trump, Twitter, and US Soft Power. *World Affairs*, 004382002311616.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/00438200231161631>
- Conger, J. A., & Kanungo, R. N. (1987). Toward a behavioral theory of charismatic leadership in organizational settings. *Academy of Management Review*, 12(4), 637–647. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1987.4306715>

- Dresner, E. (2006). Middle region phenomena and globalization. *International Communication Gazette*, 68(4), 363–378.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1748048506065767>
- Esser, A., Hilborn, M., & Steemers, J. (2023). *Screen Encounters with Britain - Interim Report Denmark: What do young Europeans make of Britain and its digital screen culture?*. King's College London. <https://doi.org/10.18742/pub01-118>
- Fisher, M. (2022, February 24). *Putin's case for war, annotated*. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/24/world/europe/putin-ukraine-speech.html>
- Fisher, W. R. (1985). The narrative paradigm: An elaboration. *Communications Monographs*, 52(4), 347-367.
- Flew, T., & Waisbord, S. (2015). The ongoing significance of national media systems in the context of media globalization. *Media, Culture & Society*, 37(4), 620–636.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443714566903>
- France 24. (2019, April 16). *For Russian speakers in Ukraine, a candidate talking their language*. France 24. <https://www.france24.com/en/20190416-russian-speakers-ukraine-candidate-talking-language>
- Goffman E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Anchor Books.
- Grabe, M. E., & Bucy, E. P. (2011). Image bite analysis of political visuals: Understanding the visual framing process in election news. In *Sourcebook for Political Communication Research* (pp. 231-259). Routledge.
- Hjarvard, S. (2008). The mediatization of society. *Nordicom Review*, 29(2), 102-131.
- Hogan, B. (2010). The presentation of self in the age of social media: Distinguishing performances and exhibitions online. *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society*, 30(6), 377-386.
- Houser, N. (2009). Peirce, phenomenology and semiotics. In *The Routledge Companion to Semiotics* (pp. 111-122). Routledge.
- Isachenkov, V. (2021, April 15). *Explainer: What's behind the conflict in Eastern Ukraine?* AP NEWS. <https://apnews.com/article/ukraine-shootings-donetsk-moscow-russia-3d2e732cc1a88c0d1b36fe856b45a8a9>
- Lilleker, D. G. (2019). The power of visual political communication: Pictorial politics through the lens of communication psychology. *Visual Political Communication*, 37-51.

- Lundskow, G. (1998). Smiles, styles, and profiles: Claim and acclaim of Ronald Reagan as Charismatic leader. *Social Thought and Research*, 185-214. <https://doi.org/10.17161/str.1808.5122>
- Makhortykh, M., & Sydorova, M. (2017). Social Media and visual framing of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine. *Media, War & Conflict*, 10(3), 359–381. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750635217702539>
- Mankoff, J. (2022, April 22). *Russia's war in Ukraine: Identity, history, and conflict*. Center for Strategic & International Studies. Retrieved from <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russias-war-ukraine-identity-history-and-conflict>
- Masters, J. (2020, February 5). *Ukraine: Conflict at the Crossroads of Europe and Russia*. Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.cfr.org/background/ukraine-conflict-crossroads-europe-and-russia>
- Marchenko, A. (2020). The personal is political: Volodymyr Zelensky in the spotlight of the international mainstream media. *Baltic Worlds: The Role of Religion in the Ukrainian Political Landscape*, XIII:2–3, 100–112.
- Mazzoleni, G. (2014). *Mediatization and Political Populism* (F. Esser & J. Strömbäck, Eds.) (pp. 42-56). Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/DOI10.1057/9781137275844>
- Mendonça, R. F., & Caetano, R. D. (2020). Populism as parody: The visual self-presentation of Jair Bolsonaro on Instagram. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 26(1), 210–235. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161220970118>
- Meyrowitz, J. (1977). The rise of "middle region" politics. *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, 133-144.
- Meyrowitz, J. (1986). *No sense of place: The impact of electronic media on social behavior*. Oxford University Press.
- Moe, T. M. (2005). Power and political institutions. *Perspectives on Politics*, 3(2), 215-233.
- Nye, J. S. (1990). Soft power. *Foreign Policy*, (80), 153-171.
- Nye, J. S. (2009). Get smart: Combining hard and soft power. *Foreign Affairs*, 88(4), 160–163. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20699631>
- Olof Larsson, A. (2021). The rise of Instagram as a tool for political communication: A longitudinal study of European political parties and their followers. *New Media & Society*, 146144482110341. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448211034158>

- Parry, K. (2011). Images of Liberation? visual framing, humanitarianism and British press photography during the 2003 Iraq Invasion. *Media, Culture & Society*, 33(8), 1185–1201. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443711418274>
- Peng, Y. (2020). What makes politicians' instagram posts popular? analyzing social media strategies of candidates and office holders with Computer Vision. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 26(1), 143–166. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161220964769>
- Persson, A. (2012). Front-and backstage in social media. *Language, Discourse & Society*, 1(2), 11-31.
- Poniewozik, J. (2022, March 9). *Volodymyr Zelensky is playing the role of his life*. The New York Times. Retrieved April 26, 2023, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/09/arts/television/volodymyr-zelensky-servant-of-the-people.html>
- Rodriguez, L., & Dimitrova, D. V. (2011). The levels of visual framing. *Journal of Visual Literacy*, 30(1), 48–65. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23796529.2011.11674684>
- Rohozinska, J., & Shpak, V. (2019). Ukraine's post-Maidan struggles: The rise of an "outsider" president. *Journal of Democracy*, 30(3), 33-47.
- Roselle, L., Miskimmon, A., & O'Loughlin, B. (2014). Strategic narrative: A new means to understand soft power. *Media, War & Conflict*, 7(1), 70–84. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750635213516696>
- Roumelioti, E. M. M. (2023). *Social Media goes to War in Ukraine - Living and Reporting the War*. [Master's thesis, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens]. <https://pergamos.lib.uoa.gr/uoa/dl/object/3309133/file.pdf>
- Shevtsova, L. (2001). From Yeltsin to Putin: The Evolution of Presidential Power. In L. Shevtsova & A. Brown (Eds.), *Gorbachev, Yeltsin, and Putin: Political Leadership in Russia's Transition* (pp. 67–112). Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1mtz6bn.8>
- Spencer, H. (1873/2005) *The Study of Sociology*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. (Original work published 1873)
- Steffan, D. (2021). Visual self-presentation strategies of political candidates on Social Media Platforms: A comparative study. *Visual Politics*, 76–103. <https://doi.org/10.5771/9783748925415-76>
- Strömbäck, J. (2008). Four phases of Mediatization: An analysis of the mediatization of politics. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 13(3), 228–246. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161208319097>

- The Associated Press. (2022, February 26). *Live updates: Zelenskyy declines us offer to evacuate Kyiv*. AP News. <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-business-europe-united-nations-kyiv-6ccba0905f1871992b93712d3585f548>
- Trammell, K. D., & Keshelashvili, A. (2005). Examining the new influencers: A self-presentation study of A-list blogs. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 82(4), 968–982. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107769900508200413>
- Troianovski, A., & Sonne, P. (2023, May 27). *Barely noting war in public, Putin acts like time is on his side*. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/27/world/europe/russia-putin-ukraine-war.html>
- Ukraine, other conflicts push forcibly displaced total over 100 million for first time*. UNHCR. (2022, May 23). <https://www.unhcr.org/news/news-releases/unhcr-ukraine-other-conflicts-push-forcibly-displaced-total-over-100-million>
- Ukraine: Civilian casualty update 19 June 2023*. OHCHR. (2023, June 19). <https://www.ohchr.org/en/news/2023/06/ukraine-civilian-casualty-update-19-june-2023#:~:text=Total%20civilian%20casualties,9%2C083%20killed%20and%2015%2C779%20injured.>
- Villanova University. (2022, September 6). *The Great Man Theory of Leadership Explained*. Villanovau.com. <https://www.villanovau.com/resources/leadership/great-man-theory/>
- Wang, J. (2022). Dramaturgical Theory in social media. *Journal of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 6, 62-66.
- Weber, M. (1922/1978) *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. 2 Vols. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. (Original work published 1922)
- Yakin, H. S., & Totu, A. (2014). The semiotic perspectives of Peirce and Saussure: A brief comparative study. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 155, 4–8. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.10.247>
- Zhang, S. I. (2021). Mediatization of conflict in the social media era: A case study of Sino-Indian border crisis in 2017. *Journalism*, 22(10), 2618-2636.

Appendix A

Coding Scheme

This quantitative content analysis examines the different characteristics of the Instagram posts in the sample. Specifically, this analysis will be looking at different visual characteristics at both an individual level and as an aggregation to form larger visual frames.

The first variable under Post Characteristics is “item date” and is designed to record the date in which the image was posted to Instagram. The second variable “time frame” indicates the time frame that the image falls under. This variable has three levels: Candidate, consisting of images posted between May 19, 2018 and May 19, 2019; President, consisting of images posted between May 20, 2019 and February 23, 2022; and Soldier-in-Chief, consisting of images posted between February 24, 2022 and February 24, 2023. The third post-related variable is “image source,” which will measure whether the image originates from Zelensky himself, a news agency, or another entity.

Under Photo Characteristics, the variable “selfie” measured whether the image is a self-taken photo by Zelensky. “Shot length” measured how much of the setting and/or subject is shown within the given frame of the image and consists of three levels: close-up, medium, and long. “Camera angle” measured the angle at which the image was taken and consists of three levels: low, equal, and high.

“Shot setting” determined where the image takes place and will be categorized as office, gym, hospital, street, sites of rubble or destruction, government building, nature/outside, show business setting, Zelensky’s home, indoor reception, war environment, transportation, or a sporting event. The variable “People” is designed to

record if the image contains people within it, and if not, what the image consists of.

“Number of people” measured the number of people within the image. The age of the people in the photos measured if the image contains young children (0-9 years of age), pre-teens (10-12 years of age), or teenagers (13-17 years of age). “Adult” measured if the image shows young adults (18-35 years of age), middle-aged adults (35-59 years of age), or older adults (60+). “Mixed Ages” is designed to categorize images that show a combination of people of different ages. The variable “ratio” determined the ratio of adults to children in the image.

“Male” measured if the image shows all people who present as male, and “Female” measured if the image shows all people who present as female. “Mixed Genders” measured if the image shows a combination of males and females, and “Gender” determined which gender dominates the image. “Facial expressions” measured the facial expressions of people in the images and consisted of three larger levels: positive, neutral, and negative. Images were also coded for the types of individuals depicted in the image: politicians, civilians, and/or military personnel. Additional visual components being coded consist of Ukrainian patriotic symbols (national colors, flags, etc.), ruins, dead bodies, casualties/injured individuals, military equipment, and enemy forces.

Images were also coded for whether Zelensky is featured in the image. The “Selfie” variable determined if the photo is self-taken by Zelensky. Images were also coded for the percentage of the shot Zelensky’s image occupies. Images featuring Zelensky were coded for facial expression, which contains the larger levels of a positive natural smile, a positive posed smile, neutral, and negative. Images with Zelensky were

also coded for the types of individuals depicted in the image with him: politicians, civilians, military personnel, and/or family members. The variable “dress” determined Zelensky’s clothing style in the image: casual/leisurely, professional, costume, and fatigue/military style. “Grooming style” consisted of neat grooming style, war-time grooming style, or fake facial hair part of a costume. “Agency” measured whether Zelensky is displaying aggressive, active, or dynamic behavior. “Affinity gestures” measured whether Zelensky’s gestures are friendly in nature. “Defiance gestures” measured is Zelensky’s gestures are threatening or antagonistic.

Images were coded for the type of activity being displayed by Zelensky. This analysis will include exercise/athletic activity, showbiz (acting, performing, or promoting entertainment projects), in the field (participating in voluntary activities with injured/displaced civilians or visiting with military personnel), working for the people (delivering a speech in front of an audience or interacting with ordinary people), and depictions of everyday life. Images were also coded for visual regions, which are categorized by front and back regions according to Goffman’s (1959) definitions mentioned previously.

Lastly, images were coded for the larger visual frames employed within the images. The “ideal candidate” frame includes both statesmanship and compassion subdimensions and the “populist campaigner” frame includes both mass appeal and ordinariness subdimensions previously mentioned. Images will also be coded for a “soldier-in-chief” frame, which includes portrayals of Zelensky in the field or leading troops.

Appendix B

Descriptive Results

Of all images in the Candidate time frame, 3.8% showed civilians, 1% showed politicians, and no images showed members of the military. Ukrainian symbols were shown in 8% of images. No images featured ruins, military equipment, enemy forces, or injured or dead individuals. Regarding the locations in which photos in the Candidate time frame took place, 42% of images took place in a showbusiness setting, 19% outside or in nature, 16% on a street in an urban area, 11% in a gym, 5% in an office, 4% in Zelensky's home, 2% at an indoor reception, and 1% in some form on transportation. No images belonging to the Candidate time frame were set in hospitals, sites of rubble or destruction, government buildings, war environments, or sporting events.

Of the 100 total images belonging to the Candidate time frame, Zelensky was featured in 93%. Zelensky is alone in 24 (25.81%) of the images he is featured in. The results indicate that 53 (57.00%) images depicted Zelensky interacting with colleagues, 27 (29.03%) with civilians, 3 (3.22%) with family members, 3 (3.22%) with supporters, 2 (2.15%) with political figures/influentials, and 2 (2.15%) with journalists. There were no photos that depicted Zelensky interacting with members of the Ukrainian military in the Candidate time frame. Just 5 (5.37%) of the Candidate images that feature Zelensky show some form of Ukrainian symbolism, and none of the images depict ruins, military equipment, enemy forces, or injured or dead individuals.

Of the images in the Candidate time frame that feature Zelensky, 40 (43.01%) depict him in a showbusiness setting, 17 (18.23%) outside or in nature, 16 (17.20%) on a street in an urban setting, 11 (11.83%) in a gym, 5 (5.38%) in an office, 2 (2.15%) at an

indoor reception, 1 (1.08%) at home, and 1 (1.08%) on some form of transportation. No images belonging to the Candidate time frame that feature Zelensky in them took place in a hospital, government building, sites of rubble or destruction, war environment, or sporting events.

The results also indicated differences in the frequency of Zelensky's physical appearance and activities. In the images that feature Zelensky in the Candidate time frame, 55 (59.14%) showed him in casual dress, 16 (17.20%) in formal attire, and 22 (23.66%) in a costume as a part of an entertainment project. No images belonging to this time frame that feature Zelensky depict him in military-style dress. 88 (94.44%) of the images in the Candidate time frame that feature Zelensky feature him with a neat grooming style, and 5 (5.30%) feature Zelensky wearing fake facial hair as part of a costume. No images in the Candidate time frame show Zelensky with a wartime grooming style. Of the images in the Candidate time frame in which Zelensky is shown and his facial expression is visible, 36 (41.38%) show him with a positive, natural smile, 30 (34.48%) show him with a positive, posed smile, 19 (21.84%) show him with a neutral expression, and 2 (2.30%) show him with a negative expression.

The results also indicate a difference in the frequency of Zelensky's activity. For images in the Candidate time frame that feature Zelensky, 47 (50.54%) images depict Zelensky acting, performing, or participating in an entertainment project, 13 (13.98%) images depict Zelensky participating in some sort of athletic activity, and 4 (4.30%) images depict Zelensky delivering a speech or talk in front of an audience. No images in the Candidate time frame depict Zelensky helping citizens or volunteering with military

personnel. Zelensky was shown to have an agentic style in 39 (41.94%) of the images in the Candidate time frame.

Of the 93 images in the Candidate time frame that feature Zelensky, 55 (59.14%) showed Zelensky filling up to 25% of the frame, 32 (34.41%) showed Zelensky filling up to 50% of the frame, and 6 (6.45%) showed Zelensky filling up to 75% of the frame. 45 (48.39%) of the images featuring Zelensky were taken at a long distance, 31 (33.33%) of the images were taken at a medium distance, and 17 (18.28%) of the images were taken at a close shot length. 70 (75.27%) images were taken from a level angle, 18 (19.35%) images were taken from a high level, and 5 (5.38%) images were taken from a low angle.

The images featuring Zelensky in the Candidate time frame, 47 (50.54%) images originated from photographers working to produce promotional content for Zelensky's entertainment projects, 44 (47.31%) images originated from Zelensky himself, and 2 (2.15%) images originated from news agencies. No images in the Candidate time frame that feature Zelensky came from the Ukrainian government or civilians. 15 (16.13%) images featuring Zelensky were taken as a selfie.

Of the 100 total images in the Candidate time frame, only 7% of images do not feature Zelensky. Of these 7 images, 3 (42.86%) take place within Zelensky's home, 2 (28.57%) take place in nature or outside, and 2 (28.57%) take place in a showbusiness setting. 4 (57.14%) feature civilians and no images feature politicians or members of the Ukrainian military without Zelensky. Additionally, 3 (42.86%) images feature some kind of Ukrainian symbolism, while no images in the Candidate time frame feature ruins, military equipment, enemy forces, or injured or dead individuals.

RQ1b asked what visual characteristics were present in Zelensky's still image posts on Instagram when he was in office before the Russian invasion in 2022. To measure the presence of different visual characteristics in images in the President time frame, frequency and cross-tabulation tests were conducted for each relevant variable.

Out of the 100 images in the President time frame, 36% of images feature civilians, 18% of images feature politicians, and 14% images feature members of the Ukrainian military. 56% of images feature some sort of Ukrainian symbolism and 4 feature military equipment. None of the images in the President time frame feature ruins, enemy forces, or injured or dead individuals. Regarding the settings in which the images in the President time frame take place, 25% of images are in a government building, 18% are in nature or outside, 17% are in the streets in an urban area, 14% are at a sporting event, 10% are in Zelensky's office, 3% are in a gym, 2% are in Zelensky's home, 2% are in a war environment, and 1% is on some form of transportation. No images in the President time frame take place in hospitals, sites of rubble or destruction, or showbusiness settings.

In the President time frame, 8% of images were taken close up to the subject, 53% were taken at a medium length, and 39% were taken with a long shot length. 77% of images were taken at a level angle, 16% from a high angle, and 7% from a low angle. 68% of image images originated from the Ukrainian government, 15% originated from Zelensky himself, 15% originated from a news agency, and 2% originated from civilians. No images in the President time frame were part of promotional efforts for an entertainment project involving Zelensky.

Zelensky is featured in 84% of the 100 images in the President time frame.

Zelensky is alone in 30 (35.71%) of them. The results indicate that 24 (28.57%) images depicted Zelensky interacting with civilians, 15 (17.86%) with members of the Ukrainian military, 13 (15.48%) with political figures or influentials, 13 (15.48%) with other colleagues, 9 (10.70%) with family members, 6 (7.14%) with supporters, and 1 (1.19%) with journalists. 42 (50.00%) of the Candidate images that feature Zelensky show some form of Ukrainian symbolism and 4 (4.75%) feature military equipment. None of the images depict ruins, enemy forces, or injured or dead individuals.

Of the images in the President time frame that featured Zelensky in them, 25 (29.76%) show him in a government building, 17 (20.24%) in nature or outside, 14 (16.67%) on the street in an urban area, 10 (11.90%) in Zelensky's office, 6 (7.14%) at an indoor reception, 4 (4.76%) in a gym, 3 (3.57%) at a sporting event, 2 (2.38%) in Zelensky's home, 2 (2.38%) in a war environment, and 1 (1.19%) on some form of transportation. None of the images featuring Zelensky in the President time frame took place in a hospital, sites of rubble or destruction, show business settings, or sporting events.

Regarding the elements of physical appearance of the images that feature Zelensky in the President time frame, there is a variance of frequencies among multiple variables. Of the President images that feature Zelensky, 63 (75.00%) depict Zelensky in formal attire, 15 (17.86%) depict casual dress, and 6 (7.14%) depict military-style dress. No images in the President time frame that feature Zelensky depict him wearing a costume as a part of an entertainment project. 74 (88.10%) images depict Zelensky with a neat grooming style, while no images depict him with a wartime grooming style or fake

facial hair that is part of a costume. Zelensky's facial expressions in the images in which expressions could be read were mostly positive, with 32 (42.67%) being positive with a natural smile, 23 (30.67%) being neutral, 13 (17.33%) being a positive, posed smile, and 7 (9.33%) being negative.

8 (9.52%) of the images in the President time frame that feature Zelensky depict him volunteering with injured or displaced civilians or visiting with military personnel, while 8 (9.52%) images depict him delivering a speech or talking in front of an audience, and 4 (4.76%) images depict him participating in an athletic activity. No images in the President time frame that feature Zelensky showed him acting or performing in front of an audience. Zelensky was shown to have agentic style in 35 (41.67%) of the images that he is shown in for the President time frame.

Of the 84 images that show Zelensky in the President time frame, 50 (59.52%) feature him filling up to 25% of the frame, 25 (29.76%) feature him filling up to 50% of the frame, and 9 (10.71%) feature him filling up to 75% of the frame. 50 (59.52%) images of Zelensky were taken at a medium distance, 27 (32.14%) images were long shots, and 7 (8.33%) images were close-ups. 64 (76.19%) images were taken at a level angle, 13 (15.48%) were taken from a high angle, and 7 (9.33%) were taken from a low level. 67 (79.76%) images originated from the Ukrainian government, 14 (16.67%) originated from Zelensky himself, and 3 (3.57%) originated from news agencies. No images featuring Zelensky in the President time frame originated from civilians or promotional efforts for entertainment projects. 5 (5.95%) images were selfies.

Out of the 100 total images belonging to the President time frame, 16 images do not feature Zelensky in them. Of these 16 images, 11 (68.75%) images took place at a

sporting event, 3 (18.75%) took place on a street in an urban area, 1 (6.25%) took place in nature or outside, and 1 (6.25%) took place at an indoor reception. None of the images in the President time frame that do not feature Zelensky took place in sites of rubble or destruction, hospitals, gyms, government buildings, showbusiness settings, Zelensky's home, war environments, or forms of transportation. 12 (75.00%) of the images without Zelensky featured civilians, while none featured politicians or members of the Ukrainian military. 14 (87.5%) of the images featured a form of Ukrainian symbolism, and none of the images featured ruins, military equipment, enemy forces, or injured or dead individuals.

RQ1c asked what visual characteristics were present in Zelensky's still image posts on Instagram after the Russian invasion in 2022. To measure the presence of different visual characteristics in images in the Soldier time frame, frequency and cross-tabulations were conducted for each relevant variable.

Of the 100 images in the Soldier time frame, 30% of the images feature members of the Ukrainian military, 29% feature civilians, and 12% feature politicians. 56% of the images feature some form of Ukrainian symbolism, 21% depict ruins, 8% feature military equipment, and 3% feature injured individuals. None of the images in the Soldier time frame feature enemy forces or dead individuals. Regarding where the images in this time frame are set, 27% of the images take place in Zelensky's office, 26% in a government building, 20% in sites of rubble or destruction, 9% in a war environment, 6% in a street in an urban environment, 6% in nature or outside, 2% in a hospital, 2% on some form of transportation, 1% at an indoor reception, and 1% at a sporting event. No images in the Soldier time frame take place in a gym, showbusiness setting, or Zelensky's home.

49% of the images in the Soldier time frame were taken from a medium distance, 40% were taken from a long distance, and 11% were close-ups. 72% of the images were taken at a level angle, 15% were taken from a low angle, and 13% were taken from a high angle. The images originated from either the Ukrainian government (57%) or a news agency (43%). No images in the Soldier time frame originated from Zelensky himself, civilians, or promotional efforts for an entertainment project.

Of the 100 images in the soldier time frame, Zelensky is featured in 57%, and he is alone in 35 (41.40%) of them. The results indicate that 12 (21.05%) depict Zelensky interacting with political figures or influentials, 12 (21.05%) with members of the Ukrainian military, 6 (10.53%) with civilians, 2 (3.51%) with family members, 1 (1.75%) with colleagues, and 1 (1.75%) with supporters. None of the images in the Soldier time frame that feature Zelensky depict him with journalists. 41 (71.93%) of the images that depict Zelensky feature some form of Ukrainian symbolism, and 1 (1.75%) shows him with an injured individual. None of the images with Zelensky feature ruins, military equipment, enemy forces, or dead individuals.

For the images in the Soldier time frame that feature Zelensky, 27 (47.37%) take place in Zelensky's office, 25 (43.86%) in a government building, 2 (3.51%) in a hospital, 2 (3.51%) in a street in an urban setting, and 1 (1.75%) at an indoor reception. None of the images in the Soldier time frame that feature Zelensky take place in a gym, in nature or outside, a showbusiness setting, Zelensky's home, a war environment, a form of transportation, or a sporting event.

In the images in the Soldier time frame that feature Zelensky, 51 (89.47%) images depict him in military-style dress, 4 (7.02%) in casual dress, and 2 (3.51%) in formal

attire. None of the images in the Soldier time frame depict Zelensky in a costume for an entertainment project. 48 (84.21%) of the images show Zelensky with a wartime grooming style, while 9 (15.79%) images show him with a neat grooming style. None of the images show Zelensky with fake facial hair as part of a costume. Regarding facial expressions in the Soldier time frame, 20 (35.09%) of the images that feature Zelensky show him with a neutral expression, 20 (35.09%) with a negative expression, 13 (22.81%) with a positive, natural smile, and 3 (5.26%) with a positive, posed smile.

7 (12.28%) of the images in the Soldier time frame that show Zelensky depict him delivering a speech or talking in front of an audience, while 5 (8.77%) depict him volunteering with injured or displaced civilians or visiting with military personnel. None of the images in the Soldier time frame that feature Zelensky depict him participating in athletic activity or acting or performing in front of an audience. The results indicate that Zelensky operates with agentic style in 23 (40.35%) of his images in the Soldier time frame.

Of the 57 images that show Zelensky in the Soldier time frame, 32 (56.14%) images depict Zelensky filling up to 50% of the frame, 23 (40.35%) depict him filling up to 25% of the frame, and 2 (3.51%) depict him filling up to 75% of the frame. Regarding shot length, the results indicate that 41 (71.93%) images were taken from a medium distance, 10 (17.54%) were close-up shots, and 6 (10.53%) were taken from a long distance. 50 (87.72%) images were taken at a level angle, 4 (7.02%) were taken at a low angle, and 3 (5.26%) were taken at a high angle. All 57 images featuring Zelensky in the Soldier time frame originated from the Ukrainian government. None of the images

featuring Zelensky originated from Zelensky himself, news agencies, or civilians, or were part of promotional efforts for entertainment projects.

Out of the 100 images in the Soldier time frame, 43% do not feature Zelensky in them. Of these 43 images, 20 (46.51%) are set in sites of rubble or destruction, 9 (20.93%) are in war environments, 6 (13.95%) are in nature or outside, 3 (6.98%) are in streets in urban areas, 2 (4.65%) are on some form of transportation, 1 (2.33%) takes place in a government building, and 1 (2.33%) takes place at a sporting event. None of the images in the Soldier time frame that do not feature Zelensky take place in showbusiness settings, in his home, or at indoor receptions.

Of the 43 images in the Soldier time frame that do not feature Zelensky, 23 (53.49%) feature civilians, while 18 (41.86%) feature members of the Ukrainian military. None of the images in the Soldier time frame that do not feature Zelensky show politicians. 21 (48.84%) images featured ruins, 15 (34.88%) depicted some form of Ukrainian symbolism, 8 (18.60%) featured military equipment, and 2 (4.65%) featured injured individuals. None of the images in the Soldier time frame that do not feature Zelensky feature enemy forces or dead individuals.

Appendix C**Codebook**

| EXCEL | VARIABLE NAME | DEFINITION/DESCRIPTION | CODING VALUE |
|--------|-------------------------------|--|-------------------|
| | | | |
| | POST CHARACTERISTICS | | |
| POST# | Number of the post in dataset | | [number] |
| DATE | Item date | Date of post | MM/DD/YY |
| SOURCE | Image source | Source of the image, if discernible: Ukraine govt [1] Zelensky himself [2] News agency [3] Other _____ [4] | 1 2 3 4 |
| TIME | Timeframe | Pre-election/election (3/31/18 - 5/19/19) [1] President (5/20/19 - 2/23/22) [2] Soldier-in-chief (2/24/22 - present) [3] | 1 2 3 |
| | PHOTO CHARACTERISTICS | | |
| | | | |
| | Shot length | | |
| CLOSE | Close-up | Images frames the subject's face tightly, face dominates the image. | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| MED | Medium | Image shows subject from the waist up | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| LONG | Long | Image shows subject from top to bottom, scenery dominates the image | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| | Camera angle | | |
| LOW | Low angle | The camera is angled upwards, looking up at the subject | 0 = No 1 = Yes |

| | | | |
|---------|------------------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|
| LEVEL | Level angle | The camera is angled evenly with the subject | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| HIGH | High angle | The camera is angled downwards, looking down at the subject | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| | PEOPLE & OTHER ELEMENTS | | |
| SETTING | Shot setting | Setting of the shot, whether indoors or outdoors, including Office [1] Gym [2] Hospital [3] Streets [4] Rubble/Destruction [5] Govt. Building [6] Nature/Outside [7] Showbiz [8] Home [9] Indoor Reception [10] War environment [11] Transportation [12] Sporting event [13] | 1-13 |
| PEEPS | People | The image shows other people besides Zelensky | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| #PEEPS | Number of people | If yes, how many OTHER people are featured in the image? | Exact count (up to 10) Then, 11+ |
| VISUALS | Other visuals | If no people, what does the image show? | Open end |
| KIDS | Children in shot | The image shows a child (or individuals attributed as such) Child (up to 9 years of age) | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| TWEENS | Pre-teen(s) in shot | Pre-teen (10-12 years of age) | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| TEENS | Teen(s) in shot | Teen (13-17 years of age) | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| 18-35 | Young adult(s) in shot | The image shows adults (or individuals attributed as such) Young adult (18-35 years of age) | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| | | | |

| | | | |
|------------------------|---|--|---------------------------------------|
| 36-59 | Middle aged adult(s) in shot | Middle age (36-59 years of age) | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| 60+ | Older adult(s) in shot | Older age (60+) | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| MIX-AGE | Mixed | The image shows a combination of people of different ages | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| RATIO | Ratio of adults to kids | More adults than kids [1] More kids than adults [2] Equal # of adults and kids [3] | 1 = more A 2 = more K 3 = Equal |
| ALL-M | Male | The image shows all males | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| ALL-F | Female | The image shows all females | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| MIX-GEN | Mixed gender combination of males and females in shot | The image shows a combination of males and females | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| GENDER | Most prevalent gender in image | If yes, is it male dominated or female dominated? | 1 = male 2 = female 3 = balncd |
| POLS | Politicians/influential [| Appearances with elected officials, journalists, or other influentials (people with power or status on the local, national or international level) | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| CIVS | Civilians | Image features ordinary citizens (or individuals attributed as such) not dressed in military garb | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| MIL | Military personnel | Image depicts military personnel (or individuals attributed as such) | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| VISUAL ELEMENTS | | | |
| SYMBOL | Ukrainian patriotic symbols | Depiction of Ukrainian symbols such as national colors or imagery, flags, sports teams, religious symbolism, Ukraine symbol on military garb | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| RUINS | Ruins | Images showing destruction as a result of conflict, such as burned buildings | 0 = No 1 = Yes |

| | | | |
|-----------------|---|--|-------------------|
| DEAD | Fatality | Images depicting fatalities (dead human bodies) | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| INJURED | Casualties | Images depicting individuals who are injured and/or recovering from injuries | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| EQUIP | Military equipment | Images depict military equipment such as weapons, ammunition, tanks, planes, drones, helicopters, etc. | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| ENEMY | Images of adversaries | Images depicting adversaries or the enemy (e.g., Russian troops or Wagner Group soldiers) or individuals attributed as such | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| ZELENSKY | | | |
| Z-MAN | Is Zelensky in the photo? | The image features Zelensky in it. | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| ALONE | Is Zelensky alone in the photo | | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| SELFIE | Selfie | Is it a self-taken photo by Zelensky? | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| Z-FILL | Percentage of the shot | What percentage of the shot does Zelensky's image occupy? Estimate nearest percentage. UP TO 25% [1] UP TO 50% [2] UP TO 75% [3] UP TO 100% [4] | 1 2 3 4 |
| Z-FACE | Facial expressions [add more nuance during reliability coding] | Positive – natural smile [1] Positive – posed smile [2] Neutral [3] Negative [4] | 1 2 3 4 |
| Z-NEG | Negative expression | If negative, what kind of negative expression is it? Fill in the blank _____ | |
| Z-OTHERS | With other people Influentials = (people with power or status, including | The image shows Zelensky with one or more 1. Political figures/influentials 2. Journalists | 1 2 3 |

| | | | |
|-----------|---|---|-------------------|
| | celebrities, or individuals attributed as such) | 3. Other Colleagues | 9 (N/A) |
| Z-SUPS | Supporters | The image shows Zelensky with supporters at political rallies or other official events | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| Z-CIVS | Civilians | The image shows Zelensky with ordinary citizens (or individuals attributed as such), not in military garb | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| Z-MIL | Military | The image shows Zelensky with military personnel (or individuals attributed as such) | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| Z-FAM | Family | The image shows Zelensky with one or more family members | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| Z-CAS | Casual/leisurely attire | Zelensky is shown wearing casual attire such as jeans, khakis, sportswear, shorts, or short sleeve shirts (but NOT his trademark wartime look of a green shirt or sweatshirt) | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| Z-COSTUME | Costume | Zelensky is shown wearing a costume as a part of a performance or entertainment project | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| Z-FORM | Formal or business attire | Zelensky is shown wearing business or formal attire (e.g. a suit and tie or tuxedo) | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| Z-ICON | Fatigues/military-style dress | Zelensky is shown wearing military-style clothing such as a dark green t-shirt and pants, trademark sweatshirt, camouflage, protective gear, flak jacket, or military uniform, etc. | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| Z-NEAT | Neat grooming style | Zelensky's face is clean-shaven or has a short trimmed beard, and his hair appears neat and styled | 0 = No 1 = Yes |

| | | | |
|----------|-------------------------------|---|-------------------|
| | | | |
| Z-WAR | War-time grooming style | Zelensky is wearing a beard, scruff, etc. and his hair may not be styled | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| Z-FFHAIR | Fake facial hair | Zelensky is wearing fake facial hair (e.g. mustache, beard, or eyebrows) on his face as a part of a costume | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| Z-AGENT | Agentic style | Zelensky is shown in a physically assertive style of behavior or interaction that features notable energy, dynamism, or active presence. It may involve movement, visible gestures, or active engagement of the body in conveying a message. He may seem energetic, aggressive, confident, tough, decisive. | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| Z-AFF | Affinity gesture | Zelensky is shown using an affinity gesture, such as waving, thumbs-up, both hands or arms raised upward, a wink to the camera or another person(s) in the shot, an informal salute, using an open palm to visually reference someone else (not finger pointing). | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| Z-DEF | Defiance gesture | Zelensky is shown using a defiance gesture, such as a raised fist, fist pump, or punch in the air, finger pointing or wagging (often in conjunction with an anger/threat facial display), shaking his finger as a taunt or implied threat, chest pounding, etc. | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| Z-ATH | Exercise/athletic activity | Image depicts Zelensky participating in some sort of athletic activity or physical exertion | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| Z-SHOW | Zelensky in a showbiz setting | Image depicts Zelensky acting/performing in front of an | 0 = No 1 = Yes |

| | | | |
|-----------|---|---|-------------------|
| | | audience or participating in promotional activities for entertainment projects | |
| Z-FIELD | Zelensky in the conflict zone or war-related setting, including cities where persons displaced by the war are ending up | Image depicts Zelensky participating in voluntary activities with injured/displaced civilians or visiting with military personnel or the front lines; interacting with ordinary people, out in public, essentially working for the people | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| Z-PUBLIC | Zelensky addressing an audience | Image depicts Zelensky delivering a speech or talk in front of an audience, or impromptu press conference | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| Z-EVERY | Depictions of everyday life (family man frame?) | Playing with dogs, relaxing at home, shown with his wife/children, etc. | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| Z-REGION | Visual region | Visual region revealed: front [1] or back region [2] (1 = public life; 2 = personal life/or other behind the scenes setting) | 1 2 |
| | LARGER FRAMES | | |
| | | | |
| | Ideal Candidate | | |
| Z-STATES | Statesmanship | With other leaders, patriotic symbols, campaign paraphernalia, formal attire | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| Z-COMP | Compassion | With children, family, religious symbolism, interacting with supporters | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| | Populist Campaigner | | |
| Z-MASS | Mass Appeal | With large audiences, adoring crowds | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| Z-ORDNY | Ordinariness | Wearing informal attire, casual dress, athletic clothes/activities, around ordinary people | 0 = No 1 = Yes |
| | Soldier in Chief | | |
| Z-SOLDIER | Soldier in Chief frame | Wearing military-style garb or fatigue, depicts Zelensky participating in voluntary activities with | 0 = No 1 = Yes |

| | | | |
|-----------|-----------------------------|--|-------------------|
| | | injured/displaced civilians or visiting with military personnel or the front lines | |
| | Celebrity Campaigner | | |
| Z-SHOWBIZ | Celebrity Campaigner frame | Where Zelensky is surrounded by awestruck journalists/fans/followers | 0 = No 1 = Yes |