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CONTENTS

Editorial	5
VALENTIN VASILE, <i>War Correspondents Reporting during the Romanian War of Independence (1877-1878): Between Neutrality and Engagement</i>	
DENISA LĂCĂTUȘ, <i>Exploring Digital Self-Education: A Qualitative Study of Expert Insights</i>	63
BOGDAN PODAR, <i>The Role of Narratives and Myths in Shaping Political Discourse: Evolutions of War Stories in Zelenskyy's Discourse during the First Year of the 2022 Russian-Ukrainian War</i>	101

BOOK REVIEW

JULIA SZAMBOLICS, Book Review of: IOANA MOLDOVAN, <i>Health-related Fake News. Case study: Online Health Information Seeking and Sharing Behavior on Social Media among Romanian Retirees Aged 50+ during the Covid-19 Pandemic</i>	137
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EDITORIAL

This is the 17th issue, no. 1 of *Styles of Communication*, the international journal which is published annually by the Faculty of Journalism and Communication Studies (University of Bucharest, Romania) in cooperation with the Committee for Philology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Wrocław Branch, Poland. From 2009 to 2014, *Styles of Communication* was published by the “Danubius” University of Galați, Romania.

The main purpose of *Styles of Communication* is to show the unity existing within global diversity. As communication implies, besides the transfer of information to others and the decoding of the others' messages, the production of meaning within (non)verbal texts/objects is closely connected to interculturality, creativity and innovation and it needs a refining of styles in order to avoid misunderstandings.

This issue is a plea for interdisciplinarity as its aim is to include different perspectives on communication, coming from different fields, such as advertising, political discourse, and journalism.

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This issue is focused on various approaches to communication studies.

We would like to see this journal as an ongoing project in which future issues may contribute to the exchange of research ideas representing broad communication -oriented approaches.

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VALENTIN VASILE¹

WAR CORRESPONDENTS REPORTING DURING THE ROMANIAN WAR OF INDEPENDENCE (1877-1878): BETWEEN NEUTRALITY AND ENGAGEMENT

Abstract. The Romanian War of Independence, part of the Russo-Turkish War (1877-1878), occurred during journalism professionalization and the rise of war correspondents, establishing their professional status. This study examines how neutrality and engagement are balanced in war correspondents' reports on the Battle of Grivitsa, a critical stage of the Third Battle of Plevna (August 30/September 11, 1877). Employing a pragma-enunciative analysis, I examined the discursive mechanisms enabling war correspondents to uphold factual accuracy while integrating subjective interpretation to varying degrees. Based on a corpus of war correspondences published between August 20 and October 3, 1877, in European newspapers – *Le Temps*, *L'Indépendance Belge*, *Românul*, *Gazeta Transilvaniei*, *Pester Lloyd*, *The Daily News*, and *The Daily Telegraph* – this study analyses seven reports from correspondents stationed at Plevna, who provided firsthand accounts of the fighting as eyewitnesses. The findings reveal an ongoing oscillation between professional standards and personal perceptions, as correspondents bear the responsibility of accurately documenting the dehumanizing realities of war. This research contributes to understanding how war reporting – whether neutral or engaged – shapes public perceptions of conflict, while also providing insights into the development of professional practices in journalism and the ethical dilemmas journalists face in high-risk environments.

Keywords: war reporting, enunciative practices, pragma-enunciative analysis, subjectivity

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1. Introduction

The Romanian War of Independence, an integral part of the Russo-Turkish War (1877-1878), unfolded at the height of the “golden age” of war correspondents, when around 125 journalists, painters, and photographers from various countries reported from the battlefields with notable freedom and prestige. The estimated figure of approximately 125 accredited war correspondents is drawn primarily from contemporary sources. One of the most important is the *Journal of Combat Actions of the Russian Army on the Balkan Front*, which, on June 22, 1877, records a total of 64 correspondents accredited to the General Headquarters of the Russian Army of Operations in the Balkans. These included Russians, Britons, Americans, French, Belgians, Germans, Austrians, Italians, one Spaniard, and one Swede, as well as two Romanians – the photographers Carol Popp de Szathmáry and Franz Duschek (Collection, 1898, pp. 172-174). It should be noted that this source provides no details about Russian or foreign correspondents reporting from the Caucasian front.

Added to this number are the correspondents accredited by the Romanian armed forces, who crossed the Danube in August 1877 to take part in the combat operations to capture Plevna at the request of the Russian side. Among them were Romanian correspondents, such as journalists Alexandru Ciurcu and Ion C. Fundescu, as well as photographers, graphic artists, and painters – including Nicolae Grigorescu and Sava Henția – alongside foreign correspondents like Friedrich Lachmann and Émile Galli, amounting to approximately 16 additional correspondents, without counting those already included under Russian accreditation (Vitcu, 1988; Ștefan, 1989; Ionescu, 2002; Petrescu, 2021; Szabo, 2023). The total number of correspondents accredited by the Russo-Romanian side thus amounts to approximately 80 journalists, photographers, graphic artists, and painters. This figure is confirmed by the American military attaché Francis Vinton Greene, who accompanied the Russian troops throughout the war. Greene acknowledges the estimated number of correspondents derived from Russian sources in his memoirs. In his book *The Russian Army and Its Campaigns in Turkey in 1877-1878*, published shortly after the war in 1879, Greene notes that on the Russian side, “about seventy-five correspondents began the campaign” (Greene, 1879, p. x). In his subsequent work, *Sketches of Army Life in Russia*, published in 1880, Greene further details the activity of the war

correspondents accredited by the Tsarist General Headquarters, indicating that “something over eighty correspondents joined the army..., about one-third of whom were Russians” (Greene, 1880, p. 164).

The number of correspondents accredited by the Ottoman side is likewise estimated based on primary sources, which allows us to approximate the presence of about 30 foreign war correspondents on the Balkan and Caucasian fronts and representatives from the main twelve Ottoman newspapers. Among the key primary sources are the *Telegram Collection: Russian Atrocities in Asia and Europe During June, July, and August 1877*, edited in 1877 by A.H. Boyajian, and official reports and correspondence signed by foreign correspondents. Essential reference works on the functioning of the Ottoman press during the war of 1877-1878, such as Yalman’s *The Development of Modern Turkey as Measured by Its Press* (1914), also provide important insights.

By accompanying the troops during military operations and acting as eyewitnesses on the battlefield, the war correspondents strengthened the credibility of their reports and earned personal notoriety among readers (Palmer, 2005, pp. 36-43). Their dispatches on the military operations in the Balkans circulated widely, reaching an international readership through numerous newspapers and illustrated periodicals. Among these, prominent publications from Austria-Hungary, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States dedicated significant space to covering the developments of the war. While some outlets had correspondents accredited to the Russian, Romanian, and Ottoman military headquarters, others published war reports reproduced from foreign newspapers or drew on information provided by press agencies.

This war continues to provide valuable insights into the evolution of journalistic practices and ethics, particularly regarding the balance between neutrality and engagement in reports from war correspondents. When analysing the press coverage of this war, this balance helps trace the roots of enduring trends in modern journalism, including the practices of responsible engagement, consciously adopted by war correspondents when confronted with death and devastation on the battlefields (Kellner, 2008; Tumber, 2013).

Building on McLaughlin’s (2016, p. 66) observation of “the development of a new style of journalism” in the late 19th century, marked by an emphasis

on accuracy and credibility, this research examines how war correspondents accredited to opposing sides navigated the interplay between neutrality and engagement during the Battle of Grivitsa, a key moment of the Third Battle of Plevna (August 30/September 11, 1877).

This major battle came after two successive Russian defeats against the well-fortified Ottoman defensive lines at Plevna. This prompted the Russian imperial authorities to request Romanian military involvement south of the Danube, beginning on August 20 / September 1, 1877. As a result, a Romanian contingent of 40,000 troops was integrated into the Western Army, made up of both Russian and Romanian forces, and placed under the effective command of Prince Carol of Romania, with Russian General Pavel Dmitrievich Zotov serving as chief of staff (Hitchins, 2023, pp. 58-60).

As a large-scale confrontation decisive for the outcome of the war, the Battle of Plevna – including the battle for the capture of the Grivitsa redoubts, which demanded a heavy blood sacrifice from Romanian troops – drew intense public attention and was extensively covered by war correspondents accredited to the belligerent sides. This phase of the war attracted one of the largest concentrations of war correspondents present on the front lines, some of whom were wounded or even killed in action. Referring to those accredited by the Russo-Romanian side, F.V. Greene (1880, pp. 166-167) observed: “Of these eighty correspondents, about half were at the front throughout the summer, and the greater part of them exposed themselves with the utmost fearlessness in battle and endured the greatest hardships without flinching. [...] For the other half, the comforts of Bucharest possessed the greater attraction. They visited the army occasionally, visited the camps and hospitals, studied the Russian character, and returned to Bucharest to digest their studies. But when the winter came on, the ardor of nearly all was benumbed, and their interest began to flag.”

By applying the pragma-enunciative analytical framework articulated by Johannes Angermüller and Alain Rabatel, the study aims to identify the enunciative, linguistic, and discursive indicators of neutrality and engagement in frontline reports, examining how correspondents manage the balance between these two approaches in their coverage of the Battle of Grivitsa. For this purpose, the article focuses on wartime dispatches

reporting on this battle, produced by British correspondents for leading British newspapers – *The Daily News* and *The Daily Telegraph* – as well as by correspondents from major continental European publications, such as the French newspapers *Le Temps*, the Belgian newspaper *L'Indépendance Belge*, the German-language *Pester Lloyd*, and the Romanian newspapers *Românul* and *Gazeta Transilvaniei*.

To this end, the research addresses the following questions:

RQ1: What markers of neutrality and engagement can be identified in frontline reports on this battle?

RQ2: How do the differences or similarities in approaches to neutrality or engagement in war correspondence reflect the reporting styles specific to Anglo-Saxon, continental European, and Romanian publications?

The structure of the study reflects the research approach: it begins with a literature review on neutrality and engagement in press reporting, followed by the theoretical and methodological frameworks of pragma-enunciative analysis, and concludes with a practical application of its analytical tools to examine selected war correspondences.

The findings are interpreted to highlight the differences observed in war reporting across the analysed newspapers and their theoretical and practical implications.

2. Literature review on neutrality in war reporting

In the second half of the 19th century, various approaches to journalistic neutrality emerged, notably in the United States, setting a trend that would later influence the European press. This period marked a significant turning point in journalism, as both editorial offices and individual journalists became increasingly committed to neutral reporting and the objective news presentation.

McLaughlin (2016) highlights early attempts to balance neutrality and engagement in war reporting, tracing them back to press coverage of events during the Canadian Rebellion (1837-1838). This effort is attributed to J.G. Bennett, the publisher of the *New York Herald*, “who emphasized

coverage on reporting and gathering facts and information rather than sensationalism and propaganda” (McLaughlin, 2016, p. 36).

These early developments laid the groundwork for ongoing debates on neutrality and engagement in journalism. As the field evolved, the emphasis increasingly shifted toward accurately delivering factual information, free from bias or promoting particular viewpoints or agendas. As a result, distinct professional practices emerged and matured, including systematic topic research, rigorous source selection and verification, and the balanced presentation of multiple, often conflicting perspectives on reported events. Gradually, neutrality became recognized as both a best practice and a professional standard for journalists, serving as a guiding principle and an aspirational ideal. Though difficult, if not impossible, to fully attain, it played a key role in shaping journalistic ethics rooted in transparency and accountability.

Scholars like Tuchman (1972), Gauthier (1991), Chalaby (1998), Schudson (2001), Ferenczi (2003), and Parent (2021) view neutrality in journalism as a key aspiration, integral to journalistic objectivity or synonymous with it (Gauthier, 1991, p. 109; Parent, 2021, pp. 60, 68-77). The enunciative strategies of neutrality, which are central to this concept, include respect for facts, impartiality, honesty, balance, accuracy, truthfulness, completeness, consistency, fairness, emotional detachment, and responsibility, all aimed at separating reported reality from the reporter’s subjective views, which may reflect a degree of engagement (Tuchman, 1972, pp. 662-678; Ferenczi, 2003, pp. 197-198). These norms have, in turn, significantly influenced press discourse, shaping editorial styles in news journalism, striving to provide the public with “an impersonal and distant account of reality” (Chalaby, 1998, pp. 128-133). Journalists aim “to separate facts from values and to report only the facts” (Schudson, 2001, p. 150), avoiding personal opinions and biases. This includes fairly representing all sides, presenting news without commentary or manipulation, and maintaining a neutral, unemotional tone. Parent (2021) examines different approaches to journalistic neutrality, contrasting the Anglo-Saxon model with European perspectives, mainly French and German. He highlights the challenges neutrality faces in journalists’ activities and the differences in expected practices such as impartiality, neutrality, and integrity across various professional codes of ethics. Parent (2021, pp. 21-47)

notes that while the Anglo-Saxon approach emphasizes neutrality and factual reporting, European models often prioritize the pursuit of truth.

Neutrality in journalism is demonstrated by adherence to professional ethical norms that guide occupational routines, even amid criticism or pressure (Tuchman, 1972, pp. 664-678; Tumber & Prentoulis, 2003, pp. 215-216, 221-221). Tumber (2020, p. 381) noted that “the academic debate has centred on the position that some journalists, in covering the dramatic effects of war actions, have adopted a critical position of denunciation of the witnessed events”. At the same time, he mentions that “whereas neutrality was sometimes perceived as unbearable or even undesired, taking a moral position during war times was usually counterbalanced by a professional requirement (and normative view) of keeping objectivity in the coverage of news.”

As firsthand witnesses to battlefield atrocities, war correspondents face the temptation to adopt a moral stance, engaging in what is known as “journalism of attachment” (Bell, 1998; Tumber, 2011, 2013; McLaughlin, 2016). Additionally, journalism of attachment has been criticized for potentially leading to inaccuracies and for being perceived as “self-righteous” and “moralizing” (McLaughlin, 2016, pp. 40-55).

The opposition between neutrality and engagement suggests that neutrality relates to universally valid ideas, while engagement reflects individual perceptions. This dynamic reveals a temptation in journalistic practice towards subjectivity – blending facts and opinions – and engaged reporting, often viewed as a patriotic act. Additionally, it includes evolving forms of journalism of attachment, driven by the war correspondent’s experience “as a witness to atrocities and injustices” (Tumber, 2020, p. 380).

These perspectives highlight how ideals of journalistic neutrality are often challenged in times of war. As Kellner (2008, p. 298) points out, “there are always complex relations between journalism and patriotism in which «objectivity» and conventional journalist standards are often strained to serve partisan ends”. In this context, Ward (2008, p. 142) argued that “the traditional emphasis on reporting skills and fact gathering” alone is insufficient for objective journalism serving the public. He suggested that “the imperative to «seek truth and report» – a major principle of journalism codes of ethics – is thereby transformed,” so that reporting is no longer seen “as «stenography of fact» but rather as an

informed interpretation of events in a larger cultural context.” Ward (2008, p. 145) further observes that, in wartime, certain news organizations may abandon their commitment to impartiality, favouring patriotic narratives. However, he suggests that responsible global journalism should reject these tendencies and provide independent, balanced reporting.

Analysing the evolution of ethical concerns of journalism from the early 19th century to the present, Ward (2020, p. 311) concludes that “professionalism and objectivity were meant to assure a skeptical public that journalists would use their power to publish responsibly and to ward off government regulation”. Ward (2020, p. 316) shares Tumber’s (2013) view that the professional standard for contemporary war reporters has shifted from neutral objectivity to a form of “responsible engagement” with events and issues. This aligns with Mercier’s argument (2019, p. 4) that “strict neutrality is an unattainable human ideal”, and that journalistic integrity relies on practices such as source verification, citation, presenting diverse perspectives, and minimizing subjective interpretations.

As journalists are increasingly regarded as active interpreters rather than mere observers (Berkowitz, 2020, p. 176; Baden, 2020, pp. 231-232), debates on journalistic norms have evolved, reconfiguring the traditional emphasis on neutrality, foregrounding engagement while redefining the balance between factual verification and interpretative assertion. Neutrality in war reporting results from maintaining an unbiased stance, unaffected by personal feelings or opinions, and refraining from favouring any side of the story. To achieve this, war correspondents strive to be impartial, precise, and accurate, presenting facts objectively without personal bias (Ward, 2020, pp. 308-318).

Based on the theoretical benchmarks outlined above, the following tables provide a synthesized overview of the main traits identified in the literature as either defining (see *Table 1*) or supporting and associated with journalistic neutrality (see *Table 2*).

While some traits are consistently recognized as core indicators of journalistic neutrality (e.g., factuality, impartiality, balance, fairness, non-engagement, emotional detachment), others are more context-dependent and may only indirectly reinforce neutrality (e.g., clarity, completeness, consistency, use of quotations, independence), or be simply associated with it (e.g., honesty, responsibility).

The selection reflects a variety of theoretical perspectives, disciplinary traditions, journalistic and sociological approaches, and the historical contexts in which different scholars have conceptualized neutrality in journalism.

Table 1

Defining Traits of Journalistic Neutrality: Synthesized Perspectives

TRAIT	DESCRIPTION	AUTHOR(S)
Factuality / Respect for Facts	Considered a fundamental professional value in journalism, factuality is maintained by adhering strictly to verified facts and avoiding the presentation of unverified information, speculation or distortion as truth, ensuring the reliability of frontline correspondences.	Tuchman, 1972; Bell, 1998; Schudson, 2001; Ferenczi, 2003;
Impartiality	Balanced perspectives reveal impartiality, the absence of biased language, favouritism toward any side, and equal representation of conflicting views. By reporting without taking sides and ensuring equal representation of all viewpoints, war correspondents avoid allowing personal opinions to influence their reports. It is viewed as a conceptual synonym for neutrality.	Gauthier, 1991; Bell, 1998; Schudson, 2001; Tumber, 2020; Parent, 2021;
Balance	Balance of information in war reporting is achieved by ensuring that all sides of a story are fairly represented, preventing bias, and providing a comprehensive view of the issue. To this end, war correspondents give each side an equal opportunity to present their case, providing each viewpoint with appropriate coverage. Balance as a concept significantly overlaps with Presentation of Conflicting Possibilities.	Tuchman, 1972; Gauthier, 1991; Parent, 2021;
Fairness	War correspondents strive to be fair in their reporting. By treating all subjects of the story justly and giving them an opportunity to respond to allegations or statements made about them, they help achieve balanced reporting. Fairness is inherently connected to both impartiality and balance.	Bell, 1998; Schudson, 2001; Ward, 2008; Parent, 2021;

Accuracy	Accuracy is denoted using verifiable facts, clear sources, and precise data in analyzed war correspondences. To ensure all information reported is correct and precise, without exaggeration or omission, war correspondents double-check their facts and sources to avoid errors, which helps maintain the credibility of the frontline correspondences. Accuracy is connected to factuality, focusing on precise and correct details.	Gauthier, 1991; Schudson, 2001; Ward, 2008; 2020;
Supporting Evidence / Corroborations	Including commonly accepted facts to support assertions enhances the credibility of the report. War correspondents use documented sources to provide reliable evidence that supports key statements and validates claims, thereby ensuring the accuracy of reported facts. This concept is also directly tied to factuality.	Tuchman, 1972; Parent, 2021;
Presentation of Conflicting Possibilities	Ensuring the presentation of multiple viewpoints is crucial to avoid bias and maintain balance. War correspondents aim to present opposing sides of an issue and conflicting perspectives or hypotheses, even when they cannot immediately verify every assertion without endorsing any particular viewpoint. This concept is a concrete application of balance.	Tuchman, 1972; Parent, 2021;
Emotional Detachment	Maintaining an emotionally neutral tone and not letting personal feelings influence the report, war correspondents present an unbiased and objective account of the story to the readers. It can be viewed as an indication of non-engagement.	Tumber & Prentoulis, 2003; Ferenczi, 2003; Parent, 2021;
Non-Engagement / Retraitism	Avoiding conflicts of interest and social or political engagements that could compromise journalistic neutrality, credibility, and reputation, war correspondents maintain a professional distance from the subjects they report on. This distance should be distinguished from emotional detachment, as it is more rooted in professional ethos.	Chalaby, 1998; Parent, 2021;

Verification / Fact-checking	Verification is carried out by cross-checking facts and sources to confirm the reliability of information. This is especially crucial in war reporting to avoid the pitfalls of political and military propaganda by the parties involved in the conflict. It is a fundamental procedure for ensuring factual neutrality.	McLaughlin, 2016; Tumber, 2020; Ward, 2020.
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The defining traits identified in *Table 1* – such as factuality, impartiality, balance, fairness, non-engagement, and emotional detachment – are widely recognized across scholarly traditions as essential elements of journalistic neutrality. These traits reflect how correspondents position themselves in relation to the events they report, avoiding personal or ideological involvement. Authors like Gauthier (1991), Bell (1998), Schudson (2001), and Ward (2020) have emphasized these dimensions as core components of neutral reporting. Equally important are accuracy, verification, supporting evidence-corroborations, and the presentation of conflicting possibilities, emphasized by Tuchman (1972), Gauthier (1991), Chalaby (1998), Ward (2008), McLaughlin (2016), and Tumber (2020), to sustain an evidence-based approach in war reporting.

In contrast, *Table 2* includes traits that, while not defining neutrality per se, support or reinforce it in specific contexts. These include clarity, completeness, consistency, structured information sequence, use of quotations, transparency, independence, honesty and responsibility. These traits contribute to the coherence, credibility, and professional ethics of reporting, indirectly sustaining neutrality. They reflect diverse perspectives, from the sociological analyses of Tuchman (1972) and Schudson (2001) to the journalistic and ethical approaches advanced by Tumber (2011, 2013, 2020) and Ward (2008, 2020), highlighting that neutrality is not merely a fixed professional standard but also a dynamic, context-dependent ideal (Mercier, 2019).

While these supportive and associated traits are not constitutive of journalistic neutrality, they help uphold the standards and expectations of neutral reporting in practice, thereby contributing to its practical application and public credibility.

Table 2

Supportive and Associated Traits of Journalistic Neutrality: Synthesized Perspectives

TRAIT	DESCRIPTION	AUTHOR(S)
Clarity	Clarity is achieved by communicating information in a clear, straightforward manner that is easily understood by the audience to avoid misinterpretation. By reducing ambiguity, clarity supports journalistic neutrality, as it minimizes the risk of biased or unintended readings that could distort the intended message.	Fowler-Watt & Allan, 2013; Parent, 2021;
Completeness	Completeness results from thorough topic coverage, including all relevant information and addressing various aspects of an issue. War correspondents strive to provide a full account of the story without omitting significant details in their reports, ensuring the public gets a complete understanding of the issue. This comprehensive approach reinforces journalistic neutrality by avoiding selective reporting and presenting a balanced view of events.	Mercier, 2019; Parent, 2021;
Consistency	Consistency is achieved by applying the same standards and rigor to all stories, regardless of subject matter. This maintains logical coherence and narrative integrity across reporting and helps uphold journalistic neutrality by avoiding double standards.	Fowler-Watt & Allan, 2013; Mercier, 2019;
Structured Information Sequence	Structured information sequence involves organizing information in a logical and hierarchical order, typically using the inverted pyramid style where the most important facts are presented first, followed by less critical supporting details. This format contributes to journalistic neutrality by prioritizing factual content over commentary, minimizing subjective framing, and ensuring clarity for the audience.	Tuchman, 1972; Parent, 2021;
Quotations	Using direct quotes from diverse sources supports the objective presentation of multiple viewpoints, helping to avoid personal framing or filtering. This approach enables war correspondents to maintain journalistic neutrality by refraining from inserting personal opinions into their reports.	Tuchman, 1972; Gauthier, 1991; Parent, 2021;

Transparency	Transparency stems from being open about the sources and methods used in gathering information. It functions as a methodological practice that reinforces the ethical foundation of journalistic neutrality.	Macnamara, 2020; Parent, 2021;
Independence	Journalistic independence is achieved by keeping reporting free from external pressures or affiliations, including political, corporate, or personal interests that could compromise editorial autonomy. As a core professional value, independence supports journalistic neutrality without necessarily defining or guaranteeing it.	Schudson, 2001; Kellner, 2008; Ward, 2020;
Honesty	Though it is a broad moral value, honesty can be considered an underlying ethical principle that supports the pursuit of journalistic neutrality. Being truthful and transparent in their reporting to maintain the integrity of their correspondences and uphold journalistic credibility and reputation, war correspondents strive to report information as accurately as possible, avoiding any distortion of facts.	Gauthier, 1991; Parent, 2021;
Responsibility	Responsibility to the public involves acknowledging and promptly correcting errors to maintain the credibility of the journalist and the publication. Although journalistic responsibility is a broad ethical concept that does not directly define neutrality, it establishes the essential context in which journalistic neutrality is exercised and assessed.	Gauthier, 1991; Tumber, 2013; Ward, 2008; 2020.

Moreover, clarity, completeness, consistency, and a structured sequence of information, as outlined by Tuchman (1972), Fowler-Watt and Allan (2013), Mercier (2019), and Parent (2021), enhance the coherence and readability of war correspondence. In turn, transparency, independence, honesty, and responsibility – discussed by Gauthier (1991), Bell (1998), Schudson (2001), Tumber (2013), Ward (2020), and Parent (2021) – support journalistic ethics and a commitment to truth.

While neutrality remains a fundamental criterion for good journalism – achieved through an unbiased stance in reporting, free from personal feelings or favouritism – war correspondents strive, or should strive, to maintain precision and accuracy by presenting information in a manner devoid of bias (Parent, 2021, pp. 70-74). However, this aspiration can only be

sustained if supported by a set of specific traits that help anchor journalistic neutrality in practice. Without these traits of neutrality – whether defining, supportive, or associated – war correspondence may drift toward partiality and engagement. While not all of them are universally recognized as intrinsic to neutrality (for instance, a journalist may be honest or independent yet still adopt a biased stance), collectively they shape an approach to reporting that aspires to be unbiased, fair, accurate, responsible, and trustworthy – respecting the written word, the reading public, and, above all, the truth. This remains both an ethical ideal and a professional standard, particularly challenging yet essential in war reporting.

3. Theoretical framework: Pragma-enunciative analysis-tools

The theoretical framework outlined below appears particularly useful for the present article, which investigates how war correspondents balanced neutrality and engagement in their reports, within a historical context marked by tensions, constraints, and even physical risks, including injury or death.

War correspondences, as verbal productions, are enunciative acts that include an identifiable enunciator, a recipient, a time and place of utterance (such as front lines), a material support, a clear communicative function (informing or influencing), and an insertion into a socio-discursive space (such as the press or public opinion). For studying these texts, considered as any other verbal productions, Maingueneau argues that “the concepts of communication setting and scene of enunciation prove more appropriate” (2014, p. 149). These notions include elements such as the purpose of communication, the status of the partners, spatial and temporal circumstances, the medium, text organization, linguistic resources, and the enunciator’s positioning in relation to the event and audience (Maingueneau, 2014, pp. 147-154).

To identify the features of neutrality and engagement in war correspondence, the analysis of enunciative structures using linguistic tools can offer valuable insights into the correspondent’s attitude towards the events they report. This attitude is conveyed through discourse (war correspondence) and becomes visible through the process of modalisation,

explored by Vion (2004, pp. 96-110; 2007, pp. 193-224) in its enunciative, discursive, and dialogic dimensions. Vion (2011, pp. 235-258) highlights how modalisation not only signals the speaker's stance towards the subjectivity of statements but also reveals the interplay between modalisation, dialogism, enunciative polyphony, and strategies such as reported discourse, represented discourse, and enunciative effacement.

In a similar vein, Franck (2022, pp. 1-12) addresses aspects related to the classification of reported speech forms – direct, free direct, indirect, and free indirect – by adopting an enunciative and pragmatic perspective that considers both the speaker's communicative intentions and the contextual factors influencing the choice of reported discourse. This approach also acknowledges the speaker's positioning, which is shaped by communicative choices and the interactional context.

Demonstrating the omnipresence of subjectivity in language, Kerbrat-Orecchioni (2009) argues that the production of a message is never the result of entirely free lexical or syntactic choices. These choices are shaped by various constraints – contextual, thematic, and rhetorical – as well as by the speaker's cultural competencies and ideological affiliations. Such factors influence enunciative positioning and are revealed through various subjectivity markers, such as deixis (personal, temporal, spatial), modalisers (nouns, affective, descriptive, and evaluative adjectives and adverbs, verbs, figures of speech), personal opinions, and the use of reported speech, thus paving the way for a pragma-enunciative approach to textual analysis (pp. 23-43; 48-210; 236-333).

In the case of war correspondents, their enunciative positioning is strongly influenced by the context in which they operate – reporting from unstable, high-risk environments – and by the discursive norms of war journalism, which impose specific thematic and genre-related constraints. These interrelated dimensions are particularly relevant for a pragma-enunciative analysis, which identifies enunciative markers and positions, and examines how the correspondent's subjectivity, expressed through engagement and positioning, shapes their reporting.

The pragma-enunciative analysis contextualizes statements based on who is speaking, when, and where, relying on enunciative pragmatics “as a methodological orientation to account for how written texts are contextualized in the act of reading” (Angermüller, 2011, p. 2992). It

examines enunciative markers – formal indicators such as deictics, logical-argumentative operators, nominalizations, suffixes, and typographical signs – that reveal the perspectives of enunciators, their varied voices in the text, their stance toward the objects of discourse, as well as their neutrality or engagement (Angermüller, 2014).

Central to Rabatel's enunciative theory, the concept of "point of view" ("point de vue" – PDV) refers to "any statement that predicates information about any object of discourse, providing not only details about the object (related to its denotation) but also insight into how the enunciator perceives the object, thereby expressing a PDV" (Rabatel, 2019, p. 170). The PDVs reveal the enunciator's stance toward the object of discourse, the roles of the enunciators, as well as modality and intentionality, through qualifications, modalisations, opinions, and value judgments (Rabatel, 2004, pp. 4-12).

The point of view (PDV) is closely tied to the propositional content (CP), which conveys the enunciator's stance toward the objects of discourse. As Rabatel explains, "propositional contents [...] also indicate the enunciator's position (axiological, ideological, rational, emotional, etc.) toward the objects of discourse" (Rabatel, 2016, p. 137). Thus, CP can reflect a neutral or subjective and engaged positioning through choices of tense, aspect, determiners, lexical categories, and modalisation.

Rabatel (2012, pp. 23-34) argues that statements do not merely convey information about the object of discourse but also reflect the enunciator's perspective on that object, as well as other, sometimes opposing, viewpoints, where the enunciator takes on a different role – observer, second enunciator, or modal subject. This perspective shift is linked to linguistic empathy, understood as the enunciator's ability to adopt another's point of view through autodialogism or heterodialogism. As Rabatel explains, "linguistic empathy involves putting oneself in another's place" (2016, p. 141), enabling the first enunciator to reposition himself and express his interpretations from a different angle.

Engagement in press narratives is rooted in the inherent subjectivity of discourse, manifested through lexical, syntactic, and organizational choices. It is expressed via personal opinions, subjective language, first-person narratives, and structural decisions that reflect the enunciator's stance. These markers of subjectivity "testify to a deliberate position

taken in constructing a report of words" (Rabatel, 2016, p. 132). They contribute to the affirmation of a point of view (PDV), which "in the linguistic sense, does not necessarily involve the formulation of an opinion; there is [point of view] whenever the choice or order of the terms of a proposition denotes the subjectivity of the enunciator, even in the absence of judgment or comment" (ibid.). These enunciative markers are not limited to "explicit words, thoughts, or comments but emerge at the level of perceptions and actions, which are imbued with intentionality and must be accounted for in the analysis of their discursive construction" (ibid., p. 144). As formal indicators, enunciative markers reveal the 'how' of discourse, guiding readers to interpret both who is speaking and how the discourse is structured.

These theoretical perspectives support a pragma-enunciative approach that reveals how subjectivity is encoded in the analysed propositional content. This enables an assessment of neutrality or engagement as reflected in the correspondents' linguistically constructed stances.

4. Methodological framework

Building on the theoretical foundation presented in Section 3 and drawing on the pragma-enunciative analytical perspective, the present study applies this framework to examine the discursive positioning of war correspondents in their battlefield reports and, where relevant, of the voices embedded in reported or represented speech. This perspective guided both the interpretative procedures applied to the selected war correspondences and the construction of the corpus.

4.1. Interpretation grid

The interpretation grid employed in this study (see *Table 3*) is designed to identify enunciative positions marked by neutrality or engagement in referenced samples of war reporting. It is structured around key analytical categories drawn from the pragma-enunciative framework developed by Angermüller (2011, 2014) and Rabatel (2004, 2012, 2016, 2019).

At the core of the interpretation grid lies the distinction between the *prime locutor* (L1) – typically the war correspondent – and the *prime enunciator* (E1), understood as the discursive instance that assumes responsibility for the utterances. The relationship between E1 and the objects of discourse – primarily detailed descriptions of battlefield actions – reveals the enunciative stance, which may range from neutral to overtly engaged, depending on the linguistic markers and rhetorical strategies employed (Angermüller, 2011, pp. 2995-2999; Rabatel, 2012, pp. 23-42; 2019, pp. 166-168).

The *point of view* (PDV) reveals the presence or erasure of the enunciator's intentionality and subjectivity, as manifested through linguistic markers that shape the representation of battlefield events and influence the reader's interpretation of the narrated combat scenes – what Rabatel refers to as propositional content (CP). A neutral PDV often reflects *enunciative effacement*, where the war correspondent's position regarding the narrated events is minimized through impersonal constructions and the avoidance of value judgments. This is visible in the use of passive voice, absence of personal pronouns, and preference for non-axiological descriptors (Rabatel, 2004, pp. 3-17; 2019, pp. 168-185).

Markers of subjectivity include deixis (personal, spatial, temporal), modalisers (such as modal nouns, adjectives, adverbs, verbs, and figures of speech), and evaluative language. Their presence signals varying degrees of engagement, while their absence supports a neutral stance. These elements help determine the point of view (PDV) and assess whether the propositional content (CP) of the war correspondence reflects neutrality, characterized by impersonal constructions, passive voice, neutral language, and enunciative effacement, or engagement, marked by axiological elements, explicit judgments, or subjective involvement. Engagement becomes apparent when correspondents adopt clear stances, expressed through first-person pronouns (singular or plural), intention markers, verbs of judgment and belief that suggest emotional involvement, and affective or evaluative adjectives reflecting ideological positioning (Rabatel, 2004, p. 4; Angermüller, 2014, pp. 1-6).

Another major category is *polyphony*, which refers to the coexistence of multiple voices in the text. This includes *reported discourse*, where a *second locutor* (L2) and a *second enunciator* (E2) appear. The relationship

between E1 and E2 can show degrees of recontextualization and *linguistic empathy*, when E1 aligns with the position of E2, thus indicating whether neutrality is preserved or compromised through reported speech (Rabatel, 2004, pp. 9-15).

Finally, the grid considers *heterodialogism*, which concerns how different voices interact within the discourse. By analysing how these elements manifest in war correspondents' texts, the study assesses the balance between neutrality and engagement, highlighting the subtle discursive strategies used to build credibility, distance, or involvement. These strategies, grounded in linguistic choices and the interplay of multiple voices, allow the first enunciator (e.g., the war correspondent) to express his battlefield assessments with nuanced subjectivity (Rabatel, 2016, pp. 141-148).

Table 3

**The Grid for Analysing Neutrality and Engagement in War Reporting
Based on a Pragma-Enunciative Approach,
According to Angermüller (2011, 2014) and Rabatel (2004, 2012, 2016, 2019)**

THE PRIME LOCUTOR (L1) war correspondent	THE PRIME ENUNCIATOR (E1) in syncretism	the instance taking in charge the objects of discourse	THE ENUNCIATIVE POSITION IN RELATION TO THE OBJECTS OF DISCOURSE									
			THE POINT OF VIEW (POINT DE VUE - PDV) (the enunciator's subjectivity; a deliberate position)								Erased point of view	
			MARKERS OF SUBJECTIVITY								Enunciative effacement	
			THE ENUNCIATIVE MARKERS							OPINION (judgment or comment)		
			Personal deictics (pronouns)	Temporal deictics	Spatial deictics	MODALISERS						
			Modal nouns	Affective and evaluative adjectives	Modal adverbs	Modal verbs	Figures of speech					
POLYPHONY reported discourses												
THE SECOND LOCUTOR (L2) embedded locutor	THE SECOND ENUNCIATOR (E2) a quasi-takeover of the objects of discourse	THE ENUNCIATIVE POSITION IN RELATION TO THE OBJECTS OF DISCOURSE										
		THE POINT OF VIEW (POINT DE VUE - PDV) (the enunciator's subjectivity; a deliberate position)								Erased point of view		
REPRESENTED DISCOURSES (in the pragma-enunciative and cognitive sense)			THE ENUNCIATIVE POSITION IN RELATION TO THE OBJECTS OF DISCOURSE									
THE PRIME LOCUTOR (L1)	THE PRIME ENUNCIATOR (E1)	THE SECOND ENUNCIATOR (E2)	E1 changes the enunciative position 'Linguistic empathy'									
	hetero-dialogism		THE POINT OF VIEW – RECONTEXTUALIZATIONS E1 puts himself in the place of the second enunciator									
			THE ENUNCIATIVE MARKERS							OPINION (judgment or comment)		

By analysing these linguistic indicators, we can assess the levels of neutrality and engagement in war reports, thus shedding light on the

enunciative strategies through which war correspondents discursively frame the battlefield events they witnessed firsthand.

4.2. Selection of the corpus

The corpus of this research consists of frontline reports published between August 20 and October 3, 1877 (equivalent to September 1 to October 15, 1877, according to the Gregorian calendar) in newspapers selected for their national and international prestige, editorial policies, circulation, and their ability to maintain accredited war correspondents at the front. These newspapers include: *Le Temps* (France), *L'Indépendance Belge* (Belgium), *Românul* (Romania), *Gazeta Transilvaniei* (published in Romanian in Austria-Hungary), *Pester Lloyd* (published in German in Austria-Hungary), *The Daily News*, and *The Daily Telegraph* (United Kingdom)².

For the pragma-enunciative analysis, one war correspondence was selected from each newspaper, chosen from the total number of correspondences recorded during the analysis period, as detailed by newspaper (see Table 4). These correspondences were transmitted by war correspondents accredited by the Russian (*Le Temps*, *The Daily News*), Romanian (*Românul*, *Gazeta Transilvaniei*, *L'Indépendance Belge*, *Pester Lloyd*), and Ottoman (*The Daily Telegraph*) military commands, as indicated in their texts.

The data selection criteria included identifying war correspondences based on the following: (1) correspondences written by correspondents stationed on the battlefield at Plevna; (2) correspondents who directly observed the fighting at Grivitsa as eyewitnesses; (3) correspondences transmitted to the editorial offices of the selected newspapers by post or telegraph; (4) those published within the specified period; and (5) correspondences explicitly marked as "From our special correspondent on the battlefield", "From our private correspondent on the battlefield", "Newspaper's private

² Western newspapers, *Le Temps*, *L'Indépendance Belge*, *Pester Lloyd*, *The Daily News*, and *The Daily Telegraph*, used the Gregorian calendar (New Style), the newspaper *Românul* used the Julian calendar (Old Style), while *Gazeta Transilvaniei* marked the dates in both calendars. Conversion of the Old Style (O.S.) dates to New Style (N.S.) is done by adding 12 days for the 19th century.

correspondence from the combat area” or equivalent formulations, given that, at the time, the systematic signing of war dispatches had not yet become a widespread journalistic convention – an aspect that makes it difficult to identify the authors of some reports accurately.

Table 4

**Corpus – War Correspondences: Total and Selected
for Pragma-Enunciative Analysis**

Total war correspondences by newspaper (20 Aug. – 3 Oct. / 1 Sept. – 15 Oct. 1877, O.S. / N.S.)	Selected correspondences for analysis	Date of report / Place of writing / Report attribution	Publication date and newspaper details
<i>Le Temps</i> 11	1	Sept. 18, 1877, In front of Plevna, from our special correspondent	Sept. 26, 1877, No. 6005, p. 2
<i>L'Indépendance Belge</i> 13	1	Sept. 11, 1877, Poradim, Private correspondence for <i>L'Indépendance</i>	Sept. 22, 1877, No. 265, p. 2
<i>Românul</i> 17	1	3/15 Sept. 1877 (O.S./N.S.), In front of Grivitsa, a private correspondence for <i>Românul</i>	Sept. 7, 1877, Year XXI, p. 1
<i>Gazeta Transilvaniei</i> 10	1	31 Aug. 1877 (O.S.), From the surroundings of Plevna, special correspondent of <i>Gazeta Transilvaniei</i> on the battlefield	Sept. 20/8, 1877 (N.S./O.S.) No. 70, p. 1
<i>Pester Lloyd</i> 24	1	Sept. 10, 1877, Grivitsa, From our special correspondent	Sept. 25, 1877, Evening Ed., No. 219, p. 1
<i>The Daily News</i> 42	1	Sept. 11, 1877, Before Plevna, from another special correspondent	Sept. 14, 1877, No. 9797, p. 5.
<i>The Daily Telegraph</i> 54	1	Sept. 6 to 14, 1877, Near Plevna, from our special correspondent	Sept. 19, 1877, No. 6955, p. 5

Although this study does not pursue a quantitative analysis of the war correspondences that appeared across the selected titles between August 20 and October 3 (O.S.) / September 1 and October 15, 1877 (N.S.), it is worth noting that the sample for pragma-enunciative analysis was drawn from a total of 171 dispatches published during the reference period, all of which met the criteria outlined above. This overall total includes only those correspondences originating from the Balkan theatre of operations, excluding reports on the fighting sent from the capitals of the belligerent states – St. Petersburg, Bucharest, and Constantinople – as well as from other European capitals. Moreover, correspondences transmitted by news agencies (e.g., *Havas*, *Reuters*, *Politische Korrespondenz*, *Wolff*, *Agence Générale Russe*), those republished from other newspapers, and official communiqués sent by the political and military authorities of the belligerent states were excluded.

5. Findings: pragma-enunciative analysis of each war correspondence

The pragma-enunciative analysis reveals how war correspondents depicted the war scene at Grivitsa during the Third Battle of Plevna by identifying neutrality markers and engagement in their reports.

5.1. The Battles of Plevna – Le Temps

Dated September 13, 1877, this report by *Le Temps*'s special correspondent in the Balkans appeared in issue no. 6005 of the newspaper, published on September 26, 1877, under the heading *The Battles of Plevna* and the note *In front of Plevna* (Figure 1), on page 2, without the correspondent's name being specified.

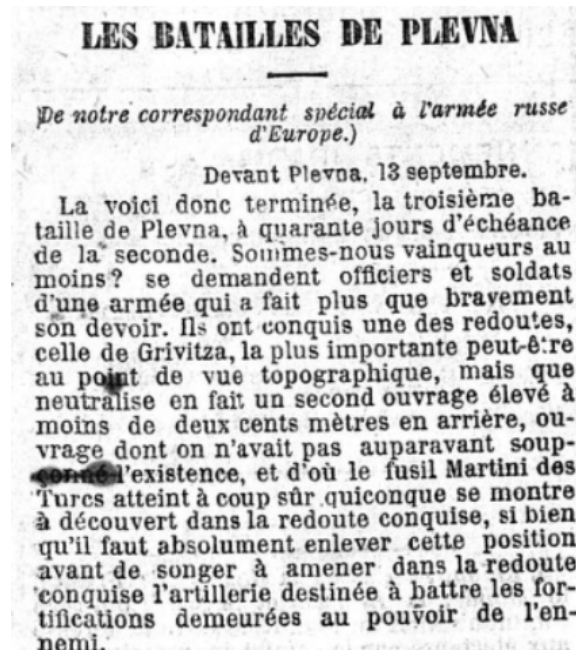


Figure 1. Opening of the war correspondence
(*Le Temps*, September 26, 1877)

As prime locutor, the war correspondent reports the events of the battle from the position of an eyewitness, with enunciative traces such as perceptual markers ("we heard," "we turned," "we could see"), spatial deixis ("the great redoubt of Grivitsa," "positions situated in front of the village"), and temporal deixis ("when on our right..."), highlighting his presence at the frontlines and the immediacy of action: "The disposition of the terrain prevented us from finding a favourable point to obtain an overall view of the attacks from the left. So, when on our right, we heard the burst of rifle fire from the attack of the centre, we turned at a trot to our observatory at the top of the great battery, from where we could see the attack on the great redoubt of Grivitsa and the positions situated in front of the village unfold. Unfortunately, we had to consider the horrible meteorological state of the atmosphere, and we only had an intermittent spectacle" (*Le Temps*, September 26, 1877, p. 2).

The correspondent provides a visual observation of the battlefield, noting both geographical markers and behavioural indicators to identify

troop positions and assess their conduct in the battle: "The Romanians occupy the far right of this line, and we were pleased to note that, after some oscillations denoting very excusable hesitations in a young army, the line of their fire is each time at the same height as that of the Russians" (ibid.). The correspondent's enunciative position is subjective, offering personal commentary on military tactics and battle outcomes. He employs various enunciative markers, including modalisers, such as adverbs, affective and evaluative adjectives, and verbs, which reveal his evaluations, assumptions, and attitudes toward the events being described: "**we were pleased** to note"; "**some oscillations** denoting **very excusable hesitations in a young army**".

Figures of speech are employed as well, such as metaphors ("a hail of projectiles", "concert of curses", "great baptism of fire"), hyperboles ("news flowed in all the rest of the night, but, alas! also the wounded"), to add depth by conveying emotions.

The text exhibits a degree of polyphony, incorporating the voices of other individuals through reported discourse. For example, it includes the direct speech of soldiers: "...there are also some Romanian soldiers struck, closer to the Russians than to their own ambulances. (...) « The fighting is hard », **they say**, « we have not yet been able to approach the redoubt, the two regiments have suffered horribly »" (ibid.). Similarly, the phrase "Are we at least victorious? **wonder** the officers and soldiers of **an army that has more than bravely done its duty**" (ibid.) introduces an enunciative polyphony by indirectly voicing the collective doubts and hopes of the troops. This reported speech weaves multiple perspectives into the correspondent's narrative, creating a rhetorical questioning that distances the narrator while conveying the uncertainty experienced on the battlefield.

Secondary locutors, specified by their function, provide insights into the performance of Romanian troops during this battle. The war correspondent conveys their observations and comparisons in reported speech: "The Romanians also seem to have honourably celebrated the great baptism of fire that their army is receiving. « They retreated at first, but then they fought like ours », **a non-commissioned officer tells me**. (...) The shooting from the centre weakens, and night has fallen, a damp, foggy and starless night, when **a young wounded officer** arrives and **tells us**: « The Grivitsa

redoubt is ours; it is within its walls that I was struck »" (ibid).

Descriptive elements (e.g., "parapets where the grass has not had time to grow", "embrasures so often breached", "light clouds of smoke", "lingering Russian riflemen") are also present providing a precise depiction of the situation: "The Turkish redoubt stands less than fifteen hundred meters away, with its parapets where the grass has not had time to grow, its embrasures so often breached by our guns, but always repaired by its defenders. A few light clouds of smoke barely surmount it, everything is finished on this side; on the left, a few lingering Russian riflemen are completing their retreat movement" (ibid.)

Of particular note, however, is the presence of affective modalisers (e.g., "horrible", "unfortunate") accompanying eyewitness descriptions: "I run to Radischovo, where I arrive around one o'clock. On the heights overlooking the village to the left are already lying one hundred and fifty or two hundred wounded, who are being transported as quickly as the limited number of available hands and stretchers at the divisional ambulance allow... At the bottom of the ravine, the scene is **horrible**: more than three hundred **unfortunate** soldiers, most of them from the 16th division, unable to go any further, have lain down on the rain-soaked ground waiting for means of transport" (ibid.)

This nuanced and compelling war report reflects the observable reality and the correspondent's perspective.

5.2. Romanian troops fighting at Grivitsa - *L'Indépendance Belge*

The newspaper *L'Indépendance Belge* no. 265, dated 22 September 1877, features on page 2 a report sent from Poradim on 11 September (Figure 2). Included in the *Affaires d'Orient* section and labelled as a *Correspondance particulière de l'Indépendance*, the text reveals the correspondent's enunciative positioning, which balances between a neutral stance and subjective engagement in depicting the Romanian troops' combat actions during the battle at Grivitsa.

(Correspondance particulière de L'INDÉPENDANCE.)
 Poradin, 11 septembre, 10 h. du soir.
 Je reviens d'assister à l'assaut contre les positions avancées de Plevna.
 J'étais ce matin à Verbitza, au camp roumain, et permettez-moi de remercier à cette place l'état-major de l'armée de la principauté de tout l'empressement et de tout le bon vouloir qu'il met au service des correspondants. Ici les représentants de la presse sont les hôtes de l'état-major; ils n'ont à s'occuper ni de leur logement ni de leur cuisine, l'intendance militaire roumaine pourvoit amplement à tous leurs besoins. J'étais donc ce matin à Verbitza. Le feu des batteries, qui avait duré sans discontinuer depuis trois jours et avec une violence extrême, avait cessé à l'aube comme par enchantement. Le calme le plus absolu régnait sur le plateau où se trouve le camp et dans le petit village de Verbitza encombré de voitures de munitions du train, etc. On me dit que les avant-postes turcs étaient à deux kilomètres. Je ne pouvais malheureusement m'en assurer par moi-même. Le temps, assez beau la veille,

Figure 2. Opening of the war correspondence,
 (*L'Indépendance Belge*, September 22, 1877)

The correspondent establishes a direct connection with the readers, enhancing the narrative's authenticity. His personal account of his experience is tempered by precise descriptions of military events, aiming to provide a realistic representation of the situation on the ground: "**I return** to my observation post. The battle rages on. From all the embrasures of the redoubt, puffs of smoke rise. The crossfire must be causing terrible havoc in the ravine." (*L'Indépendance Belge*, September 22, 1877, p. 2).

The use of the first person introduces a personal point of view and emotional involvement in the events being reported: "**I have just witnessed** the assault on the advanced positions of Plevna."; "**I cannot tell you** what I felt at that moment."; "It was at this moment that **I could judge** the courage of which the Romanian soldier is capable. They hurled themselves forward with an irresistible fury" (ibid.).

The correspondent adopts the position of a privileged witness, relaying information from other sources, such as officers: **"I was still exchanging my impressions on this matter with an officer** from General Cernat's entourage...; They opened a terrible fire on our troops, **a wounded officer told me...**", which enhances the authenticity of his report. As Rabatel (2004, pp. 9-15) mentions, using reported speech is a strategic choice to lend authority and credibility to the information.

The selection of modality markers, such as belief and modal verbs, figures of speech, descriptive adjectives and adverbs, reveals the journalist's argumentative intent: "This silence was **terrifying, horrible...**"; The Romanian soldiers "were thrown forward with **irresistible fury**"; "The Turkish fire was becoming more and more intense..."; "The young Romanian army was about to receive its **baptism of fire**, a baptism, alas!, all too bloody" (ibid.).

The emotional registers imbued with discourse modalisation (e.g., "poor Romanian peasants", "incredible determination," "ravine of death", "murderous fire", "unseen enemy", "a long trail of the dead and the dying") are predominant, providing a detailed and dramatic glimpse into the conditions of war while conveying the brutality of the confrontation: "Well, these **poor Romanian peasants**, in their worn-out greatcoats and their bonnets adorned with turkey feathers, those who have been mocked so much, have proven that they know how to die, if not how to conquer. It is the blood of the ancient Dacians that flows in their veins. With **incredible determination**, they plunged into this **ravine of death**, pushed back, crushed, and decimated by the **murderous fire** of an **unseen enemy**. Still, they did not retreat an inch, did not hesitate momentarily, always advancing, constantly charging, leaving behind, alas! **a long trail of the dead and the dying**. There were acts of heroism that **I cannot fully recount**" (ibid.).

The correspondent appears as an active participant in the narrative, aiming to inform while simultaneously conveying his emotional experience, thus blending neutrality with engagement.

5.3. *Fighting at Grivitsa - Românul*³

On 7 September 1877, the Romanian newspaper *Românul* carried on its lead page a war report titled *Fighting at Grivița* (Figure 3), signed by Friedrich Lachmann. Introduced as *A Private Correspondence for the Newspaper Românul*, the dispatch was sent from the battlefield and dated 3/15 September 1877, *In front of Grivitsa*. At the time, Lachmann was also reporting for *Der Bund* (Bern), *Die Augsburger Zeitung* and *The Chicago Gazette*.

As a witness narrator, the correspondent seeks to objectify his reporting by providing factual details (e.g., “around 5 a.m.”, “attack columns”, “3rd and 4th Divisions”, “amidst a fog”, “planned time for the assault”) about the actions of the Romanian troops in their struggle to capture the Grivitsa redoubt, yet without eliminating descriptive adjectives (e.g., “continuous rain”, “decisive moment”, “steady fire”, “violent barrage”) that add vividness and context to the narrative: “Around 5 a.m., the attack columns of the 3rd and 4th Divisions gathered amidst a fog, as often happens; despite the **continuous** rain, the morale of the army was **excellent**... The planned time for the assault was in the afternoon. The artillery maintained a **steady** fire from all batteries on the redoubt. At the **decisive** moment, our artillery unleashed a **violent** barrage on the enemy fortifications” (*Românul*, September 7, 1877, p. 1).

³ As a political, commercial, and literary weekly publication, *Românul* (*The Romanian*), was founded on August 9, 1857, in Bucharest, and became a daily newspaper in 1859.

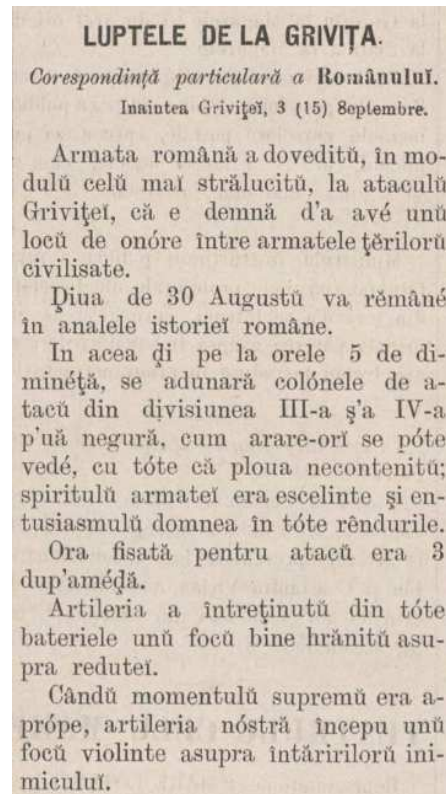


Figure 3. Opening of the war correspondence,
(*Românul*, September 7, 1877)

The correspondence incorporates subjective language elements reflected in the use of numerous affective and evaluative adjectives ("brilliant", "worthy", "excellent", "courageous", "terrifying", "bloody", "fierce", "striking"), modal adverbs ("unceasingly", "excellently", "exemplarily", "violently"), modal verbs, along with personal, temporal, and spatial deixis, as well as stylistic devices.

Figures of speech contribute to offering readers a sensory perspective of the battlefield actions, as illustrated in the following example based on a simile to describe the intensity of the enemy's response, likening the bullets fired at them to "a rain of lead": "The rain was falling even harder. At 3:10, when the Romanian columns began to approach the enemy positions, they were met with a **terrible onslaught**, a **rain of lead** denser than the one falling from the sky" (ibid.).

The frequent use of the inclusive “we” (“us”, “our”, “ourselves”) highlights that the correspondent feels solidarity with the Romanian army to which he refers (“**our** soldiers” and “**our** artillery”, “**we** recaptured the position”; “... the redoubt was in **our** hands”).

The correspondent’s engagement through evaluative and affective comments is evident in his emphasis on the hardships endured by the Romanian troops during the battle: “The battlefield is still **full of dead**, who cannot be buried because the Turks fired on medical personnel. Not only that: they also threw themselves on the wounded, mutilating them in **the most barbaric manner**” (ibid.) He also formulates a point of view through military expertise evaluations: “The losses are **truly significant**; however, thanks to **the sound decisions** of Captain Groza, who led the attack column as a staff officer, they remain **minimal in comparison to the intensity of the fire** the troops were exposed to. **Had the troops not been led in this manner**, the battalions would have reached the enemy positions with their ranks decimated, unable to continue the fight” (ibid.).

The correspondent expresses another evaluative position, praising the effective leadership of a Romanian army commander: “Colonel Anghelescu deserves congratulations for commanding troops that knew how to do their duty in **such a heroic manner**”; “Thanks to **the bravery and good leadership** of the troops, **we were able** to retake the position, driving away the enemy and causing them great losses” (ibid.)

This correspondence reflects the journalist’s emotional closeness to the combatants. Adopting the perspective of a flag-waving correspondent, it blends the objectivity of detailed factual reporting with the subjectivity of personal assessments and opinions.

5.4. Grivitsa redoubt captured – Gazeta Transilvaniei⁴

A war report titled *Grivitsa Redoubt Capture* was published on the front page of *Gazeta Transilvaniei* on September 8, 1877. It was written and

⁴ *Gazeta Transilvaniei* (*The Transylvania Gazette*) began publication on March 12, 1838, in Braşov, becoming the first information, political and cultural newspaper for Romanians in Transylvania, then part of the Austrian Empire and, from 1867 to 1918, of the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy.

submitted by the Special correspondent of *Gazeta Transilvaniei* on the battlefield, dated August 31, 1877, mentioning *From the surroundings of Plevna* (Figure 4).

Luarea redutei Grivitz'a.

(Corresp. part. a „Gaz. Trans.“ de pe campulu de resbelu.)

Din apropiarea Plevnei, 31 Aug. (12 Sept.) a. c.
Din'a de St. Alessandru, (30 Augustu) fù destinata pentru ataculu Plevnei.

Dispositiunea atacului fù urmatórea: Divisiunea a 4-a romana se atace fortulu mare numitu „Grivicea“, care'lu avea in fația; in acelasiu timp divisiunea a 3-a romana se atace in flanculu dreptu, ér' trei batalióne russesci se atace in flanculu stengu alu divisiunei a 4-a.

La órele 3 din di colón'a de atacu a divisiunei a 4-a formata din: batalionulu alu 2-lea de venatori, batalionulu alu 2-lea din alu 5-lea regimentu de linia, 1 batalionu din alu 16-lea si unu batalionu din alu 14-lea regimentu de dorobanti, — porni spre atacu in tóta ordinea si liniscea.

La órele 3^{1/2} venatorii, cari erau desfasiurati in linia de tirailori, cari luasera cu sine si tóte uneltele trebuincióse pentru trecerea siantiului, precumu: gabióne,*) fasine, scari s. a. ajunsera pe crést'a dealului, cam la 3—400 metre departare de fortu. De aci incepù assaltulu cu tóta iutiél'a si fora de a trage focuri asupra fortului, de unde inamiculu ii batea cu focu de infanteria si cu srepnele intr'unu modu inspaimantatoriu. Colón'a cu tóta plói'a de glóntie inse inaintà rapede pana la siantiulu fortului, de unde inse atatu foculu catu si baionetele inamicului o respinsera astfeliu, in catu se retrase cu mari perderi, dér' in regula.

Figure 4. Opening of the war correspondence,
(*Gazeta Transilvaniei*, September 8, 1877)

As a firsthand observer, the war correspondent takes on the role of the primary source, describing the events by drawing on factual accounts. He meticulously presents the positions of the troops, details the attack by hours and phases, and depicts the intense atmosphere of the battle, marked by infantry and artillery fire: “At 3 o'clock in the afternoon, the attacking column of the 4th Division, comprising the 2nd

Battalion of Riflemen, the 2nd Battalion of the 5th Line Regiment, one battalion from the 16th Regiment, and another from the 14th Dorobantsi Regiment, set out for the attack in perfect order and tranquillity". The correspondent also incorporates a real-time effect into his description: "**Today**, on August 31st, ... **as I write**, the cannonade continues. The outcome is unknown" (*Gazeta Transilvaniei*, September 8, 1877, p. 1).

His descriptions of the combat often carry an emotional tone, highlighting his affinity with the Romanian troops, with whom he seems to identify personally. This sense of identification is conveyed by the use of the inclusive personal pronoun "we" and its possessive form "our" in expressions like "our losses" and "our 4th division": "**Our losses** in soldiers and officers are very heavy. To give you an idea of the casualties sustained, I will mention here those of the 2nd Battalion of Riflemen... 350 wounded and dead out of 700 men, representing half of the personnel... **Our 4th division** is, I can now say, even more decimated, but the objective of its attack is at least in **our possession** (...)" ; "**our** cause"; "**we** gather"; "**we** regroup our forces"; "**we** await another order"; "**We paid** a heavy price for this" (ibid). He integrates dialogic elements into the text engaging the reader and maintaining fluidity in the development of the narrative: "To give **you** an idea of the losses..."; "At the moment I am writing **to you**..."; "Let **us** return to the 3rd Division..."; "**I can now say**...".

The correspondence's text contains personal, temporal, and spatial deixis but also abundant affective and evaluative adjectives, such as "unprecedented vigour," "heavy losses," "extraordinary vehemence," "terrifying combat," and "decisive success."

The correspondent of *Gazeta Transilvaniei* adopts a patriotic stance, practicing a "journalism of attachment" (Bell, 1998). Markers of subjectivity reveal his emotional connection with the Romanian troops: "God be with us and our cause!".

This way, the correspondence alternates between factual descriptions and evaluative comments, combining objective reporting with personal insights. This blend of detailed factual descriptions and subjective insights enriches the narrative and offers a deeper understanding of the correspondent's engagement with the events.

5.5. Romanian Troops at Grivitsa – Pester Lloyd

The special correspondent of *Pester Lloyd*, a German-language newspaper published in Budapest, filed a report from Grivitsa focusing on the actions of the Romanian troops at Grivitsa. The dispatch, written on September 10, 1877, appeared under the column *On the War*, featured on the front page of the newspaper's evening issue no. 219, dated September 25, 1877 (Figure 5).

From the very first lines, the correspondent immerses the reader in the atmosphere of the Grivitsa battlefield with the striking remark: "Cannon fire, from dawn to dusk and from dusk to dawn – such is the order of the day" (*Pester Lloyd*, September 25, 1877, p. 1)

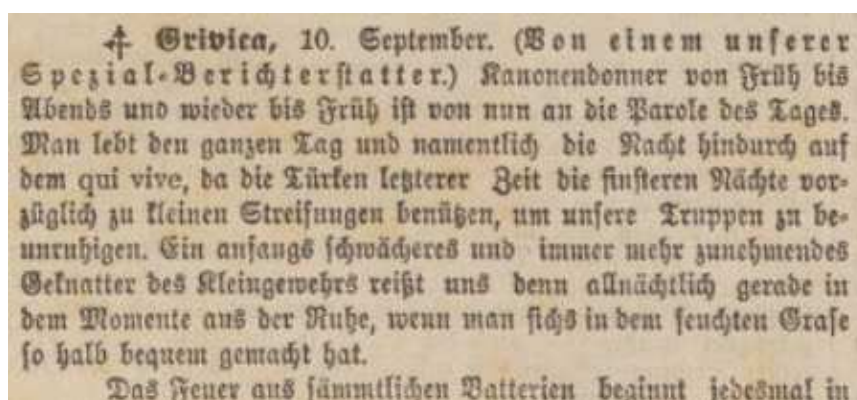


Figure 5. Opening of the war correspondence,
Pester Lloyd, September 25, 1877

The correspondent provides details in a neutral style about the order of battle, the positions and movements of the Romanian units, as well as the identification of commanders and their actions: "The batteries open fire, generally at half past four in the morning"; "The column, established for this purpose... was to depart at three in the afternoon"; "At the agreed time, the 2nd battalion of the 5th Infantry Regiment, commanded by Major Iarca, the 13th Dorobanti Regiment, led by Lieutenant Colonel Petrovanu, and a mounted artillery unit left the starting point heading toward the Grivitsa redoubt" (ibid.).

Along with descriptive passages recounting the military actions throughout the day, the journalist narrates his direct participation in the events in the first person: "Then, Captain Pruncu and about twenty men rushed and pulled the cannon back from its isolated place. However, there were no horses to put it completely safe. Since **I was riding** in the skirmish line, he asked me to run back and fetch a team. **I did this at once**, and under real rain of fire, **I managed to reach the artillery reserve**, where six horses were immediately placed at my disposal. **I returned** with them to the firing line, but **I took precautions (...)**"; "At around 10 at night **I rode**, together with Dr. Davila, to the central ambulance where **I found all the staff** busy putting definitive dressings on the wounded..." (ibid.).

Focusing on such vivid passages makes it clear that the correspondent does not just report the events but creates authenticity by showing active participation in the unfolding drama, thereby allowing readers to better grasp the chaos and intensity experienced on the battlefield.

His correspondence reflects both neutrality and engagement, as it combines observational detachment in factual descriptions with subjectivity conveyed through the use of the personal pronoun "I", modal nouns such as "selflessness" and "prowess," affective and evaluative adjectives like "formidable," "brilliant," "bold," and "unanimous," and figurative expressions like the metaphor "baptism of fire," commonly used in war reporting. These lexical choices convey the author's points of view, opinions, and attitudes, while reinforcing the emotional and evaluative tone of the report. By sharing his personal assessments with his readers, stating that "**I did not expect** in the least such a **bold attitude** towards the Turkish infantry, such **unanimously recognized prowess**, from a **young army** that had only **received its baptism of fire** today" (ibid.), the correspondent introduces a commendatory evaluation that adds a tone of praise to the report. This explicitly positive evaluation reflects a subjective enunciative stance and reveals the correspondent's affective alignment with the Romanian troops, distancing his account from a position of neutrality. His engagement becomes particularly evident through emotionally charged language and a superlative tone that conveys moral endorsement: "Victory was on **our side**; the mission had been **accomplished brilliantly**. From commander to soldier, the troops had shown an enthusiasm that deserved **the fullest appreciation**" (ibid.).

Although the correspondence aims to depict the events on the battlefield with a certain degree of neutrality, the frequent inclusion of subjective evaluations indicates the correspondent's positioning and engagement with the Romanian cause, shaping the reader's perception through a blend of factual description and personal commentary.

5.6. *The fighting at Plevna – The Daily News*

In its issue of September 14, 1877, No. 9797, page 5, *The Daily News* features two war correspondences from the Balkan front under the heading *The War. The Fighting at Plevna. Capture of Turkish Redoubts*. The first dispatch, titled *Near the Road to Lovtcha* and dated September 9, 1877, bears the byline *From our correspondent with General Gourko*. The second, *Before Plevna*, which forms the focus of our analysis, appears on the same page and is attributed *To another special correspondent*, written on September 11, 1877 (Figure 6).

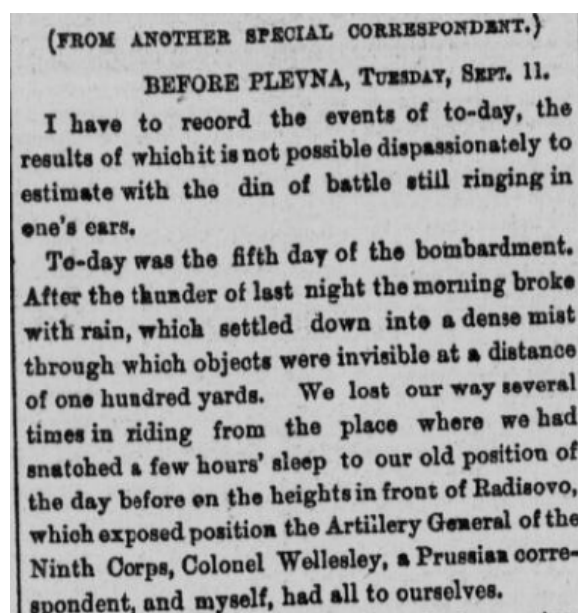


Figure 6. Opening of the war correspondence,
(*The Daily News*, September 14, 1877)

The report provides a detailed account of the Battle of Grivitsa, written in the first person by the field observer, whose enunciative stance is shaped by direct, participatory observation, as indicated by the use of personal, temporal, and spatial deixis ("I have to record...", "today", "still ringing in one's ears"), as well as by epistemic and affective modalisation, expressions of uncertainty and judgment ("it is not possible dispassionately to estimate", "steady action" "desultory fighting"): **"I have to record the events of today, the results of which it is not possible dispassionately to estimate with the din of battle still ringing in one's ears. Today was the fifth day of the bombardment..."; "I found several batteries of Russian field artillery of the 31st Division in steady action against the first and second Turkish position on the central swell, and only a little to the right and rear of the infantry men still engaged in desultory fighting, as evidenced by the maintenance of a dropping fire"** (*The Daily News*, September 14, 1877, p. 5).

The correspondent strives to maintain neutrality by offering detailed descriptions of the battlefield conditions and military movements, as illustrated by precise, concrete depictions such as "The Turks were visible out in the open **between their first and second positions, on the central swell, toiling away** at spade work under the shell-fire of the Russian batteries" and "The Russian siege-gun battery **near us** was occasionally **firing** over the central swell at the entrenched camps on the northern ridge of the Turkish position, and occasionally **throwing** shells into the town of Plevna" (ibid.). These descriptions are characterized by their observational, matter-of-fact tone, relying on spatial deixis ("between their first and second positions", "on the central swell", "near us",) and specific action verbs ("toiling away", "firing", "throwing") that convey ongoing, visible military activity without evaluative or emotive language. Such discursive strategies serve to present the scene impartially, focusing on concrete facts rather than subjective interpretation, thereby reinforcing the correspondent's effort to uphold neutrality.

To lend credibility to the report, the correspondent mentions his various observations of the battle as an eyewitness, clarifying whether or not he has visibility over the ongoing military actions: "About twelve, the fog begins to lift, almost as dramatically as it fell. **We can see** the line of the Turkish northern heights, but the intervening valley is full of

dense white smoke. Then presently **we get a glimpse** into, as it were, the interstices of smoke, and discern the Russian field batteries in the valley" (ibid.). Using the first-person plural indicates the presence of other correspondents in the press group as well.

The correspondent evaluates the reported statements of the military authorities, some of whom he appears to know personally, by employing discursive strategies that reveal his stance toward their assertions. This is achieved primarily through reported speech that conveys not only the content of what was said but also the correspondent's interpretative framing: "The colonel in command of the battery **told us with an assumption of indifference**, which **I am sure was feigned**, that **the fighting dying out was merely forepost work**, to clear the way for the grand assault against the redoubt on the isolated mamelon, which was to be made in the afternoon. **He may, indeed, have believed what he said**, but another tale **was told**, when for an instant a sharp eddy of wind blew fog and smoke away from the mamelon and slopes leading up."; "**My artillery friend** [General Skobelev] **stated further** that all the four pounders of his division had been sent to the left on towards the Sophia road with intent, **he believed**, to hinder the Turks from any attempt to retreat in that direction; an attempt which **did not seem to be probable**" (ibid.). For instance, the phrase "told us with an assumption of indifference, which I am sure was feigned" reveals the correspondent's ironic distancing and skeptical stance towards the colonel's claim that "the fighting dying out was merely forepost work." This layered enunciation introduces a critical perspective, suggesting that the official narrative may conceal the true situation. Similarly, the reported speech of "My artillery friend [General Skobelev] stated further..." combines a personal bond with the general and a cautious appraisal ("an attempt which did not seem to be probable"), which the correspondent relays without overt endorsement, thus preserving an impartial stance while subtly conveying his own evaluation.

Although the first-person perspective is present throughout the text, markers of emotional subjectivity, such as affective and evaluative adjectives, modal nouns, and adverbs, are notably absent, focusing more on factual and descriptive details. Through these pragma-enunciative devices – modulation of reported speech, epistemic markers, and expressions

of interpersonal stance – the correspondent positions himself as informant and critical commentator, mediating between official versions and observed realities, thereby balancing neutrality with subtle evaluation.

5.7. *Plevna from the Turkish side – The Daily Telegraph*

A comprehensive account of the battle of Plevna from the perspective of a war correspondent embedded with the Ottoman forces was published by *The Daily Telegraph* on September 19, 1877, No. 6955, page 5, under the title *Plevna from the Turkish side. Capture and recapture of redoubts. The battles described. Frightful aspects of the field* (Figure 7). In this report, written on 17 September 1877, *The Daily Telegraph's* special correspondent covers the period from September 6 to September 14, 1877, detailing the relentless assaults by Russo-Romanian troops on the heavily fortified Turkish positions commanded by Osman Pasha.

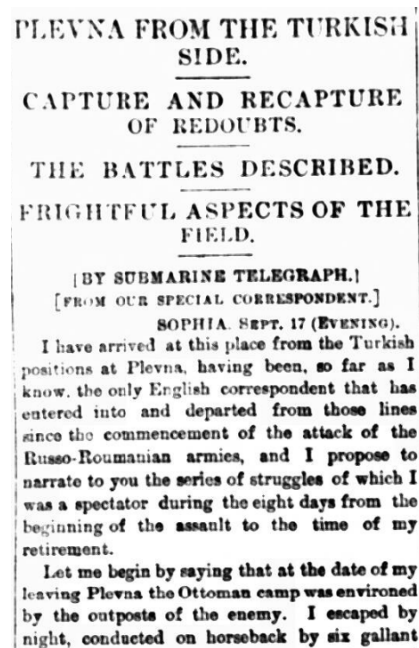


Figure 7. Opening of the war correspondence
(*The Daily Telegraph*, September 19, 1877)

The correspondent foregrounds his enunciative authority by positioning himself as the sole British observer with exclusive access to the Ottoman lines - an exceptional stance during the siege of Plevna - which serves to legitimize the forthcoming narrative: "**I have arrived** at this place from the Turkish positions at Plevna, **having been**, so far as I know, **the only English correspondent** that has entered into and departed from those lines since the commencement of the attack of the Russo-Roumanian armies" (*The Daily Telegraph*, September 19, 1877, p. 5). This opening move anchors the report in the experiential perspective of a primary locutor, embedded in the Turkish camp at Plevna, whose account is shaped by direct observation. He assumes the dual role of narrator and eyewitness to eight days of combat, using the first-person singular to show personal involvement and explicitly address the readers: "**I propose to narrate to you** the series of struggles of which **I was a spectator** during the eight days from the beginning of the assault to the time of my retirement." "**Let me begin** by saying that at the date of my leaving Plevna, the Ottoman camp was environed by the enemy's outposts. **I escaped** by night, conducted on horseback by six gallant Circassians (...) **I was** twenty-eight hours **in the saddle** without any repose, which was only gained when we reached Orhanie yesterday at midnight" (ibid.).

The correspondent located at certain observation points render the detailed representation of the battlefield dynamics that enhances the immediacy: "**I will describe** the Loftcha attack first. **As soon as** the movement began, **I went to the top of the ridge** and **saw** the Russians advancing in heavy masses of close column of battalions" (ibid.).

Through frequent visual and auditory imagery, readers are immersed in the scene through the employment of descriptive sequences and dramatic narrative rhythm, which at the discursive level serve to heighten emotional intensity and simulate immediacy: "Amid **ever-increasing slaughter** on both sides, the Turkish line once again received reinforcements, and then at **a sudden signal** - raising **a tremendous shout of 'Allah, Allah!'** and discharging simultaneous volleys - **they were seen to leap over the lips of the trenches** and **hurl themselves** with steel and clubbed muskets upon the Russians. There latter yielded, and **ran**, for the shock was intolerable" (ibid.).

The correspondent uses a rich array of modalised expressions and rhetorical devices to dramatically portray the atrocities on the battlefield, while also expressing a sense of empathy with the soldiers caught in the conflict: “**No sight, I think**, was ever seen before **like this** in warfare. It was the **fearful triumph of the breechloading arm** of precision. As it bravely crowned that **fatal plateau**, each successive Russian battalion was **mown down** by the **deadly fire** as ridges of wheat go prone to the earth before **reapers**. Again and again, it seemed that **scarcely a single man stood up alive** after the thunder and lightning of one of these **tempests of bullets**” (ibid.).

In this passage, epistemic modals such as “I think” and “it seemed” signal interpretative distance. At the same time, adjectives and nouns like “fearful triumph”, “deadly fire”, and “fatal plateau” express heightened emotional evaluation. Verbs such as “was mown down” and “stood up alive” intensify the scene's dramatic impact. At the same time, figurative language – particularly the simile “as ridges of wheat go prone to the earth before reapers” and the metaphor “tempests of bullets” – evokes the overwhelming destructiveness of modern warfare. Together, these enunciative choices generate an emotionally layered narrative grounded in personal observation and a sympathetic engagement with the events.

The emotional visual charge enhances the impact of the narrative: “**No pen can tell** – least of all while the nerves of an eye-witness are still shaken with the excitement and passions of such a spectacle – **what it conveys to the mind** to see the fair earth spread and hidden with the bodies of men (...) **miserably writhing** and struggling to rise and escape from **wounds that plainly doom them to a slower and more agonising end** than those happier victims who are **stretched so silently** beside them” (ibid.)

Along with evocative descriptions, the correspondent also shares explicit evaluations, – ranging from quantitative and factual to judgmental, both positive (about the Ottoman defence) and negative (concerning the Russian leadership), which reflect a combination of strategic assessment, personal opinion and subjective positioning: “**I judge** that the Russo-Roumanians drew nigh to us here in a mass of men about equal

to those directed against our other side.”; **“I estimate, from some experience of battlefields**, the dead and wounded that lay around Plevna after all this bloody work at between 6,000 and 7,000” (ibid.).

The correspondent’s interpretative language reflects his nuanced perspective, blending admiration for the Ottoman resistance, expressed through phrases like “superbly defended” and “indomitable resolve”, with condemnation of the Russian leadership, criticized for its “reckless” use of men “against the very muzzles of the Ottoman rifles”, while subtly critiquing the futility of the war, as underscored by the poignant remark on “sheer lack, at last, of more human blood to spill and squander”, which led them “to desist from their cruel undertaking”.

By blending expressive descriptions and evaluative judgments, the correspondent not only recounts the events but subtly critiques the destructiveness of war and the leaders’ decisions.

6. Discussion and conclusions

The results of the pragma-enunciative analysis applied to the selected correspondences highlight how war correspondents position themselves in relation to the events they report, shaping their points of view through enunciative stance, deixis and modal markers, stylistic devices, polyphony, and personal opinions. As witnesses and interpreters of the conflict, war correspondents construct narratives incorporating diverse voices, including those of military authorities, striving to balance neutrality with personally engaged perspectives.

The degree of neutrality versus engagement in each correspondence emerges from the interplay of these elements, as outlined below (see *Table 5 a, b*). Table 5 a, b provides a structured overview of war correspondents’ enunciative positioning regarding belligerent sides, battlefield scenes, human suffering and losses, and the outcomes of the fighting.

Table 5a

Enunciative Positioning in War Reporting

NEWSPAPER AND CORRESPONDENCE ANALYSED		<i>Le Temps</i> Sept 26, 1877 <i>Les batailles de Plevna</i>	<i>L'Indépendance Belge</i> Sept. 22, 1877 <i>Correspondance particulière</i>	<i>Românul</i> Sept. 7, 1877 <i>Before Grivitsa</i>
CORRESPONDENT'S ENUNCIATIVE POSITION – POINT OF VIEW		Detailed battlefield descriptions, subjective position, emotional engagement	Precise descriptions, personal perspective, clarity, consistency, structured information, emotional involvement	Factual details, military expertise, highly subjective, emotional closeness to Romanian military
T H E E N U N C I A T I V E M A R K E R S	DEICTIC MARKERS (Personal, Temporal, Spatial)	Frequent use of personal, spatial and temporal deixis	High presence of personal, spatial and temporal deixis	High presence of personal, spatial and temporal deixis, inclusive “we”
	MODAL MARKERS (Nouns, Adjectives, Adverbs, Verbs)	Moderate modalisation, evaluative and affective adjectives	Strong modalisation, expressive verbs, adjectives, adverbs	Strong modalisation, descriptive and evaluative adjectives
	FIGURES OF SPEECH (Similes, Metaphors, Rhetorical Devices)	Some rhetorical figures for emphasis, metaphors, hyperboles	Metaphors and rhetorical emphasis on suffering	Metaphors, similes and symbolic references
POLYPHONY (Reported Speech, Embedded Voices)		Includes voices of officers and other military sources	Incorporation of military accounts	Mix of military and patriotic testimonies
OPINION (Judgments and Comments)		Emphasis on reality effect and personal commentaries	Focus on personal observations emotional experience	Emphasis on evaluative remarks and interpretative judgments
NEUTRALITY <i>vs.</i> ENGAGEMENT		Moderate neutrality, mix of factual and emotional reporting	Engagement, emotionally charged language	Strong engagement, language reflecting patriotic attachment

Table 5b

Enunciative Positioning in War Reporting

NEWSPAPER AND CORRESPONDENCE ANALYSED		<i>Gazeta Transilvaniei</i> Sept. 8, 1877 <i>Grivitsa redoubt capture</i>	<i>Pester Lloyd</i> Sept. 25, 1877 <i>Grivica</i>	<i>The Daily News</i> Sept. 14, 1877 <i>The fighting at Plevna</i>	<i>The Daily Telegraph</i> Sept. 19, 1877 <i>Plevna from the Turkish side</i>
CORRESPONDENT'S ENUNCIATIVE POSITION – POINT OF VIEW		Factual descriptions, patriotic stance, affinity with the Romanian military	Detailed narrative, neutral style, accuracy, verification and engagement to express moral support for the Romanian military	Factual reporting, accuracy, fairness, structured narrative, expert analysis and descriptive details	Evocative description, nuanced perspective, direct observations, and immersive war scenes
THE ENUNCIATIVE MARKERS	DEICTIC MARKERS	High presence of personal, spatial and temporal deixis, inclusive “we”	Balanced use of personal deixis, inclusive “we”	Minimal personal deixis, emphasis on precise temporal and spatial references	Use of personal deixis for engagement, rich spatial deixis
	MODAL MARKERS	Strong modalisation, emotionally charged adjectives	Moderate modalisation, analytical tone	Low modalisation, preference for factual nouns and verbs	High modalisation, affective adjectives, strong adverbs
	FIGURES OF SPEECH	Vivid imagery, nationalist metaphors	Some rhetorical devices	Absent or minimal	Frequent use of similes and sensory descriptions
POLYPHONY (Reported Speech, Embedded Voices)		Military testimonials, Romanian patriotic voices	Multiple perspectives, including high-ranking officers	Reported statements, focus on military sources	Includes testimonies from soldiers and civilians

OPINION (Judgments and Comments)	Integration of personal interpretations and evaluative positions	Integration of individual evaluations and assessments	Limited use of personal judgments and comments	High neutrality, objective tone
NEUTRALITY vs. ENGAGEMENT	Overt engagement emotional tone, patriotic attachment	Moderate neutrality, leaning towards engagement with the Romanian cause	Focus on personal assessments and evaluative judgements	Moderate engagement, characterize d by an emotional tone, supporting the Ottoman cause

The correspondents from continental European publications such as *Le Temps*, *L'Indépendance Belge*, and *Pester Lloyd* infuse their reports with detailed neutral descriptions while also displaying marked emotional engagement through affectively charged language. These subjective accounts frequently include evaluative comments, often supplemented by military testimonies. Moreover, the frequent use of deixis enhances the “reality effect.”

Romanian publications reconcile patriotic engagement in the struggle for national independence with emerging principles of journalistic neutrality. The correspondents of *Românul* and *Gazeta Transilvaniei* stand out for their overt engagement, blending personal reflections, nationalist fervour, and support for the Romanian troops - features characteristic of the so-called “journalism of attachment” (Bell, 1998).

The report analysed in *The Daily News* prioritizes factual accounts, military expertise, critical assessments of strategies, and troop morale through a discursive construction that emphasizes a personal point of view. The text is notable for its rigorous structure, accuracy, fairness, supporting evidence, and the absence of overt emotional tones.

Although his correspondence follows the model of the Anglo-Saxon press, *The Daily Telegraph* correspondent focuses on creating an expressive description of the violence of war scenes, enhancing the readers’ immersion in the visual and auditory atmosphere of the battlefield.

We could explain the degrees of neutrality or engagement in these reports depending on the correspondents' journalistic training, the editorial lines, their emotional ties to the combatants⁵, and their national loyalties. Neutrality and engagement emerge as key markers of shifting reporting styles in the 19th-century press and the broader evolution of journalistic practices. This pragma-enunciative analysis falls within this reflection, highlighting the efforts of war correspondents to provide accurate and impartial information, while at the same time cultivating their personal and national attachments or adapting and responding to institutional constraints, whether imposed by editorial policies or by the military commands to which they were accredited.

Below is a comparative overview of the reporting styles across the analysed publications and the journalistic cultures they represent. It considers both the correspondents' discursive positioning in relation to neutrality and engagement and the broader implications of these approaches for press discourse and public perception (see *Table 6*).

Table 6

Neutrality vs. Engagement in War Reporting

PUBLICATIONS	NEUTRALITY VS. ENGAGEMENT IN WARREPORTING	OBSERVATIONS	IMPLICATIONS
ANGLO-SAXON REPORTING STYLE			
<i>The Daily News, The Daily Telegraph</i>	Factual, professional expertise, minimal emotional engagement, emphasis on impartiality, and non-engagement	Strong focus on accuracy, factuality, verification, structured narratives, supporting evidence- corroboration, quotations, and reliance on verifiable sources	Strengthens the perception of objectivity and journalistic detachment; adopts an evidence-based approach that enhances public trust in press credibility; prioritizes neutrality over personal viewpoints or national loyalties

⁵ For instance, the *Pester Lloyd* correspondent was embedded with Romanian troops for five weeks (August -September 1877) during the battles covered in his dispatches.

CONTINENTAL EUROPEAN REPORTING STYLE			
<i>Le Temps</i> <i>L'Indépendance</i> <i>Belge</i> <i>Pester Lloyd</i>	Highly emotional, with frequent evaluative and affective language, moderate engagement	Adopts a more subjective tone, potentially shaped by editorial stance, national and personal biases; employs rhetorical strategies to engage the reader	Contributes to a more interpretative style of journalism, where emotion and national perspective influence the framing of events; enhances readability through clarity and structured reporting, though emotional involvement may introduce bias
ROMANIAN REPORTING STYLE			
<i>Românul</i> <i>Gazeta</i> <i>Transilvaniei</i>	Patriotic, blending nationalism with journalistic standards, overt engagement	High emotional investment and strong attachment to the national cause, often aligned with political and military perspectives, are reflected in the use of personal reflections to influence the narrative	Balances advocacy with journalistic ethics, though it may prioritize national sentiment over strict neutrality; it illustrates the coexistence of journalistic aspirations and patriotic rhetoric, highlighting the press's role in nation-building processes

In line with Parent's (2021) theoretical approach to journalistic neutrality, this pragma-enunciative analysis of war correspondence shows that Anglo-Saxon correspondents, aligned with the standards of their journalistic culture, tend to favour factual reporting based on their professional expertise. Their style prioritizes verifiable information and a structured, detached narrative, reinforcing the idea of journalistic objectivity. This positive perception of the British press's professionalism was acknowledged at the time, as evidenced in an Editor's note on the Battle of Grivitsa (Figure 8), published in the Romanian newspaper *Românul* on September 16, 1877: "There is not a single major British newspaper that does not make every effort to respect the truth. Whenever they report on confirmed events, they do so with precision" (*Românul*, September 16, 1877, p.2)



Figure 8. Editor's note on the Battle of Grivitsa, (*Românul*, September 16, 1877)

In contrast, continental European correspondents from France, Belgium, and Austria-Hungary adopt a more emotionally involved reporting

style, frequently using evaluative language, rhetorical figures, and personal reflections. This approach can be partially attributed to the individual positioning of correspondents toward the war and the cultural and editorial traditions of their respective publications. This observation is corroborated by studies on the core professional values of journalism and newsroom cultures, which reveal significant cross-national differences in how journalistic neutrality is understood and practiced. These differences are shaped by broader cultural, ideological, and political contexts, as noted by Hanitzsch (2020) and by Donsbach and Klett (1993), whose study, *Subjective objectivity: How journalists in four countries define a key term of their profession*, is cited as a key reference by Schudson (2001) and by Parent (2021).

Romanian correspondents, in particular, demonstrate a strong patriotic commitment, marked by pronounced nationalist sentiments and emotional investments. Their accounts combine personal engagement with journalistic techniques, reflecting both their dedication to the Romanian cause and the broader role of the press in shaping national identity. While this patriotic engagement often guided the tone of Romanian war reporting, there was also an awareness, among more reflective voices within the press, of the risks of biased or inflated narratives. This dilemma is clearly articulated in the editorial on the responsibilities of the press during wartime (*Figure 9*), published in *Românul* on August 26, 1877, which recognizes the duty of the press to provide accurate and objective information despite the constraints imposed by patriotic engagement: “Of course, we would not wish for the Romanian press, regardless of its orientation, to contribute to confusion or foster false hopes. It is only natural for everyone to wish for good news about their country; however, it is the duty of the educated, of those who hold the journalist’s pen and aspire to legitimate recognition, neither to invent such news nor to exaggerate it” (*Românul*, August 26, 1877, p. 1).



În război, sunt pierderi și câștiguri, sunt lacrimi de durere și lacrimi de bucurie. Soarta armelor e mai schimbătoare de câtă timpul și mai nestatornică de câtă a vântului nestatornicie.

Ei bine, n'amă dori ca presa română, fie ea de ori-ce nuanță, să contribuie la confuziunea spiritelor sau la formarea unei încrederi factice. E'n firea lucrurilor ca totu omul să dorească știți bune pentru țara sa; e însă de datoria celor luminați, cari țin în mână pînă de cronici și aspiră la o legitimă reputație, ca nici să nu le invente, nici să nu le esagereze.

Figure 9. Editorial on the responsibilities of the press during wartime (excerpt)
(*Românul*, August 26, 1877)

War correspondents' points of view are influenced by their cultural background, journalistic and military expertise, individual affective connections, personal bonds, and vested interests, as well as contextual factors. This highlights the importance of situating war reporting practices within their historical framework, including the development of the press and ethical standards.

Regarding the implications for historical war journalism, the study highlights how war correspondents and the publications they worked for adhered, to varying degrees, to the professional standards of journalistic neutrality despite various pressures, including ideological, political, military, or personal affiliations, beliefs, and ideals.

The analysis applied to battlefield correspondences, though limited in number, highlights that one of the key aspects of journalism during the 1877-1878 war was the effort and professional competition among correspondents and publications to present factual information based on direct observation at the frontlines, offering readers an accurate portrayal of events. This approach was particularly evident in how correspondents accredited to the Russo-Romanian or Turkish armies reported the events. Their reports often appeared within the same newspaper pages – such as in *Le Temps*, *L'Indépendance Belge*, *Pester Lloyd*, *The Daily News*, and *The Daily Telegraph* – presenting opposing perspectives and diametrically different viewpoints

presenting opposing perspectives and diametrically different viewpoints from all belligerent parties. Consequently, comparing and contrasting military and civilian sources from both sides of the conflict was essential for providing a comprehensive understanding of the battlefield situation, ensuring the credibility of the reports, and enhancing the publications' reputation.

War correspondents' commitment to a fair and nuanced journalistic approach – one that incorporated not only facts but also context and diverse perspectives – significantly influenced the evolution of war journalism, shaping both how the war was reported and how it was perceived by the public. The practice of reflecting multiple, even opposing, viewpoints contributed to the advancement of professional and ethical norms in the press, where respect for factual truth, accuracy, independence, honesty, fairness, impartiality, and accountability became fundamental principles (Tuchman, 1972; Gauthier, 1991; Bell, 1998; Schudson, 2001; Tumber, 2020; Parent, 2021).

This study faces several limitations, including its reliance on a few reports from accredited war correspondents in the Russian, Romanian, and Ottoman camps, published in newspapers from the United Kingdom, France, Austria-Hungary, and Romania.

A potential future research direction would be expanding the corpus by incorporating a broader range of publications and correspondences. This would allow for a more comprehensive representation of how the war was reported, particularly in Russian and Ottoman newspapers, which were not included in the present study. Such an approach could further refine the understanding of war journalism practices across different cultural and political contexts.

The study highlights the nuanced nature of war reporting. It suggests a dynamic interaction between journalistic standards and correspondents' points of view on the events they report, shedding light on the evolving balance between neutrality and engagement in their coverage. As a phenomenon, this balance is not merely a historical remnant; it continues to manifest in contemporary times, particularly in the coverage of crises and armed conflicts, emphasizing a shift towards increased subjectivity in journalistic practices. Ultimately, from a practical perspective, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the importance of accurate and responsible journalism, particularly in times of war, for the proper functioning of democratic societies. It highlights the journalists' responsibility to provide complete and truthful information, ensuring that the press maintains its credibility as the Fourth Estate and its role as a watchdog of democracy.

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EXPLORING DIGITAL SELF-EDUCATION: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF EXPERT INSIGHTS

Abstract. Generation Z, marked by new media, interconnectedness, and a culture of instant gratification, allocates much of its time to social media platforms. Beyond their multifaceted functions, these platforms have the potential to facilitate learning by enabling teenagers to engage in various stages of knowledge construction, such as sharing ideas, identifying discrepancies, synthesizing information, and applying knowledge. This study investigates the role of Instagram and TikTok as knowledge sources for Generation Z by analyzing both the contributions and concerns related to the consumption of educational content. To achieve this, we conducted expert interviews (N=13) with academicians and practitioners from Romania, Germany, and the USA. The results indicate that social media can facilitate social interactions and identity formation among adolescents while also serving as a source of information and knowledge. However, adolescents should be guided in navigating the potential threats and mitigating their harmful effects. Additionally, the gathered expertise contributed to developing a guideline for practitioners, focusing on the key elements for creating educational content for teenagers.

Keywords: social media, adolescents, informal education, educational content

1. Introduction

The advent of Web 2.0 and social media (SM) has revolutionized how Generation Z approaches learning, ushering in a paradigm shift from

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traditional, formal education to self-directed and informal learning (Cilliers, 2017; Scholz & Vyugina, 2019). Unlike traditional media, which historically served as a primary source of information, the internet and social networks have evolved into vast and dynamic knowledge hubs (Goldie, 2016). SM, described by Shankleman et al. (2021) as a window to the world, provides a constantly evolving platform that resonates with younger generations, introducing new dimensions of learning and engagement (Throuvala et al., 2019). Thus, more research is needed to shed light on the informational reach of SM by analyzing it as an important educational resource for adolescents.

Given the growing importance of SM in adolescents' lives, the implications of the paper rely on understanding how they interact with these platforms and how it impacts their social and personal development, and overall well-being. Moreover, to effectively engage teenagers with this type of content, practitioners must have a clear image of the characteristics that define successful content. Therefore, this study addresses one primary research question: Can Instagram and TikTok serve as effective platforms to provide informal education for adolescents? This research question is supported by two secondary questions: What are the contributions and concerns of consuming educational content on SM? What key elements define impactful educational content tailored for adolescent audiences on SM? In order to answer these questions and to gain deeper insights into the topic, 13 exploratory semi-structured expert interviews were conducted with academics and practitioners from Germany, Romania, and the USA.

Technology can empower learners by providing increased agency, chances to participate in networked communities, and access to diverse resources to assist knowledge creation. (Greenhow & Lewin, 2015). The Internet is a significant "source of expanding horizons" (Szymkowiak et al., 2021, p. 2), providing rapid and widespread access to information technologies across diverse domains. A growing number of recent studies have explored the use of SM from a pedagogical perspective of formal learning (e.g., Barrot, 2018; Greenhow et al., 2019; Alamri et al., 2020; Chugh et al., 2020; Escamilla-Fajardo et al., 2021; Valtonen et al., 2021). However, the literature regarding SM as a platform for informal learning reveals a research gap, as it is limited in exploring how it

connects formal, non-formal, and informal learning (Greenhow & Lewin, 2015; Barrot, 2020; Manca, 2020).

Previous studies on Romanian teenagers have concentrated on the impact of SM on users' mental health, self-presentation on social platforms (Ștefăniță et al., 2018; Vițelar, 2019; Szambolics et al., 2023;), online privacy (Balaban et al., 2024), media literacy and fake news (Corbu et al., 2021; Rotaru, 2023), or the effects of advertising on teenagers (Iancu, 2016; Balaban et al., 2022), however, their significance as platforms for informal learning remains largely unexamined. SM conveys values, attitudes, and information on various topics that interest and engage young people. Exploring their motivations for using SM is increasingly important, as these platforms constitute a significant part of their daily lives and, therefore, substantially impact their development, growth, and understanding of the world.

The novelty of this research is threefold. Firstly, while existing research has addressed various benefits and risks associated with adolescents' use of social media (Wang et al., 2017; Throuvala et al., 2019; Engeln, 2020; Shankleman et al., 2021), fewer studies have examined its potential for informal educational purposes. Secondly, the perspectives of experts and practitioners in the field remain underrepresented in the current literature. Thirdly, this study addresses these gaps by exploring expert insights and outlining practical recommendations for creating effective educational content targeted at young audiences.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. *Social media as informal learning environments*

In addition to family, school, religion, cultural institutions, and social organizations, the media are among the most significant influences on education (Ansari & Khan, 2020; Denojean-Mairet et al., 2024). The emergence of SM platforms, collaborative tools, and user-generated content has created new opportunities for interaction and knowledge exchange (Bush & Löns, 2024). SM, based on the technical and ideological foundations of Web 2.0, enables users to create, share, and interact opportunistically and selectively through digital channels, either in real-

time or asynchronously (Zhang et al., 2024). Through the widespread use of smartphones, it has gained immense popularity, especially among adolescents and young adults who use it as an integral part of their daily lives (Griffiths & Kuss, 2017; Hosen et al., 2021; Bengtsson & Johansson, 2022).

Its development has transformed from purely social communication hubs to multifunctional entities (Hosen et al., 2021; Denojean-Mairet et al., 2024). These web-based technologies, with their interactive and innovative features, are tailored to the digital generation and enable virtual communication as well as personal development, often without prior expertise (Hosen et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2024). Ansari and Khan (2020) emphasize that communication and networking among young people are fundamentally transformed, turning the virtual world into an easily accessible, vast repository of knowledge.

SM encompasses a diverse range of online information sources that are created, shared, and utilized by consumers to inform one another (Hu & Noor, 2024). They enable individuals to publish and retrieve information, collaborate on projects, and maintain relationships (Siddiqui & Singh, 2016). As a result, SM has become the subject of research on numerous topics, including its influence on politics, social interactions, activism, identity formation, and youth cultures (Bengtsson & Johansson, 2022). Furthermore, SM has established itself as a significant platform for news dissemination, political participation, and democratic discussions (Newman et al., 2020; Masullo et al., 2022).

In January 2024, according to DataReportal, there were 13.30 million active SM user identities in Romania, representing 67.4% of the population (this figure may not represent unique individuals) (Kemp, 2024). In a 2021 survey of 894 Romanian adolescents, the Center for Independent Journalism found Instagram as the top platform, which was mentioned 719 times, followed by YouTube and TikTok. This underscores the popularity of video content among this group, with WhatsApp, Snapchat, Spotify, and Discord also showing notable engagement (CJI, 2023). Instagram and TikTok share the characteristic of focusing on short video formats, reflected in Instagram Reels and TikTok videos, and are, therefore, very popular among teenagers.

2.2. Instagram

Instagram, launched in 2010 as a mobile platform for sharing photos and videos, quickly gained popularity for its innovative editing features and visually oriented, *image-first* approach (Sheldon & Newman, 2019; Rejeb et al., 2022). Through continuous adaptability and innovation, Instagram introduced features such as live broadcasts, stories, and cross-platform sharing, significantly increasing its appeal to younger audiences (Kircaburun et al., 2018). The ability to capture, edit, and upload photos directly within the app, alongside the use of filters for creative adjustments to color, resolution, and tone, has made the platform a preferred choice, allowing adolescents to shape their online identity while engaging in a visually oriented social experience (Alhabash & Ma, 2017; Kircaburun et al., 2018; Bush & Löns, 2024). In addition to creative content sharing, Instagram provides a rich environment for self-expression, social interaction, and documentation (Szambolics et al., 2023; Avci et al., 2025).

Instagram continues to experience growth worldwide, reaching a user base of 2 billion in 2024, making it the third most used SM platform (Statista, 2024). The platform is particularly popular among young adults: globally, 32% of Instagram users belong to the 18-24 age group (Statista, 2024). A similar trend is observed in Romania, where Instagram had approximately 5.78 million users in July 2024. The largest user group, 32.1%, consists of 18-24-year-olds (Statista, 2024). Adolescents and young adults dominate the platform, as evidenced by the 1.86 million users from the 18-24 age group in Romania (Statista, 2024).

2.3. TikTok

TikTok has gained unprecedented global popularity, particularly among young audiences. Launched initially as Musical.ly in 2014, TikTok was acquired by ByteDance in 2016, rebranded, and launched globally as Douyin in China and TikTok elsewhere (Dias & Duarte, 2022; Nwafor & Nnaemeka, 2023). TikTok's short, music-enhanced videos, typically ranging from 3 to 60 seconds, provide a platform for young users to explore self-expression and identity (Stamenković & Mitrović, 2023). Its diverse content

covers topics from education and health to technology and lifestyle, while interactive features like dance challenges, sketches, and musical performances promote creativity (Dias & Duarte, 2022). Additionally, TikTok's creative tools, such as filters and speed adjustments, enable users to craft personalized content, contributing to its dynamic and engaging environment (Bresnick, 2019). Originally designed for this target group, the platform strengthens Generation Z's sense of community through trends, symbols, and values typical of their culture (Zeng & Abidin, 2021).

TikTok has emerged as a cultural phenomenon that reflects the media consumption habits of Gen Z by offering dynamic tools such as the personalized *For You Page* delivering personalized content, and keeping users engaged (Zeng et al., 2021). Moreover, it offers diverse opportunities for education and information, as professionals from various fields share expert knowledge through informative videos (Nwafor & Nnaemeka, 2023). TikTok has become one of the most downloaded apps, with over 2.6 billion downloads and approx – 1 billion active users worldwide (Stamenković & Mitrović, 2023). In Romania, TikTok has surpassed Instagram, having 8.97 million users (Kemp, 2024), with 64.6% of the users aged between 18-24 years (Start.io, 2024).

Despite their popularity, TikTok, Instagram, and similar short-video apps remain under-researched in academic studies, leaving gaps in understanding the impact of this format on media consumption and social interaction (Klug, 2020). Their ability to engage users through unique features such as interactivity, demassification, and asynchronicity raises questions about its broader implications for social behavior and media use.

2.4. Generation Z

Technological advancements, social justice movements, an unstable economy, and violence issues have shaped Generation Z (Seemiller & Grace, 2017; Chan & Lee, 2023). Unlike previous generations, they were born into a world where digital tools such as smartphones, laptops, and wearable devices were ubiquitous, marking them as true digital natives (Vogels et al., 2022; Eldridge, 2024). Growing up alongside the rise of mobile connectivity, the oldest members of Generation Z entered their formative

years when the first iPhone was launched in 2007 (Seemiller & Grace, 2017; Parent, 2023; Geiger, 2024). This intrinsic relationship with technology has profoundly influenced their habits, cultural perspectives, and social behaviors.

Living in a technology-saturated environment, they thrive on immediacy and connectivity, excelling in multitasking and engaging with global trends (Fernández-Cruz & Fernández-Díaz, 2015; Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022). Entrepreneurial problem-solving skills, quick access to information, and adaptability define Generation Z (Chan & Lee, 2023). They value instant gratification, maintain primarily digital relationships, and prioritize diversity, often seeking cultural connections and international experiences to develop language or professional skills (Twenge et al., 2018; Throuvala et al., 2019; Parent, 2023). Moreover, their higher likelihood of completing higher education, often supported by having a college-educated adult in their lives, reflects their pragmatic approach to personal and professional development, believing their education equips them with the skills to succeed in a competitive world (Chan & Lee, 2023; Parent, 2023; Eldridge, 2024).

SM has become a pivotal tool in adolescent development, facilitating the formation of supportive peer networks and fostering a sense of belonging through self-disclosure and social support—key influences in shaping behaviours, goals, attitudes, and identity (Shapiro & Margolin, 2014; Throuvala et al., 2019; Szabolcs et al., 2023). Platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat offer adolescents dynamic spaces for self-expression through talents such as singing, dancing, or sharing personal experiences to gain validation and encouragement (Nwafor & Nnaemeka, 2023). However, this engagement also comes with significant risks. The constant exposure to idealized self-presentations and social comparison can contribute to self-esteem issues and psychological distress, particularly during the sensitive phase of identity formation (Irmer & Schmiedek, 2023). Moreover, the overwhelming flow of content and the tendency to seek affirmation in these virtual environments may weaken real-world social connections, while fostering unrealistic self-images and reinforcing emotionally harmful behaviours (Kerr et al., 2024).

The interests of Generation Z are diverse, encompassing a wide range of topics, including local events and personal updates shared by friends, as well as critical global issues occurring on the other side of the

globe (Scholz & Vyugina, 2019). However, a reduced ability to maintain attention is a key characteristic of Generation Z, linked to their constant exposure to excessive information (Karasek & Hysa, 2020; Szymkowiak et al., 2021). The increasing use of media presents numerous challenges, as Generation Z, despite being technologically adept, remains largely unaware of its risks. This underscores the urgent need to equip adolescents with comprehensive media literacy skills – an endeavor made more complex by the growing intricacy and lack of clarity surrounding the competencies required of both educators and teenagers (Maloș & Lăcătuș, 2023).

2.5. Uses and gratifications of SMU

Given the strong connection between Generation Z and social media, numerous researchers have employed the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) to investigate the underlying motivations behind this engagement (e.g., Al-Menayes, 2015; Alhabash & Ma, 2017; Sheldon & Newman, 2019; Bossen & Kottasz, 2020; Brailovskaia et al., 2020; Bengtsson & Johansson, 2022; Falgoust et al., 2022; Guo, 2022; Nwafor & Nnaemeka, 2023; Stamenković & Mitrović, 2023; Wong & McLellan, 2023). Across these studies, recurring motivations include entertainment, social interaction, information seeking, self-presentation and identity, psychological needs, escapism, passing time, creative expression, convenience, and utility. While the specific gratifications vary depending on age, gender, personality traits, and the platform in use (Kircaburun et al., 2018), certain patterns are consistently observed among adolescents.

Despite growing criticism that UGT inadequately addresses the complexities of algorithm-driven, highly interactive, and platform-shaped environments, it provides a valuable framework for analyzing individual user motivations in digital contexts. Recent studies (Nwafor & Nnaemeka, 2023; Stamenković & Mitrović, 2023) reaffirm its relevance in explaining how platforms like TikTok respond to diverse adolescent needs and how Gen Z selectively engages with content in an environment of abundant choice (Trang et al., 2025). Nonetheless, a critical application of UGT – one that accounts for structural and algorithmic dynamics – remains essential for interpreting informal learning on social media today.

While numerous authors have examined diverse gratifications associated with SM use, Brailovskaia et al. (2020) systematically categorized these into five comprehensive groups that are particularly relevant to this study. Brailovskaia et al. (2020) conducted a survey involving 485 students in Germany and subsequently performed an inductive qualitative content analysis to identify the primary categories underlying the reasons for social media use (SMU): search for social interaction, search for information and inspiration, escape from negative emotions, search for positive emotions, beat of boredom and pastimes.

2.6. SMU for educational purposes

The current generation of young people, raised alongside advanced digital media, exhibits greater internet proficiency than previous generations and strongly prefers interactivity (Szymkowiak et al., 2021). Their constant exposure to technology has influenced their learning habits, communication methods, and educational expectations (Chan & Lee, 2023). The extensive use of digital tools by today's youth sets them apart from earlier generations, necessitating significant educational changes to align with their unique skills and interests (Szymkowiak et al., 2021; Shieh & Nasongkhla, 2023). Gen Z thrives in technology-driven environments and is discerning about the information they engage with, favoring practical or peer-generated content (Roth-Cohen et al., 2021). SM provides a dynamic and rapidly growing platform that appeals to the younger generation by introducing new dimensions to the learning experience (Throuvala et al., 2019; Taddeo, 2023).

Informal learning – often unstructured and unintentional – gains increasing recognition for its role in complementing, extending, or even compensating for formal education through everyday work, family, and leisure activities (Taddeo, 2023). Social media holds significant potential to connect informal and formal learning, as a valuable tool for facilitating social learning (Kumar & Nanda, 2022). SM's unique characteristics, such as its public accessibility, rapidity, and openness, promote users' social advancement and information acquisition (Nwafor & Nnaemeka, 2023; Shieh & Nasongkhla, 2023). Consequently, it has facilitated the creation of advanced, personalised learning environments that are exceptionally

engaging and self-driven (Ansari & Khan, 2020; Kumar & Nanda, 2022). Furthermore, SM activities align with social constructivist learning theories by promoting communication skills through decentralized and co-constructed learning environments (Manca, 2020). It can also enhance students' learning performance, with insights enriched by internal motivational factors (Hosen et al., 2021).

Greenhow and Lewin (2015) conducted twofold research to examine the impact of SM in formal and informal education. Both studies highlighted how SM provided young people with opportunities to access expertise and engage in knowledge construction while practicing self-determination in the learning process. Similarly, Szymkowiak et al. (2021) have explored how technology affects the acquisition of knowledge by Gen Z. Their results show that Gen Z prefers new technologies over traditional methods for their convenience, flexibility, and ability to learn anytime, with mobile apps being especially appealing due to the desire for autonomy in learning. More recently, Guo (2022) highlights TikTok's potential as an educational tool, noting its ability to provide learning opportunities and positively shape teenagers' development. TikTok fosters multimedial skills by offering a wide array of picture and video editing tools; moreover, they can explore and express their identity, fulfil their need for self-actualization, and connect with others. The authors emphasize the need for further research on adolescent learning through SM and its potential benefits for learning in both formal and informal contexts (Greenhow & Lewin, 2015; Barrot, 2020; Szymkowiak et al., 2021; Onjewu et al., 2024).

3. Methodology

This study employs expert interviews as its research method to investigate the underexplored topic of SM as a source of informal education. The expert interview captures specialized knowledge and practical experience through a reflective yet flexible approach (Bogner & Menz, 2009). Semi-structured interviews are ideal for gathering comprehensive insights from experts on complex social issues, facilitating hypothesis generation and exploratory research (Gläser & Laudel, 2010; Von Dem Berge, 2020).

Social media studies merge theory and practice, requiring input from inside experts directly involved in social processes and outside experts whose expertise stems from research and experience (Von Soest, 2022). Therefore, the experts invited for interviews are academics (Outside) and practitioners (Inside). Academics are scientists and professors specializing in new media, familiar with the digital landscape's theoretical foundations. Practitioners are educational influencers with significant reach within online communities, actively involved in creating and disseminating informational content on SM. This dual perspective thoroughly explores the SM dynamics and content production.

3.1. Data collection and sampling

The data collection process, conducted between November 2023 and February 2024, was initiated through email, where the research objectives were outlined and invitations for expert interviews were extended. Experts were selected based on their specialization in communication theories and technological fields, emphasizing ensuring diversity of expertise. Upon receiving positive responses from the experts, meetings were scheduled based on their preferences for written or audio responses. Ethical guidelines were followed, including informed consent, confidentiality, and fairness.

Experts from Romania and Germany were selected for this study to provide an in-depth perspective. While Romania's involvement in this field is still in its infancy, with only a limited number of educational influencers, Germany has already established itself in this area, hosting numerous accounts dedicated to disseminating information and knowledge. Additionally, research on education through SM in Germany is more advanced than in Romania (Opfermann et al., 2020; Rau & Grell, 2022), offering an extra dimension for the comparative analysis. The interviews (N=13) were conducted with three academics and three practitioners from Romania and Germany. In addition, one expert from the USA was included, specializing in the intersection of SM and education. All interviews were conducted by the author, either via video conferencing platforms or in person, depending on the availability and preferences of the experts. In several cases, written responses were provided instead of

live interviews. The semi-structured interview guides were adapted for each expert group (academics and practitioners), with both versions containing 12 guiding questions. The synchronous interviews had an average duration of 60 to 90 minutes. Audio recordings were transcribed, and written responses were compiled for analysis. These guides follow a semi-structured format and contain guiding questions aimed at focusing the discussion on the intended topics. The experts are listed below in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1

Description of Sample: Academics

Identifier/ Respondent	Position	Background
1A.	Professor Dr. in Computer Science with a focus on Web Development at the Faculty of Media at Kiel University of Applied Sciences	Kiel, Germany
2A.	Lecturer for Special Tasks, Computer Science and Media at the Leipzig University of Applied Sciences for Technology, Economics, and Culture	Leipzig, Germany
3A.	Professor Dr. für Corporate Communication an der Fakultät Medien der Hochschule Mittweida	Mittweida, Germany
4A.	University Lecturer Dr. at the Faculty of Communication and Public Relations at the National School of Political and Administrative Sciences	Bucharest, Romania
5A.	University Lecturer Dr. at the Faculty of Political, Administrative, and Communication Sciences at Babeș-Bolyai University	Cluj-Napoca, Romania
6A.	University Lecturer Dr. habil. at the Faculty of Political Science, Philosophy, and Communication Sciences at the West University of Timișoara	Timișoara, Romania
7A.	Professor Dr. phil., Harvard in Educational Psychology and Educational Technology at the College of Education, Michigan State University	Michigan, USA

Table 2

Description of Sample: Practitioners

Identifier/ Respondent	Organisation	Position	Followers	Background
8P.	MrWissen2Go	Journalist, Youtuber	I: 244K Y: 2.23M	Germany
9P.	Quarks	Editor-in-Chief for TikTok	I: 1.5M T: 228K Y: 816K	Germany
10P.	fluter.	Social Media Editor	I: 114K Y: 8.5K	Germany
11P.	Politică la Minut	Co-founder Politică la Minut	I: 150K T: 2.5K	Romania
12P.	Gen, Știri	Co-founder MediaGen	I: 160K T: 86K Y: 2.2K	Romania
13P.	Recorder	Product Manager at Recorder	I: 278K T: 248.5K Y: 812K	Romania

4. Analysis of results

The responses are analyzed using content-structuring qualitative content analysis, combining deductive and inductive categories. Following transcription, the material was processed manually through sequential stages: familiarization with the data, identification of coding units, assignment of codes, and development of thematic categories. Main categories are deductively derived and adapted from the Social Media Usage (SMU) model by Brailovskaia et al. (2020). These categories provided a theoretical structure for examining adolescents' motivations and behaviors on social media. In contrast, subcategories and specific codes were derived inductively from the interview data, enabling the identification of emergent themes and context-specific insights. Hence, the *search for information and inspiration* has been coded

separately to ensure a stronger focus on the search for information. Additionally, *escaping negative emotions* has found no support in the data.

The coding process allowed for the exploration of both the positive outcomes and potential risks associated with adolescents' engagement with educational content on social media and the identification of effective content creation practices as highlighted by the interviewed experts. The data is systematically coded, creating an overview for deeper analysis. Table 3 below outlines the entire coding structure, including categories and sub-codes derived inductively and deductively

Table 3

The Categories of the Thematic Content Analysis

Categories of the thematic content analysis		
Categories	Codes	Sub-codes
The contribution of consuming educational content to personal development	Search for social interaction	Belonging
		Self-expression
	Search for positive emotions	Entertainment
		Curiosity
	<i>Beat of boredom and pastime</i>	
	Search for information	Knowledge
		Skills
	Search for inspiration	General
		Specific
Concerns regarding the consumption of educational content	Cognitive effects	Cognitive overload
		Superficial processing of complex information
		Reduced attention span
	Socio-psychological effects	Addiction and overuse
		Social comparison and self-esteem
	Information and security threats	Mis-, dis- and malinformation
		Echochambers
		Cyber-bullying

Key elements of effective educational content	Strategies
	Formats
	Topics
	Guiding principles
	Impact

4.1. The contribution of consuming educational content for personal development

The most frequently mentioned benefit, as perceived by the experts, is the search for social interaction, driven by both needs for **belonging** and self-expression (Respondents 3A, 4A, 5A, 10P). Experts agree that digital networks increasingly replace analogue ones, creating safe spaces for sharing interests and sensitive topics. This can counteract loneliness and provide psychological relief (Respondents 10P, 4A, 3A). These communities extend beyond personal presence relationships (Respondent 2A) and allow unlimited communication, enabling real-time exchanges with people worldwide (Respondents 8P, 13P, 5A). SM also provides an easy medium for communication in smaller friend circles (Respondents 8P, 11P, 4A) to see what your friends and followers are doing (Respondent 11P).

The search for social interaction is also fulfilled by the need for **self-expression**, especially “through participation in social life” (Respondent 3A). Experts argue these interactions are essential for identity formation (Respondents 13P, 10P, 4A). SM provides young people the opportunity to express themselves freely, often under the protection of anonymity (Respondents 4A, 13P), to “give voice to thoughts or feelings they would otherwise not express publicly” (Respondent 4A). This anonymous environment enables them to experiment and express themselves without fear of negative consequences or social rejection. At the same time, the digital space offers a platform where young people can find social support (Respondents 7A, 3A), strengthening their sense of belonging and acceptance.

According to the experts, the second most important benefit of SM use is the search for information. Through social networks, young people can acquire both knowledge and skills. All experts agree that SM provides

access to almost unlimited information, making these platforms a valuable resource. Concepts such as micro-learning (Respondents 1A, 2A), self-directed learning (Respondents 2A, 3A, 7A, 10P), and digital learning (Respondent 8P) were mentioned as key terms. As a result, “they might interact with media and learning in a different way than traditionally” (Respondent 2A). On SM, young people can access various topics, “they find information and learn how certain things work” (Respondent 11P). The driving force behind this learning process is intrinsic motivation, allowing adolescents to choose what to explore and what interests them (Respondents 2A, 3A, 6A, 7A, 10P).

The scope of personal development extends to the specific **skills** young people acquire while engaging with SM. Primarily, active use of SM enhances media literacy (Respondents 2A, 3A, 6A). As a result, young people possess a “high level of competence in searching for and selecting information” (Respondent 6A), as well as “the ability to use different types of media” (Respondent 2A), enabling them to critically question, evaluate, and engage responsibly with media content. In addition, young people can also gain practical knowledge. Experts largely concur that SM offers easy-to-understand tutorials on a wide range of topics, from cooking techniques to creative projects and problem-solving, microlearning through short videos providing an effective way to teach practical skills (Respondent 1A). Moreover, young people “test and learn various skills, such as creating websites and artistic expression through music, collages, films, and photography. They are highly active, very creative, and acquire skills typically taught in vocational courses” (Respondent 6A).

All experts emphasize that, in the pursuit of information gathering to expand **knowledge**, the search for information includes an interest in current events, global and local news, and various other topics. Young people want to stay “up to date, they get current information very quickly, you’re basically at the pulse of time” (Respondent 8P). Some even “mainly or exclusively get their information from social media, because these now offer a wide range” (Respondent 9P). A key advantage lies in the speed at which information is available online (Respondents 8P, 11P, 2A, 3A), even in real-time (Respondent 3A). SM has become an indispensable resource for information gathering in the daily lives of young people.

The search for **positive emotions**, **entertainment**, and simple **curiosity** plays a central role in adolescents' use of SM. It should not be overlooked, as these motivations are essential to their engagement with these platforms. All experts agree that entertainment is a fundamental function and a significant benefit of SMU. Positive emotions and curiosity drive teenagers to explore new things and engage with intriguing content or the diverse functionalities offered by these platforms (Respondents 2A, 6A). Additionally, social platforms are frequently used to **beat boredom** and serve as a **pastime** (Respondents 3A, 4A, 6A, 9P, 11P), providing a distraction and allowing individuals to escape from everyday life (Respondent 9P). As noted by respondent 3A: "Social networks fill this time and offer diverse content." However, despite the potential for SM to inspire, this aspect is rarely mentioned by experts.

4.2. Concerns regarding the consumption of educational content

SM plays a vital role in adolescents' daily lives, but its benefits come with notable concerns. Experts frequently highlight cognitive effects, particularly the challenges posed by the unlimited flow of information, which acts as "a double-edged sword" (Respondent 1A). While it offers diverse options and entertainment, it can lead to **cognitive overload** (Respondents 12P, 1A, 4A, 5A, 11P), causing some to feel so overwhelmed that they withdraw completely from SM use (Respondent 11P). Rapid and constant overstimulation also affects **information processing**, as adolescents often engage with complex topics superficially (Respondents 1A, 2A, 5A, 8P). This flood of short, fast-paced content "creates an illusion of knowledge transfer, where it is believed that by watching very short videos, one is knowledgeable about a topic" (Respondent 8P). Experts lament that adolescents' **attention has significantly decreased** (Respondents 1A, 2A, 4A, 5A, 8P, 12P), as "TikTok has changed the overall pace of information consumption" (Respondent 12P). This lack of attention carries over into the educational process, where adolescents' attention in school has also declined (Respondents 1A, 4A, 5A) and beyond learning, "leading to less patience also with people" (Respondent 12P).

SM also has significant effects on the **socio-psychological well-being** of adolescents. The long hours adolescents spend online are particularly concerning for parents, leading to **overuse**. Experts frequently compare this to an **addiction** (Respondent 12P) – “every like releases endorphins” (Respondent 1A), which underscores the potential adverse effects on the emotional and social well-being of young people. These immediate rewards can lead individuals to continuously retreat to these platforms to feel better or distract themselves from problems (Respondent 4A). Adolescents spend far too much time online, neglecting other aspects of their lives, such as personal interactions, homework, sleep, meals, etc. (Respondents 1A, 5A, 7A, 11P, 13P), as respondent 4A notes: “You go online for five minutes and forget to get off at your bus stop; forget to eat.” The strong presence of adolescents in the digital space leads to a disconnect from the real world, as they spend so much time in virtual environments, their perception of the physical world diminishes, while also being trapped by FOMO – the fear of missing out (Respondents 1A, 13P, 4A).

During the critical phase of identity formation, the influences of SM are particularly relevant. Most experts highlight that one of the most significant effects is the constant **social comparison**, leading to **self-esteem** issues. External factors heavily influence adolescents as they compare themselves “in terms of physical appearance, sexual orientation, academic engagement, and much more” (Respondent 5A). Seeking validation from others, they increasingly feel inadequate when comparing themselves to peers online, leading to depression and mental health issues (Respondents 5A, 7A). Influencers also promote unrealistic lifestyles, showcasing materialism and perfection, which adolescents do not critically question (Respondent 3A). These comparisons foster unrealistic expectations about self-image (Respondent 13P), particularly for young women, for whom “it becomes a project in which a lot of time is invested, and in the process, one forgets who they really are” (Respondent 4A).

Experts highlight concerns about **information and security threats** in the digital space, particularly in the form of **mal-, mis-, and disinformation**. In the era of user-generated content, curating information becomes impossible, as unprocessed content spreads rapidly without context (Respondent 12P). Adolescents, in particular, fall victim to fake news due to their difficulty distinguishing between entertaining and factual content, especially when

shared by friends (Respondents 11P, 4A, 12P, 9P). They are taught little about differentiating fake from genuine information (Respondents 11P, 12P). Experts note that algorithms, like TikTok's, can quickly create **echo-chambers**, fostering rapid shifts toward radical views, where dissent becomes costly (Respondents 12P, 1A, 11P, 13P). Moreover, the anonymity afforded by digital platforms (Respondent 3A) enables harmful acts such as **cyberbullying**, hate speech, stalking, and exploitation, which are often mentioned, causing psychological trauma, physical harm, and further eroding trust in these spaces.

4.3. Key elements of effective educational content

The third part of the analysis focuses on the factors contributing to successfully creating youth-oriented educational content on Instagram and TikTok. The practitioners' experiences serve both as examples of good practices for the proper and efficient design of academic content and as a source of key principles that should be followed. Drawing from their expertise, the practitioners have formulated a blueprint for successful content in education. Their insights can be categorized into five key components. The following sections provide a detailed discussion of each category.

4.3.1. Strategies

The experts identify various elements that contribute to an effective strategy and are essential for managing a SM page. To succeed on SM, having a clearly defined niche is essential. This niche can refer to the specific topic one aims to cover. For example: "We have a very well-established thematic area: politics in Romania, the European Union, Europe, and the U.S. elections" (Respondent 11P). Additionally, it is essential to have a clearly defined target audience (Respondents 12P, 9P). As respondent 12 explains: "We're addressing a 17-year-old boy, attending an average school, who cannot afford to study abroad or participate in exchange programs. That's the media landscape in Romania" (Respondent 12P). The best strategy for communicating with the selected audience "is speaking to them on

an equal footing and simple terms” (Respondent 13P). Thus, respondent 12P points out a key rule of journalism in digital media: “Don’t assume your reader understands certain things.”

Central to the content creation strategy is conveying information: “It requires good storytelling, compelling dramaturgy, a narrative arc, and a clear thread to follow” (Respondent 8P). The decision to watch the video is often made within the first seconds of the video: “However, if they decide to watch it, our experience shows that it can last 30 seconds to a minute” (Respondent 9P). A captivating introduction is therefore essential, while the first 2–3 seconds are attention-grabbing. Young audiences also prefer concise and precise information delivery (Respondent 11P). Experts propose finding a balance: “The challenge lies in offering information that is essential but not overlooking the necessary context” (Respondent 11P).

Furthermore, it is important to involve the audience in the discourse. The main difference from television lies in the potential for interaction – “that viewers can also engage with the creators” (Respondent 8P). Thus, fostering engagement through discussions, direct messages, comments, and reactions (Respondent 8P) is key. Lastly, the content design should also be considered, with visual elements crafted to be appealing or even humorous to capture attention (Respondent 11P).

4.3.2. Topics

The decision to watch a video is influenced by both the choice of topics and the design of the content (Respondents 9P, 10P). “The content that resonates best is always that which is closely connected to the lives of the followers and offers points of reference.” (Respondent 10P) Therefore, topics should be presented contextually grounded and relatable, addressing young people’s current life situations and relevant questions to foster genuine engagement and interest. However, certain topics attract exceptionally high levels of attention. In line with their specific niche, content creators highlight some particularly well-received themes and others less appealing to young audiences. A comparison of the popular topics highlighted by experts in Germany and Romania revealed no significant differences, indicating that young people are attracted to similar subjects.

The topics that experience a sudden surge in views are often current issues that gain traction during specific periods or arise in response to global events of interest. As one expert aptly states, “the topics currently discussed in society can quickly go viral if the timing is captured precisely” (Respondent 11P). Equally significant are topics directly impacting the viewers’ daily lives, such as school, education, or jobs (Respondents 10P, 12P). Additionally, recurring, seasonal topics consistently resurface, such as summer, vacations, and similar events. One expert notes: “There are also so-called evergreen topics that always perform well” (Respondent 9P). According to the practitioners, evergreen topics include sexuality, drugs, sleep patterns, identity-related concerns, and nostalgia for childhood movies or series. These subjects possess timeless appeal and resonate with a broad audience. Other topics that generate particular interest include LGBTQIA+, politics, and education (Respondent 12P). These areas can be polarizing and spark lively discussions, leading to increased engagement and visibility.

4.3.3. *Formats*

Furthermore, it is imperative to present content in formats that are familiar to young audiences and to ensure that it is consistent with current trends (Respondent 13P). Both young people and platforms now favour specific formats that resonate particularly well. With TikTok’s rise and the introduction of Instagram Reels, the focus has shifted toward video content (Respondents 3A, 10P, 11P, 12P), lasting up to one minute, the preferred length for young audiences. However, carousel formats on Instagram remain effective (Respondents 11P, 12P, 13P), as they are easily shareable and allow users to consume content without leaving the platform. As respondent 12P observes, “I think our audience is smart enough not to limit themselves to just pictures, even if they aren’t outstanding; they’re better than plain text.” The preferred formats vary depending on the platform, as the TikTok specialist 9P explains: “On Instagram, we use image tiles or short animated videos, whereas on TikTok, people present the topic directly in front of the camera.”

4.3.4. *Guiding principles*

Developing content specifically tailored to young audiences holds significant influence but also comes with substantial responsibility, as Respondent 9P underlines: “We bear enormous responsibility, regardless of whether we have a million followers or just 100” (Respondent 9P). Consequently, content producers must adhere to established principles that guide their work and ensure the delivery of suitable and impactful content to their target audience. The fundamental principle all practitioners highlight is the accuracy and objectivity of the information shared. For instance, respondent 8P stresses: “For me, it’s simply important that the content we offer is correct, verified, and reliable.” Given platforms like TikTok’s rapid and transient nature, the transparency in addressing possible errors is crucial (Respondents 9P, 8P, 11P). Furthermore, it is critical to consider suggestions, comments, and criticism and to approach them openly as this contributes to “advancing educational dissemination, exploring new approaches, and engaging people on a different level, making an impact to some extent” (Respondent 8P).

Content creators are also responsible for transparently communicating their principles and values (Respondents 11P, 10P) and adhering to them consistently. This is particularly important when handling political content. It is essential to remain objective while upholding “democratic principles, striving for political independence but supporting important values”, as highlighted by respondent 11P. An ethically grounded approach is essential to foster young people’s healthy development and ensure they engage responsibly with the content presented to them. Respondent 12P elaborates on this phenomenon: “We reflect on the impact certain news can have as we encounter significant polarization and aggression in the public sphere.” Lastly, keeping promises is a key guiding principle that should be followed (Respondent 8P) more precisely, ensuring that the topics promised in the title are fully addressed by the end of the video. These promises must be realistic, as full event coverage is impossible.

4.3.5. *Impact*

Educational content represents the output of influencers' work, while the principles define their approach. However, the main question remains: Why do they do this? The final section, therefore, focuses on the intended impacts and goals they aim to achieve through their activities. Despite varying objectives and impacts, all practitioners aim to promote young people's personal development, helping them progress beyond their previous state. This shared goal unites their efforts to sustainably expand young people's knowledge, skills, and perspectives.

Most interviewed practitioners share a common goal, as respondent 9P summarizes: "Our mission is to inform people and enable them to use information for themselves." Similarly, respondent 10P highlights the importance of "ensuring balanced information delivery and drawing attention to topics that are not always at the forefront." Lastly, Respondent 13P underscores the "main goal is to provide the public with accurate and honest information; the impacts can take many forms." Furthermore, influencers focus on sparking interest (Respondents 8P, 9P, 11P, 13P). This interest can be directed toward deeper insights, as respondent 8P explains: "The information can be transferred into knowledge, while simultaneously generating enthusiasm or interest in a topic." Additionally, they "encourage engagement with political implications", such as participating in elections or joining a political party (Respondent 11P), as well as "fostering civic involvement" (Respondent 12P). This spectrum ranges from individual benefits, such as acquiring new knowledge, to concrete steps and actions aimed at fostering both personal and societal development.

5. Discussions

The expert interviews addressed a relatively unexplored topic in the existing literature, with only collateral studies providing context: the potential of social media platforms, specifically Instagram and TikTok, to serve as sources of informal education for adolescents. Although this perspective appeared novel to some experts, there was unanimous agreement that adolescents can derive significant educational benefits from social media, provided they are guided to navigate its drawbacks effectively.

Experts identified numerous advantages of social media use among young people. They emphasized, in line with previous literature, that the search for social interaction and self-expression is the primary benefit, fostering a sense of belonging and identity formation (Alhabash & Ma, 2017; Stamenković & Mitrović, 2023; Wong & McLellan, 2023). This is often achieved through creating communities where young people can express themselves anonymously and without fear of rejection (Rodgers et al., 2020; Nwafor & Nnaemeka, 2023; Parent, 2023). These networks provide both support and psychological relief (Throuvala et al., 2019; Szabolcs et al., 2023), as well as opportunities for global communication and real-time exchange, complementing or, in some cases, replacing analog networks (Griffiths & Kuss, 2017; Hosen et al., 2021).

Similar to previous studies, education and personal development represent a significant advantage of social media use (Throuvala et al., 2019; Brailovskaia et al., 2020; Plaisime et al., 2020; Hosen et al., 2021). These platforms enable young people to gain knowledge and skills by providing access to diverse topics and multimedia resources, encouraging independent and purposeful learning (Throuvala et al., 2019; Ansari & Khan, 2020; Hosen et al., 2021; Szymkowiak et al., 2021; Guo, 2022). The virtually limitless amount of available information, along with concepts such as micro-learning, self-directed learning, and digital learning, make social media a valuable resource that can complement traditional learning methods, in accordance with the results of Szymkowiak et al. (2021).

In addition to knowledge transmission, social media also fosters the development of practical skills (Szymkowiak et al., 2021; West et al., 2023). According to experts, young people enhance their media literacy skills, searching and critically evaluating information as they use SM to follow current events, global and local news (Newman et al., 2020; Masullo et al., 2022). These competencies extend beyond gathering information and enable critical engagement with media content. Young people can pick up skills in photography, video production, and creative projects, supported by well-designed learning content and tutorials (Guo, 2022). Entertainment, curiosity, and the need to overcome boredom remain valid motivations of SMU for young people, previously proven by recent studies (Bossen & Kottasz, 2020; Nwafor & Nnaemeka, 2023).

Despite the multiple advantages of SMU, there are still significant costs, disadvantages, and risks. The most mentioned issues refer to the information overload (Heiss et al., 2023). Experts warn that social media's rapid, swipe-based consumption reduces attention spans, persistence in learning, and patience in relationships, while also fostering shallow engagement and hindering critical thinking due to sensory overload and quick information intake (Karasek & Hysa, 2020; Szymkowiak et al., 2021). The information overflow makes it impossible to curate information (Selnes, 2024) and leads to the spread of disinformation, as demonstrated especially in the COVID-19 pandemic, and widely discussed in research (Corbu et al., 2021; Veeriah, 2021; Rotaru, 2023). The rapid dissemination of unverified content increases the risk of echo chambers, where extremist or false beliefs are reinforced (Cinelli et al., 2021).

Furthermore, social media has significant socio-psychological impacts, as excessive use is often compared to addictive behaviour, leading to neglect of daily tasks and social interactions, which can affect teenagers' emotional and social well-being (Popat & Tarrant, 2022). During the critical phase of identity formation, social media is incredibly influential and can have harmful effects, mainly due to constant social comparison, leading to self-esteem issues and psychological difficulties like depression (Irmer & Schmiedek, 2023; Szambolics et al., 2023). Experts emphasize that uncritical alignment with idealized portrayals of influencers and comparison with peers creates unrealistic self-images, damaging emotional and social health (Berne et al., 2014). As psychologists have concluded in research (Kerr et al., 2024), our results show that the intense use of the digital world can weaken connection to the real world, neglecting personal interactions and contributing to social anxiety and reduced ability for direct interpersonal communication.

The formula for successful content creation aimed at educating and informing teenagers relies on five important pillars, according to experts: strategies, formats, topics, guiding principles, and impact. The recipe starts with a careful, well-thought-out intention to make an impact. This intention should focus on advancing the target audience's development and knowledge acquisition, helping them progress in their lives. The impact can take many forms, but the shared goal is to inform the youth and to spark interest in future documentation. Once the desired outcomes are set, it is

essential to establish the guiding principles, values, and attitudes that will support the creation process and consistently adhere to them. These principles may include providing accurate, factual, and relevant information, along with a commitment to objectivity, transparency, and continuous improvement. They must be clearly communicated and consistently reflected in the content.

Thirdly, engaging adolescents requires implementing effective strategies tailored to their needs. Creating high-quality, tailored content starts with identifying a niche – an area of expertise – and defining a clear target audience. The next step is establishing effective communication by connecting with the audience equally and delivering a clear, easily understandable message. Equally important in content creation is the use of compelling and easy-to-follow storytelling. Capturing the viewer's attention within the first few seconds is critical, as this is when they decide whether the content is relevant and worth their time, as they value instant gratification (Throuvala et al., 2019; Parent, 2023). A strong opening, concise delivery of information, and a straightforward narrative ensure that the adolescents remain interested and invested in the message being conveyed (Roth-Cohen et al., 2021). Lastly, it is important to involve the audience, fostering engagement between the viewers and creators.

The selected formats and topics may vary. However, experts have identified impactful engagement patterns. Consistent with prior research, young adults demonstrate a preference for short-form video content (Guo, 2022; CJI, 2023), though image-based formats remain effective, particularly on platforms like Instagram. The most impactful topics align closely with the target audience's interests and everyday experiences. For adolescents, these primarily include school, education, career prospects, and trending issues that generate widespread interest (Scholz & Vyugina, 2019). Additionally, seasonal themes, such as vacations or travel, and timeless subjects, including nostalgia, sexuality, identity, and sleep-related content, resonate strongly with this demographic.

6. Conclusions

SM plays a significant role in the lives of Gen Z and the following generations. Given its persistent presence, it is essential to focus more on strategies

that enable teenagers to harness their vast potential for their benefit. Therefore, the present study explores the multidimensional impact of SM use among adolescents, focusing on the motives and behaviors driving engagement and its capacity to serve as a tool for informal learning while also contouring a guideline for content creators. The research offers both theoretical and practical implications by providing insights for researchers, journalists, educators, and parents.

This study expands the existing literature by unveiling the role of SM platforms as sources of informal learning, addressing a gap in the literature on how they can be used for self-educational purposes. It builds upon the model of reasons for SMU proposed by Brailovskaia et al. (2020), extending it by incorporating inductively derived categories of analysis. Furthermore, it also considers the downsides of SMU, offering a more comprehensive understanding of its effects. The model is viewed through an educational lens, highlighting its potential as a learning and personal development tool.

By exploring how Instagram and TikTok can function as tools for informal education, this study provides valuable practical insights for enhancing SM-based educational strategies. Practitioners can use these findings to design content that better resonates with young audiences, improving engagement and learning outcomes. Parents are offered a fresh perspective on SMU, enabling them to guide their adolescents towards a more constructive use while addressing potential risks. Additionally, educators and psychologists can better understand the motivations that drive teenagers' SM engagement, equipping them to offer more practical guidance and foster meaningful interactions with adolescents.

While this study does not directly assess Gen Z's ability to evaluate social media content credibility, interview insights offer valuable input for media literacy, especially in promoting critical thinking and fact-checking. Psychological risks like anxiety or cyberbullying are acknowledged, though not central, highlighting the need for guidance. Experts were divided – some warned against overestimating the educational value of platforms like Instagram and TikTok, while others noted their potential if used thoughtfully. Future research should incorporate mental health perspectives for a more holistic view.

Drawing on expert insights, several policy-level recommendations emerge concerning adolescents' educational use of social media. The findings emphasize the importance of an educational framework integrating media literacy, addressing digital self-education, well-being, and citizenship. Policymakers should also prioritize the creation of safe and supportive online environments by tackling risks like harmful content, cyberbullying, and privacy violations. Furthermore, the changing legal and ethical landscape – marked by growing regulatory efforts such as age verification, parental consent, and restrictions on addictive algorithmic features – reflects an increasing awareness of the need for protective measures.

The limitations of this research arise from its qualitative nature and small expert sample due to time constraints. Further interviews with a broader range of experts are needed to gain a more comprehensive understanding of informal education on SM. Future research should focus on gaps such as young users' attitudes, media consumption patterns, and the impact of social networks on identity, professional growth, and career paths. Exploring consumer behavior and attention patterns on SM could also enhance educational practices. A hybrid research approach combining qualitative with quantitative techniques and including parents, educators, and policymakers would offer a more holistic perspective on SM's role in shaping adolescents.

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THE ROLE OF NARRATIVES AND MYTHS IN SHAPING POLITICAL DISCOURSE: EVOLUTIONS OF WAR STORIES IN ZELENSKYY'S DISCOURSE DURING THE FIRST YEAR OF THE 2022 RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR

Abstract. *The leader's discourses are crucial in times of crisis. The war in Ukraine represents one such scenario: state representatives and political leaders were required to manage a communication process that provides information and builds trust among internal and external audiences. As the Ukrainian President, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, communicated with greater frequency at the beginning of the war and focused on multiple myths, narratives, and themes, the goal of this research is to analyze the strategic use and evolution of narratives and myths in the public speeches of Ukrainian President during the first year of the war, as this period was the most crucial in terms of establishing the Ukraine position and gaining international recognition and help. Thus, the research aims to identify narrative patterns and mythical structures that align with key moments of the military conflict. We propose a mixed methodology for text analysis supported by computational linguistics software programs [KH Coder; Sketch Engine]. The results suggest that the Ukrainian President's speeches have changed in terms of narratives and themes, length, frequency, or target audience directly depending on the progress of the war; each speech (structure, themes, references) and the way it was constructed is strategically aligned with the military evolution of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.*

Keywords: political discourse; Ukrainian war; strategic communication.

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1. Introduction

In 2022, nothing attracted the media attention more than the war Russia started in Ukraine, becoming a significant headline for news outlets worldwide (Pavlik, 2022). Once the armed conflict was mediatized, communication digital channels became an integral part of the battle on the frontline (Brusylovska & Maksymenko, 2023; Ardan, 2024), affecting how the war crisis was perceived by the global public, eliminating distances of time and space, and allowing shifts of perspective that, consequently, have enabled new ways of engaging with war as well as new ways of waging it (O'Loughlin, 2020). On 25 February 2022, as the war erupted in Ukraine, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy turned to video addresses and discourses to garner worldwide support (Cooper, 2022). No sitting president had ever relied so extensively on social media to connect with both domestic and international audiences, shape the global image of their nation, and promote a wartime message in a way that other world leaders are now likely to follow (Seigmund, 2023; Einarsson & Larsson, 2023; Serafin, 2022). His political discourses emphasized national unity and resilience, framing Ukraine as a defender of democracy, freedom, and, extensively, of the entire Europe, appealing to global solidarity, help, and democratic values (Rikkonen & Isotalus, 2024). On the other hand, the worldwide press attributed different perspectives on the war in Ukraine, such as conflict, human impact, and economic repercussions, profoundly affecting how the international public interprets and sees the war (Akinboade, Heske, & Molobi, 2023).

In special crises, political discourse serves as a critical tool for constructing power, ideology, and influence within society, and, in times of war, it becomes a strategic instrument for rallying support (Crespo-Fernández, 2013), promoting unity, and, simultaneously, contributing "to public opinion, which is thereby managed in such a way as to provide the necessary legitimation to political decisions that might be legally and morally dubious while violating international law and human rights principles" (Van Dijk, 1997, pp. 39-40). Consequently, the application of *Critical Discourse Analysis* (CDA) has provided methodologies to uncover how language interacts with sociopolitical structures, revealing how political language legitimizes authority, naturalizes power relations, and, eventually, "construct a large *national*

family through discourse" (Wodak, 2009, p. 24), also attributing roles to people (e.g., *the citizens; the immigrants*) and using language to reallocate roles or rearrange the social relations between the participants (Van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 32). While political discourse is described as a "special case of political action, and as a functional or strategic part of the political process" (Van Dijk, 1997, p. 18), wartime political speeches typically involve themes of heroism, sacrifice, and existential threat, shaping public perception and influencing social behavior on a large scale, as "only through language tied into social and political institutions can one declare war, declare guilty or not guilty" (Chilton, 2003, p. 30), in this way, exercising authority, and shaping the course of domestic stability and international relations. Thus, strategic political narratives provide coherent storylines that explain events and justify actions, while myths serve as symbolic stories that reflect collective beliefs and cultural archetypes (Jung, 1981; Lule, 2001). The discourse is not limited to traditional media. However, it extends into the digital age, where platforms amplify strategic narratives and weaponize information to sculpt and guide perceptions on a global scale (Polyakova & Fried, 2019). By intertwining historical references with universal archetypes such as *the hero, the antagonist, the victim, or the saviour*, political leaders have crafted compelling stories that resonate deeply with domestic and international audiences (Booker, 2004; Hall, 2005).

This study examines how narratives and myths were strategically deployed in the Ukrainian crisis by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to legitimize actions, stir public opinion, and shape global perceptions in the first year of the war, as some researchers showed that even highly significant and impactful events, such as the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, tend to receive diminishing attention over time (Chernov, 2023, pp. 309-316). This pattern occurs regardless of whether the media system operates under free influence or coercive control. "The war between Russia and Ukraine is not just a conflict between two neighboring countries" but "a conflict between a system of values, a security issue between Russia and the Western Bloc, and a cognitive warfare involving narrative strategies" (Aydemir, 2022, p. 362), integrating historical, cultural, and digital dimensions, the Ukrainian leader highlights, through his online communication during war, the potential of strategic storytelling in crafting and establishing contemporary political discourse and constructing ideologies and realities.

2. Political discourse analysis and the characteristics of political discourse in wartime

Political discourse represents a cornerstone of societal interaction, mediating the relationship between language, power, and ideology. At its core, it operates as a vehicle for ideology and authority. Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach frames political language as a tool for shaping public perception through the interaction of social structures and individual cognition, as its power derives both from its scope and various degrees of legitimacy (Van Dijk, 2017). The roots of political discourse can be traced to classical rhetoric, with Aristotle's emphasis on *ethos* (credibility), *pathos* (emotion), and *logos* (logic) as pillars of persuasion (Kraut, 2002), while by its nature, "political deliberation deals with differences of opinion over varying senses of the good in uncertain circumstances" (Triadafilopoulos, 1999, p. 746). Michel Foucault (1995) extends this approach by examining discourse as a form that produces and regulates knowledge and societal norms in an "economy of power," while Pierre Bourdieu (1991) introduced the concept of "symbolic power," where political language operates as a mechanism for social control. Consequently, *CDA* (*Critical Discourse Analysis*) emerges as a vital tool for uncovering the dynamics embedded in political discourse, examining how language constructs social realities and legitimizes authority. Ultimately, Fairclough's *three-dimensional model* (2013, p. 109-168), analyzing *texts* (text production), *discourse* (consumption and distribution), and *practice* (sociocultural practices), refers to different levels of social organization – the context of the situation, the institutional context, and the broader societal context.

Wodak et al. (2009) situate political discourse within its socio-political and historical contexts, emphasizing how narratives draw from collective memories and cultural norms. Furthermore, Wodak stated that language reflects and constructs social power, identity, and ideology, with an emphasis on politics, nationalism, racism, and populism, seeing political discourse historically situated in the public sphere, always depending on the socio-political and historical contexts (Wodak, 2019).

Wartime contexts amplify the strategic importance of political discourse as leaders create narratives to justify military actions, rally public support, and construct national unity. Wartime rhetoric often employs binary

moral frames, positioning one side as virtuous and the other as evil. For instance, George W. Bush's post-9/11 speeches framed the *War on Terror* as a defense of freedom and democracy against existential threats (Azpíroz, 2013). Wartime political discourse also constructs collective identities by emphasizing shared values and sacrifices. Leaders invoke historical narratives and metaphors to foster unity, align individual actions with national goals, and intertwine religion with national ideology (Rzepecka, 2017). At the same time, even societies construct images of enemies through psychological, cultural, and political mechanisms, as these images serve to justify conflict, violence, and war, often by dehumanizing and vilifying *the other*. Beyond *hostile imagination* and *dehumanization* (Steuter & Wills, 2009), it is highlighted how enemy images often rely on portraying adversaries as less than human – monsters, animals, or objects, as this makes it easier to justify violence against them. Thus, creating enemy images is a universal phenomenon, appearing in different forms across cultures and throughout history (Elgee, 1987). These identities are strategically crafted to serve political and military goals, relying on symbolic language, selective narratives, and emotional appeals (Hodges, 2007). The use of symbolic language and selective narratives simplifies complex war and geopolitical realities, making them accessible and emotionally resonant for diverse audiences.

Nowadays, the rise of digital media has transformed political discourse, introducing both opportunities and challenges. Platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook enabled rapid dissemination of political messages, democratizing access to public discourse, creating immediate and unpredictable connections between the trinity, government, and public, forcing each to find new ways to manage information about conflicts, leading to an "information revolution" (Hoskins & O'Loughlin, 2010, p. 155). During wars, discourses about political causes are characterized by personal opinions, emotions, and affect, especially on new media channels, as they create a free space – *public sphere* – where individuals come together to discuss and deliberate matters of common interest, free from coercion and domination (Habermas, 1991). However, these platforms also exacerbate polarization, as "social media driving political polarization and the prevalence of disinformation, both of which are also accentuating each other" (Tucker et al., 2018, p. 4), or algorithmic bias (Velkova & Kaun, 2019), creating *echo chambers* where users are exposed primarily to information

that reinforces their beliefs. Consequently, "social media's algorithm-driven environments prioritize engagement over accuracy" (Zahra, 2023, p. 117), amplifying emotional appeals and sensationalist rhetoric. This shift undermines traditional norms of rational-critical debate, as political actors increasingly adopt performative and polarizing communication styles. Additionally, spreading fake news diminishes the public's ability to discern credible information, eroding trust in media institutions. Farkas and Schou (2018) warn that disinformation strategies manipulate public perception, often for political gain, and, eventually "fake news serve to produce and articulate political battlegrounds over social reality" (p. 300). Nevertheless, political discourse remains powerful in shaping societal narratives, legitimizing authority, and influencing public opinion. While it has historically played a central role in constructing national identities and justifying policy decisions, the advent of digital media has redefined its scope and impact.

3. Rhetorical strategies in political discourse: myths, archetypes, and strategic narratives

Narratives and myths occupy a central role in political discourse, serving as tools for constructing shared identities and ideologies (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012), legitimizing policies, and galvanizing emotions (Reyes, 2011; Koschut et al., 2017), and influencing public perception relying on symbolic language, and selective narratives (Hodges, 2007; Schmitt, 2018). Defined broadly, political narratives are coherent storylines that explain events and justify actions, resonating on a personal level, making them more likely to be believed and acted upon (Jankowicz, 2020), as the language of emotions and judgments, and not of facts, remains one of the main tools of constructing powerful messages and propaganda, especially during war (Darczewska, 2014). Also, Krieg (2023) explores how both governments and independent groups use information and media to advance their goals without engaging in open warfare. He explains that *subversion* in the modern era is a "strategic exploitation of sociopsychological, infrastructural, and physical vulnerabilities in the information environment by an external adversary to alter or erode a

sociopolitical consensus or status quo" (Krieg, 2023, p. 72). By doing so, these actors can influence events and achieve their strategic aims while staying below the level of direct military conflict.

On the other hand, political myths are a core component of political narratives, acting as symbolic stories that express collective beliefs and aspirations. These myths can provide legitimacy to a political system or leader, justify actions, and mobilize citizens around a cause, as political archetypes are an ideologically marked narrative that purports to give an accurate account of past, present, or predicted political events (Flood, 2002). The Ukrainian crisis, a conflict rooted in contested identities and geopolitical rivalries, provides a compelling case for examining how narratives and myths direct and guide political discourse, as "conflicts provide fertile territory for controversy and suspicion to appear, and the Internet provides ample opportunities for debunking falsehoods and producing counter-narratives" (Khaldarova & Pantti, 2016, p. 14) and how the deployment and strategic themes are used to legitimize actions, stimulate public opinion, and shape global perceptions.

One of the first who made significant contributions to the study of narratives was Vladimir Propp (1968, pp. 25-65), who laid the foundation for structuralist approaches to the study of narrative by analyzing the common patterns and structures within folktales. He identified seven broad character types, each associated with specific functions: *The Hero* (the protagonist who seeks something and faces challenges), *The Villain* (the antagonist who opposes the hero), *The Donor* (a character who provides the hero with a magical item or assistance), *The Helper* (character who assists the hero in their quest), *The Princess* (sought-for person and sometimes the hero's reward), *The Dispatcher* (character who sends the hero on their quest), and *The False Hero* (character who claims to be the hero but is revealed to be a pretender).

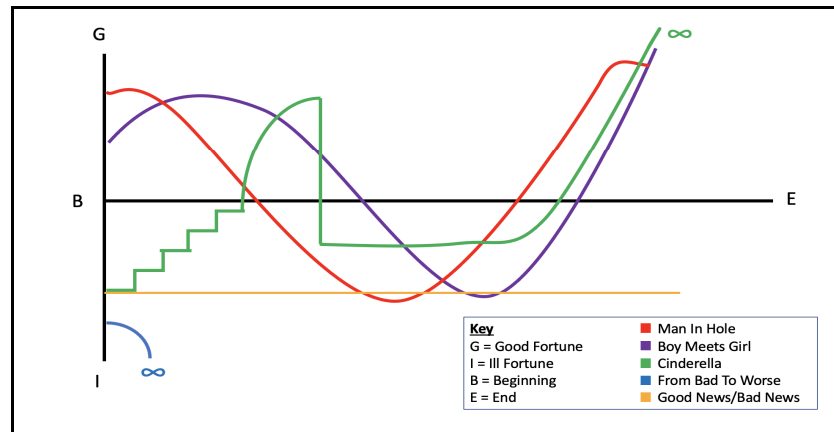


Figure 1. Five Basic Story-structures by Kurt Vonnegut
 (Source: Troilo, S. (2021). Basic plots by Kurt Vonnegut)

Novelist Kurt Vonnegut suggested that all stories have the same basic form, which can even be sketched on a sheet of graph paper. Vonnegut's story-structure chart (as shown in figure 1) consisted of the vertical axis GOOD FORTUNE – ILL FORTUNE, which reveals the fate of the hero, and the horizontal axis BEGIN – END, which creates the timeline of the unfolding action (Vonnegut, 2005, pp. 23-27). Vonnegut presents main five archetypal forms of the hero: *Man in a Hole* (the protagonist starts off in a good place, encounters some trouble and then manages to get out of it), *Boy Meets Girl* (the protagonist meets someone special or encounter a significant event and their life improves significantly), *Cinderella* (the protagonist's situation starts off poorly and improves through some magical or fortunate event), *From Bad to Worse* (the protagonist starts off in a bad situation, which only continues to get worse), and *Good News/Bad News* (mirroring real life, where the good and bad are intertwined).

Although, Christopher Booker (2004) argues that all stories, regardless of their cultural origins, can be boiled down to seven fundamental narrative structures: *Overcoming the Monster* – where the protagonist sets out to defeat an antagonistic force, *Rags to Riches* – where the protagonists begin in a lowly state, but through virtue, they rise to success, *The Quest* – where main character embarks on a journey to obtain a significant

object or reach an important destination, *Voyage and Return* – a story in which the protagonist ventures into a dangerous world, experiences a series of adventures, *Comedy* – a light-hearted story where the protagonist faces obstacles, usually of a romantic or social nature, *Tragedy* – which presents the protagonist's downfall, often due to a fatal flaw or mistake, and *Rebirth* – where the protagonist experiences a significant transformation or awakening.

In the same tone, Jack Lule (2001) is critically exploring how news stories often follow timeless archetypes, similar to ancient myths and legends. As Lule's work uncovers the deep connection between modern news reporting and traditional narrative forms, his theory suggests that journalism does more than relay facts – it perpetuates universal human experiences through recurring themes and characters. Having the core premise that journalism is a modern mythology, Lule argues that "archetypal myths can be found every day within national reports, international correspondence, sports columns, human interest features, editorials, and obituaries" (Lule, 2001, p. 3). Thus, news stories mirror the same archetypes that myths have used for centuries, stating that journalists write the world's latest tales but also tell some of its oldest. The stories that appear daily in the world's newspapers bear remarkable resemblance to the myths of ancient cultures. Also, the male figure is represented by four archetypes of masculine psychology – *King, Warrior, Magician, and Lover* – which represent different aspects of a mature male identity (Moore & Gillette, 1990), as they are linked to myths, legends, and narratives, which reflect the various roles men play in universal stories. As a whole, heroism is used in marketing, as well as in representations of the army hero, blending traits of the *magician, warrior, and king*. Thus, *archetypal blending*, as used in advertising, "enables hero narratives to remain meaningful to diverse audiences who may simultaneously expect familiar and conventional representations and might also demand transformations that reflect emerging cultural values" (Kelsey et al., 2022, p. 156).

Historical narratives provide a powerful foundation for political discourse, offering a lens through which past events are reinterpreted to influence present actions; as by mythologizing historical events and figures, strategic narratives construct a national identity that resonates emotionally with the audience, thereby reinforcing political actions as a

natural extension of a well-established historical narrative, "the perpetually mutating repository for the representation of the past for the purposes of the present" (Bell, 2003, p. 66). In the Ukrainian crisis, both Russia and Ukraine have employed strategic narratives to frame the conflict in ways that align with their agendas. Russia's narrative emphasizes historical ties between the two nations, portraying Ukraine as integral to Russian identity and heritage (Plokhyy, 2006). In analysing myth representations, Aydemir (2022) describes human figures (strong women, brave men), fictional characters (*the Kyiv Ghost*), or objects (the Ukrainian flag, tanks, tractors, Molotov cocktails) as the main symbols or legends used by Volodymyr Zelenskyy in his discourses. Thereby, "the Ukrainian authorities created a warrior society that fits the micro-mythology, and the narrative of the liberation of the Ukrainian people" (Aydemir, 2022, p. 366). This perspective underpins claims of cultural and historical unity, which are used to justify territorial ambitions and policies, such as the annexation of Crimea.

On the other hand, the Russian government frequently invokes the narrative of *denazification*, framing its actions as a moral crusade against a Western-backed threat, thereby drawing on memories of World War II to resonate with domestic audiences (Faulconbridge & Soldatkin, 2023). Conversely, in response, Ukraine has constructed a narrative of resistance and sovereignty, positioning itself as a defender of democracy against authoritarian aggression. For example, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's speeches highlight Ukraine's struggle as a heroic quest for freedom and independence, casting the nation as a vanguard of democratic values (Official Website of the President of Ukraine, n.d.). This narrative appeals not only to domestic audiences but also to the international community, framing the conflict as a broader ideological struggle between freedom and tyranny (Plokhyy, 2018; Snyder, 2018). Nevertheless, Russia brings its narratives to the online battlefield, creating journalistic or mass media stories that "can be seen aiming, in the first place, to appeal to emotions and to blur the border between what is real and what is not" (Khaldarova & Pantti, 2016, p. 9), and often taking the shape of fake news or propaganda materials (*ibidem*). Strategic narratives and myths thus demonstrate how political actors use history to create compelling storylines that legitimize their actions and mobilize support. The use of myths and archetypes in

political discourse fill the narratives with emotional resonance and cultural significance, thus archetypes such as the *hero*, *antagonist*, or *victim*, have been instrumental in shaping public perception of crisis.

During the first year of war, major news outlets and political analysts have examined the first year of the Russia-Ukraine war, segmenting it into distinct phases to understand its progression. For instance, *BBC News* (2024) and Breteau (2023) created an interactive map detailing the ebb and flow of territorial control throughout the first year, while The New York Times (n.d.) provided in-depth coverage of the Russia-Ukraine war, highlighting key phases and emphasizing significant events and shifts in the conflict's dynamics. Some divided the war into key moments, focusing on specific days and weeks (Ellison et al., 2023), or months (Askew, 2023). Following these interpretations and divisions, we created a simplified three-stage evolution of war.

Table 1

**The War in Ukraine – A Contextual Overview over the First Year,
Divided into Three Stages**

Stage of the War	Timeframe	Key Events and Characteristics
1. Initial Invasion and Defensive Efforts	February 24, 2022 – April 24, 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Russia launches a full-scale invasion with advances toward Kyiv. – Vigorous Ukrainian resistance; Battle of Kyiv as a defining early conflict. – Heavy shelling in Mariupol and Kharkiv, causing civilian casualties. – President Zelenskyy appeals to international parliaments for aid. – Russian retreat reveals atrocities in Bucha, leading to global outrage and intensified sanctions. – Ukraine's resistance and international unity define this stage.
2. Shifting Frontline and the Fight for Donbas	April 25, 2022 – August 24, 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Russia focuses on eastern regions, particularly Donbas. – Brutal battles in Sievierodonetsk and Mariupol. – Key Ukrainian victories: sinking of Moskva, liberation of Snake Island. – Ukraine gains EU candidate status and symbolic victories (e.g., Eurovision).

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – War crimes trials begin. – Heavy civilian toll from Russian missile and artillery strikes in Zaporizhzhia and Kherson.
3. Ukrainian Counteroffensives and Renewed Russian Aggression	August 25, 2022 – February 24, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Ukraine launches counteroffensives in Kherson and Kharkiv regions. – Rapid advances in Kharkiv disrupt Russian supply lines; Kherson liberated in November. – Russia escalates missile strikes on Ukraine's energy infrastructure. – Russia announces partial mobilization to sustain war efforts. – Allies provide advanced weaponry (e.g., Leopard, Abrams tanks). – President Zelenskyy calls for global unity; Ukraine's resilience remains steadfast.

Source: The Author

4. Research design

The study explores how rhetorical strategies foster national unity, shape international perceptions, and influence support for Ukraine's resistance against Russian aggression. In doing so, we will focus on identifying dominant themes and myths such as *Hero*, *Antagonist*, or *Helper*, and governing narratives like *Resistance*, *Overcoming the Monster*, *Sacred Land*, or *Sacrifice* in the discourses of Volodymyr Zelenskyy, published on the Official website of the President of Ukraine between February 24, 2022 and February 24, 2023. Firstly, we created an HTML code for scraping speeches uploaded on the website, resulting in a sample of $N = 580$ discourses in English. Regarding the form and structure of the discourses, Zelenskyy often begins his speeches with a direct salutation, such as "Dear people!" or "Great People of Great Ukraine!". This helps in establishing a personal connection with his audience. He continues with updates on recent events, reinforcing national unity and the collective strength of Ukrainians, encouraging specific actions or attitudes among citizens, and he often concludes with motivational statements or

expressions of gratitude. The length varies, as the discourses could be concise or more emotional, depending on the occasion. Many speeches are accompanied by video recordings, which are available in the video collection section of the official website. The duration of these videos varies from 9 or 10 minutes to 13 minutes. Zelenskyy primarily delivers his speeches in Ukrainian. However, depending on the audience, he has also used Russian and English to reach a broader international community. As for visual elements, the videos often feature Zelenskyy in settings that convey resilience, such as his office or significant national landmarks, like the capital city Kyiv, or important areas such as Kharkiv, Mariupol, or Bucha.

4.1. Methods

The research employs a mixed-methods approach to examine the recurrent narratives and myths in the speeches of the Ukrainian President and their strategic use.

In the *first phase* of our research, we used the text-mining software KH Coder to conduct an automated content analysis of Zelenskyy's speeches. This step allowed us to analyse the frequency of words and their co-occurrence networks systematically. We computed the frequency of specific words and phrases to identify dominant terms in the discourse. Using KH Coder's co-occurrence analysis feature, we visualized the relationships between keywords as a network graph. This allowed us to identify clusters of associated terms and analyze how frequently these terms co-occurred within the same contexts. These networks provided insight into the underlying narratives and how certain concepts were linked to broader mythological structures.

Following the automated analysis, we conducted a content and discourse analysis to examine the dominant themes and roles that emerged from the speeches. This step involved qualitative coding of the texts to uncover deeper layers of meaning and rhetoric. We coded the speeches for dominant themes, and, additionally, we identified recurring roles attributed to various entities. This phase also included analysing the use of rhetorical devices, symbolic language, and mythological structures. In

doing so, we used Sketch Engine, a corpus analysis tool, to refine our textual data. This tool allowed us to examine word contexts, create concordance lines, and compare the frequency and usage of specific terms in a more granular manner: using the function N-grams we identified the most frequent 3-4 words expressions and with Concordance and Wordlist, we investigated the context keywords are used and their frequency in the text. Sketch Engine was particularly useful for validating the findings from KH Coder and enriching the qualitative analysis.

In the final phase, we synthesized our findings to trace the evolution of dominant themes and narratives across the three key phases of the war, as illustrated in Table 1: the *initial invasion*, the *counteroffensive period*, and the *prolonged conflict phase*. Using the results, we identified how narratives and myths adapted to match the military and political realities of the war. This multistep process ensures both depth and precision, allowing us to see how these speeches served as a vital tool in Ukraine's wartime communication strategy.

4.2. Research questions

- RQ.1.** Which are the recurrent narratives and myths present in the speeches of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in the first year of war?
- RQ.2.** How are specific myths and mythical structures strategically used in the speeches?
- RQ.3.** How have narratives evolved during the war, and how have they mirrored the military actions on the front?

5. Findings

According to the three-stage division of the war, the analysis followed the investigation of the discourses of each of these three phases: *First stage*: N = 114 discourses, *Second stage*: N = 190 discourses, and *Third stage*: N = 276 discourses, as illustrated below in Table 2.

Table 2

The Three Stages of War in Ukraine and the Number of Discourses per Stage

War Stage	Number of discourses
First Stage: Initial Invasion and Defensive Efforts (February 24, 2022 – April 24, 2022)	114
Second Stage: Shifting Frontline and the Fight for Donbas (April 25, 2022 – August 24, 2022)	190
Third Stage: Ukrainian Counteroffensives and Renewed Russian Aggression (August 25, 2022 – February 24, 2023)	276

Source: The Author

With the help of KH Coder, we created the word co-occurrence networks and using Sketch Engine, we provided insights into the strategic construction of narratives and the recurrence of myths during each of the three stages in the first year of the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

5.1. First stage analysis: initial invasion and defensive efforts (February 24, 2022 – April 24, 2022)

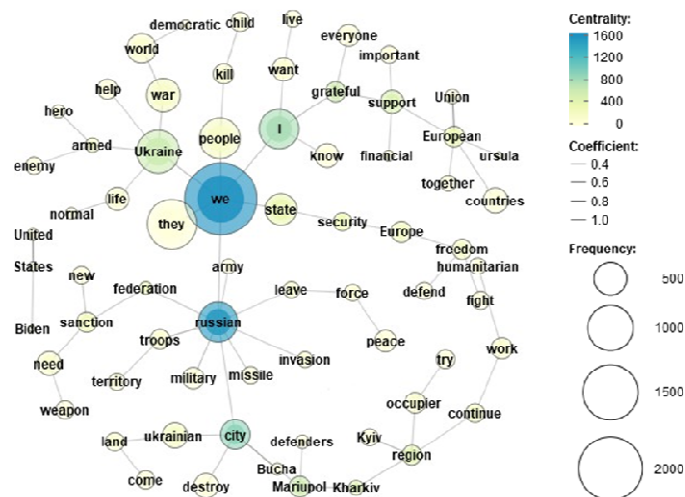


Figure 2. First stage of the war: words co-occurrence network

The frequent use of expressions conveys gratitude, national pride, and the heroic struggle of the Ukrainian people and Armed Forces. After the analysis, we found that key phrases include "I am grateful to" (N = 263, first mentioned on 25 February 2022), "Glory to Ukraine" (N = 105, first mentioned on 24 February 2022), and "Armed Forces of Ukraine" (N = 58, first mentioned on 24 February 2022). These expressions illustrate a narrative of resilience and collective strength in the face of adversity that invaded the sovereign land. According to Vladimir Propp's (1968) structuralist theory of narratives, stories often follow a sequence of functions, where a hero faces trials set by a villain, aided by helpers, to restore balance. This narrative structure is evident here, as the repeated emphasis on unity ("we", "together", "fight", or "defend") underscores the heroic struggle and reflects Propp's notion of collective action against evil forces.

Meanwhile, Ukraine is positioned as both a *hero* and a *victim*. Terms like "Ukraine", "people", "war", and "freedom" evoke heroism, highlighting the narrative of courageous resistance against aggression, broadly fitting Ukraine's story in the *Overcoming the Monster* plot, as stated by Christopher Booker (2004). The frequent use of "city" (including references to specific locations tied to identity and history like Kyiv, Bucha, and Mariupol) underscores suffering as cities became symbolic battlegrounds of resilience, constructing what Jack Lule (2001) calls a *Tragic Victim* myth. Simultaneously, the myth of sacred land depicts the homeland as something worth fighting for and/or dying for. The term "territory" emphasizes national integrity, while "city" personalizes the stakes by referencing places. The communicated story portrays the people of Ukraine as fighting for survival and freedom against overwhelming odds. Ukraine is also framed as a victim of Russia's aggression ("troops", "invasion", "missile", "destroy"). The terms "kill" and "child", connected in many of the contexts, emphasize innocent suffering, a hallmark of tragedy and, again, a key element in Lule's (2001) *Tragic Victim* storyline. This narrative aims to inspire moral outrage, which is often used to justify humanitarian and political intervention. This narrative seeks to inspire moral outrage, which is often used to emphasize humanitarian and political intervention.

On the other hand, Russia is unequivocally depicted as the antagonist in Zelenskyy's speeches, with Sketch Engine identifying frequent mentions such as "the Russian military" (N = 77, first mentioned on 3 March 2022),

"the Russian Federation" (N = 76, first mentioned on 24 February 2022), and "sanctions against Russia" (N = 57, first mentioned on 25 February 2022). Additionally, the term "Russia" and its adjective form "Russian" appear in contexts emphasizing aggression and destruction, including "Russia brought death" (mentioned on 22 April 2022), and "Russia wants to destroy..." (mentioned on 11 April 2022). These constructions reinforce Russia's role as a perpetrator of violence and a threat to Ukraine's sovereignty and existence. Terms like "Russian", "troops", and "military" reinforce aggression, while "invasion" and "occupier" portray illegal and violent action. Ukraine is depicted as enduring violence and destruction from an unprovoked war. Hence, Ukraine's narrative follows a sharp descent into suffering due to the unprovoked invasion (the fall) but maintains moments of hope and resilience through unity and support from allies (small rises), reflecting the *Man in Hole* or *From Bad to Worse* narrative arcs, as illustrated by Kurt Vonnegut (2005), underscoring the emotional engagement with audiences. The European Union, the United States, and other allied nations are positioned as indispensable helpers in the Ukrainian struggle, corresponding to Propp's *Donor* and *Helper* roles. We identified recurring themes of justice, solidarity, and international support. For instance, phrases such as "Europe can bring Russia to justice" and "Europe can force Russia into peace" (both mentioned on 13 April 2022) emphasize the role of Europe in countering Russian aggression. The inclusion of diverse nationalities further reinforces the narrative of global unity, as seen in references to different nationalities, such as "citizens of European countries, USA, and Canada" (first mentioned on 5 April 2022), aligning with mythic structures where a hero's cause becomes a universal battle between good and evil, as both Booker (2004) and Lule (2001) outline in their works. These portrayals highlight the international community's moral and practical support in Ukraine's fight.

of narrative theory, this reflects Propp's functions of helpers and donors who provide essential aid to the hero on their quest. The phrase "Glory to Ukraine" remains a constant rhetorical device in this stage, appearing 185 times, continuing its role as a patriotic invocation.

Additionally, expressions such as "Eternal memory to..." (N = 72, first mentioned on 28 February 2022) and "Eternal glory to..." (N = 68, first mentioned on 28 February 2022) accompany references to fallen heroes and defenders, underscoring the mythic sacrifice required for national survival. Lule's (2001) theory of media myths, particularly the *Hero* and *Tragic Victim* archetypes, is highly relevant here: Ukraine is depicted as a courageous defender and an innocent sufferer, inviting global sympathy and moral endorsement. At the same time, Ukraine's victimhood is consistently highlighted through terms such as "war against Ukraine" (N = 54, first mentioned on 10 March 2022), reinforcing the narrative of an unjustly attacked nation. This dual portrayal aligns with and strengthens Christopher Booker's (2004) *Overcoming the Monster* plot structure, wherein the protagonist must confront and ultimately defeat the oppressive force. Zelenskyy employs the language of heroism to frame Ukrainians as defenders of their sacred homeland against a much larger and oppressive enemy, echoing traditional mythic narratives of righteous resistance. Russia's portrayal as the antagonist intensifies over time, with a notable increase in the use of terms like "The Russian Army" (N = 118, first mentioned on 10 March 2022), compared to the earlier phase of the conflict. Russia's actions are framed in negative terms, as seen in recurring expressions such as "Russia must be stopped" (mentioned on 15 March 2022), "Russia must leave the occupied territory of Ukraine", "Russia must leave our land", and "Russia must be held accountable for the crime of aggression" (all three phrases mentioned on 24 August 2022). These statements emphasize not only Russia's culpability but also the necessity of decisive international action to address its aggression and restore Ukraine's sovereignty. In mythic terms, Russia represents the evil oppressor that must be resisted. Russia's characterization as the occupier and a source of terror aligns with historical narratives of totalitarian regimes that conquer and subjugate, this depiction strongly corresponding to Propp's *Villain* archetype. The European Union (EU) and the United States (US) are increasingly positioned as essential helpers within Zelenskyy's narrative. Mentions of the "European Union" rise to 115

occurrences, and are frequently tied to aspirations of integration and shared democratic values, as in "Ukraine is a future member of the European Union" and "Ukraine membership in the European Union" (both mentioned on 24 August 2022). Although references to the "United States" are less frequent at this stage, the country's role remains significant, highlighted through phrases such as "provided by the United States" (mentioned on 11 August 2022). This emphasis on international solidarity supports Propp's *Donor/Helper* roles and underlines the collective struggle against oppression, consistent with Lule's (2001) concept of mythic storytelling in public discourse.

Finally, Zelenskyy's narrative adapts dynamically to evolving wartime realities, incorporating both military developments (e.g., battles in Sievierodonetsk, Donbas, and Mariupol) and symbolic victories (e.g., the liberation of Snake Island, Ukraine's gaining of EU candidate status, and cultural successes like winning Eurovision on May 14, 2023). This evolving narrative strategy exemplifies Vonnegut's (2005) model of fluctuating fortunes within stories. It demonstrates a sophisticated use of language to mobilize both domestic and international audiences, ensuring continued support for Ukraine's cause.

5.3. Third stage analysis: Ukrainian counteroffensives and renewed Russian aggression (August 25, 2022 – February 24, 2023)

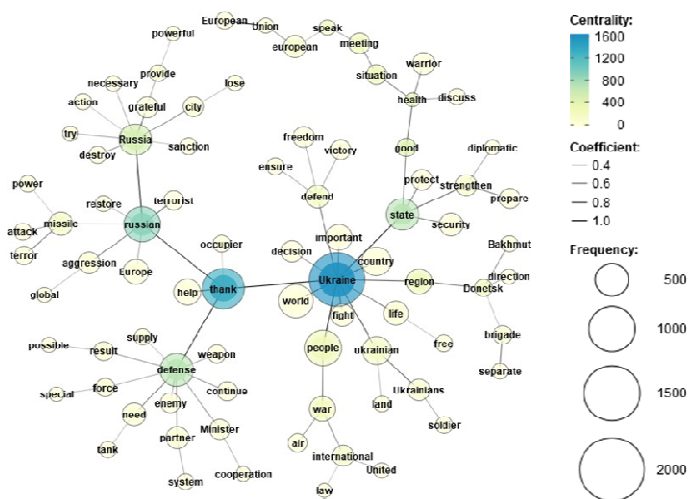


Figure 4. Third stage of the war: words co-occurrence network

In the final phase of the first year of the Russia-Ukraine war, the linguistic patterns in President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's speeches reveal a narrative architecture that foregrounds Ukraine's heroism and the solidification of Russia as the antagonist (Figure 4). The phrase "I am grateful" appears 776 times during this period, further emphasizing Zelenskyy's persistent acknowledgment of international aid and underscoring Ukraine's portrayal as a resilient hero fortified by a coalition of allies. This frequent expression of gratitude strengthens the archetype of the *Hero with Helpers*, central to Vladimir Propp's (1968) narrative functions, where external supporters (donors and helpers) assist the hero in overcoming adversity. Expressions such as "thank to", "thank for", and "thank all" (N = 679, first mentioned on 26 February 2022), often together with "everyone who helps" (N = 89, first mentioned on 14 March 2022), deepen this framework, creating a narrative of interconnected solidarity. In this mythic structure, Ukraine emerges as the virtuous protagonist, whose resilience is continually renewed through collective support, echoing Joseph Campbell's (2004) motif of the *community aid* found in the *Hero's* journey. Also, there is an increased focus on the strengthening ties between Ukraine and its allies, particularly the European Union (EU) and the United States (US). Phrases such as "Ukraine and the EU" (mentioned on 17 March 2022) or "Ukraine and the United States" (mentioned on 14 March 2022) illustrate the country's growing integration with democratic partners, situating Ukraine within a larger ideological struggle that aligns with the *Democratic Values versus Evil Empire* narrative, rooted in the ideological dichotomy between democratic systems and authoritarian regimes. Specialized literature often frames it as a broader continuation of Cold War rhetoric, where the *Evil Empire* (a term popularized by U.S. President Ronald Reagan) represents a threat to global democratic values (Goodnight, 1986; Hidalgo, 2022). This narrative characterizes democratic states as defenders of freedom, human rights, and self-determination, standing against oppressive regimes. In Zelenskyy's speeches, this narrative manifests through phrases like "Ukraine is and will be democratic" (mentioned on 25 November 2022), and "our entire democratic world" (mentioned on 11 October 2022). By framing Ukraine as a bulwark of democracy, Zelenskyy situates his country within a global alliance of democratic nations, contrasting it with "Russian tyranny" and its attempts to "force the democratic world to surrender with a terrorist

rush" (both mentioned on 11 October 2022). Statements such as "When freedom wins and tyranny collapses, people are smiling the same way all over the globe" (mentioned on 9 December 2022) articulate a vision of Ukraine's struggle as part of a broader ideological battle.

The rhetorical shift during this phase, particularly the increasing use of the term "the terrorist state" (N = 97, first mentioned on 8 March 2022) instead of "Russia" or "Russian people" – represents a deliberate intensification of the moral framing of the conflict. Phrases such as "consequences for the terrorist state" (mentioned on 18 February 2023) elevate Russia's depiction to that of a mythic embodiment of *evil*, as we have seen in Propp's (1968) *villain* archetype and aligning with Jack Lule's (2001) notion of the *Evil Other* in mythic storytelling. In doing so, Zelenskyy not only casts Ukraine's resistance as heroic but frames it within a universal moral dichotomy: justice against terror. Central motifs such as "Glory to Ukraine" (N = 264, first mentioned on 24 February 2022) and "Good Health to you" (N = 160, first mentioned on 2 March 2022) persist as linguistic symbols of unity and resilience. "Glory to Ukraine" functions as a nationalistic rallying cry, aligning with *The Quest* archetype (Propp, 1968), where defending the homeland becomes a transcendent mission, while "Good Health to you" extends empathetic solidarity to both citizens and international allies, fostering communal belonging.

Beyond these immediate rhetorical patterns, broader narrative structures emerge across the total corpus of 580 speeches. One key narrative is the *David vs. Goliath* archetype (Campbell, 2004; Goldschmied & Naghi, 2024), wherein Ukraine, the smaller but morally superior entity, confronts a vastly more powerful oppressor. This underdog framework creates deep emotional resonance by emphasizing Ukraine's courage and moral righteousness against overwhelming odds, a strategy consistent with Christopher Booker's (2004) *Overcoming the Monster* plot structure. The *Rebirth* narrative also permeates Zelenskyy's rhetoric, reflecting the notion of renewal following profound suffering (Eliade, 2018; Turner, 1974). Statements such as "we will liberate all our lands" and "repair work will continue without pause" (both mentioned on 24 February 2023) convey not only a desire for restoration but also a vision of national transformation and revival. This theme aligns with Campbell's (2004) *Return with the elixir* myth, where the hero, having faced adversity, brings renewal to the community.

Furthermore, Zelenskyy repeatedly invokes the *Sacred Land* myth (Sheridan & Pineault, 2016), framing Ukrainian territory as a hallowed space imbued with spiritual and historical significance. Phrases such as "we are fighting so hard to drive Russia out of our land" (mentioned on 17 February 2023) and "everything to protect our country" (mentioned on 7 August 2022) sacralize the nation's territory, turning its defence into a moral imperative and a unifying national duty. Thus, Zelenskyy's evolving wartime discourse integrates multiple narrative and mythic structures. Ukraine is framed not only as a heroic underdog but also as a symbol of democratic resilience, a sacred land under threat, and a nation destined for rebirth through collective struggle. This narrative strategy mobilizes emotional, political, and ethical support domestically and internationally, sustaining Ukraine's moral high ground amid an ongoing and existential conflict.

6. Discussion and conclusions

The analysis of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's 580 speeches during the first year of the Russia-Ukraine war demonstrates the use of myths and narratives to sustain morale, garner international support, and reinforce Ukraine's identity as a heroic nation. Answering the first question – *Which are the recurrent narratives and myths present in the speeches of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in the first year of war?* (RQ1), we noticed that, between 24th of February 2022 and 24th of February 2023, recurrent narratives in President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's speeches consistently framed Ukraine through the myths of *heroism*, *victimhood*, *sacred land*, *rebirth*, and the *democratic struggle against evil*, archetypal structures identified by scholars such as Vladimir Propp (1968), Joseph Campbell (2004), and Christopher Booker (2004). One dominant narrative is that of *heroism and collective resistance*. Ukraine is portrayed as the heroic protagonist defending its sovereignty against a larger oppressor, aligning with *Hero's Journey* and *Overcoming the Monster* plots (Campbell, 2004; Booker, 2004). Zelenskyy's frequent use of phrases such as "Glory to Ukraine" and references to "fallen heroes" exemplify this heroic frame. As the Ukrainian President frequently employs the hero's journey, portraying Ukrainians as resilient figures

who endure trials and tribulations in their pursuit of sovereignty, this archetype fosters a sense of shared purpose and inspires both national and international solidarity. Secondly, the *victimhood* narrative is recurrent, portraying Ukraine as an unjustly attacked nation. Terms like "war against Ukraine", "missile terror", "kill" and "child" highlight innocent suffering, aligning with the tragic narrative structures noted by Kurt Vonnegut, where stories fall into a *man in hole* shape, depicting a descent into hardship and subsequent struggle for redemption (Vonnegut, 2005). Similarly, the *martyr* archetype is prominently featured in Zelenskyy's rhetoric, with tributes to soldiers and civilians who have sacrificed their lives for Ukraine's cause. These narratives evoke empathy and moral urgency, galvanizing support for Ukraine globally (Zelizer, 2010; Goodwin & Spittle, 2002).

Additionally, the *sacred land myth* emerges, with frequent invocations of Ukraine's territory as something worth fighting and dying for – a powerful mobilizing myth that ties sovereignty to spiritual identity. The *narrative of rebirth* also appears, especially toward the latter stages of the first year, with Zelenskyy emphasizing Ukraine's future reconstruction and transformation after suffering, through phrases such as "we will rebuild..." (mentioned on 6 March 2022) or "new heroes, defenders of Kyiv" (mentioned on 24 February 2023), reflecting Eliade's (2018) and Turner's (1974) theories of *cyclical renewal after crisis*. Another recurring theme is the *saviour archetype*, where Ukraine is depicted as not only defending itself but also safeguarding democratic values for the broader international community (Snyder, 2018). Finally, the *Democratic World vs. Evil Empire* frame is recurrent, casting Ukraine as a defender of democratic values against authoritarian aggression. This narrative mirrors Cold War ideological structures and positions Ukraine within a broader global struggle for freedom.

Secondly, investigating *how specific myths and mythical structures are strategically used in the speeches* (RQ2), we noted that, by aligning Ukraine's struggle with universal ideals, these narratives transcend national boundaries and resonate deeply with diverse audiences, Zelenskyy employing specific myths and narrative structures strategically to mobilize emotional support, legitimize political actions, and foster international solidarity. First, by using the *Hero's Journey* structure (Campbell, 2004), Zelenskyy casts Ukraine as the righteous hero undergoing trials and seeking allies. For instance,

his repeated gratitude towards the EU and the US allies ("thank to" or "everyone who helps") positions these external actors as the *helpers* in Propp's typology (1968), aiding the hero in the quest. Second, the *David vs. Goliath archetype* is tactically deployed to highlight moral superiority against overwhelming odds. Phrases like "defending ourselves against Russian aggression" (mentioned on 19 February 2023) and references to Ukraine's smaller size versus Russia's military might frame Ukraine as the underdog, appealing to global sympathies.

In the same way, the *sacred land* myth is used to sacralize territorial integrity, turning battles over cities like Kyiv, Bucha, and Mariupol into spiritual struggles. The personalization of suffering via city names and references to the Ukrainian territory reinforces a mythic duty to defend the homeland at any cost. Moreover, Zelenskyy strategically amplifies the *villain archetype* by escalating Russia's portrayal from "occupier" to "terrorist state" (both first mentioned between 1-4 March 2022). This linguistic approach intensifies the emotional and moral justification for continued resistance and international action, aligning with Lule's (2001) *Evil Other* in myth-based journalism and political discourse. Finally, through the Rebirth narrative, Zelenskyy consistently links present suffering to future regeneration – "repair work will continue without pause" (mentioned on 24 February 2023) or "liberate all our lands" (mentioned on 24 February 2023) – invoking hope and resilience as political tools to maintain morale.

Last but not least, the analysis points out that *Zelenskyy's narratives have evolved during the war, the military actions on the front* (RQ3), in response to the conflict's progression and strategic political needs, based on the three-stage evolution of war.

1. **First Stage – Initial Invasion and Defensive Efforts (February 24, 2022 – April 24, 2022):** In the first months, the focus was on pure survival and establishing Ukraine as both hero and victim. Expressions like "Glory to Ukraine" and references to "missile terror" or "invasion" emphasized the existential threat and rallied both domestic and international support.
2. **Second Stage – Shifting Frontline and the Fight for Donbas (April 25, 2022 – August 24, 2022):** As the war progressed and

Ukraine achieved symbolic victories (e.g., liberation of Snake Island, European Union candidate status), the narrative shifted towards resilience and alliance-building. The growing number of expressions of gratitude ("I am grateful" appearing 653 times) highlights this shift, where the hero is not alone but actively supported by a network of allies.

3. **Third Stage – Ukrainian Counteroffensives and Renewed Russian Aggression (August 25, 2022 – February 24, 2023):** Toward the end of the first year, the narrative matured into a vision of rebirth and future reconstruction. Simultaneously, Russia's framing intensified from "occupier" to "terrorist state", showing the need for stronger moral polarization. Expressions such as "protect from the terrorist state" and "sanctions against the terrorist state" emerged in parallel with Ukraine's military counteroffensives in regions like Donbas and Sievierodonetsk.

Thus, narrative evolution mirrored military reality: initial defence (heroic survival), mid-war resilience or alliance building (hero plus helpers), and finally moral escalation and future rebuilding (rebirth). These shifts helped Zelenskyy maintain internal morale and external political support, adapting rhetorical strategies to changing circumstances while adhering to familiar, emotionally resonant mythic structures.

Nevertheless, throughout the whole Ukrainian crisis, digital media have been pivotal in shaping public perception. Ukrainian political leaders, including Zelenskyy, have used media channels to share personal stories, images of resilience, and appeals for international solidarity. These narratives often incorporate familiar myths and archetypes, creating emotionally compelling content that fosters engagement. Digital platforms also intensify the weaponization of information, as competing narratives vie for dominance in the global information space. Russia's sophisticated disinformation campaigns, which disseminate misleading or fabricated stories, exemplify how digital media can manipulate perceptions and undermine opponents (Khaldarova & Pantti, 2016). In response, Ukraine has countered with strategic narratives that emphasize transparency, resilience, and moral clarity. The interplay between these narratives underscores the role of digital media as both a battleground and a tool for shaping contemporary

political discourse (Tankard, 2001; Kimble, 2006). Hence, narratives and myths have proven indispensable in political discourse, providing a framework for interpreting events, legitimizing actions, and mobilizing public opinion. The Ukrainian crisis illustrates the strategic deployment of narratives and myths to influence perceptions and garner support, both domestically and internationally. Political actors craft compelling stories that resonate deeply with audiences by leveraging historical narratives, archetypes, and digital media. As the digital age continues to reshape the landscape of political communication, understanding the power of narratives and myths remains crucial for navigating complex geopolitical conflicts and fostering informed public discourse (Miskimmon et al., 2014; Roselle et al., 2014). The speeches of Volodymyr Zelenskyy during the first year of the war illustrate the power of narrative and myth in shaping public perception, mobilizing support, and defining national identity. Zelenskyy crafts a compelling discourse that resonates across domestic and international audiences by intertwining universal archetypes with Ukraine's specific context. His rhetoric not only sustains the morale of a nation under siege but also positions Ukraine as a central actor in the global fight for democratic values. Moreover, President Zelenskyy's rhetoric reflects a strategic alignment with Western partners, particularly the United States. Nevertheless, this discourse takes on new meaning in the context of the evolving diplomatic landscape following the 2025 election of President Donald Trump. Their recent meeting, alongside new agreements such as the U.S.-Ukraine minerals deal, signals a shift in tone and priorities within bilateral relations (Glebova, 2025).

A key limitation of the study is its reliance on publicly available transcripts of President Zelenskyy's speeches, excluding informal statements, social media content, and non-verbal communication such as tone or body language, which can significantly influence how messages are received. Furthermore, the analysis is based on English translations, which may not fully reflect the original meanings or rhetorical nuances of the Ukrainian language, potentially affecting the accuracy of keyword and narrative identification. Another limitation is the temporal dimension, as the study focuses only on the first year of the war; future research could expand the analysis to subsequent periods to examine how narratives continue to evolve in response to changing military and political conditions.

As a follow-up direction, particular attention should be paid to how Zelenskyy's discourse at the beginning of 2025, coinciding with Trump's re-emergence in the international arena, reflects adaptive rhetorical strategies shaped by a changing global order. His recent addresses demonstrate a balancing act between asserting national resilience and aligning with evolving Western expectations, highlighting the flexible nature of political discourse in times of diplomatic uncertainty. Future research could also expand the dataset to include other media formats, such as video interviews, social media posts, and third-party analyses of Zelenskyy's discourse. Additionally, a comparative analysis of Zelenskyy's rhetoric with other world leaders in times of crisis could shed light on shared patterns and unique approaches to framing national struggles.

As the war continues, Zelenskyy's narratives are likely to adapt further, reflecting the shifting realities on the ground and the ongoing need to sustain global solidarity with Ukraine.

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BOOK REVIEWS

JULIA SZAMBOLICS¹

IOANA MOLDOVAN. 2024. *Health-related Fake News. Case Study: Online Health Information Seeking and Sharing Behavior on Social Media among Romanian Retirees Aged 50+ during the Covid-19 Pandemic*. Cluj-Napoca: Accent. 194 p.

In today's digital age, where information spreads rapidly across social media platforms, disseminating health-related fake news has become a pervasive issue. Ioana Moldovan's book, "Health-related Fake News: Case Study: Online Health Information Seeking and Sharing Behavior on Social Media among Romanian Retirees Aged 50+ during the Covid-19 Pandemic," provides an insightful and thought-provoking look into the complexities of health-related fake news in the online sphere.

As the author states in the introduction of her book, the fake news phenomenon has always been present within society (p. 13). Still, it was particularly accentuated during events like the 2016 US election and the Brexit campaign. The study's main objectives include exploring the online health information seeking behaviors of retirees aged 50+, identifying informational characteristics of Facebook posts containing health-related fake news, and analyzing the engagement of the aforementioned age group with COVID-19-related false information. The book ties communication science to health communication in a rigorous interdisciplinary effort.

The book consists of 10 chapters, with the first six focusing on the context and the theoretical aspects surrounding the diffusion of false news

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on social media, conspiracy theories, various types of misinformation and disinformation, and fake news in the health sector.

The second part of the book consists of chapters 7-10, which outline the methodological approach adopted and the research conclusions. Each chapter ends with key takeaways, an aspect I find particularly important for the readers.

Chapter 1 explores the post-truth era and how social media networks such as Facebook, WhatsApp, or Twitter (X) can facilitate the dissemination of false information. The author also presents the health sector's informational ecosystem, familiarizing the reader with the research's context and the key theoretical concepts of this book.

Chapter 2 delves deeper into the phenomenon of fake news, exploring its origins, evolution, and impact on society. Throughout 23 pages, the reader will gain insight into concepts such as misinformation, disinformation, and misinformation. The author defines conspiracy theories and vividly describes why people believe in them.

The third chapter provides a brief overview of popular social media platforms, which were primarily utilized to disseminate false information during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In chapter 4, the author turns the attention to health communication. This chapter delves into the specifics of health communication in crisis situations and offers an insight into fake news and conspiracy theories about COVID-19.

Given the target demographic of Romanian retirees aged 50+, the author explains, with a solid theoretical base, why people, particularly within the specified age group, share fake news on social media in the next chapter.

The theoretical part of the volume concludes with a review of communication theories that not only explain health information-seeking behaviors but also news-dissemination behaviors. To achieve this, the author maps out the foundational theories of the research, which include the Social-Mediated Crisis Communication Model, the Health Belief Model, Longo's Expanded Model of Health Information-Seeking Behavior, the Source Credibility Theory, the Elaboration-Likelihood Model, and the Channel Complementary theory.

Chapter 7 justifies the methodological approach. The author uses a mixed-methods approach, conducting both qualitative and quantitative methods. The author conducted an online survey with 104 respondents (aged 50-80). Furthermore, she interviewed 21 individuals (aged 52 to 89) on their traditional and social media usage, health communication, and health-related information-seeking behavior. Lastly, she analyzed 25 of the most shared Facebook posts containing COVID-19-related fake news.

In the following three chapters, the author provides a detailed description of each method, providing insights into the empirical findings. Lastly, the author presents the main conclusions, limitations, and perspectives of the study.

The current book comprises 440 sources and stands out as original and pertinent research in the academic field of communication studies on the subject of health-related fake news. The initial 94 pages provide a profound theoretical foundation, encompassing valuable fundamental and specialized literature from both Romanian and foreign scholars on the subject of the research. The research design, findings, and other pertinent empirical data are meticulously presented in the subsequent 60 pages.

I highly recommend this book for communication scholars, students, policymakers, and public health institutions, as it offers valuable insights on the online behavior of 50+ retirees, an age group often marginalized in scholarly investigations. In addition, Ioana Moldovan can bring attention to an issue that is highly pertinent and has the potential to have repercussions for society, namely fake news.

Ioana Moldovan successfully fills a gap in the literature with her meticulous research from March 2020 to April 2021, providing a compelling analysis of the dissemination of health-related fake news. Her book is a timely and essential contribution to understanding and combating the spread of misinformation in the digital age.

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