

The COVID-19 Pandemic, Twitter, and the Archetype of “Country Savior” in the Ukrainian Case

NATALIIA STEBLYNA*

(Vasyl Stus Donetsk National University)

IRYNA MATSYSHYNA**

(Vasyl Stus Donetsk National University)

OLENA SKALATSKA***

(National University “Odesa Law Academy”)

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has attracted the attention of social scientists to the study of the role and influence of archetypes on public opinion. Ukrainian politicians have been informing citizens on social networks about the fight against the pandemic. It was presented as a feat, the salvation of not only the nation, but also of the world. Politicians have been independently constructing an image of the hero who helps to create a vaccine or arrange its supply and save the country's population. To establish the archetype of the hero through the discourse of vaccination, this article analyzes the strategies of constructing the archetype of the “country savior,” using the Greimas actantial model. As a result, the actantial categories were discovered by using computer semantic analysis of tweets. The authors found that politicians used the archetypes of the savior-industrialist (Viktor Medvedchuk), savior-inspirer (Volodymyr Zelenskyy), and savior-patron (Petro Poroshenko). A method for measuring negativism and its intensity in the messages of politicians was also proposed, and it was found that the government officials perceive the situation in a more positive way, while the opposition mostly negatively. It was also found that the amount of negativism and its intensity can be interpreted through the actantial models.

Keywords: Archetype, vaccination, discourse, manipulation, Twitter.

* Nataliia Steblyna, PhD is Professor at the Department of Journalism, Vasyl Stus Donetsk National University, and a media analyst at Pylyp Orlyk Institute for Democracy (n.steblyna@donnu.edu.ua).

** Iryna Matsyshyna, PhD is Professor at the Department of Political Studies and State Management, Vasyl Stus Donetsk National University, and a media coach (i.matsyshyna@donnu.edu.ua).

*** Olena Skalatska, PhD is Associate Professor at the Department of Journalism, National University “Odesa Law Academy” (elena-s2008@ukr.net).

Introduction

In order to establish a strategy for the formation of the archetype of the “country savior” and identify signs of manipulation, this article analyzes the Ukrainian case – the vaccination discourse construction in Ukraine and the Twitter rhetoric of three well-known politicians, namely Viktor Medvedchuk, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, and Petro Poroshenko.

Ukrainian Twitter remains mostly undiscovered in both Ukrainian and international political science. Thus, our study aims to fill this gap. As for common observations about the social network, it is seen not only as one of the most popular for elites’ communication,¹ but it also has its own characteristics that can influence how the message is constructed. Some politicians use social networks not only to spread information about themselves and their political positions, but also as a means for “attack and defense,” and as a “weapon.”² “Emotionally charged messages” are becoming the most popular on social media, and they are shared more often than rational ones.³ As the attention of the audience becomes more important, emotions, including negative ones, are often used by some politicians in order to ensure they keep it, and to advance their agenda.⁴ “Attack tweets” are considered successful in this regard, drawing

¹ Pawel Matuszewski and Gabriella Szabó, “Are Echo Chambers Based on Partisanship? Twitter and Political Polarity in Poland and Hungary,” *Social Media + Society* (April - June 2019): 1 – 14, accessed April 11, 2021, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2056305119837671>.

² Paromita Pain and Gina Chen, “The President Is in: Public Opinion and the Presidential Use of Twitter,” *Social Media + Society* (April - June 2019): 1 – 14, accessed April 11, 2021, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/2056305119855143>; Concha Pérez-Curiel and Pilar Naharro, “Political Influencers. A Study of Donald Trump’s Personal Brand on Twitter and Its Impact on the Media and Users,” *Comunicacion y Sociedad* 32, no. 1 (2019): 57-76.

³ Andrea Schneider, “Telling the Story of the Superhero and the Anti-Politician as President: Donald Trump’s Branding on Twitter,” *Political Studies Review* 17, no. 3 (2019): 210–223, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1478929918807712>; Chang Park and Barbara Kaye, “Expanding Visibility on Twitter: Author and Message Characteristics and Retweeting,” *Social Media + Society* (2019), accessed April 11, 2021, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/2056305119834595>.

⁴ Yini Zhang Yini Zhang, Dhavan Shah, Jordan Foley, Aman Abhishek, Josephine Lukito, Jiyoun Suk, Sang Jung Kim, Zhongkai Sun, Jon Pevehouse and Christine Garlough, “Whose Lives Matter? Mass Shootings and Social Media Discourses of Sympathy and Policy 2012–2014,” *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 24, no. 4 (2019): 182-202, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcmc/zmz009>; Nicole Ernst et al., “Favorable Opportunity Structures for Populist Communication: Comparing Different Types of Politicians and Issues in Social Media, Television and the Press,” *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 24, no. 2 (2019): 165–188, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161218819430>; Dilin Liu and Lei Lei, “The Appeal to Political Sentiment: An Analysis of Donald Trump’s and Hillary Clinton’s Speech Themes and Discourse

attention to topics that politicians consider important, while using an “impulsive” fashion of tweeting, Donald Trump-style.⁵ It also legitimized the violation of community rules and ethics on Twitter.⁶ The spread of hate speech, extremism, or racism can be perceived as the norm.⁷ Some of the tweet-communication tactics have been compared to those employed by Goebbels.⁸ Thus, the vaccination discourse on Twitter should be closely studied in order to understand how this issue is being questioned. High emotionality and negativism may distort the bigger picture.

We also considered the fact that the political discourse in Ukraine is extremely conflictual and presupposes a permanent confrontation of political actors, “competition between party elites and financial groups,” “chronic and rather acute contradictions between the branches of government (...) principal leaders,” a constant struggle for “defining reality,” and the high protest potential of society.⁹ The escalation of the political elites’ struggle occurs under the influence of exogenous factors, such as electoral campaigns.¹⁰ However, such a

Strategies in the 2016 US Presidential Election,” *Discourse, Context & Media* 25 (2018): 143-152. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dcm.2018.05.001>.

- ⁵ Jayeon Lee and Weiai Xu, “The More Attacks, the More Retweets: Trump’s and Clinton’s Agenda Setting on Twitter,” *Public Relations Review* 44, no. 2 (2018): 201-213, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2017.10.002>; Andrew Ross and Damian Rivers, “Discursive Deflection: Accusation of “Fake News” and the Spread of Mis- and Disinformation in the Tweets of President Trump,” *Social Media + Society* 4, no. 2 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305118776010>.
- ⁶ Andrea Schneiker, “Telling the Story of the Superhero and the Anti-Politician as President: Donald Trump’s Branding on Twitter,” *Political Studies Review* 17, no. 3 (2019): 210–223, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1478929918807712>.
- ⁷ Carole McGranahan, “A Presidential Archive of Lies: Racism, Twitter, and a History of the Present,” *International Journal of Communication* 13 (2019): 3164–3182; Brian Ott, “The Age of Twitter: Donald J. Trump and the Politics of Debasement,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 34, no. 1 (2017): 59-68, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15295036.2016.1266686>.
- ⁸ Pérez-Curiel and Naharro, “Political Influencers”.
- ⁹ Iryna Matsyshyna, *Konstruiuvannia politychnoi realnosti Ukrainy* [Ukrainian Political Reality Constructing] (Vinnytsya: TOV "Tvory", 2019); Sergiy Derev'ianko, “Termin “referendum” u novitnomu ukrainskomu politychnomu dyskursi [The Term ‘Referendum’ in Modern Ukrainian Political Discourse],” *Political Management* 1-2 (2012): 34-42; Roman Gryniuk and Tetyana Nagorniyak, “Sociocultural Ukraine Discourse and Political Practice during 2013 – 2016,” *Political Life* 1 (2016): 88-96; Galyna Zabolotnya, “Discourse of Power in Modern Ukraine: Legitimation’s Features of Political Authorities at Regional Level,” *Visnyk Dnipropetrovskoho universytetu* 23, no. 3 (2013): 26-33; Eduard Shcherbenko, “Ukrainian Political Discourse and the Problem of Civil Religion,” *Naukovi zapysky Instytutu politychnykh i etnonatsionalnykh doslidzhen im. I. F. Kurasa NAN Ukrainy* 3 (2017): 156-168.
- ¹⁰ Volodymyr Kipen, “Socio-political Discourse on Development and Future Ukraine,” *Political Life* 3 (2018): 90-95, <https://doi.org/10.31558/2519-2949.2018.3.15>.

confrontation between political actors does not lead to “national cohesion,” or to “democratization according to European standards.”¹¹ An unstable and extremely conflicting Ukrainian political discourse, accordingly, can produce negativism and hate speech. This means that during the pandemic, attention may not be paid to ways of overcoming it, but to speculation on the topic of vaccination, and on attempts to destroy political competitors. Ukrainian politicians were trying to build the image of a savior. To identify their political strategies, the archetypes of the “country saviors” were analyzed.

It should be noted that difficulties always arise when trying to classify the archetype of the “country savior.” This is because in the modern interdisciplinary discourse there is no single definition of the concept of “hero.” Joseph Campbell singles out several types of hero, who can metamorphose as: man, warrior, lover, ruler, savior, and saint.¹² In the context of our research, we focus on reviewing the hero as a *savior*. In the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, political leaders are integrating the idea of saving the population and building a new society when discussing vaccination. In this particular case, it is difficult to distinguish the line between the hero-ruler, the hero-savior, or the hero-saint. All of them combine cosmogonic myths (feats, death) and the initiation ritual (birth, adventures, searches). An explanation of the process of forming the image of a hero is provided by Jung’s analytical psychology within the concept of archetypes.¹³ All archetypes are integrated in the image of a hero, and they are the basis for the explaining and understanding the world, symbolizing “the unconscious independence of a person.” Archetypes allow a person to rethink modern events in relation to the past. This also affects the perception of the savior image, who in the “metamorphoses of the gods” appears as a pioneer in new, non-standard situation.¹⁴

The provisions of analytical psychology were further developed in scientific discourse, in the understanding of semantic sociocultural codes. It should be especially noted that, within the framework of political discourse and communication studies, there have been several attempts to classify existing political leaders based on archetypes and mythological ideas. Thus, Darren Kelsey views mythology as a discursive practice of journalistic storytelling. In his opinion, the archetypal image of the hero is represented in messages about

¹¹ Dmytro Arabadzhiev and Tetyana Serhienko, “The Main Directions of Development and the Formation of the Political System of Ukraine in the Modern Hybrid War,” in *Suchasna ukrainska derzhava: vektory rozvytku ta shliakhy mobilizatsii resursiv* [The Modern Ukrainian State: Vectors of Development and Ways to Mobilize Resources] (Odesa: PNPU imeni K. D. Ushynskoho, 2020); Lyubomyr Khakhula, “Development of State and National-Democratic Processes in Ukraine 1991–2014: Polish Public and Political Discourse,” *Ukrainskyi istorychnyi zhurnal* 1 (2015): 92–107.

¹² Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with Thousand Faces* (Novato: New World Library, 2008).

¹³ Carl Gustav Jung, *Essays on a Science of Mythology* (Kyiv: State Library of Ukraine for Youth, 1996).

¹⁴ Carl Gustav Jung, *Symbols of Transformation* (Moscow: ACT, 2008).

the struggle for democratic power and “ideological mechanisms of populist discourse.”¹⁵

Literature Review

Political communication during the COVID-19 pandemic has been closely monitored. In this sense, political leadership is one of the prominent topics. Cases from different countries are studied, with a preference for Western ones. As a rule, Trump administration’s response is used to show an ineffective communication during the pandemics, where lack of transparency and withholding publication of important information were extremely harmful.¹⁶ Some American politicians were perceived as “inattentive to the crisis and ineffective in their policy responses.”¹⁷ Meanwhile, the political elites’ reaction towards the health crisis has

“an enormous impact on the behavior of the general population, the public seeks information and advice about the problem and politicians may be an important source of it.”¹⁸

Additionally, the type of leadership may be a significant factor in dealing with any pandemic; several types may be not effective at it.¹⁹ Based on the experience of several countries dealing with the pandemic, some recommendations are also provided, for instance; “being first; being right; being credible; expressing empathy; promoting action; and showing respect.”²⁰ There are also some observations about the effectiveness of vaccine communication strategies. As a rule,

¹⁵ Darren Kelsey, “Hero Mythology and Right-Wing Populism: A Discourse-mythological Case Study of Nigel Farage in the Mail Online,” *Journalism Studies* 17, no. 8 (2016): 971-988, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2015.1023571>.

¹⁶ William S. Hatcher, “A Failure of Political Communication Not a Failure of Bureaucracy: The Danger of Presidential Misinformation During the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *The American Review of Public Administration* 50 (2020): 614 - 620.

¹⁷ Daryl V. Watkins and Aaron D. Clevenger, “US Political Leadership and Crisis Communication During COVID-19,” *Cogent Social Sciences* 7 (2021), doi: 10.1080/23311886.2021.1901365.

¹⁸ Karsten Böhmer, “#QuédateEnCasa, Because It’s not Just Flu: The Impact of Cognitive Authorities’ Communication on Human Behaviour During the Pandemics,” *Diskuze v psychologii* 2 (2020): 33-47.

¹⁹ Abi Sriharan et al., “Public Health and Health Sector Crisis Leadership During Pandemics: A Review of the Medical and Business Literature,” *Medical Care Research and Review: MCRR* (2021), doi: 10775587211039201.

²⁰ Darren G. Lilleker, Ioana A. Coman, Milos Gregor and Edoardo Novelli, *Political Communication and COVID-19* (London: Routledge, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003120254>.

doctors and scientists are perceived as more persuasive.²¹ Celebrities may offer additional help with vaccination promotion.²²

Of course, political discourse matters as well, and discourse analysis “could predict political behaviors.”²³ Populism, the reality of post-truth, and the alternative facts may cause trust decline; the leaders’ statements, mass media articles about COVID-19, restrictions, and the importance of quarantine may not reach their goals.²⁴ The same was true with vaccination, as public trust is extremely important for persuading people.²⁵

Nowadays political discourse in many countries is polarized. Political consensus is essential for imposing civil rights restrictions. In democratic societies, several political actors interact when dealing with measures on countering the pandemic. Thus, it is important to have a degree of cooperation between government, opposition, and experts. Oftentimes, “the lack of cooperation and coordination amongst several stakeholders” is the rule.²⁶ Besides, some political figures may use the pandemic for self-promotion and for attacking opponents. This may also lead to public mistrust and skeptical attitudes towards vaccination. Additionally, some political elites may question the pandemics, medical facts, and statistics. In the United States of America, this caused “deleterious outcomes, including partisan cueing, conflicting science, downplayed threats, emotional arousal.”²⁷ We must mention that there have been some

²¹ Jon Green, David Lazer, Matthew Baum, James Druckman, Ata Uslu, Matthew D Simonson, Katherine Ognyanova, Adina Gitomer, Jennifer Lin, Roy Perlis, Mauricio Santillana and Alexi Quintana, “The Covid States Project: A 50-State COVID-19 Survey. Report #36: Evaluation of COVID-19 Vaccine Communication Strategies,” OSF Preprints, February 10, 2021, doi: 10.31219/osf.io/d36nh.

²² Mohamad Alppy Valdez and Rendro Dhani, “Celebrity Endorsers in Government Communication: A Plausible Option amidst Uncertainty and Declining Public Trust,” *Jurnal Komunikasi Ikatan Sarjana Komunikasi Indonesia* 6, no. 2 (2021): 242-255.

²³ Daryl V. Watkins and Aaron D. Clevenger, “US Political Leadership and Crisis Communication During COVID-19,” *Cogent Social Sciences* 7 (2021), doi: 10.1080/23311886.2021.1901365.

²⁴ Terry Flew, “The Global Trust Deficit Disorder: A Communications Perspective on Trust in the Time of Global Pandemics,” *The Journal of Communication* 71 (2021): 163-186.

²⁵ Ronald Umali Mendoza, Manuel M. Dayrit, C. Alfonso and Madeline Mae Ong, “Public Trust and the COVID-19 Vaccination Campaign: Lessons from the Philippines as It Emerges from the Dengvaxia Controversy,” *The International Journal of Health Planning and Management* 36, no. 6 (2021): 2048-2055.

²⁶ Felisbela Lopes and Olga Estrela Magalhães, “COVID-19: A Pandemic Managed by Official Sources Through Political Communication,” *Comunicação e sociedade* 40 (2021): 17-32.

²⁷ Sarah E. Gollust, Rebekah H. Nagler and Erika Franklin Fowler, “The Emergence of COVID-19 in the U.S.: A Public Health and Political Communication Crisis,” *Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law* 45, no. 6 (2020): 967-981, doi: 10.1215/03616878-8641506.

effective examples, where both mass media and government actions led to people’s abidance, despite economic hardships and political crisis.²⁸

Consequently, both approaches need to be discussed: political leadership and political discourse. Different cases should be studied, especially countries with polarized political landscapes, where some political elites may use topics as COVID-19 and vaccination for manipulation or propaganda. In this respect, an additional approach may help: the analysis of political emotions and archetypes. Politicians may use emotions to influence public attitudes towards public health emergencies, but scholars have discovered that different parties (government and opposition) may use different emotions (fear, hope) to construct an image of the crisis.²⁹ “War metaphors” may help leaders to influence public opinion during the COVID-19 crisis.³⁰ Nevertheless, cases from different countries show us that emotional attitudes may have some specifics: sentiment analysis of political tweeting in India shows that almost 90% of leaders shared positive or neutral information.³¹ Thus, COVID-19 may provide political scientists with some additional data which contradicts the previous research about political communication, especially on Twitter, which was mainly characterized as negative, polarized, etc. Some observations from non-Western countries may help us to see the bigger picture of social network usage in politics. Additionally, contemporary research highlights the effectiveness of archetypes in political marketing and branding.³² Building a political image using archetypes creates universal semantics and helps shaping the political discourse. Messages on social networks are one of the forms of communication in which a certain archetype is clearly traced, aimed at forming the image of the hero among the audience.³³ The concept of “cyberhero,” a person who uses information capabilities to achieve a global goal (peace, social justice, environmental protection, etc.) is being formed in the context of the

²⁸ Jad Melki et al., “Media Exposure and Health Behavior during Pandemics: The Mediating Effect of Perceived Knowledge and Fear on Compliance with COVID-19 Prevention Measures,” *Health Communication* 37 (2020): 586-596.

²⁹ Tobias Widmann, “Fear, Hope, and COVID-19: Strategic Emotional Rhetoric in Political Communication and its Impact on the Mass Public,” *SSRN Electronic Journal* (2020), <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3679484>.

³⁰ Eunice Castro Seixas, “War Metaphors in Political Communication on COVID-19,” *Frontiers in Sociology* 5 (2020), doi: 10.3389/fsoc.2020.583680030xvqFDEFRTTT.

³¹ Kaur, Manpreet, Rajesh Verma and Sandeep Ranjan. “Political Leaders’ Communication: A Twitter Sentiment Analysis during COVID-19 Pandemic,” *Jurnal the Messenger* 13, no. 1 (2021): 45-62.

³² Kakhaber Djakel, “Political Branding Tools in Post-Soviet Countries and Archetypes of Jung. Case of Georgia,” *Myśl Ekonomiczna i Polityczna* 1, no. 68, (2020): 106–121, [https://doi.org/10.26399/meip.1\(68\).2020.04/k.djakeli](https://doi.org/10.26399/meip.1(68).2020.04/k.djakeli).

³³ Vitor Machado, Pedro Pimentel and Bruno Garcia, “An Antihero’s Journey: The Political Campaign of Jair Bolsonaro and the use of Archetypes on Facebook,” *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 20, no. 58, (2021): 36-51.

Internet space.³⁴ These transformations of the image of the savior also span over the political field.

In this paper, we decided to combine these three approaches to analyse the Ukrainian case. Firstly, it is understudied, and it may give us some new data about different types of political leadership, the spread of negative emotions and images. Secondly, the Ukrainian political discourse has been extremely polarized, as there has been little consensus among pro-Russian and pro-Western forces. Additionally, there are constant tensions between pro-Western political parties. All sides agreed about the danger of COVID-19, however, vaccination issues caused extremely harsh discussions. Ukraine did not produce its own vaccine; it was dependent on international help. Furthermore, an older question was raised: Russia or the West? Consequently, three ideas, related to the three types of modern political leadership in Ukraine, were put forward. The first one was to encourage more cooperation with Russia, despite the war in Donbas and the Crimea annexation, and antielitism (accusations towards the government, who refuses to cooperate). A second approach consisted of trying to inspire people and the international community of Ukraine supporters – as providers of vaccine. The third approach emphasized political patronage, and intentions to provide help independently.

To understand how these three types of political leadership exist against the backdrop of an extremely polarized political discourse, we used the concept of *archetypes* and evaluated the level of negativism in each case.

In what follows, the paper is structured into three sections. Firstly, we have formed a corpus of statements made by three politicians regarding the vaccination discourse, using the actantial model of Algirdas Julien Greimas, and we highlighted the constructive units of their messages. Secondly, we established the functionality of these structural units. We found out that every politician creates and promotes his own myth about vaccination through one's vaccination discourse, and it was important for us to establish the plot structure of these myths. In the third place, we discovered the functional characteristics of the "country savior" archetype of every politician, promoted through the myth of vaccination, which involves the manipulation of public opinion and the spread of negativism.

As a result, we describe the manner of building political discourse in a state with a multiparty system, where different political actors compete for public attention, while presenting different types of leadership. When speaking about vaccination, they present opposite positions on the issue, speculating about the idea of saving the nation. We also propose a formal methodological

³⁴ Dana Klisanin, "The Hero and the Internet: Exploring the Emergence of the Cyberhero Archetype," *Media Psychology Review* [Online] (2012), accessed April 11, 2021, <http://mprcenter.org/review/cyberheroes2/>.

approach for negativism evaluation, using our own dictionaries in Ukrainian and Russian, and a combination of semantic and narrative analyses for political archetypes reconstruction.

Empirical Data and Methodology

The analysis of political texts that we carried out during the first stage of our research is associated with the narrative study of the French semiotic school. The approaches of Roland Barthes, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Judith Butler were challenged by Algirdas Julien Greimas’ structuralism. His concept of “structure semantics” is very similar to Vladimir Propp’s. Propp’s work, *The Morphology of a Fairy Tale*, in which a review by Levi-Strauss was written, has initiated a new direction of research in semiotics.³⁵ The most reasonable continuation of Propp’s plot mythological model was the book by French semiotics A. J. Greimas, “Structural semantics.”³⁶ He designed a linguistic methodology, which is mainly based on Propp’s conception. However, Propp analyzed a statement as a structure, and Greimas paid attention to the structure itself as he was interested in the connections between structure and discourse. Greimas discovered actors and their participation in the discourse construction. According to the scholar, discourse is “language as taken on by the person who is speaking.” Since this article focuses on the way political actors construct archetypes, it used Greimas’ concept.

In this article, we analyze politicians as actants who have their own communication channels, their own audiences, and form their own vaccination storyline in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Three actantial categories, proposed by Greimas, “*subject-object*,” “*sender-addressee*,” “*supplementary means-enemy*” allow the actant to form plots in the form of myths and build certain archetypes. Analyzing the structures formed by the semantic units of statements, Greimas proved that it is possible to establish models with semantic content in this way.³⁷ In this article, the *structure* is the vaccination discourse through which the vaccination myth originates. We have established a model for the archetype of the “country savior” following the study of this structure, through the role of actants (politicians) and establishing the story structure of vaccination myths. We also measured the presence of negative content (total quantity and intensity) in their vaccination discourse and followed the relationship between the indicators of negative content and mythical models that were formed to promote the archetypes of saviors.

³⁵ Vladimir Propp, *The Morphology of a Fairy Tale* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003).

³⁶ Algirdas Greimas, *Structural Semantics* (Moscow: Akademicheskii proyekt, 2004).

³⁷ Greimas, *Structural*.

The messages of three leading Ukrainian politicians on Twitter were analyzed. Viktor Medvedchuk, Volodymyr Zelensky, and Petro Poroshenko are the leaders of the most popular political parties, represented in the Ukrainian Rada [The Opposition Platform – For Life (OPFL), Servant of the People, and European Solidarity], and the main political decisions are divided amongst these parties.

The OPFL party was formed in 2014 thanks to the rebranding of the Party of Regions, which during the 2013-2014 revolution was severed of its then-leader, Viktor Yanukovich, former President of Ukraine who was forced to flee to Russia. For the OPFL, Russia is not an aggressor of Ukraine. On the contrary, the party's program is based on close cooperation with Russia. There is not a single mention of any Russian aggression, like the occupation of Crimea, or Donetsk and Luhansk regions, in their program. Viktor Medvedchuk is the most active promoter of using the Russian-made Sputnik vaccine for inoculating the Ukrainians. During a trip to Crimea at the end of 2020, Medvedchuk said that he was inoculated with this vaccine together with his wife and son.³⁸ He is known not only as a co-chairman of the OPFL party, an oligarch, a member of the Rada, or a friend of Vladimir Putin, who is a godfather of Medvedchuk's child, but also as a politician charged today with "high treason and attempted plunder of national resources."³⁹ Today he is detained after his attempt to flee Ukraine three days after the start of the Russian invasion in February 2022.

Volodymyr Zelenskyy is the leader of the Servant of the People Party, which has a centrist ideology. The chairman of the political party, Oleksandr Korniyenko, quoted on the main page of the party's website, clearly sets the political tone:

"Ukrainian centrism is a political ideology in Ukraine, which provides for a search of a compromise between various groups of the population, in order to avoid a split of the country along political, ethnic and linguistic grounds, rejecting left and right extremism, and focusing on key areas of development: peace, institutions, investments, infrastructure, and democracy."⁴⁰

³⁸ Radio Svoboda, "Medvedchuk zнову зустрівся з Putinym u Moskvі [Medvedchuk meets Putin in Moscow]," *Radiosvoboda.org*, October 6, 2020, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-putin-medvedchuk/30878659.html>.

³⁹ Ukrinform, "Measure of Restraint for Medvedchuk in Treason Case Changed to Personal Recognizance," *Ukrinform.net*, May 11, 2021, <https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-politics/3343457-measure-of-restraint-for-medvedchuk-in-treason-case-changed-to-personal-recognizance.html>.

⁴⁰ Sluha narodu, "Ideolohiia partii [The Party's Ideology]," *Sluga-narodu.com*, 2021, <https://sluga-narodu.com/about/ideology/>.

The party’s name is associated with the omonymous television series, in which Volodymyr Zelenskyy played the main role. The role of the country’s president helped him win the presidential elections in 2019, as most of the the country’s population already perceived him as president by the time of the elections. That same year, the party won the early general elections. The success of the Servant of the People party is primarily associated with Volodymyr Zelenskyy himself, who became a representative of a non-politically affiliated, mostly anti-establishment group of the population. His statements and speeches were mostly populist. A similar tendency to manipulate sensitive topics for society appeared in the Ukrainian coronavirus- and vaccination-related discourse. Volodymyr Zelenskyy and his party actively communicated with world leaders and vaccines’ producers. However, coronavirus was not their main topic.

Petro Poroshenko is the leader of the European Solidarity Party. In the 2019 Parliamentary elections, the party overcame the 5% electoral threshold and took the fourth place, receiving twenty-seven parliamentary seats. The party’s ideology is presented both in the name of the party itself and in the official program, and it concerns the idea of solidarity: “Our values and beliefs are based on the idea of solidarity, on which a free solidary society should be built.”⁴¹ Being in the opposition, the party actively criticizes President Zelenskyy and his party. The topic of vaccination is raised by the politicians of “European Solidarity” in their discourses in which they criticize the authorities.

It can be noted that the modern political parties of Ukraine act in a context marked by political pluralism and the possibility of fair competition for political influence on the development of the country. The vaccination discourse only confirms this as party brands, based primarily on the political leaders Victor Medvedchuk, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, and Petro Poroshenko, have their own relation to the topic of vaccination in Ukraine. The analysis of the political texts of the three political parties’ leaders helps both to identify the polarization of their views, and to find a strategy for building the archetype of the “country savior.”

The period of data collection for our analysis was between December 1, 2020, and June 30, 2021. This period includes a discussion around the possible use of the Russian vaccine in Ukraine, which actively began in December 2020 with the submission of the Opposition Platform – For Life Party, the negotiations on the supply of other vaccines, the import of the first batch of Covishield vaccine, and the start of the mass vaccination campaign in the country.

⁴¹ European Solidarity, Prohrama partii Blok Petra Poroshenka “Solidarnist” [The Program of Petro Poroshenko’s Block “Solidarity”], *Eurosolidarity.org* (2015), https://eurosolidarity.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/es_program.pdf.

During the specified period, the politicians published 1,603 tweets. Only thirty tweets were identified on Medvedchuk's account containing keywords related to vaccination or the fight against coronavirus; in Zelenskyy's – sixty-eight; and in Poroshenko's – 127 tweets.

To measure the negative content, a negativism dictionary was used, as well as a computer program that looked for matches with the dictionary. The dictionary includes all words with negative prefixes, verbs preceded by negative particles, as well as words that have a negative connotation or are used in a negative context, such as "struggle," "scam," "crisis," "difficult," etc.⁴² The indicator of negativism in the messages of politicians was calculated using the following formula: the number of matches with the dictionary divided by the number of sentences. To establish the intensity of negativism, the recorded words with a negative meaning were divided into two categories: low and strong intensity (in accordance with the meanings of these words). Seven subcategories were included in the "low intensity" category: "struggle," "minor violations," "disease," "misunderstanding/unconsciousness," "anxiety," "pity," "lack." They were complied with seven subcategories of "strong intensity:" "failure/inaction," "crime," "death," "incompetence," "fear," "despair," and "absence." Thus, the intensity of negativism was confined within certain meanings. For example, the texts are mainly about struggle (against the coronavirus, power, etc.) about failure, about minor irregularities, or about a crime and the like. The indicator of negativism intensity was measured using the formula: the number of words in a certain subcategory/the number of words with a negative meaning.

For instance, Zelenskyy's tweets were marked as mostly neutral. Only some of them contained negativism:

"#COVID19 is **not** a reason to **forget** about other diseases. Today is the World's TB Day. UA supported @UN's intention to **overcome** the disease epidemic by 2030. In UA the incidence of active TB decreased by 30% last year."⁴³

"Not," "forget," "overcome" were the words recorded in the dictionary.

As for the intensity of negativism, Zelenskyy's tweets were coded as of "low intensity:"

"Ukraine will help India to **fight** #COVID19 as it once helped us."⁴⁴

⁴² Nataliia Steblyna. *Tsyfrovizatsiia polityky v konteksti transformatsii suchasnoho svitoporiadku* [Politics Digitalization in the Context of Modern World Order Transformation] (Odesa: Phoenix, 2020).

⁴³ Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Twitter, March 24, 2021, accessed April 21, 2022, <https://twitter.com/zelenskyyua/status/1374621095467364354>.

⁴⁴ Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Twitter, May 7, 2021, accessed April 21, 2022, <https://twitter.com/zelenskyyua/status/1390714299446927360>.

“Fight,” not “fail” – the “low intensity” category of the vocabulary.

“Discussed **challenges** of today with @antonioguterres. Fair #COVID19 vaccine distribution is crucial.”⁴⁵

“Challenges,” not “failure” belongs to the “low intensity” category of the vocabulary. Regarding the semantic analysis for mythical models’ formulation, first we compiled a corpus of statements by the three politicians (through the platform *vicinitas.io*). The tweets containing keywords related to vaccination and the fight against the pandemic were considered: “medicine,” “medical,” “COVID,” “COVID-19,” “hospital,” “doctor,” “vaccine” (names of vaccines), “pandemic,” “health,” “WHO,” “COVAX,” “coronavirus,” “sick,” “patients,” “quarantine,” and “lockdown.” After that, a semantic analysis was carried out using two types of tokenization (a word and an expression). By the first type of tokenization, the most used lemmas/actantial categories were established. By means of the second type of tokenization, the actantial categories were visualized through word clouds, which helped to define the functionality of the most popular lemmas/actants within the mythical Greimas model. Ultimately, the plot structure of the “country savior” archetype that was promoted through the myth of vaccination was determined for each politician.

Let us see the two types of tokenization for Zelensky’s tweet. The first type is shown with the “||” mark, stop-words are crossed out, and the second type is highlighted in bold:

“||Thank|| you|| @vanderbellen|| for supporting|| Ukraine's|| sovereignty|| & territorial || integrity||. **Grateful|| that you ||agreed|| to help|| to speed up|| Ukraine's|| receipt|| of vaccine || under ||#COVAX.**”⁴⁶

As a result, the most popular lemmas were established via the analysis of the whole text corpus (Zelenskyy’s tweets about the vaccination). And the word clouds about the actantial categories were created (the vaccine, for example).

For the analysis, Python programs were designed: module *re* (regular expression) was used for regular expressions, instance.g.: “is not a reason” – “\w+ not \w+ \w+” while the library *TextBlob* was used for the lemmatization. The word clouds were created using the website *WordClouds*.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Twitter, April 21, 2021, accessed April 21, 2022, <https://twitter.com/zelenskyyua/status/1384893776523677696>.

⁴⁶ Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Twitter, March 12, 2021, accessed April 21, 2022, <https://twitter.com/zelenskyyua/status/1370338750195187713>.

⁴⁷ WordClouds.com (website), <https://classic.wordclouds.com>.

Analysis and Findings

Medvedchuk's messages contain the biggest amount of negativism (Table 1 – almost every sentence contains a negation). Poroshenko is in second place – 0.81, and the least negativism is found in Zelenskyy's messages – 0.45. Therefore, the topic of fighting a pandemic and vaccination is generally presented in a negative context. The representative of the authorities perceives the situation in a positive way, while the opposition mostly negatively. The intensity of negativism is shown in Table 1.

The indicators of negativism are also consistent with the indicators of its strong intensity: the largest ones are the average indicators of Medvedchuk, then Poroshenko, and the last – Zelenskyy. However, among Poroshenko's and Zelenskyy's messages, negativism of low intensity prevails. Unlike Medvedchuk, these two politicians are focused not on negative consequences that can no longer be changed ("loss," "incompetence," "death"), but on the struggle. "Disease" is placed second among politicians' tweets. Therefore, there is negative content, but in the context of overcoming certain obstacles, and providing attention to the sick people. Zelenskyy also refers to certain errors in perception, and to the understanding of the problem's scale, while also noting the lack of resources.

Poroshenko is more critical. "Crimes" are mentioned more often than minor offenses. There are more mentions of "failure/inaction." "Absence" prevails in Zelenskyy's tweets in regard to issue of resources, whereas Poroshenko is more optimistic in this sense and speaks of a "lack" of resources. As we can see below, this is because rendering assistance is a leading topic for the politician.

Instead, words meaning "loss," "crime" are dominating in Medvedchuk's messages. Consequently, the fight against the disease has been lost in this area, several crimes of various types have been carried out, and "incompetence" and "misunderstanding" of the situation have been demonstrated. Also, the difference between the meanings of "disease" and "death" is insignificant (0.04 - 0.03).

The high rate of negativism for Medvedchuk can be explained by the significant intensity of this type of content. We can also assume the attempts to deny all arguments for "the Western" vaccines' usefulness, and to question all the government's agreements with the international vaccine providers. Poroshenko's average indicator is determined by the fact that he sees a significant number of incorrect decisions, crimes and "failures" in the fight against the pandemic, but he still perceives the situation as something that can be solved, with the help of his own efforts. Zelenskyy's low rate is due to the fact that he is mainly focused on fighting and confronting the disease. Also, he practically does not see any irreparable shortcomings.

Now let us consider how these indicators correspond to the archetype of the savior found in the tweets of politicians. The most common lemmas are shown in Table 2. Let us analyze the actantial categories that form this archetype and consider each politician separately.

Victor Medvedchuk is a *savior-industrialist*. This type of hero sees the solution to the problem as organizing the production of the Russian vaccine in the country. He condemns the actions of the Ukrainian authorities. Let us analyze the actantial categories.

The words *vaccine* and *vaccination* are used as an unattainable dream since the only solution to the problem appears to be Russia’s Sputnik vaccine (more often mentioned – see Figure 1). Therefore, let’s combine the lemmas “vaccine,” “vaccination” and “Sputnik.” According to Medvedchuk, Sputnik is no worse than other vaccines, and it is one of the world-leading vaccination developments. Ukraine should take advantage of the “successful” Russian experience and set up its production. “Sputnik” is “a new technology, state control, jobs, tax payments, even the possibility of production for export.”⁴⁸ The politician does not react to the Ukrainian start of vaccination using the Indian Covishield, or to the supply of other vaccines. That is, there is no other alternative for Medvedchuk: only Sputnik is considered viable. Considerable attention is spent condemning the Ukrainian authorities, who refuse the opportunity to produce Sputnik in Ukraine (“refuse,” “authorities,” “Russia”). Accordingly, the functional purpose of the vaccine is to serve as a strong desire, which cannot be realized for political reasons.

The authorities are seen as an obstacle to overcome. Most of the attention in the messages is paid to the formation of a negative attitude towards the authorities. Certain characteristics can be seen on the word cloud: “criminal,” “narrow-mindedness,” “primitive,” “amateurish” and the like. Often there are lemmas “to approve” “decision” – it is said that the Government, in the opinion of the politician, should approve a decision on the production of the Russian vaccine, but does not. So, the functional purpose of this actantial category is to be a barrier on the way to accomplishing the strong desire.

People suffer in the tweets of Medvedchuk. Their health and life are under threat (the lemmas “health” and “death” are among the most used). The authorities are the cause of suffering: it is noted that they “commit a crime” against people, they act “against people,” they “do not think” about people. People are not portrayed as being able to resist or fight the pandemic on their own. Accordingly, their functional purpose is to be under threat of death, without being able to help themselves.

⁴⁸ Viktor Medvedchuk, Twitter, January 5, 2021, accessed April 21, 2022, <https://twitter.com/MedvedchukVV/status/1346422820436381697>.

Production (that is, vaccine production) is a proposed solution to the problem. It is noted that Ukraine should produce “its own vaccine” (the “own” lemma is among the most used). However, the “own” vaccine is precisely “Sputnik”. That is, no distinction is made between the Russian vaccine and “ours,” as Ukraine supposedly exists in a single space together with the Russian Federation. Also, in the word cloud there are featured the year-months’ names: “November,” “May,” “April.” This can be explained by the fact that Medvedchuk often uses expressions such as “if the authorities had made a certain decision in November, in May we would have [...]” Thus, the impression of a missed opportunity is reinforced. Therefore, the production of vaccines is a supplementary means in the speech of Medvedchuk; the production of Russian “Sputnik” should save people.

Ukraine is the country that is losing the opportunity to successfully solve the vaccine-production issue, and the country in which the situation is becoming catastrophic because of that (therefore, the actantial categories “Ukraine” and “people” are included in the relationship *sender-addressee*). To change the situation, the state must abandon the supposedly unrealistic offers of vaccines from other countries. Medvedchuk casts doubt on all the actions of Ukraine aimed at this, notes the uncertainty of the conditions and the result: “Ukraine is allegedly negotiating (...) Ukraine has no official agreements or contracts.”⁴⁹ The authorities and the Ministry of Health (these lemmas are among the most popular) prevent Ukraine from obtaining an “effective vaccine.” The politician does not abandon his attempts to solve the situation (the most used words are “vaccine,” “power,” “production,” “application,” “Sputnik”). Therefore, the functional purpose of Ukraine is to lose opportunities for helping its people.

We - the actantial category serves a double role: it points to the opportunities lost by Ukraine (“could produce,” “we are fighting against windmills,”⁵⁰ - “production,” “to produce,” “mills” are encountered several times), and demonstrates determination in upholding the interests of “our citizens,” an attempt to “preserve their health,” “protect our people” (“citizens,” “to force” are the most popular). Medvedchuk uses expressions such as “we will force the authorities,” “we will seek permission”. He says that his team is legally competent, so they will be able to defend its position. Since quantitatively the second role is more prevalent, we will consider this category in this role – the functional purpose of the “we” actant is to achieve the production of vaccines in Ukraine, overcoming all obstacles.

Now let us create the actantial model, presented in the posts of Medvedchuk and shown in Figure 1. The “we” actant is the *subject* achieving

⁴⁹ Viktor Medvedchuk, Twitter, December 18, 2021, accessed April 21, 2022, <https://twitter.com/MedvedchukVV/status/1339890591589654529>.

⁵⁰ Viktor Medvedchuk, Twitter, January 12, 2021, accessed April 21, 2022, <https://twitter.com/MedvedchukVV/status/1348942063736385538>.

the cherished desire – “vaccine/Sputnik,” using a supplementary means – its production. The main enemy is the Ukrainian Government. Ukraine is defined as the *sender*, because although Medvedchuk’s tweets mention the opportunities the country is losing, they demonstrate the goals that can still be achieved. This sender can act to assist the *addressee*, namely the people, who experience suffering.

The hero who creates this mythical model (the archetype of the savior-industrialist) sets his goal on returning Ukrainian production in a single space with the Russian Federation, using Russian technology. This may explain the significant percentage and the intensity of negativity in his messages. After all, in order to implement the desired goals, it is necessary to decry all the actions of the authorities aimed against the pandemic. In promoting this archetype, Medvedchuk resorted to pressure: the authority is criminal, people are dying, Ukraine is losing opportunities, there is no effective vaccine, and no vaccine production.

Volodymyr Zelenskyy is a *savior-inspirer*. Zelenskyy’s hero is convinced that Ukraine can overcome all obstacles, including COVID-19, and his main role is to help the country, to inspire it.

Ukraine/country – we will unite these two lemmas, because “country” is used as a synonym for Ukraine. For Zelenskyy, Ukraine is active:

“Ukraine will help India fight #COVID19 as IN once helped us.”⁵¹

“#COVID19 is not a reason to forget about other diseases. Today is World TB Day. UA supported @UN’s intention to overcome the disease epidemic by 2030.”⁵²

“#Ukraine can be proud of its struggle against #COVID19. Our COVID19 mortality rate is lower than in many countries of #Europe. We managed to reduce the average weekly number of cases three times and start to restore our medicine #covid19_Ukraine #forum_ukraine.”⁵³

According to Zelenskyy, Ukraine has “sovereignty” and “integrity” (these lemmas are among the most widely used). Zelenskyy speaks on behalf of Ukraine, but he remains somewhat on the sidelines: “Germany remains a reliable friend and partner for Ukraine,” “Cooperation with Finland is important for Ukraine,” “Ukraine is glad to hold a conference on reforms,” etc. It is

⁵¹ Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Twitter, May 7, 2021, accessed April 21, 2022, <https://twitter.com/ZelenskyyUa/status/1390714299446927360>.

⁵² Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Twitter, March 24, 2021, accessed April 21, 2022, <https://twitter.com/ZelenskyyUa/status/1374621095467364354>.

⁵³ Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Twitter, February 8, 2021, accessed April 21, 2022, <https://twitter.com/ZelenskyyUa/status/13586922458101309454>.

important that Ukraine is represented as an entity that acts and overcomes obstacles independently:

“We are building a country that is constructing (...) roads, bridges, hospitals, schools, kindergartens, stadiums (...). We are building a service country. Country in a smartphone. It’s transparent, fast, comfortable.”⁵⁴

In Zelenskyy’s tweets, COVID-19 is something to fight with. Accordingly, both COVID-19 and the pandemic play the role of the enemy in his messages (“to fight” and “to counteract” – among the most common words). The reports demonstrate determination in this “difficult time of the pandemic.” Firstly, because “Ukraine has something to be proud of in counteracting COVID-19,” Ukraine has managed to “begin to restore our medicine.” Secondly, in Zelenskyy’s tweets we find calls for the world community to unite and “respond effectively to the pandemic,” as well as gratitude (“thank you” is a common word phrase).⁵⁵ Therefore, although COVID-19 is certainly the main opponent in Zelenskyy’s tweets, he admits that Ukraine is fighting it together with the whole world.

The *vaccine* is a supplementary means of fighting against COVID-19 that Ukraine should receive. The Ukrainian President notes the importance of “speeding up the delivery/receipt” of it (these word phrases – “vaccine delivery,” Ukraine should “receive the vaccine” – are the most often mentioned), and appeals to world leaders with requests for help, or thanking for their help (“thank you” is again one of the phrases used most often). Vaccination is not only a solution to the problem, but also a way to emphasize that Ukraine is important to the world. The reports say that it is “one of the priority countries.” Zelenskyy reiterates that many world leaders are helping Ukraine. It seems as if the world is united in its desire to help Ukraine. Moreover, for Zelenskyy, the “fast delivery of the vaccine” is “a strong political signal of support for Ukraine.”⁵⁶ Therefore, the vaccine is not just a supplementary means. With its help, he demonstrates confidence that these means will be received by Ukraine, and the main adversary will be defeated.

We. The range of activities in this category is to create, build, initiate, demonstrate readiness (the most common words are “ready,” “to provide,” “to start,” “to create”). Taking care of “health” (the most popular noun) is also important. Therefore, the functional purpose of this actantial category is defined

⁵⁴ Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Twitter, May 20, 2021, accessed April 21, 2022, <https://twitter.com/ZelenskyyUa/status/1395323215518605313>.

⁵⁵ Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Twitter, February 8, 2021, accessed April 21, 2022, <https://twitter.com/ZelenskyyUa/status/13586922458101309454>; Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Twitter, March 30, 2021, accessed April 21, 2022, <https://twitter.com/ZelenskyyUa/status/13767819713853849604>.

⁵⁶ Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Twitter, January 29, 2021, accessed April 21, 2022, <https://twitter.com/ZelenskyyUa/status/1355156571316219904>.

as the creation of possibilities. After all, it is not about a completed activity, but about its beginning. The Ukrainians and Ukraine should complete it. For example:

“75% of Ukrainians do not engage in regular physical exercise (...) due to the lack of accessible sports infrastructure. We started to create it.”⁵⁷

Note that in this regard, the functional purpose of this category correlates with the functional purpose of the category “Ukraine,” which is an independent subject, actively working in the presence of Zelenskyy.

Health is what Zelenskyy wishes to other people and what needs to be achieved in Ukraine. In Zelenskyy’s messages, it is health that has the greatest value (“wish,” “strong” are the words that are most often encountered). In his messages, he wishes only health and nothing else. There are also several tweets where Zelenskyy presents his program “Healthy Ukraine” – and here the politician demonstrates the need to take care of all categories of people. Thus, health has the function of an object of desire.

Gratitude. In order to establish the meaning of this lemma, we identified those to whom Zelenskyy appealed with gratitude. Among them are the leaders of many countries of the world, the head of the WHO, the Indian Institute of Vaccine Manufacturing and its head, or the CEO of Pfizer. All of them can be seen on the word cloud. Therefore, the actantial category associated with this lemma will be called “world community.” Accordingly, the purpose of this actant is the *addressee* who is thanked for what was done.

Now let us reproduce the actantial model in Figure 2. The actantial category “we” creates conditions for “Ukraine” to be able to take care of itself (that is, “we” is the *sender* and “Ukraine” is the *subject* that must act). In a pandemic situation (the adversary), this means taking care of health (a desired *object* that the *subject* must achieve). In this case, vaccine acts as a supplementary means. And the world community is the *addressee* to whom the sender “we” is addressing with gratitude.

Petro Poroshenko is a *savior-patron*. In his actantial model, the hero is promoted; he helps the country, supplies material aid and equipment to hospitals so that doctors can treat people.

Ukraine is a country that needs protection, salvation (“to protect” is the most used verb). Among the nouns confirming this are “life” and “health.” Poroshenko equates protecting Ukraine from Russian aggression with defending it against a pandemic. Ukraine is also the recipient of the necessary funds from Poroshenko himself and his party: “This year, our powerful team (...) has done a

⁵⁷ Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Twitter, June 22, 2021, accessed April 21, 2022, <https://twitter.com/ZelenskyyUa/status/1407273094247587844>.

lot to save the Ukrainian from a pandemic.”⁵⁸ Therefore, the function of Ukraine as an actantial category is to demand protection, which can be provided by Poroshenko’s team.

Vaccine. For Poroshenko, the vaccine situation is a way to show the ineffectiveness of the authorities’ actions. He emphasizes the need for an “effective vaccination system,” he speaks about the “chaotic actions of the authorities” in this regard, about “incorrect,” “opaque” procurement, low vaccination rates, lack of “high-quality,” “safe” vaccines (nouns such as “procurement,” “supply,” “provision” – are often mentioned). Against the background of the ineffective Government, which “disrupted” the vaccination, Poroshenko appears as a person who knows what needs to be done. The politician also suggests introducing an additional minister to the Government, discussing the situation at different levels, and the like. He notes his contacts with international partners, and he thanks for their assistance. To cast himself as an influential figure, Poroshenko uses the verb “to demand” (it is the most used verb), and he appeals to specific political institutions. The functional purpose of the “vaccine” actant is to be a *supplementary means* with which Poroshenko could solve the problem more efficiently.

We. This category exists in the context of assistance, donation: “we were engaged in the search and delivery of oxygen concentrators to Ukraine,” “we are collecting 10,000 food sets,” “we could not stand aside.”⁵⁹ In the same way, Poroshenko points to his initiatives: “we have introduced a draft resolution,” “we are ready to vote.”⁶⁰ Therefore, in the word cloud, “doctor,” “concentrator” (in the meaning of “oxygen concentrator”), “plan” (the “anti-COVID plan” proposed by Poroshenko) are among the most used. Another common occurrence is gratitude to doctors. Doctors are often identified with the warriors who defend Ukraine on the front. Therefore, the leading function of the actantial category is to help doctors and people.

People and (a) *person* also need protection and help, as in the case of the “Ukraine” lemma. It is noted that people’s lives are under threat (“life,” “help,” “protection” are the most common lemmas). Poroshenko calls out the Government, which “mocks” and “left people without medicines, without

⁵⁸ Petro Poroshenko, Twitter, January 10, 2021, accessed April 21, 2022, <https://twitter.com/poroshenko/status/1348206877914648581>.

⁵⁹ Petro Poroshenko, Twitter, January 3, 2021, accessed April 21, 2022, <https://twitter.com/poroshenko/status/1345730378913509376>; Petro Poroshenko, Twitter, April 17, 2021, accessed April 21, 2022, <https://twitter.com/poroshenko/status/1383390517430419467>; Petro Poroshenko, Twitter, April 25, 2021, accessed April 21, 2022, <https://twitter.com/poroshenko/status/1386256103672012804>.

⁶⁰ Petro Poroshenko, Twitter, April 26, 2021, accessed April 21, 2022, <https://twitter.com/poroshenko/status/1386678959442694147>; Petro Poroshenko, Twitter, April 26, 2021, accessed April 21, 2022, <https://twitter.com/poroshenko/status/1386678959442694147>.

oxygen, without beds.”⁶¹ In order to emphasize the helplessness of people, the most vulnerable categories are mentioned: the elderly, “people from vulnerable groups,” “needy,” and “the poorest.”

However, if Ukraine, which also needs protection, has a politician and his team to “save” it, then doctors have to “save people’s lives.” This is the fundamental difference between these categories. Poroshenko helps doctors to assist people. However, sometimes the tweets also point to helping people (providing “grocery packages,” “support,” as well as exerting influence at the legislative level). Therefore, the function of “people” as actants is defined as the *addressee* of doctors’ and Poroshenko team’s help.

Pandemic/COVID-19. We will combine these two lemmas since they have the same functional purpose. Poroshenko emphasizes the need to “fight,” “counter,” “overcome” the pandemic. Since the Government is not effective here, he demands the resignation of the Minister of Health, hinting that the coronavirus outbreak in the Carpathian region took place because the Government did not close the ski resorts. However, his focus is more on the battle against coronavirus than on the fight against the authorities. The pandemic is the main enemy. Thus, the politician notes that his political force has developed the “Anti-COVID-19 Plan,” presented it in the regions and “offered it to the authorities for implementation.”⁶² Poroshenko refers to helping hospitals and doctors. Thus, the functional purpose of the actantial category is to be Poroshenko’s opponent in the matter of protecting Ukraine and Ukrainians.

Hospitals, not doctors, appear in Poroshenko’s tweets most often because the politician writes about the equipment transfers needed to fight the coronavirus (“to transfer” and “concentrators” are most widely used lemmas). He names specific institutions which received assistance: hospitals in Toretsk, Cherkasy, Kyiv, etc. Therefore, Poroshenko must help doctors so that they carry out the “heroic feat of saving people.”⁶³ Helping hospitals is in this case the main topic, departmental hospitals are mentioned here only twice, and the politician demands to make them available to the population. Consequently, the main purpose of hospitals is to receive help from the politician and his team in order to help the sick Ukrainians.

Let us reproduce the actantial model in the posts of P. Poroshenko, shown in Figure 3. In this model, the *subject* is the actant “we” (Poroshenko’s team). The main enemy is a pandemic, and the *supplementary means* is a vaccine.

⁶¹ Petro Poroshenko, Twitter, February 10, 2021, accessed April 21, 2022, <https://twitter.com/poroshenko/status/1359574780559695875>.

⁶² Petro Poroshenko, Twitter, May 5, 2021, accessed April 21, 2022, <https://twitter.com/poroshenko/status/1389934243665620995>.

⁶³ Petro Poroshenko, Twitter, February 26, 2021, accessed April 21, 2022, <https://twitter.com/poroshenko/status/1365257015468130308>.

Since the authorities' actions on vaccination are condemned, a willingness to negotiate independently is demonstrated. Tips are given to improve the situation. The target is Ukraine, which needs protection. Another category that a politician turns to is composed of hospitals and doctors. However, if Ukraine is passive and just needs help (and therefore is an *object*), then hospitals and doctors having received equipment and other things from Poroshenko, at their turn, must save people (therefore, the category of "hospital" is the *sender*, and the "people" – the *addressee*).

Discussion

In times of pandemic, social media is not only a source of information about COVID-19 and vaccination, but it can also spread fear and misinformation. Since the coronavirus has been the most popular topic, politicians have been actively using it to advance the agenda and improve their own image. As a result, it is the messages of politicians on social networks which can become a source of manipulation, fear, and the spread of negative stereotypes. In order to cast themselves using the image of the savior of the people, tweeters may escalate the situation, hushing up achievements or exacerbating existing problems. Therefore, studies that analyze the use of social networks in political communication, measuring individual components, and modeling its structure, are important.

This study demonstrates that political tweeting on Ukrainian COVID-19 related issues contains a significant amount of negativism. At least half of the COVID-19 tweet sentences may contain negative lemmas. It is also possible to measure the intensity of negativism, whose intensity correlates with its occurrence. Of course, such a situation is understandable, since the problem faced by humanity is a large-scale and complex one. On one hand, society must understand what the true situation is, but on the other hand, escalation can lead to panic spreading, as well as to unwillingness to act against an allegedly insurmountable problem. So, in the case of Ukraine, the amount of negativism can be explained by the alignment of political forces: the representative of the Government has the least negativism, and the opposition has the most. In this sense, the Ukrainian situation is interesting, since the leader does not use Twitter to attack competitors. Nevertheless, the archetypes that move through the mythical models found in the texts of politicians can better explain both the quantity and the intensity of negativism.

We have established that every Ukrainian politician has one's own strategy for promoting the archetype of the country savior. On one hand, it creates a certain image of national heroism; on the other hand, it leads to the broadcast of

completely different scenarios: apocalyptic (Medvedchuk – savior-industrialist), triumphal (Zelenskyy – savior-inspirer), altruistic (Poroshenko – savior-patron).

The situation in the country is seen as the most critical by Medvedchuk, since the authorities refuse to cooperate with the Russian Federation, and this would lead to disaster. For this politician, the existence of Ukraine under the protection of Russia is the only correct decision. Therefore, the modern, European integration intentions of the state (including the supply of vaccines) are questioned, and their effectiveness is disputed. This explains the high concentration of negativity in his messages and its strong intensity. Speaking about production, Medvedchuk considers the mood of his electorate and its nostalgia for the Soviet Union, in which “all factories and plants worked,” and citizens were provided with jobs.

Zelenskyy, on the contrary, has a small amount of negativity in a weak intensity. This is because the mission of the inspirer is to help the country overcome obstacles, including the pandemic. The circumstances in which the hero exists are favorable (for the world community, Ukraine is a priority, there are constant negotiations on the supply of vaccine, the country itself is recovering, and a program is being created for people that will improve their health). Of course, under such circumstances, he avoids significant problem points, which blurs the full picture.

Poroshenko’s task is to maintain the lost image of the country’s leader and talk about the help for its people. To promote this image, Poroshenko needs a weak government, but even so, its mistakes are not supposed to be fatal. After all, if everything is lost, the help of the patron will not be needed. What Zelenskyy and Poroshenko have in common is that they are more focused on fighting rather than losing. However, Zelenskyy heroizes Ukraine, which thanks to him can solve problems on its own. For Poroshenko, Ukraine is passive and needs protection. In return, doctors are heroized, who, having received help from the politician, become stronger and can rescue people.

Our research has confirmed previous observations that social networks, including Twitter, are used to spread negativism, which in turn can contribute to the construction of a discourse of hatred, hostility, and antagonism. The different realities represented by the actantial models assess differently the effectiveness of vaccines and the vaccination campaign, the fight against COVID-19, and the steps necessary for this fight. This can lead to further polarization of society, which revolves more and more around social networks⁶⁴. However, the spread of negativism, the use of Twitter to attack opponents, and the construction of “out-groups” in the case of the Ukrainian political communication is not universal and depends on actantial models, the

⁶⁴ Simon Kemp, “Digital 2021: Global Overview Report,” 2021, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-global-overview-report>.

chosen archetype, and the advance strategy into social thinking to form the image of the hero.⁶⁵

The matrix of negativism proposed in the study, as well as the semantic analysis algorithm, can be used for the further study of political communication in social media. However, some aspects have their limitations. It is important to consider that, although Twitter is an area convenient for computer analysis, in Ukraine it is mainly used for communication with the global community, as only 6% of Ukrainians use Twitter. For internal communication, Facebook and Instagram are more popular. Therefore, our study is referring to a picture that is broadcast outside the country, and not inside it. Further research may show if these images match.

Additionally, the case study used in the paper may have some disadvantages. Some unique characteristics of Ukrainian political discourse and traditions of political communication may not work in other circumstances. For instance, Twitter posts may have a symbolic code and could transmit not only archetypes, but other images within other political strategies.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to analyze the Ukrainian case. Of course, the specifics of the Ukrainian political regime should be considered. The state is not a consolidated democracy, so some assumptions about political communication in the Western countries may not be useful here. Additionally, we should mention its' position somewhere between the Soviet past and a European future. Some Soviet traditions of political communication still prevail in the interactions between the government, political parties, and the society. Moreover, after the Russian aggression, the political discourse in Ukraine has become more polarized and fragmented. All these factors make the state and its political discourse unique.

However, as far as we used archetypes to understand the manner of discourse construction, some general observations may be provided. When direct communication between political leaders and society is possible, bright,

⁶⁵ Nicole Ernst et al., "Favorable Opportunity Structures for Populist Communication: Comparing Different Types of Politicians and Issues in Social Media. Television and the Press," *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 24, no. 2 (2019): 165–188, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161218819430>; Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell, "Introduction: The Sceptre and the Spectre," in *Twenty-First Century Populism*, eds. Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 1–14; Paromita Pain and Gina Chen, "The President Is in: Public Opinion and the Presidential Use of Twitter," *Social Media + Society* (2019), accessed April 11, 2021, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/2056305119855143>.

simple images are important. An altruistic hero, who promises to solve all the problems, may be extremely popular. This is why we may find the three types of country saviors in political discourses of other countries. Greimas’ actantial models, used in the paper, confirmed universal ways of the savior’s construction. Simple schemes were used in the case of vaccination, where politicians were trying to show their effectiveness as leaders. By using these models, the rhetoric of some other political figures may be analyzed, and the political regime or the political culture do not matter in this case.

Additionally, the proposed types of country saviors may be found in other political discourses as well. The image of the savior-industrialist, with his care about the working class, vivid anti-elitism, and pragmatism, is used by populists all over the world. The classic opposition is built: the savior, a common guy, who steps up and helps offended people against the corrupted selfish authorities. It works not only for vaccination issues. For instance, the actantial model of savior-industrialist was used by Donald Trump. Therefore, Medvedchuk’s model just may be added to the collection.

As for Zelenskyy, his presidency has changed his typology. He used some antielitism as well during the pre-election campaign. However, afterwards, the image of savior-inspirer has become more useful. He just steps in and provides mostly positive images in order to calm down the society and to encourage people to move forward. Here, an enemy does not seem harmful, so there is no danger, like with in the case of a savior-industrialist. The savior-inspirer connects only with friends and does not notice any criticism. For the Ukrainian political landscape this technique is relatively new, as far as highly polarized political discourse causes more aggressive ways of communication. We may suppose that the emergence of the savior-inspirer in the political arena may be understood as an indicator of political stability. If a political leader has the majority in Parliament and a relatively high rating, he or she may use a more calm and positive way of communication. Additionally, the savior-inspirer is an observer, not a participant. He does not confront an enemy. This factor also testifies for a more stable and confident way of leadership and may be used for credible political forecasts (the position of observer may be the evidence of stability, whereas the position of subject, who is going at war, may help to predict some political turbulence).

And lastly, the savior-patron, represented by Poroshenko, has been widely used all over the world since the ancient times. The actantial model may help to recognize such a type – the “Good Samaritan,” who cares about everyone in need. He just provides people with some resources. In the reality of COVID-19, these are oxygen concentrators and masks. In pre-pandemic times, he may have cared about retired people, children, refugees. In a reality powered by distrust towards the establishment, this kind of action may help some figures to promote themselves.

Thus, despite of some peculiarities of Ukrainian case, we managed to find a few general characteristics, and common techniques of political image design, which may be exploited by political leaders globally. In addition, the combination of computer and narrative analysis which is proposed in the paper may be used to develop the usage of the actantial models in the political discourses of other countries.

Annexes

Table 1. Negativism intensity

Meaning	Low intensity of negativism								Strong intensity of negativism								Other
	struggle	violations	disease	misunderstanding	anxiety	pity	lack	average	failure/inaction	crime	death	incompetence	fear	despair	absence	average	
Medvedchuk	0.15	0.01	0.04	0.1	-	0.01	-	0.06	0.25	0.15	0.03	0.1	0.03	-	-	0.11	0.13
Zelensky	0.43	-	0.17	0.02	-	0.02	-	0.16	0.04	-	0.02	-	0.04	-	0.04	0.04	0.21
Poroshenko	0.39	0.03	0.2	0.04	-	0.03	0.04	0.12	0.18	0.08	0.02	0.02	0.02	-	0.01	0.05	0.11

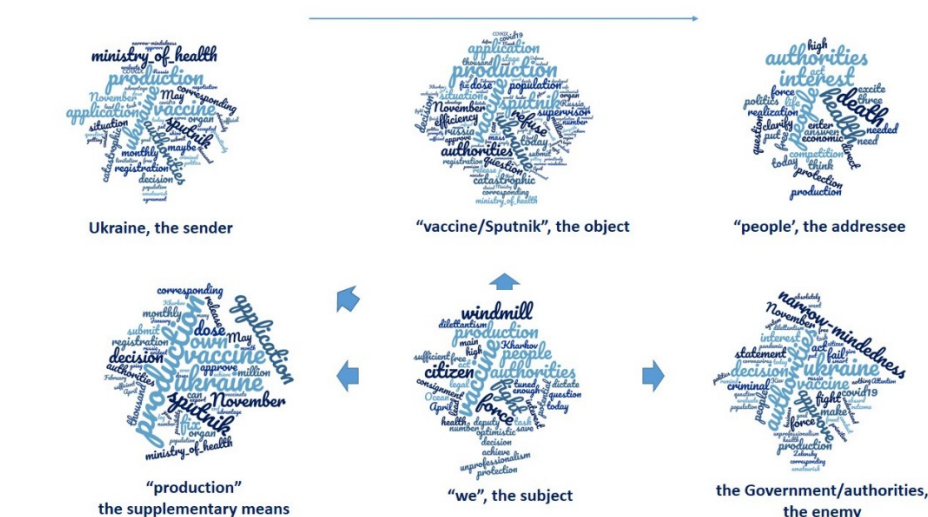
Source: author's own elaboration.

Table 2. The results of semantic analysis of Ukrainian politicians' tweets. The most common lemmas

Victor Medvedchuk	Volodymyr Zelenskyy	Petro Poroshenko
Vaccine (39)	Ukraine (33)	Ukraine (69)
Sputnik (9)	COVID-19 (16)	Vaccine (67)
Authorities (21)	Vaccine (16)	We (47)
Person (12)	We (16)	COVID-19 (32)
Production (20)	Health (10)	Person (27)
Ukraine (16)	Gratitude (8)	Pandemic (26)
We (13)	Country (8)	Hospital (21)

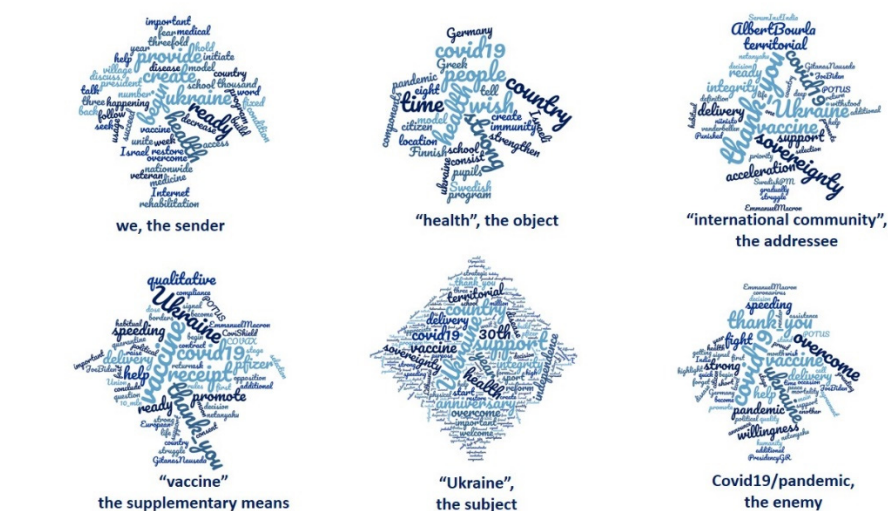
Source: author's own elaboration.

Figure 1. Actantial model in the tweets of Victor Medvedchuk



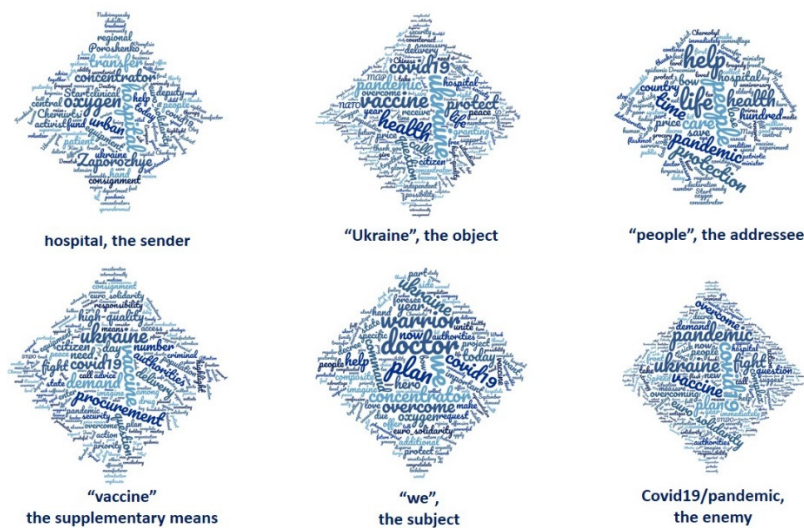
Source: author's own elaboration.

Figure 2. Actantial model in the tweets of Volodymyr Zelenskyy



Source: author's own elaboration.

Figure 3. Actantial model in the tweets of Petro Poroshenko



Source: author’s own elaboration.