



Offensive and defensive strategic narratives in Ukraine during the war with Russia

METHODS

- **Dataset for the narrative analysis:** data collected by the CAT-UA volunteering project for the daily analysis of the war communication.
- Only **communication in the Ukrainian information space** was studied.
- **Study period:** February 24 – April 4, 2022 (initial stage of the war).
- **Posts from** Facebook, Twitter, V Kontakte, Instagram, Telegram, YouTube, TikTok.
- **Messages** determined by the CAT-UA where additionally coded and then processed qualitatively.

GENERAL STRUCTURE OF THE STRATEGIC NARRATIVE

STRATEGIC NARRATIVE IS A STORY TOLD BY THE STATE AND ITS CITIZENS FOR WIN THE WAR. IT HAS SUCH STRUCTURE:

1. DISPOSITION (WE – THEY – ALLIES – OTHERS)

Boundaries that separate friends, enemies, allies and rest of the world.

2. NORMATIVE ORDER (REASONS AND AIMS OF THE WAR FOR THE SIDES)

Reasons of each side to enter the war, and goals they are going to achieve.

3. MYTHS (STORIES ABOUT THE WAR)

Real and fictional stories about the war and participation of each side in it, and about the consequences.

4. CALLS FOR ACTION (FOR ALL INVOLVED)

What all the sides have to do under the such circumstances.



UKRAINIAN NARRATIVE

DISPOSITION

1. UKRAINIANS

It is a story about total popular support for the army and secondarily to the political authority, despite the exhaustion from the war and the unworthiness of some Ukrainians. The Ukrainian army is positioned as well-prepared, highly-motivated, and humane. Pro-Russian Ukrainians are not usually mentioned as an internal enemy, it is believed, that most of them overcome the Russian outlook when faced the shelling. More harmful are rather some passive people or people who make a profit from the war.

2. RUSSIANS

Inadequate war criminal Putin serves as an impersonation of all Russians, obsessed with the war, and illiterate, who believe in the myths about their powerful army and propaganda. So, all Russians are at fault for the war. The popular slogan is: 'Our russophobia is insufficient. At the same time, the Russian army is presented as poorly prepared and motivated, soldiers cause laughter. The same applies to unconvincing Russian propaganda.

3. ALLIES

A narrative about strong support goes with the message of indecision of the western pantywaist, disconnected from reality. There is a scale of support: from the best friends (Britain, Poland, USA, and so on) to the uncertain supporters like Hungary.

4. OTHER COUNTRIES

Each of them is contradictory in his own way. For example, the criminal regime in Belarus is contrasted with its people, Moldova and Georgia are shown as unreliable allies, and China as a potential Russian ally.

NORMATIVE ORDER

1. UKRAINIANS

Ukraine protects itself and the rest of the world against totalitarianism so needs support. Ukraine doesn't want the war, but will never pass on Putin's demands. If Ukraine fall, Russian aggression will spread to the rest of Europe, and the Third world war will start.

2. RUSSIANS

Putin aspired to rebuild the greatness of Russia, but he misjudged and now going to lose or destroy the world. The first perception of the Russian goal was the establishment of the pro-Russian authority in Ukraine, but after the Bucha crimes, another idea of his goal spread: to eliminate the Ukrainians.

3. WESTERN COUNTRIES

Collective West disregarded the emergence of Russian imperial revanchism and now has to support Ukraine and so prevent the Third world war. Its politics of reconciliation was a fault, but it still doesn't do its best to support Ukraine. At last, if the truth for western countries is more important than money, as they usually say, so they have to act.

4. OTHER COUNTRIES

Not enough data.

MYTHICAL PART. THE GENERAL PLOTLINE

THE GENERAL STRUCTURE OF SUCH WAR IS SIMILAR TO TOLKIEN'S 'LORD OF THE RINGS'. SUCH A WAR REMOVES ALMOST ALL OLD DISAGREEMENTS AND CHANGES SOCIETY

The full-scale Russian invasion started exactly as the allies told. After Putin's speech, full of fakes, Russian troops attacked from Russian and Belarus territories. The armed forces of Ukraine were ready, and from the very first days inflicted heavy losses on Russia. The key drivers of successful resistance were: own and provided by allies military equipment, modern tactics and management style, and foremost, a huge will to win. As a result, pictures of the destroyed Russian equipment spread all over the world, and the planned blitzkrieg failed. Ukrainians have broken the myth about the «second army in the world».

The war turned out to be a battle between good and evil. Even people who were pro-Russian before, changed their minds when saw the Russian cruelty. Russians use «human shields», torture captured civilians and militaries, rape women and men, loot, use forbidden weapons, and turn to nuclear terrorism. This caused waves of

refugees to the western regions of Ukraine and the European countries. Some civilians are tired of the war but still stand against Putin. In the free part of Ukraine, they join the volunteering movement and support the army with money. On the occupied territories they hold meetings against Russia.

The world was horrified by this brutality and started to help Ukraine, though not enough. Russian elites became toxic in the western world. Whereas Zelenskyi became very popular. Sanctions destroy the Russian economy.

As a result, the Ukrainian army repulsed Russians from Northern Ukraine and counterattacks in other directions. Russians are building up forces to attack the East.

Meanwhile, life is going on despite the war: people get married, give birth, and launch a business. The war wraps itself into every part of Ukrainian life.

MYTHICAL PART. MICRO-MYTHS

- MAIN VICTORIES.

- The expulsion of Russians from Kyiv, Chornobaiivka (repeated bombarding of Russian military equipment),
- legendary «Ghost of Kyiv» (pilot),
- the sunken warship in Berdyansk,
- explosions in Belgorod (probably caused by Ukrainian Special Forces),
- extermination of numerous Russian generals.

- FUNNY SYMBOLIC MYTHS.

- tractor pulling the Russian tank,
- hopniks (street bullies) who get another tank,
- gypsies who stole the APC,
- old woman who brought down the drone by the jar of pickles,
- another old woman who poisoned occupants by pies,
- pigeons who spread the biological weapon (jokes on the Russian propaganda),
- so-called Tik-Tok army of Kadyrov.

- MAIN TRAGEDIES.

- Mariupol (siege, death by thirst, starvation, and shelling),
- Bucha and neighborhood cities (killing of civilians)
- Chernihiv (siege and shelling).

- OTHER SYMBOLS.

- the phrase «Russian warship, go f**c yourself»,
- the phrase «Good evening, we are from Ukraine»,
- «I need ammunition, not a ride» (known Zelenskyi`s statement),
- shows and concerts in the shelters and metro stations.

CALLS FOR ACTIONS

1. FOR UKRAINIANS

Ukrainians are called to struggle and support the army by all available means, which means joining the Ukrainian army or Territorial defense, donate the army, reveal traitors. For authorities – make no concessions and don't believe Putin. For all the people – cancel everything Russian including culture and goods. Meanwhile, to support the economy and refugees, follow information hygiene, and pray for victory.

2. FOR RUSSIANS

Wishing death to Putin and all Russians gradually replace all other wishes. At the beginning of the war, civil Russians were called to hold rallies against the war, hide their sons to avoid their mobilization, and «get the hell away from us». But after the war crimes in Bucha and other cities of northern Ukraine became known, the only wishing of death remained.

3. FOR WESTERN COUNTRIES

Calls for military and other support for Ukraine, including giving new weapons to Ukraine, the introduction of peacekeepers, and tough sanctions against Russia.

4. OTHER COUNTRIES

Not enough data.



PRO-RUSSIAN NARRATIVE

DISPOSITION

1. UKRAINIANS

At the beginning of the full-scale invasion Ukrainians were shown as the «brotherly people», and only «Nazis» who seized power looked to Russia as to enemy and enforce an army to fight. The army was shown as weak and consisted of marginals and drug addicts. But over time, while the army turned out to be highly motivated, all Ukrainians began to be displayed as «infected by Nazism».

2. RUSSIANS

Putin has the second most powerful army in the world and total popular support in Russia and «people republics». Russian soldiers are humane. Only a «fifth column» inside Russia still can't refuse the «western lifestyle» and so oppose the war.

3. ALLIES

They are shown as very weak countries, even weak Ukraine can manipulate them. Their governments try to weaken Russia, but their people and business just want to stop the war, cancel sanctions, and buy Russian oil and gas.

4. OTHER COUNTRIES

Not enough data.

NORMATIVE ORDER

1. UKRAINIANS

Ukrainians are displayed as enemies who want to destroy Russia and as brothers who want to stop the war.

2. RUSSIANS

It is the most controversial part with different, often contradictory goals. Denazification of Ukraine was proclaimed in the beginning, which turned into deukrainization in the later articles of Kremlin ideologists. More global aims are to prevent the Third world war and, at the same time, to destroy NATO. Conspiracy theories suggest another goal – to destroy biological and nuclear weapons allegedly developed in Ukraine by the USA. Also, a peacekeeping goal is to «protect Donbas», and, at the same time, it is believed that Russia has a right to keep Ukraine in its sphere of influence.

3. WESTERN COUNTRIES

Russian propaganda has failed to articulate unequivocally the goals of western countries in the studied period: according to the first version, the collective West is an initiator of the war that quarreled Ukraine with Russia; according to the second, Ukrainian Nazi involved West to the war by deception and blackmailing.

4. OTHER COUNTRIES

Not enough data.

MYTHICAL PART. THE GENERAL PLOTLINE

PRO-RUSSIAN STRATEGIC NARRATIVE IS MISSIONARY, «CRUSADE», WITH THE AIM OF LIBERATION OF «HOLY CITY» FROM «INFIDELS»

Russian army started special operations for the denazification and demilitarization of Ukraine. It is not a war, so, Russia is not an aggressor. Russians use only high-precision weapons, destroying military infrastructure and centers of «nationalist battalions», while civilians are safe and appreciate humanitarian aid. Ukrainian air forces were destroyed from the beginning, so Russia prevails in the sky.

At the same time the offensive of the «Donetsk peoples` Republic» and «Luhansk people's republic» was started, aimed to liberate their territories occupied by Ukraine, and exterminate the Nazis who shelled Donbas for eight years.

After the successful demilitarization of Northern Ukraine, Russia withdrew its troops from this region, which should contribute to the peace negotiations.

NATO and the EU, especially Anglo-Saxon countries, took the opportunity and introduced sanctions that harm their initiators more than Russia. Also, they are pumping Ukraine with weapons. Russia answered adequately: now all unfriendly countries must pay for the gas in rubbles, while Moscow is deepening its ties with Beijing. West is afraid of a direct war with Russia because Kremlin is ready to use a nuclear weapon.

As a result, tasks of the operation are carried out, and only the humanism of the Russian army delays its ultimate achievement because Ukrainian Nazis use «human shields». Unfortunately, at that time Ukrainian extremists torture Russian-speaking people, shelling Donbas and staging fakes about Russian troops.

MYTHICAL PART. MICRO-MYTHS

- MAIN VICTORIES.

- enforcing the Ukrainian government to refuse the Euro-Atlantic course,
- destroying Ukrainian air and naval forces,
- resumption of the water supply for Crimea,
- destroying «Azov» base in the Mariupol theatre,
- «greetings» to Biden by shelling the Lviv region while he was nearby in Poland.

- FUNNY SYMBOLIC MYTHS.

- Zelensky records his speeches from Poland,
- Zelensky played on the piano by its penis,
- repetition of some other messages of Ukrainian opposition used before the war.

- MAIN TRAGEDIES.

- Mariupol (cruelty of «nationalist battalions»),
- zombification of Ukrainian people, who, as it turned out, don't already love Russians.

- OTHER SYMBOLS.

- symbols 'Z', 'V', and 'O' on the military equipment,
- the outstanding celebration of the anniversary of the Crimea annexation with Putin's speech.

CALLS FOR ACTIONS

1. FOR UKRAINIANS

There are no calls except looking down – «it's your duty, my beauty», as Putin said before the war. Also, in the beginning, the Ukrainian army was called to take power in the country and make a peace with Russia, but soon it became ridiculous.

2. FOR RUSSIANS

To disregard the sanctions.

3. FOR WESTERN COUNTRIES

Also, to look down – to lift sanctions, to abandon the military support of Ukraine, as well as the attempts to cancel Russian culture, to pay for the gas in the ruble.

4. OTHER COUNTRIES

Not enough data.