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**AMERICAN SOCIAL MEDIA  
ON THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR:  
A MULTIMODAL ANALYSIS**

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**Abstract**

This research focuses on political narrative about the Russia-Ukraine war in American social media. It aims to investigate the type and configuration of multimodal semiotic resources used to present the events of this war and shape their perception by the audience, primarily American; *The New York Times* Telegram channel coverage of the 2022 Russian invasion as a case study. What kind of semiotic resources do American social media deploy to construct the narrative about the war? What are the dominant post formats, how they deploy information about the Russia-Ukraine war and construe its perception: the concepts of the WAR, of UKRAINE as a victim of aggression and a fighter for independence, of RUSSIA as a terrorist-state, and of their ALLIES and OPPONENTS? Theoretically, this study is underpinned by a cognitive-semiotic, political linguistic and multimodal approach. In political media narrative, storytelling shapes perception of war realities: it frames and reframes the readers' construal of the world, ascribes connotations to facts and events. A multimodal narrative involves different semiotic resources—verbal, graphic, audial, and cinematographic (in video). The configuration of these heterogeneous signs in a particular Telegram channel's post defines its influence as predominantly rational or emotional. The findings show that the following post formats are typical for *The New York Times* Telegram channel: image followed by text and link to another site (the most frequent); gallery (a gallery of images) and quote (a quotation with its source/author as the title) (less frequent); video and audio (rarely used). They serve to accentuate, elaborate, and extend the information in the post. I argue that Telegram posts together with users' emoji-reactions are a specific interactive genre of a multimodal political discourse. Emojis realize both pragmatic and cognitive functions: on the one hand, they are effective instruments to measure users' reaction; on the other, they contribute to meaning-making by evaluating and making salient the concepts described. The dominance of rational and verified information in *The New York Times Telegram* channel creates the true image of Russia's genocidal WAR against Ukraine and provides a fair assessment of related concepts.

**Key words:** interactive discourse, multimodality, political Telegram channel, Russia-Ukraine war, semiotic resource.

## 1. Introduction

In 2022, the Russia-Ukraine war has become one of the most important issues on the global agenda that triggered a wide information campaign reporting current news from the front. Media all over the world, in the USA in particular, demanded instruments for a wide coverage of news that would truthfully and objectively reflect current events and reach the widest possible audiences. Telegram

channels have become such a tool that offers an opportunity to reach unlimited amount of subscribers, sending posts directly to their phones. After the beginning of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022, the New York Times (NYT) responded to this challenge by launching (March 12<sup>th</sup>) a Telegram channel devoted to the news coverage of the Russia-Ukraine war with essential news, photos and videos (<https://tigrm.eu/channels/@nytimes>). The NYT Telegram channel posts from February to October 2022 serve as a case study for this present research.

Communication via Telegram channels is a form of public interaction of the admin who is the only one entitled to post messages (the 'addressee') and anonymous users (the 'addressors'). Recently, Telegram, a 4.0 style communication service, has become one of the most popular communication platforms in all spheres, especially related to education, art, business, finance, marketing, etc. (Herrero-Solana & Castro-Castro, 2022). Compared to print media, Telegram gives media discourse a unique advantage of interactivity as each public message receives immediate reaction in the form of emojis.

Until recently, the discourse of Telegram channel has not received due attention of researchers. In this present study, I aim to investigate how political media narratives shape the perceptions of the war. To reach this aim, I will focus on

- the issues of multimodal semiotic resources deployed by Telegram channels to present the events of the Russia-Ukraine war in various post formats;
- how multimodal narratives construct discourse-generative concepts—the WAR, UKRAINE as a victim of the unprovoked aggression and a fighter for independence, RUSSIA as a terrorist-state, and their ALLIES and OPPONENTS;
- types of information deployment in different formats of multimodal political discourse of Telegram channel;
- the users' construal of the world as revealed through their emoji reactions.

The framework of analysis is based on cognitive-semiotic and multimodal approaches in political linguistics. A multimodal narrative of Telegram channels involves different sign systems of meaning making—verbal, graphic, aural, and cinematographic (in video). Various ensembles of these heterogeneous signs—a word, an image, a sound, and a video—in a particular Telegram post helps users to form meaningful opinions and defines the influence of the post. I will argue that polysemiotic Telegram posts together with users' emoji-reactions are a specific interactive genre of a multimodal political discourse. Telegram posts and reactions jointly construct the image of Ukraine—a fighter for its independence—in the construal of the world of the English-speaking reader.

## 2. Methodology and framework

This present analysis of political multimedia discourse is underpinned by a cognitive-semiotic (Divjak et al., 2020; Krysanova, 2019), political linguistic (Groth, 2019), and multimodal approaches (Kress, 2010; Moschini & Sindoni, 2022; O'Halloran, 2011).

Discourse is a cognitive–communicative–linguistic gestalt, a three-aspect unity: a cognitive aspect (the construal of ideas and beliefs), a social-pragmatic aspect (language—user relations in different context), and a linguistic one (the use of language signs) (Shevchenko, Gutorov, 2019, p. 304).

According to the multimodal vector of Telegram channel analysis in this paper, “discourse” stands for any form of sign use manifested as text in a broad semiotic sense. This includes language, visual text properties (layout, letter type, cartoons, drawings, photos, color, headlines, titles, subtitles, captions, tables, figures, footage, etc.), hypertext, emoji, and other semiotic signs used in audio and video. As van Dijk argues,

*This concept of discourse may include combinations of sounds and visuals in many hybrid multimedia discourses, for instance, in movies, television, cell phones, the internet and other channels and carriers of communication (Dijk, 2008, p. 116).*

Political linguistics focuses on the study of language in the political domain. Political media cover the news from various official and unofficial sources:

*We can thus define a political narrative as one that emerges from a formal political forum, such as a parliament, a cabinet, party meetings or political demonstrations, or as narrative produced by politicians and public officials in the course of their duties. Another possible approach is to note the contents of the narrative or the conclusions that may be drawn from it. If these contain themes that are considered “political,” such as power relations and collective decision-making or compromise, the narrative might be defined as political, even if it was generated outside official political framework (Shenhav, 2006, p. 247).*

In multimodal digital media discourse, meaning-making is a complex process that depends on the information supplied by different semiotic resources, social context of perception, and the end user’s personal experience. In this present analysis, neither resource—textual, audial, visual—will be viewed as dominant or subordinate for the formation of meaningful opinions, their storage in the construal of the world, or their transformations. Rather the meaning is a gestalt jointly constructed by each semiotic resource. As Groth (2019, p. 4) argues,

*Narrative in reference to political processes is not excluded but is understood as coconstitutive. Accordingly, not just the level of state institutions but also everyday practices, the reception of political narratives by the broader public and the individual or collective mediation of narratives are important.*

What are the dominant post formats used to construct the concepts of the WAR, of UKRAINE, of RUSSIA, and of their ALLIES and OPPONENTS? In the NYT Telegram channel, they are a single image or a gallery of images, a link to another site, a video, a quotation or a text, and a headline (Post Formats, n.d.). Headlines are different in their visual presentation (the use of color or underlining, large letter type when the event is considered to have higher news value, etc.). In a broader perspective, layout differences may also communicate a different “tone” in news reports (Dijk, 2008, p. 164).

A cognitive-semiotic vector of this present multimodal analysis determines the fact that different semiotic resources and post formats are able to make individual elements of information prominent due to different clusters or ensembles of Telegram post formats. As Lakoff and Turner (1989) claim, there are several main types of information deployment in multimodal discourse: accentuation, elaboration, extension, questioning, and combining. Later they were built on by Zhabotynska and Slyvka (2020, pp. 123-124) and read as follows:

*Accentuation is providing ‘visuality’ of the entity described in the main text. Elaboration is providing information about an additional property of the entity described in the main text (X1 and X2). Extension is providing information about a new entity contiguous and congruent with the one described in the main text (X and Y). Questioning is providing information about a new entity contiguous but incongruent with the one described in the main text (X but Y). Combining is providing information about a new entity noncontiguous with the one described in the main text ((X) and (Y)) (Zhabotynska & Ryzhova, 2022, p. 120).*

In Telegram channel as an interactive genre, the scope of meaning-making means includes not only semiotic resources, common for multimodal media-discourse in general, but also provide feedback in the form of emoji. Lately, emoji has become an effective interactive means of Telegram channels. Emoji reactions—hearts, hands, faces, etc.—are marks under the text that allow users quickly and without words express their attitude to the message.

Traditionally, emoji is defined as a way of expressing emotions, i.e. a pragmatic resource. I hypothesize that emojis perform a cognitive function, they signal to users which content to choose and how to evaluate it. On the one hand, most people do not have time enough to read texts and make preferences themselves; rather they follow the choices of the herd:

*So we use others as a helpful shortcut. A filter. If a book is on the best-seller list, we're more likely to skim the description. If a song is already popular, we're more likely to skim the description. If a song is already popular, we're more likely to give it a listen. Following others saves us time and effort and (hopefully) leads us to something we're more likely to enjoy (Berger, 2016, pp. 53-54).*

On the other hand, emojis are a kind of expression of “the wisdom of the crowd”. They impose a certain assessment on the reader: “Social influence only works when other people’s opinions or behaviors are observable” (Berger, 2016, pp. 58-59). This explains, among other things, the increased number of emoji reactions on the information about political leaders and celebrities.

In this present paper, I will argue that emojis realize both pragmatic and cognitive functions: on the one hand, they are effective instruments to measure users’ reaction; on the other, they contribute to meaning-making. Emojis help users choose interesting content acting as a rating. Emojis add to the evaluation of the concepts described, they perspectivize them and make salient, thus changing the user’s construal of the world.

Presently, emojis are not limited to simple hearts or hands and their scope is in progress. The NYT Telegram channel uses a limited number of emoji reactions: a red heart, thumb up, thumb down, thinking face, and crying face that have fixed meanings. A classic red love heart emoji ❤️ is used for expressions of love (Red Heart, n.d.); a thumbs-up gesture 👍 as a rule indicates approval (Thumbs Up, n.d.); a thumbs-down gesture 👎 also known as ‘bad’ or ‘dislike’, indicates disapproval (Thumbs Down, n.d.); a ‘thinking face’ emoji, a yellow face 🤔 with furrowed eyebrows looking upwards with thumb and index finger resting on its chin, is used to question or scorn something or someone (Thinking Face, n.d.); and a ‘crying face’ emoji, a yellow face 😭 with raised eyebrows and a slight frown, shedding a single, blue tear from one eye down its cheek, may convey a moderate degree of sadness or pain (Crying Face, n.d.).

### 3. Results and discussion

From a pragmatic point of view, Telegram channel is an interactive genre of online communication of the anonymous sender and the collective addressee (the admin and the end user), who share information on the topic of the channel. What makes this narrative specific, different from other discourses?

#### 3.1. The New York Times Telegram channel

The sender. The sender’s functions are limited and authorized by the NYT. The admin (or admins) is personally unknown to the addressee, though the latter is well aware of the scope of admin’s functions and post topics.

The content. The information delivered in the channel comes from the Times journalists who provide witness accounts, interviews, and breaking news about the Russia-Ukraine war. Telegram has often been criticized as a platform where misinformation spreads easily, partly due to the lack of content moderation (Herasimenka et al., 2022). However, professional news outlets, to which the NYT belongs, “adhere to the standards and best practices of professional journalism, with known fact-checking operations and credible standards of production including clear information about real authors, editors, publishers, and owners” (Neudert et al., 2019, p. 6). The NYT channel emphasizes the veracity and authenticity of all news; it maintains the policies of strict verification of its sources of information:

### *How We Verify Our Reporting*

*Our team of visual journalists analyzes satellite images, photographs, videos and radio transmissions to independently confirm troop movements and other details.*

*We monitor and authenticate reports on social media, corroborating these with eyewitness accounts and interviews (How we verify our reporting on the Ukraine war, 2022).*

The addressee. The NYT is a messaging platform with more than 100 000 subscribers and half a billion active users. Collective recipients of information are users of different gender, social status, and nationality united by their interest in the events of the Russia-Ukraine war. Though the end user is collective and remote in space and time, special technical capabilities of the Telegram platform provide the sender–addressee interaction in the form of emoji. The process of their digital communication is indirect and unidirectional—from readers to the admin; at the same time the admin may take into account the number and quality of users’ reactions that serve a rating of the posts.

The message. From a cognitive point of view, Telegram users are involved in meaning-making based on information from different semiotic resources and their ensembles in the NYT posts. Readers’ emoji reactions reveal what particular meaningful opinions they make, driven by their own experience, knowledge, and beliefs.

On the NYT telegram channel, news coverage of the Russia-Ukraine war would typically contain a single image, with a text and a headline to go along with it. A video post would be the same but with video added in. Any of these two could use either plugins or standard embeds to display their content. As a rule, posts do not display their authorship online and refer to it in hypertext by corresponding links.

### **3.2. The NYT post formats as means of information deployment**

The war news coverage in the first nine months of 2022 have revealed typical ensembles of post formats that actualize the concepts of WAR, UKRAINE, RUSSIA, their ALLIES and OPPONENTS. The most frequent is [image + headline + text + link].

In this ensemble, the *text* verbalizes the concept, the *image* accentuates and occasionally develops/broadens the meaning, verbalized by the text (information ‘elaboration/extension’). The *headline* emphasizes the main issues of the news. The styling of headlines has changed from a monotonous “Here are the latest developments in the war in Ukraine” (<https://t.me/nytimes>) in March – April, 2022, to varied and meaningful sentences since May, tailored for each particular post. The *link* elaborates and extends the meaning by adding new information about the concept as such and related concepts.


In sample (1) below posted on March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022 (The New York Times, 2022e), the verbal mode actualizes the concept of UKRAINE’S ALLIES in the headline, text and link. The headline arrests the user’s attention and creates emotive salience by its style—all first caps in each word—that is not typical for the NYT Telegram channel. The text supplies details of the European leaders’ visit (elaboration of the concept of UKRAINE’S ALLIES): “*a defiant show of support for Ukraine; dramatic visit; to demonstrate Western solidarity with Ukraine*”) and introduces new incongruent information (combining the meanings of UKRAINE and RUSSIA): “*Vladimir V. Putin of Russia disparaged the second consecutive day of negotiations with Ukraine, undercutting the faint glimmers of hope*”.

The corresponding image (1), however, does not visualize either of the presidents mentioned in the headline; rather it broadens the information by visualizing the site of bombardment of an apartment tower in Kyiv. Thus, the image both accentuates personal bravery of European leaders (elaboration of the concept of UKRAINE’S ALLIES) and visualizes the concept of UKRAINE as a victim of aggression and the concept of RUSSIA as the aggressor (extension).

The emoji-reactions show that the intended ‘positive’ image of Ukraine and ‘negative’ of Russia got entrenched in the recipient’s mind through cumulative information from different post formats.

(1)

The New York Times



**European Leaders Brave Russian Bombardment in Audacious Visit to Kyiv**

Three European leaders staged a defiant show of support for Ukraine on Tuesday, traveling to its besieged capital, Kyiv, even as a relentless Russian artillery bombardment left apartment towers in the city ablaze, forcing terrified residents to flee into the street with only the clothes on their backs.

The dramatic visit by the prime ministers of Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovenia, which unfolded in tight secrecy as they crossed the Ukrainian border by train after dawn, was a strikingly personal gesture. But it caught other European leaders off guard, angering some and baring uncomfortable divisions in how best to demonstrate Western solidarity with Ukraine.

It also came as President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia disparaged the second consecutive day of negotiations with Ukraine, undercutting the faint glimmers of hope raised from talks the day before that both sides were looking for a way to halt the war.

[Read more](#)

👍 146 ❤️ 48 😬 16 💬 9 😞 5

👁️ 30K 01:02

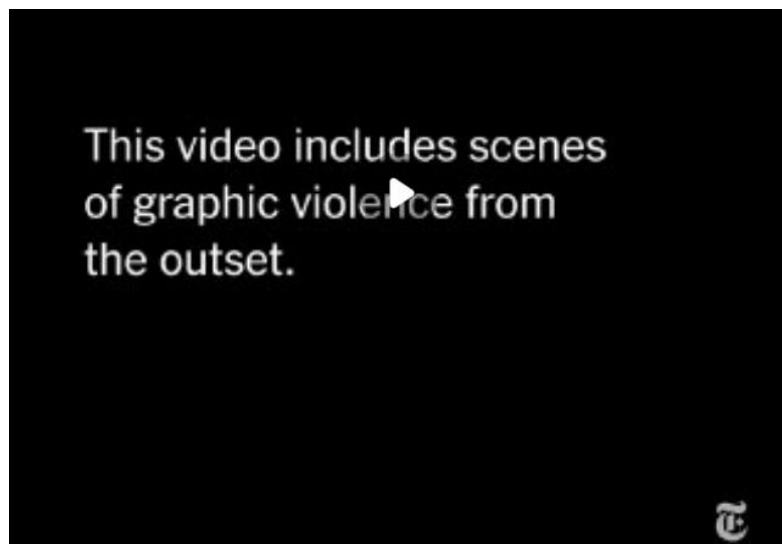
The link to post 1 (Landler & Stevis-Gridneff, 2022) supplies more information that both elaborates and extends the anchor text (sample 2). It cites the authors and date of the article that suggests ‘keys’ for further meaning- making. Among them, there is information about additional properties (elaboration) of UKRAINE’S ALLIES (*spokesman for Poland’s prime minister, Mateusz Morawiecki; the European Union; Prime Minister Petr Fiala of the Czech Republic and Prime Minister Janez Jansa of Slovenia*), of UKRAINE – THE VICTIM OF AGGRESSION (*threat of Russia’s rockets; devastating barrage; difficult phase of its grinding struggle*), and of RUSSIA – TERRORIST STATE (*Russian aggression; the Russian forces encircling Kyiv*):

- (2) A spokesman for Poland’s prime minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, said the three visitors were “de facto” representing the European Union in Ukraine. In Brussels, however, officials said the trio did not have the E.U.’s blessing, and some European diplomats complained that the trip was too risky, given the Russian forces encircling Kyiv. Others said they admired the audacity of the group, which also included Prime Minister Petr Fiala of the Czech Republic and Prime Minister Janez Jansa of Slovenia, casting it as a powerful symbol of the backing for Ukraine among countries on Europe’s eastern flank, where the specter of Russian aggression looms larger than in Paris or London. Still, for all the symbolism of standing shoulder-to-shoulder with Ukraine’s leaders under the threat of Russia’s rockets, Ukraine was facing the devastating barrage largely on its own. The mayor of Kyiv, Vitali Klitschko, imposed a 35-hour curfew, starting on Tuesday evening, which suggested the capital was entering an even more difficult phase of its grinding struggle to hold off Russian troops and tanks (Landler & Stevis-Gridneff, 2022)

To form meaningful opinions of the concepts and let end users appropriate them as their own worldview, each post contains a *link* to a full-scale article in the newspaper (“*Read more*”) or a hyperlink within the anchor text for the user to browse the hypertext. This format clarifies and details the information, gives it emotional assessment, backs it up with photographic materials. A whole newspaper article mentions its author and may contain further links to other materials of the same journalist. Such hypertexts provide greater reliability of news, estimates, and make them salient for the reader.

To enhance the emotivity of information, Telegram posts use emotively loaded war *video*. Videos on the NYT channel contain footage of civilian casualties, destruction and fires, the work of Ukrainian rescuers who help civilian victims of Russian shelling, etc. Video format emphasizes, expands and develops the meaning verbalized by headline and text. The wide use of audial and filmic semiotic resources—camera / frame / light / angle, etc.—makes this dynamic way of news coverage emotionally loaded. Such videos (The New York Times, 2022f) are preceded by warning (sample 3) lest they can psychologically injure readers of the channel. It is no coincidence that the NYT telegram channel rarely uses video posts.


(3)



In a multimodal narrative, different modes are not inherently the main or subsidiary (verbal/visual/audial); their salience is contextual. In most telegram posts, the verbal mode (headline and text) dominates; in other cases, the visual mode does. For example, in the news posted on October, 20<sup>th</sup> (The New York Times, 2022h), the *gallery of images* introduces the concept of UKRAINE as a victim of Russia’s occupation (sample 4 below). The headline makes the concept salient by emotionally loaded lexeme *horror* and font style (capitalization). However, it is the gallery that elaborates the meaning: the concept of UKRAINE – the VICTIM of AGGRESSION receives further specification in each of the photos: damaged housing, tortured residents, wrecked civilian cars, missing family members. The gallery of images and the link (Gall, 2022) also extend the meaning of UKRAINE from VICTIM to FIGHTER FOR JUSTICE by picturing Ukrainian investigators at work when they collect evidence of Russia’s terrorist crimes.

(4)

The New York Times



**'It Was Horror': Ukrainians Share Grim Tales of Russian Occupation**

With Russian soldiers pushed out of parts of the Kharkiv region, Ukrainian investigators have been overwhelmed with accounts of detentions, torture and missing relatives, as well as collaboration and property theft. [Read more](#)

@nytimes

🥵 188 🗑️ 24 👍 17 🤔 16

👁️ 20.7K 23:04

**Emoji-reactions.** In the NYT Telegram posts, the number of reader's emoji reactions depends upon the topic discussed; it is hardly dependent on the semiotic resources used to introduce it. Over the period under analysis, any information about the President of Ukraine consistently evokes a high number of reactions of approval. For example, the post on March 15<sup>th</sup> [image + headline + text] (sample 5) gathered the total of 739 reactions: 700 likes (503 red hearts + 197 thumbs-up), 25 dislikes (thumbs-down), 8 sadness (crying face), and 6 doubts (thinking face). In the example below (The New York Times, 2022d), the image backed up by the headline that mentions President Zelensky in anchor text and in hypertext (Santora, (2022) arrests reader's attention and makes the concept of UKRAINE salient.



(5)



As for the rating of other war issues, the NYT Telegram posts show that ‘domestic’ information on American involvement mostly arises much greater attention than news about the help of other Ukraine’s allies (67 :: 33% emoji reactions per a post). Verbal or visual mentions of the USA leaders, combined with such hot news as weaponry, trigger a large number of responses. In example (6), the news posted on April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022 [headline + text + image + link] (The New York Times, 2022a) gathered 382 reactions (332 likes (128 thumbs-up, 204 red hearts,) 7 sadness (crying face), 11 doubts (thinking face), and 32 dislikes (thumbs-down). The anchor Telegram text mentions President Biden and enumerates American weaponry ready to be given to Ukraine. The hypertext (Erlanger, 2022) helps to make the information salient:

(6)



*The U.S. Races to Arm Ukraine With Heavier, More Advanced Weaponry*

*As Russian troops began pouring into Ukraine nearly two months ago, the United States and its allies started supplying Kyiv with weapons for what many expected to be a short war: sniper rifles, helmets, medical kits, encrypted communications, bullets and the portable, shoulder-held Stinger and Javelin missiles that quickly became icons of the conflict. <...> The West plans to send longer-range weapons like howitzers, anti-aircraft systems, anti-ship missiles, armed drones, armored trucks, personnel carriers and tanks — arms that President Biden said were tailored to stop “the wider assault we expect Russia to launch in eastern Ukraine.”*

At the same time, information about events in which America's leaders are not directly involved (*the U.S. officials, United States intelligence agencies, American officials, etc*), as a rule, causes half as many reactions, e.g. the post on March 12<sup>th</sup> [headline + image + text + link] gathered 146 reactions (118 likes (thumbs-up), 16 doubts (thinking face), and 12 dislikes (thumbs-down). In post (7) below (The New York Times, 2022b), the concept of AMERICA is only verbalized in the text and hypertext (Barnes et al., 2022), while the concept of RUSSIA is realized by both by the image and the text mentioning Putin's name. However, the NYT readers positively evaluate the former one (concept AMERICA as UKRAINE's ALLY), which leaves no doubts as to readers' predominant sympathy to Ukraine in their construal of the world:

(7)



*U.S. Officials Say Superyacht Could be Putin's American officials are examining the ownership of a \$700 million superyacht currently in a dry dock at an Italian seacoast town, and believe it could be associated with President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia, according to multiple people briefed on the information.*

*United States intelligence agencies have made no final conclusions about the ownership of the superyacht — called the Scheherazade — but American officials said they had found initial indications that it was linked to Mr. Putin. The information from the U.S. officials came after The New York Times reported on Tuesday that Italian authorities were looking into the 459-foot long vessel's ownership and that a former crew member said it was for the use of Mr. Putin.*

Emojis of disapproval prevail in the NYT Telegram channel as reactions on posts about RUSSIA. For example, the news posted on May 22<sup>d</sup> [4 images + headline + text+ link] (sample 8.1–8.5) (The New York Times, 2022g) gathered 739 reactions 213 dislikes (18558 thumbs-down + 28 crying faces), 64 likes (58 thumbs-up + 6 red hearts), and 14 doubts (thinking face). The negative evaluation of KIRILL, RUSSIAN CHURCH, and RUSSIA appears as a result of direct binding of KIRILL with PUTIN, as it is mentioned in the headline (*leader – Putin's ambitions*), the text (*Putin's altar boy*), and images.

The four images, the headline, and the text present the concept of RUSSIA through its segment RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH and related concept PATRIARCH KIRILL I. The post below profiles the latter (the solo image of Kirill – 8.1.) against the background of the former (three smaller group images of Kirill with Putin – 8.2, near the Kremlin wall – 8.3, and with the clergy – 8.4), which ascribes a negative meaning to both PATRIARCH KIRILL I and his CHURCH in the readers' construal of the world.

Image (8.1) pictures Kirill (synecdoche—the LEADER OF THE CHURCH for THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH), which extends the meaning of RUSSIA—THE AGGRESSOR by introducing a new congruent entity of the RUSSIAN CHURCH.

Images (8.2), (8.3) elaborate the concept of PATRIARCH KIRILL I by providing information about his close connections with the Kremlin and its leader.

Image (8.4) accentuates the concept of the RUSSIAN CHURCH by visualizing the clergymen and extends the meaning of the CHURCH by focusing the clergy's role as "*Putin's altar boys*" who receive "*vast resources in return from the Kremlin*" (as the text states).

(8.1 – 8.4)



The headline below the gallery of images in (8.1 – 8.4) extends the concept of the LEADER OF THE CHURCH by connecting Kirill to PUTIN, while the text leaves no doubt about the evil nature of their connection in the world's eyes (“*Kirill has staked the fortunes of his branch of Orthodox Christianity on a mutually beneficial alliance with Mr. Putin*”). The example of Telegram post (8.5) and corresponding hypertext (Horowitz, 2022) demonstrates a huge cognitive gap between Russia and the world: the entities, which seem contiguous and congruent for the construal of the world of many Russian citizens (church and terrorist ambitions), are actually incongruent and noncontiguous for people of democratic countries.

(8.5) As Russia's invasion of Ukraine unfolded, Patriarch Kirill I, the leader of the Russian Orthodox Church, had an awkward Zoom meeting with Pope Francis.

Kirill spent 20 minutes reading prepared remarks, echoing the arguments of President Vladimir Putin of Russia that the war in Ukraine was necessary to purge Nazis and oppose NATO expansion.

“*Brother, we are not clerics of the state,*” Francis told Kirill, as he later recounted to the *Corriere della Sera* newspaper. Francis added that “*the patriarch cannot transform himself into Putin's altar boy.*”

Today, Kirill stands apart not merely from Francis, but from much of the world. The leader of about 100 million faithful, Kirill, 75, has staked the fortunes of his branch of Orthodox Christianity on a mutually beneficial alliance with Mr. Putin. Kirill offers Mr. Putin spiritual cover while his church — and possibly he himself — receives vast resources in return from the Kremlin.

Among the Telegram posts under analysis, the record 1328 reactions were caused by a most unexpected war protest on Russian TV (The New York Times, 2022c): the news on March 15<sup>th</sup> [headline + video + text + link] (sample 9) produced 1250 likes (971 red hearts and 279 thumbs-up), 31 doubts (thinking face), and 47 dislikes (thumbs-down). The readers highly estimated what Marina Ovsyannikova did on Channel 1, the Kremlin's flagship propaganda outlet. The video and the link to (Troianovski, 2022) not only visualize her protest but elaborate the information, supplying details necessary to understand it:

(9)



*A state television employee burst onto the live broadcast of Russia's most-watched news show on Monday evening, yelling "Stop the war!" and holding up a sign that said "They're lying to you here," in an extraordinary act of protest against Russia's invasion of Ukraine...*

On the whole, the topics of the NYT telegram channel can be ranked according to the reaction of readers from the most to the least influential ones. The largest number of positive emojis, as a rule, is caused by information about the first persons of the United States—allies of Ukraine and President Zelensky, as well as about artifacts that are unexpected emotionally loaded events.

#### 4. Conclusions

This paper has presented a cognitive-semiotic and multimodal approach in political linguistics. The research has addressed political narrative about the 2022 Russia-Ukraine war in American social media, in particular, the type and configuration of multimodal semiotic resources used by *The New York Times* Telegram channel to cover war news and shape their perception by the readers.

I argue that Telegram post together with users' emoji-reactions is a specific interactive genre of a multimodal political discourse. This media discourse involves different semiotic resources—verbal, graphic, audial, and filmic (video) that are equally important for the formation of meaningful opinions and their storage in the construal of the world. In multimodal digital media discourse, its meaning is gestalt jointly constructed by each semiotic resource.

The findings show that the following post formats are most typical for *The New York Times* Telegram channel: an image or a gallery of images followed by a headline, a text, and a link to another site. They serve to accentuate, elaborate, and extend the information in the post. The information of different Telegram formats frames and reframes the readers' construal of the world, ascribes connotations to facts and events.

Emojis realize both pragmatic and cognitive functions: on the one hand, they are effective instruments to measure users' reaction; on the other, they contribute to meaning-making by evaluating and making salient the concepts described. The largest number of positive emojis is caused by information about the first persons of the United States—allies of Ukraine and about Ukrainian President Zelensky. Judging by reactions, the NYT Telegram channel has succeeded in construing a true concept of the RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR and the concepts of UKRAINE as a victim of aggression and a fighter for independence, of RUSSIA as a terrorist-state, and of their ALLIES and OPPONENTS.

A further systematic analysis may help better understand a specific interactive genre of a multimodal political discourse of Telegram channels and the role of emoji reactions, in particular.

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**АМЕРИКАНСЬКІ СОЦІАЛЬНІ МЕДІА  
ПРО РОСІЙСЬКО-УКРАЇНСЬКУ ВІЙНУ:  
МУЛЬТИМОДАЛЬНИЙ АНАЛІЗ**

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**Анотація**

Це дослідження зосереджено на політичному наративі про російсько-українську війну в американських соціальних медіа. Воно має на меті дослідити типи і конфігурацію мультимодальних семіотичних ресурсів, які використовуються для представлення подій цієї війни та моделюють їх сприйняття аудиторією, насамперед американською, у соціальних мережах, зокрема, Telegram-каналі *The New York Times*, що висвітлює російське військове вторгнення 2022 року. Які семіотичні ресурси використовують американські соціальні медіа для побудови наративу про війну? Які формати постів переважають; як вони розгортають інформацію про російсько-українську війну та конструюють її сприйняття: концепти ВІЙНИ, УКРАЇНИ як жертви агресії та борця за незалежність, РОСІЇ як держави-терориста та їхніх СОЮЗНИКІВ і ПРОТИВНИКІВ? Теоретично це дослідження базується на когнітивно-семіотичному та мультимодальному підходах у політичній лінгвістиці. У політичному медіа-наративі оповідання формує сприйняття реалій війни: воно формує та переформатує читацьку інтерпретацію світу, надає конотації фактам і подіям. Мультимодальний наратив включає різні семіотичні ресурси – вербальні, графічні, аудіальні та кінематографічні (у відео). Конфігурація цих різномірних знаків у пості конкретного Telegram-каналу визначає його вплив як переважно раціональний або емоційний. Отримані дані показують, що для Telegram-каналу *The New York Times* характерні такі формати постів: зображення, за яким йде текст і посилання на інший сайт (найчастіший); галерея (галерея зображень) і цитата (цитата із заголовком джерела/автора) (рідше); рідковживані відео та аудіо. Вони служать для того, щоб підкреслити, деталізувати та розширити інформацію в пості. Дослідження доводить, що Telegram пости разом із емодзі-реакціями користувачів є специфічним інтерактивним жанром мультимодального політичного дискурсу. Емодзі реалізують як прагматичну, так і когнітивну функції: з одного боку, вони є ефективними інструментами для вимірювання реакції користувачів; з іншого, вони сприяють формуванню смислу, оцінюючи та висвітлюючи описані концепції. Домінування раціональної та перевіреної інформації в Telegram-каналі *The New York Times* створює правдивий образ геноцидної ВІЙНИ Росії проти України та дає справедливую оцінку пов'язаних концептів.

**Ключові слова:** інтерактивний дискурс, мультимодальність, політичний Telegram-канал, російсько-українська війна, семіотичний ресурс.