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## RECEPTION OF THE POLITICAL NEWS NARRATIVE IN READERS' RESPONSES: MULTIMODALITY AND INTERTEXTUALITY

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### Abstract

Developed in the field of international relations, the theory of the strategic narrative (Miskimmon et al., 2013; 2017 among others) identifies it as a means for political actors to construct a shared meaning of international politics, and to shape the perceptions, beliefs, and behaviour of domestic and international actors. The authors of the theory maintain that the explanation of the workings of the strategic narrative presumes the study of its formation, projection, and reception. Such explanation brings together various scholarly fields aimed at the search of the lacking methodology that demonstrates how the formation, projection, and reception aspects of the strategic narrative work together as a triptych. The proposed article approaches this problem from the perspective of cognitive linguistics that studies conceptual grounds for verbally delivered information. The article forwards and tests a novel methodological framework, which posits a cognitive ontology of the information, featured verbally and visually, as the feasible grounds for tracking regularities in the simultaneous dynamics of the three narrative aspects. The article focuses on the projection / reception narrative aspects, represented in a media news text and the readers' responses to it – the issue relevant for the linguistic field of intertextuality. Methodologically and thematically, the article continues the previous research (Zhabotynska & Velivchenko, 2019; Zhabotynska & Ryzhova, 2022; Chaban et al. 2023; Chaban et al. 2024 among others) of the formation / projection aspects of the strategic narrative featured in a news media text.

**Key words:** *cognitive ontology, strategic political narrative, media text, multimodality, reception of the narrative, reader's response, intertextuality.*

### 1. Introduction

This study, informed by cognitive linguistics and semiotics, is done in the field of political narratology that extends into the overlapping domains of political linguistics, media linguistics, and the linguistic theories of intertextuality and multimodality. The study *focuses* on news-related user content, represented by readers' responses to the strategic political narrative featured in the news media text. The research *pivot* is the framework of regularities in the semantic interplay of this text with the text of the readers' responses. This topic has *pertinence* to today's scholarly debate about user comments, which demonstrates a steep increase explained by the growing employment of social and digital media for news, and the growing pervasiveness of user comment threads in news comment (Stroud et al., 2016; Newman et al., 2023). The increase of such debate is also accounted for by the multi-faceted nature of user comments, which enables their examination from different

perspectives. A novel perspective addressed in this study links the research on user comments, readers of political news articles in particular, with the exploration of strategic political narratives.

The strategic political narrative's existence includes the stages of formation, projection, and reception (Miskimmon et al., 2013). Being methodologically oriented and carried out from a linguistic standpoint, the analysis of their interaction aims to expose how the narrative content, having been shaped, is semiotically 'portrayed', or projected, and how the content and the form of this 'portrait' resonate with the reader. The *problem* is that such analysis requires a conceptually novel and utility-driven methodology which can be employed in the study of all three stages of the narrative's 'life cycle'. It can be argued that a plausible methodological contribution, borrowed from cognitive linguistics, is a cognitive ontology, or systemically structured homogeneous content (Zhabotynskaya, 2017; Zhabotynska 2020). An ontological approach to the arrangement of politically relevant information demonstrated an explanatory power in the previous analysis of the narrative content (Zhabotynska & Velivchenko 2019), and its portrayal through verbal means (Chaban et al., 2023; Chaban & Zhabotynska, 2024) and visual images integrated into a multimodal political text (Chaban et al. 2019-2020; Zhabotynska & Ryzhova 2022; Zhabotynska & Chaban, 2024). In the present study, an ontological approach becomes operational in the examination of the ways in which the political narrative of a news media text evolves in the narrative of its readers.

Further, the article sets out some theoretical prerequisites pertinent for this research and concerned with the political narrative and its comments by the readers, with a concise survey of the scholarly enquiries discussing such comments. Then, the article outlines a new ontologically-based methodology intended for the study of interplay between the information in the media narrative and in the readers' responses. Application of this methodology is illustrated with the analysis of a multimodal political text coming from an American media outlet and describing the Russian-Ukrainian war – the topic to which American readers generously respond. The concluding discussion generalizes the findings and estimates their theoretical and practical implications.

## **2. Theoretical background. Political news narrative and its readers**

The essence of humanness has come increasingly to be described as the tendency to tell stories, and to make sense of the world through narrative. In linguistics, narrative was one of the first discourse genres to be analyzed, and it continues to be among the most intensively discussed (De Finna & Johnston, 2015, p.152). In political studies and international relations, scholarship on narratives has become established in the last decade, heralding the so-called 'narrative turn' (Oliveira, 2020; Chaban et al. 2023, p. 3). A *narrative* is understood as a text whose structure represents the teller's image of the world, and as a textually arranged image of the world imposed upon the audience (Zhabotynska & Velivchenko, 2019, p. 365). In the second sense, typical of social sciences, narrative is a meaning structure that organizes the human experience of time by integrating the events in the past, the present and the future into a meaningful whole (Ku, 2018, p. 9). A narrative 'groups together and integrates into one whole and complete story multiple and scattered events' (Ricoeur, 1984; Dennison, 2021, p. 3). In progressing through time, narrative allows continuous revisions in the retrospective and prospective configuration of a sequence of events (Ku, 2018, p. 9). Narrative is embedded in all kinds of social activity.

*Political narratives* can be defined as "stories about sociopolitical issues, which exist within an imagined community, where the actions of political actors and/or the outcomes of political events have important causal effects" (McLaughlin & Velez, 2017, p. 22). In many ways, political narratives are similar to the fictional narratives found in a novel, television show, or movie. They are dramatic plots filled with binary narratives about 'good guys' and 'bad guys' (McLaughlin & Velez, 2017, p. 23). A political narrative, even generated outside an official political framework, may be considered 'political' if the themes it considers are 'political' (Shenhav, 2006). Such narrative affects our perceptions of political reality, which, in turn, affect our actions in response to or in anticipation of political events (Zhabotynska & Ryzhova, 2022, p. 117). Defined as a reflection of current political affairs, the political narrative is represented primarily through media.

Political narratives may be strategic. *Strategic narrative* is the story furthering an official political strategy via the construction of “a shared meaning of the past, present and future of international politics to shape the behaviour of domestic and international actors” (Miskimmon et al., 2013, p. 2; Miskimmon et al., 2017, p. 6). “Put simply, strategic narratives are tools that political actors employ to promote their interests, values, and aspirations for the international order by managing expectations and altering the discursive environment. These narratives define ‘who we are’ and ‘what kind of world order we want’” (Miskimmon et al., 2017, p.1). The complete communication cycle of a strategic narrative includes its *formation* by the political actors, its *projection* in the media environment, and its *reception* by the public and/or other political actors – domestic or international (Miskimmon et al., 2013, p.8-12).

The producers of strategic narratives are primarily elites, not just government leaders, who “construct the strategic narrative through deliberative interaction in ‘discursive communities’ and then communicate it to the general public through speeches, press conferences, official documents, and more”. Strategic narratives “can be carried and remediated by journalists, news formats, and even films and documentaries. Through all these channels, narratives become discussed and deliberated through media and the ‘talking’ or ‘chattering’ classes” (Miskimmon et al., 2017, p. 5).

The media environment that disseminates political narratives, through news stories in particular, has now advanced an on-line culture of interaction with media audiences. The Internet has revolutionized media consumption, opened new channels for news reporting, and created opportunities for the public to express opinions and emotions instantly, through readers’ comments (Rosen et al., 2019, p. 244). Online comment sections provide a space for the public to interact with news, to express their opinions, and to learn about others’ views (Stroud et al., 2016, p.1). At present, user-generated content represents an ever-increasing proportion of media content where readers evaluate, disseminate and comment on news. Readers’ comments are usually given below news articles, thus reaching the same audience as professionally journalistic content (Kubin et al., 2024, p.1). Media outlets offer online audiences an opportunity to comment directly – and publicly – on news texts, by doing so on the sites to which they are native. In such a way, the news outlets capture a raw and immediate record of public reactions to news events, and the ways they are represented by specific outlets (and journalists), while “offering intriguing insights into how individuals process media narratives and derive meaning from them, based on both their own prior knowledge, experiences and worldviews, and the interpersonal dialogue in which they engage with fellow audience-members” (Morrison, 2018, p.15).

From a liberal perspective, the comments are a sign of the deep globalization of information sources. They belong to a new period of deliberative digital democracy (Dahlberg, 2011, p.87). Comment sections accompanying news stories may offer a favorable discursive opportunity structure for the recurring expression of media trust-undermining views – they are not restricted by the gatekeeping mechanisms of established media, are often algorithmically curated, and afford anonymity to (in)authentic commenters (Dobber & Hameleers, 2024, p.2). While there are some guardrails provided by law (e.g., hate speech is illegal in the European Union), users are generally free to respond not only to any other user but also to formerly fewer approachable institutions such as news media (Dobber & Hameleers, 2024, p.4).

Therefore, in today’s world, the power of media political discourse is no longer restricted to meaning-making processes. Newspapers “have the capability of engaging readers through interactive comment forums, a communicative space where citizens can, in principle, exercise power, creating and sustaining an identity as participating members in political processes” (Pinto-Coelho et al., 2019, p.733). This creates a sense of belonging among online readers. Comment threads are important because they allow those with relevant knowledge and/or experience to *contribute to narratives*, not just respond to them, by adding evidence-based posts that confirm what a journalist has reported, qualify it with a more balanced or nuanced account, or even contradict the published one (Morrison, 2018, p.15). User-generated content in the form of comments constitutes

a way of capturing the degree of the users' commitment with the news, since, when choosing to leave a contribution below a story, the user is showing an interest in its content, the newspaper's brand and the deliberative component of such interaction (Parra et al., 2020, p.87). Today's growing pervasiveness of user comment threads in news content is viewed as audience empowerment – allowing the audience to engage in peer-to-peer debate and information-sharing and actively contribute to narratives around which their dialogue revolves (Morrison, 2018, p.17–18).

The growing pervasiveness of user comment threads in news content has caused the increase in the studies of comments. Over the past two decades, the number of studies focusing on news-related user comments has exploded, which caused the necessity of their analysis and systematization. A brief survey of the works that study user comments and systematize such studies (Stroud et al., 2016; Mathe & Caldwell 2017; Gwon et al., 2020; Szabo et al., 2021; Aldous et al., 2023; Neuman et al., 2023; Kubin et al., 2024 among others) allows for defining such major research directions:

- (i) What is commented (modality: text vs. moving image; types of content in news media; how the type of the commented text influences comments; how news shape commenting; how they shape commentors' opinion).
- (ii) What is in comments (the themes of comments; the feelings of commentors towards specific topics, positive-negative comments; relatedness of the comments to the news content).
- (iii) Who comments (demographics of comments; commentors' bias).
- (iv) What triggers comments (what community factors correlate with commenting).
- (v) How commentors comment (style of comments across news platforms; discursive strategies; the use of narratives, facts, and data within comments; commenting behavior; incivility; how commenting evolves; how comments shape further commenting via controversy).
- (vi) Effect of comments (how they shape others' attitudes).

In the diverse landscape of the comment research, the current study immediately relates to the two major issues – what is commented (what information in the news text evokes commenting), and what is in comments (relation of the comments to the news content, emotivity of comments). Some of the other issues (how commenting evolves, and the impact of community factors on commenting) are mentioned as attendant secondary issues. Methodologically, the current study develops content analysis via grounding it on a cognitive ontology of the processed data – the approach which is specified below.

### 3. Methodology and data

The methodological framework employed in this study complies with several working hypotheses as to the intertextual interplay of the political article (news media narrative) and the readers' responses.

**Working hypothesis 1.** The content of a political media narrative may be marshalled with a cognitive ontology, or particular homogeneous information which has been specifically arranged. The content to be structured prompts the choice in between the *relational ontology* (that demonstrates the kinds of relations between the entities), *entity-based ontology* (that represents an entity as an information 'nucleus' with its 'satellites'), and *event-based ontology* (that characterizes several entities with regard to some time-bound 'event') (Zhabotynska, 2020).

If the narrative describes an 'event', its *event-based ontology* displays an information space divided into *thematic domains* (the thematically homogeneous sub-spaces of the information space). In an event-based ontology, the domains are defined with regard to the invariable referents whose iteration provides the referential coherence of the narrative text. A thematic domain comprises the information about an invariable in its relation to the event. An invariable may be an actor, an object or the event itself considered in its integrity. A domain is constituted by *thematic parcels* as its information focuses. In an event-based ontology, the parcels are typically distinguished in the domains representing a collective invariable with its constituents specified in the parcels; e.g., the

domain of a country may include the parcels ‘country’ considered as a whole, ‘people’, ‘government’, ‘president’, etc. Each parcel (or domain, if it does not disintegrate into parcels, or thus has only one parcel) subsumes *thematic quanta* that generalize the information available in the descriptions of the analyzed text. A *textual description*, as an empirical unit of the analysis, contains one proposition – an elementary conceptual structure consisting of the logical subject (the target concept) and the logical predicate (the property of the target) (Zhabotynskaya, 2017; Zhabotynska & Velivchenko, 2019; Chaban et al., 2023). The thematic quanta subsumed by a parcel shape a schematic *micronarative* that molds the parcel’s content.

The number of the textual descriptions featuring a thematic quantum defines its *salience* – factual and emotive. Respectively, the salience of a parcel depends on the number of textual descriptions in all its thematic quanta; and the salience of a domain depends on the number of textual descriptions in all its parcels.

The above principles of building an event-based cognitive ontology are applicable to the arrangement of the information in both the news media text and the readers’ comments to this text.

**Working hypothesis 2.** The constituents of a cognitive ontology developed for a *multimodal media narrative* tend to be projected verbally and visually. The visual images, which contribute to the verbal content, may be (a) neutral, irrespective of the verbal text in which they are used; (b) explicitly connoted as positive or negative, irrespective of the verbal text in which they are used; and (c) implicitly connoted as positive or negative due to the verbal text in which they are used (Chaban et al., 2019-2020; Zhabotynska & Ryzhova 2022; Zhabotynska & Chaban, 2024 among others). Visual images add factual salience to the information delivered verbally. As to the emotive load (/0/ neutral, /+/ positive or /-/ negative), visual images may intensify, amplify or contradict the information featured verbally.

**Working hypothesis 3.** The thematic nodes of the cognitive ontology that structures a media image have the *hooking capacity*, or the ability to evoke the readers’ responses to the respective information. The hooking capacity may be *zero* (no readers’ responses), *low*, *mid*, and *high* (pertaining to the number of the readers’ responses). The hooking capacity demonstrated by a narrative issue depends / does not depend on the salience of this issue depicted verbally and visually.

**Working hypothesis 4.** The types of interaction between the content of the readers’ comments and the content of the media narrative proper are (Zhabotynska & Slyvka 2020; Zhabotynska & Ryzhova 2022 among others):

- *accentuation* ( $X1 \leftarrow X1$ ): the comments repeat the idea of the narrative;
- *elaboration* ( $X1 \leftarrow X1$ ): the comments add a new detail to the same idea;
- *extension* ( $X \leftarrow Y$ ): the comments add a new idea contiguous and congruent with that in the narrative; e.g. TEXT: cause  $\rightarrow$  COMMENTS: consequence;
- *questioning* ( $X \leftrightarrow Y$ ): the comments add a new idea, which elaborates or extends the previous one via ‘no’ or ‘but’ incongruence, i.e. denial, doubt, impossibility or contrast; e.g., TEXT: cause  $\rightarrow$  COMMENTS: ‘but’ consequence;
- *combining* ( $X \& Y$ ): the comments add a new idea noncontiguous with that in the narrative; e.g., the events separated in time and space.

Accentuation, elaboration, extension, and combining are ‘boosters’ which are consonant with the previous content, while questioning is a dissonant ‘booster’.

**Working hypothesis 5.** The content of the readers responses (the comments and their ‘likes’) creates the Response Information Space (RIS) diagnostic of the public opinion. Besides its own cognitive ontology, compatible with the ontology of the media narrative, the RIS has its ‘discourse route’ shaped by the configuration of the content boosters. The consonance / dissonance of the RIS with the media narrative is defined with regard to the RIS’s discourse routes, and the salience exhibited by the nodes of the RIS’s ontology.

The above hypotheses are tested in a pilot study of the *dataset* represented by the text of the political article “*Why Russia’s war in Ukraine could run for years*” followed by lead *From Moscow to Washington, a lack of clear and achievable strategic goals points* (Walker, 2023), and the readers’ responses to this article. Published on August 20, 2023 in *The Wall Street Journal*, one of the reputable American media outlets, the article discusses a strategically important issue – the politics of the West/US as to the Russian-Ukrainian war. This issue remains topical till present. The article, which is 1492 words long, incorporates 8 visual images – 7 photos and one map. The article is followed by the declared 1512 responses, which, when thoroughly examined, can be reduced to 63 comments with 627 ‘likes’. The text of the comments is 4114 words long, or nearly thrice as long as the media text per se, which testifies to the topic’s relevance for the readers. The readers not only respond to the content of the article, but also initiate a discussion, getting engaged in it more than once in the comment’s ‘lifecycle’.

The quantitative disbalance between the comments proper and their ‘likes’ may be explained by the existence of comment writers and comment readers. The comment writers belong to that “handful of contributors” who “enrich and encourage a lively debate” (Parra et al., 2020, p. 87). According to Straud et al. (2016, p. 16), although the majority of American adult population leave comments, only a small percentage – 14% – comment on the news. The comment readers, who sufficiently prevail over comment writers, read comments “to learn about the opinions of others and to be entertained or amused by others’ comments” (Mathe & Caldwell, 2009, p. 58). It is comment readers, who leave their ‘likes’ and thus participate in the discussion covertly.

#### 4. Analysis

The article “*Why Russia’s war in Ukraine could run for years*” (Walker, 2023) portrays an event – Russian-Ukrainian war; therefore, its media image may be organized as an event-based ontology. The four domains of this ontology, defined with regard to the narrative’s invariables, are WAR (parcel: War), UKRAINE (parcels: Ukraine, Ukrainian army), RUSSIA (parcels: Russia, Russian army, President Putin), and WEST / US (parcel West / US) – Figure 1.

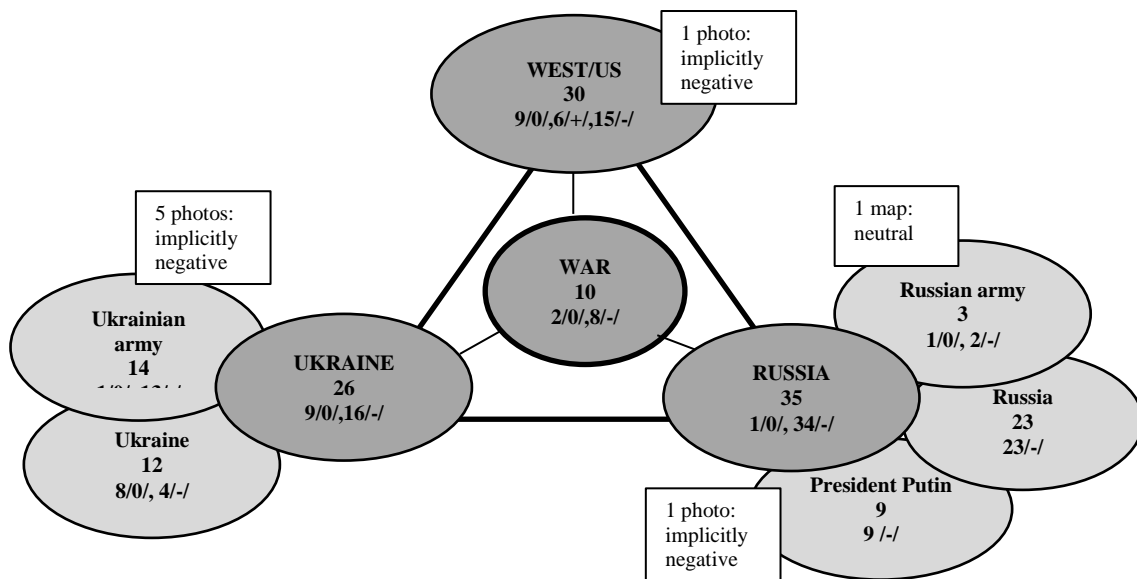


Fig.1. The RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR media image: a cognitive ontology.

Figure 1 demonstrates the factual end emotive salience of the domains and their parcels, which is created verbally and visually. The most salient domain is RUSSIA, featured with 35 textual descriptions (td), most of which are negative, and two visual images (one photo and one map). Then come the WEST / US and UKRAINE domains, which are equally salient. The WEST / US domain

has 30 td (neutral-negative), and the UKRAINE domain has 26 td (neutral-negative) accompanied by 5 photos. The least salient domain, WAR, has 10 td (negative).

The salience of the domains' parcels depends not only on the intensity of their verbal and visual representation, but also on the scope of the schematic micronarative featuring the parcel and comprising the thematic quanta (TQ). The latter generalize the content of the empirical textual descriptions. E.g.:

- **Ukrainian army**

**The Ukrainian army has been painfully pushing to undo Russian gains [1 /-/] (*Kyiv's troops in eastern Ukraine have been pushing this summer to undo Russian gains*). **The progress of the Ukrainian army is slow [4 /-/] (*For Ukrainian forces near Bakhmut, progress has been slow in the effort to retake the eastern city; front-line combat is a slow-moving slog; Ukraine's push to retake territory has been slow. their painfully slow progress this summer*), and the losses are heavy [1 /-/] (*heavy losses throughout the war*). **The reason is Russia's huge minefields and fortified lines [3/-/] (*as its forces face a deadly problem: land mines; Russia created one of the largest minefields in the world in the occupied regions, and their impact on Kyiv's counteroffensive; Russia's fortified lines in the Zaporizhzhia and Donetsk regions*) and **Ukraine's limited and outdated weaponry [4 /-/] (*the limits of Western support; Ukrainian troops' limited weaponry; [lack of] air power and air defenses. Soviet-era weapons such as Grad rocket launchers remain a staple for Ukraine*). **The Ukrainian army waits for modern arms from Western allies [1 /0/] (*as it waits for more modern arms from Western allies*).**********

The schematic micronaratives for the thematic domains and their parcels evolve as described below (the TQ that exhibit hooking capacities, i.e. evoke the readers' responses, are underlined).

- **WAR. War [10 td: 2/0/, 8/-/ > negative]. Micronarrative – 4 TQ:** The war in Ukraine is being protracted [3 /-/]. The war endangers the global economy [1 /-/]. War is continuation of policy by other means [2 /0/]. Unsuccessful wars result from the lack of an achievable political aim [4 /-/].

- **UKRAINE. Ukrainian army [14 td: 1/0/, 13/-/ > negative]. Micronarrative – 6 TQ:** The Ukrainian army has been painfully pushing to undo Russian gains [1/-/]. The progress of the Ukrainian army is slow [4/-/] HOOK, and the losses are heavy [1/-/] HOOK. The reason is Russia's huge minefields and fortified lines [3/-/] and Ukraine's limited and outdated weaponry [4 /-/]. Ukrainian army waits for modern arms from Western allies [1 /0/]. **Visual images – 5 photos /-/** which, being neutral, are implicitly connoted as negative due to the negative verbal text in which they are used. In the pictures, single actors and single pieces of transportation and weaponry resonate with the idea of the Ukrainian army's slow progress.



Photo:  
Emanuele Satolli  
for The WSJ



Photo:  
Serhii Kirovayny  
for The WSJ



Photo:  
Manu Bravo  
for The WSJ



Photo:  
Manu Bravo  
for The WSJ



Photo:  
Manu  
Bravo  
for The WSJ

(Walker, 2023).

- **UKRAINE. Ukraine [12 td: 8/0/, 4/-/ > negative-neutral]. Micronarrative – 5 TQ:** Ukraine has a maximalist aim of restoring its territorial integrity [4 /0/]. Ukraine refuses to negotiate peace without a battlefield breakthrough [1 /0/]. Ukraine dismisses the proposal to give up Russian-occupied territory [3 /0/]. The achievement of Ukraine’s maximalist political goals is hardly attainable [3 -/-], which can make the war endless [1 -/-].
- **RUSSIA. Russian army [3 td: 1/0/, 2/-/ > neutral-negative]. Micronarrative – 2 TQ:** Russian army has gains [1 /0/] HOOK. It has created huge minefields and fortified lines that had an impact on Ukraine’s counteroffensive [2 -/-]. **Visual image – one military map /0/** which is neutral, being linked to the neutral quantum “Russian army has gains”.



Source: Institute for the Study of War and AEI’s Critical Threats Project (Walker, 2023).

- **RUSSIA. Russia [23 td: 23/-/ > negative]. Micronarrative – 7 TQ:** Russia’s aims in this war elastic, ranging from ambitious imperial schemes to more limited land grabs [7/-/] HOOK. These aims are shifting with Russia’s military fortunes [5/-/]. Russia has an unrealistic long-term imperial objective to bring Ukraine back under Moscow’s sway [1/-/] HOOK. For Russia, this war is a costly and dangerous quagmire [5/-/] HOOK. But Russia thinks the cost of the war is manageable [2/-/]. Without Ukraine’s battlefield breakthrough, Russia doesn’t have to negotiate peace [1/-/].
- **RUSSIA. President Putin [9 td: 9/-/ > negative]. Micronarrative – 6 TQ:** Putin has a big imperial vision of Russia [2/-/] HOOK. Putin speaks as if the war has largely fulfilled its aim [1/-/] HOOK. Meanwhile, Putin’s goals are fluid [1/-/] HOOK, and his policy depends on where his soldiers are [3/-/]. Unclear goals allow him to say he is going towards them [1/-/] HOOK. Putin may treat smaller gains as a way to any treacherous peace based on concessions [1/-/]. **Visual image – one photo -/-** which is explicitly negative, and which amplifies the negativity of the verbal text.

A pillow bearing an image of Russian President Vladimir Putin at the home of a collector of war memorabilia in the Ukrainian city of Pavlohrad. Photo: Emanuele Satolli for the WSJ (Walker, 2023).



- **WEST / US [30 td: 9/0/, 6/+/, 15/-/ > neutral-negative]. Micronarratives – 7 TQ:** The West helps Ukraine with quality weapons [4/+/], but the Western support is limited [5/-/]. The West wants to prevent Russia from winning [1 +/-], but it fears the risks of helping Ukraine and pushing Putin to using nuclear weapons [4 /0/]. The Western allies don’t think they can leave it to Ukraine alone to



define the goals of this war [1/0/], but they sketch bargains to end the war, which do not fit either Ukraine's or Russia's goals [5 /-]. The West disbelieves that Ukraine can fully expel Russian forces [1/0/], and it is uncertain about its voters' further support of the aid to Ukraine [1/0/]. The West / US aims to put Ukraine in a strong position for peace negotiation [1/+], but the time and conditions of negotiations are unknown [2/0/]. The West / US makes the conflict drawn-out, which weakens Ukraine and makes negotiations hardly possible [3/-]. In this war, the West's political strategy is not clear [2/-] HOOK. **Visual image – one photo /-/,** which, being neutral, is implicitly connoted as negative due to its clash with the verbal text: the photo ironically alludes to the US President Biden being an 'omnipotent saint' who, however, is unable to solve the problem.



President Biden is seeking to support Ukraine's war effort without prompting a dangerous escalation Photo: Andrew Caballero-Reynolds / Agence France-Presse / Getty Images (Walker, 2023).

As the analysis shows, the factual and emotive salience of the parcels decreases in the direction: West/US (7 TQ /30 td / one photo; neutral-negative), Russia (7 TQ / 23 td; negative), Ukrainian army (6 TQ / 14 td / 5 photos; negative), Ukraine (5 TQ / 12 td; positive-neutral), President Putin (6 TQ / 9 td / 1 photo; negative), War (4 TQ / 10 td; negative), Russian army (1 TQ / 3 td / one map; neutral-negative). Among the 7 narrative invariables portrayed in the parcels only 5 get attention in the readers' responses. Such responses, while fitting the thematic parcels of the media narrative, develop their own thematic quanta. E.g.:

- **Ukrainian army**

MEDIA NARRATIVE: **The progress of the Ukrainian army is slow [3/-].**

← READERS' RESPONSES: **Its counter-attack was barely noticeable [2 /-]:** <sup>83</sup> 🇺🇸 Joseph Breton: despite the claims that the Ukrainians would easily oust them with their counter-offensive, which turned out to be barely noticeable. Meanwhile, Ukrainian army has had many achievements and few lost battles [2 /+]: <sup>5</sup> 🇺🇸 Peter Nemeth: Ukraine's successful counter-offensive last year; sinking of ships.

MEDIA NARRATIVE: **The losses of the Ukrainian army are heavy [1 /-].**

← READERS' RESPONSES: **The losses are heavy [1/-]:** <sup>83</sup> 🇺🇸 Joseph Breton: Only in the last few weeks have media propagandists described Ukraine's losses as 'heavy'. They have been heavy all the time [1/-]: <sup>83</sup> 🇺🇸 Joseph Breton: though it was clear they've been getting pummeled badly the whole time. The losses are not that heavy [1/+]: <sup>5</sup> 🇺🇸 Peter Nemeth: Ukraine's forces aren't pummeled badly. They have not been heavy all the time [2/+]: <sup>5</sup> 🇺🇸 Peter Nemeth: and were certainly not pummeled the whole time. <sup>5</sup> 🇺🇸 Peter Nemeth: this is plain Russian propaganda. Ukraine has advancement in its native weapon's technology [4/+]: <sup>6</sup> 🇺🇸 Samuel Hodder: Putin had to invade and his goal was (is) to occupy all of Ukraine. Ukraine's growing economy and technology advancement would make it impossible for Russian to do so in five more years. Ukraine's own advancement in their native weapon's technology and the ability to produce it was jump started after 2014 invasion. Putin's clock was ticking.

The questions that arise as to the interplay of the two texts – the one of the media narrative and the one of the readers’ responses to it – are at least three: (1) Does the degree of the salience exhibited by the invariables in the media narrative influence their hooking capacity (readers responses)? (2) How does the text of the readers’ comments develop the text of the media narrative? (3) To what extent are these two texts concurrent?

The correlation between the salience of the media text invariables and the readers’ responses that they evoke is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.**

**Factual salience of the media text invariables  
and the readers’ responses that they evoke**

Invariables (thematic parcels): decreasing salience	Media narrative			Readers’ responses		Hooking capacity of an invariable
	Number of TQ/td	Number of visual images	Number of TQ/td with a hook	Number of TQ/td	Number of likes	
1. West / US	7/30	1	1/1	7/40	102	Mid-to-high
2. Russia	7/23	-	4/15	18/81	150	High
3. Ukrainian army	6/14	5	2/6	7/15	88	Mid-to-low
4. Ukraine	5/12	-	-	-	-	-
5. President Putin	6/9	1	4/5	25/73	184	High
6. War	4/10	-	-	-	-	-
7. Russian army	1/1	1	1/1	9/20	103	Mid
<b>Total</b>	<b>36/99</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>12/28</b>	<b>66/229</b>	<b>627</b>	

The numbers in Table 1 entail several conclusions.

*First*, only one third of the information delivered in the media narrative is reacted to in the readers’ responses (36 TQ / 99 td :: 12 TQ / 28 td), which shows to what extent the text is ‘catchy’ for the readers.

*Second*, that part of the narrative’s content, which gets the readers’ attention, demonstrates their sufficient sensitivity to the respective topics: the readers develop them in-depth in the proportion 12 :: 66 TQ and 28 :: 229 td, or one TQ of the media narrative extends in 5-6 TQ in the comments; and one td of the media narrative evolves in 8 td in the comments.

*Third*, the discussion marshalled in the readers comments has the resonance 1::10 (63 actual comments have 627 likes), which exhibits the readers’ high involvement with the discussed issues.

*Finally*, the hooking capacity of the narrative’s invariables does not directly depend on their salience in the text. According to Table 1, the high hooking capacity is demonstrated by the invariables ‘Russia’ and ‘President Putin’, with the latter being closer to the end in the salience list. Similarly, the invariable ‘West/US’, which is at the top of this list, has mid-to-high hooking capacity. Presumably, the hooking capacity of the verbally featured media issues depends on the reader’s interpretation basis (presuppositions) rather than on the media narrative proper. This finding supports the observation that “readers comments reflect vibrant political activity” (Mathe & Calwell, 2017, p. 60) as a community factor. Meanwhile, the analysis shows that the hooking capacity of an issue in the news media narrative may be latently prompted by the visual means. In the considered article, visual images support all verbal messages defined as ‘hooks’. However, this assumption should be tested on a larger corpus of data.

In this study, the interaction between the information in the narrative text and the information in the readers’ comments is considered in terms of such content boosters as *accentuation* (the comments repeat the idea of the narrative), *elaboration* (the comments add a new detail to the same idea), *extension* (the comments add a new idea contiguous and congruent with that in the narrative), *questioning* (the comments add a new idea, incongruent with that in the narrative), and *combining* (the comments add a new idea noncontiguous with that in the narrative). The configuration of the

content boosters molds the discourse routes in the micronarratives that feature the parcels of the Response Information Space (RIS) constituted by the readers' comments and 'likes':

(1) **Ukrainian army. Media micronarrative:** The progress of the Ukrainian army is slow [3/-/]. ← **RIS micronarrative:** ELABORATION: Its counter-attack was barely noticeable [2/-/]. < **QUESTIONING:** But the Ukrainian army has had many achievements and few lost battles [2+/].

[MEDIA TEXT – 3 td /-/ ← RIS – 4 td: <sup>83</sup> 2 /-/ **consonant**; <sup>5</sup> 2 /+/ dissonant]

(2) **Ukrainian army. Media micronarrative:** The losses of the Ukrainian army are heavy [1 /-/]. ← **RIS micronarrative:** ACCENTUATION: The losses are heavy [1/-/]. ELABORATION: They have been heavy all the time [1/-/]. < **QUESTIONING:** The losses are not that heavy [3+/]. They have not been heavy all the time [2+/]. EXTENSION: Ukraine has advancement in its native weapon's technology [4+/].

[MEDIA TEXT – 11 td /-/ ← RIS – <sup>88</sup> 11 td: <sup>83</sup> 2 /-/ **consonant**; <sup>5</sup> 9 /+/ dissonant]

(3) **Russian army. Media micronarrative:** Russian army has gains [1 /0/] ← **RIS micronarrative:** EXTENSION. Russian army is not incompetent [1+/]. It has taken what it came for [1+/]. And it will not be dislodged by force [1+/]. It has a military strategy [2+/]. < **QUESTIONING:** Russian army's gains are few [1/-/]. Russian army is incompetent and ancient [8/-/]. ELABORATION: But Russian soldiers are dangerous [1/-/]. They are taught to die for their evil leaders [4/-/]. COMBINING: Another marvel of Russian competence was demonstrated today on the moon [1/-/].

[MEDIA TEXT 1 – td /0/ ← RIS – <sup>103</sup> 20 td: <sup>84</sup> 5 /+/ **consonant**; <sup>19</sup> 15 /-/ dissonant]

(4) **President Putin. Media micronarrative:** Putin has a big imperial vision of Russia [2 /-/]. ← **RIS micronarrative:** **QUESTIONING:** No, he hasn't; Putin is not trying to reconstruct a new USSR [2+/]. ELABORATION: Nobody knows; his goal may be limited to Eastern Ukraine [3+/]. EXTENSION: He doesn't want to install a puppet government in Ukraine [2+/]. < **QUESTIONING:** Yes, he desires to build a new USSR [2/-/]. ELABORATION: He is doing it both through diplomacy and military aggression [6/-/].

[MEDIA TEXT – 12 td /-/ ← RIS – <sup>27</sup> 15 td: <sup>5</sup> 7 /+/ dissonant; <sup>22</sup> 8 /-/ **consonant**]

(5) **President Putin. Media micronarrative:** Putin's goals are fluid [1/-/]. Unclear goals allow him to say he is going towards them [1/-/]. ← **RIS micronarrative:** **QUESTIONING:** He has a particular goal to stop NATO expanding to Russia's borders [1+/]. ELABORATION: Putin's concern is shared by numerous Russians [2+/]. We should consider this concern as important [2+/]. < **QUESTIONING:** False – NATO is only an excuse for his deplorable actions, since Russia has borders with NATO countries [5/-/]. ELABORATION: Putin knows that NATO poses no military threat to Russia [8/-/].

[MEDIA TEXT – 2 td /-/ ← RIS – <sup>9</sup> 18 td: <sup>5</sup> 5 /+/ dissonant; <sup>4</sup> 13 /-/ **consonant**]

(6) **President Putin. Media micronarrative:** Putin speaks as if the war has largely fulfilled its aim [1 /-/]. ← **RIS micronarrative:** **QUESTIONING:** Putin's victories are a land bridge to Crimea and killing Ukraine's Neo-Nazi Azov Battalion in Mariupol [2+/]. ELABORATION: Putin has never lost a war, and he will win in Ukraine [2+/]. EXTENSION: He may miscalculate, but why argue with a bear? [2+/]. < **QUESTIONING:** He is far from obtaining what he wanted [1/-/]. He is unable to win in Ukraine [1/-/]. The bear is diseased and crippled [1/-/]. ELABORATION: His aggression led to the new NATO countries on the Russian border [8/-/], to the increase of Western countries' military budgets [3/-/], to the drop of Europe's dependence on Russian energy [2/-/], to providing Ukraine with modern Western weapons [2/-/], to Ukraine's long-lasting fury and hatred against Russia [1/-/], and to the program of de-Russification in Ukraine and Eastern Europe [2 /-/].

EXTENSION: The situation is beyond Putin's control [9/-/]. All he has done is weaken Russia and his own political position [1/-/]. Putin's seizure of Ukrainian territory by military force is unjustified and, if not stopped, he may go further [3/-/].

[MEDIA TEXT – 1 td /-/ ← RIS – <sup>145</sup> 40 td: <sup>9</sup> 6/+/ dissonant; <sup>139</sup> 34/-/ **consonant**]

**(7) Russia. Media micronarrative:** Russia's aims in this war are elastic, ranging from ambitious imperial schemes to more limited land grabs [7/-/]. Russia has an unrealistic long-term imperial objective to bring Ukraine back under Moscow's sway [1/-/]. ← **RIS micronarrative:**

**QUESTIONING:** The aim as to the seizure of the valuable land has been fulfilled [12/+/]. EXTENSION: China will help Russia to use the seized natural resources in the future [4/+/] < **QUESTIONING:** Russian territorial gains occurred before the invasion [1/-/]. The seized areas will become a wasteland [5/-/]. Russians have failed to achieve their goals in this war [16/-/].

[MEDIA TEXT – 8 td /-/ ← RIS – <sup>43</sup> 38 td: <sup>19</sup> 16/+/ dissonant; <sup>24</sup> 22/-/ **consonant**]

**(8) Russia. Media micronarrative:** Russia's aims in this war are unclear [2/-/]. ← **RIS micro**

**narrative: QUESTIONING:** The particular aim is to stop the threat of NATO's expanding to Russia's borders [2/+/]. ELABORATION: Russia will never allow Ukraine's military alliance with hostile NATO which is an aggressive organization used by the US in its globalist foreign policy [6/+/]. EXTENSION: Russia was scared by Ukraine's intention to join NATO voiced in its constitution [2/+/]. Russia considered Zelensky to be an immature leader to cope with this situation [1/+/]. COMBINING: Russia remembered that Hitler and Napoleon invaded it through Ukraine [1/+/]. < **QUESTIONING:** Russia lies, since NATO didn't and doesn't want Ukraine to join [5/-/]. Russia knows that neither NATO nor Ukraine are aggressors [2/-/]. The aggressor is Russia [3/-/]. EXTENSION: Russia ignored its signed commitment to respect the Ukrainian sovereignty and borders [1/-/]. Russia has a long history of imperial aggression [8/-/]. This aggression [3/-/] has caused the emergence and expansion of NATO as a defensive organization.

[MEDIA TEXT – 2 td /-/ ← RIS – <sup>92</sup> 34 td: <sup>24</sup> 12/+/ dissonant; <sup>68</sup> 22/-/ **consonant**]

**(9) Russia. Media micronarrative:** For Russia, this war is a costly and dangerous quagmire [5/-/].

← **RIS micronarrative: QUESTIONING:** The economic situation in Russia remains steady [2 /+/. < **QUESTIONING:** The Russian economy is slowly being straitened under sanctions [7/-/].

[MEDIA TEXT – 5 td /-/ ← RIS – <sup>15</sup> 9 td: <sup>4</sup> 2/+/ dissonant; <sup>11</sup> 7/-/ **consonant**]

**(10) West / US. Media micronarrative:** In this war, the West's political strategy is not clear [2/-/].

← **RIS micronarrative:** EXTENSION: Western politics provoked the war and failed to prevent it [6/-/]. ELABORATION: The US has drawn Ukraine in its sphere of influence [1/-/]. The West has been pushing NATO up to Russian borders for decades in spite of Russia's strong objections [6/-/]. In this war, the US is not fighting Ukraine's occupation, but pursues its own political and economic goals [5/-/]. This war is entirely on Biden and his failed politics as to Putin [12/-/]. Biden fails to stop illegal economic and military support of Russia

[MEDIA TEXT – 2 td /-/ ← RIS – <sup>102</sup> 40 td: <sup>102</sup> 40/-/ **consonant**]


















With the exception of RIS micronarrative (10), all other RIS micronarratives incorporate *questioning* into their discourse routes, which means that the RIS in toto is highly polemical. The polemics is primarily addressed to the issues of the media text: in micronarratives (3) through (9), questioning is employed at the very beginning of the discourse route. In micronarratives (1) and (2), questioning concerns both the media text proper, and its consonant comments. Meanwhile, in most cases questioning-1 is followed by questioning-2, which means that, by contradicting the comments dissonant with the issues of the media text, the readers get consonant with these issues – see micronarratives (3) through (9).

The survey of content boosters prompts a quick suggestion that their types may add some other characteristics to the RIS. While questioning is iterated in it 13 times, the other content boosters are used less frequently: elaboration – 11 times, extension – 7 times, combining – 2 times, and accentuation – 1 time. The prevalence of elaboration (adding a new detail to the same fact) and extension (adding a new contiguous fact) agrees with the assertion that the media sets the discussion agenda, and the readers do not further discuss beyond the agenda set by the media (Miloni et al. 2012).

The configuration of the content boosters in the RIS micronarratives is only one of the factors that is pivotal for identifying this RIS as consonant or dissonant with the media text. Another factor is the salience of the thematic quanta as the micronarratives’ constituents. Such salience depends on the number of textual descriptions subsumed by the thematic quanta, and the number of ‘likes’ obtained by the quanta. These two parameters are showcased in Table 2, where emotive salience (/-/ and +/-) coincides with the factual salience of the thematic quanta.

**Table 2**

**Concurrence of the Response Information Space and the media narrative**

Invariable (thematic parcel)	Media narrative		Response Information Space (RIS)			
	Number of td	Emotivity	Number of td and likes	Dissonant td and likes	Consonant td and likes	Prevailing concurrence
President Putin	5 td	/-/	184  73	19  18 +/-	165  55 -/-	Consonant -/-
Russia	8 td	/-/	150  81	47  30 +/-	103  51 -/-	Consonant -/-
Russian army	1 td	/0/	103  20	19  15 -/-	84  5 +/-	Consonant /0<+/-
Ukrainian army	4 td	/-/	88  15	5  12 +/-	83  4 -/-	Consonant -/-
West / US	2 td	/-/	102  40	--	102  40 -/-	Consonant -/-
Total	20 td	/-/	627  229	155  65 +/-	472  165 -/-	Consonant -/-

The data of Table 2 provide evidence in favor of the prevailing consonant concurrence of the RIS with the media narrative as a whole and with its particular invariables. For the whole RIS, the number of consonant comments exceeds the number of dissonant comments 2.5 times, and the ‘likes’ for the consonant comment are thrice as numerous as the ‘likes’ for the dissonant comments.

The conducted analysis warrants several conclusions and triggers the discussion of their theoretical and practical implications.

**5. Concluding discussion**

A characteristic trait of the modern news media is their interaction with the readers that typically exists in the form of the readers’ comments to the political narrative, and the ‘likes’ to these comments. In the ‘life’ of a political media narrative, strategic narrative in particular, the readers responses represent the ‘receptive stage’. The methodology of its analysis should be compatible with that employed for the analysis of ‘formation’ and ‘projection’ stages in the narrative’s lifecycle, as it is described in (Miskimmon et al., 2013; 2017). The methodological framework proposed in this study for the exploration of readers’ responses to a political media narrative is grounded on the cognitive linguistics findings concerned with building cognitive ontologies of the information delivered verbally and visually in a multimodal text. A cognitive ontology structures

homogeneous information in different ways, one of which is provided by an event-based ontology. In it, the analyzed information disintegrates into thematic domains, which split into thematic parcels that include thematic quanta, or generalized narrative formulae that subsume the particular meanings of the descriptions in an empirical text. In an event-based ontology, most applicable for the content of political news, the domains showcase the information about the invariables, or the main ‘collective actors’ of the text. The domain’s parcels specify these actors, and the thematic quanta shape the schematic micronarratives that describe them in their relation to the event. With the idea of the cognitive ontology as foundational, this research formulated several hypotheses which have been tested and confirmed in a pilot study of a political article followed by a considerable number of readers responses – comments and ‘likes’.

Initially, it was presumed that the content of the media narrative arranged according to an event-based ontology has the constituents with different degrees of factual and emotive salience provided verbally and visually. Having established these constituents, this study asked whether the salient constituents were the ones that ‘hooked’ the readers’ attention. The answer was ‘No’. The hooking capacity of a constituent is rather dependent on the readers’ presuppositions shaped by the current political context. However, the visual images of a multimodal media text seem to be relevant for the hooking capacity of the topics which these images support. The relation between the number of constituents in the cognitive ontology of a political narrative and the number of constituents with a hooking capacity demonstrates the ‘catchiness’ of the text for the readers.

It was presumed that the part of the political narrative’s ontology that gets the attention of the readers interacts with the Response Information Space (RIS) along several lines. First, the readers’ comments develop the issues of the media narrative via the ‘content boosters’ of accentuation, elaboration, extension, questioning and combining. Second, the configuration of the boosters’ sequence creates the ‘discourse route’ along which the readers’ comments evolve. Third, if the RIS abounds in discourse routes with the booster of questioning, the readers’ comments are defined as polemical. In the research, all these presumptions have been confirmed.

The final suggestion concerned the technology for exposing the concurrence of the media narrative and its RIS with regard to their consonance or dissonance. This technology considered both the configuration of the discourse routes in the RIS, and the salience of its narrative issues, which is exposed through the number of the textual descriptions in the readers’ comments and the number of ‘likes’ to them. The developed technology, applied in the analysis of the empirical data, has proved to be feasible. It enables the presentation the formally and semantically haphazard RIS as a comprehensive and coherent whole whose information structure can be compared with that of the media narrative.

This study, being methodologically oriented, proposes the novel tools applicable in the queries that pursue theoretical and practical objectives. When applied in the theoretical interdisciplinary domain of multimodality and intertextuality, these tools help to expose regularities in the interplay of the political narrative projected in a multimodal media text, and the readers’ narrative response to this text – the issues topical for political narratology as the field of expertise in both linguistic and political studies. The practical application of the proposed methodological tools extends into the domains of political analytics and journalism. Meanwhile, “being interdisciplinary is not a matter of cherry-picking concepts, but a set of skills – collaboration, knowing how to learn from others, being flexible about one’s approaches, and presenting knowledge from your own field clearly” (Miskimmon et al 2017, p. 3). These requirements suggest *further methodological improvements* of the proposed research framework, which has also to be tested on larger scope of data.

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There are no conflicts of interest relevant to the content or financing of this article that the author has to declare.

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## РЕЦЕПЦІЯ ПОЛІТИЧНОГО НОВИННОГО НАРАТИВУ У ЧИТАЦЬКИХ ВІДГУКАХ: МУЛЬТИМОДАЛЬНІСТЬ І ІНТЕРТЕКСТУАЛЬНІСТЬ

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### Анотація

Розроблена у сфері міжнародних відносин, теорія стратегічного нарративу (Miskimmon et al., 2013; 2017 та ін.) визначає його як засіб, за допомогою якого політичні суб'єкти конструюють спільні смисли у міжнародній політиці й формують світогляд, переконання і поведінку внутрішніх і зовнішніх політичних гравців і суспільних кіл. Автори теорії стверджують, що пояснення функціонування стратегічного нарративу передбачає вивчення стадій його формування, проекції та рецепції. Пошук такого пояснення об'єднує різні галузі досліджень, спрямовані на розроблення методології, що уможливило б розуміння того, як формування, проекція та рецепція стратегічного нарративу співпрацюють разом і формують єдиний триптих. Пропонована стаття розглядає цю проблему з точки зору когнітивної лінгвістики, яка вивчає концептуальні засади вербалізованої інформації. Стаття пропонує і тестує нову методологічну концепцію, базовану на застосуванні когнітивної онтології, що структурує вербально і візуально представлену інформацію. Когнітивна онтологія уможливило б відстеження закономірностей в одночасній динаміці трьох нарративних аспектів. У фокусі статті перебуває проекційно-рецептивний аспект, представлений у тексті медіановин і реакціях читачів на них – питання, актуальне для лінгвістики інтертекстуальності. Методологічно та тематично стаття продовжує попередні дослідження (Zhabotynska & Velivchenko, 2019; Zhabotynska & Ryzhova, 2022; Chaban et al. 2023; Chaban et al. 2024 та ін.) особливостей формування / проекції стратегічного нарративу, утіленого в мультимодальному медіатексті.

**Ключові слова:** когнітивна онтологія, стратегічний політичний нарратив, медіатекст, мультимодальність, рецепція нарративу, читачька реакція, інтертекстуальність.