



# ASIAN JOURNAL OF INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH



## Institutional and Public Communication on the Russian-Ukrainian War: Between Journalism and Documentation

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54392/ajir26213>

Received: 12-12-2025; Revised: 03-05-2026; Accepted: 23-05-2026; Published: 11-06-2026



**Abstract:** The Russian-Ukrainian war has impacted the field of war journalism, in which user-generated audiovisual content has become an important tool for capturing, interpreting, and disseminating the experience of war. The study aimed to study the cultural and historical aspects of military journalism in Ukraine based on a qualitative analysis of audiovisual content. At the same time, the study is based on a qualitative content analysis of video materials shared on social networks (YouTube, TikTok, Twitter (X)) by civilians, military personnel and public activists. For this purpose, an intersectoral approach was used, which made it possible to identify the main differences in the methods of presenting military events and their cultural and historical significance. The analysis showed that the user narratives reflected the themes of patriotism, historical memory, solidarity, humor and gender aspects. It was found that civilians most often focused on personal trauma and loss, the military on collective resilience and heroism, while activists emphasized international support and cultural mobilization. The symbols that appeared in the video (positive images, city ruins, everyday objects, images of defenders) formed a new level of cultural representation of the war. Thus, the article demonstrated that UGC is not just an alternative source of information, but an important cultural resource that influences the development of military journalism and contributes to the construction of Ukrainian identity.

**Keywords:** Cultural Representation of War, Military Journalism, Russian-Ukrainian War, Ukrainian Identity, User-Generated Content (UGC).

### 1. Introduction

Modern military journalism in Ukraine has undergone a radical transformation over the past decade. Before 2014, its scope was largely limited to official reports from the Ministry of Defense and occasional specialized publications, but with the beginning of the war, and especially after Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, it became one of the key tools for shaping public opinion and national identity. At the same time, traditional media were not the only channel of information in this system. Specifically, content created by various users – civilians, military personnel, volunteers, and activists – began to gain increasing importance. Various internet platforms, including YouTube, TikTok, Twitter (X), have become important spaces where a mass military narrative is born and disseminated. That's where you can observe "field" journalism: videos from the trenches, amateur documentary reports that instantly become elements of information warfare.

Such user-generated audiovisual materials actively inform about the course of hostilities and construct the image of the modern Ukrainian soldier. Thus, such materials allow for the embodiment of a nation's collective experience and the formation of new symbols of cultural memory. So, today, military journalism in Ukraine exists at the intersection of professional media production and mass self-organized communication. Despite the obvious importance of user-generated content in contemporary discourse, this topic is under-researched. Modern authors have primarily focused on the international media discourse about the war in Ukraine. Specifically, [Białek-Szwed & Wójciszyn-Wasil \(2024\)](#) and [Kitsa \(2024\)](#) focused on the Polish press and radio, where the evolution of narratives from 2022–2024 can be traced. [Marques \(2023\)](#) highlighted the reflection of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in the media of Portugal and Brazil. The work by [Asadchykh et al. \(2024\)](#) analyzed the features of the war's portrayal in



the media of China and Japan. The authors showed that East Asian discourse is often characterized by pragmatism, self-interest, and at the same time, ambivalence in identifying the perpetrators of the conflict. A collective study by [Fengler \*et al.\* \(2018\)](#) identified the image of the war in Ukraine in European media across 13 countries. The authors' conclusion is as follows: different national media frame events depending on their own political context, although overall, the Ukrainian position received significant support. [Savitsky \*et al.\* \(2025\)](#) pointed to specific aspects of Russia's armed aggression that are related in the factual context, reflected in military journalism. The analysis of regional and national media also played a vital role in the scientific discourse. In particular, it was indicated that current texts covered changes in institutional media in conditions of active hostilities. In addition, the adaptation of the media to the needs of society was proven ([Chuzhykov & Chuzhykov, 2024](#); [Hyrina, 2018](#); [Kostusiak \*et al.\*, 2023](#)). Besides, [Bartnicki \*et al.\* \(2023\)](#) pointed to the use of various information technologies in hybrid warfare. The study by [Ivanytska \*et al.\* \(2024\)](#) is devoted to highlighting the role of Ukrainian culture in modern media. The authors also pointed to the problems of preserving identity during war. Several studies have pointed to the influence of historical memory on national identity ([Drohomyretska \*et al.\*, 2024](#); [Krasnodemska \*et al.\*, 2024](#); [Kozak \*et al.\*, 2024](#)). Authors have demonstrated that it was the memory of past tragedies and struggles that shaped society's readiness to resist in the present ([Pavlova & Rohozha, 2025](#)). At the international level, the article also touches on research on conflict communication, platform-based surveillance ([Białek-Szwed & Wójciszyn-Wasi, 2024](#)). The analysis of visual images of war and the transformation of journalistic authority in the digital environment is significant ([Rauchfleisch \*et al.\*, 2017](#); [Hallgren, 2025](#)). In particular, recent research has indicated that social platforms have changed the distribution, verification, and public interpretation of wartime images ([Manor & Crilly, 2018](#)). In addition, [Divon & Eriksson Krutrök \(2024\)](#) and [Kotišová & van der Velden \(2025\)](#) have indicated that user-generated surveillance can complicate the boundaries between journalism and documentation. Against this background, the Ukrainian case may offer an important opportunity to explore the role of user content in the interpretation of information flows.

Thus, scientific research is largely focused on classical forms of journalism, official communications, and the media's influence on the formation of national identity. However, audiovisual practices "from below," meaning personal video blogs and short videos on social platforms, remain on the periphery of academic attention. At the same time, there is a particular lack of research that would thoroughly define the role of content through the lens of the cultural and historical dimension. It is also noteworthy that contemporary researchers have primarily focused on information and security challenges (for example, the problems of disinformation and manipulation), while the issue of cultural identity and historical memory remains a little-studied and complex question. This, in turn, creates a significant gap, the filling of which is a pressing task for modern humanities.

In this study, user-generated content (UGC) is defined as audiovisual material created and initially distributed by non-institutional or semi-institutional actors. War journalism is defined as reporting produced by professional news organizations and as a communicative field of wartime in which institutional media, journalistic actors, and user-generated documentation interact. At the same time, the study distinguished documentation as evidentiary or witness-oriented recording of events from institutional communication that is strategically framed and focused on representation, mobilization, or legitimacy.

Thus, the aim of this article is to study the cultural and historical aspects of military journalism in Ukraine based on a qualitative analysis of user-generated audiovisual content created by various social groups. The research aims to answer the following questions:

- 1 How have user-generated audiovisual narratives reflected Ukrainian cultural identity and historical memory within the framework of war journalism?
- 2 What are the key themes and symbols in content created by civilians, military personnel, and activists?
- 3 How do these narratives differ in their methods of depicting war events?

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Research design

The study was conducted on the basis of a qualitative research approach, which was aimed at identifying the main socio-cultural narratives that have formed in modern audiovisual content. Qualitative methods made it



possible to identify complex cultural phenomena that cannot be fully explained by quantitative indicators alone. In the space of military communication, audiovisual materials that were actively distributed in digital media perform an informational function and act as carriers of cultural symbols and emotional narratives.

The methodological model of the study consisted of thematic coding, discursive analysis and elements of narrative analysis. This combination of methods made it possible to determine the role of civilian users, military structures and journalists in media discourse, that is, how they form and disseminate interpretations of military experience based on audiovisual materials.

The unit of analysis was individual video material (video post) that were published on digital platforms. The analysis covered several communicative levels:

verbal (speech, interviews, text captions),

visual (symbols, flags, military uniforms, images of destruction or everyday life),

audio (songs, sirens, sounds of shelling, emotional reactions),

contextual (video description, hashtags, author's comments).

Such multimodality made it possible to describe the video materials as media texts that reflected various aspects of the war experience. Since the analyzed platforms differed in format, capabilities, and distribution logic, the cross-platform comparison was conducted at the level of thematic and symbolic patterns, rather than technical platform features. In other words, the study compared how similar themes (memory, heroization, trauma, humor, solidarity) were presented on different platforms.

## 2.2 Data Sources and Sample

The main data sources were popular digital platforms that were actively used in the Ukrainian information space during the war: YouTube, TikTok, Telegram and Twitter/X. These platforms were chosen from the point of view that they play a prominent role in the modern media environment of Ukraine, as they combined eyewitness accounts, journalistic materials and institutional communication.

The YouTube platform was chosen as a space for distributing long-term video content. TikTok was included in the analysis due to its popularity among young audiences and the active distribution of short emotional narratives. At the same time, the Telegram platform is one of the main communication channels during the war. Twitter/X is defined as a platform where audiovisual content is combined with news reports. Hence, the main data sources for writing this article were popular digital platforms in Ukraine, including: 1. YouTube (the largest video platform where users post long videos, blogs, documentaries, and front-line diaries). 2. TikTok (a short-clip platform that has become particularly popular among young people). 3. Telegram (the key messenger in Ukraine during the war); 4. Twitter (now X) (news dissemination, audiovisual and text mix). Appendix A shows the main materials for analysis.

Therefore, this work analyzed different types of audiovisual information:

Civilian video blogs,

Frontline videos,

Amateur videos,

Journalistic materials and reports.

To create a corpus of materials, purposive sampling was used, which allowed us to focus on materials that are strictly related to the research tasks. The time frame of the study consisted of the period from February 2022 to September 2025, that is, the full-scale phase of the Russian-Ukrainian war, when there was a sharp increase in the volume of user-generated military content.

The criteria for including materials in the sample were:

A direct connection with the events of the Russian-Ukrainian war;

The presence of an audiovisual format (video);



Publication during the specified period of the study;

Authorship by civilians, military personnel, journalists or activists.

Materials that had no direct connection with events in Ukraine, as well as duplicate videos or repeated publications of the same content were excluded from the sample. Qualitative research methods allow for the recording of facts and interpret them in the socio-cultural space. Such an approach is key for the chosen topic, namely to determine the understanding of military journalism in wartime conditions.

### 2.3 Data Collection

Data collection was carried out systematically. In particular, at the first stage, relevant video materials were searched on platforms using keywords and hashtags related to the war. Search queries included, in particular:

*"war in Ukraine", "Armed Forces of Ukraine", "occupation", "volunteers", "military diary", "war", "military events", "war on the front", "events from the front", "Donbas".*

To operationalize purposive sampling, searches were conducted separately on each platform using a combination of keywords, hashtags, and source accounts. On YouTube and Twitter/X, searches relied on keyword combinations and channel-based browsing; on TikTok and Telegram, keywords and hashtags were supplemented by browsing posts from the respective channels. Search queries were conducted in Ukrainian and English with date restrictions that corresponded to the study period.

Content selection also took into account visibility indicators, including the number of views, reposts/shares, comments, and wider distribution across platforms. Videos were prioritized when they demonstrated significant distribution in the Ukrainian or international digital media space. This approach allowed us to cover both materials circulating in the Ukrainian information space and materials addressed to an international audience.

At the second stage, video materials that met the selection criteria were downloaded using 4K Video Downloader. This allowed saving the materials for further analysis and avoiding data loss in the event of video deletion or other critical reasons.

The next stage enabled the transcription of audio materials. In particular, special automated speech recognition services (Otter.ai, Trint) were used for this purpose. Later, the texts were edited manually to ensure accuracy. During transcription, the main and important linguistic features were preserved, including emotional expressions, pauses, and intonation accents. Transcription was performed in a clean form: the lexical content was preserved as close as possible to the original language. At the same time, minor delays or incomplete repetitions were only edited when they did not affect the meaning. When videos contained multilingual speech or code-switching, the original language was preserved in the transcript and translated into English. Spoken language, on-screen text, and subtitles were recorded separately in analytical notes. Nonverbal audio cues, such as sirens, crying, laughter, chanting, or explosions, were also noted. These moments contributed to the interpretation of emotional tone.

After that, all video materials were cataloged in a research database. For each video, metadata was recorded: platform, publication date, author or channel, language, and a brief description of the content. Visual features of the material and contextual elements (video captions, hashtags, description) were also taken into account.

As a result, 200 video materials were included in the analysis, distributed between platforms as follows: YouTube: 60 videos; Twitter/X: 50 videos; Telegram: 50 videos; TikTok: 40 videos

During the selection, the level of distribution of materials (number of views, reposts, or audience interactions) was also taken into account.

### 2.4 Data Analysis

The methods of thematic coding and discursive analysis were used to analyze the collected material. The study analyzed three groups of video materials representing different segments of modern military media discourse:



User-generated content (UGC) – amateur videos from TikTok, Telegram and YouTube platforms, created by civilian users or military personnel on personal accounts. These materials reflect the “bottom-up view” and direct experience of war.

Official military media, which includes state media and institutional communication of army units (ArmyInform, ArmyTV, Azov, Third Army Corps), which are formed editorially, but often integrate user materials or videos shot by the military.

International content – stories by Ukrainian and foreign journalists, activists and international organizations (24tv.ua, Suspilne, PBS NewsHour, WarTranslated, UK for UNHCR) that work with UGC or create their own materials based on it.

Other non-military media resources (Ramina), which combine individual user materials with information obtained from the Internet. This approach made it possible to analyze the representation of war in different segments of the digital media space.

Category assignment was based on the primary identity of the content producer, not the account. Thus, if a video originally recorded by a civilian witness was later republished by a media outlet or institutional channel, it was coded according to its original creator.

Initially, all video materials were reviewed. Subsequently, their transcriptions were determined for initial familiarization with the content. This made it possible to obtain a general idea of the structure of the material and identify the main semantic elements. After that, open coding was carried out, during which key themes and symbolic motifs were recorded, which were actively repeated in the video materials.

In the process of primary coding, various thematic elements were identified, in particular: "patriotism", "war trauma", "historical parallels", "heroization" and "religious symbolism". At the next stage, these codes were grouped into analytical categories. These categories provided the cultural meanings of the studied content: "national identity", "historical memory" and "cultural symbols of war".

The method of discursive analysis made it possible to identify the main linguistic strategies used in the video materials. Particular attention was paid to the analysis of how authors interpret military events and form symbolic narratives about the war.

Elements of narrative analysis were also applied, which was aimed at reconstructing the plot structures through which authors present their own war experience. Among the most common narratives, plots of “everyday survival”, “testimony of tragedy” and “heroic resistance” were identified.

The materials were coded manually. This method made it possible to take into account semantic nuances and cultural allusions.

As part of the study, three main groups of video materials were analyzed, representing different segments of the modern media discourse about the war.

## 2.5 Ensuring the Reliability and Validity of the Results

To ensure the reliability and analytical validity of the study, special procedures were used to verify the interpretations. First, part of the video materials were re-coded by an independent researcher. This made it possible to achieve consistency in interpretations and clarify the formulation of individual thematic categories. The results of the coding were also compared and discussed. Moreover, reflective research notes were used in the analysis process, which recorded previous interpretations, dubious cases and alternative explanations. This made it possible to reduce the risk of subjectivity when interpreting cultural symbols and narratives. The analytical triangulation method was also used. This involved comparing the results between different types of sources (user content, official military media, journalistic materials). This approach made it possible to identify common and different thematic elements. Accordingly, the use of these procedures made it possible to increase the analytical validity of the results.

## 2.6 Ethical Foundations of Research

The main principles of the research are confidentiality, anonymization, and voluntariness. From a privacy perspective, even if the video is public, the individuals depicted are not identified at the personal data level. In some cases (if it threatens the safety of the authors of the material), generalized references to sources are used in the publication without revealing the names or pseudonyms of the authors. Furthermore, videos containing scenes of violence or death were analyzed with utmost caution, without being replicated in the work. Thus, the research adheres to the ethical standards of academic work and the principles of humanity.

To ensure data integrity in the context of volatile wartime digital content, each video in the corpus was archived with a metadata record. Screenshots of important footage and saved transcript files were retained for analytical review. The published article reports only the minimum necessary identifying information to allow for scholarly review without redistributing confidential content.

The study used only publicly available audiovisual materials that were published on open digital platforms. In accordance with generally accepted research ethics for digital media, the use of such materials does not require individual consent if the content is publicly available and intended for a wide audience.

The study avoided unnecessary reproduction of traumatic or graphic materials. Footage that could reveal sensitive operational details or expose vulnerable individuals was not included.

## 2.7 Researcher's Position

The researcher is Ukrainian, which imposes a dual perspective. Specifically, the researcher possesses knowledge of the cultural, linguistic, and historical context, which allowed them to recognize symbols, allusions, and subtexts that would have gone unnoticed by a foreign researcher. However, the risks involve potential emotional bias. To minimize subjectivity, systematic coding of a portion of the results by foreign colleagues to verify the objectivity of the interpretations, and reflection were used.

## 3. Results

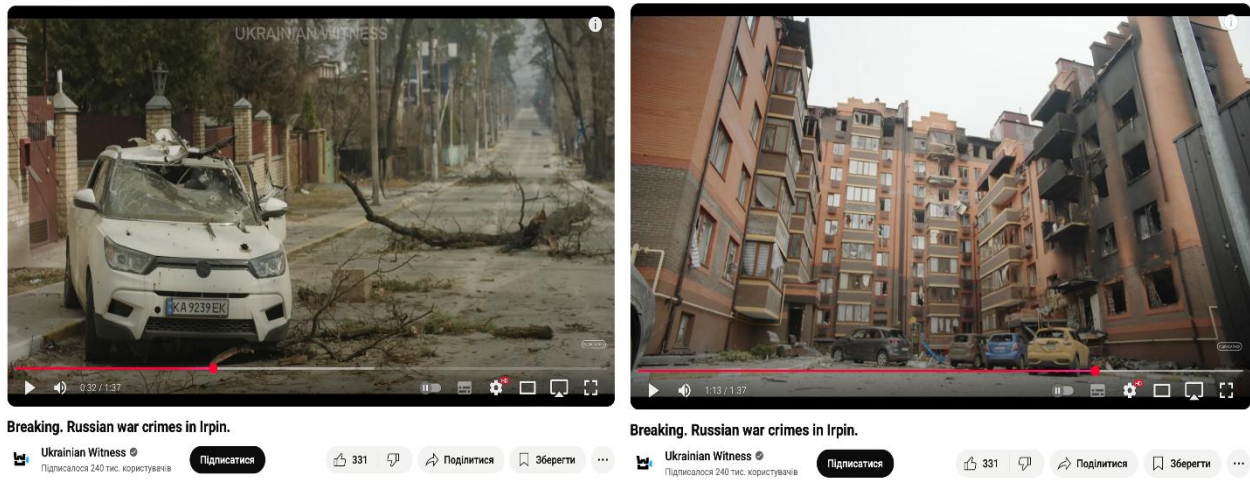
Analysis of user-generated content indicates that a significant portion of the video materials represent Ukrainian cultural identity through references to the historical continuity of the struggle.

### 3.1 Cultural Memory, Symbols and Ritual Practices

The corpus analysis showed that the motif of historical memory and symbolic documentation of war is found in approximately half of the video material studied. This theme is especially noticeable in content created by civilian users and volunteers. A video shared on Telegram channels and other social networks (Twitter, TikTok) showed local residents protesting against the Russian occupation. In particular, in the Telegram channel "Typovy Kherson", Ukrainian flags and posters with the inscription "Kherson is Ukraine" were visible among the crowd. This indicated the existence of traditions of civil resistance. In these videos, protesters chanted slogans: "Kherson is Ukraine!" and "Glory to Ukraine!" Such phrases pointed to the symbolic connection between local resistance and national identity. A similar motif is observed in a video published on the YouTube channel Ukrainian Witness on March 30, 2022, in which volunteers document the ruins of Irpin. The video explores the idea of cultural memory, as destroyed buildings are shown as evidence of crimes that must remain in history (Breaking. Russian war crimes in Irpin, 2022). Such videos are also available on other platforms (See Figure 1), formatted as a "digital chronicle" (UK for UNHCR, 2025a). In the video narration, the volunteers emphasized the documentary function of the recording and stated: "The world needs to see what happened here."

The use of national symbols is one of the most common themes in the corpus of materials. It was recorded in approximately 40–45% of videos. This theme is especially noticeable in materials from military channels and user content from the front. The official account of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine (@DefenceU) on Twitter/X has shared various user-generated materials from the front, including videos where soldiers sing the anthem or raise the flag at positions.





**Figure 1.** Russian crimes in Irpin. The image showed destroyed civilian infrastructure and damaged residential buildings, recorded by volunteers.

Source: Breaking. Russian war crimes in Irpin (2022)

Additionally, the 24 Channel YouTube channel shared a video about how Ukrainian defenders from the 123rd Territorial Defense Brigade were able to raise the first Ukrainian flag on the temporarily occupied Kinburn Spit (24 Channel, 2025). During the recording, one of the soldiers stated: "We are raising the flag so that everyone knows that this country is Ukraine" (24 Channel, 2025). These actions are ritualistic in nature and construct a symbolic image of a defender, an heir to historical traditions of struggle, in the collective imagination.

### 3.2 Humor and Everyday Resilience

A separate category is memes and humorous content. Humorous elements or memes were recorded in about a quarter of the videos. They were mostly contained in short TikTok video content.

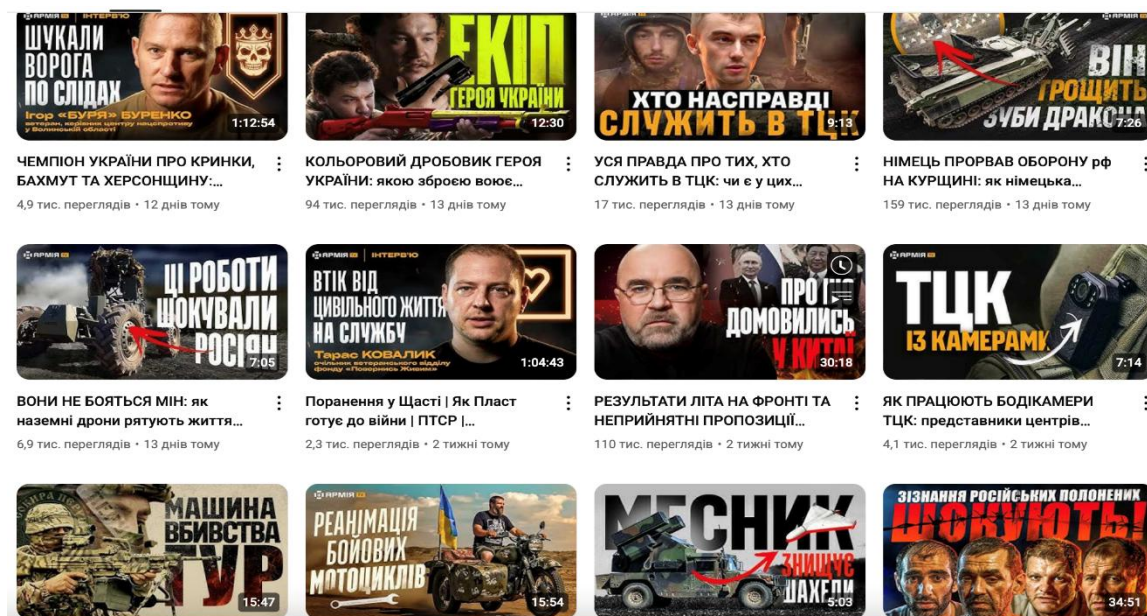
TikTok users are actively posting short front-line videos showing the daily lives of soldiers. Despite their lighthearted presentation, these videos also serve a cultural function: through irony and laughter, they become a way of collectively experiencing war and shaping a narrative of resilience. UGC actively functions as a digital memory.

For example, user-generated videos of the aftermath of Russian military shelling of civilian targets periodically appear on platforms such as Ukrainian Witness or WarTranslated. Although such independent media projects do not belong to military journalism, their purpose is to document the consequences of war and disseminate information to a global audience. Such materials serve both an informational and a memorial function, as they document the tragedy for history and act as evidence of the crimes. At the same time, it's worth noting that some UGC is aimed at an external audience. WarTranslated (@wartranslated) y Twitter/ X translates videos of Ukrainian military and civilians for English-speaking users (WarTranslated, n.d.). At the same time, one of the key characteristics of user-generated videos is their emotional intensity. For example, TikTok videos from military accounts show frontline life without editing or official commentary. It is this authenticity, the absence of "filtering," that makes the content an important carrier of the cultural code of modern Ukraine. At the same time, individual TikTok videos show the lives of ordinary civilians experiencing shelling, their thoughts on the war, and so on (UK for UNHCR, 2025b). Several TikTok videos feature soldiers making ironic comments about everyday situations on the front lines. In one example, a soldier joked while cooking food in a dugout: "Five-star restaurant, but the service is terrible." At the same time, Ukrainian journalism also integrated user-generated content, primarily video footage filmed by eyewitnesses to the events. Such stories were used in television news programs and individual reports, which were also distributed on the Internet. In particular, the DI TV channel used eyewitnesses' materials who recorded on video the moment of the Russian troops' strike on the Ukrainian city of Dnipro on September 30, 2025 (DI, 2025). To describe the strikes on the city of Lviv, the Pershiy Zakhidny TV channel distributed an amateur video that recorded the hitting of a residential building in the village of Sknyliv near Lviv, the work of rescuers and a fire brigade (TRK Pershiy Zakhidny, 2025). On the night of September 28, 2025, the Russians attacked the Kyiv region

with drones and missiles. As a result of this attack, penthouses along the street in Petropavlivska Borshchahivka were destroyed and damaged. Correspondents of Suspilne used a video of a resident of one of the houses, Mark Sergeev, who showed the first minutes of the strike on their house, and later told journalists about his condition and his emotions (Sergeev & Suspilne, 2025). Thus, user-generated audiovisual narratives in Ukrainian military journalism reflect cultural identity and historical memory through references to the historical past, the use of symbolism, the documentation of traumatic experiences, and the internationalization of narratives.

### 3.3 Heroization and Military Identity

The narrative of heroism of the military was characteristic of approximately one-third of the materials. Specifically, stories of soldiers about battles and encirclement are published on the YouTube channel Army TV – Military Television of Ukraine. Separate videos are dedicated to the heroic deeds of soldiers and detailed descriptions of various modern weapons (Ab3army, 2023; ArmyTV, 2025a; ArmyTV, 2025b). Individual videos show life in a dugout: soldiers cooking food, talking, and joking. Despite the ordinariness of the images, the very fact of being on the front lines transforms them into a symbol of heroism, where simple survival becomes an act of resistance (See Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Posters from YouTube channel Army TV – Military Television of Ukraine. The images pointed to a narrative of military heroism and everyday life at the front, in which ordinary tasks (cooking, resting, maintaining weapons) become representations of resistance

Source: *Army TV – Military Television of Ukraine (n.d.)*

The Azov YouTube channel also features a variety of videos that clearly show Ukrainian forces striking Russian positions, making tactical advances, and withdrawing from encircled areas (Azov, 2025a). The channel also features other operational footage that gives viewers an insight into ongoing military actions and maneuvers (Azov, 2025b) (See Figure 3).

Similar plots are also popular on TikTok. Ukrainian military accounts feature short videos showing everyday moments, including cleaning weapons and resting after battle. Such video stories show the presence of heroism not through pathos, but by depicting real life.

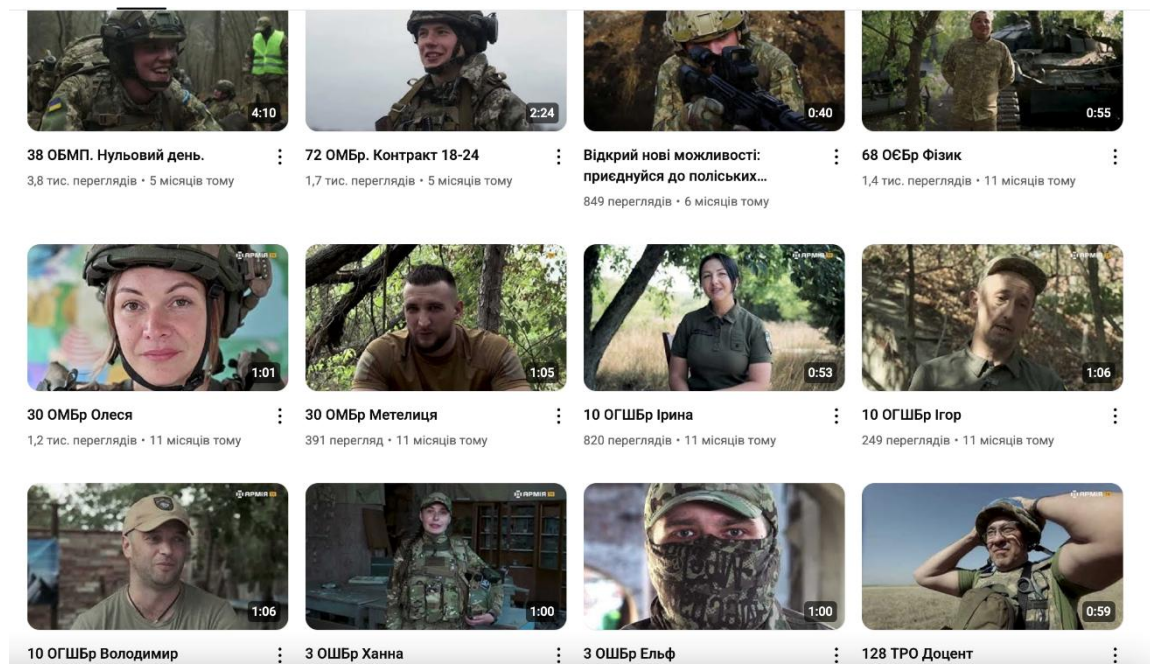
The ArmyInform channel contains professionally created videos for government media projects. Here, too, the heroism of military service is evident, for example, in a video titled "Ready to become part of the legend?" Join the Mykolaiv Marines under "Contract 18-24." In this video, the heroization of service becomes the main symbol: military service is presented as a path to entering the "legend." This forms an image of the army as a community of the chosen and refers to the historical memory of the Cossacks and warrior-defenders. Resource mobilization is also a key theme, particularly in the video "Contract 18-24 Kyrylo: 18 years old – and already a paratrooper."





**Figure 3.** Combat operations of the Azov unit, recorded on operational video footage. The video footage shows the actions of the military on the front line, in particular, the use of weapons, tactical movements and coordinated combat operations. In the analyzed corpus, such visual scenes allow for the creation of a narrative of heroization and professional identity. Source: [Azov \(2025b\)](#)

The key theme here is engaging young people. The symbol becomes the age: "18 years old" as the point of adulthood and entry into the adult world through the army. This aligns with the cultural code of a teenager's transformation into a protective adult male. A separate section of the channel is trauma and memory. The consequences of Russian shelling are actively spreading here; thus the videos serve as a digital chronicle. Ruins, fragments, and destroyed buildings become symbols, conveying the theme of collective trauma and memory. It captures the history of war for future generations. A particularly important section is the individual stories of the military: "Oles of the 30th Separate Mechanized Brigade," "Metelytsia of the 30th Separate Mechanized Brigade," "Iryna of the 10th Separate Mountain Assault Brigade" (0:53, 11 months ago), "Ihor of the 10th Separate Mountain Assault Brigade," etc. (ArmyInform, n.d.). These videos personalize the war experience, where each name becomes a symbol. The stories of specific individuals ("Olesya," "Iryna," "Ihor") convey the idea that war is not an abstraction, but the lives of specific Ukrainians (See Figure 4).



**Figure 4.** Visual presentation of military narratives on the ArmyInform channel on YouTube. The posters showed the experience of war through the personalized stories of servicemen. Here, images of different people: men, women, who told their own combat stories. The use of individual names, military uniforms and frontline symbols created symbolic representations of heroism. Source: [ArmyInform \(n.d.\)](#)

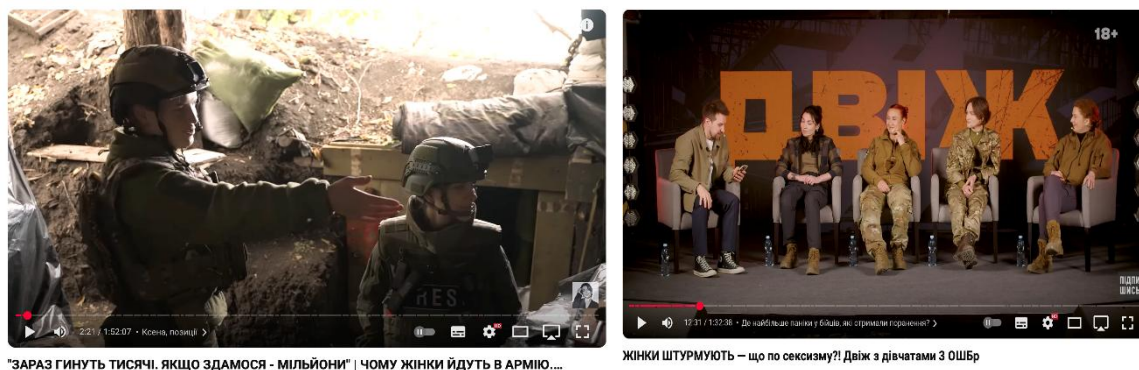


### 3.4 Gender Transformation in Military Narratives

Another important theme in the institutional communication of the army is women in war, symbolizing a symbol of change. Stories related to women's participation in war were present in approximately 15% of the video materials. This trend indicated the increasing visibility of this topic in the media space. Specifically, the Third Army Corps channel contains a video titled "WOMEN ARE ATTACKING – what about sexism?!" Movement with the girls of the 3rd Separate Assault Brigade (Third Army Corps, 2025). This video features interviews with women defenders who perform various roles, from nurses to deminers. One of the symbols is a military uniform, but with elements that evoke femininity (street makeup, hairstyle, family photos against the backdrop of military equipment). One interviewee pointed out: "At first, people were surprised to see a woman with a machine gun, but now they understand that we are fighting the same war" (Third Army Corps, 2025).

This contrasts with the traditional image of the "female guardian" and forms a new cultural identity in a country at war (Third Army Corps, 2025).

Ramina Eskhakzai's video interview ("Defenders of the Armed Forces of Ukraine," RAMINA YouTube channel) is also important material for understanding the symbols of female presence in military journalism. The interviewees: "Valkyrie," a combat medic with the Third Assault Brigade, describes the evacuation of the wounded from the battlefield and the psychological consequences of years of service; "Xena" talks about working with a machine gun – a symbol of a woman warrior mastering a weapon traditionally associated with the image of a man; "Runa" demonstrates the operation of a combat vehicle and her own experience on the Bakhmut front, emphasizing her decision to remain in the army even after the war; "Kyiv" and "Valkyrie" raise the issues of gender equality, life at the front, and the perception of women in the army (Thousands are dying now. if we surrender – millions | why women join the army, 2023). The main themes addressed in the video are overcoming stereotypes: women prove that the army is not just a "male space," and gender challenges, as the plot raises the issues of sexism, devaluing women's capabilities, and the fight for equality (Figure 5).



**Figure 5.** Posters from an interview with a 20-year-old Ukrainian machine gunner nicknamed Xena (Oksana Rubanyak). The interview depicts a young female soldier in uniform, describing her experiences on the front lines and gender perceptions in the army. Source: Xena / Oksana Rubanyak / machine gunner...(2023)

### 3.5 Internationalization of Ukrainian War Narratives

Video materials aimed at the international community play a special role in shaping the narrative of the war. They accounted for about 20% of video content. They have conveyed the pain and loss of the Ukrainian people and demonstrated Ukraine's ability to integrate its experiences into the cultural space. In particular, the PBS/NewsHour platform has a video titled "Ukrainians face a painful choice as Russians advance on city." It tells the story of civilians forced to choose between staying in cities near the front line or fleeing. Thus, such international publications have the potential to reach audiences outside Ukraine (PBS NewsHour, 2024). Some of the content has focused on stories of medical assistance and recovery in war-torn cities. In particular, TikTok has featured videos of Russian drone and missile attacks on Ukrainian cities (UK for UNHCR, 2025a). Such content must serve a dual function: internally, it supports Ukrainians in the belief that they are not alone and that their experience resonates with the global community, and externally, it shapes the image of Ukraine as an active participant in global cultural policy.



In the report, one resident explained his dilemma: "If we stay, we risk our lives. If we leave, we will lose our home" (UK for UNHCR, 2025a). Additionally, such materials create the effect of "digital solidarity": thanks to international platforms (YouTube, international media), Ukrainian stories reach a wide audience and form online support communities. Hashtags like #StandWithUkraine or #ArtistsForUkraine serve as digital markers of this global unity.

Regarding content comparison, it's noticeable that civilian users who film and share videos on TikTok, X(Twitter), or YouTube usually focus on the direct experience of war "from below": shelling, destruction of homes, life in shelters, evacuation. Thus, civilian narratives are historically significant as a "people's chronicle of war" because they allow for the documentation of events in the format of daily, often fragmented accounts.

Unlike user videos (destruction videos and documentation of the traumatic experiences of civilians), military content creators also use other types of narrative. The video "38th Separate Marine Brigade. "Day Zero" (ArmyInform, 2023) indicates the existence of a strong combat brotherhood and initiation: the first day in the unit was presented as an introduction to a new historical mission. In the story "Defenders of the Armed Forces of Ukraine" (YouTube, 2023), female servicemen spoke about the importance of professional training, existing gender equality, and overcoming stereotypes. The main symbols are uniforms, weapons, and medical instruments that embody the modern role of women in the army.

Therefore, narratives in military communication resources differ from civilian user videos: they emphasize heroism, discipline, professionalism, and form the image of the army as a subject of history that constructs a new national identity.

Activists, volunteers, and journalists primarily target their content toward an international audience and attempt to explain and globalize the Ukrainian war experience. A video from PBS NewsHour showed how the stories of displaced people are becoming universal symbols of forced migration. Unlike civilian and military narratives, activist and journalistic narratives often frame the war within the global discourse of human rights, democracy, and international support.

## 4. Discussions

The analysis of audiovisual content across three sectors (civilians, military, activists/journalists) allowed for the identification of several overarching themes that hold cultural and historical significance. Specifically, patriotism was manifested in military narratives that construct the image of a hero-defender ready for self-sacrifice. As the results show, the videos about contract service on the ArmyInform channel constructed the idea of military service as the embodiment of civic duty and national honor. This directly correlates with the concept of "communicative memory practices" (Pavlova & Rohozha, 2025), in which the heroic image becomes a mediator between the past and the present. These observations therefore indicated that wartime user-generated content functioned as a mechanism for the creation of cultural meaning. Drawing on everyday images, objects, and personal testimonies, such materials transformed individual experiences into shared cultural symbols that influenced the formation of collective memory.

The results also describe people's experiences and beliefs in victory (narratives "Kherson is Ukraine", events in Irpen, and in frontline zones). The highlighted narratives are generally consistent with the article by Kozak *et al.* (2025), describing the functioning of state institutions in the face of constant rocket attacks on Kyiv. This information provides a concrete context for the impact of hostilities on civilian and institutional life, which is part of the documentary picture. The narratives highlighted are generally consistent with the article describing the functioning of state institutions in the face of constant rocket attacks on Kyiv. This information provides a concrete context for the impact of hostilities on civilian and institutional life, which is part of the documentary picture.

At the same time, historical memory and its visualization are most prominent in the civilian sector. Footage of destroyed buildings and household items among the rubble becomes visual evidence of the war. This type of content can be considered a "people's historiography" of the war, accumulating everyday experiences. This approach resonates with the thesis of the "metaphorization" of war in media discourse (Mytsiuk, 2024), where specific objects (a bracelet, a wing) acquire symbolic meaning. Humor and memes also played an important role in shaping psychological resilience. Military TikTok videos in which soldiers joke about life in dugouts serve as a form of collective therapy. Humor in this space functioned as a form of symbolic coping strategy, as it allowed participants to reframe



traumatic experiences based on irony and shared cultural codes. At the same time, new forms of identity are being constructed in this way. Solidarity and global support are expressed in videos created by activists or shared by international organizations (such as the Global Citizen campaign or PBS NewsHour reports). Here, the symbols (stage, musical instruments, flags) are addressed to a global audience.

This can be compared with the ideas of other researchers who have indicated that social networks are an important channel for shaping the perception of Russian aggression (Marukhovska-Kartunova *et al.*, 2023). Compared to previous studies, it is clear that the latter are focused on the transformation of journalistic practices and the representation of war (Belkin *et al.*, 2022; Marukhovska-Kartunova *et al.*, 2023; Bondarenko *et al.*, 2022). In particular, the authors indicated that information culture is a significant factor in the development of Ukraine's national security. This can be directly correlated with our analysis of user content: videos on TikTok, YouTube and Telegram create an alternative channel for information dissemination and a tool for cultural mobilization. This is confirmed by our results: content about war is distributed in English and other languages, targeting an international audience. At the same time, Bondarets *et al.* (2025) and Hapievieva *et al.* (2023) showed the role the war played in influencing the themes and esthetics of Ukrainian culture. They note a shift toward documentary and the reproduction of everyday war experiences. This was confirmed by our results regarding UGC: user-generated videos are already setting the visual language that can later be broadcast in cinematic products. In this sense, UGC and film function as complementary media practices. At the same time, Filimonova-Zlatohorska *et al.* (2023) and Georgievskaja *et al.* (2023) pointed out that the war creates philosophical and socio-communicative dilemmas for cultural development: on the one hand, the need to preserve heritage, and on the other, the formation of new identities is being discussed. This is fully reflected in our thematic analysis: ruins as a symbol of loss, humor as a form of resistance, and solidarity as a new cultural code. War content becomes a space where these dilemmas are reflected in specific visual symbols.

Thus, the results obtained are consistent with most previous works, but they introduce a new emphasis: war content not only disseminates information but also produces cultural symbols that can later be institutionalized in cultural industries. Thus, while the results are broadly consistent with existing research on wartime communication and digital media practices, they also provide an important conceptual clarification. In particular, the results indicate that wartime user-generated content serves a dual function. This content functions both as a channel for disseminating information and as a cultural mechanism that creates symbolic narratives that can be institutionalized within professional media.

The identified differences between sectors have helped us understand why different groups form different types of narratives. Civilians focused on personal trauma and survival. This is because their role in the war is as witnesses, and their communication is aimed at documenting the experience for the community. The military emphasized heroism and professionalism, which aligns with their role as defenders. In this sense, military UGC plays a mobilizing role similar to traditional propaganda, but with elements of personal stories.

Activists/journalists are broadcasting the Ukrainian experience to the global space, which is explained by their desire to attract international support (Navalna *et al.*, 2025; Stiekolshchykova *et al.*, 2025). These differences are consistent with the findings of Georgievskaja *et al.* (2023) and Danilyan *et al.* (2024) regarding the differentiation of media practices depending on the target audience and legal conditions. At the same time, they highlight the polyphony of the Ukrainian information space.

Besides, the results should be considered within the context of Ukrainian history and culture. Firstly, war has become a trigger for the digital transformation of communications. Melnykova-Kurhanova (2024) and Locoman (2024) showed that Russian aggression is accompanied by attempts to block communication channels. The response was the active use of social media, which began to serve as an important alternative space for journalism. Second, media narratives reflected the tradition of memory and resistance. Kulyk (2013) and Danilyan *et al.* (2022) also described a "war of memories" in the media landscape. It is indicated that this war of memories is currently ongoing on TikTok, Telegram and YouTube, where new symbols (ruins, call signs, humor) serve as cultural codes that compete with Russian propaganda images. Third, the war became a catalyst for cultural reflection. Filimonova-Zlatohorska *et al.* (2023) indicated that Ukrainian society is looking for new forms of cultural self-presentation that combine local and international experiences. This is evident in user-generated content (UGC), which simultaneously captures local life (life in the dugout) and targets an international audience.



The theoretical significance of the study is that the paper indicates that user-generated wartime content in Ukraine should be understood not simply as an informational supplement to journalism, but also as a mechanism for working with cultural memory. In this sense, the study contributes to the conceptual improvement of military journalism as a hybrid sphere in which journalistic authority is negotiated based on interaction with platform-based witness content.

Despite the significance of the results, this study has several limitations. In particular, there is a platform shift. Social media algorithms determined which content became more visible. For example, TikTok boosted short emotional videos. However, YouTube favored longer documentaries. Limited access to certain content should also be taken into account. Some videos were removed or blocked due to censorship, copyright, or platform policies. This can create significant “gaps” in the sample and complicate the analysis of narratives. Despite the aforementioned limitations, the study has important theoretical and practical implications.

Besides, the conducted analysis of audiovisual narratives in the Ukrainian war reflects cultural identity and historical memory through symbolism, fixation of traumatic experiences, and internationalization of Ukrainian narratives. At the same time, institutional and journalistic channels not only integrate user-generated materials but also give them additional meaning in the process of documenting the war and forming the image of the Ukrainian defender.

It complements professional media and creates its own discourse that combines testimonies, mobilization messages and cultural symbols. The identified themes (patriotism, memory, humor, solidarity) have determined that the war becomes a space for the formation and consolidation of Ukrainian identity. Symbols born from user-generated content (positive, everyday objects, images of characters) already function as cultural markers capable of entering the long-term collective memory. However, it is worth noting that user-generated content can both support national security and contribute to the formation of certain risks (for example, accidental disclosure of military positions). To achieve this goal, balanced regulatory strategies should be developed. This should be a subject of attention for state authorities and the platforms themselves.

## 5. Conclusions

Thus, audiovisual content about the war in Ukrainian journalism reflected the main themes and symbols that formed the cultural-historical narrative framework. In particular, it presented cultural identity, patriotism, gender equality, and historical memory based on symbols of resilience, loss, and solidarity.

Content generated by civilians, military personnel, and activists, as a rule, pointed to themes of heroism, humor, gender roles, collective memory, and international support. At the same time, narratives differed depending on the sector. In particular, civilians emphasized personal trauma and everyday losses. Military personnel focused on collective resilience and the symbolism of victory. Activists focused on solidarity and international resonance. The results have contributed to the development of several directions. In cultural studies, content about war serves as a kind of “digital archive” of war, where cultural codes are transformed into memes, symbols and narratives that already form collective memory.

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Yes

### Conflict of Interest

The author have no conflicts of interest to declare. There is also no financial interest to report. The author certifies that the submission is original work and is not under review at any other publication.

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### Cite this Article

Lysenko Lesia, Institutional and Public Communication on the Russian-Ukrainian War: Between Journalism and Documentation, *Asian Journal of Interdisciplinary Research*, 9(2), (2026) 235-250.  
<https://doi.org/10.54392/ajir26213>

