

НОВІ МЕДІА

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MEMES AS A METHOD OF COMMUNICATION IN THE CONDITIONS OF WAR

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The article analyzes memes as a form of visual communication in war conditions, on the example of memes with Oleksii Arestovych and Valerii Zaluzhnyi, during the Russian armed aggression against Ukraine. Two forms of this method of communication have been described: direct communication and the method of narration. In the case of direct communication, memes are a communication tool of the hero of these memes, in the second, the way of narrating events.

Key words: memes, war, Ukraine, visual communication, social media, Arestovych, Zaluzhnyi.

Memes, these are a picture combined with a short text – carrying certain information, in the current definition are associated with new technologies and media. Richard Dawkins first defined the word meme in 1976 as replics, mutations and evolve (memetics)¹, now, however, it has changed its meaning, and is associated with a schematic picture with short text shared on a large scale via social media.

Simple memes are a combination of photos and short text. Compound memes are defined as informational, comic-book compositions. The memes themselves gained popularity in 2005, via social media for example a Facebook, today are mostly shared via Instagram.

The division according to technology is simple memes: stencil memes, memic reaction, memes with idiomatic expressions; and the complex memes: anatomical diagram, direct statement to the recipient, comparisons / statements, comic book, verbal-iconic game.

Memes have already been used as a manner of narrating war events, however, Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine has dramatically increased the amount of content published in this way. The factors influencing the increase in this type of communication have become technological development, digitization, and the development of social media

¹ Dawkins, R. (1989), *The Selfish Gene*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p. 192.

in which the image is one of the main elements of the narrative. The geopolitical location of Ukraine, a country in Central and Eastern Europe - where a digitization leap has been recorded in the last decade, is also significant. Let's take a look at two famous personalities, both in the real world and in the world of memes.

Oleksii Mykolaiovych Arestovych – Ukraine's Presidential Office advisor, intelligence officer, Lieutenant colonel, blogger, political and military columnist, actor. He gained his greatest fame through the use of New Media: Facebook, Telegram, Twitter, Youtube, but above all Instagram². He became most recognizable thanks to the publications on calming the society down in the first wave of the military aggression of the Russian army against Ukraine. With memes, virals, it has become famous already “zaspokiysya” – calm down. On the wave of popularity, he published more and more bold statements, repeatedly accurately predicting the future and situation. More and more courageous performances also gathered a crowd of his antifans, and helped to gain antifame (of which he is proud of the rest) not less than the original popularity. The way he communicates it is somewhat playful, sarcastic, satirical.

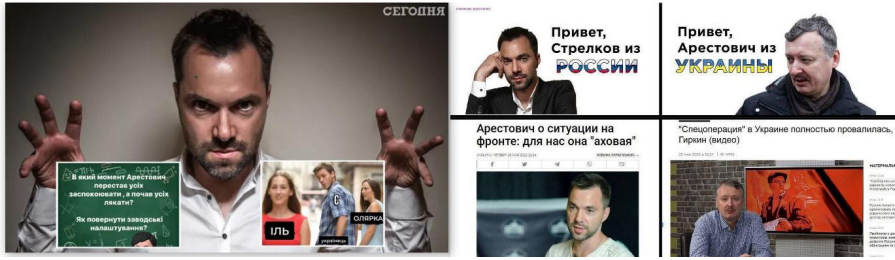
Valerii Fedorovych Zaluzhnyi – Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, member of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine, soldier, veteran of the Donbas war. Personally, he is the object of interest of Internet users, as a hero of the memes. However, he gained popularity not as a media celebrity person, but as a military man. Memes illustrated with the person of Zaluzhnyi, however, are not an element of his own communication, but a way of narrating the Ukrainian case, successes on the battlefield against enemy troops, created both by Internet users, published by the media, Internet portals, newspapers.

On his Instagram account, which is one of the main sources of communication, we will get both videos, photos and memes. Often, Arestovych himself is the first to publish memes with his participation. In any case, these are either socially soothing or sarcastic, humorous (include dark humour), about himself or his statements.

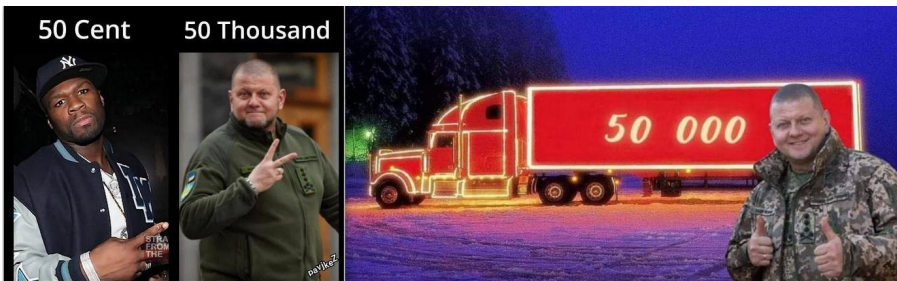


In the first case (1A.) a combo meme is described, how much time would it take to learn psychology – 2-3 weeks, maximum a month. In the second (1B.) a classic scene from a family meeting, asking when will you have children – 3 weeks, maximum a month.

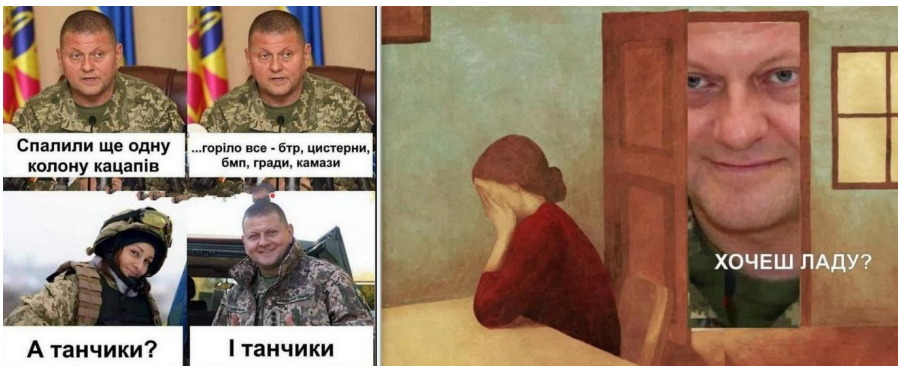
² Arestovych, O. (2022). *Instagram*, URL: <https://www.instagram.com/alexey.arestovich/>



The first meme (2A.) styling on Anatoly Kashpirovsky conjures reality, sends energy through TV. The next (2B.) is a classic comparative meme whose aim is to show one person/situation in a positive sense and to ridicule the second one.



The first (3A.) features a typical comparative meme combo, in this case with the American rapper 50 Cent, while Zaluzhnyi was presented in the role of 50,000. The second meme (3B.) depicts a reworked Coca-Cola Christmas commercial that was a hit in many countries, Zaluzhnyi is presented as the person responsible for the success of the Ukrainian army, which is getting closer to neutralizing the 50,000 soldiers of the aggressor's army. In both cases there is a context of pop culture, mass culture.



In the first case, (4A.) we have a traditional combo, i.e. a combination of two images one below the other (possibly next to each other), which is a classic canon (template) of memes from the beginning of their popularity on the Internet. The girl's joking questions about the type of Russian weapons destroyed by the UAF and the even more pleasant and romantic answer of the commander of the armed forces represent the successes of the

Ukrainian army, in a delicate, even sweet way, which is the opposite image of the brutality and misery of war. A type of meme that aims to boost national morale. In the second case, (4B.) it is a combination of classic well-known paintings with contemporary graphics. In this case, Zaluzhnyi asks the mother of a Russian soldier if she wants a Lada (car that Russia offered to families of killed soldiers). The purpose of the meme is to ridicule the absurdity of the Russian approach to human life, exposing the unhumanistic practices of the Russians who, in exchange for the death of a relative, will gladly accept a cheap car.

Conclusions:

1. Memes with Arestovych are more sarcastic, aimed at an audience that likes sharp retorts, dark (black) humor. The sarcastic way of communication brings both supporters and opponents for Arestovych. Memes with Zaluzhnyi are aimed at spreading the successes of both the commander of the main character and the overall achievements of the Ukrainian armed forces.

2. Arestovych, apart from being a hero – the subject of memes, is also a sender of information, because he intensively publishes various types of memes illustrated himself in various situations using virtually all available means of digital communication and social media. Memes with Zaluzhnyi are a type of narrative taken up by society, i.e. unidentified creators, Internet users. They present the way of narrating the current situation in Ukraine, victories over the Russian army. The brave and power of the Ukrainian nation in resisting against Russian military aggression.

3. In both cases, the memes depict the strength, resistance, successes of Ukraine in the fight against the Russian occupier, Russia and its citizens are presented in a negative light, as people devoid of humanistic values.

4. In both cases, memes presented in social networks are intended to calm the society down, support in difficult times through a sarcastic visual commentary in the form of memes.

5. When the authors of memes are the society, we are dealing with the expression of emotions, the expression of the moods prevailing in the Ukrainian society in the conditions of military operations.

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МЕМИ ЯК СПОСІБ КОМУНІКАЦІЇ В УМОВАХ ВІЙНИ

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У статті розглянуто меми як форму візуальної комунікації в умовах війни на прикладі мемів з Олексієм Арестовичем та Валерієм Залужним під час російської збройної агресії проти України.

Описано дві форми цього способу комунікації: безпосереднє спілкування та метод нарації.

У випадку безпосереднього спілкування меми є способом наративу та інструментом спілкування героя цих мемів. Тобто герой мемів є одночасно суб'єктом розповіді та відправником інформації.

У випадку методу наративу герой мемів є лише суб'єктом розповіді, предметом наративу, про якого передають інформацію.

Проблематика статті також включає порівняння мемів за способом візуалізації, типом мему. Також було розглянуто використання цих мемів у культурному контексті, тобто використання переробленої символіки поп-культури як елемента візуальної комунікації в умовах повномасштабного вторгнення. Було зроблено висновок, що меми є потужним сучасним інструментом комунікації в умовах війни.

Також виявлено, що меми як форма наративу під час війни є засобом вираження емоцій і соціальних настроїв користувачів Інтернету.

Ключові слова: меми, війна, Україна, візуальна комунікація, соцмережі, Арестович, Залужний.