



The Coverage and Reception of  
the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict



Finanțat de  
Uniunea Europeană  
NextGenerationEU



Planul Național  
de Redresare și Reziliență



UNIVERSITATEA  
LUCIAN BLAGA  
— DIN SIBIU —

# A Multim~~edial~~<sup>media</sup> Analysis of User-Generated Videos of War Tourists in Ukraine

Corina Selejan  
Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Romania

*Sibiu, 11 July 2025*

# Acknowledgements



The study is part of the **CORECON** project (The coverage and reception of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in Polish, Romanian and English-language media: A comparative critical discourse study with recommendations for journalism training).

The project is funded by the EU's NextGenerationEU instrument through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan of Romania - Pillar III-C9-I8, second round, managed by the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalization, within the project entitled *The coverage and reception of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in Polish, Romanian and English-language media: A comparative critical discourse study with recommendations for journalism training (CORECON)*, contract no. 760244/28.12.2023, code CF 25/27.07.2023

# Theoretical scaffolding and methodology

- 5<sup>th</sup> estate (non-mainstream media, “watchers of the watchdog”)
- sousveillance vs. surveillance (Thomsen 2019)
- “YouTube is now mainstream media”, but also “a site of vernacular creativity and cultural chaos”; (Burgess & Green 2018)
- The new media: participatory, grassroots, collaborative, independent, customizable, empowering and democratic (Turner 2010, Benson 2017, Ott and Mack 2020)
- Third-wave/new media: digitality, variability, interactivity, connectivity, virtuality; logics: associational (spatial rather than temporal perception, relational rather than causal), contingent/conditional, presumptive, affective (Ott & Mack 2020).

# Theoretical scaffolding and methodology

- Film studies input for technical AV issues (Sikov 2008)
- Cinema Verité / observational cinema/ direct cinema – lighter equipment made popular by use in war; break with advance planning, scripting, staging, reenactment; sync sound (Aufderheide 2007) – as precursor of vlogumentary
- Content/ qual. linguistic analysis + audio-visual analysis → ideological correlation/ reinforcement/ corroboration or lack thereof

# Dataset & selection criteria



1. *I went to the Frontline of Ukraine's Invasion into Russia*, **Task & Purpose**, 1.95M subscribers, **8.2M views**, posted 12 Dec 2024, (**1:02:29**)
2. *Solo On Ukraine's Eastern Front*, **bald and bankrupt**, 4.41M subscribers, **4.4 M views**, posted 17 Apr 2025 (**1:02:29**)
3. *So I went to Ukraine... During the war.* **Geography Now**, 3.74M subscribers, **2.4M views**, posted 19 Feb 2023 (**24:52**)
4. *Visiting Ukraine During a War. What's it Like?*, **Drew Binsky**, 5.53M subscribers, **2.3M views**, posted 25 Jan 2025 (**1:06:49**)
5. *Everyone Told Me Kyiv was Dangerous, but ...*, **Emeka Iwueze**, 0.26M subscribers, **0.3M views**, posted 26 Sept 2024 (**28:46**)
6. *My Trip to UKRAINE during the war (scariest experience of my life)*, **The Worst Traveller**, 4.5K subscribers, **0.1M views**, posted 24 Feb 2024 (**9:05**)



# 1. Task & Purpose: *I went to the Frontline of Ukraine's Invasion into Russia*



- Military news organization; professed goal: “accurate reporting” (<https://taskandpurpose.com/>)
- Filming location: Kursk (RU)
- Stated goals: “today my mission is to ***speak directly with Ukrainian soldiers*** to find out what it's really like to operate deep inside enemy territory ***to interview Russian civilians*** who are now grappling with the shocking reality of the conflict arriving at their own doorstep” [1:02 – 1:21]
- “to find out ***with my own two eyes*** what's really happening on the ground” [1:30-1:34].

# 1. Task & Purpose

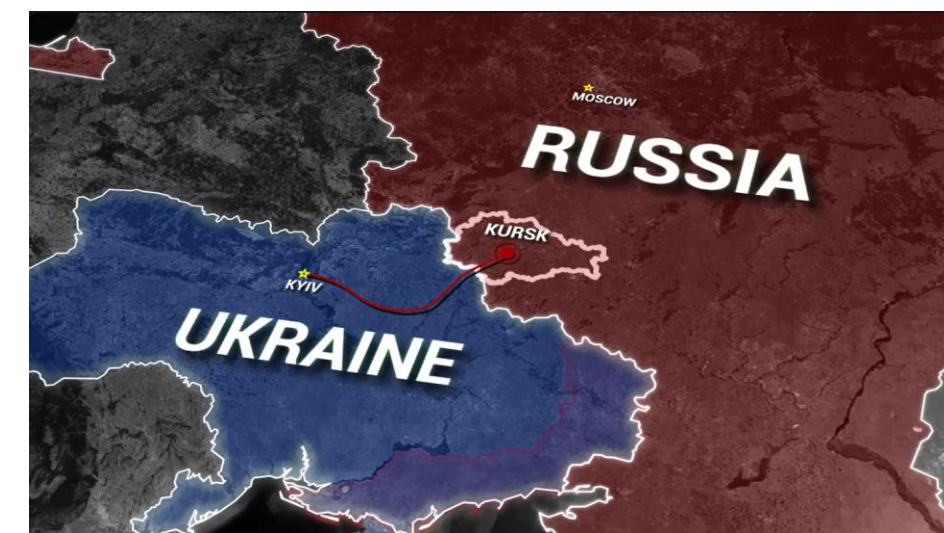


- Personal life (Chris Cappy = an Iraq veteran) & moral dilemmas (questioning his role in Iraq conflict) intrude → authority (equipment-related military jargon; *United 24 Media*) & empathy (questions to soldiers about dealing with fear)
- Explicitly calls himself a journalist (emergency evacuation)
- Fact-checking: “but I have not seen this claim independently verified” [15:42]; “checking out” whether a “concentration camp” had been set up by Ukrainians in Kursk [45:17]
- Seemingly balanced: counters argument that Russia indiscriminately bombs their own towns with Ukrainian practice (=identical)
- Editorialized (esp. ending): “I believe we should give them what they require now to stop Russia...” [1:00:03]
- Sponsored (thanks to e.g. Odoo app at beginning & end).



# 1. Task & Purpose (AV)

- Heavily reliant on acousmatic voiceover (**55.1%**) in declamatory style, slowing down at times; interviews (**19.1%**; always in voiceover translation, incl. Ukrainian official Mykhailo Podolyak 5.1%)
  - Almost imperceptible soundtrack music (instrumental, serene) accompanies acousmatic voiceover and translations of interviewees' speech
  - Animated maps; headlines of online (mainstream) media
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> cameraman
  - Conventional eye-level shots (even in 'velfies')
  - Abrupt transitions between shots (often unrelated)
  - Minimal editing (except for maps)
  - Extensive blurring to conceal locations
- **Vlogumentary** (targeted at viewers with an interest in military matters).





## 2. bald and bankrupt: Solo *On Ukraine's Eastern Front*



- “raw-travel vlogger” (<https://mrbaldandbankrupt.com/>); calls himself a “correspondent” in this video
- Filming locations: Kyiv, Chernihiv, Kryvyi Rih, Sumy, Trostyanets (then: interrogated by police and asked to leave the conflict zone)
- Stated goal: “you are about to see **what no other YouTuber has shown you until now**: this is Ukraine after 3 years of war” [1:54]
- **Speaks Russian** with “babushkas and dedushkas” [54:23]
- Editorializing lg: “...they [the people of Trostyanets] kept their statue of Tchaikovsky – [that] just shows you that the people who suffered the most are also the people with the most sense and the people furthest away from the conflict, the virtual signallers, are the maddest of all. There's a lesson in that...” [1:00:12-1:00:37] – polarizing, but not along EU/NATO/UA vs. RU lines (in contrast to Stephen Fry’s “will you ever forgive the Russians?”).

## 2. bald and bankrupt



- Emotional lg: “the saddest site you'll see in the entire Ukrainian war ... lives ruined. You don't recover from that. I'm sure if you lose a child you don't recover from that. That's ... that's it for you, your life is destroyed and ... nine families ruined forever ... this is the reality of the Ukrainian conflict” [27:57-29:31]
- Religious overtones: “Well, it's Palm Sunday here in Ukraine, which makes today's attack on the city even more poignant. And what a shame when all around the world Christianity and Christians are being, well, persecuted that um we have two Christian nations fighting a war in which, well, who knows how many hundreds of thousands of young men have died. Terrible times in this part of Europe!” [42:29-43:06]
- Evaluative lg: “See, even in wartime the Ukrainian people still keep their sense of humour and their jolliness!” [12:45].



## 2. bald and bankrupt (AV)



- Virtually no voiceover (**0.7%**); numerous interviews due to relative lack of language barrier (**23.8%**)
- Soundtrack: Ukrainian songs sung by men choirs (incl. *Slava Ukraini*)
- Thumbnail cover image: fake fire and smoke
- No 2<sup>nd</sup> cameraman; steadicam selfie-stick
- Unconventional Dutch tilts (especially in locations under martial law)
- Subtitled translations of interviewees' speech in big yellow/green letters (word-for-word, grammatically flawed sentences in English → authenticity)

→ **Travel vlog** (targeted at audiences comfortable with emotional discomfort).





### **3. Geography Now: *So I went to Ukraine... During the war.***



- Travel vlogging
- Sponsored by VisitUkraine.today
- Filming locations: Krakow, Lviv, Makariv/ Andriivka, Kyiv, Zabuchchya, Borodyanka, Irpin (the last 3 very briefly, 1:28)
- No goal statement
- Highly informal language (incl. swearwords); jocular tone
- Reviewing hotels and restaurants
- Ends with collage of interviews in a studio: “What Is a Ukrainian?” (amongst the interviewees: gold medalist wrestler & MP, renowned chef, artist, various young people)

### 3. Geography Now (AV)

- Heavily reliant on voiceover (**29.6%**); interviews (**16.2%**)
- Soundtrack: upbeat and ubiquitous music; inspirational (and manipulative) music at the end, during interviews
- Extremely short shots; fast cutting (incl. collages of photos) → trivialization
- Blatant self-promotion: logo on sweatshirt + (probably empty) mug held in hand @ beginning (studio; addressing the camera)



→ **Travel vlog** overtly targeted at entertaining (and informing) a (very) young audience





## 4. Drew Binsky: *Visiting Ukraine During a War.* *What's it Like?*

- Travel vlogger (boasts having visited 197/197 countries)
- Filming locations: Lviv, Kyiv, Kharkiv.
- Professed goal: “My mission is simple: I'm going to Ukraine to ***share stories of resilience*** and ***give a voice*** to the 40 million locals who dream of peace in their homeland” [0:18]; “I hope to ***replace narratives of destruction*** with ones of ***solidarity***” [0:50]
- Posted links of trusted organisations for donations below the video
- Leitmotif: “War is no good for anyone” [24:33; 24:46; 56:34]
- Affective language: constantly elicits emotional feedback from his wife; “an emotional roller coaster ... for every moment of joy and connection ... twice as many moments of heartbreak and fear” [1:05:44-1:05:51]





## 4. Drew Binsky (AV)

- Emotionally manipulative music soundtrack (intensifying affect)
  - Voiceover not predominant (**11.7%**); interviews (**34.4%** – mostly Ukrainian guide Markiyan = euphemistically called “my local friend”) – begs the question: **whose perspective** do viewers get?
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> cameraman
  - Intro: all the paraphernalia of Hollywood action trailers (incl. bird’s-eye views of bombed buildings)
  - Heavy editing with longer shots and conspicuous transitions (e.g. fade-out black screens)
  - Prevalence of low-angle shots and slow motion (typical of action movies → constructing a dramatically heroic persona); Dutch tilts in small spaces (e.g. train; car); unconventional camera angles to suggest danger
  - Ostentatious title cards in Ukraine’s flag colours + provision of additional context (documentary-style title cards)
- **Vlogumentary** (probably targeted at vicarious travellers, donors).



## **5. Emeka Iwueze: *Everyone Told Me Kyiv was Dangerous, but ...***



- Travel vlogger
- Filming location: Kyiv (video filmed in Lviv: *Don't TRUST The Media: I Went To Ukraine*)
- No goal statement; avoids using “war” or any of its synonyms: “it's been lovely here man ... you hear stories of stuff that have, uh, that happened but I haven't seen anything. And people are just living and just going on with their lives normally, like, again, being here you wouldn't even think that there's anything going on, uh, you know what I'm talking about” [0:44-1:04]
- Unapologetically uninformed: e.g. passing St. Andrew's church “This has to be some kind of church I would say” [1:14]; frequently interpellating viewers asking for information: “maybe someone can like kind of tell me” [5:03], “let me know” [17:49]
- Interest in local cuisine, nightlife and sports (former president of university table tennis team)
- Informal language; leitmotif: “good/ great/ lovely vibes”.



## 5. Emeka Iwueze (AV)



- No acousmatic voice-over (**0%**) – in this case, a symptom of lacking self-reflexivity; interviews (**18.5%**, thereof 10.7% = waiter in a restaurant)
- No music soundtrack
- No 2<sup>nd</sup> cameraman; steadicam selfie stick (conventional eye-level shots, minimal editing, mostly talking into the camera)
- **(Travel) vlog** (target audience?)





## 6. The Worst Traveller:

# *My Trip to UKRAINE during the war (scariest experience of my life)*



- Travel vlogger
- Filming location: Kyiv
- Stated goal: “to raise money and awareness for a **charity called UNBROKEN**” [1:00]; donates blood “for the first time” [4:23]
- Explicitly addresses negative comments about him “being a **paid actor in Ukraine** and that the war is fake news and not really happening” [5:03]: “Naturally, I was **angered**, by this, having experienced it myself and met so many people directly affected by the war” [5:09-5:17]
- Evaluative and affective language: “I have fallen in love with the beauty and culture of this country, but the thing that’s impressed me the most is the people: their spirit and **resilience** is [sic] incredible” [8:10-8:20]

## 6. The Worst Traveller (AV)

- Highest proportion of voiceover (**47.9%**), no interviews (**0%**)
- Music soundtrack (ominous music, audio aftereffects)
- No 2<sup>nd</sup> cameraman
- Embarrassed into velocity: heavy editing – extremely short shots, very fast cutting, collage style: mixed film framing (portrait/landscape)
  - sense of urgency and instability (counterbalanced by studio sequences)
- Fast but conspicuous glitch-style transitions: distorted images (e.g. wave warp effects) and electroshock sound

→ **Advocacy travel vlog** targeted at donors  
(and of course new subscribers)



### **WARNING**

THIS VIDEO SHOWS SCENES FROM MY TIME  
IN UKRAINE DURING THE ONGOING WAR  
INCLUDING: MISSING LIMBS AND  
DESTROYED BUILDINGS FROM THE START

VIEWER DISCRETION IS ADVISED

# Correlations (or lack thereof)/ conclusions

- Niche interest does *not* (always) translate into small audience (e.g. Task & Purpose 8.2 M views)
- Brevity does *not* correlate with large audience or vice versa
- Prevalence of acousmatic voiceover (e.g. Task & Purpose) produces a sense of intimacy (identification of the viewer; inner voice)
- Variety of local interviewees and their selection, degree of planning/scripting (e.g. bald and bankrupt – most spontaneous, Task & Purpose, Geography Now, Drew Binsky) → authority, credibility, insight into people's private lives



# Correlations (or lack thereof)/ conclusions

- Task & Purpose/Chris Cappy and bald and bankrupt = politically/ideologically most balanced ⇔ emotionally uncomfortable ⇔ share a lack of interest in heavy (image) editing techniques
- However, lack of interest in editing techniques does *not* translate into balanced ideology (e.g. Emeka Iwueze)
- Advocacy vlogs/ vlogumentaries (e.g. The Worst Traveller) tend to rely on music soundtrack and heavy image and sound editing
- Hollywood-style filming and editing → large(st) no. of subscribers (if Drew Binsky is a reliable indicator)

# References

Aufderheide, Patricia. *Documentary Film. A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford UP, 2007.

Benson, Phil. *The Discourse of YouTube. Multimodal Text in a Global Context*. Routledge, 2017.

Boczkowski, Pablo J. and Anderson C.W., eds. *Remaking the News. Essays on the Future of Journalism Scholarship in the Digital Age*. MIT Press, 2017.

Burgess, Jean and Joshua Green. *YouTube. Online Video and Participatory Culture*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Polity, 2018.

Davidson, Calum and John Paul, directors. “Stephen Fry into Ukraine.” *YouTube*. 31 July 2024. Accessed 29 October 2024.

Juhasz, Alexandra and Alisa Lebow, eds. *A Companion to Contemporary Documentary Film*. Wiley Blackwell, 2015.

Ott, Brian L. and Robert L. Mack. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. *Critical Media Studies. An Introduction*. Wiley Blackwell, 2020.

Piekarz, Mark. “Hot War Tourism: The Live Battlefield and the Ultimate Adventure Holiday?” *Battlefield Tourism: History, Place and Interpretation*, ed. Chris Ryan. Elsevier, 2007. 153-169. DOI 10.1016/B978-0-08-045362-0.50019-1

Sikov, Ed. *Film Studies. An Introduction*. Columbia UP, 2008.

Thomsen, Frej Klem. “The concepts of surveillance and sousveillance – a critical analysis.” *Social Science Information*. October 2019.

Turner, Graeme. *Ordinary People and the Media. The Demotic Turn*. Sage, 2010.

Wahl-Jorgensen, Karin and Thomas Hanitzsch, eds. *The Handbook of Journalism Studies*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Routledge, 2020.

# Contact

 [grants.ulbsibiu.ro/corecon](https://grants.ulbsibiu.ro/corecon)

 [grant.corecon@ulbsibiu.ro](mailto:grant.corecon@ulbsibiu.ro)

 [corina.selejan@ulbsibiu.ro](mailto:corina.selejan@ulbsibiu.ro)

Find us on our social media!

