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The American University in Cairo  
School of Global Affairs and Public Policy

**TikTok Battlefield: Comparative Analysis of English and Arabic language Representations  
of the 2022 Russian Ukrainian Conflict on TikTok**

A Thesis Submitted by  
**Dina Magdeldin Mahmoud ElHawary**

to the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Journalism and Mass Communication

Fall 2022

Under the supervision of  
**Professor Shahira S. Fahmy**

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## **Abstract**

This study extends the growing political communication research on TikTok platform through studying the representation of a major political conflict in modern history; the 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict. The study is providing a cross cultural comparison by studying the perspectives of English and Arabic speakers about the conflict. The study is based on the analysis of the 500 most liked TikTok videos - in one month duration that starts with the day of the Russian invasion - with top hashtags about the conflict in order to find the common message themes. The study uses a multi-dimensional analysis approach of connective action, collective action, and issue-specific frames to understand how TikTok was used as a social mobilization tool in reference to the conflict and how the users' languages affected these frames. The study also looked at the use of technology affordances to create memetic dimensions of content, form, and stance. As each political conflict represents its own circumstances and dynamics, unlike TikTok's nature, this study found that the artistic / humorous message theme did not represent the most prominent theme in both Arabic and English language videos. Also, message themes of victims and activists' reference were more prevalent in English language videos in comparison to Arabic language videos. The results also revealed that connective action frames (personal experiences and emotional commentary) and collective action frames (perceived injustice and agency) were widely utilized in English language videos. However, issue-specific frames (problem definition) were widely found in Arabic language videos. Additionally, the most prominent tone of communication was found to be "serious" in both English and Arabic language videos, and the most prominent communicative function was "referential communication". The most important finding of this study was the change in TikTok usual usage of playful communication in favor of serious and

informative content. Moreover, TikTok unique affordances of association “Duets and stitches” were rarely used in the examined videos.

The practical implication of this study is to understand TikTok’s position on the map of social media political expression given the application’s unique affordances. The present research coming from the MENA region and comparing it with the other world aims at crossing the gap in comparative research by examining how the playful platform is used among English and Arabic speakers posting about a political conflict of a global impact.

### **Keywords**

TikTok, Technology Affordances, Memetic Dimensions, Collective Actions, Connective Actions, online movement, Russian-Ukrainian Conflict

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

TikTok is a rising social media application that has rapidly gained popularity over the years. According to DataReportal (2022) the short-video sharing application has one Billion monthly active users worldwide and it was also the most downloaded mobile application worldwide in 2021 (Statista, 2022). Although TikTok is known for viral dances, lip-syncing performance, and humorous challenges, in recent years, it has shown an outbreak in content of serious implications, including political topics. Recent world happenings' discourse showed an emergence of the TikTok application as a key player in more serious events. For instance, US partisans' supporters used TikTok Duets to communicate their political views (Serrano et al., 2020). Moreover, TikTok became a compelling arena for Spanish political parties to reach out to younger people (Cervi & Marín-Lladó, 2021). The 2019 Lebanese protests and the 2020 deadly Beirut explosion were both represented in a humorous narrative on TikTok (Ammar et al., 2020). Also, in May 2021, it was remarkably significant to find the latest Israeli Palestinian Sheikh Jarrah dispute and its violent consequences widely communicated on TikTok platform. TikTok users posted videos that turned the youthful and fun social media platform into a mobilization arena in favor of a Palestinian narrative through content of playful political participation (Abbas et al., 2022). Sheikh Jarrah events were present on all social media outlets, but the usage of TikTok particularly allowed younger and different users' base to be engaged with the happenings (Ward, 2021).

With the emergence of TikTok in political discourse, it became compelling to invest more research into the areas of conflict and political communication on the platform. This study aims at performing further studies on political discourse on TikTok through investigating the 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict. With the Russian invasion that started on the 24th of February 2022, social

media outlets burst with content about the war. The conflict that emerged from tension between two countries into a global danger with the risk of a nuclear escalation and economic recession became a major worry for people across the globe. Accordingly, citizens' content of all types and purposes erupted on social media outlets including TikTok. In recent years, despite its positioning as a non-political outlet, TikTok became the most competent medium for a person to speak to the public in a short duration of time (Jennings, 2022). With the shift in TikTok usage and the expansion of its users' base, it is expected that a conflict of global impact would trigger users from different regions and different points of views to express themselves. Therefore, this study focuses on studying the content created by two different user bases; English and Arabic speakers to identify the similarities and differences in their expressions.

To achieve this goal, this study is based on a content analysis of the most liked 500 TikTok videos with the four most viral hashtags in English and Arabic (#Ukraine, #Russia, #أوكرانيا, #روسيا). Data was collected using the standard search on TikTok application through filtering results to the most liked videos in a one-month duration starting 24th of February 2022, which is the day the Russian invasion started, up till the 25th of March 2022. The collected data provided a corpus of videos created by English and Arabic speaking users in order to apply a cross-cultural comparison of the representation of the 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict on TikTok.

The Technology affordances of mobile media platforms influence the users' communicative actions on its environment (Bucher & Helmond, 2017). Accordingly, this study is performed considering TikTok unique technology affordances and how it impacts content creation on the platform. The purpose of this study is to present a cross cultural comparison of how people from different cultures - represented in their language of expression - express their opinions about an international conflict on TikTok. The research aims at exploring the main message themes

found in videos created by English and Arabic speaking users. Also, since social media platforms are currently serving as mobilization arenas for social movements, the study investigates frames of connective and collective action for better understanding of how English and Arabic speaking users utilized the platform for their advocative purposes. Finally, the study looks at the usage of TikTok affordances to create memetic dimensions of content, form, and stance in order to find similarities and differences between English and Arabic videos about the 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict.

## **Chapter Two: Background**

### **1. A Review of the Conflict History and the Current Situation**

In a major escalation of the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian conflict, Russia invaded Ukraine, taking the conflict to a new level of violence that is still raging till the moment of writing this study. On the 24th of February 2022, Russia waged war on Ukraine and launched a full-scale invasion of the democratic nation with a population of 44 million. An act that shattered peace in Europe and put the whole world in a threat of nuclear power clashes.

The invasion started in the early hours of the 24th of February 2022 with a military operation in the eastern side of Ukraine, the territory of Donbas (Fitzgerald, 2022) followed by explosions that were heard in different major cities across Ukraine, including the capital of Kyiv (Davis Jr., 2022). Russian forces were able to seize and take control of the Antonov International Airport, located in Hostomel on the borders of Kyiv, while airstrikes were continuing in different cities of Ukraine. Russian and Ukrainian troops fiercely fought since then. Up till the 23rd of March 2022, the Russian side managed to capture one city, Kherson, and was able to seize Zaporizhzhia, one of Europe's largest nuclear plants, besides the Eastern areas already controlled by Russian-backed separatists. The war that stretched over nine months till the moment of writing this study has caused a high toll of casualties. According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, up until the 4th of July 2022, a total of 11,152 civilian casualties in Ukraine had been recorded between killed and injured mostly caused by the use of explosive weapons. On the other hand, losses and deaths in the Russian military are also rising. Despite the discreet, the Russian Defense Ministry declared via different channels that around 500 Russian soldiers were killed and 1,500 were wounded only 10 days after invasion has started (Roth, 2022). However, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) officials estimate a higher number of 7,000

to 15,000 Russian soldiers who were killed only one month after the war was launched (Rauhala et al., 2022). Moreover, the armed attack caused a huge refugee crisis; according to the Operational Data Portal of the UNHCR, up till the 26th of July 2022, 6.162 million people had fled Ukraine to other European countries, in addition to 105,000 people who moved to the Russian Federation through Ukraine Eastern territories. Also, 6.48 million were internally displaced inside Ukraine as of March 16th, 2022, according to the Global Protection Cluster Website.

Both countries share a long history, Ukraine was previously part of the Soviet Union and both nations had tight affinity relationships (Donahue, 2022). The Soviet Union's heritage left Ukraine possessing the world's third-largest nuclear inventory, yet in 1994, Ukraine agreed to transfer its nuclear weapons to Russia in a Budapest memorandum that was signed by the United States, United Kingdom, and Russia which guaranteed Ukraine's territorial sovereignty. The tension between Russia and Ukraine has roots that go back to 2004 Ukraine's Orange Revolution which showed Ukraine's lean toward Europe (Donahue, 2022). The revolution was born after a controversial presidential election between Viktor Yushchenko, a western-oriented candidate, and Viktor Yanukovich, a Russian-backed candidate, who was declared president in an election perceived to be forged (Fitzgerald, 2022). Ukrainian masses took the streets in the color orange which was the campaign's color for Yushchenko and were able to force a re-vote, resulting in Yushchenko's victory. Tension escalated in 2008 when a NATO summit discussed the possibility of extending a membership plan to Ukraine; an action that is perceived as a security threat by Russia. The year 2014 represented a major escalation; as mass demonstrations overthrew the pro-Russian president who was able to win the elections in a prior year, Victor Yanukovich, Russia advanced its troops towards Ukraine and was able to annex the peninsula of Crimea which enjoys a strategic spot in the security of the Black Sea to Russia and Europe. The Russian control of

Ukraine's southern region of Crimea prompted a separatist rebellious movement in the east and initiated a war that claimed 14,000 lives (Kirby, 2022). In 2019, Volodymyr Zelensky was elected the president of Ukraine with a campaign that promised the end of the war with Russia. However, the years after were a prelude to the current war of 2022. In December 2021, Russian President Vladimir Putin demanded security guarantees from the West, asking NATO to stop all military activity in eastern Europe and a promise never to accept Ukraine or other former Soviet nations as members. Demands were denounced by NATO and the United States, while both NATO and Russia have been putting forces on standby. Attempts to peacefully solve the conflict failed, and Russia, who claimed it has no intention to invade Ukraine ended up performing a full-fledged war on Ukraine aiming to “demilitarize” Ukraine’s military capability limiting its possibility to join NATO or defend itself. In his address on the military intervention in Ukraine; Putin justified the war as a “denazification” of the country, referring to getting rid of the Ukrainian elected government (Veidlinger, 2022). The full-scale war is so far faced only with economic sanctions by the United States and the West.

## **2. Review of the Conflict’s Consequences**

The Russian Ukrainian war’s repercussions are not limited to the two countries. It is thought that the war’s effect has extended to impact the whole world to the extent to be thought of as a prelude to World War III. In an interview with Al Arabiya News, Ukrainian President Zelensky warned that the impact of this war will spread to other countries risking the initiation of a world war (Ferrari & Alekhtiar, 2022). Also, according to Bloomberg News, as the Western countries and the United States keep sending armed support to Ukraine, the Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov warned that the nuclear risk is serious (2022). Even though the armed conflict is still within Ukraine borders, it is clear other countries are involved in the war (Keating,

2022). Each side of the fighting countries has allies that make the conflict a global matter. According to Ian Bremmer, Eurasia political risk research and consulting firm Group president, if western countries sent troops to fight with Ukraine's military against Russia the massive consequences will lead to direct confrontation between NATO and Russian troops and accordingly risks World War III (Huddleston Jr., 2022). On the other hand, although China is still balancing its position in the conflict, China and Russia enjoy strong ties given their 20 years 'Treaty of Good-Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation' (Slater, 2022). Both countries might not be formal allies, however, their strengthened relationship is driven by shared rivalry with the United States (Maizland, 2022). Like China, other countries might have the same anti-west position aiming generally to counter America's influence. With Allies getting involved in the fight, the world is put at the risk of another world war with massive nuclear power dangers.

Besides the humanitarian crisis, the whole world would be suffering from an economic crisis caused by the conflict. Of course, there are direct economic hits of GDP losses on Russia and Ukraine, but the economic impact is extended to other countries through international trade uncertainty and global supply chains interruptions (CEPR, 2022). According to a World Bank report issued in April 2022, because of the war in Ukraine, the world trade is expected to drop by one percent, which decreases the global GDP by seven percent and by one percent in low-income countries (Ruta, 2022). Russia and Ukraine are both huge exporters of key commodities and products. According to the World Economic Forum website, Russia is a major supplier of oil and gas, where crude oil accounted for \$123 billion of its export revenues in 2019, it is also the largest wheat exporter in the world (Broom, 2022). On the other side, Ukraine is a key producer of corn, wheat, and sunflower oil (Feingold, 2022). The exporting weight of both countries is expected to cause a huge hit in commodity prices and availability, especially for countries depending on these

sources to secure their needs for such strategic products. Also, the automotive and transportation sectors, which are already suffering due to supply chain difficulties post-Covid, are also expecting a hit by the conflict as Ukrainian automotive factories supply major carmakers in Western Europe.

As the world is facing geopolitical uncertainty, the war is driving economies into inevitable recession through high inflation rates and global energy crisis (Inman, 2022).

### **3. What does the Russian-Ukrainian War Mean to the Arab Region?**

The political relationships between the Arab countries and the conflict's sides are quite complicated. On the diplomatic side, the stance of Arab countries could be seen through their votes on the United Nations resolutions to halt the Russian attack and withdraw troops. The regional power brokers: Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates joined the 138 nations that voted in favor of the United Nations General assembly resolutions (Salah, 2022). However, according to the United Nations news website, Algeria and Iraq abstained from voting, while Syria was one of the five countries that voted against the resolutions. Nevertheless, two days before the vote on the United Nations resolutions, Arab countries signed on to an Arab League statement that did not condemn Russia but called for diplomacy and humanitarian consideration (Salah, 2022). Moreover, in a recent move, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) agreed on cutting its production by 2% of global supply (Reuters, 2022). In the current tight market because of the war, the move is seen as a benefit to Russia by putting more pressure on the west, an act that questions OPEC's position, including Gulf countries, siding with Russia.

Away from the official Arab governments' position, a lot of Arab people would feel a sentimental attachment towards Russia in an attempt to stand against the Western political dominance. In a poll survey carried out by Arab News - YouGov on 7,835 people across 14 Arab countries to understand where Arab stands in the Russian Ukrainian conflict, the majority



expressed their belief that the blame falls on the NATO rather than Russia in this war, and the only exception was Syria where the blame was believed to be equal on both sides (Gornall, 2022).

Like other regions, the Middle East is expected to feel the war's impact on food and oil prices. Some Middle Eastern countries are huge dependents on food and energy imports, which make them in a weak position when it comes to the economic repercussions of this war (International Crisis Group, 2022).

#### **4. Review of the Conflict on Social Media**

Amid the crisis that has been simmering for months, different social media platforms erupted with content about the conflict and its acceleration. As the conflict is considered critical enough to affect the whole world, people from different regions seem concerned and willing to participate in the discourse about the conflict. Social media offers an opportunity to different groups for political participation (Highfield, 2016). Content about the Russian Ukrainian crisis is posted in abundance on social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and the rising famous platform: TikTok. The wide usage of TikTok worldwide made the platform a dynamic channel of communication during major events. The platform which is originally used for entertainment has been used in recent years for many non-entertainment purposes. For instance, the platform played a major role in disseminating health information and messages in the early months of the Covid-19 crisis and lockdown. TikTok and Snapchat played a major role in youth communication during the pandemic times (Southwick et al., 2021) and during the Covid-19 pandemic, health experts followed the trend to provide reliable health information (Basch et al., 2020). Also, in May 2021, the platform was excessively used by Arab and Israeli youth to support their narratives during the Palestinian-Israeli conflict of Sheikh Jarrah events. The majority used it to promote a pro-Palestinian position in what was described as "TikTok Intifada" (Ward, 2021).

According to Abbas et al (2022), TikTok affordances of visibility, editability, association, and persistence were used to create direct and indirect political content making the platform a space for political expression and online activism during the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that took place in Sheikh Jarrah in 2021. The current Russian Ukrainian conflict is not any different; according to i24NEWS website, the Ukrainian TikTok users are using the platform to document their real-life experiences of the war and to counter the Russian propaganda. A Ukrainian side narrative is storming the platform with content from real citizens; videos of people crying, explosions striking Ukrainian major cities, and shelling lightning in the country's sky. According to the Wired website, in the eight days between February 20 and February 28, views on videos tagged with the hashtag #Ukraine jumped from 6.4 billion to 17.1 billion, a rate of 1.3 billion views a day (Stokel-Walker, 2022). Also, famous Ukrainian TikTokers stopped their usual type of content to use the platform in telling the truth - as they see it - to the world. On the other hand, although some Russian TikTok influencers declared their unacceptance of the war, it is claimed that several other Russian TikTokers were spotted reciting identical text related to the war in Ukraine as if it was dictated to them to take part in this digital field of conflict (Creedon, 2022).

The application is becoming an influential tool in this conflict. In a speech directed at Russian citizens, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky mentioned "TikTokers" within the group of opinion leaders that could help end the war (Wickham and Sheftalovich, 2022). From its side, Russia has demanded the application not to include military-related content in recommended posts to minors, describing the content as "anti-Russian in character" (Culliford, 2022). The application did not respond immediately to the demand; However, according to European researchers, the Chinese-owned application is currently censoring foreign content in Russia, as 95 percent of the video content previously available to Russian users is now blocked at the application

level (Bateman, 2022). This censoring action is putting the applications in a position of acting as a propaganda channel for the Russian regime especially when considering the tight relationship between Russia and the application-owning country, China.

Because the conflict is globally important, citizens from different regions are also reporting their points of view on the conflict on TikTok. TikTok users from different backgrounds and identities are showing their positions in the conflict giving their own perspectives of the war.

Not all the Russian Ukrainian conflict content on TikTok is explicit war coverage. Using TikTok affordances to create these internet jokes is representing real documentation of a deadly situation (Chayka, 2022). The original TikTok use of music, dances, lip syncing, and viral challenges are also part of the content in relation to the conflict. In many articles, specific videos are being referred to as viral TikTok videos about the Russian-Ukrainian war, such as Ukrainian girl themed videos about her bomb shelter life (Court, 2022), Ukrainian soldier dancing to Michael Jackson's Moonlight video, and a Ukrainian gorgeous girl fleeing a luxurious location (Chayka, 2022). The fact that TikTok usage is currently extended to include all kinds of events and world happenings makes the research of such uses extremely needed.

## Chapter Three: Literature Review

### 1. TikTok, the Rising Social Media Platform

TikTok is a popular video-sharing social media application that is rapidly gaining fame nowadays, especially among younger generations. According to the Statista website, in September 2021, TikTok had approximately 30.8 million daily active users via IOS devices and over 14.43 million daily active users via android devices worldwide. It is also the most popular social media application in the year 2020 worldwide with 850 million downloads as stated on BussinessOfApps website.

Many applications support video sharing services, the largest and most popular is YouTube which is solely a video platform that has no limitations to the length or topics of videos, hosting Billions of them (Lu & Lu, 2019). Alternatively, the idea of user-generated short videos was born mainly with the former application: Vine, which was acquired by Twitter in 2012. Later the application was shut down in October 2016 because every other platform wanted to have its own service of video creation. Vine videos had a video limit of six seconds (Lu & Lu, 2019) and the videos looped continuously creating a different type of humor (Bonfiglio, 2019). After Vine was shut down many applications of video-sharing were found and the most known was Musical.ly which was later acquired by the Chinese ByteDance and merged with TikTok (Bonfiglio, 2019).

TikTok, owned by the Chinese company ByteDance, is a social media application for short-form entertainment videos of dancing, lip-syncing, showcasing talents, and sharing DIY ideas. The application operates in an exclusive version in China with the name Douyin, however TikTok is available for the rest of the world. The TikTok about page describes the application as “*the leading destination for short-form mobile video with a mission to inspire creativity and bring joy*”. launched in September 2016, endless memes, viral challenges, and unforgettable trends were

created on TikTok (Bonfiglio, 2019). TikTok users can create and view trendy short length videos that last from 15 seconds to a few minutes and share these fun and silly videos publicly (Lu et al., 2020). Apart from other video applications, TikTok - Douyin in Chinese - has specific options for focusing on the background music and special effects editing features (Lu&Lu, 2019).

The social media scene is known to be a rapid and fast-evolving market with newly developed applications on the rise every day. During the time they are being researched, it is difficult to figure out if these new applications will survive prospectively (Anderson, 2020). It is a fact that social media applications are led by trends that play a major role in the death or survival of these applications. One of the thriving trends in the latest years in social media is video creation and video posting, no matter if they are short-form videos or live broadcasting (Anderson, 2017). Hence, the TikTok application is cumulatively building its fame by being on track with the current winning trend of social media.

## **2. TikTok Technology Affordances**

Every social media platform comes with a novelty that sets it apart from other platforms. Through a set of features, advanced technologies, and differently functioning algorithms, a new application finds its way to the audience. Affordance is an important term to analyze how an application works and understand the relationship between an application and its users (Buche & Helmond, 2017). TikTok is described to be changing the way social media is functioning (Herrman, 2019) and giving new aspects to User Generated Content with a set of special technology affordances.

***Video format and video navigation;*** TikTok videos were launched with a maximum length of 15 seconds that was later increased to 3 minutes long. In March 2022, the platform announced tripling the length to reach 10 minutes with the objective of enriching users' experiences and

providing unlimited entertainment (Goodwin, 2022). In a vertical and tall format, not square or horizontal like other social media platforms, TikTok videos are navigated by scrolling up and down not by swiping or tapping like Instagram stories (Herrman, 2019).

***Video Creation and editability*** are simple and easy tasks on TikTok given all the tools and filters available by the platform. Advanced effects and editing techniques are accessible in the application. Users are also encouraged to add sounds and music to their videos (Herrman, 2019) which is a main aspect of the platform. These affordances enable end-users to easily produce short videos that are of high production values (Lu, 2019). Moreover, video creation is made easy on TikTok due to the excessive ideas and cues available by the application (Herrman, 2019) so users never run out of ideas trying to find what else to post on TikTok. For instance, challenges are one of the specific types of content on TikTok which enriches user experience on the platform. Users could join different viral challenges that get promoted on the platform, such as dare-like challenges, dancing moves, and sound clip lip-syncing.

***“ForYou ” Page*** is the user’s landing page once TikTok is opened and it is a unique form of how users consume content on the platform. This page displays videos to users no matter if they follow those video creators or not, this allows any content to become viral (Carson, 2021). “ForYou” page is algorithmically generated (Serrano et al., 2020) that recommends videos to users in a personalized system. According to TikTok Website, these videos are curated according to a set of factors: users' interactions and interests, videos’ data, and information, and finally account settings and devices' data. The fact that the “ForYou” page displays content from unfollowed accounts, bypasses the issues of self-feed into a more experience-based feed (Herrman, 2019). Unlike other platforms, TikTok is able to feed your home page before even following a single account.

*Association affordances of “Duet” & “Stitch”* are unique and exclusive features for creating responses on TikTok. A duet is a video that plays side by side to an original video as a response while keeping the original sound clip (Serrano et al, 2020). “Duets” represents a personalized response and a dynamic engagement that is exclusive to TikTok. The feature allows users to duplicate a specific video and add themselves alongside (Herrman, 2019) as the two videos are played together in a split-screen format.

On the other hand, according to the TikTok website “stitch” is a creation tool that allows a user to combine part of another user’s video into their videos. Both duets and stitches are allowed by users in the settings for other users to respond to these videos. Like duets, a stitch also recreates meanings and adds to the original content in a way that creates a thread to the main ideas by which users criticize or reply to the initial creation.

*Visibility affordances of Hashtags* is a key player in TikTok world. Hashtags were introduced by Twitter to allow users to join discussions by clicking a specific hashtag (Carson 2021). Because of hashtags, conversational behavior was invented on social media platforms (Herrman, 2019). Hashtags on TikTok represent an operational and organizational base. It groups people around trending happenings, such as popular music, viral challenges, or repeated formats of content. TikTok allows users to search for videos under a specific hashtag to yield the most popular results, hashtags are an important feature to create visibility and boost attention to users and or trends.

### **3. Political Discourse on Social Media**

Social media is one of the most prevailing inventions of modern society. According to Statista website, social media usage is one of the most popular online activities as over 3.6 billion people were using social media worldwide in 2021. The usage number is projected to increase to almost 4.41 billion in 2025 (Statista Website). Social media is in fact affecting all aspects of living

and it mainly affects people's means of social communication. Wide social media usage had its effects on all types of communication including political conflicts communication. Political communication, which is a type of discourse that usually took place among people in political arenas, streets protest, and civic events, has now found its way to the online world. Accordingly, social media is currently used by different political actors: politicians, opinion leaders, demonstrators, and protestors as a communication tool (Zeitsoff, 2017).

With the advancement of technology and the convenience of handheld devices, it is noticed that most people maintain their virtual opinions as much as they maintain their voices in real life. Political discourse is not different; social media is believed to be a crucial channel for youth political arguments (Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2019). Through social media, people found a public sphere to express themselves, exchange opinions, and advocate for their causes easily and freely. Platforms users can easily gather supporters without being endangered with identity exposure or security risks usually associated with activism (Mayfield, 2011). The political discourse on social media platforms is not limited to ordinary users, it proved its importance to political entities and public figures as well. The huge increase in social media usage entailed the increase of social media usage in political matters by individuals and institutions (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2012). This ongoing communication creates an interactive discourse and provides plenty of data that impacts political cases or conflicts. Social media provides data and information to political actors that shape the conflict itself outside their prior knowledge (Zeitsoff, 2017).

Moreover, political and activism communication on social media is playing a big role in driving events and mobilizing people. There is no better example of how technology helped a social movement influence current politics more than the Arab Spring uprisings in 2011 (Zeitsoff, 2017). In Egypt, the protests that started on the 25th of January were originally called for on



different Facebook pages and Twitter accounts. Moreover, social media was used massively to cover the Tahrir square protests than traditional media has followed (Meral, 2017).

There are various strands of literature that discuss political discourse on different social media platforms. Each social media platform has its own features and benefits that dictate how people will act on the platform. The different advantages of each social media platform draw the way how young people will politically express themselves (Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2010). TikTok with its technological affordances, unique features, and wide popularity is a new player in the political scene that is worth studying.

#### **4. TikTok in the Divisive Political and Social Movements Arenas**

Research about political content on TikTok platform is limited. Previous researchers have studied political communication and opinion influence on many social media platforms, yet not on TikTok (Serrano et al., 2020). TikTok application is usually seen as a youngster social media platform of superficial content. Due to the young age of TikTok users, the general audience perceives it as less serious than other social media platforms (Carson, 2021). However, with the increased popularity of TikTok, videos of political content started to rise on the platform opening the door for political discourse and opinion influence among TikTok users. The specifications of each social media platform dictate the way content will be handled on it. How the platform is designed and who is present on the platform are two main factors in how political communication is shaped on each social media platform (Serrano et al, 2020). The young user base on TikTok, and the unique features it presents make political communication relatively special on this platform. Accordingly, researchers became more interested in studying this type of content in an attempt to analyze political attitudes on a non-political platform.

Videos about the internal US political matters is one of the earliest political content on TikTok. Videos from supporters and spokespersons of both major US political parties; the Republicans and the Democrats are available in abundance on TikTok. Researchers Serrano, Papakyriakopoulos, and Hegelich (2020) studied the content of US Republican and Democratic partisans on TikTok in the period between October 2019 and February 2020 in an attempt to find out who uses the platform for political communication and how the platform's features drive the flow of this political discourse for a sample of 5,946 videos. The researchers crawled videos containing the hashtags #republican and #democrat and traced the duets of these videos to get relevant videos that used the same sound clip. The researchers looked into the general descriptive statistics of the collected dataset, studied the political discourse between partisan users, and finally analyzed the content through the different channels. They found that although the political communication on TikTok is sharing the same aspects as other social media platforms for creating and sharing content, there are specific characteristics that are limited to TikTok. TikTok users turn into a presenter who transforms a political opinion - usually shared as a text or URL link on regular social media platforms - into an audiovisual short performance seeking popularity and fame (Serrano et al., 2020). The researchers found that the majority of the sample's users are below 40 years old which is expected given the platform's general user base. The audiovisual capability of the platform is very attractive to young users who are disseminating their political opinions in such a playful format (Serrano et al., 2020). Using Microsoft's Face API, the researchers also looked at the emotional expressions of videos of both parties and it suggests that there is no difference in the way TikTok users express themselves in relation to their political partisanship noticing a higher average for happiness and surprise emotions more than anger and sadness justified by the nature of the platform (Serrano et al., 2020).

In a similar context, researchers Cervi and Marín-Lladó (2021) also looked into political video content on TikTok. However, their study focused on how the political parties in Spain are incorporating TikTok in their campaigns to reach young age groups. TikTok practices of the five most voted-for political parties in Spain in the general elections of November 2019 were investigated to understand how political parties are using the trending platform. The study found that although the examined parties were all present on TikTok with different capacities across the time of the study, their messages were mainly political and did not fully utilize TikTok affordances. “Duets” and “Challenges” were not used by the political parties, of the sample of 172 videos, only one political party published a challenge and a duet (Cervi & Marín-Lladó, 2021).

Response and engagement are important factors of political discourse on social media. The design of each platform defines how the interaction would take place. The duet aspect of TikTok was a primary focus of the research done by Serrano, Papakyriakopoulos, and Hegelich (2020). Duets on TikTok allow users to show solidarity or criticism in the most creative way by using physical expressions and or text snippets in a new response video playing side by side with the original video. It is argued that the duet feature is the closest to original online political debate given its interactive possibilities (Serrano et al., 2020). Most social media platforms offer engagement in three levels: viewing, the basic response of like and share, and finally an evolved response of commenting. However, TikTok adds a fourth level of interaction allowing users to respond to videos via duets in a personal and one-to-one format (Serrano et al., 2020). According to Serrano, Papakyriakopoulos, and Hegelich (2020), duets feature creates a communication tree as it is possible for users to keep responding to duets that were created in response to other duets. As these special features of TikTok are the key attractions of the platform, the more they are used

the more engagement a video would create. The most engaging posts are those matching the specific genres and affordances of TikTok (Cervi & Marín-Lladó, 2021).

One of the main expression modes on TikTok is memetic attitude. A “meme” - a term coined by Richard Dawkins in 1976 - is defined as small bits of communication that spread by copying or imitation (Shifman, 2013). It is noticed that social media tends to create a collective mode of expression among youth through trends that are largely followed. Social media creates a spiral environment of shared ideas and thoughts among youth by providing them with shared resources. The concept of political collective expression is built on three main ideas; assuming an audience with similar beliefs and having the ability to communicate with that audience; the conscious need of contributing personal voice to an existing wider conversation, and the use of common assets that makes this assumption relevant and believed (Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2019). Researchers Literat and Kligler-Vilenchik (2019) investigated political collective expression around the 2016 US elections on the music.ly platform - the previous name of TikTok - by analyzing the three memetic dimensions of cultural items: content, form, and stance. The three dimensions are “content” of a specific cultural item in reference to concepts and ideas that could be conveyed, “form” is the sensory impression perceived by the audience, and “stance” is the communicative position of the message addresser (Shifman, 2013). It is found that videos under the same hashtag used similar resources, such as political slogans, protest signs, songs, speech experts, gestures, in order to express a similar political position (Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2019). This finding advances the memetic theme naturally found on TikTok and encouraged through technological affordances of visibility and association.

Generally, with the expansion of the internet, the political potential of social media platforms became obvious. Moreover, when media platforms that are known to be less serious

became major parts in political discourse, it enforced the concept of playful political communication. Individual media of “Do IT Yourself” and “Do It With Other” type of content opened the door to a sillier mediated citizenship on social media beside satire on mainstream (Hartley, 2010). According to Hartley (2010), the emergence of silly citizenship shown in comedy, satire, viral videos, and other formats of playful media works on attracting people’s attention in the mediated political landscape. Glas et al (2019) suggests there is a three-way relationship between media, technology and play. The more play exists in arenas where citizenship is practiced, citizenship actions of political participation become of a ludic format (Vijay & Gekker 2021), a characteristic that usually describes TikTok content. Vijay and Gekker (2021) studied playful political participation in TikTok content through the contentious divisive issue of women’s entry into Sabarimala religious temple in India. The researchers examined the critique that took place on an initial soundtrack of a TV coverage of a woman who tried to enter the temple in the form of video spoofs. These created spoofs undermined the momentum of the original incident by endless repetition (Vijay & Gekker 2021). However, in a different context, the notable playful political participation on TikTok was used in favor of a cause during the Palestinian - Israeli Sheikh Jarrah events in 2021. According to Abbas et al. (2022), TikTok platform features were used as a digital activism tool to organize the publics around a pro-Palestinian narrative in what was known as the “TikTok Intifada”. The researchers examined 203 TikTok videos with the three most viral hashtags of the events and noted that a viral music and dance challenge that took place helped gain visibility and raise awareness through association affordances of duets and stitches (Abbas et al., 2022).

## **Chapter Four: Theoretical Framework**

Theories are crucial parts of research work as they determine the borderlines of a study and keep it focused (Obi et al., 2021). This present study utilizes the framing theory as a well-grounded base for studying the representation of the recent 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict on TikTok. The theoretical framework in this study considers the specific changes in framing theory when applied to the digital era. It utilizes the developed framing approaches of collective and connective actions in social movements as it deals with political discourse created on social media in a resemblance to movements that originally take place in offline arenas. The study also deploys the memetic dimensions approach in TikTok videos of the 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict as audio-video memes. This study deals with TikTok video posts created and shared by TikTok users as a memetic corpus similar in the characteristics of content, form, and/or stance. Through framing theory, connective and collective actions frames, and the memetic dimensions approach, this present study examines the representation of a fierce war and a complicated conflict portrayed in short videos created and posted on TikTok.

### **1. Framing Theory**

Framing is a theory that evolved based on the idea of selection and salience. Framing is defined as the process in which some parts of a believed reality are selected and highlighted to represent a narrative in order to promote a specific meaning (Entman, 2007). In other words, to frame is to select some elements of a particular matter and make them more notable in a communication piece to promote a certain definition, interpretation, evaluation, and or solution (Entman, 2007). Other media research sees framing as the process of organizing information in a unique context for specific elements to dominate a person's cognitive repository (Pan & Kosicki,

1993). The book “Frame Analysis” introduces frameworks as “schemata of interpretation” that provide meaning to scenes and events to which they are applied (Goffman, 1974). Goffman further explains that primary frameworks are divided into natural and social frameworks. Social frameworks are “directed doings” that entail the will, aim, and controlling effort of an intelligence (Goffman, 1974). In his book “The Whole World Is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left”, Gitlin (1980) links the frames directly to the news process and its organization; used by journalists to create their reports and by audiences who depend on these reports.

Framing is a study of media effects. According to Schuefele (1999), in the political communication field, framing should be defined on the basis of social constructivism which is the present stage of media effects research. Mass communication has a strong impact because it constructs social realities believed in by recipients, yet its effect is subject to the interaction between both media and recipients (Scheufele, 1999). Mass media sets the frames by which the audience will understand and discuss public matters, at the same time, people's interpretation is already influenced by pre-existing meaning schemas (Scheufele, 1999). Hence, frames are said to affect the audience even on the cognitive level (Obi et al, 2021) and the media's impact is different from one person to another according to his way of processing news messages (Entman, 1989). Plenty of diverse frames could be used in news communication. However, there is a broader classification of frames. Issue-specific frames are those relevant only to specific topics or events, while other frames overstep thematic limitations and can be identified in relation to different topics, duration of time, or in different cultural contexts are called generic frames (Vresse, 2005)

Because media frames include presenting and receiving, there are two concepts of media that should be considered: media frames and individual frames (Scheufele, 1999). Media frames

are central interpretive sets that provide meaning to an issue (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). Glitten (1980) defines media frames as ‘largely unspoken and unacknowledged, they organize the world both for journalists who report it and, to some important degree, for us who rely on their reports’ (P.7). On the other hand, individual frames are identified as “mentally stored clusters of ideas that guide individuals’ processing of information” (Entman, 1993, P.53).

Framing and political views have been discussed by several communication scholars. For Entman, he believes that framing has an indispensable implication on political communication (1993). In a later study, he argued that the political influence in media arises from the ability to frame stories in a way that favors one side over the other (2004). However, frames emerge from a personal reference that is built across time. Chong and Druckman (2007) explained that frames influence viewers when they evaluate the given frame based on their own pre-stored set of beliefs in mind. Accordingly, certain news frames may align and correspond to the pre-existing ideas that views already acquired (Entman, 1993; Severin & Tankard, 2001)

## **2. Framing in Social Media Era**

The emergence of social media highlighted challenges and imposed reviews on the framing theory when applied to social media. The rise of social media as a political tool has changed the dynamics of political communication and limited the influence of traditional media in favor of political actors and ordinary citizens disseminating messages directly to the audience (López-Rabadán, 2022).

Although many researchers adopted the conceptualization of media and individual frames and linked them, the concept is perceived as challenging when dealing with social media content. Social media blurs the line between institutional accounts and individuals accounts (Qin, 2015). According to Qin (2015), social media frames are not the typical interpretive packages used by



news organizations and they are also more sophisticated than personal schemata. Given the massive amount of data on social media, examining the selection and salience using the traditional mechanism becomes challenging. Qin (2015) suggests two measures relevant to social media nature and perspective: Hashtags as framing devices analysis and computer-aided semantic network analysis.

Social media advancement developed changes in framing research studies. Framing in social media reformed its research agenda towards a more balanced distribution of content between the study of media, political, and citizen settings (Lopez-Rapadan, 2021). Also, the digitization of new media showed growth in studies of visual frames. In the current era, the study of text only is no longer sufficient since the weight of photo and video roles is growing in reviewing media frames (Lopez-Rapadan, 2021)

### **3. Frames of Social Movements, Collective and Connective Action Framing**

There are various models of framing analysis approaches used by scholars interested in framing theory application (Samsudin, 2019). Studies use a framing approach to investigate the different frames used for specific events' communication. Researchers figured different groups of frames that explain how social actors compose meanings from social matters around them (Li et al., 2021). Framing is used in collective movements studies as they interpret relevant events in a way that could mobilize or demobilize the audience (Benford & Snow, 1988). Social movements and collective action campaigns are not only carriers of meaning and interpretations, but the movement actors are also considered active producers and keepers of the meanings presented to the wide audience of supporters, opponents, and viewers (Benford & Snow, 1988).

Originally, Entman (1993) advised that issue-specific frames are used to provide four aspects of a specific social matter: (a) an issue definition, (b) causal interpretation, (c) moral judgment, (d) and

a recommended treatment. Collective action frames are like any other frames as they focus attention and articulate elements of a matter to transform certain meanings and interpretations. However, Collective action frames are different in terms of their essential mobilization function; activating those who are believers of the cause, converting the observers, and finally neutralizing the rivals (Snow et al., 2018). Hence, the collective action frames produce ideas and meanings of mobilizing adherents and demobilizing antagonists (Benford & Snow, 2000). It is seen that activism goes beyond presenting meaning and ideation to actions of recruitment and mobilization. Through different frames, activists and activism organizations are able to encourage supporters to act according to these activists' goals and missions (Benford & Snow, 1988). According to Benford and Snow (1988) this is accomplished through three essential framing processes: (1) Identifying the problem, (2) proposing a solution, and (3) call to action.

In a digital era, social movements and advocacy campaigns are also taking a course of change toward a logic of connective action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). The social media era allowed movements to take place online after being originally fought in the streets (Mirbabaie, 2021). It is argued that besides the common logic of collective action associated with the creation of collective identities, there is a less familiar logic of connective action based on individualized content that is shared across different social media platforms (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). This personalized aspect created a political engagement built on personal aspects of aspiration, conduct, and grief (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). Researchers Bennett and Segerberg (2013) further explained that although people may still join movements in large groups, identity reference is salient in their personal expression rather than group identification (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013).

Li et al. (2021) used the forwarded three categories of frames; issue-specific, collective, and action frames in a multi-dimensional framing approach to analyze the #MeToo movement in

China. The researcher examined the frames adopted in the Anti-Sexual Harassment Movement in through studying frames of personal experiences and emotional commentary representing the personal action frames, injustice and opposition representing the collective action frames, and problem definition, treatment recommendation, and related news representing issue-specific frames (Li et al, 2021).

#### **4. Memetic Dimensions Approach**

Social media affordances like hashtags, actions, and soundbites create a memetic corpus (Lierat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2019) where related participants are grouped and tied. According to Shifman (2013), the ties within a memetic compilation could be examined via content analysis of memetic variability. According to Shifman (2013), The memetic variability is studied in three dimensions: (1) content (the themes, ideas, and ideologies embedded in the text), (2) form (the composition of the message), (3) and stance (the communicative positioning of the addresser). Lierat and Kligler-Vilenchik's (2019) study on youth collective political expression on social media examines the memetic dimensions of content, form, and stance by analyzing the content of two hashtags representing contrasting political views in an attempt to highlight how social media allow the build of collective expression. Social media allows a compilation of items based on imitation, where users consciously create new versions of an existing piece by keeping or changing elements of it (Gal et al., 2016). Using the same memetic dimensions approach of Shifman (2013), Gal et al. (2016) follows these selective choices of (content, form, and stance) to examine internet memes and the construction of collective identity through a viral YouTube video known as "IT Gets Better" that responds to a suicide of two gay teens who had suffered from homophobic bullying. The researchers investigated if internet users created a collective position on LGBT normativity through their versions of the same video (Gal et al, 2016). They examined 200 videos

and found they showed low levels of deviation and a tendency of similarity among videos resembling the norms found in the original video (Gal et al., 2016).

## Chapter Five: Research Questions

Based on the literature above and the limited comparative research studies on political and social movements coverage on TikTok, the researcher proposes the following Six research questions. The researcher's objective is to find out how TikTok platform was used to portray the 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict by English and Arabic speaking TikTokers in an attempt to identify differences between both types of videos. Through a quantitative method, the researcher studies the verification status, the level of engagement, and common message themes in English and Arabic language TikTok videos about the conflict. Based on the framing theory, this study incorporates a diverse group of frame genres (connective action, collective action, and issue-specific frames) to empirically examine how these frames were adopted in the Russian Ukrainian war' English and Arabic representations on TikTok. Finally, through an analysis of the memetic dimensions of content, form, and stance, the study assesses how young people used the available affordances of TikTok to express political stances within hashtags associated with contrasting political views in English and Arabic languages.

**RQ1:** What is the verification status of English and Arabic speakers' accounts posting about the 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict?

**RQ2:** What is the level of engagement found in English and Arabic language TikTok videos about the 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict?

**RQ3:** What are the common message themes found in English and Arabic language TikTok videos focusing on the 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict?

**RQ4:** Which prominent connective action frames, collective action frames, and issue-specific frames emerged during the 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict representation in English and Arabic language TikTok videos?

**RQ5:** How did the English and Arabic speakers on TikTok use the available affordances to create coherence and memetic dimensions of content, form, and stance within hashtags associated with contrasting political views?

**RQ6:** Which TikTok association affordances (Duet, Stitch, Reply / Mention) were used in English and Arabic language videos about the 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict?

## Chapter Six: Method

To address the mentioned research questions, the researcher conducts a quantitative content analysis of English and Arabic languages TikTok videos about the Russian Ukrainian 2022 conflict.

### 1. Data Collection

The present research depends on hashtags to collect data. According to Literat and Vilenchik (2019), a hashtag is an important tool for collective expressions that allow users to connect to existing topics of their interest, achieve visibility, and coordinate shared action under a collective keyword (Thorson et al., 2016). Hashtags allow selecting a corpus of collective data suitable for analysis (Lietart & Vilenchik, 2019). The search capabilities are limited on TikTok (Lietart & Vilenchik, 2019) as the application does not offer extensive sorting or filtering options. Thus, the data collection in this research is a manual process.

This study adopts a data collection method used by Literat and Vilenchok (2019) study on youth political expression on music.ly, the previous name for TikTok. To find the range of Russian Ukrainian 2022 conflict political expressive videos in English and Arabic languages on TikTok, the researcher looked for hashtags associated with both contradicting political positions and those associated with neutral war updates and follow up. In English; (e.g. #ukraine, #ukrainerussia, #standwithukraine, #deathtoputin, #stopwarukraine, #ukrainewar, #russia, #vivarussia, #ukrainerussiaconflict, #ukrainerussianwar, #ukrainerussiaupdates) and in Arab (e.g. روسيا #اوكرانيا, #اوكرانيا RU, #اوكرانيا UA, #اوكرانيا روسيا #حرب اوكرانيا وروسيا).

Hashtags were looked up without limiting them to a certain stance, considering that hashtags gather people who are willing to talk to each other about the same topic, yet unnecessarily would say the same thing (Literat & Vilenchik, 2019). The researcher considered the number of

views for each of these hashtags and then selected the most viewed hashtag with a clear orientation on each side: #ukraine (45.88 Billion Views), #russia (58.3 Billion views), #أوكرانيا (2.0 Billion views), and #روسيا (3.7 Billion Views). However, the use of a hashtag does not guarantee a clear alignment with a specific political position (Literat & Vilenchik, 2019). According to Literat and Vilenchik (2019) users might use a specific hashtag to present a contradicting idea to people of a specific orientation, act sarcastic, or to gain visibility. Accordingly, videos were collected with no assumption of their political stance.

TikTok allows users to find videos of a specific Hashtag and view the most popular results (Serrano et al., 2020). From the two most viewed hashtags in each language, the top videos were displayed to show the most viral ones. Searching filters were set to (Date posted: Last 3 Months) and (Sort by: Most Liked) to get relevant results, while filters of activity (previously watched videos and / or liked videos) were unused to guarantee unbiased results.

## **2. Sampling**

The study follows a purposive non-random sampling method. A purposive sampling technique is defined by Wimmer and Dominick (2011) as a type of selection that include elements that have exact characteristics and disregard those who fail to meet these criteria. The videos included in the sample are selected to fit the following criteria:

(1) Videos are in English and Arabic languages only to guarantee accuracy of analysis given the language capabilities of the researcher and to stick to a similar personalized cultural exposure intended by the video

(2) Videos are posted in the dates from 24th of February 2022 (first day of the Russian invasion) up till 25th of March 2022 (a month after the invasion started). As the sample was collected at the beginning of April 2022, concurrently the conflict grew relentless and was showing



no visible signs of ending, it was important to delineate the date range of the data set to represent a specific phase of the war. The month duration was decided as a representation of the early phase of the war and was used in the four hashtags' data sets to avoid alterations in search results considering the limited capabilities of TikTok search as the videos were crawled over the course of four days.

The unit of analysis was a TikTok Video. Four separate data sets were collected as sample for the study, they accounted to a total of 500 unique videos representing the top 125 videos under each examined hashtag #ukraine #russia #أوكرانيا/روسيا. The videos were extracted chronologically according to what appeared first in search result page. However, duplicate videos were removed from the data set.

### **3. Coding**

A coding book with operational definitions carrying in-depth explanations of the questions, variables, and definitions for the categories was produced to secure the validity and reliability of the coding (See Appendix 1). The variables and subcategories were adopted from former studies that dealt with similar context. To study the common message themes in the 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict in TikTok videos, the researcher adopted the variables of Xiong et al. (2019) study on the common activism message themes among social movement organizations on Twitter during the #MeToo movement. Xiong et al. (2019) concluded six primary emergent message frames that were salient in #MeToo online movement activism, which are: directly and indirectly related to the movement, references to other related issues that motivates the movement, action-oriented, event specific, references to victims, and activist mentions. Also, the researcher here borrowed the variables of Li et al. (2021) study that examined the #MeToo movement as a connective movement by looking at frames of connective and collective action beside issue

specific frames. Li et al. (2021) used seven specific types of frames for the study categorized as personal experiences and emotional commentary (represents the connective action frames), injustice and opposition (represents the collective action frames), and problem definition, treatment recommendation, and related news (represents the issue-specific frames). Duncan (2012) explanation of collective and connective action frames was also used by the researcher of the present study in constructing the operational definitions of the collective and connective action frames. According to Duncan (2012), perceived injustice by the public and engagement with call for effectiveness could affect people's collective actions. Collective actions are considered operational support for an issue through injustice perception of a situation and efficacy perception of a proposed action affecting a person's likelihood of joining this action (Duncan, 2012). Lastly, the researcher followed the variables presented by Literat and Kligler-Vilenchik (2019) in studying the role of affordances and memetic dimensions of form, tone, and stance, in voicing political opinions on social media in the context of the 2016 US presidential elections. After altering the coding variables for the present study, the researcher coded each TikTok video according to the following variables and sub-categories catering to each research questions:

***Account Verification:*** Was selected as *yes* if the TikTok account shows the blue checkmark of social media verification. If the account is verified it is filtered into account type: to be coded as (*Media outlet*) the TikTok account must be owned by a news agency or a media platform. To be coded as (*Celebrity*), the TikTok account must be owned by a famous person in entertainment fields, such as, artists, actors, or sports celebrities. To be coded as (*Official*) the TikTok account must be managed by a politician or a governmental spokesperson. To be coded as (*Verified User*) the TikTok account must belong to a social media user of huge followers' base that turned the user into a famous content creator, a brand ambassador, or an influencer.

***Common Theme Messages:*** For the present study, variables from Xiong et al. (2019) were altered to the following six frames to conform to the nature of TikTok platform and to the collected sample, noting that a single video could hold more than one message theme frame:

Frame 1 (*Political Content*) was selected as *yes* if the TikTok video shows direct political content about the Russian Ukrainian conflict, such as: news, live coverage, war updates, weapons and military force showcase, political analysis and factual information, protests, resistance actions, death tolls and casualties reporting. Frame 2 (*Related Issues*) was selected as *yes* if the TikTok video features other related issues that are central to the situation and motivates conversation about it, such as: group impressions about the situation, subjective opinions of the Russian or Ukrainian presidents' characters and personal traits, economic consequences, refugees' crisis impact on other regions and countries. Frame 3 (*Action Oriented*) was selected as *yes* if the TikTok video promotes specific actions to be taken by relevant publics, such as: calls for boycotts, protests, or raising awareness. Frame 4 (*Reference to Victims*) was selected as *yes* if the TikTok video references victims of the war and how humans are affected by the invasion. Frame 5 (*Activists Mention*) was selected as *yes* if the TikTok video features specific activists or influencers and their roles in the situation performing heroic actions or carrying out advocative behaviors of protesting or declaring opposition. Frame 6 (*Artistic & Personal*) was selected as *yes* if the video shows artistic and or funny creations, such as: dance challenges, lip-syncing, DIYs, arts showcasing, coking, religious prayers, joking, and editing skills.

***Connective action frames:*** Frame 1 (*Personal Experiences*) was selected as *yes* if the TikTok video shows or narrates a personal experience lived or witnessed by the person posting the video. Frame 2 (*Emotional Commentary*) was selected as *yes* if the TikTok video features personal emotions, such as: fear, sadness, happiness, anger, disgust, shame, enthusiasm, and so on. Videos

that show support towards one of the two conflicting countries or its citizens were also coded as *yes* for this frame.

***Collective action frames:*** Frame 1 (*Perceived Injustice*) was selected as *yes* if the TikTok video recognizes indignation or outrage towards the problem itself or those who are believed to be responsible. For instance, showing anger or hate towards the situation or a responsible person or a country, or listing reasons to oppose a country or a responsible person. Frame 2 (*Agency / Recruitment*) was selected as *yes* if the TikTok video recognizes an action that could be done about the situation. For instance, call to action of demonstrations, protests, boycott, raising awareness, or asking for digital advocacy.

***Issue-Specific frames:*** Frame 1 (*Problem Definition*) was selected as *yes* if the TikTok video intends to define, give perspective, or explain reasons of the situation. For instance, videos that state information or share updates about the conflict. Frame 2 (*Treatment Recommendation*) was selected as *yes* if the TikTok video endorses a solution to the problem. For example, videos that includes calls to stop the war or calls for other countries to interfere. Frame 3 (*Related Issues*) was selected as *yes* if the TikTok video discusses or defines another issue that is related to the main one. For instance, videos that features the impact or consequences of the conflict on other regions or other sectors, or videos that discuss or compare the situation to similar current or historical situations.

***Memetic dimensions of content, form, and stance:*** Guided by Literat and Kligler-Vilenchik (2019), the present study defines the memetic dimensions as “content” which is examined through the political orientation of each video, “form” which is studied through elements of audio and visual choices representing affordances of the audio and video creation, and “stance” which is examined through variables of tone and function of communication as follows:

**Political Orientation:** Each video was examined for the political orientation of its content message as Pro Ukraine, Pro Russia, Neutral, or Unclear. To be coded as (*Pro Ukraine*) video or its caption must show support or sympathy to Ukraine or any of its allies. To be coded as (*Pro Russia*) video or its caption must show support or sympathy to Russia or any of its allies. To be coded as (*Neutral*) video and its caption must not be showing any opinion or stance, to be only stating facts or updates. To be coded as (*Unclear*) video or its caption seems to have a message yet is not clear if it favors any of the two sides.

**Audio Genre:** Each video is examined for the audio genre it used. To be coded as (*Existing Music*) video should use existing pre-recorded music, with or without lyrics, selected from the TikTok library or uploaded by the user. To be coded as (*Existing Soundbite*) the video should use existing sound bites such as speeches, news sound bites, pop culture sound bites and voiceovers, or any sound of a found footage. To be coded as (*Original Sound*) the video should use an original audio by the creator, such as: talking on singing to the camera, or any other diegetic original sounds recorded by creator of video. To be coded as (*Mix of Audio genres*) the video should include two or more of the audio genres. To be coded as (*No Audio*) if the video did not include any audio sounds in it (Literat and Kligler-Vilenchik's, 2019).

**Video Genre:** Each video is examined for the video genre it used. To be coded as (*Original Footage with Lip-sync Performance*) video should show creator's face doing a lip-sync performance for either a musical or non musical audio. To be coded as (*Original Footage no Lip-sync*) the video should have the creator's face visible yet in a non-lip-sync performance, video creator could be talking, singing, doing a prank or any other action. To be coded as (*Original Footage Face not Showing*) the video should be an original footage uploaded by the creator, yet it does not show his or her face, such as: footage of an event, a protest, waving flags, etc..). To be

coded as (*Found Footage*) the video should show footage that is not created by the video poster whether edited or not, such as: footage from news cast, clips from movies, screen shots, etc..). To be coded as (*a Mix of Original and Found Footage*) the video should include both mentioned video genres (Lerat and Kligler-Vilenchik's, 2019).

***Tone of Communication:*** Each video is examined for its tone of communication in five categories defined by Shoshana Blum-Kulka (2004). To be coded as (*Ironic*) video must be an altered representation of a matter in a way different than what it should be. To be coded as (*Funny*) video must be purely humorous causing laughter and amusement. This also included videos of mocking or humorous mimicking of others. To be coded as (*Serious*) video must be an in earnest representation of a matter, which also includes sad and somber videos. To be coded as (*Pretend*) videos must be crafted footage of acted scenes or clips from movies that are used to depict a certain matter. Any tone that is different than these tone categories is coded as (*Other*).

***Communicative Functions:*** Based on the six fundamental functions of human communication by Roman Jakobson (1960), each video is coded for its communicative function noting that each video could hold more than one communicative function. Category 1 (*Referential Communication*) was selected as *yes* if the TikTok video is oriented toward the context or the “outside world” showing something of a wider impact that matters to others beyond the addresser. Category 2 (*Emotive*) was selected as *yes* if the TikTok video is oriented toward the addresser and his or her emotions. Category 3 (*Conative*) was selected as *yes* if the TikTok video is oriented toward the addressee and available paths of action, such as, asking people for support or raising awareness. Category 4 (*Metalingual*) was selected as *yes* if the TikTok video is used to establish a mutual agreement, for instance setting a definition of a matter. Category 5 (*Poetic*) was selected as *yes* if

the TikTok video is focusing on the aesthetic or artistic beauty of the construction of the message itself, such as, performing art.

**Association Affordance:** Each TikTok video was examined for the use of association affordance of duet, stitch, mention, or none. To be coded as (*Duet*) video must use the TikTok screen by screen duet feature. To be coded as (*Stitch*) video must be using the stitch feature that starts with a clip from another user's video followed by an original creation. To be coded as (*Mention / Reply to*) video must use the mention feature that mentions another user in a way to reply to him. The mentioned user's account name appears in the video's caption.

#### **4. Inter-coder Reliability**

After the researcher completed 10 percent of the coding process, to check the coding process reliability a second coder was asked to code the same 10 percent of the sample (50 TikTok Videos, 25 in each language). The second coder is a holder of a Journalism and Mass Communication Masters from the American University in Cairo, with an academic and a professional communication research background, who is also fluent in English and Arabic languages. The main researcher explained the coding sheet in detail to the second coder and familiarized her with the study and sample before the coding process started. Guidelines and operational definitions were used to provide a systematic way in which all videos were dealt with. First, each of two coders coded a sample of 5 videos for purposes of determining coherent understanding. Several points were clarified, and instructions were modified to address items where confusion occurred. The Inter-coder reliability test revealed that for all variables, the rate of agreement by chance was acceptable using Scott's Pi (see Scott, 1955). Specifically, for variables Accounts Verification, Affordances of Association, and Action Oriented message theme, the rate

of agreement was 1. As for variables, Treatment Recommendation, and Conative communicative function, the rate of agreement was 0.98. For Political Content and Activists Mention message themes, connective action frame of Personal Experiences, and Video genres affordances, the rate of agreement was not less than 0.90. For the Reference to Victims message theme, issue-specific frame of Related Topics, Audio genres affordances, Tone of Communication, and Metalingual and Poetic communicative functions, the agreement rate was not less than 0.80. Finally, the agreement rate for the Related Issues and Artistic / Personal message themes, Emotional Commentary, Injustice Perception, Problem Definition, and Referential and Emotive communicative functions, it was not less than 0.78.

Following the intercoder reliability process, the researcher completed coding the full sample (N=500) and produced data sets that were later processed through the statistical program, SPSS. Chi square tests were mostly used to reveal differences between English and Arabic language TikTok videos about the 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict.



## Chapter Seven: Results

Examining **RQ1** on the verification status of English and Arabic language accounts posting about the 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict, results show that only 66 accounts of a total sample of 500 video posts were verified accounts. The English language videos had 53 verified accounts while the Arabic language videos had only 12 verified accounts. As shown in Table 1 there were significantly higher English language videos with verified accounts than Arabic language videos with verified accounts ( $X^2 = 27.93$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

The verified accounts are mainly media outlets followed by verified TikTok users (see Table 1).

**TABLE 1: Comparison of Accounts Verification between English and Arabic Language TikTok Videos on the 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict (N=500)**

	English Language Videos (N=250)	Arabic Language Videos (N=250)	Chi Square
Verified Accounts	53	12	27.93*
Media Outlets	35	6	
Verified Users	15	5	
Celebrities	3	1	
Unverified Accounts	197	237	
Total	250	250	

\* $p < .05$ .

Regarding the engagement levels examined in **RQ2**, the mean values of likes, comments, and shares for English and Arabic language TikTok videos were calculated. Using T-Test to find the difference between the categorical and continuous variables under study here, results showed that the means of likes, comments, and shares among English language videos were significantly higher than Arabic language videos where the significance is  $< .001$  (see Table 2). The standard

deviation is considered high in both data sets which suggests that there is a lot of variances in the observed data around the mean.

**TABLE 2: Comparison of likes, comments, and shares between English and Arabic language TikTok Videos on the 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict (N=500)**

	English Language Videos (N=250)	Arabic Language Videos (N=250)	T Test
<u>Likes</u>			
Mean	1,489,414.80	44,951.54	23.07*
Std. Deviation	983,201.84	116,339.12	
Std. Error Mean	62,183.14	7,357.93	
<u>Comments</u>			
Mean	23,003.28	1,473.90	11.35*
Std. Deviation	29,602.53	4,768.17	
Std. Error Mean	1,872.23	301.56	
<u>Shares</u>			
Mean	37,145.67	2,131.36	10.99*
Std. Deviation	49,708.16	8,067.02	
Std. Error Mean	3,143.82	510.20	

\*t < .001.

To understand how TikTok users expressed their opinions regarding the 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict in English and Arabic languages, **RQ3** focused on the most prominent message themes in the users' videos. Following Xiong et. al (2019) identification of six messages frames around social activism movements hashtags; this study analyzed TikTok videos message themes by categorizing them into six relevant themes: Political Content, Related Issues, Reference to Victims, Activists Mention, Action Oriented, and Personal / Artistic themes, considering that a single video could hold more than one message theme. In the English language videos, the six

examined themes emerged as following: Political Content theme was found in 117 videos, Related Issues theme was found in 153 videos, Reference to Victims theme was found in 58 videos, Activists Mention theme was found in 43 videos, Action Oriented theme was found in only 9 videos, and finally Personal / Artistic theme was found in 78 videos. As for the Arabic language videos, the message themes' breakdown was as following: Political Content theme was found in 145 videos, Related Issues theme was found in 133 videos, Reference to Victims theme was found in 37 videos, Activists Mention theme was found in 9 videos, Action Oriented theme was found in only 3 videos, and lastly Personal / Artistic theme was found in 76 videos. The results show no significant difference in English and Arabic language videos for themes of Related Issues, Action Oriented, and Artistic / Personal themes. However, as seen in Table 3, the results revealed that the "Political Content" theme showed higher prevalence in Arabic language videos than English language videos ( $X^2= 6.29$ ,  $p < .05$ ). On the other side, the "Reference to Victims" theme showed higher prevalence in English language videos than Arabic language videos ( $X^2= 5.73$ ,  $p < .05$ ), along with the "Activists Mention" theme ( $X^2= 24.81$ ,  $p < .05$ ). (See Table 3).

As shown in Table 3, the results revealed that the most prominent theme in English language videos was the theme of "Related Issues" present in 61.2% of total English videos. This included videos that discussed other issues that advanced the discussion about the conflict, such as individual and country-based consequences. On the other hand, "Political Content" theme came as the first prominent theme in Arabic language videos which was present in 58% of total Arabic videos.

**TABLE 3: Comparison of Message Themes prevalence between English and Arabic language TikTok videos on the 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict (N=500)**

Total Sample (N=500)	English Language Videos (N=250)	Arabic Language Videos (N=250)	Chi Square
<u>Related Issues</u>			
286	153	133	3.27
% Total Language Content	61.2%	53.2%	
<u>Action Oriented</u>			
12	9	3	3.07
% Total Language Content	3.6%	1.2%	
<u>Artistic / Personal</u>			
52	78	76	0.04
% Total Language Content	31.2%	30.4%	
<u>Political Content</u>			
262	117	145	6.29*
% Total Language Content	64.8%	58%	
<u>Reference to Victims</u>			
95	58	37	5.73*
% Total Language Content	23.2%	14.8%	
<u>Activists Mention</u>			
52	43	9	24.81*
% Total Language Content	17.2%	3.6%	

\*p < .05

Guided by Li et al. (2021), **RQ4** looked at the frames of collective action, connective action, and issue specific frames in English and Arabic language TikTok videos on the 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict. Collective action frames were identified through “Reference to Injustice” and “Agency” variables. Reference to Injustice is represented in videos that held group-based emotions of anger and resentment towards something or someone who is believed to be

responsible for the situation. The results showed that 115 videos of the English language videos referenced injustice which represented 46% of the total English language videos. On the other hand, Arabic language videos referencing injustice were only 80 videos which represented 32% of the total Arabic language videos. According to the results, the “reference to injustice” frame showed significantly higher prevalence in English language videos than Arabic language videos ( $X^2= 10.3$ ,  $p < .05$ ). (See Table 4). As for variables of “Agency”, this included videos that called for action, the results showed that only seven videos of the English language videos represented calls for action of recruitment which represented 2.8% of English language videos. As seen in Table 4, the results showed that the “Agency” variable showed significantly higher prevalence in English language videos than Arabic language videos ( $X^2= 7.1$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The “Agency” variable was completely absent in the Arabic language videos.

**TABLE 4: Comparison of Collective Action Frames between English and Arabic Language TikTok videos on the 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict (N=500)**

	English Language Videos (N=250)	Arabic Language Videos (N=250)	Chi Square
Referencing Injustice	115	80	10.3*
Agency / Recruitment	7	0	7.1*

\* $p < .05$

For connective action frames, the results showed that 60 videos of the English language videos resembled “Personal Experiences” which represented 24% of the total English language videos. On the other hand, Arabic language videos of “Personal Experiences” were only 27 videos

which represented 10.8% of the total Arabic language videos. As shown in Table 5, the “Personal Experiences” frame showed significantly higher prevalence in English language videos than Arabic language videos ( $X^2= 15.15$ ,  $p < .05$ ). “Emotional commentary” variable was also examined to identify the existence of connective action frames in English and Arabic language TikTok videos on the 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict. Videos that showed emotions of happiness, sadness, support, empathy, crying people, and anger were all counted under this category. The results showed that the English language videos included 112 videos of emotional commentary which represented 44.8% of the English language videos. However, the Arabic language videos included only 62 videos of emotional commentary which represented 24.8% of the Arabic language videos. As seen in Table 5, the “Emotional Commentary” frame showed significantly higher prevalence in English language videos than Arabic language videos ( $X^2= 22.04$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

**TABLE 5: Comparison of Connective Action Frames between English and Arabic Language TikTok videos on the 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict (N=500)**

	English Language Videos (N=250)	Arabic Language Videos (N=250)	Chi Square
Personal Experiences	60	27	15.15*
Emotional Commentary	112	62	22.04*

\* $p < .05$

To identify issue specific frames, variables of “Problem definition”, “Treatment Recommendation”, and “Related Topics” were examined. The results showed that frames of “Problem Definition” were present in 91 videos of the English language videos which represented 36.4% of total English videos, while this frame represented 52.8% of Arabic language videos with

132 videos. This category included videos that define the situation, explain the crisis, or discuss the conflict and its reasons or consequences. As seen in Table 6, the “Problem Definition” frame showed significantly higher prevalence in Arabic language videos than English language videos ( $X^2= 13.6$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Regarding videos of “Treatment Recommendation”, which presented a solution of any type to the situation, the English language videos had 13 videos of “Treatment Recommendation” and the Arabic language videos had 4 videos of the same frame. The results showed that the “Treatment Recommendation” frame was found higher in English language videos than Arabic language videos ( $X^2= 4.93$ ,  $p < .05$ ) (see Table 6). Finally, frame of “Related Topics” which included videos that dealt with other broad issues close or similar to the conflict, was found in 38 videos of the English videos and in 68 videos of the Arabic language videos. The “Related Topics” frame showed significantly higher prevalence in Arabic language videos than English language videos ( $X^2= 10.77$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

**TABLE 6: Comparison of Issue-Specific Frames between English and Arabic Language TikTok videos on the 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict (N=500)**

	English Language Videos (N=250)	Arabic Language Videos (N=250)	Chi Square
Problem Definition	91	132	13.6 <sup>*</sup>
Treatment Recommendation	13	4	4.93 <sup>*</sup>
Related Topics	38	68	10.77 <sup>*</sup>

\* $p < .05$

To answer **RQ5** about the generated memetic dimensions of content, form, and stance in English and Arabic TikTok videos about the 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict, variables of political

orientation, video and audio genres, tone, and communicative functions were examined to understand how similar English and Arabic speakers expressed their political opinions about the current conflict. The political orientation of each video was examined categorizing videos into four political stances: Pro Ukraine, Pro Russia, Neutral, and Unclear. The results showed that English language videos' political orientation emerged as following: Pro Ukraine videos were 132 videos, Pro Russia videos were 5 videos, Neutral videos were 81 videos, and 32 videos were found to be Unclear. On the other side, Arabic language videos' political orientation came as following: Pro Ukraine videos were 58 videos, Pro Russia videos were 31 videos, Neutral videos were 135 videos, and 26 videos were found to be Unclear. As seen in Table 7, the results revealed that there were significantly higher Pro Ukraine videos in the English language videos than the Arabic language videos ( $X^2= 61.7$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

**TABLE 7: Comparison of Political Orientation between English and Arabic Language TikTok videos on the 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict (N=500)**

	English Language Videos (N=250)	Arabic Language Videos (N=250)
Pro Ukraine % of language videos	132 52.8%	58 23.2%
Pro Russia % of language videos	5 2%	31 12.4%
Neutral % of language videos	81 32.4%	135 54%
Unclear % of language videos	32 12.8%	26 10.4%
Chi Square value 61.7 significant at the level of $p < .05$		



Regarding form, the study categorized the used video and audio genres in English and Arabic language TikTok videos about the 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict to find similarities and differences among users. The results show that the used video genres in English language videos were as following: videos of “Found Footage” were 113 videos representing 45.2% of total English language videos, videos of “Original Footage No Lip Sync” were 83 videos representing 33.2% of total English videos, videos of “Original Footage Face not Showing” were 16 videos representing 6.4% of total English videos, videos of “Lip Sync Performance” were only 3 videos representing 1.2% of total English videos, and finally videos of “Mixed genres” were 35 videos representing 14% of total English language videos. On the other hand, used video genres in Arabic language videos were as following: videos of “Found Footage” were 193 videos representing 77.2% of total Arabic language videos, videos of “Original Footage No Lip Sync” were 41 videos representing 16.4% of total Arabic language videos, videos of “Original Footage Face not Showing” were 8 videos representing 3.2% of total Arabic language videos, videos of “Lip Sync Performance” were completely absent in Arabic language videos, and finally videos of “Mixed genres” were 8 videos representing 3.2% of total Arabic language videos. As seen in Table 8, the results revealed that the “Found Footage” video genre was significantly higher in Arabic language videos than English videos, these are videos not originally created by the user, such as videos from news reports. However, the results showed that the video genre “Original Footage with Face Showing but no Lip-Sync Performance” was significantly higher in English language videos than Arabic videos ( $X^2= 59.35$ ,  $p < .05$ ). (See Table 8).

**TABLE 8: Comparison of Video Genres between English and Arabic Language TikTok videos on the 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict (N=500)**

	English Language Videos (N=250)	Arabic Language Videos (N=250)
Found Footage % of language videos	113 45.2%	193 77.2%
Original Footage Face not Showing % of language videos	16 6.4%	8 3.2%
Original No Lip-Sync Performance % of language videos	83 33.2%	41 16.4%
Lip Sync Performance % of language videos	3 1.2%	0 0%
Mixed Genres % of language videos	35 14%	8 3.2%

Chi Square value 59.35 significant at the level of  $p < .05$

As for Audio genres, The results show that the used audio genres in English language videos were as following: videos that used “Existing Music” were 106 videos representing 42.2% of total English videos, videos that used “Original Audio” were 104 videos representing 41.6% of total English language videos, videos that used “Existing Soundbite” were 13 videos representing 5.2% of total English videos, videos of “Mix of Two or More Audio Genres” were 26 videos representing 10.4% of total English videos, and finally only 1 video had “No Sound” representing 0.4% of total English language videos. On the other hand, used audio genres in Arabic language videos were as following: videos that used “Existing Music” were 102 videos representing 40.8% of total Arabic language videos, videos that used “Original Audio” were 120 videos representing 48% of total Arabic language videos, videos that used “Existing Soundbite” were 10 videos representing 4% of total Arabic language videos, videos that used “Mix of Two or More Audio Genres” were 14 videos representing 5.6% of total Arabic language videos, and finally only 4

videos had “No Sound” representing 1.6% of total Arabic language videos. The results showed no significant differences in audio genres between English and Arabic videos (see Table 9).

**TABLE 9: Comparison of Audio Genres between English and Arabic Language TikTok videos on the 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict (N=500)**

	English Language Videos (N=250)	Arabic Language Videos (N=250)
Original Audio % of language videos	104 41.6%	120 48%
Existing Music % of language videos	106 42.4%	102 40.8%
Existing Soundbite % of language videos	13 5.2%	10 4%
Mix of Two Audio Genre % of language videos	26 10.4%	14 5.6%
No Sound % of language videos	1 0.4%	4 1.6%
Chi Square value 9.81		

To examine the common stance in English and Arabic language TikTok videos about the 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict, this study looked at the two variables of tone of communication and function of communication. Regarding the tone of communication, the English language videos had 172 videos categorized as “Serious” which represented 68.8% of total English language videos, 49 videos categorized as “Funny” which represented 19.6% of total English language videos, 21 videos categorized as “Ironic” which represented 8.4% of total English language videos, 8 videos categorized as “Pretend” which represented 3.2% of total English videos. On the other hand, the Arabic language videos had 179 videos categorized as “Serious” which represented 71.6% of total Arabic language videos, 32 videos categorized as “Funny” which represented 12.8%

of total Arabic language videos, 12 videos categorized as “Ironic” which represented 4.8% of total Arabic language videos, 2 videos categorized as “Pretend” which represented 0.8% of total Arabic language videos, and finally 25 videos were categorized as “Other” which represented 10% of total Arabic language videos. The results revealed significant difference between English and Arabic videos in reference to tone of communication as “Funny”, “Ironic”, “Pretend” tones were significantly higher in English language videos than Arabic language videos ( $X^2= 8.5$ ,  $p < .05$ ). (See Table 10)

**TABLE 10: Comparison of Tone of Communication between English and Arabic  
Language TikTok videos on the 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict (N=500)**

	English Language Videos (N=250)	Arabic Language Videos (N=250)
Serious % of language videos	172 68.8%	179 71.6%
Funny % of language videos	49 19.6%	32 12.8%
Ironic % of language videos	21 8.4%	12 4.8%
Pretend % of language videos	8 3.2%	2 0.8%
Other % of language videos	0 0%	25 10%

Chi Square value 8.5 significant at the level of  $p < .05$

Stance of English and Arabic language TikTok videos on the 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict was also examined through communicative function variable. Considering that each video could hold more than one communicative function, the results showed that the English language

videos had 195 videos of “Referential Communication” function, 117 videos as “Emotive”, 49 videos as “Metalingual”, 6 videos as “Conative”, and 78 videos as “Poetic”. However, the Arabic language videos had 204 videos of “Referential Communication” function, 64 videos as “Emotive”, 55 videos as “Metalingual”, 2 videos as “Conative”, and 76 videos as “Poetic”. As seen in Table 11, the results showed that English language videos had a significantly higher prevalence of “Emotive” function than Arabic language videos ( $X^2= 24.32$ ,  $p < .05$ ). However, the results showed similarities between English and Arabic videos in reference to prevalence of “Referential Communication”, “Conative”, “Poetic”, and “Metalingual” communicative functions. (See Table 11)

**Table 11: Comparison of Communicative Function Prevalence between English and Arabic language videos on the 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict on TikTok (N=500)**

Total Sample (N=500)	English Language Videos (N=250)	Arabic Language Videos (N=250)	Chi Square
<u>Referential Communication</u>			
399	195	204	1.01
% Total Language Content	78%	81.6%	
<u>Conative</u>			
8	6	2	2.03
% Total Language Content	2.4%	0.8%	
<u>Metalingual</u>			
104	49	55	0.44
% Total Language Content	19.6%	22%	
<u>Poetic</u>			
154	78	76	0.04
% Total Language Content	31.2%	30.4%	

<u>Emotive</u>			
181	117	64	24.32*
% Total Language Content	46.8%	25.6%	

\*p < .05

**RQ6** looked at association affordances in English and Arabic language TikTok videos about the 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict. The results revealed that the English language videos showed low usage of the association affordances available on TikTok. English language videos had 1 duet video, 4 stitch videos, and 8 mention / reply to videos. However, the association affordances were almost absent in Arabic language videos; the results showed that the Arabic language videos had only one mention / reply to video and had no duets or stitch videos. Accordingly, the association affordances had a higher prevalence in English videos than Arabic language videos ( $X^2 = 10.74$ ,  $p < .05$ ). (See Table 12)

**Table 12: Comparison of Association Affordances Usage between English and Arabic**

**Language TikTok videos on the 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict (N=500)**

	English Language Videos (N=250)	Arabic Language Videos (N=250)
Duet	1	0
% of language videos	0.4%	0%
Stitch	4	0
% of language videos	1.6%	0%
Mention / Reply to	8	1
% of language videos	3.2%	0.4%
Total	13	1
% of language videos	5.2%	0.4%

Chi Square value 10.74 significant at the level of  $p < .05$

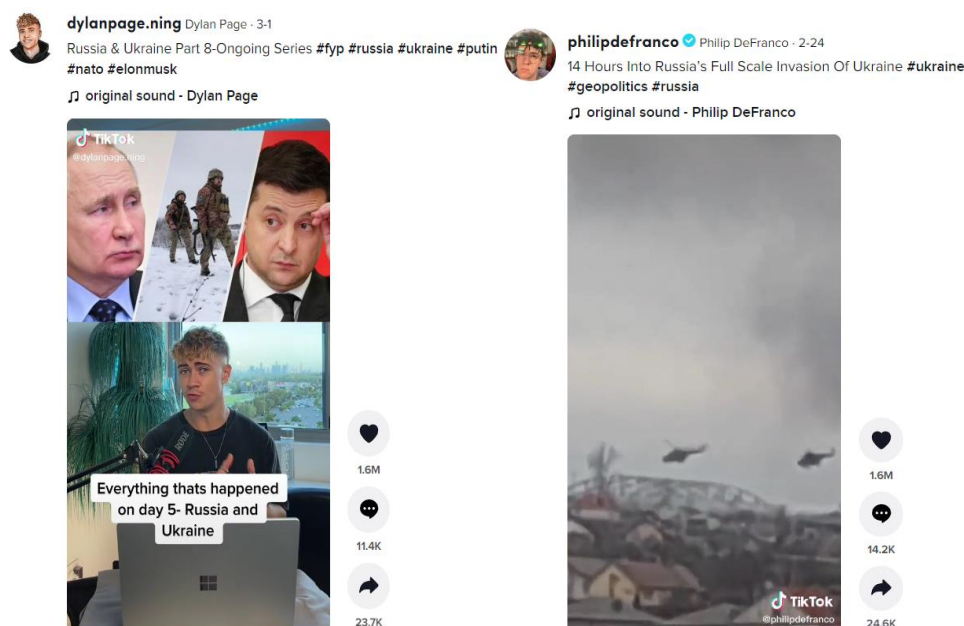
## **Chapter Eight: Discussion**

This comparative study represents one of the first attempts to study conflicts' representation on TikTok through examining videos that belong to two different user bases resembled in their language of expression. The researcher used the framing theory to examine the message themes prevailing in English and Arabic language TikTok videos on the 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict and focused on studying the different frames of connective action, collective action, and issues-specific frames. Also, the researcher examined the use of technology affordances to create memetic dimensions of content, form, and stance among English and Arabic language TikTok videos on the conflict.

Guided by the six activism themes identified by Xiong et. al (2019), this present comparative study explored the most prominent message themes in English and Arabic language TikTok videos on the 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict and showed that the prominent themes' prevalence is subject to the videos' language. The findings suggest that users' identities, represented in their language of expression, would impact the salient messages of videos on TikTok. The prevalence of themes mostly followed similar order of prevalence in both English and Arabic videos; however, the contribution was significantly different. While the "Political Content" represented the most prominent theme in Arabic language videos, "Related Issues" represented the most prominent theme in the English language videos. The "Political Content" theme which showed a significantly higher prevalence in Arabic language videos than English language videos was chosen for videos that included clear war news and factual updates, political commentary, weapon details, and army displaying. This highlighted a bigger interest in Arabic speaking TikTokers to focus on pure news updates and political commentary rather than other aspects of the conflict. By looking at the "Political Content" theme videos, it is noticed that the

English language videos were mostly news coverage and war updates, however, many of the Arabic language videos showed interest in displaying the military power of the Russians beside the general war updates (see Figure 1 and 2). On the other side, the “Related Issues” theme showed similarity in contribution between English and Arabic language videos. This theme was chosen for videos that discussed matters that were related to the main conflict and motivated discussions about it, such as the refugees’ crisis and the war impact on other countries. The “Related Issues” theme in English language videos included videos that held group opinions of praise or critique towards the countries’ presidents, Putin and Zelensky, based on their actions or traits. (See Figure 3).

**FIGURE 1.** *An example of “Political Content” theme in 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict’ English language videos on TikTok*



Source: Dylan Page, TikTok: @dylanpage. March 1, 2022.

<https://www.tiktok.com/@dylan.page/video/7070097575671516422>

Source: Philip DeFranco, TikTok: @philipdefranco. February 24, 2022.

<https://www.tiktok.com/@philipdefranco/video/7068326416827501871>



**FIGURE 2.** An example of “Political Content” theme in 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict’ Arabic language videos on TikTok



Source Ayoub.Nammoura, TikTok: @ayoub.nammoura. March 7, 2022.

<https://www.tiktok.com/@ayoub.nammoura/video/7072324680669039873>

Source xst\_10, TikTok: @xst\_10. March 5, 2022.

[https://www.tiktok.com/@xst\\_10/video/7071727763576605954](https://www.tiktok.com/@xst_10/video/7071727763576605954)

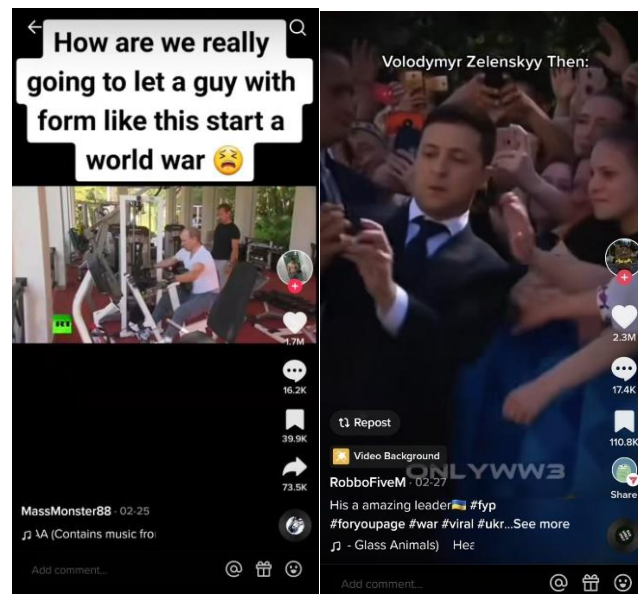
Source xst\_10, TikTok: @xst\_10. March 5, 2022.

[https://www.tiktok.com/@xst\\_10/video/7071732262244568322](https://www.tiktok.com/@xst_10/video/7071732262244568322)

Source noor\_3001, TikTok: @noor\_3001. February 27, 2022.

[https://www.tiktok.com/@noor\\_3001/video/7069182559426481409](https://www.tiktok.com/@noor_3001/video/7069182559426481409)

**FIGURE 3.** *An example of “Related Issues” theme in 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict’ English language videos on TikTok*



Source RobboFiveM, TikTok: @robbofivem February 27, 2022.

<https://www.tiktok.com/@robbofivem/video/7069315982363348225>

Source joshwilsongains, TikTok: @joshwilsongains February 25, 2022.

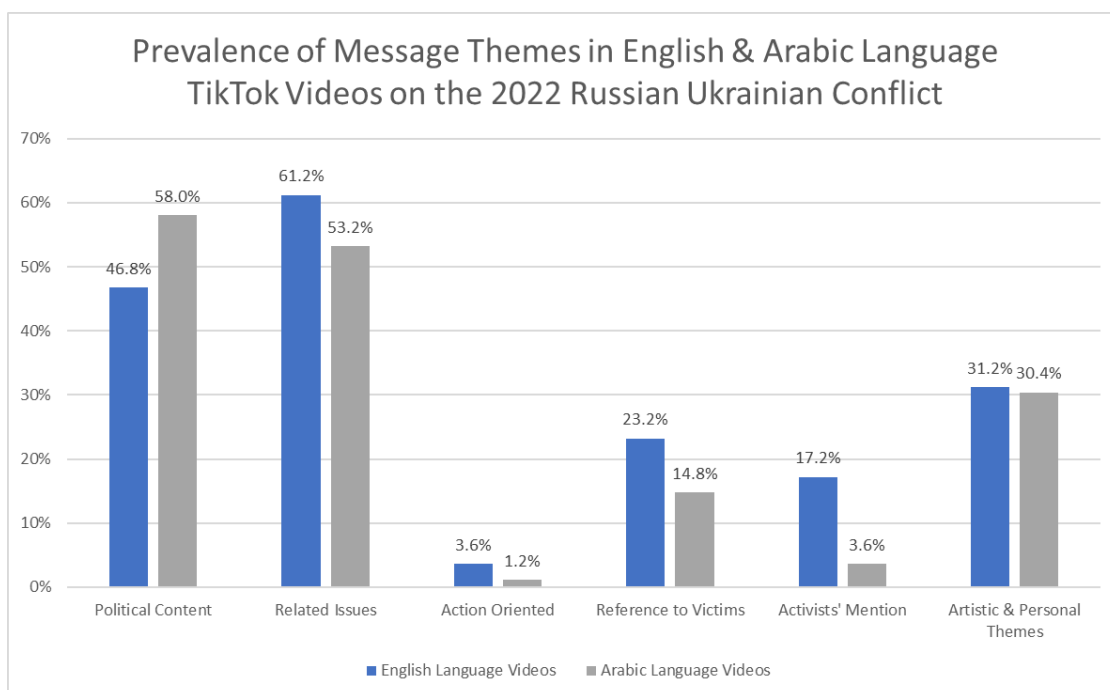
<https://www.tiktok.com/@joshwilsongains/video/7068676201807629573>

The findings revealed that the English language videos were more concerned with the humanitarian side of the conflict by posting significantly higher number of videos that discussed the conflict from a humane point of view; for instance, the “Reference to Victims” theme was found in 23.2% of English language videos versus 14.8% of Arabic language videos, and the “Activists’ mention” theme was found in 17.2% of English language videos versus 3.6% of Arabic language videos. This aspect was highly salient in the English language videos showing huge sympathy and affinity coming from the English-speaking TikTokers by focusing on the victims’ statuses and emotions and praising activists’ roles and impact. This might be traced to two reasons: first the position of English-speaking TikTokers in the conflict assuming their relationship to western communities which drives sympathy towards their neighbor country, and it also raises

fears of the direct impact that could reach them given the proximity of danger. Second, the fact that a deadly war has erupted in the European side of the world might have shocked the western communities resulting in a higher sensitivity to human suffering and losses. A fact that Arab TikTokers might be less sensitive to considering the long lived Palestinian-Israeli conflict plus the number of violent disputes and civil wars that took place in the Arab region in the last decades.

The English and Arabic language videos showed similarity in the prevalence of “Artistic and Personal Theme” coming as the third most prominent theme in both languages which resonated with the perception that the original use of TikTok is art showcasing, singing, dance challenges, and other personal artistic uses. However, this theme coming as the third most prominent theme and not the first highlighted a shift in how the youth used the application in the context of a major international conflict. (See Figure 4).

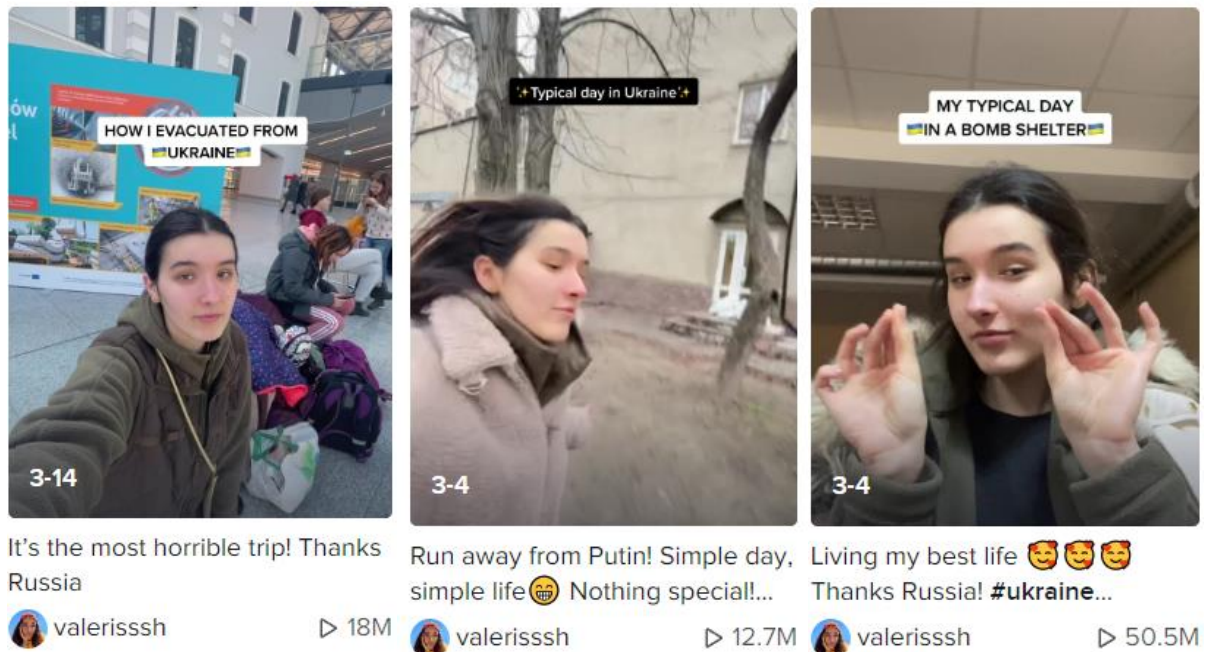
**FIGURE 4.** *Prevalence of Message Themes in 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict’ English and Arabic language videos on TikTok*



By utilizing frames of connective actions, collective actions, and issue-specific frames in studying the 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict on TikTok as a movement of audience mobilization, the results advanced the understanding that users' identity, represented in their language of expression, affected the use of these frames. The English language videos showed high stakes of connective action frames represented in emotional commentary (44.8% of English language videos versus 24.8% of Arabic language videos) and personal experiences (44.8% of English language videos versus 24.8% of Arabic language videos). Duncan (2012) suggests that in movements of crisis there is no time to figure a comprehensive reasoning for actions, therefore; personalities and experiences could shape behaviors and actions through the connective actions' frames. This again highlighted the focus on the humanitarian side in English language videos to create a connective movement based on human sensational representation and personal stories sharing. According to Bennett and Segerbberg (2013), personalization is a natural element in digital representation. The salience of connective action frames in the English language videos, even if non-native English speakers posted these videos, might show that the content of this type was intended to be communicated through a universal language for a maximum targeted outreach.

Many of the personal experiences were videos narrating stories of people witnessing the invasion. One of the most viewed videos was a series with the caption "A Typical day in ..." by Ukrainian young lady @valerisssh where she documented her daily struggles of living under the invasion, living in a bomb shelter, and fleeing to Romania (see Figure 5).

**FIGURE 5.** *An example of “Personal Experiences” videos in 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict’ English language videos on TikTok*

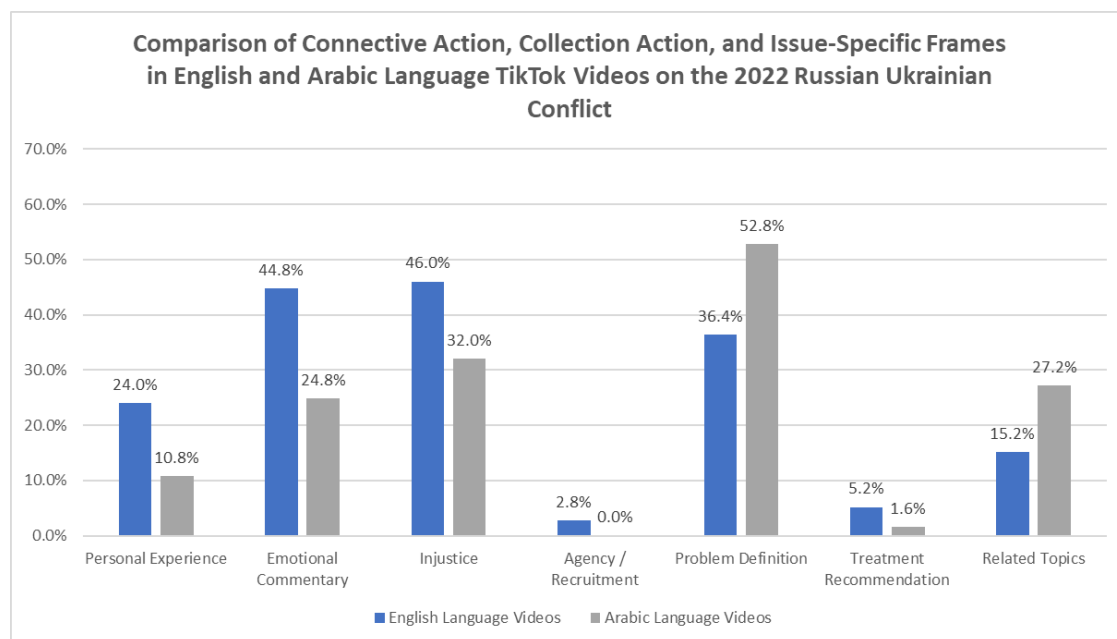


Source: <https://www.tiktok.com/@valerisssh>

The results also showed a high presence of collective action frames in English language videos represented in referencing “Injustice” and “Agency / Recruitment”. Collective action frames are useful in digital contexts as they create shared meanings adopted by individuals on the internet (Li et al, 2021). Users posting in English language were concerned about creating a shared understanding of labeling specific sides or regimes as responsible for the situation, this was especially directed towards the Russian side or the Russian president. This frame was less salient in the Arabic language videos as users posting in Arabic did not focus on creating this shared opinion with other users. On the contrary, the Arabic language videos were leaning towards issue-specific frames represented in “Problem Definition” frame which was found in 52.8% of Arabic language videos and “Related Topics” frame which was found in 27.2% of Arabic language

videos. Issue-specific frames are employed in media discourse to provide reasoning to a specific social matter to influence the audiences (Entman, 1993). Issue-specific frames were widely found in the Arabic language sample to provide meanings and explanations of the conflict that is believed to be of a profound impact to the region's economics. Thus, analysis and understanding of the situation from a political and economic point of view were needed. (See figure 6). Worth mentioning that the only issue-specific frame that was significantly higher in English language videos was “Treatment Recommendation” which was found in 5.2% of the English language videos. This included videos that called for stopping war or asking other leaders or regimes to interfere. This might be understood considering the urgent group-based need of western communities to end the war given the direct impact and danger they are facing in their region.

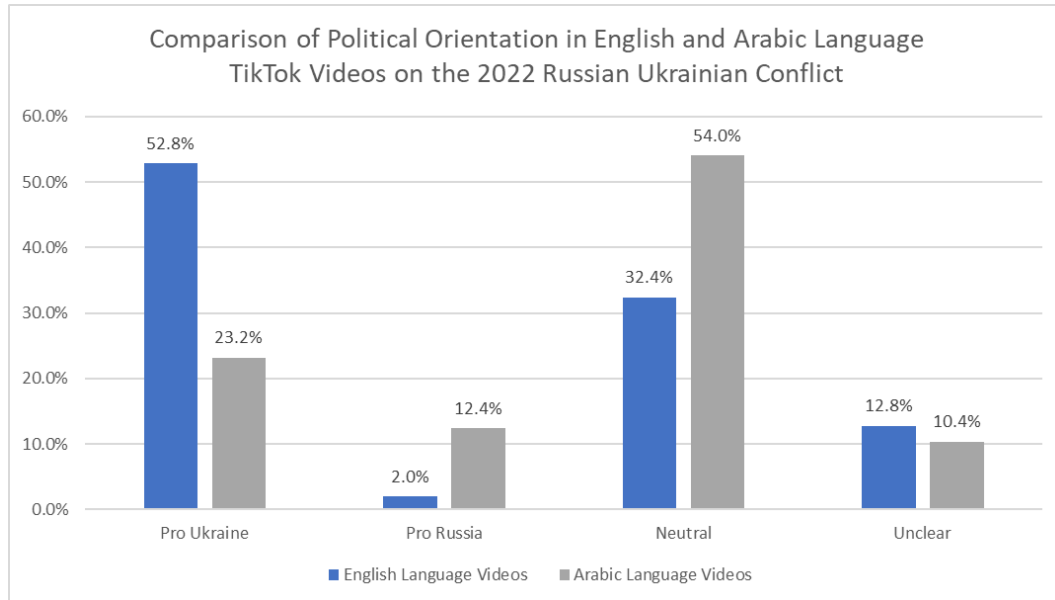
**FIGURE 6.** *Comparison of Connective Action, Collective Action, and Issue-Specific Frames in English and Arabic language TikTok Videos on the 2022 Russian Ukrainian Conflict*



The study examined the use of TikTok affordances among English and Arabic-speaking TikTokers to find how it created a memetic dimension in the representation of the conflict. The findings suggested that memetic dimensions are strongly found in the representation of the conflict

and in some cases, it is subject to the language of the video. In reference to content, the results revealed that the highest represented political orientation in English language videos was “Pro Ukraine” representing 52.8% of the total English language videos while the highest represented political orientation in Arabic language videos was “Neutral” representing 54% of the total Arabic language videos (see Figure 7). It is obvious that the English-speaking TikTokers were clearer in declaring their political orientation in their videos showing evident clues of the side they support. This might be understandable given the fact that even non-native English speakers might choose to post their opinions in English language for a guaranteed international outreach. Also, considering the declared political agenda of western governments of NATO which already supported the Ukrainian side, the same stance would be adopted by their citizens believing in the best for the countries. However, the Arabic speaking users were posting about the conflict mostly from a “Neutral” point of view which could be seen as a match of not having an officially declared position from their governments. “Pro Russia” was the least represented political orientation, however; 12% of the Arabic language videos were pro Russia. It is noted that some Arabs are tending to blame NATO rather than Russia for the conflict (Gornall, 2022), and this might also come as a natural opposition towards the west. Moreover, 12.8% of the English language videos and 10.4% of the Arabic language videos were seen by the researcher as “unclear” considering their political orientation. These videos were mainly jokes and artistic videos that did not give a clear position towards any of the sides of the conflict, on the contrary they were more focused on the message of arts, joking, or sarcasm.

**FIGURE 7.** *Comparison of Political Orientation in English and Arabic language TikTok Videos on the 2022 Russian Ukrainian Conflict*

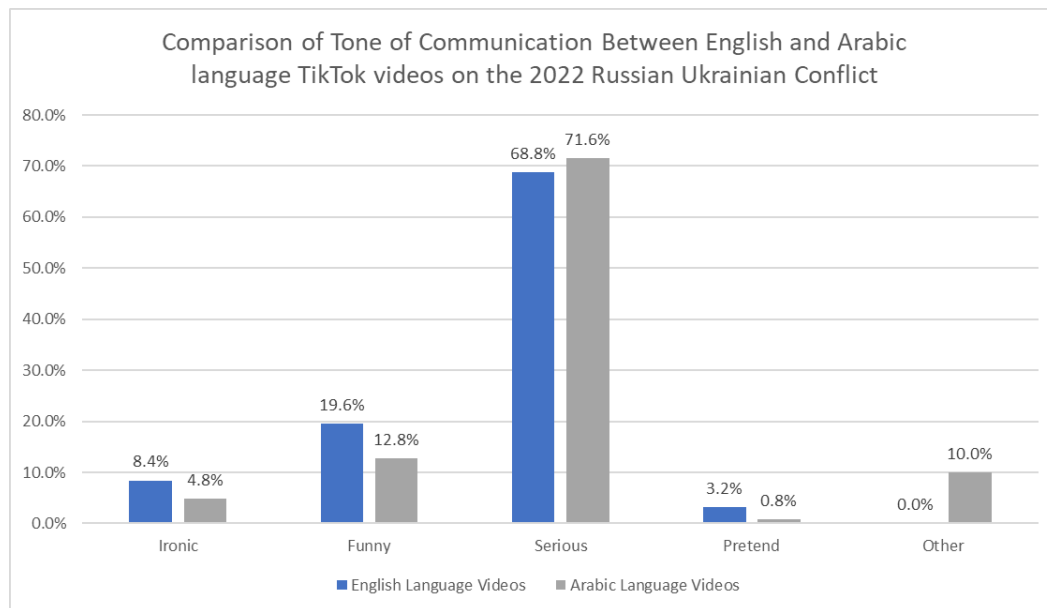


The results revealed slight deviation between English and Arabic language videos in the memetic dimensions of form. The findings generally confirmed that the ordinary actors naturally participate in major matters through technological affordances provided by applications such as TikTok. However, the English language videos had a higher prevalence of “Original Footage” than Arabic language videos. This is understood noting that a higher number of English-speaking TikTokers may be physical witnesses of the event they are posting about. On the other side, the used audio genres showed similarities between English and Arabic language videos with “original audio” genre being the most prominent audio genre in both languages videos which is in line with the abundance of updates, analysis, and political commentary content uploaded by both languages TikTokers.

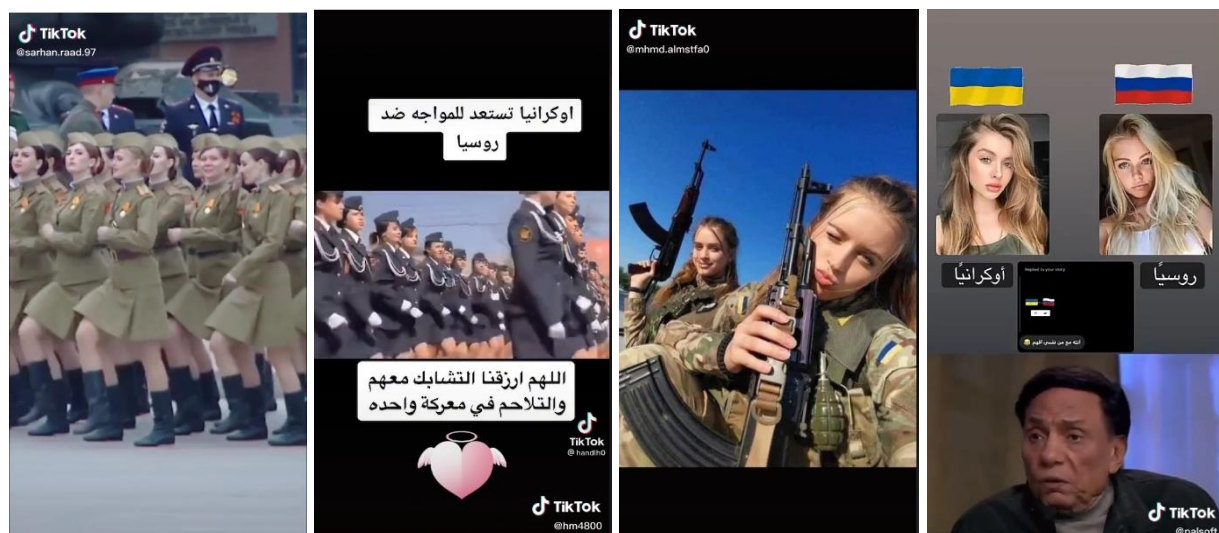


In reference to stance, the study looked at the tone of communication and the function of communication found in each video. For the tone of communication, the results showed that the contribution of tones differed between English and Arabic language videos, however they followed a similar order of prevalence (see Figure 8). The most prominent tone of communication in both languages was “serious” which might be surprising given the TikTok perceived nature. However, this resonates with the previous finding of this study that the most prominent theme in Arabic language videos was political content and the most prominent theme in English language videos was related issues, which are both in earnest content. It is possible that the severity of the conflict and its dangerous consequences were heavily perceived by the public to be handled using the usual TikTok playful and funny content. Worth mentioning that the Arabic language videos included 25 videos that were coded as others. These videos were showing a sexist tone of communication towards female members of Russian or Ukrainian armies, or towards Ukrainian female refugees whom Arab men seen as potential wives (see Figure 9). Videos of such tone were absent from the English language videos.

**FIGURE 8.** Comparison of Tone of Communication in English and Arabic language TikTok Videos on the 2022 Russian Ukrainian Conflict



**FIGURE 9.** An example of “Others / Sexist” Tone of Communication in Arabic language videos on the 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict



**Note:** Majority of these videos were no longer available on TikTok platform at the time of finalizing this research due to users’ reports

Source sarhan.raad.97, TikTok: @sarhan.raad.97. February 24, 2022.

<https://www.tiktok.com/@sarhan.raad.97/video/7068188285864021250>

Source hm4800, TikTok: @hm4800. February 24, 2022.

<https://www.tiktok.com/@hm4800/video/7068320595062082818>

Source mhmd.almstfa0, TikTok: @mhmd.almstfa0. February 25, 2022.

<https://www.tiktok.com/@mhmd.almstfa0/video/7068692626626579714>

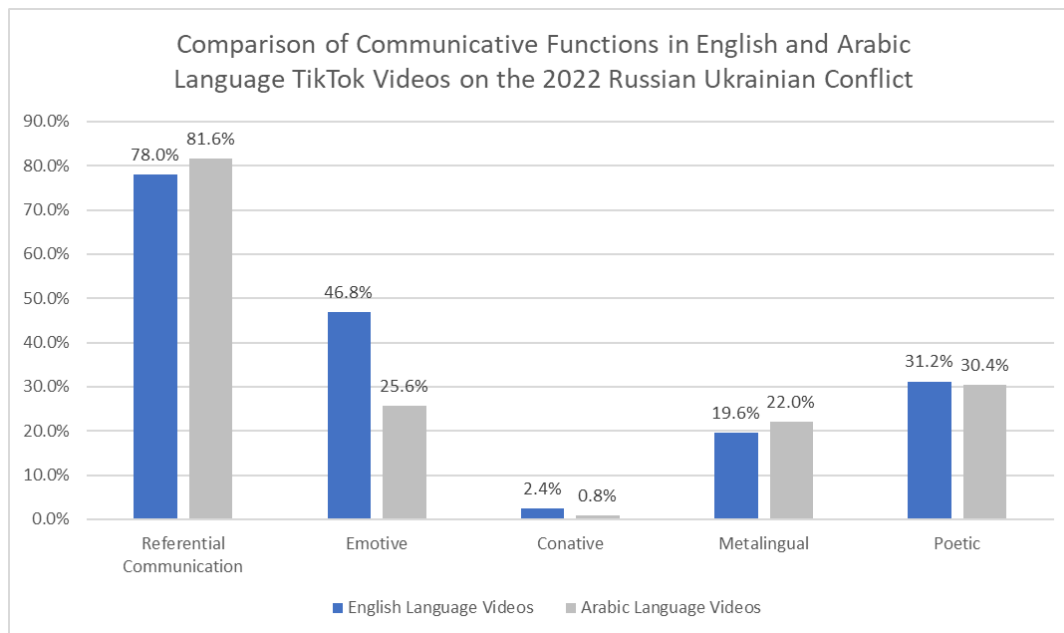
Source: palsoft, TikTok: @palsoft. February 25, 2022.

<https://www.tiktok.com/@palsoft/video/7068742396934114562>

Regarding the communicative functions, the results showed similarity between the English and Arabic language videos in the prevalence of “Referential Communication”, “Metalingual”, “Poetic”, and “Conative” communicative functions. The “Referential Communication” function in specific came as the most prominent function in both English and Arabic language videos which resonates with the previous findings that revealed the prevalence of the “Political Content” theme in Arabic language videos and the “Related Issues” theme in English language videos. Also, this comes in line with the results that revealed “Serious” to be the most prominent tone of communication. These findings further highlighted the shift in TikTok use in the context of a global crisis where seriousness, analysis, and reasoning outweighed the usual TikTok content.

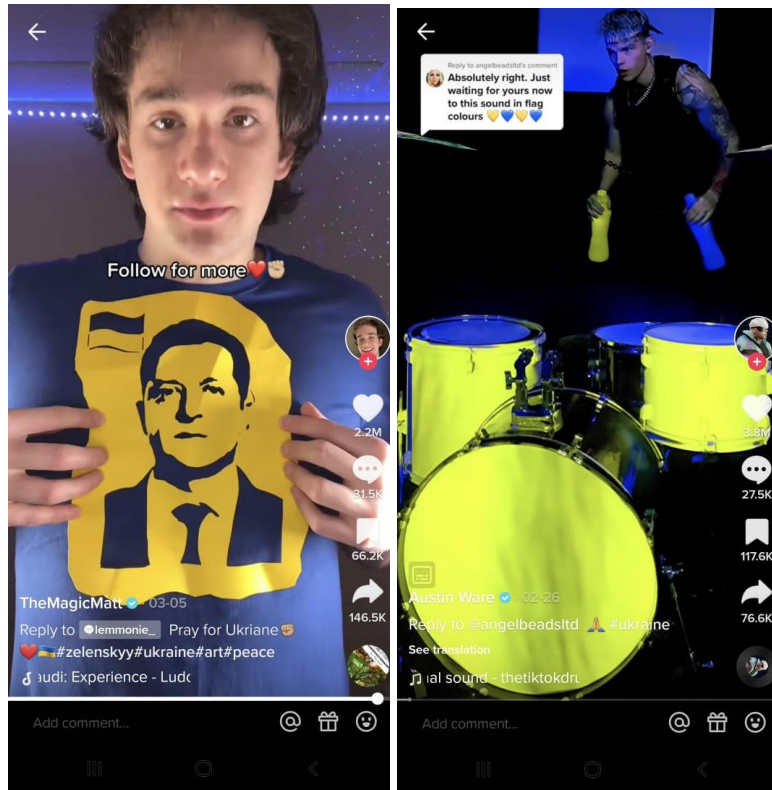
On the other hand, the results revealed that the “Emotive” function prevalence is subject to the language of the videos. The “Emotive” communicative function was found in 46.8% of the English language videos versus 25.6% of the Arabic language videos (see Figure 10). This matches the previous findings of this study that noticed a lean towards humanitarian and emotional aspect of the conflict in the English language videos versus a materialistic and a dehumanized perspective in the Arabic language videos.

**FIGURE 10.** *Comparison of Communicative Function of English and Arabic language TikTok videos on the 2022 Russian Ukrainian Conflict*



The English language videos of “Poetic” communication function showed more art and craft in creation, music and editing skills, even if associated with other powerful meanings. For instance, one of the most viewed videos is a video of the verified user “The TikTok drummer” jamming on drums with splashes of Ukraine flag colors as an act of solidarity and a video of another verified user “The Magic Matt” who created a paper die cut of President Zelensky to show his support (see figure 11). On the other side, the Arabic language videos showed creativity in creating jokes, memes, and pranks, beside the usual showcasing of editing skills on found footage (see figure 12).

**FIGURE 11.** *An example of “Poetic” Communicative Function in 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict’ English language Videos on TikTok*



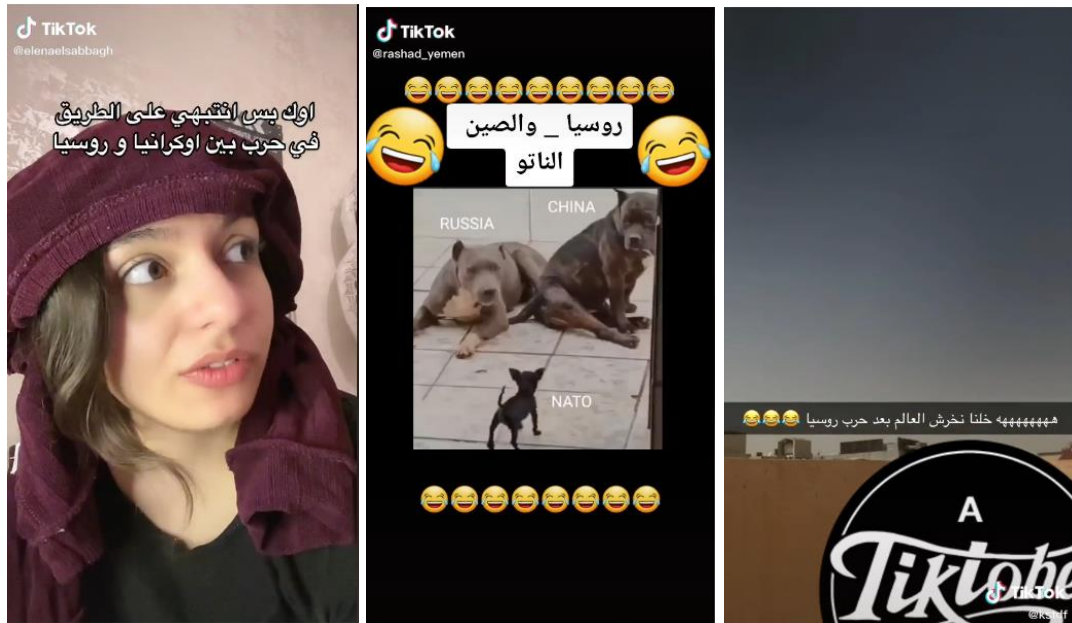
Source thetiktokdrummer. TikTok: @thetiktokdrummer. February 26, 2022.

<https://www.tiktok.com/@thetiktokdrummer/video/7069105033580662062>

Source TheMagicMatt. TikTok: @themagicmatt. March 5, 2022.

<https://www.tiktok.com/@themagicmatt/video/7071444457178139909>

**FIGURE 12.** *An example of “Poetic” Communicative Function in 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict’ Arabic language Videos on TikTok*



Source elenaelsabbagh. TikTok: @elenaelsabbagh. February 24, 2022.

<https://www.tiktok.com/@elenaelsabbagh/video/7068376828984970497>

Source rashad\_yemen, TikTok: @rashad\_yemen. February 25, 2022.

[https://www.tiktok.com/@rashad\\_yemen/video/7068763274136784129](https://www.tiktok.com/@rashad_yemen/video/7068763274136784129)

Source tp.rf, TikTok: @tp.rf February 26, 2022.

<https://www.tiktok.com/@tp.rf/video/7068972820704890114>

Association is one of the most unique affordances of engagement on TikTok. However, this comparative study revealed that the use of association affordances was rarely found in the top English and Arabic language videos on the 2022 Russian Ukrainian Conflict. Although the use of these affordances was exceptionally low in both language videos, still the English language videos witnessed a higher number of videos that used these affordances (13 English language videos versus one Arabic language video). On the contrary of other studies where association affordances

were used excessively in political contexts, the representation of the Russian Ukrainian conflict did not witness this. According to Abbas et al. (2022), through stitches and duets challenges, TikTok association features were used as a playful political expression in Sheikh Jarrah events in 2021 to express political resilience. This shift in TikTok use could be seen as an impact of the violent unpredictable escalation of the Russian Ukrainian conflict which did not allow a playful representation of the matter. By following some of the repeated audios used in videos under study, duet videos were found, however these newly created videos did not appear in the data corpus of the present study as it did not match the criteria of the top 500 most liked videos, or it did not fall under the hashtags used to collect the sample.

This comparative study also found that the number of verified accounts posting about the 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict - mostly media outlets - was higher in the English language videos in comparison to the Arabic language videos. This finding showed less interest from Arabic speaking media outlets to use TikTok as one of its social media representations, besides the lack of interest from Arab social media influencers in the topic itself. Moreover, by examining the means of likes, shares, and comments of videos, the results revealed less interest in following up on the 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict from the Arab TikTokers. The means of likes, shares, and comments were significantly higher among English language videos than Arabic language videos. This could be understood in the light of the proximity of danger caused by the conflict and the direct impact on western communities in comparison to Arabs.

It is worth mentioning that, in the Arab region, TikTok is still suffering from an initial stigma that associated the application with lower classes' content that does not rise to serious discourse or valuable opinionated discussions. The application is also fighting a bad reputation caused by a couple of lawsuits of video bloggers in Egypt, mainly young females, sentenced to

prison and fine payments for their content of dancing and lip-syncing that did not conform to Egyptian society standards. Moreover, recently the application has been accused of spreading harmful content of deadly challenges among teens and minors, which puts the application under harsh criticism and ongoing demands to shut it down in the region. According to Arabian Business website, after a 13-year-old boy in Egypt was injured while filming a viral TikTok challenge in Egypt, Egypt's members of parliament called for a ban on the famous application (2022). These social perceptions backed up with the present research results of accounts' verification status and posts' engagement levels of videos about the Russian Ukrainian conflict, lead towards the understanding that TikTok is not fully used in political discourse and online social movements in the Arab world, which draws attention to the possible development for the application and its usage in the region if positively used by opinion leaders, official entities, and media players.



## **Chapter Nine: Conclusion**

Recently, TikTok became one of the most used social media platforms on the internet. Despite that, it is still not sufficiently researched especially in the political communications field. The comparative study aimed at bridging the gap in political and social movements communications research on TikTok by studying the representation of the 2022 Russian Ukrainian conflict in a cross-cultural comparison between English and Arabic language videos.

Association is a key feature on TikTok. Viral challenges, duets, and stitches are remarkable affordances of TikTok that are usually present in communication on the platform even for serious events. However, opposite to the past literature that found abundance use of association affordances, Serrano et al. (2021) research on US partisan supporters' content on TikTok and Abbas et al. (2022) research on the TikTok Intifada, the Russian Ukrainian conflict representation on TikTok did not show huge interest in using these affordances either in English or Arabic videos.

Perhaps the most important finding of this study, was the unforeseen change in TikTok usual usage of fun, humorous, and apolitical communication. Although videos of artistic message themes were significantly present in the sample, it did not come as the first message theme in the examined sample. On the contrary, the results showed a prominence of direct and indirect political content in comparison to other message themes in both English and Arabic language samples. Also, the serious tone of communication and the referential communicative function were the dominant stances in the conflict's content. The research here suggested that each political conflict and its related online social movement are unique events. Hence, their representation on social media platforms would also be unique. The special nature of the Russian Ukrainian conflict, international repercussions, and the unpredictable violent escalation, all led to a different handling of the conflict and its digital social movement.

On the cultural comparative aspect, although the study showed some similarities in the prominent message themes' prevalence, it strongly highlighted the prominence of victims references and activists' roles as message themes in the English language videos. Again, this was further advanced with the major differences in variables of connective and collective action frames between English and Arabic language videos. The research here suggested that the English videos strongly utilized frames of connective actions "personal experiences" and "emotional commentary" and collective actions "perceived injustice" and "agency" that together showed a lean towards a humanitarian and a supportive orientation towards the conflict, the victims, and activists' roles. The English-speaking TikTokers were keen to connect through communicating personal emotive narratives of the conflict and were willing to create a shared position to hold someone accountable of the crisis and act upon that. The connective and collective action frames were less utilized in the Arabic language videos in favor of issue-specific frames that dealt more with the conflict's political facts and information in a dehumanized and a practical approach. This is also confirmed when looking at the "emotive" tone of communication which was much salient in the English language videos compared to the Arabic language videos.

In conclusion, by considering personal action frames, collective action frames, and issue-specific frames, this study provides a useful analytical tool, which is a multidimensional framing analysis for examining public discourse of an international conflict from different perspectives of English and Arabic-speaking Tiktokers. The research also studied the TikTok used affordances and their ability to create a memetic dimension in the examined sample shown in coherent content, form, and stance. The research found that the political orientation of videos was subject to the language of expression. A clear Pro Ukraine political orientation was significantly salient in

English language videos; however, most Arabic language videos were found to be neutral towards the situation.

## **Chapter 10: Limitations and Future Research**

The purpose of this study is to provide preliminary work in exploring the representation of a current major political conflict on TikTok. The study focuses on a specific timeframe, thus; a prolonged and extended research period might generate more significant results. The present study used a relatively small sample (500 TikTok videos) which were the top videos found under four specific hashtags in one month duration at the start of the conflict - 24th of February till 25th of March - which limits the findings to the parameters of an early phase of the conflict and top videos of chosen hashtags. Extending the research to a prolonged time frame and including all related hashtags might yield different results.

Another major limitation of the study is the search capabilities of TikTok. Unlike other social media applications, TikTok does not provide a commercial application programming interface (API) to share data on users (Cervi & Marín-Lladó, 2021). In this research, data collection was handled manually by the researcher depending on the primitive search functions of TikTok that does not allow exact date and visibility filtering. Also, this limitation made it difficult to collect accurate data about the users' origins and limited the comparative study to the videos' language as a manifestation of identity. Moreover, the search capabilities, links' sharing, and video loading are all changing features of TikTok according to the application development which made the reach of the collected sample a complicated matter along the research process.

The study is also limited to English and Arabic language videos due to the researcher's linguistic knowledge. This means that the study focused only on perspectives of Arab and English TikTok users and did not include other languages or identities. An extended future study that includes videos from other regions and languages is recommended as it would add other perspectives to enrich the cross-cultural comparison scope of the study.

Future research opportunities should further consider analyzing the Russian Ukrainian conflict representation on TikTok through a longer duration of time to understand the impact of time on the findings. Also, future research could consider extending the research to videos of other languages to understand perspectives of other regions and cultures. Further research on the impact of TikTok representation of the conflict on users through a survey could be interesting to understand how users perceived the videos and how it affected their knowledge and point of view of the war.

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## **APPENDIX I: 1 - Coding Sheet & Operating Definitions**

### **Code Book: Comparative Analysis of the representation of the Russian Ukrainian 2022 conflict on TikTok (Perspectives of English and Arabic Speakers on TikTok)**

#### **1. Data Set Reference Hashtag (#Ukraine - #Russia - #أوكرانيا - #روسيا)**

1. #Ukraine
2. #Russia
3. #أوكرانيا
4. #روسيا

#### **2. Data Set Language (English - Arabic)**

1. English
2. Arabic

#### **3. TikTok Video ID**

Data Set Initial - Language Initial - Serial 3 digits number

Example: U-E-001 or U-A-001 or R-E-001 or R-A-001

#### **4. TikTok Video URL**

Insert Link

#### **5. Date (Date of Video)**

Month/Day

Example: 2/24

#### **6. Profile handle**

Insert TikTok profile name

Example: hgsuiaja

#### **7. Account Verification**

1. Yes (Verified Account: has the blue checkmark, either it is an individual account or a media outlet)
2. No (Unverified, No blue checkmark)

#### **8. If verified, Specify account type**

1. Media Outlet

2. Celebrity
3. Official
4. Verified User
5. Other, mention

**9. No. of Likes**

\_\_\_ # of Likes

**10. No. of Comments**

\_\_\_ # of Comments

**11. No. of shares**

\_\_\_ # of Shares

**Use of Affordances of (visibility, editability, and association)** *reference Hautea et al (2021)*

**Visibility**

**12. Does the TikTok video post use the Hashtags Affordance?**

1. Yes
2. No

**13. List hashtags**

Insert a list of hashtags

**Edibility: What edibility affordances are used in the video?**

**14. Is there text in caption?**

1. Yes
2. No

**15. Is there text in video?**

1. Yes
2. No

**16. Does the video use music? (music, song, sound clip found in TikTok Library)**

1. Yes
2. No

**17. Does the video use icons / emojis?**

1. Yes
2. No

**18. Does the video use filters provided by TikTok app?**

1. Yes
2. No

#### Association

##### **19. What association affordances are used in video?**

1. Duet
2. Stitch
3. Reply
4. None

#### Themes of social activism found in videos *reference Xiong et al (2019)*

##### **20. Is the video of political content (coverage of news, war updates, weapons details, political analysis, presenting factual information about the conflict, protests, resistance, army, victims mentioned as part of news or war updates not as personal emotional commentary, etc..)**

1. Yes
2. No

##### **21. Is the video about other related issues (the video identifies issues that are central to the situation or the conversation around it. For example, praising or criticizing a president's traits or actions, other countries' reactions or consequences, economic consequences, refugees crisis, shelter status, personal consequences, personal impression about issues)?**

1. Yes
2. No

##### **22. Is the video action-oriented (promotes specific actions to be taken by relevant publics. For example, calls to share posts, boycotts, protests, etc..)?**

1. Yes
2. No

##### **23. Does the video contain a reference to victims (address those who had been impacted by the situation)?**

1. Yes
2. No

##### **24. Does the video include activists mentions (addresses specific activists or influencers roles in the situation - Includes the president's actions of activism (fighting or heroic action), specific fighters and specific citizens activism)**

1. Yes
2. No

##### **25. Other Artistic or Personal Themes (Dance challenges, lip-syncing, DIYs, Arts, Cooking, religious prayers, joking, editing skills)**

1. Yes
2. No

### **Connective Social Movement Frames found in videos** *reference Li et al (2021)*

#### **Connective / Personal Action Frames**

**26. Does the video show personal experiences?**

1. Yes
2. No

**27. Does the video include emotional commentary? (Includes showing support))**

1. Yes
2. No

#### **Collective Action Frames**

**28. Injustice** (The recognition of the situation that leads to a general sense of moral indignation or outrage towards the problem itself or those who are believed to be responsible. Example: showing anger or hate towards the situation or a responsible person or a country, listing reasons to oppose a country or a responsible person)

1. Yes
2. No

**29. Agency / Recruitment** (The recognition that something could be done about the situation “we can” “we must”. Example: Call to action of demonstrations, protests, boycott, showing support, or asking for sharing to raise awareness, etc .. )

1. Yes
2. No

#### **Issue-Specific Frames**

**30. Is the video a Problem Definition?** (Defining the situation, giving perspective, explaining reasons. Example: stating information, giving updates, etc ..)

1. Yes
2. No

**31. Is the video a Treatment recommendation?** (Endorsing a solution to the problem. For example, calls to stop the war, calls for other countries to interfere)

1. Yes
2. No

**32. Related Issues** (A definition of an issue related to the main one. For example: mention similar current or historical situations, impact or consequences on other countries or other sectors)

1. Yes
2. No

**Memetic Dimensions (content, form, and stance) - reference Literat and Kligler-Vilenchik (2019)**

### Content

#### **33. What is the political orientation of the video?**

1. Pro Ukraine (Video or caption is showing support or sympathy to Ukraine or any of its allies OR video is showing opposition to Russia or any of its allies in the war context)
2. Pro Russia (Video or caption is showing support or sympathy to Russia or any of its allies OR video is showing opposition to Russia or any of its allies)
3. Neutral (Video or caption is not showing any opinion, only stating facts or updates)
4. Unclear

*Note:* Use of emojis is considered a declaration of support or opposition, showing a flag of only one of the two sides is considered a show of support in consideration of context)

### Form

#### **34. What are the audio genres used in TikTok video?**

1. Existing music (existing pre-recorded music, with or without lyrics, selected from the TikTok library or uploaded by the user).
2. Existing speech/sound bites/war recorded sound (e.g. candidate speeches, news sound bites, pop culture sound bites and voiceovers, and the sound of found footage).
3. Original audio by the creator (e.g. talking into the camera, singing, and diegetic sounds recorded by creator).
4. A mix of two or more categories of sound
5. No Music
6. Other

#### **35. If other, explain**

#### **36. What are the video genres used in the TikTok video?**

1. Original footage with creator's face visible—lip-synch performance (lip-synching of both songs and non-musical audio footage such as speeches, i.e., of #1 and #2 in the audio scheme above).
2. Original footage with creator's face visible—non-lip-synch performance (e.g., talking, posing, dancing, marching, waving flag, doing a prank).
3. Original footage with creator's face not visible (e.g., flag laid out on the floor, hands in close-up, person wearing a mask, and original digital content that does not include any found footage).
4. Found footage (edited or unedited, for example, news clips, memes, Twitter screenshots, portraits of the candidates, clips from television/popular culture, slideshows, mashups, gaming clips, etc.).
5. A mix of found footage and original recorded footage.
6. Other

### **37. If Other, Explain**

#### Stance

#### Participation Structure

### **38. Does the video show any identification information?**

1. Yes (any personal / group identification information in video / audio / caption / hashtags, such as nationality, age, race, profession, or political affiliation declaration)
2. No (no identification information)

#### Keying (Tone and Style of Communication by Shoshana Blum-Kulka)

### **39. What is the video's tone of communication?**

1. Ironic (humorous because it represents a matter in a way different than what it should be)
2. Funny / Mocking (pure humorous, causing laughter or amusement) Or (Voicing or mimicking another person's habitual jargon or discourse style in positive or negative connotations. Example: lip-sync)
3. Serious (in earnest, a sincere representation of matters. This includes sad and somber videos)
4. Pretend (acting scenes, scenes from movies not used for fun or irony purposes)
5. Other (explain)

### **40. If other, explain**

#### Communicative functions (six fundamental functions of human communication by Roman Jakobson)

**41. Referential Communication** (oriented toward the context, or the “outside world”: shows something of wider impact. Something that matters to others beyond the addresser. Eg: messages that explain or analyze the conflict. Also, personal narratives give meaning to the bigger picture. Example: someone showing his resistance or his status in a shelter)

1. Yes
2. No

**42. Emotive** (oriented toward the addresser and his or her emotions)

1. Yes
2. No

**43. Conative** (oriented toward the addressee and available paths of action, asking people for support or raising awareness)

1. Yes
2. No

**44. Metalingual** (which is used to establish a mutual agreement. For example, a definition)

1. Yes
2. No

**45. Poetic** (focusing on the aesthetic or artistic beauty of the construction of the message itself, performing art, or acting scenes)

1. Yes
2. No

To understand the fundamentals functions of communication, consider the following: in order: (1) referential ("The Earth is round"), (2) emotive ("Yuck!"), (3) conative ("Come here"), (4) metalingual ("What do you mean by 'krill'?"), and (5) poetic ("Smurf").