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Mediatized remembrance rituals in Ukrainian international communication during the Russo-Ukrainian war

Mykhailo Omelchenko

PhD student,
Mohyla School of Journalism,
National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, Ukraine
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9728-0552>
Email: m.omelchenko@ukma.edu.ua

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ABSTRACT

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This study aimed to investigate how international media interpreted and presented remembrance rituals involving foreign leaders in wartime Ukraine.

A mixed-method approach was employed to analyze the coverage of two re-

membrance rituals involving Japan's and Greece's PM's visits to Ukraine. A

case study was amplified with content analysis of five media per case to shed light on techniques of media coverage. The findings demonstrate that Ukraine instrumentalized remembrance rituals to make foreign leaders live through emotional experience. The media relied on emotional storytelling and vivid visualization when covering the remembrance rituals. The results of the research are significant for international communication, scholars, and policy-makers due to the relevance of sustaining a positive image for the Ukrainian success in defending against the Russian invasion.

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АНОТАЦІЯ

Дослідження покликане розкрити сутність медіатизованих ритуалів пам'яті як інституціалізованої практики міжнародної комунікації в репертуарі української держави від початку повномасштабного російського вторгнення. Була запропонована концептуалізація процесу медійного висвітлення й інтерпретації ритуалів пам'яті за участю іноземних лідерів для зовнішніх аудиторій у період військового стану в Україні. Для аналізу висвітлення двох ритуалів пам'яті під час офіційних візитів прем'єр-міністрів Японії та Греції в Україну десятьма

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міжнародними ЗМІ та прес-службами було застосовано змішаний підхід. Зокрема, метод кейс стаді був доповнений за допомогою методу івент-аналізу, щоб мати послідовну та уніфіковану схему дослідження. Контент- та візуальний аналіз десяти медіаматеріалів дозволив зробити всебічний огляд трендів, присутніх у висвітленні подій міжнародними медіа. Отримані результати свідчать про те, що Україна інструменталізувала ритуали пам'яті для переживання емоційного досвіду іноземними лідерами. Для цього використовувалися харизматичність та медійність особи Президента Зеленського, а також організація ритуалів у локаціях, що мають символічне значення як для лідерів, так і для нації загалом. Такий підхід використовувався для зближення горизонтів між цільовими аудиторіями шляхом апелювання до знайомих їм наративів та уявлень. У висвітленні ритуалів пам'яті міжнародні медіа використовували емоційний сторітілінг, фокусувалися на коментарях лідерів із рефлексією щодо пережитого ними досвіду, а також застосували візуалізацію заходів (фото та відео з місця ритуалу пам'яті). Результати дослідження є актуальними для дослідників міжнародних комунікацій та політиків з огляду на актуальність підтримки позитивного іміджу для успіху України в захисті від російського вторгнення.

КЛЮЧОВІ СЛОВА: медіатизація, міжнародні комунікації, ритуал пам'яті, емоційний сторітілінг, російсько-українська війна.

Introduction

Since the start of the full-scale Russian invasion (from now on, FSI), Ukraine has been facing the deadliest war Europe has seen since the Second World War. The nation has required support from foreign nations to defend itself and sustain social and economic life. As international communication has proven vital in establishing trustworthy relations with crucial audiences, Ukraine has implemented an innovative strategy oriented at Western audiences to sustain a continuous support flow over volatile election cycles and lengthy procedures.

A part of this strategy lies in making foreign leaders participate in remembrance rituals. The war is a national tragedy with tens of thousands of casualties, and it has led to commemoration practices to honor the memory of the fallen. Typically, they happen on national sites of exceptional value and symbolic importance. The Wall of Remembrance of the Fallen for Ukraine is a site created for remembering casualties of the Russian aggression since 2014. Nowadays, dozens of national flags are wrapped around trees in front of it, each signifying a foreign visit. Effectively, the Wall has become a ritual site for international remembrance practice that few foreign leaders can miss during official visits to the capital. Usually, a foreign leader commemorates the bravery of Ukrainian servicepeople by laying flowers against the background of honor guards and a military orchestra.

International media provides extensive coverage of remembrance rituals by transmitting and interpreting them to broader audiences. Thus, it not only mediates the remembrance practice but profoundly influences how it is understood, with differences in approach to covering the same event. Consequently, the relevance of delving into the mediatization of remembrance rituals lies in determining Ukraine's vision and reputation, the most critical assets on the international battlefield of "whose story wins" (Ronfeldt & Arquilla, 2020).

Despite its significance, the study of mediatized remembrance rituals during wartime in Ukraine has not yet received scholarly attention. Existing research has focused on the analysis and role of mediatized rituals in diverse contexts and societies except for wartime. This gap in the literature highlights the need to examine how mediatization has influenced international remembrance practices in wartime Ukraine.

This study approaches two international remembrance rituals in wartime Ukraine through the lens of international media coverage. Understanding how different media process and present remembrance rituals, including emotional storytelling and reliance on visual elements, holds far-reaching implications for communication researchers, policymakers, and the general public.

Literature Review

Public rituals have long attracted researchers' attention in communication and social studies (e.g., Couldry, 2003; Bell, 2009; Dayan & Katz, 1992; Katz & Liebes, 2007; Sumiala, 2014). E. Durkheim viewed a ritual as a "society in action" that solidarizes a group by providing its members with a higher purpose beyond individual interests (Cottle, 2006, p. 414). Reviewing recent literature, J. Sumiala noted that studies mainly focused on mass political events, including both national successes (such as spectacles, ceremonies, and weddings) and tragedies (catastrophes and funerals) (2014, p. 939).

In the middle of the 20th century, public rituals became mediatized due to the influence of mass media, thus becoming more suitable for governmental control in time and memory. Media entities can still influence the perceived importance of international events by prioritizing the position or adding more time to a particular news piece (Blondheim & Liebes, 2002, p. 275; Chouliarakis, 2006). Notably, the media has a unique position that allows it to frame the meaning of different ritual activities, manage public emotions, and channel them to broad audiences (Pannti & Sumiala, 2009, p. 133). Moreover, engaging audiovisual capabilities were acclaimed more emotionally arousing than traditional print media, leading to unique collective emotional experiences (Cho et al., 2003, p. 310; Scott, 2014). Still, with the advent of social media, the established cycle between news, time, and events was broken, thus challenging traditional media's "monopoly over events at certain times" with the rapid flow of private interpretations (Seeck & Rantanen, 2015, p. 164).

Mediatized ritual is a unique and performative media phenomenon that "mobilizes collective sentiments and solidarities based on symbolization and a subjunctive orientation to what should or ought to be" (Cottle, 2006, p. 415). A similar concept found in the literature is a "media event," defined as "a site of maximum visibility and turbulence" (Fiske, 1994, p. 7). For example, universal media coverage of the 1969 US Moon Landing had a monopolistic, mass-oriented nature aimed at gaining an advantage in the battle for space against the USSR (Dayan & Katz, 1992, pp. 4 – 9).

An international remembrance ritual is a government-staged media event tailored to induce solid emotional reactions among foreign leaders and their constituencies to achieve desired foreign policy goals. They have historically been used to forge solidarity among different internal audiences during wartime. Usually, such events contain symbols, emotion, rhetoric, and performance constitutive of human communicative action. They are thus ready to be ritualized and conveyed through media through emotional storytelling (Cottle, 2006, p. 413). In her research of WWI memorial sites, C. Winter argued that they are emotional centers of a nation where attendees expressed "sadness, gratitude" as well as "promises to remember and never forget the dead" (Winter, 2009, p. 16). Finnish national press and television frequently involved national imagery, such as flags, symbols, and state representatives, when covering public rituals (Pannti & Sumiala, 2009, p. 127).

As states are considered "hierarchical groups of emotional people" (Hymans, 2010, p. 462), the involvement of prominent national figures in the rituals and the media's emphasis on their participation play a significant role in generating sympathy among foreign audiences. Traditionally, foreign leaders visit a country suffering from disasters or man-made catastrophes to express condolences and provide support (Hall, 2015, p. 870). A. Ross applied the concept of dramatic dominance (Goffman, 1956, pp. 62-63) to the international communication sphere. The author postulated that national leaders set the emotional agenda based on personal charisma and effective penetration of their messages (Ross, 2015, p. 24).

Notably, the Ukrainian President's public persona on the verge of popularity in the West was used to invite foreign leaders into Ukraine (Omelchenko, 2024, p. 238). The latter were motivated to capitalize on his media salience and to increase their international reputation. Delving into President Zelensky's pre-war media relations, Bilan and Netreba argued that not only did he utilize rhetorical and narrative means to engage the audience and deliver his message (active listening and rapid reaction), but also non-verbal communication (body language, mimics, and gestures). The authors concluded that to project his confidence, authority, trust, and closeness to the people, Zelensky relied on emotions when discussing susceptible topics to the nation, i.e., national pride

(Bilan & Netreba, 2024, p. 219). Notably, the deeply personal experiences of official actors during such events could sometimes form interpersonal solidarities (Hall & Ross, 2015, p. 865). For example, mediatization was essential in creating and sustaining international emotional solidarity with Palestine among wider foreign audiences (Fatic & Korac, 2011, p. 6).

Method

The key methods utilized in this research are case study and content analysis. Firstly, cases of mediatized remembrance rituals happening in Ukraine since 2022 have been carefully selected based on the following criteria: International salience of the visit (including the symbolic importance of the location for foreign leaders), the temporal gap between events, the highest possible level of foreign representation at the ritual, the presence of top Ukrainian leadership on the site, and sufficient foreign media coverage. Subsequently, two specific cases of remembrance practice were identified and both of the rituals commemorated civic casualties:

Case No. 1: Japanese Prime Minister F. Kishida's participation in the official ritual of laying flowers near a monument remembering victims of mass killings in Bucha during his first official visit to Ukraine on March 21st, 2023.

Case No. 2: Greek Prime Minister K. Mitsotakis' participation in the official ritual of laying flowers near a destroyed block of flats in Odesa during his official visit to Ukraine on March 6th, 2024.

V. Kryvoshein's event analysis overview was utilized as a framework for case studies (2018, 15 – 16). Specifically, the background of the visit, the geographical location of the event, the visit's goal, the event's subjects, and the event's media coverage have been considered when approaching two case studies.

Secondly, a qualitative content analysis of five media and press service resources that covered the events was conducted:

For Case No. 1: South China Morning Post, Euronews, The Asahi Shimbun, The Japan Times, Kyodo News.

For Case No. 2: Verified Facebook Channel of The President of Ukraine, The Hellenic Foundation for Culture in Odesa, Le Monde, CNN, Politico

The selection of media and press service resources was based on their relevance and breadth of their reach to national and international audiences. Within the media reports, an emphasis was made on searching for:

- official comments of the leaders participating in the rituals;
- media interpretation of leader's speeches and ritual as a whole;
- verbal tools were utilized to depict the symbolic, political, and cultural importance of foreign leaders participating in the ritual;
- signs of the emotional tone of the narration depicting the ritual (e.g., words like grief, anger, compassion, and/or phrases featuring and implying them).

Lastly, content analysis was supplemented by an analysis of available photo and video materials published by foreign media and press services to illustrate the emotional tone of the ritual.

Results

Since the first days of the FSI, President Zelensky has emphasized the need for Western citizens and officials to acutely perceive the reality of Russia's brutal aggression in Ukraine, including through firsthand experience (Kvasnevska, 2022). Therefore, international mediatized remembrance rituals involving foreign actors have become a tool of Ukrainian international communication. As a nation at war, mediatized rituals are highly suitable for building emotional investment in Ukraine and its cause among the participating leaders and wider foreign audiences via extensive media coverage.

When organizing international visits, Ukrainian government carefully matched ritual sites with a leader's personal background and national specificities to merge the horizons between them and

Ukrainian wartime symbolic values. Moreover, Ukraine has organized foreign visits in a particular way to elicit a desirable emotional response – sympathy and compassion to Ukraine and its citizens, but also anger at the aggressor – from the elites and the home electorate.

President Zelensky's media figure has witnessed an extremely high international visibility that has complemented the organization of foreign visits to Ukraine by attracting leaders and elite representatives. V. Zelensky's acting background, personal affective penetration, and well-assembled speechwriting team were prerequisites for forging such an influential media figure and interpersonal communicator. Importantly, Zelensky has maintained narrative and symbolic consistency, such as wearing simple wartime uniforms instead of classic costumes. Moreover, his public persona during official rituals has often been prone to emotionally imbued improvisations that feel both trustworthy and meaningful. During the 80th D-Day Anniversary in June 2024, an American veteran passed by V. Zelensky in a wheelchair and surprisingly attempted to kiss his hand, telling him, "You are a savior of people". V. Zelensky escaped this awkward situation by bending down, hugging, and responding to the veteran, "No, no, you saved Europe".

Japan PM F. Kishida's visit to Bucha (March 21st, 2023)

Background of the visit: Japan was among the first nations to strongly oppose the FSI of Ukraine. However, despite significant economic and humanitarian assistance to Ukraine throughout the war, Japan's peaceful post-war constitution still does not allow for direct military support to nations in war. Moreover, F. Kishida was the first Japanese post-war leader to visit a country in war, following an invitation by V. Zelensky in January 2023 and despite internal pressure in Japan. Indeed, as The Japan Times contends, it was only thanks to Kishida's insistence that helped overcome the "restrictive customs of the Japanese parliament and the suffocating conservatism of the country's bureaucracy" (Johnson, 2023). Moreover, the organization of this visit to the warzone proceeded in complete secrecy. The Asahi Shimbun reported that this visit was unique in Japan's history as it contradicted Japanese diplomatic etiquette (Asahi, 2023). Additionally, most media featured that the Ukrainian MFA deputy E. Dzhaparova – who also escorted Kishida during the ritual in Bucha – called this visit a "historic" one (Kyodo News, 2023).

Geographical location of the ritual: Bucha is a small town in Kyiv's agglomeration that became one of the first liberated settlements in late March 2022. Sadly, it was also the first place to become publicly associated with Russian mass executions and tortures, symbolizing the aggressor's cruelty and the victim's pain, suffering, and sorrow. Japan PM Kishida visited a memorial near the Church of St. Andrew First-Called. This spot in front of the church became a mass gravesite during the Russian occupation. After the liberation in April 2022, it became a commemorative site for popular ceremonies and international remembrance rituals.

Goal of the visit: Leaders who come to Ukraine often visit this small town in Kyiv's neighborhood to commemorate the victims among Ukrainian citizens. Often, but not exclusively, those are high representatives of neutral nations far from the war and its context. Therefore, they tend to distance themselves from participating in remembrance rituals dedicated to the fallen soldiers of Ukraine and instead lean towards expressing condolences to the nation in general.

Subjects of the event: Japan's PM F. Kishida, Ukrainian MFA deputy minister E. Dzhaparova, mayor of Bucha A. Fedoruk

Media coverage of the event: The ritual was short and straightforward: Kishida arrived in Ukraine by train and immediately went to Bucha. He laid a wreath before the church, bowed in Japanese style, and observed the silence. Then, he expressed condolences to the mayor of Bucha on behalf of Japanese nationals and entered the Church of St. Andrew. There, Kishida was shown an exhibition featuring photos of murdered Bucha dwellers with live comments right from the Bucha mayor himself. Finally, he received a commemorative badge. Tellingly, the most popular photo that the media used to illustrate the ritual was the one with Kishida and his staff performing traditional Japanese bowing in front of a Christian church with an armed guard.



Figure 1. Official photo from the international remembrance ritual in Bucha: No. 1: Japan's PM Kishida looks at the images of Russian atrocities in the memorial church; No. 2: Japan's PM Kishida bows his head in commemoration.

After the ritual, Kishida publicly expressed his emotional state during the ritual to the media. According to him, he was “outraged by cruelty” and felt “... great anger at the atrocity upon visiting that very place here”. He also made emotional generalizations, such as “The world was astonished to see innocent civilians in Bucha killed one year ago” (South et al., 2023). At the same time, Kishida emphasized the “courage and patience of Ukrainian people that defend their homeland under President Zelensky’s leadership” (Euronews, 2023). Japanese media The Asahi Shimbun mentioned “Tokyo’s emphatic support for Ukraine against Russia’s invasion” (2023). The Japan Times has put PM Kishida’s pledge “to keep aiding Ukraine with the greatest effort to regain peace” right after him offering condolences to the victims of Russian atrocities (2023).

Alongside the visit, Japanese media Kyodo News interviewed Ukrainian Deputy Foreign Minister E. Dzhaparova. It gave potent amplification to the Ukrainian position in Japan, but Dzhaparova also underlined Ukrainian attention to personal details of foreign leaders during the planning of the rituals. She mentioned PM Kishida’s background as a “lawmaker elected from Hiroshima, a city devastated by an atomic bomb during World War II.” Dzhaparova believed this background “gave him a deep understanding and empathy for the people of Ukraine. ... I felt that the prime minister sensed the suffering. He shared the suffering of the Ukrainian people as he commemorated the dead in Bucha”. Lastly, she mentioned that the commemoration ritual was “a very emotional moment for her” after she observed Kishida, “who spent much time paying tribute to the victims of the Bucha massacre” (Kyodo News, 2023).

Being aware of PM Kishida originating from Hiroshima and losing many family members to the brutal atomic bombing, Ukraine invited him to commemorate the death of innocent civilians in Bucha. It could have been the same as what he used to do and feel when he returned to war-torn Hiroshima with his family during his childhood days (Kishida, 2020). Similarly, in May 2023, Zelensky was invited to Hiroshima, a modern-day Japan’s sacred and symbolic center. Now, it was the global resonance of Zelensky’s public and media persona that added a crucial symbolic element to Japan’s G7 chairmanship in 2023.

Greece PM Mitsotakis’ visit to Odesa on March 6th, 2024

Background of the visit: Greece strongly condemned the FSI of Ukraine. However, despite its large stocks of Soviet weapons, including air defense systems required by Ukraine, Greece has been unwilling to donate them. A recent survey shows that 31% of Greeks are confident Russia will win the war (the highest percentage in the EU) whereas only 3% believe in Ukraine’s victory. Consequently, most Greeks are opposed to increasing the supplies of military equipment to Ukraine and increased internal defense spending due to the war (54% and 55%, respectively (ECFR, 2024, pp. 17-29)). Unfavorable public opinion could influence the decision-making process among the elites regardless of their political predispositions.



Figure 2. Excerpts from the official video of the commemoration ritual in Odesa, March 6th, 2024. No. 1: Makeshift memorial against the background of the destroyed house; No. 2: K. Mitsotakis and V. Zelensky bow their heads to commemorate the victims; No. 3: Zelensky comforts the depressed dwellers; No. 4: Dwellers of the destroyed house participating in the ritual.

Goal of the foreign visit: K. Mitsotakis mentioned two primary goals in Ukraine. Firstly, he noted the symbolic importance of Odesa for Greece because “the flame of Greek independence was lit [there] by the Filiki Eteria” (2024). Moreover, he considered important to visit the active Hellenic diaspora in Odesa, “a living continuation of the centuries-old connection between our countries” and to show his support. Secondly, Mitsotakis discussed various bilateral matters with Zelensky, including strategically crucial maritime trade and military support.

The geographical location of the ritual: While most foreign leaders’ visits were limited to the Ukrainian capital and its neighborhood, sometimes nations have their places of symbolic importance within Ukraine. Such a position allowed for a smart invitation policy, bringing leaders from countries with deep and historic connections to those territories. Odesa, a port city on the Black Sea, is strategically important to Ukraine and has a unique cultural heritage and national minorities, including Greeks. The latter have close ties with their homeland and bring attention to the war in Ukraine. Moreover, the Greek liberation movement Filiki Eteria originated in Odesa. Indiscriminate Russian bombardments of the city have also taken their toll on the city’s dwellers. Therefore, Odesa has many places of symbolic importance to organize international mediated rituals, such as the Filiki Eteria museum, destroyed churches, and block-of-flats.

Goal of the visit: While most foreign visits were limited to the Ukrainian capital and its neighborhood, sometimes nations have their places of symbolic importance within Ukraine. Thus, Mitsotakis claimed that he intended to come to Odesa and that V. Zelensky managed to arrange the meeting to fulfill his request (The Prime Minister of the Hellenic Republic, 2024).

Subjects of the event: Ukrainian President V. Zelensky and Greek PM K. Mitsotakis, dwellers of the destroyed block-of-flats.

Media coverage of the event: Firstly, Greece PM K. Mitsotakis was welcomed by President Zelensky in the Odesa port to have negotiations. Immediately afterward, the first ritual of the day started as both leaders visited a destroyed residential building and commemorated the deaths of 12 innocent Odesa residents, including five children. An official video of the commemoration ritual

made and shared by the Ukrainian President's press team is of specific interest. One could see that both leaders laid flowers on the makeshift memorial. The camera pans around the memorial in detail, showing victims' family photos and lamps surrounded by dozens of multicolored children's toys and hundreds of flowers. Zelensky and Mitsotakis are shown standing in complete silence with their heads bowed.

Importantly, unlike the previous case, this ritual in Odesa involved many participants. Dwellers of that residential building who survived the attack were also present during the ritual. After laying the flowers, both Zelensky and, unusually, Mitsotakis went to the dwellers: Ukrainian leader comforted the depressed residents while Greece's PM stood by him silently, listening to his interpreter. Afterward, a crying woman from the crowd thanked Zelensky for a visit, and he hugged her in turn (Zelensky, 2024).

Mitsotakis also visited the Filiki Eteria museum in Odesa. The Hellenic Foundation for Culture in Odesa, a dedicated culture diplomacy institution of the Greek government, reported online Mitsotakis's "great agitation" for visiting the city that was a synonym for Greece's "national struggle for liberation" (2024). Furthermore, on the personal Facebook page, the prime minister's press team called Odesa a "symbolic site" for the Greeks. Altogether, the public institution framed Odesa as the symbolic site for Greek national liberation before and Ukrainian struggle for liberty now. Moreover, the media also mentioned Mariupol's tragedy as a shocking experience for Mitsotakis and a grim page for Ukrainian and Hellenic histories. Such coverage was tailored for internal national pride and legacy of Greece's audiences. Historical analogies effectively link widespread knowledge of one nation's symbols and concepts with the modern Ukrainian situation. Notably, to publicly communicate Mitsotakis' experience during the visit, the press team used social media as a mediator less imbued with excessive officialdom, unsuitable for such a format.

Finally, Mitsotakis' visit was unique in that he and Zelensky came close to a Russian missile attack during their visit to the port of Odesa. Mitsotakis admitted to the media that he went through a "vivid" and "very intense experience" after witnessing the attack. However, Mitsotakis used that case to deliver two essential messages through the international media. Firstly, he emphasized the unbroken spirit of Greece by claiming that "no one will intimidate us" (Le Monde, 2024). CNN reported that for Mitsotakis, this attack came as "the most vivid reminder that there is a real war going on" in Ukraine (2024).

Secondly, instead of discouraging other leaders from official visits, Mitsotakis used international media to motivate them to live through the wartime experience: "This is one more reason why all European leaders should come to Ukraine. Because it is one thing to hear the description from the media or President Zelenskyy, and it is another to experience the war firsthand" (Politico, 2024). As an additional reminder of the wartime in Ukraine, Zelensky and Mitsotakis held a final press conference against the background of the damaged Transfiguration Cathedral in Odesa. To sum up, in a couple of hours, Mitsotakis in Odesa lived through the daily reality of wartime Ukraine by participating in the commemoration ritual and finding himself under a Russian missile attack.

Discussion

Public rituals commemorating casualties of the war have become an embodiment of wartime Ukraine. Two rituals demonstrated how Ukraine approached the wartime international communication. From a larger perspective, the widespread use of mediated rituals signifies the institutionalizing of a new politics of memory in Ukraine. Enacted on the highest level since the first day of the FSI by President Zelensky, this new, grim Ukrainian reality dressed in strict military uniform naturally reflects the self-sacrifice and tragedy of the Ukrainian nation at war.

Notably, this approach follows the main rule of strategic communications: actions are more important than words. As Greece PM K. Mitsotakis mentioned "experience" several times during his visit, leaders' and delegations' firsthand participation in commemorations of the victims of the Russian aggression is a central element of those rituals. Altogether, the media displayed emotional

registers of both Kishida and Mitsotakis, which consisted of sadness, compassion, sympathy, and fear in the case of Mitsotakis's visit.

A vital highlight from those two cases is that the rituals were dedicated to civilian victims. Rituals commemorating fallen Ukrainian soldiers are more typical for the leaders with a more "hawkish" and radical approach to the war on the Ukrainian side. Instead, rituals involving civilian victims could have far less dubious connotations for internal audiences. For instance, those could be neutral nations, such as South Korea, the President of which visited Bucha shortly after Japan's Kishida. Alternatively, there could be nations with staunch legacy of traditionalist and bureaucratic control, such as Japan. In both cases, leadership had various internal reasons for not providing Ukraine significant military assistance. Last but not least, such rituals are in place for nations without unanimous popular support towards either side of the war, like Greece.

Moreover, the sites for the rituals were chosen very carefully to appeal to their background and preferences. In the case of Japan's Kishida, his visit and commemoration practice in Bucha were linked with his childhood memories of doing the same in Hiroshima. For Mitsotakis and the Greeks as a nation, Odesa plays an integral role in national liberation, thus appealing to their patriotic feelings. This allows for tailoring messages for local context using simple yet effective historical and symbolical analogies.

Remembrance rituals have laid the groundwork for communicating the Ukrainian narrative to wider foreign audiences through the media by providing it with striking images and vivid reflections. Effectively, just like they influence foreign leaders, they are also one of the main constitutive elements of the (re)branding of the Ukrainian nation in the eyes of the international community. The context and information resonance of a major war in Europe are instrumental in disseminating a new vision and understanding. Participation of respectable foreign leaders also provides the Ukrainian vision with additional legitimacy.

Conclusion

This study sheds light on the mediatization of remembrance rituals in the international communication of a nation at war. Ukraine's critical dependence on foreign assistance has shaped its reliance on innovative ways to gather allies among the elites and the broader public. Therefore, since the start of FSI, Ukraine has instrumentalized commemoration practices to influence foreign audiences through international media coverage.

We conceptualize a mediatized remembrance ritual as an institutionalized practice in Ukraine's communication repertoire that engages foreign representatives in participation in remembrance rituals extensively covered and interpreted by international media. Two case studies of Japanese and Greek PMs' participation in remembrance events have much illustrative and explanatory potential for the field of international communications.

Specifically, Ukraine masterfully constructed two foreign visits to match perfectly with a foreign leader's previous knowledge. Through those rituals, Ukrainian diplomacy appeals to foreign leaders' personal and national predispositions. Such events tend to be organized in specific locations that resonate with an individual leader's childhood memories and the patriotic feelings of a whole nation. V. Zelensky's personal charisma and ability to project powerful emotional performance are central elements in successful foreign audience engagement through the mediatization of rituals. The firsthand experience of both Kishida and Mitsotakis during the rituals was crucial in their confessions about their emotional condition subsequently reported in the media coverage. Thus, media coverage is determined by reliance on emotional storytelling, including dissemination of leaders' reflections and statements and audiovisual imagery that further amplifies the textual part of the story. Lastly, social media platforms were occasionally used to evade officialdom when depicting the leader's emotional state.

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