

Ilona Dąbrowska

Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Lublin

POLARISATION IN COMMENTS UNDER VIDEOS FEATURING VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY PUBLISHED ON YOUTUBE <https://doi.org/10.2478/ppsr-2024-0014>

► Received: 30 July 2024 ► Accepted: 20 September 2024

Author

Ilona Dąbrowska is a doctor of social sciences in the field of media studies. She is currently an assistant professor at the Department of Mediatization of the Institute of Social Communication and Media Sciences at the Faculty of Political Science and Journalism of Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin. She is the author of many scientific articles in the field of new media. Her research interests focus on social media, media production, online journalism, e-communication and its social and cultural implications.

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7451-2648> ilona.dabrowska@mail.umcs.pl**Abstract**

In recent years, Poland has seen an increase in ideological and political polarisation. Society is divided into various dichotomies, the largest of which is the division between the two dominant political groups in Poland: Law and Justice and the Civic Platform. Polarisation is clearly visible on social networking sites, where users do not hide their views and often conduct discussions on the Internet in a very aggressive way. The aim of this study is to characterise the polarisation among comments published by YouTube users in the context of videos featuring Volodymyr Zelensky. For this purpose, Internet users' comments posted under five different audiovisual materials published on YouTube by five different publishers were analysed. Both quantitative and qualitative analysis (content analysis) were used to show what types of comments appeared in the context of Russia's armed attack on Ukraine. Various types of videos were examined (from interviews, through official speeches, to parodies), allowing us to illustrate Internet users' statements in the context of various genres of recordings. A total of 650 comments were analysed. It was found that polarisation was visible in the analysed material. Dualism is formed on the axis of pro- and anti-Ukrainian and pro- and anti-Russian. Most posts deepen polarisation by affirming the actions of the side they consider closer to themselves. The conflict between defenders of both sides ranges from insulting opposing views to insulting other authors. The discussion also included comments expressing hate speech. There was a noticeable deficit of comments toning down or calming emotions. The study therefore shows that online discussions about materials involving President Volodymyr Zelensky are characterised by a high level of polarisation, vulgarisation and hate speech.

Keywords

polarization; social media; communication; hate speech; YouTube

Introduction

Political polarisation is an important phenomenon in today's democratic society. The level of polarisation reflects the general diversity of citizens' views. Understanding the degree of the hermeticity of various environments allows us to determine the extent to which society is willing to discuss and seek common solutions. There are many types of social polarisation and many ways to measure it. For years, the international research consortium Digital Society Project has been collecting expert assessments on the level of polarisation in dozens of countries around the world, including Poland. In 2019, psychologist Paulina Górka from the University of Warsaw conducted interviews with a thousand supporters of the ruling and opposition parties in Poland. It was the first comprehensive study of effective polarisation in our country. The results showed that both sides harbour aversion to each other – if negative feelings towards people with opposite electoral preferences are treated as an indicator of political polarisation, it can be concluded that Polish society is divided (Górka 2019, p. 2). In 2021, the indicator for Poland was 3.83. For comparison, in 2001 it was 2.71, which means an increase in polarisation by 41% over 20 years (Mechkova et al., 2021). The ongoing dispute in Poland between the Law and Justice and the Civic Platform parties bears the hallmarks of total polarisation, i.e. one that covers almost all spheres of social life (Zagała 2023, p. 107). Russia's armed attack on Ukraine, which began on February 24, 2022, shocked public opinion, changed the perspective of contemporary leaders, and forced leaders and society to reflect on security. Poland, due to its direct proximity to Ukraine, was forced to react the fastest. At the same time, it also became a country that offered immediate and extensive help to the victims of Russian violence. Grassroot initiatives were of great importance in this area – e.g. charitable activities and collections conducted by volunteers. The courage and generosity of Poles has been noticed all over the world. Today, more than two years after the attack began, the social mood among Poles seems to be changing and the willingness to help refugees is decreasing. The research conducted for the purposes of this publication was aimed at finding out the opinions and moods that can be read on the basis of comments posted by YouTube users under selected videos featuring the President of Ukraine – Volodymyr Zelensky. The research also aims to verify the existence and scale of polarisation in assessing both Zelensky's image and actions, as well as Ukraine and Russia itself.

The area of research the results of which are presented in this publication are social media, and, more precisely, the social networking site YouTube. The birth of social networking sites has opened up new research for media scientists, allowing them to establish new questions and create analysis in this new, difficult-to-grasp „liquid modernity”¹ (Bauman, 2006, p. 153). Until recently, researchers were focused more on issues related to the press, radio and television, while today, as Paul Levinson (2010) wrote, „new new media” are the centre of interest of both media experts, sociologists, and psychologists. The development of technology, and above all the emergence of the Internet, has revolutionised almost all areas of human life. The structure of communication itself has also changed, and today recipients are also senders and consumers are producers (prosumers). Nowadays, active participation in the media and prosumers is increasingly being discussed. Modern society is taking over roles that were previously available only to selected groups of people. In the

1 A concept created by the sociologist and philosopher Zygmunt Bauman, intended to serve as the main one descriptive category of modern times.

area of social media, the tendency towards prosumption is particularly visible – users generate content themselves, modify existing content, and publish it on selected platforms. In this way, they turn from consumers into prosumers. They can therefore act as artists, curators, and producers (Weibel, 2012, p. 32). As Henry Jenkins (2007) wrote, with the advent of new media, people have taken the media into their own hands. An important issue in this context is convergence, which, as Jenkins pointed out, allows people to find information with the participation of media from all over the world and with immediate effect. Furthermore, convergence has brought about a remarkable change in the way media is produced and consumed, making everyone want to be a part of it (Jenkins, 2007). New technologies have permanently penetrated the life of modern people – they provide a platform for communication, work, education, promotion, and sales. They allow you to obtain information and develop your passions while confining yourself to your own interests and comfort in information bubbles. Although there has been a dispute for years between techno enthusiasts and techno skeptics about whether new technologies help more and, as Marshall McLuhan (1975) wrote, extend human senses, or whether they limit and enslave, closing people in bubbles and radicalising views (Pariser, 2011). It is certain that at this stage, whether we like it or not, the Internet took over information and communication. Social networking sites have contributed to the introduction of new communication behaviours, such as shortening statements, cataloging through hashtags (#), tagging (marking), liking, or using emoticons. One of the most eminent sociologists, Anthony Giddens, wrote about the impact of technology on society over a two decades ago, pointing out that the evolution of social movements was influenced by faxes, mobile phones, and satellite transmissions, but the main change was introduced by the appearance of the Internet (Giddens, 2004, p. 474). It is also worth mentioning the thought of Henry Jenkins (2007), who said that old media will not be simply replaced, but that their functions and status would only change with the introduction of new technologies. Manuel Castells (2007, p. 24), in turn, wrote that although technology itself does not determine social change, its presence or absence is associated with the transformation of societies. In this context, it is worth quoting the thought of Marshall McLuhan (1975, p. 45), who states that each new transmitter changes a person and expands the scale of their possibilities of action, and therefore of creating new bonds.

There are many definitions of social media in the literature on the subject. One of them draws social media as „a group of Internet applications that are both ideologically and technically based on Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). Another definition says that social media are „interactive platforms through which individuals and entire communities create and share user-created content” (Kietzmann et al., 2011, p. 242). This approach, in turn, emphasises the interactivity and social aspect of social media. Analysing these two approaches, it can be concluded that social media should be treated as online platforms that allow the creation and exchange of various content between their users. Nowadays, social media are a kind of virtual agora. Dana Rotman and Jennifer Preece (2010, p. 318) define YouTube as „a video-sharing site that offers built-in social networking features”. Dave Harley and Geraldine Fitzpatrick (2009, p. 20) call YouTube a „form of social networking tool and video sharing site”. Within social media, Andreas M. Kaplan and Michael Haenlein (2010, p. 59) distinguish, among others, social networking sites and communities aggregated around content (content communities) – the latter group includes YouTube. Karen F. Gracy (2007,

p. 185) pointed out that moving image archives, such as YouTube, could revolutionise the social order that sustains cultural institutions as creators and curators. YouTube is one of the most important pillars of contemporary culture and meta-culture. Its numerous functions include the role of an educational tool and a source of information and promotion; it is a very important tool for marketing influence. It is a place where Internet users can post and view video files, and publishing and viewing videos is completely free. In the context of the convergence process, it should be noted that some audiovisual materials published on YouTube were previously broadcast on television. However, it is worth emphasising the existence of feedback – emerging original content often becomes an inspiration for television stations. We can therefore talk about bipolar convergence, where the first path leads from traditional media to the social networking site, and the second path leads from social media to traditional media. Undoubtedly, the analysis of comments posted on YouTube can help in creating an outline of the attitudes and views of contemporary society. However, one should bear in mind the specific nature of this medium, as well as the fact that its users do not represent all social groups (e.g. digitally excluded people).

Description of research

The aim of this article is to present the nature and specificity of comments published under selected audiovisual materials presenting the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky, published on the Polish version of YouTube, and to attempt to answer questions about the occurrence and scale of polarisation in this area. The case study and content analysis methods were used during research. The scientific reflection is aimed at showing the scale and nature of comments published online, in the context of events related to Russia's armed attack on Ukraine, as well as analysing the language used by YouTube users when posting comments. The research perspective was broadened with a quantitative approach, which allowed author to organise and capture key analytical categories. The study covers 650 comments published on YouTube over a twelve-month period – from May 2023 to May 2024. All collected comments were subjected to quantitative and qualitative analysis. The comments are described in terms of thematic scope. In order to conduct research that was most current, in each instance of analysing a video, the 130 most recent comments, or those added recently, were analysed. The indicated goal will be achieved by answering the following research questions: (1) Is there a visible polarisation of opinions in Internet users' comments published under selected films? Also: (2) Which of the comments included in the study constitute the largest percentage? (3) What are the characteristics of the comments covered by the study? (4) What are the characteristics of comments about President Volodymyr Zelensky? The characteristics of individual materials are presented in Table 1.

Research material

The subject of considerations and analysis are comments generated by YouTube users, posted under five different films, published by five different publishers – Gazeta.pl (publisher: Agora SA), TVP Info.pl (publisher: Treasury), Super Express 2 (publisher: Grupa ZPR Media S. A.), naTemat (publisher: Glob360 z o.o.), and Fakt (publisher: Ringier Axel Springer Polska). The decision to choose this particular social networking site was dictated by its current, strong position on the social networking market both in Poland and around the

world, as well as the specificity of the website, which allows users (including companies and media publishers) to publish multimedia content. As can be read in the report issued by Gemius, Polish Internet Research and IAB Polska, YouTube is used by almost 26.7 million people in Poland, which constitutes 80% of Polish Internet users. On average, users spend almost 20 hours a month there (“Social Media 2023”, 2023). Materials published on the website may be original or a copy of content that has previously been published elsewhere – in traditional media or on the Internet. The possibility of almost unlimited generation and processing of content is a challenge, especially in the context of the desire to reach primary sources. Please note that materials published on social networking sites are subject to modification or duplication. The same material may also be perceived differently depending on the entity that publishes it or, more precisely, users who sympathise or do not sympathise with a given publisher. When selecting materials for analysis, three factors were taken into account: (a) the publisher, (b) the situation presented in the film, and (c) the popularity of the film. The films were selected in a way that allowed for comparative analysis – five film publications published by five different entities (publishers) were selected, and the analysed materials present President Volodymyr Zelensky in various situations. A common feature of the videos is their high online popularity, as evidenced by the number of their views. Users posted comments under each of the analysed materials, and their number as of the date of completion of the research ranged from 203 to 1,636.

Table 1. List of audiovisual materials selected for analysis.

Case 1	
title	<i>What do Andrzej Duda and Zelensky's wife have in common? The response of the President of Ukraine is disarming</i>
publisher	Gazeta.pl (Agora SA.)
link	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=909o3PPhujg
date of publication	April 5, 2023
number of views	70 106
number of comments	1472
form	interview
Case 2	
title	<i>Full speech by the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky at the Royal Castle in Warsaw</i>
publisher	TVP Info (State Treasury joint-stock company)
link	https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=bDW1nHModQo
date of publication	July 5, 2022
number of views	21 533
number of comments	203
form	rebroadcast of the speech

Case 3	
title	<i>Zelensky announced capitulation! A nasty PARODY of the Chechen leader</i>
publisher	Super Express 2 (ZPR Media S. A. Group)
link	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w8UEvpvT5d0
date of publication	March 25, 2022
number of views	494 432
number of comments	998
form	staged film
Case 4	
title	<i>Zelensky visited wounded soldiers in hospital</i>
publisher	naTemat (Glob360 z o.o.)
link	https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=SrqQFtd7tCc
date of publication	March 14, 2022
number of views	901 879
Liczba komentarzy	1636
form	rebroadcast
Case 5	
title	<i>Ukraine. Speech by President Volodymyr Zelensky</i>
publisher	Fakt (Ringier Axel Springer Poland)
link	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8GFvM8hgjME&t=26s
date of publication	February 27, 2022
number of views	435 756
number of comments	1395
form	rebroadcast

Source: own study.

The first material – *Case 1* – is a one-minute fragment of an interview with President Volodymyr Zelensky. This material was originally recorded for Euronews, both the journalists and Volodymyr Zelensky speak in English (the film has a transcription in Polish). In the film we see the president of Ukraine, dressed in a T-shirt and sweatshirt in military colours, sitting in an armchair, answering questions asked by journalists. The first one is: „How many world leaders do you talk to every day?” Zelensky answers this question: „Every day? Ten, about eight, ten”. Then the journalist asks which leaders President Zelensky prefers. The response is: „I don’t know. I can tell you with whom I have too many connections”. Then the president of Ukraine jokes about the term „too many”, explaining what he meant. The whole thing takes place in a joking atmosphere. The first person Zelensky mentions, in the context of many connections, is the President of Poland,

Andrzej Duda, the next one is the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, and the third person is Boris Johnson. When asked by a journalist which relationship he prefers, Zelensky jokingly answers: „those with my wife”. The analysed fragment presents Zelensky as a man full of distance and a sense of humour. The material paints him in a positive light and can have a warming effect on his image.

The second material – *Case 2* – is an over seventeen-minute broadcast of Zelensky’s speech during his visit to Poland. The recording was originally broadcasted live by Telewizja Polska (TVP). The speech took place in the courtyard of the Royal Castle in Warsaw. The event was attended by, among others, the President of Poland Andrzej Duda and his wife Agata Kornhauser-Duda and other representatives of the Polish authorities and diplomacy. A large audience gathered in the square, among which Polish and Ukrainian flags were visible. The President of Ukraine appeared in military attire. It begins with spontaneous shouts from the crowd: „Glory to Ukraine”, to which Zelensky responds: „Heroyam glory!”. The President of Ukraine begins his speech with the words in Polish: „Hello Warsaw. Welcome Poland. Great nation of Poland. Great Ukrainian nation. Here, shoulder to shoulder, united in this square in the spirit of freedom of great history and the glorious victory that we are bringing closer together.” In the rest of the speech, Zelensky speaks in Ukrainian, with the entire speech simultaneously translated into Polish. In his speech, the President of Ukraine thanks the Polish nation, speaks of brotherhood, and also quotes a fragment of the Polish national anthem („What foreign violence has taken from us, we will take back with the sabre”). His speech is interrupted from time to time by applause. The whole material has a positive tone, the audience’s reactions showed optimism, and the speech was warmly received.

The third material – *Case 3*, is a two-minute-long staging by its creator Ramzan Kadyrov², who calls it a parody. The material was originally published on the *Kadyrov_95 channel*. In the video, a man dressed as Volodymyr Zelensky signs the act of unconditional surrender of Ukraine. In the film we see an actor wearing characteristic military clothes, sitting behind a desk in a room imitating the office of the President of Ukraine, saying in Ukrainian: „Dear citizens, I, the acting President of Ukraine, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, agree to the unconditional surrender of all our armed forces: land, sea and air forces, as well as all forces currently under Ukrainian leadership. I guarantee complete demobilisation and denazification of Ukraine within one month from the date of signing the act of surrender. Immediately!” In the film we also see the author himself, Kadyrov, who keeps his hand on the shoulder of the character playing the role of Zelensky. Although the material does not show the features of a deepfake and it becomes clear from the first viewing that the viewer is dealing with a staging, it still has the potential for propaganda and depreciating the image of Zelensky. It may also negatively affect the morale of Ukrainian citizens and soldiers.

The fourth material – *Case 4*, is a two-minute video report of the President of Ukraine’s visit to the hospital where wounded Ukrainian soldiers are kept. In the video we see Volodymyr Zelensky entering the room where wounded soldiers lie on hospital beds. Zelensky greets them and asks, „How are the boys?” – he talks to them, jokes with them, and

2 Ramzan Akhmatovich Kadyrov, Russian: Ramzan Ахматович Кадыров (born October 5, 1976 in the village of Centaroy) — Chechen politician, Prime Minister of Chechnya in 2006–2007, from 2007 to March 2011 its president, from 2011 1 — Head of the Chechen Republic. Achmat’s son. Accused of committing war crimes in Ukraine.

comforts them. He is smiling but also empathetic, his face, apart from the smile, also shows sadness and worry. The president asks how he can help the injured. Some soldiers take a photo (selfie) with the president. During the visit, decorations are also awarded to wounded soldiers and medical staff. The entire material consists of several short shots recorded in various places in the hospital. In the later part of the recording, we see the president visiting more seriously injured soldiers with doctors in the room where medical clothing is required, which Zelensky puts on. The conversations are held in Ukrainian, with the entire conversation transcribed into Polish.

The fifth material – *Case 5* is an over four-minute fragment of President Volodymyr Zelensky's speech broadcast on Ukrainian television. This is one of many speeches of this type that Ukrainian President Zelensky has made and is making during the ongoing conflict. The speeches are aimed at informing citizens about the current situation, as well as calming down the mood and raising morale. The analyzed material is no different, in which Zelensky informs about his readiness to defend the country and reports on the tasks he performed on that particular day. A large part of the speech is devoted to relations with the leaders of other European countries and the heads of churches of various denominations. The President informs the audience about the established cooperation and current decisions important in the context of the ongoing Russian attack. Zelensky ends his speech by saying: „I want to tell you one thing: we will fight as long as it takes to free our country. Since children are already being born in shelters, even when shelling continues, the enemy here has no chance in this war.”³

Polarisation – definitional outline

Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan (1967) saw the origins of contemporary socio-political divisions in important historical events and processes, such as the Reformation and its consequences, 19th-century national revolutions, and the Industrial Revolution. The consequence of these events was the emergence of conflicts based on divisions such as centre vs. peripheries, church vs. state, primary sector of the economy vs. secondary sector of the economy, and employers vs. employees. The above divisions were reflected in the processes of shaping social structures and the emergence of parties as entities representing the interests of various communities (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967). Anthony Downs (1957), in his economic theory of democracy, argued that both political parties and voters' political preferences can be ranked on a scale from left to right based on party programs. According to this theory, voters usually decide to vote for the party that is closest to them. Downs noted, however, that this mechanism may change due to various factors, and ultimately the voter may vote for a party other than his most preferred one (Downs, 1957). Political polarisation is often explained in the context of ideological polarisation, understood as ideological distance, divergence of political and social views, and beliefs and attitudes characterising political opponents (Dalton, 1987). Giovanni Sartori (2005) wrote in a similar vein, proposing that political polarisation should be defined as a specific ideological distance between extreme parties. According to him, the most important thing is to identify the poles between which political competition takes place to then be able to determine their position in the ideological spectrum (Sartori, 2005, p. 120.). Murat Somer and

3 The entire material is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8GFvM8hgjME&t=26s> (read: 23/07/2024).

Jennifer McCoy (2018) emphasise that polarising politics is an ally of party systems – it supports the creation of antagonistic political identities and facilitates the mobilisation of party members and voters. Nolan McCarty, Keith T. Poole, and Howard Rosenthal (2006) look at polarisation slightly differently, who see political polarisation as the process of dividing politics into liberal and conservative camps. It should be added, however, that in the case of these researchers, they treated the word liberalism as a synonym for US democrats, and conservatism as an almost perfect synonym for US republicans (McCarty et al., 2006, p. 3.). Nae-Young Lee (2019), writing about polarisation, indicates that it refers to the process of shrinking the centre and shifting the position of political parties or voters in extreme directions. The level of polarisation itself indicates the ideological divergences of political elites and society, as well as the intensity of political conflicts (N.-Y. Lee, 2019). Nowadays, some researchers also emphasise the emotional context, writing about affective polarisation, i.e. one in which emotional attachment to political supporters, allies from the in-group is emphasised, while at the same time reluctance, antipathy, or even hostility towards political opponents is evident (Reiljan, 2020). As Emilia Palonen (2006) notes, polarisation as a kind of rejection of the other or opposite camp is a certain trap set for citizens. There are no intermediate options, the only possible option is to choose one of the sides. At the same time, in such a system, the political opponent turns into an enemy (Palonen, 2006, p. 320).

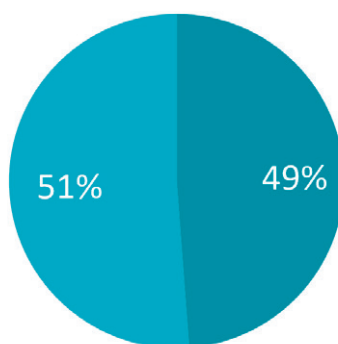
When defining the concept of polarisation, Polish researchers often specify it using words such as „social” or „worldview”. The accepted understanding of this term is most often based on bipolarity in the area of social awareness. Paweł Ruszkowski, Andrzej Przestalski and Paweł Maranowski (2020), in their book entitled “Polarization of worldviews in Polish society and classes and social strata”, link the polarisation of worldviews in Polish society with the situation of conflict, confrontation and political struggle. These phenomena are to be accompanied by symptoms of dysfunctionality resulting from the co-occurrence of alternative systems of values and norms. They treat the existence of ideological polarisation as a threat to the social system, in particular to the stability of its subsystems: economic, political, symbolic, and social structure (Ruszkowski et al., 2020, p. 191). Research conducted in 2021 by the Digital Society Project shows that Poland is among the countries where the level of polarisation is one of the highest. Additionally, data from the last twenty years prove that polarisation in Poland is systematically increasing (Mechkova et al., 2021). The Faces of Polish Radicalisation report from 2023 provides information on Poles’ opinions on the divisions in the country, where it was indicated that as many as 70% of respondents believed that Poland was divided into two tribes, and slightly less, 68%, noticed that their views were becoming more and more radical. A sharp political division was observed by 65% of respondents (Ciesiołkiewicz, 2023). Thus, the phenomenon of polarisation is becoming an important problem today, the careful observation of which may allow us to make a diagnosis and forecasts for further changes in the broadly understood dialogue and social mood in Poland.

Polarization in YouTube users’ comments

The described analysis poses a sequence of research questions regarding polarisation. First, it was decided to focus on general questions and then address more specific issues. The first question asked was whether there was a visible polarisation of opinions in Inter-

net users' comments published under selected films. The second question concerned the scale of comments and which of them constituted the largest percentage, as well as what their characteristics were. In order to answer the above questions, 130 comments under select videos were analysed each time. Due to the content of the comments, their nature, and the message contained, the research material was divided into five groups: (A) comments expressing support for Ukraine, (B) comments expressing support for Russia, (C) comments expressing criticism of Ukraine, (D) comments expressing criticism towards Russia, and (E) comments of a neutral nature. The analysis carried out allows us to conclude that the polarisation of opinions is visible in the comments examined. Polarisation is especially visible on the axis of support and criticism of Ukraine.

Figure 1. The ratio of comments expressing criticism (51%) and support (49%) towards Ukraine.



Source: own study.

The obtained data provide information on the scale of pro- and anti-Ukrainian, as well as pro- and anti-Russian comments. Their exact number is presented in Table 2. The largest percentage of all comments are those expressing criticism of Ukraine – 214 of them, which constitutes 33% of all comments analysed. The second largest group of comments showed support for Ukraine – 104 comments (31%). Already on the basis of this comparison, the division becomes visible and, moreover, it is extremely even. These proportions change in the number of comments supporting and criticising Russia's actions. There were 55 (9%) comments supporting Russia in the examined material, while only 15 (2%) criticised Russia's actions. Comments of a neutral nature, i.e. those that did not express an opinion about any of the parties, accounted for 25% of the total. It should be emphasised that the nature of the published material is important in this context.

Table 2. Number of all analysed comments divided by their nature.

	Characteristics of the comment	Numbers
A.	Comments supporting Ukraine	204
B.	Comments supporting Russia	55
C.	Comments criticizing Ukraine's actions	214
D.	Comments criticizing Russia's actions	15
E.	Comments of a neutral nature	162
	Total amount	650

Source: own study.

A detailed analysis of the collected data also allows us to assess the scale and nature of individual comments posted under each of the video materials covered by the study.

Table 3. Number of comments under individual audiovisual materials divided into five categories: (A) comments supporting Ukraine, (B) comments supporting Russia, (C) comments criticising Ukraine's actions, (D) comments criticising Russia's actions, (E) comments about neutral nature.

Case	A	B	C	D	E
Case 1	12	1	68	3	46
Case 2	31	1	67	4	27
Case 3	33	42	10	1	44
Case 4	70	8	29	5	18
Case 5	58	3	40	2	27
Totals	204	55	214	15	162

Source: own study.

Under the first material (*Case 1*) titled *What do Andrzej Duda and Zelensky's wife have in common?* which shows a fragment of Volodymyr Zelensky's interview with a joking response from him, the largest percentage of comments (52%) are those of a critical nature, expressing disapproval, both for the president of Ukraine himself and, more broadly, for the nation. Interestingly, there are more than five times fewer comments expressing support for Ukraine (9%). The second largest number of comments are neutral (36%). The fewest comments under this material are criticism of Russia (2%), and support for Russia (1%). This result may be even more surprising considering the fact that the material in question has a positive connotation and the potential to improve the image.

In the case of the second material analysed (*Case 2*), titled *The entire speech of President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky at the Royal Castle in Warsaw*, i.e. the rebroadcast of Zelensky's speech during his visit to Poland in April 2023, the first largest group of comments expressing disapproval of Ukraine (51%). The next two, although half the size, are comments supporting Ukraine (24%) and those of a neutral nature (21%). The smallest percentage are comments against Russia (4%) and in support of Russia (1%).

Under the third material (*Case 3*) – *Zelensky ANNOUNCED CAPITULATION! A nasty PARODY of the Chechen leader*, the largest percentage of comments are neutral in nature (34%), but a very similar result was achieved by comments expressing support for Russia (32%). The third largest group of comments supporting Ukraine (25%), the fourth, much smaller group, are comments against Ukraine (8%), and the fewest are comments against Russia (1%). It should be added that this material is the most controversial of all those included in the analysis. Although the title describes the film as a parody, its message is harmful to Zelensky's image, and the whole may contribute to fuelling negative moods and lowering morale on the Ukrainian side.

The fourth material (*Case 4*) is titled *Zelensky visited wounded soldiers in the hospital* and is a video report from the visit of the President of Ukraine to the hospital where wounded soldiers were treated. The largest percentage of comments under this video are those indicating support for Ukraine (54%). The second largest group are comments ex-

pressing opposition to Ukraine's actions (22%), followed by neutral comments (14%), comments supporting Russia (6%) and those expressing opposition to Russia's actions (4%).

The fifth material (*Case 5*) is a film titled *Ukraine: Speech by President Volodymyr Zelensky*. This material presents one of the president's many regularly broadcast speeches on Ukrainian television. During the recording, Zelensky conveys important content, informs about the current situation, and raises the morale of the army and citizens of his country. The majority (45%) of the surveyed comments posted under this video are pro-Ukrainian. However, the second largest group of comments expresses disapproval of Ukraine (31%). The third group are neutral comments (21%), with the fewest comments supporting Russia (2%) and those expressing opposition to Russia's actions (1%).

Regarding comments showing support for Ukraine, the largest number of them appeared under *Case 4*, i.e. a report on the visit of the President of Ukraine to the hospital. This state of affairs should not be surprising – the film shows wounded soldiers and the president, who not only shows empathy and willingness to help, but also hands out decorations. However, the remaining results of the analysis may be surprising, especially in the context of assessing the nature of the published film in relation to Internet users' reactions. It turns out that even in the case of materials with a positive connotation that help strengthen or warm the image (*Case 1*, *Case 2*), the majority of comments are critical. A similar paradox is brought about by the analysis of the material whose publication was intended to ridicule and depreciate the image of Volodymyr Zelensky (*Case 3*). The majority of comments under this material are neutral and supportive of Russia, while comments critical of Ukraine are in the vast minority (less than 10% of comments). The last important conclusion from the above analysis is the issue of anti-Russian comments. There are the fewest of them and they constitute only 2.3% of all analysed comments. This state of affairs may be puzzling, especially considering the fact that the films covered by the analysis, presenting Volodymyr Zelensky, refer to Russia's destructive actions, or even present (as in *Case 4*) the tragic consequences of Russia's attack on Ukraine.

Polarisation around Volodymyr Zelensky

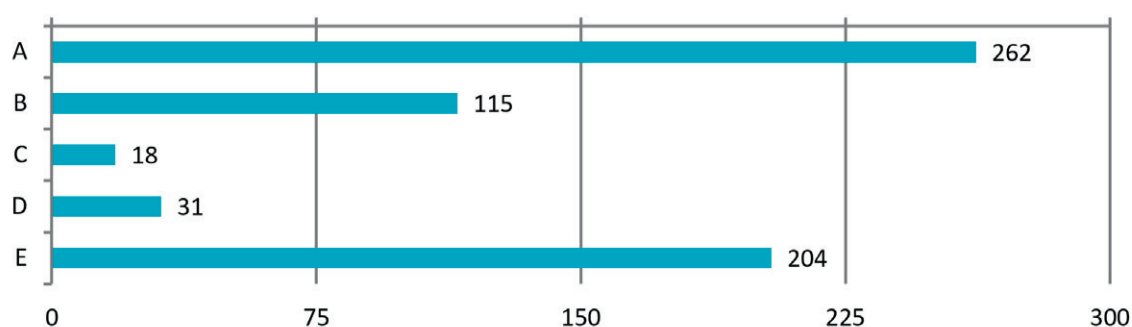
The hero of all the analysed films is the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky. It is therefore not surprising that most of the comments refer to him. However, a thorough analysis of the content of the comments highlighted other entities and allowed us to create a total of five categories according to which all published comments could be divided: (A) comments about Volodymyr Zelensky, (B) comments about Ukraine, (C) comments about Vladimir Putin, (D) comments about Russia, (E) comments about other issues. In the comments examined, there were also those where several of the above-mentioned categories were discussed, in such cases, the research selected the thread that constituted the most important aspect of a given statement. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Comments divided into thematic categories (whom and what do they concern). Categories: A – regarding V. Zelensky, B – Ukraine, C – V. Putin, D – Russia, E – other.

Case	A	B	C	D	E
Case 1	80	13	4	0	33
Case 2	52	30	0	4	44
Case 3	8	32	3	22	65
Case 4	70	22	6	2	30
Case 5	52	38	5	3	32
Totals	262	115	18	31	204

Source: own study.

According to the research, the majority (42%) of the comments concerned Volodymyr Zelensky. These were both positive and negative comments. The second largest group (32%) was a group of comments characterised by a lack of direct reference to Ukraine, Russia or the presidents of these countries. This group of entries contained various threads, but most often it was criticism – criticism of Poland and the Polish government, criticism the publication itself or its authors, or criticism directed at other users. The third group (18%) consisted of comments about Ukraine and the Ukrainian nation (both positive and negative). The least numerous groups were entries about Russia – 31 comments (5%) and Vladimir Putin – only 18 out of 650 (3%).

Figure 2. Number of comments in individual categories: A – comments about V. Zelensky, B – Ukraine, C – Vladimir Putin, D – Russia, E – Rother.

Source: own study.

The majority of the comments included in the study refer to Volodymyr Zelensky, which is justified considering the fact that all the video materials included in the analysis depict the president of Ukraine, although in different circumstances. Therefore, it is worth taking a closer look at this group of comments. In the case of the first material (Case 1), i.e. a fragment of the interview with Zelensky's joking response, 80 out of 130 comments (61%) concerned the President of Ukraine. Analysis of these provided information about their message. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. The nature of comments about V. Zelensky posted under individual materials. C1 – *Case 1*, C2 – *Case 2*, C3 – *Case 3*, C4 – *Case 4*, C5 – *Case 5*. T1 and T2 – total numbers of comments in individual categories.

	Characteristics of the comment	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	T1
1.	Comments expressing support for V. Zelensky	13	12	2	46	32	105
2.	Comments expressing criticism of V. Zelensky	62	35	6	16	16	135
3.	Comments of a neutral nature	5	5	0	8	4	22
T2		80	52	8	70	52	262

Source: own study.

When comparing the number of comments expressing support for Volodymyr Zelensky (40%) and comments expressing disapproval (51%), polarisation can be seen. This result is very similar to the previously presented analysis (see Table 2 and Chart 1) regarding the ratio of all comments expressing support for Ukraine (49%) and those expressing criticism of Ukraine (51%). In both cases, polarisation is visible, as well as the predominance of anti-Ukrainian comments. To better understand the specific nature of comments, it is also worth taking a look at their content in relation to individual video materials. The vast majority (62 out of 80) of comments posted under the first material (Case 1) are critical. These are usually short statements containing words that are offensive or critical of the president of Ukraine. This group often includes terms that are considered offensive. A similar trend is visible in the case of the second material (Case 2) – most of the comments are negative towards the president (35 out of 52). There are 12 comments expressing support and five of those of a neutral nature. In the case of the third material (Case 3), what is surprising is the number of comments that concern Volodymyr Zelensky (8 out of 130), among these eight comments, two express supports for the president of Ukraine, and six are critical. There are no neutral entries in this comment group. In the case of the fourth film (Case 4), more than half of the comments (46 out of 70) expressed support for Volodymyr Zelensky, criticism appeared in 16 entries, and there were eight comments of a neutral nature. The last material (Case 5) collected a total of 52 comments regarding the president of Ukraine, 32 of which were approving, 16 expressed disapprovals, and four were neutral. The above data allows us to draw conclusions about the correlation between the topic and form of the film and the number of negative and positive comments. The most striking example is the „parody” material (Case 3), which was created and published by Ramzan Kadyrov, a Chechen politician accused, among others, of committing war crimes in Ukraine. The film arouses controversy, which is clearly visible in the analysed comments area. This is the only case where there are no neutral entries in the context of Volodymyr Zelensky. At the same time, the use of brutalised language in the comments is visible.

The language of polarisation

The analysis, in addition to quantitative data, also provides answers to questions about the language used in published comments. It varies – usually mild in neutral comments, but brutalised in the case of comments expressing criticism of Russia, Ukraine, and, above

all, Volodymyr Zelensky. As it was already written in the earlier part of this work, in the comments covered by the study, the largest percentage are those regarding the President of Ukraine, and in this group the majority (51%) are comments criticising Zelensky. In the described research, comments were also subjected to linguistic analysis. This provided specific answers to the question about the language and expressions used towards Volodymyr Zelensky. Parallel to the results of the quantitative analysis, polarisation is visible at the level of words used by Internet users. The President of Ukraine is described either in a very positive way, such as a „hero” or a „great man”, or in a very negative way, such as a „bandit” or a „devil”. There is a noticeable deficit of neutral terms. Table 6 presents the most frequently used terms.

Table 6. Examples of the most frequently used terms referring to Volodymyr Zelensky.

Phrases expressing support	Phrases expressing criticism
hero, real leader, treasure, loved, great man, good man, best man in the world, captain Ukraine	poor actor, clown, dodger, Chazar, Jew, nazi, banderist, insincere, celebrity, mean, agent, coke king, bandit, devil.

Source: Own study.

In addition to the terms themselves, it is also worth focusing on the subject of individual comments. These can also be divided into specific categories, the most common of which are historical threads often concerning not only the Polish-Ukrainian past, but also Russian-Ukrainian relations. In this group of comments, the issue of Volhynia was most often mentioned by Internet users. Another significant group are comments that refer to the private zone, or the personal zone of the President of Ukraine. This group includes comments about previously performed professions: the work of an actor and comedian, as well as comments intended to suggest that the President of Ukraine is addicted to drugs. In the second case, we can even speak of an insistent Russian narrative that has been pursued in this direction since the beginning of Zelensky's existence in the world of politics.

Table 7. List of topics most frequently appearing in comments and sample entries.

Comment topic	Examples of critical comments towards V. Zelensky
Historical – Volhynia	„Fuc... to Ukraine, where you come from, and fight until you fall and the Russians will cut you with a saw, just like you murdered Poles alive. WE REMEMBER VOLHYNIA!!!”
Current war	„A millionaire, he doesn't care about the population. He makes himself look like a beggar. Poles, USA, EU – help. Give us weapons to fight... and whore... pay from your account, you already have billions! You are a lying piece of shit... you should be put on trial for genocide... you even look like Hitler... you spread propaganda and want to divide the whole world. finally die ...”
Personal – an actor's work	„Zelensky is a miserable actor in the hands of the oligarchs, whatever they tell him he has to do, he doesn't care about his nation, he is fueling this war, he has blood on his hands.”
Personal – drugs	„This red drug addict makes me sick. Jewish coke king.”

Source: Own study.

The examples given in the table above (Table 7) show the brutalised language used in comments critical of the President of Ukraine. Analysis of all the collected material allows us to conclude that in the case of critical comments, not only pejorative terms but also vulgarisms are commonly used. Some comments also show features of hate speech. You won't find this type of language in positive comments, where Volodymyr Zelensky is most often described as an extremely brave and devoted man to Ukraine. It should be emphasised, however, that such entries are fewer in number than those that are negative or even attacking President Zelensky. An important issue in the context of the language of polarisation in the analysed material is the issue of discussion between individual YouTube users. This appears sporadically, most often in the form of a short exchange of words, often in a vulgar way (insults are thrown at the other party). The discussions most often concern not Volodymyr Zelensky himself, but Ukrainians, who are criticised by one side of the dialogue and defended by the other. The exchange of opinions usually does not end with an agreement, but rather with one of the parties quitting (leaving the discussion). In the analysed material, most comments of a discussion nature appeared under *Case 3*, the staging of the signing of the surrender, i.e. a video that was supposed to be controversial by definition. The comments appearing under the material largely referred to the Ukrainian-Russian situation, as well as the history of Poland (in the context of the actions of Russia and Ukraine). An interesting example of a discussion is presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Example of a discussion between YouTube users – comments under Case 3.

Person X comment	„Broadcast it in the mainstream media so that the ukry in Poland can see it!”
Person Y comment	„You don't say ukry, you boor.”
Person X comment	„szoszony better??? or chachły”
Person Y comment	„culture, a little culture and good upbringing”
Person X comment	„Have you ever worked with Ukry???? there is no mention of culture there, they are peasants, sensible idiots”
Person Y comment	„a strange experience, this can be said about every nation that experienced communism. They renovated my house quickly and very thoroughly, without any problems, nice and polite.”
Person X comment	„maybe you've come across non-drinkers :))) and besides, I „worked with them” and now I work with them ;) so I have an objective view of their stupidity”
Person Y comment	„If you ever read what the availability heuristic is, you wouldn't be talking nonsense. Probably a construction worker, right? „
Person X comment	„you're right, I didn't know about it... but I don't care about this knowledge >>?????”
	End of discussion.

Source: Own study.

The above example (Table 8) is one of the less vulgar ones. Despite this, there are visible manifestations of hate speech and mutual attacks by both sides. Words considered offensive appear, but at the same time the very end of the discussion does not close, but rather „cuts off” the conversation. The comments and ongoing discussions covered by the study are characterised by clearly marked differences between views, while using offensive

words and vulgarisms. There is a deficit of logical and factual arguments, and emotional arguments appear more often. Most often, however, the comments are not supported by any arguments, and are only a kind of sudden expression of a few words or sentences written hastily (as evidenced by common spelling and grammatical errors).

Summary

The analyses conducted allow us to conclude that the polarisation of opinions is visible in Internet users' comments published under selected films. The study showed a clear split between pro- and anti-Ukrainian posts, with the ratio of comments expressing criticism of Ukraine being 51% compared to 49% of comments expressing support. These equal proportions change when pro- and anti-Russian comments are compared, where comments criticising Russia's actions constitute 2% and comments supporting Russia 9%. It is worth adding that the small percentage of anti-Russian comments may be surprising, especially considering the fact that the films included in the analysis, although indirectly, refer to Russia's destructive actions or even present the tragic consequences of Russia's ongoing armed attack on Ukraine. In the case of comments regarding Volodymyr Zelensky himself, the number of comments expressing approval is 40%, and comments expressing criticism is 51%. Therefore, in this respect there is also a clear polarisation of opinions. The comments covered by the study are characterised by brutalisation and vulgarisation of language, and there is also visible hate speech, which is often aimed at Ukrainian citizens. Both in the case of comments regarding Ukraine and the president himself, critical entries appear next to positive entries. While the first group of comments contains words of appreciation and support, the second group of comments is characterised by harsh criticism, pejorative terms, and hate speech. In the analysed comments, President Zelensky is described as both „great”, a “treasure”, and a „hero”, as well as a „bandit”, „clown” and „drug addict”. Importantly, the number of comments critical of Ukrainians increases over time. Previously appearing posts supporting and empathising with the Ukrainian nation are replaced by hostile comments expressing negative opinions and criticism, both towards President Zelensky and the Ukrainian nation. It can be concluded that with the subsequent months of the ongoing war, the public mood is deteriorating and the willingness to express support for Ukraine is decreasing.

Moderation (or lack thereof) is also very important for online discussions. Failure to remove comments expressing hate speech results in this practice becoming more widespread. Modern social networking sites seem to shift the responsibility for reporting hate speech cases to users. This approach is not effective. The very act of publishing controversial content promotes brutal discussions and comments. In turn, the structure of modern social networking sites and the possibilities of conducting online discussions favours short, one-on-one exchanges of opinions, where the polemic is usually won by the more aggressive Internet user. Even though we observe progressive changes in technology every day, we still do not know where they will lead us. It is all the more important to pay special attention to the ways in which new technologies are used, including social networking sites – both in the sphere of everyday communication and in high politics. The conducted research has certain limitations. Three of the analysed videos were published at the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, in February and March 2022, one in July 2022 and later in April 2023. However, the analysed comments come from the period from May

2023 to May 2024. There is therefore a two-year gap between the first videos and the last comments, which provides an interesting area for future research.

References

- Bauman, Z. (2006). *Życie na przemiał*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie.
- Castells, M. (2027). *Społeczeństwo sieci*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Ciesiołkiewicz, K. (2023). *Twarze polskiej radykalizacji. Raport z badań – analiza – rekomendacje*, Warszawa: Komitet Dialogu Społecznego Krajowej Izby Gospodarczej, Towarzystwo „Więź”.
- Dalton, R. J. (1987). Generational Change in Elite Political Beliefs: The Growth of Ideological Polarization, *The Journal of Politics*, vol. 49, no. 4, p. 976–997.
- Downs, A. (1957). *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, New York: Harper & Row.
- Fitzpatrick, H. G. (2009). YouTube and Intergenerational Communication: The Case of Geriatric1927. *Universal Access in the Information Society*, vol. 8, iss. 1, p. 5–20.
- Giddens, A. (2004). *Socjologia*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Górska, P. (2029). *Polaryzacja polityczna w Polsce. Jak bardzo jesteśmy podzieleni?* Warszawa: Centrum Badań nad Uprzedzeniami.
- Gracy, K. F. (2007). Moving Image Preservation and Cultural Capital, *Library Trends*, vol. 56, no. 1, p. 183–19.
- Jenkis, H. (2007). *Kultura konwergencji. Zderzenie starych i nowych mediów*, tłum. M. Bernartowicz, M. Filiciak, Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne.
- Kaplan, A. M., Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the World, Unite! The Challenges and Opportunities of Social Media, *Business Horizons*, Elsevier, vol. 53(1), p. 59–68.
- Kietzmann, J. H., Hermkens, K., McCarthy, I. P., B. S. Silvestre (2011). Social media? Get serious! Understanding the functional building blocks of social media, *Business Horizons*, no. 55, p. 242.
- Lee, N.-Y. (2014). Politics of party polarization and democracy in South Korea, *Asian Barometer. A Comparative Survey of Democracy, Governance and Development*, no. 103, <http://asianbarometer.org/publications//3c62e10f9beb44029032c1d67fcd174c.pdf>.
- Levinson, P. (2010). *Nowe nowe media*, tłum. M. Zawadzka, Kraków: Wydawnictwo WAM.
- Lipset, S. M., Rokkan S. (1967). Cleavage Structures, Party Systems and Voter Alignments: An Introduction, *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives*, eds. S. M. Lipset, S. Rokkan, New York: The Free Press, p. 1–64.
- McCarty, N., Poole, K. T., Rosenthal, H. (2006). *Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches*, Cambridge-London: The MIT Press.
- McLuhan, M. (1975). *Przekaznik, czyli przedłużenie człowieka*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe.
- Mechkova, V., Pemstein, D., Seim, B., Wilson, S. (2021), *Digital Society Project Dataset v3*, <https://digitalsocietyproject.org/data-version-3>.
- Palonen, E. (2006). Political polarisation and populism in contemporary Hungary, *Parliamentary Affairs*, 62, no. 2, p. 318–334.
- Pariser, E., (2011). *The Filter Bubble. What Internet is hiding from you?* New York: Penguin Press.

- Reiljan, A. (2020). Fear and Loathing across Party Lines' (Also) in Europe: Affective Polarisation in European Party Systems, *European Journal of Political Research*, vol. 59, no. 2, p. 376–396.
- Rotman, D., J. Preece (2010). The 'WeTube' in YouTube – Creating an Online Community through Video Sharing, *International Journal of Web Based Communities*, vol. 6, iss. 3.
- Ruszkowski, P., A. Przystalski, P. Maranowski (2020). *Polaryzacja światopoglądowa społeczeństwa polskiego a klasy i warstwy społeczne*, Warszawa: Collegium Civitas Press.
- Sartori, G. (2005). *Parties and Party Systems. A Framework for Analysis*, Wivenhoe Park: ECPR Press.
- Somer, M., McCoy J. (2018). Déjà vu? Polarization and Endangered Democracies in the 21st Century, *American Behavioral Scientist*, vol. 62, no. 1, p. 3–15.
- Weibel, P. (2012). Od mediów mechanicznych do mediów społecznych, *Mindware. Technologie dialogu*, P. Celiński (ed.), Lublin: Warsztaty Kultury.
- Zagała Z. (2023). Od podziału postsolidarnościowego do polaryzacji. (Krótkie) studium relacji między Prawem i Sprawiedliwością a Platformą Obywatelską i ich wyborcami, *Zeszyty Naukowe KUL*, vol. 66, no 3 (263).