Analysis of Latvian Celebrity Communication and Charity Concerts during the Fatigue Phase of the War in Ukraine (February–April 2023)

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Abstract. The aim of the current paper is to explore how concerts function as tools for communication and mobilization during the phase of war fatigue, and how the involved celebrities promote public engagement to facilitate fundraising and collection of donations. The theoretical framework is based on the concepts of social proof, ritual theory, and the term "war fatigue". The empirical part consists of qualitative content analysis, examining the content of celebrities' accounts in social media platforms such as *Instagram* and *Twitter*. Additionally, a survey was conducted, along with a partially structured interview with Ralfs Eilands, and an open observation was also carried out. The research concludes that concerts are effective mobilization tools during the phase of war fatigue. People's interaction with war-related news decreases during the period of war fatigue, and celebrities tend to make posts primarily during event times, followed by a rapid decrease in communication afterwards.

Keywords: *Twitter*, *Instagram,* war fatigue, war in Ukraine

Introduction

For over a year now, the ongoing war in Ukraine has been causing concerns throughout Europe. The devastation wreaked by the war has led to the exacerbation of crises and emotional distress among people. Currently, there is a sense of war fatigue that manifests itself as decrease in the interest concerning the war in society due to the intensity and news overload, as well as the events around it.

Given the proximity of the war to Latvia, the country has been actively involved in providing support and expressing genuine concern. This study falls within the broader field of communication research, specifically referred to as "crisis communication". An important aspect to consider is that war fatigue has set in, and people are becoming accustomed to the ongoing wartime situation. The problem also concerns society's engagement with war-related topics

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and its perception of the news. War fatigue leads to avoidance of war-related news. Even when celebrities communicate about it the perception of the war has changed. Considering the contemporary era of information overload, it can easily contribute to information fatigue that exacerbates people's avoidence of information with negative connotations in this difficult period of wartime fatigue.

Since the late 19th century, the news media have had a crucial role in conflicts, with significant technological advancements marking consequential shifts in the dynamics amongst the news organisations, the populations of warring nations, and the military (Parker 2020). Media have served as an important source of information and, moreover, a tool and even a weapon used by warring parties in various wartime periods to influence the population and create propaganda (Arnold *et al.* 2019).

Despite the fact that numerous media outlets have operated for many years, conflict is now communicated in ways that have never been seen before. Soldiers act as reporters, opinions are heard from both parties of the conflict, and journalists have become both reporters and camera operators due to their participation in social media. With the help of social media, the public can see soldiers' lives in posts and real footage from conflict zones, the so-called hotspots. The war in Ukraine and Russia is described with a new, previously unprecedented term in the field of communication called the "First social media war", since for the first time anyone on the ground can act as a *de facto* war reporter, sharing their experiences from the front lines. Likewise, social media are transforming the contemporary combat experience of the military staff, their families, and even of the world (Suciu 2022).

The media, along with individuals and celebrities on their own accounts on social media platforms, engage in the distribution of their thoughts on specific subjects in a broader way. According to media researcher Nick Newman, contemporary news organisations face competition not only from other traditional news organisations but also from non-traditional news organisations like social media platforms and messaging apps. These non-traditional sources have gained momentum as primary information sources for a growing segment of the population. The excessive availability of information can result in information overload and a tendency to disengage from it, hence increasing the prevalence of issues such as the propagation of inaccurate and misleading news (Newman 2019). The presence of war fatigue can be detected through individual's hesitation to engage with the news that bear relation to the war, exacerbated by information overload.

Multiple studies have identified a range of factors that contribute to individuals' tendency to abstain from engaging with news consumption. The reasons for this vary from readers' reluctance to engage with negative information to their preference for news that directly relate to their everyday preoccupations. However, one hypothesis that consistently emerges is that there is too much

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information (Tandoc *et al.* 2022). Taking into account this problem, – that the war has dragged on and people increasingly avoid the negative and unpleasant news, solutions must be found to gather the people for unity and repeated support. One of the effective methods is concert.

For several years, concerts have served as a means of communication to draw people's attention to significant events. It is an instrument that has been extensively tested and refined. The use of a musical performance has the capacity to promote unity among individuals and inspire the community to come together with one goal in mind. Concerts have helped to bring to public attention important issues and illnesses that were previously considered taboo topics. A good example is the concert that took place at Wembley Stadium in 1992. Musician Freddie Mercury, shortly before his death, revealed that he was HIV positive and gave a legendary concert that helped raise awareness about AIDS and also generated substantial contributions. The concert raised funds for AIDS research and reached approximately 1 billion people, increasing awareness about AIDS among a healthy music-loving audience (Tan 2018). This example shows how effective a concert can be.

The key concept behind the reason why concerts and charity events are effective is explained through the theory of ritual. Ritual is the foundation of all social activities and can take many different forms. Rituals can be big and expansive, like the Olympic Games, or small and intimate, like graduation ceremonies, or even as simple as "liking" a post on *Facebook* or another social media platform to assess the content of a friend's social network account. Rituals have a physical influence and reinforce community attitudes, whether they be nationalistic in nature, rites of passage, or simply an acknowledgment that one's contribution to a social network matters (Rossner *et al.* 2014).

Another persuasive way to draw public attention and engage people with important topics is through celebrity endorsement. It has been proven that the campaigns that involve famous people are more successful in generating support. A famous person, also known as a celebrity, is defined as an individual who has gained wide recognition and public attention due to their notable achievements, talent or reputation. These individuals often influence popular culture, media, and society (Abd-Elhamid *et al.* 2019).

There are several key concepts to take into account for successful celebrity endorsement. Building trust is essential for celebrity involvement to be justified. People will not perceive a celebrity's inner motivation, if they suspect that the celebrity is only endorsing something for financial gain or with a sole view of enhancing their reputation (external motivation) rather than being motivated by a genuine belief in the social cause (internal motivation). However, if it is clearly communicated that the celebrity is not receiving financial remuneration, people are more likely to believe that the celebrity is endorsing the respective cause because their intentions are genuine toward the organization's goals (Moore *et al.* 1994).

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Robert Cialdini's theory of "social proof" explains why people choose to follow the example of a celebrity. His theory suggests that people come to accept something as right or appropriate by ascertaining what other people think is right. It works especially effectively when it comes to behaviour in an uncertain situation – people accept the behaviour they observe in others as correct (Cialdini 2009).

Social learning happens best when a person interacts either with someone they like, or a like-minded individual. Then this person "addresses" him. The factor of liking is essential. Therefore, people usually accept as "correct" a behaviour suggestion or attitude that comes from the individuals who are in some way similar to themselves, or maybe have similar views, or if people see this individual as an authority (Abrams *et al.* 1990). Therefore, the celebrities, in contemporary society they can also be influencers, constitute a good tool that can contribute to changing society's thinking, or influencing their actions, and even encourage good deeds such as donation.

Methodology

This study aims to provide clear answers to the following research questions:

1. How does a concert function as a communicative tool for mobilizing society to raise donations in a wartime crisis situation, particularly during the phase of war fatigue?
2. What is the significance and impact of recognizable individuals in crisis communication and donation collection? Can they motivate society to engage in charity work?
3. Can a concert promote renewed engagement of the public with the Ukraine war crisis situation and the issues surrounding it?
4. Do celebrity efforts in communicating the seriousness of the war through post-fundraising concerts suffer from diminishing intensity, and is the impact of this communication temporary?

To reach the goal, the study has been structured on the basis of combining qualitative and quantitative research methods to obtain a wider view of the problem.

The author aimed at considering the effectiveness of fundraising events from several aspects, – from the perspective of celebrities and their interaction on social media, that were studied through content analysis, the open observation provided an insight into planning of the specific concerts, and analyses the course of the event and the public's involvement in them, as well as the opinion of the creator of the events Ralfs Eilands, which was obtained through a semi-structured interview, while in order to acquire people's personal opinion about the organized events for collecting donations in support of Ukraine, quantitative data was collected by means of a questionnaire-based survey.

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The traditional coding system of content analysis was applied in this study. Since the aim of the work was to explore the communication of celebrities in war fatigue period and how they influence people, who were the organizers and participants of the events "*Izsmej kara kuǵi Ukrainas brīvībai*" ("Mock Warship for the Freedom of Ukraine") and "*Veltījums Ukrainai*" ("Dedication to Ukraine"), the author analysed their *Twitter* and *Instagram* communication. 85 of celebrity and music group profiles were examined. The individual members of bands were not selected as separate entities, but the social media accounts of specific bands were analysed, as some performed individually, simultaneously being band members. Content analysis was conducted over a 3-month period, from January to March. From the 85 profiles of celebrities who participated in both events, the individuals who shared content related to the Ukraine war topic were selected for analysis. If the content on the celebrities' social media did not cover this topic, it was not included in the analysis. In total, the data was obtained concerning 32 celebrities.

Since this is a large dataset requiring a systematic analysis method, the data were processed using the SPSS data analysis software. In the qualitative content analysis, a coding system was created to ensure precise and accurate data processing. The codes were assigned in a coding system for research parameters such as the type, the topic of the post, and the content of the post. The study examined public reactions, including the number of likes, shares and comments. In addition, a comment section was created to take into account important notes or keywords, including topic-related hashtags in celebrity posts, and to track whose posts were being reposted or reshared.

The researcher's goal was to conduct observations at the two aforementioned fundraising events for Ukraine ("Mock Warship for the Freedom of Ukraine" and "Dedication to Ukraine"), The author of the study chose the open observation method – it did not involve prior information, specific topics, or observation guidelines, so the researcher attended the events open minded. During the observation, data were recorded using the recording method, as well as taking the photos.

The third method that was used in research is the semi-structured interview, it was used to find out the opinion of the main initiator and organizer of the two events – "Dedication to Ukraine" and "Mock Warship for the Freedom of Ukraine" – Ralfs Eilands on specific topics and key aspects.

In the design of the research, a survey method was chosen to demonstrate the effectiveness of the fundraising events in terms of how they work to draw public attention to an important event in a crisis situation. The survey was disseminated among acquaintances and further spread through a chain reaction. The author chose to publish the survey on the *Facebook* timeline and shared it in various discussion groups. The survey was shared in two Ukrainian aid and

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support groups. The survey was also sent to businesses, schools, dance groups, and interviews were conducted with older individuals who did not use smart devices. In total, 122 respondents from the age groups of 13 to 60 were reached.

Results

1. The concept of war fatigue and its manifestations

The main subject of the current study is war fatigue, and the survey results confirmed that nearly the majority of respondents at the time of the survey were experiencing some form of fatigue engendered by the war situation. Approximately 40% stated that they were feeling war fatigue. Both events ("Mock Warship for the Freedom of Ukraine" and "Dedication to Ukraine") were conceived by Ralfs Eilands, the author of the ideas and the initiator of the events. Despite the emotional strain and fatigue, the event organizer continued to host both events. The respondent acknowledged being tired of the entire situation. Eilands mentioned that in life, one does not always do things that one enjoys or wants to do; sometimes, one knows it is the right thing to do, and one simply has to act on it (Eilands 2023).

Through open observation, it was possible to notice the fundamental principles of the fundraising theories, as well as their operation and efficiency in real life. Nevertheless, in his dual role as both the event organizer and a participant, Ralfs witnessed the presence of societal tiredness. However, this factor did not hinder the general public from actively attending, observing, and demonstrating their support at these events.

2. Concert as a fundraising tool

The survey confirmed that about half of the individuals within the randomly sampled groups had participated in one of the events. This indicated that individuals had a high level of responsiveness and knowledge regarding both occasions, as seen by their active engagement. After observing the data on the attendance of the events, it was found that the concert "Dedication to Ukraine" was attended by more people than "Mock Warship for the Freedom of Ukraine".

During the course of this study, the author observed the practical implementations of theories in real-world contexts. Both measurements, upon careful examination, can be considered effective in capturing the essential characteristics of ritual theory. The support provided by Ukraine to Latvians has assumed a ritualistic nature. According to theoretical frameworks, rituals are characterized by repetitive and practiced behaviours. These activities have been taking place for a second year in a row, and the fundraising has been remarkably successful, delivering significant achievements in terms of contributions. The event "Mock

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Warship for the Freedom of Ukraine" included symbols, which included various exclamations and phrases often heard and seen used on social networks referring to the war in Ukraine. By using symbolism and evoking emotions, it becomes possible to assess the collective solidarity and limitless empathy of individuals.

Figures 1–4. Charity concert and support event **"Dedication to Ukraine"**, 24 February 2023

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Figures 5–8. Charity concert "Mock Warship for the Freedom of Ukraine", 1 April 2023

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Figures 9–10. Charity concert "Mock Warship for the Freedom of Ukraine", 1 April 2023

The elements of Robert Cialdini's social proof theory were identified while observing the events. This was clearly manifested at the events when the celebrities invited public to donate and indicated that they had made their own contributions and would continue to do so. Social proof means that individuals choose to follow the people they like. The wide range of celebrities made it possible for each of the viewers to find a favourite person or celebrity that they really liked. This could also be a motivation for some viewers to come, support and donate to the cause.

3. Content analysis of celebrity accounts on social media platforms during war fatigue phase

The author obtained data from respondents confirming that 12% of the respondents were most interested in the war at the moment and read about it every day in the age group of 41–50 years. Through qualitative content analysis, a larger dataset was researched and summarized with SPSS data software.

The author additionally established the content of the message embedded in posts through the use of codes. The message of the post on the day of the concert was most often informative, in 11 cases (11/24, 45.8%), there were also six posts that contained the author's reflections about the event itself or its circumstances, four appeals, two acknowledgments and one joke element. Before the concert, most often there were informational posts, 51 posts (51/98, 52.0%), then 28 reflections of the author (28/98, 28.6%), 11 invitations (11/98, 11.2%)

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Following the concert "Dedication to Ukraine", an increased number of posts were seen, including expressions of gratitude directed towards both the participants for their performance and the donors associated with the event. During the event, there was a degree of communication, albeit to a reduced extent compared to the post-event period. Notably, the involvement of celebrities in actively spreading information related to the ongoing events, was very limited. Comparing the two events, there were more posts on the day of the concert "Dedication to Ukraine" (24 entries, 7.5% versus 9 entries, 2.8%) than on the day of the comedy event (9 entries, 2.8%). More celebrities chose the *Twitter* platform over *Instagram* to express their opinion.

Celebrities made the most posts in the month of February, or during the period when the concert "Dedication to Ukraine" was held. Most of the posts contained informational content about the concert. After the concert, the celebrities shared very few posts thanking the people for donations – that is an important aspect when conducting donation. Celebrity posts consisted of their thoughts or some reflections regarding the concert that took place. However, in April, when the event "Mock Warship for the Freedom of Ukraine" took place, the content of the social networks of celebrities was informative rather than inviting, and mostly self-reflective.

4. People's interactions with celebrity posts on Instagram and Twitter

The correlation between the time of observation and number of *likes* was not significant. The engagement was constant over time with no association between time and the number of *likes* in the posts, $p = 0.09$.

The highest amount of comments, as well as the influx of *likes* were observed at the during the "Dedication to Ukraine" concert. The activity peak on social media was identified shortly after the concert. Visually and statistically, both *Twitter* and *Instagram* photos received fewer *likes* with time, with *Instagram* showing a stronger negative correlation $(-0.398, p = 0.003)$ than *Twitter* $(-0.098, p = 0.1)$.

Conclusions

It was proven that the society is experiencing war fatigue and has lost interest in news related to the war in Ukraine. The study demonstrated that the concert served as an effective instrument for mobilising and developing social solidarity. By using the method of open observation, the visible characteristics of ritual theory were revealed, including the changes in individuals' actions and the development of shared emotional states. The research revealed that celebrity endorsement successfully encourages public engagement and active participation in significant initiatives like fundraising. The events also demonstrated

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the display of social proof theory. The results of the survey demonstrated that the presence of celebrities in concert activities held significance for individuals, although not being the primary motivation for attending such events. It was found that the concert was capable to reclaim the public attention to the events in Ukraine in the period when war fatigue had descended upon people. It can be concluded that celebrity communication about Ukraine displayed an upward trend only during the timeframe including the two concerts. After the charity events, the celebrity engagement in openly discussing and addressing the ongoing state of warfare within their accounts on social media platforms notably declined. Communication about war returned to its initial state – few posts or silence, and society once again distanced itself from the news.

Author's note. The current paper is based on the master's thesis developed and defended in the master's study programme "Communication Science" at the University of Latvia Faculty of Social Sciences. The research supervisor of the thesis is Professor Vita Zelče.

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