Volodymyr Zelenskyy Authenticity and performance

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# Bees And Cancer

Breakthrough in Modern Medicine





tumors grow." What sets this

research apart is its potential

to lead to targeted cancer

therapies that are not only

more effective but also less

toxic than conventional

treatments like chemothera-

py or radiation. While cur-

rent methods often harm

healthy tissue, melittinbased therapies could focus

on malignant cells with

this research is still in early

experimental stages. The find-

ings were conducted in con-

trolled lab settings using cell

cultures, and more studies,

including clinical trials, are

needed before bee venom-

based treatments can be safe-

to a growing body of evidence

suggesting that nature holds

untapped solutions to some of

medicine's most complex chal-

lenges. From rainforest plants

to oceanic microbes, and now,

the humble honeybee, the nat-

ural world continues to

may no longer symbolize pain

or fear, but rather, hope,

resilience, and recovery in the

ongoing fight against cancer.

to health and healing.

inspire innovative approaches

One day, the sting of a bee

Still, the implications are exciting. This discovery adds

It's important to note that

greater precision

lv used in humans.

ı a remarkable fusion of natural researchers have uncovered a stunning potential cancer treatment, bee venom. In laboratory studies, scientists found that venom from honeybees can eliminate 100% of aggressive breast cancer cells in under 60 minutes, offering a promising glimpse into a new class of cancer-fighting

At the heart of this discovery is melittin, a potent natural compound found in bee venom. Melittin works by targeting the membranes of cancer cells, punching holes in them and effectively stopping their growth and survival without causing significant harm to surrounding healthy cells. This precise mechanism makes it especially intriguing for treating aggressive subtypes of breast cancer, including triple-negative breast cancer (TNBC), which is notoriously difficult to treat with

current therapies. "Melittin acts incredibly fast," noted one of the lead researchers. "It attacks cancer cell membranes within minutes and disrupts key signaling pathways that help





Bee Venom cures Breast Cancer: A Natural





has an opinion about their opponent, and it would be predictable also, interesting to know it in fact. Some a news read, read on. A close reading of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's self-produced social

media content alongside Western news outlets' profiles of Zelenskyy from the first months of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 illuminates a symbiotic relationship of drama-making that is mutually beneficial for Zelenskyy's military and the West's journalistic interests. Performing as a scrappy underdog turned brilliant military mind, Zelenskyy provides the Western press with an authentic protagonist figure, who makes ideal fodder for a Western news style steeped in drama-making and a natural fit for the individualized storytelling core to the genre of the profile piece. While genre is an aesthetic categorizing tool, it is also a sigtions of texts' production and circulation. Thus, taken as products of their moment, the profile pieces their interplay with Zelenskyy's short form, seemingly grassroots social media videos are revealing of the value system

underpinning journalism in the

West, and the society it reflects.

#### Zelenskyy, capturing (journalists') hearts and minds

a significantly less visible one, taking a backseat against the unfolding crisis in the Middle East, it might be hard to remember back the early days of Russia's invasion in spring 2022 when the country was ubiquitous in mainstream Western news. In those months, it was nearly impossible to follow the news without seeing similar stories across outlets: 'How Zelenskyy Found His Roar' (The Economist Staff) or 'How Volodymyr Zelenskyy Defended Ukraine and United the World' (Shuster), detailing Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. A major shift in the global order, in which war came to Europe's doorstep for the first time in decades, it makes sense that the invasion of Ukraine made headline news in Western markets. However, the sheer volume of coverage trained on not just the country, but specifically its leader, raises questions about what makes Zelenskyv.

W ith Ukraine an increasingly partisan issue for the US, and

same man, in the same way, so many The genre of the 'profile piece' emerges as a meaningful site of inquiry for understanding what it is about Zelenskyy that captured the hearts and minds of Western journalists (and publics) in those early days. Following the logic of journalistic 'scoop,' profiles are often proprietary; in other words, while celebrities and politicians might receive

the man, the leader and the citizen,

such a keen object of interest for

journalists and why Western news

outlets thoroughly strapped for

resources and time would cover the

profiles in different outlets through out their lifetimes, it is rare to see the same person profiled simultaneously across outlets. However, breaking this norm. Zelenskyv enjoyed appearances in profile stories in nearly every major Western media outlet since rising to global consciousness in February 2022. The omnipresence of these pieces warrants close attention, standing separate and apart from the (albeit widespread) breaking news/political cov-

erage of the events in Ukraine. That Zelenskyy managed to both capture this genre and break certain of its norms, appearing consistently in profiles across outlets for a sustained period of months, is thanks in part to his self-made social media content released in the days and weeks following the invasion, which quickly went viral online. Just weeks after the invasion began, TikTok hashtags related to Zelenskyy already had over 350 million combined views, and one of his own videos, posted to Telegram, garnered over 5 million views in the span of one week. Almost unanimously, the profile pieces in mainstream news outlets cite Zelenskyy's own self-produced content, not just the journalists' observations and reporting, from the time immediately following Russia's invasion as evidence for the (laudatory) story they tell. Emphasizing Zelenskyy's savvy leadership and strong resolve as key reasons why Ukraine remains standing despite expert estimations tell that the Ukrainian capital Kyiv would fall immediately upon Russia's invasion, the profiles act not as a check to his online virility,

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#### **#PERSONA**

#### Theoretical framework and methodological approach



authenticity, Zelenskyy enacts the exact story Western news wants to tell, the sheer number of profile pieces emerging in such a truncated period, suggesting that the story Zelenskyy provides is a marketable one. Performing as a scrappy underdog turned bril-

liant military mind, Zelenskyy provides the Western press with a bildungsroman-style protagonist figure who makes ideal fodder for a Western news style steeped in drama-making. Zelenskyy is not a 'traditional' Western leader: his country has long existed on the

position as a Jewish leader of a najority Christian country; he is from a working-class family, several members of which tragically ied in the Holocaust. And his oackground as a comedian and actor is atypical (though perhaps not to the US, which has seen the ikes of Ronald Reagan, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Donald Trump rise to the highest offices in the land). However, far from disqualifying, the factors that distinguish Zelenskyv are also part of what make him so enticng to Western news, unusual enough to be eye-catching, but proximate enough to Western nyths of bootstrap social climbng and intrepid male heroism to oe extraordinarily digestible. Zelenskyy's authenticity is complex, yet nearly perfectly suited or intentionally tailored) to Western news audiences for the way it engages Western society's deepest held myths.

margins of the West, as its strug-

gle to join NATO, especially since

the invasion has made clear.

Zelenskyy is also in an unusual

allows certain experiences, bodes, language and ways of thinking/knowing the world to emerge as dominant, and it is through this default, or unmarked, state that I understand 'mainstream.' It is to Zelenskyy's performances that serve as fodder for these mainstream Western media texts that I turn below.

#### **Zelenskyy profiles: Authenticating authenticity**

A s The Economist Staff writes: Mr. Zelenskyy was born in 1978 in Krvvvi Rih, a Soviet-looking, industrial city in the southeast of Ukraine, a centre of iron mining and metallurgy. His favourite film was 'Once Upon a Time in America.' To survive among the town's knife-wielding gangs, you had to have a sense of humour, chutzpah and a posse that had your back. Mr. Zelenskyy had all of these things, in abun-

The piece highlights the aspects of Zelenskyy's biography that ring true to its audiences: a humble, working-class background, a pull towards the aspiration of the West and a charisma that allowed him to overcome life's challenges. Explicitly encouraging us to understand Zelenskyy's biography as a metonym for the crisis in Ukraine, the piece continues: "Like the country he leads, Mr. Zelenskyy is far from perfect and he is often frustrating.

Standing outside the House with Chimaeras on that bright morning, with the blue sky behind him. Mr. Zelenskyy again sounded a defiant note: "We will be defending our country, because our weapon is truth, and our truth is that this is our land, our country, our children, and we will defend all of this." If fortune favours Mr. Zelenskyy, it is because he carries the virtue that Mr. Putin lacks: he speaks the truth for his people

TIME's Simon Shuster, for example, 'proves' Zelenskyy's performance of authenticity is genuine by taking an apprehensive stance early in the profile, before revealing his ultimate belief in Zelenskyy's claims. He writes, "this trip to the front lines last April was the first time I'd seen him (Zelenskyy) with his troops the former actor playing the part of the generalissimo. It was not entirely convincing." He even reports that his closest aides recognize an actor's 'malady' in Zelenskyv, trying to keep him away from social media because he becomes 'depressed' when he sees negative comments

Ve are all here. This story arc, from doubt to authenticity operates as a direct foil to Vladimir Putin's perceived elitbelief, echoes throughout the Zelenskyy profiles, a repeated ism and inaccessibility. While Zelenskyy embodies the traditional narrative that sutures Zelenskyv's authenticity as 'true.' Echoing nuclear family model with a (con-Shuster's display of distant skepventionally attractive) wife and tic turned believer. Robin Givhan children, the couple was even feabegins her column for the tured in Vogue, Putin is a notorious Washington Post by signaling that 'playboy.' Zelenskyy's home is in the she sees Zelenskyy's performance middle of a war-torn city, whereas Putin's permanent residence as exactly that: a highly honed skillset from a man who has 'masremains a mystery, while rumors tered' the art of the 'direct appeal.' have swirled about numerous nomes, including one that's alleged-However, by the end of her piece, y worth US\$1 billion (Impelli) she is receptive to the appeal. Her analysis becomes enmeshed with Zelenskyy is regularly pictured in Zelenskyy's own performance, her his signature green t-shirt alongside scrappy Ukrainian troops fightfinal paragraph invoking Zelenskyy's words from an earlier ing for the country's freedom, mean video: "The president was here. while the image arguably, most associated with Putin, is a carica ture of macho masculinity: Putin horseback-riding shirtless through the mountains of the

And he was still working." Zelenskyv's authenticity as brand lies in his affective resonance with his audience, a 'charm' that enables proximity (Sonnevend) by Siberian Tyva region of Russia connecting on a core level with the (Druzhinin). The comparison has largely Eurocentric, anti-Russian been acknowledged directly in Zelenskyy profile news coverage, (anti-communist more broadly). ruggedly individualistic, patriarwith Atlantic staff writer Megan chal society of the West. Garber noting, "Zelenskyy's latest Zelenskyy's embrace of the 'dirty videos frame him in stark contrast work' of war signals a conventional to Ukraine's aggressor: Here is masculinity that Western culture Zelenskyy, on the streets and in danger; there is Vladimir Putin, has long privileged, one, again, that the West's arch enemy Vladimir pulling history's levers from afar, Putin has eschewed (Litvinova) In removed from the violence and unaccountable for it. fact, much about Zelenskyv's

#### The stakes of symbiosis

T f authenticity as 'symbolic construct' has 'cultural value in how we understand our moral frameworks and ourselves, and more generally how we make decisions about how to live our lives,' what does it mean for Western profile news to authorize and amplify Zelenskyv's performance of authenticity? For whom, if anyone, is this kind of authenticity, and the visibility it accrued, also accessible? Who else can perform it, and who cannot, and at what cost? Against a glut of existential crises for self-determination and democracy across the globe, Zelenskyy's emergence as a singular protagonist figure in Western news suggests that it is not simply his dogged determination on behalf of his country, but his particular



brand of dogged determination that has won the hearts and minds of Western journalists. His ubiquity in Western news profile pieces cannot be disentangled from his mastery of self-branding via social media, nor from the logics of the profile genre, which rely on the kind of personal, individually focused narrative storytelling that his social media performance provides. A confluence of form and subjecthood help to explain Zelenskyy's resonant authenticity; the symbiosis of Zelenskyy's per formance on social media and the Western profiles is rooted in Zelenskyy's believability as an

authentic storyteller.

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ter of hours before falling to Putin's far stronger than expected, it was clear in the early days of the attack that they would not be able to sustain their hold on the country without outside support, Ukraine being a small country about the size of the US state of Texas and Russia a powerhouse. To put a finer point on the kind of support Ukraine requires. since the invasion, the US has appropriated more than \$175 billion in aid to the country, the large majority of which supports military efforts. This context helps to explain Zelenskyy's instantaneous transfor-

'Instantaneous' is not an exaggeration; in fact, as of early February 2022, Zelenskyy presented as one would expect the leader of a country to look, his X profile picturing him in a sharp pressed suit, shaking hands with other world leaders, and attending 'official' events. However, as soon as the invasion began. Zelenskyy's posts shifted in tone, picturing him in his now infamous green t-shirt, seated behind his desk, poring over his computer or bundled in rugged outerwear surveying the state of Ukraine's capi-

Meanwhile.

highlighting

Zelenskyy's authenticity allows

mainstream news to give its read

ers the story it presumes they

crave, potentially gaining eye-

balls and dollars. In short,

through a performance of

At a moment when the fate of his country was hanging in the balance, might also think of as the launch of can be understood as an attempt to

Zelenskyy's content: A masterful performance of authenticity When Russia invaded Ukraine his 'charm offensive,' as Ukraine's secure the support of the Western are a lot of fakes out there . .. but I rugged, tireless, and fearless leader. world in Ukraine's favour. Zelenskyy's rapid change into character can be read as impression management, in this case rooted in an attempt to secure international. financial, military, and moral support for Ukraine's fight against Russia. The logic might go: if Zelenskyy appears disheveled but dogged in his commitment to fight Russia, dressing in military attire and staying alongside his countrymen, perhaps, global leaders would take the situation as seriously as he

> In a video from the day after the invasion began, Zelenskyy nowfamously addressed Ukrainians and the world in a quick announcement recorded from his cellphone: "Good morning to all Ukrainians! There

disheveled look to his scorn for those who are 'fake,' Zelenskyy tells his viewers that he is to be believed because he is 'real' while others are

Internet influencers are a helpful

comparison here, fostering a sense of intimacy that creates (artificial) closeness with their followers. For Zelenskyv, the cultivation of this closeness started immediately when the invasion began. On the night of Russia's advance. President Zelenskyy and members of his cabinet posted a video from the governmental district of Kyiv, in which Zelenskyy repeatedly named members of his cabinet followed by the

No doubt, familiar with the dynamics of front and backstage, it declaration 'here' (0:03-0:22), confirmmatters that Zelenskyy is a profesing that the Ukrainian government sionally trained and experienced

backstage moment.

slightly, appearing proud and defiant.

Standing in sharp contrast to highly

polished, public relations-approved

materials one is used to seeing from

a politician, the shaky-cam quality of

the video, the leaders' casual dress.

and the fact that Zelenskyy was

clearly filming the video as a 'selfie'

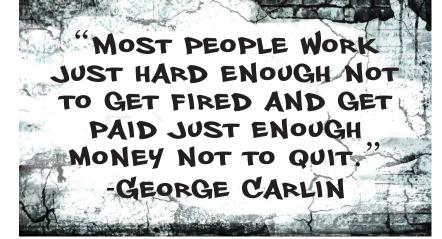
gives viewers the impression of a

actor, in addition to President of remained standing. In the video, Zelenskyy appears to hold his cell Ukraine, not because it explains why phone out in front of him to record he is so adept at performing this parthe video, the other government offiticular authenticity, but because it cials gathered closely around him. lends credence to others' interpretations of his behaviour as authentic, They are all wearing rugged coldweather gear. His colleagues appear describes this phenomenon, in serious, but Zelenskyy is smirking which theater and life appear indistinguishable, arguing:

"So, there is theater in the theater; theater in ordinary life; events in ordinary life that can be interpreted as theater; events from ordinary life that can be brought into the theater where they exist both as theater and as continuations of ordinary life . . . For some, drama is the motor underlying social processes and crisis management. For others, like Goffman, all human behaviour has a strong performative



#### THE WALL



#### **BABY BLUES**



## LIKE ROLUNG DOWN A HILL



### By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

SOMETHING

YOU ENJOY

NO, BUT IT'S

TRADITION.





ZITS

By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman