## obilizing Diasporas

Mapping transnational relief efforts in the age of social media

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Social media have reconfigured the international relief landscape by creating discursive spaces for grassroots activism. In this study, I use semantic networks to systematically investigate the role of social media in mobilizing a new actor - diasporas - for providing humanitarian aid. I visualize the structure of conversations among Ukrainian diaspora communities to illuminate the social contexts for two sets of behaviors: political advocacy, the traditional pathway for diaspora engagement, and humanitarian relief, an emergent collective behavior in which grassroots actors supply aid to their homeland directly, bypassing institutional brokers such as international nonprofit organizations.

## Sample descriptives **Context Data**

Diaspora research to date has focused on the 'symbolic' roles diasporas play in framing political events in their country of origin. At the same time, social media have led to the emergence of a new type of diasporic connectivity that transcends geographic constraints and affords multi-territorial engagement.

Crisis events in the homeland are known to politicize and mobilize diasporas for transnational activism, turning them into geopolitical actors. Research also shows the capacity of social media to transform information sharing into physical acts of caring.

Between 2014 and 2018, over \$15 million dolars' worth of relief made its way from Canada to Ukraine via large-scale, private relief initiatives, aimed to mitigate the consequences of the war. In this study, I investigate the contexts of platform-mediated diasporic involement in the Ukrainian conflict by mapping and analyzing online discourse among those groups.

Facebook is frequently used among diaspora communities as a space to articule and sustain an identity through a connection to their homeland. Across diasporic contexts, it is pertinent to consider this platform when analyzing transnational mobilization around issues of local and global significance.

For this study, I collected a sample of posts from 10 public diaspora groups that satisfied a set of inclusion criteria. Due to significant numbers of Ukrainians living in the United States and Canada, I chose to focus on these two countries. I identified all public groups that had over 100 members and produced over 100 posts, which provided a rich corpus of textual data for analysis. Finally, I identified the communities that were consistently active throughout the duration of the Anti-Terrorist Operation in Ukraine (2014-2018), which left 10 groups, five from each of Canada, and the U.S. I then used Netvizz to collect historical posts over a studied period.

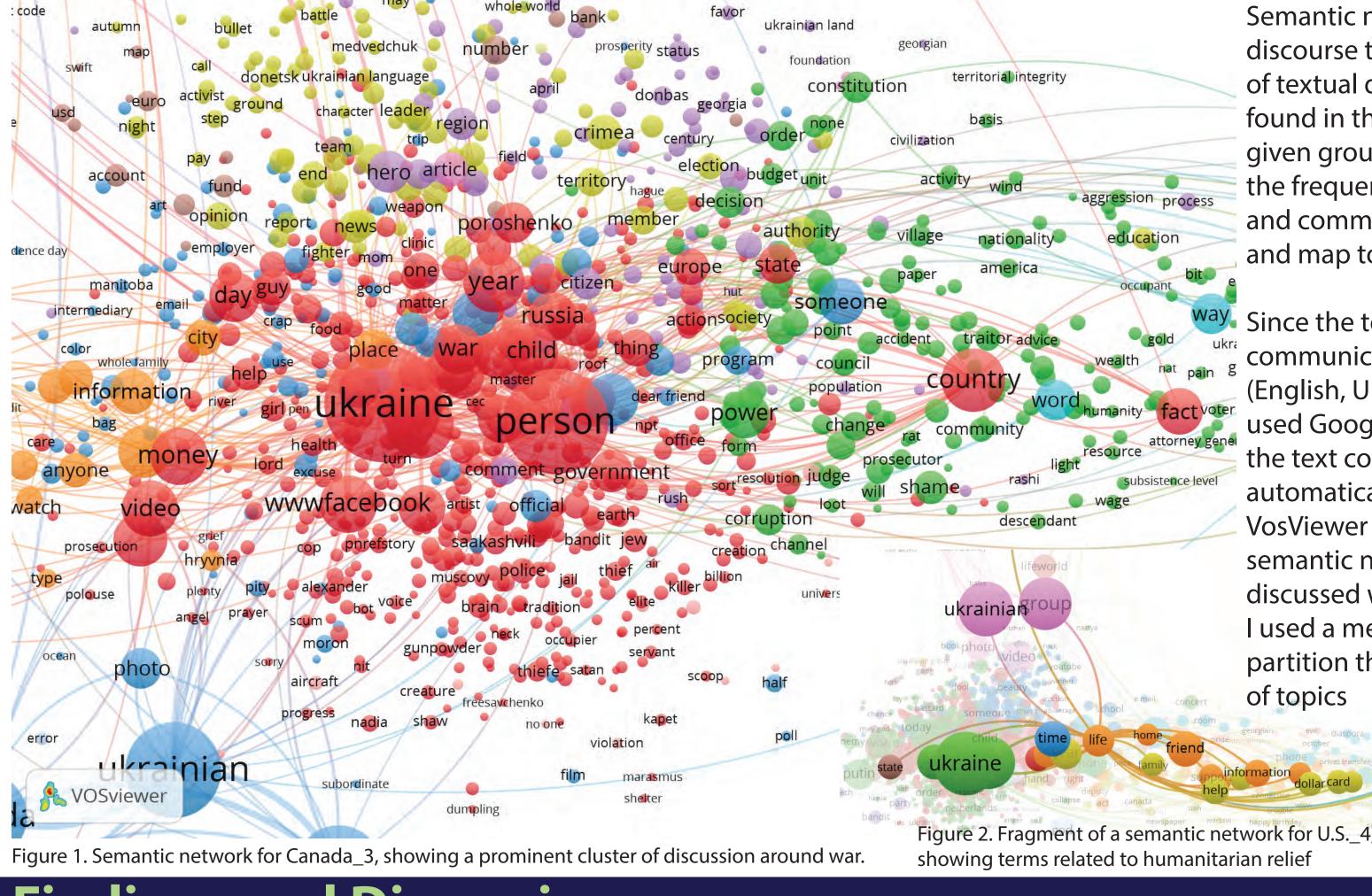
Table 1. Sample descriptives						
Group Name	Members	Posts				
Canada_1	4,498	4,486				
Canada_2	529	1,161				
Canada_3	5,917	4,530				
Canada_4	4,886	9,700				
Canada_5	8,679	19,026				
_ U.S1	12,823	20,794				
U.S2	2,229	3,736				
U.S3	2,695	2,150				
U.S4	5,893	5,095				
U.S5	794	360				

			Clusters
Group Name	Nodes	Edges	(by modularity)
Canada_1	1,225	60,839	8
Canada_2	507	23,356	5
Canada_3	1,456	129,948	6
Canada_4	2,839	307,335	7
Canada_5	3,850	461,891	8
U.S1	3,925	390,826	7
U.S2	1,220	77,139	5
U.S3	592	24,354	3
U.S4	1,607	114,194	5
U.S5	109	1,292	4

Table 3 Semantic network naramete

Table 3. Semantic network parameters.							
		Average					
	Group Name	Average	weighted	Modularity			
		degree	degree	(fast greedy)			
	Canada_1	99.33	141.51	0.15			
	Canada_2	46.07	66.78	0.17			
_	Canada_3	89.25	141.65	0.24			
	Canada_4	108.25	166.05	0.13			
	Canada_5	119.97	199.81	0.18			
	U.S1	99.57	159.08	0.16			
	U.S2	63.23	90.58	0.17			
	U.S3	41.39	56.82	0.25			
	U.S4	71.06	134.33	0.29			
	U.S5	11.85	16.58	0.24			

## **Semantic Networks**



Semantic networks are graphic representations of online discourse that allow to extract meaning from large volumes of textual data. In these maps, nodes represent the nouns found in the text corpus extracted from posts within a given group over the studied period. Edge weight indicates the frequency of co-occurrence of two terms in users' posts and comments. This approach to text mining allows to detect and map topics - clusters of terms that co-occur in a conversation

Since the ten groups in the sample communicated in three languages (English, Ukrainian, and Russian), I used Google services to translate the text corpus into English language automatically. Next, I used VosViewer software to create semantic networks of the topics discussed within the groups. I used a measure of modularity to partition the network into clusters

Figure 3. Fragment of a semantic network for Canada\_5, showing terms related to political advocacy

Figure 4. Fragment of a semantic network for U.S.\_4, showing terms related to political advocacy

## **Findings and Discussion**

Theorizing diaspora formations in contemporary platform-mediated contexts led to the emergence of new methodological approaches that combine computational and ethnographic methods to fully capture the dynamic nature of a diaspora community. Borrowing from ethnographic research, I viewed these semantic networks as "mattering maps" - discursive constructs that have the affective potential to move people to action. Starting from terms with the highest degree centrality, I analyzed each cluster, finding messages with indicated terms in the dataset to validate two sets of behaviors: transnational political advocacy for the homeland, and efforts at direct humanitarian activism.

I find that feelings of concern for affected populations were the strongest driver of relief among the Ukrainian diasporas. I also find that the contexts of diasporic engagement in humanitarian relief differed across two samples: while Canadian diasporas engegd in direct humanitarian relief via trusted people and community organizations, American Ukrainians demonstrated broader contexts of such engagement: from helping individual veterans and orphans, to working with trusted community organizations in the U.S., as well as in Ukraine. Moreover, American Ukrainians were found to be raising funds for a variety of social causes. These findings add to the literature on diasporic mobilization by showing that social media facilitate diasporic activistby reinforcing horizontal ties between diaspora members and affected communities. This 'horizontal' connectivity enables grassroots actors to supply military and humanitarian relief to their homeland directly, bypassing institutional brokers.