Investigating the landscape of the Russia-Ukraine conflict on YouTube
How YouTube Mediates Current Events

Project Introduction

On 24 February, 2022, Vladimir Putin launched an unprovoked invasion of Ukraine that devastated the country, isolated Russia further from the west and fueled economic insecurity around the world. Much criticism has been levied upon western media's portrayal of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Russia has avoided calling the conflict anything other than a 'special military operation'. Subsequently, efforts to retain an accurate representation of the Russia-Ukraine conflict were made by YouTube, wherein the platform removed 70,000 videos and 9,000 channels which trivialised the war. This project seeks to understand how the conflicting narratives on the Russia-Ukraine conflict come together in the information landscape that exists on YouTube.

Two datasets were generated for this project from YouTube Data Tools using the keywords 'Ukraine War' and 'Ukraine Military Operation'. Russian authorities and news outlets have avoided using the term "war" when describing this conflict. Therefore, the keyword 'Ukraine Military Operation' was chosen. Meanwhile, the keyword 'Ukraine War' was chosen to study a more general narrative on the conflict.

Main Research Question

What does the information landscape in the Russian-Ukraine conflict look like on YouTube?

Sub-questions

Which kind of content circulates in the information landscape around the Russia-Ukraine conflict?

Who are the actors contributing to this information landscape?

Are there temporal dynamics to both the contents and the actors?

Key Findings

1 Video List

6,578 vs 2,667
'Ukraine War'   'Ukraine Military Operation'

Russia Takes Censorship to New Extremes, Stifling War Coverage

Contradicting the ... it a war — is now ... close, and Russia ... news sources.

YouTube removes more than 9,000 channels relating to Ukraine war

Exclusive: Platform takes 'unprecedented action' to address content guideline violations since invasion

● Russia-Ukraine war: latest updates

The stark difference between the videos generated for 'Ukraine War' vs 'Ukraine Military Operation' coincides with YouTube's removal of channels and videos that were misleadingly spreading pro-Russia propaganda.
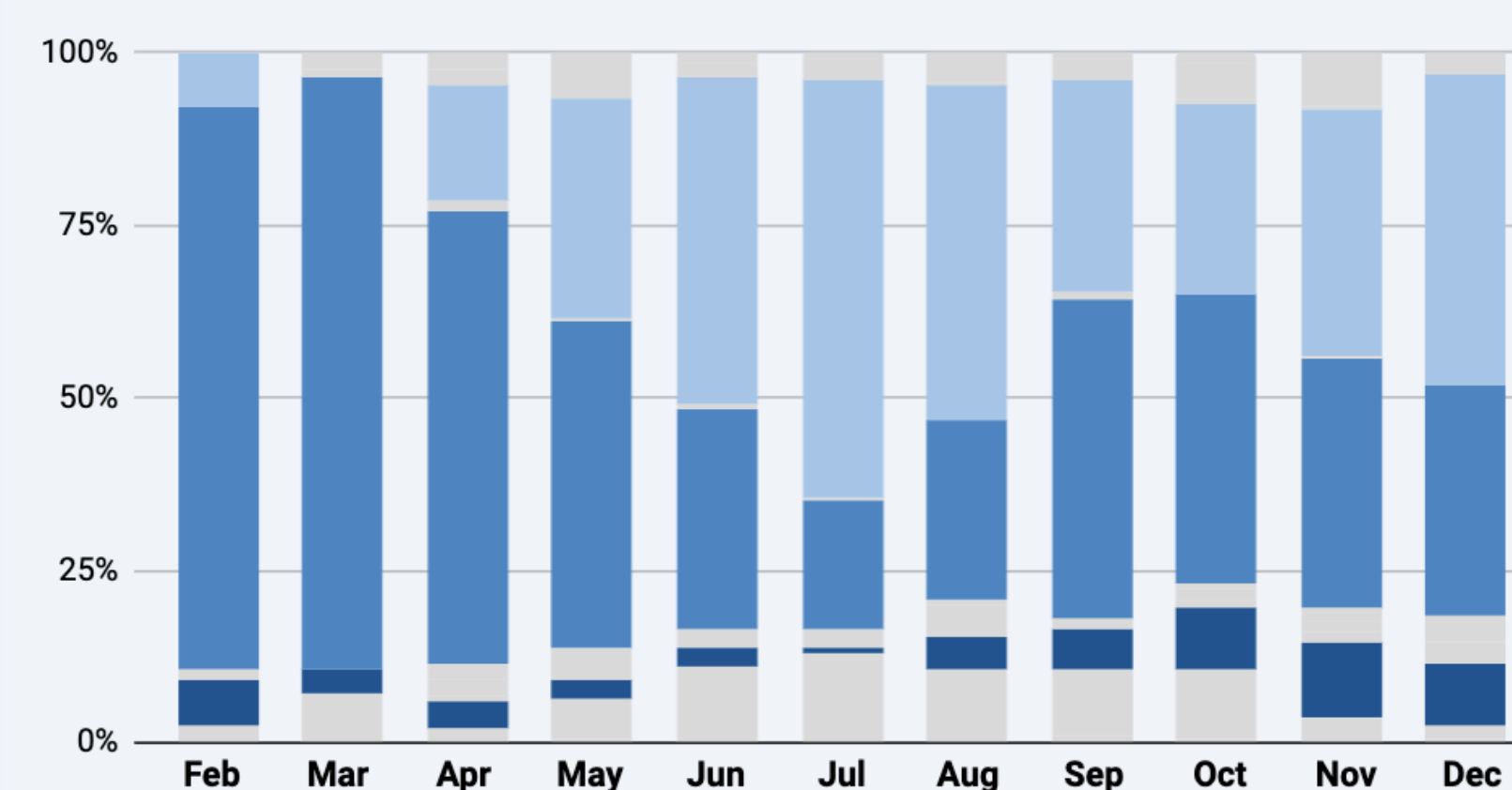
2 Video Category

Category Share per Month for "Ukraine War" Videos

Category Share per Month for "Ukraine Military Operation" videos

■ News & Politics ■ Entertainment ■ People & Blogs
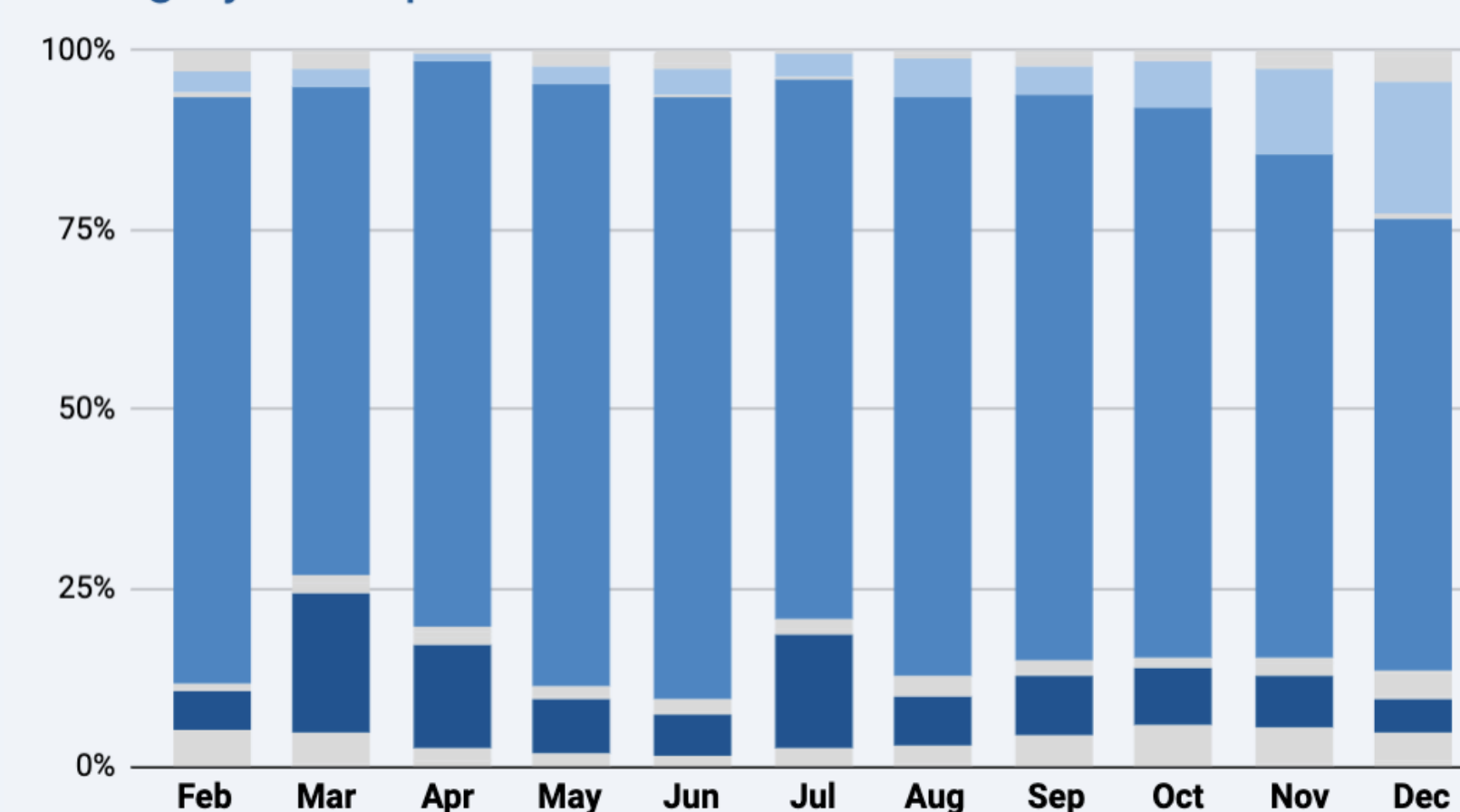
'Ukraine War' is predominantly covered by verified new media outlets and the category share remained steady over time.

'Ukraine Military Operation' largely depicts the opinions of individuals. This is likely a result of YouTube's removal of channels and videos, along with their ban on channels associated with Russian state media.
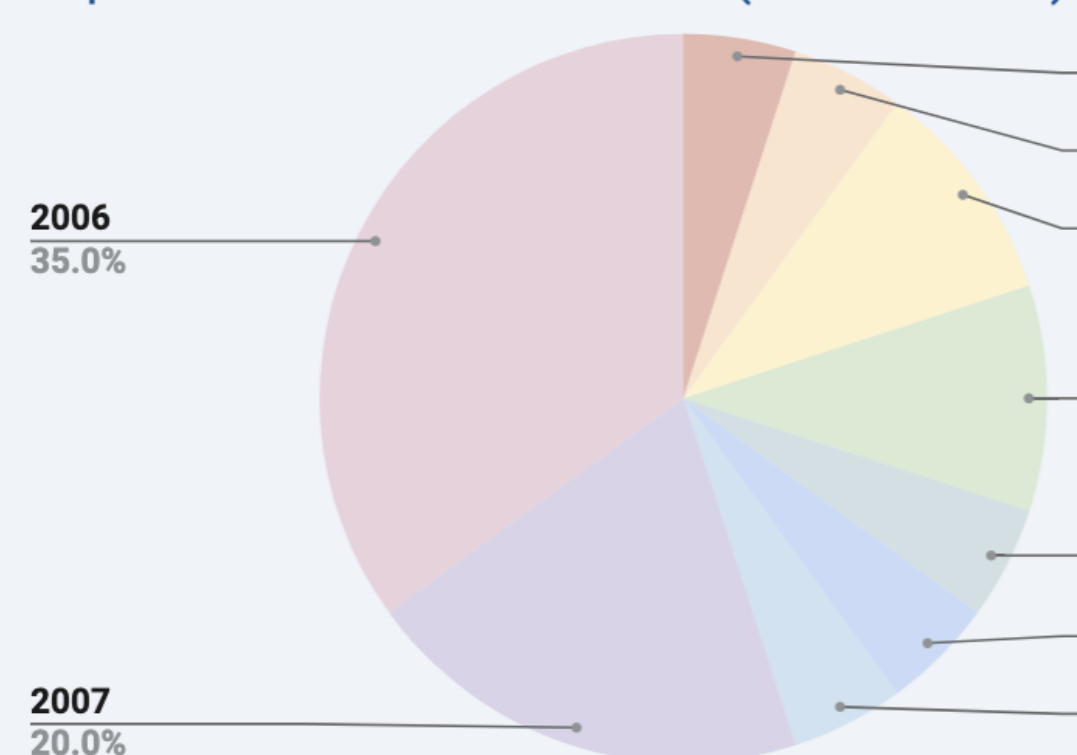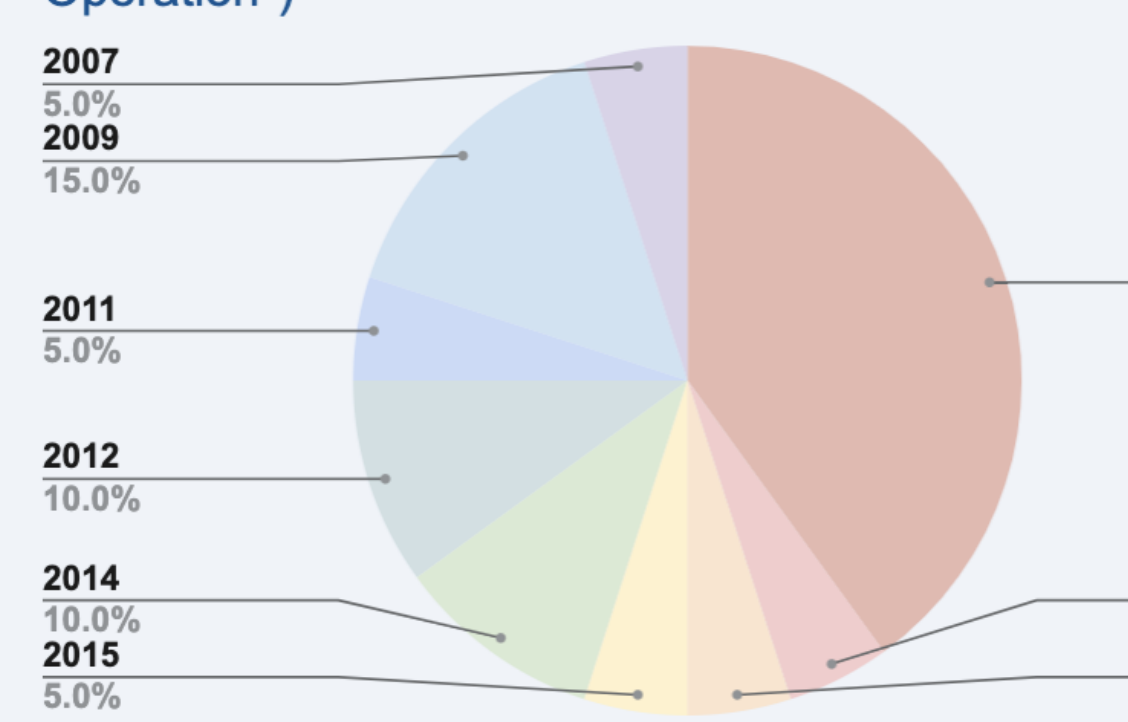
3 Key Actors

'Ukraine War'
- sky news @Sky News
- NEWS18 इंडिया @News18 India
- @WION

'Ukraine Military Operation'
- M @Mikhail SeeIDEREY
- @上帝之灵 God Knows / The Truth
- @vladb41

Top 20 Channel Published Year ("Ukraine War")

2022 5.0%, 2018 5.0%, 2016 10.0%, 2015 10.0%, 2012 5.0%, 2009 5.0%, 2008 5.0%, 2007 20.0%, 2006 35.0%

Top 20 Channel Published Year ("Ukraine Military Operation")

2007 5.0%, 2009 15.0%, 2011 5.0%, 2012 10.0%, 2014 10.0%, 2015 5.0%, 2022 40.0%, 2021 5.0%, 2020 5.0%

The channels for 'Ukraine War' were predominantly news media outlets, whereas for 'Ukraine Military Operation' they were largely individual accounts. This could further display the effect of YouTube's removal of channels falsely spreading pro-Russia propaganda. Moreover, this could also explain the younger channel age for 'Ukraine Military Operation'.

4 Video Network
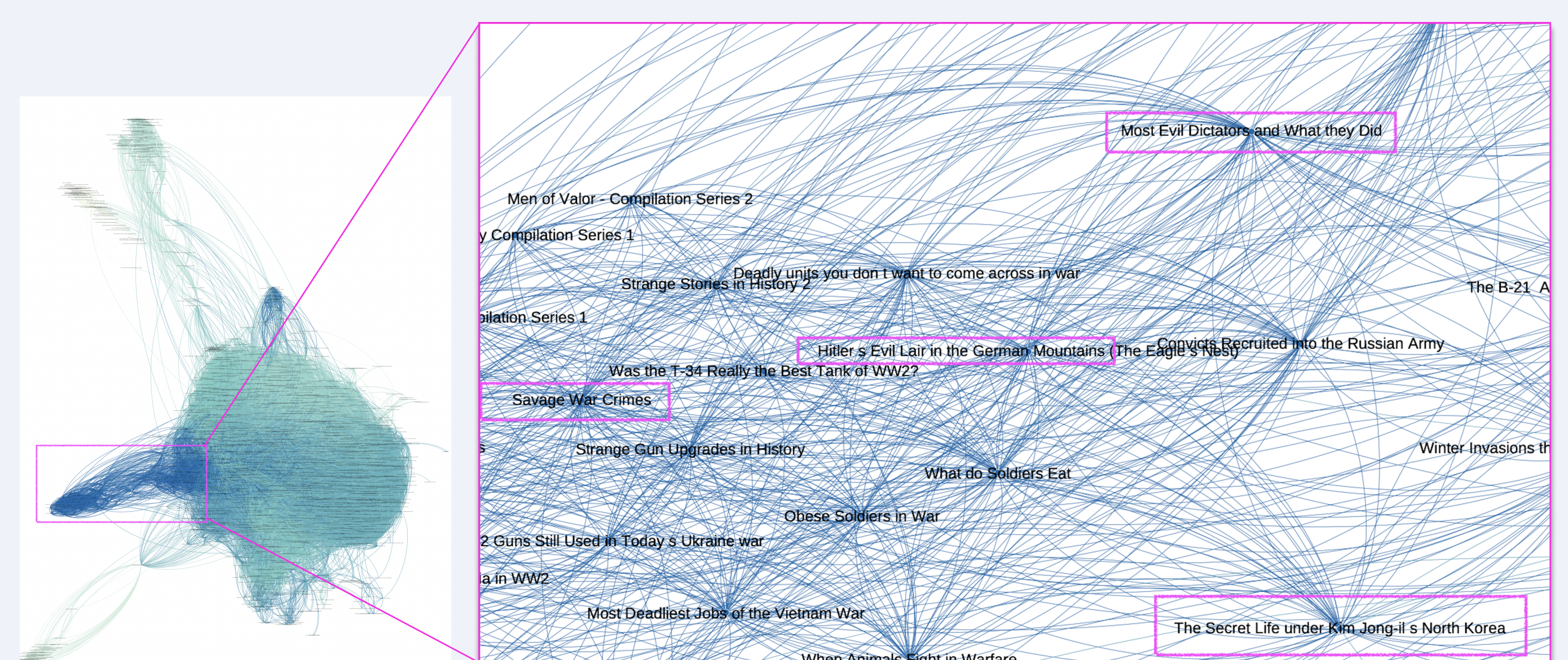
The current visualisation of the video network for 'Ukraine War' displays a large cluster of co-watched videos that were on dictators and war crimes. This cluster also displayed a need for more information wherein people were trying to educate themselves via other historical events. However, such a cluster was entirely absent in the 'Ukraine Military Operation' video network. The sentiment of the video network was largely neutral and had no connotations to war crimes or dictators.

Participants
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