Unexpected pushback among apparent allies: how transmedia activism can become transmedia war

By Wendela Waller, 6 November 2026

Introduction

Shortly after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, a community-driven, grassroots initiative emerged in The Netherlands. An informal network of women professionally involved in the energy transition, the Powervrouwen Netwerk, shared a sense of indignation regarding the Dutch government's persistence in importing natural gas from Russia. They found it intolerable that financial flows to the Russian war chest continued. They also felt appalled that the Dutch government actually lowered taxes on gasoline in response of the rising energy prices due to the geopolitical tensions. Because this did not help people who had already been struggling to pay their energy bills, and meanwhile, climate change was worsening.

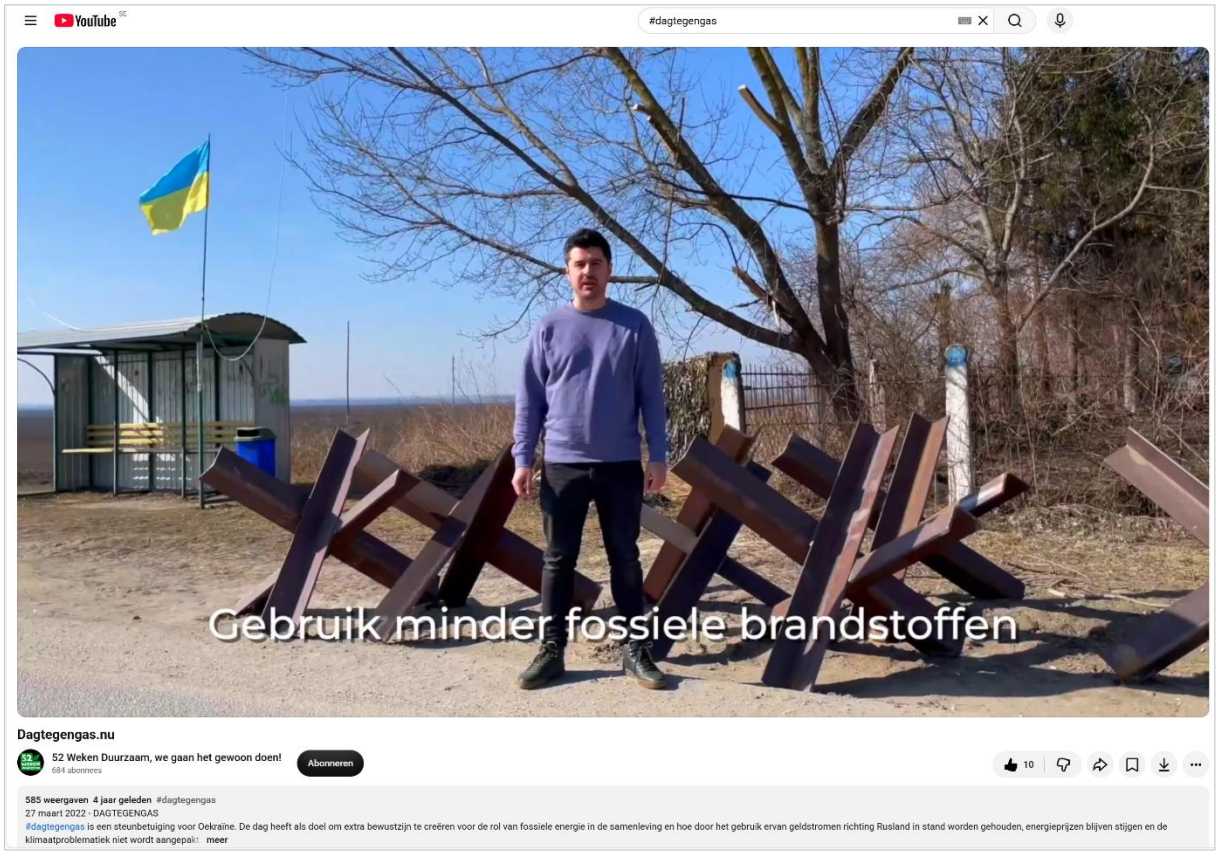
Driven by this shared sense of urgency, they joined forces to launch an initiative. They aimed to mobilize the public toward immediate natural gas reduction, using this tangible action to raise awareness about both the immediate crises and the long-term consequences of fossil fuel usage. In just a few weeks, they designed a nudge campaign that encouraged the public nationwide to participate on a designated day, March 27, and reduce their energy consumption radically (whether in solidarity with Ukraine, to lower energy bills, or to combat climate change, depending on what resonated most with the recipient). By narrating these different perspectives and diverse motivations to save energy, they lined up the messages with relevant target audiences and fitting media platforms, around the shared call for action.

The campaign was called *Dag Tegen Gas* and used the hashtag #dagtegengas. In Dutch, natural gas is just called "gas." It is used broadly in the Dutch built environment to heat homes, it also provides high-temperature heat for industry in the Netherlands, and the country uses gas-fired power plants that generate electricity. Literally, *Dag Tegen Gas* means "day against gas," but this title could be interpreted in various ways. The first word, *dag*, can also be translated as the farewell greeting "bye," thus it could also mean "(say) bye to gas." Simultaneously, the term *tegengas*, written as a single word without a space, carries the meaning of "pushback" or "resistance."

The campaign kicked off with a video the initiators had asked a Ukrainian individual to make (see Figure 1), who edited the footage while staying in a bomb shelter. At that stage, there was no formal campaign strategy, just a small group of highly motivated women who wanted to take action. Especially after getting in contact with the videographer Vitalii Pokusa, hearing the air-raid siren go off in real time during a video call with him, and seeing his video.

Figure 1

Screenshot from the campaign launch video



Note. Screenshot of the launch video recorded in Ukraine for Dag Tegen Gas. Illustrating an emergent pattern of cross-platform expansion, the clip escaped centralized distribution when it was independently embraced and hosted on YouTube by 52 Weken Duurzaam (2022).

With no budget, the project was executed entirely pro bono. Everyone involved contributed their knowledge, networks, and communication reach to the initiative, driven by enthusiasm for the campaign, experience with specific media platforms, or access to extensive professional networks, which led to a rather unstructured release of a wide variety of additional material on different platforms.

While the campaign was gaining momentum, and began to rally supporters into action, the appellation provoked unexpected resistance. Fellow energy transition specialists criticized the pay-off, interpreting its takeaway as opposing natural gas in general. This framing conflict is

clearly illustrated in an exchange with Royal VEMW, the primary advocacy group for energy-intensive industries in the Netherlands. When asked whether VEMW would encourage its members to show solidarity by saving energy on the day of action, the chair of the board declined, stating: "We fully support the call to save as much energy as possible, both for the sake of the climate and in light of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. However, we have reservations about the slogan #dagtegenhetgas. In our view, this phrase is too narrow and overly simplistic. [...] The nuance is lost when you opt for an activist slogan like the one you have chosen. In short, we cannot support this call as it stands" (G. Lankhorst, personal communication, March 21, 2022; translated from Dutch). Notably, in his response, Lankhorst altered the campaign hashtag, writing #dagtegenhetgas ("day against the gas") instead of the actual #dagtegengas. By inserting the definite article *het* ("the"), the slogan was rephrased from a multi-interpretable call for energy reduction into an explicit, anti-gas stance. This shift in wording strengthened the organization's justification for withholding support, illustrating how framing can be contested and rewritten by key industry stakeholders.

Other critics challenged the tangible outcomes of the campaign. For instance, energy transition expert Martien Visser (2022) publicly questioned the effectiveness of the initiative on Twitter, once the day of action was over. He supported his critique with a comparative chart showing that national gas consumption across two meteorologically similar Sundays was virtually identical. Accompanying the visual data, Visser observed (translated from Dutch): "I'm afraid the first Dutch #dagtegengas had no measurable impact on Dutch gas demand that Sunday. This goes to show, once again, that few things are as difficult as changing behavior." By presenting empirical consumption metrics against the campaign's symbolic call to action, Visser reframed the narrative from one of collective civic mobilization to a demonstration of the structural difficulty of behavioral energy reduction.

These competing interpretations created a paradox, which meant that actors with presumably similar goals ended up opposing it. You could described this as a *transmedia war*, understood here metaphorically, as a struggle over meaning and interpretation of a narrative, that played out across media channels and among actors who might otherwise be expected to share common goals.

This paper examines the *Dag Tegen Gas* campaign, the key concepts of transmedia storytelling that fit this case, and the plot twist that paved the way to characterize it as transmedia war.

Theoretical framework

A civic initiative like *Dag Tegen Gas* is best defined as *transmedia activism* or *transmedia mobilization*, where organizers deploy multiple platforms to raise awareness, drive engagement, and mobilize collective action (Gambarato et al., 2020). As Jenkins (2016, as cited in Gambarato et al., 2020) notes, transmedia mobilization integrates online and offline media to share a social agenda, bridging public engagement with civic advocacy.

Multiplatform participation in transmedia activism is driven by cultural attractors and activators (Gambarato et al., 2020; Jenkins, 2006). A *cultural attractor* acts as the central hook drawing diverse participants around a shared issue, whereas a *cultural activator* provides specific prompts or calls to action that motivate participants to co-create and expand content across platforms. Working together, the attractor gathers a community around a shared topic, while the activator equips participants with concrete tools to drive the initiative forward across media networks.

When an activist storyline originates without a formal blueprint and disseminates tactically and horizontally through participant action, it follows an emergent transmedia trajectory (Moloney, 2020). In *emergent transmedia*, the storyworld unfolds organically as independent stakeholders make spontaneous contributions across platforms, co-creating meaning and momentum in real time through horizontal tactics without a top-down masterplan (Gambarato et al., 2020).

Decentralized dissemination, however, leaves a narrative vulnerable to reframing and shift in meaning. When a message escapes centralized control and becomes contested, reframed, or fragmented by external public or professional interests, it transitions into a *feral transmedia* process (Moloney, 2020).

Methodology of this analysis

This paper draws on the transmedia design analytical and operational model (Gambarato et al., 2020), which provides a structured framework for analyzing the *Dag Tegen Gas* campaign. Of the model's five core dimensions, Story, Premise, Extensions, Audience, and Structure, three are selected to guide this analysis.

The *Premise* dimension establishes a transmedia project's fundamental goal, core message, context, and purpose, determining whether its primary objective is to entertain, inform, educate, persuade, or activate (Gambarato et al., 2020). *Extensions* covers the specific media platforms, narrative forms, and visual aesthetics used to unfold the storyworld across

interconnected channels (Gambarato et al., 2020). And the *Audience* dimension scopes target groups, participant roles, mechanisms of interaction, as well as cultural attractors and activators that mobilize engagement (Gambarato et al., 2020; Jenkins, 2006).

Analysis of the case

1. Premise

Analyzed through Gambarato et al.'s (2020) Premise dimension, *Dag Tegen Gas* was a nonfictional, activist initiative to persuade citizens, companies, and policy-makers to achieve immediate natural gas savings on March 27, 2022. This premise was operationalized through the slogan and hashtag #dagtegengas, which served as a clear statement of purpose and primary call to action. However, as energy transition professionals questioned the practical feasibility of this payoff (exemplified by Royal VEMW criticizing the slogan's simplicity), the hashtag shifted into the focal point of a public debate over underlying assumptions and alleged dogmatism.

2. Extensions

Under the Extensions dimension, media assets expanded organically through an emergent trajectory (Moloney, 2020). The campaign was anchored by a primary launch video recorded in Ukraine (see Figure 1). Rather than achieving mass virality, the video functioned as an internal mobilization tool that consolidated a core group of initiators. To support dissemination, a central digital hub was established at dagtegengas.nu (Dagtegengas.nu, 2022) to distribute digital media kits and provide entry points for both the public and journalists. Dissemination subsequently shifted into a decentralized model where stakeholders deployed platforms based on their individual competencies and networks. Team members managed distinct social channels tailored to specific audiences: LinkedIn engaged energy transition professionals, Twitter/X built awareness and shared energy-saving tips via #dagtegengas, and Instagram fostered visual public engagement. Concurrently, team members engaged key opinion leaders and civil society foundations focused on energy poverty and sustainability to amplify the message. This decentralized extension strategy allowed independent organizations to retain creative autonomy while driving autonomous real-world actions, such as local foundations distributing insulation materials to vulnerable households. Ultimately, these diverse, platform-specific approaches were consistently unified by the underlying premise: the hashtag #dagtegengas and the single-day payoff of March 27, 2022.

3. Audience

Participation in *Dag Tegen Gas* was driven by dual theoretical mechanisms (Gambarato et al., 2020; Jenkins, 2006). The shared geopolitical, economic, and ecological urgency of reducing natural gas dependency served as the cultural attractor, drawing together citizens, civil society groups, press, and policy-makers around a unifying cause. And the slogan and hashtag #dagtegengas, the launch video, and concrete calls to action (such as lowering thermostats or installing insulation material) operated as cultural activators, equipping diverse groups with actionable prompts to participate across platforms.

The campaign initially developed through an emergent trajectory (Moloney, 2020), as engagement moved beyond passive media consumption into active co-creation. Grassroots partners re-hosted campaign materials, while civil society organizations organized local energy-saving events. Crucially, this mobilization sought to demonstrate that public demand for energy reduction was driven by aligned geopolitical and economic motives. This bottom-up signaling achieved direct political resonance when the initiative was formally debated in the Dutch House of Representatives, where Members of Parliament successfully called on the Minister to support the campaign. This demonstrated how an emergent audience can actively expand a storyworld horizontally across both public and parliamentary spheres.

However, as momentum grew, the campaign underwent a transition into a feral transmedia process (Moloney, 2020). Once the message escaped centralized control, external actors and sector professionals emerged as active agents. Critics challenged the practical feasibility of the core payoff (exemplified by Visser's Twitter critique of national gas demand), reframing #dagtegengas from a unifying climate prompt into a contested debate over energy policy.

Conclusion

This paper examined the *Dag Tegen Gas* campaign using Gambarato et al.'s (2020) operational model, alongside the concepts of emergent and feral transmedia (Moloney, 2020) and participatory convergence (Jenkins, 2006). By analyzing the campaign across the Premise, Extensions, and Audience dimensions, this study provides key insights into the dynamics of nonfictional, activist transmedia initiatives.

Synthesizing these three dimensions reveals the inherent realities of decentralized transmedia activism. First, under the Premise dimension, the analysis demonstrates that open activist premises cannot be tightly controlled by creators; once released into the public sphere, external stakeholders can re-interpret and challenge the core message. Second, under Extensions, an emergent media strategy can successfully bridge digital storytelling with

tangible offline civic action, enabling independent foundations to deploy platform-specific channels without a top-down masterplan. Third, evaluating Audience dynamics illustrates the shift from emergent co-creation to feral contestation. When a campaign escapes centralized control, audiences cease to be passive recipients and emerge as active agents who challenge, reshape, and redirect the overarching storyworld.

Ultimately, evaluating whether *Dag Tegen Gas* achieved its goals depends on how success is measured. In terms of civic mobilization and reach, the campaign was effective: it activated a diverse coalition, generated widespread media visibility, and prompted real-world energy savings. In terms of institutional reach and political efficacy, the campaign was demonstrably successful: it penetrated parliamentary discourse, prompted Members of Parliament to call for official action, and secured formal ministerial support. In terms of narrative consensus, however, the central payoff encountered significant friction. Rather than marking a design failure, this duality reflects the reality of modern transmedia activism: success is defined not by maintaining strict narrative control, but by the capacity to spark broad civic engagement, activate physical participation, and provoke meaningful democratic debate.

References

52 Weken Duurzaam. (2022, March 25). Dagtegengas.nu [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iCZzLIf2ZRU

Dagtegengas.nu. (2022, March 24). Dagtegengas.nu [Archived webpage]. Internet Archive Wayback Machine. https://web.archive.org/web/20220324234943/https://www.dagtegengas.nu/

Gambarato, R. R., Alzamora, G. C., & Tárcia, L. (2020). Theory, development, and strategy in transmedia storytelling. Routledge.

Jenkins, H. (2006). Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide. New York University Press.

Moloney, K. (2020). All the news that's fit to push: The New York Times Company and transmedia daily news. International Journal of Communication, 14, 4683–4702.

Visser, M. [@BM_Visser]. (2022, March 29). Ik vrees dat de eerste Nederlandse #dagtegengas afgelopen zondag nog geen meetbaar effect had op de Nederlandse gasvraag [I'm afraid the first Dutch #dagtegengas had no measurable impact on Dutch gas demand that Sunday] [Graph attached] [Tweet]. Twitter. https://x.com/BM_Visser/status/1508696708888342528