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ДОСЛІДНИЦЬКІ СТАТТІ

Comparative analysis of representation of IDPs and refugees in regional media of the Eastern region of Ukraine in regional media in February 2017 and 2023*

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ABSTRACT

The article presents a comparative analysis of two media content studies with the use of media monitoring in covering the topic of internally displaced persons (IDPs). The comparative analysis covers the results of monitoring conducted in February 2017 – 2023 in the Eastern regions of Ukraine. Both studies involved quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative with the use of content analysis, qualitative – with the use of expert analysis.

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* Based on the results of the projects “Voice of regional media: coverage of conflicts regarding IDPs (internally displaced persons) in regional media of Ukraine” and “Representation of IDPs and refugees in regional media of Ukraine”.

АНОТАЦІЯ

У статті подано порівняльний аналіз результатів двох досліджень медіа контенту за допомогою моніторингу медіа на тему представлення тематики внутрішньо переміщених осіб (ВПО). Порівняльний аналіз охоплює результати моніторингу, проведеного у лютому 2017-го та 2023-го року у Східних регіонах України. Обидва дослідження передбачали проведення кількісного та якісного дослідження. Кількісного за допомогою контент-аналізу, якісного – за допомогою методу експертного аналізу.

КЛЮЧОВІ СЛОВА: моніторинг, контент-аналіз, експертний аналіз, внутрішньо переміщені особи, медіаконтент, теми моніторингу, суб'єкти моніторингу.

Introduction

After the end of the Second World War, the rise of the world economy led to the stimulation of new, completely peaceful directions of scientific research. In particular, from the second half of the 20th century, media monitoring began to be considered as a means of studying the mass media content.

Monitoring studies in the former USSR and in the West developed in different directions and had different goals. Communist ideologues needed, first of all, a means of measuring the ideological charge and direction of the media.

In Western scientific schools, content analysis was considered in the context of marketing research and social psychology.

As for the Ukrainian scientific monitoring school, after gaining independence, the methods of content analysis and expert analysis were most often used during election campaigns. In particular, with the aim of ascertaining the sympathies of the media, their involvement and the use of manipulative technologies.

In the West, among the first researchers was B. Berelson. In particular, this scientist studied content analysis in the field of application as a method of social psychology (Berelson, 1952^a). And as a means of studying the quality of content (Berelson, 1952^b, 20).

In Ukraine, the most active research and application of monitoring methods began on the eve and immediately after gaining independence. In 1991, a manual by V.V. Lyzanchuk was published. and O.D. Kuznetsova “Methods of collecting and recording information in journalism” (Lyzanchuk & Kuznetsova, 1991).

At the turn of the millennium and the turn of the century, a group of political technologists launched their activities in the administration of President Leonid Kuchma. They sent journalists detailed recommendations on the coverage of social and political events, which were called “temnyky”, so called “topic agendas”. In response, the Ukrainian opposition, media experts and public activists began to conduct various studies on media monitoring to detect various pro-government manipulations (Chekmyshev, 2001^a, 38–45); (Chekmyshev, 2001^b, 37–44); (Chekmyshev, 2001^c, 19–22); (Chekmyshev, 2006, 67–74).

As an example, we can mention the initiative of such experts as V.F. Ivanov N.L. Ligachova, O.M. Chernenko, and S.A. Datsyuk. In 2003, they conducted a study of several Ukrainian TV channels (Ligachova, N., Chernenko, S., Ivanov, V., & Datsiuk, S., 2003). In the same year, the textbook “Sociology of Mass Communication” by V.F. Ivanov was published (Ivanov, 2003), and his monograph on content analysis co-authored with N.V. Kostenko (Kostenko & Ivanov, 2003). Besides, in 2003, the leading Ukrainian theoretician of mass communication V.V. Rizun. published his intelligence on the methods of detecting manipulations in the collection of lectures “Masses” (Rizun, 2003, 94).

The collective monograph “Monitoring and information modeling of mass media” can also be mentioned as an example of systematic research. The authors are Volodymyr Rizun, Valery Ivanov, Natalya Shumarova, Oleksandr Chekmyshev, and others (Rizun et al., 2007).

Method

Based on the above theoretical foundations and specific examples of monitoring studies, this publication aims to compare the results of two studies on the representation of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees in the regional media of the Eastern region of Ukraine in February 2017 and 2023.

The project “Voice of the regional media: coverage of conflicts regarding IDPs in the regional media of Ukraine” was carried out in 2015-2017. It was financed by the European Union and was implemented by a consortium under the leadership of the British Thomson Foundation, as well as such partners as the “European Center of Journalism” (Denmark), “Common Space” Association (Ukraine), “MEMO 98” (Slovakia) and “International Institute of Regional Media and Information (Ukraine).

The aim of that project was to minimize any potential conflicts regarding IDPs through balanced news coverage in the regional media and thereby help reduce tensions in society, particularly between IDPs and host communities. The project implementers planned to achieve this by strengthening the ability of regional mass media to respond to conflicts through increasing independence and quality of content, as well as by organizational strengthening of regional mass media, in particular by ensuring access to high-quality Internet in Ukraine and abroad.

The project involved the development of early response skills to problems related to potential conflicts using media monitoring and content quality assessment of regional media.

The methodology for monitoring coverage of IDPs was developed by the “Common Space” Association and “MEMO 98”. Based on it, trainers from the mentioned partner organizations represented by the author of this article Oleksandr Chekmyshev and Slovak trainer Rasto Kuzhel taught 65 regional analysts the technique of conducting quantitative and qualitative monitoring.

The methodology provided for the following monitoring subjects, which directly or indirectly relate only to the topic of IDPs:

- President
- Government (both individually and in person from each ministry)
- Political parties
- Regional executive power
- IDPs themselves
- Civil society Organizations
- Volunteers (including private and corporate business initiatives)
- International organizations
- Church

Topics and problems considered during the monitoring process:

- Housing
- Work
- Health
- Social adaptation and social life
- Volunteers
- Social tension
- Criminality
- “Fake” IDPs
- The role of the Church

Step-by-step content selection was carried out according to the following scheme:

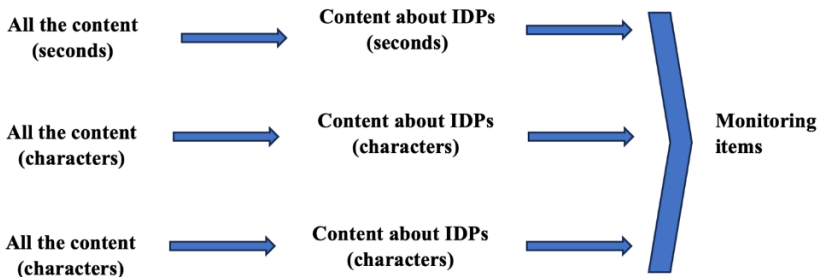


Figure 1. Content selection procedure.

The subject content was examined as follows:

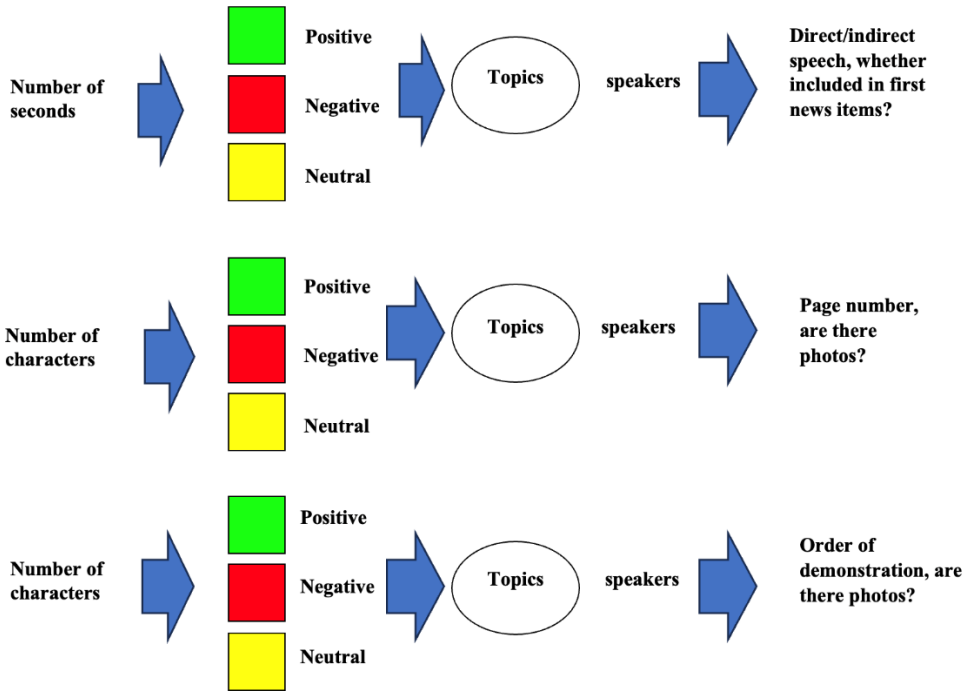


Figure 2. Content examining procedure.

Criteria for qualitative analysis were the following:

- Do the mass media verify the facts?
- Do journalists/media adhere to the principles of balance and avoid sensationalism when covering the problems of IDPs?
- Are there analytics, analysis of difficult and controversial moments, or does the media act reactively?
- Are “human stories” covered in order to “humanize” journalistic materials and lead to quality journalistic investigations?

- Problems are only identified, or do they stimulate public discussions to solve problems?
- Own or third-party content (news agencies, other media, Internet)?
- Does the media defend their position or provide balance and objectivity?
- Are there different sources of information (facts or positions)?
- Is there a critical attitude towards officials and their statements?
- Is the language and terminology regarding IDPs correct, not humiliating, without insults?
- Does the media know the difference between IDPs and refugees?
- Were there any important events that were kept silent (if so, say who did tell about it)?
- Were there different points of view, a wide range of them (not only extreme positions)?
- Have you noticed signs of bias or distortion of information?

In February 2017 and 2023, a monitoring study on the topic of IDPs was conducted using this methodology. The monitoring sample consisted of 204 media. The media in the regions were monitored within 4 groups:

- * East (controlled areas of Donetsk, Luhansk regions, as well as Kharkiv region);
- * North/Center (Sumy, Chernihiv, Zhytomyr, Vinnytsia, Dnipropetrovsk, Kirovohrad, Poltava, Cherkasy);
- * South (Odesa, Kherson, Zaporizhia, Mykolaiv, Autonomous Republic of Crimea);
- * West (Volyn, Zakarpattia, Ivano-Frankivsk, Lviv, Rivne, Ternopil, Khmelnytsky, Chernivtsi).

In 2022–2023, another monitoring project “Representation of IDPs and refugees in regional media of Ukraine” was a volunteer study of the “Common Space” Association, which was implemented in 2022–2023. The project involved monitoring a representative sample of media from the same regions whose media became the object of monitoring within the framework of the project in 2015–2017, with the exception of Crimea.

During monitoring within the project “Representation of IDPs and refugees in regional media of Ukraine” in 2022–2023, a methodology similar to the project “Voice of regional media: coverage of conflicts regarding IDPs (internally displaced persons)” was developed in 2015 by the Association “Common Space” and “MEMO 98”.

Results

- As during the comparative analysis of the monitoring results of 2016–2022, 2017 and 2023, it was found that in 2022–2023 there were significantly more materials about IDPs. This is partly explained by the scale: if in 2015–2017 every 15th Ukrainian was an IDP, then after the large-scale invasion every 5th Ukrainian became an IDP or foreign refugee.
- In 2017, materials on the topic of IDPs were also significantly less than in 2023.
- In 2017, informational rather than analytical method of materials presentation prevailed. I.e., there was a clear lack of stories with a more analytical and research approach.
- Compared to 2023, in 2017, journalists covered the current situation regarding IDPs, without forecasts and did not seek a long-term vision or deeper public discussion on how to specifically solve certain problems of IDPs.
- At the same time, the information materials of 2023 mentioned more examples of self-organization among the IDPs themselves, as well as the help of volunteers and host communities.
- In 2023, there were also significantly more materials dealing with foreign aid than in 2017.
- Compared to 2017, in 2023 local media provided more reference materials useful for IDPs.
- In 2023, regional media published significantly more human stories.
- The news of most media in 2017 did not show systematic attention to IDPs, in particular there were few problematic materials, while in 2023 there were more such materials.
- In 2017, there was also a lack of analytics, and in 2023 it was almost 30% of all materials on the topic of IDPs.

- In 2017, journalists reacted more passively to messages from local authorities, relaying them without verification. In 2023, local media became much more meticulous about official statements.
- Similarly, in 2017, local media actively reprinted the content of news agencies and capital media without any references. 2023 there were much less such materials.
- Monitoring of both transitions recorded the correct terminology regarding IDPs, there were no insults and examples of discrimination.
- Also, both in 2017 and 2023, local media avoided sensationalism when covering the topic of IDPs.
- In 2017 there were examples of imbalance, and in 2023 there were units of such materials.
- In 2017, for one reason or another, Eastern Ukrainian journalists failed to organize public forums at the local level, designed to help solve the problems of IDPs. In 2023, journalists and local media were much more successful in this matter.
- Examples of ordered materials were noticed in 2017. In 2023 they were absent.
- The specificity of the media landscape in the East during both periods led to the greatest activity of Internet media, compared to television and the press.

Quantitative analysis

The sample of mass media in the Eastern regions in 2017, compared to 2016, changed but remained representative. In 2017, it included 32 local media (3 local TV channels, 5 newspapers and 24 online media).

The 2023 sample also remained representative. The reason for the changes was the war, which radically affected the media landscape of several regions. To the greatest extent, this applies to the until recently controlled territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, as well as Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions.

Therefore, in 2023, the sample included 30 local mass media (3 local TV channels, 3 newspapers and 24 online media).

In both the 2017 and 2023 research phases, the main selection criteria were potential impact and ranking. Both research periods are special in that both samples included primarily online media. The reason is obvious - for many Ukrainians in the occupied territories, they have become the only source of information. It should also be considered that many traditional media have ceased to exist since 2014. The others have been under control of the so-called LNR/DNR militants since 2014, laboratory workers.

During monitoring in 2017, experts found out that the topic of IDPs in the media in the East was presented at the level of 2.9%.

In 2023, probably due to the rapid increase in the scale of the tragedy, attention to the topic of IDPs increased and reached 8.7%

TV channels

In 2017, television presented the topic of IDPs with a total of almost 2.5 hours of airtime. This is an average of 43 seconds of airtime every day for each TV channel sampled in this region.

In 2023, television presented the topic of IDPs more actively in absolute terms – a total of 12.5 hours of airtime. This is an average of almost 4 minutes per channel every day.

Various topics were presented. 2017: social adaptation and life in the community (23.9%), housing (17.3%), charity (14%), “unreal” IDPs (13%), health care (12.7%). Topics such as business (5.2%), employment (1.5%) and state aid (0.7%) were covered much more passively.

2023: the thematic distribution was somewhat different: social adaptation and life in the community (22.7%), state assistance (18.7%), employment (15.5%), charity (14%), health care (12.7%), housing (10.3%), business (6.1%).

Among the subjects of monitoring in 2017, IDPs themselves were most actively represented (65.4% of the total volume, international organizations (10.8%), volunteers (10.7%), regional state administrations (9%), Such subjects as non-governmental organizations (3.4%) and volunteers (0.7%) were represented much more passively.

As for the tonality of the materials, during both monitoring studies, the TV channels presented the majority of the monitored subjects mostly neutrally and positively. Mentioning of monitoring subjects in a negative tone in 2016 was only addressed to IDPs and the government (4% and 8%, respectively).

Press

In 2017, Eastern newspapers presented the subject of IDPs with a total volume of 31.9 columns in A3 format. 2023 – 95.7 columns.

In 2017, newspapers most actively covered the topic of education (76.4%). Topics such as employment (12.2%) and state aid (8.5%) were presented more passively.

In 2023, such topics as social adaptation and life in the community (37.8%), employment (29.2%), education (14.4%), charity (14.2%), and state assistance (4.4%).

Among the subjects of monitoring in 2017, newspapers most actively informed about regional administrations (76.4%). The IDPs themselves and the government were represented at the level of 13.1% and 10.5%, respectively.

In 2023, IDPs themselves (52.4%), volunteers (26.4%), regional administrations (16.4%), and the government (4.8%) were most actively represented.

The tonality of the materials was mostly neutral and positive during both waves of research. In 2017, there was a small share of negativity regarding the IDPs themselves and regional state administrations.

Online media

In 2017, the Internet sites of the Eastern region presented the topic of IDPs with a total volume equivalent to more than 29 pages of A4 format. in 2023 – almost 89.

In 2017, online media most actively presented such topics as social adaptation and life in the community (61.8%), housing (5.5%), state assistance (3.7%), charity (3.6%), crime (3.3%), business (2.2%), employment (1.2%).

In 2023, slightly different topics were prioritized: topics such as social adaptation and life in the community (39.8%), employment (27.2%), education (16.4%), employment (12.2%) and state assistance (4.4%).

In 2017, such subjects as IDPs themselves (48.4%), non-governmental organizations (21.8%), the government (36.1%) and international organizations (9.9%) were most actively represented. Regional administrations (5.8%), political parties (0.4%) and volunteers (0.2%) were minimally represented.

In 2023, the distribution of attention to subjects was somewhat different: IDPs themselves (38.4%), volunteers (31.8%), the government (26.1%), and international organizations (3.7%) were most actively represented.

Qualitative analysis

In 2017, the topic of IDPs was covered sluggishly, and in 2023, it was noticeably more active. In 2017, Eastern media did not publish analytical materials devoted to the issue of IDPs. In 2023, there were more analytics.

In 2016, journalists did not have a critical attitude to official statements of the government and local authorities and rarely did proper fact-checking. Most of the news about the displaced people was based on official press releases. In most materials, journalists did not try to form a public forum at the local level, which could be aimed at solving the problems of IDPs in the region.

Instead, in 2013, a more critical attitude towards official information and statements of officials was felt. At the same time, there were specific cases when media activity contributed to solving specific problems of IDPs.

In 2017, the “campaign of checks on IDPs” launched by the state became a particularly painful topic (especially in Kharkiv region).

In 2017, all Donetsk mass media focused on the fact that IDPs cannot exercise their right to vote during local elections. In 2023, such topics were not discussed at all.

During both waves of the study, experts stated that the language and terminology regarding IDPs was mostly correct, not derogatory. At the same time, in 2017, seven cases of hate speech against IDPs were recorded, in particular, by law enforcement agencies, who, when mentioning the IDPs' region of origin, labelled IDPs criminals. In addition, some members of local communities have been critical of IDPs in connection with the so-called fake IDPs and "retirement tourists" (who travel from Luhansk and Donetsk regions to receive pension benefits, as well as those who are not interested in getting a job in new place of residence).

In 2023, monitoring of media content did not reveal such problems.

In 2017, monitoring experts recorded several cases when the term "refugees" or "false refugees" was used in relation to IDPs. During the 3rd wave, less such materials were recorded – about 3.2% of all content related to IDPs.

During both waves, monitoring experts note that, in general, journalists avoided sensationalism in covering the problems of IDPs. In Donetsk, the coverage of IDP issues can be considered balanced, the media presented different points of view and used various sources. No evidence of involvement or distortion of information or manipulation of information was observed. Videos, photos or graphics used in some posts represent the subject of IDPs and correspond to the topic of the post, reflecting the actual situation.

Also in 2017, monitoring experts recorded the appearance of individual publications that were submitted through human stories, in particular in Donetsk region, Luhansk region, and Poltava region. In 2023, there was much more such material.

As a positive fact discovered during both waves of monitoring, experts note the appearance of several materials initiated by international projects. (Media group "Objektiv" in the material on October 19 "Internship for Kharkiv rehabilitative doctors and treatment of immigrants in Prague"). Or: "Lens" on October 15. "A hobby that has become an income. What new professions are mastered by immigrants in Kharkiv Oblast". (Deputy helps refugees' kids to gain voice in the society, 26.02.2016).

In 2017, experts recorded a small number of examples of systematic coverage of IDPs. For example, a separate section of the "Island" site "Pereselenets". In 2023, there was more such material.

Conclusion

Despite the recorded examples of qualitative changes in the coverage of the subject of IDPs, recorded during the comparison between two waves of monitoring studies, the following recommendations can be made regarding the coverage of the subject of IDPs:

- Pay more attention to analytical materials and investigations.
- Avoid sensationalism, imbalance, and uncritical attitude of journalists to official information from local state administrations representatives.
- Pay more attention to specific "living stories" that illustrate both examples of successful co-existence of IDPs in local communities and their problems.
- Use correct IDP terminology.
- Prepare more materials about how IDPs fight for their rights.
- Conduct editorial leaflets and mini trainings on how to avoid using negative vocabulary, the terms "refugees", preventing violations of discrimination standards.
- Avoid custom materials.
- Form a public forum at the local level, which could be aimed at solving the problems of IDPs in the region.

Implementation of these recommendations will contribute to improving the quality of journalism and weakening potential sources of social tension through balanced coverage of events in regional media, in particular, as a result of weakening the level of social tension between internally displaced persons and the communities that host them.

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