
RESEARCH ARTICLES

Newsmakers and news sources in the “hybrid media system” (the case of the full-scale Russian invasion coverage)

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ABSTRACT

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The study aims to compare leading newsmakers' and news sources' usage in a professional mass media and a Telegram channel. The computer-assisted method of news processing was used. As a result, we discovered that audiences of both professional mass media and new media consume the same content in different forms, and they deal with mostly the same newsmakers, with more considerable attention towards personalities for the Telegram channel and with more quotes from other mass media and accurate references for the online mass media. Therefore, we concluded that the general observation about the coexistence of professional and new media, where the former publishes classic “hard” news and the latter entertains people with information, may be questioned.

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АНОТАЦІЯ

Мета дослідження – порівняльний комп’ютерний аналіз Української правди (одного з найстаріших, якісного і найбільш популярного онлайн масмедіа, що представляє професійні медіа) та України Сейчас (одного із найбільш популярних Телеграм-каналів, що представляє нові медіа). Визначалися та порівнювалися провідні ньюзмейкери та джерела новин, щоб зрозуміти специфіку виробництва новин за часів нової медіаекології або ж «гібридної медіа системи», де співіснують професійні та нові медіа. У дослідженні був використаний комп’ютерний аналіз збору новин (заголовків), ньюзмейкерів та джерел новин (мова Python). Для ідентифікації популярних ньюзмейкерів був створений словник найбільш популярних персоналій та організацій/інститутів. Для того, щоб визначити джерело новин, вживалися регулярні вислови, що відповідають найбільш типовим видам посилань у заголовках. В результаті було з’ясовано, що під час повномасштабного вторгнення аудиторії професійного та нового медіа споживають один і той самий контент у різних формах, вони зустрічаються майже із тими самими ньюзмейкерами та джерелами новин, використовуючи переважно надійні джерела. Телеграм-канал приділяє більше уваги персоналіям (Кім, Гайдай, Арестович, Подоляк), мережеве масмедіа – організаціям/інституціям – (Офіс президента, ОВА тощо). Для професійного ЗМІ також характерна більша кількість посилань на інші ЗМІ та достовірних посилань. Таким чином, ці аудиторії можуть бути фрагментованими, але за часів повномасштабного вторгнення одні й ті ж ньюзмейкери та джерела новин формують громадську думку. Зроблено висновки, що результати дослідження ставлять під питання загальні спостереження щодо співіснування професійних та нових медіа, де перші друкують класичні “hard” news/ «жорсткі» новини, а другі розважають людей із допомогою інформації (або ж інфотейнменту). У випадку України ми бачимо спільні підходи до виробництва новин як у нових, так і професійних медіа.

КЛЮЧОВІ СЛОВА: гібридна медіа система, онлайн мас медіа, нові медіа, Телеграм, Україна.

Introduction

The modern media environment is often characterized by A. Chadwic’s concept of a “hybrid media system” (2017), where traditional and new media “interconnect via social media” (Joyce & Cheng, 2022). In this contemporary media ecology, more and more new “communication platforms are coming into play, sometimes interacting with each other, sometimes in competition with each other” (Blach-Orsten, Eberholst, & Burkal, 2017, p. 9). Moreover, audiences use different media and narratives to follow the events and connect with different groups and identities while consuming news (Sumiala, Tikka, Huhtamäk, & Valaskivi, 2016).

However, how exactly did these older media and newer media produce news, especially in the case of Ukraine, during the full-scale invasion? Who are the leading newsmakers of their news texts? What about reliable sources? As we know, news gathering and dissemination traditions differ for professional media and new media – often prevalent, however, anonymous platforms, where the professional standards of journalism may be violated.

To address these questions, we conducted a comparative computer-assisted analysis of Ukrainian Pravda (UP – the oldest qualitative and the most read online media) and Ukrayina Seychas (US – one of the most popular Telegram channels) will be conducted.

UP is one of Ukraine’s oldest online mass media, founded in 2000. Ukrainian professional media organization – Institute of Mass Information – included UP in the “white list of mass media” (IMI, 2022), which means it publishes the content of high quality. According to Similarweb statistics, UP is in second place for popularity in Ukraine (category “News and Media Publishers”) with 61.8 million visits per month.

US was founded in October 2018, and according to Telegram statistics, the channel is the most popular in the category “News and Media” as the verified channel with 1.7 million subscribers.

The leading newsmakers and news sources will be defined and compared in order to understand the specifics of news production in the times of new media ecology.

News production in the reality of a “hybrid media system.”

First, let us differentiate the main changes in professional journalism.

1. *The number of journalistic texts increases dramatically.* News organizations publish more news than 10-15 years ago, 24/7. For instance, in 2005, UP produced 6254 news items; in 2021, five times more – 36535. Additionally, journalists deal with information overflow, the growing number of “daily news sources” (Liu, 2022), and “information pollution in the Internet environment” (Abdukaya, 2022). As a rule, the number of texts, which must be produced increases, and the number of professional journalists working with the texts decreases, as far as news organizations need to reduce staff to deal with financial hardships (see Davis, 2009).
2. *Journalists deal with “the rapid speed of communication”* (Caren, Andrews, & Lu, 2020, p. 444), *and new media are usually faster in the process of news generation.* Therefore, professional mass media should verify the information to see the whole picture with background and balance. However, for some new media, it is different from the rule. Here researchers are using the concept of the Twitter effect to describe the situation: now, posts from social media are the first source of information for journalists and their audiences (Bruno, 2011). As A. Mattoni and D. Ceccobelli say: “journalists are becoming followers rather than leaders of the news making process” (2018). Not gatekeepers, but gatewatchers, according to A. Bruns (2003): journalists do not decide what information should be given to mass audiences; however, they work as curators or librarians, gathering information and providing access to a variety of reliable, trustworthy sources with direct references in order to show a more complete, balanced, trustworthy picture.
3. *In professional media, the number of exclusive news declines, and journalists reprint information from many sources.* To produce more news in an environment where every citizen with a smartphone may be a news generator, journalists do not have time or other resources to get on the scene, look for his/her sources. That is why reprints dominate the news feeds. Furthermore, the more news items a news organization publishes, the more reprints a reader gets (Detector Media, 2015).
4. *News quality and trust in the news tend to decrease.* Ukrainian professional media organizations report a correlation between the number of reprints and balance and completeness standards violations. Some regional mass media (printed or online) may reprint press releases without any change or with minimal changes, thus in such cases, journalists do not look for alternative positions, do not check information in a press release, and do not include any context (see IMI and POID reports). Of course, it influences readers’ perceptions. According to a Digital news report, less than half of their respondents (42%) “trust most news most of the time” (Newman et al., 2022).
5. *There is no classical mass audience anymore; many digital audiences have replaced it.* This phenomenon is described within the “issue public” concept proposed by Dhavan and colleagues (Shah, Friedland, Wells, Kim, & Rojas, 2012). In their view, there is not a single audience, but many of them, and each audience is sporadically formed on the web to discuss and solve a specific issue that is personally important to every audience member. Of course, in such an environment, news content becomes “fragmented and personalized” (Han, 2020), or an effect of “echo-chamber” or “filter bubbles” may occur (Kitchens, Johnson, & Gray, 2020). In addition, audiences worldwide may be “more selectively exposed to the news, unmediated by editors and professional journalists, in ways that could also lead to less diversity and the reinforcement of prejudices” (Newman, Dutton, & Blank 2012). Researchers also report some threats here: in such an environment, various groups may be formed, for instance, right-wing media, facilitating the

circulation of propaganda, political radicalization (Caren, Andrews, & Lu, 2020, p. 445), the spread of disinformation, conspiracy theories (Pyrhonen & Bauvois, 2020).

6. *Attention towards the news decreases.* “Interest in news and overall news consumption has declined” internationally, and more and more people are avoiding the news (Newman et al., 2022). Speaking about political issues, R. Shroeder proposes a concept of “limited space of political attention,” where people are not ready to pay much attention to politics and news about the topic (2018). The same situation applies to news in highly competitive or high-choice media environment (Strömbäck, Djerf-Pierre, & Shehata, 2015). Nowadays, some traditions of news production (objectivity, professionalism, impartiality, fairness, credibility) are changing because of “the hybridization of news and entertainment media” (Edgerly & Vraga, 2019, p. 810). For instance, not the status of a newsmaker but his/her ability to attract attention is critical (see Goldhuber, 1999). Moreover, some new factors are essential: the shareability of news (Mattoni & Ceccobelli, 2018, p. 8), the virality of the content (Gustafsson, 2010), the potential number of retweets (Wells et al., 2010), clickability. In such an environment, new media usually are more successful in content spreading (Joyce & Cheng, 2022).

However, traditional mass media may not only suffer because of the challenges of the new media environment, but they also may use the potential of new media to cover some issues more deeply or to reach more audiences with the coverage. This was observed in Egypt during the Arab Spring when bloggers and members of civil society exploited different platforms to counter the fake official versions about the death of Khaled Said, who was brutally beaten by police. With the help of new digital instruments, “the coverage transferred the issue’s salience from new media into mainstream media, thus reaching wider non-politicized audiences” (Badr, 2021, p. 524). Additionally, some researchers argue that with user-generated content, it is possible to make coverage deeper and more diverse (Bruno, 2011), as far as “the newsmaking process is no longer the prerogative of a limited number of actors from the political, economic, and media elite” (Mattoni & Ceccobelli, 2018, p. 2). And “ordinary people, especially the underprivileged,” may be better represented in the news (Joyce & Cheng, 2022). Even the concept of the Internet as the fifth estate was proposed, where the web can “fill niches not being served by the traditional news media... or held the traditional press to account for their practices” (Newman, Dutton, & Blank 2012).

Thus, some researchers see professional mass media and new media as competitors and co-creators of new media ecology. Newer and older media may form some system where their functions are effectively distributed, as far as relations between them can be perceived “as both competitive and interdependent” (Joyce & Cheng, 2022). To this end, McCombs and Valenzuela proposed the concept of “intermedia agenda setting” (2020), where one media’s agenda may influence others’ agenda. Alternatively, some media may be better at spreading news, whereas others – are in packaging (Joyce & Cheng, 2022). Newman and colleagues discussed a “new ecology of news production and consumption,” where both professional mass media and new media “draw from and contribute to the strength of the other while holding each more accountable” (Newman, Dutton, & Blank, 2012). Therefore, we examined the main differences and similarities in the news production process to comprehend the specifics of traditional and new media coexistence. Additionally, with the Ukrainian context, we defined the coverage of historically significant events when effective and complete reporting is crucial.

Hypothesis and research objectives

Considering the main changes for professional journalism in news production in times of the “hybrid media system,” it is appropriate to formulate the hypotheses for this study. Additionally, the media were compared as professional (with the transparent editorial office, recognizable journalists, publishing traditional journalistic genres and following the professional standards of journalism with information verification, objectivity, and editorial independence) and unprofessional new media (without transparent editorial office, confirmed authorship of publications,

predominantly publishing posts, containing only headlines and leads, with violations of some professional standards (information verification, subjectivity, ‘jeansa’ (covered advertising), etc.).

H1: Professional media (UP) and unprofessional new media (Telegram channel US) have significant differences in choosing both newsmakers (mentions) and news sources (newsmakers quoted in the headlines). Moreover, leading officials and politicians (Ukrainian and international) are not recognizable to fragmented new media audiences, who mostly follow information of personal interest in a high-competitive media environment with many choices.

H2: Both the percentage of mentions and the percentage of quoted newsmakers are more significant for professional mass media (UP) than for unprofessional new media (US), as far as unprofessional new media perceive news as entertainment and do not follow the norms and traditions of classic news writing: to include recognizable newsmaker, references to sources.

H3: Professional mass media (UP) mention personalities and institutions as far as they consider them newsworthy. On the contrary, unprofessional new media (Telegram channel US) publish news about famous personalities – to attract the public’s attention, to encourage readers to share content.

H4: In the “hybrid media system,” professional mass media prefer reliable sources, whereas, for unprofessional new media, it is not obligatory. Thus, UP will use more reliable (official) sources; in contrast, US texts will have more unreliable (non-official) sources.

To check the hypothesis, we need a purpose and several research objectives:

The *purpose* of the study is to define and compare the most popular newsmakers and news sources for UP (professional mass media) and for US (unprofessional new media) to describe the specifics of news production in the “hybrid media system.”

Research objectives are as follows:

- to highlight the main changes in news production for professional journalism in the context of the “hybrid media system”;
- to form the text corpuses for UP and US, to use vocabularies of the most popular newsmakers for the media and regular expressions to find news sources in the headlines;
- to compare and interpret the data (to differentiate types of newsmakers and news sources);
- to analyze the specifics of news production in the “hybrid media system.”

Method

For this research, a computer-assisted method of news collection (headlines) and newsmakers and news sources identification was used (Python language)¹.

With request module news archive html-pages (<https://pravda.com.ua/archives/>) were collected from the Ukrainian Pravda website (from 24th February till 31st October 2022).

With bs4 module headlines, were got 35577 total².

To identify a popular newsmaker, mentions of a person’s surname and an institution’s name were considered. Then, with re module and a vocabulary of the most famous personalities and institutions, a list of the most popular newsmakers was created (e.g., Zelensky – 1776; Biden – 311). The vocabulary contains 1288 items – surnames or institutions/political parties’ names. The vocabulary updates every year; for the details of its creation see (Steblyna, 2020).

To define a news source, three most common types of references for UP were used:

A proper name or an abbreviation before a colon:

Biden: Russia will not be disconnected from SWIFT because of Europe’s position³.

¹All Python programs, vocabularies, and files with headlines are described in the tutorial, which may be found here: http://www.ualocal.media/?page_id=989

² The dataset may be found by the link: Mendeley Data, V1, <https://doi.org/10.17632/mb76gkzjcv.1>

A proper noun or an abbreviation after a dash:

Banks and energy sector work in a standard mode, there are fuel shortages at gas stations – *OP*⁴.

A proper noun or an abbreviation after a quotation mark and a colon:

“If we consider each other to be brothers”: *Usyk* appealed to Russians and Putin⁵.

As for US, at first, the chat history was exported (the same period). The first sentence considered the headline (total 30784). As a rule, here, the first sentence and a headline match. The same vocabulary and regular expressions were used to identify newsmakers and news sources.

Results

First, let us look at the most popular newsmakers and news sources for both media (Table 1).

Table 1. *The most popular newsmakers and news sources for UP and US.*

UP (mentions)		US (mentions)		UP (quotes)		US (quotes)	
Zelensky	5	Zelensky	5,8	Mass media	1,3	Zelensky	0,7
Putin	3,5	Putin	3,3	Zelensky	1,2	Operational command	0,4
Mass media	2,9	Regional Military Administration	2,9	General Staff	0,7	General Staff	0,4
General Staff	1,8	General Staff	1,9	Regional Military Administration	0,4	ISW	0,3
NATO	1,4	UN	1,4	Kuleba	0,2	Arestovych	0,3
Regional Military Administration	1,3	Biden	1,1	Hayday	0,2	Mass media	0,3
Security Service of Ukraine	1,2	President's Office	1	Danylov	0,1	Podolyak	0,2
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	1,1	Podolyak	0,8	Bloomberg	0,1	Bloomberg	0,2
UN	0,9	Hayday	0,8	Security Service of Ukraine	0,1	Reuters	0,2
Biden	0,9	Johnson	0,6	Operational command	0,1	Hayday	0,1
National Bank	0,8	Akhmetov	0,5	President's Office	0,1	CNN	0,1
Kuleba	0,7	Kuleba	0,5	Ministry of Defense	0,1	Ministry of Defense	0,1
Kremlin	0,7	Kim	0,5	Pentagon	0,1	Biden	0,1
Ministry of Defense	0,6	Macron	0,5	ISW	0,1	Pentagon	0,1
Operational command	0,6	State Emergency Service of Ukraine	0,4	Reznikov	0,1	Reznichenko	0,1

³The original headline: “Байден: Росію не від’єднують від SWIFT через позицію Європи”

⁴The original headline: Банки та енергетика працюють у штатному режимі, на АЗС є дефіцит палива - ОП

⁵The original headline: “Якщо ми вважаємо одне одного братами”: Усик звернувся до росіян та Путіна

For both media, the newsmakers are mostly common: Zelensky and Putin are at the top for both media. Both UP and US mention General Staff, Regional Military Administrations, foreign affairs minister D. Kuleba, the UN, and American President J. Biden.

As for the news sources, the situation is the same: Zelensky and the General Staff are in the top 3, UP and US quoted other mass media, Operational Command, Institute for the Study of War, the head of Luhansk Regional Military Administration Hayday, Bloomberg, Ministry of Defense, Pentagon.

Therefore, H1 is not confirmed: no significant difference exists in the lists of the most popular newsmakers and news sources. Approximately half of the list of the most popular newsmakers and more than half of the list of news sources are common for both media.

The percentage of mentions is approximately the same as for Zelensky – he was mentioned more often (5,8% of headlines) in US. The average percentage of the 15 most popular newsmakers' mentions is almost the same – 1,6% for UP and 1,5% for US. However, with the news sources, the situation is different. The first positions in the UP's lists have twice more quotes.

H2 is confirmed partly: new medium (US) mentions newsmakers as often as professional media (UP) does, but there are more quotes of the most popular newsmakers for media (UP) than for unprofessional new media (US).

We saw some differences in the lists of the 15 most popular newsmakers. For mass-media institutions are interesting (Kremlin, OC, National bank, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Security Service of Ukraine, NATO, and Mass media). As for US, here we can see primarily personalities: Podolyak, Hayday, Johnson, Kim, Macron, Akhmetov). Thus, *H3 is confirmed*.

As for reliable/unreliable sources – in the lists of the most popular newsmakers and news sources, there are no unreliable (non-official) names; therefore, *H4 is not confirmed*.

Discussion

As far as there is no significant difference between newsmakers and news sources selection, we may conclude that the news agenda for both media is the same with little differences. The media mentioned almost the same personalities and institutions. Thus, the audience of the Telegram channels has some differences from the audience of other social networks because it has the same news reading experience as the audience of professional mass media (here the concepts of “filter bubbles,” “echo-chambers,” “issue public” do not work). Additionally, there is approximately the same percentage of popular newsmakers' mentions, so for the Telegram channel, it is essential to base news on the statements/actions of recognizable personalities/institutions. No doubt, there are some headlines without mentions of any newsmaker on US, e.g.: Russian propagandists' imbecility leads to successful attacks and positive consequences for Ukraine. However, mostly the Telegram channel headlines are created with the same norms, with references to sources, in direct quotes as an exception. The difference in the number of quotes may show a more classic approach for professional mass media (direct quotes with explicit references accompanying mentions) and a light style of news writing with some professional standards violations for the Telegram channel. For instance: “Poroshenko was seen at the airport” – the post without direct quotes or other reliable confirmation.

One more difference of the Telegram channel is its reliance mostly on newsmakers-personalities. Moreover, here, one can see some favorite politicians and officials for Ukrainians, heroes of memes and anecdotes: Arestovych, Kim, Johnson, and Macron. Of course, UP also mentions them; however, they are mainly in the top 50 most popular figures. Moreover, here both media may refer to a similar source but name it differently: for UP, it is usually a Regional Military Administration; for US, these are both an Administration and its heads (Kim, Hayday, etc.), or both the President's Office and the President's advisors (Arestovych, Podolyak, etc.).

Remarkably, part of our hypothesis about reliable/unreliable sources was not confirmed; thus, for the most famous figures, it does not work. Both media mention Putin and do not quote him or

other Russian official sources. Mostly official sources prevail. An interesting situation is with Akhmetov: he is famous for US (mentioned 183 times). However, UP mentioned him quite rarely (only 39 times). A brief analysis of posts about him shows signs of “jeansa” – covered advertising. Therefore, he cannot be considered an unreliable source. However, his selection as a newsmaker does not correspond with the professional standards of journalism.

Additionally, we may analyze the order of the most popular newsmakers and news sources. For UP, mentions of mass media as newsmakers and as news sources are important. Consequently, UP collects all unique publications from colleagues and helps to spread information. For US, not only mass media in general, but concrete names are essential, particularly as news sources. US uses more local sources (Regional War Administration and their heads); UP is interested in all-Ukrainian sources.

Conclusions

This paper discovered some specific features of professional mass media and unprofessional new media coexistence in times of full-scale invasion. We saw that both media produce news in the circumstances of information overflow, high speed of news generation (both produced more than 30 thousand texts for 8 months), and most mention the same newsmakers. Therefore, the difference is only in the forms of informing: classic news on the website or posts on the Telegram channel. According to the results, we may confirm that the so-called Twitter effect does not affect news production. Journalists or Telegram-channels administrators may use different channels to confirm information, but the most popular newsmakers remain mostly the same. Slight differences, which were observed, show us that for professional mass media “gatewatching” function (Bruns, 2003) is more important (UP quotes and mentions mass media more often). However, the Telegram channel may also fulfill it, referring to mass media in general and specific brands. This additionally conforms with the previous statement about many reprints in mass media, and we see that reprints are also popular for new media. We observed that with the proposed type of analysis, it is possible to notice some violations of the professional standards on the Telegram channel. Additionally, with the lists of the most popular newsmakers and news sources, we may observe the general situation with the standards of balance and completeness. As far as official sources dominate, there may be some problems with the standards; however, it is critical to consider the situation of a full-scale invasion, where mass media should follow martial law obligations.

This study contributes to understanding modern digital audiences’ specifics: audiences of both professional mass media and unprofessional new media consume the same content in different forms. They recognize mainly the same figures, with more extensive attention toward personalities for the Telegram channel. Accordingly, these audiences may be fragmented and selective, but these differences may not be crucial during the full-scale Russian invasion. The common topics and personalities may influence public opinion using professional media and unprofessional new media. There is no evidence of political polarization or radicalization; however, this may be another effect of the invasion.

And lastly, in the Ukrainian case, we see the same newsmakers and news sources for both media. Thus, for further research, it would be essential to compare news before the full-scale invasion and after the victory of Ukraine. It is possible that the efforts of Ukrainian informational front fighters will help form a more qualitative media environment, where both unprofessional new and traditional media will share the same approaches to professional news production.

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