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Інтерактивність зсередини: як редакції українських онлайн-медіа сприймають та застосовують інтерактивні функції……..…94
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МІЖДИСЦИПЛІНАРНІ ДОСЛІДЖЕННЯ

Європейська філософська думка як методологічне підґрунтя дослідження українських онлайн-медіа у сфері прозорості публічних закупівель……..142
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The 2025 Inaugural Address of Donald Trump as a Tool of Political Public Relations: Rhetorical Strategies of Persuasion

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Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Ukraine

The article examines the 2025 inaugural address of Donald Trump as a significant PR tool in the process of political communication. Special attention is given to the analysis of strategies for constructing the image of a "strong leader". The study explores the main rhetorical techniques, narratives, and mechanisms for shaping public opinion through communicative tactics. **The aim of the research** was to identify the key PR strategies and instruments used in Donald Trump's 2025 inaugural address and to assess their effectiveness in shaping the image of a strongman leader. The article applies content analysis of the U.S. President's address of January 20, 2025, to explore the most frequent narratives, frames, and core messages; discourse analysis to examine how Donald Trump uses language to construct the image of a strongman leader; and rhetorical analysis to trace the linguistic means of persuasion and emotional influence on the audience. Additionally, the study includes media analysis of selected American and British media outlets, such as "The New York Times", "The Washington Post", "Bloomberg", "The Wall Street Journal", "Newsmax", "CNN", "BBC News", "The Guardian", and "Fox News" among others — to assess the media reaction to Trump's speech. To support the hypotheses with sociological data, the author refers to findings from the Pew Research Center. **Conclusions.** Donald Trump's 2025 inaugural address was not merely a ceremonial political statement but a well-calculated PR tool that positioned the U.S. president as a strongman leader with messianic undertones. The rhetoric, carefully tailored to the target audience, contributed to anchoring his political messages in the public consciousness.

Keywords: inaugural address, Donald Trump, PR strategy, political communication, image, strongman leader, populism, narrative, rhetoric, messianism, brand, public opinion, frame

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Інавгураційна промова (2025) Дональда Трампа як інструмент політичного PR: риторичні стратегії впливу

Елліна Циховська
Київський національний університет імені Тараса Шевченка, Україна

У статті розглядається інавгураційна промова 2025 року Дональда Трампа як важливий PR-інструмент у процесі політичної комунікації. Особлива увага приділяється аналізу стратегій створення образу сильного лідера. Досліджено основні риторичні прийоми, наративи та механізми формування громадської думки через комунікативні техніки. **Мета дослідження**: визначити основні PR-стратегії та PR-інструменти в інавгураційній промові (2025) Дональда Трампа та оцінити їхню ефективність у формуванні образу сильного лідера. У статті використано контент-аналіз інавгураційної промови президента США Дональда Трампа від 20 січня 2025 року для вивчення найчастотніших наративів, фреймів та основних меседжів; дискурс-аналіз – щоб дослідити, як американський президент використовує мову для побудови іміджу strongman leader; аналіз фреймінга – для розуміння рамок мислення, в яких Трамп подає своє бачення світу в промові, риторичний аналіз – для простеження мовних засобів, застосованих для переконання та емоційного впливу на глядачів. Також приділено увагу медіааналізу певних ЗМІ, здебільшого – американських («The New York Times», «The Washington Post», «Bloomberg», «The Wall Street Journal», «Newsmax», «CNN», «BBC News», «The Guardian», «Fox News») для того, щоб простежити реакцію ЗМІ на промову Трампа. Для підкріплення гіпотез соціологічними опитуваннями автор звертався до досліджень Pew Research Center. **Висновки**. Інавгураційна промова Дональда Трампа 2025 року стала не просто ритуальним політичним зверненням, а продуманим PR-інструментом публічного позиціонування американського президента в іміджі strongman leader з месіанськими проявами. Обрана відповідно до цільової аудиторії риторика Трампа сприяла закріпленню політичних меседжей у свідомості слухачів.

Ключові слова: інавгураційна промова, Дональд Трамп, PR-стратегія, політична комунікація, імідж, strongman leader, популізм, наратив, риторика, месіанізм, бренд, громадська думка, фрейм

The presidential inaugural address is not merely a political ritual, but also a powerful instrument for constructing the image of a newly elected head of state. In this regard, the 2025 inaugural address of Trump merits particular attention, as it was delivered amid a period of geopolitical instability, full-scale wars, and military conflicts worldwide – issues Trump, even as a presidential candidate, had vowed to resolve. Therefore, Trump's inaugural address of 2025 was a long-anticipated presentation of the political agenda of one of the most influential countries in the world, led by a controversial leader.

Although inaugural addresses have been the subject of research in linguistics, political science, rhetoric, and history, their dimension as PR strategies within presidential communication remains insufficiently explored.

Literature review

In their work "Presidents Creating the Presidency" (2008), Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson understood inaugural speeches as a separate rhetorical genre with certain

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functions and structure. Scholar Xiuying Zhou, in "Critical Discourse Analysis of an Inaugural Speech Based on Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar" (2024), analyzed Joe Biden's inaugural address through the lens of linguistic strategies used to construct power and ideology. Maya Vassileva also explored Joe Biden's rhetoric in her study "A Political Communication Model of the Inaugural Address Speech of President-Elect Joseph R. Biden" (2021), focusing on rhetorical strategies aimed at national unity. In the article "Comparative Study of Linguistic Features Used in the Inaugural Speeches of American Presidents" (Lodhi et al., 2019), the authors compared the linguistic features of the inaugural speeches delivered by George W. Bush and Barack Obama.

There is a substantial body of research on Trump's first inaugural address, in particular, "The Function of Repetition in Trump's Inaugural Address" (2017) by Habeeb Al-Saeedi, "Make the Inaugural Great again: a rhetorical analysis of Donald J. Trump's Inaugural Address" (2019) by Danielle F. Dickerson, "Syntactic Analysis of Donald Trump's Inaugural Speech" (2020) by Olusegun Oladele Jegede et al.

There are several books that directly or indirectly discuss the perception of Trump as a messianic leader, including "God and Donald Trump" (2017) by Stephen Strang, "The Power Worshippers: Inside the Dangerous Rise of Religious Nationalism" (2020) by Katherine Stewart, "Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation" (2020) by Kristin Kobes Du Mez, "Trump, the Messiah, and the Third Temple: A Prophetic, Theological, and Political Analysis of the Future of Israel and the World" (2024) by Rab Dan ben Avraham.

Political communication, as the process of constructing and disseminating politicians' narratives in the public space, is aimed at influencing public opinion through verbal, paraverbal, and media means. Its impactful genres include presidential speeches, campaign debates, and public campaigns designed to influence attitudes towards different topics (Perloff, 2014, p. 32).

The presidential inaugural address is a powerful tool for shaping public opinion, traditionally influencing both the domestic audience (residents and citizens of the country) and the external audience (the world community). As part of the procedural etiquette, it is not limited to a ceremonial function but serves as an important PR tool for building a positive image of the state leader. In terms of its symbolic significance, the inaugural address can be equated to a form of initiation, as it is the first original text of the new president in this position, from which citizens learn about their leader's agenda. In fact, it sets the tone for the entire presidential term and aims to unite the nation after an election process where some voters opposed others in voting for another presidential candidate. As CNN's Steven Collinson notes, the inaugural address has traditionally been used by newly elected presidents to "bind up the lingering wounds of bitter election campaigns and try to get a divided populace pushing, for a few months at least, in roughly the same direction"[1].

According to Claire Jerry, the characteristic features of the president's inaugural address are (Re)Unification of the audience, Reaffirmation of national values, Setting forth political principles of the people's elected representative, as well as Enacting the presidential role, as "presidents must demonstrate an understanding of their role within the wider system" (Jerry, 2025). Scholars Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson identify five attributes of an inaugural speech, namely: 1) unification of the audience after an election, 2) celebration of the nation's communal values, 3) establishment of political principles or policy goals for the president's term in office, 4) demonstration of understanding executive power's constitutional limits, 5) focusing on the present while incorporating elements of the past and future (Campbell & Jamieson, 2008).

Exploring the origins and elements of inaugural addresses since George Washington, Colleen Shogan notes that from the very beginning, "presidents have used their first speech to speak about the nation's past, hopes for the future, and their general policy goals for the next four years" (Shogan).

[1] https://edition.cnn.com/2025/01/20/politics/analysis-trump-inaugural-speech-great-power/index.html

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Political leaders use inaugural addresses as a demonstration of their main messages, and primarily for image management, which, along with media management, internal communications of the organization, and information management, is viewed as one of the types of political activity in the field of public relations (McNair, 2011, pp. 122–123).

Method

The study is based on the official transcript of Trump's inaugural address on 20 January 2025. Three main methods of analysis were employed in the article: content analysis, discourse analysis, and rhetorical analysis. *Content analysis* was used to investigate the main narratives, linguistic patterns, and media perception of Trump's speech. We analyzed the reactions of six media outlets to Trump's speech, which were selected to represent ideological diversity: conservative ("Fox News", "Newsmax"), liberal ("CNN", "The New York Time"), and international English-language media ("BBC News", "The Guardian"). The analysis covered the first 48 hours following the speech (January 20–21, 2025), focusing on Trump's key messages and the tone of their coverage. In addition, the Flesch-Kincaid readability test was used to assess the accessibility of the speech to the target audience, which made it possible to determine the educational level required to comprehend the text.

Discourse analysis was used to study how Trump constructs his political identity and relationship with his audience, namely: creating the image of a strongman leader with messianic traits through linguistic means, constructing images of opponents through the opposition of "Self vs. Other" and using the pronoun "we" and other linguistic means to create a sense of closeness with the audience.

Rhetorical analysis was used to identify persuasion techniques (emotional appeals, demonstration of confidence, justification of decisions), historical references (use of references to American history, prominent presidents and national myths, in particular "Manifest Destiny") as tools of persuasion and audience unity, and Frank Luntz's rules of communication (use of simple words and short sentences, repetition of key messages, presentation of old ideas in a new format, appeal to emotions through inspiring language).

Results and Discussion

Donald Trump's 2025 inaugural address is designed as a powerful PR strategy aimed at strengthening his image as a strong leader of the country. In political science, the image of a strong leader is traditionally called a "strongman leader", based on such traits as extreme nationalism with calls to restore the country's former greatness, blaming others, responding to often non-existent threats to the nation (Davis, 2020, p. 280). CNN reporter Steven Collinson highlighted the strongman style of the forty-seventh US president's inaugural address: "Trump, in the manner of a classic strongman leader, leveraged his personal mythology after he was sworn in for a new term, inspiring his supporters but leaving those who fear him anxious that dark days may be ahead"[2].

In general, Trump has been repeatedly labelled a "strongman leader". For example, British journalist G. Rachman in his book "The Age of the Strongman" examines the rule of authoritarian leaders through the prism of the strongman leader image, including V. Putin, R. Erdogan, Xi Jinping, V. Orban, and D. Trump. The researcher lists virtually the same features as other researchers before him, narrowing them down to four common characteristics of the strongman style: cult of personality, disregard for the rule of law, populism, and nationalism (Rachman, 2022, p. 20). He also emphasizes the trait of all strongman leaders, which is also found in Trump, including his inaugural address: "Their goal is to convince people that they alone can save the nation. "I alone

[2] https://edition.cnn.com/2025/01/20/politics/analysis-trump-inaugural-speech-great-power/index.html

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can fix it", Trump told Americans" (Rachman, 2022, p. 20). Such statements by Trump are in line with populist narratives representative of a "cult of the leader" (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 63), criticism of the establishment and positioning of himself as the savior of ordinary people, as discussed in detail in the book "When Democracy Trumps Populism" (2019), namely Trump's presidency as populism (Weyland, 2019).

In his rhetoric, Trump does not stop at criticizing the establishment: he intensifies the "Self vs. Other" opposition, creating an image of an enemy who, in Trump's view, hinders the prosperity of the United States and its citizens. The enemies in Trump's rhetoric are the previous government, illegal migrants, and everyone who did not contribute to Trump's rise to power. Steven Hassan, analyzing the components of the Trump phenomenon, calls this narrative of the American president one of the classic influence techniques: "He creates false enemies… to engender us versus them thinking, which renders people more fearful and obedient" (Hassan, 2020, p. 13).

It is impossible to ignore the fact that Trump's role as a leader closely borders on messianism. Emphasizing the US messianism in global processes, supported by the concept of manifest destiny – the ideology of exclusivity and privilege of the American nation, to which he directly refers in his speech ("And we will pursue our manifest destiny into the stars, launching American astronauts to plant the Stars and Stripes on the planet Mars" (Trump, 2025), Trump does not stop there, identifying himself with the Messiah. In his inaugural address, he mentions the assassination attempt on July 13, 2024 during a campaign rally in Pennsylvania, explaining his survival as God's will: "But I felt then and believe even more so now that my life was saved for a reason. I was saved by God to make America great again" (Trump, 2025). Trump's Messiah complex is also highlighted by Francis Bown in his article "Donald Trump, the Mob Boss with a Messiah Complex" published in "The Guardian" (March 2025): "Since he dodged the assassin's bullet, another dimension of Trump's personality has appeared: a Messiah complex. The bullying narcissist now believes that he is the savior of the world"[3].

In fact, Trump's Messiah complex did not emerge after the assassination attempt. Trump's messianic functions have long been attributed to him. One evangelical leader, Lance Wallnau, in his book "God's Chaos Candidate: Donald J. Trump and the American Unraveling" (2016), noted Trump's significant role in restoring Christian influence in the United States, asserting that "he is anointed of God". Wallnau further argued that Trump is a "secular reformer" who aims to establish an environment conductive to a "spiritual reformation" among Christians (Wallnau, 2017).

The messianic role of the state implies creating a better future for the world, as well as the function of a world savior, which the United States assumed after the end of the Cold War. However, scholar Adarsh Badri argues that this mission of the United States has diminished since the election of Barack Obama in 2009, and that "the decline of the US as a messianic state gained intensity with the election of President Donald Trump, who had vowed to 'quickly and decisively bomb the hell out of ISIS" (Badri, 2024).

Given this, the messianism of America as a state under Trump's presidency has been overshadowed by Trump's desire to assume the role of a Messiah. However, we believe that Trump's messianism is selective, as the forty-seventh US president tends to provide assistance to certain countries over others.

Robert A. Lehrman and Eric Schnure, in "The Political Speechwriter's Companion", note that "politicians must stay upbeat" in their speeches, as voters want to hear not only an acknowledgement of existing problems, but, more importantly, their solutions, for which they elect a strong leader: "In a sense, they want speeches to resemble a well-made Hollywood feature, raising serious issues, like corruption, but providing a happy ending by the closing credits" (Lehrman & Schnure, 2019, p. 15). The authors call Trump a master of this technique, who appeals to the anger and

[3] https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/mar/14/donald-trump-the-mob-boss-with-a-messiah-complex

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frustration of Americans, but promises them to "Make America Great Again". No wonder he kept this slogan for his second presidential term. Gideon Rachman refers to this technique as "nostalgic nationalism", characterizing it as an element of strongman politics and emphasizing that "almost all strongman leaders use local variants of Donald Trump's famous promise" (Rachman, 2022, p. 25).

However, these narratives can also be interpreted as messianic. In his inaugural speech, Trump promises prosperity to the American nation, its worldwide recognition and a return of the golden age under his leadership, which he reinforces through a repeated refrain: "The golden age of America begins right now" and "The future is ours, and our golden age has just begun" (Trump, 2025).

In addition to projecting the image of a strongman leader, Olha Meleshchenko identified six strategies, that Trump employs to construct a positive public image, following the analysis of the president's political messages on Twitter. They include the roles of PATRIOT, EFFECTIVE ECONOMIC MANAGER, TIGHT POLITICAL LEADER, GOOD FRIEND, POPULAR POLITICAL LEADER, and BELIEVER (Meleshchenko, 2021, p. 110). In our opinion, Trump embodies these roles to varying extents in his inaugural address.

Notably, Trump uses intimation tactics in his rhetoric, addressing the audience as "one of his own", creating a sense of closeness to the audience, which is based on the use of the pronoun "we": "We will stand bravely, we will live proudly, we will dream boldly" (Trump, 2025). Iryna Holubovska and Tetiana Orlova observed this communicative technique, combined with Trump's tactic of positive forecasting, in his first inaugural speech in 2017, by repeting "a single syntactic construction of futuristic grammatical semantics: Pron + aux. verb will + main verb + noun…: "We will determine the course of America …; "We will face challenges", "We will confront hardships" (Holubovska & Orlova, 2017, p. 15).

The semantics behind everything Trump presents in his speech is better understood through the rhetorical techniques that he seems to have borrowed from the ten rules of successful communication proposed by Frank Luntz in his book "Words that Works" (2007). The American president consistently follows the first rule, "Simplicity: Use small words", according to which "Avoid words that might force someone to reach for the dictionary… because most Americans won't" (Luntz, 2007, pp. 4–5). In fact, in his entire thirty-minute speech, there are one to three words that the average American may not fully understand: "sovereignty", "weaponization", and "escalating". For the same purpose, Trump resorts to short sentences, in line with Frank Luntz's second rule "Brevity: Use short sentences" (*"Our sovereignty will be reclaimed. Our safety will be restored. The scales of justice will be rebalanced"* (Trump, 2025)). Similarly, Trump used short sentences in his first inaugural speech (Jegede, 2020, pp. 324–325).

The application of the Flesch-Kincaid readability tests to Trump's 2025 inaugural speech demonstrates that the speech has a level of complexity for the students in the 10th to the 12th grade (Grade level score: 9.48) of an American school and is aimed at a moderately educated audience (Flesch Kincaid Calculator). The speech is written in accessible language (fairly difficult to read), typical of a political speech, the purpose of which is to be understood by a wide audience, including both US citizens and international audience.

The political beliefs of Trump's first term (tough migration policy, selective isolationism[4], climate skepticism, and an anti-establishment discourse) repeat in the narratives of his second term in office: the "America First" narrative (*"During every single day of the Trump administration, I will, very simply, put America first", "Instead of taxing our citizens to enrich other countries, we will tariff and tax foreign countries to enrich our citizens"),* the narrative of "Restoring America's Greatness" related to the previous point *("Our sovereignty will be reclaimed. Our safety will be restored"*, *"we will begin the complete restoration of America"*), criticism of predecessors *("For*

[4] Leonhardt, D. Is Donald Trump an Isolationist? Oct. 21, 2024. https://www.nytimes.com/2024/10/21/briefing/is-donald-trump-an-isolationist.html

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many years, a radical and corrupt establishment has extracted power and wealth from our citizens", "We now have a Government that cannot manage even a simple crisis at home"), the "National Unity" narrative *("Together, we will end the chronic disease epidemic and keep our children safe, healthy, and disease-free", "National unity is now returning to America*") (Trump, 2025).

It is worth noting that the narrative of "national unity" in Trump's inaugural address has been questioned by many media observers. In particular, an article in "Bloomberg" on January 21, 2025, is titled "Surprise: Trump's Inauguration Didn't Offer Unity After All", stating that Trump "invoked the world but not the sentiment"[5].

The consistency and repetitiveness of Trump's political messages are in line with Frank Luntz's fourth rule of "Consistency Matters" (Luntz, 2007, p. 11). At the same time, Trump presents old ideas, supporting them with new ideas and details, which echoes the fifth rule of "Novelty: Offer Something New" (Luntz, 2007, p. 13). The issue of migration and the fact that Trump declares the problems of the United States as a priority examplifies how old ideas rephrased in a new way. This repetition of key ideas in different configurations makes the speech more convincing and memorable, and forms the foundation of Trump's personal brand, where mission – "America First"; vision – the primacy of the United States as a superpower on the world stage; values – perseverance, anti-globalism, strength, directness; promise – "Make America Great Again"; philosophy – act decisively.

The inspiration with which the American president delivers the key points of his inaugural speech deserves special attention. Frank Luntz calls it "Speak aspirationally", explaining the seventh rule by saying that "Each president was reminding Americans of what Lincoln called "the better angels" of their nature" (Luntz, 2007, p. 19). Trump uses this rhetorical strategy to great effect when he talks about the revival of American auto manufacturing, stating that "We will build automobiles in America again at a rate that nobody could have dreamt possible just a few years ago. And thank you to the autoworkers of our Nation for your inspiring vote of confidence" (Trump, 2025). Trump uses this rule of successful communication almost like a textbook example when he describes the efforts of the American people in historical terms: "Ambition is the lifeblood of a great nation, and, right now, our Nation is more ambitious than any other. There's no nation like our Nation. Americans are explorers, builders, innovators, entrepreneurs, and pioneers" (Trump, 2025).

To mobilize his audience, Trump uses historical references in line with Frank Luntz's seventh rule, referring to the activities of Americans as pioneers of the Wild West and the construction of the Panama Canal by Americans. All these references imply the key role of the United States in both local and global processes, and a call for Americans to reconnect with their heroic past. They also imply a strongman leader who will lead the US to a new golden era, a central theme in the populist discourse of Trump's speech. By focusing on "social identity" – belonging to the American nation – Trump elevateds the self-esteem of citizens through pride in collective achievements.

Thus, by using references to US history, Trump pursues two goals: he strengthens the sense of national unity and highlights the uniqueness of Americans, demonstrating his own connection to the long-standing institution of the presidency by mentioning the names of past American presidents (William McKinley, Teddy Roosevelt).

It should be noted that the manner in which the American president presents information also contributes to the impact of the address on listeners, namely the confidence with which Trump proclaims each sentence and the reasoning behind it – the reasons why he will act in a certain way. According to Frank Luntz's third rule of successful communication "Credibility is as important as philosophy", one should "tell people who you are or what you do" (Luntz, 2007, p.11), which is what Trump does. He outlines the situation in a particular industry and proposes solutions.

[5] https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2025-01-21/trump-inauguration-speech-did-not-offer-unity-after-all

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Specifically, in his inaugural address, he promises to sign prepared orders to resolve the problems, which he immediately does after the address is over[6].

In this way, Trump uses his presidential inaugural address as a publicity event, publicly demonstrating live the fulfilment of his promises and attracting public attention. Moreover, the public act of the president signing orders, witnessed by viewers and attendees of the inauguration, also engages them as witnesses to a historic moment, which strengthens the emotional connection between the president and the people. These actions contribute to the implementation of the PR strategy of positioning Trump as a strong and decisive leader. Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser in their book "Populism: a very short introduction" describe a populist leader as a man of action: "Many political leaders present themselves as strong leaders, but populist strongmen take it a step further, crafting an image of a man of action" (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 64). Moreover, such a leader emphasizes the urgency of decisive action: he usually argues that the situation ("crisis") requires "bold action" and "common sense solutions" (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 64). For example, in Trump's 2025 inaugural address, the word "crisis" is mentioned four times, and "common sense" twice.

Leading US media painted a positive picture of Trump's activities during the inauguration, focusing on his signing of orders ("The New York Times"[7], "The Washington Post"[8], "Bloomberg"[9], "The Wall Street Journal"[10]). It is likely that the convincing rhetorical strategies of the president's inaugural address, contributed to the approval ratings. The latest national poll by the Pew Research Center, conducted from January 27 to February 2 among 5,086 respondents, showed that 47% of Americans approved of Trump's job performance (Pew Research Center, 2025).

The media effect of Trump's inaugural address varied depending on their political alignment. Right-wing conservative media outlets, which generally support Republicans (Gramlich, 2020), such as "Fox News", portrayed Trump's return to power as an era of success and the revival of traditional values.

The new president's positive vision for governance manifests in "Fox News" headlines: "Trump vows 'new era of national success,' says America's 'decline is over' in inaugural address"[11], "Trump vows to 'act with historic speed' after presidential inauguration that brings redemption"[12], and the "Fox News" lead from January 20, 2025. Two days before Trump's inauguration, the conservative "Newsmax" TV channel also quoted Republican politician Brian Babin as saying that the newly elected president would restore the United States "to its rightful place as the number-one superpower in the world"[13].

In contrast to "Fox News", liberal left-wing media outlets that are often targeted by Trump for their criticism of his administration, such as "CNN" and "The New York Times", have traditionally been skeptical about the narratives of Trump's inaugural address. In a CNN article of January 21, 2025, titled "Trump Wields Huge Power to Kick Start His New "Golden Age", Stephen Collinson openly criticizes the content of the statements made by Trump. He writes: "But Trump also laced the pageantry of Inauguration Day with rally-style grievance politics and vast doses of untruths, twisted facts and an increasingly messianic sense of his own power, which was a foreboding omen for the rule of law"[14]. Another CNN headline from the same issue, "Trump Touts Political

[6] https://apnews.com/article/donald-trump-inauguration-swearing-capitol-b3549ebe5dae74a872502aa79def7a11
[7] https://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/20/us/politics/trump-executive-orders-list.html
[8] https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2025/01/20/trump-inauguration-speech/
[9] https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2025-01-21/trump-inauguration-speech-did-not-offer-unity-after-all
[10] https://www.wsj.com/politics/trump-to-call-for-revolution-of-common-sense-in-inaugural-address-a6d94c59
[11] https://www.foxnews.com/politics/trump-vows-new-era-national-success-says-americas-decline-over-inaugural-address
[12] https://www.foxnews.com/politics/trump-vows-act-historic-speed-presidential-inauguration-brings-redemption
[13] https://www.newsmax.com/newsmax-tv/babin-trump-us/2025/01/18/id/1195603/
[14] https://edition.cnn.com/2025/01/21/politics/donald-trump-golden-age-analysis

Firings and Retaliation as He Begins Government Overhaul in His Image", reflects a similar negative assessment of Trump's inaugural statements.

Reporter David E. Sanger of "The New York Times", in his article "A Determined Trump Vows not to Be Thwarted at Home or Abroad" of January 20, 2025, calls him "Mr. Trump" instead of "Mr. President" or simply "Trump", describing him as "the great disruptor" who "wasted no time on lofty appeals to American ideals. Instead, he spoke with a tone of aggression intended to be heard by domestic and foreign audiences"[15].

If we analyze the reaction of the international media to Trump's address, we can observe concerns about the radicalization of Trump's planned initiatives, evident from the headlines of January 20–21, 2025. For example: "BBC News" ("Trump Vows to Leave Paris Climate Agreement and 'Drill, Baby, Drill", "Trump Makes 'Two Sexes' Official and Scraps DEI Policies", "Best of 'Frenemies': Trump's Relationship with Europe This Time May Be Very Different"), "The Guardian" ("Beware, Trump: The American Spirit is Indefatigable", "Trump Sworn In as 47th President as US Braces for a New Era of Disruption and Division», "Fee, Fi, Fo…Trump: How an Ogre Won Back the White House").

Conclusion

Presidential inaugural addresses are a powerful PR tool for political leaders. Besides communicating the political direction and values of the new administration to the public, they also serve the essential function of presenting a positive image of the president.

Trump used his address as a publicity event to demonstrate his image as a strongman leader – a decisive man of action. This PR strategy aligns with his messianic strategy as the savior of the American nation, which he implements through the rhetoric of rescue after the assassination attempt, as well as by promoting national interests under the slogan "America first" as his strategic vision of the US brand.

These PR strategies are applied in the address through populist rhetoric of antagonizing the establishment and strengthening the "Self vs. Other" opposition by constructing an enemy image, as well as positioning himself as the only solution to the problems of American citizens. Trump actively used classic PR tools of political communication: simple language and short sentences, repetition of key messages, presentation of old ideas in a new way, use of emotional triggers (anger, hope, pride). He appealled to patriotism through historical references and mentioned the national myth – Manifest Destiny.

An analysis of media coverage of Trump's address demonstrated the consistency of polarized perceptions of the forty-seventh president's narratives, with conservative media outlets ("Fox News", "Newsmax") traditionally covering the speech as a positive trend for the United States, liberal media outlets ("CNN", "The New York Times") criticizing it, and international media outlets ("BBC News", "The Guardian") expressing concerns.

Overall, Trump's inaugural address successfully reinforced his personal political brand, which he has nurtured throughout his career.

Declaration of generative artificial intelligence and technologies using artificial intelligence in the writing process.

The authors did not use artificial intelligence tools in the preparation of this article. The authors of the article bear full responsibility for the correct use and citation of sources.

[15] https://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/20/us/politics/trump-sworn-in-president.html

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Narratives of the War and Newspaper Photography (Perception of the Full-Scale Russian Invasion of Ukraine by The Guardian)

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In this study, the authors combine a narrative approach to newspaper photography analysis with a quantitative, computer-assisted analysis in order to discover how the perception of the full-scale invasion changed depending on the phase of the full-scale war. **Method**. The study material included 2665 captions for photos in publications from the "Ukraine" section of The Guardian, from February 24 to December 31, 2022. We used Python modules and libraries to process data. With the bs4 module and the lxml library, photo captions were extracted. As far as photo captions are used to describe the photo, the authors used the descriptions to get the stories and then the narratives. We used the Spacy library's dependency parser to get the basic narrative's components. With this instrument, it is possible to automatically analyse the sentence's structure and define subjects, predicates, and objects. The texts were divided according to the full-scale war periodization, according to the General Staff of Ukraine: 1st phase: February 24 – April 2022 (the battle for Kyiv, retreat of Russian troops from Northern Ukraine); 2nd phase: May – August 2022 (the battle for Donbas); 3rd phase: September – December 2022 (Kharkiv, Kherson offensive operations, attacks on Ukrainian energy infrastructure, blackouts). The proposed algorithm for defining narratives makes identifying similarities and changes within the phases possible. **Conclusions**. The photos used by the Guardian maintain the emphasis on the humanitarian agenda, which is an established focus in war photography, showing war not so much through the perception of the military as through the suffering of civilians. Thus, the narratives reveal a transformation in understanding the full-scale war: from being perceived as horrible and terrifying, provoking a worldwide reaction in the first phase, to being normalised and symbolised in the second and third phases.

Keywords: The Guardian, Russian-Ukrainian war, full-scale Russian invasion, 2022, media narratives, newspaper photography, captions, quantitative analysis

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Наративи війни та газетна фотографія (сприйняття повномасштабного російського вторгнення в Україну газетою The Guardian)

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У цьому дослідженні автори поєднують наративний підхід до аналізу газетної фотографії з кількісним комп'ютерним аналізом, щоб з'ясувати, як змінювалося сприйняття російського вторгнення залежно від фази повномасштабної війни. **Метод**. Матеріали дослідження включають 2665 публікацій з розділу «Україна» The Guardian, опублікованих з 24 лютого по 31 грудня 2022 року. Для обробки даних використовувалися модулі та бібліотеки Python. За допомогою модуля bs4 та бібліотеки lxml було вилучено підписи до фотографій. Оскільки підписи до фотографій слугують для їх опису, автори використовували ці описи для отримання історій, а потім – наративів. Для отримання основних компонентів наративу використовувався парсер залежностей бібліотеки Spacy. За допомогою цього інструменту можна автоматично аналізувати структуру речення і визначати суб'єкт (підмет), присудок (предикат) і додаток (об'єкт). Тексти були розділені відповідно до періодизації повномасштабної війни, згідно з даними Генерального штабу України: 1-а фаза: 24 лютого – квітень 2022 року (битва за Київ, відступ російських військ з півночі України); 2-а фаза: травень – серпень 2022 року (битва за Донбас); 3-я фаза: вересень – грудень 2022 року (Харківська, Херсонська наступальні операції, атаки на українську енергетичну інфраструктуру, блекаути). Запропонований алгоритм визначення наративів дозволяє виявити подібності та зміни всередині фаз. **Висновки**. Фотографії, що використовувалися The Guardian, демонструють акцент на гуманітарному порядку денному, який прослідковується на світлинах, показуючи війну не стільки через перспективу військових, скільки через страждання цивільних. Наративи демонструють трансформацію розуміння повномасштабної війни: спочатку, під час першої фази, вона сприймалася, як щось трагічне та жахливе, те, що провокує усесвітню реакцію, але під час другої-третьої фази воєнні події сприймалися як щось звичайне, а також додавався символічний аспект.

Ключові слова: The Guardian, російсько-українська війна, повномасштабне російське вторгнення, 2022 рік, наративи, газетна фотографія, підписи, кількісний аналіз

Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, the press in Western Europe has mostly supported Ukraine. In doing so, the British media has been particularly active in reflecting national consensus (Martill & Sus, 2024). Researchers concluded that leading British newspapers primarily covered the political aspects of Russia's war against Ukraine (Ediz, Ediz & Yavuz, 2025), the construction of the image of Ukrainian refugees (Pavlichenko & Popivniak, 2022), and the interpretations and visions of the war by various countries' leaders (Dinçer, 2022). However, visual representations were not considered very often.

According to Susan Sontag, "In an era of information overload, the photograph provides a quick way of apprehending something and a compact form for memorizing it. The photograph is like a quotation, or a maxim or proverb" (Sontag, 2003, p. 22). The expressiveness of the visual

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language of photography as a medium, which at the same time, according to Susan Sontag's critical remark, cannot itself explain anything (Sontag, 2005, p. 17) and allows for ambiguous interpretations depending on the context, creates an invariably relevant research problem. The documentary and ethical aspect of covering the Russian-Ukrainian war through photography is the focus of Ukrainian media researchers (Lysenko, 2023; Tabinskyi, 2025).

Photography researchers usually interpret material using a qualitative approach, which is understandable. In this study, however, we decided to combine a narrative approach to newspaper photography analysis with a quantitative, computer-assisted analysis in order to discover how the perception of the full-scale invasion changed depending on the phase of the full-scale war.

Media narratives

Although there is plenty of research where media and narratives are mentioned, in some cases, there are no clear definitions of these terms or of the procedure of narrative reconstruction.

Generally, a narrative is understood as a story. However, when speaking about narrative analysis and shaping public opinion through the media, it is essential to view it at a higher level.

Smith (2016) describes it as 'a resource that culture and social relations make available to us, and which we use to construct our stories', and 'a template – scaffolding of sorts – from which to build and structure [...] the stories'. Thus, narratives help us process our stories, construct meanings, and see the synthesis of 'multiple elements of identity presentation into a coherent identity construct' (Bates, Hobman & Bell, 2020). Mass media are one of the primary sources of narratives.

There is also some confusion surrounding the term in scholarly literature. Sometimes, narratives are used to explore the specific themes of discussions on social networks (Rodrigues et al., 2023). Other times, people's stories are included in media texts (Fletcher-Randle, 2022). However, these are definitely not media narratives; they are just stories.

To reconstruct media narratives, we need to consider patterns that occur more or less constantly in media texts.

One approach to identifying such patterns is frame analysis. E.g., researchers using this approach reconstructed media narratives of war and tourism, concluding that some narratives can "undermine the confidence of tourism practitioners and raise concerns among investors and potential tourists" (Tan & Cheng, 2024). Thus, media narratives can demonstrate how coverage influences stakeholders' perceptions. Another study used frames and content analysis to explore how newspapers covered the war on terror. Hussain & Munawar (2017) demonstrated the difference between 'war' and 'peace' frames. This approach mainly allows us to show the thematic dimensions of narratives, but not their structural elements.

There is also another approach to differentiate some "motiffes" – "recurring aspects of stories (e.g., events/happenings, conflict/tensions, action, certain phrases) that create a web of meanings" (McGannon et al, 2023). Alternatively, there can be some actions, events, and characters. E.g., researchers propose the algorithm for a narrative identification: "characters – usually individuals and institutions – act. Acts are meaningful (i.e., they have social significance and moral worth), and they are undertaken with motive (the emotionally charged desire to achieve or prevent something)" (Mroz, Papoutsi, & Greenhalgh, 2021).

For this study, we define a media narrative as a 'generalised' storytelling construct, in which fact-based stories selected by the media are used as building blocks. We suppose that specific scenarios, characters, and actions will occur more frequently, enabling us to identify the most popular narratives. These narratives, of course, influence readers' interpretations of events. We will not use frames to reconstruct these narratives, as these mainly help researchers see different media coverage perspectives. The basic components of the narrative will be more important to us. First, we will analyse the stories told by the newspapers' photos – the building blocks of the narratives – and then we will identify the most popular storytelling constructs. To this end, the second

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approach described earlier will be more effective as it does not focus on understanding, attitudes, and interpretations but considers the basic elements of storytelling.

War photography and its challenges

The visual representation of war through photography is a significant and contentious topic with a long history, dating back to the Crimean War (1853–1856) and the American Civil War (1861–1865). While the pioneer of war photography, Roger Fenton, was more of a propaganda mission commissioned by the British government, creating a positive narrative of the Crimean War as a heroic adventure and avoiding depictions of death and the horrors of war, the Americans Matthew Brady, Alexander Gardner, and Timothy O'Sullivan were the first to break this taboo by taking "brutally legible pictures of dead soldiers". They had exclusive permission from President Lincoln to access the battlefield, but were not commissioned as Fenton had been (Sontag, 2003, pp. 50–52). They justified their shocking war photographs by the documentary mission of photography as a dispassionate medium. "The camera is the eye of history," Brady is supposed to have said (Sontag, 2003, p. 52).

Since then, war photographs have been created with a particularly humanistic purpose: influencing public opinion, promoting anti-war narratives, and forming a social consensus against war. Susan Sontag noted: "For a long time some people believed that if the horror could be made vivid enough, most people would finally take in the outrageousness, the insanity of war" (Sontag, 2003, p. 14). However, "The photographs Mathew Brady and his colleagues took of the horrors of the battlefields did not make people any less keen to go on with the Civil War. […] Photographs cannot create a moral position, but they can reinforce one and help build a nascent one." (Sontag, 2005, pp. 12–13). Indeed, the depiction of the horrors of war, and especially the suffering of civilians, has an ambiguous effect depending on the degree of proximity of the viewer to the events. If, for a distant and neutral observer, it is an argument for an immediate end to the war, for others, it can be a call to arms in defence of justice and the continuation of the war. So, viewers' beliefs can result in the radically different narratives that war photography can convey. "The photographer's intentions do not determine the meaning of the photograph, which will have its own career, blown by the whims and loyalties of the diverse communities that have use for it." (Sontag, 2003, p. 39). Therefore, one should not rely on the photo to "speak for itself". "[...] one day captions will be needed, of course. The misreadings, misrememberings, and new ideological uses for the pictures will make their difference. Normally, if there is any distance from the subject, what a photograph "says" can be read in several ways (Sontag, 2003, p. 29).

Another problem, noted by Susan Sontag, is the decrease in society's sensitivity to shocking photographs due to their increase in number and their transformation into clichés. "Conscripted as part of journalism, images were expected to arrest attention, startle, and surprise. […] The hunt for more dramatic (as often described) images drives the photographic enterprise and is part of the normality of a culture in which shock has become a leading stimulus of consumption and source of value. […] The image as shock and the image as cliché are two aspects of the same presence" (Sontag, 2003, pp. 22–23). "Photographs shock insofar as they show something novel. Unfortunately, the ante keeps getting raised—partly through the very proliferation of such images of horror." (Sontag, 2005, p. 14) In addition, the perception of war photographs is influenced by the factor of "war fatigue": "It is because a war, any war, does not seem as if it can be stopped that people become less responsive to the horrors. Compassion is an unstable emotion. It needs to be translated into action, or it withers." (Sontag, 2003, p. 101).

However, despite these warnings, suffering needs to be highlighted, and ethical challenges will arise again and again. These include the dilemma between documenting grief and respecting the victims and privacy of their relatives (see Naidenko, 2023; Lysenko, 2023), or the question of the admissibility of comparing the experiences of suffering of people during the war in different countries, or even on contrary sides of the same war. In particular, after criticism from Ukrainian

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photojournalists, the jury of the World Press Photo 2025 competition recognized the mistake of combining the photos "*Beyond the Trenches*" by Florian Bachmeier and "*Underground Field Hospital*" by Nanna Heitmann into a visual pair, which depict, respectively, a Ukrainian girl from from Kharkiv Oblast who suffers from panic attacks due to the war, and a wounded militant of the self-proclaimed "Donetsk People's Republic" supported by Russia. "There is an obvious difference between a child suffering from the aftermath of war and the torment of a soldier from the occupying forces who causes this suffering," World Press Photo noted (Lobanok, 2025). In this situation, Susan Sontag's reasoning in "*Regarding the Pain of Others*" sounds like a kind of prediction: "To set […] sufferings [of people in besieged Sarajevo] alongside the sufferings of other people was to compare them (which hell was worse?), demoting […] martyrdom to a mere instance. [...] It is intolerable to have one's own sufferings twinned with anybody else's." (Sontag, 2003, p. 113). A narrative that actually equates the victim and the aggressor seems to be caused precisely by the observer's choice of a seemingly "neutral" and "impartial" position. The moral dilemma of peace and justice arises again.

In addition to the ethical problems of war photodocumentary, a significant threat to the authority of photography as a means of documenting reality and conveying the truth is the possibility of technical falsification or fabrication of the image. This possibility has increased significantly since photography went digital. In digital photography, the traditional physical medium of the photograph disappeared, and the difference between the original image and its copy was eliminated (see Mitchell, 1992). In turn, with the development of neural networks and generative artificial intelligence, this threat reaches a new level, as synthetic, entirely generated images appear to be almost indistinguishable from true photographs, but, in fact, such scenes and people have never existed (see Ritchin, 2025).

Method

For this study, we picked the most popular British newspapers and looked for those that have open access and are open to unlimited automatic parsing (collecting the data). According to Statista (2025) data, in 2024, the most popular papers were "The Sunday Times, The Guardian, and The Sun, with 37 percent of respondents reporting that they had a positive opinion of these publications". However, only the Guardian website allows information collection automatically without limits, which is why it was chosen.

It was possible to download all the texts from February 24 to December 31, 2022.

Python modules and libraries were used to process data.

With the requests module, it was possible to get 2665 publications from the "Ukraine" section.

We divided the texts according to the full-scale war periodization, according to the General Staff of Ukraine:

1st phase: February 24 – April 2022 (the battle for Kyiv, retreat of Russian troops from Northern Ukraine);

2nd phase: May – August 2022 (the battle for Donbas);

3rd phase: September – December 2022 (Kharkiv, Kherson offensive operations, attacks on Ukrainian energy infrastructure, blackouts).

After that, photo captions were extracted from the bs4 module and the lxml library. As far as photo captions are used to describe the photo, we used the descriptions to get the stories and then the narratives.

We used the Spacy library's dependency parser to get the basic narrative's components. With this instrument, it is possible to automatically analyse the structure of the sentence. Let us see the examples.

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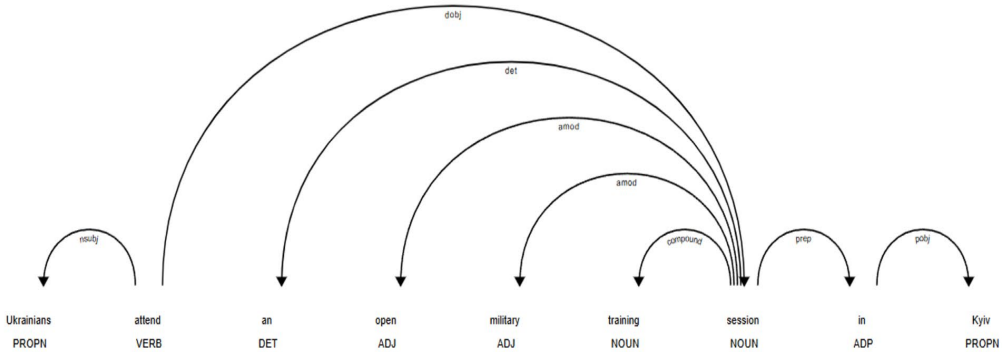
Figure 1.
The results of the sentence dependency analysis of the photo caption

Ukrainians attend an open military training session in Kyiv. Photograph: Sergei Chuzavkov/Sopa Images/Rex/Shutterstock



In Figure 1, the results of the sentence dependency analysis are visible. The subject (nsubj, “Ukrainians”), the predicate (VERB, “attend”), and the object (dobj, “session”) were defined.

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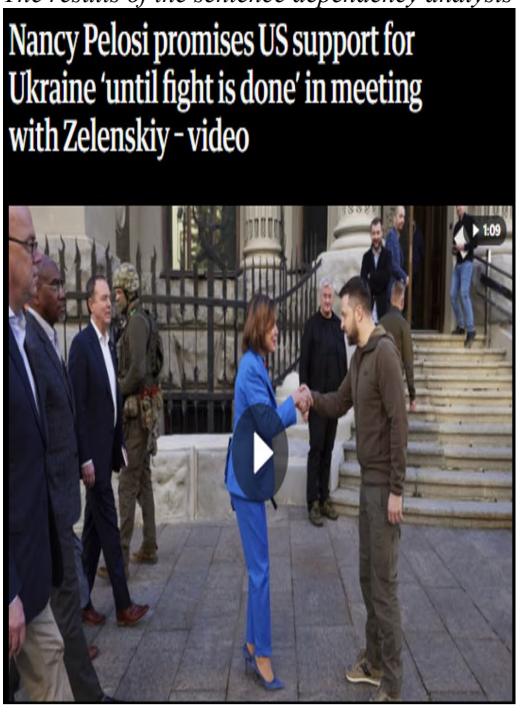
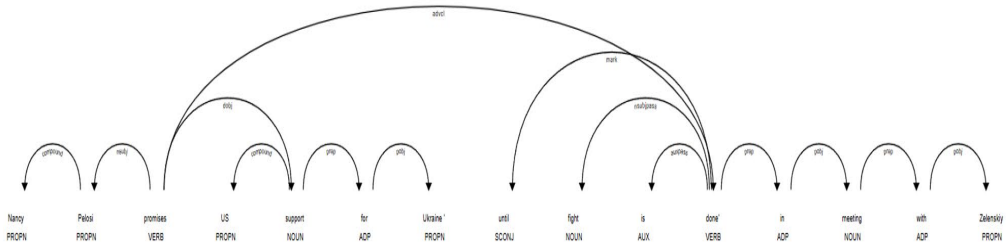
Figure 2.
The results of the sentence dependency analysis of the video caption





In Figure 2, there are results of video caption analysis: the subject (nsubj, “Pelosi”), the predicate (VERB, “promises”), and the object (dobj, “support”).

Thus, with this type of semantic analysis, it is possible to automatically define the basic narrative’s components: the subject / the main character, who acts; the action, and the object, which can also be understood as the goal of the subject.

Now, let us see the basic narratives from the three phases.

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Results and Discussion

1st phase: life of civilians during the war, refugees, politicians' statements and protests

Table 1.
The most popular subjects, predicates, and objects during the 1st phase

mentions	subject	mentions	predicate	mentions	object
52	people	46	say	20	city
50	woman	44	destroy	16	part
36	Russia	29	damage	16	placard
32	Ukraine	28	shell	14	building
32	Zelenskiy	26	leave	14	war
28	Putin	25	show	12	border
22	civilian	24	hit	12	bus
20	family	21	take	12	refugee
18	protester	17	hold	12	Russia
18	resident/ soldier	15	flee/help/walk	12	train

We can see that the primary focus was on civilians (people, women, civilians, families), the consequences of the war (destroy, shell, hit, building, city), movements (leave, refugee, bus, border). Politicians and states were also mentioned. The verb 'say' indicates the paper's interest in politicians' statements. Another topic is protests in Russia and worldwide (protesters, hold, placard).

Thus, here we have four leading narratives:

1) Civilians (primarily women) suffer because of the war, they are rescued by military, emergency specialists; the emotions are showed: "Firefighters help a woman to evacuate from a damaged apartment building in Mariupol"; "A woman is helped to cross a river on an improvised path under a destroyed bridge in the town of Irpin"; "A woman cries near her house in Bucha, where the mayor said 280 people had been buried in a mass grave".
2) People fleeing, crossing the border, using different types of transport (e.g., a bus): "Thousands of people brought to safety in a convoy of Ukrainian buses – video"; "People fleeing the besieged city of Mariupol in Ukraine on Monday".
3) Politicians declare something about the war: interpretations, definitions, attitudes: "'We will defend ourselves' from Russia, says Ukraine president Volodymyr Zelenskiy in

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speech– video"; "Boris Johnson vows to help refugees fleeing Ukraine, says Putin talks were a 'charade' – video".

4) People all over the world are protesting against the war: "'No to war!': Russian protesters defy Putin – video report"; "A banner calls on the UK government to help Ukrainian refugees at a protest in London against the Russian invasion".

2nd phase: life of civilians, military actions, Russian war crimes, and military ceremonies

Table 2.
The most popular subjects, predicates, and objects during the 2nd phase

mentions	subject	mentions	predicat	mentions	object
44	People	107	say	13	body
37	soldier	94	destroy	10	Flag
31	Zelenskiy	56	damage	10	Part
26	Putin	47	leave	9	Area
22	Ukraine	44	take	8	aftermath
20	smoke	41	show	8	people
20	troop	41	walk	8	Russia
20	woman	40	shell	7	City
15	man	33	kill	7	Fire
15	Russia	32	hit/rise	7	guard/vehicle

Some changes can be seen in the narratives: while civilians remain essential, other topics have emerged or become more popular, such as military actions (soldier, troop, smoke, rise, aftermath, guard, vehicle), everyday life during the war (walk, man), Russian military crimes and death during the war (body, kill), and the symbolisation of war (flag). Some topics, such as politicians' claims, destruction, and shelling, remain similar.

Let us define the narratives:

1) People are getting used to the war (people just standing near the debris or walking next to damaged buildings); women and men are shown: "People walk next to an apartment building hit by shelling"; "A man walks next to heavily damaged buildings and destroyed cars in Bakhmut, Donetsk region, eastern Ukraine".

2) Soldiers on duty, actions of the troops from both sides, injured soldiers, who are getting medical treatment: "Smoke and dirt rise in the city of Sievierodonetsk during fighting between Ukrainian and Russian troops this week"; "A Ukrainian soldier holds a Next Generation Light Anti-tank Weapon (NLAW) that was used to destroy a Russian armoured personnel carrier in March"; "Vasyl, a soldier being treated at a hospital in Dnipro".

3) People, media, or other institutions discover Russian war crimes: "Russian president, Vladimir Putin, and defence minister Sergei Shoigu. Western military officials claim the Russian leader could have made a catastrophic error that led to the deaths of 500 soldiers at the Siverski Donets river"; "Volunteers carry an exhumed body near Borodyanka, north-west of Kyiv"; "Graves dug by residents for civilians killed in Mariupol, photographed in April".

4) People, soldiers using flags to celebrate events, mostly connected with the war; military ceremonies: "A boy waves a national flag atop a seized Russian tank in Kyiv"; "Russian

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cosmonauts pose with a flag of the self-proclaimed Luhansk People's Republic at the International Space Station"; "A Russian national guard soldier with an attached letter Z, which has become a symbol of the Russian military, stands guard during a rehearsal for the Victory Day military parade".

3rd phase: Putin's announcements, liberation of Ukrainian territories, and the life of civilians on the lands destroyed by Russia

Table 3.
The most popular subjects, predicates, and objects during the 3rd phase

mentions	nsubjs	mentions	verbs	mentions	objects
75	Putin	122	say	235	Ukraine
71	soldier	96	destroy	151	region
46	People	73	damage	139	Kyiv
45	Zelenskiy	53	show	99	Russia
41	resident	53	take	97	strike
33	Russia	45	make	90	Kherson
33	woman	45	walk	73	building
31	man	43	stand	65	city
28	troop	41	see	62	attack
25	force	40	hit	60	war

The most obvious change is that Putin has become the most popular figure. It is also interesting that Ukraine has changed from being the subject to being the object. Russia can be described in both roles. We can also see two Ukrainian regions: Kyiv and Kherson. This change can thus be explained by the liberation of Ukrainian territories, when the regions or Ukraine were mentioned as objects in the captions.

Therefore, it is possible to define the narratives:

1) Putin's announcements (in particular – the mobilization), participation in the ceremonial events: "A young Russian hugs his mother at a military recruitment centre in Volgograd after Vladimir Putin ordered a mobilization"; "Vladimir Putin addresses crowds at a concert to celebrate the claimed annexation of Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia".

2) Ukrainian troops, forces, soldiers, liberating the occupied territories; everyday life of the soldiers: "Russian armoured vehicles abandoned in Balakliia, Kharkiv region on Saturday, September 10. Ukrainian forces confirmed they had entered the town of Kupiansk in eastern Ukraine, in a lightning counter-offensive that has seen swathes of territory recaptured"; "A Ukrainian soldier helps a wounded comrade as troops move down a road in the Kharkiv region".

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3) Life of civilians during the war: the residents near the destroyed property, the life of people near the frontlines: “A man walks by a street market destroyed by military strikes in Kharkiv, Ukraine, on September 6”; “A woman rides past a destroyed building in Izium, Kharkiv region”.

Conclusion

The proposed algorithm for defining narratives makes identifying similarities and changes within the phases possible.

Generally, the photos used by the Guardian maintain the emphasis on the humanitarian agenda, which is an established focus in war photography, showing war not so much through the perception of the military as through the suffering of civilians.

Civilians were represented throughout all the phases; however, the topic of civilian suffering due to the war was most prominent in the first phase. This outcome contradicts previous findings (Ediz, Ediz & Yavuz, 2025) regarding Ukraine-related publications’ political and economic focus in the British press. While the researchers analysed the verbal texts, this discovery regarding the ‘humanitarian focus’ of the visual texts suggests that news about politics and economics was contextualised regarding the impact on civilians whose lives and property were endangered by the full-scale invasion. Further research could consider the gender roles portrayed by photographers, as women were often depicted as victims. It is also possible to see that the focus of the narratives about civilians changed: in the first phase, the circumstances of the war were depicted as extraordinary; in the second and third phases, scenes from everyday life were predominantly chosen by photographers. Additionally, families were mentioned as subjects during the first phase; afterwards, only men and women were mentioned. Thus, family ties/stories were not so important.

In the context of refugees, this topic was also the most popular during the first phase. Afterwards, the journalist mentioned topics such as evacuation, fleeing due to war, and displacement. However, the term ‘refugee’ was not popular. Captions mostly referred to ‘people’ or ‘women’. This can be explained by more empathetic attitudes towards Ukrainians in the British press when discussing refugees. They were seen not just as refugees from a faraway country, but as people similar to the British.

The popularity of the political dimension is also visible in our case study. Politicians were mostly shown while making a declaration; Zelensky and Putin were the most popular, but Putin had the most mentions during the third phase. This can be explained by the partial mobilisation announcement, in which British journalists tried to contrast “ordinary Russians”, who were “forced” to join the army, with the Kremlin. Additionally, this war criminal was shown at various events connected with the ‘celebration’ of the illegal annexation of occupied regions. This was also an attempt to oppose the Russian retreat on the frontlines and the official reaction of the Kremlin.

As for the narratives about military actions, it is interesting that these were not among the most popular during the first phase – the narratives about civilians displaced them. The everyday life of soldiers was mostly depicted. It is also interesting that individual scenes with soldiers were more popular than generalised scenes about the troops’/forces’ actions. (Surprisingly, this seems to be reminiscent of Roger Fenton’s approach, which focused on portraits and scenes from soldiers’ daily life rather than on combat). Additionally, the ‘humanitarian’ focus was evident here too, as numerous photographers showed injured soldiers and attempted to convey their suffering.

The British press can also present a more generalised representation of the sides. Russian soldiers or troops were depicted as part of the Russian military machine, whether during parades or other celebrations, guarding military objects, or in the context of war crimes. In contrast, the everyday life of Ukrainian soldiers was described. Thus, the public saw them as more relatable than the Russians. In the context of the 2022 counter-offensive operation, Ukrainians appeared as liberators. The Russians, on the other hand, remained occupiers.

There were also plans to show ordinary Russians against the war and Putin. This was evident during the first phase of Russian protests against the full-scale invasion. Afterwards, there were infrequent mentions in the captions, and the term 'protester' was not used; mostly words such as 'people' and 'woman' were used instead. This suggests that journalists did not perceive these protests as being particularly significant. A second opportunity to show Russians that they opposed the war emerged during the third phase. Mobilised Russians were shown in situations of 'forced' mobilisation. However, there was no constant repetition of the narrative of ordinary Russians trying to stop the war. Furthermore, while covering numerous Russian events in support of the war, journalists also showed ordinary Russians greeting the full-scale invasion.

Thus, the narratives reveal a transformation in understanding the full-scale war: from being perceived as something horrible and terrifying, provoking a worldwide reaction in the first phase, to being normalised and symbolised in the second and third phases. This echoes Sontag's note on the audience's desensitization to shocking images. The humanitarian perspective remains important in this context, with photos of civilians usually accompanying political issues.

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Declaration of generative artificial intelligence and technologies using artificial intelligence in the writing process.

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Communication Strategies of NGOs in Reporting War Crimes in Ukraine

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This article examines the communication strategies of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in reporting and advocating accountability for war crimes during Russia's war against Ukraine. The **study aims** to identify effective mechanisms of public engagement, legal advocacy, and international outreach used by Ukrainian and international human rights groups. It applies the following **method**: qualitative content analysis, case studies, and source triangulation. Examples are drawn from the activities of ZMINA, the Media Initiative for Human Rights, Truth Hounds, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the Clooney Foundation for Justice. The findings **reveal** a multilayered communication model that combines legal rigor, emotional storytelling, media collaboration, and digital innovation. The paper also highlights key challenges, such as disinformation, audience fatigue, and reputational risks, and outlines NGO responses. Communication emerges as a strategic instrument in the global fight against impunity.

Keywords: NGOs, war crimes, strategic communication, human rights advocacy, transitional justice

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Комунікаційні стратегії громадських організацій у висвітленні воєнних злочинів в Україні

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У статті проаналізовано комунікаційні стратегії неурядових громадських організацій (НУО) у висвітленні воєнних злочинів, скоєних під час війни Росії проти України. **Метою дослідження** є виявлення ефективних механізмів публічного інформування, формування суспільної підтримки правосуддя та міжнародної адвокації з боку українських та міжнародних правозахисних організацій. **Метод** дослідження поєднує якісний контент-аналіз, кейс-стаді та триангуляцію джерел. Проаналізовано приклади з діяльності ZMINA, Медійної ініціативи за права людини, Truth Hounds, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Clooney Foundation for Justice. Особливу увагу приділено звітам, кампаніям у соцмережах, мистецьким проєктам, правовим ініціативам та кризовим кейсам. **У результаті** виявлено багатоканальність та багаторівневість комунікаційних стратегій: НУО одночасно звертаються до внутрішньої та зовнішньої аудиторій, поєднують емоційні наративи й юридичні аргументи, застосовують як класичні, так і цифрові формати. Дослідження висвітлює ключові виклики (дезінформація, втома аудиторії, репутаційні ризики) та реакції на них (стандарти фактчекінгу, етична журналістика, коаліційна адвокація). Показано, що комунікація стала для НУО не лише інструментом інформування, а й засобом впливу на політику і правосуддя в Україні та за її межами.

Ключові слова: громадські організації, воєнні злочини, стратегічні комунікації, правозахисна адвокація, перехідне правосуддя

The communication of war crimes has become one of the defining elements of modern armed conflicts, shaping public narratives around the legitimacy or illegitimacy of war. The rhetoric surrounding war crimes is actively used by numerous actors, with human rights NGOs playing a particularly significant role. These organizations are vital in delivering objective information about crimes and drawing public attention to violations of international humanitarian law. For example, following the launch of Russia's full-scale military aggression against Ukraine, Ukrainian human rights organizations joined efforts under the "Tribunal for Putin" (T4P) initiative. Over three years, the coalition has documented more than 84,000 instances of international crimes and submitted nine communications to the International Criminal Court (ICC) (ZMINA, 2025).

Ensuring accountability for war crimes represents not solely a legal task but also a communication challenge: without adequate public awareness and societal support, justice becomes significantly harder to attain. NGOs play a critical role in bringing to light the truth about war crimes and encouraging legal action. Increasingly, NGOs are assuming the dual responsibility of documenting events on the ground and appealing to the international community for justice. A compelling historical example is the war in the Balkans, where human rights advocates – specifically Helsinki Watch – later known as Human Rights Watch – were among the first to urge the UN to establish a tribunal to prosecute war criminals (Futamura, 2023). In this instance, the civil society initiative catalyzed the creation of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

The advancement of technology in the 21st century has created new opportunities for

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communicating war crimes. A relatively recent development is the emergence of investigations based on open-source intelligence (OSINT) conducted by citizens and independent communities. Publicly available digital data and tools now allow individuals to investigate crimes and verify the accuracy of claims made by conflicting parties. These civil society efforts have become part of the broader public discourse on war and have the potential to transform international legal frameworks. Thus, communication about war crimes is no longer the exclusive domain of states or the media – it has become a shared responsibility of the public, enhancing transparency and increasing pressure on perpetrators.

Examining the communication strategies of civil society organizations in the context of war crimes is both timely and valuable for several reasons. Firstly, it helps us understand how societies come to learn the truth about the gravest crimes and how public support for justice is fostered. Secondly, analyzing the communication efforts of both Ukrainian and international organizations provides practical approaches and lessons learned – especially in light of the unique circumstances posed by the full-scale war in Ukraine. Finally, recognizing the challenges faced by communication professionals allows for the development of practical recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of information campaigns in this critical domain.

Research specifically focused on the communication strategies of civil society organizations in the context of war crimes remains limited; however, related issues are addressed across several bodies of work. These sources can be grouped into three main categories. First, some studies and reports document the efforts of NGOs themselves to collect evidence and raise awareness of crimes. This descriptive approach is utilized in reports by Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, the Clooney Foundation for Justice (CFJ), the Human Rights Center ZMINA, the Media Initiative for Human Rights (MIHR), and other organizations. For instance, Human Rights Watch report on Bosnia (2008) highlights the challenges of integrating evidence from local human rights groups into judicial proceedings (HRW, 2008). An article by the Atlantic Council on Amnesty International's controversial 2022 report demonstrates how poorly framed communication can lead to reputational losses for advocacy organizations (Posner, 2022).

Second, another strand of literature examines justice-oriented communication campaigns where the Ukrainian experience has grown increasingly relevant. For example, journalist Julian Borger, writing for The Guardian in 2023, describes how the CFJ team submitted files with war crimes to German prosecutors, leading to three investigations (Borger, 2023).

Third, several studies focus on the use of emerging technologies in the collection and presentation of the evidence concerning war crimes. This includes investigations by open-source research communities such as Bellingcat, which must navigate the verification of digital evidence amid an ongoing crisis of trust and widespread disinformation (OSF, 2023).

However, most of the aforementioned works either focus on normative aspects – for instance, the standards for collecting, verifying, and preserving digital evidence (Berkeley Protocol, 2022) – or on broader issues of transitional justice and the informational framing of war (Sherpa & Lugt, 2024).

In contrast, there has been no comprehensive analysis of the communication strategies employed by civil society organizations – their structure, channels, audiences, and effectiveness – in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Key issues remain underexplored, including the relationship between NGO communication efforts and international responses to war crimes, the specific features of Ukraine's advocacy communication during wartime, and how civil society organizations interact with the media and the broader public in shaping narratives of justice. These questions are central to this study, which aims to fill this gap in the existing academic literature by proposing a model for analyzing NGO strategies concerning war crimes, grounded in the experience of Ukrainian human rights organizations since 2022.

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Method

This research employs a combination of qualitative analysis, case studies, and content analysis. The primary focus is on the communication strategies of human rights organizations from 2022 to 2025. The study incorporates a review of academic literature, analytical reports, media publications, and materials produced by the organizations themselves, including reports, public statements, website content, and social media posts.

Using a case study approach, this research analyzes the activities of six leading NGOs: three Ukrainian organizations (the Human Rights Center ZMINA, the MIHR, and Truth Hounds) and three international organizations (Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the CFJ). It conducts an in-depth analysis of their communication tools, target audiences, key messages, visual formats, media campaigns, and advocacy practices.

Special attention is directed towards high-profile and socially significant cases, such as the controversy surrounding Amnesty International's 2022 report, the advocacy campaign "Where Are Our People?", and the CFJ's legal initiatives concerning the investigation of war crimes. Content analysis was applied to publications, public statements, and social media messages, identifying key themes, rhetorical techniques, and narrative structures.

To ensure the validity of findings, source triangulation was applied, involving cross-referencing data from official NGO materials, independent journalistic investigations, and scholarly literature. This approach assured the comprehensiveness and reliability of the research results.

Results and Discussion

Civil society organizations play diverse roles in communicating the issue of war crimes, ranging from collecting and documenting evidence to public advocacy, educational outreach, and pressure on governmental institutions to ensure justice. Their communication efforts aim to raise public awareness about the crimes committed, shape public opinion around the inevitability of accountability, and prompt international action, such as investigations, sanctions, or tribunals. In pursuing these objectives, human rights organizations simultaneously tailor their communications to several key audience groups.

The first group is the general public within the affected country. For Ukrainian human rights advocates, it is vital to inform the domestic population about the aggressor's crimes to deepen public understanding of the scale of the tragedy, foster solidarity with victims, and generate support for justice. Coverage of war crimes through national media outlets, social media platforms, and public educational initiatives – such as lectures and exhibitions – is aimed at engaging Ukrainian citizens. This heightened public awareness strengthens resilience against enemy propaganda and unifies society around the conviction that perpetrators must be held accountable. Moreover, for affected individuals and their families, this communication serves as a public recognition of their suffering, affirming that it is acknowledged and documented – and, therefore, that justice remains attainable.

The second primary target audience is the international community. Nearly all communication cases concerning war crimes by Ukrainian NGOs are, to some extent, directed toward external audiences, including foreign media, democratic governments, and their citizens. This approach is driven by the critical need to secure international support, essential for ensuring justice and mobilizing military, financial, and humanitarian assistance for Ukraine as the victimized state. For this reason, Ukrainian human rights defenders frequently publish materials in English and organize international advocacy events where they present reports on war crimes and other international violations committed by the Russian Federation. For instance, in 2023–2024, the Human Rights Center ZMINA organized a series of events across Europe and the Americas – including activities within the framework of Crimea Week in Brussels, side events at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) meetings, and delegation visits to the United States and Latin

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America, where its representatives raised awareness of Russia's war crimes and human rights abuses in Ukraine. This form of communication aims to sustain global attention on the war and engage international institutions and foreign governments in taking specific actions against perpetrators.

Another strategic audience includes stakeholders with the authority to influence accountability processes directly. These actors include law enforcement bodies, judicial authorities, legislatures, executive branches, and intergovernmental institutions such as the ICC, the UN, the Council of Europe, the EU, and the OSCE. NGOs often craft messages tailored to this audience by publishing policy recommendations, issuing open letters, and participating in public hearings and roundtables. The key objective is to influence decision-making, such as advocating for the establishment of a special tribunal, imposing sanctions against war criminals, or seeking international legal support for Ukraine. A successful example of this is the work of the CFJ, which prepares legally substantiated case files and submits complaints to judicial bodies in various countries under the principle of universal jurisdiction, particularly regarding crimes committed by Russian actors in Ukraine. In 2023, the CFJ, in partnership with Ukrainian organizations, submitted evidence packages to the German Federal Prosecutor's Office, triggering investigations into three separate war crimes cases (Borger, 2023). The CFJ's communication team ensured broad media coverage of this legal step to amplify its political impact. They combined direct stakeholder communication with public outreach, generating societal pressure on German officials to take action.

Media and Opinion Leaders. While the media are not the final target of communication efforts, they are among the most influential intermediaries. Human rights organizations cooperate closely with journalists, providing them with verified data, expert commentary, and access to witnesses. Information about war crimes reaches mass audiences through news coverage, feature articles, and documentary films. Many NGOs have established relationships with leading global media outlets, who regularly cite their findings. Moreover, human rights defenders often act as media experts or spokespersons in broadcast interviews and on social media platforms. A case in point: the coordinators of the "Where Are Our People?" campaign, which highlights the deportation of Ukrainians, reported that their efforts resulted in over 700 publications in top-tier international media (WOAP, 2023). Thus, strategic engagement with the press significantly amplifies the effectiveness of NGO communications, allowing their messages to reach wider audiences.

Communication Channels and Formats. Civil society organizations employ various channels and formats in an integrated approach. These can be grouped into several key categories.

Official reports, analytical papers, and press releases

Many organizations publish detailed written reports on documented war crimes, which they post on their websites and distribute to media outlets and international institutions. These reports typically include well-structured evidence (witness testimony, photographs, videos, satellite imagery, and legal qualification of crimes) and often contain specific policy recommendations. For example, between 2014 and the onset of the full-scale invasion, Truth Hounds conducted over 50 field missions in eastern Ukraine and Crimea, collecting extensive documentation and submitting at least three significant files to the ICC (Dooley, 2022). Since 2022, they have shifted to producing rapid-response reports, issuing public alerts within 5.5 hours of the initial attacks and publishing daily updates about new war crimes on their website (Dooley, 2022). This approach enables the public to remain quickly and reliably informed. The MIHR also regularly disseminates factual data and analysis. As of April 2025, the MIHR identified at least 2,246 Ukrainian civilians who have been abducted by Russian forces from occupied territories and are unlawfully detained in Russian prisons (MIHR, 2025). These statistical updates are often presented as infographics and news-style summaries, drawing public attention and pressuring authorities to secure the release of the detainees. International organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International also issue detailed reports on war crimes, typically in the form of briefing papers and research documents,

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which are accompanied by press releases. These reports often attract significant media coverage and help set the agenda for public discussion of the issue for extended periods.

Media Campaigns and Social Media

Human rights NGOs maintain an active presence on social media platforms, including Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and Telegram, using these channels for direct communication with their audiences. Social platforms serve as key venues for rapidly disseminating updates on new crimes, sharing survivor stories, and presenting short video or photo evidence, along with announcements of public actions. Hashtag campaigns have become essential to this strategy, leveraging recognizable slogans to mobilize attention. For instance, following the destruction of Mariupol, Human Rights Watch, in partnership with Ukrainian organizations such as Truth Hounds and SITU Research, launched the global campaign #JusticeForMariupol, encouraging users to share information about the crimes and demand accountability (HRW, 2022). Thousands of people, including prominent politicians and artists, engaged with the hashtag, further amplifying the reach of Human Rights Watch's report on the destruction in Mariupol.

Overall, social media empowers NGOs to engage younger, global audiences while bypassing traditional media gatekeeping, allowing information to spread virally. These platforms also facilitate online civic engagement. NGOs can coordinate petition drives, mass email campaigns to government officials, and digital solidarity actions. Amnesty International, for example, is known for its digital initiatives supporting victims, including its "Write for Rights" marathon to large-scale signature campaigns demanding investigations into specific war crimes. Meanwhile, the MIHR launched the "Release Hostages: A Demand for Freedom" campaign, which urged the international community to take action to save lives and help free Ukrainians held hostage by the Russian Federation (MIHR, 2023).

Press Conferences, Briefings, and Public Events

NGOs frequently organize in-person and online events with media participation to raise awareness of particularly sensitive or high-profile topics. Press conferences provide an opportunity to simultaneously present research findings or new developments to a broad audience of journalists, thereby ensuring coverage in subsequent news cycles. For instance, the MIHR held a press event in Kyiv titled "Always First: Families of Captured and Missing Paratroopers Demand Dialogue with the State," where relatives of Ukrainian prisoners of war publicly called on authorities to accelerate prisoner exchanges (MIHR, 2025). The event was covered by multiple TV networks, advancing public attention to the issue of military detainees.

ZMINA regularly holds public discussions and panel events, including presentations of its reports. In 2023, ZMINA and partner organizations held a briefing at the Ukrainian Crisis Media Center entitled "Evil Will Be Punished," summarizing three years of documentation work under the T4P initiative. The event was streamed live and received a wide media coverage. NGOs also participate in thematic public events such as exhibitions, memorial campaigns, and conferences. For example, during a week of open debates, the Center for Civil Liberties organized a photo exhibition on Russian war crimes displayed outside the UN headquarters in New York. These events serve as media triggers and emotionally powerful means of engaging audiences by appealing to their values and moral sensibilities.

Artistic and Interactive Projects

Cultural and artistic formats – from traditional exhibitions to digital storytelling initiatives – have emerged as innovative communication tools for NGOs. In 2024, Ukrainian NGOs Common Sense and PR Army launched the "Art for Freedom: Unseen Civilians" project, a series of exhibitions across Europe, spotlighting civilians unlawfully held by Russia (ZMINA, 2024). Ukrainian

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and international artists created visual pieces telling the stories of specific detainees, often accompanied by QR codes linking to more detailed information. The project aimed to use the universal language of art to convey the human toll of war and mobilize international pressure for their release.

Another representative initiative is the global advocacy campaign "Where Are Our People?" (WAOP), initiated in 2022 by a coalition of Ukrainian public relations professionals. The campaign focuses on exposing the forced deportation of Ukrainians to Russia and Belarus. As part of the initiative, organizers developed an interactive website featuring a deportation map, a catalog of survivor testimonies, and a series of international events. In November 2022, the WAOP team held a press conference on the abduction of Ukrainian children in France, which gained traction in local media and helped draw the attention of the ICC (PR Army, 2022). As a result, in March 2023, the ICC issued arrest warrants for Russian officials involved in the deportations. This swift outcome may not have been reached without the communication efforts of civil society actors (ICC, 2023).

In February 2024, as part of an advocacy tour in the United States, Ukrainian children who had been successfully repatriated from deportation testified before the UN Security Council about their experiences for the first time. Creative formats – such as art and interactive installations – allow human rights organizations to "breathe life" into dry facts, reach the hearts of diverse audiences, and overcome the growing sense of "news fatigue." The participants have noted that art serves as a universal language that resonates with both diplomats and ordinary citizens, regardless of background (ZMINA, 2024). Consequently, creative initiatives have become an integral part of NGO communication strategies, complementing more traditional media tools.

International Advocacy and Legal Action

Communication through legal mechanisms warrants focused attention. Human rights NGOs do not merely report facts, they also initiate legal proceedings, which function as a form of public communication that signals justice is feasible. Using its legal expertise and resources, the CFJ files lawsuits on behalf of victims in various countries. As previously mentioned, in 2023, the CFJ and its Ukrainian partners prepared three war crimes cases involving the shelling of a resort near Odesa, executions in Kharkiv Oblast, and incidents of sexual violence near Kyiv. Evidence from these cases was submitted to Germany's Federal Prosecutor's Office, marking the start of a universal jurisdiction campaign targeting Russian war criminals.

Notably, these legal actions are accompanied by broad media coverage. The CFJ issues press releases, while prominent media outlets amplify the stories. For example, the UK-based The Guardian provided detailed reporting on the cases in Germany (Borger, 2023). As a result, the public is updated on the progress of the investigations, reinforcing belief in the possibility of justice. Ukrainian NGOs act in similar ways. The T4P coalition regularly submits evidence to the ICC, accompanied by public announcements demonstrating momentum. To date, the coalition has submitted nine formal communications to the Office of the ICC Prosecutor (ZMINA, 2025).

Additionally, representatives of Ukrainian organizations, including the Center for Civil Liberties, have been advocating for the creation of a Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression. They speak at international forums to promote this idea globally. These communication efforts have yielded positive results. On May 9, 2025, delegations from 35 European countries convened in Lviv and signed a joint declaration supporting the establishment of a Special Tribunal to prosecute Russia's crime of aggression against Ukraine (Radio Svoboda, 2025).

Thus, communication strategies utilized by civil society organizations are both multichannel and multilayered. They combine factual evidence with emotional storytelling, address both domestic and international audiences, and integrate traditional media with digital tools along with legal and cultural dimensions. Importantly, Ukrainian human rights organizations cooperate closely with international partners, significantly enhancing their impact. For example, Human

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Rights Watch and Amnesty International rely on local NGOs for data collection, while Ukrainian activists use global platforms provided by Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International to amplify their messages. Joint projects – such as the Mariupol documentation initiative or international art exhibitions – demonstrate the synergy of efforts. As a result, a global communication network on war crimes is emerging, one that combats silence, preserves the visibility of truth, and maintains focus on justice.

In the process of communicating war crimes, human rights advocates face serious challenges that complicate their work:

Propaganda distortion and politicization

Any message about war crimes runs the risk of being distorted by hostile propaganda or co-opted for political purposes. A vivid example is the communication crisis surrounding Amnesty International's report in August 2022. The report, which criticized the Ukrainian military for allegedly stationing troops in residential areas, was widely condemned by Ukrainian officials and experts. In contrast, the Kremlin embraced the report and began actively citing it to justify its bombardments (Posner, 2022). Oksana Pokalchuk, then head of Amnesty Ukraine, publicly distanced herself from the report, noting that the global office had ignored the input of Ukrainian researchers, and resigned in protest. She stated: "The organization created material that sounds like support for Russian narratives. Seeking to protect civilians, the report has become a tool of Russian propaganda" (Posner, 2022). This case illustrates how poorly framed messaging can harm the credibility of human rights work and be weaponized by aggressors. The challenge for NGOs is to exercise extreme caution in crafting their messages and present them in context, so their work is not taken out of context or misinterpreted. Rapidly responding to disinformation by debunking falsehoods and clarifying controversial statements is crucial to maintaining public trust.

Security, Ethics, and Psychological Burden

Gathering evidence of war crimes often occurs in dangerous conditions – on the frontlines, under shelling, or through direct contact with survivors of traumatic events. Communication professionals within NGOs frequently accompany investigators into high-risk areas, exposing themselves to serious physical threats. Beyond physical safety, psychological burnout is another concern: constant exposure to harrowing stories – mass killings, torture, sexual violence – can take a toll on the emotional well-being of the team.

Equally important are the ethical considerations. Communicators must balance the imperative to reveal the truth about atrocities with the obligation to avoid inflicting further harm on victims. When publishing testimony, NGOs are responsible for obtaining informed consent, anonymizing vulnerable individuals (such as survivors of sexual violence or minors), and protecting them from stigmatization or reprisal. Cultural sensitivities must also be considered: overly graphic images or explicit descriptions of violence may trigger shock, disgust, or rejection of the message. Human rights organizations are often forced to adapt their content and include content warnings to avoid retraumatizing both survivors and viewers. These considerations present a heavy burden on communication teams and require professional training in trauma awareness, emotional resilience, and adherence to journalistic ethics when covering conflict-related topics.

Fact-Checking and Maintaining Trust

The reputation of human rights organizations depends mainly on the accuracy of the information they disseminate. In wartime, gathering and verifying facts is especially difficult: access to occupied territories is limited, witnesses may fear retaliation, and physical evidence may be destroyed. Nevertheless, public communication demands timeliness – audiences expect real-time updates. Therefore, the challenge lies in maintaining accuracy without sacrificing speed.

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For this reason, NGOs are increasingly adopting formal fact-checking standards, collaborating with investigative journalists, and using digital tools for verification – such as satellite imagery or blockchain timestamps to authenticate evidence. OSINT has become a valuable asset: independent analysts and volunteers help verify photo and video materials, making it possible to confirm or refute claims more quickly. Organizations like Bellingcat have established themselves as credible actors capable of validating conflicting accounts and exposing disinformation (Futamura, 2023).

However, implementing such methods requires additional resources and expertise, which can be challenging for smaller organizations. Another essential dimension of trust is impartiality. Human rights groups must maintain a high standard of objectivity to avoid accusations of bias or political alignment. In the context of the war in Ukraine, this means international organizations are expected to monitor violations by all parties. Any perception of selective reporting can seriously damage an NGO's credibility. Therefore, the challenge is to deliver balanced, legally sound information that can withstand exhaustive scrutiny.

Audience Fatigue and Information Competition

At the onset of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the issue of war crimes dominated public discourse. However, over time, mass audiences have shown signs of fatigue. Emotional exhaustion sets in as people become overwhelmed by the constant stream of distressing news and their sensitivity to shocking information decreases. For NGO communicators, it becomes increasingly complicated to sustain the same level of public engagement. This is especially true of international audiences: as the active phase of war continues, the public in other countries shifts its attention to domestic issues, and war crimes risk fading into background "noise."

In response, human rights organizations are seeking innovative ways to regain public attention. Unconventional strategies have become essential: telling personalized stories from the perspective of individual victims rather than using statistics, employing VR/AR technologies to immerse audiences in the reality of war, and engaging high-profile ambassadors – artists, actors, or public figures – who can attract new audiences by harnessing their reputations. NGOs also emphasize positive developments – such as stories of successful prosecutions or the release of victims – to strengthen hope and sustain long-term public interest.

State Pressure and Reputational Risks

The work of human rights organizations often struggles against resistance from the authorities whose crimes they expose. In authoritarian states, NGOs may face direct repression. For example, in August 2024, Russian authorities tagged the CFJ as an "undesirable organization," effectively banning it from operating on Russian territory – following its active investigations into war crimes committed in Ukraine (Starcevic, 2024). Russia's Prosecutor General accused the foundation of "discrediting Russia" and collaborating with "extremists." Such pressure poses a significant challenge for NGOs, as it impedes information gathering (by restricting access to Russian territory) and exposes local partners in the aggressor state to danger.

In democratic countries, the threat is reputational rather than physical. For instance, when Amnesty International released a controversial report on Ukraine, its reputation as an impartial human rights defender was called into question. A wave of criticism and backlash from Western media and experts cast doubt on the organization's credibility in this conflict. Thus, a core challenge for communication professionals is to uphold the reputations of their NGOs as trustworthy sources of information. This requires a prompt acknowledgment of mistakes, ensuring transparency in methods (including research procedures and fact-checking standards), and maintaining open dialogue with audiences.

Additionally, human rights organizations should work in coordination with one another to develop shared communication standards, such as ethical guidelines for reporting on war, which would help strengthen the overall credibility of the human rights sector.

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Thus, the challenges facing NGO communication strategies in the context of war crimes are substantial but not insurmountable. Many of them are interrelated; for example, enemy propaganda intensifies audience fatigue, while security risks hinder the accurate collection of data. At the same time, civil society organizations have developed a range of counterstrategies: forming international coalitions to reduce pressure from individual states, experimenting with innovative storytelling formats to re-engage the public, and strictly adhering to the standards of accuracy and verification to uphold credibility. These trends and responses are further synthesized in the concluding section.

Conclusions

This study demonstrates that communication strategies employed by civil society organizations are essential to the global pursuit of justice for war crimes. Both Ukrainian and international NGOs adopt a comprehensive approach to exposing such crimes – collecting evidence, conducting rigorous verification, disseminating information through diverse channels, and engaging in proactive advocacy with governmental and intergovernmental institutions. Human rights organizations serve as vital bridges between victims and the public: they elevate survivors' voices and transform individual tragedies into arguments for systemic change. Through reports, campaigns, and public actions, these organizations help society understand what constitutes a war crime, who holds responsibility, and why accountability is vital.

One of the significant achievements of NGO-led communication is the ability to sustain visibility of war crimes on the public agenda despite attempts to suppress or distract from the issue. In the context of Ukraine, human rights defenders have ensured that the world was promptly informed about the atrocities committed in Bucha, Mariupol, Izium, and dozens of other locations. International media relied heavily on the findings of Ukrainian NGOs and local journalists when reporting on those events, subsequently generating a wave of global support for Ukraine and increasing pressure on governments to take action. A revealing example includes the issue of child deportations: campaigns such as "Where Are Our People?" and coordinated advocacy efforts (e.g. testimony gathering, press events, appeals to international institutions) have successfully promoted the topic within the agendas of the UN and the ICC.

A defining feature of successful communication strategies is coalition-building and partnership. Ukrainian NGOs have come together in joint initiatives such as the T4P coalition, which helped standardize documentation methods and allowed them to speak with one voice on the international stage. Collaborations with trusted global organizations, such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the CFJ have strengthened international trust in Ukrainian data and intensified pressure on the Russian Federation. Conversely, international bodies have benefited from local expertise, which has made their statements more informed and impactful. This experience underscores the potential for global integration of communication efforts: a transnational network of NGOs, journalists, lawyers, and advocates can rapidly convey the truth and demand justice wherever needed.

The analysis of challenges shows that, although obstacles persist, human rights organizations are increasingly learning how to overcome them. The controversy surrounding the Amnesty report served as a key lesson in the importance of local context and the sensitivity of language during wartime. The public reaction in Ukraine revealed that audiences are also capable of critical engagement, meaning that trust in human rights communications is built through mutual responsiveness. Technological innovations, such as OSINT, have become indispensable in documentation work, and their further adoption will strengthen the credibility and evidentiary value of NGO communications.

In anticipation of the end of the war and the shift to transitional justice processes, the role of strategic communication will only continue to grow. It will be necessary to ensure transparency in the trials of war criminals, keep the public informed about the progress and challenges of these

proceedings, and maintain focus on reparations for victims. The communication infrastructure established by civil society organizations lays the foundation for effectively fulfilling these tasks. The continued coordination and professionalism of NGO communication teams will safeguard against historical amnesia and disinformation, helping to turn the horrors of war into lessons for humanity and arguments in favor of stronger systems for protecting human rights.

In conclusion, the communication strategies employed by civil society organizations to document and expose war crimes are strategically essential, multidimensional, and rapidly evolving. They contribute to shaping collective memory about the war, reinforce the moral imperative of justice, and coordinate the actions of various actors – from the general public to government institutions – to pursue accountability. Future research in this field may focus on empirically measuring the impact of specific communication tools (e.g., how public opinion shifts in response to campaigns) and developing guidelines for justice institutions to better engage with civil society.

What is already undeniable, however, is that without the voices of civil society, the path to justice for war crimes would have been significantly longer and more difficult. In the hands of human rights defenders, communication has become a powerful weapon against war – a weapon of truth, dignity, and hope for a just peace.

Declaration of generative artificial intelligence and technologies using artificial intelligence in the writing process. The authors did not use artificial intelligence tools in the preparation of this article. The authors of the article bear full responsibility for the correct use and citation of sources.

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A Comparative Analysis of the Russia-Ukraine War Coverage on Arabic News Websites in 2025: Al Jazeera vs. Al Arabiya

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This article examines trends in the coverage of the Russia-Ukraine war on two Arabic websites, Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya, three years after its start. The study aims to achieve the following objectives: to analyze and quantify the media content related to the war on these two major Arabic news websites, and to conduct a comparative analysis of the media content on both news websites, focusing on themes, issues, and coverage trends. **Method**. To analyze and quantify media content published on the Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya websites, specifically issues and trends, content analysis was utilized to research 99 pieces of media content from both websites published between February 24, 2025, and June 24, 2025. **Results.** It was observed that both websites primarily focused on the political topics of the war; secondly, both websites demonstrated an emphasis on the military aspect. The humanitarian sphere ranked third, while the economic coverage was relatively low. Both websites demonstrated a shared trend of portraying Ukraine in a more favorable light while framing Russia more negatively. However, the degree of intensity and editorial framing between the two media differed. **Conclusion**. Both websites engaged with various issues of the Russia-Ukraine war, including political, military, humanitarian, social, and economic issues, with different levels of attention. The coverage by both Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya of the Russia-Ukraine war was generally objective to some extent. However, a thorough analysis of the coverage trends indicates a slight bias favoring the Ukrainian perspective.

Keywords: Russia-Ukraine war, Al Jazeera, Al Arabiya, issues, trends, media and mass communication

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Порівняльний аналіз висвітлення російсько-української війни на арабських новинних сайтах у 2025 році: Al Jazeera проти Al Arabiya

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У цій статті розглядаються тенденції висвітлення російсько-української війни на двох арабських веб-сайтах, Al Jazeera та Al Arabiya, через три роки після її початку. Дослідження має на меті досягти таких цілей: проаналізувати та кількісно оцінити медіаконтент, пов'язаний з війною, на цих двох основних арабських новинних веб-сайтах, а також провести порівняльний аналіз медіаконтенту на обох новинних веб-сайтах, зосереджуючись на темах, проблемах та тенденціях висвітлення. **Метод**. Для аналізу та кількісної оцінки медіаконтенту, опублікованого на веб-сайтах Al Jazeera та Al Arabiya, було використано контент-аналіз для дослідження 99 медіаконтентів з обох веб-сайтів, опублікованих у період з 24 лютого 2025 року по 24 червня 2025 року. **Результати**. Було помічено, що обидва веб-сайти в основному зосереджувалися на політичних темах війни; по-друге, обидва веб-сайти продемонстрували акцент на військовому аспекті. Гуманітарна сфера посіла третє місце, тоді як економічне висвітлення було відносно низьким. Обидва веб-сайти продемонстрували спільну тенденцію зображувати Україну в більш сприятливому світлі, одночасно зображуючи Росію більш негативно. Однак ступінь інтенсивності та редакційне фреймування між двома ЗМІ відрізнялися. **Висновки**. Обидва вебсайти займалися різними питаннями російсько-української війни, включаючи політичні, військові, гуманітарні, соціальні та економічні, з різним рівнем уваги. Висвітлення російсько-української війни як Al Jazeera, так і Al Arabiya було загалом певною мірою об'єктивним. Однак ретельний аналіз тенденцій висвітлення свідчить про незначну упередженість на користь української точки зору.

Ключові слова: російсько-українська війна, Аль-Джазіра, Аль-Арабія, проблеми, тенденції, медіа і масова комунікація

Media coverage of wars and crises has a great power in our life, in fact it can shape the perception of these issues for countries and their governments on the one hand and influence the public opinion all over the world on the other hand, in addition to shaping attitudes towards wars, mobilizing public support, and creating perceptions of the enemy (Zrazhevska, 2025, p. 8). Hence, academic research into the media coverage of the Russia-Ukraine war as one of the most recent and significant current wars in the world, holds considerable significance in many parts of the world.

Currently, the Russia-Ukraine war is considered one of the most prominent events in the world. In fact, the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine began on February 24, 2022, and became one of the greatest threats to humanity since World War II, particularly in Europe. Many world leaders gave this assessment to the events as declared by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, who stated, "The war in Ukraine is the most dangerous period for Europe since the Second World War" (Krainikova, & Prokopenko, 2025, p. 12).

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Accordingly, many media scholars inside and outside Ukraine continue to monitor the timeline of the Russia-Ukraine war through numerous studies that focus on media content related to this issue (Lee, 2023; Verbytska, 2024; Vidya Nadkarni et al., 2024; Uluşan, Özejder, 2024; Espírito Santo, 2024; García-Jiménez, Suárez-Álvarez, & Catalina-García, 2024; Wozniak, Liu, & Lind, 2024; Zecchinon, & Standaert, 2024).

A literature review conducted in this context reveals a few studies about Arabic media addressing the Russia-Ukraine war, in particular, the study "Al-Jazeera Arabic and Al-Jazeera English headlines on the Russian–Ukrainian conflict: a Hallidayan transitivity analysis" (Muwafi et al., 2024). This study explores how Al Jazeera Arabic (AJA) and Al Jazeera English (AJE) represented the participants involved in the 2022 Russian-Ukrainian conflict through their headlines. Analysis of transitivity patterns in AJA and AJE headlines highlighted both similar and different representations of the conflict. Another study focuses on the Russian narratives in the coverage of the Russia-Ukraine war in the Arabic versions of Russia Today Arabic and Sputnik (Styszyński, 2023, p. 12). Furthermore, by using a sample content on such websites as The Washington Times, the Russian Trud, the Egyptian Al-Ahram Gate, and the Saudi Al-Riyadh, El-Kholi (2022) studied their frameworks in covering the events of the Russia-Ukraine war (El-Kholi, 2022, p. 47).

This article examines trends in the coverage of the Russia-Ukraine war on Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya three years after its onset. The study aims to pursue the following objectives: to analyze the Arabic media's perspective on the war between Russia and Ukraine, to analyze and quantify the related content on these two major Arabic news websites from February 24, 2025, to June 24, 2025, specifically themes, issues, and trends, and compare these findings with previous analyses of both Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya.

Method

Since its onset on February 24, 2022, the Russia-Ukraine war has become a significant event that garnered extensive media coverage worldwide, including by the Arabic media. Many countries address this crisis through newspapers, TV channels, news websites, etc.

In this study, we choose to analyze the Russia-Ukraine war coverage by two major Arabic news websites : Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya, three years into the war. We employed content analysis to quantify the media content published on these two websites. This media content reflects the main issues and trends presented in journalistic reports, news, or articles.

The selected period for this media content analysis corresponds to the beginning of the fourth year of the war (February 24, 2025) through June 24, 2025, totaling 121 days. Using systematic random sampling, we took 10 percent of the total number of days; resulting in 12 days for analysis and yielding 99 media pieces in total (see Appendix 1).

The sample of our study comprises 99 media pieces published on both Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya websites between February 24, 2025, and June 24, 2025. This study consists of two main stages: the first involved the analysis of the media pieces on both websites, and the second focused on comparing the findings.

Results and Discussion

A thematic comparative analysis of journalistic content published on the news websites of Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya regarding the Russia-Ukraine war covered the period from February 24, 2025, to June 24, 2025, and revealed the following findings:

The two news websites differed in the space allocated for covering the war. Al Jazeera features a permanent and dedicated section on its homepage, specially dedicated to the war, titled "War in Ukraine," whereas Al Arabiya includes its coverage of the war within a broader section labeled "Arab and the World." However, the two websites showed convergence in the total number of pieces published about the Russia-Ukraine war.

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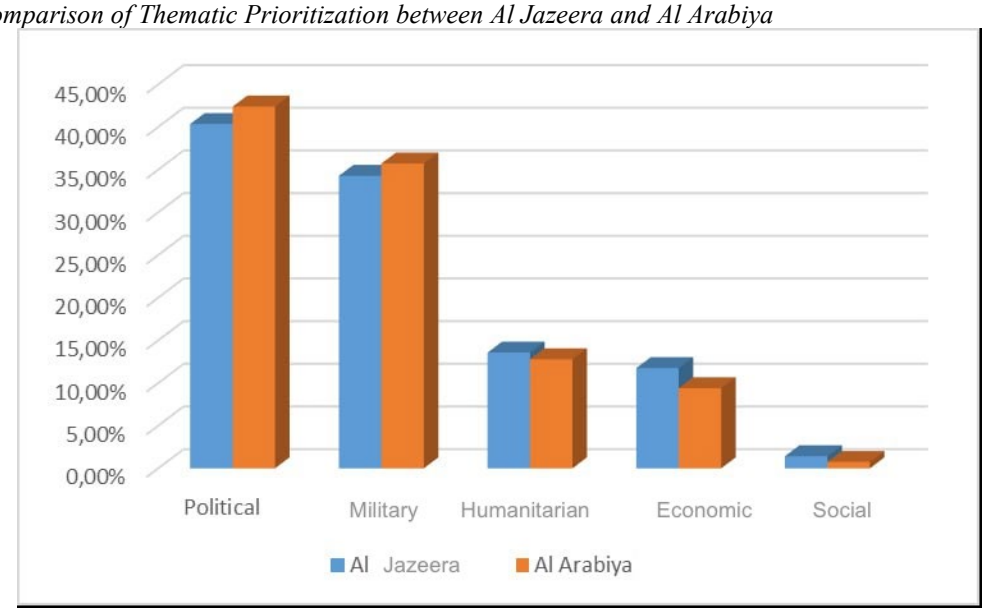
Table 1.
Total number of journalistic content on Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya websites

Media network	Al Jazeera	Al Arabiya
	51	**48**
Total	**99**	

Both Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya demonstrated a shared focus on the Russia-Ukraine war, providing comprehensive news coverage through reports, field dispatches, and analytical articles. These pieces were generally categorized under the labels "Russia News," "Ukraine News," or "Russia-Ukraine News," all of which addressed the conflict from multiple perspectives. The coverage prioritized the following dimensions in order: 1. Political dimension, 2. Military dimension, 3. Economic dimension, 4. Humanitarian dimension, 5. Social dimension.

Comparative analysis of thematic prioritization in the coverage of the Russia-Ukraine war

Figure 1.
Comparison of Thematic Prioritization between Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya



1. The Political dimension

The ascendency of the political dimension on both websites can be explained by the specific period under analysis, which was marked by significant political activity and tensions in international relations. This context was highly influenced by intense diplomatic efforts aimed at containing the conflict and facilitating negotiations and peace initiatives, with the ultimate objective of achieving a ceasefire and ending the war.

Throughout this timeframe, the coverage highlighted the role of the United States, particularly through the statements and positions of its president, Donald Trump, who was persistently

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portrayed as a central and influential key actor in shaping the trajectory of the war, both politically and militarily. For instance, headlines such as "Trump urges Putin to cease fire and suggests Zelensky may be ready to relinquish Crimea" illustrate this framing (Al Jazeera). In the same vein, another report stated, "Rubio noted that, to achieve peace, both sides must be genuinely committed, warning that the United States would take a different course of action if Russia and Ukraine were not willing to pursue peace…" Following Washington's threat to withdraw its mediation, Russia affirmed its commitment to resolving the conflict with Ukraine (Al Arabiya).

Both media covered the willingness of Russia and Ukraine to engage in negotiations, along with appeals for a truce and ceasefire. For instance, Al Arabiya reported that "Ukraine expresses readiness for a meeting with Russia... and awaits the 'peace memorandum'" (Al Arabiya). Similarly, articles such as "Lavrov: A New Round of Negotiations with Ukraine Will Be Held Soon" framed diplomatic processes while underlining the mutual accusations between Moscow and Kyiv regarding the failure of talks (Al Arabiya). The coverage also included Russia's announcement of a three-day ceasefire and Ukraine's call for a minimum 30-day truce, both of which underscored the fragility of peace efforts (Al Arabiya).

In summary, both media prioritized the political dimension, yet with different emphases: Al Jazeera contextualized developments within global power reconfigurations, while Al Arabiya foregrounded ceasefire negotiations and the inflexibility of Russia's conditions. Together, their coverage framed the conflict as deeply rooted in the geopolitics of security guarantees.

2. The Military Dimension

Given the limited success of political and diplomatic initiatives, military developments constituted the second major theme in the coverage of the two media.

Al Arabiya frequently stressed the immediacy of battlefield events and their humanitarian consequences. Reports such as "More War Crimes and Attacks on Civilians" (Al Arabiya) and "Zelensky: We Arrested Two Chinese Nationals Fighting for Russia, and We Expect a U.S. Response" (Al Arabiya) highlighted both human suffering and international entanglements. The media also described counteroffensives, such as the "Spider Web", as significant escalations (Al Arabiya) and highlighted Russia's framing of the conflict as existential struggle (Al Arabiya).

By contrast, Al Jazeera often linked battlefield dynamics to broader geopolitical strategies. For example, the articles "Russia Announces Retaking of Kursk, Zelensky Announces Arrest of Chinese Fighters" (Al Jazeera) and "Ukrainian Forces Target Kharkiv and Sumy, While Washington Hints at Withdrawing from Peace Talks" (Al Jazeera) explored how military events intersected with diplomatic tensions. Analytical pieces, such as Dr. Mazen Al-Najjar's "Militarization of Europe: The Return of Cold War Atmosphere with Russia" (Al Jazeera), further underscored the war's broader geopolitical stakes.

In comparison, Al Arabiya opted for an event-driven, tactical lens focused on immediate battlefield outcomes and humanitarian fallout, whereas Al Jazeera framed military developments within strategic and Cold War-like geopolitical narratives.

3. The Humanitarian Dimension

Both media prioritized humanitarian issues yet framed them under different lights. Al Arabiya highlighted casualty counts, destruction, and moral narratives. Examples include "Ukraine: 14 Dead and 44 Injured in Russian Attack on Kyiv" (Al Arabiya), "Russian Airstrike on Sumy: 40 Drones Downed Near Zaporizhzhia" (Al Arabiya), and "Russia Accuses Ukraine of Delaying Prisoner Swap, Kyiv Denies It" (Al Arabiya). The media emphasized attacks on civilians, portraying Russia as the primary perpetrator, as seen in "Russian Military Assault on Ukraine's Civilians," where Zelensky described Russia as "the embodiment of evil" (Al Arabiya).

Al Jazeera, while concurrently addressing the issue of civilian casualties, placed more emphasis on humanitarian processes and their limitations. Reports such as "Ukraine Recovers

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Bodies of 909 Soldiers Killed in Combat Following a Prisoner Swap" (Al Jazeera) and "Ukraine Recovers a New Batch of Its Children and Thanks Qatar" (Al Jazeera) showcased repatriation and family reunification efforts. Additionally, the medium explored psychological dimensions, as in "It Ended Quickly with One Achievement: What's Behind the Stalled Negotiations between Russia and Ukraine?" (Al Jazeera). In comparison, Al Arabiya presented humanitarian coverage in stark, event-driven terms, stressing Russian atrocities, while Al Jazeera embedded humanitarian issues within frameworks of processes, negotiations, and societal resilience.

4. The Economic Dimension

The economic dimension was equally significant but framed within political and strategic contexts. Al Jazeera underscored Ukraine's rejection of U.S. aid given the attached conditions (Al Jazeera), Kyiv's pursuit of U.S. investment guarantees (Al Jazeera), and Trump's prediction of an upcoming minerals agreement (Al Jazeera). In contrast, Al Arabiya, stressed Ukraine's parliamentary approval of the minerals agreement with the United States (Al Arabiya) and Kyiv's sanctions against China for allegedly arming Russia (Al Arabiya).

Consequently, both media treated economic issues as deeply political; Al Jazeera accentuated aid disputes and conditionality, while Al Arabiya emphasized sanctions and formal agreements. Together, their coverage suggests that economic reporting functioned less as financial analysis and more as a reflection of geopolitical bargaining.

5. The Social Dimension

The social dimension was the least covered by both media, yet their approaches varied. Al Jazeera contextualized social issues within the framework of domestic politics, noting declining support for President Zelensky and increasing pressures to hold elections (Al Jazeera). This framing presented public sentiment as a factor influencing political legitimacy and governance. In contrast, Al Arabiya treated the social dimension only peripherally, usually incorporating it into humanitarian narratives. One example cited the head of tribal affairs, who stated, "We cannot deliver any aid trucks without them being looted" (Al Arabiya). Such isolated mentions reduced social issues to mere logistical challenges in humanitarian aid, rather than reflecting deeper systemic dynamics.

Comparatively, Al Jazeera linked social themes to internal governance, while Al Arabiya reduced them to incidental references. Both media marginalized the social dimension relative to political, military, economic, and humanitarian narratives.

Overall, the comparative analysis of Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya demonstrates that both media framed the Russia-Ukraine war predominantly through state-centric and elite-driven narratives, with marked differences in emphasis across the five thematic dimensions. Politically, coverage converged on negotiations and ceasefire initiatives, though Al Jazeera placed these within the context of global geopolitical shifts while Al Arabiya foregrounded tactical diplomacy and Russian conditionality. Militarily, Al Arabiya adopted an event-driven, battlefield-centered approach, whereas Al Jazeera contextualized combat within broader strategic and Cold War legacies. Humanitarian reporting by Al Arabiya stressed casualties, destruction, and a moral condemnation of Russia, while Al Jazeera highlighted humanitarian processes such as prisoner swaps and child reunifications, linking them to the psychological toll of the war. Economically, both media treated financial issues as inseparable from politics: Al Jazeera underscored aid conditionality and negotiations, while Al Arabiya emphasized sanctions, agreements, and formal institutional processes. Finally, both media marginalized the social dimension, albeit with differing emphases: Al Jazeera framed it as a measure of political legitimacy and governance pressures in Ukraine, while Al Arabiya reduced it to sporadic humanitarian references. Collectively, these findings suggest that despite thematic variations, both media consistently privileged geopolitical and elite

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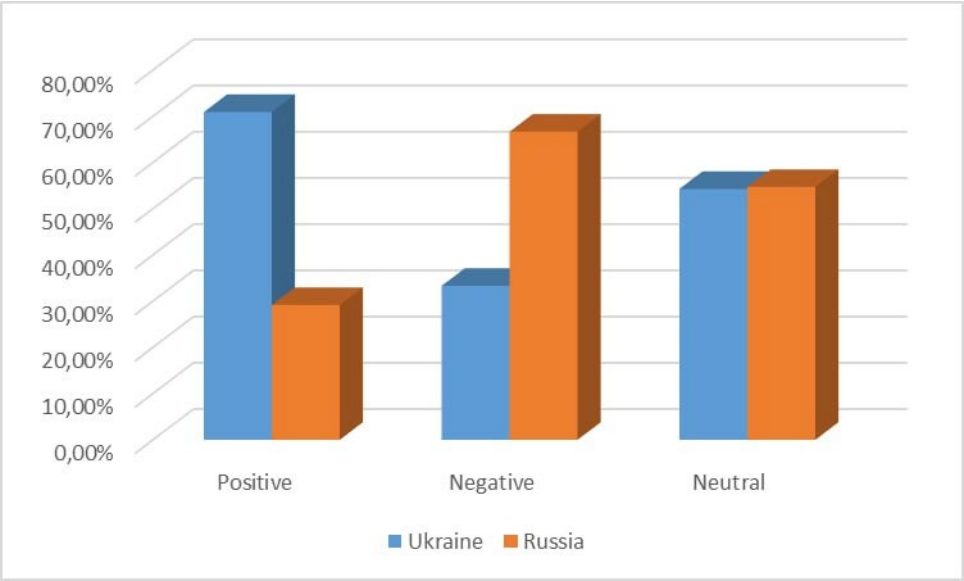
perspectives over sustained engagement with the real-life experiences of ordinary people, thereby reinforcing the dominance of state-centric frames in international conflict reporting.

Comparative analysis of Al Arabiya and Al Jazeera coverage sentiment

Figure 2.
Al Arabiya coverage sentiment towards Russia and Ukraine



The thematic analysis of Al Arabiya's reporting on the Russia-Ukraine war demonstrates a range of perspectives that fluctuate between positive, negative, and neutral framings depending on the context of the event. Quantitatively, Ukraine received the majority of positive coverage (70.83%), while negative framings were primarily directed at Russia (66.67%). Neutral portrayals were more frequently associated with Ukraine (54.29%) than with Russia. A closer examination of Ukraine-related coverage shows a relatively balanced distribution: neutral (37.25%), positive (33.33%), and negative (29.42%). Neutral reporting typically involved a balanced presentation of both Ukrainian and Russian viewpoints, particularly in diplomatic contexts, such as ceasefire negotiations and peace initiatives. Positive framings depicted Ukraine as a victim of aggression, legitimizing its right to self-defense, highlighting its military successes, and emphasizing its willingness to engage in peace efforts. Negative coverage of Ukraine was less frequent and largely stemmed from external criticism by international actors (e.g., Donald Trump, Elon Musk) or narratives of failed offensives.

Russia's portrayal was predominantly negative (56.60%), with frequent depictions of aggression, civilian targeting, and obstruction of peace efforts. The use of highly charged language, such as "terrorist state" or "criminal acts," reinforced this framing. Neutral portrayals (30.19%) were limited to factual reporting without evaluative language, whereas positive coverage (13.21%) was rare and largely associated with Russia's participation in peace talks or its ability to repel Ukrainian offensives. Overall, Al Arabiya's stance can be described as neutral-to-positive regarding Ukraine and predominantly negative toward Russia.

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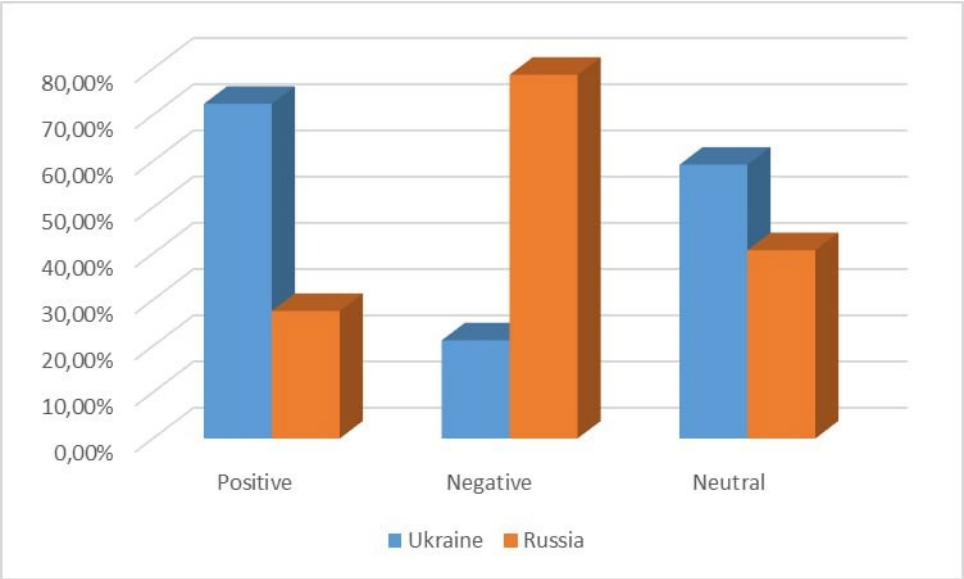
Figure 3.
Al Jazeera coverage sentiment towards Russia and Ukraine



The analysis of Al Jazeera's reporting reveals a clearer editorial bias toward Ukraine. Positive coverage made up 72.41% of Ukraine-related reporting, with a significant portion of neutral coverage (59.26%). Negative portrayals of Ukraine (21.28%) were relatively infrequent. Detailed results show that Ukraine was represented positively in 44.68% of cases, neutrally in 34.04%, and negatively in 21.28%. Positive narratives emphasized Ukraine's victimhood, humanitarian suffering, and tactical ingenuity, particularly in operations such as the "Spider Network," which was framed as a strategically impressive success. Neutral coverage was more prevalent in diplomatic contexts and discussions of international mediation, while negative portrayals were limited and largely stemmed from criticism by external figures or Russian skepticism regarding Ukrainian intentions.

In contrast, Russia's coverage was explicitly negative (66.07%). The country was consistently depicted as the primary aggressor and as an obstacle to peace, with frequent use of emotive language such as "invasion," "brutality," and "terrorism." Negative framings also emphasized the humanitarian consequences of Russian actions while downplaying the Russian civilian perspective. Neutral coverage (19.64%) appeared mainly in reports about international negotiations, while positive portrayals (14.29%) were scarce and typically linked to Russia's participation in peace talks or its temporary tactical successes.

Comparative Framing across Al Arabiya and Al Jazeera

Both media demonstrated a shared trend of presenting Ukraine in a more favorable light while framing Russia more negatively. However, the degree of intensity and editorial framing differed. Al Arabiya exhibited a more fluctuating stance, alternating between neutrality and positivity in its portrayal of Ukraine, while maintaining a predominantly critical tone toward Russia. Al Jazeera, in contrast, displayed a stronger alignment with Ukraine through consistently sympathetic coverage and harsher criticism of Russia, thereby presenting a more polarized narrative overall. This comparative framing underscores how linguistic choices, evaluative labels, and thematic

emphasis contribute to shaping the perception of the conflict. Although both media converge in depicting Ukraine as the victim and Russia as the aggressor, the degree of emphasis placed on this framing reflects their distinct editorial sentiments and possibly their broader institutional or geopolitical alignments.

Conclusions

Both Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya covered the Russia-Ukraine war from February 24, 2025, to June 24, 2025. An analysis of 99 journalistic pieces from both websites revealed that the war was addressed in various dimensions, including political, military, humanitarian, economic, and social facets.

It was observed that both media primarily focused on the political dimension of the war during this period, largely due to the numerous regional, especially European, and international political initiatives - most notably from the United States, under President Donald Trump – encouraging both sides to engage in negotiations and agree to a ceasefire.

Secondly, both media placed a noticeable emphasis on the military aspect, given the military escalation witnessed during this period, including increased military alliances, arms acquisitions, and on-the-ground combat. This was particularly evident in the significant counteroffensive launched by Ukraine against Russia, marking the largest and most substantial counterattack of the war since February 2022.

Another noteworthy observation is that the coverage of the war by both media tended to give considerable attention to the humanitarian side, especially in articles that covered Russian military attacks and the issue of prisoners of war, all within the broader context of the political trajectory of the conflict.

Due to the overwhelming political and military developments in the war, economic coverage was relatively limited. However, there were pieces dedicated to the most significant economic aspects between Ukraine and the United States, including topics such as aid and loans, mining agreements, and Ukraine's potential accession to the European Union.

Regarding the social aspect, which appeared the least covered, it was largely overshadowed by the political and military dimensions.

Based on the aforementioned, it can be concluded that the coverage by both Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya of the Russia-Ukraine war was primarily informative and reportorial, addressing the regional and international ramifications of the war and covering its various dimensions (political, military, humanitarian, economic, and social). The coverage was generally objective to some extent and balanced in terms of the number of published pieces, the variety of topics covered, the sourcing of information, and the presentation of both Russian and Ukrainian narratives. However, a thorough analysis of the coverage's sentiment indicates a slight bias toward the Ukrainian perspective. The tone of the coverage was more favorable to Ukraine and more critical of Russia, which was held responsible for the failure of negotiations, the hindrance of peace efforts, issues of prisoners of war, and the humanitarian suffering caused by Russian military attacks on civilians.

In conclusion, both Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya, through their coverage, provide timely news updates that reflect developments in the Russia-Ukraine war, positioning themselves as primary sources for shaping knowledge, attitudes, and opinions among Arab audiences regarding this conflict.

Authors' Contribution. Soumia Teniou, Asma Bouanane, Meryem Madoui – conceptualization, methodology; Amel Fadhloune, Asma Bouanane, Meryem Madoui – software, formal analysis; Amel Fadhloune – data validation, writing (original draft); Soumia Teniou – writing (review and editing).

Declaration of generative artificial intelligence and technologies using artificial intelligence in the writing process. We, Soumia Teniou, Amel fadloune, Asma Bouanane, Meryem Madoui, confirm that no artificial

intelligence tools were used to create, write, or edit the text during the preparation of this manuscript. All results are original and obtained without the help of AI. We mention that we used Chat GPT only to correct the translation of the articles and reports we analysed. The authors of the article are fully responsible for the correct use and citation of sources.

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Contemporary Digital Technologies of Media Communication in Social Media: A Typological Classification

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The study examines the latest communication technologies of the digital age, which are changing the ways and effectiveness of conveying information to the media audience. Scientific literature shows fragmentation in defining the boundaries, terminology, and classification of means of conveying information in the digital age, which necessitates a unified approach to analyzing the latest communication practices. The **purpose** of this article is to review existing research on contemporary technologies in mass communication, to classify the latest technologies for conveying information in the digital environment and to identify the key vectors of their application in the context of mass communication. The authors consider social media, streaming services, and the latest television, some advertising platforms, automatic translation tools, analytics, and crowdsourcing platforms as part of the latest communication technologies. The **methodology** is based on theoretical analysis, content analysis, typological, and comparative methods. The study proposes a typological structure of the contemporary communication technologies based on the following criteria: communication format, degree of automation, role of the audience, nature of personalization, and algorithmic control. The **results** of the study can be applied in future detailed studies on the development of media management, information policy, and digital security strategies. They also contribute to the formation of a scientific basis for further research in media communications in the context of the modern digital transformations.

Keywords: social media, modern digital technologies, new information technologies, social networks, streaming platforms

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Сучасні цифрові технології медіакомунікації в соціальних мережах: типологічна класифікація

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У дослідженні розглядаються новітні технології комунікації цифрової епохи, що змінюють способи та ефективність донесення інформації до аудиторії ЗМК. У науковій літературі спостерігається фрагментарність у визначенні меж, термінології та класифікації засобів донесення інформації у цифрову добу, що зумовлює потребу в уніфікованому підході до аналізу новітніх комунікаційних практик. **Мета** статті – оглянути наукову літературу, що стосується теми сучасних технологій масової комунікації, здійснити класифікацію новітніх технологій донесення інформації в цифровому середовищі та визначити ключові вектори їх застосування в контексті масової комунікації. Автори розглядають соціальні медіа, стримінгові сервіси, деякі рекламні платформи, інструменти автоматичного перекладу, платформи аналітики та краудсорсингу як частину сучасних комунікаційних технологій. **Методологія** базується на теоретичному аналізі, контент-аналізі, типологічному та порівняльному методах. У межах дослідження сформовано типологічну структуру новітніх технологій комунікування за критеріями: формат комунікації, ступінь автоматизації, роль аудиторії, характер персоналізації та алгоритмічного контролю. **Результати** дослідження можуть бути застосовані в розробці стратегій медіаменеджменту, інформаційної політики та цифрової безпеки. Вони також сприяють формуванню наукового базису для подальших досліджень у сфері медіакомунікацій в умовах цифрової трансформації соціальних комунікацій.

Ключові слова: соціальні медіа, сучасні цифрові технології, новітні інформаційні технології, соціальні мережі, стримінгові платформи

The modern information space is characterized by the rapid development of technologies that deliver information and shape public opinion through ideological messaging, commercial communication, and political discourse. In the context of digital transformation, media actors increasingly rely on tools such as artificial intelligence, algorithmic recommendation systems, crowdsourcing platforms, streaming services, and augmented reality. While the academic literature has addressed many of these technologies individually, there is still no systematic classification of contemporary media communication technologies. This niche complicates both the theoretical understanding of new tools and their practical application in information policy, strategic communications, and journalism.

To address this gap, the present study draws on McQuail's theory of mass communication and develops a typology of emerging media influence technologies. The research is guided by the following questions:

RQ1: How can contemporary media communication technologies be systematically classified in terms of McQuail's mass communication concepts (power, integration, enlightenment, and commodification), and how do factors such as automation, algorithmic control, and personalization reshape the traditional sender-receiver relationship?

RQ2: What are the strengths and weaknesses of different media technologies in relation to McQuail's functions of mass communication – i.e., their capacity to shape opinion (power), foster

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or weaken social integration, provide reliable knowledge (enlightenment), or risk manipulation and disinformation – especially within journalism, strategic communication, and information policy?

Accordingly, the purpose of this research is to develop a classification of contemporary media communication tools and to examine their role in the socialization of Internet users. By combining conceptual analysis with comparative assessment, the study contributes to the theoretical foundations of media studies while offering practical insights for journalists, policymakers, and communication strategists.

Literature review

Classical mass communication theory emerged in the early 20th century from a threefold concern: the power of new communication media, their role in social integration or disintegration, and their potential to promote or undermine public enlightenment. Early optimism about media as educational and integrative forces sat alongside fears about their manipulative potential – worries reinforced by wartime propaganda and authoritarian uses of press and cinema. These foundational tensions continue to shape debates today, even as technologies and social contexts have changed. This is one of the key tenets in McQuail's mass communication theory (McQuail, 2010). We apprehend some statements from this theory: the power of media, communication and social integration, one-way communication from mass media to mass audience, and expanding the theory by comparing contemporary mass communication technologies and approaches that they imply in social media and social networks.

McQuail's overview highlights core theoretical features of mass communication: large-scale distribution, one-directional flow, asymmetry between sender and receiver, standardization and commodification of content. These elements still provide a useful analytic baseline, but their applicability must be reconsidered in contexts where interactivity, personalization and multi-directional flows occur (social platforms, streaming, user-generated content). The shift from purely "transmission" models towards interactional, networked, and algorithmically mediated models is a major theoretical evolution.

The emergence of digital technologies has profoundly affected the media landscape, a transformation widely documented in academic literature. While Jean Chalaby (2024) provides a detailed economic analysis of streaming platforms, highlighting how their advertising models echo those of 19th-century newspapers, his focus remains largely on the business aspect. Similarly, Yurii Bondar (2018), Volodymyr Rizun and Yurii Havrylets (2024) discuss the broader socio-political implications and the growing influence of media on mass consciousness.

However, a closer look at the existing body of research reveals a significant gap. While these scholars successfully identify the effects of digital media – be it new business models or stronger societal influence – they often lack a focus on the specific mechanisms by which these effects are achieved, especially in a local or regional context. The shift in paradigm from studying media effects to media effectiveness, as noted by Artem Zakharchenko (2023), underscores this transition, yet a detailed examination of how specific technologies, like social media algorithms or AI, shape communication goals in practice remains underdeveloped.

This is where the findings of Jiao et al. (2025) and Koukaras et al. (2020) become particularly relevant, as they signal the rapid integration of AI and new technologies into daily life. This proliferation of new tools creates a discrepancy: we have a growing number of new digital platforms and technologies, but a limited understanding of how these specific tools are being harnessed to manipulate or shape media narratives. Therefore, while prior research provides a strong theoretical foundation for understanding the evolution of media, they do not adequately address the nuanced, platform-specific inconsistencies in how these new technologies are changing user behavior and content consumption.

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This study *aims* to bridge this gap by outlining most of the modern digital and AI-powered technologies in daily usage on social media and in communications. By focusing on specific technological solutions and providing clear definitions, this research will offer new insights into the discrepancies between the theoretical understanding of media's influence and its practical application in a digital-first environment.

In-depth citations from the literature

The issue of the emerging digital technologies and their impact on media is widely researched around the world and some of these studies will be relevant to understand the current level of understanding of the issue and the views held by fellow academics. Prof. Jean Chalaby looks at the economics of the media industry and the impact of new streaming platforms that are rapidly replacing traditional and cable TV on home screens:

> The business model of video-on-demand advertising platforms is based on bringing viewers and advertisers together. This principle is not new, and the Video-on-Demand advertising service was preceded by newspapers in the 19th century and radio stations in the 20th century. Newspapers have always relied on advertising revenue, but in the late 19th century, press magnates were the first to transform newspaper content to create a mass audience and establish a correlation between the price of advertising space and the number of readers (Chalaby, 2024).

This study discusses the business models and revenue streams of streaming platforms. The defining feature of websites that sell movies and TV series is the fact that these websites do not own the product (movies), but rather rent them in order to sell the viewing of this work to the end consumer. So scientific research of communications and business interests walk hand in hand.

Yurii Bondar writes about globalization and the active transformation of the media in his work "Information and Publishing in the Context of Socio-Political Transformations" as follows:

> With the development of information technology, social communication connections are also developing (and sometimes becoming more complicated), which directly affects the formation of mass, including political, culture and, accordingly, the socialization of society. The realities of all-information give grounds to talk about new trends and phenomena emerging in the process of socio-political transformations and the practice of the information society. Such trends and phenomena certainly require attention and comprehension in both practical and scientific and theoretical aspects (Bondar, 2018).

Volodymyr Rizun and Yurii Havrylets wrote the following about media influence:

> The media have always influenced the mass consciousness, using their own methods of influencing the audience. With the diversification of the media system and the emergence of new types of media, their influence is becoming stronger, more diverse, and has stronger consequences (Havrylets & Rizun, 2024).

Their approach and recent examples of media influence are a useful example for researchers of social communications and mass media.

The paradigm of media communication research has shifted from studying the means of communication themselves to studying their effectiveness, the achievement of a certain communication goal. Artem Zakharchenko writes about this in his doctoral dissertation:

> The formation of the concept of mediatization has seen a paradigm shift from the study of effects to the study of communication effectiveness; from the study of media influence to the perception of communication as an organized action using various tools. As this action takes place in the

communication system, measurement has its own peculiarities in different countries, depending, in particular, on the level of control – state or otherwise – over goal-setting in communication (Zakharchenko, 2023).

Chinese researchers from Beijing Normal University in their article "The Relationship between Digital Technologies and Innovation: Overview, Critique, and Research Agenda" record a significant increase in the number of scientific studies devoted to the latest technologies, which indicates the active introduction of new digital technologies, AI models and algorithms of social media, and media content consumption services into our daily lives (Jiao, Wang, Libaers, Yang, & Hu, 2025).

Greek researchers from Thessaloniki categorize social media by type. They recognize that while there are many different social media platforms on the market, users often need a one-stop shop to meet all or almost all of their needs (Koukaras, Tjortjis, & Rousidis, 2020).

All aforementioned investigations provide us with an opportunity to contemplate the basic concepts of media, media communication, evolution and development of social, communication and digital technologies, as well as to cover a small fraction of what has been lately happening in the field of artificial intelligence. Moreover, AI tools are already changing the way we use and understand social communications.

While existing research has examined specific technologies or platforms separately (Chalaby, 2024, etc.), little attention has been paid to how these technologies can be systematically classified within a unified framework. Moreover, most studies lack focus on the hybrid role of algorithms in reshaping sender-receiver relations. This article attempts to fill that gap.

Method

This study employed a combination of methods to achieve its goals and objectives:

1. Literature analysis (theoretical analysis)

Theoretical analysis was used to identify the evolution of the concept of "media communication" in the context of transition to a digital and algorithmic environment. Despite the existence of well-established classifications (R. Harris, D. McQuail), their adaptation to the social media environment with its interactive nature and personalized feeds allows us to clarify the parameters of modern influence.

2. Comparative analysis

The article provides a comparison between different groups of technologies based on the nature of their communication approaches, strengths, and weaknesses of media mechanisms. The method allowed us to compare each technology by several criteria: nature and means of media communication; strengths (e.g., high engagement, targeting accuracy, translation optimization); weaknesses (risk of manipulation, algorithmic distortion, data instability, distrust of sources).

3. Typological (classification) analysis

The classification of the latest media communication technologies has been formulated in accordance with their functional features, communication channels, level of interaction with the audience, and intensity of audience reach.

The comprehensive application of these methods allowed to thoroughly analyze the research object and to define reasonable supported conclusions.

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Results

As examples of the latest technologies of media communication, we consider the latest technologies that are crucial in defining modern media field and actively contribute to the formation of the information society, actively involving individuals in their vast network of content that is constantly expanding.

Streaming Platforms

Streaming services such as YouTube, Netflix, and Twitch have transformed the model of content consumption from the once linear television to personalized viewing (Haydak, 2024). These services make the possibility of a detailed choice of content possible for consumers (Baker, 2024).

Streaming platforms are online services that deliver media content (video, audio, live events, etc.) over the Internet to users on demand and in real time. Instead of downloading content, this technology allows for immediate display and consumption of media content on various devices. These services feature:

- personalization algorithms;
- recommendation systems;
- interactive and serial content;
- possibility of instant response and community formation.

Streaming platforms have fundamentally changed how news is produced and consumed. Digital journalism leverages these platforms to:

- *Break news in real time*: journalists can use live-streaming features on platforms like Twitch and Facebook Live to broadcast from the scene of a breaking news event, providing immediate, unedited coverage. This creates a sense of "liveness" and urgency that traditional media can't always match (Foxman et al., 2024).
- *Engagement with the audience*: platforms with interactive features, such as live chat and Q&A functions, allow journalists to directly engage with their audience. This builds a stronger connection and can help establish trust and credibility.
- *Delivering long-form content*: services like YouTube and podcasts on Spotify allow news organizations to produce and distribute in-depth, long-form content that might not fit the format of a traditional news broadcast or article. This includes documentaries, interviews, and deep dives into complex topics via experts discussing the topic over hours-long recordings.
- *Monetize content*: news outlets can use streaming platforms to create new revenue streams through ad revenue, subscriptions, and even direct donations from viewers, which brings the community-building feature to a whole new level. At first aimed to support independent creators, now big news outlets can profit from streaming platforms ads revenue as well, and build a community of so-called patrons, who donate money for exclusive content or simply to support their preferred news outlet regularly.

Social Media (Social Networks)

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter) have evolved into powerful instruments for shaping public opinion. Their influence depends significantly on who controls the narrative and which audiences are drawn into specific informational systems. In post-industrial societies, social media have become synonymous with modern information behavior, functioning as primary communication channels, news sources, and even marketplace, creating an entire e-commerce section of the retail market. In this regard, they can be considered universal infrastructures for information exchange and interaction (Goulart).

At the core of their mediation power lie technological mechanisms that drive the creation, spread, and impact of information, including:

- Algorithmic curation of news feeds, which dictates content visibility and engagement;

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- Content virality and distribution dynamics, enabling rapid amplification of narratives;
- Emergence of digital opinion leaders and influencers, who shape discourse within niche communities;
- Paid, targeted advertising, which personalizes influence and reinforces message reach towards target audience.

Together, these mechanisms construct a dynamic ecosystem of influence, in which social media users are not only consumers but also active participants in the reproduction and transformation of public discourse.

Machine translators for journalism

Tools such as Google Translate, DeepL, expand the possibilities of international communication by making it extremely easy for professional translators and creative personnel of media outlets to translate large amounts of text into different languages, which reduces the workload of translators in newsrooms and allows people with sufficient language skills to quickly translate and publish materials in different languages. The impact of globalization and technological development on the field of translation, particularly in the context of journalism, has been profound:

> the term globalization has affected the translation field more than anything else… The burden in question occurred due to the circulation and speed of the upcoming tasks and the lengthiness of the documents demanded to be translated. This observation directly relates to modern journalistic practices, where the speed of news production and the global demand for accessible content place increased pressure on newsrooms to localize information efficiently and accurately (Mercan, Akgün, & Odacıoğlu, 2024).

Machine translation tools contribute to this process by enabling:

- Automation of content translation across multiple languages;
- Simultaneous multilingual publication, expanding audience reach;
- Cultural adaptation of messages, allowing for nuanced international communication;
- Acceleration of editorial workflows, supporting real-time journalism in a global context.

These capabilities make machine translators not just auxiliary tools, but integral components of the digital media infrastructure in the age of globalized news.

Advertising technologies (AdTech)

Digital advertising systems (Meta Ads, Google Ads, Programmatic platforms) allow to fine-tune the impact on the target audience. The most significant technological advancement in this area has been the use of so-called Machine Learning in the analysis, processing, and interpretation of advertising data, which allows for a significant increase in the amount of processed data, thus making it possible to more accurately predict the effectiveness of an ad for each individual user account (Chandrasekaran, 2025).

These tools include:

- geolocation and behavioral targeting;
- retargeting;
- native advertising in the content;
- creatives for each separate account based on big data.

Programmatic Advertising is the most common application of AdTech in journalism. Programmatic advertising automates the buying and selling of ad space (also known as ad inventory) using software and algorithms.

Real-Time Bidding (RTB): When a user visits a news website, an automated, real-time auction occurs in milliseconds. Advertisers bid on the available ad space, and the highest bidder wins the right to display their ad. This process is managed by a *Supply-Side Platform (SSP)*, which helps

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the publisher (the news outlet) sell its inventory, and a *Demand-Side Platform (DSP)*, which helps the advertiser buy it (Pippit.ai, 2025).

Benefits for Journalism: RTB allows publishers to maximize the revenue from every single page view by ensuring that ad space is sold to the highest bidder. It also makes it easier for smaller news outlets to compete with larger ones by giving them access to a global pool of advertisers.

Crowdsourcing and user engagement platforms

Platforms like Reddit, Change.org, and Wikipedia use the energy of a mass audience to create and distribute content. Types and applications of crowdsourcing: this technology is widely used to collect data in consumer research, replacing traditional sampling with online participants, e.g., on Amazon Mechanical Turk. According to the platform's website:

> Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) is a crowdsourcing platform that makes it easy for individuals and companies to outsource their processes and tasks to a distributed workforce that can perform these tasks virtually. This can include anything from conducting simple data validation and research to more subjective tasks such as participating in surveys, moderating content, and more. (Amazon Mechanical Turk).

It also supports idea generation, open innovation, and customer-centric product development by involving customers, stakeholders, and investors in business processes (Goodman & Paolacci, 2017; Hammon & Hippner, 2012).

Contests and problem solving: Crowdsourcing contests involve posting tasks (e.g., design, programming) with monetary rewards, attracting a variety of solutions from a wide range of participants. Such contests are common on online platforms and have been studied in terms of their incentive structure and participant behavior (Segev, 2020; Afuah & Tucci, 2012).

Such technologies provide for:

- involving users in the media process;
- creating public awareness campaigns;
- strengthening the effect of trust in content through "social proof".

In the context of social media, social proof functions as a psychological mechanism that influences users through visible indicators of popularity, such as likes, comments, shares, or upvotes. Crowdsourcing platforms and comment-driven networks (e.g., Reddit, Wikipedia, Change.org) use social proof to build collective credibility and drive civic or informational engagement. Just as product reviews in the SaaS (Software as a Service) sector, these dynamics are leveraged to shape opinion and legitimize content choices.

Let us clarify the concept of "social proof" for a better understanding of the peculiarities of its application and the role of cloud and crowdsourcing technologies in this phenomenon.

> Social proof is a popular psychological tactic where people take into account user reviews and impressions to make different purchasing decisions. SaaS companies use social proof to demonstrate that their products provide a positive experience and meet user requirements. Building trust is key for SaaS businesses as customers look for long-term solutions rather than one-time purchases (PayPro Global, 2024).

Monitoring and analytics platforms

Tools such as CrowdTangle, Brand24, Meltwater, Google Trends are used to track the information field. Monitoring and analytics platforms are essential tools for collecting, processing, and analyzing large arrays of data in a variety of industries, including healthcare, manufacturing, social media, and software. These platforms allow organizations to gain insights, optimize operations, and proactively respond to emerging issues. Monitoring platforms in manufacturing analyze production data at multiple levels (planning, part program, program line) to optimize processing by

tracking both high-frequency and low-frequency variables (Beudaert et al., 2019). AI platforms analyze social media data for marketing, reputation management, and competitor analysis, providing intelligent insights and personalized advice (Perakakis et al., 2019). Other systems focus on monitoring public sentiment and social attitudes, using sentiment analysis and machine learning to assess attitudes toward public policy and societal issues (Karyukin et al., 2021).

Specifically, in the field of international communication and media influence, these platforms enable:

- Prompt response to information threats and disinformation campaigns;
- Detection of "points of influence" – individuals, topics, or platforms driving engagement;
- Evaluation of content strategies, including the reach, engagement, and perception of media campaigns.

By combining data-driven intelligence with predictive analytics, such platforms empower organizations – including newsrooms, public institutions, and state media – to navigate the complex dynamics of digital public space and maintain resilience against information warfare and manipulative narratives.

As the answer to RQ1, our analysis shows that contemporary media communication technologies can be classified according to five criteria: communication format, degree of automation, role of the audience, personalization, and algorithmic control. When placed into McQuail's mass communication framework:

- *Power* is concentrated in technologies such as social media platforms and streaming services, where algorithms prioritize visibility and agenda-setting, often shaping what content audiences consume.
- *Integration* is supported by crowdsourcing platforms and interactive streaming tools that involve audiences as co-creators of content, fostering social cohesion or collective mobilization.
- *Enlightenment* is facilitated through machine translation tools and monitoring/analytics platforms, which expand access to multilingual information and provide data for informed decision-making.
- *Commodification* is most evident in advertising technologies (AdTech) and streaming monetization, where user data and attention are turned into market value.

In all these cases, automation, personalization, and algorithmic curation have reshaped the sender–receiver relationship. Audiences are no longer passive but actively influence message circulation (through shares, likes, and participation), while algorithms mediate what content is visible. This creates a *hybrid communication model* that combines elements of one-way mass communication with interactive, personalized, and data-driven exchanges.

The latest technologies of influence have significantly expanded the tools of mass communications, increasing their accuracy, flexibility, and efficiency. The amount of data that people and machines use to achieve their goals and increase the effectiveness of media influences has increased immeasurably. However, it has also raised a number of challenges: ethical, technical, and political. In the future, it is advisable not only to classify these technologies, but also to assess their impact in different contexts: national, international, commercial, and political. Here, it would be appropriate to analyze the "classical" and newest technologies of media influence in the public broadcasting systems of different countries of the world and Ukraine. Some research on the origin and evolution of broadcasting systems in the world has already been conducted (Horodenko & Shtelmakh, 2024).

These technologies imply a number of weak points that can strongly impact the ethics of how we use news and communication in our digital age, they include:

- *Algorithmic Distortion and Dependence*: Many of these technologies, especially streaming and social media, rely on algorithms that can lead to creating "information bubbles" for end users and a dependency on how these algorithms shape what content a user sees.

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- *Risk of Manipulation and Disinformation*: The speed and reach of these tools, particularly social media, make them susceptible to manipulation and the rapid spread of disinformation and misinformation. This can erode public trust in news sources and media content at all, which brings up unpredicted and possible dire consequences for media and communications business.
- *Loss of User Trust*: The use of AdTech and personalized targeting can lead to an "advertising overload," which may cause users to lose trust in the content or the platform itself as well as "advertising fatigue" when the ads themselves will cease to stimulate emotion and desire of the end user because of various processes that make human body and mind build resistance to such kind of stimuli.
- *Ethical Challenges*: The extensive use of data and automation raises a few ethical, technical, and political challenges that need to be addressed in further research with implementation of multidisciplinary approaches to the research process.

Here is a comparative table that highlights specific weaknesses for each mentioned technology group:

- *Streaming Platforms*: The main weaknesses are the risk of information bubbles and the audience's dependence on algorithms.
- *Social Media*: Their primary weaknesses are the poor quality of content and the high risk of manipulation and disinformation.
- *Machine Translators*: These tools may produce translation errors and result in an unstable quality of translated content.
- *Advertising Technologies (AdTech)*: Weaknesses include advertising overload for users and a potential loss of user trust.
- *Crowdsourcing Platforms*: While they offer collective support, there is low control over accuracy of information, and they are at risk of manipulations.
- *Monitoring and Analytics Platforms*: Their effectiveness is highly dependent on the quality of the data, which can lead to a risk of false conclusions.

For RQ2, after classifying and analyzing the data on platforms, tools and technologies mentioned and described above, we were able to create a comparative table with a detailed and concise description of each item, strengths and weaknesses, advantages and risks of using each of the listed technologies.

Table 1.
Comparison of media influence technologies

	Technology	**Ways of media impact**	**Strengths**	**Weaknesses**
1	Streaming platforms (YouTube, Netflix, Twitch)	Personalization, recommendations, interactivity, and the formation of subcultures	High engagement, emotional attachment of the audience	Risk of information bubbles, dependence on algorithms
2	Social media (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, X)	News feeds, virality, influencers, ads targeting	Speed of information dissemination, ability to form opinions	Poor quality of content, manipulation, disinformation

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3	Machine translators (Google Translate, DeepL)	Translation, multilingual content creation, cultural adaptation	Reducing the language barrier, optimizing newsroom productivity	Possible translation errors, unstable quality of translated content
4	Advertising technologies (Meta Ads, Google Ads)	Location-based targeting, behavioral targeting, native advertising	High accuracy of audience coverage, budget efficiency	Advertising overload, loss of user trust
5	Crowdsourcing platforms (Reddit, Change.org, Wikipedia)	Mass involvement of users, public campaigns, social proof	Mass participation, public campaigns, social proof. Collective support for ideas, high trust in content	Low control over accuracy, risk of manipulations
6	Monitoring and analytics platforms (CrowdTangle, Brand24, Google Trends)	Tracking trends, identifying points of influence	Rapid response to information threats, strategic planning	Dependence on data quality, risk of false conclusions

The contemporary information society is characterized by the integration of digital technologies into mass communication, which fundamentally changes the ways of influencing the audience. The latest digital technologies expand the possibilities of personalization, emotional engagement, international communication and manipulation of information flows, especially in the field of social media (social networks, streaming platforms, crowdsourcing). Our inquiry has provided a typology of these technologies that allows them to be clearly divided by their mechanisms of influence: viewing interactive content, personalized advertising, crowdsourced support, automated content translation. The strong points of technologies (efficiency, scalability, personalization) are accompanied by weaknesses (risks of misinformation, dependence on algorithms, power supply, availability of fast broadband Internet connection, ethical challenges).

The comparative analysis of six groups of technologies reveals both strengths and weaknesses in their activity:

- *Streaming platforms (YouTube, Netflix, Twitch)*: Strengths include high engagement, emotional attachment, and real-time news broadcasting. Weaknesses lie in audience dependence on algorithms and risk of information bubbles, which can limit enlightenment and skew public opinion.
- *Social networks (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, X)*: Strengths include speed of dissemination and opinion formation via influencers. Weaknesses are poor content quality, susceptibility to manipulation, and amplification of disinformation, which can undermine integration and enlightenment.
- *Machine translators (Google Translate, DeepL)*: Strengths include multilingual communication, cultural adaptation, and newsroom productivity. Weaknesses are translation errors and unstable quality, which may distort reliable knowledge.
- *Advertising technologies (Meta Ads, Google Ads, programmatic tools)*: Strengths are precise targeting and efficient budget use, which can reinforce communication power.

Weaknesses include advertising overload and erosion of user trust, threatening the credibility of journalism.

- *Crowdsourcing platforms (Reddit, Change.org, Wikipedia)*: Strengths include mass participation, social proof, and public mobilization, enhancing integration. Weaknesses are low control over accuracy and high risk of manipulation.
- *Monitoring and analytics platforms (CrowdTangle, Brand24, Google Trends)*: Strengths include rapid detection of information threats and strategic communication planning. Weaknesses are dependence on data quality and risk of false conclusions, which can distort enlightenment.

Overall, the analysis demonstrates that while modern technologies broaden the *tools of influence and personalization*, they simultaneously increase ethical, technical, and political risks. Their effectiveness in shaping opinion and supporting integration depends heavily on the transparency of algorithmic control and the capacity of media actors to mitigate manipulation and disinformation.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that modern technologies of media communication – ranging from streaming platforms and social networks to machine translation, AdTech, crowdsourcing, and analytics tools, have fundamentally transformed the dynamics of mass communication. By classifying these technologies according to their mechanisms of influence, the research provides a structured framework for understanding both their potential and their limitations.

The study addressed two research questions. In response to **RQ1**, we developed a typology of modern media communication technologies structured by format, automation, personalization, algorithmic control, and the role of the audience. When applied to McQuail's framework, this classification demonstrates how digital platforms redistribute communicative power, enhance or weaken social integration, broaden access to knowledge, and commodify user attention in ways that transform the sender–receiver relationship into an algorithmically mediated, interactive exchange.

In response to **RQ2**, our comparative analysis revealed that each technology group carries both opportunities and risks: streaming and social networks expand engagement but foster dependency on algorithms; machine translators enable multilingual communication but risk errors; AdTech strengthens targeting but erodes trust; crowdsourcing builds participation but lacks accuracy control; and analytics platforms support strategic planning but depend on data quality. Collectively, these findings highlight that while emerging technologies extend the scope of media influence, they also intensify ethical and political challenges, requiring balanced application in journalism, strategic communication, and information policy.

By offering a systematic typology, this study contributes to the theoretical foundations of media communication research while providing practical insights for policymakers, journalists, and communication strategists. The results can inform the development of information policy, digital security strategies, and innovations in international broadcasting, where the balance between technological opportunity and ethical responsibility remains a defining challenge of the digital age. We can also draw a conclusion that the use of new technologies, such as social media, has significantly expanded the possibilities of media influence and at the same time made it accessible to a wide range of communicators.

Authors' contribution. Yurii Bondar - conceptualization, methodology; , Pavlo Shtelmakh - software, formal analysis, data validation.

Declaration on Generative Artificial Intelligence and Technologies Using Artificial Intelligence in the Writing Process. The authors used the AI model ChatGPT in this research to find and organize the literature review. Additionally, another AI-based tool for researchers – Consensus

(https://consensus.app/search/) – was used for manual article research based on the paper's keywords. The authors of the article bear full responsibility for the correct use and citation of sources.

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"The War on an Invisible Front": Narratives about LGBTQ+ in Instagram and TikTok Comments

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This article analyzes the dynamics of online discourse surrounding LGBTQ+ communities in the comments sections of Ukrainian social media (Instagram, TikTok) in the context of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine. The **study aims** to identify, classify, and analyze the dominant narratives that reflect perceptions of LGBTQ+ individuals in the online space, as well as to examine the sentiment of discussions and their platform dependency. The paper employs a hybrid methodology based on a corpus of 600 comments from 20 viral videos. Quantitative content analysis and sentiment analysis were conducted, along with a qualitative discourse and narrative analysis, to identify underlying semantic structures. The **results** demonstrate a pronounced polarization of opinions in online comments, with 45% being positive, 38.2% negative, and 16.8% neutral. Statistically significant differences were found between the platforms: TikTok appears as a space of greater solidarity, while Instagram exhibits a higher level of conflict. Five dominant narratives structuring public communication were identified, the central one being the conflict between a narrative of equality and various forms of resistance, which exacerbates the vulnerability of LGBTQ+ communities. The study's **conclusions** demonstrate that despite a significant level of hostility, the overall dynamics of expressions on social media during the war indicate a gradual increase in support for LGBTQ+ communities. This inference suggests a discrepancy between the sentiment of online reactions and data from previous sociological surveys. This process is a significant indicator of the value transformation within Ukrainian society. The practical significance of the work lies in providing recommendations for media and platforms on enhancing digital inclusion.

Keywords: LGBTQ+, content analysis, narrative analysis, social media, online comments, TikTok, Instagram, war

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«Війна проти невидимого фронту»: наративи про ЛГБТК+ в коментарях Instagram і TikTok

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У статті аналізується динаміка онлайн-дискурсу навколо ЛГБТК+ спільнот в коментарях українських соціальних мереж (Instagram, TikTok) в умовах повномасштабної війни Росії проти України. **Метою** дослідження є ідентифікація, класифікація та аналіз домінантних наративів, що відображають сприйняття ЛГБТК+ людей в онлайн-просторі, а також аналіз тональності обговорень та її залежності від платформи. У роботі застосовано гібридний метод: на основі корпусу з 600 коментарів під 20 віральними відео було проведено кількісний контент-аналіз із застосуванням аналізу тональності, а також якісний дискурс- та наративний аналіз для виявлення глибинних смислових структур. **Результати** демонструють виражену поляризацію думок в онлайн-коментарях: 45% з них були позитивними, 38,2% – негативними, 16,8% – нейтральними. Виявлено статистично значущі відмінності між платформами: TikTok є простором більшої солідарності, тоді як Instagram демонструє вищий рівень конфліктності. Ідентифіковано п'ять домінантних наративів, що структурують публічну комунікацію, центральним з яких є конфлікт між наративом рівності та різними формами опору, що посилює вразливість ЛГБТК+ спільнот. **Висновки** дослідження демонструють, що попри значний рівень ворожості, загальна динаміка висловлювань у соцмережах в умовах війни свідчить про поступове посилення підтримки ЛГБТК+ спільнот. Це вказує на розбіжність між тональністю онлайн-реакцій та даними попередньо проведених соціологічних опитувань. Цей процес є важливим маркером ціннісної трансформації українського суспільства. Практичне значення роботи полягає у наданні рекомендацій для медіа та платформ щодо посилення цифрової інклюзії.

Ключові слова: ЛГБТК+, контент-аналіз, наративний аналіз, соціальні мережі, онлайн-коментарі, TikTok, Instagram, війна

The representation of LGBTQ+ communities (standing for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer – an umbrella term for non-heterosexual and non-cisgender identities – and +, representing all other gender identities and sexual orientations) in the media serves as a key source of social knowledge about their identity, influencing the formation of public attitudes (McInroy & Craig, 2017; Randev, 2022). A prolonged lack of positive portrayals in traditional media has contributed to the marginalization of these groups (Gross, 2001). In this context, Stuart Hall (1997) interprets representation as a process of constructing meaning that depends on cultural codes and interpretive practices, thereby highlighting the relativism in the depiction of gender and sexual diversity.

Social networks, as a key type of online platform (specifically, interactive digital media platforms), differ from other forms of digital content (e.g., forums or static websites) in their interactivity, algorithmic distribution, and capacity for real-time engagement. These characteristics make them a unique environment for community formation and the exchange of ideas.

Social media have become an integral part of the daily lives of LGBTQ+ youth, providing a space for self-expression, emotional support, and access to relevant information (Craig et al., 2021). Within this interactive context, comments on posts have become a central arena for expressing public opinion, making them a valuable data source for analyzing sentiments in online discourse (Alafwan et al., 2023). These virtual spheres enable the open discussion of sensitive

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topics, thereby forming a "digital public sphere," the analysis of which is crucial for the social sciences. This problem becomes particularly relevant in Ukraine during the full-scale war, which has radically transformed the social landscape and exacerbated the vulnerability of LGBTQ+ communities (Margalit, 2019).

Russia's war against Ukraine has not only a physical dimension but also an invisible one – a struggle over ideology and societal values. This virtual "war on an invisible front" unfolds on social media, where narratives of tolerance and support clash with those of aggression, disinformation, and prejudice that can deepen social divisions. This struggle goes against a backdrop of global ideological confrontation, where, as researchers note, Russia openly positions its invasion as a defense of "traditional values" against a perceived "liberal and decadent West" (Luciani & Shevtsova, 2024; Tsaturyan, 2024). Therefore, analyzing online discourse is critically important for understanding the transformations occurring in society.

The full-scale war has created a unique social paradox: sociological surveys record an unprecedented increase in tolerance and support for equal rights for LGBTQ+ individuals, partly due to their participation in the country's defense (Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, 2024). Concurrently, Alon Margalit (2019) notes that armed conflict significantly exacerbates the vulnerability of LGBTQ+ persons who already face violence and discrimination in peacetime. Notably, the rights of LGBTQ+ people are an integral part of universal human rights, which prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, as enshrined in international documents ratified by Ukraine, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the European Convention on Human Rights (1950). These rights are interconnected with national legislation, yet the current Law of Ukraine "On the Principles of Preventing and Combating Discrimination" (2012) does not explicitly include sexual orientation and gender identity among its protected characteristics. This creates a legislative gap, which Draft Law No. 13597 (2025) – registered but not yet adopted – aims to close. On the other hand, research acknowledges the potential drawbacks of social media during crises, such as the dissemination of disinformation and the amplification of harmful narratives that can exacerbate existing social tensions and vulnerabilities (Ye et al., 2023). As Marian Blanco-Ruiz and Clara Sainz-de-Baranda (2018) point out, digital media are a battleground for visibility, where marginalized groups often find more opportunities to create communities of support compared to traditional mass media.

The **aim** of this study is twofold: first, to reveal the dynamics of narratives concerning LGBTQ+ communities in social media comments, and second, to develop an empirical model of their impact on online perceptions and media discourse amid the war, with the overarching goal of offering practical recommendations for moderation policies and strengthening digital inclusion.

The **object** of the study is user reactions to content about LGBTQ+ communities on the social networks Instagram and TikTok. The **subject** is user comments under video content that reflect attitudes toward LGBTQ+ topics.

This research makes both a theoretical and practical contribution to understanding how LGBTQ+ content is perceived in the online space during the war. In the media sphere, it enriches knowledge about the construction of identities in the digital environment by integrating theories of narrative and representation with empirical data from platforms where algorithms shape discourse. It also provides empirical insights into emotional reactions, stereotypes, and values, which can be used to improve moderation mechanisms and communication strategies on social media. More broadly, it contributes to the development of digital sociology and queer studies through an analysis of 600 comments under 20 viral videos with over 10 million views, assessing polarization in online discourse.

To empirically test and quantitatively verify the relationship between platform characteristics and the tone of discourse amid the war, we formulated the following operationalized hypotheses:

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Hypothesis 1: The discursive environment on TikTok is characterized by a higher proportion of supportive comments towards LGBTQ+ communities compared to Instagram, reflecting differences in audience demographics and communication culture on these platforms.

Hypothesis 2: Negative comments on both social networks reproduce persistent stereotypical narratives and provoke chain reactions, thereby escalating digital conflict and increasing the vulnerability of LGBTQ+ communities.

Hypothesis 3: The sentiment of public discussions in the online space is more negative than the general societal attitudes recorded in sociological surveys, indicating a discrepancy between online communication and broader social trends.

To achieve the aim, we set the following research objectives:

1. To identify thematic clusters in comments under LGBTQ+ content on Instagram and TikTok, analyze their sentiment (positive, negative, neutral), and establish associations between themes and emotional reactions in the context of war.
2. To identify and classify dominant narratives (support, resistance, ambivalence, etc.), assess their prevalence and dynamics in response to different types of content, in order to identify prevailing discourses.
3. To examine how the discovered narratives mirror and potentially influence broader public discussions on LGBTQ+ inclusion amid the national crisis, comparing the results with existing sociological data on support for the LGBTQ+ community in Ukraine to trace patterns of convergence or discrepancy.

This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the sociocultural dynamics in algorithmically governed spaces where perceptions of vulnerable groups emerge, spread, and are contested, providing a basis for future interventions in digital communication during conflicts.

Literature Review

Social media have become a pivotal tool for LGBTQ+ communities, facilitating not only the dissemination of information but also the creation of safe spaces for self-identification and advocacy (Andika et al., 2024; Eickers, 2024; Berger et al., 2022). A synthesis of existing research indicates that these platforms serve a dual function: on one hand, they enhance the visibility of marginalized groups, and on the other, they foster the formation of a collective identity through interaction and support. For instance, as Muhammad Fauzi Fitri Andika et al. (2024) note, Instagram serves as an effective tool for overcoming stereotypes and promoting inclusivity, providing LGBTQ+ communities with a space for authentic self-expression, advocacy, and the formation of a multidimensional identity. Similarly, TikTok is famous as a platform that promotes the visibility of LGBTQ+ content and can positively influence the perception of this community among users, notably by increasing levels of acceptance, even if the topic causes some anxiety in parts of the audience (Romadlon et al., 2022). Research by Matthew Berger et al. (2022) supports these findings, highlighting how social media has become a space where young people can explore their identity, receive peer support, and avoid isolation – a particularly crucial function for those without access to physical LGBTQ+ communities. At the same time, social networks allow LGBTQ+ users to control the process of disclosing their identity through strategies of anonymity and content access restrictions (Berger et al., 2022). In synthesis with Gen Eickers (2024), who presents social media as a space that fosters a sense of belonging for LGBTQ+ individuals by enabling interaction with people who have similar life experiences, it becomes evident that these platforms not only facilitate individual self-expression but also promote collective solidarity, shaping a sense of community amidst marginalization.

Despite these positive aspects, the literature actively explores the risks that accompany the opportunities social media offers, creating a comprehensive understanding of their role for LGBTQ+ communities. Social networks, despite their inclusivity, can be platforms for cyberbullying, hate speech, and discriminatory expressions, which have serious negative consequences for

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the physical and mental health of adolescents and young adults (Abreu & Kenny, 2018). This point aligns with a broader analysis of comments as a method for gauging online audience reactions to LGBTQ+ subject matter (Insight Public Organization, 2021; Hayman, 2024), a domain where negative dynamics often prevail. A study by Paula Carvalho et al. (2023) analyzed 20,056 Portuguese-language comments on YouTube, manually classifying them by types of expression: hate speech, counter-speech, offensive language, and other categories. The results showed that about 70% of the comments had a negative or very negative sentiment. A significant prevalence of covert hate speech, manifested through irony or sarcasm, was characteristic of discourse about the LGBTQ+, as was a high level of counter-speech (Carvalho et al., 2023). In a similar vein, research by Kaden Hayman (2024) examined 100 comments under an Elle Magazine Facebook post about 30 famous LGBTQ+ individuals and found that 86% of these comments contained hostile or intolerant statements. The main themes of negative rhetoric included a desire to ignore LGBTQ+ topics, religious prejudice, the perception of LGBTQ+ identity as an illness or a trend, and overt disgust (Hayman, 2024). The NGO "Insight" (2021) further supported these conclusions with a large-scale study of the Ukrainian segment of Facebook, utilizing algorithmic analysis of 11,900 comments. The study found that 46% of comments had a neutral tone, 21% expressed support for LGBTQ+ communities, and 33% contained negative statements. Among the negative comments, 80% conveyed stereotypes and pseudoscientific claims, while overt calls to violence were rare. In sum, these studies demonstrate that social media comments reveal a complex spectrum of online reactions toward LGBTQ+ communities, ranging from overt hostility and subtle aggression to a substantial portion of neutral or supportive positions. It highlights the necessity of employing varied research methodologies and considering local contexts better to understand the climate of online discourse and combat bias.

Existing empirical analyses of audience reactions, such as the study by Insight (2021), focus on Facebook, while Instagram and TikTok – key platforms for youth audiences – remain largely unexplored in the Ukrainian academic field. Despite a gradual increase in attention to LGBTQ+ topics in the Ukrainian media landscape, there is a current lack of empirical research that systematically analyzes audience reactions, particularly comments under media content, in the context of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine. To date, available research has predominantly focused on the general dynamics of LGBTQ+ media representation in the post-Euromaidan period and during the conflict in Donbas. For example, Maryna Shevtsova (2017) notes that after Euromaidan, there was an increase in the public visibility of LGBT communities. However, homophobic narratives persisted in public discourse, particularly in the rhetoric of right-wing radical groups. Maria Teteriuk (2016) highlights that within the discourse of "national unity," LGBT people were either excluded or forced to integrate through homonationalist strategies, which, in turn, created risks of further marginalization for the most vulnerable groups within the community. Therefore, notwithstanding the growing media focus on LGBTQ+ topics, the perception of this issue within society continues to be contested.

A context where the struggle for LGBTQ+ rights acquires a distinct geopolitical dimension exacerbates this contradiction (Verpoest, 2018). Russia's full-scale invasion is not only a military aggression but also an ideological project, openly positioned as a defense of "traditional values" against a supposedly decadent West (Luciani & Shevtsova, 2024). In this paradigm, Russia systematically employs anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric as a foreign policy tool that analysts describe as a clash of competing "projects of modernity": while Western democracies signal their modernity through the protection of minority rights, Russia promotes an alternative model based on patriarchal values (Luciani & Shevtsova, 2024; Tsaturyan, 2024). This ideological conflict is instrumentalized through the process of securitization, whereby a specific group – in this case, LGBTQ+ individuals – is constructed as an existential threat to the nation, its values, and its security (Luciani & Shevtsova, 2024). As researchers note, the Kremlin has for years used state media to foster a positive association between anti-LBGTQ+ views and anti-Ukrainian sentiments, effectively linking these

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two issues into a single anti-Western narrative (Tsaturyan, 2024). This geopolitical struggle manifests directly in the Ukrainian media space, where Russian and pro-Russian media disseminate homophobic "formula stories" about LGBTQ+ people as "perverts." In contrast, pro-Western media promote a counter-narrative of "heroes," turning Ukraine into a "fulcrum of geopolitical contests" (Soroka et al., 2022).

Russian information operations also purposefully use LGBTQ+ topics on social media to deepen social divisions in Western countries, including Ukraine, by creating and spreading memes that simultaneously appeal to both progressive and conservative groups to provoke conflict (Jones, 2020). Notably, an analysis of the Ukrainian social media segment during the full-scale invasion, conducted by "Detector Media," revealed that Russian propaganda deliberately uses LGBTQ+ themes to discredit Ukraine's European choice, spreading manipulative narratives about "Gayropa" and using homophobic imagery to denigrate Ukrainian authorities and military personnel (Bilousenko et al., 2022). Thus, the negative narratives circulating on social media are often not merely spontaneous expressions of prejudice but local echoes of a transnational, instrumentalized anti-gender ideology. At the same time, the full-scale war has also triggered a reverse process – desecuritization – where the participation of LGBTQ+ people in the country's defense contributes to their integration into the national narrative and reduces their perception as a threat (Luciani & Shevtsova, 2024). When synthesized with global research, the Ukrainian context illustrates how crisis events like war intensify polarization, where the positive aspects of visibility (as in Andika et al., 2024) collide with the risks of marginalization (as in Abreu & Kenny, 2018), underscoring the necessity of localized empirical analyses to understand the dynamics in conflict settings.

Method

Sample Rationale and Data Sources

This study aims to analyze public reactions in comments on LGBTQ+ topics within the Ukrainian digital space during the full-scale war. Following the recommendations regarding the need to study new media platforms (Alafwan et al., 2023), the analysis focuses on content from influential Ukrainian accounts on the social networks TikTok ("USE PRO TSE" [ALL ABOUT IT][1], PrEP.com.ua[2]) and Instagram (Get Test[3], PrEP.com.ua[4]), which are key platforms for the dissemination and discussion of LGBTQ+ issues. The selection of these accounts is justified by their popularity among youth and adult users, as well as their specific audience characteristics: TikTok is oriented toward dynamic, short-form content with high engagement (predominantly a younger audience of 18–34 years), whereas Instagram ensures broader reach through visual representation and transmedia distribution, including automatic content sharing to Facebook feeds. This feature enables engagement with older groups (35+ years) and promotes demographic diversity. Consequently, this approach enables a comparison of reactions across different social networks, taking into account their demographic differences.

The choice of these four accounts (which are created by an LGBTQ+ public organization) is explained by their significant cumulative reach and influence. E.g., the "USE PRO TSE" profile on TikTok has 123,400 followers and has received 7.5 million views over the past year (from September 23, 2024, to September 25, 2025, according to the platform's built-in analytics), while

[1] USE PRO TSE. (n.d.). Videos [TikTok profile]. TikTok. Retrieved July 17, 2025, from https://www.tiktok.com/@pro.sekc.
[2] PrEP.com.ua. (n.d.). Videos [TikTok profile]. TikTok. Retrieved July 17, 2025, from https://www.tiktok.com/@prep_ukraine.
[3] Get Test. (n.d.). *Posts* [Instagram profile]. Instagram. Retrieved July 17, 2025, from https://www.instagram.com/gettest.com.ua/.
[4] PrEP.com.ua. (n.d.). *Posts* [Instagram profile]. Instagram. Retrieved July 17, 2025, from https://www.instagram.com/prepcomua/.

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PrEP.com.ua on TikTok has 27,200 followers and 3.8 million views during the same period. These metrics were obtained through a thorough review of page statistics automatically calculated by the social networks, ensuring the accuracy and objectivity of the data.

Acknowledging the potential methodological challenges related to the algorithmic nature of social media and the specific audience of public organizations, we developed the research design to ensure maximum validity and analytical depth. A key argument for the chosen sample is that the analyzed content reaches far beyond a loyal audience or so-called "filter bubbles." The accounts' statistical data convincingly show that the vast majority of views are generated not by followers but through algorithmic recommendations to a broad audience. For example, for the "USE PRO TSE" account, 50.7% of traffic comes from the "For You" recommendation feed, while followers account for only 1.4% of views (as of September 25, 2025). Similarly, the average share of views from non-followers for the analyzed videos is 97%. The same situation applies to the selected Instagram pages, where 95% of viewers are not followers, and only 5% are subscribers. This position demonstrates that the content reaches a broad and heterogeneous audience, making their reactions a valuable cross-section of the public online discourse that emerges in these digital spaces.

A demographic analysis of the audience also refutes the notion that the content is exclusively targeting teenagers. The core audience on TikTok consists of young adults: the 18–24 age group constitutes 43.4% for "USE PRO TSE" and 44.6% for PrEP.com.ua, while the 25–34 age group makes up 33.2% and 35.2%, respectively (as of September 25, 2025), with a smaller share of older groups (35+ years – 15.5%), which nevertheless ensures the representativeness of the adult audience. In turn, on Instagram, the age distribution of viewers is as follows: 25–34 years – 26.8%, 35–44 years – 24.9%, 45–54 years – 19.5%, and the 55–64 age group constitutes 12.7% of the audience. Transmedia distribution plays a key role here: videos published on Instagram are automatically shared on Facebook. It is through this mechanism that older age groups, who are traditionally more active on Facebook, are effectively engaged. This case enables an expansion of reach and the inclusion of comments from a more diverse audience, encompassing a wider range of ages and viewpoints.

For the analysis, 20 viral videos (i.e., those that garnered a significant number of views and interactions; 12 from TikTok, 8 from Instagram) published between 2022 and 2025 were selected. This period encompasses the onset and progression of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine, enabling an examination of the evolution of discourse under crisis conditions. The total number of views for these videos exceeds 12 million (precisely 12,248,101 views as of September 25, 2025, according to platform analytics). The average view count for a TikTok video is 652,412, with the most popular video amassing 3,433,500 views; for Instagram, the average is 552,395 views (as of September 25, 2025). Such a focus on viral content ensures the representation of reactions from a broad audience, as these videos entered the recommendation feeds of not only a niche demographic but also the general public, thereby reducing potential loyalty bias. From each video, we collected the 30 most popular comments (those that received the most likes and replies), comprising a total corpus of 600 comments. This approach, unlike random sampling, allows for the analysis of reactions that achieved the most outstanding visibility and support, and consequently have the most significant impact on shaping public discourse, as they are listed first, seen by most users, and capable of provoking chain discussions or agreement.

Potential limitations of algorithms, which may promote content only to interested users and amplify polarization (e.g., more positive sentiment on TikTok due to its younger audience), were minimized by focusing on viral videos with high non-follower reach. This situation is in line with a balanced gender and age distribution of the audience: the gender composition was established based on an analysis of statistics across all accounts (average figures: 42% male, 57% female, 1% other). Therefore, bias is minimal, while the sample captures a heterogeneous spectrum of opinions from the active online audience.

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Data Analysis Procedure and Methods

Data analysis was conducted in two stages using a hybrid approach that combines quantitative and qualitative methods. The first stage employed quantitative content analysis with manual coding, which, facilitated by discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995), allows for the consideration of contextual nuances such as irony, hidden meanings, and sarcasm that are inaccessible to automated systems (Neuendorf, 2017; Schreier, 2012). Each comment was classified by its tonality within Sentiment Analysis as positive, negative, or neutral. Besides, we performed thematic coding to identify key discussion topics. To enhance the reliability of categorization, the author independently verified the consistency of code application by re-coding a portion of the sample (20% of the corpus) after a time interval (Krippendorff, 2004, 2019). Furthermore, to assess inter-coder reliability, Krippendorff's alpha was calculated on a pilot subsample (n = 100 comments), yielding a value of 0.83, which indicates a high level of agreement (Krippendorff, 2019).

To increase methodological transparency and ensure the replicability of the results, a comprehensive coding scheme was developed for this study. It contains categories for tonality, thematic blocks, narrative markers, typical linguistic patterns, and examples (Template for analyzing..., 2025). This scheme was formed through inductive analysis, taking into account the context of the comments, and it reflects the specific reactions of users to LGBTQ+ content on social media. Additionally, to ensure replicability, the coding sheet includes examples from the actual comments. The ethical aspects of data collection were considered; the comments are public and have been anonymized without identifying the users.

The second stage employed narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008) to identify deep semantic structures within the comments. Narrative theory, which has evolved from a structuralist focus on motives and functions (Burke, 1945; Barthes & Duisit, 1975) to cognitive and sociocultural studies of meaning- and identity-making (Bruner, 1991; Ricoeur, 1984), allows for the examination of stories as a fundamental mechanism for understanding reality. In this study, we regard a narrative as a stable interpretive framework that is reproduced in comments to make sense of LGBTQ+ topics. It is operationalized through the following components: (1) thematic focus, (2) typical roles (hero, victim, antagonist), (3) central conflict (e.g., tradition vs. modernity), and (4) a value-ideological frame. Narratives were identified inductively by detecting recurring plot structures within the thematic clusters established during the content analysis phase. This approach enables the distinction between themes (what is being said) and narratives (how it is being said, within the context of a specific plot logic).

This comprehensive methodology ensures a deep and well-founded analysis of public discussions in the most influential digital spaces where perceptions of LGBTQ+ communities are currently being formed and contested in the context of war.

Results

This section presents the empirical results of the study, obtained through a hybrid analysis of 600 comments. The data are structured according to the research objectives and aim to sequentially verify the stated hypotheses.

1. Quantitative Sentiment Analysis and Hypothesis Verification

In line with the first research objective, we conducted a quantitative sentiment analysis of the comments (n = 600) to identify the audience's emotional reactions. The results demonstrate a pronounced polarization of online sentiment (see Figure 1). Of the total corpus, 45% (n = 270) of comments expressed a positive sentiment, 38.2% (n = 229) a negative sentiment, and 16.8% (n = 101) were neutral. While positive reactions represent the largest single portion, the cumulative share of negative and neutral comments (55%) points to profound ambivalence and considerable tension within online discussions on LGBTQ+ issues amid the war.

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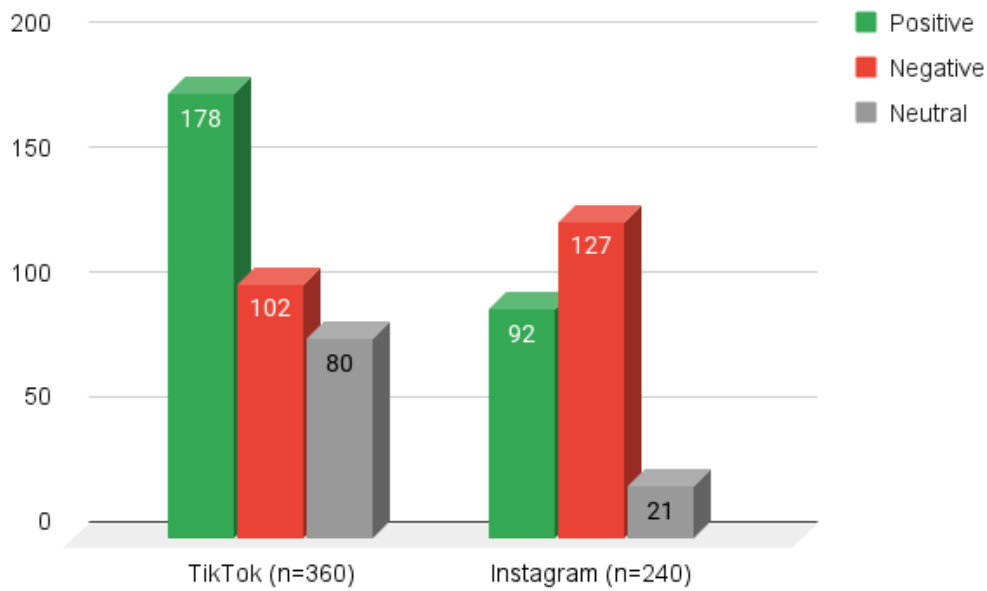
A comparative analysis of the platforms revealed statistically significant differences, which is key to verifying Hypothesis 1. On TikTok (n = 360), positive comments were dominant (49.4%), while negative and neutral comments accounted for 28.3% and 22.2%, respectively. This condition confirms the platform's association with the amplification of solidarity discourses. In contrast, Instagram (n = 240) exhibited an opposite dynamic: negative comments prevailed (52.9%), while positive ones accounted for only 38.3%. This identified contrast between the platforms is not a methodological artifact or a study flaw but a central empirical finding that supports Hypothesis 1 regarding the different nature of online discourses depending on the specifics of the social network and its audience. Furthermore, the pronounced negative tone of online discourse, which contrasts with data from nationwide sociological surveys indicating growing tolerance, provides empirical support for Hypothesis 3 regarding the discrepancy between the tone of online discourse and broader societal trends.

Figure 1.
Comparative Distribution of Comment Sentiment Regarding LGBTQ+ on TikTok and Instagram



2. Dominant Narratives and Their Structure

In accordance with the second research objective, the identification and classification of dominant narratives were conducted (Table 1). Although the quantitative analysis indicated a prevalence of positive comments (45%), the qualitative narrative analysis revealed a significant asymmetry in their structure. Supportive reactions were largely homogeneous, consisting of general statements about equality, which allowed them to engage in a single "narrative of equality."

In contrast, the negative comments, despite their slightly smaller share (38.2%), exhibited a significantly higher level of narrative complexity and diversity. Drawing upon the methodological definition of a narrative as a stable interpretive framework with its own thematic focus, roles, central conflict, and value-ideological frame, four heterogeneous narratives of

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resistance (i.e., those that are diverse in their logic and argumentation) were identified: exclusion, sinfulness, hierarchy of priorities, and threat to children.

The active reproduction of stereotypes and the provocation of chain reactions within these four narratives confirm Hypothesis 2, which posits that negative comments contribute to digital escalation and exacerbate the vulnerability of LGBTQ+ communities.

Table 1.
Structural Analysis of Dominant Narratives in Comments about LGBTQ+ on TikTok and Instagram

Narrative	Structural Components	Example Comments
1. The Narrative of Equality: **"LGBTQ+ are People Just Like Everyone Else"**	**Thematic Focus:** Human rights, equality, freedom of expression, support for LGBTQ+ service members. **Typical Roles:** LGBTQ+ individuals as heroes; supporters as helpers; homophobes as antagonists. **Central Conflict:** Humanism & Empathy vs. Intolerance & Prejudice. **Value/Ideological Frame:** Liberal values, recognition of every person's dignity.	*"Love is love. Everyone has the right to be happy." "Thanks to our LGBTQ+ defenders! Respect." "Everyone should be equal in their rights."*
2. The Narrative of Exclusion: **"They Don't Belong Here"**	**Thematic Focus:** The very presence of LGBTQ+ individuals in the public sphere. **Typical Roles:** LGBTQ+ as objects of hatred; commenters as aggressors. **Central Conflict:** Existence vs. Annihilation/Exile. **Value/Ideological Frame:** Radical intolerance, assertion of dominance through humiliation.	*"F##king f##gots, g#t the f##k out of Ukraine." "Ew, gay." "You people need to be cured."*
3. The Narrative of Sinfulness: **"LGBTQ+ is a Deviation from God's Laws"**	**Thematic Focus:** Public visibility of LGBTQ+ as a challenge to religious norms. **Typical Roles:** LGBTQ+ as sinners; the "traditional family" as a victim; commenters as defenders of faith. **Central Conflict:** Piety/Nature vs. Sin/Perversion. **Value/Ideological Frame:** Conservative, religious values; the existence of a single, correct, God-given order.	*"This is a sin. God created man and woman." "Sodom and Gomorrah." "There is no place for perversion in the Kingdom of God."*
4. The Narrative about Hierarchy of Priorities: **"LGBTQ+ is not a Priority Because of the War"**	**Thematic Focus:** LGBTQ+ rights in the context of war. **Typical Roles:** LGBTQ+ activists as "internal enemies"; true patriots as heroes; commenters as arbiters of relevance. **Central Conflict:** War/Survival vs. "Inappropriate" rights and activism. **Value/Ideological Frame:** Militarized patriotism,	*"We have a war going on, and you have your parades. Don't you have anything better to do?" "Send them to the front, not to a parade. Where is the TCR [Territorial Center of Recruitment]?"*

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	where civic value is defined solely by participation in national defense.	*"While our boys are dying, these people are here demanding their rights."*
5. The Narrative of Threat to Children: **"LGBTQ+ is Propaganda"**	**Thematic Focus:** The visibility of LGBTQ+ in media as a threat to minors. **Typical Roles:** LGBTQ+ as seducers; children as innocent victims; commenters as saviors of childhood. **Central Conflict:** Innocence/Normality vs. Depravity/Ideological Influence. **Value/Ideological Frame:** Paternalistic anxiety for the future generation, protecting children from "harmful" information.	*"This is f##got propaganda that corrupts our children." "Stop showing this, children are watching." "Homo-propaganda is a threat to the family."*

3. Associations Between Content Themes and Discursive Practices

In line with the third research objective, the analysis revealed a clear correlation between the themes of the video content and the dominance of specific narratives. Content that integrated LGBTQ+ individuals into socially approved roles activated the narrative of equality. The most positive reactions and support were elicited by videos featuring military service members (e.g., Viktor Pylypenko[5]), endorsements from famous personalities (Olya Polyakova[6], Anna Trincher[7]), and discussions about civil partnerships. Conversely, videos that challenged traditional gender norms activated narratives of resistance. Content about transgender people showed the highest level of aggression (particularly a video about a transgender woman's experience at a recruitment center), gender-nonconforming appearance, and Pride marches. This inference demonstrates a social paradox: a readiness for solidarity with LGBTQ+ individuals who fit the image of a "heroic citizen," alongside simultaneous resistance to accepting aspects of identities that fall outside heteronormative perceptions.

A deeper qualitative analysis of the comments revealed complex discursive practices underlying these narratives. E.g., the phrase "*Send them to the front, not to a parade*" is not merely a call to action but a complex statement that simultaneously affirms a heteronormative ideal of the citizen-defender and stigmatizes public forms of LGBTQ+ representation. The reactions display a wide range of tones, from overt aggression to restrained support and irony. Even a seemingly neutral comment like "*it is not for me, but let them be*" functions as a form of tolerant distancing that passively reinforces the social norm. Lexical patterns and micro-memes play a distinct role. Phrases like "*don't you have anything better to do?*" or "*but the children are watching*" operate as recurring formulas that construct a social hierarchy of problems and lend the force of a social norm to condemnation.

In contrast, expressions like "*so proud of you*," "*you are not alone*," and rainbow emojis become markers of solidarity. Sarcasm and self-irony (e.g., "*bring back landline phones!!!*") are often present in comments, serving as a defense mechanism to discuss taboo topics in a lighter

[5] PrEP.com.ua, "Gay Serviceman Viktor Pylypenko Responds to Hateful Comments," Instagram video, December 14, 2024, https://www.instagram.com/reel/DDkagEhN1bz/
[6] USE PRO TSE, "Olya Polyakova Supported the LGBTIQ Community at a Concert in the Palace of Sports," TikTok video, October 28, 2024, https://www.tiktok.com/@pro.sekc/video/7430879639482141958
[7] USE PRO TSE, "How Does Anna Trincher Feel about the LGBT Community?," TikTok video, April 23, 2024, https://www.tiktok.com/@pro.sekc/video/7361087307937516806

tone, simultaneously diffusing and highlighting the existing conflict. These observations reveal the complex, multi-layered structure through which perceptions of LGBTQ+ communities are formed, disseminated, and contested in the digital space during wartime.

Discussion

The results of this study not only affirm the profound polarization within Ukraine's online environment concerning LGBTQ+ issues but also uncover a central paradox of the contemporary digital landscape: various platforms operate as separate social ecosystems, each with its own norms of discourse. Specifically, the conclusion that Instagram serves as an arena for significantly more negative reactions appears, at first glance, to contradict the findings of Andika et al. (2024), who viewed the platform as a tool for promoting inclusivity. However, this discrepancy can be clarified by the unique socio-political context of Ukraine. During full-scale war, social networks have evolved into a space not only for communication but also for expressing collective stress and anxiety (Ye et al., 2023). Plausibly, the higher level of aggression on Instagram – which, through its integration with Facebook, reaches an older and more heterogeneous audience – is a manifestation of this wartime stress, which is channeled into hostility toward the "other."

Furthermore, this hostility is not an exclusively internal phenomenon; it is fueled and structured by external disinformation campaigns. The narratives of resistance identified in the comments ("sinfulness," "threat to children," "not a priority") largely align with the key messages of Russian propaganda, which purposefully constructs the image of "Gayropa" and uses LGBTQ+ topics to divide Ukrainian society (Bilousenko et al., 2022). Consequently, negative comments are often not so much original thoughts as they are a retransmission of sown narratives, which is a practical manifestation of the securitization of LGBTQ+ communities (Luciani & Shevtsova, 2024). Thus, the data obtained do not refute previous research but rather contextualize it, demonstrating that the role of social media is not static and changes dramatically under the influence of crisis conditions.

At the same time, despite a significant level of negativity, the study's results indicate an important shift toward growing support for LGBTQ+ communities, which is consistent with national data from KIIS (2024) and shows a positive trend compared to the pre-war analysis by the NGO "Insight" (2021). This paradoxical growth in tolerance amidst an existential crisis can be interpreted within the framework of Ukraine's struggle for its own civilizational identity. As stated in the article's title, the war also takes place on an "invisible front" – the front of values. In this context, support for human rights, including LGBTQ+ rights, becomes a marker of belonging to the European democratic world and a conscious dissociation from the authoritarian, homophobic ideology of the aggressor, which instrumentalizes anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric as part of its geopolitical struggle against the West (Luciani & Shevtsova, 2024; Tsaturyan, 2024). The negative narratives identified in this study, such as "threat to children" or "sinfulness," are concrete examples of the "formula stories" spread through pro-Russian media to construct the image of LGBTQ+ people as "perverts" (Soroka et al., 2022). Thus, the narrative of equality, particularly prominent among a younger audience on TikTok (Romadlon et al., 2022; Berger et al., 2022), is not merely an expression of personal views but also an element of broader civic resistance and national self-determination.

These findings have significant practical implications for the media sphere and digital inclusion policies. For journalists and content creators, the need to transition from simple terminological literacy to narrative competence becomes evident. It means not only using correct terminology but also consciously working to counter dominant narratives of resistance, such as "not a priority" or "a threat to children." Understanding the phenomenon of "conditional inclusion," media outlets should strive for the ethical and balanced representation of the full diversity of LGBTQ+ communities, paying special attention to the voices of the most marginalized

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groups, particularly transgender people. Concurrently, responsibility also lies with the platforms themselves. Effective moderation must evolve from reacting to individual trigger words to contextual analysis that can recognize entire hostile narratives. Furthermore, to ensure equal opportunities for visibility, greater transparency is needed regarding the algorithmic promotion of "sensitive" content to avoid the potential "shadow banning" of LGBTQ+ topics. Thus, enhancing digital inclusion means creating an environment that guarantees not only the right to presence but also safety from harassment and visibility in the information flow.

Despite the significance of these findings, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations of this study, which in turn open up prospects for future research. First, the focus on two platforms (TikTok and Instagram) does not allow for the extrapolation of the conclusions to the entire Ukrainian digital space, particularly to specific environments like Telegram or YouTube. Second, although the analysis of viral content allowed for the inclusion of a heterogeneous audience, it does not capture the dynamics within less popular, niche discussions. At the same time, we must emphasize a unique methodological advantage of this work: the researcher's position as the author of the analyzed content provided full access to all comments, including those automatically hidden or restricted by the platform. It reduced the risk of missing a significant portion of adverse reactions and increased the validity of the data. Future research could adopt a longitudinal approach to track the evolution of narratives over time and could also expand the analysis to include comparisons with other platforms and content types.

Conclusions

This research, which analyzed the dynamics of narratives within the online discourse on LGBTQ+ communities on Ukrainian social media amid the full-scale war, yielded several key findings. Firstly, we empirically verified that the digital public sphere is not monolithic but consists of fragmented ecosystems: TikTok predominantly functions as a space for solidarity, while Instagram, with its Facebook integration, serves as an arena for considerably higher levels of conflict and animosity (in confirmation of Hypothesis 1). Secondly, five dominant narratives were identified (equality, exclusion, sinfulness, a hierarchy of priorities, and threat to children) that act as instruments for perpetuating stereotypes and escalating conflict, thus confirming Hypothesis 2. Thirdly, the high share of negative comments supports Hypothesis 3, which concerns the discrepancy between the more hostile online discourse and the general rise in tolerance documented by sociological surveys.

The study's theoretical contribution is the articulation of the "conditional inclusion" phenomenon, wherein acceptance of LGBTQ+ communities is contingent upon their representation conforming to dominant social norms (or prevailing patriotic frameworks). In contrast, the visibility of more marginalized groups (notably transgender individuals) still encounters significant opposition. The practical value of the study lies in formulating recommendations for media and platforms to strengthen digital inclusion by fostering narrative literacy and implementing contextual moderation.

Finally, the analysis of social media comments demonstrates that the fight for equality and human rights is an inseparable component of the victory on the "invisible front" – the battle for values that will shape the future of a democratic and inclusive Ukrainian society.

Declaration of generative artificial intelligence and technologies using artificial intelligence in the writing process. The authors did not use artificial intelligence tools in the preparation of this article. The authors of the article bear full responsibility for the correct use and citation of sources.

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Transformation of Media Narratives in the Coverage of the Activities of Ukraine's Security and Defense Sector

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This article **aims** to clarify the transformation of media narratives in the coverage of the activities of Ukraine's security and defense sector in the context of Russian aggression. It reviews the historical evolution of defense journalism, beginning with Soviet traditions and the marginal status of military topics in the early decades of independence, leading to the formation of a systemic model of wartime information support following 2014. Particular attention is given to the full-scale invasion of 2022, during which journalism emerged as a key element of the information front. The article identifies the main media narratives in contemporary war journalism: heroization, memory journalism, international solidarity, and the narrative of resilience. It elucidates how these narratives contribute to mobilizing society, shaping historical memory, and securing international support. Furthermore, the article analyzes the principal challenges of the information space, including the spread of disinformation, the balance between freedom of speech and security needs, the influence of digital platforms, and the dangers faced by journalists. The article explores the institutional and legal frameworks that define journalists' cooperation with the security sector, specifically: the Information Security Doctrine (2017), the Cybersecurity Strategy (2021), and the activities of the Center for Countering Disinformation. It shows how the practice of Ukrainian defense journalism is gradually aligning with NATO standards in Strategic Communications (StratCom) and Public Affairs. The article also outlines internal challenges to integrating Ukrainian media into the Euro-Atlantic space, including economic dependence, personnel shortages, and the risk of excessive militarization within journalism. Conversely, it identifies prospects for development, such as deepening cooperation with NATO, building international partnerships, creating educational programs in war journalism, pursuing digital transformation, and updating ethical codes. The article **summarizes** that the transformation of media narratives in the security and defense sector is not only a reflection of wartime challenges, but also an important factor in shaping Ukraine's information policy and its Euro-Atlantic integration.

Keywords: media narrative, defense journalism, strategic communications, NATO, information security, war journalism, disinformation

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Трансформація медіанаративів у висвітленні діяльності сектору безпеки та оборони України

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Мета статті – з'ясувати трансформацію медіанаративів у висвітленні діяльності сектору безпеки та оборони України в умовах російської агресії. Розглянуто історичну еволюцію оборонної журналістики – від радянських традицій і маргінального статусу військової тематики у перші десятиліття незалежності до формування системної моделі інформаційного супроводу війни після 2014 року. Особливу увагу приділено періоду повномасштабного вторгнення у 2022 році, коли журналістика стала ключовим елементом інформаційного фронту. Виявлено основні медіанаративи сучасної воєнної журналістики: героїзації, журналістики пам'яті, міжнародної солідарності та наративу стійкості. З'ясовано їхню роль у мобілізації суспільства, формуванні історичної пам'яті та залученні міжнародної підтримки. Проаналізовано головні виклики інформаційного середовища: поширення дезінформації, баланс між свободою слова і потребами безпеки, вплив цифрових платформ, небезпеку для життя журналістів. Окремо розглянуто інституційно-правові рамки, що визначають співпрацю журналістів із сектором безпеки: Доктрину інформаційної безпеки (2017), Стратегію кібербезпеки (2021), діяльність Центру протидії дезінформації. Показано, що практика української оборонної журналістики поступово наближається до стандартів НАТО у сфері StratCom та Public Affairs. Окреслено внутрішні виклики інтеграції українських медіа у євроатлантичний простір – економічну залежність, кадровий дефіцит, ризик надмірної мілітаризації журналістики. Разом із тим визначено перспективи розвитку: поглиблення співпраці з НАТО, розбудова міжнародних партнерств, створення освітніх програм з воєнної журналістики, цифрова трансформація та оновлення етичних кодексів. **Узагальнено**, що трансформація медіанаративів у сфері безпеки та оборони є не лише відображенням воєнних викликів, а й важливим чинником інформаційної політики та євроатлантичної інтеграції України.

Ключові слова: медіанаратив, оборонна журналістика, стратегічні комунікації, НАТО, інформаційна безпека, воєнна журналістика, дезінформація

Modern armed conflicts have significantly transformed the nature of journalism, particularly the coverage of the activities of the security and defense sector. Since 2014, and especially with the onset of Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, Ukraine has entered a scenario in which the information sphere has emerged as one of the crucial fronts of confrontation. In this context, journalism not only performs its traditional informative role but is also transforming into an instrument of strategic communications that shapes public sentiment, secures international support, and forms state resilience. The relevance of this study also lies in the recognition that the transformation of media narratives in covering the security and defense sector is not only a reflection of contemporary wartime challenges, but also a critical component of Ukraine's European integration process. Consequently, journalism has become not only a means of informing but a strategic tool for shaping national resilience and enhancing the international image of the state.

Review of Scholarly Research

The issue of the transformation of media narratives in the coverage of the security and defense sector exists at the intersection of journalism studies, political science, and information security research.

In the Western academic tradition, considerable emphasis has been placed on the theory of media narratives and their role in shaping public consciousness. In particular, the works of R. Barthes (Barthes, 1972) and W. Fisher (Fisher, 1987) underscore that journalistic texts serve not only to inform but also to construct specific "frames of reality." In wartime contexts, these frames become instruments for legitimizing political decisions and mobilizing societal support.

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Ukrainian researchers mostly focus on the interrelationship between journalism and information security. A. Antypova (Antypova, 2023) analyzes the role of strategic communications in fostering national resilience, highlighting the need for journalists to engage with state structures.

A separate direction is the study of military and defense journalism. The contributions of Western scholars such as A. Hoskins and B. O'Loughlin (2010) and H. Tumber and F. Webster (2006) illustrate the evolution from "embedded journalism" during the Iraq War to the concept of "networked wars," wherein media become part of the informational space of battle. Following 2014, a distinct model of defense journalism has emerged in Ukraine, combining elements of traditional military reporting with crisis communication practices.

The role of international organizations warrants attention. NATO StratCom COE reports (2016; 2024) systematize methods of Russian disinformation and analyze their impact on public opinion (NATO, 2016; 2024). In its documents (2020; 2022), the European Commission identifies media literacy and transparency as key tools for combating information threats (European Commission, 2020; 2022).

Thus, academic research delineates several key dimensions: theoretical (the concept of media narrative, its structure, and functions); empirical (analysis of specific examples of war journalism in Ukraine and globally); and normative (NATO and EU standards that shape new approaches to media practices). These dimensions provide a foundation for further analysis of the transformation of Ukrainian media narratives within the security and defense sector.

Method

Analyzing the transformation of media narratives, particularly within the sphere of security and defense, requires a set of methods. Content analysis enables the study of the structure of media texts quantitatively and qualitatively, allowing researchers to identify prevailing themes, keywords, and images. In the context of war journalism, these methods serve to assess how often publications feature narratives of heroization, civilian suffering, or international support (Krippendorff, 2018, p. 24). Content analysis provides a framework for tracing changes in information presentation at different stages of the war. Discourse analysis focuses on the study of language structures and communicative strategies. In the reporting of security matters, this involves revealing how journalists, through language, shape interpretive frames that legitimize the actions of state authorities, the military, or international partners. As N. Fairclough notes, "language is always an instrument of power," and therefore a mechanism for shaping political reality (Fairclough, 1995, p. 57).

The comparative-historical method offers insights into how defense journalism in Ukraine has transformed compared with other countries, particularly during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. This comparative analysis indicates that while Ukrainian journalism adopts certain aspects of "embedded journalism," it concurrently develops unique practices reflective of the transparency of the volunteer movement and the digital activism of society (Hoskins & O'Loughlin, 2010, p. 92).

The case study method, which entails the examination of specific instances such as publications, journalistic investigations, and information campaigns, allows for an exploration of how particular media outlets craft narratives pertaining to the security and defense sector. This is especially important for studying crisis situations, for example, the shelling of civilian facilities, where media reactions directly affect Ukraine's international standing.

The integration of multiple methods ensures a deeper analysis of the transformation of media discourse. These methods allow not only for describing changes in journalism but also for explaining the factors that drive them and their implications for communication security.

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Results and Discussion

The term "media narrative" combines the concepts of media and narrative, meaning "a story created in the media space." The academic literature defines it as a structured form of communication that shapes a certain vision of events, phenomena, or actors in society (Fisher, 1987, p. 59). In his classic work *Mythologies*, R. Barthes noted that any message in mass media inevitably constructs a specific "mythology" that frames how reality is interpreted (Barthes, 1972). This framing acquires particular significance in modern journalism during armed conflicts, when society experiences informational uncertainty.

In the Ukrainian context, the concept of a media narrative is increasingly used to explain how journalism creates the image of war and the security sector. A. Antypova underscores that war narratives do not just describe events; they also become an element of strategic communications, where journalism operates as part of the information front (Antypova, 2023, p. 45).

Research by H. Tumber and F. Webster identifies *three main types of narratives* within modern war journalism:

- **Narrative of heroization:** creating images of heroes who symbolize the struggle;
- **Narrative of victimhood:** highlighting the suffering and losses of the civilian population;
- **Narrative of international solidarity:** emphasizing the support from allies and partners

(Tumber & Webster, 2006, p. 41).

In Ukraine, following 2014, these three dominant narratives became the foundation of media information policy. After the onset of full-scale war in 2022, they underwent further transformation: on the one hand, the heroic narrative intensified; on the other, a new ***narrative of resilience*** emerged, emphasizing the indomitable spirit of the people and the state.

Thus, a media narrative in journalism serves not merely as a way of presenting news but as a communicative strategy that establishes interpretive frames for society and influences political processes. In wartime, its significance multiplies, as the media perform not only informative roles but also mobilizing and protective functions.

However, understanding the development of Ukrainian defense journalism requires consideration of the Soviet legacy. In the Soviet era, military media served a purely propagandistic function, aiming to enhance the army's authority, create the image of the "defender of the Motherland," and conceal any weaknesses. Journalists did not have access to real information about military issues, and materials were mostly official reports and "parade" stories.

After independence, Ukraine inherited this model. In the 1990s, coverage of the Armed Forces remained fragmentary and was mostly confined to specialized military publications such as "Narodna Armiia" and "Viisko Ukrainy". In national media, army-related topics were sporadic, primarily consisting of official press releases from the Ministry of Defense.

At the same time, journalism began to gain independence. The first military correspondents emerged during Ukrainian peacekeeping missions in Kosovo, Sierra Leone, and Iraq. Their reports demonstrated more freedom in covering service conditions and soldiers' everyday lives.

Nevertheless, until 2013, military topics remained marginal. The main challenges included:

- Bureaucratic control over journalists' access to military facilities;
- The absence of a professional school of defense journalism in Ukraine;
- A low level of public interest in the army in peacetime.

In fact, by the time Russian aggression against Ukraine began in 2014, defense journalism in Ukraine had not yet fully developed as a distinct field. It was still largely a remnant of Soviet military propaganda rather than a modern approach to analyzing the security sector.

The onset of Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014 marked a turning point for defense journalism in Ukraine. If previously the security sector was a peripheral topic, then after the annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of war in Donbas, it became central to the media space.

Citizens needed prompt and reliable information about the progression of hostilities, the situation in the ATO zone, the state of the army, and casualty figures. This demand stimulated the

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emergence of specialized military journalists and new media projects. Concurrently, volunteer and civic media initiatives, such as "Censor.NET" and the "Ukrainian Military Portal") became increasingly active, serving as alternative sources of news. During this period, a practice known as **defense journalism** emerged. This practice included:

- Promptly informing the public about the progression of hostilities;
- Preparing analytical materials on the state of the security sector;
- Creating a patriotic narrative to support the army and the state.

This was especially evident in the coverage of the defense of Donetsk Airport (2014–2015), where journalists teamed up with the military to create and promote the image of the "Cyborgs"– a symbol of resilience and heroism.

However, despite the growing role of the media, journalists working in the ATO zone faced significant limitations: controlled access to the front by the Ministry of Defense; the risk of coming under fire, which resulted in many Ukrainian journalists being killed or wounded. Additionally, the spread of fakes and manipulations in Russian media required that Ukrainian media outlets develop fact-checking mechanisms.

Starting in 2016, cooperation between journalists and the press centers of security agencies became more active. Regular briefings, official social media pages, and information campaigns were introduced, enhancing the integration of journalism into the state's system of strategic communications.

Thus, from 2014 to 2021, Ukraine's defense communication journalism evolved from chaotic reporting to a more systematic model of wartime information support. This development laid the groundwork for further transformation of media narratives following the onset of the full-scale invasion in 2022.

Key Themes and Symbols of Contemporary War Journalism

Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022 fundamentally transformed Ukraine's media space. Journalism began to operate under conditions of total war, wherein the information front has emerged as critically important; media narratives significantly shape societal perceptions of events and influence the international community's understanding of the nature and scale of aggression.

1. Narrative of heroization. A principal symbol within Ukrainian journalism is the portrayal of the warrior-defender, personifying the nation's resilience and courage. The defense efforts of Kyiv, Mariupol, and Azovstal have generated iconic media representations–such as the "Ghost of Kyiv" and the Azov fighters. These narratives serve to bolster morale and have become a powerful instrument of international solidarity.

2. Narrative of victimhood and memory journalism. Materials that document civilian victims of the war occupy a crucial space in the media discourse. Reports about destroyed cities, torture in Bucha, and mass graves in Izium contribute to what is termed "memory journalism." This approach records war crimes while simultaneously creating a historical memory of events (NATO, 2024, p. 32).

3. Narrative of international solidarity. From the initial days of the war, Ukrainian journalists actively emphasized the support received from NATO, the European Union, and the United States. Coverage of arms supplies, diplomatic visits, and humanitarian aid has cultivated an image of Ukraine as a part of Western civilization, fighting for shared democratic values and freedom (NATO, 2022, p. 5).

4. Visual journalism. The photographic and video documentation of war crimes has emerged as a leading genre within journalism. Footage of destroyed buildings and injured civilians serves not only as journalistic material but also as critical evidence in international courts, positioning journalism as an essential element of the infrastructure of international justice.

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5. Narrative of resilience. A new concept–resilience–reflects the ability of Ukrainian society to adapt and resist aggression. This theme manifests in reports about life under shelling, the continuation of educational processes, and the restoration of infrastructure despite destruction.

Thus, in the aftermath of the 2022 Ukrainian war, journalism has focused on creating multifaceted narratives, encompassing the heroization of military personnel alongside documentation of the aggressor's crimes. These narratives have become both an instrument of internal mobilization and a means of external communication that strengthens international support for Ukraine.

At the same time, within the context of full-scale war, journalism covering the security and defense sector faces a number of new challenges that define contemporary media discourse. These challenges encompass not only the technical aspects of reporting from combat zones but also the global trends of digitalization and information warfare.

1. Fakes and disinformation. One of the main challenges is the massive spread of false information. Russian propaganda actively employs social networks, anonymous Telegram channels, and even fake media outlets to manipulate public opinion within Ukraine and abroad (NATO, 2016, p. 28). This situation imposes a dual pressure on journalists: the need for rapid reporting and rigorous fact-checking. In response, there has been a rise in fact-checking practices and specialized resources, such as "StopFake" and "VoxCheck".

2. Censorship and the balance between freedom of speech and security. In wartime, the state is forced to restrict access to certain information, such as the locations of strikes and troop movements, which often sparks debates about the limits of free speech. While such restrictions are justified on security grounds, they may also decrease public trust in official sources (Antypova, 2023, p. 49). Achieving a balance between ensuring national security and upholding democratic values becomes a key challenge for both journalists and governmental institutions.

3. Influence of digital platforms and social media. The information space is increasingly shaped by digital platforms. TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter/X have become primary channels for disseminating war-related stories, often outpacing traditional media (Hoskins & O'Loughlin, 2010, p. 94). This has given rise to a new style of journalism–fast, visually driven, and emotionally charged–where the lines between professionals and amateurs are blurred.

4. Emotional overload of the audience. Daily consumption of news about shelling, civilian deaths, and destruction causes "war fatigue." This phenomenon compels journalists to search for new formats, such as survival stories, materials about recovery, and interviews with heroes to maintain interest while reinforcing the narrative of resilience.

5. Risks to journalists. Journalists working in combat zones become targets of deliberate attacks. According to Reporters Without Borders (2023), dozens of Ukrainian and foreign journalists have been killed or wounded since the invasion began. This situation raises concerns not only about professional standards but also about safety as an integral component of journalistic activity.

Therefore, the current information space during wartime is characterized by a complex combination of external information attacks, internal restrictions, and technological change. For Ukrainian journalism, this means the need to adapt, integrate international practices, and constantly balance between professional standards and national security needs.

Institutional and Legal Frameworks

The start of the war against Ukraine highlighted that journalism and information policy could not exist in isolation from the state's security strategy. The system of strategic communications began actively integrating the media as a vital element of the information front.

1. Presidential Decree No. 47/2017 laid the legal foundations for a state information policy. The Information Security Doctrine of Ukraine (2017) defines as key priorities: countering disinformation, strengthening communication between state bodies and society, and ensuring freedom of speech while guaranteeing information security. This became an important signal for journalism, as the media were officially recognized as partners in ensuring national security.

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2. The adoption of the Cybersecurity Strategy (Presidential Decree No. 44/2021) meant a transition to a comprehensive approach that considers the information space in conjunction with digital threats (On the Cybersecurity Strategy, 2021). This created new challenges for journalists, who now needed to address not only the informational content but also the technological aspects of disseminating materials, protecting sources, and securing digital communication channels.

3. Established by Presidential Decree No. 106/2021, the Center for Countering Disinformation became a key institutional platform for combating Russian propaganda. Its activities include analyzing and debunking fakes, coordinating efforts between state bodies and the media, and fostering international cooperation with NATO and the EU in the field of information security (On the Establishment of the Center, 2021).

4. Integration of journalism into state communications. Since 2014–and particularly after 2022–the Ministry of Defense and the General Staff created a system of press centers with regular briefings for journalists. This practice aligns with NATO Public Affairs standards, where the priorities are transparency, promptness, and consistency in official information (NATO, 2018, p. 3).

Thus, the state strategy in information policy is gradually forming the institutional framework within which defense journalism operates. This framework determines the relationship between freedom of speech and the requirements of national security while integrating Ukrainian journalism into the broader Euro-Atlantic context. Nevertheless, despite positive changes, the institutional and legal frameworks remain contradictory. On the one hand, coordination between the state and the media is strengthening; on the other, the risks of excessive control and limitations on journalistic independence persist. This situation requires continuous improvement of legislation and its alignment with Euro-Atlantic standards.

In wartime, the interaction between journalists and the security sector acquires strategic significance. Journalists serve not only an informative role but also become integral elements of the state's strategic communication system. Conversely, the security sector gains the ability to communicate its messages to both society and international audiences.

Since 2014, and especially after 2022, the Ministry of Defense and the General Staff have introduced regular briefings for both national and international media. This practice ensures prompt communication with the public regarding the progress of hostilities, a unified stance in covering the situation, and increased trust in official sources.

Ukrainian media are actively engaged in state information campaigns aimed at mobilizing society and supporting the military. Examples include the campaigns "The Army with the People," "Defense Forces–the Shield of Ukraine," and initiatives to drive international aid. These efforts blend journalism with aspects of public diplomacy.

Journalists working at the front line serve as a key link between the military and society. At the same time, their work is regulated by accreditation rules that require compliance with security demands, limitations on disclosing military information, and coordination with press officers. Although these rules limit journalists' freedoms, they are necessary to save the lives of service members (On the Information Security Doctrine, 2017, p. 6).

Crisis communications play a special role in this cooperation. For example, during massive missile strikes or disasters, such as the tragedy in Kramatorsk in April 2022, journalists and official structures worked in sync to avoid panic and ensure the reliability of information (StratCom COE, 2024, p. 41).

Despite these positive developments, challenges in the cooperation between journalists and the security sector remain. Issues such as excessive secrecy of some institutions, the risk for journalism to become a tool of state propaganda, and limited access to independent investigations in wartime persist.

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Therefore, cooperation between journalists and the security sector is an integral element of Ukraine's contemporary information policy. It ensures a balance between security needs and freedom of speech and integrates Ukrainian practices into the broader Euro-Atlantic context.

Ukrainian Practices of Integration into Euro-Atlantic Standards

As Ukraine works to align with NATO standards, it is gradually adopting Euro-Atlantic approaches in communications. This shift affects both state policy and journalistic practices:

1. Participation in joint exercises and training. Since 2016, Ukrainian journalists and press officers have been actively involved in trainings organized by the NATO StratCom COE in Riga, as well as in international training programs within the Partnership for Peace framework. During such trainings, participants learn standards of crisis communications, media operations in wartime, and strategies for countering disinformation (NATO, 2016, p. 43).

2. Development of a press officer system. The Armed Forces of Ukraine have created an institute of press officers who function as communications managers. Their roles are becoming increasingly aligned with NATO Public Affairs standards by providing timely commentary, organizing briefings, and ensuring the safety of journalists on the front lines.

3. Implementation of transparency practices. Ukrainian journalism increasingly demands prompt debunking of fakes and providing verified information. This aligns with NATO's principle of "truth–speed–transparency." For example, joint press briefings held by government structures following massive missile and drone attacks have become a practice that combines information dissemination and crisis communications.

4. Cooperation with international media. Ukrainian journalists actively collaborate with foreign correspondents from the BBC, CNN, and Deutsche Welle. This interaction helps integrate the Ukrainian perspective into global information flows, promotes adaptation to international professional standards, and enhances the image of Ukraine as part of the Euro-Atlantic space (European Commission, 2022, p. 10).

Thus, the integration of Ukrainian journalism into the Euro-Atlantic space is gradual. It is reflected in the combination of official reforms in the communications sector and the practical experience of journalists participating in joint programs with NATO. Despite positive shifts, challenges remain: a lack of trained specialists in strategic communications, difficulties in maintaining a balance between freedom of speech and the state interests, the risk of bureaucratizing the work of press officers, limited resources for large-scale information campaigns, economic dependence of media on political or business groups, the influence of polarized information flows–from official state sources to alternative blogs and social networks, and the risk of excessive militarization of journalism.

As Ukraine moves closer to NATO standards in communications, there is a risk that journalism could be viewed as a "continuation of the state's information policy." In this case, there is a danger of undermining the critical potential of the media, which contradicts the democratic principles of independent journalism (European Commission, 2022, p. 147).

Prospects for Development

Despite significant internal challenges, Ukrainian journalism in the field of security and defense has substantial potential for further integration into the Euro-Atlantic space. Development prospects can be delineated along several key lines:

1. Deepening cooperation with NATO. Further participation of Ukrainian journalists in training programs, seminars, and workshops within the NATO StratCom COE will contribute to aligning with professional standards. Participation in joint information operations and international projects will enable Ukraine to consolidate its position within the Alliance's communication architecture (StratCom COE, 2024, p. 6).

2. International partnerships and knowledge exchange. Active cooperation between Ukrainian media and international organizations–including Reporters Without Borders, the

European Broadcasting Union, and the International Federation of Journalists–is essential. Such cooperation ensures access to best practices and strengthens the authority of Ukrainian media worldwide (Reporters, 2023, p. 11).

3. Development of educational programs. Establishing university courses and specializations in war journalism and strategic communications is a necessary advancement. By integrating theoretical training with frontline practical experience, a new generation of journalists will be equipped to work according to Euro-Atlantic standards.

4. New codes of ethics. Presently, journalism needs updated codes of ethics that address the balance between freedom of speech and the needs of national security. These guidelines should align with the NATO principle "truth–speed–transparency," while guaranteeing the independence of editorial policies (European Commission, 2020, p. 8).

5. Digital transformation. The future of Ukrainian defense journalism is closely linked to digital technologies. The use of big data, AI tools to detect fakes, and interactive multimedia formats will ensure the international competitiveness of Ukrainian media.

Thus, the development prospects of Ukrainian media in the security and defense sector are influenced by both an internal need for reform and an external drive for Euro-Atlantic integration. Implementing these directions will facilitate the emergence of a new form of journalism–responsible, transparent, and resilient to the challenges of information warfare.

Conclusions

The transformation of media narratives in the coverage of the activities of the security and defense sector has become not only a reaction to war, but also a strategic element of state information policy. Ukrainian journalism is progressively aligning with NATO standards while preserving democratic values and professional autonomy. This process is a guarantee of fortifying national resilience and enhancing Ukraine's international image. The study of the transformation of media narratives in covering the activities of Ukraine's security and defense sector reveals that journalism in wartime has navigated a complex yet productive path–from the legacy of Soviet propaganda to the gradual integration of NATO standards.

Declaration of generative artificial intelligence and technologies using artificial intelligence in the writing process. The authors did not use artificial intelligence tools in the preparation of this article. The authors of the article bear full responsibility for the correct use and citation of sources.

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Interactivity from the Inside: How Ukrainian Digital Media Newsrooms Perceive and Apply Interactive Features

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This study explores the role of interactivity in the communication strategies of Ukrainian digital media. It investigates editorial perspectives on the benefits and challenges of implementing interactive features, as well as how media outlets assess their effectiveness. **Method.** The primary research method was an expert survey, which enabled the collection of opinions and evaluations from professionals with in-depth knowledge of the digital journalism landscape. In June–July 2025, responses were gathered from 16 representatives holding editorial or managerial positions in leading Ukrainian digital media outlets. **Results.** The study confirms the growing importance of interactivity in the communication strategies of Ukrainian newsrooms, while also revealing only partial alignment between the stated approaches to interactivity and its actual implementation. Interactivity is commonly associated with audience feedback mechanisms, hypertextual and multimedia storytelling, and interactive content formats – all of which attract significant editorial interest. In contrast, deeper forms of audience engagement, such as content co-creation or horizontal communication among users, receive less attention from newsrooms. Respondents noted that interactive formats can provide tangible benefits for media, both in terms of performance on social media (e.g., increased reach and audience engagement) and on websites (e.g., higher visit counts, longer session durations, and deeper interaction). The key barriers to broader adoption of interactivity remain the lack of technical resources, time constraints, and the need to involve external specialists. **Conclusions.** The article concludes that successful integration of interactivity requires not only appropriate tools but also editorial openness, managerial support, and a willingness to rethink the relationship between journalists and their audience.

Keywords: digital journalism, online media, newsrooms, interactivity, audience engagement

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Інтерактивність зсередини: як редакції українських онлайн-медіа сприймають та застосовують інтерактивні функції

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У статті досліджено роль інтерактивності в комунікаційних стратегіях українських онлайн-медіа, з'ясовано редакційне бачення переваг та бар'єрів впровадження інтерактивних функцій, підхід редакцій до оцінки ефективності їх імплементації. **Метод.** У якості основного методу дослідження використано експертне опитування, що дозволило залучити думки та оцінки професіоналів із глибоким розумінням внутрішніх процесів цифрового медіаландшафту. У червні-липні 2025 року було зібрано 16 відповідей на анкету від респондентів, що представляють управлінську чи редакторську ланку провідних українських онлайн-медіа. **Результати.** Дослідження засвідчило зростаючу роль інтерактивності в комунікаційних стратегіях українських онлайн-медіа, однак лише часткову відповідність між заявленими підходами до інтерактивності та фактичним її втіленням. Поширеним є звернення до інтерактивності як до можливості фідбеку аудиторії, гіпертекстуального та мультимедійного сторітелінгу, значний інтерес редакції онлайн-медіа проявляють також і до інтерактивних форматів контенту. Натомість глибші форми взаємодії з аудиторією, зокрема співтворення контенту або горизонтальна комунікація всередині аудиторії, користуються нижчим інтересом редакцій. З відповідей респондентів встановлено, що інтерактивні формати можуть забезпечити відчутну користь для медіа – як у контексті ефективності в соціальних мережах (зростання охоплення, збільшення залученості аудиторії), так і на вебсайтах медіа (збільшення кількості відвідувань, зростання тривалості сеансу та глибини взаємодії). Основними бар'єрами до ширшого впровадження інтерактивності залишаються нестача технічних ресурсів, часові обмеження та необхідність залучення сторонніх фахівців. **Висновки.** Зроблено висновок, що успішна інтеграція інтерактивності потребує не лише інструментів, але й редакційної відкритості, підтримки менеджменту та готовності переосмислювати відносини між журналістами й аудиторією.

Ключові слова: цифрова журналістика, онлайн-медіа, редакція, інтерактивність, взаємодія з аудиторією

Interactivity is widely recognized as one of the defining characteristics of digital journalism, reshaping the traditional one-way model of communication. It is conceptualized as a multidimensional characteristic encompassing the interaction between the audience, editorial staff, content, and technological environment (Загорулько, 2025), and thereby expanding the role of the audience in the journalistic process (Трачук & Андрющенко, 2024). Early theoretical works emphasized interactivity for its potential to enhance journalistic practice by facilitating richer, more democratic communication (Pavlik, 1997), which would distinguish digital journalism from traditional forms of media. However, despite the theoretical optimism, its actual implementation in newsrooms has lagged behind expectations. Scholars have repeatedly noted that the adoption of interactive technologies has been hesitant and limited (Kenney et al., 2000; Chung, 2008). Domingo referred to interactivity as "a powerful myth" in the newsroom – a concept frequently invoked in academic discourse but rarely fully realized in professional practice (Domingo, 2008).

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The authors declare no conflicts of interest.
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Nonetheless, more recent research demonstrates that interest in interactivity among journalists and editors remains strong, and many newsrooms are experimenting with interactive features and formats. As digital journalism matures, the scholar focus has shifted from whether interactivity should be used to how it can be effectively integrated into editorial strategies. This study addresses that gap by examining how Ukrainian digital newsrooms perceive and apply interactive features. By focusing on the internal logic of editorial decision-making, we contribute to a deeper understanding of interactivity not just as a technological feature, but as an evolving professional and organizational practice within digital journalism.

Literature Review

While interactivity has long been identified as a hallmark of digital journalism, empirical studies demonstrate that its newsroom implementation remains constrained by structural and professional factors. Scholars emphasize that the success or failure of interactive features often hinges less on technology than on organizational conditions, editorial routines, and journalistic culture, amplifying the urgency for rethinking how newsrooms engage with audiences (Hayes, 2021).

Domingo argues that despite the prevalence of interactive tools, newsrooms tend to prioritize immediacy over participation, with interactivity often handled separately from the core news production process (Domingo, 2008). As a result, opportunities for audience engagement are limited to pre-defined, low-impact channels such as comments or ratings. Chung, based on interviews with editors, observes that although there is interest in interpersonal interaction with users, practical difficulties prevent its full realization (Chung, 2007). Boczkowski argues that online-only newsrooms, which view users as co-producers, are more likely to innovate in interactivity, with organizational structures and audience perceptions playing a decisive role (Boczkowski, 2004). Similarly, García highlights three key obstacles to meaningful interactivity: working conditions, limited contact between journalists and users, and the inertia of organizational culture (Garcia, 2007). Foxman proposes the concept of the "magic circle of play" to describe emerging models of audience engagement, where journalists design interactive experiences that invite playful and iterative public involvement (Foxman, 2016). However, he cautions that engagement is often filtered through abstract performance metrics, reinforcing the separation between editorial logic and user feedback.

Barredo Ibáñez et al. provide important empirical insight through 35 in-depth interviews with digital journalists from Colombia, Peru, and Ecuador (Barredo Ibáñez et al., 2019). Their findings reveal that interactivity is largely perceived as a formal and diagnostic tool, rather than a mechanism for participatory content co-creation. Civic input is welcomed for audience monitoring or agenda setting but is rarely integrated into journalistic production itself. Skepticism toward user-generated content contributes to a one-way model, where interactivity often replicates legacy routines rather than transforming them. While analyzing interactivity implementation on USA online news websites, Kenny et al. found that only 3% of newsrooms provide personalized responses to audience emails, while 28% send generic replies and 69% do not respond at all – revealing a significant gap between the professed and practiced commitment to interactivity (Kenney et al., 2000).

In the Ukrainian scholarly discourse, studies by Honcharova (Гончарова, 2014), Terkhanova (Терханова, 2019), Fedorchuk (Федорчук, 2010), and Zhenchenko (Женченко, 2016) have examined the transformation of newsroom roles in digital environments, focusing on convergence, editorial multitasking, and professional hybridization. Although these works acknowledge the influence of user behavior and platform dynamics, they stop short of systematically analyzing editorial attitudes toward interactivity as a communication strategy. Trachuk and Andriushchenko note emerging challenges such as the automation of feedback and the rise of synthetic AI based interaction, further complicating genuine audience engagement (Трачук & Андрющенко, 2024). To date, however, no research has focused specifically on how Ukrainian editors conceptualize

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and operationalize interactivity within their organizational contexts – a gap this study seeks to address.

This study **aims** to examine the role of interactivity within the communication strategies of Ukrainian digital media, to explore how editorial teams perceive the benefits and barriers to implementing interactive features on their websites. To operationalise this aim, the study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: How do Ukrainian digital newsrooms conceptualize interactivity within their communication strategies, and how is this understanding reflected in the selection and practical implementation of interactive features?

RQ2: How do editorial teams assess the benefits and perceived effectiveness of interactivity for audience engagement and media website performance?

RQ3: What barriers limit the broader adoption of interactive features in Ukrainian digital media?

Method

To address the research questions, this study employed the method of expert survey, which is widely used in the social sciences to gather in-depth insights from individuals with specialized knowledge or professional experience. This method involves the strategic selection of respondents whose institutional positions enable them to observe or influence specific organizational processes (Bogner, 2009). Expert surveys and in-depth expert interviews, although different in format, are grounded in the same methodological logic of purposeful and information-oriented sampling. Accordingly, the broader scholarly discussion on optimal sample sizes in expert-based qualitative research remains applicable to survey designs as well. Determining an adequate sample size is often debated, as it depends not only on numerical thresholds but also on the homogeneity and "information-richness" of respondents (Patton, 2015). Previous scholarship generally recommends 5–20 participants as an optimal range for expert interviews (Mason, 2010; Різун & Скотникова, 2013; Govindaraj, 2020). Guided by this methodological rationale, the present study applied the same principle of information sufficiency and selected respondents whose institutional roles provide direct insight into newsroom communication strategies, ensuring the relevance and depth of the data obtained.

The expert survey was conducted using a structured questionnaire distributed via email to the editorial teams of the 50 most popular Ukrainian digital media outlets, based on audience rankings provided by Similarweb for the fourth quarter of 2024. Invitations to participate in the study were sent to editorial email addresses listed on the official websites of these outlets. Additionally, a link to the questionnaire was published on social media pages affiliated with the Institute of Journalism (Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv) to broaden outreach. The questionnaire was administered using the Google Forms platform and consisted of 15 questions (marked Q1…Q15), including both closed and open-ended formats, allowing for a combination of quantifiable analysis and qualitative insight. The questions were grouped into five thematic sections, aligned with the study's research questions. The first section examined how newsrooms conceptualize interactivity within their communication strategies and how this understanding shapes the selection and implementation of interactive features (RQ1). The second and third sections focused on the practical adoption of interactivity in newsrooms: the former addressing participatory and dialogic features, and the latter examining the production of interactive content. Together, these sections primarily contribute to answering RQ1, while also providing insights the constraints relevant to RQ3. The fourth section explored newsroom evaluations of the benefits and perceived effectiveness of interactive features (RQ2), as well as the barriers limiting their broader adoption (RQ3). The fifth section collected brief respondent background information, including their role and the characteristics of the media they represent.

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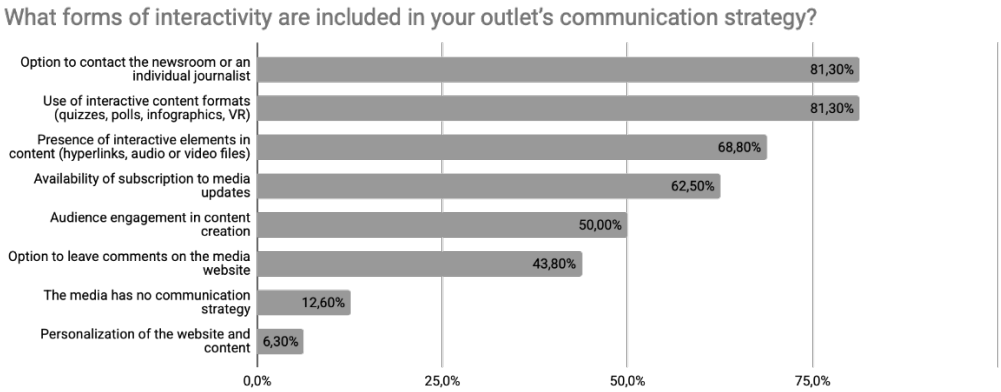
Results and Discussions

The initial stage of data collection took place during June-July 2025. A total of 16 responses were received, including submissions from editorial teams representing the following outlets: BBC News Ukrainian, 24 Kanal, Ukrinform, LB.ua, Radio Svoboda (with representatives from both the main newsroom and Donbas Realii project), Deutsche Welle Ukrainian, Texty.org.ua, Slovo i Dilo, Fakty ICTV, Chytomo, Kunsht, Slidstvo.Info, SPEKA, Vilne Radio, and Mukachevo.net. The professional profile of the sample includes 81,25% editorial and strategic decision-making personnel (10 editors, 1 development director, 1 brand manager, and 1 community manager) and 18,75% digital journalists. A key limitation of this study lies in the size of the expert sample, which represents only part of the Ukrainian digital media landscape. This constraint limits the generalizability of the findings to the entire media sector. At the same time, the analytical value of the study is strengthened by the fact that most respondents occupy senior editorial or strategic positions, which provides insight into decision-making processes and institutional perceptions that are not accessible through larger but less specialised samples. Given that some of the findings may pertain to commercially sensitive editorial strategies, the results are presented in anonymized form.

The first section of the questionnaire focused on whether Ukrainian digital media outlets have a defined communication strategy and what role interactivity plays within it. A majority of respondents (87.5%) reported that their media do have an approved communication strategy (Q1: "Does your media outlet have an approved communication strategy?"). Among those, all confirmed that their strategies include certain forms of interactivity (Q2: "Does your communication strategy include any forms of interactivity?"). When asked to specify what forms of interactivity are included in their strategies (Q3: "What forms of interactivity are included in your outlet's communication strategy?"), respondents most frequently mentioned the possibility for users to contact the newsroom, interactive content formats (e.g., quizzes, polls, infographics), and embedded interactive elements (such as hyperlinks, audio, or video files). In contrast, editors showed considerably less interest in fostering audience participation in content production or in enabling user-to-user interaction via comment sections (Figure 1).

Figure 1.
Forms of interactivity included in media communication strategies (Q3, n=16)



Although 50% of respondents stated that participatory opportunities for audience involvement in content development are included in their communication strategies, such mechanisms appear to be underutilized in practice. In response to Q4 ("If your website allows users to contact the newsroom or suggest a news item, how often do they use this opportunity?"), only 25% reported

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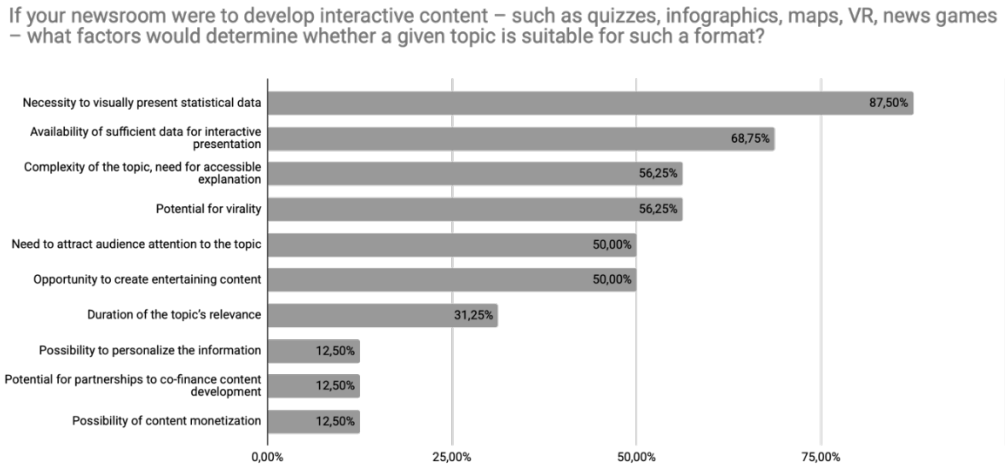
that users often reach out. According to respondents, 37.5% indicated that users engage occasionally, while another 37.5% noted such contact is rare. A similar pattern is observed in how newsrooms use user-generated content. Only one respondent (6.3%) stated that their outlet incorporates user-submitted content on a daily basis. Another 31.3% indicated doing so at least once a month, while the majority (62.4%) reported using it less frequently (Q5: "How often does your newsroom use content proposed by readers/viewers?"). The reasons for the limited use of audience-submitted content include lack of relevance (e.g., low news value, insufficient factual basis, lack of focus, overly local scope, unverified information, hate speech, or promotional content), insufficient editorial resources to process submissions, or, in one case, a policy of considering only contributions from members of the outlet's paid membership club (Q6: "If your newsroom does not use audience-submitted content, what are the reasons?"). In contrast, newsroom engagement in direct communication with audiences is significantly higher. A total of 62.4% of respondents stated that their outlet responds to user comments on a daily basis (Q7: "How often does your newsroom respond to user comments on the website or on social media?"). An additional 18.8% reported responding at least once a week, while 18.8% do so less frequently.

Figure 2.
Factors that determine suitability of interactive content format (Q8, n=16)



The following section of the questionnaire explored editorial attitudes toward interactive content. When asked about the factors influencing decisions regarding the appropriateness of interactive formats, respondents most frequently emphasized the importance of making information accessible to audiences. Specifically, they highlighted the need to clearly visualize statistical data, address topic complexity, and ensure clarity in explanation (Figure 2). Slightly less common were considerations related to technical feasibility and overall relevance of the interactive format (Q8: "If your newsroom were to develop interactive content - such as quizzes, infographics, maps, VR, news games - what factors would determine whether a given topic is suitable for such a format?").

Given that limited technological expertise and the need for external contributors are often cited by researchers as barriers to implementing interactivity, the study examined the technical capabilities of newsrooms deeper. Among the surveyed Ukrainian digital media, 68.75% acknowledged a need to involve external specialists (Q9: "If your newsroom were to produce interactive content, would it require external expertise? If so, what kind?"). Most commonly,

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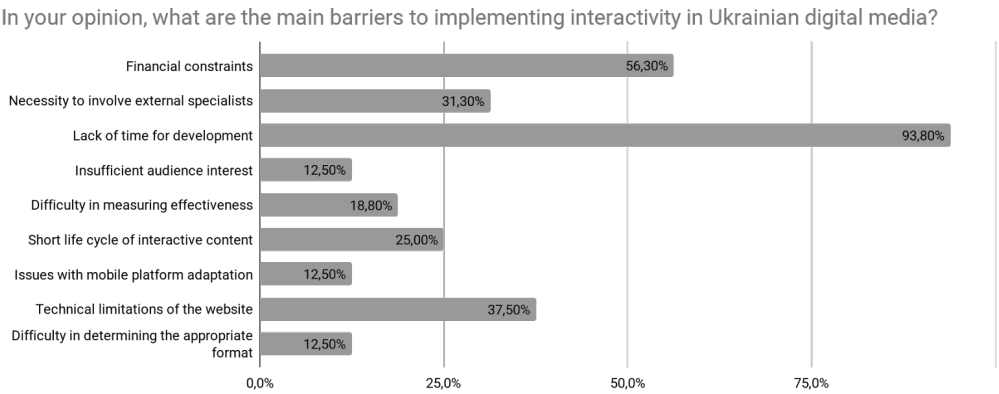
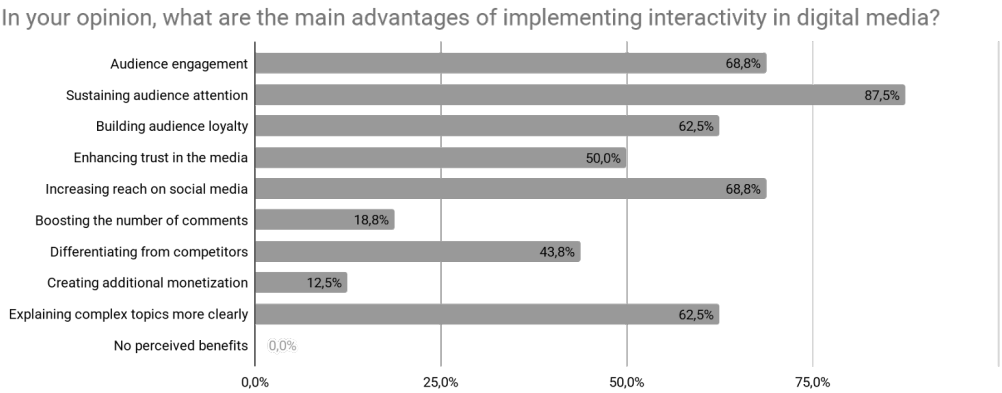
respondents mentioned the need for developers, designers, layout specialists, and data journalists. Thus, the shortage of in-house professionals is one of the key barriers to broader adoption of interactivity. Other important constraints identified (Figure 3) included lack of time for development, financial limitations, and technical restrictions of website infrastructure (Q10: "In your opinion, what are the main barriers to implementing interactivity in Ukrainian digital media?").

Figure 3.
Main barriers to implementing interactivity in digital media (Q10, n=16)



In contrast, the main perceived benefits and motivations for using interactivity included enhanced audience engagement and retention, increased reach on social media, greater audience loyalty, and improved accessibility of complex topics (Q11: "In your opinion, what are the main advantages of implementing interactivity in digital media?"). Notably, only 12.5% of respondents identified interactive technologies as having a direct impact on content monetization (Figure 4).

Figure 4.
Main advantages of implementing interactivity in digital media (Q11, n=16)



The final core section of the survey examined how newsrooms assess the effectiveness of interactive formats. In response to the question "How does your newsroom evaluate the effectiveness of interactive content?" (Q12), the leading metrics cited were the number of views (87.5%) and the depth of engagement (68.8%). Additional relevant indicators included click-throughs to

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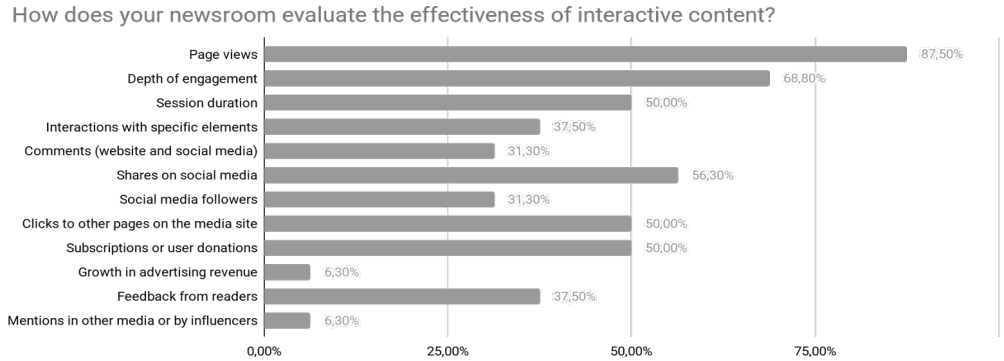
other media content (50%) and average session duration on the website (50%). Respondents also emphasized metrics related to social media performance, including shares, comments, and follower growth, as illustrated in Figure 5.

In the final question of this section (Q13: "What actual impact of implementing interactive content has your newsroom observed?") respondents were asked to reflect on tangible results from the implementation of interactive formats. Most linked the positive impact to improved social media performance – both in terms of user reach and engagement. However, respondents also noted measurable benefits on their websites, including increased traffic, longer session duration, and greater user interaction (e.g., scroll depth). One respondent also emphasized that active participation in low-effort interactive features such as polls can generate valuable input for future editorial content, serving as a form of crowdsourced agenda-setting. Additional perceived effects included increased audience trust and loyalty toward the media outlet overall.

Figure 5.
Indicators reflecting the effectiveness of interactive content in digital media (Q13, n=16)



The alignment between the expected (Q12) and actual (Q13) effects of implementing interactivity in online media leads to a positive conclusion: editorial teams are generally successful in achieving the outcomes they anticipate when employing interactive technologies, which supports the justification for their use. The reported effectiveness of interactivity in social media metrics is particularly significant given the growing role of social platforms as a key source of referral traffic for online media websites (Троян, 2024). Thus, interactivity can serve as an important tool not only for attracting but also for retaining audiences on media platforms, strengthening user engagement, and potentially fostering greater brand loyalty over time. However, outlined difficulties in measuring the effectiveness of interactive features (Q10) may hinder a fuller understanding and appreciation of their impact. This uncertainty in metrics could limit the strategic use of interactivity and complicate its integration into long-term editorial planning, especially in newsrooms where performance is primarily evaluated through quantifiable outcomes.

Conclusions

This study demonstrates that interactivity is increasingly recognized by Ukrainian digital media as a valuable component of digital journalism. Addressing RQ1, the findings show that most editorial teams incorporate interactive elements into their communication strategies – primarily through direct user channels and multimedia formats – indicating a positive shift toward more engaged forms of storytelling. However, deeper types of user involvement, such as participatory content creation or user-to-user interaction, remain underdeveloped. The findings reveal only a partial alignment between the declared importance of interactivity and its practical application. While many respondents report that participatory features are formally included in their strategies, actual use of user-generated content is limited.

In relation to RQ2, editors generally perceive interactive formats as effective, especially in enhancing audience engagement, increasing time spent on site, and boosting social media performance – now a critical source of traffic for online media. The observed alignment between expected and actual outcomes suggests that interactivity, when implemented intentionally, can bring measurable editorial and strategic benefits. At the same time, the study's insights into RQ3 confirm the persistence of several structural barriers that hinder the broader adoption of interactivity – chiefly limited staffing, financial constraints, and insufficient technical expertise. Addressing them through capacity building, workflow optimization, or the development of accessible technological solutions may significantly advance the use of interactive tools.

While these findings provide a nuanced understanding of newsroom perceptions and practices, they should also be interpreted in light of the study's methodological limitations. The expert sample, though information-rich, represents only a segment of the Ukrainian digital media landscape, meaning that some institutional perspectives may remain underrepresented. Accordingly, the conclusions reflect informed insights from practitioners directly involved in decision-making but do not claim statistical generalizability across the entire industry.

Overall, the results reinforce the view of interactivity not merely as a set of technical affordances, but as a forward-looking editorial approach requiring both institutional support and a reimagined relationship with the audience. Promising avenues for future research include comparing newsroom perspectives on the implementation of interactivity with audience expectations, as well as exploring potential solutions to the identified barriers hindering its adoption.

Authors' contribution: Kateryna Horska was responsible for the methodology and overall supervision of the study, while Dmytro Zagorulko conducted the research, interpreted the results, and prepared the manuscript.

Declaration of Generative Artificial Intelligence and Technologies Using Artificial Intelligence in the Writing Process. During the preparation of this article, the authors used ChatGPT (GPT-4o) exclusively as a translation aid to ensure linguistic clarity. All translations were subsequently reviewed and revised by the authors. The authors bear full responsibility for the accuracy and appropriateness of the final text.

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The image of the Ukrainian military in 2022–2024 and the connective nature of its formation

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This study validates the hypothesis that the representation of the image of a Ukrainian fighter in social media is predominantly shaped by ordinary users, thereby underscoring the connecting nature of this image. For an in-depth study of the transformation of the image of a fighter, we used a combination of quantitative discourse analysis and qualitative narrative analysis. The study shows how, in less than 3 years, the image of military representatives has undergone profound narrative transformations, including tonality adjustments: if in the first months after February 24, 2022, the most popular statement was the statement of valor, efficiency, and professionalism of the military, then in the future attention increased to negative features: the Soviet way of thinking, neglect of preparation or risks, toxicity of communication and methods of work, etc. The authors' study of such judgments made it possible to assert that the representation of a fighter's image in social media largely depends on which users are more willing to form this image at a given moment, as well as on important social events that trigger its discussion.

Keywords: strategic communications, strategic narrative, Russian-Ukrainian war, Armed Forces of Ukraine, image of a soldier

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Образ українського військового у 2022-2024 роках і конективна природа його формування

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Це дослідження доводить конективну природу репрезентації образу українського бійця в соціальних медіа, тобто, таку, що створена перш за все рядовими користувачами соціальних медіа. Для глибинного вивчення трансформації образу бійця нами використано поєднання кількісного дискурс-аналізу та якісного наративного аналізу. Дослідження показує, як за неповні 3 роки імідж представників війська зазнав глибинних наративних трансформацій, зокрема й коригування тональності: якщо в перші місяці після 24 лютого 2022 року найпопулярнішою була констатація звитяжності, ефективності та професійності військових, то в подальшому зростала увага й до негативних рис: радянського способу мислення, нехтування підготовкою чи ризиками, токсичності спілкування та методів роботи тощо. Вивчення авторів таких суджень дало можливості стверджувати, що репрезентація образу бійця в соцмережах значною мірою залежить від того, які користувачі в цей момент з більшою готовністю цей образ формують, а також від важливих суспільних подій, які запускають його обговорення.

Ключові слова: стратегічні комунікації, стратегічний наратив, російсько-українська війна, Збройні сили України, образ військового

Relevance of the study

The full-scale invasion of Russia, launched on February 24, 2022, provoked a radical rethinking of value guidelines by most Ukrainian citizens. Such circumstances traditionally form the "need for orientation" (Weaver, 1980): a situation of great demand for explanations of reality, as well as for new strategies of behavior. One of these benchmarks was Ukrainians who joined the army, volunteering, humanitarian or information activities. Ukrainian traditional and social media, the interest of which has grown rapidly since the beginning of the invasion, as evidenced by the increase in the number of visits to news sites (on average +300%), the number of subscribers to popular news social media resources (from +90% to +770% since the beginning of the invasion), and the level of attention of Ukrainians to news – 89% (Nanovska, 2024), have actively written about such new role models. Ukrainian servicemen are the "media faces" of war. We assume – and this became the main **hypothesis of** our study – that the social media representation of the image of a soldier in the Ukrainian information space reflected the public mood about the war and was formed primarily by ordinary participants in the information space. Thus, in 2022, the priority of online discussions was problems that are usually at the bottom of Maslow's pyramid, such as power blackouts (CAT-UA, 2023). Over time, a challenge to a positive image of a military man began to form: a split between the front and the rear, the military and the civilians. At the same time, problems began to accumulate, including the replenishment of the army and a general

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The author Artem Zakharchenko declared a conflict of interest. He is the member of editorial board. The manuscript was processed by an independent editor, and the author Artem Zakharchenko was excluded from the review and decision-making process.

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deterioration in the mood of Ukrainians on social media regarding the war (Luzan, 2024). These transformations, according to our assumption, took place simultaneously with changes in the image of the fighter on social media, and therefore, the landmarks and role models for Ukrainian citizens.

The purpose of the study: to determine the quantitative and qualitative characteristics of the image of a Ukrainian soldier in social media, and the patterns of their change since the beginning of the invasion; to identify the factors of such changes by identifying the authors of judgments about fighters and changing their behavior.

Analysis of recent research and publications

The problem of representing the Ukrainian army and the image of military personnel lies at the intersection of three theoretical frameworks: strategic communications and strategic narratives, the creation of images and mythical ideas about specific social groups, as well as the use of communication technologies for this purpose.

The concept of "strategic communications" is multifaceted and multidisciplinary, as it is applied by researchers not only in social communication studies but also in various related fields, including political science, economics, and military affairs. Theorists of strategic communications see the environment of their implementation as a network within which messages are distributed between its different members, and it is in this branched environment that stories are formed (Hagenbach & Koessler, 2010). Thus, strategic communications are not necessarily a two-way, but rather a multi-vector process of joint construction of meanings, which is interactive in nature (van Ruler, 2018). It is in such a multi-vector environment, obviously, that the image of a fighter is formed.

This article is primarily devoted to the military vision of strategic communication and the image of the fighter as part of it. Military theorists (Holmqvist, 2013) define strategic communication (stratcom) as the effective interaction with the civilian population to attract them to their side during armed confrontation through the ethical and ontological justification of war. That is, victory in the kinetic war is guaranteed by victory in the "war for the hearts and minds" of people. The main tool of such confrontation is the strategic narrative – that is defined as the means used by political actors to construct a common vision of the past, present, and future, which shapes the behavior of internal and external actors, manages expectations, and changes the discursive environment in which actors operate (Miskimmon et al, 2013). However, this approach was created for the context of military actions of great powers (primarily the United States of America) abroad (in Iraq, Afghanistan), and not for the conditions of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and, as a result, an existential war. For these conditions, Ukrainian researchers have developed a separate approach.

It is known that anyone with access to the Internet can influence events that occur in a real-world environment, including those on the battlefield (Edwards, 2013). The definition of the phenomenon of "mass self-communication" is significant: the Internet and social media have deprived the elite of the exclusive prerogative to shape the agenda (Castells, 2009). This became noticeable in the example of mass protests since 2011, such as the Arab Spring, #MeToo movements, Occupy Wall Street, etc., which later described the phenomenon of affective publics – a special state of the online audience that allows it to behave as an organized force (Papacharissi, 2015). In the same way, during the war in Ukraine, a connective strategic narrative was formed (Zakharchenko, 2025), that is, one that was mostly created by social media users, not by the authorities. Thus, the connective nature of strategic narrative implies that its formation is not monopolized by a single structure; instead, there are many interconnected actors who create a story that motivates people to fight.

The image of a fighter in a strategic narrative performs a function of "describing the main character of the story", and is, of course, one of its most important parts. Numerous studies have

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been devoted to it; in particular, it is worth highlighting the analysis of the evolution of the image of soldiers in American culture from World War II to the Vietnam War (Huebner, 2008). In the study of the image of British soldiers, they compared three classic stereotypes about them – heroes, victims, thieves – and came to the conclusion that in their culture, there are now more depictions of the military as vulnerable people, although not without preserving the heroic image of a soldier as one that prevails (McCartney, 2011). The studies mentioned did not aim to identify general patterns in the formation of the image of defenders but were of an applied nature. In the Ukrainian academic discourse, there is also a study of the image of soldiers, in particular, the period of the Anti-Terrorist Operation: Nauruzov & Pidmohylna (2018) studied how the Ukrainian media formed the heroic image of soldiers, and came to the conclusion that the awareness of ordinary Ukrainians with their compatriots who defend them was low at that time. The archetypal components of this image were also investigated based on Facebook posts (Khraban & Silko, 2021), but without quantification that would provide an idea of the current ratio of different ideas about the military in public opinion, at least through social media. More relevant research has been devoted to the use of visual language to construct modern representations of heroes from the Russian-Ukrainian war, with the conclusion that this approach moves away from romanticizing the past and creates a new national myth based on the stories of real military personnel (Tymoshenko, 2024).

So, we see that there is still a need to study a holistic image of a Ukrainian soldier during a full-scale invasion, by testing the theory that it is part of a connective strategic narrative and therefore corresponds to its laws and is formed mainly not by the authorities, but by other figures in the information space.

Method

Quantitative part of the study

To study the image of a fighter, we employed a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, specifically discourse analysis and narrative analysis.

The study's source base comprised an array of data accumulated by the NGO Communication Analysis Team – Ukraine (CAT-UA) as part of its research on military communication. The data is compiled as follows: CAT-UA analysts randomly selected 1,250 posts every day from all publications dedicated to military topics published within the pro-Ukrainian segment of social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Telegram, Instagram, TikTok) for the period from February 24, 2022, to November 15, 2024. Then, in this array, for each message, CAT-UA analysts determined the key message using the method of analyzing PR messages (Zakharchenko, 2022). That is, this array served as a source of semi-processed data for us. This array has been partially cleaned of bot posts, if any were detected by CAT-UA analysts. However, such cleaning is not technically complete. In addition, no cleaning was performed to remove fake messages and information influence operations by hostile states, as we believe that these influences are an important factor in shaping discourse.

For the purposes of our study, only posts with key messages related to the Ukrainian military were selected from the broader array. These are messages like "Ukrainians are proud of, thank the Armed Forces of Ukraine", "The Ukrainian militaries are well trained and equipped", "Ukrainians quarrel with each other", "Ukrainians criticize the Armed Forces of Ukraine, volunteers", "Ukrainians help Ukrainian soldiers", etc. A total of 70 key messages were identified that could be used to define posts containing characteristics of Ukrainian soldiers. Thus, we received an array of 47,632 publications that most likely describe the image of the Ukrainian military. 1500 messages were randomly selected from this array, of which 883 turned out to be relevant during the encoding process.

By manually coding two trained encoders, the following categories were defined for each message:

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1. The tone of the assessment of the Ukrainian military.
2. The role played by the fighter.
3. Specialty or position of a military man.
4. Generalized characteristics in 1-2 words.
5. Post author category.
6. For posts from citizens – the author's attitude to military service (liable for military service, not liable for military service, military personnel).

Intercoder reliability was calculated using 100 lines of the array as an example and varied between 0.87 and 0.96 depending on the indicator.

The obtained quantitative data were statistically processed in Microsoft Excel, and generalizations were made for each category within the framework of the discourse analysis, taking into account not only the content of the messages but also the behavior of the authors and external events.

Qualitative part of the study

The narrative analysis was conducted using the same data set, but with high-quality thematic coding. Meaningful judgments about Ukrainian fighters were not standardized or counted; instead, they were recorded in a separate document structured by topic. Thus, a list of topics related to Ukrainian fighters was obtained, which were discussed on social media, each consisting of a certain number of judgments present on social media. Each of these topics was presented in a coherent narrative by the publication's authors.

Methodological limitations of the study

The combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches enables us to overcome the traditional limitations of each method. For example, qualitative narrative analysis made it possible to consider the specific characteristics of the objects of study, which are not salient enough and therefore do not manifest themselves in quantitative research, but are important for many Ukrainians. On the other hand, quantitative methods enable a focus on the features of the soldier's image that are truly noticeable in social media, thereby overcoming the narrator's subjectivity.

However, the limitations of the data source remain relevant. It does not consider the opinions of people who either do not use social media or do not actively contribute to it. In addition, some features of the image of a soldier that social media users prefer not to voice in accordance with the principle of the "spiral of silence" (Noelle-Neumann, 1974) may not be considered.

Results

Quantitative analysis

Attitude towards fighters

Despite the total predominance of positive mentions in the sample (80%, see Figure 1), significant changes are noticeable in the dynamics. For example, in the second quarter of 2024, this figure was only 64%.

The most positive period in the perception of the Ukrainian fighter was 2022. At this time, they were described as glorious, associated with the hope of victory. Stories about how they destroy the occupiers and seize their equipment, know how to organize life in the trenches, sacrifice their lives for the sake of Ukraine, or otherwise die under Russian fire, and the streets are named after them, prevailed. In the liberated territories, soldiers are greeted with gifts. In the first year of the full-scale invasion, there is almost no negative attitude towards the military; however, closer to the beginning of 2024, complaints emerge about the actions of military territorial recruitment and social support centers. The share of messages without pronounced emotionality is also growing – about mobilization and the need to replenish the army. To a lesser extent, complaints about the incompetence of military commanders are noticeable in the information space (for example, in

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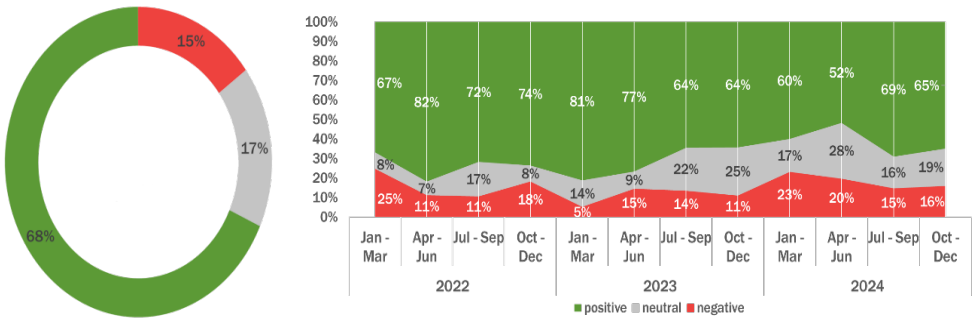
the situation with the formation of the 128th Separate Mountain Assault Brigade on the front line in November 2023).

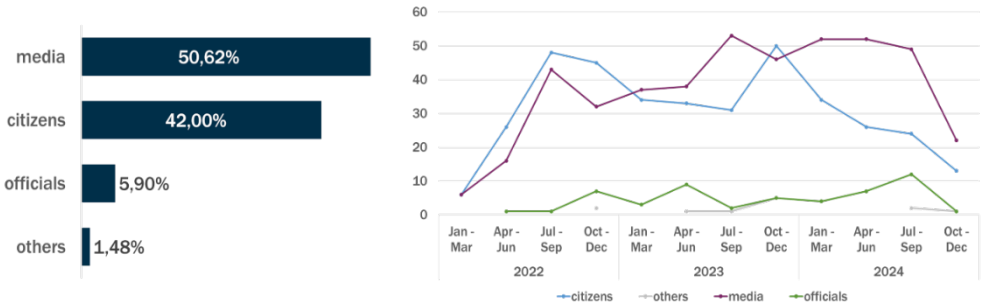
Figure 1.
The general distribution of user sentiment and the dynamics of its change (percentage of the number in the sample as a whole and quarterly)



Sources of communication

In the first months of the war, **citizens**' communication about the image of a soldier is livelier than the media, although they mainly distribute the content of various portals (mostly regional media or news YouTube channels). Women and, less often, men spread emotional stories: for example, about how parents searched for the body of their dead son right in the middle of the field and took him out in the trunk from shelling to bury him with dignity. **Initially**, the media tend to cover the military in the context of hostilities or bold decisions to join the army. They actively disseminate interviews with the military, in which they discuss the combat path. Over time, there are more obituaries in the media, which, in the end, seize the initiative from citizens, who begin to publish much less content about the war (the turning point was the period of discussion of changes before mobilization – with the final transfer of the initiative to the media after the presentation of the relevant draft law, see Figure 2). However, over time, citizens began to actively request that they sign petitions to award the defenders the title of Hero posthumously. **Official bodies** appear in the information space less frequently, with specific stories about the military, holiday congratulations, obituaries, and appeals to join the ranks of the Ukrainian Defense Forces.

Figure 2.
The frequency of occurrence of key sources of judgments about the military (percentage of the total sample) and the dynamics of the activity of these sources (number in the sample)



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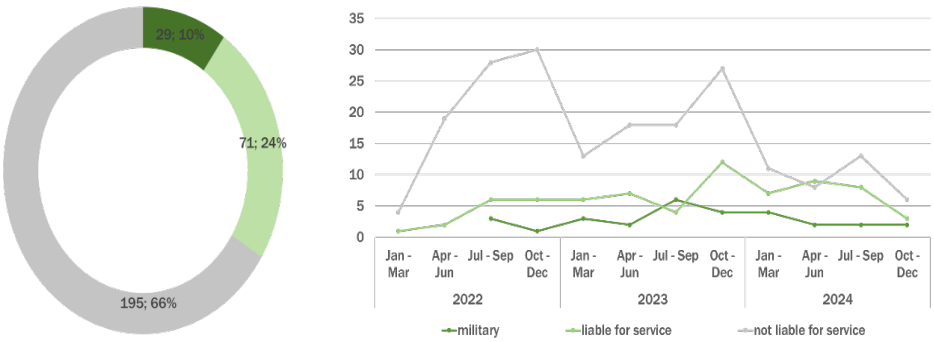
The author's attitude to military service

Since the beginning of 2022, the category **of non-liable for military service** (mostly women) has been actively disseminating stories about soldiers, accompanying them with emotional comments (expressing gratitude, pride, sadness). Such accents are sometimes accompanied *by magical or poetic characteristics of the military* ("when he picked up a violin, the shooting stopped" or "heroes do not die because they are made of flint"), as well as prayers for the preservation of life. Over time, the activity in this category declines and gradually equals that of the other two groups (see Figure 3), and the portion of the content written by non-conscripts has already become more realistic. At first, those **liable for military service** retell stories of their military participation in certain operations and obituaries, but as 2024 approaches, they are increasingly discussing mobilization and the actions of military recruitment office representatives. The **military itself often appears** in videos recorded on TikTok about the course of hostilities. In mid-2023, the surge in content from them is partly due to attention to counteroffensive assessments. Later, this content is replaced by textual stories about everyday conditions of service or certain achievements, such as promotions in rank.

Figure 3.
The frequency of categories of citizens who spoke about the military, according to their attitude to military service (percentage of the total sample of posts from citizens), and the dynamics of their activity (number in the sample)



Roles in which the military appears

The role **of defenders** from the aggressor significantly prevails in the sample (more than half of all posts, see Figure 4), with a description of how they perform official tasks: we are talking about the personal stories of the military, everyday difficulties (training, equipment, weapons, weather, clashes with the occupiers) and responding to these challenges, new realities of life (trenches, shelling, etc.), everyday life and facilities (water, Starlink, etc.). Flaunting of new weapons is noticeable. The role **of the victim** makes up a fifth of the massif: severe trials in captivity or after wounds, and most often, a statement of the death of soldiers without details. Among the descriptions of the role of **the hero** (almost the same share) are stories about the sacrifice of the dead (especially prominent people like V. Skakun or R. Ratushnyi), about successes in the defense of the Motherland (such as the long-term defense of Mariupol and Bakhmut), and about the rescue of comrades. Petitions for the title of "Hero of Ukraine" with descriptions of the applicants are also becoming increasingly noticeable, which, on the one hand, allows you to learn more about the heroic biographies of the deceased, but on the other hand, usually consist of template messages about them and do not contain any unique information. The context of the threat from the military (2.9%) becomes more visible from 2024, as evident in stories about enlistment offices, whose

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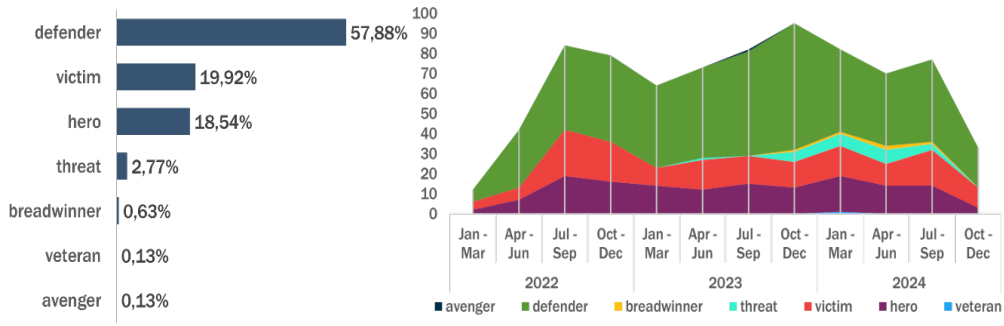
representatives are feared by civilians or who are dissatisfied with the military due to receiving low-quality replacements. Less often, stories of criminal negligence of commanders (for example, the formation of the 128th brigade near the forward positions) are told about the threat. Less than 1% fall into the roles of breadwinner (joining the ranks of Ukraine's Defense Forces as an opportunity to improve one's – or family's – financial situation, as indicated by salaries in vacancies), veteran, or **avenger**.

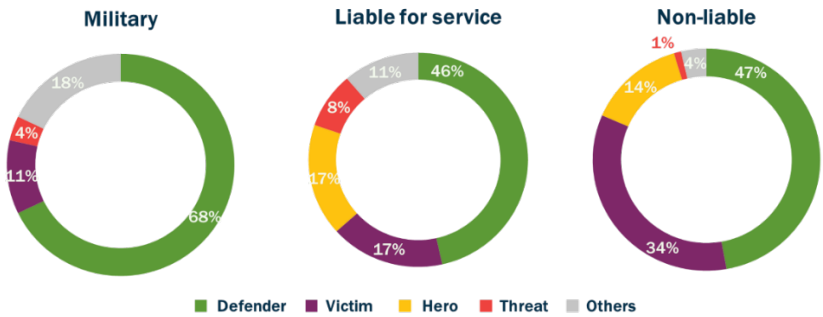
Figure 4.
The share of posts with key roles in which the military appears (percentage of the total sample) and the change in attention to them (number in the sample)



Comparison of the author's roles and attitude to military service

As we can see in Figure 5, the military themselves mostly talk about their service as a routine to protect the state and their loved ones (68% in the corresponding category), share footage where they are in positions, performing certain tasks, or just in full military equipment (which invariably attracts attention from women). Sometimes they criticize commanders whose orders they consider threatening. At the same time, unlike some civilians, they are not inclined to consider their work a manifestation of heroism or extraordinary abilities. Civilians, in turn, pick up the stories of outstanding military figures and frame them as heroic, such as those of M. Dianov and A. Verkhohlyad, among others. Although there is enough emphasis on ordinary people in the army. The threat from the enlistment officers is almost completely noticeable in the posts of men liable for military service. Non-liable (women) are very sensitive to the positioning of soldiers as victims (34% in the relevant category) – about how they are taken away by the war or suffer (in captivity, because of wounds).

Figure 5.
Comparison of roles depending on the categories of citizens who speak about them (share of all posts from a certain category)



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Characteristics of the military

In this list, the recognition of extraordinary qualities prevails brave, legendary, heroic, indomitable, sacrificial, who survived the most terrible episodes of war (see Figure 6). Habitual soft skills (such as the ability to perform tasks, responsibility) remain in the background, as well as the recognition of intellectual or physical abilities. Negative characteristics remain on the margins (prone to corporal punishment, criminal acts) and often relate to the moments of interaction of the enlistment officers with civilians, and not the military among themselves. Due to age, the characteristics of soldiers often appear as young, in the prime of life, which contrasts with the existing and described in the Ukrainian media problem of replenishing the army with young personnel against the backdrop of the "aging" of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (Strashkulych, 2024). There are also mentions of those who held the line since the ATO in Donbas and have since gained combat experience, which has been needed since the beginning of the full-scale invasion.

Figure 6.
"A cloud of words" from the characteristics of the military on social media, in Ukrainian (the larger the size of the word/phrase, the more often it occurs)

Military positions mentioned in posts

The most common mentions of "classic" positions in social media are riflemen, gunners, sappers, etc. (see Figure 6). But unit commanders are even more often mentioned – stories about exceptional intelligence and talents are often associated with them, as well as enlistment officers, amid the attention to mobilization.

A fifth of all posts were devoted to the **commanders of the unit**, where certain specialties/positions were indicated. They are often mentioned as representatives of a new formation who led their subordinates and died alongside them. Among such personalities is D. Kotsyubaylo ("Da Vinci"). However, later, some of them became both objects of criticism for criminal orders (for example, lining up at the front) and victims of despair (the suicide of Commander I. Hryb after leaving Vuhledar).

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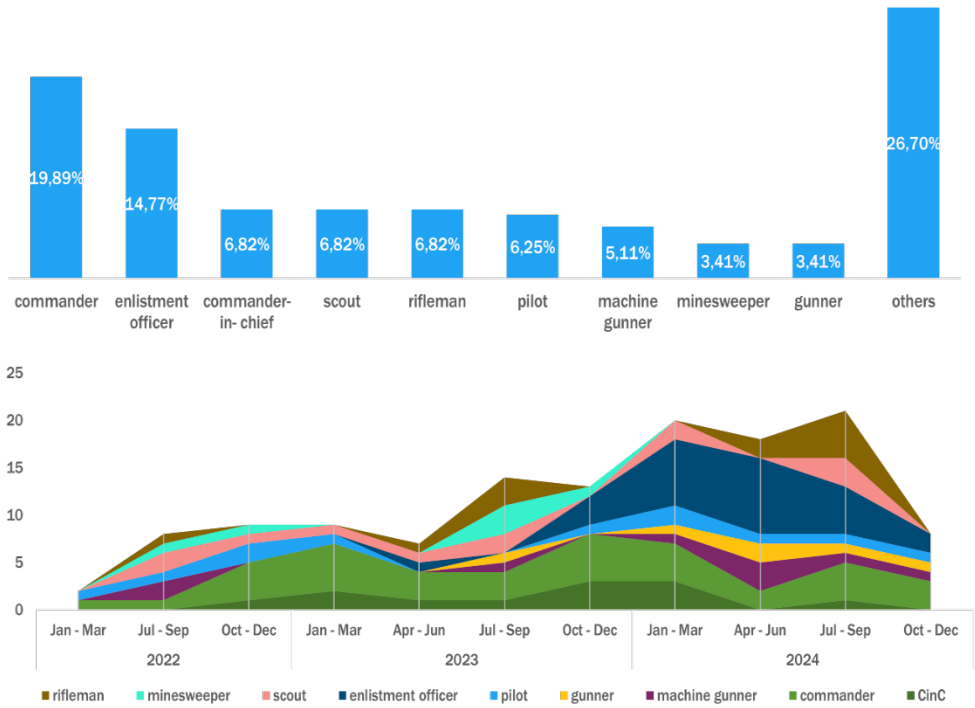
Figure 7.
Distribution of attention to positions/specialties in the army (share among the entire array in which specific specialties are mentioned), as well as changes in attention to them (number of posts in the sample)



An enlistment officer is almost always represented critically: both by civilians liable for service, and by the military. Texts in defense of the very principle of mobilization are noticeable, but not in defense of this category of military. Mentions **of the Commander-in-Chief** are, first, mentions of V. Zaluzhnyi, mostly full of respect and with high marks. Such a level of trust allows direct communication of complex and unpopular topics – particularly the controversial draft law on strengthening the criminal liability of military personnel, on strengthening mobilization, etc.

Military positions related to specific functional duties in war (**scouts**, **riflemen**, **pilots**, **machine gunners**, **minesweepers**, etc.) are often visible in obituaries. Meanwhile, specialties in the military related to technological innovations (such as **unmanned aerial vehicle operators**) are less represented in the three-year sample; in addition, they have a rarer context obituary, unlike infantrymen and stormtroopers. In the first year of the full-scale war, there was a noticeable emphasis on the successes of the riskiest categories of the military, such as reconnaissance men or pilots, who significantly influenced the course of events (for example, in air battles for Kyiv or the defense of Mariupol).

In this way, we see that the image of a soldier, if it is not generalized but refers to specific individuals with specific combat specialties, is primarily determined by the commanders and infantry, but other specialties add important accents to it.

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Qualitative analysis

2022. The Ukrainian strategic narrative highlights the key provisions that the Ukrainian soldier is well-trained, motivated, and a source of pride and gratitude. Initially, there was a noticeable emphasis on supply problems; however, later, Western partners who provided military assistance to Ukraine made adjustments to their communication. A Ukrainian soldier is portrayed as a professional; their experience enables us to discuss being ahead of NATO standards. And also, about the contrast with the newly mobilized Russians: both at the beginning of the invasion and after V. Putin's decision to partially mobilize in September 2022, against the backdrop of the retreat from the Kharkiv region. The waves of gratitude and love for the military are amplified by a successful counteroffensive; the army is considered a new collective superhero and has earned great trust. The military receives special gratitude from residents of the liberated cities. Obituaries are distributed by both ordinary citizens regarding their loved ones and by regional authorities – here, sadness is combined with respect. Manufacturers present new types of weapons. The military is being trained and trained. They try to equip the positions as conveniently as possible. Everything revolves around the narrative of preparing and caring for the military, driven by the desire for victory. After all, the presence of women in the Defense Forces has reached its highest values, and the Ministry of Defense is developing a separate uniform for them.

2023. High expectations are generated by the counteroffensive: the typical Ukrainian soldier is quickly mastering Western equipment, joining the "Offensive Guard"; it is emphasized that the occupied Ukrainian cities are waiting for the liberators. At the same time, internal problems of the army, which were less noticeable before, amidst the background of a general patriotic upsurge, are beginning to come out of the "shadows": about the poor provision of the military personnel, concealment of losses, persecution of those who "tell the truth", sadists and corrupt officials. The faults of the military leadership become noticeable quickly, as in the case of the death of the soldiers of the 128th Separate Brigade (in November 2023). There is an increasing amount of emotionally charged negativity towards the command, as well as unconstructive squabbles (for example, between M. Bezuhla and V. Zaluzhnyi), which creates tension between the civilian and military authorities. Meanwhile, the enlistment summonses are gradually rocking a wave of indignation over the draft, which the Russians immediately use. The information space becomes a place for escalating fears about service. The authorities seek to address these problems, such as by sending enlistment officers to the front, but globally, this approach does not yield significant results. Ukrainians are proud of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, but they are in no hurry to join their ranks, despite the need for replenishment. Later, the emphasis was shifted to the topic of axiological conversations about "justice".

2024. The previous year's problems are intensifying, and a track of unresolved mobilization issues has been added, which has put the military in an uncertain position against the background of the lack of defined terms of service and their proper replacement. S. Gnezdilov's demonstrative unauthorized abandonment of the unit (AWOL, which stands for "away without official leave") initiates a discussion of the fatigue of the military; they mostly condemn the act publicly, but, despite everything, there is no change in perception: the opinion that someone else should fight remains established. At the same time, various influential Ukrainian opinion leaders are working to promote the popularization of military service and increase the involvement of compatriots in the defense of their country. We are talking about writers, musicians, comedians, entrepreneurs, artists, and actors. Additionally, the narrative about the military places a distinct emphasis on the manufacturability of solutions to save human lives (drones, ground-based robotic systems) and optimize bureaucratic processes (document flow, transfer between military units).

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Conclusions and discussion

The image of a soldier as an element of the strategic narrative is a complex construct consisting of many components, including:

- A set of symbolic representations of soldiers and epithets that characterize them: hero, defender, brave, etc.
- Notable stories associated with these images, based on real events: the defense of Azovstal and the subsequent capture of its defenders, the courageous deeds of fallen heroes such as Oleksandr Matsievsky, and their life stories, etc.
- Typical roles played by the bearers of the image: defender, victim, hero, threat, etc.
- Typical assessments of the actions of the military in such roles and the emotions they evoke: pride, fear, condemnation, love, etc.

This image has undergone transformations during the years of the full-scale invasion. Starting in 2022, the image of the fighter as a "superhero" prevailed and was maintained in later years, but to a lesser extent. It was formed primarily by non-liable for service, mainly women. However, the militaries themselves on social media presented a much less pretentious image of themselves: there was no heroic rhetoric in their descriptions, but instead, attention was given to everyday problems and life.

Over time, the category of authors that was the most massive at the beginning of the invasion – namely, non-liable for military service – radically reduced their attention to the image of a fighter, and the rest of the authors (military and civilians liable for military service, media, official institutions) began to form a more realistic image. Characteristics like "sunshine", "our guys", etc., in social media began to contrast with under-communicated problems that were previously tried to be talked about less: the average age of the military, uncertainty with the terms of service, the shortage of people in combat positions, AWOL, and the unprofessionalism of commanders. Almost exclusively, official speakers, rather than ordinary users, discussed the reforms. Instead, among the assessments of the fate of military personnel expressed by civilians, considering the high number of casualties, metaphors such as "one-way ticket" became more frequent. Among other military figures, the enlistment offices are mentioned more frequently, and their methods are condemned. Instead, it is difficult to find success stories on social media of people who were forcibly mobilized, yet were able to find themselves in a new role despite the circumstances.

Character changes rarely occur gradually, just because a certain number of fighters with a new status accumulate. Almost always, tectonic changes occur due to a certain event: the terrorist attack in Olenivka highlighted the role of a soldier of the Armed Forces of Ukraine as a victim, and the transfer of aircraft increased the visibility of pilots. However, different aspects of the soldier's image will be shaped by various events, and it does not seem realistic to name each of them over the course of these three years. Instead, we should note that real changes in the soldier's image are brought about by events that not only become newsworthy for the media but also become part of the strategic narrative, marking the stages of Ukraine's defense.

As a result, we see that official accounts form a minimal part of judgments about Ukrainian servicemen. The image of a Ukrainian soldier is largely shaped by citizens and the media, with their judgments significantly influenced by their attitude toward military service. Events that activate changes in such attention, and therefore changes in the image of a fighter, are not always initiated by official institutions, such as the draft law on mobilization or the Offensive Guard campaign. Along with these events, the creators of such news events can be both Russians (terrorist attack in Olenivka) and Western partners (the transfer of aircraft, which, however, took place at the insistence of the Ukrainian authorities).

The lack of full control of the Ukrainian authorities over the image of the Ukrainian fighter entails both disadvantages and advantages characteristic of the connective strategic narrative in general (Zakharchenko, 2025). On the one hand, this image becomes vulnerable to hostile

information influences and generally unpredictable cases, as the openness of the information space allows various actors to influence it. On the other hand, a positive perception of the image of a soldier in this case does not depend on the perception of power as a whole, and therefore, with a sharp deterioration in the image of the authorities as a result of certain scandals or information attacks, it allows for maintaining trust at least in the army.

Directions for future research

This study provides a general overview of the military`s image and the patterns of its formation. However, further research on this topic would be beneficial. In particular, it would be useful to:

- Determine the contribution of myths about individual Ukrainian heroes to the overall image of the military.
- Study the formation of the image of the military over a longer period, in particular during the Anti-Terrorist Operation / Joint Forces Operation.
- For practical, rather than scientific, research, it would be useful to map all the events that influenced the formation of the image of the soldier and establish cause-and-effect relationships between these events and changes in images.

Authors' contribution: Artem Zakharchenko – conceptualization, methodology, writing (review and editing); Yevhen Luzan – conceptualization, quantitative and qualitative analysis, writing (original draft); Anhelika Machula – data manual coding and analysis; Maryna Fursenko – data manual coding and analysis.

Declaration of generative artificial intelligence and technologies using artificial intelligence in the writing process. The authors did not use artificial intelligence tools in the preparation of this article. The authors of the article bear full responsibility for the correct use and citation of sources.

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RESEARCH ARTICLES
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Russia's framing of North Korean soldiers' participation in the Russo-Ukrainian war

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When Russia engaged North Korean troops to fight the Armed Forces of Ukraine during Ukraine's Kursk offensive, this became a major turn in the full-scale Russo-Ukrainian war. The events showcased strong escalation on Russia's side and internationalization of the war, once again proving Russia to be a negative actor within the system of international security. There is currently a lack of detailed picture of how Russia communicated (framed) the deployment of North Korean soldiers to mitigate the reputational damage. This paper is focused on providing practical insights for understanding Russia's strategic communication by highlighting how its framing of this issue evolved. Qualitative frame analysis based on Entman's approach is used to interpret Russia's communication concerning involvement of the North Korean troops. Frames are induced from the chronological analysis of messages issued by Russian officials between autumn 2024 and spring 2025. Five key frames are identified, varying from labeling news about North Korean troops as "informational canard" to emphasizing the "glorious rightful alliance" between Russia and North Korea. It is implied that Russia's communication regarding North Korean troops gradually became more explicit in blaming its enemies (like Ukraine, NATO, or South Korea), more defensive, and more direct in recognizing North Korean troops' engagement on the battlefield. The study indicates that Russia was adapting its strategic communication depending on the overall geopolitical context to support its strategic goals and public image. The paper provides deeper evidence-based understanding of Russia's strategic communication, including attempts at flexible communication in the information warfare.

Keywords: mass communications, strategic narratives, strategic communication, framing, Russo-Ukrainian war

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Російський фреймінг участі північнокорейських військових у повномасштабній російсько-українській війні

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Коли Росія залучила північнокорейські війська для боротьби зі Збройними Силами України під час Курської наступальної операції України, це стало важливим поворотом у повномасштабній Російсько-українській війні. Ці події продемонстрували сильну ескалацію з боку Росії та інтернаціоналізацію війни, що вкотре підтвердило репутацію Росії як негативного актора в системі міжнародної безпеки. Наразі бракує детальної картини того, як Росія комунікувала (фреймувала) розгортання північнокорейських солдатів для пом'якшення репутаційної шкоди. Ця стаття зосереджена на наданні практичної інформації для розуміння стратегічної комунікації Росії, зокрема через висвітлення еволюції фреймінгу Росії щодо залучення північнокорейських військових. У дослідженні для інтерпретації комунікації Росії використовується якісний фреймовий аналіз (на основі підходу Ентмана). Фрейми отримані з хронологічного аналізу повідомлень, опублікованих російськими офіційними акторами між осінню 2024 року та весною 2025 року. У дослідженні пояснюється, як російські фрейми були залучені до цього процесу. Загалом, визначено п'ять ключових фреймів, від називання новин про північнокорейські війська «інформаційною качкою» до наголосу на «славетному законному союзі» між Росією та Північною Кореєю. У роботі з'ясовується, що комунікація Росії щодо північнокорейських військ поступово ставала більш явною у покладанні провини на своїх ворогів (як-от Україна, НАТО чи Південна Корея), більш оборонною та більш прямою у визнанні участі північнокорейських військ на полі бою. Дослідження вказує на те, що Росія адаптувала свою стратегічну комунікацію залежно від загального геополітичного контексту для підтримки своїх стратегічних цілей та публічного іміджу. Стаття пропонує глибше розуміння того, як стратегічна комунікація Росії працювала в контексті повномасштабної Російсько-української війни. Вона також пропонує перспективи для подальших досліджень подій навколо участі північнокорейських військ та спроб Росії мати гнучку стратегічну комунікацію в інформаційній війні.

Ключові слова: масові комунікації, стратегічні наративи, стратегічна комунікація, фреймінг, російсько-українська війна

Direct engagement of North Korean troops on the battlefield in 2024 could be considered, perhaps, one of the major events in the full-scale Russo-Ukrainian war. At that time, to weaken Russia's own offensive operations in Ukraine, the Armed Forces of Ukraine had launched a successful offensive in the border areas of Russia's Kursk region in the summer of 2024, surprising Russia and capturing several settlements. With Russia's own armed forces being scattered all along the frontline in Ukraine, Russia requested direct military assistance from North Korea, based on then-recent Treaty on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the Russian Federation and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The deployment of North Korean soldiers was widely covered in the media and discussed primarily in the context of international relations, security, and escalation of the war. The media also focused on Russia's reaction to the information about the DPRK's troops. Yet, there has been little analysis on how Russia framed this topic.

This paper is based on the pre-assumption that Russia's strategic communication in the full-scale Russo-Ukrainian war attempts reinterpretation of events that might depict Russia as a negative actor. Russia is considered to have used certain strategic narratives and framing to legitimize the invasion of Ukraine, promote the image of a peace maker, a leader of the free world, and even

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explain attacks on civilian infrastructure (Bradshaw et al., 2024; Fridrichová, 2023; Kuzmenko, 2024a; Snigyr, 2023). Russia's engagement of North Korean soldiers to fight the Armed Forces of Ukraine in the Kursk region was positioned as severe escalation and internationalization of the war in international media, comments by government representatives, NATO leadership, and the officials of international organizations like the United Nations[1]. Therefore, it could be argued, that deployment of North Korean troops could undermine Russia's strategic narratives of being on the right side of history (Herd, 2022) and being dedicated to reaching peace (Bradshaw et al., 2024).

This article approaches the framing Russia conducted to interpret the involvement of North Korean troops. The aim of this paper is to highlight how the framing evolved between autumn 2024 and spring 2025 in the context of Russia's strategic communication in wartime. Accordingly, the research goals are:

1) to highlight the frames used by Russia to interpret the involvement of the North Korean soldiers,
2) to synthesize a chronological table of those frames,
3) to induce the key tendencies in how the framing changed,
4) to provide the interpretation of frames and the tendencies of their change in a relation to the context of Russia's strategic communication, situation on the battlefield, and geopolitical activities related to ending the war (negotiations).

Method

This research relies on the frame analysis of Russia's strategic communication concerning the involvement of North Korean troops (further in this text, they may be referred to as "NK troops"). The sample design is based on a purposeful sampling approach and engages criterion sampling – specifically, criterion-i sampling in Palinkas et al.'s (2015) terms. Criterion sampling's logic is "to review and study all cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance" (Patton, 2022: 238). For this paper, messages the fulfill two requirements could be selected:

- these are messages from the statements of Russia's public officials (like the president, government spokespersons, or other government representatives) – the direct communicators within Russia's strategic communication (Kuzmenko, 2024b),
- they concern (comment on, confirm, deny, explain etc.) the participation of North Korean soldiers in the full-scale Russo-Ukrainian war, primarily in the Kursk region of Russia, where Ukrainian Armed Forced have been holding certain territories, and bordering territories in Ukraine.

Russian government officials have commented on North Korean soldiers participating in the war only on a few occasions since autumn 2024. Hence, it would be reasonable to use all the comments that fulfill the requirements for the empirical base. Overall, nine messages issued between October 19, 2024, and May 11, 2025 were analyzed.

The frame analysis itself follows Entman's (1991; 1993) approach and highlights the four elements of framing: problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendations. Therefore, "To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (Entman, 1993: 3). Also, a frame "must include only those elements of the message that are critical to its presumed impacts on information processing" (Entman, 1991: 8).

[1] https://www.lemonde.fr/en/opinion/article/2024/10/24/war-in-ukraine-the-north-korean-escalation_6730330_23.html; https://www.politico.eu/article/north-korea-russia-ukraine-war-called-huge-escalation-risk/; https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_229661.htm?selectedLocale=en

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Accordingly, frames are induced from the nine selected messages, and each of them is reviewed in a deductive logic using Entman's (1993) approach: for each frame, its problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendations are deduced. Then, the chronological framing table is established to track how the frames of NK soldiers' participation changed over time and to highlight the key tendencies. Finally, the interpretation of these changes is provided by viewing the frames in the context of Russia's strategic communication, the situation on the battlefield and geopolitical activities relating to ending the war.

Results

One of the first comments from Russia's government officials was issued by the Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov on October 10, 2024. When he was asked about North Korean soldiers aiding Russia on the battlefield, Peskov claimed that the information was fake[2]:

> *"This looks like another informational canard"*

"Canard" is a slang word and a metaphor which essentially means "fake [news]". The initial **"informational canard" frame** denies that North Korean troops were deployed to participate in the war on Russia's side. The causal interpretation is not provided explicitly, yet the frame implies negative connotation of the "canard" and discreditation of Russia (hence, negative moral evaluation is implied). The implicit recommendation within this frame is not to believe what Russia would consider anti-Russian fake information.

However, on October 21, 2024, another response by Peskov was spread by the Russian media. On that occasion, Peskov shifted his rhetoric towards ambiguity[3]:

> *"We see a lot of contradictory information, South Koreans state one thing, then the Pentagon state that they have no confirmation to such statements, so there is a lot of contradictory information. Perhaps, that is how it should be treated"*

This frame, which could be labeled as "**unfriendly contradictory information**" implies that South Korea and the US (causal interpretation) generate messy interpretations (problem definition). Contrary to the previous message, Peskov's statement thus makes a larger and more precise emphasis on the actors that create the problem (from Russia's perspective). The message does not provide a vast moral evaluation. However, a generally negative evaluation and criticism of the unfriendly countries' "contradictory" communication could be implied. Finally, Peskov's statement also puts the treatment recommendation straightforwardly: the information concerning North Korean soldiers should be treated as contradictory information generated by unfriendly states.

On October 23, 2024, two days after the previous comment, another comment was provided by Russia's foreign ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova. On that occasion, she was asked to confirm or deny the involvement of North Korean troops in the war during a session of questions from the media.

> *"It is not clear why South Korea raised such buzz. As we see, these are not only public statements by the officials, but it is also colossal work in mass media on the **propaganda level**. […] Russia's interaction with DPRK in the military segment and other segments, firstly, follows the international law and does not violate it and, secondly, does not cause any harm to South Korea. […] Having tracked the sequence of events, it is not hard to notice who and with what intentions initiated these **information throw-ins, noise, information waves**. The initial reports on this topic emerged in Ukrainian*

[2] https://tass.ru/politika/22089309
[3] https://www.interfax.ru/russia/987742

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English-language media. Next, [South Korean] intelligence picked it up, publishing its «research». Then, NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte requested a phone call with the Republic of Korea's president Yoon Suk Yeol, with whom he discussed response actions, including the activation of tripartite agreement between the Republic of Korean, Ukraine, and NATO"[4]

Zakharova's vast comment represents the **"anti-Russian propaganda noise"** frame. The problem definition implies that Russia (and DPRK) act in accordance with the law and do nothing wrong at least regarding South Korea. Yet, NATO, the South Korean government, and Ukraine are defined as the troublemakers (causal interpretation) whose aggressive actions are based on groundless accusations towards Russia (moral evaluation). The frame also "recommends" tracking the side that is responsible for anti-Russian propaganda – Russia's rivals.

During the BRICS summit, on October 24, 2024, Russia's president Vladimir Putin responded to NBC News reporter's question regarding satellite images that show North Korean troops participating in the war. Putin's response was considerably different from the previous comments by the Russian representatives[5]:

"Images are a serious thing. If there are images, they reflect something […] As for our relations with Democratic People's Republic of Korea…As you know, as far as I am concerned, our treaty on strategic partnership was ratified just today. There is Article 4 there. We have never doubted that North Korean leadership takes our agreements seriously. But how and what we do within this article is our business. Initially, the respective consultations concerning the implementation of Article 4 of this Treaty must be conducted. But we are in contact with our North Korean friends and we will see how this process will develop"

Putin's ambiguous statement imposes the **"none of your business"** frame. The interpretation of the problem states that the only problem is the attempts of Russia's geopolitical enemies (namely the US) to take down Russia and influence what it considers self-defense. Russia's enemies are defined as the force behind the problem. The moral evaluation is promoted as "whatever is happening (if it's happening at all), is lawful on Russia's side, and Russia does not own any explanations to its enemies." Accordingly, the frame suggests that Russia's enemies should stop aggressive actions against Russia and should not interfere in Russia's affairs.

Finally, on April 26, 2025, during the report to Vladimir Putin, Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces Valery Gerasimov described the involvement of North Korea's forces on the battlefield[6]:

"Particularly, I would like to note the participation of the [DPRK's servicemen] in the liberation of the border areas of the Kursk region, who, in accordance with the Treaty on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between our countries, provided significant assistance in defeating the wedged group of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Soldiers and officers of the Korean People's Army, while conducting combat missions shoulder to shoulder with Russian servicemen, demonstrated high professionalism, showed fortitude, courage, and heroism in battle during the repelling of Ukraine's invasion"

Gerasimov's statement could be considered the first occasion when Russian state officials confirmed the detachment of North Korean servicemen as explicitly. His words also highlight the transformation of previous messages into the explicit **"glorious rightful alliance"** frame.

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[4] https://www.mid.ru/ru/press_service/video/brifingi/1977268/#013
[5] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M6dSQRTASDg
[6] https://t.me/news_kremlin/5550

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On the same day, NK troops' involvement was re-confirmed by Russia's foreign ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova in a comment for the Russian media kp.ru[7]:

> *"[North] Korean servicemen took part in the operation to liberate the Kursk border area in accordance with Article 4 of the Treaty on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, signed in June 2024 during the visit of Russia's President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin to Pyongyang. The solidarity shown by our Korean friends is a manifestation of the high, practically allies-level of our relations. We are confident that our ties will continue to strengthen and develop in accordance with the agreements of the leaders of our countries"*

Zakharova's comment reaffirms the «glorious rightful alliance» frame. Though, even greater emphasis is made on the claimed legitimacy and lawfulness of NK troops involvement, as well as on the general development of international relations between Russia and DPRK.

Finally, on April 28, 2025, Vladimir Putin's statement including a significant praise for the involvement was publicized (for example, the English-language version of the statement was posted by Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs)[8]:

> *"Units of the Korean People's Army played an active role in the defeat of the neo-Nazi formations of the Kiev regime that invaded our territory, in full compliance with international law and in accordance with the letter and spirit of the Treaty on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the Russian Federation and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea of June 19, 2024 – in particular, Article 4 of the Treaty, which requires each of the Parties to provide immediate military assistance in the event of an armed attack against the other. Our Korean friends' decision was guided by a sense of solidarity, justice and genuine comradery. We highly appreciate this and are sincerely grateful, personally to the Chairman of State Affairs, Comrade Kim Jong-un, as well as the entire leadership and the people of the DPRK.*
>
> *We commend the DPRK soldiers' heroism, their excellent training and dedication displayed while fighting, shoulder to shoulder with Russian soldiers, defending our Motherland as their own. They fulfilled their duty with honor and valor, covering themselves with unfading glory. The Russian people will never forget the heroism of the DPRK special forces. We will always honor the heroes who gave their lives for Russia, for our common freedom, fighting side by side with their Russian brothers in arms"*

Putin then praised North Korean troops' participation in the warfare once between May 9-11, 2025. During the «Victory Day» celebration on May 9, Putin personally congratulated North Korean high-ranking officers who were present in Moscow for the military parade, as covered by Russia's TASS media[9]. Russian media Komsomolskaya Pravda cited Putin's words as[10]:

> *"[I wish] Good health to all [North Korean] soldiers! Good wishes and all the best to your armed forces"*

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[7] https://www.kp.ru/daily/27691.5/5080871/

[8] https://www.facebook.com/MIDRussia/posts/pfbid0rNwL8TTta9zreym4ZzpkoTdP365mrkKjHf1WotPwV9J5hSktBSxW2woHRDuJ6ZS9l

[9] https://t.me/tass_agency/314262

[10] https://www.kp.ru/daily/27697.5/5085927/

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Afterwards, during the press conference on May 11 (which concerned the «Victory Day» and negotiations between Russia, Ukraine, and the West), Putin recalled thanking DPRK's officers during the celebrations[11]:

> *"I was glad to personally thank the military leaders of the Korean People's Army, to pass the warmest words to the soldiers and commanders of the special forces units of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, who, together with our fighters, professionally, I want to emphasize this, conscientiously carried out tasks in liberating the border areas of the Kursk region from the formations of the Kiev regime. I emphasize, they showed courage and heroism, acted, I want to say this again, on the highest level professionally, demonstrated good training and preparation"*

Overall, this frame implies Ukraine's actions are the problem. The frame omits any implications that Ukraine has been acting in self-defense in the border regions to fight against Russia's full-scale invasion. On the contrary, it positions Ukraine as the aggressor, Russia as the victim and the defending side, and North Korea as the state that gives brotherly military assistance to the «Motherland defenders». The frame also focuses on both legal evaluation and general moral evaluation of NK troops' participation. It is stated that Russia and DPRK act in accordance with the international law and, more importantly, do so in a brotherly, heroic, honorable way by defending Russia's borders together. The treatment recommendation here is that Russia and DPRK should continue to develop their alliance, whereas enemies must be warned that Russia and DPRK will assist each other in case of attack on one of them.

To summarize, five frames were induced from the analysis, as highlighted in Table 1.

Table 1.
Chronology and breakdown of Russia's frames of NK troops' involvement, based on the conceptualization approach by Entman (1993)

Framing functions	**Frames**				
	October 10, 2024	*October 21, 2024*	*October 23, 2024*	*October 24, 2024*	*April 26-28, 2025*
	Informational canard	**Unfriendly contradictory information**	**Unfriendly noise**	**None of your business**	**Glorious rightful alliance**
Problem definition	No problems on Russia's side, NK troops' deployment is a form of fake news	No problems on Russia's side, but there's some contradictory information	No problems on Russia's side, but there's informational noise from enemies	No problems on Russia's side, but it's none of the enemies' business	Russia is attacked by Ukraine, Russia and DPRK defend Russia's borders (legally and legitimately)
Causal interpretation	-	Unfriendly states generate contradictory information	Enemies (South Korea, NATO, Ukraine) enforce anti-Russian actions, propaganda	Russia's enemies escalate the war and wrongfully demand something from Russia	Ukraine is the aggressor that attacks Russia's bordering regions

[11] https://t.me/tass_agency/314511

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Moral evaluation	Implied generally negative evaluation	Implied generally negative evaluation: the unfriendly states' approach to information is messy	Enemies (Ukraine, South Korea, NATO etc.) make groundless accusations against Russia	Whatever Russia does or might do is lawful, whereas Russia's enemies are not entitled to any demands for explanations	Russia and DPRK act strictly in accordance with the international treaties and defend Russia's borders from external aggression (heroism, brotherhood, and glory)
Treatment recommendation	Implication that the information should not be treated seriously	To treat news of NK troops' involvement as (somewhat anti-Russian) contradictory information	Audience should be cautious and track down the culprit of anti-Russian propaganda	Russia's enemies should stop fighting Russia and intervening in its affairs	Russia and DPRK should strengthen their relations and enemies must fear this alliance

The development or Russia's framing follows four key tendencies. *Firstly*, the framing switched from the initial denial of North Korean troops' involvement to ambiguity (the principle of "neither confirm, nor deny"), then to non-denial, mockery, and then hints at the confirmation, and, finally, to explicit confirmation. It could be assumed that Russia decided to find an alternative to denial while more hard evidence of North Korea's involvement emerged in the media and while Western governments became more reassured in those facts.

Furthermore, it could be argued that the Ukrainian Kursk offensive has become both a severe military problem for Russia and an «elephant in the room» for Russia's audience. At the beginning of the full-scale Russo-Ukrainian war, transitioning of the frontline to Russia's territories could have been perceived as highly unlikely. Hence, after the Armed Forces of Ukraine withdrew from the town of Sudzha and some other areas in the Kursk region, the Russian government tried to position it as a major redeeming victory. Arguably, confirmation of the NK troops' presence is easier if the whole Russian counteroffensive is positioned as a victory.

The shift to confirmation, however, was secured by a concurring intensified justification of Russia's actions (the second tendency). Then, the *second* tendency is that in all cases, the moral evaluation states that Russia did nothing wrong. Yet, the initial position that nothing happened and thus there is nothing to blame Russia has changed to the standpoint that whatever Russia is doing, it is doing the correct thing and is doing it legally. Putin's, Zakharova's, and Gerasimov's statements emphasize that Russia follows international law and acts in accordance with international treaties (including the treaty with North Korea). The coinciding emergence of a more articulate moral justification of Russia's actions allows to move from the denial of evidence to mocking American media and hinting that the satellite images of North Korean troops are true, and to finally confirming NK troops' engagement.

Thirdly, the framing shifted from non-personalized statements about the informational canard and fake news to blaming Russia's geopolitical enemies directly. The causal interpretation has become specifically more aggressive and culminated in positioning the West as the villain. At the same time, the moral evaluation switched from generalized negative evaluation to a defensive position that Russia is doing everything right, contrary to its enemies. This correlates with Russia's general strategic narratives of being on the good side (Herd, 2022; Snigyr, 2023). Hence, the *fourth*

tendency is a common feature across the four frames. This is the preserved implication that there are no problems caused by Russia or its allies – the blame is put merely on Russia's enemies.

Discussion

The case of Russia's framing of North Korean soldiers' engagement in the Russo-Ukrainian war exemplifies Russia's approaches to flexible strategic communication. From a certain perspective, Russia had to conduct double crisis communication: reinterpreting the Ukrainian offensive to Russia's internal audience and explaining the presence of North Korean troops mostly for the international public.

On the one hand, Russia's frames might seem changeable and incoherent with one another. On the other hand, the evolution of those frames might be related to dynamic geopolitical power relations and discourse surrounding the full-scale Russo-Ukrainian war. Russia has clearly switched to more direct and even boastful confirmation of the North Korean army's presence in the Kursk region when it became strategically useful. In other words, it happened at times when:

1. Russia gathered at least minimal factual grounds to claim that it was victorious in Kursk for its internal audience (despite Russia's and North Korea's large casualties and continued active operations of the Armed Forces of Ukraine somewhere around Russia's borders).
2. The Russo-Ukrainian war peace negotiations became more intense, and Russia decided to raise the stakes by threatening the West with its alliance with North Korea.

Also, despite certain inconsistencies, Russia's frames always referred to the same underlying strategic narratives of being the leader of countries fighting for freedom and generally being on the good side (Herd, 2022; Snigyr, 2023).

However, this study has certain limitations that imply prospects for further research. Firstly, at the time of this paper application, the full-scale war continues together with a difficult negotiation process. Hence, it remains to be seen whether there will be new occasions of NK troops' involvement and new corresponding strategic communication. Secondly, this paper briefly mentioned possible determinants of Russia's framing, but the strategic communication could be analyzed in-depth, for example, with greater emphasis on international relations, international security, geopolitical shifts after the 2024 United States' presidential elections, or Russia-Ukraine-US-Europe negotiations.

Declaration of generative artificial intelligence and technologies using artificial intelligence in the writing process. The author did not use artificial intelligence tools in the preparation of this article. The author of the article bears full responsibility for the correct use and citation of sources.

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Mediatization of Religion: Toward Understanding Pilgrimage in the Digital Environment

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The mediatization of pilgrimage in the context of its formation as a socio-communicative institution is examined as a process of transforming traditional sacred experience under the influence of digital technologies and media. The **purpose** of this article is to analyze pilgrimage as a media phenomenon through the use of interpretive tools such as storytelling, digital diaries, interactive maps, and QR codes (Beebe, 2008; Kanaan-Amat, Crous-Costa, & Aulet, 2019; Lundby, 2014). The author explores how digitalization enables new forms of participation in pilgrimage practices, including inclusive online formats for people with disabilities, youth, and users of social networks and virtual media platforms (Collins-Kreiner, 2010). The analysis focuses on the formation of virtual communities of pilgrims on media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Viber Web, and WhatsApp Web, which facilitate not only communication but also spiritual involvement in liturgies, sermons, and journeys. Virtual catalogs, presentations, lectures, and other digital tools are becoming powerful instruments for positioning pilgrimage routes in the digital media space (Barbato, 2022; Dimodugno, 2023). As a **conclusion**, the article offers a scholarly rationale for the institutionalization of pilgrimage as a socio-communicative institution, a process that emerges through its mediatization (Panchenko & Rizun, 2024; Couldry, 2007). In this context, the use of artificial intelligence tools − particularly ChatGPT − is gaining relevance, opening new opportunities for personalized engagement within digital pilgrimage practices (Zhou et al., 2023; OpenAI, 2023).

Keywords: mediatization, pilgrimage, socio-communicative institution, sacred communication, digitalization, interpretive drift, storytelling

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Медіатизація релігії: до осмислення паломництва в цифровому середовищі

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Медіатизація паломництва в контексті становлення соціальнокомунікаційного інституту розглядається як процес трансформації традиційного сакрального досвіду під впливом цифрових технологій та медіа. **Метою** статті є аналіз медіатизації паломництва як прояву медіатизації релігії та становлення його як соціальнокомунікаційного інституту, зокрема сторітелінгу, digital-щоденників, інтерактивних карт і QR-кодів (Beebe, 2008; Kanaan-Amat, Crous-Costa, & Aulet, 2019; Lundby, 2014). Автори досліджують, як диджиталізація сприяє появі нових форм залучення до паломницьких практик, зокрема для людей з інвалідністю, молоді, користувачів соціальних мереж і віртуальних медіаплатформ (Collins-Kreiner, 2010). У центрі аналізу − створення віртуальних спільнот паломників у таких медіа, як Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Viber Web, WhatsApp Web, що забезпечують не лише комунікацію, а й духовну участь у літургії, проповідях, подорожах. Віртуальні каталоги, презентації, лекції та інші цифрові інструменти перетворюються на потужні засоби позиціонування паломницьких маршрутів у цифровому медіапросторі (Barbato, 2022; Dimodugno, 2023). У **висновку**, статтею запропоновано наукове обґрунтування процесу інституціалізації паломництва як соціальнокомунікаційного інституту, що відбувається внаслідок його медіатизації (Panchenko & Rizun, 2024; Couldry, 2007). У цьому контексті особливої актуальності набуває використання інструментів штучного інтелекту, зокрема ChatGPT, відкриває нові можливості для персоналізованої взаємодії в межах цифрових паломницьких практик (Zhou et al., 2023; OpenAI, 2023).

Ключові слова: медіатизація, паломництво, соціальнокомунікаційний інститут, сакральні комунікації, диджиталізація, інтерпретаційний дрейф, сторітелінг

Theoretical background

The theoretical and methodological basis of the work is modern research in the field of social communications, mediatization, pilgrimage, and religious tourism. The circle of scientists whose works became the basis of the study includes: A. Baggio (2005), M. Barbato (2022), K. Beebe (2008), R. Butler and V. Suntikul (2018), and K. Casellas and others. (Casellas et al., 2019), N. Collins-Kreiner (Collins-Kreiner, 2010), N. Couldry (Couldry, 2007), S. De Ascaniis and L. Cantoni (De Ascaniis & Cantoni, 2016), A. De Sousa and C. da Rosa (De Sousa & da Rosa, 2020), D. Dimodugno (Dimodugno, 2023), T. Duda (Duda, 2019), K. Helland (Helland, 2016), S. Hjarvard (2008), H. Hussein and Y. Wang (Hussain & Wang, 2024), D. Johansen and A. Ohrvik (Johannsen & Ohrvik, 2020), H. Jorge (2023), M. Kanaan-Amat, N. Crouse-Costa, S. Olet (Kanaan-Amat et al., 2019), E. Kasneci et al. (2023), O. Lo Presti (2011), K. Lundby (2014), L. Martino (2012), P. Mansson et al. (Månsson et al., 2020), S. Murray (Murray, 2021), D. Olsen & Timothy (Olsen & Timothy, 2018), OpenAI (2023), S. Panchenko & Rizun, 2024), E. Paschinger (Paschinger, 2019), E. Polus & Carr, 2021), D. Priymak (Приймак, 2016), V. Rizun (Rizun, 2008; 2024), E. Sánchez-Amboage et al. (2017), V. Schulz (Schulz, 2004), K. Shenderovsky (Шендеровський, 2013), S.

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The authors declare a conflict of interest, as Panchenko is a doctoral student of the editor-in-chief, and Rizun is the editor-in-chief. At the time of manuscript review, the powers of the editor-in-chief were transferred to the deputy editor-in-chief, Maria Butyrina.

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Ignatieva (Ігнатьєва, 2013), T. Tan and K. Perry (Tan & Perry, 2022), E. Verón (Verón, 2014), Zhou et al. (Zhou et al., 2023).

The works of these scholars highlight the issues of digital religion, storytelling, interpretive drift, digital tourism, the use of generative artificial intelligence technologies, in particular ChatGPT, as an interpretive and communication tool in the digital pilgrimage experience, interactive formats, and the institutionalization of pilgrimage as a socio-communication institution.

Problem statement

Pilgrimage as a socio-communication institution is a complex phenomenon that combines spiritual practices, tourism activities, and institutional forms of organization. In the current digital era, the traditional sacred experience of pilgrims is being transformed by the media, which necessitates a rethinking of pilgrimage in the context of mediatization (Hjarvard, 2008; Couldry, 2007; Lundby, 2014). The need to understand new forms of pilgrimage interaction, such as media pilgrimage, necessitates the development of a scientific framework for analyzing digital interpretive practices, including digital diaries, virtual routes, and storytelling (Kanaan-Amat, Crous-Costa, & Aulet, 2019; Wu, Chang, & Wu, 2019).

The scientific problem lies in the lack of clearly formulated conceptual approaches to analyzing pilgrimage as a mediatized and institutionalized social institution. The sectoral problem is related to the inconsistency between religious, tourist, and information structures that organize pilgrimage trips in a multi-confessional society, particularly in Ukraine. In this area, there is a branching of competencies and duplication of functions between church pilgrimage departments, travel agencies, and digital media platforms (Panchenko & Rizun, 2024; De Sousa & da Rosa, 2020).

In addition, pilgrimage serves a number of important social functions, including cognitive, communicative, consolidating, therapeutic, and resource-saving. In particular, the organizers of pilgrimage routes can actively contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage and the environment (Panchenko, 2022; Margry, 2008), which actualizes the ecological component of the study. In this context, it is crucial to evaluate the potential of pilgrimage as a tool not only for spiritual rejuvenation but also for sustainable development (Jirásek, 2011).

Thus, the focus of the research is to solve the scientific problem of understanding pilgrimage in the digital age, as well as the sectoral problem of organizing pilgrimage practices in a multi-confessional society, considering the ecological component (Davide Dimodugno, 2023). The study aims to provide a scientific basis for the implementation of a systemic, interdisciplinary model of media pilgrimage as an effective socio-communication institution.

The **purpose** of the study is to scientifically substantiate the process of mediatization of pilgrimage as a factor of institutionalization in the socio-communication space. The research aims to analyze the transformation of pilgrimage practices under the influence of digital media, including new forms of communication, participation, and representation of sacred experiences in the online environment (Hjarvard, 2008; Lundby, 2014; Shenderovsky, 2013).

The theoretical and methodological basis is formed by the provisions of the theory of mediatization of religion (Couldry, 2007; Hjarvard, 2008), the socio-communication approach (Rizun, 2008), as well as narrative and visual-interpretive analysis, which are used to study digital practices of pilgrimage in the context of social networks, interactive tools, and virtual communities (Kanaan-Amat, Crous-Costa, & Aulet, 2019; Johannsen & Ohrvik, 2020; Wu, Chang, & Wu, 2019).

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Method

The methodological basis of the study draws upon an interdisciplinary combination of the mediatization theory of religion (Hjarvard, 2008; Lundby, 2014), a socio-communication approach to the analysis of digital practices (Rizun, 2008; Couldry, 2007), and institutional analysis, which allows us to understand pilgrimage as a form of social order in the context of digital transformation (Martino, 2012; Panchenko & Rizun, 2024).

To analyze digital pilgrimage practices, elements of discourse analysis of media texts and communications in social networks, visual-interpretive analysis of digital narratives and tools (Kanaan-Amat, Crous-Costa, & Aulet, 2019; Wu, Chang, & Wu, 2019), as well as digital ethnography, which allows us to study the formation of virtual communities of pilgrims (Johannsen & Ohrvik, 2020; Jorge, 2023), were applied.

The chosen approaches ensure interdisciplinarity, allowing us to consider media pilgrimage as a complex phenomenon at the intersection of media, religion, culture, and social communication. Such methodological tools enable the identification of mechanisms of mediatization of sacred experiences, the comprehension of transformation in pilgrimage practices, and the analysis of their institutionalization in the modern digital media environment.

Results and Discussion

Let us consider in detail the scientific works that address the issues of mediatization of pilgrimage through modern media tools in the era of digitalization and in the process of institutionalization of pilgrimage as a socio-communication institution.

Mediatization is the process by which the main elements of social or cultural activity (e.g., politics, education, religion, etc.) acquire a media form. As a result, the activity is carried out to a greater or lesser extent through interaction with the media. The symbolic content and structure of social and cultural activity are influenced by the media environment and media logic, on which they gradually become more dependent (Hjarvard, 2008; Schulz, 2004; Sánchez-Amboage et al, 2017).

Mediatization is a process of social change that, to some extent, subordinates other social or cultural spheres to the logic of the media. In the case of the media: channels, languages, and environments contribute to changes in the quantity, content, and direction of religious messages in society, while transforming religious ideas, challenging, and replacing the authority of institutionalized religions. Thanks to these processes, religion has become mediatized as a social and cultural activity (Hjarvard, 2008; Jansson, 2002). As the scholar E. Verón notes, mediatization is a technical, social, and cultural process that encompasses the sphere of discursiveness of meanings that are interrupted when "mental processes" are exteriorized in the form of material devices, which he calls "media phenomena" (Verón, 2014, p. 14). Mediatization is only the name for a long historical sequence of institutionalization of media phenomena in human societies and its multiple consequences" (Verón, 2014, p. 15; Reader, 2007).

The collective monograph "*Mediação & Midiatização*" has a chapter that refers to our study "*Mediação e midiatização da religião em suas articulações teóricas e práticas: um levantamento de hípotes e problemáticas*" ("Mediation and mediatization of religion in its theoretical and practical articulations: a survey of hypotheses and problems"). In a scientific investigation, author Luis Mauro Sá Martino notes that the integration of information technologies into religious practice transforms its structure in response to changed social expectations and evolving communication formats, making it more diffuse and ambiguous. An example of this is the myriad of smartphone apps that offer everything from online versions of the Bible with features such as keyword searches and peer-to-peer commentaries to downloadable sermons and prayers that, embedded in the specific mediation and mediatization of religion in their theoretical and practical articulations, are heard or recited according to one's inclination and preference. In the author's view, the

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mediatization of religion signifies not only a moment of change in the practice of religious institutions but also an apparent broader restructuring of the meanings of "sacred," "religious," and "religious experience" in a mediatized society (Martino, 2012; The Digital Pilgrim Project, 2025).

The relationship between media and religion in the context of a society undergoing a process of mediatization emphasizes the articulation of religiousness with the symbolic and the material, within a mobile and often shifting boundary, yet one that remains visible. If, on the one hand, traditional forms of religious experience are restored and maintained, such as liturgical celebrations and personal connections in the community, on the other hand, an avalanche of media products appears, intended for consumption by a market of believers who seek to adapt communication practices to formats that correspond to everyday patterns of information consumption; they are recipients of messages and consumers of products, seeking the religious message in the same media and consumer context in which they receive other messages (Vidal-Casellas et al, 2019). There is a contrast, which can also be interpreted as a dialogue, between hypermodern media practices, in which the technological dimension exceeds the use of the most modern devices, and "premodern" practices, such as the distribution of amulets of various kinds, belief in curses or in the healing power of essential oils, among other elements related to the same "premodern" matrix of religion (Martino, 2012; Månsson, et al, 2020). In the section of his PhD thesis "*Institutionalization of Pilgrimage and Tourism Activity in the Context of Globalization Processes of Culture*", scholar D. Pryimak argues that religious pilgrimage is a peculiar factor in the institutionalization of cultural practices of travel, in particular tourism, which makes it possible to define it as a modern innovative technology. Differentiation of tourism and pilgrimage in the context of globalization processes of modernity is a new topic that suggests that the extensive principle of movement, reaching shrines, and the intensive way of communication, when all resources of information visualization are included, in particular virtualization, as well as the wide exchange of places and the presentation of places, become competitive practices in relation to mass culture, become realities of alterglobalism, as well as virtualization and technological equipment of the entire virtual, visual and figurative complex, which is associated with a wide range of cultural formation as a representative mechanism (Приймак, 2016; Coleman, Eade, 2004; Moaven et al, 2017).

In the monograph "*The vital questions of mass communication theory*", Professor V. Rizun examines communication according to the following features: 1) communicators – those between whom communication takes place, in particular the communicant – the one who initiates the communication process, acts as its addressee, and the communicator – the one to whom the communication is directed and who is its addressee; 2) the spiritual and intellectual unity of those who communicate – a common consciousness, a common culture; 3) a common form of spiritual being – language; 4) the socio-psychological ability to communicate (Rizun, 2008). It is communication during a pilgrimage that fills the sacred journey with a communicative exchange between groups of pilgrims. This is clearly evidenced by the signs of communication cited above. Sacred communications are of great importance during a pilgrimage. Recently, there has been a trend of overcoming pilgrimage routes using planned routes that are detailed, planned, and have places of power during the journey (monasteries, cemeteries, temples, sacred places, trees, mountains, waterfalls). Sacred communications can take various forms and occur in any way convenient for you. Among the sacred forms of communication, the following can be distinguished: keeping a spiritual diary, meditation, talking or praying aloud, writing a letter to the Universe or the Absolute, keeping a guidebook during a pilgrimage, undertaking a sacred (especially for you) journey - and these are just a few of the vast varieties of spiritual communication. At the heart of all these methods is a special sense of connection through communication – a universal human experience that goes beyond culture, religion, beliefs, or thoughts. Some interpret spiritual communication as a human connection. In contrast, others see it as a connection between a person and the Absolute or as a

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connection with a higher sense of meaning and purpose in life. It is an important part of our spiritual health and well-being (Ігнатьєва, 2013; Margry, 2008).

In the monograph "*Tourism, Pilgrimage and Intercultural Dialogue: interpreting sacred stories*", a team of scholars M. Kanaan-Amat, N. Crous-Costa, S. Aulet carried out a comprehensive analysis of the features of tourism, pilgrimage and intercultural dialogue in sections that are relevant to our topic and require a detailed review: "*Tools for interpreting religious heritage*" (Kanaan-Amat et al., 2019); "*Does a religious tourist need a guide? Interpretation and Storytelling in Sacred Places*" (Duda, 2019); "*Pilgrimage Tourism and Social Media: A Path for the 21st Century?*" (Paschinger, 2019).

In the section "*Tools for the interpretation of religious heritage,*" scholars M. Kanaan-Amat, N. Crous-Costa, and S. Aulet consider interpretation as a crucial role in the protection, use, and mediation of natural, cultural, or intangible heritage, including religious heritage. The information provided in sacred sites is key to ensuring a hospitable reception. However, it is also a key element in explaining the site's nature to visitors, regardless of their prior experience. In the context of growing interest in cultural heritage, socio-cultural resources are becoming increasingly important, and interpretation tools are a key element (Murray, 2021, p. 165). In the case of sacred sites, as representative spaces of identity and transmitters of core cultural values, interpretation tools must highlight regional features. To show, to enable discovery, to arouse interest, to teach, to inform, to entertain, to inspire dreams are some examples of the purposes of interpretation. Interpretation is a fundamental component of dialogue and communication (Casellas et al, 2019; Månsson et al, 2020).

As the authors emphasize, interpretation is not limited to natural and cultural sites: it is also open to ethnology, manufacturing, folk crafts, historical cities, and archaeology. It aims to provide explanations and information about sites in two main areas:

• the environment: routes, observation trails, cognitive routes, landscape research points;

• on-site: spaces where permanent or temporary exhibitions are located, visits are organized, and commented on by guide-interpreters.

In the case of sacred sites, visitors require guidance to discern what to look for and what is significant. It is essential to acknowledge that there is a growing lack of awareness about the symbolism and values associated with religion. This is especially true for foreign visitors who have very different cultural and religious backgrounds (Butler & Suntikul, 2018; Olsen & Timothy, 2018).

In sacred sites, especially those with the most complex infrastructure and equipment, information and awareness for visitors should not be limited to the space of a single temple. For example, souvenir shops should sell products that contribute to raising awareness. Similarly, accommodation services should take this opportunity into account by offering guests a variety of materials, placing them in rooms or allocating a separate space to display this information (Kanaan-Amat et al., 2019, pp. 86–87; 91; 93).

In the monograph section "*Does a Religious Tourist Need a Guide? Interpretation and Storytelling in Sacred Places*" author Tomasz Duda examines in detail the place of religious tourism and pilgrimage in the current religious and cultural system. As the scientist writes, one of the main challenges of modern religious tourism (including pilgrimage) is active adaptation to the changing needs of people in planning their free time and satisfying spiritual needs (Baggio, 2005, p. 16). Based on local religious, cultural, historical, or natural heritage, increasingly innovative religious tourism products are being created that reflect the needs of society (Dimodugno, 2023; Vernon, 2003). A tourist sacred space comprehensively combines the essence of a holy place with various types of excursions that incorporate elements of religious and historical education, as well as the appreciation of cultural heritage (Helland, 2016; de Ascaniis & Cantoni, 2016). This type of pilgrimage poses challenges for specialist interpreters, whose role is mainly performed by tourist guides and volunteers specially trained for this purpose. Their role is not only to explain the

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intricacies of the historical and cultural origins of a given object, place, or route, but also to actively share the main ideas with visitors, using the appropriate narrative process and forms of communication. Studies conducted with tourists/pilgrims traveling to holy places and shrines have shown that in this direction of religious tourism (which is still very individual in nature), the services of a guide-interpreter are highly desirable and in demand. He is expected not only to have knowledge, but also to be able to "immerse" the participant in the atmosphere of a sacred place. The task facing a religious tourism guide is to accompany the pilgrim in the process of exploring both religious truths and the genesis of their formation and functioning in a specific natural environment. A skillfully conducted narrative combined with sufficient provision of knowledge will allow the pilgrim to experience the sacred place more deeply and consciously (Duda, 2019, pp. 105; 113).

In the scientific article "*Pilgrimage tourism and social media: A way forward in the 21st century?*", the scientist E. Paschinger talks about the importance of religious tourism in the era of digitalization and gives an example of the digitalization of part of the "Way of St. James" (De Sousa & da Rosa, 2020). Religious tourism is one of the key sectors of the global economy, which has maintained its competitiveness despite the financial crisis, the pandemic's challenges, and wars. The emergence of social media and its vast opportunities for better, targeted marketing and open dialogue between visitors, pilgrims, and local stakeholders have challenged traditional methods of marketing and branding destinations. This is especially true for religious heritage and pilgrimage, which has a growing trend (Gemzöe, 2020). Using the example of the digitalization of part of the Spanish "Way of St. James", the landscape is being institutionalized for the strategic promotion of religious tourism through social media. This is often fragmented and limited to the initiative of a few institutions or key stakeholders (De Sousa, da Rosa, 2017). The institutions responsible for tourism development have partly overlapping competencies. This duplication needs to be eliminated to ensure the proper coordination of tourism policies, agree on common objectives, and implement coordinated measures to achieve these objectives. To maintain and increase the competitiveness of the tourism sector, a holistic approach is necessary. Meeting the needs of tourists is of paramount importance. This can only be achieved through high-quality standards throughout the entire value chain of religious tourism (De Ascaniis & Cantoni, 2016). Accordingly, scholars consider the fundamental foundations of religious tourism development, including demand and product, education and training, visitor experience, and the development of new products, especially in light of the issues of digitalization and social media, in modern pilgrimage. Social media has become a vital and increasingly powerful marketing tool utilized by individuals from diverse backgrounds (Tan & Perry, 2022). Tourists, like pilgrims, plan their trips and gather information using social networks, and they receive advice from friends and other virtual contacts before, during, and after their trip or pilgrimage. Thus, social media is increasingly penetrating the preparation, organization, and discussion of pilgrimage (Paschinger, 2019; The mediatization, 2025).

In the article "*Church institution and digital world: new opportunities to profess the word of God,*" scholar O. Lo Presti explored the relationship between the church institution and new technologies in the field of communication and management of religious tourism experiences. The author undertakes a critical study of the church's institutional use of new technologies for communication, management, and promotion of its heritage. The empirical stage of the study is realized by analyzing technologies applied to the ecclesiastical heritage, with the Neapolitan Catholic Church serving as an example. This work demonstrates the high degree of technological use by ecclesiastical institutions for the communication and education of people, with the aim of evangelization. The results of this study will help understand the adaptability of these technologies to the needs of users, recipients, and territories; the degree of their improvement and promotion; as well as the measures that can be implemented for the effective and efficient management of heritage and territories (Lo Presti, 2011).

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As the scholar C. Helland reflects on "Digital religion" and "Digital society" in the chapter "*Digital religion. Handbook of religion and society*", he writes that if it did not seem paradoxical, religion in all its forms and functions is transferred and mixed with the digital world. These new relationships change the way we practice religion, as well as the way religion affects society and culture. Digital religion is the blending of our modern mediated society with contemporary religious beliefs and practices. Digital religion is not just the presence of "religion" on digital media, but rather the combination of all the social and cultural components that we associate with religion, with all the elements that we associate with digital society (Helland, 2016).

In the article "*Pilgrimage in Mediaspace: Continuities and Transformations*", scholar N. Couldry introduces the concept of "media pilgrimage". The article discusses various challenges: first, the argument that relatively banal journeys to media-related places cannot be compared with the intensity of religious pilgrimage; second, the difficulties associated with making the concept of "media pilgrimage" work in a cross-cultural comparison; third, the difficulties of understanding what will be the continuation of "pilgrimage" in the online environment of digital media. The author concludes that the concept of media pilgrimage remains useful, even if its future boundaries are currently particularly uncertain (Couldry, 2007). In the article "*The mediatization of religion: A theory of the media as agents of religious change*", scholar S. Hjarvard developed a conceptual framework for understanding how media can transform religion. These changes are complex and do not necessarily have the same impact on religion; in some cases, the media can contribute to the re-sacralization of society, in others, they can undermine the authority of institutionalized religion and promote secular ideas, rituals, and ways of worship. At a general level, these processes share one commonality: they all attest to the mediatization of religion. At the heart of this theory is the concept of mediatization. Through the process of mediatization, religion is increasingly subject to the logic of the media. As channels of communication, the media have become the primary source of religious ideas, particularly in the form of everyday religion. As a language, the media shape the religious imagination according to the genres of popular culture. As a cultural environment, the media have taken over many of the social functions of institutionalized religions, providing both moral and spiritual guidelines and a sense of community. Finally, the results of a national survey in Denmark are presented to substantiate the theoretical arguments and illustrate how the mediatization of religion has made popular media texts important sources of spiritual interest. Through mediatization, religious ideas and practices have become increasingly dependent on the media (Serrallonga, 2018). As channels of communication, the media have become the primary source of images and texts about magic, spiritualism, and religion. As languages, the media shape religious imagination according to the genres of popular culture. The media, as a cultural environment, have taken over many of the social functions of institutionalized religions, providing both moral and spiritual guidelines and a sense of community. As a result, institutionalized religion in modern Western societies plays a less prominent role in the communication of religious beliefs, and instead, banal religious elements of the media come to the forefront of society's religious imagination (Hjarvard, 2008; Shmueli & Collins-Kreiner, 2018).

The team of scientists D. Johannsen and A. Ohrvik in the scientific investigation "How to Be a Pilgrim: Guidebooks on the Norwegian St. Olav Ways and the Heritagization of Religion" examined the contemporary revival of pilgrimage in Northern Europe as part of a trend towards the inheritance of religion, which allows for the emergence of new religious representations. Scholars have analyzed the "Ways of St. Olaf" guides from the perspective of narrative scripts, examining in detail how they can influence expectations, shape pilgrims' behavior, and direct their attention to a transforming history and religious heritage. Based on published pilgrim journals and diaries, they conclude that the guides lead a process of "interpretive drift" (the change of beliefs under the influence of experience and new impressions that instantly affect perception), which influences pilgrims towards the acceptance and embodiment of a new role in the religious sphere (Wu et al., 2019). The guides invite pilgrims to take on the role of heirs of the medieval European tradition.

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With the emergence of renewed pilgrimage routes in European countries where pilgrimage has long been neglected and detached from confessional beliefs, we are witnessing the exploratory development of new religious formats, expressions, and identities in motion. All parts of the guides can contribute to the process of "interpretive drift", which is a defining feature of the pilgrimage experience, as documented in many pilgrim reports (Hussain & Wang, 2024). The restored "Ways of St. Olaf" have all the hallmarks of a "caminoized" pilgrimage; they are oriented towards long-distance walking, signposts along the historical route, a pilgrim's passport, and a certificate of completion of the pilgrimage (Johannsen & Ohrvik, 2020, pp. 508, 509, 516).

In the article "*The Mediatization of Camino de Santiago: Between the Pilgrimage Narrative and Media Circulation of the Narrative*", a team of scholars, M. T. De Sousa and A. P. da Rosa conducted research on the relationship between pilgrimage, narrative, and mediatization. The research object was the transformation of the pilgrims' experience on the Camino de Santiago de Compostela. The analysis showed that the mediatization of modern pilgrimage has led to changes in the interaction of experience and narrative (narrative is a set of interconnected real or fictional events, facts, or impressions that make up a narrative text) (Nancy L. Frey). Vitally important in religious communities, narratives form a connection between the act of narration and contact with the sacred in the symbolic context. Thus, they form a key basis for religious doctrines and rituals. Narratives also play a crucial role in the transmission of religious experiences. It is through narratives that members of a religious group process their experiences and inspire others to do the same. Moreover, narratives disseminate the religious experience itself. This perspective is helpful when considering the contemporary context in which it is impossible to make sense of communication without discussing the circulation of meanings that manifests itself in the media sphere. Narrative is no longer the result of pilgrimage; instead, it incorporates experience as an activity that modifies it. This is a historical process that involves at least three major transformations, directly linked to the pilgrims' assimilation of technological innovations that significantly reduce the gap between experience, narrative configuration, and its circulation (Polus & Carr, 2021). The first transformation is associated with motorized means of transportation, which almost halves the time of pilgrimage. The narratives of the return journey home, common in the diaries of medieval and modern pilgrims, have largely disappeared or been reduced to brief notes or reflections. The understanding of pilgrimage is changing. Instead of consisting of two mirror journeys (there and back), it begins to consist of the time spent from departure to arrival in Santiago de Compostela (De Sousa & da Rosa, 2020; Jorge, 2023).

Table 1.
The Structural Logic of Media Pilgrimage in the Context of Digitalization

Theoretical concept	Communication instrument	Empirical case (open source)	Conclusion / Practice transformation
Mediatization of religion	Online pilgrimage platforms	YouTube: video diaries Camino de Santiago	Transferring experience to screen form (mediagenicity)
Digitalization of the sacred experience	QR codes, mobile applications	Vatican News App: digital routes for believers	Interactivating the ritual, accessibility for a global audience
Pilgrimage storytelling	Instagram, TikTok, Facebook groups	#camino #virtualpilgrimage (Instagram, 2023–2024)	Sacralization of everyday life through personal digital narratives
Institutionalization of media pilgrimage	Official websites, online communities	Website of the Patriarchate of the UGCC, Camino	Formation of stable digital structures

		Pilgrims community (Facebook)	
Mediatization through AI	ChatGPT, generative models	ChatGPT: route generation, prayers, Bible analysis	Personalization of experience, automated spiritual guidance

Note: The table was compiled by the authors using generative artificial intelligence (ChatGPT, OpenAI, 2024) to structure theoretical approaches, digital tools, and empirical cases.

Conclusions

This study presents an interdisciplinary analysis of pilgrimage as a social communication institution in the context of digital transformation, which occurs under the influence of mediatization and digitalization processes. Based on the theory of mediatization of religion (Hjarvard, 2008; Lundby, 2014), the social communication approach (Rizun, 2008; Couldry, 2007) and institutional analysis (Martino, 2012; Panchenko & Rizun, 2024), we substantiated that pilgrimage transforms not only as a religious practice, but also as a form of public communication that acquires new functions in the digital environment.

The use of visual-interpretive analysis, discourse analysis of media texts, and digital ethnography (Johannsen & Ohrvik, 2020; Jorge, 2023) has allowed us to identify key mechanisms of mediatization of sacred experience. In particular, it is shown how storytelling, digital diaries, QR codes, interactive maps, streams, and social networks (Paschinger, 2019; Duda, 2019) shape new practices of participation in pilgrimage. In this context, digital tools act not only as channels of representation but also as means of transformation and rethinking of religious experience (De Sousa & da Rosa, 2020; Helland, 2016).

The formation of virtual pilgrimage communities, which function as new social structures with their own logic, rituals, ethical norms, and interaction practices, is analyzed (Collins-Kreiner, 2010; Hussain & Wang, 2024). These communities are not only a complement to offline pilgrimage, but often act as its alternative.

The paper also presents the concept of institutionalization of pilgrimage as a socio-communication institution, which is formed as a result of the combination of religious, tourist, and digital components (Panchenko & Rizun, 2024; Lo Presti, 2011). The processes of canonization of routes, standardization of digital formats, emergence of new normative practices (pilgrim's passport, certificate of completion of the route, etc.), as well as the key role of the media as an agent of this institutionalization are identified (Barbato, 2022; Johannsen & Ohrvik, 2020; Vernon, 2003).

Particular attention is paid to the role of generative artificial intelligence, in particular ChatGPT, in creating personalized pilgrimage routes and narratives. Such technologies enable a deeper interaction between text, experience, and user, offering new forms of sacred communication in the digital environment (Zhou et al., 2023; OpenAI, 2023).

Thus, the study has shown that media pilgrimage is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon that combines religious, communication, technological, and cultural aspects. The proposed approach not only enables us to comprehend the transformations of pilgrimage as a media phenomenon but also to consider it as a new model of social communication that corresponds to the logic of a digital society. The study of this phenomenon requires further research using narrative, visual, and ethnographic analysis, which will contribute to a deeper understanding of digital sacredness and the prospects for its institutionalization.

Authors' contribution: Svitlana Panchenko – collection of material, literature review, writing of research results; Volodymyr Rizun – conceptualization, discussion of the problems, editing.

Declaration on Generative Artificial Intelligence and Technologies Using Artificial Intelligence in the Writing Process. The authors utilized artificial intelligence tools in the preparation of this article,

specifically to systematize sources and create a table. The authors of the article bear full responsibility for the correct use and citation of sources.

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European Philosophical Thought as a Methodological Foundation for the Study of Ukrainian Online Media in the Sphere of Public Procurement Transparency

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The article examines European philosophical and socio-communicative approaches that provide the theoretical foundation for studying transparency in public procurement in the context of Ukrainian online media activity. **The aim** of the article is to assess the applicability of a philosophical-methodological framework for interpreting the role of online media in Ukraine (as a factor in ensuring transparency in public procurement) by analyzing the concepts of publicity, power, communication, and social space as articulated by European philosophers. **The research methods** include an analysis of works by members of the Frankfurt School (such as Habermas, Marcuse), as well as contemporary European critical thinkers (including Foucault, Arendt, Žižek, Bourdieu, Lefebvre, Schutz, Berger, and Luckmann), who address the concepts of publicity, power, communicative action, social space, and critical cognition. These ideas enable the development of a methodological approach that, through the conceptualization of "measure" (as a philosophical category combining quantity and quality), facilitates an examination of how effectively Ukrainian online media fulfil their potential as a factor in ensuring transparency in public procurement. The review encompasses 13 sources, including monographs, classic philosophical works, articles, and open-access publications from 1964 to 2024. Empirical data from Ukrainian media organizations (such as Dozorro, IMI, and MDF) are used to illustrate specific media practices. **The findings** demonstrate that philosophical concepts of publicity and communication allow for interpreting online media not only as tools for information dissemination but also as integral components of the societal mechanism for public oversight, with a defined social function that shapes their role in ensuring the transparency of budgetary processes.

Keywords: public procurement, online media, transparency, philosophy of communication, Frankfurt School, publicity, social practice

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Європейська філософська думка як методологічне підґрунтя дослідження українських онлайн-медіа у сфері прозорості публічних закупівель

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У статті оглянуто європейські філософські та соціально-комунікаційні підходи, які формують теоретичну основу для дослідження прозорості публічних закупівель в контексті діяльності онлайн-медіа в Україні. **Мета** статті – з'ясувати прдатність філософсько-методологічної бази для інтерпретації діяльності онлайн-медіа в Україні (як чинника забезпечення прозорості публічних закупівель) через аналіз концептів публічності, влади, комунікації та соціального простору у працях європейських філософів. **Методи** дослідження: аналіз праць представників Франкфуртської школи (Габермаса, Маркузе), а також філософів сучасної європейської критичної думки (Фуко, Арендт, Жижек, Бурдьє, Лефевр, Шюц, Берґер і Лукман), у яких розглядаються концепти публічності, влади, комунікаційної дії, соціального простору та критичного пізнання. Ці ідеї уможливлюють розробку методологічного підходу, який дає змогу через концептуалізацію «міри» (як філософської категорії, що поєднує кількість і якість) дослідити, наскільки онлайн-медіа в Україні реалізують свій потенціал бути чинником прозорості публічних закупівель. Огляд охоплює 13 джерел: монографії, класичні філософські праці, статті, а також публікації у відкритому доступі за 1964–2024 рр. Допоміжну функцію в аргументації виконують емпіричні матеріали українських медійних організацій (зокрема Dozorro, IMI, MDF), які ілюструють конкретні аспекти медійної практики. У **результаті** показано, що філософські концепції публічності й комунікації дають змогу інтерпретувати онлайн-медіа не лише як інструмент інформування, а як складову частину суспільного механізму публічного контролю з чітко окресленою соціальною функцією, що визначає їх участь у забезпеченні прозорості бюджетних процесів.

Ключові слова: публічні закупівлі, онлайн-медіа, прозорість, філософія комунікації, Франкфуртська школа, публічність, соціальна практика

The functioning of online media as a factor in ensuring the transparency of public procurement requires not only empirical observation and quantitative content analysis but also theoretical reflection within the framework of the humanities. This issue gains particular relevance when transparency is viewed not merely as a technical or normative characteristic of access to information, but as a complex philosophical category emerging at the intersection of social interaction, power relations, communicative rationality, and cultural production.

Public procurement, as a sphere of government activity, functions not only as a system for resource allocation but also as a sphere of heightened societal attention, where media act as a social institution of oversight and accountability. The need for a literature review stems from the fact that existing studies on media in the context of public procurement predominantly focus on practical aspects – such as investigative journalism, access to public information, and the operation of anti-corruption platforms. However, there is a lack of comprehensive analysis that would allow for interpreting the activities of online media from a broader philosophical perspective – as a socio-

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communicative practice where the potential of transparency as an ethical and political category is either fulfilled or not.

The review of philosophical literature is intended to fill this gap by establishing a theoretical framework for the subsequent empirical analysis of Ukrainian online media. The attempt to conceptualize the role of Ukrainian online media as a factor in the transparency of public procurement has necessitated an engagement with foundational European philosophical and socio-communicative theories.

The aim of the article is to determine the suitability of a philosophical-methodological framework for interpreting the activities of online media in Ukraine (as a factor in ensuring transparency in public procurement) through an analysis of the concepts of publicity, power, communication, and social space in the works of European philosophers. This review seeks to systematize the conceptual approaches that form the theoretical foundation for analyzing the potential of media in ensuring transparency. It also proposes the conceptualization of the notion of "measure" (as a unity of quantitative and qualitative characteristics of a social phenomenon) to assess this potential. The objectives of this review are as follows:

- To formulate a methodological basis for analyzing media content, editorial practices, and interactions with institutions and audiences;
- To explore how the concepts of publicity, transparency, power, communication, knowledge, and space are interpreted in philosophy and social theory;
- To identify conceptual frameworks that enable an assessment of whether online media are capable of serving as a factor of transparency in the sphere of public procurement.

In this context, the works of key philosophers – such as Habermas, Foucault, Arendt, Marcuse, Žižek, Bourdieu, Lefebvre, Schutz, Berger, and Luckmann –are examined to determine how their ideas can be applied to interpreting the functioning of online media as a complex social institution. The selection of philosophical sources underpinning this review is not arbitrary. All the referenced thinkers address the issues of publicity, knowledge, power, social space, and communication as defining factors in the organization of modern society. These concepts provide a foundation for a philosophical understanding of the activities of online media in the context of public procurement transparency.

Habermas (1991) conceptualizes the public sphere as an environment where public opinion is formed through communicative action, offering a framework to understand how media can serve as an arena for public oversight of power, which is crucial for developing a methodology for their interpretation.

Marcuse (1964), along with other representatives of the Frankfurt School, critiques the mechanisms of ideological production in mass culture, enabling an examination of the limitations of online media autonomy in the context of the commercialization of the information space, thus accounting for these constraints in the methodological evaluation of their activities.

Foucault (1971) introduces the concept of discourse as a form of power-knowledge, providing a tool to analyze how public procurement is articulated in the media and which meanings dominate in this discourse, thereby offering an approach to interpreting media content.

Arendt (1967) views political action and publicity as a space of emergence, which helps assess the extent to which media create conditions for public participation in political life –an essential aspect of their role as a factor in transparency.

Bourdieu (1996) focuses on journalism as a field with its own rules and capitals, enabling an analysis of media editorial practices as forms of institutionalized struggle for influence, thus providing a methodological framework for studying media institutions.

Lefebvre (1991) introduces the concept of social space as a product of configurations of power and materiality, allowing us to conceptualize online media as a space of structured interaction between institutions and audiences, which impacts their capacity to ensure transparency.

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Žižek (2006) critiques transparency as an ideological demand of late capitalism, allowing for a nuanced understanding that avoids oversimplified notions of "openness" as an unequivocal value and highlights contradictions in the realization of transparency, thereby enriching the research methodology.

Schutz (1964), alongside Berger and Luckmann (1966), develops an approach to communication as the social construction of reality, providing a methodological basis for analyzing how media shape perceptions of public procurement as either a public good or, conversely, a tool for manipulation. All the referenced authors represent key directions in critical philosophy, phenomenology, and social theory, offering a conceptual toolkit for analyzing online media as a space where the public function of journalism is realized. This review not only confirms the existence of a philosophical foundation for further research but also outlines methodological guidelines for analyzing the extent to which media fulfill their societal role in ensuring transparency in public procurement in Ukraine.

Method

The literature review presented in this article establishes a philosophical-methodological foundation for analyzing online media as a factor in ensuring the transparency of public procurement in Ukraine. The focus is not merely on compiling a list of sources but on constructing a cohesive corpus of philosophical and socio-communicative approaches that enable the interpretation of transparency as a dynamic, contextually determined social practice. The review encompasses 13 sources, including classic monographs, scholarly works, lectures, and contemporary analytical materials from Ukrainian media organizations (Dozorro, IMI, MDF), all of which are publicly accessible. These sources were selected not as a representative sample of all philosophical thought on communication but as a conceptually rich foundation for analyzing the issue under study.

The corpus of sources is not exhaustive but is deliberately limited and structured. Its methodological sufficiency lies in the fact that all selected texts represent critical reflections on publicity, communication, power, knowledge, social space, and the institutional functioning of media. These texts enable the development of a conceptual framework for analyzing the category of "factor" in relation to how effectively online media fulfill their societal role in overseeing public finances. This targeted selection does not claim comprehensiveness but ensures the necessary theoretical focus: it allows concentration on concepts directly relevant to analyzing online media as a factor of transparency within the sphere of public procurement. Chronologically, the review spans from 1964 to 2024. The earlier boundary is set by the publication of Herbert Marcuse's work (Marcuse, 1964), which was one of the first efforts to critically analyze mass culture, one-dimensional thinking, and the information environment as a form of power. Unlike the works of Immanuel Kant (representing classical German idealism) or Edmund Husserl (representing phenomenology), which establish the epistemological foundation of European philosophy, the texts of the Frankfurt School (Marcuse, 1964; Habermas, 1991) are directed toward the social realities of the 20th and 21st centuries, with their media, capitalism, ideology, and technology. The focus on philosophical concepts that shed light on contemporary mechanisms of communication enables an analytical understanding of the functioning of online media as an institution of public oversight and accountability.

The search for sources was conducted through a combination of academic databases and open-access knowledge platforms. The primary platforms included Google Scholar, Internet Archive, SpringerLink, JSTOR, MIT Press, ResearchGate, and the official websites of analytical centers (Dozorro, MDF, IMI). The search strategies employed were twofold.

On the one hand, name-based queries were used, such as "Habermas public sphere," "Foucault discourse," and "Žižek transparency criticism," which allowed to quickly identify the core of philosophical argumentation. Concurrently, a categorical strategy was employed based on keywords relevant to the research topic: "public procurement," "online media," "transparency," "publicity,"

"social practice," "critical theory," "media oversight," "factor," and "philosophy of communication." These queries were applied in both Ukrainian and English-language information spaces, allowing for an examination of local discourse specifics while engaging with the global academic context.

The selection of results was guided by several criteria: first, the source's alignment with the conceptual framework developed in this study (e.g., whether publicity is treated as a process rather than a state); second, the degree of scholarly legitimacy of the source (preference was given to texts published by academic publishers, university archives, or reputable professional platforms); and third, conceptual relevance – whether the source offers ideas that can be methodologically integrated into the analysis of online media in the context of public procurement.

Artificial intelligence (GPT-4) was used as a supplementary tool to refine bibliographic details, verify the relevance of sources, and format the bibliography in APA style. For translating quotes from English and other foreign-language sources into Ukrainian, the DeepL machine translation tool was employed, followed by mandatory authorial editing and cross-checking with the original to ensure accuracy in conveying meaning. However, challenges arose during the search and use of AI tools: for instance, an initial reference to Slavoj Žižek's "The Parallax View" proved to be invalid, though the text was later located in another reliable source via Google Scholar. This underscores the need for critical evaluation of AI-generated results (including machine translations) and the mandatory manual verification of each bibliographic element and translation accuracy. Thus, AI was integrated not as a substitute for research but as a tool for refining, processing textual information, and accelerating certain technical processes within the meta-search.

Ultimately, the method for selecting and analytically processing sources is grounded in principles of academic integrity, conceptual relevance, and theoretical depth. It enables the creation of not only a bibliographic foundation for the review but also a philosophical framework for the study, in which each author, concept, and source plays a functional role in understanding how online media in Ukraine can serve as a factor of the transparency of public procurement and to what "measure" this potential is realized.

Results and Discussions

The conducted literature review enables the formulation of key conceptual guidelines necessary for a philosophical understanding of the role of online media in ensuring the transparency of public procurement. The examined philosophical approaches not only provide a general framework but also establish an analytical apparatus that allows us to define the concept of "factor" as a philosophical category relevant to the context of Ukrainian online media, laying the groundwork for assessing the "measure" of their impact.

The content and analytical function of the key ideas that form the methodological foundation of this study are reviewed (*an overview of these ideas, the philosophers who advocated them, and their proposed applications to the analysis of online media are included in the Appendix*).

Jürgen Habermas, in his monograph "The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere" (Habermas, 1989), conceptualizes the public sphere as a special space where public opinion is formed through rational communication among independent citizens. His theory provides a methodological tool for analyzing media as a potential arena for such discourse. He emphasizes that this space has undergone profound historical changes: the influence of the market, politics, and mass culture has altered the conditions under which public discussion occurs. These changes have significantly impacted the functioning of the press, a key element of the public sphere. He states, "From mere institutions for the publication of news, newspapers also became bearers and leaders of public opinion, as well as instruments in the arsenal of party politics. For the internal organization of the newspaper enterprise, this resulted in the emergence of a new function between the collection and publication of news – the editorial function. For the publisher, it meant a shift from

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being a news merchant to a dealer in public opinion" (Habermas, 1989, p. 182). This transition illustrates the loss of the media's original function of pure information dissemination. In such transformed conditions, maintaining the potential for rational discourse becomes increasingly challenging. Consequently, creating and sustaining meaningful, reasoned discussions on socially significant topics becomes a complex process requiring ever greater effort. This transformation also affects the potential role of online media (as successors to the press) in the public sphere. On the one hand, they remain significant players in shaping societal perceptions of transparency. On the other hand, their ability to act as a factor in transparency is not guaranteed and depends on a range of conditions: access to editorial resources, internal professional culture, regulatory frameworks, and the level of media literacy of audiences. In this context, transparency emerges not as a predetermined quality but as a communicative process in which media can serve as a factor – provided their content, editorial practices, and operational contexts genuinely foster the formation of public oversight.

This perspective on media as an institution that constructs social reality necessitates engagement with the ideas of Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, whose works provide a methodological foundation for understanding the perception of media messages. In "The Social Construction of Reality" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), they argue that societal knowledge is formed through repeated actions, social practices, and linguistic acts, which stabilize perceptions of the world. They state that "the reality of everyday life continues to appear as an intersubjective world, a world I share with others," adding, "we share a common sense of its reality" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 37). This suggests that "reality" in society is the result of a collective interpretive process in which language and the form of information presentation play a decisive role. Within the framework of this study, where online media are examined as a factor of the transparency of public procurement, this implies that the significance of the topic depends not only on its presence in news content but also on how it is presented: the depth, consistency, attention to context, and implications. Superficial, inconsistent, or passive presentations can devalue a topic, even if it holds genuine societal importance, as they fail to form a stable perception of its significance in the audience's consciousness.

Alfred Schutz, in his work "The Well-Informed Citizen" (Schütz, 1964), highlights that media shape the structures of everyday knowledge, which either limit or expand citizens' ability to participate in societal life. His concept serves as a methodological tool for assessing how media influence public awareness. He emphasizes that "knowledge is socially distributed, and the mechanism of this distribution can be made the subject of a sociological discipline," further noting the intersubjective nature of knowledge, which is "transmitted to us as a pre-organized stock of problems with means for their solution, procedural norms, etc." (Schütz, 1964, p. 121). In this sense, transparency is not just access to information but a construction of significance that depends on genre, agenda, rhetorical strategies, and trust in the source. It shapes social knowledge that either empowers individuals to participate in societal processes or, conversely, diminishes their roles in political life.

Pierre Bourdieu, in his work "On Television" (Bourdieu, 1998), argues that information in the media is never completely neutral – its selection and presentation depend on the journalist's position within the field of power, as well as the structure of symbolic, economic, and social capitals that shape editorial decisions and audience expectations. His field theory provides a methodological tool for analyzing institutional factors that influence the media. As he notes, "If I want to know what a given journalist is going to say or write, or will find obvious or unthinkable, normal or negligible, I must know the position the journalist occupies in this space. I also need to know the specific power of the media outlet in question" (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 41).

In the context of Ukrainian online media, this implies that coverage of public procurement is neither uniform nor universal: it is shaped by resources, political contexts, and financial dependencies. This is supported by empirical data: in 2023, the number of criminal proceedings in the

sphere of public procurement rose to 779 (compared to 343 in 2021), yet only 41 of them –5% – were initiated based on appeals from the monitoring online media outlet DOZORRO (Pylypenko & Nesterov, 2024). At the same time, according to a study by the Media Development Foundation, independent local media show only marginal increases in attention to analytical topics regarding budgetary expenditures, despite audience interest in such content (Media Development Foundation, 2024). Meanwhile, 95% of these outlets operate on grant funding, which secures them greater editorial autonomy to cover sensitive topics. Conversely, regional media that do not rely on donor funding are often financially tied to local authorities, who are the primary procurers in public procurement. As evidenced by the IMI's study "Covert Advertising in Regional Media", 60% of political covert advertising (referred to as "dzhynsa" in Ukrainian media discourse) in regional media is commissioned by local authorities. This creates a clear conflict of interest and potentially hinders critical reporting of procurement-related topics (Institute of Mass Information, 2024).

Thus, the media's treatment of public procurement is neither inherent nor guaranteed; its representation varies according to the political, economic, and editorial contexts.

Transparency, in this sense, should be regarded not just as access to a certain array of information but as the incorporation of the topic into socially significant discourses that media are capable of sustaining, reproducing, deepening, and reiterating. In his lecture "L'ordre du discours" (Foucault, 1971), Michel Foucault draws attention to the inequalities among discourses that exist in any society: not all topics have an equal opportunity to be heard, preserved, reiterated, and maintained in circulation. His concept of discourse as power-knowledge is key to the methodology for analyzing how media shape (or fail to shape) the public significance of topics. Some statements vanish without a trace, while others gain stability and further development. As Foucault notes, "In societies, there is very often a certain gap between discourses: those that are 'uttered' throughout the days and those that pass along with the very act of their utterance; and discourses [...] that still have to be uttered" (Foucault, 1971, p. 10). This implies that the mere mention of public procurement in the media does not guarantee its public significance: for the topic to gain weight, it must be incorporated into an ongoing discursive circulation, meaning it must have the opportunity to be continued, interpreted, and reiterated in new contexts.

This approach allows us to view transparency not as a technical category but as a discursive one, linked to power, legitimacy, and long-term presence in the information field. Hannah Arendt, in her article "Truth and Politics," writes: "What is at stake is not truth as such, but factual reality itself, and this is indeed a political problem of the first order. And since factual truth, though less open to controversy than philosophical truth and obviously accessible to everyone, often meets a similar fate when brought into the public realm – opposed not by lies or deliberate falsifications but by opinion – perhaps it is worth raising again the old, supposedly outdated question of the antagonism between truth and opinion" (Arendt, 1967, p. 237). Her reflections on publicity and political action help us methodologically conceptualize how media can (or cannot) create a space for the emergence of factual truth. In this sense, media that consistently support the topic of public procurement serve not only as channels for data dissemination but also as institutions that endow the public topic with factual stability, protecting it from being overshadowed by opinion. They provide a space for repeatability and recognition, without which transparency remains episodic rather than a structural quality of the information environment. Thus, the issue concerns not merely the functional presence of the topic in news but its capacity to become a resilient part of societal reality – despite competing interpretations, fragmented attention, and political risks. Herein lies the paradox of contemporary publicity, where the significance of facts is determined not solely by their objective presence but by their ability to be recognized, reiterated, and accepted as meaningful.

This gap between the visible and the evident can be conceptualized through the notion of parallax, which Slavoj Žižek identifies as an analytical optic (Žižek, 2006). His approach provides

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a methodological tool for analyzing the contradictory aspects of transparency. "The standard definition of parallax: the apparent displacement of an object (the shift of its position against a background) caused by a change in observational position that provides a new line of sight. The philosophical twist to be added, of course, is that the observed difference is not simply 'subjective,' due to the fact that the same object which exists 'out there' is seen from two different stances, or points of view" (Žižek, 2006, p. 17). In the context of media representations of public procurement, this means that transparency is not a fixed characteristic; rather, it emerges from the convergence of conflicting viewpoints: on the one hand, there are normative expectations regarding the role of media in accountability and participation; on the other, there are specific editorial decisions, political constraints, and market conditions. The concept of parallax allows us not just to acknowledge the differences between these perspectives but also to analyze them as objects of investigation. As Žižek asserts, "the notion of the parallax gap, far from posing an irreducible obstacle to dialectics, provides the key that allows us to discern its subversive core" (Žižek, 2006, p. 4). In this way, the instability between different visions creates opportunities for critical analysis–in our case, the study of how transparency arises from the interplay of institutional design, editorial strategy, and audience perception.

This logically leads us to the next part of the review– the critique of one-dimensionality, as developed by Herbert Marcuse. In his work "One-Dimensional Man" (Marcuse, 1964), Marcuse highlights that under conditions of mass consumption and the pervasive presence of information technologies, society gradually loses its capacity for critical thinking. His ideas are methodologically valuable for analyzing how media can either facilitate or hinder the critical reception of information. People increasingly perceive reality as a given, without questioning its underlying foundations: "Thus emerges a pattern of one-dimensional thought and behavior in which ideas, aspirations, and objectives that, by their content, transcend the established universe of discourse and action are either repelled or reduced to terms of this universe" (Marcuse, 1964, p. 17). This phenomenon is particularly relevant to media, which, instead of providing analysis and investigation, increasingly limit themselves to reproducing "ready-made" content or presenting facts without context. As Marcuse notes, in these situations, mass communication media reduce even philosophy, religion, and art to a common denominator–namely, the commodity form: "The music of the soul is also the music of salesmanship. Exchange value, not truth value, is what counts" (Marcuse, 1964, p. 21). As a result, public procurement, despite being a socially significant topic, may remain "invisible" to the audience, even if information about it is formally available. Without context, interpretation, and an emphasis on societal significance, data lack the potential to generate critical reflection. In this regard, Marcuse's observation that "intellectual freedom would mean the restoration of individual thought now absorbed by mass communication and indoctrination" (Marcuse, 1964, p. 12) resonates deeply. This perspective encourages us to view transparency not as access to information but also as a social practice that requires critical participation from the media and the ability to challenge established discursive frameworks.

It is also important to consider the specific conditions under which editorial offices operate, including political, regional, and institutional factors. After all, the ability of the media to address public procurement as a societal problem depends not only on internal decisions but also on the broader social space, which, according to Henri Lefebvre, is self-constructed and politically determined. In this context, the concept of social space, developed by Henri Lefebvre, becomes particularly significant. In his work "The Production of Space" (Lefebvre, 1991), he argues that space is not merely a backdrop for social processes but is a product of the struggle for meaning, resources, and power. His theory of the production of space provides a methodological foundation for analyzing how spatial factors influence media activities. In this view, space serves not only as a physical environment but also as a site of symbolic influence, where knowledge, discourses, and media are formed and operate. As the researcher notes, "the transparency of space equates knowledge, information and communication" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 29), suggesting that the spatial

organization in society affects the accessibility and perception of what is considered "transparent" in the public sphere. This approach allows for a renewed perspective on the role of media in the regional dimension: online media do not simply report on procurement; they operate within a specific space that either facilitates or constrains their activity.

Given the philosophical and sociological foundations of transparency as a practice sensitive to specific contexts, it becomes crucial to account for local social conditions. This includes factors such as the level of editorial autonomy, the presence of civic initiatives, and access to open data for journalists and the public. Understanding these factors provides a basis for further analysis of media content in a macro-regional context, allowing us to trace dependencies between social space and the opportunities for media to fulfill their oversight role in the sphere of public finances.

Conclusions

The conducted literature review has deepened our understanding of how the concepts, specifically, transparency, publicity, power, communication, knowledge, and social space are interpreted in contemporary European philosophical thought. By analyzing the works of Habermas, Foucault, Marcuse, Bourdieu, Arendt, Žižek, Lefebvre, Berger, Luckmann, and Schutz, we find that transparency emerges not as a technical characteristic or institutional condition but as a complex social construct, intricately tied to communicative practices, institutional constraints, power interactions, and audience trust.

Building on this theoretical foundation, we have developed conceptual frameworks to analyze online media as a potential factor of ensuring transparency in the sphere of public procurement. The referenced authors not only outline how public knowledge and the societal visibility of government processes are formed but also highlight the conditions under which media are capable (or incapable) of fulfilling their oversight function. Consequently, transparency in media is not guaranteed but depends on contextual factors: editorial strategies, the level of autonomy, access to data, and societal expectations regarding publicity.

These concepts also lay the groundwork for developing a methodological approach applicable to further empirical analysis. This approach entails not only identifying mentions of public procurement but also assessing the extent to which online media fulfill their societal function, i.e., determining the "measure" of their impact. This involves assessing the quality, depth, consistency, and systematic nature of content related to public expenditures. In this way, the review not only establishes theoretical foundations but also provides a clear philosophical basis for analyzing how effectively online media operate as mechanisms of democratic oversight in the public sphere and the "measure" of their effectiveness as a factor of transparency.

Authors' contribution. Viktoriya Shevchenko was responsible for the methodology and overall supervision of the study, while Ihor Darmostuk conducted the research, interpreted the results, and prepared the manuscript.

Declaration of Generative Artificial Intelligence and Technologies Using Artificial Intelligence in the Writing Process. All results presented in this article are original and obtained without the use of artificial intelligence. Artificial intelligence was not used to create, edit or write the text of this article. At the same time, individual AI-based tools, in particular GPT-4 and DeepL, were used as auxiliary tools – exclusively for clarifying bibliographic data, forming a bibliography in APA format and preliminary translation of citations with subsequent author editing. Each element was carefully checked manually. Information on the use of these tools is provided in the "Method" section. The authors bear full responsibility for the content and integrity of the published materials.

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Appendix

Overview of Key Philosophical Concepts and Their Applications

Philosopher (The main work discussed in the article)	Key concept(s)	Application to online media analysis and public procurement transparency (as interpreted in the article)
Jürgen Habermas *(The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere)*	Public sphere, communicative action, transformation of the public sphere.	Online media as a potential arena for rational discourse and the formation of public opinion on public procurement. Transparency is viewed as a communicative

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		process. The ability of the media to be a factor of transparency depends on editorial resources, professional culture, regulatory frameworks, and the media literacy of the audience.
Peter Berger, Thomas Lukman (*The Social Construction of Reality*)	Social construction of reality, intersubjective world, everyday knowledge.	The significance of the topic of public procurement in the media depends not only on its presence but also on the quality of its presentation (depth, consistency, context, and consequences). A superficial or unsystematic presentation can devalue a socially important topic, preventing a stable understanding of its significance.
Alfred Schutz (*The Well-Informed Citizen*)	Social Distribution of Knowledge, Structures of Everyday Knowledge, The Well-Informed Citizen.	Media shape the everyday knowledge of the audience and influence their awareness and ability to participate in public life. Transparency is perceived as a construction of meaning that depends on media genres, agendas, rhetoric, and trust in the source.
Pierre Bourdieu (*On Television*)	Field theory (journalistic field), habitus, capitals (symbolic, economic, social).	Online media coverage of public procurement is neither neutral nor universal; it is determined by the journalist's position within the field, media resources, political contexts, and financial dependencies. Conflicts of interest (e.g., dependence of regional media on local authorities) can hinder critical reporting.
Michel Foucault (*L'ordre du discours*)	Order of discourse, power-knowledge, inequality of discourses, practices of exclusion.	For the topic of public procurement to gain societal importance, it must be consistently integrated into media discourse, allowing for ongoing exploration and interpretation. Transparency is viewed as a discursive category linked to power, legitimacy, and a long-term presence in the information field.
Hannah Arendt (*Truth and Politics*)	Factual truth vs. opinion, publicity as a space for emergence, political action.	Online media can create a space for the emergence of factual truth about public procurement, giving the topic factual stability and protecting it from being overshadowed

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		by subjective opinions. This ensures repeatability and recognition of the topic, establishing transparency as a structural quality of the information environment.
Slavoj Žižek (*The Parallax View*)	Parallax, parallax gap.	Transparency is not a stable characteristic but emerges from the convergence of conflicting points of view (normative expectations about media roles vs. editorial realities, political constraints, and market conditions). This instability and the gap between perspectives serve as an object of critical analysis.
Herbert Marcuse (*One-Dimensional Man*)	One-dimensional man, one-dimensional thinking, critique of mass communication, commodity form.	Contemporary media can either facilitate or hinder critical perception of information about public procurement. There is a risk of reducing significant topics to a commodity form, to a superficial presentation without contextualization. Transparency requires critical media engagement and the ability to challenge established discursive frameworks.
Henri Lefebvre (*The Production of Space*)	The social production of space, space as a social construct.	Social, political, and economic spaces (particularly at the regional level) affect the operations of online media and their ability to ensure transparency. Local conditions (editorial autonomy, civic initiatives, access to data) determine the media's ability to exercise oversight.

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