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Anonymous and Official Telegram Channels in Ukraine: Analysis of Popularity during the Hybrid War

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This study examines Telegram channels popular among Ukrainian users, highlighting the platform's expanding role in hybrid warfare. Telegram is increasingly replacing traditional media, functioning both as a news source and a content hub, and often disseminating propaganda through anonymous accounts. The **research aims** to assess Telegram's impact on Ukraine's media landscape by analyzing the presence and persistence of official, anonymous, and propaganda channels in top popularity rankings. The **methodology** includes a critical review of sources, 14 weeks of monitoring (June–September 2024) using Telemetrio and Tgstat, and statistical analysis via Pivot Tables. The **results** show that anonymous channels are the most consistently present, propaganda channels rank high in audience reach, while official and traditional media sources appear infrequently or are absent altogether. These **findings** support the hypothesis that unregulated sources dominate Ukraine's digital information space, underscoring the need for a robust national information security strategy and more rigorous monitoring of Telegram during wartime.

Keywords: Telegram; Hybrid warfare; Information security; Anonymous sources; Media analytics

Анонімні та офіційні Telegram-канали в Україні: аналіз популярності під час гібридної війни

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Об'єктом цього дослідження є Telegram-канали, популярні серед українських користувачів. **Актуальність** дослідження зумовлена стрімким зростанням популярності Telegram як платформи для поширення інформації в умовах гібридної війни. Telegram дедалі активніше замінює традиційні медіа, виступаючи і як джерело новин, і як платформа для поширення контенту. Також ця платформа стала джерелом пропагандистського та маніпулятивного контенту, зокрема через велику кількість анонімних каналів. **Метою** дослідження є оцінити вплив платформи Telegram на український медіаландшафт шляхом аналізу присутності та динаміки офіційних, анонімних і пропагандистських Telegram-каналів у переліках найпопулярніших серед українців, виявити закономірності домінування, стабільності та впливу різних типів каналів в умовах гібридної війни. **Методами** дослідження є критичний аналіз теоретичних джерел та публікацій у медіа, моніторинг присутності Telegram-каналів у незалежних аналітичних системах Telemetrio (загальний рейтинг) та Tgstat (рейтинги за охопленням і цитованістю), який здійснювався упродовж 14 тижнів (червень–вересень 2024 року); статистичний аналіз за допомогою інструменту Pivot Table, який дозволив провести підрахунок кількості появ кожного каналу для оцінки рівня стабільності та обчислити частку кожного типу каналів у загальному масиві, проаналізувати змінюваність рейтингів, визначити статистичні показники як для різних типів, так і для окремих каналів. Головні **висновки** полягають в тому, що анонімні канали демонструють найвищу стабільність присутності в рейтингах. Пропагандистські канали стабільно присутні у рейтингах, особливо за охопленням. Офіційні джерела, навпаки, з'являються менш регулярно. Канали традиційних медіа не потрапили у жоден із рейтингів протягом 14 тижнів спостереження. Усе це підтверджує гіпотезу про домінування неконтрольованих джерел у цифровому просторі, що потребує розробки ефективної стратегії державної інформаційної безпеки та посиленого моніторингу діяльності Telegram-каналів у період воєнної загрози.

Ключові слова: Telegram; Гібридна війна; Інформаційна безпека; Анонімні джерела; Медіааналітика

The information component of modern wars has become no less significant than combat operations. In the case of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, information warfare is an important element of a broader hybrid war – a concept that involves the integrated use of military, information, cyberattacks, economic pressure, disinformation, and other means of influencing an enemy state (Hoffman, 2007). Hybrid threats as an element of hybrid confrontation are aimed not only at physical infrastructure or armed forces, but also at the consciousness of citizens. Within the framework of this hybrid war, social platforms play a key role in spreading news, shaping public opinion, and sometimes mobilizing citizens for specific actions. They are increasingly replacing traditional media as the main source of information. Thanks to these platforms, the enemy can achieve control over the information space. Telegram has become one of the most popular digital platforms for distributing information in Ukraine over the past three years. This service provides quick and convenient access to news, but at the same time acts as an environment for active dissemination of information from anonymous sources and propaganda. The features of

Telegram's functioning are radically different from classic media. Telegram channels often operate without editorial policies, they do not check the reliability of the content they distribute or its source. On the one hand, official Telegram channels associated with state institutions, well-known media or public figures have become authoritative sources of news for many Ukrainians. On the other hand, anonymous channels that do not have a clear identification, do not declare an information policy, and are often tools of information influence, disinformation or manipulation are actively operating in Telegram. In this context, the analysis of the popularity of official and anonymous channels in Telegram becomes particularly relevant. Studying the dynamics in the popularity of different types of channels allows us to better understand the information environment of Ukraine in the war conditions and to determine which sources Ukrainian users prefer – given the reach, citations, and stability of presence in the ratings of the most popular channels. Ukrainian researchers have repeatedly emphasized the growing influence of alternative digital media, which are not subject to regulation and are a potential tool for information invasion (Бутиріна, 2023; Величковський, 2024). In this context, studying Telegram channels – their popularity, stability of presence in the top ratings, types of owners – allows us to analyze the state of the information environment and the level of trust of users in official or anonymous sources.

The *purpose* of this study is to analyze the popularity of Telegram channels in the Ukrainian media space in the context of a full-scale war, in particular, to identify the information players that dominate this environment, as well as to find out how stable the positions of official and anonymous sources are in the most popular ratings, and how these ratings change over time.

Theoretical background

The concept of hybrid war at the beginning of the 21st century became key in understanding new forms of armed and unarmed conflicts. Hybrid war is a form of conflict that combines military, information, cybernetic, economic, and political tools to achieve strategic goals without direct open confrontation. Hybrid wars are characterized by a high degree of integration of different types of threats, including irregular military actions, cyberattacks, information manipulation, and diplomatic pressure (Hoffman, 2007; Bartles, 2016).

In the context of Russia's war against Ukraine, which has been ongoing in a hybrid format since 2014 and has grown into a full-scale phase since 2022, the information component of the conflict has become extremely important. According to Ukrainian researchers (Бутиріна, 2023; Величковський, 2024; Галіпчак, 2024), it was precisely destructive information influences that became the tools of the first stage of aggression, creating the prerequisites for political destabilization, delegitimization of the Ukrainian government, and undermining trust in national institutions. The essence of information warfare lies in the systemic impact on the perception of reality, emotions, beliefs, and behavior of the mass audience in order to achieve strategic results. Modern information warfare is a "battle for the mind," in which control over the interpretations of events becomes more important than control over territory (Pripoae-Șerbănescu, 2023). Social media play a special role in this process, as platforms that ensure efficiency, visuality, and the viral effect of spreading messages.

The Telegram platform became especially popular with the beginning of the full-scale invasion. Telegram channels became not only a source of news, but also an arena for information operations, in particular the spread of disinformation, fakes, panic narratives or conspiracy theories. The emergence of anonymous channels, often without transparent identification of the owner, creates the ground for manipulative influence and a decrease in the information hygiene of society (Самагальська & Шпуганич, 2024). That is why the Telegram platform can be considered a media front of the new generation, where not only the dissemination of information takes place, but also the struggle for its interpretation. Research over the dynamics of such channels' popularity allows us to identify stable communication patterns, information risk zones, and potential

vulnerabilities of the state's information security. Until 2022, Telegram was not an important source of information for Ukrainians, although its popularity gradually grew in the years before the Great War. In 2017–2018, the messenger was used mainly by young people and technologically savvy users. However, since 2019, Telegram has become a source of information – anonymous political channels that spread insider information, analytics, and rumors about Ukrainian politics have become increasingly popular on Telegram. In 2021, only 20% of Ukrainians used Telegram as their main source of news (Поліковська, 2023). However, with the outbreak of the full-scale war, this figure has increased several times.

After February 24, 2022, Telegram became the most important channel for distributing information in Ukraine. In 2022, more than 65% of Ukrainians used Telegram as their main source of news (Ukrainian media use and trust, 2022). In 2023–2024, 72% of Ukrainians used Telegram to receive news (В Україні Telegram зберігає лідерство серед соцмереж, 2024). At the same time, more than 85% of Ukrainians used this service to follow current news.

The reasons for the popularity of Telegram in Ukraine are due to a number of factors. Among them is the speed of updating information, especially in the first days of the Great War, when Ukrainians were looking for operational information about the situation in their regions. State structures registered on the platform quite quickly, so over time the Ukrainian government began to actively use Telegram to communicate with citizens. The channel of the Ukrainian President's Office, the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the Security Service of Ukraine, as well as the official pages of city administrations became the main sources of verified information. The lack of censorship in Telegram, especially against the background of blocking Ukrainians on Facebook / Instagram and Twitter platforms, led to the fact that it was possible to distribute materials about the real situation on the front and the crimes by the Russian occupiers. Despite its numerous advantages, the use of Telegram in Ukraine is accompanied by certain risks. In September 2024, Ukraine banned the use of the messenger on official devices due to fears of possible data leaks to Russia. The National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine stated that Russian special services could access messages and personal data of Telegram users, including deleted messages. Over time, the discussion about the dangers of Telegram in Ukrainian society intensified, and more and more experts in cybersecurity, information confrontation, and strategic communications began to talk about the risks of this platform's popularity among Ukrainians, primarily as an insufficiently protected communication tool (Палікот, 2024).

The head of the Main Intelligence Directorate at the Ukraine's Ministry of Defense, Kyrylo Budanov, also spoke about the dangers of Telegram. In the fall of 2024, Mr. Budanov called Telegram a platform that poses a threat to the national security of Ukraine due to the potential ability of Russian special services to access users' personal data and personal messages (Богданьок, 2024). Budanov also emphasized that Telegram is the main channel for the spread of disinformation in Ukraine, especially through anonymous channels that often publish unverified data or fakes. He compared Telegram to a "digital training ground for information operations" used by both Ukrainian and hostile information campaigns.

The large number of anonymous Telegram channels in the Ukrainian information space poses risks to national security: they do not have clearly defined authors, violate journalistic standards, and spread fakes and manipulations. An additional threat is the platform itself, which is affiliated with Russian developers and has an opaque ownership structure. Despite the active discussion about the popularity of Telegram as a messenger and news source, quantitative research on anonymous channels and their impact is lacking. Only a few analytical reports are available, in particular from the Ukrainian Institute of Media and Communication («Як функціонують та завойовують аудиторію телеграм-канали-мільйонники», 2023). This study aims to fill the gap by assessing the real impact of Telegram channels in Ukraine.

Method

To achieve the goal of the study, a comprehensive approach was used, including both theoretical and empirical analysis. At the first stage, a review of scientific sources, analytical materials, as well as publications in industry media on the issues of hybrid warfare, digital security, information influences, and the functioning of alternative media was carried out. This allowed us to form a theoretical basis for the study, clarify key concepts and outline a range of problems, in particular regarding the use of Telegram as a platform for the spread of disinformation, anonymous communications, and propaganda.

For a quantitative analysis of the popularity of Telegram channels, open data from two leading analytical platforms – Telemetrio and TGStat, specializing in monitoring the dynamics of the Ukrainian Telegram segment – was used. Data collection was carried out weekly for 14 weeks – from June 10 to September 9, 2024. As a result, an empirical database was formed, consisting of four tables of 140 positions each (a total of 520 positions), which included the top 10 channels by overall popularity according to Telemetrio and the top 10 channels by three separate indicators from TGStat: number of subscribers, level of coverage, and frequency of citations.

Data aggregation was automated using the Instant Data Scraper web parsing tool, which allows you to effectively obtain structured information from web pages.

Microsoft Excel tools were used to process and analyze the collected data, in particular, tools for building pivot tables (Pivot Table) and functions for calculating frequencies, average values, number of appearances of individual channels in weekly ratings, as well as identifying new participants. This approach allowed for: frequency analysis of the presence of Telegram channels in the ratings; comparison of the stability of channel positions by different metrics; analysis of the dynamics of updating the top 10 (number of new channels per week); typology of channels according to the criteria of officiality, anonymity and belonging to propaganda content.

Combining quantitative analysis with a qualitative assessment of the content and nature of Telegram channels allowed to comprehensively assess the nature of the information field, identifying dominant sources of influence, finding out the level of audience trust in different types of channels, and also recording potential threats to information security.

Results and discussion

A classification was developed to analyze the channels that were included in the popularity ratings. The initial division into "Official", "Anonymous", and "Other" turned out to be insufficient due to the variety of channels, in particular military and utilitarian. Therefore, an expanded classification was applied. Separate categories include cryptocurrency and betting channels, military group channels (without Telegram verification), as well as two propaganda channels, "Mir segodnya s "Yuriy Podoliaka"", and "Anatoly Shariy". The rest are mostly classified as "anonymous", with the exception of "Lachen pyshe" (marked as "known"), "Nikolayevsky Vanek" ("anonymous-utilitarian") and "Trukha Ukraine" ("unofficial" due to the presence of a public representative – Maksym Lavrynenko) (see Fig. 1). Thus, all channels were classified into one of the following categories: official, cryptocurrency, sports, anonymous, propaganda, anonymous-utilitarian, famous.

Figure 1.
Classification of the collected dataset

Date	Title of the Telegram channel	Link	Category (type)	Number in the rating
10.06.2024	Дропы от Стукача	https://t.me/crypto_drop_stukach	Cryptocurrencies	1
10.06.2024	Труха Україна	https://t.me/joinchat/1ziX_pqykOFmNDQy	Unofficial	2
10.06.2024	Николаевский Ванёк	https://t.me.io/channels/1662388432-vanek_nikolaev	anonymous-utilitarian	3
10.06.2024	Украина Сейчас	https://telemetr.io/uk/channels/1197363285-AAAAAEdeUFWDy5Uux_Cimg	Anonymous	4
10.06.2024	Лачен пише	https://telemetr.io/uk/channels/1536630827-lachentyt	Known	5
10.06.2024	Times of Ukraine	https://telemetr.io/uk/channels/1431180517-VU4U5Vm2-Lh8tVC2	Anonymous	6
10.06.2024	Реальна Війна | Україна | Новини	https://telemetr.io/uk/channels/1198589840-voynareal	Anonymous	7
10.06.2024	Инсайдер UA	https://telemetr.io/uk/channels/1352726486-insiderukr	Anonymous	8
10.06.2024	Реальний Київ | Украина	https://telemetr.io/uk/channels/1181169156-kievreal1	Anonymous	9
10.06.2024	Всевидящее ОКО Украина	https://telemetr.io/uk/channels/1307866449-okoo_ua	Anonymous	10
17.06.2024	Труха Україна	https://t.me/joinchat/1ziX_pqykOFmNDQy	Unofficial	1
17.06.2024	Николаевский Ванёк	https://telemetr.io/uk/channels/1662388432-vanek_nikolaev	anonymous-utilitarian	2
17.06.2024	Стукач Трейдит	https://telemetr.io/uk/channels/1785085145-stukach_trading	Cryptocurrencies	3
17.06.2024	Украина Сейчас	https://telemetr.io/uk/channels/1197363285-AAAAAEdeUFWDy5Uux_Cimg	Anonymous	4
17.06.2024	Лачен пише	https://telemetr.io/uk/channels/1536630827-lachentyt	Known	5
17.06.2024	Times of Ukraine	https://telemetr.io/uk/channels/1431180517-VU4U5Vm2-Lh8tVC2	Anonymous	6
17.06.2024	Реальна Війна | Україна | Новини	https://telemetr.io/uk/channels/1198589840-voynareal	Anonymous	7
17.06.2024	Инсайдер UA	https://telemetr.io/uk/channels/1352726486-insiderukr	Anonymous	8
17.06.2024	Реальний Київ | Украина	https://telemetr.io/uk/channels/1181169156-kievreal1	Anonymous	9
17.06.2024	Всевидящее ОКО Украина	https://telemetr.io/uk/channels/1307866449-okoo_ua	Anonymous	10
24.06.2024	Труха Україна	https://t.me/joinchat/1ziX_pqykOFmNDQy	Unofficial	1
24.06.2024	Николаевский Ванёк	https://telemetr.io/uk/channels/1662388432-vanek_nikolaev	anonymous-utilitarian	2
24.06.2024	Лачен пише	https://telemetr.io/uk/channels/1536630827-lachentyt	Known	3
24.06.2024	Украина Сейчас	https://telemetr.io/uk/channels/1197363285-AAAAAEdeUFWDy5Uux_Cimg	Anonymous	4
24.06.2024	Азбука Криптана	https://telemetr.io/uk/channels/2011642222-kripto_azbuk	Cryptocurrencies	5
24.06.2024	Times of Ukraine	https://telemetr.io/uk/channels/1431180517-VU4U5Vm2-Lh8tVC2	Anonymous	6
24.06.2024	Стукач Трейдит	https://telemetr.io/uk/channels/1785085145-stukach_trading	Cryptocurrencies	7
24.06.2024	Реальна Війна | Україна | Новини	https://telemetr.io/uk/channels/1198589840-voynareal	Anonymous	8
24.06.2024	Инсайдер UA	https://telemetr.io/uk/channels/1352726486-insiderukr	Anonymous	9
24.06.2024	Реальний Київ | Україна	https://telemetr.io/uk/channels/1181169156-kievreal1	Anonymous	10
01.07.2024	Труха Україна	https://t.me/joinchat/1ziX_pqykOFmNDQy	Unofficial	1
01.07.2024	Николаевский Ванёк	https://telemetr.io/uk/channels/1662388432-vanek_nikolaev	anonymous-utilitarian	2
01.07.2024	Лачен пише	https://telemetr.io/uk/channels/1536630827-lachentyt	Known	3

1. Based on frequency analysis, Telegram channels that had stable popularity ratings were identified, as well as those that appeared in the rating episodically.

The obtained values helped to divide the channels into several groups, among which there were stable leaders that appeared in the rating most weeks, medium-frequency channels, and episodical ones.

According to the Telemetrio rating, anonymous channels were in the top 10 most popular 83 times or 59.29% of cases, and when we added to this value the number of occurrences of the anonymous-utilitarian channel (another 14), it turned out that more than two-thirds of the popular Telegram channels among Ukrainians are anonymous (see Fig. 2). Official ones did not get into this rating at all. In the Tgstat rating by subscribers, the situation did not change – in total, anonymous and anonymous-utilitarian channels also received 83 hits among the popular channels. This means that more than half of the most popular Telegram channels in Ukraine (those that are read the most) are anonymous.

Figure 2.
Frequency of appearance of different types of channels in the ratings

Titles of the rows	Number for each category
anonymous	83
anonymous-utilitarian	14
known	14
cryptocurrencies	15
unofficial	14
Total	**140**

Analysis of the Tgstat rating by reach showed that it features three leaders – anonymous channels were included in the rating 30 times (21.4%), propaganda channels took second place (27 times or 19.29%), and military channels were in third place (21 entries – 15%). Unfortunately, official channels lost not only to these three, but also to other channels (the well-known "Lachen writes" or the utilitarian "Nikolaevsky Vanek") – the rating recorded 14 cases of official channels entering the top 10, which is only 10%.

The better situation was recorded in the rating by citations. Despite the predominance of anonymous channels with an indicator of 70 entries (50%), official Telegram channels took second place with a share of 30% and 42 entries. It is important to emphasize that the official channel of President Zelenskyy was only in this rating, moreover, this channel led this rating for all 14 weeks. The President's Telegram is an influential and cited information platform among Ukrainians.

Anonymous channels occupy a leading position among the most popular Telegram channels in Ukraine: according to the Telemetrio rating and the number of subscribers, they are the undisputed leaders. At the same time, in terms of reach, and especially citations, official and military resources compete with them. The constant presence of two propaganda channels in the top by reach for 14 weeks confirms the Telegram's role as a tool for spreading propaganda among Ukrainians.

2. Based on the analysis of the duration of the presence of different channels in the weekly top10 rating, it was revealed how stably different types of channels hold the audience's attention over a long period.

The simultaneous distribution of channel types by duration of presence allowed us to investigate which categories (e.g., official or anonymous) are more stable. This made it possible to draw conclusions about the long-term interest from the audience towards certain sources of information, as well as about trends in trust and attention in the conditions of information warfare. The category of "channels of constant presence" deserves special attention – i.e., those that were in the top 10 all weeks in a row. The presence of such channels indicates their stable coverage, influence and importance in the media space. Channels that appeared in the rating once were marked with the characteristic "single appearance", less than three times were classified as "unstable", less than 7 times were assessed as "moderately stable". In the remaining cases, i.e., channels that were in the rating in more than half of the weeks during which the observation was conducted, were assessed as stable.

It is obvious that situational channels that got there because of external events or other informational influences appeared in the ratings for three months. An example of such a channel is #FreeDurov, which appeared in the Telemetrio ratings only twice – on September 2 and 9. This appearance was apparently a consequence of the arrest of Telegram's founder Pavel Durov in France on August 24, 2024. In contrast, other channels, e.g., "Lachen Pyshe" or "Nikolaevsky Vanek" were repeated every week during the monitoring period, so they were defined as "channels of constant presence". Among the participants of the Telemetrio rating, such constant channels, in addition to those mentioned above, were Times of Ukraine, "Trukha Ukraine", "Insider UA | Ukraine | News", "Real War | Ukraine | News", "Ukraine Now", and "Real Kyiv | Ukraine" – all of them are anonymous channels and all of them were rated as stable. Thus, out of 8 stable channels with a permanent presence in this rating, only "Lachen Pyshe" is non-anonymous. These data prove that the interest of Ukrainian users in anonymous channels is a stable phenomenon.

As for the analysis by subscribers, the permanent participants in this rating were "Nikolayevsky Vanek", "Trukha Ukraine", and "Lachen Pyshe", the anonymous Times of Ukraine and the propaganda "Mir Segodnya s Yuriy Podoliaka" – out of four channels, we constantly see anonymous and propaganda ones again. In the Tgstat rating by reach, a slightly different situation is observed – unfortunately, in addition to the channels "Nikolayevsky Vanek", "Trukha Ukraine", and "Lachen Pyshe", two propaganda platforms "Mir Segodnya s Yuriy Podoliaka" and the Shariy

channel have a stable presence. The military channels included in this rating had less coverage – the channel of the Air Force Commander Mykola Oleshchuk received the most attention from users – out of 14 weeks, this channel was in the ratings 12 times. Thus, out of four stable channels, one is propaganda, and two more are anonymous.

The citation rating turned out to be the most resistant to informational influences – its composition did not change during all 14 weeks of observation and had a stable composition of the channels included in it. At the same time, it is worth emphasizing that along with the official platforms of this rating – the official Telegram channels of the president and the GUR (Defense Intelligence of Ukraine), there are propaganda "Mir segodnya s Yuriy Podoliaka" and "Ukraine.ru".

An analysis of all four ratings showed the longest presence of anonymous and propaganda channels in them, which indicates that anonymous channels in the Ukrainian Telegram space are a stable phenomenon.

3. To assess the quality of the presence of Telegram channels in the top 10, the average rating position occupied by the channels during the studied period was analyzed. Such analysis allows us to draw conclusions about the influence of channels within the rating – after all, lower rating values (1–3) indicate greater popularity in a particular week. At the same time, on the contrary, a higher average rating (i.e., closer to 10th place) indicates lower visibility among users.

This approach helped not only to record the presence of channels in the top 10, but also to assess the intensity of their influence on the information space. According to the unified Telemetrio rating and the Tgstat rating, the indicators of anonymous channels in terms of coverage are almost the same – 7.0 according to the first rating and 7.7 according to the second. Instead, the leader in terms of the average rating in Telemetrio is the "unofficial" channel, i.e., "Trukha Ukraine" – it received position number 1.2. At the same time, in terms of reach, Tgstat puts propaganda channels in first place – their average rating is 2.2, the undisputed leader of this list is "Mir Segodnya s "Yuriy Podoliaka". The most popular in terms of reach was "Nikolaevsky Vanek", while official channels received an average rating of about 8 (see Fig. 3).

Figure 3.
Average rating of different types of channels

Titles of the rows	Average rating position
anonymous	7,73
anonymous-utilitarian	2,29
known	5,79
military	7,19
cryptocurrencies	7,33
unofficial	4,43
official	7,57
propaganda	2,26
sports	7,67
Total	**5,50**

Anonymous channels received an average position of 4.6 in terms of citations, but they slightly surpassed official ones with their rating of 4.9. Almost the same situation is when calculating the average position of a channel in the list by the number of subscribers – propagandists received the best indicator here at 2.7.

Despite the presence of official channels among the most popular, users are more interested in anonymous and propaganda sources. This indicates the dominance of such channels in the Ukrainian Telegram and higher attention to them compared to official ones. Only in terms of the level of citations, official channels are close to anonymous ones, but they are inferior in reach and positions even within the top 10.

4. As part of the analysis of the stability of the presence of various channels in the rating, the duration of the presence of various channels in the weekly rating was assessed. This indicator allows us to see how stably the channel holds the audience's attention over a long period.

Based on the data obtained, it was possible to build our own classification based on the stability of the presence of channels in the top 10. E.g., channels that appeared in the rating once were marked "Single appearance", less than three times were called unstable, less than 7 times – moderately stable. The category of "channels of constant presence" deserves special attention – i.e., those that were in the top 10 for all 14 weeks during which the study was conducted. The presence of such channels indicates their stable coverage, influence and importance in the media space.

In addition, the distribution of channel types by duration of presence allowed us to investigate which categories (e.g., official or anonymous) are more stable. This made it possible to draw conclusions about the long-term interest of the audience in certain sources of information, as well as about trends in trust and attention in the conditions of information warfare.

According to the Telemetrio rating, the channels with a constant presence in the top 10 were "Lachen Pyshe", "Nikolayevsky Vanek", "Realna Viyna", "Realny Kyiv", "Ukraine Seych", "Trukha Ukraine", and "Insider UA". In terms of typology, the most active participants in the top 10 were anonymous channels that do not declare transparent identification of owners and do not have a clearly defined editorial policy. In the Tgstat rating by reach, the situation is somewhat different – "Shariy", "Lachen Pyshe", "Trukha", and "Nikolayevsky Vanek" were consistently present here. Interestingly, the rating by citation demonstrated complete stability throughout the entire observation period, so analyzing its dynamics turned out to be inappropriate. At the same time, the Tgstat rating by the number of subscribers showed the constant presence of the "Times of Ukraine" channel, as well as another clearly identified propaganda resource – "Mir Segodnya s Yuriy Podoliaka". Analysis of both Tgstat ratings (by reach and by subscribers) revealed a high stability of the presence of anonymous channels: most of them showed more than 8 appearances in the weekly rating or were in it constantly, throughout all 14 weeks of observation. Such stability is indicative – it marked not only a high level of audience engagement, but also a formed demand for content that does not go through traditional verification mechanisms. At the same time, the appearance in these same ratings of channels with a clear propaganda orientation indicates the systematic use of Telegram as a platform for influence within the information front of hybrid warfare (see Fig. 4).

Figure 4.
Stability assessment of different types of channels

Title of a Telegram channel	Number of weeks	Percent	Stability value
CATS Community	10	71%	Стабільний
Naij Sports Hub	2	14%	Нестабільний
Naija Sports Hub	4	29%	Помірна стабільність
Nigeria Football Hub	5	36%	Помірна стабільність
Times of Ukraine	14	100%	Стабільний
Азбука Криптана	3	21%	Нестабільний
Анатолий Шарий	3	21%	Нестабільний
Инсайдер UA	9	64%	Стабільний
Лачен пише	12	86%	Стабільний
Лёха в Short'ах Long'ует	2	14%	Нестабільний
Мир сегодня с Юрий Подо	14	100%	Стабільний
Николаевский Ванёк	14	100%	Стабільний
Реальна Війна | Україна | I	9	64%	Стабільний
Реальний Київ | Украина	3	21%	Нестабільний
Стукач трейдит	4	29%	Помірна стабільність
Труха ⚡Україна	14	100%	Стабільний
Украина Сейчас	12	86%	Стабільний
Финансист | Бизнес | Инве	6	43%	Помірна стабільність

Thus, the obtained data confirm the hypothesis about the significant role of anonymous and propaganda Telegram channels in shaping public opinion in Ukraine, as well as the vulnerability of the digital information space to targeted information operations, in particular from the aggressor country.

5. The study analyzed the degree of rotation of participants in the top 10 Telegram channels for 14 weeks. This parameter allowed us to assess the level of stability in the information space: whether the constancy of information leaders is maintained, or, on the contrary, there is high variability and competition for the audience's attention. A low level of list updating indicates a stable structure of the information space and fixed audience preferences regarding information sources. In contrast, a high frequency of new channels in the top 10 indicates the variability of media interests, reaction to external events or an intense struggle for reach and influence. This approach allows us to assess not only the popularity of individual channels, but also the general dynamics of changes in the Telegram segment. To this end, we determined the number of new channels that first appeared in the rating each week, compared to the previous list.

As in the previous analysis, the Tgstat rating by citation rate was not included in this stage of the study due to its absolute stability. At the same time, the Telemetrio rating for 14 weeks showed the appearance of new channels in 6 cases. Tgstat by coverage recorded 11 such appearances, and the rating by the number of subscribers – 8. Thus, the rating by coverage turned out to be the most dynamic, which can be due to both short-term surges of interest in specific topics and active distribution of content by individual channels during periods of information tension.

In general, the results indicate the relative stability of the Telegram space, which is dominated by several leading channels with a high frequency of repeated inclusion in the rating. At the same time, the periodic appearance of "newcomers" in the lists indicates the flexibility of the audience and the ability of the information environment to respond to current events or new sources of messages.

Conclusions

The analysis of the popularity of Telegram channels showed that among the channels popular with the Ukrainian audience, the largest share belongs to anonymous channels, including propaganda ones. This main conclusion of the study confirmed the initial hypothesis that anonymous Telegram channels occupy a prominent place in the Ukrainian Telegram environment. Another important result of the study was that during three months of observation of four different ratings, no Telegram channel of traditional media was ever included in the analyzed lists. This is evidence that anonymous and unofficial channels dominate the Telegram space of popular channels in Ukraine.

Based on the analysis of the dataset obtained over three months of more than 500 channels and their own classifier, not only popular channels were identified, but also those that were in the ratings constantly or situationally, the average rating for different types of channels was calculated, the level of stability of their presence was determined; and the dynamics of channel rotation in weekly lists was also measured.

According to the results of the analysis, in the Telemetrio ratings (top 10 popular channels), the group of channels that were constantly present for 14 consecutive weeks included such channels as "Lachen Pyshe", "Nikolayevsky Vanek", "Realna Viyna", "Realny Kyiv", "Ukraine Seych", "Trukha Ukraine", and "Insider UA". In most cases, these were anonymous channels that do not have open information about the owner, editorial policy or verified sources of funding. In the Tgstat rating, "Lachen Pyshe", "Trukha", "Nikolayevsky Vanek", and the Anatoliy Shariy channels maintained their positions in terms of reach. The latter, like the channel "Mir Segodnya s Yuriy Podoliaka" (a regular participant in the rating by the number of subscribers), belong to the category of propaganda and openly broadcast anti-Ukrainian messages.

In both analyzed ratings, anonymous channels were mostly either stably present (more than 8 appearances in 14 weeks) or recorded weekly (100% presence). This indicates the audience's stable interest in content from unverified sources, which in the context of information warfare is a factor in the increased vulnerability of the information space. The presence of propaganda channels in the top ratings – as those that openly broadcast pro-Russian narratives – confirms that Telegram is actively used as a tool for disinformation and psychological influence.

The study paid particular attention to the dynamics of updating lists. An analysis of the rotation of channels in the ratings was conducted: the number of new participants that appeared in the top 10 each week was calculated. In the Telemetrio rating, new channels appeared only 6 times in 14 weeks, which indicates a fairly stable structure of participants. In Tgstat, the rating by reach turned out to be somewhat more dynamic – new channels were added 11 times, in the list by subscribers – 8 times. Low channel rotation may indicate the stability of interest in a limited range of sources, as well as a high level of trust or the habit of users to consume information from the same Telegram channels. At the same time, the appearance of "newcomers" in the rating by reach is likely a reaction to individual events or information bursts that were actively circulating in the media.

In general, the results of the study confirm that the Ukrainian Telegram environment functions as a segment with an increased concentration of information risks. The combination of anonymity, high popularity, lack of proper moderation, and stable presence of anti-Ukrainian channels creates conditions for manipulative influence on the minds of citizens. In this context, critical thinking, media literacy of users, and state policy in the field of digital security acquire special importance.

Further research should focus on deeper content analysis of messages, identification of network connections between channels, investigate into bot activity, and the impact of external events on the structure of Telegram's information field. This will allow for a comprehensive assessment of the platform's role in modern hybrid warfare and the development of effective strategies to counter information threats.

Declaration of generative artificial intelligence and technologies using artificial intelligence in the writing process.
During the preparation of this article, the author used ChatGPT to help summarize the results of the analysis of practical cases. The author of the article bears full responsibility for the content of such generalizations.

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