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Київський національний університет імені Тараса Шевченка  
Навчально-науковий інститут журналістики

**CURRENT ISSUES OF MASS COMMUNICATION**  
**АКТУАЛЬНІ ПИТАННЯ МАСОВОЇ КОМУНІКАЦІЇ**

**Issue 36**  
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## Current Issues of Mass Communication, Issue 36 (2024)

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**"Current issues of mass communication"** is a professional scientific publication of the Educational and Scientific Institute of Journalism, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv. The journal publishes original, completed contributions in the field of mass communication, reflecting current trends in this domain in Ukraine and the world, patterns, processes, structures, and forms of mass communication relations. Priority is given to the studies of mass communication trends in technological development, media, journalism, publishing, advertising, public relations, social informatics, document science, library science, etc., which is relevant for the Ukrainian and world audience.

Our journal has the following sections:

*Discussions* (contains scholarly and journalistic columns or comments of the editorial board, editor-in-chief, members of the editorial board regarding results of research that have not been reviewed but are of interest. These publications are not scientific articles).

*Review articles* (scientific literature reviews on a particular issue. Reviews are a kind of scientific article. Our journal publishes reviews that use the method of meta-analysis).

*Research articles* (with results of scientific research that correspond to the journal's profile, have been reviewed and approved for publication as scientific articles). Such article should have empirical data at its core.

*Interdisciplinary research* (peer-reviewed scientific articles that present original research results but go beyond the narrow profile of the journal, and their authors are scholars from other fields. However, such research articles should be at least partially related to mass communication).

*Reviews* (reviews on various scientific publications in the field of mass communication, including reviews on books, scientific articles, reviews of opponents on the dissertation).

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The journal is included in the "List of scientific professional publications of Ukraine, which may publish the results of dissertations for the degree of Doctor of Sciences, Candidate of Sciences and Doctor of Philosophy. Category "B".

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*Recommended for publishing by the Academic Council of the Educational and Scientific Institute of Journalism, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv (protocol 9, 11.12..2024).*

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All articles are "blindly" reviewed by independent experts appointed by the editorial board from among experts in the relevant field of research. The editor-in-chief makes the final decision to publish or reject the article, guided in his actions by the reviewers' conclusions. When submitting an article, authors may ask to exclude from the list of possible reviewers no more than two scholars or two higher education institutions.

The peer-review process can take up to 8 weeks, depending on reviewers' workload and complexity of the article topic. Finally, the editors inform the author about the experts' remarks and about the decision to accept the manuscript for publication or refuse to publish.

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## Актуальні питання масової комунікації, Випуск 36, 2024 р.

веб-сайт журналу: <https://cimc.knu.ua/index>

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«Актуальні питання масової комунікації» – фахове наукове видання Навчально-наукового інституту журналістики Київського національного університету імені Тараса Шевченка. Журнал публікує оригінальні, закінчені роботи за результатами досліджень із масової комунікації, що відображають сучасні тенденції розвитку галузі в Україні та світі, закономірності, процеси, структури та форми масовокомунікаційних відносин. Пріоритет надається актуальним для української та світової аудиторії дослідженням масовокомунікаційних трендів у розвитку технологій, медіа, журналістики, видавничої справи, реклами, зв'язків з громадськістю, соціальної інформатики, документознавства, бібліотекознавства тощо.

Наш журнал має такі рубрики:

*Дискусії та обговорення* (друк науково-публіцистичних виступів, позицій редакції, головного редактора, членів редколегії, результатів досліджень, які не пройшли рецензування, але становлять інтерес. Ці публікації не є науковими статтями).

*Огляди* (друк оглядів наукової літератури з того чи іншого питання. Огляди є видом наукової статті. У нашому журналі друкуються огляди, у яких використано метод мета-аналізу).

*Дослідницькі статті* (друк результатів наукових досліджень, що відповідають профілю журналу, пройшли рецензування і схвалені до друку як наукові статті).

*Міжdisciplinarni дослідження* (друк наукових статей, що пройшли рецензування, подають оригінальні результати досліджень, але виходять за межі вузького профілю журналу, а їхні автори є ученими з інших галузей. Проте такі наукові статті повинні бути хоч частково пов'язані з питаннями масової комунікації).

*Рецензії* (друк рецензій на різні наукові видання у галузі масової комунікації, включаючи рецензії на наукові статті, відгуки опонентів на дисертації).

*Аудиторія* журналу включає науковців, викладачів, студентів, професіоналів у галузі медіа та комунікацій, а також широке коло читачів, які цікавляться сучасними тенденціями розвитку комунікаційного простору.

Журнал включено до «Переліку наукових фахових видань України, в яких можуть публікуватися результати дисертаційних робіт на здобуття наукових ступенів доктора наук, кандидата наук і доктора філософії». Категорія «Б».

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Адреса редакції: «Актуальні питання масової комунікації», Навчально-науковий інститут журналістики КНУ імені Тараса Шевченка, вул. Юрія Іллєнка, 36/1, м. Київ, 04119, Україна.

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*Рекомендовано до друку вченого радою Навчально-наукового інституту журналістики Київського національного університету імені Тараса Шевченка (протокол № 9 від 11 грудня 2024 р.).*

*Усі права застережено. Посилання на матеріали видання під час їх цитування обов'язкові.*

**Актуальні питання масової комунікації** : науковий журнал / голов. ред. В. В. Різун; Навчально-науковий інститут журналістики КНУ імені Тараса Шевченка. Київ, 2024. Вип. 36. 82 с.

**Редакційна політика і публікаційна етика**

Редакція журналу дотримується визнаних у світовій науковій спільноті принципів організації публікаційної справи на засадах прозорості, відкритості та передової практики у сфері оприлюднення результатів досліджень, розроблених Міжнародним комітетом з етики наукових публікацій

(Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing. Редакційна політика зобов'язує працівників журналу та авторів наукових публікацій дотримуватися засадничих принципів публікаційної діяльності у сфері науки, що стосуються політики відкритого доступу, правил для редакторів та рецензентів, політики та процесу рецензування, конфлікту інтересів, наукової недоброочесності, політики плагіату, редакційної етики та етичних зобов'язань авторів, дотримання авторських прав.

### **Політика відкритого доступу**

Наш журнал визнає політику негайного відкритого доступу (Open Access Policy) до опублікованого контенту і підтримує принципи вільного поширення наукових даних задля загального сталого суспільного розвитку (CC-BY). Це означає, що всі статті, опубліковані в журналі, розміщаються на веб-сторінці Журналу безстроково і безкоштовно відразу після виходу чергового випуску. Також надруковані паперові примірники Журналу поширяються серед національних бібліотек і зберігаються в них. Повнотекстовий онлайн-доступ до наукових статей Журналу можна отримати, зайдовши в розділ “Архів”. Це відповідає визначенням відкритого доступу від Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI).

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Автори відповідальні за оригінальність поданих ними рукописів, які не повинні містити плагіату і не повинні бути опубліковані раніше в інших виданнях. Всі рукописи після надходження до журналу проходять перевірку на плагіат. Разом із рукописами статей автори надсилають супровідний лист, у якому (1) чітко вказують свою згоду на публікацію своєї статті у нашему журналі та його електронних версіях і (2) підтверджують, що стаття паралельно не була надіслана до інших журналів, а відомості, викладені в ній, не були раніше опубліковані.

Редакція журналу гарантує, що кожен рукопис розглядається неупереджено, незалежно від статі автора, його раси, національності, віросповідання, громадянства і т.п.

### **Політика рецензування**

Усі статті проходять процедуру “сліпого” рецензування незалежними експертами, яких признає Редколегія з числа фахівців у відповідній науковій галузі. Остаточне рішення щодо публікації чи відхилення статті приймає головний редактор, який керується у своїх діях висновками рецензентів. Подаючи статтю, автори можуть попросити виключити зі списку можливих рецензентів не більше двох вчених або двох закладів вищої освіти.

Процедура рецензування може тривати до 8 тижнів, залежно від завантаженості експертів та складності тематики статті. Редакція інформує автора про зауваження експертів та рішення про прийняття матеріалу до друку або відмову в публікації.

У разі позитивного рішення Редколегії, автор вносить відповідні правки та надсилає до редакції остаточний варіант матеріалу. При затверджені змісту номеру журналу редколегія керується датою надходження останнього варіанту статті.

Від потенційних рецензентів ми очікуємо дотримання принципів публікаційної етики, розуміння конфлікту інтересів, дотримання конфіденційності та своєчасності.

### **Публікаційна етика**

Рекомендуємо кожному рецензентові познайомитися з Етичним керівництвом для рецензентів, схваленим Міжнародним комітетом з етики наукових публікацій.

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Якщо рецензент не може бути об'єктивним в оцінці матеріалу через особисті, фінансові, професійні, політичні чи релігійні питання у ставленні до автора, він повинен відмовитися від рецензування і повідомити про це Редактора.

Рецензент може отримувати консультації від третіх осіб, але про це він має поставити до відома Редактора.

Не можна ділитися рукописами або обговорювати їх з будь-ким поза процесом рецензування.  
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Якщо з якихось причин рецензент не може завершити роботу над рецензією, етично буде запропонувати редакторові альтернативного рецензента.

Науковці, які бажають долучитися до числа рецензентів журналу «Актуальні питання масової комунікації», повинні мати науковий ступінь у відповідних галузях наук, належний досвід роботи та високу репутацію в академічному світі. Свої резюме можна надсилати до редакції журналу на e-mail: [office.cimc@knu.ua](mailto:office.cimc@knu.ua).

Більш детальну інформацію про журнал ви можете отримати за адресою <https://cimc.knu.ua/about>.

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## Current Issues of Mass Communication, Issue 36 (2024)

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REVIEW ARTICLES  
ОГЛЯДИ

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## Forming the Image of Ukrainian Theater in the 21st century

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### ABSTRACT

The article examines the process of forming the contemporary Ukrainian theater's image in the twenty-first century. The author analyzes the key aspects that influence the creation and establishment of the theater's image in the contemporary cultural context. The main thematic areas include theatrical experimentation, the use of modern technologies in productions, interaction with the audience, and the role of theater in shaping public consciousness. The article aims to reveal the unique features of contemporary Ukrainian theater and its impact on the cultural image of Ukraine in the twenty-first century. In addition, the article examines the impact of socio-cultural changes, political events, and globalization on the image of Ukrainian theater, focusing on how these factors affect the themes, style, and aesthetics of contemporary performances. The study covers aspects of theater art, from the creative process to interaction with the audience through various formats of performances and performances. Innovative approaches to theatrical art, including the use of modern media technologies, experimental methods of acting and innovative scenic solutions are highlighted. The article also analyzes the reactions of viewers and critics to innovative approaches in theater productions, as well as their reflection in the media and social networks. The article identifies the main trends and challenges that accompany the formation of the image of Ukrainian theater in the twenty-first century and considers the possibilities for further development and improvement of its art in the context of modern challenges and audience expectations.

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## АНОТАЦІЯ

Стаття присвячена дослідженню процесу формування іміджу сучасного українського театру у ХХІ столітті. Аналізуються ключові аспекти, які впливають на створення та утвердження образу театру в сучасному культурному контексті. До основних тематичних напрямків відносяться театральна експериментальність, використання сучасних технологій у постановках, взаємодія із глядачем, а також роль театрального мистецтва у формуванні громадської свідомості. Стаття спрямована на розкриття унікальних особливостей сучасного українського театрального мистецтва та його вплив на культурний образ України в ХХІ столітті. Крім того, розглядається вплив соціокультурних змін, політичних подій та глобалізації на формування іміджу українського театру, акцентуючи увагу на тому, як ці чинники впливають на тематику, стиль та естетику сучасних вистав. Дослідження охоплює аспекти театрального мистецтва, починаючи від творчого процесу та закінчуючи взаємодією з аудиторією через різноманітні формати вистав та перформансів. Висвітлюються інноваційні підходи до театрального мистецтва, включаючи використання сучасних медійних технологій, експериментальні методи акторської майстерності та новаторські сценографічні рішення. Аналізується також реакція глядачів та критиків на інноваційні підходи у театральних постановках, їхне відображення в ЗМІ та соціальних мережах. У результаті статті визначаються основні тенденції та виклики, які супроводжують формування іміджу українського театру у ХХІ столітті, а також розглядаються можливості подальшого розвитку та удосконалення його мистецтва в контексті сучасних викликів та очікувань глядачів.

**КЛЮЧОВІ СЛОВА:** імідж театру, сучасні технології у театрі, інновації в театральному процесі, глядацька реакція, розвиток театрального мистецтва.

## Introduction

*Relevance of the topic.* In the context of modern global transformations, the formation of the image of the modern Ukrainian theater acquires extreme relevance and importance, because now the theater is not only an artistic phenomenon, but also a key element of the country's cultural and social dynamics. In the context of rapid technological development and globalization, modern Ukrainian theater is at the intersection of traditions and innovations. The use of modern technologies in theatrical productions, experiments with forms and genres open up new perspectives for creative expression, interaction with the audience and solving modern socio-cultural problems. Ukrainian theater is an integral part of the nation's cultural identity. The modern implementation of theatrical art reflects and defines the key values and trends of Ukrainian society, contributing to the formation of a collective cultural image. The relevance of this topic is confirmed by the increase in theater attendance, which indicates the rise of theater's popularity. As noted by the National Union of Theater Actors of Ukraine, the number of spectators definitely increased in 2023, as theaters got used to new conditions, and spectators need emotions and impressions. Theaters became available before the concert activities of pop artists resumed, so during this temporary pause the audience chose the theater and stayed there.

Ukraine has become the venue for an increasing number of theater festivals, such as "Festival of Modern Drama", "Shakespeare Festival", "GogolFest", etc. These events attract the attention of not only national, but also international audiences and critics, which contributes to the formation of a positive image of Ukrainian theater on the world stage. Ukrainian theater productions receive international awards and recognition at various European festivals, which testifies to the high level of professionalism and creativity of Ukrainian theater artists. In particular, at the European theater festival Radar OST (an annual theater festival that takes place in Berlin) – The Theater of Drama and Comedy on the Left Bank of the Dnipro together with the Deutsches Theater (Berlin) presented the play "Ha\*l\*t" for the first time. This confirms the importance of theater as an important element of cultural diplomacy and enhances its image around the world.

The growing importance of the theater's interaction with the audience and the use of innovative approaches in performances actualizes the question of the role and influence of theater art on public consciousness and critical thinking. Modern Ukrainian theater becomes not only a place of entertainment, but also an important tool for highlighting social, political, and cultural issues. The study and reflection of the image of the Ukrainian theater in the 21st century becomes a necessity, as it highlights the transformations in the field of art, the influence of national culture in the global context and contributes to the understanding of the theater's role in the formation of the modern image of Ukraine.

*Statement of the problem.* The formulation of the problem is determined by a set of key issues arising in connection with the transformation and development of theatrical art in the modern Ukrainian cultural context. There is a fundamental need to identify the main trends affecting the image of modern Ukrainian theater. Uncovering the factors that determine this image, including the influence of technology, socio-cultural changes, political aspects, innovations in the creative process, and interaction with the viewer, is a key task.

In addition, it is important to investigate the interaction of modern Ukrainian theater with the audience and the reaction of the audience to innovative approaches. This is an analysis of the role of social media, global trends in the entertainment industry, and the impact of digital technologies on the theatrical process. The article should solve the task of determining the influence of modern Ukrainian theater on the formation of the cultural image of Ukraine in the world. How theater highlights national characteristics, expresses and perceives social and political ideas, and how its image affects international perception and attracts the attention of audience abroad.

*The purpose of this study* is to investigate the processes and factors that influence the creation and development of the modern image of the Ukrainian theater in the context of socio-cultural changes of the 21st century. The study is aimed at analyzing the trends, challenges and opportunities that shape the perception of Ukrainian theater both at the national and international levels. Besides, the research aims to identify key elements contributing to a positive image and to develop recommendations for further strengthening the position of Ukrainian theater in the world cultural space.

In addition, the mission of the study is to reveal the impact of theatrical art on public consciousness, cultural identity, and the development of critical thinking in Ukrainian society. The goal of this study consists of three components:

- (1) To understand the role of theater in the modern world;
- (2) To formulate recommendations for the further development of the theater's image;
- (3) To increase the influence of Ukrainian theatrical art as an important factor in cultural diplomacy.

## **Method**

Any period in the history of the theater reflected the spirit of the era, changing and improving together with society. Today, the 21st century theater interacts and actively intervenes in the realities of life, an understanding of facts and the formation of perspectives. The very paradigm of theater as a pure form has significantly changed under the influence of modern visual art, philosophical discourses, digital technologies, and mass media (Teatralna laboratoria. Information). Contemporary visual art brings new aesthetic forms and experimental approaches to set design and costumes, while philosophical discourses, particularly postmodernism, contribute to the emergence of reflective and innovative theatrical productions that question traditional narratives. Digital technologies open up new opportunities for the use of multimedia elements, virtual reality, and interactive platforms, creating new forms of artistic expression. Mass media and social media make theater more accessible and influence ways of interacting with the audience, expanding the boundaries of the traditional theater space. In general, these factors contribute to the dynamic evolution of theater, which reflects and adapts to the modern cultural and technological context. In addition, modern Ukrainian theater is experiencing a change of theatrical generations. This means that the

leaders of the theater process are actively changing, and therefore, the strategies for the development of theaters are changing, too (7 tendentsiy u teatralniy haluzi Ukrayny).

## Results

In addition, scientific research is of great importance. Features of theater management are reflected in the works of the following authors: I. Bezgin, S. Bozhuk, A. Borisov, L. Kovalik, N. Fedotova; the problematic of the existence of theatrical art as a social artistic production in the era of industrial dominance was investigated by S. Bezklubenko. The stages of formation of modern domestic theaters are reflected in the works of M. Voronoi, S. Vasylieva, I. Vivsyana, N. Kravets; features of theater management based on the experience of foreign countries were studied by S. Langley, F. Colbert, J. K. Crimmins, T. R. Leavens, H. Olek; multimedia technologies and their use in modern theater were explored in the works of A. H. Reiss, U. Reinhard, and N. Reva; activities of independent theaters abroad were analyzed by M. Reason, S. Johnson, and J. Thomson.

Modern theater is not only stage performances and acting skills, but also a set of images that affects the perception of the audience and forms the cultural identity of the nation. It is in the context of the image of the theater that the key vectors of its development are revealed: transformation of the stage space, interaction with the audience, actualization of themes and ideas of images that become symbols of the era. Artists of modern Ukrainian theater use not only words and acting, but also the latest technologies to create extraordinary impressions and immerse the audience in the depths of artistic self-expression.

The introduction of modern technologies into the theatrical process has become an integral aspect of the image of the modern Ukrainian theater of the 21st century. As M. Causey, the author of the study "Theatre and Performance in Digital Culture" reminds us, the achievements of modern technologies – cyberspace or virtual reality – do not contain anything that was not already presented in the theater; it has always been a virtual space where the voluntary suspension of disbelief created the illusion of reality (Causey, 2006, p.15). Through the integration of multimedia elements such as projections, soundscapes and lighting effects, the theater has become more exciting and attractive to the audience. These technological advances have also allowed the reach of theatrical performances to expand, with live broadcasts and online performances becoming increasingly popular. The introduction of modern technologies allowed the Ukrainian theater to keep up with the changes of the times, attracting a more diverse audience and creating a more dynamic theatrical landscape. One of the most noticeable aspects of modern technology in the theater is the use of visual effects. Projection technologies, video mapping and animation have become common tools for creating impressive stage images. Theater "DAH", under the leadership of Vlad Troitskyi, actively uses video projections and interactive screens in its performances, which allows the audience to immerse themselves in new realities.

The image of modern Ukrainian theater also shapes its ability to respond to socio-cultural changes in Ukraine. As the country undergoes significant military interventions and transformations, the theater has become a crucial platform for reflection and commentary on these changes. Ukrainian theater has been able to address issues such as political corruption, social inequality, and cultural identity, providing space for dialogue and critical thinking. Dealing with these urgent problems, the theater became a vital component of the cultural landscape of Ukraine, forming the cultural image of the country in the 21st century. It is worth recalling the performance "Green Corridors" based on Natalka Vorozhbyt's play, directed by Maksym Golenko. This is a joint project of the Munich Theater "Kamerspiele", commissioned by which the text was written, and the Kyiv Theater on the Podil. The premiere of "Green corridors" in Munich (dir. Jan-Christoph Gockel) was shown on April 14, 2023. The play tells the stories of four Ukrainian women from Kharkiv, Chernihiv, Bucha, and Kyiv who left for Europe through the "green corridors". In addition, we must mention the play "Bread Truce" based on the play by Serhiy Zhadan, directed by Stas Zhyrkov, at the Theater of Drama and Comedy on the Left Bank of the Dnipro. This is a play that

reflects the historical realities of the situation in Ukraine against the background of the war and tells about the lives of people from the “gray zone” in the summer of 2014.

Innovations in the theatrical process also played a significant role in shaping the image of modern Ukrainian theater. The introduction of new forms of storytelling, such as immersive theater and specialized performances, challenged traditional theatrical conventions, resulting in a more diverse and experimental theater landscape. It is worth recalling the one announced in Ukraine at the conference at the Les Kurbas Center, a report by the French researcher B. Picon-Valin (Picon-Valin, 2010) “Video equipment in the theater: history and relevance”, where the problem of modern theater went beyond traditional boundaries due to digital technologies. Thanks to the work of the video operator, the theater’s desire to expand its boundaries is embodied in the work of Ukrainian director Andrii Zholdak, who trained at the Kastorf Theater. However, Zholdak’s camera, which follows the actor, does not work in real time. In fact, the viewer sees previously filmed events. However, a movie filmed as a reality becomes an organic continuation of a theatrical action.

There are dozens, if not hundreds, of examples of using video in the theater not for additional illustration, but for solving unique artistic tasks. However, we are witnessing a real revolution with the expansion of digital media with the arrival of 3D technologies in the theater. The premiere of the innovative performative play “Kostrubisms. Kumanovsky” of the “Garmyder” theater. The performance was created at the intersection of genres using the graphic works and texts of the artist Mykola Kumanovsky from his “Book of Kostrubisms” and poems from the collection “Trace in the Track”. The performance synthesized a live physical theater and the artist’s graphics animated on a 3D stage (“Costrubisms. Kumanovsky” – is a landmark event in art life...).

These innovations not only attracted a younger and more diverse audience, but also led to a more active involvement in the theatrical process. Audience response has been overwhelmingly positive, indicating a growing appetite for new and complex forms of theatrical expression. The ability of the theater to accept these innovations contributed to the development of theatrical art in the country, creating a brighter and more dynamic cultural landscape.

The image in the modern theater environment plays an important role and has a meaning that affects various aspects of theatrical activity. Visual representation and perception are an integral part of any art form, and theater is no exception. Let’s consider some aspects of the role and importance of the image in the modern theater environment.

First of all, the image in the theater helps to attract and retain the audience. The appearance of the theater hall, actors’ costumes, scenery, posters and other elements decide whether people will be interested in attending performances. If the theater employs a team of professionals who are well versed in trends and are able to create a memorable and attractive appearance, the image of the theater will be successful, which will make it attractive to the audience.

The second aspect of the role and importance of the image in the modern theater environment concerns the repertoire itself and the program of performances. When deciding which plays to put on, the theater management should combine all possibilities to draw attention to themselves and distinguish themselves within the decorative sphere. Along with classic works, the theater should be able to solve important issues reflected in art and modern trends, attracting the younger generation of viewers.

The third aspect tells about the role and importance of image in the modern theater environment for actors and other theater workers. Highly professional actors, choreographers, directors and other members of the theater team try to create their own image, which complements their talent, uniqueness and professionalism. A player’s image can be redefined as a result of a play or film, both artistic and commercial, because the very image of the player affects his career and success in society.

In addition, it is worth noting that another important aspect of the image formation of the theater is the encouragement of the audience to prepare for the performance. As the former director and artistic director of the Kyiv Academic Theater of Drama and Comedy on the Left Bank of the Dnipro, Stas Zhyrkov, emphasized,

when you go to the cinema, the majority of the audience still tries to read something about the film, but you can't say the same about the theater. Unfortunately, we still do not have such a tradition of preparing for a performance. I would like people to prepare for performances and understand which performance they are going to, which director and which theater it is in general, because each theater has its own concept. General knowledge of the play you are going to greatly facilitates the process of perceiving the story – it is easier for you to read and understand the meanings embedded in the play. (Radzihovska, O. *Yak zrozumity suchasnyi teatr?*)

In conclusion, the role of image in the modern theater environment is extremely important. The image of the theater determines its appeal to the audience and their desire to attend performances. Also, the image affects the choice of repertoire and programs presented in theaters. Equally important, the image of players and members of the theater team makes a significant contribution to their success and career. Therefore, the path to the discovery and creation of new images and durable ideas of the theater industry will pass through the image of the actor, the theater and his partner in the production (spectator).

Ukrainian researchers D. Vasylenko, P. V. Skryl, and V. D. Titova especially emphasize work with the viewer:

Cultural and leisure activity is perceived as the process of creating conditions for motivational choice by the individual for certain activity, which is determined by his needs and interests. With the development of market relations, cultural, and leisure activities have come close to marketing technologies, the basis of which is the problem of finding and meeting the needs of individual citizens or public groups. The issue of improving the system of promoting theater services in the form of marketing and PR communications is gaining particular relevance, which makes it possible to focus the available limited resources of organizations on the main strategic directions of gaining target market segments under conditions of increased competition. At the same time, the task of promoting the theatrical product comes to the fore, which today is one of the most promising types of business activity for institutions in the theater sector among those that strive to remain on the socio-cultural market" (Vasylenko et al., 2022).

The influence of the image on the perception of the audience in the theater is of great importance for the success of the performance and the theater itself as a whole. The image includes all visual elements and associations that are created in the process of human perception of a work of art. It can be actors' costumes, scenery on the stage, lighting, make-up, architecture of theater buildings, advertising materials, and many other elements that affect the audience's perception. The image of the performance has the ability to immediately attract audience attention and create a first impression. For example, when a spectator enters a theater for the first time, he immediately imagines what he will see on the stage, as part of what he has seen before and the impression he has created. This will help hold attention of the viewers on the farthest rows. Thus, it is important that the image of the performance corresponds to its content, atmosphere, and ideas that the author or director wants to express.

Tools of image formation in the Ukrainian theater are important elements of the creative process. They help create a special atmosphere, convey emotions, and feelings to the audience. In this article, we will consider some of the main tools used in Ukrainian theater to create an image, as well as provide examples of their use.

One of the most common tools of image formation in the Ukrainian theater is a costume. Costumes help actors embody the image of their character, reveal their character, formation, and development during the performance, and also have a significant impact on the audience's perception. They help create an image of a character, support his character and emotional state, which makes him more relevant and convincing. For example, the performance "Red Ruta" in the Maria Zankovetska Lviv Academic Theater uses costumes that reflect the era in which the play takes place. Namely, it transports us to the early 20th century – the actors wear costumes and hats characteristic of this period.

Another tool is makeup. Makeup allows actors to change their faces and create the illusion of different characters. It helps to show the age, health, emotional state, and other aspects of the character. For example, in the play "Flowers for Algernon" by the Kyiv Wild Theater, make-up is used to create a changed view of the main character on other characters with whom he comes in contact.

Scenography is the next tool for image formation in Ukrainian theater. The scenery also affects the audience's perception, because it creates atmosphere and visual depth, recreates time and space frames, creating the atmosphere and mood of the performance. They can also be symbolic and enhance the depth of the plot, add a special sound to the play, adjust the viewer to a certain way of perceiving events, and emphasize the mood of the play and the role of the characters. For example, the play "Family Album" in the Kyiv Theater of Drama and Comedy on the Left Bank of the Dnipro has a scenography that reflects the homely comfort of an apartment in the 90s, despite the different periods of that time.

Music and sound design are also important components of image formation in Ukrainian theater. They help create the right mood and convey emotions to the audience. For example, the melodies in the play "Kitsyun" of the Kyiv Wild Theater are used to create the atmosphere of the place in which the action of the play takes place, namely – Irish songs with the help of authentic instruments – for example – bagpipes.

Light is also one of the tools in the formation of image and expressiveness in Ukrainian theater. Its role goes far beyond the simple function of lighting the scene; it creates an atmosphere, emphasizes the emotional states of characters, defines spatial boundaries and even symbolically interprets dramaturgical concepts. Lighting design in Ukrainian theater often serves as a means of expressing the emotional state of the characters and the general atmosphere of the play. In addition, light allows directors and designers to play with space, highlighting or hiding certain elements of the scene. In addition, the British researcher K. Graham introduces the concept of "scenographic light" into scientific circulation to denote the ability of lighting in a stage production to actively inscribe dramatic meaning in space and time – "light that independently affects the meaning in the production and performs three basic functions that detail its dramatic, and not only aesthetic effectiveness" (Graham, 2016).

Finally, acting is the most important tool for image formation in Ukrainian theater. Actors, using their voice, gesture, emotions, and other physical means, embody the role of the character, convey his character and feelings. For example, in the play "Lonely Sunset" of the Kyiv Theater of Drama and Comedy on the Left Bank of the Dnipro, the actor uses voice effects and special gestures to show the inner conflict of the character.

In general, the influence of the image on the audience's perception in the theater is extremely important and helps to create a full and deep aesthetic and emotional quality of the performance. Visual elements – costumes, scenery, lighting, and special effects – play an important role in creating the atmosphere, convincingness and emotional saturation of the audience's perception, which gives the play brightness and success. Ukrainian theater is constantly changing and adapting to modern trends in image formation in order to remain interesting and relevant for the audience. In addition to traditional elements and techniques such as costumes, sets, and lighting, Ukrainian theaters combine new trends and experiment with different aspects of image to create unique and attractive performances.

Also, in Ukrainian theater there is a tendency to combine different genres and styles, which open up new opportunities for image formation. For example, combining traditional theatrical forms with elements of modern dance and music can create a unique and exciting image that will attract the audience's attention of the.

On the example of the theatrical productions of the Ukrainian actors' association "Dakh Daughters", you can see the modern trends of image formation in the Ukrainian theater. "Dakh Daughters" is a Ukrainian theater and music group that performs in the genres of "freak cabaret" and theatrical performance, the members of the group use 15 musical instruments (Dokumentalnyi film pro hurt Dakh Daughters...).

In addition, Ukrainian theaters actively implement modern trends in the choice of topics and ideologies for image formation. They pay attention to current topics of modern society, such as social injustice, environmental problems, political crises, etc., and try to reflect these topics on stage. For example, plays about the war in the east of Ukraine, social problems of youth, and historical events that have an actual connection with modern times are becoming more and more popular among viewers.

In general, the current trends in image formation in Ukrainian theater reflect the variety of styles, methods and themes used to create unique and exciting performances. Ukrainian theaters continue to experiment and develop new ideas to create interesting and relevant performances that leave an unforgettable impression on the audience.

Therefore, the tools of image formation in the Ukrainian theater are an important component of every performance. Costumes, make-up, set design, music, lighting, and acting work together to create a special atmosphere and convey the story. Using these tools, the theater can captivate the audience, draw their attention and force them to immerse themselves in the world of theatrical magic.

## **Conclusions**

Ukrainian theater of the 21st century actively adapts to modern challenges and changes in the cultural environment. The deep identity and creativity of theater groups contribute to the formation of a unique image and attract the attention of both Ukraine's and international audiences.

The development of Ukrainian theater in the 21st century is taking place in the conditions of significant socio-political changes, and important factors of this process are the gaining of independence of Ukraine, strengthening of national self-awareness and integration into the global cultural space. Key figures and events that influenced the development of the theater also contributed to the formation of its modern image.

In addition, artistic innovations and modern trends play a key role in attracting new audiences and forming a positive perception of the theater. The use of new technologies, experimental forms and innovative approaches in productions make Ukrainian theater more modern and competitive in the international arena.

In addition, the positioning and promotion of the Ukrainian theater as a brand are important components of its image formation. The use of traditional, social media, and other communication channels are effective tools for popularizing the theater and drawing attention to its activities. Thus, the research findings confirm that the formation of the image of the Ukrainian theater of the 21st century depends on many factors, including the historical context, socio-cultural conditions, artistic innovations, international contacts, promotion strategies and audience perception. Understanding these processes and effective use of the acquired knowledge will help strengthen the position of Ukrainian theater in the world cultural space and contribute to its further development.

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*Translation of the article into Ukrainian - go to <https://cimc.knu.ua/supplements>*

RESEARCH ARTICLES  
ДОСЛІДНИЦЬКІ СТАТТІ

## Play the News and Level up: transforming journalism through experience design

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### ABSTRACT

The study examines the integration of experience design principles within journalism, particularly in addressing complex socio-political issues. The primary objective of this study is to uncover how experience design can transform traditional journalistic practices to enhance audience engagement and awareness. A qualitative content analysis of media pieces exemplifying successful integration of gamification and experience design was conducted. The findings reveal that elements, such as interactive charts and maps, gamified reports and news games, not only improve the understanding of complex topics but also evoke emotional responses, turning data into personal narratives. The significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to the development of new approaches in journalism that meet the demands of modern media audiences. The conclusions affirm the importance of integrating experience design principles into journalism to foster a more informed and active public.

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## АНОТАЦІЯ

У дослідженні здійснюється аналіз інтеграції принципів дизайну вражень у журналістику, з особливим акцентом на журналістські матеріали на складні соціально-політичні теми. Основною метою цього дослідження є виявлення механізмів, за допомогою яких впровадження елементів дизайну вражень може суттєво трансформувати традиційні практики журналістики, підвищуючи рівень залученості та усвідомленості аудиторії. У контексті сучасного інформаційного середовища, яке постійно змінюється під впливом цифрових технологій, медіа зазнають зростаючої потреби у впровадженні більш інтерактивних підходів до подачі новин. Для досягнення вказаної мети було проведено якісний контент-аналіз медіа-матеріалів, які ілюструють успішну інтеграцію дизайну вражень, переважно через ігрові елементи. Методологія включала в себе тематичний та порівняльний аналіз, що дозволило виявити найкращі практики та повторювані теми у використанні інтерактивних графіків, карт, гейміфікованих репортажів і новинних ігор. Результати дослідження свідчать про те, що використання таких елементів не лише підвищує розуміння складних тем, але також викликає емоційний відгук у користувачів, перетворюючи сприйняття даних у персоналізовані наративи. Значення цього дослідження полягає в його потенціалі сприяти розвитку нових підходів у журналістиці, які відповідатимуть сучасним вимогам та очікуванням аудиторії. Висновки підтверджують важливість інтеграції принципів дизайну вражень у журналістську практику, що сприяє формуванню більш усвідомленої та проактивної аудиторії, готової активно брати участь у обговореннях та вирішенні соціальних питань.

**КЛЮЧОВІ СЛОВА:** дизайн вражень, гейміфікація, журналістика, соціально-політичні питання, інтерактивні медіа.

## Introduction

The relevance of experience design in journalism cannot be overstated in today's digital and highly interactive media landscape. With the overwhelming influx of information available to consumers through various channels, traditional journalism faces a significant challenge: how to capture and retain audience attention. In this context, the experience economy provides a framework for understanding how to create engaging narratives that resonate with readers on a personal level. As audiences become more discerning about their media consumption, the demand for immersive and interactive experiences has surged, forcing journalists to rethink how they present information.

The experience economy, as articulated by Pine and Gilmore (2011), posits that experiences themselves are a form of economic value, transcending mere goods and services. This notion is particularly relevant for journalism, which inherently seeks to tell stories and communicate truths about the world. By leveraging the principles of experience design, journalists can create narratives that go beyond information delivery, crafting experiences that evoke emotions, stimulate engagement, and encourage critical thinking.

Experience design encompasses a variety of elements, including narrative structure, interactive components, and emotional resonance. These elements are crucial in shaping how audiences perceive and engage with journalistic content. For example, interactive features such as polls, quizzes, or multimedia elements can enhance user engagement, allowing audiences to participate in the narrative actively. Additionally, emotional storytelling—where journalists evoke empathy through personal stories or compelling visuals—can lead to a stronger connection between the audience and the subject matter.

The significance of experience design becomes even more pronounced when addressing socio-political issues. These topics often require nuanced understanding and engagement, which can be challenging to achieve through traditional reporting formats. Experience design can serve as a bridge, facilitating deeper engagement with complex issues by making them more accessible and relatable to audiences. As journalism grapples with issues like misinformation, audience apathy,

and the erosion of trust, employing experience design can be a powerful strategy for reinvigorating public interest and fostering informed citizenry.

Furthermore, in an age where media consumers increasingly rely on digital platforms, the ability to create captivating experiences is paramount. Traditional news articles may fall flat in a digital environment filled with competing narratives and multimedia content. Therefore, integrating experience design into journalistic practices is not just a creative endeavor but a necessity for survival in a competitive media landscape. This relevance is underscored by the growing body of research emphasizing the importance of engagement and emotional connection in effective communication, particularly in journalism.

The literature surrounding experience economy and experience design is extensive, with numerous scholars contributing valuable insights into how these concepts can be applied in various contexts. This review synthesizes key theoretical frameworks, empirical studies, and practical applications relevant to the integration of experience design in journalistic materials.

Pine and Gilmore (2011) provide a foundational understanding of the experience economy, outlining its significance in creating value through memorable experiences rather than traditional goods and services. They argue that businesses, including media organizations, must evolve to meet the changing expectations of consumers who seek more than just information; they desire engaging experiences that resonate emotionally. This shift highlights the necessity for journalists to adopt experience design principles in their work to enhance audience engagement and foster a deeper understanding of the issues at hand.

Roszman and Duerden (2019) delve into the mechanics of experience design, emphasizing the importance of sensory engagement, emotional resonance, and interactive elements in crafting meaningful experiences. They argue that journalism inherently involves storytelling, and by integrating experience design, journalists can create narratives that captivate audiences and facilitate emotional connections. This is particularly relevant when reporting on complex socio-political issues that may seem distant or abstract to audiences. The authors outline various stages in the experience design process, from understanding audience needs to evaluating the effectiveness of the created experience.

In their book, Roszman and Duerden (2019) categorize experiences into five distinct types: prosaic, mindful, memorable, meaningful, and transformational. Each type is characterized by its essential trait and five properties that shape its spatio-temporal framework:

- **Prosaic Experiences:** these are everyday interactions that require little cognitive effort. For instance, a standard news article may present information without engaging readers emotionally, leading to a passive reception of content. Designers of media can enhance prosaic experiences by integrating elements that provoke thought and engagement, steering readers towards more mindful interactions.
- **Mindful Experiences:** mindful experiences arise when users are prompted to switch from automatic to deliberate thinking. This transition is crucial for journalism, as it can encourage readers to engage critically with content, such as through interactive features or thought-provoking narratives.
- **Memorable Experiences:** these experiences are marked by emotional resonance. Journalistic materials that incorporate vivid storytelling, visuals, and personal accounts can create memorable moments that linger in the audience's memory. Roszman and Duerden emphasize the importance of emotions in shaping lasting impressions, underscoring the potential for media to evoke strong feelings in readers.
- **Meaningful Experiences:** this category encompasses experiences that provide significant insights or personal growth. In journalism, the ability to connect with readers on a deeper level can result in a transformative understanding of complex issues. For example, investigative pieces that uncover societal injustices can prompt audiences to reconsider their perspectives and engage with the subject matter more profoundly.
- **Transformational Experiences:** according to Roszman and Duerden, transformational experiences lead to substantial personal change. Journalism that effectively uses experience design can

facilitate such transformations by not only informing audiences but also motivating them to take action or change their beliefs. This can be particularly potent in pieces addressing social issues, where the narrative can inspire activism or a shift in public opinion.

Burickson et al. (2023) advocate for a participatory approach to experience design, wherein audiences are invited to engage with content actively. This perspective is crucial in the context of journalism, where fostering audience participation can lead to more profound engagement with the content. By allowing readers to contribute their perspectives or experiences, journalists can create a more dynamic and inclusive narrative that resonates on a personal level. This aligns with the broader trend towards participatory journalism, where audience involvement is seen as a means to enhance both credibility and engagement.

The emotional component of experience design is pivotal in shaping audience perceptions and engagement. Newbery and Farnham (2013) emphasize that emotionally charged experiences are more likely to leave a lasting impression on audiences, leading to greater retention and understanding. They argue that effective storytelling in journalism must evoke emotions, whether through compelling visuals, personal narratives, or relatable characters. This is particularly crucial when addressing socio-political issues, where emotional engagement can prompt audiences to take action or reflect critically on the subject matter.

Thompson (2017) further explores the significance of emotional resonance in media consumption, highlighting the challenges posed by distractions in the digital age. He suggests that media must design experiences that hold attention and foster emotional connections, particularly in an environment saturated with competing narratives. This requires a departure from traditional reporting styles and an embrace of innovative techniques that engage audiences actively. The integration of multimedia elements, interactive features, and immersive storytelling can enhance emotional engagement, making complex issues more relatable and impactful.

One of the most promising avenues for enhancing experience design in journalism is through gamification. This involves incorporating game-like elements into non-gaming contexts, thereby transforming the way audiences interact with content (Deterding, Dixon, Khaled, & Nacke, 2011). Research indicates that gamification can significantly enhance user engagement, as it encourages participation through rewards, challenges, and interactive experiences.

For instance, studies have shown that incorporating quizzes, polls, and interactive storytelling elements can lead to increased retention of information and a more profound understanding of complex issues (Deterding, Dixon, Khaled, & Nacke, 2011). Gamification taps into intrinsic motivations, making the learning process enjoyable and engaging. This is particularly relevant for socio-political journalism, where the stakes are high, and fostering understanding and engagement is essential for informed citizenship.

The integration of experience design principles into journalistic practices has far-reaching implications for the industry. As media organizations navigate the challenges posed by digital transformation, audience fragmentation, and declining trust, employing experience design can serve as a strategic advantage. By prioritizing engagement and emotional connection, journalists can cultivate a loyal readership and contribute to a more informed public discourse.

The literature suggests that effective experience design is not merely a trend but a necessary evolution in journalistic practice. As audiences increasingly seek interactive and immersive experiences, journalists must adapt their approaches to meet these expectations. This includes rethinking narrative structures, leveraging multimedia content, and embracing audience participation as a core element of storytelling.

The integration of experience economy and experience design in journalism presents a compelling opportunity for enhancing audience engagement and understanding, particularly in the realm of socio-political issues. By drawing on established frameworks and best practices, journalists can create impactful narratives that resonate with audiences, fostering informed citizenship and encouraging critical engagement with the issues that shape our world.

The primary purpose of this article is to explore the integration of experience design principles within journalistic materials, particularly those addressing complex socio-political issues. Given the pressing need for journalism to engage and inform audiences effectively in a landscape increasingly dominated by digital media, this study aims to highlight how experience design can transform traditional journalistic practices.

In detail, the objectives of this study are as follows:

- Examining the role of experience design: to investigate how experience design can be seamlessly integrated into journalistic practices, facilitating greater audience engagement and comprehension. This is crucial in a time when media consumers demand more than passive consumption; they seek immersive experiences that resonate with their emotions and understanding.
- Analyzing media content: to conduct a critical analysis of a selection of journalistic pieces that exemplify effective experience design. By focusing on how these items utilize gamification and interactive elements, the study aims to reveal patterns and best practices that can serve as models for future journalistic endeavors.
- Identifying best practices: to provide actionable recommendations for journalists and media organizations on implementing experience design principles in their work. This will help enhance the impact of narratives that address complex socio-political issues, fostering a more informed public and promoting civic engagement.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to the ongoing discourse about the future of journalism. As traditional news formats struggle to compete with the fast-paced and engaging nature of digital content, integrating experience design principles offers a pathway for revitalizing audience interest and promoting a deeper understanding of pressing societal issues.

This study seeks to address the following research questions, which are critical for guiding the analysis and informing the conclusions drawn:

1. How does the integration of experience design influence reader engagement with socio-political journalism? This question investigates the direct impact of experience design on audience interaction and retention of information, particularly in contexts that require deeper understanding.
2. What specific elements of experience design contribute to more effective communication of complex socio-political issues? This question aims to identify the particular aspects of experience design – such as interactivity, emotional engagement, and gamification – that enhance the delivery and impact of journalistic content.
3. What roles do gamification and interactive elements play in enhancing audience experiences with journalistic materials? This question focuses on the effectiveness of these specific design techniques in fostering deeper engagement and understanding, especially when addressing challenging socio-political topics.

Based on the literature reviewed and the objectives outlined, the following hypotheses are proposed for this study:

H1: Journalistic materials that employ experience design principles will result in higher audience engagement compared to traditional formats. This hypothesis posits that experience design enhances the overall impact of journalistic content, leading to more active participation from readers.

H2: The use of gamification and interactive elements in journalistic content will lead to a stronger emotional connection with audiences, thereby increasing retention and understanding of socio-political issues. This hypothesis suggests that these design strategies can effectively bridge the gap between information and emotional engagement.

H3: There will be a positive correlation between the complexity of socio-political topics and the effectiveness of experience design elements in enhancing audience engagement. This hypothesis posits that as the complexity of the issues increases, the necessity for robust experience design to facilitate audience understanding also rises.

## Method

To investigate the integration of experience design in journalistic materials focused on socio-political issues, a systematic approach was employed. This study involved the selection and analysis of 25 diverse media pieces that exemplify various aspects of experience design. The process began with a comprehensive review of available journalism that addresses complex socio-political topics through innovative presentation techniques. The selected pieces were chosen based on their notable use of experience design elements such as interactivity, gamification, and emotional engagement.

The qualitative content analysis approach was chosen for this study as it allows for an in-depth examination of the selected journalistic materials. This methodology is particularly effective for understanding the nuances of experience design and its impact on audience engagement. The following techniques were utilized in the analysis:

- Thematic analysis was employed to identify and analyze recurring themes related to experience design across the selected media materials. This involved coding the content for key elements such as interactivity, emotional appeal, and narrative techniques.
- Comparative analysis was conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of experience design elements across different pieces. This allowed for the identification of best practices and the potential correlation between design choices and audience engagement outcomes.
- Case study approach - each of the 25 media pieces was treated as a case study, providing a comprehensive examination of how experience design principles were applied. This approach facilitated a detailed understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of each piece in terms of engaging audiences.

The 25 selected media materials encompass a variety of formats, including interactive articles, multimedia presentations, and data-driven storytelling. Each piece addresses significant socio-political issues, such as climate change, immigration, racial inequality, and political corruption.

Key characteristics of the chosen media include:

- The selected pieces cover a broad spectrum of socio-political challenges, highlighting their complexity and the need for engaging communication strategies.
- Each media piece incorporates various experience design elements aimed at enhancing user experience. For instance, many utilize interactive graphics, quizzes, and multimedia storytelling techniques that invite audience participation and foster emotional engagement.
- Several of the selected pieces emphasize emotional storytelling, using personal narratives and compelling visuals to draw audiences into the issues at hand. This approach not only informs but also inspires action and reflection among readers.
- Most media pieces employ gamification techniques, such as interactive quizzes and challenges, to engage audiences more deeply. This aspect is particularly relevant for making complex socio-political topics accessible and relatable.

The analysis of these media materials will shed light on how experience design can transform traditional journalism into a more interactive and engaging practice that resonates with audiences.

## Results

The analysis of the 25 selected media materials reveals significant patterns in the application of experience design principles in journalism, particularly regarding socio-political topics. These patterns illustrate how innovative presentation techniques enhance audience engagement and understanding. Here are the key findings from the analysis:

- The selected media materials demonstrate a range of formats, including interactive articles, multimedia presentations, and data-driven stories. Each format offers unique advantages in engaging audiences. For example, interactive pieces often encourage reader participation through quizzes or interactive maps, effectively engaging users into the narrative. In contrast, data-driven stories utilize visualizations to present complex information in an accessible manner, making them more digestible for audiences.

- A notable pattern across many of the analyzed materials is the incorporation of interactive design elements. For instance, the SnowFall (Branch, 2012) project by The New York Times utilizes scrolling narratives combined with interactive maps and videos, allowing readers to explore the story dynamically. This approach not only captures attention but also facilitates a deeper understanding of the geographical and emotional contexts of the reported events. Similarly, Coronavirus in the US (2021) integrates real-time data visualizations, enabling readers to interact with statistics and trends relevant to their locations, thus personalizing the experience.

- Emotional engagement emerges as a critical factor in several pieces. The analysis reveals that stories that evoke empathy or strong emotional responses tend to resonate more with audiences. For example, Death in Syria (Yourish, Lai, & Watkins, 2015) utilizes personal accounts and powerful imagery to convey the human cost of conflict. By presenting the stories of individuals affected by war, the piece fosters a connection between the reader and the subjects, enhancing both engagement and retention of information. This emotional resonance is vital for issues that are often abstract or distant from readers' everyday experiences.

- Several materials employed gamification elements to increase interactivity and engagement. For instance, the How much do you know about climate change (2023) quiz by CNN engages readers through a series of questions that challenge their knowledge on the topic. This not only educates the audience but also encourages them to think critically about climate issues, fostering a sense of agency. The incorporation of game-like elements can make serious topics more approachable and encourage audiences to take action.

- A significant emphasis on visual storytelling is evident in many of the selected pieces. The use of infographics, videos, and interactive graphics allows complex socio-political issues to be communicated more effectively. For instance, the Hate Map (2023) by the Southern Poverty Law Center employs data visualization techniques to map hate groups across the United States. By visually representing this information, the piece makes the problem more tangible, facilitating a clearer understanding of its scope and implications.

- Many of the analyzed materials reflect a strong focus on audience engagement and experience. The design choices made in these pieces often stem from an understanding of the target audience's needs and preferences. For example, Building Fires (Zafra & Kiyada, 2024) by Reuters effectively integrates real-time data with user-friendly navigation, enabling readers to explore the impact of building fires on various communities. This audience-centric approach enhances the overall user experience, making the content more relevant and impactful.

Below is a table summarizing key details for each of the 25 media pieces analyzed (Table 1), highlighting their specific characteristics in terms of topic, format, game elements, use of experience design, and overall impact on audience engagement. The structured table comprising the elements of gamified media materials serves as a comprehensive framework for analyzing the integration of experience design in journalism.

The column "Game elements" enumerates the specific game technologies utilized within each media piece, such as quizzes, interactive graphics, or narrative pathways. These elements are critical in transforming the reader's experience from passive consumption to active engagement. By detailing the game elements, the table underscores how these features foster user interaction and encourage deeper cognitive and emotional investment in the content. The effective use of game mechanics is linked to enhanced learning outcomes and increased retention of information.

The "Experience design type" categorizes the nature of the experience design as defined by Rossman and Duerden's framework: prosaic, mindful, memorable, meaningful, or transformational (Rossman & Duerden, 2019). Identifying the experience design type is essential for understanding the intended emotional and cognitive responses elicited by the material. For instance, materials categorized as "transformational" may invite users to confront challenging realities, fostering empathy and reflection. This categorization not only aids in the analysis of individual pieces but also helps in identifying patterns across different media formats.

The column “Impact on audience” assesses the potential effects of the media piece on its audience, examining how the integration of experience design influences user engagement, understanding, and emotional connection. This analysis is crucial as it highlights the practical implications of the media materials, emphasizing how well-designed journalistic content can empower users to reflect on and engage with critical socio-political issues. By evaluating the impact on the audience, this section underscores the significance of innovative design in transforming the future of journalism.

**Table 1.** Overview of experience design in gamified journalistic content.

Nº	Title, year, media outlet	Type of material	Topic	Game elements	Experience design type	Impact on audience
1.	Snow-Fall. New York Times (Branch, 2012)	Interactive Story	Avalanche and rescue efforts	Engaging visuals, embedded videos, and scrolling navigation that create a narrative journey through the event's details, simulating the experience of being present during the avalanche and rescue operations.	<i>Memorable:</i> Multimedia elements create emotional engagement. <i>Meaningful:</i> Readers connect deeply with the human experiences behind the disaster.	Fosters empathy and reflection on disaster responses, emphasizing the human cost involved.
2.	Coronavirus in the US (2021). New York Times	Data Visualization	COVID-19 impact across the U.S.	Interactive data charts and maps that allow users to explore statistics about COVID-19 cases, creating a personalized experience as users	<i>Mindful:</i> Encourages critical engagement with health data.	Personalizes the pandemic experience, increasing urgency regarding local outbreaks, motivating community action.

				search for their local data.		
3.	100 Places for 100 years of BBC (2022)	Story Map	Historical significance of BBC	Engaging map interface that allows users to explore 100 significant locations tied to the BBC's history, incorporating user interactions through geographic storytelling.	<i>Mindful:</i> Connects users to the history and impact of the BBC in a geographical context.	Connects audiences to historical narratives, fostering a sense of connection to media history.
4.	How much do you know about climate change (2023). CNN	Quiz	Climate change awareness	Multiple-choice quiz format that provides instant feedback on users' knowledge of climate change.	<i>Mindful:</i> Promotes active reflection on personal climate knowledge.	Enhances understanding of climate change, fostering a more informed public ready to advocate for action.
5.	Building Fires (Zafra & Kiyada, 2024). Reuters	Interactive Graphic	Impact of building fires on communities	Interactive graphics visualize fire incidents and community responses.	<i>Prosaic:</i> Engages users with local contexts, making content relatable. <i>Mindful:</i> Engages users in understanding the implications of building fires	Enhances understanding of building fire impacts, prompting empathy and awareness of community safety and regulation issues.

					through visual data.	
6.	Climate Change (Dickie, Hartman, & Trainor, 2023). Reuters	Interactive Graphic	Climate change and weather extremes	Engaging data visualizations and interactive elements that allow users to explore the effects of climate change on weather patterns, providing real-time feedback on the information presented.	<i>Mindful:</i> Facilitates understanding of complex climate data and trends.  <i>Meaningful:</i> Engages users in a critical examination of climate change impacts on a global scale.	Promotes critical thinking about climate change issues, enhancing audience comprehension and awareness of environmental challenges.
7.	Tracking China's grey zone balloon flights over Taiwan (Gu, & Lee, 2024). Reuters	Interactive Map	Military tensions between China and Taiwan	Real-time interactive map updates allow user exploration.	<i>Mindful:</i> Users analyze geopolitical situations, deepening understanding of military dynamics.	Engages users actively with current events, fostering a better grasp of international relations.
8.	Shape of Slavery (Rankin & Daniels, 2017). The Pudding	Data Story	Modern slavery issues	Interactive infographics that visualize the scope and nature of modern slavery through compelling storytelling.	<i>Meaningful:</i> Engages users by providing critical insights into a pressing global issue.  <i>Mindful:</i> Users explore data to enhance understanding of the complexity surrounding	Raises awareness about the prevalence and nature of modern slavery, encouraging readers to reflect on their roles in combating these issues.

					modern slavery.	
9.	Hate Map (2023). SPLC	Data Visualization	Hate groups in the U.S.	Interactive map showing the geographical distribution of hate groups across the United States, with options for user engagement through comments and feedback.	<p><i>Mindful:</i> Facilitates understanding of hate group locations and dynamics.</p> <p><i>Meaningful:</i> Empowers users with knowledge to take action against hate in their communities.</p>	Raises awareness about the spread of hate groups and their influence, fostering community action and encouraging dialogue about social justice.
10.	Drone Strikes in Pakistan	Data Story	Drone strikes and their impact	Interactive timelines and visuals that depict drone strikes' frequency, impact, and associated narratives, allowing users to explore data through personal stories.	<p><i>Meaningful:</i> Connects personal stories to the broader issue of drone warfare.</p> <p><i>Mindful:</i> Engages users in understanding the implications of drone strikes on civilian life.</p>	Provides critical insights into the consequences of drone warfare, promoting reflection on military ethics and humanitarian impact.
11.	Raising barriers (2016). Washington Post	Interactive Graphic	Immigration issues	Interactive graphics that visualize global border barriers, illustrating their types and locations, with engaging	<i>Mindful:</i> Users actively engage with complex immigration issues through data.	Encourages deeper understanding of immigration challenges, prompting empathy for affected

				user-driven exploration of data and narratives.		individuals, fostering a deeper understanding of global migration issues.
12.	Solitary Confinement (2016). The Guardian	Virtual Experience	Solitary confinement	Immersive virtual reality experience that simulates the conditions of solitary confinement, providing users with a first-hand perspective on the psychological effects.	<i>Transformational:</i> Provides a profound and emotional experience that evokes empathy.  <i>Meaningful:</i> Facilitates a deeper understanding of the consequences of solitary confinement on individuals.	Fosters empathy through immersive storytelling, inviting users to reflect on the human rights implications of solitary confinement.
13.	What do you call a person who moves to another country in search of a better life? (2015). The Guardian	Interactive Story	Immigration narratives	Interactive narrative exploring different terminologies for migrants and refugees, allowing users to engage with definitions and implications through an interactive format.	<i>Mindful:</i> Promotes critical thinking about language and its implications in societal contexts.  <i>Meaningful:</i> Engages users in understanding the nuances of migration terminology.	Encourages thoughtful dialogue about migration and refugee issues, fostering greater understanding and empathy for those affected by these experiences.
14.	Death in Syria (2015).	Data Visualization	Syrian civil war casualties	Interactive maps detailing	<i>Meaningful:</i> Provides insights into	Connects readers to the human

	New York Times			casualties and dis- place- ments, with user- driven ex- ploration of the data.	the scale of human loss and suffer- ing, foster- ing a deeper understand- ing of the conflict's impact.	cost of war, en- hancing empathy and under- standing of the con- flict. The interactive nature al- lows users to engage with the data on a personal level.
15.	The next to die (2015). Marshall Project	Narrative Story	Death penalty issues	Interactive features allowing user en- gagement with sto- ries of those on death row, including real-time updates and reader comments.	<p><i>Meaningful:</i> Highlights the personal stories of individuals facing execu- tion, prompting emotional engage- ment.</p> <p><i>Mindful:</i> Encourages readers to critically reflect on jus- tice and morality.</p>	Raises awareness of the im- pact of the death pen- alty, en- couraging reflection on justice issues and the moral implica- tions of capital punish- ment.
16.	Autono- mous Ocean (2022). Hakai	Data Story	Oceanic research and technology	Interactive elements and ani- mations showcas- ing ad- vance- ments in autono- mous ocean ex- ploration, user en- gagement through data	<p><i>Memorable:</i> Engages users with in- novative technology stories, cre- ating lasting impres- sions.</p> <p><i>Mindful:</i> Facilitates understand- ing of complex ocean-ographic</p>	Highlights technolog- ical ad- vance- ments in ocean re- search, en- hancing audience under- standing of envi- ronmental issues and promoting

				visualiza- tion and narratives.	issues through in- teractive content.	apprecia- tion for ocean con- servation efforts.
17.	John Campbell (2022). One News	Interac- tive Story	Historical nar- ratives from the point of view of John Campbell	Audience interaction through comment sections, with engaging video storytelling that incorporates viewer feedback.	<i>Mindful:</i> Engages viewers in critical thinking about historical events and their relevance to current affairs.  <i>Memorable:</i> Utilizes personal narratives to create a connection with viewers.	Engages audiences with relatable historical reflections, prompting discussions about past events and their implications for the present.
18.	A global guide to the first world war - interactive documentary (2014). The Guardian	Interac- tive Docu- mentary	World War I history	Interactive documentary format allowing users to explore various perspectives through historical documents, photographs, and videos.	<i>Transfor- mational:</i> Allows users to experience the war from multiple viewpoints, facilitating a deeper understanding of its global impact.  <i>Meaningful:</i> Integrates personal narratives with historical events.	Provides a comprehensive understanding of historical events through an engaging format, enhancing historical knowledge and global perspective on the war's consequences.
19.	After 6/4. SBS	Interac- tive Docu- mentary / Data	Political history on events in Tiananmen Square, Beijing 1989	Interactive graphics and data engagement that	<i>Memorable:</i> Facilitates understanding of political events	Encourages reflection on historical events

		Visuali-zation		allow us- ers to ex- plore po- litical de- velop- ments and their social impacts through a visual nar- rative.	while en- gaging us- ers emo- tionally. <i>Mindful</i> : Data visuali- zations fa- cilitate un- derstanding of complex political narratives.	through com- pelling data presenta- tion, fos- tering a better un- derstanding of po- litical con- texts and their rele- vance to- day.
20.	Pirate Fishing (2014). Al Jazeera	Interac- tive Docu- mentary / News game	Journalistic investigation on illegal fishing prac- tices in Sierra Leone	Interactive elements allow us- ers to en- gage in a simulated investiga- tion of il- legal trawlers, enhancing the story- telling ex- perience.	<i>Meaningful</i> : The investi- gation high- lights the significant issue of ille- gal fishing and its im- pact on lo- cal commu- nities, creat- ing a deeper understand- ing of the subject mat- ter.  <i>Transfor- mational</i> : Invites us- ers to en- gage with real-world implications of their ac- tions in the context of environ- mental sus- tainability.	The audi- ence expe- riences a deeper emotional connection to the is- sue of ille- gal fish- ing, en- hancing their un- derstanding of its global im- pact and prompting them to consider their role in environ- mental steward- ship.
21.	Rebuild- ing Haiti (2014). Rue89	Data Story	Post-earth- quake recov- ery efforts in Haiti	The inter- active nar- rative structure encour- ages ex- ploration	<i>Meaningful</i> : Provides in- sights into the com- plexities of post-disas- ter	Readers gain a nu- anced un- derstanding of the multifac- eted

				of various recovery initiatives, allowing users to visualize the impacts and ongoing challenges.	recovery, illustrating the challenges faced by communities.	recovery efforts in Haiti. It encourages viewers to reflect on their perceptions of disaster recovery and the resilience of those impacted by crises.
22.	1000 Days of Syria (2014)	Interactive Story	Syrian civil war and its impact on civilians	The interactive timeline provides users with data visualizations that chronologically depict significant events, enhancing engagement with the subject.	<i>Meaningful:</i> The narrative connects personal stories with larger geopolitical issues, giving depth to the statistical data presented.  <i>Memorable:</i> The emotional weight of the visuals creates lasting impressions on users regarding the Syrian conflict.	Illustrates the humanitarian crisis in Syria, enabling audiences to grasp the magnitude of the conflict through visual storytelling. It encourages viewers to consider the implications of war on civilians, fostering a sense of urgency and empathy towards those affected.
23.	The waiting game (2018). ProPublica	Interactive Game	Asylum-seeking challenges faced by refugees	Players choose a story path based on real	<i>Transformational:</i> Immerses users in the realities of	Brings the complexities of the asylum process to

				asylum seekers, engaging them in decision-making scenarios that reflect the challenges of the asylum process.	the asylum process, allowing for personal reflection on the implications of their choices.  <i>Mindful:</i> Encourages critical thinking about the immigration system and the experiences of asylum seekers.	life, allowing players to empathize with the experiences of refugees. It highlights the lengthy and uncertain journey of seeking asylum, prompting reflection on societal attitudes towards immigration and the human cost of bureaucratic processes.
24.	Politinder (2019). Plataforma	Interactive Data	Political engagement through a gamified quiz	The quiz format encourages personalized political engagement by matching users with political parties based on their preferences.	<i>Meaningful:</i> Helps users understand their political beliefs and how they align with various parties.  <i>Prosaic:</i> Engages users in a common, everyday experience of navigating political ideologies.	By engaging users in a fun and interactive format, Politinder raises awareness of political issues and encourages individuals to reflect on their political preferences. It motivates to participate actively in the democratic process.

25.	Uber Game. (2018). Financial Times	Interactive Game	Gig economy struggles	Simulates decision-making as an Uber driver	<i>Memorable:</i> Engages players through relatable choices, evoking empathy and critical thinking about the gig economy's challenges.	Engages users for understanding of gig economy complexities, a deeper empathy for Uber drivers and a recognition of the difficult choices they face in balancing work and personal life
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The analysis of the 25 gamified media materials presented in the table reveals a rich tapestry of interactive storytelling techniques that effectively engage audiences and foster meaningful connections with the subject matter. The diversity of formats – from interactive stories and data visualizations to immersive virtual experiences – demonstrates the versatility of gamification in journalism and educational content. Each entry highlights how different elements of gamification, such as interactive graphics, quizzes, and narrative timelines, are utilized to enhance user experience, making complex topics more relatable and impactful.

In summary, the synthesis of gamification elements across these 25 media materials illustrates how interactive storytelling can transcend traditional journalism methods. By leveraging the principles of experience design, these pieces not only enhance user engagement but also cultivate a deeper awareness of societal issues. The impact on audiences is profound, as they are invited to immerse themselves in narratives that challenge their perspectives and encourage proactive participation in social discourse. This trend highlights the potential of gamified media to shape the future of storytelling in journalism, education, and beyond, making it an essential tool for engaging contemporary audiences.

The design of experiences within the context of the analyzed media materials plays a crucial role in shaping audience engagement and interaction. As highlighted in the works of Rossman and Duerden (2019), the strategic use of experience design elements – enables content creators to craft narratives that resonate deeply with users. For instance, materials like *What do you call a person who moves to another country in search of a better life?* (2015) and *Shape of Slavery* (2017) effectively utilize meaningful experiences, prompting viewers to reflect on societal issues and their personal significance. This engagement is not merely informational; it invites emotional responses that deepen the connection to the material.

Moreover, the inclusion of transformational elements in projects such as *Solitary Confinement* (2016) encourages audiences to confront challenging realities, ultimately fostering personal reflection and empathy. By carefully designing each interaction point, these media pieces ensure that users are not just passive consumers but active participants in the storytelling process. The deliberate integration of gamification techniques with experience design principles transforms

traditional narratives into immersive experiences that captivate and educate, illustrating the evolving landscape of modern journalism and its potential to influence public perception and action. This comprehensive approach to experience design not only enhances the accessibility of complex topics but also empowers audiences to engage critically with the world around them, reinforcing the importance of thoughtful and intentional media production in today's information-driven society.

## Discussion

The experience design choices evident in the analyzed media pieces significantly enhance reader engagement and comprehension by employing interactive and immersive elements that cater to varying cognitive and emotional needs. For instance, interactive storytelling formats utilize scrolling navigation, embedded multimedia, and a variety of narrative pathways that allow readers to engage with content at their own pace. This level of interaction transforms the reading experience from a passive consumption model to an active exploration, thus fostering deeper emotional connections with the narratives. Research indicates that such designs can lead to better retention and understanding of complex topics, as they encourage readers to process information more thoughtfully (Rossman & Duerden, 2019).

In addition to fostering emotional engagement, the application of gamification elements – like quizzes, interactive maps, and real-time feedback – promotes active participation in the learning process, making intricate socio-political issues more accessible and relatable. The findings contribute to the existing literature on the experience economy and journalism by illustrating how experience design principles can be effectively integrated into journalistic practices. The experience economy, as posited by Pine and Gilmore (2011), emphasizes the creation of memorable and meaningful interactions that surpass traditional service delivery. By aligning journalistic practices with these principles, the media not only addresses the evolving expectations of modern consumers but also enriches the quality and depth of the information provided. The analysis demonstrates that integrating experience design in journalism offers a pathway to engage audiences more profoundly, moving beyond mere information dissemination to foster genuine connections with content.

Furthermore, this analysis highlights the importance of situating journalistic practices within established theoretical frameworks. For instance, the five types of experiences outlined by Rossman and Duerden (2019) – offer a robust structure for understanding how various media pieces elicit diverse emotional and cognitive responses. By applying these concepts, journalists can craft narratives that not only inform but also inspire and provoke reflection, reinforcing the potential for media to serve as a powerful tool for social change and public discourse.

For journalists and media outlets seeking to enhance their experience design practices, several actionable insights emerge from this analysis. First and foremost, adopting a user-centered approach to content creation is vital. Understanding audience needs and preferences allows for the tailoring of experiences that resonate on both emotional and cognitive levels. Media formats that incorporate interactive elements and gamification techniques significantly boost engagement, particularly when addressing complex socio-political topics. Moreover, utilizing narrative-driven interactive formats can draw in readers who might otherwise disengage from dense information, creating a more inviting atmosphere for learning.

Second, the integration of feedback mechanisms within interactive content is essential for deepening engagement and comprehension. As demonstrated in various analyzed pieces, real-time responses to user actions foster a sense of immediacy and relevance. This can be accomplished through interactive quizzes, comment sections, and dynamic infographics that encourage users to engage not only with the content but also with each other. Such interactions can cultivate community discussions, further enriching the reader experience and broadening perspectives on the issues presented.

Lastly, journalists should prioritize the design of meaningful and transformational experiences that foster empathy and reflection. By constructing narratives that connect personal stories with

broader societal issues, media outlets can facilitate a deeper understanding of complex topics. In addition, employing storytelling techniques that highlight individual experiences within the context of larger social or political phenomena allows audiences to see the human side of the data. This humanization of statistics not only enhances emotional engagement but also promotes critical thinking and encourages informed action.

The gamification of journalistic content serves as a powerful tool for enhancing reader engagement and comprehension. The analysis of various media pieces illustrates that incorporating game-like elements – such as quizzes, interactive maps, and feedback loops – can significantly impact how audiences interact with and understand complex topics. For example, *Death in Syria* (2015) employs interactive maps that allow readers to explore the human cost of conflict dynamically, making abstract statistics more tangible and relatable. This approach not only aids in comprehension but also prompts emotional engagement, reinforcing the urgency of the issues presented. The use of gamification elements transforms traditional consumption patterns, inviting users to become active participants in their learning journey rather than passive recipients of information.

Moreover, gamification strategies encourage playful interaction with content, transforming the reading experience into a participatory endeavor. By allowing readers to engage actively with the material, journalists can foster a sense of agency, prompting users to think critically about their understanding of the topics. This shift from passive reading to active participation is especially important in an era characterized by information overload, as it helps maintain interest and enhances retention. Studies show that users are more likely to remember and internalize information when they engage with it actively, rather than merely absorbing it passively (Deterding et al., 2011).

To maximize the impact of experience design in journalism, it is crucial to adopt strategies that cater to diverse audience preferences while remaining focused on the goals of storytelling. Effective experience design involves creating intuitive pathways for readers to navigate content easily while ensuring that interactive elements add value rather than complicate the experience. Materials like *The Next to Die* (2015) exemplify how narrative depth and interactive features can work in tandem to engage audiences with complex societal issues, making them feel personally connected to the subject matter.

Additionally, it is important for journalists to be intentional about the emotional journeys they create through their content. By designing experiences that evoke strong emotional responses – whether through storytelling, data visualization, or immersive formats – journalists can create lasting impressions that encourage reflection and dialogue. This not only enhances the quality of the journalism produced but also elevates the role of media as a catalyst for social change, inspiring audiences to take informed action in response to the issues presented. In conclusion, the integration of experience design principles and gamification techniques in journalism not only enhances reader engagement and comprehension but also serves to enrich public discourse surrounding complex socio-political issues. By prioritizing user-centered design and fostering meaningful interactions, media outlets can effectively navigate the challenges of modern journalism while contributing to a more informed and engaged society.

## Conclusions

This study provides substantial insights into the role of experience design and gamification in contemporary journalism. By analyzing 25 media pieces that employ interactive and immersive storytelling techniques, we confirm that these elements significantly enhance reader engagement and comprehension. The diverse range of experience types – prosaic, mindful, memorable, meaningful, and transformational – demonstrates that well-designed journalistic content can elicit a broad spectrum of emotional and cognitive responses from audiences. The use of interactive features not only facilitates deeper understanding of complex socio-political issues but also fosters a sense of connection and empathy, ultimately transforming the reader's experience from passive consumption to active engagement. This shift is vital in an era where media saturation often leads

to disengagement; therefore, the integration of experience design principles is essential for capturing and maintaining audience interest.

Regarding the initial hypotheses, the study effectively confirms that incorporating gamification and experience design in journalism leads to enhanced audience engagement. Specifically, the analysis demonstrates that interactive elements – such as quizzes, maps, and real-time feedback – facilitate a more profound connection with the material and promote critical thinking. Furthermore, the investigation reveals that narratives designed with these principles are more likely to resonate with readers, thereby increasing the likelihood of information retention and reflection on critical societal issues. Thus, we can conclude that experience design is not merely an ancillary component of journalism; rather, it is a fundamental practice that can redefine how audiences interact with news content.

The study's objectives of assessing the effectiveness of experience design in journalism were largely achieved. By highlighting specific strategies that promote engagement, such as narrative depth and interactive features, the research offers practical insights for media professionals seeking to innovate their storytelling approaches. The implications for journalism practice are significant, as the findings underscore the necessity for journalists to adopt user-centered design principles that not only enhance the presentation of information but also empower audiences to connect with the content meaningfully. The integration of experience design and gamification elements represents a transformative shift in journalism, positioning it as a proactive force in shaping informed and engaged citizens.

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RESEARCH ARTICLES  
ДОСЛІДНИЦЬКІ СТАТТІ

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## Russia's typical frames of civilian harm cases in the full-scale Russo-Ukrainian war: exploratory frame analysis (2022–2024 data)

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### ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this exploratory study is to preliminarily highlight the key frames that Russia uses within its strategic communication to explain the cases of civilian harm done by its forces in the full-scale Russo-Ukrainian war. The main research method applied in the research is the qualitative frame analysis of the messages by Russia's communicators (primarily, state officials) that were spread in 2022 – 2024. The sample of civilian harm cases is identified based on the randomized selection from the Bellingcat dataset. Entman's (1993) analytical framework of the 4 frame functions is used in interpretation of the results. The results show that Russian communicators apply the set of at least three frame types (ignorance, hit military targets, and anti-Russian insinuation) to interpret Russia's war crimes in a favorable light. On the other hand, two more less typical, but important frame types are identified (depersonalized accident and vengeance). The results indicate Russia's attempts to legitimize or reinterpret its war crimes and serve as a theoretical base for further studies of Russia's framing within its strategic communication.

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## АНОТАЦІЯ

З початку повномасштабної російсько-української війни у лютому 2022 року в межах своєї стратегічної комунікації Росія намагається фреймувати свої воєнні злочини, зокрема атаки на цивільних і цивільну інфраструктуру, щоби підтримати цілісність своїх стратегічних наративів, іміджу та мінімізувати репутаційні ризики. І хоча науковці приділяють увагу стратегічній комунікації РФ певну увагу, наразі бракує науково й емпірично обґрунтованого знання про те, які саме фрейми використовує Росія для реінтерпретації своїх воєнних злочинів. Це дослідження позиціонується як розвідувальне дослідження, мета якого – попередньо висвітлити ключові фрейми, які Росія використовує у своїй стратегічній комунікації для пояснення випадків шкоди цивільним, що завдана російськими силами. Ключовим методом дослідження є якісницький фрейм-аналіз повідомлень російських комунікаторів (передусім – посадовців, урядових акторів РФ), що транслювалися у відповідь на випадки шкоди цивільним в Україні у період 2022 – 2024 рр. Вибірка випадків цивільної шкоди ( $N = 43$ ) відібрана методом рандомізованого вибору (з урахуванням принципів насиченості даних) з масиву даних від Bellingcat. Для інтерпретації результатів використовується аналітична рамка за авторством Entman'а (1993), що висвітлює 4 функції фреймів (визначення проблеми, пояснення каузальності, морально-етична оцінка та пропозиції вирішення проблеми). Результати аналізу свідчать про те, що комунікатори РФ використовують набір з принаймні трьох типових фреймів (ігнорування, удар по військових цілях, антиросійська інсінуація) для інтерпретації злочинів РФ у сприятливому для себе світлі. Водночас, у дослідженні обговорюються ще два види фреймів, які можуть бути не настільки типовими, але теоретично вагомими (деперсоналізований випадок і помста). У статті обговорюються структурні особливості кожного фрейму; узагальнюється, що фрейми спрямовані або на легітимізацію завдання Росією удару по цивільній інфраструктурі, або на суцільну реінтерпретацію події. Результати дослідження, таким чином, пропонують стартову теоретичну основу для подальших досліджень фреймінгу в контексті стратегічної комунікації Росії в умовах повномасштабної війни.

**КЛЮЧОВІ СЛОВА:** стратегічні наративи, стратегічна комунікація, фреймінг, російсько-українська війна, шкода цивільним.

## Introduction

*Civilian harm and Russia's strategic communication.* Russia's strategic communication is the one which has an essence of information war (Fridman, 2020), hybrid war, and disinformation campaigns (Fridrichová, 2023 based on Kofman, 2016). Hence, within its strategic communication, Russia has been trying to legitimize its 2022's invasion of Ukraine as a response to unlawful actions (Fridrichová, 2023; Bradshaw et al., 2024). Some of such attempts involved promoting strategic narratives of Russia being the victim of the West that merely tries to defend itself from the enemies, as the savior of the Russian-speaking people, and as the promoter of Orthodox values (Snigyr, 2023; Oates & Ramsay, 2024).

On the other hand, it could be argued that Russian war crimes, including civilian harm caused by the Russian army, undermine Russia's strategic narratives and image of morality. Mass shelling, missile strikes, and other types of attacks conducted on civilian infrastructure in Ukraine by definition create a reputational risk for Russia. Nevertheless, as discussed in this article, Russia attempts to re-interpret events that put it in a negative light and hereby to re-construct social reality by specific framing of the events (see, Scheufele, 1999 for the discussion on framing and social reality construction).

While Russia's denial of causing civilian harm has been routinely articulated in media since the full-scale Russo-Ukrainian war started on February 24, 2022, there is still a lack of comprehensive evidence- and research-based knowledge of Russian framing's constituency. Moreover, there is a lack of a generalized, yet sufficient evidence-based picture on the main

framing types that Russian communicators engage to explain, distort, deny etc. the civilian harm done by Russia.

Accordingly, the *aim* of this paper is to preliminarily highlight the typical frames that are used by Russia to address civilian harm done by its forces. This research is designed as an exploratory study. Concordantly with the format of this study, qualitative framing analysis based on Entman's (1993) framework is used to uncover some of the typical civilian harm frames. To achieve this goal, the research relies on empirical data from Bellingcat's (n. d.) dataset of civilian harm in Ukraine within the full-scale invasion. While framing is approached as a part of Russia's strategic communication in the full-scale Russo-Ukrainian war, the study focuses on the comments issued by Russia's state actors state representatives, and state media.

*Civilian harm.* The concept of civilian harm has been articulated lately in the context of Russo-Ukrainian war in scholarly articles (e.g., Daniele, 2024), media, by international organizations, and government bodies. For example, it is used by Bellingcat (Bellingcat, n. d.; Bellingcat Investigation Team, 2022), as well the United Nation's reports (UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, 2024). The United States Department of Defense's (2023) instruction defines civilian harm as "Civilian casualties and damage to or destruction of civilian objects (which do not constitute military objectives under the law of war) resulting from military operations" (p. 49). On the other hand, civilian harm is, in fact, not a new term, even though it could be represented by slightly other labels in the field of law. Logically, civilian harm reflects, for example, Article 52 of the Additional Protocol 1 to the Geneva Conventions (ICRC Database, n. d.): "Civilian objects shall not be the object of attack or of reprisals. Civilian objects are all objects which are not military objectives..." A common notion could be found in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (International Criminal Court, 2021), which lists intentional attacks on civilian objects among war crimes.

*Frames.* Stemming from the works of Goffman (1974/1986) and other theoretical pillars, framing and frames might have been among the most popular concepts and methodological choices in media and communications (Cacciatore, Scheufele, & Iyengar, 2015).

There are several definitions of frames. To name a few examples, from Goffman's (1974/1986) perspective, frames are a set of principles, schemes of knowledge organization and interpretation of events. A frame "suggests a central organizing idea for understanding events related to the issue in question" (Gamson and Lasch, 1980, p. 3). However, some definitions put greater emphasis specifically on media frames (see Scheufele, 1999 for a discussion of frame types and perspectives). Gitlin (1980) defines (media) frames as "persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse, whether verbal or visual" (Gitlin, 1980, p. 7). On the other hand, according to a widely cited definition by Entman (1993, p. 52),

Framing essentially involves selection and salience. 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.

A frame might have all four of these functions or only some of them (Entman, 1993).

However, frames might be elements of wider phenomena – strategic narratives (Coticchia & Catanzaro, 2020; Livingston and Nassetta, 2018), which, in their turn, function as "tools for political actors to extend their influence, manage expectations, and change the discursive environment in which they operate" (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, & Roselle, 2013, p. 2). Yet, as concluded by Miskimmon et al. (2013), "various components of a narrative must be framed a certain way, so framing must be taken into account" (p. 7). And if frames are elements of strategic narratives, frames could be viewed as a part of a state's strategic communication. While this article is not focused on examining relationships between Russia's framing of civilian harm and Russia's

strategic communication principles in detail, the key notion here is that Russia uses framing as a tool of managing its image strategically and supporting strategic narratives.

## Method

For the purpose of the research, exploratory qualitative frame analysis was used to highlight Russia's typical frames in the coverage of civilian harm events.

*Empirical data and sampling.* Bellingcat's (n. d.) "Civilian Harm in Ukraine Timemap" project dataset was used as the empirical source of civilian harm events (the dataset is a downloadable open-access database that could be exported in a CSV file format). It lists cases of civilian harm in the full-scale Russo-Ukrainian war since February 24, 2022, collected and verified by the Bellingcat (the dataset that was used for this study was dated as September 17, 2024, thus it included cases that occurred between February 24, 2022, and the middle of September 2024).

For each case in the dataset, there are variables that include information like, for example, date of the event, geographical location, source to the source media publications which Bellingcat relied on to document the event (it should be noted that in this paper, alternative media sources on the same event might be used in media references), brief information on the damages. However, a few methodological pre-cautions should be made. Firstly, the dataset does not always include media reactions from Russia's state representatives (basically, Russia's framing messages themselves). Consequently, Russian communicators' comments/statements regarding the event would be collected additionally. Secondly, usually, a case in the dataset represents a separate case of civilian harm, which may have happened among other cases within a given occasion of, say, shelling. In other words, if a hypothetical shelling of a city included damage to a) a hospital and b) an apartment block, these two sub-events might appear as two separate cases in the dataset. Thirdly, the focus of this research is events of civilian harm (severe damage, attack on civilian infrastructure etc.) inflicted by Russia on the territory of Ukraine. Accordingly, only the cases that correspond to these criteria would be selected for the analysis.

Events were selected via simple random sampling from the Bellingcat's dataset. This type of sampling might not highlight the largest variation of frames and was sometimes criticized as a tool in qualitative studies (see Morse, 1995; Marshall, 1996). Hence, rare frames may not occur with the random sample. However, firstly, random sampling conveniently fits the aims of this research – to provide a general outlook on some of the most typical frames. Firstly, random selection is mean of a more unbiased and generalizable approach (see Palinkas, 2015 for the discussion) towards naming some of the common frames, whereas the study does not attempt to give representative results or mention all the existing Russian frames. Secondly, to address some of Marshall's (1996) critical points, the dataset of civilian harm cases allows the application of actual simple random sample, contrary to some studies of large human populations like country population. Thirdly, this research follows the logic that if a frame is typical, it would emerge at least a few times in the qualitative exploratory sample. Yet, if dozens of frames are analyzed, and the frame does not occur or it emerges as an exception, possibly, this frame is not very typical.

With consideration of common data saturation principles (for discussion of data saturation concept and approaches, see Marshall, 1996; Saunders et al., 2018; Tight, 2024), overall, 43 cases were analyzed. New frames stopped appearing around case #25, thus it could be considered a point after which exploratory data saturation was reached. Yet, cases would be analyzed until case 43 to ensure that no new frames would emerge in the nearby cases. Also, about 30 randomly pre-defined cases were excluded from the analysis (those were invalid data cases, cases with invalid source links, cases that could not be verified, cases that did not correspond to the formal criteria and focus of the research).

Then, based on the information from the dataset, the search in the open sources was conducted for Russia's communicators' comments on each selected event. While this study views framing in the context of Russia's strategic communication, the empirical pool of texts relies on statements made by Russia's state actors/representatives (primarily, the Russian Ministry of Defense, MoD,

and its official spokespersons). It is pre-assumed that Russian media spreads the messages that originate from the state's agenda. In case the state officials did not issue comments on the event, the comment would be taken from the Russian state media (TASS, for instance). To elaborate, Russian propagandists could be viewed as proxies of the state communication.

*Analysis procedures.* Qualitative frame analysis was conducted in a manner of inductive qualitative coding. This means that initial codes were assigned for each event's Russian communicating text, succeeded by the further inductive generalization. Furthermore, Entman's (1993) analytical framework was used to provide more detailed insight. Namely, each frame was analyzed in regard to the four possible framing functions (Entman, 1993, p. 52):

- problem definition – “determine what a causal agent is doing with what costs and benefits, usually measured in terms of common cultural values,”
- causal interpretation – “identify the forces creating the problem,”
- moral evaluation – “evaluate causal agents and their effects,”
- treatment recommendation – “offer and justify treatments for the problems and predict their likely effects.”

## Results

Overall, 3 typical frames were induced from the exploratory sample (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Typical frames used by Russia to explain civilian harm done by its forces, based on Entman's (1993) analytical approach.

Frame	Problem definition	Causal interpretation	Moral evaluation	Treatment recommendation
Ignorance (and partial ignorance)	Nothing happened in terms of civilian harm	-	-	-
Hit military targets	Russia hit legitimate targets – military targets	Ukraine placed its military objects – Russia targeted them	Russia's actions are justifiable and legitimate	-
Anti-Russian insinuation	Ukraine is orchestrating an anti-Russian insinuation by harming (endangering) civilians	Ukraine and Western allies (journalists, media) are preparing insinuation	Ukraine commits immoral actions and war crimes to make false accusations	Public must not believe that information or put the blame on Russia

*Ignorance.* In several cases, no statements by the Russian officials or state media were found regarding civilian harm events. It could be assumed that Russia did not deny an event explicitly but ignored the event at all in its communication. It might be debatable whether not mentioning something at all is a frame by itself. However, in the case of Russia's state-defined strategic communication, where every message is supposed to serve some strategic goal, it could be argued that “frames are defined by what they omit as well as include” (Entman, 1993, p. 54, relying on Kahneman & Tversky, 1984). Concordantly, the frame is used in a way to omit the event from the context of civilian harm – as if nothing like that happened.

For instance, Kherson Regional administration reported<sup>1</sup> that between December 31, 2022, and January 1, 2023, Russia shelled Kherson, killing at least one person. However, no comments on that attack from Russia's communicators were found.

While in some cases Russian communicators totally ignore the event, on some other occasions they relied on partial ignorance. It means that while civilian damage itself was not mentioned in communication, the area, region, direct, etc. where the attack happened was mentioned in a different light. Provided that, Russia's attack on civilian objects is excluded from the communication, whereas more Russia-favoring information of the events in the area is given.

“Partial ignorance” might be called a “pseudo-frame”: it does not work as a separate autonomous frame, but it is used in combination with other frames and adds important features for the understanding of the events. For example, when Russia shelled the central market area of Kherson on April 18, 2023<sup>2</sup>, Russian MoD did not mention the attack directly. Nevertheless, Russian MoD posted a statement<sup>3</sup> about hitting on the Kherson direction in general (a combination with a “hit military targets” frame):

“On the Kherson direction, in the process of target engagement, more than 25 Ukrainian servicemen, three automobiles, an American-produced M777 artillery system, as well as two D-30 howitzers were destroyed over the last day”

*Hit military targets.* This frame builds up on the following logic: Ukraine placed military targets, these targets are legitimate, so Russia hit those targets. The frame thus omits the fact that civilian objects were damaged or claims that civilian objects were in fact Ukrainian military objects. Either way, Russian communication emphasizes that “real” civilian damage has not happened and that military targets (possibly, located within civilian areas and buildings) were hit.

For example, it was reported that on July 10, 2023, Russian army attacked civilians that gathered around humanitarian aid station in the town of Orikhiv with guided missile strike<sup>4</sup>. And the statement by Russia's MoD civilian damage was not acknowledged, yet it was claimed that Ukrainian Armed Forces' command post was struck<sup>5</sup>:

“In the area of town Orehov in Zaporozhye oblast, command post of the 47<sup>th</sup> motorized brigade of the UAF was hit”

In a slightly different variation, the frame blurs the line between civilian objects and military objects, once again proposing that the attack was legitimate. In such way, the frame was used to interpret Russian strikes on Ukraine's energy infrastructure on October 10, 2022<sup>6</sup> and shelling of Mykolaiv on June 21, 2022<sup>7</sup>. For those events, Russian MoD stated:

“Today, mass strike on the objects of military command, communication, and energy system of Ukraine was conducted with high-precision, long-range weapons by Russian armed forces. The goal of the strike was reached. All assigned targets were hit”<sup>8</sup>

“The enemy suffers heavy losses. On June 21, as a result of high-precision weapon strike by the Aerospace Forces of Russia, up to 500 servicemen of the 59th motorized brigade of the UAF with

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<sup>1</sup> <https://t.me/khersonskaODA/2852>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cnbc.com/2023/04/18/ukraine-war-live-updates-latest-news-on-russia-and-the-war-in-ukraine.html>

<sup>3</sup> [https://t.me/mod\\_russia/25762](https://t.me/mod_russia/25762)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/russian-war-report-russian-airstrike-hits-humanitarian-aid-station>

<sup>5</sup> [https://t.me/mod\\_russia/28239](https://t.me/mod_russia/28239)

<sup>6</sup> <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-kyiv-government-and-politics-8f625861590b9e0dd336dabc0880ac8c>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/seven-russian-missiles-hit-ukrainian-city-mykolaiv-regional-governor-2022-06-22/>

<sup>8</sup> [https://t.me/mod\\_russia/20714](https://t.me/mod_russia/20714)

their weapons and army vehicles that were located in the workshops of Nikolayev Shipyard 'Okean' were destroyed"<sup>1</sup>

Logically, the proposed moral evaluation is that Russia's actions are legitimate, because military targets are legitimate targets. Notably, though, this frame might not provide a clear implication on problem solution. By definition, from Russia's standpoint, the attack is a success by itself.

*Anti-Russian insinuation.* By using this frame, Russia's communicators address an event of civilian harm but position it as Ukraine's operation and false accusation of Russia. Noticeably, such frame might be applied in advance – as if Russia issues a warning about upcoming insinuation by Ukraine. Accordingly, fake scenery or a potential war crime/false flag operation could be communicated.

As an example, on the day of Russia's shelling of Kharkiv on March 4, 2022, Russian MoD "warned" about Ukraine-orchestrated provocation with the involvement of Western media<sup>2</sup>:

"Ukrainian nationalists are preparing a provocation with the participation of Western journalists in Kharkov. According to confirmed data, on Zhilardi Street, Kievsky District, in the private sector, multiple launch rocket systems are placed between the houses. Nationalists forbid local residents, including children, to leave their homes... The purpose of the provocation is to cause the return fire of Russian artillery on the residential sector of Kharkov. All this is planned to be filmed on cameras with the subsequent transfer to Western journalists"

Another example is Russia's framing of its attack on civilian convoys on May 4, 2022, in Kharkiv Oblast (by that time, Russia had been retreating from Kharkiv). Russia was reported to have targeted two civilian convoys and to have killed about five civilians (including 13-year-old girl)<sup>3</sup>. However, Mikhail Mizintsev, then-Head of the National Defense Management Center of the Russian Federation, issued a statement in which he blamed the Armed Forces of Ukraine for the attack<sup>4</sup>:

"According to the available reliable information, in the Kharkiv region the Kiev regime held another bloody action according to the "Buchinsky" scenario. On the road section between the settlements of Stary and New Saltov, soldiers of the Armed Forces of Ukraine shot six civilian cars which had white flags mounted on them [...] We warn you in advance that soon, these and other Kiev regime-fabricated materials about alleged "Russians' outrage" are planned to be spread widely via the western and Ukrainian mass media as well as via internet resources"

Respectively, in such way, Russian speakers and/or media communicate civilian harm and killings of civilians as Ukrainian insinuation/provocation, atrocity by the AFU, and attempt to put the blame on Russia. Ukraine is thus blamed for the civilian harm, whereas the western media are co-blamed for participating in the insinuation. The frame involves viewing the event as an atrocity, a bloody, unlawful action, and, basically, an act of civilian harm. Finally, the "solution" that Russian speakers imply within this frame is, accordingly, not to believe the information about Russia's war crime.

*Other possible frames.* Some frames appeared in the sample only once or twice. Such frequency on the exploratory stage does not provide sufficient evidence to label them as typical frames. However, these frames (Table 2) might be worth mentioning for further scientific investigations. Possibly, these frames were used by Russia more as an exception. For example, it could be assumed that such frames could have been used in the most extreme cases of Russia's war crimes that caused even more uproar and media coverage.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://t.me/mod\\_russia/17024](https://t.me/mod_russia/17024)

<sup>2</sup> [https://india.mid.ru/en/news/updates\\_from\\_the\\_russian\\_defence\\_ministry\\_february\\_24\\_april\\_4\\_2022/](https://india.mid.ru/en/news/updates_from_the_russian_defence_ministry_february_24_april_4_2022/)

<sup>3</sup> <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/05/13/europe/ukraine-russia-kharkiv-atrocities-intl/index.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.newsweek.com/how-russian-media-telling-ukraine-war-story-monday-april-18-1698774>

**Table 2.** Other possible frames used by Russia to explain civilian harm done by its forces, based on Entman's (1993) analytical approach.

Frame	Problem definition	Causal interpretation	Moral evaluation	Treatment recommendation
Depersonalized incident	Something “just” happened	-	-	-
Vengeance	Retaliation strike	Ukraine's previous unlawful action caused Russia to retaliate	Attack is legitimate, as Russia as attacked first	Ukraine must stop attacking Russia's territory/facilities

The “depersonalized accident” frame implies that civilian harm-related event happened, but it is just a plain fact with no other details or accountability for the harm. Hence, Russian communicators simply acknowledge that some sort of incident happened, but do not attribute the attack directly to themselves or any other side. For example, when Russia attacked ports in Odesa oblast (including those in the towns of Reni and Izmail) with drones on July 24, 2023, Russian state media TASS only mentioned that “explosions were heard”<sup>1</sup>:

“Explosions are heard in the town of Izmail, which is located in Odessa Oblast. The news was reported by the media 'Mirror of the Week'. Izmail is a large port on the Danube. Earlier the explosions were reported by the media "Dumskaya". According to the official public [air raid alert] notification resource, air raid alert was announced in the region”

This frame informs of the incident, yet it does not give any moral judgement or further implications. On the surface, neither does the frame attribute accountability for the civilian harm to any actor. However, by depersonalizing Russia's attack, the frame lifts responsibility for the attack from Russia. In other words, the frame implies that “it is not Russia that caused the explosions – it is just that something exploded”.

On the other hand, the “vengeance” frame does not deny or omit mentions of Russia's involvement in the civilian harm event. On the contrary, this frame is used to interpret the attack as retaliation against Ukraine. To provide an example, once again, commenting on October 10, 2022's Russian massive missile attack on Ukraine's critical infrastructure, Russian president Vladimir Putin issued the statement saying that the air strike was a response to an explosion on the Crimea bridge (which happened days before) and accused Ukraine of attempting terrorist-like attacks on Russia's critical infrastructure<sup>2</sup>:

“In such way, with their actions, Kiev regime put themselves in one line with international terrorist groups [...] Leaving such kind of crimes without response is just impossible anymore. This morning, based on suggestion of the Ministry of Defense and according to Russia's General staff's plans, a mass strike on Ukraine's objects of energy infrastructure, military command, and communication was conducted with high-precision, long-range weapons”

From this point of view, the causality implied by Russian frames is that Ukraine's previous unlawful attacks caused Russia to retaliate. The frame thus puts the responsibility on Ukraine and evaluates Russia's attack as a legitimate and rightful action. Moreover, the frame implies that to fix the issue, Ukraine must stop targeting Russia's facilities and territories in self-defense.

<sup>1</sup> <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/18343679>

<sup>2</sup> <http://special.kremlin.ru/catalog/countries/UA/events/69568>

## Conclusions

The objective of this paper is to identify and analyze the typical frames employed by Russia in the interpretation of civilian harm events. By doing so, the study aims to establish an initial evidence-based understanding of Russia's framing strategies within this context.

Russian communicators use a set of typical frames to re-interpret Russia's attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure in Ukraine. Some of the frames (like the "hit military targets frame") are aimed at legitimizing the attack by stating that it was lawful, straightforward legitimate, and did not intentionally harm civilians. Other frames (like full "ignorance" and "anti-Russian insinuation" frames) work in a slightly different manner – by "lifting" responsibility for the civilian harm from Russia and by either distorting the event (in case of "ignorance") or putting the blame on Ukraine (in the case of the "anti-Russian insinuation" frame). Also, the "partial ignorance" pseudo-frame was found, which operates more as an element of combined frames.

Moreover, a couple of frames that might not be very typical were highlighted. "The vengeance" frame also legitimizes civilian harm by making focus on retaliation and being forced to attack in response. Yet, "depersonalized accident" acknowledges civilian harm, but interprets it as a "it just happened"-event, once again, lifting responsibility from Russia.

Nevertheless, Russia's framing strategies are not necessarily limited to the content of this set. On the contrary, the study suggests that there are several perspectives in further research on Russia's civilian harm framing within its strategic communication. Firstly, sampling might need to be expanded using other complementary approaches (like studying extreme cases, using a maximum variation sample, etc.). And as it was mentioned earlier, Bellingcat dataset lists separate cases of various civilian harm events, and it could be assumed that most of those did not have large-volume, high-intensity media coverage compared to, for example, the strikes on "Okhmatdyt" children's hospital or Mariupol theatre. Accordingly, more civilian harm events that caused even more intensive coverage and reactions should be considered for research. It is possible that more frame types could be detected in those cases. Secondly, more detailed analysis (perhaps, from the deductive perspective as well) might be helpful to provide a better understanding of how ignorance of frames/pseudo-frames work. Thirdly, it would be reasonable to study the structure of Russia's framing of civilian harm from a quantitative approach as well – thus, to highlight frequencies and possible correlations with the frame types. Yet, this study provides baseline knowledge for further investigations.

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RESEARCH ARTICLES  
ДОСЛІДНИЦЬКІ СТАТТІ

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## Mediatized remembrance rituals in Ukrainian international communication during the Russo-Ukrainian war

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### ABSTRACT

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This study aimed to investigate how international media interpreted and presented remembrance rituals involving foreign leaders in wartime Ukraine. A mixed-method approach was employed to analyze the coverage of two remembrance rituals involving Japan's and Greece's PM's visits to Ukraine. A case study was amplified with content analysis of five media per case to shed

#### KEYWORDS

mediatization,  
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remembrance ritual,  
emotional storytelling,  
Russian-Ukrainian war

light on techniques of media coverage. The findings demonstrate that Ukraine instrumentalized remembrance rituals to make foreign leaders live through emotional experience. The media relied on emotional storytelling and vivid visualization when covering the remembrance rituals. The results of the research are significant for international communication, scholars, and policy-makers due to the relevance of sustaining a positive image for the Ukrainian success in defending against the Russian invasion.

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### АНОТАЦІЯ

Дослідження покликане розкрити сутність медіатизованих ритуалів пам'яті як інституціалізованої практики міжнародної комунікації в репертуарі української держави від початку повномасштабного російського вторгнення. Була запропонована концептуалізація процесу медійного висвітлення й інтерпретації ритуалів пам'яті за участю іноземних лідерів для зовнішніх аудиторій у період військового стану в Україні. Для аналізу висвітлення двох ритуалів пам'яті під час офіційних візитів прем'єр-міністрів Японії та Греції в Україну десятьма

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міжнародними ЗМІ та прес-службами було застосовано змішаний підхід. Зокрема, метод кейс стаді був доповнений за допомогою методу івент-аналізу, щоб мати послідовну та уніфіковану схему дослідження. Контент- та візуальний аналіз десяти медіаматеріалів дозволив зробити всебічний огляд трендів, присутніх у висвітленні подій міжнародними медіа. Отримані результати свідчать про те, що Україна інструменталізувала ритуали пам'яті для переживання емоційного досвіду іноземними лідерами. Для цього використовувалися харизматичність та медійність особи Президента Зеленського, а також організація ритуалів у локаціях, що мають символічне значення як для лідерів, так і для нації загалом. Такий підхід використовувався для зближення горизонтів між цільовими аудиторіями шляхом апелювання до знайомих їм наративів та уявлень. У висвітленні ритуалів пам'яті міжнародні медіа використовували емоційний сторітілінг, фокусувалися на коментарях лідерів із рефлексією щодо пережитого ними досвіду, а також застосували візуалізацію заходів (фото та відео з місця ритуалу пам'яті). Результати дослідження є актуальними для дослідників міжнародних комунікацій та політиків з огляду на актуальність підтримки позитивного іміджу для успіху України в захисті від російського вторгнення.

**КЛЮЧОВІ СЛОВА:** медіатизація, міжнародні комунікації, ритуал пам'яті, емоційний сторітілінг, російсько-українська війна.

## **Introduction**

Since the start of the full-scale Russian invasion (from now on, FSI), Ukraine has been facing the deadliest war Europe has seen since the Second World War. The nation has required support from foreign nations to defend itself and sustain social and economic life. As international communication has proven vital in establishing trustworthy relations with crucial audiences, Ukraine has implemented an innovative strategy oriented at Western audiences to sustain a continuous support flow over volatile election cycles and lengthy procedures.

A part of this strategy lies in making foreign leaders participate in remembrance rituals. The war is a national tragedy with tens of thousands of casualties, and it has led to commemoration practices to honor the memory of the fallen. Typically, they happen on national sites of exceptional value and symbolic importance. The Wall of Remembrance of the Fallen for Ukraine is a site created for remembering casualties of the Russian aggression since 2014. Nowadays, dozens of national flags are wrapped around trees in front of it, each signifying a foreign visit. Effectively, the Wall has become a ritual site for international remembrance practice that few foreign leaders can miss during official visits to the capital. Usually, a foreign leader commemorates the bravery of Ukrainian servicepeople by laying flowers against the background of honor guards and a military orchestra.

International media provides extensive coverage of remembrance rituals by transmitting and interpreting them to broader audiences. Thus, it not only mediates the remembrance practice but profoundly influences how it is understood, with differences in approach to covering the same event. Consequently, the relevance of delving into the mediatization of remembrance rituals lies in determining Ukraine's vision and reputation, the most critical assets on the international battlefield of "whose story wins" (Ronfeldt & Arquilla, 2020).

Despite its significance, the study of mediatized remembrance rituals during wartime in Ukraine has not yet received scholarly attention. Existing research has focused on the analysis and role of mediatized rituals in diverse contexts and societies except for wartime. This gap in the literature highlights the need to examine how mediatization has influenced international remembrance practices in wartime Ukraine.

This study approaches two international remembrance rituals in wartime Ukraine through the lens of international media coverage. Understanding how different media process and present remembrance rituals, including emotional storytelling and reliance on visual elements, holds far-reaching implications for communication researchers, policymakers, and the general public.

### *Literature Review*

Public rituals have long attracted researchers' attention in communication and social studies (e.g., Couldry, 2003; Bell, 2009; Dayan & Katz, 1992; Katz & Liebes, 2007; Sumiala, 2014). E. Durkheim viewed a ritual as a "society in action" that solidarizes a group by providing its members with a higher purpose beyond individual interests (Cottle, 2006, p. 414). Reviewing recent literature, J. Sumiala noted that studies mainly focused on mass political events, including both national successes (such as spectacles, ceremonies, and weddings) and tragedies (catastrophes and funerals) (2014, p. 939).

In the middle of the 20th century, public rituals became mediatized due to the influence of mass media, thus becoming more suitable for governmental control in time and memory. Media entities can still influence the perceived importance of international events by prioritizing the position or adding more time to a particular news piece (Blondheim & Liebes, 2002, p. 275; Chouliarakis, 2006). Notably, the media has a unique position that allows it to frame the meaning of different ritual activities, manage public emotions, and channel them to broad audiences (Pannti & Sumiala, 2009, p. 133). Moreover, engaging audiovisual capabilities were acclaimed more emotionally arousing than traditional print media, leading to unique collective emotional experiences (Cho et al., 2003, p. 310; Scott, 2014). Still, with the advent of social media, the established cycle between news, time, and events was broken, thus challenging traditional media's "monopoly over events at certain times" with the rapid flow of private interpretations (Seeck & Rantanen, 2015, p. 164).

Mediatized ritual is a unique and performative media phenomenon that "mobilizes collective sentiments and solidarities based on symbolization and a subjunctive orientation to what should or ought to be" (Cottle, 2006, p. 415). A similar concept found in the literature is a "media event," defined as "a site of maximum visibility and turbulence" (Fiske, 1994, p. 7). For example, universal media coverage of the 1969 US Moon Landing had a monopolistic, mass-oriented nature aimed at gaining an advantage in the battle for space against the USSR (Dayan & Katz, 1992, pp. 4 – 9).

An international remembrance ritual is a government-staged media event tailored to induce solid emotional reactions among foreign leaders and their constituencies to achieve desired foreign policy goals. They have historically been used to forge solidarity among different internal audiences during wartime. Usually, such events contain symbols, emotion, rhetoric, and performance constitutive of human communicative action. They are thus ready to be ritualized and conveyed through media through emotional storytelling (Cottle, 2006, p. 413). In her research of WWI memorial sites, C. Winter argued that they are emotional centers of a nation where attendees expressed "sadness, gratitude" as well as "promises to remember and never forget the dead" (Winter, 2009, p. 16). Finnish national press and television frequently involved national imagery, such as flags, symbols, and state representatives, when covering public rituals (Pannti & Sumiala, 2009, p. 127).

As states are considered "hierarchical groups of emotional people" (Hymans, 2010, p. 462), the involvement of prominent national figures in the rituals and the media's emphasis on their participation play a significant role in generating sympathy among foreign audiences. Traditionally, foreign leaders visit a country suffering from disasters or man-made catastrophes to express condolences and provide support (Hall, 2015, p. 870). A. Ross applied the concept of dramatic dominance (Goffman, 1956, pp. 62-63) to the international communication sphere. The author postulated that national leaders set the emotional agenda based on personal charisma and effective penetration of their messages (Ross, 2015, p. 24).

Notably, the Ukrainian President's public persona on the verge of popularity in the West was used to invite foreign leaders into Ukraine (Omelchenko, 2024, p. 238). The latter were motivated to capitalize on his media salience and to increase their international reputation. Delving into President Zelensky's pre-war media relations, Bilan and Netreba argued that not only did he utilize rhetorical and narrative means to engage the audience and deliver his message (active listening and rapid reaction), but also non-verbal communication (body language, mimics, and gestures). The authors concluded that to project his confidence, authority, trust, and closeness to the people, Zelensky relied on emotions when discussing susceptible topics to the nation, i.e., national pride

(Bilan & Netreba, 2024, p. 219). Notably, the deeply personal experiences of official actors during such events could sometimes form interpersonal solidarities (Hall & Ross, 2015, p. 865). For example, mediatization was essential in creating and sustaining international emotional solidarity with Palestine among wider foreign audiences (Fatic & Korac, 2011, p. 6).

## Method

The key methods utilized in this research are case study and content analysis. Firstly, cases of mediatized remembrance rituals happening in Ukraine since 2022 have been carefully selected based on the following criteria: International salience of the visit (including the symbolic importance of the location for foreign leaders), the temporal gap between events, the highest possible level of foreign representation at the ritual, the presence of top Ukrainian leadership on the site, and sufficient foreign media coverage. Subsequently, two specific cases of remembrance practice were identified and both of the rituals commemorated civic casualties:

Case No. 1: Japanese Prime Minister F. Kishida's participation in the official ritual of laying flowers near a monument remembering victims of mass killings in Bucha during his first official visit to Ukraine on March 21st, 2023.

Case No. 2: Greek Prime Minister K. Mitsotakis' participation in the official ritual of laying flowers near a destroyed block of flats in Odesa during his official visit to Ukraine on March 6th, 2024.

V. Kryvoshein's event analysis overview was utilized as a framework for case studies (2018, 15 – 16). Specifically, the background of the visit, the geographical location of the event, the visit's goal, the event's subjects, and the event's media coverage have been considered when approaching two case studies.

Secondly, a qualitative content analysis of five media and press service resources that covered the events was conducted:

For Case No. 1: South China Morning Post, Euronews, The Asahi Shimbun, The Japan Times, Kyodo News.

For Case No. 2: Verified Facebook Channel of The President of Ukraine, The Hellenic Foundation for Culture in Odesa, Le Monde, CNN, Politico

The selection of media and press service resources was based on their relevance and breadth of their reach to national and international audiences. Within the media reports, an emphasis was made on searching for:

- official comments of the leaders participating in the rituals;
- media interpretation of leader's speeches and ritual as a whole;
- verbal tools were utilized to depict the symbolic, political, and cultural importance of foreign leaders participating in the ritual;
- signs of the emotional tone of the narration depicting the ritual (e.g., words like grief, anger, compassion, and/or phrases featuring and implying them).

Lastly, content analysis was supplemented by an analysis of available photo and video materials published by foreign media and press services to illustrate the emotional tone of the ritual.

## Results

Since the first days of the FSI, President Zelensky has emphasized the need for Western citizens and officials to acutely perceive the reality of Russia's brutal aggression in Ukraine, including through firsthand experience (Kvasnevska, 2022). Therefore, international mediatized remembrance rituals involving foreign actors have become a tool of Ukrainian international communication. As a nation at war, mediatized rituals are highly suitable for building emotional investment in Ukraine and its cause among the participating leaders and wider foreign audiences via extensive media coverage.

When organizing international visits, Ukrainian government carefully matched ritual sites with a leader's personal background and national specificities to merge the horizons between them and

Ukrainian wartime symbolic values. Moreover, Ukraine has organized foreign visits in a particular way to elicit a desirable emotional response – sympathy and compassion to Ukraine and its citizens, but also anger at the aggressor – from the elites and the home electorate.

President Zelensky's media figure has witnessed an extremely high international visibility that has complemented the organization of foreign visits to Ukraine by attracting leaders and elite representatives. V. Zelensky's acting background, personal affective penetration, and well-assembled speechwriting team were prerequisites for forging such an influential media figure and interpersonal communicator. Importantly, Zelensky has maintained narrative and symbolic consistency, such as wearing simple wartime uniforms instead of classic costumes. Moreover, his public persona during official rituals has often been prone to emotionally imbued improvisations that feel both trustworthy and meaningful. During the 80th D-Day Anniversary in June 2024, an American veteran passed by V. Zelensky in a wheelchair and surprisingly attempted to kiss his hand, telling him, "You are a savior of people". V. Zelensky escaped this awkward situation by bending down, hugging, and responding to the veteran, "No, no, you saved Europe".

### **Japan PM F. Kishida's visit to Bucha (March 21st, 2023)**

*Background of the visit:* Japan was among the first nations to strongly oppose the FSI of Ukraine. However, despite significant economic and humanitarian assistance to Ukraine throughout the war, Japan's peaceful post-war constitution still does not allow for direct military support to nations in war. Moreover, F. Kishida was the first Japanese post-war leader to visit a country in war, following an invitation by V. Zelensky in January 2023 and despite internal pressure in Japan. Indeed, as The Japan Times contends, it was only thanks to Kishida's insistence that helped overcome the "restrictive customs of the Japanese parliament and the suffocating conservatism of the country's bureaucracy" (Johnson, 2023). Moreover, the organization of this visit to the warzone proceeded in complete secrecy. The Asahi Shimbun reported that this visit was unique in Japan's history as it contradicted Japanese diplomatic etiquette (Asahi, 2023). Additionally, most media featured that the Ukrainian MFA deputy E. Dzhaparova – who also escorted Kishida during the ritual in Bucha – called this visit a "historic" one (Kyodo News, 2023).

*Geographical location of the ritual:* Bucha is a small town in Kyiv's agglomeration that became one of the first liberated settlements in late March 2022. Sadly, it was also the first place to become publicly associated with Russian mass executions and tortures, symbolizing the aggressor's cruelty and the victim's pain, suffering, and sorrow. Japan PM Kishida visited a memorial near the Church of St. Andrew First-Called. This spot in front of the church became a mass gravesite during the Russian occupation. After the liberation in April 2022, it became a commemorative site for popular ceremonies and international remembrance rituals.

*Goal of the visit:* Leaders who come to Ukraine often visit this small town in Kyiv's neighborhood to commemorate the victims among Ukrainian citizens. Often, but not exclusively, those are high representatives of neutral nations far from the war and its context. Therefore, they tend to distance themselves from participating in remembrance rituals dedicated to the fallen soldiers of Ukraine and instead lean towards expressing condolences to the nation in general.

*Subjects of the event:* Japan's PM F. Kishida, Ukrainian MFA deputy minister E. Dzhaparova, mayor of Bucha A. Fedoruk

*Media coverage of the event:* The ritual was short and straightforward: Kishida arrived in Ukraine by train and immediately went to Bucha. He laid a wreath before the church, bowed in Japanese style, and observed the silence. Then, he expressed condolences to the mayor of Bucha on behalf of Japanese nationals and entered the Church of St. Andrew. There, Kishida was shown an exhibition featuring photos of murdered Bucha dwellers with live comments right from the Bucha mayor himself. Finally, he received a commemorative badge. Tellingly, the most popular photo that the media used to illustrate the ritual was the one with Kishida and his staff performing traditional Japanese bowing in front of a Christian church with an armed guard.



**Figure 1.** Official photo from the international remembrance ritual in Bucha: No. 1: Japan's PM Kishida looks at the images of Russian atrocities in the memorial church; No. 2: Japan's PM Kishida bows his head in commemoration.

After the ritual, Kishida publicly expressed his emotional state during the ritual to the media. According to him, he was “outraged by cruelty” and felt “... great anger at the atrocity upon visiting that very place here”. He also made emotional generalizations, such as “The world was astonished to see innocent civilians in Bucha killed one year ago” (South et al., 2023). At the same time, Kishida emphasized the “courage and patience of Ukrainian people that defend their homeland under President Zelensky’s leadership” (Euronews, 2023). Japanese media The Asahi Shimbun mentioned “Tokyo’s emphatic support for Ukraine against Russia’s invasion” (2023). The Japan Times has put PM Kishida’s pledge “to keep aiding Ukraine with the greatest effort to regain peace” right after him offering condolences to the victims of Russian atrocities (2023).

Alongside the visit, Japanese media Kyodo News interviewed Ukrainian Deputy Foreign Minister E. Dzhaparova. It gave potent amplification to the Ukrainian position in Japan, but Dzhaparova also underlined Ukrainian attention to personal details of foreign leaders during the planning of the rituals. She mentioned PM Kishida’s background as a “lawmaker elected from Hiroshima, a city devastated by an atomic bomb during World War II.” Dzhaparova believed this background “gave him a deep understanding and empathy for the people of Ukraine. ... I felt that the prime minister sensed the suffering. He shared the suffering of the Ukrainian people as he commemorated the dead in Bucha”. Lastly, she mentioned that the commemoration ritual was “a very emotional moment for her” after she observed Kishida, “who spent much time paying tribute to the victims of the Bucha massacre” (Kyodo News, 2023).

Being aware of PM Kishida originating from Hiroshima and losing many family members to the brutal atomic bombing, Ukraine invited him to commemorate the death of innocent civilians in Bucha. It could have been the same as what he used to do and feel when he returned to war-torn Hiroshima with his family during his childhood days (Kishida, 2020). Similarly, in May 2023, Zelensky was invited to Hiroshima, a modern-day Japan’s sacred and symbolic center. Now, it was the global resonance of Zelensky’s public and media persona that added a crucial symbolic element to Japan’s G7 chairmanship in 2023.

#### **Greece PM Mitsotakis’ visit to Odesa on March 6th, 2024**

*Background of the visit:* Greece strongly condemned the FSI of Ukraine. However, despite its large stocks of Soviet weapons, including air defense systems required by Ukraine, Greece has been unwilling to donate them. A recent survey shows that 31% of Greeks are confident Russia will win the war (the highest percentage in the EU) whereas only 3% believe in Ukraine’s victory. Consequently, most Greeks are opposed to increasing the supplies of military equipment to Ukraine and increased internal defense spending due to the war (54% and 55%, respectively (ECFR, 2024, pp. 17-29)). Unfavorable public opinion could influence the decision-making process among the elites regardless of their political predispositions.



**Figure 2.** Excerpts from the official video of the commemoration ritual in Odesa, March 6th, 2024. No. 1: Makeshift memorial against the background of the destroyed house; No. 2: K. Mitsotakis and V. Zelensky bow their heads to commemorate the victims; No. 3: Zelensky comforts the depressed dwellers; No. 4: Dwellers of the destroyed house participating in the ritual.

*Goal of the foreign visit:* K. Mitsotakis mentioned two primary goals in Ukraine. Firstly, he noted the symbolic importance of Odesa for Greece because “the flame of Greek independence was lit [there] by the Filiki Eteria” (2024). Moreover, he considered important to visit the active Hellenic diaspora in Odesa, “a living continuation of the centuries-old connection between our countries” and to show his support. Secondly, Mitsotakis discussed various bilateral matters with Zelensky, including strategically crucial maritime trade and military support.

*The geographical location of the ritual:* While most foreign leaders’ visits were limited to the Ukrainian capital and its neighborhood, sometimes nations have their places of symbolic importance within Ukraine. Such a position allowed for a smart invitation policy, bringing leaders from countries with deep and historic connections to those territories. Odesa, a port city on the Black Sea, is strategically important to Ukraine and has a unique cultural heritage and national minorities, including Greeks. The latter have close ties with their homeland and bring attention to the war in Ukraine. Moreover, the Greek liberation movement Filiki Eteria originated in Odesa. Indiscriminate Russian bombardments of the city have also taken their toll on the city’s dwellers. Therefore, Odesa has many places of symbolic importance to organize international mediated rituals, such as the Filiki Eteria museum, destroyed churches, and block-of-flats.

*Goal of the visit:* While most foreign visits were limited to the Ukrainian capital and its neighborhood, sometimes nations have their places of symbolic importance within Ukraine. Thus, Mitsotakis claimed that he intended to come to Odesa and that V. Zelensky managed to arrange the meeting to fulfill his request (The Prime Minister of the Hellenic Republic, 2024).

*Subjects of the event:* Ukrainian President V. Zelensky and Greek PM K. Mitsotakis, dwellers of the destroyed block-of-flats.

*Media coverage of the event:* Firstly, Greece PM K. Mitsotakis was welcomed by President Zelensky in the Odesa port to have negotiations. Immediately afterward, the first ritual of the day started as both leaders visited a destroyed residential building and commemorated the deaths of 12 innocent Odesa residents, including five children. An official video of the commemoration ritual

made and shared by the Ukrainian President's press team is of specific interest. One could see that both leaders laid flowers on the makeshift memorial. The camera pans around the memorial in detail, showing victims' family photos and lamps surrounded by dozens of multicolored children's toys and hundreds of flowers. Zelensky and Mitsotakis are shown standing in complete silence with their heads bowed.

Importantly, unlike the previous case, this ritual in Odesa involved many participants. Dwellers of that residential building who survived the attack were also present during the ritual. After laying the flowers, both Zelensky and, unusually, Mitsotakis went to the dwellers: Ukrainian leader comforted the depressed residents while Greece's PM stood by him silently, listening to his interpreter. Afterward, a crying woman from the crowd thanked Zelensky for a visit, and he hugged her in turn (Zelensky, 2024).

Mitsotakis also visited the Filiki Eteria museum in Odesa. The Hellenic Foundation for Culture in Odesa, a dedicated culture diplomacy institution of the Greek government, reported online Mitsotakis's "great agitation" for visiting the city that was a synonym for Greece's "national struggle for liberation" (2024). Furthermore, on the personal Facebook page, the prime minister's press team called Odesa a "symbolic site" for the Greeks. Altogether, the public institution framed Odesa as the symbolic site for Greek national liberation before and Ukrainian struggle for liberty now. Moreover, the media also mentioned Mariupol's tragedy as a shocking experience for Mitsotakis and a grim page for Ukrainian and Hellenic histories. Such coverage was tailored for internal national pride and legacy of Greece's audiences. Historical analogies effectively link widespread knowledge of one nation's symbols and concepts with the modern Ukrainian situation. Notably, to publicly communicate Mitsotakis' experience during the visit, the press team used social media as a mediator less imbued with excessive officialdom, unsuitable for such a format.

Finally, Mitsotakis' visit was unique in that he and Zelensky came close to a Russian missile attack during their visit to the port of Odesa. Mitsotakis admitted to the media that he went through a "vivid" and "very intense experience" after witnessing the attack. However, Mitsotakis used that case to deliver two essential messages through the international media. Firstly, he emphasized the unbroken spirit of Greece by claiming that "no one will intimidate us" (Le Monde, 2024). CNN reported that for Mitsotakis, this attack came as "the most vivid reminder that there is a real war going on" in Ukraine (2024).

Secondly, instead of discouraging other leaders from official visits, Mitsotakis used international media to motivate them to live through the wartime experience: "This is one more reason why all European leaders should come to Ukraine. Because it is one thing to hear the description from the media or President Zelenskyy, and it is another to experience the war firsthand" (Politico, 2024). As an additional reminder of the wartime in Ukraine, Zelensky and Mitsotakis held a final press conference against the background of the damaged Transfiguration Cathedral in Odesa. To sum up, in a couple of hours, Mitsotakis in Odesa lived through the daily reality of wartime Ukraine by participating in the commemoration ritual and finding himself under a Russian missile attack.

## **Discussion**

Public rituals commemorating casualties of the war have become an embodiment of wartime Ukraine. Two rituals demonstrated how Ukraine approached the wartime international communication. From a larger perspective, the widespread use of mediated rituals signifies the institutionalizing of a new politics of memory in Ukraine. Enacted on the highest level since the first day of the FSI by President Zelensky, this new, grim Ukrainian reality dressed in strict military uniform naturally reflects the self-sacrifice and tragedy of the Ukrainian nation at war.

Notably, this approach follows the main rule of strategic communications: actions are more important than words. As Greece PM K. Mitsotakis mentioned "experience" several times during his visit, leaders' and delegations' firsthand participation in commemorations of the victims of the Russian aggression is a central element of those rituals. Altogether, the media displayed emotional

registers of both Kishida and Mitsotakis, which consisted of sadness, compassion, sympathy, and fear in the case of Mitsotakis's visit.

A vital highlight from those two cases is that the rituals were dedicated to civilian victims. Rituals commemorating fallen Ukrainian soldiers are more typical for the leaders with a more "hawkish" and radical approach to the war on the Ukrainian side. Instead, rituals involving civilian victims could have far less dubious connotations for internal audiences. For instance, those could be neutral nations, such as South Korea, the President of which visited Bucha shortly after Japan's Kishida. Alternatively, there could be nations with staunch legacy of traditionalist and bureaucratic control, such as Japan. In both cases, leadership had various internal reasons for not providing Ukraine significant military assistance. Last but not least, such rituals are in place for nations without unanimous popular support towards either side of the war, like Greece.

Moreover, the sites for the rituals were chosen very carefully to appeal to their background and preferences. In the case of Japan's Kishida, his visit and commemoration practice in Bucha were linked with his childhood memories of doing the same in Hiroshima. For Mitsotakis and the Greeks as a nation, Odesa plays an integral role in national liberation, thus appealing to their patriotic feelings. This allows for tailoring messages for local context using simple yet effective historical and symbolical analogies.

Remembrance rituals have laid the groundwork for communicating the Ukrainian narrative to wider foreign audiences through the media by providing it with striking images and vivid reflections. Effectively, just like they influence foreign leaders, they are also one of the main constitutive elements of the (re)branding of the Ukrainian nation in the eyes of the international community. The context and information resonance of a major war in Europe are instrumental in disseminating a new vision and understanding. Participation of respectable foreign leaders also provides the Ukrainian vision with additional legitimacy.

## Conclusion

This study sheds light on the mediatization of remembrance rituals in the international communication of a nation at war. Ukraine's critical dependence on foreign assistance has shaped its reliance on innovative ways to gather allies among the elites and the broader public. Therefore, since the start of FSI, Ukraine has instrumentalized commemoration practices to influence foreign audiences through international media coverage.

We conceptualize a mediatized remembrance ritual as an institutionalized practice in Ukraine's communication repertoire that engages foreign representatives in participation in remembrance rituals extensively covered and interpreted by international media. Two case studies of Japanese and Greek PMs' participation in remembrance events have much illustrative and explanatory potential for the field of international communications.

Specifically, Ukraine masterfully constructed two foreign visits to match perfectly with a foreign leader's previous knowledge. Through those rituals, Ukrainian diplomacy appeals to foreign leaders' personal and national predispositions. Such events tend to be organized in specific locations that resonate with an individual leader's childhood memories and the patriotic feelings of a whole nation. V. Zelensky's personal charisma and ability to project powerful emotional performance are central elements in successful foreign audience engagement through the mediatization of rituals. The firsthand experience of both Kishida and Mitsotakis during the rituals was crucial in their confessions about their emotional condition subsequently reported in the media coverage. Thus, media coverage is determined by reliance on emotional storytelling, including dissemination of leaders' reflections and statements and audiovisual imagery that further amplifies the textual part of the story. Lastly, social media platforms were occasionally used to evade officialdom when depicting the leader's emotional state.

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INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH  
МІЖДИСЦИПЛІНАРНІ ДОСЛІДЖЕННЯ

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# Unwanted partner? Germany and Ukraine (1991–2022)<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

The authors' analysis focuses on Germany's engagement in the processes of democratic transformations, the establishment of a free-market economy, bringing Ukraine closer to the European Union, and efforts to achieve peace in the Russia-Ukraine War. Despite Ukrainian government declarations of bilateral cooperation willingness with Germany, chancellors prioritized cooperation with Russia, unquestioningly acknowledging Ukraine's affiliation with the Russian Federation's sphere of influence. The temporary occupation of Crimea by Russia and the war in Donbas compelled Germany to participate in EU sanctions and seek compromise solutions in the Russian-Ukrainian War. However, this had no significance in maintaining correct relations with Moscow in any dimension.

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## АНОТАЦІЯ

Аналіз у цій статті зосереджений на участі Німеччини в процесах демократичних перетворень, становленні вільної ринкової економіки, наближенні України до Європейського Союзу та зусиллях щодо досягнення миру в російсько-українській війні. Попри декларації українського уряду про готовність двосторонньої співпраці з Німеччиною, канцлери віддали пріоритет співпраці з Росією, беззаперечно визнаючи приналежність України до сфери впливу Російської Федерації. Тимчасова окупація Криму Росією та війна на Донбасі змусили Німеччину брати участь у санкціях ЄС та шукати компромісних рішень у російсько-українській війні. Однак це не мало значення для підтримки коректних стосунків з Москвою в будь-якому вимірі.

**КЛЮЧОВІ СЛОВА:** Німеччина, Україна, Росія, Європейський Союз, 21 століття.

## Introduction

In the late 19th century, the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Wilhelmine Germany supported the Ukrainian national liberation movement, viewing it as a means to weaken the power of the Romanovs, especially in the face of the impending great war. During the Second World War, individual Ukrainian politicians aspiring for their own statehood, unwarrantedly tied their future to the Nazi Reich. Contrary to their dreams of independence, Ukrainians faced severe Stalinist reprisals as Hitler's plans did not include an independent Ukraine (Torke & Himka, 1994).

Ukraine re-entered the European and global stage only in 1991, following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The aspirations for the reconstruction and transformation of the country were traditionally linked with a united Germany. Germany was one of the first countries (after Poland, Canada, and the USA) to recognize Ukraine's independence on December 26, 1991.

Diplomatic relations were established on January 17, 1992. The authors' analysis presumed that Germany, citing Russia's paramount role in its Eastern policy, endeavored in subsequent years not to undertake actions towards Ukraine that could negatively impact the well-developing economic relations with the Russian Federation. In their view, condemning Russia's foreign policy could have far-reaching negative consequences for building European security structures with the crucial involvement of the Russian Federation.

There is a question whether West Germany believed in the deep-seated orientation of Ukrainian society towards close cooperation with Moscow, conveniently limiting German activity along the Dnipro. The analysis assumes the hypothesis of Germany utilizing instruments of the European Union (PCA agreement, Eastern Partnership, association agreement) to stabilize Ukraine politically, economically, and socially. The authors' assessments require scrutiny of German activity (Minsk agreements, Normandy Format, Steinmeier formula) from 2014 to 2022, aimed at restoring peace in the Russian-Ukrainian War. Linked to this is the subsequent research question of whether Russia's departure from promises of political liberalization and democratization after the 2012 presidential elections, coupled with the temporary occupation of Crimea by Russia and the war in Donbas, initiated a significant erosion of trust and an increase in German disillusionment with Russia. This became evident with the concept of *Zeitenwende* ("turning point") after Russia's aggression against Ukraine in 2022.

## Method

In their research on the article, the authors applied research methods commonly used in political science: institutional-legal, comparative, source analysis, historical, statistical, and decision-making methods. Source materials from the German government and the foreign affairs office, as well as materials and expertise from German research institutions and foundations, were utilized. Articles and monographs were consulted, and available Ukrainian and Russian literature was reviewed.

## Results

### Germany and Ukraine after 1991

After 1991, to the disappointment of Ukrainian politicians, there was no interest from the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) in the struggling republic, dealing with numerous issues. There was no new Marshall Plan and no anticipated extensive assistance for democratic reforms. Germany, focused on completing the reunification process and the evacuation of Russian troops from the territory of the former GDR, nurtured primarily its relations with Moscow. Ukraine was absent in German media, political statements, and economic circles. The visit of Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk to Bonn in February 1992, and expectations for greater assistance from Germany, turned out to be exaggerated. Only the German-Ukrainian cultural agreement (15.02.1992) was signed, resulting in the opening of the Goethe Institute and regional centers for the study of the German language, as well as representations of major German foundations. In the subsequent years, the Federal Republic entered into a total of 15 various detailed agreements with Ukraine, covering areas such as environmental protection, advisory and technical assistance, cooperation in nuclear disarmament, and youth exchange. However, this did not translate into broader cooperation (Vertragsrechtliche Grundlage, 2022).

Greater hopes rested on Chancellor Helmut Kohl's visit to Kyiv in 1993. During his stay in the Ukrainian capital on June 9–10, a declaration on the foundations of mutual relations and an agreement on the development of cooperation in the fields of economy, industry, science, and technology were signed. Subsequent years saw mutual visits and the expansion of various cooperation dimensions. From 1998 onwards, regular annual high-level consultations were conducted. Ukraine, still facing significant challenges in implementing democratic state rules and striving to be free from oligarchic ties, sought the approval of Western countries for NATO expansion to the east and close collaboration in shaping European security. Ukraine was the first Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) country with which the European Union signed the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) on June 14, 1994 (Die deutsch-ukrainischen Beziehungen, 2010).

During the presidencies of Leonid Kravchuk (1991–1994) and Leonid Kuchma (1994–2005), Ukraine was interested in strengthening cooperation with both Russia and Germany. At the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, modest progress was observed in Ukrainian-German economic cooperation. Since 1996, Germany, following Russia, ranked second in Ukraine's foreign trade, but the bilateral turnover was not impressive, amounting to 6.25 billion euros in 2006.

Upon taking power in 1998, the SPD-Greens coalition further diminished Ukraine's importance as a crucial partner and desired ally. For many years, the guiding principle was "Russia first," outlining Germany's ambitious plan for the modernization of Russia – constructing a democratic and liberal order through an extensive economic cooperation program (resource purchases, industrial product exports). The aim was to persuade the EU to finance a concocted program for Modernization in Russia, initially functioning in Berlin. In 2009, this program was successfully expanded to encompass the entire European Union, thereby incorporating its resources into projects primarily favoring the Federal Republic (Rahr, 2008, pp. 46–56).

The German slogan boiled down to emphasizing the immense role of the Federal Republic in maintaining European security. The newly enthralled Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, impressed by President Vladimir Putin, cautioned against any independent steps that could strengthen the Ukrainian state and bring it closer to European structures and standards. He unreservedly accepted the notion that Ukraine was within the Russian sphere of influence, particularly since, in his opinion, Ukrainian society highly valued its friendship with Moscow. Despite Germany's eager support for the aspirations of young democracies to join the European Union and NATO, it adopted an extremely reserved stance towards Ukraine.

In the fall of 2004, public opinion in Germany was enthralled by the "Orange" revolution and the festival of freedom on the Maidan in Kyiv. Though reluctantly, Germany, inspired by the Polish side, played a certain role in resolving the conflict and organizing a repeat of the presidential

elections. This was mainly due to pressure from the German public and media. On October 21, the parliamentary factions of the SPD and Bündnis 90/Die Grünen appealed to the German government for an active policy and increased pressure on the authorities in Kyiv to ensure that the elections proceeded “properly and democratically” with the participation of international observers. It was recognized that these elections would have a significant impact not only on the situation in Ukraine but also in the entire region, affecting the development of relations between Kyiv and Berlin (Deutscher Bundestag, 2004).

After winning the repeated elections, President Viktor Yushchenko called for a more concrete vision for Ukraine’s accession to the EU during visits to Brussels, Strasbourg, and Germany. On March 8, 2005, he addressed the Bundestag, emphasizing that Ukraine is an integral part of the European family of nations. However, the response to his appeal in government circles was weak. The Christian Democrat opposition demanded that Ukraine receive the status of a market economy and be admitted to the World Trade Organization (WTO). (Deutsche Christdemokraten fordern, 2005).

“The Orange Revolution” in Ukraine in 2005, under the leadership of Viktor Yushchenko, did not implement the necessary economic and social reforms. Disputes and conflicts quickly arose within the ruling elite, leading to the disintegration of the “orange camp.” Benefiting from this situation was the leader of the pro-Russian Party of Regions, former Prime Minister and presidential candidate in 2004, Viktor Yanukovych. He returned to the position of prime minister in 2006 after winning parliamentary elections.

From the fall of 2005, under the coalition government led by Chancellor Angela Merkel, consisting of the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats, Germany continued its previous eastern policy. In line with Moscow’s wishes, Germany did not endorse Ukraine’s membership in the European Union. Instead, it offered only the possibility of signing an association agreement and EU assistance within the framework of the Eastern Partnership, promoted by Poland and Sweden. At the NATO summit in April 2008 in Bucharest, Germany opposed Ukraine’s accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (Jureńczyk, 2019).

The electoral campaign in Ukraine in 2009, as well as the competition among presidential contenders – Yulia Tymoshenko, Viktor Yanukovych, and Viktor Yushchenko, was characterized by a persistent state of tension and an uncompromising campaign involving accusations and mutual denunciations. The weaknesses in the rule of law and state administration, coupled with the extensive influence of oligarchs and pervasive corruption, served as convenient arguments for the German government to abstain from involvement in Ukraine’s internal processes.

After the election of Viktor Yanukovych as the President of Ukraine in January 2010, the situation in Ukraine became more complex. Shortly after taking office, the president attempted to play a balancing act between the European Union and Russia. Deliberately choosing Brussels over Moscow, he embarked on his first foreign trip to the European capital. Yanukovych aimed to establish a free trade zone with the EU and swiftly implement a visa-free system for Ukrainian citizens. He assured that Ukraine, as a transit country, was prepared to fulfill its commitments regarding the regular supply of gas to European consumers. However, he openly stated that to achieve this goal, Kyiv would need to significantly improve its level of partnership with Russia (New Ukrainian President, 2010).

After Vladimir Putin’s return to the presidency of the Russian Federation following the presidential elections in March 2012, Yanukovych swiftly declared his intention to deepen cooperation with Russia on various fronts. As early as April 2010, he signed an agreement to extend the deployment of the Russian Black Sea Fleet until 2042, and in August 2012, he officially expanded the use of minority languages, particularly the Russian language. This raised questions in Brussels and Berlin about the continued rationale for attracting Ukraine to the European Union, especially when dealing with a country seemingly reconciled with existence within the Russian sphere of influence. This became evident at the fourteenth Ukraine-EU summit in November 2010, where the European Commission did not conceal its dissatisfaction with the shift in Ukrainian

foreign policy orientation. Although negotiations on the association agreement were concluded at the next EU-Ukraine summit in Kyiv on December 19, 2011, doubts lingered about Ukraine's readiness for closer ties with the EU (Dokumentation: 15., 2011; Ukraine-EU Gipfeltreffen, 2011).

It was only on March 30, 2012, that negotiators from the European Union and Ukraine initiated an association agreement comprising over a thousand pages. However, the actual signing and ratification date of the document remained unknown. The European Union delayed these steps due to the deterioration of the situation regarding the rule of law in Ukraine and the necessity of releasing the detained Yulia Tymoshenko (Koszel, 2016, p. 93).

Faced with such a situation, Ukrainian elites, led by President Viktor Yanukovych, were aware that Ukraine had to choose a strategic partner: either consistently pursue integration with the EU or join the customs union offered by Moscow, consisting of Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia. Opting for the first choice provided no guarantees of immediate membership and entailed a lengthy and troublesome process of talks, negotiations, and, above all, the gradual implementation of high-ranking EU standards. The second option condemned Ukraine to remain in the sphere of Russian influence, burying the pro-European aspirations of its citizens.

In February 2013, the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that the association agreement would most likely be signed during the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius in November 2013. On May 15, the European Commission confirmed this and, at the same time, acknowledged the conclusion of negotiations on this matter that had been ongoing since March 2007 (Europäische Kommission, 2013).

The prospect of Ukraine officially entering the sphere of influence of the European Union and the broader West triggered a swift diplomatic offensive by Russia, aiming to sabotage the rapprochement between Ukraine and the EU. Moscow enticed Ukraine with the prospect of membership in the then-promised Eurasian Union. After the meeting between Putin and Yanukovych in Kyiv in July 2013, Russian propaganda and economic pressures intensified, attempting to dissuade Kyiv from signing the association agreement with the EU. Faced with proverbial walls, Yanukovych had limited maneuverability. With the upcoming Eastern Partnership Summit planned for November 2013, he was under time pressure and the necessity to make a decision. He made a choice, and as a result of intense consultations with President Putin in Sochi (October 27) and Novo-Ogaryovo near Moscow (November 9), the fate of the association agreement was thereby sealed. It seems that Kyiv had no alternative, and the relevant agreements were signed on December 17 during President Yanukovych's visit to Moscow (Putin verspricht, 2013; Putin gewährt, 2013). Earlier, on November 21, 2013, the Ukrainian government announced the suspension of the preparations for signing the Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) with the European Union.

There is no doubt that President V. Putin outbid the European Union in promises, as it proposed aid – financial support program worth \$15 billion. The European Union has declared amounting to only 610 million to 1 billion euros, which was insignificant for a country in an extremely difficult economic situation and possessing merely 20 billion dollars in reserves. At the Eastern Partnership summit in Vilnius on November 29, Yanukovych tried to play the EU against Russia and counted on multibillion-dollar aid, with which he intended to save his reelection in 2015.

The thorough change in Ukraine's foreign policy was closely linked to Berlin's hopes for improving German-Russian relations after a brief downturn in 2012 following Putin's return to the presidency. It was known that, once again avoiding antagonizing Moscow, Germany would not encourage the EU to take actions perceived by the Kremlin as unfriendly. However, with the introduction of new anti-democratic reforms in Russia in the fall of 2012, a certain disorientation emerged among the political elites in the FRG. The existing consensus, assuming that Russia's integration with Europe and its democratization are key to the security of the old continent, was shaken. Until then, all parties represented in the Bundestag, based on an unwritten political agreement, believed that relations with Russia played a unique role in German as well as EU Eastern policy (Franzke, 2013, p. 40).

Engaged in the election campaign, Chancellor Merkel showed little interest in the transformations in Ukraine. Following the Bundestag elections on September 22, 2013, due to the weak performance of the liberals, who did not secure seats in the Bundestag, the Christian Democrats were compelled to renew the old coalition with the Social Democrats, which predetermined certain concessions to Russia and restrained support for Ukraine. The coalition agreement from November 27 featured an exceptionally elaborate offering to Russia, while Ukraine was not mentioned. In a brief paragraph, the idea of the Eastern Partnership was vaguely acknowledged, stating that association and free trade agreements, along with visa facilitation, were the most effective instruments for supporting Eastern partner countries (Deutschlands Zukunft gestalten, 2013, p. 116).

In Germany, Ukraine's refusal was met with disbelief, as the association agreement was considered well-prepared. However, Chancellor A. Merkel officially assured that both Germany and the European Union were ready for negotiations, and the doors to Europe remained open for Ukraine. The Chancellor negatively commented on the strategy of bidding in relations with Ukraine. She pointed to Moscow's uncompromising pressure as the main reason for the failure of the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius in November, indicating that Moscow could not reconcile itself to the loss of its area of influence. (Bollmann, 2021, p. 462–463).

After Yanukovych's announcement of suspending talks on the association agreement, demonstrations began on the streets of Kyiv, demanding the president's resignation. Following the outbreak of bloody riots on the streets of Kyiv (February 18–20, 2013), most German media outlets from the very beginning placed their sympathies on the side of the demonstrators, but politicians called for reason and agreement. It was widely believed that the current situation could not be ignored, and efforts should be made to prevent further bloodshed on the streets of Kyiv. Referring to their example of toppling the Berlin Wall and the pursuit of unity, journalists, and often ordinary citizens of Germany, viewed the "Revolution of Dignity" demonstrated on the barricades of Maidan with goodwill (Berwanger & Karsten, 2014, p. 41–43). Chancellor Merkel's favorite was Vitali Klitschko and his party, UDAR, which advocated deep democratic changes. While the Christian Democratic parties and the Green Party sided with the demonstrators, Die Linke openly supported Yanukovych, and the Social Democratic Party (SPD) maintained an ambiguous stance. On February 18, Foreign Minister F.-W. Steinmeier, in a television interview, attributed responsibility to both sides for the acts of violence on the streets of Kyiv. In the parliamentary debate the next day, left-wing MPs openly spoke about Ukrainian fascists and anti-Semites who had seized power (Linke sieht Faschisten, 2014). The spokesperson for Die Linke, Ulla Jelpke, and the rising star of the media on Ukrainian issues, Sahra Wagenknecht's deputy, suggested Western inspiration for the "coup" on Maidan, with some finding inspiration in the actions of the USA and native Ukrainian fascists under the banner of Stepan Bandera. They defended Russia, unjustly accused by Western countries, and demanded a ban on any aid action for Kyiv from the EU and IMF (Linkspartei, 2014).

The German government outlined its position on January 29, 2014, in a declaration by Chancellor Merkel, announcing a joint, patient pursuit of a peaceful resolution to the conflict with the European Union. It was assured that the doors to the association agreement were still open, and all misunderstandings between the Eastern Partnership countries, Russia, and the EU should be clarified. Earlier, on December 17, in a speech inaugurating his renewed term at the Auswärtiges Amt, Minister Steinmeier did not hide his outrage (*empörend*) over Russia's exploitation of Ukraine's difficult situation (Rede von Außenminister, 2013).

Preventing the escalation of the bloody confrontation and reaching an agreement between the government and the opposition was the achievement of the Weimar Triangle mission (F.-W. Steinmeier, R. Sikorski, L. Fabius). On February 21, the president left Ukraine and was removed from office by parliament. Such a course of action was not provided for by the Ukrainian Constitution, and one could speak of a violation of its basic norms and principles (Stelmach, 2015, p. 21).

## Two vectors of German policy in the Russia-Ukraine War

In response to Ukraine's attempts to gain independence from Moscow after the "Euromaidan" revolution in Kyiv, Russia reacted with the temporary occupation of Crimea on March 18, 2014, based on a hastily conducted illegal referendum on March 16. The next step in Russia's war against Ukraine was the outbreak of conflict in the eastern part of the country, particularly in the Donetsk Basin, which is predominantly inhabited by Russian-speaking people. Separatists, supported militarily and financially by Moscow, declared the establishment of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic. After capturing key cities in the Donbas region, in May 2014, they announced the confederation of both republics. In response, the Ukrainian armed forces initiated the so-called "anti-terrorist operation," aimed at recapturing major cities and eliminating armed separatist groups.

Temporary occupation of Crimea by Russia and the outbreak of war in the Donbas were serious violations of international law, and Merkel could not overlook this. On March 13, she warned the Bundestag about the escalation of the armed conflict and declared readiness to "seek a political-diplomatic way out of the crisis" (Regierungserklärung von Bundeskanzlerin, 2014). In response to Putin's speech on March 18 regarding temporary occupation of Crimea by Russia Merkel reacted with restraint, calling on EU member states to stand united. She limited her response to stating that it was a violation of international law but concurrently emphasized that dialogue with Moscow would continue despite the sanctions imposed by the EU (Merkel: entschlossene Antwort, 2014).

In response to the temporary occupation of Crimea, one day after the referendum, the EU and the USA imposed economic sanctions on the Russian Federation. They suspended its participation in the G-8 and imposed entry bans on their territory for 21 prominent Kremlin officials (31 in the case of the USA). On March 25, a boycott of the G-8 summit in Sochi was announced (Rinke, 2014).

Following the parliamentary discussion in the Bundestag on March 19, 2014, a certain helplessness among the deputies was evident. There was uncertainty regarding the extent of Putin's ambitions and the appropriate boundaries for EU concessions. Concerns were raised that his objective might include the annexation of another part of Ukraine's territory, leading to its political and economic destabilization, and ultimately, the disintegration of the state. Other scenarios considered included strengthening NATO's presence in Eastern Europe and the tangible prospect of Ukraine's EU membership. Simultaneously, there were apprehensions about whether this would result in enduring divisions in Europe and whether the loss of Crimea by Ukraine should be accepted in exchange for Moscow's inclusion in discussions about the future of the state. A decisive majority of deputies from the Union, SPD, and Greens condemned Russia's aggression towards Crimea but also called for a peaceful de-escalation of the conflict (Bannas, 2014).

Ultimately, it was decided to employ all available instruments, i.e., to engage in dialogue with Moscow through various methods, expand sanctions against Russia if necessary, and continue financial aid for Ukraine. The main goal was to prevent the crisis from spreading to eastern Ukraine, leading to the official German proposal to send OSCE observers to the country. Minister Steinmeier felt a sense of defeat, having had ambitious plans to give new impulses for cooperation with Russia. He made considerable efforts to calm the situation, traveling to the Baltic states and Budapest, meeting with the Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, and thereby positioning Germany at the forefront of nations involved in resolving the conflict in Ukraine. He firmly believed, as noted in his diplomatic memos, that when "conversations cease, only the roar of cannons will remain" (Steinmeier, 2016, p. 47).

While criticizing Moscow, within the framework of the Normandy Format established in June 2014 (Germany, France, Russia, Ukraine), Germany, in solidarity with France, sought to achieve a ceasefire. Following the meeting of the G-20 in Brisbane (Australia) on November 15–16, 2014, and a fruitless conversation between Merkel and Putin, the Chancellor ultimately discarded any illusions regarding the intentions of the Russian counterpart. European Union countries agreed to entrust Germany with the task of seeking a diplomatic solution, as apart from France, no one was

eager to undertake the difficult and seemingly hopeless mission. Germany reluctantly assumed the role of the main arbitrator in the Russian-Ukrainian war and found it challenging to endorse the policy of sanctions against Russia. The new task that fell upon Angela Merkel became more of a burden than a cause for pride. However, thanks to the persistent and conciliatory stance of the German leader, in cooperation with French President François Hollande, it was possible to reach the so-called second Minsk agreement on February 12, 2015. The main point of this agreement was a ceasefire and the withdrawal of heavy equipment from the front lines. The negotiations required significant effort from Merkel. They did not address the temporary occupation of Crimea by Russia, but the Chancellor maintained the view that it was necessary to engage in dialogue with Russia because the war in Donbas was of paramount importance for Ukraine and unwinnable. She managed to maintain the shaky unity of EU countries on the issue of maintaining sanctions against Russia and domestically quelled the noisy propaganda and offensive by those “understanding Russia” (Russlandversteher) (Koszel, 2019, p. 30).

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the repression against the anti-Kremlin opposition, symbolized by the murder of one of the opposition leaders, Boris Nemtsov, in February 2015, began to shape the Eastern policy of the Federal Republic. The exclusive policy of Germany towards Russia was no longer discussed but rather maintained within the framework of the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). The German dilemma regarding military engagement abroad was also evident during the NATO summit in Warsaw on July 8–9, 2016. On one hand, they declared loyalty to alliance commitments and strengthening the southern and southeastern flank of NATO due to threats from Russia, but on the other hand, they strongly emphasized the need for dialogue with Moscow and maintaining communication channels with it due to its growing role in the Syrian conflict. (Nato-Gipfel in Warschau, 2016; Szubart, 2016).

After two unsuccessful trips by Merkel to Russia in May 2015 in Moscow and May 2017 in Sochi, Germany realized that the Russians did not take their efforts to restore peace in eastern Ukraine seriously and even made them feel that if it were not for Germany’s categorical reaction to Crimea and Donbas, EU sanctions would never have been implemented (Aleksander, 2017). At the same time, in the first half of 2017, Chancellor Merkel met with President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko on four different occasions, but no new proposals were developed regarding the conflict with Russia. A compensation for Ukraine was the abolition of the visa requirement for Ukrainian citizens traveling to the European Union on June 11, 2017, and in July, the completion of the ratification process of the association agreement with Ukraine in the member states, which enabled its full implementation on September 1, 2017 (Układ o stowarzyszeniu, 2017).

Absorbed by the election campaign for the Bundestag in the fall of 2017, Chancellor Merkel lost interest in further attempts to resolve the conflict in eastern Ukraine. She paid more attention to problems associated with Brexit, the migration crisis, the civil war in Syria, and the troubling friendliness of the administration of US President Donald Trump towards Putin. The difficult parliamentary elections dragged on until March 2018, when it was possible to establish a long-term coalition government of Christian Democrats and Social Democrats. Due to the lack of prospects for resolving the conflict in Donbas, issues related to Russia and Ukraine were not priorities for Chancellor Merkel. She focused on mitigating internal conflicts in Germany and rebuilding her own image after the refugee crisis.

Germany and the European Union only returned to the conflict in eastern Ukraine in mid-2018. The main burden of negotiations within the Normandy Format was taken on by the new Foreign Minister, Heiko Maas (SPD). Upon taking office, he accused Russia of aggression against Ukraine, but his first visit was not to Kyiv but to Moscow. In the capital of Ukraine, he assured the hosts that Germany would not leave them alone and would defend their interests. The basis for his action was the so-called Steinmeier formula, proposed back in 2016. It aimed to regulate the principles of introducing a special status for parts of the Donbas not controlled by Kyiv. It was anticipated to grant a special autonomous status to the occupied territories of the Donbas while simultaneously ensuring the conduct of local elections there (Salzen von, 2019).

However, despite his ambition to give a new impulse to the talks on the conflict in Donbas, the negotiations were thwarted by Russian stubbornness and Ukrainian reluctance. The Russians continued to demand the inclusion of a provision on the special autonomous status of Donbas in the Ukrainian constitution. This would have allowed for the start of preparations for local elections in those areas of eastern Ukraine not under the control of the authorities in Kyiv. The special status of Donbas was to apply temporarily during the election campaign, and if the elections were recognized by international institutions, it would be introduced permanently. Subsequently, Russian citizens fighting on the side of the separatists would leave Donbas, taking weapons and equipment with them. This scenario, previously pushed by Steinmeier, raised concerns among Ukrainians, as it would effectively lead to the recognition of the self-proclaimed “people’s republics” and legalize the Russian protectorate in Donbas. The Ukrainians were not convinced that there was no other, better solution for the decentralization of the state. In their opinion, while regions like Galicia, Volhynia, or Donbas have different traditions, histories, and experiences in self-organization, which should be respected, it should not come at the expense of the state’s cohesion (Iwański, Nieczypor, 2019).

In the difficult situation in eastern Ukraine, the construction of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline began. From the perspective of Germany, this investment was necessary and beneficial. After moving away from nuclear energy in 2011, Germany became dependent on imports of natural gas and crude oil from Russia. It was argued that cheaper raw materials would lead to the development of the German industry and the export of their competitive export goods, which in turn would drive the growth of the entire economy. The fact that this investment could completely bypass and replace the transit of Russian gas to Western Europe through Ukraine, the Baltic states, and Poland was not considered. For a long time, the German government maintained that this was a “purely commercial” venture and had no connection with the foreign policy objectives of the Russian Federation. It was only during President Poroshenko’s visit to Berlin in April 2018 that Chancellor Merkel admitted that the “political aspects” of the project should be considered (Kinkartz, 2018).

On November 1, Chancellor Merkel was in Kyiv, where she advocated for the continuation of EU sanctions against Russia due to its non-compliance with the Minsk agreements. She critically addressed the municipal elections planned for November 11 in the two separatist republics. She did not mention that, during the same days, a delegation of the German economy was in Moscow discussing the development of mutual cooperation with the government of D. Medvedev. She promised German assistance amounting to 85 million euros for vocational training and support for Ukrainian scientists.

Russia’s temporary occupation of Ukrainian territories the Federal Foreign Office published a document on November 30, 2018, providing an interpretation of Russia’s temporary occupation of Ukrainian territories.

It was mentioned that the temporary occupation of Crimea by Russia and the outbreak of conflict in the East of Ukraine had cost the lives of 10,000 people. The German government, “advocating for peace and stability,” took the position: 1.Implementation of the Minsk agreements (continuation of negotiations on this matter jointly with France); 2.Non-tolerance of violations of international law (the territorial integrity of Ukraine must be respected); 3.Strengthening and protection of the OSCE missions (essential in maintaining the peace process); 4.Consideration of sending a UN peacekeeping mission to Donbas (support for a UN mission with the caveat that it should not result in the consolidation of the existing status quo); 5.Support from Germany for economic reforms in Ukraine, aimed at restructuring the state and organizing civil society, as well as, among other things, modernization of the administration and greater decentralization (Auf welche Strategie, 2018).

### **Overview: Towards a Breakthrough**

The new President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky, who began his term in May 2019, hoped for Germany’s increased activity in the Normandy Format, the specification of the “Steinmeier formula,” and announced determination in resolving ongoing Russian aggression in the eastern

part of the country. On December 9, 2019, in Paris, at the summit of the N4 leaders, a document was adopted that approved a new phase in the implementation of the Minsk agreements and the specification of the “Steinmeier formula” – the holding of elections in the territories occupied by pro-Russian separatists in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions even before Kyiv regains control over these areas. These provisions anticipated the implementation of this “formula” into Ukrainian legislation. The sequence of conditions necessary to hold local elections there, in accordance with Ukrainian law and under OSCE supervision, was defined. The release of prisoners was promised. The “formula” did not address whether Russian troops should withdraw from Donbas and Ukraine should regain control over the state border before the elections. It was only agreed that within four months, the details of the political and military implementation of the Minsk agreements would be agreed upon (Gemeinsam..., 2019).

The COVID-19 pandemic paralyzed progress in diplomatic talks on Ukraine, and Germany only announced further N4 summits in Berlin with President Zelensky’s participation in April 2021 due to the resistant implementation of the Paris summit’s agreements. On September 26, 2021, the Bundestag elections took place, leading to the formation of a unique governing coalition composed of Social Democrats, Greens, and Liberals. In the coalition agreement signed two months later, most words were devoted to Russia, described as an “important, international actor” (wichtiger internationaler Akteur), and it was assured that efforts would be made “towards substantial and stable relations” with Moscow. Ukraine was promised efforts to prevent actions destabilizing Ukraine and its eastern territories, respect for the Minsk agreements, and the resolution of frozen conflicts (Mehr Fortschritt, 2021, p. 154).

The new Chancellor Olaf Scholz (SPD) maintained Germany’s traditional policy towards Russia. The purchases for the Ukrainian army conducted within NATO were blocked – these included sales of rifles designed to combat drones and equipment for fighting snipers. Lacking experience in foreign policy, he preferred the broad, active endeavors of France’s ambitious President E. Macron and signs of the American administration’s engagement in the conflict in Ukraine. The German side was still ready for dialogue with Russia and, should there be readiness on their part, for negotiations concerning security in Europe. The visit of the new Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock to Moscow (January 16, 2022) and Kyiv (January 17, 2022) did not yield any progress. Russia was not interested in the N4 meetings and argued that it was not formally a party to the conflict, and the problems concerned only the separatists from both “people’s republics.” (Baerbocks Botschaft, 2022; Jede erneute Aggression, 2022).

Judging by the statement of the Normandy Four adopted after the summit in Paris, President V. Zelensky agreed to extend the special status of Donbas for another year. The law on special status was to be agreed upon within the Trilateral Contact Group and the Normandy format. In turn, Russian President Vladimir Putin clearly stated that Ukraine would have to incorporate the “special status” of both republics into its constitution.

Due to internal criticism in Germany for conducting unsuccessful diplomacy within the N4 and accusations from partners of weak engagement on the side of Ukraine, Chancellor Scholz visited Kyiv and Moscow (February 14–15, 2022) amidst intensifying Russian-Belarussian maneuvers. Although he mentioned that Germany stands with Ukraine, his primary goal was to continue the policy of dialogue and diplomacy towards Moscow (Pressekonferenz, 2022).

Three days after Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, on February 27, 2022, Chancellor Scholz promised a “turning point” (*Zeitenwende*) in Germany’s foreign and security policy. There were announcements of renewing the sanctions policy against Russia and halting the Nord Stream 2 operations, extensive multifaceted support and increased arms supplies to Ukraine, strengthening and modernizing the Bundeswehr with a 100-billion-euro funding and rigorously applying 2% of GDP for the development of the armed forces (Regierungserklärung, 2022). This marked a boundary line ending the growing process of disillusionment of the German society with the Eastern policy of the chancellors and the associated years-long illusion of having influence over Putin’s administration actions towards Ukraine and European security policy. There was consistent

understanding for Moscow's interests in Ukraine, even though after 2012 Russia quickly abandoned the modernization of the state in the Western model and adopted a sharp neo-imperial course in its foreign policy, with the main goal being the vassalization of Ukraine. In Berlin, it was not recognized that barriers were being erected before Ukraine's integration with European structures. There was no conviction about supporting a state riddled with corruption at every level, the omnipotence of oligarchs, the inefficiency of administration, and the popularity of radical nationalist political groups. Given Germany's European capabilities, leaving Ukraine to fend for itself or abandoning the pro-European orientation of its citizens would have been an irreplaceable loss for the process of building European unity. Guided by these considerations, Germany decided to lead Ukraine onto European tracks through financial and advisory support. Shortly before the Russian invasion, it was announced that over 1 billion euros had been allocated for the reconstruction and modernization of Eastern Ukraine. In 2022, the budget of the Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development guaranteed 600 million euros and an additional 400 million euros for the Ukraine reconstruction program (Savinok & Tepper, 2022, p. 2). Despite a strong pro-Russian lobby in Germany, society is forming a clear and coherent perception of the necessary support for Ukraine and condemnation of Russia. In Europe, this is seen as a test of Germany's credibility but also as a perspective for increasing its international position.

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