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Digital journalism and the role of social media in shaping public perception of Russian aggression in Ukraine

El periodismo digital y el papel de las redes sociales en la percepción pública de la agresión rusa en Ucrania

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Abstract


The purpose of the article is to study the role of digital journalism and social media in creating public perception of Russian aggression in Ukraine. To achieve this goal, theoretical general scientific research methods were used: analysis and synthesis. The use of the content analysis method to study the content of messages on social media and Internet platforms, the use of a descriptive qualitative approach combined with discourse analysis and language reconstruction became relevant. The results of the study indicate that among the obvious advantages of online journalism are a variety of information sources, the ability to disseminate news quickly, interaction with the audience, global reach, and open access to information. In addition, in the Ukrainian context, coordinated efforts have effectively raised the visibility of Ukraine's


Resumen


El propósito del artículo es estudiar el papel del periodismo digital y los medios sociales en la creación de la percepción pública de la agresión rusa en Ucrania. Para lograr este objetivo, se utilizaron métodos teóricos generales de investigación científica: análisis y síntesis. Resultó relevante el uso del método de análisis de contenido para estudiar el contenido de los mensajes en los medios sociales y las plataformas de Internet, el uso de un enfoque cualitativo descriptivo combinado con el análisis del discurso y la reconstrucción del lenguaje. Los resultados del estudio indican que entre las ventajas evidentes del periodismo online se encuentran la variedad de fuentes de información, la capacidad de difundir noticias con rapidez, la interacción con la audiencia, el alcance global y el acceso abierto a la información. Además, en el contexto ucraniano,

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current needs in search engines, which has contributed to their resolution. However, it should also be recognised that online journalism has its drawbacks. The manipulation and spread of fake news used by Russian propaganda has highlighted the vulnerability of this form of journalism. The scale and intensity of Russian propaganda had a significant impact on the formation of public opinion among Russians and partly among foreigners. They began to use imposed narratives to understand Russian aggression and the role of other countries in the conflict. The conclusions emphasise that these trends underline the importance of the theory of use and gratification, which indicates that audiences have their own views on information sources and are influenced by them according to their own beliefs.

Keywords: online journalism, social media, manipulation, Russian-Ukrainian war, digitalization.

Introduction

The Russian-Ukrainian war was a large-scale hybrid conflict that had a significant impact on world public opinion. This war affects public opinion through various channels, including the media. Thus, in the information landscape of the 21st century, digital journalism and social media are becoming important tools for shaping global discussion and perception of key episodes in public life. One such event that has played a significant role in the current global debate is the Russian aggression in Ukraine. This event not only triggered political and geopolitical changes but also transformed the way the world receives, perceives, and discusses information. In this context, digital journalism and social media have played a key role in shaping public opinion on Russian aggression in Ukraine.

The media, in general, play an important role in shaping and disseminating public opinion. They are modern communication channels, such as the press, television, radio, and the Internet, which serve to disseminate information. However, it should be acknowledged that the tools, which are using in the mass media have a manipulative possibilities. In the modern society online journalism plays an important role and becomes a tool that can directly influence people's minds. Russia's information manipulative aggression in the context of events related to Ukraine emphasises that journalists can use various methods to manipulate society. Unfortunately,

los esfuerzos coordinados han aumentado eficazmente la visibilidad de las necesidades actuales de Ucrania en los motores de búsqueda, lo que ha contribuido a su resolución. Sin embargo, también hay que reconocer que el periodismo en línea tiene sus inconvenientes. La manipulación y difusión de noticias falsas utilizadas por la propaganda rusa ha puesto de manifiesto la vulnerabilidad de esta forma de periodismo. La escala e intensidad de la propaganda rusa tuvo un impacto significativo en la formación de la opinión pública entre los rusos y, en parte, entre los extranjeros. Empezaron a utilizar narrativas impuestas para entender la agresión rusa y el papel de otros países en el conflicto. Las conclusiones subrayan que estas tendencias ponen de relieve la importancia de la teoría del uso y la gratificación, que indica que las audiencias tienen sus propias opiniones sobre las fuentes de información y se dejan influir por ellas según sus propias creencias.

Palabras clave: periodismo en línea, redes sociales, manipulación, guerra ruso-ucraniana, digitalización.

this aggression is often aimed not only at shaping certain views but also at undermining the Ukrainian ethnos.

When analysing the interaction between digital media and social platforms, it will be important to determine how they influence the construction of the information landscape, defining and redefining the public's views on these events. For this reason, it is extremely important to consider the role of digital media and social networks in determining public perception of Russian aggression in Ukraine and to reveal the key mechanisms of this influence.

The aim of the paper is to research of the role of digital journalism and social media in shaping public perception of Russian aggression in Ukraine. This goal will involve several important tasks: to consider the advantages of online journalism and social media in shaping public opinion during the Russian-Ukrainian war, to identify the shortcomings in their use (on the example of Russian propaganda activity).

Conceptual Framework or Review Literature

The issue of online journalism and their impact on public opinion is not new to the scientific community. Certain aspects of this broad phenomenon have been the subject of lengthy consideration and analysis. Some researches

identified the main problems in the use of and trust in Internet resources and the information posted on them. A similar issue was also addressed by Bakić-Mirić (2018), who critically assessed the impact and development of social media and their independent influence on public opinion. Bakić-Mirić (2018) initiates his paper by suggesting that a comprehensive grasp of social media necessitates viewing it through the lens of critical theory. This perspective offers a sharp examination of power dynamics and economic exploitation. It employs dialectical reasoning as an analytical tool, while also serving as a critique of prevailing ideologies and political economies. Furthermore, critical theory represents an intellectual dimension of societal struggle. But the author does not provide concrete examples, in particular, how media manipulation functions in modern Central-Eastern Europe.

Bor (2014) studied the transformation of journalism education on a global scale under the influence of new digital realities. Therefore, this work outlines the theoretical foundations of the influence of social media. An important shortcoming of the work is the lack of examples related to the media of Central and Eastern Europe. Bossio (2017), on the other hand, characterised the combination of factors (education, new practices, digitalisation) that influence modern journalism, identifying its strengths and weaknesses. This work is more specific than the previous ones. However, the disadvantage is that the author tries to cover a large amount of information for analysis, however, does not explain the influence of the media in practice.

The researchers paid considerable attention to the unfolding of Russian aggression and a response of the international community, which was partly shaped by social media. For example, the problem of falsifications was an important topic of discussion in the study by Kiliçaslan (2022). Similarly, difficulties in verifying the work of online journalists were identified by Hristakieva et al., (2022) and Kiliçaslan (2022). Also, Plekhanova et al., (2023), based on the study of numerous scientific literature, summed up some of the doubts about the work of online journalists, the impact of propaganda on their work, etc. At the same time, important aspects of the formation of new ethics in the handling of information, the use and verification of facts, etc. were left out of the study. The study also did not take into account the OSINT factor, which has become particularly popular in the wake of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Instead, the possibilities of

positive use of social media and online journalism in covering complex political and social events, including Russian aggression and its consequences, are being actively discussed. In their research project, Norwegian scientists Karlsen and Aalberg (2021) in their study, explored the influence of online media on shaping consumer trust in content. In the same vein, Pavlik (2022), an American scholar specializing in the examination of digital technologies' impact on public opinion, conducted a compelling study that underscored the paramount importance of disseminating accurate information to counteract potential distortions introduced by Russian propaganda. To illustrate this, Pavlik drew upon the example of media coverage during the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. His analysis predominantly concentrated on the developments that transpired after the commencement of a new phase of the conflict in 2022. However, the weakness of the work is that the author focused on the analysis of events from 2022, by passing the details of events from 2014. This problem is present in many modern works, since even before 2022 this issue was not so popular among modern scholars.

Furthermore, it's worth noting that an extensive exploration of the key dynamics in the information warfare between Ukraine and the Kremlin regime was already documented in a comprehensive study authored by Romanian academics Bîă and Dragomir (2020). This work offers a thorough examination of the subject matter, shedding light on the complexities of this ongoing information battle. The importance of overcoming information myths through the use of social media was identified by Geissler et al. (2023). Similarly, Yuskiv (2022) emphasised the peculiarities of journalists' work on the Web. Thus, against the backdrop of general dissatisfaction with the spread of propaganda and fake news, researchers also note positive opportunities in using the Internet for journalism and shaping public opinion. It is worth noting that the principles of a professional journalist's work on the Internet are not much different from traditional paradigms. It is probably more about the peculiarities of dissemination and assimilation of information by users of online information channels, which will require additional research in the future.

It is important to emphasise the philosophical paradigms (Durmishi & Durmishi, 2022) that become the basis for understanding modern information society. From this point of view, the classic works of Jürgen Habermas (2014) and Michel Foucault (Allan, 2022) are extremely

important. Although these works do not relate to specific examples of manipulative influence, but the studies of these authors constitute the theoretical and methodological basis of the research. At the same time, interpretations of the future development of the public and public opinion under the influence of future challenges are relevant (Shakun, 2022), which will definitely lead to transformations in the information environment and its perception by users (Sofilkanych, 2022). The issues of reading and understanding texts are also important, and the Internet and new forms of journalism have a particular impact on them (Lavriv, 2023). Taking these studies into account allows us to reassess the possibilities for the development of online journalism and its impact on public opinion.

Therefore, as the analysis of the literature shows, modern authors mainly paid attention to the general theory of media influence on the consciousness of citizens. These papers form a powerful methodological basis of this research. In addition, other authors detailed this issue. However, in view of the development and use of more and more new hybrid mechanisms in this in this war, the problem needs to be reviewed and certain aspects clarified.

Methodology

Through analysis, the complex phenomenon of digital online journalism and social platforms was examined through the prism of a combination of individual elements. The application of the synthesis method made it possible to make certain generalisations on the proposed issues. The use of the content analysis method was also relevant, as it allowed us to study several important elements at once. In particular, at the initial stage of the work, the main opinions and views of scholars on the subject were considered. On the other hand, the content analysis made it possible to determine the content of digital information platforms and social networks, to characterise the manipulative and truthfulness of content created for the respective platforms, and their impact on public opinion around the world.

Conducting a content analysis on this topic involved a systematic assessment and classification of the content of literature and individual digital media sources. Here are some criteria that are taken into account:

1. Source selection

Various sources of digital media are identified. A mix of sources with different perspectives and affiliations is provided

2. Definition of content

Classified content by different types:

1. General theory
 2. Empirical works
 3. General reviews of articles
 4. News articles
3. The key topics or topics related to Russian aggression in Ukraine, which are discussed in scientific works and individual media, are identified.
 1. Relations between Ukraine and Russia
 2. Ukraine's relationship with NATO and the EU
 3. Propaganda
 4. Oppression of Russian speakers in Ukraine
 4. Definition of language and tone

The language and tone used in the content was checked, including the presence of hate speech, inflammatory language or propaganda in Russian media.

The methodology used involves a descriptive qualitative approach combined with discourse analysis and language reconstruction, which was inspired by Michel Foucault in his research. According to him, discourse is not just a set of words or sentences in a text; rather, it has the ability to generate something completely new (Allan, 2022). Therefore, when analysing discourse, it is imperative to consider linguistic events through a double lens: one that delves into both the spheres of meaning and reference. Foucault's concept of discourse is a valuable tool for understanding the construction of perception that underlies communication with an audience. Our analysis focuses on discourses that develop within a sphere of influence, often held by powerful stakeholders who create dominant narratives aimed at controlling public discourse.

The selection of social media content and information platforms for analysis was based on a random sampling from social media catalogues along with specific findings related to propaganda related to the Russia-Ukraine conflict during 2014-2023. Our dataset includes both primary and secondary data obtained

through direct observation during visits to social media platforms to collect information and content, supplemented by a review of relevant literature. The selection of specific data samples for this study includes the determination of criteria that ensure the appropriateness and representativeness of the data obtained. Here are some criteria that are taken into account:

1. Time period: The time frame of the study covers the period from 2014 to 2022.
2. Geographical focus: primarily interested in events in Eastern and Southern Ukraine.
3. Data language: English, Ukrainian, Russian.
4. Type of source: News articles, social media posts, scientific studies, reports, reviews. Each type of source can provide a different understanding of a topic.
5. Key Events or Milestones: Focuses on specific key events or milestones of the war, such as the annexation of Crimea, major battles, or diplomatic negotiations.
6. Bias and Objectivity: Potential biases in selected data sources are considered. For example, news outlets may have their own biases, and social media content may be influenced by algorithms and user behavior.
7. Variety of data. In the paper, the authors sought to diversify their data sources to capture a wide range of perspectives, including different media outlets, political leanings, and social media influencers.

By defining and following these criteria, a well-structured and relevant set of data was created, which made it possible to effectively trace the role of digital journalism and social media in the effective formation of public perception of Russian aggression in Ukraine.

Results

The importance of modern online journalism for shaping public opinion

Internet journalism, as understood by contemporary researchers, is a field of journalism

that deals with the creation, editing, and distribution of information materials via the Internet (Morris & Ogan, 2018). This form of journalism uses various online platforms, such as websites, social media, blogs, and others, to present news, articles, photos, videos, and other types of journalistic material online. Online journalism is evolving along with technological changes and is influencing the way we receive and consume news and other information. It is currently having a significant impact on the media landscape, as many traditional publications are moving to an online format, and new digital publications and blogs are gaining popularity. It is also important to note that online journalism covers a variety of topics, from politics and news to sports, science, culture, and many other areas, making it accessible and diverse to a wide range of readers.

An important feature of this type of journalism is that it allows to quickly focus public attention on current events, forming certain perceptions about them and influencing public opinion (Selvarajah & Fiorito, 2023).

The unfolding of the Russian-Ukrainian war has demonstrated the speed with which information about the hostilities spread in the global context. According to experts, the Russian-Ukrainian war (its second phase, which began in 2022) is one of the most widely covered military conflicts of our time. Thanks to the deployment of the latest digital technologies, photo and video recording, materials from the battlefields instantly spread across social media and other resources. Supplemented by professional commentary and reviews, they were at the top of the viewing and public interest list around the world (Shevchenko, 2022). At the same time, access to the Internet has also helped to shape public opinion within Ukraine, thereby strengthening resistance to Russian aggression.

Therefore, the use of online journalism and social media has numerous advantages for shaping public opinion (See Table 1):

Table 1.
Advantages of social media and online journalism in shaping public opinion

Advantage	Characteristics
Wide access to information	The Internet provides quick and easy access to a variety of information sources from around the world. This helps citizens to get multiple perspectives on events and issues and to make informed decisions.
Diversity of sources	There are various types of information sources on the Internet, including news sites, blogs, social media, video blogs, and more. This allows citizens to receive information from a variety of authors and sources, which contributes to a more objective consideration of issues.
Instant relevance	Online journalism allows you to provide up-to-date information in real time. This is especially important when covering fast-moving events such as emergencies or political changes.
Ability to interact	Online journalism and social media create opportunities for interaction between journalists and readers or viewers. This fosters active discussion and exchange of views, which can enrich public opinion.
International coverage	The Internet allows journalists and citizens to obtain information about events abroad and to cover international issues. This contributes to a broader global understanding and appreciation of different cultures and perspectives.
Open access	Many online information resources are available free of charge, allowing more people to access information regardless of their financial means.

Source: created by the authors based on Lestari (2019), Pickard (2020), Douglas, & Phillips (2022)

All of these factors make online journalism and social media a powerful tool for shaping public opinion and contributing to a more open and informed society. Similarly, coordinated action in the Ukrainian context has made it possible to bring the most pressing needs of Ukraine to the top of the search results, thereby putting significant pressure on their implementation. In general, the efficiency and comprehensiveness of the Internet has opened up opportunities for information dissemination.

Propaganda on the Web: the Russian case of the invasion of Ukraine 2014-2023

Online journalism, in addition to its many advantages, has a number of propaganda capabilities. The entire arsenal of such vulnerabilities was demonstrated by Russian propagandists when they began to justify the Kremlin regime's aggression against Ukraine (Drugă, 2023). This is especially true of Russian websites or special accounts on social media that spread false or partially true information. In particular, almost since the end of February 2014, the vast majority of Russian online media have joined the information and psychological warfare against Ukraine, trying to support the attack against Ukraine. Such well-known Russian new media websites as newspapers and news outlets such as Vesti (Izvestia), Rossiyskaya Gazeta (Rossiyskaya Gazeta), Moskovskiy Komsomolets (Moskovskiy Komsomolets), Kommersant (Kommersant), Vzglyad (Vzglyad) as well as entire powerful companies such as RIA Novosti, ITAR-TASS, ROSBALT, AIS, etc., not

only actively disseminated uncertain information, but also formulated and disseminated false information themselves.

For example, since the winter 2014, the same Izvestia, Rossiyskaya Gazeta, Moskovskiy Komsomolets, Kommersant, Vzglyad and other media outlets have been spreading false information about the defection of the Ukrainian Black Sea Fleet's flagship, the Ukrainian Navy frigate Hetman Sahaidachny, to Russia. The prevalence of destructive hostile propaganda and the dissemination of false news through newspapers in the occupied territories of eastern Ukraine since the spring 2014 has been one of the main reasons for the high prevalence of anti-Ukrainian sentiment and separatist rhetoric among the local population (up to 70 percent) (Afanasiev et al., 2023). Some publications actively use Internet resources and do not prohibit their website administrators from using fictitious or false information to disseminate propaganda messages (Zhabotynska & Ryzhova, 2022). Such a "source" is, for example, Pravda.ru. The history of this resource is illustrative, as it was among the first Russian information and analytical publications to appear on the Russian-language Web. If we trust the information posted on the website, the publication has a respected reputation and high ratings. Every day, more than 250,000 unique users visit the website and read at least a few of the materials on offer. A closer look at the materials on this site reveals that much of the information is openly propagandistic and does not reveal the true nature of the phenomena

described. In addition, the “journalists” use a number of methods that openly indicate the presence of paid propaganda goals (Fredheim, 2016). For example, on 15 October 2015, Pravda.ru published an article with the vocal title “With the help of the 'Insurgent Alphabet', Ukrainians are taught to 'kill Muscovites'”. The content of the material allegedly points to a new Ukrainian school doctrine and new textbooks, where the main characters with strange names Adolfik and Alarmik “demonstrate” to students how to get rid of Ukraine's enemies - Russians and Poles. In this particular case, a method of outright distortion of reality was used, which was intended to appeal to those Russians who are not familiar with the internal situation in our country and tend to consider it a “wild country”. The issue of 17 August 2015 contained an article “Stephen Cohen: The idea of “two Ukraine's” is not so bad”. The article states that Ukrainian and American politicians are not averse to dividing Ukraine and separating the entire Donetsk region from it. Thus, “two Ukraine” would have to emerge - an option, according to the publication, that is quite acceptable to world politics. In fact, the method of stating a fact was used in the formation of this news: the official position of the state (in this case, the United States of America) was replaced by the subjective opinion of a little-known American professor Stephen Cohen.

In addition, Pravda.ru's contributors often use the method of labelling. Words and phrases that evoke negative associations on an unconscious level appear systematically in articles: “fascists”, “punishers”, “punitive troops”, “junta”, “people's mayor”, “people's governor” (meaning self-proclaimed), “thugs”, “far-right”, “Nazis”, etc. (Yadlin-Segal & Oppenheim, 2021).

Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, these narratives have only intensified, with Russian cyber forces actively spreading false information on social media. On 23 May 2023, the Permanent International Media Monitoring Mission, which examines disinformation related to Ukraine and was launched by the NGO Ukraine 2050, presented a report available in five languages (English, German, French, Spanish, and Ukrainian). This report covers the media monitoring of disinformation about Ukraine from 24 February 2022, when Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine began, to 24 February 2023. The report combines the various disinformation narratives into seven general meta-narratives to better highlight the information base that Russian propaganda created during the active phase of the

war. These seven disinformation metanarratives are as follows:

1. “NATO, led by the United States and supported by the West, is the aggressor that launched military operations against Russia in Ukraine”.
2. “Ukraine is an aggressive, artificial, and neo-Nazi country”.
3. “Europe and the West, in general, are making mistakes by providing weapons and any other assistance to Ukraine, as well as by using sanctions against the Russian Federation”.
4. “Ukraine is committing a number of war crimes and terrorist acts against its population and staging civilian casualties to blame the Russian government”.
5. “Ukraine oppresses everything Russian: language, culture, etc.”.
6. “Russia is a humane state that fiercely defends its interests”.
7. “Russia is the last pillar of spirituality in modern Europe and the leader of the movement against the spread of Western neo-colonialism”.

These meta-narratives reflect various attempts to manipulate public opinion and create alternative narratives about the war in Ukraine (Käihkö, 2018). It is important to analyse and critically evaluate the information presented in the media, especially on social media, in order to achieve an objective perception of events. It is worth remembering that Russian bots often operate on social media, spreading false information to discredit the Ukrainian population. In particular, it has been proven that Russian bots spread the idea on social media that Ukrainian refugee women fled abroad not to escape the war, but to “take away” their husbands from Polish and German women (Martinez de Bartolome & Rivera Martín, 2023). Of course, all these narratives are subject to fact-checking and have nothing to do with reality, but they have a certain impact on public opinion.

Discussion

The concept of the “public sphere” is of key importance for understanding the functioning of modern societies, as the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas proposed to study in his time (Habermas, 2014). Habermas was inclined to understand public perception and public opinion as a kind of social mechanism that participates in the organisation and conduct of certain critical public debates, emphasising the importance of promoting social discourse and shaping

perceptions (Habermas, 2014). This vital area of public engagement, fundamental to democracy, provides citizens with a sanctioned platform to express their views. Any arena where people, in their individual capacity, can express their views on specific topics qualifies as a manifestation of the public sphere.

In today's landscape, the emergence of digital communication technologies, often referred to as digital cultures, has brought about profound changes in the media industry. Researchers have drawn parallels between this technological evolution and Habermas's conceptualisation of the public sphere. Instead of being static tools, information and communication technologies are dynamic mechanisms that change our cognitive capacities and create effective models of social and political interaction (Mateus, 2020). Thus, the public sphere, in the Habermasian sense, is being re-established as an intermediate space between the government and the public sphere, on the one hand, and the private spheres of individuals and groups, on the other (Astuti et al., 2022). Today, citizens are not just passive media consumers, but active contributors and participants in the public sphere of media. In addition, a number of different public forums, including exhibitions, meetings, conferences, protest marches, street performances, theatre productions, universities, cafes, public spaces, and clubs, play a key role in maintaining discussions in the public sphere.

The emergence and functioning of digital channels of information transmission has greatly expanded the possibilities for shaping public opinion. Online journalism and social media have become key tools for disseminating information and have become convenient mechanisms for consumers to absorb it (Geissler et al., 2023). It is worth discussing that in modern works detailed attention is paid to the advantages of digital journalism. In particular, an important aspect is the rapid dissemination of information, global coverage, multimedia content, and diversity of viewpoints. In addition, it is worth considering that Internet news is available 24/7, allowing people to stay informed at their convenience, given their busy lifestyles.

At the same time, other shortcomings of digital journalism have been identified in detail in scientific studies. For this reason, disinformation is important. Digital journalism is susceptible to the spread of false information. In the conditions of Russian aggression in Ukraine, this can lead to the spread of misleading or fabricated stories, which will affect public perception. A significant

problem is the lack of editorial supervision. Some digital platforms may lack rigorous editorial oversight, leading to lower journalistic standards, sensationalism, and a focus on bait rather than accuracy. On the other hand, social media algorithms can create filter bubbles where people only receive information that matches their existing beliefs. This can reinforce prejudices and polarize public opinion. There are also forms of deliberate manipulation and the use of false information, which, in times of rapid information transfer, can multiply in the information space in a matter of hours.

Globally, social media users do not simply fall victim to deceptive information (Hristakieva et al., 2022). Many of them accept false narratives due to the influence of their political context and in order to conform to their own political beliefs. This approach to understanding audience behaviour in media is known as the Usage and Gratification Theory (UGT) (Karlsen & Aalberg, 2021; Selvarajah & Fiorito, 2023). The UGT assumes that media users are not passive consumers, but rather have freedom of choice and play an active role in interpreting and using media in their lives (Durmishi & Durmishi, 2022). This theory argues that audiences are responsible for their choice of media that meets their needs and provides them with satisfaction.

It can be argued that in the Ukrainian context, this concept is confirmed, as the possibilities for choosing information sources are tangible, and many people have made a conscious choice to trust some messages (social media posts) and ignore others. It can be used to spread manipulative materials. The power wielded by netizens, who have the ability to generate, consume, and reproduce information online, has led to an alarming surge in disinformation and misinformation about the Russian-Ukrainian war. This trend often involves the dissemination of false statements and racially charged information and propaganda materials. The formation of perceptions, which in turn shape the perception of reality, can have both a direct and indirect impact on public opinion about the Russian-Ukrainian war. These perceptions, once formed, are transmitted through both verbal and non-verbal means, contributing to the creation of further discourse.

Instead, OSINT platforms specialising in publishing information from private investigations and being highly effective have become an under-researched phenomenon during the Russian-Ukrainian war. Open-source intelligence (OSINT) is an abstract approach or set

of implements for finding and extracting information from economic, political and military sources available in the public domain and not violating the law (Horska et al., 2023). This type of analysis is widely used in the field of national defence and security, as well as in investigative operations. Typically, the OSINT methodology includes the following steps: searching for information sources, registering them, processing and analysing actual data, storing the information, and establishing some measures. Even raw information from the Net, if properly processed, can contain a significant amount of useful information that, if necessary, can be classified as secret and given the status of a state secret (Horska et al., 2023). Broadly speaking, OSINT analytics stands out as a highly promising facet of journalism, with a notable capacity to disseminate pertinent information across various online platforms. This field of journalism is dedicated to sourcing and analyzing publicly available data from the internet, making it a valuable source of up-to-date, meaningful information. Despite the fact that such research can also spread fake news and propaganda materials, some research groups value their reputation and only share verified data.

Conclusions

Therefore, at the present stage, online journalism and social media are important elements in shaping public opinion, which is also evident in the case of the unfolding Russian aggression. First of all, it is worth noting that online journalism has made it possible to focus the world's attention on important events taking place in the world. The Russian aggression has also become an event, so the prompt coverage of the events has shaped a certain public opinion about the Russian aggressors. Among the unequivocal advantages of this form of information presentation are a variety of sources, instant relevance, the opportunity for feedback and interaction, global international coverage, and open access. In addition, coordinated activities in the Ukrainian context made it possible to effectively raise the needs of Ukraine in search results, which significantly contributed to their implementation. In general, the efficiency and comprehensiveness of the Internet have opened up wide opportunities for information dissemination. This has also led to the spread of negative manifestations of online journalism and the influence of social media on public opinion. The manipulations and outright fakes used by Russian propaganda demonstrated the vulnerability of online journalism. The massiveness and activity of Russian propaganda

information influenced the formation of public opinion among Russians and partly foreigners, who began to use imposed narratives to explain Russian aggression, define the role of the United States in the conflict, etc. This trend proves the theory of use and satisfaction, which shows the audience's commitment to certain sources of information.

Implications for the future:

An important aspect of this article is to discuss the implications of this research for future conflicts. Extrapolating the conclusions regarding the role of digital journalism and social networks in shaping the public perception of Russian aggression in Ukraine, it is called to reveal how similar dynamics can affect future conflicts. In addition, it is in this context that the development of media literacy, after the spread of misinformation through digital journalism and social media, emphasizes the need for increased media literacy and education. Education programs can help the public distinguish between reliable and unreliable sources of information by developing critical thinking skills. A separate aspect is the regulation of the accountability process. It says that governments and tech companies may need to strengthen regulations and accountability measures to counter the spread of false information. This could involve stricter content moderation, fact-checking and penalties for those who deliberately spread misinformation. An important point is the development of ethical reporting. Journalists and news organizations must adhere to high ethical standards, fact-checking and appropriate reporting practices. Ethical journalism can counter sensationalism and misinformation. In addition, the international community can work together to counter state-financed disinformation campaigns and cyberwarfare during conflicts. Multilateral efforts can help mitigate the spread of false narratives. Meanwhile, fact-checking organizations can play an important role in debunking false claims and providing accurate information. Supporting fact-checking efforts can help combat the spread of misinformation.

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