



## Journalism during periods of crisis challenges of armed conflicts and pandemics: The experience of Ukraine and Eastern European countries

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**Abstract.** Twenty-first-century journalism underwent profound transformations under the influence of global crises – pandemics, armed conflicts, information wars, and hybrid threats – which determined the need to reconsider its role as a social institution, a communication mechanism, and a guarantor of democratic values. The purpose of the study was to identify patterns in the transformation of journalism in crisis contexts and to determine models of its adaptation in Eastern European countries. The methodological basis was an interdisciplinary approach combining elements of comparative, content-analytical, and case-study analysis; in particular, the comparative method made it possible to identify differences between national models of crisis journalism in Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania, and Romania. The results showed that journalism in crisis conditions lost its purely informative function, transforming into a multi-level system of crisis communications. In the case of Ukraine, a shift was traced from a neutral observer to a subject of information resistance, combining informative, mobilisation, and security functions. Polish journalism demonstrated the potential of civic solidarity and horizontal self-organisation of the media community, which contributed to increased public trust in fact-checking platforms. The Lithuanian model was distinguished by institutional coherence, where state and independent structures interacted within strategic communications, whereas Romania revealed a contradiction between the high institutionalisation of fact-checking and the vulnerability of the media market to political pressure. Comparative analysis identified shared threats – censorship, psychological burnout, economic constraints, disinformation, and ethical dilemmas – which reinforced one another, creating a crisis media ecosystem. Digitalisation proved to be a factor of adaptation, enabling compensation for the destruction of traditional communication channels through the use of social media

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and fact-checking platforms. Generalisation of the results provided grounds to argue that Eastern European journalism developed a hybrid model of functioning that combined traditional democratic principles with elements of information defence. It was confirmed that successful adaptation of journalism depended not only on technical resources, but also on the level of ethical maturity, professional autonomy, and societal solidarity. The practical significance of the study lay in the possibility of using its results to develop national strategies to enhance information resilience, improve the preparation of journalists for work in crisis conditions, and shape standards of responsible media communication during emergencies

**Keywords:** fact-checking platforms; disinformation; censorship; hybrid threats; information security

## Introduction

Twenty-first-century journalism was in a state of constant adaptation to crisis situations, which increasingly took on a global character. Armed conflicts, pandemics, information wars, and hybrid threats changed not only the conditions under which media operated, but also the very nature of the journalistic profession. In conditions of uncertainty, rapid events, and societal polarisation, journalists faced the need to combine ethical standards, safety, and promptness. This problem was relevant for countries at war or experiencing the consequences of large-scale social catastrophes, where the quality of journalism determined the level of citizens' trust in institutions, the stability of the information space, and the effectiveness of crisis communications. For this reason, the study of journalism in crisis contexts – pandemic and wartime – acquired exceptional importance for understanding its adaptability, its role in countering disinformation, and the preservation of democratic values.

In previous studies, scholars' attention focused on analysing the functioning of journalism under the COVID-19 pandemic and in armed conflicts; however, these works examined individual aspects of the phenomenon without combining different crisis situations into a single analytical framework. F.O. dos Santos (2022) analysed the work of UN-affiliated communicators and journalists in the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2021), finding that even in conflict regions journalists were able to adapt the work without violating ethical principles. The author emphasised that the combination of medical and security crises did not lead to degradation of journalistic standards, but, on the contrary, stimulated the formation of practices of survival and professional resilience. This indicated the possibility of effective functioning of journalism even in an environment of multiple risks, which was a manifestation of its global viability. The study by N. Springer *et al.* (2022) focused on comparing norms of objectivity in conflict coverage by Ukrainian and Swedish journalists. The scholars found that despite striving to adhere to the principle of objectivity, journalists in both countries often deviated from it in content. Ukrainian journalists tended to support the official state position, whereas Swedish journalists demonstrated value loyalty to allies. The authors concluded that journalistic patriotism was not so much

an ethnic or political identity as an indicator of trust in state institutions and societal stability. B. Christensen & A. Khalil (2024) examined the practices of journalists in Syria, Yemen, Libya, and Iraq who worked remotely because of threats to life. The researchers showed that the use of digital technologies, including social networks and encrypted communication channels, became an element of journalism's survival in conflict zones. At the same time, the authors emphasised changes in the processes of building trust with sources and the growing role of journalists as intermediaries in information verification. The study underlined the technological and communicative dimension of journalistic adaptation to crisis conditions.

L. Lysenko (2024) drew attention to the extensive use by journalists of user-generated content (UGC) in war coverage. The study showed that materials from Telegram and Facebook became sources of real-time information that provided access to unreachable areas, but created risks regarding reliability. The author pointed to the need to introduce legal and technological standards of fact-checking in order to avoid distortion of reality. K. Yanchenko *et al.* (2023) considered Ukraine's sanctions against pro-Russian television channels as an example of the "boundary work" of journalism. The authors revealed a complex struggle for legitimacy between the state, the media community, and sanctioned channels that were positioned as repressed opposition media (mass media). This work introduced the concept of "journalism parasites" to describe actors who undermined professional standards from within the media system. In the context of crisis journalism in Eastern Europe, the study by T.D. Wilson & E. Maceviciute (2025) showed that the audience during an armed conflict demonstrated active media behaviour, where critical perception of sources and comparative analysis of international and local media acted as mechanisms of psychological adaptation. Socially mediated discussion of information among close social circles formed a model of collective processing of crisis information, which confirmed the transformation of journalism's role from informing to participation in the system of society's psychological resilience.

J.V. Pavlik (2023) analysed the consequences of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine for news media, identifying ten main directions of transformation. The

study showed that the war caused not only physical losses, but also a profound change in the role of journalists, who became participants in a global information war. J.V. Pavlik emphasised the growth of journalism's social responsibility and its role in documenting war crimes and sustaining the moral spirit of society. S.S. Patel *et al.* (2020) examined the COVID-19 pandemic as an object of hybrid attacks aimed at undermining trust in medical systems. The scholar found that politicisation of the crisis complicated access to reliable information, and the deficit of verified messages created a vacuum that was filled by disinformation campaigns. S.S. Patel *et al.* emphasised the need to increase transparency in the communication of authorities and to ensure regional coordination during crises, which were conditions for resilient media infrastructure.

Despite a significant number of works, the interaction of journalism with crisis environments remained insufficiently comprehensively studied. Most scholarly works focused either on ethical aspects or on security risks, and only isolated studies analysed journalism as an integrative system functioning under conditions of multiple challenges. At the same time, there was a lack of interregional comparisons that would make it possible to interpret differences between countries with different models of media systems – post-socialist, transitional, and stable democratic. The purpose of this study was an analysis of the challenges and forms of adaptation of journalism in crisis situations – armed conflicts and pandemics – in the context of contemporary trends in democratisation and information security in Eastern European countries. The objectives of the study were: to identify structural and professional challenges faced by journalists during crises; to generalise forms and strategies of adaptation of journalistic activity; and to compare the experiences of different countries to identify universal models of media survival in a crisis environment.

## Materials and Methods

The methodological basis of this work was grounded in an interdisciplinary approach that combined elements of comparative, content-analytical, case-study, and socio-communicative analysis. The study covered the period from 2020 to 2024, analysing the transformation of journalism during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2021) and the full-scale war in Ukraine (from 2022). The basic research tool was the comparative method, which made it possible to compare Ukraine's journalistic experience with relevant practices of Eastern European countries – Poland, Lithuania, and Romania. The comparative characterisation of journalism in Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania, and Romania was carried out according to five criteria: the institutional basis for countering disinformation, key countering instruments, the role of independent media and fact-checking, the press freedom ranking, and key bottlenecks/risks. These cases were chosen because all three states had shared historical and political

prerequisites for building a democratic media system after authoritarian regimes, were members of the European Union, were in direct geopolitical contact with the region of armed conflict, and experienced the influence of hybrid information threats. Such a sample ensured the possibility of comparative analysis not only at the level of professional practices, but also in the area of legal-regulatory, ethical, and security aspects of media activity. In addition, these countries had a significant number of institutionalised initiatives to counter disinformation and support journalistic resilience, which made it possible to conduct interstate comparison within a single European information field.

In the course of the work, the case-study method was applied, which made it possible to examine specific situations of journalism's functioning in crisis contexts in detail. For the Ukrainian case, data from the Institute of Mass Information were analysed (IMI, 2022; 2023a; 2023b). Additionally, reports by Freedom House (2025) and materials from the Centre for Strategic Communications and Information Security (Interfax-Ukraine, 2023; 2024) were taken into account, reflecting security challenges in the media environment. These sources provided quantitative and qualitative information on journalists' professional condition, the level of safety, manifestations of censorship, cyberattacks, and psychological burnout during the full-scale war. The Polish case was based on data from Demagog (n.d.) and Archivum (n.d.). For Lithuania, materials from the Ministry of health of the Republic of Lithuania (2021) and analytical reports by M.E. Černikovaite (2022) were used. The study by J.B. Tremblay (2021) was also incorporated, demonstrating the formation of state strategic communications and network cooperation with media during the COVID-19 pandemic (2019-2021). In the case of Romania, the activity of the fact-checking initiative Factual (n.d.) and materials from Media Freedom Rapid Response (2025) were analysed. Additionally, for all countries in the region, data from Eurobarometer 91.2 surveys were taken into account (Vulpe & Rughinis, 2021), which made it possible to reflect the level of citizens' trust in media and the prevalence of belief in fake messages.

The use of comparative content analysis made it possible to systematise types of threats to journalistic activity under crisis conditions. On the basis of generalising the data of R. Patching & M. Hirst (2021), S. Fiialka & Z. Kornieva (2024), and V. Štětka & S. Mihelj (2024), analytical conclusions were formulated. These scholars were selected as representatives of different research traditions: the Australian school of crisis journalism, Ukrainian analysis of transformations of professional identity, and the European approach to media pluralism. The complementarity ensured the possibility of building an integrated typology of challenges – from censorship to ethical dilemmas and technological threats. The selection of these authors was determined by the relevance to the topic of crisis communications, the deep empirical foundation of the studies,

and the use of comparative models of analysis. In addition to analytical methods, a normative-prognostic approach was applied in the work, aimed at developing specific recommendations for enhancing information resilience and adapting journalism to crisis conditions on the basis of generalised comparative experience.

A component of the study was the structural-functional analysis method, which was applied to identify interconnections between groups of challenges: censorship, political pressure, risks to journalists' lives, technological threats, ethical dilemmas, and social polarisation. Each of these elements was considered not in isolation, but in interaction with others – as part of a holistic system of the information ecosystem during a crisis. This made it possible to preserve analytical logic that reflected the complexity and interdependence of factors shaping media reality in crisis contexts. Attention was paid to data that recorded quantitative indicators – stress levels, the number of killed journalists, the scale of cyberattacks, financial constraints, and indicators of trust in media. This approach made it possible to ensure a balance between qualitative description and statistical verification of phenomena.

## Results

### Theoretical and analytical foundations of journalism under crisis conditions

Journalism as a social institution gained significance in times of crisis challenges, as its functions transformed in line with social needs, political conditions, and global information processes. The traditional roles of journalism – informing, public education, the formation of public opinion, and oversight of those in power (Nordfors, 2004) – during periods of armed conflict or pandemics not only remained in place, but also underwent substantial reconsideration, as society found itself in conditions of uncertainty, fear, and heightened demand for reliable information. Under such circumstances, journalism performed the function of a crisis communicator, where information messages were aimed at stabilising social sentiment and preventing panic. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-2021, a significant number of media outlets in Eastern European countries adapted the editorial policies in order to promptly convey information about quarantine restrictions, vaccination rates, or morbidity statistics. In Lithuania, the Ministry of Health held daily briefings that were broadcast by leading television channels, which turned journalism into a channel of state communication while simultaneously raising the issue of the balance between media independence and the needs of state policy (Černikovaitė, 2022).

Journalism performed a particularly important role in conditions of armed conflict. The Ukrainian experience after 2014, as well as after Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, showed a transformation of journalism from the classical model of a "neutral observer" to a more active

model, in which journalists also acted as participants in information confrontation. On the one hand, this strengthened the mobilisation potential of the media, which became an element of national security, and on the other hand, it created risks of blurring ethical standards and turning independent media into an instrument of propaganda. In particular, according to the annual survey of the Institute of Mass Information (IMI) in December 2023, 98% of surveyed journalists in Ukraine felt stress and 59% felt constant fatigue (IMI, 2023a). Another empirical sign of transformation was a significant deterioration in journalists' financial situation since the beginning of the full-scale invasion. In August 2022, in an IMI survey, 74% of journalists reported that the financial situation had worsened (IMI, 2022).

The main challenges faced by journalists were censorship, political and economic pressure, as well as direct risks to life and health. These factors did not operate in isolation: the combination of these pressures formed a complex system of threats that were interconnected and mutually reinforcing. The analysis of journalistic activity in crises had to take into account not only formal restrictions on freedom of speech, but also latent mechanisms of control, influence, and repression that changed the conditions under which media operated. Censorship could manifest itself both as explicit bans or the blocking of sources, and through self-censorship and pressure on access to official statistics. An example was the difficulty of obtaining information from authorities: according to a survey by KIIS (the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology) and the Centre for Strategic Communications and Information Security, 51% of surveyed foreign journalists in Ukraine reported encountering significant problems in obtaining information from official sources (Interfax-Ukraine, 2023). Other data related to cyber threats and digital pressure: IMI reported that 68% of media professionals and 82% of bloggers in Ukraine had encountered an increase in cyberattacks since the beginning of the full-scale war (IMI, 2023b).

Political and economic pressure on journalists in crisis conditions manifested through administrative restrictions, manipulation of accreditation, judicial prosecutions, as well as cuts in financial support for independent media. In Romania, significant state funds were spent by political parties on advertising contracts with media, often without transparency or labelling as political advertising, which in effect undermined editorial independence and encouraged self-censorship. For example, in 2022, the ruling parties allocated approximately 58 million lei (~ 11.7 million euros) to political advertising in the media, almost twice as much as in 2021 (~ 24 million lei) (Media Freedom Rapid Response, 2025). In Poland, there were also confirmed cases of administrative restrictions: for example, media organisations or journalists who criticised the authorities, reported difficulties in obtaining state subsidies or grants, manipulation of accreditation rules during official events, as well

as socio-economic pressure through reduced advertising or advertiser boycotts. One report by Polish NGOs indicated that in 2021-2022 journalists who investigated corruption in the healthcare sector (for example, procurement of medical equipment) were subjected to defamation lawsuits that were used as a means of delaying proceedings and imposing financial burdens.

Direct risks to journalists' lives, and health in crisis conditions were recorded statistically: 57 journalists were killed in 2022 in the course of the journalists' professional duties; of these journalists, 8 were in Ukraine (The Shift News, 2022). During the COVID-19 pandemic, a survey by the International Federation of Journalists (2020) among journalists indicated that more than half of

respondents felt stress and anxiety due to working during the crisis; it also reported deteriorating working conditions, loss of income, lack of equipment, or lack of protective equipment. Summarising the above, it was possible to identify the systemic nature of threats: censorship created the framework for information activity, political and economic pressure limited professional autonomy, and direct risks to life changed the very understanding of the journalistic profession. These factors formed a multidimensional crisis ecosystem in which journalists were not only observers but also active participants in social processes, forced every day to make decisions between professional ethics and personal safety. These challenges are reflected in Table 1.

**Table 1. Key challenges of journalism in crisis situations (armed conflicts and pandemics)**

Challenges	Manifestations	Consequences for journalism
Censorship	Direct bans, blocking access, self-censorship, content control	Reduction in media pluralism, decline in trust in official sources, strengthening of the role of alternative platforms
Political and economic pressure	Administrative restrictions, lawsuits, dependence on state or private grants	Increased dependence of editorial teams, reduced critical journalism, growth of self-censorship
Risks to life and health	Physical aggression, infectious threats, lack of protective equipment, psychological burnout	Professional demotivation, high staff turnover, spread of citizen journalism
Disinformation and fakes	Mass dissemination of false news on social networks and messengers	Decline in trust in media, need for rapid fact-checking, shift in editorial policy priorities
Technological challenges	Cyberattacks on newsrooms, account hacking, website blocking	Disruption of operational continuity, increased expenditure on digital security, shift towards decentralised platforms
Ethical dilemmas	Balance between the right to information and national security, issues of covering traumatic content	Blurring of standards of objectivity, growth of public discussions about the limits of journalistic responsibility
Social polarisation	Pressure from different population groups, expectations of confirmation of "one's own" position	Radicalisation of editorial policy, risk of audience loss, growing role of niche media

**Source:** compiled by the authors based on R. Patching & M. Hirst (2021), S. Fialka & Z. Kornieva (2024), V. Štětka & S. Mihej (2024)

The data presented in Table 1 indicated that the challenges of journalism in crisis situations were integrative in nature. Censorship not only restricted freedom of speech but also provoked the spread of unofficial communication channels, which could increase the risks of disinformation. Political and economic pressure created conditions for the gradual erosion of professional standards, where journalists lost editorial independence and the media space became vulnerable to manipulation. Direct risks to life and health undermined the resilience of the profession, as the danger of physical losses and psychological burnout increased, which changed the staffing structure of the industry. Thus, journalism in crisis conditions simultaneously performed the role of an information intermediary and became an indicator of the state of democracy and human rights in a given society.

The ethical dilemmas of journalistic activity under crisis challenges were always related to the search for a balance between citizens' right to receive reliable information and the need to guarantee the safety of society (Arđan, 2024). It was precisely in situations of armed conflicts and pandemics that this dilemma intensified,

because any message disseminated in the public space could have direct consequences for people's lives, the course of hostilities, or the level of social stability. The issue was not only freedom of speech as a democratic value, but also the journalist's responsibility for the possible consequences of published information, which required the media not merely to transmit facts, but also to assess risks consciously. One ethical problem in wartime was the relationship between promptness and the safe presentation of material. On the one hand, society needed the fastest possible access to information about the progress of hostilities, the humanitarian situation, losses, or the actions of the enemy. On the other hand, publishing specific data about the location of military units, evacuation routes, or the scale of destruction could directly threaten the safety of civilians and military personnel. In Ukraine, after the start of the full-scale invasion in 2022, the National Council on Television and Radio Broadcasting adopted clear restrictions on broadcasting details of hostilities in real time (Arđan, 2024). These restrictions triggered debate among journalists: did this not contradict the public's right to information. At the same time,

an analysis of cases in which photos or videos with geolocations of Ukrainian artillery positions were published in open access and used by the enemy to adjust artillery targeting demonstrated that complete freedom of information in crises could result in catastrophic consequences.

Ethical dilemmas also arose in the context of pandemics, where the question arose: what was more important – full disclosure of information about the scale of the threat or the prevention of panic. In Poland in 2020, the government restricted journalists' access to COVID-19 mortality statistics in the first months of the pandemic, which provoked criticism from international human rights organisations (Winiarska-Brodowska, 2022). At the same time, an analysis of society's reaction to information "injections" on social networks showed that exaggerated or unverified data provoked panic buying, mass departures from cities, and even aggression towards medical workers. This created an ethical paradox: the journalist had a duty to tell the truth, but excessive overly direct reporting in covering facts without contextualisation could undermine social stability.

The issue became particularly acute in conditions of disinformation campaigns. In Lithuania during the COVID-19 pandemic, military analysts and strategic communications units recorded the mass dissemination of false information in comments under medical-topic publications, on social networks, and on forums. Disinformation messages included claims about the ineffectiveness of vaccines, a conspiracy of pharmaceutical corporations, and doubts about vaccine safety (Ministry of Health..., 2021). Researchers of Eurobarometer 91.2 among 27 EU (European Union) countries, including Lithuania, Poland, and Romania, established that approximately one third of citizens believed that vaccines could cause serious side effects, which was a manifestation of the risk of manipulation of information (Vulpe & Rughinis, 2021). The complexity of the situation also lay in the fact that journalists often acted not only as communicators, but also as citizens drawn into the crisis. For example, in Ukraine (2024) 58% of media workers reported that the psychological state had worsened compared with 2023; excessive emotional burden and information stress became a daily background (Interfax-Ukraine, 2024).

In summary, the ethical dilemmas of journalistic activity in crises were not simply a choice between truth and falsehood, but a constant process of balancing between different levels of social responsibility. Journalism simultaneously had to provide citizens with truthful data, prevent the spread of panic, protect the safety of military personnel and civilians, not become an instrument of propaganda, and at the same time not lose society's trust. In this sense, crises acted as "litmus paper" for testing the resilience of professional standards and the moral reference points of journalism. It was through these dilemmas that a new code of professional ethics was formed, one that took into account the specifics of

the information age, where every word could matter not only for awareness but also for the survival of society.

### **Comparative analysis of the experience of Ukraine and Eastern European countries**

Ukrainian journalism under martial law appeared not only as an instrument of informing, but as a social phenomenon in constant transformation and performing functions to support societal resilience. On the one hand, journalists were forced to work under conditions of extreme risk, facing threats of physical destruction, persecution, and psychological exhaustion. On the other hand, the profession itself formed new strategies of survival and adaptation and produced specific models of interaction with the authorities, society, and international structures. The analysis of these processes made it possible to understand more deeply how, in wartime, journalism transformed into a form of social resistance, an instrument of civic mobilisation, and at the same time an object of attacks by hostile information systems.

In the Ukrainian experience, one aspect of journalists' survival in wartime was the physical safety. The need for special safety measures increased – from the use of body armour and helmets to the creation of mobile shelters and the organisation of evacuation corridors for media workers. At the same time, leading newsrooms were forced to invest significant resources in staff training – first-aid courses, survival training in combat zones, and knowledge of behaviour protocols during artillery shelling or mine threats. At the same time, survival in wartime conditions had not only a physical but also an economic dimension. The war led to the destruction of the advertising market, reduction in print press circulations, a decrease in the number of subscribers, and a decline in the revenues of online media. In the first 1,000 days of the full-scale war, 329 Ukrainian media outlets ceased to exist, of which only 16% (52 media outlets) managed to resume operations (IMI, 2024b). However, this stimulated the search for new funding models: the role of grant support, international assistance, crowdfunding, and donor platforms increased. Thus, the adaptation of Ukrainian journalism occurred through diversification of funding sources and the formation of partnerships with international organisations.

Equally important was the dimension of journalists' psychological resilience. Work under constant stress, filming scenes of destruction and human losses, and the constant risk to life generated a high level of professional burnout and post-traumatic disorders. In response to these challenges, psychological support programmes were developed, special hotlines were created, and training sessions on resilience and stress management were conducted. This made it possible to form a certain professional "immune system" that supported the functioning of media even under critical conditions. In parallel, professional standards of journalism were transformed. In wartime, the emphasis shifted from the principle of

absolute neutrality to prioritising national security and countering hostile propaganda. At the same time, a tense balance remained between society's right to truthful information and the requirements of wartime censorship. An example was restrictions on publishing data on the movement of military units, the results of shelling, or other aspects. Ukrainian journalists adapted by using so-called "delayed publication" or by creating special editorial protocols that made it possible to coordinate materials with military structures without violating the principles of professional independence (IMI, 2023a).

Attention should be paid to the digital transformation of journalism, which under martial law acquired strategic significance. The use of social networks, Telegram channels, and online platforms made it possible to disseminate information promptly, even when traditional channels were destroyed or blocked. The Ukrainian context and the response of the civic media sector were marked by the rapid institutionalisation of fact-checking initiatives, active cooperation with international donors, and a simultaneous state regulatory response during the wartime period. Independent initiatives such as StopFake (n.d.), VoxCheck (n.d.), Texty (n.d.), and others significantly strengthened the role of fact-checking in the media space and adapted the practices to crisis challenges. These organisations actively focused on the verification of real-time reports – checking claims about shelling, infrastructure destruction, civilian losses, and so on – and on counter-disinformation research that analysed how fake narratives spread through social networks or messengers. In the period 2022-2024, some of these organisations received emergency funding to support continuity of work, especially given the risks of physical danger, attacks on offices or journalists, and the threat of data leaks. StopFake expanded its verification toolkit through its own technological means: it introduced automatic scripts for comparing media content, image and video analysis, as well as a Telegram bot that enabled the audience to send suspicious materials for verification promptly. VoxCheck increased the volume of refuted claims, while simultaneously introducing a system of internal chatbots for monitoring social networks and user requests; Texty integrated machine text analysis tools, which allowed it to filter out template fakes and increase the speed of response to the spread of false information.

The impact of these initiatives on the digital transformation of journalism proved multifaceted: these organisations stimulated higher standards of information verification, contributed to professional training of journalists (through workshops and webinars), and also contributed to the development of media literacy among audiences by publishing details of the verification methods and openly discussing cases of disinformation. These initiatives also contributed to technical infrastructure – APIs for bots and open data for journalist fact-checkers – which made it possible to scale practices of responding to information threats. At the same time,

state mechanisms (blocking Russian information channels, telemarathons, cooperation with military structures to limit the disclosure of tactical data) created a tense balance between information security and the risk of censorship; structural monitoring bodies and media NGOs recorded both positives (a reduction in the number of targeted killings of journalists in certain periods) and threats to pluralism (Freedom House, 2025).

The experience of Poland, Lithuania, and Romania during crises demonstrated a complex interaction between political transformations, the development of the media environment, and societal survival strategies. Historical and contemporary examples of these countries made it possible to single out certain patterns in the functioning of journalism and public discourse, which in crises became factors in shaping national resilience. It was possible to trace how, during periods of political turbulence, military threats, or global pandemics, the information sphere performed the role not only of reflecting events, but also of an active instrument of civic mobilisation. Poland had rich historical experience of resisting censorship and using journalism as a resource for democratisation. During the period of martial law (1981-1983), the print and underground press ("bibuła", samizdat) became an element of opposition communication: archival and research collections recorded hundreds – and by some estimates more than half a thousand – independent and underground publications and periodicals that operated in Poland in the late 1970s-1980s and created an alternative information space. These empirical data underlined the role of "parallel publicity" as a mechanism of civic mobilisation under repression (Archivum, n.d.).

In contemporary conditions of digital hybridisation of the media space, fact-checking initiatives in Europe played a key role in maintaining trust in journalism and in shaping a resilient information ecosystem. The Polish organisation Demagog (n.d.) was one of the most developed independent structures specialising in verifying political statements, statistical data, and socially significant claims. Demagog used standardised reliability assessment protocols, which covered the classification of claims by levels of truthfulness, contextual verification of sources, automated fact searching in open databases, and the use of analytical tools to detect manipulation. After 2022, the organisation strengthened its analysis of disinformation narratives related to the war in Ukraine, migration processes, and energy security. It was the integration of Demagog into transnational fact-checking networks that made it possible to create a model of rapid response to information attacks, involving state institutions, journalists, and civil society organisations. This significantly increased the speed of information verification and the level of interaction between Polish and Ukrainian newsrooms during crisis information waves.

Lithuania demonstrated a more systemic approach to information security, combining state coordination

with independent analytical initiatives. After 2017, the country's government created a coherent architecture of strategic communications within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of National Defence, and the Armed Forces. These structures operated in a so-called whole-of-society mode – an approach that envisaged partnership between state bodies, media, universities, and non-governmental organisations. At the same time, the independent initiative Debunk (n.d.) became a centre for analytical processing of data on information attacks. Its activity combined OSINT monitoring (open-source intelligence), algorithmic content analysis, and the development of tools for detecting “coordination waves” – simultaneous publication of fakes from different accounts or platforms. Debunk produced monthly analytical reports for journalists and government structures, conducted training programmes on digital security and ethical fact-checking, and also cooperated with the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats in Helsinki. The Lithuanian model was characterised by a balance between a security-oriented approach and the preservation of editorial autonomy, although scholars warned of the risk of excessive state influence, which could reduce the level of journalistic independence (Tremblay, 2021).

Romania, in turn, followed a path from the centralised media system of the Ceauşescu era to a pluralistic but fragmented information field. One of the key actors was the fact-checking platform Factual, which since 2014 specialised in verifying political statements, and during the COVID-19 pandemic – in deconstructing fake medical narratives. During the pandemic, the platform played an important role in combating disinformation about vaccination, morbidity statistics, and “alternative methods of treatment”. This approach stimulated the development of data journalism in Romania, as fact-checking began to be based not only on textual analysis, but also on the systematic use of open state registers, statistical

databases, and open APIs for information collection. At the same time, according to experts, the Romanian media market remained vulnerable due to the political dependence of certain outlets and the low level of transparency of media financing, which made further development of independent digital fact-checking platforms important (Factual, 2020).

A comparative overview of these cases showed that Eastern European approaches to crisis journalism varied from civic self-organisation and “parallel publicity” (historical Poland) to the combination of state strategic communications and independent techno-analytical centres (Lithuania), and to a model in which fact-checking existed, but its effectiveness was limited by structural market problems and low transparency of financing (Romania). All three models demonstrated that successful countering of disinformation required simultaneously technical tools (OSINT, monitoring), institutional mechanisms (coordination between state structures and NGOs), and transparent financial solutions to preserve editorial autonomy.

The comparative analysis of the experience of these countries showed that, despite different historical trajectories, journalism in crisis periods acquired the features of a hybrid institution, combining the functions of classical informing, civic mobilisation, and elements of information defence. Poland demonstrated a model of social solidarity, where media became a channel of assistance to refugees and a platform for social integration. Lithuania illustrated a model of strategic media security, where journalism was integrated into the national defence system. Romania, by contrast, showed the complexity of the interaction between journalism and politics, when during crises media were forced to balance between the need for truthful informing and external pressure from the authorities or economic groups. Table 2 is presented below, which synthesises the institutions, practical tools, and measurable outcomes of Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania, and Romania.

Table 2. Comparative characteristics of journalism in crisis periods

Direction / Criterion	Ukraine	Poland	Lithuania	Romania
Institutional basis for countering disinformation	A network of independent fact-check initiatives, NGO monitoring, international donors, state decisions to block sources of hostile propaganda; practical cooperation with defence structures on information security issues.	The presence of established fact-check structures and participation in European networks; previously political pressure on public broadcasters, which has been partially eased.	State / semi-state strategic communications centres, techno-analytical NGOs, integrated media literacy programmes; priority – information resilience as national security.	Developed fact-check initiatives, but weak translation of results into mass public discourse; high influence of political and economic factors on media financing.
Key instruments for countering disinformation	Rapid debunking, Telegram bots, open observation databases, cooperation with platforms (partial), monitoring of the adversary's information “injections”; a combination of data journalism and rapid verification.	Political fact-checks, long-term analytical investigations, educational programmes; cooperation with EU networks.	Analytics based on technical monitoring (OSINT), AI tools for detecting bot networks, regular information bulletins for state institutions and media.	Fact-checking articles, COVID-19 datasets (research projects), media literacy initiatives, but limited reach in rural areas.

Continued Table 2.

Direction / Criterion	Ukraine	Poland	Lithuania	Romania
Role of independent media and fact-check (applied indicators)	Increased fact-check activity during the wartime period, introduction of automated tools (Telegram bots), integration into news streams; high volume of debunking in 2022-2024 (emergency funding from platforms).	Demagog as a stable structure, regular publications and reports, membership in IFCN/EFCSN; examples of large-scale investigations.	Debunk and techno-analytical centres publish regular studies and analytics; a strong production base for fact-checking.	Factual carries out systematic checks of politicians' claims (academic publications with case analysis); but the absence of broad political pressure on disinformation.
Press freedom ranking (RSF 2024) and its impact on countering disinformation	61 <sup>st</sup> place (RSF 2024) – a combination of risks for journalists in the combat zone and reform dynamics; journalist safety and independence affected the work of fact-check initiatives.	47 <sup>th</sup> place (RSF 2024) – sensitivity to political influence, but stable independent fact-check structures.	13 <sup>th</sup> place (RSF 2024) – a relatively high level of press freedom, which strengthens the effectiveness of independent analytics.	~49 <sup>th</sup> place (RSF 2024) – problems with transparency of media financing and political influence; this weakens a large-scale response to disinformation.
Key bottlenecks/risks	Balance between information security and pluralism; high risk of operational vulnerability of fact-check teams under shelling; the need for systemic funding.	Dependence on political cycles; risk of regulatory manipulation when government circumstances change.	Risk of the "securitisation" of media – close cooperation with state structures may undermine critical journalism; need for independent expertise.	Uneven fact-check coverage, weak funding, high societal vulnerability to conspiracy theories.

**Note:** IFCN – International Fact-Checking Network; EFCSN – European Fact-Checking Standards Network; RSF – Reporters Without Borders

**Source:** compiled by the authors based on Aspen Institute Romania (2021), I. Călin (2022), IMI (2024a), G. Zulonaite (2024), Freedom House (2025), R.-N. Radu (2025), Demagog (n.d.), Debunk (n.d.), Factual (n.d.), RSF (n.d.)

The comparative analysis (Table 2) demonstrates that in all four countries instruments for countering disinformation were formed, but the models differed along three axes: the degree of state integration into countering efforts (from active cooperation to more separated models), the level of institutionalisation of independent fact-checking, and the range of funding/media literacy coverage. Ukraine and Lithuania directed the emphasis towards operational information security (which was justified in the context of military threats), Poland had strong traditions of political fact-checking with powerful civil society organisations, and Romania represented an example of a country with a developed fact-check ecosystem but with institutional weaknesses that reduced large-scale effectiveness. A critical shared problem remained the insufficient transmission of fact-check results into mass information flows: local sites and NGOs generated many checks, but algorithmic platform ranking and media economics often reduced the visibility of these materials among citizens. This was a technical problem (platform algorithms), an institutional problem (lack of cooperation agreements with platforms), and an educational problem (low media literacy in certain demographic groups). European initiatives – namely the broad framework of the EU Code of Practice against Disinformation (European Commission, 2022), EDMO (European Digital Media Observatory)/EFCSN (EDMO, 2024) – created a regulatory framework and networks for coordination, but

implementation remained fragmented and depended on national capacity-building measures.

Based on the conducted analysis, a set of constructive recommendations was formulated, aimed at countering disinformation and strengthening information resilience. The primary task was to strengthen the integration of independent fact-checking structures into the official crisis communication system through formal cooperation mechanisms, such as memoranda with state agencies, which would make it possible to ensure synergy while preserving editorial autonomy and establishing transparent barriers to prevent instrumentalisation. In parallel, it was necessary to develop technical infrastructure (API – Application Programming Interface, bots, open datasets), which would make it possible to detect recurring narratives at scale and automatically signal risky information "injections" to both journalists and citizens; these tools already demonstrated effectiveness in Ukraine and Lithuania, therefore such infrastructure should be standardised and implemented more widely. One direction was to strengthen media literacy programmes with an emphasis on behavioural change rather than only on knowledge acquisition, targeted at vulnerable population groups; at the same time, the effectiveness of such interventions should be assessed through quasi-experimental methods and surveys before and after the intervention. There was also a need to ensure long-term funding for independent fact-checking organisations through a mixed-financing

model combining grants, platform support, and donor funds, so that during crises these organisations did not lose operational capacity (European Commission, 2025).

The prospects for applying Eastern European experience to strengthen Ukrainian journalism should be considered as a multidimensional programme of transferring practices, tools, and institutional solutions that combined technical, human resources, organisational, and legal-regulatory components. Effective borrowing should be based not on simply copying individual initiatives, but on systemic adaptation taking into account the Ukrainian context – the level of risks, the structure of the media market, the presence of civic initiatives, and the specifics of the information threat. Lithuania's experience in developing technologically proficient centres for disinformation analysis demonstrated that combining OSINT tools, automated detection systems, and volunteer networks yielded a rapid increase in analytical capacity. Ukrainian fact-check organisations already had similar developments, but the scaling was possible through formalised partnerships with techno-analytical centres (shared APIs, data exchange, unified monitoring interfaces), as well as through the deployment of multi-level "signal platforms" that combined automatic detection of anomalies on social media with manual verification by experts. Such integration made it possible to shorten response time to coordinated campaigns and increase the likelihood of early detection of systemic bot networks.

Regular measurement of the impact of fact-check initiatives and educational campaigns made it possible to shift reactive practices into predictable interventions. Countries in the region had examples of working metrics: audience reach, the pace of debunking narratives, the number of platform "takedown" requests, changes in the level of trust in institutions within target cohorts. The implementation of quasi-experimental evaluations (pre- / post-intervention surveys, A/B testing of message formats, tracking behavioural changes in vulnerable groups) would provide Ukrainian initiatives with a transparent justification for attracting long-term funding and optimising resources. European reviews of the response to COVID-19 emphasised the need for such systemic evaluations for adaptive management of information campaigns (Heiss *et al.*, 2021).

Polish and Lithuanian experience indicated that combining external grant funding with contracts for producing content for local communication campaigns and technical contracts helped reduce vulnerability to the political cycle and one-off inflows of funds (Center for International Private Enterprise, 2024). For Ukraine, this meant creating structural solutions: rapid-response funds for media in crises, long-term grant mechanisms for fact-check centres, and incentives for platform partnerships (agreements with social networks on prioritising verified materials). A concrete step could be the introduction of transparent co-funding rules: 30-40% funding from donors, 30% – commercial/platform contracts,

30% – state-civil society programmes (under conditions of guarantees of editorial independence). This model reduced the risks of "one-off survival" and increased institutional sustainability (Shaping Europe's digital future, 2024). Transferring the experience of "close but controlled" cooperation between state structures and independent analytical centres should be implemented through contractual mechanisms (memoranda of interaction, SLA (Service Level Agreement) on data exchange, rules on the inviolability of editorial policy). Ukrainian wartime experience showed that cooperation with defence bodies was sometimes necessary (for example, regarding tactical data), but without formalised barriers this could quickly turn into censorship or instrumentalisation. The recommended practice was to develop and publish a code of interaction defining the parties' obligations, confidentiality criteria, algorithms for publishing corrections, and mechanisms of external oversight (public councils, international partners). This approach combined the Lithuanian emphasis on national information security with the Polish tradition of independent civic oversight (Maliukevičius, 2024).

Eastern European countries demonstrated that technical and institutional tools worked only in the presence of trained personnel. For Ukraine, the priority should be large-scale training of journalists in OSINT, digital security, ethical reporting practice in conflict conditions, as well as systems of continuous psychological support. This included certification programmes from universities and NGOs, short first-aid courses, and training on working in crisis conditions. Polish experience in operational information support for refugees and Lithuanian practices of multilingual public education demonstrated that information intervention should be socially targeted: different formats (short visual instructions, chatbots, localised video clips) worked better than universal press releases (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 2022). In Ukraine, this meant scaling multilingual services for internally displaced persons and border communities, integrating Telegram/WhatsApp bots for rapid deconstruction of fakes, and creating local "information points" in cooperation with local administrations and NGOs. One of the most significant lessons of the region was that without effective legal mechanisms, all other innovations risked becoming undermined. Ukraine could adopt approaches to protecting journalists through specialised legal clusters: operational legal centres for emergency support, funds to cover legal costs, and legislative norms that complicated mechanisms of politically motivated lawsuits.

The expected effects of comprehensive implementation of Eastern European experience included increased operational capacity to detect and neutralise disinformation campaigns, growth in trust in independent media institutions (through transparent procedures and metrics), improved protection of journalists, and a reduction in cases of censorship through a more mature

model of state-civil society interaction. Such a result was possible only if the transfer of practices was accompanied by localisation – adaptation of standards to regional languages, audience mental models, and the realities of media economics. Pilot projects should be launched at the level of regional media and the impact should be clearly measured (quantitative and qualitative indicators), after which successful models should be scaled to the national level. This would reduce the risk of unjustified expenditure and provide an evidence base for political decisions on funding.

The application of Eastern European experience to strengthen Ukrainian journalism should be strategic, multichannel, and evidence-oriented. The most promising directions were technical integration of fact-check tools, standardisation of effectiveness assessment, sustainable funding models, personnel programmes, and clear legal guarantees. The combination of these components would ensure not only operational resilience in crises, but also a long-term improvement in the quality of journalism as an element of democratic and security infrastructure.

## Discussion

The conducted comparative study confirmed that the conclusions of various authors and international research groups were consistent with the key trends identified within the analysis of Eastern European journalism under crisis conditions. The identified patterns made it possible to trace common features in the transformation of media systems, in particular the transition from a model of passive information delivery to active media involvement in the management of social processes, the formation of information resilience, and ethical self-regulation. The conclusions of B. Sahana (2025) regarding the role of media in crisis communications coincided with the results of the conducted analysis of Ukrainian and Eastern European experience. In the study by B. Sahana, it was shown that during natural disasters and pandemics, media not only transmitted information but also constructed narratives, shaping social reactions and behavioural models. A similar dynamic was observed in Ukraine, where during the period of the full-scale war the media performed the functions of a crisis communicator and a moral reference point, supporting the collective resilience of society. As in the cases described by B. Sahana, journalism in Ukraine was forced to combine the task of rapid response with the need to preserve accuracy, which created ethical dilemmas between the precision of reporting and the prevention of panic. Both studies emphasised that trust in media in crisis contexts depended on editorial teams' ability to maintain a balance between empathy, professional standards, and technological responsiveness.

The comparison with the study by K.A. Akopian (2023) confirmed similar conclusions regarding the specifics of war journalism in Ukraine. In the work of K.A. Akopian, war correspondents were considered participants in the

information front who simultaneously adhered to the norms of international humanitarian law. This corresponded to the results of the present study, in which journalists under conditions of armed conflict performed the functions of mediators between the authorities and society, becoming an element of the national security system. The analysis of the Ukrainian case also confirmed that the main challenges remained physical danger, psychological exhaustion, and the constant tension between ethical principles of objectivity and the need for information resistance. Similar to K.A. Akopian, the results of the study indicated the gradual formation of a professional ethical code of war journalism, oriented towards the protection of life, the safety of civilians, and the reliability of data even in situations of limited access to sources.

The positions presented in the work of M. Zahoor & N. Sadiq (2021) correlated with empirical observations regarding the digital transformation of journalism in the region. The authors emphasised that social networks and digital platforms had radically changed the structure of communications in conflict zones, ensuring the instantaneous circulation of information and new monitoring tools. Similar trends were traced in Ukrainian, Polish, and Lithuanian media, where Telegram channels, OSINT tools, and analytical platforms were used for fact-checking, data collection, and rapid response to disinformation. At the same time, both in the study by M. Zahoor & N. Sadiq and in the analysis of Eastern European practices, the risks of information overload, the spread of unverified information, and a decline in editorial control were recorded. The comparison showed that under conditions of war and pandemics, media transformed from a communication tool into a key actor in shaping the information space, where technological advantage did not always guarantee ethical responsibility. The comparative results also revealed that the experience of Eastern Europe complemented and expanded the conclusions of the cited studies by demonstrating practical models of information resilience. Polish media confirmed the importance of horizontal links between newsrooms and civil society, which correlated with B. Sahana (2025) recommendations on increasing trust through community participation. The Lithuanian case proved close to the approaches of M. Zahoor & N. Sadiq, where digital technologies and analytical laboratories were integrated into the state security system. The Romanian experience, by contrast, emphasised structural constraints and political influence, which partially contradicted the ideal models of effective crisis communication proposed in the work of B. Sahana.

The comparison of the obtained conclusions with the results of the study by D. Kukhar (2025) demonstrated that both studies recorded the process of transition of Ukrainian media from a post-Soviet paradigm of dependence towards the formation of a new journalistic identity focused on the values of social responsibility and national security. However, unlike the conclusions of D. Kukhar, who primarily emphasised the ideological

and humanitarian dimension of this transformation, the present study also identified a systemic institutional restructuring of the media sector, where mechanisms of self-regulation and collective protection of journalists were formed. While in D. Kukhar's work the war was viewed mainly as a catalyst for professional rethinking, the obtained results showed that it also became a structural factor of industry modernisation – from the emergence of crisis communication headquarters in newsrooms to the formation of new formats of cooperation between independent fact-checking organisations and state communication structures. Both studies coincided in concluding that patriotic discourse in the media had intensified and that "resilience journalism" had emerged; however, the present study specified this process in the context of integrating OSINT technological tools and automated fact-checking algorithms, which allowed not only the maintenance of information defence but also the enhancement of the analytical quality of content.

In comparison with the work of A. Węglińska *et al.* (2024), the present study confirmed the authors' conclusion regarding the growing role of digital technologies and social media in shaping new professional dynamics in journalism, but went beyond the individual level of analysis of field correspondents by encompassing the macrostructural context of the information ecosystem. While A. Węglińska *et al.* focused on microsocial changes – shifts in working standards, ethical dilemmas, and psychological pressure – the results of the present study showed that these changes were transforming into stable professional patterns: journalists began to perceive digital mobility, hybridity of sources, and collective verification as a new norm of journalistic practice. In addition, whereas the study by A. Węglińska *et al.* was dominated by an empirical focus on the experience of war reporters, the present study captured a broader context – including editorial structures, local media, and fact-checking initiatives that jointly shaped a new model of information interaction between the state, journalists, and audiences. The difference also lay in the interpretation of risks: while A. Węglińska *et al.* emphasised technological and psychological challenges, the present study demonstrated the integration into a broader system of crisis threats – from physical danger to institutional pressure – which required the creation of comprehensive mechanisms for journalist safety.

The comparison with the work of Y. Gunawan *et al.* (2023) revealed a significant difference in research focus, yet allowed for an expansion of understanding of the systemic nature of threats to journalism in armed conflicts. Y. Gunawan *et al.* argued that violations of journalists' rights under international humanitarian law were not isolated but systemic, pointing to an imbalance between international protection norms and the actual implementation. The present study confirmed these observations but also expanded the analytical scope by showing that threats to journalists' safety had not only a legal but also a

socio-institutional dimension. It was established that legal mechanisms remained declarative without parallel development of internal professional support structures – such as solidarity networks, crisis funds, and collective communication platforms. Thus, while Y. Gunawan *et al.* focused on the normative-legal aspect of safety guarantees, the results of the present study demonstrated that only the integration of legal, ethical, and technological components was capable of ensuring a real level of journalist protection under crisis conditions.

The comparison of the obtained results with the study by M. Túnñez-López *et al.* (2020) revealed significant parallels in the understanding of crisis-driven transformations in journalism, although the context and analytical focus differed. In the study by M. Túnñez-López *et al.*, the COVID-19 pandemic was considered a catalyst for institutional renewal of European public service media (PSM), which rethought the role in society by shifting the emphasis from traditional information delivery to a socio-therapeutic and integrative mission. Similarly, the present study recorded that Ukrainian and Eastern European media under crisis conditions – both pandemic and war – began to perform not only information transmission functions but also the stabilisation of public sentiment, countering disinformation, and mobilisation of civic resources. At the same time, while M. Túnñez-López *et al.* emphasised the institutional adaptation of public broadcasters to remote working modes, automation of production processes, and hybridisation of formats, the results of the present study showed that in the Eastern European context these processes were less technological but more security-oriented in nature: the digitalisation of journalism functioned not only as a means of modernisation but also as a survival tool under conditions of information warfare. The present study confirmed the conclusion of M. Túnñez-López *et al.* that crises accelerate structural changes in media, but supplemented it with the assertion that such changes do not always lead to democratic strengthening. In the context of Ukraine and Eastern European countries, technological adaptation was accompanied by ethical and political dilemmas – balancing freedom of speech and information security, transparency and censorship. While for Western European public broadcasters the pandemic became a condition for increasing trust in official sources, in countries with hybrid media systems it instead intensified issues of independence, self-regulation, and resistance to manipulation.

The comparison with the study by L. Papadopoulou & T.A. Maniou (2024) enabled a deeper understanding of the political and regulatory aspects of media functioning under crisis conditions. The authors concluded that the pandemic crisis provided governments with opportunities to expand control over the media field by introducing temporary, but often long-term, restrictions on freedom of speech that affected both traditional and digital journalism. The present study confirmed this

trend, recording similar phenomena in Eastern European states, particularly in Ukraine, Poland, and Romania, where administrative restrictions, economic pressure, and self-censorship shaped new forms of indirect censorship. However, compared with L. Papadopoulou & T.A. Maniou, who analysed these processes mainly from a normative-legal perspective, the results of the present study demonstrated the social embeddedness – censorship practices manifested not only as vertical acts of state control but also as horizontal mechanisms of collective self-restraint by journalists in situations of national threat. The study by L. Papadopoulou & T.A. Maniou emphasised that the pandemic altered the very structure of journalistic autonomy, while the results of the present analysis showed that similar trends also emerged during wartime, but in an even more radicalised form. The search for a balance between national interests and citizens' right to objective information became the key ethical conflict of the crisis period. While in L. Papadopoulou & T.A. Maniou the crisis was viewed as a challenge to democratic standards of press freedom, in the Eastern European context, according to the present study, it appeared as a factor that simultaneously restricted freedom and stimulated the development of professional solidarity, self-organisation, and the formation of new practices of journalistic resilience.

The comparison of these works with the obtained results demonstrated that Ukrainian and Eastern European journalism formed a new type of hybrid communication institution that combined the functions of information provision, advocacy, crisis management, and social therapy. Unlike previous studies, the present research made it possible to trace not only the consequences but also the mechanisms of this transformation – from the rethinking of objectivity ethics to the formation of techno-communication survival strategies that defined the contours of future journalism in the post-crisis period.

## ■ Conclusions

The conducted study made it possible to formulate a comprehensive conclusion regarding the state, challenges, and transformation of journalism under crisis conditions of armed conflicts and pandemics, based on the experience of Ukraine and Eastern European countries. The analysis showed that journalism as a social institution underwent significant evolution, transforming its traditional functions of information provision, oversight of power, and public opinion formation in response to extreme conditions. Under the conditions of the full-scale war in Ukraine, a shift was observed from the model of a neutral observer to active participation in information confrontation, where media began to perform the role of a crisis communicator, an instrument of national security, and a tool of civic mobilisation, which simultaneously generated serious ethical dilemmas regarding the balance between objectivity, patriotism, and security constraints.

The comparative analysis revealed that Eastern European countries developed diverse models for countering crisis challenges: Ukraine formed a hybrid model combining independent fact-checking with information security needs; Poland demonstrated the strength of civic solidarity journalism and fact-checking structures integrated into European networks; Lithuania developed an institutionally balanced system of strategic communications with an emphasis on technological solutions; Romania, in turn, highlighted the difficulty of overcoming structural problems of the media market despite the presence of developed fact-checking initiatives. The study identified the systemic nature of threats faced by journalists, including censorship, political and economic pressure, direct risks to life and health, psychological burnout, disinformation campaigns, and technological challenges, which reinforced one another, forming a multidimensional crisis ecosystem. A critical aspect was the intensification of ethical dilemmas related to the search for a balance between society's right to information, the need to prevent panic, the protection of national security, and the preservation of professional autonomy. The digital transformation of journalism acquired strategic significance, manifested in the widespread use of social networks, Telegram channels, OSINT tools, and automated verification systems, which made it possible to compensate for the destruction of traditional information channels and ensure prompt coverage.

Based on the obtained data, a number of recommendations were formulated aimed at strengthening information resilience, including the institutionalisation of cooperation between independent fact-checking structures and state bodies, the development of technical infrastructure for detecting disinformation, the implementation of long-term funding models, the scaling of media literacy programmes, and the creation of effective mechanisms for the legal protection of journalists. Overall, the study demonstrated that journalism under crisis conditions transformed into a hybrid institution combining the functions of classical information provision, civic mobilisation, and elements of information defence, while the accumulated Eastern European experience may serve as a valuable resource for building a resilient, adaptive, and professionally mature media system in the post-crisis period. The study is limited to the analysis of selected Eastern European countries (Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania, Romania) and specific crisis contexts (armed conflict, pandemic), which does not allow full extrapolation of the conclusions to all countries in the region or other types of crises. Prospects for further research lie in the comparative analysis of the long-term impact of crises on media systems, the development of quantitative metrics for the effectiveness of information security mechanisms, and the study of the impact of artificial intelligence on crisis journalism practices.

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## Журналістика у періоди кризових викликів збройних конфліктів та пандемій: досвід України та країн Східної Європи

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**Анотація.** Журналістика XXI століття зазнала глибоких трансформацій під впливом глобальних криз – пандемій, збройних конфліктів, інформаційних війн та гібридних загроз, що визначило необхідність переосмислення її ролі як соціального інституту, механізму комунікації та гаранта демократичних цінностей. Метою дослідження було виявлення закономірностей трансформації журналістики в умовах криз та визначення моделей її адаптації в країнах Східної Європи. Методологічну основу роботи склав міждисциплінарний підхід, що поєднав елементи порівняльного, контент-аналізу та кейс-стаді аналізу; зокрема, порівняльний метод дозволив виявити відмінності між національними моделями кризової журналістики в Україні, Польщі, Литві та Румунії. Результати показали, що в умовах кризи журналістика втратила свою суто інформаційну функцію, перетворившись на багаторівневу систему кризових комунікацій. У випадку України простежувалося зміщення від ролі нейтрального спостерігача до суб'єкта інформаційного спротиву, який поєднував інформаційну, мобілізаційну та безпекову функції. Польська журналістика продемонструвала потенціал громадянської солідарності та горизонтальної самоорганізації медіаспільноти, що сприяло підвищенню довіри громадськості до платформ фактчекінгу. Литовська модель вирізнялася інституційною узгодженістю, де державні та незалежні структури взаємодіяли в межах стратегічних комунікацій, тоді як Румунія продемонструвала суперечність між високою інституціоналізацією фактчекінгу та вразливістю медіа-ринку до політичного тиску. Порівняльний аналіз виявив спільні загрози – цензуру, психологічне вигорання, економічні обмеження, дезінформацію та етичні дилеми, які підсилювали одна одну, створюючи кризову медіасистему. Цифровізація виявилася фактором адаптації, що дозволило компенсувати руйнування традиційних комунікаційних каналів через використання соціальних медіа та платформ фактчекінгу. Узагальнення результатів дало підстави стверджувати, що журналістика Східної Європи розвинула гібридну модель функціонування, яка поєднувала традиційні демократичні принципи з елементами інформаційного захисту. Було підтверджено, що успішна адаптація журналістики залежала не тільки від технічних ресурсів, але й від рівня етичної зрілості, професійної автономії та суспільної солідарності. Практичне значення дослідження полягає в можливості використання його результатів для розробки національних стратегій з посилення інформаційної стійкості, покращення підготовки журналістів до роботи в умовах криз та формування стандартів відповідальної медіа-комунікації під час надзвичайних ситуацій

**Ключові слова:** платформи фактчекінгу; дезінформація; цензура; гібридні загрози; інформаційна безпека