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Зміст / Contents

Vol. 11, No. 2

O. Prosianyk, O. Zyma, K. Nobis-Wlazlo The development of creative industries in media in a digital environment.....	8
О. Просяник, О. Зима, К. Нобіс-Влазло Розвиток креативних індустрій у медіа в умовах цифрового середовища.....	8
R. Kutsyk, B. Bezpalko "The war of images": Coverage of Russia's full-scale armed aggression against Ukraine in British political cartoon (based on materials from "The Times" and "The Sunday Times").....	22
Р. Куцик, Б. Безпалько «Війна образів»: висвітлення повномасштабної збройної агресії Росії проти України у британській політичній карикатурі (за матеріалами «The Times» та «The Sunday Times»).....	22
O. Vasylynyna, O. Mizina, Y. Blokha Regulatory and legal frameworks and standardisation of mechanisms for ensuring the authenticity of electronic documents in the age of generative content.....	47
О. Василинина, О. Мізіна, Я. Блоха Нормативно-правове регулювання та стандартизація механізмів забезпечення автентичності електронних документів в епоху генеративного контенту	47
V. Kotsur, O. Pavlenko Documenting and archiving materials on the development of kickboxing in Ukraine: The source base of periodicals from the late 20 th to early 21 st century.....	58
В. Коцур, О. Павленко Документування та архівування матеріалів про розвиток кікбоксингу в Україні: джерельна база періодики кінця XX – початку XXI століття	58
V. Dudar, O. Tiutiunnyk, O. Dudar Convergent journalism of Ukrainian online media in the context of full-scale wars	72
В. Дудар, О. Тютюнник, О. Дудар Конвергентна журналістика українських онлайн-медіа в умовах повномасштабної війни	72
A. Zlenko, Yu. Liashchenko, N. Riznyk Military documentation as a source of historical memory: Problems of preserving digital evidence of the war in Ukraine.....	84
А. Зленко, Ю. Лященко, Н. Різник Воєнна документація як джерело історичної пам'яті: проблеми збереження цифрових доказів війни в Україні	84
O. Bezruchko, H. Chmil, I. Gavran, V. Mykhalov, M. Chaika Digital audiovisual practices as social communication technologies: Transformation of cultural narratives.....	98
О. Безручко, Г. Чміль, І. Гавран, В. Михальов, М. Чайка Цифрові аудіовізуальні практики як технології соціальних комунікацій: трансформація культурних наративів	98
M. Mukasheva, R. Bakenova, A. Alim, N. Nuraliev, A. Akunov Émigré media as a tool for transnational political influence: Communication mechanisms and models of elite responses in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.....	116
М. Мукашева, Р. Бакенова, А. Алім, Н. Нуралієв, А. Акунов Емігрантські медіа як інструмент транснаціонального політичного впливу: комунікаційні механізми та моделі реагування еліт у Казахстані та Киргизстані.....	116
A. Duishekeeva, R. Nuriden, N. Myktybayev, N. Alieva, A. Emilbekova Ethical issues and self-regulation in the Central Asian media: Features and problems.....	136
А. Дуйшекеєва, Р. Нуріден, Н. Миктибаєв, Н. Алієва, А. Емільбекова Етичні питання та саморегулювання в медіа Центральної Азії: особливості та проблематика.....	136
K. Ketners, M. Petersone Ethical challenges of generative artificial intelligence in global social communications: International standards and practices	151
К. Кетнерс, М. Петерсоне Етичні виклики генеративного штучного інтелекту в глобальних соціальних комунікаціях: міжнародні стандарти та практики	151
K. Mile, B. Zogaj Political memes as a communicative tool for shaping public opinion in election campaigns: A comparative analysis	166
К. Міле, Б. Зогай Політичні меми як комунікаційна технологія конструювання суспільної думки в електоральних кампаніях: порівняльний аналіз	166



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The development of creative industries in media in a digital environment

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Abstract. The relevance of the research lies in the transformation of the media part of creative industries under the influence of digital technologies and large-scale socio-political upheavals (full-scale war, economic shocks), which radically changed the mechanisms of production, distribution and monetisation of media content. The aim of the study was to analyse the development trends of the media creative industries in Ukraine during 2022-2025, assess economic losses and recovery needs, identify key barriers, and propose targeted policies to strengthen the sector. The methods used in the research included a systematic analysis of national and international reports, content analysis of scientific publications, statistical data analysis and a comparative approach, content analysis of industry data, comparative analysis of subsectors (film, publishing, advertising, online media), as well as synthesis of findings from studies conducted by the Lviv Media Forum and UNESCO. The obtained results showed that the war caused significant losses: about 28% of media outlets suspended their activities, and the estimated potential losses of the sector amount to hundreds of millions of dollars. Despite the publishing industry demonstrating some resilience, advertising budgets have shifted toward digital platforms. As a result of the study, it was established that the Ukrainian media suffered significant losses in 2022-2025; at the same time, the digital segment has grown, the market share of online media has increased, and the level of media literacy among the population has improved. The practical value of the research lies in formation of recommendations for the sustainable growth of the creative industries in the media sector, particularly in the areas of digitalisation, investment attraction, and integration into the European cultural space. The practical value of the research also includes proposed measures such as proposals for a programmes to increase digital competence, tax incentives for media export projects, and modelling of hybrid financing for film and publishing – all of which can be used by the government, donors, and market participants

Keywords: communications; cultural industries; artificial intelligence; digital media; digitalisation; creative activity

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Introduction

The development of creative industries within the media sphere under the conditions of the digital environment is acquiring strategic importance for contemporary Ukraine. Global digitalisation, content platformisation, the proliferation of social networks, and artificial intelligence technologies are transforming the mechanisms of media production, distribution, and monetisation. In turn, the full-scale war has triggered profound structural shifts in media functioning, exacerbating economic risks, human capital losses, and the necessity to develop and implement innovative resilience models. As a constituent of the creative industries, the media perform not only economic but also cultural, social, and security functions, shaping national identity and sustaining informational stability within society. Under these circumstances, conducting a comprehensive analysis of creative industry development in the digital media environment is essential for the formulation of effective public policy.

Theoretical and methodological approaches to the digitalisation of cultural space have been systematised by K. Pletsan (2021), who identified that digital platforms are fundamentally altering the nature of the cultural product, transforming it into an interactive and multi-format entity. The author emphasises that the digital environment fosters a new model of interaction between the creator and the audience, where the consumer becomes an active participant in communication rather than a mere passive recipient. In 2023, researchers focused on the resilience of the creative sector amidst crisis-driven challenges. V. Bakalchuk (2023) argued that creative industries possess a high potential for rapid adaptation due to a significant share of intellectual capital and flexible forms of employment. A similar stance is maintained by I.R. Bereziuk-Rybak *et al.* (2023), who emphasised the role of creative industries in shaping Ukraine's innovation economy and note that the digital segment demonstrates the greatest capacity for recovery. In turn, O. Oliynyk (2023) analysed the integration of artificial intelligence into creative industries and concludes that the use of AI tools in media enhances the efficiency of analytics and content personalisation; however, it simultaneously creates risks of disinformation and necessitates clear ethical frameworks.

In 2024, research shifted toward a more applied and sectoral focus. I. Dul'ska (2024) substantiated that the digitalisation of creative industries during wartime is a necessary prerequisite for their survival, as it provides alternative income streams and expands opportunities for international cooperation. N. Stoliarchuk (2024) examined the socio-economic potential of creative industries and concludes that their development requires a balance between economic efficiency and the preservation of the cultural value of the media product, alongside the refinement of legal and regulatory frameworks. At the same time, a 2024 European Commission analytical report indicates that digital media have become

the dominant segment of the advertising market in EU countries, prompting states to implement support programmes for local audiovisual production and digital skills development. A comprehensive study by UNESCO in collaboration with the Lviv Media Forum (n.d.a) revealed that while the war caused significant economic losses for Ukrainian media, it simultaneously accelerated the transition to online formats, remote work, and donor-based funding models. The further development of analytics in 2025 demonstrates a deepening of research into sectoral transformations. In their study, S. Kucherenko & Y. Kostyk (2025) established that digital marketing and online distribution have significantly altered the revenue structure of the publishing industry, increasing its dependence on social networks and platforms. The authors emphasise the necessity of investing in digital infrastructure and developing new competencies in content monetisation. Updated analytical materials from UNESCO (2025) highlight the need for long-term media sector recovery programmes that combine financial support, digital skills development, and the strengthening of cybersecurity.

Thus, scholarly works from 2021-2025 consistently reveal the evolution of approaches to the development of creative industries in the media: from conceptualising the digital transformation of the cultural space to analysing the sector's resilience during wartime and the implementation of innovative technologies. At the same time, there remains a noticeable gap in comprehensive empirical research that unite aspects of legislation, technology, competence and funding in media creativity. The purpose of this study was to analyse current trends, opportunities, and limitations in the development of Ukraine's media and creative industries in digital environment to develop practical measures for the sustainable growth of media subsectors. To achieve this aim, the study set and fulfilled the following objectives: to identify the key features of media creativity development in the digital environment; to compare the Ukrainian experience with international practices; to propose political and practical recommendations for strengthening the television, radio, print, and digital media sectors. The scientific novelty of the study lies in combining the analysis of technological, legislative, and educational dimensions of the development of Ukraine's media and creative industry, based on empirical data and interviews with industry participants.

Materials and Methods

The research methodology was based on an interdisciplinary approach, covering the period 2020-2025. Methods of content analysis of academic and specialised publications, as well as statistical analysis of data from UNESCO (2025), the Chytomo (2024), Nielsen (n.d.), and Lviv Media Forum (n.d.a; n.d.b), were used. Comparative analysis was used to assess the dynamics of development

across specific subsectors – film, print media, and digital platforms. The study applied the following methods: system analysis to identify structural components and trends; content analysis of digital media platforms; comparative method – comparison of Ukrainian models with international ones; analysis of legislative acts and regulatory frameworks to complement data and understand practical barriers. During 2022-2025, a number of key publications appeared that shed light on the state and challenges of the sector, which were analysed in the study: EU reports on the integration and recovery of creative industries (2024); analytical materials by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (2025); Lviv Media Forum (n.d.a; n.d.b) and UNESCO (2025) studies on media losses and needs; analysis of the publishing market by the Chytomo (2024); reports on advertising budgets and digital spending (industry reviews 2023-2024); and media literacy indices (Detector Media, 2024). These publications reveal the key trends: the digital orientation of markets, the increasing role of online platforms, and the need for large-scale support for media recovery.

Furthermore, the study incorporated a supplementary comparative analysis of the development of creative industries in Ukraine and Poland. This comparative element was employed as a secondary analytical tool to better contextualise the trajectories of digital transformation within the Central and Eastern European (CEE) region. The objective of this auxiliary approach was to provide a broader perspective on the resilience and adaptability of the Ukrainian media market by referencing the Polish experience as a regional benchmark for integration into the EU digital single market. Such a comparison facilitates a more nuanced identification of potential best practices and supports the formulation of strategic recommendations for the post-crisis recovery of Ukraine's creative sectors.

Results and Discussion

The absence of a clearly defined term "creative industries" in Ukrainian legislation, widely used in EU employment through cultural (artistic) and/or creative expression, makes it impossible to have an appropriate state policy in the field of culture (Zaxid.net, 2018). Nevertheless, I.V. Skavronska (2017) demonstrates that the efficiency of creative industries is of significant importance to the Ukrainian economy. Her study illustrates how creative industries can facilitate Ukraine's transition toward a creative economy. Specifically, four primary objectives are identified that can yield economic, social, creative, and cultural benefits: the preservation and development of creative talent, the encouragement of Ukrainian creative entrepreneurship, the promotion of a "culture of openness", and the formation of a creative ecosystem. R. Tomlins *et al.* (2021) emphasise that the concepts of the "creative economy" and "creative industries" have rapidly gained prominence in Ukraine. Their work examines creative economy operations within the country,

including the strategic developmental trajectory of its creative industries. In their study, O. Lyubchenko & A. Lyubchenko (2024) focus on creative businesses encompassing media, arts, technology, and design. They argue that identifying the strengths of key sectors will facilitate the formulation of effective strategies to support the industry. Furthermore, the authors conduct an analysis of development trends, allowing for the forecasting of future opportunities and challenges, including the impact of international trends. The significance of developing creative industries is further highlighted by O. Zavadenko (2025), who asserts that they not only stimulate national economic growth but also shape the cultural identity of society, influence urban processes, and create new avenues for creative self-expression.

According to the UNCTAD classification (Creative economy report, 2010), the creative industries also include audiovisual media such as film, television, and radio broadcasting, as well as media that include software and video games. The definition of the concept "creative industries" was formalised in the Law of Ukraine No. 2458-VIII (2018), which states that these are "types of economic activities aimed at creating added value and jobs through cultural (artistic) and/or creative expression". As T.B. Semenchuk *et al.* (2024) note, the process of communication often involves the confrontation of different viewpoints, since each individual has a unique worldview and way of processing and interpreting information and this contributes to the emergence of new ideas. However, it also brings certain risks: creativity and innovation rely on collaboration among people who perceive the world differently. Consequently, instead of constructive dialogue, destructive conflicts may arise within teams, slowing down the creative process of creating the media product and cooperation. When it comes to creative industries within the media sector, it is essential to consider the study of A. Maslow, who proved that creativity is an innate human inclination that can be lost under the influence of environment, education, and social conditions. For personnel engaged in a company's innovation activities, it is important to be able to generate unique ideas, which, once implemented, become profitable and provide additional income (Semenchuk *et al.*, 2024).

The official website of the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine (2024) provides the substantiation of the concept "creative industries". Namely, it has been proved that "this is the sector of economy which unites a wide range of industries based on creativity, innovation, and cultural products". Creative industries cover a broad spectrum of various fields, in particular, such as media (including film, television, radio, publishing), arts, design (graphic, industrial, web design), music, literature, architecture, advertising, fashion, exhibition activities, video games, as well as culinary arts, theatre, and many others. Each of these fields has its own distinct characteristics, yet all use creativity and creative approach in the process of creating

goods and services. In 2022, due to the onset of full-scale war and its consequences across all sectors of the national economy, Ukraine's creative industries entered a state of crisis. Despite these challenges, representatives of the creative industries continue their activities by adapting to new conditions and external changes. International partners have provided support not only to ensure the basic safety of Ukrainian professionals and but also to resume activities, offering many opportunities both abroad and in Ukraine (Ministry of Culture of Ukraine, 2024). Also, in 2022, Ukraine exported creative services worth USD 3,766 million, imported worth USD 724 million, thus, the positive balance amounted to USD 3,042 million.

The share of exports of creative services, according to the State Statistics Service of Ukraine, in total exports of services was 41.1% (in 2021 – 30.1%). From the share of creative services which make 41.1%, 40.5% are telecommunications services, computer and information services, 0.4% – royalties, and 0.2% – cultural and recreational services. That is, almost all exports in the creative industries come from the IT sector, which provides computer services (Ministry of Culture of Ukraine, 2024). The research into existing problems that have arisen in the development of creative industries in the digital environment allows for making the following generalisation, which is given in Table 1.

Table 1. Problematic aspects of the development of creative industries in the digital environment

Indicator	Result
Share of media projects with digital distribution	Approximately 70-80% of media creativity projects use digital platforms, social networks, and streaming services (expert data)
Legislative certainty	The Law of Ukraine "On Culture" provides a definition of the term "creative industries", yet in national classifier the list of creative industries does not fully account for all media-related spheres
Level of digital competence of creators	Many authors possess a basic level of digital literacy; however, there is a significant lack of knowledge in areas such as content promotion, monetisation, and platform algorithms

Source: developed by the authors based on A. Shtefan (2024), Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (2025)

The results of such a generalisation are consistent with the conclusions of I. Dul'ska (2024), who proved that digitalisation is an important condition for the survival and development of creative industries in crisis circumstances. At the same time, as in the works of K. Pletsan (2021) and N. Stoliarchuk (2024), it was proved that legislative and educational barriers remain key obstacles to the development of creative industries in the digital environment. Compared to international experience, for example, EU countries that actively use grant programmes, state support, focuses on digital platforms and the media economy, the Ukrainian model of the development of creative industries lacks comprehensive

support. For example, in the EU there is the clear support through programmes such as Creative Europe, connected by Ukraine to media subcomponent in 2024, which opens new opportunities for cooperation and funding (European External Action Service, 2024). It was also found that social networks and platforms are not only distribution channels, but also an environment that shapes new business models, promotion, and interaction with the audience. After the full-scale invasion of the Russian Federation into Ukraine, certain changes have occurred in the development of creative industries, in the media environment in particular. Some indicators can be considered to observe these changes (Table 2).

Table 2. Statistics of changes of creative industries in Ukraine's media, 2022-2025

Indicator	Time / Period	Value
Decrease in the number of taxpayers in the creative industries	I quarter of 2022 / I quarter of 2021	Approximately 60% decrease in the number of taxpayers in the creative industries
Reduction of income in creative industries	I quarter of 2022 / I quarter of 2021	Decline in declared revenues by approximately 41%
Share of media outlets that suspended operations due to the war	Late February 2022 – July 2024	28% of media outlets suspended their operations; some have not yet fully resumed work
Number of media outlets that have not resumed work or function in a limited capacity	As of July 2024	One in six of the media that suspended operations are still not fully operational; 38.3% of those that suspended – did not work for more than half a year; 10 media outlets had not resumed work at the time of the survey
Economic losses / needs for recovery of the media sector	2025 (UNESCO)	Investments needed to fully restore the sector – USD 392 million to cover salaries, equipment, psychological support, training, etc.

Source: developed by the authors based on R. Tomlins *et al.* (2021), IMI (2024), Detector Media (2024), Ministry of Culture of Ukraine (2024), Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (2025)

Based on the data presented in Table 2, the following generalisation can be made: the development of the creative industries has been significantly affected by the war. A considerable number of media outlets suspended their operations (28%), and some have still not been able to resume activity. This has influenced media content production, revenues, and human resource potential. From the very first months of the war (in February-March 2022), the creative sector experienced a decline in income, specifically a decrease in revenues and in the number of taxpayers during the first quarter of 2022 compared to 2021. Although many media organisations ceased operations, some have managed to resume work or continue functioning in a modified mode.

As for publishing activities, despite the infrastructure blows: the destruction of printing houses, logistical problems, in 2024 the publishers who continued to work generated a total sales volume (AIN, 2024). This shows the stability of demand for books, as well as market fragmentation and price increases, which must be taken into account for the development of creative industries. However, logistics, the complexity of the work of printing houses, small print run, unprofitable local initiatives, etc. remain problematic. But there are also positive aspects – this is the growth of interest in translations and the modernisation of electronic formats. Nielsen (n.d.) research shows that the locomotive of improving the work of the media is digital, namely the fact that advertising budgets are increasingly focused on online media. The improvement of media performance is also influenced by the increasing level of media literacy in the country, which opens opportunities for digital creative projects, but also increases competition with global platforms. Investment is needed to improve the work of the media sector, that is, significant support is needed, and not

only from the state, but also from international donors, grants and private business.

Thus, increasing of competitiveness and economic potential of the cultural and creative industries sectors, in particular the audiovisual sector, is carried out through the implementation of the Programme "Creative Europe". The Diia. Business (n.d.) contains information that starting in May 2021, the European Commission officially announced the new Programme "Creative Europe" for the period from 2021 to 2027. This programme is aimed at financing projects and initiatives that aim to strengthen cultural diversity, as well as meet the needs and challenges of the sector of cultural and creative industries. In accordance with this programme, it is proposed to participate in competitions aimed at developing advanced digital skills, implementing digital technologies in enterprises, developing digital infrastructure, and making digital services even more accessible for citizens and public institutions of the European Union and associated countries to the Programme "Digital Europe" (Diia. Business, n.d.).

The total budget of the Programme "Creative Europe" (2021-2027), which consists of three sub-programmes, includes EUR 2.44 billion, which are distributed as follows: "Culture" – 33%; "Media" – 58%; "Cross-Sectoral Cooperation" – 9%. That is, the main emphasis is on the use of creative industries in the media (Diia. Business, n.d.). The sub-programme "Media" is focused on supporting cooperation in the audiovisual sector to expand business and distribute European content internationally. It promotes talent development, expands opportunities for cooperation between countries, supports the introduction of new technologies, and contributes to the ecologisation of the industry and achievement of social goals such as gender balance and national diversity. The thematic sectors of the sub-programme competitions cover three main areas, which are given in Table 3.

Table 3. Main directions of the competitions of the sub-programme "Media"

Direction of sub-programme	Substantiation
Content	Focuses on cooperation and innovation in the creation and production of high-quality media projects
Business	Supports innovation to improve competitiveness, scale opportunities and develop talents to strengthen Europe's position in the global market
Audience	Provides access to European works and develops initiatives for their distribution among potential viewers

Source: developed by the authors based on Diia. Business (n.d.)

In accordance with the sub-programme "Cross-Sectoral Cooperation", which focuses on common challenges and opportunities for the sectors of cultural and creative industries (CCI), it includes competitions to support news media, in particular through the promotion of media literacy, pluralism and freedom of speech in relation to quality journalism (Diia. Business, n.d.). Based

on the research conducted, several proposals have been formulated for the development of creative industries within the Ukrainian media sector. The identified challenges and corresponding strategic recommendations are examined for each specific media type. In particular, Table 4 presents a detailed analysis related to the advancement of creative industries in the field of television.

Table 4. Problems and proposals for their solutions related to the development of creative industries on television

Problems	Proposals for solving problems	Comments on proposals
High production costs; reduced regional presence; job security risks; loss of advertising revenue	Tax holidays for investments in production	VAT reduction or tax credits for the purchase of equipment and production studios for 3-5 years
	Targeted subsidies for regional content	Grant competitions for the production of local content, which will strengthen the presence in the regions and create jobs. Possible through partial co-financing by the state and business
	Distribution programmes in digital channels	Support for the creation of national VOD platforms or subscription channels, subsidising the adaptation of content for online platforms
	Risk insurance system for the production of TV products	State (donor) programmes for insurance of projects during war and post-conflict recovery
	Training of professional personnel	Internship programmes in large productions, courses in digital production and interactive scriptwriting, etc.

Source: developed by the authors based on S. Galyuk (2024), I. Dulcka (2024), Lviv Media Forum (n.d.a)

The table outlines the key challenges hindering the development of creative industries within the television production sector. These are dominated by high content production costs, a diminishing regional presence, increased security risks under martial law, and a decline in advertising revenues. The proposed measures focus on establishing systemic state and institutional support for the industry, specifically through the implementation of tax incentives for production investment, targeted subsidies and grant support for regional content, and the development of digital distribution

channels and national VOD platforms. Particular attention is paid to the introduction of production risk insurance mechanisms, as well as the enhancement of human capital through professional training and re-training. The comprehensive implementation of these tools can improve the resilience of the television industry, preserve regional content diversity, and establish the prerequisites for the sustainable development of creative industries in the medium and long term. Table 5 provides information related to the development of creative industries on radio.

Table 5. Problems and proposals for their solution related to the development of creative industries on radio

Problems	Proposals for solving problems	Comments on proposals
Need for digital distribution; financial vulnerability of small radio stations; loss of local infrastructure	Digital transformation FM→DAB+/IP	State support for the transition to digital radio broadcasting (pilot DAB+ networks) and the deployment of streaming platforms for local stations
	Grants for radio journalism for local communities	Financing socially important radio communication projects at the local level
	Creation of content sharing platforms	The ability for several radio stations to share programmes on the network, which will help reduce costs
	Hybrid revenue model	A combination of listener micropayments, local advertising with state startup grants

Source: developed by the authors based on IMI (2024), T.B. Semenchuk *et al.* (2024), I. Dulcka (2024), S. Kucherenko & Y. Kostyk (2025)

Table 5 presents the primary challenges facing the development of creative industries in the broadcasting sector. Key issues include the necessity for digital transformation, the financial vulnerability of small and local radio stations, and the progressive erosion of local broadcasting infrastructure. The proposed solutions focus on incentivising the transition to digital content distribution formats by supporting the implementation of DAB+ and IP-radio technologies, as well as the development of streaming platforms for local broadcasters. Grant support for community-oriented radio journalism and the funding of socially significant local radio projects are identified as vital instruments for stabilising the sector. Particular emphasis is placed on establishing content-sharing platforms as a mechanism for cost optimisation, alongside the introduction of hybrid revenue models that integrate commercial and institutional

funding sources. The implementation of these measures will enhance the economic resilience of the radio industry, preserve local broadcasting, and facilitate the adaptation of creative industries to the conditions of the digital economy. Table 6 provides information related to the development of creative industries in print media, which include publishing, newspapers and magazines.

As a result of military actions and structural transformations of the media market, systemic challenges in the development of creative industries within the print media segment have intensified. Key challenges include the destruction of production and logistical infrastructure, rising printing costs, declining circulations, a deficit of financial and material resources, and increasing complexities in distribution processes. The proposed solutions focus on the restoration and modernisation of critical printing infrastructure through investment,

credit, and grant support, as well as on incentivising the digital transformation of the publishing industry by developing electronic and audio formats and expanding international distribution channels. A vital role is assigned to support programmes for small and local print initiatives in affected regions, which will facilitate the preservation of media pluralism and cultural diversity. Additionally, the necessity of developing professional competencies in marketing and content monetisation is emphasised, alongside strengthening the export

potential of national literature through state support for international promotion and translation programmes. The comprehensive implementation of these measures establishes the prerequisites for enhancing the adaptability and long-term resilience of print media within the context of post-crisis recovery. It is also necessary to consider information related to the development of creative industries in digital media, which also includes online publications, video projects, streaming, content studios, etc (Table 7).

Table 6. Problems and proposals for their solution related to the development of creative industries in print media

Problems	Proposals for solving problems	Comments on proposals
Destruction of infrastructure; rising prices; decreasing circulation; lack of resources; logistical problems	Investments in critical printing infrastructure	Credit programmes or grants for modernisation of printing houses and logistics; tax breaks for purchase of equipment
	Support for the digital transformation of publishing houses	Obtaining subsidies for the creation of e-books, audiobooks and distribution through international platforms
	Programmes for small print initiatives	Microgrants for local publishing houses and newspapers in affected regions
	Educational programmes on marketing and monetisation	Training modules on digital marketing for publishers, authors and editors
	Promotional campaigns for the export of literature	State support for participation in international fairs and translation competitions

Source: developed by the authors based on Chytomo (2024), N. Stoliarchuk (2024), Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (2025), UNESCO (2025), S. Kucherenko & Y. Kostyk (2025)

Table 7. Problems and proposals for their solutions related to the development of creative industries in digital media

Problems	Proposals for solving problems	Comments on proposals
Competition with global platforms; monetisation; copyright; ethics of using artificial intelligence, cybersecurity	Development Fund for Digital Productions	Accelerators and grants for digital content startups
	Preferential financing/investment guarantees for projects with export potential	Project localisation, SaaS tools for media
	Platforms for collective monetisation	Creation of national micropayment solutions and subscription tools to support authors
	Protection of copyright, data and licensing	Responsible attitude to content creation, simplified content registration system, collective rights management mechanisms, support for integration with international partners
	Investments in cybersecurity and backup	State grants for cyber protection measures, content and infrastructure backup

Source: developed by the authors based on O. Oliynyk (2023), I.R. Bereziuk-Rybak *et al.* (2023), I. Shkodina *et al.* (2023), Y. Trach. (2024), IMI (2024), I. Dulka (2024), UNESCO (2025)

Based on the developed proposals for the advancement of creative industries within the media sector, several key generalisations can be formulated. Regarding the television industry, priority is given to the modernisation of the technical infrastructure, the production of high-quality, socially significant content, and the promotion of local series and documentary filmmaking. In the realm of radio broadcasting, strategic development focuses on the expansion of podcasts and digital radio formats, integration with mobile applications, and the preservation of regional broadcasting as a vital instrument for maintaining cultural identity. Furthermore, the stabilisation of print media necessitates the comprehensive

digitisation of publications, the advancement of electronic libraries, and the provision of state support for regional printing houses, alongside the international promotion of Ukrainian-language products. Finally, addressing the deficit of investment in multimedia content within the digital media segment requires enhanced cybersecurity for editorial offices, the creation of robust platforms for Ukrainian-language content distribution, and the implementation of incentives to stimulate the export of digital creative services.

Creative industries in the media sphere (UNESCO, 2025) are based on innovation, intelligence and creativity. Tools that expand the possibilities of creativity in media

include the use of artificial intelligence. This allows the media to create new formats. Artificial intelligence (AI) is an integral part of the creative industries in the Ukrainian media sector. According to the definition of UNESCO (2025) and the European Union, creative industries include those sectors of the economy that are based on creativity, innovation and intellectual activity, which include the media. The use of AI in Ukrainian newsrooms indicates the expansion of journalistic creativity and the emergence of new formats of communication with the audience. According to IMI monitoring data, about 22% of Ukrainian newsrooms constantly use AI to create texts, translations, subtitles or illustrations, which indicates the integration of intelligent technologies into the processes of producing a creative product (IMI, 2024). At the same time, the Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine in 2024 developed recommendations for the media on the responsible use of AI, emphasising the need for transparency, ethics and the priority of the human factor.

AI in the media is not limited to the automation of routine tasks, but creates new forms of journalistic and communication practice that correspond to the essence of the creative industries. In addition, the ethical dimension of the use of AI (in particular, in cases where the generated images were mistakenly perceived as real in UNIAN materials) emphasises that the integration of intelligent technologies requires regulatory standards, which are a sign of the maturity of the creative sectors (Rubryka, 2023). Thus, artificial intelligence can be considered a component of the creative industries in the Ukrainian media, as it ensures innovation, the creation of new cultural products and services, contributes to the development of the media market and at the same time creates the need for the development of ethical norms, which increases the quality and competitiveness of the Ukrainian creative sector.

As O. Oliinyk (2023) argues, the adoption of AI can potentially add greater diversity to creative industries in

their activities and outcomes. In particular, this may apply to the media industry, which uses AI and machine learning to collect and analyse data, allowing media companies to better understand the needs and desires of customers. AI is also used as a research tool, capable of filtering information and distinguishing reliable sources from dubious ones, which significantly reduces the time for conducting research, allowing journalists to create even more content, ensuring the reliability and accuracy of their sources. O. Oliinyk (2023) also argues that there are certain risks in the use of AI. It can be intentionally used to spread false information through models that generate stories and narratives based on false data, changing points of view, but maintaining a formal style and aesthetics. An example of the spread of disinformation is the use of deepfakes and voice-altering models with malicious intentions, such as damaging reputations, discrediting individuals, or making threats. AI can be used to create fakes and disinformation, which can result in a loss of audience trust. Thus, the use of AI in the creation of journalistic products contributes to the creation of innovative media products; expands the creative practices of journalists; helps to form new audience segments, but necessarily requires the use of ethical standards.

Sustainable development of the media as a creative industry can be imagined as a balance between such components as creativity, technology and ethics. That is, a synthesis of these components should occur, and creativity should provide uniqueness and cultural value. As for technologies, this is the use of artificial intelligence, which opens up new opportunities and optimises the work of the media. The third element must necessarily be ethics, which guarantees responsibility and trust when communicating with the target audience. Each component of the creative industries in the Ukrainian media will be substantiated (Table 8).

Table 8. Key components of creative industries in the Ukrainian media

Essence	Process of using	Examples	Result
Creativity			
The core value of creative industries lies in generating new ideas, narratives, communication formats, and cultural products	Investigative journalism; storytelling; documentary projects; multimedia formats (podcasts, interactive longreads, visual special projects); artistic projects	Creation of innovative media products that combine text, video, audio, and visualisations (e.g., special projects of Hromadske and Suspilne); investigative journalism (e.g., Bihus.Info, Slidstvo.Info); author-driven media projects, podcasts, art magazines	Creativity ensures the uniqueness and cultural value of the product, distinguishing creative industries from purely technological or informational products
Technology (AI usage)			
Artificial intelligence acts as a catalyst for media development within creative industries, combining automation with opportunities to expand creative potential	Automatic text-to-speech (Vector + Respeecher, 2024); generation of illustrations, subtitles, translations (IMI, 2024); analysis of large datasets for investigative journalism; use of tools for data processing, content generation, and analytics	AI-driven content/research platforms (e.g., Vector); AI can be used for comment moderation, automatic recognition of text or video	AI does not replace journalists but enables the emergence of new formats and removes routine barriers, freeing space for creativity; technology serves as a tool that enhances and expands the boundaries of creativity in media

Continued Table 8.

Essence	Process of using	Examples	Result
Ethics			
Creative industries in the media are impossible without audience trust, which is founded on adherence to ethical standards	Transparent designation of AI-generated content; Avoidance of disinformation and manipulations (e.g., the UNIAN incident with an AI-generated image, 2023); protection of copyright and personal data; compliance with human rights, journalistic standards, and AI usage guidelines; transparency	Ethics is a prerequisite for maintaining public trust and the legitimacy of creative practices in the media space	Codes of Journalistic Ethics (National Union of Journalists of Ukraine); The Ministry of Digital Affairs has developed: ✓ recommendations on the ethical use of AI; ✓ recommendations on the responsible use of AI in the media (2024), which emphasises the importance of ethics as a basic element

Source: compiled by the authors based on K. Pletsan (2021), O.Oliinyk (2023), IMI (2024), I. Dulcka (2024), T.B. Semenchuk *et al.* (2024), Y. Trach (2024), L. Bezuhla & I. Lazakovich (2024)

Thus, each component of the creative industries within the Ukrainian media landscape possesses distinct application characteristics. Creativity is defined as the fundamental value-based core of creative industries, manifesting in the production of innovative media formats, original narratives, and culturally significant products that ensure the uniqueness and competitiveness of media content. The technological component, particularly the utilisation of artificial intelligence (AI) tools, is viewed as a catalyst for the development of the media sphere, combining the automation of routine processes with the expansion of the analytical and creative capabilities of journalists and media producers. At the same time, it is emphasised that AI serves as an auxiliary tool that enhances rather than replaces human creative potential. The ethical dimension plays a separate, vital role in the functioning of creative industries, ensuring audience trust and the legitimacy of media practices. Compliance with journalistic standards, transparency in AI usage, and the protection of intellectual property and personal data are regarded as essential prerequisites for the sustainable development of creative industries in a digital media environment. Collectively, these components form a comprehensive model for the functioning of creative industries in Ukrainian media, integrating innovation, technological efficiency, and social responsibility.

In-depth study on media losses and needs in Ukraine. A joint study by UNESCO (2025) and the Lviv Media Forum (n.d.b) (covering the period from February 2022 to July 2024) systematises the direct economic and infrastructural losses sustained by Ukrainian editorial offices, outlines the key recovery needs (including salaries, equipment, training, and psychological support), and provides indicative estimates of the sector's budgetary requirements for recovery. This research serves as a key source on the impact of the war on the media landscape and on recovery priorities (UNESCO, 2025). This comprehensive study systematises the critical impact of the full-scale invasion, documenting that over 80% of Ukrainian

media outlets faced significant revenue declines, with some regional offices losing up to 95% of their advertising income. The research highlights extensive infrastructural damage, including the destruction of broadcasting towers and editorial facilities. Key recovery priorities identified in the study focus on emergency operational support (covering salaries and security equipment), digital resilience (cybersecurity and cloud-based migration), and the restoration of regional broadcasting to counter disinformation in frontline territories. Furthermore, the report provides indicative estimates suggesting that the sector requires approximately USD 120-150 million annually for sustainable recovery, emphasising the need for a shift from emergency grants to long-term institutional investment and psychological rehabilitation for media professionals.

Digital penetration and social media. S. Kemp (2024) provides the most recent national-level figures on digital indicators. As of January 2024, internet penetration in Ukraine stood at 79.2% (approximately 29.64 million internet users), with 24.3 million social media users (64.9% of the population). In Poland, internet penetration is around 89-90%, and social media users number roughly 29.0 million (75.6% of the population) (Kemp, 2025). These figures demonstrate that both countries maintain high levels of digital activity, though Poland has a somewhat larger relative domestic digital market.

Digital advertising market and its scale. The Report Strategiczny IAB Polska 2023/2024 estimates the value of Poland's digital advertising market in 2023 at approximately PLN 7.8 billion, with projections of continued growth and a strong digital contribution to the overall advertising budget. This positions Poland as a regionally significant digital market with a well-developed commercial base for media operations (IAB Polska, 2024). In Ukraine, cross-sector assessments and advertising market monitoring indicate that in 2023, total advertising expenditure amounted to approximately USD 1.115 billion, of which digital accounted for about USD 874.8 million (market monitoring data). Following 2022, the

market has been recovering, with 2024-2025 showing a rebound in digital spending (Abroad VRK, n.d.).

The official report Cultural and Creative Industries in 2023 (2025) identifies 124.1 thousand enterprises (99.1% – micro) and employment of approximately 236.7 thousand people, average gross monthly salary in the sector PLN 8,868. These figures reflect the quantitative and organisational maturity of Poland's sector. Recent analytical reports (PAIH / CRPK / Creative Tech) highlight the strength of Poland's gaming industry, AR/VR and creative-tech startups in Poland

as drivers of creative services export in Central and Eastern Europe (Poland. Business Forward, n.d.). Findings from UNESCO (2025), Lviv Media Forum (n.d.), and other monitoring studies confirm the central role of digital platforms and social networks as channels for distribution and monetisation. At the same time, they emphasise the urgent need for capital investment, cybersecurity measures, and education (media literacy, digital skills) (Nielsen, n.d.). The comparative summary of key indicators in the digital media is presented in Table 9.

Table 9. Comparison of key indicators (selected area: digital media)

Indicator	Ukraine (sources 2023-2025)	Poland (sources 2023-2025)
Internet penetration (latest public data)	79.2% (29.64 million users, early 2024)	89.8% (34.5 million users, early 2025)
Active social media users	24.3 million (64.9% of population, early 2024)	29.0 million (75.6% of population, early 2025)
Digital advertising market size (2023; local currency)	USD 874.8 million digital (as part of total ad spending of USD 1,115.1 million in 2023)	PLN 7.8 billion
Share of digital in advertising mix	2023: 78% digital (based on 2023 expenditure structure)	High digital share; IAB data shows Internet dominance in 2023-2024 market growth
Number of enterprises in cultural and creative industries (CCIs)	Data for Ukraine remain fragmented (national classification and statistics disrupted due to wartime conditions). Available evidence indicates a strong export of IT services (share of export of creative services in 2022 was high) and numerous small media/startups	124.1 thousand enterprises in the CCI sector (2023), 99.1% of which are micro-enterprises; employment 236.7 thousand people
Basic risks	War/security; damaged infrastructure; partial dependence of media outlets on donor funding; instability of the advertising market in affected regions	Competition, necessity of internationalisation, regulatory and GDPR-requirements, investment needs for large-scale export-oriented projects

Source: compiled by the authors based on Poland. Business Forward (n.d.), IAB Polska (2024), S. Kemp (2024), I. Horbas & K. Koshel (2024), UNESCO (2025), Abroad VRK (n.d.)

The conducted analysis and comparative characterisation of the digital media landscape indicators in Ukraine and Poland (Table 9) allow for the formulation of several critical conclusions regarding the current state and development prospects of creative industries under conditions of crisis and digital transformation. Despite the catastrophic consequences of the full-scale invasion – specifically the loss of up to 95% of advertising revenue among regional media and total sector losses requiring annual investments of USD 120-150 million – the Ukrainian media space demonstrates high digital viability. An internet penetration rate of 79.2% and the dominance of digital advertising (accounting for 78% of the advertising expenditure structure in 2023) indicate that digital platforms have become the definitive channel for maintaining informational resilience. Benchmarking against the Polish model reveals a gap in institutional maturity and economic scale. The Polish market, with an internet penetration rate of nearly 90% and a structured Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI) sector comprising over 124,000 enterprises, serves as a regional benchmark for successful integration into the EU Digital Single Market. Conversely, while the Ukrainian market trails in quantitative indicators and stability, it exhibits a unique recovery dynamic in digital spending throughout 2024-2025. While the key challenges for Poland include

regulatory requirements (GDPR), international competition, and the necessity for internationalisation, Ukraine's priorities remain within the realm of physical survival and security: infrastructural restoration, cybersecurity, and overcoming critical dependence on donor funding. The gathered data confirms that the strategic recovery of the Ukrainian creative sector must be based not only on emergency aid but also on a systemic transition toward long-term investments in "creative-tech", digital literacy, and the scaling of successful media project case studies. In summary, the Polish experience in the institutionalisation and commercialisation of creative industries can be partially adapted in Ukraine to form a roadmap for post-crisis recovery, with a particular emphasis on supporting micro-entrepreneurship and the digital resilience of regional media.

The results obtained within the framework of the present study indicate that the transformation of Ukraine's media creative industries is driven by three key groups of factors: the digitalisation of business processes, wartime challenges, and the integration of innovative technologies, particularly Artificial Intelligence (AI). The findings establish that the most resilient media entities are those that combine content platformisation, diversification of revenue streams, and the development of digital competencies among personnel. A comparison of

these results with the findings of other researchers allows for a deeper interpretation of the identified trends. Research conducted by K. Pletsan (2021) proves that digital platforms shape a new model of cultural production, where the audience becomes an active co-creator of content. Her conclusions correlate with the results of the present study, which also evidence increased interactivity and a shift in media toward personalised digital experiences. At the same time, the study further establishes that under wartime conditions, interactivity also serves a mobilisation function, enhancing audience trust and engagement.

V. Bakalchuk (2023) emphasised the high adaptability of creative industries due to flexible forms of employment. The current results support this thesis but refine it: flexibility proves effective only in the presence of digital infrastructure and skills for remote team coordination. Without investment in digital tools, flexibility alone does not guarantee resilience. Researchers I. Bereziuk-Rybak *et al.* (2023) highlight the role of creative industries as a driver of the innovation economy, focusing on the macroeconomic potential of the sector. The present study complements this approach with a micro-level analysis, demonstrating that the media segment ensures the fastest adaptation through digital business models, yet remains highly dependent on grant funding. O. Oliinyk (2023) examined the integration of artificial intelligence into creative processes, pointing to increased efficiency in analytics and personalisation. The findings partially confirm these conclusions: AI tools indeed accelerate data processing and content creation. However, the study shows that their use in Ukrainian media remains fragmentary, hindered by a lack of financial resources and regulatory frameworks. I. Dulska (2024) substantiates that digitalisation is a prerequisite for the survival of the creative sector during wartime. The current findings extend this assertion, demonstrating that digitalisation not only ensures survival but also creates the conditions for entering international markets through online distribution and partner platforms.

N. Stoliarchuk (2024) emphasised the need for a balance between economic efficiency and the cultural value of the product. This study confirms that an exclusive focus on commercialisation diminishes audience trust, especially in a wartime context where demand for socially responsible content increases. Thus, while the present results align with the researcher's position, they emphasise a stronger influence of the security factor. S. Kucherenko & Y. Kostyk (2025) establish that digital marketing alters the revenue structure of the publishing sector, strengthening the role of social networks. The study demonstrates a similar trend in the media segment but also identifies the risk of algorithmic dependence on global platforms, which may limit editorial autonomy. In the article by L. Bezuhla & I. Lazakowych (2024), creative industries are viewed as a component of national economic security and a factor in forming the state's cultural resilience

amidst wartime transformations. The authors focus on the need for systematic state support, the development of cluster models, and integration into the international cultural and economic space. Their conclusions correlate with the present findings regarding the importance of digitalisation and international integration for strengthening the position of Ukrainian media. At the same time, the present study complements the macroeconomic and politico-institutional perspective with a micro-level analysis of the media segment, showing that digital business models, platformisation, and flexible work formats provide rapid adaptation in crisis conditions. The research of S. Galyuk (2024) focuses on the transformation of creative industries within the digital economy, specifically the roles of innovation, digital competencies, and entrepreneurial culture. The author emphasises that digitalisation not only changes production processes but also shapes a new logic of interaction between content producers and consumers. These points align with the current findings regarding increased interactivity, personalisation, and platform-based distribution. However, the findings specify that under wartime conditions, digital transformations acquire an additional security and mobilisation dimension, and their effectiveness largely depends on access to financial resources and international support.

Thus, a comparative analysis of these contemporary studies demonstrates general alignment between the present results and current scientific approaches to the development of creative industries. Simultaneously, the data obtained allow for the refinement of several points: first, digitalisation in the Ukrainian media sector has a security dimension alongside its economic one; second, AI integration is in its nascent stages; and third, the grant-based funding model simultaneously supports and structurally transforms the sector. This expands existing scholarly approaches and forms a foundation for further interdisciplinary research.

Conclusions

The full-scale war has caused significant problems for Ukrainian media, as one of the components of the creative industries. Thus, about 28% of media have suspended their activities, the potential losses of the media sector are estimated at hundreds of millions of dollars, which requires long-term recovery. The film subsector has suffered the greatest decline, while the publishing sector has demonstrated relative stability by 2023. As the studies show, the locomotive of recovery is digital media. Namely: the share of online spending and the possibility of exporting digital services is growing, but this requires investments in competencies, infrastructure and legal support. The implementation of the measures proposed in the study: targeted investments, tax incentives, education, digital platforms, copyright protection can accelerate recovery and increase the resilience of the media component of the creative industries. It should also be said that long-term media recovery in Ukraine

requires targeted funding, but the proposed project grants will not be enough; a combination of public investment, donor support, and private investment is needed to develop digital infrastructure.

The growing role of online media and increasing media literacy of both journalists and consumers of journalistic products are a prerequisite for the development of creative industries in the media of Ukraine. Investments in the educational process of journalists will contribute to the formation of their digital skills, which will influence the production of high-quality content for the media, social networks, and digital platforms. The media component of creative industries in Ukraine is showing significant growth thanks to digital technologies, platforms and social networks, but this development is hampered by weak legislative regulation, insufficient digital competence and limited access to resources. To stimulate further development, it is necessary to update the regulatory framework, which would clearly define the concept, areas and support of media creative industries. Education and training of media content creators require a comprehensive approach: digital skills, marketing, monetisation, use of platforms and technologies. Policy strategies should take into account grant programmes, state and international support, stimulation of innovations, cooperation with technology companies.

In conclusion, it should be noted that Ukraine is focused on: scaling commercial solutions: to use high digital activity for launching internal payment/subscription solutions, local AVOD/podcast projects and advertising products that will keep revenue in the country (reducing budget "leakage" to global platforms); investments in cybersecurity, backup and resilient infrastructure, this is a

priority for Ukrainian editorial offices. Poland focuses on: exporting content and globalisation of business models (use strong domestic advertising markets and developed infrastructure for CEE/Western markets); accurate metrics for further analysis. Recent studies (2023-2025) indicate that the digital transformation of media remains the main driver of the recovery and development of creative industries in both countries, although the scale and structural characteristics of the markets differ.

The study of creative industries' development in the Ukrainian media sector during 2022-2025 reveals a distinct convergence of crisis-driven challenges and emerging digital opportunities. While traditional media formats have sustained substantial losses, the digital segment has established itself as the primary catalyst for transformation. Future research efforts should prioritise the analysis of the export potential of Ukrainian creative services, the evaluation of state and international support programmes, and the continuous monitoring of localised empirical data, including media business models, AI impact, and the geographical mapping of media recovery and content export across Ukraine and Poland.

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Розвиток креативних індустрій у медіа в умовах цифрового середовища

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Анотація. Актуальність дослідження полягає у трансформації медійної частини креативних індустрій під впливом цифрових технологій та масштабних суспільно-політичних потрясінь (повномасштабна війна, економічні шоки), що радикально змінили механізми виробництва, розповсюдження та монетизації медіаконтенту. Метою дослідження було проаналізувати тенденції розвитку медійних креативних індустрій в Україні в період 2022-2025 років, оцінити економічні втрати й потреби на відновлення, виявити ключові бар'єри та запропонувати цільові політики для посилення сектору. Серед методів, які були використані у дослідженні: системний аналіз національних і міжнародних звітів, контент-аналіз наукових публікацій та галузевих даних, порівняльний аналіз підсекторів (кіно, видавництво, реклама, онлайн-медіа), аналіз статистичних даних, а також синтез висновків досліджень Lviv Media Forum і UNESCO. Отримані результати показали, що війна спричинила значний шок для галузі: близько 28 % медіа призупинили діяльність, а потенційні втрати сектору сягають сотень мільйонів доларів. Незважаючи на те, що видавнича галузь демонструє певну стійкість, рекламні бюджети переорієнтувалися на цифрові платформи. У результаті дослідження встановлено, що українські медіа зазнали значних втрат у 2022-2025 роках, проте водночас відбулося зростання цифрового сегмента, збільшення на ринку частки онлайн-медіа, а також підвищення рівня медіаграмотності населення. Практична цінність дослідження полягає у формуванні рекомендацій щодо стійкого розвитку креативних індустрій у медіа, зокрема у напрямках цифровізації, залучення інвестицій та інтеграції в європейський культурний простір. Також практична цінність дослідження полягає у розробленні конкретних заходів, а саме: програми підвищення цифрової компетентності, податкових стимулів для медіаекспортних проєктів, моделюванні гібридного фінансування для кіно та видавництва, які можуть бути використані урядом, донорами та учасниками ринку.

Ключові слова: комунікації; культурні індустрії; штучний інтелект; цифрові медіа; цифровізація; творча діяльність



"The war of images": Coverage of Russia's full-scale armed aggression against Ukraine in British political cartoon (based on materials from "The Times" and "The Sunday Times")

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Abstract. The relevance of studying political cartoons as a form of visual communication is driven by their capacity to concisely reflect socio-political processes, shape public opinion, and influence the interpretation of the Russian-Ukrainian war. This article aimed to analyse how Russia's full-scale armed aggression against Ukraine was represented in British political cartoons published in "The Times" and "The Sunday Times" during the first year of the war. The research methodology was grounded in an interdisciplinary approach combining media studies, visual-analytical methods, and tools of quantitative and qualitative content analysis. This combination captured the specific nature of political cartoons as visual informational products that simultaneously interpret and construct public perceptions. The study demonstrated that British cartoonists actively employed satire to frame the conflict through a clear moral dichotomy of "good and evil". The visual narratives primarily centred on the Russian president as the main instigator, whose image evolved from a self-confident aggressor into a demonised symbol of cruelty and moral degradation, particularly following the atrocities in Bucha. In contrast, utilising the David and Goliath motif, the Ukrainian president was consistently depicted as the archetype of heroic national resistance. Cartoonists actively highlighted the war's global consequences (energy and food crises) and criticised Western political hesitation, the UK's domestic controversies (e.g., the Partygate scandal), and bureaucratic failures in managing the refugee crisis. Quantitative analysis indicated a natural decline in publication frequency over the year, reflecting the media phenomenon of attention fatigue. Nevertheless, the unprecedented concentration of visual satirical materials during the early months secured a definitive victory for Ukraine in the informational "war of images". The practical significance of this research lies in its applicability to studies of media discourse, visual propaganda, and the formation of international perceptions of contemporary armed conflicts

Keywords: Russian-Ukrainian war; British satirical discourse; caricature; visual narratives; visual propaganda; mass media; newspaper

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Introduction

The relevance of this study is determined by the growing role of visual media in shaping public perceptions of contemporary political and military conflicts. In this context, political cartoons serve as an important instrument for the media interpretation of events, as they are capable of conveying evaluations, emotions, and ideological meanings in a concise and symbolic form that influences public opinion. The full-scale armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine has become one of the central themes of the international information space, which has also been reflected in the satirical visual culture of leading global media outlets. An important source for examining this process is the British newspapers "The Times" and "The Sunday Times", which are among the most authoritative and influential publications in the United Kingdom and regularly publish political cartoons reflecting current international developments. The cartoons published in these newspapers not only respond to key events of the war, but also construct particular images of its participants, interpret political processes, and reflect Western public attitudes toward the conflict. In this regard, the analysis of such visual materials makes it possible to gain a deeper understanding of the mechanisms of media representation of the Russo-Ukrainian war and the formation of the international information narrative surrounding it.

Russia's full-scale armed aggression against Ukraine immediately garnered significant scholarly interest. Research has explored not only the political and international dimensions of the conflict but also its representation in the media landscape, particularly in political cartoons, which serve as a crucial medium for the visual interpretation of wartime events. The global dimension of the satirical conceptualisation of the Russo-Ukrainian war has been thoroughly examined within a large-scale project by O. Semotiuk (2023), which encompasses a corpus of approximately 4,000 cartoons from over 60 countries. Specifically, in a 2023 study, the author analyses visual rhetoric and the types of text-image interaction, contrasting the international perspective of the conflict with the national visions of the direct participants (Ukraine and the Russian Federation). Building on this macro-approach, O. Semotiuk & Y. Hladyr (2025) explore the phenomenon of "impartial humour". Employing quantitative content analysis, the authors conclude that even when cartoonists feign "neutrality", the visual narrative consistently conveys the perception of the war as a cross-border, global evil. Closely aligned with this global conceptual approach is the publication by L. Morales Domínguez *et al.* (2022). The authors analysed the Western satirical message regarding the Russo-Ukrainian war during the first year and a half of the conflict (from the eve of the invasion to the death of Y. Prigozhin). The study examined 277 political cartoons sourced from the most frequently used platforms worldwide, identifying 33 cognitive subframes.

An understanding of the global and Western perspectives on the conflict is impossible without considering how the direct participants visualise it. Thus, the specific features of enemy representation in Ukrainian satirical discourse have been thoroughly investigated by L. Pytlova (2022). Based on the materials of *Perets* magazine, the author argues that the primary strategies of Ukrainian cartoons involve the demonisation, mockery, and belittlement of the aggressor (personified by V. Putin) as a means of overcoming public fear. Expanding the analysis of the national context, T. Shevchuk (2023) examined modern Ukrainian political cartoons as humorous creolised texts disseminated via social networks. This research highlights the capacity of satirical graphics to convey complex socio-political messages and actively shape public opinion in an accessible format. A diametrically opposed function is performed by Russian political cartoons. The chronological continuity of this phenomenon is demonstrated by O. Gaiko & O. Chaika (2024), who highlight the systemic use of satirical graphics as a key element of Russia's hybrid warfare and the "Gerasimov doctrine" between 2014 and 2022.

Alongside this, a significant body of research focuses on the coverage of Russian aggression in the media of specific Western countries. A notable example is the publication by O. Snigovska & A. Malakhiti (2022). Analysing the Greek media landscape, the researchers view political cartoons as "creolised texts" and highlight specific stylistic devices (metaphor, irony, animalisation) and manipulative tactics employed in the context of hybrid warfare. The Canadian vector of satirical interpretation of the Russo-Ukrainian war has been explored by E.K. Koliada *et al.* (2024). Using leading Canadian online publications ("Edmonton Journal", "Toronto Sun", "The Globe and Mail", etc.) from 2022 to 2024, the authors analysed political cartoons as an effective tool for building resilience against Russian propaganda. The American satirical discourse is also represented by a series of in-depth studies. Notably, a semiotic analysis of the Russo-Ukrainian war in the political cartoons of the "Tribune Content Agency" was conducted by A. Abbasi *et al.* (2022). The construction of V. Putin's image in the cartoons of the news portal *usnews.com* is examined by A.N. Soare (2023). An organic addition to the analysis of the Russian president's image within the same publication is the study by the authorial team of N. Nasira *et al.* (2025).

Directly related to the subject area of this research are studies focusing on the British media landscape. In particular, the representation of the Russo-Ukrainian war in the cartoons of "The Week" magazine is the subject of a study by A.V. Karakaş & M. Yılmaz (2023). This research is of special interest, as it opens up avenues for intra-British media comparativism. However, the immediate foundation for this article is a study by R. Kutsyk (2022), in which the satirical graphics of the British newspapers "The Times" and "The Sunday Times" were examined as

an informational mechanism for constructing the image of the Russo-Ukrainian war. That study focused on the first seven days of the full-scale invasion, capturing the initial reaction of the British press: the marginalisation of the Russian leadership's image and the heroisation of Ukrainian resistance. Nevertheless, since these initial findings were based on the narrow chronological time-frame of the onset of open aggression, an objective scientific need arose to extend the temporal horizon of the research to one year.

Consequently, the aim of this article was to conduct an expanded analysis of the specific features of how Russia's full-scale armed aggression against Ukraine is represented in political cartoons published by the British newspapers "The Times" and "The Sunday Times" between February 24, 2022, and February 26, 2023. Specifically, the study sought not only to verify previous observations but also to trace the evolution of the publications' multimodal narrative by identifying the primary thematic plots, the dynamics of political leaders' images, and the transformation of symbolic devices through which cartoonists interpreted key events at different stages of the war.

Materials and Methods

The empirical basis of the study consisted of 66 political cartoons (Kutsyk, 2025) published on the official website of "The Times" and "The Sunday Times" during the first year of Russia's full-scale armed aggression against Ukraine, from 24 February 2022 to 26 February 2023 (The Times, n.d.). The choice of this not entirely "clean" chronological range (one year and two days) is explained by the fact that, for the sake of analytical comprehensiveness, the sample also included cartoons published on 25 and 26 February 2023, which appeared in connection with the anniversary of the outbreak of the full-scale war. The research methodology was grounded in an interdisciplinary approach that combines media studies, visual-analytical and communication methods, and tools of quantitative and qualitative content analysis. This combination was dictated by the specific nature of political cartoons as visual informational products that simultaneously interpret and construct public perceptions of political events. The application of quantitative content analysis enabled the determination of the frequency of war-related materials, their proportion within the overall information flow, and the dynamics of editorial attention throughout the period under study.

The obtained quantitative indicators served only as a starting point for a deeper qualitative visual and thematic analysis, which involved classifying the cartoons by key themes, interpreting the depicted characters, symbols, metaphors, and ideological meanings, and identifying analogies, allusions, and historical parallels employed by the authors. A narrative (plot-based) approach was used to trace how visual imagery reproduced or reinterpreted real military, political, and socio-economic

events and processes. To identify the specific features of the representation of different actors – Russia, Ukraine, and Western states – a comparative method was applied, allowing for the delineation of both commonalities and distinctions in the approaches of cartoonists from "The Times" and "The Sunday Times". The final analytical stage involved contextualising each cartoon within its concrete historical and political circumstances, which made it possible to account for the actual course of hostilities, diplomatic developments, public sentiments, and key debates within the British information space. Taken together, these methods enabled a comprehensive and multidimensional examination of how British political cartoons depict, interpret, and construct the images of Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine and its consequences.

Results

Dynamics of publishing cartoons

Outbreak of Russia's full-scale armed aggression against Ukraine on 24 February 2022 was the largest political catastrophe since World War II. The line of battle engagement along the Ukrainian border stretches for thousands of kilometres, and the number of dead and wounded military and civilians on both sides is estimated at hundreds of thousands, if not more. The consequences of the Russian invasion have impacted not only Ukraine, but also the world, especially Europe. Indeed, an event of this magnitude caused a significant resonance. The world's media literally "exploded" with news reports about Russia's full-scale armed aggression against Ukraine. The oldest British daily newspaper, "The Times", and its Sunday edition, "The Sunday Times", were no exception.

On 25 February 2022, "The Times" placed particular emphasis on the significance of the event by describing it as "a dark day for Europe". The headline was printed on a black background rather than in the traditional black type on a light page, a design choice intended to underscore the global scale and tragic nature of Russian aggression not only for Ukraine but also for the European continent as a whole. In addition to this striking headline, the central place on the front page was occupied by a photograph of the injured Ukrainian woman Olena Kurilo, who survived the missile strikes in the Kharkiv region (Fig. 1). This image quickly circulated through international media, from Europe to the United States, and became the "face of the war".

Photographs and video footage constitute a substantial part of the informational content concerning events in Ukraine and remain among the most effective means of representing events in their real and dynamic form. At the same time, these are not the only visual materials that attract the attention of the media and the public. A special place belongs to political cartoons, which, despite the development of information technologies and the availability of diverse means of

disseminating information, have not lost their relevance. Due to their emotional nature, relative immediacy, and multi-layered meaning, cartoons are a rather wonderful way to access the past. Acting as a kind of “clues” and markers of social and political dynamics, they often reveal what the past was “in reality” better than any written word. By their very nature, cartoons are not “passive

reflectors” of reality and are never “passively” perceived by readers. On the contrary, they help to crystallise attitudes and express the thinking of broad groups of society in a meaningful and concise way (Scully & Varnava, 2020). It is this ability to simplify and to explain the point that makes cartoons such a powerful tool for spreading and establishing certain stereotypes and images in society.



Figure 1. “The Times” front page from 25 February 2022

Source: Tomorrow's Papers (2022)

In total, for the period from 24 February 2022 to 26 February 2023, on the official websites of “The Times” and “The Sunday Times” 368 cartoons were published (The Times, n.d.), 66 of which were thematically related to Russia’s full-scale armed aggression against Ukraine, including its political and socio-economic consequences (Kutsyk, 2025), which accounted for 18% of the total. At the same time, during the first three months of the war, this figure was much higher and amounted to 47% (41 images out of 88), which was almost half of the total number of cartoons published at that time. However, in the second quarter (from 25 May to 24 June), the percentage of published cartoons on the subject of the study reached its lowest point and amounted to only 6% of the total number (Table 1). In the third quarter, the number

of published cartoons did not change significantly (7% of the total). There was a slight increase in September and October, which was due to the successful liberation of almost the entire territory of the temporarily occupied Kharkiv region by the Ukrainian army and the covert operation to blow up the Crimean Bridge. Later, the number of cartoons remained extremely low, in particular, during the 9th month (from 25 October to 24 November) this figure was 0. It was only as the anniversary of Russia’s full-scale armed aggression against Ukraine approached that the attention of “The Times” and “The Sunday Times” increased again. For example, during the 12th month of full-scale aggression (from 25 January to 26 February 2023), 11 thematic cartoons were published, which amounted to 32% of the total number for the same period (Table 1).

Table 1. Quantitative indicators and percentage ratio of published cartoons related to the Russian-Ukrainian war in "The Times" and "The Sunday Times" newspapers for the period from 24 February 2022 to 26 February 2023

Month	The total number of cartoons	Thematic number of cartoons	Percentage of the total number of cartoons	Total number of cartoons per quarter	Thematic number of cartoons for the quarter	Percentage of the total number of cartoons	Total cartoons for half a year	Total thematic cartoons for half a year	Percentage of the total number of cartoons
1 (24 February – 24 March)	28	23	82	88	41	47	179	46	26
2 (25 March – 24 April)	31	14	45						
3 (25 April – 24 May)	29	4	14						
4 (25 May – 24 June)	31	2	7	91	5	6			
5 (25 June – 24 July)	31	1	3						
6 (25 July – 24 August)	29	2	7						
7 (25 August – 24 September)	31	4	13	92	6	7	189	20	11
8 (25 September – 24 October)	30	2	7						
9 (25 October – 24 November)	31	0	0						
10 (25 November – 24 December)	28	2	7	97	14	14			
11 (25 December – 24 January)	35	1	3						
12 (25 January – 24 February)	34	11	32						
Total	368	66	18%						

Note: the "thematic" group consists of all cartoons related to the Russian-Ukrainian war and its main consequences

Source: compiled by the authors based on R. Kutsyk (2025) and The Times (n.d.)

Thus, the results show that the dynamics of publishing cartoons about Russia's full-scale armed aggression against Ukraine in "The Times" and "The Sunday Times" had been declining over the year. After two months of war, the degree of interest in the war dropped sharply and events in Ukraine faded into the background. This change in dynamics was due to the focus of the British media on the internal political problems of the United Kingdom, among which the Partygate political case, the resignation of B. Johnson, and the competition between the main opponents for the prime ministerial seat took centre stage.

The image of V. Putin

Since the first days of Russia's full-scale armed aggression against Ukraine, British cartoonists have focused on the figure of Vladimir Putin as the main culprit. On 25 February, 2022, the first special cartoon was published, which accumulated popular perceptions of the Russian president and his political and ideological beliefs (Fig. 2). It was created by Peter Brookes, the famous English cartoonist. The cartoon depicts Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, the main Marxist theorists, Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin, the communist founders of the Soviet Union, and Russian President Vladimir Putin in a single line. The caption "Back in the USSR" is added to the top of the illustration.



Figure 2. Cartoon by P. Brookes "Back in the USSR" ("The Times", 25 February 2022)
Source: R. Kutsyk (2025)

Such analogies are not unfounded and have a rational explanation. Russia's series of armed aggressions against the former "union republics" is a direct indication of V. Putin and his inner circle's desire to construct a new model of a union state similar to the former USSR, where Russia will once again play a dominant role, through force and coercion. The idea of a "revival" of the Soviet Union within the borders of 1991 had been

nurtured in the Kremlin long before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Back in 2005, in his annual televised address to the Federal Assembly of Russia, V. Putin stated that the collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the XX century (BBC Ukrainian, 2005). On the eve of the full-scale invasion, this rhetoric reached its peak. On 21 February 2022, in a special video message, the Russian president announced the official recognition of the independence of the so-called separatist puppet quasi-state entities "DPR" and "LPR". But before announcing this decision, V. Putin gave an almost hour-long "lecture" in which he stated that Lenin was the "true" "architect" of Ukraine, that Ukraine "has never had a stable tradition of its true statehood", and that historical Russia is the entire former USSR, the collapse of which occurred due to a series of historical and strategic mistakes by the Bolsheviks and the leadership of the CPSU (Radio Svoboda, 2022).

In P. Brooks's cartoons, V. Putin appears quite self-confident, and his appearance (a naked torso with a ribbon of ammunition fastened crosswise) resembles the main character of the Hollywood action movie Rambo. This image is connected to the real story of 2009. At the time, the main Russian news agencies published a selection of official photos from V. Putin's summer vacation in a remote region of Siberia. In most of them, the Russian president (then prime minister) is shown in military clothing and boots, but in the footage of riding, he is shirtless (Rodgers, 2009). Since then, V. Putin has been associated with the sarcastic image of a "half-naked Rambo", which artists systematically use in their political cartoons. While in the first days of the full-scale armed aggression, the president appeared to the readers as quite confident, this changed later. Due to the massive crimes committed by the Russian army and the systematic shelling of peaceful Ukrainian cities, V. Putin's image was increasingly becoming negative and disrespectful. On 1 March, Russia launched another series of missile attacks on Kyiv. Two rockets hit the Kyiv TV tower and the territory of the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Centre. As a result of the explosion, five people who were passing by were burned alive (Philp & Charter, 2022). This event caused considerable outrage among the public and Holocaust memorial centres around the world (Philp, 2022). In response to the missile attacks on Ukrainian cities, a new thematic cartoon appeared in "The Times" on 2 March (Fig. 3). It was created based on the illustration of the same name *The Road to Homo Sapiens* by Rudolf Zellingner, first published in 1965 in the *Early Man* book (Howell & The Editors of LIFE, 1965). The most famous is its abridged version, where instead of 15 species of primates, 6 are presented (dryopithecus, oreopithecus, ramapithecus, neanderthal, cro-magnon, and modern human). In popular culture, this illustration has been repeatedly used to imitate and parody various types of progress. P. Brooks also decided to adapt it.



Figure 3. Cartoon by P. Brooks
("The Times", 2 March 2022)

Source: R. Kutsyk (2025)

The cartoon depicts representatives of different species of hominids gradually evolving into *Homo sapiens*. However, as they move forward, they look with indignation at V. Putin, who, despite progress, is moving in the opposite direction, leaving a bloody trail behind him. He also holds missiles in his hands. The content of the cartoon not only placed an emphasis on V. Putin's war crimes, but also demonstrated to readers the fact of his personal degradation as a *Homo sapiens*. This is clearly evidenced by the type of walking, which is identified with the way monkeys move. So, in just a week, the British cartoons abruptly changed the image of V. Putin from a "half-naked Rambo" to a "degrading man".

Further growth of criminal actions of the Russian army led to an increase in the "demonisation" of the image of the Russian president. In this context, the events that took place in the city of Bucha, which is located a few kilometres from the Ukrainian capital and came under temporary occupation in the first four weeks of the war, had a great impact on world opinion. According to official reports from the National Police of Ukraine, after the withdrawal of the Russian army more than four hundred bodies of Ukrainian civilians and servicemen killed by Russian soldiers were found here (National Police of Ukraine, 2024). This event caused a significant response in the world media. The event received extensive coverage in the international media. In a feature article published on 4 April, "The Times" emphasised the scale of brutality uncovered after the liberation of Bucha and other towns in the Kyiv region. The newspaper reported numerous cases of mass killings of civilians, torture, the destruction of entire families, mass graves, and sexual violence, stressing the systematic nature of the crimes committed by Russian soldiers. The article also suggested that the targeted killing of men of fighting age could indicate a deliberate policy aimed at terrorising the Ukrainian population and undermining Ukrainian statehood, noting that such actions may meet the threshold of genocide (The Times, 2022b). Responding to similar horrors in Bucha and other Ukrainian cities, cartoonists sought to convey the nature of the criminal actions

authorised by the Russian leadership as accurately and clearly as possible. A striking example was the cartoon created by Norwegian cartoonist Morten Morland, which was published in "The Times" on 4 April (Fig. 4).



Figure 4. Cartoon by M. Morland
("The Times", 4 April 2022)

Source: R. Kutsyk (2025)

It depicts a blood-stained V. Putin, who is walking boldly forward, leaving a bright red trail on the ground. He is carrying a scythe, which is both the main instrument of the crime and a symbol of death. Along with V. Putin, Death itself is represented in the stereotypical image of the Grim Reaper, looking in horror at the crimes committed by the Russian president. Despite the fact that the cartoon contains no text, its story logically leads the reader to conclude that V. Putin has surpassed even Death itself with his actions and the number of victims. P. Brooks's cartoon of 6 April is somewhat similar in its motive (Fig. 5). The author depicted V. Putin against the backdrop of the Russian flag, the red field of which simultaneously symbolises a bloody pond. As in the previous cartoon, the Russian president is stained with numerous splashes of blood and is holding the main instrument of the crime, but this time it is a kitchen cleaver for chopping meat. At the top left of the image, a special caption "Family butcher..." was added to the image, allegorically emphasising that entire families were victims of Russian crimes.



Figure 5. Cartoon by P. Brookes "Family butcher..."
("The Times", 6 April 2022)

Source: R. Kutsyk (2025)

An important feature of the Kremlin's military strategy is its large-scale destructive nature. In April-May 2022, Russia moved its main forces to eastern and southern Ukraine. It was here that the biggest battles the world had not seen since World War II would begin and continue to be fought. At the end of May 2022, fierce fighting took place on the outskirts of Sievierodonetsk. At the time, it was the only part of Luhansk region that continued to be under the control of the Ukrainian government. On 27 May, despite the defensive actions of the Ukrainian army, Russian troops managed to approach the outskirts of the city and gradually move into the centre. On the same day, Sievierodonetsk Mayor Oleksandr Stryuk said that about 90% of the housing stock was damaged, 60% of which was beyond repair (Ukrinform, 2022). The total destruction of cities in eastern Ukraine caused a new cartoon by P. Brooks to appear on 28 May (Fig. 6).



Figure 6. Cartoon by P. Brookes "I've taken another prize city! What city!" ("The Times", 28 May 2022b)
Source: R. Kutsyk (2025)

The story is focused on the ruins of a Ukrainian city. Among the destroyed buildings and bodies of civilians is a Russian tank with a "Z" militaristic symbol. On top of it, there is a half-naked V. Putin, who is standing with his bloody hands, showing a gesture of victory and confidently claiming that he has "taken another prize city". At the same time, one of the Russian generals (probably S. Shoigu) looks out of the hatch of the tank and, looking at the area through binoculars, asks the Russian president, "What city?". The story of the cartoon is a sharp irony of the so-called Russian "liberation" of Ukrainian cities, which in fact ends in their total destruction. This situation is a consequence of V. Putin's irresistible desire to seize new territories at any cost, sparing neither technical nor human resources.

Thus, British political cartoons consistently constructed a strongly negative and increasingly demonised image of Vladimir Putin as the main culprit of the Russian-Ukrainian war. While at the initial stage of the invasion, he appeared as a self-confident aggressor, the subsequent course of events, mass war crimes, and the

destruction of Ukrainian cities led to the transformation of this image into a symbol of cruelty, moral degradation, and death. To achieve this effect, cartoonists actively employed such artistic techniques as irony, sarcasm, grotesque, historical analogies, allegories, and symbolic imagery. Through these satirical and visual-symbolic means, the authors not only reacted to the ongoing events of the war but also articulated a clear moral assessment of the actions of the Russian leadership.

Visual and symbolic representation of V. Zelenskyy and V. Putin in political cartoons

One of the important consequences of Russia's full-scale armed aggression was the transformation of Ukraine's image. The aggressive nature of the war and the strong resistance of Ukrainians became an example for many of them of a desperate struggle for freedom and democratic values. This led to the strengthening of Ukraine's international image. However, the changes concerned not only its overall image, but also individual political leaders. In this context, it was V. Zelenskyy's image that underwent the most dramatic transformation. The 2019 presidential election, marked by V. Zelenskyy's entry into the second round and his landslide victory (73.22%) (Central Election Commission of Ukraine, 2019), attracted significant international attention due to his prior career as a famous comedian and showman. He gained fame at Kvartal 95 Studio and in the 2015 political comedy TV series "Servant of the People", where he played a history teacher elected president (Servant of the people, n.d.). Major global media highlighted his background in headlines such as "Hoping for peace, Ukraine's voters appear likely to elect a comedian as president" (Troianovski, 2019) and "Comedian wins landslide victory in Ukrainian presidential election" (Walker, 2019), emphasising the "comedian" label and reflecting Western scepticism about Ukraine's choice.

After the outbreak of Russia's full-scale invasion on 24 February 2022, the international community's position on V. Zelenskyy changed dramatically. On 25 February, "The Washington Post" reported that the US government was ready to help the Ukrainian president leave Kyiv to avoid capture or assassination by advancing Russian troops, but he refused the offer (Harris *et al.*, 2022). Although the media reported that the President of Ukraine remained in Kyiv, rumours about his possible escape continued to circulate in Ukrainian society. These speculations were dispelled after V. Zelenskyy recorded an evening video address near the Presidential Office in Kyiv together with key representatives of the state leadership, demonstrating that the country's political leadership remained in the capital and continued to coordinate the defence of the state (Hromadske, 2022). The video message and the decision to stay in Ukraine significantly strengthened V. Zelenskyy's political rating. According to a poll conducted by the Sociological Group

Rating as of 26-27 February 2022, 91% of Ukrainians supported the President's actions (Rating Group, 2022). The firm and determined position of the Ukrainian president was widely praised by Western leaders and the media. In particular, "The Washington Post" emphasised that Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who had previously been known as an actor and comedian, emerged during the war as an effective wartime leader whose decision to remain in Kyiv and actively communicate with society strengthened both domestic support and international sympathy for Ukraine (Pietsch & Westfall, 2022). Thus, V. Zelenskyy's image has been transformed from a "comedian president" to a "leader president". Such changes were vividly reflected in M. Morland's cartoon published in "The Times" on 1 March (Fig. 7).



Figure 7. Cartoon by M. Morland "My demands" ("The Times", 1 March 2022)

Source: R. Kutsyk (2025)

V. Zelenskyy appears to the readers in an olive military uniform with his hands clenched into a fist. Opposite him, on top of a pile of broken Russian equipment, V. Putin stands and reads out his demands. The main leitmotif of the story is the emphasis on the size ratio between the two politicians. V. Zelenskyy is portrayed as a "great leader" who confidently confronts the Russian president without hesitation. Instead, V. Putin is portrayed as a "little dwarf" who, despite the situation at the front, namely significant losses of personnel and military equipment, continues to make his demands. P. Brooks' cartoon from March 8 is quite interesting in its content (Fig. 8). Structurally, the image is divided into two stories. The first depicts V. Putin on a tank, which is aimed at an unarmed V. Zelenskyy. But this situation does not frighten the Ukrainian president, who confidently confronts it. In the second part, V. Zelenskyy bends the cannon of a Russian tank into the shape of the Latin letter "Z" with his bare hands, causing considerable surprise to V. Putin. The story of the cartoon mocks not only the "power" of the world's second army, but also the Kremlin's propaganda symbols, as evidenced, in particular, by the ironic "'Z' is for Zelenskyy..." caption.

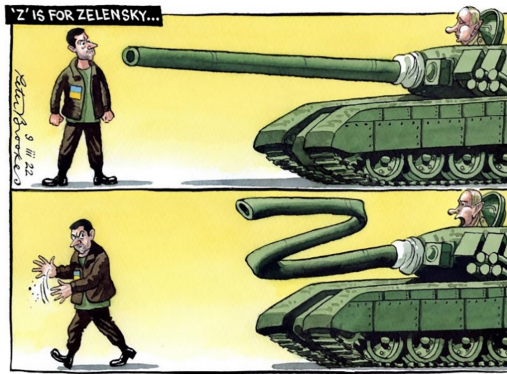


Figure 8. Cartoon by P. Brookes "'Z' is for Zelensky..."
("The Times", 8 March 2022)

Source: R. Kutsyk (2025)

It is worth clarifying that from the first days of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Russian military equipment has been marked with various symbols in the form of individual Latin letters: "Z", "V", "O", "X", and "A". Among all the symbols, the letter "Z" is the most widely used. Very soon, it became the main militaristic symbol in Russian propaganda and was used by Russian civilians in rallies and flash mobs as a sign of support for the invasion. There is no consensus on the real meaning of these symbols. The most popular theory used by military experts is that they were written in accordance with specific areas where Russian troops are usually deployed, for example, "Z" could mean "zapad", i.e., west in Russian. Others believe that the letters were painted to avoid friendly fire (Sauer, 2022). In the context of the confrontation between the images of the Ukrainian and Russian presidents, M. Morland's cartoon published in "The Sunday Times" on 27 March is extremely telling (Fig. 9). Its plot is based on the Old Testament biblical story of the struggle between David and Goliath. In M. Morland's cartoon, V. Zelenskyy plays the role of David, while V. Putin is Goliath. The image of the Ukrainian president is presented quite modestly: he is dressed in a light summer tunic, wearing no shoes, and holding a sling, one of the oldest primitive weapons. At this time, the Russian president appears to the readers as a giant, reminiscent of a Roman legionnaire. He is well equipped and armed: his head and body are protected by a strong metal helmet and armour. Putin holds a large long sword in his right hand and a shield with the propaganda symbol "Z" in his left. It is quite clear that the forces of the parties are not equal.

The appearance of M. Morland's cartoon was preceded by an extraordinary NATO summit held on 24 March 2022, in Brussels. At the meeting, V. Zelenskyy addressed the Alliance members via video link. He asked for hundreds of tanks and jets, saying that his country needed them to survive. However, French President Emmanuel Macron has ruled out this possibility because of fears that it could draw NATO into a direct conflict with

Russia. He said that this issue is a "red line" and the Alliance does not want to become "complicit" (Swinford & Waterfield, 2022). As a result, the summit did not adopt any specific decision that could really help Ukraine in its military confrontation with Russia. That is why M. Morland's cartoon depicts NATO holding a sword with the Alliance's emblem in one hand and pouring stones for V. Zelenskyy's sling with the other. Such insignificant, literally primitive assistance is surprising to the Ukrainian president: with his gaze, he clearly demonstrates that this is not enough to bring down Goliath. It cannot but be noted that among all the cartoons, this one most accurately conveyed the symbolism and nature of the armed conflict between Ukraine and Russia.



Figure 9. Cartoon by M. Morland
("The Sunday Times", 27 March 2022)

Source: R. Kutsyk (2025)

Thus, cartoons framed the confrontation between Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Vladimir Putin as a central symbolic narrative of the Russian-Ukrainian war, through visual contrasts in size, posture, and attributes, as well as through exaggeration, irony, and historical or biblical analogies – most notably the David and Goliath motif – cartoonists constructed a clear dichotomy between the two leaders. Zelenskyy was depicted as the embodiment of resistance, determination, and moral legitimacy, while Putin appeared as the aggressor whose military power did not ensure moral or political superiority. At the same time, these images emphasised the asymmetry of the conflict, frequently portraying Ukraine as a smaller but resolute force confronting a much larger opponent. In this way, the cartoons not only reflected the transformation of Zelenskyy's international image from a "comedian president" to a wartime leader, but also visually articulated a broader narrative of moral and political confrontation between Ukraine and Russia, aggression and the defence of freedom.

Response of the West and support for Ukraine

On the eve of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Western leaders repeatedly warned V. Putin about imposing powerful sanctions on Russia if it escalated the conflict.

But these words are of little consequence to the Kremlin, which has long been planning a large-scale armed aggression and was ready to take risks to achieve its geopolitical goals. In this regard, a popular topic of discussion in the British press was the question of the West's response to Russia's full-scale armed aggression against Ukraine and the effectiveness of the sanctions imposed. It should be noted that cartoonists were very sceptical about their effectiveness. For example, on 26 February, "The Times" published a cartoon by P. Brooks (Fig. 10) depicting US President Joe Biden, French President Emmanuel Macron, and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson. All of them are using symbolic gestures and "sanction" flowers to try to stop Russian President Vladimir Putin, who despite this, confidently continues to drive his tank with a smile on his face. Thus, even in the early days, the cartoonists stated the obvious fact that the West's actions were not decisive enough and the sanctions imposed were not able to stop the invasion. In addition, Kremlin was prepared for such a scenario. V. Putin and his entourage understood that even if tough sanctions were imposed, their effect would be felt only later, and therefore the Russian economy would have enough time to adapt, which actually happened.



Figure 10. Cartoon by P. Brooks "Sanctions" ("The Times", 26 February 2022)

Source: R. Kutsyk (2025)

Despite the limited immediate impact of sanctions, Russia's invasion strengthened cooperation between Ukraine and Western countries, which became the main providers of financial and military assistance. This support enabled Ukraine to stabilise the situation and continue resisting Russian aggression. However, the issue of supplying heavy weapons remained contentious. In January 2023, ahead of the Ramstein meeting, debates focused on the transfer of German Leopard 2 tanks. Initially, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz opposed the decision, later linking it to the possible delivery of American Abrams tanks, while the United States also hesitated to make a commitment (The Times, 2023). Germany's cautious stance was influenced not only by fears of escalation with Russia but also by historical sensitivities connected with the legacy of the Nazi regime. The issue was

resolved after intensive discussions among allies. On 25 January, Joe Biden announced that the United States would provide 31 M1 Abrams tanks to Ukraine, while on the same day Olaf Scholz confirmed the delivery of 14 Leopard 2A6 tanks (Moody *et al.*, 2023). The positive decisions of NATO members to provide tanks to Ukraine were reflected in several cartoons. The first, by P. Brooks, depicts a German Leopard targeting Putin. The latter looks quite upset about this (Fig. 11).

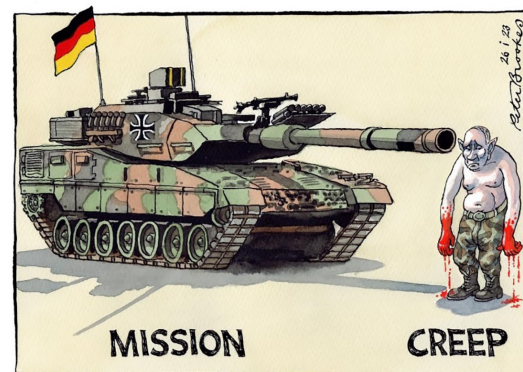


Figure 11. Cartoon by P. Brooks "Mission. Creep" ("The Times", 26 January 2023)

Source: R. Kutsyk (2025)

The author of the second is the artist Ella Baron. The cartoon depicts V. Zelenskyy rolling up his sleeves and leading a column of tanks provided by Western partners (Fig. 12).



Figure 12. Cartoon by E. Baron "All behind you, Zelensky. After David Low" ("The Sunday Times", 29 January 2023)

Source: R. Kutsyk (2025)

This story is an allegory for the previously known David Low's cartoon "All behind you, Winston" (Langworth, 2020). Thus, E. Baron not only made pointed reference to the strengthening of Ukraine's military and technical forces, but also highlighted V. Zelenskyy's leadership image, comparing him to the figure of Winston Churchill, who enjoyed considerable political authority and popularity during World War II. While the problem

with tanks was resolved positively for Ukraine, the matter of providing aircraft remained open. The acquisition of fighter jets could greatly influence the course of the war in favour of the Ukrainian army, as it would make it possible to conduct effective and targeted air strikes, as well as to deter Russian aircraft far from the Ukrainian border and thus protect cities and villages from bombing. Despite V. Zelenskyy's numerous requests on the eve of the anniversary of Russia's full-scale armed aggression, the allies remained unwavering on this matter. The absence of a positive solution for Ukraine has led to the appearance of another thematic cartoon in which P. Brooks mocks the indecision of European political leaders (Fig. 13).



Figure 13. Cartoon by P. Brookes "Fighter jets? No!" ("The Times", 10 February 2023)

Source: R. Kutsyk (2025)

It depicts V. Zelenskyy asking R. Sunak, E. Macron, and U. von der Leyen whether there will be fighter jets. The latter, although they answer "yes" many times, end up with one big "no" word. However, it should be added that minor concessions were made on the issue of supplying Ukraine with aircraft. On 8 February 2023, it was decided that the UK would train Ukrainian pilots to fly fighter jets, because, as the newly elected British Prime Minister R. Sunak said, "the first step in being able to provide advanced aircraft is to have soldiers or aviators that are capable of using them" (Swinford *et al.*, 2023). An important event in the context of establishing close relations between Ukraine and the West was the unexpected official visit of US President J. Biden to Kyiv on 20 February 2023. It was the first visit of a US president to Ukraine since 2008, and the first time a sitting US president visited a war zone not controlled by the US military. Details of the visit of J. Biden was kept completely secret and prepared for several months (Baker & Shear, 2023). Of course, an event of this scale immediately aroused considerable interest among the world community and the media. "The Guardian" called it perhaps the most significant visit by a US president to a European country since the end of the Cold War (Harding, 2023). "The Times" cartoonists also did not stand

aside. The next day, after J. Biden's visit, a corresponding thematic cartoon by M. Morland was published (Fig. 14).



Figure 14. Cartoon by M. Morland "Z. Special military operation" ("The Times", 21 February 2023)

Source: R. Kutsyk (2025)

The main character of the story is V. Putin, who looks angry and tries to throw a large cake at the TV. The reason for his anger is, of course, the meeting of J. Biden with V. Zelenskyy. Interestingly, the cake is not an ordinary one, but a festive one. Its lower tiers bear the militaristic symbol "Z" and the propaganda euphemism "Special military operation". At the very top is a single candle, symbolising one year of full-scale aggression. The story of the cartoon is told in such a way as to place the emphasis on the important symbolic significance of J. Biden's visit to Ukraine on the eve of the anniversary of the invasion. In this regard, it is appropriate to recall the words of Polish Ambassador to the EU Andrzej Sadoś, who rightly stated, "It is a timely, symbolic and historic visit which shows that the free world stands with Ukraine" (Melkozerova, 2023).

The analysis of British political cartoons demonstrates that the West's response to Russia's invasion and the subsequent support for Ukraine has become a central narrative in visual media. Cartoonists highlighted the initial ineffectiveness of sanctions, portraying Western leaders as symbolically attempting to restrain Putin while he continued the invasion unabated. Simultaneously, cartoons reflected the gradual strengthening of Ukraine's military capabilities through Western aid, notably the supply of tanks, and visually reinforced Zelenskyy's leadership and strategic role. At the same time, the continued delays in providing fighter jets were depicted satirically, emphasising Western indecision and the limitations of their support. Key political events, such as President Joe Biden's historic visit to Kyiv, were also captured in cartoons, symbolically portraying the alignment of the free world with Ukraine and the increasing isolation of Russia. Overall, these visual narratives not only illustrated the dynamics of international support but also framed Ukraine's defence as both a military and symbolic struggle, highlighting the critical role of Western assistance in shaping the course of the conflict.

Boris Johnson, Partygate, Ukraine and the war

Frequent trips to Ukraine by British Prime Minister Boris Johnson sparked lively debate in the British press. The increased attention to these visits was largely driven by their political context, particularly the so-called Partygate scandal. Johnson was accused of violating COVID-19 lockdown restrictions during the pandemic in 2020–2021. At a time when most British were forced to stay at home, some representatives of the government and the ruling Conservative Party organised several holiday gatherings at Downing Street. This situation caused a wave of public outrage, and political opponents demanded that B. Johnson be held accountable for violating the law. However, Russia's full-scale armed aggression pushed this issue to the back burner. The main focus of Johnson's and the British politicians' attention was on the events in Ukraine. Moreover, relations between the British and Ukrainian governments have become very close. Showing his continued support, on 9 April, B. Johnson made his first official visit to Kyiv since the invasion, where he personally met with V. Zelenskyy (Swinford & Waterfield, 2022). Their relationship became so close that the British Prime Minister visited Ukraine twice more after that. British society was critical of Johnson's frequent trips. His political opponents and the media widely claimed that he was hiding behind the war in Ukraine and thus seeking to avoid responsibility in the Partygate case. Sharp public criticism led to a series of cartoons published in "The Times". The first of them appeared in March. However, the most striking is the cartoon by P. Brooks which was published on 20 April (Fig. 15).



Figure 15. Cartoon by P. Brookes "Human shield..." ("The Times", 20 April 2022)

Source: R. Kutsyk (2025)

Its appearance was preceded by several events. On 12 April, the London police issued 30 official fines for violating the rules during the COVID-19 pandemic. Among those who received them were B. Johnson and R. Sunak. After that, some members of the opposition parties, including Leader of the Labour Party Keir Starmer and the first ministers of Scotland and Wales, demanded that they resign (Scott, 2022). B. Johnson's response to the criticism and the fine was an official statement to

parliament on 19 April, in which he apologised for violating quarantine rules. However, his words did not inspire much confidence either among representatives of opposition parties or the media. On the same day, "The Times" wrote, "What he did do was try to deflect attention from his own behaviour by burying his apology in a wider statement on the latest developments in Ukraine, thereby further signalling that he considered questions regarding his honesty as self-indulgent at a time of international crisis" (The Times, 2022a).

In fact, these words were the reason for the appearance of P. Brooks' cartoon. It depicts B. Johnson sitting in the British Parliament and shielding himself from the "attacks" of his colleagues with two shields. Each of them is painted in the colours of the Ukrainian flag, and in the foreground is V. Zelenskyy, who, with his arms crossed, has a rather stern and indignant look. This cartoon's story very successfully reflected the point of view that the then British Prime Minister was using Russia's war against Ukraine as an argument for his own justification and staying in power. However, B. Johnson failed to "extinguish the fire" of public discontent. Therefore, on 7 July 2022, he officially announced that he was stepping down as Prime Minister and Leader of the Conservative Party. Two months later, on 6 September, Liz Truss became the new Leader of the Conservative Party and Prime Minister of Great Britain. Thus, the Russian-Ukrainian war appears not only as an international conflict but also as an important element of the United Kingdom's domestic political discourse. In this context, the image of the war in Ukraine was used by cartoonists as a means of satirically interpreting the political crisis surrounding the Partygate scandal and criticising Boris Johnson's attempts to appeal to the international situation to reduce pressure from his opponents.

The failure of the "Blitzkrieg War" and Ukraine's military success

On the very first day of Russia's full-scale invasion, many people had a key question: how long Ukraine would stand against. It is known that the Russian army ranks second in the world after the United States in terms of its military and technical capabilities. According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), in 2021, the number of servicemen in the active Russian army was 900 thousand, while in the Ukrainian army there were only 209 thousand (Chapter five: Russia and Eurasia, 2021). From the point of view of the ratio of military forces, Ukraine's confrontation with such a giant is tantamount to a defeat. This was the opinion of many Western experts and politicians in the first days of the invasion. Despite the pessimism, events in Ukraine took an unexpected turn. The armed invasion provoked a massive wave of patriotism and unprecedented cohesion among Ukrainian society. Ukrainians at all levels began to resist. In the first days of the full-scale war, the number of people willing to enlist in the territorial

defence far exceeded the number of weapons available in military centres. The Russian command clearly did not expect this. In addition, the first days demonstrated the disorganisation and low manoeuvrability of the Russian army. As a result, a new reality has emerged in which Ukraine has not only resisted, but also demonstrated the ability to actively counter the Kremlin's aggressive plans.

This course of events was immediately reflected in a British cartoon. In this context, the most eloquent is the cartoon by P. Brooks published on 31 March 2022 (Fig. 16). The creation of the cartoon is connected to an important phase of the full-scale war – the retreat of the Russian army from Kyiv. On 29 March, Russia's Deputy Defence Minister Alexander Fomin officially announced that Moscow would "sharply reduce military activity" in the Kyiv and Chernihiv fronts (Hodge *et al.*, 2022). At the same time, the Ukrainian military launched a series of counteroffensives that resulted in the liberation of the cities around the Ukrainian capital. Among them were Bucha and Hostomel, which suffered the most from the Russian occupation (Clark *et al.*, 2022). As a result, the Kremlin's plan to "capture Kyiv in three days" completely failed, and the Russian army suffered significant human and technical losses.



Figure 16. Cartoon by P. Brooks "The 'Retreat' from Kyiv... I feel a right tit!" ("The Times", 31 March 2022)
Source: R. Kutsyk (2025)

In the foreground of the cartoon, V. Putin is shown leading a long convoy of Russian military equipment. According to satellite images, it stretched for 64 km (Ali & Stewart, 2022). Despite its "grandiose" appearance, the convoy failed to reach Kyiv. Among the main reasons were problems with logistics, lack of food and fuel, and low morale among Russian soldiers. It is worth noting that the story of the cartoon is a satirical allegory on the "Napoleon's retreat from Moscow" painting by German artist Adolf Northen. Therefore, the Russian president is depicted on horseback, and instead of a modern military uniform, he is wearing a long greatcoat modelled after the XIX century, and he is wearing a "Napoleonic" hat. Obviously, the events in Ukraine evoked direct analogies for P. Brooks with the French Napoleon's march on Moscow in 1812, which also ended in retreat.

In the war with Ukraine, Russia has used not only ground and air forces, but also the Black Sea Fleet. It was with its help that the Kremlin managed to block the entire northern Black Sea region, including the main Ukrainian ports through which grain and other food products were exported, for a time. For a long time, it was believed that Ukraine would not be able to break through this blockade, as the Ukrainian army did not have the necessary technical means to do so. However, on 13 April, an unexpected event occurred that caused a significant resonance. On this day, the Ukrainian Navy launched two Neptune cruise missiles at the cruiser Moskva, the flagship of the Russian Black Sea Fleet. The ship sank as a result of the damage and difficult weather conditions. On the evening of 14 April, the Russian Ministry of Defence officially recognised the sinking of the Moskva (Parker & Brown, 2022). This is the largest loss of the Russian navy since World War II. In their editorial leader, the editors of "The Times" stated, "The sinking of the Moskva, the guided-missile cruiser that was the flagship of Russia's Black Sea Fleet, is a humiliating symbolic defeat, bolstering Ukrainian morale and stoking huge anger and demands for revenge in Russia" (The Times, 2022c).

"The Sunday Times" published a special cartoon on 17 April in response to this event (Fig. 17). Since Western Christians celebrated Easter on this day, M. Morland made the Easter bunny the main character of the story. In his paws he holds a basket of blue and yellow eggs, which are analogous to Ukrainian anti-ship missiles Neptune. In the background is the cruiser Moskva, which was hit by an Easter egg and is sinking to the bottom of the sea.



Figure 17. Cartoon by M. Morland ("The Sunday Times", 17 April 2022)
Source: R. Kutsyk (2025)

In the context of the failure of the Russian government's military plans, it is worth mentioning another cartoon by P. Brooks, which was published on 12 May (Fig. 18). It was triggered by a joint statement made by Finnish President Sauli Niinistö and Prime Minister Sanna Marin that their country must apply for NATO membership without delay (Grylls & Brown, 2022). It should be added that this decision was prompted by Russia's

full-scale armed aggression against Ukraine. The Russian leadership's response to the Finnish government's statement was not long in coming. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated, "Finland's accession to NATO will cause serious damage to bilateral Russian-Finnish relations and the maintaining of stability and security in the Northern European region. Russia will be forced to take retaliatory steps, both of a military-technical and other nature, in order to neutralise the threats to its national security that arise from this" (Sobenko, 2023).



Figure 18. Cartoon by P. Brooks "I'm warning you, Finland!" ("The Times", 12 May 2022)

Source: R. Kutsyk (2025)

Russia's statement was the reason for the appearance of P. Brooks' cartoon. It depicts a Ukrainian farmer pulling a broken Russian tank with the help of a tractor. V. Putin looks out from his hatch, who, despite his losing position, threatens Finland. Interestingly, the story of cartoon is based on real events that took place in the first weeks of the full-scale invasion. For example, in March, videos appeared in the Ukrainian information space showing ordinary Ukrainian farmers on tractors pulling almost undamaged Russian military equipment (Radio Free Europe. Radio Liberty, 2022). These images quickly spread around the world and turned into Internet memes. The following jokes were made about Ukrainian farmers, "Never ask a woman her age, a man his salary, a Ukrainian farmer from where he got his anti-aircraft system"; "After 12 days of stealing Putin's tanks, Ukrainian farmers are now unofficially the fifth-largest military in Europe" (Holl-Allen, 2022).

Ukrainian farmers have become a new symbol of resistance to Russian aggression, as they have tried to remove Russian equipment from the roads and fields despite active hostilities and threats to their lives. This situation, which is comical on the one hand and quite realistic on the other, has once again demonstrated the weakness of the Russian army and the failure of its main military objectives. Therefore, it is not surprising that in his cartoon, P. Brooks used this particular image to ridicule Russia's threats to Finland. After the sinking of the cruiser Moskva, the next military success of the Armed Forces of Ukraine was an effective counteroffensive

operation in the northeast on 6-12 September 2022, which resulted in the liberation of almost the entire territory of the Kharkiv region. It should be added that the Russian authorities have not provided any official explanation for their defeat on this sector of the front. Moscow's silence has even caused considerable anger among some pro-war commentators and Russian nationalists on social media. Some have called on President V. Putin to make immediate changes to ensure the final victory in the war (Polityuk & Balmforth, 2022).

Another fact of the failure of the Kremlin's military plans was vividly reflected in an ironic cartoon by P. Brooks published in "The Times" on 14 September (Fig. 19). The image consists of two consecutive scenes: first, V. Putin lights a cannon and orders "Take that Ukraine!", but after the shot, the recoil effect is triggered and the cannon rolls over the Russian president and crushes him to the ground. Later, commenting on his cartoon, P. Brooks said, "The Russians were taking a hammering, as opposed to being the superpower that swallowed Ukraine. Maybe Vladimir Putin still thinks he can do it – you never know what's inside his head. But his invasion was backfiring like a cannon" (The Times, 2022d).

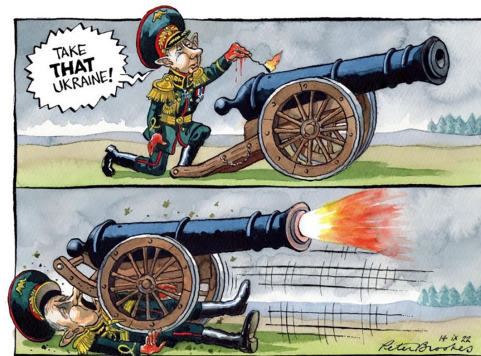


Figure 19. Cartoon by P. Brooks "Take that Ukraine!" ("The Times", 14 September 2022)

Source: R. Kutsyk (2025)

After the successful counteroffensive operation to liberate the Kharkiv region, the military successes of the Ukrainian army did not exhaust. On 8 October, the Security Service of Ukraine conducted a covert special operation that severely damaged the Crimean Bridge. The explosion of a truck filled with 21 tonnes of explosives collapsed two half-sections of the roadway and damaged a railroad track (BBC News Ukraine, 2023). The destruction of the Bridge is of strategic importance to Ukraine, as since the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion, it has been actively used by Russia to transfer military equipment, food and manpower to Crimea and from there to the southern theatre of operations. In addition, the Crimean Bridge has become a formidable ideological tool that Russia actively uses in its propaganda. Its opening in 2018 was considered one of V. Putin's greatest achievements. Back in 2016, the Russian

president said that the construction of the Bridge was a "historic mission" (Horchynska, 2016). Its construction was to solve not only logistical problems, but also to become one of the key factors for the final "unification" of the occupied Crimea with Russia. Therefore, the destruction of the Crimean Bridge is also symbolic for Ukraine. Given the importance of the event, on October 10, a corresponding thematic cartoon by M. Morland was published (Fig. 20). It depicts a long conference table that was heavily damaged by the explosion, as indicated by the smoke columns. V. Putin also fell to the floor from the blast wave. It is interesting that in the cartoon the analogue of the Crimean Bridge is a table. This comparison is not accidental.



Figure 20. Cartoon by P. Brookes "Take that Ukraine!" ("The Times", 14 September 2022)

Source: R. Kutsyk (2025)

On the eve of the full-scale invasion, V. Putin began holding one-on-one meetings with foreign dignitaries at a giant oval table about five meters long. At the same time, the Russian president and the guest were sitting opposite each other at the farthest ends of the table. From the outside, this situation looks quite strange and ridiculous. Among all the meetings held, the most memorable was the visit of E. Macron, who arrived in Moscow on 7 February to prevent a future war between Russia and Ukraine. After five hours of talks, the French president failed to get any public concessions from V. Putin. Although this meeting was not destined to become historic, thanks to the long white table, it quickly turned into an Internet meme. Political experts and journalists speculated that this format of the talks and the table itself were a demonstration of force to "subdue" Macron, or perhaps even a physical expression of disdain. There is also a version that V. Putin tried to avoid contracting COVID-19 in this way (Holmes, 2022). Regardless of the real reason, the table has become another symbol of Russia's "geopolitical game". It is therefore not surprising that the cartoon used it as an analogue for the Crimean Bridge. In concluding the discussion of Russia's military failures and Ukraine's success, reference should be made to M. Morland's cartoon, published in "The Sunday

Times" on 26 February 2023 to mark the anniversary of the full-scale invasion (Fig. 21). It depicts Putin in a Soviet military uniform, keeping a bear on a chain, striking it with a baton and forcing it to perform a "victory dance". However, as you can see from the story and the crossed-out days of the calendar on the wall, the animal fails to complete it successfully.



Figure 21. Cartoon by M. Morland "The victory dance" ("The Sunday Times", 26 February 2023)

Source: R. Kutsyk (2025)

It is worth noting that the image of the bear in the cartoon has a symbolic meaning, since in history and culture, its image is most often used as an allegory for the Russia. In Western European discourse, it is associated with savagery, insatiability, backwardness, etc. However, in Russia itself, such a zoomorphic allegory has taken on a positive connotation. The image of the bear is perceived by Russians as a manifestation of strength, durability and indestructibility. Moreover, today this animal is the main symbol of United Russia, which is the dominant political force. Therefore, it can be concluded that the story of M. Morland's cartoon best reflects the fact that Russia's strategic military objectives, which it planned to implement through armed aggression, have failed.

The analysis of British political cartoons reveals that the failure of Russia's "blitzkrieg" strategy and Ukraine's unexpected military successes became a central theme in the visual interpretation of the war. Cartoonists ironically depicted the retreat of Russian troops from Kyiv, the sinking of the cruiser Moskva, Ukrainian counteroffensives, and other events that demonstrated the weakness of Russia's military machine and the collapse of the Kremlin's plans. Through satire, historical allusions, and symbolic imagery – such as Ukrainian farmers, the damaged Crimean Bridge, or the allegory of the Russian "bear" – artists highlighted the contrast between the ambitious rhetoric of the Russian leadership and the actual battlefield outcomes. In this way, the cartoons constructed a narrative of the war in which Russia's initial military superiority did not guarantee success, while Ukraine's resistance emerged as a symbol of unexpected effectiveness and strategic resilience.

Ukrainian refugees and the British government's migration policy

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has triggered one of the largest migration crises since World War II. Millions of Ukrainians were forced to leave their homes and move westward in search of refuge. In the first month of the war alone, more than 3.6 million refugees left Ukraine and went abroad. An additional 6.5 million people were internally displaced (Operational Data Portal, 2022a). In six months, this figure reached an even higher level. Thus, according to a report prepared by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, as of 26 August, the number of Ukrainian refugees exceeded 6.6 million. In total, 11.5 million people have been displaced from Ukraine since 24 February, of whom only about 5 million have returned (Operational Data Portal, 2022b). It is clear that this global crisis has become one of the main topics discussed in the media. Cartoonists have also paid their attention to this problem. The first cartoon in this context was published in "The Times" on 28 February (Fig. 22). It depicts Priti Patel, the British Home Secretary, who, despite the difficult situation and the fire in the house, asks a mother and child an absurd question: "Are you willing to pick fruit?!" Its formulation is no accident. From the first days of the war, some Ukrainian refugees went to the UK. However, it has the most stringent visa requirements among European countries. Therefore, in the early days of the war, only close family members of British citizens could enter the country. This government policy immediately met with sharp criticism. On 26 February, Yvette Cooper, the Shadow Home Secretary, wrote on her Twitter page, "Ukraine is under fire. People are fleeing war. Yet Home Office still applies normal visa restrictions inc salaries, language, close relatives This isn't solidarity w Ukraine, it's immoral. Govt must urgently provide simple sanctuary route to UK for Ukrainians who need our help" (Cooper, 2022a).



Figure 22. Cartoon by M. Morland "I said, are you willing to pick fruit?!" ("The Times", 28 February 2022)
Source: R. Kutsyk (2025)

The political debate was further intensified after the words of Kevin Foster, the Minister of Immigration, who on the same day in a tweet (later deleted) suggested

that Ukrainians apply to come to the UK under the seasonal worker scheme for fruit and vegetable picking (Wheeler *et al.*, 2022). This statement provoked another huge scandal, and therefore became the main reason for the appearance of M. Morland's cartoon. In this regard, the already mentioned Y. Cooper emotionally noted, "My God. People are fleeing war in Europe, the like we haven't seen in generations, in search of swift sanctuary. Yet the immigration minister says the answer is they should put in an application to pick Britain's fruit & veg" (Cooper, 2022b). Despite the criticism, the British government refused to simplify the entry procedure for refugees, arguing that it was a security issue. Home Secretary P. Patel said that visas are crucial to prevent Russian troops and extremists from coming to Britain (Dathan & Zeffman, 2022). In order to somehow address the situation, on 6 March, P. Patel said that she was considering creating a third humanitarian route that would go beyond the existing family and community sponsorship schemes, which allow Ukrainians to enter the UK without having any family ties. However, this statement was denied by B. Johnson, who noted that the new route actually meant the previously announced sponsorship programme (Dathan & Smyth, 2022). This inconsistency and chaotic nature of the British government's actions has increasingly drawn criticism from the media. As a result, on 8 March, "The Times" published a new cartoon (Fig. 23). The picture shows Ukrainian women and children trying to pass through the British humanitarian corridor, which is getting smaller and smaller every time they get closer to the door.



Figure 23. Cartoon by M. Morland "Humanitarian corridor..." ("The Times", 8 March 2022)
Source: R. Kutsyk (2025)

Numerous bureaucratic procedures added to the difficulties of Ukrainian refugees. This issue was most acute in the French city of Calais, which is the closest crossing point across the English Channel from continental Europe to Britain. The geographical location of the city has led to the arrival of hundreds of Ukrainian refugees who were looking for the fastest way to get to the United Kingdom. However, upon their arrival, they faced a major problem: there was no visa centre in

Calais. P. Patel refused to open it here, arguing that it would be used by smugglers and would attract other migrants trying to get to the UK (Dathan *et al.*, 2022). Consequently, hundreds of Ukrainian refugees were told to travel to Paris or Brussels, which are hundreds of kilometres away from Calais, to obtain visas (Easton, 2022). In addition, on 7 March, Home Secretary P. Patel twice stated that she had allegedly established a visa centre on the way to the French port. However, the information provided was not true. No visa centre was established at that time. Such actions of the government caused another round of criticism from various political circles. The next day, the Home Secretary admitted that the statement was false, noting that the plan was only in the works and that the new facility would probably be located in Lille (about 120 km from Calais) (Woodcock, 2022). In response to the events in Calais, a special cartoon by P. Brooks was published in "The Times" on 10 March (Fig. 24).

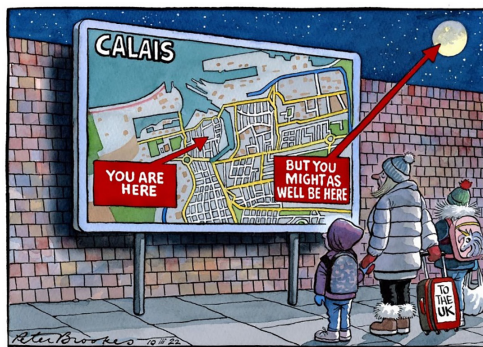


Figure 24. Cartoon by P. Brooks "To the UK. Calais. You are here. But you might as well be here" ("The Times", 10 March 2022)

Source: R. Kutsyk (2025)

The illustration depicts a woman with two children looking at a billboard with a map of the city. Two text explanations are marked on the map, indicating an ambiguous location. The first arrow states that "you are here", i.e., in the city centre near the port, and the second arrow, going beyond the billboard, points to the Moon. With this story, the author of the cartoon, P. Brooks, sarcastically emphasised that Ukrainian refugees would be able to get to the Moon rather than to the new visa office in Lille. Despite public criticism and debate, the British government has never been able to quickly resolve the issue of legal border crossing by Ukrainian refugees.

The analysis cartoons show that the problem of Ukrainian refugees became a significant subject of public debate in the United Kingdom during the first months of the war. Cartoonists critically reflected the British government's cautious and often inconsistent migration policy, drawing attention to strict visa requirements, bureaucratic delays, and the difficulties faced by Ukrainians seeking refuge. Through irony and visual symbolism,

these cartoons emphasised the contradiction between political declarations of support for Ukraine and the practical barriers encountered by refugees. In this way, the cartoons not only reflected the scale of the migration crisis but also contributed to the public debate about the effectiveness and moral responsibility of the British government's migration policy.

Energy and food crisis

The problem of refugees was not the only one that Europe and the world faced after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Fears of a disruption in Russian supplies led to a sharp rise in the price of oil and gas. During the first week, the price of oil rose by 10% to over USD 118 per barrel, which was a record since 2013. On 2 March, gas prices in the UK jumped 38%, more than ten times higher than a year earlier, and reached 463 pence per therm (Gosden, 2022a). On March 5, as Russia intensified its missile bombardment of Ukraine, the price already exceeded 500 pence per therm (Gosden, 2022b). The energy crisis put the British government in a difficult position. On 23 March, Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak was to officially address the public to propose the main ways to resolve the situation. It was the preparation of the spring economic statement that served as grounds for the story of M. Morland's new cartoon published on 14 March (Fig. 25). It depicts an exhausted R. Sunak sitting in front of the fireplace in his house and asking the relevant question: "Have you seen the gas prices?" At the same time, he has a large number of drafts of the spring economic statement next to him, which he burns one by one. The cartoon showed the complexity of the problems faced by the British Chancellor of the Exchequer.



Figure 25. Cartoon by M. Morland "Have you seen the gas prices? Spring statement. Draft 86" ("The Times", 14 March 2022)

Source: R. Kutsyk (2025)

To resolve the situation at least in the oil market, B. Johnson decided to appeal to Saudi Arabia to convince it of the need to increase production. On 16 March, he arrived on an official visit and met with Crown Prince

Mohammed bin Salman. However, this trip caused a wave of criticism from political and public observers. The main reason was systematic human rights violations in Saudi Arabia. In particular, on Saturday, three days before Johnson's arrival, 81 people were executed in the country. All of them were convicted on charges including terrorism and holding "deviant beliefs". Human rights organisations claimed that many of them did not have a fair trial. Moreover, even on the day of Johnson's visit, three men were executed in Saudi Arabia. Sir Keir Starmer, the Leader of the Labour Party, accused the British Prime Minister of simply "going cap in hand from dictator to dictator" (Zeffman *et al.*, 2022). Since the issue of relations with Saudi Arabia caused heated discussions, "The Times" published two thematic cartoons. The first depicts B. Johnson, who, despite the fact that he is drowning in a river of blood, holds a container of fuel and addresses the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, calling him a "lifesaver" (Fig. 26).



Figure 26. Cartoon by M. Morland "You're a lifesaver!" ("The Times", 15 March 2022)

Source: R. Kutsyk (2025)

In another cartoon, the British Prime Minister is represented as a nodding donkey, kneeling with his head bowed before Muhammad bin Salman and his associates, who are holding bloody sabres (Fig. 27).



Figure 27. Cartoon by P. Brookes "The nodding donkey..." ("The Times", 17 March 2022)

Source: R. Kutsyk (2025)

The COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine have dealt a significant blow to the food market. At the end of March, "The Times" reported that according to the Office for National Statistics, inflation in the UK hit a 30-year high with average prices 6.2 percent higher than a year ago (Ellson, 2022). The press noted that due to rising food prices and increasing tariff, British families having low incomes are forced to give up things that were once part of their daily routine, including fresh food (Beal & Gibbons, 2022). A cartoon published by P. Brooks on 26 March was a reaction to the cost-of-living crisis (Fig. 28). It depicts Putin clutching a mother and a small child with bloody hands, pointing a gun barrel at them and asking: "You live. The price? Ukraine...". Obviously, with this story, P. Brooks tried to appeal to the moral feelings of the British people and lay stress on the fact that their economic difficulties cannot be compared to the difficult situation of Ukrainians, who are forced to pay the highest price every day, i.e. their own lives.



Figure 28. Cartoon by P. Brookes "Cost of living crisis... You live. The price? Ukraine..." ("The Times", 26 March 2022)

Source: R. Kutsyk (2025)

Inflation in the UK continued to grow exponentially. In April, it reached a 40-year high of 9% (Nachiappan, 2022). On 16 May, Andrew Bailey, the Governor of the Bank of England, commenting on the situation, publicly stated that the UK is facing an "apocalyptic" rise in food prices. According to him, the main reason for this is Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which has enough food in stock but is unable to export it now. A. Bailey's words about "apocalyptic" inflation caused a lively discussion in the media and criticism of the British government. He was accused of hyperbole, irresponsibility, and an attempt to divert attention from the Bank's efforts to propose effective ways to fight inflation (Smyth *et al.*, 2022). E. Bailey's words and the lively public response inspired P. Brooks to create a cartoon based on biblical motifs (Fig. 29).

It depicts the four horsemen of the apocalypse, who personify the characters from the sixth chapter of the Book of Revelation by John of Patmos in the New Testament. One of the horsemen asks, "What's for dinner?" and

the other replies, "Horse!" These words frighten the horses a lot, as evidenced by their wide-opened eyes. With this story, P. Brooks not only emphasised the issue of rising food prices, but also skilfully brought the public's lively response to the "apocalyptic" statements of the Governor of the Bank of England into focus (Smyth *et al.*, 2022).

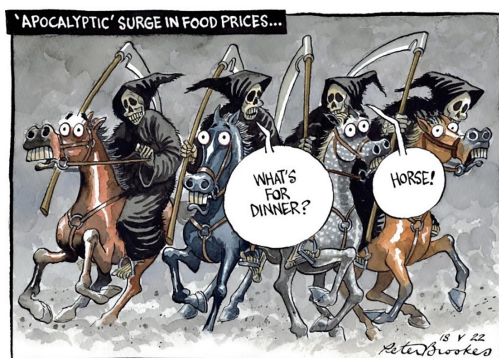


Figure 29. Cartoon by P. Brookes "Apocalyptic surge in food prices... What's for dinner? Horse!" ("The Times", 18 May 2022)

Source: R. Kutsyk (2025)

Thus, the analysis of cartoons shows that the growth of the energy and food crises was interpreted by the artists not only as economic difficulties but also as direct political challenges caused by Russia's war against Ukraine. Through satire, irony, and symbolic imagery, cartoonists depicted rising energy prices, inflation, and the deterioration of living standards, while also criticising controversial steps taken by the British authorities, particularly attempts to establish energy cooperation with authoritarian regimes. Particular attention in the cartoons was given to the moral dimension of the crisis: economic difficulties in the United Kingdom were contrasted with the far more severe consequences of the war for Ukrainians. In this way, visual narratives shaped the perception of the global nature of the consequences of Russian aggression and emphasised the especially dramatic situation of Ukraine, where the issue of the cost of living effectively turned into a matter of life and death.

Discussion

The findings of this study align with broader global trends in the satirical conceptualisation of Russia's full-scale armed aggression against Ukraine, as demonstrated in the works of O. Semotiuk & Y. Hladyr (2025) and L. Morales Domínguez *et al.* (2022). A common feature across all political cartoons is the interpretation of the Russian-Ukrainian war primarily as a global evil. Even when authors attempt to remain neutral, complete impartiality is impossible to achieve, as humour inherently contains a moral evaluation. A clear confirmation of this is the societal stance of the Global South countries. Although on a political level Arab states attempt to maintain the status of geopolitically "detached" observers, an analysis of

their cartoons O.A. Al-Dala'ien *et al.* (2022) demonstrates that the consequences of the war inevitably affect them as well. The food crisis, energy collapse, and the refugee problem emerge as universal themes in visual narratives, convincingly proving the all-encompassing nature of the conflict and projecting it as a global threat.

The analysis of "The Times" and "The Sunday Times" demonstrates that British political cartoons construct the Russian-Ukrainian war as a fundamental clash of civilisational values. Events are consistently portrayed through the dichotomy of "good and evil". The visual construction of the confrontation between V. Putin and V. Zelenskyy serves as the central symbolic axis of the British satirical narrative. The consistent demonisation of the Russian president, whose image has evolved from a self-confident aggressor into a symbol of death and the "family butcher", closely aligns with the strategies of mockery and belittlement identified by M. Yatsymir-ska (2015) and L. Pytlova (2022) in Ukrainian satirical discourse. Interestingly, within the British media landscape itself, both solidarity and a certain variability in image construction can be observed. As the findings of A.V. Karakaş & M. Yılmaz (2023) indicate, a similar personification of responsibility for the war and the visualisation of V. Putin as an isolated and suspicious dictator is also conventional for another British publication – "The Week" magazine. The Russian leader is depicted as an isolated, paranoid dictator (the long table metaphor), who is detached from reality and conceals military failures (such as the sinking of the Moskva cruiser) behind a smokescreen of propaganda. Furthermore, both studies record the active use of the animalistic bear metaphor to demonstrate how the Russian military machine has become "stuck" and failed in Ukraine. At the same time, the results of the present study reveal a distinct divergence in the representation of the war and Ukraine. In "The Week", significantly less attention is paid to the mass atrocities committed by the Russian leadership, and Ukrainians are more often portrayed as helpless victims of a tragedy. Conversely, the artists of "The Times" and "The Sunday Times" articulated the asymmetry of the conflict differently – they made every effort to expose the most heinous war crimes of the Russian president and frequently employed the David and Goliath motif, transforming the Ukrainian people and V. Zelenskyy into an archetype of heroic resistance and moral legitimacy.

The aforementioned narratives starkly contrast with Russian visual propaganda, which depicts Ukraine as a weak, dependent, or disoriented state allegedly used by the West for its own interests, while Russia acts as a "protector-bear" or an "older brother", which is directly aimed at legitimising the aggression and hyperbolising the threat from the "hostile West". As noted by V. Kato-la (2017) and M.I. Drahan (2025), Russian cartoons are characterised by complete congruence with state propaganda media narratives, reproducing the same messages disseminated through television, news outlets, and

social media, including the “demonisation” of Ukraine, the denial of Russian aggression, the romanticisation of the imperial past, and the justification of war crimes under the guise of “protecting Russian speakers”. A similar anti-Western perspective is actively echoed in the media sphere of Russia’s strategic allies. Specifically, S. Zhabotynska & O. Ryzhova (2022) demonstrate in their study of multimodal narratives in the Chinese newspaper “Global Times” that, despite Beijing’s officially declared neutrality, Chinese visual propaganda systematically aligns with Russian ideologemes. The cartoons in this publication completely ignore the humanitarian consequences and Russian war crimes, focusing instead on discrediting the US and NATO expansion as the true culprits of the conflict striving for global hegemony.

It should be particularly noted that a defining feature of the British satirical discourse is its deeply introspective and critical nature regarding the policies of the West itself. While E.K. Koliada *et al.* (2024) show that other Western media frequently used cartoons primarily as an instrument of resistance against external Russian propaganda, “The Times” and “The Sunday Times” actively leveraged the context of the war to critique domestic political failures. The scepticism towards the actions of the allies fully aligns with the conclusions of A.V. Karakaş & M. Yılmaz (2023), who identify a persistent image in the British media of NATO as a passive “lifeguard” refusing to assist non-Alliance members. Notably, cartoonists from both publications articulate the issue of the West being distracted by its own domestic problems amidst the tragedy in Ukraine. However, while in *The Week* this contrast is built predominantly on the critique of American politics (focusing on pandemic disputes in the US or the actions of former President D. Trump), the examined “The Times” and “The Sunday Times” pursued a path of acute national self-criticism. The intertwining of the conflict with the Partygate scandal, delayed aid, and bureaucratic hurdles for refugees illustrates that the war was deeply integrated into the UK’s domestic agenda, and global crises were viewed as direct moral tests for the British government itself.

Summarising the results of the comparative analysis, it can be asserted that the British satirical discourse (exemplified by “The Times” and “The Sunday Times”) occupies a unique niche in the global informational landscape of the Russian-Ukrainian war. In contrast to the propagandistic narratives of autocracies (Russia and China), which construct a distorted reality, and the detached stance of the Global South, British political cartoons perform a complex dual function. On the one hand, they serve as an uncompromising instrument of moral solidarity with Ukraine, articulating the responsibility of the aggressor and heroising the Ukrainian resistance. On the other hand, they remain an indicator of a mature democratic society capable of utilising an international crisis as a mirror for poignant national self-criticism. Thus, visual metaphors do not merely document the political chronicle of the war; they

forge core value orientations, ultimately cementing in the mass consciousness of the Western reader the perception of this conflict as a defining, existential struggle for the future of European democracy.

Conclusions

The analysis demonstrated that Russia’s full-scale armed aggression against Ukraine was comprehensively and multifacetedly covered in British political cartoons. To enhance the impact of the depicted stories, cartoonists employed a wide range of artistic techniques, among which the most prominent were grotesque, parody, irony, sarcasm, hyperbole, personification, and analogies of a political, historical, and biblical nature. The visual narratives primarily centred on Russian President V. Putin as the main culprit of the events. He was assigned a series of dynamic images that evolved as the war unfolded. In the first days of the invasion, he appeared to readers as a “half-naked Rambo” confidently committing an act of aggression. However, with the subsequent increase in war crimes committed by the Russian army, the image of the Russian president took on a pronounced disparaging form: cartoonists emphasised V. Putin’s personal degradation and the loss of basic human qualities. The atrocities in Bucha further reinforced the “demonisation” of his image, where he was compared to Death himself and labelled the “family butcher”. A direct counterpoint to this negative portrayal was the highly positive image of V. Zelenskyy. The readers of “The Times” and “The Sunday Times” saw the Ukrainian president as a “great leader” who courageously confronts Russia’s armed aggression.

It is worth noting that alongside the primary focus on V. Putin’s image, the heroism of Ukraine, and the mass atrocities committed by the Russian army, the cartoonists also extensively highlighted the broader global consequences of the war, particularly the escalating energy and food crises. Furthermore, in their effort to convey the complexity of the ongoing political processes as objectively as possible, the authors did not hesitate to actively critique the West. The most heavily criticised aspects included the lack of decisive action by Western leaders to counter Russia’s aggression, Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s attempts to evade domestic responsibility amid the Partygate scandal, and the British government’s bureaucratic inability to quickly resolve the Ukrainian refugee issue. The analysis of quantitative indicators revealed that despite the significant total number of cartoons published in “The Times” and “The Sunday Times”, the editorial attention to the full-scale invasion decreased sharply over the year. This trend, however, has a logical explanation. First, it reflects a well-documented media phenomenon of attention fatigue, where societal interest in protracted conflicts gradually diminishes over time. Furthermore, it is essential to consider that a political cartoon is a highly concentrated, unique media product rather than a mass-produced news item. Therefore,

its primary value lies not in publication frequency, but in its capacity to succinctly and accurately capture the most pressing and controversial socio-political phenomena.

Considering these factors and the unprecedented density of publications during the first two months of the invasion, it is evident that the Ukrainian issue has never before received such extensive attention in the history of British satirical graphics. Given the intense informational warfare waged by Russia in Europe, this represents a significant informational success. Ukraine emerged in the mass consciousness of the British public not as a geopolitical appendage of the Russian sphere of influence, but as an independent state with a resilient civil society fighting for European democratic values. By firmly establishing Russia as the primary antagonist of modern Europe and framing the conflict through a clear moral dichotomy, the British satirical discourse consolidated a definitive victory for Ukraine within the visual media landscape. Future research should expand the

chronological scope to subsequent years of the conflict to trace the evolution of visual narratives under conditions of a prolonged war and political change in the United Kingdom, conduct comparative analyses between conservative ("The Times") and left-liberal ("The Guardian", "The Independent") British media to assess the impact of editorial ideology on war representation, and examine the reception of political cartoons in digital environments and their interaction with contemporary visual folklore, particularly internet memes.

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«Війна образів»: висвітлення повномасштабної збройної агресії Росії проти України у британській політичній карикатурі (за матеріалами «The Times» та «The Sunday Times»)

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Анотація. Актуальність вивчення політичної карикатури як форми візуальної комунікації зумовлена її здатністю лаконічно відображати суспільно-політичні процеси, формувати громадську думку та впливати на інтерпретацію російсько-української війни. Метою статті був аналіз того, як повномасштабна збройна агресія Росії проти України була репрезентована в британських політичних карикатурах, опублікованих у «The Times» та «The Sunday Times» протягом першого року війни. Методологія дослідження ґрунтувалася на міждисциплінарному підході, що поєднував медіастудії, візуально-аналітичні методи, а також інструменти кількісного та якісного контент-аналізу. Така комбінація відображала специфіку політичної карикатури як візуального інформаційного продукту, що одночасно інтерпретує та конструює суспільне сприйняття. Дослідження продемонструвало, що британські карикатуристи активно використовували сатиру для фреймування конфлікту через чітку моральну дихотомію «добра і зла». Візуальні наративи насамперед зосереджувалися на російському президенті як головному ініціаторі війни, чий образ еволюціонував від самовпевненого агресора до демонізованого символу жорстокості та моральної деградації, особливо після звірств у Бучі. Натомість, використовуючи мотив Давида і Голіафа, український президент послідовно зображувався як архетип героїчного національного спротиву. Карикатуристи активно висвітлювали глобальні наслідки війни (енергетичну та продовольчу кризи) і критикували політичну нерішучість Заходу, внутрішні суперечки у Великій Британії (зокрема скандал Partygate) та бюрократичні провали у вирішенні проблеми біженців. Кількісний аналіз вказав на закономірне зниження частоти публікацій протягом року, що відображає медійний феномен «втоми від теми». Тим не менш, безпрецедентна концентрація візуальних сатиричних матеріалів у перші місяці забезпечила беззаперечну перемогу України в інформаційній «війні образів». Практичне значення цього дослідження полягає в можливості його застосування для вивчення медіадискурсу, візуальної пропаганди та формування міжнародного сприйняття сучасних збройних конфліктів

Ключові слова: російсько-українська війна; британський сатиричний дискурс; політична карикатура; візуальні наративи; візуальна пропаганда; засоби масової інформації; газета



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Regulatory and legal frameworks and standardisation of mechanisms for ensuring the authenticity of electronic documents in the age of generative content

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Abstract. The relevance of the study is conditioned by the growing risks of falsification of digital documents, forgery of electronic signatures, metadata manipulation, and distribution of synthetic content that replaces the content of authentic sources. The purpose of the study was to determine the theoretical foundations for the establishment of a comprehensive system for the protection of electronic documents, combining regulatory, technical, and information and analytical verification mechanisms, in the context of increasing risks of potentially destabilising impacts of artificial intelligence systems. The paper considered the regulatory framework, approaches, and mechanisms for ensuring the authenticity of electronic documents in the context of rapid development of content generated using artificial intelligence systems. The current Ukrainian legislation governing electronic trust services and document management was analysed, including the international standards of eIDAS, ETSI, ISO/IEC, and C2PA, which regulate issues relating to the authentication, integrity, and origin of electronic data. The features of advanced authentication technologies, in particular, qualified electronic signature, electronic seal, blockchain, digital watermarks, cryptographic hashes, and mechanisms for fixing the origin of content, were clarified. The specifics of the influence of generative content on the creation of fake documents, synthetic media, and disinformation campaigns were determined. The paper described the features of information analytics as an effective tool for identifying, evaluating, and minimising risks that are directly related to the use of generative content in electronic documents. It was proved that information and analytical methods allow for multi-level audit of data origin, metadata analysis, identification of signs of automated generation, and forecasting of threats to digital trust systems. It was proposed to consider information analytics as an integrative component of the contemporary electronic document authentication architecture, combining legal, technical, and organisational

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mechanisms for ensuring information protection in the context of digital changes. The practical significance of the study lies in the possibility of using the results to implement a comprehensive approach to data authentication in electronic document management systems. In addition, the proposed approaches to analysing the origin of content, metadata, and features of generative processing allow creating systems for monitoring and auditing electronic documents to detect falsifications, synthetic materials, and manipulative content

Keywords: information protection; qualified electronic signature; metadata; artificial intelligence systems; standardisation; information analytics

■ Introduction

Intensive integration of artificial intelligence technologies in all spheres of public activity determines the need not only for technical control over their work, but also for a high-quality information and analytical assessment of the processes of creating, using, and distributing generative content in electronic documents. In this context, information analytics becomes a key tool for the development of a comprehensive data audit: it provides collection, verification, classification, and interpretation of information about data sources, algorithmic features of generated materials, their compliance with regulatory requirements, and potential risks. In the absence of reliable confirmation of sources, there is a risk that artificial intelligence systems will use biased, false, or copyrighted data without the appropriate consent of the copyright holders, which undermines the integrity and reliability of such systems. As indicated by S. Longpre *et al.* (2024), current practices include extensive use of sources and grouping of data without tracking or verifying their original sources, author's intentions, copyright and licensing status, or basic composition and properties.

M.R. Shoaib *et al.* (2023) pointed out in their paper that advanced artificial intelligence significantly increases the realism of artificially created and forged materials. This leads to a rapid increase in the volume of disinformation, cyber harassment, falsification of digital documents, and large-scale manipulation of public consciousness. Among innovative yet risky technologies, special attention is drawn to generative models, sophisticated machine learning algorithms, and large data processing models that can produce content that is difficult to distinguish from authentic sources. In these circumstances, information analytics becomes critical, because it provides a comprehensive approach to identifying, assessing and minimising the risks associated with the use of AI. Analytical methods allow performing multi-level verification of data reliability, identifying signs of automated generation and manipulative influences, modelling potential threats, and systematically analysing information flows in which fake or modified content is distributed.

The review of contemporary academic research, both in Ukraine and in the international sphere, shows the gradually increasing attention to the issues of authentication of electronic documents, in particular under the influence of artificial intelligence, and the associated risks to authenticity, trust, and information security. The

paper by I. Khomych *et al.* (2025) focused on identifying the features of automated digital content creation to provide a comprehensive assessment of the authenticity of electronic documents during the rapid spread of AI technologies. The researchers emphasise that conventional approaches to recording digital signatures and metadata are not sufficient to counteract the risks of falsification and manipulation of digital data generated by artificial intelligence models. J. Sharma *et al.* (2026) examined new technical approaches for verifying the origin and authenticity of content, in particular, blockchain-based methods and vector similarity for separating AI-generated images from human works, which opens up prospects for digital authentication of multimedia documents. The paper by O. Ege *et al.* (2025) was devoted to the investigation of user aspects and the experience of using electronic signatures, which affects the perception of security and the availability of authentication on the part of end users. The paper highlighted the relationship between security, convenience, and trust in electronic authentication mechanisms.

Contemporary research focuses not only on the technical aspects of electronic data protection, but also on the issues of legal regulation of mechanisms for detecting generative content considering the analysis of metadata, the history of document creation and distribution. The developments of S.V. Hubariev & O.O. Loviak (2022) and A.L. Sviatoshniuk (2023) systematised the legal aspects of the use of electronic signatures, electronic documents, and trust services, identified gaps in current legislation, and interpreted regulatory requirements for the protection of digital authenticity. In these papers, the researchers emphasised the imperfection of legal regulation and the need to adapt Ukrainian norms to international standards in the field of electronic identification and digital trust. Despite this, the issue of integrating information and analytical approaches into the system of legal regulation of the authenticity of electronic documents, and evaluating their effectiveness in countering falsification and manipulation of digital data, remains rather neglected.

The purpose of the study was to investigate the state of regulatory regulation and standardisation of electronic document authentication mechanisms in Ukraine, compare it with international approaches and determine the areas of development in the context of generative

content distribution, and to substantiate the role of information analytics as a key tool for evaluating the effectiveness of these mechanisms. To achieve this goal, the following tasks were defined: to carry out a comparative analysis and to identify the main gaps in the current regulatory framework of Ukraine and international standards for the authentication of electronic documents in the context of the spread of generative technologies; to characterise emerging technologies for ensuring the authenticity of electronic documents; to determine the role and potential of information and analytical tools for detecting fake materials and predicting the risks of their distribution in the digital environment. The scientific originality of the study consists in a comprehensive overview of the characteristics of the current system of regulatory, legal, and technical safeguards for the authenticity of electronic documents, and in the identification of approaches to analysing the origin of content, metadata, and indicators of generative processing.

Materials and Methods

The study used an interdisciplinary approach that combines methods of comparative analysis of laws and regulations, system analysis, content analysis of sources, and scientific generalisation. This methodological combination was conditioned by the complex nature of the problem of ensuring the authenticity of data of electronic documents during the period of increasing risks of exposure to the content of artificial intelligence systems, which requires simultaneous consideration of legal, technical, and information and analytical dimensions. Comparative analysis of laws and regulations was used to compare the national model of electronic authentication regulation in Ukraine with European approaches. The objects of comparison were Ukraine and the European Union as legal systems with varying degrees of integration of digital trust mechanisms and AI regulation. Within the Ukrainian legal framework, the provisions of Law of Ukraine No. 2155-VIII (2017) have been analysed, specifically Article 1 (definition of authentication), Article 18 (legal consequences of the use of a qualified electronic signature), and Article 23 (requirements for trust services). Article 5-7 of the Law of Ukraine No. 851-IV (2003), which provide a legislative justification for the legal force of an electronic document and the conditions for its use as evidence. At EU level, articles 25 and 26 of Regulation (EU) No. 910/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council (2014) have been analysed; these articles set out the principles of the legal equivalence of electronic signatures. The comparison revealed regulatory gaps in regulating the origin and authenticity of AI-generated materials.

The system analysis method was used to structure the digital trust architecture as an integrated model that includes legal mechanisms, technical standards, and information and analytical audit and monitoring tools. This approach defined functional relationships between the components of the authentication system and their

role in ensuring the integrity, irrefutability of authorship and verification of electronic data. Content analysis was used to clarify the content of publications, international standards, and analytical reports that have become the scientific basis for writing a paper. The studies by C.L. Pedersen & T. Ritter (2024), S. Longpre *et al.* (2024) and I. Khomych *et al.* (2025) were analysed. The analysis has enabled the systematisation of current approaches to the verification of digital content and the identification of general risks directly associated with the automated generation of information.

The technical specifications of the Coalition for Content Provenance and Authenticity were considered (2024), which offered a model for cryptographic recording of the origin of digital content, and the ISO/IEC 42001:2023 (2023) standard, which defines the features of risk management, responsibility and transparency of the use of AI systems. The analytical basis of the study was supplemented by data from the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (2023), which records trends in the growth of cyber threats associated with the use of generative technologies. Materials from the Council of Europe (n.d.a; n.d.b) were used as sources of official normative texts. The method of scientific generalisation substantiated approaches to improving the procedures for confirming the origin, integrity, and reliability of electronic documents, considering current risks and threats to information security caused by the use of an artificial intelligence system.

Results and Discussion

Methodology for detecting generative content in electronic documents

In the context of global digital transformation, there is a change in the principles of perception of reality due to the fusion of physical and virtual environments. Humanity has entered a new phase of digitalisation, where the line between the artificial (created with the help of digital technologies) and the authentic (connected with material reality) becomes less noticeable. C.L. Pedersen & T. Ritter (2024) stated that the created pseudo-authenticity is not based on the actual reliability of information, but on its perceptual reality, which is built on the visible connection between the digital entity and the individual, place, and time. This state of affairs forms a new information paradigm, within which truth takes on a relative character, and trust in digital content depends mainly on technical and visual features, and not on its objective compliance with reality. The researchers confirmed that contemporary AI-based systems achieve a high level of digital authenticity, that is, synthetic pseudo-reality is perceived as real and true. This creates new authentication requirements for artefacts, interactions, and data sets associated with or authorised by a person or organisation.

Artificial intelligence systems generate three different forms of results: artefacts (text, images, audio,

and video), interactions, and data sets that cannot be distinguished from “intelligent” information created by humans. In addition, advanced digital technologies can interact with users in such a way that the latter perceive these interactions as communication with real people. This phenomenon is a separate dimension of digital authenticity, which is characterised as “interactions generated by artificial intelligence”, that is, social and communicative processes of reproducing signs of human behaviour using algorithmic and generative technologies. According to C.L. Pedersen & T. Ritter (2024), another component of generative AI is the development of a set of synthetic data that has the same properties as real-world data, but is autonomous, which is united by one characteristic – “to appear real and true”, based on the inability to distinguish between human and machine origin. To form a full-fledged system for determining the origin of data in digital environments, researchers use a number of specialised approaches aimed at ensuring the attributability and traceability of information. These approaches include authentication methods for content and related metadata that are recorded during the creation and dissemination of information; consent and refusal registration mechanisms that allow authors to determine the terms of use of their materials; standardised formats for documenting the origin of data sets; and specialised libraries and registries that aggregate information about data sources and characteristics. The use of these tools helps to give unstructured data attributes, verify their authenticity, and provide navigation in formats suitable for machine interpretation. As noted by S. Longpre *et al.* (2024), none of these approaches alone provides a comprehensive solution to the problem of data origin in artificial intelligence systems, since they mainly focus on verifying the source or reliability of information and do not fully cover such critical aspects as copyright, licensing conditions, confidentiality, and legal regime of data use.

According to A. Farooq & C. de Vreese (2025), in the context of disinformation generated by AI systems, content authenticity is a central category for determining its credibility. According to scientific research by the Coalition for Content Provenance and Authenticity (2024), authenticity is a property of digital content that contains a set of origin and connection data that can be cryptographically verified for forgery. Generative neural networks built on a transformable architecture can create text, visual, and even structured documents similar to the originals. The use of such models for editing or full generation of official documents creates the risk of synthetic falsification, namely, forgery of content while maintaining external signs of authenticity. As a result, there is a threat to electronic document management systems (EDM). As noted in the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (2023), attackers are increasingly using generative models to create documents that mimic corporate contracts, tax returns, or certificates.

European Parliament (2023) prohibits the placement, commissioning, and use of artificial intelligence systems that use subconscious influences aimed at circumventing a person’s conscious control, and purposefully manipulative or deceptive methods, if their use is intended or leads to a significant distortion of the behaviour of an individual or group of persons due to a significant violation of their ability to make informed decisions, resulting in actions that would not have been taken in the absence of the influence of the relevant AI systems, which would have caused them significant harm. To counteract such risks, it is necessary to introduce mechanisms for verifying content by origin that record the history of edits and the source of document creation, for example, using Coalition for Content Provenance and Authenticity (2024) standards or integration with blockchain registries. For example, a digital watermark involves embedding a hidden and unique template or code in content during its creation, which can later be used to verify its authenticity. Blockchain technology offers another layer of security by providing a decentralised and immutable register of content creation and distribution, making it easy to track unauthorised changes. M.R. Shoaib *et al.* (2023) described an approach that uses biometric authentication, which uses unique biological characteristics such as facial recognition patterns, voice prints, or even print rhythms, to verify identity in digital media. However, these methods must balance the need for security with concerns about privacy and the possibility of abuse. Such challenges create the need to create a new digital trust architecture that combines legal, technical, and ethical mechanisms. This is not only about checking electronic signatures, but also about establishing the authenticity of the entire chain of content creation, processing, and publication. Such systems should be based on the principles of transparency, reproducibility, and confirmed origin of data. Despite the fact that conventional mechanisms for protecting electronic documents, in particular, qualified electronic signatures, cryptographic algorithms, certificates of trusted suppliers, remain the foundation of digital security, their effectiveness is gradually decreasing in the face of new threats generated by generative AI systems. Technologies that can create and modify information are becoming more powerful, which significantly complicates the verification of the authenticity of digital materials.

The introduction of more progressive and secure electronic signatures, such as biometric or multi-level signatures that provide maximum security and legal force of documents, will increase the level of protection against unauthorised access, prevent falsification of documents, and improve the legal weight of electronic documents. According to D. Tarasenko (2025), reducing the burden on employees, reducing the likelihood of errors, improving the efficiency of management processes can be achieved by introducing artificial intelligence technologies for automatic classification, processing and redirection

of documents, and for predicting the necessary actions based on data analysis. In particular, creating an ecosystem where data authenticity, consent, confidentiality, legality, and relevance are considered and managed holistically requires a unified data origin structure. In addition, the blockchain is a promising mechanism for creating immutable records of the origin of electronic documents. Registration of the document hash in a decentralised registry provides verified confirmation of its creation and integrity. Changes to the document automatically change the hash, making forgery or unauthorised modification virtually impossible. According to ISO/TC 307:2016 (2016), blockchain solution standards recommend their use in authentication chains, especially in government document management and legal registers. According to scientific research by D. Tarasenko (2025), it is blockchain technologies that can significantly increase the security and transparency of electronic document management, especially when working with important documents and transactions. The technology provides immutability and the ability to track changes in documents, which increases the level of trust in such systems.

Ukrainian legislation and international standards on the regulation of authentication, integrity and origin of electronic data

In Ukraine, the authenticity of electronic documents is ensured primarily through a qualified electronic signature and digital trust services. The Law of Ukraine No. 2155-VIII (2017) defines authentication as “an electronic process that allows verifying the electronic identification of an individual or legal entity and/or the origin and integrity of electronic data”. The Law stipulates that a qualified electronic signature has the same legal validity as a personal signature, and has the presumption of compliance with a handwritten one. It is created based on a qualified certificate and issued by accredited trust centres under the supervision of the National Cybersecurity Agency. Additionally, the law provides for an electronic seal of a legal entity and an electronic time stamp for recording the moment of signing. In addition, the law states that electronic documents with QES cannot be declared invalid only because of the electronic format. Another Law of Ukraine No. 851-IV (2003) details the general requirements for electronic documents (structural details), noting that a document is considered legally significant if there is an electronic signature confirming its authenticity. S.V. Hubariiev & O.O. Loviak (2022) noted that when using an electronic digital signature, a high level of security, data protection, and document authenticity is guaranteed. The research by M.V. Parasiuk (2025) also confirmed that the national legislation establishes the legal status and legal force of an electronic document, but there is no mandatory condition for identifying an electronic document as a means of proof – an electronic signature.

According to S.V. Hubariiev & O.O. Loviak (2022), an electronic digital signature functions as a comprehensive

cryptographic mechanism that combines encryption, hashing, and the use of a public key certificate. Encryption involves applying a special algorithm to an electronic message that converts it into an encoded form and makes it impossible to get acquainted with the content without the appropriate access key. Hashing consists of converting an array of data of any length into a fixed-size bit sequence, which allows quickly comparing data and checking its integrity during signature formation and verification. A public key certificate, in turn, is an electronic document that certifies the connection between the public key and a specific entity, contains information about the issuer of the signature, the validity period of the certificate and its purpose. These elements are implemented as interrelated components of an automated process in the process of integrating an electronic digital signature into electronic document management systems. When creating a document in the EDM, the system generates a hash function of the file, after which the signer imposes a signature using its private key, and the public key along with the certificate is added to the document structure or checked through an external service. For example, in corporate internal document approval systems, signing is carried out through integrated cryptographic modules that automatically check the validity of the certificate in the registry and record the timestamp. If changes are made to the document after signing, the hash value changes, which allows the system to immediately detect integrity violations.

In general, the legal regulation of the authenticity of electronic documents in Ukraine is based on a clearly defined system of electronic identification and trust services, the central element of which is a qualified electronic signature as a legally significant means of confirming the origin, integrity, and authorship of electronic data. National legislation ensures the legal equality of electronic and paper documents, establishes the presumption of QES reliability, and forms a high level of cryptographic protection through encryption, hashing, and key certification mechanisms. Simultaneously, the existing authentication model is primarily focused on confirming the will of the subject, and not on comprehensive verification of the origin and life cycle of digital content. At the international level, the authenticity of electronic documents is ensured by standards and regulations. The Regulation (EU) No. 910/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council (2014) forms uniform rules for qualified electronic trust services, in particular, defines the legal equivalence of a QES with a handwritten signature and creates a single list of trusted providers at the level of the European Union. According to the provisions of the regulations, an improved electronic signature must be uniquely associated with the signatory, provide the possibility of its identification, be created using data for generating an electronic signature that is under the exclusive control of the signatory, and be linked to the signed data in such a way that any further changes can be recorded and identified.

A common feature in the Ukrainian and European approaches is that an electronic signature is considered not as a separate physical object, but as an integral part of an electronic document or transaction, which guarantees the authenticity of the signatory and their will. The essence of an electronic signature is to establish and confirm a person in a digital environment and give their actions legal force. In other words, an electronic signature serves as an element of digital identity, giving the signer a trusted status in digital transactions. As noted by I. Khomych *et al.* (2025), the electronic signature appears as one of the key components of this system: it provides authentication (identification), data integrity (guarantee of document immutability), and non-repudiation (inability to deny its authorship). In particular, through the use of cryptographic methods, an electronic signature guarantees authenticity (the ability to verify the identity of the signer) and the integrity of electronic documents (control of data immutability after signing).

An important initiative to ensure the authenticity and integrity of digital content is the Coalition for Content Provenance and Authenticity (2024), which offers a cryptographically secure chain of origin model that captures information about the creation, editing, and publication of digital materials in the form of metadata that can be verified. This creates a technical basis for distinguishing authentic electronic documents from synthetically generated or manipulated content. It is worth noting that the C2PA (Coalition for Content Provenance and Authenticity) specification has no direct legal force, its implementation is consistent with contemporary regulatory approaches to the responsible use of artificial intelligence and complements international standards in the field of electronic identification and management of AI.

The European Telecommunications Standards Institute (ETSI), the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) cover the formatting and verification of

electronic signatures, seals, and timestamps. For example, ISO/IEC 20248:2022 (2022) define a digital signature scheme in barcodes to verify data, and a number of ISO standards describe digital watermark techniques. The ISO/IEC 20248:2022 (2022) standard is particularly relevant as a tool for institutional risk management related to the use of artificial intelligence systems. The spread of generative models significantly complicates the identification of the origin, integrity, and reliability of electronic documents, which increases the need for formalised mechanisms for controlling the creation, modification, and use of digital content. ISO/IEC 42001:2023 (2023) sets out requirements for the system management of AI application processes, including the definition of responsibility, documentation of decisions, data management and transparency, which creates the organisational basis for the implementation of technical authentication standards. In conjunction with ISO/IEC 20248:2022 (2022), the standard forms a holistic system of regulatory support for the authenticity of electronic documents in accordance with the risks posed by AI systems.

Another important regulation governing mechanisms for the protection of electronic documents is the Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence (Council of Europe, n.d.b), which sets out the principles for the safe implementation of AI – human dignity, transparency, non-discrimination. Also adopted is the European Parliament (2023) Artificial Intelligence Act, which introduces the obligation to label AI content. The legislation on digital services requires platforms to intensively monitor and identify manipulative content. Furthermore, UNESCO and OECD are developing ethical guidelines and calling for international cooperation in the fight against disinformation. Despite the activities of ISO, ETSI, and C2PA, there is no single international standard that would regulate the authentication of content created or modified using artificial intelligence. The available approaches are mostly fragmentary (Table 1).

Table 1. Approaches to content authentication in the context of artificial intelligence development and their application in electronic document management

Approach / Standard	Description	Application in electronic document management
eIDAS	European regulation on the authentication of electronic documents, in particular a qualified electronic signature (QES). Does not cover content created by AI.	Used to verify the authenticity of electronic signatures, but does not consider the possibility of manipulating AI-generated data, which can be a problem in the context of their growth.
ISO/IEC 42001	International standard of the artificial intelligence management system, which sets requirements for risk management, transparency, accountability, and control of the use of AI in organisations. Focused on the institutional level of management of the processes of creating and using AI systems.	Used for developing internal policies regarding the use of generative tools in the preparation of documents, fixing the source of content creation, and managing the risks of synthetic falsification. It does not provide automated recording of the modification history in EDM, but only forms general requirements for risk management.
C2PA	Technical specification that provides for cryptographically secure recording of metadata about the creation, editing, and publication of digital content (provenance data). Provides traceability of the chain of changes and the source of file origin.	Creates a technical basis for labelling content, but does not yet have legal recognition in most countries. Does not address the issue of authenticity in the absence or intentional deletion of metadata, nor does it cover the organisational context of using the document.

Source: Regulation (EU) No. 910/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council (2014), ISO/IEC 42001:2023 (2023), Coalition for Content Provenance and Authenticity (2024)

Such a regulatory gap allows taking comprehensive responsibility for distributing forged documents created with the help of AI. For example, even if the generated content contains false data, there are no direct provisions in the current Ukrainian and European law regarding its labelling or prohibition of distribution without appropriate designations. This creates serious legal risks, as users and organisations cannot be sure of the legal purity of such materials and their responsibility for their use.

Information analytics as an integrative component of the contemporary electronic document audit architecture

Information analytics is gradually becoming the basis for security management in the digital content generation environment, including in electronic document management systems. It is an important component of the electronic document authentication architecture that links technical solutions (cryptography, digital signatures), regulatory requirements, and organisational processes (access policies, auditing, and risk management). In addition, analytics helps to establish the authenticity of content, track the origin of data, and counteract malicious use of generative AI. It is the information and analytical modules in the EDM that perform automated processing of event logs, metadata, and various versions of the document. The system compares timestamps, editing history, approval routes, and digital certificate statuses to identify discrepancies between the declared document creation procedure and actual user actions. For example, if a document was signed with a qualified electronic signature, but previously unauthorised interference or an unregulated version change was recorded, the analytical system generates an increased risk signal. This is consistent with the opinion of N. Zozulya *et al.* (2025), who considered information and analytical activities as the integration of algorithmic monitoring, anomaly analysis, and digital trace assessment into management processes. The researchers suggest that the use of analytical technologies enhances the ability of EDMs to identify the risks of digital content manipulation in a timely manner.

According to the generalisation by T. Kumarage *et al.* (2024), detection systems can analyse the statistical, stylistic, and structural features of a text to determine the probability of its machine origin. Integration of such algorithms into EDM allows evaluating the content of the document along with checking the signature and hash values. If, for example, in a corporate system, internal regulations provide for limited use of generative tools for creating service documents, the analytical module can compare the linguistic characteristics of a new document with the author's previous materials and identify atypical patterns. In this case, authenticity is considered not only as confirmation of the identity of the signatory, but also as compliance of the content with the established policies of the organisation. As noted by O. Fedoruk (2024), contemporary EDMs require integrated

event monitoring mechanisms that allow detecting anomalies in document access, editing, and routing. Analytics modules process event logs, analyse atypical signing time intervals, repetitive operation patterns, or uncharacteristic user activity. The system can automatically record attempts at mass signing of the same type, non-regulatory version changes, or abnormal file movement between structural divisions. In other words, authenticity is evaluated not only through the validity of an electronic signature, but also through the compliance of the subject's behaviour with a typical business process model. As noted by V. Savchuk & V. Derii (2023), analytical mechanisms not only record events and technical parameters of documents, but also form an information basis for risk assessment, monitoring compliance with procedures, and ensuring the reliability of management decisions. D. Liudvenko *et al.* (2023) emphasised that the information security of EDM should be based on the principles of comprehensive control of the document life cycle. Analytics allows tracking the origin of data by comparing versions, creation times, software tools used, and changes in the file structure. If, for example, a service document passes the approval procedure, the analytical system analyses the logic of the sequence of actions. If a sequence break or misalignment of timestamps is detected, a risk signal is generated that allows reconstructing the context of document creation and determine whether a hidden modification occurred before the final signing.

According to the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (2023), there is an increase in cases of using generative models to create fake business documents and phishing materials. In such circumstances, only formal verification of the electronic signature does not guarantee the accuracy of the document content. Analytics allows performing correlation analysis of user behaviour, signing frequency, atypical time intervals, or mass operations of the same type, which may indicate automated or malicious use of credentials. These risks are confirmed by the results of the study by J. Zhou *et al.* (2023). The researchers prove that synthetic content created by contemporary generative models is characterised by a high level of logical consistency and stylistic plausibility, which significantly complicates its identification as automatically generated. However, algorithmic detection systems show limited stability in the case of adaptive models, while human confidence assessment often depends on cognitive biases and the context of perception. P. Perapu (2025) suggests that contemporary analytical technologies use machine learning and behavioural analysis to collect and correlate data from various sources to detect anomalies and threats in a timely manner. Such tools allow correlating data with various security systems and cloud services to detect complex attacks, and speed up the localisation of threats by detecting atypical user behaviour and changes in traffic. In addition, according to the researcher, information and

analytical technologies control complex document transfer routes, data duplication, or attempts to export files without authorisation through integration interfaces.

In addition, information analytics combines artificial intelligence, digital expertise, and other tools to verify the authenticity of content. According to T. Kumarage *et al.* (2024), analytical platforms use machine learning algorithms to distinguish AI-generated text from human text. Such systems detect characteristic patterns, inaccuracies, or biases in AI and can estimate the probability of content generation by artificial intelligence. In general, analytical products combine multi-level analysis of visual, audio, and file features to create detailed reports with evidence of content manipulation. Combining these methods with the use of blockchain trails, digital signatures, and a well-established audit procedure can significantly reduce the risks of fraud. Thus, information analytics in audit systems of electronic documents acts as an integrative component that combines legal requirements, technical means of protection and procedural control mechanisms. Its application allows comprehensively assessing not only the formal validity of an electronic signature, but also the context of creating, processing, and using a document. The analysis of behavioural, structural, and content characteristics of digital objects ensures timely detection of anomalies and potential risks of falsification.

The results of the study showed that the conventional model of ensuring the authenticity of electronic documents, which is based mainly on the use of qualified electronic signatures, cryptographic hashing and key certification, in the context of the spread of generative artificial intelligence systems, is insufficient to comprehensively counteract modern forms of falsification of digital content. In contrast to the classical paradigm focused on confirming the will of the subject and the integrity of the document, the approach proposed in the study provided for the integration of the information and analytical component as an independent level of verification. The conclusions obtained are partially consistent with I. Khomych *et al.* (2025), who viewed an electronic signature as an element of digital identity and emphasised its fundamental role in building trust in electronic transactions. The researchers emphasised that cryptographic mechanisms guarantee the authenticity of the signer and the integrity of the document. The researchers focused mainly on the legal and technical aspects of electronic signature as an identification tool, while the problem of analysing synthetic content created by AI remained out of consideration. The results of this study expand their best practices, as they demonstrate the need to supplement cryptographic verification with analytical procedures for detecting signs of automated generation.

The problem of changing the nature of authenticity in the context of the new phase of business digitalisation was conceptually explored by C.L. Pedersen & T. Ritter (2024). The researchers argued that in the fifth

phase of digitalisation, authenticity is increasingly determined by perceptual characteristics, rather than actual compliance with reality. The main provisions of their scientific research confirm the results obtained in the study, according to which generative models create content with a high level of "pseudo-authenticity", which makes it difficult to distinguish it from the original sources. Of particular significance is the study by S. Longpre *et al.* (2024), in which the researchers identified a systemic crisis regarding the authenticity, consent, and provenance of data in the field of AI. They argued that the lack of a transparent mechanism for recording, storing, and verifying information about the origin of a digital object undermines confidence in the results of algorithmic processing. The results of the study are consistent with the opinion of the authors, specify it, and also prove the feasibility of implementing mechanisms for fixing the chain of document creation and editing as a mandatory element of EDM.

The technical aspects of confirming the origin of digital content were developed in detail by the Coalition for Content Provenance and Authenticity (2024), which proposed a specification for a cryptographically secure metadata chain. It was established that the proposed standard forms an important technological basis for documenting the history of content creation. However, unlike C2PA, where the emphasis is mainly on technical implementation, this paper proves the need for regulatory integration of such mechanisms, since without legal recognition, data on the origin of a digital object, the conditions for its creation, authorship, time parameters, and the history of modifications do not acquire proper evidentiary value. A similar conceptual approach to the representation of secure generative AI was proposed by J. Collomosse & A. Parsons (2024), who formulated a model of the three pillars – origin, transparency, and fairness. The results obtained confirmed the importance of these components, but supplemented them with an element of information analytics as a system integrator between legal and technical components. Questions of algorithmic detection of AI-generated text were systematised by T. Kumarage *et al.* (2024), who reviewed methods for detecting and attributing machine-generated content. Their results indicate the limited stability of modern detectors in the case of adaptive generation models. This confirms the thesis of the current study that it is impossible to rely solely on technical detection as a universal authentication tool. The technical side of the problem of synthetic media was analysed by Y. Mirsky & W. Lee (2021), who proved the continuous improvement of deepfake technologies and the complexity of their reliable detection. The results obtained confirm their opinion on the escalation of the technological confrontation between generation and detection. A report by the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (2023) showed an increase in the number of attacks using generative models to create fake documents and phishing materials. These data confirmed

the empirical validity of the study's conclusions about the need to move from a reactive to a preventive approach in the field of authentication.

Thus, contemporary research mostly considers the problem either from the technical or legal side. But the results of this study consist in the synthesis of these approaches through the inclusion of information analytics as an integrative component of the system for ensuring the authenticity of electronic documents. The proposed model allows moving from fragmented solutions to a comprehensive risk management system that considers legal norms, technical standards, and algorithmic mechanisms for detecting synthetic content.

■ Conclusions

In the context of the rapid spread of generative content created by artificial intelligence systems, the issue of ensuring the authenticity and reliability of electronic documents is becoming of strategic importance. Given the growing risk of falsified documents, forged electronic signatures, and synthetic text and graphic materials, several advanced technological solutions are used in the current practice, which form the basis of digital trust. The electronic signature remains a key tool for verifying the authenticity of documents in a digital environment. The use of cryptographic algorithms based on the public key ensures the integrity, inevitability, and legal significance of electronic documents. Ukrainian legislation on the authenticity of electronic documents is based on a combination of QES and trust services, which corresponds to EU approaches. However, insufficient regulation of the legal aspects of the use of generative technologies and the lack of unified technical standards for digital authentication create significant risks for national security, personal data protection, and the functioning of electronic document management. The growing number of cases of using generative AI for destructive purposes, such as creating fake materials or imposing fake electronic signatures, requires the urgent introduction of comprehensive legal, technical, and ethical control mechanisms. Solving this problem is a key factor in building trust in digital communications, ensuring cybersecurity, and protecting the information space as a whole.

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Information and analytical support becomes a key component of monitoring the work of dangerous and potentially risky AI technologies, as it provides an opportunity to form transparent mechanisms for monitoring, auditing, forecasting, and making managerial decisions. Thus, the integration of information analytics with the processes of evaluating and regulating artificial intelligence is a necessary condition for ensuring information security, the reliability of electronic documents, and the stability of society to manipulative influences. The development of generative AI puts forward new requirements: countries around the world, including Ukraine, are guided by global standards for labelling and verifying content. That is why it is advisable to strengthen participation in international initiatives, such as the Council of Europe, International Organization for Standardization, International Electrotechnical Commission, Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, in order to update the national regulatory framework in a timely manner in accordance with global trends.

Thus, ensuring the authenticity of electronic documents in the era of generative content should be based on an integrated approach that combines reliable legal norms, technical standards, and adaptive verification mechanisms. The introduction of QES, electronic timestamps, and blockchain, combined with the harmonisation of national legislation and international acts, creates the basis for maintaining trust in digital processes and effectively countering information manipulation in the age of artificial intelligence. Future research will focus on developing a methodology for the automated verification of the origin and authenticity of generative content, and on exploring the potential of AI for detecting forged or synthetic documents.

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Нормативно-правове регулювання та стандартизація механізмів забезпечення автентичності електронних документів в епоху генеративного контенту

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Анотація. Актуальність дослідження зумовлена зростанням ризиків фальсифікації цифрових документів, підроблення електронних підписів, маніпуляції метаданими та поширення синтетичного контенту, який підміняє зміст автентичних джерел. Метою дослідження було визначення теоретичних засад формування комплексної системи захисту електронних документів, що поєднує нормативно-правові, технічні та інформаційно-аналітичні механізми верифікації, в умовах зростання ризиків потенційно дестабілізуючих впливів систем штучного інтелекту. У статті розглянуто нормативно-правові засади, підходи та механізми забезпечення автентичності електронних документів в умовах стрімкого розвитку контенту, який генерують за допомогою систем штучного інтелекту. Було проаналізовано чинне законодавство України у сфері електронних довірчих послуг та документообігу, а також міжнародні стандарти eIDAS, ETSI, ISO/IEC, C2PA, які регулюють питання автентифікації, цілісності та походження електронних даних. З'ясовано особливості сучасних технологій автентифікації, зокрема кваліфікованого електронного підпису, електронної печатки, блокчейну, цифрових водяних знаків, криптографічних хешів і механізмів фіксації походження контенту. Визначено специфіку впливу генеративного контенту на створення фейкових документів, синтетичних медіа та дезінформаційних кампаній. Схарактеризовано особливості інформаційної аналітики як ефективного інструменту виявлення, оцінювання та мінімізації ризиків, які безпосередньо пов'язані з використанням генеративного контенту в електронних документах. Обґрунтовано, що інформаційно-аналітичні методи дозволяють здійснювати багаторівневий аудит походження даних, аналіз метаданих, ідентифікацію ознак автоматизованої генерації та прогнозування загроз для систем цифрової довіри. Запропоновано розглядати інформаційну аналітику як інтегративний компонент сучасної архітектури автентифікації електронних документів, що поєднує правові, технічні та організаційні механізми забезпечення захисту інформації в умовах цифрових змін. Практичне значення дослідження полягає в можливості використання результатів для впровадження комплексного підходу до автентифікації даних у системах електронного документообігу. Крім того, запропоновані підходи до аналізу походження контенту, метаданих і ознак генеративної обробки уможливають створення систем моніторингу та аудиту електронних документів з метою виявлення фальсифікацій, синтетичних матеріалів і маніпулятивного контенту.

Ключові слова: захист інформації; кваліфікований електронний підпис; метадані; системи штучного інтелекту; стандартизація; інформаційна аналітика



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Documenting and archiving materials on the development of kickboxing in Ukraine: The source base of periodicals from the late 20th to early 21st century

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Abstract. The aim of the paper was to establish the source potential of national, regional, and specialised press in documenting the development of kickboxing in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The research methodology combined content analysis of periodicals, historical-chronological and comparative methods, as well as source criticism and analysis of the serial completeness of archival holdings to assess the representativeness of the source base. As a result, it was established that the central press fulfilled a normative-legitimising function, documenting kickboxing primarily in the format of nationally significant events and standardising its description through reportage genres. The research determined that these publications ensured systematic documentary recording of sporting events by regularly reproducing dates and venues of competitions, the quantitative and personal composition of participants, and their organisational and federative affiliation. While the 2000s saw a shift towards institutionally organised coverage using statistical parameters, chronological logic, and recognised disciplinary nomenclature, content analysis of materials from the late 1980s to the mid-1990s revealed fragmented coverage, genre instability, and terminological inconsistency in references. The development of sections, club activities, coaches' biographies, and popular participation in events have all been documented by regional and district press, which has been shown to be the primary source of information about local sports infrastructure. It is shown that specialised sports periodicals and federative protocol materials enabled the verification of newspaper reports and enhanced the source accuracy of reconstructions. The conclusions substantiate the expediency of a comprehensive use of periodicals from different levels for reconstructing the history of kickboxing. The practical significance of the research results lies in their potential use by libraries and archives at national and regional levels for archival description, identifying gaps in newspaper/magazine runs, and determining priorities for digitising sports periodicals related to the development of kickboxing in Ukraine

Keywords: source studies; rubric; digitisation; reportage; journalism

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Introduction

The relevance of this study was determined by the fact that periodicals from the late 20th to early 21st centuries preserved a body of “everyday” yet publicly legitimised evidence concerning the formation of kickboxing in Ukraine, thus acting not only as an information channel but also as a documentary environment for recording socio-communicative processes in sport. Newspaper and magazine publications specifically reproduced how sporting practices gained public visibility, how media representations of the sport’s “normativity” were constructed, and by what descriptive tools (genres, rubrication, statistical formulas) the sport was integrated into the broader public agenda. In addition to the need to “locate references”, there was also a need to ensure that periodicals were treated as scholarly sources with clear protocols for selection, evaluation, and archival documentation due to the physical vulnerability of newsprint, the uneven preservation of complete collections, and the incomplete nature of digital access. The issue of sports magazine loss was chiefly associated with the failure to deposit publications in archive and library collections at the time of their issuance, precisely when the foundational layer of national documented memory was being established. Local newspapers with low circulation, club bulletins, and ephemeral sports supplements exhibited editorial instability, interruptions in serialisation, inadequate adherence to required copy deposit requirements, and poor institutional communication between publishers and depositories. Thus, deficiencies in the source material arose not from arbitrary losses over time, but from the lack of primary acquisition records – materials were excluded from collections, failed to obtain inventory status, were not indexed, and consequently remained inaccessible for future retrieval and source verification. O. Veremchuk & O. Postelzhuk (2025) contended that in circumstances of technological instability, digitalisation need to be seen primarily as a means of preserving national memory, rather than just as a kind of technical modernisation. The researchers asserted that the enduring preservation of magazines as a serial resource is unfeasible without standardisation and institutional coordination, cautioning against the potential fragmentation of digital collections in the lack of a cohesive repository architecture. L. Greenberg (2023) analysed the special character of wartime dangers, suggesting that the risks of loss encompass both physical and organisational dimensions due to interrupted acquisition and exchange chains. The author noted that while quick fixes are prioritised, the “randomness” of preservation is made worse by differences in resources among institutions, making some categories – like sports publications – less accessible. According to R.L. Savchuk & O.V. Figlevskyj (2022), the local newspaper serves as a chronicler of sports infrastructure and community identity, highlighting the significance of localised content. They demonstrated how local media record micro-historical information, such as names, dates, and toponyms, that are necessary

for a thorough reconstruction of sports history through a focused selection of genres.

By studying the history of professional standards and technical practices, P. Lokshyn *et al.* (2024) investigated the development of sports journalism, considering magazines as a communication tool that affected the degree of public representation of sports issues. The researchers highlighted the difficulties in standardising journalistic techniques and the resource constraints faced by editorial offices by establishing a correlation between the calibre of sports coverage and the level of institutional maturity within the media industry. A critical viewpoint on the “scanning for scanning’s sake” approach was presented by O.V. Shevchenko & V.G. Sprynsyan (2022), who proposed that digital copies of newspapers are an essential component of cultural memory rather than just an additional technological format. The authors defended the need to preserve a digital document’s whole life cycle, emphasising the importance of metadata, creation conditions, and operating context. V. Oryshchuk (2023) shifted the focus of research to the managerial side of digitisation, arguing that in the absence of coordinated political and regulatory frameworks, digital transformation only changed the outward signs of information access inequality without addressing its underlying causes. This created the potential of selective digitisation, in which institutions neglect topic peripheries, often including sports archives, while comprehensive projects only emphasise content that is prioritised. M. Jablonsky & J. Šima (2021) research clarified the methods of structural paper deterioration via chemical oxidation reactions, providing the scientific foundation for newspaper collections’ susceptibility. The critical requirement for quick action to physically preserve printed materials was confirmed by the authors’ analysis of the processes of yellowing/browning and the deterioration of mechanical strength in cellulose fibres. The cumulative negative effects of fluctuating microclimatic conditions on the material durability of paper collections were empirically demonstrated by E. Verticchio *et al.* (2022). The researchers described the preservation of serial publications as a question of careful management of storage conditions by correlating deterioration rates with changes in ambient temperature and humidity. The technical limitations of using digitised periodical collections were analysed by K. Kettunen *et al.* (2022), who established a direct correlation between the quality level of optical character recognition and the completeness of information retrieval. The authors demonstrated that Optical Character Recognition (OCR) errors distort content analysis results, which becomes significant when working with sports publications, where search queries are often based on personal names, toponyms, and numerical data.

In summary, previous research has addressed the digitisation of archives, access policies, the state of sports journalism, and the technical-material risks to preservation; however, it has not sufficiently and

systematically integrated these directions with source analysis of sports periodicals specifically as a serial complex for documenting kickboxing. Consequently, the aim of this article was to conduct an analysis of periodicals from the late 20th to early 21st centuries as a source base for documenting and archiving the development of kickboxing in Ukraine. To achieve this aim, the following tasks were set: to identify the typological groups of periodicals and outline their information regimes; to determine the key preservation risks and substantiate the principles of archival description and digitisation; and to compare the potential of central, regional, and specialised sports press in reconstructing the event-based and infrastructural components of kickboxing's development.

Materials and Methods

In the study, texts from periodical print publications and their digital copies were used, as well as online publications from editorial archives and regional media that reproduced the informational context of documenting kickboxing in the Ukrainian media space of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The empirical corpus consisted of 8 media outlets/publications of various levels and 12 relevant publications/issues from 1987-2018. Specialised sports press was represented by the following sources: "Sportyvna Hazeta" (Issue 47 of "Sportyvna Gazeta", 1987) and the newspaper "Komanda" (Goodbye, "Komanda"? 2017). From national publications, the corpus included "Ukraina Moloda" (Korolov, 2005) and "Uriadovyi Kurier" (In our capital, the blow..., 2015). Regional and local levels were analysed using the examples of the newspapers "Slobidskyi Krai" (Breslavets, 2013) and "Visti" (Pereyaslavets became the champion..., 2018). The online segment encompassed materials published on the portals "Gazeta.ua", including the article Ukrainian woman becomes... (2008), and "PMG.ua", including the article Transcarpathian kickboxers achieved... (2014). Additionally, for verification and comparison with newspaper reports, a federation protocol document was included (Ukrainian Kickboxing Federation, 2018). Separately, outside the main historical corpus (without inclusion in the chronological comparisons of 1987-2018), an example of a current digital news representation was used – "Kamyanske.com.ua" (Bugueva, 2025). The search and formation of the corpus were carried out according to a purposive principle (selection of publications by typological groups) using full-text search with keywords within each selected resource, within the limits of available digital sets. The identification of materials in digital archives and on websites was conducted using a set of keywords and spelling variants: "kickboxing", "full contact", "light contact", "semi-contact", "K-1", as well as combinations with event-related terms such as "championship", "tournament", "cup", "competition", "national team". Inclusion criteria were – the presence of kickboxing as the direct object of the report (event/result/institutional fact/biographical mention in a sports context), the

presence of publication data (date of publication and/or issue number, identification of the publication), which ensured chronological positioning, the possibility of assigning the material to a rubric/thematic block (sport/martial arts, etc.) or the presence of structural markers of a sports news item (name of competition, result, participants). Exclusion criteria were undated texts without reference to a specific issue, materials where kickboxing was mentioned only briefly without factual parameters, as well as reports with unclear source attribution that made correct retrospective comparison impossible. The obtained data were interpreted on the basis of the concepts of documentary communication, as presented in M. McLuhan (1994), and social memory, as developed by J. Assmann (2011). This theoretical framework facilitated the elucidation of the varying "visibility" of kickboxing in the media – how genre forms dictate the nature of sources, and how, via consistent categorisation, local references are transmuted into public history.

Utilising the source research approach, the identification, attribution, and critique of the selected resources were conducted, differentiating between analytically relevant and fragmented references. The first category included publications containing at least two factual blocks (date, location, persons, institutional markers, or result), for example, the material in the publication "Slobidskyi Krai" (Breslavets, 2013). Mentions without verifiable details that did not allow the event to be verified were classified as fragmentary. The selected array of analytically significant publications was subjected to content analysis, which involved coding each unit according to a unified scheme – level of publication (national, specialised, regional, local, online archive), genre (news, report, feature, announcement, interview, review), rubric or thematic block (if present), terminological designations of disciplines or versions, presence of metadata in the text, use of illustrations, and type of event. The historical-chronological method was applied with annual discreteness (refined by the event date from the text if necessary) to construct a sequence of media mentions and record transitions from isolated reports to more regular formats. The comparative method was used to contrast the central press. The comparative method was used to juxtapose national and specialised press ("Uriadovyi Kurier", "Ukraina Moloda", "Sportyvna Hazeta", "Komanda", the national portal Gazeta.ua) with regional/local periodicals ("Slobidskyi Krai", the newspaper "Visti" (Boryspil), the regional portal PMG.ua) in terms of factual density, genre models, and frequency of institutional markers, which allowed for distinguishing events of a national level from locally recorded episodes.

Results

Periodical press as a tool for documenting and institutionalising kickboxing in Ukraine

In the national press, kickboxing was presented in reportage-news formats, where the event was framed

as an official-level occurrence and described through standardised markers (date/venue, competition status, participant composition, outcome), with semantic accents built around the formulas of “achievement” and “national success” (McEnnis, 2021). In terms of social memory, it was the central press that partially transferred reports from the level of situational communicative memory (local tournaments, club news) to a broader layer of public memory, where the recording of events occurred through stable rubrics, standardised genres, and recurring narratives (McLuhan, 1994). The central publications, particularly the official national state press, played a crucial role in kickboxing by presenting events through a “official” discourse in two dimensions: statistical-registrational (results, rankings, geographic participation) and institutional (comments from federation or departmental representatives, competition announcements, and concise information on rules and classifications). For example, articles from the national daily “Uriadovyi Kurier” (In our capital, the blow..., 2015) that emphasised kickboxing as an official city/state event serve as an example of the centre segment. The format, team makeup, event background, and institutional identifiers (World Association of Kickboxing Organisations (WAKO), etc.) were all described in accordance with public reporting rules. Kickboxing was not consistently covered by the central press, as shown by thematic selection; the sport became well-known during noteworthy events that went beyond the local context, like international victories, publicly significant tournaments, integration into state programmes, and “anniversary” or “demonstration” events. Therefore, the legitimisation and standardisation of the descriptions, rather than the thoroughness of the chronicle, is what gives central periodicals their inherent value. It is within this framework that consistent organisational names, accurate self-designations of disciplines/versions, and formalised references to regulations and ranks are identified. All-Ukrainian periodicals with regular sports sections make up a separate stratum that successfully performed a national function in the advancement of sports communication despite not being a part of the mainstream socio-political press (Sazonova, 2021). Such publications include the newspaper “Ukraina Moloda”, which from the early 1990s systematically published materials on the development of sports in Ukraine, including martial arts. For example, biographical sketches, such as the material on the sporting path of successors to famous champions, recorded a personalised success story (Korolov, 2005). In issues from the mid-2000s, this publication featured individual articles directly dedicated to kickboxing, its disciplines, competitive structure, and national championships, evidencing the gradual inclusion of this sport into the all-Ukrainian media space. The existence of the publication’s open electronic archive enabled a comprehensive selection of publications and the formation of a working corpus of texts for analysing the media

documentation of sports practices; at the same time, the selectivity of digital newspaper collections and editorial priorities, which focused attention on the most popular sports, determined the uneven coverage of kickboxing.

Content analysis of regional materials demonstrated that the local press performed a different function – that of primary recording and local institutional memory. While central publications recorded the presence of kickboxing mainly in the phase of high achievements or resonant events, district and regional newspapers documented the “everyday infrastructure” of its development – the opening of sections, first clubs, coaches’ biographies, local championships, trips to competitions, support from local authorities or sponsors. As noted by J. Assmann (2011), at the level of social memory theory, this corresponds to the preservation of communities’ communicative memory: local publications recorded what did not make it into national media, yet it is precisely from such “small” reports that the reconstruction of the sport’s initial stages in a region is composed. In the archival dimension, the regional press acquires the status of a source with an increased risk of loss (due to low print runs, weak institutional support for preservation, lack of systematic digitisation), which enhances its value and, at the same time, necessitates special practices for its identification and description. Transcarpathia demonstrated the following situation – materials from the local information field recorded both sporting results and organisational steps (the role of federation leaders, contacts, international connections), with the presentation having the character of a “chronicle of events”, where metadata important for the researcher (dates, locations, surnames, club names) is present directly in the text. As an example, one can cite a publication Transcarpathian kickboxers achieved... (2014) from the newspaper “PMG. ua”, which serves as a source containing concentrated information about the performances of Transcarpathian kickboxers and the organisational activity of the regional federation. For a document specialist, the value of such material lies in the fact that it is simultaneously a “news item” and a minimal “protocol” of a sporting event (result, participants, coach, institutional context).

The Kharkiv region, in materials from the regional press, was reflected through reportage formats detailing the structure of competitions (divisions, weight categories, number of teams, local geography of clubs). For example, the regional publication Slobidskyi Krai, in a publication about a tournament near Kharkiv, recorded not only the fact of its holding but also organisational and “statistical” parameters (number of athletes, districts/cities, disciplines such as light-/semi-/full-contact), which makes the material suitable for further comparative analysis of the regional network of sections. From the perspective of historical reconstruction, this means that the regional press often fulfils the function of a “registrar” of structural features of development (participation rates, club map, organisational centres), which central media

did not reproduce systematically. Kyiv region, as an example of a capital region, demonstrates the documentary role of district newspapers in covering specific clubs, coaches, and athletes' participation in championships. Material from the newspaper "Visti" contains personified information (names of athletes, coaches, circumstances of participation, quantitative parameters of competitions), which is a primary element for the district press and one of the key elements for biographical reconstruction and compiling local "registers" of sports personnel (Pereyaslavets became the champion..., 2018). In practice, such detailing confirms the functional specificity of the district newspaper as a basic source for studying microhistory and sports local lore. In conclusion, district and regional newspapers served as the most detailed source regarding the initial stages of development of sections and clubs, which the central press might ignore due to the absence of a "national news angle".

A separate segment of the source base was formed by specialised sports periodicals and departmental communication channels, which provided a different type of documentation – institutionally oriented and standardised in its forms of information presentation. Specialised publications included sports newspapers and magazines which, even without a permanent "kickboxing" rubric, could more systematically reproduce sports terminology, genres of analysis and interviews, and also adhere to standards for naming organisations and tournaments. In

this sense, the very existence and accessibility of serial issues in digital collections (as in the case with the collection of issues of "Sportyvna Hazeta" in the digital periodicals archive) is important (Issue 47 of "Sportyvna Gazeta", 1987). The departmental dimension in the period from the late 2000s to the early 2010s is also represented by resources of sports governance bodies, where kickboxing appears as an object of official communication: news, documents, announcements, correspondence. Although these are predominantly electronic formats, they are a logical continuation of the "departmental press" as a tool for recording decisions and events and confirm the trend towards the institutional consolidation of the sport in official documentation. Furthermore, alongside periodicals, there functioned a body of operational federation documents, which have a "quasi-periodical" character (regularly produced for specific competitions) and can be used to verify newspaper reports: fight pairings, protocols, regulatory materials. As an example, the Ukrainian Kickboxing Federation (2018) document serves as a primary registration source and includes organised data about participants, divisions, combat forms, and programme duration factors. Such records are crucial for confirming the accuracy of periodical publications (names, weight categories, tournament status) in the context of source critique. They also demonstrate the balance between journalistic storytelling and formalised documentation in sports communication (Table 1).

Table 1. Functional typology of periodicals in the system of documenting the history of kickboxing

Level of periodical	Periodicals	Primary function	Type of information for the researcher	Specifics of kickboxing coverage
National (official)	"Uriadovyi Kurier"	Normative-legitimising. Recording an event as a fact of state significance	Official names, dates, national team composition, competition status	Irregularity – only resonant events or successes of national scale
National (specialised)	"Sportyvna Hazeta", "Komanda", "Ukraina Moloda"	Professional-standardising. Formation of professional terminology and chronicles	Statistics, reviews, interviews with experts, rankings	Systematicity – presence of rubrics, tracking dynamics, stabilisation of terminology
Regional (oblast)	"Slobidskyi Krai"	Institutional memory of the region. Recording the local network	"Everyday infrastructure": club openings, sponsors, local tournaments	Detailing – mentions of children's sections and events ignored by the centre
Local (district)	"Visti Newspaper (Boryspil)", "Gazeta.ua"	Personification of history. Communicative memory of the community	Biographical data of athletes, names of first coaches	Microhistory – focus on specific individuals and their path

Source: created by the author

The analysis showed that the national press primarily used normative-legitimising and representational techniques to document kickboxing, selecting events according to their social significance and standardising their descriptions. Although they addressed sports inconsistently, central publications made it easier to document the "official" discourse within statistical and institutional frameworks; as a result, its source value was primarily found in the legitimisation and standardisation of identities, statuses, and regulatory indicators. Local and regional periodicals documented the "everyday infrastructure" of development that sometimes eluded the attention of central authorities, acting as primary records and archives of

local institutional memory. This corpus was supplemented by federation papers and specialised sports periodicals, which enhanced report verification capabilities and integrated journalistic narrative with official event data.

Evolution of thematic content in publications (late 20th – early 21st century)

The corpus of publications from the late 1980s to the mid-1990s was formed amidst the transformation of the media space and the establishment of new sporting practices, which directly influenced the methods of their recording in the periodical press. During this period, kickboxing was only entering the information field

of mass publications and did not have an established status within the system of sports journalism. The absence of stable editorial approaches, unified terminology, and clear genre models led to a heterogeneity in the forms of material presentation. Consequently, reports on kickboxing were placed in various thematic blocks – from sports chronicles to information-entertainment and news rubrics – which determined the specific nature of the early stage of its media documentation (Rauch & Kropyvnytska, 2025). The reasons for such coverage have a documentary studies explanation: in the early period (1991–2000), there was a lack of stable primary official information channels that editorial offices could work with regularly (the unified federal structures were still being formed, calendars were not publicly accessible, and protocols did not circulate as public information). Journalists often lacked established professional terminology: texts contained mixed names of disciplines, unclear descriptions of rules, and the substitution of sporting categories with everyday terms (“brawl”, “skirmish”, “tough fights”, etc.), which reduced source accuracy. The rationale for media selection at that period perpetuated “exoticisation”: the novel contact sport with striking tactics was more readily “marketable” through emotional cues and conflict-oriented storytelling than through tranquil statistics. Unlike the digital representation of the 21st century, where tournaments are clearly structured and tied to a state or memorial context, such as the all-Ukrainian tournament in Kamianske dedicated to the Day of Remembrance of Defenders, in the 1990s, sports journalism did not yet have such established institutional templates for description (Bugueva, 2025). From an archival studies perspective, this period is problematic; even when publications existed, they were often difficult to retrieve subsequently due to weak indexing (lack of stable subject headings, chaotic headlines, inconsistent keywords). This is precisely why serialised sports newspapers, where the likelihood of preserving and repeating thematic sections was higher, as well as the possible retrospective identification of materials through digital collections of issues, gained priority.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, periodicals registered a transition towards the professionalisation of sports coverage and the emergence of features of an institutional narrative (Lokshyn *et al.*, 2024). The changes manifested in three interrelated dimensions: genre stabilisation and regularity – the frequency of reviews, short reports, announcements, and interviews increased, with materials being tied to the competition calendar. In the specialised sports press (or in the “sports pages” of national publications), kickboxing gradually began to be described alongside other disciplines as an institutionally recognised element of the sports field. The role of sports publications, notably the newspaper “Komanda”, which functioned as a regular channel for sports information from 1995 and produced standards for reporting and reviewing, was indicative, generally enhancing the

“documentary quality” of sports communications (accuracy of names, text structure, contextual recording) (Sazonova, 2021). An examination of publications from this era, notably the piece on Vitali Klitschko’s match, reveals a transition towards comprehensive accounts of the international accomplishments of Ukrainian sportsmen, delineating the tournament standing and the circumstances of the contest (Men’s club. Kickboxing..., 2016). Kickboxing was no longer portrayed in the media as “street fighting” or “brutal spectacle”, but rather as a “official sport” with “national teams” and “opportunities for international representation” (Orel *et al.*, 2021). Through concise, results-driven reporting, national digital media began systematically documenting overseas achievements in the 2000s (Ukrainian woman becomes..., 2008). After resolving the issue, the central press started highlighting the events’ organisational and representational features, which were essential for their legitimisation. The media began documenting kickboxing through institutional categories, as demonstrated by publications about tournaments that detailed the organisational framework (international bouts, national teams, markers of federal affiliation) (Vichor, 2007). The texts included names of winners and reward recipients, club location, and numerical factors (participants, teams, and categories). As a result, journalistic content became more in line with the function of a “secondary document”, which is a simplified representation of primary documents. The local press, which provided a “cross-section” of the area’s sports network, demonstrated this tendency. A local magazine article that meticulously described a competition, including dates, venue, teams, disciplines, and winners, serves as an example (First in kickboxing!, 2005).

Within the framework of social memory, institutionalisation appeared as a change from episodic allusions to the methodical recording of events: championships, official competitions, the formation of national teams, and statements from federations produced a cohesive collection of verifiable facts that made it easier to create a chronology based on a comparatively stable sequence of events rather than isolated narratives. At the same time, it is crucial to draw attention to the differences: journals showed an imbalance between the centre and the regions even throughout the institutionalisation phase, and they also ignored the day-to-day activities of clubs (training procedures, staff changes, local cooperation). This emphasises how important it is to combine newspaper pieces with official federation documents (bout sheets, protocols) in order to make it easier to explain and validate media coverage. Interviews with athletes, coaches, and authorities constitute a unique type of sources in magazines. These interviews have two different characteristics: first, they are journalistic texts with inherent subjectivity; second, they function as a written medium for recording “oral history”. The examination of programmatic interviews with P. Orel, President of the National Kickboxing Federation of Ukraine under the

WAKO, substantiated the presence of a coherent public strategy focused on redefining the societal perception of kickboxing. These materials embody not just the personal perspectives of the federation's president but also a comprehensive communicative strategy aimed at legitimising this sport within the post-Soviet societal framework. The argumentation was built on emphasising the coordination and technical complexity of kickboxing, which was presented as a synthesis of classical boxing and karate. Such rhetoric was aimed at attracting educated urban youth and distancing this sport from the criminalised perceptions of martial arts prevalent in the public consciousness of the 1990s (Opanashchuk, 2015).

The mention of specific coaches and educators allows for clarifying the personnel composition of the sport's early centres and reconstructing informal networks of professional interaction. An important element of these narratives is also the appeal to the principles of fair judging: an episode where P. Orel publicly refused to interfere in the outcome of a fight became a component of the symbolic construction of the ethical code of Ukrainian kickboxing and was actively disseminated by the press as confirmation of commitment to the principles of fair play. A separate body of sources reflects the ideological transformation of discourse in the early 21st century, raising the issue of national identity and the role of sport in nation-building processes (Opanashchuk, 2015). P. Orel articulates the transition from the Soviet model of fostering an "international athlete" to the image of the athlete as a bearer of Ukrainian national tradition, appealing to historical parallels with the Cossacks. Such statements indicate that sports periodicals of the early 21st century began to function as an ideological platform within which sport was viewed as a tool for shaping civic and national consciousness. The interviews reproduced what does not make it into the official records: motives for participation, perceptions of "real sport", evaluations of judging, relationships between clubs, and regional competition. In J. Assmann's (2011) terms, this is important material of communicative memory, which periodicals "preserved" for subsequent reading. In conclusion, the evolution of the thematic content of periodicals – from "exoticised" and terminologically unstable mentions to more institutionally and statistically rich publications – reflects the process of kickboxing's establishment as a socially recognised sport. For documentary studies, this is simultaneously a history of changing forms of recording – from an incidental report to a relatively standardised description that can be included in archival complexes and used for reconstruction without significant loss of content.

Problems of preservation and archiving of sports periodicals

The material component of periodicals from the late 20th and early 21st centuries was shaped under conditions of socio-economic and production constraints, which

directly impacted the quality of printed media. Newspaper files from the 1990s were created amidst a shortage of printing resources and instability in the publishing infrastructure, affecting the physical and chemical characteristics of the paper. For the printed production of the so-called "transformation period", typical features were low density and increased porosity of the paper base, instability of printing inks, and high acidity of the material, caused by the use of wood pulp with a high lignin content. It was precisely the presence of lignin and unremoved impurities from the wood raw material that caused accelerated yellowing and darkening of the paper, loss of mechanical strength, brittleness, and fragility of the medium, especially under prolonged exposure to light and elevated temperatures. Consequently, low-quality newsprint falls into the category of materials with the highest rates of physical degradation (Kraševac *et al.*, 2025). From an archival studies perspective, it is important to emphasise that for the history of kickboxing, it is not only the loss of the textual corpus that is crucial but also the degradation of the photographic and illustrative layer (Fig. 1). In addition to documenting physical skills, characteristics, award ceremonies, the spatial elements of sports facilities, and local infrastructure, the photographs (reportage images from tournaments, athlete portraits, posters, club insignia, and occasionally result tables) served to depict communal memory. Newspapers with poor printing quality in the 1990s published images on thin paper at low resolution. Fading, blurring, delamination of the printed layer, and mechanical damage at the publications' folds and binding points were all signs of this medium deterioration.

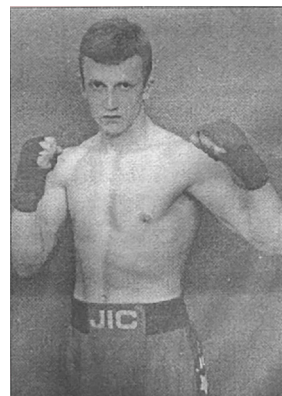


Figure 1. Example of photographic material degradation
Source: First in kickboxing! (2005)

Brittleness was the main issue with degradation mechanics; sheets lost their elasticity, broke easily along folds, crumbled at the edges, and binding/fastening points (staples, adhesive spines, thread) turned into "acceleration zones" for tearing. Essentially, the "minor" informative components vital for sports history were lost – brief remarks, photo captions, results tables, names of winners, dates, and toponyms. As the medium deteriorates,

these elements vanish initially, so directly reducing the repeatability of events from the source. The deterioration of the photographic and pictorial layer, which historically has both an illustrative and documentation purpose in kickboxing, need specific attention. The technical printing peculiarities of the 1990s, specifically the low resolution of the halftone screen and the quality of ink (Fig. 2), create an additional barrier for contemporary

archiving. Such printing defects not only lead to the loss of visual detail but also significantly complicate the process of scanning and Optical Character Recognition (OCR) of accompanying texts and captions. Preservation practices for news media also record that paper brittleness and fragility are precisely key barriers to safe access and digitisation, as preliminary conservation is necessary before reformatting/scanning (Hutchison, 2024).



Figure 2. Example of an image with low printing quality

Source: Men's club. Kickboxing... (2016)

The "environmental" factor is also important; the degradation rate of paper collections increases significantly with temperature and humidity fluctuations, in non-specialist or uncontrolled storage facilities, and in premises lacking preventive microclimate monitoring. Research on risks to paper collections in the context of climatic conditions emphasises that the stability of storage parameters is critical for slowing down degradation (Fouseki *et al.*, 2023). Therefore, when it comes to materials on the history of kickboxing, the problem has two aspects: newspapers as a medium quickly deteriorate, destroying both the "textual layer" and the pictorial elements, which often serve as the only material for identifying early events and figures. The comprehensiveness of collections in national and regional repositories is the subject of the second cluster of vulnerabilities, which is related to the institutional level. The legal deposit has always been the main way for institutions to purchase magazines. The regulatory framework of Ukraine's legal deposit system outlines the parties involved, the types of documents, and the processes by which designated storage institutions can obtain them. By preserving the consistency of purchases, this method attempts to reduce the likelihood that low-circulation magazines will be forgotten by the country. However, an analysis of legal deposit delivery practices in the newspaper industry revealed a different picture: even with a regulatory framework, the actual comprehensiveness of holdings depends on the diligence of editorial offices and publishers as well as the

ability of institutions to enforce oversight (Jensen, 2021). Important to this analysis are the findings of an analytical study conducted by the Book Chamber of Ukraine, which showed a decrease in the number of delivered legal deposit newspapers in 2021 compared to the previous year, along with the presence of undelivered titles. For 256 newspaper titles published in 2020, editorial offices were found to have failed to provide legal deposits; a percentage of these non-deliveries came from different locations (Zhyhun & Ustinnikova, 2022). This directly affects the history of kickboxing: a local newspaper or departmental bulletin (club/federation newsletter) is considered a "fortuitously preserved" source if it was not included in the legal deposit system.

Gaps in holdings, such as incomplete bound volumes, losses in annual sets, missing individual issues, and disruptions in the seriality of publishing, demonstrate the preservation difficulty for sports journals in prestigious library and archive collections (Dubrovina *et al.*, 2024). This indicates a violation of the idea of serial completeness of the record in archival language, which leads to a distortion of event chronology and hinders accurate retrospective content analysis (mention frequency, section heading stability, genre dynamics). Structural factors of the 1990s, including limited print runs, editorial instability, financial volatility, publication closure or re-registration, and insufficiently developed institutional procedures for the transfer of complete sets for permanent preservation, exacerbated the deficiencies

at regional state archives and local libraries. Low-circulation regional publications, district newspapers, municipal bulletins, sports groups' internal printed newsletters, and infrequent club releases were also given analytical attention. These sources often documented kickboxing's "primary infrastructure" (division formation, regional championships, team outings, sponsorship support) that the mainstream media ignored. The third and most perilous aspect of the issue is to digitalisation and accessibility. In practice, the physical degradation of periodicals could be offset by the systematic creation of digital copies (scanning, metadata, long-term digital preservation, access via repositories) (Neshat & Ghasemi, 2023). However, research into the state of digitisation in Ukraine points to a structural obstacle – the absence of a national programme for digitising documentary heritage leads to uncoordinated actions by institutions and the lack of an integrated national digital resource (Shevchenko, 2022). This means that even with individual successful initiatives, the country lacks a unified "entry point" to the digital corpus of periodicals, forcing the user to work with scattered collections from various institutions. It is indicative that the Ukrainian digital landscape was formed through a multitude of parallel resources and digital libraries; relevant overviews mentioned various platforms, including the digital libraries oriented towards the National Library of Ukraine named after V. Vernadsky and individual projects such as the Libraria archive of Ukrainian periodicals.

The existence of several platforms itself is a positive factor, but for the history of kickboxing, the problem lay elsewhere: sports press, especially regional publications, did not fall within scanning priorities, as it was overshadowed by historical publications or documents of cultural and political significance. As a result, a "digital inequality" of source segments is formed – what is preserved physically is not necessarily accessible digitally, and what is accessible digitally does not necessarily represent the sports periphery where the actual formation of the network of sections and tournaments occurred. There is no way to reverse the hazards associated with a lack of systematic digitisation. A layer of social memory pertaining to early kickboxing, including early local championships, club locations, coaching figures, the evolution of symbols, and documentary photographs, is lost when a newspaper file deteriorates, frequently as a result of the acidity of the paper and frequent handling. In the context of social memory, this refers to the destruction of the material underpinnings of collective communicative memory; local stories do not develop into long-lasting cultural forms if their custodians are not preserved in institutionally protected archives and duplicated in digital formats. From the perspective of document studies, what is lost is not just "information", but also the documentary structure, which includes section headings, page layout, and more aspects within the problem that provide context and enable precise interpretation. There is a procedural component to access restrictions: even

when bound volumes are kept in repositories, researchers still have to deal with a number of challenges, such as usage requirements for rare or fragile documents, copying restrictions, the need to work in reading rooms, and the absence of thorough electronic indexes for specific sections. This has an immediate impact on study reproducibility; without full-text search and trustworthy digital copies, content analysis is a laborious process that may result in unintentional exclusions. The analysis shows that, as a historical source for kickboxing, the periodical press from the late 20th to the early 21st centuries is characterised by increased physical media vulnerability because of worse paper quality and unfavourable storage conditions. The ability to attribute early events, personalities, and the local sports infrastructure is limited by the degradation of both the textual and especially the visual components. Incomplete holdings, seriality disruptions, and functional shortcomings in the legal deposit system are all sources of institutional-level hazards. The risk of losing a significant amount of recorded memory is increased by the absence of a coordinated state push for the digitisation of publications, which directly affects how thoroughly the history of kickboxing's development in Ukraine can be recreated.

Discussion

The findings showed that the Ukrainian periodical press's coverage of kickboxing was erratic and dependent on editorial visibility tactics. As a result, the collection of documents did not provide a thorough picture of the sport's development; rather, it only documented moments of increased public attention. Kickboxing was primarily presented by central media as an institutionally acceptable entertainment for "national occasions". As a result, their content is only useful as a record of official markers (competition status, organisational names, regulatory designations); nonetheless, it consistently ignores the routine tasks required in building the regional infrastructure and club network. By recording "minor" facts and local stories, the regional and district newspapers helped to offset this shortcoming. However, this press is the most vulnerable to loss, limited archives, and inadequate digitalisation, making the reconstruction of the early stages of kickboxing expansion dependent on the unpredictable preservation of materials. F. Brissot (2024) using the example of the Parisian "bibliolympiades" programme, illustrated how a library can transform from a passive repository into an active participant in a major sporting event by creating thematic resources and documentation. This initiative, deployed across a network of city libraries from 2022, was distinguished by a high level of organisation and visibility in the public sphere thanks to an extensive programme of events. In the conducted study, the opposite institutional regime was observed; the documentation of kickboxing depended on editorial selection and the random preservation of newspaper files, rather than on a programmatically organised

formation of an archival corpus. This divergence is conditioned by different institutional regimes – whereas in Paris it was a purposeful cultural policy with predictable communication channels, in this case, the documentation was fragmentary, random, and suffered from gaps in serial runs and the weak digital presence of local newspapers. This led to a shift in research focus: unlike an approach oriented towards the curation of cultural content, as in the cited author's case, the key task in the conducted study became the problem of preserving documentary memory, whereby the volume and quality of the empirical material were determined not by programmatic communication, but by the physical condition and actual survival of archival complexes. Research by S. Townsend (2021) demonstrated that the availability of a large and relatively complete digital corpus of the sports press makes “distant reading” and the identification of long-term discursive lines possible. The results of this study showed a unique situation; the analysis was carried out in an environment where access to publications was restricted, thus the main issues were not only interpretation but also representativeness and the verification of true material. There was evidence of a functional distinction between press levels: although regional newspapers provided factual density (dates, locations, clubs, personalities), they were also the most vulnerable to loss. Central publications granted status to events and standardised nominations. This difference was explained by the differing state of the corpuses: in digital archives, conclusions depend to a large extent on the quality of OCR and metadata, whereas in the study of kickboxing, gaps in serial runs and the absence of stable full-text access remained decisive. Consequently, the need to verify newspaper reports with federation documents acquired not a supplementary, but a methodologically essential character.

In their report-atlas of digital newspaper heritage, M.H. Beals & E. Bell (2020) proposed the mapping of collections and metadata as a tool for the critical analysis of digitised periodicals, emphasising that the interpretation of newspaper materials is impossible without understanding the form, provenance, and principles of archive formation. The authors drew attention to access restrictions, licensing barriers, and the heterogeneity of metadata, which necessitated the use of a controlled vocabulary for cross-collection comparisons. The conducted study conceptually aligned with this logic in the sphere of source criticism, since without considering the “form of recording” – rubrication, genre models, and the status of the publication – it is impossible to correctly reconstruct the chronology of events. At the same time, a difference was observed between the results: whereas the authors' research focused analytically on digital databases and issues of their interoperability, this study was dominated by analogue newspaper files, marked by the physical degradation of the medium and the absence of a unified digital access environment. Consequently, the interpretative lens shifted – risks were localised

not in the hidden decisions of the digitisation process, but in the actual loss of individual issues and the disappearance of basic metadata due to the deterioration of paper material. Thus, the divergence in conclusions lay not in the realm of interpretation, but in the realm of the archive's readiness – the digital-metadata level was contrasted with the level of physical preservation and survival of documentary holdings. S. Oberbichler & E. Pfanzelter (2022) emphasised that in digital newspaper collections, the visibility of material is determined by interfaces, search algorithms, and keyword choices, which can produce results that are either excessively narrow or noisy. The study of kickboxing empirically confirmed this problem using the material of print holdings – early mentions proved difficult for retrospective searching due to chaotic headlines and unstable terminology, even before the interpretation stage. However, the nature of the limitations in these cases was different – in the digital environment, barriers were shaped by interface decisions and OCR quality, whereas in the conducted study, the determining factors remained the physical absence of digitised corpora and disruptions to serial completeness. Both approaches converged on the necessity of critiquing the tool – digital search mechanisms shaped the sample no less actively than editorial regimes determined the very fact of a report appearing in the print press. At the same time, the final emphases naturally diverged – for digital collections, optimisation entailed improving functionality, interfaces, and the contextualisation of results, whereas for the study of kickboxing, the priority remained the creation of a basic digital layer for the preservation of regional periodicals.

The “Environmental Scan” method, proposed by K. Beelen *et al.* (2023), was aimed at overcoming hidden biases in digital newspaper collections by comparing the available sample with the complete historical landscape of periodical publications, based, for instance, on industry and bibliographic directories. This approach made it possible to distinguish between the “wide scan” level, oriented towards assessing the representativeness of the corpus, and the “deep scan” level, aimed at identifying latent structures and thematic dimensions. The conducted study replicated a similar logic at the empirical level through a functional typology of periodicals – the central press covered events selectively, primarily in the presence of a nation-wide news occasion, whereas regional publications accumulated local institutional memory, which only partially transitioned into the nation-wide media space. The difference lay in the scale of the analytical procedures – the “Environmental Scan” method allowed for the quantitative measurement of representativeness on large digital corpora, whereas in this study it was interpreted through the functional roles of different press levels and the degree of risk regarding their physical loss. This comparison refined the nature of the unevenness in documentation – the visibility of kickboxing was limited not only by editorial selection,

but also by collection factors, particularly gaps in files and the absence of stable digital copies. A. Ben-David *et al.* (2024) proposed a methodological framework for analysing social memory in the social media environment, in which processes of remembering were considered a product of users' everyday digital practices, rather than a result of purposeful institutional preservation policy. The authors showed that memory in the digital space functioned as a dynamic and unstable process, dependent on platform algorithms, linguistic patterns, and the temporal logic of online communication, where specific narratives gained visibility through repetition and algorithmic amplification. The methodology combined macro-analysis of thematic structures with micro-analysis of the linguistic and communicative characteristics of content, allowing for the identification of persistent patterns in the representation of the past. The conducted study on kickboxing conceptually intersected with this logic regarding the analysis of memory visibility mechanisms, but relied on a fundamentally different type of source. Whereas in the works analysed by the authors, memory was formed in a digital environment with an excess of traces, in this case the key features were the fragmentation and physical vulnerability of the print periodicals. The difference in results was conditioned by the differing conditions of corpus formation – algorithmically driven circulation of digital content versus the institutionally unstable preservation of serial newspaper files. In conclusion, both approaches highlighted different levels of social memory – the digital-communicative and the documentary-archival – which allowed for a more precise understanding of the nature of the uneven visibility of the past. The obtained results demonstrated that the documentation of kickboxing in the Ukrainian periodical press was shaped under the influence of editorial, institutional, and material factors, which led to an uneven visibility of this sport in the public sphere. A comparison with contemporary approaches to the analysis of digital archives and social memory revealed that the key limitations in the Ukrainian context arose not at the level of interpretation or tools, but at the stage of preserving and forming the very body of sources. The central press facilitated the legitimisation and standardisation of descriptions, whilst regional media documented the foundational infrastructure of development but were the most susceptible to extinction. Thus, it was determined that recreating the history of kickboxing necessitates the integration of magazines from many sources with official records and the comprehensive digitalisation of local newspapers as a requirement for subsequent analytical study.

■ Conclusions

The findings showed that periodicals from the late 20th and early 21st centuries were an important source for tracking the development of kickboxing, but because of editorial decisions and the differing prominence of

publications in public discourse, they formed an inconsistent corpus of sources. The major newspapers chose which events to cover, gave them social significance, and created the interpretive framework for comprehending athletic achievements. As a result, the national press primarily carried out normative-legitimising and representational functions. Primary sources were the best suitable for reconstructing the "official" tale of kickboxing history from a source-study perspective since they recorded institutional markers, agreed-upon group and tournament names, and standardised reporting forms. Concurrently, it was found that the sport obtained "visibility" in national media mostly during significant national news events. As a result, the central press historically reflected peak and noteworthy occasions rather than the regular dynamics of the sport's development. An analysis of regional and district journals revealed a different method of documentation: local media made it easier for communities' institutional memory to be initially recorded and preserved. The beginning of sections, club activities, coaching biographies, local championships, team outings, and grassroots support were all meticulously documented here, making the regional newspaper essential for recreating the early stages of development. Local texts often had significant metadata, including dates, toponyms, personal names, club names, disciplines, and weight categories, which were inconsistently reflected in central reports, as examples from the Zakarpattia, Kharkiv, and Kyiv regions showed. A separate segment of the source base was supplemented by specialised sports periodicals and departmental channels, while federation documents of a quasi-periodical nature ensured the verification of newspaper reports and demonstrated the transition from journalistic narrative to the formalised recording of events. Comparing local newspaper reports with formalised competition documents increased the source reliability of the reconstructions, reduced the risk of erroneous interpretations caused by editorial selection or the loss of seriality, and shifted the analysis from the level of individual texts to the level of a systematic documentary complex. Future studies should concentrate on developing a representative digital corpus of Ukrainian sports magazines, comparing regional kickboxing institutionalisation models, taking into account club networks and the athletes' and coaches' biographical paths, and strengthening the verification base through organised federation documents.

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Документування та архівування матеріалів про розвиток кікбоксингу в Україні: джерельна база періодики кінця XX – початку XXI століття

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Анотація. Метою роботи було встановлення джерельних можливостей загальнонаціональної, регіональної та спеціалізованої преси у документуванні розвитку кікбоксингу наприкінці XX – початку XXI століття. Методологія дослідження поєднувала контент-аналіз періодики, історико-хронологічний та порівняльний методи, а також джерелознавчу критику та аналіз серійної повноти архівних фондів для оцінки репрезентативності джерельної бази. У результаті було встановлено, що центральна періодика виконувала нормативно-легітимізаційну функцію, фіксуючи кікбоксинг переважно у форматі подій загальнонаціонального масштабу та стандартизуючи його опис через звітні жанри. У ході дослідження встановлено, що зазначені публікації забезпечували системну документальну фіксацію спортивних подій шляхом регулярного відтворення дат і місць проведення змагань, кількісного та персонального складу учасників, а також їх організаційно-федеративної належності. Контент-аналіз матеріалів кінця 1980-х – середини 1990-х років засвідчив фрагментарність, жанрову нестабільність і термінологічну невпорядкованість згадок, тоді як у 2000-х роках простежувався перехід до інституційно структурованого висвітлення з використанням статистичних параметрів, календарної логіки та усталених назв дисциплін. Доведено, що регіональна та районна преса виконувала функцію первинної фіксації локальної спортивної інфраструктури, документуючи створення секцій, діяльність клубів, біографії тренерів і масовість змагань. Показано, що спеціалізована спортивна періодика та федеративні протокольні матеріали забезпечували можливість верифікації газетних повідомлень і підвищували джерельну точність реконструкцій. У висновках обґрунтовано доцільність комплексного використання періодики різних рівнів для відтворення історії кікбоксингу. Практичне значення результатів дослідження полягає в тому, що вони можуть бути використані бібліотеками й архівами на національному та регіональному рівнях для архівного опису, виявлення прогалин у підшивках і визначення пріоритетів оцифрування спортивної періодики, розвитку кікбоксингу в Україні.

Ключові слова: джерелознавство; рубрика; оцифрування; репортаж; журналістика



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Convergent journalism of Ukrainian online media in the context of full-scale wars

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Abstract. The purpose of the study was to determine the specifics of the functioning of convergent journalism of Ukrainian online media and its role in ensuring effective communication in the context of military conflict. The research methodology combined comparative, contextual, and structural functional analysis of open sources, industry monitoring, and survey results. The findings showed that the war accelerated the process of convergence, transforming it from an innovative practice to the normal functioning of the media, while changing the nature of the professional roles of journalists, combining the functions of a reporter, analyst, and multimedia producer. It was found that Telegram became the dominant channel of operational information, YouTube serves as contextualisation and explanation of events, and websites provide archiving and verification of analytical content. The analysis showed that multimedia formats have increased interactivity and audience engagement, while creating mechanisms for cognitive protection against misinformation. It was investigated that professional standards of journalism have undergone adaptation, in particular, a shift from the traditional principle of verification before publication to operational publication with subsequent verification and the use of open source tools to confirm facts. The results of the study showed that convergent journalism of Ukrainian online media takes place to ensure information stability and effective management of public communication during the war. It was proved that the transformation of professional standards and platform differentiation of media created a comprehensive system of interaction between editorial offices and the audience. The practical significance of the results obtained lies in their orientation to editorial teams, media experts, and public communication bodies to improve the effectiveness of information policy and media security in crisis conditions

Keywords: verification; trust level; integration; disinformation; social networks; communication

Introduction

The full-scale war of the Russian Federation against Ukraine has transformed the national media system, actualising convergent journalism as a mechanism for the functioning of online media in the face of an existential threat.

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In the face of constant military risks, information attacks, limited resources, and a growing public demand for operational, reliable, and explanatory information, digital media are forced to simultaneously rebuild editorial processes, professional roles of journalists and communication strategies. Convergence in these conditions takes on social and communication significance, turning into a tool for ensuring information stability, countering disinformation, and supporting public mobilisation. That is why the study of convergent journalism of Ukrainian online media in the context of a full-scale war appears as a scientifically and socially significant problem that requires a comprehensive interdisciplinary understanding.

In scientific studies, the problems of convergent journalism in crisis and conflict contexts were revealed from various analytical standpoints. L. Ngobeni (2024) investigated the impact of multimedia content integration on the effectiveness of news materials and proved that the combination of video, audio, and infographics increased audience accessibility and engagement. The researcher analysed the practices of News24 and SABC (South African Broadcasting Corporation) and showed that multimedia convergence contributed to the development of an immersive narrative, while the dominance of text formats limited the depth of coverage. S. Almakaty (2025) analysed the mechanisms of moderation of disinformation in war conditions and revealed an increase in the effectiveness of hybrid content verification systems that combined artificial intelligence and human expertise. The researcher proved that local adaptation of algorithms and cross-platform fact-checking significantly increased the accuracy of detecting manipulative content. There was an increase in the problem of merging state propaganda with viral organic content, which complicated the process of distinguishing information threats. The study by V. Navumau & O. Matveeva (2025) conceptualised Telegram as “infrastructure in action”, analysing its use by the military, volunteers, and diaspora during the war. The study showed that the platform’s technical affordances provided high-speed communication, coordination, and psychological support in dangerous situations. Moreover, the researchers identified structural risks associated with the spread of disinformation, surveillance, and social polarisation through opaque moderation.

L. Lysenko (2024) analysed the use of user content in military journalism and showed that materials from Telegram and Facebook became a source of operational information from inaccessible territories. The researcher proved that the active involvement of UGC (User-Generated Content) contributed to the democratisation of the media field and increased the speed of information. Moreover, an increase in the risks of unreliability and manipulation was recorded, which actualised the need to develop legal and technological verification standards. Y. Gunawan *et al.* (2023) examined systemic violations of journalists’ rights in armed conflicts and proved that non-compliance with international humanitarian law

was structural rather than accidental. The researchers analysed the gap between the declared international standards for the protection of journalists and the practice of their implementation. It was concluded that the digitalisation of war has increased the vulnerability of journalists, expanding the range of threats from physical violence to cyber attacks. M. Zahoor & N. Sadiq (2021) analysed the impact of digital platforms on the transformation of journalism in conflict regions and proved that social networks have radically changed the structure of communications. The researchers showed that instant dissemination of information and new tools for monitoring events significantly expanded the capabilities of journalists. Moreover, an increase in information noise and a decrease in reliability control were recorded.

The study by A.M. Stancu (2023) analysed the practices of Romanian public television and proved that coverage of the war in Ukraine was a catalyst for the transition to hybrid forms of content. The researcher showed that the combination of professional journalistic narratives with amateur videos and multi-platform distribution of materials contributed to an increase in the speed and authenticity of communication. It was concluded that convergent practices have transformed not only news formats, but also the logic of interaction with the audience. V.V. Georhiievskia *et al.* (2024) analysed the challenges for Ukrainian journalism and media security in the face of full-scale aggression. The researchers classified the main methods of information attacks and established a direct link between disinformation and threats to the physical safety of journalists. The study also analysed national and international legal mechanisms for countering information threats. As a result, the thesis that media security is a component of national security and critical thinking of society was substantiated.

The complex understanding of convergent journalism of Ukrainian online media as an integral social and communication model of functioning in a full-scale war remained insufficiently systematised in the scientific discourse. The purpose of the study was to analyse the features of the functioning of convergent journalism in Ukrainian online media and its role in ensuring effective social communication in crisis conditions. Within the framework of achieving this goal, the task was set to characterise the convergent practices of Ukrainian online media, analyse editorial strategies and organisational transformations, and determine the social and communication function of convergent journalism in a society at war.

Materials and Methods

The methodological design of the study was formed considering the specifics of the study of convergent journalism in a full-scale war and was based on a combination of analytical descriptive, and structural and functional approaches. The time frame of the study covered the period 2022-2025, which corresponded to the phase of active transformation of the media system of Ukraine

under martial law. The methodological tools of the study included comparative analysis, contextual analysis, structural and functional approach, and systematisation method. The material basis of the study consisted of open analytical reports, results of opinion polls and industry monitoring of international and national organisations, which systematically record the parameters of media consumption, the level of trust in news, and structural changes in the media market of Ukraine in the conditions of war. In particular, data from the European Federation of Journalists (2024) was used to characterise general trends in the digital news environment, materials from the Public Broadcasting Company of Ukraine (Suspilne) (2025) were used to outline the characteristics of news consumption by Ukrainian audiences, and the findings of Edelman (2024) – to operationalise the category of trust in the media. To analyse the transformation of the media landscape and the conditions of functioning of editorial offices during the war period, monitoring data from the Institute of Mass Information (IMI) (2024) on the sources of origin of news content and Newsroom (2023) materials were used, which record a decrease in the number of media as a result of a full-scale war. The choice of these sources was determined by their empirical orientation, regularity of publications, and direct relevance to the Ukrainian context, without extrapolating data from other information environments. For certain aspects related to the structure of information consumption by Ukrainian audiences outside the country, materials were used Society for Social Research and Statistical Analyses Ltd. (2023), which allowed considering the transnational dimension of the Ukrainian information space.

Comparative analysis was used to compare the roles of different digital platforms in the structure of convergent journalism. The criteria for this comparison were the level of integration of the platform into editorial processes, the functional purpose of the communication channel, the type of content that prevails, and the nature of interaction with the audience. Within this approach, Telegram (n.d.) was analysed as a news distribution messenger and YouTube (n.d.) as a video platform. Contextual analysis was used to interpret statistical indicators of reach, engagement, and trust, taking into consideration the security and social conditions of war. This allowed considering digital platforms not in isolation, but as elements of the information infrastructure of public sustainability. In this context, attention was paid to international broadcasting as a component of information support, in particular, data from Deutsche Welle (DW) (2024), which were used to substantiate the transnational measurement of media influence.

The structural and functional approach was used to analyse the social and communication function of convergent journalism. Within the framework of this approach, multimedia formats were considered as functional elements of the system that perform the tasks

of operational information, cognitive stabilisation, and maintaining trust. The criteria for comparing formats were communication function, trends and role in the media space. All materials used were analysed within the stated study period without extrapolating the data beyond it. Generalisations were carried out exclusively based on indicators and formulations recorded in the reports, which ensured a correspondence between the research methodology and its analytical part.

Results

Theoretical and conceptual foundations of convergent journalism in crisis conditions

In media studies of the first quarter of the 21st century, convergent journalism is considered as an integrated model of journalistic activity, combining the production, editing and distribution of content within a single digital ecosystem focused on cross-platform information consumption (Su & Su, 2025). In contrast to the early interpretations of the early 2000s, where convergence was interpreted mainly as a technological combination of media platforms (Dwyer, 2010), latest approaches focus on the organisational restructuring of the newsroom, changing the professional roles of journalists, and transforming communication with the audience. In this context, there is a need for a clear theoretical distinction between convergent journalism and multimedia and cross-media models, which are often equated in scientific and journalistic texts. Research emphasised that multimedia concerns forms of content presentation, cross-media – channels of its distribution, while convergence covers the structural integration of technologies, editorial processes and professional roles (Hermida, 2020).

Evolution of approaches to the interpretation of convergent journalism during the 2016-2026 demonstrated a gradual departure from technological determinism. While research prior to 2016 focused on multimedia and digital tools, studies after 2016 increasingly concentrated on the professional and organisational consequences of convergence. In particular, M. Deuze & T. Witschge (2020) considered convergence as a process of transformation of journalistic identity, within which a journalist ceases to be a narrow specialist and acquires the features of a “universal media professional” able to work with various formats and platforms. The development of this logic can be traced in the paper by N. Usher (2018), where convergent journalism was analysed through the prism of procedural integration. The researcher proved that the sign of convergence is not the very fact of a multi-platform presence, but the restructuring of the newsroom in such a way that the production and distribution of content takes place in a single editorial cycle. This has direct practical consequences: shorter publication times, fewer editorial bottlenecks, and faster response times in crisis situations. The normative approach presented in the paper by K. Wahl-Jorgensen & T. Hanitzsch (2019) recorded

a fundamentally new stage in the development of the concept. Convergent journalism is interpreted here as a mandatory standard of professional activity, and not as a development option. In times of war, such normativity becomes important, since media that are not capable of convergent integration are less adaptive to infrastructure disruptions, cyber attacks, and rapid changes in the information environment. Organisational approach, developed by L. Küng (2015), summarised

previous theoretical developments and demonstrated that the result of convergence is the emergence of hybrid newsrooms, in which journalists, data analysts, SMM specialists and editors work within the framework of a common production logic. According to the researchers, such structures demonstrate higher resilience in crisis conditions and better maintain the audience's trust. Approaches to the interpretation of convergent journalism are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Basic approaches to the interpretation of convergent journalism in scientific research

Theoretical focus	Interpretation	Analytical value
Organisational structure	Hybrid newsroom	Shows management implications
Procedural	Integration of production and distribution	Substantiates editorial restructuring
Normative	Convergence as a standard	Records institutionalisation
Editorial board	Unified strategy for creating meaning	Explains content logic
Professional	Transformation of journalistic identity	Explains the change in the role of a journalist

Source: compared by the authors based on L. Küng (2015), N. Usher (2018), K. Wahl-Jorgensen & T. Hanitzsch (2019), A. Hermida (2020), M. Deuze & T. Witschge (2020)

The extended analysis shows that approaches to the interpretation of convergent journalism reflect a consistent theoretical evolution, in which the technological aspect gives way to professional, editorial, and organisational dimensions. There is a normative shift in which convergence ceases to be an innovation and becomes an indicator of the institutional capacity of the media, which in war conditions is directly related to the ability to provide continuous, reliable, and socially significant communication. This theoretical shift directly correlates with empirically fixed practices of functioning of online media in crisis conditions and creates the basis for further analysis of technological, organisational, and content convergence as interrelated mechanisms for ensuring information sustainability.

A full-scale war radically changes the role of journalism, transforming it from a tool for regular information to an element of the infrastructure of public sustainability. Under these conditions, convergent journalism performs a system-forming social and communication function that combines operational information, reducing information uncertainty, countering disinformation, and supporting collective mobilisation. This refers not only to multiplatformism as a technical characteristic, but also about the ability of media to ensure the continuity of communication in the face of threats to the physical, digital, and cognitive security of society. Analytical data from the Reuters Institute Digital News Report for 2023-2024 showed that in countries involved in military or acute security conflicts, there is a sharp increase in audience dependence on media capable of integrating multiple channels of information distribution simultaneously (European Federation of Journalists, 2024). The growth of multichannel consumption directly correlates with the information reserve function. Convergent media that work simultaneously in the web environment, social networks, and instant messengers have a higher

ability to compensate for communication interruptions, blocking individual platforms, or cyber attacks.

The structural element of the social and communication function is countering disinformation. Convergent journalism allows synchronising fact-checking materials, explanatory texts, video messages and short messages in different environments, reducing the "life cycle" of fake messages in the public space (Srisaracam, 2022). Of particular importance is the influence of convergent practices on the level of trust and readiness of the audience for public mobilisation. In times of war, trust in the media is formed primarily through the transparency of sources, contextualisation of events, and availability of explanatory content. Media that systematically use integrated formats (analytical text combined with video, infographics, and live updates) show a 20-25% higher level of trust on the part of the audience compared to those that are limited to monotonous presentation of information (Edelman, 2024). Thus, in military conditions, convergent journalism performs not an auxiliary, but a strategic social and communication function, acting simultaneously as a channel of information, a tool for cognitive protection and a factor in maintaining social sustainability.

Strengthening the social and communication role of convergent journalism is naturally accompanied by a transformation of professional standards and ethical norms. War creates a situation in which the classic balance between speed and accuracy of information becomes critical, since a delay in the spread of news can have security consequences, and a mistake can cause real harm. Journalists in crisis situations are forced to work in the publish-then-verify mode, which formally contradicts traditional standards, but is compensated by transparency, prompt updates, and public correction of errors (Hermida, 2018). In a digital convergent environment, it is the openness of the information verification process that becomes a factor in preserving professional

legitimacy. In parallel, the role of institutional verification mechanisms is increasing. Editors integrated into convergent newsrooms use multi-step verification procedures, including OSINT tools (Open-Source Intelligence), geolocation analysis, and visual content metadata verification (Anter, 2024). This suggests that convergence does not lower standards, but rather encourages their technological evolution.

The ethical dimension of transformation is sharpened in terms of minimising harm. In times of war, journalistic ethics are shifting from abstract neutrality to contextual responsibility. This applies to limiting the publication of data on the movement of troops, the consequences of strikes and the identification of individuals, which may create additional risks for the civilian population or defence structures. Thus, the transformation of professional standards and journalistic ethics in war conditions is not their devaluation. On the contrary, it reflects the adaptation of regulatory principles to the realities of increased information risks, where responsibility, technological verification and transparency become conditions for maintaining the trust and public significance of journalism.

Practical manifestations of convergent journalism in the context of the war in Ukraine

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation in 2022 was a catalyst for accelerated platform integration of Ukrainian online media, transforming their activities into a holistic communication ecosystem. Within this ecosystem, websites, social networks, instant messengers, and video platforms perform complementary functions aimed at ensuring continuous, scalable, and sustainable audience awareness in the face of military risks. This not only involves simply duplicating content, but about the functional distribution of roles between platforms depending on the speed, format, and level of reliability of information. This means that Ukrainians receive information about war, security, and social services simultaneously from several sources and devices adapted to the context of the action: the operational nature of instant messengers, the explanatory capabilities of video and text platforms, and analytical cross-sections on websites.

Telegram (n.d.), which is the leading channel for daily information, became dominant in Ukraine's media space after the start of the full-scale invasion in 2022. For example, 51% of Ukrainians consider Telegram their main source of news, ahead of YouTube (n.d.) (25%) and other social networks or instant messengers as sources of information about current events and security. Among those who subscribe to public news channels, 62% listed Telegram as a platform where they regularly receive news, while YouTube and Facebook (Meta Platforms, Inc., n.d.) were mentioned less frequently (32% and 22%, respectively) (Mazurenko, 2025). This data is consistent with the monitoring of media consumption,

according to which 65% of Ukrainians in 2025 consume news through instant messengers and social networks, despite the fact that the phone is used as a device for accessing news in 91% of cases. In the same sample, Telegram was the main channel among messengers: 94% of messenger users used it to access news, which confirms not only the frequency, but also the dominance of this channel in the information ecosystem (Public Broadcasting Company of Ukraine, 2025). These data point to a shift in information consumption structures: traditional websites, while still a source of systematic information and analytics, play a secondary role in direct access to operational messages that are delivered through more dynamic formats – Telegram channels, Facebook feeds, and YouTube platforms, and quick reminders in instant messengers. This does not mean that websites lose their value completely: they continue to serve as an archive of information enhanced by fact-checking and long-term analytics, but their place in the first row of the information space is shifting in favour of platforms with low time delays in content delivery.

In practical terms, convergent journalism in Ukraine is implemented through a stabilised set of editorial practices that became widespread after 2022. One of them is platform-first distribution, where the initial publication takes place in fast digital environments (Telegram, YouTube Shorts, Facebook), and the website performs the function of an archive, verification, and analytical extension. According to IMI (2024), 40% of the news of Ukrainian online media contained links to publications in social networks or instant messengers, of which 57% of the materials were links to Telegram posts. The second practice is functional differentiation of platforms, in which the same information drive is adapted to different channels depending on temporality and cognitive load. It is worth emphasising that this model of multichannel information has unique security implications for Ukraine in the face of aggression. Despite the fact that Telegram, like other messengers, has restrictions on content control and risks of spreading false information, their decentralised nature ensures continuous access to news even during large-scale cyber attacks, blocking or communication restrictions, which are not always guaranteed by traditional websites or centralised information platforms. This becomes critical during sudden attacks, evacuation alerts, or other emergencies where the speed of information dissemination can affect the safety of citizens. In such circumstances, multimedia content – in particular, short videos, live updates in Telegram channels of state and independent media, video streams from the scene and explanatory videos on YouTube – allows combining pace, context, and emotional presence, which increases the effectiveness of communication. For example, YouTube channels of government agencies and independent journalists become not only a source of information, but also a way to explain complex events, attract the audience to the

situational understanding and context that takes place for the strategy of information sustainability of society.

Platform integration of information channels in Ukraine directly affects the organisational models of online media editorial offices. Under the influence of the long war, these models have undergone changes: from hierarchical structures to more flexible, networked and cross-functional formats of work that can quickly respond to information challenges of war. The problems faced by editorial offices (media closure, loss of staff, the need to adapt messages to different platforms) were recorded by independent monitoring. The monitoring data of the Institute of Mass Information do not contain direct digital indicators of the percentage of media that reduce highly specialised positions, but record personnel and structural challenges, in particular, the closure of a large number of media outlets due to the war. As of May 2023, more than 230 media outlets had ceased operations in Ukraine due to a full-scale invasion, which affected the professional composition of media teams and required a review of roles and functions in those editorial offices that remained active (Newsroom, 2023). IMI's main monitoring reports for 2023-2025 show that transparency of work and compliance with journalism standards in leading Ukrainian online media are gradually increasing. Thus, in 2023, the transparency of Ukrainian online media was approximately 68% (Mashkova, 2024), and in 2024 – already 78% in the top 50 publications (Ukrainian Sociological Portal, 2024), which indicates a systematic adaptation of editorial offices to the requirements of openness and responsibility to the audience. IMI also determines that many editorial decisions, in particular regarding the selection of sources and compliance with standards of balance of opinions, are consistently followed even in difficult conditions of war, which is an indicator of organisational discipline in editorial offices and the ability to maintain professional standards under the pressure of information risks (Barkar, 2025).

Regarding the optimisation of production processes in the media, available external research gives a general idea of the media landscape in Ukraine during the war. For example, USAID/Internews (United States Agency for International Development) analytical reports

2023-2024 show that social networks and instant messengers are becoming dominant sources of news for the majority of the population of Ukraine, which requires editors to quickly adapt content to these platforms, integrate data on audience behaviour and reduce the time cycles of message production. Thus, in 2024, 87% of Ukrainians used a smartphone to consume news and 84% – social networks, while only 30% noted traditional websites (Pushkariova, 2024). These trends have influenced the editorial organisation: content is increasingly being developed as a multimedia module, not just as a text publication, which involves coordinating roles between journalists, designers, videographers, and data analysts. Although IMI does not publish specific percentages of staff changes due to such transformations, the very data on editorial closures and increased transparency indicate structural changes in the organisational culture and editorial boards.

The issue of psychoemotional load of journalists is also recorded in separate reviews: international organisations pay attention to the increased level of professional stress among media professionals in areas of prolonged conflict, in particular in Ukraine. Journalists use internal security and psychological support protocols, and editorial offices rotate tasks and measures to prevent burnout, which becomes an integral part of editorial strategies for increased uncertainty (Sydorenko *et al.*, 2025). Thus, organisational transformations of Ukrainian online media in the context of war are formed as a combination of adaptation to changes in news consumption, integration of multimedia and platform channels and efforts to preserve professional standards. These changes allow editors to maintain functional effectiveness, audience trust, and the ability to respond to the challenges of long-term information stress.

Various multimedia formats – videos, streams, infographics, and interactive materials – perform specific communication functions in the Ukrainian information environment, which was formed in the context of the military conflict. They not only complement text reports, but also in many cases become the main channels for rapid transmission of information, explaining the context of events and forming public opinion (Sosnytskyi, 2025). Multimedia content formats are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Multimedia content formats and their communication role in the military media space of Ukraine

Format	Main communication function	Confirmed trends / role
Telegram	Prompt information	51-52% of Ukrainians read news through Telegram channels
YouTube	Discussion and explanation of content	32-66% of respondents use YouTube as a source of news or video information
Social networks (in general)	Large-scale dissemination of information	~78% consume news via social networks and instant messengers
Conventional media (websites, television)	Secondary to digital	Only ~10% regularly consume news via television

Source: compared by the authors based on O. Snopok (2023), Public Broadcasting Company of Ukraine (2025), Deutsche Welle (2024), A. Mazurenko (2025)

Interpretation of the Table 2 data showed that multimedia content formats in the military media space of Ukraine performed not competing, but functionally differentiated communication roles, which reflected the structural transformation of the information ecosystem in war conditions. Telegram was formed as a key channel of operational information, focused on the rapid dissemination of factual messages and reports, which met the audience's request for immediate access to up-to-date information and contributed to the concentration of various multimedia formats within a single communication environment. YouTube performed primarily an explanatory and analytical function, providing context expansion, interpretation of events, and the establishment of causal relationships through a combination of visual narrative and expert commentary. Social networks and instant messengers generally acted as a mechanism for large-scale distribution and secondary circulation of information, strengthening the network nature of communication through the practice of reposting, commenting and collective understanding of content. Conventional media in this system acquired an auxiliary status, performing rather a confirmation or background function, which indicated the shift of the centre of information interaction from hierarchical channels to a multi-platform model with a clear distribution of communication roles.

Data on total media consumption confirm that digital formats have radically replaced conventional media. Monitoring of the social impact of media in Ukraine shows that 74-96% of the audience uses social networks and instant messengers at least periodically to access information services. Social media was used by at least 74% of respondents in the fourth week before the survey, while video streaming services (YouTube) were used by 57% (Society for Social Research and Statistical Analyses Ltd., 2023). Multimedia formats in Ukraine during the war are not isolated tools, but parts of a single integrated communication strategy, where each format performs a specific function: Telegram as the main channel provides coverage and speed of access. YouTube videos and streams provide explanations and emotional insight into events. Social networks generally serve as a large-scale distribution channel. This combination illustrates that it is the convergent use of multimedia formats within the integrated communication ecosystem that increases the efficiency, perception, of reliability and engagement of the audience, which is necessary for the functioning of a democratic information space in war conditions.

Discussion

The comparative analysis showed that the results of the study not only correlated with current international scientific approaches, but also supplemented them through a comprehensive combination of professional, organisational, and socio-communication levels of analysis. This made it possible to interpret convergent journalism not as a set of separate digital practices, but as a systematic

infrastructure for the functioning of Ukrainian online media in the face of an existential threat. Generalisations proposed by B. Medeiros Neto *et al.* (2022) showed that digital convergence in newsrooms developed primarily as a technologically and organisationally driven process related to editorial virtualisation, multiplatform content distribution, and the integration of social networks into production cycles. The conducted research confirmed the relevance of these provisions for the Ukrainian media environment, but demonstrated the expansion of their content in the context of a full-scale war. If the researchers considered convergence as an innovative stage in the development of digital journalism, the results of the study showed its transformation into a mandatory condition for the functioning and survival of the media. The Ukrainian context showed that virtual editorial offices, collaborative platforms, and social networks performed not only the function of increasing speed and interactivity, but also served as tools for ensuring the continuity of information in the face of physical threats, loss of infrastructure, and personnel restrictions.

Conceptual provisions formulated by O. Boichak & A. Hoskins (2022) within the framework of the "Digital War" paradigm were confirmed in the analysis of Ukrainian online media. The idea of moving from a hierarchical, "top-down" media environment to a fragmented but influential digital environment in which the boundaries between journalists, citizens and participants in the conflict are blurred was empirically correlated with the functioning of Telegram channels, streaming platforms, and social networks in Ukraine. The conducted research allowed concretising this thesis, showing that the personalisation of the war and the involvement of the audience did not lead to the complete disinstitutionalisation of journalism. On the contrary, in military conditions, the role of professional editorial offices as centres of verification, contextualisation, and ethical filtering of content was strengthened, even with the active participation of citizens in the dissemination of information. In contrast to the emphasis of researchers on decentralised forms of participation, the results of this study demonstrated the development of a hybrid model in which civic practices were integrated into editorial convergent strategies, rather than supplanted them.

Methodological generalisations of M. Jungblut (2022) on the role of content analysis in the study of military conflicts correlated with analytical approaches used in the study of convergent journalism in Ukraine. While agreeing with the thesis about the fundamental importance of media content analysis for understanding the frames, roles and narratives of war, the study also showed the limitations of purely content-oriented approaches in explaining the transformations of media systems. The Ukrainian case showed that for an adequate analysis of military journalism, it is necessary to go beyond textual and visual representations and consider the organisational, platform and technological parameters of news production. In this sense, the results of the

study complemented the author's approach, demonstrating that functional differentiation of platforms, editorial strategies for reserving distribution channels, and changes in the professional roles of journalists directly affected the nature of content and its public perception.

Comparison of the results of the conducted study with the results obtained by G. Ptaszek *et al.* (2023), certified conceptual and empirical consistency in the interpretation of the role of convergent platforms in military communication. In their study, researchers analysed Telegram as a space for the development of strategic narratives, where differences between authoritarian and competitive media models manifested themselves through the specifics of event framing. The study confirmed this conclusion, but expanded it at the expense of the institutional dimension, showing that the use of Telegram by Ukrainian online media was not only a tool for narrative flexibility, but also an element of system platform specialisation. If G. Ptaszek *et al.* focused mainly on the content of messages and semantic framework, but the results showed that the flexibility of the Ukrainian narrative was directly related to the organisational convergence of editorial offices that can quickly adapt the format, tone, and level of emotional saturation of content depending on the phases of the war.

Analytical provisions formulated by M. Ardan (2024) on the transformation of the Ukrainian media system from a politicised and fragmented model to a more centralised and consolidated one, coincided with the generalisations of the study. In particular, the thesis by M. Ardan on the audience's transition from conventional media to digital platforms and instant messengers was confirmed by the results of an analysis of platform differentiation, where Telegram and YouTube performed different but complementary functions. The study clarified the interpretation of this centralisation, showing that it did not mean monotony or reduced pluralism, but formed a hybrid model of convergent journalism, in which centralised editorial standards were combined with decentralised distribution channels. In contrast to the researcher's emphasis on the systemic level of media policy and structural shifts, the results of the study further showed that it was editorial convergence practices that became a mechanism for coordinating the speed of information, reliability, and ethical responsibility in war conditions.

An empirical case presented by N. Vlasova & A. Bakhmetieva (2024), on the transformation of the Dnipro TV YouTube channel, is conceptually correlated with the generalised conclusions of the study on the role of video platforms in the structure of convergent journalism. The findings showed that the integration of local media into the YouTube ecosystem contributed to a sharp increase in the audience, changing its socio-demographic characteristics and going beyond the national information space. The study confirmed these trends at the macro level, showing that YouTube in Ukrainian online media performed the function of deep explanation,

analytics, and contextualisation, which was in demand among internal and external audiences. In contrast to focused case analysis by N. Vlasova & A. Bakhmetieva, the results of the study showed that the success of video conversion depended not only on the platform, but also on the integration of video content into the overall editorial strategy, where YouTube functioned in close connection with Telegram and websites. This allowed expanding the interpretation of the Dnipro TV case as part of a broader structural process typical of the Ukrainian media system during the war.

Comparison of results obtained by A. Węglińska *et al.* (2024) with the conclusions of the conducted research showed conceptual consistency in the interpretation of war as a factor of radical transformation of the journalistic profession, while identifying differences in the levels of analytical focus. In the study by A. Węglińska *et al.*, emphasis was placed on the micro level of professional activity of military journalists, in particular on changing roles, intensifying multimedia skills, increasing psychological stress and security risks in a digital environment. The study confirmed these findings, but expanded them to show that individual professional transformations were derived from deeper institutional and structural shifts in the media system. Convergent journalism was considered not only as a set of new skills of a journalist, but as a systematic model for organising content production, where the universalisation of roles became a forced response of editorial offices to the personnel, financial, and security constraints of wartime. Thus, the findings were interpreted as an empirical manifestation of a broader process of institutional convergence, recorded at the level of the entire Ukrainian online media ecosystem.

Comparative analysis with the study by A. Oleinik (2025) clarified the issue of narrative uniformity and the role of platforms in military communication. The researcher argued that digital and conventional media within the same country showed a high level of discursive convergence, forming stable national information clusters, where Telegram, television, and official statements reproduced coordinated narratives. The conducted study generally confirmed this pattern for the Ukrainian case, but supplemented it with a conclusion about the functional differentiation of platforms within the general narrative field. Although the semantic framework remained consistent, the various platforms performed excellent communication functions: Telegram provided efficiency and mobilisation effect, YouTube was responsible for explanation and interpretation, and websites were responsible for maintaining analytical depth and verifiability. In contrast to approach by A. Oleinik (2025), which emphasised the reproduction of state-centred narratives in the digital space, the study showed that it was the convergent organisation of editorial offices that helped to combine narrative unity with multi-level communication adapted to the fragmented needs of the audience.

Comparison with the findings of O. Marukhovska-Kartunova *et al.* (2023) showed a common understanding of the ambivalent role of digital platforms and social networks in war. The researchers emphasised the dual effect of digital journalism: on the one hand, it provides rapid global dissemination of information and mobilises international support for Ukraine, on the other – creates a favourable environment for manipulation, fakes, and propaganda. The study was consistent with these findings, but shifted the focus from audience selectivity to editorial mechanisms for countering information threats. It was shown that in a full-scale war, it was convergent practices – a combination of OSINT verification, cross-platform verification, and content contextualisation – which reduced the destructive impact of disinformation and helped maintain trust. If O. Marukhovska-Kartunova *et al.* (2023) focused on the cognitive filters of the audience, the results of the current study showed the role of institutional media responsibility in shaping the information stability of society.

In general, the comparison with the analysed studies showed that the results of the study were consistent with international theoretical approaches to the study of digital journalism and media warfare, while expanding them at the expense of the Ukrainian context. It was shown that convergent journalism in Ukraine not only reflected global trends in digitalisation, but also formed a specific model of military communication, in which technological, organisational, and social convergence functioned as components of the infrastructure of social sustainability. This helped to clarify the scientific understanding of the role of media in protracted conflicts and outline the areas for further comparative research in the field of military and crisis journalism.

Conclusions

The conducted research identified and analysed the vectors of transformation of the Ukrainian media system in the context of a full-scale war, focusing on the phenomenon of convergent journalism as a central mechanism of adaptation. In the course of research, it was found that war acted as a catalyst that accelerated and radicalised the process of convergence, transforming it from a theoretical model or innovative practice into a mandatory norm for the functioning and survival of the media. Theoretical analysis has demonstrated the evolution of scientific understanding of convergence – from a technologically determined approach that emphasised multi-platform capabilities to a comprehensive vision that integrates organisational, procedural, professional and regulatory components. It was proved that this interpretation, where convergence acts as a standard of institutional capacity, describes the reality of Ukrainian media, which are forced

to simultaneously rebuild editorial processes, transform professional roles of journalists, and adapt ethical principles to the conditions of an emergency.

The study of Ukrainian online media practices demonstrated the development of a holistic communication ecosystem based on the principles of functional differentiation of platforms. Within this ecosystem, Telegram has established itself as the dominant operational information channel, performing a role even in the face of interruptions and cyber attacks, while YouTube has taken on the functions of in-depth explanation and contextualisation of events, and websites have become archives and platforms for verified analytics. This platform specialisation was not accidental, but turned out to be a strategic response to the needs of an audience that needed speed, reliability, and simultaneously the depth of understanding. The conclusion was the understanding that in the context of an existential threat, convergent journalism has gone beyond a technical tool and acquired the status of a strategic social and communication function. It has evolved into an infrastructure of public sustainability, combining mechanisms for rapid informing, cognitive protection against disinformation, support for collective mobilisation, and maintaining trust. Furthermore, the transformation of professional standards, the shift from the principle of verify-then-publish to publish-then-verify, the strengthening of the role of OSINT verification tools, and the contextualisation of ethical principles towards minimising harm did not lead to the devaluation of journalism, but, on the contrary, formed a new adaptive regulatory framework corresponding to the realities of information warfare. The limitation of the study was that the analysis of convergent journalism practices was based mainly on available monitoring, reports and published cases, which did not allow for an in-depth comparison of internal organisational processes and long-term transformation effects in individual editorial offices. The prospects for further research are to conduct a comparative longitudinal analysis of specific media organisations to study the evolution of their convergent models, and to quantify the direct impact of these practices on the level of audience trust and public resilience in the context of ongoing conflict.

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Conflict of Interest

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Конвергентна журналістика українських онлайн-медіа в умовах повномасштабної війни

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Анотація. Метою проведеного дослідження стало визначення особливостей функціонування конвергентної журналістики українських онлайн-медіа та її ролі у забезпеченні ефективної комунікації в умовах воєнного конфлікту. Методологія дослідження поєднувала порівняльний, контекстуальний та структурно-функціональний аналіз відкритих джерел, галузевих моніторинрів і результатів соціологічних опитувань. Результати показали, що війна прискорила процес конвергенції, трансформувавши його з інноваційної практики в норму функціонування медіа, при цьому змінився характер професійних ролей журналістів, що поєднували функції репортера, аналітика та мультимедійного продюсера. Було встановлено, що Telegram став домінантним каналом оперативного інформування, YouTube виконує функції контекстуалізації та пояснення подій, а вебсайти забезпечують архівування та верифікацію аналітичного контенту. Аналіз показав, що мультимедійні формати підвищили інтерактивність та залученість аудиторії, одночасно створюючи механізми когнітивного захисту від дезінформації. Досліджено, що професійні стандарти журналістики зазнали адаптації, зокрема зміщення від традиційного принципу перевірки перед публікацією до оперативного публікування з подальшою верифікацією та використання інструментів відкритих джерел для підтвердження фактів. Висновки дослідження засвідчили, що конвергентна журналістика українських онлайн-медіа має місце для забезпечення інформаційної стабільності та ефективного управління суспільною комунікацією під час війни. Було доведено, що трансформація професійних стандартів і платформна диференціація медіа створили комплексну систему взаємодії між редакціями та аудиторією. Практичне значення отриманих результатів полягає в їх орієнтації на редакційні команди, медіаекспертів і органи державної комунікації для підвищення ефективності інформаційної політики та медіабезпеки в кризових умовах

Ключові слова: верифікація; рівень довіри; інтеграція; дезінформація; соціальні мережі; комунікація



Military documentation as a source of historical memory: Problems of preserving digital evidence of the war in Ukraine

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Abstract. The purpose of the study was to analyse the role of military documentation in the construction of historical and social memory and to investigate specific challenges associated with the preservation of digital evidence of the war in Ukraine. A comprehensive interdisciplinary approach was applied, which through regulatory, document, comparative, and content analysis covered legislative acts, institutional practices, archival projects, digital platforms, and open-source materials, which allowed tracing the mechanisms of creating, storing, verifying, and using digital evidence of war. In the course of the study, it was found that digital military documentation was transformed from an auxiliary information resource into a central element of war documentation, simultaneously acquiring evidence, memorial, and communicative significance. It was revealed that a full-scale war led to the development of one of the world's largest arrays of digital evidence, which includes official documents, multimedia materials, satellite images, and eyewitness accounts. The functional complementarity of various types of digital documentation was revealed, where state archives provide legal legitimation, and public and media initiatives – efficiency and social representation of events. Analysis of the regulatory framework revealed gaps in the procedural regulation of the status of digital evidence, which led to inconsistencies in law enforcement practices. The study of institutional practices showed progress in the scale of digitisation of archival funds, simultaneously identifying the problem of fragmentation of storage standards and metadata. Separately, it was proved that the spread of digital content manipulation technologies has actualised the need to introduce complex verification procedures and international evidence evaluation protocols. It was concluded that the effective preservation and use of digital military documentation is possible only if state, public, and international institutions coordinate based on unified

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legal, technical, and ethical standards. The results of the study will be of interest to archivists, lawyers, researchers in the humanities, journalists, and specialists in documenting war crimes who work with digital evidence of war and the development of historical and collective memory

Keywords: archives; multimedia materials; eyewitness accounts; disinformation; crimes

Introduction

The relevance of the topic of military documentation as a source of historical memory is determined by the unprecedented intensity and scale of digital recording of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation, which began in 2022. The course of military events is accompanied by the mass production of digital evidence in the form of official documents, satellite images, video and photo materials, OSINT data (Open-source intelligence), journalistic reports and eyewitness accounts, which simultaneously serve as evidence of war crimes, sources of historical knowledge and carriers of collective memory. In the digital age, military documentation is gradually losing its status as an auxiliary tool of historiography and is transformed into a complex multidimensional system located at the intersection of archival studies, media research, digital humanities, international law, and memorial studies. The issue of preservation, authentication, and long-term use of digital evidence is aggravated by the destruction of infrastructure, algorithmic policies of digital platforms, legal uncertainty, and threats of content manipulation, which calls into question their stability as a historical source and legally permissible evidence.

Within the scientific discourse, digital military documentation was interpreted in several interrelated analytical planes. In particular, B. Christensen & A. Khalil (2023) focused on the transformation of conflict journalism under the influence of digital technologies and social media, exploring journalists' use of platforms X, encrypted messengers, and other digital tools to collect, verify, and disseminate information from war zones. Their analysis showed that digital affordances allowed combining source security, efficiency, and professional standards, while strengthening the role of journalists as mediators between war events and public interpretation. As a result, the researchers emphasised the importance of digital materials not only as a news product, but also as a potential historical and evidence-based resource. Another dimension of the problem was revealed in the study by M. Ochi & H. Dagenborg (2025), who conducted a systematic analysis of 52 online war crimes archives and classified them into evidence archives, legal material archives, and memory archives. The paper noted that the technical complexity of digital archives remained opaque to lawyers, reducing the effectiveness of their use in legal proceedings and increasing data security risks. The principles of "do no harm" and "efficiency" proposed by the researchers were justified as basic for designing digital archives, which allowed consolidating the idea of them as a tool for combining justice, historical accuracy,

and collective memory. The problems of using advanced technologies in the context of the prosecution of war crimes of the Russian Federation in Ukraine were considered in the paper by M.S. Ellis (2025). The researcher reasoned the critical role of digital evidence in conflicts and outlined the unique position of Ukraine as an active subject of global justice. The conclusion that the effectiveness of digital documentation depends on international solidarity and institutional support allowed interpreting it not only as a tool for recording it, but also as an element of global political and legal interaction.

In parallel with the legal aspects, the research focused on the preservation of cultural heritage in war conditions. concrete example of civic engagement in digital heritage preservation was presented in the paper by A.A. da Costa & L.R.M. Santos (2023), dedicated to the Backup Ukraine Project. The researchers demonstrated that using the Polycam application and involving citizens in creating 3D copies of cultural objects transformed the passive position of the population into a form of active participation in heritage preservation, confirming that even in conditions of instability and resource scarcity, digital documentation remains effective through the active involvement of local communities and the use of open tools. Thus, the combination of digital technologies, the concept of "soft power" and collective memory practices formed a new model of responsibility, in which individual digital actions acquired national and historical significance. S. Bonjack (2025) examined the genesis and success of the SUCHO (Saving Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Online) initiative as a model for mass rescue of digital cultural heritage during the war. The researcher analysed the role of professional communities and personal connections in responding to conflicts and suggested creating structured teams to save data in the context of military operations. M. Gentile (2025) explored the process of memorialising the war of independence of Ukraine in the context of nation-building during a full-scale Russian invasion. The researcher analysed six urban places of memory, finding that the military nation is based on the connection with past challenges for the nation, the definition of Ukraine as the antithesis of Russia, the marginalisation of the Soviet past, and the mobilisation of local identity. The study by D. Vonnák et al. (2025) analysed transnational networks and practices of mobilising aid for the protection of Ukraine's cultural heritage during a full-scale war. The study identified actors, resources, logistics chains, and organisational alliances, and analysed intersections between extreme

cultural and humanitarian responses, pointing to factors that contribute to or hinder effective coordination of aid on the ground. The study by M. Bareikytė & M. Makhortykh (2024) was aimed at analysing the transformation of the practice of witnessing war on digital platforms using the example of a Telegram channel dedicated to the occupied Ukrainian city. The researchers empirically investigated inconspicuous digital evidence as a non-institutionalised form, identifying changes in communication practices during different periods of occupation and substantiating the concept of digitally accessible evidence of war considering its polyvocality.

Despite the amount of research, the comprehensive understanding of military documentation as an integrated source of historical and social memory through the prism of the problems of preserving digital evidence of war remained insufficiently systematised. The purpose of the study was to investigate military documentation as a source of development of historical and social memory and to outline the problems of preserving digital evidence of the war in Ukraine. To achieve this goal, it was planned to classify the main types of digital evidence of war, analyse the challenges of their preservation and verification in the context of armed conflict, and determine the importance of military documentation for social communication and the processes of forming collective memory.

■ Materials and Methods

The methodological structure of the study was based on a comprehensive multidimensional approach aimed at a comprehensive investigation of the phenomenon of digital military documentation in Ukraine as a complex object located at the intersection of legal, archival, communication, and memorial practices. To achieve this goal, an interrelated set of methods focused on the collection, systematisation, comparative analysis, and interpretation of heterogeneous sources and data was applied, which allowed considering the subject of research from an integrated perspective. The regulatory framework for the study was established through a critical analysis of national legislation. The study focused on the Criminal Procedure Code of Ukraine (2012), with an emphasis on identifying existing definitions, procedural rules, and gaps relating to the regulation of the status, collection, recording, and assessment of digital (electronic) evidence. The official profile of Ukraine in the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime (Council of Europe, 2022) was used to contextualise national approaches within the international framework and determine basic eligibility criteria. Simultaneously, analytical materials contained within the CyberUA project initiated by the Council of Europe (Council of Europe Office in Ukraine, n.d.) were reviewed to analyse areas for institutional capacity development.

Systematisation and classification of digital military documentation arrays were carried out using the document management method and the typological classification method. To characterise the infrastructure component

of access to archival heritage, the functionality and significance of an Interarchive Search Portal (State Archival Service of Ukraine, n.d.) was studied. To supplement the public sector, materials from the Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine (2024; n.d.) were used, concerning the creation of a centralised digital archive of documents from the war period, including information about the activities of museums, in particular, the digital collections of the Dovzhenko Centre (n.d.). The study analysed materials that include publications in the media that record Ukraine's achievements in the international context (Ukraine has become..., 2024), and information on specific regional archival initiatives (The Lviv archive..., 2024). The analysis of the public and media documentation contour was carried out using open source analysis methods. In this context, the object of study was the evidence collection tool – the “eVorog” chatbot (Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine, n.d.), and publicly available statistics on the volume and dynamics of its use, reflected in display messages (Ukrinform, 2025). The role of social platforms Facebook (Meta Platforms, Inc., n.d.), Telegram (Telegram Messenger LLP, n.d.) and X (X Corp., n.d.) was considered as technological and communicative environments where digital evidence is generated, archived, circulated and socially reinterpreted, and subsequently incorporated into narratives of collective memory. Specialised materials from the law enforcement and training systems were used to investigate the procedural, expert, and judicial aspects of working with digital evidence. The analysis covered official publications of the Judiciary of Ukraine (2025) devoted to practical aspects of using OSINT materials in criminal proceedings, and analytical developments of the National School of Judges of Ukraine (2025), which contain recommendations on standards for the assessment of digital evidence with reference to international protocols, in particular the Berkeley Protocol. The international legal context was provided through the study of the principles and practices of the International Criminal Court (n.d.), and a critical analysis of expert assessments presented in studies by reputable think tanks, such as the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) (2024).

The study covered the chronological period of full-scale war from 2022 to 2025, which allowed tracing the dynamics of the development of institutional practices, technological solutions, and social responses to the challenges of this stage. The choice of specific examples (for example, certain archival projects, platforms or tools) was determined by their representativeness, public significance, and illustrative potential for demonstrating trends, achievements, and systemic problems in the field of digital documentation of the war in Ukraine. The material basis of the empirical research was a body of digital military documents and publications selected for content analysis from open, verified, and institutionally relevant sources used in humanitarian, legal, and media studies of the war in Ukraine. The sample included 124

texts published in 2022-2025. The main source of digital military documentation was archival platforms and specialised repositories, in particular the Ukraine War Archive (UWA, n.d.). The group of official documents and public reports that were included in the empirical sample consisted of regulatory materials, reports of monitoring missions, and daily combat reports published by state bodies of Ukraine and international institutions which directly recorded events and actions related to the war. For example, the data from Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (n.d.); international reports of the U.S. Department of State (2025). These materials, united by a common focus on the events of the war, were used in content analysis to compare the content of digital military documents with normative and internationally recognised information about the course of hostilities and human rights violations.

The third group consisted of OSINT data and eyewitness accounts recorded in social networks, digital archives, and instant messengers, which had clear time and geographical markers and were used in reports of human rights organisations or journalistic investigations. Verification of such materials was based on international OSINT research standards, in particular the Berkeley Protocol on Digital Open Source Investigations (National School of Judges of Ukraine, 2025), which set standards for the collection, analysis, and storage of digital data suitable for international legal processes. The inclusion criteria were the presence of a clear temporal and spatial reference, the identified source of origin, the possibility of verifying the material, and its potential suitability for legal or analytical use. The key categories of analysis included: "war crimes", "type of digital evidence", "source of recording", "OSINT verification", "legal relevance", "narrative of testimony", "institutional status of the material". The unit of analysis was defined as a separate document or publication as a whole, with additional micro-level coding of meaningful text fragments (paragraphs and sentences) containing a description of an event, a qualification of an action, or a reference to evidence. This approach combined quantitative comparison of category frequencies with qualitative interpretation of content. The analysis procedure involved a step-by-step selection of materials based on keywords and thematic markers in the sources. Coding was performed using a combined method with NVivo 14 qualitative text analysis software, which ensured the reproducibility of the procedure and transparency of categorisation. To verify the reliability of the encoding, double independent encoding was applied by two researchers, followed by the calculation of Cohen's kappa agreement coefficient, which was $\kappa = 0.81$, corresponding to a high level of inter-encoder reliability according to established methodological criteria. The comparative legal method was used to compare the provisions of national legislation with international standards. The logic of the methodological presentation was built consistently: from the analysis of the regulatory

framework and institutional landscape – through the systematisation of types of documentation and the analysis of mechanisms for their creation – to the investigation of technical, procedural, and ethical challenges of their preservation, verification, and use.

Results and Discussion

Military documentation in the system of historical and social memory

Military documentation in humanitarian disciplines is considered as a set of tangible and intangible digital information carriers that record and communicate events and consequences of armed conflicts. In terms of subject matter, it is located at the intersection of historiography, archival and memorial studies, and digital humanities, which allows interpreting it not only as a factual data set, but also as a semiotic complex of conflict memory that forms collective narratives and social identity. The war in Ukraine has become one of the most documented in the digital environment, as millions of photos, videos, audio materials, and messages create a large array of primary digital sources of historical, legal, and cultural significance for future generations (Hoskins & Shchelin, 2023). This data becomes the basis for scientific analysis, legal investigations, and cultural reconstructions of the conflict, for example, the Ukraine War Archive (n.d.) project has collected more than 37 million digital files, including videos, photos, and eyewitness accounts.

In the humanities and legal science of the 21st century, the concept of "document" is considered as a fixed trace of activity and intellectual information that has signs of authenticity, and stores information about a fact, process, or state that can be reproduced in the future (Pédaque, 2022). The document includes information and material components, covering both conventional written media and digital forms, in particular, digital files or databases. This definition emphasises the totality of characteristics of a document as an information resource, including the characteristics of reliability, integrity, and reproducibility, which is the subject of archival science and document management (Lytvynska, 2014). In jurisprudence and criminal procedure, the concept of "evidence" is supplemented by criteria of admissibility, relevance and reliability, which determine whether information can be used in court proceedings. Digital (electronic) evidence in criminal proceedings is electronic information obtained in accordance with procedural legislation that is relevant for establishing the circumstances of the case and can be admitted as evidence. To do this, it is necessary to ensure the authenticity of the data, the ability to establish its origin, time, geographical labels, and compliance with the procedure for extracting and storing it (Ragni, 2023).

In the humanities, in particular in memory studies, digital data is considered as structural units of social memory that not only capture information, but also influence the storage and translation of collective ideas

about the past. Digital archives, social media, and other digital platforms create dynamic collections of materials that influence ways of remembering in society, in particular, by expanding access to historical materials, democratising the creation of narratives and involving social groups in the process of memory documentation. Digital archives and social media function as active environments that change the dynamics of collective memory, including mobility, procedurality, and participation of broad communities in memory practices (Mandolessi, 2024). In the context of the war in Ukraine (2022-2025),

the classification of digital evidence reflects different levels of origin, purpose, and functions of data, which allows systematising their contribution to documenting events, evaluating facts, and forming a collective memory of the conflict. This classification is necessary because different types of digital sources have different legal force, different requirements for the collection and storage procedure, and different influences on public perception of war events. The main categories of digital military evidence and their functions in documentation are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Classification of types of digital military documentation and their functions

Digital evidence category	Main examples of sources	Functions in documenting war	Analytical value
Official government documents	Decrees, orders, registers of victims, state reports	Recording administrative facts, legitimising events, creating a legal basis	Serves as a legally significant base for international litigation and defines data processing standards
Digital archives and databases	Ukraine War Archive, archives of scientific and museum institutions	Centralised storage, structured metadata system, long-term storage	Ensures the reliability and availability of data for scientific research and event reproduction
Multimedia materials	Photo, video recording, satellite images	Visual chronology of events, documentation of destruction and crimes	Allows visual reconstruction of circumstances and confirmation of facts, in particular in forensic examinations
Eyewitness accounts and OSINT	Social networks, personal digital diaries	Personal experiences, context of events, operational reports	Expands understanding of the war experience by creating a dynamic array of social memory

Source: compiled by the authors based on C. Oxendine (2022), S. Mandolessi (2024), G. Chlevickaitė (2025), Judiciary of Ukraine (2025), UWA (n.d.)

This classification demonstrates the structural relationships between different forms of digital sources and their functional roles. Official documents provide legal and administrative record of facts, which makes them necessary for international legal mechanisms, since they are standardised for long-term preservation and have clearly defined time, geographical and identification attributes necessary for procedural use. Digital archives and databases systematise this broad field of data, enabling researchers and human rights defenders to structure and analyse arrays of materials covering various aspects of conflict. Multimedia materials provide a visual component of cognition of events that take place for the reconstruction of circumstances and confirmation of facts in forensic and historical research. Eyewitness accounts and OSINT data expand the field of memory, providing contextual and individual perspectives that are needed to explore the collective memory and social identity of a war-torn society.

Digital archives and databases that arise as a result of cooperation between scientists, human rights organisations, and international institutions serve as a centralised repository with the ability to effectively search and describe metadata. For example, Ukraine War Archive (n.d.) is a platform that combines tens of millions of files, including interviews, photos and videos, and provides a rigorous methodological description and metadata for each material, allowing them to be used as

an object of historical and legal research. Other digital archives, such as library and museum initiatives, complement this structure by preserving local and regional documentary collections with a similar goal of making them accessible for scientific analysis and educational projects (Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine, 2024). Multimedia materials, in turn, include visual and audio evidence of events, which usually contain a high level of tactical information – for example, photos of destruction, video recordings of attacks, and satellite images of front lines. Such data is of great importance not only for reconstructing the chronology of events, but also for visually demonstrating facts during judicial and journalistic investigations. OSINT research has demonstrated the effectiveness of algorithmic approaches to verifying such materials, in particular, using geolocation and time markers, which increases their reliability and representativeness as sources of science and law (Khan *et al.*, 2023).

Eyewitness accounts and OSINT materials are inherently personalised and contextualised: they reflect individual experiences of war, which is valuable for memory studies. This data appears in social networks and instant messengers, and while its original form may be less structured, digital capture techniques allow metadata and verification to increase its value as evidence or historical sources. A general analysis of the above classification shows that different categories of digital sources complement each other: official documents consolidate

legal and administrative aspects, digital archives provide reliability and long-term preservation, multimedia materials provide visual context, and OSINT evidence expands the contextual scope of events through human perspectives and operational data. Such a multidimensional data structure is necessary for scientific research of war, since it combines “formal and informal” sources, providing a comprehensive basis for historical, legal, and socio-cultural analysis. In addition, military documentation plays a role in the formation of collective memory, since digital sources register not only the facts of conflict, but also become elements of a memorable narrative that transforms individual experiences into socially significant meanings. The mechanism of transformation of digital evidence into components of collective memory occurs through the re-presentation and interpretation of materials in various communication environments. Social networks, in particular, Facebook, Telegram and X are used as platforms for documenting war experiences in real time, where communities create “digital diaries” and eyewitness accounts, which are then integrated into broader narratives and discussions of events. Research has shown that Telegram has become a key platform for military communication, almost on par with conventional media, providing daily updates on air alarms, troop movements, humanitarian aid, and personal stories of civilians and fighters (Mazur, 2025). Sociological data demonstrated the widespread use of Telegram, Facebook, and YouTube as the main sources of news about the war for a significant part of the population, which turned these platforms into massive archives of human experiences and perceptions of events (Havryliuk, 2023). Specific examples illustrated how communities used hashtags and thematic categories to understand their own experiences as part of a shared story: posts tagged #war #wardiary, #війна #щоденниквійни showed regular posts about life under fire, evacuation, family relationships, and local events that not only informed, but also shaped community-wide narratives (Kot et al., 2024).

These digital “war diaries” did not disappear after their initial publication, but were integrated into thematic streams, whose metadata allowed them to create chronologies, spatial maps, and thematic generalisations, which enhanced their memory function. Thus, the platform-based cyclical nature of content creation, sharing, and re-presentation contributed to the transition of individual experiences to a general social narrative, which was preserved as part of the digital cultural phenomenon of war memory. In general, digital media provided a mechanism for the constant interaction of individual and collective narratives, where personal messages were transformed into public memory texts, and content generated at the time of the event acquired post-war significance as a source of historical knowledge, ethical memory, and social identity. This process emphasised not only the role of social platforms in recording military events, but also their ability to form a shared memory

through reinterpretation, thematic grouping, and integration into mass digital archives.

Empirical analysis of the corpus of digital military materials revealed a number of stable structural and semantic patterns in the practices of digital war documentation in Ukraine. The overall dynamics of the presented materials indicate a gradual transition from fragmented, decentralised forms of event recording to more ordered and standardised models of digital representation of war, combining analytical and legally oriented functions. The quantitative distribution of materials by year demonstrates an increase in institutional participation in documentation processes, especially starting in 2023. While 2022 was dominated by materials created in the form of spontaneous digital testimonies and OSINT publications, 2024-2025 was, in turn, dominated by documents with a clearly defined institutional status, formalised descriptions of events and expanded metadata support. This indicates the transformation of digital documentation from a reactive practice of crisis response to a stable element of the information and legal infrastructure of war. Analysis of the types of digital evidence showed the dominance of multimedia formats, primarily photo and video materials, which make up almost half of the sample. Their quantitative superiority is combined with high analytical and evidence-based significance, since these formats are most often used for reconstruction of events, space-time binding, and confirmation of facts in reports of human rights and international organisations. Simultaneously, a significant proportion of text documents indicate the growing role of analytical understanding and interpretation of recorded events, which complements visual data and forms integral digital narratives of war.

From the standpoint of sources of recording, the largest share is made up of materials placed in specialised digital archives that accumulate and systematise military documentation. Their dominant position indicates the gradual centralisation and institutionalisation of the digital memory of war. Official documents of state bodies and international institutions form the second largest group, performing the function of regulatory and legal framing of events. OSINT materials, although inferior in quantity, play a key role as primary sources of information that initiate further verification, archiving, and legal evaluation processes. The results of the analysis of the legal relevance of digital materials are particularly revealing. More than half of the corpus contains signs of potential suitability for use in legal proceedings, indicating a high level of documentary saturation of the digital space of war. However, a significant proportion of materials remain at the level of evidence or contextual descriptions, without being transformed into formalised evidence. This indicates that there is a gap between the mass nature of digital fixation and its full integration into legal mechanisms of prosecution. The generalised quantitative distribution of results is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of digital military materials by key analytical parameters

Analytical parameter	Category	Share (%)
Material type	Multimedia	46.8
	Text messages	38.7
	Combined	14.5
Analytical parameter	Category	Share (%)
Source of recording	Archive platforms	41.1
	Official institutions	32.3
	OSINT environments	26.6
Legal relevance	High	58.9
	Limited	27.4
	Contextual information	13.7

Source: compiled by the authors based on a content analysis of a sample of 124 texts of digital military documentation for the period 2022-2025, including materials from archival platforms such as UWA (n.d.), official reports of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (n.d.) and U.S. Department of State (2025)

Table 2 confirms that archive platforms are gradually becoming key nodes for accumulating digital evidence, combining different types of materials, and ensuring their further interpretation and reuse. Simultaneously, the correlation between high and limited legal relevance indicates a structural tension between the volume of recorded digital evidence and the possibilities of their full legal application. This tension is a systemic characteristic of modern military conflicts, in which digital technologies significantly outstrip the pace of adaptation of legal and procedural mechanisms. As a result, the results of the empirical study show that digital documentation of the war in Ukraine has formed a multi-level ecosystem of materials, which combines eyewitness accounts, OSINT data, archival practices, and official legal documents.

The process of transforming digital evidence into collective memory narratives is connected with the fact that content created during the war does not remain passive archival material, but becomes an active participant in the memory discourse. Digital evidence is constantly circulating in the public space, re-interpreted, commented on and regrouped into thematic collections that serve as the basis for memory practices in the digital environment. The presence of such materials in the media space allows society to maintain memory in socio-political processes, forming a collective awareness of what happened and what is happening, and an identity based on the traumatic experience. Thus, digital media not only reflects events, but also plays a central role in creating memorable narratives for broad groups of society. Documentation in its nature is one of the fundamental counteractions to disinformation and historical revisionism, since military events take place simultaneously on the battlefield and in the information space (Hilmar, 2025). The social and communicative potential of military documentation is realised through the widespread use of documentary materials in the media, education, and human rights activities. Journalists and media professionals during the war use digital testimonies, photos, and videos to create full-fledged media narratives that explain the chronology of events, the scale of destruction,

and the human history of the conflict. Journalists working with sensitive war content should have specific skills in evaluating, filtering, and ethically presenting digital evidence to minimise the risks of re-traumatising the audience and avoid spreading incorrect information. In turn, training programmes on media literacy and professional journalism develop skills in working with digital sources, which is necessary in the context of information warfare, where the media space simultaneously acts as an arena of information attacks and a platform for documenting real events (McDougall, 2025).

The use of military documentation in education is another dimension of the social impact of digital sources. Educational programmes include the analysis of digital evidence for the development of critical thinking in students, which allows future specialists in the humanities and social sciences to consciously interpret evidence of war, separate facts from propaganda, and evaluate the reliability of information. This approach contributes not only to professional development, but also to public maturity in understanding, documenting and preserving the memory of military conflicts. With international communication and advocacy in mind, military documentation has become a stream of information that shapes international discourses about war. Photo, video, OSINT data, and broadcasts from the scene are incorporated into reports of international organisations and human rights groups submitted to structures such as the International Criminal Court (n.d.), and are used in processes aimed at bringing to justice for war crimes. Such a mechanism confirms that digital evidence is becoming part of the justification of legal positions in international courts, where the study of civil initiatives to document war crimes in Ukraine demonstrates that the coordination of local and international efforts creates new standards of evidence for cross-border law enforcement procedures (Chlevickaitė, 2025). Thus, military documentation in the digital age is simultaneously a tool for the development of collective memory, a means of countering disinformation, a media artefact, an educational resource, and an international advocacy tool that enhances its central role in public life and the humanities.

Problems of preserving, verifying, and using digital evidence of the war in Ukraine

Digital evidence of the war in Ukraine covers a wide range of materials: photos and videos, satellite images, audio files, geolocation data, messages from smartphones and social networks, and data from drones or surveillance cameras. As of mid-2024, OSINT archive projects alone have collected millions of open-source videos. However, only a percentage of this data undergoes full-fledged expertise and analytical processing due to limited analytical resources and technological infrastructure for processing such data sets (RUSI, 2024). The collection and recording of digital evidence in military conditions is characterised by fragmentation, randomness, and unevenness. Due to the constant fighting, access to conflict zones is limited, and places of events change dynamically, which leads to missing moments, fragmented chronologies, and incomplete data. Under such conditions, digital materials are stored only on eyewitness devices or in temporary online placements, which creates the risk of loss or deletion of primary evidence. This disordered collection of data complicates their further processing and analysis, as specialists are forced to work with incomplete time or geographical labels, which reduces their evidentiary value in formal investigations. The risks of data loss are compounded by combat activities and cyber threats. In addition to direct infrastructure destruction, digital sources are subject to removal from platforms, changes in storage formats, technical obsolescence, and threats of hacker attacks. The findings of Amnesty International and its Evidence Lab indicate that large volumes of videos and photos may be “deleted or unavailable due to platform policies that respond to graphic content”, making it difficult to store and capture data for a long time (Huet, 2022).

Part of the collection of digital evidence is provided by volunteer and public initiatives that create arrays of photo and video materials, coordinate geolocation and timestamps, and transmit this data to official investigative authorities. Such initiatives exceed government efforts, but their activities are highly dependent on resources and coordination, which creates uneven quality and completeness of data collected. In particular, according to Minister of Defence of Ukraine Mykhailo Fedorov, as of March 2025, the total number of reports sent by Ukrainians via the chatbot “eVorog” (Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine, n.d.) during three years of full-scale war (2022–2025) exceeded 660,000, with hundreds of new reports coming in every week (Ukrinform, 2025). Establishing the origin, time, and context of the creation of digital materials is a critical step in evaluating them as evidence. Without a clear identification of the source and timestamps, digital files lose their legal significance, since the standard requirements of criminal procedure legislation regarding the admissibility of evidence provide for the establishment of a link between the facts of the event and the evidence itself.

Digital data can have evidentiary value only if its authenticity is confirmed, including verification of metadata, digital signatures, timestamps and spatial binding, and strict adherence to the extraction/fixation procedure.

However, a regulatory framework in the Criminal Procedure Code of Ukraine (2012) contains gaps in the definition and procedural regulation of digital evidence. Analysis of the document shows that it does not contain clear separate provisions on “electronic (digital) evidence”, and although a “document” is defined as an object containing recorded information (photos, videos, sounds, data), there is no specific procedure for collecting, recording, verifying, and evaluating digital information obtained from a network or devices. This leads to procedural difficulties and heterogeneous judicial practice when accepting digital evidence as admissible in criminal cases, in particular, when using OSINT materials, satellite images, or digital recordings (Council of Europe, 2022). The lack of a separate definition and procedure for digital evidence is one of the main barriers to their effective application in Ukrainian courts. Thus, the scale of citizens’ participation in digital documentation of the war in Ukraine demonstrates the potential of digital evidence as sources of evidence, but the existing regulatory and procedural gaps in the Criminal Procedure Code of Ukraine limit their direct admissibility in criminal proceedings, which requires further legislative and expert adaptation of the legal framework.

In addition to structural barriers, digital materials are vulnerable to manipulation, deepfake technologies, and secondary editing, which creates additional difficulties in evaluating them. Artificial intelligence algorithms can create high-quality manipulated images and videos that are difficult to distinguish from authentic ones without specialised tools. This is a threat to the credibility of digital evidence in judicial and historical contexts, as it requires the development and implementation of methods that can counteract such threats (Sabin, 2025). Metadata such as timestamps, geolocation coordinates, and digital signatures is crucial in the process of verifying and authenticating digital evidence. They allow linking a digital file to a specific time and place of the event, which is necessary for establishing evidence lines in legal proceedings and historical reconstructions. In practice, international standards such as the Berkeley Protocol (recognised OSINT verification standard) are used to ensure the admissibility and reliability of digital evidence in courts and international tribunals (National School of Judges of Ukraine, 2025). Table 3 shows the main risks and methods of verifying digital evidence of war and illustrates the relationship between the main threats and practical approaches to their cybercriminalistic resolution.

Analysis of Table 3 shows that the introduction of system verification methods plays a central role in improving the reliability of digital evidence of war. A systematic combination of OSINT tools, forensic metadata

analysis, international standards, and professional training reduces the impact of fragmentation, technical limitations, and manipulation threats. Simultaneously, legal regulation and standardisation of procedures are factors that will determine whether digital evidence will be

acceptable in international and national trials. In the context of the war in Ukraine, the creation of such structural and procedural decisions is necessary to create a reliable evidence base that can withstand the tests of both courtroom and historical reconstructions.

Table 3. Key risks and methods for verifying digital evidence of war

Main risks	Risk description	Verification and counteraction methods
Data fragmentation and unevenness	Data from different sources has an incomplete chronology, disparate time and geographical labels	Using OSINT tools for correlating time and geolocation tags, integrating various sources
Risks of losses due to military operations and technical restrictions	Destruction of devices, unavailability of platforms, deletion of content	Archiving on reliable digital platforms, regular backups
Manipulation, deepfake, and secondary editing	AI-generated content creates potentially fake media	Use of digital forensics, metadata analysis, spectral image analysis
Lack of a standard legal procedure	Lack of regulation of digital evidence verification in the Criminal Procedure Code of Ukraine	Implementation of international protocols, development of national standards
Insufficient expert competence	Limited number of digital forensics specialists	Professional trainings, international cooperation, creation of competence centres

Note: AI – artificial intelligence

Source: compiled by the authors based on N. Huet (2022), RUSI (2024), S. Sabin (2025), National School of Judges of Ukraine (2025), Council of Europe Office in Ukraine (n.d.)

The situation with the digitisation of the archival heritage of Ukraine in the period 2022-2025 demonstrated both significant achievements and systemic challenges. Back in 2023, Ukrainian archives created more than 21 million digital copies of documents, which allowed the country to take one of the leading places in the world in terms of digitisation rates during war (Ukraine has become..., 2024). These indicators were a signal for a large-scale mobilisation of resources aimed at protecting archival heritage and preserving national memory. Some regional initiatives showed local success in this work: for example, the State Archive of the Lviv Oblast uploaded about 500 thousand digital copies to the public in 2024, including unique historical materials, which increased the availability of local sources for scientists and the general public (The Lviv archive..., 2024).

Despite these achievements, the problem is the lack of unified digital archiving standards, which makes it difficult to combine data for long-term storage and access. The lack of standards for the unification of metadata, procedures for checking, encoding, and describing digital materials, leads to fragmentation of the information space where different archived peripheral repositories can use their own approaches to data structuring, which makes it difficult to integrate them into single repositories. This is the case for wartime materials, as their legal and historical significance may be called into question in the future if there are no guarantees to preserve the integrity and identification of data. In response to such challenges, there is a debate about the optimal relationship between centralised and decentralised models for storing digital evidence. A centralised approach provides better coordination, a single quality standard, and the ability to concentrate limited resources in high-security

institutions. However, decentralised initiatives, including community and volunteer projects, allow covering a wider field of real-time materials that cannot always be quickly transferred to centralised archives due to physical or technical limitations. Both approaches have their advantages and disadvantages, and their synchronisation and integration into a single archive and information ecosystem is the subject of ongoing discussions and cooperation projects.

The effective operation of the digital military evidence archiving system at the standard level depends on coordinated actions not only of technological solutions, but also of a wide range of institutional actors involved in the process: from state archives and museum institutions to media, human rights, and public organisations. These institutions implement a set of functions – they guarantee access, authenticity, and data protection and create the basis for their scientific, legal, and memorable use. State archives in Ukraine play a role in shaping digital data storage strategies. As part of digitisation projects, platforms such as the Interarchive Search Portal (State Archival Service of Ukraine, n.d.), where, as of 1 January 2025, more than 2.5 million digital copies of documents from the National Archival Fund have been made public, expanding access for researchers and the public to archival heritage materials in digital form. Museum and library institutions, such as Dovzhenko Centre (n.d.), actively digitise audiovisual and cultural artefacts of historical and documentary value during the war, creating digital collections available for further analysis.

The legal and ethical aspects of the use of digital military documentation appear as the basic conditions for its sustainable preservation and further application in scientific, legal, and memorial contexts. The central

issue in this dimension remains the protection of personal data and the security of witnesses, as digital archives accumulate sensitive information about individuals, including data on the locations of participants in the conflict, contact information, and personal eyewitness accounts. Analysis of the practices of Ukrainian archives shows that the mechanisms for regulating access to materials with personal data remain institutionally incomplete, which significantly limits the possibility of their public use without the presence of developed legal and ethical control tools. In this context, the principles of confidentiality, minimisation of processing, and proportionality of access to data, the level of which should correspond to the risks for persons whose data are stored, appear as fundamental regulatory guidelines for the implementation of digital archival practices at the national and international levels (Parmelee *et al.*, 2025).

The results obtained are organically integrated into the contemporary scientific discourse, while expanding it through a comprehensive understanding of digital military documentation as a multidimensional phenomenon that combines legal evidence, archival value, and the functions of a collective memory carrier. The study showed that the effectiveness of digital documentation of war is determined not so much by technical or institutional solutions, but by the ability to integrate legal, archival, and socio-cultural approaches into a single sustainable system focused on long-term memory preservation, ensuring justice, and maintaining cultural identity. In this sense, the results are conceptually correlated with the findings of O. Hudoshnyk *et al.* (2025), who interpreted the massive mediatisation of military experience through participating initiatives and digital archives as a factor in transforming the memory landscape, where user-generated content acquires the status of an element of historical narrative. The current study expands this opinion, demonstrating that digital evidence functions not only in the media and therapeutic dimensions, but also forms the evidence base and objects of long-term archival storage, which creates tension between the emotional, memorial, and procedural and legal logic of their use.

Analysis of the problem of remote documentation of war crimes revealed a conceptual relationship with the provisions of P.R. Williams & N. Carle (2023), who saw remote documentation as an innovative response to limited physical access to war zones, emphasising the importance of digital infrastructure, cybersecurity, and ethical online interaction protocols. The results confirmed the effectiveness of this approach in the context of the Ukrainian conflict, but simultaneously showed its structural limitations: the collected data sets are often characterised by incomplete metadata, which complicates their legal verification and integration into national judicial procedures. Thus, remote documentation appears as an effective tool for initial collection, which, however, requires institutional refinement to transform

into procedurally valid evidence. The results of the study also correlate with the findings of Y. Kovalenko (2025) regarding the role of digital archives in maintaining the historical memory and cultural identity of Ukraine. The importance of audiovisual archives as sources of humanistic knowledge and global communication is confirmed, but the data obtained raises questions about the excessive fragmentation of archival initiatives. In contrast to the emphasis on the positive potential of decentralised practices, the study showed that the lack of unified metadata standards and coordination mechanisms creates risks of loss of context and reduced analytical value of materials in the long term. A. Koenig's (2022) opinion on the paradigm shift from centralised models of evidence gathering to decentralised and collaborative forms is also within this conceptual field. These ideas are consistent with the conclusions about the transformation of military documentation into a complex semiotic complex formed at the intersection of state, public, and individual practices. Simultaneously, the study complemented the legal interpretation of digital evidence with a socio-cultural dimension, demonstrating their role in the documentation of collective memory and memorial narratives.

The concept of a standardised digital infrastructure for documenting war crimes, proposed by I. Svoboda *et al.* (2025), also found confirmation in the results of a study that identified a critical shortage of unified archiving standards, metadata descriptions, and digital evidence verification procedures. The hybrid model proposed by the researchers conceptually corresponds to the recorded trend towards interdisciplinary convergence of technological, legal, and ethical approaches. The results of the study detailed the limitations of this approach, in particular, data fragmentation, uneven geographical coverage, and dependence on digital platform policies that directly affect the long-term preservation of evidence arrays. Analytical observations by M. Makhortykh (2023) on the vulnerabilities of digital platforms as military evidence storage environments are in direct line with the identified risks of losing primary materials due to technical failures, infrastructure destruction, and enterprise solutions of private platforms. The study expanded this approach, demonstrating that fragmentation or loss of digital materials affects not only historical reconstruction, but also the legal admissibility of evidence and the processes of collective memory documentation, which actualises the need for synergy between state archives, museums, public initiatives, and international institutions, while simultaneously consolidating these practices. A similar logic can be traced in relation to the provisions of L.L.R. Roush (2023), who emphasised the lack of effective preventive international mechanisms for documenting cultural heritage during armed conflicts. In line with the conclusions about the fragmentary nature of digital evidence collection, the study further emphasised the semiotic and sociocultural dimensions of digital documentation, in particular, its ability to form long-term narratives

of collective memory and maintain cultural identity in the digital environment, which goes beyond the purely judicial and reparatory interpretation.

Thus, the technological, legal, and ethical components of archiving digital military evidence form an interdependent system, the development of which is impossible within the framework of isolated approaches. Large-scale implementation of innovative technologies should be accompanied by unification of standards, inter-institutional coordination, integration with international norms, and clear regulation of the protection of human rights, in particular, the privacy and security of witnesses. It is this integrated approach that creates the grounds for transforming digital military documentation into a legally acceptable, scientifically valid, and socially significant resource of the collective memory of society.

■ Conclusions

In the course of the study, it was found that military documentation in the digital age was transformed into a complex semiotic complex, which found itself at the intersection of historiography, archival studies, memorial studies, digital humanities, and jurisprudence, forming new approaches to recording, interpreting, and preserving traces of conflict. The deployment of a full-scale war in Ukraine since 2022 has been a catalyst for the emergence of one of the world's largest digital evidence arrays, including millions of multimedia files, OSINT materials, official documents, and eyewitness accounts that have acquired both historical, legal, and socio-cultural value. It was demonstrated that these digital artefacts not only passively recorded events, but also actively participated in the processes of collective memory documentation, transforming individual experiences into socially significant narratives through mechanisms of circulation in social networks and digital archives. The classification of types of digital military documentation revealed their functional complementarity: official government documents provided legal and administrative legitimization of facts; centralised digital archives and databases, such as the Ukraine War Archive, provided system storage and structuring of metadata; multimedia materials formed a visual chronology and became a tool for forensic reconstruction; while eyewitness accounts and OSINT sources expanded the contextual understanding of the conflict, introducing the human dimension and operational data into the documentation, which turned out to be necessary for social memory research.

Simultaneously, systemic problems were identified that accompanied the documentation process. The collection of digital evidence in the context of active combat operations has proved fragmented and uneven, resulting

in data sets with incomplete time and geographical labels, while technical limitations, infrastructure destruction, digital platform policies, and cyber threats have created high risks of losing primary materials. The critical challenge was the insufficient regulatory framework: the analysis of the Criminal Procedure Code of Ukraine showed the lack of a clear definition and special procedural regulation for digital (electronic) evidence, which led to heterogeneity of judicial practice and limited their direct admissibility in national criminal proceedings. In addition, the proliferation of deepfake technologies and secondary editing capabilities have jeopardised trust in the authenticity of digital materials, requiring the development of sophisticated verification techniques such as metadata analysis, spectral image analysis, and the introduction of international protocols such as the Berkeley Protocol. The large-scale mobilisation of public resources allowed achieving success in digitisation, which laid the material foundation for long-term memory preservation, but the lack of unified archiving standards and metadata created risks of fragmentation of the information ecosystem.

The social and communicative potential of military documentation was implemented through its active use in the media, education, and international advocacy. Journalists, human rights defenders, and educators have turned digital evidence into tools for forming public narratives, developing critical thinking, and building an evidence base for international courts, including the International Criminal Court. Synergy between state archives, museums, public initiatives, and international institutions proved necessary for the development of a sustainable multidimensional system capable of ensuring the legal admissibility, scientific validity, and socio-cultural significance of digital military documentation. A limitation of the study was the lack of regulatory and standardised procedures for verifying digital evidence in national legislation, which makes it difficult to use them directly in criminal proceedings. The prospects are to develop common archival and information standards and interdisciplinary methodologies that combine legal, technological, and ethical approaches to transform digital arrays into a long-term tool for justice, science, and collective memory documentation.

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Воєнна документація як джерело історичної пам'яті: проблеми збереження цифрових доказів війни в Україні

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Анотація. Метою статті було проаналізувати роль воєнної документації у конструюванні історичної та соціальної пам'яті та дослідити специфічні виклики, пов'язані зі збереженням цифрових свідчень війни в Україні. У роботі було застосовано комплексний міждисциплінарний підхід, який через нормативно-правовий, документознавчий, порівняльний та контент-аналіз охопив законодавчі акти, інституційні практики, архівні проєкти, цифрові платформи та матеріали відкритих джерел, що забезпечило змогу простежити механізми створення, збереження, верифікації та використання цифрових доказів війни. У ході дослідження було встановлено, що цифрова воєнна документація трансформувалася з допоміжного інформаційного ресурсу в центральний елемент фіксації війни, набувши одночасно доказового, меморіального та комунікативного значення. Проаналізовано, що повномасштабна війна зумовила формування одного з найбільших у світі масивів цифрових доказів, який включає офіційні документи, мультимедійні матеріали, супутникові знімки та свідчення очевидців. Було виявлено функціональну взаємодоповнюваність різних видів цифрової документації, де державні архіви забезпечували правову легітимацію, а громадські та медійні ініціативи – оперативність і соціальну репрезентацію подій. Аналіз нормативної бази показав наявність прогалин у процедурному регулюванні статусу цифрових доказів, що призводить до неоднорідності правозастосовної практики. Дослідження інституційних практик засвідчило прогрес у масштабах оцифрування архівних фондів, водночас виявивши проблему фрагментації стандартів зберігання та метаданих. Окремо було доведено, що поширення технологій маніпуляції цифровим контентом актуалізувало потребу у впровадженні складних процедур верифікації та міжнародних протоколів оцінки доказів. Зроблено висновок, що ефективне збереження та використання цифрової воєнної документації можливе лише за умов координації державних, громадських і міжнародних інституцій на основі уніфікованих правових, технічних та етичних стандартів. Результати дослідження орієнтовані на архівістів, правників, дослідників гуманітарного профілю, журналістів і фахівців з документування воєнних злочинів, які працюють із цифровими доказами війни та формуванням історичної і колективної пам'яті

Ключові слова: архіви; мультимедійні матеріали; свідчення очевидців; дезінформація; злочини



Digital audiovisual practices as social communication technologies: Transformation of cultural narratives

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Abstract. The aim of the study was to identify the mechanisms and directions of transformation of cultural narratives in the digital environment and to determine the role of digital media in the formation of new forms of collective memory. An interdisciplinary approach was employed, combining methods of discursive analysis, structural-semantic modelling, and cultural hermeneutics to identify patterns of change in cultural narratives within the digital space. The study demonstrated that the category of the “cultural narrative” in contemporary humanities has ceased to be merely a narrative structure and has instead become a complex of meaning-producing practices that shape collective ways of interpreting the past, present, and future. An analysis of historiographical approaches showed that the narrative representation of history is an act of constructing meaning rather than reproducing facts, which determines the specificity of cultural discourses. A comparative analysis of classical and media-oriented theories revealed two main developmental tendencies: a shift from the grammar of storytelling to technologies of memory. In the digital age, cultural narratives acquire a modular, fragmentary, and multiple structure, giving rise to new modes of representing experience. It was determined that digital audiovisual practices influence narrative processes through three mechanisms – interactivity, visualisation, and algorithmisation – which transform the ways cultural meanings are produced and perceived. These mechanisms are considered key factors in the transformation of social communication practices under conditions of digitalisation, as they redefine the forms of interaction, circulation of meanings, and public engagement with cultural memory. In the Ukrainian context, digital initiatives in the field of cultural heritage, including the digitisation of museum collections and online archives, combine the functions of preservation and representation of national culture under conditions of war. This indicates the emergence of a new type of narrative – interactive, networked, and hybrid – combining local memory with global visibility. The digital transformation of cultural narratives has revealed both the potential for democratising access to culture and the risks of algorithmic inequality and loss of depth of content. Preserving cultural autonomy in the digital environment requires the integration of technological innovation with critical awareness and institutional support. The results of the study may be used in the development of strategies for digital humanities, cultural policy, social communication technologies, and programmes for the digital preservation of Ukraine’s cultural heritage

Keywords: memory construction; collective consciousness; social communication; digital documentation

■ Introduction

In the age of digital culture and profound social transformations of the twenty-first century, the issue of constructing personal and collective identity has acquired exceptional relevance. Identity is no longer perceived as a fixed structure or a set of immutable characteristics; instead, it has become a dynamic process of self-reflection in which thought, narrative, and memory form a single ontological continuum. These processes are inseparably connected with transformations in the social communication environment, where digital media increasingly function as the primary instruments for transmitting, reshaping, and institutionalising cultural meanings. Global challenges – from war and migration processes to the rapid development of artificial intelligence – have made questions of human self-understanding, the authenticity of cultural practices, and the interpretation of the past central to the humanities. In the Ukrainian context, where processes of self-identification are closely intertwined with historical trauma, media representations, and cultural change, the analysis of narrative forms has become a necessary tool for understanding sociocultural mechanisms of resilience and transformation.

Scholarly studies from 2021 to 2025 have shown that the phenomenon of identity has been interpreted through the prism of narrativity and digital practices. In the work of B. Wojciechowski (2024), identity was understood as the result of a reflexive process without

a static dimension, unfolding as dynamic self-construction through thinking and self-consciousness. The author emphasised that narrative functioned not merely as a storytelling tool but as a means of shaping the temporal structure of experience, in which the sequence of events reflected the logic of personal becoming. The researcher argued that plot organisation is a formative principle that ensures the unity and semantic completeness of the individual narrative. The study by M.L. Nappi *et al.* (2024) focused on digital forms of cultural heritage, where narrativity manifested through cataloguing systems, digital archives, and institutional communication. An analysis of the evolution of Italian participatory platforms showed that the transition from traditional guides to interactive digital libraries opened up opportunities for creating new forms of knowledge. The authors noted that the integration of Big Data and digital tools in museum environments not only enriched cultural experience but also shaped new types of narratives – hybrid, modular, and intermedial.

The study by T.E. Onyejelem & E.M. Aondover (2024) developed the concept of generative digital multimedia tools (DGMTT), which transform digital content into a product of algorithmic creativity. Within this theory, narratives emerged as results of interaction between human intention and machine processes, necessitating a new ethics and ontology of creativity. In the article by C.I. Ienciu (2024), attention was focused on the legacy

of Hayden White and his concept of the “value of narrativity” in representing reality. The author showed that, through the opposition between real and imaginary discourses, H. White emphasised the subjective nature of historical descriptions, which was of direct relevance for understanding contemporary narrative forms in which the boundary between fact and artistic interpretation became increasingly blurred. The work of B.F.K. Norambuena & T. Mitra (2021) expanded the boundaries between narrative theory and computational systems by proposing the model of a “narrative map” – a tool that visualised the structure of a story as a route of events. This approach opened up prospects for automated analysis of plot connections, necessary for digital journalism and the analysis of disinformation. Studies by M. Cai *et al.* (2025) and S.F. Sakarang *et al.* (2025) laid the foundations of a contemporary theory of narrative visualisation, demonstrating how data could be transformed into empathetic stories through interactive graphics, video, and multimodal techniques. Both works highlighted the potential of digital tools to expand the communicative capacities of science and art, while also drawing attention to the risks of emotional superficiality and loss of deep meaning.

Media studies and communication theory make it possible to interpret digital cultural narratives not only as textual or symbolic constructions, but also as socially mediated processes of meaning circulation. In particular, studies of social media memory show that digital platforms blur the distinction between commemorative and everyday communication, because memory is increasingly produced through comments, hashtags, posts, reposts, visual materials, and platform-specific interaction patterns. A. Ben-David *et al.* (2024) emphasise that social media require new methodological approaches to collective memory, since remembrance is shaped by both large-scale data flows and platform-specific cultural norms. Their framework is useful for the present study because it allows digital narratives to be examined as dynamic social communication practices rather than as stable narrative texts. H. Hastuti *et al.* (2025) show that digital platforms and algorithms mediate the production, distribution, and evaluation of news, reconfiguring gatekeeping and prioritising engagement metrics. Although their study focuses on journalism, its conclusions are applicable to cultural communication more broadly, since cultural narratives are also shaped by algorithmic ranking, recommendation systems, audience metrics, and platform-dependent visibility.

Despite considerable attention to issues of identity, narrativity, and digital forms of communication, the question of integrating these directions into a unified analytical model remained unresolved. Previous studies either focused on individual identity or on the technical aspects of digital systems, while the interaction between the reflexive “self”, cultural context, and algorithmic media ecology remained only fragmentarily explored. The

aim of the study was to systematise contemporary approaches to the study of narrative identity in the context of digital culture and to identify the main mechanisms through which technological media influence the formation of personal and collective narratives, with the purpose of developing a theoretical model applicable to the analysis of social communication practices in the digital age. The objectives of the study were to synthesise theoretical models of narrative identity in contemporary humanities; to compare cultural, media, and technological factors of identity transformation; and to identify the cognitive and communicative mechanisms that ensure the stability or variability of narrative structure in the digital environment.

Materials and Methods

The methodological structure of the article corresponded to the interdisciplinary approach adopted in contemporary social communication studies, combining cultural, media, documentary, archival, and socio-political analysis to examine the transformation of cultural narratives in the digital age. The study focused not only on the theoretical interpretation of digital narratives, but also on the analysis of specific documentary sources, statistical reports, digital cultural projects, and institutional practices that demonstrate how cultural meanings are produced, circulated, preserved, and reinterpreted in the digital environment.

The empirical basis of the study included four groups of materials:

- ✓ Documents of international organisations and institutional programmes: UNESCO’s Action plan for culture in Ukraine (UNESCO, 2024), the ICOM-SAREC Ukraine project report (ICOM, 2024), and the UNESCO/ICCROM programme Endangered Heritage: Emergency Evacuation of Heritage Collections used in cooperation with the Maidan Museum (ICCROM, 2022).

- ✓ Statistical and analytical data on media consumption and digital communication in Ukraine: DataReportal’s Digital 2025: Ukraine report (Kemp, 2025), the 2025 survey on Ukrainians’ news consumption (How do Ukrainians, 2025), and the Media Literacy Index of Ukrainians... (2025).

- ✓ Digital projects and institutional cases in the Ukrainian cultural field: Mystetskyi Arsenal’s electronic editions of exhibition catalogues (Mystetskyi Arsenal presents..., 2025), PinchukArtCentre’s (2025) digital educational materials and online exhibition formats, the Maidan Museum’s cooperation with UNESCO/ICCROM, the Ukrainian Heritage Monitoring Lab’s (2025) digitisation initiatives, and UBIENNALE (2025) as a case of digital and new media art.

- ✓ Scientific publications from 2019–2025 devoted to cultural narratives, digital memory, media practices, digital heritage, social communication, document studies, archival studies, and library science. Particular attention was given to studies on social communication

processes (Kholod, 2023), virtual culture archiving (Trach, 2025), archival and library affairs in Ukraine (Dubrovina et al., 2025).

The analysis was conducted in three stages. At the first stage, the digital communication environment was described through statistical and analytical reports on internet use, social media activity, video content consumption, and media literacy in Ukraine. This made it possible to define the communication conditions in which digital cultural narratives circulate. At the second stage, digital cultural projects and institutional initiatives were examined in order to identify changes in the representation of cultural memory, heritage, and identity. At the third stage, the mechanisms of narrative transformation were systematised into three analytical categories: interactivity, visualisation, and algorithmisation. These mechanisms were then interpreted as factors influencing the production, dissemination, and social perception of cultural meanings. The conceptual-analytical method was used to systematise the theoretical approaches to cultural narratives, narrative identity, digital memory, and social communication. This method made it possible to identify the conceptual links between narrative theory, media studies, digital humanities, and the theory of social communications. In particular, it was applied to distinguish cultural narrative not only as a textual or symbolic structure, but also as a communicative and documentary formation that exists within digital platforms, archives, audiovisual interfaces, and institutional repositories.

The method of documentary analysis was applied to primary documentary sources, including reports, institutional documents, project descriptions, official announcements, and materials of international organisations. This method was used to examine how digital cultural heritage was described, classified, preserved, and represented in documents produced by UNESCO, ICOM-SAREC, ICCROM, Ukrainian cultural institutions, and digital heritage initiatives. The documentary approach made it possible to analyse digital narratives as documented traces of cultural memory, while archival and library science perspectives helped to interpret digitisation as a process of selection, metadata organisation, access provision, and long-term preservation. Discursive analysis was used to identify recurring themes, semantic oppositions, and dominant interpretative frames in the textual descriptions accompanying digital exhibitions, online cultural projects, institutional reports, and digital heritage initiatives. Special attention was paid to such semantic oppositions as preservation/destruction, local memory/global visibility, heritage/war, documentation/representation, and cultural autonomy/platform dependence. This method made it possible to determine how cultural institutions construct the meaning of digital heritage and how Ukrainian cultural narratives are framed in the context of war, international communication, and digital preservation.

Structural-semantic modelling was applied to compare narrative schemes in traditional and digital forms of cultural representation. The comparison included museum catalogues and their electronic versions, online exhibitions, audiovisual guides, digital archives, and interactive cultural projects. This method made it possible to identify structural shifts from linear and institutionally controlled narratives to modular, networked, and user-oriented forms of representation. The modelling focused on three parameters: the structure of the narrative, the role of the audience, and the mode of access to cultural meaning. The comparative-structural method was used to compare different levels of digital representation, from global models of digital cultural communication to local Ukrainian cases of heritage digitisation, digital art, and online cultural mediation. This method enabled the identification of similarities and differences between traditional forms of cultural representation, such as printed catalogues, museum exhibitions, and television formats, and digital forms, such as social media narratives, video platforms, VR/AR projects, online archives, and digital art practices. The content-functional approach was applied to interpret digital audiovisual practices as social communication actions rather than merely technological products. It was used to examine how video content, visual projects, interactive interfaces, digital catalogues, and online exhibitions perform communicative functions: informing audiences, preserving memory, generating emotional involvement, legitimising cultural meanings, and supporting international visibility. In this context, indicators such as reach, accessibility, interactivity, visual format, and institutional mediation were treated as contextual variables that influence the circulation of cultural narratives.

The empirical-descriptive method was used to synthesise statistical indicators from open reports and surveys. Data on internet use, social media reach, YouTube audience size, news consumption, and media literacy were not used to analyse individual audience behaviour but to describe the broader media environment in which cultural narratives are produced and disseminated. These data made it possible to substantiate the argument that digital platforms have become central infrastructures for the circulation of cultural meanings in Ukraine. The institutional-analytical approach was applied to examine the role of Ukrainian and international cultural institutions in the digital preservation and representation of heritage. The study analysed the activities of Mystetskyi Arsenal, PinchukArtCentre, the Maidan Museum, the Ukrainian Heritage Monitoring Lab, and UBIENNALE 2025. These cases were selected because they represent different forms of digital cultural mediation: electronic catalogues, online educational resources, emergency heritage preservation, digitisation of museum objects, and digital/new media art. The selection criterion was the public availability of digital

materials and their relevance to the transformation of cultural narratives in Ukraine.

Thus, the methodological framework of the study was based on the integration of social communication theory, media studies, document studies, archival studies, library science, and cultural analysis. This made it possible to examine digital cultural narratives not only as symbolic constructions, but also as communicative, documentary, institutional, and technological phenomena. The combination of conceptual, documentary, discursive, structural-semantic, comparative, and empirical-descriptive methods ensured a comprehensive analysis of how interactivity, visualisation, and algorithmisation transform the production, preservation, and public circulation of cultural memory in the digital age.

Results

Theoretical and methodological foundations for the study of cultural narratives in the digital age

In the humanities, the category of the "cultural narrative" focuses attention not merely on the structure of a story, but on a set of meaning-producing practices that shape collective frameworks for interpreting the past, present, and future within a particular group or society. The historiographical tradition, represented by the works of H. White (1984), highlighted a fundamental problem: history, as a scholarly discursive practice, constructs meanings through narrative operations (tropology, the choice of an explanatory mode) rather than uncovering "pure" facts as such; this means that cultural narratives should be considered discursive constructions with their own formal-semantic logic, which is subject to critical analysis. In parallel, the philosophical tradition added a dimension concerning plausibility and the interpretative function of narrative: narrative not only structures events in time, but also creates meaningful models of identity and collective memory that have emotional and normative consequences for society (Paul, 2011). The evolution of approaches in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries can be traced in two complementary directions. The first – classical narratology and historiography – analyses the grammar of storytelling (protagonists, plot, cause-and-effect relations), revealing how these elements shape historical scenarios and legitimise political decisions (Eiranen *et al.*, 2022). The second – cultural and media analyses – focuses on the products of mass and popular culture (cinema, television, public rhetoric), demonstrating that narratives function as technologies of memory and representation and have material carriers and institutions that modulate their effectiveness (De Kosnik, 2016).

The analytical layer of contemporary theory of cultural narratives emphasises three operational processes: the selectivity of representation (what enters a narrative and what is excluded), intertextuality (the crossing of narratives across genres and media), and authorisation

(who has the right to create "official" narratives). Each of these processes has empirically measurable markers: the frequency of themes in media discourse, the citation of sources in political speeches, and changes in semantic fields (frequent word co-occurrences) in text corpora (White, 1984). The turn to "post-print" and digital contexts has forced a reconsideration of classical notions of narrative: in the digital environment, narratives exist in formats where the central features are no longer linearity and sequence, but modularity, fragmentation, and mnemonic multiplicity (multiple versions, remixes, interactive scenarios) (Manovich, 2002). This means that cultural narratives are not only texts/stories, but complex practices with different modes of delivering meaning – from individually authored videos to large-scale transmedia campaigns. The transition from linear to modular narrative forms changes not only the structure of storytelling but also the models of social communication: the audience becomes an active participant in the production, interpretation, and redistribution of meanings. In this context, fragmented digital narratives correspond to participatory communication, where users comment on, remix, supplement, and circulate cultural content across different platforms (Koenitz, 2023). As a result, narrative communication becomes networked and dialogic, while cultural memory is formed through multiple interactions rather than through a single authoritative narrative source.

The transition of cultural representation into the digital age is accompanied by structural changes in the media ecology: the characteristics of new media – numerical representation, modularity, automation, variability, and transcoding – have been identified as operational principles of digital forms that transform the ways cultural narratives are created and disseminated. These principles make digital audiovisual products (videos, streams, short formats, interactive documentary projects) flexible in transmedia deployment: a single piece of content can be easily fragmented, reworked, and reintroduced into other narrative fields. There are two interconnected levels of influence of digital audiovisual practices. The first is that low barriers to entry and standardised content-creation mechanics (mobile cameras, simple editors, platform templates) have expanded the circle of creators and, as a result, the diversity of narratives. The second is that platform algorithms determine which of thousands of fragments becomes visible to a mass audience, thereby performing a function of "governance" and effectively influencing which narratives consolidate as dominant. This produces changes in the properties of narratives themselves. Traditional grand narratives (e.g., state-centred historical accounts) undergo fragmentation on digital platforms: they are broken down into micro-narratives circulating across different genres and formats. Such switching complicates the task of controlling and validating historical meanings, but at the same time creates

opportunities for dialogic reproduction and the preservation of alternative memories. Analytically, this is reflected in the growth of video consumption and social video content: in 2025, YouTube in Ukraine reached about 56.4% of the population (21.6 million users) and 68.5% of all internet users in the country, illustrating the role of video as a primary carrier of meaning and information (Kemp, 2025). These figures indicate that audiovisual practices have become the central channel for the formation and transmission of cultural narratives. This statistic indicates that YouTube functions as one of the leading social communication platforms in Ukraine, shaping the character of media consumption and influencing the circulation of cultural meanings in the digital environment. Thus, the Ukrainian digital media environment demonstrates that cultural narratives increasingly function as socially mediated, platform-dependent, and transnational forms of communication that connect memory preservation with public representation (Kholod, 2023).

In the Ukrainian context, digital audiovisual practices acquired a sociocultural function under conditions of war and societal mobilisation. The digitisation of cultural heritage (scanning, archiving, online exhibitions), online performances, and streaming initiatives served not only as means of preservation, but also as instruments of international communication and of shaping an external narrative about events in Ukraine. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2024) and European programmes responded to these needs through funding and technical support, as well as initiatives in digital preservation and training; for example, UNESCO documents on cultural action for Ukraine indicate the priority of digital tools in preserving and promoting culture during conflict. This means that digital audiovisual practices in Ukraine play a dual role – as local resistance and as a global communicative channel. In the digital media space, narratives cease to be monolithic, linear storytelling structures and move towards multi-level, modular, and adaptive configurations (Tukhtarova *et al.*, 2021). This transition is driven by three interrelated mechanisms – interactivity, visualisation, and algorithmisation – each of which has its own diagnostic logic, empirical indicators, and consequences for processes of constructing collective meaning. The integration of these mechanisms produces qualitatively new regimes of cultural representation in which questions of legitimation, visibility, verification, and emotional modulation of narratives become significant. Interactivity transforms narrative from a passive text into a procedural practice of co-creating meaning. It includes two closely related dynamics: the blurring of boundaries between producer and audience and the emergence of real-time feedback loops (Takala, 2023). Theoretically, this makes it possible to speak of a “platform periphery” as a new field of narrative production: the audience not only consumes a finished story but also generates

its fragments, which can then enter broader narratives. From a narratological perspective, the key point is that interactivity changes the authority of the source: narratives can simultaneously have numerous “small authorisations” (local groups, influencers), which complicates the function of centralised validation of memory (Yusifova & Kazimi, 2025). This creates new risks (disinformation, fragmentation of memory) but also opens space for the pluralisation of voices, including those of marginalised groups.

Visualisation, as a mechanism of narrative transformation, operates on two levels: transforming data into images (infographics, charts, interactive maps) and the dominance of an audiovisual emotional code in communication (video and photo content as the primary carrier of meaning) (Shao *et al.*, 2025). It is important to distinguish between visualisation as an analytical means (data visualisation for interpreting complex processes) and visibility as a performative instrument (video clips, memes, photos as attention-grabbing signals that generate rapid affective responses). Visualisation increases the persuasive effect of a narrative regardless of its factual accuracy, which makes verification methods (metadata, provenance, reverse image search) a critical task in research. For Ukraine, examples are characteristic of the active use of visual formats in documenting events (not only artistic projects, but also journalistic investigations with audiovisual evidence); these formats give narratives “illustrative weight”, facilitating their rapid diffusion online (Serbina *et al.*, 2022).

Algorithmisation models the visibility of narratives at a scale that is currently practically inaccessible to any other intellectual instrument. Search and recommendation algorithms act as an “intermediary actor” that not only selects content according to relevance parameters, but also shapes the spatial cartography of audience attention. Two directions should be distinguished: the technical (mathematical) architecture of the algorithm – as a selection factor (e.g., watch time, click-through rate (CTR), interactions) – and the socio-political consequences of such selection (filter bubbles, algorithmic discrimination against certain cultural forms). Algorithmisation generates the problem of “invisible censorship”: deviation from trends automatically reduces the chances of a narrative becoming widely accessible, regardless of its ethical or historical significance. The combination of interactivity, visualisation, and algorithmisation produces new qualitative effects. Narratives become fragmented and multi-level; the process of narrative legitimation depends not only on the evidential base, but on the platform and its algorithmic priorities – making platform analysis an element of any narrative study. Digital mechanisms increase the pace of narrative change: social waves can reach critical mass within days or hours, and then fade or shift just as quickly. Digital mechanisms for narrative diffusion are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Digital mechanisms of narrative diffusion

Mechanism	Description	Operational indicators
Interactivity	The dynamics of audience co-creation of narratives through two-way communication, remixes, and user-generated content (UGC). There is a shift from the role of author towards shared "prosumption", where user feedback influences the evolution of the cultural plot	Number of comments and reposts; share of UGC within thematic hashtags; rate of remix emergence; engagement rate (= interactions/impressions)
Visualisation	Transforming information into visual forms (video, infographics, interactive maps, VR spaces). Visual code becomes the main carrier of emotional content, influencing the speed of perception and validation of cultural narratives	Share of visual content in thematic streams; number of video views/shares; number of visual artefacts with metadata (geolocation, date); average watch time
Algorithmisation	The shaping of cultural narratives through algorithms for selecting and ranking content on digital platforms. Recommendation systems determine which plots become "visible", influencing collective imaginaries and memory	Frequency of topics appearing in recommendation feeds; CTR and watch time as visibility factors; reach coefficient for different content types; visibility gap between cultural and commercial topics

Source: compiled by the authors based on L. Manovich (2002), G.B. Takala (2023), H. Metzler & D. Garcia (2023)

Table 1 demonstrates that each mechanism has its own measurability and set of methods, but real influence on narrative can be understood only through their integrated study. Interactivity provides polyphony of voices and makes narratives dynamic; visualisation strengthens the emotional and perceptual efficiency of narratives; algorithmisation determines which of these narratives actually reaches a wide audience. The combined effect means that a narrative may be emotionally powerful (visualisation) and widely remixed (interactivity) yet remain marginal if platforms do not "support" it algorithmically. This underscores the importance of platform policy as an integral part of cultural policy. For the Ukrainian context, the table highlights practical priorities: the need to finance infrastructural backup, develop authentication/provenance tools for visual content, cultivate skills in digital public history within museum and cultural institutions, and develop strategies of "platform diplomacy" – that is, organised communication campaigns that take algorithmic rules into account and target international audiences.

As regards the Ukrainian cultural space itself, in the digital age it is characterised by a combination of intensified domestic content production, an external need for international communication, and active efforts at the digital preservation of cultural heritage. Under conditions of intensive aggression (2022-2025), these processes acquired an additional palliative-political function: digital platforms serve as channels for mobilising international support, documenting crimes against culture, and preserving local memories (Kovalenko, 2025). Infrastructural and demographic indicators determine the potential of digital influence. According to analytical reports, the prevalence of social networks and internet access in Ukraine remain high, creating appropriate conditions for the rapid circulation of digital narratives: according to the Digital 2025 overview for Ukraine, at the beginning of 2025 there were about 21.6 million active social media accounts in the country, illustrating mass reach through digital platforms. Such audience dimensions mean that media practices – especially audiovisual ones – have the potential to shape both local and transnational narratives (Kemp, 2025). Thus, the Ukrainian digital media

environment demonstrates that cultural narratives increasingly function as socially mediated, platform-dependent, and transnational forms of communication that connect memory preservation with public representation.

Digital preservation of cultural heritage in Ukraine: Institutional practices

Within state initiatives, the digital preservation of Ukraine's cultural heritage includes the creation of registers and the digitisation of holdings. Thus, the Action plan for culture in Ukraine (UNESCO, 2024) states that there are more than 12 million artefacts in over 970 museums and 2,500 public collections, but only about 10% of holdings have been digitised. These indicators point to the critical state of cultural heritage documentation and highlight the need to develop more effective tools and methods for preserving, describing, systematising, and providing access to cultural information. With regard to institutional initiatives, one example is Mystetskyi Arsenal, which published free electronic editions of exhibition catalogues (including the catalogue *Imprint. Ukrainian Printmaking of the 20th-21st Centuries*) with safe online access (Mystetskyi Arsenal presents..., 2025). The announcement also notes that the electronic editions are available for free viewing and that the collection of publications will be expanded. This means that the institution not only digitised materials but made them publicly accessible, thereby expanding the audience and strengthening the role of digital cultural representation. Another example is the PinchukArtCentre (2025) in Kyiv, which provides audio guides and video tours of exhibitions, allowing audiences to engage with content remotely.

In the civic and international segment, a significant example is the participation of the ICOM-SAREC project for Ukraine, oriented towards the digital preservation of museum collections: the "ICOM4Ukraine" project supported the digitisation of collections and the registration of Ukrainian museums on international platforms to increase international visibility (ICOM, 2024). Similarly, within the Maidan Museum project in Kyiv, in cooperation with UNESCO/ICCROM, the manual *Endangered Heritage: Emergency Evacuation of Heritage Collections*

was translated into Ukrainian, indicating international cooperation in the protection and digitisation of cultural heritage (ICCROM, 2022). From a technological perspective, for example, the Ukrainian Heritage Monitoring Lab (2025) reports that as of 2025 more than 12,000 museum objects had been digitised, more than 100,000 images created, and mobile digitisation centres were operating in Kyiv and Lviv. This confirms that not only high-level projects but also practical implementation is taking place. As for war as a catalyst – for example, a piece concerning Odesa museums notes that by early 2023 more than 5,400 files from 30+ museum collections had been digitised (Chernetska, 2024). Overall, these examples demonstrate that the digital preservation and representation of cultural heritage in Ukraine is being implemented at state, institutional, and international levels – with concrete indicators, technological resources, and cooperation.

The political and international dimension of narrative transformation in Ukraine deserves separate attention. The combination of local digital activity and international communication channels creates multiscalar narratives: internal narratives of resilience and resistance intersect with external diplomatic narratives about aggression and the need for assistance. The dynamics of such intersections affect both memory politics and cultural diplomacy. However, international programmes supporting digitisation (UNESCO, ICOM-SAREC, etc.) not only fund technical solutions but also perform a narrative function, amplifying stories about heritage preservation as part of the global cultural order. Under these conditions, digitisation acquires not merely a technical meaning but becomes an element of cultural security and resilience. The effectiveness of digital documentation is determined not only by the quantitative scale of digitisation, but also by compliance with international metadata standards, which ensure interoperability, searchability, and long-term accessibility of digital resources. In this context, the Dublin Core Metadata Element Set is important as a basic cross-domain model for describing digital objects through standardised elements such as title, creator, subject, date, format, and identifier; it supports the consistent description and discovery of heterogeneous cultural resources (Dublin Core Metadata Initiative, 2024). The Europeana Data Model is also relevant for cultural heritage institutions, as it enables the aggregation, connection, and enrichment of metadata from museums, archives, and libraries and supports the representation of complex cultural objects within a semantic and interoperable framework (Europeana Pro, 2025). Therefore, the digitisation of Ukrainian cultural heritage should be understood not only as the creation of digital copies, but also as a documentary and archival process that requires metadata standardisation, institutional coordination, and long-term preservation strategies. Overall, these examples demonstrate that the digital preservation and representation of cultural

heritage in Ukraine is being implemented at state, institutional, and international levels – with concrete indicators, technological resources, and cooperation.

Practical manifestations and trends in the transformation of cultural narratives in Ukraine

Digital audiovisual practices in Ukraine encompass a range of phenomena – from social media and blogging to digital art and documentary-making – each of which functions as a means of creating, representing, and circulating cultural narratives. First and foremost, social networks and messaging apps have become one of the leading platforms through which Ukrainian users receive information, stories, cultural plots, and forms of self-representation. According to a study, 86% of respondents in Ukraine used social media to obtain news in 2025; 37% of those surveyed stated that social media was their only source of information (How do Ukrainians..., 2025). Thus, social media create a mass channel for representing cultural meanings – from memes, through blogs, to videos and stories – and thereby form new narratives that go beyond traditional media. These indicators point to a structural shift in Ukraine's media landscape, where social networks have partly assumed the functions traditionally performed by mass media, transforming not only the consumption but also the production and circulation of cultural narratives. Thus, social media create a mass channel for representing cultural meanings – from memes, through blogs, to videos and stories – and thereby form new narratives that go beyond traditional media. Blogging and vlogging are another audiovisual practice gaining prominence in Ukraine. Video platforms such as YouTube occupy a significant share of users' time: according to 2024 data, 58% of Ukrainians watched videos and films online (Media Literacy Index..., 2025). Bloggers and video creators of Ukrainian origin produce content that covers cultural themes – history, art, war, youth culture – and this content takes the form of an audiovisual narrative: a video story, the author's commentary, sound, and editing. This format changes the mode of reception: instead of reading a text or watching a television programme, the user receives a personalised video story that is interactive (comments, likes, subscriptions) and can be remixed or reposted.

Digital art in Ukraine is another relevant direction that combines audiovisuality with technological innovation. For example, the project UBIENNALE (2025) presented more than 35 works from 10 countries in formats such as Augmented Reality/Virtual Reality/Mixed Reality (AR/VR/MR), generative art, and interactive installation. In addition, an article analysing Ukrainian digital art during the full-scale war recorded a trend: most wartime posters are digital art, which became one of the leading media used by Ukrainian artists during this period (Sydorenko et al., 2023). These practices create narratives of resistance, memory, and cultural identity that circulate both locally and globally. Such initiatives indicate the emergence of

a new type of publishing and exhibition practice under the conditions of digital technologies, where traditional forms of cultural presentation are increasingly supplemented or replaced by multimodal digital formats.

Documentary practice is also adapting to digital audiovisual realisation: online documentary films, interactive web projects, and multimedia stories about war, culture, displaced persons, and other topics. An example is the DOCU/SYNTHESIS project (Docudays UA, 2025), which in 2025 received 188 applications, selected 32 participants, and produced 10 finalist projects ("How We Remember") with an emphasis on digital heritage, memory, and multimedia. This shift towards digital audiovisualisation means that narrative within the cultural space becomes not only a linear story but a multimodal experience (video + sound + interface + audience participation). The outcome of all these practices is a radical transformation of cultural narratives: they become more dynamic, more fragmented, more multi-format, and more globalised. For example, Ukraine's digital artistic content creates means of communicating with international audiences (through VR installations, online exhibitions) while also producing local narratives (war memory, cultural resistance, remembrance).

The perception and dissemination of cultural meanings undergo fundamental changes in the digital era: the media ecology, forms of interaction, the pace of circulation, and the boundaries of authorship are all modified (Dyomin *et al.*, 2021). Above all, digital media transform modes of reception: audiences perceive meanings through multimedia formats – video, interactive installations, short social-media formats – which changes the

nature of engagement from passive viewing to active interaction (likes, comments, reposts). For example, research shows that every second adult in Ukraine uses the internet daily – 80% of respondents spend at least three hours per day online (80 percent of..., 2024). This fact illustrates the mass presence of "digital time" in everyday life and creates a new environment for cultural meanings: they no longer wait for a reader in a study, but are "sought out" where people spend their 3+ hours online. The distribution of meanings has changed through two major transformations: expanded audiences and lowered barriers to entry; and the increased complexity of dissemination networks – from centralised traditional media to decentralised social networks, blogging platforms, and user-generated content.

This shift creates new parameters for cultural representation: speed (content can go viral within minutes), adaptability (formats can change, be remixed, and translated), and multimodality (image + sound + interactivity). In this sense, cultural narratives cease to be linear stories on pages or screens and are transformed into "segmental" meanings that users can activate, modify, and disseminate. The Ukrainian experience confirms this logic: for example, digital art is one form in which new media (AR, VR, generative art) enable the creation not merely of representation but of experience. In Ukrainian culture, digital art is already regarded not only as a form but as a political and social necessity, with an emphasis on accessibility, technology, and humanitarian rights to cultural activity (Davymuka, 2025). The difference from traditional forms of representing Ukrainian cultural narratives is reflected in Table 2.

Table 2. Comparative characteristics of traditional and digital forms of representing Ukrainian cultural narratives

Form of representation	Key characteristics	Methods of dissemination/access	Advantages	Challenges
Traditional (print, television, museum exhibition)	Static or linear formats; limited interaction channel; centralised production	Television broadcasts, printed magazines/newspapers, museum displays	High reliability, established institutions, rich context	Limited audience, low interactivity, slow circulation
Digital audiovisual (social media, video platforms)	Dynamic, multimedia formats; user interaction; platform-dependent rules	YouTube, Telegram channels, blog videos, stories and reposts	Broad access, rapid dissemination, high audience engagement	Algorithmic constraints, format superficiality, fragmentation
Digital art / interactive practices	Media art, AR/VR, generative art, installations; demand for participation	Online exhibitions, VR/AR projects, NFT art, media installations	New forms of expression, international visibility, creative potential	Resource instability, technological barriers, reception complexity
Hybrid formats (museum + online, print + AR)	Combination of traditional institutional formats with digital layers; partial interactivity; expanded multimodal access	Museum exhibitions with online catalogues, printed editions with QR codes or AR elements, hybrid educational programmes, virtual tours linked to physical displays	Preservation of institutional reliability combined with broader access, audience engagement, and flexible interpretation	Need for technical support, uneven digital access, additional production costs, and risk of fragmented user experience

Source: compiled by the authors based on V. Kulyk (2011), B. Ivanytska *et al.* (2024)

Table 2 shows that digital forms of representation expand the possibilities of cultural narratives: they provide wider access (as confirmed by statistics on internet

and social media penetration in Ukraine), greater dynamism (short videos, blog formats, changing accounts), and enable new formats (AR/VR, generative art). On the

other hand, they are not without challenges: platform algorithmic rules, fragmentation of audience attention, and the potential loss of depth and context are real problems documented both in academic publications and in media literacy reports. For example, in Ukraine the share of the audience with high digital competence decreased from 55% to 48% between 2023 and 2024 (Media Literacy Index..., 2025). This decline in digital media literacy can be interpreted as a symptom of the contradiction between the mass dissemination of digital technologies and society's capacity to interact with them critically, which is a key issue within social informatics as a field concerned with the social consequences of information and communication technologies. Therefore, although digital forms have high potential for cultural narratives, their effective functioning requires institutional, technological, and methodological means of support. The table also points to the need for hybrid approaches: combining traditional and digital formats may be most effective. For example, a museum exhibition (traditional) can be complemented by an online version or a VR display (digital), expanding the audience and forming new representational pathways.

In the media spaces of the twenty-first century, digital culture becomes one of the fundamental conditions for the formation of collective memory and identity (Ivashko *et al.*, 2020). This influence manifests at several interconnected levels: through changes in memory carriers and modes of representation; through the modification of audiences and their participation in creating or transmitting memory; and through the integration of digital procedures into processes of cultural self-determination. Digital culture does not simply disseminate existing narratives – it modifies, repositions, and sometimes recreates them, which has significant consequences for both individual and collective identity. Collective memory plays a role in shaping cultural identity even in traditional (non-digital) forms. "Historical memory" serves as the basis of the moral foundations of contemporary Ukrainian society because it transmits higher moral values – goodness, truth, freedom – to subsequent generations (Ovsiankina, 2019). At the same time, digital culture opens new channels for realising this function: for example, the digital archiving of Ukraine's audiovisual heritage during wartime allows not only the preservation of a material trace but also the creation of a new form of "digital memory" that has the potential to influence the identity of actors – both internal (Ukrainian) and external (Kovalenko, 2025).

Digital culture contributes to mnemonic activation (that is, making memory active rather than passive), multimodal reception, and the visualisation of narratives – effectively forming a new regime of memory in which interactive digital products become sites of memory. Digital technologies open the door to studying collective memory, in particular through "trace data" – the footprints of digital communication (Yasseri *et al.*, 2022).

Digital culture modifies its formation in two directions: it creates possibilities for communication and interaction between local and global cultural communities – digital platforms provide access to global cultural discourse, reducing the isolation of local experience; and digital culture changes the very nature of identity: it becomes more decentralised, fragmented, and flexible – users can simultaneously belong to several "online communities", participate in the construction of meanings, and even modify their own identity through digital content. Collective identity in Ukraine is formed not as homogeneous but as a "polyphonic memory", taking into account different regional, age, and social groups (Vitov & Tymofieieva, 2025).

The digital transformation of cultural narratives carries significant potential but is also accompanied by many risks. On the positive side: democratisation of access, scalability, speed of dissemination, and new forms of participation. Digital platforms enable broader audiences to participate in the creation and dissemination of narratives – meaning that cultural voices of previously marginalised communities can be heard. In the Ukrainian context, this is important: it provides opportunities for displaced persons, communities, and regions to participate in cultural representation through digital formats. Digital transformation also means the possibility of creating international narratives: Ukrainian cultural initiatives can reach global audiences via online platforms, strengthening the representation of Ukraine beyond the national space (Kravchuk *et al.*, 2025). However, there is also a range of risks. The commercialisation of cultural narratives means that cultural content is produced according to market logic, likes, and monetisation, which can distort meanings. For example, research on digital brands indicates that in the era of digital branding of the Ukrainian economy there are risks: in the global digital economy, personalised marketing, data analytics, and digital branding create challenges for cultural autonomy (Rodinova *et al.*, 2024). The superficiality of formats is another risk: short videos, memes, and infographics may simplify historical or cultural narratives, making them easily accessible but less profound. Another risk is algorithmic inequality: digital platforms do not distribute visibility equally – cultural narratives that do not meet algorithmic criteria (likes, views, watch time) risk being marginalised. Academic work by Ukrainian authors notes that virtual repositories and digital collections have potential, but there are threats to their long-term sustainability, technological support, access, and authority (Melnik *et al.*, 2025). Democratisation of access also creates a paradox: more people can create cultural narratives, but this implies less centralised checking and validation – raising the risk of unreliable or manipulative narratives.

Therefore, it is necessary to combine digital opportunities with critical awareness, institutional support, and digital literacy. For example, when digitising audiovisual heritage, it is worth ensuring not only technical preservation

but also metadata, verification, accessibility, and a normative component so that the digital product can truly perform a representative function of memory rather than merely serve as a marketing artefact. In addition, it must be taken into account that digital transformation does not automatically mean the quality of representation – it requires active cultural moderation, a critical approach, and strategic support. Thus, the digital transformation of cultural narratives is a dual dynamic: on the one hand, it is an opportunity to move towards new forms of memory and identity; on the other, it is a challenge for culture, institutions, and audiences to ensure that these forms do not become superficial, commercially determined, or marginalised. Digital culture can be a tool for preserving and transmitting narratives, but only under conditions of critical reflection, adequate institutional support, and users' digital literacy.

Discussion

The study showed that the cultural narrative in the digital environment has transformed from a traditional linear storytelling structure into a complex system of meaning-making practices that combine cognitive, emotional, and technological levels of communication. This conclusion aligns with broader trends in the humanities, which interpret digital forms not as tools of representation but as autonomous mechanisms of meaning production. In this context, comparison with scholarly works devoted to interactive digital narratives made it possible to identify both shared theoretical positions and significant differences in emphasis. Compared with the conceptual conclusions of D. Masood (2024), who analysed H. White's legacy and the problem of historiographical representation, the results of this study confirmed that narrative remained not merely a form of describing the past but a mechanism of meaning construction. However, whereas in D. Masood's work historical discourse was considered within the framework of post-structuralist deconstruction of knowledge, in the present study narrative functioned within a broader digital-cultural frame, where the source of meaning-making was not only authorial structures but also networked collective practices. While D. Masood placed the main emphasis on the crisis of humanist historicism and the shift towards posthumanist thinking, the findings of this analysis demonstrated an empirical transition from monologic representations of history to polyphonic digital memory formats, in which narratives were formed through the interaction of users, platforms, and algorithms. Thus, conceptual continuity between the two approaches was defined by a shared understanding of narrative as a structure of power over meaning, but in the digital age this power becomes distributed.

Comparison with the results of S. Zaitseva *et al.* (2025) revealed direct thematic affinity in the context of the Russo-Ukrainian war. The study by S. Zaitseva *et al.* showed that digital mythologemes functioned as means of collective mobilisation and emotional cohesion, serving as a

form of social "cement" under conditions of information warfare. In the present study, these processes received a broader cultural explanation: they were interpreted not only as instruments of mobilisation but also as manifestations of a deep transformation in the ways narratives are produced in the digital environment. Whereas in S. Zaitseva *et al.* algorithms were described primarily as catalysts for the spread of mythologemes, the results of this work indicated that algorithmic influence also had selective and normative functions – it not only accelerated the circulation of content but also determined which stories gained the status of being "visible". In this way, algorithmisation was treated not merely as a mechanism of distribution but as a form of power over cultural representation. In addition, the findings confirmed S. Zaitseva *et al.*'s conclusions regarding the role of ethical responsibility: in digital culture, narratives grounded in verified facts and shared values displayed greater resilience and audience trust, turning digital memory into a space of moral legitimation. This confirms that the transformation of cultural narratives in the digital environment is not only a cultural issue but also a social communication problem directly connected with information security, media literacy, and society's capacity to distinguish between verified narratives, manipulative content, and algorithmically amplified mythologemes.

In comparison with the study by S. Kot *et al.* (2024), devoted to multimodal analysis of the visual art of war, the results of this study confirmed observations about the role of visual code in constructing cultural narratives while extending the context to a systemic level. S. Kot *et al.* focused on aesthetic and symbolic strategies of representation – heroisation, victimisation, identification; in the present study, visualisation was considered a technological mechanism of meaning-making that integrated cognitive, emotional, and algorithmic components. The visual outputs of Ukrainian digital initiatives – particularly PinchukArtCentre, Mystetskyi Arsenal, and VR KOLO – demonstrated that visibility was being transformed from an aesthetic instrument into a communicative infrastructure of memory. In this sense, the findings deepened S. Kot *et al.*'s conclusions by showing that visual culture not only transmitted traumatic experiences but also formed new regimes of collective interpretation in which visual artefacts served as interfaces of social memory. This understanding makes it possible to reconsider the classical ontology of cultural memory, shifting it from an archival and documentary level to a dynamic and networked one (Trach, 2025). Ukrainian digital narratives that emerged during the war exemplified a transition from centralised history to decentralised pluralities of memory coexisting within the interfaces of social media, digital art, and audiovisual platforms. They combined an aesthetics of resistance with technological infrastructure, turning the digital environment into a space of collective experience in which history was reproduced not as a story but as interaction. In this context, the findings indicated that the

transformation of cultural narratives in the digital age was not merely a consequence of technical progress but a profound change in the epistemological order – a shift from authorial control to algorithmic co-creation, from stable memory to memory as process, and from narrative as text to narrative as event.

Compared with the conclusions of K. Pletsan *et al.* (2023), the results confirmed that the digital transformation of cultural heritage in Ukraine indeed functioned not only as an instrument of technical preservation of artefacts but also as a mechanism of meaning-making. Whereas K. Pletsan *et al.* focused on the functional aspect of digitisation – the creation of registers, digitisation of monuments, and implementation of innovative technologies in heritage preservation – the theoretical analysis demonstrated that this process also had a deep cultural-symbolic dimension. The digital registration of monuments, interpreted by K. Pletsan *et al.* as an element of information protection, was interpreted within this study as a form of reconstructing narrative memory in which each digital object became a medium of cultural presence. Moreover, the comparison showed that digital tools not only contributed to patriotic education, as noted by K. Pletsan *et al.*, but also performed a function of decentralised re-signification of cultural identity through user-interaction interfaces. Thus, while K. Pletsan *et al.* demonstrated the strategic role of digitisation in state cultural policy, the present analysis highlighted its epistemological potential – the creation of new forms of collective knowledge and memory existing within a dynamic digital ecosystem.

The findings of I. Siliutina *et al.* (2024) supported many of the theoretical propositions identified in this study – for example, regarding the dual nature of digitisation as a process that simultaneously opened new opportunities for heritage preservation and generated new risks. I. Siliutina *et al.* emphasised technical and ethical problems – digital obsolescence, copyright issues, data security, limited access – which partly correlates with the risks identified here of algorithmic inequality and the commercialisation of cultural narratives. However, compared with I. Siliutina *et al.*, the present study moved beyond a technocentric approach, showing that digital technologies not only enabled archiving but also became an environment for producing new meanings. Whereas Siliutina *et al.* treated digitisation primarily as a tool for protecting cultural values under crisis conditions, the results of this analysis showed that digital culture was becoming an active space of interaction in which memory was not only preserved but continuously reconstructed through user participation practices. This created a new paradigm of preservation – “memory as process” rather than “memory as archive” – which significantly broadened the humanities’ interpretation of digital technologies.

The study by Y. Acim (2025) revealed a global dimension of the influence of digital media on the formation

of cultural narratives, which corresponded to the results of this study while also revealing differences in the interpretation of the mechanisms of that influence. Y. Acim focused on how media and social platforms fostered cross-cultural communication while generating challenges of representation, including digital distortion and disinformation. In the present study, similar processes were considered as part of a broader logic of algorithmisation and fragmentation of cultural meanings that transformed the very nature of collective memory. Whereas Y. Acim interpreted digital narratives primarily as an instrument of transnational exchange of cultural models, the results of this analysis showed that these narratives simultaneously acted as mechanisms of cultural resistance, specifically in the context of the war in Ukraine. The difference also lay in the level of institutional engagement: Y. Acim’s analysis emphasised global media corporations and tendencies towards cultural homogenisation, whereas the present study demonstrated the emergence of alternative, decentralised media practices that contributed to the democratisation of meaning-making. Both approaches pointed to commercialisation as a threat to the depth of cultural experience, but in the present study this problem was supplemented by the identification of mechanisms of self-regulation through critical digital awareness and local practices of reinterpreting historical memory.

M. Bellini (2022) addressed the problem of representing complex meanings within interactive digital narratives, where meaning emerges as the result of non-linear interaction among multiple layers of information. The author emphasised that Interactive Digital Narratives (IDNs) function according to the principle of self-organising systems in which the user becomes part of the narrative structure, influencing its dynamics. This position resonates with the findings of the present study, where interactivity was defined as a mechanism of transformation of cultural narratives. Both approaches showed that in the digital space the boundary between producer and recipient loses clarity, and the process of meaning creation acquires a collective and procedural character. At the same time, M. Bellini considered IDNs mainly as autonomous media systems, whereas the analytical model in this study emphasised the sociocultural function of such narratives – particularly their influence on the formation of collective memory and identity. Thus, while structural complexity was central for M. Bellini, the present findings demonstrated social complexity, namely the interaction between technological form and cultural context.

H. Koenitz (2023) systematised theoretical approaches to IDNs on the basis of cognitive narratology and a cybernetic approach. The author analysed the evolution of ideas over three decades and proposed a conceptual framework that treated interactivity as a cognitive process that turns the user into an active co-author of meaning. This position aligns with the findings

of the present study, which emphasised the procedural nature of contemporary narrative and the change in its communicative logic in the digital environment. However, compared with H. Koenitz's theoretical model, the present findings focused more strongly on the cultural and socio-political consequences of these processes. Whereas H. Koenitz interpreted IDNs as a phenomenon of interaction between system and user, the present study considered this phenomenon as part of a broader cultural ecosystem in which digital media perform not only a function of transmission but also of reproduction of cultural memory.

From the perspective of social communication theory, these findings show that interactive digital narratives should be analysed not only as new aesthetic or technological forms, but also as communicative systems that reorganise the relations between sender, message, medium, and recipient. In traditional models of communication, the narrative was usually transmitted from an institutional or authorial source to an audience; in interactive digital environments, however, the audience becomes a co-producer of meaning, while the platform itself acts as an intermediary that structures access, visibility, and participation. This means that interactivity changes the basic logic of social communication: cultural meanings are no longer simply disseminated but are continuously negotiated, modified, and legitimised through user practices, algorithmic selection, and networked circulation. Therefore, the transformation of cultural narratives in the digital age should be understood as part of a broader shift from linear communication to participatory, platform-mediated, and socially distributed forms of meaning-making.

The studies by L. Dubrovina *et al.* (2025), S.S. Harahulia & T.V. Symonenko (2025) make it possible to expand the interpretation of digital cultural narratives from a purely media-cultural perspective to a documentary, archival, and library-science framework. L. Dubrovina *et al.* demonstrate that archival and library institutions in Ukraine are becoming important infrastructures for the organisation, preservation, and intelligent processing of cultural and documentary resources, especially in the context of artificial intelligence implementation. S.S. Harahulia & T.V. Symonenko, in turn, show that research support services in digital humanities transform libraries into active participants in knowledge production rather than passive repositories of sources. Together, these works confirm that the digital transformation of cultural narratives should be understood as an institutional and documentary process in which archives, libraries, metadata systems, digital repositories, and research infrastructures ensure the preservation, circulation, and scholarly interpretation of cultural memory. Overall, comparison with these works showed that interactivity, algorithmisation, and visualisation functioned as universal mechanisms of digital narrativity, but in the Ukrainian context they acquired additional functions – documentation,

resistance, and the reconstruction of national identity during war. The digital transformation of cultural narratives opened new horizons for communication, memory, and self-identification, while simultaneously raising questions about the limits of authenticity, algorithmic control, and the need to develop critical digital awareness. Comparison with earlier theoretical models indicated that the humanities are moving towards synthesis – from technical aspects to cultural ones, from form to meaning, and from structure to interaction.

Conclusions

The study demonstrated that the category of the “cultural narrative” in the humanities is not merely a narrative structure but a set of meaning-making practices that shape collective frameworks for interpreting the past, present, and future. The historiographical tradition established a fundamental problem: history as a discursive practice constructs meanings through narrative operations rather than revealing objective facts, defining cultural narratives as discursive constructions with their own formal-semantic logic. The evolution of approaches in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries can be traced in two directions: classical narratology analysed the grammar of storytelling, revealing the formation of historical scenarios, while cultural and media analyses focused on products of mass culture, demonstrating the functioning of narratives as technologies of memory. The analytical layer of contemporary theory emphasised three operational processes: selectivity of representation, intertextuality, and authorisation. The turn to digital contexts in the 2020s required a revision of classical conceptions of narrative, because in the digital environment narratives exist in formats of modularity, fragmentation, and mnemonic multiplicity, which entails the transformation of cultural narratives into complex practices with different modes of delivering meaning. The transition of cultural representation into the digital age was accompanied by structural changes in the media ecology, in which the characteristics of new media – numerical representation, modularity, automation, variability, and transcoding – defined the operational principles of digital forms that transformed the ways cultural narratives are created and disseminated. There were two interconnected levels of influence of digital audiovisual practices: low barriers to entry expanded the circle of creators and the diversity of narratives, while platform algorithms determined content visibility, thereby performing a function of governing dominant narratives. This produced changes in the properties of narratives themselves, as traditional grand narratives underwent fragmentation into micro-narratives circulating across different genres and formats, complicating the control and validation of historical meanings while simultaneously creating opportunities for dialogic reproduction of alternative memories.

In the Ukrainian context, digital audiovisual practices acquired a sociocultural function under conditions

of war, performing a dual role as local resistance and a global communicative channel. In the digital media space, narratives ceased to be monolithic structures and shifted into multi-level configurations through three interrelated mechanisms – interactivity, visualisation, and algorithmisation. Interactivity transformed narrative into a procedural practice of co-creating meaning, blurring the boundary between producer and audience and changing the authority of the source. Visualisation operated at the levels of transforming data into images and the dominance of an audiovisual emotional code, increasing the persuasive effect of a narrative. Algorithmisation modelled the visibility of narratives at scale, acting as an intermediary that shaped the spatial cartography of audience attention and generating the problem of invisible censorship. Within state initiatives, the digital preservation of Ukraine's cultural heritage included the creation of registers and digitisation of collections, supported by international cooperation. Practical manifestations of the transformation of cultural narratives in Ukraine encompassed social media, blogging, digital art, and documentary-making, each functioning as a means of creating and circulating cultural meanings. Digital culture influenced the formation of collective memory and identity through changes in the carriers of memory, the modification of audiences, and the integration of digital procedures into processes of cultural self-determination, creating a new regime of memory in which interactive digital products became sites of memory. The digital transformation of cultural narratives carries significant potential for democratising access, scalability, and new forms of participation, but it is also accompanied by risks of commercialisation, superficiality of formats, algorithmic inequality, and reduced centralised verification, which requires combining digital opportunities with critical awareness, institutional support, and digital literacy

to ensure the quality of representation and preserve cultural autonomy.

The obtained results also have practical significance for the development of applied social communication technologies. In particular, they may be used to design strategies for digital documentation of cultural heritage, platform diplomacy, media literacy programmes, and information security practices under conditions of contemporary informational challenges. This confirms that the transformation of cultural narratives in the digital environment is not only a cultural and technological process, but also a socially significant communication phenomenon that requires coordinated institutional, documentary, and educational responses. A limitation of the study lies in its focus on theoretical analysis of the transformation of cultural narratives in the digital environment without conducting original empirical research, which restricts the possibility of verifying certain theoretical propositions with specific data. Future research perspectives are defined by the need for empirical verification of the proposed theoretical model, in particular through the analysis of specific digital platforms, the study of algorithmic mechanisms shaping narratives, and comparative studies cultural narrative transformation in Ukrainian and international contexts, using methods of content analysis and social media network analysis.

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Цифрові аудіовізуальні практики як технології соціальних комунікацій: трансформація культурних наративів

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Анотація. Метою дослідження було виявлення механізмів і напрямів трансформації культурних наративів у цифровому середовищі та визначення ролі цифрових медіа у формуванні нових форм колективної пам'яті. Використано міждисциплінарний підхід, який поєднує методи дискурсивного аналізу, структурно-семантичного моделювання та культурної герменевтики для виявлення закономірностей змін культурних наративів у цифровому просторі. Дослідження продемонструвало, що категорія «культурний наратив» у сучасних гуманітарних науках перестала бути лише наративною структурою і стала комплексом практик, що породжують сенси, які формують колективні способи інтерпретації минулого, теперішнього та майбутнього. Аналіз історичних підходів показав, що наративне представлення історії є актом конструювання сенсів, а не відтворенням фактів, що визначає специфіку культурних дискурсів. Порівняльний аналіз класичних і медіаорієнтованих теорій виявив дві основні тенденції розвитку: перехід від граматики оповідання до

технологій пам'яті. У цифрову епоху культурні наративи набувають модульної, фрагментарної та множинної структури, породжуючи нові способи представлення досвіду. Визначено, що цифрові аудіовізуальні практики впливають на наративні процеси через три механізми – інтерактивність, візуалізацію та алгоритмізацію, які трансформують способи виробництва та сприйняття культурних сенсів. Ці механізми розглядаються як ключові чинники трансформації практик соціальних комунікацій в умовах цифровізації, оскільки вони перевизначають форми взаємодії, циркуляції сенсів та суспільної залученості до культурної пам'яті. В українському контексті цифрові ініціативи в галузі культурної спадщини, зокрема цифровізація музейних колекцій та онлайн-архівів, поєднують функції збереження та репрезентації національної культури в умовах війни. Це свідчить про виникнення нового типу наративу – інтерактивного, мережевого та гібридного, який поєднує локальну пам'ять із глобальною видимістю. Цифрова трансформація культурних наративів виявила як потенціал демократизації доступу до культури, так і ризики алгоритмічної нерівності та втрати глибини контенту. Збереження культурної автономії в цифровому середовищі вимагає інтеграції технологічних інновацій із критичним усвідомленням та інституційною підтримкою. Результати дослідження можуть бути використані для розробки стратегій цифрових гуманітарних наук, культурної політики, технологій соціальних комунікацій та програм цифрового збереження культурної спадщини України

Ключові слова: конструювання пам'яті; колективна свідомість; соціальні комунікації; цифрова документація



Émigré media as a tool for transnational political influence: Communication mechanisms and models of elite responses in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan

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Abstract. The purpose of this study was to examine émigré media as a documentary and communication system through which information about political influence is recorded, preserved, verified, transmitted and re-circulated across national borders. The research combined source-based documentary analysis, archival reconstruction, digital-source verification and qualitative content analysis of émigré periodicals, Azattyk/Azattyq publications, international resolutions, human-rights reports, legal documents and statistical materials relating to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Particular attention was paid to methods of documenting emigrant content, including the fixation of

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testimonies, publication metadata, screenshots and web archives, cross-platform preservation of digital traces, and comparison of media messages with official statements and institutional reactions. It was established that émigré media function as a transnational documentary infrastructure rather than only as political actors: they accumulate alternative evidence, preserve counter-narratives, and transmit them through international, transnational and domestic communication circuits. The study analysed narrative framing, multiplatform dissemination and wave documentation as independent communication strategies, not merely as auxiliary instruments for achieving political outcomes. The findings show that elite responses followed differentiated models: adaptive authoritarianism in Kazakhstan and repressive resistance in Kyrgyzstan. The practical significance of the study lies in its application to archival work, particularly for the description, preservation, verification and long-term accessibility of émigré media collections and digital evidence produced under conditions of political pressure

Keywords: émigré journalism; diasporic media platforms; documentary communication; source verification; digital preservation

■ Introduction

Émigré journalism occupies a specific place in the system of social communications because it operates simultaneously as journalism, documentary evidence, archival memory and a channel of transnational public communication. Transnational media of this type form a communication system that functions beyond national borders and exceeds the classical “sender-channel-receiver” model: the same message may be produced in exile, archived on a digital platform, redistributed by diaspora networks, cited by international organisations and then returned to the country of origin as a documented political claim. The period from 2020 to early 2025 was characterised by intense migration processes and the transformation of political systems, which exerted a significant influence on the formation of national identity and political consciousness. The media play a key role in these processes, acting not only as transmitters of information but also as active participants in documentary circulation, shaping public opinion and influencing the positions of the political elite (Sultanbayeva *et al.*, 2025). A particularly acute manifestation of this issue is observed in the post-Soviet states of Central Asia, where processes of national self-determination and political modernisation unfold alongside intensive migration flows and growing informational pressures.

The scale of diaspora communication provides the demographic context for this study. According to International Organization for Migration (2023; 2025), estimates of ethnic Kazakhs abroad vary between approximately 5 and 7 million people, while Kyrgyz migration sources indicate that almost 1 million Kyrgyz citizens work abroad and that diaspora associations operate in different host countries. The digital environment also increases the relevance of documentary transmission: S. Kemp (2023) recorded 17.73 million internet users in Kazakhstan at the beginning of 2023, with internet penetration at 90.9% and 66.8% of the total internet user base using at least one social media platform. The historical dimension of this phenomenon is equally important. Political emigration has often acted as a catalyst for the intellectual and political development of nations

by creating conditions for the articulation of national political thought beyond state structures. In Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, émigré intellectual activity acquired particular significance because it provided a space for the formulation of national political ideas and critical reflection on sociopolitical processes when such debate was restricted or impossible within domestic political systems. Therefore, the contemporary role of émigré media should be analysed in continuity with earlier forms of exile journalism and political documentation.

Recent studies show that émigré and diaspora media should be examined not only as channels of political expression but also as systems for producing, preserving and recirculating documentary evidence. K. Koziura (2025), analysing diaspora memory work, demonstrates that émigré periodicals, community documents, commemorative brochures, posters and photographs may function as displaced archives through which suppressed historical experience is preserved and later reactivated in public memory. R. Arafat (2021) similarly shows that diaspora journalists maintain links with conflict-affected homelands through digital networks that combine news production, human-rights advocacy, civil-society documentation and transnational communication. C. Porlezza & R. Arafat (2022) further conceptualise journalism in exile as a hybrid professional field in which media actors document attacks, publish records of violations, develop safety guides and cooperate with human-rights organisations. In the digital context, J. Zeng & C.Y. Cheng (2024) extend this logic to diasporic citizen journalism, showing how digital diaspora communities can become cross-border infrastructures of news production and sense-making during protest events. This documentary perspective has also been developed in studies of digital diaspora platforms. O. Ogunyemi (2018) conceptualised diasporic journalism as a distinct communicative practice shaped by exile, audience fragmentation and cross-border accountability, while T. Dodds *et al.* (2024) showed that diaspora journalists construct kinship-based professional networks that help collect, verify and transmit information under conditions

of risk. S. Nguyễn *et al.* (2022) further demonstrated that digital diaspora media must be analysed through transnational data flows, platform affordances and community-based verification practices rather than through domestic media models alone.

The media landscape of Central Asia and its impact on social processes has become a subject of close scholarly attention in recent years. T. Karabchuk *et al.* (2023) conducted a comprehensive analysis of the media landscape in three Central Asian states, identifying its effects on key social and behavioural dimensions in the region. The authors demonstrated that contemporary media played a decisive role in shaping public consciousness and political preferences. Developing this topic further, B. Bayimbetov (2023) examined the role of mass media in the political and social transformation of post-Soviet Central Asia, with emphasis on the specific mechanisms of media influence under conditions of political transition. The digital transformation of media decision-making, described by E. Grossman (2022), is also relevant to the present article because it shifts attention from media influence in an abstract sense to the documented movement of messages across institutional environments. In this context, the influence of émigré media is assessed through traceable communication acts: publication dates, platform metrics, citations in international reports, references in parliamentary debates, official statements, draft laws, accreditation decisions and other documentary signs of elite reaction.

Despite the existing body of research, the specific interaction between émigré media and political processes in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan remains insufficiently examined. The mechanisms through which émigré journalism shaped national political consciousness and influenced elite responses require more detailed analysis. Of particular importance is the examination of how the journalistic activity of figures such as Mustafa Shokay contributed to the transformation of political elites and influenced nation-building processes in the region. This issue remains on the periphery of scholarly attention, limiting the understanding of the historical roots of contemporary political processes in Central Asian states and the role of the media in their formation.

The aim of the study was to determine the nature of the influence exerted by émigré journalistic activity on the dynamics of political change and the transformation of elite positions in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan through analysis of the media legacy of political émigrés. To achieve this aim, the following objectives were defined: to analyse the specific features of émigré journalistic activity as an instrument of political influence; to identify the communication mechanisms through which émigré content was stored, circulated and re-entered domestic political debate; to assess how elite reactions were documented in official statements, legal initiatives, accreditation decisions, personnel changes and international resolutions.

Materials and Methods

The source base of the study consisted of documentary materials that recorded the production, preservation and circulation of émigré political communication from 1920 to early 2025. The historical corpus included émigré periodicals and related archival descriptions, especially "Yash Turkistan", "Milli Yolash", "Yaş Türkistan" and "Yeni Dünya", as systematised in the works of E. Allworth *et al.* (1967), A.B. Zholmakhanova *et al.* (2018), M. Rakhmatov (2023) and U. Saidirakhman (2025). The contemporary corpus included Azattyk/Azattyq publications and videos, documents of international organisations, human-rights reports, media-freedom reports, legal documents and statistical datasets on digital audiences and migration.

The archive database was formed through searches in published bibliographic descriptions of Turkistani émigré periodicals, digitised collections of "Yash Turkistan", the websites of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and Azattyk/Azattyq, the European Parliament Resolution No. 2022/2505(RSP) "On the Situation in Kazakhstan" (2022), Human Rights Watch (2022), Freedom House (2022), Reporters Without Borders (2022), the Committee to Protect Journalists (2024), the International Organization for Migration (2021; 2023; 2025) and materials of Internews (Schläpfer & Parkyn, 2024). Searches were conducted in English, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Russian and Turkish using the keywords "émigré journalism", "diaspora media", "Yash Turkistan", "Yaş Türkistan", "Mustafa Shokay", "Azattyk", "Azattyq", "foreign representatives law", "January events Kazakhstan", "transnational repression", "Kazakh diaspora", "Kyrgyz diaspora", "эмигрантская пресса", "Яш Туркестан", "Азаттык", "Азаттық", "диаспоралық медиа".

Documents were included when they met four criteria: they belonged to the chronological scope of 1920-2025; they were connected with émigré or diaspora media, exile journalism, transnational media circulation or official reactions to such media; they contained political discourse, evidence of documentation practices or traces of institutional response; and they could be verified through bibliographic, archival, organisational or digital metadata. Materials were excluded if they were anonymous without verifiable metadata, purely opinion-based without a documentary link to the studied cases, duplicated across platforms, or unrelated to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The authenticity of historical sources was verified through comparison of bibliographic descriptions, issue numbers, publication dates, named editors, language versions and references in secondary historical works. Digital sources were verified through URL stability, publication date, author or institutional attribution, archived copies where available, screenshots, cross-platform comparison and triangulation with reports of international organisations. For videos and social-media materials, the date of upload, channel identity, platform metadata, viewer or subscriber

indicators and subsequent citations in reports or official statements were recorded.

Qualitative content analysis was used to examine the documentary and communication functions of the corpus. The unit of analysis was a separate publication, editorial article, interview, video report, Telegram post, official statement, legal document or international resolution. The coding categories were: type of document; platform and preservation format; evidence recorded; verification markers; narrative frame; target audience; communication route; form of elite reaction; time lag; and documentary outcome. A second reading of 25% of the corpus was conducted after a two-week interval to check coding stability; discrepancies were resolved by recoding ambiguous items and clarifying category definitions. Time-lag analysis was used to identify the interval between publication and reaction. For print sources, the moment of publication was determined according to the issue date; for online sources, according to the publication or upload date recorded on the platform; and for official reactions, according to the date of the statement, resolution, draft law, court decision, accreditation decision or personnel change. Elite reactions were identified through official speeches, presidential addresses, parliamentary voting records, draft laws, court filings, accreditation decisions, ministry statements, diplomatic notes and documented changes in institutional communication. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise the corpus structure, while the assessment of effectiveness remained qualitative and was based on triangulation of documentary traces rather than on inferential modelling.

The methodology had several limitations. Historical archives of émigré periodicals are incomplete because many issues, letters and distribution records were lost during repressions, wars and forced migration. Language barriers also affected the analysis, since some sources were published in Ottoman Turkish, French, Arabic, Kazakh, Kyrgyz and Russian. The corpus is not fully representative of all émigré journalism because not all publications have survived or been digitised. Finally, émigré media themselves are politically engaged sources; therefore, their claims were treated as documentary evidence requiring verification rather than as neutral descriptions of events.

Results

Specific features of émigré journalistic activity as an instrument of political influence

Émigré media platforms in the Central Asian region during the period from 1920 to early 2025 constituted a complex ecosystem of information channels that evolved from traditional print publications to contemporary digital platforms. Periodical publications, including the journal “Yash Turkistan”, the newspaper “Milli Yolash” produced by Turkic émigrés in Istanbul, the journal “Yaş Türkistan” in Paris, and the Berlin publications “Yeni

Dünya”, created an alternative information space in which national liberation narratives could circulate beyond the control of the metropole (Allworth *et al.*, 1967). These platforms performed a threefold function: informing the diaspora about events in the historical homeland, preserving and developing national identity, and facilitating political mobilisation and lobbying in host states. The contemporary transformation observed from the 2010s to early 2025 was characterised by the integration of digital technologies, which significantly expanded the speed of information transmission and the geographical reach of audiences, creating conditions for the formation of transnational information networks among different segments of the diaspora (Dodds *et al.*, 2024). The structural organisation of émigré media platforms demonstrated fundamental differences from state or commercial media, relying on voluntary labour, financial support from the diaspora, and assistance from international organisations, which ensured relative independence from political pressure exerted by the states of origin. The parallel public sphere created by émigré media made it possible to formulate discourses that would have been impossible under conditions of authoritarian control in the homeland. The digital revolution of the past one and a half decades further reinforced these capacities by providing tools for the instantaneous coordination of different segments of the diaspora and the establishment of stable communication channels functioning independently of state censorship (Ogunyemi, 2018). Diasporic media became platforms for articulating alternative political projects and for conducting critical analysis of political processes in the states of origin, which gave them a distinctive role in the transformation of political discourse.

The journalistic practice of Mustafa Shokay in the period 1920-1941 constituted a classical model of émigré political communication that combined documentary reporting, ideological advocacy, and diplomatic communication. The publication of the journal “Yash Turkistan” and other periodicals enabled Mustafa Shokay to establish a stable channel of informational influence on both the European political elite and the emerging Central Asian diaspora. The documentary component of his work included the systematic collection of evidence concerning repressive actions in Turkistan, the publication of archival materials, and analytical examination of political processes in Soviet Central Asia, thereby creating a factual basis for criticising Soviet policy in the region (Zholmakhanova *et al.*, 2018). In documentary terms, Mustafa Shokay’s journalism relied on several methods of evidence fixation. First, he transformed reports from correspondents and travellers into dated textual records that could be cited in exile debates. Second, he preserved names, places, administrative decisions and descriptions of repression in article form, thereby converting fragmentary oral or private information into stable documentary units.

Third, he connected journalistic evidence with diplomatic communication by using periodical publications as dossiers for Western intellectuals, journalists and political organisations. This combination of testimony, archival citation and analytical commentary made "Yash Turkistan" a documentary platform rather than only a polemical journal (Saidirakhman, 2025).

Particular attention in his journalism was devoted to exposing the consequences of the so-called "Goloshchyokin policy" or "Little October" programme (1925-1933), implemented under the leadership of F.I. Goloshchyokin in Kazakhstan. This policy included forced collectivisation, confiscation of livestock from the nomadic population, and the harsh suppression of traditional forms of economic activity, which resulted in the mass famine of 1930-1933 that claimed, according to various estimates, up to one and a half million lives. In his publications, Mustafa Shokay presented the Goloshchyokin policy as an example of the colonial and repressive character of Soviet authority towards Turkic peoples, highlighting the destruction of the social structure of Kazakh society, the annihilation of the national intelligentsia, and the suppression of all forms of political and cultural expression (Rakhmatov, 2023). The communication route of these materials was also significant. "Yash Turkistan" was published between 1929 and 1939 and formed a 117-issue collection that circulated among Turkestanian émigré communities in Europe, Turkey and Asia (Saidirakhman, 2025). Although precise print-run figures are fragmentary and should be treated cautiously, Mustafa Shokay's own retrospective assessment of the journal emphasised its wide distribution: letters reached the editorial circle from Arab countries, Turkey, Persia, India, Afghanistan, China, the Far East and other regions (Shokay.kz, 2025). Thus, the documentary message did not move through a single linear channel; it passed from informants and émigré correspondents to the editorial office, then to printed issues, diaspora reading circles, European interlocutors and political organisations.

His criticism was not confined to general anti-Soviet positions. In a number of articles, he provided a detailed analysis of the consequences of forced collectivisation and the coerced transition of nomadic populations to a sedentary lifestyle, noting that such measures led to the destruction of traditional social structures and to mass human casualties (Dogalov *et al.*, 2023). Mustafa Shokay devoted particular attention to the problem of resettling nomads into sedentary farming, interpreting it as a coercive measure that deprived Kazakhs of economic autonomy and cultural identity. In the émigré press, he also addressed the causes and scale of the famine in Kazakhstan, highlighting the criminal inaction of the authorities and raising the question of why those responsible for the tragedy had not been held accountable. Mustafa Shokay associated these processes with the broader policy of Moscow

aimed at suppressing national consciousness and dismantling the foundations of traditional life among Turkic peoples. In his book "Turkestan under Soviet Rule", he exposed the hypocrisy of Bolshevik national policy, which formally proclaimed equality and autonomy but in practice became an instrument of control and subjugation (Moldabekov, 2017).

Mustafa Shokay's assessments reflect a comprehensive critique of both prerevolutionary colonial agrarian policy and the Soviet course of collectivisation and the "Little October", which enabled him to examine the developments in Kazakhstan in the context of long-term oppression and the repressive attitude of the state towards national societies. The ideological function was realised through the formation of the concept of an independent Turkestan and the development of programme documents of the national liberation movement, which were disseminated among émigré communities and served as a basis for political mobilisation. The diplomatic dimension of Mustafa Shokay's assessments reflect a comprehensive critique of both prerevolutionary colonial agrarian policy and the Soviet course of collectivisation and the "Little October", which enabled him to examine the developments in Kazakhstan in the context of long-term oppression and the repressive attitude of the state towards national societies. Mustafa Shokay's activity was manifested in appeals to Western governments, participation in international conferences, and attempts to form political alliances with other émigré movements in the region, demonstrating the capacity of émigré journalism to move beyond simple information dissemination and to function as an instrument of political diplomacy (Rakhmatov, 2023).

The model of political communication developed by Mustafa Shokay demonstrated the ability of émigré journalism to operate simultaneously as an intellectual, propagandistic, and diplomatic instrument. Publications of "Yash Turkistan" served not only as a source of information for the diaspora but also as a means of shaping international public opinion concerning the situation in Central Asia. Mustafa Shokay's strategy included the creation of a network of correspondents among émigrés, the establishment of contacts with Western journalists and politicians, and coordination with other national movements in the region (Saidirakhman, 2025). This model established the foundational principles of émigré political journalism in the region and influenced subsequent generations of Central Asian political émigrés, creating a precedent for the use of media platforms to articulate political demands and mobilise international support. The methods through which émigré journalism influenced political discourse arose from the adaptation of media practices to conditions of operation beyond state control and the need to mobilise international support. Narrative framing strategy involved the deliberate presentation of events through conceptual frameworks

comprehensible to Western audiences, including human rights, national self-determination, and democratic values. Research on the African diasporic press has shown a tendency among émigré journalists to select conflict-oriented, human-centred, and accountability-focused angles of coverage rather than simply reproducing material from Western news agencies, which heightens the emotional impact of publications and enhances the mobilisation of public opinion (Ogunyemi, 2017). Heuristic documentation has become a central method of legitimising political claims through the collection of personal testimonies, historical and archival materials, which serve as both emotional and factual justification for criticism of political regimes. Contemporary research confirms that émigré colleagues organise networks for collecting and transmitting materials on repression or crises, increasing the credibility of publications and contributing to the formation of the collective memory of the diaspora (Dodds *et al.*, 2024).

Coordination with political actors represents a strategic area of activity for émigré journalism, which involves the use of publications to build alliances with non-governmental organisations, human rights defenders and the governments of host countries. Diaspora media often function as intermediaries between activist movements and international political institutions, providing informational support for lobbying activities and for the formation of political coalitions (Tsavkko Garcia, 2024). Multiplatformity in contemporary émigré journalism included the integration of traditional media formats with digital tools, including websites, social networks, and messaging applications. Digital networks enable migrant journalists to coordinate, bypass censorship, maintain communication between the diaspora and the homeland, and exchange operational information, which significantly expanded their capacity to shape political discourse (Nguyễn *et al.*, 2022). These methods produce a synergistic effect, in which émigré media act not merely as sources of alternative information but as active participants in political processes capable of influencing the development of international policy towards countries of origin.

A comparative analysis of émigré and domestic journalism in the formation of political narratives reveals differences in freedom of expression, legitimacy and audience reception, as well as in resource availability and geographical reach. Émigré journalism possesses a greater degree of freedom of expression and can formulate radical narratives that would have been impossible under the authoritarian or semi-authoritarian control characteristic of many post-Soviet Central Asian states. Domestic media are constrained by censorship and self-censorship, narrowing the range of permissible political discourses and affecting the quality of political information available to the population (Abramson, 2024). Legitimacy and audience reception demonstrate different patterns of influence: domestic media maintained

organisational links to the population through local language use and the immediacy of reporting, and their narratives exerted direct influence on everyday public opinion. Émigré platforms exert greater influence on elite groups, international actors and the diaspora, creating alternative channels of political information that can re-enter countries of origin through digital pathways and personal networks (Blom, 2024). For comparison, domestic media organisations in the region retained a broader direct audience but operated under stronger institutional constraints. According to marketing research and media market analysis, approximately 53 million website views are recorded in Kazakhstan each month, indicating the scale of the domestic audience reach available to major local news portals (Birbayeva, 2025). By contrast, émigré and exile platforms often have smaller or more fragmented audiences but stronger capacity to document politically sensitive issues, preserve them outside state-controlled infrastructures and transmit them to international institutions.

Resource availability and geographical reach created different opportunities for political influence: émigré outlets often faced financial constraints but demonstrated advantages in establishing international connections and in gaining access to Western political institutions. Internal media were more integrated into the local media environment and had direct access to mass audiences, but were constrained in their ability to provide critical analysis of political processes (Carment *et al.*, 2022). Political change required the interaction of both spheres: émigré journalism expanded international pressure and diplomatic visibility, while domestic journalism mobilised and shaped mass internal opinion. The synergy between émigré and domestic media determined the effectiveness of political influence and the capacity to transform political discourse at both national and international levels (Chirvas, 2022). Contemporary digital technologies created new opportunities for the integration of émigré and domestic media flows, which could enhance their combined impact on political processes in the Central Asian states.

An analysis of empirical data on the impact of various émigré journalistic methods on political discourse made it possible to systematise their effectiveness in relation to contextual factors and target audiences. Studies of diaspora media indicated that the success of political influence was determined not only by the quality of journalistic output but also by the ability to adapt communication strategies to the specific political conjuncture and the media environment of host countries (Fabos *et al.*, 2021). Contemporary trends pointed to the growing role of digital platforms in strengthening the political influence of émigré journalism, which required a reconsideration of traditional approaches to analysing media influence in the context of transnational political communication (Table 1).

Table 1. Documentary and communication methods used by émigré journalism

Method	Documentary description	Communication mechanism	Target audience	Documented effectiveness
Narrative framing strategy	Presentation of events through human-rights, self-determination and accountability frames	Conversion of local events into internationally legible documentary claims	International political elite, human-rights organisations	High when cited in reports, resolutions or diplomatic statements
Heuristic documentation	Collection of testimonies, archival materials, screenshots and dated platform records	Legitimation of political claims through a verifiable evidence base	International media, political institutions, diaspora	Moderate to high, depending on source triangulation
Coordination with political actors	Linking publications with NGOs, human-rights advocates and host-country institutions	Transformation of media evidence into lobbying, legal and diplomatic documents	Political institutions, activist networks	High when followed by resolutions, hearings or official statements
Multiplatformity	Preservation and redistribution through websites, YouTube, Telegram, Facebook and mirrored channels	Expansion of reach, speed and resilience against censorship	Diaspora, international audience, domestic readers	Very high in the digital era when platform metrics and reposts are visible

Note: the effectiveness estimates are qualitative and are based on a synthesis of documentary traces, including citation analysis in reports and resolutions, monitoring of official reactions, OSINT checks of platform circulation, audience indicators and the case studies discussed in Results section

Source: created by the authors based on O. Ogunyemi (2017), A. Fabos *et al.* (2021), S. Nguyễn (2022), T. Dodds *et al.* (2024), R. Tsavkko Garcia (2024)

The presented analysis of methods used by émigré journalism demonstrates an evolution from traditional forms of political communication to integrated multi-platform strategies that maximised political influence through the diversification of channels of impact and the adaptation of content to the specificities of different audiences. The experience of Mustafa Shokay as a classical representative of émigré political journalism illustrates the resilience of core principles of media influence, which remain relevant under the contemporary conditions of the digital transformation of the media environment. Contemporary trends indicate an increasing role of technological innovations in expanding the capacity of émigré journalism to influence political processes both in the states of origin and within the international political system, which creates new opportunities for examining the relationship between diasporic media activity and the transformation of political elites in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

Mechanisms for the formation of national political consciousness through émigré media

Forming national political consciousness through émigré media in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan represents a multi-level process that was realised through a set of interconnected mechanisms adapted to the conditions of the transnational political space. The émigré press acted as a catalyst in articulating national political ideas, creating alternative channels for expressing political positions that would have been inaccessible under the conditions of restricted media freedom in the states of origin. These mechanisms operated within the framework of continuous interaction between diasporic communities and political processes in the homeland, creating transnational

political networks capable of influencing the transformation of the national political discourse (Waldinger & Shams, 2023). Studies of the Kyrgyz diaspora demonstrated that émigré media aggregated evidence of political events, formed thematic frames for the perception of political reality, and consolidated discussions within diasporic communities, which subsequently influenced political sentiments and mobilisation processes both in the diaspora and within the territories of the states of origin (Chekirova, 2024). Archiving alternative narratives is a separate technology for preserving collective memory. In the historical period, this function was performed by complete and partial sets of émigré periodicals, personal memoirs, correspondence and reprinted programme texts; in the digital period, it is performed through website archives, video repositories, screenshots, mirrored pages, Telegram reposts and social-media metadata. Such archiving allows politically sensitive narratives to survive beyond the jurisdiction of the state of origin and to be reactivated during later political debates. In this respect, the archive is not a passive storehouse but a communication mechanism that enables the repeated circulation of documentary evidence across generations and platforms (Nanovsky & Knox, 2024).

The structural features of diasporic communities in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan created specific conditions for the functioning of émigré media as instruments of political socialisation. Mapping of the Kyrgyz diaspora showed the presence of developed communication practices among various segments of the emigrant community, which provided a stable basis for the dissemination of political ideas and the formation of collective political positions (International Organization for Migration, 2021). Émigré media became a space for

articulating alternative national projects that could differ fundamentally from official state narratives, offering alternative models of political development and national identity. The legal consciousness of migrants was shaped by the interaction between the legal systems of the states of origin and the host countries, which created unique conditions for the development of a critical attitude towards political institutions and legal practices in the Central Asian states (Güdük & Desmet, 2022). This process contributed to the formation of transnational political consciousness, characterised by critical analysis of political processes and readiness for political mobilisation beyond traditional state boundaries.

The transmission of political concepts and ideologies through émigré media channels is carried out through integrated digital strategies that include networked publications on social media and in messaging applications, multimedia reports by émigré journalists, and coordination with activist groups. The digital structure of contemporary émigré media allows ideological messages to be disseminated rapidly between the diaspora and domestic audiences, forming recurrent semantic patterns that contribute to the consolidation of political positions and the mobilisation of public opinion (Yu & Parke, 2023). Kinetic links between émigré journalists create stable networks of trust and mutual support that ensure coordination of activity and the transmission of meanings across different media platforms and geographic locations (Dodds *et al.*, 2024). These networks function as mechanisms for transmitting not only information but also political values, ideological orientations, and strategic approaches to political mobilisation, which support the formation of a coherent political discourse among émigré communities. The mechanisms for transmitting political concepts are adapted to the specificities of different digital platforms and take into account the modes of information reception among various audience segments (Kunanets *et al.*, 2020). Émigré media employ multimodal communication strategies that combine textual materials, audiovisual content, and interactive formats, which increase the effectiveness of political influence and expand possibilities for emotional engagement. Diasporic geopolitics becomes an instrument for forming alternative international narratives that may shape the international community's perception of political processes in Central Asia and contribute to changes in the geopolitical positioning of regional states (Adamson & Han, 2024). Émigré media act as agents of diasporic geopolitics, forming transnational political coalitions and influencing international policy towards the states of origin through the mobilisation of public opinion in host countries.

The formation of alternative information spaces through emigrant media creates parallel information ecosystems that not only counter the official rhetoric of the states of origin but also generate mobilisation mechanisms linking online activity with offline actions. These

mechanisms are manifested in the organisation of protest actions, volunteer initiatives and electoral activity, which are coordinated through emigrant media platforms and implemented both within diaspora communities and in the territories of the states of origin (Chekirova, 2024). Journalists and media in exile become targets of transnational pressure from the states of origin, which simultaneously limits their capacities and underscores the political significance of alternative information platforms for the transformation of public consciousness (Gorokhovskaia *et al.*, 2023). Transnational repression against emigrant media demonstrates their effectiveness as instruments of political influence and creates additional incentives for the development of technological and organisational solutions aimed at ensuring the security and resilience of media activities. A concrete example is the digital circulation of Azattyk content in Kyrgyzstan. The Radio Azattyk website was blocked in October 2022 over a video report on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border clashes, while the service's bank accounts were also frozen; nevertheless, its materials continued to circulate through social media and video platforms (Associated Press, 2023). The audience infrastructure was already substantial: Azattyk's YouTube page exceeded 500,000 subscribers by 2018, and by July 2023 reports noted that the channel had almost 2 million subscribers (Media Policy Institute, 2023). This case shows how one media material can transform audience behaviour from passive reception to active redistribution, discussion and preservation of blocked content. Alternative information spaces function as platforms for the development of critical political thinking and the formation of skills in political analysis among diaspora communities. Emigrant media provide access to alternative sources of information, analytical materials and expert assessments, which expand the informational horizon of the audience and facilitate the development of a more complex and nuanced understanding of political processes. These platforms create conditions for the development of the political agency of the diaspora, transforming passive consumers of information into active participants in political processes who are capable of influencing political decisions both in the states of residence and in the states of origin (Dodds *et al.*, 2024). The formation of political agency occurs through feedback mechanisms between media and audience, which include commenting, discussion and the creation of user-generated content, thereby contributing to the development of skills in political argumentation and critical analysis.

Mechanisms for circumventing state censorship and control through emigrant media include a set of technological, organisational and financial strategies aimed at ensuring information security and the resilience of media activity. Technological solutions include website mirroring and the creation of mirror channels, the use of VPN services and messaging applications, as well as the deployment of content on distributed platforms such as Telegram and YouTube, which provide greater resilience

against censorship measures. Organisational strategies include the creation of networks of correspondents within the territories of the states of origin and the training of journalists in methods of ensuring digital security, which enables the maintenance of operative contact with internal information sources and protects participants in media networks from political persecution (Babayev, 2024). Financial strategies are directed towards diversifying funding sources through grants from international organisations, audience subscriptions and the development of educational products, which reduces dependence on individual funding sources and enhances the resilience of media projects (Schläpfer & Parkyn, 2024). The same logic can be observed in Kazakhstan during the January 2022 crisis, when Freedom House (2022) recorded nationwide restrictions on internet access for several days and subsequent patterns of website blocking and content removal. Since reliable open sources do not provide a stable multiplier for VPN application downloads after the Azattyk/Azattyq restrictions, the present study does not treat such figures as verified statistical evidence. Instead, it documents the censorship-circumvention mechanism through observable practices: mirror links, reposted videos, social-media redistribution and citation of blocked materials by international organisations. Co-ordination with international media platforms and human rights foundations create additional opportunities for overcoming censorship constraints and expanding the audience of émigré media. Partnerships with international organisations provide access to technical resources, expertise in media security and financial support, which enhanced the professional standards of émigré media and expanded their capacity for political influence (Free Press Unlimited, 2022). These mechanisms form a stable ecosystem of support for émigré media, enabling them to operate under political pressure and censorship restrictions while retaining the capacity to influence the formation of national political consciousness and the mobilisation of diaspora communities. Contemporary trends indicate a strengthening role for technological innovation in ensuring media security and expanding the possibilities for political communication, which created new prospects for the development of émigré journalism as an instrument of political transformation in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

The influence of émigré political discourse on the transformation of elite positions

The influence of émigré journalism on the domestic political elites of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan is realised through three specific channels of impact, each of which demonstrates measurable outcomes in the transformation of political behaviour. International legitimising pressure is evident in the fact that publications by the Azattyk service (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty) on the arbitrary detention of more than 100 peaceful protesters in Almaty on 4 January 2022, together with subsequent

documentary interviews with the families of victims, including the sister of Zhasulan Anafiyaev, who died in custody, led to the adoption of European Parliament Resolution No. 2022/2505(RSP) "On the Situation in Kazakhstan" (2022). The resolution required the Kazakh authorities to conduct an independent investigation of the events and to release detained activists. Within two months of its adoption, President Tokayev announced a transition to the political reform programme "New Kazakhstan" and initiated a constitutional reform, which constituted a direct response to international pressure. Informational transmission shows concrete results through the integration of materials produced by émigré journalists into the reports of international organisations: the Human Rights Watch (2022) investigation into arbitrary arrests and torture of protesters in Kazakhstan directly relied on Radio Azattyk reports on the detentions in Almaty and used interviews conducted by Azattyq TV with the relatives of individuals who died in custody, which resulted in the inclusion of corresponding recommendations in international human rights documents. In communication terms, the case followed a traceable chain: Azattyk/Azattyq documented protest detentions and interviews; the materials were redistributed through video, website and social platforms; human-rights organisations used them as evidence; the European Parliament incorporated the documented situation into a resolution; and the Kazakh elite responded through the language of reform and constitutional adjustment. The source of the media infrastructure is also documented: RFE/RL is funded through the United States Agency for Global Media (2024), and its FY2024 annual budget was reported as USD 142.2 million with an estimated audience of 47 million.

Internal informational leaks create the most sensitive yet effective channel of influence on elite groups through the circulation of émigré media content in closed groups and messaging platforms used by high-ranking officials. In Kyrgyzstan, a study of the online activity of the diaspora showed that materials published by Kyrgyz émigrés on Facebook and Telegram were regularly forwarded and discussed within government circles in Bishkek, which was confirmed by an analysis of digital traces and interviews with civil servants (Chekirova, 2022). This circulation of information led to concrete political decisions: on 14 March 2024, the Parliament of Kyrgyzstan adopted amendments to the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic "On Non-Profit Organisations", known as the foreign representatives' law, which directly aimed to restrict the influence of émigré media and international organisations on domestic political processes. The vote proceeded without debate and lasted seven minutes, resulting in 66 votes in favour and only 5 against (Reuters, 2024; Committee to Protect Journalists, 2024). The adoption of this law constitutes an institutional response by elites to a perceived threat from the émigré discourse, confirming its actual impact on political processes. The communication

chain in this case was shorter and more domestic: diaspora publications were reposted in Telegram and Facebook networks, discussed in semi-closed professional and administrative circles, reframed by pro-government actors as evidence of external interference, and then materialised in a legislative response. Elite reaction was documented through parliamentary voting records, draft-law texts, public statements by deputies and subsequent criticism from international organisations.

The dynamics of changes in the positions of elite groups follow a clear stepwise logic, beginning with rhetorical adaptation and potentially reaching institutional transformation depending on the intensity of external pressure. In Kazakhstan, after coverage of the January 2022 events by émigré media, the first stage of response involved modifications to the official rhetoric: in his address to the nation on 16 March 2022, President Tokayev declared the necessity of constitutional amendments for further democratisation and political decentralisation, as well as a transition “from a super-presidential form of governance to a presidential republic with a strong parliament” (Cornell, 2024). The second stage involved the adjustment of political initiatives through the preparation of concrete draft laws: in late March 2022 a working group of 19 members was established to draft constitutional amendments, and on 5 May 2022 the president signed a decree to hold a referendum on 5 June 2022. The third stage reached the level of institutional transformation: on 6 June 2022 the amendments were approved by 77 per cent of votes with a turnout of 68 per cent, which resulted in the transition from a super-presidential to a presidential-parliamentary system, a reform of the electoral system introducing a mixed model for the Mazhilis, and the removal of former President Nazarbayev’s status a “national leader” (Al Jazeera, 2022). The evidentiary base for determining elite reaction included dated presidential addresses, decrees, referendum decisions, parliamentary documents and official explanatory narratives; therefore, the analysis treats elite response as a documentary sequence rather than as an inferred psychological shift.

Elite groups oriented towards external markets demonstrated measurably faster adaptation to criticism from émigré media. In Kazakhstan, representatives of extractive companies and the financial sector, after the publication of critical materials in international media regarding corruption schemes, initiated corporate social responsibility programmes and implemented international transparency standards within several months of the appearance of critical publications. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan established a dedicated unit for monitoring international media and responding to critical publications, which indicates the institutionalisation of responses to the émigré discourse (International Crisis Group, 2022). Security agencies and administrative clans displayed the opposite tendency: following critical publications on the use of force against

protesters, Kazakhstan’s security bodies initiated checks on journalists working with émigré media, which resulted in the denial of accreditation to all 36 Radio Azattyk journalists in January 2024 and the initiation of legal proceedings for “disseminating false information” (Reporters Without Borders, 2022).

Mechanisms of adaptation by political elites include specific strategies whose effectiveness may be measured through the analysis of changes in political discourse and institutional practices. Rhetorical demilitarisation in Kyrgyzstan is manifested in the replacement of security-oriented terminology with the language of human rights in official documents: following criticism from émigré media regarding the dispersal of protests in 2020, official statements by the Ministry of Internal Affairs began to include phrases concerning “compliance with international standards” and “the protection of citizens’ rights to peaceful assembly” (Gorokhovskaia et al., 2023). Institutional cosmetic measures include the creation of various consultative bodies involving representatives of civil society, which formally incorporate the public into a consultative process but do not receive any actual authority to influence political decisions. The co-optation of activists and diaspora leaders demonstrates results in the modification of the tone of criticism voiced by émigré communities through the inclusion of diaspora representatives in consultative formats at ministries and state agencies.

Repressive instruments show an inverse correlation with effectiveness: the intensification of persecution of journalists leads to an increase in the number of critical publications in émigré media and attracts additional attention from international human rights organisations. The adoption of the law on foreign representatives in Kyrgyzstan in March 2024 triggered sharp criticism from the European Union and the United States, with deputy Nadira Narmatova, one of the initiators of the law, explicitly stating that the law was directed against Western influence through civil society and that “the West is afraid of losing its mechanisms of influence over our politics and the formation of public opinion” (Reuters, 2024; OCCRP, 2024). International organisations, including the Netherlands Helsinki Committee (2024), expressed serious concern that the law would inflict a destructive blow on Kyrgyzstan’s active civil society and undermine its ability to carry out its important and legitimate work for the benefit of the people of Kyrgyzstan. The Kyrgyz case should therefore be interpreted as part of a broader regional pattern rather than as an isolated legislative event. Russia’s “foreign agents” legislation, first adopted in 2012 and later tightened, created a legal model for marking foreign-funded civil society and media actors as politically suspect. Reuters (2024) explicitly described the Kyrgyz bill as styled on Russia’s law. A similar pattern appeared in Georgia in 2024, where a reintroduced bill required organisations receiving more than 20% of their funding from abroad to register as pursuing the

interests of a foreign power, provoking criticism from the European Union and comparisons with Russian-style restrictions (Light, 2024). These parallels confirm that documentary control over foreign-funded media and civil society has become a regional technology of managing transnational communication.

Contemporary transformations of elite discourse are characterised by three measurable changes in political communication and institutional practices. The internationalisation of the agenda is manifested in the fact that the official rhetoric of the governments of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan increasingly refers to international standards and employs terminology aligned with the expectations of Western audiences, reflecting an adaptation of political rhetoric to the expectations of the international audience (Cornell, 2024). The instrumentalisation of migration is expressed in the creation of specialised agencies for work with the diaspora and in the development of programmes for engagement with émigré communities, which are regarded simultaneously as a resource for attracting investment and as a potential source of political challenges. Media adaptation includes the development of state digital platforms for countering critical publications and the hiring of international PR agencies to work with foreign media, with particular attention given to the creation of content on the same platforms used by émigré media (Novikova *et al.*, 2025).

These transformations create a new dynamic of interaction between political elites and émigré media, characterised by the professionalisation of informational confrontation and the increasing complexity of strategies of influence. Content analysis of official communications shows that state media in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have begun actively using the same platforms and formats as émigré media, including the production of content for Telegram channels, YouTube, and social networks, which indicates the recognition of the effectiveness of émigré media strategies and attempts to adapt them for the purposes of state propaganda. The case of Radio Azattyk illustrates an evolution from relative tolerance to systematic pressure: while in the early 2020s the service's website had approximately 9 million monthly visits, by 2022 access to the site was restricted, and by 2024 all journalists of the service were denied accreditation for covering corruption schemes and human rights violations (Aktailakova, 2025). Contemporary elites demonstrate an increasing readiness to engage in dialogue with émigré communities while maintaining control over key political processes, creating a new model of authoritarian adaptation to transnational informational challenges. The evolution of elite strategies indicates the formation of a new type of political communication characterised by simultaneous engagement with domestic and international audiences, which requires political elites to develop more complex and adaptive approaches to managing information flows and political narratives.

Synthesis of findings and conceptual model of the influence of émigré media

The integrative model of interaction between emigrant media, political consciousness and elite transformations in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan demonstrates a complex system of multi-level linkages that operates through three principal circuits of influence: the international, the transnational and the domestic. The international circuit includes mechanisms of legitimisation through engagement with international organisations, human rights structures and Western governments, where emigrant media act as providers of information and analytical materials for shaping international public opinion. This circuit is characterised by high effectiveness in generating external pressure on political elites, which is evidenced by instances in which resolutions of the European Parliament were adopted on the basis of materials produced by emigrant media and were followed by political reforms in the countries under study. The transnational circuit operates through diaspora networks and digital platforms, ensuring the circulation of information between emigrant communities and domestic audiences, thereby creating alternative information flows that circumvent state censorship. The domestic circuit is realised through the penetration of emigrant-media content into political and business elites via personal networks, social media and professional channels, leading to intra-elite reflection and adaptation of political positions.

The model demonstrates the non-linear nature of the influence exerted by emigrant media on political processes, where the effectiveness of impact depends on the degree of integration between the various circuits and the synchronisation of their functioning. The greatest impact on political elites is achieved when all three circuits are activated simultaneously, generating comprehensive pressure both from outside and from within the political system. The time lag between the publication of materials in emigrant media and the political reaction of elites ranges from several weeks to several months, with the intensity of the reaction correlating directly with the level of international resonance produced by the publications. The model also identifies feedback mechanisms, whereby the reaction of political elites to emigrant discourse becomes a subject of coverage in emigrant media, creating cyclical processes of mutual influence. The adaptive quality of the model is manifested in the capacity of emigrant media to adjust their strategies of influence in response to changes in the political environment and the development of countermeasures by state structures. The identified patterns and tendencies in the countries under study demonstrate both common features and specific differences in the mechanisms through which emigrant media influence political processes. General pattern is the stepwise nature of elite reactions to criticism from emigrant media, which begins with rhetorical adjustments, progresses to

institutional cosmetic measures and may reach the level of structural political reforms when a critical threshold of international pressure is achieved. Both countries exhibit differentiated receptiveness among various elite groups to emigrant discourse: externally oriented segments of the elite display a greater readiness to adapt, whereas security and administrative structures tend to favour repressive responses. The temporal dynamics indicate an intensification of the influence of emigrant media during periods of political crisis and a weakening during periods of stability, which indicates that the effectiveness of influence depends on the domestic political conjuncture.

Specific differences between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are reflected in the intensity and character of the response of political elites to emigrant discourse. In Kazakhstan, a strategy of adaptive authoritarianism prevails, which involves the implementation of limited political reforms in response to international pressure while retaining control over key political processes. The 2022 constitutional reform represents a classic example of this strategy, in which formal changes to the political system were accompanied by the strengthening of informal control. In Kyrgyzstan, a strategy of repressive resistance dominates, characterised by the adoption of restrictive legislation and direct pressure on emigrant media and associated organisations. The adoption of the Law on Foreign Representatives in 2024 demonstrates the willingness of Kyrgyz elites to confront the international community for the purpose of suppressing critical discourse. These differences are conditioned by economic factors, the degree of integration into international markets, and the characteristics of political traditions in each country. The trend towards the professionalisation of informational confrontation is characteristic of both countries and is manifested in the creation of specialised state structures for monitoring emigrant media, the development of counter-propaganda strategies, and the recruitment of international PR agencies to engage with foreign audiences. The digitalisation of the media environment enhances the capabilities of both emigrant media and state structures, creating new forms of informational competition. The growing role of social networks and messaging platforms as channels for disseminating emigrant content compels state structures to develop more sophisticated methods of informational control, including selective blocking and technological access restrictions. The evolution from simple disregard to active counter-action against emigrant media indicates recognition

of their political significance and their potential to influence domestic political processes.

The specific features of the influence of emigrant media in the post-Soviet context are shaped by the legacy of Soviet political culture, the characteristics of nation-building, and the nature of integration into global information networks. Post-Soviet political culture is characterised by high sensitivity to criticism from external actors, which increases the impact of emigrant media on political elites and creates additional incentives to respond to international pressure. The incomplete processes of nation-building in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan assign a particular role to emigrant media as alternative centres for the formation of national narratives, which raises concerns among political elites regarding potential challenges to official state ideology (Karassayev *et al.*, 2024). The weakness of domestic media institutions and restrictions on press freedom in post-Soviet states create an informational vacuum that is partially filled by emigrant media, thereby increasing their influence on public opinion formation.

The geopolitical context of the post-Soviet region, characterised by competition between Russian, Chinese, and Western influence, creates additional opportunities for emigrant media to position themselves as conduits of Western values and as an alternative to authoritarian development models (Stronski & Ng, 2018). This positioning simultaneously enhances their appeal to segments of the population and elites oriented towards Western integration and provokes resistance from groups adhering to traditionalist or pro-Russian positions. The economic dependence of post-Soviet states on external markets and investment generates structural incentives for political elites to take into account international public opinion, formed in part through emigrant media (Gfoeller, 2025). Migration processes and the formation of large diasporas in Western countries provide a stable social base for emigrant media and create channels for the re-entry of their content into the countries of origin. An integrative analysis of the identified patterns makes it possible to formulate a conceptual model of the influence of emigrant media on political processes in post-Soviet Central Asia, characterised by non-linearity, multi-level structure, and adaptability (Table 2). This model demonstrates that the effectiveness of influence depends on the synchronisation of various factors: international conjuncture, domestic political processes, technological capacities, and the socio-cultural characteristics of target audiences.

Table 2. Conceptual model of documentary communication through émigré media

Level of influence	Documentary and communication mechanisms	Target actors	Time lag	Effectiveness
International	Formation of international public opinion; transfer of media evidence to human-rights and parliamentary documents	International organisations; Western governments; non-governmental organisations	2-4 weeks	High if accompanied by international resonance
Transnational	Mobilisation of diaspora networks; preservation and re-circulation of alternative information flows	Diaspora communities; international public audiences	1-2 weeks	Moderate, dependent on the size and activity of the diaspora

Continued Table 2.

Level of influence	Documentary and communication mechanisms	Target actors	Time lag	Effectiveness
National	Penetration into elite groups; citation in official discourse and institutional decisions	Political elites; business community; civil society	1-6 months	Variable, dependent on the political context
Local	Formation of local support networks; archiving of local testimonies and activist materials	Regional elites; local activists	2-8 weeks	Low under conditions of authoritarian control

Note: the 2-4-week lag at the international level was established through the Azattyk/Azattyq case: publications and video evidence concerning the events of 4 January 2022 preceded the European Parliament Resolution of January 2022 and subsequent international human-rights documentation. The 1-6-month national lag was derived from the sequence between the January 2022 coverage, the presidential reform address of 16 March 2022, the decree on the referendum of 5 May 2022 and the constitutional vote of 5 June 2022. The Kyrgyz foreign-representatives case was used to document a shorter legislative reaction cycle, since media and civil-society criticism was followed by parliamentary adoption of the bill in March 2024

Source: created by the authors

The empirical analysis of differences in the response strategies of political elites to the challenges posed by émigré media identified four principal models of adaptation, each characterised by specific instruments and outcomes (Table 3). Adaptive authoritarianism, characteristic

of Kazakhstan, demonstrated the greatest effectiveness in maintaining political stability while minimising international criticism, whereas repressive resistance, predominant in Kyrgyzstan, resulted in an escalation of conflict with the international community.

Table 3. Models of political-elite responses to transnational documentary communication

Response model	Primary instruments and communication environment	Short-term outcomes	Long-term consequences	Examples
Adaptive authoritarianism	Limited reforms, rhetorical concessions, selective co-optation; centralised media environment with high international-market sensitivity	Reduction of international criticism, preservation of internal stability	Gradual erosion of authoritarian control, rising expectations for further reforms	Kazakhstan 2022-2024
Repressive resistance	Restrictive legislation, direct repression, information blockade; shrinking press freedom after an initially more pluralistic digital environment	Suppression of critical voices, mobilisation of traditionalist support	International isolation, radicalisation of the opposition	Kyrgyzstan 2023-2024
Non-response / Ignoring	Absence of reaction, minimal counter-measures; low perceived resonance of émigré documentation	Maintenance of the status quo, avoidance of escalation	Accumulation of public discontent, loss of international credibility	Early periods in both countries
Co-optation	Inclusion of critics into state structures, economic incentives; communication environment allowing controlled dialogue	Neutralisation of specific critics, creation of an appearance of dialogue	Corruption of state institutions, erosion of authenticity within the critical discourse	Selected cases in both countries

Source: created by the authors on the basis of an analysis of political processes in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan from 2020 to the first half of 2025

The communication environment helps explain the differences between the models in Table 3. In 2022, Reporters Without Borders' World Press Freedom Index placed Kazakhstan at 122nd after a rise from 155th, while Kyrgyzstan rose from 79th to 72nd, remaining the most open media environment in Central Asia at that moment (Putz, 2022). The subsequent deterioration of media freedom in Kyrgyzstan, including pressure on Azattyk, Kloop and other independent outlets, created conditions for the shift from relative openness to repressive resistance. Kazakhstan's higher level of centralised media control and stronger integration into international markets favoured adaptive authoritarianism: limited reformist rhetoric and institutional adjustments were combined with monitoring and selective restriction of independent and émigré media. The findings

of the study demonstrated that the influence of émigré media on political processes in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan is systemic in nature and extends beyond mere informational impact, shaping new models of political communication and elite behaviour in an era of globalised information flows. The identified patterns indicate the growing role of transnational media networks in the political dynamics of post-Soviet Central Asia and highlight the need for more sophisticated analytical approaches to understanding the mechanisms through which they operate.

Discussion

The study identified a systemic pattern of influence exerted by émigré media on political processes in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan across three core channels: the

international, the transnational, and the domestic. It was established that the effectiveness of the influence was characterised by a non-linear dynamic with a time lag ranging from several weeks to several months, while political elites demonstrated differentiated responsiveness to the émigré discourse depending on the degree of their integration into international markets. The identified patterns of stepwise elite reactions and the formation of new models of political communication require correlation with the findings of contemporary research in the field of diaspora politics and media influence. The analysis of mechanisms of diasporic political influence transmitted through media channels shows substantial correlation with the findings of T. Heidenreich & J.M. Eberl (2021) concerning the role of social media in shaping the migration-related discourse of political elites. The authors noted that elites adjust their rhetoric in response to alternative information flows, a conclusion consistent with this study's identification of rhetorical recalibration as the first stage of elite reaction to criticism from émigré media. However, a major divergence concerns temporal parameters: whereas T. Heidenreich & J.M. Eberl record almost immediate elite reactions to shifts in social media, this study identifies a longer delay of 2-4 weeks in the international channel of influence. This discrepancy can be attributed to the specificities of the post-Soviet political context, where elites display greater resistance to external pressure than their counterparts in Western democracies. Moreover, this study's findings on differentiated elite responsiveness align partially with the authors' observation that political actors react unevenly depending on their positioning within the political spectrum.

The results of the analysis of the crisis-driven influence exerted by émigré media on political processes show substantial convergence with the study by S. Hutter & H. Kriesi (2022), which examined the politicisation of migration during periods of crisis. The authors emphasised that crisis periods create windows of opportunity for the transformation of political discourse through the activation of alternative actors, including diaspora communities and the media linked to them. This conclusion corresponds to the pattern identified in the present study, namely the intensified influence of émigré media during political crises, such as the January 2022 events in Kazakhstan. However, S. Hutter & H. Kriesi focused primarily on the European context and highlighted the role of right-wing populist parties in the politicisation of migration, whereas the results of the present research reveal an opposite dynamic, in which émigré media act as instruments for the democratisation of political discourse within authoritarian regimes. The researchers noted the cyclical nature of the politicisation of migration, which partially aligns with the feedback mechanisms identified in this study between émigré discourse and elite reactions. Nevertheless, a significant divergence lies in the direction of influence: whereas crises in

the European context tend to lead to the tightening of migration policies, in post-Soviet Central Asia crisis periods create opportunities for the liberalisation of political regimes under pressure from émigré media (Yesmagambet & Kairbekov, 2025).

The identified patterns in the formation of transnational political networks through diaspora media find substantial confirmation in the study by R.M. Bhat & R. Rajeshwari (2022) concerning the role of diasporic culture in international relations. The authors emphasised the capacity of diaspora communities to establish alternative channels of diplomacy and to influence international relations through cultural and informational mechanisms. These conclusions correspond to the mechanisms of international legitimising pressure identified in the present research, whereby émigré media acted as providers of information for international organisations and Western governments. R.M. Bhat & R. Rajeshwari (2022) highlighted the long-term nature of diasporic influence on international relations, which is consistent with the demonstrated capacity of émigré media to form stable transnational political coalitions. At the same time, the researchers considered diasporic influence primarily in a positive light as an instrument of soft power, whereas the findings of this study demonstrated the ambivalent character of émigré media influence, which may both support democratisation and provoke authoritarian consolidation in the states of origin.

The mechanisms of diaspora mobilisation identified in this study show partial convergence with the conclusions of L. Bird (2023) concerning the motivational factors behind diasporic support for conflicts in the homeland. The author noted that diaspora communities tended to support political change in the states of origin when effective communication channels and identification with political objectives were present. This conclusion corresponds to the identified role of émigré media as catalysts of diaspora political mobilisation. L. Bird emphasised the significance of information flows for the formation of diasporic positions, which aligns with the established mechanisms of transmitting political concepts through digital platforms. However, the author focused primarily on the support of armed conflicts, whereas the findings of this study demonstrated a broader spectrum of political influence, including peaceful protests, electoral campaigns and human rights activities. A significant divergence also lay in the assessment of the effectiveness of diasporic influence: L. Bird noted the limited real impact of the diaspora on political processes in the states of origin, whereas this research identified concrete cases of elite position shifts under the influence of émigré discourse.

The analysis of digital mechanisms of diaspora participation in political processes demonstrates a significant correlation with the findings of M.A. Maigari & K. Shehu (2025) concerning diaspora engagement in

democratic processes in the internet era. The authors emphasise the transformative potential of digital technologies for expanding diaspora political participation and overcoming geographic constraints. These conclusions correspond to the mechanisms of multiplatform communication identified in the present study, which enable the integration of traditional and digital media channels to maximise political influence. M.A. Maigari & K. Shehu note the democratising effect of digital technologies on diaspora political participation, which aligns with the identified capacity of émigré media to generate alternative information spaces under conditions of authoritarian control. However, the authors consider diaspora participation primarily in the context of formal democratic procedures, such as electoral campaigns, whereas the findings of this study demonstrate a broader range of political influence, including informal mechanisms of elite pressure and international diplomacy. Moreover, M.A. Maigari & K. Shehu do not account for the specificities of authoritarian regimes, where diaspora political activity may provoke repressive responses from state institutions.

The identified patterns of transnational linkages between diasporas and their states of origin find substantial confirmation in the work of R. Bond (2022), which examines migrant associations with their homelands in the context of transnationalism and development. The author highlights the complex character of diaspora ties, which encompass both economic and political aspects of engagement with countries of origin. These conclusions correspond to the multi-layered model of émigré media influence identified in the present study, which operates through multiple channels of impact. R. Bond notes the ambivalent nature of diaspora connections, which may contribute to the development of states of origin while simultaneously creating additional challenges for political stability. This conclusion aligns with the contradictory effects of émigré media influence identified in this study, which may generate both democratic reforms and authoritarian consolidation. However, R. Bond focuses primarily on the economic dimensions of diaspora linkages and devotes insufficient attention to political mechanisms of influence, whereas the present study concentrates specifically on the political effects of diaspora media activity.

The mechanisms of state responses to diaspora activism identified in this study shown considerable correspondence with the findings of B. Baser & É. Féron (2022) concerning the reactions of host states to the diaspora policies of countries of origin. The authors highlight the tension between principles of state sovereignty and transnational practices of diaspora governance. These conclusions correspond to the mechanisms of overcoming state censorship and control identified in the present study, which include technological, organisational, and financial strategies aimed at ensuring the resilience of media activity. B. Baser & É. Féron note increasing

conflictual dynamics in relations between states of origin and host countries in the context of diaspora politics, which aligns with the documented cases of transnational repression targeting émigré media. The authors emphasised the need to reconsider existing concepts of state sovereignty in the context of the globalisation of diaspora linkages, which corresponds to the trends identified in this study regarding the emergence of new models of political communication in the transnational space. Nevertheless, B. Baser & É. Féron approached the issue primarily from the perspective of host states, whereas the present study focuses on the impact of diaspora activism on political processes in countries of origin.

The analysis of identity-related aspects of diasporic political influence revealed partial convergence with the study of N.B. Bhandari (2021) concerning the relationship between diaspora and cultural identity. The researcher emphasised the role of diasporic communities in preserving and transforming national identity through various cultural practices, including media activity. These findings corresponded to the mechanisms of national-political consciousness formation identified in the present study. The author highlighted the dynamic character of diasporic identity, which was shaped by the interaction between the cultural traditions of states of origin and the influence of host societies. This conclusion aligned with the identified capacity of emigrant media to construct alternative national projects that could differ fundamentally from official state narratives. However, the scholar considered diasporic identity predominantly in cultural terms and paid insufficient attention to the political dimensions of identity processes, whereas the results of the present study demonstrated the politicisation of diasporic identity through media mechanisms.

The identified regularities linking diasporic status and political activity found partial confirmation in the work of A. Ghoshal (2021), which examined issues of refugees, homeland and diasporic identity. The author emphasised the particular role of traumatic experience in shaping diasporic political activity and aspirations for change in states of origin. These findings partially corresponded to the mechanisms of heuristic documentation identified in the present study, whereby emigrant media used personal testimonies of repression to legitimise political claims. A. Ghoshal highlighted the development of a specific diasporic subjectivity characterised by a critical stance towards political regimes in states of origin. This conclusion aligned with the identified capacity of emigrant media to foster critical political thinking among diasporic communities. Nevertheless, the author focused primarily on refugees as a specific category of diaspora, whereas the present study examined a broader spectrum of emigrant communities, including economic migrants and political activists.

The mechanisms of the spatial dimension of diasporic political influence identified in the present study

showed a degree of correlation with the work of A. Blunt & R. Dowling (2022) on the concepts of home, migration and diaspora. The researchers emphasised the complexity of diasporic conceptions of “home” and their implications for forms of political activity in the transnational sphere. These findings corresponded to the mechanisms identified in the present study for the creation of alternative informational spaces, which functioned as platforms for the development of political agency within diasporic communities. The authors noted the multiplicity of diasporic identifications with different geographical spaces, which aligned with the identified capacity of emigrant media to establish transnational political networks. The researchers highlighted the transformative potential of diasporic spatial practices for political processes in both states of origin and host countries. This conclusion corresponded to the multi-level model of emigrant-media influence on political elites identified in the study. However, the authors considered the spatial aspects of diasporic existence predominantly in a theoretical manner and paid insufficient attention to concrete mechanisms of political influence.

The findings of the study contribute specifically to media communication theory by conceptualising émigré media as documentary communication infrastructures. The article shows that their influence is produced not only by persuasive messages but also by the ability to fix evidence, preserve alternative narratives, verify claims through cross-platform traces and convert media materials into institutional documents such as reports, resolutions, draft laws and official statements. This expands theories of transnational media influence by adding a documentary dimension: media power is exercised through the creation of reusable records that travel between diaspora communities, international organisations and domestic elites. The identified model of adaptive authoritarianism further demonstrates that even under authoritarian control of the media environment, transnational communication networks can generate structural pressure for institutional change when documentation, platform circulation and international citation are synchronised.

■ Conclusions

The conducted study made it possible to identify the systemic character of émigré media as documentary communication infrastructures in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The analysis showed that their significance lies not only in political influence but also in the recording, preservation, verification and transmission of alternative evidence under conditions of restricted domestic media freedom. Historical periodicals and contemporary digital platforms formed a complex ecosystem of transnational documentation operating through international, transnational and domestic channels. Emigrant journalism demonstrated the capacity to function as an effective documentary and communicative instrument

because it differed from traditional domestic media in its location outside direct state control, its reliance on diaspora networks and its ability to preserve politically sensitive evidence in foreign archives and digital repositories. The integration of digital technologies expanded these capacities by enabling rapid copying, reposting, mirroring and citation of materials across platforms. The mechanisms of forming national political consciousness through emigrant media proved to be multi-level. Diasporic media platforms not only transmitted alternative political concepts but also archived collective memory, preserved counter-narratives and created documentary resources that could later be used by journalists, researchers, activists, international organisations and political actors.

The impact of emigrant political discourse on elite positions was characterised by non-linear time lags and documentary chains of reaction. The study showed that publications, videos, reports and platform records became politically significant when they were cited by international organisations, translated into official statements, or materialised in legislation, accreditation decisions and institutional reforms. The study identified two principal models of elite response to transnational documentary communication. Kazakhstan exhibited adaptive authoritarianism, in which limited political reforms and rhetorical concessions were combined with continued media monitoring and selective restriction. Kyrgyzstan exhibited repressive resistance, characterised by restrictive legislation, direct pressure on independent and émigré media and attempts to control foreign-funded civil-society communication.

The practical significance of the findings lies in the possibility of using the proposed model for communication science, archival work and media-support programmes. It can be applied to evaluate the effectiveness of media support for civil society in authoritarian contexts, to design protocols for preserving émigré media collections, to verify digital evidence, and to forecast the institutional consequences of transnational communication campaigns. A limitation of the study is its focus on two Central Asian countries, which restricts the generalisability of the results to the entire post-Soviet region. Prospects for further research include expanding the corpus to additional post-Soviet states and developing comparative methods for analysing digital preservation, platform circulation and elite responses to émigré media documentation.

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Емігрантські медіа як інструмент транснаціонального політичного впливу: комунікаційні механізми та моделі реагування еліт у Казахстані та Киргизстані

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Анотація. Метою дослідження було вивчення емігрантських медіа як документальної та комунікаційної системи, за допомогою якої інформація про політичний вплив фіксується, зберігається, перевіряється, передається та повторно циркулює через національні кордони. У дослідженні поєднано джерелознавчий документальний аналіз, архівну реконструкцію, перевірку цифрових джерел і якісний контент-аналіз емігрантської періодики, публікацій Azattyk/Azattyq, міжнародних резолюцій, звітів правозахисних організацій, правових документів і статистичних матеріалів, що стосуються Казахстану та Киргизстану. Особливу увагу приділено методам документування емігрантського контенту, зокрема фіксації свідчень, метаданих публікацій, скріншотів і вебархівів, кросплатформному збереженню цифрових слідів, а також зіставленню медійних повідомлень з офіційними заявами та інституційними реакціями. Установлено, що емігрантські медіа функціонують не лише як політичні актори, а передусім як транснаціональна документальна інфраструктура: вони накопичують альтернативні докази, зберігають контрнаративи та передають їх через міжнародні, транснаціональні й внутрішньодержавні комунікаційні контури. У дослідженні проаналізовано наративне фреймування, мультиплатформне поширення та хвильове документування як самостійні комунікаційні стратегії, а не лише як допоміжні інструменти досягнення політичних результатів. Результати показують, що реакції еліт формувалися за диференційованими моделями: адаптивний авторитаризм у Казахстані та репресивний опір у Киргизстані. Практичне значення дослідження полягає в його застосуванні в архівній роботі, зокрема для опису, збереження, перевірки та забезпечення довготривалого доступу до колекцій емігрантських медіа й цифрових доказів, створених в умовах політичного тиску

Ключові слова: емігрантська журналістика; діаспорні медіаплатформи; документальна комунікація; перевірка джерел; цифрове збереження



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Ethical issues and self-regulation in the Central Asian media: Features and problems

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Abstract. The purpose of the study was to assess ethical issues and the effectiveness of media self-regulation mechanisms in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The research methodology included the use of methods of content analysis of legislation and activities of media organisations, a case method for analysing specific incidents and international organisations, a statistical approach to the use of digital technologies in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and a comparative analysis of self-regulation practices. The main result of this study was the analysis of ethical challenges and practices of self-regulation of journalism in the context of digital transformation in Central Asian countries. The study identified and analysed the problems of disinformation, censorship, and pressure on

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journalists. The effectiveness of media self-regulation practices was also evaluated using the example of Kazakh and Kyrgyz organisations. It was determined that the spread of the Internet and the development of digital technologies, especially social networks, have become an important channel for the spread of disinformation and propaganda in the Central Asian region. The analysis of the scheme for analysing fact-checking information became a landmark in the study. A comparative analysis of the practices of self-regulation of mass media in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan showed that in Kyrgyzstan, self-regulation of mass media is better developed than in Kazakhstan, due to the active participation of public organisations. However, both countries face restrictions on freedom of speech, in particular, with increased state control of the media, a lack of mediation, and fact-checking mechanisms. The study showed that in order to overcome ethical challenges, it is necessary to increase the media literacy of the population, strengthen media independence and develop effective mechanisms for self-regulation. The results of this study can be used to develop strategies aimed at improving the standards of journalism and ensuring freedom of speech in Central Asian countries

Keywords: fact-checking; censorship; freedom of speech; disinformation; fake news; media literacy

Introduction

In the context of the growing flow of information, the development of digital technologies and the increasing influence of social networks, issues of compliance with ethical standards in journalism are becoming particularly acute. In particular, in the context of political instability and social conflicts, ensuring the safety of journalists and protecting their rights has become critical to preserving freedom of speech and access to reliable information. This requires the creation of effective mechanisms to protect and support media workers, and increased responsibility for attacks on them. Research on these issues is important for ensuring freedom of speech, increasing confidence in the media (mass media), and strengthening democratic institutions in Central Asian countries. A review of recent research on ethical issues and self-regulation in Central Asian media, particularly in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, revealed a number of common and specific challenges. The study by B. Kurambayev (2020) pointed out that plagiarism in journalism in Central Asia is rampant and encouraged by government mechanisms, leading to a false model of excellence for future journalists and the public. According to B. Kurambayev & E. Freedman (2019), Central Asian journalists exhibit widespread ethical misconduct, including a lack of balance and impartiality, the use of multiple false names, the sale and/or purchase of news, bribery of journalists, etc., which indicates the need to improve ethical standards in journalism to improve public life and potential democracy. In particular, the above-mentioned list of challenges, according to researchers, is most typical for the Kyrgyz media. Thus, the results of the study by S.M. Gabbay (2024) showed that despite gaining independence in 1991 and steps towards democratisation, Kyrgyzstan continues to struggle with serious human rights issues, including restrictions on freedom of speech and interference with freedom of association. However, the Kyrgyz media act as an intermediary between society and the authorities, performing the functions of the "fourth power", despite the pressure of various political forces (Asanova & Eshimkanova, 2024). Accordingly, Kyrgyzstan's political culture and media development have contributed

to the creation of pluralism in the information space, where the media play a role as an intermediary between society and the authorities.

In Kazakhstan, there is a tendency to strengthen state control over the information space, which restricts freedom of speech and media independence. The study by S.B. Ryskeldinova & K.O. Sak (2021) noted that Kazakh media are experiencing difficulties inherited from the Soviet media system, in particular, there are remnants of old structures in the media that hinder and restrict independent journalism. Restrictions on the flow of information and the independence of journalism in Kazakhstan hinder freedom of speech and media independence, which are prerequisites for the development of democracy. L.T. Akilzhanova *et al.* (2023) indicated that the state has strengthened control over information processes to preserve data security in the context of the transition of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the digital economy. The researchers also stressed that the improvement of the situation is possible due to the improvement of information literacy of the population and its support through interaction with civil society organisations and the introduction of publicly available media education programmes. The analysis of these studies revealed a tendency to strengthen state control over the information space of Kazakhstan, which led to restrictions on freedom of speech and independence of the media, and to an increase in cases of censorship and pressure on journalists. N. Nandagopal (2022) stated that media ethics are crucial for proper broadcasting, avoiding misrepresentation, and promoting universal values, truthfulness, accountability, and the rule of law. Therefore, the media must adhere to ethics when collecting and distributing news, ensuring objectivity and fairness in presenting information to society. M. Altintop & G. Bak (2022) noted that self-regulation of new media is crucial because it allows individuals to produce and consume content without a corporate identity, but its effectiveness depends on individual content production and ethical standards. Media literacy skills can help people to fight misinformation and fake news on social

media by reducing polarisation and promoting informed decision-making (Popescu, 2020). Thus, the above-mentioned studies highlighted the role of media ethics and media literacy in ensuring quality journalism and combating disinformation, especially in the context of the development of new media, where self-regulation and ethical standards have become key to the development of an objective and fair information ecosystem.

Most studies on this topic focus on identifying problems, but do not provide a detailed comparative analysis of existing self-regulation mechanisms and their effectiveness. It is not well understood how differences in political culture and legislation affect the media's ability to self-regulate. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to identify key challenges and develop recommendations for improving ethical standards and the effectiveness of self-regulation. The implementation of the goal included the following tasks: to identify the main ethical problems faced by the media in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, including plagiarism, censorship, disinformation, and corruption; to analyse the existing mechanisms of self-regulation in both countries, including codes of ethics, media councils and other institutions, and evaluate their effectiveness; to carry out a comparative analysis of media self-regulation practices on the example of the countries under study, identifying differences.

■ Materials and Methods

The analysis of the features of the functioning of ethical problems and practices of self-regulation in the media was based on a study of such countries as Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The purpose of the study was to use such methods as analysis, case method, comparative analysis, and statistical approach. The content analysis method was used to investigate the legislative framework, codes of ethics, and public organisations regulating media activities in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The main sample for this analysis was Kyrgyz organisations, such as Public Association of "Journalists" (2009), Independent union of journalists in the Kyrgyz Republic (IUJKR) (2021) and Media self-regulatory body (n.d.). Kazakhstan organisations such as Union of Journalists of Kazakhstan (2021), Ministry of Information and Social Development (2022) and Factcheck.kz (n.d.). Code of Ethics of Journalists of the Kyrgyz Republic (2007) and Code of Ethics of Journalists of the Republic of Kazakhstan (2012) were also considered. The main criteria for selecting the above-mentioned organisations were: relevance to the media sphere (direct attitude of organisations to the regulation, protection or support of media activities in both countries), influence on the development of media policy (role in the development of the legislative framework, ethical standards or public opinion regarding the media); diversity of functions (representation of various aspects of self-regulation – protection of journalists' rights, development of professional standards, media literacy and fact-checking), representation of various

stakeholders (interests of journalists, editors, the public, and the state). An additional sample was legislative acts. Among them were the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan (1995) and the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic (2021). The source database also included Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 451-I (1999), Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 401-V (2015) and Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 545-IV (2024).

The case method was used to analyse specific international organisations, including the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (1975), Committee to Protect Journalists (2025) and the International fact-checking network (2025). Statistical data on the functioning and use of the Internet among the population in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan provided by S. Kemp (2025a; 2025b), including statistics on users of social networks Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Snapchat, Twitter (X), were also used. The case method was also used to analyse specific incidents, such as the protests in 2020 in Kyrgyzstan and 2022 in Kazakhstan, which allowed illustrating the ethical challenges that journalists face in conditions of political instability. Therefore, some articles from online sources were analysed: The Kyrgyz authorities blocked... (2022), A. Syzdykov (2024) and Freedom House (n.d.). The method of statistical analysis was used to interpret data on the use of the Internet and social networks Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, and LinkedIn in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. This helped to understand the impact of digital technologies on the information space and identify trends in the spread of disinformation. The method of comparative analysis was used to identify differences and similarities in media self-regulation practices between the two countries – Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and to assess the effectiveness of the presented practices. The comparative analysis was carried out based on the following features: the legislative framework, existing professional organisations, codes of ethics, self-regulation mechanisms, and the focus of organisations' activities. Approaches to the interpretation of the results obtained were based on the principles of objectivity and impartiality. Information from various sources was critically evaluated and compared to identify patterns and trends. The results of the analysis contributed to the achievement of the research goal, as they allowed assessing the ethical challenges faced by modern journalism in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. They also provided insight into how self-regulatory practices can help to overcome these challenges and improve the quality of journalism in the region.

■ Results

Ethical challenges in contemporary journalism in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan

Journalism in Central Asia faces a number of serious ethical challenges that complicate its role as an independent and responsible source of information. Media

ethics plays an important role in maintaining the objectivity of news, protecting the public's right to information, and building trust in the media (Wang, 2024). One of the main problems is disinformation, which is spread through both conventional media and social networks. False information, fake news, and manipulation of public opinion undermine the credibility of journalism and pose a threat to public stability. A notable example of disinformation was the guide on the October 2020 Kyrgyz political crisis following the parliamentary elections (Kazama, 2024). Then the results of the parliamentary elections caused mass protests, which led to a change of power. During the protests, social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and Telegram became the main source of information. However, many of the reports were unverified, contradictory, or downright false. Rumours of election fraud, violence, and political intrigue spread. These messages were often emotionally coloured, which contributed to their rapid spread. Disinformation on social media has had a significant impact on public opinion. The dissemination of unverified information was widely accepted as factual, thereby exacerbating social tensions. This complicated the work of journalists and made it difficult to cover events objectively. A similar situation regarding the mass spread of disinformation occurred in Kazakhstan in 2022 – a series of mass protests began due to a sharp increase in prices for liquefied gas, which is used as fuel for cars (Keegan, 2022). However, the protests later became more political in nature, reflecting public discontent with the socio-economic situation, corruption, and authoritarian rule. According to Freedom House (n.d.), during the riots in Kazakhstan, there were significant interruptions in Internet access. In particular, in Almaty, the mobile Internet was completely blocked, indicating that the Kazakh authorities tried to restrict access to information during the riots. Another important challenge is censorship, which can be either direct (state) or indirect (self-censorship, economic pressure). Restrictions on freedom of speech and access to

information complicate the work of journalists and limit opportunities for objective coverage of events. In Kyrgyzstan, there is a tendency to strengthen state control over the information space. For example, blocking the information resource Azattyk (The Kyrgyz authorities blocked..., 2022). As noted by F.F. Babayev (2024), the media resource Azattyk is known for its objective coverage of events both in the country and in the world, in particular, regarding public life and democratic processes, and has repeatedly faced blocking on the territory of Kazakhstan, especially during periods of political instability or social protests.

Digital technologies and social media can affect the ethical standards of journalism in different ways. On the one hand, they expand the possibilities for obtaining and distributing information, and on the other hand, they make it more difficult to control its reliability and dissemination. As noted by R.S. Zhasylykbaeva *et al.* (2024), the digital environment has significantly changed the way information is created and disseminated, which affects compliance with ethical standards in journalism. Digital technologies allow journalists to access a wide range of sources of information, which contributes to faster and more comprehensive coverage of events. Social media has become an important tool (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, LinkedIn) for gathering information, especially in the context of limited access to traditional sources (Blikhar *et al.*, 2023; Andrisano Ruggieri *et al.*, 2024). Digital platforms allow journalists to establish direct contact with their audience, receive feedback, and engage citizens in the news creation process. Interactive formats, such as online broadcasts, surveys, and comments, increase audience engagement and promote citizen journalism. Digital technologies allow independent journalists and bloggers to circumvent censorship and disseminate information that is not available in traditional media. Figure 1 presents a comparative overview of social media platform usage in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan at the start of 2025.

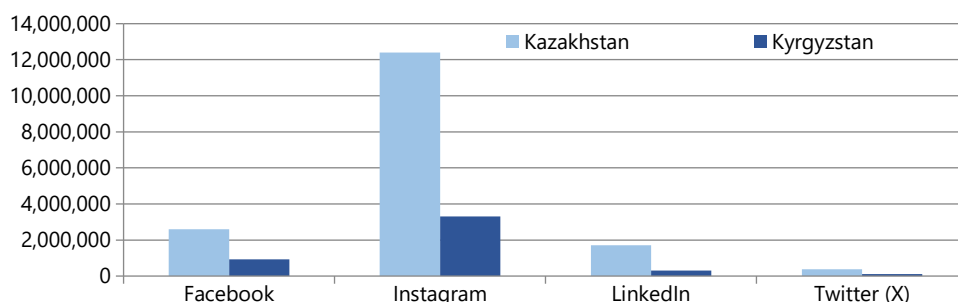


Figure 1. Social network usage statistics at the beginning of 2025

Source: compiled by the authors based on S. Kemp (2025a; 2025b)

As shown in Figure 1, about 93% of the population in Kazakhstan used the Internet, which was 19.2 million people. Over the past year, the number of Internet users increased by 1.3%, that is, by 238 thousand

people. However, more than 7% of the population, namely 1.48 million people, still do not have access to the Internet. At the beginning of 2025, Kyrgyzstan had 6.41 million Internet users, which was 88.5% of the

total population. Social media, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, and LinkedIn, have a significant impact on the dissemination of information and the development of media discourse. At the beginning of 2025, about 15.7 million Kazakh adults were active users of social networks. Instagram is the dominant social network in both countries, indicating the growing importance of visual content in the region. Facebook is much more popular in Kazakhstan than in Kyrgyzstan. Social networks are important in disseminating information and shaping media discourse in both countries. Social media raises concerns about privacy, security, and ethics, and to balance these concerns, attention must be paid to data monetisation, algorithmic bias, and misinformation (Rajagopal *et al.*, 2024). The lack of effective mechanisms for verifying information and the low level of media literacy of the population complicate the fight against disinformation. Digital technologies pose risks to privacy breaches and cyberbullying, especially against journalists who investigate or criticise the authorities. Anonymity on the Internet contributes to the spread of hate speech and aggression. The use of artificial intelligence to create news and analyse data raises new ethical questions related to objectivity, transparency, and responsibility. Digital technologies are changing the business model of traditional media, which creates financial difficulties and can affect the independence of editorial offices. It is necessary to develop effective mechanisms for self-regulation and raise ethical standards of journalism in the context of digital transformation. The impact of digital technologies on the ethical standards of journalism is a dynamic process that requires constant analysis and adaptation.

In the context of political instability and social conflicts, journalists face special ethical challenges. Conflict-sensitive journalism involves journalists being aware of the potential impact of their materials on conflict escalation. It emphasises the need for balanced coverage of events, avoiding hate speech and stereotypes. An example is projects that support journalists in conflict zones by teaching them methods of conflict-sensitive coverage. In conflict situations, protecting information sources becomes critical. Journalists should take steps to ensure the anonymity of sources that may be at risk. International organisations such as Reporters Without Borders support journalists in protecting their sources (A guide to journalism safety organizations, 2022). In conflict situations, disinformation can spread very quickly, which complicates the work of journalists. International organisations and media initiatives are developing tools and methods for fact-checking and combating disinformation. Organisations such as the International fact-checking network (2025) coordinate fact-checking activities around the world. Committee to Protect Journalists (2025) provide support to journalists working in hazardous environments. They provide security training, legal assistance, and document attacks on

journalists. Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (1975) publishes manuals for journalists working in conflict zones, which set out the rules for safe work. Journalists must comply with international humanitarian law governing coverage of armed conflicts. This includes a ban on propaganda of war, incitement to hatred and the dissemination of information that could harm the civilian population. Modern media face challenges in creating accurate and ethical news, as fake news is readily available, and regulators must set standards and protect the public from bad journalism (Frost, 2021). To overcome these challenges, it is necessary to increase the level of media literacy of the population, strengthen media independence, and develop effective mechanisms for self-regulation. It is also important to ensure the safety of journalists and protect their rights.

Practices of self-regulation of the work of journalists and mass media in Kyrgyzstan

In Kyrgyzstan, the activities of mass media are regulated at the legislative level by a number of laws that define the rights and obligations of journalists, and impose restrictions on the dissemination of certain information. Among them are the Law of The Kyrgyz Republic No. 938-XII (1992) (defines the legal basis for the activities of mass media, the procedure for their creation and registration, the rights and obligations of journalists), Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic (2021) (guarantees freedom of speech and the press, prohibits censorship) and Law of the Kyrgyz Republic No. 161 (2025) (regulates the dissemination of false information, establishes responsibility for its dissemination). Self-regulation of new media is crucial because it allows individuals to produce and consume content without a corporate identity, but its effectiveness depends on individual content production and ethical standards (Altintop & Bak, 2022). There are professional organisations in Kyrgyzstan that promote media self-regulation, in particular, the Public Association of "Journalists" (2009). The Public Association of "Journalists" in Kyrgyzstan is one of the key organisations promoting the development of independent and responsible journalism in the country. The main aspect of this organisation's activities is the protection of the rights of journalists, providing legal and other support in cases of violation of their rights, speaking out against censorship, pressure on the media and harassment of journalists, seeking respect for freedom of speech. The organisation also conducts trainings, seminars, and other educational events for journalists aimed at improving their professional level and ethical standards. The organisation participates in media self-regulation processes, contributing to the creation and functioning of independent media councils and ethics commissions. It also promotes the development of independent self-regulatory mechanisms, such as media councils and ethics commissions, which help to resolve conflicts between the media and the public. In particular, the organisation

monitors violations of the rights of journalists and mass media during elections. The Public Association of "Journalists" (2009), like other media institutions in Kyrgyzstan, faces such problems as restrictions on freedom of speech, pressure from government agencies, and insufficient funding. Despite this, the organisation continues to play an important role in protecting the rights of journalists and supporting the development of independent and responsible journalism in the country.

Another significant organisation is the IUJKR (2021), a professional association of journalists working in various media outlets in Kyrgyzstan. IUJKR protects the rights and interests of journalists, provides legal support in cases of their violation and contributes to improving working conditions. The organisation actively responds to the facts of pressure, harassment and censorship against journalists, publishing statements, and appeals to the authorities. IUJKR also promotes the professional level of its members by organising trainings, seminars and other educational events, and actively participates in media self-regulation processes, supporting the creation and operation of independent media councils and ethics commissions. It is worth noting that the IUJKR, like other media organisations in Kyrgyzstan, faces various challenges, including restrictions on freedom of speech, pressure from the authorities, and insufficient funding. Nevertheless, the organisation continues to play an important role in protecting the rights of journalists and promoting the development of independent and responsible journalism in the country. In 2024, at the initiative of the IUJKR, the Ethics Council of the Union of Journalists was established. The Ethics Council serves to increase the professional responsibility and quality of journalism in the media environment, and to strengthen public trust. In particular, the council should ensure compliance with journalistic ethics based on appeals from the public or media representatives; make independent and fair decisions in resolving controversial cases in the media sphere; organise trainings, seminars, discussions on ethical principles for journalists; monitor the compliance of materials published in the media with ethical standards. The creation of this council will make a significant contribution to the professional development of journalists and increase public confidence in the media. In order to effectively resolve complaints about the work of the media, the Republican Congress of Journalists established the Media self-regulatory body (n.d.). This commission, as a press self-regulatory body, focuses on reviewing and deciding complaints concerning materials published in the media of Kyrgyzstan. Its main function is to resolve complaints from readers, viewers, and listeners about the compliance of articles or television (TV) and radio programmes with ethical standards of journalism. Journalists themselves believe that their activities should be regulated by ethical norms and rules. The commission strives for a civilised resolution of conflicts between the media and their audience, avoiding legal proceedings.

The decision of the Media self-regulatory body (n.d.) is an instrument of public influence on those media outlets that violate journalistic ethics. These decisions can be made public both in the media that have received a complaint, and in other media to inform the public about cases of violation of professional ethics by individual journalists or editorial offices. In addition, all decisions made are sent to higher education institutions in the country of education for use by journalism teachers. The Commission's activities are aimed at achieving the following goals: establishing an equal and constructive dialogue between the parties to the conflict; ensuring the precise definition of contested actions and formulating decisions that can serve as precedents in the future; and also contributes to the development of responsible journalistic ethics; building trust in the media; and establishing the principle of freedom of speech in Kyrgyzstan. The country's print and broadcast media have effective self-regulation mechanisms, among which the Code of Ethics of Journalists of The Kyrgyz Republic (2007) occupies an important place. This code is actively distributed in the journalistic environment, becoming the subject of regular discussions and study. The code clearly defines the inadmissibility of using mass media to the detriment of public interests, human, and civil rights. In particular, propaganda of war, violence, and racial, national, sexual, gender, regional, religious, sexual, and social intolerance is prohibited. An important aspect of the code is the requirement to clearly distinguish between facts, opinions, and assumptions in journalistic materials. The journalist is obliged to avoid publishing deliberately false information, and if an error is detected, immediately correct it. The code also emphasises the need for a balanced representation of the positions of opponents, including those who have become the object of criticism. It was also necessary to note the introduction of the activities of the Media Policy Institute, which introduces a procedure for resolving legal discussions through mediation aimed at coordinating the interests of conflicting parties to reach a mutually acceptable agreement (Focus on Kyrgyzstan..., 2023). Although the activities of mediators in the country previously had no legislative regulation, Law of the Kyrgyz Republic No. 161 (2017) was adopted, which entered into force on February 11, 2018. Media Policy Institute (MPI) is a non-profit organisation dedicated to the protection of freedom of speech and the development of independent media (Focus on Kyrgyzstan..., 2023). The institute is dedicated to protecting freedom of speech. The MPI actively monitors and analyses legislation related to freedom of speech and the media. The organisation provides legal support to journalists and media outlets that face violations of their rights. MPI is also engaged in the development of independent media, in particular, MPI conducts trainings and seminars for journalists aimed at improving their professional level. In addition, the organisation is engaged in analytical activities: MPI conducts research and analysis

of the media environment in Kyrgyzstan; the organisation publishes reports and analytical materials, drawing the attention of the public and the international community to problems in the media environment.

It should be emphasised that mediators are capable of resolving disputes arising from a variety of contexts, including civil, family, labour, and certain criminal law matters. Over the years, the media representative has mediated numerous media cases. Among the conflicting parties between which mediation was conducted were, in particular, the newspapers "MSN" and "Slovo Kyrgyzstana"; "MercyCo International" and the newspaper "Moskovsky Komsomolets in Kyrgyzstan"; the Independent newspaper "Tribuna" and the Central Election Commission of the Kyrgyz Republic; the newspaper "Batken Tani" and the information and analytical department of the Central Election Commission of the Kyrgyz Republic; the TV and radio company "Piramida" and the company "Areopag" (Media Invest) (Kyrgyzstan tightens control..., 2025). MPI initiated a public commitment by a conscientious member of the media community of Kyrgyzstan to increase the responsibility of media managers for creating the safest possible working conditions for their employees and for compliance with generally accepted international and national standards of journalistic activity and ethics. This commitment is a volun-

tary act of media managers and representatives and is of a recommendatory nature, being open for signature by all media managers. In 2010, the MPI held a series of talks and meetings with media representatives and managers, emphasising the importance of making every effort to ensure the safety of journalists and comply with generally recognised professional standards. In 2018, the foundation launched Factcheck.kg, Kyrgyzstan's first independent online platform for verifying and refuting false information, manipulation, and propaganda (Requirements and criteria for..., 2022). This project became a pioneer in the genre of fact-checking, which was previously little known in the country. Through Factcheck.kg, the term "fact-check" has become familiar to journalists, and the number of materials based on information verification has increased in the media. The range of expert fact-checkers and organisations that implement verification skills has also expanded. The Factcheck.kg (n.d.) team consists of experienced journalists specialising in various socially important topics. The project's mission is to counter disinformation and improve media literacy among both professional journalists and a wide audience. The goal is to combat false information, manipulation and propaganda, and distribute high-quality and reliable content. Table 1 shows the criteria and operation process of the "Factcheck" section.

Table 1. Information analysis scheme in the "Factcheck" section

Stage	Criteria/Actions	Description
1	Material selection criteria	Availability of facts for verification; public dissemination of information; public significance; request from readers
2	Object of investigation	Public statements; high-profile facts
3	Essence of the question	Informational preamble with explanations
4	Evidence and arguments	Facts, statistics, documents from open sources; expert information with documentary confirmation
5	Verdict	True, untrue, half-true, not proven, manipulation; a brief reasoned explanation

Source: compiled by the authors based on Requirements and criteria for the selection... (n.d.)

Table 1 demonstrates a structured fact-checking process. The first stage emphasises the importance of selecting materials that are verifiable and socially significant and widespread in the public space. This ensures a focus on relevant and important topics of public interest. Identifying the object of an investigation (a public statement, a high-profile fact) helps focusing efforts on specific statements. The use of open official sources and expert opinions with documentary evidence ensures objectivity and reliability. "Verdict" provides a clear conclusion with a reasoned explanation, which makes the process transparent and understandable for the audience. Thus, Table 1 demonstrates the high standards of journalism that are used to verify information, which contributes to improving the media literacy of society and combating disinformation. In general, the above-mentioned structure of the "Factcheck" section provides high-quality and reliable

verification of information, which is important for maintaining trust in the media.

Practices of self-regulation of journalists and mass media in Kazakhstan

In Kazakhstan, the activities of mass media are regulated both by law and through various state and public organisations. Media self-regulation is an effective tool for protecting users' rights, but it is not enough to prevent the emergence and dissemination of false information and hostile rhetoric (Lee, 2023). The key government body that determines and implements state policy in the information and social development sphere is the Ministry of Information and Social Development (MISD) (2022). This body plays a central role in shaping the strategy and directions for the development of the country's information space. The main functions of MISD include the development and implementation of



the state information policy aimed at developing the information space of Kazakhstan, and monitoring compliance with media legislation. An important area is the regulation of media activities, which covers licensing of TV and radio companies and supervision of their work, and the regulation of Internet resources, in particular social networks. The development of information infrastructure is another significant aspect of MISD's activities. The ministry promotes the development of information and communication technologies and increased public access to the Internet. Ensuring information security is also a priority area, so MISD participates in the development and implementation of measures to protect the state's information space from disinformation and propaganda. In addition, MISD actively supports the development of civil society in Kazakhstan, providing support to non-governmental organisations. The ministry is also engaged in strengthening interethnic and interfaith harmony by promoting dialogue between various ethnic and religious groups. MISD is also responsible for youth policy, within which the ministry develops and implements state youth policy, and supports youth initiatives.

One of the main activities of MISD is the state regulation of television and radio broadcasting and mass media. This includes monitoring compliance with legislation, issuing licenses, and other regulatory functions. An important aspect of the committee's work is international cooperation in the field of mass media, which contributes to the exchange of experience and implementation of international standards in the media space of Kazakhstan. The main laws governing mass media activities in Kazakhstan include the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan (1995), Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 451-I (1999), Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 545-IV (2024). Kazakhstan has a number of public organisations that protect the rights of journalists and freedom of speech. These organisations monitor violations of journalists' rights, provide legal assistance, and work to improve the media literacy of the population. Club of editors-in-chief is a voluntary public association of editors-in-chief and media managers of Kazakhstan (Kudrenok, 2015). The main goal of this association is to promote effective competition between the media, strengthen interethnic harmony and stability in society. The club consists of more than 300 editors-in-chief and media managers of Kazakhstan. The club organises meetings of editors-in-chief with the first heads of state to understand the processes taking place in the country. The club promotes the exchange of experience between

editors-in-chief. The club deals with the development of the media industry. The club of editors-in-chief plays an important role in the media space of Kazakhstan, contributing to the development of professional journalism and strengthening ties between the media. The Union of Journalists of Kazakhstan (2021) plays an important role in the country's media space, focusing on protecting the rights of journalists and supporting the development of high-quality and ethical journalism. The organisation actively protects the rights of journalists, providing legal and other support in cases of their violation, and also opposes censorship, pressure on the media and harassment of journalists, seeking respect for freedom of speech. To improve the professional standards of journalists, the union organises trainings, seminars, and other educational events. It is also involved in the development and dissemination of ethical codes and standards of journalism, promoting media self-regulation through the creation and support of independent media councils and ethics commissions. In addition, the union establishes a dialogue between the media, the public, and the authorities on ethical journalism. A relevant aspect of the union's activities is cooperation with international organisations engaged in the protection of freedom of speech and the development of journalism. This helps to exchange experience, receive support, and promote the implementation of international standards of journalism in Kazakhstan. Code of Ethics of Journalists of the Republic of Kazakhstan (2012) is an important tool for regulating the professional behaviour of journalists in the country. It sets standards for the collection, processing and dissemination of information, and defines the relationships between journalists, information sources and the public. The main principles of the Code of Ethics of Journalists of the Republic of Kazakhstan include the desire for accuracy and reliability in messages, objectivity and impartiality, responsibility to the public, respect for privacy, compliance with the laws of Kazakhstan and professional solidarity. Journalists should check information from multiple sources, avoid conflicts of interest, be aware of the impact of their messages on society, and avoid spreading information that may cause harm. The Code of Ethics of Journalists of the Republic of Kazakhstan is an important tool for ensuring high-quality and responsible journalism. It helps journalists to make ethical decisions and maintain high standards of professional behaviour. In Astana, media experts discussed topical issues related to the ethics of media workers and proposed a number of measures to address these problems (Table 2).

Table 2. Proposals for addressing media ethics issues in Kazakhstan

No.	Proposals
1	Strengthen teaching the basics of professional ethics at universities; conduct training sessions and seminars; review and strengthen the Code of Ethics of Journalists of the Republic of Kazakhstan (2012)
2	Create an Institute of news ombudsmen in editorial offices; create press councils that would include representatives of civil society, media experts and ombudsmen from influential media outlets

Continued Table 2.

No.	Proposals
3	Introduce restrictions on media coverage of violence; conduct legal trainings for journalists
4	Separate ethical principles for journalists and editorial offices; develop ethical principles for the field of artificial intelligence
5	Develop basic principles of media in Kazakhstan; create a public committee on media self-regulation
6	Stress the importance of verifying information
7	Share the results of the analysis of training programmes for journalists
8	Create a council on ethics for journalists
9	Make a "round table" regular for discussing current issues in the field of mass media

Source: compiled by the authors based on Alikhan Smailov instructs to widely discuss... (2022)

Analysis of Table 2 showed that the participants of the round table made a number of proposals aimed at improving professional standards and improving media self-regulation. Among the key initiatives: strengthening ethics teaching at universities, conducting trainings for journalists, revising the Code of Ethics, creating the Institute of news ombudsmen and press councils, limiting coverage of violence, developing ethical principles for artificial intelligence, and creating a public committee on media self-regulation and a Council on ethics for journalists. In addition to government regulation, there are also public ones, such as the KazMediaNetwork, and Factcheck.kz (n.d.). KazMediaNetwork, founded in 2021, focuses on the development of basic media principles in Kazakhstan and the creation of a public committee on media self-regulation (The first Public Committee..., 2021). Their activities are aimed at

raising professional standards of journalism, promoting ethical behaviour in the media space, and ensuring media transparency and responsibility. KazMediaNetwork aims to create a platform where journalists, media experts, and members of the public can work together to solve ethical problems and improve the quality of information. FactCheck.kz is engaged in fact-checking and combating disinformation in Kazakhstan. Their activities are aimed at verifying the accuracy of information distributed in the media and social networks, identifying and refuting fake news and disinformation, and improving the media literacy of the population. Both organisations contribute to raising ethical standards, combating disinformation, and developing high-quality journalism in the country. Table 3 provides a comparative analysis of media self-regulation practices in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.

Table 3. Comparative analysis of media self-regulation practices in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan

Criteria	Kyrgyzstan	Kazakhstan
Legislative framework	Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic (2021), Law of The Kyrgyz Republic No. 938-XII (2023), Law of the Kyrgyz Republic No. 161 (2025)	Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan (1995), Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 451-I (1999), Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 545-IV (2024), Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 401-V (2015)
Professional organisations	Public Association of "Journalists" (2009), IUJKR (2021), Media Policy Institute	Club of editors-in-chief, Union of journalists of Kazakhstan (2021), KazMediaNetwork, FactCheck.kz (n.d.), MISD (2022)
Codes of Ethics	Code of Ethics of Journalists of the Kyrgyz Republic (2007), Ethics Council of the UJKR	Code of Ethics of Journalists of the Republic of Kazakhstan (2012)
Self-regulation mechanisms	Media self-regulatory body (n.d.), Mediation (Media Policy Institute), public commitment of a bona fide member of the media community	Limited, mostly voluntary
Focus of organisations' activities	Protection of the rights of journalists, improving professional standards, developing media literacy, Factcheck.kg (n.d.)	Strengthening competition between media outlets, interethnic harmony, development of the media industry protection of journalists' rights

Source: compiled by the authors based on T. Kudrenok (2015), The first Public Committee... (2021), Requirements and criteria for the selection... (2022), Focus on Kyrgyzstan... (2023), Factcheck.kg (n.d.), Factcheck.kz (n.d.)

Table 3 highlighted that Kazakhstan demonstrated a more centralised and institutionally regulated model of self-regulation, whereas Kyrgyzstan demonstrated a more diversified and civil society-oriented self-regulatory environment. This contributes to the development of

mediation and fact-checking mechanisms, and focuses on protecting the rights of journalists and improving media literacy. In Kazakhstan, self-regulation is mostly limited and voluntary. More emphasis is placed on state regulation, where organisations focus on developing the

media industry. However, there is an increase in state control over the information space, which limits the independence of the media. Consequently, Kyrgyzstan has more developed media self-regulation practices compared to Kazakhstan, where state regulation plays a dominant role. However, both countries face challenges related to restrictions on freedom of speech and pressure on independent media. Based on the comparative analysis of media self-regulation systems in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, several structural weaknesses were identified in both countries. In Kazakhstan, the main issue is the highly centralised nature of media governance, which limits the institutional autonomy of professional media organisations and reduces the practical effectiveness of ethical codes, making them largely formal and declarative. In Kyrgyzstan, although a more pluralistic institutional environment exists, including complaint commissions and media policy organisations, their effectiveness is constrained by fragmented coordination, lack of unified reporting standards, and absence of systematic performance evaluation. In both countries, a shared problem is the voluntary nature of ethical compliance and the absence of binding enforcement mechanisms, which significantly weakens self-regulation in a highly digitised information environment characterised by widespread social media influence and high internet penetration. Another key finding is the gap between formal regulatory frameworks and practical implementation. In Kazakhstan, media organisations often operate in close interaction with state institutions, which reduces independence and limits transparency in decision-making processes related to ethical regulation (Karassayev *et al.*, 2023). In Kyrgyzstan, although institutions such as media complaint bodies and professional unions are active, there is no consolidated system for tracking the implementation of their decisions, including the proportion of cases resolved and the level of compliance by media outlets. In both countries, fact-checking initiatives exist, but they remain fragmented and lack standardised national-level integration, which reduces their overall impact on combating disinformation. These systemic issues indicate that current self-regulatory mechanisms function more as advisory systems rather than enforceable governance tools.

The findings of D.A. Craig (2021) showed that the existing framework of media ethics should be applied to social media practices in order to solve the problems of cross-cultural verification, countering misinformation in the communication network. Exploring the integration of artificial intelligence into media, O. Al-Zoubi *et al.* (2024) determined that journalists face ethical challenges when implementing artificial intelligence in editorial offices, such as data bias, privacy violations, and a lack of legislation and international regulations. The results of the above-mentioned studies coincide with the position of this study in the context of the global nature of problems related to disinformation, censorship, and ethical challenges in journalism, especially in the context of digital

transformation. According to the results of this study, access to the Internet and the development of digital technologies, in particular, social networks such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, LinkedIn, have become a powerful tool for spreading disinformation and propaganda in the region. According to this, the low level of media literacy of the population makes them vulnerable to manipulation, which undermines confidence in traditional media. P. Idiongo (2024) noted that fake news has significantly undermined public confidence in traditional media, with younger, less media-literate people being hit harder, and trust in politically polarised and less regulated regions significantly declining. The researcher noted that comprehensive strategies are needed to overcome the impact of fake news and media literacy programmes for society. L. Levi (2020) pointed out that it is necessary to expand media literacy to help citizens understand the structure and functioning of democracy, promote critical thinking, and reduce the vulnerability of the mainstream press to information manipulation. N.M. Lee (2018) argued that one of the most important strategies for dealing with threats on the Internet is digital media literacy training. Ultimately, it is crucial for combating fraud and misinformation, but there is a need for more research on effective educational interventions for adults. According to M. Tomšič (2023), the quality of media communication directly affects the level of media literacy of the population, that is, the ability of people to critically comprehend and analyse messages distributed by both traditional and online media. According to the researcher, media literacy is a key tool for protecting against negative phenomena in the media space, such as disinformation and fake news, and also increases the resilience of citizens to political messages that exploit elements that often underlie populist politics. The analysis of the above studies confirmed the conclusions of this study, made in the context of Central Asia, on the impact of digital technologies on the spread of disinformation and the need to improve media literacy. Therefore, the need to adapt journalistic practices and improve media literacy are key factors for maintaining public confidence in the media.

This study indicated that there is a shortage of independent fact-checking organisations in Central Asia. However, there is now a tendency to increase fact-checking restrictions in the world as a whole. E. Humprich (2019) noted that fact-checking has become important, so news outlets and independent organisations are involved in debunking information. However, the effectiveness of fact-checking depends on the ability of fact-checking organisations to gain the trust of the audience through the transparency of their working methods. The study by P. Ferracioli *et al.* (2022) indicated that fact-checkers play an important role in various media systems, and their work is influenced by the professional culture and features of the media system, which can potentially lead to new levels of competition in journalism. According to S. Tejedor *et al.* (2024), fact-checking

and research on fake news in the social sciences, shows that Europe and the United States are leading the way, with universities in the United States accepting the largest number of researchers working on the topic. Results of the study by S. Singh *et al.* (2024) showed that independent fact-checking organisations show a shift away from political neutrality by selectively debunking false news and presenting information that affects consumers' perception of news. Fact-checking organisations strive to provide accurate information and hold public figures and media networks accountable for mistakes and false statements during crises such as the coronavirus (Bouli-fa, 2021). Results of the study by M.A. Amazeen (2017) showed that fact-checking is spreading around the world as a tool for building democracy, appearing where democratic institutions are perceived as weak or under threat, similar to the growth of consumer reform movements. This is conditioned by the fact that politics is increasingly using strategies organised by consultants and marketing and advertising agencies, an example of which is the Brexit referendum. However, before fact-checking can effectively inform people, it must first gain a foothold in the structural environment (Ginters & Revathy, 2021). The analysis of the above papers coincides with the position of this study on the growing role and number of fact-checking organisations in the world. This section of the study highlighted the role of fact-checking in providing accurate information during crises and as a tool for building democracy. Overall, research has shown that there is a global trend towards their development. It was also found that the threats faced by journalism (censorship, disinformation, etc.) need to be addressed. It was determined that, despite the efforts of public organisations, the effectiveness of media self-regulation remains limited, which indicates the need for further development of self-regulation mechanisms and improving media literacy of the population.

■ Conclusions

According to the study, it was determined that journalism in Central Asia faces a number of serious ethical challenges that significantly affect its role as an independent and responsible source of information. Among them are disinformation and fake news, censorship and restrictions on freedom of speech, conflicts of interest and privacy violations, the influence of digital technologies, insufficient level of media literacy, ethical challenges in conditions of political instability and social conflicts. In the course of the study, it was determined that in order to overcome these challenges, it is necessary to increase the level of media literacy of the population, strengthen the independence of the media, develop effective mechanisms for self-regulation, ensure the safety of journalists and protect their rights. The study revealed that Kyrgyzstan has a relatively developed system of self-regulation of mass media,

which is based on legislative norms and active activities of public organisations, for example, the Public Association of "Journalists", IUJKR. It was determined that these independent organisations defend the rights of journalists, promote their professional level and participate in the creation of self-regulation mechanisms, such as media councils and ethics commissions. An analysis of media self-regulation practices in Kazakhstan revealed that control over the activities of journalists and mass media occurs both through legislative norms and with the participation of state and public structures. Among the public organisations operating in Kazakhstan, the Club of editors-in-chief, the Union of journalists of Kazakhstan, and others were highlighted, which contributed to strengthening effective competition between the media and the development of professional journalism, and the Union of journalists of Kazakhstan focuses its activities on protecting the rights of journalists and supporting the development of high-quality and ethical journalism. A comparative analysis of self-regulation practices revealed that Kyrgyzstan has a more developed system of self-regulation, characterised by active participation of public organisations and the presence of mediation and fact-checking mechanisms. In Kazakhstan, self-regulation is mostly limited and voluntary, with a greater emphasis on state regulation. It was determined that both countries face challenges related to restrictions on freedom of speech and pressure on independent media. In Kazakhstan, there is a tendency to strengthen state control over the information space, which limits the independence of the mass media. The research process was complicated by the fact that the study was based on available data and information at the time of its implementation. Therefore, changes in legislation, technology, or the political situation may affect the relevance of conclusions. For further research and improvement of the available results of the study, it is recommended to expand the geographical focus, including other Central Asian countries (Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan) in the study for comparative analysis and identification of regional trends, and to conduct a comparative analysis with the countries of Europe and America. In addition, it will expand the analysis of digital technologies by examining the impact of artificial intelligence, social media algorithms, and other digital technologies on ethical standards of journalism.

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Етичні питання та саморегулювання в медіа Центральної Азії: особливості та проблематика

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Анотація. Метою дослідження було оцінити етичні проблеми та ефективність механізмів саморегуляції медіа в Казахстані та Киргизстані. Методологія включала застосування методів контент-аналізу законодавства та діяльності медіаорганізацій, кейс-методу для аналізу конкретних інцидентів та міжнародних організацій, статистичного підходу до використання цифрових технологій у Казахстані та Киргизстані, а також порівняльного аналізу практик саморегуляції. Головним результатом дослідження став аналіз етичних викликів та практик саморегуляції журналістики в умовах цифрової трансформації країн Центральної Азії. У роботі виявлено та проаналізовано проблеми дезінформації, цензури та тиску на журналістів. Ефективність практик саморегуляції медіа оцінювалась на прикладі казахських та киргизьких організацій. Встановлено, що поширення Інтернету та розвиток цифрових технологій, зокрема соціальних мереж, стали важливим каналом поширення дезінформації та пропаганди в регіоні. Аналіз схеми перевірки фактів став ключовим етапом дослідження. Порівняльний аналіз практик саморегуляції ЗМІ показав, що в Киргизстані саморегуляція медіа розвинена краще, ніж у Казахстані, завдяки активній участі громадських організацій. Проте обидві країни стикаються з обмеженнями свободи слова, зокрема через посилений державний контроль медіа, відсутність механізмів медіації та фактчекінгу. Дослідження продемонструвало, що для подолання етичних викликів необхідно підвищувати медіаграмотність населення, зміцнювати незалежність медіа та розвивати ефективні механізми саморегуляції. Результати можуть бути використані для розробки стратегій, спрямованих на підвищення стандартів журналістики та забезпечення свободи слова в країнах Центральної Азії.

Ключові слова: перевірка фактів; цензура; свобода слова; дезінформація; фейкові новини; медіаграмотність



Ethical challenges of generative artificial intelligence in global social communications: International standards and practices

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Abstract. The purpose of the study was to analyse the global experience of forming ethical and legal frameworks for the use of generative artificial intelligence in the media industry, publishing and public communications. The research methodology included a theoretical analysis of scientific sources to identify global challenges of artificial intelligence in the media, a comparative analysis of international regulatory approaches to artificial intelligence, a systematic analysis of professional codes of ethics of journalists to assess the adaptation of traditional norms to algorithmised content distribution, and a case study of leading media organisations and platforms for investigating fact-checking practices, the use of algorithmic ranking, and the integration of ethical standards with automated systems. It was found that generative artificial intelligence automatically creates press releases, social media posts, and multimedia campaigns, which increases the efficiency of communication and the effectiveness of information impact. The development of an ethical and legal framework for the use of generative artificial intelligence in media, publishing, and public communications is accompanied by an increase in distrust of AI content (more than 60%), an increase in transparency requirements (approximately 70%), an increase in copyright regulation (approximately 65%), an increase in the share of AI disinformation (approximately 27%), and a rapid increase in deepfake content (more than 900%), which generally confirms the need for comprehensive legal regulation and control. Global cases show that tools such as British Broadcasting Corporation Verify (a division of British Broadcasting Corporation), Associated Press Content Verification Systems and Google Fact Check Explorer (Google) combine algorithmic data analysis, open intelligence sources, and automatic information filtering with mandatory human fact-checking, which allows quickly detecting misinformation and ensuring the reliability of news in real time. The practical significance of the study is that the results can be used by journalists, editorial offices, publishers, and Public Relations specialists to implement transparent algorithmic systems, ensure copyright compliance, adapt codes of ethics to digital platforms, and improve the effectiveness of content management and communication campaigns

Keywords: social networks; international coordination; content creation; copyright; gatekeeper

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Introduction

The rapid introduction of generative artificial intelligence into global social communications is transforming the ways in which information is created, disseminated, and interpreted, while simultaneously actualising the complex of ethical challenges associated with content reliability, algorithmic biases, data privacy, and responsibility for automated generation results. The growing role of such technologies in the media space, political processes, and business communications increases the risks of disinformation, manipulation, and social inequality, which leads to the need to agree on international standards and ethical principles for their use. The study of the ethical challenges of generative artificial intelligence (AI) and the analysis of international regulatory practices appears as an important area of understanding the transformations of the contemporary communication environment, focused on ensuring transparency, accountability, and safe functioning of digital technologies in a global society.

The growing role of generative artificial intelligence in global social communications requires a comprehensive understanding of ethical challenges and the search for effective international approaches to their settlement. M. Al-Kfairy *et al.* (2024) reviewed interdisciplinary approaches to analysing the ethical problems of generative AI and examined ways to addressing them through a combination of technological and regulatory solutions. The researchers considered issues of algorithmic bias, developer responsibility, and the risks of distributing unreliable content. Expanding the scope of generative AI in complex digital environments deepens attention to the social implications of its use. B. Chimbaga (2023) investigated the ethical and social challenges of integrating generative AI into the Internet of Things environment and analysed the impact of automated systems on user security. In this paper, the researcher considered the issues of confidentiality, autonomy of solutions, and potential risks of manipulative influence. Simultaneously, there is an interest in the use of generative AI in academic communication and its impact on the quality of scientific texts. K. Costa *et al.* (2024) examined the benefits and challenges of using generative AI in academic writing and analysed the impact of such tools on the integrity and quality of research. The risks of plagiarism, reduced critical thinking, and the need to develop recommendations for responsible use were analysed. Further generalisation of scientific approaches was carried out through the analysis of the structure of ethical discourse. G.P. Georgiou (2025) conducted thematic modelling of scientific publications and analysed key areas of generative AI research. The paper covered the topics of trust in information, transparency of algorithms, and social consequences of digital technologies. G. Kostygina *et al.* (2023) analysed disclosure standards in social media and generative AI research and outlined approaches to ensuring reproducibility of results.

Mechanisms for increasing transparency and responsible use of data in the digital environment were identified.

The development of international approaches to regulating generative AI was linked to the ideas of sustainable development and global responsibility. G.G. Landini (2025) investigated the ethical principles of using generative AI and analysed the possibilities of their integration into international policies. The relationship between technology innovation and social responsibility was traced. The regulatory dimension of the problem reflects the transformation of legal approaches to regulating digital technologies. S. Sahebi & P. Formosa (2025) investigated the phenomenon of AI-mediated communication and analysed the impact of generative systems on user epistemic trust. The risks of information distortion and transformation of its perception processes were analysed. Socially oriented approaches focus on the possibilities of generative AI for social development. W. Shafik (2025) explored the potential of generative AI in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and analysed its role in solving global problems. The balance between the innovation of technologies and the ethical responsibility of their application was evaluated. Generalisation of scientific developments contributes to the systematisation of key ethical challenges of generative AI. E.C. Tirpan (2024) reviewed and analysed the main categories of ethical issues. The study covered issues of bias, transparency, responsibility, and impact on social processes. Methods for minimising ethical risks and improving the reliability of generative AI in social communications were analysed.

Despite the questions raised by previous studies, there were still some gaps in the study of the ethical problems of generative AI. In particular, international standards and comparative regulatory practices of different jurisdictions were not sufficiently systematised. There is a lack of research that comprehensively assesses the impact of generative AI on information trust and social responsibility in global communication networks. The purpose of the study was to investigate international practices in creating ethical and legal norms for the use of generative artificial intelligence in various fields. The objectives of the study were: to compare international approaches to AI regulation (on the example of the EU AI Act, US standards and Asian models); to investigate the transformation of professional ethical codes of journalists and editors under the influence of algorithmisation; to systematise global cases of using AI to combat disinformation and create content.

Materials and Methods

The research includes theoretical analysis of scientific sources, comparative analysis of international regulatory approaches to AI, evaluation of professional codes of ethics of journalists based on system analysis and case studies of leading media organisations with the study of fact-checking practices, algorithmic ranking, and integration of ethical standards in digital journalism. A theoretical

analysis of the global challenges associated with the use of artificial intelligence in media, in particular, algorithmic bias, problems of copyright to content created by AI, and the transformation of the role of the “gatekeeper” in information flows based on J. Kuai (2024), M.Á. Fernández-Barrero & C. Serrano-Martín (2025), D.V. Voinea (2025) allowed identifying key trends in the regulation and standardisation of AI tools in the media. Statistics on the level of distrust of AI content in the media, requirements for transparency of its use, legal regulation of authorship in the publishing sphere, the spread of AI-generated disinformation in public communications, and the dynamics of growth of deepfake content based on data by F. Simon *et al.* (2025), N. Newman (2026) were also considered. Additional sources included NewsGuard (2025), Tamzid (2026), and McAfee (2026).

Within the framework of the study, a comparative analysis of international approaches to the regulation of artificial intelligence was carried out, in particular, the regulatory model of the European Union (AI Act) (Artificial Intelligence) (Proposal for a Regulation..., 2021) and the decentralised regulatory environment of the United States of America (based on the recommendations of the Federal Trade Commission (n.d.) and the National Institute of Standards and Technology. The paper also described the principle-oriented approaches of Asian countries, as set out in Japan’s Social Principles of AI (Japan AI social principles, 2025) and Singapore’s Model AI Governance Framework (AI Verify Foundation & Infocomm Media Development Authority, 2024). The choice of these approaches was determined by their representativeness to three different regulatory paradigms of strict legal regulation, flexible industry self-regulation, and ethical governance that provides a comprehensive coverage of global practices. The selection criteria were the level of regulatory formalisation, the degree of mandatory requirements, the availability of risk classification, control, and responsibility mechanisms, and a focus on the balance between innovative development and the protection of human rights. Comparisons were made based on certain criteria that included regulatory rigidity, transparency, accountability, human oversight, institutional control organisation, and cultural approach. Four professional codes of ethics of journalists were considered through system analysis, among them Society of Professional Journalists (2014) Code of ethics, Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists (1954). The features of the RTDNA Canada (2021) Code of ethics and the Canadian Association of Journalists (2023) Code of ethics were also highlighted, with an emphasis on four key aspects, including regulatory rigidity, transparency, accountability, human oversight, institutional control organisation, and cultural approach.

A case study was conducted by the following companies and organisations: British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Verify (BBC Verify largely..., 2025), European Broadcasting Union (EBU) (Keaten, 2025), Associated

Press (AI News Staff, 2026). In addition, Google (Google AI for Developers, n.d.), WAN-IFRA (The age of AI in the newsroom, 2025), and individual scenarios of protests in Los Angeles (Campbell, 2025), related to the spread of disinformation and the public response to the use of AI in the media space and medical disinformation through deep fakes were analysed. BBC Verify, European Broadcasting Union, Associated Press, and WAN-IFRA were selected as leading representatives of various segments of the global media industry and demonstrate practices in implementing artificial intelligence and countering disinformation. In particular, Google was included in the analysis, as it formed the infrastructure for distributing and verifying information through AI algorithms that directly affect the media space. The study examined real-time fact-checking practices, the use of Open Source Intelligence (OSINT), data analysis, automated pre-filtering of content, the use of AI assistants to assess the credibility of news, algorithmic cross-referencing with reliable sources, the integration of ethical standards and transparency, and the combination of algorithmic systems with human fact-checking.

Results

Theoretical analysis of the use of artificial intelligence in the media industry, publishing, and public communications

Artificial intelligence in the media creates a number of global challenges, including algorithmic bias, copyright issues for AI-generated content, and the transformation of the role of the gatekeeper in information flows. Copyright problems were related to the fact that generative AI systems create texts, images, videos, and other content based on large amounts of data, including human works, which causes legal disputes about the ownership of copyrights to the resulting products. This requires the development of legal frameworks, licensing schemes, and standards for using data for model training (Kuai, 2024). The transformation of the role of the gatekeeper is that conventional editors and journalists who previously carried out control and filtering of information flows based on professional and ethical standards are replaced by algorithmic systems that automatically select, rank, and recommend content to users, which requires revision of professional codes of ethics, integration of transparency principles, and combined human and AI control, and the development of mechanisms for monitoring algorithmic decisions. Taken together, these challenges define key areas of AI regulation and standardisation in media, including algorithm audits, transparency and accountability, copyright protection, and adaptation of ethical standards to the digital transformation of the information environment (Voinea, 2025).

The use of artificial intelligence in publishing and public communications is becoming increasingly important in the current conditions, although the level of systematic research remains limited and fragmented.

Theoretically, AI is considered as a tool for automating content processes, optimising editorial decisions, and improving the effectiveness of communication with the audience (Waliszewski *et al.*, 2025). In the publishing industry, algorithms are used to generate texts, edit them, proofread them, automatically translate them, and adapt materials to different audience segments. Machine learning tools analyse large text arrays, identify stylistic errors, offer options for improving the structure, and predict reader preferences, which contributes to more accurate editorial policy planning (Buhai *et al.*, 2026). In public communications, AI is integrated into the processes of interaction with the audience through chatbots, automated user service systems, and analytical platforms for monitoring the information environment (Novikova *et al.*, 2025). This allows quickly responding to changes in public opinion, identifying information risks, and adjusting communication strategies. An example of practical application is algorithms for personalisation of news feeds, which adapt content in accordance with the interests of users, and automatic fact-checking systems that compare information with reliable sources and reduce the level of disinformation spread. The use of AI is accompanied by problems related to ethical aspects, risks of algorithmic bias, and the need to combine automated solutions with human control (Murala *et al.*, 2025). Thus, AI in publishing and public communications forms a new paradigm of information management, where the key role is played by the integration of technological innovations with professional standards of journalism and communication, which ensures a balance between efficiency, reliability and trust of the audience.

Algorithmic bias manifests itself through the use of large amounts of data reflecting historical social biases and structural inequalities in news ranking systems, content recommendations, and automatic moderation. A ProPublica study found an algorithm bias against African-American defendants (Angwin *et al.*, 2016). In the media, this can lead to underestimation of topics related to minorities or regional communities, and requires auditing algorithms, transparency of models, and the involvement of various social groups in their testing. Copyright issues for AI-generated content are related to the use of generative models such as OpenAI Generative Pre-trained

Transformer (GPT) (OpenAI Developers, n.d.), Drawing with Artificial Intelligence – Learned Examples (DALL-E) (OpenAI, n.d.) and MidJourney (n.d.), which train on large data sets containing people's work. This creates legal disputes about the ownership of copyright to the resulting content. For example, in the United States in 2023, there was a legal dispute between artists and companies that used their work without consent to train AI models, which led to claims for licensing fees. Media editors use AI tools to create texts, illustrations, and totals of large amounts of data, which requires clear regulation and transparency of the use of data for model training (Rosen, 2023). The transformation of the role of the gatekeeper is evident in the fact that editors and journalists are no longer the only filters of information. Algorithms for social platforms such as Facebook, YouTube and X (Twitter), automatically select and rank content for users based on interests, behaviour, and historical data (Loucif *et al.*, 2020). This shifts control from human to algorithm, calling into question traditional editorial standards for the accuracy, significance, and ethics of materials. Codes of ethics, such as the Society of Professional Journalists (2014), the Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists (1954) and the Canadian Association of Journalists (2023) have been supplemented with provisions on algorithm transparency, the explainability of automated decisions, and active human involvement in the oversight of AI systems.

The global challenges of using AI in the media have technical, ethical, legal, and social dimensions (Abdygalyim *et al.*, 2025). Algorithmic bias requires independent audits and multi-level testing of algorithms, copyright issues stimulate the development of new legal tools for data and content protection, and changing the role of the gatekeeper leads to a revision of professional standards in favour of models that combine human control and automated mechanisms. This integrated approach allows assessing the prospects for regulating and ethical use of AI in the media and ensuring the sustainable development of information ecosystems. Table 1 summarises the key trends in the regulation and standardisation of AI tools in the media, reflecting the main areas of development of legal norms, ethical standards, and technical requirements for the use of artificial intelligence in the media environment.

Table 1. Key trends in the regulation and standardisation of AI tools in the media

Key trend	Scope of application	Regulatory/standardisation measures
Algorithmic transparency	News ranking and content recommendations	Implementation of algorithm audits, explainability of AI solutions, reporting to users
Copyright protection for AI-generated content	Generative content (text, images, videos)	Establishing licenses, standards for using data to train models, and legal frameworks for AI content
Responsibility of the gatekeeper	Control of information flows	Revision of ethical codes of journalists, combining human supervision with algorithmic supervision, development of professional recommendations
Ethical standardisation	Media and social platforms	Inclusion of provisions on transparency, non-discrimination, and multi-level control
International coordination	AI regulation in global media	Harmonisation of norms, recommendations on transparency, security, and responsibility of AI systems

Source: compiled by the authors based on M.Á. Fernández-Barrero & C. Serrano-Martín (2025), R. Saeed *et al.* (2026)

Table 1 summarises key trends in the regulation and standardisation of AI in the media, reflecting the complexity of approaches covering technical, legal, and ethical aspects of technology application. Transparency of algorithms ensures clarity and accountability of AI decisions in ranking news and content recommendations, while copyright measures for AI-generated content contribute to resolving legal disputes and standardising the use of data for model training. The transformation of the role of the gatekeeper combines conventional editorial control with algorithmic systems, which increases the effectiveness of moderation of information flows, and ensures compliance with professional standards. Ethical standardisation and international coordination allow establishing universal principles of non-discrimination, multi-level control, and harmonisation of norms at the global level. Taken together, these trends demonstrate that the regulation and standardisation of AI in the media requires an integrated approach that combines technical, legal, and ethical mechanisms to ensure the stable, reliable and responsible functioning of the digital information environment.

The experience of developing an ethical and legal framework for the use of generative artificial intelligence in the media industry is characterised by increasing requirements for transparency and reliability of information. Empirical evidence shows that more than 60% of the audience shows distrust of news content created or modified with the help of AI, which actualises the need for its clear labelling and editorial control (Simon *et al.*, 2025). This situation contributes to the introduction of ethical principles of openness in the use of algorithms, responsibility of media organisations, and ensuring fact-checking as a mandatory component of journalistic practice. In publishing, the development of regulatory approaches focuses on the regulation of authorship and intellectual property issues in the context of using generative AI. In particular, approximately 65% of industry representatives support the need to create clear legal mechanisms for determining the status of content generated by algorithms, and responsibility for its distribution (Newman, 2026). This encourages the integration of academic integrity norms, the development of editing policies, and the development of hybrid models of collaboration between author and technology.

In the field of public communications, the key area is countering disinformation and manipulative content created using generative AI. Studies show that the spread of false statements generated by AI reaches approximately 27% among the verified materials, reflecting a significant increase in information risks (NewsGuard, 2025). In this regard, approaches are being formed aimed at strengthening control over information sources, developing tools for detecting artificial content, and improving the level of media literacy in society. An additional aspect is the growth of cyber threats and digital manipulations associated with the use of generative AI. It has

been reported that more than 80% of modern online scams contain elements of automated content creation, which makes them more difficult to detect and increases the level of risks for users (McAfee, 2026). However, the number of deepfake materials is growing by more than 900%, which increases the need for the introduction of technologies for identifying fakes and regulating their use (Tamzid, 2026). In response to these challenges, comprehensive ethical and legal mechanisms are being developed to ensure the safe functioning of the digital information environment.

International approaches to regulating artificial intelligence

International standards are developed to ensure consistency of approaches to the regulation and use of technologies in the global environment, which is especially important in the context of the development of artificial intelligence. They reduce legal uncertainty, promote international cooperation and form common rules for states and organisations, which allows effectively combining innovative development with the requirements of security and human rights protection, as demonstrated by the integrated approach of the European Union (Proposal for a Regulation..., 2021). The content of international standards includes clearly defined elements: terminology base, risk classification, principles of ethical use of technologies, requirements for transparency and accountability, and mechanisms for monitoring and assessing compliance. For example, in contemporary artificial intelligence management frameworks, it is necessary to use risk management and responsible implementation of technologies (AI Verify Foundation & Infocomm Media Development Authority, 2024). This allows systematically assessing the impact of technologies and ensuring their safe functioning at all stages of the life cycle. The development of international standards is driven by the need to establish a balance between stimulating innovation and preventing potential risks to society. They are formed based on agreed positions of governments, the scientific community, and business, which ensure their practical applicability in different countries. However, standards can be either binding or recommendatory, but in both cases, they are aimed at increasing confidence in technologies and ensuring their responsible use. Table 2 shows a comparative analysis of key international regulatory approaches to artificial intelligence.

Table 2 shows that the main difference between international standards is the approach to regulating AI. The European Union is represented by the AI Act (Proposal for a Regulation..., 2021), which sets out a strict legislative framework with mandatory requirements for high-risk systems, clear risk classification criteria, legally established liability mechanisms, and a centralised multi-level surveillance system. The process of establishing an ethical and legal framework for the use of generative artificial intelligence in the media industry, publishing and

public communications is viewed as a phased regulatory process, with bans on certain high-risk practices already in place from February 2025 and basic requirements for AI literacy being introduced; from August 2025, rules for general-purpose models come into force, with an emphasis on transparency and risk management, and from

2 August 2026, requirements for high-risk systems will be fully applied, alongside mandatory conformity assessment, human oversight and the creation of national regulatory "sandboxes" in each country, which together will ensure the transition to comprehensive legal and ethical regulation of AI in the information sector.

Table 2. Comparative analysis of international regulatory approaches to artificial intelligence

Criteria	AI Act (EU)	USA – FTC and NIST	Japan – Social principles of AI	Singapore – Model AI governance framework
Regulatory rigidity	Strict legislative framework; mandatory requirements for high-risk systems; defined sanctions and legal liability	Flexible regulation; combination of recommendations and industry standards; emphasis on business self-regulation	Voluntary principles; ethical guidelines; no mandatory sanctions	Voluntary, fundamentally oriented framework; balance between innovation and social responsibility
Transparency	Consolidated by law; algorithms should be clear and explicable	Recommended as best practice; openness of solutions	Focused on ethical openness and explainability, without legal compulsion	Ethical principle; emphasises transparency and user trust
Accountability	Clear legal mechanisms of responsibility; defined roles and responsibilities of organisations	Accountability through agencies and internal control of companies	Responsibility is assigned to organisations; control through ethical standards	Primary responsibility for organisations; coordination through corporate and government committees
Human supervision	Mandatory for high-risk systems; ensures safety and minimisation of damage	Recommended for high-impact algorithms	Ethical principle; not formalised	Important for ethical use; optional, based on corporate policy
Institutional organisation of control	Centralised, multi-level surveillance system (national and European authorities)	Decentralised; different agencies and standards; coordination through recommendations	Coordination and advisory; monitoring through national committees	Coordination and advisory; focused on corporate and government committees
Cultural approach	Priority of human rights protection, ethical and safe implementation of AI	Focus on innovation, market freedom, minimal government intervention	Balance between technological development and social responsibility	Balance between innovation, social harmony, and ethical standards; national values are taken into consideration

Source: compiled by the authors based on Proposal for a Regulation... (2021), AI Verify Foundation & Infocomm Media Development Authority (2024), Japan AI social principles (2025), Federal Trade Commission (n.d.)

Transparency and intelligibility of algorithms, accountability of organisations, and mandatory human supervision are formalised at the legislative level, which ensures a high level of human rights protection and safe implementation of AI. The United States is adopting a flexible, decentralised model based on the recommendations of the Federal Trade Commission (n.d.), where regulatory rigidity is less, and control is carried out through agencies and corporate self-regulation practices. Transparency and accountability are rather recommended, and human oversight is not required, which allows innovating faster while maintaining market flexibility. The Asian approaches presented by Japan's Social Principles of AI and Singapore's Model AI Governance Framework (AI Verify Foundation & Infocomm Media Development Authority, 2024) are based on voluntary ethical principles and advisory mechanisms, focusing on the balance between technological development, social harmony, and organisational responsibility. Transparency, accountability, and human oversight in these models remain fundamental, while the institutional organisation of control is coordinating, reflecting the culturally determined values and specifics of AI implementation in different societies.

Transformation of journalistic ethics under the influence of artificial intelligence

In the world's leading media and digital platforms, there is an active integration of artificial intelligence technologies into the work of editorial offices and news distribution, which requires adaptation of traditional ethical principles of journalism and the introduction of new responsibility procedures. For example, The New York Times actively encourages the use of internal AI tools for auxiliary tasks, such as preparing headlines, ideas for materials, or data research, but restricts the role of generative AI in creating the main content, leaving journalists with the final editing and confirmation of facts (Russell *et al.*, 2025). Similarly, journalistic publications in the United States have begun to use AI to optimise editing and research processes, but academic reviews indicate that the use of such technologies remains uneven and their role is not disclosed to readers, creating challenges for transparency and accountability. In response to these challenges, news organisations and digital platforms are gradually developing ethical guidelines for AI tools. In particular, CBC News emphasises that artificial intelligence should remain an auxiliary, not

the main content creator, with the final decision on publication and fact-checking left to people; in its principles, the editorial board requires open disclosure when AI is used in journalistic work, and an explanation of how this affected the created material (Fenlon, 2025). This practice reinforces the conventional ethical requirements for accuracy, transparency, and accountability laid down in professional codes and serves as a counterweight to the risks associated with automation.

Algorithmic news processing in the digital environment also changes the audience's perception of journalism: news recommendation algorithms on platforms such as social networks or content aggregators can amplify sensational content or form "information bubbles" without proper transparency about ranking criteria (Weinbrand *et al.*, 2025). Research by the BBC and the European Broadcasting Union found that about 45% of AI assistant responses contained problems with

fact or sources, highlighting the need for new standards for verifying and controlling AI-generated or AI-curated content (Largest study of its..., 2025). In addition, the changes also affect the interaction of AI systems with conventional sources: most of the current AI models used to summarise news or make recommendations depend on available journalistic materials, but often do not provide proper citation or compensation to the original media, which raises serious ethical and legal issues (Karadeglija, 2026). This, in turn, encourages the media to create their own policies for cooperation with AI companies, which should ensure, on the one hand, support for journalistic work, and on the other, the preservation of independence, transparency, and fairness, which are the core of professional ethics. Table 3 illustrates the transformation of professional codes of ethics for journalists and editors under the influence of content algorithmisation.

Table 3. Transformation of professional codes of ethics of journalists and editors under the influence of content algorithmisation

Codex	Key ethical principles	Conventional implementation	Problems in algorithmisation conditions	Transformation and adaptation
Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) Code of ethics	1. Search for the truth and report it 2. Minimise damage 3. Act independently 4. Be accountable	Editorial fact-checking, journalistic investigations, ethical editorial policy	Algorithms can amplify sensational content, create "information bubbles", and rank news biased	Development of AI fact-checking; creation of algorithmic monitoring policies; integration of accountability into automated feeds
International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) Declaration of Principles	1. Independence 2. Impartiality 3. Respect for privacy 4. Avoidance of conflicts of interest	Editorial supervision, Interstate ethical standards, editors' judgements	Algorithms can distort the news feed, target sensitive groups, and create asymmetric access to information	Development of recommendations for ethical supervision of AI; audit of algorithms; additional human control over automated content
Radio Television Digital News Association (RTDNA) Code of ethics	1. Accuracy 2. Transparency 3. Justice 4. Accountability	Correction of errors in broadcasts; compliance with editorial standards; transparent source of information	Automatic content aggregation can introduce errors; AI generation can hide sources; distribution speed exceeds editorial control	Implementation of AI content verification procedures; transparency of algorithmic processes; mandatory editorial supervision of AI-generated content
Canadian Association of Journalists (CAJ) Code of ethics	1. Accuracy 2. Independence 3. Accountability 4. Justice 5. Respect for privacy	National ethical framework; editorial meetings; ethical decisions in contentious cases	Algorithms can increase bias, reduce context, and prioritise clicks over ethics	Development of AI policies for journalists; audit of algorithms; training of editors and journalists on the ethical use of AI; implementation of algorithmic control

Source: compiled by the authors based on Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists (1954), Society of Professional Journalists (2014), RTDNA Canada (2021), Canadian Association of Journalists (2023)

The transformation of professional codes of ethics of journalists and editors under the influence of algorithmisation takes place through the adaptation of key principles of traditional journalistic ethics to the conditions of automated content processing and distribution. In global codes such as the Society of Professional Journalists (2014) Code of ethics and the Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists (1954), the principles of trustworthiness, transparency, and responsibility are detailed in relation to the use of algorithms for fact-checking, labelling AI-generated materials, and

avoiding bias in automated news feeds. Simultaneously, regional standards, in particular RTDNA Canada (2021) Code of ethics and the Canadian Association of Journalists (2023) Code of ethics, include recommendations for controlling the quality of content in digital media, ensuring human supervision of algorithmically processed information, and integrating technologies to support ethical editorial decisions. Changes are also evident in practical approaches to publications: algorithmic tools are used to pre-moderate news, detect potentially harmful or biased content, and personalise news feeds,

but the ultimate responsibility remains with editors and journalists. Thus, the transformation of codes consists not only in updating the texts of ethical norms, but also in introducing mechanisms of human control, automatic labelling of AI content, ethical selection and management of materials, which ensures a balance between the technological capabilities of algorithms and conventional professional standards of journalism.

Global AI cases in the fight against disinformation

The systematisation of global cases of using AI to combat disinformation and create content demonstrates that media organisations, technology companies and collaborative initiatives are actively implementing algorithmic solutions to identify false claims and maintain journalistic reliability in the face of rapid growth of information volumes. In particular, the practice of BBC Verify includes a special division of the British Broadcasting Corporation that uses open sources intelligence (OSINT), data analysis, and judicial methods to verify information and detect misinformation in news materials, in particular in real time through BBC Verify Live, operating on the BBC online platform, increasing audience confidence in verified facts and refuting fakes in the daily news stream (BBC Verify largely..., 2025). In partnership with other organisations and tools, journalists can automatically identify anomalies in texts and videos, enabling faster recognition of false messages during election campaigns or crisis events where speed and accuracy are crucial. The second area of AI application covers large-scale research that evaluates the impact of algorithmic systems on the way users receive news (Barlybayev *et al.*, 2024). This has led to recommendations for closer collaboration between AI developers and the media, focusing on increasing transparency, clearly differentiating facts and opinions, and regularly updating training data. Such developments encourage major news organisations, such as the Associated Press, to integrate algorithmic solutions for pre-checking videos, photos, and text that automatically filter out potentially fake content even before it gets into editorial processing (AI News Staff, 2026).

Globally, initiatives such as "News Integrity in the age of AI", supported by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), the World Association of news publishers (The age of AI in the newsroom, 2025) and other international media groups, call on AI developers to ensure transparent use of news materials in training models, provide clear attribution and protect the right to reliable information, and seek consistent standards for the ethical application of technology in journalism (Keaten, 2025). This includes not only technical means, but also political steps, in particular, the requirement to authorise the use of content in generative models only with the consent of copyright holders and increase the level of responsibility of technical companies for errors in their AI systems. Tech giants like Google are also contributing to the fight against misinformation by offering tools like Google Fact

Check Explorer (Google AI for Developers, n.d.), which automatically compare data sets with reliable sources such as Reuters or the Associated Press, helping journalists and consumers quickly verify news claims. Similarly, academia is working on policies and standards for using AI in fact-checking. An example of this is a study from Germany and Ukraine that offers practical recommendations for developing regulatory approaches that promote accuracy and trust in the media environment, while minimising the risks of bias and over-automation.

Individual cases demonstrate how AI is used directly in complex misinformation scenarios (Oklander *et al.*, 2025). During the protests in Los Angeles, AI tools were used both to distribute fake videos and messages and to automatically verify them, although the results were heterogeneous and highlighted the importance of combining AI tools and human fact-checking. In addition, the problems of deep fakes depicting fictional doctors in the context of medical misinformation have caused a public outcry and pressure on social platforms to improve algorithmic detection of malicious content (Campbell, 2025). Thus, global cases of using AI as a tool for combating disinformation demonstrate the duality of this technology: on the one hand, algorithms can accelerate the spread of false information, and on the other hand, offer powerful tools for detecting and deterring it when they are integrated into reliable journalistic processes, develop international standards for cooperation between media and technology companies, and increase user literacy in the digital environment. Global cases of using artificial intelligence in journalism demonstrate that in practice algorithmic solutions combine automatic fact checking with human control to increase the reliability of content (Skorokhod *et al.*, 2023). At BBC Verify, journalists use open sources of intelligence, algorithmic data analysis, and judicial methods to detect misinformation, including through the BBC Verify Live platform, which allows real-time verification of information, automatically identifying anomalies in texts and videos, and speeding up the refutation of fakes during election campaigns or crisis events. Such practices reflect the integration of algorithms into editorial processes, where AI helps filter potentially unreliable content before it is published, and journalists provide final verification and attribution, increasing audience confidence and compliance with ethical standards.

Another area of AI use covers large-scale research on the effectiveness of automated systems and assessing their impact on news consumption (Ashimova *et al.*, 2023). Major media organisations are implementing algorithmic tools for pre-checking videos, photos, and text, and global initiatives are calling for transparent use of news in training models, clear attribution, and the development of international standards for the ethical application of technology in journalism. The practical application of AI in complex scenarios, such as during protests or the spread of medical deep fakes,

demonstrates the duality of the technology: algorithms accelerate the detection of misinformation, but simultaneously require integration with human fact-checking to ensure accuracy and credibility of news content.

Discussion

The use of generative artificial intelligence in global social communications creates new ethical challenges that require a systematic approach to regulating and standardising practices. Key issues are related to algorithm transparency, copyright, disinformation control, and responsibility for decisions made by artificial agents. This is evident in user interaction with digital platforms, where generative models act as intermediaries in the dissemination of information, content creation, and formation of public narratives. Such conclusions are consistent with the analysis of thematic models presented by H. Ali & A.F. Aysan (2025), who showed that ethical requirements for AI cover a variety of areas, from education and medicine to financial and communication systems. The integration of generative AI into social communications requires not only technological, but also normative evaluation. AI policies and guidelines remain fragmented, and their implementation varies depending on the geography and type of organisation. This is consistent with conclusions of A. Dabis & C. Csáki (2024), who examined the first policy responses of higher education institutions to the challenges of generative AI and note the lack of unified standards of ethical application. Organisations trying to implement AI policies face difficulties balancing innovation and compliance with legal norms, reflecting a general trend towards a gradual development of regulatory frameworks at the global level. The results of the study reveal the heterogeneity of AI perception in the educational environment. The use of generative models in educational processes raises discussions about the ethics of automating assessment, creating educational materials, and supporting student assignments. This coincides with the conclusions of R. AlAli & Y. Wardat (2024), who emphasised that the integration of AI into education opens up wide opportunities for personalising learning, but simultaneously creates risks of content manipulation and disruption of academic integrity. It was revealed that the element is to establish clear principles for using models, including requirements for transparency of algorithms, and the ability to track the sources of created content.

Generative systems contribute to changing the role of a person in communication processes. For example, automated creation of texts, images, and multimedia content changes user interaction with information flows, affects the speed of information dissemination, and can increase the cognitive load on the audience. These results support the observation of F.F.-H. Nah *et al.* (2023), who described the challenges of human-AI collaboration and emphasised the need to form an ethical framework governing interaction. It turns out that without

establishing rules for using generative models, the risks of social and legal consequences increase. Copyright and intellectual property issues are becoming a critical issue when applying generative models in global communications. Most of the created content does not have a clear legal attribution, which creates potential conflicts when using materials in the professional and scientific environment. This is consistent with the conclusions of N. Lucchi (2023), who investigated the ChatGPT case and copyright issues, noting that legal uncertainty can hinder innovation and limit the adoption of generative technologies in organisations. It was revealed that international standards and practices for regulating generative AI are at the stage of development, and different countries apply different approaches to ethical requirements. This reflects the conclusions of Y. Jin *et al.* (2025), who described a global perspective on the adoption of AI policies and recommendations in higher education institutions. International coordination, exchange of best practices and the development of unified ethical principles can reduce the risks of misuse of generative models. The use of AI in social communications requires a balance between efficiency and ethics. Technologies provide fast and large-scale access to information, and the lack of control creates risks of manipulation, dissemination of false data and reduced communication quality. This was confirmed by the conclusions of T. Farrelly & N. Baker (2023), who investigated the implications of generative AI in higher education and noted that ethical regulation is becoming necessary to maintain trust in digital communication platforms. Only through a comprehensive combination of technological, regulatory and educational approaches is it possible to ensure the effective use of generative AI. Evaluating the user experience and effectiveness of communication through AI allows identifying problems of awareness of the risks and opportunities of the technology. This was consistent with the conclusions obtained by M. Matsiola *et al.* (2024), who evaluated the usability of generative models in learning, ethical implications, and communication effectiveness. Increasing the digital literacy and ethical thinking of users contributes to a more informed application of generative technologies in global communications.

Integrating AI into global communications can support sustainable development goals, including access to quality education. This conclusion is consistent with the study by R. Raman *et al.* (2024), who investigated the transformational role of generative AI in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in education. When properly managed, generative technologies can not only improve communication efficiency, but also help reduce social inequality in access to information resources. The results show the need to update and adapt existing standards. J. Laine *et al.* (2025) stressed that along with conventional principles of ethics, new principles should be formed that consider the features of generative systems and their impact on society. Establishing

a clear ethical framework contributes to predictability of results and reduces the risks associated with generative technologies. This confirms conclusions of R. Raman *et al.*, who identified trends in fake news related to AI and determined the impact on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Generative algorithms significantly speed up the dissemination of false information, making it difficult for users to identify it. Data analysis demonstrates the existence of legal and regulatory gaps in the use of AI in global communication platforms. The results show that existing regulatory frameworks often do not cover the specifics of generative models, leaving room for abuse. This is consistent with the conclusions obtained by Y. Qian *et al.* (2024), who focused on the issues of ethics, law, and governance in society in the context of the active introduction of AI. The lack of clear standards increases the risks of privacy violations, and creates ambiguity in the area of responsibility for automatically created content.

Users of global communication platforms demonstrate varying levels of awareness of AI ethics. This was confirmed by conclusions of R. Sabherwal & V. Grover (2024), who offered a balanced perspective on the impact of generative AI on society. According to their study, society demonstrates a simultaneous fascination with technology and concern about possible negative consequences, which coincides with the identified patterns of AI use in social networks and communication services. Generative AI creates ethical dilemmas in research and academic publications. Researchers face difficulties in determining the limits of the use of automated content and evaluating its reliability. This was confirmed by the observations of D. Schlagwein & L. Willcocks (2023), who described the ethical aspects of the use of GAI in scientific research. The use of generative models without clear ethical standards can lead to a violation of the principles of scientific integrity, and to distortion of the results of publications. The results of the study point to difficulties in balancing innovation and regulating AI on a global scale. The data show that the rapid introduction of generative technologies outstrips the development of legislative and ethical standards. X. Wang & Y.C. Wu (2024) stressed that the balance between innovation and regulatory requirements remains critical to ensuring the safe and ethical use of AI. Global regulatory practices are lagging behind the pace of technological development, creating potential risks for users and organisations. The analysis revealed the problems of managing and controlling generative AI at the international level. The lack of agreed standards creates heterogeneity in the ethical use of AI between countries and organisations. This is consistent with conclusions of A. Taeihagh (2025), who investigated the management of generative AI and emphasised the need to create global policies and frameworks that ensure the ethical use of technology. The study demonstrated that effective governance requires international coordination and clear standards of

transparency and accountability. The results highlighted the privacy and data security challenges associated with AI applications. Automatically generated texts, images, and videos may pose a risk of personal information leakage or manipulation. This is consistent with the conclusions obtained by C. Uddagiri & B.V. Isunuri (2024), who considered the ethical and particular problems of generative AI. It turns out that without proper data protection and ethical protocols, the use of AI can lead to a violation of privacy and loss of user trust. The study revealed the potential of AI in industry and manufacturing processes, while pointing out the risks of misuse.

Integrating generative AI into industrial systems increases efficiency, but simultaneously creates new ethical and social challenges (Efremov, 2026). This is consistent with the conclusions of N.L. Rane (2023), who analysed the role of generative AI in Industry 4.0, 5.0, and Society 5.0, noting that technologies provide new opportunities for process optimisation, but also require ethical oversight to minimise negative impacts. Generative AI requires the development of guidelines for academic performance and publications that include philosophical, legal, and practical dimensions. K.-S. Tang *et al.* (2024), O. Le Poidevin (2025) pointed out the need for ethical and methodological recommendations for the use of AI in scientific journals. Rules for applying generative models help to avoid problems with authorship, credibility, and academic integrity. The results demonstrate the challenges of creating value through generative AI. Automatic content generation does not always bring ethical and economic benefits if there are no appropriate standards and frameworks. This coincides with the conclusions of S.F. Wamba *et al.* (2025), who highlighted the difficulties in creating ethical added value through generative technologies. Without ethical management and control strategies, the risks of abuse and social conflict increase. The results show that generative AI creates both new opportunities for optimising processes and communications, and ethical, social, and organisational challenges. Effective use of technology requires clear rules, ethical oversight, and integration of standards to minimise risks and ensure accountability.

Conclusions

The use of generative artificial intelligence in the media industry, publishing, and PR communications creates a complex of technical, ethical, legal, and social challenges, including algorithmic bias, copyright issues for AI-generated content, and the transformation of the role of gatekeeper. In media, AI automates the creation of news and multimedia materials, increases the speed of publication preparation and content personalisation in publishing, and ensures the prompt development of releases and posts in PR communications. These processes require transparency of algorithms, audits, adaptation of codes of ethics and legal regulation for the sustainable development of digital information ecosystems.

International standards for the regulation of artificial intelligence form common principles and approaches for the safe and responsible use of technologies in the global environment, ensure the harmonisation of policies and practices of various states and organisations, reduce legal uncertainty, promote transparency, accountability, and ethics of the implementation of systems, include risk classification, mechanisms for monitoring and conformity assessment, and balance innovation development with the protection of human rights, while differing in regulatory rigidity, institutional organisation, degree of human supervision and cultural approach, which allows adapting standards to the specifics of national contexts and ensures their practical applicability.

The transformation of journalistic ethics under the influence of artificial intelligence consists in adapting conventional principles of reliability, transparency, and accountability to the conditions of automated content creation, processing, and distribution, which involves the development of internal media policies regarding the use of AI tools, the introduction of algorithmic labelling of materials, auditing systems to avoid bias, integrating human control into moderation and fact-checking processes, and training editors and journalists in the ethical use of technologies, ensuring a balance between speed and personalisation of content and compliance with professional ethical standards in a global digital environment. Global cases of the use of artificial intelligence in the fight against disinformation show that algorithmic

systems effectively detect fakes and anomalies in texts, photos, and videos before they are published, while integrating human control for fact-checking and final editing; the practices of BBC Verify, Associated Press, and Google Fact Check Explorer demonstrate that the combination of AI analytics, open sources of intelligence and transparent attribution allows increasing the reliability of content, restrain the spread of false information during election campaigns or crisis events, and form standards for the ethical use of technologies in global media. The limitations of the study were to use mainly theoretical sources and individual cases without a broad empirical sample, which makes it difficult to generalise the results for all segments of the media sphere. The prospects for further research are to investigate the influence of generative artificial intelligence on the development of audience confidence in the media and the development of models for effective interaction between algorithmic systems and human control in the processes of content creation and distribution.

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Етичні виклики генеративного штучного інтелекту в глобальних соціальних комунікаціях: міжнародні стандарти та практики

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Анотація. Метою дослідження був аналіз світового досвіду формування етичних та правових основ використання генеративного штучного інтелекту в медіаіндустрії, видавничій справі та публічних комунікаціях. Методологія дослідження включала теоретичний аналіз наукових джерел для виявлення глобальних проблем штучного інтелекту в медіа, порівняльний аналіз міжнародних регуляторних підходів до штучного інтелекту, систематичний аналіз професійних кодексів етики журналістів для оцінки адаптації традиційних норм до алгоритмізованого розповсюдження контенту, а також тематичне дослідження провідних медіаорганізацій та платформ для дослідження практики перевірки фактів, використання алгоритмічного ранжування та інтеграції етичних стандартів з автоматизованими системами. Було виявлено, що генеративний штучний інтелект автоматично створює прес-релізи, публікації в соціальних мережах та мультимедійні кампанії, що підвищує ефективність комунікації та результативність інформаційного впливу. Розробка етичної та правової бази для використання генеративного штучного інтелекту в медіа, видавничій справі та публічних комунікаціях супроводжується зростанням недовіри до контенту, що базується на штучному інтелекті (понад 60 %), підвищенням вимог до прозорості (приблизно 70 %), посиленням регулювання авторських прав (приблизно 65 %), збільшенням частки дезінформації, пов'язаної з штучним інтелектом (приблизно 27 %), та стрімким зростанням контенту, що базується на дідфейках (понад 900 %), що загалом підтверджує необхідність комплексного правового регулювання та контролю. Глобальні кейси показують, що такі інструменти, як British Broadcasting Corporation Verify (підрозділ British Broadcasting Corporation), Associated Press Content Verification Systems та Google Fact Check Explorer (Google), поєднують алгоритмічний аналіз даних, відкриті джерела розвідки та автоматичну фільтрацію інформації з обов'язковою перевіркою фактів людиною, що дозволяє швидко виявляти дезінформацію та забезпечувати достовірність новин у режимі реального часу. Практичне значення дослідження полягає в тому, що результати можуть бути використані журналістами, редакціями, видавцями та фахівцями зі зв'язків з громадськістю для впровадження прозорих алгоритмічних систем, забезпечення дотримання авторських прав, адаптації кодексів етики до цифрових платформ та підвищення ефективності кампаній з управління контентом та комунікацій

Ключові слова: соціальні мережі; міжнародна координація; створення контенту; авторське право; гейткіпер



Political memes as a communicative tool for shaping public opinion in election campaigns: A comparative analysis

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Abstract. The aim of the study was to identify trends in the operation of political memes across various sociopolitical contexts and to ascertain their impact on the formation of public perceptions during election campaigns. To investigate the structure, tone, and dissemination of political memes across four electoral campaigns (United States 2016, Brazil 2018, Ukraine 2019, and India 2019), the methodological framework combined corpus and network analysis. This approach enabled the tracing of variations across platforms and types of digital interaction. The results demonstrate that political memes are complex visual-textual units that inform, affect, mobilise, discredit, and signal political belonging. Their dominant functions vary according to political context, platform architecture, and audience structure: emotional and discrediting memes intensified polarisation and reinforced candidate-related frames in the US; mobilisational and informational memes facilitated the construction of a "new" anti-system candidate and encouraged youth engagement in Ukraine; and WhatsApp-based memes supported targeted mobilization in Brazil. The findings further reveal that open platforms, such as X, Reddit, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, increase visibility, virality, and agenda-setting. Conversely, closed or semi-closed channels, like WhatsApp and Telegram, enhance group-based trust and targeted dissemination while reducing transparency and external verification. The study concludes that the influence of political memes depends on informational compression, emotional resonance, and identificational signalling, rather than any single communicative function. Ultimately, political memes represent an independent form of digital political communication capable of influencing public opinion through interaction with user communities, platform algorithms, and content. These findings have practical implications for media literacy initiatives, platform regulation, electoral communication analysis, and the development of rapid visual fact-checking techniques tailored to modern digital campaigns

Keywords: social media; digital communication; voter; campaign; mobilisation

Introduction

The relevance of the research topic is determined by the rapid transformation of political communication in a digitalised society, where social media have become the main arena for public debate, manipulation and the

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shaping of public opinion. In the era of info-capitalism, political messages increasingly take forms oriented not towards rational argumentation but towards the emotional engagement of audiences, which radically alters traditional mechanisms of political participation. Memes, as visual-textual units, have become one of the instruments of this shift: they combine elements of satire, humour, symbolic representation and ideological signalling, turning into a means of influence that simultaneously entertains, mobilises and shapes political identity. The relevance of the study was defined by the need to understand how exactly political memes affect voters' perceptions, their political behaviour and social orientations.

A review of the literature showed that the phenomenon of political memes has been studied from various theoretical and methodological perspectives, but remains insufficiently systematically conceptualised in the context of electoral behaviour. The study by S. Mukhtar *et al.* (2024) revealed the sociological and linguistic diversity of internet memes, viewing them as cultural replicators capable of reflecting social trends, generational differences and value conflicts. The authors stressed that memes are not merely a by-product of digital communication, but act as an instrument of social interaction that creates new models of collective expression. The work of F. McKelvey *et al.* (2023) showed that political communities on Facebook formed stable networks of social cohesion in which memes served as symbolic "markers" of group belonging. The authors argued that memes contributed less to persuading opponents than to consolidating internal solidarity, creating closed communicative spaces. The study by N.A.G. Matias *et al.* (2024) demonstrated that memes stimulated the political activity of student leaders through a combination of short forms, emotional content and social visibility. The authors stressed that memes not only reflected young people's mood but also acted as a catalyst for political participation, thereby confirming their role in shaping new practices of digital mobilisation. A. Halversen & B.E. Weeks (2023) investigated political memes from the viewpoints of producers, viewers, and outcomes, demonstrating that memes have both participatory and expressive purposes on social media. According to their findings, memes enable users to express political opinions, foster a sense of community, and interact informally but socially meaningfully with public issues.

In the bibliometric review by C. Kamath & S. Alur (2025), five main theoretical approaches to the analysis of meme communication were systematised: rhetorical, relevance-blending, humorous, evolutionary and conceptual blending. At the same time, the authors underlined the insufficient use of marketing theories to explain the mechanisms of the dissemination of political memes, which created a gap in the academic discourse. According to G. Anderau & D. Barbarrusa (2024), memes serve a variety of communicative purposes simultaneously,

such as humour, criticism, in-group signalling, and the simplification of difficult political concepts. This method is significant because it makes political memes comprehensible as multi-layered units that integrate identity marking, information, and evaluation into a single visual-textual form. The playful nature of meme-based political communication was highlighted by M. Mortensen & C. Neumayer (2021), who demonstrated that humour, irony, and parody are distinct forms of political participation rather than being divorced from politics. Their research showed that memes, particularly in online spaces where users engage through sharing, remixing, and commenting, can make political issues more approachable and emotionally compelling. Therefore, memes' "playfulness" should be viewed as a communication tool that spreads political meanings.

According to A.O. Smith & J. Hemsley's (2022) information-centred theory, memes are units of informational difference that evolve as they are copied, altered, and shared. This viewpoint is helpful because it reframes memes as dynamic information objects embedded in digital communication systems rather than just amusing artefacts. In this way, memes can be seen as condensed carriers of socially relevant meanings that record changes in focus, interpretation, and group assessment. Internet memes are crucial for information research, according to B.J. Tulloch (2023), because they contribute to the creation, sharing, and interpretation of knowledge in virtual spaces. The author demonstrated how memes can serve as unofficial documentary formats for users to document, dispute, and negotiate common perceptions of reality. Since memes preserve condensed traces of public mood, social reaction, and identity-based communication, this theory supports the interpretation of memes as "micro-documents" of collective sentiments.

Despite the growing body of research on memes as instruments of social interaction, political expression and identity construction, existing studies still tend to examine their communicative, emotional or informational functions separately. Insufficient attention has been paid to how these functions operate together in electoral contexts, particularly in relation to voters' perceptions, mobilisation and the formation of collective political meanings. This study addresses this gap by conceptualising political memes as multi-layered communicative units that simultaneously inform, affect, identify and document public sentiment during election campaigns. The aim of the present study was to develop a comprehensive understanding of the role of political memes in shaping public opinion during elections. The main objectives of the research were: to carry out a comparative analysis of political memes in the context of four electoral campaigns in different countries; to identify relationships between the platform of dissemination, the type of memetic content and the nature of its influence on electoral behaviour; and to assess the synergistic interaction between the informational, emotional and

identificational functions of political memes as factors in the formation of public opinion.

Materials and Methods

The methodological basis for the study of political memes in electoral campaigns was built on an interdisciplinary approach combining elements of communicative, socio-technical, cultural and political analysis. The choice of this strategy was determined by the nature of the phenomenon of the political meme itself, which operates at the intersection of cultural representation, technological mediation and social interaction. Within the framework of the study, a combination of qualitative methods was used to ensure a comprehensive vision of the processes of creation, dissemination and functioning of political memes in the digital environment. The leading procedure was the use of the method of comparative analysis, which made it possible to juxtapose four empirical cases of electoral campaigns – the United States of America – USA (2016), Ukraine (2019), Brazil (2018) and India (2019). The criteria for case selection were: the existence of a documented empirical base of memetic content; the role of digital platforms in political communication; and the sociocultural and technological diversity of the contexts. The choice of these specific examples is justified by the fact that they represent different levels of development of digital infrastructures, distinct models of political participation and varied cultural traditions of perceiving humour and political satire.

To structure the data obtained, the method of systematising empirical indicators was used, which consisted in organising descriptions of platforms, technological features, meme types, functions and effects recorded in the studies by P. Davison (2020), L. Shifman (2014) and L. Bülow & M. Johann (2023). Analytical reports by the Pew Research Center (2025) were also examined. The material of the analysis consisted of corpora of memes collected within the aforementioned campaigns and documented in academic articles (Moody-Ramirez & Church, 2019; Reis *et al.*, 2020; Semotiuk & Shevchenko, 2023). In cases where the original sources recorded quantitative parameters (number of memes, reactions, platform types), these data were interpreted in a qualitative context – not for statistical verification but to outline typological trends. The method of classification was used to distinguish types of political memes – mobilisational, discrediting, emotional and informational – according to the criteria of functional orientation, emotional tone, semantic purpose and social response. This approach made it possible to structure the corpus of memes by functional categories and to relate them to the political tasks they perform.

The method of comparative platform analysis was applied to study the role of different social media in the dissemination of political memes. For each platform, three criteria were considered: technical features affecting content circulation; advantages for the spread of

political messages; and potential risks or constraints. This approach made it possible to trace how the architecture of a platform and its algorithmic mechanisms determine the nature of the visibility and emotional impact of memetic content. The methodological approach was based on comparing data from the official resources of leading social platforms (X; Facebook; Instagram). This made it possible to obtain a representative picture of the functioning of political memes in different digital environments. For deeper analysis, data from other popular platforms (TikTok; WhatsApp; Reddit) were also used, which ensured comprehensive coverage of the main channels for the dissemination of visual political content. In the course of the study, the method of criterial comparison was also employed, involving the juxtaposition of the characteristics of memetic practices across a number of indicators: type of content, mechanism of dissemination, emotional valence, degree of platform openness, form of user participation and level of political influence. This made it possible to construct a generalised model of the impact of socio-technical conditions on the political effectiveness of memes. The assessment of differences between open (X, Reddit, TikTok, Instagram) and closed (WhatsApp, Telegram) platforms was carried out according to the parameters of data accessibility, transparency of algorithms and disinformation potential.

One of the methods applied was the empirical-descriptive method, which made it possible to generalise documented cases of meme use during electoral campaigns and to present them in comparative form. This method enabled not only the description of the functioning of political memes, but also the explanation of the socio-communicative mechanisms of their influence. Each case was considered as a contextual unit, taking into account the political culture of the country, the level of digital media literacy, the dominant communication channels and the specific features of the target audience. The method of interpretive generalisation was used to construct analytical conclusions on the basis of comparing meme types, platforms and political effects. This method made it possible to integrate individual observations into a coherent conceptual model of the interrelations between the semiotic properties of memes, the technical structure of platforms and the social behaviour of users.

Results

Theoretical foundations for the analysis of political memes in electoral processes

In the academic literature, the political meme should be regarded as an interdisciplinary phenomenon: it is simultaneously a cultural unit, a visual-verbal construct and a communicative act that exists within the ecosystem of digital networks. The classical starting point – D. Dawkins's memetics approach as a metaphor of cultural replication – is supplemented by studies of internet memes which treat memes as minimal "figures"

of digital discourse with stable formal features and high variability of meaning in the process of reproduction (Davison, 2020). L. Shifman (2014) provided an interpretative impetus by defining a meme as a content unit that combines form, content and mechanism of dissemination, and by emphasising the role of intertextuality and remix culture in the creation of political meaning. The symbolic function of the political meme lies in the fact that, through simple visual-verbal substitutions, complex political phenomena are reduced to easily recognisable markers. A meme functions as a “sign” that condenses a set of connotations (historical allusions, memetic templates, cultural clichés) into a compressed form characteristic of networked culture. This makes it possible to create cultural memory rapidly and to manipulate interpretative frames. Symbolic condensation is stronger under conditions of high emotional involvement and weaker fact-checking; therefore, memes are most effective where the audience relies on socially sanctioned collective “shelves” of meaning rather than on detailed factual information (Shifman, 2014).

In the socio-technical dimension, the political meme is the product of interaction between content, users and platform algorithms. The large-scale impact of memes as a political instrument is conditioned not only by their semantic density but also by the technical capacities of platforms – the nature of the news feed, personalisation algorithms, the mechanics of reposts and the existence of closed chats/groups (where control over information flows is more difficult). This is evident in statistical reports on platform use: according to Pew Research Center (2025), around half of adults in the United States at least occasionally obtain news from social media (53% for news as of 2025 on social networks), which defines the potential scale of memetic content’s impact on the information environment. At the global level, approximately 60-64% of the population use social networks (depending on the source), which further increases the importance of these instruments in political communication. Algorithmic selection and ranking of content partly determine which memes become viral. In algorithms that optimise displays according to engagement metrics (time on site, number of interactions), content with high emotional valence (anger, humour, shock) is favoured in terms of reach. As a result, memes that appeal to emotions have a greater likelihood of “taking off” and therefore of amplifying the frames they contain. This principle explains why memes serve less for reasoned discussion and more for emotional mobilisation: platforms “reward” such forms of content in their very architecture.

The more general notion of communication technology can also be used to interpret political memes. In this way, a meme is a technologically mediated form of social interaction that modifies the rhythm, scale, and emotional density of political communication rather than just a digital image or amusing message. Since the medium itself changes the circumstances in which mes-

sages are created, disseminated, and understood, this interpretation is consistent with M. McLuhan’s (2001) view of media as “extensions” of human perception and social action. The structure of digital platforms, where social relationships, visibility, and symbolic power are organised through communication flows, intensifies this transformation in networked political communication (Castells, 2009; 2010). According to social communication theory, memes serve as ritualised forms of group participation in addition to being information carriers. According to J.W. Carey’s (2008) cultural approach to communication, meme-sharing can be viewed as a way for users to reproduce group values, preserve shared meanings, and symbolically engage in public life. Though in a condensed, emotive, and frequently ironic form, J. Habermas’s (1989) concept of the public sphere is pertinent for explaining how memes enter digital public discourse and contribute to the formation of public opinion. Memes can therefore be viewed as micro-level communication acts that take part in macro-level public meaning-making processes.

The way users exchange memes to convey agreement, irony, solidarity, or distancing from specific political positions is particularly indicative of the social-interactive nature of memes. Memes, GIFs, and emojis promote relationship-oriented online communication by promoting emotional expression, self-disclosure, and social connection, as demonstrated by R.X. Peng & J. Chen (2025). In the context of political communication, this means that a meme serves as a relational signal: reposting or responding to it signifies participation in a particular interpretive environment, recognition of shared codes, and community membership in addition to content transmission. Consequently, a meme’s ability to link informational content with interpersonal and group-based interaction is what gives it its communicative value. In addition, political memes can be thought of as a way to record public opinion. They preserve condensed traces of collective reactions, fears, expectations, and conflicts at a specific historical moment, but they do not document public attitudes in the same way as surveys or official statistics. P. Pascual-Ferrá *et al.* (2025) showed that social media memes may contribute to early public opinion formation around public health threats. In this way, memes serve as unofficial micro-documents of public opinion, documenting how online communities interpret political events symbolically and emotionally.

The multimodal structure of memes reinforces this documentary role. Political memes rely on multimodal re-contextualisation, which combines images, captions, cultural allusions, and political frames to create new meanings, as demonstrated by L. Bülow & M. Johann (2023). M. Johann (2022) went on to say that memes are a type of social media political expression that is connected to users’ political interests and engagement. As a result, the meme should be viewed as a small-scale communicative technology that simultaneously informs, affects,

identifies, and documents: it transmits political information, elicits an emotional reaction, indicates group affiliation, and leaves a trace of collective public interpretation. The distinction between open networks (X, Reddit, public Facebook pages, Instagram) and closed/semi-closed ones (WhatsApp, Telegram) has significant implications for the nature of memetic influence. Open networks allow memes to “flow” quickly into mass visibility and to be observed by researchers; closed platforms facilitate targeted, undocumented dissemination, which complicates external verification and increases the risk of information operations. Empirical cases illustrate this differentiation: during the 2018 electoral campaign in Brazil, WhatsApp served as a channel for the mass spread of political disinformation and memes in the form of images/audio messages, which affected the informational landscape in regions with high WhatsApp penetration. Academic reports and analytical work indicate that, because data from closed groups are difficult to access, it is harder to assess the full effect, yet examples of coordinated message dissemination are well documented (Cruz *et al.*, 2019). Empirical observations from specific campaigns show that the 2016 US pres-

idential primaries and the election more broadly were among the most “memified” in recent history; researchers documented large-scale discussions on Reddit which shaped narratives around the candidates (for example, memes depicting Donald Trump in paradoxical/heroic or caricatural images), and these discussions spilled over into traditional media or served as a source for targeted political adverts (Owen, 2016).

Quantitative engagement indicators make it possible to assess the intensity of memetic phenomena but not always their political effectiveness. For instance, corpora of memes collected for the 2019 Ukrainian campaign show thousands of unique images and tens of thousands of reactions; studies of comparative meme typology record the predominance of ironic and positive tones in memes supporting V. Zelenskyi, which correlated with the growth of his visibility among younger audiences on social networks. However, a direct causal link between meme views and the act of voting remains methodologically difficult to prove (panel data and experiments would be required) (Pidkuimukha & Kiss, 2020). A comparison of platforms and their significance for political memes is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparative characteristics of platforms and their significance for political memes

Platform	Technical and communicative features determining memeability	Advantages for the dissemination of political memes	Limitations and risks of memetic influence
X	Open data structure; retweets as a mechanism of secondary distribution; algorithmic support for trending topics; hashtag system; integration with journalistic and analytical API interfaces.	Maximum speed of information circulation; formation of cross-platform information waves; heightened visibility for political journalists and researchers; possibility to track network dynamics of memes in real time.	Character limit per post; algorithms' preference for emotionally polarised content; spread of bot activity; risk of discourse radicalisation.
Facebook / Instagram	Algorithmically personalised news feed; system of groups and pages; visually oriented content; opportunity for paid promotion of posts; mechanisms of social validation (likes, comments, reactions).	Broad demographic reach; emotional-visual impact of memes; high effectiveness of targeted political advertising; flexible formats (images, video, stories).	Algorithmic opacity; tendency towards information bubbles; risks of censorship or restrictions on political content; active dissemination of disinformation via closed groups.
Reddit	Modular community structure (subreddits); hierarchical voting system; strong content moderation; high degree of internal cultural codification.	Deep thematic specialisation; high content quality in niche subcultures; effectiveness of memetic chains within individual communities; potential for “organic” political discussion.	Limited overall reach beyond the platform; segmented audience; weak cross-platform integration; risk of echo chambers.
WhatsApp / Telegram	End-to-end encryption; large groups and broadcast lists; support for multimedia content; minimal oversight by platforms.	High speed of horizontal content circulation; possibility of targeted mobilisation of local voter groups; effectiveness in regions with high mobile internet penetration.	Lack of public analytics and monitoring tools; increased risk of disinformation and manipulative campaigns; impossibility of external verification of sources.
TikTok	Recommendation algorithm based on behavioural patterns; short video formats; possibilities for remixing; use of trends and audio tracks as social markers.	Extremely high virality among young people; strong visual-emotional saturation; potential for political socialisation through humour and cultural adaptation of messages.	Algorithmic “black box”; rapid “burn-out” of content; dependence on trend cycles; risks of indirect political propaganda through cultural patterns.

Source: compiled by the authors

The data in the table show that different social platforms create specific conditions for the circulation of political memes, determined by their technical architecture, algorithmic principles and users' cultural practices. X functions as a space of rapid political reaction, where, thanks to open feeds and the retweet mechanism, memes quickly acquire “trend” status and influence the

agenda, particularly through interaction with the journalistic environment. At the same time, the brevity of the format and the presence of bot activity create risks of manipulation and oversimplification of political messages. Facebook and Instagram are oriented towards visual appeal and broad audience reach, which makes them optimal for emotionally intense or visually symbolic

memes. However, the closed nature of some groups, censorship-related restrictions and the spread of disinformation lower the analytical transparency of processes in these networks. Reddit forms a segmented ecosystem in which political memes circulate within thematic communities, encouraging deep irony, meta-discursivity and user self-reflexivity, but limiting overall reach. WhatsApp and Telegram provide a high level of trust and targeting, yet their closed nature complicates monitoring and creates conditions for the uncontrolled spread of fake content. TikTok, in turn, shapes a new paradigm of political communication through video memes – short, remixed forms capable of rapidly mobilising a youth audience, although they are characterised by low stability of informational effect.

Thus, the technical features of platforms determine not only the speed and scale of meme dissemination, but also the very structure of political discourse in the digital environment. In digital electoral campaigns, political memes perform a variety of strategic functions that can be classified into types: mobilisational, discrediting, emotional and informational. These types are not strictly isolated; they overlap, but they enable analytical differentiation of mechanisms of influence. Mobilisational memes are oriented towards activating action (registering to vote, reposting, participating in a campaign); discrediting memes towards undermining the trustworthiness or legitimacy of opponents; emotional memes towards creating or intensifying the audience's emotional involvement (anger, pride, humour); informational memes towards conveying facts, instructions or raising awareness (for example, how to check fake news) (Anderau & Barbarrusa, 2024). In each case, the analytical value lies in the fact that identifying the type of meme makes it possible to structure content analysis and to interpret its potential impact on public opinion, political attitudes and behaviour. Mobilisational memes have the clear aim of stimulating action or consolidating group participation. In an electoral context, this function is relevant for campaigns seeking to mobilise young or passive voters. A meme carrying the message "Go vote" which receives a high level of reposting becomes a digital form of traditional "get out the vote" tactics. In the academic literature, such memes are classified as grassroots action/mobilisational (Chagas *et al.*, 2019).

Discrediting memes are oriented towards undermining the image of a political opponent or institution. They include satirical or caricatural depictions aimed at eliciting a negative reaction, devaluing or reframing meanings. In the study "Effects and perception of multimodal recontextualization in political internet memes", the authors note that humorous memes directed against political actors were used to construct "heroic or villainous images" and had higher engagement on social media (Bülöw & Johann, 2023). For example, in the United States during elections, memes portraying a candidate as incompetent or corrupt became popular and could

reinforce a negative frame (Al Afnan, 2025). This discursive function is crucial for understanding how memes may operate not merely as humour but as an instrument of delegitimisation. Emotional memes focus on eliciting an emotional response – anger, joy, humour, pride, fear – through visual-verbal means. Empirical research shows that memes with high emotional valence are more likely to be reposted and to spread more widely. For example, a study of the younger generation (Generation Z) demonstrated that greater exposure to political memes correlates with a higher level of political participation and with the perception of memes as "meaningful" within political discourse (Foreman-Braunschweig, 2025). This link between emotionality, attention and engagement suggests that emotional memes have the potential to influence attitudes, even if not directly behaviour.

Informational memes serve to transmit news, facts, instructions or to enhance media literacy. Research from Spain (Zamora Medina *et al.*, 2021) analysed memes during electoral debates and found that among them were infographics, meme-images explaining candidates' positions or encouraging fact-checking. In this case, memes function as "micro-narratives" of informational communication, condensing complex political discourse into a compressed visual-textual format. Given audiences' low attention span for text, informational memes are an adaptive form of political communication. These types of memes are interconnected: mobilisational memes contain an emotional component (for example, a call to "become part of the movement" accompanied by an image of an energetic group); discrediting memes stand at the intersection of emotional and informational (they convey negative information but in humorous or satirical form); emotional memes may serve as instruments of mobilisation or discrediting; informational memes may serve mobilisation (by raising awareness) or reducing discrediting (through fact-checking).

Empirical analysis of the impact of political memes in electoral campaigns

For the empirical analysis, four electoral campaigns were selected that represent different sociocultural and technological contexts: the USA (2016), Ukraine (2019), Brazil (2018) and India (2019). In each case, political memes served as an element of digital communication with varying levels of reach, audience engagement and informational impact. In the case of the USA (2016), research showed that Facebook pages dedicated to political memes emerged as spaces for discussing the candidates Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump (Moody-Ramirez & Church, 2019). The authors note that memetic content on such pages was predominantly negative in tone towards the candidates and used humorous or satirical imagery (for example Trump's hairstyle or the email scandal involving Clinton) (Goodrich, 2019). In the case of Ukraine (2019), a study analysed a corpus

of 1,121 memes covering the period from March 2019 to December 2020 (Semotiuk & Shevchenko, 2023). The article shows that these memes included ironic, satirical and serious visual-verbal representations of the candidates Volodymyr Zelenskyi and his predecessor Petro Poroshenko. For Brazil (2018) and India (2019), research documents the collection of data from the WhatsApp messenger, including image-memes disseminated during electoral campaigns in these countries (Reis *et al.*, 2020). This work highlights the role of the messenger as a platform for politically significant visual content.

A comparison of electoral campaigns in different countries revealed that the dominant type of meme depends

on the technological, sociocultural and political specificity of the country. In countries with high messenger penetration (Brazil), informational and mobilisational memes disseminated via WhatsApp gained importance; in countries with high polarisation and an active digital youth population (USA), emotional and discrediting memes dominated the digital discourse; in countries undergoing renewal of political leadership (Ukraine), mobilisational and informational memes about an anti-system candidate became more influential. Thus, meme typology provides an analytical basis for comparative research. The characteristics of political meme types are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. Characteristics of political memes in electoral campaigns

Country / campaign	Main platform/channel	Dominant type of memes	Typical themes	Key function
USA 2016 (presidential)	X, Reddit, Facebook, Telegram	Emotional/Discrediting	Polarisation, candidate persona, scandals	Amplifying emotional resonance; discrediting the opponent and mobilising the base
Ukraine 2019 (presidential)	Facebook, Instagram	Mobilisational/Informational	Anti-system stance, "new leader", change	Constructing the image of a "new candidate"; raising awareness and engaging young people
Brazil 2018 (presidential)	WhatsApp, Facebook	Informational/Mobilisational	Disinformation, corruption, anti-system messages	Mass targeting via messenger; increasing participation; influencing regional voting
India 2019 (general)	Instagram, WhatsApp, TikTok	Emotional/Mobilisational	Nationalism, youth, digital campaign	Emphasis on youth participation; creating viral content; stimulating activity

Source: compiled by the authors based on T. Goodrich (2019), M. Moody-Ramirez & A.B. Church (2019), C.C.V. Machado *et al.* (2019), J.C.S. Reis *et al.* (2020), L. Pidkuimukha & N. Kiss (2020), O. Semotiuk & V. Shevchenko (2023)

The analysis of platforms for the dissemination of political memes shows that each communication channel has unique characteristics that determine its potential for influence. X provides rapid viral spread through its open feed and hashtags but encourages superficial perception through its short format. Facebook and Instagram, with their visually oriented algorithms, effectively engage audiences but form isolated echo chambers. Reddit offers deeper discussions within niche communities but limits mass reach. Closed messengers (WhatsApp, Telegram), thanks to targeting and trust within groups, become instruments of influence in particular countries, as demonstrated by the Brazilian experience, although research into their role is complicated by privacy. TikTok, by contrast, engages young people through video format and remix culture, but the speed at which content is updated makes it difficult to assess the stability of its impact. Thus, the effectiveness of political memes depends not only on their content, but also on the specific features of the platform, its algorithms, the target audience and the sociocultural context, which requires a differentiated approach to analysing their role in electoral campaigns.

In empirical observation, political memes appear simultaneously as condensed informational units, catalysts of emotional reactions among the audience and markers of group identity. The informational function is

manifested in the ability of memes to convey meaning in a compressed form – from factual lines to instructions ("how to check a fact", "where and when to vote") – in a format that is easily remixed and retransmitted. Empirical data and corpus studies show that memes fulfilling an informational function are often accompanied by higher indicators of immediate reach within their target community (Vosoughi *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, memes served as a condensed record of narratives about candidates. The emotional function of memes consists in their capacity to intensify the audience's emotions – humour, sarcasm, anger, pride or disgust – thereby raising engagement and virality. Experimental and corpus studies find that content with high emotional valence is more likely to be reposted; at the same time, the emotional marking of a message weakens normative standards of fact-checking on the part of the recipient, reducing motivation for counter-argumentation and rational processing of information. In political science terms, this produces two lines of consequence: first, emotional memes enhance the visibility of particular frames; second, they demonstrated communication strategies aimed at emotionally framing candidates. This explains why, during intense campaigns, emotional and discrediting memes display informational resilience even after publications by fact-checkers. Paradoxically, according to S. Vosoughi *et al.* (2018), it is precisely their

“ease” of understanding that makes them robust in attitudinal memory.

The identificational function of memes is manifested in their role as symbols of group belonging and markers of “in-group/out-group”. A meme can serve as a marker of political identity: liking or reposting a meme functions as a social signal to network contacts and simultaneously confirms membership in a particular political cluster. Network studies (sociometry of remixes, cluster analysis) show that memes circulate within dense communities with a high level of internal cohesion, where repeated remixes reinforce the overall narrative and contribute to the consolidation of group identity. The use of memes as identificational markers has a direct implication for political mobilisation: memes not only inform or elicit emotion, they create a sense of “we”, which in itself is a driving force of political behaviour. Analytically, as stated by S.C. Woolley & P.N. Howard (2017), this means that measuring the impact of memes must take into account changes in the structure of networked support and communicative practices. The political and practical implications for regulation and practice are that systemic interventions must take into account the composite nature of meme functions. Since memes simultaneously inform and mark identity, response policies should include several layers: raising digital and media literacy to reduce informational vulnerability; greater transparency of algorithms and platform-level measurement of virality indicators to reduce the algorithmic advantage of emotional content; rapid fact-checking mechanisms adapted to visual formats; and, in the case of closed messengers, support for independent research and partnerships between scholars and platforms (since closed channels complicate external verification and scholarly monitoring). The Oxford Internet Institute and other centres have gathered evidence of the industrialisation of manipulation on social media, highlighting the need for comprehensive policies rather than mere censorship or technical “filters” (Woolley & Howard, 2017).

Interpretation of the findings indicates that memes operate as a multifunctional tool of political communication; their impact is determined not only by the nature of the content, but also by the structure of the audience (level of digital literacy), the character of the social field (degree of polarisation) and the architecture of platforms (open feeds vs closed messengers). The scientific imperative lies in moving from descriptive mapping of meme corpora to synthesised, causally oriented studies that combine corpus analysis, sociometry and individual experiments or panels. For political decision-making and the development of regulatory instruments, it is necessary to rely on such multi-factor empirical conclusions rather than solely on indicators of reach or virality.

Discussion

In the context of political communication, the findings confirmed that political memes play a multifunctional

role, combining informational, emotional and identificational components. The synergistic interaction of these functions revealed a complex structure of memetic influence which was not reducible to a simple instrument of political campaigning, but instead constituted an autonomous mechanism of socio-psychological action. Comparison with other academic works made it possible to situate the results within the broader context of research on digital political participation, discursive practices and network mobilisation. Comparison of the findings with the conclusions of P. Saccomanno (2025) showed that both studies converge in treating political memes as an effective but not self-sufficient instrument of political communication. A common logic can be traced in the works: memes increased citizens’ engagement with political content, but their influence was mainly limited to the emotional-cognitive level. The researcher defined memes as a phenomenon that activated young people’s political awareness but did not contribute to the formation of stable political convictions. Similarly, the analysis of the four electoral campaigns showed that memes performed informational, emotional and identificational functions without demonstrating causal power in changing political attitudes. However, the synergistic interaction between meme functions identified in the present study broadened P. Saccomanno’s approach, as it revealed not only communicative but also structural-psychological effects, mediated by levels of digital literacy and polarisation.

Comparison with the results of B. Heiskanen (2017) revealed a shared understanding of memes as a mechanism of political participation that went beyond traditional communication channels. B. Heiskanen emphasised that during the 2016 US elections, memes created an alternative discourse that allowed audiences to react to political events in real time and to participate in the political process through cultural codes. Similar processes were observed in the analysis of the Ukrainian case in 2019, where memes produced effects of identification and mobilisation, particularly among young people. However, unlike the American context, where emphasis was placed on the participatory potential of memes, the findings of the present study also highlighted their informational and discrediting aspects. The evidence from the USA on the faster spread of false news confirmed B. Heiskanen’s observations regarding the capacity of memes to turn into an instrument of manipulation rather than merely self-expression. Thus, both studies concur in recognising the dual nature of memes – as a factor in democratic participation and, at the same time, as a risk for the quality of political discourse. Comparison with the research of A. Halversen & B.E. Weeks (2023) showed close correspondence in understanding memes as an inclusive form of political expression. The researchers demonstrated that memes served as a platform for the participation of diverse groups – from politically active users to those previously apathetic – which aligns

with the synergistic effect between emotional and identificational functions found in the present study. As in the conclusions of A. Halversen & B.E. Weeks, there is an observable increase in online expression and political engagement through humorous and satirical formats. However, the analysis of the four electoral campaigns supplements these observations by pointing to the dependence of memetic influence on platform type and on the level of digital literacy of audiences, going beyond A. Halversen & B.E. Weeks' initial conclusions. Whereas they focus on the correlation between exposure to memes and political outrage, the present findings demonstrate a more complex mechanism in which digital skills shape users' ability to interpret content critically. This indicates that memes not only stimulate political participation, but also shape a cognitive-emotional field in which mobilisational, informational and destructive effects intersect.

Comparison with the study by M. Johann (2022) shows significant conceptual and empirical overlap. M. Johann defines political memes as a form of political expression closely linked to users' level of interest in political processes and to the intensity of their activity. The findings confirmed this link, since participation in creating and spreading memes was seen as part of broader participatory practices in the digital sphere. In particular, in the Ukrainian case in 2019, memes not only performed informational and mobilisational functions, but also stimulated young people's political engagement through humour, identification and emotional association with the candidate. However, unlike M. Johann, who focuses mainly on active user participation as a factor in political effectiveness, the present study's results point to a more complex interaction between the level of digital literacy, the degree of polarisation and the type of platform. These parameters shaped the strength of meme influence, generating differences between cases in countries with varying levels of development of the digital environment. In Brazil in 2018, the WhatsApp platform provided a localised mobilisational effect, whereas in Ukraine in 2019 memetic activity was concentrated mainly in open networks, creating an effect of mass engagement. Thus, M. Johann's conclusions about the relationship between memes and political participation are supplemented by the clarification that this relationship is multi-layered, mediated by the socio-technical parameters of the communication environment. The detected synergy between the emotional, informational and identificational aspects of memes indicates that their influence extends beyond the traditional theory of political participation and encompasses the cognitive-affective dimension of mass digital communication.

Comparison with the study by P. Misra (2024) highlighted another aspect of the issue – the tension between the democratisation of political communication and the risks of its destructive transformation. The researcher argued that memes are an instrument of influence

which simultaneously mobilises diverse audiences and facilitates the spread of prejudice, disinformation and verbal aggression. In this context, the findings of the present study align with his observations: in the cases of the USA (2016) and Brazil (2018), a combination of virality, emotionality and discrediting potential of memes was recorded. However, the present study expands P. Misra's approach by showing that these phenomena are not universal but depend on the level of digital literacy and the structure of the political space. In countries with higher digital competence (as among parts of the youth in the EU or Ukraine), memes tended to perform primarily informational and identificational functions, whereas in environments with low levels of critical content evaluation (as in some regions of Brazil), they became a means of emotional manipulation. P. Misra's conclusions on the erosion of political discourse through meme virality are consistent with the observed risks of causal fallacy, where the speed of dissemination is not accompanied by substantive accuracy. At the same time, within the present study, this process is viewed not only as a threat but as a regular stage in the evolution of digital communication, which requires not restriction but the development of regulations aimed at increasing algorithmic transparency, media literacy and the quality of public dialogue.

It is important to consider the algorithmic architecture of digital platforms when interpreting the results of this study. Ranking systems, recommendation systems, and engagement-based feeds all influence the visibility, repetition, and audience reach of political memes, which do not spread in a neutral communicative environment. In their extensive study of Twitter, F. Huszár *et al.* (2022) demonstrated that algorithmic systems may amplify political content unevenly, meaning that some messages gain more visibility due to the technical logic of the platform as well as their semantic appeal. This directly relates to political memes, as their ability to effectively communicate depends on whether platform algorithms convert them from isolated amusing posts into widely circulated political signals. This algorithmic aspect contributes to the explanation of why identity-based and emotionally charged memes frequently gain more traction than messages with complex information. According to H. Metzler & D. Garcia (2024), algorithmic mechanisms and social drivers interact to produce digital media effects. While algorithmic mechanisms include personalisation, recommendation, and engagement optimisation, social drivers in the context of political memes include humour, anger, irony, group identity, and affective resonance. As a result, the impact of memes is not solely generated by content; rather, it results from the interaction between users' emotional reactions and the platform systems that give preference to content that can elicit attention, reactions, and redistribution.

The social-informatics perspective, which holds that communication technologies should be examined as

socio-technical systems rather than as passive means of information transmission, is also consistent with this interpretation. J. Rose & O. MacGregor (2021) demonstrated how algorithm-driven persuasion is ingrained in digital platform architecture, where users' interactions with and interpretations of persuasive content are shaped by interface design, data flows, and automated ranking systems. When it comes to political memes, this means that a meme's ability to communicate depends not only on its visual-verbal format but also on the technical circumstances surrounding its visibility, recommendation, repetition, and social validation. Comparison with the work of M.A. Al Afnan (2025) shows convergence in the conclusion that political memes are a communication tool that influences voter behaviour and structures public opinion. However, unlike Al Afnan's study, which stresses the dichotomous nature of memes – as drivers of mobilisation and, simultaneously, of disinformation – the results of this study show that memetic effects are not only polarising but also adaptive, depending on the context of political culture and the level of digital literacy. The patterns identified in the electoral campaigns of the USA, Ukraine and Brazil indicate that memes do not merely reflect political polarisation but actively reproduce it, forming network structures that mutually reinforce emotional reactions.

Comparison of the results with existing theoretical models demonstrated that political memes do not perform their functions in isolation, but in interdependence, creating network effects that extend beyond individual platforms. All of the studies compared confirm the importance of the emotional component as a mechanism of influence, but it is in this study that it is shown how the emotionality of memes is combined with their informational and identificational roles, generating a synergistic effect. This approach makes it possible to explain the differing effectiveness of memes in the contexts of the USA, Brazil, Ukraine and India. In the USA, emotional intensity combined with high replication frequency; in Brazil, with the social integration of messengers; in Ukraine, with the symbolic re-imagining of a political leader as an "anti-system hero". Thus, the study's findings are consistent with global trends while also extending them by showing that memetic influence is not only an instrument of polarisation but also a form of cultural adaptation of political discourse. Political memes emerge not merely as a means of manipulation, but as mediators of social emotions which shape political participation through humour, identification and emotional resonance, thereby opening a new avenue of research in digital political communication.

Conclusions

The study has shown that political memes function as complex, multifunctional instruments, combining informational, emotional and identificational functions. Empirical analysis of four electoral campaigns demonstrated

a clear relationship between platform type and the nature of memetic influence. In particular, it was found that in the case of Brazil in 2018, WhatsApp served as the main channel for disseminating political memes, affecting the informational landscape in regions with high penetration of this messenger. In Ukraine in 2019, analysis of a corpus of 1,121 memes revealed a predominance of ironic and positive tones in memes in favour of V. Zelenskyi, which correlated with increased visibility among younger audiences. The study's empirical findings showed that political memes serve as context-dependent electoral communication tools whose impact varies based on audience composition, platform architecture, and national political circumstances. A comparison of the campaigns in the USA in 2016, Ukraine in 2019, Brazil in 2018, and India in 2019 revealed that emotional and discrediting memes were particularly prevalent in highly polarised environments, while informational and mobilising memes became more important in campaigns that depended on messenger-based dissemination, anti-system narratives, or youth engagement. Memes function as multifunctional communication units that simultaneously inform, emotionally engage, and mark group identity, thereby shaping collective perceptions within the digital public sphere. In this regard, the empirical results verified that memes played a role not only in the dissemination of political messages but also in the formation of networked group belonging, the reinforcement of political attitudes, and the symbolic framing of candidates.

The results demonstrate how various memes can be used to mobilise audiences, bolster candidate images, or frame opponents within particular platform environments, which has practical implications for the development of electoral communication strategies. Political actors, campaign teams, and communication experts may find this analysis useful in developing more context-sensitive tactics that take into consideration the identifying, symbolic, and emotional roles memes play in influencing public opinion. The main limitation of the study lies in its primary focus on correlational relationships between the spread of memes and political processes, which does not allow causal relations to be definitively established without the use of experimental methods. Future research should therefore develop a multi-methodological approach combining corpus analysis, social network analytics and controlled experiments to identify the causal impact of political memes on the formation of public opinion and electoral behaviour.

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Політичні мему як комунікаційна технологія конструювання суспільної думки в електоральних кампаніях: порівняльний аналіз

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Анотація. Метою дослідження було виявити закономірності функціонування політичних мемів у різних соціально-політичних контекстах та з'ясувати, як вони впливають на формування громадської думки під час виборчих кампаній. Для вивчення структури, тону та поширення політичних мемів у чотирьох виборчих кампаніях (США, 2016; Бразилія, 2018; Україна, 2019; Індія, 2019) методологічна база поєднувала корпусний та мережевий аналіз. Це дозволило простежити варіації між платформами та типами цифрової взаємодії. Результати показують, що політичні мему є складними візуально-текстовими одиницями, які інформують, впливають, мобілізують, дискредитують та позначають політичну приналежність. Домінуючі функції мемів варіюються залежно від політичного контексту, архітектури платформи та структури аудиторії: емоційні та дискредитуючі мему посилюють поляризацію та закріпили фрейми, пов'язані з кандидатами, у США; мобілізаційні та інформаційні мему допомогли сформувати «нового» антисистемного кандидата та заохотили участь молоді в Україні; а мему на базі WhatsApp сприяли залученню молоді в Бразилії. Результати також показують, що відкриті платформи, такі як X, Reddit, Facebook, Instagram та TikTok, підвищують видимість, вірусність та формують порядок денний, тоді як закриті або напівзакриті канали, такі як WhatsApp і Telegram, підвищують групову довіру та цільове поширення інформації, одночасно знижуючи прозорість та зовнішню верифікацію. Дослідження показало, що вплив політичних мемів залежить від ступеня стиснення інформації, емоційного резонансу та сигналів ідентифікації, а не від якоїсь однієї комунікативної функції. У дослідженні зроблено висновок, що політичні мему є самостійною формою цифрової політичної комунікації, здатної впливати на громадську думку шляхом взаємодії з користувацькими спільнотами, алгоритмами платформ та контентом. Отримані результати мають практичне значення для ініціатив з медіаграмотності, регулювання діяльності платформ, аналізу передвиборчої комунікації та розробки методів швидкої візуальної перевірки фактів, адаптованих до сучасних цифрових кампаній.

Ключові слова: соціальні мережі; цифрова комунікація; виборець; передвиборча кампанія; мобілізація

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