

Broadening the Field of View and Increasing Pressure: Polish Journalists on the Roles of Social Media during the War in Ukraine

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Abstract: War is a time of significantly increased demand for information and difficult access to verified data. The example of the ongoing war in Ukraine illustrates the importance of the media as an information source, particularly social media, its roles, and how it can be utilized by various types of actors. The article analyzes the significance of social media in the work of professional journalists in covering the war in Ukraine. The article uses the perspective of Polish journalists, based on the results of in-depth interviews (IDI) conducted in May 2022, after the opening period of the conflict, to present the argument.

Keywords: war communication; social media; journalist research; quality of media content

INTRODUCTION

War is a time of significantly increased demand for information yet also presents challenges in accessing reliable and verified data. Media perform a special role in this context as a source of information for various groups of recipients. The importance of a media presence during wartime has taken on various forms across historical periods depending on the available communication technology, the prevailing foreign policy paradigm, the international situation in general and the political regime of the country, in which the media must operate (see Ammon, 2001, pp. 5–65; Szymańska, 2021, pp. 21–37).

At the time in 1918 that Senator Hiram Johnson uttered the words “[t]he first casualty when war comes is truth”, the range of existing types of media was quite limited. The level of available communication technologies made it difficult to influence the audiences of hostile countries through mass media. The

prevailing political paradigm at that time also assumed that native media served not only as an information channel, i.e., to inform, but also to promote patriotic attitudes among citizens. In the intervening 100 plus years, almost everything has changed: the conditions and the manner of politics, as well as the media itself and the way it understands its role. Only the deficit of truth remains unchanged.

This article analyzes the significance of social media in the work of professional journalists in covering the war in Ukraine and uses the perspective of Polish journalists and based on the results of nine in-depth interviews (IDI) conducted after the first period of the conflict in May 2022.

The IDI is a classic qualitative method that researchers have successfully applied in the discipline of media studies (see Jabłonowski & Gackowski, 2012, p. 21; Jabłonowski & Jakubowski, 2014, p. 22). Research of this kind is exploratory in nature. Exploratory cognitive activity as a qualitative procedure has an interpretive character and is close to idiographic explanation; thus, is in the tradition of hermeneutical cognition (Sztompka, 2007, p. 41). The aim of an IDI therefore, is to empirically search for new dependencies by deepening knowledge about the already established dependence, better recognition of the circumstances accompanying its course, etc. (Krauz-Mozer, 2005, p. 48). The results of the research discussed in this article will serve as a contribution to reflect on the current paradigm of the role of the media in wartime, the usefulness of explanatory models to be used in the future and an indication of the space for the emergence of further models.

MEDIA REPORTING WAR – A SHORT HISTORY

In the context of reporting wars (and international issues in general), the importance of the mass media is, first and foremost, determined by the dynamic development of communication technologies. The technical standards available during World War II allowed for the transmission of a message by telephone or telegraph in real-time only in text form. The recorded image (photo or film) of events had to be transported to the editorial office, where it underwent a complicated chemical process. Only the technology available during the Vietnam War enabled the transmission of an image with a slight delay of approximately 48 hours (Cohen, 1986, pp. 38–39). In the mid-1970s, the speed of text transmission increased to a maximum of 1,200 words per minute. A decade later (in the 1980s), the development of satellite technology increased this efficiency tenfold (Cohen 1986, p. 159). The presence of satellite television also meant that from then on, decision-making processes in the field of policy regarding foreign issues were accompanied by live television coverage. In literature, this period is referred to as the 'decade of the dish' (Gowing, 1994, p. 3; Korte, 2009, p. 131).

The technology available at that time, however, was still costly (Hess & Kalb, 2003, p. 72). This is why, even in the mid-1990s, media coverage of a given issue was limited to when an expensive “dish” was made available at the site of the event (Cohen, 1986, pp. 47–48). Almost unlimited transmission was possible only in the middle of the first decade of the 21st century (Hess & Kalb, 2003, p. 72). However, technical development does not automatically mean an increase in the quality of the coverage.

In the opinion of Ted Koppel, a long-time American war correspondent and winner of numerous prestigious journalistic awards, the delay of several days in the reporting procedure contributed to a higher quality of coverage, as the authors had more time to consider the correct comment to make on the reported events. The commentary on the events could mature in the author’s mind and be created within several days, which was needed to deliver the film reel to the editorial office of the appropriate medium (Hess & Kalb, 2003, p. 21). Nowadays, when the media broadcasts programs 24 hours a day, reporters can no longer afford such comfortable reporting conditions. The media must be prepared for live streaming at any time and does not have time not only to think over the wording intended for use in the message but often even to properly verify the information obtained (Szymańska, 2017b). The pressure of time is not the only problem facing modern media. A significant issue affecting the quality of foreign coverage by the media is the growing economic pressure, which Western media feels even more strongly today than any political influence (Szymańska, 2017a). This should be accounted for, when considering the media’s role in the modern world.

The second factor that influences the way the media reports on war is the standards applicable at a given historical moment and in a particular country regarding the functions and tasks that politicians expect from the media and which the politicians are willing to accept from them. Several stages of development regarding these relations can be distinguished in the period after World War II (Idzik & Klepka, 2020). In specific historical periods, politics dominated this arrangement, and at times, the media prevailed. In retrospect, it can be assumed that these relations followed a sine wave pattern (Szymańska, 2021). Which of the elements gained the advantage at a given moment depended mainly on the current state of communication technology development and the current political situation. Regardless of the political system (democratic or non-democratic), the media causes politicians more trouble with the better, faster, and more mobile communication technology they have and use. In an undemocratic regime, new communication technologies may lead to the emergence of new media channels that evade the control of those in power. This carries the risk of an alternative circulation of information, which is not conducive to the effectiveness of state propaganda, a crucial instrument for influencing society in non-democratic

systems. For a change, in a democratic system, the presence of independent media is a critical element in legitimizing the political system and those who govern and is therefore essential from the perspective of society. This does not mean, however, that independent media are liked, convenient, and enjoyed from the point of view of politicians. After all, politicians in democratic systems are continuously controlled and evaluated by the media (as long as they are indeed independent) and are usually criticized more often than praised. Questioning competencies and political decisions in times of peace is certainly a challenge for democratic governments and political elites. This criticism from the media gains an entirely different dimension during wartime when sustained public support for the conduct of a war is a prerequisite for victory.

The paradigm in force during World War II, and subsequently during the Cold War, assumed the unity of politics and the media. For example, the American media in the first half of the 1960s, as in the 1940s and 1950s, identified itself with the policies implemented by the government (Ramaprasad, 1983, p. 73). In the same period, a similar relationship between the media and politics was also indicated by Yoel Cohen in the case of the UK (Cohen, 1986, p. 102). The dominant model of relations at that time meant a unified voice between the government and the media, with the media playing the role of an advocate for the government, and all consequences of this situation (Ramaprasad, 1983, pp. 72–73).

Due to the rapid development of the media, this situation changed at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s (Larson, 1988, p. 5). The image of the Vietnam War presented on American television reached a much larger audience than war media coverage had in the past. Moreover, unlike the text press, images had a powerful emotional charge (see Andén-Papadopoulos, 2009; Andén-Papadopoulos & Pantti, 2013). The most significant qualitative change, however, concerned the fundamental attitude of the American media towards the activities of the US government. The course of the Vietnam War and the participation of US soldiers in this conflict over time were assessed increasingly critically by the American media. The end of the Vietnam War, therefore, marks the time when the media finally shifted away from the model of a government advocate to an adversary model of this relationship (Ramaprasad, 1983, pp. 72–73).

The influence of television broadcasts presenting images of the Vietnam War on American public opinion made politicians aware of the power of the media, which may have contributed to the loss of public support for the war. This experience changed the attitude of American politicians towards the media during armed conflicts. From then on, the goal of successive administrations was to isolate journalists as effectively as possible from information of a strategic nature, especially in situations of political and military crises (Seib, 1996, p. 107). Yoel Cohen formulated similar observations regarding the attitude

towards the media by the British Foreign Office politicians and diplomats of the time (Cohen, 1986, p. 102).

The tactic of isolating journalists from information was sometimes more and sometimes less effective in subsequent armed conflicts. During the Iranian Revolution of 1979, American politicians finally succumbed to the pressure of the media, which became the *de facto* channel for disseminating diplomatic information (Seib, 1996, p. 107). During the invasion of Grenada by American troops in 1983 and Panama in 1989, the US government administration gained an advantage: journalists were forbidden access to the conflict area, i.e., the media found itself in a state of complete isolation (Foerstel, 2001, p. 99). At that time, the way of reporting the war was a derivative of the so-called *pool system*, i.e., media access to information from the conflict area was controlled and supervised by the government (Foerstel, 2001, p. 100). In the same period, a similar tactic of behaviour towards the media was used in Great Britain during the conflict with Argentina over the Falklands-Malvinas (Koschwitz, 1983, p. 56; Ossendorf, 1988, p. 88). As a result of the use of the so-called *pool system*, the role of the media was reduced to being the distribution channel of government messages. The pool system used by the Coalition during the first Gulf War showed that the system was insufficient to wholly isolate the media from all available information. The media's power of influence also lay in the possibility of informing about this fact and thus weakening the support for actions carried out by the government administration (see Foerstel, 2001, pp. 100–102).

The period of the first Gulf War is also essential for these considerations due to the importance that US TV station *CNN* gained in the international media discourse at that time, because it developed into being the leading creator of the narrative about the Gulf War and later also about other events on the international political scene (Edwards, 2001, pp. 312–314). The phenomenon of the global scale of the impact of this TV station is called 'the *CNN* effect'. This term describes the influence exerted during the 1990s by the coverage of this medium on world politics, diplomacy, and the way of reporting concerning international affairs (Gilboa, 2005, p. 27).

A decade after the *CNN* effect emerged, a new paradigm of media influence has emerged in international relations, known as the *Al Jazeera* effect. Its emergence was a consequence of subsequent changes that have occurred in the media sphere and within the international arena. The *Al Jazeera* effect primarily concerns the influence that new media have gained on foreign policy (see Seib, 2008). In this context, researchers emphasize the importance of the Internet as an alternative source of information (e.g., informal blogs) about the situation inside countries (such as China or Cuba) where independent media are not available. On the other hand, the *Al Jazeera* effect also applies to the loss of the dominant position in the global media landscape by Western mainstream media (including *CNN*)

in favor of various types of media from other countries, and thus the end of the dominance of the Western perspective of looking at global problems.

In the first decade of the 21st century, the example of the Qatari TV program *Al Jazeera* demonstrated how satellite TV and the Internet, when combined, contributed to the emergence of a new type of community. Despite being territorially dispersed, this community had a significant impact on international politics. This view refers to the concept of virtual state, which posits the existence of a new quality in international relations, a derivative of globalization processes (see Rosecrance, 1996). The virtual state created by *Al Jazeera* and other Muslim media was as real in this context as the actual states of the region. The *Al Jazeera* effect, therefore, refers to the impact that the use of a combination of assorted media types by certain actors has on various aspects of an international situation. As exemplified by organizations such as Hezbollah, Al Qaeda, or ISIS, this phenomenon has gained particular importance, especially in the context of the existing threat of terrorism (see Seib, 2008; Krawczyk, 2009; Baines et al., 2010; Macnair & Frank, 2017).

The presence of the media and their way of reporting events are therefore not indifferent to the course of wars. The media can have a mobilizing effect on the societies of the warring parties and their allies or be a factor that weakens their involvement. Finally, the media can be instrumentalized by the parties to the conflict, especially in the case of non-democratic regimes, and used for their strategic purposes (see Szurmiński, 2009). Recently years shows the use of the media and social-media channels for destabilizing and manipulating public opinion within and outside the country. These unethical, manipulative actions are some of the most important elements of modern hybrid warfare, which uses both hard (weapons and munitions) and soft (media, and especially new media) tools to conceal intentions and maximize confusion and uncertainty (Monaghan, 2015, pp. 65–74; Iasiello, 2017, p. 60).

The multiplicity of media messages and the broadened range of recipients, and finally, the paradigm shift in the media (especially the emergence of social media), have also increased the number of actors participating in international political war communication. In addition, over the last few years, social media has also increased the importance of international communication at both the meso and micro levels. The last of the above-mentioned levels of communication, which is particularly difficult for politicians to control, can have a significant impact on the work of contemporary journalists reporting on a war. In this situation, it is worth not only to consider how social media's presence affects the work of professional journalists. but also interesting to determine the role that social media plays in shaping the opinions of professional journalists covering the war in Ukraine. These issues were the subject of the Polish Media on War in Ukraine (PMWUa) project, which formed part of the Jean Monnet Chair project Media,

Freedom, Trust and Transparency in the European Union (FreeMed). The PMWUa project was conducted at the Chair of Political Communication and Media at the Institute of Journalism, Media & Communication Science of the Jagiellonian University in Cracow, Poland.

RESEARCH PROJECT “POLISH MEDIA ON WAR IN UKRAINE”

The research covered two stages. First stage includes a qualitative analysis of media coverage of the first month of the war in Ukraine in selected Polish media outlets. The scope of analyzed outlets included information portals (*onet.pl, interia.pl, wp.pl*), commercial and public radio (*Radio Kraków, Radio RMF*), and TV stations (*TVP1, TVN*), as well as nationwide and local daily press (*Gazeta Wyborcza, Rzeczpospolita, Nasz Dziennik, Fakt, Dziennik Polski, Gazeta Krakowska*) and weeklies (*Newsweek, Polityka, Wprost, Tygodnik Powszechny, Do Rzeczy, W Sieci, Gazeta Polska*). This stage of research aimed to identify the climate of the Polish media discourse on the war in Ukraine and to select journalists who authored the coverage. The second stage of the research consisted of in-depth interviews (IDIs) conducted with Polish publishers and journalists.

The selected respondents (n=9) included publishers (n=2), journalists working in editorial offices in the country (n=4), and war correspondents (n=3), see Table 1. Respondents who were authors of reports from within Ukraine are marked with an asterisk (*). All interviews were conducted in Polish. The average duration of the interview was approximately 45 minutes. Transcription was performed manually based on the recording. The results were evaluated using MAXQDA software.

Table 1. The structure of respondents

Media outlet and the function of the respondent in the editorial office	Respondents
RMF.FM (publisher)	Jonasz Jasnorzewski
RMF.FM (war correspondent) *	Mateusz Chłystoń
ONET.pl (publisher)	Piotr Kozanecki
ONET.pl (journalist)	Mateusz Baczyński
WP.pl (war correspondent) *	Patryk Michalski
Gazeta Wyborcza (journalist)	Bartosz T. Wieliński
Polityka (journalist)	Jagienka Wilczak
Tygodnik Powszechny (journalist/correspondent) *	Marcin Żyła
Wprost.pl (war correspondent) *	Karolina Baca-Pogorzelska

Source: Author’s own work

The interviews took the form of semi-structured interviews. The interview guideline comprised 12 questions (see Table 2). The cognitive value of the obtained results was enhanced by using open-ended questions and by appropriately placing control questions in the interview guideline (Szymańska & Köhler, 2018). This article analyzes and presents selected answers that address the relevance of social media in reporting on an ongoing conflict. Most of the quotes below come from answers connected to the questions marked with double asterisks (**) in Table 2. By the standards adopted in the research and due to the discussion of sensitive materials and battlefield content, the statements and opinions obtained during individual interviews are discussed below, maintaining the anonymity of their authors. Quantifiers regarding the type of medium used in the evaluation of the statements obtained are generally used separately so as not to facilitate the identification of the author of the quoted statement. The adoption of such standards was necessary to recruit the respondents for the research.

Table 2. Interview guideline

	Interview questions
	How do you assess the credibility of contemporary media?
	What is the role of the media during wartime?
	How, in your opinion, is it possible to maintain objectivity in the information provided in war zones? What causes the most difficulties?
	How do you assess the credibility of media coverage during the war in Ukraine?
**	To what extent can the service of other media be a source of information on events in a war-torn country?
**	To what extent does the presence of social media affect the work of a journalist covering contemporary wars?
**	What is the role of a journalist covering events in a war-torn country for a news service?
	Who is the addressee of your information service on events in Ukraine?
	To what extent do you take into account possible reactions abroad to your publications?
	How do you see the role of the media reporting on wars in the future?
**	How do you personally verify information about events in Ukraine?
	Is it easier or more difficult to report on a war that is taking place so close to Poland's borders than to report on other, more distant conflicts?

Source: Author's own work

Polish journalists pointed out many consequences of the presence of social media during the ongoing war in Ukraine. In their statements, they referred to both the positive and negative sides of this presence. The observations of the respondents concerned both the impact of social media's presence on the course of the war after 24 February 2022 and its influence on the work of professional journalists reporting on this conflict. All these aspects of social media's presence

concerning the war and the work of professional journalists served as criteria for organizing the research results, which will be discussed in detail below and illustrated with specific statements from the respondents.

OPINIONS OF POLISH JOURNALISTS ON SOCIAL MEDIA DURING THE WAR IN UKRAINE

THE GENERAL POSITIVE ASPECTS OF THE PRESENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA DURING THE WAR IN UKRAINE

Among the positive aspects of social media's presence, journalists highlighted its benefits in broadening the field of view and increasing insight into the conflict's course. In their opinion, social media plays a key role in reporting about this particular war, because, for the first time, we gain direct access to the very first front lines:

The Ukrainian war showed the key role of social media [...] because professional correspondence [...] is accompanied by those in social media, and they probably do an even better job, and all this social media and the reports that appear there are more important [...].

[...] In social media, we have a "live" transmission from the war. [...] a journalist, [...] going with a camera to the front line, generally rarely goes to the place of direct fighting. [...] Today, soldiers who shoot, who are in the trenches, who fire, who defend, have phones and shoot this live, and today we feel as if we are in this war. [...] if only professional journalists were allowed in there, we would not have three-quarters of these images, and we would not have this kind of report.

In the opinion of the respondents, social media also contributes to a significantly greater pressure than the media in general puts on political actors in the case of this war. A significantly expanded circle of recipients of the war message (in this case, extended by social media users) positively increased the impact factor of the media as representatives of the public mood:

The presence of social media is of key importance, and it is also thanks to the media that Ukraine manages to exert [...] pressure that until now, if not for the media, the government of Ukraine (and) President Zelensky could exert only through diplomatic channels on Western societies, on Western governments, on Western leaders [...]. Thanks to the media [...], I mean, here, both

professional media and social media, this pressure is greater, and I think it allows one to get more than they would get without it.

Journalists also noted that social media is being successfully used by Ukrainians to maintain Western interest in the ongoing war within their territory. A much larger group of communicators and broadcasters of the war message, shortening the distance of the presented image to the perspective of those directly fighting, means that this time, the war could no longer be ignored, and it even forced a profound change in the attitude of Germany toward this war:

Social media is crucial because, on the one hand, it keeps the West interested in the events. The war in Ukraine has ceased to be a local conflict, e.g. thanks to such wide access to the media by those interested in this war and participants in this war [...] which made it possible to extend this war globally [...]; the war in Ukraine is no longer a matter for only Ukrainians, it is not a local conflict; it is a matter for the whole world, and the Ukrainians managed to do it.

Strong pressure from the local media, including Ukrainian social media, but also the European media since the beginning of the war, changed the attitude of Germany very much.

THE GENERAL NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF THE PRESENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA DURING THE WAR IN UKRAINE

Among the adverse effects of social media, journalists most often emphasize, and strongly, the threat of the rapid dissemination of disinformation and fake news. The respondents were, nevertheless, aware that both sides of the conflict are manipulating the facts, although, of course, for distinct reasons:

Social media [...] is an easy tool to spread disinformation.

Truth was the first to fall in this war, [...] Both sides practice their propaganda because each has its own goal in this. Furthermore, it is obvious how the media is used for this, [...] this war has shown what a huge role the media plays in disinformation, also in achieving such particular goals, [...] the disinformation role of the media in this war has become very clear and active.

In this war, the media is, however, one of the most important battlefronts. Of course, we talk widely about the media, including social media. [...] the art of disinformation that has been created in recent years is so effectively used at the moment.

One of the respondents linked 21st-century technologies to the difficulty of combating disinformation:

The saying ‘truth dies in war’ worked very, very well for us during this conflict. The fact that we have access to modern technologies does not make the situation any easier”.

This instrumental use of social media to spread manipulated information by both sides of the conflict requires much more effort from journalists to verify the information they receive. As one journalist argued:

Today, the greatest challenge for all media is to verify everything that appears on an ongoing basis, especially on the Internet.

Another respondent explained the problem in greater detail and had an interesting solution:

I have liked many news channels on the Telegram communicator on my phone, with information from Ukraine; and indeed, if something happens, hundreds of pieces of information appear there immediately, but unfortunately, only about sixty percent of it is later confirmed. Today, you just have to be careful and make a big correction, especially remembering that anyone can post anything on the Internet. If this is not a verified source of information, then we cannot treat it as reliable information.

Nevertheless, the failures of the mainstream media demonstrate the need for vigilance in the work of a journalist when using social media as a source of information. Journalists of the Polish media also learnt from their experience, as one journalist explained:

Fakes posted via Telegram, via Twitter, and so on. Unfortunately, this is the dark side of social media. Large international media sometimes get into such stupid topics, for example, the *Washington Post* recently announced that the Spirit of Kyiv has died. I do not know how many times the media has buried him [The Spirit of Kiev].

Polish journalists saw another negative consequence of the presence of social media in this war in the heavily distorted image of the war that social media recipients receive:

One of the dangers of social media, I am thinking mainly of Instagram now, is the fragmentation of the image of war. Any picture sent from a war or a war-torn area becomes a report or correspondence. It is great that such fragments of reality are shown, but sometimes we get the impression that the war is depicted in these “icons” and told through pictures that create the illusion of being there. Unfortunately, images, short texts, or posts have limited power to convey knowledge.

However, the journalists did recognize that some social media users can overcome the limitations of these forms of media and are able to convey a very reliable, qualitative message through them. One of the respondents referred to a specific example:

In my opinion, Paweł Reszka is a good example of showing the war through social media in Poland. His snippets of text posted on Facebook are compelling images. They are quite short, but they explain a lot.

A negative result of the presence of social media is, in the opinion of Polish journalists, the very uniform, even homogeneous approach to presenting the conflict, as one respondent explained:

Social media brings together like-minded people, so the message on a given topic becomes more and more homogeneous over time.

Another negative side of the presence of social media during this war is an increase in emotional saturation and the brutalization of the message. As one of the respondents noted, it was possible for the first time for media users to see what the professional media are not allowed to show, but which is an indispensable element of war; in other words, journalists saw how a specific combatant died in a war:

We see what the soldier who is firing at the moment sees. [...] there was this TikTok where [...] a live transmission was conducted by one of the Kadyrovs, i.e. one of those Chechen soldiers, [...]. He died at the time when [...] he spoke [...] during his broadcast.

Being a viewer of such a brutally realistic message evokes completely different emotions than when following the course of the war through professional media. As a result, the perceived advantage of social media in broadening the perspective on the conflict is highly ambivalent. Social media users who share images of the war do not avoid brutal images. In contrast, the image of the victims

is presented without adhering to the ethical principles that are the standards in professional media work.

Journalists have made similar observations regarding security rules, which are inherently much harder to enforce on social media users than on professional journalists who must apply for accreditation and adhere to security recommendations if they wish to continue reporting on the war. Wartime is a moment when ill-considered reports about the deployment of forces or the effectiveness of an enemy attack can result in human lives being lost, and social media deals with this matter in a much worse fashion than professional media:

If we have an object being bombed and people live nearby, they immediately upload a video. What is also not entirely good in Ukraine was that we found that the army later appealed and looked for the authors of such recordings, as the aggressor's army could precisely answer the question of whether they got to the place they wanted.

So social media is doing a good job on one hand and a very bad job on the other. For example, inhabitants of particular places, witnesses of attacks, and individuals who reveal certain information often facilitate the enemy's work. A very famous example is social media, I guess TikTok – the day before the attack on a shopping center in Kyiv, a guy on TikTok posted a video where you could see how many troops were there and where they were standing. Heavy equipment was set up on the base. It was all in the background of the video. And then the rocket arrived. The guy was detained, and later, another video, some kind of propaganda video, appeared on the web, made under the title “Don't do what I did”. But it also shows how both sides follow social media, and it shows that the social media role is important after all.

[O]n the other hand, all these war messages carry a very high risk. We have military accreditations in which we are clearly told what rules apply to us. That we can't live-stream the attacks. Even if we witness a rocket fly over, we cannot show it, so as not to show the trajectory of the flight. We can't show the work of air defense. There was at least one case, I don't know if it's the only one, in which a Dutch journalist was expelled by Ukraine with a two-year ban on entering the country as punishment for broadcasting live. He deliberately showed that, here in Odessa, a rocket was flying overhead and would land. This is reprehensible because the Russians can use their flight corrector immediately.

THE IMPACT OF THE PRESENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE WORK OF PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS COVERING THE WAR IN UKRAINE

The impact of social media on the work of professional journalists covering the war in Ukraine, was substantial, and in the opinion of Polish journalists, both positive and negative. It was therefore twofold similarly to the impact on the fate of the conflict in general, i.e.:

Sometimes it helps, sometimes it hinders. It helps because, as I mentioned, very often we can learn something quickly from social media.

I think that social media has a great impact on the work of a professional journalist, both positively and negatively. The negative impact, which has not changed for many years, is that social media aggregates extreme content. The reactions and comments of social media users often do not bring anything new. [...] The advantage of social media is that almost everyone has access to this first cohort of information about the war, because most of us use social media, and it is difficult to escape the war using it.

In a war zone social media is a significant source of information that first appears there. Professional journalists also look to social media for confirmation of information that reached them through other channels about the location of events:

Before anything appears in the professional media or official announcements, practice shows that it will first appear in social media.

With certain technological tools and with a lot of time and patience, you can find out some things that would normally be difficult to find out.

When, for example, I received some information that there was a rocket attack on this place, I went on Facebook, I went on Twitter, on other social media. And I tried to look for confirmation first in this way because it is known that the services of the state will tell us to wait for an official announcement. So, trying to confirm, I was scrolling through social media, and I found, for example, a recording where clouds of smoke could be seen over the town mentioned earlier. So that confirmed something had happened. Subsequent recordings showed that, for example, ambulances rushed in that direction, so it was possible to conclude that something was going on. It was also such a light bulb for us that, okay, let's go there because something is happening. So the role of social media is hugely important nowadays.

For war reporters and journalists covering the ongoing war, social media is also an essential source of information coming directly from political decision-makers as it helps to reach vital informants much faster:

I get information about the war in Ukraine both from my colleagues from the editorial office, as well as from practically all the media available. I also use channels on Telegram [...] I expanded the catalogue of media used by me by pages of the Twitter profiles from Ukrainian intelligence services or ministries, or various offices, whether Ukrainian, British, or American.

[...] the presence of social media certainly makes it easier to reach many contacts and many people, the actors of events [...] because almost everyone is present somewhere in social media

Social media has accelerated the flow of information. It allows information not only to be quickly acquired and exchanged, but also to be put into circulation much more quickly. Thanks to this, in the opinion of Polish journalists, social media allows for faster documentation of events. Moreover, it is precisely this documentary function during wars that deserves special mention:

Thanks to social media, information can be shared very quickly, important information can be introduced into mass circulation very quickly, [...] recordings that may be evidence of, for example, war crimes or other important events, and in this sense, I think that from the point of view of journalists, it is also very valuable.

In the opinion of Polish journalists, social media is also the reason why the importance of professional media has increased. Firstly, as an important point of reference in the work of journalists, and secondly, in the context of verifying information from the war zone:

I write to [...] our correspondent in Ukraine and ask him: "How was it?". I also use Twitter, check various foreign media, and arrange this picture from such a mosaic.

Whenever there is information about the credibility of which we are not sure, and we know that we will not be able to verify it quickly on our own, we check whether the BBC has provided it. Whenever they describe it, even if from the same source, sometimes even the good choice of words that the BBC presents helps us to wrap it up a bit.

We try to check the given information through at least three independent, reliable sources. [...] It is therefore beneficial if a given event receives confirmation through large, recognized international media. [...] for example [...] CNN or the BBC and, for example, the Associated Press, because then I have the feeling that this information has its justification. Of course, we also [...] check with people who often have this information first-hand.

I have my media and editorial offices, which I trust for many reasons – these are largely English-language editorial offices. The first step of verification is to trust the media, which has not let me down so far.

Most journalists move freely within the media sphere, and they are aware of which media is reliable and which is unreliable.

CONCLUSIONS

The ongoing armed conflict in Ukraine has shown that the presence of social media has qualitatively changed the way of communicating about the war. The increased impact of social media is due to several reasons. First of all, it results from the fact that its message completes the picture of the ongoing war and complements the reports of professional journalists with the perspective of insiders, direct participants and victims of this conflict (but also the perpetrators, which must not be forgotten), which contributes to the emotionalization of this message compared to the coverage of previous armed conflicts – probably to a similar extent as the appearance of television broadcasts in the case of the Vietnam War. Secondly, the grand scope of social media has multiplied the number of people who receive information about the war. Thirdly, the consequence of social media's presence is the constant updating of war information, as the operation mechanism of this communication strategy coincides with H.M. Kepplinger's concept of instrumental updating, well known in media studies (see Kepplinger et al., 1989, 1991). Fourthly, social media significantly contributed to accelerating the circulation and flow of war information.

All these factors together mean that the possibility of exerting pressure on the political actors involved in this war has multiplied significantly. Social media probably also has a significant impact on creating a social climate conducive to the construction and continuous strengthening of the alliance between Western countries and Ukraine. The narrative about the war in Ukraine as a fight to defend democratic values and the right of nations to self-determination, consistently built through social media channels, allowed for the creation of a community

of values connecting Ukraine to its Western allies. The result of the presence of social media, combined with reports from Western mainstream media, is a phenomenon whose mechanism is similar to the concept of the *virtual state* that the *Al Jazeera effect* is based on.

However, the speed and easy access to social media as a war messaging channel is a double-edged sword. The negative aspects of social media's presence include, above all, significant information chaos and the need to substantially increase efforts in data verification and fact-checking. There is no doubt that social media is one of the important front lines in today's war. The presence of social media has increased the effectiveness of traditional propaganda communication activities. The aggressor of this war uses social media to spread disinformation and destabilize public support, even in countries allied with Ukraine. On March 1st, 2022, the Polish Institute for Internet and Media Research alerted on Twitter that in the previous 24 hours, the activity of Russian trolls on Polish Internet increased 11,000 times (sic!) (Instytut Badań Internetu i Mediów, 2022). Social media has also become a space of information warfare (the so-called "TikTok war" and the emergence of warfluencers), and the intensity of information diversion makes it difficult for journalists of professional media to work. This field is a space for new theoretical concepts.

The adverse effects of social media's presence ultimately increase the importance of traditional media, which is once again gaining significance as a crucial point of reference for professional journalists covering the war in Ukraine and as a tool for verifying the information they gather. In this situation, the self-referential nature of professional media increases, as their employees willingly utilize the message of media with an established position in the global media landscape. A special role in this context is once again played by media channels such as the BBC, CNN, Reuters, and the Associated Press. It follows from this that, in the context of the war in Ukraine, which, according to media coverage, is being fought over Western values, at least for Western media (in the Western world?), the media, which were the lighthouses indicated in *the CNN-Effect concept*, are regaining importance again.

Within the margin of the above analyses, it is worth considering another issue of the presence of social media during this particular war. Due to the specificity of using this media (algorithms responsible for content selection and, in the case of some social media, also the very young age of users and the time they spend on using it), it is difficult to predict the social consequences of the presence of such an intense and uncontrolled of war in the social media space today, though they are sure to occur.

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