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Ethical problems with coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian war in online media and social networks

Problemy etyczne w relacjonowaniu wojny rosyjsko-ukraińskiej w mediach internetowych i na portalach społecznościowych

Abstract: The purpose of our research was to analyse the influence of social networks on the perception of the war in Ukraine as well as on the course of the struggle in the information field.

Today, social networks have become one of the main trendsetters, therefore, to effectively fight against disinformation and enemy information attacks, it is necessary to understand not only the specifics of their audience's perception of information but also to be well-versed in the specifics of the content generated by social media. For this purpose, we used the comparative method, monitoring, and content analysis.

In the article, we give examples of ethical dilemmas that Russia can use to its advantage in the war against Ukraine. For example, social media policies prohibit the posting of sensitive content. This does not allow telling the whole truth about the war, as a result of which not everyone understands the depth of the tragedy. Thanks to this, the world's reaction to Russia's criminal actions is not as harsh as it could be.

Our research was an attempt not only to outline the problem but also to propose ways to solve it. It is clear that media and ethics are inseparable, but at the same time, it is necessary to understand that ethics cannot hide the truth. In future studies, it is worth investigating more deeply the ethical norms of the coverage of sensitive content, especially about war. Perhaps it would be worthwhile indicating the situations that allow departure from the general rules.

Keywords: Russian-Ukrainian war, journalistic ethics, social networks

Streszczenie: Celem naszych badań była analiza wpływu portali społecznościowych na postrzeganie wojny na Ukrainie, a także na przebieg zmagań w polu informacyjnym.

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Dziś sieci społecznościowe stały się głównym wyznacznikiem trendów, dlatego aby skutecznie walczyć z dezinformacją i wrogimi atakami informacyjnymi, konieczne jest nie tylko zrozumienie specyfiki odbioru informacji przez odbiorców, ale także dobra znajomość specyfiki treści generowane przez media społecznościowe. Posłużyliśmy się metodą porównawczą, monitoringiem i analizą treści. W artykule podaliśmy przykłady dylematów etycznych, które Rosja może wykorzystać na swoją korzyść w wojnie z Ukrainą. Na przykład zasady dotyczące mediów społecznościowych zabraniają publikowania treści wrażliwych. Nie pozwala to na opowiedzenie całej prawdy o wojnie, w wyniku czego nie wszyscy rozumieją głębię tragedii. Dzięki temu światowa reakcja na zbrodnicze działania Rosji nie jest tak ostra, jak mogłaby być.

Nasze badania były próbą nie tylko nakreślenia problemu, ale także zaproponowania sposobów jego rozwiązania. Oczywiste jest, że media i etyka to rzeczy nierozłączne, ale jednocześnie trzeba zrozumieć, że etyka nie może ukrywać prawdy.

W przyszłych badaniach warto głębiej przyjrzeć się normom etycznym relacjonowania treści drażliwych, zwłaszcza o tematyce wojennej.

Słowa kluczowe: wojna rosyjsko-ukraińska, etyka dziennikarska, sieci społecznościowe

Introduction

After 24 February 2022, according to the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, social networks became the most popular source of information. 76.6% of Ukrainians use them to receive news. In second place is television with 66.7% of votes. Third place was taken by the Internet (excluding social networks) – 61.2% of users. Radio is currently listened to by about 28.4% of Ukrainian citizens, and print media is read by only 15.7% of respondents[1].

According to another social survey conducted by the GlobalLogic company, among 76.6% of Ukrainian citizens who use social networks as a source of information, 66% choose Telegram, 61% choose YouTube, and 58% choose Facebook[2].

Among the most polar online mass media in Ukraine are UNIAN, Channel 24, and Ukrainian Pravda. These online media have a large audience on social media. The full-scale war in Ukraine has led to a sharp increase in the use of social networks as a source of news.

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1   *Media consumption of Ukrainians in conditions of full-scale war*, OPORA, 01 July 2022, https://www.oporaua.org/report/polit_ad/24068-mediaspozhivannia-ukrayintsiv-v-umovakh-povnomasshtabnoyi-viini-opituvannia-opori.html [1.07.2022].

2   Y. Mudzhuri, *What social networks do Ukrainians use during the war: statistics*, SPEKA, 05 August 2022, https://speka.media/yakimi-socmerezami-koristuyutsya-ukrayinci-pid-cas-viini-doslidzennya-p22nyp [5.08.2022].

Thus, UNIAN has 857,418 subscribers, Channel 24 has 212,486, and Ukrainian Pravda has 155,260. On the YouTube platform, UNIAN has 2.71 million subscribers, Channel 24 has 5.1 million, and Ukrainian Pravda has 859,000.

On Facebook, UNIAN has 754,000 followers, Channel 24 has 2.4 million readers, and Ukrainian Pravda has 808,000 followers. The influence of online media on social networks is significant. This is why it is so important to adhere to ethical standards and current Ukrainian legislation, the recommendations of the military administration, and prioritize responsible journalism when using social media platforms to disseminate news.

Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Telegram all have certain terms of service. These are the rules that must be accepted by default in order to use the network. Social networks have strict moderation policies to prevent the spread of provocative content that incites hatred or inflames tensions. Each social network works according to a certain algorithm by which they can block a post or limit its promotion within the network[3]. Of all the aforementioned social networks, Telegram is the most loyal to the distribution of sensitive content[4].

The Russian-Ukrainian war became a crisis that the world had not experienced since the Second World War. In an era dominated by social media, the coverage of this armed confrontation by online platforms has sparked considerable ethical debate. The article examines the ethical problems of covering the Russian-Ukrainian war on social networks of online media. Topics such as disinformation, violations of legislation, recommendations of the Ukrainian authorities, and established ethical standards were delved into. Social networks can contribute to the rapid spread of unverified information and, as a result, the spread of panic among the population and the undermining of trust in the mass media.

As a consequence of this difficult scenario, the main research problem of the article arose, which can be formulated as follows: How

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3   *Social networks: concepts, history of emergence. Zaporizhzhia Regional Universal Scientific Library*, https://zounb.zp.ua/resourse/zaporizkyy-kray/zaporizhzhya-bibliotechne/fahova-os-vita/socialni-merezhi-piv [6.06.2022].
4   A. Romaniuk, *The illusion of security: Telegram*, Ukrainian Pravda, 29 July 2022, https://www.prav-da.com.ua/columns/2022/07/29/7360729/ [29.07.2022].

should online mass media present information during the war on their pages on social networks: on the one hand, revealing the whole terrible truth of Russia's military actions, and on the other hand, adhering to journalistic standards and ethics?

The main problem can be broken down into the following questions:

1. How do online media use social media during wartime?
2. What are the challenges for media in social networks during war?
3. What difficulties do journalists face when publishing news on social networks?
4. How to present content on social networks by online media during a war, from the point of view of journalistic ethics and morality?

The purpose of the research, the results of which are presented in this article, is an analysis of online media coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian war on social networks and an assessment of the ethical issues. This article highlights the importance of ethical journalism and the responsible use of social media by online media.

1. How online media use social media during war

Social networks during the war are important both for propaganda from the aggressor country and for Ukraine, which is not only repelling attacks by Russian troops at the front but also trying to tell the whole world the truth.

James Barnes noted that a social network is a social structure consisting of a group of nodes, which are social objects (social group, person, personality, individual) and connections between them[5]. We analysed the official recommendations of the Journalistic Ethics Commission, the Ministry of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and the normative legal acts of Ukraine[6].

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5   J.A. Barnes, *Class and Committees in Norwegian Island Parish*, "Human Relations" 1954, no. 7, pp. 39-58.
6   *Recommendations of the Journalistic Ethics Commission on information that cannot be disclosed in the media during martial law*, CJE, 17 March 2022, https://cje.org.ua/statements/rekomendatsii-komisii-z-zhurnalistskoi-etyky-shchodo-informatsii-iaku-ne-mozhna-rozgholoshuvaty-v-media-pid-chas-voiennoho-stanu/ [17.03.2022].

The primary target of social networks was to make it easy to meet people, find a friend based on your interests, and stay in touch with everyone you met in real life[7]. In addition, a social network page becomes a kind of blog for each user, in which he/she can talk about their life and show photos of interesting events. Users can create their own profiles that represent their personality and interests. The most famous social networks in Ukraine are Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Telegram[8].

Mass media and especially online media use social networks to distribute their content to a wider audience. They share articles, videos, podcasts, and other forms of content through social media platforms. Their goal is simple – to reach a large number of users and draw attention to their media. It is also worth paying attention to the speed of information dissemination because in this aspect social networks are currently without competition.

It is in social networks that online media can interact the most with their own audience. Users comment on publications, share their opinions, and participate in discussions. Such interaction promotes dialogue and allows the mass media to understand the needs and interests of their audience. In turn, journalists can use social media platforms to gather information, find sources and find breaking news. One of the biggest advantages of social networks for online media is the promptness of providing information and quick feedback from the audience[9].

In order to post news on the site, it takes time to process information and write and design content. At the same time, it only takes a few minutes to publish breaking news on social networks. These are mostly short messages of a few sentences, sometimes with attached photos and videos. That is why during the full-scale invasion of Russia, almost all online media expanded their pages on social networks and instant messengers. In this way, mass media expand their audience

7   A. Bodnar, *Social networks as a tool of formation of internal and external branding of the territory*, Donetsk National University, Political Management, 2012, https://ipiend.gov.ua/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/bodnar_sotsialni.pdf [2012].
8   *From which social networks do Ukrainians get information?*, Poll, Ukrainian Pravda, 15 February 2022.
9   T.M. Plekhanova, *Social networks as the newest platform for promotion of media content*, https://cutt.ly/RwuwYi1U [w.d.].

and quickly inform them about current events and the latest news on the battlefield, in the country, and the international arena.

2. Social media in a time of war: truth vs platform politics

The first ethical principle that a journalist should rely on during an attack on his/her country is to help the army win and support the fighting spirit of the society. Everything that goes beyond these tasks, the journalist simply has no right to publish. This will not always be consistent with journalistic standards, but war is a serious matter that can partly explain the departure from accepted rules.

This opinion is supported by journalists Stanislav Yurchenko, Tetiana Bezruk, and Stanislav Kozlyuk, who spent a lot of time in the war zone. They outlined several rules that journalists should follow, and one of the main ones is to listen to the military and law enforcement officers, to follow their orders. It is also worth understanding that it is the army and law enforcement that directly fight the aggressor, therefore, during war, the information vector is set by them.

Russia's full-scale attack on Ukraine on 24 February 2022, vividly demonstrated that Ukrainian journalists in general have learned to cover hostilities since Russia's annexation of Crimea and parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in 2014. However, some media workers and officials could not cope with the psychological pressure and acted according to the rule "I say what I know". This led to the fact that the enemy could adjust their fire simply by monitoring the Ukrainian mass media and social networks, and the number of innocent victims increased. With this in mind, in the future, it is worth opening a wider discussion about how to convey the truth to a wide audience in wartime without endangering any human life.

"Entertain or Enlighten?" asked Ajai K. Rai in 2000, seeking an answer to the question of the role of the media in times of war[10]. It is an interesting perspective because war and entertainment do not go hand in hand. This especially applies to the ethical aspect because the

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[10] *Media at War: Issues and Limitations, Ajai K. Rai, Strategic Analysis: A Monthly Journal of the Institute for defense studies and analysis (IDSA)*, December 2000, vol. 24, no. 9.

negative emotions provoked by war are incompatible with entertainment. But in practice, we see examples that make us reconsider this position. For example, the Ukrainian military can publish videos of their successful actions, superimposing music, comments, and other special effects.

Accordingly, footage that may contain scenes of violence may be accompanied by entertaining special effects. Can the media publish such content? From an ethical point of view – no, because of the violent scenes. But the reality we find ourselves in because of the war is just that, so are we not distorting our perception of it by simply blocking out some information?

By attacking Ukraine, Russia posed a challenge not only to Ukrainian democracy but also to the entire civilized world. In view of this, the Ukrainian media faced a challenge: if the observance of standards and norms could not prevent armed aggression, how would the established rules of the game allow the aggressor to stand by? How far can we deviate from generally accepted norms, which are an important marker of the quality of our work? And do we have such a right at all?

The difference now is that the rhetoric and discussions in the infospace are decisive. They form the fighting spirit of the military, promote the unity of society, and send signals to Ukraine's partners, without whose help the resistance to Russia would not be so successful and effective. Ukrainian media have to balance and seek answers to many professional questions simply in the vortex of war. The correctness of decisions can be assessed in the future, but now we have to look for options that will cause the least damage.

With the help of empirical analysis, it was possible to determine the patterns of informational pretexts, which Russia uses to try and shake Ukraine and the faith of its allies in its ability to resist. It was also possible to define basic general rules that will help journalists not only to avoid mistakes but also to be as effective as possible. The study is also designed to help media workers avoid ethical dilemmas in working during a war against their country.

Social networks often block the content of media and average users. Here, first of all, we are talking about the so-called hate speech. Hate speech often manifests itself in offensive statements, obsessive stereotypes, threats, harassment, or spreading false information with

the aim of inciting enmity. It has a wide variety of distribution channels and one of the largest is social networks.

In the context of war, it is important to distinguish hate speech from freedom of expression. During the course of the war, it was extremely important that the media and social media users had the right to express opinions, ideas, and tell the terrible truth about the war[11].

One of the most striking restrictions on the right to expression was the situation when the Facebook and Instagram platforms began to block photos of mass killings in the Kyiv region, which caused public outrage. Content posted under the hashtags #Bucha, #BuchaMassacre, #GenocideOfUkrainians, etc., was massively deleted from social networks[12].

The spread of misinformation on social networks has become one of the more serious problems faced by the Ukrainian mass media. Spreading false or misleading information has a significant impact and creates serious problems. Numerous studies have highlighted the alarming spread of misinformation on social networks. For example, the study by Vosoughi, S., Roy, D., and Aral, S, which deals with the spread of false information on Twitter. The authors found that fake news spreads much faster and reaches more people than true stories. The study emphasises the need to address the problem of disinformation to protect the integrity of information in the digital space[13].

As we have already noted, media pages on social networks are under a lot of pressure, this happens in particular due to the imperfection of automatic algorithms and the low-quality moderation process on the part of social networks (for example, a lack of understanding of the country's internal context). However, there is another reason for the intensive activity of Russian bots, which often complain about (pro)Ukrainian publications[14].

11   *What is hate speech and how to counter it*, NV, 13 November 2021, https://nv.ua/ukr/spec/mova-vorozhnechi-shcho-ce-shcho-robiti-yakshcho-ti-jiji-zhertva-yak-karayetsya-50195594.html?utm_content=set_lang [13.11.2021].

12   *The company Meta explained why Facebook and Instagram block hashtags about Bucha and photos of the city*, Ukrainian Pravda, 05 April 2022, https://cutt.ly/EwuwUvMX [5.04.2022].

13   S. Vosoughi, D. Roy, S. Aral, *The spread of true and false news online*, "Science" 2018, vol. 359, no. 6380, https://www.science.org /doi/10.1126/science.aap9559.

14   *Limitation of Ukrainian content on social networks: metamorphosis after Russian aggression*, CEDEM, 15 June 2023, https://cedem.org.ua/analytics/obmezhennya-u-sotsmerezhah/ [15.06.2023].

The politics of social networks provoked an ethical dilemma for Ukrainian journalists. Every journalist is called to cover the truth, especially during the war period. Instead, blocking sensitive content to protect the audience's feelings is also understandable. Therefore, the question arises, what is more important, the truth or the feelings of the audience? Currently, everyone finds the answer to this question for themselves, however, it needs further study.

3. Online mass media management of social networks during war: the moral and ethical aspects of journalists' work

It is the professional duty of every journalist to provide accurate and verified information[15]. A media worker has a double responsibility when he/she writes about war, especially in their own country. Journalists must exercise maximum vigilance when publishing material on social networks, where information spreads at lightning speed, so even a small inaccuracy can have an impact on a large audience[16].

Thoughtful and balanced management of social networks must comply with the current legislation of Ukraine and the ethical requirements for journalistic materials.

The journalistic ethics of war coverage by online media on social networks is a topical theme since it is digital technologies that dictate the rules of the game in the field of disseminated information today. It is extremely important for journalists and media organisations to understand what content is permissible to create and distribute without harming the audience.

In order to prevent the publication of information that could influence the course of the war and help the enemy, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopted Law No. 7189 on 24 March 2022, which limits the rights of the population to publish certain data about military operations on social networks.

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15 *Professional journalism standards: information guide*, IMI, 27 February 2020, https://imi.org.ua/advices/profesijni-zhurnalistski-standarty-normatyvna-dovidka-i31933 [27.02.2020].
16 *Journalist[s?] on social networks. Recommendations for the media*, IMI, 14 January 2020, https://imi.org.ua/advices/zhurnalist-u-sotsialnyh-merezhah-rekomendatsiyi-dlya-media-i31209 [14.01.2020].

The legislative body of Ukraine created a list of what exactly is prohibited from being published:

- photos or information about missiles flying or hitting a target, without official confirmation from the authorities;
- movement of Ukrainian military personnel and any military facilities;
- anti-aircraft defence work;
- places of shelling or projectile impact;
- any link, location, or coordinates of army battles;
- numbers of cars and armoured vehicles of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the police, volunteers, and other structures related to military operations;
- injured or killed before the official data are released.

Violation of these norms is punishable by a prison term in accordance with the Criminal Code of Ukraine[17].

The Code of Professional Ethics of Ukrainian Journalists, adopted at the 10th Congress of the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine in April 2002[18], operates in Ukraine. One of the basic rules that every media must follow is the prohibition of disseminating information related to military secrets[19].

When publishing any information on social media, a journalist must be guided by the standards of humanity and truth[20]. The Deputy Minister of Defence of Ukraine, Hanna Malyar, asks journalists: "First of all, there should be respect for the dead and their families. Social networks and tact are incompatible, less so, it is better to wait until the brigade (commander) officially confirms the identity of the deceased"[21].

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17 *Draft Law on Amendments to the Criminal and Criminal Procedural Codes of Ukraine to ensure counteraction to unauthorized dissemination of information on the sending or transfer of international military aid to Ukraine, the movement, transfer, or placement of the Armed Forces of Ukraine or other military formations of Ukraine, committed during a state of war or state of emergency*, Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2160-IX, 24 March 2022.

18 *Code of ethics of a Ukrainian journalist*, NSJU, https://cje.org.ua/ethics-codex/ [13.12.2013].

19 *Ethical principles of a journalist's work: Western experience*. Institute of Mass Information, International Organization for the Protection of Freedom of Speech Reporters Without Borders, 2002.

20 *Journalism in Conflict: Best Practices and Recommendations: A Handbook of Recommendations for Media Workers*, BAITE, Kyiv 2016.

21 *The MINISTRY of Defence was called to wait for the official confirmation of the identity of the shot Ukrainian military*, IMI, 7 March 2023, https://imi.org.ua/news/u-minoborony-zaklykaly-dochek-atysya-ofitsijnogo-pidtverdzhennya-osoby-rozstrilyanogo-ukrayinskogo-i51248 [7.03.2023].

In cases when the news is of great social importance, but there is no possibility to contact the relatives, and the information about the death of a military or civilian has not yet been notified to the relatives or has not been made public on official resources, the face of the person who died should be obscured in the photo[22].

Another ethical recommendation is important for online media – the prohibition of using unverified information from social networks (about losses or active enemy attacks). Such information can cause panic among the population and play into the hands of the enemy.

An important aspect that cannot be dispensed with when broadcasting news about the war to the masses is the description and publication of photos and videos of human casualties. Posting overly disturbing images that depict violence or suffering is generally not appropriate for social media[23]. Such content can be traumatizing to viewers and lacks appropriate context or sensitivity to victims.

Also, the media must demonstrate the horror and brutality of the war that Russia is waging against Ukraine. This is a reality that the audience must be informed about. However, publishing photos with sensitive content can annoy relatives who have lost close family or demoralize the population.

For example, the media, which distributed on social networks a video without hiding the face of a Ukrainian prisoner of war shot on camera by the Russians, grossly violated the Code of Ethics of a Ukrainian journalist.

On 6 March 2023, a video of the execution of a Ukrainian soldier was shared on social networks. The video shows a man in a Ukrainian military uniform standing, smoking a cigarette and looking into the Russians' camera. Behind the frame, the voice of one of the Russian soldiers can be heard saying "Take him down", referring to the chevron. In response, the soldier of the Armed Forces says, "Glory

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22 *Statement of the CJEU regarding the release of a video of the execution of a Ukrainian prisoner of war*, CJE 13 March 2023, https://cje.org.ua/statements/zaiava-kzhe-shchodo-opryliudnennia-video-rozstrilu-ukrainskoho-viyskovopolonenoho/ [13.03.2023].

23 *Media and war: features of the dissemination of information and photos during martial law*, Human Rights Platform, https://www.ppl.org.ua/zmi-i-vijna-osoblivosti-poshirennya-informaci%D1%97-ta-foto-pid-chas-voyennogo-stanu.html [24.11.2023].

to Ukraine!". After these words, an automatic volley rang out, which killed the Ukrainian soldier[24].

When describing losses, one should think about acceptable vocabulary. You cannot use the words "corpses", "dead", or "killed" people. Such materials should focus on presenting facts and context without harmful emotional colouring. By not following such ethical recommendations, journalists violate accepted ethical codes and contribute to Russian propaganda, the purpose of which is to sow panic, fear, and anxiety among Ukrainians[25].

Online media's social networks should not become a platform for or exploit the suffering of individuals or communities to increase the number of views. When publishing news, a journalist must remember dignity and respect. One of the most high-profile cases of non-compliance with ethical standards is the post by RAI News 24 journalist Anton Kudinov, who published a series of videos on Facebook with Iryna Dmitrieva, a woman who lost her daughter and was seriously injured during a rocket attack on Vinnytsia on 14 July 2022.

The official representative of the media took advantage of the psychological state of the woman. In particular, in one of the videos, a woman in tears watches a video with her still-living daughter. Due to numerous complaints, Kudinov's first post was deleted by Facebook, but he published these materials again. Thus, the journalist neglected the principles of professional ethics, which do not allow taking advantage of victims in a state of shock, and his actions could further traumatize the mother of the dead girl[26].

24 *Statement of the CJEU regarding the release of a video of the execution of a Ukrainian prisoner of war*, CJE, 13 March 2023, https://cje.org.ua/statements/zaiava-kzhe-shchodo-opryliudnennia-video-rozstrilu-ukrainskoho-viyskovopolonenoho/ [13.03.2023].

25 *Recommendations of the CJEU on the coverage of the death of people during the war*, CJE, 04 May 2022, https://cje.org.ua/statements/rekomendatsii-kzhe-shchodo-vysvitlennia-zahybeli-liudey-pid-chas-viyny/?fbclid=IwAR2aoeGD02MznTa2S9y4l6xgLO7m5XnbbJkvaJ82wmwMelnhbJxOS Ftqr6U [4.05.2022].

26 *The RAI News 24 fixer posted a video with the mother of the girl who died in Vinnytsia on social media*, Detector Media, 16 May 2022, https://detector.media/community/article/201059/2022-07-16-fikser-rai-news-24-vyklav-u-sotsmerezhi-video-z-matiryu-zagybloi-u-vinnytsi-divchynky/ [16.05.2022].

Conclusions

The emergence of social networks has revolutionized the way conflicts are covered and discussed, opening up new opportunities and challenges for ethical journalism.

According to a study of 57 national and local media conducted by the Media Development Foundation, almost half of Ukrainian mass media had problems with the restrictions that the social network Facebook imposed on their pages. In particular, they were restricted from monetization, use of advertising, and organic reach of content. The reason for such steps taken by the social network is content from the front line and publications that used trigger words (for example, Muscovites[27]).

When Russia launched its full-scale war against Ukraine, content moderators on social networks began blocking content about military aggression in an attempt to preserve the previous rules. This is especially true for the Meta platforms – Facebook and Instagram. In order to better respond to events that occur in real life, these social networks should work better on the policy of moderating Ukrainian content[28].

Russia's war against Ukraine is characterised as the most documented on the Internet[29]. It was also called the biggest war online[30]. This became possible thanks to the Ukrainian media community, which actively covers the course of military events, in particular, on social networks.

But many Ukrainians complain about Facebook and Instagram's restrictions on content about the Russian invasion. This is evidenced

27 *Red light for Ukrainian news. Why and how Facebook limits local media pages – analytic report*, Media development foundation, 2022, https://research.mediadevelopmentfoundation.org/fb-2022.html#intro [2022].

28 *Facebook and Instagram can block you if you post about war. Why?*, Radio Svoboda, 2 November 2022, https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/facebook-meta-instagram-blocking-ukraine-war-russia/32112013.html [2.11.2022].

29 *How Ukrainians have used social media to humiliate the Russians and rally the world*, The Washington Post, 1 March 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/03/01/social-media-ukraine-russia/ [1.03.2022].

30 *Online discourse in times of war: Analysing the social media conversation around Ukraine*, Democracy reporting international, 9 January 2023, https://democracy-reporting.org/en/office/ukraine/publications/online-discourse-in-times-of-war-analysing-the-social-media-conversation-around-Ukraine [9.01.2023].

by the fact that since 24 February 2022, the amount of blocked content of Ukrainians and their accounts has increased significantly.

In social networks, online media can gather their audience, quickly convey information, and receive feedback from their readers. However, on the other hand, they contribute to the spread of fakes, misinformation, manipulation, and panic.

"Finding a balance between the public importance of information and the risk that this information may cause harm through publication is one of the challenges for Ukrainian journalists covering the events of the war. Compliance with professional standards – for example, efficiency, accuracy, reliability – is not enough to find the right solution in a particular situation. And here, the key role is played by the ethical norms that guide the journalist", says Lina Kush, the first secretary of the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine[31].

Ethical management of social networks by online media involves compliance with a number of principles and practices. This is compliance with accepted ethical principles and moral standards. All material and posts must meet the requirements of current Ukrainian legislation. Journalists must verify information from multiple sources before publishing or sharing it.

Dissemination of misinformation, rumours, or unverified claims that could lead to confusion and harm public confidence as well as cause panic or distrust, both in the media and among the Ukrainian authorities, should be avoided. The hybrid war waged by Russia against Ukraine works precisely for this purpose[32].

Online media must promptly correct any errors or inaccuracies and provide rebuttals. This helps maintain trust and fosters a culture of responsible journalism online.

Another important aspect of social networks is the management of comments, which requires responsible moderation. Online media editors should set clear guidelines for comments and interactions with

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31   *Self-regulation of Ukrainian media during martial law in Ukraine. From work experience Committees on journalistic ethics: Analytical and reference collection* / For general, L. Kuzmenko, L. Kush, M. Dvorovoy, O. Pogorelova (eds.), https://detector.media/community/article/201059/2022-07-16-fikserrai-news-24-vyklav-u-sotsmerezhi-video-z-matiryu-zagybloi-u-vinnytsi-divchynky/ [16.07.2022].
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users, ensuring that discussions remain respectful and constructive. Hate speech, threats, or any form of discriminatory language should not be tolerated.

The media should prioritize verifying information from multiple reliable sources before publishing or sharing content on social media. Fact-checking and cross-referencing information can help combat the spread of misinformation and support journalistic integrity.

The media must be transparent about their sources and methodology when covering war-related events. Clearly defining the limitations and uncertainties of information can help the audience understand the complexity of the situation and avoid spreading unverified or misleading content.

It's important to provide context when you talk about war-related incidents. Media organizations should strive to provide comprehensive history, historical context, and geopolitical factors to help audiences better understand the complexity of the conflict and avoid simplistic or biased narratives.

Media should actively engage with their audience on social media platforms, facilitating dialogue, and responding to questions or concerns. This approach promotes transparency, builds trust, and allows for a more detailed understanding of the conflict.

By implementing these practical guidelines, media organizations can promote responsible and ethical coverage of war on social media, ensuring accurate dissemination of information and contributing to a more informed public discourse.

Acknowledgement

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