Maksym SOKLAKOV, Master of Arts.
ORCID ID: 0009-0002-4892-634X
e-mail: maksym.soklakov@knu.ua
Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Kyiv, Ukraine

SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS AS DISCURSIVE ENVIRONMENTS IN THE CONTEXT OF RUSSO-UKRAINIAN WAR

B a c k g r o u n d . *Social media platforms have become primary channels of media consumption and key battlegrounds for information warfare. Their socio-technical affordances democratize cultural production–fueling new forms of expression, political mobilization, and even participation in military operations-while also enabling large-scale propaganda, cultural influence, and historical documentation on both sides of the Russo-Ukrainian frontline. Operating beyond state control, these platforms serve not only tactical communication needs but also broader processes of identity-building, cultural resistance, and the preservation of collective memory. Intensified by the protracted conflict and ongoing mediatization trends, this unique digital landscape demands urgent socio-humanitarian analysis.*

M e t h o d s . *This study employs a multi-method design to explore cultural production and discursive practices during the Russo-Ukrainian War. We mapped social media affordances via media-studies frameworks; harvested public posts, metadata, hashtags, and profiles using OSINT; and conducted informal content analysis. Narrative and critical discourse analyses revealed story arcs and ideological strategies, while memory and spatial analyses examined commemorative posts and symbolic redefinitions of urban spaces.*

R e s u l t s . *The Russo-Ukrainian war is highly mediatized, with smartphones and social media turning civilians into active participants. These platforms enable content creation, OSINT, propaganda, and resistance, reshaping cultural practices and information flows. In occupied areas, competing media narratives emerge-occupation channels seek to legitimize control, while grassroots resistance documents realities and reinforces Ukrainian identity. Social media becomes both a battlefield and an archive of war.*

C o n c l u s i o n s . *Social media platforms shape the digital image of the city through the production of everyday content. Media content is used for cultural influence and to establish control over the newly formed digital public sphere. The publication of digital content is, in essence, a process of cultural production in social media. Therefore, social media constitute a valuable source for research, as they allow us to study the transformations that occur during the occupation, as well as to predict the development of reintegration policies.*

K e y w o r d s : *social media, discourse, mediatization, information warfare, civil society, temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, digital public sphere.*

Background

Social media platforms are one of the main sources of media consumption and, as a result, are emerging as one of the key spaces for waging information warfare. The democratizing impact of new digital media on the modes of production and consumption of culture is causing the emergence of new cultural practices and transformation of existing ones. The socio-technical affordances of social media are being utilized to create new practices and forms of cultural expression and political organization as well as new forms of participation in military operations and new regimes of publicity.

Contemporary social media platforms are conceptualized through the notion of the digital public sphere, which functions as a discursive environment where public opinions are formed. Although distinct from the ideal model of the Habermasian public sphere which is a communicational environment structured by the norms of rationality and inclusiveness, social media create environments that structure communication in a way, that fosters the emergence of new modes of publicity and possibilities for participation in public debate – the discursive environments of social media function according to their logic, outside the control of state institutions. Social media platforms are a significant tool that finds numerous applications, both for operational communication and for larger-scale processes of creating and preserving the continuity of identities, cultural resistance, and documentation of historical events. These processes are related to global trends in the dynamics of cultural production transformations and the reconfiguration of cultural practices under the influence of new media contexts.

The dynamic circulation of information flows in social media occurs in accordance with their internal logic. Caused by the general trend of mediatization and intensified by the long-term events of the Russo-Ukrainian War, social transformations create a unique media landscape. Consequently, the necessity to investigate social media platforms as significant discursive territories and analyze digital content from a socio-humanitarian perspective is urgent. The same social media platforms are used as one of the main tools of public communication on both sides of the Russo-Ukrainian frontline, in particular for the dissemination of propaganda, the exercise of cultural influence, the dissemination of digital content, documentation, redefinition, notification, and a large number of other cultural practices. The study of cultural practices implemented on social media platforms during the Russo-Ukrainian war will help to understand that social media is an important discursive space and a tool for shaping public opinion. Such research will contribute not only to deepening knowledge of new media but also to solving practical problems of developing communication strategies and tactics of information warfare, which could strengthen the resilience of Ukrainian society in effectively countering Russian propaganda and conducting information and psychological operations against the enemy.

Methods

This study employs a multi-method research design, integrating ten complementary approaches to examine cultural production and discursive practices on social media platforms in the context of the Russo-Ukrainian War. Drawing on media studies theories, we first mapped the intrinsic affordances and logic of social media platforms. Using OSINT techniques, we systematically harvested publicly available posts, channel metadata, hashtags, and user profiles. An informal content analysis was conducted. To uncover underlying story arcs, we applied narrative analysis. Critical discourse analysis focused on how language, imagery, and sound in posts function as ideological

tools. To analyze collective memory construction, we identified posts related to memorial dates and historical events. Visual and textual representations of urban spaces were analyzed to understand symbolic redefinitions.

Results

The starting point of the analysis can be the widely spread thesis that characterizes the Russo-Ukrainian war as the most documented and mediatized. From the perspective of material semiotics (Beetz, 2016), this characteristic seems necessary to be revealed primarily through the analysis of the actual material foundations of communication processes. In the modern world, the most widespread and essential material foundation that gives access to almost all everyday communicative media practices is, without a doubt, a smartphone. This technological object can be thought of from the perspective of the actor-network theory of the French philosopher Bruno Latour as a non-human actor that has its agency in the process of technological mediation of communication processes. In this process, the interaction of people and technologies forms sociotechnical heterogeneous assemblages, in which people and technologies have equal agency in the creation of the social as an effect par excellence. The feasibility of such a view is justified by the extent to which social life depends on material objects in general, and communication processes in particular. Thus, the main socio-technical object and material basis of most contemporary communication processes is a smartphone, a mobile communication device. Its widespread distribution, its integration into everyday life, and its constant vernacular use by the general public make it a significant mediatizing factor in the transformation of cultural forms. This mediatizing influence largely determines the digital dimension of the Russo-Ukrainian war.

The smartphone, as an ordinary civilian technology, is already actively used by the military as a hybrid communication tool. The military potential of this technological object was gradually realized during the stage of hybrid aggression in Donbas when the smartphone went a long way from a complete restriction (which was largely ignored) on its use by soldiers to the official permission for military personnel to actively use it to perform official tasks. The penetration of smartphones into everyday life has already had a significant impact on the army as an institution. If in modern industrial armies, the soldier was completely cut off from his social environment and could not communicate with it except through the postal system, where his letters passed through censors, then in the contemporary situation, this cut-off is many times lower, and the contact between the soldier and his civilian life is constant. The penetration of media and mobile devices breaks the closed nature of the army as an institution. As Roman Horbyk (2022) puts it: "As a non-human actor, mobile is a focal point that bundles participatory efforts of civilian individuals, volunteer groups, and small businesses to support the army".

The study of discursive practices of smartphone use in the context of the Russo-Ukrainian war requires a specific understanding of the socio-technical affordances and potential opportunities that this device provides to its users. The analysis can be conditionally divided into two stages: the first is an analysis of the technical properties of the hardware, and the second is an analysis of the social capabilities of the software or, conditionally speaking, the material and virtual dimensions of communication, respectively.

In the context of this study, the most significant technical function of the smartphone itself in terms of hardware is its ability to reproduce media materials, the main element of which is the camera, which determines the possibility of photo and video recording. Contemporary British military researcher Matthew Ford (2024) understands the smartphone as a weapon that has significant potential to influence the course of military events and, by its very nature, transform the nature of participation in contemporary military conflicts. In particular, the smartphone camera determines its use as a hybrid tool of documentation and intelligence. The way Ford describes it is that "large-scale connectivity has turned every individual with a smartphone into a component of a larger digital kill chain" (Ford, 2024). Since the smartphone is a hybrid tool, an ordinary civilian with a phone in his hands can already transmit photos, videos, and geolocation of the enemy, and thus be involved in the cycle of identifying and defeating enemy targets. As a result of the emergence of new forms of participation in military operations due to the widespread distribution of smartphones, the distinction between combatants and non-combatants is blurred.

Since anyone has the opportunity to directly photograph and videotape the events they witness, this leads to a radical transformation of the forms of recording, remembering, archiving, creating representations, and even forms of participation in military operations. However, describing the smartphone solely as a technological object addresses only the process of media content production. Equally important is its social dimension – that is, the practices and conditions of content consumption and distribution. In addition to hardware, software plays a crucial role, prompting a shift in research attention from the material to the virtual dimension.

A smartphone is an element of informational infrastructure that opens up access to the Internet in general and social media platforms in particular. The arrangement of a smartphone as a sociotechnical object in everyday life leads to permanent connectivity and the ubiquity of information networks that create the conditions for the transformation of social and cultural forms. Social media platforms, as a software, constitute dynamic discursive environments, where the available socio-technical affordances and technical design of the platform determine the process of communication in general, and the circulation of media content in particular. Since media create representations that determine our understanding of the world around us, the smartphone transforms how society perceives and participates in war.

The average consumer-citizen, as a user of numerous commercial services of the digital economy, regardless of their status and level of education, has significant tools for creating and distributing any type of visual or audio content, entering the communication process. Given this, the implementation of the phenomenon of crowdsourcing of intelligence data took place. The widespread use of smartphones, along with the rapid quantitative and qualitative growth of social media engagement, has integrated civilians into the cycle of reconnaissance and destruction of military targets. This practice developed at the beginning of the full-scale invasion when various communication channels and chatbots were created in messengers and social media, through which the civilian population had the opportunity to transmit information about the actions and movements of enemy troops, providing a written description, geolocation and accompanying photo and video materials. Commercial media services find their use as elements of military infrastructure, which is described

by the theoretical concept of communicative militarism (Dyer-Witheford & Matviyenko, 2019).

Social media platforms have become the main source of news and media consumption in the context of the full-scale Russo-Ukrainian war since February 2022. The most widely used social media platform is "Telegram", which has occupied a unique information niche and emerged as a hybrid communications tool that combines both a messenger and a public communications tool. Unlike more conventional and mainstream platforms, the low levels of content moderation policies in this messenger allow the publication of military content and footage of combat clashes, which has effectively determined its role as the main aggregator of socio-political communications and war-themed content.

The encrypted, broadcast-friendly format of the application made it an important tool. Telegram quickly became a key space of information warfare, serving as both a source of news and a platform for coordinating actions. Since the beginning of the war, a kind of fragmented digital public sphere has formed within it. The possibility of horizontal communication in the messenger has provided significant community-building potential, which has been actively used by civil society. Citizens began to actively use digital technologies for self-organization and, thus, had numerous opportunities to join the course of the war. The participatory nature of digital media has led to the emergence of a wide range of new forms of complicity, not limited to the information dimension. In addition to the above-mentioned ability to report information about the advance of Russian troops, social media has also contributed to the formation of public networks and shaped the space of information resistance. Grassroots self-organization of communicative communities in media channels has led to the possibility of mass participation, involving citizens in volunteer initiatives, distributing instructions of public resistance, and operational information about urgent needs, etc. Forms of digital grassroots self-organization and mobilization have led to the agency of civil society in extra-institutional forms (Bareikytė & Makhortykh, 2024). The way Bareikytė & Makhortykh describe this is that "… inconspicuous digital witnessing constitutes an important part of the contemporary realm of digital war witnessing and extends the arrested war framework to include non-institutionalized witness practices …". Extra-institutional, grassroots self-organization of volunteers and civil society has emerged as one of the factors of national resilience in a crisis of state institutions. Information about evacuation opportunities, places of distribution of humanitarian aid, etc., was disseminated on social media. Social media performed numerous functions, including informational, communicative, coordinative, mobilizational, and emotional-relief. The horizontal communicative environment has led to the persistence of crowdfunding and crowdsourcing practices (Boichak, 2017). The way Olga Boichak describes the significance of the Facebook as a social media platform in context of Russo-Ukrainian war is that it "… played an instrumental role in the social infrastructures of battlefront volunteers by providing space and affordances for large-scale, transnational public involvement. The platform has been used by grassroots activists to maintain civilian resilience at times when the Ukrainian state lacked the capacity to defend its territory from an escalating military threat". Crowdfunding practices remain quite widespread in Ukrainian civil society today. Fundraising campaigns to help victims or for various needs of military units are often announced on social media.

One of the interesting practices of using the messenger has become monitoring channels of varying degrees of popularity and authenticity, which provide more detailed information about air raids. They report live on current threats for different regions. There is both an official telegram channel of the Air Force of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and various unofficial channels. In some places, these unofficial channels report on the threat of shelling more promptly than air raid sirens. The way Taras Nazaruk describes the significance of the Telegram as a social media platform is that: "Telegram channels and chats became an integral part of the warfare (air raid sirens, open-source and crowdsourcing intelligence, lists of casualties and missing people, Russian disinformation networks to justify airstrikes on civilian objects). Also, they facilitated emergency communication in local horizontal networks (evacuation from occupied territories, checkpoints and border crossings, mobilisation notices, petrol availability, rocket launches, and apartment house chats)" (Nazaruk, 2022).

Social media leads to the mobilization of not only financial and social resources but also intellectual and analytical ones. The current situation, marked by the overproduction of digital content, enables and significantly facilitates the dissemination of media through open-source intelligence (OSINT) practices. Numerous initiatives carefully analyze media content distributed in information channels on both sides of the front, and thus conduct analytics of military operations, or even identify targets for further destruction. The most famous example is the "DeepState" map, which, based on open-source analysis, reflects the movement of the front line.

One of the key ways social media's communication space influences military operations is by facilitating the diffusion of battlefield innovations, such as those related to the use of commercial drones. Beyond the active presence of numerous volunteer and commercial organizations manufacturing FPV drones on social media, the communicative environments of social media enable the distribution of footage taken by drones and linkages among diverse military specialists and analysts. In communication with a large audience, radio technology experts have the opportunity to quickly collect and distribute information about enemy tactics, as well as jointly develop advice on how to counteract them successfully. In particular, one of the technical nuances is radio frequencies, which are constantly changing and thus adapting to the dynamic realities of combat operations and cycles of weapons innovation.

However, one of the most significant influences is that social media serves as one of the main sources of information about the war, and war thus appears as a mediatized experience for many people. "Telegram" as the main media platform, with its functional design, provides a participatory, polyvocal war news feed: numerous media channels broadcast media content from various actors, such as anonymous channels, public figures, political figures, news channels, public organizations, military units, various volunteer communities, etc. Numerous media channels, each with its audience and agenda, together form a multi-narrative landscape of the war. Through the distributed media content, the course of the war is documented, and its symbolic perception is constructed. The democratizing potential of social media and the absence of censorship determine the production of an infinite plurality of representations of war and its interpretations. In the context of the mediatization of the public sphere, the distribution of digital content can be both a socio-cultural practice and a political act.

During information warfare, public opinion is manipulated through narrative constructions built around media content. Since media platforms provide the opportunity to both consume and distribute media content, this enables ordinary users to participate in information warfare (Asmolov, 2022, 2024). The democratizing potential of social media makes it possible to participate in information warfare; users can participate through the distribution of campaigning and propaganda materials, various ideologically and emotionally colored messages, etc. Narrative constructions in media platforms are usually presented in a simplified, humorous format through memes, thereby enabling viral propaganda, which instrumentalizes creative online practices as a form of information warfare. Information warfare thus adapts to the realities of public communication on social networks and acquires the characteristic features of digital marketing – aimed at endless fragmentation and niche targeting – which enable the coexistence of mutually exclusive narratives and the adaptation of propaganda to the needs of each micro-audience.

Digital content in media channels appears as material that provides significant opportunities for studying the numerous transformations caused by the war. Among all the existing differentiations of media channels, a cluster of channels thematically dedicated to the occupied territories seems to be significant. Social media appear as almost the only freely available source of information that allows studying the transformations taking place in the occupied Ukrainian territories.

In order to analyze the existing information infrastructures in the occupied territories, it is first necessary to outline the dynamics of transformations in media consumption during the full-scale invasion. With the beginning of a full-scale invasion, the "United News" telethon was launched, uniting all major media holdings and serving a stabilizing function. However, given the urgent need for more operational and narrowly thematic communications in war conditions, a large number of people switched to messengers and social media platforms, as they create the possibility of providing more nuanced, detailed, and thematically differentiated communication. Unlike the one-way broadcast of information on television, social media create a significant space for interactivity and the possibility of communication in non-institutional forms.

The social media network environment facilitated horizontal communication, particularly during the first stages of a full-scale invasion, in conditions when traditional information infrastructures did not provide operational information or did not function at all. In particular, horizontal communication in social media and messengers was studied using the example of their use in a besieged city. The significant community-building potential of social platforms was actively used for various forms of grassroots public self-organization and contributed to the emergence of various kinds of communicative practices. Citizens in group chats, in crisis conditions of lack of information, horizontal communication in the roll call format shared the crumbs of information they knew about various urgent needs, rumors, information about evacuation, the current state of affairs, etc. Numerous chat rooms in various messengers, both new and those that existed before the invasion, were used in the conditions of the crisis of democratic institutions as a form of grassroots self-organization, where ordinary citizens communicated in conditions of insufficiency or unavailability of ordinary communication infrastructures (Pavlova & Rohozha, 2023, 2025). However, with the final occupation, grassroots communication loses its relevance which is due to establishment of conventional infrastructures, means of communication, and information channels.

It is worth noting that during the occupation, all means of information influence on the population are used, including newspapers, television, radio, etc. However, in the context of mediatization, social media platforms emerge as the most relevant sources of information – and the only ones freely accessible for analysis.

As already noted, "Telegram" has become the main space for media consumption and the main tool of public communications, including in the context of occupation. It is worth noting that the overwhelming number of channels thematically dedicated to the occupied territories appeared in the spring-summer of 2022. Given the existing differentiation of media channels by thematic binding to specific cities, social media platforms can be considered as a socio-spatial phenomenon that interacts with the urban environment as the main theme. Media channels become a place where a kind of digital image of the city is constructed and a space like a fragmented public sphere where current events in the city are covered (Drozdova et al., 2022). Thus, the struggle for territory is accompanied by a redefinition of urban space, which is reflected in the digital image of the city, which is formed by thematically dedicated media channels.

Social media, woven into everyday life, emerged as the main channel for consuming media content. A significant propaganda apparatus is attracted by the occupiers to saturate the information field in order to satisfy the needs of the urban population as an audience consuming content. Media channels emerged as a hybrid tool used to exert informational and cultural influence. Media channels function as cultural and discursive spaces where digital content circulates, through which narratives are built, identities are established, processes of redefining urban space are reflected, frames of perception of events are built, etc. Content in media channels is used to construct social reality.

First of all, it is important to understand the actors who implement informational influences. The first to emerge are the official channels of the occupation administrations, which serve as mouthpieces for conveying information to the population, establishing new rules of the occupation administration in the city, where official announcements, administrative orders, etc., are published. Some channels are purely dedicated to the city and publish various kinds of city news, commercial, and entertainment content. These channels operate according to a purely commercial logic and serve as aggregators of everyday content dedicated to the city. The specificity of their functioning is in the weaving of ideological narratives into everyday communication. There are also channels controlled by official occupation media, various Russian public organizations, political parties, institutions, etc. All of them together form a heterogeneous assemblage of various, functionally and thematically differentiated media channels, which form a kind of closed functional information ecosystem of the occupied city (Soklakov, 2024).

There are numerous topics of publications in these media channels. However, if we analyze not the content they publish (which is certainly valuable material), but the internal principle according to which they implement their activities, then it is possible to reveal a single narrative grammar. Given the fragmentary and highly contextual nature of communication in social media, all pro-Russian occupation channels function in the logic of a single discourse, which can be conditionally called the discourse of "liberation".

This discourse is inherently functional and serves a specific purpose to legitimize the existing status quo, and the power of the occupation administration, and at the same time delegitimize alternative points of view, thus reproducing power dynamics in the process of communication. Power dynamics are manifested in patterns of publications, specific words, metaphors, symbols, frames, and narratives, which appear as discursive tools used to achieve the above-mentioned goal.

This discourse is organically consistent with the all-Russian propaganda. The occupation itself is explained through the established narrative of historical unity with Russia, in which the act of occupation is called "*освобождение*" (liberation), and reunification with historical lands, the formulation "*возвращение в родную гавань*" (return to the native harbor), "*исконно русские земли*" (specifically Russian lands) is often found. The narrative also involves moments of self-aggrandizement, imperial mission, and restoration of historical greatness in the fight against enemies, which are quite volatile categories for Russian ideology. The dominant ideological mechanisms construct these ideas in such a way that the state of the city before the occupation is presented as a state of crisis and moral decline. Accordingly, clear binary oppositions are established, in which any presence or signs of Ukrainian statehood are labeled as evil. Consequently, a narrative of justification of the occupation under good intentions is built, where the actions of the Russian occupation troops appear not as a criminal act of occupation and enslavement, but rather as "liberation", which serves as a moral mandate and justifies any actions with the need to save the local population.

This and other narrative structures are not published directly but are woven into everyday publications of digital content. Thus, media channels become tools of everyday cultural production of meanings and a space of ideological contestation where public opinion is formed.

The occupied territories of Zaporizhzhia, Kherson, Donetsk, and Luhansk regions are referred to as "*новые регионы*" (new regions). Consistently, such discursive framing contributes to the reconfiguration of regional identity and the redefinition of urban space. Linguistic and cultural markers are changing, in particular through the change of toponymy – as a rule, occupation administrations return the names of streets that existed before decommunization, but new names also appear. For example, a street in Melitopol was named after the murdered Russian propagandist Darya Dugina. In the course of identity manipulation, there is a shift in emphasis in historical and cultural memory. The Soviet model of memory is actively involved, and a kind of mythical time model is being constructed, combining existing events with the ideologized myth of the "Great Patriotic War", recreating the narrative of the fight against the fascists and thus giving an aura of righteousness to current events. Thus, through the manipulation of cultural and historical memory, subjectivation occurs through a reconfigured narrative of history and culture. The ideological apparatus revises history, highlighting some historical events and downplaying others. This consistently leads to the denial of Ukrainian identity, the delegitimization of Ukrainian statehood, and the rejection of the existence of the nation as such.

This is most clearly reflected in concrete actions to redefine urban space, in particular in mnemonic policies and memorial practices, through the dismantling of monuments of the Ukrainian model of memory, such as the monuments to the Heavenly Hundred, the shift in attention to Soviet monuments, and the installation of new monuments to the so-called "liberators". In addition to the mobilization of nostalgia for the Soviet Union, numerous other narratives are also involved, in particular Russian Orthodoxy and the historical and cultural model of memory of modern Russia in general. This is reflected in public rituals and commemorative practices, where rituality is enacted live, and also in digital practices through repeated formulas, narrative patterns, the repetition of key phrases, and the thematization of ritualized publications for holidays and anniversaries of events.

The occupied territories of Ukraine thus become the object of cultural policies on the part of the Russian Federation. Ritualism is largely built through the activities of various Russian public organizations. Information and reports on various socio-cultural projects and events, such as theater productions, sports competitions, seminars, lectures, etc., are actively published. Culture, therefore, becomes a space that is actively exploited by the occupation administration for its self-legitimization and normalization of situation.

In the case of the city of Mariupol, one can trace how the trauma caused by the events of the siege is constructed and interpreted. Due to the already mentioned moral binary opposition, any war crimes are automatically attributed to the Ukrainian troops. In publications, such a rhetorical construction as "*жизнь продолжается*" (life continues) is often employed, and attention is shifted from traumatic events to the process of restoring and rebuilding the city, which is always depicted in positive tones. Information is published on the implementation of various infrastructure improvement projects, the work of municipal services, etc. Russian propaganda uses Mariupol and its reconstruction process as one of the symbols that demonstrate the success of the policies implemented by the occupiers (Hetmanova, 2024). At the same time, such policies often bypass and silence the voices of residents, who are not always satisfied with the quality of reconstruction.

However, at the same time as the occupation pro-Russian channels that perform a specific function of normalization, pro-Ukrainian channels of resistance movements emerge and actively function, which undermines the interpretation of events imposed by the occupation administration. Resistance channels create discursive communities that challenge the occupation and thus constitute an alternative space that characterizes the current situation as an occupation and a situation of acute crisis.

The publications reflect everyday acts of resistance, in particular the practices of redefining public spaces in occupied cities. Footage of partisan actions or direct action is published, as well as acts of non-violent resistance, such as graffiti, stickers, and posters spread in urban space, which symbolically redefine urban space and express protest against the imposed symbols of occupation. Media channels become a living archive and source of information about partisan actions, which combines footage of the actions themselves with comments from their performers. Thus, the process of redefinition and contestation is reflected in both urban and network spaces.

Resistance channels build a space of solidarity and thus serve the function of supporting people living under occupation. Anonymous subjective reflections on the traumatic nature of everyday life under occupation are published, as well as useful advice on how to maintain secrecy and various opportunities for helping resistance movements. Resistance movements work to delegitimize the actions of occupation administrations. Resistance movements such as "*Жовта Стрічка*", "*Зла Мавка*", "*АТЕШ*", and others are actively engaged in these activities.

It is worth noting that compared to the pro-Russian network, the pro-Ukrainian infrastructure of Telegram channels is much smaller. The Russian information war is much more active and coordinated, especially on the part of state media, since social media platforms are one of the main tools of information influence, which are actively used by the Russian authorities in general and the occupation administration in particular to create an image of everyday life, spread propaganda, legitimize themselves, etc.

Social media platforms are a key tool of information warfare, which functions according to its logic. For example, some occupation information channels were created even before the actual physical occupation, or there are channels dedicated to cities that have never been and are not under Russian control. Media channels are thematically tied to a specific locality and thus serve as a space for recording and documenting events in this locality. A specific non-institutionalized form of digital documentation emerges, where ordinary users collectively document events in occupied cities daily. The content and tone of the publications changed over time, reflecting the gradual change in the realities of the occupied territories.

Thus, two mutually exclusive digital images of the city are constructed: by the occupation administration and by resistance movements. The occupation channels function for the sake of their own legitimization and normalization of the current situation, while the resistance movements undermine this and wage an active struggle, asserting the continuity of Ukrainian identities.

Discussion and conclusions

An analysis of the use of the Telegram messenger as a media platform and a tool of public communication allows us to conclude that the traditional idea of clearly centralized propaganda is dynamically changing and adapting to the rapid development of new media, social platforms on the Internet, and the emergence of a network society. The emphasis is shifting from the centralized dissemination of a single ideological narrative to establishing control over the fast-moving information environment of the network society. The significant organizational potential of social media platforms is used by authoritarian regimes to achieve their own goals: to imitate communication between the authorities and society, mobilize certain segments of the population, and demobilize others. In the context of war and mass blocking of official resources of propaganda information, Russia adapts a centralized propaganda machine and, using a kind of "swarm" tactic, initiates the process of multiple dissemination of propaganda through micro-narratives in the system of horizontal interactions of the network society. At the same time, the network environment itself is not politically biased, but it is also actively used by the opposing side. In the context of the Russo-Ukrainian war, social media platforms are used as a tool of information warfare. The digital image of the city (Tormakhova, 2022) in this sense also becomes a battlefield. In the studied case of occupied Berdiansk (Soklakov, 2024), it is obvious that this image is undergoing significant transformations. Since the occupation, numerous networks of media channels dedicated to the city of Berdyansk have begun to appear, which form a certain idea of it.

Within the established information infrastructures, a virtual environment emerges in which users can discuss, share information, and express opinions – which, in essence, corresponds to the definition of the digital public sphere. As all kinds of social practices and culture in general are increasingly mediated by digital platforms, the opportunity arises to explore the cultural landscape within the networked environment. It is in such environments that the cultural production of digital content takes place: news, entertainment, discussions, administrative announcements – that is, all forms of information exchange that are possible in social media. Thus, the concept of the digital public sphere within cultural studies acquires essential importance, since new practices of cultural production and civic participation emerge in the networked environment. Moreover, these new practices are used by various participants in the networked space, thereby shaping cultural production within social media.

In the context of the mediatization of cultural practices (Pavlova, 2022), social media are increasingly integrated into the practices of everyday life. Cultural production takes place within the social media, which is easily accessible to wide segments of the population. The affordances of social media contribute to the creation of digital content that is distinguished by its relevance, and the perceived immediacy of everyday life creates an impression of authenticity for the recipient. This specificity is exploited by Russian PSYOP units, which use social media for informational influence on the population of the occupied territories. It can be concluded that their strategy is to saturate the network environment with a plurality of pro-Russian information channels with varying degrees of formality and content policy, to establish control over it. These channels create everyday digital content that implicitly embeds narratives that legitimize Russian rule and normalize the status quo.

Ukrainian channels, on the other hand, form a much smaller network. This can be explained by counter-sabotage measures, as well as the fact that pro-Ukrainian channels do not publish daily topical local news. Their purpose is to form a space for the struggle for the image of the city and to maintain a center of solidarity that allows people under occupation to maintain contact with the Ukrainian public sphere while remaining in the necessary secrecy.

Thus, social media shapes the digital image of the city through the production of everyday content. Media content is used for cultural influence and to establish control over the newly formed digital public sphere. The publication of digital content is, in essence, a process of cultural production in social media. Therefore, social media constitute a valuable source for research, as they allow us to study the transformations that occur during the occupation, as well as to predict the development of reintegration policies.

References:

Asmolov, G. (2022). The transformation of participatory warfare: The role of narratives in connective mobilization in the Russia–Ukraine war. *Digital War*. https://doi.org/10.1057/s42984-022-00054-5

Asmolov, G. (2024). Propaganda in the Network Environment: How propaganda has changed in the era of social media and during times of war. *Re: Russia*. https://re-russia.net/en/expertise/714/

Bareikytė, M., & Makhortykh, M. (2024). Digitally witnessable war from pereklychka to propaganda: Unfolding Telegram communication during Russia's war in Ukraine. *Media, War & Conflict*. https://doi.org/10.1177/17506352241255890

Beetz, J. (2016). Materiality and subject in Marxism, (post-)structuralism, and material semiotics. *Palgrave Macmillan UK*. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-59837-0

Boichak, O. (2017). Battlefront volunteers. In *#SMSociety17: Proceedings of the 8th international conference on social media & society* (pp. 1–10). ACM Press. https://doi.org/10.1145/3097286.3097289

Drozdova, Y., Dukach, Y., Kel, N. (2022). Telegram Occupation. How Russia Wanted to Breed a Media Monster, but Ended up with a Paper Tiger. Texty. https://texty.org.ua/projects/108161/telegram-occupation-how-russia-/wanted-breed-media-monster-ended-paper-tiger/ [in Ukrainian] [Дроздова, Є., Кельм, Н., & Дукач, Ю. (2022, 29 жовтня). Телеграм-окупація. Як Росія вибудовувала медіамережу, а вийшло потьомкінське село. Texty.org.ua – статті та журналістика даних для людей – Тексти.org.ua.

https://texty.org.ua/projects/108016/telehram-okupaciya-yak-rosiya-vybudovuvala/-mediamerezhu-vyjshlo-potomkinske-selo/]

Dyer-Witheford, N., & Matviyenko, S. (2019). *Cyberwar and revolution: Digital subterfuge in global capitalism*. Univ Of Minnesota Press.

Ford, M. (2024). From innovation to participation: Connectivity and the conduct of contemporary warfare. *International Affairs*, 100(4), 1531–1549. https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiae061

Hetmanova, D. (2024). The politics of (un)gratefulness. on russian "reconstruction" projects in occupied mariupol. *Mariupol Memory Park*. https://www.mariupolmemorypark.space/en/library-en/the-politics-of-/ungratefulness

Horbyk, R. (2022). "The war phone": Mobile communication on the frontline in Eastern Ukraine. *Digital War*. https://doi.org/10.1057/s42984-022-00049-2

Nazaruk, T. (2022). Subscribe and Follow. Telegram and Responsive Archiving the War in Ukraine. *Sociologica*, 16(2), 217–226. https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1971-8853/15339

Pavlova, O., & Rohozha, M. (2023). Mariupol siege viber-community as a form of grassroot movement in the context of "declining state of global democracy". *Ideology and Politics Journal*, 241–275.

Pavlova, O., & Rohozha, M. (2025). Communicative practices of perception and memory of Russian-Ukrainian war and the graphosphere of the media channel. *Studies in East European Thought*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11212-025-09712-2

Pavlova, O. (2022). When visual practices became mediatized: The context of the signification mode of Modernism and the Classic culture industry. *Ukrainian Cultural Studies*, (2 (11), 67–71. https://doi.org/10.17721/ucs.2022.2(11).13 [in Ukrainian]. [Павлова, О. (2022). Коли візуальні практики стали медіатизованими: контекст способу сигніфікації модернізму та класичної культурної індустрії. *Українські культурологічні студії*, (2 (11)), 67–71. https://doi.org/10.17721/UCS.2022.2(11).13]

Soklakov, M. (2024). Cultural Production on Social Media: Case Study of Occupied Town. *Ukrainian Cultural Studies* 2 (15): 49–57. https://doi.org/10.17721/UCS.2024.2(15).10. [in Ukrainian] [Соклаков, М. (2024). Культурне виробництво в соціальних медіа: ситуаційний аналіз окупованого міста. *Вісник: Українські культурологічні студії*, 2(15), 49–57. https://doi.org/10.17721/UCS.2024.2(15).10]

Tormakhova, A. (2022). Digital image of the city as a form of communication. *Ukrainian Cultural Studies*, 2(11), 72–75. https://doi.org/10.17721/UCS.2022.2(11).14

Максим СОКЛАКОВ, магістр
ORCID ID: 0009-0002-4892-634X
e-mail: maksym.soklakov@knu.ua
Київський національний університет імені Тараса Шевченка, Київ, Україна

СОЦІАЛЬНІ МЕДІА-ПЛАТФОРМИ ЯК ДИСКУРСИВНЕ СЕРЕДОВИЩЕ В КОНТЕКСТІ РОСІЙСЬКО-УКРАЇНСЬКОЇ ВІЙНИ

В с т у п . *Соціальні медіа-платформи стали основними каналами медіа-споживання та основним полем битви для інформаційної війни. Їхні соціально-технічні можливості демократизують культурне виробництво, підживлюючи нові форми вираження, політичну мобілізацію та навіть участь у військових операціях, а також уможливлюючи масштабну пропаганду, культурний вплив та історичну документацію по обидва боки російсько-українського фронту. Діючи поза державним контролем, ці платформи обслуговують не лише потреби тактичної комунікації, але й ширші процеси формування ідентичності, культурного опору та збереження колективної пам'яті. Посилений затяжним конфліктом та постійними тенденціями медіатизації, цей унікальний цифровий ландшафт вимагає термінового соціально-гуманітарного аналізу.*

М е т о д и . *Це дослідження використовує багатометодний дизайн для вивчення культурного виробництва та дискурсивних практик під час російсько-української війни. Ми картографували можливості соціальних мереж за допомогою медіа-досліджень; зібрали публічні публікації, метадані, хештеги та профілі за допомогою OSINT; а також провели неформальний контент-аналіз. Наративний та критичний дискурс-аналіз виявив сюжетні арки та ідеологічні стратегії, тоді як аналіз пам'яті та просторовий аналіз досліджували пам'ятні пости та символічне переосмислення міських просторів.*

Р е з у л ь т а т и . *Російсько-українська війна дуже медіатизована, завдяки смартфонам і соцмережам, які перетворюють мирних жителів на активних учасників. Ці платформи дозволяють створювати контент, проводити OSINT-розслідування, пропаганду та чинити опір, змінюючи культурні практики та інформаційні потоки. На окупованих територіях виникають конкуруючі медіа-наративи – окупаційні канали прагнуть легітимізувати контроль, тоді як низовий опір документує реалії та зміцнює українську ідентичність. Соціальні мережі стають одночасно полем бою та архівом війни.*

В и с н о в к и . *Соціальні медіа-платформи формують цифровий образ міста через виробництво повсякденного контенту. Медіаконтент використовується для культурного впливу та встановлення контролю над новоствореною цифровою публічною сферою. Публікація цифрового контенту, по суті, є процесом культурного виробництва в соціальних мережах. Таким чином, соціальні медіа є цінним джерелом для досліджень, оскільки вони дозволяють нам вивчати трансформації, які відбуваються під час окупації, а також прогнозувати розвиток політики реінтеграції.*

К л ю ч о в і с л о в а : *соціальні медіа, дискурс, медіатизація, інформаційна війна, громадянське суспільство, тимчасово окуповані території України, цифрова публічна сфера.*