

## PHENOMENON OF SOCIAL MEDIA DURING THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR

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**Abstract:** The objective of this study is to analyze the impact of social media on public opinion during the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. The article employs the following scientific methods to achieve its goal: logical-historical, structural-functional, and comparative analysis methods. The article analyzes the following terms: media (used to describe mass media tools used for information transmission or communication with a significant audience); traditional media (including print press, radio, television, various sound and video recordings, and computer technologies aimed at a mass audience, with relatively broad accessibility and corporate production and distribution of information); and social media (online platforms and internet resources allowing users to create, share, and consume content from other users). The functions of media are categorized into traditional (informational, analytical, cognitive-enlightening, moral-educational, influential, and hedonistic) and modern (live broadcasts, stories, marketplaces, shared pages, and groups). It is concluded that modern social media are gaining comprehensive influence over audiences, which is a significant aspect in times of war. Our analysis highlights how social media influences society during wartime, including phenomena such as the "Spiral of Silence" effect, the manifestation of "herd instinct" in social media, the influence of opinion leaders, and the trust in information published on social networks.

**Keywords:** media; social media; mass media; armed conflict; warfare; Russian-Ukrainian war.

### 1 Introduction

Due to the rapid advancement of modern information technologies and mass media (hereafter referred to as media) in today's world, media has become a significant object of influence on public opinion during societal crises and armed conflicts. Unlike historical conflicts such as the Second World War, the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war is shaping new communication trends among politicians, citizens, and the media. Specifically, the emergence of modern trends in media (particularly social media) prompts us to carefully analyze existing research on the topic and identify the specifics of contemporary trends in their influence on public opinion, which currently demonstrate phenomenal success in shaping societal public opinion.

Firstly, the rapid adaptation of tools in the Russian-Ukrainian war drives this trend - for example, the reporting of current events on-site via smartphones (both through traditional and social media). Secondly, a notable trend (representing a specific phenomenon of wartime) is the active integration of social media into the information landscape. Accounts on social networks such as Instagram, Telegram, and Facebook consistently address the topic of war. This direct communication is often trusted by consumers, as it is considered information 'from the horse's mouth'. In Ukraine, Telegram enjoys the highest popularity among society as the primary channel for receiving up-to-date information. From this perspective, it is noteworthy to mention the active utilization of manipulative influence in social media, particularly in accentuating the construction of a certain "image of warfare".

Politicians and armed forces create their own image of warfare by engaging with their audiences through tweets or posts on Facebook and Telegram channels. This trend is notably evident in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. The Ukrainian military regularly shares updates on its frontline progress via social media. They disseminate professionally produced audiovisual materials that are then shared by other social media users and utilized by professional editors and journalists [2].

In addition to the traditional functions of the media, which inform society about the Russian-Ukrainian war, entertainment content emerges as a prominent aspect, despite its atypical association with war themes. In this aspect, it is noteworthy to mention the production and dissemination of memes. However, memes about the Russian-Ukrainian war often serve an informative function, albeit through an entertaining genre. This use of memes indicates a consistent trend of 'infotainment' regarding the Russian-Ukrainian war in the media.

The next trend in modern war is the image of the enemy (which serves as a key objective of the media). The information warfare between Russia and Ukraine, Ukrainian and Russian propaganda operates on three fronts: their own citizens, the enemy, and the international community, which is also a trend in this war, where the media plays a central role. In this regard, "each side of the conflict presents its own facts and myths, censors for various reasons, Russia – to prevent objective media from speaking out, Ukraine – to prevent military data from being leaked" [5].

Therefore, the aforementioned points largely emphasize the relevance of this topic and its importance in the current realities of Ukrainian society. The relevance and specific phenomenon of social media during wartime lie in several aspects:

1. Information warfare: social media serves as a vital tool for spreading propaganda, influencing public opinion and manipulating information. Parties to the conflict can utilize social networks to disseminate their views, demonize opponents, and garner support among their citizens.
2. Coordination and mobilization: social media enables quick coordination of actions and mobilization of support. This can be useful for organizing protests, volunteer groups, as well as disseminating information about the actions of military or humanitarian organizations.
3. Monitoring and reconnaissance: social media can be used to gather information about enemy actions, monitor public opinion, and identify weaknesses in the enemy's strategy.
4. Psychological warfare: through social media, it is possible to influence the psychological state of the enemy, demoralizing its population or, conversely, boosting its morale.

Overall, social media serves as an important element in modern conflicts, including military ones. It complements traditional methods of warfare and influences public opinion in real-time.

### 2 Materials and Methods

To address the aim of the article, the following general scientific methods of understanding social phenomena and processes were utilized: *logical-historical*, *structural-functional*, and *comparative methods*, for analyzing the terms 'media', 'traditional media', and 'social media'; *analysis and synthesis* – for delineating the content and specificity of social media in conditions of military conflict; *classification* – for typologizing varieties of social media in conditions of military conflict; *structural-functional analysis* – for elucidating the primary functions of social media that require study and reconsideration of the most effective ones in view of the military situation.

The theoretical framework of our research is based on the fundamental scientific contributions of Ukrainian scholars regarding the phenomenon of social media. Specifically, we draw upon the works of O. Halamai, who investigates the intersection of media and society, focusing on the interaction between media and politics, as well as media and culture. T. Matviienko specializes in research on media and communications, particularly examining the impact of the Internet and social networks on society. M. Kibkalo conducts research on the use of social networks in political processes, as well as aspects of digital journalism. Finally, D. Chernukha explores the influence of social networks and internet media on society and politics.

Among foreign researchers, notable figures include M. McLuhan, who studied the impact of mass media on culture and society. His works, such as *“Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man”*, remain significant for comprehending the interaction between media and society. A. Nielsen specializes in research on media and consumer markets, particularly measuring television viewing, internet activity, advertising trends, and so forth. C. Gaiman investigates social networks and their influence on younger generations. E. Ires focuses on studying the relationships between new media, technologies, and society. D. Rushkoff examined the impact of media on culture and society.

However, considering the latest challenges and threats facing society, particularly the ongoing state of war, which has persisted for three years across the entire territory of Ukraine, demands further theoretical and practical examination of the mentioned subject. Since the theoretical frameworks developed by researchers do not encompass the full spectrum of issues confronting contemporary Ukrainian society starting from February 24, 2022, this prompted the selection of this research topic.

### 3 Results and Discussion

Modern society differs radically from all previous forms of human existence. Individuals find themselves in a world that is constantly changing, compelling them to adapt with significant effort and transform it in search of new opportunities to fulfill their spiritual needs and individual inclinations. By creating new information technologies and continually reorganizing traditional media to change the world, humans also alter their consciousness, perception of the world, and value orientations [9].

In particular, the term “media” (from the Latin “media”, meaning “intermediate”) is used to describe mass communication channels employed for the transmission of information or communication to a significant audience. The study and analysis of the term “media” can be approached from several aspects:

1. Technical aspect: Media can encompass various technologies and communication tools, such as newspapers, magazines, radio, television, film, the Internet, social networks, and other digital platforms. Each of these mediums has unique characteristics that influence the perception and reception of information.
2. Socio-cultural aspect: Media play a crucial role in shaping society, culture, and identity. They influence the views, beliefs, values, and norms of information consumers.
3. Economic aspect: Media constitute a significant sector of the economy, generating revenue from advertising, content sales, subscriptions, and other services. They create jobs for journalists, editors, content producers, programmers, and other professionals.
4. Political aspect: Media play a key role in the political process, providing citizens with information about government actions, political events, elections, and other social issues. They can also serve as a means of influencing public opinion and shaping civic consciousness.
5. Theoretical aspect: Media are the subject of study for many disciplines, including journalism, mass communication, sociology, cultural studies, political science, and others. Media research involves studying their role in society, mechanisms of operation, influence, and evolution.

Overall, the analysis of the term “media” requires consideration of its multifaceted nature and the inclusion of various aspects, from technical capabilities to socio-cultural and political implications, especially during the full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war.

From this, the understanding of the two main terms of our research arises, namely: “traditional media” and “social media”. To comprehend the transformation path of traditional media, it is necessary to analyze their etymological understanding and specificity of existence in the process of conducting information

warfare. Traditional media encompass printed press, radio, television, various sound and video recordings, diverse computer technologies united by their orientation toward mass audiences, relative accessibility to a large number of people, and corporate character of information production and dissemination. Formalized types of such media include mass media and communication channels, which can be differentiated by carrier characteristics, namely printed (newspapers and magazines) and electronic (television, radio, Internet) [9].

The essence of traditional media lies in their historical and technical nature, which is reflected in the ways information is disseminated and communicated to the audience. The key features of traditional media include: physical carrier (traditional media utilize physical carriers for information transmission, such as paper (newspapers, magazines), radio waves (radio), airwaves (television)); one-way communication (in most cases, traditional media offer one-way communication, where information is transmitted from the publisher to the audience without immediate feedback); centralized control (traditional media typically have a centralized management structure, where editors, owners, or governmental bodies determine the information presented to the public); limited audience coverage (traditional media are limited in audience coverage, as their access is usually restricted by geographical boundaries); format consistency (traditional media employ standard formats, such as articles, reports, radio broadcasts, television programs, which may be predictable for the audience).

Social media, in turn, are online platforms and internet resources that allow users to create, share, and consume content from other users (two-way communication between content provider and consumer). This can include text messages, photos, videos, audio recordings, and other formats. Social media also provide tools for interaction, communication, and tracking the activity of other users.

The main feature of social media lies in their ability to create a network of connections between users, enabling them to communicate, exchange thoughts and information, as well as create and participate in communities based on various interests. For example, popular social media platforms include Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, TikTok, YouTube, and many others. Each of them has its own unique features and is aimed at different audiences and types of content.

Social media has become a unique phenomenon that has permeated all spheres of human activity. American researcher D. Rushkoff expresses the idea of the rapid development of information technologies, which humans may not always be able to integrate into the production process. In our case, we can confidently assert that the use of social media has fully met expectations. Social networks have significantly expanded their usual functions, and bloggers (thought leaders) have found a higher purpose in their activities, demonstrating the best aspects of civil society. As the author notes, “virtual authors shape new consciousness and new informational priorities through the production and exchange of informational flows. Together, they describe human civilization in real time, and each vision is a significant part of history”. Social media includes personal blogs, microblogs, social networks, video hosting platforms, photo services, internet forums, and so on. The first condition of social media is the author’s accessibility to a wide audience. The thematic focus of network communication is determined by the specificity of a particular social media platform and its content resources - for example, the audiovisual capabilities of a YouTube channel and short messages on Twitter. Regardless of the content of the message, its technical characteristics, and the audience targeted by the information, all of these aspects have a powerful impact on individuals [7].

The essence of social media lies in their ability to create a virtual environment where users can communicate, share content, interact, and collectively create and influence content. The main features of social media include: multidirectional communication (creating the possibility for multidirectional communication, where users can interact not only with their friends and family,

but also with any other individual or group through public or private messages); collaborative content creation (social media users can create, share, and edit content together); interactivity (providing the opportunity to interact with content, making communication more dynamic and engaging); global reach (allowing users to interact with people from all over the world, breaking geographical boundaries and creating a global community); personalization and communities (users can create personalized profiles and join interest-based communities, enabling them to receive content that matches their preferences and needs).

Social media not only change the way we communicate and perceive information but also have a significant impact on society, culture, politics, and the economy. They have become an integral part of modern life, bringing people together and facilitating rapid information exchange on a scale previously thought impossible.

The functionality of social media allows for nearly real-time coverage of events, both online and offline. In contrast, other mass media require time for processing and dissemination, with some, such as in print media, lacking the capability for immediate notification. Another advantage of using social media is their low resource requirements. Publishing any message does not entail financial investment, specialized equipment, or skills. Ease of use contributes to savings of cost, manpower, and time. Additionally, social media are characterized by their accessibility and extensive audience reach, regardless of users' location. Utilizing the internet network does not necessitate any ties to a specific country, location, or time. Merely having a mobile phone or another gadget with internet access is sufficient for obtaining the required information [1].

Hence, it is imperative to meticulously delineate the primary distinctions between traditional media and social media. Their fundamental divergence lies in the modalities of information dissemination, the nature of audience interaction, and content formats. Below, several key disparities between them are presented, which we deem pertinent to elucidate:

#### 1. Methods of information dissemination:

- traditional media: utilize physical mediums such as paper (newspapers, magazines), radio waves (radio), and broadcast (television).
- social media: internet platforms and applications that allow users to communicate, share content, and interact with each other.

#### 2. Nature of audience interaction:

- traditional media: typically transmit information unilaterally, without the possibility of immediate feedback from the audience.
- social media: provide multi-directional communication where users can interact with each other and with content.

#### 3. Content formats:

- traditional media: employ standard formats such as articles, reports, radio broadcasts, television programs.
- social media: enable users to create and collaboratively edit various content types, including photos, videos, text messages, audio recordings, etc.

#### 4. Centralized management:

- traditional media: typically have a centralized management structure, where editors or owners determine the information presented to the public.
- social media: generally, have a decentralized nature, where content is created by users rather than centralized owners or editors.

These distinctions delineate the modalities of information perception and consumption, thereby exerting influence on the

societal role of media and their positioning within the media landscape, particularly amid conditions of national military conflict.

Pertinently, Professor B. Potiatinik remarks on this matter, while examining the four stages of new media development, noting that "the subsequent waves in the second decade of the 21st century were associated with social networks, video blogging, such as on YouTube or Instagram. Blogging marked a new stage in journalistic evolution, characterized by a higher level of authorial independence and freedom" [3].

Recent research indicates a rapid development of media and a transformation of their function, particularly in the audiovisual and electronic components. The significant impact namely on mass consciousness through such media channels during wartime is emphasized. This leads to the realization that the term "mass media" no longer corresponds to modern realities (including traditional media specifically). This term was much more relevant when information flows were somewhat official and unidirectional, namely, through traditional media channels (radio, television, printed publications, etc.). However, the contemporary information landscape has shown that a significant part of the mechanism of information transmission is dedicated to feedback, i.e., the audience's reaction to what is heard or seen. Thus, it can be argued that information transforms into a process of bidirectional communication, mutual exchange of information [9]. This necessitates the integration of social media into societal usage and consequently the emergence of their latest functions.

There exists a multitude of contemporary functions that social media bring in society, yet they are constantly evolving as the subject of influence changes. Overall, an analysis of classifications of modern media and their substantive characteristics by S. Danilenko, Y. Zasursky, G. Pocheptsov, Ye. Prokhorov, A. Sarkisian, A. Fedorov, L. Fedotova, A. Yakovtsev, and others allows for the division of media functions into the following main groups: informational (reporting on the state of affairs, various facts, and events); analytical (often the presentation of facts is accompanied by commentary, analysis, and evaluation); cognitive-enlightening (by conveying various cultural, historical, scientific information, mass media contribute to enriching the knowledge base of their consumers, listeners, viewers); moral-educational (media reflect moral-aesthetic priority models of social behavior, principles of morality and aesthetic taste, notions of good and evil); the function of influence (media influence people's views and behavior, especially during periods of so-called societal inversion or during mass socio-political actions); hedonistic (aimed at providing leisure, pleasant pastime, recreation, restoring energy, satisfying the aesthetic needs of the audience) [6].

In particular, when discussing the phenomenon of social media in contemporary Ukrainian society, it is worth noting the transformation of their functions in the context of Ukraine's military situation. The latest functions of social media are often created to facilitate communication, increase engagement, and enhance interactivity. In the conditions of war, these functions can become particularly useful, as they can impact various aspects of the military process and provide timely information to the public, namely:

1. Live streaming: The ability to conduct live broadcasts allows users to quickly and effectively disseminate information about real-time events. This can be useful for reporting on events in conflict zones, showcasing life on the front lines, or documenting humanitarian crises.
2. Stories: The Stories feature allows users to publish temporary content that automatically disappears after a certain period. This can be used for quick reporting on real-time events or showcasing life in conflict zones.
3. Marketplaces: The presence of marketplaces on social media can be useful for organizing assistance and support for military or civilian individuals in need.
4. Shared pages and groups: Social media platforms enable the creation of shared pages and groups for coordinating

actions and exchanging information among different groups operating in wartime conditions.

The uniqueness of these functions in the context of the full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war lies in their ability to rapidly and effectively disseminate information, coordinate actions, and assist in mobilizing resources to respond to crisis situations. Such capabilities enable people to stay informed, interact, and provide assistance where it is most needed.

Therefore, an analysis of the terminological framework of the concept of “social media”, their distinction from traditional media, and their latest functions enable the identification of their phenomenon of psychological influence on society during the Russian-Ukrainian war. In particular, it is pertinent to focus on the following aspects:

The “Spiral of Silence” Effect (coined by E. Noelle-Neumann). The hypothesis of the “spiral of silence” by German researcher E. Noelle-Neumann predicts the ability of mass media to influence public opinion by encouraging minorities to express their opinions while suppressing the views of the majority. Thus, the prevailing environment and accepted views may inhibit the expression of one’s own opinion, especially if it contradicts the prevailing one. A similar phenomenon is observed in social networks, where messages are often generated by representatives of the minority. Nevertheless, users who do not wish to remain silent unconsciously begin to share ideas that previously contradicted their beliefs [8]. This phenomenon is vividly manifested in the contemporary Russian-Ukrainian war.

Manifestation of the “herd instinct” in social media. In social networks, the “herd instinct” is vividly expressed in cases where posts attract the most attention, characterized by a significant number of likes and comments. Consequently, the audience assigns greater importance to such messages, while information with fewer responses remains almost unnoticed. Such mechanisms of “contagion” work effectively, especially in the case of bots on social networks. Bots post a large number of emotionally-charged comments under posts, which, in turn, influence the psychological state of readers, transmitting specific moods and stimulating a change in opinions not through rational means, but by arousing the “desired” emotional reactions [4].

The phenomenal influence of thought leaders (influencers), especially during the period of the full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war, lies in their ability to shape public opinion, form views, and beliefs of a large number of people through their authority, charisma, and influence. Here are some key aspects of this phenomenon: extensive audience reach (their messages can reach millions of people simultaneously, making them powerful means of communication during wartime); trust and authority (their thoughts and views are often perceived as authoritative and reliable because they have a reputation as experts in their field); ability to shape public opinion (their public statements, comments, and recommendations can influence the behavior and beliefs of a large number of people); ability to mobilize the public (they can advocate for certain goals, calling for support or protest, thereby influencing society’s reaction to military actions or other events).

Significant trust in the information published on social media is based on the following factors: personal context (typically, society trusts information coming from friends, relatives, and acquaintances on social media); influence of social networks (trust can also arise from users’ participation in specific social groups or communities where information exchange may be more trusted, as it occurs within a shared identification context); sources of information (official accounts of reputable news agencies, expert bloggers, academic sources, and other authoritative sources); feedback and ratings (if many people react positively to certain information or a source, it can increase the level of trust in it).

#### 4 Conclusion

Thus, contemporary social media are rapidly gaining momentum in their development, encompassing a diverse, wide, and accessible audience, posing the issue of social media’s influence on public opinion in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war. It is precisely in social media where the battleground lies in the information space.

Hence, as a result of our analysis, we have identified four phenomena of social media: the “spiral of silence” model and the “herd instinct”, which vividly underscore the value of transmitting personal views and positions and the pervasive influence on public opinion (so to speak, the “correct” one) on individuals. Modern thought leaders convey current information and can receive feedback through the capabilities of social media, which engenders absolute trust in this phenomenon, especially during wartime.

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