

Media Professionalism in Covering Socially Sensitive Content During The Russo-Ukrainian War

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Abstract

The article analyzes modern media professionals' approaches to covering socially sensitive content and creating effective communication. It is noted that in the conditions of the Russo-Ukrainian war, the concept of socially sensitive journalism has acquired special importance, because editorial offices are faced with tragedies and human suffering every day, raise socially important topics, and fight Russian disinformation. The object of our research was mobilization communication, because the attention of Ukrainian society today is drawn mainly to it to a great extent. The material for scientific research was journalistic publications from Ukrainian online media that relate to the topic of mobilization and the activities of centers for manning and social support (TCK and SP). Materials were selected and analyzed, including headlines that demonstrate value judgments, ethically incorrect nominations, emotionally colored formulations, determining positive and negative practices of presenting the topic of mobilization in the information space, and affecting the public mood of Ukrainians in war conditions. The challenges that Ukrainian media professionals face today when covering the topic of mobilization include investigated: ineffective state communication, constant updating of legislation, ambiguous comments on this phenomenon by officials, and hostile information attacks. The great responsibility in covering this topic by journalists was noted, as well as the mandatory observance of professional standards of reliability, accuracy, completeness, accessibility of information, maintaining a balance of opinions and points of view, and separating facts from value judgments. The importance of ethical norms was emphasized in compliance with the Code of Ethics of a Ukrainian Journalist. Recommendations are given for professional media coverage and the creation of correct mobilization communication through subtopics that concern Ukrainians the most: motivation to fulfill civic duty and voluntary entry into the ranks of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, compliance with legislative norms, the rights of mobilized people, fairness in decision-making, effective interaction of the TCK with units of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Examples of positive practice are human-centricity and coverage of motivational stories, showing examples of successful mobilization. It is concluded that only by adhering to the principles of responsibility and professionalism, media professionals will be able to cover this topic qualitatively, without harming Ukraine's defense capability and the approach to victory.

Keywords: Ethics; Journalistic Standards; Media Professionalism; Mobilization; Russo-Ukrainian War; Socially Sensitive Content.

1. Introduction

Speaking about journalism in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war, many media specialists note that all topics today are socially sensitive, because during martial law, the journalistic approach to covering events must consider ethical norms, the psychological state of the audience, the context of the situation, security, and the possible impact of information on society. Recently, the concept of socially sensitive journalism has acquired special importance in Ukraine, since editorial offices work in extremely difficult conditions of information warfare, constantly fighting enemy attacks and Russian propaganda, and daily encountering mass tragedies and human suffering. Socially sensitive journalism during war is not only a way of reflecting events in the state, but also an important tool for supporting society. It must support Ukrainian society, help people find a way out of critical situations, protect their rights, expose enemy crimes, and give a voice to those who need it most. Socially sensitive materials should focus on the fate of civilians, those who suffered in the war, veterans, disabled military personnel, displaced persons, volunteers, and other vulnerable groups. This helps society better understand its problems and attract assistance. When covering sensitive content, journalists should carefully select information, avoid sensationalism, speculation, and emotional manipulation. It is important to check the sources of information and not disseminate unconfirmed data that may disorient

society or play into the hands of the enemy. On the other hand, one should remember legal norms, because truthful coverage of events should not endanger military personnel or civilians. The war caused chronic stress and exhaustion in Ukraine's population, so media professionals should refrain from inflaming situations, try to promote less negativity in the news feed, and primarily focus on neutral or positive materials, as well as offer constructive solutions, putting people and their dignity first.

In the Ukrainian and global context, socially sensitive journalism is defined as a type of professional activity focused on ethical, inclusive, and responsible coverage of topics related to social groups of people. The scientific vector today is aimed at the correct coverage of media-sensitive content [20]. Researchers note that within the framework of socially sensitive journalism, the central issue is not only the transmission of facts, but also the formation of public understanding, empathy, and a critical attitude towards social inequality. Sensational journalism is today an important technology for conflict resolution [23]. In the conditions of war in Ukraine, the communication potential of decision journalism is significant [27].

A theoretical presentation of the principles of conflict-sensitive journalism, focused on reducing tension and social responsibility, is presented in the work (e.g., Raharjo [17]). The author draws attention to how the media avoids hate speech and ethically portrays the parties to the conflict. Scholars also focus on the media professionalism of journalists in conflict zones (e.g., Tejedor, Cervi & Tusa [22]). In the context of war, sensitive journalism becomes critically important because the information space is filled not only with facts but also with emotions, pain, fear, and narratives that can both support and manipulate public consciousness. Information manipulation is the purposeful distortion, substitution, or dosage of information to influence the perception, behavior, or decision of the audience. Researchers around the world are studying the ethical challenges for journalists in combating disinformation and manipulation, standards of truth and responsibility (e.g., Chavez & Freedman [6]), propaganda, and dissemination of information during the Russian-Ukrainian war (e.g., Gouliev [8]). The role of socio-psychological processes in journalists' attitudes towards war and peace has been investigated in an article (e.g., Yontucu et al. [25]), and the semantic field of the concept 'Russian-Ukrainian war' in the Ukrainian infomedia space of the war period has been paid attention to in an investigation [15].

One of the extremely sensitive topics during the Russo-Ukrainian war is the topic of mobilization. It directly affects the lives of thousands of Ukrainians, their families, the morale of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and civilians. Given this, journalists must cover it responsibly, adhering to professional standards of reliability, accuracy, completeness, accessibility of information, maintaining a balance of opinions and points of view, and separating facts from value judgments. Ethical norms are also important for compliance with the Code of Ethics of a Ukrainian Journalist, and the use of ethically correct nominations and formulations. It is important to avoid manipulation and panic, and to avoid unintentionally facilitating hostile propaganda through an emotionally colored context. Journalists should use only official sources (the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, the Office of the President, the Territorial Defense Forces, etc.). Any rumors or unconfirmed data can cause panic and harm Ukraine's defense capabilities. The enemy is constantly monitoring the Ukrainian media, so any unnecessary information about mobilization can be harmful. It is necessary to avoid emotionally provocative headlines so that such materials do not demoralize Ukrainian society and sow fear. Instead, it is better to write publications about the legal aspects of mobilization, the rights and obligations of citizens. It is advisable to focus on social responsibility; therefore, proper mobilization communication should emphasize that this is not a compulsion, but the duty of every citizen in wartime, it is a matter of Ukraine's collective security, and a need for defense and future victory. Given the great role of journalism in correct covering this socially sensitive topic for Ukrainian society, the National Council of Ukraine on Television and Radio Broadcasting [14] last year called on the media to take a correct and professional approach in covering sensitive topics, in particular, the mobilization process and the activities of the TCK. This is because mobilization communication is subject to special information attacks due to the active focus and spread of fakes by the enemy.

Human-centricity is important in journalistic coverage, and the personal stories of mobilized people must be covered with respect. It is necessary to avoid distorted stories with an emphasis on fear or cruelty, speculation on the topic of conscription into the ranks of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and depicting only the negative side of mobilization. Instead, it is worth showing the stories of those who went to war voluntarily and fulfilled their duty with dignity.

Proper mobilization communication should provide answers to public inquiries, explaining to people how mobilization is carried out, who is subject to conscription, and who has the right to deferment, where and how to get legal advice, and what guarantees a mobilized person has. Such media publications increase the legal literacy of society and reduce tension among citizens.

We observe how, through Russian narratives, the enemy discredits mobilization in Ukraine, spreading fakes that "Ukrainian men are caught on the streets", "mobilized people are thrown in without training", "everyone is sent to the front without weapons". Journalists should be the first to refute Russian manipulations and explain the real situation using specific examples.

Data from the Institute of Mass Information's constant monitoring [1] indicate that despite the dominance of neutrality in news on mobilization topics, the number of negative materials is unfortunately increasing. This is caused by various factors, primarily ineffective state communication regarding mobilization processes. The very concept of "mobilization" in the Ukrainian information space is increasingly acquiring a negative context, which is a consequence of unsuccessful formulations caused by the very content of the events, that the state is unable to eliminate today. As media experts note, the coverage of mobilization in the Ukrainian media demonstrates the absence of a unified information policy on the part of the authorities, which would help form a positive image of mobilization and ensure coherence and coordination of this process.

Today, it is important to develop professional media approaches to covering socially sensitive topics in wartime, in particular those related to mobilization and the activities of the TCK, to know how to counteract disinformation and cover mobilization processes objectively, accurately and fully, to use correct nominations and ethically correct formulations, to maintain a balance of opinions, to avoid value judgments, far-fetched hyperbole, emotionally colored vocabulary in headlines, to emphasize humanity and respect, to write explanatory materials by legal norms. Only by adhering to these principles will journalists be able to cover the topic of mobilization responsibly and professionally without harming Ukraine's defense capability and the approach to future victory.

The purpose of the article is to explore media professionals' approaches to creating effective communication when covering socially sensitive content related to mobilization topics in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

Given that the topic of socially sensitive journalism in the context of the Russo-Ukrainian war is a new phenomenon, it has not been studied in the modern scientific paradigm. Today, the focus is on the role of the mass media in covering armed conflicts [3; 4], as well as on the transformational processes of the Ukrainian media space caused by the war [16]. In the context of socially sensitive journalism, hate speech in wartime is studied [7; 10; 26].

Media specialists themselves are engaged in the study of sensitive journalism. I. Zemlyana and O. Romaniyuk write about how Ukrainian print and online media cover sensitive topics [26]. O. Kushchenko draws attention to journalistic investigations that raise sensitive topics [12]. Important in this context are the handbooks of the Commission on Journalistic Ethics: "Self-regulation of Ukrainian media during martial law in Ukraine. From the experience of the Commission on Journalistic Ethics [13], "Handbook on Journalistic Ethics" [9]. These

manuals contain professional recommendations on the correct coverage of the topic of mobilization in Ukraine by professional standards and the Code of Ethics of Ukrainian Journalists.

Given that the topic of mobilization became relevant after the full-scale invasion, and today it is considered in the aspect of socially sensitive journalism, there are practically no scientific studies in this domain. Our article is new in this direction of research, which enhances its relevance. We only sporadically come across media studies that raise the issue of the specifics of Ukrainian journalists' coverage of the topic of mobilization or provide professional recommendations on this. Thus, D. Barkar's publications present the monitoring of the Institute of Mass Information on the peculiarities of media approaches to materials about mobilization for certain periods [2]. The recommendations of the Commission on Journalistic Ethics on the proper coverage of the topic of mobilization in Ukraine [18], as well as the study of the Institute of Mass Information on the role of the authorities and a unified information policy in presenting the topic of mobilization, are also relevant [7]. Sporadic media specialists analyze the regional information space regarding the professional and ethical preparation of materials about mobilization, as in the case of the study of the topic of mobilization in the Cherkasy media [19].

Despite the special attention of scientists to socially sensitive journalism of wartime, as we can see, there are practically no research studies on the professional coverage of the topic of mobilization in the media, except for individual media publications. Given this, our investigation is relevant and innovative, as it raises an extremely important topic, to which the attention of Ukrainian society is currently drawn.

2. Method

During the analysis, we considered the specifics of wartime and its impact on journalists' adherence to professional standards and ethics when covering socially sensitive content. The material for scientific intelligence was journalistic publications, in particular, headlines from Ukrainian online media, relating to the topic of mobilization. We selected and analyzed those titles that demonstrate value judgments, ethically incorrect nominations, emotionally colored formulations, which determine positive and negative practices of presenting the topic of mobilization in the information space, and affect the public mood of Ukrainians in wartime.

The objectivity and comprehensiveness of the study was ensured by the use of several methods: descriptive, which allowed systematizing and characterizing nominations that are outside the boundaries of ethical norms and journalistic tolerance, as well as professional standards; contextual analysis, used to identify and clarify the features of covering the topic of mobilization in the context of Ukrainian media; communicative and pragmatic analysis, the purpose of which is to identify the impact of sensitive content on readers, in particular on vulnerable groups of the population and those recipients to whom this topic is close; monitoring to systematize data on the quantitative parameters of neutral, positive, and negative publications on the topic of mobilization in various Ukrainian media.

As a result of the study, unethical examples of language play in modern media texts were identified and analyzed. It was shown that the formation of new, expanded, or narrowed units is determined by objective reality and occurs under the influence of intralinguistic and extralinguistic factors. The manipulative component is considered by us as a lexeme or a group of lexemes, a syntactic construction that has in its connotation a clearly expressed exaggerated meaning.

The following methods of linguistic research are used in the work: analysis of dictionary definitions, contextual and component analysis, and discourse analysis. The descriptive method was used in the systematization, classification, and generalization of the observation results. Content analysis was used in the process of identifying and characterizing the strategies and tactics of manipulation implemented on the pages of online publications. The comparative method made it possible to identify the features of the communicative policy of the analyzed newspapers, that is, to determine the dominant strategies and tactics of manipulative influence, as well as the relationship between their choice and the characteristics of the target audience of the online publication.

The theoretical significance of the work lies in studying manipulation from the point of view of its multi-level and multi-layered nature. In the process of identifying manipulative strategies, a set of factors was considered, which made it possible to present a non-rigid classification reflecting the features of journalists' speech activity. As a result, a free model with an open list of tactics united by a dominant feature was created. Such a course of research made it possible to establish a connection between strategies, tactics, techniques, and language means of manipulation, as well as to identify areas of their intersection.

3. Results and discussion

Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, Ukrainian media have been actively covering socially sensitive topics, in particular, the mobilization process and the activities of territorial recruitment and social support centers (TCK and SP). Today, in the third year of the Russo-Ukrainian war, such journalistic materials attract increased attention due to the aggravation of the mobilization topic in the eyes of Ukrainian society. Given that this topic is relatively new, Ukrainian media workers often face certain difficulties when covering it [15]. The quality work of journalists is complicated by the constant updating of legislation, ambiguous comments on this phenomenon by officials, hostile information attacks, including fakes and manipulations about mobilization. When depicting this topic in the media, it is especially important to adhere to professional standards and ethical norms. Journalists must provide all information related to mobilization only from official and reliable sources, distinguish true reports from Russian intrusions, so as not to aggravate the already difficult situation in Ukraine regarding mobilization processes and the work of the TCK. Given the news content, as well as the requirements of information genres, media workers must maintain a neutral tone, avoid value judgments, and show little to no emotion. However, this can be very difficult in the conditions of regular reports of public clashes between TCK representatives and civilians, frequent exposure by law enforcement agencies of corruption schemes in the mobilization system, and the spread of hostile myths about mobilization. Since the context of such information is usually negative, it is extremely difficult for media workers to write neutral publications [5]. Unfortunately, today, Ukraine lacks a unified information policy that would contribute to the formation of a positive image of mobilization. Despite this, there are editorial teams that have jointly decided not to show the mobilization or actions of the TCK in a negative light, so as not to inflame public sentiment, as this could harm the morale of Ukrainians during the war.

A study by the Institute of Mass Information (IMI) [9] in October 2024, conducted based on monitoring of 10 leading online Ukrainian media, showed that mobilization began to be covered more emotionally, although the neutral tone of news content on this topic dominates (54.2%), which indicates that journalists adhere to professional standards. There are relatively few positive materials about mobilization (10.5%), but negative ones still prevail (35.3%).

When covering the topic of mobilization, journalists should focus on a neutral tone of information presentation or look for some positive context. The neutrality of the content is added by covering information regarding mobilization legislation, cf. "Mobilization begins in Ukraine in a new way: 10 key issues" ("BBC News Ukraine", May 18, 2024); "New mobilization rules. What the law adopted by the Rada provides for" ("Ukrainska Pravda", April 11, 2024); "New rules. How will mobilization change in Ukraine and will there be "economic

reservation" ("RBK-Ukraine", October 11, 2024); "Conscription into the army without visiting the TCK: new mobilization rules explained to volunteers" ("LB.ua", October 9, 2024).

A positive impression is made on readers by publications in which mobilization is presented through motivation, cf. "18-year-olds need to be motivated, not mobilized" ("Ukrainian Pravda", January 26, 2025); "There should be a 'carrot and stick': an expert explained how Ukraine can solve the problem with mobilization" ("UNIAN", December 23, 2024); "The main thing is not age, but motivation and preparation": what motivates joining the army" ("Army Inform", August 14, 2024); "There is a difference": the TCK talked about the motivation of volunteers and those forcibly mobilized" ("UNIAN", November 24, 2024).

It is advisable to cover the stories of famous people who mobilized into the ranks of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, which can serve as a good example for others, cf. "A famous musician joins the Armed Forces of Ukraine. He appealed to Ukrainians with a request" ("RBK-Ukraine", April 17, 2024); "Famous Ukrainian writer Serhiy Zhadan joined the ranks of the Armed Forces of Ukraine" ("UNIAN", June 6, 2024); "In this war, the main thing for us is to win": another famous actor went to defend Ukraine at the front" ("Patriots of Ukraine", November 13, 2023), as well as those Ukrainians who returned from abroad and went to fight: "The dream is to return home with victory". The story of a serviceman from the Ternopil region, Mykola Vajda" ("Suspilne Ternopil", June 11, 2023); "From the French Legion to the Armed Forces of Ukraine. During the liberation of Kherson, he was wounded, but he wants to join the ranks: the story of a military man" ("Suspilne Donbas", May 21, 2024); "What will I tell the children? What was my role during the war? Did I flee abroad or hide?": The story of Serhiy Molchanov" ("Gluzd", June 2, 2023).

A positive image of mobilization will be formed by media materials based on specific stories of people who gained great experience and life values during the war, cf. "A millionaire serving in the Armed Forces of Ukraine told what he gained during the war" ("Glavkom", January 11, 2025); "Steel warriors": a podcast about stories of a spirit that is stronger than the body" ("Povernys zhivym", February 15, 2023); "The war taught me to take responsibility for the lives of strangers" – the story of a school principal from Slaviansk" ("Vchasno", September 18, 2022).

It is no less important to write about war through the practice of returning from the front to peaceful life, showing that mobilization is not a sentence: "The story of military Volodymyr Skosohorenko, who has experience of returning from the front to peaceful existence" (Vinnytsia State Regional Administration, August 21, 2023); "On thoughts, feelings and desires: a story about a volunteer's return to civilian life" (Radio Liberty, March 13, 2023); "Born to live." Stories of those who returned from "zero" ("Bukvy", October 23, 2024), as well as positive, inspiring stories about fighters who, despite being seriously injured, remain optimistic and continue to work for victory: "When you do nothing, you fade away": the story of a Lviv veteran who adapts to civilian life" ("Suspilne Lviv", March 30, 2024); "The liberation of Kherson and life after injury: the story of a hero who received a bionic prosthesis from Favbet" ("TSN", February 7, 2024); "The body was paralyzed: the story of a soldier who returned to work after a serious injury" ("UNIAN", April 29, 2024), or they pass on combat experience to others: "The ideal infantryman is the one who fought and returned home": the story of military instructors from the Zaporizhzhia direction" ("Suspilne Zaporizhzhia", January 25, 2025); "One thought is spinning in my head: to do everything that depends on me", – the story of a soldier from the 104th brigade of the TrO" ("Rivne 1", December 31, 2024); "The war will end when every Ukrainian wants it", – a Volyn soldier who survived two clinical deaths" ("Volyn News", March 24, 2024).

Publications about the voluntary return of soldiers to the front after rehabilitation will have a positive context: "I realized that my experience would be useful at the front": the story of a soldier from Chernivtsi, who plans to return to the front after long-term rehabilitation" ("Young Bukovynets", November 4, 2023); "Returned to the front after a serious injury. The soldier's story impressed Ukrainians" ("RBK – Ukraine", June 12, 2024); "I knew that I would return. It was a matter of time": the story of a soldier from Vinnytsia, who is back at the front after being injured" ("Suspilne Vinnytsia", January 13, 2024).

Materials about foreigners who defend Ukraine also help to draw attention to the obligation to go to war through the media: "It is very easy to fall in love with Ukraine". The story of a foreign military paramedic" ("Ukrainian Week", August 6, 2024); "I went to shorten this war at least for a moment": the story of a Pole who is fighting in the Armed Forces of Ukraine against Russia" ("Radio Liberty", April 9, 2024); "This country gave me a lot": the story of a Vietnamese who joined the Armed Forces of Ukraine and is fighting for Ukraine" ("TSN", June 18, 2024).

Despite the neutral or positive context of coverage of mobilization, today we often observe the negative side of this concept in the media space. Even the percentage ratio (over 35 %) indicates that the mobilization process in Ukraine is often written about in a negative light. A significant number of news items are devoted to negative assessments of the course of the mobilization process in Ukraine and its consequences: "Mobilization in Ukraine is ineffective": a military man explained what needs to be changed now" ("TSN", October 27, 2024); "Forced mobilization is ineffective, but there were opportunities to update the data in another way, – OK 'Zahid'" ("Espresso", December 15, 2024); "Forced mobilization is ineffective: what needs to be changed – a military expert" ("Kontrakty.ua", November 5, 2024); "TCK began to fine city mayors for the failure of mobilization" ("Novynarnya", January 29, 2025). Usually, the headline includes a comment from a military man or veteran, based on whose expert opinion the material is based. The connotation of the wording plays a decisive role here, and journalists often make mistakes by presenting these comments without presenting another point of view, and accordingly, violate the professional standard of balancing different opinions.

Manipulative headlines are also present with the first part of the media title speaking of a possible phenomenon in the present tense, while in the second part we see a denial of this, e.g.: "Mobilization of students and teachers during the holidays: the Ministry of Education and Science assured that this is not provided for by law" ("Ipta Fax", January 23, 2025). We come across publications where the wording, not the essence of the information provided, determines the emotional coloring of the text. This usually happens due to the presentation of the token "mobilization" alongside tokens with a negative coloring: threatening, fear, scary, scandalous, panic, harsh, etc.: "We are playing a very dangerous game with society": SBU Major General Yagun on the current state of mobilization" ("Espresso", January 5, 2024); "Dangerous mobilization: in Mukachevo, a man threatened police and military officers with a knife - video" ("TSN", July 9, 2024); "The situation with mobilization is extremely dangerous" ("33 Channel", April 2, 2024); "Scandalous mobilization: mayors of Ukrainian cities were fined, and those reserved may be called up" ("TSN", January 28, 2025); "Military tell civilians about the fears of mobilization. Part 3: Life and Health" ("Army Inform", August 13, 2024); "Panic at the sight of people in uniform: Ukrainian men desperately try to avoid mobilization, – NBC" ("UNIAN", May 28, 2024); "Why Ukraine needs a tough mobilization: 'Grandfather' from the Armed Forces named the reasons" ("UNIAN", March 20, 2024).

Materials that depict this phenomenon in terms of certain groups of people according to social status do not contribute to a positive attitude towards mobilization: "Mobilization only for the poor: how dangerous is the new initiative" ("Korespondent.net", January 4, 2024); "This is a war for the poor": NYT on tough mobilization methods in Ukraine" ("TSN", December 19, 2023); "The authorities want to send the poor to the front" ("Channel 33", March 12, 2024). The negative side of mobilization is demonstrated by the stories of those who do not want to go to war, cf. "Victory, but without my participation": stories of those who do not want to go to war" ("BBC News Ukraine", June 18, 2024); "I am afraid of mobilization, because it is scary to lose touch with friends and partners. About relationships during the war"

("Vilenzh", January 16, 2024); "I do not want to be a dead hero, I want to be a living evader". How they flee from the army and what to do about it" ("Hromadske", May 31, 2023).

Publications with emotional warning headlines also inflame the mobilization situation: "Roadblocks, sudden checks of the TCK": experts have named scenarios for the nearest mobilization" ("TSN", October 26, 2024); "The TCK recommends that everyone who has a deferment be prepared for mobilization" ("TSN", September 30, 2024); "Mobilization in Ivano-Frankivsk region: search for those liable for military service, work of the VLK and summonses by mail" ("Firtka", January 1, 2025); "Odessa water utility scares residents: they will be left without water due to mobilization" ("Studlib News", January 21, 2025). Some media titles are too hyperbolic and, due to their clickability, are aimed at generating panic in society, cf. "Women, teachers, students, and police: Ukraine is preparing for full mobilization of the population" ("Volyn News", December 17, 2023).

Fears of conscription are caused by publications that describe the possibility of mobilizing women: "Which women can already be mobilized. Let's explain" ("BBC News Ukraine", November 9, 2024); "Some women can go to serve from February 1: who is affected" ("UNIAN", January 27, 2025); "Will they go to the front?": mobilization of women under the new bill" ("Ternopil City Website", January 31, 2024).

Also, the negative context around the lexeme "mobilization" is formed by media publications that highlight corruption schemes and their consequences of avoiding service in the Armed Forces of Ukraine and receiving a deferment: "Fuel coupons in exchange for a deferment from mobilization: the State Bureau of Investigation caught the head of the Ternopil TCK in bribery" ("Censor.net", October 24, 2024); "Helped a friend to issue documents and a deferment out of line: a serviceman of the TCK was convicted in the Frankivsk region for a bribe" ("Suspilne Ivano-Frankivsk", December 17, 2024); "Students for 1,500 euros: a scheme to evade mobilization was exposed in Transcarpathia" ("Ukrainska Pravda", October 15, 2024).

Publications about the conflict between civilians and TCK employees, arising due to the latter's unlawful actions, do not add positivity to the situation with mobilization, cf. "Up to 12 years in prison for serving a summons – these may be the consequences of a fight between a soldier and a resident of Cherkasy" ("Telegraph", May 2, 2023); "Fall on the stairs from the blow: the Sumy Specialized Prosecutor's Office commented on the death of a man after a fight in the TCK" ("Suspilne Sumy", January 6, 2025); "Fight during document verification in Poltava: what the TCK says" ("TSN", January 3, 2025); "In Lutsk in the TCK – a fight and an attempt at a riot: what is known (video)" ("Konkurent", November 22, 2024). When covering information related to the activities of the TCK, it is necessary to carefully check the facts and sources, adhering to the standard of accuracy, reliability, completeness of information, balance of opinions, and points of view. Recently, there has been news about the problems of mobilization and the reluctance of Ukrainian men to go to war. This is evidenced by the following headlines of publications: "Men do not want to go to war: Vitaliy Kim made a loud statement about mobilization" ("Regionews.ua", January 25, 2025); "They think that we will win without them". In Azov, they explained why Ukrainians do not want to volunteer for the army and what to do about it" ("New Voice", October 19, 2024); "Why people do not want to mobilize for the Armed Forces of Ukraine – a sociological study" ("Dzerkalo Tyzhnia", April 5, 2024); "Mobilization: why Ukrainians are in no hurry to go to serve and can this be changed?" ("Kropyvnytskyi Chas-time", August 2, 2024); "Olexandr Zavitnevych: People are hiding, people do not want to go to serve" ("BBC News Ukraine", June 12, 2024); "They do not want to go to the TCK, – the Ministry of Digital Affairs reported on the problem with the reservation of IT specialists" ("Sudovo-yuridichna gazeta v Ukrainy", February 15, 2024). On the one hand, they seem to highlight a real problem and show the real state of society; on the other hand, they demotivate, sow fear, and disappointment in those who are fighting.

In the modern mass media space, materials in which disability is viewed as an illegal way to avoid mobilization or travel abroad have a negative context. This is evidenced by the following headlines of publications: "New business in Ukraine: marry a woman with a disability to avoid mobilization" ("Glavkom", July 12, 2023); "I will save you from mobilization": how much does it cost to "buy" a woman with a disability to "skip" from service" ("Radio Trek", July 20, 2023); "Wife for rent: how men try to leave Ukraine. Those who evade mobilization "marry" women with disabilities" ("Apostrophe", July 28, 2023); "I am looking for a wife... for my husband. How disability was turned into a profitable business during the war" ("Telegraf", July 13, 2023); "Married a woman with a disability who is 24 years older than me to go abroad: the newlyweds were exposed" ("Ukrainska Pravda", July 11, 2023); "A soldier from Volyn married a much older woman with a disability" ("Visnyk+K", June 23, 2023); "In the Lviv region, a woman with a disability married a relative to take him abroad" ("Your City", November 23, 2023); "I will save you from mobilization". Ukrainian women with disabilities are massively looking for men for fictitious marriages and earnings" ("RBK-Ukraine", July 19, 2023); "A woman with a disability was detained in the Lviv region for a fictitious marriage with a relative who was conscript" ("Lviv.media", November 23, 2023).

Media workers also need to be careful when covering information about refusing to receive a summons, serving in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and punishment for it, as such stories can negatively affect public sentiment in conditions of martial law. Analyzing materials published after a full-scale invasion, we see that journalists do not always adhere to this, cf. headlines: "A man received a summons and stated that he "does not want to serve in the Armed Forces of Ukraine": how it ended" ("TSN", January 29, 2025); "A student who refused mobilization was convicted in Ukraine: details" ("TSN", January 29, 2025); "A man received a summons and stated that he would agree to mobilization on one condition: how it ended" ("TSN", October 19, 2024); "Did not want to serve in the Armed Forces of Ukraine: the court imprisoned a Lviv resident for three years" ("Lviv Media", June 13, 2024); "Passed the medical examination, but did not want to serve: how the court punished the draft evader" ("TSN", April 6, 2024); "Religion did not allow: in Katerynopil, a man who did not want to serve in the army was convicted" ("Pro vse", February 23, 2024); "In Volyn, a former teacher who evaded the draft because he did not want to serve was imprisoned for three years" ("Volyn News", April 21, 2024); "A man from the Kyiv region received a summons and hid from mobilization for several months: how did it end" ("TSN", May 16, 2024); "I wanted to serve in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, but without mobilization: a draft evader was sentenced in Volyn" ("Apostrophe", December 10, 2023).

The media repeatedly "hint" some kind of unusual ways to avoid the draft, as, for example, in the materials "In the Carpathian region, a man received a summons and decided to divorce to avoid mobilization" ("Halytskyi Korrespondent", February 6, 2024); "A man received five summons and avoided mobilization: how it all ended" ("Glavkom", January 26, 2025); "A man received a summons and avoided mobilization because of his mother's advice" ("TSN", January 15, 2025); "A resident of the Ternopil region avoided mobilization: what three arguments did he give" ("Ternopil city website", January 15, 2025).

Publications that highlight the illegal actions of TCK employees in serving summonses, in particular to people with disabilities, do not add motivation to the successful implementation of mobilization: "In the Frankivsk region, they wanted to mobilize a man with crooked arms and spinal disease: how it all ended" ("TSN", May 25, 2024); "In Vinnytsia, a summons was handed to a man with a disability: how he can legally appeal the decision of the TCK (video)" ("RBK-Ukraine", July 25, 2023); "In Vinnytsia region, military enlistment office employees served a summons to a man with a disability" ("Live News", July 24, 2023) or those who are entitled to a deferment: "The TCK ignored the application for a deferment from the father of a child with a disability: the court put an end to the case" ("Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union", August 7, 2024); "In Transcarpathia, a summons was served to the father of a child with a disability: the court

protected him from mobilization” (“24 Channel”, August 27, 2022); “Seven children and was tried for evading mobilization: why was a father with many children served a summons” (“Express”, May 8, 2024); “The TCK denied a deferment to a former military man who is the father of three children” (“VectorNews”, October 23, 2024).

When writing about mobilization, it is worth focusing less attention on information aimed at reservation from the mobilization of employees of state and private enterprises, it is also inappropriate to put this information in the headline and put it in the center of readers’ attention, as, for example, in the following news: “The state must restore reservations, because the country’s defense capability depends on it, – expert” (“RBK-Ukraine”, October 25, 2024); “Reservations, mobilization and postponement: what has changed for Ukrainians since January 1” (“Glavkom”); “Are reserved employees mobilized in Ukraine: clarification from a lawyer from the TCK” (“UNIAN”, January 6, 2025).

Journalists must adhere to professional ethics and not support the often widespread erroneous information practice of serving summonses as punishment for some offenses, as is described in the news item: “In Kyiv, loud drift lovers were handed out summonses – police” (“Hromadske”, April 25, 2023). Such a media approach is unsuccessful, as it shows military duty as coercion or punishment, rather than the possibility of fulfilling a civic duty.

When formulating headlines for publications, media professionals should remember about neutrality, as they cover socially sensitive content, and resort less to provocative titles or emotionally colored nominations, cf. “Harsh delivery of summonses: the Armed Forces punished military commissars and reminded Ukrainians of their duty” (“TSN”, February 14, 2023).

Almost all headlines with a pronounced connotation reflect information about various schemes for evading mobilization, cf. “A draft evader bought three ‘children’ to cross the border as a father of many children” (“Interfax-Ukraine”, January 23, 2025); “A father of many children for \$7,000: in the Odessa region, a draft evader tried to go abroad” (“Sudovo-yuridichna gazeta v Ukraini”, December 28, 2023); “The evader tried to ‘magically’ disappear from Ukraine” (“Redpost”, March 10, 2024); “A gray zone for the evader, or Disability ‘for all the money in the world’” (“Ukrinform”, May 29, 2024); “Mobilization in a new way: intermediaries are already ‘selling’ women with disabilities to evaders” (“Volyn News”, June 17, 2024); “The unfortunate evader wandered through the forest for a day, and then called rescuers” (“Ukrainska Pravda”, August 14, 2023); “In the Lviv region, a frightened evader hid in the forest from mobilization” (“Varto”, May 22, 2024). These media titles contain explicit value judgments and demonstrate a violation of the professional standard of separating facts from opinions, since news content must be neutral by the requirements of information journalism.

Journalists must also avoid generalizations and attaching so-called “labels” to a court decision. It is unjustified to resort to generalizations and call a person an “evader” if the publication does not show evidence of evasion of mobilization, proven in court, e.g., “In the mountains of Rakhiv region, a Lviv ‘evader’ almost died from hypothermia (PHOTO)” (“Zakarpattia online”, January 25, 2025); “In Transcarpathia, an evader got lost near the border with Romania and called rescuers” (“Zahid net”, October 14, 2024); “An evader from Odessa was found in the forest in Transcarpathia” (“Karpatskyi obektiv”, October 30, 2024).

Ukrainian media professionals need to cover the topic of mobilization ethically and not imitate Russian narratives about “hunting” or “catching” men, as enemy Telegram channels often write. They constantly spread fake messages in wartime that supposedly a “hidden” mobilization is undergoing, the front is experiencing “colossal” losses, and men are “caught on the streets.” Monitoring the domestic information space, we come across media that also use similar formulations in their publications, which should be avoided: “Hunt for men: mobilization fever in the occupied Luhansk region” (“Army Inform”, October 15, 2024); “Scandalous mobilization: Zaluzhny’s statement, ‘hunting’ for men and discarded summonses” (“TSN”, February 6, 2024); “When will the TCK stop ‘hunting’ men on the streets: Ukrainians were given an answer” (“Holos Karpas”, May 26, 2024); “The lawyer told what rules the TCK violates: ‘earnings’, packaging and ‘hunting’ for men 45+” (“Znay.ua”, January 3, 2025); “Mobilization in Ukraine: what the Armed Forces of Ukraine say about the TCK’s ‘hunting’ for men” (“TSN”, February 3, 2024); “Police are watching how the TCK catches men in Ukraine (VIDEO)” (“Chetverta studiia”, March 21, 2024); “Mobilization in Lviv style or why the TCK catches people – read in the material” (“Live. News”, October 27, 2023); “Now the TCK will triple the catch: from June 1, hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians have lost the right to a deferral – who will pack their backpacks?” (“Prykarpattya Online”, June 3, 2024).

The editorial offices do not ignore cases when employees of territorial recruitment centers are involved in corruption schemes due to abuse of their official duties, cf. “A thousand dollars for a fictitious summons: a TCK employee was detained in the Odessa region for a bribe” (“Ukrinform”, January 29, 2025); “In Volyn, a TCK official was caught for a bribe for unfitness for service ‘retroactively’” (“Sudovo-yuridichna Gazeta v Ukraini”, November 21, 2024); “A military man wrote fictitious summonses to men for a bribe on forms he took from the TCK” (“Slidstvo Info”, December 16, 2024).

When writing about mobilization, journalists must present information as accurately and completely as possible, checking and clarifying it in official sources. For example, the publication “The Head of the Chernivtsi OVA allowed military enlistment office employees to check citizens’ documents” (“Chernivtsiy Promin”, March 12, 2023) does not meet the standards of accuracy and completeness of information, because the text of the news does not provide readers with information about where exactly the TCK employees can check documents, how and when they will begin to implement this. Readers should not look for answers to their questions themselves. The information in the news item “A guy lost consciousness in Transcarpathia after being ‘handed’ a summons (VIDEO)” (“Voice of the Carpathians”, February 15, 2023) is incomplete, because the source is a video posted on social networks. And this source, as it is known, cannot be trusted. Therefore, to verify the reliability of the information provided, as well as to present it fully and balanced, the journalist should have learned more about the author of the video and the purpose of its distribution, and found confirmation in other sources unrelated to the previous one.

Covering mobilization processes in Ukraine requires journalists to be well-versed in legal norms. Editorial teams should remember that it is forbidden to disclose details of mobilization plans, the number and places of gathering of mobilized people, personal data of conscripts without their consent, and other information that may help the enemy.

Journalists should be careful with sources of information, check their reliability and accuracy. The right choice of sources helps to avoid fakes and manipulations, and the spread of disinformation content. One should turn to reliable sources, primarily official ones (General Staff, Ministry of Defense, Security Service of Ukraine, etc.), lawyers and military experts, and verified volunteer organizations. Information should also be presented in a balanced manner, explaining legislative nuances and necessarily providing official comments from the military or lawyers.

It is needed to be aware of unreliable sources: anonymous telegram channels, propaganda media, presenting testimonies of individuals without verifying the information. It is also important to adhere to ethical standards, not to spread manipulative messages in headlines like “Everyone is being mobilized!”, “Summons will be handed out in supermarkets”, because they harm social stability and can sow panic among the population. As noted above, one should not portray mobilization as something negative, because such materials demotivate Ukrainians, increase fear, and distrust of the authorities.

Given that words shape public perception, it is important to avoid sensationalism and emotional exaggeration. For example, it is better to write neutrally “Mobilization continues by the law” rather than “People are being caught and forced to go to war”. The headline “Clarification of data on those liable for military service” demonstrates a neutral tone of the narrative, while another, “Chaos with the delivery of summonses,” contains evaluative judgments. It is also better to use the wording “Failure to fulfill a duty under the law” rather than “Evasion from mobilization”.

Today, Ukrainian media, which strive to comprehensively, objectively, and fully assess the actions of local government officials and employees of TCK, are exposed to criticism and accusations of playing into the interests of the enemy, since such material can influence the course of mobilization and destabilize the population. To avoid such accusations, media workers often rebroadcast official information when working on publications on the topic of mobilization.

It is not expedient to resort to this, since such a format does not allow the topic to be fully disclosed and questions that concern society to be answered, so they usually remain unanswered, which often creates space for rumors and fakes.

In the context of a full-scale war in Ukraine, the issue of professional responsibility of the media in interpreting socially sensitive topics acquires not only ethical, but also directly communicative, psychological, and information and security significance. In this regard, we outline several promising directions for further scientific research:

- 1) Experimental analysis of the impact of headlines on the perception of socially sensitive content. It is advisable to conduct experiments with variable headlines for the same media text to assess how the type of headline (neutral, emotionally charged, mobilizational, manipulative) affects the emotional state, level of trust, and mobilization guidelines of the audience.
- 2) Audience survey on the perception of sensitive topics in the media. It is important to collect empirical data on the expectations and assessment of journalists' professionalism by content consumers. It is necessary to study which lexical and stylistic decisions inspire trust, support, or, conversely, cause rejection or distrust.
- 3) Content analysis of professional standards in covering mobilization and military topics. A comparative analysis of national and regional media regarding adherence to the principles of balance, reliability, correctness of nominations, and avoidance of hate speech in materials related to mobilization and conscription is relevant.
- 4) Sociolinguistic research of the vocabulary of mobilization communication. It is important to analyze how media nominations are perceived differently by the audience depending on their social and psychological characteristics.
- 5) Research on the media sphere as a mediator of state communication. It is advisable to find out to what extent media professionals fulfill the role of interpreters of official messages, while maintaining the principles of independent, impartial journalism, and how this affects the perception of mobilization rhetoric.
- 6) Development of ethical and professional recommendations. Based on the results of the research, practical recommendations can be created for journalists working with mobilization topics. Particular attention should be paid to the issues of the audience's psycho-emotional safety and socially responsible formation of motivational messages. Therefore, further research should be interdisciplinary, combine linguistic, socio-communicative, psychological, and media ethics approaches, and have both an analytical and applied nature.

4. Conclusion

Analyzing the Ukrainian media space for the availability of journalistic materials on the currently relevant topic of mobilization, we observe that domestic online media outlets have begun to cover this content more emotionally. Even though most publications are written in a neutral tone in compliance with the requirements of information genres, we still record negative and positive practices in presenting this topic, as the number of both negative and positive news has increased. The topic of mobilization processes in Ukraine is not easy for journalists to cover, because on the one hand, they are faced with regular reports from law enforcement agencies about corruption in the mobilization system, and on the other hand, constant public clashes between representatives of recruitment centers and civilians. Since the context of these events is negative, it is extremely difficult for media professionals to write about mobilization in a neutral tone or to cover this phenomenon in a positive direction. Although such news demonstrates an objective presentation of events, it harms the morale of Ukrainians in wartime.

We can summarize that when covering socially sensitive content in the context of the Russo-Ukrainian war, media professionals must be extremely responsible and accurate, adhering to professional standards and ethics, and make the materials more positive against the background of negative public sentiment regarding mobilization processes in Ukraine. It is necessary to cover the topics that most concern Ukrainian society due to mobilization: motivation to fulfil civic duty and voluntary entry into the ranks of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, compliance with legislative norms, the rights of mobilized persons, fairness in decision-making, and effective interaction of the TCK with units of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Examples of good practice include covering stories that are motivational and show examples of successful mobilization. Stories about mobilized persons can be a powerful tool for informing if presented correctly. For example, it can be interviews with servicemen who explain their motivation and duty; stories about the preparation, training, and adaptation of the mobilized, emphasizing the support of the military by their families and society. Such journalistic materials help reduce fear and show mobilization not as coercion, but as a necessary contribution to victory. Media workers should be tolerant and avoid ethically incorrect tokens that can hang “labels” on people whose guilt has not yet been proven. One should not play along with the enemy and show mobilization as a “deliberately planned action” or write about the actions of the TCK in a negative light.

We understand that when covering such a socially important topic during martial law, journalists have certain restrictions on disseminating complete information, which may create difficulties in their work. However, even in wartime, the media must make every effort to honestly, fully, and objectively inform the public. Journalists must undoubtedly adhere to professional standards (reliability, accuracy, completeness, accessibility of information, balance of opinions and points of view, separation of facts from value judgments), as well as ethical norms, to ensure high-quality coverage of socially sensitive topics important to all Ukrainians.

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