

Trust in journalism in Ukraine: Challenges and prospects in wartime

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Abstract

This article investigates the dynamics of media trust in Ukraine amid the ongoing armed conflict initiated by Russia and explores avenues for enhancing journalism education. Based on a comprehensive analysis that includes a survey of 500 university students from major regions of Ukraine, the study demonstrates that trust in official media sources surged during the early stages of the full-scale invasion—as citizens demanded timely, transparent information—but later declined due to information fatigue and critical scrutiny of unilateral communication formats. Despite these shifts, interest in news has remained consistently high throughout the war, reflecting the vital role of journalism in society. The survey revealed that 94% of respondents primarily rely on digital platforms (notably Telegram) for updates. Moreover, only 20% of participants rated their media literacy as high, underscoring a critical need for improved fact-checking and analytical skills. Additionally, the article highlights the crucial role of artificial intelligence (AI) in enhancing media literacy by automating verification processes and supporting deeper critical analysis, a capability that can be effectively used as an instrument in the fight against disinformation. In light of these developments, the article highlights the urgent need to reform journalism education by integrating comprehensive media literacy and fact-checking modules, fostering interdisciplinary approaches, and strengthening critical thinking skills. The sustained prestige of the journalism profession—despite its risks—underscores the necessity of these reforms, which will equip future journalists to counter disinformation and media manipulation while ensuring the resilience of democratic discourse in an increasingly volatile information environment.

Keywords: War, media trust, information warfare, journalism education, media literacy, digital platforms, martial law, disinformation, Ukraine, students, artificial intelligence

Introduction

The Reuters Institute Report (Reuters, 2024) indicates that deliberate news avoidance has risen to 39%, with this percentage of people worldwide reporting that they avoid news, particularly due to prolonged conflicts such as the war in Ukraine. Consequently, the challenges posed by the proliferation of disinformation, malicious

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information manipulation, and societal polarization are intensifying and rank among the top five global risks (world economic forum global risks report 2025).

Trust in journalism is an essential element of a democratic society, as it enables citizens to obtain reliable information necessary for making informed decisions and holding power accountable. Journalism is an intermediary between the government and society, fostering transparency and democratic accountability (Garusi & Leonhardt, 2024). Its primary role is to provide rigorously verified information that empowers citizens to adapt effectively to a changing environment (Kalogeropoulos, Newman, & Fletcher, 2024). Under extraordinary circumstances, trust in journalism becomes pivotal for ensuring governmental transparency and accountability (Toff, Kalogeropoulos, & Nielsen, 2024). The imposition of martial law and constraints on media freedom present a significant challenge to journalism: maintaining objectivity while addressing matters of national interest (Garusi & Leonhardt, 2024).

On the night of 23–24 February 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, continuing the aggression that began in 2014 and prompting the imposition of martial law. In crises, timely and reliable information is essential—even life-saving. Over the subsequent three years, news consumption has remained high as the war persists and many individuals have family members or close acquaintances involved in combat (Ukrainian media landscape 2022–2024).

Shortly after the invasion commenced, Ukraine introduced the “Unified Telethon,” uniting all national television channels to broadcast uniform content. There has been a shift in the structure of the information landscape. Television is now dominated by a single channel, which is a drastic change from the pre-war situation, where multiple channels competed and were owned by different oligarchs. Initially justified as a crisis measure, its effectiveness was questioned due to censorship and diminishing trust in official media. By 2023, a decline in confidence in the Unified Telethon drove audiences to seek alternative information sources, indicating a gradual erosion of television’s role as the primary news medium (KIIS, 2024).

Simultaneously, Russian disinformation targeting Ukraine increased considerably, aiming to influence both Ukrainians and citizens in supportive countries (Reporters without borders, 2023; Reuters, 2024). Russia actively employs modern media platforms—

including social networks, messaging apps, and artificial intelligence—to propagate disinformation and propaganda. These campaigns have escalated to include direct incitements to hostility, the denial of Ukrainian statehood, and the encouragement of war crimes (Kyiv international cyber resilience forum, 2025).

In the context of conflict, digital literacy has assumed critical importance. Recent studies indicate that improved media literacy enhances the ability to detect fake news and manipulative messaging (Detector Media, 2024; OPORA, 2024). The Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine (MDTU, 2023) has implemented initiatives to foster critical thinking and information analysis skills, which are vital for countering disinformation. This issue is especially urgent in higher education, where future journalists must be equipped to discern reliable data from disinformation amid ongoing informational challenges.

Statement of problem

The study aims to identify key factors influencing trust in journalism amid wartime conditions and socio-political changes in Ukraine. Special attention is given to analyzing trust levels among journalism students and integrating the findings into educational curricula to enhance transparency, professionalism, and ethical standards in journalism. Such an analysis can also help predict the level of national trust in journalism by comparing journalism students' trust with the overall national sentiment. Furthermore, understanding the level of trust journalism students have in the media products of their senior colleagues is crucial for forecasting the future development of journalism in the country.

Research hypothesis

In wartime Ukraine, the increasing demand for reliable and timely information provokes a two-phase transformation in public trust toward the media. Initially, particularly during the full-scale invasion, Ukrainians, including students, exhibit heightened trust in official sources (e.g., national television and state-run Telegram channels) due to the urgent need for stable governmental messaging and transparent communication. Over time, however, factors such as information fatigue, homogeneous

media formats (e.g., Telethon), and the growing appeal of digital alternatives (e.g., Telegram, YouTube, Instagram) have led to a decline in trust in official media, with audiences increasingly turning to independent projects and alternative sources. This shift is accompanied by media literacy and the development of critical thinking among youth, underscoring the pressing need to reform journalism education by incorporating modern fact-checking tools and digital information analysis.

Research objectives

- Analyze sociological data to assess the dynamics of public trust in media.
- Determine the impact of wartime conditions on students' media perceptions.
- Measure media trust among the target audience using quantitative (standardized surveys) and qualitative methods (semi-structured interviews, content analysis of educational programs).
- Develop recommendations to optimize journalism education, fostering critical thinking and effective countermeasures against contemporary information threats.

Literature review

Analysis of media trust in Ukrainian studies

Media trust in Ukraine is a critical issue amid full-scale armed conflict and socio-political change. Several organizations have systematically measured citizens' trust in media through annual surveys (Ukrainian media landscape, 2022–2024). These studies indicate that before 2014, media trust was moderate; however, following the Donbass conflict and ensuing Russian hybrid aggression, public reliance shifted toward independent, pro-Ukrainian sources.

After the February 2022 full-scale invasion, trust in official sources and national television surged—exemplified by the Unified Telethon—with reported trust rates of 65–70% for government messages, approximately 60% for the telethon, and 40–50% for reputable Telegram channels, although anonymous channels remain largely distrusted (KIIS,

2024). Over time, however, this trust has declined, with surveys by KIIS (2024) reporting a drop from 43% in December 2023 to 36% by February 2024, prompting audiences to seek alternative sources.

Concurrently, Russian disinformation campaigns have intensified, aiming to undermine Ukrainian statehood and incite hostility (reporters without borders, 2023, Reuters, 2024). The rapid rise of digital platforms—especially social media and messaging apps—has contributed to media space fragmentation and the formation of “information bubbles.”

Enhanced digital literacy is crucial for discerning credible news from disinformation. Recent studies show that improved media literacy strengthens critical news consumption (Detector Media, 2024; OPORA, 2024), prompting initiatives by the Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine (MDTU, 2023) aimed at boosting critical thinking and analytical skills.

Overall, the multifaceted challenge of media trust in Ukraine—driven by social media influence, state regulation, and evolving consumption patterns—calls for further interdisciplinary research and comprehensive policy reforms. Faculty of Journalism at Grinchenko University routinely assesses Ukrainian students' trust in journalism (Hutsol & Hutsol, 2024; Balabanova, 2024). Given the importance and relevance of this topic, we conducted a new study in April 2025 to further assess shifting media trust trends among university students.

Research methodology

The study uses a multidisciplinary approach to examine how wartime conditions, free speech restrictions, and disinformation affect journalism students' trust in media. Its goal is to analyze students' information practices, counter-disinformation strategies, and the need to enhance educational programs on modern methods, including AI technologies. In the first phase, an online survey of journalism students from various Ukrainian higher education institutions gathered data on news consumption, trust in media sources and fact-checking skills. The survey data were analyzed using statistical software. For deeper insights, the study conducted semi-structured interviews and a content analysis of media

literacy educational resources, comparing current data with past findings to clarify wartime media trust dynamics. The integrated results highlight the relationship between wartime conditions and media trust, while also identifying the educational needs of future journalists regarding disinformation. Ethical standards were maintained through informed consent and data anonymization.

Findings

To test the hypothesis, an online survey was conducted among students from five Ukrainian universities. This study builds on a pilot survey conducted in December 2023, in which 205 students from three institutions—Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University, Vinnytsia National Technical University, and Chernihiv Polytechnic—responded. The follow-up survey was carried out in April 2025. The study surveyed 500 students from five universities: Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Vinnytsia National Technical University, Lviv Polytechnic, and Vasyl Stefanyk Prykarpattian National University. These institutions collectively represent higher education across Ukraine, excluding the eastern regions. Universities were selected based on their willingness to participate and the feasibility of conducting in-person surveys; however, a formal sampling procedure was not employed.

The respondents, aged 17–21 years, answered 18 questions regarding their media consumption habits, trust in media, perceived media manipulation, and media literacy, as well as their views on potential new electives in their curricula. Notably, the gender distribution shifted from 63.8% female (in 2023) to 81.6% female in 2025, with corresponding percentages for male respondents at 38.7% and 18.4%, respectively.

When asked about their frequency of news consumption across various media (television, newspapers, internet, radio), 63.8% of respondents reported reading the news frequently, 32.7% occasionally, and only 3.6% rarely. This high engagement indicates a strong interest in sociopolitical processes, reflecting an active and concerned student demographic, likely influenced by the ongoing war and the fact that many respondents have relatives or close acquaintances actively involved in the conflict.

Discussion

Journalism in wartime: A profession under threat and the rising prestige of journalism

In Ukraine today, journalism has become one of the most dangerous yet vital professions, demanding unwavering presence at the heart of events—amid death, destruction, and violence—while risking one's own life. In combat zones, journalists face constant, life-threatening dangers, yet their work remains indispensable.

Since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, 125 Ukrainian media professionals have been killed while fulfilling their duties or defending the country on the battlefield (NUJU, 2025). Additionally, over 30 media workers and citizen journalists remain in Russian captivity, including five women, who face torture and fabricated terrorism charges (Ukrinform, 2025).

Journalism is not simply a profession—it is a lifelong mission. Despite overwhelming challenges, most Ukrainian journalists continue reporting, ensuring that even the most vulnerable regions receive essential, timely news. Nowhere in Ukraine is truly safe for journalists. Russian missiles and drones deliberately target television studios, newsrooms, and media infrastructure in both frontline cities and deeper within the country. War correspondents are particularly vulnerable—every hotel near the front lines, where journalists traditionally stayed, has been bombed. Moreover, Russian forces employ a brutal "double-strike" tactic, intentionally launching second missile attacks aimed at rescuers, medics, and journalists (NUJU, 2024).

Following the invasion, 40% of Ukrainian media companies were forced to close due to security threats and financial hardship (NUJU, 2024). Despite these dangers, most journalists remain in Ukraine, committed to their work. Remarkably, young Ukrainians continue to pursue journalism, fully aware of its risks and responsibilities in defending their nation's information sovereignty.

In 2025, 61 higher education institutions in Ukraine will offer journalism programs, reflecting a deep and enduring interest among young professionals in shaping the country's media landscape (Education.ua, 2025). Nearly all of these universities endure relentless bombing attacks, forcing them to adapt to wartime realities. Shelters have become an integral part of campus infrastructure, ensuring a measure of protection for students and

faculty. Yet, the walls of these institutions also bear witness to profound loss—memorial walls honoring fallen students and faculty continue to grow, a tragic testament to the devastating toll of the war on Ukraine's academic community.

We aimed to study how students perceive news information in wartime conditions while acknowledging the specific limitations that exist in such circumstances. The research itself remains objective, but the reality is complex. Complete transparency is difficult due to wartime restrictions—governments do not disclose data on casualties, military operations, or infrastructure damage. Additionally, information about government misconduct, abuse of power, and corruption is often limited or selectively reported, making it harder for citizens to access a full picture of political and institutional accountability. However, we took these factors into account when conducting the study. The paradox is that much of this information is already accessible on social networks and YouTube, while official sources either do not publish it or do so with delays. This study examines the challenges of the wartime information landscape and analyzes how students navigate and interpret news in these conditions.

Since the beginning of the war, the government has used official channels to broadcast positive mobilizing information. However, over time, Ukrainians began to perceive this approach as lacking objectivity, leading to a decline in trust and a shift away from traditional media toward alternative sources. This trend is evident not only in national studies but is also confirmed by the results of our survey.

As shown in Figure 1 regarding trust in media, the 2025 survey revealed that 77.5% of respondents predominantly trust the media while remaining alert to the possibility of manipulative presentation; 19.5% mainly distrust the media, 2.5% expressed complete trust, and 0.5% reported complete distrust. In comparison, the 2023 survey found that 88.1% of students expressed partial trust, 6.4% complete trust, and 5.4% complete distrust. These results suggest a significant increase in skepticism among students over time.

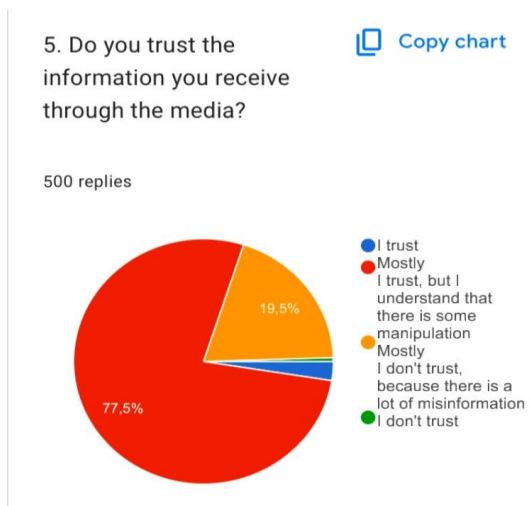


Figure 1.

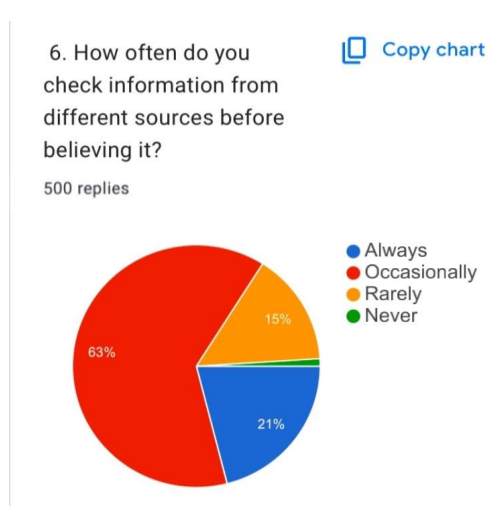


Figure 2.

The decline in trust—shifting from relatively high levels in 2023 to heightened skepticism in 2025, may be linked to a growing awareness of media manipulation in the context of ongoing conflict. According to Figure 2, students exhibit an active approach to verifying received information: 21% always fact-check news, 63% do so occasionally, 15% rarely verify, and only 1% never verify. This pattern indicates a high level of critical thinking and caution in media consumption. Moreover, **Figure 3** highlights young people's critical stance toward official information sources, reinforcing a broader societal trend in Ukraine.

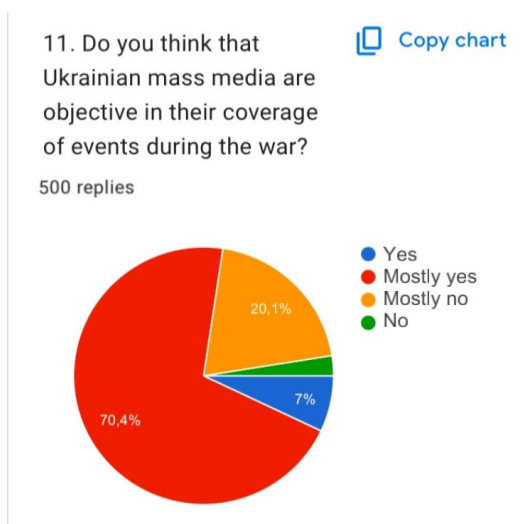


Figure 3.

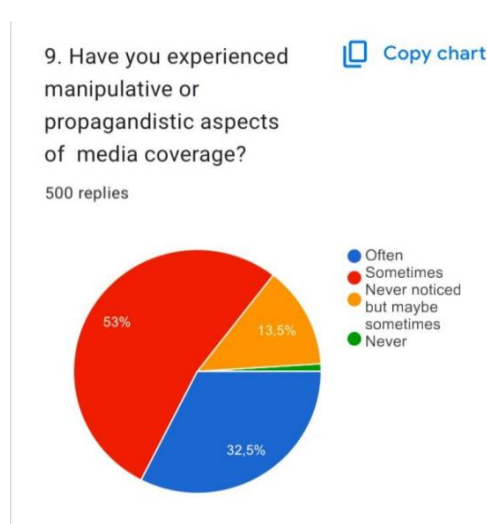


Figure 4.

This rising skepticism toward institutional media is shaping how younger generations engage with news and information during crises, presenting a dual challenge

for media organizations: maintaining the integrity of factual, unbiased reporting while mitigating the influence of political manipulation.

The survey on news and information sources confirmed a prevailing tendency toward social media usage. Specifically, 94% of respondents reported primarily receiving news via Telegram channels, followed by news websites (45.5%), international media (40.5%), public media (22.5%), and the telethon (7.5%). This diversity in sources suggests a strong desire for rapid and varied information that may be less subject to filtering. Most students tend to passively consume content, relying primarily on social networks rather than professional media. Key challenges include low trust in traditional media, high trust in unverified influencers, difficulty distinguishing facts from opinions (notably on platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Telegram, & TikTok), and a tendency to interpret subjective content as objective. Moreover, manipulative techniques (e.g., clickbait, emotional headlines, & out-of-context information) are often not recognized, while fake news and disinformation are actively disseminated via messaging applications, particularly during crises.

It is plausible that a pro-government information campaign advocating for restrictions or a total ban on Telegram in Ukraine during 2024–2025 contributed to its surge in popularity (94% usage). For example, in October 2024, the National Council for Television and Radio Broadcasting of Ukraine—the principal state regulator of the information space—issued calls for an expedited complete ban on Telegram for Ukrainian residents (TSN, 2024). Nevertheless, Telegram has emerged as the primary source for urgent news, such as air raid alerts, explosions, attacks, and official government announcements, due to its ability to instantaneous messages dissemination. Amid declining trust in traditional media and the limited alternatives provided by the telethon, Telegram has fostered source pluralism by featuring both official and independent outlets, including investigative journalists, analysts, and volunteers. Telegram channels often publish exclusive insights, unofficial analyses, and on-site photographs that do not appear in mainstream news feeds, appealing to audiences who wish to be “in the know” before others. Consequently, according to data from Kantar and Inter-news (2023–2024), Telegram has emerged as the leading social network for news consumption in Ukraine.

It is evident that the degree of media influence—and its perceived effectiveness—depends significantly on both the intensity and manipulative nature of the media’s impact,

as well as on the recipients' critical thinking and media literacy skills. Media literacy is crucial for distinguishing reliable information from noise, maintaining emotional and psychological resilience, averting mass panic, and making informed decisions based on verified information. In times of war, media literacy is indispensable for protecting one's life (Filter, 2024).

Regarding media literacy, 66.5% of students rate their level as average, and 20% as high. Figure 4 illustrates that in terms of identifying manipulative aspects in media coverage, only 13.5% reported that they had never noticed such elements, while an additional 1% completely denied their presence, indicating that a substantial majority are aware of potential propagandistic and manipulative techniques. Survey responses on effective methods for teaching media literacy reveal that 38.2% of respondents support a comprehensive approach (combining lectures, practical exercises, and workshops), 23.6% prefer solely practical exercises, and 21.6% favor workshops alone. Furthermore, 45.5% of students are fully satisfied with existing curricula, and 41% are partially satisfied. As shown in Figure 5, students are motivated to improve their media literacy skills: 25.1% have attended relevant courses, 50.8% have not yet participated but are willing to do so, and only 10.6% express no interest in such training.

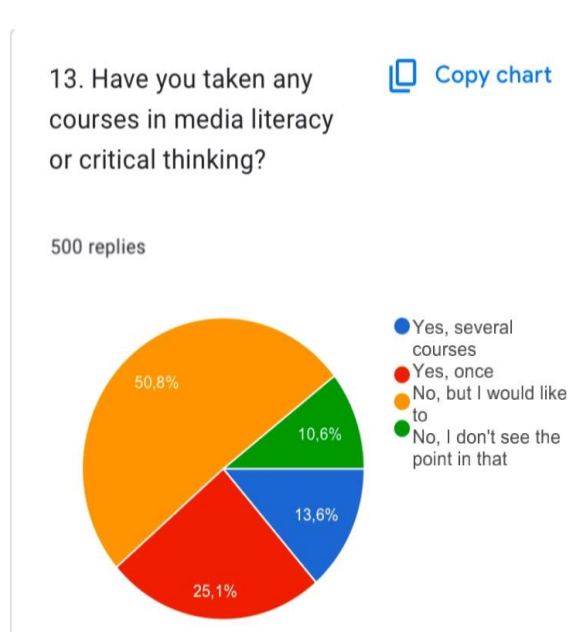


Figure 5.

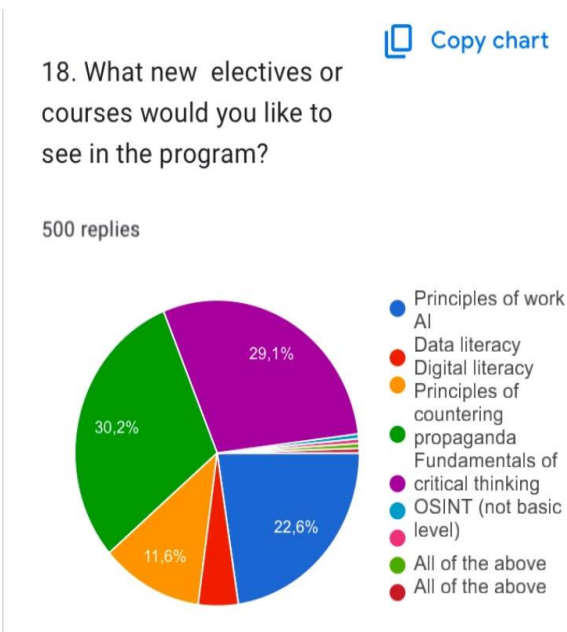


Figure 6.

As shown in Figure 6, interest in new elective courses was highlighted by the survey results. Specifically, 30.2% of students support courses on countering propaganda, 29.1%

favor classes on the fundamentals of critical thinking, and 22.6% endorse learning about the principles of artificial intelligence (AI).

An additional survey was conducted among approximately 80 undergraduate journalism students (aged 16–19) enrolled in an “Advertising and Public Relations” program. Respondents answered two supplementary questions beyond the socio-demographic items: (1) how frequently do you use AI (e.g., ChatGPT)? And (2) Do you use AI to verify the credibility of information (texts, podcasts, videos), and if so, which applications or platforms do you use? Approximately 52% of respondents reported using AI “frequently,” 47% “occasionally,” and nearly none selected “rarely.” However, only about 35% indicated that they use AI for information verification, with ChatGPT emerging as the most popular tool for this purpose.

According to data from the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS, 2023), 80% of Ukrainian citizens now access the Internet daily, an increase of 8% over 2023. Although the Razumkov Center reported that only 14% of Ukrainians used AI in daily life (Razumkov Center, 2023), the true figure is likely higher due to the integration of many AI services within common digital platforms. Generative AI models—such as GPT-4 and Gemini—are becoming increasingly widespread and accessible for everyday users in Ukraine, automating routine tasks and enhancing educational productivity

AI plays a significant role in enhancing media literacy by providing new avenues for fact-checking and critical analysis. For example, the NewsGuard platform employs algorithms to assess the credibility of news sources and assign reliability ratings, thereby helping users distinguish accurate information from misleading content (NewsGuard, n.d.). Similarly, the Ukrainian company OSAVUL has developed an AI-driven platform that detects disinformation and counters propaganda, particularly from Russian sources, by analyzing online content using machine learning and natural language processing techniques. In addition, the Mantis Analytics platform monitors the information space in real time, quickly identifying coordinated information attacks and hostile narratives, which supports state agencies and security services in counteracting disinformation campaigns (OSAVUL, n.d.; Mantis Analytics, n.d.).

In summary, the intensification of Russian aggressive information campaigns during the war in Ukraine creates an urgent need for integrated measures to improve digital literacy, strengthen cyber defense, and enhance the capacity to counter propaganda. These

factors are critical for maintaining a stable information environment, fostering media trust among students, and advancing quality journalism in Ukraine.

Conclusions and recommendations

An analysis of media trust dynamics in Ukraine confirms that socio-political transformations and wartime realities have significantly shaped perceptions of journalism. The primary threat significantly impacting journalism and journalism education remains Russian aggression. Targeted attacks on journalists, destruction of media infrastructure, the tactic of double missile strikes on civilian sites—including universities—and the systematic use of disinformation all create unprecedented challenges for freedom of speech and the professional activities of media workers and educators.

At the same time, state regulation of the information space should not take on an overly restrictive character, as excessive limitations lead to a decline in trust in official news channels, a trend reflected in our research. Journalism students increasingly turn to alternative sources, including Telegram channels, YouTube, and independent media projects. Today, verifying information obtained from traditional or online media has become a common practice for consumers. Surveyed students increasingly evaluate sources critically, analyze the reliability of data, and pay attention to potential manipulation. However, only 20% of students rated their media literacy skills as high, and fewer than half expressed satisfaction with the quality of media education in their institutions. This gap highlights a pressing need for stronger educational frameworks that equip students to navigate the complexities of modern information landscapes.

To address these challenges, integrating media literacy across all journalism disciplines is essential. Universities must go beyond technical training, ensuring students develop the skills to analyze, verify, and critically assess information—ultimately fostering a deeper understanding of democracy and media culture.

Educational programs should incorporate AI-driven tools for content analysis and misinformation detection, alongside hands-on crisis training, interdisciplinary approaches to media studies, and resilience-building workshops to help students navigate trauma, information overload, and manipulative narratives. Media literacy must also be framed as a

civic responsibility, reinforcing democratic principles, fact-checking skills, ethical journalism, and public awareness. Furthermore, journalism education should draw from real-world examples, showcasing the experiences of war reporters, investigative journalists, and those providing life-saving information in crisis zones. By studying the courage, integrity, and accountability of these professionals, students will gain a deeper appreciation for the role of journalism in safeguarding truth and democratic values.

These recommendations aim to prepare a new generation of journalists who are adept at critical digital analysis, capable of identifying and countering propaganda, and committed to upholding democratic values in times of both global and local crises (Schafer et al., 2024; Reporters Without Borders, 2023). Integrating these measures into journalism education is expected to reinforce media trust and strengthen the quality and ethical standards of journalism in Ukraine.

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Ask not what your community can do for you: The democratic contribution of journalism education's WIL pedagogy

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Abstract

While most research into Work Integrated Learning in the journalism discipline focusses on benefits to students, this paper concentrates on knowledge and value-creation that WIL projects contribute to the wider community. Using Barnett's philosophy of knowledge co-creation (2000; 2011; 2017; 2024) this paper analyses a learning and teaching project in which first year RMIT journalism students profiled all candidates who were standing in one of four LGAs in Melbourne's west during the 2024 Victorian local government elections for the hyperlocal news outlet, The Westsider. This paper analyses The Westsider's readership statistics to draw conclusions about the democratic and social potential of journalism education's WIL pedagogy. Based on these conclusions, this paper puts forward a new 'JFK' WIL model. This is particularly important in the current climate where community news is rapidly filling the democratic void left by the implosion of the commercial local news sector (Simons & Dickson, 2019; Hess & Waller, 2016). By shifting the emphasis from the classroom to the community, the paper is able to reveal the value of tertiary journalism education WIL programs to wider social processes when collaborating with multiple stakeholders – in this instance, industry, local government and community leaders.

Keywords: *Hyperlocal; community journalism; journalism education; Ronald Barnett; knowledge co-creation; Ecological University.*

Introduction

WIL (Work Integrated Learning) is a keystone of journalism education pedagogy (Dodd et. al., 2018; Skinner, et. al., 2001; Bromley, 2012). Commonly known as the 'hospital model', WIL can be broadly defined as "a range of approaches and strategies that integrate theory with the practice of work within a purposely designed curriculum" (Patrick et. al., 2008: p. v). There are a number of Journalism WIL models that have emerged since the turn of the century that have moved journalism from the traditional internship model (where students spend a specified number of hours in the newsroom of an industry partner), to newsroom simulations in the classroom and event-based

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