

RESPONSE OF THE MEDIA TO THE WAR: THE CASE OF UKRAINE'S *UNITED NEWS* TELETHON¹

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Abstract: *In the conditions of war, the conflicting parties use the available means of communication to interact with the public and to achieve their strategic goals. The rapid development of communication technologies provides new communication opportunities. Even though the current war of the Russian Federation against Ukraine is called “The First Social Media War”, a powerful information role was played by television, particularly the United News telethon, founded by the largest media groups of Ukraine in the first days of the war. Media channels stopped their separate broadcasting and divided a common telecast among them to inform 24/7. The article analyses the achievements of this new practice of news reporting, particularly the consolidation of society, the influence on public opinion and support for government decisions, the provision of objective and verified information, the fight against fakes, the ability of channels to survive in wartime, etc. However, the unification of the news presentation format is criticised due to the uniformity of the content, the lack of alternative points of view, and the dominance of the authorities in the media space. The possible transformation/disappearance of the United News telethon is outlined.*

Keywords: *war, media, communication, media space, public opinion, United News telethon.*

Rezumat: *Răspunsul mass-media războiului. Cazul teledonului ucrainean „Știri*

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¹ This study was conducted in the framework of the Jean Monnet Module “EU Strategic Communications: Counteraction to Destructive Influences” (No.101047033 ERASMUS-JMO-2021-MODULE).

unite". În condiții de război, părțile aflate în conflict folosesc mijloacele de comunicare disponibile pentru a interacționa cu publicul și pentru a-și atinge obiectivele strategice. Dezvoltarea rapidă a tehnologiilor de comunicare oferă noi oportunități de comunicare. Chiar dacă actualul război al Federației Ruse împotriva Ucrainei se numește „Primul Război Social Media”, un rol informațional puternic l-a jucat televiziunea, în special teledonul United News, fondat de cele mai mari grupuri media din Ucraina în primele zile ale războiului. Canalele media și-au oprit difuzarea separată și au împărțit o transmisie comună între ele pentru a informa 24 ore din 24. Articolul analizează realizările acestei noi practici de reportaj de știri – în special consolidarea societății, influența asupra opiniei publice și sprijinirea deciziilor guvernamentale, furnizarea de informații obiective și verificate, lupta împotriva falsurilor, capacitatea canalelor de a supraviețui în timp de război etc. Cu toate acestea, unificarea formatului de prezentare a știrilor este criticată din cauza uniformității conținutului, a lipsei de puncte de vedere alternative și a dominației autorităților în spațiul media. Se subliniază posibila transformare/dispariție a teledonului United News.

INTRODUCTION

From the point of view of the media, war is a “story to be continued” where there are tension, unexpected turns of the “plot” and strong emotions. Consequently, any news about the war is sure to attract an audience and the media enter into fierce competition for exclusive material. However, media behaviour in times of war is significantly different from activities in peacetime because journalists interact with sensitive content and must be aware of and predict all the consequences of what they are talking about. In other words, reporters are not only able to unite and support citizens but also to incite hatred and provoke destructive actions. In addition, media professionals find themselves in the line of “crossfire” (not only in the literal sense) between politicians and pressure from the military, which also significantly affects the balance between objectivity, impartiality and the search for strong emotions.

Russia began aggression against Ukraine in 2014 and such media groups as *Inter*, *StarLightMedia*, *Ukraina* and *1+1* (23 TV channels in total), which represented the interests of certain political forces and oligarchs, used reports about the course of the military campaign to position political parties and their leaders.² Before 2014, the political struggle took place around the topic of social protection

² Roman Kravets, *Televizor i vybory. Koho pidtrymuyut' Akhmetov, Pinchuk, Kolomoys'kyi i Firtash*. [Television and elections. Who are supported by Akhmetov, Pinchuk, Kolomoisky and Firtash], in “Ukrayinska Pravda”, December 7, 2018, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2018/12/7/7200495/> (Accessed on 23.04.2023).

of the population. Since 2014, proposals for conflict resolution have become a “field of discord”. However, throughout 2014, in a situation of uncertainty, unexpected and incomprehensible threat, the Ukrainian media performed their function of rallying Ukrainian citizens to oppose the enemy. During this period, even political disagreements disappeared from the media space. However, the media and citizens gradually got used to the war. The next Presidential and Verkhovna Rada elections were approaching. And the media again began to concentrate on political problems and interests which led to the polarisation of Ukrainian society and the strengthening of protest sentiments.³

February 24, 2022, was a turning point for the media sphere in Ukraine. Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine violated both the state and information borders of the country. Ukrainian media faced new conditions and requests. To provide citizens with all the necessary information promptly – from air alerts and possible missile strikes to events on the front – some Media Holdings in Ukraine united and started working 24/7. This is how the *United News* telethon was formed – a unique example of the joint coordinated activity of journalists (of previously competing channels) in the conditions of war.

Arnaud Mercier claims that “each conflict since the advent of war correspondents has seen innovations in the realm of media coverage: mobilising an entire nation by means of a censored press (WWI), radio and cinema used as a means of mass propaganda and mobilisation (WWII), more mobile filming equipment and an increase in the number of international journalists sent to the combat zone (Vietnam War), live satellite links and the appearance of the CNN worldwide non-stop news network (1991 Gulf War), and a globalised media scene, with several competing non-stop news channels representing opposing views on the issues (latest wars in Afghanistan and Iraq)”⁴.

We intend to scrutinise a new media practice, i.e., telethon, created under

³ Yuriy Pavlenko, Oleksiy Haran et al., *Vyborcha kampaniya 2020: u 2019-mu vsi media byly v odnu tochku, zaraz my povernulysya do oliharkhichnoho plyuralizmu. Opytuvannya ekspertiv i politykiv. Chastyna II* [The 2020 election campaign: in 2019, all the media hit the same spot, now we are back to oligarchic pluralism. Survey of experts and politicians. Part II], in “Detector Media”, October 28, 2020, <https://detector.media/infospace/article/181962/2020-10-28-vyborcha-kampaniya-2020-u-2019-mu-vsi-media-byly-v-odnu-tochku-zaraz-my-povernulysya-do-oligarkhichnogo-plyuralizmu-opytuvannya-ekspertiv-i-politykiv-chastyna-ii/> (Accessed on 23.04.2023).

⁴ Arnaud Mercier, *War and media: Constancy and Convulsion*, in “International Review of the Red Cross”, Vol. 87, № 860, December 2005, p. 653, <https://www.corteidh.or.cr/tablas/a21918.pdf> (Accessed on 02.07.2023).

the conditions of the RF invasion of Ukraine. We assume that the *United News* telethon shaped the attitude of Ukrainians towards the war, in particular, the broad support of Ukrainian citizens to resist the enemy both on the battlefield and in public space. Therefore, we aim 1) to investigate whether the *United News* telethon fulfilled its main mission, i.e., to be a source of objective information, to consolidate society, to provide moral support to citizens; 2) to analyse the observance of journalistic standards in war conditions; 3) to find out the prospects for the transformation/closing of the telethon.

The research period covers February 24, 2022–March 24, 2023. The *United News* telethon was watched. The official reports of the *Ministry of Culture and Information Policy* (<https://mkip.gov.ua/>) and the *Institute of Mass Information* (journalistic analytical centre) (<https://imi.org.ua/>), the *Detector Media* monitoring and research of media landscape in Ukraine (<https://en.detector.media/>) and statistical data of the *Rating Sociological Group* and *InMind* company were analysed.

The methodological basis of the research includes the theory of framing⁵, i.e., how the media packages and presents information, for instance, about the war, the enemy and the Armed Forces of Ukraine, to the public; agenda-setting theory⁶, i.e., the more attention the media gives to certain issues, for instance, the heroic battle for the Ukrainian cities and settlements, the more likely the public will be to label those issues as vital ones; mediatization theory⁷ which outlines social changes “caused” by mass media, for example, the change of attitude to everything related to Russia. The authors have applied a complex of general theoretical methods, i.e., deduction, induction, generalisation and synthesis as well as the principles of scientific objectivity, comparison, reliability and analysis.

This paper contributes to furthering the understanding of the complex relations between war and media and provides insights into how media, specifically TV, respond to war, can shape public opinion, and unite the society to fight the aggressor. However, the research does not give a detailed analysis of the media impact on war outcomes; it could be the focus of further study.

⁵ Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*, New York, NY et al., Harper & Row, 1974.

⁶ James Dearing and Everett Rogers, *Agenda-Setting*, Thousand Oaks, CA Sage, 1996.

⁷ Andreas Hepp, *Mediatization and the 'molding force' of the media*, in “Communication”, 37 (1), 2012, p. 7, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/276202928_Mediatization_and_the_'molding_force'_of_the_media/references (Accessed on 12.07.2023).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The issues of media coverage and propaganda in war were not overlooked by scholars. For instance, V. Bratic has analysed the history of media use in conflicts since ancient times⁸. In *Propaganda and Conflict: War, Media and Shaping the Twentieth Century*, the authors explore the changing interactions of media, propaganda and diplomacy, specifically WWI, demonstrating that the media could shape public opinion which politicians feared; these tendencies intensified in WWII.⁹ G. S. Jowett examined propaganda from a historical perspective claiming that the WWI marked a watershed in the development of propaganda techniques.¹⁰ S. Aday analysed the relations between the news media and US foreign policy with particular emphasis on war.¹¹ Propaganda and genocidal campaigns were researched by A. Des Forges¹² and L. Kirschke.¹³ Myths of war and in war, communication and culture in peacetime and war, military-industrial communication complex and censorship in the Gulf War were the research topics in *Communication and Culture in War and Peace*.¹⁴

Analysing the role of media in recent wars, Hoskins and O'Loughlin¹⁵ identified three phases of conflict mediatisation, namely, 1) the broadcast war during the 1990s with the dominant role of international news channels, such as CNN; 2)

⁸ Vladimir Bratic, *Examining peace-oriented media in areas of violent conflict*, in "International Communication Gazette", Vol.70, Issue 6, 2008, p. 487-503, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1748048508096397> (Accessed on 19.03.2023).

⁹ Mark Connelly, Jo Fox, Stefan Goebel and Ulf Schmidt (Eds.), *Propaganda and Conflict: War, Media and Shaping the Twentieth Century*, Bloomsbury Academic, 2019.

¹⁰ Garth S. Jowett, *Propaganda and communication: The re-emergence of a research tradition*, in "Journal of Communication", 37 (1), 1987, p. 97-114.

¹¹ Sean Aday, *The US Media, Foreign Policy and Public Support for War*, in Kate Kenski, Kathleen Hall Jamieson (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook on Political Communication*, Oxford University Press, 2017, p. 315-332.

¹² Alison Des Forges, *Leave none to tell the story: Genocide in Rwanda*, New York: Human Rights Watch, 1999, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2020/12/rwanda-leave-none-to-tell-the-story.pdf (Accessed 08.06.2023).

¹³ Linda Kirschke, *Broadcasting genocide; censorship, propaganda, & state-sponsored violence in Rwanda 1990-1994*, London, ARTICLE 19, 1996, <https://www.article19.org/data/files/pdfs/publications/rwanda-broadcasting-genocide.pdf> (Accessed 08.06.2023).

¹⁴ Colleen Roach (Ed.), *Communication and Culture in War and Peace*, Sage Publications, 1993.

¹⁵ Andrew Hoskins and Ben O'Loughlin, *Arrested War: The Third Phase of Mediatisation*, in "Information, Communication and Society", 18 (11), 2015, p. 1320-1338.

the “diffused war” during the 2000s when the internet and social media offered new possibilities to distribute information and documents; and 3) the “arrested war” in which professional media and military institutions can control social media dynamics and use them for their own needs.

Ph. Taylor, in his book *Munitions of the Mind*, suggests that, in a nuclear age, we need peace propagandists – people whose job is to increase communication, understanding and dialogue between different peoples with different beliefs. A gradual process of explanation will generate greater trust and therefore greater empathy and consensus will emerge. Fear, hypocrisy and ignorance are the principal enemies of peace and peaceful coexistence.¹⁶ In *War, Media and Propaganda: A Global Perspective*, D. Miller claims that in wartime “the “unfriendly” information should be destroyed, wherever it comes from”.¹⁷

To some extent, war reporting contradicts the normative foundations of journalism, i.e., to present all sides of a conflict, to have some kind of neutrality,¹⁸ as journalists are supposed to support their “own side”¹⁹, to employ a patriotic framework of reporting and cover events that threaten the well-being of their nation.²⁰

Analysing the impact of wars on the evolution of the media over several centuries and following WWI, K. Jones claimed that “War not only creates a supply of news but a demand for it”.²¹ In other words, war makes media thrive. Referring to the period of WWI, H. Laswell focused on the power of mass media influence on audience attitudes: “After the Civil War, the American nation was a warm friend

¹⁶ Philip M. Taylor, *Munitions of the mind: A history of propaganda from the ancient world to the present era* (3rd ed.), Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 2003, p. 324, <https://cryptome.org/2013/01/aaron-swartz/Mind-Munitions.pdf> (Accessed 18.03.2023).

¹⁷ David Miller, *Information Dominance: The Philosophy of Total Propaganda Control?*, in Yahya R. Kamalipour, Nancy Snow (Eds.), *War, Media and Propaganda: A global Perspective*, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004, p. 9.

¹⁸ Allan Stuart, Barbie Zelizer (Eds.), *Reporting war. Journalism in Wartime*, London and New York, Routledge, 2004, p. 4-5.

¹⁹ Piers Robinson, Stuart Allan, Barbie Zelizer (Eds.), *Researching US media-state relations and twenty-first century wars*, in *Reporting War: journalism in wartime*, Routledge, 2004, p. 96-112.

²⁰ Silvio Waisbord, *Journalism, Risk, and Patriotism*, in *Journalism after September 11*, London and New York, Routledge, 2002, p. 201-219.

²¹ Kennedy Jones, *Fleet Street & Downing Street*, London, Hutchinson and Co., 1919, p. 198, <https://archive.org/details/fleetstreetdowni00joneuoft/page/106/mode/2up> (Accessed on 12.05.2023).

of Russia <...> but American friendship passed over into active hostility. The explanation is very simple: America was fed on the British Press and Britain was in conflict with Russia.”²² The authorities use the media to their own advantage to strengthen their control in a potentially turbulent time even in countries far from the main theatres of combat actions.²³ Summarizing the results of the 20th century wars, A. K. Rai claims that “governments, mindful of their own popularity, generally seek to harness mass media in wartime to persuade citizens of a war’s justice and the enemy’s implacability”.²⁴

Since WWI, governments developed control regimes over media to counter enemy propaganda, the spread of unwanted information, and espionage.²⁵ During WWII, there was a military censorship service that controlled access to information for the press.²⁶ In the US, radio significantly exceeded the use of other mass media.²⁷ The Department of Information contained a Radio Division whose activity was recognised as an important tool of the psychological warfare program.²⁸

²² Harold D. Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in the World War*, New York, Peter Smith, 1938, p. 187, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015000379902&view=1up&seq=279> (Accessed on 12.05.2003).

²³ Jared Davidson, *The history of Censorship and State Control During the First World War, in New Zealand’s First World War Centenary Programme Ran From 2014 To 2019*, 2018, <https://ww100.govt.nz/censorship-state-control> (Accessed on 12.05.2003).

²⁴ Ajai K. Rai, *Media at War: Issues and Limitations*, in “Strategic Analysis”, 24 (9), 2000, https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/olj/sa/sa_dec00raa01.html (Accessed on 12.05.2003).

²⁵ Andreas Marklund, *Communications Surveillance during World War I*, in “EHNE. Digital Encyclopedia of European History”, 2020, <https://ehne.fr/en/encyclopedia/themes/material-civilization/between-control-and-liberty/communications-surveillance-during-world-war-i> (Accessed on 14.05.2003). Kendall Banning, *The Military Censorship of Pictures: Photographs that came under the ban during the World War – and why*, U.S. Army Signal Reserve Corps, 1926, p. 1-2, <https://sgp.fas.org/eprint/photos.pdf> (Accessed on 14.05.2003). *Espionage Act of 1917*, in “The State Historical Society of Iowa”, 2023, <https://iowaculture.gov/history/education/educator-resources/primary-source-sets/americas-involvement-world-war-i/espionage> (Accessed on 14.05.2003).

²⁶ *Media in Wartime*, in “PBS”, 08 August, 2022, <https://www.pbs.org/opb/historydetectives/feature/media-in-wartime/index.html> (Accessed on 28.03.2003).

²⁷ Anthony Rhodes, *Propaganda: The art of persuasion: World War II*, New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1976, p. 147-148, <https://archive.org/details/propagandaartofp0000rhod/page/n3/mode/2up> (Accessed on 28.03.2003).

²⁸ *Records of the Office of Inter-American Affairs*. Vol. Inventory of Record Group 229. Washington D.C.: National Archives and Record Services – General Services Administration, 1973, p. 26,

Consequently, *Radio War Guide* was created.²⁹ However, during the Vietnam War, the situation was completely different as it was the “first television war” – “For the first time in American history, the news from the front lines was brought straight into the living room”.³⁰ The media is believed to have played a large role in the defeat of the United States, as a tendency toward negative reporting helped undermine support for the war in the US while its uncensored coverage helped the enemy in Vietnam.³¹

As we can see, success in the conflict largely depends on media support and the resulting attitude (perception of the conflict). After the successful Gulf War in the early 1990s, the famous American general J. Shalikashvili confirms this idea: “We don’t win unless CNN says we win”.³² The US government took into account previous mistakes and both wars in the Persian Gulf received wide coverage in the media.³³ The government, primarily the military, managed to convey the war in the Persian Gulf to the American public in a favourable light, imposing certain restrictions on press coverage.³⁴

To understand how the media are involved in the state’s information control system, it is important to take into account the nature of the conflict. Obviously, in a time of total war, when the territorial integrity and national security of

<https://www.archives.gov/files/research/foreign-policy/related-records/rg-229-inter-american-affairs.pdf#page=33> (Accessed on 28.03.2003).

²⁹ *Radio War Guide*, US Office of War Information, U.S. G.P.O. Washington, D.C., USA, , July 1, 1943, <https://archive.org/details/RadioWarGuide-nsia/page/n1/mode/2up> (Accessed on 28.03.2003).

³⁰ Jessie Kratz, *Vietnam: The First Television War*, in “Pieces of History. National Archives”, January 25, 2018, <https://prologue.blogs.archives.gov/2018/01/25/vietnam-the-first-television-war/> (Accessed on 02.04.2003).

³¹ Ronald H. Spector, *The Vietnam War and the Media*, in “Encyclopedia Britannica”, 24 April, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Vietnam-War-and-the-media-2051426> (Accessed on 30.05.2023).

³² *Military Review. Cover Page*, November-December 1995, <https://cgsc.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p124201coll1/id/447> (Accessed on 26.04.2023).

³³ Jason Deparle, *AFTER THE WAR; Long Series of Military Decisions Led to Gulf War News Censorship*, in “The New York Times”, May 5, 1991, <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/05/05/world/after-the-war-long-series-of-military-decisions-led-to-gulf-war-news-censorship.html> (Accessed on 26.04.2023).

³⁴ Jason Deparle, *AFTER THE WAR... Douglas Kellner, The Persian Gulf TV War Revisited*, Routledge, 2004, <https://pages.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/papers/gulfwarrevisited.htm> (Accessed on 26.04.2023). John J. Fialka, *Hotel warriors covering the Gulf War*, Washington DC: Woodrow Willson Centre Press, 1992, p. 1.

a nation are at stake, it calls for total patriotism from the media. Instead, regional conflicts (like those in which the US or the USSR/Russia took part after WWII) are perceived differently – “limited wars in distant lands demand limited patriotism and the limited sacrifice of truth”.³⁵

Since the advent of access to the battlefield in real time, the role of the mass media has grown significantly. General C. Powell, who held key positions in the US during both wars in Iraq, emphasised the key role of television: “Turn your attention to television because you can win the battle or lose the war, if you don’t handle the story right”.³⁶ At first it was satellite television, later – transmission of content via the Internet and distribution in social networks. The civil war in Yugoslavia in 1999 was called the First “Internet War”.³⁷ Later, Social TV, i.e., a combination of social networks and TV, became relevant.³⁸ These can be video reposts from news TV channels, bloggers on YouTube, TikTok, content from Telegram channels and Twitter. Reports in real time or close to real time and multiplicity of access are their essential features. Back in 1992, Colonel A. D. Campen in his book *The First Information War* emphasised the related risks and problems of information control by the military, because journalists become direct participants in hostilities. His vision was the following: “A free, informed and responsible press can tell the whole story and do so without endangering current military operations”.³⁹

The modern war in Ukraine is called “The First Social Media War”⁴⁰, i.e., ow-

³⁵ Ali T. Sheikh, *Not the Whole Truth. Soviet and Western media Coverage of the Afghan Conflict*, in “Conflict Quarterly”, Fall, 1990, p. 88, <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/JCS/article/download/14919/15988/0> (Accessed on 26.04.2023).

³⁶ Pk Mallick, *Military Media Relation in Today’s Warfare*, in “Combat Journal”, September, 2000, p. 2, <https://indianstrategicknowledgeonline.com/web/MILITARY%20MEDIA%20RELATION%20IN%20TODAY%20WARFARE.pdf> (Accessed on 09.03.2023).

³⁷ *Inside the First “Internet War”*, in “Wired”, January 1, 1999, <https://www.wired.com/1999/01/inside-the-first-internet-war/> (Accessed on 09.03.2023).

³⁸ Simon Dumenco, *Believe The Hype? Four Things Social TV Can Actually Do*, in “Ad Age”, April 13, 2012, <https://adage.com/article/the-media-guy/hype-things-social-tv/234134> (Accessed on 09.03.2023).

³⁹ Alan D. Campen, *Information, Truth and War*, in “The First Information War”, Fairfax, Va.: AFCEA, 1992, p. 89-90, <https://archive.org/details/firstinformation00camp/page/90/mode/2up?view=theater> (Accessed on 09.03.2023).

⁴⁰ Peter Suci, *Is Russia’s Invasion Of Ukraine The First Social Media War?*, in “Forbes”, March 1, 2022, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/petersuci/2022/03/01/is-russias-invasion-of-ukraine-the-first-social-media-war/?sh=314552e81c5c> (Accessed on 13.03.2023).

ing to social media and messengers it was possible to convey adequate information about the events, despite the total superiority of Russia in terms of resources and the potential of information influence. And this is the first war when the invading party did not gain complete information dominance in the world.⁴¹

So, the use of media in war is a long-rooted practice, but the development of communication technologies incites the emergence of new ways to interact with the public and to create public opinion. In the next section, we consider the practice of telethon introduced in Ukraine.

UNITED NEWS TELETHON AS A MEANS TO UNIFY CITIZENS AND A SOURCE OF OBJECTIVE INFORMATION

In the conditions of war, the activity of the Ukrainian media develops in two directions: 1) to inform the domestic and foreign public about the course of events, decisions of the President and relevant public authorities, and to provide the citizens with access to information that is important to them during the war; 2) to counteract and combat fakes spread by the RF in Ukraine and the world, in particular in Europe. In other words, the media of Ukraine set the agenda of discussions, frame the perception of war, the Armed Forces and the political elite and change the attitudes toward Russia and to everything associated with it. This activity is aimed to consolidate the Ukrainian society to fight back, to support the Armed Forces of Ukraine and the decision-makers, to enhance the support of Ukraine by partners, to eliminate panic, to give hope for survival and good prospects.

To achieve the goals above, in the first days of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the editors of *Suspilne*, *Rada*, *Inter*, *ICTV*, *1 + 1* and *Ukraina 24* united and launched a joint information telethon *United News* (*#UArazom – #UAtgether*) under the supervision of the *Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine*⁴². Their

⁴¹ Dan Ciuriak, *Social Media Warfare Is Being Invented in Ukraine. Technological conditions determine how wars are communicated. However, these apply to both sides*, in "CIGI", June 15, 2022, <https://www.cigionline.org/articles/social-media-warfare-is-being-invented-in-ukraine/> (Accessed on 13.03.2023).

⁴² UKAZ PREZYDENTA UKRAYINY №152/2022 *Pro rishennya Rady natsional'noyi bezpeky i oborony Ukrayiny vid 18 bereznya 2022 roku "Shchodo realizatsiyi yedynoyi informatsiyanoi polityky v umovakh voyennoho stanu* [DECREE OF THE PRESIDENT OF UKRAINE No. 152/2022 On the decision of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine dated March 18, 2022 "Regarding the implementation of a unified information policy under martial law"], the President of Ukraine Official Internet

slogan is “In unity is strength”. Since March 7, 2022, the *United News Telethon* has had an English-language track. Formally, it is not a channel, it does not have a joint editorship, and its producers are coordinated mainly at the strategic level. News sections that alternate in the joint broadcast are produced by editorials with different standards and different priorities (including the interests of the owners or political patrons), aimed at different target audiences.

To increase the access to the telethon news in conditions of war, the following opportunities were created: free access to major national TV channels (UA: *Pershiy, 1+1, ICTV, Inter, Ukraina, Rada, UNIAN TV* are accessible for free in *YouTV, SweetTV, OmegaTV, MEGOGO, KyivstarTV, 1+1 video, Olltv*); most TV channels have their own *YouTube* channels and also broadcast on their websites; one can listen to the telethon via the Internet radio *radioplayer.ua*, provided the appropriate application is installed; in the application *Diya* (Action) (public services online) there is a section *Diya TV*.

The format of the telethon was tested for the first time on the eve of the war when on the initiative of the *Minister of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine* O. Tkachenko, a telethon was held on February 16, 2022, on all Ukrainian TV channels on the topic of unity from 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. and from 7:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. At the request of the *Cabinet of Ministers*, a unified information platform of strategic communication “UA together” was created to provide daily information to the population about the security situation and the activities of state bodies.⁴³

On March 18, 2022, the *Decision of the National Security and Defense Council* “Regarding the implementation of a unified information policy under martial law” granted the joint telethon official status: “To establish that in the conditions of martial law, the implementation of a unified information policy is a priority issue of national security, the provision of which is implemented by unifying all national TV channels, the content of which consists mainly of information and/or information and analytical programs, on a single information platform of strategic communication – 24-hour information marathon “The United News #UAtogether” (Yedyni novyny #UARazom)”.⁴⁴ However, *Espresso, Pryamy* and *Channel 5* refused

Representation, <https://www.president.gov.ua/documents/1522022-41761> (Accessed on 02.02.2023).

⁴³ Yevhen Kizilov, *U seredu vsi telekanaly Ukrayiny pokazhut' telemarafon na temu yednannya – Tkachenko* [On Wednesday, all Ukrainian TV channels will show a telethon on the topic of unity – Tkachenko], in “Ukrayinska Pravda”, February 15, 2022, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2022/02/15/7324094/> (Accessed on 02.02.2023).

⁴⁴ UKAZ PREZYDENTA UKRAYINY №152/2022 ...

to broadcast *United News* 24 hours a day and their digital transmission was disconnected. The *State Service for Special Communications and Information Protection* explained that the channels were cut off to comply with the decision of the *Security Council* regarding the mandatory broadcast of the telethon.⁴⁵

For the Ukrainian competitive media landscape, it was a “miracle” that old media rivals began to work together to consolidate the society. Ukrainian media specialists even called it “information air defence in the war of civilizations”⁴⁶ because the marathon played a significant role in preserving Ukrainian statehood in February–March, 2022 when the threat was the greatest and the information attack on Ukraine was the most powerful.

We can single out three important reasons for the formation of this TV broadcasting format:

1. In the first weeks of the war, objective and timely information was a matter of life and death. The information space was full of fakes, disinformation, misrepresentations, attempts to incite panic or just information garbage. Online publications, even those that honestly tried to check the facts, repeatedly “blew up information mines”.⁴⁷ It was also dangerous to rely on official websites and pages in social networks as they were often hacked by Russians. Under these conditions, the idea of combining the broadcasts of the central top-rated channels into a joint marathon with a state “quality mark” was very appropriate. It had to be the space where, if they did not tell the whole truth about the war, at least they did not lie and did not spread Russian propaganda. That was both in the interests of the audience, who needed reasons to believe at least some news, and in the interests of

⁴⁵ «Espresso», *Pryamyy ta 5 kanal ne vymknuly z tsyfrovoho efiru, a peremknuly na kanal «Rada». U Derzhspetsyzv'yazku vidpovily na petytsiyu* [“Espresso”, “Pryamyy” and Channel 5 were not switched off from the digital airwaves, but switched to the “Rada” channel. The State Special Communications Service responded to the petition], in “Detector Media”, September 6, 2022, <https://detector.media/infospace/article/202591/2022-09-06-espresso-pryamyy-ta-5-kanal-ne-vymknuly-z-tyfrovogo-efiru-a-peremknuly-na-kanal-rada-u-derzhspetszyv'yazku-vidpovily-na-petytsiyu/> (Accessed on 04.02.2023).

⁴⁶ Svitlana Ostapa, *Spil'nyy telemarafon — informatsiyna PPO v tsyvilizatsiyinyi viyni* [A united telethon is an information air defense in the war of civilizations.], in “Detector Media”, March 15, 2022, <https://detector.media/kritika/article/197522/2022-03-15-spilnyy-telemarafon-informatsiyna-ppo-v-tyvilizatsiyinyi-viyni/> (Accessed on 14.03.2023).

⁴⁷ Otar Dovzhenko, *Dyvo, shcho zatyahnulosa. Telemarafon «Yedyni novyny» u 2022 rotsi* [A wonder that took so long. United News Telethon in 2022], in “Detector Media”, December 22, 2022, <https://detector.media/shchodenni-telenovini/article/206445/2022-12-28-dyvo-shcho-zatyagnulosya-telemarafon-iedyni-novyny-u-2022-rotsi/> (Accessed on 14.03.2023).

broadcasters, some of whom could not work fully amid the chaos and panic of the first weeks of the war.

2. There was also the interest of the authorities: to channel information and prevent the enemy from using the most popular Ukrainian media to influence society. The wartime law gives the authorities the right to take control of the media, to shut down their work, and to impose military censorship.⁴⁸

3. No one knew how the oligarchs would behave if the invader successfully advanced and captured the capital. The owner of the *Ukraina* group, R. Akhmetov, had waged a fierce media war against the authorities which weakened somewhat in February but did not stop. In January 2022, D. Firtash (the *Inter* group) called on Ukraine to abandon NATO, and a co-owner of the *Inter* group, S. Lyovochkin, was one of the leaders of the pro-Russian party *Opposition Platform – For Life*. The behaviour of V. Pinchuk, the owner of *StarLight Media*, and I. Kolomoisky, *1+1 media*, was also unpredictable if all their enterprises ended up in the occupied territory (the Russian army was approaching Kryvyi Rih). “Not trusting the oligarchs and expecting a blow in the back from them is a healthy reflex of any Ukrainian government”,⁴⁹ because there was a potential threat that at a crucial moment the most influential TV channels could start shaking the fragile situation, or publicly turn society against the government, demanding immediate peace or negotiations.

Full-scale military actions radically changed the need for news among the citizens of Ukraine. There was a need to be in a constant stream of information. Control over the news, that is, constant monitoring of information sources, became one of the factors of feeling safe. Those who had previously deliberately avoided any news and preferred entertainment content began to follow them, i.e., with the start of hostilities, news content took first place in their consumption.⁵⁰

In the first months of a full-scale invasion, the very idea of a *United News* telethon was expedient and appropriate. It is confirmed by the survey conducted by the sociological group *Rating* in March 2022 (Table 1). The war changed the weight of ways to obtain information: central television dominated among the sources, including the news telethon (62%). The second position was occupied by

⁴⁸ Otar Dovzhenko, *Dyvo, shcho zatyahnulosya...*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Yuriy Vyshnevskiy, *Proval monopolii na pravdu. Chomu dvi tretyny ukrayintsiv ne dyvlyat'sya telemarafon* [The failure of the monopoly on truth. Why two-thirds of Ukrainians do not watch the telethon], in “Dilova Stolytsia”, December 1, 2022, <https://www.dsnews.ua/ukr/politics/proval-monopolii-na-pravdu-pochemu-dve-treti-ukraincev-ne-smotryat-telemarafon-30112022-470238> (Accessed on 28.04.2023).

channels in messengers (42%), which could be explained by the speed and number of publications, because the war created a high need for constant information, and messengers best met those needs, i.e. they could be read anywhere and any-time, one needed a smart phone and the Internet. The share of social networks decreased (37%; in November 2021 it was 49%), probably they were partially replaced by groups and channels in messengers, because by their function social networks were no longer about receiving information, but about communication and the ability to share information.⁵¹

Table 1

Preference of media channels in March 2022		
Position in rating	Channel	%
1	central television	62
2	messengers	42
3	social networks	37

In July–August 2022, the *InMind* company, commissioned by the *Internews* international organisation with the financial support of the *United States Agency for International Development (USAID)*, conducted the annual survey “Ukrainian media, attitudes and trust in 2022”⁵² which proved that social networks (and messengers were included) were the leading sources of information for Ukrainians (59% of all respondents had used them in the last 7 days and ranked them in the top 2 in terms of importance). The second position was occupied by the *United News* telethon (43% ranked it in the top 2 by importance). The majority of those who recognised the *United News* telethon as a prime information source explained it by the truthfulness/reliability of the information (Table 2).

⁵¹ *Shoste zahal'nonatsional'ne opytuvannya: adaptatsiya ukrayintziv do umov viyny* [Sixth nationwide poll: adaptation of Ukrainians to the conditions of war], Rating Sociological Group, March 23, 2022, [HTTPS://RATINGGROUP.UA/RESEARCH/UKRAINE/SHESTOY_OBSCHENACIONALNYY_OPROS_ADAPTACIYA_UKRAINCEV_K_USLOVIYAM_VOYNY_19_MARTA_2022.HTML](https://ratinggroup.ua/research/ukraine/shestoy_obschenatsionalnyy_opros_adaptatsiya_ukraincev_k_usloviyam_voyny_19_marta_2022.html) (Accessed on 28.04.2023).

⁵² *Doslidzhennya DEMOKRATIYA, PRAVA I SVOBODY HRMADYAN TA MEDIASPOZHIVANNYA V UMOVAKH VIYNY* [Research DEMOCRACY, RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS OF CITIZENS AND MEDIA CONSUMPTION IN THE CONDITIONS OF WAR], July 2022, <http://surl.li/rblacy> (Accessed on 26.04.2023).

Table 2

Media channel positive rating ranking		
Criteria	Social media	United News telethon
True, reliable information	26%	68%
Easy to use	36%	13%
A lot of information, different points of view	24%	6%
They inform quickly/promptly	20%	11%
Clear format	3%	1%

Among various sources of information, 57% of respondents trusted the *United News* telethon (rated 7–10 points on a scale, where 10 points mean “completely trust”). Only 7% did not trust the telethon (rating 0–3 points). 65% approved of the *United News* telethon as a method to form a common opinion, while 17% did not share this idea.

In December 2022, the website of the *Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine* provided the following statistics regarding trust in the telethon (the *News Trust Barometer* study was conducted by *Suspilne* TV channel and research company *Gradus Research*). Media experts also emphasise that, at the same time, there is a strengthening of trust, i.e., the share of those who “rather” trust the telethon has shifted to those who trust it “completely”:⁵³

Table 3

Citizens' trust in the <i>United News</i> telethon	
Criteria	United News telethon
They know about the existence of the telethon	91%
They are its regular audience	78%
They actively watch	41%
They declare their trust in it as a source of news	71%
They watch the telethon on TV channels	80%

⁵³ *Informatsiynyy telemarafon «Yedyni novyny #UArazom» zalyshayet'sya nadiynym dzherelom informatsiyi dlya ukrayintiv – opytuvannya* [Informational telethon “United News #UArazom” remains a reliable source of information for Ukrainians – survey], Ministry of Culture and Information Policy, December 30, 2022, <https://mkip.gov.ua/news/8391.html> (Accessed on 01.05.2023).

They watch it because it always shows relevant information	28%
They watch it because different experts (guests) take part in it	27%
It unites people and does not divide society	24%
It gives only verified and objective information	23%
It is produced by channels I trust	20%
It provides more in-depth information	19%
It shows the diversity of opinions and positions	17%
It features presenters I trust	14%

V. Paniotto, Director General of the *Kyiv International Institute of Sociology*, defines the two biggest achievements of the telethon due to the uniformity of its information space: 1) it contributed to the cohesion of society and 2) it improved the attitude towards state institutions and the president. Before the beginning of the full-scale war, there were significant regional differences in people's views: in June 2021, 70% in the West of Ukraine supported Ukraine's accession to the EU, and in the East, only 29%. Then in May 2022, this support equalled to 94% and 76%, respectively (the difference decreased from 41% to 18%). The attitude towards the state and its institutions has significantly improved. From August 2021 to September 2022, trust in Zelenskyi increased from 36% to 80%, trust in the government from 18% to 35%, and in the Parliament from 19% to 35%. "This was influenced by both the war and the lack of opposition channels which constantly criticised the authorities and Zelenskyi personally".⁵⁴

The telethon fulfilled its mission of "a single united voice". Catching different waves, Ukrainians were guaranteed to hear official information from the highest leadership of the country on the leading channels. This both reassured and united Ukrainians, and justified the actions necessary for proper resistance to the occupiers. In the conditions of RF information dumping and fakes, the society received access to official information from primary sources and operative refutation of Russian disinformation. Television broadcasters, who did not have the resources for full-fledged information broadcasts, were able to share the load, supporting and helping each other in the regime of the marathon.

⁵⁴ Halyna Korba, *Telemarafon: yak vin zminyuye ukrayins'ke suspil'stvo ta media rynok* [The telethon: how it changes Ukrainian society and the media market], in "BBC News Ukraine", December 30, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/features-64112594> (Accessed on 26.04.2023).

CRITICISM OF THE *UNITED NEWS* TELETHON

The statistics from the previous section indicate a decrease in the level of attention to the telethon from 62% in March 2022 to 43% in July 2022. This is partly because citizens were not always able to watch television either due to the lack of electricity or due to the forced necessity to move, fleeing war. The already mentioned monotony of the TV broadcast was also a significant reason which induced viewers to turn to the Internet and social networks more often.

In their study (June–August 2022), *Detector Media* experts analysed the attitudes of viewers and media professionals to the telethon content⁵⁵ (Table 4).

Table 4

Perception of marathon news		
Perception	Media experts	Viewers (aged 18–65)
It covers the activities of the authorities	87.21%	65–55%
It is engaged in state propaganda	94.19%	77.62%
It shows reliable information about the war	51.16%	66.14%
It is managed by the Office of the President	87.21%	24.74%
It has lost its relevance	66.28 %	68.73%
I have stopped watching it	75.58%	46.74%
I have never watched it	20.93%	15.87%

The most important conclusions are the following: viewers think less about the telethon than the media professionals; the telethon is engaged in state propaganda; the telethon has lost its relevance.

In addition, typical violations of journalistic standards were recorded, but their number varies from channel to channel. In particular, the experts of *Detector Media* concluded that in October–December 2022, twice as many cases of serious violations of journalism standards and gross errors were recorded on the air of the *United News* telethon than in the previous six months (Table 5).

⁵⁵ Inna Serhiyenko, Orest Biloskurskiy, *Yak peresichni hlyadachi spryymayut' marafon «Yedyni novyny»?* [How do ordinary viewers perceive the United News telethon?], in “Detector Media”, September 1, 2022, <https://detector.media/blogs/article/202432/2022-09-01-yak-peresichni-glyadachi-spryymayut-marafon-iedyni-novyny/> (Accessed on 01.05.2023).

Table 5

Violation of journalistic standards in the <i>United News</i> telethon ⁵⁶							
Standard	1+1	ICTV/ STB	Inter	Rada	Suspilne	My - Ukraine	Total
Reliability	389	592	447	427	183	304	2342
Accuracy	195	234	112	185	89	147	962
Separation of facts from opinions	741	1496	889	459	173	460	4218
Completeness of information	31	41	27	42	26	45	212
Balance of thoughts	1	1	0	0	0	1	3
Availability of information submission	26	14	15	33	25	21	134
Operativeness	2	4	4	0	6	0	16
Ethical violations	0	1	2	0	5	0	8
Total violations of standards	1385	2383	1496	1146	507	978	7895

The report shows that in total, during one broadcast hour of the telethon, an average of 25 violations of standards occur. According to the general indicators of the channels, the situation concerning two key standards is the worst: the separation of facts from opinions (the average indicator for the telethon shows this standard is violated more than 13 times every hour) and reliability (it is violated an average of 7.5 times every hour).

There is also the problem of distributing telethon content. While editors worked on their channels, they were focused on the maximum distribution of their content on various platforms. Instead, the media brand *United News*, although positioned as the main reliable source of news, is not engaged in the distribution of content outside the live broadcast. There are no publicly available archives of the

⁵⁶ Ihor Kulias, *Pidsumky monitorynhu telemarafonu «Yedyni novyny» za zhovten'—hruden' 2022 roku. Druha chastyna* [Monitoring results of the United News telethon for October-December 2022. The second part], in "Detector Media", January 16, 2023, <https://detector.media/shchodenni-telenovini/article/207039/2023-01-16-pidsumky-monitoryngu-telemarafonu-iedyni-novyny-za-zhovtengruden-2022-roku-druha-chastyna/> (Accessed on 01.05.2023).

telethon. There is neither a *United News* website nor a YouTube channel, which would show all broadcasts, or a multimedia editorial office, which would cut and repackage exclusive content, as all full-fledged information channels do. The editors take care of “their” content independently by posting part of their telethon broadcasts (individual interviews, news releases and materials) on YouTube, and repackaging the stories for “their” sites.

In the first months of the marathon, the channels posted several hours of broadcast recordings on YouTube. Later, that practice was stopped, but it does not serve the interests of the audience since they cannot clearly identify the source of the news they have learnt from the telethon and do not know where to look for news or a conversation that has already passed on the air.

Towards the end of 2022, the joint telethon caused less enthusiasm and gave much more reasons for criticism, making the public fear that this emergent, temporary form of organisation of the Ukrainian information TV space would become permanent and would bury the diversity that had been the strength of Ukrainian TV channels. The mistakes of the authorities also contributed to the increase in criticism, namely: 1) the appearance of presenters who had been previously pro-Russian propagandists; 2) speeches of former People’s Deputies of the *OBFL*⁵⁷ party on the air of *Rada*; 3) removal of TV news that differed from the news of the telethon, particularly the channels close to the opposition *European Solidarity* of P. Poroshenko. However, in the first months of the war, *Channel 5*, *Pryamy* and *Espresso* did not criticise the government at all, so there was no objective reason to fear them; 4) during the broadcast of the telethon, the *President’s Office* started to actively use the *Rada* channel (which was launched specifically for PR of the President’s Office and the presidential party *Servants of the People*⁵⁸) for massive PR. Subsequently, the *Rada* began image-making of the President’s entourage, the latter should ensure the work of the head of state rather than be engaged in public policy. PR of individual deputies from *Servants of the People*, whitewashing of allies of the *Servants of the People* from the former *OBFL*, black PR against P. Poroshenko gradually became features of the telethon.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ OBFL – acronym for the pro-Russian party *Opposition Block – For Life*

⁵⁸ Hala Skliarevska, Otar Dovzhenko, *Vlada i ye novyny. Yak «Sluha narodu» peretvoryuye kanal «Rada» na instrument piaru y politychnoyi borot’by* [Power is news. How “Servants of the People” turns the Rada channel into a PR and political struggle tool], in “Detector Media”, December 16, 2021, <https://detector.media/infospace/article/194842/2021-12-16-vlada-i-ye-novyny-yak-sluga-narodu-peretvoryuie-kanal-rada-na-instrument-piaru-y-politychnoi-borotby/> (Accessed on 04.06.2023).

⁵⁹ Otar Dovzhenko, *Dyvo, shcho zatyahnulosya...*

Thus, the telethon, which in the first weeks of the war had an impeccable reputation and was perceived as a ray of truth in the sea of fakes and lies, started to move in the wrong direction, i.e., to the loss of the trust of a thoughtful and media-literate audience. “Because it’s hard to believe that the knights of the information war are in front of you, if they repost Yermak’s twitter every day⁶⁰.”⁶¹

Among the main objections to the telethon are the risks it can carry for the future of media as a business, as well as for freedom of speech in general. The head of the *Institute of Mass Information*, O. Romaniuk, warns that the existence of a single telethon for a long time can further distract people from television and spoil the democratic image of Ukraine in the world.⁶²

The European Union privately expressed concern to official Kyiv about Ukraine’s media policy. For example, German Ambassador A. Feldhusen said that the EU called Kyiv to move away from the *United News* telethon format on television and to give viewers a choice. According to the diplomat, the EU understands that information warfare is a component of modern wars, and its partners are aware of why Ukraine banned pro-Russian channels. But since the other channels were also affected by the restrictions, Kyiv has been repeatedly urged to move to a more open information space. “People should have alternative sources of information. It seems to me that all your political forces are now patriotic. Everyone wants Ukraine to win. Maybe there are different views, but still, everyone is a patriot. And people should be allowed to choose what they want to watch.”⁶³

In other words, what was created as a consolidation of society and countering the RF’s information aggression turned into a consolidation of the political power of the President’s Office and restriction of freedom of expression for the media to avoid internal criticism. As a result, the question arises more and more often: “How long will the telethon last?”. Government representatives, in particular the *Minister of Culture and Information Policy* O. Tkachenko, reply that the telethon will continue until victory.⁶⁴ A related question is “Who should make the

⁶⁰ Andriy Yermak is the head of the Office of the President of Ukraine, the “gray cardinal” of Ukrainian politics.

⁶¹ Otar Dovzhenko, *Dyvo, shcho zatyahnulosya...*

⁶² Halyna Korba, *Telemarafon: yak vin zminyuye ukrayins'ke suspil'stvo...*

⁶³ Serhii Sydorenko, *Posol Nimechchyny: U NATO zaraz shchodnya obhovoryuyut' te, yak vidpovisty u razi yadernoho udaru* [German Ambassador: NATO now discusses every day how to respond in the event of a nuclear attack], in “Ukrayinska Pravda”, September 28, <https://www.euointegration.com.ua/interview/2022/09/28/7147648/> (Accessed on 24.05.2023).

⁶⁴ *Ministr kul'tury Tkachenko zayavyv, shcho derzhava povynna finansuvaty Yedynny*

decision about finishing the telethon?”. The *Ministry of Culture and Information Policy* in cooperation with the *National Council for Television and Radio Broadcasting* are responsible for making all important decisions regarding the format of the telethon. These bodies will have to give instructions so that the big channels stop producing the telethon and return to their usual programming. However, this is also likely to be a matter of the political will of the *Office of the President*. *Detector Media* experts emphasise that events can develop according to different scenarios: 1) optimistic – the complete victory of Ukraine, the liberation of all Ukrainian lands, cessation of hostilities, the capitulation of Russia and multi-year payment of reparations (and the telethon may cease its work); 2) pessimistic – part of the territories will remain occupied or hostilities will continue, albeit with less intensity; martial law can be cancelled not in all of Ukraine, but only in certain regions. Then the “implementation of a unified information policy” in the form of a government-controlled telethon may drag on for years, or at least until the change of government.⁶⁵

CONCLUSIONS

In the difficult conditions of confronting mass systemic information influence by a much stronger aggressor, Ukraine had to solve several fundamentally necessary tasks, i.e., to ensure coverage of events at the front that would be profitable for the state and safe for the army, to consolidate the society, to decrease the panic, and to promote Ukraine’s position against the massive information influence of Russia in the world. The realisation of these intentions resulted in the creation of a new, unique TV practice – the *United News* telethon.

The national telethon has provided several solutions. Firstly, it has united the media channels represented on the market to produce a common view in the absence of a dominant channel (for example a powerful news agency) which could broadcast the official view and enable OpSec coordination. Secondly, it provides a conditionally independent but powerful platform for the formation of basic materials for further distribution in the world media space and use in social networks

marafon, oskil'ky yoho pryypynennya «ne na chasi» [Minister of Culture Tkachenko said that the state should finance the United Telethon, because its termination “is not at the right time.”], in “Bukvy”, October 5, 2022, <https://bykvu.com/ua/bukvy/ministr-kultury-tkachenko-zaiavyv-shcho-derzhava-povynna-finansuvaty-iedynyi-marafon-oskilky-ioho-pryypynennia-ne-na-chasi/> (Accessed on 24.05.2023).

⁶⁵ Otar Dovzhenko, *Dyvo, shcho zatyahnulosya...*

with the formation of a certain kind of “splinternet”. As for civilians, media, television for instance, may become the source “from which information, interpretations and images of war are acquired, either a supplement to or substitute for, first-hand experience.”⁶⁶ In the first months of the war, *United News* telethon helped the Ukrainians unite to fight against the aggressor. In this period, it was recognised as a main information channel since it did its best to offer objective, verified information and refuted fakes. Finally, the telethon provided its participants with certain guarantees of survival in conditions of war and uncertainty of market prospects. Moreover, television has played the role of an integrator for a wide range of information channels.

Instead, when the critical risk to the existence of the state and the nation in general decreased, which occurred as a result of the Armed Forces of Ukraine’s success in countering Russian aggression during the second half of 2022 and in 2023, the relevance of the *United News* telethon started to decline slightly, and its critics strengthened regarding media independence. Obviously, this is proof of the overall democracy of the media space in Ukraine, its participants can resort to consolidation under the leadership of the authorities in the face of an existential threat, but they are able to return to the usual competitive model with the onset of peacetime⁶⁷.

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⁶⁶ Ajai K. Rai, *Media at war...*

⁶⁷ The first step was made by the National Public Broadcasting Company of Ukraine – Suspilne Broadcasting, which on May 21, 2024, withdrew from the telethon to produce its own marathon.

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