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**RUSSIAN INFLUENCE OPERATIONS TO THE UKRAINIAN
AUDIENCE: OCCUPATION OF AZOV**

Master's thesis

Programme International Relations and European-Asian Studies

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ABSTRACT

This Master thesis is dedicated to the topic of the role of information in modern warfare. The phenomena of information warfare and its effects were investigated under the specific case of the occupation of the Azov Sea and the Ukrainian vessels captured by the Russian Federation.

The concept of information warfare, its ontology, meaning and role in comparison with classic warfare tools are presented in the first part. The second part is focused on studying of the impact of Russian influence operations on Ukrainian audience in the specific case Azov occupation, the role of the media in the conflict and its effect on the formation of public opinion.

First of all, it is a case study, which means an intensive research and combines qualitative and quantitative methods. The case study was chosen in order to bring the real-life context. It includes content and discourse analysis.

Apart from that, the set of qualitative methods were used within this approach (Flick 2014). The study monitored the conflict and analysed issues related to the topic reported by international television channels. The methods involved document analysis, discourse and visual analysis. Quantitative methods are statistical analysis based on polls.

The main subjects of this research are the concept and the influence of the informational warfare in comparison with traditional means of conflict in the Azov Sea. They have a lot in common, but at the same time, they are very different. In general, the question of the research is: "Had the Russian propaganda success in formation of public opinion in Ukraine or not?".

Keywords: informational warfare, occupation of Azov, Ukrainian vessels capture, Russian propaganda.

INTRODUCTION

Information warfare is a political buzzword of the 21st century. The term information warfare prevails among many politicians and journalists such as Marshall McLuhan and Dan Kuehl. Nevertheless, what does it mean? It seems like not everyone is aware of its meaning and how it works. Therefore, in this research paper, this issue will be studied.

No doubt, information warfare is on the rise nowadays, and it is marching across Europe and the world. So, the question of information warfare was studied in this paper work. The possible advantages of the new types of war in comparison with the old ones were highlighted here.

Many scientists such as Tad Schnauffer (2016), Jolanta Darczewska (2014), Margarita Jaitner (2015), Christopher Chivvis (2017), Maria Snegovaya (2015) and Joanna Szostek (2014) have researched Russian hybrid warfare and focused on the role of Russian information warfare in the Crimea's annexation and the war in Donbas as well. It is a factor (one of the factors) that motivated to study this case.

One specific example of use of information warfare tools was chosen. This case study investigates the role of information in the occupation of the Azov Sea by the Russian Federation and most commonly referred to as the Kerch Strait incident. The case is space-time localised. It can be easily outlined as a part of a subject for analysing since it is highly representative and consists of elements of "classical" and non-linear tools like information warfare developing international alliances, supporting local parties and manipulating media. Therefore, it is one of the few examples of modern non-linear warfare in the 21st century. The definition of this term is highly debatable, but non-linearity in this case is based on having a third blurred party in the warfare like "green men" in the beginning of 2014 when the occupation of Azov started. Still, it is usually used to describe

the conflict that does not fit into classical characteristics of warfare. One thing we can report with confidence that it consists of different methods, including informational warfare.

Modern Ukraine-Russia standoff can be described with terms of unconventional non-linear warfare. It defines the presence of non-war tools and a washout of old-fashioned war conflict. What makes this non-linear war unique is its components such as coherence, dynamics, relations and flexibility. It can be used in rising essentialism of the media. Moreover, the informational factor in some cases may be an independent factor and indeed, more crucial than military.

The investigated case, more widely known as Kerch Strait incident, happened on the 25th of November 2018 when passing through the Kerch Strait three Ukrainian ships were attacked and captured by Russian militaries. The research problem is why there is a divergence of views within Ukraine and what influenced citizens' opinion.

It is important to underline that the investigated case gives the possibility to avoid personalism since the decision of international institution and courts are available and transparent. It means that in legal terms, the truth has been already established. This is a unique and modern example of unconventional non-linear warfare of the 21st century. The fact that judicial war was won, but the information was lost makes it even more impressive than others.

The role of information flow in describing the Kerch Strait incident is going to be evaluated. The hypothesis is that Russian influence had small impact in formation of public opinion among Ukrainian citizens on the occupation of Azov due to limited infiltration and bad reputation. In this situation, the Russian and Ukrainian media only undermined trust in Ukrainian authorities and lawfulness of martial law. There were some other influential factors as well.

In order to reach the purpose of the paper and distinguish propaganda or any hidden motives in the media, ten news releases have been selected among media in Ukraine that have the biggest share of audience. The timeline of selected informational materials concerning the investigated case for analysis is from November 2018 to November 2019:

- three most-watched TV media in Ukraine (2 news releases of visual per each)
- three most-read media in Ukrainian Internet (2 news releases of textual per each)
- two most popular "pro-Russian" media in Ukraine (2 news releases each)

- two most popular Russian media in Ukraine (2 news releases each)

The audience coverage was measured by USAID-Internews Media Consumption Survey in 2019 based on polls conducted among Ukrainian citizens. One of the parts of the report is a rating of media, including national TV and the Internet media. If the TV and Internet media are equal, one piece of the visual and textual news release was used. Some of them are available in both formats as well. Also with the help of polls, the biggest Russian and "pro-Russian" will be outlined.

The performed document, discourse and visual analysis are based on Hodgetts & Chamberlain (2014) analysing news media, and Jørgensen & Philips (2002) discourse analysis.

Jørgensen and Philips say that discourse is a particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world). One of the perfect application is how the same subject could be conveyed in mass media. That would be the struggle of different claims and therefore, different discourses. Three approaches were outlined: Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory, critical discourse analysis and discursive psychology. All of them share the fundamental principles of how language and subject can be understood and how they impact social change. The three mentioned approaches are different, but this research was based on a complex of them as they share the same idea. Jørgensen and Philips claim the way we talk does not neutrally reflect our world, identities and social relations, but plays an active role in creating and changing them. Hodgetts and Chamberlain apply critical discourse analysis to analyse media emphasizing. They focused on the styles and strategies of language users rather than on what was said.

Thus, the focus is on the presence of the author, the context with the main focus, language, vocabulary and structures, use of photos and videos. Afterwards, the responses to the following questions will be found during media analysis:

1. What is the general content?
2. What is the style of presenting information?
3. Where is the favour information presented?
4. What is the target audience?

Based on these results as well as on the other such as the level of trust to the media, the conclusion if the hypothesis can be proved or not will be made. Subjects of analysis are to be coded, merged

together and presented in summary tables. In case if the hypothesis is proved and Russian media played a minor role in formation of public opinion, the other influential factors are to be outlined.

The paper consists of three chapters. The first chapter is dedicated to the object of research. It goes through the concept of informational warfare and sets its core. The second chapter describes what happened in the Azov Sea, how the conflict was resolved, and what steps have been taken. The main idea of the last chapter is to measure the influence of the media in the conflict in terms of the vulnerability of Ukrainian recipients. Also, the recommendations and possible solutions in resistance to Russian propaganda are given.

1. THEORY OF INFORMATION WARFARE AND RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA

1.1. Modern tools of warfare and unique characteristics of Russian information strategy

One of the first persons who discussed the phenomena of information war in the open press was Marshall McLuhan in his work "Culture is our business" in the 1960s. Even then, it was clear that the Cold War was carried out using information technology everytime. The wars were conducted with the help of the most advanced technology. Moreover, heavy arms, which were used in the "hot" wars of the past, destroyed the enemies one by one in a heartbeat. In contrast, with the help of the cinema and television, the information persuasion immersed the entire population into a new world of imagination. Marshall McLuhan (1970, 66) said: "World War III is a guerrilla information war with no division between military and civilian participation".

However, the most important in information warfare is the new information technology itself. If it is viewed as a weapon, it can turn into a total catastrophe for humankind. As an instrument of politics, information warfare means the existence of one society at the expense of the exclusion of another one.

In the 20th century, people began to give a very narrow interpretation of the concept of "information war". Scientists always tried to come up with the exact definition of information warfare. Still, unfortunately, there are no strictly standard features, which could be applied to all information wars. The question is highly debatable. Sometimes in political science, some conceptions possess more questions, then answers.

The question of what makes information a weapon deserves special attention. Many experts believe that information weapons are means of distorting, destroying and stealing information; overcoming protection systems; restricting the access of individual users; disorganisation of the actions of technical means and computer systems.

According to Blair (2001), information warfare is a targeted effort to undercut and neutralise the enemy's command and control system to protect and coordinate the activities of the command and control system of friendly forces.

At the same time, Arthur Cebrowski (Silveberg, 1997) states that information warfare is any action to deny, exploit, corrupt or destroy the enemy's information and its functions.

Besides, Dan Kuehl (2013) defines information warfare as the "conflict or struggle between two or more groups in the information environment".

However, such a narrow definition of multidimensional information weapons does not allow to present the whole arsenal of modern information tools. Therefore, the following definition can be considered more precise: information warfare it is the use of different kind of information technology in order to deceive an enemy including devastating impact on information systems and infrastructure as well as people and leaders.

Compared to conventional information weapons, it has several new features. Of course, it is difficult to agree with those authors who consider information weapons more potent than nuclear ones, since they have different purpose impressions. What is much more important is that the information weapons have a pronounced offensive character, since the effect of the information lies in its preventive nature. The effect of the informational attack is much more durable, as it provokes distrust, frustration, nihilism and so on since it is complicated and time-consuming to change the negative perception (Ventre 2009).

Firstly, the first significant advantage of information weapons is its relative cheapness compared with other types of weapons because the investments in enemy destruction are not significant. It is anticipated that the enemy has all the necessary means for his destruction. The effectiveness of use of information weapons is to "help" the enemy to direct his available means against himself - to create the effect of self-destruction.

Secondly, information warfare does not have a strict definition. As a result, it possesses a wide range of strategies and weapons towards a variety of enemies. Occasionally it is difficult to distinguish who is a target of the information attack and who is the opponent. Therefore, it is difficult to prosecute the guilty party and bring them to justice. Moreover, international law seems obsolete in the field of information wars and does not recognise any kind of legal liability.

Thirdly, the opportunities of information warfare are limitless. It gives the ability to manipulate public perceptions. For example, Social Media is a powerful tool for distributing news and other information. However, social media can distribute unconfirmed information, misinformation, especially during high-profile events.

Lastly, information warfare is a considerable challenge to intelligent state services. Tradition methods and analytics cannot be applied to fight information attacks. It makes it crucial to adapt to the call of our time and new types of war, such as cyber or information warfare. It is a challenge to identify the threat, its possible targets, as well as a person or a group of people who is in charge of the attack. Threats are changing very rapidly, and we are becoming more and more vulnerable (Arquilla, Borer 2007).

Overall, the essential principle of conducting an information war is the aggressor's desire to continuously expand the controlled information space, bypassing the established moral norms and rules, deliberately breaking all social restrictions and eroding moral settings. At the same time, the media concentrate attention on odious facts, publish confidential information about the personal life of public politicians, and conduct scandalous "investigations", knowingly falsifying information, savouring piquant details (Macdonald, 2007). The task is to activate the subcortical layers of the human brain, including the mechanism of manipulating the feelings and emotions of people, which is the basis of management of the psychology of the crowd.

At the same time, the strategy of information warfare involves organisation of resistance to informative actions of the enemy, including a strict prohibition on the dissemination of alternative information. However, it is essential to underline a few points. Such restrictions are not proved effectively (unless only in authoritarian states), and they are a direct threat to human right in terms of freedom of speech and press. Therefore, such actions should be performed wisely and with extra caution. Media prohibition may have a different outcome as a tool that not often gives a positive result. For example, in a case, if the government announces some source of information or media

as not credible, it will affect only citizens with a high level of trust to authorities. Thus, the modern information war strategy combines the latest information technology with massive propaganda aimed at providing information dominance.

It is crucial to understand and accept the changes in modern warfare. It does not necessarily possess arms as it used to be. Nowadays, it is more about cyber and information aspects. State governments have to acknowledge new threats and adapt to them. However, there is no decline in the quality of democracy and democratic reversals. Governments should not try to seize the power of media and the Internet. All such actions undermine the fundamental human rights like freedom of expression and the press, what is unacceptable. Unfortunately, such steps towards the state control of the media and the Internet could be seen in Russia (Gleis 2016).

The target of the Russian information strategy is not only citizens of Russia but the audience all around the globe. State-owned media like Russia Today or Sputnik are ready to be available for broadcasting in Europe, in the United States and across the globe. Russia realises the role of international media channels in modern information warfare. The state-funded media such as Al Jazeera and China Central Television (CCTV) are actively on-air for years now as well (Dougherty, 2014).

Information campaigns influenced a lot the South and East of Ukraine, as a result the Crimea and Donbas were invaded without resistance. It gave support to the establishment of the so-called people republic (Gerber, Zavisca 2016). The primary sources of Russian news for Ukrainians are satellite TV and Youtube channels. In 2014, the Ukrainian government quickly realised the impact of propaganda. It banned Russian TV channels, websites and social networks like Vkontakte and Odnoklasniki. Those social networks are the easiest and the cheapest platform for bot creation.

Moreover, the Ukrainian media regularly spreads fake news by quoting their Russian colleagues. According to the monitoring results of Detector Media (2018), news with Russian narratives are disseminated mostly by the sites "Strana.ua", Newsone.ua, "Vesti", 112.ua, which are also used as the primary source of information about Ukraine in the Russian information space.

However, a better way to describe the Russian approach is as non-linear warfare. Tad Schnauffer (2016) says that while undertaking this non-linear grand strategy, the lines between war and peace are blurred. It causes states to act without a clear declaration of war. Non-linear warfare relies on

the subversion and division of the enemy's social and political structure, allowing the aggressor to do their will by any means, not just brute force. Therefore, non-linear warfare has no limits or boundaries, and it may apply any measures in order to reach the purpose. If Russia conquered Ukraine by force, it could have happened, but that was not the purpose. Instead, it undermines state legitimacy to population, for instance, "little green men" in Crimea, supported NGO's and politicians abroad as well as misinformation campaigns (Shekhvostov 2015).

On January 26, 2013, General Valery Gerasimov (2014), the Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Federation, turned to the members of the Russian Academy of Military Sciences with the speech. He described a new military strategy. He highlighted that in order to achieve military-political goals in the modern world, political, diplomatic, economic and other measures, including the hidden ones, such as attracting non-government international organisations and private military companies are increasingly significant (Mölder, Sazonov 2018).

Also just a few days before the annexation of the Crimea Vladislav Surkov, Putin's ex-advisory published a short article under his pseudonym, Nathan Dubovitsky (2014). Surkov also described the new approach to a military strategy. He said that this was the first non-linear war. In the primitive wars of the nineteenth, twentieth, and other middle centuries, the fight was usually between two sides: two nations or two temporary alliances. However, now, four coalitions collided, and it was not two against two or three against one. It was all against all...

Russian authorities use the information for different, not a neutral perspective. Dmitri Kiselev, the general director of MIA Rossiya Segodnya, announced in an interview with the BBC (Rosenberg 2016) that the time of clean journalism has undoubtedly passed, his journalism, like the BBC's journalism, is not neutral. It is impossible to be such even theoretically, because, in a vast sea of information, the selection of information is already subjective, or corresponds to editorial policy. Selectivity is no longer neutrality.

To sum up it all, it should be said that the non-linear features of this conflict are unannounced war movements, denial of interference in domestic affairs of another state. Obvious fake excuses and informational influence also plays an essential role in Russian modern warfare strategy.

1.2. The Vulnerability of Ukrainian audience to Russian influence operations

Apart from everything, we have to admit that Ukraine and Russia have long historical links, and breaking these links might be difficult and painful. Let`s take a look at the international relations theory and try to find why Ukrainian society may be especially vulnerable to Russian influence operations (Piculicka-Wilczewska, Sakwa 2015).

Samuel Huntington (2003), the author of «The Clash of Civilisations», suggested the quite exciting idea. In the 90th of the 20th century, he predicted in his theory, that Ukraine might be divided across the cultural line between more catholic West of Ukraine and orthodox East of Ukraine. The current situation does not mean that the prediction has realised. However, a different view on whether the country should progress towards the East or the West is a real part of the conflict as well as using the orthodox map by Kremlin in their influence operations as the rebelling East is always a hot topic on the agenda.

The theory of regionalism can help to analyse the difference between the Ukrainian regions, which used to be parts of different countries until the middle of the 20th century. It was an essential factor of distinction between the West and the East of Ukraine. Donbas and Crimea was the most developing region in the 19th century, and different ethnic groups settled there during the industrialisation period. However, to be completely honest, it should be noted that the vast majority of Crimea and Southern regions citizens do speak the Russian language. As it is seen in the picture, it is more than 50 per cent of citizens.



Figure 1.1. Ukraine language division, from Max Fisher, nine questions about Ukraine you were embarrassed to ask,

Source: The Washington Post (2014)

The regional identity of the Donbas region is important. It was developed in the 20th century supported by the Soviet government information campaigns. It exercised the particular kind of local patriotism exalting the miner proletarian region. That is the reason why the collapse of USSR was extremely painful to the locals. First of all, it was the identity crisis. Nobody wanted to lose their status of state elites. As well as after the breakdown of economic relations between the regions of the former USSR, the economic stagnation was even more painful for the previously rich and prosperous region.

The post-colonial theory can shed more light on the Ukrainian situation after the soviet times. For decades, Ukraine used to be a part of the Soviet Union, and now it is a 29- year- old grown-up country. Nowadays, the Russian language is still widely in use, but it is gradually losing its dominant status. Apart from that, the Soviet ideology, with its vision of history is not accessible anymore. The conflict has even broadened the gap between the East and the West. Moreover, there is much going on here: political and ideological.

Therefore, all these theories explain the loyalty of East Ukrainians towards the Russian Federation, as well as the attractiveness of the media agenda of the neighbouring state.

1.3. The Kerch strait incident and the origins of Russian-Ukrainian conflict

As we see from the previous chapter, Russian influence has been presented since the early days and focused on the weakest point of Ukrainian society. It became the background for more severe intervention later. The tense standoff between Ukrainian and Russian Federation has been existing for more than 6 years, and there is no visible end of it either. Basically, the pro-Russian unrest started in February 2014 right after the Euromaidan movement. It covered quite a lot of cities in the East and South of Ukraine. Euromaidan started in Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine, on the Independence Square on November 21, 2013. The main reason was the refusal of the former President of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovich to sign the association agreement with the European Union. Due to the bad economic state, for many Ukrainians EU integration was seen as a tool for "a better life". Apart from the economic aspect, the revolution of dignity has a strong ideological and value-based background. It was not only about the welfare, but mostly about European values, vectors of development. The name of revolution is self-explanatory. However, the former President overturned the decision about association between Ukraine and the EU not to derail relationship with Russia. It was considered as a betrayal of Ukrainian State and its citizens (Gai-Nyjnyk, 2016). During the month Yanukovich tried to shut down the protest by force of the internal policy troops called Berkut. This thing turned the peaceful protest into the confrontation.

Afterwards, the Crimea was annexed by the Russian Federation using its combat forces. The great majority of international organisation and other democratic states criticised the tricky Crimea referendum (Gorbulina, 2017).

On 25 November 2018 Ukrainian ships tried to pass through the Kerch Strait. Approaching the shipping channel they were intercepted by the Russian coast guard, one of the vessels rammed Ukrainian tug. After passing to the anchorage in front of the Kerch bridge, the Ukrainian ships were blocked. When they tried to go on back to Odesa, Russian forces began to pursue them and used weapons. Indeed, as was already mentioned, officials took polar opposite positions, but such action was predictable. It is now clear that the dreadful thing was that Ukrainian citizens and society had divergent views on the matter.

To some extent, the international law worked in the case of occupation of Azov. After formation of independent states, the maritime border between Russia and Ukraine was not settled. However,

at that time, Presidents signed the Treaty on Cooperation in the Use of the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait, which entered into force on April 23, 2004 (23.04.2004 /643_205).

This Agreement was not denounced by any of the Parties and, therefore, was valid. It is characteristic that it does not appear on the list of international treaties on the website of the Russian Foreign Ministry.

According to this Agreement, the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait is historically the inland waters of the Russian Federation and Ukraine (Article 1). Merchant ships and warships, as well as other state vessels under the flag of the Russian Federation or Ukraine, operated for non-commercial purposes are used in the Sea of Azov and Strait of Kerch by freedom of navigation (Article 2).

The 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea states the right of transit passage applies to all ships, including warships, and aircraft. It is according to Article 38 of the Convention, the so-called right of free navigation.

This rule of international law fully applies to the Kerch Strait, regardless of the presence of territorial waters and the exclusive economic zone of Russia (Katuoka, Skirmante 2018).

To sum up it all, we can say that one most important date has to be outlined. On May 25, The International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) announced its decision (no 26, 23.05.2019), as an interim measure: Russia is obliged to immediately release two Ukrainian warships, a support vessel and 24 Ukrainian sailors detained near the Kerch Strait in November 2018, and allow them to return to the homeland, thereby satisfying the requirements of Ukraine.

As we have the decision of The International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS), Ukrainian rights to cross the strait are not a matter of observation and discussion. However, it has become a matter of manipulations, disinformation and bluff. The main aim of this paper is to distinguish and outline such incidents.

On September 7, the exchange of prisoners of war happened between Ukraine and Russia. The exchange took place according to the formula 35 by 35. Among them 24 Ukrainian sailors arrived in Kyiv, detained by the Russian coast guard in the Kerch Strait. The case was closed on November 18, when robbed and damaged Ukrainian ships were returned.

However, there are two sides of the story. One part of the society believes that the passage of Ukrainian ships through Kerch duct was legal, that is to say, the Ukrainian side had unfettered authority to reach Ukrainian ports in the Azov sea. The second part of the society firmly convinced with another popular idea, that the capture of navy vessels was exclusively Ukrainian fault and Russia was just provoked. Who is right in this situation, and how that faulty assumption was created?

Ukraine has not used the decision of the international court. Sailors were exchanged, but not returned. Moreover, it has to be noted that Ukrainian vessels are moored in Russia. That means that the juridical war was won, while the informational war was lost with no chances. Let us see whether that is true.

2. THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN OCCUPATION OF AZOV

2.1. The impact of Russian influence operation in Azov

The second chapter studies how the Ukrainian audience perceives the Case of Azov occupation and the role of the media there. Before jumping into real research, it should be considered what Ukrainian citizens think about the incident that happened on November 25, 2018. In order to have a complete picture, let`s look at some social polls or so-called surveys.

According to a survey conducted by Rating Group Ukraine (2018), the majority of Ukrainians (about 58%) believe that Russia committed an act of military aggression in the Kerch Strait, capturing Ukrainian ships and sailors. The opposite opinion is held by only 22% of respondents. However, it also means that every fifth respondent still has not decided. The results are shown in the figure below.

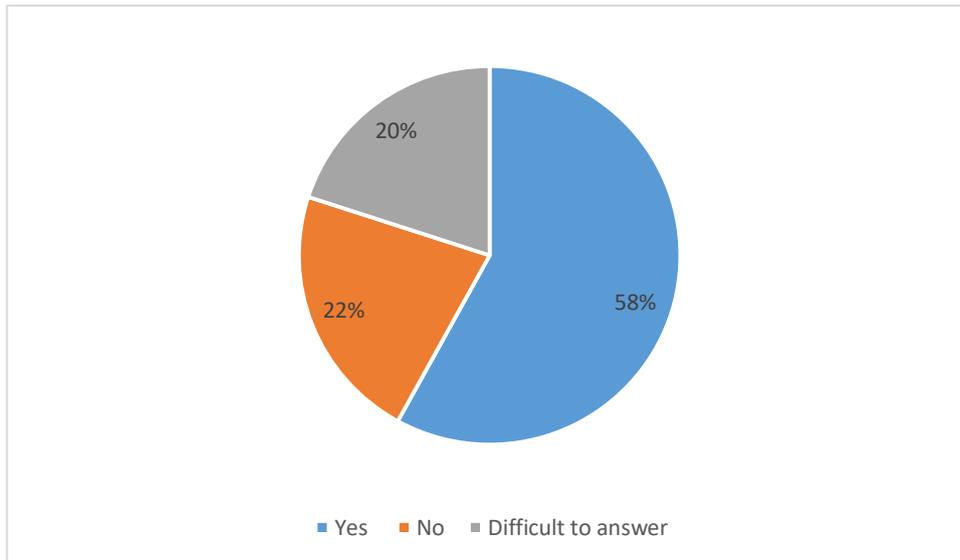


Figure 2.1. Has the Russian Federation committed an act of aggression against Ukraine by the incident with military vessels in Azov sea on November 28, 2018?

Source: Rating Group Ukraine (2018)

However, at the same time, only one-third of Ukrainians support the decision to impose martial law for 30 days, almost 60% do not support it. It should be mentioned that the decision is relatively more supportive by residents of western (44%) and central (39%) Ukraine, and it is less supportive in the south (24%), least in the East (14%). It endorses the idea of the social divisions within Ukraine, as was shown in the previous chapter.

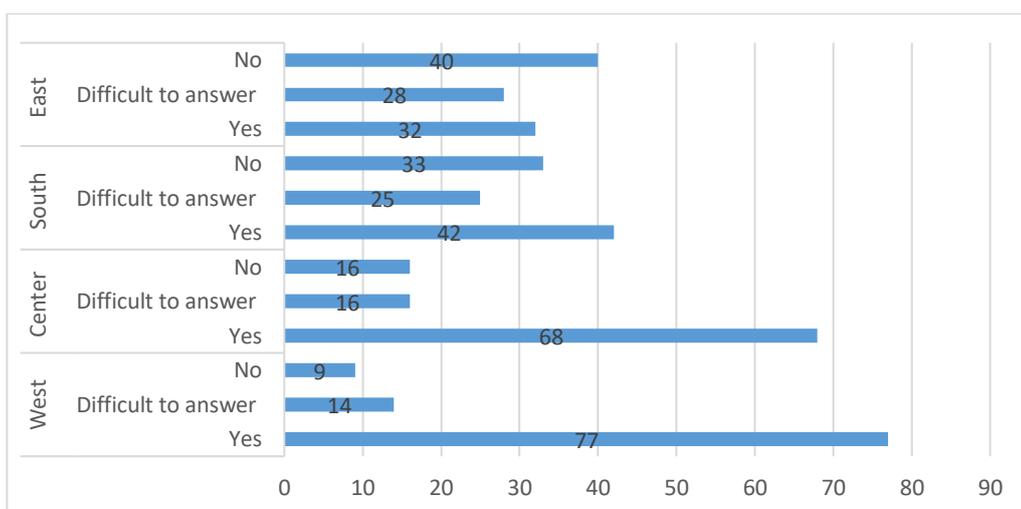


Figure 2.2. Has the Russian Federation committed an act of aggression against Ukraine by the incident with military vessels in Azov sea on November 28, 2018

Source: Rating Group Ukraine (2018)

Most of the citizen of the Eastern and Southern Ukraine do not see the Russian Federation as an aggressor that attacked its neighbour. This one and plenty of other surveys prove this point.

Apart from that, the majority of respondents (69%) consider the introduction of martial law as a belated decision. They are convinced that it was necessary to introduce it back in 2014 after the annexation of the Crimea and the outbreak of hostilities in Donbas.

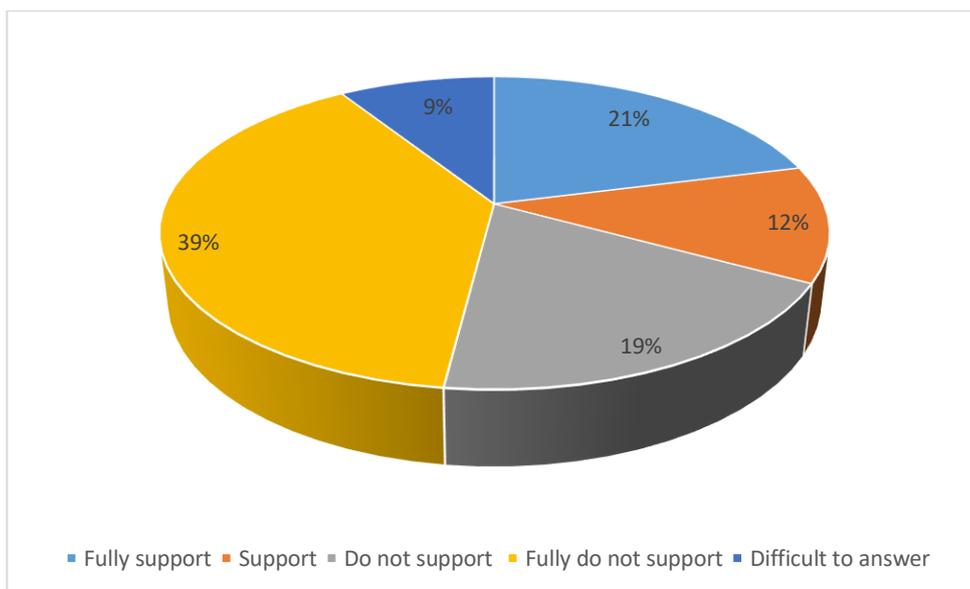


Figure 2.3. Since November 26, 2018, the martial law was introduced in Ukraine. Do you support it?

Source: Rating Group Ukraine (2018)

Interestingly enough, that almost two-thirds of those polled admit that President Petro Poroshenko wanted to introduce martial law in Ukraine for 60 days in order to postpone the presidential election.

However, we can be sure that the plan mentioned above was not fulfilled. There might be at least two options for why it was not implemented. The first one - there was no scenario to postpone the presidential election, and martial law was a reasonable response to Russian aggression, and the second one - there was such a scenario. However, it was not completed due to public opinion. Overall, we do know that the absence of public support and division in perception weakened official position of Ukraine in the conflict that happened in Azov. We do not know for sure which has had a greater impact on public opinion about this case and formed social reaction: the

traditional distrust of the authorities for Ukrainians, negative personal attitude to President Poroshenko or Russian propaganda. Let`s focus on the role of the media.

As reflected in the previous chapter, the first goal of this paper is to prove or disapprove the role of the media in the formation of social opinion. The rightfulness of the Ukrainian side and aggression of the Russian Federation is not a matter of discussion. However, as we can see from the surveys, Ukrainian society has a different position.

Like everything else in the world, the media industry is evolving. Newspapers were replaced in the middle of the last century by radio. Radio was supplanted by television, and in the 21st century, an increasing part of the audience gives preference to the Internet. Moreover, the network took over both viewers and radio listeners and press lovers (Porche et al. 2017). Most media have their news sites, and television channels broadcast their programs on the network; therefore, the traditional media are fading into the background.

According to the survey commissioned by the Detector Media NGO (2019), despite the fact of internet media development and popularity, the vast majority of Ukrainian citizens (54%) receive information about the situation in the country and the world from Ukrainian television channels. Another 42% of Ukrainians receive information from Internet resources (central and local, Ukrainian and Russian or from the social networks).

For some people, the main source of information is personal social circles: relatives, friends, neighbours, colleagues, and others. Other sources such as radio or press account for no more than 8%.

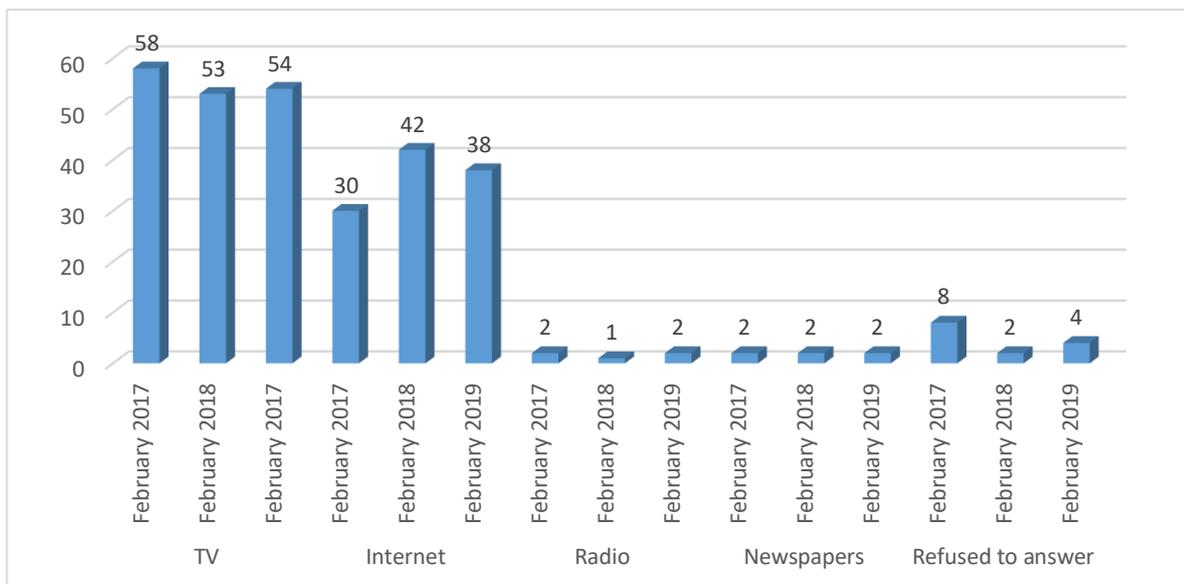


Figure 2.4. The most used sources of information in Ukraine.

Source: Detector Media NGO (2019)

As a rule, TV gives the most narrow picture of what is happening as viewers do not have much choice of sources. They are locked in a small pull of information. According to the conducted survey, the East of Ukraine is the most vulnerable in this case.

For obvious reasons, the majority of 87 per cent of Ukrainian population use the Ukrainian media as the primary source of information. However, the Ukrainian media field may be also tricky and not so straightforward in presenting news. The phrase "Whoever owns the information, owns the world" became famous after the Napoleonic wars in the 19th century when Rothschild's family made a fortune by knowing first the outcome of the battle. However, this expression has another, modern, subtext - who owns the "media", owns the world. Therefore, the media usually refers as a fourth estate or power alongside with legislative, executive and judicial branches. Let us see the most popular media in Ukraine and who owns them. We will take a look at the three most common sources like TV, the Internet and social networks.

Most Ukrainians use TV as the main source of information. Below there is the table that consists the information about the most-watched TV channels in Ukraine. The Ukrainian TV market is controlled by 6 or 7 main channels. Moreover, it has to be noted that holding 1+1 has more than 50 per cent of viewers. Other highly watchable channels are Inter, ICTV, TRK Ukraine, STB, 112 Ukraine and Novyi. The Rating was conducted by USAID in 2019.

Table 2.1. The most popular TV media in Ukraine.

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Absolute gain, %
1+1	63,00%	62,00%	57,00%	59,00%	63,00%	0
Inter	56,00%	47,00%	43,00%	41,00%	41,00%	-0,15
ICTV	31,00%	28,00%	33,00%	33,00%	32,00%	0,01
Ukraina TRK	18,00%	22,00%	27,00%	28,00%	28,00%	0,1
STB	31,00%	38,00%	36,00%	33,00%	26,00%	-0,05
112 Ukraina	14,00%	15,00%	15,00%	18,00%	20,00%	0,06
Novyi	12,00%	18,00%	15,00%	15,00%	13,00%	0,01
2+2	6,00%	4,00%	4,00%	6,00%	4,00%	-0,02
NewsOne	0,00%	0,00%	2,00%	3,00%	4,00%	0,04
NTN	5,00%	6,00%	7,00%	5,00%	4,00%	-0,01
5 channel	13,00%	8,00%	7,00%	8,00%	4,00%	-0,09
24 channel	6,00%	1,00%	5,00%	3,00%	3,00%	-0,03
Pryamyi	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	3,00%	0,03
UA Pershyi	3,00%	4,00%	2,00%	3,00%	2,00%	-0,01
Mega	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	2,00%	0,02
TET	3,00%	3,00%	2,00%	3,00%	2,00%	-0,01
Espresso. TV	1,00%	1,00%	1,00%	2,00%	2,00%	0,01

Source: USAID (2019)

Nowadays, most of the TV media are presented on the Internet and have their News page. Ukraine is not an exception, and 1+1 holds the first spot among the Internet media as well. It is shown in the table below.

Table 2.2. The most popular internet media in Ukraine.

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Absolute gain, %
1+1	9,00%	6,00%	7,00%	10,00%	10,00%	1,00%
Facty	6,00%	5,00%	5,00%	8,00%	7,00%	1,00%
Obozrevatel	4,00%	3,00%	3,00%	6,00%	6,00%	2,00%
Ukrainska Pravda	6,00%	6,00%	9,00%	4,00%	5,00%	-1,00%
Novosti Ukraini	6,00%	3,00%	5,00%	9,00%	5,00%	-1,00%
Korrespondent	10,00%	6,00%	8,00%	7,00%	5,00%	-5,00%
Vesti	4,00%	3,00%	4,00%	4,00%	5,00%	1,00%
Segodnya	3,00%	3,00%	4,00%	5,00%	5,00%	2,00%
Novosti.ua	4,00%	4,00%	3,00%	7,00%	4,00%	0,00%
Sobytia	4,00%	3,00%	3,00%	5,00%	4,00%	0,00%
Podrobnosti	3,00%	3,00%	3,00%	4,00%	4,00%	1,00%
Liga.net	5,00%	3,00%	4,00%	3,00%	4,00%	-1,00%
Strana.ua	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	3,00%	3,00%
Hromadske.TV	4,00%	2,00%	3,00%	2,00%	3,00%	-1,00%
Telegraf	0,00%	1,00%	0,00%	3,00%	2,00%	2,00%
Espresso. TV	3,00%	1,00%	2,00%	2,00%	2,00%	-1,00%

Source: USAID (2019)

All the above have their censorship and policies. Most of them follow the interests of the owners. In order to understand what those editorial policies are, we have to remember who Ukrainian media magnates are (Boyd-Barrett 2017).

Igor Kolomoisky has the most significant share in the market. Under his control there is a powerful asset of the 1+1 Media group, which includes the 1+1 and 2+2 the television channels, several entertainment channels and the UNIAN news agency. Kolomoisky publicly denies influence on the editorial policy of television channels. However, their content is entirely consistent with the interests of the oligarch. Thus, during the presidential race, "1+1" mercilessly criticised Kolomoisky's main opponent Petro Poroshenko, but provided full support to Vladimir Zelensky.

The second most popular media belongs to another oligarch Dmitry Firtash and Sergii Levochkin, beside Sergey Levochkin used to be the head of the Presidential Administration of Viktor Yanukovich. Inter TV channel and some other less politicised media are included in the UA Inter Media Group holding. For years, Inter has remained the most popular channel in Ukraine. However, with the outbreak of war in Donbas in 2014, it has significantly lost its viewers. Inter became famous because of scandals with pro-Russian statements by journalists and managers.

Thirdly, under the influence of Victor Pinchuk, there are such channels as ICTV, STB, Novyi and Fakty newspaper. The main goal of those is not to create one censored line of information. The content of these channels is mostly entertainment programmes. Therefore, they are not very influential in terms of following oligarchs business or political interests like the two ones described previously.

For a couple of last years, Viktor Medvedchuk who has a personal relationship with President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin became the owner of three television channels: 112, NewsOne and ZIK. Thus, Medvedchuk is the owner of two of the top 10 of the all-Ukrainian information channels. According to the TV Panel of the Industrial Television Committee, in May 2019, the total share of television viewing of channels 112, NewsOne and ZIK amounted more than 24%

The richest Ukrainian, Rinat Akhmetov, controls the Media Group Ukraine holding, which, among other things, includes one of the most popular Ukrainian television channel – TRK Ukraina. Akhmetov uses his TV channel to build his image, criticise opponents and lobby oligarchs'

interests. TRK Ukraina gained the most viewers for the past four years. Since 2015 it expanded its outreach on 10 per cent. His newspaper and internet media Segondya showed a decent increase in comparison to previous years.

It is worth to be mentioned that 5 Kanal and Pryamyi belong to the fifth president of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko. However, they are not very influential as possess only four and three per cent of the share. The mentioned media were extremely loyal to its owner during the election campaigns and presidency (Zhdanova, Orlova 2015).

Overall, we can conclude that oligarchs have a massive impact on information perception in Ukraine. They set news agenda pursuing their own political and business interests, which spoil the quality of information consumed by recipients.

The second most used source of media is the Internet and social networks. It should be noted that in May 2017, the Presidential Decree "On the application of personal special economic and other restrictive measures (sanctions)" came into force. It includes the block of VKontakte and Odnoklassniki, which were ones of the most popular social media in Ukraine. As a result, Facebook instantly became the most popular social network in Ukraine, as shown in the table below. Most of the other Russian websites were blocked (Zhdanova, Orlova 2015). Despite all efforts, news from the eastern neighbour is still available. That makes below data essential.

Table 2.3. The most popular social networks in Ukraine.

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Absolute gain, %
Facebook	1,00%	7,00%	8,00%	8,00%	11,00%	10,00%
YouTube	0,00%	0,00%	2,00%	2,00%	4,00%	4,00%
Vkontakte	4,00%	9,00%	5,00%	2,00%	1,00%	-3,00%
Twitter	0,00%	4,00%	0,00%	1,00%	0,20%	0,20%

Source: USAID (2019)

Social networks are not only a source of information for the media but first and foremost, a platform for the audience to take their part in it. It is believed that social networks have become a key to reporting in times of crisis like the investigate case, which subsequently evolved into the daily use of social networks for news. In doing so, the audience itself becomes part of the media - through comments, through the opportunity to become a part of the news and influence the agenda (Moore 2018).

All popular sites deploy bots in order to perform aggressive information campaigns. Artelligence has developed an algorithm to determine in case a profile is a bot. It monitored what and in what way this profile comments on the web. Suppose the text of the commentary under the Facebook post follows one line and repeat itself. In that case, such profiles are classified as bots.

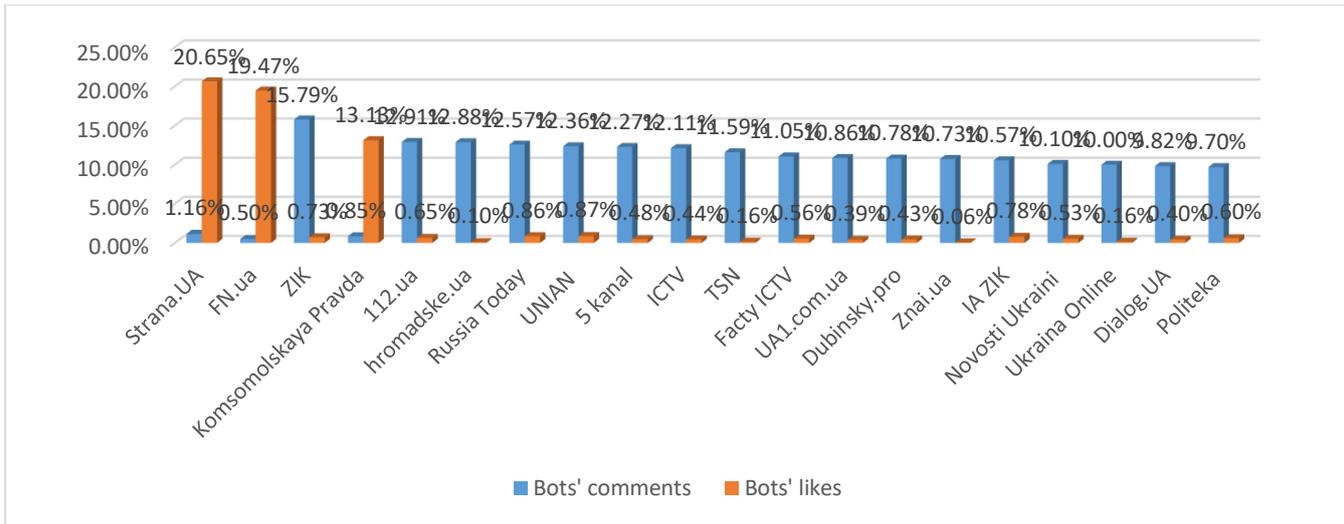


Figure. 2.5. The share of bots among the Ukrainian Facebook audience.

Source: VoxUkraine (2018)

According to the collected data, 4 out of the top 10, which use +the help of bots, are the followers of the Russian agenda. RT Today, Komsomolskaya Pravda are the Russian media, and 112.ua and ZIK belong to already mentioned Viktor Medvedchuk. For instance, the number of ZIK bots accounts si 13,33 per cent in the comment section, and 0,85 per cent of likes were given by bots as well. Another quite a popular channel is 112.ua. It has 12,91 per cent of bots in the comment section, and bots gave 0,65 of likes. The most popular Facebook international propaganda resource Russian Today deploys 12,27 per cent of bots in the comment section and 0,48 of likes.

Thus, Facebook in Ukrainian realities with all its advantages, disadvantages and limitations is a required field for public discussion and political activity. Once registered on Facebook, Ukrainians influence the agenda of discussions, while the traditional media are losing their popularity.

As we can see, the Ukrainian audience consumes Ukrainian and Russian information products mostly from the Internet and satellites. One of the reasons is that Russian channels are officially banned in Ukraine as well as some media pages. As the results, the InMind (2019) sociological

poll "Attitude of the population to the media and consumption of various types of media in 2019" presented on October 22, 2019 showed that 13% of Ukrainians use Russian media as a news source. Among the Ukrainian users of the Russian media, the most popular TV channels are Russia 1, Russia 24, NTV and the most read internet sites are Gazeta.ru, Lenta.ru and Vesti.ru. All of them distribute the state propaganda of the Russian Federation

Statistics says that even though only 13% of Ukrainians personally use Russian media, but almost every third or 30 per cent of respondents consider the Russian news source as the main one.

The motives of using the Russian media as the primary source of information vary. Among the reasons for visiting the Russian media are:

- 35% of respondents said they could get an alternative point of view
- 22% claimed that the media in Russia were interesting to watch and read
- 21% considered that they used it to receive news in Russian
- 4% of respondents said that the media in the Russian Federation are truthful and more independent.

At the same time, 36% of Ukrainians were unable to substantiate their needs for using the Russian media. Most of the Russian media are used in Donetsk and Zaporizhzhya regions (27% and 25% correspondingly), the least of it - in Lviv (6%). Thus, East and South are the main consumers of Russian information, while West and Center are the least.

To sum up it all, we can say that approximately 42% of Ukrainian citizens do not believe that Ukrainian was right in Kerch Strait incident. The media could partially influence it. For our research, the most popular Ukrainian media were selected: 1+1, ICTV, Obozrevatel, STB, 112 Ukraina, NewsOne. Inter and TRK Ukraina were not taken into account as they do not provide the open-access to their archives. RussianToday and Gazeta.ru on the Internet were analysed as the media that have the biggest audience on the Ukrainian web.

2.2. Media analysis on Kerch strait incident

In the previous subchapter, the most influential media with the biggest audience in Ukraine have been distinguished with the help of USAID-Internews Media Consumption Survey (2019). Therefore, 1+1, ICTV, Obozrevatel, STB were taken into account. Unfortunately, there is no open-source for Inter and Ukraina materials, so the runners-up STB and ICTV will be taken instead. At the same time 1+1 and ICTV has a great share of audience on TV and the Internet, so according to methodology here, one visual and one written news release will be taken. 112 Ukraina, NewsOne were chosen being "pro-Russian" media in Ukraine (Detektor Media, 2018). Russia Today and Gazeta.ru were chosen as the most influential Russian media in Ukraine (InMind, 2019). Therefore, 16 news are analysed in this chapter; the list of those is also available in appendix 1.

It is worth to mention that Gazeta.ru and Russia Today are state-funded channels (Russia), the others are the Ukrainian private organisations.

Table 2.4. Russia Today breakdown.

<p>Authors</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. “Tense standoff around Kerch Strait between Russia & Ukraine: How it developed” – no author (article) 2. “Tense standoff around Kerch Strait between Russia & Ukraine: How it developed” – no author (article) <p>Both articles are author-free. It can be assumed that the authors avoid direct responsibility for their writing by not showing their authorship.</p>
<p>Context with the main focus</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The timeline of the incident was presented with facts, videos and photos. However, there is a tendency to downplay a piece of information. It is presented one-sided, while the same facts may be viewed differently. The author gives a direct message on who is right and who is wrong in the situation that happened. Several Russian authorities and agencies were cited in the article. Other opinions seem to have been ignored. 2. The context of the article is an opinion of a Russian security agency called FSB in the situation on the Azov sea; the presentation of the incident from the Russian security agency; an implicit accusation of the Ukrainian side on terrorism and the break of maritime laws.
<p>Language and vocabulary</p>	<p>Similarities: Language - formal, but catchy: Kyiv uses "bandit methods" to achieve its goals – Russia Today citing the Russian Foreign Ministry's spokeswoman, Maria Zakharova. Apart from that, Russia Today called the incident in the Kerch strait "marine terrorism". Contrasts, comparisons, metaphors, click-bait titles were used there.</p>
<p>Using photos, videos</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It provides with the video from the Russia vessel, several additional photos and videos with titles like "Ukrainian naval vessels breached Russian border" or "Coast guards trace Ukrainian vessels after the breach of Russian waters." Both of them has a direct conclusion. 2. Here is a photo from above of the vessels manoeuvres; photos of confrontation between Russian and Ukrainian vessels, which highlight the complexity of the situation. <p>Similarities: using photos to support the meaning and the conclusion in the text.</p>
<p>Structure</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. - the chronology of events; - the chain of events; - opinions; - conclusion. 2. - the chronology of events; - the causes; - the consequences; - the similar cases; - the conclusion. <p>Similarities: the direct conclusion about the blame of one side.</p>
<p>Aims</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The main aim is to provide information in a particular manner. The author avoids some controversial points. Generally, the article is following the main ideological line of the channel. According to the article and presented events, Ukrainian vessels broke the maritime law and ruthlessly breached the borders of the Russian Federation. There is one explanation of the events that can follow according to the chain of the event is presented. 2. The main aim is to provide the audience with the official opinion of the Russian authorities. It serves as a logical continuation of the previous article.

Source: compiled by the author.

Being the most read on the Ukrainian Facebook Russia Today has the weirdest reputation among all news agencies that fall under our research. It has a particular style of how to make the news attractive and extravagant. The authors always use clickbait title and bright pictures to attract the audience. All of them has a direct message to the audience. The language is very catchy, consisting of metaphors, comparisons. Russia Today does not elaborate on the issue of maritime border demarcations, laws, by focusing on other points. Russia Today seems to provide us with the most critical facts and digits but ignore some of them. The main objective of the articles is to influence the audience and provide an alternative picture of the cases. The article undermines the image of the Ukrainian navy and Ukraine as a state in general. It reminds of Crimea "separation" from Ukraine and highlights the position of the Russian Federation in Azov towards its neighbour. Russian Today is available in Russian as well as in English, which enlarges its target audience.

Table 2.5. Gazeta.ru breakdown

Authors	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. “Ni Odnogo Dosmotra“: Korabli Ukrainy Narushyli Granicu Rossii?” – no author (article) 2. “”Provokacii Zapada“: Korabli Ukrainy Narushyli Granicu s Rossiei.” – no author (article) <p style="text-align: center;">Both articles have authors.</p>
Context with the main focus	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It reports what happened in this case and its reasons. 2. The article mostly focuses on the consequences of the event.
Language and vocabulary	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Language is very informal; the author uses "simple" words that are understandable by everyone. The complicated thing like maritime law is described in a very primitive way. Sometimes the language used there was offensive towards the Ukrainian side of the conflict. The article starts with the open question: "Has Ukraine broken the border?". 2. The same style of presenting information is used in the second article. It is a question-answer approach to presenting. The language used is also informal, but more preserved in expressions. It may also be described as a style of storytelling that is very easy to read.
Using photos, videos	<p>Similarities: The article includes no photos or maps. It has only one video segment from state Russia24 new program on the same topic.</p>
Structure	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. - the chronology of events; - the explanation of the maritime law; - the reaction of the Russian Federation; - why it happened and who is interested in, and the conclusion. 2. - the chronology of events; - the consequences; - other similar cases; - possible escalations in the future; - conclusion. <p>Similarities: the articles are pushing to own conclusion, which would be evident after reading, even though the second article does not have a separated conclusion.</p>
Aims	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The aim is to show what happed and why this can be considered an unlawful and ruthless breach of the Russian border. Another purpose is to prove the fact that the Ukrainian militaries are incapable of anything and its management is incompetent in comparison with the Russian militaries. 2. Like in the Case of Russia Today, the second article serves as a logical continuation of the first one. The article aims to show how this conflict may develop in the further and what consequences would be for both sides. The title states the "provocation of the West."

Source: compiled by the author.

Gazeta.ru uses informal or sometimes even too informal style (authors are getting personal and offensive) in how they present information. However, at the same time, their names are not mentioned in the articles. Metaphors, comparisons and rhetoric questions are used, which makes it easy to read and comprehend information. In contrast to Russia Today, Gazeta.ru is quite pessimistic in matters relevant to the Azov sea. What happened was indeed a provocation of the Ukrainian government that was prepared in advance. The message to the readers is clear.

Table 2.6. TSN 1+1 breakdown

Authors	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. „Rossiya Bilshhe Rou Gotuvala Provokaciu v Azovskomu Mori za Dopomogou Feikvyh Novyn“ – no author (article) 2. „Agresiya RF v Zaovskomu Mori: Rosiyany Zahopyly v Polon 23 Ukrainskyh Viiskovyh Moryakiv“ - Strashko A. (news video) <p style="text-align: center;">The article has no author.</p>
Context with the main focus	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The article expresses the views about the conflict, but it does not remain neutral. It shows the chronology of the conflict as well. The focus is on the positions of the sides of the conflict and the reaction of the international audience to this incident. It provides information about martial law induction sceptically. 2. The video stresses the dreadfulness of the situation. The position of the news agency is not neutral as well.
Language and vocabulary	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The language is formal. There is a significant number of quotations, facts, arguments. 2. The language is also formal; its features are many metaphors and comparisons.
Using photos, videos	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The photo of the Crimea bridge, which connects Russian with the peninsular, highlights a military presence of the Russian Federation in the Crimea. The map of conflict and the number of infographics is provided in the text. 2. The number of videos of the sea combat includes the ramming, a Mayday radio-call from the Ukrainian vessel and the conversation between Russian militaries attacking which are full of emotions. <p>Similarities: the photos are used strictly to the topic, and have no double meaning.</p>
Structure	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. - the background; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the chronology of events; - the response of Russian and Ukraine to the case; - the martial law in Ukraine and the world's reaction. 2. - a brief introduction; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the chronology of events <p>Similarities: objective facts and background with full information is a crucial part of every article.</p>
Aims	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The aim is to give objective information and a brief explanation of the case. It is noticeable that the author refers to the government of Ukraine as a more trustful source. 2. It is focused on the first, and current information of the incident as the news programme was filmed on the same day when the conflict happened. The second aim is to spread awareness about the difficulty of relationships between Russia and Ukraine among people. <p>Similarities: the pro-Ukrainian position.</p>

Source: compiled by the author.

1+1 is a Ukrainian media that expresses its pro-Ukrainian position in the news. Most journalists directly or indirectly represent Russian forces as occupants and aggressors in that incident in the Kerch Strait. TSN (1+1 news agency) seems to be very stressed by the escalation in the Kerch Strait. The journalists seem to be on the side of the Ukrainian sailors. However they concerned about the worsening of relations with the Russian Federation. The 1+1 article and the video are

quite formal and well structured, all assumptions are well-thought with the arguments, quotations and facts. In contrast, Gazeta.ru, 1+1 sees the occupation of the Azov Sea as a prolonged and well-prepared act of aggression towards Ukraine. However, 1+1 provides information concerning martial law introduction from a negative perspective as it relates to upcoming presidential elections.

Table 2.7. Facty ICTV breakdown.

Authors	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. “Ataka v Kerchynskii Protoci: Yak Rosiya Zahopyla Nashi Korabli ta Moryakiv” – Nakonechna T. (article) 2. “Ataka v Kerchynskii Protoci: Yak Rosiya Zahopyla Nashi Korabli ta Moryakiv” – Nakonechna T. (news video) <p style="text-align: center;">Both authors are mentioned.</p>
Context with the main focus	The similarity: both news releases come in paring and dedicated to one-year capture of the Ukrainian vessels. Both of them assesses not only the incident but all following events in terms of conflict resolution.
Language and vocabulary	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The language in the article is mostly informal. It shows the personal feeling towards the jailed sailors. It consists of "catchy" words and phrases such as "fairy tails" when it refers to the statements on the situation presented by the Russian Federation. 2. The news release seems to be conservative and formal, despite almost the same text narrative. The same allegories and emphasises are used.
Using photos, videos	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The article has a reference to the video presented in the other investigated news release (ICTV). 2. It has a wide range of videos showing the sea combat and its infographics, the delivery of international tribunal of the law of the sea and the interviews with the Ukrainian sailors after their release from a Russian jail.
Structure	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. - the chronology of events - the reactions and consequences; - the trial of the sailors before and after their release 2. - the chronology of events; - the trial of the sailors; - the decision of International Tribunal and its implementation
Aims	Similarities: both the article and the video linked to the date of the conflict in Kerch Strait a year ago. Therefore, the most significant aim is to fresh up the memory of readers/viewers and remind them that crime conducted by the Russian Federation cannot be justified. The second main idea is that Russia did not fulfil the decision on the International court and exchanged the sailors, and did not return them as it was decided.

Source: compiled by the author.

ICTV is a private channel that has a news agency called Facty. Facty news releases, investigated in this thesis, are slightly different as they were published later and reflect a broader scope of information regarding the case. Therefore, the main focus and aim are not to give objective information to the audience on a specific case, but to evaluate the events that happened after the

capture of Ukrainian vessels and sailors. Along with 1+1, ICTV holds the same pro-Ukrainian position. The channel expresses its own one-sided opinion in quite an informal way by using different kinds of literary devices. The authors highlighted that the problem of the occupation of the sea of Azov is still ongoing. The main point of the investigated article is a call for change. However, the overall style and the position towards the incident are similar to 1+1.

Table 2.8. Obozrevatel breakdown.

Authors	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. “Konflikt u Kerchenskii Protoci: Yak Rosiya Napluvala Na Mijnarodne Pravo” – no author (article) 2. “Konflikt Rosii ta Ukrainy u Kerchenskii Protoci: Vsi Podrobyci” – no author (article) <p style="text-align: center;">No authors are mentioned.</p>
Context with the main focus	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The main focus of the article is to understand who is right in the conflict. It covers several judicial documents and international agreements, gives a brief overview of the official Ukrainian position in response to the case. The details of the conflict have been ignored. 2. The main focus is on the chain of events with the timelines, the official and non-official reaction to the case. <p>Similarities: both articles are mostly focused on the official Ukrainian position on the conflict, which leads the audience to direct conclusion.</p>
Language and vocabulary	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The language is formal as it is used to describe the legal issues. It has no literary tools. Therefore, a high number of legal citations are presented in the text. However, the title is not nearly as formal: "Kak Rossiya napleva na mejdunarodnoe pravo" (How Russia does not care about international law). 2. The language of the article is very similar to the articles in Russia Today. It is still formal, but with use of allegories. For instance, "hand of West" is used to describe the reaction of the head of Crimea Sergei Aksenov, who suspects the Western countries in backing up the Ukrainian government.
Using photos, videos	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The author used only one photo from the place of the incident; there were no more photos or videos. 2. It consists of many photos of the incident in order to show the chain of events.
Structure	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. - the legal basis; - the response of the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense. 2. - the cases; - comments on the Case from Ukrainian and Russian officials.
Aims	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The main aim of the article is to show who was right in the incident according to international law and bilateral agreements. 2. It provides the audience with the description of the events in Azov.

Source: compiled by the author.

Obozrevatel is a private internet news portal that belongs to the Ukrainian businessperson and politician Myhailo Brodskyi. It holds a strictly pro-Ukrainian position, which can be tracked directly from the title of the article without going deep into it. Also, it should be noted that the

investigated article presents a straw poll among the readers. They had to answer the questions whether the conflict was the Ukrainian provocation or Russian aggression. 74% per cent of the respondents have chosen the second option. Two articles are quite different in their style, which means that the authors have some freedom in expressing themselves. However, none of them has any mention of the author's names. Nevertheless, it should be admitted that the information presented in these articles shows the pro-Ukrainian position of the authors.

Table 2.9. STB breakdown.

Authors	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. “Roztrli v Azovskomu Mori – Vikna-Novyny – 29.11.2018” – Evtushyna V. (news video) 2. “Voennyi Stan – Vikna-Novyny – 28.11.2018” – Yanchar J. (news video) <p style="text-align: center;">Both authors are mentioned.</p>
Context with the main focus	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The main focus of the article is set on a proof of peaceful trespassing of the Ukrainian vessel through the Kerch Strait and Russian arms usage in response. Also, it gives special attention to purposely distorted and disingenuous of radio recordings on Russia state TV. 2. The second article is dedicated to martial law in Ukraine, which was imposed after the investigated case took place. It describes how contrasting was the effect of the introduction of martial law on people in different regions of Ukraine, how martial law changed the life of the state and its citizens.
Language and vocabulary	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A click-bait title like an "executing in the Azov sea" is used there. However, the style is a formal language; there is a high number of quotations, facts, arguments. 2. The style is storytelling, simple, but the formal language is used.
Using photos, videos	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The news episode uses only two videos. The first one is the speech of the Ukrainian security service representative, and the second one is the piece from the Russian political show. 2. It also has many journalists' reports from over Ukraine. It has to be mentioned that the Ukrainian journalists call their Russian colleagues propagandists and show a piece of news from their programme.
Structure	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. - Ukrainian official position towards the usage of arms by the Russian Federation and spreading the fakes by Russian media 2. - what martial law means and how it affected the country.
Aims	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The main aim is to show the high level of aggression from Russian militaries, highlight the use of the heavy arms against the Ukrainian vessels that did not intend to use any weapons. 2. The main aim is to show that martial law was the right choice and its legitimacy should not be undermined.

Source: compiled by the author.

STB is one of the most popular Ukrainian channels. It has a news programme called Vikna (Windows). STB holds strictly pro-Ukrainian position highlighting the official position of Ukrainian authorities. They seem to be more focused on busting the myths of Russian TV than

analysing the actual case. However, at the same time, Vikna journalists keep themselves away from hasty expressions. The language remains quite formal.

Table 2.10. 112 Ukraina breakdown.

Authors	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. “Ot Tarana Buksira do Voennogo Polojeniya: Polnaya Hronologiya Eskalacii Konflikta v Azovskom More i ee Posledstviya” – no author (article) 2. “Incident v Azovskom More Eto Voina – Jdanov” – Kujeev P., Jdanov O. (news video) <p style="text-align: center;">The article has no author.</p>
Context with the main focus	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The article shows the complete chronology of events from the incident till the introduction of martial law in Ukraine. It covers several subtopics interconnected with the occupation of Azov. 2. The second video is from the political programme called "Poglyad na Tyzhden" ("Week Overview"). It gives personal opinion of some so-called experts in the fields. The Guest expert is convinced that Ukraine provoked the incident.
Language and vocabulary	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. This article seems to be the most formal one among all of the above-investigated pieces. Language is strictly formal; there is a high number of quotations, facts, arguments. 2. The chosen piece of video is a military expert opinion. The expert uses simple language. He asked a rhetoric question: "Who gave the command to transition" claiming that Russian military response was evident. The title of the video was taken from his quotation "it is a war", and it reached the most significant number of views in that channel devoted to the theme of the occupation of Azov. This title was chosen for apparent clickbait reason.
Using photos, video only	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The article has some photos to follow up with a timeline of the story. 2. Some videos from the sea combat are shown as a background to the expert's call.
Structure	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The article is very well structured and easy to follow: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a brief description of the case; - the Ukrainian and Russian official responses; - the world's reaction and current status. 2. The video consists of only one interview, that is a personal opinion on the case.
Aims	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It has no direct or indirect conclusions. 112 Ukraina seems to be neutral towards both sides of the conflict. Moreover, the journalist doubts the veracity of Ukrainian and Russian explanations. It gives an overview of both opinions. 2. The programme aims to discuss the possible consequences of the conflict in the Azov sea.

Source: compiled by the author.

112 Ukraina has an ambiguous reputation in Ukraine. As it was already mentioned, Viktor Medvedchuk, a close relative of Vladimir Putin is the owner of it. It worth mentioning that when he became the owner of the channel, many journalists left it. However, unlike the others, 112 Ukraina seems to be most neutral towards both sides. At least, the first article gives the audience a chance to decide for themselves who is right. The journalists are professionals; there is not any sign of disrespect in their expressions. However, in the second investigated video, some scepticism

towards Ukrainian authorities is visible. The expert is confident that the Ukrainian vessels have provoked the Russian military intentionally. However, the presenter hastened to say that it was only his personal opinion.

Table 2.11. NewsOne breakdown.

Authors	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Konflikt v Azovskom More: Rossiya gtozitsa primenyat Specnaz – no author (article) 2. “Matkovskii: Vvazyvatsa v Pramoj voennyi Konflikt s RF v Azovskom More Nam Protivopokazano” – Prudius V., Shevchuk L., Matkovskii R. (news video) <p style="text-align: center;">The article has no author.</p>
Context with the main focus	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The article is quite short, and the context is not very specific. It is dedicated to the fact of the usage of heavy arms in Kerch strait and has no preferences. 2. The video focuses on the Ukrainian reaction to the incident and martial law. It has to be noted that NewsOne sees a direct link between martial law introduction and upcoming presidential elections in 2019.
Language and vocabulary	<p>Similarities: the language is formal. The video has a high number of quotations, facts, arguments.</p>
Using photos, videos	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The article possesses very little visual accompaniment. It has only one picture of the bridge across the Kerch Strait, which is blocked by the tanker. 2. The TV News release has a wide range of video parts, including the official speeches, the experts comment on developments of the incident as well.
Structure	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the fact of the arms usage in Kerch Strait; - the Russian official explanation, the official Ukrainian response; - the official European response. 2. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ukrainian official response; - martial law introduction; - international reaction to the conflict in Azov.
Aims	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The article has no direct or indirect meanings; it aims to make readers think it over and make a conclusion. 2. This channel conveys an implicit message to people that they should not rely on international partners' opinion as the world is divided regarding the Ukrainian-Russian relations. Also, the significant part of the news release is dedicated to undermining the authority of the former President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko.

Source: compiled by the author.

Having the same owner, 112 Ukraina and NewsOne have a similar reputation of being loyal to the Russian Federation and being in opposition to the 5th president of Ukraine. The political scientist's speech that was included in the second news release highlighted that martial law was introduced in the region that has the lowest support to Petro Poroshenko. The possibility of the postponement of the presidential elections provoked a controversial reaction in the Ukrainian media and society. Besides, it has to be noted that the first article covers official positions of both sides of the conflict. The Russian comment is followed by the Ukrainian one. The order here may be important and lead to an indirect conclusion.

To sum up it all, it is apparent that, in the vast majority of cases, the media represent the interests of their country. Therefore the same facts can be used with the polar opposite meaning and purpose. Russian media are strictly following the Russian agenda claiming West and Ukraine in provocation in Azov. The Ukrainian media take a pro-Ukrainian or neutral position. Thus, some media and some journalists employ the term "aggressor" in relation to the Russian Federation, the others remain indifferent or partially agree with the view of possible incompetence from Ukrainian in order to hold political interests.

Overall, the Ukrainian media such as 1+1, ICTV, STB and Obozrevatet continue to adhere to the pro-Ukrainian position. They convinced that the occupation of Azov is real and the Ukrainian vessels had all legal rights to cross the Kerch Strait. It should be pointed out that these channels attract the most significant part of the audience. 1+1 has 63%, ICTV - 32% and STB - 26 % of the audience. The internet media 1+1 has 12%, ICTV - 7% and Obozrevatel - 6% . They are in the top 3 among all media.

As it was already mentioned, the real influence of the Russian media such as Russia Today and Gazeta.ru on Ukrainian audience is impossible to determine. However, according to the previously noted statistics, at least 13 per cent of Ukrainian citizens use Russian media. Also it has to be admitted, the impact of Russian media on Ukrainian citizens is low, considering the level of trust. At the same time, 112 Ukraine and NewsOne prove themselves loyal to the Russian Federation. Both channels cast minor doubts on the professionalism of Ukrainian militaries and their command. They cover almost 25 per cent of the audience. In addition, 1+1, the most prominent media in Ukraine, expressed some scepticism towards Ukrainian response to the conflict, presenting the introduction of martial law as a political decision that had no security purposes behind it. As a result, it has influenced people's opinion.

Therefore, some part of the audience sees the situation in Azov from the Russian media point of view, but it is fairly small. As a result, it cannot be claimed that it was the factor that has resulted in the division of opinions on Azov occupation. The Ukrainian media kept the mostly pro-Ukrainian position in terms of occupation of Azov. However, they expressed doubt about the feasibility of the implementation of martial law, which, as a result, influenced public opinion in this regards. It leads us to the conclusion that both Russian and the local Ukrainian media played an essential role in the conflict of Azov. It could not form a public opinion on the occupation of Azov that could contradict with a judicial decision but formed a faulty assumption on official

decision and introduction of martial law. Some other factors helped to form a public opinion as well. They are chronic mistrust to national media Ukrainian authorities and lost communication between the state and their citizens.

3. RESISTANCE TO INFORMATIONAL WARFARE

As we came to a conclusion, information warfare is real, and its impact is visible. The right way to proceed is to develop a strategy of combating the propaganda. It has to be admitted that much has been done in this area since 2014 when the Crimea was occupied.

In 2015 the Ukrainian government adopted the law "On making changes to some laws concerning protection of information television and radio space of Ukraine" that has changed the law about cinematography (№18, 131). The National film agency has a right to make a decision which films to release and which have to be banned. For instance, the films that threaten Ukrainian national security or the films which star the actors who are under personal sanctions in Ukraine. According to this law, hundreds of films were blocked for different reasons. In May 2017 upon Presidents Decree "On implementation of personal special economic and other restrictive measures (sanctions)" the most popular social network Vkontakte and Odnoklassniki (originated in Russia) were blocked in Ukrainian web as well. That Decree made Russia Today, Komsomolskay Pravda, Zvezda and some other Russian media are forbidden on Ukrainian territory. The current President Vladimir Zelenskii has recently extended it (№184/2020).

However, there is a fine line between the information security and freedom of the press.

Like in any other democracy, The Constitution of Ukraine guarantees the freedom of expression and the press. At the same time, rights and freedoms of citizens may be limited in case of any emergencies in terms of national security, territorial integrity or social security.

According to the authors of the law on information security, national security was defined as a primary goal and purpose. In terms of the occupation of Donbas, Azov and ongoing war, it should be justified. However, as we investigated in the previous chapter, such strict rules and limitations

of the foreign media holders seem not to be working. Most of the limitations were imposed in 2014 and 2015. However, up to 2018, when the tension in the occupation of Azov reached its pick, the society was still divided. It must be said that this fight is not for the information, but for the citizens' minds.

The lack of trust in the media and state institutions seems to be the biggest problem and threat to national security, which empowers Russian influence operations even more. In terms of trust and credibility, the central Ukrainian TV channels account for less 40% on average, and the Ukrainian internet media has an even lower level of trust – 13% on average.

According to Detector Media sociological studies (2018), about 57% of respondents trusted the central television in a matter of the war in the East, and now they included 39%. There is also a trend to decrease the share of those who believe in information from Ukrainian websites and social networks.

Table 3.1. What are the sources of information you trust the most?

Respondents could choose 3 options, %	West	Central	South	East
Ukrainian TV	47,3	46,5	30,2	31,7
Ukrainian internet media	18,3	14	11,9	9,1
Social networks	11	15,4	9,3	13,3
Relatives, friends, neighbours, colleagues etc.	3,1	4,9	7,1	12,2

Source: Detector Media (2018)

Thus, as it is seen from the table, there is a different level of credibility in Ukrainian Media in the different parts of Ukraine. The West and Center trust the Ukrainian media most (47,3% and 46,5% respectively), the East and the South of Ukraine – the least (31,7% and 30,2% respectively).

The division in trust to the media and authorities may also provoke the division in opinions on this investigated case. According to the social research of the analytical and advisory department of the American Gallup Institute (2019), the level of trust in the authorities in Ukraine is the lowest across the globe. Up to the date of conflict in Kerch Strait, only 9 per cent of the Ukrainian citizens had confidence in their government. The tendency is clear. Since the last elections in 2014, the level of trust in the government dropped by 15 per cent from 25 per cent. Generally, as we can see from the graph below, it has never been very high.

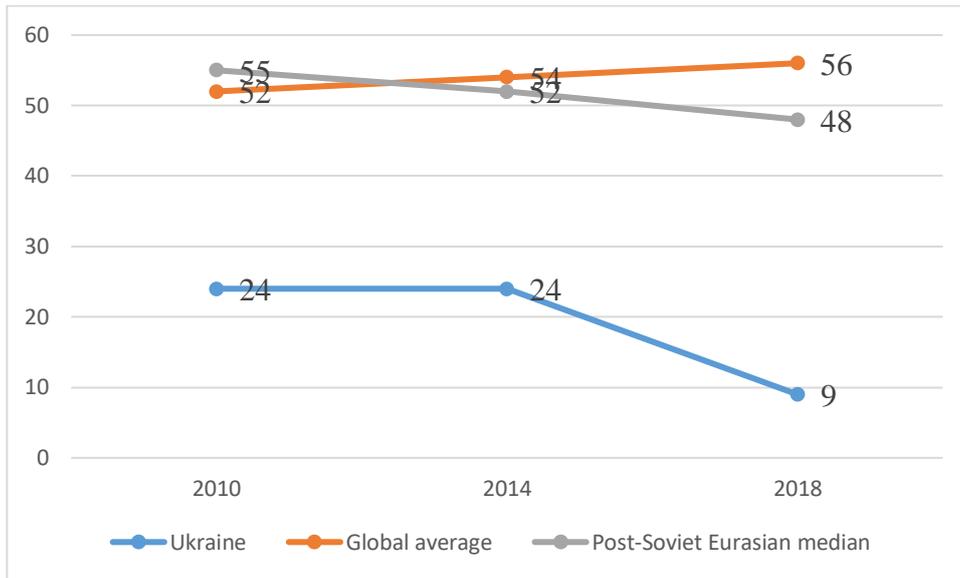


Figure 3.1. In [country] do you have confidence in each of the following, or not? How about the national government? % Yes, confident.

Source: Gallup Institute (2019)

The level of credibility of the new President and government elected last year has been intentionally ignored, because the occupation of Azov happened during the term of the sixth President. Whoever wins the election he will face high expectations and desire for fast changes.

Sevgil Musaeve (VoxCheck 2018), the former chief editor of *Ukrainska Pravda*, noted the direct link between the decline in trust for both the media and authorities. In her opinion, The Ukrainian media frequently cite the local authorities without raising the global issues that led to the total disappointment of the public. Society often accuses the media of distorting the real events that take place in the country.

Sevgil is right, but in that case, it is not very important. It should be admitted that through the years of Poroshenko`s president term, the media such as 1+1, Inter, NewsOne were markedly working against authorities. However, as we investigated, in Azov case, the situation is polar opposite even with a little hint of doubt from NewsOne and 112 Ukraina. Concisely, most of the Ukrainian channels took an exact pro-Ukrainian position in the conflict. However, the defensive measures

taken by the government were presented negatively. The significant part of the population considered that the incident was not the act of aggression from Russia, but the provocation from the Ukrainian leadership. Some people saw it as an attempt to postpone or cancel the upcoming presidential elections.

Two main factors played an essential role in this case. The first one was already established; it is a strong presence of the Russian media in the Ukrainian field as well as oligarchic and pro-Russian opposition influence on the Ukrainian media. The ownership structure was described in the previous chapter. It was revealed, that 25% 1+1 group belongs to well-known Viktor Medvedchuk who owns NewsOne and 112 Ukraina as well.

The second factor is a low level of trust to the national media and authorities that resulted in the loss of communication between the state and its citizens. The President and the Government are working in the same information field. It is well accepted by a particular part of the population. Society is divided as a result of the war as it has never been before. Unification of the country is not an easy task.

The main task of the state institutions to perform their duties, but also to conduct efficient information campaigns about the results through different channels (Hellman, Wagnsson 2017). Statistics show that over 70% of Ukrainian citizens are unaware of national strategy towards the occupation of Azov.

The best is to enhance the use of informal channels, including social media: Facebook, Instagram and a variety of messengers. There is no monopoly on traditional media anymore. Messages must be clear and straightforward, and every decision must be open for discussion to anyone who wants to do it. Special attention must be dedicated to the South and East. The creation of particular Russian-casting TV channel or newspaper should be considered. People should not feel separated and alone with their problems. Ukraine is different, and we have to embrace it and find a personal approach to everyone.

Sweden would be a perfect example of openness. According to the Constitution of Sweden, The Freedom of the Press Act establishes the principles of an open society and guarantees universal access to official information. Thus, any person has the right to access the documentation of the Parliament decisions, also including financial reports. Nevertheless, it must be noted, that apart

from the changes on the state level, every one of us has to develop the personal awareness and be able to distinguish a good source of information and fakes. In other words, we have to follow the next tips:

1. Use critical thinking and double-check the facts. They could be a fake using intentionally or unintentionally or be partially presented. It is the way when the recipient can be fooled.
2. Do not follow emotions. Be careful about the click-bait titles, that most likely attract the attention.
3. Use transparent and open-source of information. Media must have a clear structure and public ownership.
4. Contacts of editorial office should be available.
5. Use only the officially registered media. They take responsibility for what they write or record.
6. Credible media follow journalistic standards.
7. To give preference to the media with goodwill. They value their audience and image.

At the same time, the state can enhance citizens' self-awareness by developing educational programs on information literacy and critical thinking. Such campaigns should be launched in schools so that young people would be taught in the right way.

Overall, the Ukrainian response to Russian influence operation was decent, but it did not solve the root cause. Russian information campaigns were strictly limited in the Ukrainian information field by the law, but it is impossible to do thoroughly. So the ultimate goal should be the regaining of trust and developing effective channels for this and keeping in mind the regional differences.

CONCLUSION

In the 21st century, information became one of the major assets of states in conduction warfare. Therefore, the topic of informational campaigns is a tool for conducting war, which can supplement or assist the classic definition of war.

One of the important elements of Russian information policies is the concept "Russian world". In its essence, it is a neo-imperial geopolitical, ideological doctrine that aims to substantiate and help reincarnate Russia as an imperial superpower in the borders of 1914. The best way to describe Russian influence operation is as non-linear warfare.

It should be said that the Ukrainian government managed to limit the effect of information campaigns from the neighbour country by applying personal sanctions and restrictions to different kind of content, including Russian media channels, networks and films. The investigated RussiaToday and Gazeta.ru are strictly following the Russian state agenda of hard propaganda. It has to be mentioned that the Russian media has a smaller audience than the Ukrainian one and they have a bad reputation among the Ukrainian viewers and readers as well. Therefore, their influence cannot be profound.

At the same time, Ukrainian media took a mostly pro-Ukrainian position but being very sceptical about Ukrainian political figures. They expressed doubt about the feasibility of the implementation of martial law. This can be explained by the ownership structure. As a result, both Russian and the local Ukrainian media played an essential role in the conflict of Azov in regards to introduction of martial law and Ukrainian authorities in general.

Thus, we can conclude with the fact that Russian influence operation played a minor role in the investigated case. However, the lack of trust in national media and Ukrainian authorities, as well as their communication fail, and other political speculations were crucial in this case. As was mentioned, Detector Media (2018) confirms the level of trust to the Ukrainian government and President accounted for only 9%, and less than 39% of Ukrainians trusted national TV, and less than 13% trusted national Internet media.

The hypothesis was that Russian influence operations did not manage to form public opinion among Ukrainian citizens on the occupation of Azov due to limited infiltration and bad reputation. Therefore the hypothesis was proved as the impact of the operations was fairly low, because of the minimal level of trust to Russian media and a small share of pro-Russian media (according to InMind in 2019). There were other influential factors in the case of Azov occupation mentioned above.

Therefore, there is a logical mismatch: despite all the facts, according to the provided survey by Rating Group (2018), 42% of Ukrainian, citizens do not believe or were not sure that the Russian Federation committed the act of aggression towards Ukraine. As a result, the decision of the international institutions supported the Ukrainian side, but public opinion remained controversial.

The state is obliged to ensure that the information space is free from any abuse. The government has a right to protect citizens from offensive information, recognise and respect the right of citizens to receive it completed and unbiased, which will allow them to form their own opinion. The state and the media should change approaches and develop a reliable strategy for regaining the lost trust. They should find new ways of communication but not only of traditional media which are outdated. The special attention has to be given to the most vulnerable Eastern and Southern regions of Ukraine, where Russian information campaigns were the most successful and the loss of communication between the state and its citizens was huge. Meanwhile, the average citizens all over the country should learn self-awareness and critical thinking.

Therefore, this thesis does not put doubts on the legitimacy of the government's information security in Ukraine. It is a call to have the possibility to compare, the ability to analyse and develop a personal opinion.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. The list of materials that were used in media analysis

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