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On the issue of choosing optimal ways to overcome crisis phenomena in the field of political communications against the background of large-scale military aggression

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Abstract

The paper examines the choice of optimal ways of overcoming crisis phenomena in the sphere of political communication in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Special attention was paid to the theoretical explanation of the phenomenon of political communication in terms of its scope and practical usefulness. The article analyzes the features of the conduct of an information war by the Russian Federation. The purpose was to investigate the optimal ways of overcoming crisis phenomena (large-scale military aggression) by means of the tool of political communication. The article is based on the use of two types of research methods: general scientific (analysis, synthesis, induction, deduction) and special political (structural-functional, historical, etc.). The obtained results allow us to conclude that, on the basis of the analysis of the Russian-Ukrainian war, communication solutions should be aimed at fulfilling three tasks: neutralizing negative information, editing it and disseminating alternative information. The work of communicators during the war has certain limitations caused by their subordination to the military command. Definitely, the problem of the Russian-Ukrainian war

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demonstrated the existence of a considerable number of problematic issues in political communication in Ukraine and the world.

Keywords: political communication; overcoming the crisis; large-scale military aggression; information context; Russian-Ukrainian war.

Sobre la cuestión de la elección de las formas óptimas de superar los fenómenos de crisis en el ámbito de la comunicación política en el contexto de una agresión militar a gran escala

Resumen

El trabajo examina la elección de las formas óptimas de superar los fenómenos de crisis en el ámbito de la comunicación política, en el contexto de la guerra ruso-ucraniana. Se prestó especial atención a la explicación teórica del fenómeno de la comunicación política en términos de su alcance y utilidad práctica. El artículo analiza las características de la conducción de una guerra de información por parte de la Federación Rusa. El propósito fue investigar las formas óptimas de superar los fenómenos de crisis (agresión militar a gran escala) mediante la herramienta de la comunicación política. El artículo se basa en el uso de dos tipos de métodos de investigación: científico general (análisis, síntesis, inducción, deducción) y político especial (estructural-funcional, histórico, etc.). Los resultados obtenidos permiten concluir que, sobre la base del análisis de la guerra ruso-ucraniana, las soluciones de comunicación deben estar dirigidas a cumplir tres tareas: neutralizar la información negativa, editarla y difundir información alternativa. El trabajo de los comunicadores durante la guerra tiene ciertas limitaciones causadas por su subordinación al mando militar. Definitivamente, el problema de la guerra ruso-ucraniana demostró la existencia de un número considerable de cuestiones problemáticas en la comunicación política de Ucrania y del mundo.

Palabras clave: comunicación política; superación de la crisis; agresión militar a gran escala; contexto informativo; guerra ruso-ucraniana.

Introduction

The radicalization of the conflict in Ukraine and the direct aggression of the Russian Federation have actualized a number of political and social problems of the modern world. The biggest and bloodiest European war of the early twenty-first century has demonstrated the unwillingness of democratic elites to act decisively, and societies, overwhelmed by Russian propaganda and misinformation, have split. Although sociological polls lean toward support for Ukrainians, misunderstanding the cause and nature of the war is still a danger. Let us note the role of political communication in countering aggressors.

Thanks to timely informing the society and power elites of Ukraine and the world it was possible to prevent even greater casualties and to consolidate Ukrainian politicians and ordinary citizens. Therefore, the study of methods of political communication is the actual task of modern science, though it is important to compare theoretical bases with real steps in crises. Actually, the article aims to analyze the choice of optimal ways to overcome crises in the sphere of political communication (on the example of the Russian-Ukrainian war of 2022). Although the military actions are not completed, the actions of the Ukrainian government deserve an explanation from a political science point of view and can be recognized as certain patterns of behavior in the occurrence of future conflicts.

1. Materials and methods

Two types of research methods are used in the work: general scientific and special political methods. First of all, we used general logical methods: analysis, synthesis, induction, and deduction. With the help of the method of analysis, it was possible to divide the subject of research into separate components (definition of political communication, characterization of information war between Russia and Ukraine, definition of propaganda mechanisms of political communication of the Russian federation, characterization of optimal ways to overcome the crisis phenomena in the field of political communication on the background of military aggression).

The synthesis managed to combine previously selected parts into a complete study and draw specific conclusions. The historical method and the work used the method of projections, the application of which consisted in superimposing general recommendations to overcome crisis phenomena against the background of Ukrainian realities.

Thanks to this method it was found out to what extent theoretical remarks have success to be used in practice. In addition, the article is built on the application of special political research methods, in particular, structural-

functional. This method is based on the characterization of public problems as integrated parts of the general global political discourse. At the same time, the article is formed based on the principles of conflictology.

This theory assumes the creation of productive mechanisms for resolving various kinds of crisis (conflict) situations. The article also uses other methods: synchronous, retrospective, comparative, etc. The mentioned methods are auxiliary for the study of the problem of choosing the optimal ways of overcoming crisis phenomena in the sphere of political communication based on the analysis of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

2. Literature Review

This work is formed based on the properties of modern political literature. Note that given that the topic of the development of the Russian-Ukrainian war through the prism of various dimensions is relevant, so there are many works on this issue in the scientific opinion. The scientific literature used can be divided into two types: 1. Professional works of foreign scholars. 2. The work of Ukrainian authors. From the first category, let us highlight Park (2019), who investigated the main ways of solving conflict political problems. Piumatti *et al.* (2017) studied the importance of mediation on the development of modern politics. Davis *et al.* (2020) in a general monograph characterized the features of the formation of the phenomenon of political communication, the authors paid special attention to the importance of media in the system of political communication.

At the same time, this study is formed based on the analysis of modern historiography of the Russian-Ukrainian war. In particular, Kuzio (2021) characterized the peculiarities of the conduct and distribution of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Bînă and Dragomir (2020) investigated the problem of the development of the Russian-Ukrainian information war and analyzed its distribution and key mechanisms of its conduct. Also weighty for our study are the theoretical works of the definition of hybrid warfare.

Let us note that it is information warfare that is a component of this type of modern armed conflicts. For example, Manolea (2021) characterized the main aspects of hybrid war, its components, and mechanisms of use based on the analysis of the Russian-Ukrainian war. So, as we can see, the problem of Russian-Ukrainian confrontation is a popular topic for modern scholars. However, still little studied many aspects of this war, primarily because of its active development, which is difficult to analyze and foresee. Let us note that the problem of the information component of this war, which has noticeable importance in hybrid wars, remains poorly investigated.

At the same time, the issue of overcoming crisis phenomena in the sphere of political communications against the background of large-scale military aggression needs a thorough analysis. In addition, the issue of predictive development of the Russian-Ukrainian war based on the use of political mediation is poorly studied. The authors of this article will attempt to characterize the problems outlined above.

3. Results

3.1 Political communication: peculiarities of functioning in Ukraine

A kind of mediator between politicians and society is the media, whose influence on political communication is very high. The mass media have now invaded the entirety of human life. Yes, mass communication is a social process that connects individual parts, i.e., social groups of the general society with each other. Thus, this process performs the task of disseminating the information component in society. Despite this, the means of communication can be manipulative in nature. As the experience of the Russian Federation shows, it is common to manipulate the mass consciousness under the slogans of freedom, and equality, that is, under topical appeals (Bînă and Dragomir, 2020). At the same time, despite such glaring slogans, it should be remembered that it is information manipulation that is the most effective aspect for the suppression of freedom. For the individual, the process of manipulative action takes place unnoticed.

Often under the manipulative influence, the thinking of the consumer is not even formed, because the autonomous sense-making of the subject is replaced by intrusive considerations, values, and beliefs. The phenomenon of the process of manipulation today is a really significant social problem because the context of aggressiveness of manipulation is explained by the fact that it is a fairly new tool, at the same time adequate social response to it has not yet taken place. Consequently, society must understand the information environment as an environment for creating and shaping its consciousness (Davis *et al.*, 2020).

The phenomenon of political communication - the transmission, exchange of political information, which systematizes political work and gives it new meanings, roles, forms of public opinion, and political socialization of citizens - stands out prominently in the system of mass communication. Broadly speaking, political communication is the process of transmission of political information, which takes place from one part of the political system to another, thus there is circulation between political and social systems, as well as between political groups, structures, and

individuals. In part, political communication also permeates all social levels, but traditionally it is identified with large masses, and thus it is related to the phenomenon of mass communication (Park, 2019).

In Ukraine political communication has a systemic and permanent nature. In times of crisis, the functioning of political systems is unstable because in this period many different threats can lead to the destruction of the existing system. Thus, public attention to information flows when various kinds of crises are spreading noticeably increases; citizens must critically analyze the main messages coming from the common information space (Davis *et al.*, 2020). However, if the authorities are not able to meet the information needs of the population, or are not simply engaged in communication with society, the evaluation of their work will be low.

At the same time, key officials of the state, before introducing a specific model of communication in times of crisis, should thoroughly approach the process of determining the schemes of action regarding a particular phenomenon, event, condition, or process that concerns society of the country.

However, a separate difficulty for the authorities at present is not only the understanding of the real situation but also the structuring of information flows according to the type of crisis process (Bînă and Dragomir, 2020). One type of information must become public in order to cover the official opinion, to explain the real state of affairs, and to overcome the panic moods in the society. At the same time, there should also be the second type - closed information. The main purpose of the latter is to maintain stability in the state.

Such circumstances lead to a noticeable transformation of political communication in the top leadership of Ukraine at the time of the crisis, which requires a detailed study. Let us note that such areas of the political system as social institutions, politics as part of public discourse, and politics as an element of the daily news image are under the significant influence of political communication.

Subjects in political communication are citizens of the state, social groups, political institutions and individual politicians, associations of citizens, parities, national and international organizations and movements, political parties, state and local authorities, and governmental, non-governmental, and international organizations. The peculiarity of political communication is that the directions of communicative action can change, and the subject and the object can change.

For example, when elections take place in cities and districts, the direction of communication can go from local authorities to citizens (because the subject in such a relationship is a simple voter) (Davis *et al.*, 2020). Note also that there are horizontal and vertical levels of political communication.

On the horizontal level, primarily roughly equal institutional components or social actors (e.g., city mayors or party group leaders) communicate. The goal of vertical political communication is to establish communication between hierarchically different levels of the political structure. Establishing the feedback necessary for vertical communication is electoral races and voter participation, public opinion polls, etc.

3.2 Mechanisms of the Russian Information War against Ukraine

The Russian-Ukrainian confrontation, already eight years old in eastern Ukraine, is characterized by two basic dimensions: the real and the virtual. During 2014-2015, Ukrainians became victims, on the one hand of direct military aggression and, on the other hand, of unprecedented anti-Ukrainian propaganda deployed in the Russian media (Ghilès, 2022). The realization of manipulative influence on the pages of newspapers, therefore, can be qualitatively traced on the example of anti-Ukrainian hysteria, which is characterized by Russian newspapers. A typical feature of the anti-Ukrainian information war was that Ukraine experienced almost the entire arsenal of repressive discourse techniques - Russian media purposefully and unwaveringly denied all evidence that somehow conflicted with the official Kremlin version of the interpretation of political phenomena in Ukraine (Johnson, 2022).

The uncompromising stoicism in demonstrating the military struggle in Donbas became a specific alibi even for the global media, whose credibility in the Western world was not questioned (Materniak, 2020).

By its typical messages, style, and internal logic, the disinformation and information-psychological pressure operation launched by the Russian Federation around the problems of the “will” of the residents of the autonomous republic of Crimea and the southeastern regions of Ukraine is a “puzzle” of a more complex and much broader special information campaign. which reaches at least November 2013. - the course and results of the events of Euromaidan and the Revolution of Dignity (Materniak, 2020).

Practically since the end of February 2014, the overwhelming majority of the Russian traditional media have taken up information and psychological fight against Ukraine, trying to shape the conduct of an army attack against Ukraine. For example, such well-known Russian newspapers and news publications as *Izvestia*, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, *Moskovsky Komsomolets* (*Kommersant*), *Vzglyad* (*Vzglyad*), and the entire powerful RIA *Novosti* (Russian News Agency), *ITAR-TASS* (*ITAR-TASS*), *ROSBALT*, *AIS* (*AIS*), etc., not only actively disseminated inaccurate information but also formulated and replicated deliberately false information.

For example, since the winter of 2014, the same publications *Izvestia*, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, *Kommersant*, *Vzglyad*, and others have been spreading false information about the transfer to Russia of the flagship of the Ukrainian Black Sea Fleet, the frigate of the Ukrainian Navy, *Hetman Sagaidachny*.

The prevalence of destructive hostile propaganda since the spring of 2014 and the replication of untrue news through newspaper distribution in the occupied territories of eastern Ukraine was one of the main reasons for the considerable spread of anti-Ukrainian sentiments and separatist rhetoric among people (at 0 20%). Some publications actively use Internet resources and do not forbid administrators of their sites to use fictitious or false information to spread propaganda information messages (Bînă and Dragomir, 2020).

Such a source is, for example, *Pravda.ru*. The history of this resource is indicative because it was among the first Russian information and analytical publications to emerge on the Russian-language Web. If you trust the information posted on its website, *Pravda.ru* has a respected reputation and high ratings among Russians. Every day, more than 250 thousand unique users come to the Internet resource's page, browsing through at least a few of the materials on offer. Upon closer examination of the materials on this site, it is not difficult to notice that much information is openly propagandistic in nature and does not reveal the true nature of the events described. In addition, the "journalists" of this resource resort to the use of a number of methods that openly indicate the presence of custom-made propaganda purposes.

In connection with the military aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine as one of the directions of the information war, the aggressor uses war propaganda through TV channels (Bînă and Dragomir, 2020). Although objective television does not exist in contemporary Russia, more detailed attention should be focused on the real "mouthpiece of the Kremlin" - the TV channel *Russia Today*, whose product refers to aggressive anti-Ukrainian and anti-Western propaganda. *Russia Today* is one of the Russian state-owned television networks that broadcast primarily in foreign languages and is intended for foreign audiences.

This project has been in existence since 2005, funded by Russian taxpayers and headquartered in Moscow. The main working languages are English, Arabic, Spanish, Russian and German. The management of the channel positions the work of its journalists as an alternative view of the problems covered by American and English journalists, in particular those from CNN and BBC world channels.

The appearance of annexationist Russian propaganda fruit in the information space of the USA and EU countries recently influenced the

appearance of concern of the leaders of these countries in the context of strengthening of the latent information pressure on the citizens. It was connected, first of all, with the activation of the Russia Today channel. The analysis of Russian television conducted by Business Insider journalists received extensive publicity.

They noted that the conclusion of the week-long review of news exclusively from the perspective of Russia Today staff was that there is a powerful informational influence on the viewer's consciousness. This influence, according to experts, should create and validate a distorted view of certain events as the only true one and exclude any alternative interpretations of these events (Manolea, 2021).

Unfortunately, Russian television as a whole as of the first half of 2022 has turned into a collective "Russia today": Russian news agencies do not present truthful information, and when they even notify and actual events, they do not forget to add certain ideological Russian content to them. The Russian media is a weapon of hybrid warfare unleashed by the authorities against countries and ethnicities, mostly belonging to the Western democratic world (Cieślík and Gurshev, 2020). First of all, this concerns Ukrainians, who may fall into the "tenets" of Russian "journalists" and perceive exclusively distorted reality. This requires appropriate political communication on the part of the Ukrainian government and individual politicians.

4. How to organize political communication under conditions of Russian aggression?

First of all, we should note that the communication mechanisms applied by the leadership of the state in a crisis should have an offensive and creative character. If the top official does not take a dominant position from the beginning of the crisis situation, it will be difficult to correct the situation and overcome negative trends later on. However, if the crisis phenomenon (as in the case of the Russian-Ukrainian war) will increase rapidly, then the obligatory condition for the implementation of such communication remains its promptness.

The beginning of the Russia-Ukraine war in 2014 demonstrated that the complexity of unpredictable political crises is manifested in the novelty that affects the uncertainty of the functions of the main actors of the state (Kuzio, 2021). Note that, in part, top officials may be unprepared for such a crisis situation, so decisions may not always be made that are most appropriate. On the other hand, the complexity of the emergence of an unpredictable crisis event lies in its dynamic development (Schlöpfer, 2016). Despite this, the rapid development of the crisis can be counteracted by the urgent response of the communication team.

Considering the unpredictability of crises, communication solutions in such circumstances should focus on such tasks (presented in Table 1).

Table No. 01. The main tasks of communication solutions in crises

| Main tasks | Terms of execution |
|--|--|
| 1. Neutralizing (or blocking) the flow of negative information | Performed at any period of appearance and dissemination of negative information. |
| 2. Editing negative information | Is carried out at any stage of the dissemination of negative information. |
| 3. Dissemination of alternative information. | This is done when necessary. For example, in the situation of the Russian-Ukrainian war - dissemination of truthful information to counter Russian propaganda. |

At the same time, as the experience of the Russian-Ukrainian war shows from the mass media from the country's main speakers, information should be disseminated on such important grounds (presented in Table 2). Source: authors.

Table No. 02. Basic principles of information flow dissemination in case of crisis (military) conditions

| Principles of information flow dissemination in case of crisis conditions |
|--|
| 1. bad news should be reported first. The point is that other sources (in this case, Russian propaganda resources) should not be allowed to get ahead of the bad facts. |
| 2. The tone of reporting should be entirely based on truthful facts and allegations made public |
| 3. If there is no reliable information at a certain point, you should thoroughly argue the reasons, frame the situation, and outline the likely timing and method of presentation. |
| 4. The communicating authority should be sure to honor its own promises. |
| 5. Do not provide private comments about the situation, certain rumors, predictions, etc. |

Source: authors.

Note that the work of communicators during a military threat is subject to certain restrictions due to their subordination to the military command. For this reason, many information cannot be disseminated. If we examine military conflict as a special kind of crisis management, three prerequisites of media information support must first be provided (Manolea, 2021). First, it is a real-time process of information delivery. Second, messages must contain truthfulness (or at least plausibility).

In addition, openness to communication and interactivity remains important. Let us note, however, that political communication is a special interaction of one society with another. For this reason, interaction shapes, supports, transforms specific social functions, rules, or norms in a particular social group or culture.

Given the Ukrainian practice of the political process, this kind of crises requires a structured work plan from official communication actors, because the key process of crisis deployment has certain phases, so during each period, appropriate communication activities should be organized to prevent the escalation of a threatening situation. Despite this, it is obvious that unpredictable crises are complex in terms of dynamism and novelty. Consequently, it requires the Ukrainian authorities to react swiftly, rationally in the managerial sphere and to provide clear operational information to citizens in the prism of communicative work.

However, unpredictable crises are defined in terms of basic parameters, therefore, for their media coverage and providing citizens with information in order to create appropriate perception by the public is quite likely to develop certain communication algorithms (Moore, 2020). It should be noted that the presence of communication plans and strategies of the top leadership of Ukraine for the time of crisis creates a pledge of loyal views in the society regarding negative events of political development, prevention of certain threats to the national security of the state.

We believe that society should trust, above all, accurate sources of information. As we can see, the major Russian media are instruments of propaganda, so a fair move by the Ukrainian government was to ban the broadcasting of Russian TV channels (subsequently the press and other ways of transmitting information). This step required a political decision and the will since it bordered on censorship, unpopular in post-Soviet countries. Such a decision paid off: as a result, even the leading states of the Western democratic world eliminated Russian TV channels from their broadcasting networks.

After the outright military aggression began in February 2022, Ukrainian officials chose the right strategy. Rejecting all accusations, the Ukrainian authorities did a lot to strengthen the social and informational space of Ukraine. In particular, they noted the different origins of Russian and Ukrainian statehood. While Russians take their roots from the Golden Horde, Ukrainians developed in accordance with European trends in the powerful Kievan Rus (later the Galicia-Volhynia state) (Mereniuk and Parshyn, 2021).

Additionally, it should be noted that communication during crises is quite different from that existing in the case of a stable and predictable political system. An important mission is now entrusted to the highest

officials and persons authorized by them, who turn into VIPs, whose actions should be aimed at eliminating public panic, asserting stability and calm in society.

To ensure a successful confrontation with the military crisis in the field of political communication, it is necessary, first of all, to classify the crisis. In particular, according to experts, crises are divided into long-, medium- and short-term according to the criterion of urgency. While according to the criterion of predictability they can be predictable and unpredictable.

Therefore, it is necessary to choose a political communication strategy based on understanding the essence of the crisis. In February 2022 Ukrainian politicians well understood the scale of the threat and united around the President of Ukraine. A strategy of promptly informing society about the military successes and defeats of the Ukrainian army was also chosen. The trust that was established between society and the state “disperse” panic and discord among the population and presented to the West exclusively their own point of view (as they did in 2014 with Crimea).

5. Discussion

One effective method of establishing political communication during crises is to conduct an active and generally honest dialogue at the vertical level of communication. The apex of this has been shown to be the president of Ukraine, high-ranking military officials, and other official speakers. It is they who relay relevant information for wider use. Military actions showed that the strength of Russia was in its ability to wage a “hybrid” war, using propaganda and agents of influence to substitute concepts, sow discord, and panic. In this, they were assisted by a wide network of state media, which were used as another weapon of moral, psychological, and political influence.

Ukraine’s centralized information delivery system dealt a blow to the Kremlin’s tactics. Although many pro-Russian intellectuals, businessmen, and cultural and educational figures advocated the continued existence of ties between Russia and the civilized world, their influence diminished considerably. The continued emphasis on Russia’s war crimes “ties the hands” of the Kremlin lobbyists.

A successful example of political communication in Ukraine was the unity of political elites around the personality of the President of Ukraine. Despite the disagreements in the vision of the future of Ukraine. Among politicians, there is an opinion that unity is the key to success. We should also note the fiasco of pro-Russian political parties, whose activities were investigated by the security services and banned or disbanded. It remains to be regretted that this step has been taken only now.

For a long time, adherents of these political forces have positioned themselves as defenders of Russian-speakers, imposing a pro-Putin vision of the problems in political communications. The danger, however, has not been overcome, because the people who participated in the lobbying of foreign interests have never been punished. Theoretically, they could nominate themselves in the future, and therefore, in all likelihood, a partial representation of Kremlin stooges will remain. Though they will not be able to act openly.

The 2022 war demonstrated that Ukraine's political elites are capable of negotiating with their European counterparts. Successes on the diplomatic front have ensured the provision of sophisticated weapons, trainers, shelters for millions of refugees, etc. Regular consultations increase trust between the Ukrainian side and European and American partners. However, some people from President Volodymyr Zelenskyi's entourage are believed to have ties to Russia. For this reason, the active participation of the democratic world in the war against it is also important because of the internal resistance of some undisclosed agents.

Conclusions

So, in the narrow sense, political communication is the transmission, exchange of political information, systematizing political work and giving it new meanings, and roles, forming public opinion and political socialization of citizens. In a broad sense, the term refers to the process of political information transmission through circulation between political and social systems, as well as between political groups, structures, and individuals. The Russian-Ukrainian war demonstrated a significant crisis in political communication.

It was Russia's hybrid aggression, which was disseminated in several powerful ways: through pro-Kremlin media, through external and internal active propaganda, through agents of influence, and through opinion makers. Thanks to this authoritarian Russian regime and Putin managed to partially camouflage the real unfolding of events in eastern Ukraine and Crimea in 2014. At the same time, already during the open Russian aggression (February 2022), the Ukrainian side was much better prepared for the confrontation.

Political communication acquired a clear vertical orientation, and public trust in the Ukrainian armed forces and official spokespersons of the Ukrainian government was established. This immediately dramatically reduced the influence of Russian propaganda. As the practice of political communication in Ukraine in the conditions of information society showed a more or less open dialogue with the society, partial provision of relevant information has an advantage over direct propaganda, which is resorted to by the Russian side.

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