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**Social media as a tool of political communication in post-Soviet countries.
A comparative research of political actors from Ukraine and Belarus**

PhD thesis written
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List of Abbreviations

AOL	America Online
API	Application Programming Interface
ARPANET	Advanced Research Projects Agency Network
BEL	Belarus
BIO	User Profile Biography
CAWI	Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing
DDoS attack	Distributed Denial-of-Service
DNS	Domain Name System
ES	European Solidarity
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIF	Graphics Interchange Format
IP	Internet Protocol
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
ISP	Internet Service Provider
KGB	Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti
MP	Member of Parliament
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NAU	National Anti-Crisis Management
O.P.C.	Online Political Citizen
PSB dependency	Public Service Broadcasting
PR	Public Relations
Roskomnadzor	The Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Mass Media
SP	Servant of the People
SNS search	Social Networking Service search
WELL	Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link
UK	United Kingdom

UKR	Ukraine
URL	Uniform Resource Locator
US	United States
USA	United States of America
USENET	User's Networks
VPN	Virtual Private Network
WWI	World War I
WWII	World War II

Introduction

Political communication has deeply changed since the introduction of the Internet. Traditional media indeed remain important tools, but they are no longer central to the process. There are numerous factors that force political actors to expand their communication activities to social media. From one perspective, they gain greater control over the communication process. Each of them can construct the necessary image, as well as produce and promote unique content, with limited third-party intervention. From another perspective, these platforms gather large audiences of potential voters. Their share of global users is 59.4% of the total population¹. Today, staying competitive requires having a strong online presence. Social media are considered as a main communication channel in this PhD dissertation.

Americans are often regarded as pioneers of online trends. US Senator Howard Dean has been called the “father of all Web campaigns,” while candidate Barack Obama further transformed this experience into the first successful Internet election². The latter’s online presence included 15 social media platforms. He also developed “my.barackobama.com,” his own social network equivalent. Obama’s strategy of building online communities and voter networks resulted in 3.2 million “supporters” on Facebook, 1 million “friends” on MySpace, and victory during the 2008 presidential election³. Apart from this, social media contributed to the double triumph of populist candidate Donald Trump. His Facebook campaign was built around microtargeting practice, which tailored ads to different audiences based on their interests. His Twitter style was compared to “the Ernest Hemingway of 140 characters”⁴. Even the ban could not stop his online activity because Trump created his own source of “real” news, namely the “Truth Social” platform. This example changed the optics of the role of social media in democracy.

¹ S. Kemp, *Digital 2023: Global Overview Report*, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-global-overview-report> (accessed on 11.04.2023).

² G. Gonçalves, *Political communication*, [in:] Heath R. L., & Johansen W. (Eds.), *The International Encyclopedia of Strategic Communication*, John Wiley & Sons, Boston 2018, p. 3.

³ P.J. Maarek, *Politics 2.0: New Forms of Digital Political Marketing and Political Communication*, “Tripodos” 2014, 1(34), p. 16.

⁴ V. Zinichenko, *(Volodymyr) Trump or Donald (Zelenskyy). A comparative analysis of the winning campaigns in 2016 and 2019*, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznan 2020.

The state of events in the post-Soviet region has its unique direction. Among other things, Ukrainian and Belarusian political actors have demonstrated notable experience in using social media. This communication tool serves as a modifier of political and media systems there. The former country has a transitional or hybrid regime, where the majority of traditional media operate under oligarchic control. Its authorities also imposed military censorship in 2022. The latter country has a consolidated authoritarian regime, where all political and media processes are subordinate to Alexander Lukashenko. Despite all this, social media played a certain role in the victory of Ukrainian comedian Volodymyr Zelenskyy during the 2019 presidential election, while Telegram posts bypassed traditional censorship and led to the biggest protests in Belarusian history. “Do you have the ability to block Telegram channels? Nobody has it, not even those who invented this entire web – Americans... Even if the Internet is turned off today, these Telegram channels will work from Poland,” Lukashenko admitted⁵. These points served as the primary motivation for undertaking this research.

According to the literature review, the patterns of using social media for political communication in Ukraine and Belarus have not yet been comprehensively explored. Although the Russia-Ukraine war has generated a large number of research papers, other developments in these post-Soviet countries have attracted little attention. Specifically, there were approximately 20 scientific articles as of 2020, or initial period of the study. Ukrainian group focused mainly on Facebook and X (formerly known as Twitter), while other online platforms were neglected. Most of the articles were written in English. Belarusian group preferred not to analyze the content of specific social media, but to explain their impact in general. The dominant language was Russian.

The most popular research topic related to Ukraine was Euromaidan, when some authors tried to understand the role of social media in mobilizing protests. In particular, Ronzhyn put “coordination and mobilization” among their four main functions during such events. He noted that protesters used this tool in order to prepare for possible attacks by police forces. The other three functions were the exchange of tactical information and news, calls for the

⁵ BELTA, *Lukashenko predupredil o negativnom vliyanii Telegram-kanalov: nekotorym lyudyam zadurili mozgi*, <https://www.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-predupredil-o-negativnom-vliyanii-telegram-kanalov-nekotorym-ljudjam-zadurili-mozgi-406066-2020/> (accessed on 01.06.2021).

necessary supplies and funding, as well as the external communication with other countries⁶. Next, Brantly used the definition of “information communications technologies” in line with “social media.” He built his work around the concept of social mobilization and analyzed it from the perspective of cultural theories. His main finding was that social media contributed significantly to the process of physical mobilization, but they were not the only tool. In addition, the content produced in the Western part of Ukraine or in the Ukrainian language expressed the greatest support for Euromaidan⁷. Finally, Piechota and Rajczyk directly asked protestors about their experiences with social media. The authors conducted surveys among students. The results showed that social media were their main source of information. Moreover, students used them to create, comment, disseminate information, as well as communicate with each other⁸.

Onuch wrote one of the most exhaustive studies on the role of social media during Euromaidan. She researched both audience and content. The data gave her the opportunity to describe average demonstrators, their motivations for participation, and their social media practices. Onuch also gave examples of some framing patterns used for mobilization (e.g. slogans, language constructions). The key takeaway was that social media did not mobilize people. Nonetheless, they influenced people’s motivation and formed their demands through the dissemination of information⁹.

Two research papers identified social media as a tool of geopolitical influence in Ukraine. According to Simons, shared values and norms, as well as the proper use of emotions, made it possible “to control what people think about.” Pro-Euromaidan communities on Facebook (with European political direction) appealed to the enthusiasm of protestors, while anti-Euromaidan communities (with Russian political direction) created a sense of fear. The

⁶ A. Ronzhyn, *The use of Facebook and Twitter during the 2013-2014 protests in Ukraine*, [in:] *Proceedings of the European Conference on Social Media*, European Conference on Social Media (ECSM 2014), Brighton 2014, pp. 442-449.

⁷ A.F. Brantly, *From Cyberspace to Independence Square: Understanding the Impact of Social Media on Physical Protest Mobilization During Ukraine’s Euromaidan Revolution*, “Journal of Information Technology & Politics” 2019, Volume 16, Issue 4, pp. 360-378.

⁸ G. Piechota & R. Rajczyk, *Media społecznościowe w protestach politycznych na przykładzie ukraińskiej rewolucji godności*, [w:] D. Piontek, S. Ossowski (red.), *Komunikowanie społeczne w dobie nowych technologii*, 2017, pp. 21-34.

⁹ O. Onuch, *EuroMaidan Protests in Ukraine: Social Media Versus Social Networks*, “Problems of Post-Communism” 2015, Volume 62, Issue 4, pp. 217-235.

author incorporated the concepts of “persuasion and influence” alongside the information function of social media¹⁰. In turn, Dobysh focused exclusively on pro-Russian subscriptions regarding territorial location in Ukraine. He built his work around the concept of “political behavior” on social media platforms. His conclusions demonstrated that pro-Russian communities produced “broader geopolitical narratives and imaginations of different territories.” This tactic worked in eastern Ukraine and in Crimea¹¹.

There were some post-Euromaidan studies. Smirnova analyzed the concepts of “electronic government” and “electronic democracy.” She identified legal challenges in Ukrainian realities¹². Ronzhyn described the practices of civil activism on Facebook. He summarized that former Euromaidan online communities became a source of news and calls for action¹³. However, this work could be classified as an overview. Ronzhyn did not provide enough arguments for his explanatory framework. There was no logical structure in the article.

Despite the widespread use of social media during the 2019 presidential election in Ukraine, scientists have produced only a few research papers on the topic. Zakharchenko, Maksimtsova, Iurchenko, Shevchenko, and Fedushko analyzed the behavior of followers of the two main rivals, namely former President Poroshenko and future President Zelenskyy. According to the results¹⁴, their supporters produced almost the same number of posts, but Poroshenko achieved greater interaction (e.g. comments, likes). The authors covered the audience characteristics in detail. Although they compared Ukrainian online strategies with American ones, this part was a bit controversial. Some points were based on assumptions without any evidence.

¹⁰ G. Simons, *Euromaidan and the Geopolitical Struggle for Influence on Ukraine via New Media*, “Eurasia 2.0: Russian Geopolitics in the Age of New Media” 2015, pp. 275-294.

¹¹ M. Dobysh, *Euromaidan and conflict in Eastern Ukraine in social networking sites: Territorial differences of pro-Russian subscriptions in Ukraine*, “Hungarian Geographical Bulletin” 2019, Volume 68, Issue 1, pp. 51-64.

¹² N. Smirnova, *E-government and Social Media in Ukraine: Global Challenges for Legal Regulations*, “Lex Portus” 2020, Volume 1, Issue 21, pp. 69-84.

¹³ A. Ronzhyn, *Social media activism in post-Euromaidan Ukrainian politics and civil society*, [in:] 2016 Conference for E-Democracy and Open Government (CeDEM), IEEE, 2016, pp. 96-101.

¹⁴ A. Zakharchenko, Y. Maksimtsova, V. Iurchenko, V. Shevchenko & S. Fedushko, *Under the conditions of Non-Agenda ownership: Social media users in the 2019 Ukrainian presidential elections campaign*, arXiv (Cornell University), 2019.

Alberti and De Serio attempted to analyze the digital strategies of the two candidates on Facebook and Twitter (currently known as X). The authors identified Zelenskyy's campaign as the example of a new way of conduction politics. Their study was built around the concept of "democratization" provided by social media¹⁵. Nonetheless, they did not give too many details. Alberti and De Serio extracted only general information about Facebook pages (posts per day/average, total reactions, as well as shares, comments, likes, wows, angry, thankful, haha per post). The three most popular posts from both sides were collected to draw qualitative conclusions. There were many inaccuracies in information.

Regarding Belarus, the role of social media during protest actions was the key topic among the first group of studies. Tarkowski, Fathy and Melyantsou covered online strategies of 2010-2011. They identified three social media functions: dissemination of information, assistance in the preparation of protest actions, and support of communication with the diaspora around the world. "Online freedom" was opposed to censorship of traditional media. It seems that Belarusian authorities felt a certain threat from social media as early as 2010, when they began to introduce some regulations on online activities¹⁶. Ilyina provided more information on the topic of legislation¹⁷. Moving forward, Herasimenka focused on the role of social media in 2011-2013 public campaigns under "nondemocratic" conditions. He was the only one author of this literature review, who determined specific contextual features of the Belarusian case (e.g. Internet access, political dynamics, and media environment). The work was built around the concept of "political engagement." According to the results, online platforms were successful in addressing environmental issues and advocating ordinary people, but they were unable to influence foreign policy changes or government-related issues¹⁸.

The second group of articles was connected with blogging. Stsipanau opened the discussion in 2017. He demonstrated the prospects of this form of activity for show business and

¹⁵ A. Alberti & L. De Serio, *Social media and politics: the case of Ukraine*, "Geopolitical, Social Security and Freedom Journal" 2020, 3(1), pp. 65–86.

¹⁶ A. Tarkowski., B. Fathy & D. Melyantsou, *From the network to the streets: Online tools and democratization in Egypt and Belarus*, "Policy Brief" 2011, Issue 5, pp. 1-12.

¹⁷ E. M. Ilyina, *Setevyye aspekty politicheskogo protsesssa v usloviyakh razvitiya informatsionnogo obshchestva v Respublike Belarus*, "Resp. in-ta vyssh. shk. Filos.-gumanitar. nauki:sb. nauch. st." 2012, Issue 11, pp. 73-80.

¹⁸ A. Herasimenka, *Political participation and internet platforms: How new communication technologies help Belarusian civic activists*, "Politics and Society in Belarus" 2016, Issue 1, pp. 4-12.

politics¹⁹. Rudnik conducted in-depth research on the topic. She studied self-censorship among bloggers in Belarus and Russia, or the authoritarian countries. The basic concept was “the spiral of silence,” when government regulations influenced freedom of expression. It was revealed that bloggers have become the counter-power, or “the main information source alternative to state-owned and/or state-controlled media.” Although they were not afraid to criticize the Belarusian authorities, the main reasons for self-censorship were threats to family, pressure from secret services, and ethical considerations²⁰. Only a small part of the qualitative analysis was devoted to the text materials of bloggers in this paper.

The third group of articles concerned the representation Belarusian government on social media platforms. Stsiapanau counted 11 accounts of ministries on Twitter in 2014. Most of them performed an information function. Some facilitated communication with appropriate government agencies. Ministry of Foreign Affairs and law enforcement agencies used this communication tool in the most effective way²¹. Parfenchyk came to the same conclusion in 2017²². These facts proved the preparation of the Belarusian authorities for competition in the online space.

Stsiapanau was one of the most productive Belarusian researchers to date. He analyzed the advantages of the Telegram messenger and determined its place in the Belarusian media environment²³. His other work focused on traditional media accounts on social networks. The author defined their news distribution strategies and paid special attention to the use of Internet memes²⁴.

Finally, there was only one comparative analysis of social media between Ukraine and Belarus. Pospieszna and Galus interviewed civic activists from the two countries about their experiences with and attitudes toward this communication tool. The authors determined that

¹⁹ U. Stsiapanau, *Belorusskiy videoblogging: Stanovleniye segmenta mediarynka*, Journalism-2017: state, problems and prospects: materials of the 19th International scientific practical conference, 2017, pp. 369-372.

²⁰ A. Rudnik, *Why do bloggers keep silent? Self-censorship in social media: cases of Belarus and Russia* [Master's thesis], Södertörn University, School of Social Sciences, 2020.

²¹ U. Stsiapanau, *Analiz ispol'zovaniya servisa "Twitter" v rabote belorusskikh respublikanskikh gosorganov*, “Bulletin of the BSU” 2014, Volume 4, Issue 1, pp. 77-80.

²² A.A. Parfenchyk, *The Use of Social Networks in Public Administration*, “State and municipal management issues” 2017, Issue 2.

²³ U. Stsiapanau, *Messendzher Telegram v informatsionnom prostranstve Belarusi*, “BSU” 2018, pp. 240-245.

²⁴ Idem, *Social media as content distribution channel for Belarusian mass media*. *Journal of the Belarusian State University*, “Journalism and Pedagogics” 2017, Issue 1, pp. 100-105.

social media were more related to the concept of “Liberation Technology” (provide benefits) than “Net Delusion” (provide harm). The information, networking and mobilization roles of social media were analyzed in detail²⁵.

It seems that researchers have paid more attention to the topic of social media in Ukraine than in Belarus. The literature review identified several gaps that need to be addressed. First, previous knowledge about the two countries should be updated (e.g. political systems, media systems, social media use). Second, online political communication should be investigated from the perspective of various political actors. Third, it is possible to deepen knowledge about different periods (e.g. election, routine, crisis). Fourth, the Telegram platform should be studied in detail due to its significance for the post-Soviet region. Fifth, there is a lack of comparative research examining post-Soviet countries other than Russia. This PhD dissertation fills all the gaps.

The research describes general patterns of political communication via social media in Ukraine and Belarus. It should be considered as the first attempt to raise this scientific problem. The main research objectives are constructed based on context, content, and correlation. The first objective is to explore the political and media systems of Ukraine and Belarus, which justify the choice of social media. The second objective is to reveal the elements of social media strategies from the perspective of various political actors in Ukraine and Belarus, and to compare them. Facebook in Ukraine and Telegram in Belarus were chosen for the analysis, which included 5 research periods. Since there is a political actor-citizen axis, the third objective is to investigate the possible correlations between the consumption of information about political actors, on the one hand, and online participation, offline participation, political knowledge, on the other hand, among Ukrainians and Belarusians. These objectives are transformed into the following research questions:

RQ1. How do various post-Soviet conditions (media, politics) justify the choice of social media as a political communication tool?

²⁵ P. Pospieszna & A. Galus, ‘*Liberation Technology*’ or ‘*Net Delusion*’? Civic Activists’ Perceptions of Social Media as a Platform for Civic Activism in Belarus and Ukraine, “Europe-Asia Studies” 2019, Volume 71, Issue 10, pp. 1664-1684.

RQ2. What are the similar and different patterns of using social media for the political communication in democratic Ukraine and authoritarian Belarus?

RQ3. To what extent are Ukrainians and Belarusians exposed to the communication of political actors on social media?

The first hypothesis is based on Hallin and Mancini's reflections about the structure of media markets in the digital age. They cite the example of the Arab Spring, when the authorities were able to impose severe restrictions on popular traditional media. However, they did not do the same with the Internet²⁶. Thus, the hypothesis is proposed as follows: **H1.** The political system controls the traditional media system more than the one modified by digital factors.

According to the study of Bulovsky, democratic leaders tend to tweet more and share more information in their tweets than authoritarian leaders²⁷. Nonetheless, Herasimenka's research indicates that censorship prevents Belarusian activists from fully utilizing Internet platforms²⁸. Moreover, there is a new generation of Belarusian political actors, who started using Telegram during the 2020 presidential campaign. They do not have enough online experience. It could shape their posting dynamics. Therefore, the hypothesis is proposed as follows: **H2.** Political actors from authoritarian Belarus use social media less diversely in terms of topics, functions, and frequency of posts than those from democratic Ukraine do.

Karlsen and Enjolras list mobilization among the political motivations for using social media²⁹. Furthermore, ordinary people associate these online platforms with a source of knowledge about politics³⁰. The greatest influence is determined among the youth audience³¹. Given all this, it would be valuable to determine which type of content delivery – direct or

²⁶ D.C. Hallin & P. Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems Beyond the Western World*, Cambridge University Press, 2012.

²⁷ A. Bulovsky, *Authoritarian communication on social media: The relationship between democracy and leaders' digital communicative practices*, "International Communication Gazette" 2018, 81(1), pp. 20–45.

²⁸ A. Herasimenka, *Political participation...*, op. cit., pp. 4-12.

²⁹ R. Karlsen & B. Enjolras, *Styles of Social Media Campaigning and Influence in a Hybrid Political Communication System: Linking Candidate Survey Data with Twitter Data*, "The International Journal of Press/Politics" 2016, Vol. 21 (3), pp. 338-357.

³⁰ J. Jakubowski & I. Olejnik, *Online Communities and Online Activities of Politicians - Opinions of Internet Users*, „Środkowoeuropejskie Studia Polityczne" 2015, nr 3, pp. 183-201.

³¹ Ibidem; F. Marquart, J. Ohme & J. Möller, *Following Politicians on Social Media: Effects for Political Information, Peer Communication, and Youth Engagement*, "Media and Communication" 2020, Volume 8, Issue 2, pp. 197-207.

indirect – proves to have better correlation on social media. Thus, the hypothesis is proposed as follows: **H3**. Citizens, especially younger ones, benefit more from direct than indirect communication of political actors on social media.

Source analysis was utilized in the theoretical part of the research, while quantitative and qualitative methodology were applied in the empirical part of the research. Triangulation of methods (content analysis, survey, comparative method) were used in order to ensure greater reliability of its results. Specifically, content analysis was essential for processing social media posts (the main unit of examination). Surveys helped reveal potential correlations. Comparative analysis made it possible to identify universal and contextual trends in Ukraine and Belarus.

As for content analysis, it consisted of two stages. First, the content of social media posts was examined. Second, the numbers of basic statistical information was counted. The appropriate order was chosen due to the large amount of data. Priority was given to information about content over information about the number of followers, interactions, etc. The latter seem to play a less important role in the constantly changing online environment with a large number of users.

Facebook in Ukraine and Telegram in Belarus were chosen because of their popularity and characteristics, which distinguish them from other social media in the respective countries. The former was the leading social network among Ukrainians, while the latter was the safest messenger for Belarusians in 2020. It is assumed that these online platforms gathered the largest number of political representatives.

The research sample comprised of 13 political actors from Ukraine and 13 political actors from Belarus. They were divided into 5 groups: presidential candidates, political parties, most popular politicians, mayors, bloggers/influencers. The latter group added value to this PhD dissertation. It was impossible to ignore their participation in the political life of these countries, especially when they successfully operate from abroad. Although Anatoliy Shariy created his own Ukrainian political party, NEXTA Live have not declared its ambitions in Belarusian politics yet. However, the online activity of the Belarusian team cannot be called purely media-based due to the coordination of protests and the expression of political positions in their posts. It is also known that people from various fields become political

figures in Ukraine and Belarus because of their popularity (e.g. Zelenskyy, Tsikhanouskaya). NEXTA Live is the most famous Telegram channel in Belarus as of 2020. Since its members are potential traditional politicians, their practices cannot be omitted when considering the Belarusian case.

The research period included 5 separate stages. Since the registration point of each social media account was different, the dates of these stages were unique for each political actor. It was assumed that each political actor took them into account at least approximately when developing digital communication strategies. In particular, the election period was frequently discussed in scientific literature. It was decided to divide this stage into the start of the campaign (the first month, testing various online practices) and the development of the campaign (the second month, using established practices) in order to show more insights. Next, there was a month of the post-election period, followed by a month of the routine period after half a year pause (daily performance of professional duties). The development of events in the post-Soviet region caused the inclusion of a month of the war period (special period or crisis period). Importantly, each month presented only indicators of general statistics (e.g. number of posts, number of interactions) in order to monitor the presence or lack of online activity on the part of political actors. At the same time, deep analysis of content took place on the 7 days basis within each of the months. These were specific days of its publication. As a result, this division helped to show the most accurate elements of the online strategies in Ukraine and Belarus.

As for the survey method, it was important to study not “changes,” but “state” (how is it?), in order to capture the so-called “photo” of society at that moment (September 2023-April 2024). The questionnaires were distributed among 531 Ukrainians and 506 Belarusians within their respective countries and abroad. They were prepared in three different languages: Ukrainian (for Ukrainians), Russian (for Belarusians), and English (full translation). All versions of the questionnaire were identical in terms of the proposed content. The general scheme consisted of 16 single-choice questions and 3 multiple-choice questions for both Ukrainians and Belarusians. Importantly, Belarusian political conditions led to the inclusion of one additional question for representatives of this country (20 in total). There was another

question regarding the general localization of survey participants. The rules of anonymity were fully respected.

The time scale of work could not be defined literally. From the perspective of source analysis, there was no universal starting point due to the description of historical developments. The research process was completed at the end of January 2024, with some exceptions added later that year. From the perspective of content analysis, the starting dates were the 2019 elections in Ukraine and the 2020 presidential election in Belarus. They were considered as turning points for the political and media systems of both countries. The end date was March 2022, as the first month of the Russia-Ukraine war. From the perspective of the survey method, it was conducted from September 2023 to April 2024. These dates followed the research periods of content analysis. Enough time has passed for an objective assessment of political communication via social media.

This PhD dissertation consists of introduction, 5 chapters, conclusions, bibliography, as well as 12 appendices.

The first chapter provides a theoretical explanation of political communication. It includes a variety of concepts: from the most fundamental to the newest ones. The history and characteristics of political communication are presented, and the participants in the process are described. In addition, it covers the issue of mediatization and demonstrates various types of logic (e.g. political logic, media logic, social media logic).

The second chapter reveals the role of social media in political communication. It presents the evolution of their definitions and types. Next, the focus is on the digital architecture of Facebook and Telegram, or the main online platforms of this research. After that, social media are considered from the perspectives of cyber-optimists and cyber-pessimists. Finally, there is an identification of valuable elements in the already formed communication strategies of political actors from different parts of the world. They are transformed into categories for content analysis in Chapter 4.

The Ukrainian and Belarusian contexts are described in the third chapter. Among other things, there are comparisons of political systems (transitional or hybrid regime vs.

consolidated authoritarian regime) and media systems. Digital media are presented as modifiers of media systems.

The fourth section compares the overall presence of Ukrainian political actors on Facebook and Belarusian political actors on Telegram. Its main part is devoted to the content analysis of these social media platforms. First, there are detailed results for various groups of political actors and specific periods. Second, the author identifies general elements of digital communication strategies in the two countries. They are also compared.

The fifth section concerns citizens of Ukraine and Belarus, who are the main consumers of political messages on social media. It begins with a brief comparison of the two cultures. The main part is devoted to survey results and their comparison across countries.

In summary, this research is the attempt to propose an international scientific discussion on the topic of political communication via social media in post-Soviet countries, especially in Ukraine and Belarus. It updates information on their political and media systems and reveals their unique social media practices. Thanks to manual data collection, it is possible to accurately analyze all posts of the political actors. There are no filtered gaps. Archival data is included. Thanks to the unique methodology, it is doable to compare a large number of political actors from opposing systems and from different social media platforms. The paper shows more than a trending crisis period. It analyzes the poorly researched Telegram. The first data on valuable correlations between consumption and political activity are presented as well. This is the most comprehensive study on the topic to date. It can be seen as a first step towards a larger research. It is even more valuable because of the comparative method. The PhD dissertation is prepared in the field of social communication and media sciences.

Chapter 1. Political communication

1.1. Theoretical basis of political communication

The political life of each country includes a variety of actors. They all have certain interests, strategies, ideas for development, which often do not coincide. Hence, politicians try to persuade their colleagues and enlist the support of voters, media criticizes them, citizens raise their voice at demonstrations, etc. Politics can be about power, choice, legitimation, participation and many other things¹. All these interactions and goals are based on the process of political communication. It is a subfield of the more general field of communication studies.

Researchers of political communication have produced various definitions of it. The current study proposes to divide them into several groups: 1) those created before 1997, or the launch of a social network called Sixdegrees.com; 2) those created between 1997 and 2008; and 3) those created after 2008, or the first Internet election in the United States (see more in Chapter 2). This approach differs from other variants in the scientific literature. It presents the chosen term from the perspective of social media.

One of the first definitions of political communication was published in the work “Political Behavior” in 1956. Eulau, Eldersveld and Janowitz were interested in analyzing “the process of mediating relations between ruling institutions and voters.” The first researchers limited the concept to a one-way flow of political messages². In 2022, the discussion has already turned into two-dimensional communication or even three-dimensional communication.

Wolton proposes his own definition where political communication is “the space in which contradictory discourse is exchanged between three actors with the legitimate right to express themselves in public on politics, namely politicians, journalists and public opinion by means of opinion polls.” Elections are the point that ends one space of political communication and starts another. This process ensures the operation of a democratic system³. On the contrary,

¹ J.G. Blumler, *Political communication*, [in:] G. Mazzoleni, K.G. Barnhurst, K. Ikeda, R.C.M. Maia & H. Wessler, *The International Encyclopedia of Political Communication*, Vol. 3, Wiley, 2015, p. 989.

² B. Dobek-Ostrowska, *Komunikowanie polityczne i publiczne*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2006, p. 134.

³ D. Wolton, *Political Communication: The Construction of a Model*, “European Journal of Communication” 1990, 5(1), pp. 9–28.

Denton and Woodward are more strict in their wording. According to them, political communication is a “pure discussion about the allocation of public resources (revenues), official authority (who is given the power to make legal, legislative and executive decision), and official sanctions (what are the state rewards or punishes)”⁴.

As for other old-media definitions, Manheim says that political communication is “the creation, distribution, use and control of information as a political resource, whether that is done by governments, by organizations like pressure groups or media, or by individuals”⁵. Swanson and Nimmo see it as a strategic way “to influence public knowledge, beliefs and action” related to political issues⁶. Finally, Pye thinks that it is “the flow of messages and information that gives structure and meaning to the political process”⁷.

The second group of definitions pays more attention to details of political communication. It opens with Ociepka and Ratajczak, who interpret the process as “the transmission of symbols and meanings in which the actors of the political scene and citizens participate.” Their actions should have a political purpose⁸. Meadow adds, “... political communication involves the exchange of symbols and messages between political actors and institutions, the general public, and news media that are the products of or have consequences for the political system”⁹.

Perloff refers to political communication as “the process by which a nation’s leadership, media, and citizenry exchange and confer meaning upon messages that relate to the conduct of public policy”¹⁰. The connections that arise between them are summarized in a “golden communication triangle”¹¹. Graber also emphasizes the political effect of the message. She states that political communication “encompasses the construction, sending, receiving, and

⁴ R.E. Denton & G.C. Woodward, *Political Communication in America*, Praeger, 1990, p. 14.

⁵ J.B. Manheim, *All of the People, All of the Time: Strategic Communication and American Politics* (1st ed.), Routledge, 1991, p. 7.

⁶ D. Swanson & D. Nimmo, *New Directions in Political Communication: A Resource Book*, Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1990, p. 9.

⁷ L.W. Pye, *Political communication*, [in:] V. Bogdanor (Ed.), *The Blackwell encyclopedia of political science*, 2nd edition, MA: Blackwell, Cambridge 1993, p. 442.

⁸ B. Ociepka & M. Ratajczak, *Media i komunikowanie polityczne*. Arboretum, 2000, p. 8.

⁹ S. Michalczyk, *Komunikowanie polityczne*, „Śląsk” Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 2005, p. 17.

¹⁰ R.M. Perloff, *Political Communication*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1998, p. 8.

¹¹ B. Dobek-Ostrowska, *Komunikowanie polityczne i publiczne...*, op. cit., p. 153.

processing of messages that potentially have a significant direct or indirect impact on politics”¹².

In her definition, Shymanova expands the circle of communicating actors. She writes, “Political communication is a process through which communication takes place between the authorities, political parties, public organizations and movements, officials and the population”¹³.

Dobek-Ostrowska collects thoughts of other authors in her own definition. She explains the process of political communication through its features. First, it is a part of natural interpersonal communication. Second, it takes place in a specific communication space (she mentions the information space). Third, it covers a specific community. Forth, it is formal communication. Fifth, it uses all available communication channels (can be mediated or direct). Sixth, it aims to transmit and exchange political messages between political actors (policymakers) and citizens (who are affected by this policy), with the involvement of mass media (present the policy). She also mentions two-way flow of messages (from actors to citizens and vice versa) but this idea is developed later in this work¹⁴.

The third group of definitions is the most elaborated to date. Their authors consider political communication after Obama’s Internet victory, which is a crucial event for social media platforms. That year’s explanation belongs to Tuman. According to him, political communication is “the discursive process by which political information is shared and promotes awareness, ignorance, manipulation, consent, dissent, action, or passivity”¹⁵.

McNair writes that political communication is “purposeful communication about politics” carried out by various entities. It includes: 1) communication performed by politicians/political actors in order to achieve their goals, 2) reports, debate and other types of communication about them in media, 3) communication of non-political figures addressed

¹² D.A. Graber & J.M. Smith, *Political Communication Faces the 21st Century*. “Journal of Communication” 2005, 55(3), p. 479.

¹³ O. Shymanova, *Teoretychni osnovy doslidzhennya politychnoyi komunikatsiyi*, “Ukrainian national idea: realities and prospects of development. Collection of scientific works” 2007, 19, p. 183.

¹⁴ B. Dobek-Ostrowska, *Komunikowanie polityczne i publiczne...*, op. cit., p. 155.

¹⁵ J. S. Tuman, *Political Communication in American Campaigns*. SAGE Publications, 2008, p. 8.

to politicians and political actors¹⁶. Rush and Althoff interpret it “as a process whereby relevant political information is passed from one part of the political system to another, and between social systems and political systems”¹⁷. Kalsnes translates the summary of Strömbäck on political communication. The latter thinks about it as “the communicative interplay among political actors, media actors, and citizens”¹⁸. Emmer, Wolling and Vowe try to look at the process by focusing on citizen participation. The authors interpret the political actions (for example, voting or protest) as a message to the political system and name it “a public form of political communication”¹⁹.

Mancini identifies “power” as the main feature of the concept of political communication and the main difference from the other types of communication. “It deals with the distribution of power among different competing views, actors, and interests.” The author underlines “power in society.” He states that political communication involves “exchange” to achieve a result²⁰. Kenski and Jamieson define the concept as “making sense of symbolic exchanges about the shared exercise of power and the presentation and interpretation of information, messages or signals with potential consequences for the exercise of shared power”²¹. Furthermore, Schulz considers communication as political when “it relates to collectively binding decisions on the distribution of scarce societal resources”²².

As before, Blumler refers to the messages “from, to, and about government (including all attempts to influence it)” but argues that the boundaries of the concept have become more flexible. He considers political communication research in terms of power perspective (effects), systemic perspective (with interrelated levels and components), dynamic

¹⁶ B. McNair, *An Introduction to Political Communication (Communication and Society)* (5th ed.), Routledge, 2011, pp. 3-4.

¹⁷ R. Setyowati, F. Sadewo & M. Legowo, *The Role of Political Communication in Anticipating Social Conflicts Based on the Government Policy in East Java*, Proceedings of Social Sciences, Humanities and Economics Conference (SoSHEC 2017), 2018, p. 41.

¹⁸ J. Strömbäck, *Makt, medier och samhälle: en introduktion till politisk kommunikation*, SNS Förlag, Stockholm 2009, p. 31; B. Kalsnes, *The Power of Likes: Social Media Logic and Political Communication*, University of Oslo, Oslo 2016, p. 19.

¹⁹ M. Emmer, J. Wolling & G. Vowe, *Changing political communication in Germany: Findings from a longitudinal study on the influence of the internet on political information, discussion and the participation of citizens*, “Communications” 2012, 37(3), p. 238.

²⁰ B. Badie, D. Berg-Schlosser & L. Morlino, *International Encyclopedia of Political Science*, SAGE Publications, 2011.

²¹ K. Kenski & K.H. Jamieson, *The Oxford Handbook of Political Communication*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2017, p. 5.

²² W. Schulz, *Political communication in long-term perspective*, “Political Communication” 2014, p. 63.

perspective (technological, organizational, political system and other changes that influence political communication systems), and normative perspective (norms of organization and realization of political communication)²³.

Norris says, “Political communication is an interactive process concerning the transmission of information among politicians, the news media, and the public.” She identifies three types of its operation: 1) from governing institutions to citizens (downward), 2) among politicians (horizontally), 3) from public opinion to authorities (upward)²⁴.

Baym explains the division of political communication study into three theoretical paradigms. One of them considers communication as a function of a political system with particular attention to “input variables and outcome effects,” and the process of “transmission” of messages. Second paradigm views communication as interaction, or social action. It emphasizes its dynamics and focuses on “transaction between and among actors.” Third paradigm is about communication as culture. It plays a constitutive role in shaping the political system, political processes, behavior, etc.²⁵.

Summarizing all these definitions, it is clear that most authors focus on interaction (“interactive process,” “pure discussion,” “discourse,” “discursive process,” “interplay,” “exchange,” etc.) in political communication. “The fundamental role of [it] is to prevent the political debate from closing in upon itself.” It can be achieved by diversifying political topics and by establishing political flexibility²⁶.

There are other characteristics of the process. For example, the boundaries of political communication are formulated by economic structures, technologies and everyday practices (creation, distribution and consumption of the product). Its elements and basic communication technologies constantly evolve together with relevant media developments. It covers those organizations and spheres that are affected by politics (almost everything and everyone). It is integrated in the specific media ecology. Political communication has deeply

²³ J.G. Blumler, *Political communication...*, op. cit., pp. 989-999.

²⁴ P. Norris, *Political Communication*, “International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences” 2015, p. 342.

²⁵ G. Baym, *Political communication*, [in:] G. Mazzoleni, K.G. Barnhurst, K. Ikeda, R.C.M. Maia & H. Wessler, *The International Encyclopedia of Political Communication*, Vol. 3, Wiley, 2015, pp. 169–179.

²⁶ D. Wolton, *Political Communication...*, op. cit., p. 21.

normative “patterns and practices” (have consequences in democratic countries). Moreover, it relies on a structured but shifting “politics-media axis” (institutions with different goals and logics are interdependent and involve interactions)²⁷.

The process is “a mix of public and personalized communication, mass media and social media, established and non-established communicators.” There is no longer a clear line between serious messages and entertainment. Political communication is also affected by globalization²⁸. Political leaders and activists can appeal to the international community without any obstacles. Changes in one political communication system may affect such kind of a system in another part of the world. Furthermore, it is the constant process with a particular focus on election periods.

Political messaging can still take the form of “interpersonal communication” (e.g. one-to-one discussions, by emails, etc.), or “group networks” (Facebook posts, local meetings, etc.)²⁹. Political communication is also related to mass communication because, for example, politicians often send their messages to masses through newspapers, radio and TV. Moreover, their communication through social media is characterized by some elements of this process. Mass communication includes: 1) “unrestricted access” (available to the general public), 2) a one-way flow of information, which is “central-peripheral in terms of geography” and “asymmetrical in respect of elite-popular relations,” 3) “near immediate contact” with a large number of people inside and outside the country, 4) ability to monitor it, 5) selection or allocation of public responsibilities, 6) anonymous, impersonal and voluntary relations between “senders” and “receivers,” 7) very homogenous and predictable patterns of perception by individuals, 8) standardization of content, 9) the result of work of complex organizations³⁰.

Another concept related to political communication is strategic communication. Strömbäck and Kioussis define it as “organizations’ purposeful management of information and

²⁷ J.G. Blumler, *Core Theories of Political Communication: Foundational and Freshly Minted*, “Communication Theory” 2015, 25(4), p. 426; G. Baym, *Political communication...*, op. cit., p. 170.

²⁸ F. Esser & B. Pfetsch, *Comparing Political Communication*, [in:] D. Caramani (Ed.), *Comparative Politics. Fourth updated edition*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2017, p. 2.

²⁹ P. Norris, *Political communication*, [in:] D. Caramani (Ed.), *Comparative politics. 3rd edition*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2014, p. 319.

³⁰ D. McQuail, *Mass Communication*, [in:] G. Mazzoleni, K.G. Barnhurst, K. Ikeda, R.C.M. Maia & H. Wessler, *The International Encyclopedia of Political Communication*, Vol. 3, Wiley, 2015, p. 690.

communication to reach political objectives it has set out for itself.” According to their article, there are “vote-seeking,” “policy-seeking,” and “office-seeking parties” who use this type of communication³¹. Hence, it can be assumed that strategic communication is an integral part of political communication. Every politician or protester with certain ambitions develops it in order to succeed.

There are at least three functions of political communication. First, it reveals new problems as they arise. Second, it includes them in the political agenda. Third, if parties find consensus on these issues, it is easier to exclude them³².

The process of political communication may take place at “a microlevel (units),” “a mezolevel (institutions),” and “a macrolevel (society as a whole)”³³. Political communicators (1), languages, symbols and techniques (2), media (3), audiences (4), effects (5) are the elements of the framework proposed by Nimmo³⁴. There is also another division, where one of the levels consists of political, cultural, economic environment and various social systems. Second level includes political and media organizations, or “political advocates of all kinds.” Third level – political and journalistic mediators, communicators. Fourth level – production of the content. Fifth level – citizens (diverse and heterogeneous)³⁵.

These multiple levels cannot be considered separately. There are various interrelationships existing between them. If there is a decision to take only one actor, this can lead to possible mistakes and misunderstanding of the process of political communication³⁶. For example, not all politicians are able to convey messages to their audience with the desired effect. They use services of a press secretary, hire entire communication teams that can be their mediators,

³¹ J. Strömbäck & S. Kioussis, *Strategic political communication in election campaigns*, “Political Communication” 2014, p. 111; K. Strøm, *A behavioral theory of competitive political parties*, “American Journal of Political Science” 1990, 34, pp. 565–598.

³² D. Wolton, *Political Communication...*, op. cit., p. 21.

³³ B. Dobek-Ostrowska, *Komunikowanie polityczne i publiczne...*, op. cit., p. 155.

³⁴ D. Nimmo, *Political Communication Theory and Research: An Overview*, “Annals of the International Communication Association” 1977, 1(1), p. 442.

³⁵ J.G. Blumler, *Core Theories...*, op. cit., p. 426; J. G. Blumler, *The Shape of Political Communication*, “Oxford Handbooks Online” 2015, p. 48.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 48.

etc. In addition, the direction of the process may change. Citizens can send their messages to the government through vox pops³⁷ conducted by media organizations.

Communication between actors of the same level (e.g. government officials – government officials) is called “horizontal.” On the contrary, “vertical” communication takes place between representatives of different levels (e.g. government officials - citizens)³⁸.

There are various categories of actors in political communication. The author of this PhD dissertation generalizes the first one as political actors. Other researchers can also present it as “politicians,” “political parties,” “ruling institutions,” “government” or “government institutions,” “official authority,” “nation’s leadership,” “officials,” “policymakers,” “public organizations and movements,” “institutions,” “organizations like pressure groups,” etc.

McNair includes political parties, public organizations, pressure groups and even terrorist organizations in the category of political organizations. It is the equivalent of the category of political actors presented in the current research. He defines them as “those individuals who aspire, through organizational and institutional means, to influence the decision-making process.” Authorities use their power to promote necessary policies. In contrast, opposition tries to create obstacles for their implementation and offers alternatives³⁹.

The author defined all the above terms. *Political parties* consist of a group of people united by ideology and organizational structure. They have certain goals that can be achieved through communication with other actors. For example, they need to explain their ideas to colleagues or citizens in order to achieve necessary support. *Public organizations* are considered as “non-party organizations with political objectives.” Their goal is to raise socially important issues and agitate for their solution. They have access to media due to the popularity of their opinion in society. Other non-party actors are *pressure groups*. However, sometimes they can transform into “green” parties that continue to be established in different countries. Pressure groups tend to focus on a single problem. Moreover, they are very

³⁷ The opinions of people recorded talking informally in public places; a broadcast for radio or television in which people going past in a public place are asked their opinion on a particular subject (Cambridge Dictionary, *Vox pop*).

³⁸ M. Ostapenko, *Politychna komunikatsiya: teoretychni aspekty doslidzhennya*, “Political Management” 2012, #3, p. 142.

³⁹ B. McNair, *An Introduction...*, op. cit., p. 5.

political in their objectives. They can communicate with other actors through advertising and public relations. *Terrorist organizations* are also perceived as non-party entities. They try to achieve their political goals through violence (terror attacks). Terrorists need media attention in order to spread their messages to a wide audience. Press conferences, press releases, leaks and even acts of aggression are considered as means of their communication⁴⁰.

Nimmo proposes a category of political communicators. It is based on Lasswell's views, who distinguished propagandists, principals, and laymen. The author transforms them into politicians, professional communicators, and activists. A *politician* can act as a party representative seeking political power, or as an ideologue of changes (through reforms or revolution). Both positions require communication skills⁴¹. A journalist or a promoter (press secretary, political consultant, etc.) is referred to as *professional communicators*. They act as mediators in order to help politicians with communication (advancing their interests). Third group consists of other *political activists* (opinion leaders and spokespersons for interest groups). They share their personal opinions on the situation with the audience⁴².

Ganzhurov classifies head of state, parliament, government, judiciary, local governments and others as institutional actors of political communication⁴³. Akayomova refers to Dahl, who singled out ruling actors, and those who claim power⁴⁴.

Political actors use communication in order to take control of power or legitimacy⁴⁵. The process can include manipulations and strategic calculations, as well as elements of "passion, responsibility, and proportionality"⁴⁶. Charismatic communication skills play an important role. There are several types of them: "political initiative and creativity," "communication

⁴⁰ Ibidem, pp. 5-9.

⁴¹ D. Nimmo, *Political Communication...*, op. cit., pp. 442-443; E. Katz & B. Danet, *Communication between bureaucracy and the public*, [in:] I. Pool & W. Schramm (Eds.), *Handbook of communication*, Rand McNally, Chicago 1973.

⁴² D. Nimmo, *Political Communication...*, op. cit., p. 443.

⁴³ Y. Ganzhurov, *Politychna komunikatsiya: problemy strukturnykh*, "Political management" 2004, #2, p. 125.

⁴⁴ A. Akayomova, *Politychna komunikatsiya yak protses vzayemodiyi politychnykh sub'yektiv*, "Political management" 2011, #1, p. 89.

⁴⁵ T. Sheaffer, S. R. Shenhav & M. Balmas, *Political actors as communicators*, "Political Communication" 2014, p. 211.

⁴⁶ J.G. Blumler, *Core Theories...*, op. cit., p. 433; R. van Broekhoven *Vocation vs. mediatization*, Paper presented to Workshop on the Mediatization of Politics, London School of Economics, 2014; M. Weber *Politics as a vocation*, *Lecture delivered at Munich University*.

initiative and creativity,” “cooperation with journalists,” “cooperation with politicians,” and “rhetorical and dramatic abilities.” Another significant factor is rhetorical skills⁴⁷.

The author of this PhD dissertation has decided to choose the name “political actors” due to the specific nature of the research. Political life of Ukraine is mostly represented by traditional politicians. However, the situation in Belarus includes various types of participants. The unrecognized President Lukashenko is one of the few traditional Belarusian politicians in the current work. Representatives of opposition are political activists who have never been in power before. There are also bloggers in Belarus and Ukraine with blurred boundaries of their political communication. Hence, the accepted definition of the category is an umbrella term that encompasses all possible variants.

Media is the second element of the process. The other scholars define it as “journalists,” “media actors,” and “news media.” They also describe it in the form of “news reports, editorials, and other forms of media discussion of politics.” According to Ganzhurov, mass media are functional actors of political communication⁴⁸.

McNair takes a different approach. His category “media organizations” consists of “print, broadcasting and online channels.” The latter includes websites, blogs and social media in the context of political information. The main functions are the transmission of political messages created outside media organizations, and sending of those prepared by different producers (journalists, bloggers, etc.). As can be seen, he views the media first in terms of technology and then people⁴⁹.

If the event is not covered by the media, it does not exist. Media information could not be neutral, but full of value judgments. There are three different types of reality: 1) objective (actual event), 2) constructed (produced by media), 3) subjective (perceived by people)⁵⁰. Political messages reach consumers after being processed by certain actors. For example,

⁴⁷ T. Sheafer, *Charismatic Skill and Media Legitimacy*, “Communication Research” 2001, 28(6), pp. 711–736; T. Sheafer, *Charismatic Communication Skill, Media Legitimacy, and Electoral Success*, “Journal of Political Marketing” 2008, 7(1), pp. 1–24; T. Sheafer, S. R. Shenhav & M. Balmas, *Political actors...*, op. cit., pp. 217–218.

⁴⁸ Y. Ganzhurov, *Politychna komunikatsiya...*, op. cit., p. 125.

⁴⁹ B. McNair, *An Introduction...*, op. cit., pp. 10–11.

⁵⁰ Ibidem, p. 11; L.L. Kaid, J. Gerstle & K.R. Sanders, *Mediated Politics in Two Cultures: Presidential Campaigning in the United States and France*. Praeger, New York 1991.

journalists choose the best news from their own subjective point of view. They need to keep in mind their ratings, on the one hand, and their image, on the other hand. Propagandists manipulate information in accordance with their goals. It is also difficult to check the authenticity of the video uploaded to social media by ordinary people (so-called, citizen journalism). Therefore, the final product may differ from the actual event.

Nimmo emphasizes three types of media that transmit political communication: 1) mass media (can cover a large number of people), 2) public organizations (create opportunities for internal and external communication), 3) interpersonal or face-to-face (informal, two-way dimension)⁵¹. The same classification is presented by Rush⁵². Furthermore, Salgado identifies mass media, social media (social interaction on the Internet) and individual media (“primarily used to communicate and express the views of individuals”)⁵³.

Political communication can take mediated and non-mediated forms⁵⁴. If the transmission of information from political actors to citizens or vice versa is checked and controlled by journalists or other communicators, it is indirect or mediated form of communication. If nobody interferes in this process, and the actor has the opportunity to provide an information in accordance with his/her vision, it is direct or non-mediated form.

This research is focused on social media. Therefore, there are three options for applying the category of media. First, use the technology-oriented approach, as McNair did. Second, pay attention to social media owners and their established rules (more in Chapter 2). Third, since social media represent online, direct or non-mediated form of communication, then this category can be completely omitted. In essence, this is the core of a new version of political communication. Nonetheless, the third option does not exist in its pure form.

The third element of the process is citizens. They appear in other definitions as “voters,” “non-politicians,” “public,” “individuals,” “the population,” “general public.” Ganzhurov

⁵¹ D. Nimmo, *Political Communication...*, op. cit., pp. 445-446.

⁵² B. Dobek-Ostrowska, *Komunikowanie polityczne i publiczne...*, op. cit., p. 142.

⁵³ S. Salgado, *The media of political communication*, “Political Communication” 2014, p. 273.

⁵⁴ Ibidem, pp. 280-281.

identifies them as social actors (individuals and different social communities)⁵⁵. Akayomova refers to Dahl, who includes politically active and apolitical parts of the population⁵⁶.

Some authors describe citizens as “public opinion,” or, more precisely, “public opinion by means of opinion polls.” According to Wolton, it must be addressed by actors. Public opinion helps politicians gain knowledge about possible outcomes of their actions. Journalists use opinion polls to support their arguments in disputes with politicians. Opinion poll organizations construct democracy through it⁵⁷.

McNair calls the category as “citizens,” but explains it as “audience.” According to him, political communication would not be relevant without this element. The main goal of various actors is to persuade (to affect) citizens who are their audience (can be broad or narrow)⁵⁸. In addition, citizens do not only passively consume political information. They can produce their own content (messages), or reactions (comments).

Nimmo writes about “audiences of a public variety” with special attention to “public opinion.” It consists of three types: 1) “popular opinion” (summary of individual opinions), 2) public opinion (includes different interests), 3) “mass opinion” (measured or intuitive consensus on specific issues)⁵⁹.

The category of citizens/audience is represented in this PhD dissertation by Ukrainians and Belarusians. One of the research aims is to determine the possible correlations between political messages and citizens of the two countries (their knowledge, participation, etc.), or their absence.

The author summed up all the definitions, characteristics and actors in his own one. The term should be suitable specifically for this PhD thesis. In the paper, political communication is understood as a strategic process of creating, controlling, and transmitting information from political actors to citizens via social media in order to achieve their goals. The notions of exchange or interaction are excluded due to certain features of communication of Belarusian

⁵⁵ Y. Ganzhurov, *Politychna komunikatsiya...*, op. cit., p. 125.

⁵⁶ A. Akayomova, *Politychna komunikatsiya...*, op. cit., p. 89.

⁵⁷ D. Wolton, *Political Communication...*, op. cit., pp. 20-21.

⁵⁸ B. McNair, *An Introduction...*, op. cit., p. 10.

⁵⁹ D. Nimmo, *Political Communication...*, op. cit., pp. 446-447.

political actors on Telegram. Although they offered options for sending feedback, not all of them enabled the function of comments during the period of research.

1.2. Historical development of political communication

1.2.1 History of political communication research

Scholars usually mention two significant dates in the history of political communication research. The 1940s, when Paul Lazarsfeld worked at Columbia University on the effects of propaganda, are seen as a starting point⁶⁰. There are also the 1970s, when it was recognized as a separate area of research. During this time, the International Communication Association and the American Political Science Association established departments of political communication⁶¹. However, the interest in the field can be traced in much earlier periods. For instance, public opinion helped the ancient Greeks in the management of their city-states⁶². Aristotle viewed rhetoric as “a faculty of considering all the possible means of persuasion on every subject” (in Hobbes translation)⁶³. His well-known elements: Ethos (credibility of the speaker), Pathos (emotions) and Logos (logical appeal) are still the basis of every public speaking course. Other classic representatives of the art of persuasion are Sun Tzu and Shakespeare⁶⁴. Machiavelli’s work “The Prince” is considered “the first ‘public relations’ manual for political leaders”⁶⁵. All of these are elements of the future study of political communication.

Representatives of the school of humanities (linguists, historians and others) studied media and communications until the end of the 19th century. After that, the circle expanded to psychologists, economists, political scientists and other scholars of the developing social sciences and experimental psychology. Sociologists from the United States, Germany and

⁶⁰ M. Soha & J. Meyrowitz, *Political Communication Research*, [in:] G. Mazzoleni, K.G. Barnhurst, K. Ikeda, R.C.M. Maia & H. Wessler, *The International Encyclopedia of Political Communication*, Vol. 3, Wiley, 2015, p. 1014.

⁶¹ D.M. Ryfe, *History and Political Communication: An Introduction*, “Political Communication” 2001, 18(4), p. 408.

⁶² M. Soha & J. Meyrowitz, *Political Communication...*, op. cit., p. 1014.

⁶³ E. Doxtader, *In the Name of a Becoming Rhetoric: Critical Reflections on the Potential of Aristotle’s Rhetoric 1355b*, “Philosophy & Rhetoric” 2013, 46(2), p. 231.

⁶⁴ D.D. Nimmo & K.R. Sanders, *Introduction: The emergence of political communication as a field*, [in:] D.D. Nimmo & K.R. Sanders (eds.), *Handbook of Political Communication*, Sage, Beverly Hills, London 1981, p. 17.

⁶⁵ M. Soha & J. Meyrowitz, *Political Communication...*, op. cit., p. 1014.

France were, probably, among the first to explore this field in the late 19th and early 20th centuries⁶⁶. Nonetheless, social psychologists were among the most prominent. Surveys and experiments, as the two methods of data collection in political communication, were developed by them⁶⁷.

The popularity of communicative research continued to grow between 1920s and 1930s. The main reasons for this were the World War I, as well as the emergence of the press and films. The post-war period is characterized, among other things, by the development of research on “modern mass democracy.” Political communication included issue of political culture, discussion, democratic orientations, etc. However, political scientists focused on behaviorism. The main topic of research was propaganda that persuaded millions of people to kill each other⁶⁸.

Lasswell, a representative of social psychologists, is one of the most famous scholars of that time. He developed an algorithm for communication analysis, which consists of five elements: “who [1, subject of communication] says what [2, message] to whom [3, object of communication], in what channel [4, tool of communication], with what effect [5, result / consequences]”⁶⁹. Chaffee assumes that Lasswell and Ahora may have been the first to include the term “political communication” in the title of the book (“Political communication: The public language of political elites in India and the United States”)⁷⁰.

German political communication research also developed at the beginning of 20th century. Quantitative content analysis of newspapers was proposed by sociologist Weber. He was one of the few representatives of this school. In 1916, “the first European department of newspaper science” was opened in Leipzig. In 1923, the Institute for Social Research was established in Frankfurt. The famous Frankfurt School was originally located there. It tried to study Marxism. However, the main attention of German researchers was paid to the analysis of the reasons for the defeat of propaganda during the WWI. It was perceived as the

⁶⁶ C. Reinemann, *Political communication research. A brief history of the field and the idea of this handbook*, “Political Communication” 2014, p. 4.

⁶⁷ D.M. Ryfe, *History and Political Communication...*, op. cit., pp. 408-409.

⁶⁸ B. Pfetsch & F. Esser, *Comparing Political Communication*, [in:] F. Esser & T. Hanitzsch (Eds.), *Handbook of Comparative Communication Research*, Routledge, London 2012, p. 27; C. Reinemann, *Political communication...*, op. cit., p. 5; D.M. Ryfe, *History and Political Communication...*, op. cit., p. 409.

⁶⁹ G. Baym, *Political communication...*, op. cit., p. 171.

⁷⁰ S. Chaffee, *Studying the New Communication of Politics*, “Political Communication” 2001, 18(2), p. 238.

one of the weakest sides of the Axis powers⁷¹. Eventually, Nazi propaganda began to intensify.

There was a wave of emigration from Nazi Germany and Austria to the US in 1930s. Another prominent researcher, Lazarsfeld, took this path. He studied radio using the tools of social psychology at the newly founded Office of Radio Research⁷². Moreover, he started to work at Columbia University. The scholar focused on decision-making process during the 1940 presidential election in the US⁷³.

It was the time of the WWII, when the words “communication” and “propaganda” could be considered synonymous. For example, the popular Rockefeller Foundation organized a series of events to discuss the development of American propaganda for an upcoming war with Nazis. Nonetheless, the word “propaganda” was replaced by “communication” in order to distinguish its American use from German. In addition to this, Lasswell and Lazarsfeld participated in the workshops. They agreed to use quantitative methods and media effects in their studies during the “propaganda war.” It gave a huge boost to media and communication research in the post-war period⁷⁴.

In 1948, Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet invented the “two-step flow model of communication.” According to it, people do not receive information directly from mass media. Initially, information content is received and processed by the so-called “opinion leader.” Next, this person passes it on to less-active parts of society through interpersonal communication. This situation occurred during the 1940 presidential election in the US, when people who read newspapers retransmitted messages to other voters. The results were published in the book “The People’s Choice”⁷⁵.

Lazarsfeld continued to develop this theory together with Katz in the 1950s. This time received the name “the era of minimal effects.” The authors concluded that people are not

⁷¹ C. Corradetti, *The Frankfurt School and Critical Theory*, <https://iep.utm.edu/critical-theory-frankfurt-school/> (accessed on 22.02.2022); C. Reinemann, *Political communication...*, op. cit., p. 6.

⁷² Ibidem, p. 5.

⁷³ M. Soha & J. Meyrowitz, *Political Communication...*, op. cit., p. 1014.

⁷⁴ C. Reinemann, *Political communication...*, op. cit., pp. 5-6.

⁷⁵ M. Postelnicu, *Two-step flow model of communication*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/two-step-flow-model-of-communication> (accessed on 22.02.2022); M. Soha & J. Meyrowitz, *Political Communication...*, op. cit., p. 1014.

able to make their own decisions related to politics. Moreover, media information cannot influence them. In fact, the decision-making process is shaped by members of their social group (friends, family, colleagues, etc.). As a result, it is better to treat the public as a heterogeneous mass, not homogeneous. The research was published in the book “Personal Influence”⁷⁶.

A number of other events took place at the beginning of the post-war period. First, there was a decline in social science research in Germany. Most of its members were connected with Nazis. This field began to revive only in the 1960s. Second, the Soviet Union did not educate journalists, but propaganda workers. Their main aims were to persuade people to be loyal to the communist movement, the state and to emphasize the importance of the press. This way of thinking spread throughout Eastern Europe. Third, the term “public opinion” was replaced by “communication” in the late 1950s⁷⁷.

Some distinctive features characterize the political communication research in the second half of the 20th century. For instance, scientists have started to pay more attention to quantitative methodology. Authors who build their arguments and conclusions on the basis of data collection and categorization gain more credibility in scientific community. Moreover, if initially the main topic was propaganda, then it changed to other recurring events. Researchers focused on elections. These periods consist of many components that can be analyzed (marketing strategies, rhetoric of politicians, effectiveness of their actions, voters’ feedback, etc.)⁷⁸.

Several types of research have become dominant during these years. The first is related to the content of messages that are produced by communication process. Scholars try to investigate the main function of the message (attack, acclaim, or defense), its emotional tone (positive, negative, or neutral), the main topic, and many other elements. They also count the amount of messages in a particular media, compare these characteristics and numbers between different types of media, time periods, countries, etc.

⁷⁶ M. Postelnicu, *Two-step flow...*, op. cit. (accessed on 22.02.2022); W.L. Bennett & S. Iyengar, *A New Era of Minimal Effects? The Changing Foundations of Political Communication*, “Journal of Communication” 2008, 58(4), pp. 707–710.

⁷⁷ C. Reinemann, *Political communication...*, op. cit., pp. 5-7.

⁷⁸ M. Soha & J. Meyrowitz, *Political Communication...*, op. cit., p. 1016.

Another research tradition measures the effects of messages. The terms “effects” and “influences” were brought to the field by mass communication. They are also inescapable partners of the word “cause”⁷⁹. The interest is to examine the potential communicative impact of political actors, systems and mass media on behavior, opinions, knowledge, values, beliefs, etc. of citizens, in general, or specific subgroups (African-American men, college graduates, white liberals or others) expressed in the political process⁸⁰. In the propaganda or persuasion model, the effects are determined by changes in certain political attitudes and preferences⁸¹.

Since 1970, scientists have begun to clarify, correct, and supplement previous ideas. In fact, the results of Lazarsfeld and his co-researchers on the weak influence of mass media did not last long. Ryfe stated that they were “a primary culprit” in the deterioration of political and social life in the 20th century. “They have (not necessarily in this order) contributed to the demise of parties, helped to produce ignorant and apathetic citizens, depressed social capital, warped the election process, heightened public cynicism and disrespect for political authorities and institutions, and served the crucial connection between citizens and political process. Moreover, historically there is a linear relationship between the presence of mass media in the political process and their negative impact: The greater their presence, the greater their general negative impact,” he explained⁸².

The 1970s finally marked the separation of political communication as a field. Among other things, scientists began to deal with the concept of “political communication culture.” It “refers to the cultural determinants of the media and politics relationship. It captures the beliefs and values of political communication actors and their public expression in relation to political culture”⁸³. Culture is based on the context of the existence of a particular society, shaped by historical practices⁸⁴. Furthermore, the focus of political communication research expanded to the analysis of government processes, strategic communication campaigns, etc.

⁷⁹ S. Chaffee, *Studying the New Communication...*, op. cit., p. 239.

⁸⁰ P. Norris, *Political Communication*, “International Encyclopedia...”, op. cit., p. 343; D.M. Ryfe, *History and Political Communication...*, op. cit., pp. 409-410.

⁸¹ S. Iyengar, *A Typology of Media Effects*, “Oxford Handbooks Online” 2014, p. 59.

⁸² D.M. Ryfe, *History and Political Communication...*, op. cit., p. 411.

⁸³ B. Pfetsch, *Political Communication Culture*, [in:] G. Mazzoleni, K.G. Barnhurst, K. Ikeda, R.C.M. Maia & H. Wessler, *The International Encyclopedia of Political Communication*, Vol. 3, Wiley, 2015, p. 1004.

⁸⁴ D.M. Ryfe, *History and Political Communication...*, op. cit., pp. 416-417.

According to Chaffee, “the structure of communication shapes the structure of politics.” It is an integral part of the activities of political actors, and its restrictions affect the process of power exercise⁸⁵.

Around the 1980s and 1990s, there was a transition from the era of “minimal effects” to the era of “strong effects.” The main changes of this period are the separation of individuals from group civil society, and the greater choice of media channels, media sources, and content produced by different actors⁸⁶. Initially, the main reason for the “decline in social capital” was considered to be radio, then television⁸⁷. The Internet has become another tool added to this list.

The following years are characterized by research on production processes. It includes political and media perspectives. The former analyzes mechanisms of creating and transmitting messages (directly, indirectly) used by political actors⁸⁸. The latter identifies news production as the central issue. It is based on agenda-setting, framing, priming and other theories, sourcing, “objectivity” and other types of bias⁸⁹.

Scientists have started to compare countries in terms of media systems. At first, it was “Four Theories of the Press” by Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm. The typology of the Cold War period included “Libertarian media systems” (freedom of expression without state intervention), “Socially responsible media systems” (an important role of both freedom of expression and a state), “Authoritarian media systems” (state control over freedom of expression) and “Soviet Communist model” (media as a tool for party propaganda)⁹⁰. Then, Hallin and Mancini prepared the prominent research “Comparing media systems: Three models of media and politics.” They proposed a framework for analysis that includes four dimensions: 1) “press market,” 2) “political parallelism,” 3) “journalistic professionalism,” 4) “role of the states.” It gave them an opportunity to classify countries in one out of the three models of media-politics relationships: 1) Mediterranean as “polarized pluralist,” 2) Northern

⁸⁵ S. Chaffee, *Studying the New Communication...*, op. cit., pp. 237-238.

⁸⁶ W.L. Bennett & S. Iyengar, *A New Era...*, op. cit., p. 708.

⁸⁷ D.M. Ryfe, *History and Political Communication...*, op. cit., p. 413.

⁸⁸ P. Norris, *Political Communication*, “International Encyclopedia...”, op. cit., p. 342.

⁸⁹ M. Soha & J. Meyrowitz, *Political Communication...*, op. cit., p. 1017.

⁹⁰ P. Norris, *Political communication*, [in:] D. Caramani (Ed.), *Comparative politics. 3rd edition...*, op. cit., pp. 321-322.

European as “democratic corporatist,” and 3) North Atlantic as “liberal”⁹¹. The detailed schemes are presented in Chapter 3.

The concept of “political information environments” is a supplement to media systems. Esser et al. define it “as the quantitative supply of news and public affairs content provided to a national audience by routinely available sources”. The main objectives are to explain how they increase the level of provision and consumption of political information among citizens and to compare the results between different countries⁹².

There are also studies of political communication systems, and political communication processes. The first group focuses on the comparison of structures (“macro-level relationships between media institutions and political institutions” and their organization), cultures (explained earlier), messages (input and output flows) and effects (explained earlier) of political communication⁹³. The second group is the logical continuation of the first one. Scholars compare: 1) the communications infrastructure, 2) the regulatory environment, 3) the structure of media ownership, 4) the skills and capacities of the journalism profession, 5) the contents of political communication, 6) the effects of communication⁹⁴.

The topic of new media has become one of the main orientations of researchers in the 21st century. This PhD dissertation is no exception. The author explains the transformation of political communication in the new media environment, analyzes the patterns of using social media by political actors from Ukraine and Belarus, compares them, and identifies the possible correlations between political messages on social media platforms and citizens of the two countries, or their absence. The study includes not only election, but also post-election, routine and war periods.

⁹¹ D.C. Hallin & P. Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics*, Cambridge University Press, 2004.

⁹² F. Esser, C.H. de Vreese, J. Strömbäck, P. van Aelst, T. Aalberg, J. Stanyer, G. Lengauer, R. Berganza, G. Legnante, S. Papathanassopoulos, S. Salgado, T. Sheaffer & C. Reinemann, *Political Information Opportunities in Europe*, “The International Journal of Press/Politics” 2012, 17(3), pp. 248-250.

⁹³ B. Pfetsch & F. Esser, *Comparing Political Communication...*, op. cit., pp. 32-39.

⁹⁴ P. Norris, *Political communication*, [in:] D. Caramani (Ed.), *Comparative Politics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2011, pp. 358–359; B. Pfetsch & F. Esser, *Comparing Political Communication...*, op. cit., p. 33; B. Pfetsch & F. Esser, *Political communication in comparative perspective: Key concepts and new insights*, “Political Communication” 2014, p. 93.

1.2.2 Three ages of political communication

There were three phases in the development of political communication after the end of WWII. The first one dates back to around 1850-1960 and is called “the golden age of the parties” and “the age of the newspapers”⁹⁵. Its other name is “the classic era of political communication.” Direct contacts (e.g. election rallies) and printed media were the main tools of communication between political actors and voters at that time⁹⁶. Radio tried to challenge the leading role of newspapers in the 1920s⁹⁷.

The first “age” is characterized by huge trust in political institutions. The main reason was numerous social reforms and initiatives. In addition, there were high levels of party identification among voters⁹⁸. “Party-dominated communication system” included: 1) meaningful political messages (politicians tried to distance themselves from opponents by focusing on their own programs of action and change), 2) easy access to mass media (communication flows contributed to the promotion of these messages), 3) appropriate response from voters (“through selectivity and reinforcement”)⁹⁹.

Railway networks facilitated the rapid and cheaper distribution of the printed media¹⁰⁰. Journalists could send information in telegrams from different parts of the world¹⁰¹. Moreover, newspapers did not become obsolete due to the popularity of electronic media in the post-war period. Journalists have found an opportunity to adapt to new forms of production and distribution. However, it does not mean that their number has not decreased¹⁰².

⁹⁵ T. Tasente, *The 4 phases of evolution of political communication systems: from the golden age of the parties to the golden age of the users*, “Technium Social Sciences Journal” 2020, Vol. 2, p. 77.

⁹⁶ D. Gërguri, *Campaigning on Facebook: Posts and online social networking as campaign tools in the 2017 general elections in the Republic of Kosovo*, “Central European Journal of Communication” 2019, 12(1), p. 94.

⁹⁷ J. Wolling & M. Emmer, *Individual political communication and participation*, “Political Communication” 2014, p. 453.

⁹⁸ T. Tasente, *The 4 phases of evolution...*, op. cit., pp. 77-78.

⁹⁹ J.G. Blumler & D. Kavanagh, *The Third Age of Political Communication: Influences and Features*, “Political Communication” 1999, 16(3), p. 212.

¹⁰⁰ D. Gërguri, *Campaigning on Facebook...*, op. cit., p. 95.

¹⁰¹ P. Norris, *Political communication*, [in:] D. Caramani (Ed.), *Comparative politics. 3rd edition...*, op. cit., p. 319.

¹⁰² Idem, *Political Communication*, “International Encyclopedia...”, op. cit., p. 343.

The end of WWII marked the beginning of “the modern era of political communications.” Initially, state TV channels broadcast party meetings, and private ones showed commercials to their viewers, interpersonal communications were still used in elections, and printed media reached educated readers¹⁰³. In the 1960s, researchers distinguish “the television era.” The new medium transmitted information through audio and video channels. Face-to-face communication has been replaced by prime-time communication. Nationwide television became the dominant channel of political communication and the monopolist in the media market. Furthermore, there was a decline in the level of political trust¹⁰⁴.

The most important changes of this period were: 1) fewer opportunities for selective exposure. For instance, TV channels provided broadcast time for most political actors. Hence, viewers could no longer listen only to information that fully matched their beliefs. The main victim of this transformation was party propaganda. 2) Television has become the central platform for political communication. Fairness, neutrality, measure choice, and impartiality were among its required standards. Therefore, the number of partisan voters have decreased due to the new norms of political participation attributed to the “model citizen.” 3) Television has begun to reach a wide audience of people, especially hard-to-reach segments of the public (apolitical citizens). For example, long-term party identification has been replaced by short-term political events. 4) TV news has become the main channel that transmits short-term influences. Political actors have begun to take into account the media agenda when planning political meetings, delivering speeches, etc.¹⁰⁵

Modern campaigning required new tricks in order to attract voters. For instance, one of the innovations was the preparation of speeches in advance and the assessment of their potential acceptability. In contrast, television created a distance between political actors and citizens, and reduced the political activity of the latter¹⁰⁶.

Political communication through TV channels was seen as “centripetal” during this period. Its viewers were “near-universal.” Television did not give a variety of choices to them.

¹⁰³ P. Norris, *Political communication*, [in:] D. Caramani (Ed.), *Comparative politics. 3rd edition...*, op. cit., p. 319.

¹⁰⁴ T. Tasente, *The 4 phases of evolution...*, op. cit., p. 78.

¹⁰⁵ J.G. Blumler & D. Kavanagh, *The Third Age...*, op. cit., p. 212.

¹⁰⁶ T. Tasente, *The 4 phases of evolution...*, op. cit., p. 79; J.G. Blumler & D. Kavanagh, *The Third Age...*, op. cit., pp. 212-213.

Politicians offered people a limited number of main images, journalists formed an idea of what is considered the main events of the day (agreed standardized views), and norms of political behavior¹⁰⁷.

The third age of political communication began in the 1990s and was called the “postmodern period” and “digital era”¹⁰⁸. It saw the development of the Internet as a new communication space, direct mailing, telephone banks and various digital technologies (see also: Figure 1). Methods such as public opinion polls and focus groups have received popularity again. Television remained dominant media and became multi-channel¹⁰⁹.

Fig. 1. History of political campaigns

	Premodern Campaigns	Modern Campaigns	Professional Campaigns
Tools	Print media, rallies, meetings, foot soldiers	Broadcast television news, news advertisements, polls	Internet, direct mail
Mode/style	Labor-intensive, interpersonal, amateur	Capital-intensive, mediated, indirect	Capital-intensive, marketed, targeted, continuous
Orientation to voter	Mobilizing, voters = loyal partisans	Converting and mobilizing, voters = loyal partisans and floating	Interactive, voters = consumers
Internal power distribution	Local-centric	National-centric	Local-/national-centric, bifurcation

Source: R. Gibson & A. Römmele, *A party-centered theory of professionalized campaigning*, “The Harvard International Journal of Press / Politics” 2001, 6(4), p. 34.

One of the main characteristics of this period is diversification. Cable and satellite technologies have contributed to the growth in the number of TV channels and radio stations. New media companies continued to be created. The share of news on television increased. Communication became faster and was able to reach a much larger audience. An information space began to form new requirements for its actors. For instance, viewers have expected an

¹⁰⁷ Ibidem, p. 221.

¹⁰⁸ T. Tasente, *The 4 phases of evolution...*, op. cit., p. 79.

¹⁰⁹ D. Gërguri, *Campaigning on Facebook...*, op. cit., p. 95; R. Gibson & A. Römmele, *A party-centered theory...*, op. cit., p. 31.

immediate reaction from politicians to the events. Journalists have started to work with a huge amount of information in conditions of high competition. Furthermore, people bought more technological equipment (TVs, radios, etc.) to obtain the necessary information¹¹⁰. However, television made it possible for viewers to avoid politics. Entertainment content has become an alternative for them¹¹¹.

Personalization became another feature of the time. Television has simplified politics by focusing not on political arguments but on images of politicians. The political environment was no longer perceived through ideology and program of a candidate or party, but through specific personalities. Media has switched from an educational function to infotainment¹¹² (e.g. late night shows, debates)¹¹³. These factors led to the reluctance of people to join political parties. Voters have become less critical of politics and more pragmatic. It was much easier for political actors and media to manipulate their choice¹¹⁴.

Political campaigns ceased to be limited to the election period and were transformed into “permanent campaigns.” Patrick Caddell, a pollster who helped Jimmy Carter become president of the US, was the first to use this term in 1974. He advised Carter to follow this strategy. Sidney Blumenthal was also credited as an author of this concept. He wrote a book of the same name in 1980. Ultimately, the strategy began to spread in the political environment and was used, among others, by Bill Clinton and Barack Obama¹¹⁵.

The postmodern era led to the professionalization of political campaigns. Politicians have started hiring communication teams (e.g. advisors, experts) in order to receive more popularity. They distinguished communication as a central element, not just a complement to political decisions. The main task for implementation was complete dominance in the

¹¹⁰ J.G. Blumler & D. Kavanagh, *The Third Age...*, op. cit., p. 213.

¹¹¹ M. Gurevitch, S. Coleman & J.G. Blumler, *Political Communication —Old and New Media Relationships*, “The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science” 2009, 625(1), p. 166.

¹¹² “Television programming that presents information (as news) in a manner intended to be entertaining.” See: G.P. Matthews, *Infotainment*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/infotainment> (accessed in 22.02.2022)

¹¹³ Ibidem.

¹¹⁴ T. Tasente, *The 4 phases of evolution...*, op. cit., p. 79.

¹¹⁵ V. Vasko & D. Trilling, *A permanent campaign? Tweeting differences among members of Congress between campaign and routine periods*, “Journal of Information Technology & Politics” 2019, 16(4), p. 344; T. Tasente, *The 4 phases of evolution...*, op. cit., p. 80.

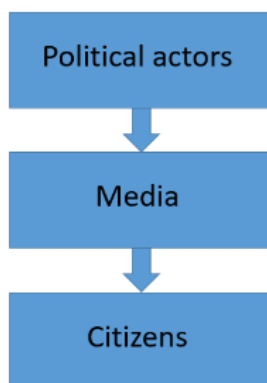
information agenda¹¹⁶. Voters were perceived as “political consumers”¹¹⁷. Moreover, political actors have created “rebuttal units” due to the excessive use of attacking messages in political campaigns. After all, these successful practices have been transferred to world politics¹¹⁸.

1.2.3 Traditional models of political communication

The process of political communication emphasizes the creation of messages by actors and their transmission through various channels. The main source determines the form and substance of the information sent. In turn, receivers decide how to interpret it. This interpretation depends on personal experience, education, influence of others, etc. and may vary from person to person¹¹⁹.

The traditional flow of messages is one-way or one-dimensional (Figure 2). It includes only one flow of communication, from a political actor to citizens, not the other way around, and usually happens through media. It is characterized by a high level of control over information. The model also falls into the category of mass communication¹²⁰.

Fig. 2. Top-down model of communication



¹¹⁶ J.G. Blumler & D. Kavanagh, *The Third Age...*, op. cit., p. 214.

¹¹⁷ C. J. Hamelink, *The Professionalization of Political Communication: Democracy at Stake?* [in:] Negrine R., et al. (Ed.), *The professionalization of political communication*, Intellect, 2007, p. 182; T. Tasente, *The 4 phases of evolution...*, op. cit., p. 80.

¹¹⁸ J.G. Blumler & D. Kavanagh, *The Third Age...*, op. cit., pp. 214-215.

¹¹⁹ L.H. Hoffman, *Participation or Communication? An Explication of Political Activity in the Internet Age*, “Journal of Information Technology & Politics” 2012, 9(3), p. 220.

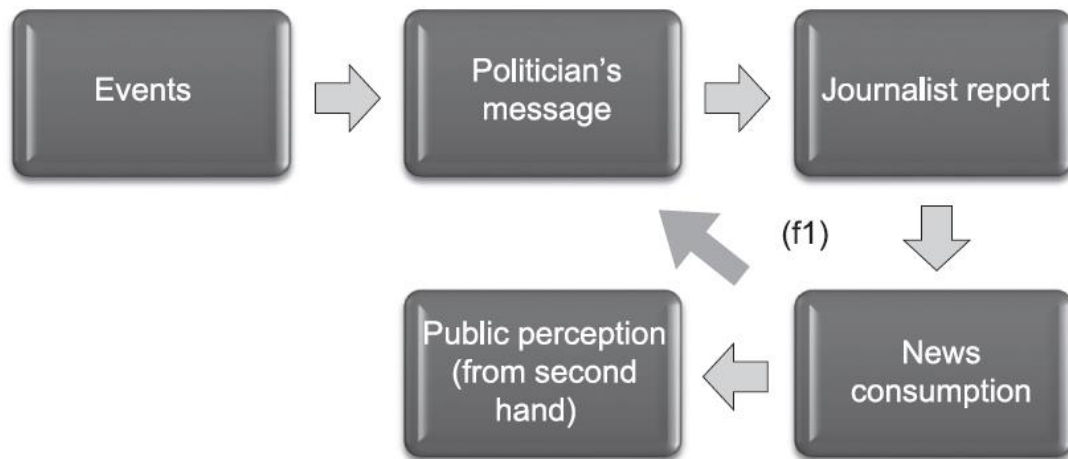
¹²⁰ Ibidem, p. 221.

Source: Own elaboration.

Volkmer describes communication and information flows through the actor-connector-interlocutor model. The first element in this chain refers to the original source of information that produces media content. The “connector” (whether it is a newspaper or an online forum) is responsible for establishing connections between media nodes. The “interlocutor” re-discusses the issue with a “wider, interdependent public.” This model involves various information suppliers and consumers¹²¹.

Figure 3 illustrates the perception of Gërguri. According to it, the event is the first stage in the traditional flow of information. Next, a political actor creates a message (second stage). Journalists process it and send to the public in the form of an article, report, etc. (third stage). This is followed by the consumption of news (forth stage). It shows the level of popularity of a political actor (f1). After all, public perception is created (fifth stage). In the age of traditional media, political messages were transmitted through newspapers, radio and television¹²².

Fig. 3. The traditional flow of information



Source: D. Gërguri, *Campaigning on Facebook...*, op. cit., p. 96.

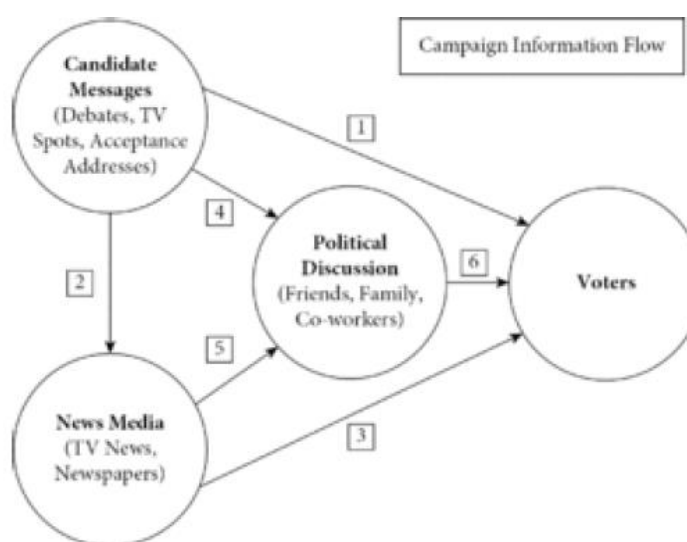
Proponents of functionalist theory believe that political messages help to distinguish a particular candidate from the opponents. Political actors inform the public about themselves,

¹²¹ G. Tianru, *Comparative political communication research in the digital epoch: A typology of national communication spaces*, “The Information Society” 2019, 36(2), p. 60.

¹²² D. Gërguri, *Campaigning on Facebook...*, op. cit., p. 96.

their policies and emphasize their advantages over others. They spread messages through the media, special interest groups, etc. Kenski and Jamieson distinguish several variants of information flow (Figure 4). The first path represents direct communication between candidates and voters (live TV debates without mediation). The second is the transmission of messages from a candidate to media. The latter show this information to voters in various forms (the third path). The forth includes messages that move from a candidate to a voter, who passes it on to another voter through discussion (the sixth way). The fifth path is also based on the discussion between voters (the sixth again). However, one of them receives information from news media¹²³.

Fig. 4. Another variant of traditional information flow



Source: W.L. Benoit, *The Functional Theory of Political Campaign Communication*, "Oxford Handbooks Online" 2014.

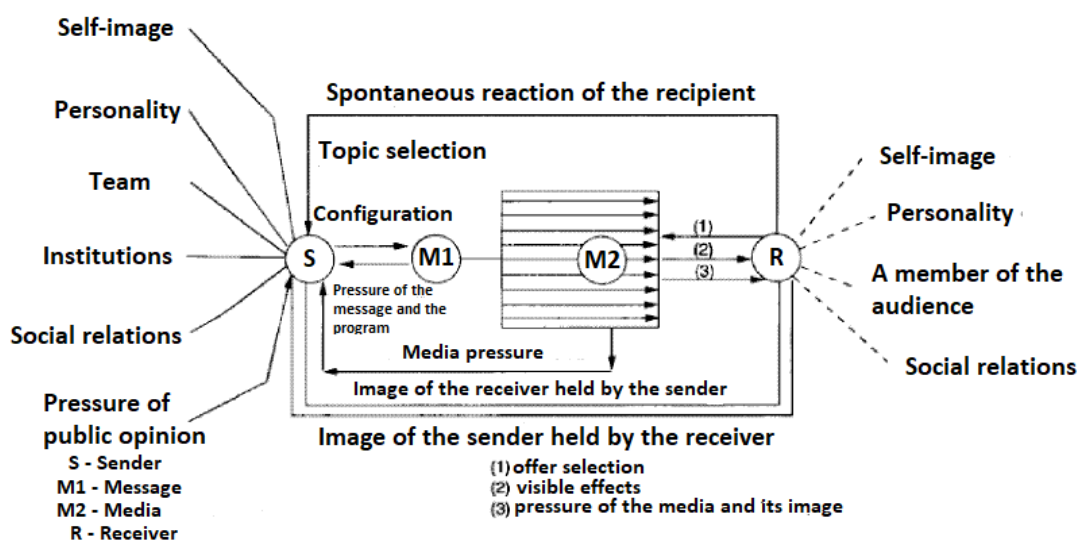
According to Rush, Maletzke's model of psychological mass communication with some modifications (Figure 5) is the most suitable for analyzing the process of political communication, especially the formation of public opinion. It takes into account psychological and social characteristics of both a sender and a receiver of a specific message, emphasizes the role of a selector and restrictions imposed by media. The model focuses on

¹²³ W.L. Benoit, *The Functional Theory...*, op. cit., pp. 196-197.

the mutual perception of participants, social and organizational conditions. The author tries to describe how images of process participants determine the feedback¹²⁴.

Political communication also incorporates informal and formal message flows. The former takes place behind closed doors (secret agreements, diplomatic negotiations, etc.). The latter is presented as news, infotainment, political comedy, daily talk and other forms of content¹²⁵.

Fig. 5. Maletzke's model of psychological mass communication in political communication



Source: D. McQuail & S. Windahl, *Communication Models for the Study of Mass Communications*, Longman, 1993; B. Dobek-Ostrowska, *Komunikowanie polityczne i publiczne*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2006.

Communication is an integral element of political activity. It gives actors the opportunities to achieve their goals. One-dimensional communication remains popular among them. It allows political actors to send necessary messages to citizens and worry less about their feedback. Nevertheless, times change along with audience requests. Modern technologies transform the structure of political communication and intensify two- and three-dimensional flows of information.

1.3 Political communication in the age of the Internet

The Internet has become one of the greatest revolutionary technologies for communication in the XX century. It took on the most recognizable form in the 1990s, when Tim Berners-

¹²⁴ B. Dobek-Ostrowska, *Komunikowanie polityczne i publiczne...*, op. cit., pp. 143-144.

¹²⁵ B. Pfetsch & F. Esser, *Comparing Political Communication...*, op. cit., p. 26.

Lee invented the World Wide Web, a means of accessing data. After that, web browsers (e.g. Mosaic, Internet Explorer), search engines (e.g. Yahoo, Google), websites, social media (e.g. Facebook, YouTube) and other important innovations have begun to be developed. According to the Digital 2023 report, about 64% (5.16 billion) of the world's population use the Internet, while the number of active social media users crossed the mark of 4.7 billion¹²⁶.

The Internet can be divided into three dimensions. The structural one refers to the accessibility of the network to people. It depends on "legal, social, economic, cultural, technical, and even Web-architectural features." The representational dimension is determined by the level of pluralism of opinions in the online space. For instance, the amount of products for and from minorities plays a significant role. One more dimension of interaction recognizes the perception of the audience not just as consumers, but people who have their opinions and can exchange them with others¹²⁷.

As mentioned earlier, researchers attribute the Internet to the third age of political communication, which has grown into the forth: new media era¹²⁸. The greater number of information channels of this period gave a chance for more accurate adaptation to certain identities, interests and conditions. Previously excluded voices have started to be heard in the media space and influence their specific audience¹²⁹. The Internet is credited with partial responsibility for the "civic reawakening of a new generation"¹³⁰. Mass communication versus computerized communication, "broadcast" or "unidirectional communication" with "delayed" feedback or its absence versus "social interaction," "multidirectional communication," and the public that determines the media agenda, old journalism versus new journalism and other competitions have become the latest topics on the agenda. The relationships between suppliers and receivers of information have been reorganized. "In most

¹²⁶ S. Kemp, *Digital 2023: Global...*, op. cit. (accessed on 11.04.2023).

¹²⁷ P. Dahlgren, *The Internet, Public Spheres, and Political Communication: Dispersion and Deliberation*, "Political Communication" 2005, 22(2), p. 149.

¹²⁸ T. Tasente, *The 4 phases of evolution...*, op. cit., pp. 79, 81.

¹²⁹ J.G. Blumler & D. Kavanagh, *The Third Age...*, op. cit., p. 221.

¹³⁰ L.H. Hoffman, *Participation or Communication...*, op. cit., p. 218.

societies, then, centripetal communication is to some extent retreating and centrifugal communication is advancing”¹³¹.

Two-dimensional, interpersonal communication or simply dialogue requires not only the flow of messages from political actors to citizens, but also vice versa. This feedback can be expressed in the form of comments on websites and on social media pages, or through flash mobs (the use of specific hashtags, mentions in order to draw attention to urgent problems). Both sides take an active part in the information exchange process. Moreover, the Internet, and in particular social media platforms, make it easier for people to communicate with each other, to organize themselves for actions, etc. They create a “network connectivity”¹³². These are the characteristics of the three-dimensional system. Both mass communication and interaction can be reflected in group communication¹³³. It is also important that a user can join the discussion with like-minded people and those who have opposing views¹³⁴. This is the standard view.

Interaction is one of the main concepts of modern political communication. It can be defined as “a measure of a media’s potential ability to let the user exert an influence on the content and/or form of the mediated communication”¹³⁵. The following types are known: mediated, quasi-mediated and face-to-face¹³⁶. Computer-mediated is the new type of interaction, meaning “human communication via computers”¹³⁷.

New media symbolize the transformation of the one-way flow of information that Borderwijk and Kaam call “transmissional interactivity” into three other forms of two-way communication. According to their matrix, “conversational interactivity” is the model where a consumer is the owner, producer and disseminator of information. A provider is the owner

¹³¹ J.G. Blumler & D. Kavanagh, *The Third Age...*, op. cit., p. 221; T. Tasente, *Transformations of the Political Communication in Social Media Era – from Mediatization to Decentralization*, “Acta Universitatis Danubius. Communicatio” 2014, Vol 8, no 1, p. 24.

¹³² D. Owen, *New Media and Political Campaigns*, “Oxford Handbooks Online” 2014, p. 829.

¹³³ P. Dahlgren, *The Internet...*, op. cit., p. 150.

¹³⁴ L.H. Hoffman, *Participation or Communication...*, op. cit., pp. 221, 229.

¹³⁵ J.F. Jensen, *Interactivity: Tracking a New Concept in Media and Communication Studies*, “Nordicom Review” 1998, 12(1), p. 201.

¹³⁶ E. Johansson, *Social media in political communication. A substitute for conventional media?* [in:] *Close and Distant: Political Executive–Media Relations in Four Countries*, Nordicom, University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg 2019, p. 153.

¹³⁷ J. Simpson, *Computer-mediated communication*, “ELT Journal” 2002, 56(4), p. 414.

and producer of the information in case of the “consultational interactivity” pattern, but the consumer remains its distributor. “Registrational interactivity” is the model where the consumer produces the message, but its processing and control remain at the disposal of the information proving center¹³⁸. Additionally, it should be noted that the one-way flow of messages continues to exist in the online space.

Johansson combines the visions of McMillan and Larsson in a model of cyber-interactivity (Figure 6). The authors project it on X (Twitter) and Facebook, where one-way communication is realized through monologue and feedback, and two-way communication – through responsive dialogue and mutual discourse. After all, broadcasting (one-way), redistributing (one-way), interacting (two-way), acknowledging (two-way rather than one-way) are categorized as forms of communication¹³⁹.

Fig. 6. Cyber-interactivity model

	Twitter	Facebook	Cyber-interactivity patterns
Broadcasting	Tweet	Post	One-way communication (monologue and feedback)
Redistributing	Retweet	Share	
Interacting	Mentions, @reply (Direct message)	Comment (Chat (in Messenger*)) Reply*	Two-way communication (responsive dialogue and mutual discourse)
Acknowledging	Favourite Like *	Like React*	Two-way communication (but neither responsive dialogue nor mutual discourse)

Source: E. Johansson, *Social media in political communication...*, op. cit., p. 153; S. McMillan, *A four-part model of cyber-interactivity: Some cyber-places are more interactive than others*, “New Media & Society” 2002, 4(2); A.O. Larsson, *Comparing to Prepare: Suggesting Ways to Study Social Media Today—and Tomorrow*, “Social Media + Society” 2015, 1(1).

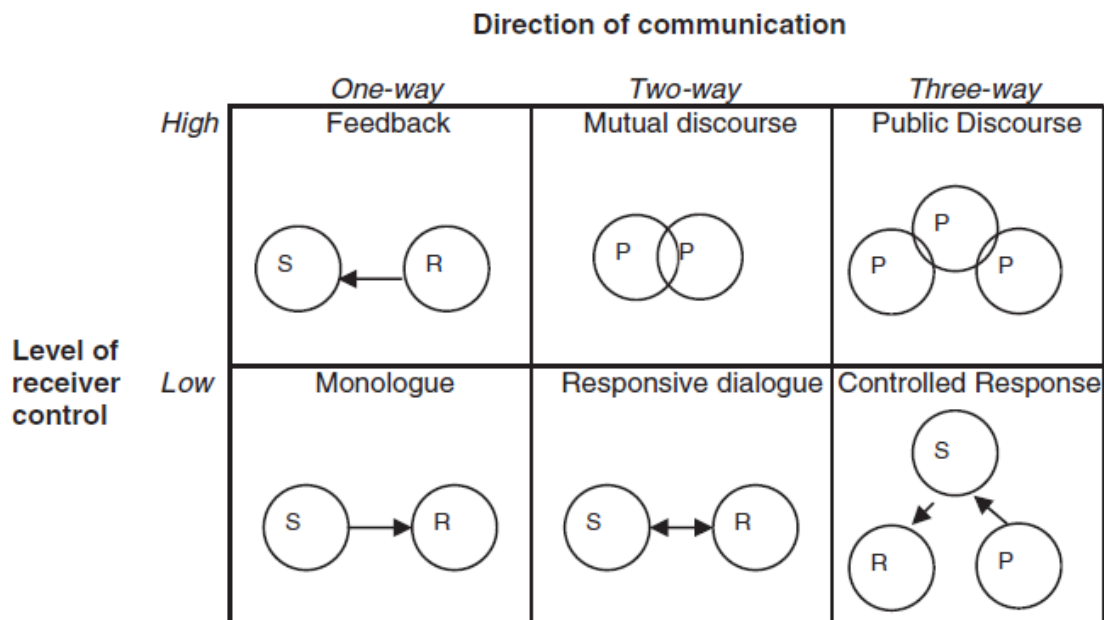
Ferber, Foltz and Pugliese expand the perception of one-, two-, and three-dimensional flows of information (Figure 7). They include high and low levels of receiver control and introduce the category of “participant.” If the low one-way communication is based on the classic monologue, then high allows limited participation of the receiver. It does not guarantee that the sender will respond to this feedback. In turn, responsive dialogue (e.g. e-commerce sites)

¹³⁸ J.F. Jensen, *Interactivity...*, op. cit., pp. 186-187.

¹³⁹ E. Johansson, *Social media...*, op. cit., p. 153.

is unbalanced because the sender has main control over the two-way communication, while mutual discourse (e.g. chat room) provides both participants with the greater level of control. In case of the low three-way communication, users are able to receive information (receivers) or participate in the discussion (participants). The website administration (sender) fully moderates it. In contrast, users gain more control in the high three-way communication, transforming moderators into equal participants in the process. They can only remove comments that violate website rules¹⁴⁰.

Fig. 7. One-, two- and three-dimensional communication (updated view)



Note: S = sender, R = receiver, P = participant (sender/receiver roles are interchangeable).

Source: P. Ferber, F. Foltz & R. Pugliese, *Cyberdemocracy and Online Politics: A New Model of Interactivity*, “Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society” 2007, 27(5), p. 393.

Political actors began to participate in the “multidimensional impression management”¹⁴¹. One of the goals is to maintain effective control over all communication channels in the age of the Internet. It is no longer enough to organize a meeting with the electorate or speak on television. They should back up their statements with appropriate posts, tweets, finalize them with photos on Instagram, and follow the feedback. Specially hired individuals and teams help politicians skillfully perform all these tasks. Communication experts attempt to create

¹⁴⁰ P. Ferber, F. Foltz & R. Pugliese, *Cyberdemocracy...*, op. cit., pp. 393-394.

¹⁴¹ J.G. Blumler, *The fourth age of political communication*, “Politiques de communication” 2016, 1(6), p. 27.

more holistic image of political figures in both media and social networks. Moreover, they explore every new opportunity for communication brought by two-dimensional, and three-dimensional flows (online propaganda, “try to make the most of new citizen capacities,” etc.). Hence, professionalization of political communication continues to develop¹⁴².

Despite these modifications and removal of barriers, some political actors continue to use one-way communication. They attempt to re-establish traditional hierarchies, preexisting power relations in the online space, use the only information function, and show little interest in full interaction, participation elements and personalized communication. Among the possible reasons are limited amount of money, lack of time, and relative ease of creating messages for the mass communication process. Jackson and Lilleker define these actions as the use of “Web 1.5” technology¹⁴³.

Considering the examples, the first will be one-way communication with voters via email. It allows political actors to send a large number of messages to a mass audience at a low cost. The whole process is relatively simple. Emails can be delivered in the form of a newsletter, a call for action (e.g. election mobilization) or fundraising information. This way of communication cannot be compared to direct mailing due to the existence of spam filters and the ability to delete a message without even reading it¹⁴⁴. Users can have many email addresses, which makes it difficult to distinguish the main one.

The second example is websites that have absorbed elements of one- and two-way flows of information. Politicians who are “incumbents” use their official pages for information purposes, repeating the functions of email. They also try to promote their strengths and achievements. In turn, “challengers” tend to make more use of Web 2.0 features. They start blogging, provide an opportunity to comment their posts and leave links to their social media pages. These are more interactive forms of communication¹⁴⁵. However, even social networks can be used for one-way messaging if political actors decide not to engage in

¹⁴² P.J. Maarek, *Politics 2.0...*, op. cit., p. 14; E. Johansson, *Social media...*, op. cit., pp. 150-151; R. Sánchez Medero, *Democratization in Political Communication*, “Political Studies Review” 2020, 19(4), p. 612.

¹⁴³ D. Gërguri, *Campaigning on Facebook...*, op. cit., pp. 96, 99; R. Sánchez Medero, *Democratization in Political...*, op. cit., p. 613; B. Pfetsch, B. & F. Esser, *Political communication in comparative perspective...*, op. cit., pp. 94-95; L.H. Hoffman, *Participation or Communication...*, op. cit., p. 229.

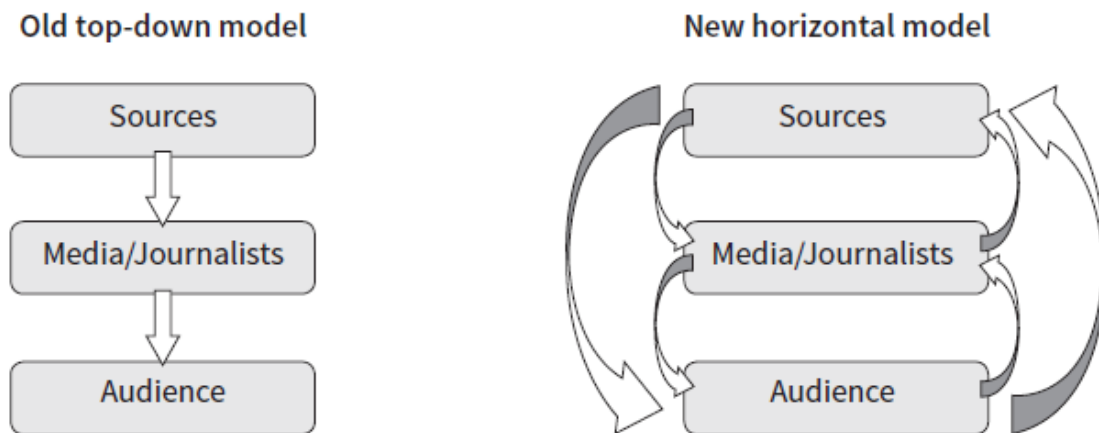
¹⁴⁴ L.L. Frankel & D.S. Hillygus, *Niche Communication in Political Campaigns*, “Oxford Handbooks Online” 2014, pp. 183-184.

¹⁴⁵ Ibidem, pp. 185-186.

conversation with other users. Each team searches for the most effective methods to win the election and people's hearts.

New media has brought another transformation: from a vertical to a horizontal model of communication, or, in other words, from indirect to direct communication (Figure 8). According to Castells, the horizontal model can be called “mass self-communication.” It is self-directed, self-selected and self-generated¹⁴⁶. This model reduces the influence of media workers on the process, but does not exclude them completely. Both politicians and citizens benefit from this change because they retain the originality of their messages.

Fig. 8. Transformation of the political communication process, version 1



Source: E. Johansson, *Social media in political communication...*, op. cit., p. 150.

The former are able to implement the principle of narrowcasting. It allows them to communicate directly with key groups and segments of their electorate. The target audience can be reached via emails, social media, newsletters at work, at home and in any other place¹⁴⁷. Modern technologies such as smartphones, tablets, smart watches, etc. contribute to this mission. The list continues to expand.

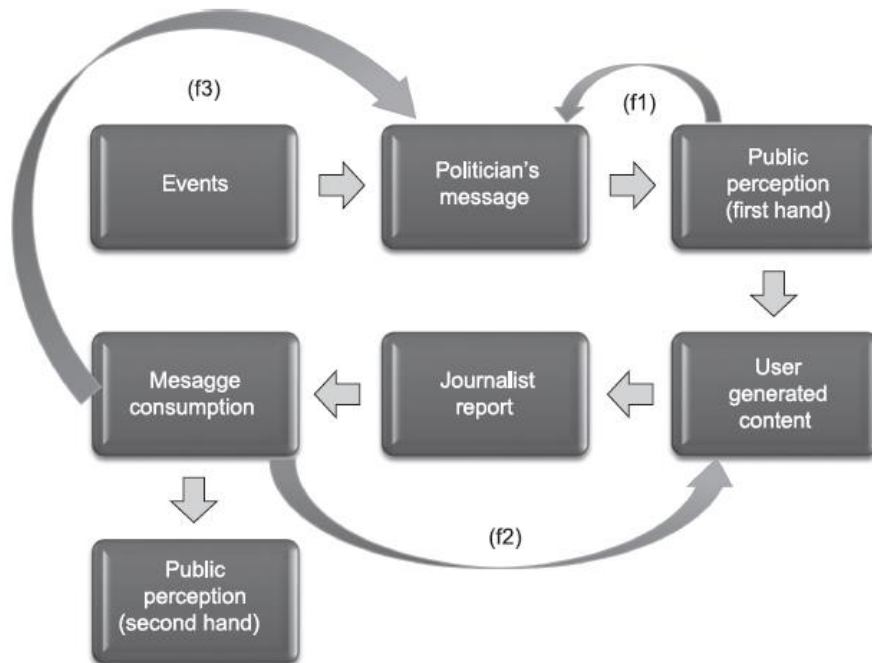
Political actors on social media have their primarily and secondary audiences. The first is direct friends/subscribers/followers who monitor their messages and conversations. The second group of users receives information from their own friends, who re-broadcast it from

¹⁴⁶ E. Johansson, *Social media...*, op. cit., p. 153.

¹⁴⁷ T. Tasente, *The 4 phases of evolution...*, op. cit., p. 80.

original sources, in other words – indirectly. Although some are not interested in politics, they may be exposed to unintended exposure. Politicians lose control over the second flow of messages as they move further along the Internet. Other users have the ability to edit the original information. Their personal networks can significantly improve and expand the information reach of candidates¹⁴⁸.

Fig. 9. Transformation of the political communication process, version 2



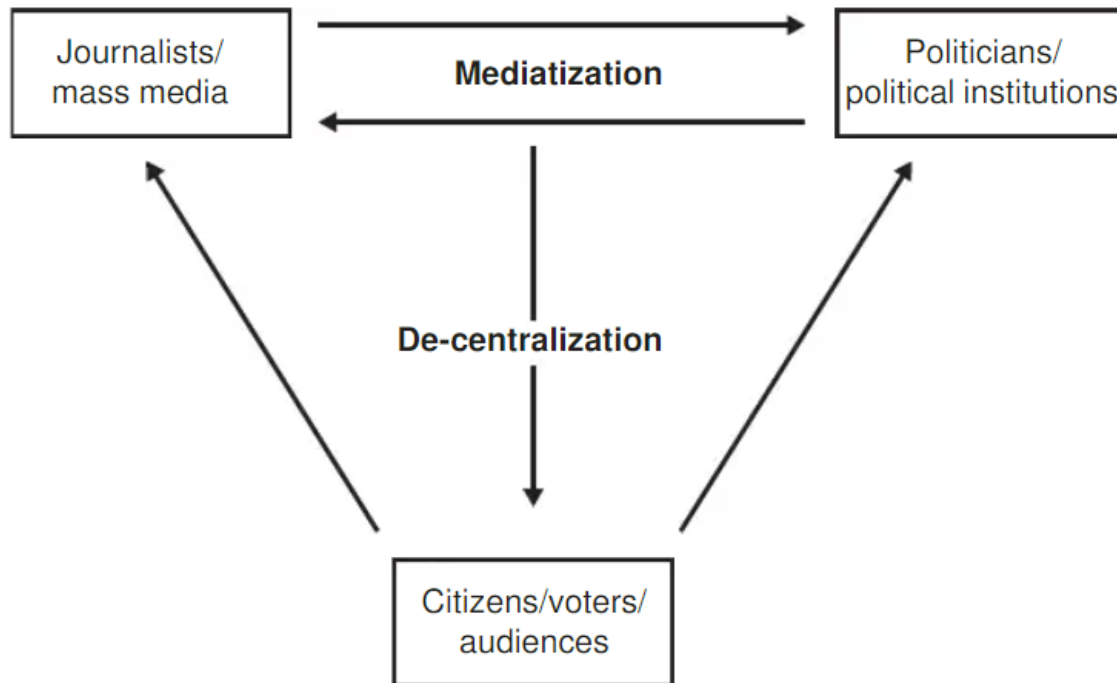
Source: D. Gërguri, *Campaigning on Facebook...*, op. cit., p. 97.

Gërguri drew the scheme that only confirms the above views. Figure 9 shows that political messages can be received by the public in two ways: with or without the participation of journalists. The latter process is more dynamic. The author mentions that social media platforms reflect the interests of political actors, while traditional media aims to protect the public ones. There are three types of feedback that citizens generate on social media: 1) based on information from pages of politicians or political parties (f1), 2) based on information

¹⁴⁸ C. Vaccari & A. Valeriani, *Follow the leader! Direct and indirect flows of political communication during the 2013 Italian general election campaign*, "New Media & Society" 2013, 17(7), pp. 1026, 1028-1029; M. Gurevitch, S. Coleman & J.G. Blumler, *Political Communication — Old and New...*, op. cit., p. 172.

consumed and transmitted by other users (f2), 3) based on information traditionally reported by journalists (f3)¹⁴⁹.

Fig. 10. Transformation of the political communication process, version 3



Source: K. Brants & K. Voltmer, *Political Communication in Postmodern Democracy*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

Brants and Voltmer depict changes in the process of political communication in a slightly different way (Figure 10). They present two standard dimensions: the horizontal, where political messages flow from politicians to mass media (so-called “elite”) and vice versa; and the vertical, where this information reaches citizens. However, the Internet break this structure though decentralization. It gives people space to express and share their views and opinions with other users (many-to-many communication), creates bottom-up structure (citizens are the main participant, primary role in communication). The horizontal dimension threatens to disappear completely along with traditional journalism. Opinion leaders, alternative media sources replace them and begin to guide the public¹⁵⁰.

¹⁴⁹ D. Gërguri, *Campaigning on Facebook...*, op. cit., pp. 97-98.

¹⁵⁰ K. Brants & K. Voltmer, *Political Communication...*, op. cit., pp. 4, 8-11; T. Tasente, *Transformations of the Political...*, op. cit., pp. 20-24.

“Prosumers” or “new intermediaries” are other names for such type of users, as they not only consume information but process and produce it too. Bloggers and influencers have mastered the modern technologies faster than others, which allows them to have a significant impact on the online space, especially suppliers and products. The new nature of their relationships with political actors and/or citizens are more dynamic. They can use one-, two-, or three-dimensional communication. This decision depends on the request of each user. Although people trust them, prosumers do not perform a representative function. They also cannot be compared to media representatives, as they are often politically biased¹⁵¹. It is important to note that even some journalists try to retrain for this role in order to be intermediaries again¹⁵².

Political actors started to use local opinion leaders in their election campaigns to reach a larger audience. A centralized model of political communication (one messages for everyone) changed to a network model. The main message is still created at the candidate’s headquarters, but then passed on to opinion leaders. The latter know better the personal beliefs and needs of their followers. Therefore, they “personalize” the information so that it is convincing to the local audience¹⁵³. It can be perceived as a return to some of the key features of interpersonal and group communications that prevailed during the “golden age of parties” or “the classic era of political communication”¹⁵⁴.

Celebrities can be taken as another example of opinion leaders. Vaccari and Valeriani refer to the term “bridging elites” proposed by Freelon and Karpf in order to describe them. Actors, singers and others use online tools to express support for a particular candidate or share socially significant information. Together with politicians, they can follow each other on social media platforms to increase mutual popularity. Celebrities try to turn their apolitical fans into politically interested voters. Moreover, people can blindly trust the choice of stars because of their authority¹⁵⁵.

¹⁵¹ R. Sánchez Medero, *Democratization in Political...*, op. cit., pp. 615-617.

¹⁵² See also: T. Kononiuk, *Dziennikarze na cyfrowych sterydach*, „Media-Biznes-Kultura. Dziennikarstwo i komunikacja społeczna” 2023, (15), pp. 151-164.

¹⁵³ T. Tasente, *The 4 phases of evolution...*, op. cit., p. 79.

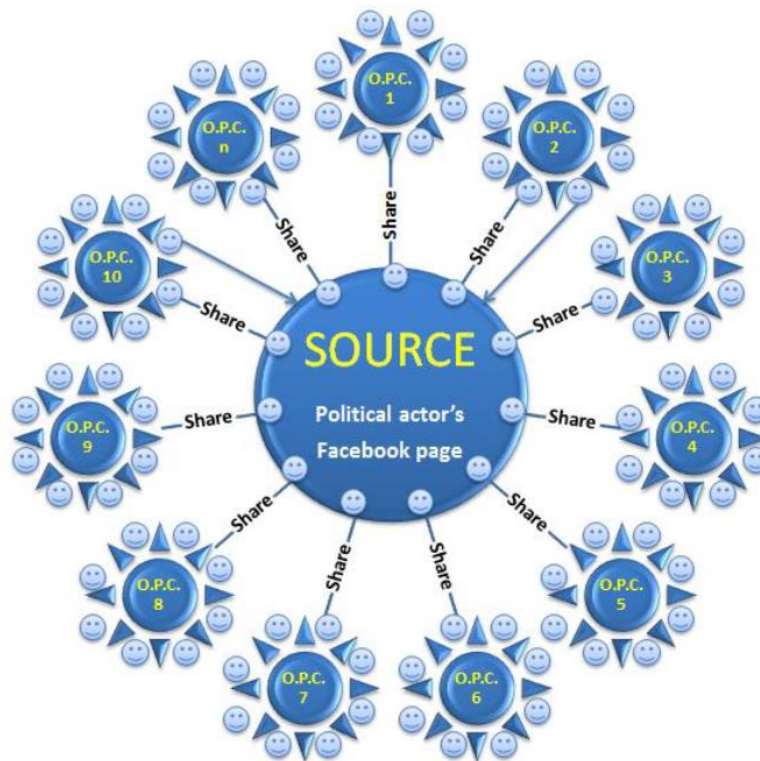
¹⁵⁴ P. Norris, *Political communication*, [in:] D. Caramani (Ed.), *Comparative politics. 3rd edition...*, op. cit., p. 319.

¹⁵⁵ C. Vaccari & A. Valeriani, *Follow the leader...*, op. cit., pp. 1036-1037.

The situation when some people have the opportunity to master the modern technologies better than others do highlights the problem of digital inequality. Rogers identifies five categories of innovation adopters: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, laggards¹⁵⁶. This imbalance is created, among other things, by their level of knowledge and financial situation. Not everyone has time to get acquainted with changes and dangers that the Internet has brought to communication. This creates some options for potential manipulations. Furthermore, appropriate technical skills are required¹⁵⁷.

In contrast to the model of Brants and Voltmer and the term “decentralization,” Blumler proposed his own vision of the ecology of political communication. The author divided it into two levels: the first is institutionalized for shorthand purposes, the second – grassroots, which includes two productive forms of political communication (old and new)¹⁵⁸.

Fig. 11. Transformation of the political communication process, version 4



Note: O.P.C. = Online Political Citizens

¹⁵⁶ D. Gërguri, *Campaigning on Facebook...*, op. cit., p. 96.

¹⁵⁷ L.H. Hoffman, *Participation or Communication...*, op. cit., pp. 219, 230.

¹⁵⁸ J.G. Blumler, *The fourth age...*, op. cit., p. 27.

Source: T. Tasente, *Transformations of the Political...*, op. cit., p. 25.

There is another version of decentralized communication (Figure 11). According to it, there are groups of “online political citizens” (opinion leaders or “public-receptors”), which can include any member of society. Their participants take part in the discussion of a political message. After that, some users decide to become fans of the original source of this message. Hence, the number of people who create groups of “online political citizens” and share political messages of a particular candidate to an out-of-reach audience will rise¹⁵⁹.

Decentralization is linked to the concept of democratization of the media environment. According to the well-known quote of US President Abraham Lincoln, “Democracy is ‘government of, by and for the people.’” In order for citizens to enjoy all benefits of this political system, they must be well informed. Tools and platforms for exercising the right to freedom of expression are another important requirement. Traditional media to some extent helps to satisfy both of them.

The Internet has taken the implementation of these demands to a new level. It has become a transparent environment where a user can find all the necessary information on a topic that interests him or her. The domination of several media organizations has been replaced by various online sources¹⁶⁰. Sometimes, users may consume news without even realizing it. Additionally, digital architecture creates new ways to conduct discussions and debates. They are based on the concepts of “deliberation, authenticity..., inclusiveness, civility”¹⁶¹. People get the opportunity to learn about other thoughts, interests and values. Participation is guaranteed for everyone.

Researchers of political communication in Germany have even developed its new form “Lazy Modernist”¹⁶². It is related to online participation – “an information-rich activity that utilizes new media technology and is intended to affect, either directly or indirectly, policy-makers, candidates, or public officials”¹⁶³. The main features are: young age, strong postmodernist orientations, low levels of traditional offline actions, such as participation in elections,

¹⁵⁹ T. Tasente, *Transformations of the Political...*, op. cit., pp. 24-26.

¹⁶⁰ M. Emmer, J. Wolling & G. Vowe, *Changing political communication...*, op. cit., p. 234.

¹⁶¹ J.G. Blumler, *The fourth age...*, op. cit., p. 29.

¹⁶² J. Wolling & M. Emmer, *Individual political communication...*, op. cit., p. 460.

¹⁶³ L.H. Hoffman, *Participation or Communication...*, op. cit., p. 220.

manifestations, etc., but high rates of modern online activities, such as commenting, searching for information, signing petitions¹⁶⁴.

Hoffman also prepared a classification of communication and participation in the online space. Instant messaging, writing posts, discussing politics with others, sharing photos, videos and other graphic elements related to political campaigns, watching them, forwarding someone's political comments to others, subscribing to political news, receiving political newsletters, monitoring electoral preferences of your friends, revealing your political preferences, checking information related to voting procedure, visiting a local or state websites are attributed to communication practices. In turn, participation activities include friending of a political candidate, joining political groups, signing petitions and raising money for the candidate¹⁶⁵.

People fulfil their civic responsibilities and enjoy "direct representation." They control the actions of the government, make their development proposals, and provide the necessary feedback to officials. The government initiates discussions with citizens on policy issues, plans, exchanges views on ways to solve problems, etc. All these actions on the Internet are aimed at improving the representative democracy and political representation. Three conditions should be met for their successful implementation: 1) continuity of communication; 2) two-dimensional communication; 3) government officials should act responsibly, justify their actions to society¹⁶⁶.

The path of political communication to democratization and empowerment of citizens can be divided into three periods: 1) preparatory stage (disintermediation of communication); 2) decision stage or actual democratization (use of unconventional media channels by citizens, new patterns of behavior); 3) consolidation stage (the result in the form of a new frame of reference). This is the transformation from a restricted environment to a more liberalized one. Nevertheless, this cannot be applied to all citizens due to the digital divide. Not everyone has

¹⁶⁴ J. Wolling & M. Emmer, *Individual political communication...*, op. cit., p. 460.

¹⁶⁵ L.H. Hoffman, *Participation or Communication...*, op. cit., pp. 223-224.

¹⁶⁶ J. Stromer-Galley, *Political Discussion and Deliberation Online*, "Oxford Handbooks Online" 2014, p. 838; M. Karlsson & J. Åström, *Social media and political communication*, "Journal of Language and Politics" 2017, 17(2), p. 308; S. Coleman, *New mediation and direct representation: reconceptualizing representation in the digital age*, "New Media & Society" 2005, 7(2), p. 196.

computers, access to the Internet and, hence, the benefits of democratization¹⁶⁷. To paraphrase the classics: modern political communication has become communication of the people, by the people, for the people, who are Internet users.

On the one hand, e-democracy facilitates the participation of activists in large digital networks, improves knowledge about politics, motivates people to be involved in it, and ensures greater transparency of state processes. On the other hand, it makes people frustrated when the authorities are reluctant to communicate online. Furthermore, e-governments try to maintain control over the debate, save the top-down hierarchy and monitor their citizens¹⁶⁸.

There is a problem of “bifurcated efficacy.” People can experience the usefulness of their actions on the Internet in different ways. For instance, users can be involved in clicktivism (perception that liking, retweeting, signing online petitions, etc. affect changes). They raise money for specific purposes or organize others for manifestations through online communication. Nonetheless, they may feel politically ineffective when they do not have resources for changes (e.g. necessary contacts with government officials or those who needs help). Their ideas and discourses cannot be implemented, remain at the same stage and do not bring any visible results to the public¹⁶⁹.

Although the Internet contributes to the public sphere through heterogeneity and proliferation of information sources, its development involves fragmentation¹⁷⁰. It happens due to the association of users in “advocacy groups” or “cyber-ghettos” based on common interests or positions¹⁷¹. Social networks encourage fragmentation by forming so-called filter bubbles. Algorithms show people messages based on their previous likes and search queries. They exclude other information and, obviously, other points of view.

¹⁶⁷ R. Sánchez Medero, *Democratization in Political...*, op. cit., pp. 611, 615.

¹⁶⁸ P. Dahlgren, *The Internet...*, op. cit., pp. 154, 156; M. Gurevitch, S. Coleman & J.G. Blumler, *Political Communication — Old and New...*, op. cit., p. 174; J. Stromer-Galley, *Political Discussion...*, op. cit., p. 839; A. Pap, M. Ham & K. Bilandzic, *Does social media usage influence youth's interest in politics?* “International Journal of Multidisciplinarity in Business and Science” 2018, Vol. 4 (5), pp. 84-85; J. Wolling & M. Emmer, *Individual political communication...*, op. cit., p. 465.

¹⁶⁹ J.G. Blumler, *The fourth age...*, op. cit., p. 29.

¹⁷⁰ P. Norris, *Political communication*, [in:] D. Caramani (Ed.), *Comparative politics. 3rd edition...*, op. cit., p. 319.

¹⁷¹ P. Dahlgren, *The Internet...*, op. cit., p. 152.

It is especially evident in the era of “post-truth politics” when people are willing to agree only with arguments based on their pre-existing views, but not with facts¹⁷². Therefore, candidates focus on narratives close to the beliefs of their voters, but not on the benefits of their political programs. Appeals to emotions, personal values are mixed with misinformation necessary to discredit opponents. It becomes difficult to distinguish truth from error. Political teams can quickly make and distribute fakes via social media. The role of journalists as gatekeepers of social trust is undermined by freedom of communication in the online space¹⁷³. Furthermore, modern technologies such as artificial intelligence allow you to change the voice and face of a specific person, making it easier to create false information.

The biggest disadvantages of these tendencies are the polarization of society and the narrowing of users’ political horizons. A large number of news sources benefit only those who are more interested in politics. Their views can be transformed into more extreme ones. Other people remain at the same level or worse because selection of content allows them to avoid politics. The gap between the two groups becomes wider. It can lead to the propaganda of intolerance and hatred towards the other side. Additionally, it is harder to reach any compromise¹⁷⁴.

The Internet seems to be a less regulated space than television. The new cyber-geography is no longer associated with a specific nation-state¹⁷⁵. It is overloaded with information and no longer has authoritative sources. Any of them can be compromised, which reduces users’ trust. Furthermore, television operates on the basis of compliance with information standards¹⁷⁶. There are not many supervisory bodies in the online space, but the situation gradually changes.

¹⁷² J. Rose, *Brexit, Trump, and Post-Truth Politics*, “Public Integrity” 2017, 19(6), pp. 556-557.

¹⁷³ O. Hoffjann, *The Politician as a Player: Political Strategic Communication as a Play*, “Journal of Communication Inquiry” 2020, 45(3), pp. 268-270; S. Jędrzejewski, *Zdehumanizowany gatekeeping i przyszłość mediów i dziennikarstwa*, „Roczniki Kulturoznawcze” 2024, 15(2), pp. 63-85.

¹⁷⁴ P. Dahlgren, *The Internet...*, op. cit., p. 152; J. Stromer-Galley, *Political Discussion...*, op. cit., p. 839; C. Vaccari & A. Valeriani, *Follow the leader...*, op. cit., p. 1028; W.L. Bennett & S. Iyengar, *A New Era...*, op. cit., p. 724.

¹⁷⁵ B. Pfetsch & F. Esser, *Comparing Political Communication...*, op. cit., p. 26.

¹⁷⁶ M. Gurevitch, S. Coleman & J.G. Blumler, *Political Communication — Old and New...*, op. cit., pp. 174, 176.

In addition, there are opinions that when people go online, they become “identity-free; one’s body identity could be left behind and a new one constructed”¹⁷⁷. This is partially true because people are in control of their profiles on the Internet. They can provide real information or change it according to their preferences (e.g. name, age, gender). It is becoming quite common to publish other people’s photos as your own. You can also hide behind a fictitious nickname when commenting. All these contribute to the growth of hate speech and offline violence. However, it is relatively easy to verify someone’s identity by personal IP address¹⁷⁸. Authorities, especially in authoritarian countries, implement surveillance technologies or control ISPs. Journalists and Internet activists can also act as watchdogs. They investigate violations of institutional and human rights online, so find their own ways to identify specific users¹⁷⁹.

Communication via the Internet can occur in two ways: synchronously and asynchronously. The former allows you to stay in touch with other interlocutors in real time. For example, you can send a message to a friend in another part of the city, country, etc. and receive an immediate answer. You can also arrange a video conference with other colleagues. In contrast, asynchronous communication gives you an opportunity to respond whenever you decide. It can be in an hour, in a week, in a month (in other words, your own time). The sender has time to plan the message in detail¹⁸⁰. Both ways solve the problem of time efficacy.

Among other things, scientists emphasize speed, ease of use and versatility of digital tools. The first characteristic is based on the fact that any text or graphic data can be uploaded to the World Wide Web from one part of the world and immediately downloaded by users in another part. Search engines facilitate the process. Moreover, there are no geographical borders. Dispersed users around the world have the possibility to communicate freely. The second feature means that even people with cheap smartphones has access to the Internet. There is no need for special equipment. Modern communication technologies are inexpensive and require minimal effort. The third characteristic is versatility. Digital media cover most

¹⁷⁷ J. Stromer-Galley, *Political Discussion...*, op. cit., p. 841.

¹⁷⁸ “Internet Protocol Address: a number that is given to each computer when it is connected to the internet” (Cambridge Dictionary, *IP address*).

¹⁷⁹ J.G. Blumler, *The fourth age...*, op. cit., p. 25.

¹⁸⁰ L.H. Hoffman, *Participation or Communication...*, op. cit., pp. 221-222.

forms of previous means of communication. Users can watch videos on YouTube, live broadcasts on Periscope, observe photos on personal blogs and texts on Facebook and X/Twitter pages¹⁸¹. Some social networks can even combine, if not all, then most of these elements. Another name for this phenomenon is “hybrid digital media”¹⁸².

Social media can bring popularity to any little-known actor of political communication. This tool is comparable to the bow that helped Robin Hood rob the rich and give money to the poor. For instance, social media platforms give a chance to candidates who do not have significant financial resources to campaign against traditional elites. The result can be seen in the number of new supporters or volunteers who help political teams. Another example is dissatisfied citizens who challenge mainstream news media by creating alternative news media. They perceive themselves as a “corrective of ‘traditional’, ‘legacy’ or ‘mainstream’ news media in a given sociocultural and historical context...”¹⁸³. Their authors can deviate from informational standards. One way is to use evaluative judgments in news materials. Moreover, even individual users can reach a certain audience of subscribers. It allows them to earn money using content monetization.

Communication via social media has a “risky nature.” It is not monolithic, as in case of emails. Political figures always need to update information in their profiles, write in the feed, post video stories and go live, connect with their friends, colleagues and supporters, create and join groups, etc. This is a transparent space. An erroneously sent message will be distributed on the Internet in a few minutes. It can seriously damage the election campaign and reduce their chances of winning¹⁸⁴. Politicians must use this tool responsibly.

Social media introduce new entertaining forms of creating and remixing information. Political actors can suggest an idea for a trend or provoke it with some actions (e.g. popular or funny statement). Their audience, especially the younger ones, becomes its mediator. For example, teenagers record creative videos combining them with photos and music, and wait for likes. The result is of interest to their friends, who continue to produce content and spread

¹⁸¹ P.J. Maarek, *Politics 2.0...*, op. cit., pp. 15-16; S. Iyengar, *A Typology...*, op. cit., p. 65.

¹⁸² D. Owen, *New Media...*, op. cit., pp. 829-830.

¹⁸³ K. Holt, T. Ustad Figenschou, & L. Frischlich, *Key Dimensions of Alternative News Media*, “Digital Journalism” 2019, 7(7), p. 862.

¹⁸⁴ L.L. Frankel & D.S. Hillygus, *Niche Communication...*, op. cit., p. 187.

a certain political idea. However, they can be easily manipulated due to lack of knowledge and experience. Therefore, more and more countries recognize the need for media literacy courses in schools.

New media are perceived as “flexible and adaptable.” The face-to-face conversation model, the fundraising process and many other practices have been transferred from offline to online space with some modifications¹⁸⁵. In addition, traditional and social media platforms exchange information with each other. For instance, posts of a political actor or any other person on Facebook can be used by journalists in TV, radio news, or even magazines. Politicians can follow and engage in public discussions with their colleagues on social media platforms. It is called “inter-elite conversation,” can happen between domestic and international actors (“transnationalization of online political communication”), and get media attention too. In turn, political figures often talk about latest news materials with their audience online. In all these cases, they set the agenda¹⁸⁶.

It is important to note that the elite-mass relations are characterized by “stronger cross-currents than previously experienced.” The dominant influence of elites on communication space has diminished. One of the reasons is that political groups have begun to resemble each other. Among others are the creation of populist movements that criticize traditional politicians and the development of independent journalism¹⁸⁷.

Traditional consumption of information (watching TV shows, listening to the radio programs, reading newspapers) can inspire the audience to be active on social media platforms. Those interested want to deepen their knowledge on a new topic, share their thoughts, influence others and get involved in politics. All these apply to the concept of “dual-screening,” which means “the bundle of practices that involve integrating, and switching across and between, live broadcast media and social media”¹⁸⁸. For instance, it has become

¹⁸⁵ D. Owen, *New Media...*, op. cit., p. 829.

¹⁸⁶ D. Gërguri, *Campaigning on Facebook...*, op. cit., p. 98; C. Vaccari & A. Valeriani, *Follow the leader...*, op. cit., p. 1037.

¹⁸⁷ J.G. Blumler, *The fourth age...*, op. cit., p. 29.

¹⁸⁸ A. Pap, M. Ham & K. Bilandzic, *Does social media...*, op. cit., pp. 85-86; A. Chadwick, B. O’Loughlin & C. Vaccari, *Why People Dual Screen Political Debates and Why It Matters for Democratic Engagement*, “Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media” 2017, 61(2), pp. 221-224; C. Vaccari, A. Chadwick & B. O’Loughlin, *Dual Screening the Political: Media Events, Social Media, and Citizen Engagement*, “Journal of Communication” 2015, 65(6), p. 1041.

popular to give feedback to a live radio program using a certain hashtag. It is often voiced and monitored by hosts. Thus, listeners transform into users in order to discuss specific issues, ask questions or simply send greetings.

Political actors try to adapt their communication patterns in line with new trends. They can create any necessary image online due to the lack of interference from traditional media, freely attack their opponents because of the relatively low level of censorship or even its absence, promise anything and avoid responsibility for their words. All these actions relate to the concept of “popularization” of political communication. According to it, politicians use communication strategically in order to strengthened ties with their supporters and establish new relationships with people who have not followed, supported, knew them before. One of the emphasis is on emotional connection. The most important is to receive the necessary attention from traditional and social media platforms. Popularization is the umbrella term for definitions such as “personalization of politics,” “intimate politics,” “lifestyle politics” and “populism”¹⁸⁹.

“Personalization” or “depoliticization” is one of the strategies boosted by social media even more than by television. The individual politician is currently the most popular brand among voters. He or she is encouraged to focus on personal values rather than political beliefs and views in order to look closer to ordinary people. “Just like you” appearance or “lifestyle politics” increases trust and arouses sympathy for them¹⁹⁰.

Other names for this concept are “individualization” or “privatization,” as the political actor becomes equal in opportunities with the political party. One of the reasons is the ability to communicate directly on the Internet. For example, the politician can create his/her own blog in order to share personal thoughts and experiences. This individualistic tool helps to bypass party censorship and shifts attention to the author¹⁹¹.

¹⁸⁹ D. Ceccobelli, *The Popularization of Political Communication*, “International Journal of E-Politics” 2019, 10(1), pp. 12-14; D. Piontek, *Personalizacja jako efekt mediatyzacji i polityki*, „Środkowoeuropejskie Studia Polityczne” 2015, (3), s. 91-103.

¹⁹⁰ D. Gërguri, *Campaigning on Facebook...*, op. cit., p. 98; M. Gurevitch, S. Coleman & J.G. Blumler, *Political Communication — Old and New...*, op. cit., pp. 173-174; P.J. Maarek, *Politics 2.0...*, op. cit., pp. 17-18; D. Ceccobelli, *The Popularization...*, op. cit., p. 13.

¹⁹¹ S. Kruikemeier, G. van Noort, R. Vliegthart & C.H. de Vreese, *Getting closer: The effects of personalized and interactive online political communication*, “European Journal of Communication” 2013, 28(1), pp. 54-55; M. Karlsson & J. Åström, *Social media...*, op. cit., p. 309.

It has become much easier to persuade voters who have little knowledge of politics. Hence, political actors post family photos on Instagram or use vernacular language on X (Twitter), which are the signs of “intimate politics.” The particular style distinguishes them from other competitors. People perceive them as extraordinary individuals who deserve to be elected to a certain position. It is called “celebrity politics”¹⁹².

All these tendencies can lead to a situation where politicians, especially new ones, begin to address voters in a populist manner. It includes advocating of simple solutions to complex problems, playing on emotions, ambiguity of positions, manipulations of facts, etc.¹⁹³ Communication teams need to think more about the attractiveness of the message, the entertainment character, rather than the essence of the information¹⁹⁴. Therefore, researchers acknowledge a deterioration in the quality of speech¹⁹⁵.

Simplification of information is another problem brought by social media. People prefer to read short tweets rather than long analytical texts (so-called “longreads”), or do not finish them. They do not want to waste time and try to capture as many messages as possible in an environment with a wide range of sources. As a result, it creates a number of problems. First, short messages can only cover one side of the story. Second, they worsen critical thinking. Third, the situation can lead to the spread of fake news. It was proven by the experiment of the Ukrainian satirical online show “Toronto Television.” The authors made a post in which they repeatedly asked to finish reading it. The detailed story was about a game that makes children run away from home. Although the authors concluded at the end that the information was fake, the post was distributed 17 thousand times¹⁹⁶.

Online space is characterized by its fluidity. Every minute users join and leave social media groups, register on websites and delete from them. These actions do not require much effort. As a result, it is difficult to count the number of actual supporters of a specific political actor¹⁹⁷. Bots (artificial subscribers) complicate the situation even more. Different politicians

¹⁹² D. Ceccobelli, *The Popularization...*, op. cit., p. 13.

¹⁹³ V. Zinichenko, *(Volodymyr) Trump or Donald (Zelenskyy)...*, op. cit., p. 16.

¹⁹⁴ J.G. Blumler, *The fourth age...*, op. cit., p. 24; O. Hoffjann, *The Politician...*, op. cit., p. 268.

¹⁹⁵ T. Tasente, *The 4 phases of evolution...*, op. cit., p. 81.

¹⁹⁶ NV, *Post pro smertel'nu hru Chornyy kin' poshyryly 17 tysyach raziv. Vona vyyavylasya eksperimentom Telebachennya Toronto*, <https://nv.ua/ukr/lifestyle/post-pro-smertelnu-hru-chornij-kin-repostnuli-17-tisjach-raz-vona-vijavilasja-eksperimentom-telebachennja-toronto-2512035.html> (accessed on 25.04.2022)

¹⁹⁷ P. Dahlgren, *The Internet...*, op. cit., p. 155.

use them in order to create the impression of a high level of support and convince undecided voters of their popularity. The latter can follow the logic of numbers when making the final choice.

Looking at marketing strategies, the division into push and pull is applicable in the online space. On the one hand, push media directly deliver advertising content to voters without significant interaction with them. Recipients may not even want to receive these materials. It is often related to traditional media (e.g. television and radio advertising), but can be distributed through e-mails and other forms of online advertising. On the other hand, pull media create an environment that encourages people to actively search for the necessary information about the candidate, engage with messages. The World Wide Web is primarily considered as this type of environment. One of the specific examples is social media with behavioral targeting¹⁹⁸.

Big data is another technology associated with new media. It is a collection of valuable knowledge about individual users. For example, their interests, online behavior, etc. It can be accumulated using cookies, action logs and storages of Internet providers. Sometimes, people even do not know about this process. Communication specialists use big data in order to identify like-minded groups of people and target them with specifically tailored messages (microtargeting strategy)¹⁹⁹. It increases the effectiveness of political campaigns.

After all, the Internet in general and social media in particular influence the development of political communication and their potential is not yet exhausted. They provide political actors with new ways to attract voters. Candidates change strategies, adjust communication behavior and carefully select interlocutors online. National and transnational practices are adapted to the needs of a particular country. Journalists lose their mediating power while citizens become equal participants in the process. In other words, the traditional structure of political communication undergoes a complex modernization²⁰⁰.

¹⁹⁸ R.K. Nielsen & C. Vaccari, *Do People "Like" Politicians on Facebook? Not really: Large-Scale Direct Candidate-to-Voter Online Communication as an Outlier Phenomenon*, "International Journal of Communication" 2013, 7, pp. 2335-2336.

¹⁹⁹ P.J. Maarek, *Politics 2.0*..., op. cit., p. 15.

²⁰⁰ R. Sánchez Medero, *Democratization in Political*..., op. cit., p. 607; B. Pfetsch, B. & F. Esser, *Political communication in comparative perspective*..., op. cit., pp. 93-94; L.L. Frankel & D.S. Hillygus, *Niche Communication*..., op. cit., p. 180.

Its conventional forms (e.g. agitation, direct mail, phone banking) continue to exist with a specific focus on television. This medium of mass communication retains the status of “dominant” and “far-reaching,” while TV news is still the main source of political information. However, their positions have become less confident due to the changes in the media landscape. The Internet has posed a serious challenge to television and has partially replaced newspapers. While the consumption of news from traditional sources has a negative trend, the audience increasingly get them from “blogs, comedy sites, government websites, candidate sites and alternative sites.” Young people generally exclude traditional means of communication from their media diet. In conclusion, the Internet has already become an “unavoidable,” “integral,” “new” and supplementary tool of political communication. It is difficult to imagine any democratic country without this modern technology²⁰¹.

1.4 Transformation continues: from mediatization to new types of media logic

Mediatization is a broad issue that should be considered separately in the context of political communication. Initially, the competitive relationship between political actors and media has to be recognized in order to move forward. Both sides try to impose their own agendas in the process of creating a political message. This competition can be balanced (if they need each other equally), media may require the political agenda, or politicians may take the media agenda as a guide²⁰². The third option is related to mediatization.

Authors have attempted to define this process-oriented concept as “politics that has lost its autonomy, has become dependent in its central functions on mass media, and is continuously shaped by interactions with mass media”²⁰³, or, more simply, the “adaptation of politics to the needs of the mass media”²⁰⁴. They also link it to media logic that influences “the fringe areas of cultural life”²⁰⁵, and intrudes “as an institutional rule into other fields where it now supplements (and in extreme cases replaces) existing rules for defining appropriate

²⁰¹ P.J. Maarek, *Politics 2.0...*, op. cit., p. 16; M. Gurevitch, S. Coleman & J.G. Blumler, *Political Communication — Old and New...*, op. cit., pp. 167, 169; W.L. Bennett & S. Iyengar, *A New Era...*, op. cit., p. 717; D. Owen, *New Media...*, op. cit., p. 831; R.K. Nielsen & C. Vaccari, *Do People “Like”...*, op. cit., p. 2336.

²⁰² T. Tasente, *Transformations of the Political...*, op. cit., p. 21.

²⁰³ G. Mazzoleni & W. Schulz, “Mediatization” of Politics: A Challenge for Democracy? “Political Communication” 1999, 16(3), p. 250.

²⁰⁴ H.M. Kepplinger, *Mediatization of Politics: Theory and Data*, “Journal of Communication” 2002, 52(4), p. 973.

²⁰⁵ S. Hjarvard & L.N. Petersen, *Mediatization and cultural change*, “MedieKultur: Journal of Media and Communication Research” 2013, 29(54), p. 3.

behavior”²⁰⁶. After all, mediatization points out the central role of media (mediating technology or media organizations) in political and social spheres²⁰⁷.

The process can be divided into macro and micro levels of analysis. The former corresponds to the growing importance and influence of the news media in politics over time. Political actors acknowledge the effectiveness of these means of communication, consider their use to achieve goals, but do not lose their own weight. In turn, politicians improve media skills in order to increase the impact on news at the micro level. One way is to master the news media logic. Another way is to adopt the new rules and predict the possible reaction of the media to their actions through self-mediatization or reflexive mediatization. For example, politicians may organize an event that will meet the needs of the media. The main goal is to draw attention to your person²⁰⁸.

The same author went further and identified four phases of the mediatization of politics based on Western experience²⁰⁹:

In the first stage, media become the most important communication tool and source of information. They are able to influence the thoughts of ordinary people and shape their perception of reality. As at the macro level, politicians start to pay more attention to media. However, the latter have not achieved independence from institutional actors. This phase is considered as fundamental in the process of mediatization. This is also the moment when politics begins to be mediated.

In the second stage, media reach semi-independence from political bodies. The latter can no longer use them to secure their own interests. Journalists start to be guided by the media logic, not the political logic. They gain control over the content and make their own decisions about its compliance with the format, audience and other characteristics of the specific media

²⁰⁶ F. Esser, *Mediatization as a Challenge: Media Logic Versus Political Logic*, “Democracy in the Age of Globalization and Mediatization” 2013, p. 160.

²⁰⁷ J.G. Blumler & D. Kavanagh, *The Third Age...*, op. cit., p. 211; S. Livingstone, *On the Mediation of Everything: ICA Presidential Address 2008*, “Journal of Communication” 2009, 59(1), p. 3.

²⁰⁸ F. Esser, *Mediatization as a Challenge...*, op. cit., p. 162; J. Strömbäck, *Mediatization*, [in:] G. Mazzoleni, K.G. Barnhurst, K. Ikeda, R.C.M. Maia & H. Wessler, *The International Encyclopedia of Political Communication*, Vol. 3, Wiley, 2015, pp. 831-832.

²⁰⁹ J. Strömbäck, *Four Phases of Mediatization: An Analysis of the Mediatization of Politics*, “The International Journal of Press/Politics” 2008, 13(3), pp. 235-241.

organization. All these improve the professionalism of journalists and may increase commercialization.

In the third stage, all previous tendencies are strengthened. Media and their logic are so independent and widespread that no one is able to ignore them. Political actors have completely lost control over this channel of communication. As at the micro level, politicians now have to adapt to news formats and improve their skills in this area, not vice versa. “The mediated reality becomes more important than the actual reality, in the sense that it is the mediated reality that people have access to and react to”²¹⁰. However, there are still several ways to resist these changes.

In the fourth stage of mediatization, political logic is mixed with media logic, so the boundaries are no longer visible. Political and social spheres integrate media to such an extent that politicians use all resources to shape the news agenda. Among other things, they transform short-term communication strategies into permanent campaigning and invest in their professionalization. Additionally, media logic becomes so strong that journalists who use it may lower some information standards in order to achieve profits. It is impossible to avoid media in this phase.

Mediatization is associated with four processes. The first is “extension” that helps to overcome spatial and temporal boundaries and improves human capabilities. The second is “amalgamation,” which means the integration of media in everyday life. The third concerns the “substitution” of traditional communication activities (e.g. various interactions with service providers via the Internet). The fourth is called “accommodation” and manifests itself in the adaptation of political actors to media requirements in order to achieve the necessary level of publicity. The latter can be done by changing the organizational structure or adjusting the communication behavior of a political unit²¹¹.

As noted earlier, mediatization affects not only political but also other areas of social life. In terms of significance, it can be compared to globalization, individualization, etc. Media

²¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 238.

²¹¹ J. Haßler, M. Maurer & C. Oschatz, *Media Logic and Political Logic Online and Offline*, “Journalism Practice” 2014, 8(3), pp. 326-327; W. Schulz, *Reconstructing Mediatization as an Analytical Concept*, “European Journal of Communication” 2004, 19(1), pp. 88-90.

become an independent entity that pursues its own interests. They can either interfere in communication between different individuals and institutions, or provide society with a platform for expressing opinions. However, in the latter case, media will direct speakers. Among other things, they influence “sex/gender and generational relationships, deviance, control and surveillance, religious and ritual dimensions, power relationships, urban environment and city life, localization and globalization processes...”²¹².

In the literature, the concept of mediatization is often accompanied by the concept of mediation. Researchers draw a distinction between them. The latter means a neutral act of disseminating information through media. They mediate between various actors of political and social processes. Mediation does not depend on the type of media that dominates the media landscape, nor on the level of media freedom, nor on compliance with professional standards. It reflects the recognition of the media as the most important channel for information exchange and communication²¹³.

Mediatization and media logic are closely intertwined concepts. The latter one is the foundation of all other logics. Altheide defined it “as a form of communication, and the process through which media transmit and communicate information.” Media logic focuses on the process of message construction in order to reflect political reality. It consists of such elements as style, rhythm, format (“code of interpretation” – e.g. morning news, late night show), grammatical rules of a particular medium (newspaper, radio, Internet, etc.) and its distinctive features. The logic establishes guidelines to which different actors in the communication process can adapt. Thus, politicians adjust their actions, statements and behavior in accordance with the requirements of trending information channels²¹⁴. All these lead to another definition, where media logic is shown as “the dominance in societal processes of the news values and the storytelling techniques the media make use of to take

²¹² F. Esser, *Mediatization as a Challenge...*, op. cit., pp. 158-159; G. Mazzoleni, *Mediatization of Society*, “The International Encyclopedia of Communication” 2008, p. 3053.

²¹³ J. Strömbäck, *Four Phases...*, op. cit., pp. 229-231; F. Esser, *Mediatization as a Challenge...*, op. cit., p. 157; T. Tasente, *Transformations of the Political...*, op. cit., p. 22.

²¹⁴ D.L. Altheide, *Media Logic*, [in:] G. Mazzoleni, K.G. Barnhurst, K. Ikeda, R.C.M. Maia & H. Wessler, *The International Encyclopedia of Political Communication*, Vol. 3, Wiley, 2015, pp. 750-752.

advantage of their own medium and its format, and to be competitive in the ongoing struggle to capture people's attention"²¹⁵. It makes them important participants in the political process.

"News media logic" or "mass media logic" are the other names of media logic that can be found in the literature. It explains why the patterns of media work within different countries are similar. This logic encompasses three crucial dimensions: professional, technological, and commercial. They shape the culture of news construction. These aspects were explained by Esser²¹⁶ and Strömbäck²¹⁷:

Professionalization means that media are separated into an independent institution that is difficult to influence or control from the outside. Journalists follow certain norms and values (balance of information, separation of facts from opinions, etc.). Their voice is not limited to simple transcription of events, but also enriched with critical analysis and various interpretations. The professional aspect ensures public trust in media.

The technological dimension reflects how a certain technology creates content and reproduces political reality in story formats. This process is influenced by characteristics of the selected media (newspaper, radio, TV or Internet). For instance, it is much more difficult to convey an event through text than through a television picture.

Commercialization of news is another element that increases the autonomy of media as the institution. In fact, it pushes them from political to economic dependency, which is also undesirable for journalists. Commercialization makes an impact on different stages of working with news (production, selection, presentation). The main transformation is from information format to infotainment (mix of information and entertainment). Among other things, it requires dramatization, spectacularization, personalization of news, a focus on scandals, etc. The last commercial indicator intersects with critical professionalism. In this case, journalists try to distance themselves from politics and business.

Mass media logic is characterized by a constant flow of information and diverse personalities. Journalists update the news content around the clock in order to keep their audience interested. Media also position themselves as neutral actors who fairly reflect the reality,

²¹⁵ J. Strömbäck, *Four Phases...*, op. cit., p. 233.

²¹⁶ F. Esser, *Mediatization as a Challenge...*, op. cit., pp. 166-174.

²¹⁷ J. Strömbäck, *Mediatization...*, op. cit., p. 830.

when in fact they serve as filters with their own requirements. In order to become a media character, it is enough to fulfil them. Moreover, opinion polls and ratings are used by media actors to legitimize their actions²¹⁸.

On the one hand, media logic is closely connected with political logic. We can assume that both logics inform each other. Media has played a role in shaping political styles, events, results, and other elements. On the other hand, political and media logic are opposite. Their actors behave uniquely and follow different agendas²¹⁹.

Political logic is built around individual politicians and political parties. They decide what is important for people to know. Initially, political actors go through the process of gaining power (elections). It requires self-presentation. They try to garner support for their views and programs. These “politics aspects” are among those that shape political logic. After that, the best actors get the opportunity to work in political institutions and make important decisions. It is a collective and authoritative process. In this case, political logic includes a “policy dimension” (development of an action plan or “production” of politics) and a “process dimension” (its official approval). The main goal is to solve social problems. In addition, there is another subconcept of “polity.” It refers to rules that regulate the political process, the institutional framework and limit the actions of political actors²²⁰.

Political communication can be guided by political or media logic. Nonetheless, the latter concept is more developed²²¹. It has some additional distinctive features specified by researchers. The first one is the absence of policy issues in terms of the above-mentioned dimensions of “polity, policy and politics.” Instead, media logic prefers “horse race coverage.” It emphasizes the differences between candidates, as well as focuses on opinion polls and public perception. The second feature is personalization or coverage of individual politicians instead of abstract topics. The third is negativity. Journalists present events in a negative rather than a positive tone. Media prefers to show negative rather than positive news. The fourth difference between media logic and political logic is topicality. In fact, political

²¹⁸ J. van Dijck, & T. Poell, *Understanding Social Media Logic*, “Media and Communication” 2013, 1(1), p. 4.

²¹⁹ U. Klinger & J. Svensson, *The emergence of network media logic in political communication: A theoretical approach*, “New Media & Society” 2014, 17(8), p. 1244.

²²⁰ J. Strömbäck, *Four Phases...*, op. cit., pp. 233-234; F. Esser, *Mediatization as a Challenge...*, op. cit., pp. 164-166; J. Strömbäck, *Mediatization...*, op. cit., p. 830.

²²¹ Idem, *Four Phases...*, op. cit., pp. 233-234.

parties need to solve long-term problems. However, news signifies up-to-date information. Hence, media work with short-term events. The last feature is the absence of ambiguity. If politicians prefer to be vague in their positions in order to get maximum support, journalists select precise stories for their programs²²².

Mediatization leads to the replacement of political logic with media logic as the main one²²³. This transformation can be expressed in the following examples. Politicians prefer to create a short-term image instead of trying to solve long-term problems. They often run negative campaigns against their opponents, publish press releases and give public speeches. Even political parties adopt the strategy of personalization. As a result, political actors do not offer quality changes, but receive better media coverage.

Altheide writes about a single media logic, but it is possible to move forward and talk about different types of logic. Changing media landscape is one of the reasons for their emergence. Hence, the advent of the Internet along with social networks has led to the creation of social media logic. Van Dijck and Poell define it as “the processes, principles, and practices through which these platforms process information, news, and communication, and more generally, how they channel social traffic”²²⁴.

Although social media logic coexists and mixes with mass media logic, its strategies and tactics have different technological and economic lineage. Among other things, social media mechanisms digitalize all data needed for analytics and measurement. They affect interactions between users, as well as the processes of production, selection, and consumption of information. It can be stated that their algorithms are the main gatekeepers compared to journalists in mass media. After all, political actors have already realized the potential of new logic and began to create profiles on social media platforms²²⁵.

Social media logic consists of programmability, popularity, datafication, and connectivity. These four main elements were described by Van Dijck and Poell²²⁶:

²²² J. Haßler, M. Maurer & C. Oschatz, *Media Logic...*, op. cit., pp. 328-330.

²²³ D.L. Altheide, *Media Logic...*, op. cit., p. 753.

²²⁴ J. van Dijck, & T. Poell, *Understanding Social Media...*, op. cit., p. 5.

²²⁵ E. Johansson, *Social media...*, op. cit., p. 154; B. Kalsnes, *The Power of Likes...*, op. cit., pp. 45-46.

²²⁶ J. van Dijck, & T. Poell, *Understanding Social Media...*, op. cit., pp. 5-11.

If media logic focuses on programmed flow, content, and audience, then social media logic shifts to programmability, code, and users. The concept of programmability refers to “the ability of a social media platform to trigger and steer users' creative or communicative contributions, while users, through their interaction with these coded environments, may in turn influence the flow of communication and information activated by such a platform”²²⁷. It is facilitated by the two-way process of online communication.

Popularity is expressed through the transformation of the most “likable” people into media characters. In the case of media logic, journalists filter out people (e.g. politicians, experts, ordinary citizens) who meet their requirements and make them celebrities. One of the examples is annual rankings compiled by leading magazines. In turn, social media logic depends on algorithms and socio-economic factors. People with the highest number of followers and messages with most likes and retweets reach the top. Another way is to pay for account promotion. The two logics complement each other, but the new one allows users to measure popularity in the process of achieving it.

The next element is datafication. As is known, mass media collects information about preferences and tastes of their audience through surveys, opinion polls and ratings. Instead, all necessary data is already integrated into the architecture of networked platforms. They include profiling and demographic data, metadata (e.g. time and date of creation, location, size), and other quantifiable types of data. Among other things, it helps to personalize ads, predict user needs and epidemics in real time.

Connectivity is the last element of social media logic. It stems from the goal of traditional media – to connect content and advertising with geographically and demographically defined audiences. However, the creation of social media platforms has modified this process. The term “connectivity” indicates socio-technical characteristics, as special algorithms direct connections in the online environment. Groups are formed automatically or through personal recommendations. Furthermore, users have the opportunity to create their own social networks and communities. It is called “networked individualism” because a person is the main participant in the communication process.

²²⁷ Ibidem, p. 5.

Some scholars have observed a transition from a “logic of collective action” (offline) to a “logic of connective action” (online). The former refers to the acquisition of collective identity, ideology and action frames by individuals. It requires strong hierarchical organizational control, resources, symbolic construction and dissemination of a united “we.” At the same time, the logic of connective action is based on distinctive features. Bennett and Segerberg²²⁸ emphasize the following ones: 1) digital media act as organizational agents (introduce an organizational principle); 2) this logic consists of large-scale, flexible and fluid social networks (allow quick coordination of actions, change of goals, information sharing, goes beyond geographical and temporal boundaries, easy to expand); 3) it includes more individualized processes and personalized ideas; 4) centralized leadership, resources, formal control and organization, collective identity framing are optional; 5) public action or contribution to the common good is perceived as an act of personal expression and recognition, and should be self-motivated.

The concept of “network” is central to any social media platform. The same assertion can be applied to all new media logics, and especially to network media logic. Some authors consider it as an alternative name for social media logic²²⁹, while others present it separately²³⁰. Network media logic can be described within three dimensions: content production, information distribution and media use. Klinger and Svensson²³¹ provide the necessary explanation (see: Figure 12).

Network media logic has introduced a new way of content production. It is based on amateur activities and a combination of production and use (or so-called “produsage”) in the online space. Information is selected according to the individualized beliefs of users and further expectations of maximum attention to it. The whole process, including the stage of providing content, is inexpensive. Thus, bloggers can be considered relatively independent.

²²⁸ W.L. Bennett, & A. Segerberg, *The Logic of Connective Action*, “Information, Communication & Society” 2012, 15(5), pp. 742-760.

²²⁹ B. Kalsnes, *The Power of Likes...*, op. cit., p. 26.

²³⁰ E. Johansson, *Social media...*, op. cit., p. 155; U. Klinger & J. Svensson, *The emergence...*, op. cit., pp. 1241–1257.

²³¹ Ibidem, p. 1245-1250.

Fig. 12. Comparison of mass media logic with network media logic

	Mass media logic	Network media logic
<i>Production</i>		
Ideal	Traditional journalism: autonomous, following ideals of news values in the service of what is referred to as public interest	User-generated content: based on ideas of produsage, reflexivity, and personalisation
Commercial imperatives	High organisational costs for business models related to infotainment	Low organisational costs for business models related to personal relationships
Technology	Affordance for a single public sphere	Affordance for a fragmented public
<i>Distribution</i>		
Ideal	Mass dissemination to subscribers	Viral distribution to like-minded
Commercial imperatives	Business models depend on centralised distribution by professional journalists	Business models depend on principles of connectivity and popularity
Technology	Affordance for broadcasting	Affordance for updating in peer networks
<i>Media use</i>		
Ideal	Consumption of professionally selected and framed information	Sharing reflexive and personal information among peers and like-minded
Commercial imperatives	Business models depend on advertisements and subscriptions	Business models depend on data mining, targeted advertising, and surveillance
Technology	Affordance for passive use along geographical boundaries	Affordance for interactive use in peer and online networks

Source: E. Johansson, *Social media in political communication...*, op. cit., p. 155; U. Klinger & J. Svensson, *The emergence of network media logic in political communication: A theoretical approach*, “New Media & Society” 2014, 17(8).

The patterns of information distribution has also changed. As is known, each network consists of nodes that are linked in a system. The current point is when users become one of such nodes that can filter, remix and distribute content within networks of “like-minded” others. The latter process is dominated by the logic of virality. If the message matches its qualities, it will quickly spread (through comments, shares and recommendations) on the Internet. Bloggers can act as catalysts. Additionally, network media logic has introduced new economic models. For example, platforms have begun to offer a combination of basic (free) and premium (paid) services.

The third dimension that has been transformed is media use. One of its main aspects is the construction of niche networks based on interests. Social media platforms as a tool involve a large number of self-selected people, often avoid any type of control, and give users the opportunity to organize their own social reality. When they join a network of like-minded people, they choose the content to follow. Moreover, users consume information actively. Therefore, it must be constantly updated on social media.

Generalizing the idea of Klinger and Svensson, logic is a set of rules and formats of communication on different platforms. Newspapers, radio and television tend to use media logic (or news media logic, or mass media logic). The process of mediatization has helped it overcome political logic and make traditional media independent of any outside influence. The next step is the introduction of the Internet, a unique technology that brings other competing logics (logic of connective action, social media logic, network media logic). They are all dynamic and constantly evolving.

It seems that new media, and especially social media platforms, return power over the communication process to political actors. The latter can bypass journalists and dictate their agenda. They have also enriched ordinary citizens who can raise their voice thanks to this tool. Traditional media, who lost their information monopoly, suffer the most. Some authors call this “a new era of mediatization.” However, they remain the important actors in the hybridized model of political communication²³². In addition, traditional and new media logics overlap and intertwine²³³.

To sum up, political communication has gone through a long history of transformation to reach its current point, and the process continues to evolve with the advent of the Internet. Although it includes various elements, social media play a central role in the online space. Political actors not only use this tool, but also try to master it in the best possible way. Among the main goals – communication control and competitive advantage. It is important to investigate the already known practices of using social media in the next chapter. Nonetheless, online media landscape changes so fast that it is hard to describe the full potential of these platforms. Only at the time of writing the chapter: Mark Zuckerberg

²³² R. Sánchez Medero, *Democratization in Political...*, op. cit., p. 613.

²³³ U. Klinger & J. Svensson, *The emergence...*, op. cit., p. 1251.

announced the development of Metaverse, Donald Trump launched his Truth Social (network), and Elon Musk bought Twitter²³⁴. Therefore, the final version of this PhD dissertation differs from the initial one.

²³⁴ The current name is X.

Chapter 2. Social media as the tool of political communication

2.1 Theoretical foundations of social media

New media is a constantly changing concept. Each generation had its own new technologies such as newspapers, telegrams, telephones, radio, and television. Scholars have described their development through the prism of four theories of media evolution. One of them is based on the idea of “Displacement.” If new media compete with old media by providing the same services, the former will replace the latter. The second theory of “Functional equivalence” emphasizes the dominance of new media over old media, but notes that the second type still exists. The main idea of the third one is the complementary character of new media in relation to old media. The fourth is “Theory of the niche.” According to it, niche media coexist, compete for popularity, but do not try to replace each other¹. After all, the current new media are related to the era of digitalization. They are virtual and intended mainly for personal communication². Attention of this chapter focuses on social media as one of them.

To begin with, authors provide different explanations of the word “social” in this particular context. If media institutions are associated with an infrastructure that facilitates access to important things from the social world, then new media become a platform where social and economic life unfolds. As an example, Mark Zuckerberg once called Facebook “a fabric that can make any experience online social”³. All four forms of sociality can be found in the nature of social media. They are a product of social activity, as well as a source of shared knowledge and information (cognition). These platforms allow users to work together for a common goal (cooperation). Their functioning is based on interactions and establishment of social relations (communication). The latter can lead to a stronger feeling of belonging to a certain group of people (community)⁴.

¹ K. McIntyre, *The Evolution of Social Media from 1969 to 2013: A Change in Competition and a Trend Toward Complementary, Niche Sites*, “Social Media and Society” 2014, 3(2), pp. 8-11.

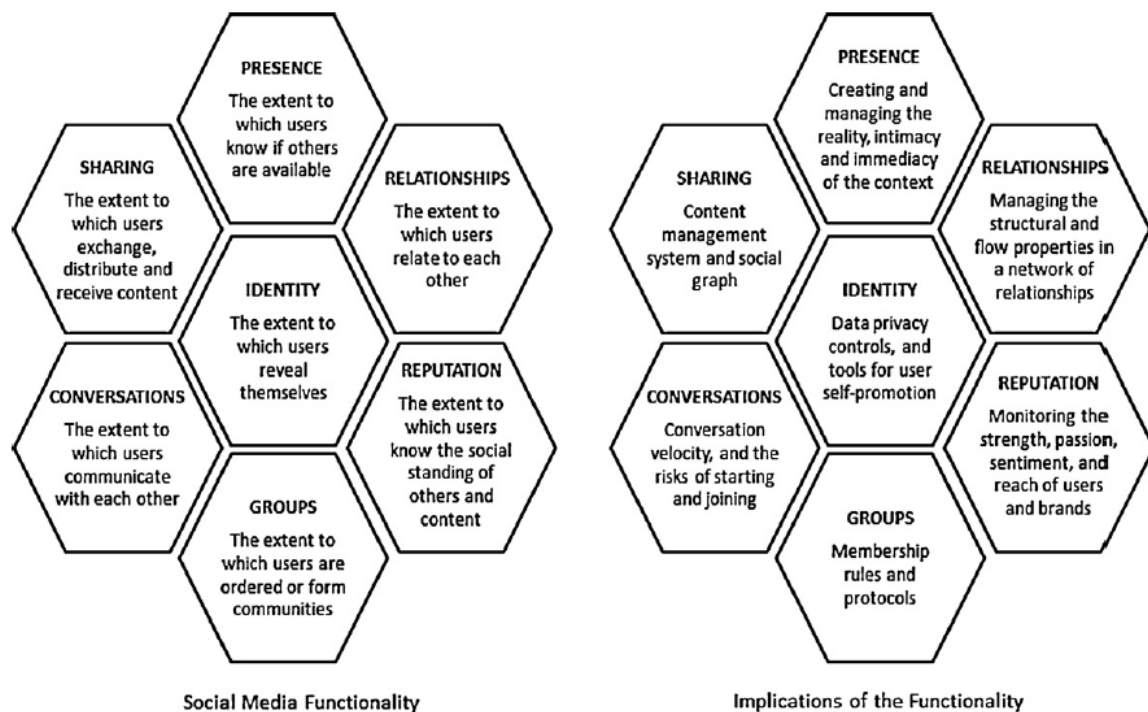
² D. McQuail, *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory* (6th ed.), Sage, 2010, p. 116.

³ N. Couldry & J. van Dijck, *Researching Social Media as if the Social Mattered*, “Social Media + Society” 2015, 1(2), 205630511560417, p. 2; J. van Dijck, *The culture of connectivity*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2013, p. 67.

⁴ C. Fuchs, *Social media: a critical introduction*. Sage, 2017, pp. 6-7; J.W. Treem, S.L. Dailey, C.S. Pierce & D. Biffel, *What We Are Talking About When We Talk About Social Media: A Framework for Study*, “Sociology Compass” 2016, 10(9), p. 769.

Social media platforms place social actors, known as users, at the center of their experiences⁵. These individuals are involved in practices of identity “construction, affirmation, obfuscation, or alteration”⁶. For example, they decide whether to show exact moments or create an idealistic images of their lives. The main tools of users are BIO, feeds or walls, stories, LIVE function, and Ads. Their content is based on storytelling “within informational and persuasive communication”⁷. According to the concept of “nonaddressed audiences,” they produce it for a certain class of people (e.g. friends, followers/subscribers). Family members, colleagues, neighbors and many other consumers can be included into these categories. Therefore, users should think carefully about the appropriateness of the content they post. Sometimes, these “collapsed contexts” make them migrate between platforms⁸. After all, the most basic user experiences can be found in a “honeycomb” of social media (Figure 13).

Fig. 13. Functional building blocks of social media



⁵ N. Couldry & J. van Dijck, *Researching Social Media...*, op. cit., p. 4.

⁶ J.W. Treem, S.L. Dailey, C.S. Pierce & D. Biffl, *What We Are Talking About...*, op. cit., pp. 774-775.

⁷ J.H. Lipschultz, *Social Media Communication: Concepts, Practices, Data, Law and Ethics* (2nd ed.), Routledge, 2017, p. 11.

⁸ B. Hogan & J. Melville, *Social Media*, [in:] J.D. Wright (ed.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, Elsevier, Amsterdam 2015, pp. 421-422.

Source: J.H. Kietzmann, K. Hermkens, I.P. McCarthy & B.S. Silvestre, *Social media? Get serious! Understanding the Functional Building Blocks of Social Media*, “Business Horizons” 2011, 54(3), p. 243.

Although the technology under investigation is new, the basic patterns of interaction in social media started to develop a long time ago. Among other things, the ancient Greeks, Chinese and Egyptians used signal smoke or drums to communicate at a distance. Iranians transmitted their letters through horse riders as early as 550 BC⁹. Information became “viral” thanks to handwritten letters and printed bulletins in the Christian Church and pre-revolutionary France. After that, authors of the US newspaper “Publick Occurrences” (1690) offered their readers three functions of modern social networks: consumption (reading process), commenting (they left a blank page), and sharing with others (it could be transferred)¹⁰. This block can be finalized with the invention of the telegraph (1792), the telephone (1890), and the radio (1891), which made it possible to send information faster over long distances¹¹.

The next stage in the history of social media is associated with the early years of the Internet, when it became possible to exchange messages in the digital space. ARPANET is the name of the first computer network that appeared in 1969. It was launched by the Advanced Research Projects Agency of the US Department of Defense with the aim of connecting Eastern and Western parts of the country¹². Two years later, Ray Tomlinson invented emails. He used an At Sign (@) in order to separate the username from their location¹³. Moreover, the first discussion groups were created in 1980s. USENET (User’s Networks) and Bulletin Board Systems were the places that allowed people to exchange views, news and other types of data¹⁴. The WELL, or the Whole Earth ‘Lectronic Link, was one of the most influential virtual communities. Its discussions were organized into forums (conferences). They

⁹ T.D. Baruah, *Effectiveness of Social Media as a tool of communication and its potential for technology enabled connections: A micro-level study*, “International journal of scientific and research publications” 2012, 2(5), p. 3.

¹⁰ J.W. Treem, S.L. Dailey, C.S. Pierce & D. Biffl, *What We Are Talking About...*, op. cit., p. 773.

¹¹ T.D. Baruah, *Effectiveness of Social Media...*, op. cit., p. 4.

¹² M.A. Dennis & R. Kahn, *Internet | Description, History, Uses & Facts*, [in] *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/technology/Internet> (accessed on 13.01.2023); J.H. Lipschultz, *Social Media Communication...*, op. cit., p. 41.

¹³ R. Swatman, 1971: *First Ever Email*, <https://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/news/2015/8/60/1971-first-ever-email-392973> (accessed on 09.12.2022).

¹⁴ A.M. Kaplan & M. Haenlein, *Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media*, “Business Horizons” 2010, 53(1), p. 60.

reflected the numerous interests of users. The platform had become an inspiration for Rheinghold, who wrote a book “The Virtual Community.”

Modern social media can be defined through their classification, typology or sub-genres. They have been updated and combined into one list¹⁵. It includes, but is not limited to:

- Blogs (professional blogs, microblogs, personal blogs, online diaries, aggregator);
- Social networks (social network sites, social networking sites, professional networking sites, enterprise social networks, business networks, SNS search);
- Collaborative projects (information creation community, wikis, collaborative authoring);
- Content communities (photo/picture sharing sites, video sharing sites, media products community, multimedia, media sharing sites, content-sharing sites, streaming services);
- Forums (user- and message forums, discussion forums);
- Social news and bookmarking;
- Traditional news;
- Technology news;
- User appraisal sites (product review, online review sites, shopping and reviews);
- Social culture;
- Social entertainment;
- Virtual worlds (virtual social worlds, virtual communities, Metaverse);
- Virtual game worlds (social gaming);
- Link sharing services;
- Folksonomies;

¹⁵ T. Aichner, M. Grünfelder, O. Maurer & D. Jegeni, *Twenty-Five Years of Social Media: A Review of Social Media Applications and Definitions from 1994 to 2019*, “Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking” 2021, 24(4), p. 215; A.M. Auvinen, *Social media—the new power of political influence*, Center for European Studies, 2012, p. 8; J.W. Treem, S.L. Dailey, C.S. Pierce & D. Biffl, *What We Are Talking About...*, op. cit., p. 770; A.M. Kaplan & M. Haenlein, *Users of the world...*, op. cit., pp. 62-64; M.E. El Ouardi, A. El Ouardi, J. Segers & E. Henderickx, *Social Media Conceptualization and Taxonomy*, “Journal of Creative Communications” 2014, 9(2), p. 119; E. Stoycheff, J. Liu, K.A. Wibowo & D.P. Nanni, *What have we learned about social media by studying Facebook? A decade in review*, “New Media & Society” 2017, 19(6), p. 969; L. Sloan & A. Quan-Haase, *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media Research Methods* (First), SAGE Publications Ltd., 2017, pp. 17-18; J.H. Lipschultz, *Social Media Communication...*, op. cit., p. 43.

- Scheduling and meeting;
- Mashups;
- Messengers;
- Geo-location based sites/services (including dating apps);
- Web conferencing;
- Audio chat rooms.

The era of social networks began with the launch of Sixdegrees.com in 1997. At that time, Classmates.com had limited functionality. It allowed people to choose a school affiliation. Instead, users could create profiles, add friends, and chat with them on Sixdegrees.com. Despite the huge popularity of this service, the developers could not transform its potential into a stable business and shut it down¹⁶. The following years marked the emergence of online diaries (e.g. Open Diary in 1998, LiveJournal and BlackPlanet in 1999). It is an analogue of blogs. This type of social media brought writers from different parts of the world into one community. They could share personal thoughts and feelings as well as follow other diaries/journals¹⁷.

One of the main technological and ideological foundations of social media is Web 2.0¹⁸. Some authors put these two terms in one row by mistake¹⁹. Web 2.0 was invented by Tim O'Reilly²⁰. This new way of using the World Wide Web has replaced static Web 1.0 at the turn of the century. The main difference is that all users began to participate in content modification with the help of free tools²¹. They can access the process from multiple devices²². Hence, networking and interaction have reached a new level of development²³.

The period from 2000 to 2012 brought social media, which offer more opportunities to simplify the organization of our daily lives. For instance, Ryze.com and LinkedIn were

¹⁶ J.G. Billings, *An Agent of Democracy: Evaluating the Role of Social Media in Modern Presidential Elections*, "Academic Festival" 2017, 17, p. 7; D.M. boyd & N.B. Ellison, *Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship*, "Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication" 2007, 13(1), p. 214.

¹⁷ A.M. Kaplan & M. Haenlein, *Users of the world...*, op. cit., p. 60; J.G. Billings, *An Agent of Democracy...*, op. cit., p. 7.

¹⁸ M. Wolf, J. Sims & H. Yang, *Social media? What social media?* UK Academy for Information Systems Conference Proceedings 2018, 2018, 3, pp. 3-4.

¹⁹ C. Fuchs, *Social media...*, op. cit., pp. 34, 37.

²⁰ B. Hogan & J. Melville, *Social Media...*, op. cit., p. 421.

²¹ A.M. Kaplan & M. Haenlein, *Users of the world...*, op. cit., pp. 60-61.

²² J.W. Treem, S.L. Dailey, C.S. Pierce & D. Biffel, *What We Are Talking About...*, op. cit., p. 769.

²³ A.M. Auvinen, *Social media...*, op. cit., p. 4.

launched with the goal of creating business networks. Couchsurfing became a website where travelers search for a place to stay and organize joint trips. “Friendster” failed to create romantic pairings between friends-of-friends, while “Tinder” successfully implemented the ability to date random people. Wikipedia has described itself as “the free encyclopedia” that can be edited in a collaborative manner. YouTube built its platform around videos, Instagram and Snapchat around photos. Spotify focused on music. They transferred photo albums into online space, gathered favorite music in one place, and gave rise to such communication genres as vlogging (video blogging), reaction videos, etc. Personal information had a secondary role on this type of platforms.

The multifunctional Facebook (social network) and X/Twitter (microblogging site with limited number of characters) deserve a separate explanation as the first generally popular platforms. In short, they have offered greater personalization of profiles, connections with different social groups, and a variety of opportunities to work with content. Their monetization policies and advertising tools, including API, have attracted influencers as well as corporations. Additionally, politicians chose these tools in order to increase their influence in domestic and international politics. The most prominent examples include US presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump. The latter went further and launched TruthSocial for his supporters. This social network mimicked the design of X (Twitter), which had previously banned the former president.

Despite high competition, social media platforms continued to emerge in the post-2012 period. Telegram, together with Whatsapp and Viber, formed a generation of messengers. Short videos and a For You recommendation system became the main features of TikTok. Periscope was one of the first to introduce live streaming services²⁴. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic gave temporary rise to the Clubhouse. Users could join it by invitation and conduct audio discussions with random people in special rooms. After all, it is safe to say that McLuhan’s “global village” and Friedman’s “flat world” have been reflected in modern social media from different angles²⁵. They can work effectively even if a user does

²⁴ NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, *New Trends in Social Media*, https://stratcomcoe.org/cuploads/pfiles/social_media_report_public_09dec.pdf, p. 24 (accessed on 06.10.2022).

²⁵ A.M. Auvinen, *Social media...*, op. cit., p. 4.

not have a huge number of friends, as presented in the “small world” phenomenon of Milgram and Travers²⁶. However, it is assumed that these technologies have not showed their maximum potential yet.

It is highly probable that the exact term “social media” appeared in the last decade of the XX century. Bercovici, who investigated the topic, identifies at least three possible authors. The former senior executive of the online media company America Online (AOL) Ted Leonsis remembers using this phrase in the early 1990s. Darrell Berry, one of the developers of the Japanese online media environment Matisse, talks about late 1994. The most confident in her role as a creator – entrepreneur Tina Sharkey, but her first evidence dates back to 1999²⁷.

Researchers did not want to rush with a choice of “social media” as an umbrella term in academic papers. It started to be dominant only in 2010. Instead, scholars preferred to use “computer-supported social networks” as equivalent to “social networks,” “virtual communities,” “social networks,” “online social network,” “social network sites,” “social networking sites,” “social software” and “Web 2.0” as equivalents to “social media,” “social media channels,” “web-based social media systems,” and “social media networks.” These conclusions were made after analyzing 54 definitions that appeared in the literature between 1996 and 2018 (Appendix A). Moreover, the citation counts of the selected articles were provided as of 25 September 2022. They were collected from Google Scholar.

Among other things, the term “virtual communities” puts “people” or “constituents” in the first place and makes technology their supportive element. They have not yet been recognized as “users.” Their main activities are communication, interaction, and engagement in the process of social exchange, which take place in a virtual location. It is created on the Internet using electronic media. The main connecting links are common interests, needs, objectives, geography, identity/property, and demographic segment.

The definition of “social networks” (together with all related terms) can be considered through three stages of evolution. The first of them (1996, 1997) partially resembles “virtual

²⁶ B. Hogan & J. Melville, *Social Media...*, op. cit., p. 424.

²⁷ J. Bercovici, *Who Coined “Social Media”? Web Pioneers Compete for Credit*, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jeffbercovici/2010/12/09/who-coined-social-media-web-pioneers-compete-for-credit/?sh=78e1911451d5> (accessed on 10.12.2022).

communities.” The second (2006-2008, 2012) focuses on public and semi-public profiles. According to it, “individuals” can construct their own profile space, collect and share profiles of others. This element also enables interaction. Additionally, one of the most popular scientific articles about “social network sites” dates back to this period²⁸. After that, the third stage (2013) includes an updated version of boyd and Ellison’s definition. Its main features are consumption, production and interaction of “participants” with user-generated content.

The next group of definitions is derived from the main term “social media.” In particular, “social media networks” are based on the ideas of boyd and Ellison. The main difference is that the new variant recognizes “users” and their ability to access and protect digital content from search mechanisms²⁹. Another definition of “web-based social media systems” is shown through their types (e.g. blogs, message forums, media-sharing sites) that reach and affect a huge number of people³⁰. According to Fischer and Reuber³¹, “social media channels” are cheap, convenient and scalable Internet and mobile technologies. Shirky³² emphasizes the functioning of “social media” and “social software” outside the framework of traditional institutions and organizations. The remaining details can be observed in Appendix A. Taken separately, all these definitions are incomplete. They cover only some aspects/sides of the technology under investigation and can be more applicable as categories.

It is considered that the most acceptable term is “social media.” It does not have the final definition, but can be characterized through a set of common features from the literature. First, “social media” encompasses social networks, messengers, blogs, virtual communities, etc. Second, these platforms are centered on “Web 2.0” and “user-generated content.” Third, mobile technologies started to be a part of them. Fourth, “social media” are not limited to a couple of functions, but allow the use of various ones. Fifth, most of the definitions have modern terminology. In addition, “social media” is the main concept of the article “Users of

²⁸ “Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship” by boyd and Ellison has been cited 25 044 times.

²⁹ G.C. Kane, M. Alavi, G. (Joe) Labianca & S.P. Borgatti, *What’s Different About Social Media Networks? A Framework and Research Agenda*, “MIS Quarterly” 2014, 38(1), pp. 279-280.

³⁰ T. Finin, A. Joshi, P. Kolari, A. Java, A. Kale & A. Karandikar, *The Information Ecology of Social Media and Online Communities*, “AI Magazine” 2008, 29(3), p. 77.

³¹ E. Fischer & A.R. Reuber, *Social interaction via new social media: (How) can interactions on Twitter affect effectual thinking and behavior?* “Journal of Business Venturing” 2011, 26(1), p. 2.

³² C. Shirky, *Here comes everybody*, Penguin, London 2008; C. Fuchs, *Social media...*, op. cit., p. 39.

the world, unite! The Challenges and Opportunities of Social Media” by Kaplan and Haenlein³³. However, it is not used as the main one in this PhD dissertation.

It is believed that the definition of Carr and Hayes is the most analytically useful. They consider “social media” as “Internet-based channels that allow users to opportunistically interact and selectively self-present, either in real-time or asynchronously, with both broad and narrow audiences who derive value from user-generated content and the perception of interaction with others.” The authors set an ambitious goal. This definition should be used until at least 2035 year³⁴. It is difficult to predict such a long-term outcome. Nonetheless, it is possible to evaluate this explanation at the time of writing this PhD thesis. Social media actually creates selective self-presence on the web in both variants of time. The word “interaction” absorbs such characteristics as communication, exchange of information, etc. As well as the “audience” is an umbrella term for friends, followers, subscribers, etc. Moreover, this definition of social media fulfils the correctness criteria introduced by Rak³⁵. The phrase “Internet-based channels” is an appropriate designata of definiendum. It is not in contradiction with the reverse of social media. The definition is operationalizable, internally consistent, has a precisely stated meaning, not value-laden, not normative, not contextual. It contains all the necessary points for understanding Facebook in Ukraine and Telegram in Belarus, which is the main goal of this PhD dissertation.

The term “social media” has undergone numerous visible changes along with the development of the corresponding online platforms. Its evolution is proven in Appendix A. Starting as virtual communities, they have transformed into spaces with extended functionality. They have also integrated into various spheres of social life, including politics. The development has reached the point where social media are used as a tool to reverse the democratic path of the West and to strengthen authoritarian regimes. Among the famous examples are Cambridge Analytica, Brexit, Trumpism, and others. Therefore, it is crucial to

³³ It was cited 27 827 times.

³⁴ C.T. Carr & R.A. Hayes, *Social Media: Defining, Developing, and Divining*, “Atlantic Journal of Communication” 2015, 23(1), p. 53.

³⁵ J. Rak, *Theoretical Approaches towards Cultures of Political Violence*, “Theorizing Cultures of Political Violence in Times of Austerity” 2018, pp. 23-24.

conduct a detailed analysis of the technical capabilities of online platforms, particularly Facebook and Telegram, as they are the primary focus of this research paper.

2.2 The digital architecture of Facebook and Telegram

Although people view their online activities as independent, the technological infrastructure of social media is the fundamental element that determines certain usage patterns in virtual space. It “is written in code, influenced by algorithms, and constantly tweaked by developers to maintain a competitive market advantage”³⁶. Affordances (available practices) and constraints (limitations) are its main design features³⁷. Terms and conditions of a selected platform are referred to as “cold affordances,” while its functions are mentioned in terms of “warm affordances”³⁸. In other words, social media architecture establishes the rules of communication and interaction, shapes users behavior, strategies, knowledge and digital environment, teaches them how to work with information, and many other things³⁹. All these processes depend on an orientation of a “designer” (developer) with a personal background⁴⁰. They can be changed at any time and without warning, leaving users with the only option of adaptation⁴¹.

“Network structure” is one of the aspects that influences platform architecture. It manages communication between users through “searchability,” “connectivity” and “privacy.” The first point recognizes their potential to find other accounts and follow them. The second point concerns the processes of initiation and establishment of connections between accounts. They are transformed into weak or strong ties. The former refer to a close circle of people, while

³⁶ M. Bossetta, *The Digital Architectures of Social Media: Comparing Political Campaigning on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat in the 2016 U.S. Election*, “Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly” 2018, 95(2), p. 473.

³⁷ F. Comunello, S. Mulargia & L. Parisi, *The ‘Proper’ Way to Spread Ideas through Social Media: Exploring the Affordances and Constraints of Different Social Media Platforms as Perceived by Italian Activists*, “The Sociological Review” 2016, 64(3), p. 524.

³⁸ S. Trepte, *Social Media, Privacy, and Self-Disclosure: The Turbulence Caused by Social Media’s Affordances*, “Social Media + Society” 2015, 1(1), 205630511557868.

³⁹ H. Farrell, *The Consequences of the Internet for Politics*, “Annual Review of Political Science” 2012, 15(1), p. 36; F. Gilardi, T. Gessler, M. Kubli, & S. Müller, *Social Media and Political Agenda Setting*, “Political Communication” 2021, 39(1), p. 39.

⁴⁰ M.L. Kent & M. Taylor, *Fostering Dialogic Engagement: Toward an Architecture of Social Media for Social Change*, “Social Media + Society” 2021, 7(1), 205630512098446, p. 5.

⁴¹ D. Kreiss & S.C. McGregor, *Technology Firms Shape Political Communication: The Work of Microsoft, Facebook, Twitter, and Google With Campaigns During the 2016 U.S. Presidential Cycle*, “Political Communication” 2017, 35(2), p. 4.

the latter – to familiar ones or complete strangers. Weak ties are perceived as more common in social media⁴². The third point is related to the ability of individuals to show or hide information about themselves. Moreover, users can accept or reject messages from others⁴³.

“Flexibility” is the second aspect of this classification, which reveals the possibilities of content access, distribution, and mediation in social media. Scholars distinguish its “hardware” component. According to it, people can use computer web browsers, smartphone applications and various other tools in order to log into their online profiles. These recent changes have expanded the geography of the platforms⁴⁴. The following “graphical user interface” is the visual element that facilitates navigation in personal accounts. Furthermore, the latter support only certain types of multimedia formats, define the limits of text characters in messages and the policy of hyperlinks distribution. These are the characteristics of the third component. “Cross-platform integration,” as the fourth, allows users to share the same content units across different social media profiles. The final element is “the broadcast feed” that organizes and ranks the events from other accounts or channels⁴⁵.

Data is compared to the currency or valuable resource of the online space⁴⁶. Its production mainly takes place on social media platforms along with content production⁴⁷. If narratives are one of the prime features of traditional communication, then digital one can be distinguished thanks to its databases⁴⁸. When users accept the terms and conditions of a particular website or application, they start sharing personal information with it voluntarily. Their digital footprints (e.g. friending, following, liking, commenting) are collected and quantified by special technologies. This process is at the core of the “datafication” aspect. “Matching,” “targeting” and “analytics” are among its elements, which can bring benefits for political, commercial and other purposes. For example, actors identify their audiences by

⁴² K. Ikeda & Y. Yasuda, *Social Networks*, [in:] G. Mazzoleni, K.G. Barnhurst, K. Ikeda, R.C.M. Maia & H. Wessler, *The International Encyclopedia of Political Communication*, Vol. 3, Wiley, 2015, p. 1506; J. van Dijck, ‘You have one identity’: performing the self on Facebook and LinkedIn, “Media, Culture & Society” 2013b, 35(2), p. 201.

⁴³ M. Bossetta, *The Digital Architectures...*, op. cit., p. 475.

⁴⁴ C.T. Carr & R.A. Hayes, *Social Media...*, op. cit., p. 60; NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, *New Trends...*, op. cit., p. 12 (accessed on 06.10.2022).

⁴⁵ M. Bossetta, *The Digital Architectures...*, op. cit., p. 476.

⁴⁶ N. Couldry & J. van Dijck, *Researching Social Media...*, op. cit., p. 3; J. van Dijck, ‘You have one identity’..., op. cit., p. 202.

⁴⁷ J.W. Treem, S.L. Dailey, C.S. Pierce & D. Biffl, *What We Are Talking About...*, op. cit., pp. 777-778.

⁴⁸ J. van Dijck, ‘You have one identity’..., op. cit., p. 203.

“matching” them to a specific type of data in the first place. After that, they target these users with advertisings or offers. Finally, they get the opportunity to improve their performance using real-time analysis of results⁴⁹.

The architecture of social media would be incomplete without the fourth aspect – algorithms. They are defined as “encoded procedures for transforming input data into the desired output, based on specified calculations”⁵⁰. In particular, each click/action/choice of an owner of a social media page can build/shape/personalize its subsequent appearance. Algorithms take on the role of editors, censors, advertising agents, and even judges⁵¹. They can be both open and hidden. Their work is sustained by at least four basic activities: classification, ranking, recommendation, and filtering. The latter help to promote, limit, or boost the reach of posts in social media⁵². Although these instructions are functionally automatic, they can be manipulated. The main goal of algorithms is to maximize the number of connections that will transform into economic revenues⁵³.

Each service creates a certain perception among users. It is hard to find a better example of a “standard” social media than Facebook, which ranked #1 in terms of usage in the world⁵⁴. In fact, this network governs the main aspects of human life and includes all the essentials, such as profile, list of friends, wall, scalability, broad access, as well as opportunity to communicate⁵⁵. There are images, videos, file transfers, and even games, with a particular focus on textual content⁵⁶. The company adopted the strategy of absorbing its competitors horizontally (for dominance – Instagram, WhatsApp) and vertically (for expanding the

⁴⁹ M. Bossetta, *The Digital Architectures...*, op. cit., p. 477.

⁵⁰ E. Garzonio, *Performative Intermediaries Versus Digital Regulation. A Multidisciplinary Analysis of the Power of Algorithms*, “Frontiers in Sociology and Social Research” 2022, p. 161.

⁵¹ N. Couldry & J. van Dijck, *Researching Social Media...*, op. cit., p. 3; E. Garzonio, *Performative Intermediaries...*, op. cit., pp. 158, 160.

⁵² M. Bossetta, *The Digital Architectures...*, op. cit., pp. 476-477; E. Garzonio, *Performative Intermediaries...*, op. cit., p. 161.

⁵³ J. van Dijck, *‘You have one identity’...*, op. cit., p. 202.

⁵⁴ F. Comunello, S. Mulargia & L. Parisi, *The ‘Proper’ Way...*, op. cit., p. 525; S. Kemp, *Digital 2021: Global Overview Report*, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-global-overview-report> (accessed on 11.10.2022).

⁵⁵ O. Schwarz, *Facebook Rules: Structures of Governance in Digital Capitalism and the Control of Generalized Social Capital*, “Theory, Culture & Society” 2019, 36(4), p. 5; P.R. Berthon, L.F. Pitt, K. Plangger & D. Shapiro, *Marketing meets Web 2.0, social media, and creative consumers: Implications for international marketing strategy*, “Business Horizons” 2012, 55(3), p. 263.

⁵⁶ M.E. El Ouiridi, A. El Ouiridi, J. Segers & E. Henderickx, *Social Media...*, op. cit., p. 120.

functional potential – Face.com, Atlas, Snaptu)⁵⁷. Among the main users are individuals at the micro-level, companies at the meso-level, and governments at the macro-level⁵⁸. Facebook will not stop working if one of them is offline. Anyone can log in to use the platform from a computer or a mobile device at a convenient time⁵⁹.

The Facebook experience starts with the creation of an account. A user is required to provide his/her name, date of birth, and gender. All other details, including a profile picture, are optional. After logging in, Facebook offers to find friends and review privacy settings. The account can be opened (public) or closed (private) for outsiders. The platform has a home page and a timeline (Figure 14). In addition, a “Feeds” tab asks “What’s on your mind, ...?” The main tool consists of recommended posts in the first place. They should encourage the user to follow other business pages. These publications can be commented and shared. There are seven types of reaction to them (like, love, care, haha, wow, sad, angry). According to Fuchs⁶⁰, Facebook strives to create an affirmative atmosphere and has a bias towards positive emotions.

In comparison to Facebook, Telegram messenger is only the 11th most-used social media in the world⁶¹. Nonetheless, it is among the top 5 most downloaded apps in 2021⁶². This cloud-based platform is primarily designed for smartphones, but also has a web version for laptops⁶³. Its launch in 2013 marks a growing trend towards private conversations and instant messaging⁶⁴. Among the main users are individuals, media, activists and politicians. They can produce textual, audio, graphic content, transfer files, and have the ability to make regular/video calls. Telegram was developed by Pavel Durov as the main competitor to

⁵⁷ C. Fuchs, *Social media...*, op. cit., p. 185; G. Schleffer & B. Miller, *The Political Effects of Social Media Platforms on Different Regime Types (Summer 2021)*, “Texas National Security Review” 2021, pp. 79-80.

⁵⁸ M.E. El Ouiridi, A. El Ouiridi, J. Segers & E. Henderickx, *Social Media...*, op. cit., p. 120.

⁵⁹ C.T. Carr & R.A. Hayes, *Social Media...*, op. cit., p. 10.

⁶⁰ C. Fuchs, *Social media...*, op. cit., pp. 190-191.

⁶¹ S. Kemp, *Digital 2021...*, op. cit. (accessed on 11.10.2022).

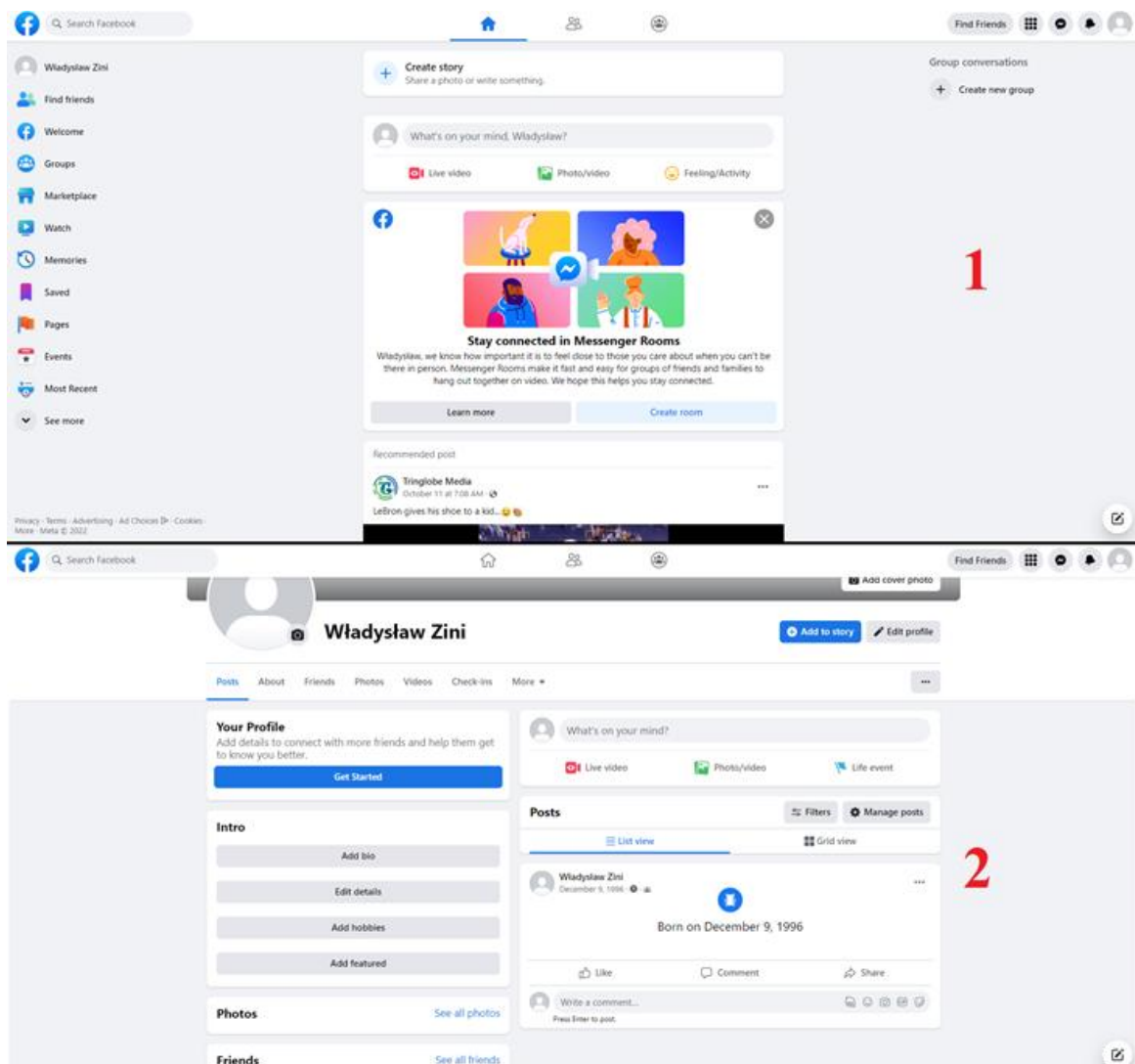
⁶² J. Koetsier, *Top 10 Most Downloaded Apps And Games Of 2021: TikTok, Telegram Big Winners*, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/johnkoetsier/2021/12/27/top-10-most-downloaded-apps-and-games-of-2021-tiktok-telegram-big-winners/?sh=f0e17083a1fe> (accessed on 05.12.2022).

⁶³ S. Walther & A. McCoy, *US extremism on Telegram: Fueling Disinformation, Conspiracy Theories, and Accelerationism*, “Perspectives on Terrorism” 2021, 15(2), p. 102.

⁶⁴ NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, *New Trends...*, op. cit., p. 16 (accessed on 06.10.2022); A. Dargahi Nobari, M.H.K.M. Sarraf, M. Neshati & F. Erfanian Daneshvar, *Characteristics of viral messages on Telegram; The world’s largest hybrid public and private messenger*, “Expert Systems With Applications” 2021, 168, 114303, p. 1.

WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger led by Mark Zuckerberg. Their previous rivalry was between V Kontakte and Facebook.

Fig. 14. Home page (1) and timeline (2) of Facebook



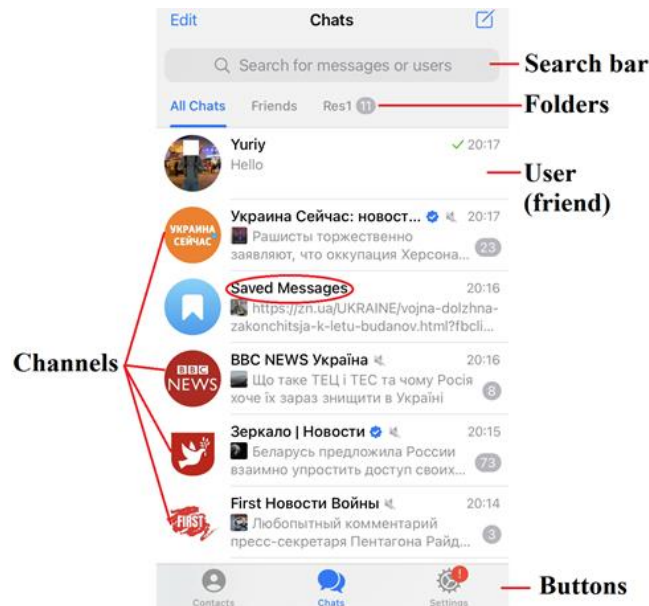
Source: Own elaboration.

Registration in Telegram consists of several steps. Users must be verified with a phone number⁶⁵. After that, they can provide their names (real or fake) and photos. Once the profile exists, there are options to add BIO information, username, as well as adjust privacy settings (e.g. regarding the phone number). It looks much “simpler” than a Facebook account.

⁶⁵ Update: Telegram offers to purchase an anonymous number through the “Fragment” blockchain platform. It enables registration without a SIM card.

Communication with other users of the platform can be established in three ways: through a contact list, through a search bar, through groups/channels. All these elements are visible on a home screen (Figure 15). Additionally, messages can be forwarded between chats and channels. Their members have animated emojis and stickers as reaction options.

Fig. 15. Home screen of Telegram messenger



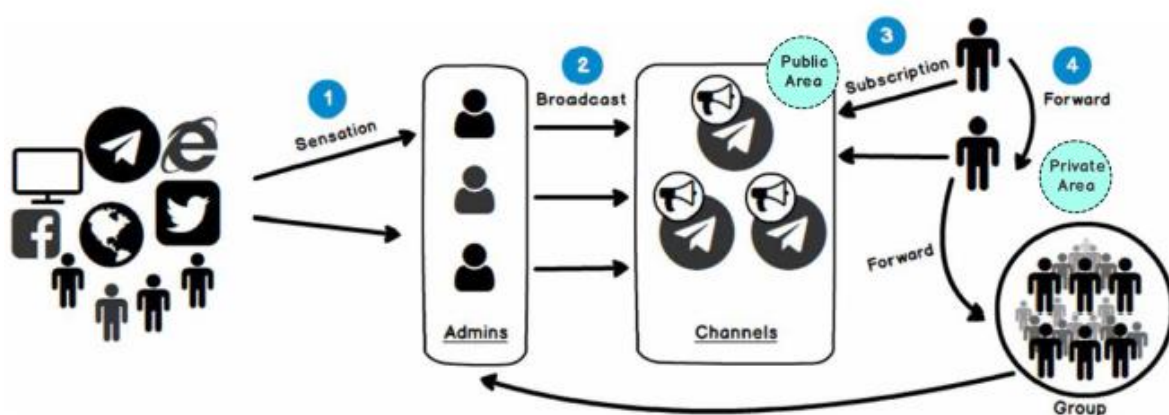
Source: Own elaboration.

Telegram gained its popularity, among other things, thanks to private and public channels. They are defined as chat rooms that combine characteristics of a blog and a news feed. Their content can be original or forwarded from other channels. It includes various types of information such as facts, live updates, infographics, memes, leaks, rumors, insights, propaganda, compromising materials, etc. The technology implements one-to-many communication model. It requires only one or a few administrators to distribute messages to large audiences consisting of an unlimited number of subscribers. The latter can remain anonymous⁶⁶.

⁶⁶ S. Walther & A. McCoy, *US extremism...*, op. cit., p. 102; A. Salikov, *Telegram as a Means of Political Communication and its use by Russia's Ruling Elite*, "Politologija" 2019, (3 (95)), pp. 90-91; A. Dargahi Nobari, N. Reshadatmand & M. Neshati, *Analysis of Telegram, An Instant Messaging Service*, Proceedings of the 2017 ACM on Conference on Information and Knowledge Management, 2017, pp. 2035-2036; A. Dargahi Nobari, M.H.K.M. Sarraf, M. Neshati & F. Erfanian Daneshvar, *Characteristics of viral messages...*, op. cit., pp. 3, 5.

As shown in Figure 16, information flow on Telegram channels includes four stages. Initially, administrators receive materials from external sources. Next, they select the most relevant information and post it on channels. After that, subscribers consume it from this public area. Telegram keep them informed with timely push notifications. At the final stage, messages are forwarded between users on the platform. It leads to an increase in the number of views and subscribers, as the main forms of feedback between administrators and readers. However, part of them may be bot accounts⁶⁷.

Fig. 16. Information flow on Telegram channels



Source: A. Dargahi Nobari, M.H.K.M. Sarraf, M. Neshati & F. Erfanian Daneshvar, *Characteristics of viral messages...*, op. cit., p. 11.

Telegram also allows third-party developers to integrate bots into its platform using Application Programming Interface (API). In this case, they are an important source of information. The type of bots is described as “an automatic answering account that can respond to specific text command by giving preformatted answers”⁶⁸. On the one hand, the so-called “personal advisors” help individuals learn more about specific proposals from political actors and business companies, as well as establish communication with them⁶⁹. On

⁶⁷ A. Dargahi Nobari, M.H.K.M. Sarraf, M. Neshati & F. Erfanian Daneshvar, *Characteristics of viral messages...*, op. cit., pp. 4-5; A. Salikov, *Telegram as a Means...*, op. cit., pp. 90-91, 94.

⁶⁸ T. Sutikno, L. Handayani, D. Stiawan, M.A. Riyadi & I. Much Ibnu Subroto, *WhatsApp, Viber and Telegram which is Best for Instant Messaging?* “International Journal of Electrical and Computer Engineering (IJECE)” 2016, 6(3), p. 911.

⁶⁹ NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, *New Trends...*, op. cit., pp. 17-18 (accessed on 06.10.2022).

the other hand, users must be careful due to the presence of dangerous bots that can collect data from a device.

Durov once said that the main idea behind Telegram is that “everyone on this planet has a right to be free.” Since the platform is based on an MTProto Mobile protocol, it provides server-client encryption in cloud chats (e.g. protects against Internet providers, random hackers) and end-to-end encryption in secret chats. The latter can be selected among the options for a new message. To enable it, a recipient must be online. This most attractive feature of Telegram shows a padlock symbol and includes at least four advantages. First, only communication parties can understand the content of messages. The technology leaves no traces on the servers and does not share their data with third parties. Second, it notifies users if someone takes a screenshot. Third, it disables the forwarding function. Fourth, the sender can set a timer to clear chat messages. In addition, Telegram has introduced anti-censorship mechanisms, so the platform is accessible even when blocked by the authorities. No virtual private network (VPN) is required for its operation. Users can configure auto-deletion of all messages from any chat after a specific time. Thus, this messenger is reliable and secure tool for communication, especially in non-democratic regimes⁷⁰.

The biggest drawback of this architecture is that it appeals to a far-right audience. Those who have violated the guidelines and been banned from other social media strategically switch to Telegram because it is considered the “standard” of a less public online space. Among the most prominent examples are ISIS terrorist groups, Trump supporters, anti-vaccinators, etc. They are “sellers” of propaganda for like-minded people who keep coming back because of the dynamic environment of the platform⁷¹. At first, the developers considered the influx of such users as a symbol of neutrality and independence of Telegram. Eventually, the rise of violent content forced them to think about improvements⁷².

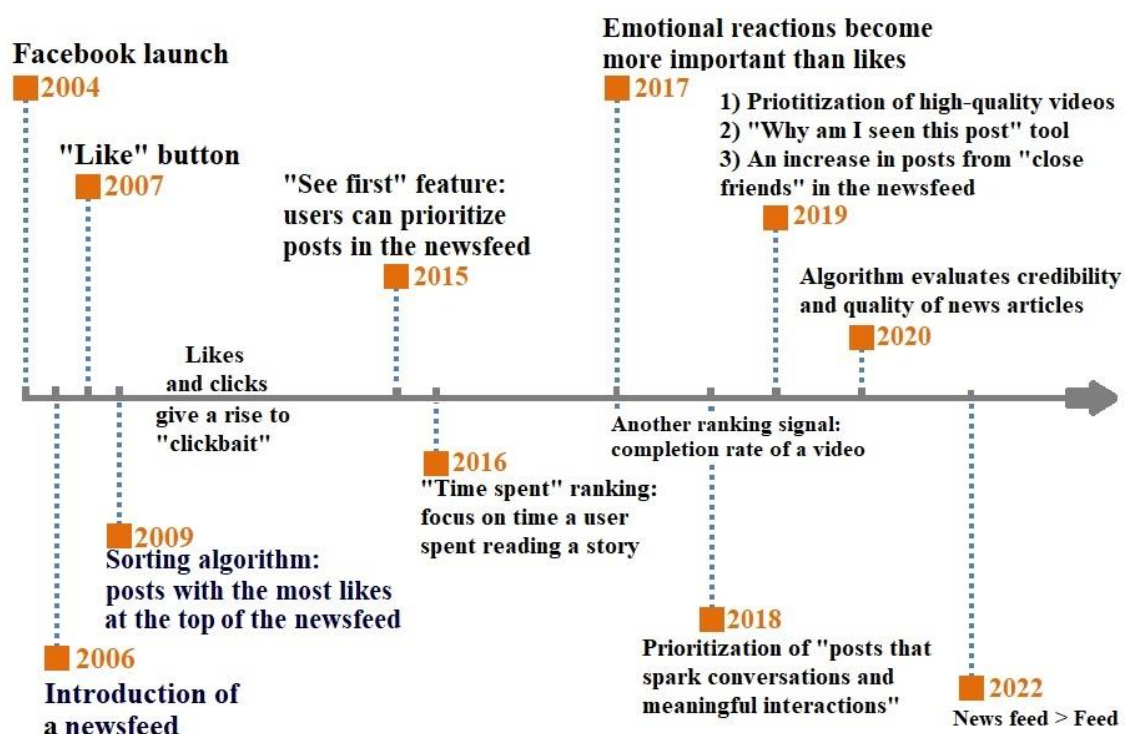
⁷⁰ T. Sutikno, L. Handayani, D. Stiawan, M.A. Riyadi & I. Much Ibnu Subroto, *WhatsApp, Viber and Telegram...*, op. cit., pp. 911-913; D. Loucaides, *How Telegram Became the Anti-Facebook*, <https://www.wired.com/story/how-telegram-became-anti-facebook/> (accessed on 15.12.2022); A. Herasimenka, T. Lokot, O. Onuch & M. Wijermars, *There's more to Belarus's 'Telegram Revolution' than a cellphone app*, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/09/11/theres-more-belaruss-telegram-revolution-than-cellphone-app/> (accessed on 15.12.2022); A. Salikov, *Telegram as a Means...*, op. cit., p. 90.

⁷¹ S. Walther & A. McCoy, *US extremism...*, op. cit., p. 102; A. Knuutila, A. Herasimenka, J. Bright, R. Nielsen & P.N. Howard, *Junk news distribution on Telegram: The visibility of English-language news sources on public Telegram channels*, “The Computational Propaganda Research Project” 2020, p. 1.

⁷² D. Loucaides, *How Telegram...*, op., cit. (accessed on 15.12.2022).

Unlike Telegram, Facebook has a content recommendation system and an algorithmic feed. The former tries to predict what posts a user might like. According to author's observations, these recommendations are based on digital traces (e.g. cookies) of a certain individual. The latter ranks every posts and sorts them in a feed after every page refreshment. The main criterion is not a chronological order, as it was before 2009, but interests of a user, type of content (which one prevails), affinity (with a source/content), and weight levels (type of digital interaction with content)⁷³. The evolution of the Facebook Feed can be observed on an infographic (Figure 17). Over the years, it has become more sophisticated. However, users and institutions with huge number of followers are still at the top, while those who promote useful information but have a smaller audience do not reach many people⁷⁴.

Fig. 17. History of development of the Facebook Feed



⁷³ E. Garzonio, *Performative Intermediaries...*, op. cit., p. 162; ETech, *Explained: The algorithms that run Facebook*, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/tech/trendspotting/explained-the-algorithms-that-run-facebook/articleshow/87282136.cms?from=mdr> (accessed on 05.12.2022); C. Newberry, *How the Facebook Algorithm Works in 2023 and How to Make it Work for You*, <https://blog.hootsuite.com/facebook-algorithm/> (accessed on 05.12.2023).

⁷⁴ W. Oremus, C. Alcantara, J.B. Merrill & A. Galocha, *How Facebook Shapes Your Feed*, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/interactive/2021/how-facebook-algorithm-works/> (accessed on 05.12.2022).

Source: Own elaboration; P. Cooper, *How the Facebook algorithm works in 2019 (and how to work with it)*, <https://blog.hootsuite.com/facebook-algorithm/> (accessed on 07.12.2022); ETech, *Explained: The algorithms...*, op. cit. (accessed on 05.12.2022).

Social media offer services that equate users to “value creators” in the eyes of political, economic, cultural, and other actors. In particular, Facebook attracts people with the ability to write long posts, share stories, reels, live streams, and even find dates. After that, the platform turns their interactions into data and allows interested individuals (e.g. PR managers) to buy targeted advertising. A “like” button becomes “a universal token of worth”⁷⁵. Compared to Facebook, Telegram does not have such services. The messenger empowers channel administrators to make decisions about publishing advertisements and setting their visibility⁷⁶. In addition, channel advertisement can be detected in four ways. First, there can be “self-mention” at the end of the messages. It is effective when they are forwarded. Second, a channel may intentionally list other channels in its post (“spam-mention”). Third, “ham-mention” indicates an actual content that mentions another channel⁷⁷. In 2021, Telegram separately launches sponsored messages without compromising user privacy.

The biggest flaw in Facebook’s architecture is that feeds can be turned into “echo chambers” thanks to algorithms. They, on the one hand, promote posts that affirm interests of users, increase their isolation in ideological “filter bubbles,” and expand the distance between opposing groups. Since no one watches unattractive content, Facebook shows the most popular one in order to convert views into money. It is a part of the digital “attention economy.” As a result, people become more extreme and stubborn in their views. This is also beneficial to partisan users. On the other hand, the company’s global affairs president, Nick Clegg, said that algorithms reduced the levels of hate speech and misinformation⁷⁸. As indicated above, Facebook constantly improves their work. One of the reasons is to filter negative materials. Users can flag them as well⁷⁹.

⁷⁵ O. Schwarz, *Facebook Rules...*, op. cit., pp. 5, 8-9.

⁷⁶ A. Dargahi Nobari, M.H.K.M. Sarraf, M. Neshati & F. Erfanian Daneshvar, *Characteristics of viral messages...*, op. cit., p. 4.

⁷⁷ A. Dargahi Nobari, N. Reshadatmand & M. Neshati, *Analysis of Telegram...*, op. cit., p. 2036.

⁷⁸ W. Oremus, C. Alcantara, J.B. Merrill & A. Galocha, *How Facebook Shapes...*, op. cit. (accessed on 05.12.2022); G. Schleffer & B. Miller, *The Political Effects...*, op. cit., p. 82; F. Comunello, S. Mulargia & L. Parisi, *The ‘Proper’ Way...*, op. cit., p. 527.

⁷⁹ O. Schwarz, *Facebook Rules...*, op. cit., p. 12.

A final point of comparison between the two platforms is a privacy policy. In other words, it is an electronic agreement that people “sign” (accept) before using social media. After that, every digital footprint that a user leaves online is considered through the lens of possible data collection. Simple carelessness can lead to the transfer of important information to third parties, from advertisers to authorities. Hence, the issue is decisive for those who want to feel that their data is secure. Nevertheless, others simply do not attach too much importance to it due to the problem with media literacy.

Facebook revised its privacy policy after the biggest data leak scandal involving them and Cambridge Analytica⁸⁰. The version dated 26 July 2022 was analyzed. It applies to almost all products of the company. The document includes a lot of different points and hyperlinks, making it difficult to read. Furthermore, it is not possible to use the platform without accepting the privacy policy. Hence, people have no choice but to tick the appropriate box and bypass various complications.

Facebook collects data about literally everything that happens on the platform and even beyond it. The list includes posts, comments, audio, hashtags, interactions, views, metadata, apps and actions in them, information about transactions, temporal features of working with different types of content, information from its camera tools, and many other things. The developers even reserve the right to decrypt the content of messages if they have been reported for review. Moreover, data about the device, its signals, identifiers, activities, cookies and characteristics of Internet connection are transferred to the company. Partners, measurement vendors and third parties can also share information with it. Surprisingly, the process occurs whether or not users are logged in or have a Facebook account.

Platform employees are not the only ones who can process these types of data. Third parties have access to certain information as well. In particular, advertisers and those who use

⁸⁰ In this case, social media users were unaware that the latter company would receive information about them. The chain started with a psychological test in an application called “thisisyourdigitallife.” It was created in 2014 thanks to Aleksandr Kogan, professor at Cambridge University. Participants received a financial reward for passing the test. Next, they gave permission to collect data from their Facebook pages, including information about friends. The database of about 50 million profiles was transferred to Cambridge Analytica for analysis. Finally, the company may have shared results with representatives of political campaigns (e.g. Brexit, Donald Trump) and influenced their success. In: S. Meredith, *Here’s everything you need to know about the Cambridge Analytica scandal*, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/03/21/facebook-cambridge-analytica-scandal-everything-you-need-to-know.html> (accessed on 05.12.2022).

Facebook analytics mainly receive reports on interactions with their products without contact details. Information related to the transaction process is shared with sellers. Marketing vendors and service providers perform their tasks on the platform using the necessary data. Facebook also provides information to outside researchers, integrated partners and others. However, it does not specify the full list of data that these actors can obtain. All explanations are based on examples.

Legal grounds are another reason for data transfer from Facebook to third parties. Among other things, the company considers requests from law enforcement and government agencies in two cases. First, if it is in accordance with the law. Second, if the answer arises from good faith considerations that can ensure safety, security and integrity of Facebook and its community. The term of storage of personal information on the servers is determined in each case separately. It can be transferred to data centers from different states (the developers indicate only democratic ones). After all, Facebook tries to create an impression of data security. Nonetheless, the high amount of data collected, as well as the chaotic and unclear privacy policy give reasons to doubt the reliability of the service in non-democratic countries.

Telegram messenger has a shorter and clearer privacy policy than Facebook. A much smaller number of features may be part of the explanation. The author analyzes the version as of 1 November 2022⁸¹. It consists of 12 sections with corresponding subsections. There is an accurate division of responsibilities. Telegram is referred to as “we,” “us” and “our,” while the user of the services is referred to as “you.”

There is no confusion with the data types used by the platform. It requires a mobile number (to create an account) and e-mail (to receive a password recovery code). There is “no way” for third parties to read secret chats, while encryption keys for cloud chats are stored in different data centers. A shared location is treated like any other message. Synchronization of contacts begins after the user’s consent and transfers only the name and number to Telegram. Some aggregated metadata (not fully specified) can be collected to improve account security, provide useful features, and enhance cross-device functionality. Like Facebook, the messenger requires user data, including cookies, for the proper functioning of the platform. However, it does not use them to serve ads. The developers specifically note

⁸¹ See: <https://telegram.org/privacy>, accessed on 01.11.2022.

that their priorities are individual interests, as well as fundamental rights and freedoms in the field of personal data protection.

Third parties are represented on Telegram in the form of service providers and bots. Specifically, Google is a partner in the processes of transcription and translation of messages. It cannot use these data for any of its services. In contrast, Telegram is not responsible for the transfer of any purchase information to different sellers and for the operation of third-party bots.

Although information about the location of data servers is incomplete, Telegram can be considered a reliable platform. The only possible legal basis for providing the data of its users to law enforcement authorities can be a court decision on suspicion of a terrorist act. The developers “may” disclose IP address and phone number, which is not too much. The word “may” emphasizes the readiness to refuse such a request. Periods of data storage are also clearly defined in the privacy policy. Consequently, Telegram has become the main communication channel for the opposition in authoritarian Belarus.

In summary, all these characteristics influenced the choice of Facebook and Telegram as social media for this PhD dissertation. Since the author has explained the phenomenon of social media from the theoretical and technological sides, it is time to review the potential of these platforms for changes in political life. Hence, the next subchapter analyzes their possible role in the democratization process.

2.3 The cyber-optimists vs. cyber-realists debate on social media

From the historical perspective, it seems that people are in constant search for so-called “disruptive technologies,” which can change the patterns of their actions in the pre-existing political and media systems⁸². The cycle repeats itself as follows: initially, a certain innovation benefits ordinary users. Then, it is mastered by authorities for their own purposes of greater control over citizens. Finally, people search for a more efficient technology that can bring them back on the path of progress. The same happened, among others, to the printing press (promoted democracy, but encouraged state centralization and censorship), as

⁸² M.R.T. Soriano, *Internet as a Driver of Political Change: Cyber-pessimists and Cyber-optimists*, “Revista del Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos” 2013, 1, p. 333.

well as radio and television (promoted pluralism of opinions and thoughtful debates, but served as propaganda tool)⁸³.

Social media symbolizes the current “disruptive technology.” There are two schools of thought that argue about its role in the process of democratization. On the one hand, “cyber-optimists,” or “cyber-enthusiasts,” or “cyber-utopianians” believe that these platforms can empower people in nondemocratic societies to challenge authoritarian regimes and recognize them as “technologies of freedom” (political, social, economic, etc.) or “liberation technologies”⁸⁴. In their opinion, it is difficult for the state to limit or control them⁸⁵. This type of picture is also actively promoted in traditional mass media⁸⁶. It inspires Western donors to invest in programs for the development of information and communication technologies, as well as in “Internet freedom” projects around the world⁸⁷. On the other hand, “cyber-realists,” or “cyber-pessimist,” or “cyber-skeptics” insist that authorities, especially authoritarian ones, have found methods of combating social media (e.g. actively blocking them), or have learned how to use this tool with a reduction in potential risks. They compare it to “technologies of control” or “net delusion” that enhance the possibilities of social surveillance and negatively affect the process of democratization⁸⁸.

The year 2001 in the Philippines brought one of the first strong arguments in favor of cyber-optimists. During the impeachment process, Congress tried to suppress key evidences against corrupt President Joseph Estrada. As a result, Filipinos used social media to mobilize mass protests. They spread messages with the text saying, “Go 2 EDSA. Wear blk.” Estrada resigned within a few days. In 2009, these platforms were the main tool of “the first Facebook

⁸³ L. Diamond, *Liberation technology*, “Journal of Democracy” 2010, 21(3), p. 71.

⁸⁴ A. Bulovsky, *Authoritarian communication...*, op. cit., p. 22; M.R.T. Soriano, *Internet as a Driver...*, op. cit., p. 334; G. Wolfsfeld, E. Segev & T. Sheaffer, *Social Media and the Arab Spring*, “The International Journal of Press/Politics” 2013, 18(2), p. 117; W.H. Dutton, *The fifth estate emerging through the network of networks*, “Prometheus” 2009, 27(1), p. 5; P. Pospieszna & A. Galus, ‘*Liberation Technology*’..., op. cit., pp. 1664-1684; L. Diamond, *Liberation technology...*, op. cit., p. 70.

⁸⁵ J. Gainous, K.M. Wagner & C.E. Ziegler, *Digital media and political opposition in authoritarian systems: Russia’s 2011 and 2016 Duma elections*, “Democratization” 2017, 25(2), p. 209; P. Pospieszna & A. Galus, ‘*Liberation Technology*’..., op. cit., pp. 1672-1673.

⁸⁶ J.W. Treem, S.L. Dailey, C.S. Pierce & D. Biffl, *What We Are Talking About...*, op. cit., pp. 775-776.

⁸⁷ A. Breuer & J. Groshek, *Online Media and Offline Empowerment in Post-Rebellion Tunisia: An Analysis of Internet Use During Democratic Transition*, “Journal of Information Technology & Politics” 2014, 11(1), p. 26.

⁸⁸ M.R.T. Soriano, *Internet as a Driver...*, op. cit., p. 334; G. Wolfsfeld, E. Segev & T. Sheaffer, *Social Media...*, op. cit., p. 117; W.H. Dutton, *The fifth estate...*, op. cit., p. 5; H. Farrell, *The Consequences...*, op. cit., p. 36; F. Gilardi, T. Gessler, M. Kubli, & S. Müller, *Social Media...*, op. cit., p. 38.

revolution” in Moldova, when people wrested power from the communists⁸⁹. “The Goliath of totalitarianism” was eventually overthrown by “the David of the microchip,” as US President Reagan symbolically predicted in 1989⁹⁰.

The technology began to be perceived as a game changer in the context of democratization. Torres Soriano⁹¹ lists at least 4 of its advantages. The first is the promotion of inter-group relations (internal and external). It is also known as “networking” and “community-building”⁹². The point is that social media help connect people with common (protest) interests, which increases the possibility of collective actions⁹³. It is especially important in authoritarian countries with a single information policy. The second is the ability to exercise fundamental democratic rights (e.g. freedom of expression) on these platforms despite state censorship in all other spheres of life. Anonymity of users protects them from possible punitive repressions. The third is the opportunity to reveal alternative information about local events to international community that is not available in the government-controlled mass media⁹⁴. It leads to a situation where an authoritarian regime becomes more cautious in actions. The fourth is the promotion of socio-economic development and transformation. In this case, political elites face the so-called “dictators’ dilemma”: either to allow the Internet with possible risks to their rule or establish maximum control without its important commercial benefits in the age of globalization.

Turkey is an example of a country with a “hybrid regime,” where President Erdogan tried to hide his scandals by imposing a ban on YouTube and X (Twitter). However, it only triggered “reactance” among people. This psychological mechanism forced citizens, who already have experience of using these platforms, to circumvent censorship. They used such tools as the Tor network and the VPN. After that, Erdogan was heavily criticized on X (Twitter) for

⁸⁹ C. Shirky, *The political power of social media: Technology, the public sphere, and political change*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25800379>, p. 28 (accessed on 13.12.2022); G. Schleffer & B. Miller, *The Political Effects...*, op. cit., p. 80.

⁹⁰ New York Times archive, *Reagan Gets a Red Carpet From British*, <https://www.nytimes.com/1989/06/14/world/reagan-gets-a-red-carpet-from-british.html> (accessed on 15.12.2022).

⁹¹ M.R.T. Soriano, *Internet as a Driver...*, op. cit., pp. 334-337.

⁹² P. Pospieszna & A. Galus, *‘Liberation Technology’...*, op. cit., p. 1677.

⁹³ H. Farrell, *The Consequences...*, op. cit., p. 40.

⁹⁴ M. Arafa & C. Armstrong, *“Facebook to Mobilize, Twitter to Coordinate Protests, and YouTube to Tell the World”*: *New Media, Cyberactivism, and the Arab Spring*, “Journal of Global Initiatives: Policy, Pedagogy, Perspective” 2016, 10(1), 6, p. 90.

restricting freedoms. This situation proves that it is technically difficult to limit access to social media, at least completely⁹⁵.

Political leaders of various systems also use this technology to advance their interests. According to Bulovsky's research⁹⁶, democratic ones prefer multi-directional communication style with high-quality messages that provide information to their citizens. Their accounts are diverse in terms of active followers, shares and published content. Although authoritarian rulers have all the power in their countries, they still need to strengthen their legitimacy. Hence, they choose uni-directional communication style with posts that project influence online. A large number of inactive followers, a rare practice of tweeting, and a lack of interaction characterize it. Most importantly, they take advantage of the technology. This is another reason for the absence of a total ban on these platforms.

The potential of social media to coordinate protests and mobilization is often repeated in the literature by cyber-enthusiasts⁹⁷. Online actions, as a "resource," provoke offline actions, and vice versa⁹⁸. The former fits perfectly into the above example from the Philippines. The latter takes the form of a reaction to the event (e.g. war, voting). Users fill the pages of certain actors with comments containing specific demands or requests. It does not require significant communication costs and occurs in a flexible form⁹⁹. Activists do not need permission from the government or any other party to initiate these actions. They can engage in campaigns that were previously unavailable to them.

One of the main values of social media is the provision of access to a large amount of information. These platforms offer a pluralistic and independent space where dissidents can produce, consume and share diverse content¹⁰⁰. Their goals are to maximize the visibility of a particular message, to attract support for a particular cause and to share knowledge with

⁹⁵ A.C. Miller, *#DictatorErdogan: How Social Media Bans Trigger Backlash*, "Political Communication" 2022, 39(6), pp. 801–825.

⁹⁶ A. Bulovsky, *Authoritarian communication...*, op. cit., pp. 20–45.

⁹⁷ Ibidem, p. 22; P. Pospieszna & A. Galus, *'Liberation Technology'...*, op. cit., pp. 1678-1679.

⁹⁸ F. Comunello, S. Mulargia & L. Parisi, *The 'Proper' Way...*, op. cit., p. 523.

⁹⁹ H. Farrell, *The Consequences...*, op. cit., p. 39.

¹⁰⁰ L. Diamond, *Liberation technology...*, op. cit., p. 71.

others¹⁰¹. Among other things, it can be liberal ideas¹⁰². However, the most important one is to undermine authoritarian regimes that monopolize and direct public debate¹⁰³.

Social media tools are an integral part of any revolution in the Internet age. At the first stage, they are used to unify the symbols and goals of the protest movement and to find like-minded people, as already mentioned. At the second stage, a specific incident is disseminated through these platforms, which is intended to motivate the public to take action against, for example, traditional political elites¹⁰⁴. They are “powerful instruments for transparency and accountability, documenting and deterring abuses of human rights and democratic procedures,” which leaves no chance for officials to hide any secret, scandal or mistake¹⁰⁵. At the third stage, there are three options for the development of the conflict: 1) the state suppresses the uprising; 2) the state satisfies public demands; 3) the situation remains unresolved for a long time¹⁰⁶.

The Khaled Said movement in Egypt is an example of the revealing function of social media. While mainstream ones tried to attribute his death to drug addiction, photos and videos shared on the Facebook page “We Are All Khaled Said” showed multiple signs of beatings and torture on his body. They were inflicted on him by the police. The truth quickly spread through online platforms, convinced people of the propaganda function of traditional mass media, as well as mobilized them against policy brutality and government corruption. It evolved into the “Arab Spring,” when Egyptians used “Facebook to schedule the protests [e.g. announcing date and time], Twitter to coordinate, and YouTube to tell the world.” Therefore, President Mubarak resigned after 18 days of protests¹⁰⁷. A similar situation occurred with Iran’s Green Movement, when X/Twitter (primarily), Facebook, YouTube and

¹⁰¹ F. Comunello, S. Mulargia & L. Parisi, *The ‘Proper’ Way...*, op. cit., p. 524.

¹⁰² G. Schleffer & B. Miller, *The Political Effects...*, op. cit., p. 80.

¹⁰³ P. Pospieszna & A. Galus, *‘Liberation Technology’...*, op. cit., p. 1669.

¹⁰⁴ G. Schleffer & B. Miller, *The Political Effects...*, op. cit., p. 87.

¹⁰⁵ L. Diamond, *Liberation technology...*, op. cit., p. 71.

¹⁰⁶ G. Schleffer & B. Miller, *The Political Effects...*, op. cit., p. 87.

¹⁰⁷ M. Arafa & C. Armstrong, *“Facebook to Mobilize...”*, op. cit., pp. 89-90; BBC News, *Egypt police jailed over 2010 death of Khaled Said*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26416964> (accessed on 15.12.2022); P. Norris, *Political mobilization and social networks. The example of the Arab spring*, “Electronic democracy” 2012, p. 66.

local social networking sites helped protesters to resist vote fraud in 2009. They provided people with a free and secure space for communication¹⁰⁸.

According to Arafa and Armstrong¹⁰⁹, “politics [became] personal” on social media during the Arab uprisings. Emotions, as one of the leading forces of any protest, were transmitted through these platforms. They were embedded in alternative news stories, which only strengthened the engagement of ordinary citizens. For instance, it helped Tunisians to deal with the “barrier of fear” that the regime had created inside the country¹¹⁰. In addition, activists spread their democratic ideas even far beyond the borders in order to evoke world empathy¹¹¹. As one of them said, “When the revolution came, I was in Belgium... We tried to use all the information we could handle: status updates, pictures, videos. When we heard that something happened in Kasserine or somewhere else, we’d pick up the phone, we’d know someone who knows someone and we would find the information and post it.” These and other efforts led to success in the form of regime change¹¹².

Cyber-optimists noted that young revolutionists from Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, Syria and Bahrain also shared information between each other using social media during the aforementioned events. Mobile phones have made this opportunity available to everyone. In addition, women could participate in these protests and did not violate any social norms and rules. “Tunisia’s blogger Lina Ben Mhenni, Egypt’s Esraa Abdel Fattah, who became widely known as ‘Facebook girl,’ Libya’s Danya Bashir, and Bahrain’s Zeinab and Maryam al-Khawaja” are among the main alternative sources of the “Arab Spring”¹¹³.

The technology has been called “the only channel” or “the last hope” for opposition actors in non-democratic countries¹¹⁴. In particular, Hong Kong protestors chose Telegram in authoritarian China because of low restrictions on political content and data privacy¹¹⁵. It

¹⁰⁸ L. Diamond, *Liberation technology...*, op. cit., pp. 79-80; B. Hogan & J. Melville, *Social Media...*, op. cit., p. 423.

¹⁰⁹ M. Arafa & C. Armstrong, *Facebook to Mobilize...*, op. cit., pp. 89-90.

¹¹⁰ A. Breuer & J. Groshek, *Online Media...*, op. cit., p. 32.

¹¹¹ J.G. Billings, *An Agent of Democracy...*, op. cit., p. 4.

¹¹² A. Breuer & J. Groshek, *Online Media...*, op. cit., p. 34.

¹¹³ M. Arafa & C. Armstrong, *Facebook to Mobilize...*, op. cit., pp. 76-77, 89-90.

¹¹⁴ J.M. Dollbaum, *Social Policy on Social Media: How Opposition Actors Used Twitter and VKontakte to Oppose the Russian Pension Reform*, “Problems of Post-Communism” 2020, p. 2; P. Pospieszna & A. Galus, *‘Liberation Technology’...*, op. cit., p. 1679.

¹¹⁵ A. Knuutila, A. Herasimenka, J. Bright, R. Nielsen & P.N. Howard, *Junk news...*, op. cit., p. 1.

does not even show users subscriptions. Taking the example of Belarus, activists constantly use social media, in general, to spread historical national symbols (not the ones used by the authorities) or to create hashtags that will be shared voluntarily by others. Furthermore, they record or broadcast live videos of arrests and other illegal actions against protesters (again alternative information). As a result, this content reaches a large audience, encourages people to join their movement offline, and challenges state-controlled traditional media news. It has almost no chances of being removed from the Internet.

The liberation potential exposes people to a variety of positions, arguments and opinions on key issues. This spectrum of options is much wider than in any geographical community. While users obviously consume the posts of their friends, family and colleagues, they also become participants in debates with complete strangers (e.g. supporters of political rivals). It can reduce the value of their true preferences, encourage them to change their own positions, make them more informed as citizens, or increase their civic participation/engagement in protest activism. The last point is part of “behavioral” function of social media. After all, users become more politically aware than non-users¹¹⁶.

Another condition of a stable democracy is free, fair and transparent elections. Social media platforms contribute to strengthening the positions of ordinary citizens during these events. They enable communication with candidates, monitoring of the process, and return the opportunity to express opinion without censorship. In turn, politicians motivate people to actively participate in their campaigns and vote for them. Among other things, Barack Obama “used Facebook to organize, Twitter to send news, and YouTube to communicate.” As a result, he became the first African-American president of the United States. His tactics, which the author reveals in detail in the next subchapter, spread to non-democratic Nigeria and other countries of the world¹¹⁷.

Contrary to the arguments above, history seems to be developing in favor of the opinions of cyber-pessimists. The evidences are as follows. In 2010, Zuckerberg was made “Person of

¹¹⁶ J.G. Billings, *An Agent of Democracy...*, op. cit., p. 19; G. Schleffer & B. Miller, *The Political Effects...*, op. cit., p. 80; H. Farrell, *The Consequences...*, op. cit., p. 43; P. Norris, *Political mobilization...*, op. cit., p. 57.

¹¹⁷ J.G. Billings, *An Agent of Democracy...*, op. cit., pp. 6, 14, 17-18, 20-21, 24; L. Diamond, *Liberation technology...*, op. cit., p. 70; A. Bulovsky, *Authoritarian communication...*, op. cit., p. 23.

the Year” of Time magazine. The editors called him “The Connector”¹¹⁸. In 2011, this award was given to a symbolic image of “The Protester” from the Middle East¹¹⁹. In 2016, however, it went to the controversial Donald Trump, who successfully used X (Twitter) in his campaign and became the US president. According to scholars, “In only five years social media have gone — in the popular imagination at least — from being a way for prodemocratic forces to fight autocrats to being a tool of outside actors who want to attack democracies”¹²⁰. Moreover, a study of authoritarian Bahrain after the Arab Spring showed changes. Although these platforms continued to be seen as an important tool, the number of risks for digital activists has increased in this country¹²¹.

In general, skeptics argue that the role of social media is overestimated, their impact is negligible, and their existence is allowed by authoritarian leaders¹²². According to the summary provided by Torres Soriano¹²³, democratic movements from the online space are just a “mirage” created by cyber-optimists. They do not have a sufficient social base and consist of a politically active minority. Their ties are weak and fall apart at the first real offline danger. Full transparency can only discourage them from certain actions (donations to controversial causes)¹²⁴. Since autocrats always feel insecure, the Western image of “liberation technology” only provokes them.

Authoritarian rulers have found ways to strengthen their control over the information space in the Internet age. Among them are the so-called “defensive” measures that limit the amount of available content from the websites of other countries. They are also called “friction” tactics.” Any kind of information (e.g. religious, political) that may contain risks for regime dominance is blocked. There is a possibility of almost complete isolation. The most important

¹¹⁸ Person of the Year 2010 – TIME, https://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2036683_2037183_2037185,00.html (accessed on 21.12.2022).

¹¹⁹ Person of the Year 2011: The Protester, https://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2101745_2102132_2102373,00.html (accessed on 21.12.2022).

¹²⁰ J.A. Tucker, Y. Theocharis, M.E. Roberts & P. Barberá, *From Liberation to Turmoil: Social Media And Democracy*, “Journal of Democracy” 2017, 28(4), pp. 46-47.

¹²¹ K. Moore-Gilbert & Z. Abdul-Nabi, *Authoritarian downgrading, (self)censorship and new media activism after the Arab Spring*, “Social Media + Society” 2021, 23(5), pp. 875–893.

¹²² H. Farrell, *The Consequences...*, op. cit., pp. 44, 46; A. Bulovsky, *Authoritarian communication...*, op. cit., p. 21.

¹²³ M.R.T. Soriano, *Internet as a Driver...*, op. cit., pp. 337-339.

¹²⁴ H. Farrell, *The Consequences...*, op. cit., p. 43.

thing is to hide it from users. They should feel that their Internet experience is normal and, for example, Facebook is not accessible due to an unknown error. These arguments refute the aforementioned “dictator’s dilemma.” In some cases (e.g. sexual, violent materials), even democratic countries apply this type of measures¹²⁵.

Laws and regulations that subordinate the private sector to the directives of the state are another type of authoritarian control. They also include special surveillance and censorship technologies that authorities require certain companies to build into their products. In addition, users can be tied to accounts and devices through registration of their passport data. All of these measures allow the regime to process vast amounts of data in order to understand how ordinary citizens use social media platforms. Potentially dangerous actions of the opposition are neutralized already at the planning stage. It creates an atmosphere of uncertainty and fear. No one knows which click in the cyberspace may lead to further punishment like fine, imprisonment or worse. People resort to self-censorship in these “digital dictatorships”¹²⁶.

The United Nations serves as a platform for discussing proposals that may ultimately receive partial or full international recognition. While democratic countries (members of the European Union, the United States, the United Kingdom, etc.) advocate for an open Internet, authoritarian ones (China, Russia, Iran, etc.) lobby for more state control over it. The latter use cyber security as a main argument. If the international community votes in favor of their proposal, the UN mandate will cover up the aforementioned decisions on censorship and data collection¹²⁷.

Authoritarian leaders can also use “offensive” strategies in order to counter any forms of dissent. In particular, they employ armies of bots or pay influencers to discredit the image of activists. The form of censorship is called “flooding.” It interrupts oppositional discourse with messages of government propaganda, disinformation, and negative commentary.

¹²⁵ R. Deibert, *Cyberspace Under Siege*, “Journal of Democracy” 2015, 26(3), pp. 65-66; M.R.T. Soriano, *Internet as a Driver...*, op. cit., pp. 339-341; J.A. Tucker, Y. Theocharis, M.E. Roberts & P. Barberá, *From Liberation to Turmoil...*, op. cit., p. 51.

¹²⁶ R. Deibert, *Cyberspace Under Siege...*, op. cit., pp. 67-68; M.R.T. Soriano, *Internet as a Driver...*, op. cit., pp. 341-342; J.A. Tucker, Y. Theocharis, M.E. Roberts & P. Barberá, *From Liberation to Turmoil...*, op. cit., pp. 50-51; B. Hogan & J. Melville, *Social Media...*, op. cit., p. 423; G. Schleffer & B. Miller, *The Political Effects...*, op. cit., p. 94.

¹²⁷ R. Deibert, *Cyberspace Under Siege...*, op. cit., p. 70.

Moreover, threats can be sent to dissidents. Their personal information can be disclosed on social media platforms. In rare cases (e.g. elections, public demonstrations), authorities may resort to the organization of mass disruptions in the online space. One of the last options is a complete shutdown of the Internet¹²⁸.

Preference falsification in combination with the so-called “filter bubbles” of social media platforms is a dangerous advantage for authoritarian rulers facing opposition. This mechanism can make the latter believe that they have neither allies nor supporters. Furthermore, when ordinary citizens lack media literacy skills, they spread viral stories through their networks that may contain fake information. Hence, autocrats transform reality without coercion or repressions. The possibility of any collective action against them is reduced to a minimum¹²⁹.

The Chinese Communist Party is a prime example of an authoritarian actor that downplays the benefits of social media. It has created a “cyber sovereignty’ model” and set boundaries for political discourse in the country¹³⁰. Among its well-known tools is “The Great Firewall of China,” which filters “keywords and URLs to control what computer users within the country can see on the Internet”¹³¹. The continuous monitoring is carried out by several Internet Service Providers, the Cyberspace Administration of China, and other agencies embedded in government infrastructure¹³². Additionally, regular users participate in the “50-cents party.” Their mission is to patrol the net, to report breaches, and to post favorable comments about authorities¹³³. Lastly, China shares its technological capabilities with Malaysians, Ethiopians, Venezuelans and others¹³⁴.

¹²⁸ Ibidem, pp. 68-70; J.A. Tucker, Y. Theocharis, M.E. Roberts & P. Barberá, *From Liberation to Turmoil...*, op. cit., pp. 51-52; M.R.T. Soriano, *Internet as a Driver...*, op. cit., pp. 341-342.

¹²⁹ H. Farrell, *The Consequences...*, op. cit., p. 40; G. Schleffer & B. Miller, *The Political Effects...*, op. cit., pp. 82-83.

¹³⁰ G. Schleffer & B. Miller, *The Political Effects...*, op. cit., p. 95; D. Stockmann, T. Luo & M. Shen, *Designing authoritarian deliberation: how social media platforms influence political talk in China*, “Democratization” 2019, 27(2), p. 248.

¹³¹ R. Deibert, *Cyberspace Under Siege...*, op. cit., p. 65.

¹³² L. Diamond, *Liberation technology...*, op. cit., p. 73; D. Stockmann, T. Luo & M. Shen, *Designing authoritarian deliberation...*, op. cit., p. 248.

¹³³ L. Diamond, *Liberation technology...*, op. cit., p. 74; M.R.T. Soriano, *Internet as a Driver...*, op. cit., p. 340.

¹³⁴ G. Schleffer & B. Miller, *The Political Effects...*, op. cit., p. 97.

Iranian government was also among those who adopted the negative practices of various authoritarian regimes and bought surveillance technologies even from Western companies (e.g. Siemens, Nokia)¹³⁵. The filtering infrastructure of the country consists of the Supreme Council of Cyberspace, the Commission to Determine the Instances of Criminal Content, the Information and Communication Technology Ministry, as well as the Cyber Police, the Iranian Cyber Army and other institutions¹³⁶. Their censorship methods can be found in Figure 18. Consequently, Iran received one of the lowest Internet Freedom Scores (16 points in 2021-2022). It was the third after China and Myanmar¹³⁷.

Fig. 18. Internet censorship methods used by Iranian authorities (including social media)

Preventative Methods	Interceptive Methods	Reactive Methods
Methods used to prevent forbidden content from reaching Iranian users in the first place.	Methods used to monitor and block forbidden content from reaching users as they access it.	Methods of censorship and control used to respond to users after they have gained access to restricted content.
URL 'blacklist' When a user attempts to access blocked content, they are automatically redirected to a webpage managed by censors	Deep Packet Inspection Technology used to monitor, track and block internet traffic	Respond to patterns in user-behaviour Traffic analysis and DPI surveillance informs the creation of updated blacklists and filtered keywords
DNS redirection Telecommunications Infrastructure Company (TIC) is given a list of URLs, which it blocks prior to allocating bandwidth to ISPs	MITM (man-in-the-middle) Method used to intercept online communications	Arrest of internet activists and developers The state has arrested a number of cyber-activists working against online censorship
Content-control software Software used by TIC to automatically inspect, filter, and block sites	Traffic Analysis Analysis of sites that are being viewed most frequently	Periodic blocking of SSL Websites with SSL security protocols are periodically blocked inside Iran, forcing users to use insecure websites instead.
HTTP host and keyword filtering URLs and headers containing specific text are automatically filtered by TIC		Connection throttling At moments of political or social tension, connection speeds are throttled to limit online engagement
Broadband speed limitations ICT Ministry forbids speeds faster than 128kbps for home users		

Source: K. Bowen & J. Marchant, *Internet censorship in Iran: Preventative, Interceptive, and Reactive*, [in:] B. Robertson & J. Marchant (Eds.), *Revolution decoded: Iran's digital media landscape*, Small Media, 2015.

¹³⁵ L. Diamond, *Liberation technology...*, op. cit., p. 81.

¹³⁶ A. Akbari & R. Gabdulhakov, *Platform surveillance and resistance in Iran and Russia: The case of Telegram*, "Surveillance & Society" 2019, 17(1/2), pp. 224-225; K. Bowen & J. Marchant, *Internet censorship in Iran: Preventative, Interceptive, and Reactive*, [in:] B. Robertson & J. Marchant (Eds.), *Revolution decoded: Iran's digital media landscape*, Small Media, 2015, p. 20.

¹³⁷ Freedom House, *Internet Freedom Scores*, <https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores> (accessed on 22.12.2022).

The Russian model of Internet control is similar to the Iranian one and cheaper than the Chinese one. Authorities try to subdue the information environment through laws and intimidation. The Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Mass Media (Roskomnadzor), as the leading body of censorship, issues warnings to websites, blocks them, as well as constantly updates the list of “extremist” ones¹³⁸. It includes Facebook and Instagram, but excludes YouTube, WhatsApp and the Chinese platform TikTok. The executive body restricted access to X (Twitter) without any labels¹³⁹. Moreover, an alternative search engine Yandex was probably developed to collect more data about users. The popular local social network Vkontake came under the control of pro-Kremlin forces (VK, previously known as Mail.ru Group) for the same purpose¹⁴⁰.

An attempt by the Russian authorities to restrict Telegram failed successfully. The messenger continued to work stably during the ban. According to the official wording, it was later unblocked due to “the readiness of the Telegram founder to counter terrorism and extremism”¹⁴¹. However, the real reason can be its potential benefit to the authorities. In particular, political elites use the messenger for internal and external communication. They post their viewpoints and monitor opposition sentiments. A significant influence on public opinion occurs through anonymous channels that leak dirty information about opponents of the regime¹⁴².

Autocrats use social media not only to consolidate power, but also to undermine the stability of democratic countries around the world. It is possible due to the ability of the technology to disseminate information across borders from any location. One way is to establish the support of local political actors who share the same views and can promote relevant narratives among the target group of citizens on these platforms. Another way is to buy

¹³⁸ G. Schleffer & B. Miller, *The Political Effects...*, op. cit., p. 97; A. Akbari & R. Gabdulhakov, *Platform surveillance...*, op. cit., pp. 226, 229; A. Krzywdzińska, *Roskomnadzor kontra zachodnie serwisy społecznościowe w Rosji*, [in:] M. Nowina Konopka, W. Świerczyńska-Głównia, & A. Hess (Eds.), *Nowa rewolucja komunikacyjna*, Uniwersytet Jagielloński w Krakowie, Kraków 2023.

¹³⁹ Reuters, *Russia finds Meta guilty of “extremist activity” but WhatsApp can stay*, <https://www.reuters.com/technology/meta-asks-russian-court-dismiss-proceedings-extremism-case-reports-2022-03-21/> (accessed on 23.12.2022).

¹⁴⁰ A. Akbari & R. Gabdulhakov, *Platform surveillance...*, op. cit., pp. 226-227.

¹⁴¹ Durov on Telegram unblocking in Russia: confidentiality, privacy of correspondence remain messenger’s fundamental principle, <https://interfax.com/newsroom/top-stories/69083/> (accessed on 23.12.2022).

¹⁴² A. Salikov, *Telegram as a Means...*, op. cit., pp. 103-104.

knowledge from the private companies in order to adjust the effectiveness of fake news, manipulations and other types of content in a desired information space. For example, the Russian Internet Research Agency used Facebook tools to spread propaganda in the US during the 2016 presidential election. The so-called “internet trolls” also conducted disinformation campaigns in Ukraine. Ironically, it was relatively easy for them to interfere because freedom of expression can create problems for the security of democratic institutions¹⁴³.

Internal challengers in liberal countries are another group that got a voice thanks to social media. It includes populists, far right extremists and other “alternative” movements. Their main goals are to gain supporters, to weaken democratic ideas, and to turn democracy into an illiberal or even authoritarian regime. Representatives of these groups have their own practices of using online platforms and adopt successful strategies from democrats and autocrats. They also learned to “play” by the rules of social media. In particular, TikTok requires communication through short videos, while X (Twitter) allows users to post tweets with a limited number of characters. It benefits the authoritarian forces too. After all, these developments force democratic leaders to think about the regulation of cyberspace¹⁴⁴.

There will always be optimists and pessimists in the debate about democratization with the use of social media. Indeed, it is difficult to determine the specific “effects” caused by this tool in the complex information environment of today. However, it cannot be denied that these platforms provide humanity with the fastest information from anywhere in the world. The author personally knows about every air raid siren in the warring native city of Kyiv, while writing this PhD dissertation in Poznan. It is also difficult ignore the fact that social media are practically the only chance to maintain communication between representatives of the Belarusian opposition (mostly external) and its citizens (those who stayed and those who left). And no one can avoid mentioning in the discussion that a young generation spends most of its time on phones or tablets, watching videos on YouTube or recording another tiktok. Therefore, this technology has become an integral part of present and future life.

¹⁴³ G. Schleffer & B. Miller, *The Political Effects...*, op. cit., pp. 81, 94, 97-99; P. Pospieszna & A. Galus, *'Liberation Technology'...*, op. cit., p. 1675.

¹⁴⁴ J.A. Tucker, Y. Theocharis, M.E. Roberts & P. Barberá, *From Liberation to Turmoil...*, op. cit., pp. 47, 52-54; G. Schleffer & B. Miller, *The Political Effects...*, op. cit., pp. 83, 86, 90, 97.

The next subchapter focuses on specific examples of its use for political communication. There are numerous online strategies developed by various actors from different parts of the world. It is important to identify their specific elements and transform them into categories for content analysis of Ukrainian and Belarusian posts.

2.4 Elements of communication strategies on social media in world politics

Social media platforms went through several stages until they were recognized and adopted. Initially, it was important that this tool became popular among mass society. After that, advertisers got a reason to develop strategies for working in this market. Although politicians have comfortably occupied television, they have not been able to escape “the social media revolution.” As mentioned before, some of them still prefer one-way communication to interaction. However, to be competitive today means to have a social media page. This principle determines their presence online.

US Senator Howard Dean was first to discover the significant potential of modern technologies for political communication. The Politico website even called him “the father of all Web campaigns”¹⁴⁵. During the 2004 Democratic primaries, Dean was able to raise about 40 million dollars and connect voters via Deanspace and Meetup platforms¹⁴⁶. In addition, his website DemocracyForAmerica.com demonstrated the possibilities of using the Web 2.0 technology through a blog format¹⁴⁷.

Barack Obama was the candidate who developed Dean’s practices during the 2008 US presidential election, or during the first recognized Internet election¹⁴⁸. The success was possible thanks to better technological capabilities. Initially, a video announcement of his campaign was posted on the website of the Democratic National Committee. Among other things, the YouTube channel were used to distribute ads and documentaries, as well as to upload recordings of offline events. Influential singers and songwriters shared compositions about Obama on the platform. Nonetheless, the main strategy of the campaign was to build

¹⁴⁵ S. Friess, *The father of all Web campaigns*, <https://www.politico.com/story/2012/09/how-deans-wh-bid-gave-birth-to-web-campaigning-081834> (accessed on 05.01.2023).

¹⁴⁶ P.O. Costa, *Barack Obama’s use of the Internet is transforming political communication*, “Quaderns del CAC” 2009, 12(33), p. 36.

¹⁴⁷ J.G. Billings, *An Agent of Democracy...*, op. cit., p. 19.

¹⁴⁸ G. Gonçalves, *Political communication...*, op. cit., p. 3.

online communities and networks of voters. For example, the Facebook group “Students for Barack Obama” proved its effectiveness among young people. Although the candidate himself was represented on 15 social media platforms, his team went further and developed my.barackobama.com, an analogue of the social network. The latter collected information about voters in a database. It offered the following functions: create a profile of a person (define a role in the campaign), write a blog (with proposals and opinions), join a group (different segments of the society), donate money to the campaign (fundraising), and receive a task (e.g. contact with voters)¹⁴⁹. As mentioned earlier, Obama’s online strategy was considered as a turning point in the development of political communication. Despite all this, the subchapter is not limited to the American trends. It tries to find valuable components in already formed communication strategies of political actors from different parts of the world.

One of the most important elements for any political actor is a well-chosen message. The functional theory considers it as a means of influencing consumers. Since the main goal of candidates is to be known and perceived better than their opponents, prospective voters learn about them from various sources of information (see Chapter 1). The latter include three types of messages: attacks, acclaims, and defenses. Each of them can be related either to character (personal qualities, ideals, leadership ability) or to policy (past deeds, future plans, general goals)¹⁵⁰. Their examples are shown in Figure 19. As reported by Rossini et al.¹⁵¹, better positions in the opinion polls contributed to the change of strategy of American politicians from neutral to persuasive on X (Twitter) and Facebook during the early stages of the 2016 presidential election. The popular candidates were more likely to send messages that defend them and, especially, attack their opponents. They also focused more on image issues rather than political positions. In the case of Taiwanese politicians, challengers attacked more than incumbents who spread acclaims and defenses. Their Web 1.0 campaign contained mostly policy messages, while Web 2.0 campaign – character messages¹⁵².

¹⁴⁹ L.L. Frankel & D.S. Hillygus, *Niche Communication...*, op. cit., pp. 186-187; J.G. Billings, *An Agent of Democracy...*, op. cit., pp. 20-23; P.O. Costa, *Barack Obama's...*, op. cit., pp. 37-38.

¹⁵⁰ W.L. Benoit, *The Functional Theory...*, op. cit., pp. 195-206.

¹⁵¹ P. Rossini, J. Hemsley, S. Tanupabrungrun, F. Zhang & J. Stromer-Galley, *Social media, opinion polls, and the use of persuasive messages during the 2016 US election primaries*, “Social Media + Society” 2018, 4(3).

¹⁵² W.C. Wen, *Facebook political communication in Taiwan: 1.0/2.0 messages and election/post-election messages*, “Chinese Journal of Communication” 2013, 7(1), pp. 19–39.

Fig. 19. Examples of messages about policy and character

	Policy	Character
Acclaim	"I will reduce inflation."	"I will always be honest with you."
Attack	"Job creation fell during my opponent's administration."	"My opponent cannot be trusted."
Defend	"My opponent is wrong to say I raised taxes."	"It is simply false to say I don't care about people."

Source: W.L. Benoit, *The Functional Theory of Political Campaign Communication*, "Oxford Handbooks Online" 2014.

The 2014 general elections were characterized by significant use of X (Twitter) in India. Its main function was to inform followers through original tweets and retweets. On the one hand, the winning party (Bharatiya Janata) managed to combine the personalization of its leader, a focus on youth issues (e.g. employment and economic development), and the targeting of voters on this platform. Additionally, it enabled the newly formed party (Aam Aadmi) to compete in online debates, promote itself, gain recognition from traditional media, interact with people, and call them to vote. On the other hand, a ruling party (Indian National Congress) chose the tactic of criticism that replicated the behavior of traditional media. It could be the reason for losing the largest number of seats in the parliament¹⁵³. A comparison can be made with the cross-national research of parliamentary campaigns in 2013 and 2015 on Facebook. The authors concluded that a more traditional information strategy characterized Polish parties, while Czech parties used this social network to mobilize supporters¹⁵⁴.

Several factors can influence the decision to make a particular post. They were identified in the study of Polish parties, which covered the strategies of the non-election period on the

¹⁵³ S. Ahmed, K. Jaidka & J. Cho, *The 2014 Indian elections on Twitter: A comparison of campaign strategies of political parties*, "Telematics and Informatics" 2016, 33(4), pp. 1071–1087.

¹⁵⁴ V. Stetka, P. Surowiec & J. Mazák, *Facebook as an instrument of election campaigning and voters' engagement: Comparing Czechia and Poland*, "European Journal of Communication" 2018, 34(2), pp. 121–141.

same platform¹⁵⁵. The general trend showed that these political entities published issues related to the context of competition at that time. They emphasized their strong topics and ignored those that might reveal weaknesses. The corresponding division can be traced historically. Another factor was the position of the party in the political system (government-mainstream opposition, challenger).

The characteristics of successful political posts on Facebook were determined by Nave, Shifman and Tenenboim-Weinblatt¹⁵⁶. It was a study of the profiles of Israeli politicians. According to the results, factors that can increase the likeability of a message include implied emotions (the experience of feelings), humor (e.g. mockery, irony), personal exposure (personal details), personal stance (personal opinion or position), use of first person (e.g. “I,” “we”), and anger-evoking cues (demonstration of wrongdoing that should trigger a negative attitude towards responsible people). Most of them are associated with attributes of self-presentation. Specifically, if the use of humor has been a successful tactic for left-wing politicians, the same can be said about out-group reference for right-wing politicians. In contrast, the presence of visual elements and the short size of posts showed a negative trend.

Moving on to specifics, Gerbaudo, Marogna and Alzetta¹⁵⁷ analyzed the emotions of political posts during the 2017 UK election. They identified positive themes (e.g. higher social expenditures, call to vote) and terminology (e.g. “hope,” “care”) as characteristics of the Labor strategy. Personalization of the party leader was also found in their messages. Alternatively, the Conservatives focused on national security and Brexit, which are negative topics. After all, the results confirmed the effectiveness of the first approach. It means that so-called “positive posting” can be an indicator of greater engagement, which contradicts the results of other scientific papers¹⁵⁸.

¹⁵⁵ W. Rafałowski, *Parties' Issue Emphasis Strategies on Facebook*, “East European Politics and Societies: And Cultures” 2019, 34(1), pp. 96–123.

¹⁵⁶ N.N. Nave, L. Shifman & K. Tenenboim-Weinblatt, *Talking It Personally: Features of Successful Political Posts on Facebook*, “Social Media + Society” 2018, 4(3), 205630511878477.

¹⁵⁷ P. Gerbaudo, F. Marogna & C. Alzetta, *When “Positive posting” attracts voters: user engagement and emotions in the 2017 UK election campaign on Facebook*, “Social Media + Society” 2019, 5(4).

¹⁵⁸ P. Baranowski, S. Kruschinski, U. Russmann, J. Haßler, M. Magin, B. Márton, A. Ceron, D. Jackson & D. Lilleker, *Patterns of Negative Campaigning during the 2019 European Election: Political Parties' Facebook Posts and Users' Sharing Behaviour across Twelve Countries*, “Journal of Information Technology & Politics” 2022, pp. 1–18; A. Ceron & G. D'Adda, *E-campaigning on Twitter: The effectiveness of distributive promises and negative campaign in the 2013 Italian election*, “New Media & Society” 2016, 18(9), pp. 1935–1955; P.

It also seems that people are tired of too formal communication style. They want some entertainment. On the contrary, as another study shows, the language cannot be completely informal. Voters still expect a certain level of professionalism from politicians. Using only colloquial language can lead to a decrease in trust and support¹⁵⁹.

A well-known example of a negative communication is populism. It relies on closeness to “the people,” demonization of “the elites,” and critical attitudes toward dangerous “out-groups”¹⁶⁰. Among other things, Bracciale and Martella¹⁶¹ described 4 populist political communication styles on X/Twitter (Figure 20). Jakubowski added elements such as the “Heartland” category (Internet as the infrastructure and organizational foundation of society), the limitation of the gatekeeper function, cognitive emancipation (independence of knowledge from the elite thanks to social media), “Stammtisch” (simplification and emotional character of messages), the strategy of an exceptional personal image, as well as close ties with pop culture¹⁶². It is important that the presence of populist components does not mean that a politician has adopted the corresponding ideology. Even non-populist actors can use them¹⁶³.

In general, Western political leaders had more populist elements in their Facebook posts than Latin American political figures¹⁶⁴. Furthermore, Casero-Ripollés, Sintés-Olivella and

Nulty, Y. Theocharis, S. A. Popa, O. Parnet & K. Benoit, *Social media and political communication in the 2014 elections to the European Parliament*, “Electoral Studies” 2016, 44, p. 443.

¹⁵⁹ O.M. Bullock & A. Y. Hubner, *Candidates’ use of informal communication on social media reduces credibility and support: Examining the consequences of expectancy violations*, “Communication Research Reports” 2020, 37(3), pp. 87–98.

¹⁶⁰ S. Bennett, A. Lipiński, A. Stępińska, D. Abadi, T. Gammeltoft-Hansen, N. Hubé, M. Baloge, G. Bobba, Eg. Butkevičienė, Ch. Brands, et al., *Populist Communication on Social Media*, [Research Report] Center for Social Sciences, Center of Excellence of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (Hungary), 2020, halshs-02735283, p. 8; E. Block & R. Negrine, *The populist communication style: Toward a critical framework*, “International journal of communication systems” 2017, 11, p. 179.

¹⁶¹ R. Bracciale & A. Martella, *Define the populist political communication style: the case of Italian political leaders on Twitter*, “Information, Communication & Society” 2017, 20(9), pp. 1310–1329.

¹⁶² J.J. Jakubowski, *Populizm i social media – małżeństwo z rozsądku?* „Kwartalnik Naukowy OAP UW „e-Politikon” 2017, no. XXIV, pp. 30–58.

¹⁶³ See also: A. Stępińska, *Populist Political Communication across Europe: Contexts and Contents*, Peter Lang Group AG, 2020; A. Stępińska, A. Lipiński, D. Piontek & A. Hess, *Populist Political Communication in Poland: Political Actors–Media–Citizens*, Logos Verlag Berlin GmbH, 2020.

¹⁶⁴ M. Zulianello, A. Albertini & D. Ceccobelli, *A Populist Zeitgeist? The Communication Strategies of Western and Latin American Political Leaders on Facebook*, “The International Journal of Press/Politics” 2018, 23(4), pp. 439–457.

Franch¹⁶⁵ presented a specific case from Europe. They analyzed the X/Twitter profiles of Podemos (a Spanish populist party) and Pablo Iglesias (its leader). Those two complemented each other in terms of strategy. While the former actor criticized the ruling elites, the latter tried to connect with people through personal life stories (showing that Iglesias is one of them). In contrast to right-wing populism, the recognizable features of left-wing populism were the desire to reform democracy and the rejection of xenophobic rhetoric.

Fig. 20. Populist political communication styles in Italian politics

Name	Characteristics	Example
“Engaging” style	It can be described as an interrogative and non-aggressive style towards others. It is centered on self-promotion and support for one’s own political party. A politician encourages supporters to act, and others (e.g. opponents, media, citizens) to interact. The social media profile constantly informs followers about the candidate’s activities and refers to the campaign management and performance.	Georgia Meloni (Brothers of Italy, conservative).
“Intimate” style	It can be characterized as a neutral style. A politician focuses on intimate and personal life stories. Other elements include storytelling, emotionalization, chit-chat and gossiping, as well as references to current non-political issues (e.g. sport, TV shows).	Nichi Vendola (Left Ecology Freedom, left-wing), Matteo Renzi (Democratic Party, centre-left-wing).
“Man on the street” style	It is an aggressive style towards “out-groups.” Vulgar language,	Matteo Salvini (Northern League, right-wing).

¹⁶⁵ A. Casero-Ripollés, M. Sintés-Olivella & P. Franch, *The populist political communication style in action: Podemos’s issues and functions on Twitter during the 2016 Spanish general election*, “American Behavioral Scientist” 2017, 61(9), pp. 986–1001.

	satire and irony are integrated into social media posts. The main appeal is to negative feelings and emotions of the people. It includes references to specific problems and possible solutions, as well as political bias and cherry-picking fallacy (selection of only profitable arguments) based on current events. A politician tries to set an agenda.	
“Champion of the people” style	It is centered on attacking the elite and referring to the people. A politician can be compared to a taboo breaker who fights against political correctness. The main topic is politics and everything related to it. The style implies simplification and informality. The politician intervenes in different types of problems.	Beppe Grillo (Five Star Movement, neither right-wing nor left-wing).

Source: Own elaboration based on R. Bracciale & A. Martella, *Define the populist political communication style: the case of Italian political leaders on Twitter*, “Information, Communication & Society” 2017, 20(9).

One of the latest conclusions was confirmed in a more broad research of Spanish political communication on X (Twitter). Indeed, the newly emerged parties complemented their leaders and vice versa, while the representatives of old camps shared the same information. In addition, there were three other significant findings. First, Web 2.0 did not lead to diversification of the agenda, at least in Spain. Podemos was the only party that offered more than a few topics to its followers. Second, political actors prioritized form (attractiveness) over content (concrete proposals) in their messages, which is the feature of the game frame. Third, interests of the audience did not correspond to the thematic filling of political profiles. The greatest engagement was caused by posts from the category of “others” and with

humorous notes¹⁶⁶. To sum up, Spanish representatives did not use X (Twitter) with maximum efficacy during the 2016 elections.

The opposite can be stated about former UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, or the so-called “celebrity politician,” closely associated with populism. His entertaining image has proven to be popular among modern voters. In their research, Wood, Corbett and Flinders noted a further shift from the type of “superstar celebrity politician” to “everyday celebrity politician.” The adaptation of the so-called “normality” was a kind of reaction to “the crisis of ‘being human.’” Johnson built this picture over the years using at least three successful elements. He changed his communication with voters from one-way to two-way by creating an X (Twitter) account. Followers were invited to ask questions once a month during his tenure as Mayor of London. Next, the politician used “the ‘spontaneous’ marketing technique” and always found himself in curious situations. It only emphasized his informality and authenticity. Finally, he tried to show emotional closeness with people, excluding any manifestations of superiority¹⁶⁷. As a result, Johnson won hearts of Londoners, Britons and even Ukrainians.

X (Twitter), as well as businessperson and entrepreneur identities, were among the elements of the successful construction of the Donald Trump brand in 2016-2017. He combined the traits of the superstar and the everyday celebrity politician, which led to the emergence of a “superhero anti-politician celebrity.” The concept centers on an ordinary member of the public (1) who has exceptional abilities (2) to save the country. These two components allow Trump to be flexible when communicating with potential voters. The main enemy is incompetent traditional politicians. Instead, it is enough to have the only one strong leader, a different other, with past successes and future solutions. This person bets on unilateralism and confrontation¹⁶⁸.

¹⁶⁶ L. Alonso-Muñoz & A. Casero-Ripollés, *Political agenda on Twitter during the 2016 Spanish elections: issues, strategies, and users' responses*, “Communication & Society” 2018, 31 (3), pp. 7-25.

¹⁶⁷ M. Wood, J. Corbett & M. Flinders, *Just like us: Everyday celebrity politicians and the pursuit of popularity in an age of anti-politics*, “The British Journal of Politics and International Relations” 2016, 18(3), pp. 581–598.

¹⁶⁸ A. Schneiker, *Telling the Story of the Superhero and the Anti-Politician as President: Donald Trump's Branding on Twitter*, “Political Studies Review” 2018, 17(3), pp. 210–223.

Analyzing the literature and media, it becomes noticeable that the online environment contributes to the transformation of the party-centric style of communication (from Western countries) to the candidate-centric style of communication (from the United States) in the whole world¹⁶⁹. One of its types is self-personalization. Metz, Kruikemeier and Lecheler distinguish three levels of this process: professional (description of the professional qualities of a certain political actor), private (stories from/about life), and emotional (filling posts with emotions). A German example showed that the first one was often used by politicians, but did not contribute to greater audience engagement. The second one provoked the engagement of the audience, but was rarely used. The most balanced was the third – emotional level. Additionally, visuals often complemented posts with self-personalization on Facebook¹⁷⁰. They strengthen the idea embedded in the message.

Bright self-expression manifests itself in other variants as well. One of the most prominent genres of political humor in the online space is memes or, in other words, “viral images, videos, and catchphrases under constant modification by users, and with a propensity to travel as fast as the Internet can move them”¹⁷¹. They are not just visuals, but a reflection of public thoughts and ideas, which can take the form of cartoons, excerpts from movies, hashtags, etc.¹⁷² Their creators most often produce memes that depict someone’s situation in a positive (affiliative) or negative way (aggressive). It is a wrong tactic because the audience likes to share self-defeating memes. At the same time, creators mostly turn to sarcasm and silliness as the main humorous types¹⁷³. When politicians assume this role, they use memes to clarify complex terms, promote their policies and ideas, reduce tensions, deal with their own criticism, and attack opponents¹⁷⁴. Among famous examples are Obama, Trump, as well as

¹⁶⁹ R. Karlsen, *Obama’s Online Success and European Party Organizations: Adoption and Adaptation of U.S. Online Practices in the Norwegian Labor Party*, “Journal of Information Technology & Politics” 2013, 10(2), pp. 158–170; S. Vincent, *#Personal vs #Party: A comparative study of candidates’ new media campaigning in Japan and the United Kingdom*, “Open Political Science” 2020, 4(1), pp. 1–14.

¹⁷⁰ M. Metz, S. Kruikemeier & S. Lecheler, *Personalization of politics on Facebook: examining the content and effects of professional, emotional and private self-personalization*, “Information, Communication & Society” 2019, 23(10), pp. 1481–1498.

¹⁷¹ X. Martínez-Rolán & T. Piñeiro-Otero, *The use of memes in the discourse of political parties on Twitter: analysing the 2015 state of the nation debate*, “Communication & Society” 2016, 29(1), pp. 145–160.

¹⁷² Ibidem, p. 147; M. Moody-Ramirez & A.B. Church, *Analysis of Facebook Meme Groups Used During the 2016 US Presidential Election*, “Social Media + Society” 2019, 5(1), 205630511880879, p. 3.

¹⁷³ V. Taecharungroj & P. Nueangjamnong, *Humour 2.0: Styles and Types of Humour and Virality of Memes on Facebook*, “Journal of Creative Communications” 2015, 10(3), pp. 288–302.

¹⁷⁴ M. Moody-Ramirez & A.B. Church, *Analysis of Facebook Meme...*, op. cit., p. 1; X. Martínez-Rolán & T. Piñeiro-Otero, *The use of memes...*, op. cit., pp. 145–160.

Spanish political parties. Memes are supposed to reveal positive emotions. The main effect of memes is the release of positive emotions in people¹⁷⁵. However, sarcasm and irony have negative connotations. Memes cease to exist with the loss of virality¹⁷⁶.

Generally, Instagram is a perfect example of an image-oriented platform that expands the communication capabilities of political actors. Its visual form reveals certain points that cannot be conveyed through text. Among this content, posts with a face (preferably a large one, belong to a politician) and emotions (positive and negative) arouse the greatest interest. If the text form is more likely to boost comments, then the presence of graphic elements causes a high number of likes. Audience, as in other social media, wants to see non-political photos and videos. Posts about personal life are an element of surprise from politicians¹⁷⁷. Thus, digital storytelling is one of the production forms that was adopted during the 2016 presidential elections in Austria. Future president Alexander Van der Bellen designed his Instagram profile as a visual diary available to followers. It consisted of photos, videos and, oddly enough, GIFs. Some of the posts demonstrated the professional side of the candidate (biographical strategy). Others focused on his team professionals (team strategy). Since the first results were annulled, Van der Bellen decided to act as a winner during the second attempt (incumbent strategy). His profile contained many links (e.g. to a fan shop, to other social media) and announcements¹⁷⁸. Despite all these facts, the interactivity function was rather irrelevant on this platform¹⁷⁹. It echoes the results from Facebook and X (Twitter).

According to the popular opinion, social media are adopted by political actors to interact with supporters (see Chapter 1). Available options include mentions, replies, shares, hashtags, and favorites. Nevertheless, this is only true to a certain extent because, as researches have shown once again, political representatives are not willing to use the full communication potential of new platforms. For instance, it was confirmed in a study of Spanish politicians on

¹⁷⁵ V. Taecharungroj & P. Nueangjamnong, *Humour 2.0...*, op. cit., p. 292.

¹⁷⁶ X. Martínez-Rolán & T. Piñeiro-Otero, *The use of memes...*, op. cit., p. 146.

¹⁷⁷ Y. Peng, *What Makes Politicians' Instagram Posts Popular? Analyzing Social Media Strategies of Candidates and Office Holders with Computer Vision*, "The International Journal of Press/Politics" 2020, 26(1), pp. 143–166.

¹⁷⁸ K. Liebhart & P. Bernhardt, *Political Storytelling on Instagram: Key Aspects of Alexander Van der Bellen's Successful 2016 Presidential Election Campaign*, "Media and Communication" 2017, 5(4), pp. 15–25.

¹⁷⁹ A. Pineda, E. Bellido-Pérez & A.I. Barragán-Romero, "Backstage moments during the campaign": *The interactive use of Instagram by Spanish political leaders*, "New Media & Society" 2020, 24(5), pp. 1133–1160.

X/Twitter, where they preferred to use a hybrid media logic¹⁸⁰. Similar results were shown by Norwegian politicians on Facebook¹⁸¹. They were in line with the normalization hypothesis, which suggested that traditional campaign techniques were replicated in the online space¹⁸². Among the reasons for maintaining one-way communication could be negative consequences for political campaigns due to a failed response, arrogance of politicians due to the length of time in power, or simply ignorance of new technologies. Furthermore, the study of Bright et al.¹⁸³ did not show significant effect of interaction on winning more votes. It can only convince political actors that their strategy is the only right one.

Hashtags were analyzed more specifically in the context of Norwegian media environment. As a result, local politicians included them in tweets in a way that matched their traditional roles and professional norms. They retweeted popular ones, but did not take the initiative to create new ones. The function of agenda-setting was left to journalists. Consciously or unconsciously, political representatives have taken a secondary role online¹⁸⁴. However, this is not always the case. The results of the study, which focused on the 2018 Italian general election, showed that parties and candidates were able to raise awareness of their policy issues via X/Twitter and Facebook¹⁸⁵.

While a negative general trend is visible, there are still those who are more willing to use the interactive potential of social media (in line with an innovation hypothesis). This list comprises challengers and small parties of the new formation. They see the tool as an opportunity to run campaigns with little financial resources. Even bad PR matters to them. In addition, profile of a specific person provokes more user engagement than the profile of a

¹⁸⁰ L. Alonso-Muñoz & A. Casero-Ripollés, *Political agenda...*, op. cit., pp. 7-25.

¹⁸¹ B. Kalsnes, *The Social Media Paradox Explained: Comparing Political Parties' Facebook Strategy Versus Practice*, "Social Media + Society" 2016, 2(2), 205630511664461.

¹⁸² S.Y.B. Lam, M.F.M. Cheung & W.H. Lo, *What matters most in the responses to political campaign posts on social media: The candidate, message frame, or message format?* "Computers in Human Behavior" 2021, 121, 106800, pp. 2-3; M. Karlsson & J. Åström, *Social media...*, op. cit., pp. 305-323.

¹⁸³ J. Bright, S. Hale, B. Ganesh, A. Bulovsky, H. Margetts & P. Howard, *Does campaigning on social media make a difference? Evidence from candidate use of Twitter during the 2015 and 2017 U.K. elections*, "Communication Research" 2019, 47(7), pp. 988-1009.

¹⁸⁴ G. Enli & C. A. Simonsen, *'Social media logic' meets professional norms: Twitter hashtags usage by journalists and politicians*, "Information, Communication & Society" 2017, 21(8), pp. 1081-1096.

¹⁸⁵ S. Bentivegna, R. Marchetti & A. Stanziano, *The Agenda-Building Power of Facebook and Twitter*, [in:] D. Taras, R. Davis, *Electoral Campaigns, Media, and the New World of Digital Politics*, University of Michigan Press, 2022, pp. 124-142.

political party. The same can be applied to the presence of messages with positive and negative emotional tone, humor, long length (in accordance with the previous results), as well as reasoning and references to competing actors¹⁸⁶.

A political campaign can also be promoted through social media advertising. The main goal is to convince as many potential voters as possible. It can take the form of a regular post that appears in the feeds of other users through subscriptions, reposts, or a high number of likes. A specific message can be boosted among an already formed audience. Moreover, Facebook offers the possibility of paid advertisements. It is marked as “sponsored” or “promoted.” The main difference from sponsored posts is the ability to target prioritized users based on selected characteristics. Even interests and behavior patterns can be specified¹⁸⁷. However, political teams pay most attention to gender and age (with an emphasis on youth), previous level of support, electoral system and geographical location (in some cases) when determining the target audience¹⁸⁸. Another name of this process is data-driven political advertising, where user data becomes the main “currency” for political actors. It can deepen information asymmetry by showing certain ads to specific groups of people while ignoring others¹⁸⁹. According to a study of Baviera, Sánchez-Junqueras and Rosso, Spanish political parties use ads to mobilize voters. They prefer images of candidates rather than policy issues. The topics of their messages correspond to the ideologies of the parties¹⁹⁰. If German incumbent parties try to spread positive content, opposition turns to negative original posts, sponsored posts, and paid ads. The latter cover the well-established issues¹⁹¹. Despite the fact that social media advertising opportunities facilitate the spread of fake news and

¹⁸⁶ B. Kalsnes, *The Social Media Paradox Explained: Comparing Political Parties' Facebook Strategy Versus Practice*, “Social Media + Society” 2016, 2(2), 20563051166446; R. Heiss, D. Schmuck & J. Matthes, *What drives interaction in political actors' Facebook posts? Profile and content predictors of user engagement and political actors' reactions*, “Information, Communication & Society” 2018, 22(10), pp. 1497–1513.

¹⁸⁷ S. Kruschinski, J. Haßler, P. Jost & M. Sülflow, *Posting or Advertising? How political parties adapt their messaging strategies to Facebook's organic and paid media affordances*, “Journal of Political Marketing” 2022, pp. 3-4.

¹⁸⁸ S. Stuckelberger & J. Koedam, *Parties' voter targeting strategies: What can facebook ads tell us?* “Electoral Studies” 2022, 77, 102473.

¹⁸⁹ S. Minihold, S. Lecheler, C. de Vreese, & S. Kruikemeier, *Exploring digital campaign competence: the role of knowledge in data-driven election campaigns*, “Journal of Information Technology & Politics” 2024, pp. 1-2.

¹⁹⁰ T. Baviera, J. Sánchez-Junqueras & P. Rosso, *Political advertising on social media: Issues sponsored on Facebook ads during the 2019 General Elections in Spain*, “Communication & Society” 2022, 35(3), pp. 39–49.

¹⁹¹ S. Kruschinski, J. Haßler, P. Jost & M. Sülflow, *Posting or Advertising...*, op. cit., pp. 1–21.

disinformation, they contribute to the competitiveness of small political actors during the election period¹⁹².

Another part of the promotion strategy is the selection of content to share on social media profiles. In particular, Heidenreich et al.¹⁹³ paid attention to news items. They analyzed Facebook posts from representatives of Spain, Germany and the UK. As a result, three factors can increase the likelihood of sharing a specific journalistic material. First, if it includes an issue associated with a political party. Second, if it directly mentions a political party. Third, if a particular media outlet is linked to a political party. Furthermore, politicians prefer to distribute longer articles.

Political campaigns have increasingly started to involve real third parties as well, namely online influencers, who help to gain support from a new target audience. These are usually amateurs from various fields (e.g. comedy, fitness, travel, family). The number of their followers varies from several million (very popular) to several thousand (local leaders). This indicator of trust, real or boosted, attracts the attention of politicians. In particular, American president Biden cooperated with them during the 2020 election. First, he participated in joint live broadcasts with influencers on Instagram, Facebook and YouTube. Second, influencers discussed his candidacy on separate live streams with celebrity guests. Third, influencers traditionally called to vote for Biden. Unlike official accounts, they presented messages in a natural style. It created the sense of trust between them and the audience¹⁹⁴. Additionally, people repeat certain actions more willingly if the information comes from a familiar person¹⁹⁵.

¹⁹² N.M. Brodnax & P. Sapiezynski, *From Home Base to Swing States: The Evolution of Digital Advertising Strategies during the 2020 US Presidential Primary*, "Political Research Quarterly" 2022, 75(2), p. 476.

¹⁹³ T. Heidenreich, J.M. Eberl, P. Tolochko, F. Lind & H.G. Boomgaarden, *My Voters Should See This! What News Items Are Shared by Politicians on Facebook?* "The International Journal of Press/Politics" 2022, 194016122211047.

¹⁹⁴ R. Heilweil, *Joe Biden recruits Instagram influencers like Keke Palmer for campaign*, <https://www.vox.com/recode/21429755/influencers-joe-biden-democrats-pacs-social-media-facebook-instagram-campaign> (accessed on 10.01.2023).

¹⁹⁵ The theory of social proof by Robert Cialdini. In: R.B. Cialdini, *Influence: science and practice* (5th ed.), Pearson Education, 2009, p. 99.

Weismueller et al.¹⁹⁶ examined the tweets of influencers in order to provide recommendations for improving their political communication. The authors concluded that content with emotions, especially positive ones, spreads better than content with arguments. It only confirms the above-mentioned opinion that people are not interested in the political agenda of the candidates. Instead, they want to get the feeling of closeness and togetherness. Other factors include a large number of followers and a dominant language style that shape the online authority of an influential user. All of them should be considered by political teams. It can improve the effectiveness of influencers and increase the chances of candidates in the short-term perspective, at least.

Bots are a new weapon in the toolkit of political representatives that draws a clear line between traditional media and social media. Their name comes from the word “robots.” These automated scripts replace humans in order to perform online tasks. In particular, they interact with the target audience on political topics. One of the main goals is to influence public opinion. A more detailed list is presented in Figure 21. Profiles of bots mimic actions of real users (e.g. making posts, sharing links). Nonetheless, they are often incomplete in terms of personal information¹⁹⁷.

Thanks to new digital technologies, political campaigns can also be transformed into permanent ones. They are referred to as the “election year effect” and “every day is election day,” implying the continued support of the high public interest¹⁹⁸. Hence, political entities should apply the same strategies and tools listed above in election and various non-election periods. However, differences were found in the tweets of American politicians. Members of Congress posted more frequently during the routine period than during the election period. They preferred messaging about their own country and hard news outside of the political

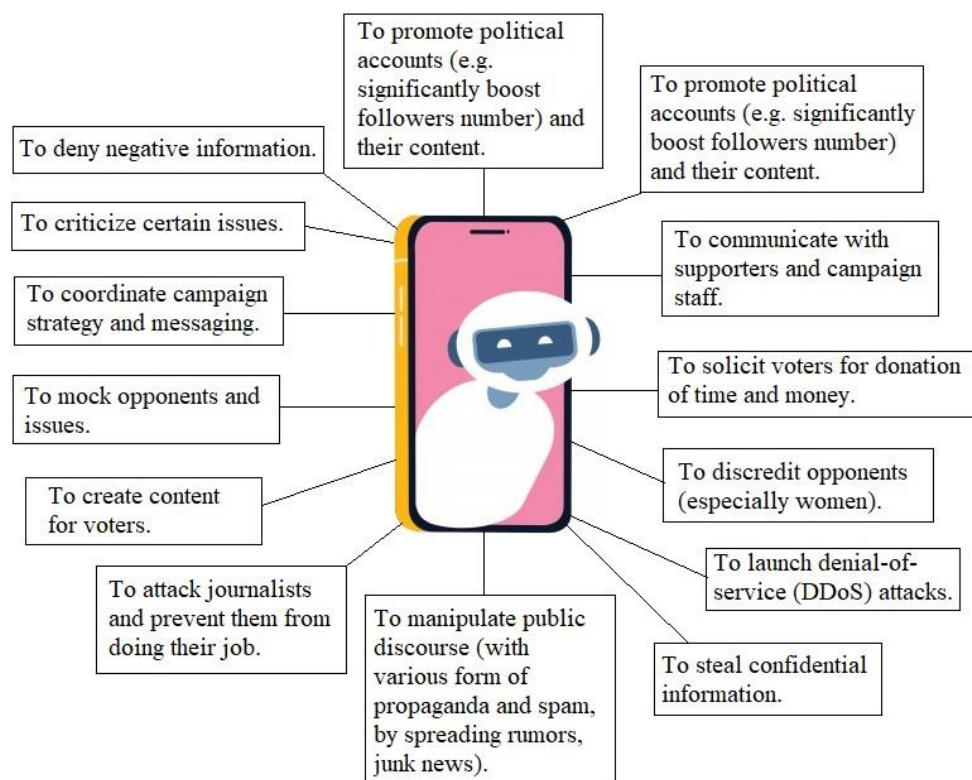
¹⁹⁶ J. Weismueller, P. Harrigan, K. Coussement & T. Tessitore, *What makes people share political content on social media? The role of emotion, authority and ideology*, “Computers in Human Behavior” 2022, 129, 107150.

¹⁹⁷ P.N. Howard, S. Woolley & R. Calo, *Algorithms, bots, and political communication in the US 2016 election: The challenge of automated political communication for election law and administration*, “Journal of Information Technology & Politics” 2018, 15(2), pp. 82-88.

¹⁹⁸ A.O. Larsson, *Online, all the time? A quantitative assessment of the permanent campaign on Facebook*, “New Media & Society” 2014, 18(2), p. 286; D. Ceccobelli, *Not every day is Election Day: a comparative analysis of eighteen election campaigns on Facebook*, “Journal of Information Technology & Politics” 2018, 15(2), p. 136.

campaign. This period was also characterized by more negative sentiments in tweets¹⁹⁹. Another study confirmed this general tendency. It showed that world leaders of advanced industrial democracies were more likely to use Facebook during the election period than during the routine period. There was more personalization in their posts, as well as less political issues and negative emotions at the time. Only the level of privatization of political communication (coverage of personal life) remained unchanged throughout the research period²⁰⁰. After all, it means that political actors do not want to develop permanent campaigns. They follow, among other things, scientific recommendation to achieve electoral goals, but then return to a more realistic demonstration of the situation in the country.

Fig. 21. Uses of bots in political communication



Source: Own elaboration based on P.N. Howard, S. Woolley & R. Calo, *Algorithms, bots, and political communication in the US 2016 election: The challenge of automated political communication for election law and administration*, “Journal of Information Technology & Politics” 2018, 15(2).

Although the main strategic elements have already been presented, politicians and representatives of their digital teams also directly shared their experience of using social

¹⁹⁹ V. Vasko & D. Trilling, *A permanent campaign...*, op cit., pp. 342–359.

²⁰⁰ D. Ceccobelli, *Not every day is Election Day...*, op. cit., pp. 122–141.

media through the interview method. The most interesting points were selected from several scientific articles. For instance, American professionals chose X (Twitter) to reach different audience segments. It was possible to work with users who logged into the platform in order to follow political discussions and reactions²⁰¹. French politicians informed, justified and explained political decisions, but had a taboo on tweeting about their personal lives. According to the “citoyenneté” principle, private beliefs cannot affect political reputation in this country²⁰². At the same time, Finnish parliamentarians focused on ordinary life on Facebook. It led to an unexpected positive reaction from the audience²⁰³. In general, the answers showed that traditional broadcast communication has been finally replaced by social media as a significant tool in modern political communication. Yet the words did not always match the practical results.

The overview of strategic elements in this subchapter does not claim to be exhaustive. It is impossible to cover all scientific works. Nevertheless, the author has tried to present the most distinctive components found in the social media literature. The studies included countries from almost every continent. The acquired knowledge can be helpful in the process of preparing a codebook. It creates a basis for further analysis of the cases of Ukraine and Belarus. Finally, the author is ready to explore the use of social media by political actors from these two countries in the following chapters.

In sum, these platforms have proven to be a useful tool in political communication. They freed political representatives from the control of the government and the mass media. Most attempts to block them are doomed to failure. However, the place of former regulators did not remain empty. It was occupied by the owners of social media, namely corporations and specific individuals. They write their own “rules of the game” and set acceptable boundaries by adjusting the technical functionality of Facebook, Telegram and others. One example is billionaire Elon Musk and his experiments with X (Twitter). Politicians are forced to accept his demands in order to communicate with key target audiences, which can include partisans,

²⁰¹ D. Kreiss, R.G. Lawrence & S.C. McGregor, *In Their Own Words: Political Practitioner Accounts of Candidates, Audiences, Affordances, Genres, and Timing in Strategic Social Media Use*, “Political Communication” 2017, 35(1), pp. 16-17.

²⁰² A. Frame & G. Brachotte, *Le tweet stratégique: Use of Twitter as a PR tool by French politicians*, “Public Relations Review” 2015, 41(2), p. 283.

²⁰³ M. Mannevu, *Uneasy self-promotion and tactics of patience: Finnish MPs’ ambivalent feelings about personalised politics on social media*, “International Journal of Cultural Studies” 2022, 26(1), p. 110.

masses, target groups, and individuals²⁰⁴. The ultimate goal is to convince potential voters. A number of strategies have been developed over the years of existence of these modern technologies. Their patterns of use vary from country to country, from democracy to autocracy. Therefore, it is important to examine social media through the prism of the various conditions in which they exist.

²⁰⁴ M. Magin, N. Podschuweit, J. Haßler & U. Russmann, *Campaigning in the fourth age of political communication. A multi-method study on the use of Facebook by German and Austrian parties in the 2013 national election campaigns*, "Information, Communication & Society" 2016, 20(11), pp. 1700-1701.

Chapter 3. Media systems in Ukraine and Belarus

3.1 Theoretical foundations of a media system

There is no universally accepted definition and clearly established boundaries of the term “media system,” which originates from political science¹. Additionally, scientific literature offers various options for its analysis, which will be shown in this chapter. The main goal is to define specific criteria that can describe media systems in Ukraine and Belarus. A special emphasis is placed on the relationship between media and politics. This process, however, requires gradual work.

To begin with, the more general term “system” is defined through the words like “interrelation” and/or “interdependence” of something (e.g. elements, actions, parts)². Mancini mentions at least three examples of its application in different types of media studies³. In particular, system in the indicative sense of the media, in the confrontational meaning towards other systems, and through the prism of functional systems theory. At the same time, Hallin refers to its key characteristics: “irreducibility” (consists of relational components that can only be fully understood as the whole), “boundary maintenance” (interacts with other social subsystems), as well as “autopoiesis” (self-development as the reaction to changes in the surrounding environment)⁴.

In this context, the media system is among subsystems of the larger social system. Earlier in 1996, the former was called a “mass information system” by Golka⁵. Santana-Pereira defines it in terms of “a network of media outlets... that exist, interact, and compete in a certain geographical area within the same historical period, serving the same population, using the same language and the same cultural codes, acting under the same legal framework, and

¹ D.C. Hallin, *Media System*, [in:] G. Mazzoleni, K.G. Barnhurst, K. Ikeda, R.C.M. Maia & H. Wessler, *The International Encyclopedia of Political Communication*, Vol. 3, Wiley, 2015, p. 811; P. Mancini, *The Idea of “Systems” in Media Studies: Criticisms, Risks, Advantages*, Palgrave Macmillan UK EBooks, 2015, pp. 21, 25; P. Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems and the Digital Age*, “International journal of communication” 2020, 14, p. 5762.

² D.C. Hallin, *Media System...*, op. cit., p. 802.

³ P. Mancini, *The Idea of “Systems”...*, op. cit., pp. 21-22.

⁴ D.C. Hallin, *Media System...*, op. cit., p. 802.

⁵ Z. Oniszczyk, *System medialny w ujęciu teoretycznym*, [w:] Z. Oniszczyk, M. Gierula (red.). *M mało znane systemy medialne*, 2007, p. 9.

meeting identical political, economic, and social constraints”⁶. There is a geographical differentiation between a national media system, which exists within the borders of one country, and a transnational (or global) one, which overcomes the borders thanks to the development of modern technologies⁷. Moreover, it is important that one country can belong to several media systems based on linguistic and/or cultural similarities⁸.

Oniszczyk summarizes the works of Polish scientists and describes media system in two ways. In a narrow sense, it includes “all mass media that legally operate in a given country.” As factors determining their role in the system, he repeats legislative regulations, but adds organizational rules and ethical standards⁹. However, it remains unclear why the author bypasses those media that continue to work illegally. For example, social media provide the platform for these units¹⁰. Considering a broad sense (see: Figure 22), the media system can be called “a mass communication system.” It incorporates mass media (the core) as well as media institutions (surrounding environment of the core). The functioning of the system is ensured by the interconnection of those elements¹¹.

The same list of the core media is repeated by Dobek-Ostrowska. In contrast, her definition is more detailed. The scientist understands media system as “a set of structural and financial arrangements, constrained by specific legal and institutional factors that include issues of ownership, media access, media control, and political constraints.” The relationship between media and society is explained through primary (audience and advertisers) and secondary markets (regulatory institutions and providers of information, new technologies, etc.). Among the main characteristics of media system are decentralization from state monopoly, privatization of public media, dissemination of new communication technologies, concentration of ownership, development of global and local media markets, as well as

⁶ J. Santana-Pereira, *The Portuguese media system and the normative roles of the media: a comparative view*, “Análise social” 2016, p. 783.

⁷ D.C. Hallin, *Media System...*, op. cit., p. 804; Z. Oniszczyk, *System medialny...*, op. cit., s. 19.

⁸ J. Santana-Pereira, *The Portuguese media...*, op. cit., p. 783.

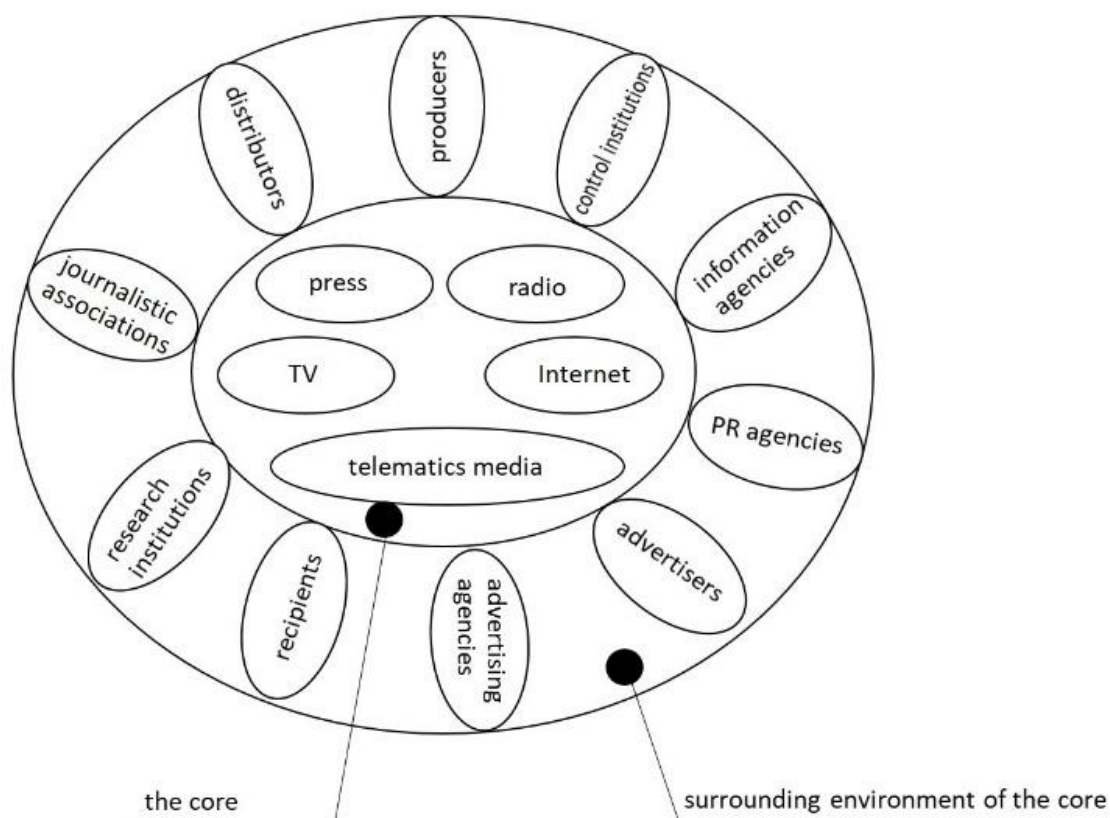
⁹ Z. Oniszczyk, *System medialny...*, op. cit., s. 15.

¹⁰ See also: J. Skrzypczak, *Czy należy prawnie regulować funkcjonowanie platform mediów społecznościowych?* “Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis Studia De Cultura” 2022, 14(1), pp. 76–95.

¹¹ Z. Oniszczyk, *System medialny...*, op. cit.s. 15.

openness and development¹². They are mostly associated with Western countries and their democratic media systems.

Fig. 22. Media system in a broad sense



Source: Z. Oniszczyk, *System medialny...*, op. cit., s. 16.

3.1.1 Patterns of analysis of Western media systems

One of the most popular typologies of media systems is presented in the book “Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics” by Hallin and Mancini. Since its publication in 2004, it has gained more than 10 thousand citations¹³. According to the title, the authors try to propose criteria for the analysis of media systems and political systems. Their formation takes place on an interdependent basis. They have to vary from a lower to a higher degree, depending on a country. As a result, three models are distinguished: the

¹² B. Dobek-Ostrowska, *Komunikowanie polityczne i publiczne: podręcznik akademicki*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2012.

¹³ Google Scholar metrics: https://scholar.google.com/citations?view_op=view_citation&hl=en&user=ljCM--oAAAAJ&citation_for_view=ljCM--oAAAAJ:dfsIfKJdRG4C, accessed on 06.08.2023.

Liberal Model in North Atlantic region, the Polarized Pluralist Model in Mediterranean countries, and the Democratic Corporatist Model in North and Central Europe¹⁴. Nonetheless, they cannot be fully projected onto other parts of the world because this “is not intended as a universal framework”¹⁵. Furthermore, since these are “ideal types,” the units of analysis do not have to mirror them completely¹⁶. Although the variables are specific to Western and North American countries, some of them can be applicable to the analysis of non-Western territories. Figure 23 presents the relevant dimensions for comparing media systems.

Fig. 23. A model for the analysis of media systems by Hallin and Mancini

Dimension	Explanation
The structure of media markets with a focus on the development of a mass press, or the inclusiveness of the press market by Brüggemann et al. ¹⁷	It determines which media prevail in a particular society and who constitutes its audience. Conclusions are drawn from statistics on newspaper sales, gender differences in newspaper coverage, and proportions in the consumption of different media.
Political parallelism	It refers to political orientations of media and journalists in news coverage. Its presence can be determined through the tonality of media content, the participation of media workers in political life, the partisanship of media audiences, organizational ties between media and political actors, and journalistic roles in media systems. A high level of parallelism is achievable thanks to the external pluralism of different media, while low level is reduced to the internal pluralism of an individual media organization. This concept receive the most attention of scientists from different parts of the world ¹⁸ .

¹⁴ D.C. Hallin & P. Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models...*, op. cit., pp. 66-75.

¹⁵ L.C. Herrero, E. Humprecht, S. Engesser, L.M. Brüggemann & F. Büchel, *Rethinking Hallin and Mancini beyond the West: An analysis of media systems in Central and Eastern Europe*, “International Journal of Communication” 2017, 11, p. 4800.

¹⁶ D.C. Hallin, *Typology of Media Systems*, [in:] *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, Oxford University Press. Oxford 2016, p. 4.

¹⁷ M. Brüggemann, S. Engesser, F. Büchel, E. Humprecht, & L. Castro, *Hallin and Mancini Revisited: Four Empirical Types of Western Media Systems*, “Journal of Communication” 2014, 64(6), p. 1040.

¹⁸ D.C. Hallin & P. Mancini, *Ten Years After Comparing Media Systems: What Have We Learned?* “Political Communication” 2016, 34(2), p. 3.

Professionalization	A variable determined by the level of journalistic autonomy in a decision-making process, the presence of professional norms (e.g. ethical principles of a media organization), and orientation toward a public service.
The role of the state	Among other things, its intervention in the form of obtaining media ownership, providing subsidies for public broadcasting, and introducing media regulations (e.g. laws that affect the work of media workers).

Source: D.C. Hallin & P. Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models...*, op. cit., pp. 21-45.

These media dimensions were transformed into 21 indicators with appropriate scale measurement by Brüggemann et al. The results depend on the availability of databases and their novelty. In particular, the inclusiveness of the press market incorporates various statistics on the reach of daily newspapers (overall, working class newspapers, and women newspapers). Among the indicators of political parallelism are “lacking separation of news and commentary,” which is calculated through the number of evaluative links in the news, or “political orientation of journalism,” which is quite evident in the particular country. Other data (“partisan influence and policy advocacy,” “political bias,” “media-party parallelism,” and “PSB dependency”) can be presented in the form of answers to survey questions, which are given by journalists or citizens. The same measurement is used among the indicators of professionalization (“internal/external autonomy,” “media credibility,” “professional guidelines,” and “public orientation”). The final indicators of the role of the state were formed through the analysis of existing regulations on a binary scale and through certain calculations of subsidies, taxes, market shares and license fees. Interestingly, the authors did not find data on Canada and excluded it from the research¹⁹.

Hallin and Mancini’s model also served as inspiration for other authors. In particular, McQuail and Brants developed a simplified framework for the analysis of media systems. It

¹⁹ M. Brüggemann, S. Engesser, F. Büchel, E. Humprecht, & L. Castro, *Hallin and Mancini Revisited...*, op. cit., pp. 1043-1051.

consists of 8 dimensions, which can be observed in Figure 24. The researchers offer it to their students during classes but it can have valuable points for this chapter too²⁰.

Fig. 24. A model for the analysis of media systems by McQuail and Brants

#	Dimension	Possible characteristic
1	Market structure	Monopoly, oligopoly, competition?
1	Ownership	Private, public?
2	Source of financing or income	License fee or taxation, subscription, advertising, mixed revenue?
3	Mission	Cultural-pedagogic logic, selling eyeballs and maximizing profit?
4	Accountability	To the public, politics, shareholders, and how independent?
5	Politicization	Level of neutrality, balance and independence?
5	Political parallelism	Structural linkages to political parties of other political organizations?
6	Diversity of programme genres and content	Ratio of information, education, culture and entertainment?
7	Address of audience	Citizens, consumers, clients, customers?
8	Form and level of regulation/governance	What is regulated? How weak or strong? State or self-regulation?

Source: K. Brants, *The Fine Art of Comparing Media Systems: Opportunities, Pitfalls and Challenges*, “Palgrave Macmillan UK EBooks” 2015, p. 38.

Although media system is of primary importance in the chapter, it did not emerge in a vacuum. This system has a direct connection, relation, interdependence and even “interpenetration” with a political system. The latter is defined as a governmental system, or as “the dynamic interplay of people’s ideas and interests” with all the corresponding demands and reactions²¹. In terms of connection between the two, it is important to mention that actors of both systems use each other and available technologies to advance their own objectives and influence. For instance, media owners can give politicians airtime in exchange for benefits (e.g. legislative, financial) for themselves or their organizations. They can also

²⁰ K. Brants, *The Fine Art...*, op. cit., p. 38.

²¹ K.W. Deutsch, and J.D. Derbyshire & I. Derbyshire in S. Engesser & A. Franzetti, *Media systems and political systems: Dimensions of comparison*, “International Communication Gazette” 2011, 73(4), pp. 275–276.

prepare the ground for an independent campaign in politics²². In turn, this is obviously another instrument for the popularization of political representatives among voters. Hence, these two systems need to be studied together, so Hallin and Mancini present 5 criteria for the analysis of political systems, or the political context of media systems (see: Figure 25).

Fig. 25. A model for the analysis of political systems by Hallin and Mancini

Dimension	Explanation
The role of the state	This category is explained by the difference between the European tradition of the welfare state and the American tradition of liberal democracy. The former interprets media as one of the state institutions that must be financed and regulated. This state of affairs is a consequence of the ideas of authoritarianism and political participation that prevailed in European countries at different times. On the contrary, the latter grants complete freedom to media as private entities and regulates them through the First Amendment (freedom of speech, press and others).
Consensus vs. majoritarian democracy	This variable reflects the political culture of a particular country. While the winner takes and controls all power under majoritarianism, the multiparty system and the constant need for compromise are inherent in consensus politics. According to this, the ruling party in a majoritarian democracy has a greater need for the development of a professional (meaning neutral) media environment. Strengthening control may have a negative impact on its activities after a possible transition to the opposition.
Individual vs. organized pluralism; liberalism vs. corporatism	It is determined through the political role of interest groups. Either these are groups that organize to participate directly in politics (organized pluralism or corporatism, for example, in Italy), or these are individual citizens who have relations with the government in an atmosphere of competition

²² J. Hardy, *Western Media Systems*. Routledge, 2010, pp. 108-115.

	between special interests groups (individualized pluralism or liberalism, for example, in the US). In the first case, media is the mouthpiece of political parties, religious subcommunities, etc.
Rational-legal authority and clientelism	The former is based on compliance with formally established procedures to ensure autonomy and avoid outside interference. Its forms are bureaucracy, an independent judicial system, or efforts to serve the public interest. In particular, special institutions make autonomous decisions regarding financial assistance and regulations of various types of media, and promote the development of the media market. Journalists perform their work professionally, and instrumentalization is practically absent because media owners do not need preferences from the authorities. The opposite situation, when media organizations exchange independence for funding and protection from legal norms, is a characteristic of clientelism (the word comes from the so-called “clients” they serve).
Moderate vs. polarized pluralism	This category is explained by a smaller or larger ideological distance. For instance, constant conflicts and diametrically opposed party ideologies are among the feature of polarized pluralism. Historically, it arises in countries where there are problems with the transition to liberalism due to the dominance of conservative forces. Only a few cases can be described as reaching its classical form. At the same time, moderate pluralism gravitates towards a central ideology and accepts a difference in positions. As for the media, they are a tool or “advocate” for conflicting parties in polarized pluralism. Professionalization increases when it decreases.

Source: D.C. Hallin & P. Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models...*, op. cit., pp. 46-65.

Ten years later, the same authors engage in a discussion about the Internet and online media as part of media systems. They think about the possibilities of blurring national borders thanks to the presence of this technology, or the adaptation of Internet media to the relevant systems. These means of communication can also depart from existing models and fill a niche in a particular country by, for example, increasing in external pluralism²³. Considering the situation in Ukraine and Belarus, the author of this PhD dissertation is a big supporter of the last option. The corresponding arguments will be given later in this chapter.

Overall, Hallin and Mancini acknowledge the influence of the Internet on the media environment without certainty in future consequences. The context (e.g. economic, political) is one of the main characteristics for analysis. Among the noticed changes are deinstitutionalization (transition from a defined hierarchy to a “party of one”) and reinstitutionalization (transition from the power of states to the power of platforms). Thus, political pluralism and professionalization become less important due to the expansion of opportunities for ordinary users. At the same time, the variables such as the role of the state, the structure of media markets, clientelism and polarization remain important and include new areas for research²⁴.

These thoughts are partially echoed by Humprecht et al. They took the basic idea of Hallin and Mancini (2004), its implementation from the work of Brüggemann et al. (2014), and made an attempt to add online indicators. First, if printed press is still popular in some countries, it is being digitalized to continue functioning in others. To this end, it is important to measure its reach both offline and online (see: media market). Second, professionalization of journalists began to depend on involvement (or not) in discussions with readers on social media platforms. The comments of the latter affect the perception of the content published by media representatives. In addition, guidelines regarding work in online media started to appear. Third, indicators of the role of the state (e.g. licensing and subsidies) are extended to the online space. Moreover, the authors suggest exploring media freedom. Relevant data for this analysis can be found in such international rankings as Freedom House. After all, the

²³ D.C. Hallin & P. Mancini, *Ten Years After...*, op. cit., pp. 10-11.

²⁴ P. Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems and the Digital Age...*, op. cit., pp. 5761–5774.

study already covered several Eastern European countries, but did not include Belarus and/or Ukraine²⁵.

3.1.2 Patterns of analysis of non-Western media systems

The work of Hallin and Mancini (2004) originates from another outstanding book called “Four Theories of the Press: The Authoritarian, Libertarian, Social Responsibility, and Soviet Communist Concepts of What the Press Should Be and Do” by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm. This is the first classification of media systems²⁶. Although it dates back to 1956, its authors offer theories of media functioning that go beyond the boundaries of the Western world. In addition to traditional media, they cover film industry. They are explained through history and examples of various media regulations. As a result, certain theories can be applied to analyze conditions in Ukraine and Belarus. Figure 26 depicts the possible options for selection.

Fig. 26. Classification of media systems by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm

Theory	Explanation
The Authoritarian Theory of the Press	One of the oldest theories of media systems, which has not lost its relevance since the 16 th -17 th centuries. Among the supporters of this theory are such historical figures as Plato, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Rousseau, Hegel, Mussolini, Hitler and others. The main idea is expressed through the total control of the government over the press. It can be carried out with the help of authorized individuals who are issued with special patents, licenses, etc. In turn, the media is used to support and promote the policies of power institutions pursuing certain goals. Criticism of government decisions is prohibited and punishable by fines and criminal prosecution. Historically, the death penalty was used, but in rare cases.

²⁵ E. Humprecht, L. Castro Herrero, S. Blassnig, M. Brüggemann, & S. Engesser, *Media Systems in the Digital Age: An Empirical Comparison of 30 Countries*, “Journal of Communication” 2022.

²⁶ D.C. Hallin, *Typology of Media Systems...*, op. cit., p. 2.

The Soviet Communist Theory of the Press	The logical continuation of the previous media system. According to it, mass media perform the function of “propagandist,” “agitator,” or simply “mouthpiece” of the Communist Party and its principles. They are the main tool in the process of transition to a classless society and support of socialism. Their functioning is fully integrated into the “planned” system, where each position (e.g. censor, reviewer) is occupied by Party representatives. Criticism of the latter is tantamount to treason. Moreover, mass media are exclusively state-owned. The commercial factor and private media are completely absent. It is important that this pattern of functioning is perceived as appropriate.
The Libertarian Theory of the Press	It has a completely different essence. To begin with, the transition from authoritarianism to libertarianism began in the 18th century and made significant progress in the 19th century. The main ideologues behind this process were Milton, Jefferson, Mill and others. It was recorded mainly in constitutions. Nonetheless, it does not mean that the level of freedom is the same everywhere. Each country should be considered as a separate case. They can be grouped by the example of Hallin and Mancini. Among the main functions of mass media are information, entertainment, as well as criticism and control. They are a platform for maintaining a balance of opinions and finding solutions. Control over their activities is exercised not by the state, but by the court. Even wrong thoughts cannot be censored. Media personnel may also resort to self-correction. Additionally, anyone can start and profit from a media organization because the libertarianism encourages a competitive environment.
The Social Responsibility Theory of the Press	It is derived from the Libertarian Theory in the 20th century. The technological and industrial revolution, the growth of intellectual level and professionalism

	among individuals of that time, as well as criticism of media environment became the impetus of its formation. The main distinguishing characteristic can be guessed from the name. The development of mass media transformed into a demand for social responsibility for the proposed functions (most of them repeat libertarian ones). It was organized in the form of ethical codes. The oldest document dates back to 1923. The fact that each media owner interprets them differently is one of the reasons for the emergence of monitoring commissions. Furthermore, the government in this theory has almost no control over the media (possible only for insurance of public service). It recognizes them as a private business, promotes and protects various freedoms.

Source: F.S. Siebert, T. Peterson & W. Schramm, *Four theories of the press: The authoritarian, liberal, social responsibility and Soviet Communist theories of what the press should be and do*, University of Illinois Press, 1984.

Comparing the main countries in the current study, Ukraine can fit into the characteristics of the Social Responsibility Theory, while Belarus strengthens its positions within the framework of the Authoritarian Theory (see details in the following subchapters). In particular, three revolutions and the Russia-Ukraine war became the main impetus for journalistic responsibility to Ukrainian society. The actions of politicians are monitored by various media representatives (e.g. investigative journalists). The latter are controlled by ethics commissions (e.g. the Commission on Journalistic Ethics) and public organizations (e.g. Detector media). The authorities can intervene in the media environment to ensure its protection from an external aggressor. Such actions can be mixed with state propaganda too. At the same time, the ruling regime of Lukashenko has completely capture the information space within Belarus. Its media spread exclusively pro-government narratives. Power structures do not allow any criticism. Journalists can face death penalty (e.g. Protasevich was pardoned by Lukashenko²⁷).

²⁷ Lukashenko pomylyvav eksredaktora Nexta Protasevycha, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-world/3712569-lukashenko-pomiluvav-eksredaktora-nexta-protasevica.html> (accessed on 14.12.2023).

As can be seen, not only Hallin and Mancini (2004), but also Siebert et al. (1984) drew attention to the analysis of media systems in connection with political systems. However, one of the clearest operationalization was proposed by Engesser and Franzetti (see: Figure 27). The authors advocate a combination of primary quantitative and supportive qualitative methodology in this type of research so that it goes beyond simple numbers and demonstrate a deeper understanding of each individual case. In the paper, they took the theoretical background and transformed it into their own version of dimensions of media systems and political systems. These 4 (or 8 together) should provide an opportunity to compare different countries at the macro-level.

Fig. 27. Operationalization proposed by Engesser and Franzetti

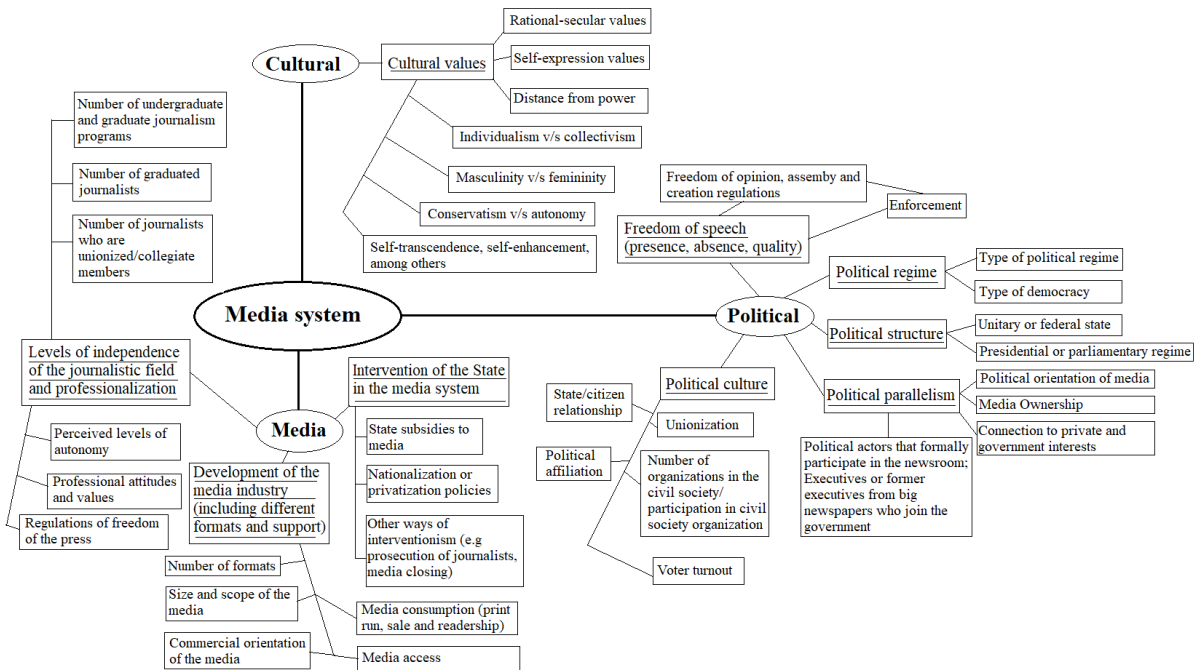
Dimension	Explanation
Freedom of the media system of a certain country	It is shown through an average special index. It is calculated by adding the Freedom House ranking to the Reporters Without Borders ranking and dividing the sum by two.
Freedom of the political system	It is also measured by an average special index. It consists of 6 provisions that must be present in the constitution of a country: freedom of press, freedom of information, freedom of opinion, no censorship, no occupational ban, autonomy from state. If a country guarantees the provision, the authors give it “1.” If it has a limited form – “0.5.” A score of “0” is given in the complete absence of a certain guarantee. The sum is divided by the number of provisions.
Diversity of the media system (two subdimensions)	The first subdimension is the range of media products, which consists of such indicators as the number of inhabitants of a country, the numbers of titles and copies of newspapers, as well as the number of domestic and foreign TV channels (public, commercial, paid). Importantly, the latter suppose to have local advertising. The second subdimension is the concentration of the media market. On the one hand, it includes the number of newspaper titles per million inhabitants and the number of newspaper copies per thousand

	inhabitants. It is less clear why the authors explain them as concentration but enter these numbers in the range table. On the other hand, circulation (%) and viewing time (%) make it possible to calculate the market shares of the 5 (rarely 10) largest newspapers and TV channels. The combination of these numbers divided by 2 gives an average index of concentration.
Diversity of the political system	It is measured by the actual number of political players who can influence the processes in a country. The main indicators are the party system (one-party, two-party, or multi-party), the total number of political parties in the parliament, and the number of political parties in power.
Centrality of the media system (qualitative category)	It is determined by the geographical location where the largest amount of print and television content is produced (approximately more than 50%).
Centrality of the political system	First of all, this category shows the political center of the country. It is the place where the presidential administration, the government quarter and other important institutions are located. The second element is the actual political system: presidential, semi-presidential, parliamentary democracy, parliamentary monarchy, or partisan dictatorship. The third element is the form of government: centralized or federalized. It is important to add a decentralized form. Furthermore, the authors define the distribution of power: strict, partial, or non-existent.
Tradition (historical dimension)	In the case of the media system, the first year of operation of a new type of media (newspaper, mass press, public TV, private TV, online media) is identified as a new stage of social adaptation. Radio as a medium is omitted in the article. In the case of the political system, the main indicators are the year of ratification of the constitution together with the year of guaranteeing the right to freedom of

communication. Thus, the authors try to show the connection between two systems.

Source: S. Engesser & A. Franzetti, *Media systems and political systems...*, op. cit., pp. 280–286.

Fig. 28. A model for the analysis of media systems by Mellado and Lagos



Source: C. Mellado & C. Lagos, *Redefining comparative analyses of media systems from the perspective of new democracies*, “Communication & Society” 2013, 26(4), pp. 7-19.

The dimensions make it possible to go beyond the analysis of Western states and include, for example, a country like Mexico. It can be stated that Latin America is far from Europe and that its parts had a military dictatorship, which was significantly different from the communist oligarchy. On the contrary, the experience of these countries can still be transferred to representatives of Eastern Europe. The reasons are the “transition” process and the label of “new democracies” that arose there²⁸. Hence, the classification of Mellado and Lagos (2013), focusing mainly on Chile, can be useful for this research. The framework is also based on the book of Hallin and Mancini (2004) and the resulting critique. It consists of political, cultural and media dimensions. As Figure 28 shows, the number of subdimensions is much greater.

²⁸ K. Voltmer, *Comparing media systems in new democracies: East meets South meets West*, “Central European Journal of Communication” 2008, 1(01), pp. 28, 31-33.

It is clearly an attempt to become one of the most comprehensive models that can be found in the literature. Its main sources of data are rankings and indexes. The authors combine quantitative and qualitative methodology. They are not afraid to use the observation method when there are no scales or measurements. Furthermore, the authors compare actions on paper with real-world applications (see: Freedom of speech). Most importantly, they offer understandable indicators that influence the media system. It seems that these dimensions can be analyzed from different perspectives and without strict reference to the proposed sources. Not all of them are fully developed. The cultural one does not include all elements of Hofstede's theory.

Another area of research is the Eastern European or "post-communist" region. It is a rapidly changing environment that faces the process of transition, or departure from communist circumstances to some other state of affairs²⁹. Given that the Soviet legacy is still present in the respective countries, it is difficult to predict when and what this next state of affairs can be achieved. Ideally, the path to the so-called "mature democracy" (the highest level of democratization) is proposed through the "pre-transition," "transition," and "consolidation stages," as well as through the same three transition phases of media reform³⁰. Nevertheless, the complexity of the issue lies in the fact that the region has transformed not only in the media, but also in the political and economic spheres. Moreover, the media sector began its commercialization and remained without large state subsidies. Economic pressures came from both media managers and foreign investors, who focused not on journalistic standards, but on financial profits. Political interference continued to exist because media is an only way to reach voters and destroy opponents. Journalists, in turn, decided to choose opinions over facts in their materials, as it was the case during the Soviet times³¹.

²⁹ P. Gross & K. Jakubowicz, *The Slings and Arrows of Outrageous Fortune: When, How and for What Purpose is Media Transition and Transformation Undertaken (and completed) in Central and Eastern Europe?* [in:] P. Gross & K. Jakubowicz (eds.), *Media Transformations in the Post-Communist World: Eastern Europe's Tortured Path to Change*, 2012, pp. 1-2, 4.

³⁰ D. Rustow, and G. O'Donnell & Ph. Schmitter, and B. Rozumilowicz in B. Dobek-Ostrowska, *25 years after communism: Four models of media and politics in Central and Eastern Europe*, [in:] B. Dobek-Ostrowska & M. Głowacki (eds.), *Democracy and media in Central and Eastern Europe 25 Years On*, 2015, p. 13.

³¹ K. Voltmer, *Comparing media systems in new democracies...*, op. cit., pp. 29-31; E. Lauk, *How will it all unfold? Media systems and journalism cultures in post-communist countries*, [in:] K. Jakubowicz & M. Sükösd (eds.), *Finding the right place on the map: Central and Eastern European media change in a global perspective*, 2008, pp. 200-202.

More than one generation of media workers must change so that the process of transition can be fully completed. The current media space continues to be filled with information from a significant share of “old” journalists. They studied in accordance with communist principles, propagated the narratives of the Party, and deliberately enforced censorship. It is important to mention that these people not only prepare news reports, but also form the basis of self-regulatory bodies. Only some of them constituted a part of the so-called “samizdat”³².

On the contrary, Voltmer (2008) analyzes the region in general based on the dimensions proposed by Hallin and Mancini (2004) and comes to the following conclusions. First, it is about the interests of politicians and oligarchs who make media outlets their instrument of power, and not about the commercialization of the media market with the appropriate level of independence. Second, it is about the role of the state, which can reduce media dependence by implementing the necessary legislation, but not about the lack of censorship or state intervention, which remains after the Soviet Union. Third, it is about political parallelism, which increases the number of positions in the public sphere, and its negative form when they are directed against opponents. Fourth, it is about “illusory” professionalization, when the evaluation of the quality of journalism is formed on the basis of the perception of a certain culture³³. After all, points of view may differ, but the main legacy of the Soviet Union is clearly visible.

Another process used to describe the changes in the post-Soviet region is transformation, or evolution of the media system in terms of political, economic, cultural and other aspects³⁴. Although its meaning is almost identical to transition, this term is more popular in the literature. The post-communist transformation is referred to as the third phase of transformation after the Southern European countries and Latin America ones³⁵. It repeats some of the already mentioned things and adds new ones.

The transformation phase includes media wars for independence between journalists and the authorities, or “disabling environment.” Furthermore, market activities have contributed the

³² Independent self-published production. See: Ibidem, pp. 198-200.

³³ K. Voltmer, *Comparing media systems in new democracies...*, op. cit., pp. 37-38.

³⁴ P. Gross & K. Jakubowicz, *The Slings and Arrows of Outrageous Fortune...*, op. cit., pp. 1-2, 7.

³⁵ H.J. Kleinstaub, *Comparing west and east: A comparative approach to transformation*, “Comparative media systems: European and global perspectives” 2010, pp. 23, 29-34.

most to the evolution of media in these countries. Among other forces of influence are globalization and changes in the structure of media owners, investors, and political elites. Journalists have finally received the necessary freedom and opportunity to rewrite their working norms and standards. However, they did not have experience in order to fulfil various democratic expectations. As a result, the complete Western models are unlikely to be applicable in this part of the world due to the unique context (historical, professional, etc.)³⁶. It is hardly understandable for outsiders and needs to be studied separately. Although Engesser and Franzetti (2011) only include Russia in their sample, the region has many more interesting and dissimilar cases to propose.

As mentioned earlier, the emergence of the Internet was another important factor that influenced the process of re-shaping the media system. Information and communications technology were developing and digitalizing. Media have begun to switch to an online version, which coincided with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Multimediality, hypertextuality and interactivity have become characteristic features of new journalism. The potential audience of media has expanded in scope. It has change the processes of production and consumption of information content³⁷.

Each country experienced the Soviet rule differently. The authorities established a greater or lesser level of control and censorship. After that, each case went through stages of liberalization and deregulation. All these factors shaped the contours of a post-communist legacy, which took three paths (Figure 29). According to one of them, media have become more pluralistic. According to another path, there was a capture of media by new interest groups³⁸. Jakubowicz and Sükösd referred to Sparks, who gave alternative labels to these paths – “transitology” and “elite continuity”³⁹. The third way marked a return to the starting

³⁶ K. Jakubowicz & M. Sükösd, *Twelve concepts regarding media system evolution and democratization in post-communist societies*, [in:] K. Jakubowicz & M. Sükösd (eds.), *Finding the right place on the map. Central and Eastern European media change in a global perspective*, 2008, pp. 9-40; E. Lauk, *How will it all unfold...*, op. cit., pp. 193, 194-195, 198.

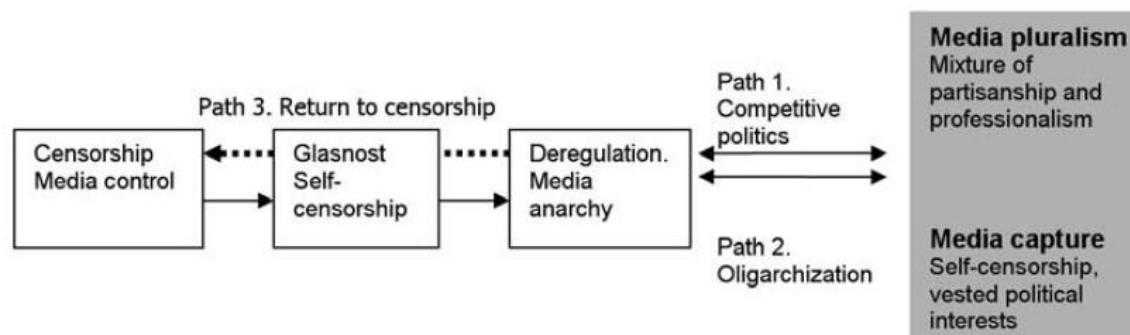
³⁷ Ibidem, p. 17; Ibidem, pp. 205-208.

³⁸ A. Mungiu-Pippidi, *How media and politics shape...*, op. cit., pp. 72-73.

³⁹ K. Jakubowicz & M. Sükösd, *Twelve concepts...*, op. cit., p. 23.

point, or censorship⁴⁰. Kleinstaub also indicated the fourth path where the transformation partially failed. It was called “defective democracies” or “blocked transformation”⁴¹.

Fig. 29. Three media paths after the collapse of the Soviet Union



Source: A. Mungiu-Pippidi, *How media and politics shape each other in the new Europe*, “Romanian Journal of Political Sciences” 2008, (01), p. 72.

All these conditions gave a rise to a more specific version of the analysis of Eastern European media systems, which was proposed by Herrero et al. (2017). Its sample included 11 countries of the region. Moreover, the authors adopted the model of Brüggemann et al. (2014) and added 4 news dimensions: press freedom (Freedom House index), foreign TV share (% among top 3 private operators), ownership concentration in the market (% of audience share among top 3 leaders). One of them was the use of online news. The authors also cautioned that the data should always be updated (taking into account governmental intervention, new laws, etc.) and the study should be longitudinal⁴². The similarities between the research papers are already noticeable.

Nonetheless, the overview would not be complete without two prominent Polish authors who analyze post-communist media systems and political systems. One of them is Karol Jakubowicz⁴³, who suggests adding economic, cultural and social variables in order to examine media systems, as well as consider modern technologies and their ways of communication. His inspiration is Huang’s “transitional media approach” with an emphasis

⁴⁰ A. Mungiu-Pippidi, *How media and politics shape...*, op. cit., pp. 72-73.

⁴¹ H.J. Kleinstaub, *Comparing west and east...*, op. cit., pp. 25, 33.

⁴² L.C. Herrero, E. Humprecht, S. Engesser, L.M. Brüggemann & F. Büchel, *Rethinking Hallin and Mancini beyond the West...*, op. cit., pp. 4804-4805, 4811-4812.

⁴³ K. Jakubowicz, *Introduction. Media systems research: An overview*, [in:] B. Dobek-Ostrowska, M. Gtowacki, K. Jakubowicz & M. Sükösd (eds.), *Comparative Media Systems: European and Global Perspectives*, 2010, pp. 1-22.

on the historic dynamics (not only revolutionary, but also evolutionary) of a particular media system⁴⁴. Moreover, it is worth mentioning a few other points from his overview that relate to post-communist states. Among them is the classification of some Eastern European countries as “free and not responsible” with a high level of tabloidization and political instrumentalization of media⁴⁵, which makes sense. Another important part is the dimensions of Blum (see: Figure 30) due to the presence of the Eastern European “shock model” with Ukraine and Belarus in the final framework. This type of media system is characterized by constant government intervention and control over the media sphere. The specified countries have a “formal” democratic system⁴⁶. However, his methods create some confusion due to the lack of a clear explanation⁴⁷.

Fig. 30. A model for the analysis of media systems by Blum

	A: liberal	B: middle	C: regulated
1. Government system	democratic	authoritarian	totalitarian
2. Political culture	polarized	ambivalent	concurring
3. Media freedom	no censorship	cases of censorship	permanent censorship
4. Media ownership	private	private and public	public
5. Funding of media	market	market and state	state
6. Parallelism of media and political parties	low	moderate	high
7. State control of media	low	moderate	high
8. Media culture	investigative	ambivalent	concurring
9. Media orientation	commercial	divergent	public service

Source: R. Blum in B. Thomas in K. Jakubowicz, *Introduction. Media systems research...*, op. cit., p. 5.

⁴⁴ C. Huang in K. Jakubowicz, *Introduction. Media systems research...*, op. cit., pp. 11-12.

⁴⁵ J. Yin (2008) in Ibidem, pp. 6-8.

⁴⁶ R. Blum in B. Thomas in K. Jakubowicz, *Introduction. Media systems research: An overview*, [in:] B. Dobek-Ostrowska, M. Gtowacki, K. Jakubowicz & M. Sükösd (eds.), *Comparative Media Systems: European and Global Perspectives*, 2010, pp. 4-6.

⁴⁷ K. Jakubowicz, *Introduction. Media systems research...*, op. cit., p. 6.

Another Polish scholar who includes the media systems of Central and Eastern Europe as one of the main research interests is Dobek-Ostrowska. Her work “25 years after communism: four models of media and politics in Central and Eastern Europe” will form the basis of this chapter thanks to the most complete and understandable analysis. Its main idea is to build models of media and politics for the countries of the region. The focus is on “relations between political actors (political parties, politicians, state authorities), and the mass media (owners and journalists) which decide on the level of political parallelism (media politicization)... [and] factors such as economic development... (media commercialization).” A strong emphasis is placed on the explanation of historical heritage of these states. It is important to note that the dynamics of change here is much faster than in other parts of Europe. Moreover, the author pays attention to the presence of new technologies⁴⁸.

According to the research methodology, it is done in stages. First, the level of democratization is determined. Second, the countries are placed in the corresponding models. The main data sources are the Democracy Index (the stage of democratic transition, which makes it possible to divide countries into groups), the World Press Freedom Index and Freedom of the Press (media autonomy), GDP for the selected year (opportunities for investment and development of the media sphere), and Internet Users by Country (level of access to modern technologies). As a result, all these figures were transformed into 4 models with common characteristics: Hybrid Liberal Model (mainly West Slavonic and Baltic countries), Politicized Media Model (Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Romania, Serbia), The Media in Transition Model (flawed democracies, hybrid regimes, including Ukraine), and The Authoritarian Model (only Russia and Belarus)⁴⁹.

This overview consists of a variety of possible frameworks related to different parts of the world. Their dimensions are presented with the specific goal of developing an operationalization that can be used to compare the media systems of Ukraine and Belarus. One of its main parts is the necessary attention to the online space. The finally selected

⁴⁸ B. Dobek-Ostrowska, *25 years after communism...*, op. cit., pp. 13-14; B. Dobek-Ostrowska, *How the media systems work in Central and Eastern Europe*, [in:] E. Połomska & Ch. Beckett (eds.), *Public service broadcasting and media systems in troubled European democracies*, 2019, pp. 259-278.

⁴⁹ Ibidem.

measurements depend on publicly available data and literature. Importantly, this analysis does not aim to develop any model that can be associated with groups of countries.

3.2 Political systems of Ukraine and Belarus

The description begins with the political dimensions of the two countries, as it provides an understanding of the circumstances for the formation of the current media systems. General information, history, and major events regarding their transition and/or transformation will be covered in the subchapter. The comparison will determine the main similarities and differences in the development of two countries. Importantly, the detailed description of the political systems is provided deliberately in order to answer RQ1, as well as to accept or reject H1⁵⁰. Some clarifications are present in the following subchapters.

As for Ukraine, it is the second largest country in Europe (603.550 sq km), which consists of 24 regions and the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. Kyiv is the capital. According to BBC, the population is 43.5 million people. However, the Russia-Ukraine war is the main reason for the significant drop in this figure. Another contrast relates to the form of government. Although Ukraine is defined as parliamentary-presidential republic, all decisions are made by the president with a monomajority in the parliament. If the profile of the country on the BBC website lists information about President Zelenskyy, there are no mentions of Prime Minister Shmyhal⁵¹.

As for Belarus, it is a smaller country (207.595 sq km) than Ukraine, which consists of 6 regions. Minsk is the capital. The population is 9.4 million people⁵². However, its oppositional part emigrated to other countries due to the persecution of the regime. The form of government is a presidential republic with absolute power of Lukashenko. It is interesting that the Ukrainian side refuses to name the position of Lukashenko after the illegitimate

⁵⁰ Reminder: **RQ1**. How do various post-Soviet conditions (media, politics) justify the choice of social media as a political communication tool? **H1**. The political system controls the traditional media system more than the one modified by digital factors.

⁵¹ BBC News, *Ukraine country profile*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-18018002> (accessed on 07.08.2023).

⁵² BBC News, *Belarus country profile*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17941131> (accessed on 07.08.2023).

election in 2020. Among other things, the Ukrainian media space is filled with such synonymous as “self-proclaimed,” “illegally elected,” or “illegitimate” president⁵³.

Compared to other European countries, Ukraine and Belarus do not have much experience in the formation of democratic institutions. Considering the initial period of independence of these countries, Sribna refers to the words of Brzezinski, who united Ukraine and Belarus into a group of countries with the mentality of a “Soviet man”⁵⁴. Indeed, one can agree with the claim that most of the “former” Soviet elites continued to be in power and determined the “rules of the game.” Nonetheless, the process of gaining independence in two countries differs. Thus, it reflects the differences in the mentality of two nations at that time.

There is an opinion that Ukraine became independent in 1991 too easily. Actually, it devalues the many-year history of activities of dissidents and repressed people. Journalists were the driving force of the process (see: Subchapter 3.3). Its culmination came in 1990, when the Student Brotherhood of Lviv and the Kyiv branch of the Ukrainian Student Union gathered in the capital to protest against the signing of the new Union Treaty. Most of their demands were fulfilled, which paved the way for independence. Its proclamation took place on August 24, 1991. After that, 90% of Ukrainians confirmed their desire to live in an independent state in a referendum vote⁵⁵.

The political system of Belarus began to take shape on completely different foundations. The period of “liberalization of the Soviet system” in the country⁵⁶ formed a social layer of the intelligentsia, but its share was too small. It also included media representatives (see: Subchapter 3.3). In 1990, the opposition represented by the Belarusian Popular Front unexpectedly received 10% of seats in a parliament filled with communist parties. At the same time, a high level of Sovietization and a low level of national identity distinguished

⁵³ Ukrayins’ka Pravda, *Ukrayina vyznachylas’, yak nazyvatyme Lukashenka*, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2020/09/30/7268211/> (accessed on 08.08.2023); M. Shchur, *Yak teper nazyvaty Lukashenka: prezydent, lider chy dyktator?* <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/prezydent-lider-dyktator-yak-nazyvaty-pana-lukashenka-/30792571.html> (accessed on 08.08.2023).

⁵⁴ T. Sribna, *Transformacja systemów politycznych Polski i Ukrainy: charakterystyka porównawcza głównych tendencji*, „Środkowoeuropejskie Studia Polityczne” 2011, nr 3, s. 20.

⁵⁵ P. Kahuy, *30 rokov tomu. Referendum 1991 roku pro nezalezhnist’ Ukrayiny i rozpad SRSR (arkhivni foto)*, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/referendum-pershoho-hrudnia-1991-roku-pro-nezalezhnist-ukrayiny-arkhivni-foto/30287132.html> (accessed on 08.08.2023).

⁵⁶ In other words, “perestroika.”

Belarusian society itself⁵⁷. All the problems of that period were associated with the process of democratic transformation⁵⁸. According to the results of the referendum on March 17, 1991, 82.7% of the Belarusian voters wanted to preserve the Soviet state. It signalizes that Belarus adopted the Declaration of State Sovereignty on July 27, 1990, not thanks to, but against the events of that period. On August 25, 1991, the document received the status of a constitutional law, which meant the declaration of independence. The position of chairman of the Supreme Soviet was taken by Stanislav Shushkevich, associated with opposition forces⁵⁹.

The basic law of every independent country is the Constitution. It was supposed to destroy the Soviet political legacy and ensure a stable democratic path. On paper, the situation in the two countries should have looked the same. In reality, they chose different variants of development. The newcomer Lukashenko began to build a strong authoritarian regime in Belarus. Despite many obstacles, Ukraine continued its transformation with a list of presidents. It was difficult for various political forces to monopolize power thanks to the pluralism there.

The first change of power took place in 1994, when Ukrainian President Kravchuk lost to his opponent Kuchma. The former secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine distinguished himself as someone who manipulated political rules and procedures. He agreed to hold election in order to reduce social tensions in the country that was in the state of institutional chaos. When Kravchuk realized that he might lose the power, he tried to postpone them. However, the first change of the head of the state in the post-Soviet countries did take place⁶⁰.

In 1996, the Constitution of Ukraine was adopted. Among other things, it established a presidential-parliamentary republic. This model would alternate with the parliamentary-presidential republic (both known as the mixed form of government) throughout the years of

⁵⁷ R. Czachor, *Transformacja systemu politycznego na Białorusi w latach 1990–1996*, „Przegląd Wschodnioeuropejski” 2014, 5(1), s. 32-33.

⁵⁸ V. Shadurski, *Tri desyatiletia suvereniteta Respubliki Belarus' (1991–2021): tochka nevozvrata ne proydena*, „Wschodnioznawstwo” 2022, 16, p. 397.

⁵⁹ R. Czachor, *Transformacja systemu politycznego...*, op. cit., s. 33-34.

⁶⁰ V. Pashkov & O. Homeriki, *Polityko-rezhymni transformatsiyi v Ukrayini (1991-2019): Bih po Kolu na Shlyakhu do Demokratiyi*, “Visnyk Natsional’noho yurydychnoho universytetu imeni Yaroslava Mudroho” 2023, 1 (56), pp. 136-139.

independence. Their main function is to maintain the balance of power (the legislative branch is the Verkhovna Rada, the executive branch is the Cabinet of Ministers, the judicial branch, and President of Ukraine). It is one of the key differences from the Soviet political system. Others include the ability to nominate an unlimited number of independent candidates to power structures and a multi-party system as opposed to the monopoly of the Communist Party and lists of pre-agreed people. Furthermore, the Constitution significantly reduces the level of control and ensures various rights and freedoms of Ukrainians (including freedom of speech, see: Subchapter 3.3). No ideology has ceased to be mandatory⁶¹.

There is also another side to the implementation of the Constitution. In particular, the political elites try to prevent the democratic changes that are prescribed in the document. They give voters money or food for the “right choice” in the ballot paper. As a result, some Ukrainians have doubts about the importance of their vote and stop participating in elections. Some lose interest in politics and may vote based on the advice of family or friends rather than their own opinion. Other Ukrainians are in permanent opposition to the authorities. They take to the streets to participate in various kinds of demonstrations⁶². All these slow down the development of the country, which already lost a lot of time being a part of the Soviet Union.

In the case of Belarus, the country was divided into two camps: former communists led by Prime Minister Kebich and oppositionists led by the already mentioned Belarusian Popular Front. It was the only period of popularization of Belarusian culture and departure from the Soviet Union and Russia. The official colors of the flag became white, red and white according to the model of 1918. At the same time, Belarusian was recognized as the only state language. The biggest achievement was the adoption of the 1994 Constitution (with the necessary provisions on freedom of speech, see: Subchapter 3.3). Belarus was declared a presidential republic (replacing the parliamentary republic) with subsequent distribution of powers. The President makes the main decisions, on the one hand, the Supreme Soviet or later the National Assembly (consists of upper and lower houses), the Council of Ministers and the courts are significantly limited in their decisions, on the other hand. Although this

⁶¹ G.G. Krivchik, *Political Transformations in the Post-Soviet Ukraine*, “Sociosfera” 2016, (1), pp. 104-110.

⁶² O. Skrypniuk, M. Melnykovich, O. Strunevych, A. Kubko, & S. Saranov, *Transformation of the political regime in Ukraine in the times of independence: stages and features*, “Revista Amazonia Investiga” 2022, 11(58), p. 50.

arrangement was supposed to maintain the balance of power, it has contributed to its distortion. The first presidential campaign led to a harsh response from the communists to the opposition. Kebich initiated the fight against corruption and appointed Lukashenko as the head of the relevant commission. Shushkevich lost his position in the Supreme Soviet. After all, the first one was supposed to come to power, but Lukashenko won the election. He received about 45% of votes in the first round and about 80% of votes in the second round. It was probably the only free and fair presidential election in the history of the country. The system of democracy defined in the Constitution began its transformation⁶³.

Lukashenko is the only President of Belarus. As of 2024, he has been in power for 30 years. During this time, Lukashenko distinguished himself as a personalized and authoritarian head of state. He also received many nicknames⁶⁴. For some, he is “Batka” (by association with the father of the nation). This image is more acceptable for him. For example, he likes to devalue representatives of his bureaucratic apparatus through public humiliation⁶⁵. For others, he is “the last dictator of Europe.” This image is obtained for brutal mass repressions among the opposition and its supporters. The latter looks more plausible.

Lukashenko came to power as a former farmer. He is considered a populist without a clear political agenda⁶⁶. The main idea was to spread nostalgia for the Soviet Union. The candidate distanced himself from any political camps and focused on rapprochement with ordinary Belarusians. He promised to restore order and build such a state as it was during the Soviet times. The idea of parliamentary republic was covered in a negative light. Although Lukashenko’s promises did not differ from those of his communist opponents, the use of emotions contributed to his victory⁶⁷.

Despite the fact that Lukashenko promised revenge to the ruling elites, this did not happen. Instead, he focused on transforming the institute of the president into the main power

⁶³ R. Czachor, *Transformacja systemu politycznego...*, op. cit., s. 34-39.

⁶⁴ R. Goncharenko, *Belarus President Lukashenko marks 25 years*, <https://www.dw.com/en/belarus-strongman-lukashenko-marks-25-years-in-power/a-49530563> (accessed on 09.08.2023).

⁶⁵ V. Shadurski, *Tri desyatiletiya suvereniteta Respubliki Belarus'...*, op. cit., p. 407.

⁶⁶ A. Åslund, *Europe's last dictator: The rise and (possible) fall of Alyaksandr Lukashenka*, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/belarusalert/europes-last-dictator-the-rise-and-possible-fall-of-alexander-lukashenko/> (accessed on 09.08.2023).

⁶⁷ R. Czachor, *Transformacja systemu politycznego...*, op. cit., s. 38; V. Shadurski, *Tri desyatiletiya suvereniteta Respubliki Belarus'...*, op. cit., p. 406.

structure in Belarus. Other political actors began to be selected not on the basis of necessary classifications, but on the basis of their willingness to be loyal to the president⁶⁸. The power bloc (e.g. police, KGB) was in the center. This so-called “repressive machine” had one of the largest numbers of participants in the world. In exchange for benefits, they stood in solidarity with their leader during mass protests⁶⁹. His political opponents began to disappear without a trace. Moreover, Lukashenko took a course to completely reduce the influence of other branches of government on the political life of the country⁷⁰. Similar movements took place in the media environment (see: Subchapter 3.3).

The first step was the holding of parliamentary election simultaneously with the referendum in 1995. Lukashenko urged Belarusians not to participate in the election because of the futility of this power body. Its funding was limited. The results of the referendum also gave him the right to dissolve the parliament in case of violation of the Constitution⁷¹. Any decisions that are taken contrary to the President could fall under this wording. In addition, the development of economic integration with Russia and the change of state symbols (to those similar to the Soviet ones) were supported. The former was necessary due to the lack of economic success. Belarus abandoned privatization, focused on strengthening former Soviet enterprises and trusted Soviet management practices⁷².

The second step was another referendum in 1996. The most important were changes to the Constitution that related to the relationship between the President and the parliament. Among other things, the already mentioned reformatting of the Supreme Soviet into the National Assembly took place at the time. Moreover, the President received the right to appoint key ministers, officials (together with those who are responsible for the budget), and heads of local executive bodies. He can issue decrees, orders and directives. Amendments to the Constitution and application of the impeachment procedure became practically impossible⁷³.

⁶⁸ R. Czachor, *Transformacja systemu politycznego...*, op. cit., s. 39.

⁶⁹ V. Shadurski, *Tri desyatiletia suvereniteta Respubliki Belarus'...*, op. cit., pp. 406-407.

⁷⁰ R. Czachor, *Transformacja systemu politycznego...*, op. cit., s. 39.

⁷¹ Ibidem, s. 39-40.

⁷² Ibidem, s. 40; V. Shadurski, *Tri desyatiletia suvereniteta Respubliki Belarus'...*, op. cit., p. 407; A. Åslund, *Europe's last dictator...*, op. cit. (accessed on 09.08.2023).

⁷³ R. Czachor, *Transformacja systemu politycznego...*, op. cit., s. 42-43; Zerkalo, *Kak Lukashenko priobrel absolynutnyu vlast'.* *Rasskazyvayem, chto sluchilos' v Belarusi chetvert' veka nazad*, <https://news.zerkalo.io/economics/5471.html> (accessed on 10.08.2023).

Interestingly, these changes were only the beginning of the formation of an authoritarian system.

Ukrainian President Kuchma, who was in power from 1994 to 2004 (two terms), demonstrated similar political intentions regarding the consolidation of power. Among the concrete steps were the following. First, he created the Council of Regions in order to control local government bodies under the argument of joint agreement on important issues. Second, Kuchma wanted to eliminate the influence of the legislative branch of power through the law “On State Power and Local Self-Government in Ukraine”⁷⁴. The power bloc had to provide guarantees of stability. Its advantage was in the absence of control by society⁷⁵. Third, the country changed 7 governments during Kuchma’s time in power. The unstable branch of power was managed by the President. Fourth, the Administration of the President promoted pro-government candidates for full subordination of local councils⁷⁶. Fifth, excessive corruption began to flourish at various levels of power as a payment for loyalty to the head of state. They acted in accordance with telephone instructions from the center. Sixth, power gradually passed into the hands of only one large multi-party corporation⁷⁷. It resembles an attempt to build a new communist system in independent Ukraine.

Kuchma can also be considered the father of the oligarchic-bureaucratic system or corporate capitalism. It was based on the Constitution (strengthened the position of the President by providing control over important areas of political life in the country), the cooperation of former Soviet political actors with local criminal elites, as well as the large-scale privatization of industrial and energy complexes (transferred to the family and partners of the President through non-transparent tenders). This regime even received the name “Kuchmizm”. Instead of the “rule of law”, the country received an “arbitrary rule” with clientelism. The role of moderator between oligarchic-clan groups was assigned to the President⁷⁸. Kuchma

⁷⁴ V. Pashkov & O. Homeriki, *Polityko-rezhymni transformatsiyi...*, op. cit., p. 140.

⁷⁵ O. Skrypniuk, M. Melnykovich, O. Strunevych, A. Kubko, & S. Saranov, *Transformation of the political regime...*, op. cit., p. 51.

⁷⁶ V. Pashkov & O. Homeriki, *Polityko-rezhymni transformatsiyi...*, op. cit., pp. 141-142.

⁷⁷ O. Skrypniuk, M. Melnykovich, O. Strunevych, A. Kubko, & S. Saranov, *Transformation of the political regime...*, op. cit., pp. 51-52.

⁷⁸ V. Pashkov & O. Homeriki, *Polityko-rezhymni transformatsiyi...*, op. cit., p. 141; O. Skrypniuk, M. Melnykovich, O. Strunevych, A. Kubko, & S. Saranov, *Transformation of the political regime...*, op. cit., p. 51; M. Ratajczak & W. Baluk, *System medialny niepodległej Ukrainy*, [w:] Z. Oniszczyk, M. Gierula (red.), *Mało znane systemy medialne*, 2007, s. 96.

formulated his rule in Ukraine around them. On the contrary, Lukashenko was the only main figure in Belarus.

Oligarchic clans in Ukraine were formed due to the loss of control from Moscow and the disorganization of society after the collapse of the Soviet Union. They converted their economic power into political power and functioned on the basis of formal (permission to break the law) and informal rules (subordination to the main political family). These forces captured the Ukrainian media environment (details about ownership in Subsection 3.3). The most famous are the groups from the Dnipropetrovsk and Donetsk regions. The first included President Kuchma, oligarch Pinchuk, Prime Ministers Lazarenko and Tymoshenko, the Privat group with oligarchs Kolomoisky and Bogoliubov, etc. Its existence was accompanied by internal struggle and the absence of a common political party. Ukrainians perceived its direction as pro-Ukrainian due to the defense of Ukrainian statehood at certain moments of danger to its existence. At the same time, the second group consisted of President Yanukovich, Prime Minister Azarov, oligarchs Akhmetov (the richest man in Ukraine) and Kolesnikov, as well as other political and economic figures. Many of them were former prisoners. They managed to create the Party of Regions. Its image was built around the person of Yanukovich over the years. The philosophy of the clan can be formulated as pro-Russian due to the nostalgia for the Soviet Union and constant support for the partnership with Russia⁷⁹. Additionally, there were Kyiv and Kharkiv groups. Nonetheless, their influence was more limited to the territory of the respective regions.

Consequently, the period of Kuchma's rule is called the regime of "soft authoritarianism." Since competitive electoral mechanisms, a strong opposition and a protest society were formed in the country, it was never able to evolve into a fully-fledged authoritarian regime. The beginning of the new century was marked by the actions "Ukraine without Kuchma"⁸⁰.

No less significant was the presence of the Russian factor in the political and media systems of both countries (continuation in Subsection 3.3). Kuchma and Lukashenko were called

⁷⁹ M. Minakov, *Republic of Clans: The evolution of the Ukrainian political system*, "Central European University Press EBooks" 2019, pp. 228–241.

⁸⁰ Ibidem, pp. 96-97; V. Pashkov & O. Homeriki, *Polityko-rezhymni transformatsiyi...*, op. cit., p. 142.

“ours” in Moscow⁸¹. The development of mainly economic and political ties took place during this period. Lukashenko has been trying to maneuver between the West and the East, but Russia still manages to absorb Belarus. At the beginning of independence, cooperation with the Eastern neighbor became a priority for the country. The Soviet legacy contributed to this. First, the Belarusian economy was strongly dependent on the Russian one (e.g. oil refineries, machine parts). Second, various Belarusian managers were not able to cut ties with the center in Moscow. As a result, Lukashenko signed the Treaty on the Formation of the Community of Russia and Belarus (1996), the Treaty of Military Cooperation between the two states (1997), the Treaty on the Creation of the Union State (1999) and others. The latter received its extension. Numerous violations of human rights and falsification of elections completely turned the West away from Lukashenko. His rhetoric of blackmail in relations with Russia has lost its relevance. Opportunities for resistance to the imposed policies remained minimal⁸². In 2021, a series of roadmaps for the creation of the Union State and 28 integration programs were signed. Among other things, there were economic, financial, agricultural, energetic and military issues⁸³.

Kuchma chose the path of multi-vectoring in international politics, which contributed to the development of relations with both Western and Eastern partners. In particular, he came to power with the promises of establishing “special relations” with Russia⁸⁴. One of the first decisions were to make it the guarantor of Ukrainian security under the Budapest Memorandum in exchange for the loss of nuclear status⁸⁵. The choice of Russia as the main partner was also facilitated by reluctance of the West to cooperate with Kuchma due to his scandalous image⁸⁶. In 1997, the two countries signed the Treaty on Friendship, Strategic Partnership and Cooperation, as well as the Agreement on the Status and Conditions of Stay

⁸¹ D. Shurchalo, *Velykyy dohovir mizh Ukrayinoyu i RF 1997 roku: peredumovy viyny zakladalysya todi?* <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/velykyi-dohovir-rosiya-ukrayina-viyna/31887879.html> (accessed on 15.08.2023).

⁸² V. Shadurski, *Tri desyatiletia suvereniteta Respubliki Belarus'*..., op. cit., pp. 408-415.

⁸³ RFE/RL's Belarus Service, *Putin, Lukashenka Agree To 28 Union State 'Programs'*, <https://www.rferl.org/a/putin-lukashenka-union-state/31546225.html> (accessed on 13.08.2023).

⁸⁴ D. Shurchalo, *Velykyy dohovir...*, op. cit. (accessed on 15.08.2023).

⁸⁵ S. Khomenko, *Epokha Kuchmy: desyat' neodnoznachnykh rokiv*, https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/politics/2013/08/130809_kuchma_epoch_sx (accessed on 13.08.2023).

⁸⁶ O. Vagner, *Vid lyubovi do nenavysti – odyn krok. Ukrayina i Putin*, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/30120715.html> (accessed on 13.08.2023).

of the Black Sea Fleet of Russia in Ukraine⁸⁷. The last one was extended in 2010 for 32 years⁸⁸. Moreover, Russian President Putin visited Kyiv at the end of Kuchma's term. Nevertheless, Ukraine understood the threats posed by its Eastern neighbor and tried to resist the increase of its influence. It slowed down the process of integration into the Single Economic Space, rejected Russian claims to Crimea, and defended its interests during the Tuzla Island Crisis. After all, Kuchma wrote the book "Ukraine is not Russia"⁸⁹.

The 2004 presidential election saw the first attempt to challenge the existing political elites. Former Prime Minister and Chairman of the National Bank Yushchenko ran for the office in order to change the political system. Former Prime Minister Yanukovich became his main rival. The latter was supported by Kuchma for the continued existence of the established system. If Yushchenko was considered a reformist with pro-Ukrainian and pro-European orientations, Yanukovich was associated with criminality⁹⁰.

The reason for the Orange Revolution was the results of the second round of the election. At first, exit polls showed Yushchenko's victory (52% against 48%). However, voter turnout in the Eastern regions increased dramatically and the official results showed Yanukovich's victory with a margin of 2.5%. People went out to peaceful protests, while Yushchenko chose two strategies for further actions. The revolutionary strategy consisted in the self-recognition of one's own presidential victory and the corresponding behavior in relation to the various branches of power. The institutional or constitutional strategy provided for the passage of all constitutional procedures for the official recognition of the election results as invalid. Consequently, a third round of election was scheduled, where 52% of voters chose

⁸⁷ D. Shurchalo, *Velykyy dohovir...*, op. cit. (accessed on 15.08.2023).

⁸⁸ Y. Korogodskyi, *Kharkivs'ki uhody: yak 10 rokiv tomu Yanukovych zdav Krym Rosiyi*, https://espreso.tv/article/2020/04/21/kharkivski_ugody_yak_10_rokiv_tomu_yanukovych_zdav_krym_rosiyi (accessed on 14.08.2023).

⁸⁹ S. Khomenko, *Epokha Kuchmy...*, op. cit. (accessed on 13.08.2023); O. Vagner, *Vid lyubovi do...*, op. cit. (accessed on 13.08.2023); D. Shurchalo, *20 rokiv tomu: knyzhka «Ukrayina – ne Rosiya» Leonida Kuchmy i konflikt za ostriv Tuzla*, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/kuchma-ukrayina-ne-rosiya-ostriv-tuzla/32606738.html> (accessed on 15.08.2023).

⁹⁰ L. Bivings, *Ukraine's Orange Revolution*, <https://kyivindependent.com/ukraines-orange-revolution/> (accessed on 21.08.2023).

Yushchenko⁹¹. It was the first triumph of democracy in independent Ukraine, or the so-called “democratic breakthrough”⁹².

While Ukraine was embarking on the path of democratic changes, the authoritarian regime was strengthening in Belarus. The first unrecognized presidential election were held in the country in 2001⁹³. Dissatisfied opposition journalists, politicians and activists literally began to disappear. Lukashenko held another referendum, which gave him the right to run for president an unlimited number of times⁹⁴. Belarusians were neutralized and ready to vote for any decision of the authorities. An unspoken social contract existed between both sides. The population did not claim active participation in the political life of the country in exchange for acceptable living conditions, economic support and freedom of movement⁹⁵.

After that, political life in both countries was characterized by partial or complete liberalization of authoritarian tendencies. On the one hand, Yushchenko distinguished himself by the democratic distribution of power and the development of the national idea. He did not allow administrative pressure, ensured fair and competitive elections, as well as freedom of speech and expression of opinions⁹⁶. At the same time, Lukashenko released political prisoners, brought back independent newspapers and started discussions about human rights. A record number of candidates were registered to participate in the 2010 presidential elections, namely 10 of them⁹⁷. On the other hand, Yushchenko’s rule was accompanied by constant conflicts with the parliament. His party lost power already in the parliamentary-presidential republic. These developments caused disappointment in the democratic system among Ukrainians. The following President Yanukovich took advantage

⁹¹ Ibidem; A. Karatnycky, *Ukraine’s Orange Revolution*, “Foreign Affairs” 2005, 84(2), pp. 35-52.

⁹² M. Ratajczak & W. Baluk, *System medialny niepodległej Ukrainy...*, op. cit., s. 97.

⁹³ Hrodna.life, *Vybory v Belarusi 1994–2020: ot pokusheniya do mema pro 3%*, <https://ru.hrodna.life/articles/elections-timeline-1994-2020/?fbclid=IwAR0M08AStzyEXoTsCvuEdESwk51kgMPv2mR0vSrfmDGW4ePpJngolZ6GvVk> (accessed on 25.08.2023).

⁹⁴ L. Skliar, *Dos’ye: Kak izmenili Belarus’ referendumy 1995, 1996 i 2004 godov*, <https://eurasia.expert/kak-izmenili-belarus-referendумы-1995-1996-i-2004/?fbclid=IwAR1YhukSlRzhXWmTsfel4jfZ94xPWNNk9c-Ry7cfHWHWma994GxiKd011Dg> (accessed on 25.08.2023).

⁹⁵ U. Rouda, *Belarus: transformation from authoritarianism towards sultanism*, “Baltic journal of political science” 2012, (1), p. 65; V. Shadurski, *Tri desyatiletiya suvereniteta Respubliki Belarus’...*, op. cit., p. 398; E. Kocharyan, *Comparing Media Systems Applied in Post-Soviet Countries Political Parallelism and Role of the State in Armenia, Belarus and Russia* [Master’s thesis, University of Gothenburg], 2021, p. 32.

⁹⁶ O. Skrypniuk, M. Melnykovich, O. Strunevych, A. Kubko, & S. Saranov, *Transformation of the political regime...*, op. cit., p. 52; V. Pashkov & O. Homeriki, *Polityko-rezhymni transformatsiyi...*, op. cit., p. 143.

⁹⁷ Hrodna.life, *Vybory v Belarusi 1994–2020...*, op. cit. (accessed on 25.08.2023).

of the situation. He returned the authoritarian methods of power concentration around the president⁹⁸. In addition, Lukashenko won the election with the unprecedented redistribution of votes (79.65%) and returned to the old methods of governance. He staged a bloody crackdown on protesters who were dissatisfied with the results. Opposition leaders were sent to prison again⁹⁹.

Although Yanukovich became the fourth President after the democratic transition of power, his governing style was similar to Lukashenka's one. From the very beginning of his term, he returned the presidential republic, started criminal prosecution of his opponents (oppositionists Tymoshenko and Lutsenko were sent to prison), got closer to Moscow and spread its cultural narratives (language and history). The main difference from Lukashenko was the presence of his allies in power. Yanukovich made decisions together with representatives of the Donetsk oligarch clan, promoted members of his family to leadership positions, relied on the dominant Party of Regions in the parliament and absorbed other partner parties¹⁰⁰.

The politics of Yanukovich and his family caused the third revolution in Ukraine (Revolution of Dignity or Euromaidan). The last straw was the non-signing of the Association Agreement with the European Union and the subsequent bloody dispersal of protesting students in the fall of 2013. The "dictatorship" laws, which were adopted by the parliament, became the last attempt to retain power. They included restrictions on freedom of speech, freedom of peaceful assembly, etc. The risks for potential mass arrests of protesters were based on unclear grounds¹⁰¹. Furthermore, security forces began to kill demonstrators. As a result, Yanukovich was forced to flee the country. For the first time in the country's history, the Verkhovna Rada applied the impeachment procedure against the President. He was aslo sentenced in absentia to 13 years of imprisonment for treason and aiding in the conduct of an

⁹⁸ V. Pashkov & O. Homeriki, *Polityko-rezhymni transformatsiyi...*, op. cit., pp. 145-149.

⁹⁹ U. Rouda, *Belarus: transformation from...*, op. cit., p. 64; Hrodna.life, *Vybory v Belarusi 1994–2020...*, op. cit. (accessed on 25.08.2023).

¹⁰⁰ V. Pashkov & O. Homeriki, *Polityko-rezhymni transformatsiyi...*, op. cit., pp. 145-149; O. Skrypniuk, M. Melnykovich, O. Strunevych, A. Kubko, & S. Saranov, *Transformation of the political regime...*, op. cit., p. 52.

¹⁰¹ *Ukraine: Brief legal analysis of "Dictatorship Law"*, <https://www.civicsolidarity.org/article/880/ukraine-brief-legal-analysis-dictatorship-law>, (accessed on 26.08.2023).

aggressive war¹⁰². Russia attacked Ukraine, annexed Crimea and occupied Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

Poroshenko became the first President of Ukraine during the wartime. The crisis helped him gain 54.7% of the vote and win in the first round. A complete reset of the government took place, so the “European Ukraine” coalition won the parliamentary elections (Block of Petro Poroshenko, People’s Front, Samopomich, Radical Party of Oleg Lyashko, and Fatherland). The first two parties won the largest number of votes and formed the basis of the coalition. The parliamentary-presidential form of government was returned. This balanced the system of functioning of the state in which President Poroshenko and Prime Minister Yatsenyuk represented different political forces. It is worth mentioning that the Party of Regions transformed into the Opposition Bloc due to its bad reputation. The legacy of Euromaidan forced all political actors to play by the rules. As a result, this arrangement of forces contributed to the democratization of the political system, the implementation of reforms, pro-Ukrainian and pro-Western orientations, and the development of the Ukrainian army. Among the key achievements were the signing of the Association Agreement with the EU, the introduction of the visa-free regime between EU and Ukraine, implementation of the Free Trade Area Agreement with the EU, reforms in the anti-corruption sphere, decentralization, and other types of reforms¹⁰³.

Nevertheless, Poroshenko covertly tried to expand his influence on power processes. He was still a representative of the “old” system. The Verkhovna Rada passed laws that allowed the President to additionally form the staff of anti-corruption bodies (National Anti-Corruption Bureau, Anti-Corruption Court), state regulators, and structural units of the security and defense sphere (Ukroboronprom). Some of these powers were abolished by the Constitutional Court. In addition, Prime Minister Yatsenyuk was replaced by Groysman, a representative of the President’s party. Poroshenko expects full control of the parliament, but the new Prime Minister has become an independent figure. Subsequently, a similar political

¹⁰² BBC News Ukraine, *Yanukovycha zasudyly do 13 rokiv uv'yaznennya*, <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/news-46984124> (accessed on 26.08.2023).

¹⁰³ V. Pashkov & O. Homeriki, *Polityko-rezhymni transformatsiyi...*, op. cit., pp. 150-153; O. Skrypniuk, M. Melnykovich, O. Strunevych, A. Kubko, & S. Saranov, *Transformation of the political regime...*, op. cit., pp. 52-53.

development took place with Kyiv mayor Klitschko. In the end, Poroshenko lost the 2019 presidential election and transferred power in a democratic manner¹⁰⁴.

At the same time, Lukashenko continued to be the President of Belarus. Although he ignored the repeated protests of representatives of Belarusian society and the lack of opposition in the parliament, there were other signals of concern for him. First, Russia attacked Ukraine and the same could happen with Belarus. Lukashenko tried to regain the trust of the West and arranged peace talks in Minsk. Second, public dissatisfaction with the economic situation in the country, plans for integration with Russia, and the response to the coronavirus pandemic was growing. Third, possible fears due to insufficient political rating forced him to appoint the former head of the KGB, Siarheyenka, as the head of the presidential administration¹⁰⁵. He did not plan to lose power.

Two important turning points should be marked on the political timeline of these countries. In 2019, the comedian Zelenskyy became the President of Ukraine. His figure was the personification of the struggle of ordinary people against the old political establishment. Interestingly, Zelenskyy's political career began six months before the election (the feature is disclosed in Subchapter 3.3). The newcomer won a crushing 73.22% of the votes against the career politician Poroshenko¹⁰⁶. After that, his party achieved an election victory and formed an absolute majority in the parliament. Most of them are randomly gathered people from various fields who supposed to vote for Zelenskyy's proposals. Although the country de jure maintains a parliamentary-presidential republic, it is de facto ruled by the president. The Prime Minister, the Cabinet of Ministers and the Parliament are fully subordinated to his decisions. Many of them contradict the Constitution¹⁰⁷.

It is important to recognize that Zelenskyy before and after the start of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine are two different politicians. Absolute power was given to the President during martial law. However, there are important achievements in the transformation of the

¹⁰⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁵ A. Yeliseyev, *Belarus at a Crossroads: Political Regime Transformation and Future Scenarios*, East Center, 2020.

¹⁰⁶ Ukrinform, *Vybory Prezydenta: Zelenskyy peremih z 73,22% holosiv*, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-elections/2691466-prezidentom-ukraini-stav-volodimir-zelenskij.html> (accessed on 09.09.2023).

¹⁰⁷ O. Skrypniuk, M. Melnykovich, O. Strunevych, A. Kubko, & S. Saranov, *Transformation of the political regime...*, op. cit., p. 53.

political system. These are the large-scale struggle against the clan-oligarchic structure, the destruction of the centers of the Russian lobby in the country (the church of the Moscow Patriarchate, pro-Russian parties), heroic leadership during the war, the status of the EU candidate country, the transition to NATO military standards, digitalization of the country, etc. Despite the lack of a strong democratic mechanism of checks and balances, Ukrainians consider the state as an important element for their survival in times of crisis. It is difficult to recall analogues of such cooperation during the time of independence¹⁰⁸.

In 2020, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya became one of the admitted candidates for the presidency of Belarus. The former teacher and housewife opposed Lukashenko along with 5 other candidates. Her husband, blogger Sergei Tsikhanouskii, was arrested together with another oppositionist Viktor Babaryka. Signatures for former diplomat Valeriy Tsepkalo were rejected by the Central Election Commission. Therefore, Tsikhanouskaya united with representatives of these political actors and ran as a single candidate from the opposition.

Although the election results showed the victory of Lukashenko over Tsikhanouskaya (80.23% against 9.9%), Belarusians refused to believe in them and organized the longest protest actions in the history of the country¹⁰⁹. They took place in almost all major cities and were accompanied by bloody crackdowns, torture and murder of activists (repressions against media in Subchapter 3.3). The largest march in terms of attendance took place in Minsk (200 thousand participants). Even factory workers, the basis of the country's economy, went on strike¹¹⁰.

Tsikhanouskaya declared herself the winner of the election. After that, she was forced to go abroad due to pressure and threats from the authorities. Some of her opposition colleagues were arrested, while others began to operate from abroad (similarly to media in Subchapter 3.3). As for Tsikhanouskaya, she was able to form the first Belarusian government in exile. Its representative power is recognized by democratic countries. Among other things, it deals

¹⁰⁸ N. Gumenyuk, *War Makes the State*, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/war-makes-state-governance?fbclid=IwAR0wUmakhD_H_L6R0YrSgaPssp21Gibdt4CxNMUE_B3RrkFWceVIDI5PgZU (accessed on 10.09.2023).

¹⁰⁹ BBC News, *Belarus election: Opposition disputes Lukashenko landslide win*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-53721410> (accessed on 15.09.2023).

¹¹⁰ VOA News, *Hundreds of Thousands March in Belarus*, https://www.voanews.com/a/europe_hundreds-thousands-march-belarus/6194491.html (accessed on 25.09.2023).

with assistance and protection of Belarusians abroad, defense of national interests in international politics (separation of responsibility between the criminal authorities and ordinary people), and preparation for the change of the political system from an authoritarian to a democratic one.

The given time periods show the difference in the transformation of political systems in Ukraine and Belarus. One of their few similar features is the effort to create a strong head of state (the president) and a weak government (with some exceptions). According to the scientific literature, the authors offer a variety of options for their specific classification. The rankings of the Freedom House could not be overlook either (see: Figure 31). They confirm the same trends.

Fig. 31. Democracy rankings in Ukraine and Belarus

State	Ukraine (transitional or hybrid regime)		Belarus (consolidated authoritarian regime)	
Ranking Year	Democracy score by Freedom House	Democracy Index by the Economist	Democracy score by Freedom House	Democracy Index by the Economist
2023	3.36, 39 place		1.11, 2 place	
2022	3.36, 39 place	5.42, 87 place	1.18, 3 place	1.99, 153 place
2021	3.36, 39 place	5.57, 86 place	1.29, 5 place	2.41, 146 place
2020	3.39, 40 place	5.81, 79 place	1.39, 7 place	2.59, 148 place
2019	3.36, 39 place	5.90, 78 place	1.39, 7 place	2.48, 150 place
2015	3.25, 38 place	5.70, 88 place	1.29, 5 place	3.62, 127 place

Source: Freedom House, *Belarus*, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/belarus/nations-transit/2023> (accessed on 30.09.2023); Freedom House, *Ukraine*, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/ukraine/nations-transit/2023> (accessed on 30.09.2023); The Economist, *Democracy Index*, <https://www.eiu.com/> (accessed on 30.09.2023).

Regarding Ukraine, it is possible to distinguish different types of political systems: 1) unconsolidated competitive authoritarianism (Kravchuk) or a transitional state with super-parliamentarism (1991-1996); 2) a semi-authoritarian oligarchic regime or a hybrid state with an authoritarian regime (Kuchma, 1996-2004); 3) the regime of electoral democracy or a hybrid state with an electoral regime (Yushchenko, 2004-2010); 4) competitive authoritarianism or hybrid democracy with an authoritarian regime (Yanukovych, 2010-2013); 5) cartel, competitive unstable democracy (2014-2016), semi-competitive, soft

presidential-oligarchic authoritarianism (since 2016) or a hybrid state with an electoral regime (Poroshenko and Zelenskyy, since 2014)¹¹¹. The legacy of the Soviet Union is the present elements of the oligarchic republic¹¹². Despite all this, it is visible that the process of transition to a democratic system takes place, but slowly and with obstacles. The constant alternation of authoritarian and democratic methods of exercising power forms a hybrid or transitional regime in Ukraine¹¹³.

Regarding Belarus, the country has always been dominated by authoritarianism in its various forms. It began to be formed with the arrival of the only President Lukashenko in 1994. As another confirmation, Steblyna cites three periods in terms of the number of participants in the presidential elections: 1) high (2006-2008); 2) moderate (2008-2012); 3) relatively low (2012-2015)¹¹⁴. At the same time, Rouda classifies the nature of the regime in Belarus as sultanism due to the monopolization of power, dynastic tendencies, personalized ideology, mass repressions, formality of procedures, etc.¹¹⁵ After all, the first real chance for democratic changes became the figure of Tsikhanouskaya and her “alternative” government operating from abroad. Nevertheless, the authoritarian system still continues to exist.

As the chapter moves to a detailed analysis of the media systems in the two countries, it is true that the application of Hallin and Mancini’s dimensions of political systems is irrelevant when comparing the two countries. Ukraine can still be classified in the following way. First, the state is being transformed in a democratic direction. Among other things, the new Media Law was adopted in 2022. It should promote the independence of the mass media and limit attempts at financial pressure on them. Second, the structure of power is constantly changing from a consensus democracy to a majoritarian democracy and vice versa. As of 2023, the latter prevails. At the same time, the government does not develop neutral media. It rather discredits their activities by creating a negative image for people, so they transfer to social

¹¹¹ V. Pashkov & O. Homeriki, *Polityko-rezhymni transformatsiyi...*, op. cit., pp. 135-158; H. Zelenko in O. Skrypniuk, M. Melnykovich, O. Strunevych, A. Kubko, & S. Saranov, *Transformation of the political regime...*, op. cit., pp. 47–56.

¹¹² M. Minakov, *Republic of Clans...*, op. cit., pp. 217–246.

¹¹³ O. Skrypniuk, M. Melnykovich, O. Strunevych, A. Kubko, & S. Saranov, *Transformation of the political regime...*, op. cit., p. 54.

¹¹⁴ N.O. Steblyna, *Transformatsiya avtorytarnoho rezhymu u tsyfrovii real'nosti (na prykladi Bilorusi 2006-2015 rr.)*, “Politychne zhyttia” 2020, 1, pp. 75–83.

¹¹⁵ U. Rouda, *Belarus: transformation from...*, op. cit., pp. 70-75.

media. Third, oligarchs as media owners are an example of individual pluralism. They exchange information time for their own benefit. Fourth, clientelism is still present. It is especially manifested in the defense of the interests of the “own” candidate.

As for Belarus, almost all media in the country are subordinate to Lukashenko. Opposition media work from abroad. This state of affairs makes any attempt to analyze the political system through the appropriate criteria completely meaningless.

3.3 Traditional media systems of Ukraine and Belarus

Surprisingly, scientific literature does not have a large number of publications describing media systems in Ukraine and Belarus as of the end of 2023. Among the main problems are the loss of relevance, the description of the post-Soviet region through the lens of Russia, and the high cost of some articles. Therefore, it was decided to take the structure of old scientific materials and update their data with the help of journalistic sources. The following units formed the basis of this subchapter: 1) “System medialny niepodległej Ukrainy” by Ratajczak and Baluk; 2) “Emergence of the media system in Ukraine following the collapse of the USSR” by Nesteriak; 3) “The media system in Ukraine. Political science approach” by Hajduk; 4) “The media market and media ownership in Post-Communist Ukraine” by Ryabinska; 5) “Characteristics of the Belarusian media system” by Usov; 6) “Media in post-Soviet Belarus: between democratization and reinforcing authoritarianism” by Manaev; 7) “Comparing Media Systems Applied in Post-Soviet Countries Political Parallelism and Role of the State in Armenia, Belarus and Russia” by Kocharyan. Another important source was “Monitoring Media Pluralism in the Digital Era: Preliminary study to the implementation of the Media Pluralism Monitor: Ukraine” by Opryshko. It was divided into Fundamental Protection, Market Plurality, Political Independence and Social Inclusiveness¹¹⁶. As a result, the conducted analysis added uniqueness to this PhD dissertation.

Searching for historical information about media in Belarus is a responsible matter, because the current government constantly rewrites and censors it. Each event is presented from an advantageous angle by the interested party. It is difficult to trust even representatives of local

¹¹⁶ Since this is the preliminary study, it does not have any indicators.

universities. Hence, the author of the thesis searched for facts and checked them from several sources.

To begin with, the origin of the media system of Belarus most likely dates back to June 1862, when the Underground Lithuanian Committee headed by Kastus Kalinovsky began publishing the newspaper “Mužyckaja praŭda.” Its content consisted of materials about the struggle for the independence of Belarus. The main feature of the newspaper was the Belarusian language in Latin script. A total of 7 issues were released. After that, Tsar Nicholas II lifted the ban on the use of national languages in the Russian Empire. The decision served as an impetus for the establishment of the first legal Belarusian newspaper “Nasha Dolya” (Our destiny) and the legal weekly “Nasha Niva” (Our cornfield) in 1906. Unofficially, both were organs of the first illegal party “Belarusian Socialist Community.” They promoted the Belarusian national idea, which differed from the Russian and Polish ones. Since “Nasha Dolya” used radical propaganda and was quickly closed, “Nasha Niva” became more liberal and appealed to all Belarusians and their supporters. Press publications were issued in Latin and Cyrillic scripts¹¹⁷. Although “Nasha Niva” still exists, Lukashenko ordered to recognize the newspaper with more than 100 years of history as extremist¹¹⁸.

On the contrary, the Belarusian authorities are proud of creating “the main newspaper of Belarus” called “Soviet Belarus”¹¹⁹. Its first issue was published under the name “Worker” in 1927. After 10 years, it was renamed. The authors focus on socio-political topics and publish them in Russian and Belarusian languages. Since its founders include the presidential administration, the materials reflect Lukashenko’s vision of the state of affairs. It is the most circulated newspaper in the country. However, there is information about forced subscription¹²⁰. As of 2023, its full name is “SB. Belarus Segodnya” (Belarus Today).

¹¹⁷ L. Dovnar, *The role of Vilna in the renaissance of Belarusian press in the early 20th century: ideological and personal relations*, “Knygotyra” 2009, 52, pp. 199, 202-205; T. Sapego, *The period of Byelorussian renaissance of the beginning of the 20th century at the book museum of the national library of Belarus*, “Knygotyra” 2009, 52, pp. 256-257.

¹¹⁸ Deutsche Welle, *Belarus’ ob’yavila “ekstremist-skim” izdaniye “Nasha Niva”*, <https://www.dw.com/ru/belarus-priznala-jekstremistskim-izdanie-nasha-niva/a-60571232> (accessed on 30.11.2023).

¹¹⁹ O. Gerasimenko, *Segodnya glavnoy gazete Belarusi - 95 let*, <https://rg.ru/2022/08/02/slovo-derzhath.html> (accessed on 30.11.2023).

¹²⁰ E. Kocharyan, *Comparing Media Systems...*, op. cit., p. 31.

Equally important mass media in Belarus are radio and television. In particular, Belarusians were able to listen to the first national radio broadcast on November 15, 1925. Radio newspapers became the main ones on the air. The radio station broadcasted a signal at a distance of 300 km. The process of radification of Belarus was completed in 1960¹²¹. At the same time, the first television program was released on January 1, 1956. Announcer Tamara Bastun addressed the audience. Among the first genres were concerts, performances, films and film magazines. Some of them were made in Belarus, others were sent from the center in Moscow. Over time, genre diversity only expanded¹²². Importantly, both radio and television are fully subordinated to the authorities in Belarus.

Considering Ukraine, historical information is open and transparent. It contributes to the variety of versions regarding the origin of printed publications. Researchers argue about the priority characteristic (language or content) that would determine the date of the first Ukrainian newspaper. For example, the one-day journal “Kurjer Lwowski” (1749) tends to be considered the Polish publication because of the language. However, Krevetskyi associates the French-language weekly “Gazette de Leopol” (1776, Lviv) with the first Ukrainian newspaper. Ignatienko considers the Russian-language newspapers “Preis-Kurant” (Price list, 1809, Odesa) and “Kharkivskyi tyzhnevnyk” (Kharkiv weekly, 1812, Kharkiv) to be precursors of the Ukrainian press. Finally, “Kharkiv Demokrit” and “Ukrainskiy vestnik” (Ukraine Herald, 1816, Kharkiv) were named the first Ukrainian newspapers by him. For Makovey and Wozniak, it was “Zorya Halytska,” which began to be published in Galicia in 1848¹²³.

Information about the beginnings of Ukrainian radio and television is more specific. In particular, the first attempt to show a live TV broadcast took place on February 1, 1939 in Kyiv. The video series consisted of portraits of the leaders of the Soviet Union. Due to World War II, the next broadcasts were scheduled to take place on November 5 and 6, 1951. Two

¹²¹ About radio. History, <https://radio1.by/ru/o-radio/istoriya/> (accessed on 30.11.2023).

¹²² BELTA, DOS'YE: K 60-letiyu Belorusskogo televideniya, <https://www.belta.by/society/view/dose-k-60-letiju-belorusskogo-televideniya-175706-2015/> (accessed on 30.11.2023); Belteleradiokompaniya, 67 let nazad nachalas' i efinaya istoriya BT, https://www.tvr.by/news/obshchestvo/67_let_nazad_nachalas_i_efirnaya_istoriya_bt/ (accessed on 30.11.2023).

¹²³ T.A. Trachuk, *Do vytokiv ukrayins'koyi nauky pro zhurnalistyku*, “Scientific Notes of the Institute of Journalism” 2003, 13, pp. 82-89.

films were shown on the air. Thus, Kyiv entered the top ten European capitals with electronic television¹²⁴.

As for the radio, the authorities of Soviet Ukraine wanted to distribute political-educational and propaganda-propaganda audio materials following the example of Moscow. This desire transformed into the first radio concert, which was broadcast on November 16, 1924 in Kharkiv. It lasted 22 minutes. About one and a half thousand people from the premises of the central party club became its listeners. Although the producers planned new concerts and the release of the radio magazine “Radiopolumya” (radio fire), the main goal was to broadcast information from important Soviet newspapers. The audience constituted various groups of the society (e.g. workers, military personnel, youth). New radio owners were encouraged with free printed copies. In addition, it was possible to listen to the declaration of independence of Ukraine thanks to a live broadcast on the radio¹²⁵.

The beginning of the 1990s was marked by a turning point in the history of the Ukrainian media system. As the prominent politician Vyacheslav Chornovil said: “The rotten Russian Empire [Soviet Union] is collapsing...” Among the factors that contributed to this event was the so-called “samvydav,” or press that was published without the consent of the Soviet authorities. Apparently, newspapers like “Bakhmut,” “Dzvin,” “Young Ukraine” and many others were heard by their society¹²⁶.

From this moment, the formation of an independent media market in Ukraine begins. As of 2023, its development has already reached 8 periods. The following classification was proposed by Ratajczak and Baluk¹²⁷. The last 3 periods were supplemented by the author of this PhD dissertation. All of them could be directly connected to the various typologies from Subchapter 3.2:

- 1) 1989-1991 - freedom of speech as part of the liberalization of the Soviet system;

¹²⁴ Y.M. Litovkina, *Do 70-richchya z chasu stvorennia ukrayins'koho telebachennia* (1951), <https://nlu.org.ua/vustavki.php?id=1015> (accessed on 01.12.2023).

¹²⁵ V. Noskov, «Allo! Hovoryt' Kharkiv! Vam, vam, vam!» <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/26692642.html> (accessed on 01.12.2023); *News of the company. 98 rokiv v efiri: 15 faktiv z istoriyi Ukrayins'koho Radio*, <https://corp.suspilne.media/newsdetails/5584> (accessed on 01.12.2023).

¹²⁶ Y. Nesteriak, *Emergence of the media system in Ukraine following the collapse of the USSR*, „Środkowoeuropejskie Studia Polityczne” 2019, 4, p. 154.

¹²⁷ M. Ratajczak & W. Baluk, *System medialny niepodległej Ukrainy...*, op. cit., s. 98.

- 2) 1992-1994 - approval of the institutional and legal frameworks that regulate the functioning of the market and the economic crisis;
- 3) 1994-1998 - revival of the media market and the beginnings of the organization of freedom of speech;
- 4) 1998-2004 - organization of the media market with continuation of censorship;
- 5) 2004-2010 - an attempt to return to freedom of speech;
- 6) 2010-2013 - direct censorship by the authorities;
- 7) 2013-2022 - development of freedom of speech;
- 8) 2022-? - censorship during the full-scale war of Russia against Ukraine.

It is important to consider the structure of the media system. According to 2022 statistics, the press market included 1.089 newspapers with a total annual circulation of about 418.000 copies. Its basis is the local press. The situation is worse than in 1991, when it was just formed. At that time, the press market included 1.909 newspapers with a circulation of about 3.8 million copies¹²⁸. Among the main factors of the sharp decline are the COVID-19 pandemic and the war. Moreover, the Ukrainian press was characterized by bilingualism (Ukrainian and Russian) for a long time¹²⁹. Hence, another reason could be the adoption of the Law of Ukraine “On Ensuring the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as a State Language” in 2019. According to its provisions, printed mass media must be published in the state language from 2022. Publication in a foreign language may take place if there is a priority version in the state language¹³⁰.

One of the distinguishing features of the functioning of the Ukrainian media market is the difficult financial situation from the very beginning of its existence. For example, the press suffered from rising prices for paper (its supplies depended on Russia for a certain period of time), printing, and delivery services. Newspaper publishers did not have significant financial opportunities. These were comfortable conditions for their absorption by oligarchs (see their

¹²⁸ State Scientific Institution “Book Chamber of Ukraine named after Ivan Fedorov”, *Statistics*, <http://www.ukrbook.net/statistika/periodyka2022.pdf> (accessed on 01.12.2023).

¹²⁹ M. Ratajczak & W. Baluk, *System medialny niepodległej Ukrainy...*, op. cit., s. 108; Y. Nesteriak, *Emergence of the media system...*, op. cit., p. 160.

¹³⁰ Law of Ukraine “On Ensuring the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as a State Language” from April 25, 2019, № 2704-VIII, <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2704-19#Text>

growing political importance in Subchapter 3.2)¹³¹. Pinchuk, Akhmetov, Lozhkin and others took advantage of the situation. However, the global trend towards digitization has influenced the development strategy of print media. A small number of newspapers and magazines remained in paper form. Their audience consists of Ukrainians over the age of 56¹³². In order to determine their owners, a list of the most popular printed sources of information was found as of 2021 (later this type of media was excluded from similar surveys) and updated as of 2023¹³³. Among them is a “Correspondent” magazine of a “Ukrainian Media House” with lawyer Yumoranov. He is associated with the former owner Kurchenko (an associate of the fugitive President Yanukovich, oligarch). Also, an “Express” newspaper of an “Express Media Group” headed by Pochynok. Independent analysts compare it to his “matryoshka doll.” Other owners consists of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine (“Holos Ukrainy” newspaper), Cabinet of Ministers (“Uryadovyy Kurier” newspaper), Spodarenko (the owner of a “Silski visti” newspaper and son of former politician), as well as Shvets (received ownership of the newspaper “Facts and Comments” from oligarch Pinchuk under unknown circumstances), a publishing house “New Information” headed by political assistant-consultant Vavrysh (“Kraina” magazine) and even Ukrposhta, or Ukraine’s national post (“7ya” newspaper)¹³⁴.

While the print news audience is only 3% of the population, the share of radio listeners is an equally low 10%¹³⁵. Ratajczak and Baluk called the high number of local broadcasters an important feature of the Ukrainian TV and radio market in 2007, but it is difficult to find information about their exact number in 2023¹³⁶. It is safe to talk about 15 nationwide radio

¹³¹ M. Ratajczak & W. Baluk, *System medialny niepodległej Ukrainy...*, op. cit., s. 107; Y. Nesteriak, *Emergence of the media system...*, op. cit., p. 157.

¹³² USAID & Internews, *Ukrayins'ki media, stavlennya ta dovira u 2023 r.*, <https://internews.in.ua/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Ukrainski-media-stavlennia-ta-dovira-2023r.pdf> (accessed on 02.12.2023).

¹³³ USAID & Internews, *Stavlennya naseleennya do media taspozhyvannya riznykh typiv media 2021*, https://detector.media/doc/images/news/archive/2021/193866/usaaid_internews_media_report_2021_ukr.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0Enf-DL6hGTYPZXSA6SMBYL1NLQR-lbcjr2f1jD7yQbdHYGQIWRI-h_mQ (accessed on 02.12.2023).

¹³⁴ Ekonomichna Pravda, *Kolomoys'kyi zayavlyaye, shcho areshtovani mediaaktyvy Kurchenka khochut' povernuty yoho otochennyyu*, <https://www.epravda.com.ua/news/2020/09/10/664958/> (accessed on 02.12.2023); N. Onysko, *Komu nalezhat' l'vivs'ki ZMI*, <https://imi.org.ua/articles/komu-nalejat-lvivski-zmi-i686> (accessed on 02.12.2023); Institute of Mass Information, *Media Ownership Monitoring Ukraine 2016. Press market*, <https://ukraine.mom-rsf.org.ua/media/print/> (accessed on 02.12.2023).

¹³⁵ USAID & Internews, *Ukrayins'ki media...*, op. cit. (accessed on 02.12.2023).

¹³⁶ M. Ratajczak & W. Baluk, *System medialny niepodległej Ukrainy...*, op. cit., s. 111.

stations¹³⁷. The most popular of them are “Luks FM,” “Hit FM” and “Ukrainian Radio”¹³⁸. The first two focus on entertainment content. The latter is the oldest radio station in Ukraine. Its basis consists of socio-political content. It is independent from any forms of influence because it is part of the Public Broadcasting group¹³⁹. In addition, the first Ukrainian-language radio station “DRUZI” started functioning in Estonia. It is aimed at the diaspora¹⁴⁰.

The main owners of the radio market are oligarch Pinchuk with the largest “Tavr Media” holding, pro-Russian businessman Yevtukhov, and the wife of Lviv mayor Kit-Sadova. Radio stations owned by the oligarch Kurchenko were transferred to other owners or were deprived of their licenses¹⁴¹. Moreover, the journalists created “Hromadske Radio,” which began to function online, and then received full broadcasting licenses.

Ukrainian television moves in a different direction. It lost a key investor, specifically the oligarch Akhmetov. After the adoption of the Law on Oligarchs under President Zelenskyy, he unexpectedly transferred the licenses of his TV channels and print media to the state¹⁴². This is an important event, because a TV channel “Ukraine” from “Media Group Ukraine” was the most rated channel at the beginning of the Russia-Ukraine war in February 2022. The media holding included 6 more TV channels (“Ukraine 24,” “UFO TV,” “Indigo TV,” “Football 1/2/3”)¹⁴³. The oligarch used it to promote his interests and popularize his political

¹³⁷ National Council for Television and Radio Broadcasting, *11 iz 15-ty zahal'nonatsional'nykh radiostantsiy vedut' movlennya lyshe ukrayins'koyu movoyu*, <https://www.nrada.gov.ua/11-iz-15-ty-zagalnonatsionalnyh-radiostantsiy-vedut-movlennya-lyshe-ukrayinskoyu-movoyu/> (accessed on 02.12.2023).

¹³⁸ USAID & Internews, *Ukrayins'ki media...*, op. cit. (accessed on 02.12.2023).

¹³⁹ *Ukrainske radio*, https://ukr.radio/1channel_about (accessed on 03.12.2023).

¹⁴⁰ V. Perun, *Dlya ukrayintsiv v Estoniyi zapuskayut' pershu radiostantsiyu DRUZI*, https://lb.ua/world/2023/11/14/584267_dlya_ukrayintsiv_estonii_zapuskayut.html (accessed on 04.12.2023).

¹⁴¹ Detector media, *U «Nashoho radio» zminyvsya vlasnyk*, <https://detector.media/rinok/article/183567/2020-12-23-u-nashoho-radio-zminyvsya-vlasnyk/> (accessed on 04.12.2023); N. Dulyaba, *Sadovyy vktre zadeklaruvav lyshe zarplatu, a druzhyna – mil'yonni dokhody*, <https://portal.lviv.ua/news/2021/03/30/sadovyy-vktre-zadeklaruvav-lyshe-zarplatu-a-druzhyna-miljonni-dokhody> (accessed on 04.12.2023); Detector media, *Natsrada ne prodovzhyla litsenziyu radio NRJ*, <https://detector.media/rinok/article/201610/2022-08-04-natsrada-ne-prodovzhyla-litsenziyu-radio-nrj/> (accessed on 04.12.2023); TSVK *zareyestruvala syna vlasnyka "Radio Shanson" Yevtukhova kandydatom u deputaty: shcho vidomo*, https://24tv.ua/tsvk_zareyestruvala_sina_vlasnyka_radio_shanson_yevtuhova_kandidatom_u_deputati_shho_vidomo_n1173884 (accessed on 05.12.2023).

¹⁴² A. Korinovska, *Zakon pro oliharkhiv i vtraty cherez viynu. Shcho oznachaye zayava Akhmetova pro vykhid z media*, <https://suspilne.media/259814-zakon-pro-oligarhiv-i-vtrati-cerez-vijnu-so-oznacae-zaava-ahmetova-pro-vihid-z-media/> (accessed on 03.12.2023).

¹⁴³ I. Krytska, *Mediaviyna za mil'yony dolariv na misyats'. Kanaly Akhmetova, Pinchuka, Kolomoys'koho ta Firtasha ob'yednaly v odyn efir. Yak tse pratsyuye ta zvidky braty hroshi*, <https://forbes.ua/inside/edinyy-efir-29042022-5735> (accessed on 03.12.2023).

partners. After all, journalists of the media holding founded the company “MY – Ukraine” with the TV channel of the same name. Blogger and political expert Petrenko became the beneficial owner¹⁴⁴.

The business of ex-President of Ukraine Poroshenko was also affected by the aforementioned law and the war. He was forced to sell the shares of a “Priamyy” channel and a “Channel 5” to journalists, public figures and politicians (former employees of these media). They merged into a “Vilni Media” company together with an “Espresso” TV channel¹⁴⁵. Furthermore, these channels were not allowed to co-produce an information telemarathon “Yedyni Novyny” (“one voice” policy informing about the course of the war). The authorities disconnected them from digital broadcasting for no clear reason¹⁴⁶. While they continue to run via the Internet, the telemarathon is provided by the “Pershiy,” “1+1,” “ICTV,” “Inter,” “Rada” and “We-Ukraine” TV channels. These media players had financed the telemarathon at their own cost until the government allocated more than UAH 146 million to it¹⁴⁷.

The television news audience is 30% (3rd place). The most popular TV channels are “1+1,” “ICTV,” “STB” and “Inter”¹⁴⁸. The first is part of a “1+1 media” group along with 6 other TV channels. The main owner is the oligarch Kolomoiskyi. The second and third are part of a “StarlightMedia” group (7 TV channels in total), which are owned by the oligarch Pinchuk. The fourth is owned by “Inter Media Group” (8 TV channels in total), which is divided between the former head of the Security Service of Ukraine Khoroshkovskyy, former member of the Party of Regions Lyovochkin, and oligarch Firtash. The latter may be extradited from Austria to the USA on suspicion of corruption¹⁴⁹. All the above-mentioned

¹⁴⁴ V. Bunyak, *Oleksandr Tkachenko: Zhurnalisty zasnuvaly kanal «My — Ukrayina» na vykhidnu dopomogu pislya zvil'nennya*, <https://detector.media/infospace/article/208146/2023-02-19-oleksandr-tkachenko-zhurnalisty-zasnuvaly-kanal-my-ukraina-na-vykhidnu-dopomogu-pislya-zvilnennya/> (accessed on 09.12.2023).

¹⁴⁵ Poroshenko zayavyy, shcho prodav aktsiyi svoikh telekanaliv zhurnalistam cherez zakon pro oliharkhiv, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-poroshenko-telekanaly/31551703.html> (accessed on 09.12.2023).

¹⁴⁶ Detector media, *Monomarafon. Chomu vlada prypynyla movlennya 5 kanalu, Pryamoho ta «Espresso»*, <https://detector.media/infospace/article/198512/2022-04-19-monomarafon-chomu-vlada-prypynyla-movlennya-5-kanalu-pryamoho-ta-espresso/> (accessed on 09.12.2023).

¹⁴⁷ D. Opryshko, *Monitoring Media Pluralism in the Digital Era: Preliminary study to the implementation of the Media Pluralism Monitor: Ukraine*, European University Institute, 2023, p. 5.

¹⁴⁸ USAID & Internews, *Ukrayins'ki media...*, op. cit. (accessed on 02.12.2023).

¹⁴⁹ I. Krytska, *Mediaviyna za mil'yony...*, op. cit. (accessed on 03.12.2023); MediaSapiens, *Komu nalezhat' nayretytnhovishi ukrayins'ki kanaly i yak zminylasya struktura yikhnoyi vlasnosti za ostanni rik*, <https://uagit.tv/2021/8/11/9267-komu-nalezhat-nayretytnhovishi-ukrayinski-kanaly-i-yak-zminylasya-struktura-yihnoyi-vlasnosti-za-ostanni-rik> (accessed on 09.12.2023).

TV channels fall under the thematic categories of information and entertainment. Their owners continue to be oligarchs due to loopholes in the law¹⁵⁰.

A separate part of the media market is public television and foreign broadcasting. In fact, the first unsuccessful attempt to establish an independent public broadcaster took place in 1997. After that, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe issued a resolution obliging Ukraine to turn state television and radio companies into public broadcasting channels. However, the Law “On Public Television and Radio Broadcasting of Ukraine” was finalized only in 2015. It happened during the presidency of Poroshenko. The “First National” TV channel was reformatted into “UA:Pershyi”¹⁵¹. In general, public broadcasting consists of 2 nationwide TV channels, 3 nationwide radio channels, 23 regional branches in the regions and “UA:Crimea”¹⁵². Despite this, the parliamentary channel “Rada” and foreign broadcasting still remain in the ownership of the state. In particular, the Ukrainian-language channel “Dim” broadcasts entertainment, cultural, educational and social content to the temporarily occupied territories. The main mission of the Russian-language “FreeDom” channel is to broadcast informational content about the war to a Russian audience. The latter replaced “UATV,” which provided news in Ukrainian, English, Crimean Tatar, Arabic, and Russian¹⁵³.

There are some essential features of the Belarusian media system, which are completely different from the Ukrainian media system. First, the state media is not national media. They broadcast in Russian and bypass the issues of national discourse and Belarusian identity¹⁵⁴. Second, the country has a subsystem of state media and a subsystem of independent media.

¹⁵⁰ I. Ryaboshtan, *Yurysty pro zakonoprojekt pro oliharkhiv: Kolomoys'kyi, Pinchuk, Medvedchuk, Firtash mozhut' ne pidpasty pid vyznachennya «oliharkha»*, <https://detector.media/infospace/article/189025/2021-06-10-yurysty-pro-zakonoprojekt-pro-oligarkhiv-kolomoyskyi-pinchuk-medvedchuk-firtash-mozhut-ne-pidpasty-pid-vyznachennya-oligarkha/> (accessed on 09.12.2023).

¹⁵¹ O. Ruban, *Vnutrishnye inomovlennya Ukrayiny. Na koho movlyat' derzhavni telekanaly "Dim" i "FreeDom"*, <https://detector.media/infospace/article/220188/2023-12-05-vnutrishnye-inomovlennya-ukrainy-na-kogo-movlyat-derzhavni-telekanaly-dim-i-freedom/> (accessed on 09.12.2023); Y. Nesteriak, *Emergence of the media system...*, op. cit., p. 162.

¹⁵² CEDEM, *Suspil'ne movlennya vidznachaye p'yatyrichchya!* <https://rpr.org.ua/news/36618/> (accessed on 10.12.2023).

¹⁵³ O. Ruban, *Vnutrishnye inomovlennya Ukrayiny...*, op. cit. (accessed on 09.12.2023).

¹⁵⁴ P. Usov, *Characteristics of the Belarusian media system*, „Wschód Europy. Studia Humanistyczno-Społeczne” 2019, 4(1), pp. 73-75.

It means that there is a request for completely opposite subsystems in Belarusian society¹⁵⁵. This corresponds to the political situation from Subchapter 3.2.

Coming back to the press market, neighboring Belarus still functions according to the Soviet model. Its popularity in society varies between 4% and 18%¹⁵⁶. It is difficult to expect any significant changes in the work of the state media, which are guaranteed protection and stability in exchange for loyalty to the President and the promotion of his agenda. Official statistics indicate an increase in the number of newspapers from 224 in 1990 to 369 in 2023¹⁵⁷. It singles out a publishing house “Belarus Today” (with already mentioned “SB. Belarus Segodnya” and its supplement “Narodnaya Gazeta,” “Respublika” as the official newspaper of the Council of Ministers, “Selskaya Gazeta” published by the Presidential Administration, as well as “Znamya Yunosti” for youth) and a publishing house “Zvyazda” (with the newspaper of the same name)¹⁵⁸. Nonetheless, a note with a high proportion of private media does not equal opposition media. First, their circulation is very low (approximately 8 thousand copies) compared to the state ones (from 20 to 400 thousand copies). Information can reach only a small number of people in this way¹⁵⁹. Secondly, the authorities fight criticism using harsh methods. For example, they close independent newspapers and imprison journalists, put pressure on media workers, revoke registrations, order printing offices to refuse cooperation, and declare opposition media as extremists¹⁶⁰.

¹⁵⁵ O. Manaev, *Media in post-Soviet Belarus: between democratization and reinforcing authoritarianism*, “Demokratizatsiya” 2014, 22(2), pp. 207-230.

¹⁵⁶ Baltic Internet Policy Initiative, *Issledovaniye: belorusy podozrevayut media vo lzhi i ishchut novosti za rubezhom*, <https://euroradio.fm/ru/issledovanie-belorusy-podozrevayut-media-vo-lzhi-i-ishchut-novosti-za-rubezhom> (accessed on 11.12.2023); Vitebskiye vesti, *Po itogam sotsissledovaniya internet i televideniye v tope istochnikov informatsii dlya belorusov*, <https://vitvesti.by/obshchestvo/po-itogam-sotsissledovaniya-internet-i-televideniye-v-tope-istochnikov-informatsii-dlya-belorusov.html> (accessed on 11.12.2023); *Tendentsii mediapotrebleniya v Belarusi*, <https://colabmedios.org/tendenczii-mediapotrebleniya-v-belarusi/> (accessed on 04.12.2023); BELTA, *Kakiye istochniki informatsii yavlyayut-sya dlya vas osnovnymi?* <https://www.belta.by/infographica/view/kakie-istochniki-informatsii-javlajutsja-dlja-vas-osnovnymi-32155/> (accessed on 04.12.2023).

¹⁵⁷ R. Motulskiy, *Knigoizdaniye Belarusi sovetskogo perioda*, “Belaruskaya dumka” 2012, 1, pp. 56-63. https://beldumka.belta.by/isfiles/000167_151223.pdf; *Sredstva massovoy informatsii v Belarusi*, <https://www.belarus.by/ru/about-belarus/mass-media-in-belarus> (accessed on 04.01.2024).

¹⁵⁸ *Izdatel'skiy dom «Belarus' segodnya»*, <https://org.sb.by/ru/> (accessed on 03.12.2023).

¹⁵⁹ P. Usov, *Characteristics of the Belarusian...*, op. cit., p. 66.

¹⁶⁰ Znishchennyye PAHONI, <https://web.archive.org/web/20080729193324/http://www.pahonia.promedia.by/str/chronika.htm> (accessed on 03.12.2023); Charter97, *Zakrytaya hazeta «Dyen'»*, <https://web.archive.org/web/20070930202135/http://www.charter97.org/bel/news/2003/08/05/day> (accessed on 03.12.2023); Brestskaya gazeta, *Pechatnuyu versiyu «Brestskoy gazety» postigla uchast' «Narodnoy voli»*, «Belgazety», «Svobodnykh novostey Plus», <https://web.archive.org/web/20210119183837/https://www.b->

Lukashenko can do this at any time through his people without any accountability. As a result, there is no opposition press in the country.

The functioning system of radio and television in Belarus is not much different from the press. For instance, it remains the only country in Europe without a public broadcaster¹⁶¹. The main media holding “Belteleradiokompania” is fully subordinated to Lukashenko and includes 7 TV channels (informational “Belarus 1,” family entertainment “Belarus 2,” sociocultural “Belarus 3,” regional “Belarus 4,” sports “Belarus 5,” “NTV-Belarus,” international satellite TV channel “Belarus 24”) and 5 radio channels (first national channel of the Belarusian radio, radio stations “Culture,” “Stalitsa,” “Radius-FM,” foreign radio “Belarus”), as well as 5 regional television and radio companies¹⁶². The company is considered to be the major actor with the maximum broadcasting territory. Among other things, “Stalitsa” received the frequencies of “Avtoradio,” which broadcast advertisements of opposition politicians during the 2010 election¹⁶³.

The main pool of TV channels with nationwide coverage are the same state-funded TV channels, including “ONT,” “STV” and the interstate TV channel “Mir.” Basic content is created for them to “prolong the life” of the current Lukashenko regime¹⁶⁴. This is confirmed by the fact that the state survey puts television on the 1st place among sources of information (60.2-65.5%), while the opposition poll gives it only 3rd-5th place (11-31%)¹⁶⁵. Each TV channel has its own direction of propaganda. In particular, “Belarus 1” is designed for supporters of the Soviet Union memory. They are intimidated by the possible consequences of a change in the “stable” regime and the coming of the opposition to power. “ONT” recognizes the correctness of some ideas of the opposition, but negatively describes any

g.by/society/pechatnuyu-versiyu-brestskoy-gazetyi-postigla-uchast-narodnoy-voli-belgazetyi-svobodnyih-novostey-plyus/ (accessed on 03.12.2023).

¹⁶¹ Y. Nesteriak, *Emergence of the media system...*, op. cit., p. 162.

¹⁶² Ministry of Information of the Republic of Belarus, *Belteleradiokompanii – 25 let*, <http://mininform.gov.by/news/all/belteleradiokompanii-25-let/> (accessed on 10.12.2023).

¹⁶³ E. Martinovich, *Komu prinadlezhit radioefir? Samyye populyarnyye radiostantsii Minska*, <https://m.nashaniva.com/ru/161861/> (accessed on 10.12.2023).

¹⁶⁴ A. Khudanov, «*Belarus' 1*», *ONT i STV: v chëm mezhdū nimi raznitsa? Ob'yasnyayem na kartochkakh*, <https://mediainfo.belarus-1-ont-i-stv-v-chyom-mezhdū-nimi-raznica-obyasnyaem-na-kartochkah> (accessed on 13.12.2023).

¹⁶⁵ Baltic Internet Policy Initiative, *Issledovaniye: belorusy...*, op. cit. (accessed on 11.12.2023); Vitebskiye vesti, *Po itogam sotsissledovaniya...*, op. cit. (accessed on 11.12.2023); *Tendentsii mediapotrebieniya v Belarusi...*, op. cit. (accessed on 04.12.2023); BELTA, *Kakiye istochniki...*, op. cit. (accessed on 04.12.2023).

alternatives. “STV” is designed for conspiracy theorists and believers. The channel glorifies the activities of law enforcement agencies. One of the main propaganda speakers, Azaryonok, also works there. Among his main narratives is the “demonic West”¹⁶⁶.

In contrast, there is an opposition TV channel “Belsat,” which operates from Poland via satellite. It was founded by Polish Public Broadcaster (Telewizja Polska, TVP) in 2007. There are both Belarusian and Polish journalists among the managers and employees. The main emphasis is on the Belarusian language on the air. It offers viewers topics that are bypassed by pro-government channels (corruption of government officials, the Russia-Ukraine war, etc.)¹⁶⁷. Moreover, “Euroradio” and “Malanka Media” plan to create another independent TV channel¹⁶⁸.

The radio market consists of state-funded (72) and private (26) mass media as of 2022 (50, 149). Most of their programs are entertainment content¹⁶⁹. The audience of radio news is about 5-15% of the population¹⁷⁰. According to information from “Radio Liberty” in 2019, popular radio stations are the first commercial “Radio Rocks,” the “mouthpiece” of the Belarusian trade unions “Novoye radio,” and another private “Yumor FM”¹⁷¹. At the same time, the independent Belarusian Association of Journalists presents the Belarusian-American “Radio BA” as the first private radio station that stopped broadcasting due to lack of funding¹⁷². Although radio “Unistar” has a German company among its founders, it continues to work within the country¹⁷³. Interestingly, Malmygo claims that radio “Unistar,”

¹⁶⁶ A. Khudanov, «Belarus' I», *ONT i STV...*, op. cit. (accessed on 13.12.2023).

¹⁶⁷ E. Daneyko *Za chto vlasti Belarusi presleduyut telekanal "Belsat"?* <https://www.dw.com/ru/за-что-власти-беларуси-преследуют-телеканал-белсат/a-48528913> (accessed on 13.12.2023); Belsat, *The First Independent Television Channel in Belarus*, <https://belsat.eu/en/about/the-first-independent-television-channel-in-belarus> (accessed on 13.12.2023).

¹⁶⁸ «Yevroradio» i Malanka Media khotyat sozdat' novyy nezavisimyy telekanal, <https://udf.name/news/society/260985-evroradio-i-malanka-media-hotjat-sozdat-novyj-nezavisimyy-telekanal.html> (accessed on 13.12.2023).

¹⁶⁹ E. Martinovich, *Komu prinadlezhit...*, op. cit. (accessed on 10.12.2023).

¹⁷⁰ Baltic Internet Policy Initiative, *Issledovaniye: belorusy...*, op. cit. (accessed on 11.12.2023); Vitebskiye vesti, *Po itogam sotsissledovaniya...*, op. cit. (accessed on 11.12.2023); *Tendentsii mediapotrebleniya v Belarusi...*, op. cit. (accessed on 04.12.2023); BELTA, *Kakiye istochniki...*, op. cit. (accessed on 04.12.2023).

¹⁷¹ *Kamu nalyezhats' papulyarnyya FM-stantsyi w Byelarusi*, <https://www.svaboda.org/a/29717321.html> (accessed on 12.12.2023).

¹⁷² Belarusian Association of Journalists, «Radio Bi-Ey» okonchatel'no ushlo v istoriyu, <https://baj.media/be/content/radio-bi-ey-okonchatelno-ushlo-v-istoriyu> (accessed on 12.12.2023).

¹⁷³ E. Martinovich, *Komu prinadlezhit...*, op. cit. (accessed on 10.12.2023).

“Radio BA” and “Radio Rocks” have semi-state or mixed form of ownership¹⁷⁴. Other foreign “Radio Liberty” and “Euroradio” are able to spread reliable news on the territory of Belarus from Lithuania and Poland¹⁷⁵. Opposition radio stopped functioning from the inside. It is difficult and pointless to search for the specific owners of these radio stations because their information value is not significant from the perspective of understanding the market. Belarusian businessmen do not perceive radio as a profitable investment. New radio stations do not appear on the market due to lack of profits, as well as frequencies in Minsk¹⁷⁶.

Foreign media leave a separate mark in both media systems. The post-Soviet influence persists through the Russian-Belarusian or pro-Russian mass media. The former are more noticeable in Belarus. For example, the TV channel “ONT” uses the programs of the Russian First Channel, and the TV channel “RTR-Belarus” uses the programs of the international “Russia RTR”¹⁷⁷. “NTV-Belarus” is a licensed version of the Russian channel “NTV.” There are also completely Russian newspapers “Argumenty i fakty” or “Komsomolskaya Pravda.” All these and other Russian media promote the agenda of the respective neighboring country. Sometimes, it is even directed against the Belarusian authorities. Interestingly, Russian media were considered anti-regime until 2013-2014¹⁷⁸. This resulted in public criticism from Lukashenko, deprivation of accreditation and a ban on broadcasting¹⁷⁹. Such actions were possible due to existing relations with the West at that time (see: Subchapter 3.2). Nonetheless, Lukashenko and Putin signed documents on the creation of a joint media company, which could potentially include two newspapers, a TV channel and a magazine¹⁸⁰.

¹⁷⁴ T.V. Malmygo, *System of modern radio broadcasting of Belarus*, “Belarusian State University” 2022, p. 150.

¹⁷⁵ Nazlo Lukashenko. V Litve zapustili novoye radio, <https://baltnews.com/v-litve/20230111/1025848106/Nazlo-Lukashenko-V-Litve-zapustili-novoe-radio.html> (accessed on 13.12.2023).

¹⁷⁶ E. Martinovich, *Komu prinadlezhit...*, op. cit. (accessed on 10.12.2023).

¹⁷⁷ P. Bykovskiy, *Kak v Belarusi rossiyskiye kanaly prevrashchayut v rossiysko-belorusskiye*, <https://www.delfi.lt/ru/abroad/belorussia/kak-v-belarusi-rossiyskie-kanaly-prevrashchayut-v-rossiysko-belorusskie-75784693> (accessed on 13.12.2023).

¹⁷⁸ P. Usov, *Characteristics of the Belarusian...*, op. cit., pp. 72-73.

¹⁷⁹ Nastoyashcheye Vremya, *MID Belarusi vyslal iz strany zhurnalista rossiyskogo Pervogo kanala posle syuzheta o koronaviruse*, <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/jurnalista-pervogo-kanala-vislali-iz-belarusi/30598790.html> (accessed on 14.12.2023); Lukashenko raskritikoval soobshcheniya rossiyskikh SMI o COVID-19 v Belorussii, <https://www.rbc.ru/rbcfreenews/5e94a4b69a7947d092b62cb6> (accessed on 14.12.2023); V Belorussii zapretili veshchaniye trekh rossiyskikh telekanalov, <https://iz.ru/1172613/2021-06-02/v-belorussii-zapretili-veshchanie-trekh-rossiyskikh-telekanalov> (accessed on 14.12.2023).

¹⁸⁰ Putin i Lukashenko podpisali dogovor o sozdanii ob'yedinennogo mediakholdinga Rossii i Belarusi. V nem budut dve gazety, telekanal i zhurnal «Soyuznoye gosudarstvo», <https://meduza.io/news/2024/01/29/putin-i-lukashenko>

All because Russian journalists were always seen as professionals. They were even invited to work on Belarusian TV channels. One of them is Yekaterina Tikhomirova on “Belarus 1,” who talks about “fascist and anti-Russian threats”¹⁸¹.

The latter was a feature of the Ukrainian media system too. This method is less obvious in terms of influence, but more difficult in terms of implementation. Some newspapers added the word “Ukraine” to their names (e.g. “Argumenty i fakty v Ukraine,” “KP in Ukraine”), but continued to remain in Russian ownership after the collapse of the Soviet Union¹⁸². Radio stations were copied from Russia or founded as branches of Russian companies (e.g. “Melody,” “Chanson,” “Retro,” “Russkoye Radio”)¹⁸³. The pro-Russian views were also promoted via the newspaper “Vesti.” It was distributed free of charge in the subway and other crowded places¹⁸⁴. Other TV channels belonged to the pro-Russian politicians Medvedchuk and Kozak (“112,” “NewsOne,” “ZIK”), Muraev (“Nash,” “Maxi TV”), as well as Shufrich (“UkrLive,” “First Independent”). A total of 7 channels is a significant figure for a propaganda machine. Fortunately, their licenses were canceled¹⁸⁵. Most of the media from this list ceased to exist as of 2023.

“Viasat” TV channels, which have a Russian company in their ownership structure, were also excluded from the list of foreign TV channels that are allowed to be rebroadcast in Ukraine. The final document consists of 114 TV channels¹⁸⁶. The same list in Belarus includes 220 foreign TV channels¹⁸⁷. It is just that Ukraine protects its media environment from the enemy, while Belarus limits ways for objective truth.

[lukashenko-podpisali-dogovor-o-sozdanii-ob-edinennogo-mediaholdinga-rossii-i-belarusi-v-nem-budut-dve-gazety-telekanal-i-zhurnal-soyuznoe-gosudarstvo](#) (accessed on 10.12.2023).

¹⁸¹ A. Khudanov, «Belarus' 1», *ONT i STV...*, op. cit. (accessed on 13.12.2023).

¹⁸² Y. Nesteriak, *Emergence of the media system...*, op. cit., pp. 157-158.

¹⁸³ Institute of Mass Information, *Media Ownership Monitoring Ukraine 2016. Radio*, <https://ukraine.mom-rsf.org/ua/media/radio/> (accessed on 02.12.2023).

¹⁸⁴ Institute of Mass Information, *Media Ownership Monitoring Ukraine 2016. «Vesti»*, <https://ukraine.mom-rsf.org/ua/media/detail/outlet/vesti/> (accessed on 02.12.2023).

¹⁸⁵ N. Dankova, *Natsrada anulyovala litsenziyi semy kanaliv Murayeva, Shufrycha ta Medvedchuka*, <https://detector.media/rinok/article/212237/2023-06-08-natsrada-anulyovala-litsenzii-semy-kanaliv-muraieva-shufrycha-ta-medvedchuka/> (accessed on 15.12.2023).

¹⁸⁶ Detector media, *Natsrada finalizovala onovlenyy spysok inozemnykh kanaliv. Kanaliv Viasat u n'omu ne maye*, <https://detector.media/rinok/article/205052/2022-11-17-natsrada-finalizuvala-onovlenyy-spysok-inozemnykh-kanaliv-viasat-u-nomu-ne-maie/> (accessed on 16.12.2023).

¹⁸⁷ Ministry of Information of the Republic of Belarus, *Spisok inostrannykh sredstv massovoy informatsii, poluchivshikh razresheniye*, <http://mininform.gov.by/activities/spisok-inostrannykh-sredstv-massovoy-informatsii-poluchivshikh-razreshenie/> (accessed on 19.12.2023).

The last type of traditional media is information agencies. On the one hand, only state information agencies (“BelTA” and “Television News Agency”) remained in Belarus. Independent “BelaPAN” was recognized as an extremist organization¹⁸⁸. “Interfax-West” ceased to exist due to amendments to the media law, which forbade foreigners and stateless persons to be the founders of the media in the country¹⁸⁹. On the other hand, there is only one state information agency “Ukrinform” in Ukraine. The authorities are constantly trying to take it under their control. Among the other leading ones are “UNIAN,” “Interfax-Ukraine,” “RBC-Ukraine” and “Ukrainian News.”

As of October 2023, the center of Ukrainian media is Kyiv. Specifically, 101 print media, 155 radio broadcasters and 214 TV media are registered there. Kharkiv Oblast has the second largest number of print media registrations (43), Lviv Oblast has 66 radio broadcasters, while Odesa Oblast has 57 TV media¹⁹⁰.

Registrations of Belarusian media are mostly concentrated in Minsk and its region. Specifically, it includes 179 distributors of print media, as well as 57 distributors of TV and radio media. Brest and its region come second (126 print media, 26 TV and radio). It makes sense to single out 22 distributors of TV and radio media from Grodno and its region¹⁹¹.

It is obvious that the media market of Belarus has significantly lost funding opportunities due to the pandemic, international isolation and various other factors. As of 2022, a significant drop in GDP was recorded (-4.7%)¹⁹². Only state media can operate with relative stability¹⁹³. In return, they are used as instruments for spreading state propaganda. Other private mass media depend on constantly unstable advertising and additional services (e.g. ordering songs

¹⁸⁸ KGB priznalo Belapan ekstremistским formirovaniyem, <https://devby.io/news/kgb-priznalo-belapan-ef> (accessed on 15.12.2023).

¹⁸⁹ «Interfaks-Zapad» prekratit rabotu v Belorussii s 1 yanvarya, <https://www.vedomosti.ru/media/news/2021/12/31/903532-interfaks-zapad-prekratit-rabotu> (accessed on 16.12.2023).

¹⁹⁰ S. Kot, *Skil'ky v Ukrayini ZMI: v yakomu misti naybil'sha*, <https://it.comments.ua/ua/news/Internet/skilki-v-ukraini-zareestrovanih-zmi-onlayn-media-drukovani-vidannya-tele--ta-radiomovniki-720092.html> (accessed on 15.12.2023).

¹⁹¹ Ministry of Information of the Republic of Belarus, *Registers*, <http://mininform.gov.by/documents/reestry/> (accessed on 19.12.2023).

¹⁹² The World Bank, *Belarus*, <https://data.worldbank.org/country/BY> (accessed on 19.12.2023).

¹⁹³ *Skol'ko deneg iz byudzheta poluchat gosudarstvennyye SMI*, <https://sputnik.by/20230110/skolko-deneg-iz-byudzheta-poluchat-gosudarstvennyye-smi-1071040674.html> (accessed on 20.12.2023).

and greetings on the radio)¹⁹⁴. The situation is similar in Ukraine, where most media are non-profit¹⁹⁵. As a result, they become image tools in the hands of different owners. Among the common phenomena are the so-called “temnyky” (instructions for coverage of certain events in the media prepared by interested persons) and “dzhynsa” (paid advertising in a veiled form). The first had its peak during the times of President Kuchma and President Yanukovich (see: Subchapter 3.2). The latter is noticed on a monthly basis in Ukrainian media by independent monitoring companies.

Belarusian opposition media can only operate from abroad, so their financial possibilities are not unlimited. They are supported by advertising and audience donations. The main emphasis is on grants and various support programs proposed by donors. However, Belarusian opposition media are already included in the same group with Russian liberal mass media due to lack of funds in competitions. As a result, some of them were forced to close because of the difficult situation¹⁹⁶.

Ukrainian TV channels can receive some benefits from the constant presence of a certain political force on the air. In particular, the talk show “Pravo na vladu” (“1+1”) and the talk show “Svoboda slova” (“ICTV”) invited representatives of the ruling “Servant of the People” the most. The talk show “Priamyy efir” (“Priamyy”) favored representatives of the “European Solidarity” party¹⁹⁷. The situation is similar with daily news¹⁹⁸. Thus, it is possible to state a

¹⁹⁴ E. Martinovich, *Komu prynadlezhit...*, op. cit. (accessed on 10.12.2023).

¹⁹⁵ Liga, Reanimation Package of Reforms, USAID, *V Yevropu – bez oliharkhiv: yak vyhlyadaye i shcho maye daty Ukrayini deoliharkhizatsiya*, <https://rpr.org.ua/news/v-yevropu-bez-oliharkhiv-iak-vyhlyadaie-i-shcho-maie-daty-ukraini-deoliharkhizatsiya/> (accessed on 20.12.2023); O. Sharipov, V. Fedorchuk, B. Davydenko, *Z Dnem zhurnalista. Shcho viyna zalyshyla vid biznesu ta redaktsiy naybil'shykh ukrayins'kykh media. Spoyler – ne dochekayetes'*, <https://forbes.ua/company/z-dnem-zhurnalista-shcho-viyna-zalishila-vid-biznesu-i-redaktsiy-naybilshikh-ukrainskikh-media-spyler-ne-dochekaetes-06062023-14020> (accessed on 20.12.2023).

¹⁹⁶ Belarusian Association of Journalists, «*Finansirovaniye belorusskikh SMI ukhudshayet-sya. Vse sil'neye oshchushchayetsya konkurenciya so storony rossiyskikh SMI*». *Chto delat'?* <https://baj.media/ru/analytics/finansirovanie-belorusskikh-smi-uhudshaetsya-vse-silnee-oshchushchaetsya-konkurenciya-so> (accessed on 12.12.2023).

¹⁹⁷ N. Patrikyeyeva, *Khto u favori na tok-shou: yaki polityky naychastishe z'yavlyayut'sya na TB pered vyboramy?* <https://www.chesno.org/post/4265/> (accessed on 20.12.2023).

¹⁹⁸ Detector media, *Holovni trendy u shchodennykh novynakh vseukrayins'kykh telekanaliv 2019—2021 rokiv*, <https://detector.media/infospace/article/196766/2022-02-23-golovni-trendy-u-shchodennykh-novynakh-vseukrainskykh-telekanaliv-20192021-rokiv/> (accessed on 21.12.2023).

division between TV channels loyal to the authorities and ex-President Poroshenko. Moreover, TV channels receive seasonal income from political advertisements¹⁹⁹.

Journalists and showmen in both countries have the option of building a political career. Among the 31 members of Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine were the general director of the “1+1 media” group, the owner of “Espresso” TV channel, hosts of entertainment TV shows, singers, comedians, newspaper journalists, news anchors, TV correspondents and others. Most of them represented “Servant of the People” and “European Solidarity” parties. The highest position was the Minister of Culture²⁰⁰. At the same time, among the potential politicians of the Belarusian parliament were the head of “Belteleradiocompany,” the head of the pro-government Belarusian Union of Journalists, the head of the press service of the Prosecutor General’s Office, propagandists, political scientists, and TV presenters. All of them supported Lukashenko and his associates. In turn, their participation in the election was agreed in advance with the authorities²⁰¹.

It is important to remember that Ukrainian and Belarusian journalism was under the influence of the Soviet system for a long time. Therefore, its consequences were visible to a greater or lesser extent even in 2023. Real changes are noticeable in Ukraine thanks to the transformation of education and the emergence of new generations of journalists. They are taught in public and private higher education institutions. The bachelor’s program is available in 37 universities, while the master’s – in 30 universities. As of 2015, the most popular were Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Zaporizhzhia National University, and Kyiv National University of Culture and Arts²⁰². In contrast, Belarusian journalists and propagandists are trained at the Belarusian State University, Yanka Kupala State University

¹⁹⁹ N. Dankova, *Skil'ky zarobyly ukrayins'ki telekanaly za dva roky ta khto z nykh zdaten prozhyty bez politychnoyi reklam*, <https://detector.media/rinok/article/190337/2021-07-20-skilky-zarobyly-ukrainski-telekanaly-za-dva-roky-ta-khto-z-nykh-zdaten-prozhyty-bez-politychnoi-reklamy/> (accessed on 21.12.2023).

²⁰⁰ *Chy staly produktyvnymy nardepamy kolyshni zhurnalisty i shoumeny*, <https://www.slovoidilo.ua/2020/06/25/infografika/polityka/chy-staly-produktyvnymy-nardepamy-kolyshni-zhurnalisty-shoumeny> (accessed on 20.12.2023).

²⁰¹ E. Doronina, *Propagandisty i siloviki. Kto v Belarusi rvetsya v deputaty?* <https://www.dw.com/ru/propagandisty-i-siloviki-kto-v-belarusi-hocet-stat-deputatom/a-67902808> (accessed on 05.01.2024).

²⁰² O. Piddubna, *De hotuyut' zhurnalistiv v Ukrayini?* <https://ms.detector.media/zhurnalistyska-osvita/post/16247/2016-03-14-de-hotuyut-zhurnalistiv-v-ukraini/> (accessed on 15.12.2023).

of Grodno, and Mogilev State A. Kuleshov University. The Master's program is missing only in the last one²⁰³. According to the rating of academic freedom²⁰⁴, Ukraine received a score of 7 (partially restricted), and Belarus – a score of 10 (closed).

Journalism in both countries formally functions on the basis of ethical codes. The Ukrainian document consists of 19 articles written in accordance with human rights and fundamental freedoms. They promote freedom of speech and expression, serving public interests, respect for private life, impartial coverage of court proceedings, complete and objective information, separation of facts from comments and advertising, balanced coverage of events, prohibition of plagiarism and illegal methods of obtaining information, prohibition of discrimination, and so on²⁰⁵. Importantly, the word “formally” was used for a reason. The practical side shows problems with factoring, balance of information, and invited experts²⁰⁶. At the same time, the Belarusian document has 12 articles that focus on prohibitions rather than encouragement to abide them. If the first part highlights the principles of professional ethics, then the second and third parts list the possible variants of journalists' misconduct and their responsibilities²⁰⁷. Moreover, there is no clause about violation of the ethics by serving the interests of the authorities.

The media culture of the two countries is different. The Ukrainian one can be safely labeled as “investigative.” In particular, well-known representatives of investigative journalists are Tkach and Bihus. Among the profile topics are corruption, illegal actions of officials, false information in declarations, etc. There are cases of surveillance of journalists and obstruction of their professional activities. In contrast, the Belarusian media culture can be characterized as “ambivalent.” If independent journalists cover the crimes of power representatives led by Lukashenko, pro-government journalists try to discredit their work.

²⁰³ E. Kulakova, *Kuda postupat'? Profesiya zhurnalist*, <https://blog.100ct.by/kuda-postupat-profesiya-zhurnalista#popup:formaaliass> (accessed on 15.12.2023).

²⁰⁴ Index on Censorship, *Index Index*, <https://www.indexoncensorship.org/campaigns/indexindex/> (accessed on 27.12.2023).

²⁰⁵ Commission on journalistic ethics, *Kodeks etyky*, <https://cje.org.ua/ethics-codex/> (accessed on 27.12.2023).

²⁰⁶ N. Kuryata, *Suchasni standarty profesiynoyi zhurnalistyky*. Institute of Mass Information. <https://imi.org.ua/monitorings/suchasni-standarty-profesijnoyi-zhurnalistyky-i42512> (accessed on 27.12.2023).

²⁰⁷ Belarusian Union of Journalists, *Kodeks professional'noy etiki zhurnalista*, <http://bsj.by/bszh/kodeks/> (accessed on 27.12.2023).

The main indicator of media professionalism is the level of trust in them on the part of society. According to the results of the “Internews” survey, they took 9th out of 10 places in Ukraine with a rate of 53%²⁰⁸. There was some decrease in the indicator compared to 2022. As for Belarus in 2023, independent sources showed trust in state media at the level of 38%, in Russian media at the level of 37%, and in independent media at the level of 40%²⁰⁹. Pro-government sources provided slightly different figures as of 2022 (49.6% of trust in state media, 6.5% in non-state media, 1.9% in foreign media)²¹⁰. The general trend was an increase in trust in state and Russian sources of information, as well as a decrease in trust in independent media.

Regarding the legislation of Ukraine in the field of media, it has undergone a transformation from 6 different laws into a unified Law “On Media” under President Zelenskyy. The requirements of the European Union were fulfilled²¹¹. It is also necessary to add the Constitution of Ukraine, the laws of Ukraine “On electronic communications,” “On ensuring the functioning of the Ukrainian language as the state language,” “On cinematography,” “On advertising,” “On public media of Ukraine,” “On information,” “On the system of foreign broadcasting in Ukraine,” “On state support of media, guarantees of professional activity and social protection of journalists,” as well as other documents and international treaties. According to Article 34 of the Constitution of Ukraine and Article 4 of the Law “On Media,” freedom of speech is guaranteed²¹². Importantly, there is a specific clause that prohibits censorship. The state also undertakes to guarantee transparency and availability of information on the structure of media ownership. Their founders can be citizens of Ukraine, as well as foreigners and stateless persons who live in Ukraine and need to be registered as legal entities²¹³. Prohibited topics do not include “dissemination of inaccurate information

²⁰⁸ USAID & Internews, *Ukrayins'ki media...*, op. cit. (accessed on 02.12.2023).

²⁰⁹ Belarusian Analytical Workshop, *Doveriye belorusov k Gossmi i rossiyskim media vosstanavlivayet-sya posle rezkogo obvala*, <https://thinktanks.by/publication/2023/07/17/doverie-belorusov-k-gossmi-i-rossiyskim-media-vosstanavlivaetsya-posle-rezkogo-obvala.html> (accessed on 15.12.2023).

²¹⁰ BELTA, *Ekspert: belorusy stali bol'she doveryat' gosudarstvennym SMI*, <https://www.belta.by/society/view/ekspert-belorusy-stali-bolshe-doverjat-gosudarstvennym-smi-551142-2023> (accessed on 15.12.2023).

²¹¹ D. Opryshko, *Monitoring Media Pluralism...*, op. cit., p. 27.

²¹² *Law of Ukraine “On Media” from December 13, 2022, № 2849-IX*, <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2849-20#Text>; *Constitution of Ukraine of June 28, 1996, No. 254к/96-BP*, <https://www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/1996/en/42875>

²¹³ *Law of Ukraine “On Media” from December 13, 2022, № 2849-IX*, <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2849-20#Text>

that may harm state interests”²¹⁴. At the same time, the ban applies to the propaganda of the Russian, Communist or National Socialist totalitarian regimes²¹⁵. The last three points significantly distinguish Ukrainian legislation from Belarusian legislation.

One of the special sections of the Law “On Media” is called “Peculiarities of legal regulation of media activity during armed aggression.” It consists of 9 articles that list restrictions on the content of information in media, as well as restrictions on the structure of ownership and financing of the media. There are some points about a ban on any activity of media actors associated with the aggressor state. In addition, these articles present the possibilities of regulating the media sphere within the temporarily occupied territories and other important restrictions²¹⁶.

The full-scale war also affected Ukraine’s obligations to international partners. The country withdrew Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights and Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Both are about freedom of expression. Such actions are justified by martial law²¹⁷.

The main regulatory and supervisory body in the field of media is the National Council of Ukraine on Television and Radio Broadcasting. The Law “On Media” established its status as a unified regulator. Its main function is to consider the issue, extension, and cancellation of radio licenses, as well as registrations of other types of media. Moreover, it participates in the development and implementation of state policy in the field of media, supervises and controls compliance with legislation, engages in other activities. Violation of legislation is divided into three degrees: minor, significant, gross. Response measures range from fines to banning of a particular media company²¹⁸. Other important bodies in the field of media are the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine, the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine, and the Ministry of Justice of Ukraine.

²¹⁴ *Law of the Republic of Belarus “On Mass Media” from July 17, 2008, No. 427-Z,* <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=3871&p0=h10800427>

²¹⁵ *Law of Ukraine “On Media” from December 13, 2022, № 2849-IX,* <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2849-20#Text>

²¹⁶ Ibidem.

²¹⁷ D. Opryshko, *Monitoring Media Pluralism...*, op. cit., p. 7.

²¹⁸ *Law of Ukraine “On Media” from December 13, 2022, № 2849-IX,* <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2849-20#Text>

The media system of Belarus functions on the basis of the Constitution of Belarus and the Law “On Mass Media”²¹⁹. In particular, Article 33 of the Belarusian Constitution and Article 5 of the aforementioned law formally guarantee freedom of speech. Censorship is not allowed in accordance with Article 7. Although state monopolization of mass media is prohibited on paper, the situation is completely different in practice. The main body of state administration in the field of mass information is the Ministry of Information. It censors the media based on decrees from Lukashenko. It has the power to both register new media and terminate their existence. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is able to notify about the ban on the work of foreign correspondents on the territory of the country. Violation of the legislation entails “criminal, administrative, civil and other liability.” Among other state bodies in this field are the Public Coordinating Council in the Field of Mass Information and the Belarusian Union of Journalists. Their decisions are advisory in nature. The Belarusian Association of Journalists is their independent alternative operating from abroad.

Permanent censorship is the most popular form of repression in Belarus. It manifests itself through obstruction of journalistic work, complete closure of media companies, physical violence, criminal prosecution and imprisonment. In fact, there is a ban on any kind of independence within the country. The 2020 protests became the catalyst for these events (political description in Subchapter 3.2). There are known cases of police firing at workers with “press” inscriptions. About 1.500 attacks on them were recorded. Journalists were detained for covering protests, more specifically, doing their professional activities. They were released from the police station in the beginning without any problems. After some time, the court began to send them to colonies for long terms. Furthermore, the authorities began to create obstacles for the production of independent materials (e.g. refuse to print newspapers, cancel state registrations). As a result, the newspapers “Narodnaya volya” (28 years of existence), “Infa-kurier” (23 years) and other media ceased to be published. Warnings were issued to radio stations for spreading “inappropriate” content. Media workers were fired or fined. Most of the journalists have gone abroad. Another option is underground work in Belarus with all the risks to their lives. As of the end of 2022, 33 representatives of

²¹⁹ *Law of the Republic of Belarus “On Mass Media” from July 17, 2008, No. 427-Z, <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=3871&p0=h10800427>; Constitution of the Republic of Belarus of March 15, 1994 (as amended by the referendum of November 24, 1996), <https://constitutionnet.org/sites/default/files/Belarus%20Constitution.pdf>*

the profession were in jail²²⁰. There was no doubt about the imprisonment of female journalists (Andreeva, Chultsova and others).

One of the most revealing stories is the detention of Belarusian blogger and journalist Protasevich, who conducted his opposition activities from abroad. Belarus declared him internationally wanted on numerous charges of insulting the president, terrorism, inciting mass riots, and others. The detention took place during his flight from Athens to Vilnius. The Belarusian dispatch service informed the pilot about mines on board and forced him to land the plane in Minsk. Protasevich was imprisoned. The international community condemned such actions of the Lukashenko's regime. They were labeled as "air piracy" and "terrorism"²²¹.

Unlike Belarus, information on violations of freedom of speech in Ukraine is transparent. It is collected by monitoring organizations like "Institute of Mass Information" and "Detector media." According to the statistics, 83 cases of violations were registered in 2023. This number is much less than in 2022 (97 cases), 2021 (197 cases) and 2020 (229 cases). The most common crimes were beatings of journalists, obstructing their professional activities, threats, property damage, cybercrimes, restricting access to public information, indirect pressure and legal pressure. There was also selective admission of journalists to the presidential conference and to the battlefield²²². The number of cases of self-censorship increased since the beginning of the war (37% because of pressure from media owners, 35%

²²⁰ A. Volynets, *Kak belarusskiye media perezhili revolyutsiyu, repressii i emigratsiyu*, <https://www.dekoder.org/ru/article/kak-belarusskiye-media-perezhili-revolyciyu-repressii-i-emigratsiyu> (accessed on 15.12.2023); A. Isachenko, *Ot preduprezhdeniy do ugovornykh del: kak belarusskiye vlasti davyat na nezavisimyye SMI*, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-55260648> (accessed on 17.12.2023); Belarusian Association of Journalists, *«Prostituta za takoy obidnyy i nepredskazyemyy final». Belorusskikh media ostayetsya vse men'she. Posmotreli, kakiye iz nikh zakrylis' v 2023 godu*, <https://baj.media/be/analytics/prostitute-za-takoy-obidnyy-i-nepredskazuemyy-final-belorusskikh-media-ostaetsya-vse-menshe> (accessed on 16.01.2024); Belarusian Association of Journalists, *SMI v Belarusi v 2022 godu*, <https://baj.media/ru/analytics/smi-v-belarusi-v-2022-godu> (accessed on 19.12.2023).

²²¹ Zaderzhan byvshiy glavred protestnogo kanala Nexta Roman Protasevich. *Yego snyali s posazhennogo v Minske samoleta*, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-57218804> (accessed on 13.12.2023).

²²² V. Kraynya, *Protyahom 2023 roku IMI zafiksuvav v Ukraini 150 porushen' svobody slova. Mayzhe polovynu z nykh vchynyla Rosiya*, <https://detector.media/infospace/article/221653/2024-01-12-protiyahom-2023-roku-imi-zafiksuvav-v-ukraini-150-porushen-svobody-slova-mayzhe-polovynu-z-nykh-vchynyla-rosiya/> (accessed on 12.01.2024).

because of pressure from the authorities)²²³. Moreover, 62% of journalists equated the information telemarathon “Yedyni Novyny” with state censorship²²⁴. At the same time, the public broadcaster has not received full state funding since 2017. These decisions threaten its existence and independence²²⁵. However, some of the mentioned indicators can be justified by the peculiarities of wartime.

Among other things, the entire history of Ukrainian independence is haunted by the story of the murder of journalist Gongadze in 2000. According to the most common version, he was killed at the behest of former President Kuchma. The reason was his investigative activity. The main culprits have not yet been identified and punished in 2023. Another high-profile story was the murder of journalist Sheremet in 2016. Those responsible for blowing up his car have not been found too. It is worth mentioning that the high level of danger in this profession was caused by the Russia-Ukraine war. In 2023, the occupiers killed at least 27 media workers, 2 of them while performing their professional activities²²⁶.

The situation in the occupied territories is very difficult. Russia adjusted the information policy of those regions in accordance with its own legislation. It tried to block access to Ukrainian sources of information in order to spread propaganda narratives. Any attempts at resistance were cut off. Independent journalists were tortured, kidnapped, and killed²²⁷.

The fight against disinformation is part of the Information Security Strategy of Ukraine. It is implemented by the Center for Combating Disinformation, the Center for Strategic Communications, the National media literacy Project “Filter” (from the state side), as well as by various non-governmental fact-checking organizations such as StopFake, VoxCheck and others. Their activities led to an increase in media literacy among Ukrainians (50% have

²²³ *Z pochatkom povnomasshtabnoyi viyny sered mediynykiv zroslo kil'kist' vypadkiv samotsenzury*, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/3704264-z-pochatkom-povnomashtabnoi-vijni-sered-zurnalistiv-zroslo-kilkist-vipadkiv-samocenzuri.html> (accessed on 23.12.2023).

²²⁴ *Absolyutna bil'shist' zhurnalistiv vvazhayut, shcho v ukrayins'kykh ZMI ye tsenzura*, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/3704250-absolutna-bilsist-zurnalistiv-vvazaut-so-v-ukrainskih-zmi-e-cenzura.html> (accessed on 23.12.2023).

²²⁵ S. Shevchenko, «BBC po-ukrayins'ky»: *chomu Suspil'nomu movlennyyu postiyno brakuye hroshey?* <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/suspilne-movlennya-chomu-ne-vystachaye-hroshey/31612038.html> (accessed on 23.12.2023); Index on Censorship, *Index Index...*, op. cit. (accessed on 27.12.2023); Reporters Without Borders, *World Press Freedom Index*, <https://rsf.org/en/index> (accessed on 27.12.2023).

²²⁶ V. Kravnyy, *Protyahom 2023 roku...*, op. cit. (accessed on 12.01.2024).

²²⁷ D. Opryshko, *Monitoring Media Pluralism...*, op. cit., p. 10.

an above-average level, 31% - a high level)²²⁸. At the same time, similar projects are not observed in Belarus. According to the 2021 survey, 51% of citizens believe that they can identify fake news²²⁹. These data require additional verification.

After all, Figure 32 reveals detailed indicators from the World Press Freedom Index for 2023. The proposed contexts directly affect the media systems in Ukraine and Belarus. Among the evaluation criteria, the political context shows the level of media independence from political representatives. The legal framework depends on the presence or absence of legislative barriers for the journalistic profession. The economic context is related to financial pressure on journalists, or financial benefits for services rendered to political figures. The socio-cultural context reflects the levels of social constraints based on the identity of media workers and cultural taboos that can lead to self-censorship. The last indicator of security shows the risks of physical harm and repression during the performance of the journalistic profession. All their examples can be found above in this chapter.

Comparing the two cases, Ukraine has much better indicators than Belarus. However, the former country has the second worst performance in the political context. Ukrainian political actors are constantly trying to increase the level of media loyalty to them. The war creates a favorable environment for such actions. The country's profile on the website also lists reasons such as blocking sources of Russian propaganda and Russia's efforts to limit access to objective information in Ukraine²³⁰. Regarding authoritarian Belarus, it has the best of the worst indicators in the economic context. The reason for such a "high" position is the external subsidization of independent media²³¹. Although Belarus is slightly ahead of Ukraine in terms of safety figures, both countries have a pessimistic situation. The Russian invasion of Ukraine is the only factor behind the better performance of "Europe's most dangerous country for journalists," where around 400 representatives of the profession were forced into exile²³².

²²⁸ Ibidem, pp. 1, 25.

²²⁹ Baltic Internet Policy Initiative, *Issledovaniye: belorusy...*, op. cit. (accessed on 11.12.2023).

²³⁰ Reporters Without Borders, *Ukraine*, <https://rsf.org/en/country/ukraine> (accessed on 27.12.2023).

²³¹ Reporters Without Borders, *Belarus*, <https://rsf.org/en/country/belarus> (accessed on 27.12.2023).

²³² Ibidem.

Fig. 32. Reporters Without Borders (detailed indicators for 2023)

State	Ukraine	Belarus
Political indicator	60.63, 65 place	32.34, 174 place
Economic indicator	63.48, 30 place	47.67, 82 place
Legislative indicator	80.66, 26 place	28.07, 167 place
Sociocultural indicator	80.4, 40 place	48.3, 139 place
Security indicator	20.78, 179 place	29.45, 168 place

Source: Reporters Without Borders, *World Press...*, op. cit. (accessed on 27.12.2023).

Fig. 33. Freedom of speech in Ukraine and Belarus

State	Ukraine		Belarus	
Ranking	Reporters Without Borders (global score)	Index on censorship	Reporters Without Borders (global score)	Index on censorship
Year				
2023	61.19, 79 place	8 points, significantly restricted	37.17, 157 place	10 points, closed
2022	55.75, 106 place		39.62, 153 place	
2021	67.04, 97 place		49.18, 158 place	
2020	67.48, 96 place		50.25, 153 place	
2019	67.54, 102 place		48.34, 153 place	
2015	60.9, 127 place		52.02, 157 place	

Source: Index on Censorship, *Index Index...*, op. cit. (accessed on 27.12.2023); Reporters Without Borders, *World Press...*, op. cit. (accessed on 27.12.2023).

Figure 33 quite accurately reflects the dynamics of the state of affairs in the two countries²³³. Apart from its geographical location, the media system of Ukraine is closer to Europe than the media system of Belarus. The former country is constantly making progress in the development of freedom of speech. The change of presidents did not affect this dynamic. Sometimes, a slight lowering of the position is possible. This is a typical characteristic of any hybrid regime. Despite the war, Ukraine took the highest 79th place in 2023. At the same time, Belarus remains on the same authoritarian positions all the time: one president, one policy and complete lack of freedom of speech. Only the label changed from “difficult” to “very serious.” Nevertheless, solutions to smaller censorship problems for Ukraine and

²³³ See also some macro-scale findings in Subchapter 3.1.

bigger problems for Belarus can be found in the online environment, especially on various social media platforms.

3.4 Digital media as modifiers of media systems

The global Internet has become a place for the operation of new types of media, namely news websites and social media platforms. According to the Digital report, 79.2% of Ukrainians and 86.9% of Belarusians had access to it in 2023²³⁴. However, a negative trend was observed in these figures. Among the possible reasons could be the Russia-Ukraine war and the difficult political situation in Belarus. At the same time, the share of social media users was 74% of Ukrainians and 44.9% of Belarusians. If the level of Internet freedom in Ukraine was defined as “partially free” or “significantly narrowed,” then the level of Internet freedom in Belarus was “not free” or “closed”²³⁵.

News websites are seen as the next step in the evolution of print media. They significantly expand the boundaries of paper and remain online forever. Their advantages are also the speed of providing information, the convergence of different types of information (text, audio, video), as well as the possibility of interaction with the audience. After all, radio stations and TV channels began to be present in the online environment.

In Ukraine, the first online media appeared in between 1995 and 1998. It happened thanks to radio and press representatives. One of the mentioned websites was www.ukrainet.lviv.ua, where the authors published Ukrainian culture news. Its developers were not professional journalists, but amateurs²³⁶. After 28 years, the official registration of the first online media took place²³⁷.

²³⁴ S. Kemp, *Digital 2023: Belarus*, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-belarus> (accessed on 01.12.2023); Idem, *Digital 2023: Ukraine*, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-ukraine> (accessed on 01.12.2023).

²³⁵ Freedom House, *Freedom on the Net report. Internet Freedom Scores*, <https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores> (accessed on 01.12.2023); Index on Censorship, *Index on Censorship*, op. cit. (accessed on 27.12.2023).

²³⁶ M. Chabanenko, *Shcho vidomo i shcho nevidomo pro pershi ukrayins'ki sayty*, <https://detector.media/rinok/article/37855/2008-04-16-shcho-vidomo-i-shcho-nevidomo-pro-pershi-ukrainski-sayty/> (accessed on 03.01.2024).

²³⁷ V *Ukrayini zareyestruvaly pershi onlayn-media*, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/3726259-v-ukraini-zareestruvali-persi-onlajnmedia.html> (accessed on 03.01.2024).

In Belarus, the first online media appeared in between 1996 and 1998. This market was started by “Vecherniy Minsk” newspaper on July 24, 1996. Next step, various traditional media followed the example of this print media²³⁸. After 22 years, the first online media was officially registered in the country as sb.by, or “Belarus Segodnya”²³⁹.

The transition to the digital version in the two countries was caused by different circumstances. In particular, Ukraine has experienced technological development. “Everything is clear: ‘paper’ in the world is dying faster than journalism in general,” the editor-in-chief of “Dzerkalo Tyzhnya” wrote²⁴⁰. One of the oldest newspapers stopped publishing in paper form in 2019 and focused on an online version. The same fate befell “Segodnya,” “Perets” and other newspapers²⁴¹. Among the most popular media of the new market were representatives of television (“1+1” and “Channel 24”), specialized news websites (“Ukrainska Pravda” and “Censor.net”), the magazine “Correspondent,” etc. Hromadske.ua has been characterized by its political impartiality. There were also English-language media (“The Kyiv Independent”) or English-language versions of websites. The total audience share of news websites was 41% (2nd place) in 2023²⁴².

In contrast, Belarusian independent media chose the online environment as a priority due to persecution and repression by the authorities. It seems impossible to find an opposition newspaper, radio station, TV channel that would function freely in the country. They try to use every opportunity. Among other things, newspapers began to distribute not only news materials, but also electronic versions of paper publications. The editor-in-chief of “Novy Chas” stated that their main goal was not to make money, but to spread independent information to as many people as possible²⁴³. In addition, specialized news websites were

²³⁸ A.A. Hradiushko, *Formation and development of Internet media infrastructure*, “Vyesnik Vitsyebskaha dzyarzhavnaha wnivyersiteta” 2009, 4 (54), pp. 83-88.

²³⁹ BELTA, *Pervoye setevoye izdaniye zaregistrirovano v Belarusi*, <https://www.belta.by/society/view/pervoe-setevoe-izdanie-zaregistrirovano-v-belarusi-329241-2018/> (accessed on 03.01.2024).

²⁴⁰ Y. Mostova & V. Mostovyy, *Ze!Povit*, https://zn.ua/ukr/internal/ze-povit-334130_.html (accessed on 03.01.2024).

²⁴¹ See also theoretical framework: W. Świerczyńska-Głównia, *Print Publishers On The Net. Entry Strategies of the Print Media in Their Internet Editions*, „Zarządzanie Mediami” 2015, 3(4), pp. 241-256.

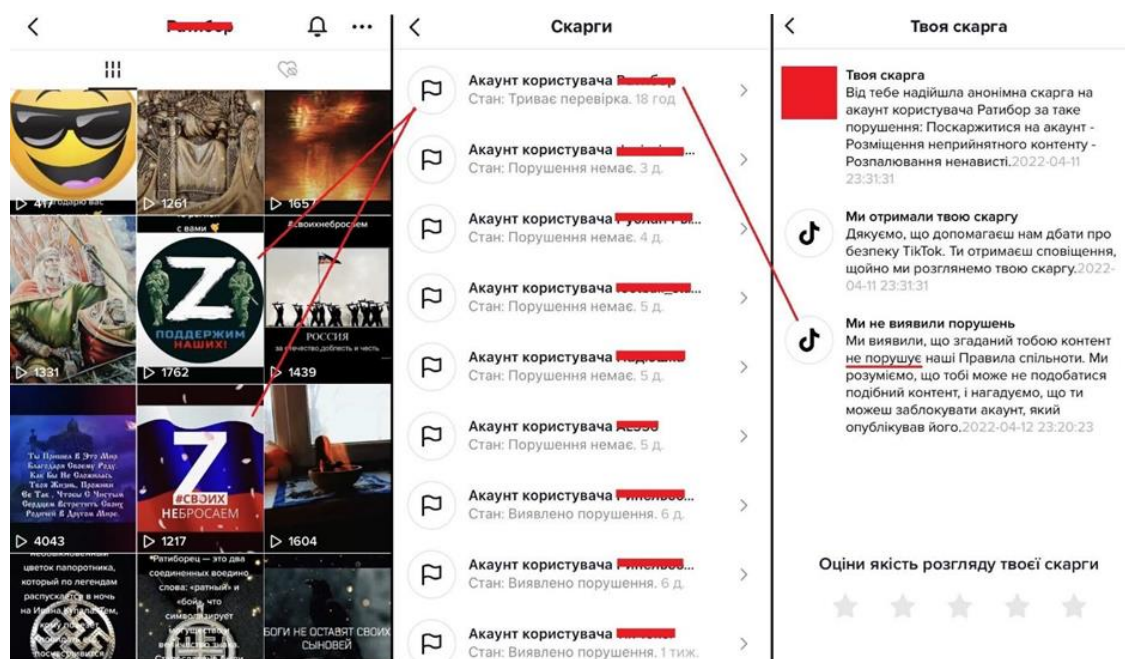
²⁴² USAID & Internews, *Ukrayins’ki media...*, op. cit. (accessed on 02.12.2023); D. Opryshko, *Monitoring Media Pluralism...*, op. cit., p. 22.

²⁴³ Media IQ, «Chitateli pechatayut na svoikh printerakh». *Kak vyzhivayut nezavisimyye gazety v usloviyakh informatsionnoy blokady*, <https://mediaiq.info/chitateli-pechatayut-na-svoih-printerah-kak-vyzhivayut-nezavisimye-gazety-v-usloviyah> (accessed on 04.01.2024).

created. The most popular of them are “Onliner.by,” “Charter 97” and “Zerkalo” (previously blocked TUT.BY)²⁴⁴. Hence, at least some solutions have been found solely thanks to the Internet. While state sources put news websites in 2nd place (51.3-61%) after television, opposition sources give them 1st place in terms of popularity (65-71%)²⁴⁵.

The online environment has also provided new opportunities for generating income. The main sources are various options for placing advertisements, grant programs, paid access to sites or individual news materials, material thanks to individual authors, monetization of YouTube, community creation and collection of donations for additional benefits (participation in the work of the media editorial office). The priority is to attract a foreign audience. Its small share is equivalent to a large share of the local audience²⁴⁶. As a result, all these tools helped Ukrainian online media to survive during the war period and supported the viability of the disappearing Belarusian opposition media in exile.

Fig. 34. Reporting process on TikTok: 1) Example of a violator; 2) A panel where decisions can be tracked; 3) Negative decision on this case



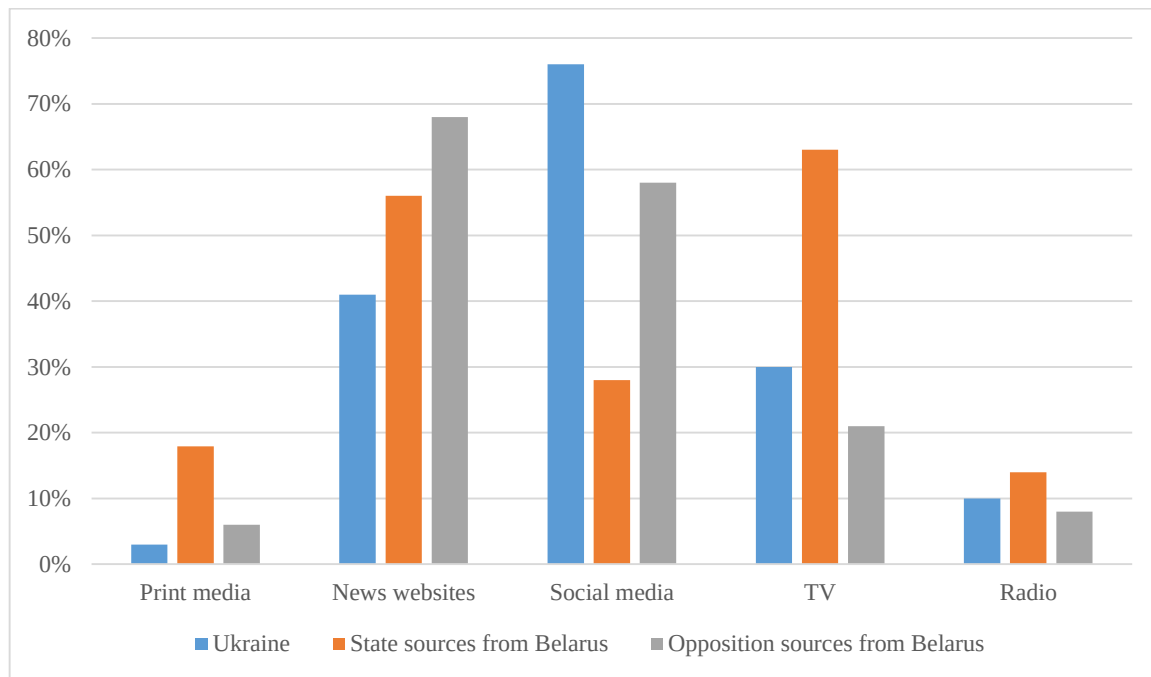
²⁴⁴ Reyting populyarnykh poiskovykh sistem i novostnykh resursov v Belarusi v sentyabre 2022 goda, <https://bolkunets.org/news/rejting-populyarnykh-poiskovykh-sistem-i-novostnykh-resursov-v-belarusi-v-sentyabre-2022-goda> (accessed on 04.01.2024).

²⁴⁵ Baltic Internet Policy Initiative, *Issledovaniye: belarusy...*, op. cit. (accessed on 11.12.2023); Vitebskiye vesti, *Po itogam sotsissledovaniya...*, op. cit. (accessed on 11.12.2023); *Tendentsii mediapotrebleniya v Belarusi...*, op. cit. (accessed on 04.12.2023); BELTA, *Kakiye istochniki...*, op. cit. (accessed on 04.12.2023).

²⁴⁶ O. Sharipov, V. Fedorchuk, B. Davydenko, *Z Dnem zhurnalista...*, op. cit. (accessed on 20.12.2023).

Source: Own elaboration.

Fig. 35. Media diet of Ukrainians and Belarusians



Note: Belarusian ratings can present social networks and messengers as separate categories, which affects popularity indicators.

Source: Ukraine is based on USAID & Internews, *Ukrayins'ki media...*, op. cit. (accessed on 02.12.2023); Belarus is based on the average value of data from 2 state sources (the latest numbers): Vitebskiye vesti, *Po itogam sotsissledovaniya...*, op. cit. (accessed on 11.12.2023); BELTA, *Kakiye istochniki...*, op. cit. (accessed on 04.12.2023); and the average value of data from 2 opposition sources: Baltic Internet Policy Initiative, *Issledovaniye: belorusy...*, op. cit. (accessed on 11.12.2023); *Tendentsii mediapotrebleniya v Belarusi...*, op. cit. (accessed on 04.12.2023).

Regarding social media, these are separate systems functioning on their own terms. As already mentioned in Chapter 2, they offer equal opportunities for professional journalists and ordinary users to distribute text, audio, and video content. Their actions do not require attracting additional funds. Any regulatory decisions are made by the developers. The American Facebook blocks Ukrainian media posts about the war, while the Chinese TikTok refuses to do the same in relation to symbols of Russian war propaganda²⁴⁷. The latter was proved directly by the author (see: Figure 34). Obviously, social media can both fulfill and ignore the requirements of the power structures from a certain country. It happens because blocking them can be a much more difficult process than blocking ordinary news websites.

²⁴⁷ T. Bots, *Facebook blokuye posty ukrayins'kykh media pro viynu. Chomu?* <https://mediamaker.substack.com/p/meta-facebook-vs-ukrainian-media> (accessed on 24.12.2024).

In Ukraine, 76% indicated social media as the main source of information²⁴⁸. In Belarus, their numbers from state sources range between 16.5% and 39.7%, while opposition sources give them from 54% to 61%²⁴⁹. Figure 35 demonstrates the complete picture of media consumption in Ukraine and Belarus. The Belarusian authorities underestimate social media the most. They can feel threatened.

Fig. 36. Statement of the Telegram owner during the 2020 protests



Source: Charter97, Pavel Durov: *My vklyuchili instrumenty antitsenzury v Belarusi, chtoby Telegram ostavalsya dostupnym*, <https://charter97.org/ru/news/2020/8/10/389022/> (accessed on 05.01.2024).

Despite the fact that among the most popular social networks for news are V Kontakte and Instagram, and investigations on YouTube collect millions of views, the main attention in Belarus deserves Telegram²⁵⁰. It was the only active social media during the 2020 protests. Its developers have used anti-censorship tools in order to combat Internet outages and

²⁴⁸ USAID & Internews, *Ukrayins'ki media...*, op. cit. (accessed on 02.12.2023).

²⁴⁹ Belarusian ratings can present social networks and messengers as separate categories, which affects popularity indicators; Baltic Internet Policy Initiative, *Issledovaniye: belorusy...*, op. cit. (accessed on 11.12.2023); Vitebskiye vesti, *Po itogam sotsissledovaniya...*, op. cit. (accessed on 11.12.2023); *Tendentsii mediapotrebleniya v Belarusi...*, op. cit. (accessed on 04.12.2023); BELTA, *Kakiye istochniki...*, op. cit. (accessed on 04.12.2023).

²⁵⁰ Belarusian ratings can present social networks and messengers as separate categories, which affects popularity indicators. In addition, Belarusians may be afraid to choose the Telegram option because of potential criminal liability; *Obzor tendentsiy mediapotrebleniya v Armenii, Belarusi, Gruzii, Moldove i Ukraine*, <https://colabmedios.org/obzor-tendencij-mediapotrebleniya-v-armenii-belarusi-gruzii-moldove-i-ukraine/> (accessed on 04.01.2024); Baltic Internet Policy Initiative, *Stalo izvestno, kakaya sotsset' samaya populyarnaya sredi belorusskoy molodezhi*, <https://charter97.org/ru/news/2022/12/18/528815/> (accessed on 05.01.2024).

blocking of online platforms (see: Figure 36). Telegram itself has a decentralized nature of functioning, which significantly complicated attempts to impose any restrictions²⁵¹. Such technologies as VPN, Tor and proxy servers also became effective in this case (see more in Chapter 2)²⁵². “Do you have the ability to block Telegram channels? No one has, not even those who came up with this whole web, the Americans,” Lukashenko acknowledged²⁵³. The platform took the lead among all sources of information in Minsk²⁵⁴.

Information channels became the important advantage of Telegram. They allowed users to focus only on news messages in chronological order without a filter bubble. Their authors can be divided into amateurs/bloggers, professional journalists from online media, professional journalists from traditional media and pro-government propagandists. As of the beginning of 2024, the most popular were “NEXTA Live” (amateurs/bloggers), “Belarusian Hajun” (amateurs/bloggers), “Zerkalo” (online media), “Onliner” (online media) and “Belarus Halounaye” (amateurs/bloggers). Importantly, the first channel was ahead of the second channel by more than 600 thousand subscribers²⁵⁵. The same “NEXTA Live” was the main source of information and coordination during the 2020 protests. The prosecutor’s office of Belarus believed that its authors caused 10 million dollars of damage to the state²⁵⁶. Pro-government journalists tried to discredit the whole Telegram²⁵⁷. At the same time, their channels started appearing on the platform (anonymous “Zheltyye slivy,” official “BELTA” and others). Ironically, any blocking of these media by the platform developers faced

²⁵¹ V. Olekhovich, *Kak i pochemu v mire blokirovali Telegram?* <https://tech.onliner.by/2020/08/12/kak-i-pochemu-v-mire-blokirovali-telegram> (accessed on 06.01.2024).

²⁵² D. Kuryshko, *Okno v Belarus'. Chto takoye Telegram-kanal NEXTA i kak on poyavilsya*, <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/news-russian-53749206> (accessed on 07.01.2024).

²⁵³ Lukashenko rasskazal, *pochemu ne mozhet blokirovat' Telegram*, <https://devby.io/news/lukashenko-vs-telegram> (accessed on 07.01.2024).

²⁵⁴ *Tendentsii mediapotrebleniya v Belarusi...*, op. cit. (accessed on 04.12.2023).

²⁵⁵ *Telegram channels and groups catalog. News and media. Belarus*, <https://by.tgstat.com/en/news> (accessed on 31.01.2024).

²⁵⁶ *Figuranty «dela NEXTA» nanesli gosudarstvu vred na summu v 10 millionov dollarov. Tak schitayet «prokuratura»*, Belarus golovnogogo mozga [Telegram channel], <https://t.me/belamova/34330> (accessed on 19.01.2024).

²⁵⁷ *Fal'shivaya informatsiya: mozno li doveryat' novostyam iz Telegram-kanalov? Rubrika «Antifeyk»*, <https://ont.by/news/falshivye-novosti-chem-chrevato-informacionnoe-oruzhie-rubrika-antifejk> (accessed on 19.01.2024).

criticism from the Belarusian authorities under the formulation of “suppression of freedom of speech on the Internet”²⁵⁸.

If there are problems with access to social media in Ukraine, they are insignificant. The hybrid regime implies open competition. At the beginning of writing this PhD dissertation in 2020, Facebook had been the main source of news for Ukrainians for several years already. YouTube was the second choice²⁵⁹. Later, it became the main platform for banned pro-Russian media and opposition TV channels of ex-President Poroshenko. In 2023, Telegram took the lead with 44%. It even surpassed television (43%), YouTube channels (36%) and news media websites (34%) in the ranking²⁶⁰. The numbers are slightly different from the previous data, but indicate the same “winner.”

Representatives of professional online media were more popular than traditional media on Facebook even in 2019. The leaders were “Znaj.ua” and “Politeka.” The third place was taken by the anonymous public page “Novosti Ukrainy i Mira”²⁶¹. Next, similar trends were transferred to Telegram. As of early 2024, only 8 anonymous channels managed to gain more than one million followers. Among them, “Trukha” and “Nikolaevskiy Vanyok” crossed the mark of two million followers²⁶². However, the lack of information about their owners poses a threat to the Ukrainian media space. They can be both Ukrainian and Russian actors. The latter are also present in an open form. Another problem of these amateur Telegram channels is the non-compliance with professional standards (e.g. creating panic, spreading fakes). It is a well-known fact that the Office of the President of Ukraine encourages the activity of the “Trukha” channel. Its representatives were invited to the meeting of the President of Ukraine

²⁵⁸ *Mininform otreagiroval na blokirovku ryada belorusskikh Telegram-kanalov*, <https://sputnik.by/20220923/mininform-otreagiroval-na-blokirovku-ryada-belorusskikh-telegram-kanalov-1067186911.html> (accessed on 19.01.2024).

²⁵⁹ M. Zakusylo, *Sotsmerezhi y telebachennya – osnovni dzherela novyn dlya ukrayintsiv; dovira do natsional'nykh media vpala (doslidzhennya)*, <https://detector.media/infospace/article/181614/2020-10-16-sotsmerezhi-y-telebachennya-osnovni-dzherela-novyn-dlya-ukrayintsiv-dovira-do-natsionalnykh-media-vpala-doslidzhennya/> (accessed on 19.01.2024).

²⁶⁰ Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, *Rezultaty vseukrayins'koho opytuvannya dlya konsul'tatyvnoyi misiyi Yevropeys'koho soyuzu v Ukrayini*, <https://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=ukr&cat=reports&id=1307&page=1> (accessed on 03.01.2024).

²⁶¹ MediaSapiens, *Yaki ZMI ukrayintsi naybil'she chytayut' u Feysbutsi — doslidzhennya*, <https://ms.detector.media/mediadoslidzhennya/post/23197/2019-07-17-yaki-zmi-ukrayintsi-naybilshe-chytayut-u-feysbutsi-doslidzhennya/> (accessed on 04.01.2024).

²⁶² *Telegram channels and groups catalog. News and media. Ukraine*, <https://uk.tgstat.com/news> (accessed on 31.01.2024).

with mass media²⁶³. In return, the ruling party could receive certain benefits (e.g. a positive tone of news materials).

The most famous regulation of the online space in Ukraine took place in 2017. Former President of Ukraine Poroshenko signed a decree banning the Russian web services “Yandex” and “Mail.ru Group.” The real shock was the restriction of access to social media “VKontakte” and “Odnoklassniki”²⁶⁴. The former held leadership positions in Ukraine²⁶⁵. The decision was justified because of the information war between Russia and Ukraine. In addition, the issue of the Telegram platform was discussed. The security of the Ukrainian state during a full-scale invasion was called into question due to the Russian origin of the platform owners.

Although the term “Internet media” was introduced by the Law on Oligarchs, the online sphere in Ukraine is regulated by the Law “On Media.” It defines “online media,” as well as “information sharing platform” and “video sharing platform” (social media). “Online media” can be both a website and a social media page. Their registration is optional. However, it provides such advantages as the possibility of receiving state support, prohibition of refusal of accreditation, protection of journalists, etc. Moreover, the law can be applied to unregistered entities as well²⁶⁶.

The entire social media platforms are not “online media.” Their main difference is the lack of editorial control. Bloggers are not counted as such. In fact, Ukraine does not want to take responsibility for social media. On the one hand, those in Ukrainian jurisdiction are directly responsible for violations of the law. On the other hand, those in the jurisdiction of other countries are not subjects to this law. The latter are regulated on the basis of local legislation. The National Council for Television and Radio Broadcasting cooperates with them through

²⁶³ V. Troyan, *OP zaprosyv na zustrich z media Telehram-kanal "Trukha". Zhurnalisty oburylysya*, <https://imi.org.ua/news/op-zaprosyv-na-zustrich-z-media-telegram-kanal-truha-zhurnalisty-oburylysya-i56163> (accessed on 24.12.2024).

²⁶⁴ E. Greys & N. Korinovska, *Poroshenko pidpysav ukaz pro zaboronu «VKontakte» i Mail.ru v Ukrayini*, <https://hromadske.ua/posts/prezydent-ukrainy-petro-poroshenko-pidpysav-ukaz-pro-novi-sanktsii> (accessed on 17.01.2024).

²⁶⁵ O. Shulga, *Zrivnyalas' za populyarnistyu v Ukrayini z poshukachem Google*, https://zn.ua/ukr/TECHNOLOGIES/roziyska-merezha-vkontakte-zrivnyalas-za-populyarnistyu-v-ukrayini-z-poshukachem-google-167111_.html (accessed 17.01.2024).

²⁶⁶ *Law of Ukraine “On Media” from December 13, 2022, № 2849-IX*, <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2849-20#Text>

agreements, memoranda and appeals with certain requirements. One of them can be the ban on the distribution of certain online media in Ukraine. It can be applied in the event of a court decision. Moreover, the National Council is the final authority that determines whether a specific social media page belongs to an unregistered online media based on the criteria of a co-regulation act. It also responds to gross violations of anonymous online media in the form of prescriptions²⁶⁷.

In comparison, the Belarusian authorities are constantly trying to establish complete control over information in the online environment. Among the main documents that regulate the functioning of the Internet and social media in this matter are the Presidential Decree “On measures to improve the use of the national segment of the Internet” and the Law “On Mass Media.” The first attempts to block independent websites were made as far back as 2001. Authorities also resorted to DDoS attacks, redirection to fake copies of sites, DNS modification, physical shutdown of servers and other blocking methods²⁶⁸.

As for the aforementioned official documents, the former introduced the term “restriction of access to information” in the legislation regarding the Internet. Authorities began to create lists with IP addresses of restricted and blocked websites²⁶⁹. The Operational Analytical Center under the President of the Republic of Belarus received the right to access information about individuals, owners of domain names in the national domain zone, without their consent. This move was aimed at combating anonymous users²⁷⁰.

The latter document is more comprehensive and well thought out. It includes 7 amendments and additions in the period from 2008 to 2023. Its action extends both to the Internet and specifically to social media. In particular, such concepts as “Internet resource,” “online edition” and “news aggregator” are introduced. The most important is the first of them. It is defined as “an Internet website, a page of an Internet website, a forum, a blog, an application

²⁶⁷ M. Zakusylo, *Rehulyuvannya onlayn-media: «za» ta «proty» v konteksti zakonoprojektu pro media*, <https://detector.media/rinok/article/178703/2020-07-11-regulyuvannya-onlayn-media-za-ta-proty-v-konteksti-zakonoproiektu-pro-media/> (accessed on 21.01.2024).

²⁶⁸ F. Pavluchenko, *Istoriya blokirovok Interneta v Belarusi, ili sheyping ne vseгда polezen*, <https://reform.by/spravly/istoriya-blokirovok-interneta-v-belarusi-ili-sheyding-ne-vsegda-polezen> (accessed on 10.12.2024).

²⁶⁹ Ibidem.

²⁷⁰ K.O. Volkova, *Legal regulation of social networks: Belarusian and Russian experience*, “Belarusian State University” 2022, pp. 29-30.

for a mobile device, another information resource (its constituent part), which is placed on the global computer network Internet, distributes mass information.” Its registration is not mandatory. It can only secure the status of “online edition” and turn the authors into journalists²⁷¹. Obviously, the wording “a page of an Internet website” refers to social media pages. Regardless of their registration or lack of registration, the law still applies to their authors and developers.

The legislation allows “the republican body of state management in the field of mass information” (Ministry of Information) to limit access to any Internet resource. The reasons may be the issuance of warnings regarding the elimination of violations of the law, the dissemination of prohibited information, non-compliance with the requirements of the ministry, the decision of the court or the Interdepartmental Commission for Security in the Information Field, failure to provide data, liquidation of the legal entity of the owner, or the ban on the activities of foreign media²⁷². According to independent media, 8.025 Internet resources were blocked between 2015 and 2022²⁷³. As of October 2023, 954 Telegram channels were recognized as “extremist materials”²⁷⁴. Any of them can become an “extremist organization” with criminal responsibility²⁷⁵. Among other things, Belarusians are detained for various types of interaction (subscription, comments, etc.) with Telegram channels²⁷⁶. At the same time, Telegram servers are located in different countries. Its developers do not want to comply with Belarusian legislation. Even if the Belarusian authorities can block individual channels, they are not yet able to limit the functioning of the entire platform.

²⁷¹ *Law of the Republic of Belarus “On Mass Media” from July 17, 2008, No. 427-Z*, <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=3871&p0=h10800427>

²⁷² Ibidem.

²⁷³ *Nastoyashcheye Vremya, V Belarusi s nachala 2022 goda zablokirovali boleye 3 tysyach internet-resursov*, <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/v-belarusi-zablokirovali-boleye-3-tysyach-internet-resursov-/32179768.html> (accessed on 14.12.2023).

²⁷⁴ A. Ruvina, *Telegram-kanaly narodnykh posol'stv priznali ekstremist-skimi materialami*, <https://belsat.eu/ru/news/23-10-2023-telegram-kanaly-narodnyh-posolstv-priznali-ekstremistskimi-materialami> (accessed on 15.12.2023).

²⁷⁵ *Katerina, 2 miliona ekstremistov? V Belarusi raspravlyayut-sya s podpischikami Telegrama*, <https://www.svoboda.org/a/dva-miliona-ekstremistov-v-belarusi-raspravlyayutsya-s-podpischikami-telegrama/31527073.html> (accessed on 14.01.2024).

²⁷⁶ *Kontrol' povedeniya pol'zovateley v internete v Belorussii*, https://www.tadviser.ru/index.php/Статья:Контроль_поведения_пользователей_в_интернете_в_Белоруссии (accessed on 15.01.2024).

In conclusion, the political and media systems of Ukraine and Belarus accurately reflect their labels in various international ratings, specifically “hybrid regime” and “authoritarian regime.” On the one hand, there is a constant change of power in Ukraine. Although its representatives cooperate with loyal media owners, the existence of freedom of speech is visible. According to the survey results in 2023, journalists confirmed this information even under martial law²⁷⁷. On the other hand, the government in Belarus has remained unchanged since 1994. Lukashenko completely destroyed any manifestation of independent journalism within the country and left only pro-government traditional media. Logically speaking, social media platforms have become the most popular source of information among all media for Ukrainians and the only chance for obtaining objective information for Belarusians. Their choice is justified (RQ1).

As for the Ukrainian media system, the Internet has expanded the possibilities of choosing information sources, especially during wartime. The range of potential newsmakers starts with ordinary users and continues with bloggers, comedians, etc. Their amateur videos in the online space were the first to confirm the beginning of the full-scale war. They are much faster than traditional media. Interest groups cannot fully control the media space anymore. It is no longer possible to hide any news like in the Soviet era. New ways to monetize content (e.g. donating) have been created. Moreover, different types of users are engaged in the information war for people’s minds and territory. On the one hand, they popularize Ukrainian culture and spread the truth. On the other hand, the chance to become a victim of enemy propaganda gave an impetus to the development of media literacy in the country (e.g. the National media literacy project “Filter”). The unique experience can be useful for the international community. Therefore, it is not surprising that social media and news websites have the largest audience in Ukraine.

As for the Belarusian media system, the Internet makes it possible to resist the complete capture of traditional media by the authorities. Being inside the country is no longer a mandatory condition for various representatives of the opposition (from politicians, media and bloggers to ordinary users). They are distinguished by creative approaches in the online

²⁷⁷ *Absolyutna bil'shist' zhurnalistiv...*, op. cit. (accessed on 23.12.2023).

environment (e.g. Internet platform “Holos”²⁷⁸). Their safety is ensured by anonymous social media tools. Financial assistance is provided thanks to international partners and donations. It seems like a game changer for citizens of the most repressive country in Europe.

While Ukraine shifts the responsibility for regulating social media to their developers, Belarus tries to establish strict control over them. Legal and technological means are in place to limit their functioning. However, they do not have much success. Social media algorithms are much more complex than traditional media mechanisms. Their capabilities are much greater than even the capabilities of news websites. It is not enough to block one element. It is not enough to add one channel to the list of prohibited web pages. Social media platforms consist of millions of elements and web pages that are linked to other websites in the national online space. Hence, H1 is accepted. The political system controls the traditional media system more than the one modified by digital factors. The latter expand the boundaries of pluralism both in Ukraine and in Belarus.

Various political actors from these two countries have already noticed the potential of social media platforms. In democratic Ukraine, candidate Zelenskyy built his election campaign using them as the main channel for communication with voters. “...I was told that we would not find contact because Facebook and social media influenced 6% of society. I was told that those people from social media were more lazy in terms of any change, they did not believe in change. That the same politicians would remain, and that the main was television audience. We were told a lot of things. Next, what did we do? We did not believe it. We found a format of communication with the people, from 6-8% to the big TV. We practically did not interact with the TV. Well, very little...” he said during one of the interviews²⁷⁹. After that, he was elected President. In Belarus, opposition leader Tsikhanouskaya was able to communicate with protesters exclusively via social media in 2020. Other options were blocked by the authorities. The example of Telegram channel “NEXTA” has already been mentioned too. This opposition news leader manages to maintain its popularity at a high level. After all, social media can be compared to “an island of freedom” for various political actors. The use

²⁷⁸ Conducted an independent count of votes based on photos of the ballots.

²⁷⁹ V. Krasynskyy & S. Shcherbyna, *Volodymyr Zelenskyy: Nam vyhidno rozpustyty Radu, ale budemo dumaty i vchynyaty za zakonom*, <https://www.rbc.ua/ukr/news/vladimir-zelenskiy-nam-vygodno-raspustit-1555546435.html> (accessed on 31.01.2024).

of their potential is revealed in the next two chapters. Dependence on traditional media and government restrictions seem to be a thing of the past rather than a thing of the future.

Chapter 4. Social media activity of the political actors from Ukraine and Belarus

4.1 General information

According to the literature review, various researchers produce limited knowledge on the topic of social media use by political actors from Ukraine and Belarus. Starting from 2019, they show the former country through the profiles of Presidents Poroshenko, Zelenskyy, and several members of parliament¹. Among the Belarusian political actors are the self-proclaimed President Lukashenko, the leader of the democratic forces Tsikhanouskaya, some bloggers/influencers like NEXTA, and representatives of local authorities². At the same time, the number of scientific works is at a very low level. Despite all this, the real picture is much broader with numerous interesting insights, especially after the 2019 elections in Ukraine and the 2020 presidential election in Belarus. These dates are seen as a turning point on the politics-social media axis for both countries.

Since there are no separate lists of online political presence similar to international ones, the current study provides data on the use of Facebook in Ukraine and Telegram in Belarus as of the end of 2021. The choice of these social media is justified in the methodological subchapter below. The lists cover presidential candidates (Ukrainian participants in the 2019 election, actual and potential Belarusian participants since the 2020 election), political parties and members of parliament, mayors, as well as some other famous politicians, bloggers/influencers (countless). Links to their social media pages can be found in Appendices B, C. They were prepared manually. The structuring will be useful to any researcher who decides to analyze political communication via social media platforms in these two countries.

¹ A. Alberti & L. De Serio, *Social media...*, op. cit., pp. 65–86; A. Zakharchenko, Y. Maksimtsova, V. Iurchenko, V. Shevchenko & S. Fedushko, *Under the conditions of Non-Agenda ownership: Social media users in the 2019 Ukrainian presidential elections campaign*, arXiv (Cornell University), 2019.

² D. Kuznetsova, *Broadcasting messages via Telegram: Pro-Government social media control during the 2020 protests in Belarus and 2022 Anti-War protests in Russia*, “Political Communication” 2023, 41(4), pp. 509–530; A.A. Hradziushka, O.Y. Vikhrova & H.F. Velikaborats, *Digital Transformation of Public Life in Russia and Belarus: Dialogue Between the Government and Citizens on New Media Platforms*, [in:] *2023 Communication Strategies in Digital Society Seminar (ComSDS)*, IEEE, 2023, pp. 106–111; A. Rudnik, *Why do bloggers keep silent? Self-censorship in social media: cases of Belarus and Russia* [Master’s thesis], Södertörn University, School of Social Sciences, 2020.

The list consists of 328 Ukrainian positions and 45 Belarusian positions. It is the largest database to date. In Ukraine, the oldest Facebook page was registered on 17 September 2008 by blogger Shariy. At that time, there were no posts that could indicate the reasons for its creation. It was probably not the Russia-Georgia war. In Belarus, the oldest Telegram channel was registered on 15 May 2016 by blogger Belarus of the Brain. This time was characterized by protests and preparations for a parliamentary election. Nothing is known about the possible connection between these events. As for the newest online pages, they belong to Belarusian politician Andrey Savinykh (1 September 2021) and Ukrainian politician Vladimir Moroz (30 October 2021). The peak years for the creation of social media profiles were 2019 in Ukraine (143 cases) and 2020 in Belarus (19 cases). They were identified as the starting points for the study.

The overall presence of political actors was also calculated as of the end of 2021. In Ukraine, 79.5% of presidential candidates³, 72.7% of political parties⁴, 57.4% of members of parliament⁵, and 77.4% of mayors had social media pages. In Belarus, these figures were more difficult to calculate due to the presence of both registered and banned political actors. In particular, 5 candidates were officially registered during the 2020 presidential election. While 8 candidates and potential presidential candidates had Telegram pages, Anna Kanopatskaya was not present online. Next, 4 political parties were officially registered in total. There were 7 political parties with Telegram channels. The Republican Party of Labor and Justice was the only exception. After that, the lowest presence was among members of parliament (6.9%)⁶ and mayors (9%). Finally, certain political actors from Ukraine and Belarus were selected for the research. The main objectives were to answer RQ2, as well as to accept or reject H2⁷.

³ Percentage of all candidates during the 2019 presidential election.

⁴ Percentage of all political parties during the 2019 parliamentary election.

⁵ Percentage of 420 politicians of the IX convocation. This number was displayed on the official website of the Verkhovna Rada at the time of analysis.

⁶ Percentage of 174 politicians of the VII convocation.

⁷ Reminder: **RQ2**. What are the similar and different patterns of using social media for the political communication in democratic Ukraine and authoritarian Belarus? **H2**. Political actors from authoritarian Belarus use social media less diversely in terms of topics, functions, and frequency of posts than those from democratic Ukraine do.

4.2 Methodology

In the current study, Facebook and Telegram were chosen for several reasons. First, these social media platforms are easier to compare because of the similarities in their architecture. They are not like Instagram and TikTok, where the focus is on multimedia content. Instead, textual information makes up a significant portion of an ordinary post on Facebook and Telegram. Messages are transmitted in the form of endless news. Second, as of the beginning of the research in 2020, Telegram was the safest messenger for Belarusians, while Facebook was the most popular social media among Ukrainians⁸. Third, media experts noted that former Ukrainian President Poroshenko had made Facebook the main social media for politics⁹. It has become the indispensable tool for the functioning of any political actor in Ukraine. It is worth to repeat that many official pages were created for political campaigning and professional activity. At the same time, Telegram became the main attribute for the communication of Belarusian political actors due to the already mentioned attempts to block opposition sources of information. After all, it is assumed that Facebook in Ukraine and Telegram in Belarus gathered the largest number of political representatives. It allows the author to obtain broad and accurate results regarding the comparison of the two countries.

Creating a complete and differentiated sample was a challenging task. It was crucial to reach the most valuable representatives from each political branch in both countries, especially in the situation when the number of Belarusian political actors on social media was significantly lower than the number of Ukrainian political actors. The criterion of different ideologies had to be present as well. Therefore, all Belarusian political actors were found on Telegram. After that, a search for Ukrainian political actors with similar points in the political background was conducted on Facebook. Political actors with vague information about their professional activities, insufficient data for analysis, as well as those who did not fit into the proposed time frames, were filtered out. If Irina Rineyskaya was an unremarkable pro-government politicians with a Telegram account in the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus, there were much more charismatic female politicians

⁸ MediaSapiens, *Facebook – naypopulyarnisha sotsmerezha ukrayintsiv, za neyu ydut' Instagram i Telegram – doslidzhennya*, <https://ms.detector.media/sotsmerezhi/post/25606/2020-09-29-facebook-naypopulyarnisha-sotsmerezha-ukrayintsiv-za-neyu-ydut-instagram-i-telegram-doslidzhennya/> (accessed on 10.10.2023).

⁹ Bombardyr, *Telehram abo kremlinhrm: chy zablokuyut' / khto zaroblyaye mil'yony / oliharkhy khochut' th-kanaly* [Video], YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=APb8jVErl8A> (accessed on 20.02.2024).

with Facebook pages in the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. The specific one was not chosen due to the lack of satisfactory grounds (e.g. political and methodological) for comparison. In addition, such a political entity as the Coordination Council in Belarus was crossed out because it had no analogues in the opposite country.

The final sample consists of 13 Belarusian political actors and 13 Ukrainian political actors. In Belarus, there are 5 presidential candidates: Alexander Lukashenko (nominally President)¹⁰, Viktor Babaryka¹¹, Valeriy Tsepkalo¹², Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya¹³, Pavel Latushka¹⁴ (all opposition challengers, actual or potential candidates, taking into account the registration process); 5 political parties: Liberal Democratic Party of Belarus or The truth of Gaidukevich¹⁵, White Rus¹⁶, Communist Party of Belarus¹⁷ (all registered and pro-government), Narodnaya Hramada. Party of Nikolay Statkevich (not registered, opposition)¹⁸, National Anti-Crisis Management (potential party, opposition)¹⁹; 1 most popular member of the VII convocation of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly on social media: Oleg Gaidukevich (pro-government)²⁰; 1 mayor: Alexander Rogachuk (Brest)²¹; 1 blogger/influencer: NEXTA Live²². In Ukraine, there are the same 5

¹⁰ One of the oldest authoritarian leaders of the post-Soviet space. His legitimacy is not recognized by the European Union, Great Britain, the United States, Ukraine and many others.

¹¹ The newcomer to politics, former chairman of the board of Belgazprombank, political prisoner as of 2022.

¹² Former member of Lukashenko's team, director of the Park of High Technologies. He left Belarus in 2020.

¹³ The leader of the United Democratic Forces of Belarus, who works in exile. She entered politics after the imprisonment of her husband, blogger Sergei Tsikhanouskiy. She is a former English translator.

¹⁴ Former Belarusian diplomat and director of the Janka Kupala National Theatre.

¹⁵ Former regional branch of the Liberal Democratic Party of the Soviet Union. Its leader is Oleg Gaidukevich.

¹⁶ The party "aims to support the political course of the President of the Republic of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko." The main partner is the United Russia party. Oleg Romanov became the chairman of the political organization.

¹⁷ It was formed after the split in the Party of Communists of Belarus. Its creators were supporters of Lukashenko. The party has always advocated the official course of the country's president. It is headed by Alexei Sokol.

¹⁸ One of the oldest political parties in Belarus. The word "hramada" in the name refers to "a group of people united by a common goal." They are ready to lead the socio-political protest until the final victory over the authoritarian regime. Its leader, Nikolay Statkevich, is a political prisoner.

¹⁹ The political structure of Pavel Latushka, which was created to promote the goals of the entire Belarusian democratic movement. Its members operate from Poland. It is a platform for creating a potential opposition party.

²⁰ Leader of the Liberal Democratic Party of Belarus. He considers the withdrawal of his candidacy from the 2020 presidential race to be his greatest achievement. The politician did it in favor of Lukashenko.

²¹ He has been in the position since 2014. He is a former military man.

²² It was founded by Stepan Putilo, a 17-year-old schoolboy, in 2015. The name translates as "someone." The Telegram channel blurs the boundaries between media and politics. On the one hand, it produces investigations and news. On the other hand, its members make statements and coordinate the actions of opposition forces.

presidential candidates: Petro Poroshenko (the fifth President of Ukraine)²³, Volodymyr Zelenskyy (opposition challenger, the sixth President of Ukraine)²⁴, Yulia Tymoshenko (opposition challenger)²⁵, Yuriy Boyko (pro-Russian, opposition challenger)²⁶, Anatoliy Hrytsenko (opposition challenger)²⁷; 5 parties: European Solidarity (party of the fifth President)²⁸, Servant of the People (party of the sixth President, opposition)²⁹, Opposition Platform – For Life (pro-Russian, opposition)³⁰, Motherland (opposition)³¹, Voice (opposition)³²; 1 most popular member of the VIII convocation of the Verkhovna Rada on social media: Volodymyr Groysman³³; 1 mayor: Andriy Sadovyi (Lviv)³⁴; 1 blogger/influencer: Anatoliy Shariy (pro-Russian)³⁵. This is the largest representation of political actors from the two countries, together and separately, considering their political activity on social media platforms.

²³ Leader of the European Solidarity party, former Minister of Foreign Affairs. He is also a businessman.

²⁴ The newcomer to politics, leader of the Servant of the People party. He was a comedian, producer, presenter, actor, and screenwriter.

²⁵ Former Prime Minister of Ukraine and former political prisoner. Head of the Motherland party.

²⁶ Former Chairman of the Board of the National Company “Naftogaz Ukraine” and former Minister of Fuel and Energy. Co-chairman of the Opposition Platform – For Life party (banned from 2022).

²⁷ Former Minister of Defense and head of the Civic Position party.

²⁸ The former Block of Petro Poroshenko. Associate member of the European People’s Party. Its goal is the accession of Ukraine to the EU and NATO.

²⁹ Although the party is considered to be newly created, it was registered in 2016 as the Party of Decisive Changes. Its current name coincides with Zelenskyy’s popular TV series. Olena Shulyak was elected as the head of the party. Its basis was made up of both experienced specialists and random people (e.g. showmen, athletes).

³⁰ The party of social direction, which was banned in 2022 due to its destructive activities. Built on the remnants of the pro-Russian Party of Regions. The latter was connected with the fugitive president Yanukovich.

³¹ The former Block of Yulia Tymoshenko. Associate member of the European People’s Party. Among other things, it focuses on issues of agriculture.

³² The newly created party of the musician Svyatoslav Vakarchuk. The head of the party is Kira Rudyk. It declares a democratic approach to politics, separating money from politics, and “puts a person at the center of public policy.”

³³ Former mayor of Vinnytsia, former Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada and former Prime Minister of Ukraine. He entered the parliament on the list of the Block of Petro Poroshenko. After that, his own party failed to pass the threshold in 2019.

³⁴ Former Member of Parliament. He ran for president in 2019, but withdrew his candidacy in favor of Hrytsenko. He headed the electoral list of the Samopomich party, which did not enter the parliament during the 2019 election.

³⁵ Former journalist, current propagandist. He left Ukraine due to alleged persecution. His online streams are conducted from abroad. The Security Service of Ukraine accused him of illegal activities to the detriment of national security in the information sphere. In addition, he has his own political party, which received 2.23% of the vote during the 2019 parliamentary election. It also took part in the 2020 local election. Its leader is his wife Olha Shariy. The Shariy party was banned in 2022 due to activities aimed at destabilizing the situation in Ukraine.

In Ukraine, 5 presidential candidates were selected based on their election results in 2019³⁶. After that, there was a change of power. Thus, Zelenskyy's image combined two accounts (Zelenskyy's team – specifically for the election campaign, Office of the President of Ukraine – further professional role). Next, 5 political parties were also selected based on their election results in 2019³⁷. Considering the representative of the Verkhovna Rada, Groyzman was the most popular politician of his convocation by the number of followers. He corresponded to the profile of Gaidukevich in Belarus, the most popular Member of Parliament on Telegram at the same point in time. As for the mayors, Sadovyi also had the largest number of followers. He was a short-lived presidential candidate and had an unsuccessful attempt to run for parliament. Nevertheless, he is the best fit for this category because of popularity and territorial location. Sadovyi (Lviv) and Rogachuk (Brest) both represented the Western cities near the border with European Poland. As for bloggers/influencers, Shariy was a pro-Russian political actor in Ukraine. His political party took part in the parliamentary election and received more than 342 thousand votes. The Belarusian Telegram channel NEXTA has not yet announced its political ambitions. However, nothing prevents its members from making this decision at any time. In 2020, they did not cooperate with any of the politicians and were the main coordinator of the protests.

As can be seen, the sample includes both individual and collective entities from different political levels of the two countries. It gathers presidents (former and current), the most important contenders during presidential elections, the most valuable representatives of parliaments and mayors (in terms of online presence). Since the parliament is the key to the functioning of the democratic system of Ukraine, all political parties of the IX convocation of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine are listed for analysis. In turn, Belarus is represented by both old and potentially new political parties. Importantly, such political actors as NEXTA Live and Shariy are included in the sample. Their role is blurred, but they can no longer be separated from the political life of the two countries. This combination of political actors is

³⁶ TSVK ofitsiyno oholosyla rezul'taty 1-ho turu prezidents'kykh vyboriv, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-cvk-oficijno-ogolosyla-rezultaty-1-turu-prezydentskykh-vyboriv/29866247.html> (accessed on 10.10.2023).

³⁷ Rezul'taty vyboriv v Radu v Ukrayini 2019, <https://www.rbc.ua/ukr/news/rezultaty-parlamentskih-vyborov-ukraine-1558364994.html> (accessed on 10.10.2023).

the basis for comparing Ukraine and Belarus as a whole, as well as for comparing specific political levels³⁸.

The research period includes 5 separate stages. Since the registration point of each social media account is different, the dates of these stages are unique for each political actor. However, it is assumed that each political actor takes them into account at least approximately when developing a communication strategy, so their division is justified. When constructing the periods, the author prioritized the days of active publication as starting points in some of them (start of the election period, connection between the post-election period and the routine period). It helped secure a broad sample and added a randomization factor. The election period is most often mentioned in scientific literature³⁹. It was decided to divide this stage into the start of the campaign (the first month, testing various online practices) and the development of the campaign (the second month, using established practices) in order to show more insights. There is an exception for the Servant of the People party due to the late date of their registration and the short duration of the election period. Next, there is a month of the post-election period, followed by a month of the routine period after half a year pause (daily performance of professional duties). The development of events in the post-Soviet region caused the inclusion of a month of the war period (in other words, a special period or crisis period). Importantly, each month represents only indicators of general statistics (e.g. number of posts, number of interactions). It is done to monitor the

³⁸ Importantly, the author's opinions may not align with views, judgments, statements and ideologies of the political actors selected for this PhD dissertation.

³⁹ S. Ahmed, K. Jaidka & J. Cho, *The 2014 Indian elections...*, op. cit., pp. 1071–1087; S.Y.B. Lam, M.F.M. Cheung & W.H. Lo, *What matters most in the responses to political campaign posts on social media: The candidate, message frame, or message format?* "Computers in Human Behavior" 2021, 121, 106800; A. Casero-Ripollés, M. Sintés-Olivella & P. Franch, *The populist political communication style...*, op. cit., pp. 986–1001; J. Bright, S. Hale, B. Ganesh, A. Bulovsky, H. Margetts & P. Howard, *Does campaigning on social media...*, op. cit., pp. 988–1009; L. Alonso-Muñoz, S. Marcos-García & A. Casero-Ripollés, *Political leaders in (inter) action. Twitter as a strategic communication tool in electoral campaigns*, "Trípodos" 2016, (39), pp. 71-90; L. Alonso-Muñoz, & A. Casero-Ripollés, *Political agenda...*, op. cit., pp. 7-25; T. Baviera, J. Sánchez-Junqueras & P. Rosso, *Political advertising...*, op. cit., pp. 39–49; A.R. Beta & T.A. Neyazi, *Celebrity Politicians, digital campaigns, and performances of political legitimacy in Indonesia's 2019 elections*, "International Journal of Communication" 2022, 16, pp. 331-355; P. Gerbaudo, F. Marogna & C. Alzetta, *When "Positive posting" attracts voters: user engagement and emotions in the 2017 UK election campaign on Facebook*, "Social Media + Society" 2019, 5(4); P. Rossini, J. Hemsley, S. Tanupabrunsun, F. Zhang & J. Stromer-Galley, *Social media, opinion polls, and the use of persuasive messages during the 2016 US election primaries*, "Social Media + Society" 2018, 4(3); K. Liebhart & P. Bernhardt, *Political Storytelling...*, op. cit., pp. 15–25; S. Kruschinski, J. Haßler, P. Jost & M. Sülflow, *Posting or Advertising...*, op. cit., pp. 1–21.

presence or lack of online activity on the part of political actors. At the same time, deep analysis of content takes place on the 7 days basis within each of the months. These are specific days of its publication. Figure 37 presents more details and explanations. There is an exception (the development of the election period of the Liberal Democratic Party of Belarus), which does not significantly affect the results. It is made to include the full sample of political parties in Ukraine. As a result, this division into 5 different stages helps to show the most accurate elements of the strategies of political actors from Ukraine and Belarus (see Appendices D and E for visualization of the process and exact dates).

Fig. 37. Specification of the research period in Belarus and Ukraine

Period	Belarus	Ukraine
Election (start)	The election period in Belarus began on 11.05.2020 ⁴⁰ . At that moment, some Belarusian political actors already had a Telegram account. Others created it later. Their online political campaign started at different times, but still had the same starting point. Therefore, the first period covered the month of each political actor on Telegram after 11.05.2020. The starting point is the first day of active publishing. The first 7 days of content publication are taken for detailed analysis. This instruction is relevant to all political actors because the 2020 presidential election was an opportunity for a	In Ukraine, there was a long election campaign in 2019. Parliamentary election followed presidential election. Since both presidential candidates and political parties were taken for the research, their starting points differ. The presidential campaign started on 01.01.2019 ⁴¹ . The starting point for every presidential candidate and blogger/influencer is the first day of active publishing. The parliamentary campaign started on 24.05.2019 ⁴² . The starting point for each political party and deputy, as well as for Mayor Sadovyi, is the first day of active publishing. The latter was also an

⁴⁰ The first documents have been submitted to the Central Election Commission in Belarus: <https://sputnik.by/20200511/Pervye-dokumenty-ot-potentsialnykh-kandidatov-v-prezidenty-postupili-v-TsIK-1044655961.html>

⁴¹ It officially started on 31.12.2018, but this is a public holiday. The main stage began on New Year's Eve, when Zelenskyy announced his campaign for the presidency.

⁴² TSVK ne vstyhne provesty tendery dlya druku i dostavky byuleteniv na parlaments'ki vybory, https://lb.ua/news/2019/05/23/427648_tsik_uspeet_provesti_tenderi.html (accessed on 10.10.2023).

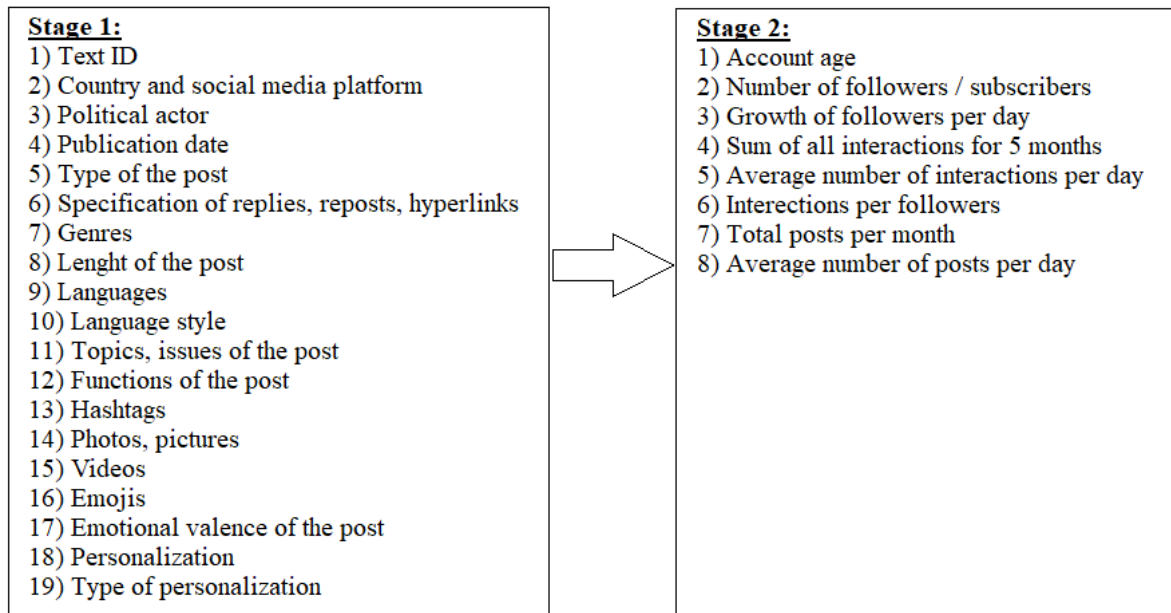
	complete reboot of the political system in Belarus.	active participant in this political campaign. Hence, the first period covered the month of each political actor on Facebook after the specified dates. The first 7 days of content publication are analyzed in detail.
Election (development)	A month later. The start date is calculated from the start day of the previous period (+30 days). Once again, 7 days are analyzed in detail.	A month later. The start date is calculated from the start day of the previous period (+30 days). Once again, 7 days are analyzed in detail.
Post-election	The date of Lukashenko's inauguration ceremony was not taken as the end of the election campaign in Belarus because the opposition continued to protest. Its representatives hoped for new elections and a transition of power. Instead, the end of the election campaign is considered the day of the last attempt to organize protests (25.03.2021). The post-election month can be chosen from the new working week (or from 29.03.2021). Once again, 7 days are analyzed in detail.	The end date of the election campaign for all political actors is 03.08.2019. The post-election month can be chosen from the new working week (or from 05.08.2019). Once again, 7 days are analyzed in detail.
Routine	The start date for this period is counted from the seventh day of active publication of the previous period. Six months is added to it. It is considered as a sufficient pause in order to analyze the everyday practices of political actors, or in other words, their	The start date for this period is counted from the seventh day of active publication of the previous period. Six months is added to it. It is considered as a sufficient pause in order to analyze the everyday practices of political actors, or in other words, their

	routine. Each of them has its own random unique routine.	routine. Each of them has its own random unique routine.
War	A month of each profile since the beginning of the full-scale Russia-Ukraine war (24.02.2022). Belarus is a part to the war.	A month of each profile since the beginning of the full-scale Russia-Ukraine war (24.02.2022).

Source: Own elaboration.

The research uses quantitative and qualitative content analysis, as well as a comparative method. The coding process consisted of two stages (Figure 38). First, the content of social media posts was analyzed. Second, the numbers of basic statistical information was counted. The appropriate order was chosen due to the large amount of data. Priority was given to information about content over information about the number of followers, interactions, etc. The latter seem to play a less important role in the constantly changing online environment with a large number of users. Especially, it is difficult to distinguish real accounts from bots in these circumstances.

Fig. 38. Coding process



Source: Own elaboration.

Since the theoretical aspects of political communication and social media are discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, the codebook is aimed to be a supportive instrument in the practical analysis

of online political strategies. In this research, the latter concept is adopted as the one that encompasses a variety of features. A comprehensive review of scientific literature made it possible to examine online strategies of the selected political actors using 19 different categories. During the codebook construction process, the deductive approach prevailed over the inductive approach. The knowledge base consisted of 27 scientific articles⁴³. According to them, Facebook and X (Twitter) became the most studied platforms during election campaigns and outside of them. There were also works with Instagram, TikTok and Telegram. Among the studied countries were Spain, USA, Great Britain, France, Egypt and others. On the contrary, this study is a unique attempt to compare Facebook and Telegram with regard to political actors and their strategic elements in Ukraine and Belarus. Hence, each category of the codebook and its indicators were created bearing in mind the possibility to compare two social media platforms with different architectures, as well as political actors of various profiles. The final unified version was prepared for 5 research periods. The main unit of analysis became a social media post.

The first group of categories refers to metadata. A coder must assign a number to each post. After that, there is a need to choose an appropriate country along with a social media post. The next step is a selection of a specific political actor from the list. This block ends with a publication date. All these categories identify the input parameters of a post.

The category “Type of the post” reveals the level of attention of a certain political actor to the social media tool. Its indicators are constructed on the basis of similar research on X (Twitter) with the necessary adjustments⁴⁴. In particular, “Original post” is a presentation of exclusive information. It indicates a significant focus on the use of social media. A “Reply” is a sign of active interaction, and a “Repost” is a sign of passive interaction. At the same time, hyperlinks are a sign of shifting attention from the author to another political actor or source. Especially, the hyperlink to another website shows lack of interest in using social media.

⁴³ References in subchapter 2.4 and subchapter 4.2.

⁴⁴ S. Kruschinski, J. Haßler, P. Jost & M. Sülflow, *Posting or Advertising...*, op. cit., pp. 1–21; A. Pineda, E. Bellido-Pérez & A.I. Barragán-Romero, “*Backstage moments during the campaign*”..., op. cit., pp. 1133–1160; L. Alonso-Muñoz, S. Marcos-García & A. Casero-Ripollés, *Political leaders...*, op. cit., pp. 71–90.

The category “Specification of replies, reposts, hyperlinks” depends on their presence in the analyzed post. It shows a relationship between a political actor and other sources, and “connectedness” in the posts⁴⁵. These actions can be an opportunity to expand one’s information boundaries and promote others. The main inspiration for the construction of this category was similar categories in the scientific articles: 1) “Political Leaders in (inter)Action. Twitter As a Strategic Communication Tool in Electoral Campaigns” by Alonso-Muñoz, Marcos-García and Casero-Ripollés; 2) “The 2014 Indian elections on Twitter: A comparison of campaign strategies of political parties” by Saifuddin, Jaidka and Cho. However, its indicators were modified according to the goals of the current study. Among them are websites, social media pages, media, ordinary users, and self-references. It is possible to choose several options. The final numbers can exceed the number of posts.

The “Genre” category reveals the essence of information material prepared by certain actors for, most often, advertising a political actor. It can be both a professional source (journalist) and an amateur source (blogger / influencer). Considering these cases, it is a form of maintaining ties with classical mediators rather than a direct communication approach. Among the possible options are “Brief news,” “Interview / comment / press-conference,” “Talk show / Latest news,” and “Report.” The “Article” indicator is divided into three types. The typology is based on the BBC guide⁴⁶. The direct communication approach is also present when political actors address their supporters in the form of a “Blog / Vlog / Podcast.” Nonetheless, the latter can include internal or external production of various news programs with a focus on a specific political character.

The “Length of the post” category was created based on the quantitative characteristics of tweets. Their limits have changed and set trends in the distribution of text content over the years. Since the author must be competitive and maintain the attention of followers in an online environment overloaded with information, publishing short (less than 140 characters) and medium-sized posts (141-280 characters) is a reliable strategy. At the same time, large

⁴⁵ M. Abdulmajeed & R. El-Ibiary, *Analyzing the communicative strategies of Egyptian political influencers: content and discourse analyses of Twitter accounts*, “Communication & Society” 2020, 33(2), p. 299.

⁴⁶ Newspaper articles, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/z2t3rdm/revision/6> (accessed on 11.10.2023).

publications (more than 280 characters) are more typical of traditional media. People hardly read them to the end. Nevertheless, they are the sign of deliberation.

The next two categories refer to the analysis of languages used in the post. First, the coder must make a choice, one or more, from the proposed options: Ukrainian, Belarusian, English, Russian, Other(s). It indicates the potential audience of the post. Second, language style is an element of creating the image of a political actor. There is another choice between professional rhetoric (classic style), informal communication (digital style), or their mix. The “Informal” indicator was presented in the papers: 1) “Just like us: Everyday celebrity politicians and the pursuit of popularity in an age of anti-politics” by Wood, Corbett and Flinders; 2) “Candidates’ use of informal communication on social media reduces credibility and support: Examining the consequences of expectancy violations” by Bullock and Hubner; 3) “Analyzing the communicative strategies of Egyptian political influencers: content and discourse analyses of Twitter accounts” by Abdulmajeed and El-Ibiary. After all, these categories refer to the forms of message presentation⁴⁷. They set priorities in the analyzed strategies.

One of the most complex categories to develop were “Topic(s), issue(s) of the post” and “Function(s) of the post.” It is important to avoid overlap in their indicators. The former category aims to reveal priority topics in the posts (22 codes in total), while the latter category aims to show communicative intentions in relation to audiences (12 codes in total). The main reason for the difficulties is the lack of explanations about the process of constructing similar categories in research papers. It results into some confusion. For instance, “Personal life and backstage” is presented as a function as well as a topic⁴⁸. Nonetheless, it is not about the purpose of a message (active state), but about its subject (passive state). In this case, a political actor describes his or her personal life. As for the function, it can be “Image

⁴⁷ M. Abdulmajeed & R. El-Ibiary, *Analyzing the communicative strategies...*, op. cit., p. 299.

⁴⁸ A. Casero-Ripollés, M. Sintes-Olivella & P. Franch, *The populist political communication style...*, op. cit., pp. 986–1001; A. Pineda, E. Bellido-Pérez & A.I. Barragán-Romero, “Backstage moments during the campaign”..., op. cit., pp. 1133–1160; L. Alonso-Muñoz, & A. Casero-Ripollés, *Political agenda...*, op. cit., pp. 7-25.

building.” The same can be stated about “Electoral program” (mistakenly as a function) and some other indicators⁴⁹.

Another reason is the limited meaning of the presented indicators. On the one hand, “Criticism” can be a function of the post⁵⁰. On the other hand, it can be turned into a topic of “Relationships with other politicians.” The latter is much broader and does not focus exclusively on negative comments. Moreover, some detailed indicators like “Inflation” and “Agriculture/rural affairs” can be combined into more general code of “Business and economy.” Hence, similar transformations are made regarding other indicators too. These steps allow obtaining better conclusions about the selected political actor. The main sources for the creation of these categories were scientific articles: 1) “The Populist Political Communication Style in Action: Podemos’s Issues and Functions on Twitter During the 2016 Spanish General Election” by Casero-Ripollés, Sintés-Olivella and Franch (primary source of indicators); 2) “The 2014 Indian elections on Twitter: A comparison of campaign strategies of political parties” by Saifuddin, Jaidka and Cho; 3) “Backstage moments during the campaign”: The interactive use of Instagram by Spanish political leaders” by Pineda, Bellido-Pérez and Barragán-Romero; 4) “Political agenda on Twitter during the 2016 Spanish elections: issues, strategies, and users’ responses” by Alonso-Muñoz and Casero-Ripollés; 5) “Parties’ Issue Emphasis Strategies on Facebook” by Rafałowski; 6) “Talking It Personally: Features of Successful Political Posts on Facebook” by Nave, Shifman and Tenenboim-Weinblatt; 7) “Authoritarian communication on social media: The relationship between democracy and leaders’ digital communicative practices” by Bulovsky.

A summary of all indicators from the specified papers was depicted in Figure 39. It was a collection of their approaches to codebook construction in the categories of “Topic(s), issue(s) of the post” and “Function(s) of the post.” Next, all necessary modifications were implemented in the current codebook. Special conditions of Ukraine and Belarus (e.g. war) were taken into account. Additional indicators were included to enable cross-country analysis. It could show interesting connections between the two sides. The category of “Function(s) of the post” was more adjusted than “Topic(s), issue(s) of the post.”

⁴⁹A. Casero-Ripollés, M. Sintés-Olivella & P. Franch, *The populist political communication style...*, op. cit., pp. 986–1001.

⁵⁰ S. Ahmed, K. Jaidka & J. Cho, *The 2014 Indian elections...*, op. cit., 1071–1087.

Importantly, it is assumed that an individual post can include more than one function or topic. Their numbers can exceed the number of posts, but it is necessary to count them all.

Fig. 39. Indicators from the scientific literature that belong to the categories “Topic(s), issue(s) of the post” and “Function(s) of the post”



Source: Own elaboration.

The “hashtag” category is considered as a sign of interactivity in scientific literature⁵¹. As mentioned in Chapter 2, it is an agenda-setting tool. The keywords “connect” political actors with their audiences and structure information. It is often presented in the form of topic or creative slogan. One of the reasons for inclusion of this category was the research paper entitled “Political Leaders in (inter)Action. Twitter As a Strategic Communication Tool in Electoral Campaigns” by Alonso-Muñoz, Marcos-García and Casero-Ripollés.

⁵¹ A. Pineda, E. Bellido-Pérez & A.I. Barragán-Romero, “Backstage moments during the campaign” ..., op. cit., p. 1152.

The following categories analyze the presence of various graphic elements (pictures, videos, emojis) in the posts. They are also named as “digital communicative practices”⁵². Multimedia are necessary for better visual attractiveness of a post. They contribute to audience attention.

The category “Emotional valence of the post” reflects the deep nature of the analyzed content. As mentioned in Chapter 2, people prefer emotional posts to political posts. It is important for them to see the human virtues of a political actor. The letter can choose to focus on successes, problems or provide their audiences with neutral information.

Categories 19 and 20 determine the presence or absence of personalization in posts. It influences voters’ perception of a political actor and their voting decisions. As already noted in Chapter 2, there is a difference between a Western trend (focus on a party, collective approach) and an American trend (focus on individuals and their personalities). It is no longer applicable only to election campaigns, but also to routine politics. The following types of personalization can be distinguished: “Professional,” “Emotional” and “Private.” Hence, these categories are designed to determine the dominant choices in Ukraine and Belarus. The main source of inspiration for their inclusion was the article entitled “Personalization of politics on Facebook: examining the content and effects of professional, emotional and private self-personalization” by Metz, Kruikemeier & Lecheler. Again, there may be several types of personalization in the post.

The codebook was carefully prepared for about six months before the pilot study. It had several variations transformed into the final one. The key events that influenced its development were the 2nd IPSA-ABU Summer School for Social Science Research Methods at Antalya Bilim University (Turkey), as well as the workshop titled “Książka kodowa jako narzędzie do badań nad dziennikarzami” by Prof. UAM dr hab. Stępińska and Dr hab. Secler at Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland. The author also conducted a thorough review of the scientific literature and numerous consultations with Prof. UAM dr. hab. Skrzypczak, Prof. Smolak-Lozano and Dr Jakubowski. These actions prevented serious mistakes in the codebook.

⁵² A. Bulovsky, *Authoritarian communication...*, op. cit., pp. 20–45.

The pilot study was conducted on a sample of 10 political actors from different time periods in order to obtain maximum confidence in the effectiveness of the proposed codebook: Lukashenko and Poroshenko – the election period (start), Babaryka and Zelenskyy – the election period (development), NEXTA Live and Shariy – the post-election period, Rogachuk and Sadoviy – the routine period, the National Anti-Crisis Management and the “Voice” party – the war period. A total of 265 posts were analyzed (145 from Belarusian political actors and 120 from Ukrainian political actors). As a result, several points for improvement were identified. First, there was a need for a broader description of coding indicators. Second, it was necessary to better separate “Category 11: Topic(s), issue(s) of the post” from “Category 12: Function(s) of the post” due to the overlap of some indicators. Third, there was a need to add a classification of the “Article” genre in Category 7. Fourth, it was necessary to add an indicator “0 = No text” in “Category 10: Language style.” Fifth, there was an opportunity to transform “Category: Graphic element: GIF” into an indicator of “Category 14: Graphic element: photo(s), picture(s).” All these points were successfully adjusted.

The design of the codebook with the appropriate number of categories is considered as rational. The main justification is the difficulty of ensuring a comparison between the maximum number of political actors from the two countries and the large amount of data collected. It is also important to take into account the manual coding of all this amount of information in order to obtain unique research results.

4.3 Database

The data collection process was another challenge for several reasons. First, there is no app to collect data from Telegram. Second, Facebook limits the ability to collect data from its platform. Third, this study focuses on individual actor profiles rather than keywords. Fourth, the applications for collecting general statistical data (number of posts, interactions, etc.) like Brand24, Fanpage Karma, TGStat, NapoleonCat do not have archival data of political actors from Ukraine and Belarus. Fifth, the same applications can provide inaccurate data (detected through data comparison). They may not disclose their data collection methodology. Therefore, the author collected content data manually by taking screenshots and analyzed them in the same way. General statistical data were also calculated manually.

The content database was created in more than a week (22 February 2024 – 4 March 2024). Some corrections were made on 18 April 2024 – 19 April 2024. This was the time when message consumption already changed from active to passive. No drastic changes were expected in it. As already mentioned, specific dates for each political actor were presented in Appendices A and B. Finally, the author had taken screenshots, which turned into 7073 posts (1993 posts from Ukrainian political actors and 5080 posts from Belarusian political actors). The results of manual coding procedure were recorded in two Excel coding sheets (name and name). All calculations were made using Excel and PSPP programs. There were at least 50 posts that could not be displayed.

General statistical data were collected between 3 June 2024 and 3 July 2024. As already mentioned, it was the period of passive consumption of information from social media profiles. The results were recorded in separate Excel files for each political actor. All calculations were made in the same program.

4.4 Results

Due to the large amount of data, the outcomes are delivered in several stages. At the beginning, each political level is compared separately. Details are provided regarding the already mentioned: 1) presidential candidates; 2) political parties; 3) most popular politicians; 4) mayors; 5) bloggers/influencers. After that, there is a description of general trends from Ukraine and Belarus. This is the key part of the subchapter, which ends with conclusions.

4.4.1 Presidential candidates

The first point of analysis is the visual appearance of a social media page and the BIO, or biography, of a political actor⁵³. Generally, all presidential candidates have a profile photo and a completed BIO. Among the common features, all Ukrainian political actors, except Hrytsenko, leave links to their websites and/or other social media. The same can be said about Babaryka, Tsikhanouskaya and Tsepkalo from the Belarusian side. Latushka adds a link for donations in order to support his work. Lukashenko does not provide online users with any

⁵³ As mentioned in the methodology, the Belarusian political actors of this level: Lukashenko, Babaryka, Tsepkalo, Tsikhanouskaya, Latushka; the Ukrainian political actors: Poroshenko, Zelenskyy, Tymoshenko, Boyko, Hrytsenko.

external sources. He limits himself to a single phrase: “There is something here that they won’t show on TV. Although they could.”

While all pages of Ukrainian politicians have a verification mark, most Belarusian representatives also confirm their identity. The exceptions are Lukashenko and Latushka. This small detail shows their irresponsibility in the age of a large number of fake accounts. The latter can spread misinformation and manipulation on behalf of political actors. The signature saying “An official channel of Pavel Latushka” in the BIO is not a sufficient preventive measure in this case. Interestingly, the inclusion of a similar phrase is typical for Ukrainian political actors. They add it despite the presence of a verification mark.

Among the main contrasting points are the images of politicians from the two countries. Apart from Lukashenko, all Belarusian candidates are pictured in classical suits. The nominal President has a photo with the vehicle registration plate 001 and the flag of Belarus. This is a reference to the name “Pool of the First” (*Пул Первого*), which positions him as the leader of the country. Tsikhanouskaya even tried to troll him based on this feature. She temporarily named the Telegram channel as “Pool of the First” (*Пул Первой*), which indicates her election victory⁵⁴. Compared to Ukraine, only Boyko and Hrytsenko are dressed in suits. Poroshenko is depicted in military uniform because of the wartime. Tymoshenko appears in discreet casual clothes. Two profiles of Zelensky do not show the politician himself. The social media pictures display the candidate’s symbols.

Another difference is that three out of five Belarusian candidates include options for feedback via Telegram bots. Among them, Tsepkalo offers the possibility of discussion using a separate chat. These are the features of two-way communication. Ukrainian political actors do not have anything similar, which is a sign of one-way communication.

The second point of analysis is the basic statistical data. In general, the online experience of Ukrainian political actors is twice as long as that of Belarusian political actors (Figure 40). The same trends persist in terms of the number of followers and the growth of followers per day. The reason is the late emergence of new Belarusian opposition candidates. Most of them became political entities in 2020. Telegram is chosen as the primary platform for their

⁵⁴ *Пул ПервоГО* – the masculine ending; *Пул Первой* – the feminine ending.

communication. Its technological capabilities are considered as a game changer for the Belarusian media system.

In Ukraine, the oldest Facebook account belongs to Tymoshenko. Hrytsenko has the least online experience. It negates a possible correlation between account age and election results. Zelenskyy, as the winner of the 2019 presidential race, created his election page half a month earlier than Hrytsenko. However, it is worth noting that Zelenskyy already had his other personal Facebook profile for 6 years.

Poroshenko and Tymoshenko gathered the largest number of followers. The same trend persists in terms of their daily growth. Although they overtook Zelenskyy, these indicators are not of significant value. A certain part of them may be foreign users, bots, etc. Moreover, Poroshenko overtook Zelenskyy in other insignificant data, namely, in the number of interactions (Figure 41). Again, it is worth considering the presence of a competitor's personal Facebook page. Interestingly, Hrytsenko's followers became the most active among all. This indicates not the quantity, but the quality of his supporter base. He potentially has fewer bots among his followers than the leaders in this chart.

In Belarus, Lukashenko has the oldest Telegram channel (Figure 40). He is also the leader in terms of the number of followers and their daily growth. Since the channel was created in 2019, this shows the foresight of his online strategy. It signalizes that his team already understood the potential and danger of the social media platform. The 2020 protests should not have come as a big surprise to them. However, they did not understand how to deal with Telegram at that time.

The youngest Telegram channel belongs to Latushko. He became another representative of the Belarusian opposition, who actively appeared on the platform in 2020. The leader Tsikhanovskaya has the largest number of followers among them. This reflects her real position in the structure of the Belarusian democratic forces. Although this figure reaches a relatively small mark of 24 thousand, there is a solid explanation for such a performance. Belarusian citizens may be afraid to follow the pages of opposition politicians due to persecution by law enforcement agencies. Some users may still be subscribed to her husband's channel Country for Life.

Despite the largest number of followers and interactions, Lukashenko significantly loses to all oppositionists in terms of the number of interactions per follower (Figure 41). The most active are supporters of the imprisoned politician Babaryka. At the same time, Tikhanovskaya's content received more views than Babaryka's content.

Fig. 40. General statistics of the selected Ukrainian presidential candidates on Facebook and Belarusian presidential candidates on Telegram (account age and followers)

Political actor (country)	Account age (date of registration / date of analysis)	Followers⁵⁵	Growth of followers per day
Poroshenko (Ukraine)	3616 days (12.07.2014 / 04.06.2024)	2 500 000	691
Zelenskyy (Ukraine) ⁵⁶	1985 days (29.12.2018 / 04.06.2024)	742 000	374
Tymoshenko (Ukraine)	4842 days (04.03.2011 / 04.06.2024)	2 200 000	454
Boyko (Ukraine)	1996 days (18.12.2018 / 04.06.2024)	91 000	46
Hrytsenko (Ukraine)	1967 days (16.01.2019 / 04.06.2024)	136 000	69
In total (Ukraine)	14 406 days	5 669 000	394
Lukashenko (Belarus)	1672 days (07.11.2019 / 04.06.2024)	204 996	123
Babaryka (Belarus)	1486 days (13.05.2020 / 06.06.2024)	4305	3
Tsepkalo (Belarus)	1491 days (08.08.2020 / 06.06.2024)	1503	1
Tsikhankouskaya (Belarus)	1415 days (23.07.2020 / 06.06.2024)	24 555	17
Latushka (Belarus)	1385 days (22.08.2020 / 06.06.2024)	6778	5
In total (Belarus)	7449 days	242 137	33

Source: Own elaboration.

⁵⁵ Facebook rounds numbers.

⁵⁶ Only Zelenskyy's team.

Fig. 41. General statistics of the selected Ukrainian presidential candidates on Facebook and Belarusian presidential candidates on Telegram (interactions)⁵⁷

Political actor	Sum of all interactions (Facebook: reactions + shares + comments; Telegram: views) for 5 months ⁵⁸	Average number of interactions per day	Interactions/followers
Poroshenko	6 981 493	46 543	2.8
Zelenskyy	6 700 597	44 671	2.59
Tymoshenko	1 756 384	11 709	0.8
Boyko	264 960	1766	2.9
Hrytsenko	495 844	3306	3.6
Lukashenko	108 619 100	724 127	529.9
Babaryka	9 511 667	63 411	2209.4
Tsepikalo	2 500 681	16 671	1663.8
Tsikhankouskaya	41 771 800	278 479	1701.2
Latushka	11 350 100	75 667	1674.5

Source: Own elaboration.

Belarusian presidential candidates publish more posts than their Ukrainian counterparts (Figure 42). They lead in terms of indicators during the election period (start), the election period (development), the post-election period, the routine period, and even during the war period. The latter period is characterized by numerous explanations from the Belarusian side. If Lukashenko tried to justify the movement of Russian troops through the territory of Belarus, the opposition called for separating the positions of the dictator and the Belarusian society in order to avoid isolation. The largest number of posts was published compared to other periods. The smallest number of posts was published during the post-election period. In contrast, Ukrainian politicians and society did not have a lot of time to publish posts during the war period. They defended the country from Russian invaders. This is the second

⁵⁷ These numbers are overview data. They cannot be compared between social media platforms. Facebook has an active nature of interactions to count (reactions, shares, comments require a click). Telegram has a passive nature of interactions (just views).

⁵⁸ Facebook and Telegram can round numbers.

⁵⁹ It cannot be calculated due to the sum of interaction data from the two Facebook pages.

important period for them. The largest number of their posts fell on the election period (development), while the least number – on the post-election period.

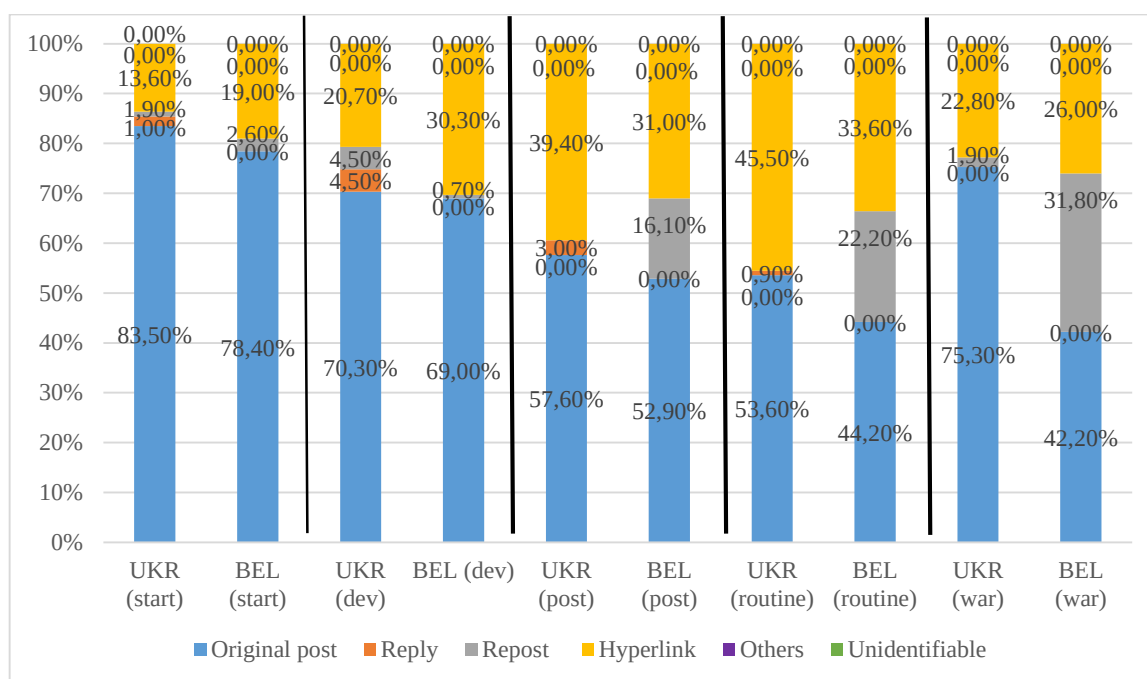
Fig. 42. General statistics of the selected Ukrainian presidential candidates on Facebook and Belarusian presidential candidates on Telegram (posts)

Political actor	Election (start)	Election (development)	Post-election period	Routine period	War period
	Total posts per month / Average number of posts per day				
Poroshenko	189 / 6.3	217 / 7.2	82 / 2.7	71 / 2.4	133 / 4.4
Zelenskyy	76 / 2.5	147 / 4.9	127 / 4.2	137 / 4.6	329 / 11
Tymoshenko	42 / 1.4	71 / 2.4	14 / 0.5	35 / 1.2	56 / 1.9
Boyko	34 / 1.1	43 / 1.4	25 / 0.8	26 / 0.9	24 / 0.8
Hrytsenko	81 / 2.7	145 / 4.8	26 / 0.9	24 / 0.8	53 / 1.8
In total (Ukraine)	422 / 2.8	623 / 4.2	274 / 1.8	293 / 2	595 / 4
Lukashenko	115 / 3.8	274 / 9.1	144 / 4.8	158 / 5.3	241 / 8
Babaryka	120 / 4	153 / 5.1	114 / 3.8	43 / 1.4	22 / 0.7
Tsepkalo	44 / 1.5	52 / 1.7	25 / 0.8	260 / 8.6	369 / 12.3
Tsikhonouskaya	61 / 2	59 / 2	68 / 2.3	47 / 1.6	134 / 4.5
Latushka	113 / 3.8	63 / 2.1	48 / 1.6	53 / 1.8	80 / 2.6
In total (Belarus)	453 / 3	601 / 4	399 / 2.66	561 / 3.7	846 / 5.6

Source: Own elaboration.

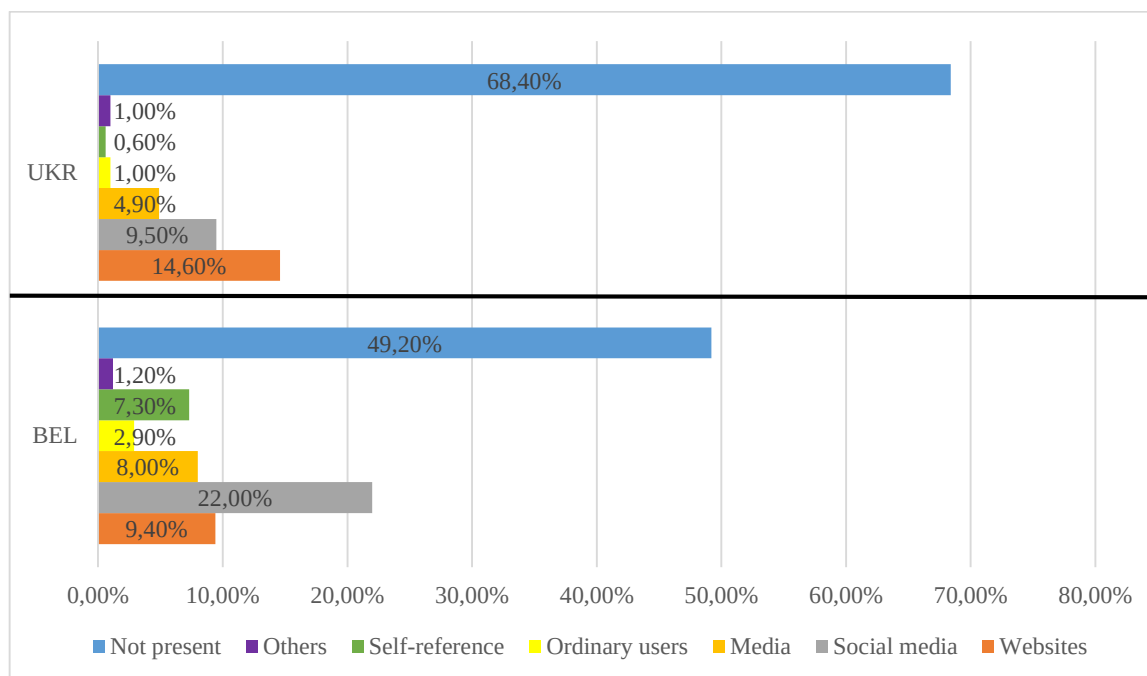
The online communication of the presidential candidates included original posts, reposts, and hyperlinks. Ukrainian representatives also occasionally responded to other social media posts (Figure 43). It was interesting that the number of unique content decreased over time, while the amount of hyperlinks increased. This could indicate either some fatigue from supporting a particular online profile, or a desire to increase traffic of other sources. The first reason seemed more plausible. In particular, Belarusian candidates started reposting messages only in the post-election period. After that, the number of reposts only grew. They began to make less effort on social media after the end of their election period. As an exception, the war period was a real shock for Ukrainian political actors, which transformed into a boost in original content.

Fig. 43. Type of the posts (presidential candidates)



Source: Own elaboration.

Fig. 44. Specification of replies, reposts, hyperlinks (presidential candidates)



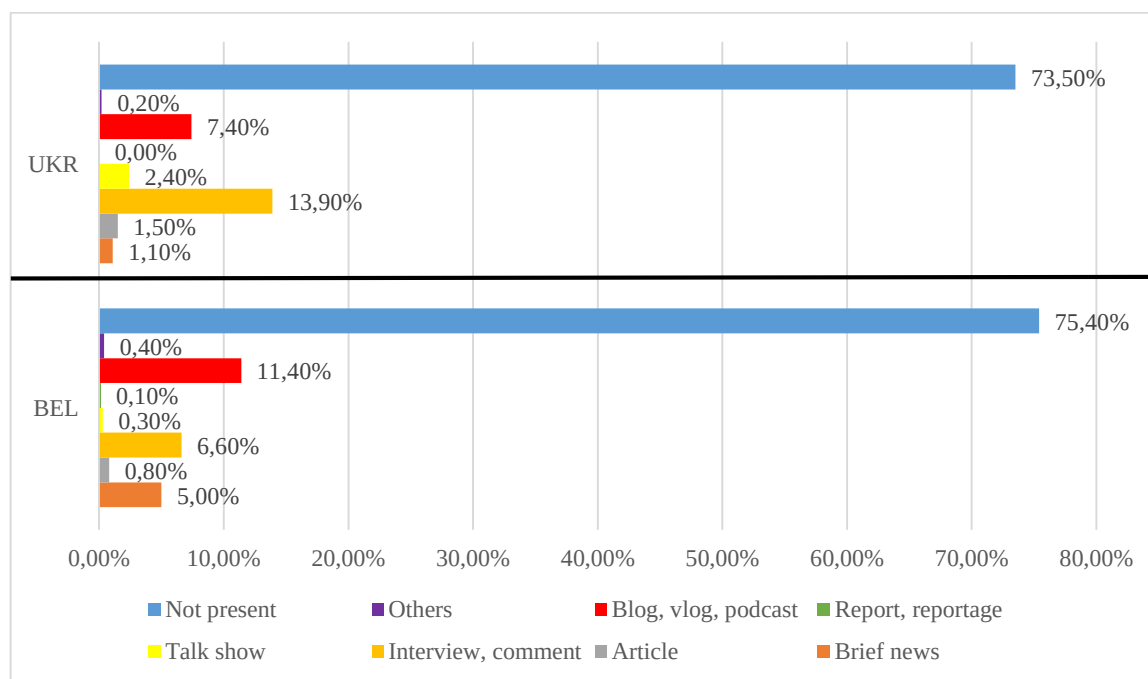
Note: These indicators can differ from the number of posts.

Source: Own elaboration.

Ukrainian and Belarusian presidential candidates preferred online sources of information, but they were different (Figure 44). If Ukrainians redirected their audience to websites, Belarusians chose social media platforms. All because of the political systems in the respective countries. The authoritarian regime did not give confidence in websites as a technologically stable source of information. Moving forward, traditional media came in third place for both sides. Belarusians also resorted to some self-referencing.

The two most popular genres were vlogs and interviews (Figure 45). Although Zelenskyy was the first to introduce vlogs into his election campaign, Belarusians had a higher percentage of this online genre. It incorporated video appeals as well. This was another indication of the social media value for their online communication. The opposite situation was among Ukrainian candidates. In addition, Belarusian representatives resorted to the distribution of short news. Ukrainian representatives could participate in talk shows and share information about them.

Fig. 45. Genre in the posts (presidential candidates)

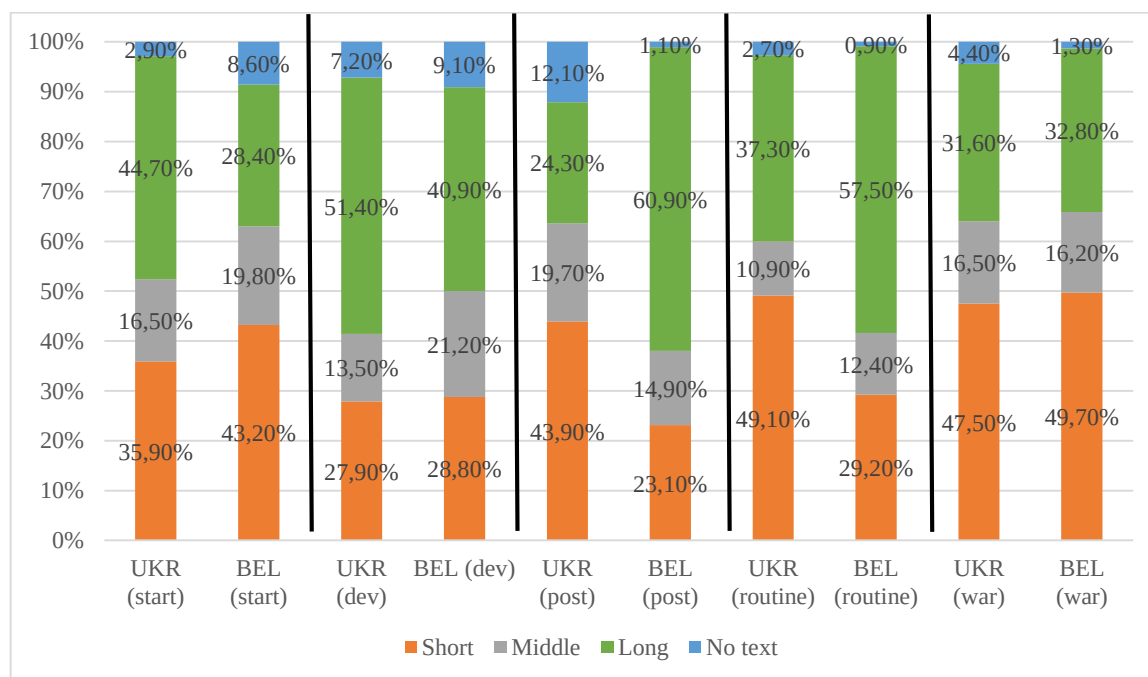


Source: Own elaboration.

Ukrainian political actors only slightly outperformed Belarusian political actors in terms of short posts. Approximately the same share, from 10% to 21%, was made up of medium-

length messages (Figure 46). Interestingly, candidates from both countries were not laconic during the development of their election campaigns. Ukrainian candidates wanted to convey more information during the initial period as well. At the same time, both sides delivered quick, short informational messages to the audience during the crisis period of the war.

Fig. 46. Length of the posts (presidential candidates)



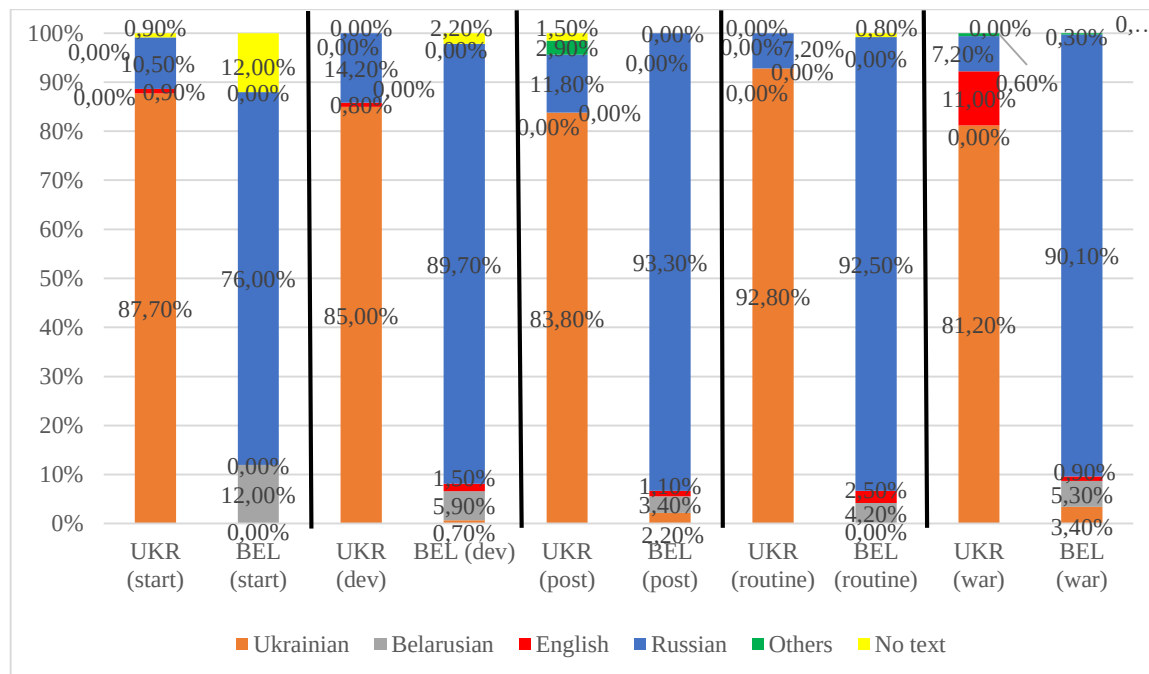
Source: Own elaboration.

There were contextual differences between Ukrainian and Belarusian presidential candidates in terms of language (Figure 47). The bilingualism of Ukrainian society transformed into the dominance of Ukrainian, followed by Russian. The highest percentage of English fell on the war period due to the search for support from international friends. In turn, Russian became the most popular language among Belarusian candidates. The largest share of posts in Belarusian was published during the initial period. Interestingly, there was a small percentage of untranslated Ukrainian posts. This could be explained by the proximity of the languages.

If Ukrainian political actors relied on a formal communication style, Belarusian political actors used a balanced style (Figure 48). The former continued to maintain their distance from users. The posts could be too complex and alienated in the social media environment. Despite the majority of formal messages from Belarusian candidates, the share of informal

and mixed posts was not much smaller. The diversified agenda did not overload their audience with one format of information.

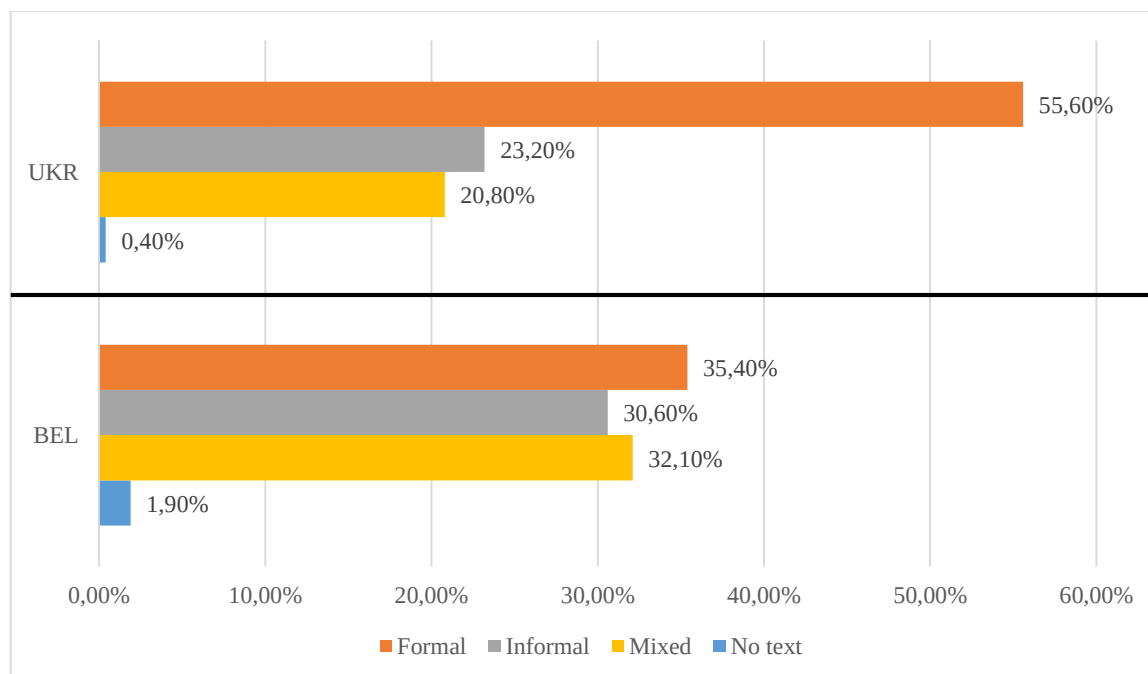
Fig. 47. Languages in the posts (presidential candidates)



Note: These indicators can differ from the number of posts.

Source: Own elaboration.

Fig. 48. Language style (presidential candidates)



Source: Own elaboration.

The listed presidential candidates from Ukraine and Belarus had some level of similarity regarding the timeline for choosing one or another topic (Figure 49). First, personal issues and ranking indicators had the most frequent values during the election period (start). Candidates tried to show themselves as ordinary people and applied the logic of numbers in order to increase their chances of winning. Second, the theme of election and the theme of health reached their maximum percentage during the second election period (development). The latter had the same number of posts among Ukrainian candidates during the routine period. Despite the overall small indicators, the repetition indicates the stable place of the topic of health on the agenda. Third, the topic of criminal prosecutions can be highlighted during the post-election period. At that time, the winners took revenge on the defeated. Fourth, war posts were prevalent during the corresponding period. This topic was dominant in the table. Fifth, multi-topic posts were more likely to appear during the routine period, or in other words, day-to-day activity.

As for other important points, the Ukrainian candidates bet on the election period (start) regarding the topics of culture, socio-cultural events and religion. Their priorities for the second election period (development) were economy, science, corruption, legislation, media literacy and relations with other political actors. Such results only prove the importance of scientific attention to this period. After that, the issues of international relations and democracy were raised during the post-election period. Users were more likely to encounter the issues of infrastructure and media during the routine period.

If election periods were dominant for a small number of topics, this changed over time in Belarus. Their presidential candidates focused on infrastructure, legislation, socio-cultural events and media during the post-election period. The issue of religion was mostly voiced during the election period (development), and the issue of media literacy – during the war period. All other subjects reached their peak during the routine period.

Fig. 49. Topics, issues of the posts (presidential candidates)

UKR/BEL	Election (start)	Election (development)	Post-election	Routine	War
Business and economy	7,7% / 7,1%	10,5% / 4,6%	9,5% / 6,1%	8,8% / 9,7%	3,1% / 4,0%
Health and social policy	0,8% / 3,2%	5,5% / 4,0%	3,8% / 2,3%	5,5% / 2,8%	4,5% / 3,1%
War, conflicts, terrorism	5,5% / 0,0%	7,2% / 0,0%	18,1% / 0,0%	26,9% / 0,0%	58,7% / 45,0%
Foreign affairs, international relations, world events	8,6% / 4,6%	6,6% / 9,8%	25,7% / 13,8%	19,2% / 16,5%	14,7% / 12,6%
Culture, education, sport	4,7% / 2,0%	1,1% / 1,4%	7,6% / 4,6%	3,8% / 5,7%	2,2% / 3,3%
Science, technology, environment, animal rights	0,0% / 0,0%	1,6% / 0,6%	0,0% / 1,5%	0,5% / 4,0%	0,0% / 1,0%
Infrastructure	0,8% / 0,0%	1,1% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,7%	2,2% / 0,6%	0,0% / 0,6%
Corruption	0,0% / 0,0%	3,3% / 0,0%	1,9% / 0,0%	1,1% / 1,1%	0,0% / 0,0%
Legislation	0,8% / 1,3%	5,5% / 0,6%	0,0% / 4,6%	2,2% / 0,0%	0,9% / 1,0%
Democracy	0,8% / 0,6%	0,6% / 0,0%	1,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 2,3%	0,4% / 0,2%
Religion	20,3% / 0,0%	5,0% / 0,6%	4,7% / 0,0%	0,6% / 0,0%	0,9% / 0,0%
Socio-cultural and mourning events	13,3% / 0,0%	1,1% / 3,3%	11,5% / 3,8%	5,0% / 1,7%	0,4% / 0,4%
Relationships with other political actors	3,1% / 0,0%	7,7% / 3,3%	1,0% / 6,9%	2,8% / 11,3%	1,8% / 10,8%
Relationships with media	0,8% / 1,3%	1,1% / 0,0%	0,0% / 1,5%	2,2% / 0,6%	0,4% / 0,6%
Prosecution, civil and human rights,	3,1% / 11,0%	3,3% / 6,5%	3,8% / 22,2%	3,3% / 18,2%	1,8% / 4,0%

criminal actions					
Personal issues and backstage	6,3% / 11,6%	4,4% / 4,6%	5,7% / 3,0%	2,2% / 3,4%	0,0% / 2,5%
Election	11,7% / 38,0%	19,9% / 40,5%	1,9% / 2,3%	0,0% / 1,7%	0,0% / 4,0%
Rankings and results	3,1% / 12,2%	2,8% / 0,0%	0,0% / 5,3%	0,0% / 0,6%	0,0% / 1,8%
Media literacy	0,0% / 2,6%	2,8% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,5% / 1,1%	1,8% / 4,5%
News and views overview	6,3% / 0,0%	5,0% / 6,5%	3,8% / 6,9%	9,9% / 8,5%	8,4% / 0,6%
Others	2,3% / 0,6%	0,0% / 6,5%	0,0% / 14,5%	3,3% / 10,2%	0,0% / 0,0%
Unclear	0,0% / 3,9%	3,9% / 7,2%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%

Note: 1) The number of topics was greater than the number of posts because each message could cover more than one topic; 2) Read from left to right. The idea is to identify the peak selection period for each topic (deeper analysis of strategic decision-making). Other important dynamics will be shown in general trends.

Source: Own elaboration.

Likewise, there are few similarities regarding the key period scheduled for a particular function (Figure 50). Among other things, presidential candidates bet on manners and protocol during the election period (start). They posted the largest number of messages about their work and decisions during the routine period. Candidates continued to communicate their actions after the election, which confirms the phenomenon of permanent campaigning. The function of mobilizing supporters was most evident during the war period. Ukrainian politicians called to unite all forces for the defense of the country, while Belarusian politicians were looking for ways to support the Ukrainian people. This feature also showed sufficient results during the election period (development). At the same time, there was no commercial advertising at all.

There were other points that should be mentioned. First, the most posts with achievements and political advertisement appeared during the initial election period (the Belarusian candidates) and during the subsequent election period (the Ukrainian candidates). Second, criticism dominated the rhetoric of Ukrainians during the routine period, while Belarusians were most critical of Lukashenko during the war period. Third, the election period (start) has become a priority for Ukrainians regarding information dissemination and multifunctional

posts. The same can be noted about the post-election period for Belarusians in terms of humor and multifunctional posts.

Fig. 50. Functions of the posts (presidential candidates)

UKR/BEL	Election (start)	Election (development)	Post-election	Routine	War
Professional updates	20,6% / 27,9%	15,8% / 27,4%	33,0% / 24,5%	38,8% / 31,4%	40,0% / 24,8%
Image building	5,9% / 3,0%	4,0% / 5,2%	6,9% / 4,5%	3,4% / 4,8%	2,7% / 2,0%
Manners and protocol	22,3% / 9,0%	9,8% / 4,3%	17,5% / 5,2%	10,1% / 4,3%	5,8% / 2,8%
Accomplishments	9,4% / 11,7%	9,8% / 3,3%	3,9% / 5,2%	1,1% / 3,2%	6,5% / 3,5%
Political advertisement	16,5% / 20,2%	23,2% / 25,1%	7,7% / 12,9%	14,0% / 13,9%	7,7% / 8,9%
Commercial advertisement	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%
Criticism	8,9% / 4,0%	12,3% / 7,6%	21,3% / 20,0%	24,2% / 19,6%	12,7% / 26,0%
Humor and entertainment	2,3% / 1,5%	4,4% / 1,9%	0,0% / 3,2%	0,6% / 3,2%	0,0% / 1,3%
Call to action	5,9% / 14,6%	14,8% / 18,0%	9,7% / 18,0%	6,7% / 11,1%	19,7% / 19,5%
Dissemination of information	2,3% / 1,5%	1,0% / 1,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 5,3%	0,3% / 10,6%
Multifunctional post	5,9% / 3,0%	4,4% / 5,7%	0,0% / 6,5%	1,1% / 3,2%	4,3% / 0,6%
Others	0,0% / 3,6%	0,5% / 0,5%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,3% / 0,0%

Note: 1) The number of functions was greater than the number of posts because each message could cover more than one function; 2) Read from left to right. The idea is to identify the peak selection period for each function (deeper analysis of strategic decision-making). Other important dynamics will be shown in general trends.

Source: Own elaboration.

One of the main similarities in the analyzed posts of the Ukrainian presidential candidates was political rivalry. All politicians, even former allies, criticized President Poroshenko. They were not afraid to mention his name. Among other things, Hrytsenko spoke of “dictate from the authorities,” Boyko referred to them as “the regime,” and Zelenskyy proposed “Let’s do him together.” Freedom of speech was ensured by democratic political conditions.

In addition, Hrytsenko and Zelenskyy offered opportunities for interaction with the audience. The former candidate encouraged leaving questions in the comments on his Facebook page. The latter candidate responded to criticism of his professional background through a flash mob #яклоун (I am a clown). The requirement was to record a video with someone's name, salary, scholarship, pension, or "everything that makes you a clown." He transformed the frivolous attitude towards his candidacy into a frivolous attitude towards the problems of his supporters-citizens.

Regarding individual online features, Poroshenko broadcast his agenda "Army. Language. Faith." It is interesting that he did not highlight achievements as his own. The candidate built his personal image through posts about his wife. He distributed various interviews to his TV channels (Channel 5, Pryamiy Channel) and international journalists. The war forced him to change the tone of posts about Zelenskyy to a positive one. "I don't care who voted for whom. It is important for me that everyone votes for Ukraine now," Poroshenko stated.

Zelenskyy's Facebook page was built around his persona. Information was presented in a simple and transparent manner. The candidate encouraged Ukrainians to join his team and distributed voting instructions. The ratings were supposed to strengthen voters' confidence in his winning prospects (the logic of numbers). The war caused an increase in the number of personal appeals from his side.

Besides Poroshenko, Boyko criticized the so-called "Groisman regime," or the rule of the former Prime Minister of Ukraine. It seems that the pro-Russian politician was only "playing the role" of an oppositionist due to his disadvantageous positions after losing power. The posts were aimed at a key audience, namely Chernobyl survivors, veterans and other recipients of state benefits. He focused on the so-called "money and a refrigerator," or in other words, the improvement of the basic needs. This message was intrinsic to the Soviet mentality. Moreover, Boyko spread old public opinion indicators regarding the EU and NATO. He even tied them to the topic of pensioners.

As for the other candidates, Hrytsenko had an amateur style of posts. He constantly thanked users for their replies. Tymoshenko identified herself with ordinary people. Her characteristic address was "My dears."

One of the main similarities of the analyzed posts of the opposition Belarusian presidential candidates was unity for the sake of victory against the authoritarian regime. On the one hand, they often used the word “together” (e.g. *вместе, разам*) and offered various opportunities for interaction. Babryka and Tsepkalo answered questions live on social media platforms. People were invited to join their initiative groups. Instructions for protests were distributed. On the other hand, there was merciless criticism of Lukashenko. He was called an “occupier,” “dictator,” “fascist junta,” “madman,” “Saddam Hussein in Europe,” “moustached creature,” “lying creature,” “mad creature,” “impostor,” “chyk chyryk.” Tsikhanouskaya used the most moderate rhetoric.

Regarding individual online features, Lukashenko’s communication team showed the background of various events. The main character was called as “the First” (*Первый*). He was portrayed as a strong leader. There was also the use of casual language such as “lifehack,” “spoiler,” etc. Among the offensive terms applied to the opposition were “*протестуны*.”

Tsikhanouskaya assumed the role of leader of the democratic forces. Her posts were long and formal. They could include Latushka as an ally. Back in March 2021, she was still calling for new elections. Back in 2022, she separated the position of Belarusians against the war from the responsibility of Lukashenko and Putin for the war.

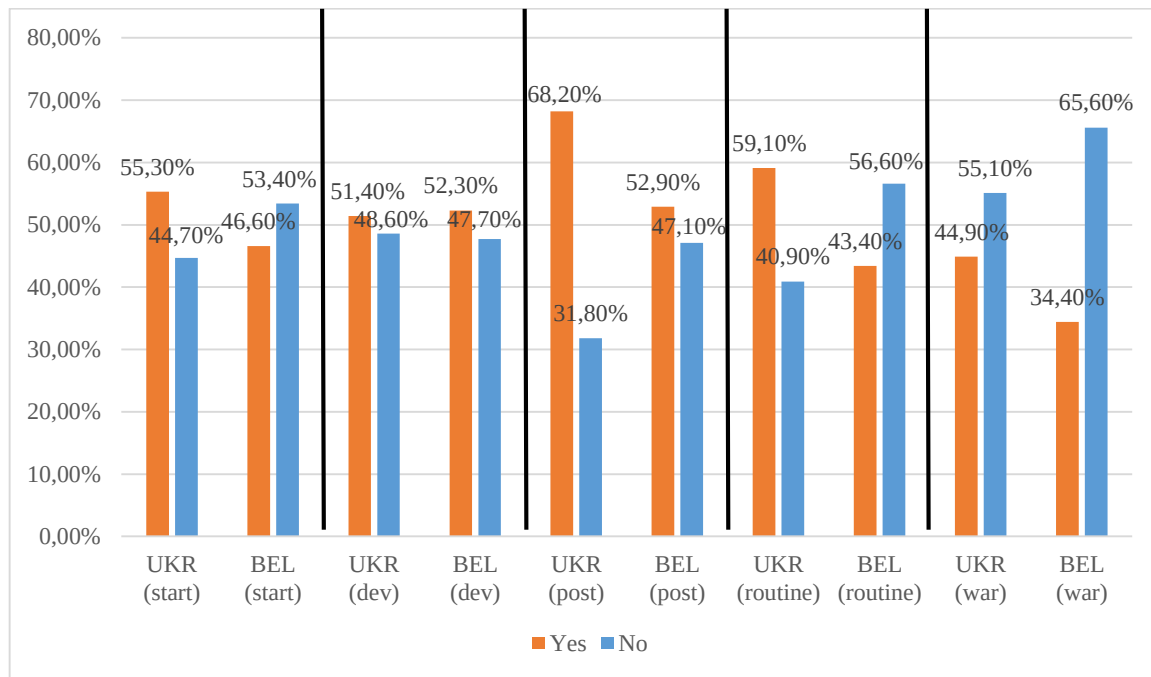
Latushka’s style was similar to Tsikhanouskaya’s style, but more radical. It included long and formal posts. There were reposts from Tsikhanouskaya’s channel. It was emphasized that Lukashenko was no longer the president of Belarus. He was responsible for the war.

As for the other candidates, Babryka’s team proposed saying “no to war” through a referendum in 2022. He listed various ways of helping Ukrainians. Tsepkalo called for a clear position of Belarusians against the war. He asked to dissuade the Belarusian military from attacking Ukraine. Rumors were also spread. According to him, the workers of flying board #1 were sure that Lukashenko would not be able to escape the country.

Most posts by Ukrainian candidates included pictures, which was not the case for Belarusian political actors (Figure 51). The former cared less about the visual appeal only during the war. They simply might not have had enough time for such considerations during the

culminating period for their country. In contrast, Belarusians diluted their posts with pictures during the development of their election campaigns and during the post-election period. Other periods were characterized by a lower presence of this graphic element, so there was no long-term tendency.

Fig. 51. Photos, pictures in the posts (presidential candidates)



Source: Own elaboration.

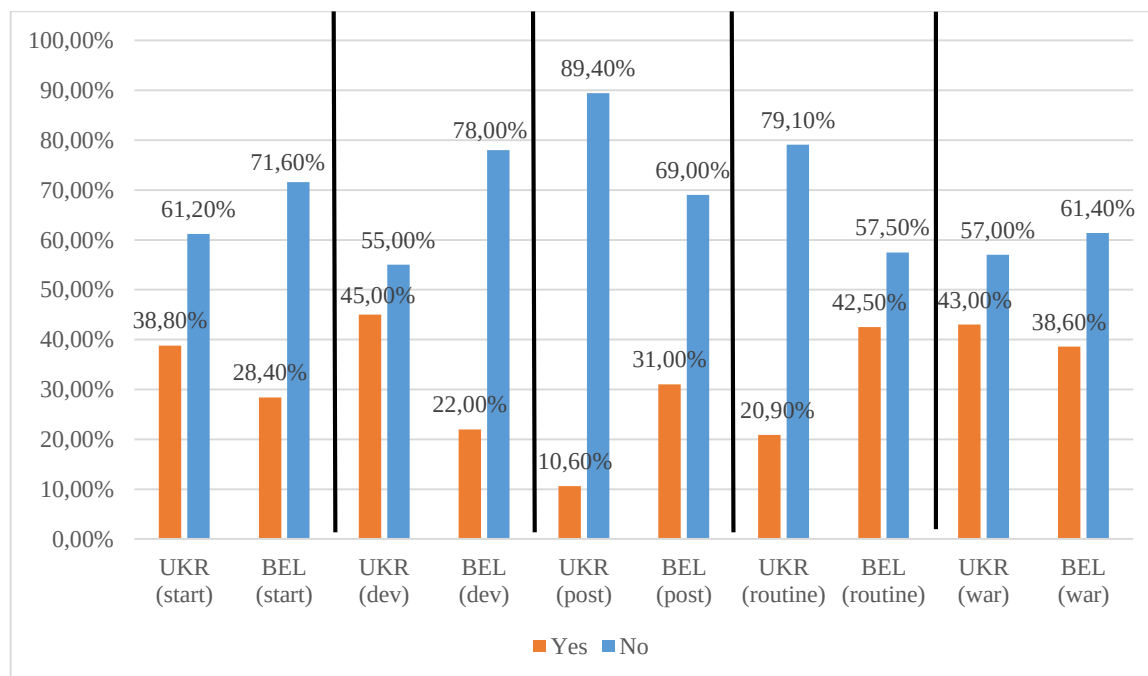
Videos made up a smaller portion of posts in both cases (Figure 52). Ukrainian political actors added them during the most important periods. The multimedia element reached its peak among Belarusian representatives during the routine period. This indicated different priorities.

Belarusians used emojis more frequently than Ukrainians in order to organize their texts structurally (Figure 53). The share of this graphic element was almost close to 50% during the election period (start), the routine period, and the war period. It did not rise above 8% in the posts of Ukrainian representatives.

Although the percentage was small in both countries, hashtags were used more during election periods than after them (Figure 54). In Ukraine, there was a steady decline with one

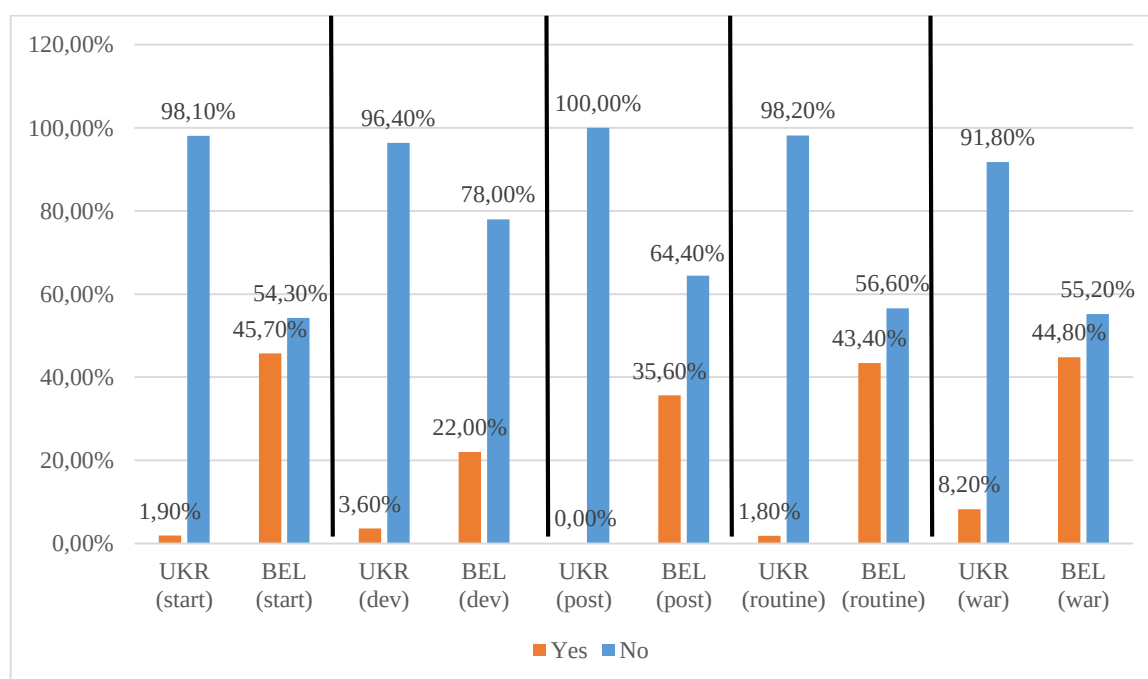
exception. In Belarus, the peak period was the election period (development). Therefore, these findings could potentially indicate a low effectiveness of hashtags in the region.

Fig. 52. Videos in the posts (presidential candidates)



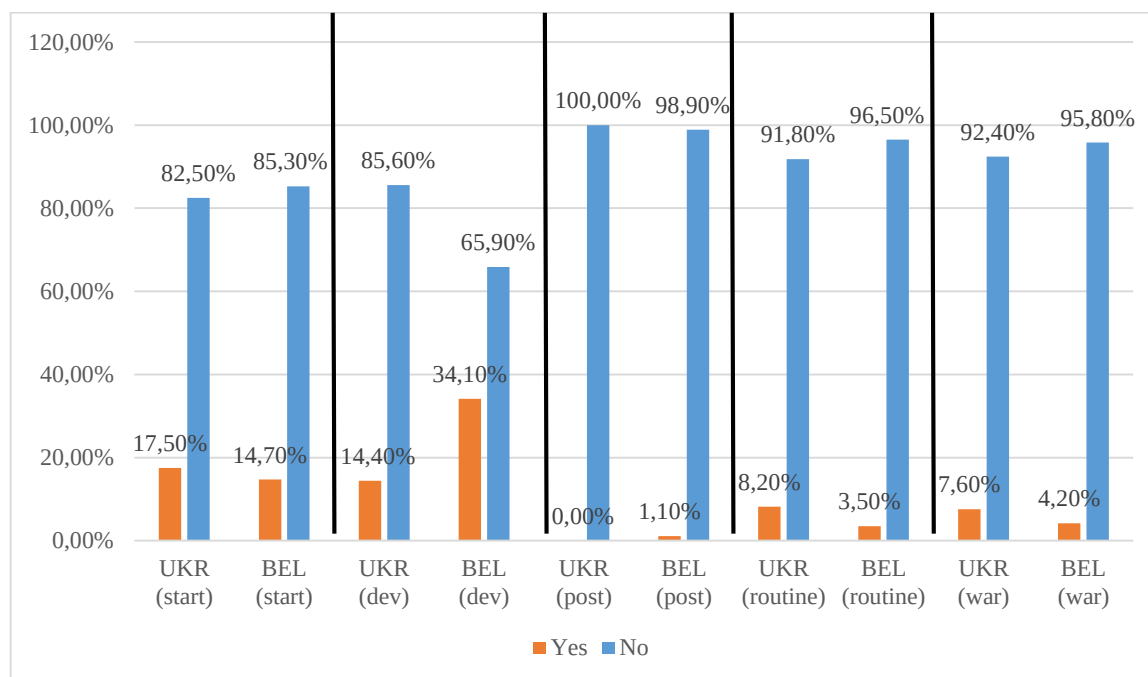
Source: Own elaboration.

Fig. 53. Emojis in the posts (presidential candidates)



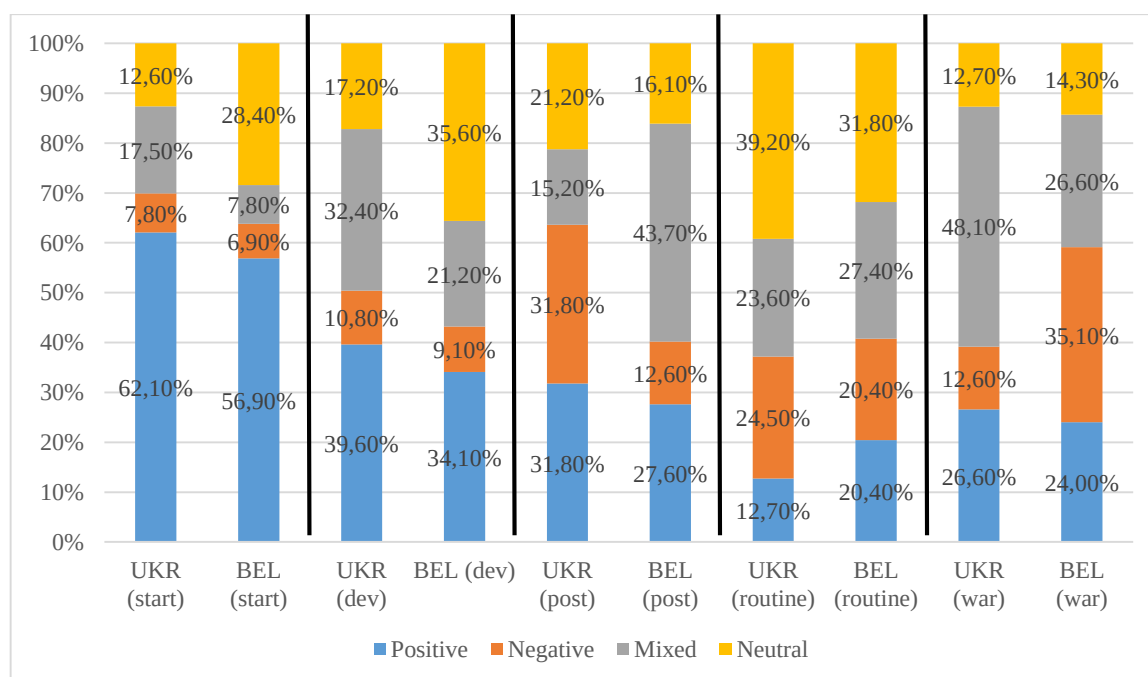
Source: Own elaboration.

Fig. 54. Hashtags in the posts (presidential candidates)



Source: Own elaboration.

Fig. 55. Emotional valence of the posts (presidential candidates)

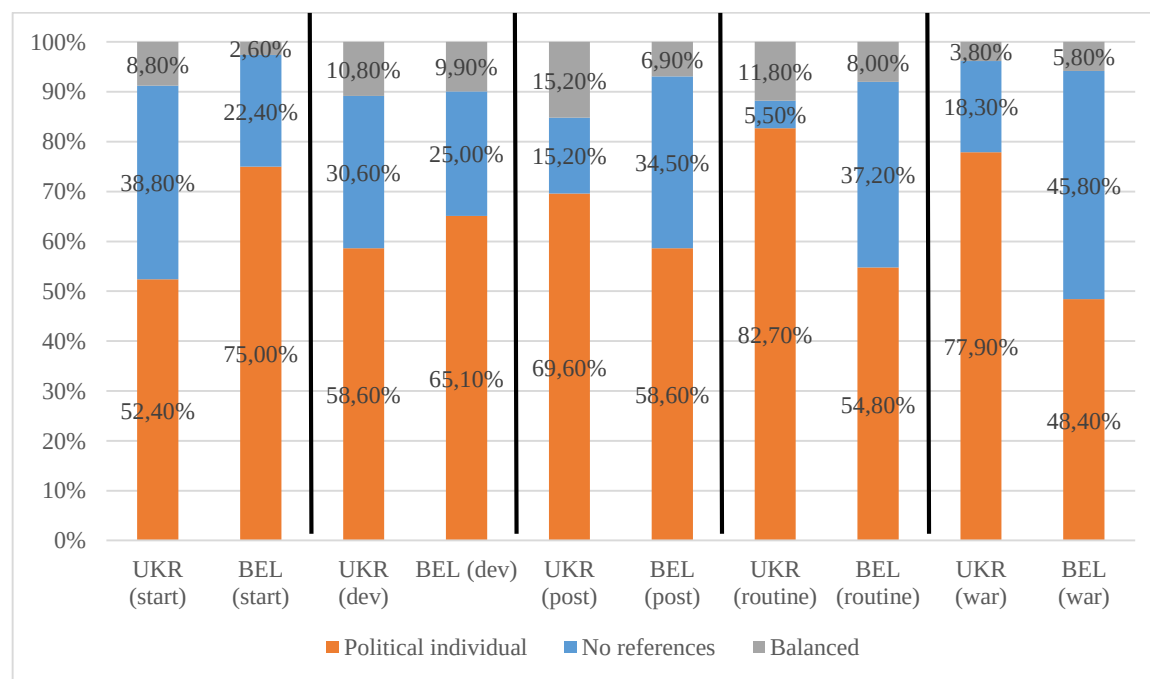


Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 55 showed a constant drop in positive emotions, from the initial period to the routine period. Surprisingly, the war period was distinguished by a certain increase in this emotion. Such a development could be associated with the spread of hope in the posts. The period was also marked by a peak in negative emotions among Belarusian representatives. As already noted, opposition candidates placed responsibility for the war on Lukashenko. In addition, Belarusians more often behaved neutrally. Mixed emotions prevailed among Ukrainian political actors.

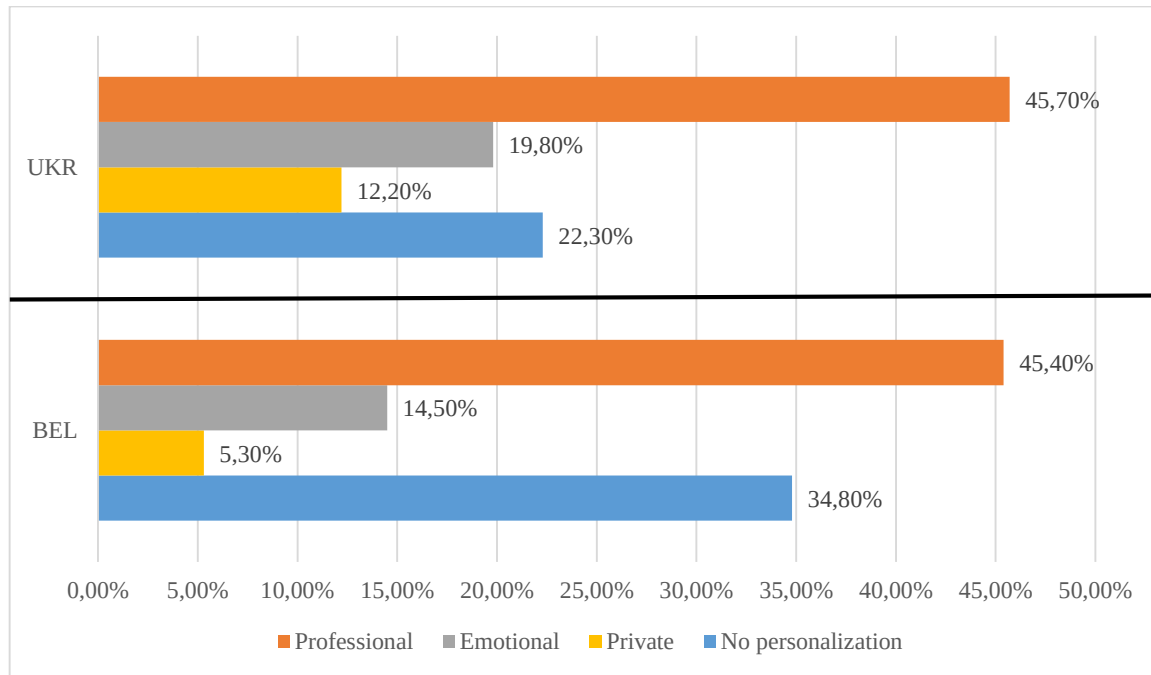
Presidential candidates from both countries used personalization in their posts (Figure 56). During election periods, Belarusian political actors focused on their personal branding more often than Ukrainian political actors. The latter dominated during the post-election period, the routine period, and the war period. Furthermore, there were no differences in terms of types (Figure 57). Professional personalization was the most popular one. Emotional and private forms of personalization occupied the second and third places, respectively.

Fig. 56. Personalization in the posts (presidential candidates)



Source: Own elaboration.

Fig. 57. Type of personalization (presidential candidates)



Note: These indicators can differ from the number of posts.

Source: Own elaboration.

To sum up, political communication of presidential candidates via social media proceeded differently. From one perspective, Belarusian representatives chose original posts, social media sources, vlogging, a balanced language style, and professional personalization. The main language was Russian. They operated better with emojis. From another perspective, Ukrainian representatives focused on original posts, added pictures to them, as well as used professional personalization. The main language was Ukrainian. They operated better with videos, hashtags, and published more short posts. In addition, there were only a few similarities between the two sides in terms of topics and functions. The emotional background was diverse.

It is advisable to maintain original content at the proper level, enhance the use of diverse graphic elements and positive emotions, and find a balance in the types of personalization. For Ukrainian candidates, to increase the production of vlogs and reduce the number of formal messages. For Belarusian candidates, to be more concise in their statements. These recommendations are based on scientific literature, but may not take into account all possible nuances.

4.4.2 Political parties

Profile photos with corresponding symbols have become a common feature of Ukrainian and Belarusian political parties⁶⁰. However, there are some exceptions. The Voice party has the image of the same name combined with the colors of the Ukrainian flag, while the Narodnaya Hramada party displays a photo of its leader Nikolay Statkevich with the inscription “MY PRESIDENT IS IN PRISON” (in Belarusian). All parties have filled out their BIOS. Apart from that, there are no other commonalities between the countries.

If the Ukrainian political parties Servant of the People, European Solidarity, and Motherland repeat such a description as “Official page of the political party [name] on Facebook,” then the Voice party and the Opposition Platform for Life use the slogans “Loyal to Ukraine” and “UNITED FOR THE SAKE OF PEACE!” (in capital letters). They all have verification marks and external links to their websites and/or other social media.

The appearance of Belarusian political parties is rather chaotic. For example, the Liberal Democratic Party of Belarus describes the content of its Telegram channel in the BIO. The White Rus party urges everyone “who loves their country” to follow its channel. The Communist Party of Belarus uses a standard inscription like “Official channel of the Communist Party of Belarus.” These three political actors have no external links. At the same time, Narodnaya Hramada and the National Anti-Crisis Management provide a description of their activities in the BIOS. They have links to chatbots in order to collect the necessary feedback. If the former team adds a link to their website, the latter one offers to support their work with donations. None of the listed Belarusian parties has a verification mark.

As for basic statistical information, the online experience of Ukrainian political parties is twice as long as that of Belarusian political parties (Figure 58). The difference in the number of followers and their daily growth is even more drastic. All Belarusian parties, except for the National Anti-Crisis Management, have been politically active for quite some time. Nevertheless, the creation of some Telegram channels seems more like a reaction to the

⁶⁰ As mentioned in the methodology, the Belarusian political actors of this level: Liberal Democratic Party of Belarus or The truth of Gaidukevich, White Rus, Communist Party of Belarus, Narodnaya Hramada. Party of Nikolay Statkevich, National Anti-Crisis Management; the Ukrainian political actors: European Solidarity, Servant of the People, Opposition Platform – For Life, Motherland, Voice.

actions of opposition forces. The decision only emphasizes the importance of this online platform for the country's information space.

In Ukraine, the oldest Facebook account belongs to the Motherland party, which repeats the result of their leader Tymoshenko. The Voice party is the least experienced of all. It is even younger than the newly created Servant of the People party, but no more productive. The latter has the greatest increase in followers per day. It overtook the European Solidarity party, which has the largest number of followers due to its longer online presence.

The posts of the European Solidarity party received the most interactions among all Ukrainian parties (Figure 59). However, their supporters were not so active. They were overtaken by the followers of the Voice party. Both political actors received better figures in these categories than the Servant of the People party.

In Belarus, the opposition parties have the oldest and youngest Telegram channels (Figure 58). They symbolize the generational change in the politics of this country, from the Narodnaya Hramada to the National Anti-Crisis Management. However, the pro-government party White Rus has the most followers and shows the best growth rates per day. These figures do not correspond to the interaction trends at all, where the opposition parties and their supporters demonstrate a confident leadership (Figure 59). Among the pro-government parties, only the Liberal Democratic Party of Belarus can be distinguished in terms of solid performance. The lower figures can be explained using the mechanism of organizing pro-government events. It is possible that the authorities force Belarusians to follow a certain list of Telegram channels, but they are not obliged to read any information there.

Fig. 58. General statistics of the selected Ukrainian political parties on Facebook and Belarusian political parties on Telegram (account age and followers)

Political actor (country)	Account age (date of registration / date of analysis)	Followers⁶¹	Growth of followers per day
Servant of the People (Ukraine)	1841 days (23.05.2019 / 05.06.2024)	334 000	181
Oppositional Platform – For Life (Ukraine)	3559 days (08.09.2014 / 05.06.2024)	77 000	22

⁶¹ Facebook rounds numbers.

Motherland (Ukraine)	4320 days (08.08.2012 / 05.06.2024)	336 000	78
European Solidarity (Ukraine)	3541 days (26.09.2014 / 05.06.2024)	468 000	132
Voice (Ukraine)	1820 days (13.06.2019 / 05.06.2024)	137 000	75
In total (Ukraine)	15 081 days	1 352 000	90
Liberal Democratic Party of Belarus	1761 days (13.08.2019 / 07.06.2024)	2612	2
White Rus (Belarus)	1453 days (16.06.2020 / 07.06.2024)	9890	7
Communist Party of Belarus	1411 days (28.07.2020 / 07.06.2024)	830	0.6
Narodnaya Hramada (Belarus)	2401 days (11.11.2017 / 07.06.2024)	550	0.2
National Anti-Crisis Management (Belarus)	1312 days (04.11.2020 / 07.06.2024)	2290	1.7
In total (Belarus)	8338 days	16 172	1.9

Source: Own elaboration.

Fig. 59. General statistics of the selected Ukrainian political parties on Facebook and Belarusian political parties on Telegram (interactions)⁶²

Political actor	Sum of all interactions (Facebook: reactions + shares + comments; Telegram: views) for 5 months⁶³	Average number of interactions per day	Interactions/followers
Servant of the People	1 195 001	7967	3.6
Oppositional Platform – For Life	169 527	1130	2.2
Motherland	258 620	1724	0.8
European Solidarity	3 693 939	24 626	7.9
Voice	1 447 982	9653	10.6

⁶² These numbers are overview data. They cannot be compared between social media platforms. Facebook has an active nature of interactions to count (reactions, shares, comments require a click). Telegram has a passive nature of interactions (just views).

⁶³ Facebook and Telegram can round numbers.

Liberal Democratic Party of Belarus	2 362 879	15 753	904.6
White Rus	609 289	4062	61.6
Communist Party of Belarus	80 691	538	97.2
Narodnaya Hramada	2 694 493	17 963	4899
National Anti-Crisis Management	3 994 800	26 632	1744.4

Source: Own elaboration.

Once again, Belarusian political parties publish more posts than their Ukrainian counterparts (Figure 60). They lead in terms of indicators during the post-election period, the routine period, and even during the war period. While opposition parties sought options to support Ukrainian people and defend Belarusian people, pro-government parties criticized the Ukrainian political leadership and praised the decisions of Lukashenko and Putin. This period transformed into the highest number of posts among: 1) all research periods, 2) the two countries⁶⁴. The lowest number of posts was published during the election period (start). In comparison, Ukrainian political parties were most active during the election period (development) and least active during the post-election period.

Fig. 60. General statistics of the selected Ukrainian political parties on Facebook and Belarusian political parties on Telegram (posts)

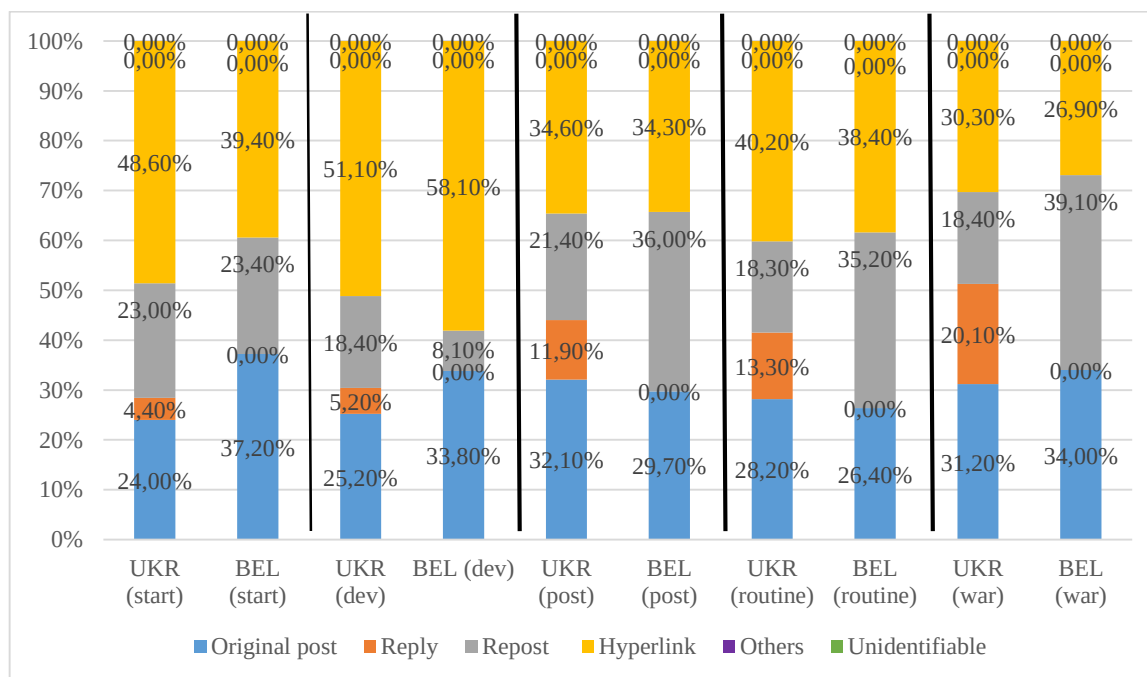
Political actor	Election (start)	Election (development)	Post-election period	Routine period	War period
	Total posts per month / Average number of posts per day				
Servant of the People	164 / 5.5	161 / 5.4	70 / 2.3	121 / 4	606 / 20.2
Oppositional Platform – For Life	227 / 7.6	227 / 7.6	208 / 6.9	306 / 10.2	50 / 1.6
Motherland	155 / 5.2	227 / 7.6	50 / 1.6	197 / 6.6	73 / 2.4
European Solidarity	140 / 4.6	211 / 7	210 / 7	266 / 8.9	339 / 11.3
Voice	297 / 9.9	500 / 16.6	62 / 2.1	154 / 5.1	51 / 1.7

⁶⁴ Applies only to this group of political actors.

In total (Ukraine)	983 / 6.5	1326 / 8.8	600 / 4	1044 / 7	1119 / 7.5
Liberal Democratic Party of Belarus	47 / 1.6	8 / 0.3	120 / 4	168 / 5.6	851 / 28.4
White Rus	53 / 1.8	323 / 10.8	406 / 13.5	284 / 9.5	729 / 24.3
Communist Party of Belarus	73 / 2.4	69 / 2.3	105 / 3.5	93 / 3.1	82 / 2.7
Narodnaya Hramada	313 / 10.4	353 / 11.8	60 / 2	112 / 3.7	645 / 21.5
National Anti- Crisis Management	83 / 2.8	113 / 3.8	73 / 2.4	49 / 1.6	85 / 2.8
In total (Belarus)	569 / 3.8	866 / 5.7	764 / 5.1	706 / 4.7	2392 / 15.9

Source: Own elaboration.

Fig. 61. Type of the posts (political parties)

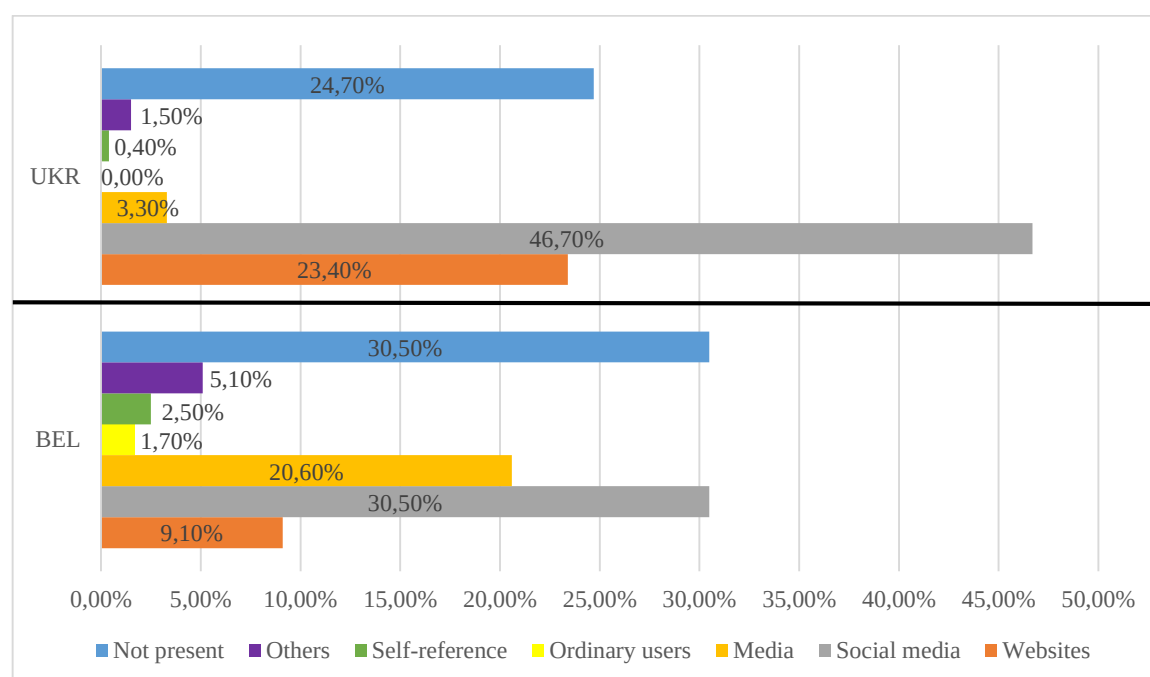


Source: Own elaboration.

The content analysis revealed no clear majority preference for a certain post type (Figure 61). The only exception was the development of the election period, when hyperlinks dominated the agenda in both cases. They were also the top choice in general, which identified the inclination for supplementary content over unique content. Specifically, the observed trend relied on the following order: hyperlinks, original posts, and reposts. In Ukraine, original posts outnumbered hyperlinks during the war period. Political parties also had replies across periods. In Belarus, reposts shifted the agenda during the post-election period and the war period. They strengthened their position during the routine period. There were other minor changing patterns among Ukrainian and Belarusian political actors.

Since hyperlinks were an important element of digital communication strategies, there was a particular need to specify them (Figure 62). The main source in both cases was social media. After that, there were differences. Ukrainian political parties placed hyperlinks to internal websites, while Belarusian political parties – to external media. The latter also included 1.7% of hyperlinks to ordinary users, which indicated greater diversity in this category.

Fig. 62. Specification of replies, reposts, hyperlinks (political parties)

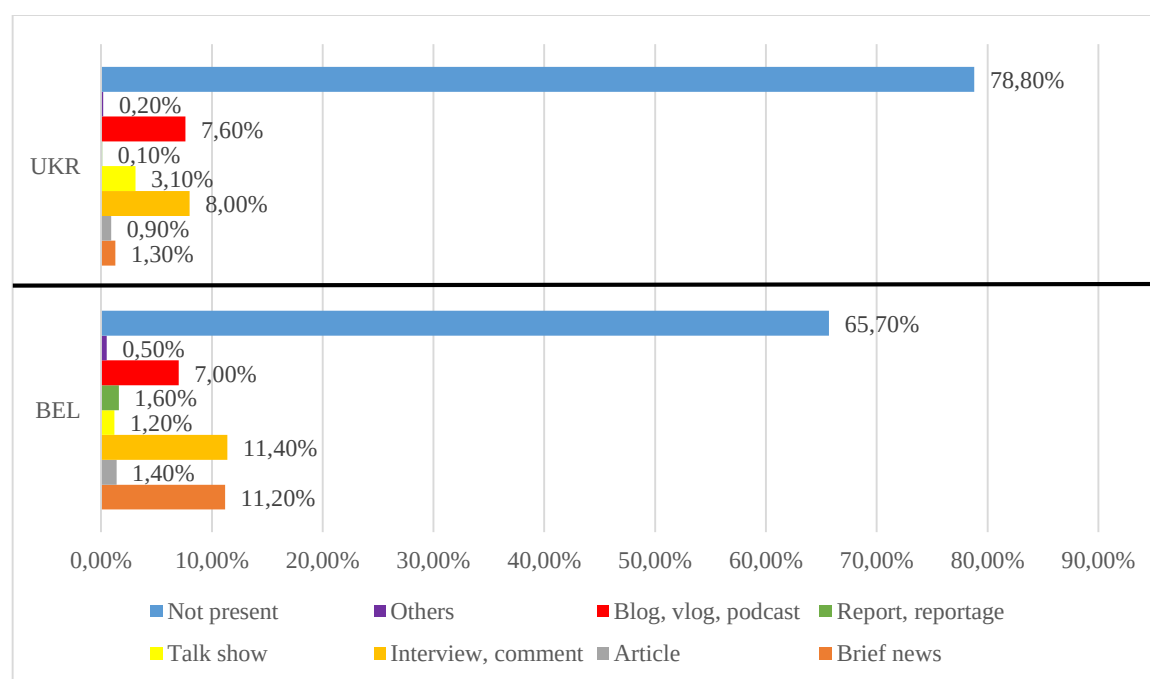


Note: These indicators can differ from the number of posts.

Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 63 revealed that interviews and commentary were the most popular among the proposed genres. Ukrainian and Belarusian political parties spread statements of their members. This argument provided further evidence supporting the secondary role of these profiles. Belarusian parties also redistributed short information materials. The vlog genre took 2nd place in the posts of Ukrainian parties and 3rd place in the messages of their counterparts. Other genres received small percentages.

Fig. 63. Genre in the posts (political parties)



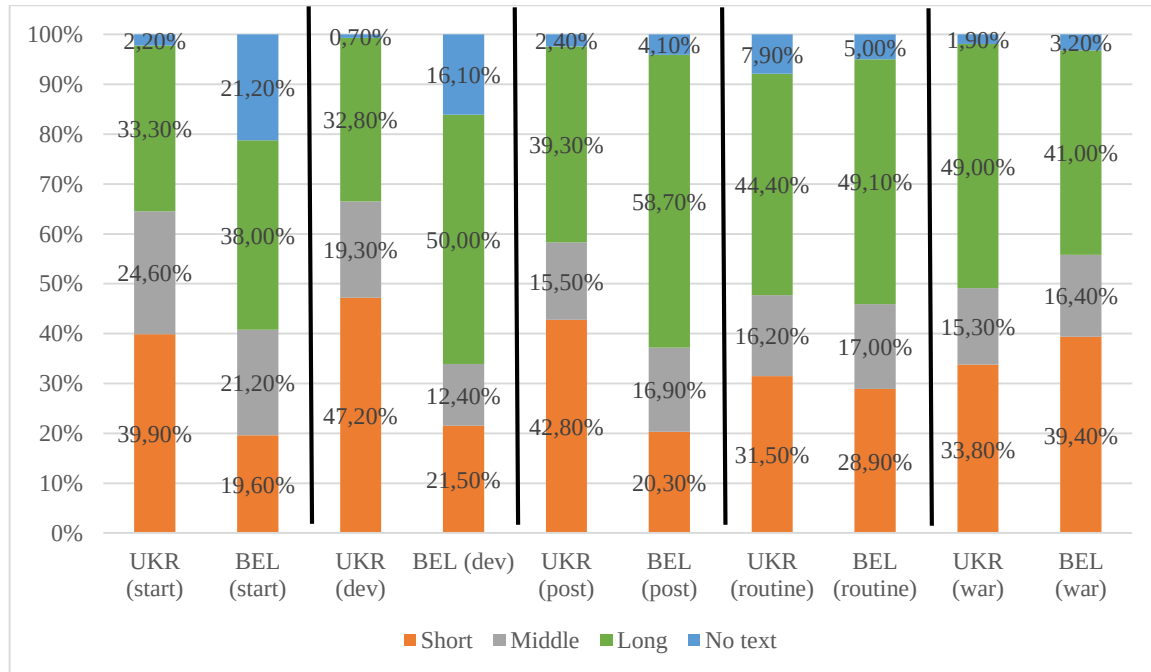
Source: Own elaboration.

There was some contrasts in terms of post length (Figure 64). Belarusian political parties preferred long posts to short posts during all the periods. They lost in this number to the opposing side only during the war period. At the same time, Ukrainian political parties chose more short posts during the election periods and the post-election period. The number of long posts began to exceed the number of short posts during the following periods. This side had a more balanced distribution of different lengths.

While Ukrainian political parties published content in their native language, Belarusian political parties used Russian (Figure 65). The former relied on English the most during the war period. The latter had no more than 1.5% of English posts during the election period

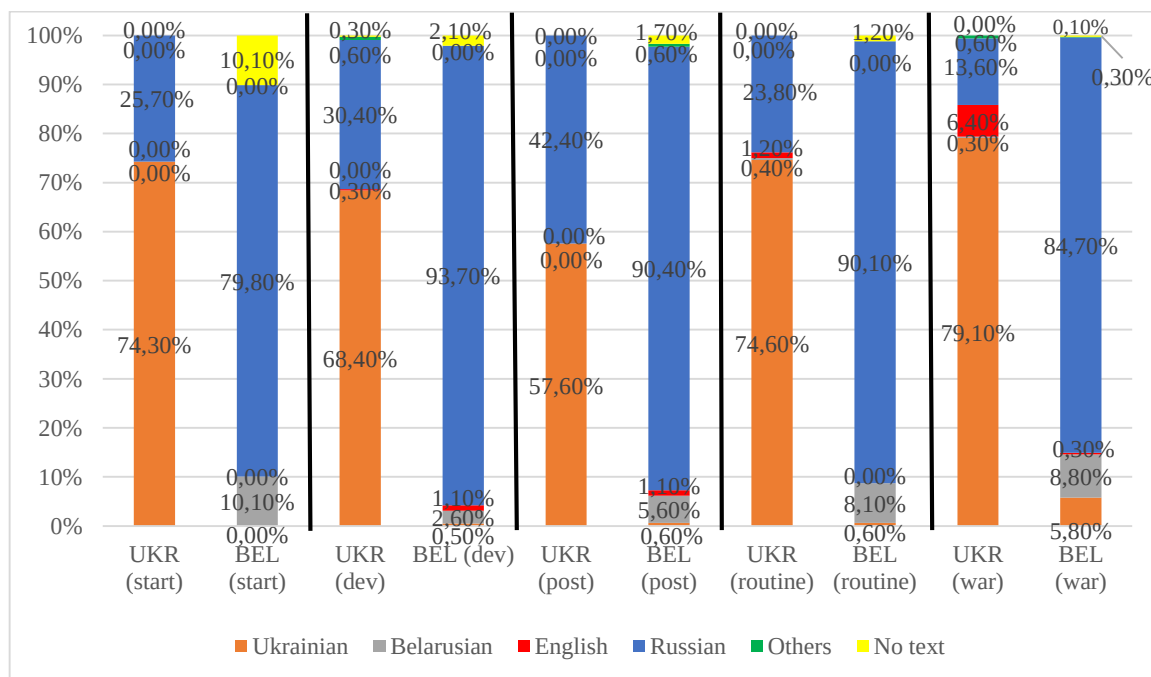
(development), the post-election period, and the war period. They also distributed posts in Ukrainian during the war period.

Fig. 64. Length of the posts (political parties)



Source: Own elaboration.

Fig. 65. Languages in the posts (political parties)



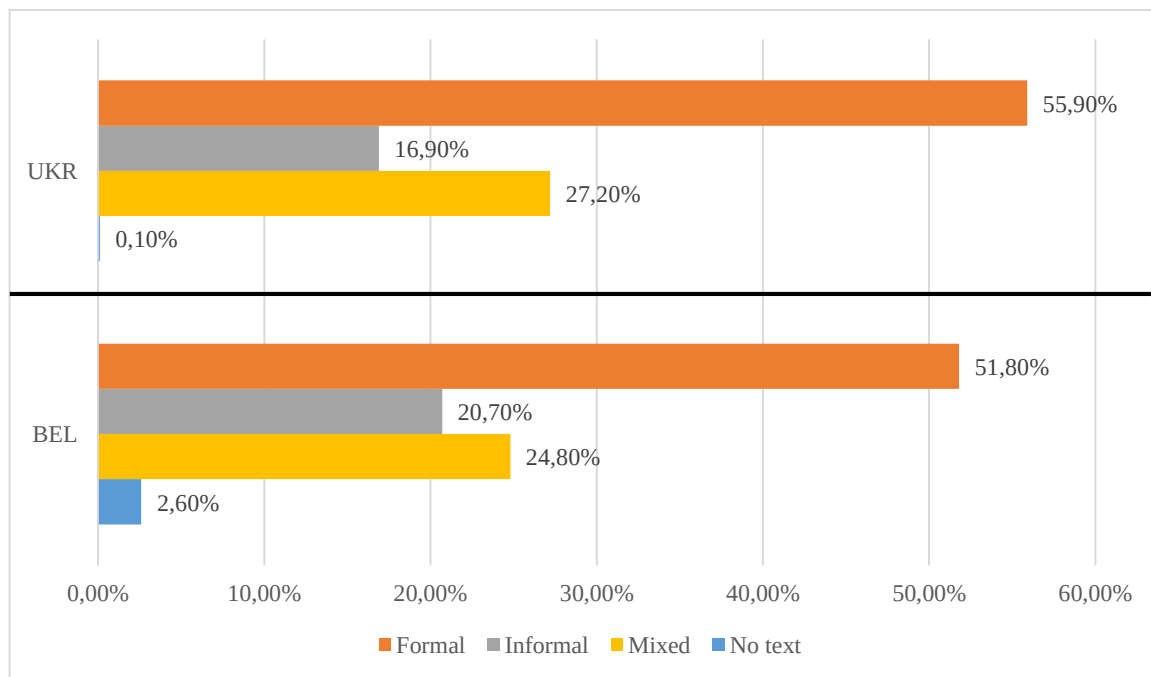
Note: These indicators can differ from the number of posts.

Source: Own elaboration.

In addition, there were two striking differences from other groups of political actors. First, Ukrainian political parties had a significant share of posts in Russian. It gradually increased to about 42% during the post-election period and then began to decline. Second, the largest percentage of posts in Belarusian was observed during the election period (start). Next, there was a decline to 2.6%. Finally, their number grew again across periods.

Moving forward, political actors from both countries had similar trends in terms of language style (Figure 66). The majority of posts were written in formal language, ruling out the possibility of a balanced approach. Mixed posts occupied the second place. Informal style was used the least. Belarusian parties outperformed Ukrainian parties in the most recent style, but not in the others.

Fig. 66. Language style (political parties)



Source: Own elaboration.

There are at least 7 similarities out of 20 indicators regarding the peak period for a particular topic posting (Figure 67). For example, election and personal issues were the most typical in the posts of the initial election period. Although the latter topic was less popular, it was

included in the agenda in order to simplify the official image of the political parties. Next, the post-election period was a priority for raising cultural issues, socio-cultural events, and political relations with media. Finally, the main similarities belonged to the war period. They included the theme of war and the theme of media literacy, which is logical at such a time.

Apart from it, the post-election period (3 times: infrastructure, corruption, democracy), the routine period (4 times: economy, legislation, criminal prosecutions, relationships with other political actors) and the war period (4 times: health, international relations, science and multi-topic posts) were among the main ones in the Ukrainian posting schedule. In turn, the Belarusian parties distributed the topics in the following way. The post-election period expanded the thematic block to 6 main items: economy, international relations, technology, legislation, religion, media relations and multi-topic posts. The routine period became a priority for the topics of health, infrastructure and democracy. All other periods had fewer than three main themes.

Fig. 67. Topics, issues of the posts (political parties)

UKR/BEL	Election (start)	Election (development)	Post-election	Routine	War
Business and economy	9,1% / 3,4%	6,1% / 8,1%	9,2% / 9,5%	16,3% / 7,1%	6,4% / 3,0%
Health and social policy	4,8% / 1,7%	4,0% / 2,7%	5,7% / 3,4%	7,1% / 8,6%	10,4% / 1,1%
War, conflicts, terrorism	6,3% / 0,0%	11,9% / 0,0%	18,4% / 1,5%	15,8% / 2,4%	51,2% / 43,6%
Foreign affairs, international relations, world events	4,8% / 4,5%	8,1% / 7,7%	10,6% / 20,5%	9,9% / 24,3%	10,4% / 9,4%
Culture, education, sport	2,0% / 1,7%	2,9% / 1,5%	9,9% / 8,7%	3,4% / 6,3%	1,7% / 2,2%
Science, technology, environment, animal rights	0,8% / 1,1%	1,1% / 0,0%	1,4% / 2,7%	1,2% / 2,4%	2,1% / 1,8%
Infrastructure	2,4% / 0,0%	0,9% / 1,2%	2,8% / 0,8%	1,5% / 2,0%	0,2% / 0,4%

Corruption	0,8% / 0,6%	0,0% / 0,0%	2,1% / 0,0%	0,5% / 0,4%	0,0% / 0,0%
Legislation	10,7% / 1,1%	2,5% / 1,5%	2,8% / 5,3%	11,8% / 5,1%	1,2% / 2,3%
Democracy	0,4% / 0,0%	0,4% / 0,0%	1,4% / 0,0%	0,0% / 1,2%	0,2% / 0,8%
Religion	0,8% / 0,0%	0,7% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,8%	0,5% / 0,0%	0,2% / 0,0%
Socio-cultural and mourning events	7,1% / 6,1%	3,8% / 1,5%	7,1% / 6,8%	6,7% / 3,9%	0,4% / 1,0%
Relationships with other political actors	5,2% / 12,8%	3,1% / 15,4%	2,1% / 6,8%	6,4% / 5,9%	4,4% / 6,9%
Relationships with media	0,4% / 0,6%	0,4% / 0,4%	2,1% / 0,8%	0,7% / 1,6%	0,2% / 0,8%
Prosecution, civil and human rights, criminal actions	3,6% / 12,3%	7,4% / 20,8%	2,8% / 11,7%	7,6% / 13,7%	1,7% / 2,4%
Personal issues and backstage	6,0% / 3,4%	5,4% / 1,2%	1,4% / 1,1%	0,2% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,2%
Election	21,4% / 38,5%	21,1% / 22,7%	9,2% / 0,4%	2,2% / 3,9%	0,0% / 16,0%
Rankings and results	2,0% / 0,0%	3,4% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,4%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 1,6%
Media literacy	2,4% / 0,0%	2,9% / 2,7%	1,4% / 1,1%	0,0% / 2,0%	3,7% / 3,3%
News and views overview	3,2% / 1,7%	4,3% / 1,2%	4,3% / 7,2%	2,7% / 3,5%	5,4% / 1,3%
Others	3,6% / 4,5%	7,0% / 3,5%	5,0% / 8,0%	5,4% / 5,5%	0,2% / 1,7%
Unclear	2,4% / 6,1%	2,5% / 8,1%	0,0% / 2,7%	0,0% / 0,4%	0,0% / 0,1%

Note: 1) The number of topics was greater than the number of posts because each message could cover more than one topic; 2) Read from left to right. The idea is to identify the peak selection period for each topic (deeper analysis of strategic decision-making). Other important dynamics will be shown in general trends.

Source: Own elaboration.

There are only 4 similarities out of 11 indicators regarding the priority period of choosing a certain function (Figure 68). Among them, image building dominated during the initial election period. The post-election period was the most typical for the protocol function and commercial advertisement. Dissemination of information reached its greatest value during the war period.

It is also worth talking about the differences in the agenda. On the one hand, Ukrainian political parties chose the war period in order to publish the largest number of professional updates, calls to action, achievements and multifunctional posts. Political advertisement and humor dominated the election period (start). On the other hand, Belarusian political parties chose the election period (start) in order to publish the largest number of professional updates and achievements. Political advertising, humor, calls to action and multi-functional posts dominated another election period (development). Furthermore, criticism was most typical for the routine period (Ukraine) and for the post-election period (Belarus).

Fig. 68. Functions of the posts (political parties)

UKR/BEL	Election (start)	Election (development)	Post-election	Routine	War
Professional updates	29,5% / 36,7%	32,4% / 27,7%	30,6% / 30,3%	26,1% / 32,6%	38,4% / 28,4%
Image building	4,2% / 4,5%	1,8% / 2,0%	2,5% / 1,5%	0,5% / 2,6%	1,2% / 1,1%
Manners and protocol	7,1% / 4,5%	5,0% / 1,3%	10,7% / 6,5%	5,9% / 3,0%	6,6% / 2,6%
Accomplishments	2,7% / 8,0%	4,2% / 4,6%	2,5% / 2,7%	2,1% / 1,7%	9,0% / 4,7%
Political advertisement	28,0% / 15,6%	24,3% / 15,8%	10,7% / 15,7%	20,6% / 12,4%	4,8% / 7,1%
Commercial advertisement	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	1,7% / 0,4%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%
Criticism	11,9% / 12,6%	13,1% / 14,2%	24,8% / 18,8%	29,4% / 16,7%	10,8% / 17,2%
Humor and entertainment	1,8% / 3,0%	2,9% / 9,2%	1,7% / 6,5%	0,0% / 3,4%	1,2% / 1,7%
Call to action	13,7% / 11,1%	14,5% / 19,1%	14,0% / 8,4%	14,2% / 14,2%	24,2% / 13,9%
Dissemination of information	0,0% / 2,0%	0,0% / 0,3%	0,0% / 7,7%	0,0% / 11,2%	0,8% / 21,9%
Multifunctional post	0,9% / 1,0%	1,7% / 2,6%	0,8% / 1,5%	1,2% / 1,3%	2,6% / 1,0%
Others	0,3% / 1,0%	0,0% / 3,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,9%	0,4% / 0,5%

Note: 1) The number of functions was greater than the number of posts because each message could cover more than one function; 2) Read from left to right. The idea is to identify the peak selection period for each function (deeper analysis of strategic decision-making). Other important dynamics will be shown in general trends.

Source: Own elaboration.

Ukrainian political parties shared links to social media profiles of their members, which was important during the information war. There were signs of interaction with the audience.

After the victory of candidate Zelenskyy, the main message of the Servant of the People party was “Let’s do them again” during the 2019 parliamentary election. They often mentioned the newly elected president in their posts. The interaction function was used during the selection of party members. It was suggested to report unworthy candidates. As for the war period, the party shared motivational and patriotic slogans. They initiated “twitterstorms” towards international politicians and organizations. Moreover, they called for delivering truthful information to Russians and to all friends in the world. There was inappropriate vocabulary, because “this war has lost censorship.”

The European Solidarity party shared messages from various party members (e.g. Poroshenko, Gerashchenko, Friz). During the election, their goal was to prevent Russian revenge and protect Ukraine. During the war, putin⁶⁵ was called an “animal,” a “scoundrel,” a “maniac.” He was suggested to be “brought to trial” and “hanged.” Russians were called russists⁶⁶. Party members also coordinated volunteer activities.

The Motherland party reposted Tymoshenko’s page and news. There were hyperlinks to comments of party members on the official website. Its communication included comics. Furthermore, party members addressed the audience in order to formulate the main problems of young people. They made proposals for land reform.

The pro-Russian Opposition Platform for Life party rebroadcast comments from its members. The main sources were social media and the official website. Leader Boyko responded to comments in his YouTube videos. The party criticized Poroshenko and justified relations with Russia. There was inappropriate language. Voting for them meant voting for peace. Among the supporting traditional media were the Inter TV channel and the Newsone TV channel, as well as the website Strana. During the war, they focused on helping Ukrainians and avoided any mention of the negative actions of their representatives.

⁶⁵ With a lowercase letter due to lack of respect.

⁶⁶ The ideology of Russian fascism.

The newly formed Voice party proposed to “make politics open.” It introduced people to its activities during the election period. The posts disseminated the positions of various party representatives. Political messages were mixed with cultural events. Since the leader was the singer Vakarchuk, the party organized a musical “Tour of change.” Interestingly, some videos included sign language.

As for the Belarusian opposition parties, the National Anti-Crisis Management tried to protect the affected Belarusians from the illegal actions of the authorities. Another goal was the transition from authoritarian to democratic rule. Their Telegram channel offered numerous bots for two-way communication. At the same time, Narodnaya Hramada had a chaotic online strategy. They could criticize both the authoritarian regime and their opposition allies. The party was most supportive of the blogger-candidate Sergei Tsikhanouskiy. Its youth wing created memes about Lukashenko. Among the posts were literary quotes related to repressions and dictatorship.

As for the pro-government parties, they all spread Lukashenko’s agenda. Despite past conflicts, the Communist Party supported his candidacy. Their posts covered all conspiracy theories: from Western terror to white-red-white sectarians, or opposition. The main defender of Belarus was Lukashenko, while Tsikhanouskaya was familiarly called as “Sveta.” In addition, there was a message about the Bandera legacy of Polish President Andrzej Duda.

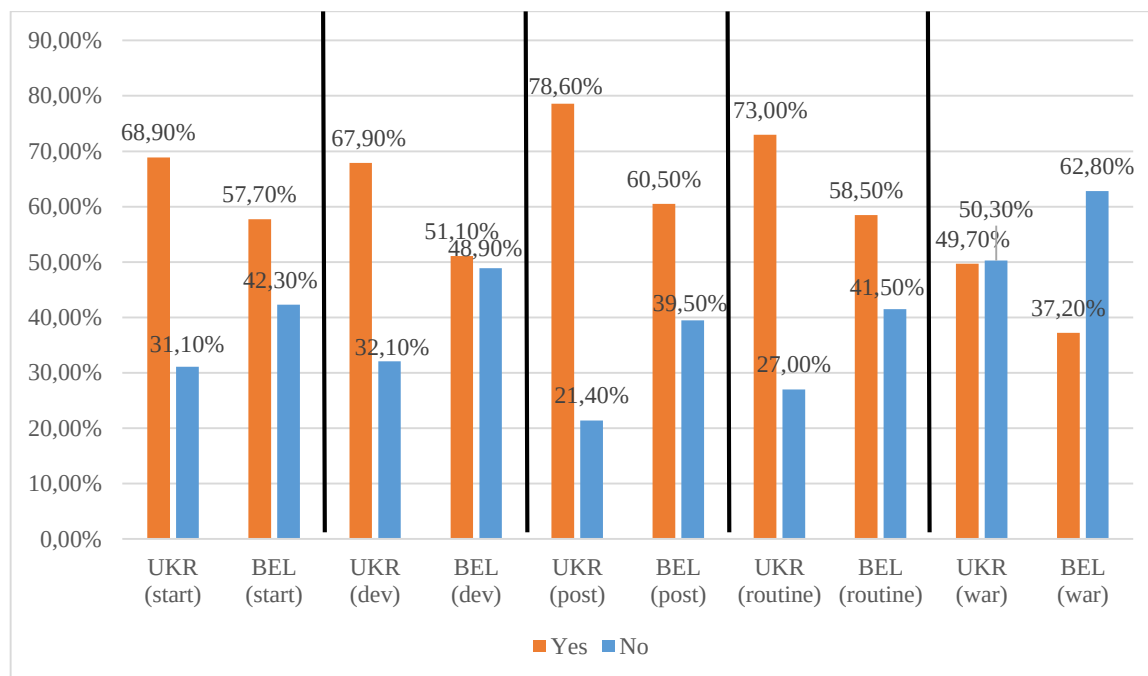
The White Rus party promoted the 2022 presidential referendum. During the process, they literally became journalists who interviewed voters. Opposition Telegram channels were called as “destructive.” Their information was caught on mistakes, which reinforced the narrative about spreading fakes. Regarding the war, White Rus denied the bombing of Kyiv and called for friendship with all neighbors. Criticism was directed at the opposition, Zelenskyy, the United States, Estonia and many others.

Besides Lukashenko, the Liberal Democratic Party of Belarus published messages from/about their leader Gaidukevich.

Moving on to the graphic elements, the most popular were pictures in both cases (Figure 69). Specifically, Ukrainian political parties included them in the posts more often than

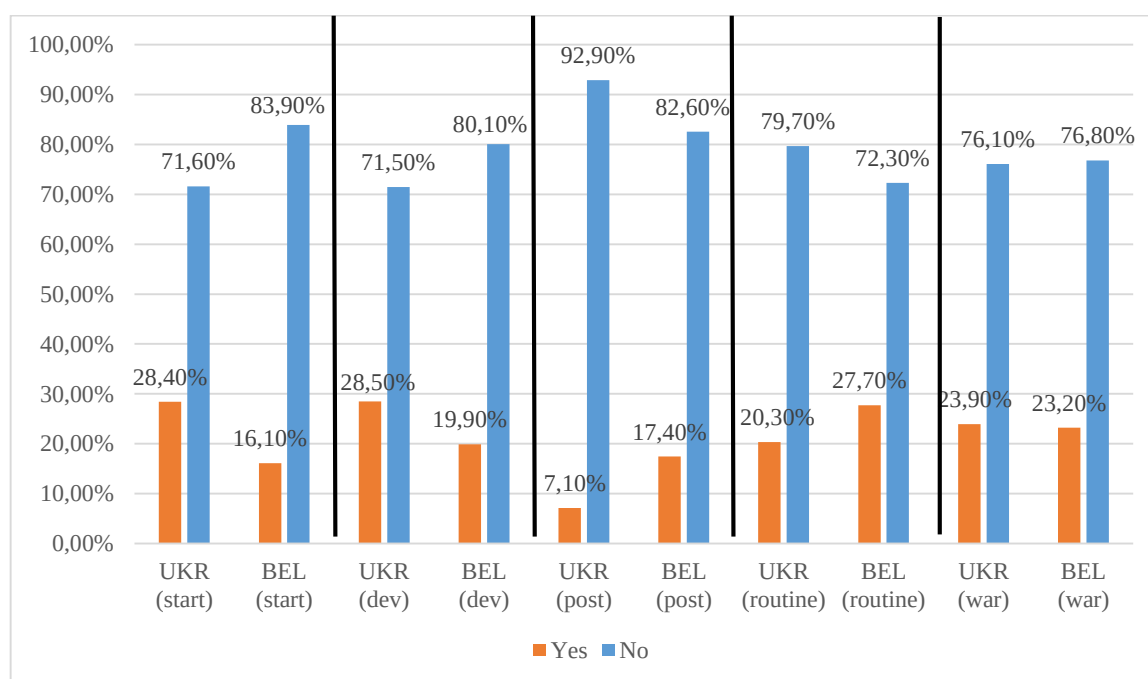
Belarusian political parties. Peak numbers were observed during the post-election period. Nonetheless, there was a significant decline in their share during the war period.

Fig. 69. Photos, pictures in the posts (political parties)



Source: Own elaboration.

Fig. 70. Videos in the posts (political parties)

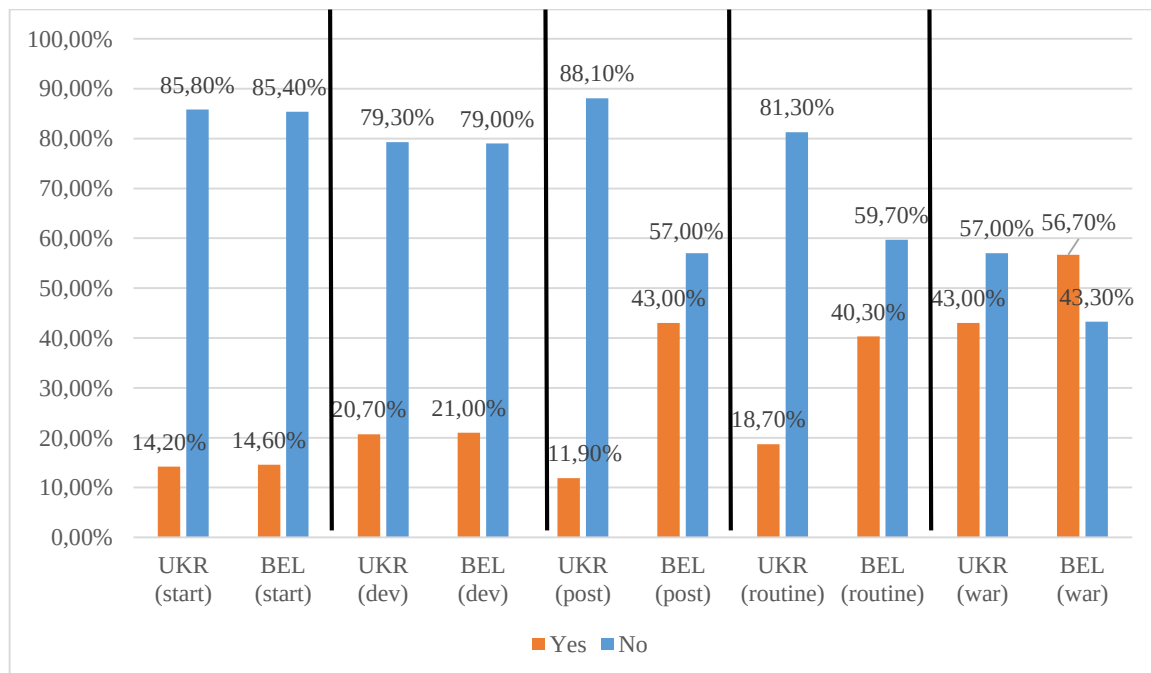


Source: Own elaboration.

Videos did not rise above the 30% mark (Figure 70). Among other things, Ukrainian political parties had a higher number of integrated videos during the outlined election periods. Belarusian political parties outperformed their neighbors during the post-election period and the routine period. The percentage became equal during the war period. The general trend consisted of growth, decline and growth again. Between the routine and war periods, Ukrainian representatives increased the number of posts with videos. They showed the horrors of war. Compared to them, representatives of the neighboring country turned to this multimedia element less.

Emojis were not the stable element in digital communication strategies (Figure 71). Belarusians included them much more often than Ukrainians. After the initial growth, their share reached 43%. The same was not completely true for Ukrainian parties, where the number decreased to around 12% during the post-election period. The only decline was observed in the posts of Belarusian parties between the post-election and routine periods. Other trends were only positive. Importantly, the highest number of posts with emojis was published during the war period. Belarusian representatives organized the majority of their messages using this multimedia element at that time.

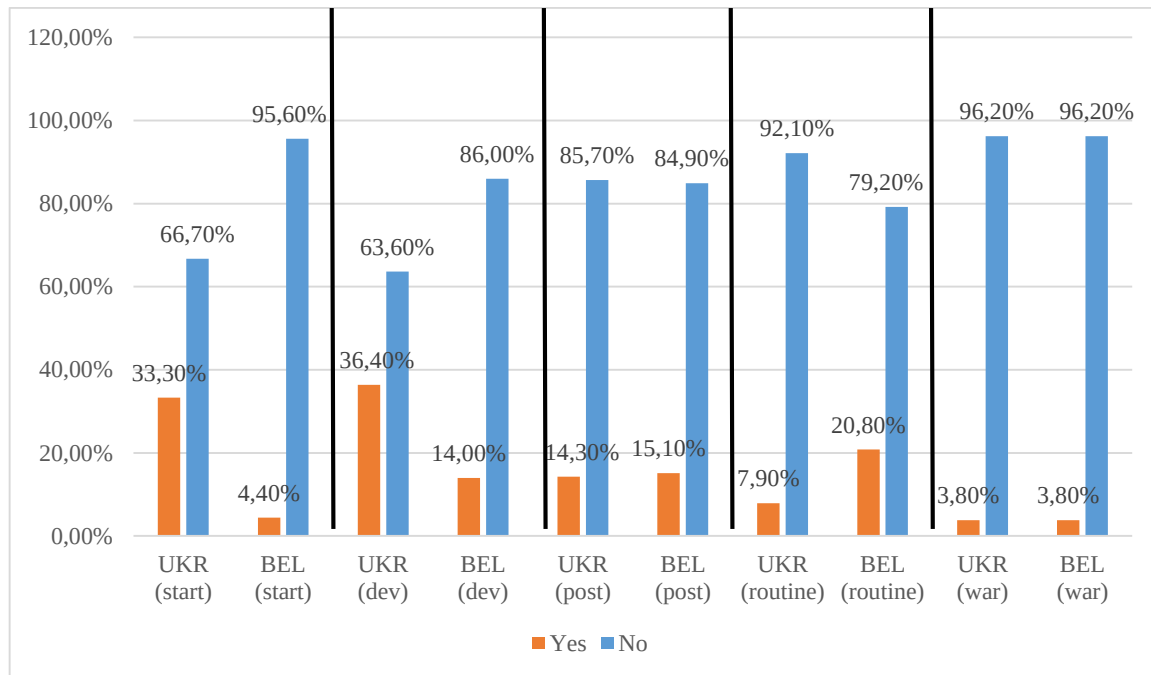
Fig. 71. Emojis in the posts (political parties)



Source: Own elaboration.

Hashtags were not a priority in both cases (Figure 72). They occupied a larger share in the Ukrainian agenda. From one perspective, Ukrainian representatives used them in small numbers during the election campaign. After that, they abandoned this connective element. From another perspective, there was a growing trend to the highest point, namely about 20%, in the Belarusian case. Again, the element was ignored during the war period.

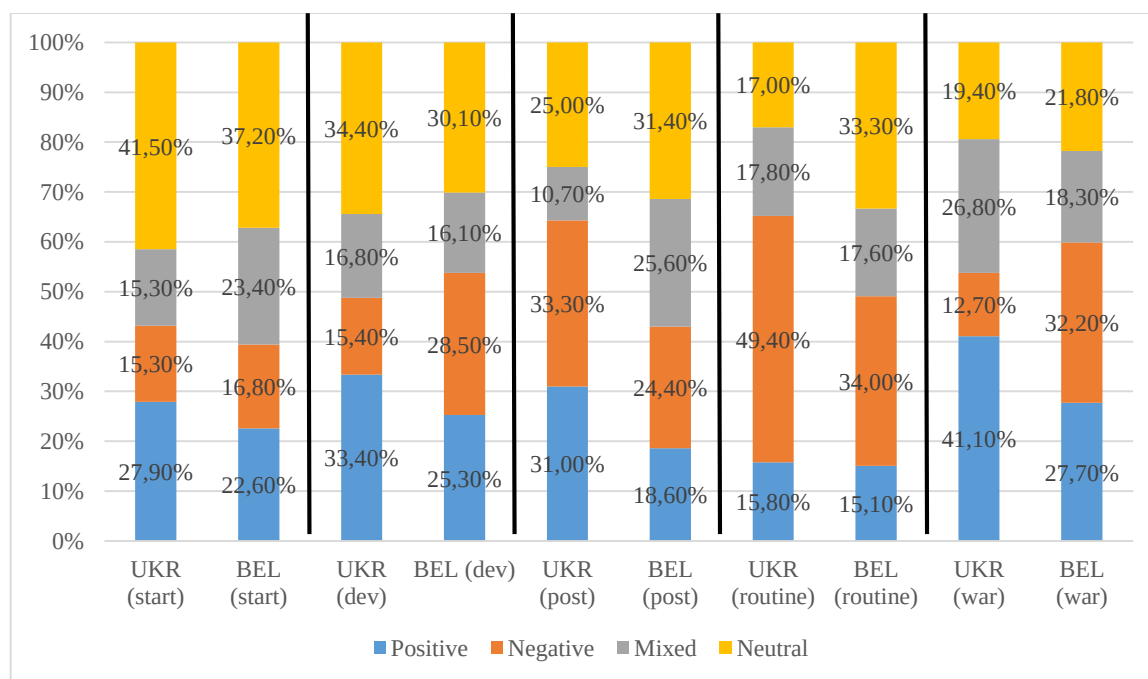
Fig. 72. Hashtags in the posts (political parties)



Source: Own elaboration.

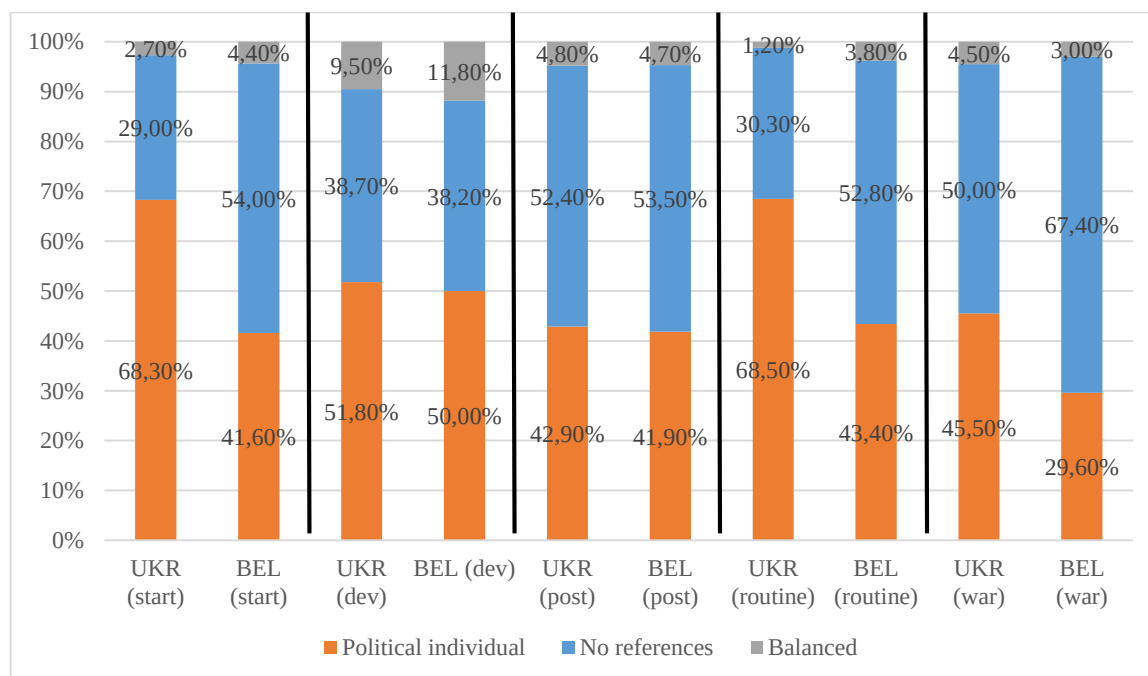
Surprisingly, neutral and negative emotions were the two key valences in the posts (Figure 73). The first grew into the second over the periods. In the Ukrainian case, the transition stage was the post-election period. In the Belarusian case, everything changed during the routine period. In addition, Ukrainian political actors were more positive than Belarusian political actors, especially during the war period. No emotion exceeded 50%, so there was no single dominant valence.

Fig. 73. Emotional valence of the posts (political parties)



Source: Own elaboration.

Fig. 74. Personalization in the posts (political parties)

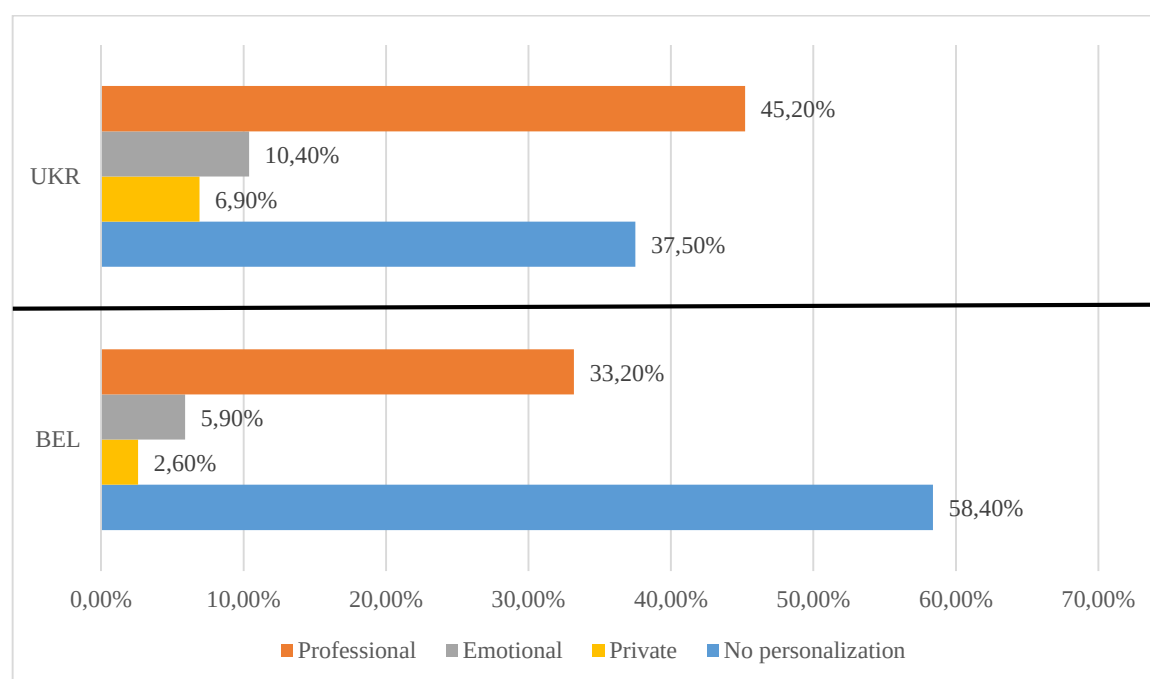


Source: Own elaboration.

Ukrainian political parties resorted to greater personalization in comparison to Belarusian political parties (Figure 74). Apparently, the closest trend was observed during the development of the election period. Ukrainians published as twice as many posts with personalization during the start of the election campaign and during the routine period. The indicators did not exceed 50% during the post-election and war periods.

There was the same general trend with regard to the type of personalization (Figure 75). The most popular of all was professional personalization. The indicators of emotional and private personalization were much lower. They occupied the second and third positions, respectively.

Fig. 75. Type of personalization (political parties)



Note: These indicators can differ from the number of posts.

Source: Own elaboration.

To conclude, Ukrainian and Belarusian political parties focused more on the act of distributing existing information rather than on producing original content. They provided hyperlinks to social media. The main genres were interviews (in both cases) and short news (in the Belarusian case). Among other similarities, these representatives used the formal style in their posts. The primary emotional valences were neutral and negative. Pictures were included in most of their messages, except for the war period. The same cannot be said for videos and hashtags.

Apart from the differences in topics and functions, Ukrainian and Belarusian political actors also varied in the lengths and languages of their posts. The former prioritized professional personalization during the specified periods, whereas the latter made greater use of emojis to structure their text.

There are several recommendations for this group of political actors. First, it is important not to overuse long posts. This will lead to better perception of information. Second, political parties should find a balance in terms of including various graphic elements. This will improve the visual appearance of their posts. Third, the number of hashtags should be increased. They will contribute to the reach of content. Fourth, there should be a limit to the use of negative emotions. The audience cannot be overloaded with them. The same applies to the formal language style and professional personalization, as the fifth point.

4.4.3 Most popular politicians

Considering this political level⁶⁷, Groysman's BIO informs about his job title, which is a traditional feature of Ukrainian political actors. He has a photo, a verification mark, as well as links to his website and other social media. On the contrary, Gaidukevich describes himself in two words: "My truth." The similar phrase can be found in the name of his Liberal Democratic Party of Belarus on Telegram. Apart from a photo, there is no additional information about the country's most popular politician. He does not use the opportunity to attract uniformed voters. Thus, Gaidukevich risks being left without potential supporters who are unfamiliar with his persona.

Regarding basic statistical data, Groysman created his online profile much earlier than Gaidukevich (Figure 76). The Ukrainian politician has more followers and a higher daily growth rate. The interaction rates are provided as an overview (see Figure 77). However, Gaidukevich publishes more posts than Groysman (Figure 78). The former politician prevails during the post-election period, the routine period, and the war period. He consistently defends a pro-government agenda. The latter politician bets on election periods (start and

⁶⁷ As mentioned in the methodology, the Belarusian political actor of this level is Gaidukevich, while the Ukrainian political actor is Groysman.

development). During the 2019 parliamentary race, he separated from Poroshenko and created his own party.

Fig. 76. General statistics of the selected Ukrainian politician on Facebook and Belarusian politician on Telegram (account age and followers)

Political actor (country)	Account age (date of registration / date of analysis)	Followers ⁶⁸	Growth of followers per day
Groysman (Ukraine)	3558 days (10.09.2014 / 06.06.2024)	932 000	262
Gaidukevich (Belarus)	1293 days (23.11.2020 / 07.06.2024)	32 848	25

Source: Own elaboration.

Fig. 77. General statistics of the selected Ukrainian politician on Facebook and Belarusian politician on Telegram (interactions)

Political actor	Sum of all interactions (Facebook: reactions + shares + comments; Telegram: views) for 5 months ⁶⁹	Average number of interactions per day	Interactions/followers
Groysman	1 813 543	12 090	1.9
Gaidukevich	3 631 222	24 208	110.5

Source: Own elaboration.

Fig. 78. General statistics of the selected Ukrainian politician on Facebook and Belarusian politician on Telegram (posts)

Political actor	Election (start)	Election (development)	Post-election period	Routine period	War period
	Total posts per month / Average number of posts per day				
Groysman	110 / 3.6	144 / 4.8	44 / 1.5	10 / 0.3	74 / 2.5
Gaidukevich	39 / 1.3	31 / 1	89 / 3	86 / 2.9	205 / 6.8

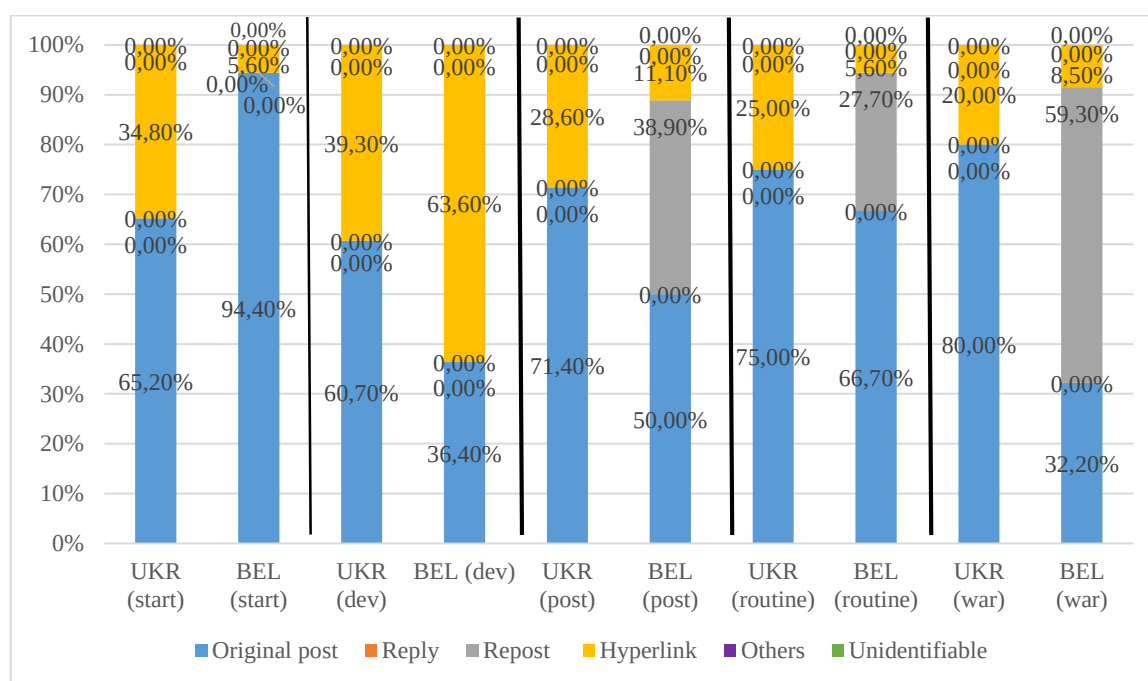
Source: Own elaboration.

⁶⁸ Facebook rounds numbers.

⁶⁹ Facebook and Telegram can round numbers.

Among the analyzed content, one can find original posts, reposts, and hyperlinks to external sources of information (Figure 79). While original posts dominate Groysman's page, the situation is different with Gaidukevich's channel. During the election period (development), he prefers hyperlinks to other types of messages. Such content ranges from 20 to 40% of all Groysman's posts in each of the periods. During the Russia-Ukraine war, the largest share of Gaidukevich's messages is made up of reposts. Lukashenko's channel occupies a special place among them. There is no similar content on Groysman's page. Hence, it seems that Gaidukevich works less on the development of his social media account. He likes to rely on external producers of information.

Fig. 79. Type of the posts (most popular politicians)



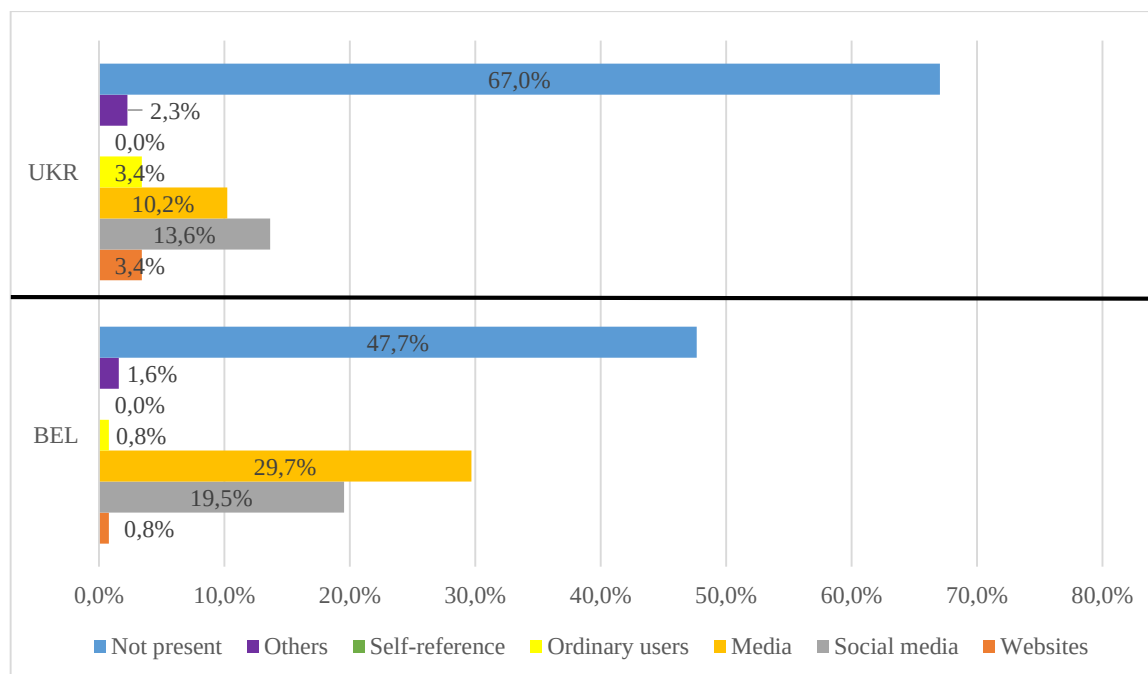
Source: Own elaboration.

The most popular sources for both politicians are media and social media (Figure 80). Groysman can mention the Facebook pages of his political colleagues. Journalistic materials are slightly less common for his online profile. The opposite situation applies to Gaidukevich. More specifically, interviews and comments are the predominant genres for both politicians (Figure 81). After that, users can check materials related to their participation in various political talk shows. New formats of interaction with audiences remain at a low level. Their publications in the format of blogs and vlogs have approximately the same percentage as talk

shows. Among other things, Groyzman releases a special video diary with the results of his work over a certain period of time. In addition, Groyzman published a link to a feature article, while Gaidukevich – to three news articles.

Ukrainian and Belarusian politicians publish posts of different sizes (Figure 82). In particular, Groyzman chooses short messages in 4 out of 5 analyzed periods. This move facilitates the perception of information for his followers. Long posts are published during the war period, or, in other words, the period of increased responsibility. A politician must interpret the situation and further actions for different audiences. This size is the second priority for him. In contrast, Gaidukevich prefers long posts during the election periods (start and development) and during the post-election period. The second priority is the medium size. It means that the Belarusian politician overloads his followers with information. This is the format of pro-government propaganda. Additionally, Gaidukevich does not publish short posts during the election period (development). A certain proportion of his messages do not have any text at all, which stands out from the general strategy. The size of his posts is less adapted to the conditions of the online environment than the size of posts on the Ukrainian page.

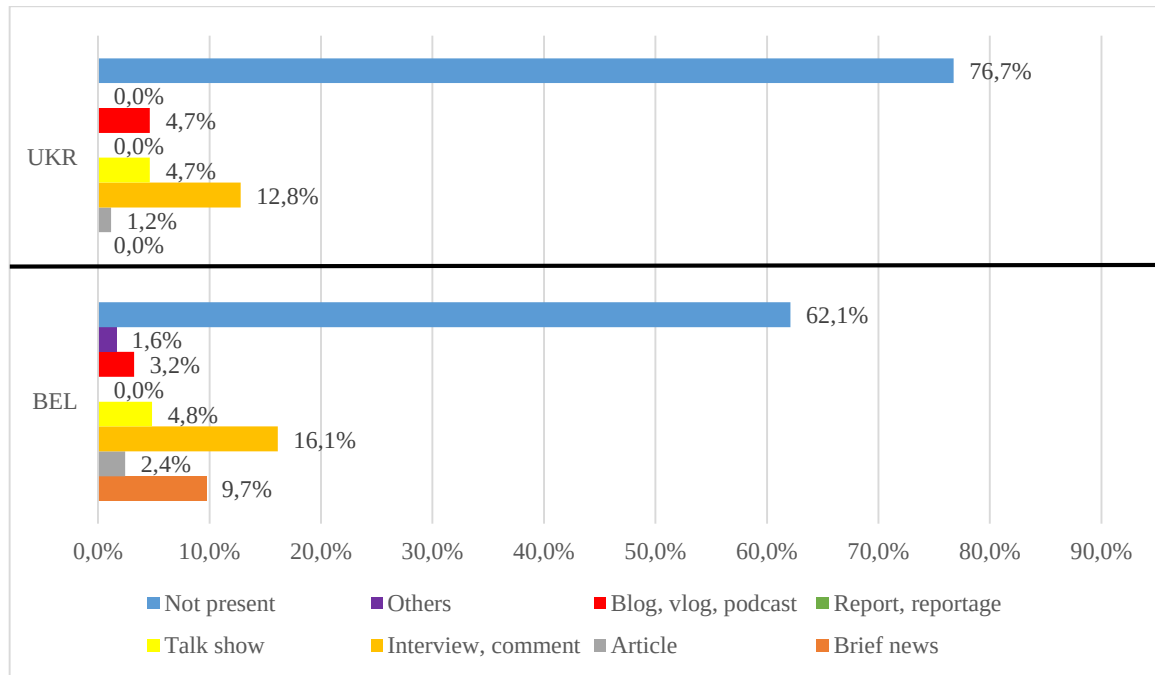
Fig. 80. Specification of replies, reposts, hyperlinks (most popular politicians)



Note: These indicators can differ from the number of posts.

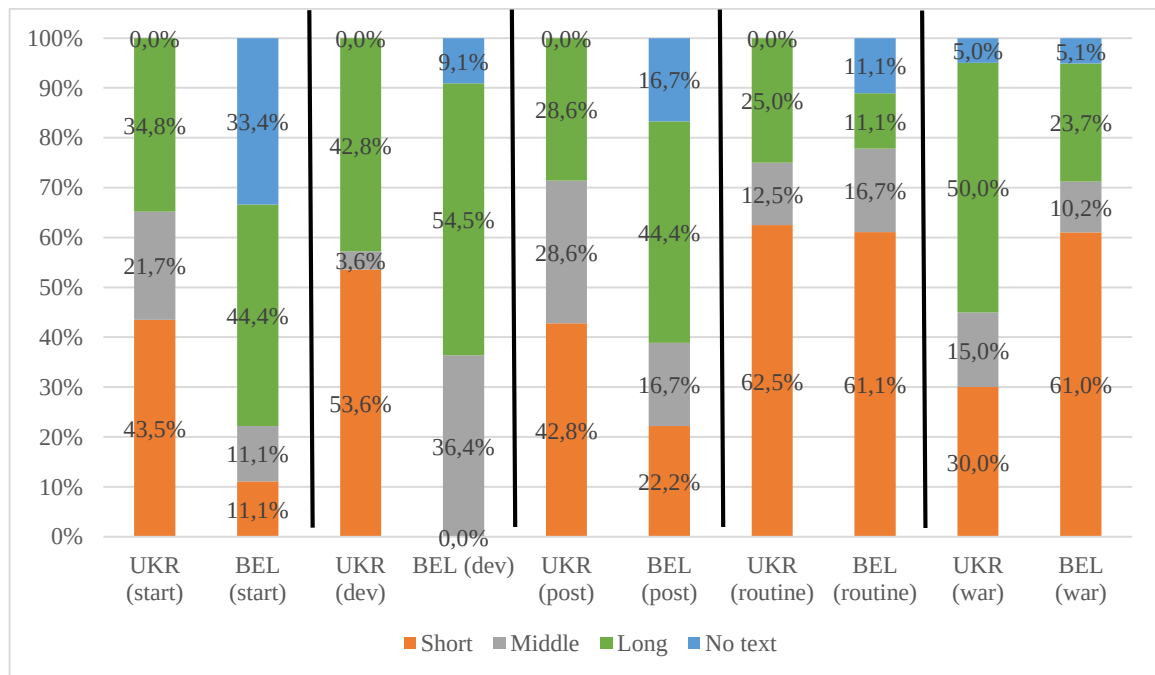
Source: Own elaboration.

Fig. 81. Genre in the posts (most popular politicians)



Source: Own elaboration.

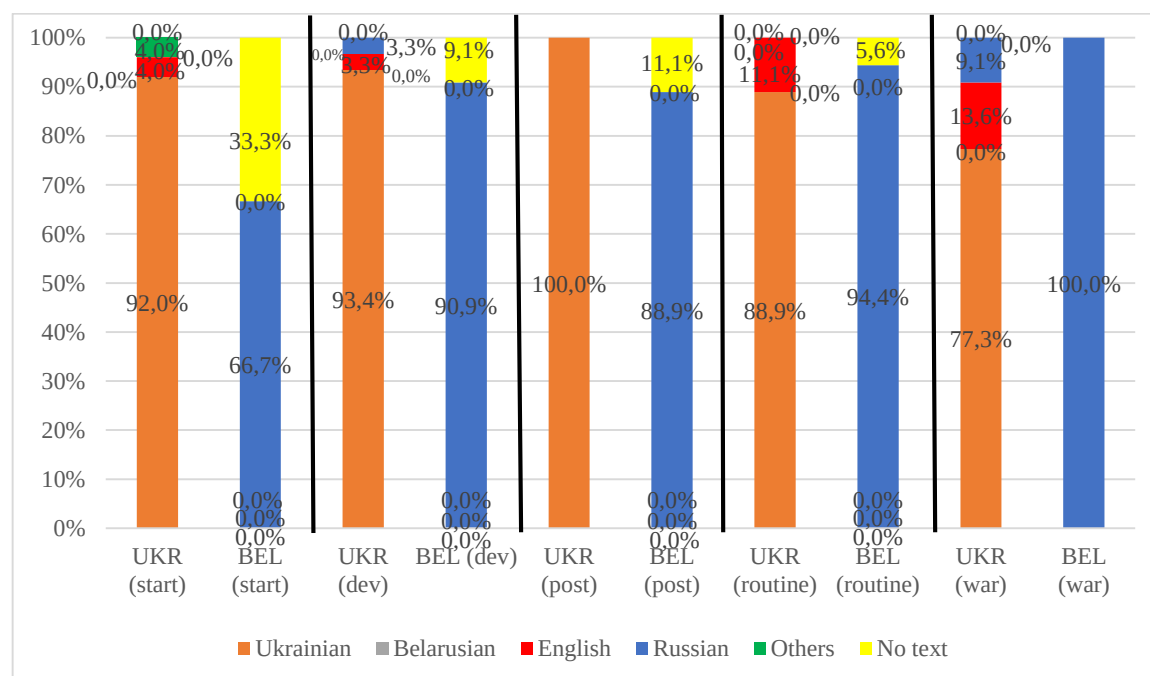
Fig. 82. Length of the posts (most popular politicians)



Source: Own elaboration.

While Gaidukevych uses exclusively Russian and completely ignores Belarusian in his posts, Groysman is more multilingual (Figure 83). His dominant language is Ukrainian. However, he also uses English and Russian. Their peak falls on the war period. The Ukrainian politician addressed foreign partners and urged the Russian society to stop the war. He compares Putin to Hitler, his regime – to Fascism and Nazism.

Fig. 83. Languages in the posts (most popular politicians)



Note: These indicators can differ from the number of posts.

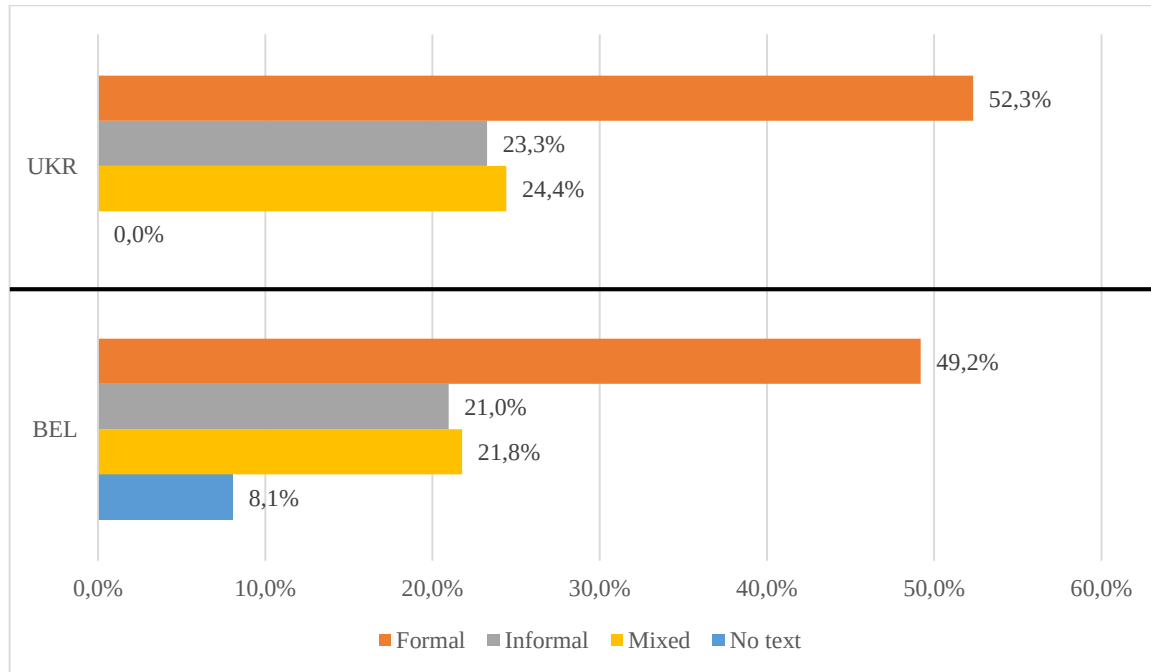
Source: Own elaboration.

Both politicians prefer a formal communication style over an informal communication style (Figure 84). A mixed style is also present. Sometimes, Groysman can call Putin a “psychopath.” Thus, these political actors try to maintain a distance from their audience, which is not typical for social media platforms.

Almost all of the proposed topics appear in the posts of Groysman and Gaidukevich (Figure 85). There are only some similarities regarding the trending period for each topic. In particular, the economic topic exists during the election period and reaches its peak during the routine period in both cases. It is not surprising that the topic of war is mostly covered during the corresponding period. However, Gaidukevich does not pay any attention to it during the election periods. Groysman omits it during the post-election period. The topic of

election is also covered during the corresponding periods (Ukraine – start, Belarus – development). After that, it almost completely disappears from the agenda.

Fig. 84. Language style (most popular politicians)



Source: Own elaboration.

There are other observations that should be described. First, the topic of health and social policy is mostly voiced during the election period (development) in Belarus. The same is typical for a Ukrainian political actor during the post-election period. After the peak, this topic completely disappears on both pages. Second, the topic of international relations is a priority in different periods. Gaidukevich operates with it during the post-election period. He imposes the idea of a “fraternal Russian people” on Belarusians and intimidates them with the Ukrainian events in case of any destabilization. Groyzman tries to attract international support during the war period. Third, the topic of culture appears best during the post-war period (the Belarusian politician) and during the routine period (the Ukrainian politician). Fourth, the topics of infrastructure and socio-cultural events are more popular in Ukraine than in Belarus, while the topic of legislation is in the opposite direction. Fifth, the topic of relations with other politicians appears in different periods (Belarus – election period, Ukraine – war period). The same applies to the topic of prosecution and criminal actions (Ukraine – election period, Belarus – routine period). Sixth, Gaidukevich focuses on personal

issues during the election period (development), while Groyzman – during the routine period. Seventh, more than three topics in a post can be found during the routine period (Belarus) and during the war period (Ukraine). Finally, all other topics are the least covered ones.

Fig. 85. Topics, issues of the posts (most popular politicians)

UKR/BEL	Election (start)	Election (development)	Post-election	Routine	War
Business and economy	10,7% / 18,2%	8,1% / 7,7%	11,1% / 7,1%	15,4% / 22,2%	2,9% / 2,7%
Health and social policy	3,6% / 4,5%	10,8% / 7,7%	33,3% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%
War, conflicts, terrorism	3,6% / 0,0%	5,4% / 0,0%	0,0% / 7,1%	23,1% / 5,6%	50,0% / 53,4%
Foreign affairs, international relations, world events	10,7% / 9,1%	5,4% / 15,4%	0,0% / 35,7%	15,4% / 0,0%	20,6% / 9,6%
Culture, education, sport	3,6% / 9,1%	10,8% / 0,0%	22,2% / 0,0%	7,7% / 16,7%	2,9% / 2,7%
Science, technology, environment, animal rights	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 1,4%
Infrastructure	7,1% / 0,0%	2,7% / 0,0%	11,1% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 1,4%
Corruption	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%
Legislation	0,0% / 0,0%	2,7% / 7,7%	0,0% / 7,1%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%
Democracy	0,0% / 0,0%	2,7% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	2,9% / 0,0%
Religion	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%
Socio-cultural and mourning events	14,3% / 9,1%	10,8% / 7,7%	0,0% / 7,1%	23,1% / 0,0%	0,0% / 1,4%
Relationships with other political actors	3,6% / 13,6%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 3,6%	0,0% / 5,6%	8,8% / 2,7%
Relationships with media	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 7,7%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%

Prosecution, civil and human rights, criminal actions	7,1% / 0,0%	0,0% / 7,7%	0,0% / 14,3%	0,0% / 16,7%	2,9% / 0,0%
Personal issues and backstage	7,1% / 4,5%	5,4% / 7,7%	0,0% / 3,6%	7,7% / 0,0%	0,0% / 1,4%
Election	10,7% / 4,5%	5,4% / 23,1%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 8,2%
Rankings and results	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 1,4%
Media literacy	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 11,1%	0,0% / 4,1%
News and views overview	7,1% / 0,0%	8,1% / 0,0%	0,0% / 7,1%	7,7% / 16,7%	8,8% / 1,4%
Others	10,7% / 13,6%	21,6% / 0,0%	22,2% / 3,6%	0,0% / 5,6%	0,0% / 8,2%
Unclear	0,0% / 13,6%	0,0% / 7,7%	0,0% / 3,6%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%

Note: 1) The number of topics was greater than the number of posts because each message could cover more than one topic; 2) Read from left to right. The idea is to identify the peak selection period for each topic (deeper analysis of strategic decision-making). Other important dynamics will be shown in general trends.

Source: Own elaboration.

Fig. 86. Functions of the posts (most popular politicians)

UKR/BEL	Election (start)	Election (development)	Post-election	Routine	War
Professional updates	34,2% / 41,7%	35,6% / 27,3%	13,3% / 33,3%	20,0% / 47,8%	12,9% / 30,4%
Image building	5,3% / 4,2%	8,9% / 13,6%	0,0% / 4,2%	10,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 1,3%
Manners and protocol	7,9% / 12,5%	8,9% / 4,5%	6,7% / 4,2%	20,0% / 0,0%	9,7% / 2,5%
Accomplishments	21,1% / 4,2%	22,2% / 4,5%	33,3% / 8,3%	10,0% / 0,0%	6,5% / 5,1%
Political advertisement	18,4% / 12,5%	11,1% / 27,3%	40,0% / 16,7%	0,0% / 8,7%	0,0% / 25,3%
Commercial advertisement	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	20,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 1,3%
Criticism	0,0% / 20,8%	4,4% / 9,1%	0,0% / 29,2%	20,0% / 30,4%	35,5% / 13,9%
Humor and entertainment	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%
Call to action	10,5% / 0,0%	6,7% / 9,1%	6,7% / 0,0%	0,0% / 13,0%	29,0% / 8,9%

Dissemination of information	0,0% / 4,2%	0,0% / 4,5%	0,0% / 4,2%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 11,4%
Multifunctional post	2,6% / 0,0%	2,2% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	6,5% / 0,0%
Others	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%

Note: 1) The number of functions was greater than the number of posts because each message could cover more than one function; 2) Read from left to right. The idea is to identify the peak selection period for each function (deeper analysis of strategic decision-making). Other important dynamics will be shown in general trends.

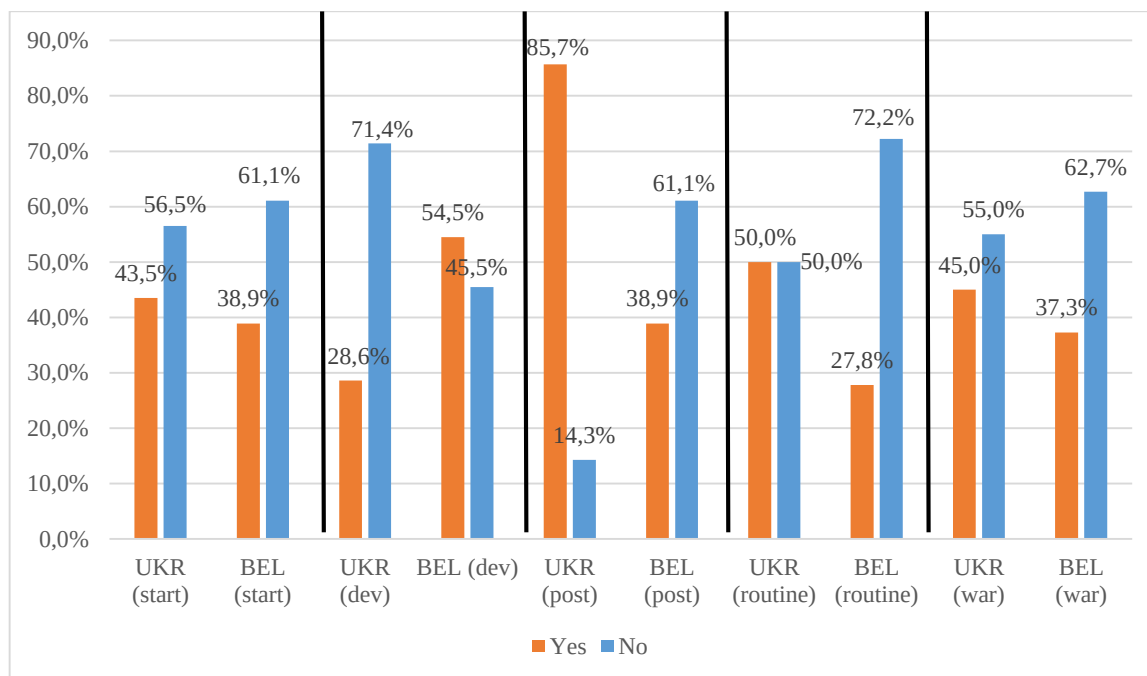
Source: Own elaboration.

Apart from humor and entertainment, Groysman and Gaidukevich use almost all other proposed functions of a post (Figure 86). However, there are practically no similarities regarding the peak period for each function. On the one hand, both politicians choose the post-election period to talk about their achievements. While Groysman often mentions the decentralization reform, Gaidukevich creates an artificial appearance of activity and change. On the other hand, the most professional updates are posted during the routine period (the Belarusian politician) and during the election periods (the Ukrainian politician). If Gaidukevich calls for action during the routine period too, Groysman uses this function during the war period. The image building and protocol functions mostly appear during the election periods (Belarus) and during the routine period (Ukraine). The most criticism is heard during the routine period (Belarus) and during the war period (Ukraine). Gaidukevich is the only politician who disseminates information. Multifunctional posts can be found exclusively on Groysman's page.

Groysman and Gaidukevich prefer textual content over multimedia content. In particular, posts with photos are the majority in only two cases (Figure 87). Gaidukevich uses them during the election period (development). He tries to increase his support through visualization. Interestingly, the Belarusian representative can post pictures separately from the text. At the same time, the Ukrainian politician includes photos during the post-election period, which is relatively calm. Such actions are not a way to diversify the content, but a desire to simplify the work. He continues to do this during the routine period, where the percentages are divided equally. He even posts two memes during the war period. Despite the fact that Groysman includes photos in his messages more often than Gaidukevich, both politicians do not want to dilute their posts with this type of multimedia content on a stable

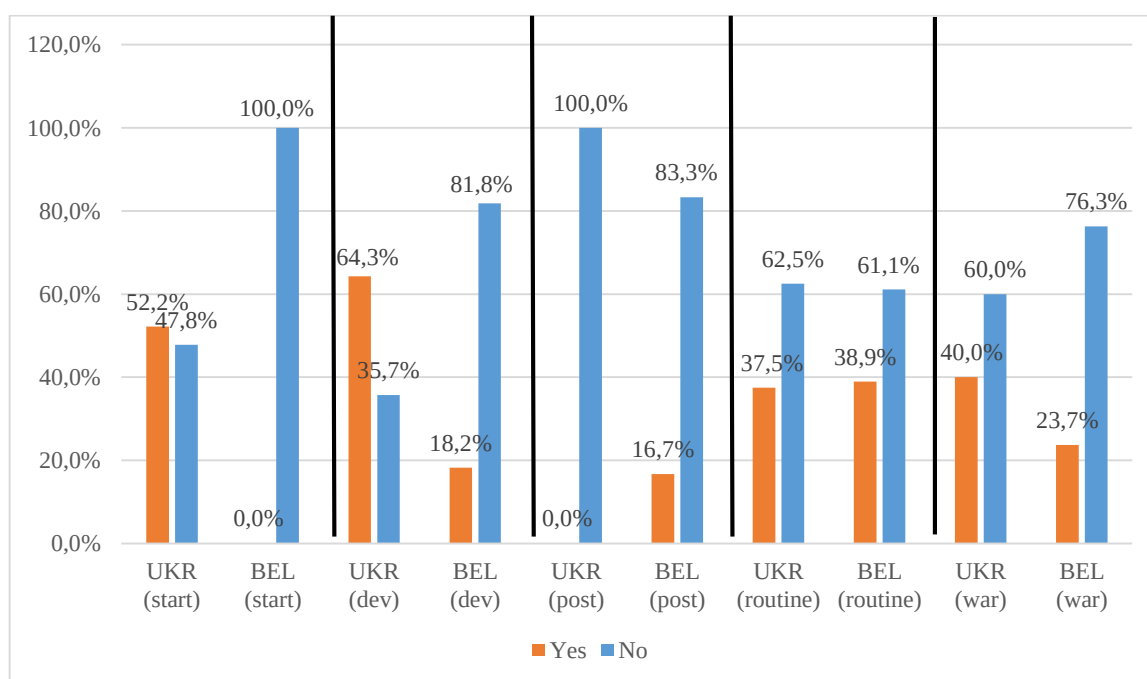
basis. Such a move could attract more audience attention because of information simplification.

Fig. 87. Photos, pictures in the posts (most popular politicians)



Source: Own elaboration.

Fig. 88. Videos in the posts (most popular politicians)

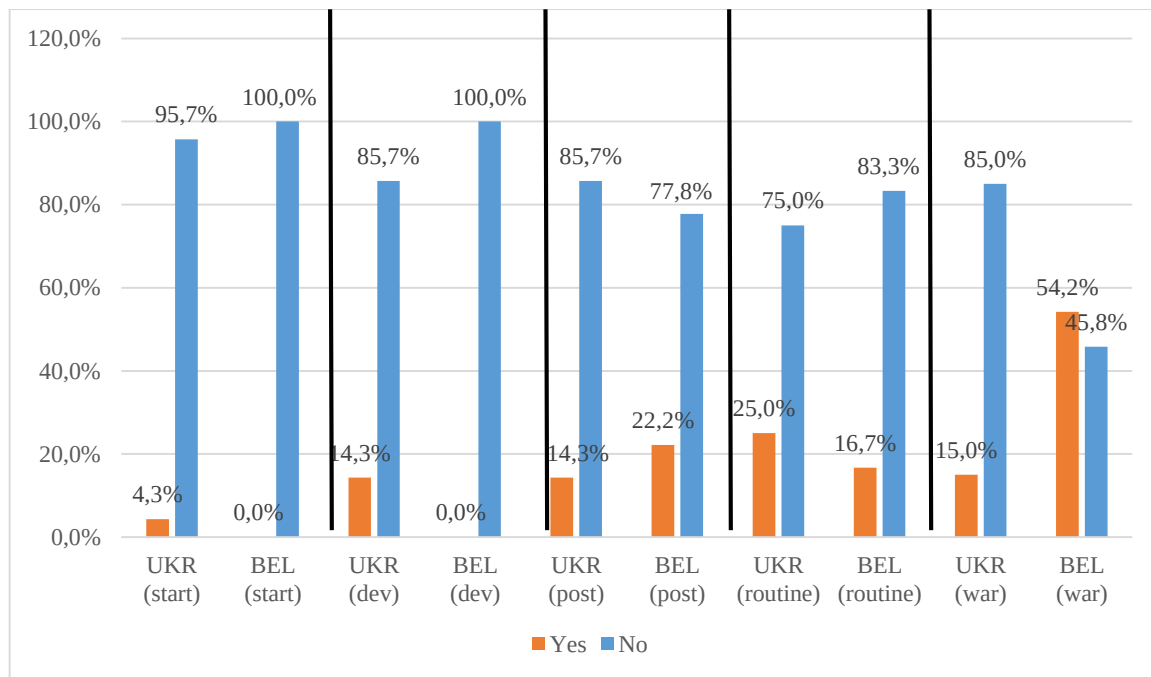


Source: Own elaboration.

The tendency continues with video content (Figure 88). On the one hand, Groysman uses this graphic element more often than Gaidukevich. On the other hand, posts with video constitute the majority in only two cases, during the election periods in Ukraine. They are completely absent during the post-election period in Ukraine and during the election period (start) in Belarus. Once again, the conclusion is that both politicians refuse to diversify their social media strategies.

As for emojis, their presence is very low in both countries (Figure 89). The only exception is the war period, when most of Gaidukevich's posts include them. Groysman's best indicator can be found during the routine period. However, it is still low.

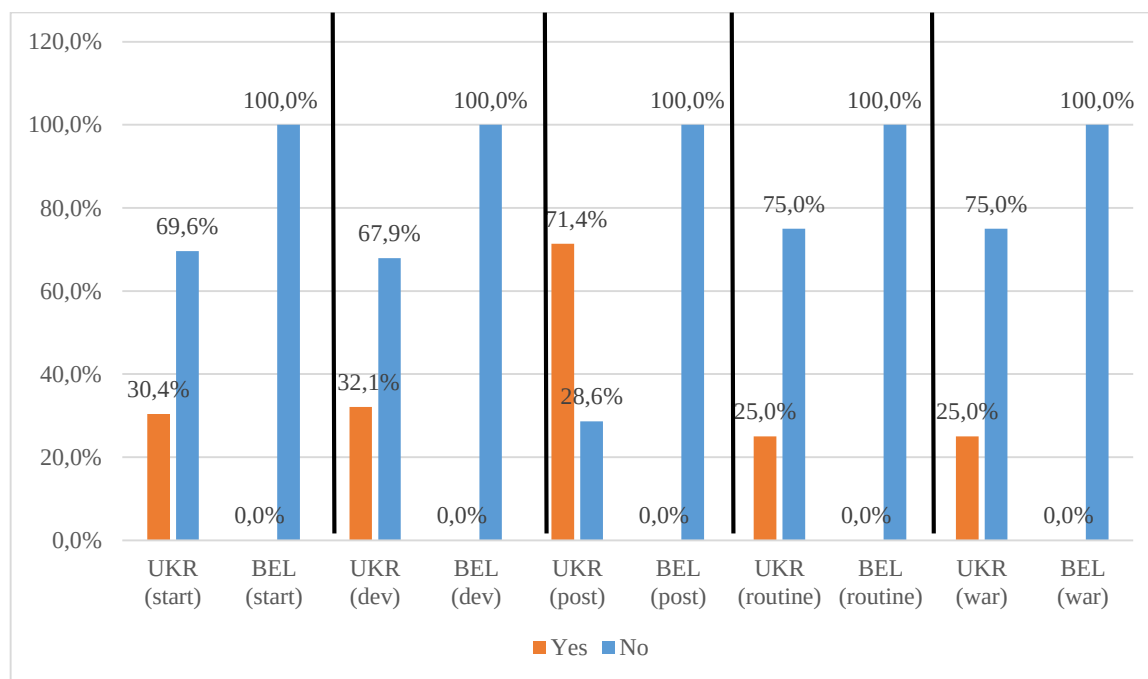
Fig. 89. Emojis in the posts (most popular politicians)



Source: Own elaboration.

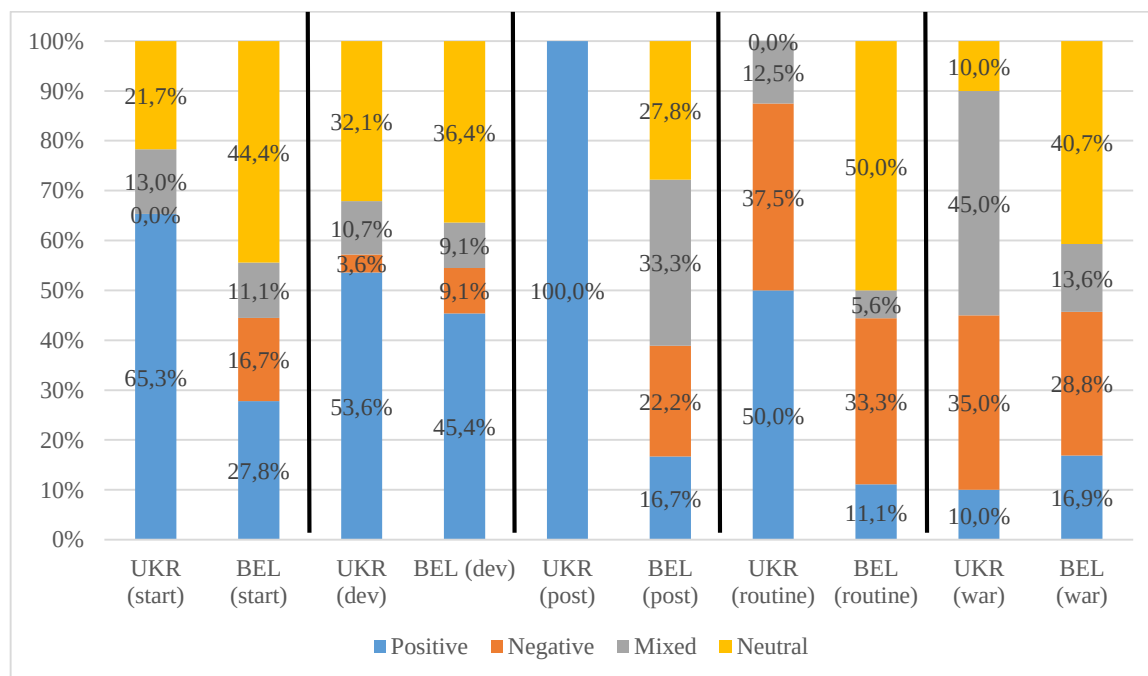
If Groysman uses hashtags at a low level, Gaidukevich does not include the # sign at all (Figure 90). The greatest presence of this element falls on the post-election period. It is used in the vast majority of posts. Nevertheless, this is another drawback of both politicians when working in the online environment.

Fig. 90. Hashtags in the posts (most popular politicians)



Source: Own elaboration.

Fig. 91. Emotional valence of the posts (most popular politicians)

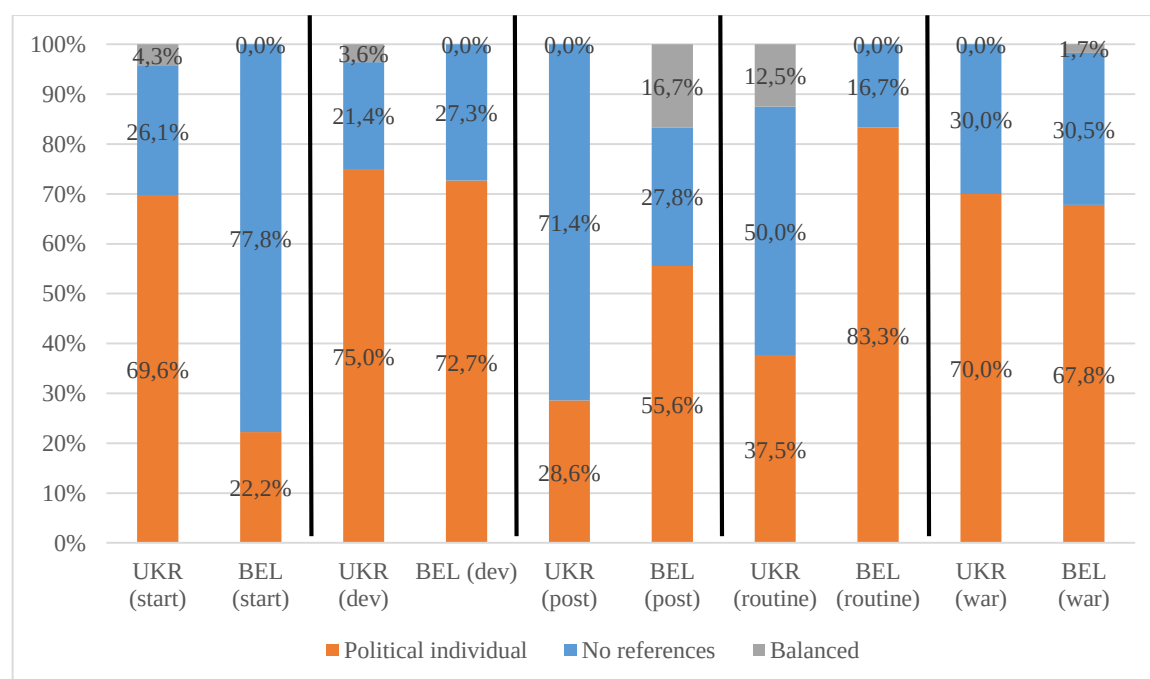


Source: Own elaboration.

The emotional tone of the two political actors differs across periods (Figure 91). It is obvious that the positive tone dominates Groysman's posts. It scores 100% during the post-election period despite his defeat. There are no negative posts during the election period (start), which is a rare phenomenon within the parliamentary competition. The only exception is the war period, when mixed posts and negative ones make up the majority of all. In turn, Gaidukevich prefers neutral posts. The share of positive posts makes up the majority during the election period (development). The post-election period is quite balanced in terms of all emotions.

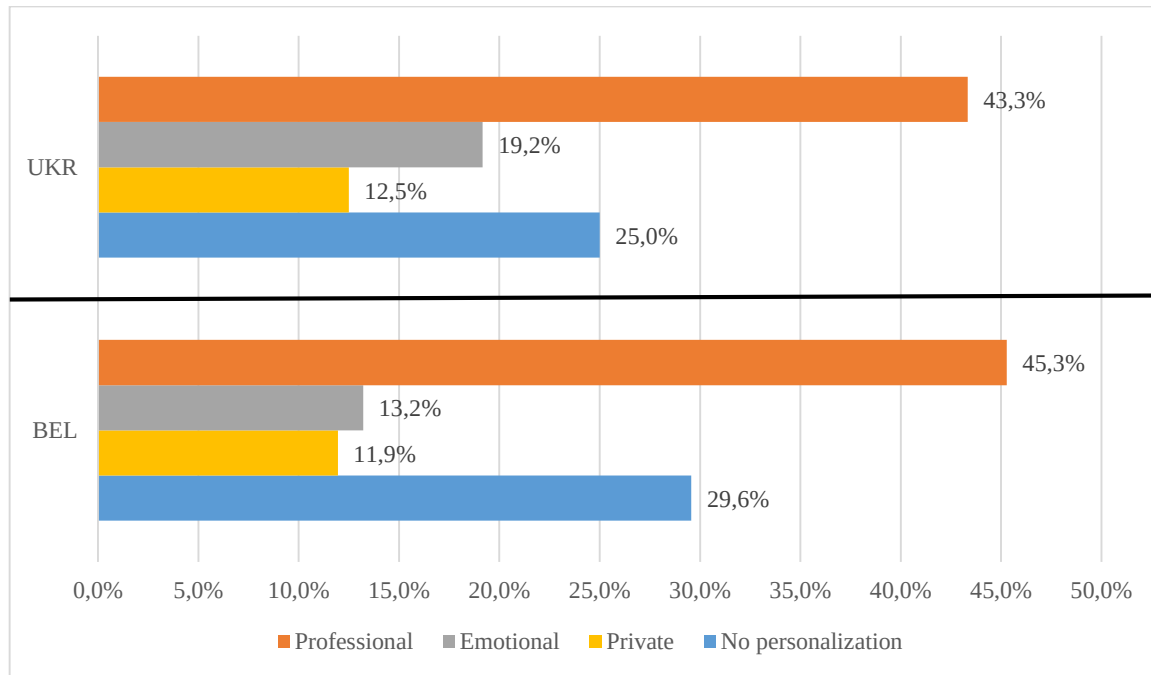
Personalization dominates the posts of both politicians (Figure 92). Most messages center on Gaidukevich in 4 out of 5 periods, while the same applies to Groysman in 3 out of 5 periods. Similar indicators of the two political actors can be observed during the election period (development) and during the war period. The most popular of all is professional personalization, while the least popular is private personalization (Figure 93). In addition, Groysman mentions his supporters more often ($n=14$) than his team ($n=12$) in posts without personalization. Gaidukevich refers to his team ($n=12$) more frequently than to his supporters ($n=7$), which is the opposite dynamic.

Fig. 92. Personalization in the posts (most popular politicians)



Source: Own elaboration.

Fig. 93. Type of personalization (most popular politicians)



Note: These indicators can differ from the number of posts.

Source: Own elaboration.

To sum up, the most popular politicians from Ukraine and Belarus still keep their distance from followers. They prefer formal, professional communication. Despite the fact that Groyzman manages his online page in a better way (e.g. type of the post, length, languages) than Gaidukevich, both politicians are still far from using the full potential of social media platforms. It is recommended to diversify their profiles in terms of various multimedia content and hashtags. Importantly, their pages have completely different priority periods in terms of proposed topics and functions.

4.4.4 Mayors

As for local governors⁷⁰, both have profile photos in formal clothes. Mayor of Brest Rogachuk adds the only inscription: “We are together!” He repeats the mistake of another Belarusian politician, Gaidukevich. This information is not enough in order to attract new subscribers. There is a need to follow the example of the Mayor of Lviv. In particular, Sadovyi is depicted with the Ukrainian flag. His BIO informs about the job position, provides

⁷⁰ As mentioned in the methodology, the Belarusian political actor of this level is Rogachuk, while the Ukrainian political actor is Sadovyi.

links to the website and various social media pages. The specified phone number and e-mail can be considered as more traditional options for feedback. Sadovyi emphasizes that he works around the clock and indicates the address of his reception room. Such details did not appear on the social media pages of the aforementioned political actors. Hence, this is the most comprehensive BIO.

Fig. 94. General statistics of the selected Ukrainian mayor on Facebook and Belarusian mayor on Telegram (account age and followers)

Political actor (country)	Account age (date of registration / date of analysis)	Followers ⁷¹	Growth of followers per day
Sadovyi (Ukraine)	4992 days (07.10.2010 / 06.06.2024)	1 100 000	220
Rogachuk (Belarus)	1431 days (08.07.2020 / 07.06.2024)	8079	6

Source: Own elaboration.

Fig. 95. General statistics of the selected Ukrainian mayor on Facebook and Belarusian mayor on Telegram (interactions)

Political actor	Sum of all interactions (Facebook: reactions + shares + comments; Telegram: views) for 5 months ⁷²	Average number of interactions per day	Interactions/followers
Sadovyi	1 494 623	9964	1.4
Rogachuk	1 650 200	11 001	204.3

Source: Own elaboration.

Fig. 96. General statistics of the selected Ukrainian mayor on Facebook and Belarusian mayor on Telegram (posts)

Political actor	Election (start)	Election (development)	Post-election period	Routine period	War period
	Total posts per month / Average number of posts per day				
Sadovyi	49 / 1.6	64 / 2.1	31 / 1	46 / 1.5	108 / 3.6

⁷¹ Facebook rounds numbers.

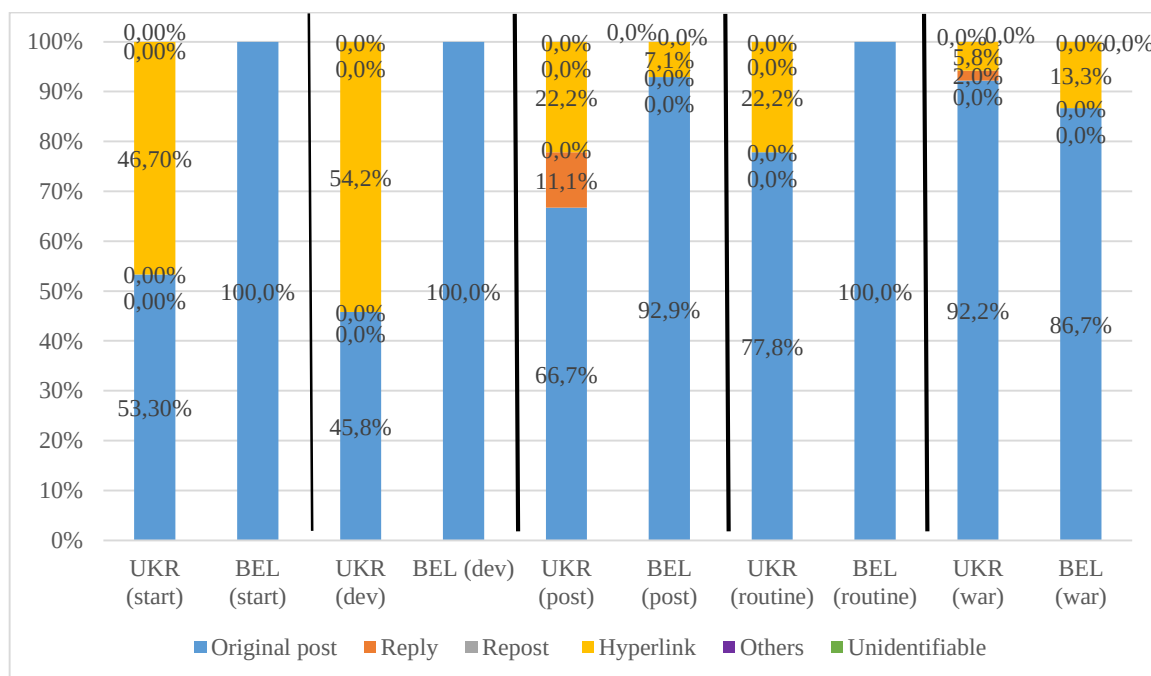
⁷² Facebook and Telegram can round numbers.

Rogachuk	68 / 2.3	47 / 1.6	45 / 1.5	54 / 1.8	53 / 1.8

Source: Own elaboration.

Considering basic statistical information, Sadovyi created his online profile much earlier than Rogachuk (Figure 94). The Ukrainian politician has significantly more followers and a higher daily growth rate. The interaction data for both is shown in an overview format (see Figure 95). In contrast, Rogachuk cares more about the people of Brest than Sadovyi about the people of Lviv in terms of communication. The former political actor sends slightly more messages to his compatriots (Figure 96). His numbers prevail during the election period (start), the post-election period, and the routine period. The latter focuses on the election period (development) and the war period. He is the first Ukrainian political actor to outnumber his Belarusian counterpart during the last research period. Since the position of mayor implies direct work with people, Sadovyi must constantly communicate with the people of Lviv in times of emergency. Unlike representatives of other political branches, Rogachuk does not have to explain the city's position on the war in another country.

Fig. 97. Type of the posts (mayors)

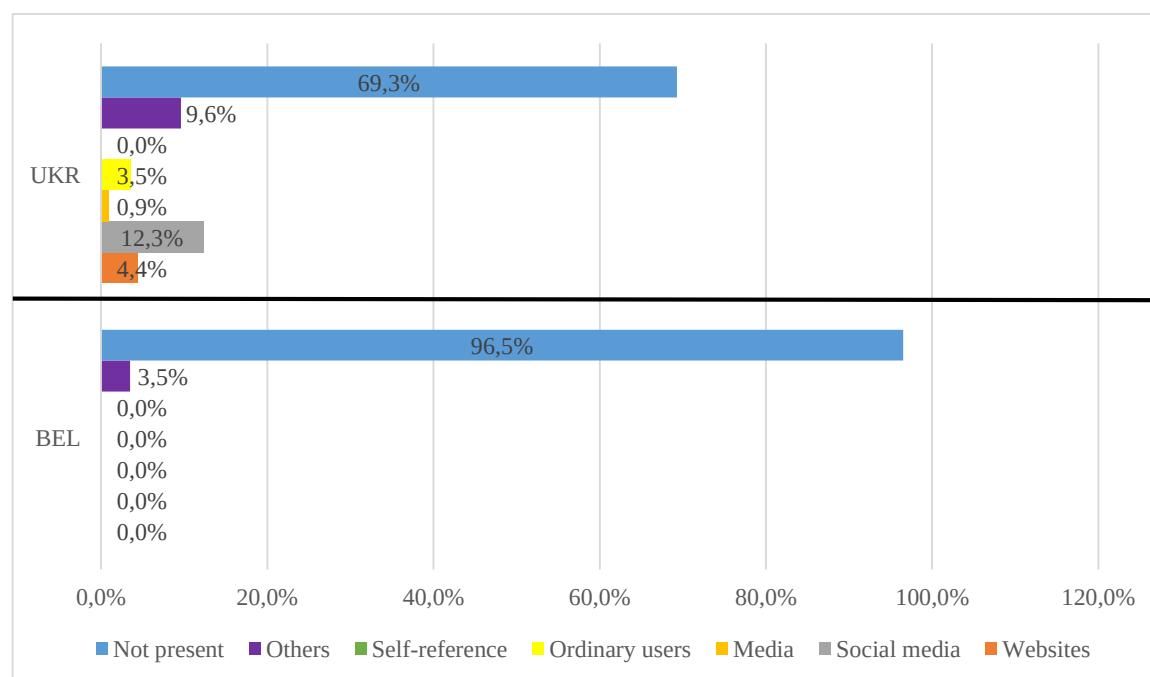


Source: Own elaboration.

Among the analyzed data on mayors, there were original posts, replies and hyperlinks (Figure 97). Rogachuk made a bet on unique messages, which coincides with the purpose of social media. As evidence, 100% indicator during the election periods and the routine period. In turn, hyperlinks made up a significant part of Sadovyi's posts. They exceeded the percentage of original messages during the election period (development). There were also replies to posts from other actors, which is a sign of horizontal interaction.

Whereas the Belarusian mayor preferred original posts, the Ukrainian mayor had more diversity among sources (Figure 98). The largest number of replies and hyperlinks were to other social media accounts. After that, websites and regular users accounted for almost the same percentage. Among the "others" category was the profile of the Leopold Jazz Festival.

Fig. 98. Specification of replies, reposts, hyperlinks (mayors)

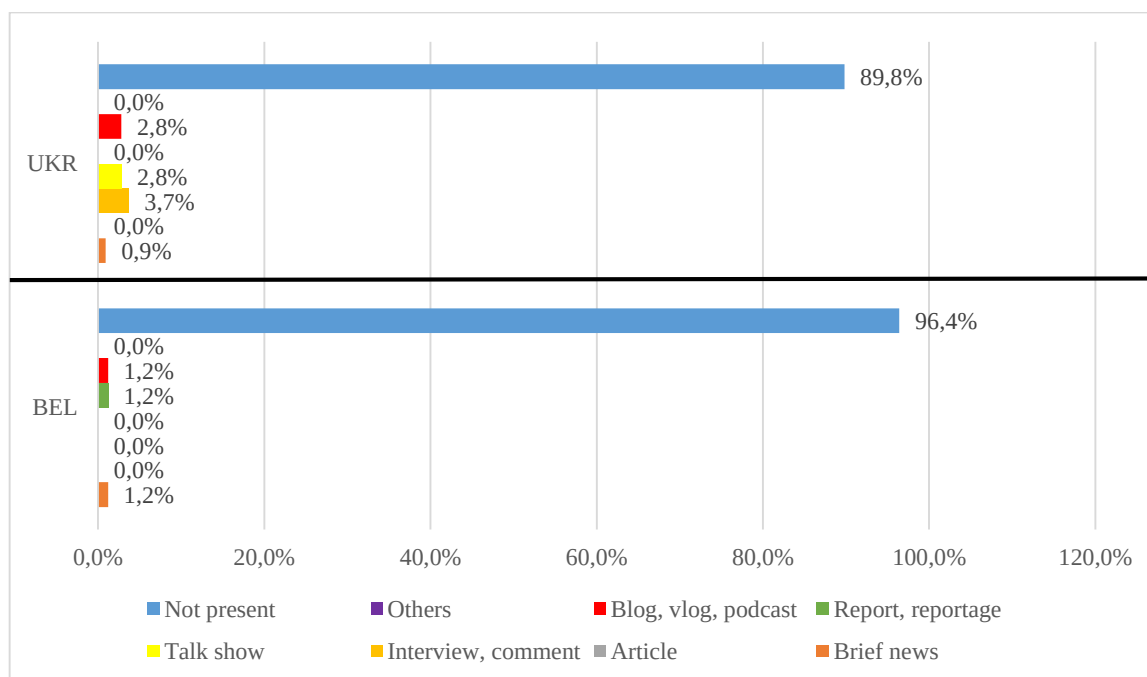


Note: These indicators can differ from the number of posts.

Source: Own elaboration.

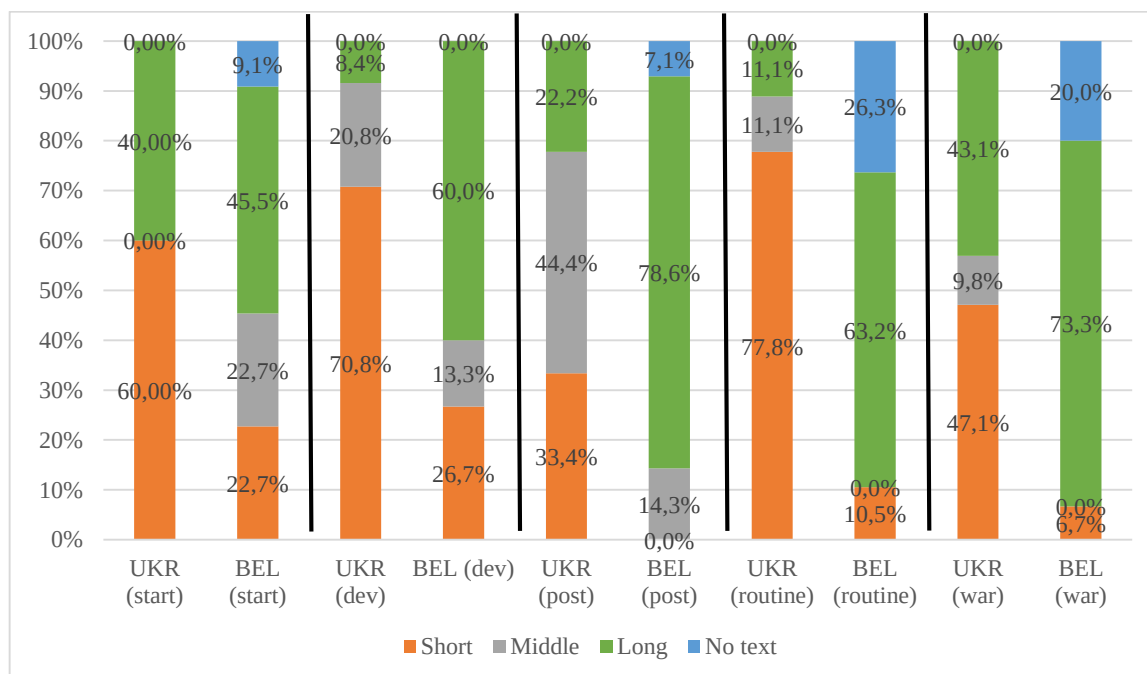
As for genres (Figure 99), Sadovyi preferred conversational formats of interview and talk show. Rogachuk published more traditional short news and reports on the events in Brest. Although the general share was insignificant, the former had more vlogs than the latter.

Fig. 99. Genre in the posts (mayors)



Source: Own elaboration.

Fig. 100. Length of the posts (mayors)

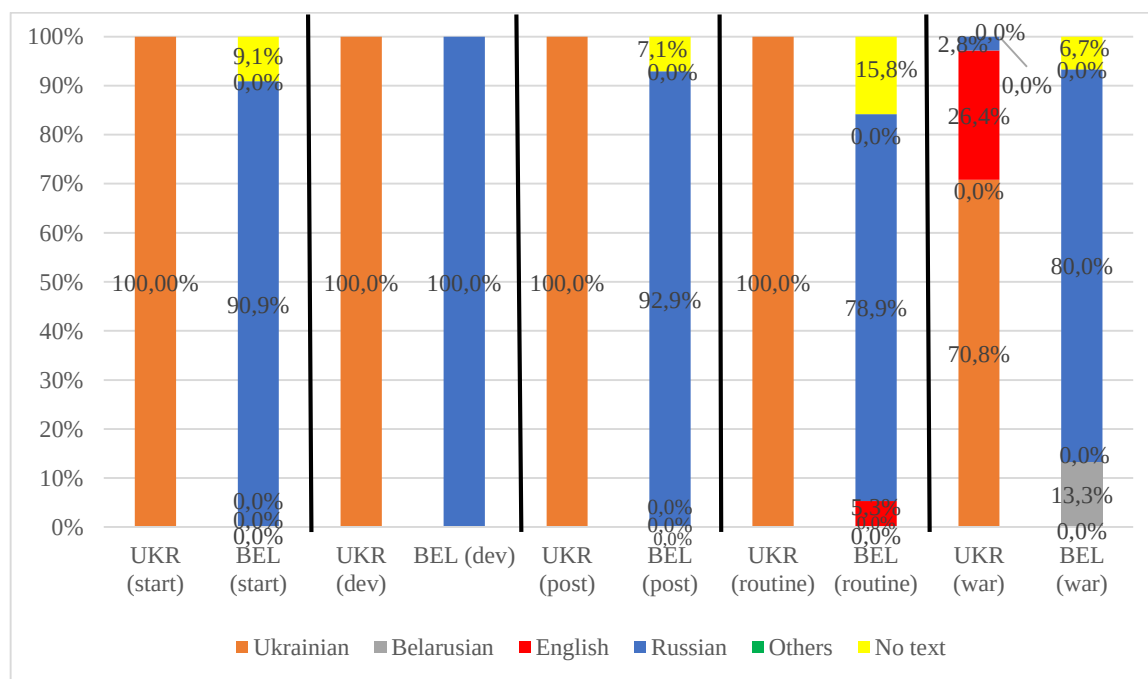


Source: Own elaboration.

There was an obvious contrast in terms of post size (Figure 100). While Sadovyi tried to communicate through short messages, Rogachuk wrote long messages. The former had a more diverse online publishing strategy. It was not supposed to overload the audience. The post-election period was even characterized by the prevalence of medium-sized posts. The latter disseminated more information, but he was less adapted to the social media format in this category. Sometimes, the Belarusian mayor did not know how to use the available tools of his Telegram channel. He posted pictures separately from text messages.

Another difference was in the language of posts (Figure 101). In particular, Sadovyi exclusively posted in his native language during 4 out of 5 periods. English and Russian were added during the war period in order to appeal to diverse international audiences. At the same time, Rogachuk communicated with his followers in Russian. Some transformations occurred during the routine period and the war period. They brought posts in English and eventually in Belarusian.

Fig. 101. Languages in the posts (mayors)



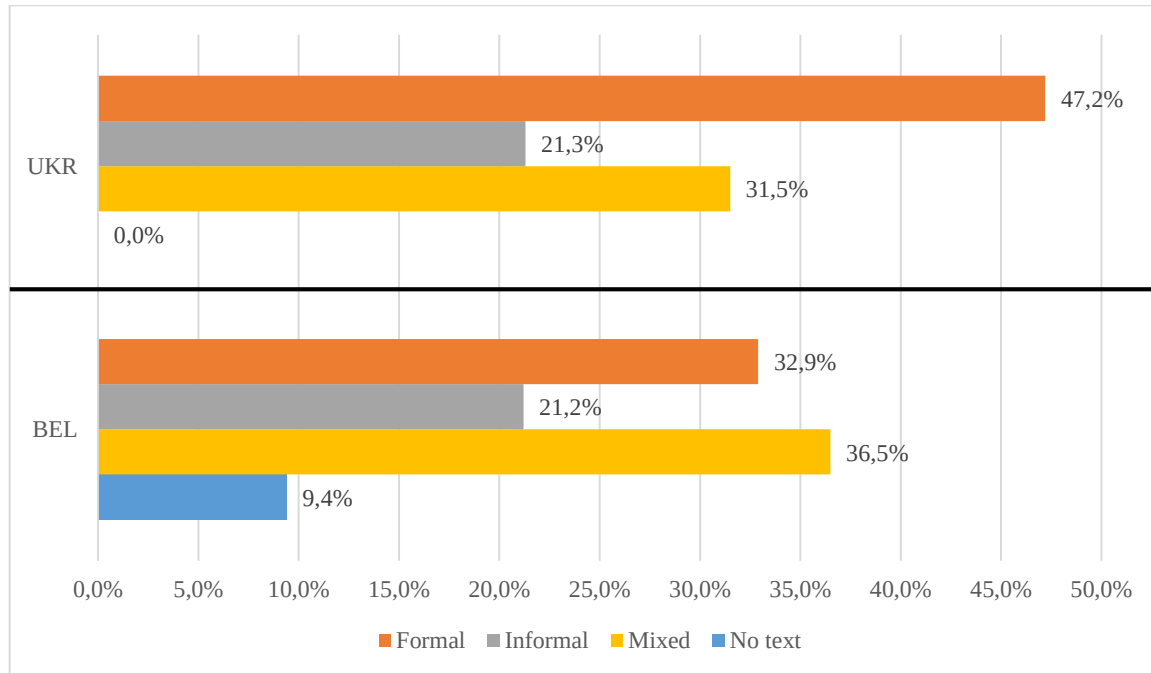
Note: These indicators can differ from the number of posts.

Source: Own elaboration.

If the Ukrainian mayor used a formal style in his posts, the Belarusian mayor operated with a mixed style (Figure 102). It means that Rogachuk found a balance between professional

and private accents. Sadovyi should have done the same, since his messages included subordination on the “mayor-citizen” axis. In addition, both candidates had the same share of informal messages.

Fig. 102. Language style (mayors)



Source: Own elaboration.

There are only some similarities between Sadovyi and Rogachuk regarding the key period for choosing a particular topic (Figure 103). Their health posts peaked during the routine period. Rogachuk announced a large-scale vaccination campaign. He called on the people of Brest to take action and ended his messages with the words: “Take care of yourself.” Another similarity was the largest number of posts about the war during the corresponding period. These events showed Sadovyi’s concern for Ukrainians. He posted numerous air alert messages and urged everyone to engage in territorial defense. As for the topics of culture and science, the Ukrainian mayor revealed them during the election period (development), while the Belarusian mayor did the same during the post-election period. The former promoted movies and the Leopold Jazz Festival in Lviv. The latter invited Belarusians to watch football.

Moving forward, Rogachuk gave the greatest preference to the topics of the economy and personal issues during the election period (start). He published the most posts on international relations and criminal offenses during the election period (development). The highest percentage of posts about socio-cultural events and elections coincided during the war period. In turn, Sadovyi mostly wrote about elections, religion and criminal actions during the election period (start). He focused on the economy and international issues during the post-election period. Democracy, relations with other politicians and multi-topic posts appeared exclusively on his page. He often attacked President Poroshenko and complained about the pressure on his family. Both mayors did not publish other topics (corruption, media, and legislation).

Fig. 103. Topics, issues of the posts (mayors)

UKR/BEL	Election (start)	Election (development)	Post-election	Routine	War
Business and economy	0,0% / 22,2%	2,9% / 16,7%	15,3% / 0,0%	0,0% / 8,0%	4,4% / 13,6%
Health and social policy	0,0% / 3,7%	0,0% / 5,6%	7,7% / 18,8%	9,1% / 52,0%	5,9% / 9,1%
War, conflicts, terrorism	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 5,6%	7,7% / 0,0%	9,1% / 0,0%	67,7% / 9,1%
Foreign affairs, international relations, world events	0,0% / 0,0%	2,9% / 5,6%	23,1% / 0,0%	0,0% / 4,0%	2,9% / 0,0%
Culture, education, sport	0,0% / 3,7%	40,0% / 16,6%	23,1% / 18,8%	18,2% / 16,0%	2,9% / 4,5%
Science, technology, environment, animal rights	0,0% / 0,0%	2,9% / 0,0%	0,0% / 12,4%	0,0% / 4,0%	0,0% / 9,1%
Infrastructure	0,0% / 22,2%	2,9% / 5,6%	7,7% / 31,3%	0,0% / 12,0%	5,9% / 18,2%
Corruption	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%
Legislation	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 4,5%
Democracy	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	9,1% / 0,0%	1,5% / 0,0%
Religion	0,0% / 3,7%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	18,2% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%

Socio-cultural and mourning events	10,0% / 7,5%	2,9% / 5,6%	7,7% / 6,3%	18,2% / 0,0%	0,0% / 22,8%
Relationships with other political actors	30,0% / 0,0%	2,9% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%
Relationships with media	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%
Prosecution, civil and human rights, criminal actions	30,0% / 0,0%	2,9% / 11,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	9,1% / 0,0%	2,9% / 0,0%
Personal issues and backstage	5,0% / 14,8%	28,4% / 11,0%	7,7% / 0,0%	9,1% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%
Election	20,0% / 0,0%	2,9% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 9,1%
Rankings and results	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%
Media literacy	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	4,4% / 0,0%
News and views overview	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	1,5% / 0,0%
Others	5,0% / 11,1%	8,4% / 0,0%	0,0% / 12,4%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%
Unclear	0,0% / 11,1%	0,0% / 16,7%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 4,0%	0,0% / 0,0%

Note: 1) The number of topics was greater than the number of posts because each message could cover more than one topic; 2) Read from left to right. The idea is to identify the peak selection period for each topic (deeper analysis of strategic decision-making). Other important dynamics will be shown in general trends.

Source: Own elaboration.

Unlike the topics, there are many similarities regarding the peak period assigned to each function (Figure 104). The largest percentage of political advertising fell on the election period (start) for the two mayors. They showed the most achievements during the election period (development). The call to action was most characteristic during the routine period. The greatest number of professional updates was published during the war period. The functions of image building and humor were most frequently used during the election periods. Neither Sadovyi nor Rogachuk had commercial advertisement in their posts.

There are also a small number of differences that cannot be ignored. In particular, the protocol function was applied during the post-election period (the Belarusian mayor) and during the

routine period (the Ukrainian mayor). The function of information dissemination and multifunctional posts refer exclusively to Rogachuk, while only Sadovyi used criticism in his messages.

Fig. 104. Functions of the posts (mayors)

UKR/BEL	Election (start)	Election (development)	Post-election	Routine	War
Professional updates	17,9% / 28,1%	8,2% / 35,0%	38,4% / 55,0%	36,3% / 30,8%	45,8% / 66,6%
Image building	3,6% / 9,4%	12,1% / 5,0%	7,7% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%
Manners and protocol	17,9% / 6,3%	8,2% / 10,0%	23,1% / 20,0%	27,3% / 7,7%	12,3% / 5,6%
Accomplishments	7,1% / 18,7%	8,2% / 25,0%	0,0% / 15,0%	0,0% / 19,2%	4,9% / 22,2%
Political advertisement	10,7% / 6,3%	8,2% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	2,5% / 0,0%
Commercial advertisement	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%
Criticism	25,0% / 0,0%	8,2% / 0,0%	7,7% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	1,2% / 0,0%
Humor and entertainment	3,6% / 3,1%	28,5% / 0,0%	15,4% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%
Call to action	14,2% / 21,9%	18,4% / 15,0%	7,7% / 5,0%	27,3% / 26,9%	33,3% / 5,6%
Dissemination of information	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 10,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 15,4%	0,0% / 0,0%
Multifunctional post	0,0% / 3,1%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%
Others	0,0% / 3,1%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 5,0%	9,1% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%

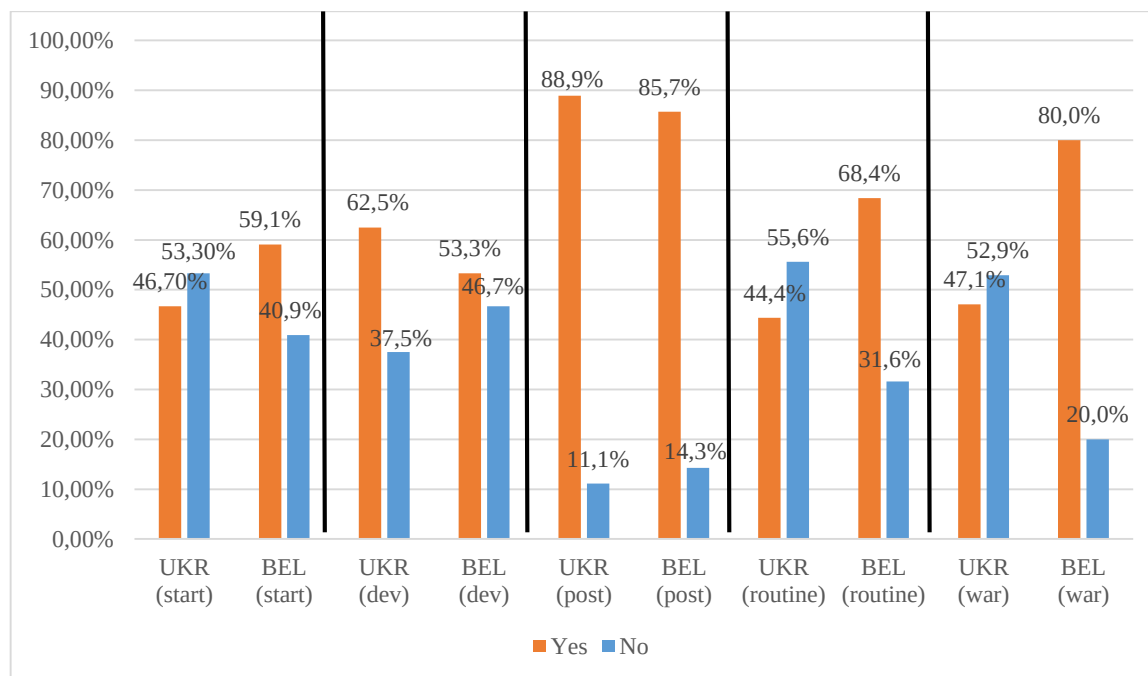
Note: 1) The number of functions was greater than the number of posts because each message could cover more than one function; 2) Read from left to right. The idea is to identify the peak selection period for each function (deeper analysis of strategic decision-making). Other important dynamics will be shown in general trends.

Source: Own elaboration.

If Rogachuk diversified a significant majority of his posts with pictures, Sadovyi was close to such indicators (Figure 105). On the one hand, the Belarusian mayor dominated during the election period (start), the routine period, and the war period. On the other hand, the Ukrainian mayor had more graphic elements of this type during the election period

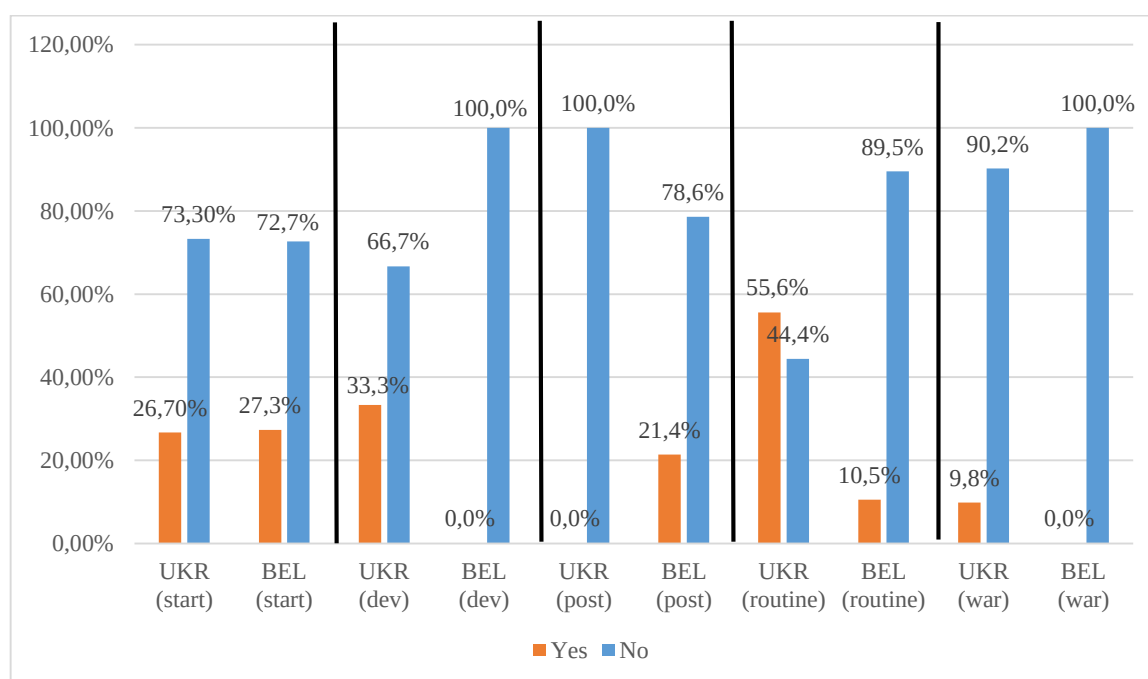
(development) and the post-election period. The posts with photos accounted for slightly less than half of the share in all other periods.

Fig. 105. Photos, pictures in the posts (mayors)



Source: Own elaboration.

Fig. 106. Videos in the posts (mayors)

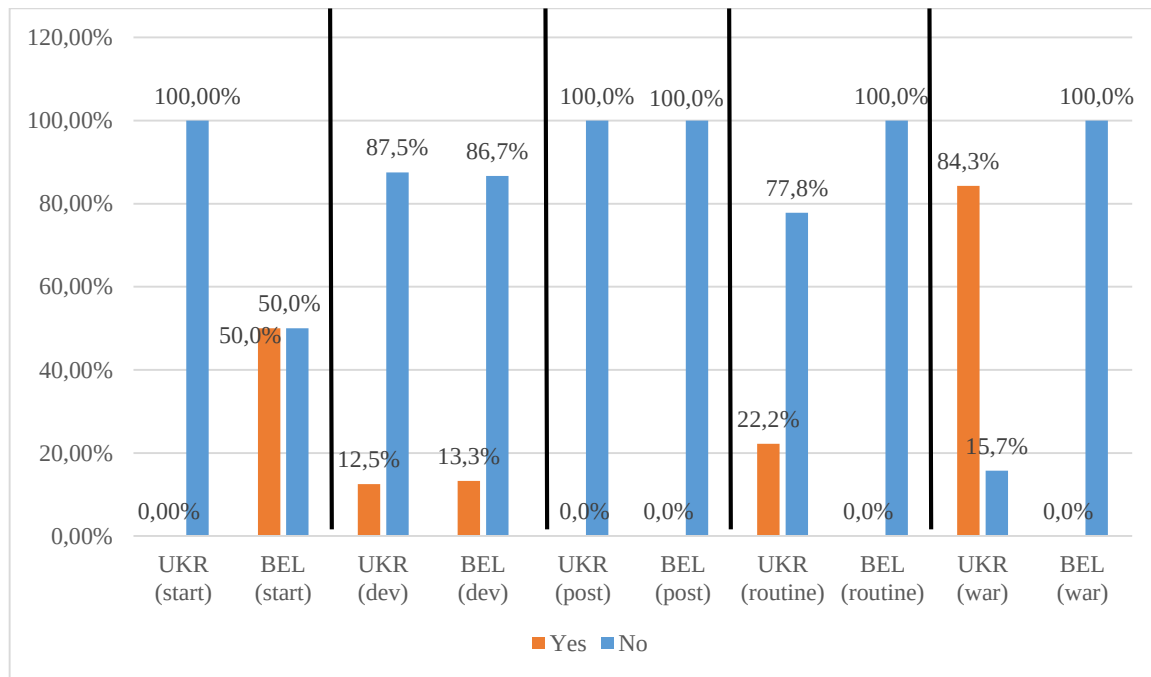


Source: Own elaboration.

The share of videos was drastically lower in both cases (Figure 106). It worsens the attractiveness of the proposed information. At the beginning, the two political actors published approximately the same number of posts with videos. After that, the Ukrainian mayor slightly increased their amount. The Belarusian mayor completely excluded them. During the post-election period, the situation changed in the opposite direction. The largest number of posts with videos was published by Sadovyi during the routine period. Finally, such content was somewhat present on the Ukrainian mayor's page and completely absent on the Belarusian mayor's channel during the war period.

The key periods for incorporating emojis were the first election period (Belarusian political actor) and the war period (Ukrainian political actor). There was approximately the same number of posts during the election period (development). Sadovyi also organized his text during the routine period. Figure 107 captured all the necessary indicators. As observed, there was a noticeable tendency to use this graphic element during important periods from one side or the other. Nonetheless, it was still relatively low.

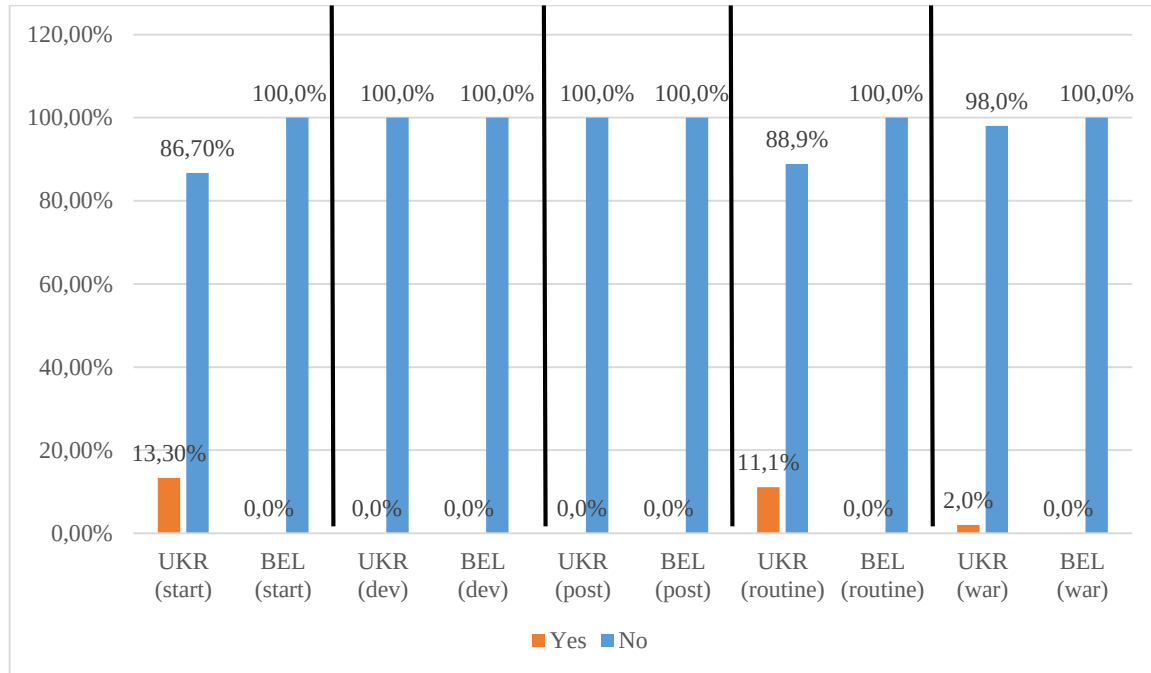
Fig. 107. Emojis in the posts (mayors)



Source: Own elaboration.

Almost nothing could be said about the presence of hashtags (Figure 108). Only Ukrainian political actors used this connective element. It happened in small quantities during the election period (start), the routine period, and the war period.

Fig. 108. Hashtags in the posts (mayors)



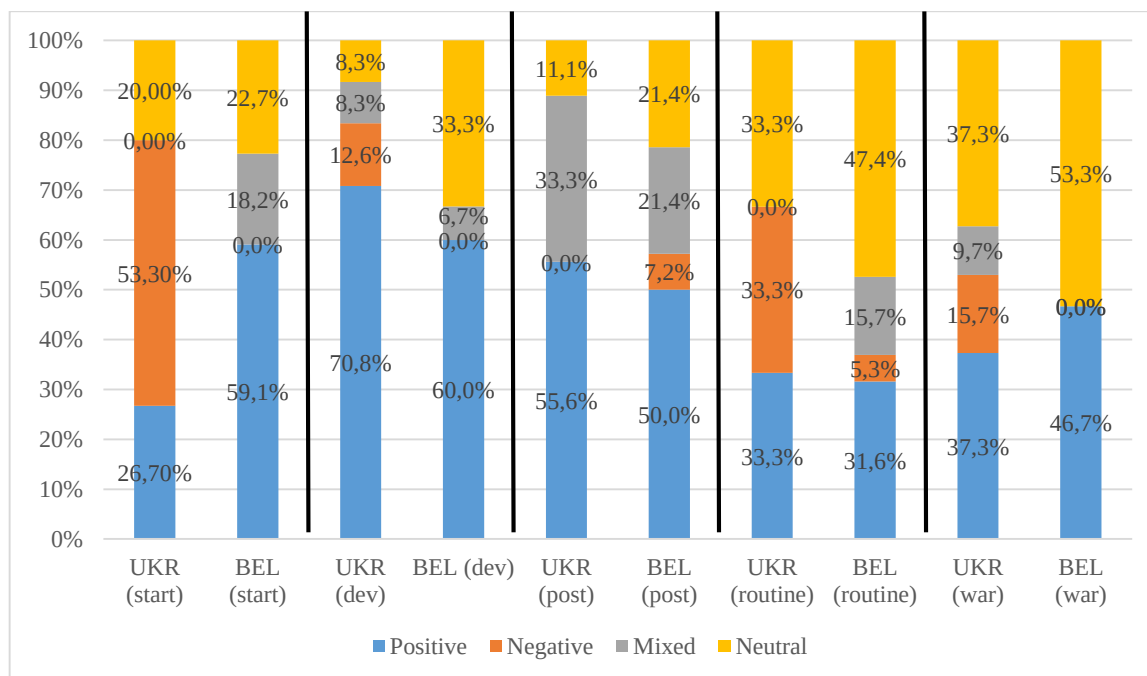
Source: Own elaboration.

It was interesting to consider the emotional valence of posts across different time periods (Figure 109). From one perspective, the Belarusian mayor produced mostly positive or neutral narratives. He paid little attention to negative events in the country. From another perspective, the Ukrainian mayor had a chaotic distribution of emotions. During the start of the election period, most posts were negative. They changed to a positive tone during the following phases. The most balanced was the routine period, when the percentage ratio between positive, negative and neutral posts was exactly the same. In addition, Sadovyi maintained a positive or neutral valence during the war period.

Personalization in the posts of both mayors was limited to the election period (beginning). After that, it was maintained at a low level. The main indicators were reflected in Figure 110. According to its distribution by types (Figure 111), the most popular was professional personalization, which is typical for Ukraine and Belarus. If private and emotional

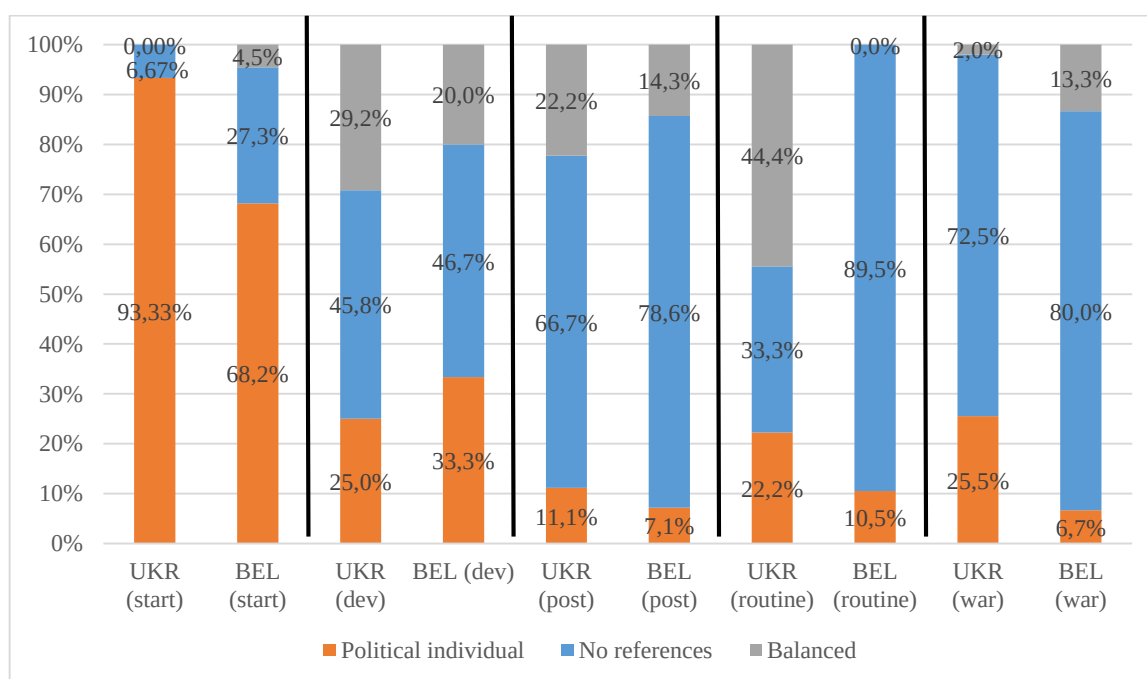
personalization had the same indicators in Sadovyi's posts, the former was more present in Rogachuk's posts.

Fig. 109. Emotional valence of the posts (mayors)



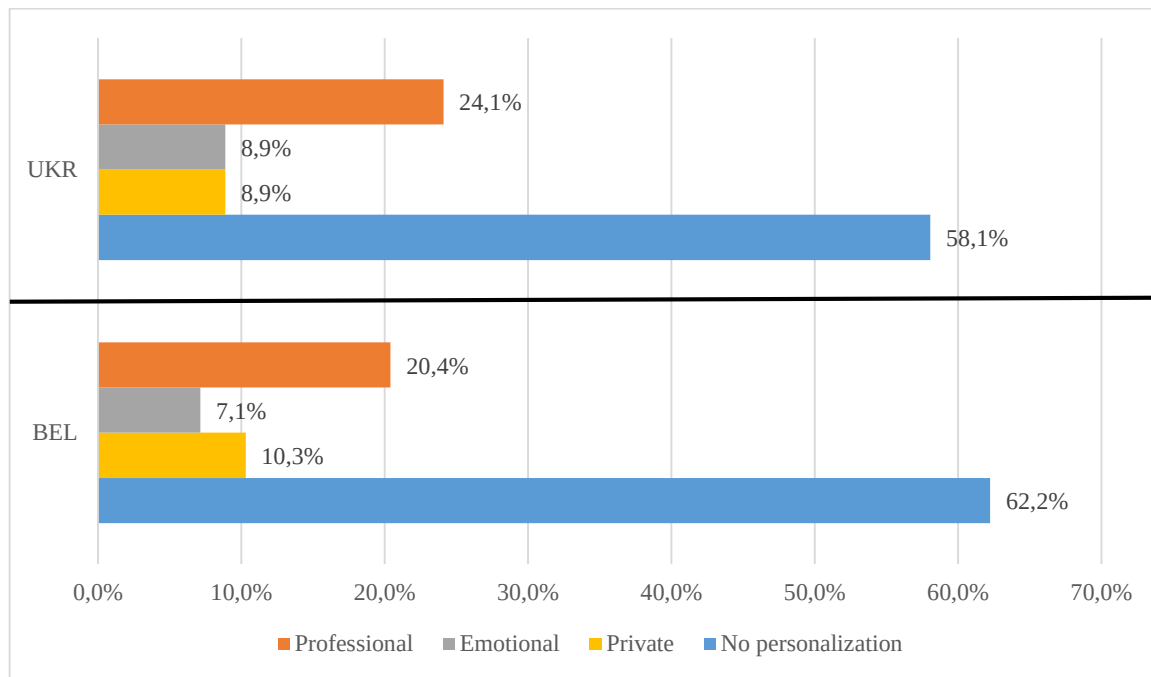
Source: Own elaboration.

Fig. 110. Personalization in the posts (mayors)



Source: Own elaboration.

Fig. 111. Type of personalization (mayors)



Note: These indicators can differ from the number of posts.

Source: Own elaboration.

In conclusion, both mayors tried to exploit the possibilities of social media in their own way. Potential disadvantages were compensated by advantages and vice versa. Among other things, if the functions of the posts were similar enough, the differences in topics indicated the contextual orientation of each political actor.

On the Ukrainian side, Sadovyi produced original content mixed with hyperlinks to various social media. He chose short messages in his native language, which was in line with general digital trends. However, he used a formal style. The presence of multimedia elements and personalization was limited to certain periods. Hashtags appeared rarely. This contradicted the fundamental principles of communication via social media.

On the Belarusian side, Rogachuk focused on unique content and maintained a balance with the mixed style. His posts were diluted with pictures. They were dominated by positive valence in order to form an attractive image. At the same time, the Belarusian mayor lacked brevity. He used emojis only during the election period (start), while videos occupied a small

share of his messages. There were no hashtags at all. Personalization was also present during the first period.

Both political actors are recommended to improve their communication by growing the number of multimedia elements and hashtags. It can improve the visual appeal of the posts, as well as their connectedness. If Sadovyi should add more informal or mixed messages for the sake of liveliness, Rogachuk should reduce the amount of information for better consumption. The development of balanced personalization in posts is also desirable for stronger perception of the mayors.

4.4.5 Bloggers/influencers

The last level of this analysis presents political actors with blurred boundaries of activity⁷³. Although both are directly involved in politics, they try to avoid mentioning it in their social media BIOographies. Ukrainian blogger Shariy calls himself as “the author of digital content” and “the media expert.” He indicates his own website as the main place of work. In a similar way, Belarusian influencers NEXTA Live confidently describe themselves as “the Media №1.” The former is depicted on the main photo of the Facebook page. The latter have their own symbol of the Telegram channel. Both political actors have verification marks (the only pair) and promote their other social media pages. However, the Belarusian team looks like a stronger collective player. They provide options for feedback (chat and email), a contact profile for collaboration, and the opportunity to help them in the form of donations via PayPal.

Fig. 112. General statistics of the selected Ukrainian blogger/influencer on Facebook and Belarusian blogger/influencer on Telegram (account age and followers)

Political actor (country)	Account age (date of registration / date of analysis)	Followers ⁷⁴	Growth of followers per day
Shariy (Ukraine)	5742 days (17.09.2008 / 06.06.2024)	332 000	58

⁷³ As mentioned in the methodology, the Belarusian political actor of this level is NEXTA Live, while the Ukrainian political actor is Shariy.

⁷⁴ Facebook rounds numbers.

NEXTA Live (Belarus)	1941 days (14.02.2019 / 07.06.2024)	965 285	497

Source: Own elaboration.

Fig. 113. General statistics of the selected Ukrainian blogger/influencer on Facebook and Belarusian blogger/influencer on Telegram (interactions)

Political actor	Sum of all interactions (Facebook: reactions + shares + comments; Telegram: views) for 5 months ⁷⁵	Average number of interactions per day	Interactions/followers
Shariy	894 658	5964	2.7
NEXTA Live	5 029 986 253	33 533 242	5210.9

Source: Own elaboration.

Fig. 114. General statistics of the selected Ukrainian blogger/influencer on Facebook and Belarusian blogger/influencer on Telegram (posts)

Political actor	Election (start)	Election (development)	Post-election period	Routine period	War period
	Total posts per month / Average number of posts per day				
Shariy	111 / 3.7	127 / 4.2	72 / 2.4	146 / 4.9	64 / 2.1
NEXTA Live	277 / 9.2	493 / 16.4	154 / 5.1	186 / 6.2	6281 / 209

Source: Own elaboration.

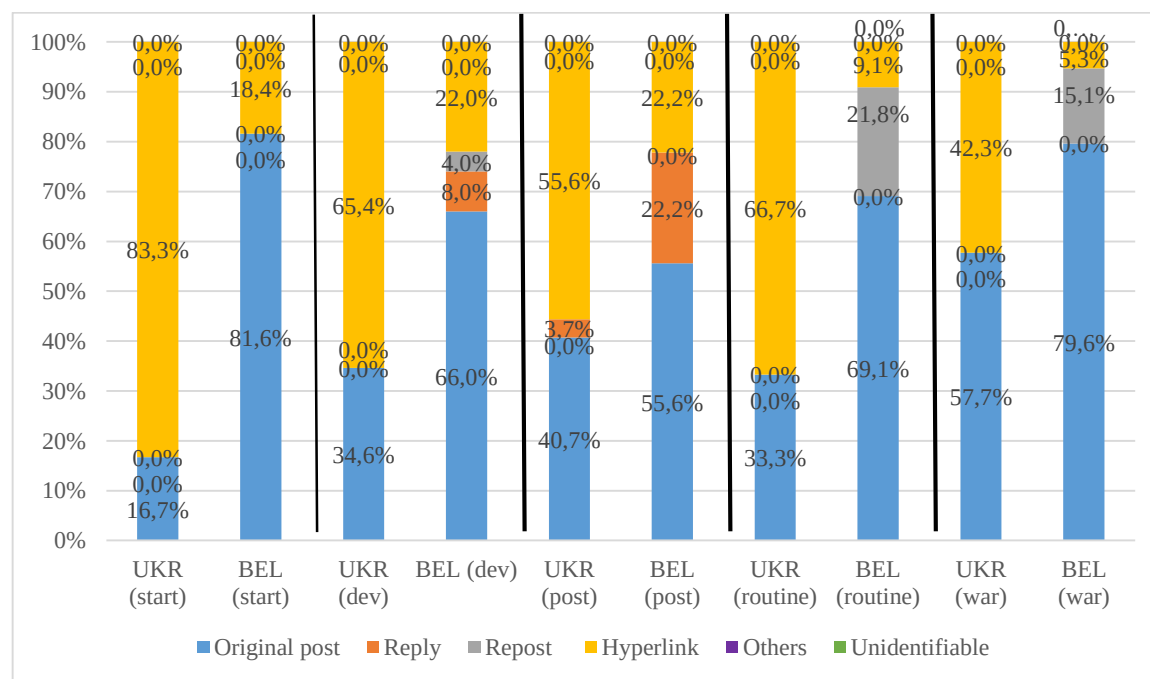
Apart from the direct political involvement, the basic statistical numbers have become a distinctive feature of the Belarusian political actor. If the Ukrainian blogger registered his social media page much earlier than the Belarusian blogger (Figure 112), this experience did not transform into better online performance. NEXTA Live achieved a higher number of followers in a shorter time. Every day, this channel can expect around 500 new followers, which is the greatest figure among all political actors from the two countries. All interaction data is presented in an overview format (see: Figure 113). Importantly, the NEXTA Live structure included two other Telegram channels (NEXTA and LUXTA) with their separate follower bases. In addition, the Belarusian blogger completely outperformed the Ukrainian

⁷⁵ Facebook and Telegram can round numbers.

blogger in terms of posting (Figure 114). During the war period, this Telegram channel published more than 200 posts per day, which is an unattainable number for other political actors from the two countries. The workflow continued 24/7, even at night. It seems that it would have been very difficult for an ordinary user to process such a large amount of information. The feasibility of choosing such a strategy is unclear.

After content analysis, it became clear that there was a significant contrast between these representatives of the new type of political actors. Identified elements of the digital communication strategies confirmed the blurred boundaries of their possible activities. The first difference was observed in the type of posts (Figure 115). If most of the messages produced by the Belarusian blogger were original, the Ukrainian blogger preferred hyperlinks. The exception in the Ukrainian case could be observed during the war period. The results also showed that the Belarusian influencer was more likely to use replies and reposts.

Fig. 115. Type of the posts (bloggers/influencers)

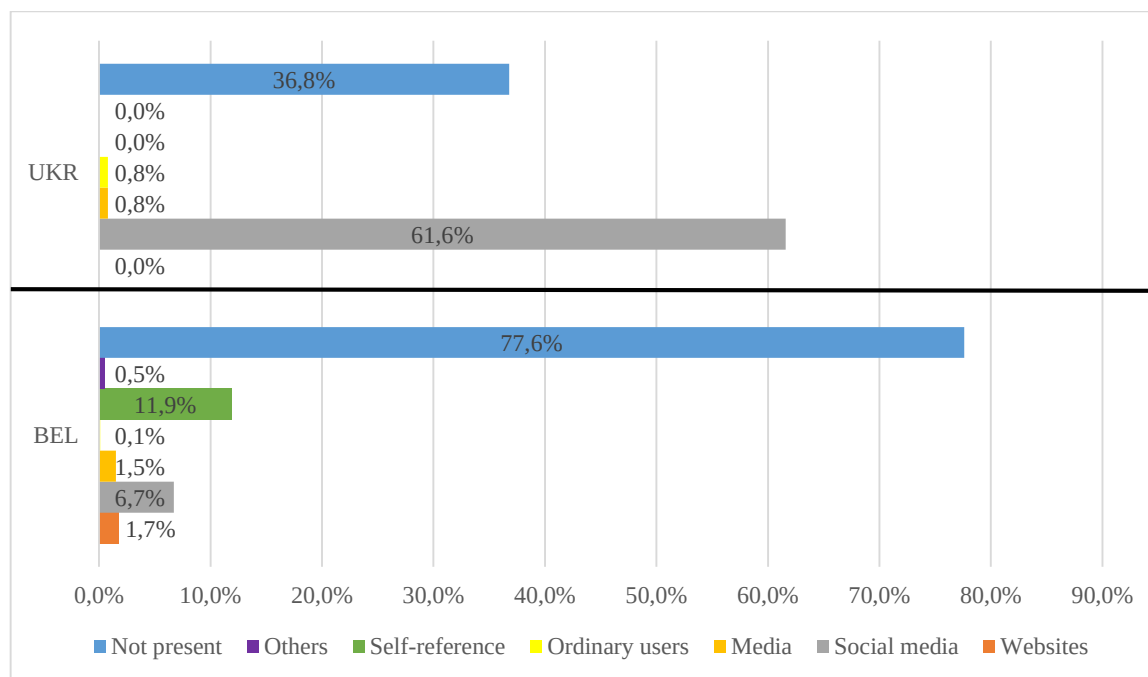


Source: Own elaboration.

The main sources of information were social media and self-referencing (Figure 116). In particular, NEXT Live mentioned their previous posts or made connections with other

Telegram channels of their framework (e.g. NEXTA, LUXTA). Despite hyperlinks to the external YouTube, Shariy also promoted his own content. The metrics of other sources were unremarkable.

Fig. 116. Specification of replies, reposts, hyperlinks (bloggers/influencers)



Note: These indicators can differ from the number of posts.

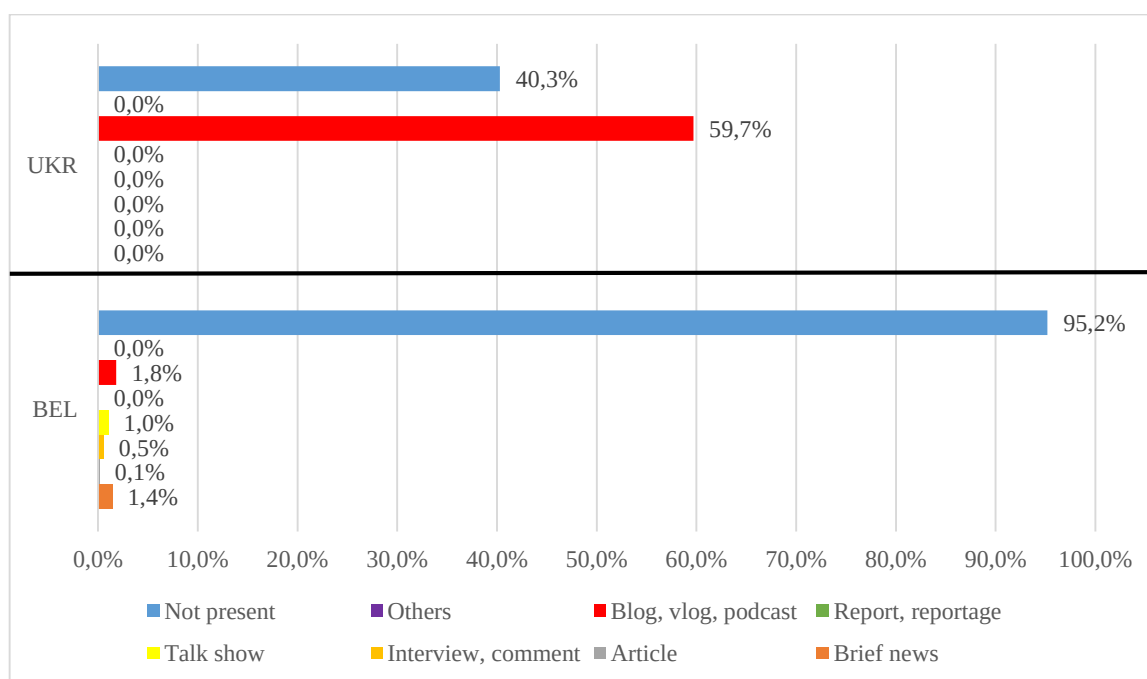
Source: Own elaboration.

The main genre of external information was vlogs (Figure 117). It dominated the posts of the Ukrainian political actors and received almost 2% in the posts of the opposite party. Brief news and talk shows had even smaller share in the Belarusian case.

The next difference was in the post length. According to Figure 118, Shariy adopted a short size during all selected periods. Their smallest proportion occurred during the war period, which required more explanation for the audience. In turn, NEXTA Live preferred long messages. One exception was the election period (development) with a balanced distribution of posts. Another exception was the war period, when quantity clearly outweighed quality⁷⁶.

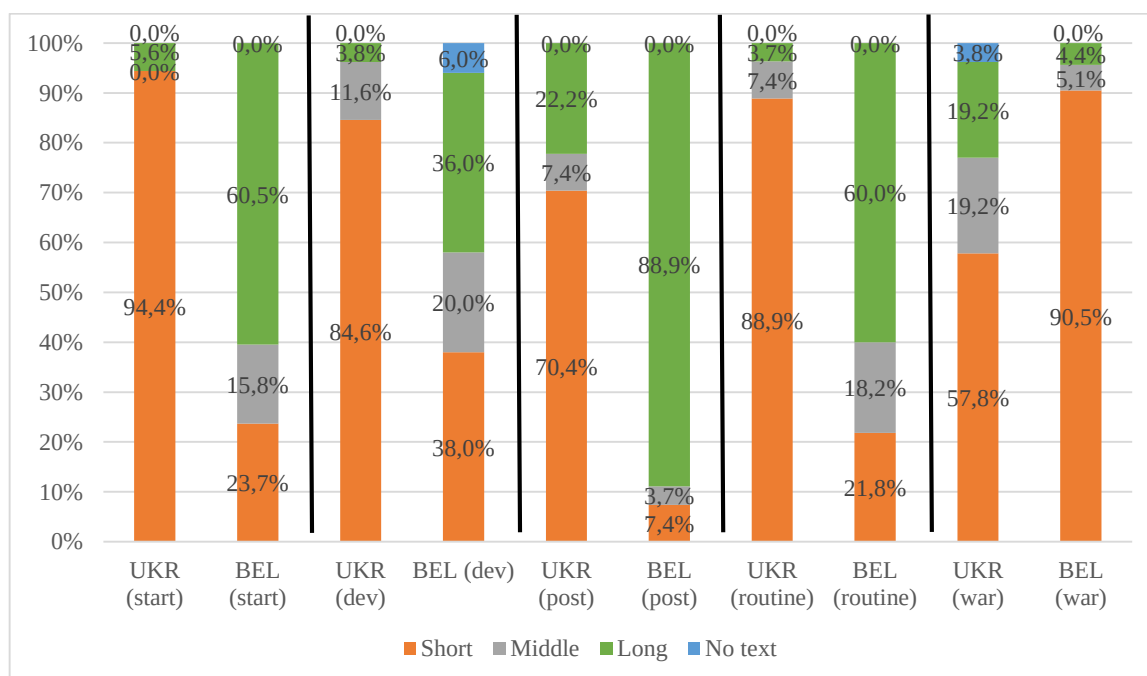
⁷⁶ This study with the chosen methodology revealed additional insights about this Telegram channel. It went beyond the key protests during the election period, which were covered by various media.

Fig. 117. Genre in the posts (bloggers/influencers)



Source: Own elaboration.

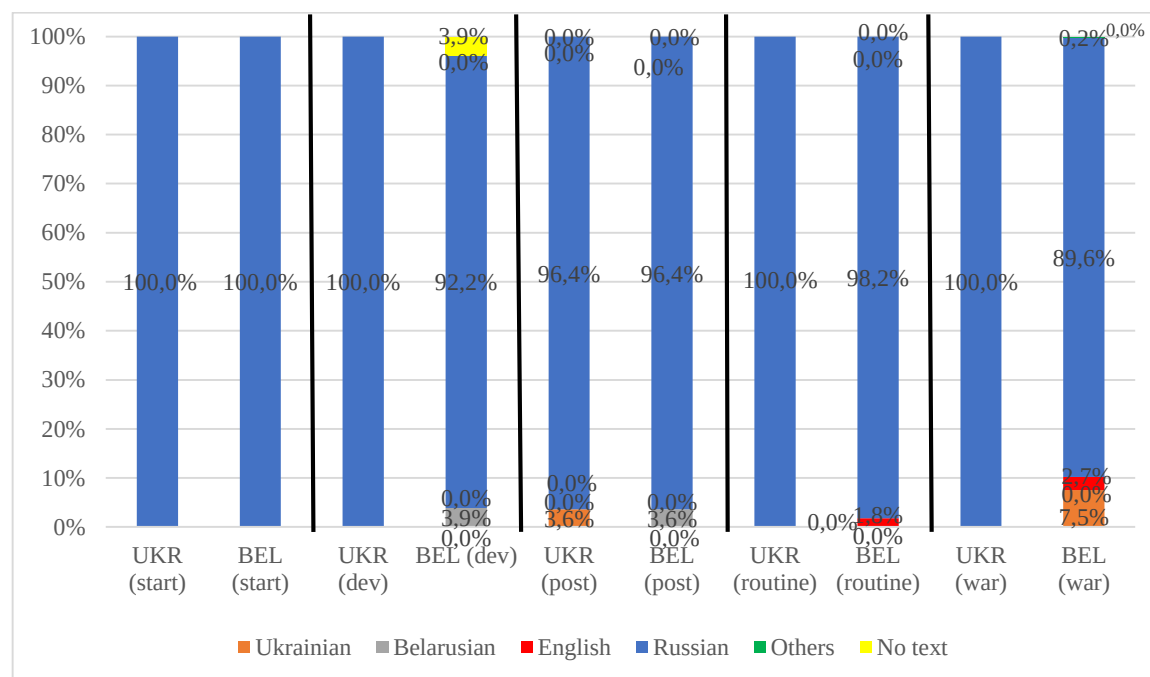
Fig. 118. Length of the posts (bloggers/influencers)



Source: Own elaboration.

Both political actors prepared their posts in Russian (Figure 119). While the Ukrainian blogger's choice could be explained by his pro-Russian orientation, the Belarusian blogger tried to gather a larger audience from post-Soviet countries. Interestingly, the latter sometimes published posts in English and even in Ukrainian, but not in Belarusian.

Fig. 119. Languages in the posts (bloggers/influencers)



Note: These indicators can differ from the number of posts.

Source: Own elaboration.

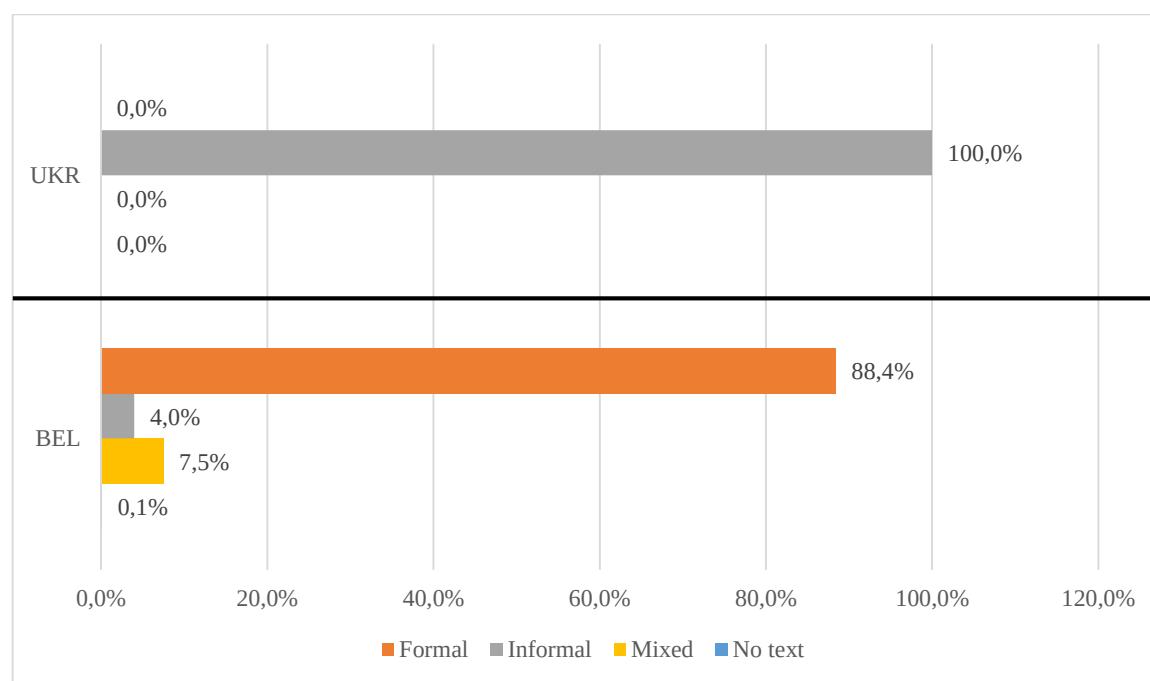
There was a visible imbalance in terms of language style (Figure 120). While formal language prevailed in the posts of the Belarusian blogger, all the posts of the Ukrainian blogger were written in informal language.

Both bloggers have a small number of similarities regarding the trending period for each topic (Figure 121). Obviously, the war period had the largest number of posts with the relevant topic. The pro-Russian blogger Shariy even criticized Russia, while NEXTA Live declared full support for the Ukrainian people. The latter simultaneously used the slogans “Long live Belarus,” “Glory to Ukraine” and “No war.” The Belarusian blogger published many posts about the situation in different parts of Ukraine. Some of them had such a direct address as “the people of Kyiv” or “relatives of soldiers in Russia” (sign of a multinational audience across borders). About 292 posts mentioned Ukrainian political actors in the context

of war (+3 posts in terms of foreign affairs). The channel also stated that “many (Russian) soldiers do not want to be participants in war crimes.” After that, media literacy became another important topic during the war period. NEXTA Live has even developed its own information verification mechanism. The Belarusian blogger also engaged its subscribers in a special chat to combat fakes. Next, the culture discussion performed best during the routine period. Relations with other political actors reached their peak during the electoral period (development). Both bloggers had the most multi-topic posts during the post-election period.

As for other important points, the topics of business and legislation received the largest numbers during the routine period (the Ukrainian blogger) and during the first election period (the Belarusian blogger). The topics of infrastructure and religion are placed in the opposite direction. Only Ukraine was interested in the topic of election rankings, while the topic of democracy was completely absent in both cases.

Fig. 120. Language style (bloggers/influencers)



Source: Own elaboration.

Fig. 121. Topics, issues of the posts (bloggers/influencers)

UKR/BEL	Election (start)	Election (development)	Post-election	Routine	War
Business and economy	0,0% / 10,0%	2,9% / 2,5%	0,0% / 8,5%	4,3% / 3,5%	2,7% / 6,8%
Health and social policy	0,0% / 40,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 4,3%	6,4% / 5,3%	8,1% / 0,6%
War, conflicts, terrorism	0,0% / 0,0%	2,9% / 0,0%	6,4% / 8,5%	14,9% / 2,7%	40,6% / 66,4%
Foreign affairs, international relations, world events	0,0% / 6,0%	11,4% / 2,5%	2,1% / 42,5%	10,6% / 42,4%	10,8% / 14,2%
Culture, education, sport	0,0% / 4,0%	2,9% / 1,3%	10,6% / 2,1%	12,8% / 5,3%	2,7% / 1,9%
Science, technology, environment, animal rights	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 1,3%	0,0% / 8,5%	0,0% / 4,4%	8,1% / 2,3%
Infrastructure	4,5% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	2,1% / 2,1%	2,1% / 6,2%	0,0% / 2,3%
Corruption	0,0% / 0,0%	2,9% / 0,0%	17,0% / 0,0%	2,1% / 3,5%	0,0% / 0,0%
Legislation	0,0% / 2,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	2,1% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,1%
Democracy	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%
Religion	13,6% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,9%	0,0% / 0,1%
Socio-cultural and mourning events	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,9%	0,0% / 0,0%
Relationships with other political actors	40,9% / 6,0%	54,2% / 11,2%	25,6% / 4,3%	12,8% / 0,0%	10,8% / 0,9%
Relationships with media	0,0% / 2,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	12,8% / 0,0%	8,5% / 1,8%	2,7% / 0,0%
Prosecution, civil and human rights, criminal actions	0,0% / 8,0%	5,7% / 30,0%	8,5% / 14,9%	6,4% / 18,6%	2,7% / 1,9%

Personal issues and backstage	18,2% / 0,0%	8,6% / 2,5%	2,1% / 0,0%	6,4% / 0,0%	2,7% / 0,0%
Election	0,0% / 18,0%	2,9% / 27,5%	2,1% / 0,0%	0,0% / 2,7%	0,0% / 0,2%
Rankings and results	4,5% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%
Media literacy	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	2,1% / 0,0%	5,4% / 1,4%
News and views overview	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 2,5%	4,3% / 4,3%	0,0% / 1,8%	2,7% / 0,9%
Others	0,0% / 4,0%	5,6% / 11,2%	2,1% / 0,0%	8,5% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%
Unclear	18,3% / 0%	0,0% / 7,5%	4,3% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%

Note: 1) The number of topics was greater than the number of posts because each message could cover more than one topic; 2) Read from left to right. The idea is to identify the peak selection period for each topic (deeper analysis of strategic decision-making). Other important dynamics will be shown in general trends.

Source: Own elaboration.

There are practically no similarities between bloggers regarding the peak period for choosing a particular function (Figure 122). The only clear one is the mobilization of followers during the war period. If image building appeared in the posts of the Ukrainian political actor during the initial election period, a small share of it was noticed in the posts of the Belarusian political actor during the routine period. The function of criticism had the opposite order in terms of periods. The pro-Russian blogger Shariy could attack anyone, especially President Poroshenko and those associated with him. At the same time, NEXTA Live focused its efforts on the illegitimate President Lukashenko. The politician received the following nicknames: “Lukashist usurper,” “dictator,” “fascist,” “Tarakan Grigorievich Trekhprotsentnyy,” “Cockroach” and many others. The channel team declared itself “the biggest enemy of the regime.” Both bloggers were engaged in ridiculing political competitors at different times.

There are several other observations. First, the functions of professional updates and achievements were the most typical for the Ukrainian blogger during the war period. He sometimes addressed his party’s supporters, but his main style of work was to comment on selected political figures and their actions. The same functions were inherent in the posts of the Belarusian blogger during the second election period (professional updates) and during the post-election period (achievements). The Telegram channel supported the opposition forces through the dissemination of information, which was often mixed with a certain political position. The team of young people actually managed the public sentiments. The

only share of multifunctional posts also belonged to them. Second, NEXTA Live was the only one to publish political and commercial advertisements. The latter was one of the factors for its functioning. Third, the manners and protocol function had the best percentages during the post-election period (Ukraine) and during the first election period (Belarus).

Fig. 122. Functions of the posts (bloggers/influencers)

UKR/BEL	Election (start)	Election (development)	Post-election	Routine	War
Professional updates	0,0% / 15,4%	8,6% / 32,4%	0,0% / 10,4%	9,4% / 15,8%	21,4% / 11,0%
Image building	10,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	9,4% / 1,8%	4,8% / 0,1%
Manners and protocol	0,0% / 1,9%	2,9% / 1,5%	4,5% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	2,4% / 0,5%
Accomplishments	0,0% / 3,8%	0,0% / 1,5%	4,5% / 6,9%	0,0% / 1,8%	9,5% / 1,3%
Political advertisement	0,0% / 19,3%	0,0% / 13,2%	0,0% / 3,4%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,7%
Commercial advertisement	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 10,3%	0,0% / 3,4%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%
Criticism	40,0% / 38,5%	34,2% / 19,1%	38,6% / 10,4%	68,7% / 10,4%	54,8% / 3,3%
Humor and entertainment	50,0% / 1,9%	48,6% / 13,2%	52,4% / 3,4%	12,5% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,6%
Call to action	0,0% / 1,9%	5,7% / 1,5%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	7,1% / 4,7%
Dissemination of information	0,0% / 17,3%	0,0% / 7,3%	0,0% / 62,1%	0,0% / 68,4%	0,0% / 77,8%
Multifunctional post	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 1,8%	0,0% / 0,0%
Others	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%	0,0% / 0,0%

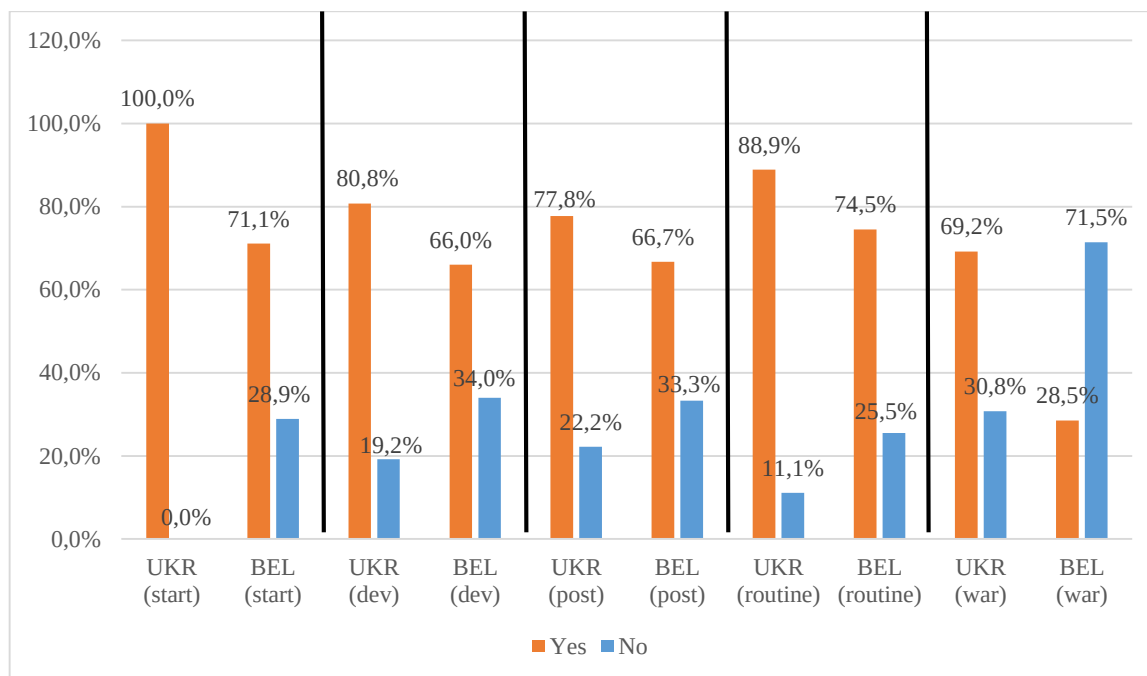
Note: 1) The number of functions was greater than the number of posts because each message could cover more than one function; 2) Read from left to right. The idea is to identify the peak selection period for each function (deeper analysis of strategic decision-making). Other important dynamics will be shown in general trends.

Source: Own elaboration.

The most commonly used graphic element was images (Figure 123). Their number almost never fell below 65%. The mentioned exception was the war period, when NEXTA Live preferred quick and simple text content over any visual element. If the Belarusian blogger reached a peak during the previous routine period, the Ukrainian blogger included photos in

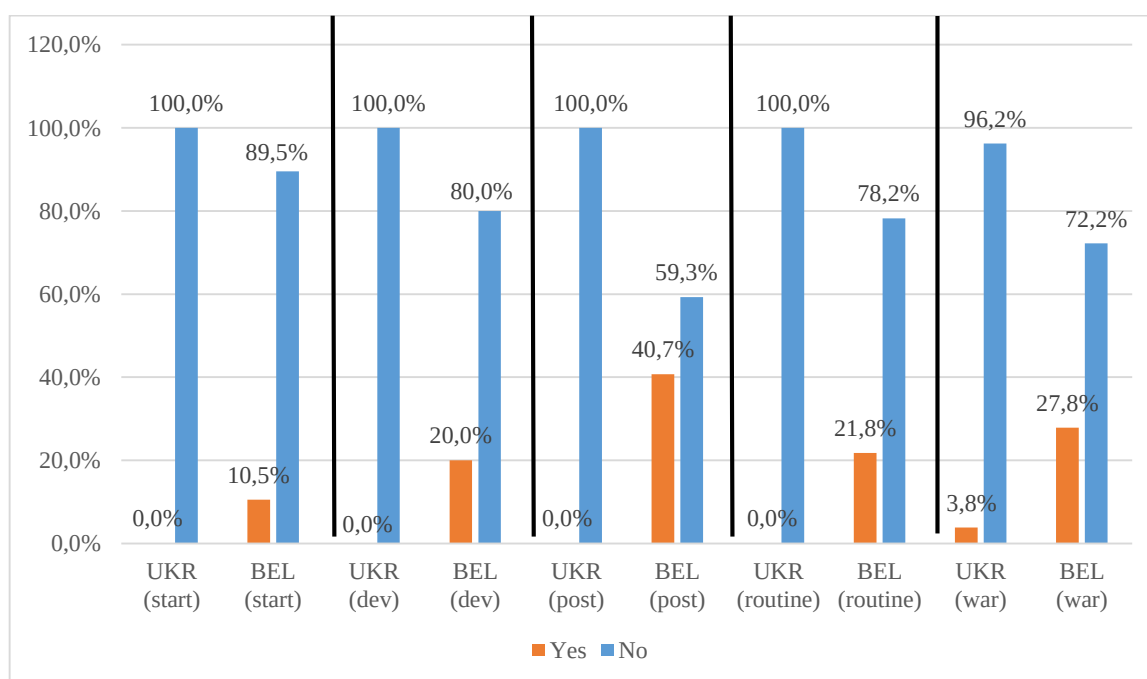
all his posts during the election period (start). Overall, the former used less photos than the latter.

Fig. 123. Photos, pictures in the posts (bloggers/influencers)



Source: Own elaboration.

Fig. 124. Videos in the posts (bloggers/influencers)

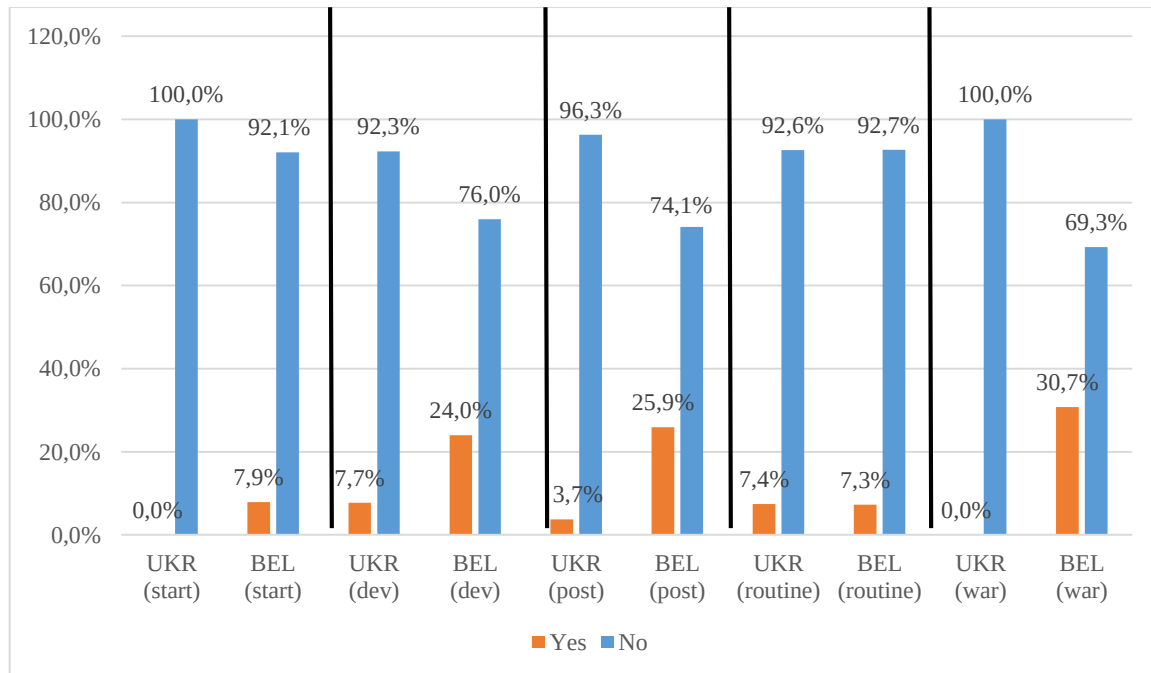


Source: Own elaboration.

The opposite situation was with video. Despite the generally low figures, NEXTA Live published the graphic element more frequently than Shariy (Figure 124). There was a gradual increase between the initial period and the post-election period. After that, a double decline occurred. Finally, the numbers began to climb again.

Both political actors were reluctant to use emojis (Figure 125). Their share did not exceed 8% among Shariy's posts, whereas it could reach as high as 25-30% among NEXTA Live's posts. Their peak could be observed during the development of the election period, on the one hand, and during the war period, on the other hand.

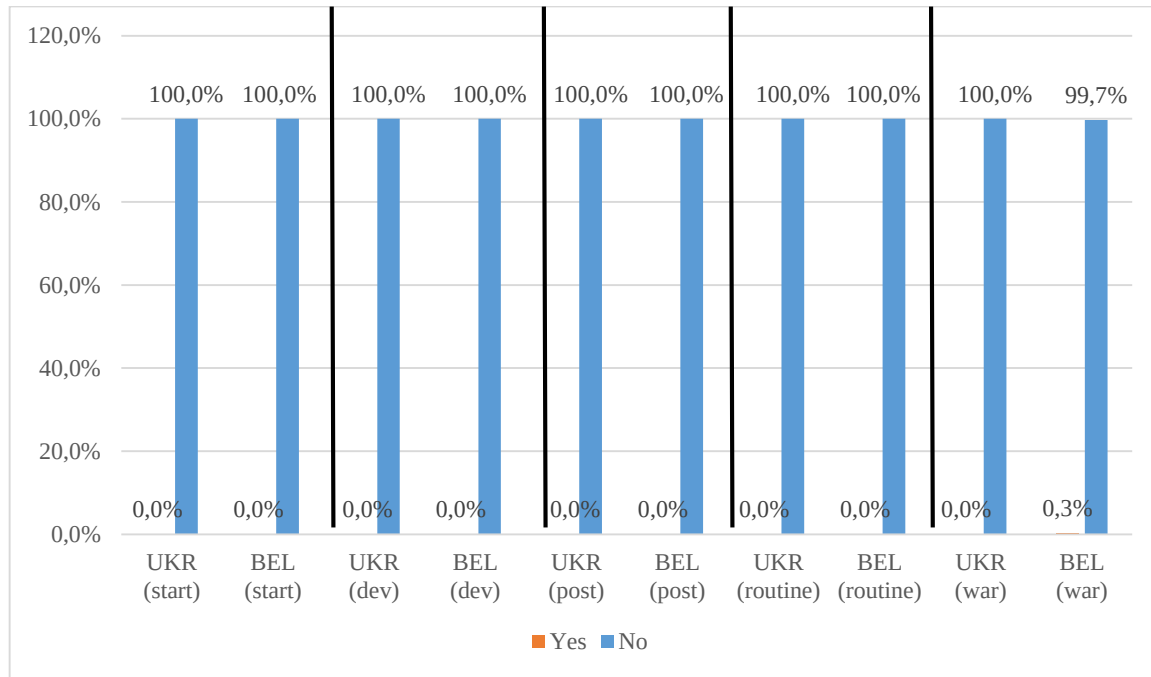
Fig. 125. Emojis in the posts (bloggers/influencers)



Source: Own elaboration.

As shown in Figure 126, Ukrainian and Belarusian influencers did not use hashtags at all. This was a serious omission in the process of content distribution.

Fig. 126. Hashtags in the posts (bloggers/influencers)

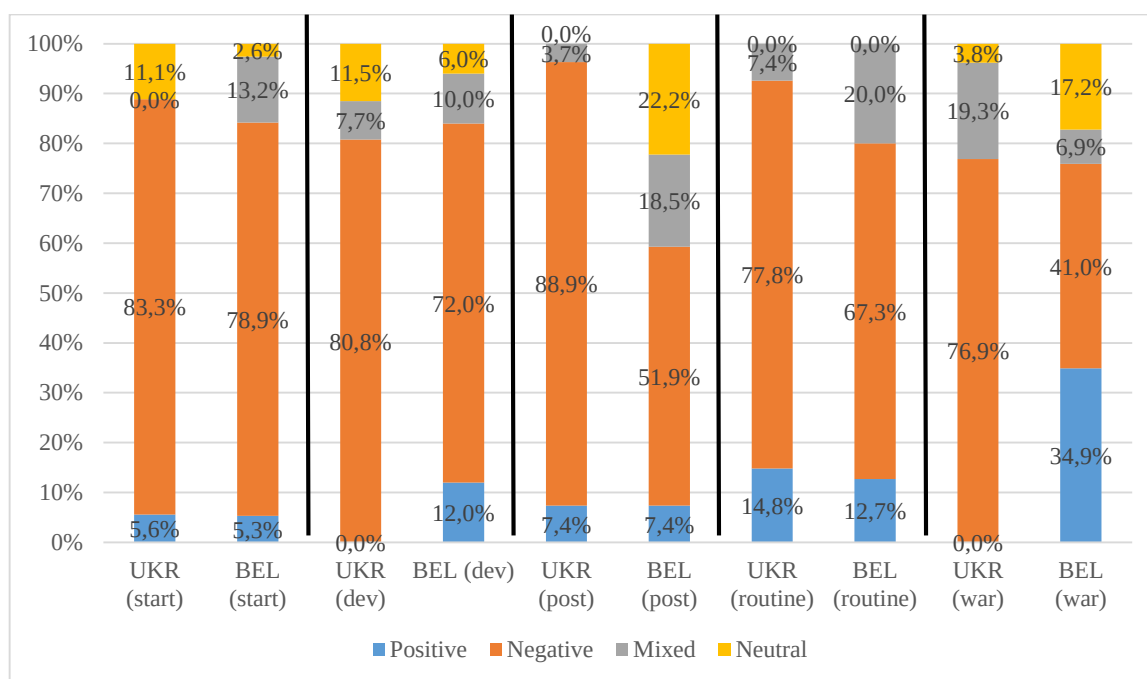


Source: Own elaboration.

The prevailing emotional valence of the posts was negative in both cases. The Ukrainian blogger had a slight advantage (Figure 127). Among other things, Shariy completely excluded positive messages during the two key periods, namely the election period (development) and the war period. If the first period appeared to be a purposeful campaign against the authorities, the second period was associated with tragic events. Interestingly, positive emotions reached their peak in the posts of the Belarusian influencer during the war period. They mostly reflected successful events regarding Ukrainian defense.

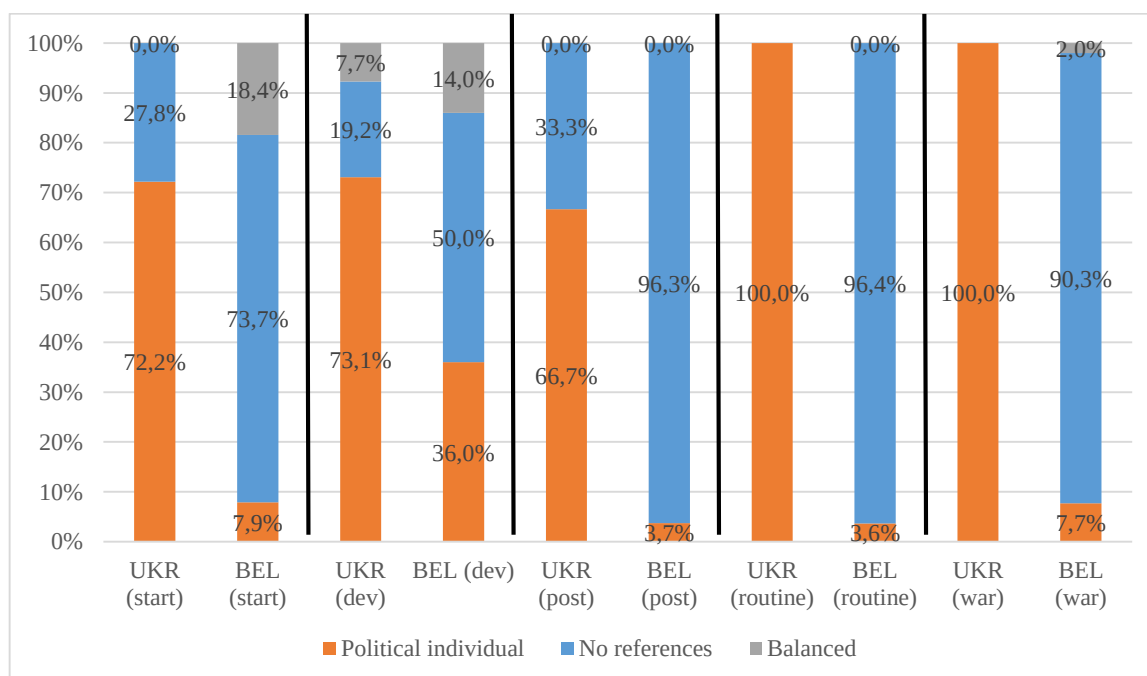
Shariy resorted to personalization in his posts, while NEXTA Live did not do the same (Figure 128). From one perspective, the Ukrainian blogger was in the spotlight of his content. He had a balance between emotional and professional types of personalization (Figure 129). From another perspective, NEXTA Live avoided the person-centered approach. The highest rate was recorded during the second election period. Generally, focusing on events became an alternative to personalization.

Fig. 127. Emotional valence of the posts (bloggers/influencers)



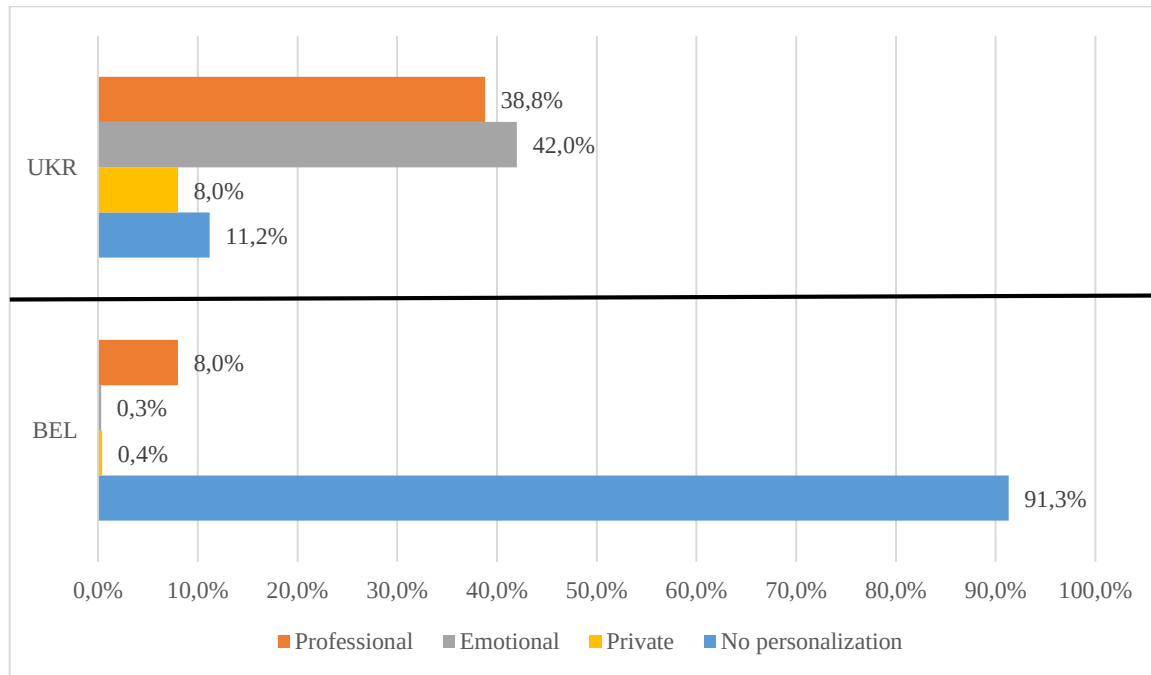
Source: Own elaboration.

Fig. 128. Personalization in the posts (bloggers/influencers)



Source: Own elaboration.

Fig. 129. Type of personalization (bloggers/influencers)



Note: These indicators can differ from the number of posts.

Source: Own elaboration.

To summarize, bloggers did not limit themselves to specific patterns of using social media for political communication. They demonstrated a broader perspective. Besides topics and functions, there were other differences in the analyzed categories.

Shariy used Facebook as an additional platform for distributing his content. The hyperlinks redirected users to YouTube vlogs with negative criticism. The Ukrainian blogger was in the center of the frame. He chose short posts in Russian. Among their features was informal communication style. Pictures were the main graphic accompaniment.

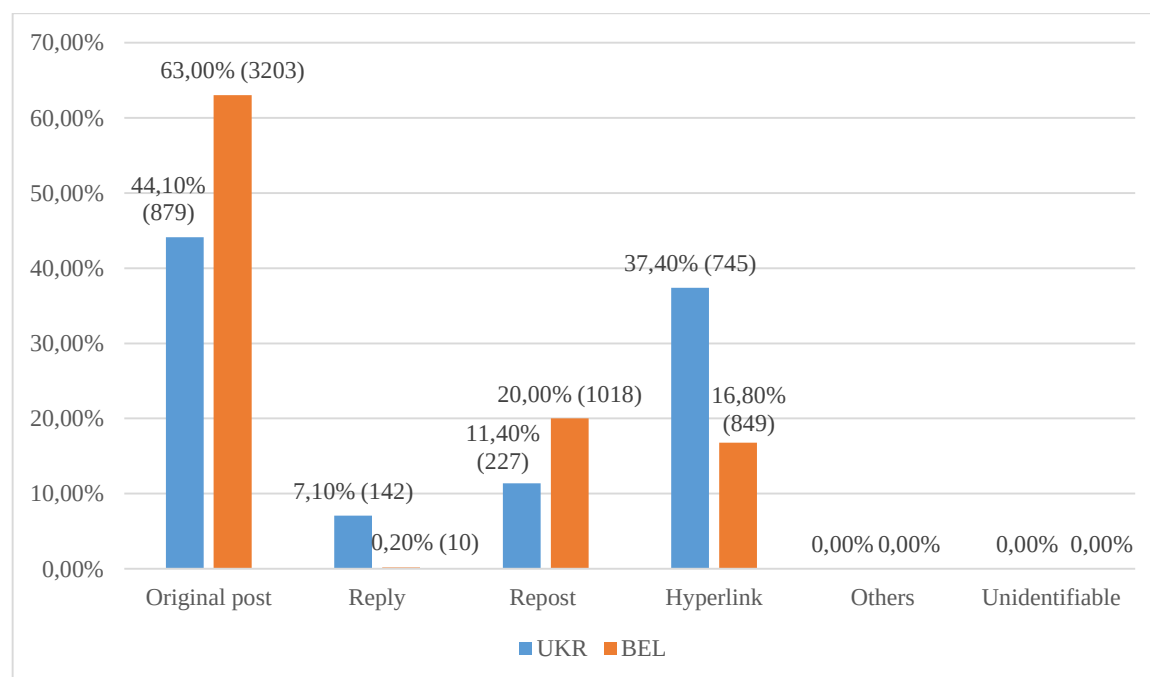
NEXTA Live used Telegram to spread alternative information. Some citizens even referred to it as a “counter-propaganda” channel. The Belarusian team published original content in Russian. They could redirect the audience from one of their profiles to another. Their posts were formal, long, included photos, and had a negative valence. They did not resort to personalization. The war period played a special role in their online communication (e.g. number of posts, their length, topics, functions, photos, emojis, emotions, even hashtags). The number of followers distinguished NEXTA Live from other political figures.

Despite the skillful use of social media by this group of political actors, there are several possible recommendations for improving their online communication. Shariy is capable of producing a greater volume of original content. This can increase the versatility of his social media profiles. He should also find a balance between formal and informal styles, include more videos and emojis, use hashtags, add private personalization and positive posts. In turn, NEXTA Live has to reduce the overload of information for followers and diversify their agenda. Finding a balance in post length and language styles is important. The Belarusian team should also incorporate more graphic elements, hashtags, as well as increase the positive valence of their messages.

4.4.6 General trends from Ukraine and Belarus

After describing the details, this is the main part of the chapter. It presents the sum of all indicators mentioned above. The figures include the research periods and the political actors from the two countries. The trending elements inherent in their online strategies are identified and compared. The results complement the knowledge about the Ukrainian media system and the Belarusian media system in terms of social media platforms.

Fig. 130. Type of the posts (in total)

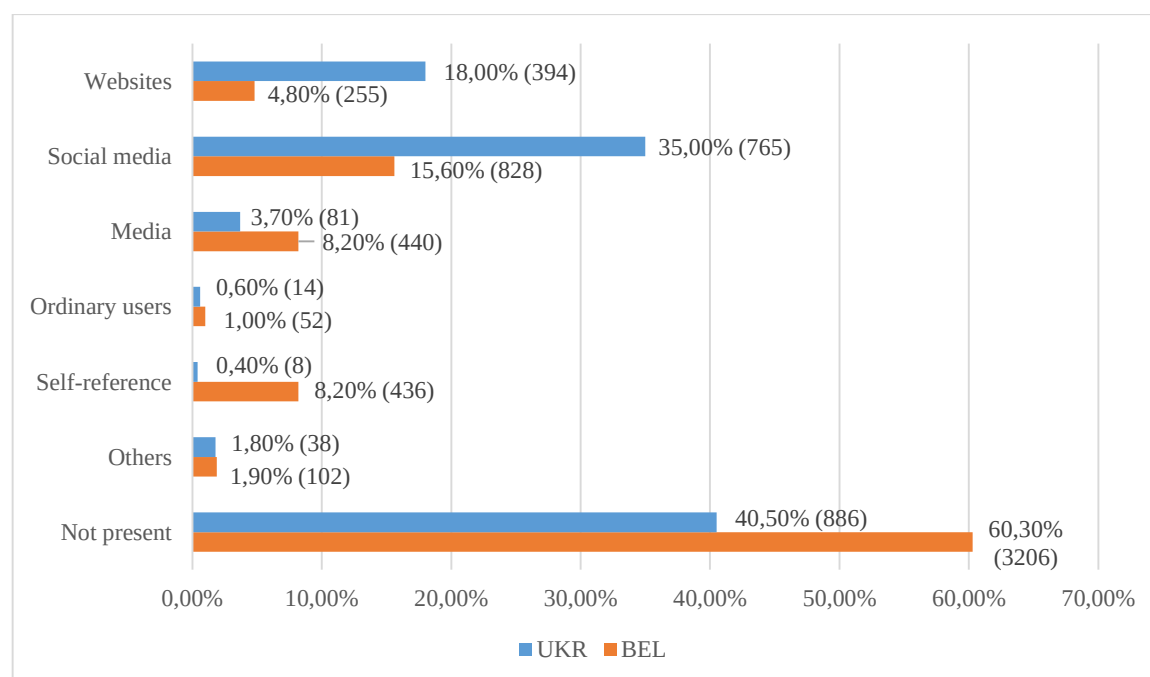


Source: Own elaboration.

The bar chart above (Figure 130) illustrates the distribution of post types. As can be observed, Ukrainian and Belarusian political actors most often produced original posts. However, their percentage was less certain in the Ukrainian case due to a sufficient number of hyperlinks. Another difference could be seen in the frequency of active replies and passive reposts. While Belarusian political actors provided information from other sources without interference, Ukrainian political actors could add their own commentary to it. The struggle between the old practices of indirect communication and the new practices of direct communication remained evident.

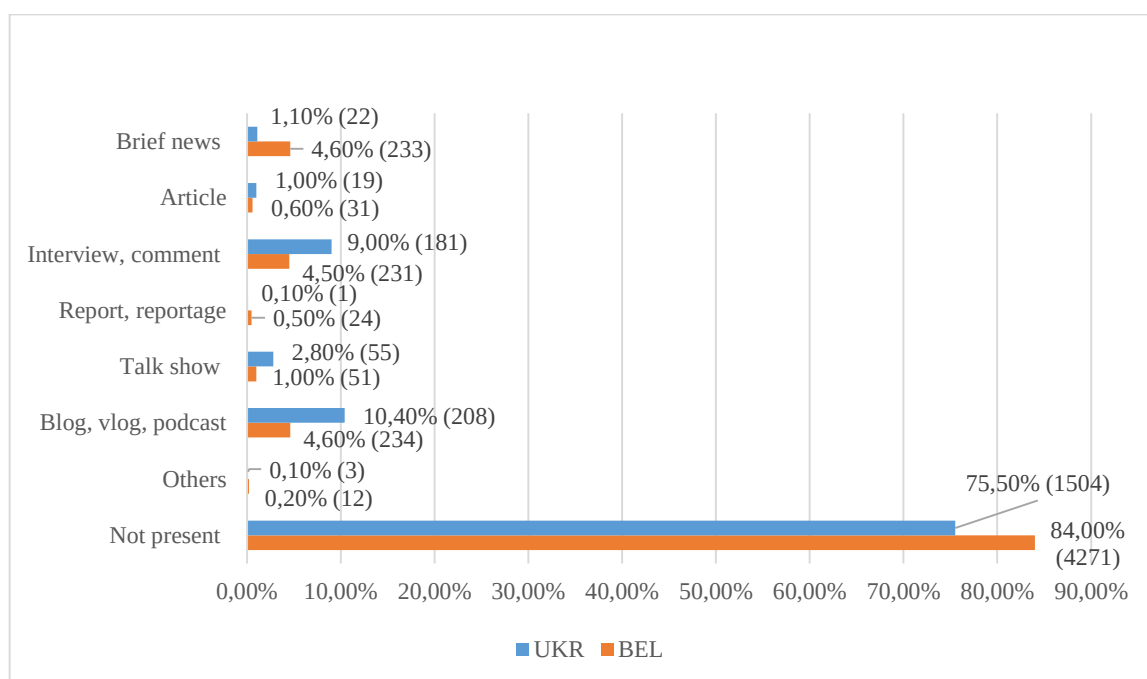
Importantly, social media platforms became the dominant source of information in both countries (Figure 131). Although Ukrainian political actors referred to certain profiles more often than Belarusian political actors, the numbers of both indicated another attempt to integrate on these online platforms. The selected political actors tried not to go beyond their information space, or spaces. As for other sources, both sides made almost no references to ordinary users. Apart from it, they followed different paths. Ukrainians favored websites, while Belarusians preferred information from media representatives. The latter received the same percentage with the self-reference option of Belarusian political actors.

Fig. 131. Specification of replies, reposts, hyperlinks (in total)



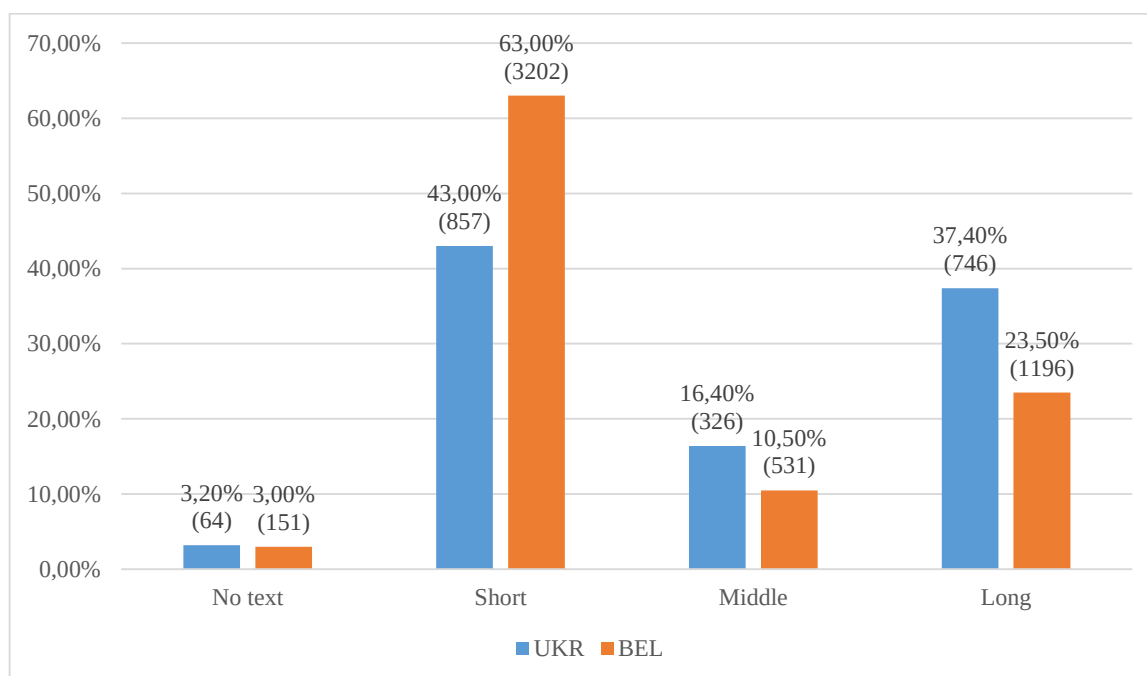
Source: Own elaboration.

Fig. 132. Genre in the posts (in total)



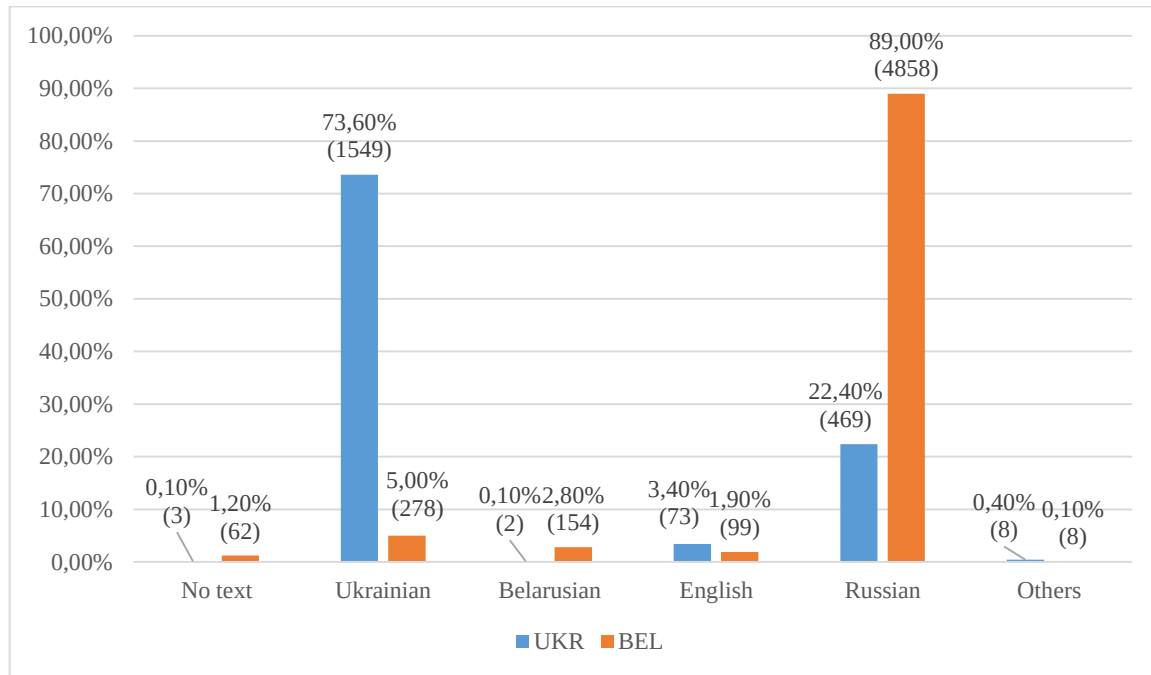
Source: Own elaboration.

Fig. 133. Length of the posts (in total)



Source: Own elaboration.

Fig. 134. Languages in the posts (in total)



Source: Own elaboration.

Despite the overall small number, vlogs became the most popular genre in both countries (Figure 132). It was another positive signal in terms of adapting to the social media format. Political actors clearly tried to be creative when producing content. This genre only slightly surpassed traditional interviews and commentary in both cases. Nevertheless, there were differences in the frequency of posting. Ukrainian political actors produced more vlogs and interviews than Belarusian political actors. They were more willing to participate in talk shows and publish articles, especially editorials. Short news became an alternative for Belarusians (had the same percentage as vlogs). News articles supplemented them. The only explanation for such indicators is the presence of better opportunities for media communication in the democratic political environment, where all attention is not focused exclusively on one person.

Regarding the size, Ukrainian and Belarusian political actors mostly chose short posts in order to communicate with audiences (Figure 133). They dominated the Belarusian agenda with 63% and outweighed the Ukrainian agenda. The size could contribute to a better perception of political information. Moving forward, the share of long posts took second place. Their percentage was only slightly lower than the percentage of short posts in the

Ukrainian case. They could ensure better engagement in line with the information from Chapter 2. As for other features, Ukrainian political actors published a greater number of long posts and medium posts than Belarusian political actors.

There were important differences in terms of language (Figure 134). Despite a certain share of Russian (about 22%), the native language prevailed in the posts of Ukrainian political actors. The same cannot be applicable to the Belarusian online environment, where political actors transmitted information in Russian. The share of posts in Belarusian was less than 3%. This is the main consequence of the long-term destruction of Belarusian culture by the Lukashenko regime. In addition, there were only a small number of English posts. The long-term partnership between Ukraine and the European Union did not help in this case. Their indicator was only slightly better than the Belarusian one.

There was no balance in terms of language style (Figure 135). The mixed style ranged from 16% to 23% in the two countries. The informal style had approximately the same indicators. Although Ukrainian political actors used these styles more often than Belarusian political actors, they lost in terms of formal style. The latter was the main language style in both countries. Hence, the selected political actors fully satisfied the audience's demand for professionalism, but not entertainment (see Chapter 2). Among the possible factors were the difficult political situation in Belarus and the Russia-Ukraine war (see Chapter 3).

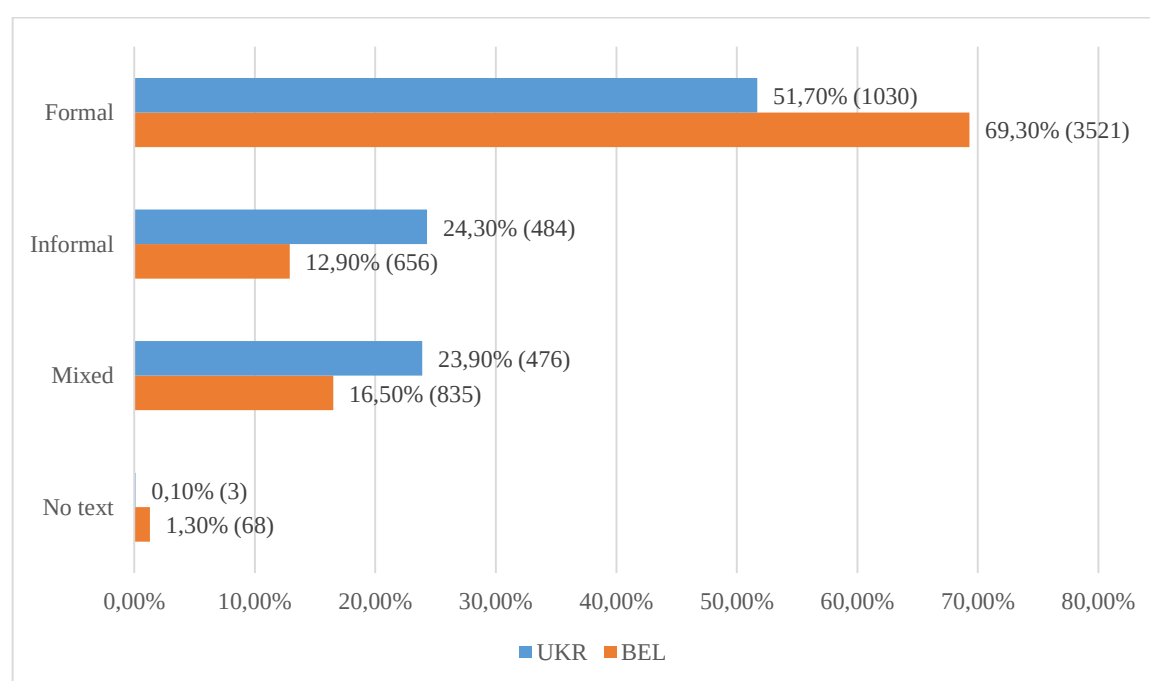
The table below (Figure 136) details the order of topics in the online strategies of Ukrainian political actors and Belarusian political actors. In particular, there were several similarities. Political actors of both countries mostly focused their attention on the Russia-Ukraine war. This topic showed a solid gap from the second place, namely international relations. Both topics were closely related to each other. Since Ukraine and Belarus were involved in the war, their political actors began to seek solutions together with international partners. The positions of their relations with other political actors (6th place) and the topic of corruption (17th place) also coincided on the agenda.

Regarding the differences, the third priority for Belarusians was the election (including numerous protests) and the fourth priority was the economy. Ukrainians placed them in the opposite order. The topic of criminal prosecutions in Belarus and the topic of health in Ukraine rounded out the top 5. All other topics did not coincide in the two countries and

scored less than 5%. Furthermore, Belarusian political actors published 371 posts in terms of war and 10 posts in terms of international affairs about Ukrainian political actors. Belarusian political actors appeared in the posts of Ukrainian political actors only 3 times.

The posts of Ukrainian political actors were more diverse than the posts of Belarusian political actors in terms of topics (H2). The main confirmation was 14 out of the 20 proposed items (highlighted in bold). While war and international relations had the largest figures and dominated the Belarusian agenda, the percentages were more evenly distributed in Ukraine.

Fig. 135. Language style (in total)



Source: Own elaboration.

Fig. 136. Topics, issues of the posts (in total)

	UKR (priority position)	BEL (priority position)
Business and economy	8,1% (3)	6,3% (4)
Health and social policy	5,7% (5)	2,1% (8)
War, conflicts, terrorism	24,1% (1)	44,1% (1)
Foreign affairs, international relations, world events	10,1% (2)	13,6% (2)
Culture, education, sport	4,2% (9)	2,8% (7)

Science, technology, environment, animal rights	1,1% (15)	2,0% (9)
Infrastructure	1,4% (14)	1,9% (10)
Corruption	0,9% (17)	0,1% (17)
Legislation	3,8% (10)	1,0% (13)
Democracy	0,5% (18)	0,2% (16)
Religion	1,9% (12)	0,1% (17)
Socio-cultural and mourning events	4,4% (8)	1,1% (12)
Relationships with other political actors	5,4% (6)	4,1% (6)
Relationships with media	1,0% (16)	0,4% (15)
Prosecution, civil and human rights, criminal actions	4,4% (8)	5,5% (5)
Personal issues and backstage	3,3% (11)	1,0% (13)
Election	7,8% (4)	6,5% (3)
Rankings and results	1,0% (16)	0,7% (14)
Media literacy	1,8% (13)	1,8% (11)
News and views overview	4,7% (7)	1,8% (11)
Others	3,4%	1,9%
Unclear	1,0%	1,0%

Note: The priority position shows the general place of a certain topic in online strategies.

Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 137 shows the indicators of post functions. While there were a few similarities between the two countries, they were not of primary importance. Ukrainian political actors and Belarusian political actors placed the function of mobilization in the 4th place, the function of achievements in the 6th place, and the function of commercial advertisement in the last place of their agenda.

On the contrary, there were much more differences. If Ukrainian political actors most often published professional updates, Belarusian political actors preferred information dissemination. Criticism and political advertisement were also included in the top 3. All other functions were less frequent in the analyzed messages.

The posts of Ukrainian political actors were more diverse than the posts of Belarusian political actors in terms of functions (H2). It was similar to the situation with topics. The

function of information dissemination and the function of professional updates dominated the Belarusian agenda. They significantly reduced the percentages of other items. At the same time, there was no similar problem with the Ukrainian agenda. Its leaders had a smaller share of posts. Therefore, other functions had the opportunity to obtain more percentages.

Fig. 137. Functions of the posts (in total)

	UKR (priority position)	BEL (priority position)
Professional updates	29,9% (1)	21,0% (2)
Image building	2,9% (8)	1,5% (9)
Manners and protocol	8,2% (5)	2,4% (7)
Accomplishments	5,7% (6)	3,4% (6)
Political advertisement	15,2% (3)	7,4% (5)
Commercial advertisement	0,1% (11)	0,2% (11)
Criticism	17,0% (2)	10,5% (3)
Humor and entertainment	3,5% (7)	2,0% (8)
Call to action	15,0% (4)	9,9% (4)
Dissemination of information	0,3% (10)	40,2% (1)
Multifunctional post	2,0% (9)	1,0% (10)
Others	0,2%	0,5%

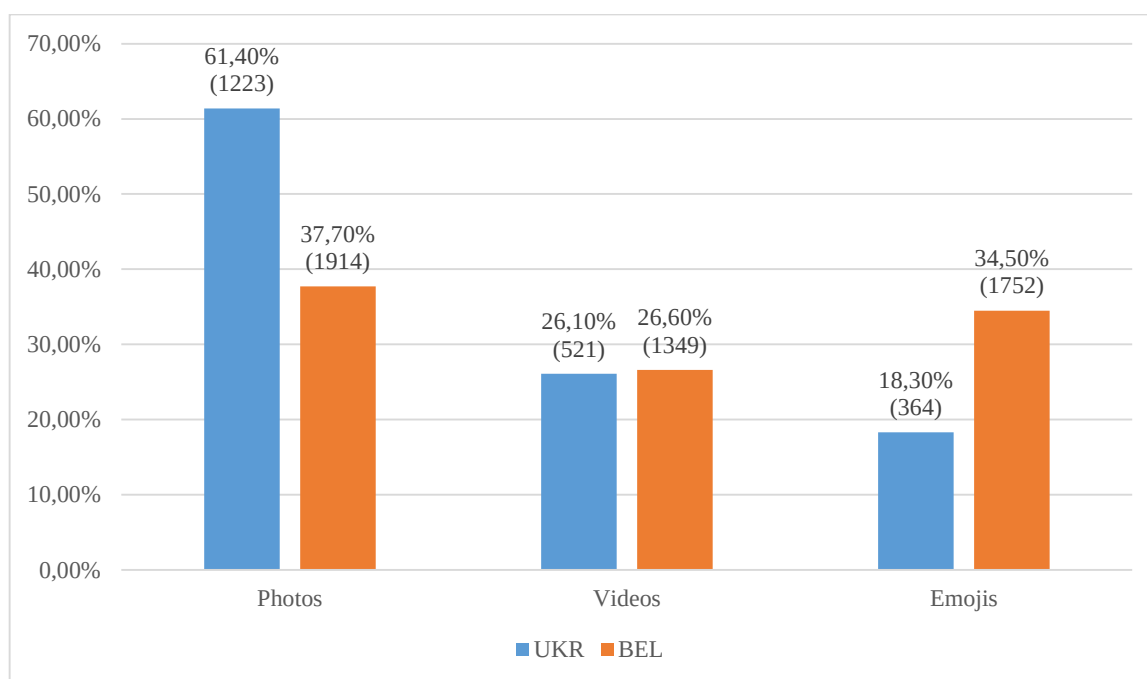
Note: The priority position shows the general place of a certain function in online strategies.

Source: Own elaboration.

As for the specified multimedia components, they were present in different proportions among the posts of political actors from Ukraine and Belarus (Figure 138). If pictures were a priority element for both countries, Ukrainians had a higher number of them. Belarusians typed more emojis. Video content accounted for almost the same share of posts in both countries, with a slight advantage for Belarus.

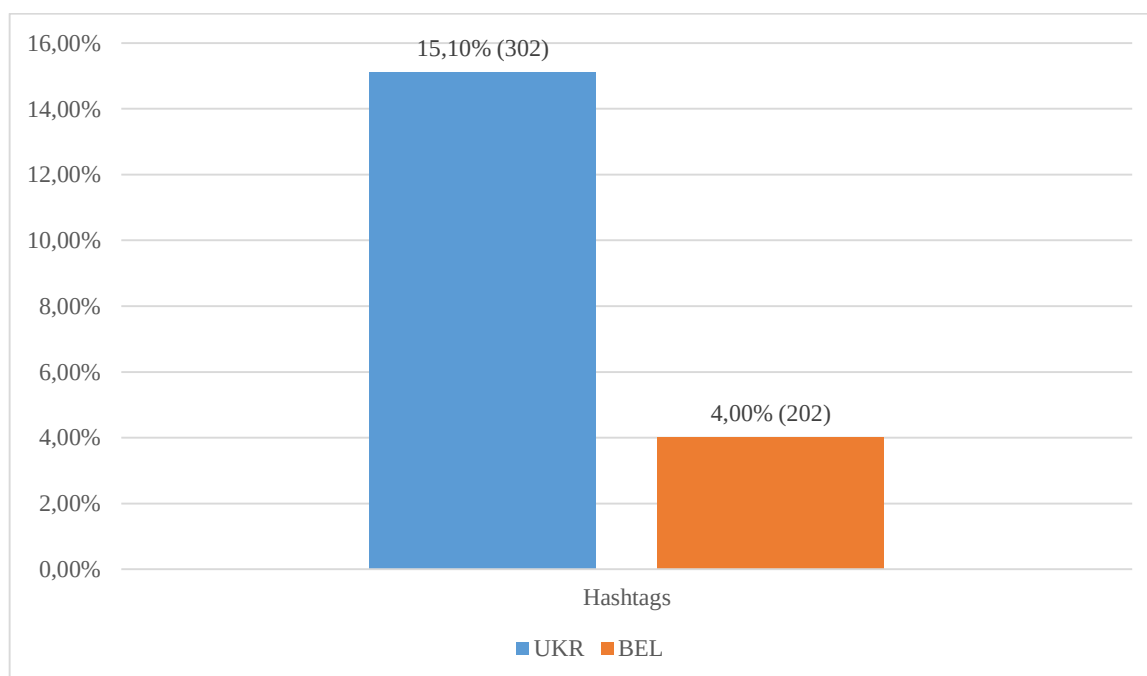
Ukrainians tried better than Belarusians to diversify their content. The majority of their posts were designed with pictures in order to dilute the textual information. This multimedia element was also a bit more popular than emojis in the posts of Belarusian political actors. Among its types were memes (spotted 53 times in Ukraine and 49 times in Belarus) and GIFs (4 times only in Belarus). Additionally, no less than 10 reels appeared among Ukrainian videos.

Fig. 138. Presence of graphic elements in the posts (in total)



Source: Own elaboration.

Fig. 139. Presence of hashtags in the posts (in total)



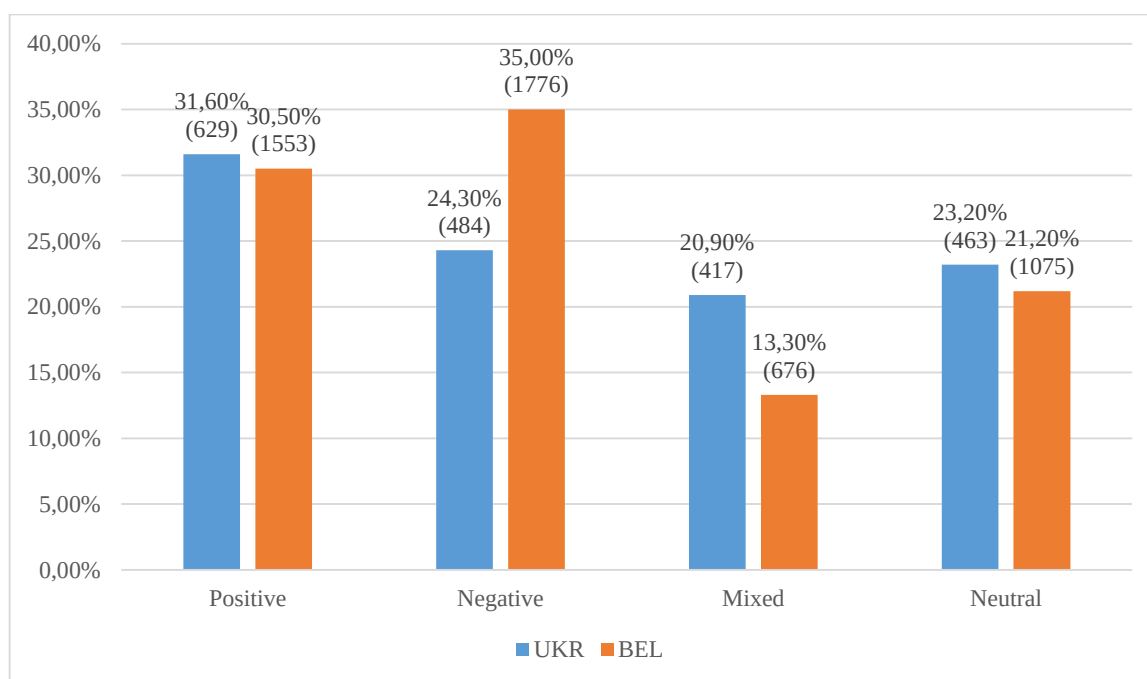
Source: Own elaboration.

[illegible]

Hashtags became another characteristic element of social media, which representatives of both countries were reluctant to use in their online strategies. As can be seen in Figure 139, it appeared on the Facebook pages of Ukrainian political actors more often than on the Telegram channels of Belarusian political actors. In both cases (Figure 140), hashtags helped advance the agenda of new political figures. The Ukrainian Voice party insisted on changes (e.g. #Voice of changes, #Tour of changes, #Team of changes, #New politics), while Belarusian politicians grouped their proposals by names (e.g. #babaryka, #NAU, #tikhanovskayasvetlana). There was a mobilization function (e.g. #must act – Ukraine, #NAUaction – Belarus). The common hashtag for the two countries was “stop Russia,” which only emphasizes the solidarity between them.

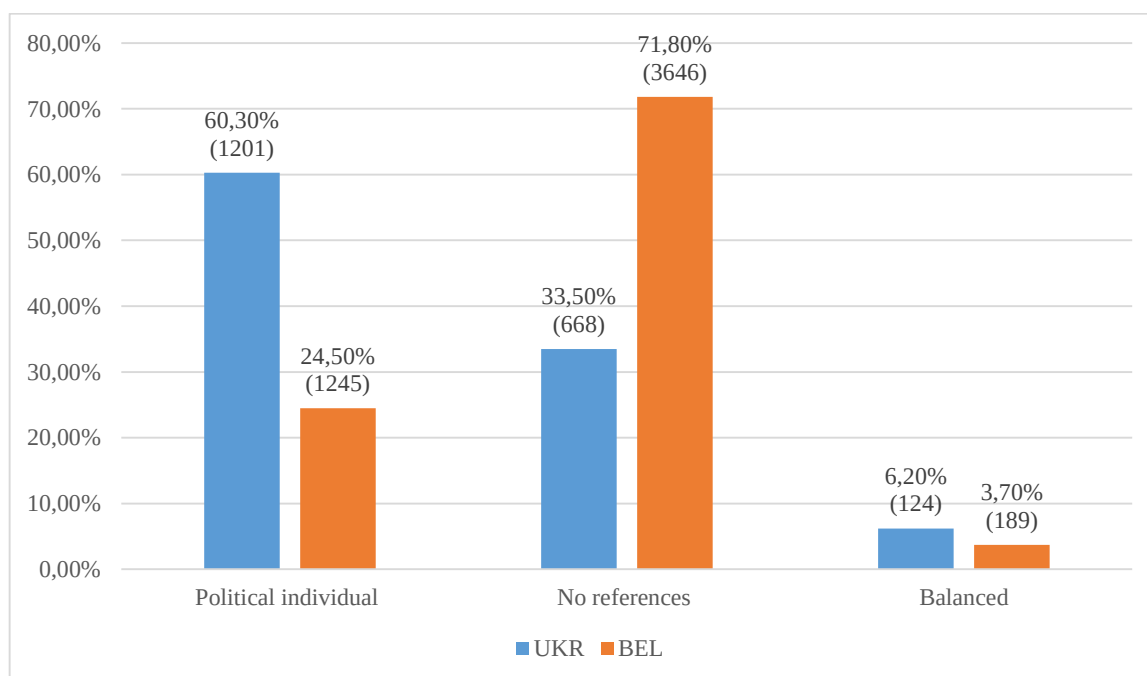
315

Fig. 141. Emotional valence of the posts (in total)



Source: Own elaboration.

Fig. 142. Personalization in the posts (in total)

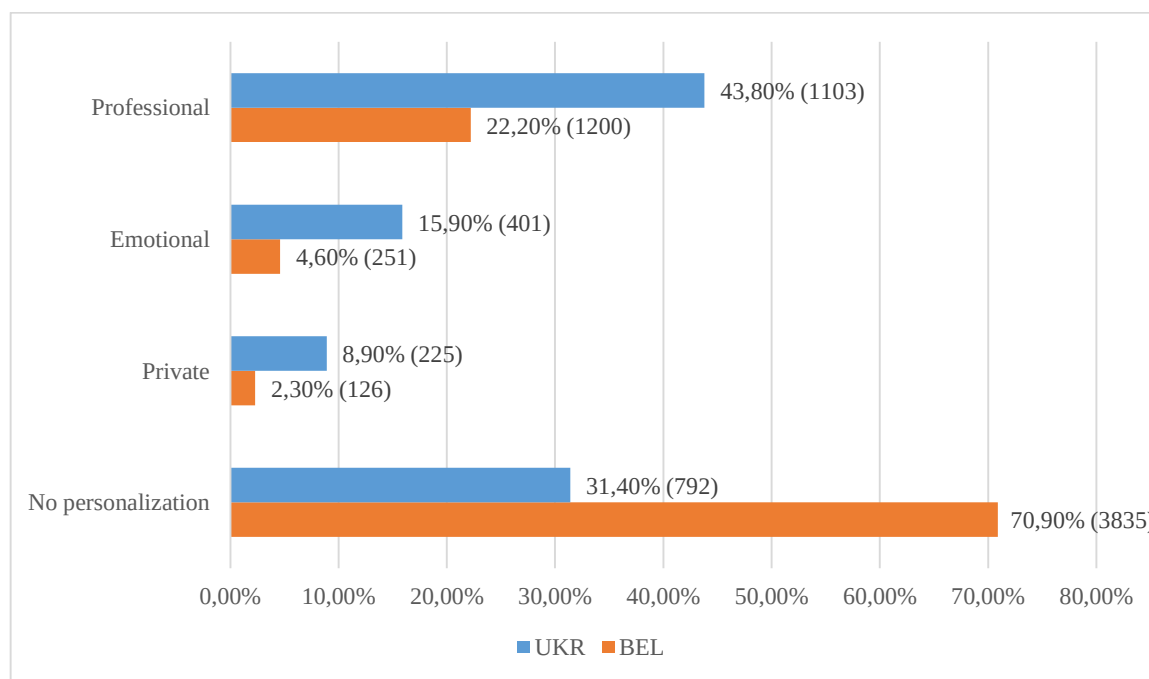


Source: Own elaboration.

The indicators of personalization also differed between the two countries (Figure 142). While the communication of Ukrainian political actors was clearly person-oriented, this was not observed among Belarusian political actors. It seems that the latter tried to distance themselves from the cult of personality imposed by Lukashenko. The posts focused even more on Belarusians (n=476) than on members of their teams (n=352).

Figure 143 shows the distribution in terms of personalization types. The most popular was professional personalization, when political actors depicted their work activities. It was followed by emotional personalization, when political actors could add any emotional component to their comments. The least represented was personal personalization. These results indicate that Ukrainian political actors and Belarusian political actors remain closed. They do not allow online users to enter their personal lives. However, the specified type provokes engagement (see Chapter 2). It is recommended to resort to it more often in order to form the image of a human being.

Fig. 143. Type of personalization (in total)



Source: Own elaboration.

In conclusion, social media can be used to a greater or lesser extent, but this tool can no longer be ignored. Each political actor makes his own decision about when, what and how to

post on these online platforms. Each action can shape the functioning of both media systems and political systems. This chapter compared the similar and different patterns of using social media for the political communication in democratic Ukraine and authoritarian Belarus (RQ2). It revealed in-depth details as well.

As can be observed, there were differences in the construction of BIOs, or biographies. Ukrainian political actors filled out brief information about themselves on the pages. The most complete BIO was prepared by Mayor Sadovyi. Although Belarusian BIOs looked more chaotic, they tried to use them in the most efficient way. There were longer descriptions, external links, feedback and collaboration tools, etc.

Turning to specifics, Belarusian political actors published more posts than Ukrainian political actors. Their figures prevailed during the election period (start), during the post-election period, during the routine period, and during the war period. The political system and the media system of Belarus obviously provoked them to be so assertive. After all, Ukrainian actors dominated only during the election period (development). Such results were a surprise in the context of H2.

The main part of the content analysis showed an equal number of similarities and differences in terms of the proposed elements of online strategies. Among the main similarities: type of posts (original post); sources of information (social media); genre of information materials (blog, vlog, podcast); length of posts (short); language style (formal); graphic elements (photos, videos); and types of personalization. Among the main differences: genre of information materials (brief news – Belarus); language of posts (Ukrainian – Ukraine, Russian – Belarus); topics of posts; functions of posts; graphic element (emojis – Belarus); hashtags (prevailed in Ukraine); emotional valence (positive – Ukraine, negative – Belarus); and personalization (present – Ukraine, absent – Belarus). The main topics were the war and the international relations in the two countries. This result reflected an obvious shift in the agenda. The top 3 also included the economy in Ukraine and the elections in Belarus. Furthermore, the function of professional updates occupied a key position in the posts of Ukrainians, and the function of information dissemination took the lead in the posts of Belarusians. These results formed the answer to RQ2.

Other findings only partially confirmed the proposed hypothesis (H2). Contrary to the post frequency indicators, Belarusian political actors were less diverse than Ukrainian political actors in terms of topics and functions. Taking all these into account, the Ukrainian online strategy could be called a “strategy of professional activation on crisis topics,” while the Belarusian one – a “strategy of diluting authoritarian discourse”⁷⁷.

Overall, Ukrainian political actors and Belarusian political actors did not use the full potential of social media platforms as of March 2022. The former had slightly more progress, while the latter focused on limited elements of their strategies. According to Tsikhanovskaya, the COVID-19 pandemic was a turning point for the transition of people into social media. Hence, there is an understanding of the importance of this tool, but a lack of time for development. The next section presents the first results on political communication via social media.

⁷⁷ The abnormally large amount of posts from the NEXTA Live channel gave rise to thoughts about its influence on the final form of the Belarusian online strategy. The indicators were calculated without its participation. The most striking changes were listed as follows. First, the proportion of long posts exceeded the proportion of short posts. Second, the elections became the second topic on the agenda, while international relations – the third topic. The total number of differences between the two countries increased to 17 (previously 16). Third, professional updates became the main function of posts, while information dissemination dropped to 5th position. The total number of differences decreased to 7 (previously 8). Fourth, the emotional valence changed from negative to positive. Hence, NEXTA Live had a significant influence on the final shape of the Belarusian online strategy. The Telegram channel could not be excluded from the research due to its popularity indicators (see general statistics above and Chapter 5) and significance for Belarusian politics.

Chapter 5. Exposure to the communication of political actors via social media in Ukraine and Belarus

5.1 Ukrainians and Belarusians: brief introduction to the cultures

According to the Lasswell's model of communication¹, the following three elements have already been explored in this work: Who (political actor), Says What (social media post), In Which Channel (social media platform). The only left: To Whom (ordinary users), and With What Effect (taken as a possible correlation). Specifically, ordinary Ukrainians and Belarusians are the main target of all the above-mentioned online strategies and activities. Their exposure or lack of exposure to the messages of political actors on social media is going to be revealed and compared in this chapter. Users' feedback in various forms is included as well.

The point of departure is an approximate delineation of the cultural boundaries of the two nations in order to understand their nature. The word "approximate" is mentioned deliberately for several reasons. First, the topic is so deep that it requires a separate study. Second, the main limitation is generalizability in the existing cross-cultural research papers². Third, there are no relevant studies on the peculiarities of Belarusian and Ukrainian cultures, taking into account the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war. Such events significantly affect their transformations. In consequence, the basis of this overview is well-organized and authoritative Hofstede's cultural dimensions.

The term "culture" has hundreds of definitions, both in sophisticated scientific literature and in a simple Google search engine. It is even associated with the soul and heart of a certain nation, the driver of national security, etc. According to Hofstede³, "Culture is the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others." Nowadays, its blurring is intensified thanks to the process of globalization,

¹ Multiple variations in Z.S. Sapienza, N. Iyer & A.S. Veenstra, *Reading Lasswell's Model of Communication Backward: Three Scholarly Misconceptions*, "Mass Communication & Society" 2015, 18(5), p. 607.

² Y. Han, H.D. Nguyen & T.H. Kim, *Addressing User Engagement in Social Media Platforms with Cultural Differences Based on Hofstede's Dimensions*, "Asia Pacific Journal of Information Systems" 2024, 34(1), p. 196.

³ G. Hofstede, *Dimensionalizing Cultures: The Hofstede Model in context*, "Online Readings in Psychology and Culture" 2011, 2(1), p. 3.

which includes the rapid movement of people from one group to another. From a communication point of view⁴, “Culture is a set of human-made objective and subjective elements that in the past have increased the probability of survival and resulted in satisfaction for the participants in an ecological niche, and thus became shared among those who could communicate with each other because they had a common language and they lived in the same time and place.” Basically, it orients people in the surrounding environment. There are at least three taxonomies of culture (relation to self, relation to others, relation to risk)⁵. Figure 144 includes their dimensions of national culture and proposed counterparts in virtual culture. This is a guide for decoding Ukrainian and Belarusian cultures.

Fig. 144. Cultural dimensions

Dimension	National culture	Perceived virtual culture
Power distance (the degree of acceptance of unequal distribution of power)	A large power distance means a clear hierarchy in society; a small power distance means the opportunity to question the decisions of the authorities in an environment of collaboration and cooperation.	A large power distance means choosing a social media with a clear division into prominent and ordinary users (by the presence of “friends” and “followers,” by paid subscription, and so on); a small power distance encourages the connection of all users on a platform regardless of their background.
Uncertainty avoidance (“a society’s tolerance for ambiguity”)	Strong uncertainty avoidance compares unplanned situations, impromptu actions with a threat; weak uncertainty avoidance means accepting the possibility of such situations and actions.	Users with strong uncertainty avoidance feel the need for more social media engagement in order to fit into the structure of society; users with weak uncertainty avoidance may rely less on online connectedness due to stability in real life.
Individualism/Collectivism (the degree of integration into groups)	Individualists take care of themselves and their closest relatives, they have personal	Individualists choose the development of a unique and creative online individuality as

⁴ L.A. Samovar, R.E. Porter, & E.R. McDaniel, *Communication between cultures*, Cengage Learning, 2009, pp. 23-24.

⁵ Y. Han, H.D. Nguyen & T.H. Kim, *Addressing User Engagement...*, op. cit., p. 194.

	interests and orientations; collectivists unite in social groups with common goals, where they feel supported and safe.	their priority, these users are characterized by self-expression and personalization; collectivists choose interdependence and knowledge sharing with other members of society, they unite in online groups and communities.
Masculinity/Femininity or Motivation towards Achievement and Success (distinction or overlapping of gender roles in a society)	Male values (decisive) reflect perseverance, competition, achievement, material success, and so on; female values (consensus-oriented) reflect care, modesty, priority of quality of life, concern for others, and so forth.	Masculine cultures use social media for career development; feminine cultures focus on personal relationships in this online environment.
Long-Term Orientation/Short-Term Orientation (determines time priorities in actions and challenges)	Long-term oriented people emphasize future events, adaptation to circumstances and problem solving; short-term oriented people emphasize traditions and the present period, prefer good or even bad stability to progress.	(Proposed by the author): long-term oriented people try to create profiles on a large number of social media platforms and develop them; short-term oriented people have 1 or 2 social media pages to meet their basic communication needs.
Indulgence/Restraint (the degree of freedom to satisfy human desires)	Indulgence is associated with personal control of life, the importance of freedom of speech, satisfaction, enjoyment, and other positive emotions; restraint is associated with a less happy society where strict social norms regulate and control desires.	(Proposed by the author): Since social media platforms try to direct and regulate their users, it is difficult to think of any analogues for this dimension.

Source: G. Hofstede, *Dimensionalizing Cultures: The Hofstede Model in context*, “Online Readings in Psychology and Culture” 2011, 2(1); Y. Han, H.D. Nguyen & T.H. Kim, *Addressing User Engagement in Social Media Platforms with Cultural Differences Based on Hofstede’s Dimensions*, “Asia Pacific Journal of Information Systems” 2024, 34(1); Own elaboration.

There is no big difference between the power distance scores in Ukraine (92/100) and Belarus (95/100). The former country is characterized by a high level of centralization since the time

of the Soviet Union. A hierarchical approach is reflected in any type of business interaction⁶. Hence, it is not surprising that President of Ukraine has the main power and influence in the formally parliamentary-presidential republic. Society also evaluates the performance of state institutions through the lens of the country's leader. Other characteristics of the culture include corruption and equal distribution of income⁷. At the same time, an even greater hierarchical order is present in Belarus⁸. Lukashenko gets the most benefits and his power cannot be criticized. It is mentioned that respect for authority is passed down from generation to generation. Among the main features of the Belarusian mentality are "hospitality, diligence, warmth and cordiality in relations between people, conscience and compassion, collectivism, tolerance." The last one is especially highlighted by Piniuta⁹.

The difference in the indicators of individualism is slightly greater for Ukraine (55/100) than Belarus (48/100)¹⁰. It means that the latter country prefers group relations, interdependence and mutual assistance, or in other words, collectivism¹¹. Nonetheless, it is difficult to agree with Hofstede's conclusions about Ukraine, where many defenders went to the frontline in order to protect, first of all, the whole country, and not only the closest relatives. The opinion about Ukraine as a collectivist country is also voiced in the study of Wackowski and Blyznyuk¹².

Another difference is shown in the indicators of motivation towards achievement and success (former masculinity/femininity). Ukraine scores 27 out of 100 points, while Belarus scores 20 out of 100 points. However, both countries prefer a consensus society. Modesty is listed as one of the dominant features of Ukrainians and Belarusians. They "work to live" and

⁶ Country comparison tool, <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison-too> (accessed on 07.06.2024).

⁷ K. Wackowski & T. Blyznyuk, *Modern Ukrainian and Polish business cultures: G. Hofstede's classification*, "Economic Annals-XXI" 2017, 165(5–6), p. 72.

⁸ The Culture Factor Group, *Country comparison tool...*, op. cit. (accessed on 07.06.2024).

⁹ V. Kirienko in I. Piniuta, *Belarusian mentality in the context of intercultural communication: grounds or pessimism and optimism*, "Sustainable Multilingualism" 2017, 11(1), pp. 43–44.

¹⁰ The Culture Factor Group, *Country comparison tool...*, op. cit. (accessed on 07.06.2024).

¹¹ I. Piniuta, *Belarusian mentality...*, op. cit., pp. 44–45

¹² K. Wackowski & T. Blyznyuk, *Modern Ukrainian and Polish business...*, op. cit., pp. 71–74.

downplay personal achievements¹³. The Ukrainian mentality is also associated with the historical archetype of the “Great Mother”¹⁴.

Both Ukraine and Belarus have the same score (95/100) on uncertainty avoidance. Ukrainians always try to be prepared for any situation and have clear answers. They need detailed instructions for action, as well as specific laws. Formality is inherent in their conversation with strangers¹⁵. In turn, “cautiousness” is a typical characteristic of Belarusian culture together with “distrust” and “secrecy”¹⁶. They follow rules and laws, avoid changes and feel threatened by people with atypical behavior¹⁷. Interestingly, the same indicators do not work in the situations of revolutions or protests. On the one hand, Ukrainians can be characterized as a deeply protest culture despite possible future uncertainty. On the other hand, Belarusians are still unable to transform their activities into a successful outcome. Their efforts significantly intensified in 2020.

The most ambiguous dimension for both cultures is long-term orientation/short-term orientation, where Ukraine scores 51 out of 100 points and Belarus scores 53 out of 100 points (very close to each other)¹⁸. As for Ukrainians, they try to accumulate and save. However, they may sacrifice short-term gains for long-term success¹⁹. As for Belarusians, they have respect for traditions, on the one hand, as well as pragmatism and optimism about the future, on the other hand²⁰.

Ukrainian culture scored 14 out of 100, and Belarusian culture scored 15 out of 100 in terms of indulgence (also very close to each other). It means that they show restraint, cynicism, passivity and pessimism. Ukrainians and Belarusians control their desires and avoid the joy

¹³ The Culture Factor Group, *Country comparison tool...*, op. cit. (accessed on 07.06.2024); I. Piniuta, *Belarusian mentality...*, op. cit., pp. 46-47.

¹⁴ K. Wackowski & T. Blyznyuk, *Modern Ukrainian and Polish business...*, op. cit., p. 73.

¹⁵ The Culture Factor Group, *Country comparison tool...*, op. cit. (accessed on 07.06.2024).

¹⁶ I. Piniuta, *Belarusian mentality...*, op. cit., pp. 45-46.

¹⁷ The Culture Factor Group, *Country comparison tool...*, op. cit. (accessed on 07.06.2024).

¹⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁹ K. Wackowski & T. Blyznyuk, *Modern Ukrainian and Polish business...*, op. cit., p. 74.

²⁰ I. Piniuta, *Belarusian mentality...*, op. cit., p. 49.

of life. They are dominated by a thirst for complaints (e.g. about government institutions, living conditions)²¹.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to determine the current level of interest in politics among Belarusians. Safety issues may be the reason for the lack of research on this culture. In turn, Ukrainians became more interested in politics during the war (somewhat interested - 60.5%, very interested - 29.9%). They can freely express their political opinions (75.9%), as of the end of 2022²².

Fig. 145. Ukrainian and Belarusian cultures in the 2024 regional context



Source: The Culture Factor Group, *Country comparison tool...*, op. cit. (accessed on 07.06.2024).

²¹ The Culture Factor Group, *Country comparison tool...*, op. cit. (accessed on 07.06.2024); K. Wackowski & T. Blyznyuk, *Modern Ukrainian and Polish business...*, op. cit., p. 74; I. Piniuta, *Belarusian mentality...*, op. cit., pp. 48-49.

²² I. Balachuk, *Ukrayintsi pid chas viyny staly bil'she tsikavytysya politykoyu*, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2023/01/16/7385044/> (accessed on 10.06.2024).

From this brief introduction, it is still possible to conclude the convergence of Ukrainian and Belarusian cultures. The closest dimensions are uncertainty avoidance, indulgence, power distance, and long-term orientation/short-term orientation. Both nations belong to the Slavic family. They have similar symbols, customs and traditions. Their languages are 84% similar in vocabulary and grammar. They are understandable without a translator²³. Moreover, Figure 145 demonstrates a comparison in a regional context (neighboring countries). The need to view survey results through the prism of unique cultural characteristics justifies the inclusion of these indicators. After all, the next step will be to determine the degree of exposure to the communication of political actors via social media among citizens of the two countries.

5.2 Methodology

In order to achieve the research objectives²⁴, the survey method and the comparative method were chosen in this PhD dissertation. The questionnaires were distributed among Ukrainians and Belarusians in two different contexts, within their respective countries and abroad (mainly in Poland). The first wave required the involvement of additional funds in order to reach a large number of people and have access to wartime Ukraine and “closed” Belarus. It was done with the help of a specialized company. The participants were 800 people. The second wave was implemented using snowball sampling. The participants were 304 people (237 after filtering). Overall, the project included six tasks: 1) Preparation of the survey questions; 2) Negotiations with potential specialized companies for the distribution of prepared questionnaires; 3) Obtaining grant funding; 4) Implementation of the surveys by the selected company; 5) Distribution of questionnaires by snowball sampling; 6) Analysis of the responses and summary of the key results.

The first task is considered as one of the most difficult. It is necessary to start from the fact that social media platforms have the power to leave a certain imprint on the political behavior of citizens. They are mainly a complementary rather than a compensatory source of political

²³ M. Pleshko, *Bez perekladu: chomu ukrayintsi i bilorusy rozumiyut' odyń odnoho*, <https://www.cbc.org.ua/post/no-translation-needed> (accessed on 10.06.2024).

²⁴ Reminder: **RQ3**. To what extent are Ukrainians and Belarusians exposed to the communication of political actors on social media? **H3**. Citizens, especially younger ones, benefit more from direct than indirect communication of political actors on social media.

information, or in other words, a supplement to traditional media and online websites in terms of political knowledge²⁵. It is applicable to the social media posts of political actors as well. Potential exposure to political content on social media is in line with the concept of internal political efficacy, or the ability “to understand and participate effectively in politics.” It can be done through various forms of online/offline activities²⁶. These are the main foundations of the survey. Furthermore, the following studies mostly serve as inspiration for its design: 1) “Online Communities and Online Activities of Politicians – Opinions of Internet Users” by Jakubowski and Olejnik; 2) “Following Politicians on Social Media: Effects for Political Information, Peer Communication, and Youth Engagement” by Marquart, Ohme and Möller.

This part of the dissertation aims to show general trends related to political communication through social media in Ukraine and Belarus. It takes into account all platforms in order to save money. The main condition is the recruitment of social media users. It is assumed that Facebook and Telegram are a default part of their media diets given the popularity of these platforms in the two countries. They are specifically highlighted in the introduction to the survey. It is important to study not “changes,” but “state” (how is it?), in order to capture the so-called “photo” of society at that moment (September 2023-April 2024). The results can be seen as a first step towards a larger research. They are already unique. There are no similar studies on Ukrainians and Belarusians. It is even more valuable because of the comparative method.

The questionnaire was prepared in three different languages: Ukrainian (for Ukrainians), Russian (for Belarusians), and English (full translation). There was an opportunity to prepare the questionnaire for Belarusians in their native language. However, some citizens advised to prepare it in the Russian language due to the low level of use and understanding of the Belarusian language within the country at least. The official results of the 2019 population census showed recognition of Belarusian as a native language among 61.2% of the

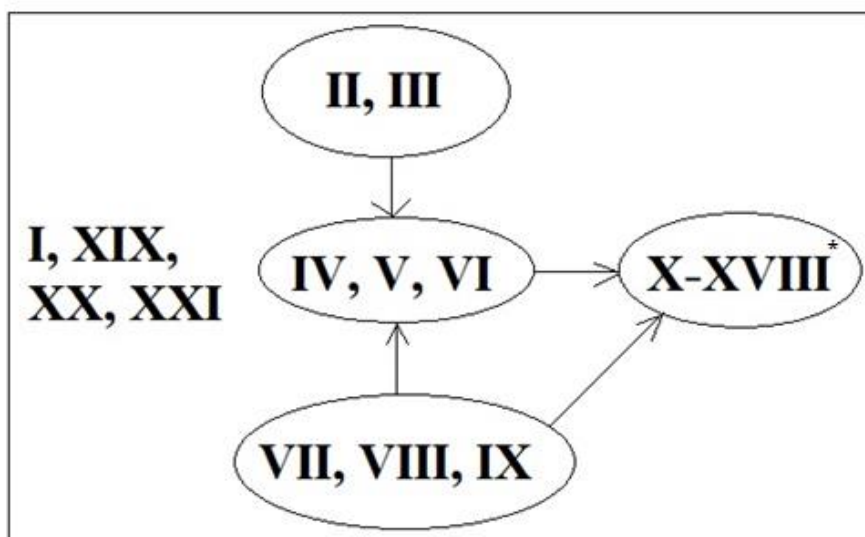
²⁵ A. Shehata & J. Strömbäck, *Learning Political news from social media: network media logic and Current Affairs News Learning in a High-Choice Media Environment*, “Communication Research” 2018, 48(1), p. 141; J. Jakubowski & I. Olejnik, *Online Communities...*, op. cit., pp. 188, 197; C.S. Park, *Learning Politics from social media: interconnection of social media use for political news and political issue and process knowledge*, “Communication Studies” 2019, 70(3), p. 15.

²⁶ F. Marquart, J. Ohme & J. Möller, *Following politicians...*, op. cit., p. 197.

population. Nevertheless, the majority of Belarusians indicated the use of Russian at home²⁷. Belarusian political actors used Russian in most of their social media posts as well (see Chapter 4). Therefore, it was decided to accept this suggestion in order to avoid risks. The decision still caused some criticism and refusal to fill out the questionnaire by several Belarusians.

All versions of the questionnaire are identical in terms of the content of the proposed questions. The general scheme consists of 16 single-choice questions and 3 multiple-choice questions for both Ukrainians and Belarusians. Importantly, Belarusian political conditions led to the inclusion of one additional question for representatives of this country (20 in total). Another question regarding the localization of Ukrainians and Belarusians (in general, within the respective country or abroad) was added during the second wave of the survey. All questions are structurally divided into 4 blocks. Their main connections are shown in Figure 146. The justification for each measurement is presented separately below. The full versions of the questionnaire can be found in Appendices G, H, I.

Fig. 146. Interconnection between survey questions



Note: Question XVIII is placed outside the oval circle in the Ukrainian questionnaire.

Source: Own elaboration.

²⁷ Belstat: *dlya 61,2% belorusov rodnoy yazyk – belorusskiy* (2020, September 10). BELTA. <https://www.belta.by/society/view/belstat-dlja-612-belorusov-rodnoj-jazyk-belorusskij-406281-2020/>, accessed on 11.06.2024.

Social media use. Since the questionnaire starts with the choice of citizenship in order to provide the corresponding Ukrainian or Belarusian version (see *Socio-demographic variables*), the first essential question measures the frequency of social media use among Ukrainians and Belarusians. In particular, social media platforms such as Facebook and Telegram are specifically highlighted in the question itself in order to evoke priority associations. Responses were coded on a 5-point scale (1 = Once a month or less, 5 = Several times a day). This introductory question is intended to weaken resistance to the survey with a complex political topic. Its indicators are essential in the context of obtaining information about political actors (representing the ruling elite/regime and opposition forces), as well as politics in general (Questions IV-VI).

Political preferences. This question is more direct and difficult for participants than the previous one. Since Ukrainians could openly share their views and beliefs, it was formulated quite clearly for them. It was asked, “Which side of politics do you support?” The answers were “1 = Ruling elite (President and/or the “Servant of the People” party)”; “2 = Opposition forces”; “3 = Against all (against the ruling elite and opposition forces)”; and “4 = Not interested in politics.” At the same time, it was taken into account that Belarusians may be afraid to openly talk about their political preferences because of potential repressions. The question was rephrased for security reasons. It was asked, “Do you support the policy being pursued in your country?” The answers were “1 = Probably yes” (supporting the ruling regime); “2 = Probably no” (supporting the opposition forces); and “3 = Not interested in politics.” In conclusion, these questions aim to show the potential correlation between political beliefs and the content displayed on social media profiles. They also reveal the political preferences of Ukrainians and Belarusians.

Consumption of political information on social media. The following questions IV, V, VI measure the frequency of encountering various types of political information on social media. Among them are information about representatives of the ruling elite/regime and information about representatives of opposition forces. These two sides should be very clear for the respondents. In a simplified form, they are the main ones in any political system. If messages about political actors reach the audience, their communication mission is already partially successful. Furthermore, one of the questions covers the topic of politics in general (no

mention of the specified representatives). It is designed to address potential cases of missing information about political actors. Responses to all the questions are coded on a 5-point scale (1 = Never, 5 = Several times a day). If option 1 is interpreted as no consumption of the aforementioned types of content, options 2-5 confirm exposure to them. Such strategy gives more options for choosing the correct answer and presents additional details about the frequency. The logic behind all these questions lies in the possible correlation between the consumption of information about political actors, on the one hand, and online participation, offline participation, political knowledge, on the other hand.

Social media following of political actors. The next two multiple-choice questions refer to direct communication. Participants must indicate their subscription preferences from the list. Logically, a subscription equals at least some information about a political actor. Thanks to the questions, it is possible to measure the benefits of using this social media practice (Questions VII-VIII) compared to indirect communication (Question IX). The results accept or reject H3. It is also possible to understand the approximate popularity of political actors from the sample for content analysis. There are many similarities with the current list. The latter simply adds some popular Ukrainian and Belarusian political actors that cannot be compared in terms of content. Moreover, they are divided into groups by general political roles (the ruling elite/the ruling regime, -/pro-government political figures, opposition, opinion leaders or influencers). Basically, the division takes place between the government and the opposition. It should be clear to the survey participants. It is important that Ukrainians and Belarusians also have a choice of political actors from the opposite country. This step strengthens the results of the cross-country analysis with new insights. Possible answers include “I am not subscribed to anyone from this list, and I am not subscribed to Ukrainian/Belarusian political figures in general”; “I am subscribed to the representatives of the ruling elite/the ruling regime from the list”; “I am subscribed to the representatives of the opposition from the list”; “I am subscribed to the opinion leaders/influencers from the list”; “I am subscribed to Ukrainian/Belarusian political figures who are not on the list”; and “I am subscribed to the representatives of pro-government political figures from the list” (the last option is only for Belarusians)²⁸.

²⁸ Note: the respondents could choose several answers, so their sum differs from the total.

Although the list included the most popular political actors from the two countries, it was impossible to include all of them. On the Belarusian side, political actors of a similar type can be added at least to the category of opinion leaders/influencers. On the Ukrainian side, political actors of a similar type can be added to each category due to their high social media presence.

Incidental exposure to information about political actors. This multiple-choice question refers to indirect communication. It shows alternative options for transferring content about political actors, so it appears on social media profiles of ordinary citizens. The latter receive information about political actors on these online platforms while using them for other purposes²⁹. Respondents have to choose from news media posts, friends' posts and messages, advertising posts, and social media recommendations³⁰. They can indicate a lack of such experience too³¹. Among other things, the numbers of incidental exposure, without following any political actor from the respective country on social media, can be useful in the context of information displayed about one of the specified political sides (Questions V, VI). As passive information-seeking behavior, it can be compared to subscription practices in isolation, or voluntary information-seeking behavior (Questions VII, VIII), in terms of possible benefits for ordinary citizens (online participation, offline participation, political knowledge, or among Questions X-XVIII). The results accept or reject H3.

Since the choice of communication type comes to the fore in this hypothesis, citizenship does not play a serious role. The answers of Ukrainians and Belarusians are calculated together. The strength of this comparative analysis lies in the combination of participants from different political systems. The questionnaires are filtered based on the only choice: either subscription or incidental exposure to a political actor of the respective country, but not both together. There are 6 possible benefits. In addition to offline participation and knowledge, each variant of online participation is analyzed separately (see later in the chapter). Conclusions are made according to the best indicators (not necessarily more than 50% of positive answers).

²⁹ C.S. Park, *Learning Politics from social media...*, op. cit., p. 4.

³⁰ A. Shehata & J. Strömbäck, *Learning Political news from social media...*, op. cit., p. 129.

³¹ Note: the respondents could choose several answers, so their sum differs from the total.

Citizenship is a priority in RQ3. In order to compare Ukrainians and Belarusians, it is necessary to define the possible levels of exposure to the communication of political actors via social media. This is a logical continuation after consuming certain information. The levels depend on the transformation of information into actions and knowledge. There are both optimists and skeptics regarding these issues³². The current paper accepts arguments from both sides of the debate. According to the assumption, the main difference in their conclusions can be present due to the uniqueness of each culture and the experience behind it. In the current paper, it is decided to outline five levels of potential exposure among Ukrainians and Belarusians, as well as the option of its absence (see: Figure 147). Actions are prioritized over knowledge because knowing something is not enough in the world of politics. The former is the main benefit for a political actor, producer of content. The complete success of the communication mission can be determined in this way.

The RQ3 covers the comparison of Ukrainians and Belarusians in terms of 3 blocks: offline participation, knowledge, and combined online participation. The latter is the sum of the answers to Questions X, XI, XIII and XIV. Each block is considered successful if it receives the majority of positive responses among citizens. Only respondents who consume information about political actors (either the ruling elite/regime, or the opposition, or both sides) are selected for analysis.

Fig. 147. Possible levels of exposure to the communication of political actors via social media

Level	Description
Absent	Citizens do not consume information about political actors on social media.
Very low	Citizens consume information, do NOT participate in the proposed online and offline activities, rate their knowledge about political actors as at least CERTAIN.

³² C.S. Park, *Learning Politics from social media...*, op. cit., pp. 1-24; A. Shehata & J. Strömbäck, *Learning Political news from social media...*, op. cit., pp. 125–147; M. Bene, *Influenced by peers: Facebook as an information source for young people*, “Social Media + Society” 2017, 3(2), 205630511771627; F. Marquart, J. Ohme & J. Möller, *Following politicians...*, op. cit., pp. 197-207; J. Jakubowski & I. Olejnik, *Online Communities...*, op. cit., pp. 183-201; H.G. De Zúñiga, L. Molyneux & P. Zheng, *Social Media, Political Expression, and Political Participation: Panel analysis of Lagged and Concurrent relationships*, “Journal of Communication” 2014, 64(4), pp. 612–634.

Low	Citizens consume information, participate in the proposed online activities OR offline activities, rate their knowledge about political actors as CERTAIN.
Medium	Citizens consume information, participate in the proposed online OR offline activities, rate their knowledge about political actors as HIGH.
High	Citizens consume information, participate in the proposed online AND offline activities, rate their knowledge about political actors as CERTAIN.
Very high	Citizens consume information, participate in the proposed online AND offline activities, rate their knowledge about political actors as HIGH.

Source: Own elaboration.

Online political participation (or slacktivism) characterized by low effort or commitment. It consists of four main questions to the recipients. They are asked about: 1) the frequency of responding to posts (in the form of likes or other reactions), sharing posts, or commenting on posts of political actors, 2) the frequency of publishing posts with hashtags or commenting with hashtags, 3) the frequency of posting memes or commenting on memes about political actors. Answers to all these questions were coded on a 5-point scale (1 = Never, 5 = Several times a day). The most important indicator was the action itself (Options 2-5 versus Option 1), while the frequency became an additional detail. The clarifying question was asked about the relation of memes to groups of political actors (e.g. to the ruling elite/regime, to the opposition, or to both). The forth question was about the actions of donating money or signing petitions, which political actors announce exclusively on social media. Possible answers were “1 = Yes,” “2 = No.” Taken together, all these types of online participation could show a correlation with potentially consumed information about political actors (Questions V, VI) via direct or indirect communication (Questions VII-IX).

Offline political participation. The main issue includes any possible event organized by political actors in real life (meeting, protest, demonstration, volunteering, and so on). Information about them is typically shared via social media. Today, it is difficult to imagine their placement in traditional media. Political leaflets are also a thing of the past. Thus, possible answers are “1 = Yes,” “2 = No.” It was decided to refrain from such an option as “participation in the election.” This question needs a lot of additional clarification in order to

prove at least some role of social media (given the variety of incentives in political advertisement on TV). It is not possible in this study due to the limit of questions for the corresponding price. However, an additional question specifies the source of information regarding offline activities (1 = Social media, 2 = Websites, 3 = Traditional media, 4 = Other). When calculating, offline activity was counted only under the first option. The importance of the “1=Yes” option requires separate confirmation from the participants. These points are connected to Questions V, VI (whether the information is consumed or not) and Questions VII-IX (via direct or indirect communication).

Belarusians received another question because of the possible fear to answer truthfully. Specifically, not everyone was ready to admit their participation even in an anonymous survey due to the threat of criminal proceedings in Belarus. Therefore, they had to indicate the main reason for ignoring online and offline activities. Possible answers were “1 = I am afraid,” “2 = I do not want to,” “3 = I refuse to answer” (can indicate fear too). Both the first and third options can be considered as their secret participation. Despite the fact that social media is almost the exclusive source of oppositional information for Belarusians, this result can only be included to account for potentially lost positive responses.

Knowledge. This term refers to facts about political actors that users can recall in memory for specific purposes (e.g. interpretation, discussion, understanding). A knowledgeable society contributes to the development of democracy³³. Although researchers can conduct a knowledge test based on a battery of questions from political news stories in order to prove the learning process via social media, there is no such possibility in this study due to the limit of questions for the corresponding price³⁴. Therefore, the participants were asked to give their own assessment of the acquired knowledge about political actors. An important condition was social media as a source of information. Reports were coded on a 5-point scale, where “1 = Not at all (as absent),” “2 = Just a little” and “3 = Moderately” (calculated together as CERTAIN), “4 = Significantly” and “5 = To a great extent” (calculated together as HIGH). This question shows a possible correlation with potentially consumed information about political actors (Questions V, VI) via direct or indirect communication (Questions VII-IX).

³³ C.S. Park, *Learning Politics from social media...*, op. cit., pp. 3, 13.

³⁴ Ibidem; A. Shehata & J. Strömbäck, *Learning Political news from social media...*, op. cit., pp. 125–147.

Socio-demographic variables. Respondents were asked about their citizenship (1 = Ukraine, 2 = Belarus) in order to obtain the appropriate version of the questionnaire. This step made it possible to separate and compare their answers. Since the word “citizens” is used, it is better to ask about their citizenship. Participants also marked their age group (18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-65, 66+). Distinguishing young people (18-24) from others is important task because of H3. Additionally, respondents indicated their gender (1 = Male, 2 = Female, 3 = Do not want to answer). They could indicate their location at will (1 = Within the territory of their country, 2 = Abroad, 3 = Do not want to answer). Since the specialist company had specific sampling parameters regarding location, a similar understanding of snowball sampling was required.

All versions of the survey were carefully developed. The English version of the questionnaire was revised with my supervisors. Since all questions must be logically connected, it was reworked at least four times in order to produce valuable results. After that, the Ukrainian and Russian versions were sent to PhD students from Ukraine and Belarus for review and critical comments. It was important to get feedback from locals who understand the current situation inside their respective countries. It led to changes in terminology, restructuring of some questions and addition of indicators and explanations. For example, the ruling elite (“правляча верхівка”) was renamed as the ruling regime (“правлящий режим”) for the Belarusian participants. It should clarify the meaning for ordinary citizens. Moreover, the possibility of refusing to answer some questions was added for the safety and comfort of survey participants. Full confidentiality and anonymity was ensured.

Survey participants were provided with an e-mail address for feedback. Some comments were received. The criticism concerned the selection of political actors from Ukraine in the Question VII. The participant was dissatisfied with the inclusion of pro-Russian politicians and influencers (e.g. Dubinskyi, Shariy). They were referred to as “state traitors.” However, it does not exclude the fact that they form part of the political life of Ukraine. Their inclusion gives a more complete and objective picture of the country. Therefore, these political actors were left on the list. This is the summary of the first step.

The second task was establishing cooperation with a specialized company that would be able to distribute the questionnaire among Ukrainians and Belarusians³⁵. The following conditions were to be fulfilled. The proposed *method* was CAWI (Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing), since the value of this kind of survey is high. *Target group*: 18+, people using social media. *Sample*: N=400 Ukrainian citizens and N=400 Belarusian citizens located within the territory of their respective countries. The company was unable to arrange complete representativeness due to the political situation in both countries, which caused significant migration. Instead, gender representativeness was ensured (54% women and 46% men). The *results* were to be sent as a database in Excel format. *Time frame*: September-October 2023.

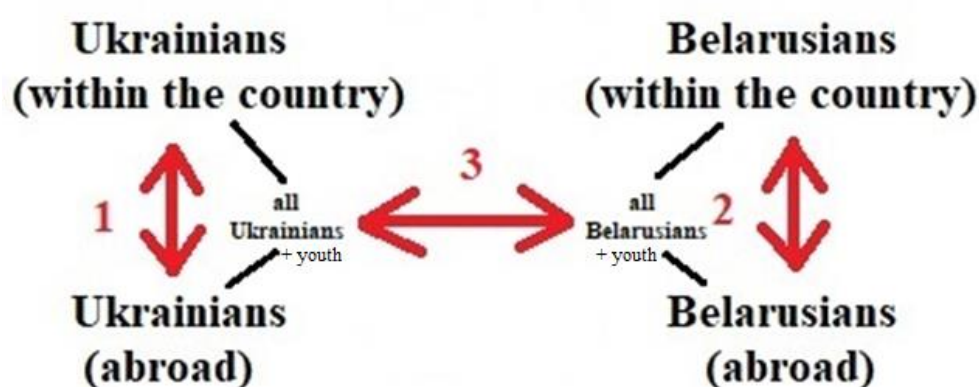
The third task was to receive grant funding. The application 054/13/SNS/0001 was submitted in the “Inicjatywa Doskonałości – Uczelnia Badawcza” at Adam Mickiewicz University. Initially, the author applied for the maximum quota of 20 000 PLN. It was assumed that the price for the services of the selected company could increase at the time of the actual study (almost a year after the financial approval). In addition, there was no guarantee of cooperation with this particular company after such a long period of time. No obligations were documented. The offers of other companies were significantly higher too (around 19 000 PLN). This situation led to the reduction of the sample to 400 Ukrainians and 400 Belarusians in order to prevent risks. After all, the applicant received financing in the amount of 14 268 PLN.

As time has shown, all the decisions made were correct. The selected company has changed its name. The updated price was significantly higher, specifically 17 000 PLN (net). Only negotiations made it possible to return to the old proposal. As a result, the implementation of the 4th task was started in August and completed in September 2023 (non-election period, but wartime).

³⁵ Since Adam Mickiewicz University, as a grant provider, prohibited any cooperation with Ukrainian and Belarusian companies in 2023, it was necessary to look for a Polish company. Relevant request were made to 9 companies via e-mail (Appendix J). In 2022, the best offer was made by the “DBR Research” company. The agreed financial cost was 14 268 PLN (gross). In 2023, the company changed its name to “Fieldstat.” The final price was negotiated at the level of 14 199.12 PLN (gross).

The second wave of the survey began on 26.09.2023 and ended on 26.04.2024 (non-election period, but wartime). The questionnaire was prepared in Google Forms. The use of the snowball sampling technique was justified. Ukrainians and Belarusians can be considered as a hard-to-reach audience because of the political circumstances. They may be afraid to answer the questions or simply do not have time due to a difficult life situation. Hence, the questionnaire was distributed among friends, Facebook groups and Polish universities (Adam Mickiewicz University, University of Wroclaw, University of Warsaw, Jagiellonian University). The ad was placed in the “MY” bar in Poznan (Appendix K), which is associated with the Belarusian and Ukrainian communities. The participants were sent a request to further distribute the questionnaire among their circle of acquaintances. Unfortunately, the administrators of some Facebook groups rejected the request to post the questionnaire due to their apolitical nature. The implementation of the 5th task turned out to be more difficult than expected. The sample consisted of 189 Ukrainians and 115 Belarusians. During the filtering process, only the responses of participants from abroad were left. Some questionnaires were deleted due to incorrect filling of answers in questions 7, 8, and 9. The same respondents indicated that they follow and do not follow political actors, as well as receive and do not receive information about political actors in other ways on social media platforms. The final numbers were 131 Ukrainians and 106 Belarusians.

Fig. 148. Possible comparisons



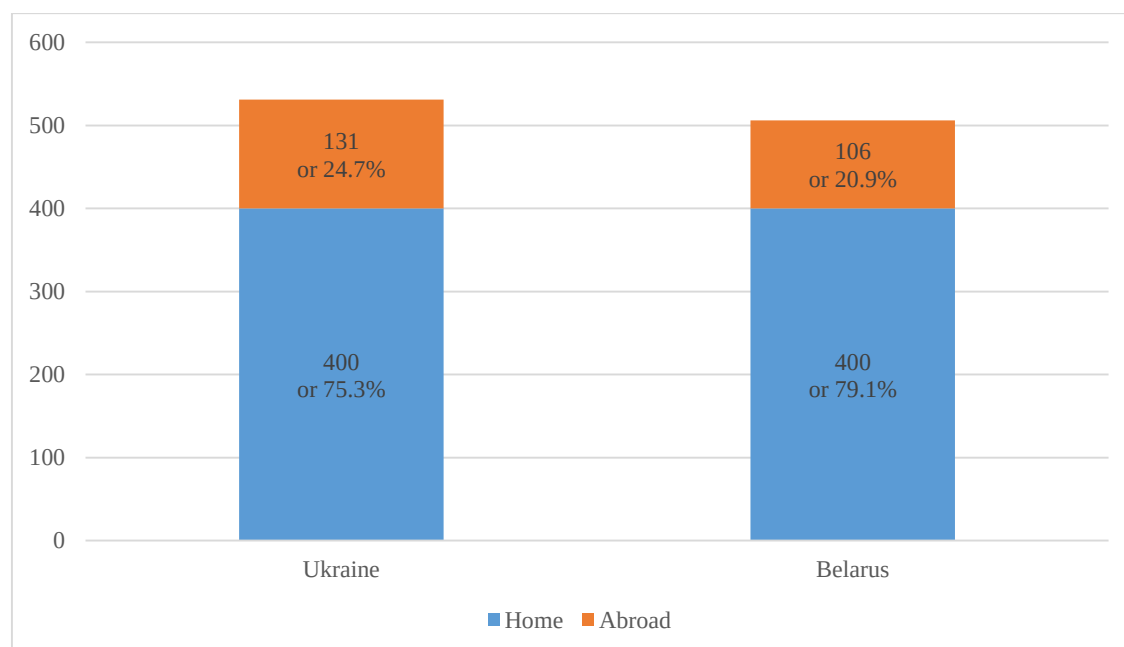
Source: Own elaboration.

The next step was the analysis of the collected answers. All data were presented in the form of Excel files and CSV-files. The latter were processed in the PSPP program. At this stage, the logical connections between the questions played an important role. It was possible to make three different comparisons (Figure 148). The main one (3) was between citizens of Ukraine and Belarus because of the focus of this PhD thesis. The other two (1 and 2) also brought some new insights, but it was irrelevant to analyze these details in every presented question. The key findings were described in the next subchapter.

5.3 Results

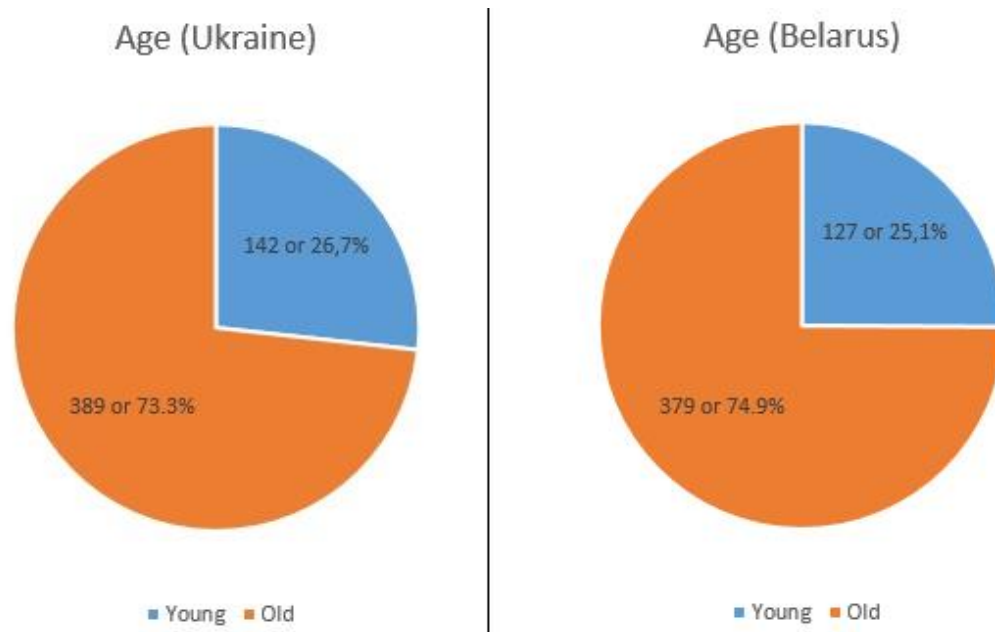
To begin with, the Ukrainian part of the sample consists of 531 respondents (or 100%). Their share within the territory of Ukraine is 400 participants, while abroad – 131 participants. The gender distribution includes 198 men, 332 women and 1 unidentified person. The difference arose due to the greater number of female respondents abroad (113 versus 17 males). It is obvious that the Russia-Ukraine war was the main factor in this. As for age, the group of young people (from 18 to 24 years old) involves 142 Ukrainians.

Fig. 149. The detailed sample from the two countries



Source: Own elaboration.

Fig. 150. Age distribution in the sample



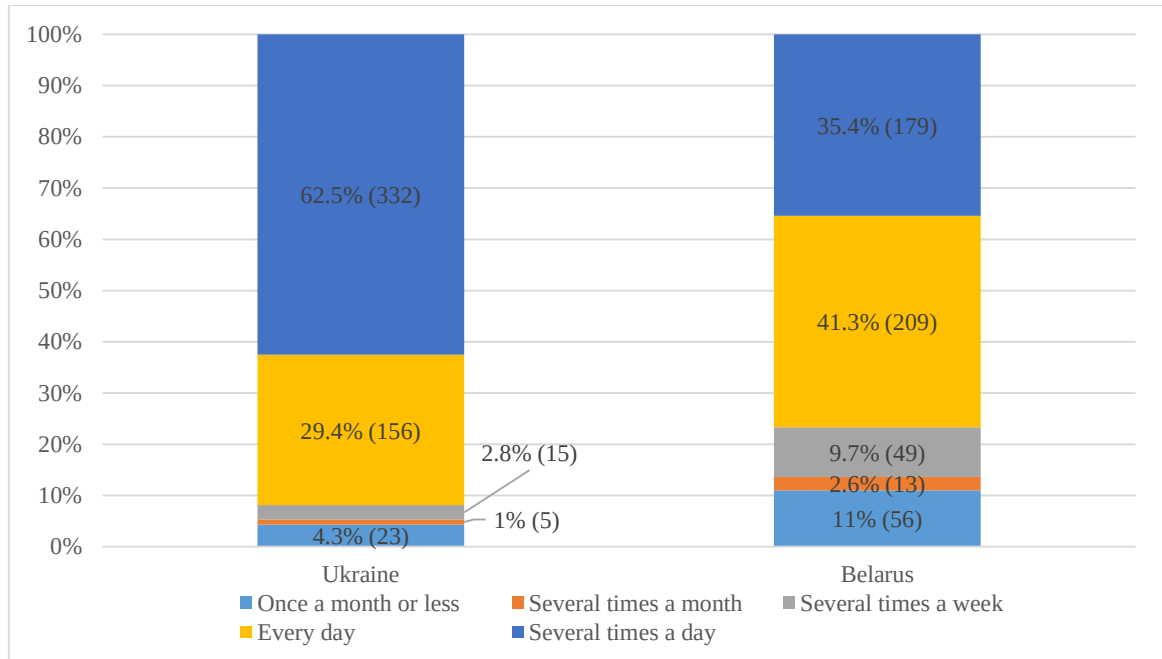
Source: Own elaboration.

In turn, the Belarusian part of the sample consists of 506 respondents (or 100%). Their share within the territory of Belarus is 400 participants, while abroad – 106 participants. It is not significantly differ from the Ukrainian part of the sample (Figure 149). The gender distribution includes 201 men, 300 women and 5 unidentified respondents, which means that the gap is closer in this case. As for age, the group of young people involves 127 Belarusians, which is not much smaller than in the Ukrainian part of the sample (Figure 150). Since the number of respondents from both countries is still different, all comparisons are made using percentages.

As mentioned, the study covers only social media users. The results demonstrate that these communication platforms occupy a significant place in the lives of Ukrainians and Belarusians (Figure 151). The majority of respondents use them at least once a day. At the same time, Belarusians are less active users. Only 35.4% of them access social media several times a day, compared to the dominant 62.5% of Ukrainians. The latter can feel more freedom online because of the chosen democratic path and freedom of speech. In addition, a slightly larger share of Belarusians turn to social media only a few times a week or even less often. Among the main reasons can be the widespread practices of online surveillance and the

potential punishment for users (located inside the country) or for their families (if a user left the country alone).

Fig. 151. The general frequency of social media use



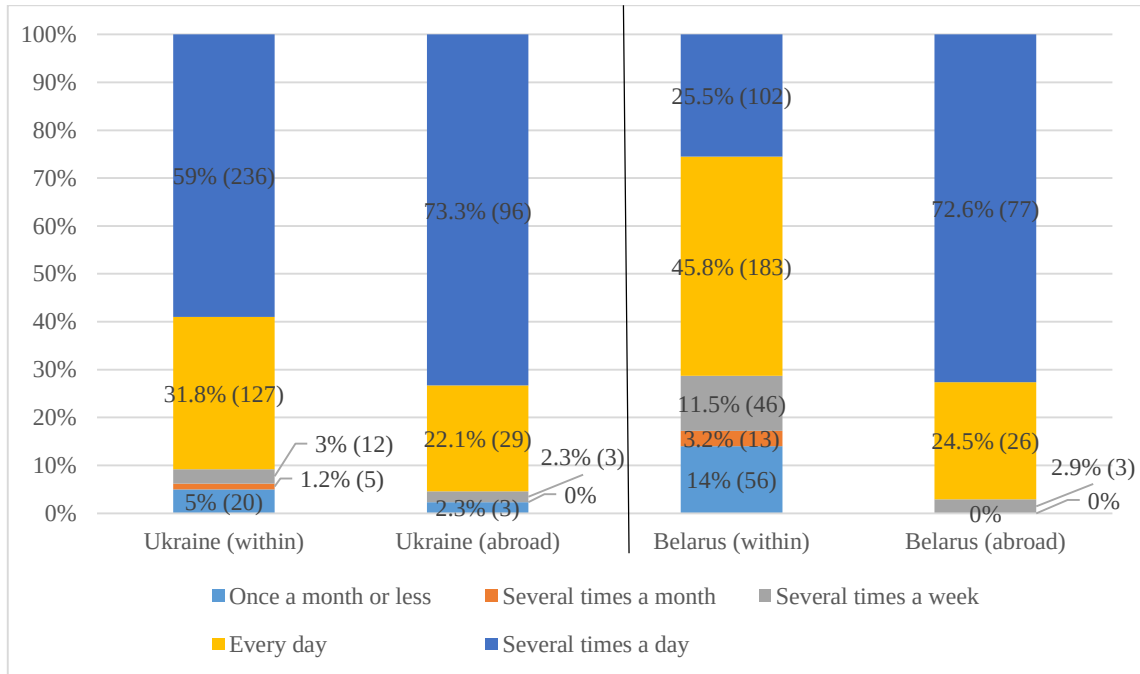
Source: Own elaboration.

Looking at the answers in detail, Belarusians from abroad use social media significantly more often than their compatriots at home (Figure 152). Countries of the EU like Poland can give comfortable freedom in this case. As for Belarusians who stay in the country, there is a threat that less use of these online platforms could lead to greater absorption of pro-government propaganda. The connection with opposition political actors and objective information can potentially become weaker. Moving forward, there is no surprise that the main audience of social media is young users, so-called “digital natives” (Figure 153). This is the key “asset” for the future development of Belarus that requires special attention.

In comparison, the answers of Ukrainian respondents mostly repeat neighboring trends. Rates of social media use are slightly lower domestically than abroad, but still high (Figure 152). If the domestic media environment is full of various sources of information, these online platforms have become a solution for those who left the country and want to stay in touch with home. The young audience dominates social media as well (Figure 153). All this

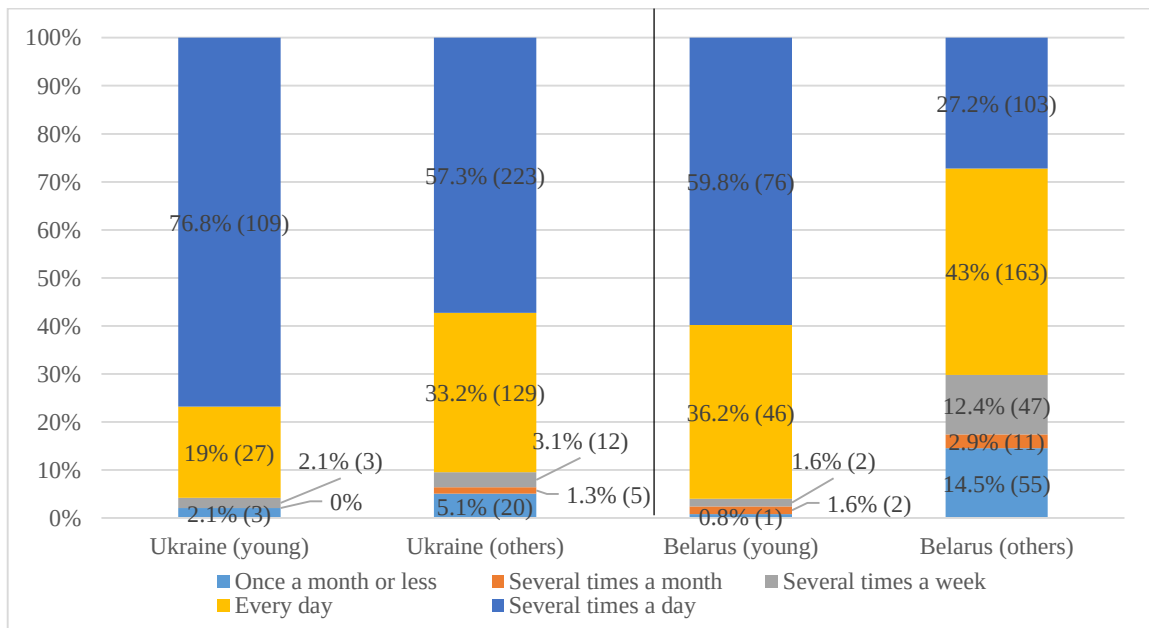
detailed knowledge about the frequency of social media use is an important ground for further survey results, especially regarding the potential consumption of political information.

Fig. 152. The detailed frequency of social media use (location)



Source: Own elaboration.

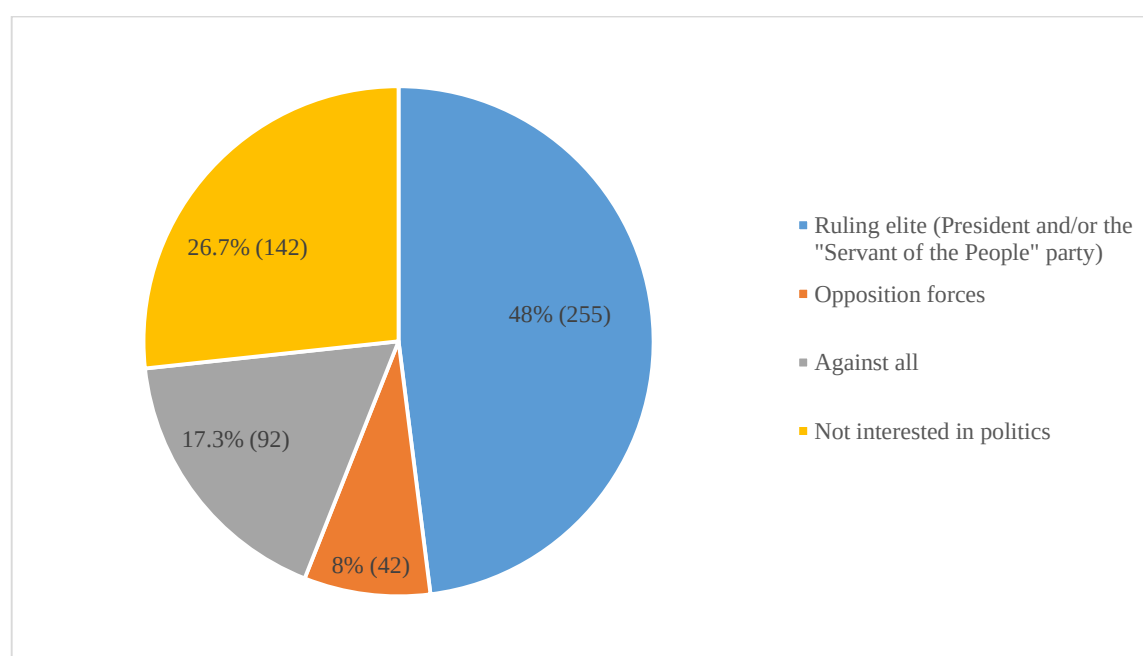
Fig. 153. The detailed frequency of social media use (age)



Source: Own elaboration.

Next, President Zelenskyy is the leader among the political preferences of Ukrainians (Figure 154). Although this answer option included his party, Zelenskyy remains the main character. The figure of 48% is close to the results of a survey conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology in December 2023³⁶. As for other outcomes, a large part of respondents do not support any political side (17.3%) or are not interested in politics at all (26.7%). These indicators are an advantage of the study. It will outline the potential for obtaining information about political actors on social media and subsequent online/offline activity with the inclusion of disinterested people.

Fig. 154. Political preferences of Ukrainians



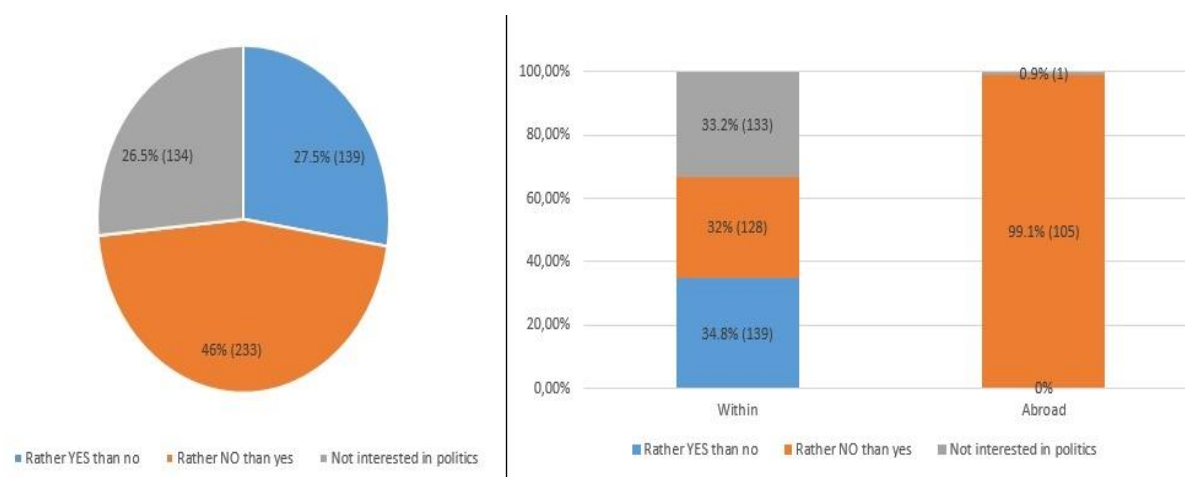
Source: Own elaboration.

The Belarusian group of respondents seems to reflect the real mood of society. It confirms the disagreement of the majority with the policy pursued by the authoritarian regime (Figure 155). The domestic part of the sample is balanced in preferences. Although it was possible to choose the option “not interested in politics” for the sake of security, 34.8% of Belarusians within the country backed Lukashenko, who objectively has supporters as well. It means that

³⁶ S. Smyshlyayev, *59% ukrayintsiv doviryayut' i Zelens'komu, i Zaluzhnomu* – KMIS, <https://www.dw.com/uk/59-vidsotkiv-ukrainciv-doviraut-vodnocas-i-zelenskomu-i-zaluzhnomu-kmis/a-67757257> (accessed on 11.06.2024).

the research adheres to the principle of diversity in terms of political views. Nonetheless, the answers of respondents from abroad give every reason to claim that 33.2% of Belarusians inside the country could choose the apolitical option in order to be safe. There was not a single person who supported Lukashenko abroad. Only one user identified disinterest in politics. The main reason is that Belarusian oppositionists are the dominant group fleeing to Europe, especially after the 2020 protests.

Fig. 155. Political preferences of Belarusians

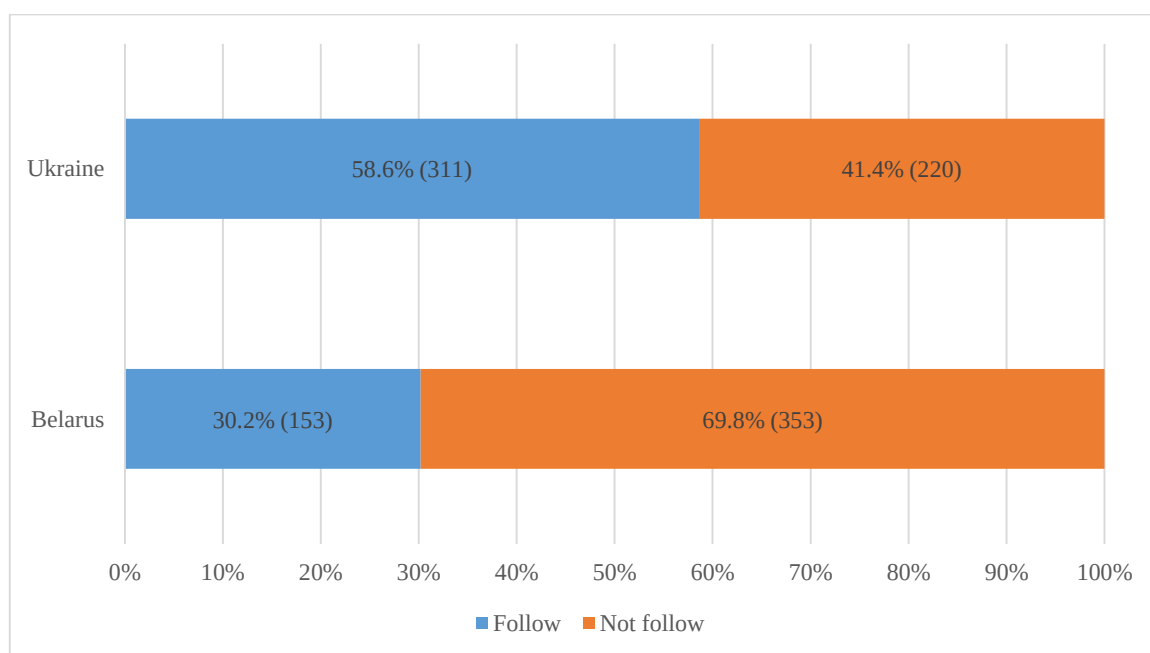


Source: Own elaboration.

There is a noticeable gap in the practice of following political figures on social media (Figure 156). While this is common for most Ukrainians (58.6%), the numbers are completely opposite for Belarusians (30.2%). Once again, the power structures of this authoritarian country monitor and punish citizens for following so-called “extremist” opposition channels³⁷. It can be concluded that this method of intimidation gives the desired result. Similar problems have not been noticed in Ukraine yet. People absolutely calmly follow their preferable political actors.

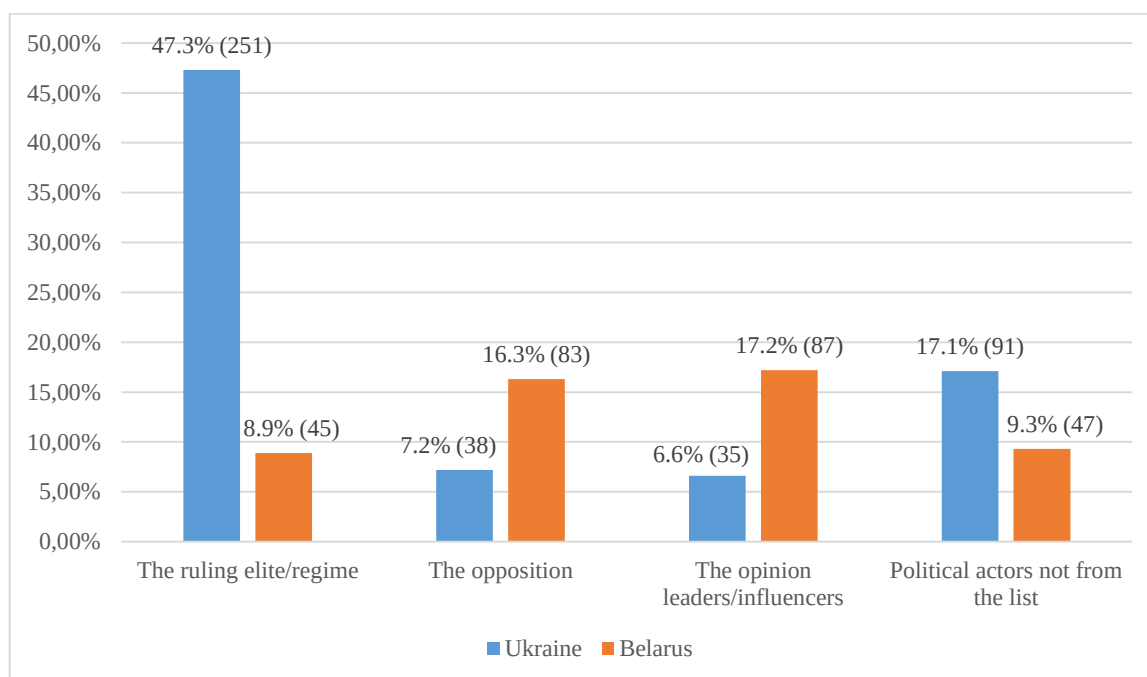
³⁷ GUBOPiK priznal chto nakazyvaet dazhe za podpisku na ekstremistskie kanaly. Chto delat? <https://belsat.eu/ru/news/09-09-2023-gubopik-priznal-chto-nakazyvaet-dazhe-za-podpisku-na-ekstremistskie-kanaly-chto-delat> (accessed on 13.06.2024).

Fig. 156. The process of following political actors



Source: Own elaboration.

Fig. 157. The process of following political actors (in detail)



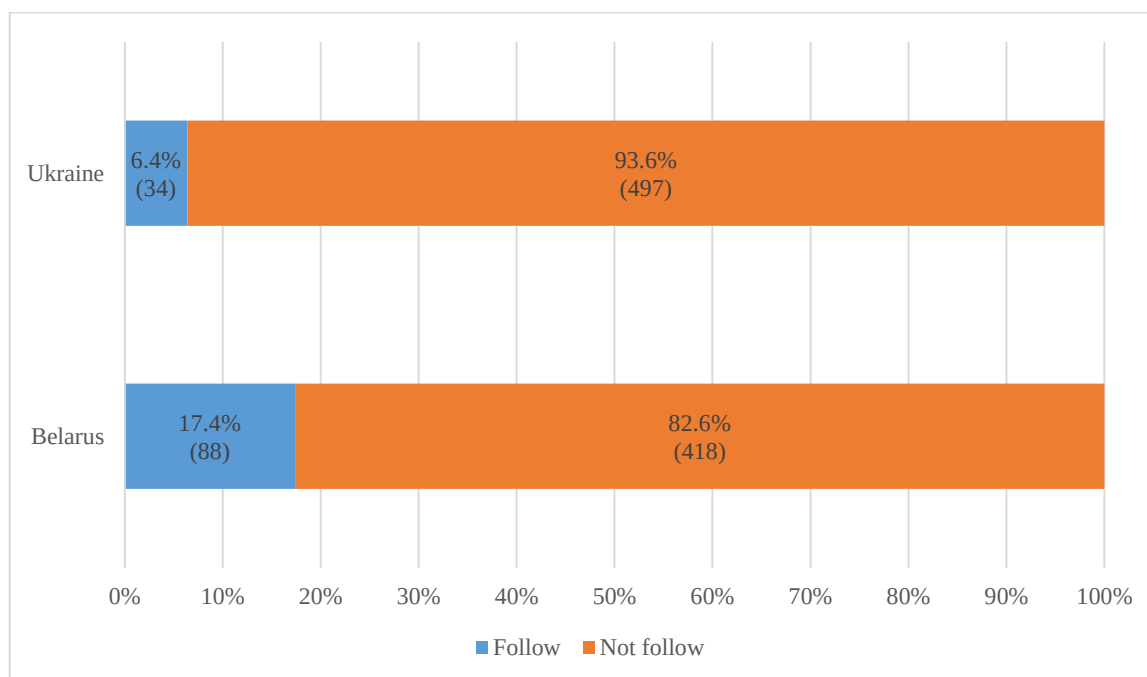
Source: Own elaboration.

The detailed social media diet of respondents is depicted in Figure 157. First, it can be assumed that the lists of political actors from Ukraine and Belarus are well formed considering the low numbers of subscriptions to other political figures. Second, Ukrainians single out President and his team (47.3%), which only confirms the aforementioned opinion about Zelenskyy's popularity. At the same time, representatives of the opposition (7.2%) and influencers (6.6%) are less attractive. Their indicators are practically equal. This sheds light on the growing importance of the latter in the political life of the country. Third, Belarusians follow influencers the most (17.2%). This result corresponds to the generally high number of subscribers to the NEXTA channel (see Chapter 4) and indicates the potential of this layer of political actors. The next place is taken by the accounts of opposition politicians (16.3%), which reveal slight fatigue from the traditional version of politics. Despite the advantage in information visibility (see below), representatives of the authorities are practically ignored by the Belarusian audience. Only 8.9% of respondents are subscribers to the channels of Lukashenko and pro-government politicians. The overload of information about their actions from various sources can be one of the main reasons for this.

There is a small connection between the two countries (Figures 158 and 159). The fact is that around 17% of Belarusian respondents follow Ukrainian political actors. The most popular are representatives of the Ukrainian authorities. This corresponds to the stories of random Belarusians citizens. They told the author about their choice to watch Zelenskyy's New Year's greeting as an alternative to Belarusian President. As for the connection in the reverse direction, much fewer Ukrainians are interested in Belarusian political actors (6.4%). Influencers attract the most attention, while Lukashenko is of no interest to anyone. This result is striking in comparison to 2019, when he topped the popularity rating among Ukrainians³⁸.

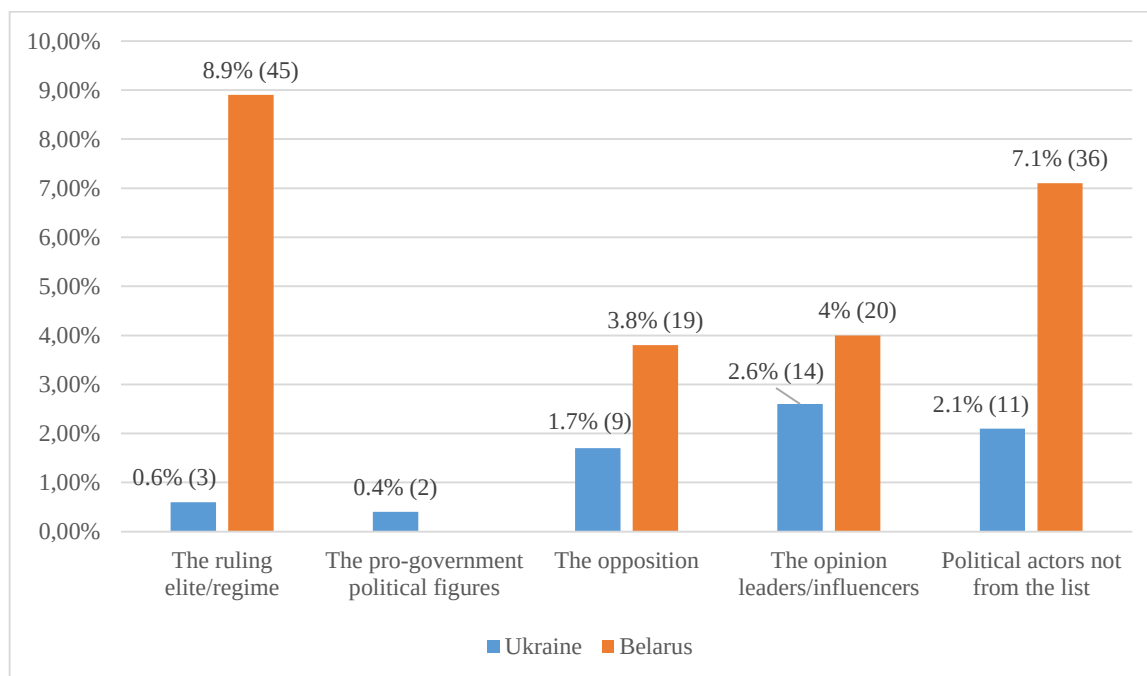
³⁸ *Naykrashche ukrayintsi stavlyat'sya do ochil'nykh krayiny-susida – opytuvannya*, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2019/11/11/7231650/index.amp> (accessed on 13.06.2024).

Fig. 158. The cross-country connection in terms of following political actors



Source: Own elaboration.

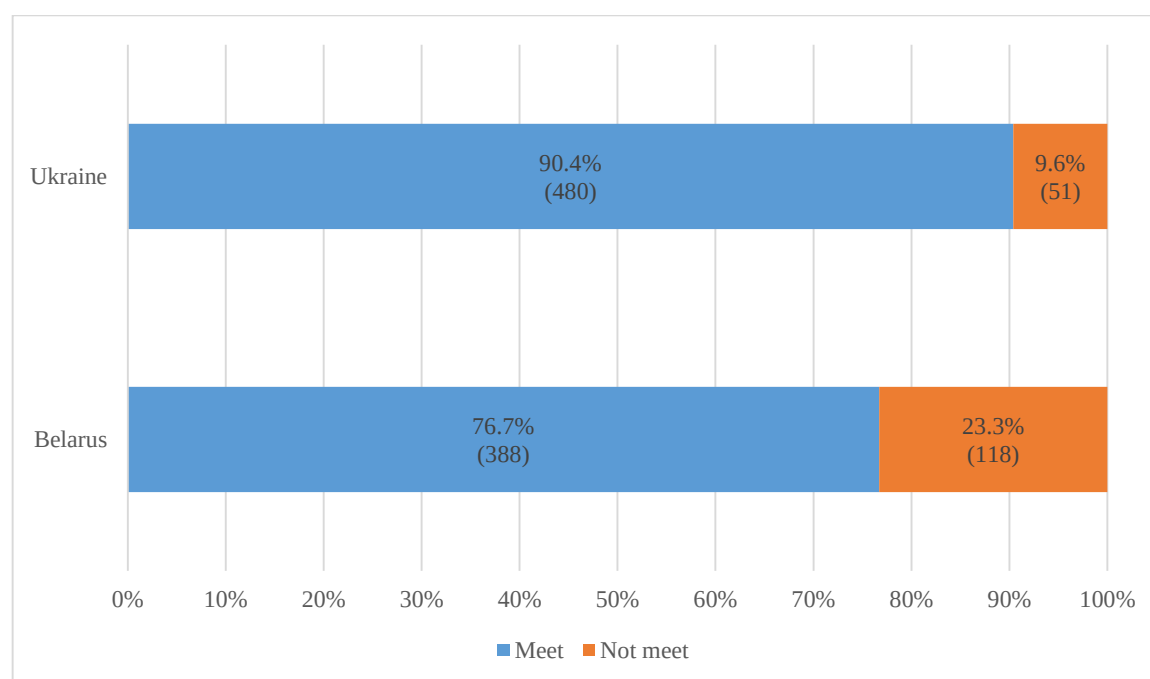
Fig. 159. The cross-country connection in terms of following political actors (in detail)



Source: Own elaboration.

There is also indirect communication between political actors and the audience. It is presented in various forms of incidental exposure to their information. It occurs more often than direct communication in the answers of respondents from both Ukraine and Belarus (Figure 160). A higher percentage of Ukrainians than Belarusians (90.4% versus 76.7%) declares the consumption of political content in this way. Specifically (Figure 161), the most effective method of Ukrainian political actors is advertising on social media. Their spending on this technique of persuasion grew at least in the first half of 2021³⁹. Messages from friends and the social media recommendation algorithm played a slightly less important role. While news media posts had the smallest share at 25.2% among Ukrainians, they were the most popular among Belarusians. This variant reached a mark of 48.4%. It confirmed the transition of traditional media to the online sphere, which is especially relevant for opposition journalists from this country. The results show promising prospects for the chosen path. Other options for indirect communication were roughly equal, ranging from 21 to 28%. Obviously, it is too early to talk about significant de-mediation of the communication process.

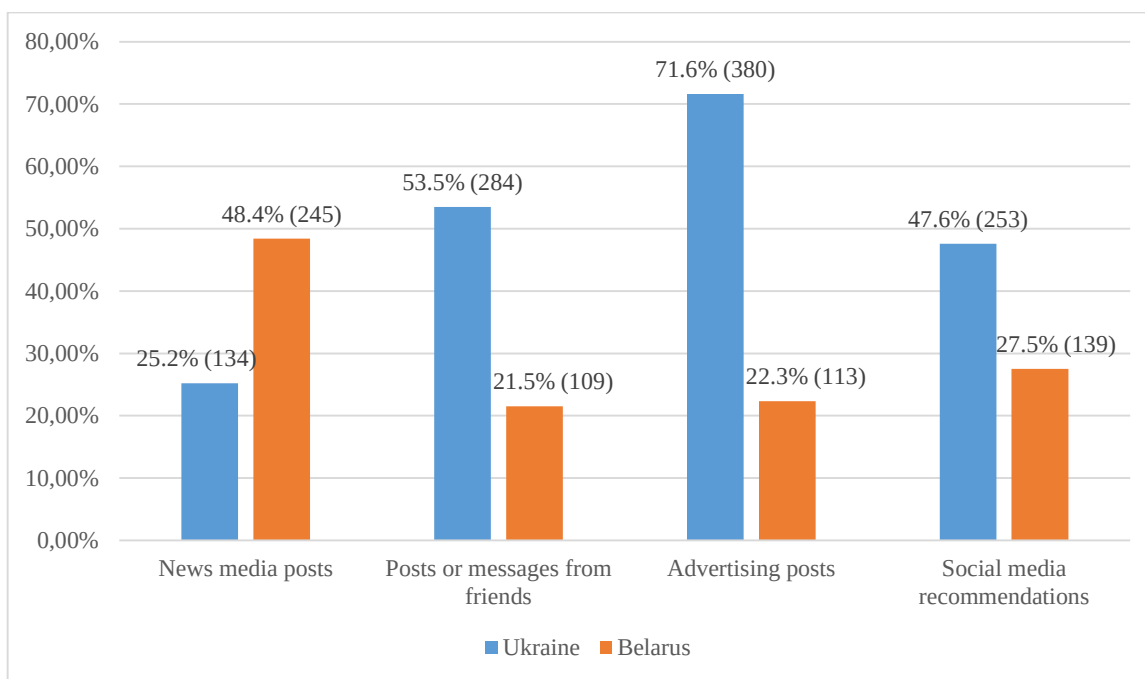
Fig. 160. Incidental exposure to information about political actors



Source: Own elaboration.

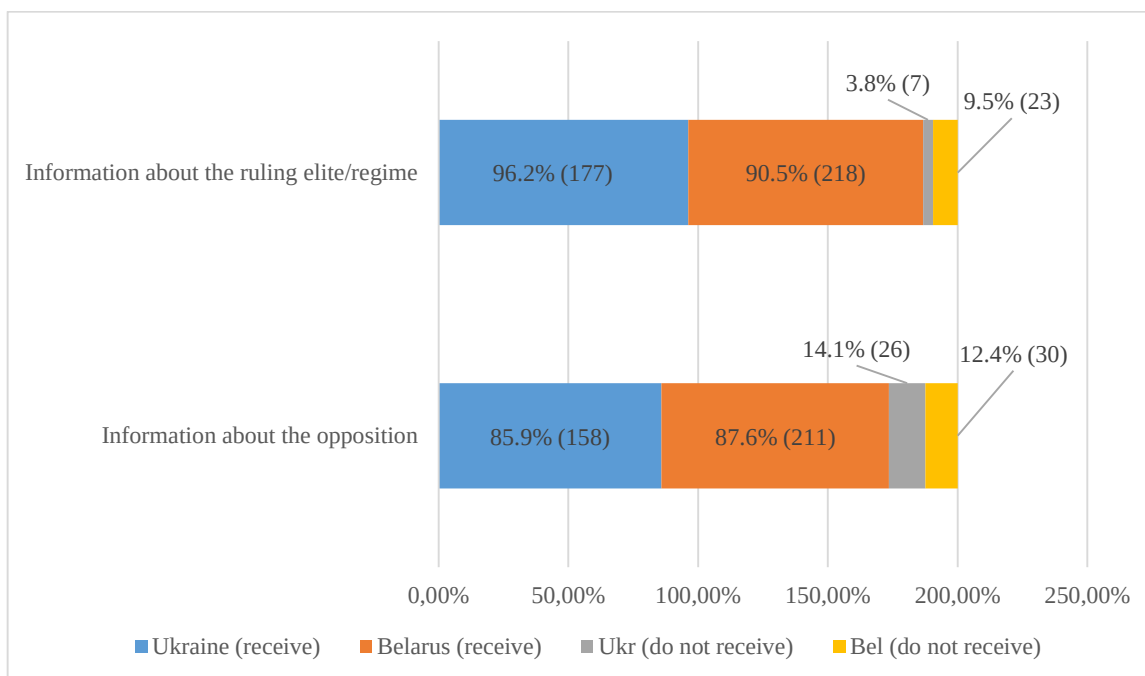
³⁹ N. Patrikyeyeva & I. Feshchenko, *Vytraty politykiv na reklamu v sotsmerezhakh u 2021 rotsi zrosly na tretynu*, <https://www.chesno.org/post/4853/> (accessed on 13.06.2024).

Fig. 161. Variants of incidental exposure to information about political actors



Source: Own elaboration.

Fig. 162. Incidental exposure in isolation to information about political actors



Source: Own elaboration.

Incidental exposure in isolation mainly creates an informative picture of political actors in power (Figure 162). This signals not only their accidental visibility, but also the existing work on filling the online environment with content. Communication specialists try to improve or strengthen the positions of their representatives. Compared to the Ukrainian case, the gap in obtaining information about the Belarusian authorities and about the opposition is minimal. It is around 3%. Moreover, the Belarusian opposition does a slightly better job than the Ukrainian opposition (87.6% versus 85.9%). Although the difference is small, it is important given the fact that Belarusians constantly work from abroad.

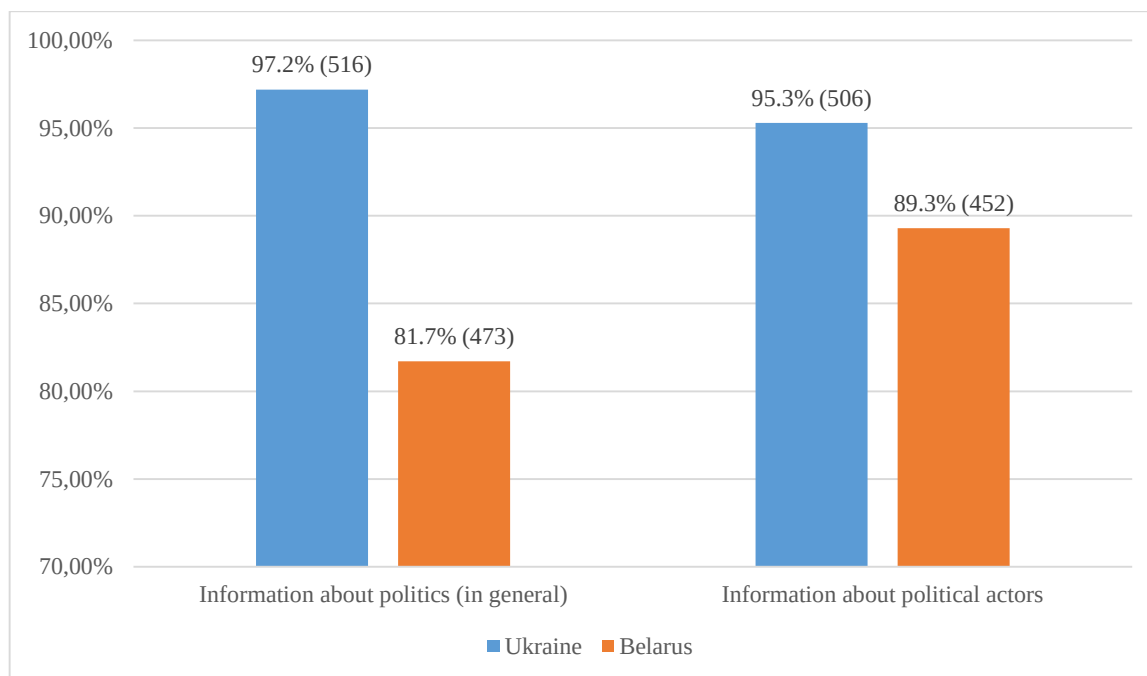
The frequency of displaying political information on social media profiles is a logical continuation of the communication chain. Regardless of the type, it is at a high level among citizens of both countries (Figure 163). Nevertheless, Ukrainians receive more information about politics in general (97.2%) and about political actors specifically (95.3%) than representatives of the neighboring country do. These news items are inescapable given the daily use of social media. The former type of information is a little more popular than the latter type for Ukrainian citizens. A possible reason is the Russia-Ukraine war. During this period, the topic of the country's survival bypasses any political figure. Even apolitical people have begun to monitor the news on a regular basis⁴⁰. As for Belarusians, they see information about political actors more often (89.3%) than news about politics (81.7%). The political direction of this country depends solely on the political actors in power. All decisions of the authoritarian government are under the strict control of the leader Lukashenko. An alternative democratic way is proposed by the opposition forces (Tsikhanouskaya, Latushka and others).

The most important thing is that news about political actors reach online users. This content can be both positive and negative, but political actors maintain attention to themselves. At this stage, political communication shows promising results. The ruling elites/regime is met with solid resistance from the opposite camp in both countries. If representatives of the Ukrainian opposition are less popular among the population and lose 10% to Zelenskyy, the gap in Belarus is only 6.2% despite all the obstacles from the authorities (Figure 164). An

⁴⁰ I. Balachuk, *Ukrayintsi pid chas viyny...*, op. cit. (accessed on 10.06.2024).

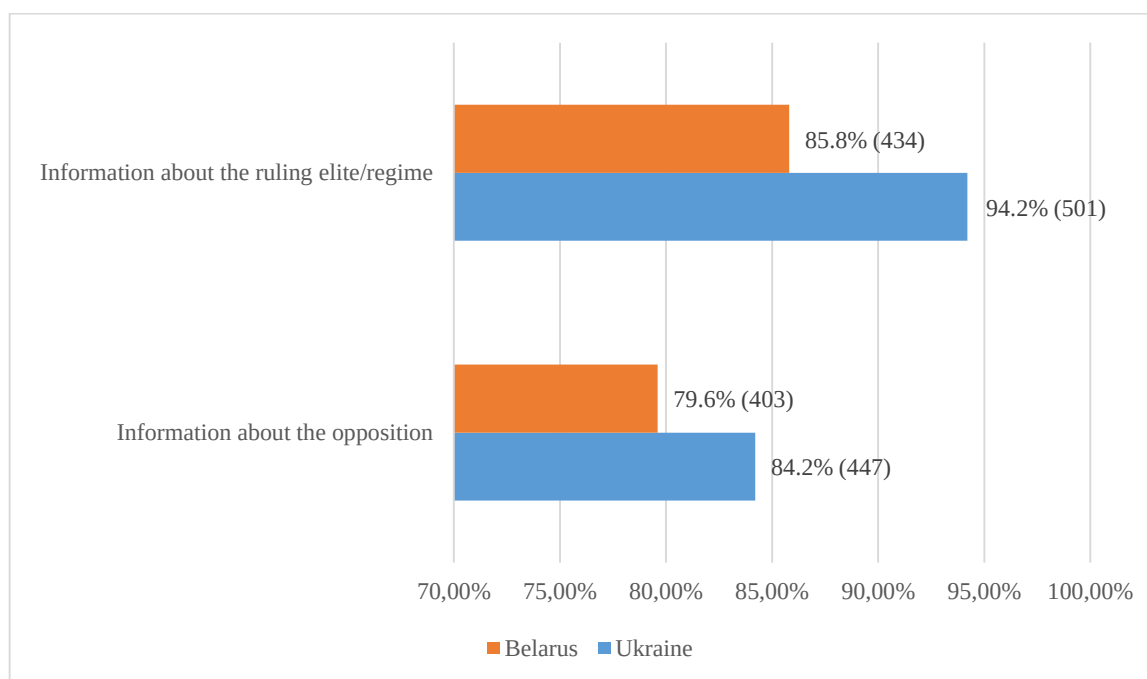
interesting insight is that the Ukrainian opposition and the Belarusian authorities achieve better indicators of visibility in contrast to the political beliefs of citizens.

Fig. 163. Consumption of various types of political information on social media



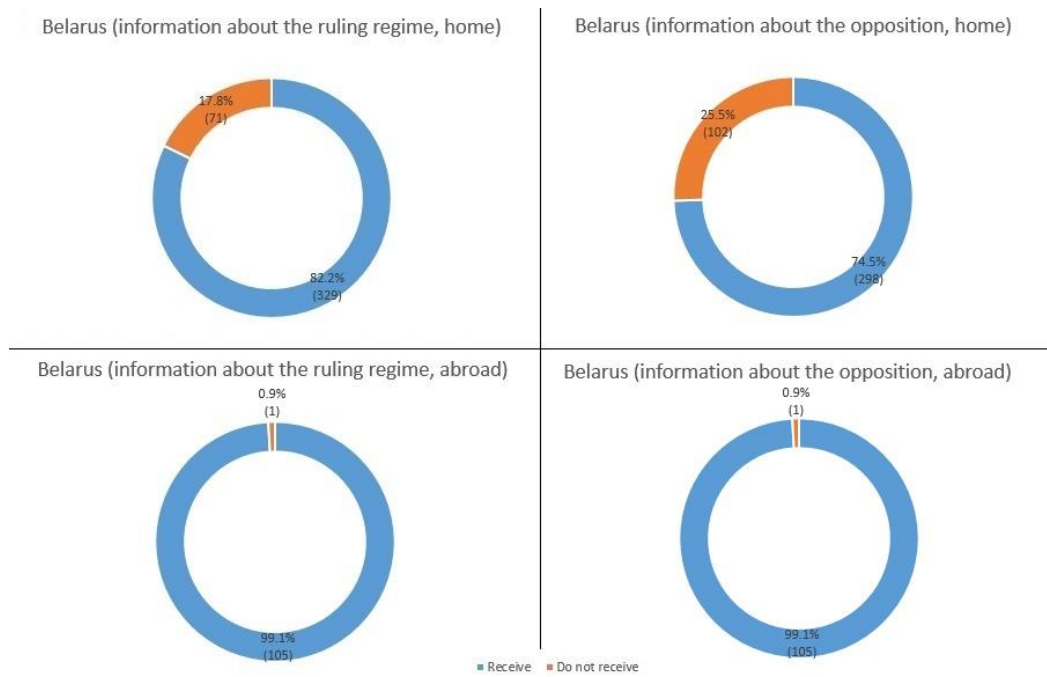
Source: Own elaboration.

Fig. 164. Consumption of information about political actors on social media (political side)



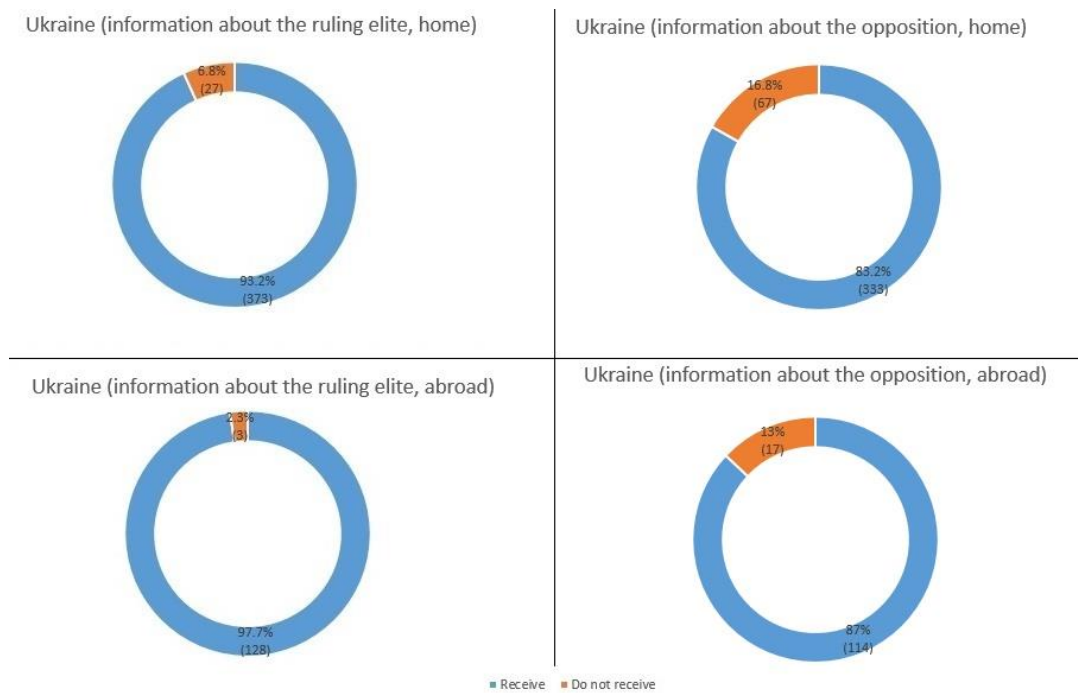
Source: Own elaboration.

Fig. 165. Consumption of information about political actors on social media (location for Belarus)



Source: Own elaboration.

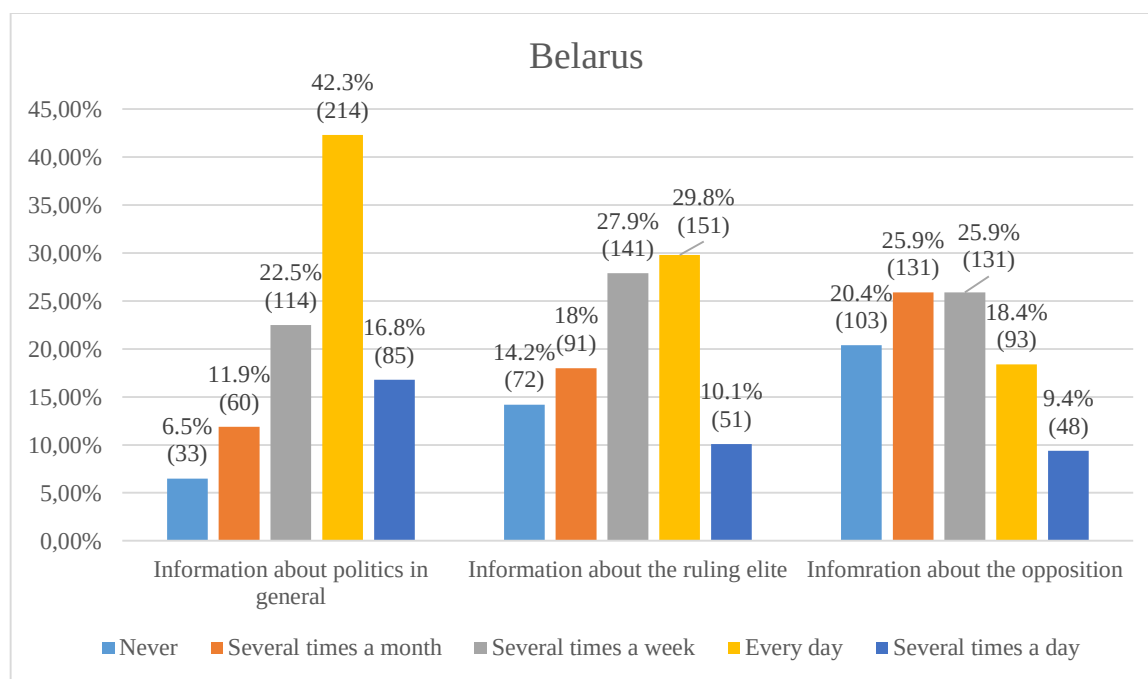
Fig. 166. Consumption of information about political actors on social media (location for Ukraine)



Source: Own elaboration.

Information about the Belarusian authorities and the opposition reaches an unprecedented 99.1% of citizens from abroad (Figure 165). However, the opposition figures are significantly worse within the territory of the “closed” country (74.5%). This direction for development must be clear to its representatives, given the political conditions. In comparison, the indicators of the Ukrainian authorities and the opposition are only slightly better abroad than within the territory of Ukraine (Figure 166).

Fig. 167. Consumption of various types of political information on social media (frequency among Belarusians)

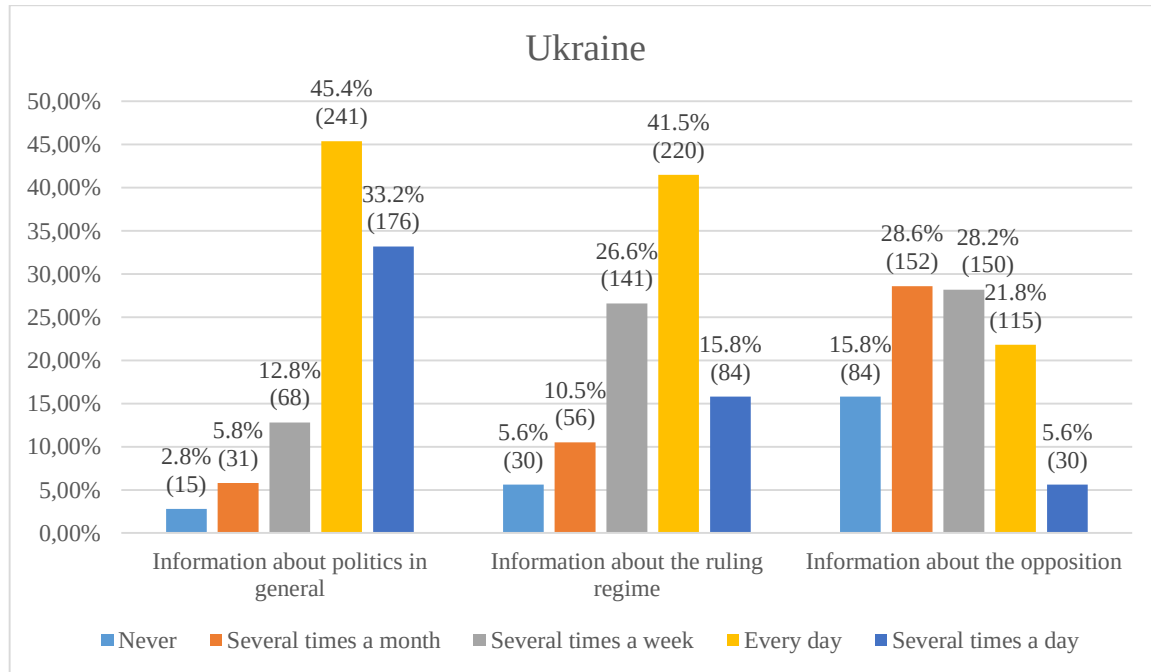


Source: Own elaboration.

The detailed frequency of appearance is shown in Figures 167 and 168. According to them, most Belarusians come across news about politics every day. The indicator of 42.3% is the strongest among all. Citizens receive information about the government from several times a week (27.9%) to every day (29.8%). The opposition needs to work on the frequency of informing the population because their content is visible to Belarusians only a few times a week (25.9%) or several times a month (25.9%). Moreover, Ukrainians have a similar situation. The results of politics in general (45.4% – every day) and the opposition (28.6% – several times a month and 28.2% - several times a week) are very close to the Belarusian case. The only exception is the better position of the authorities. The majority of Ukrainians receive information about them every day (41.5%). It is not surprising, because, for example,

the leader of the warring country posts online appeals to citizens on his social media accounts every day.

Fig. 168. Consumption of various types of political information on social media (frequency among Ukrainians)



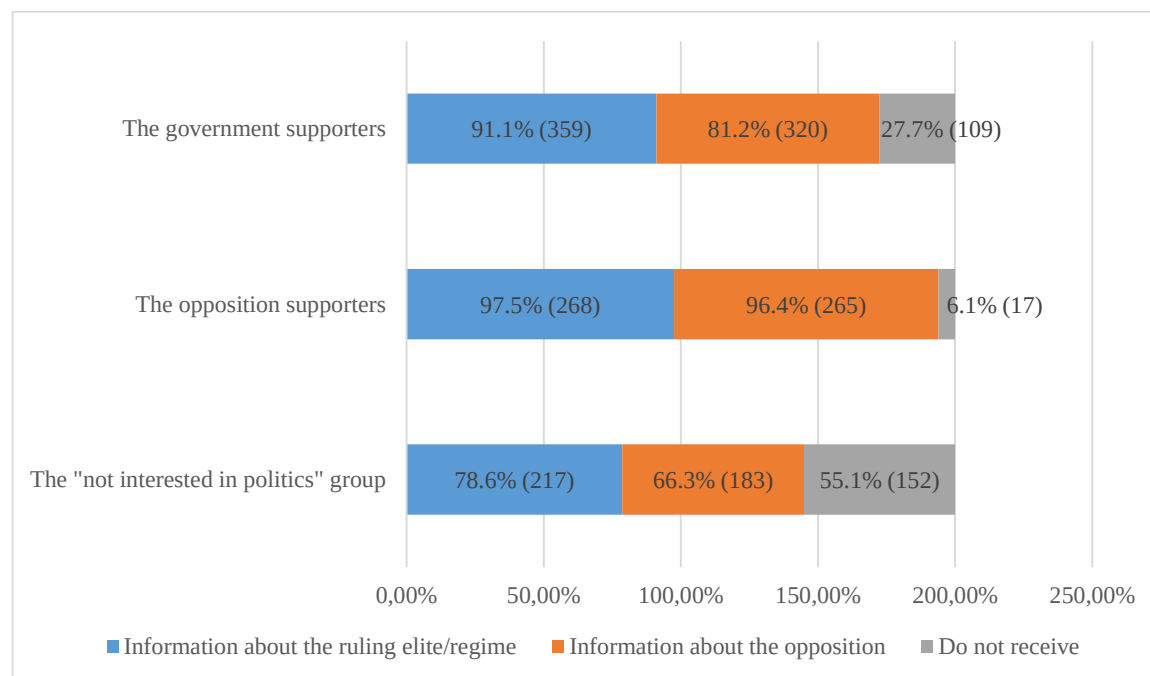
Source: Own elaboration.

According to Shehata and Strömbäck⁴¹, the content in social media profiles of users is a reflection of “their own preferences, filtered by algorithms, and their online networks,” or of “personalized, issue-specific, and network-dependent streams of news.” If all these points can be applicable to Facebook and similar platforms, the algorithm for creating “filter bubbles” is rather irrelevant to Telegram. Users follow political channels according to their own preferences on this platform and receive information based on the criterion of novelty. They can get it from their friends too. The participants of the survey had the opportunity to choose the dominant path in Questions VII-IX. Moving forward, the combined results show (Figure 169) that government supporters from the two countries consume the most information according to their political views (91.1%). They also have a certain vision about the competitive side (81.2%). The opposition supporters receive slightly more information about the authorities than about their own political side. The difference is only 0.9%, but their

⁴¹ A. Shehata & J. Strömbäck, *Learning Political news from social media...*, op. cit., p. 129.

social media profiles do not function in accordance with the aforementioned beliefs. Additionally, the priority group for both sides should be people “not interested in politics.” They often decide the final results of elections. Information about the ruling political figures is also more visible (78.6%) to these citizens than information about the opposition representatives (66.3%). This can be a dangerous trend.

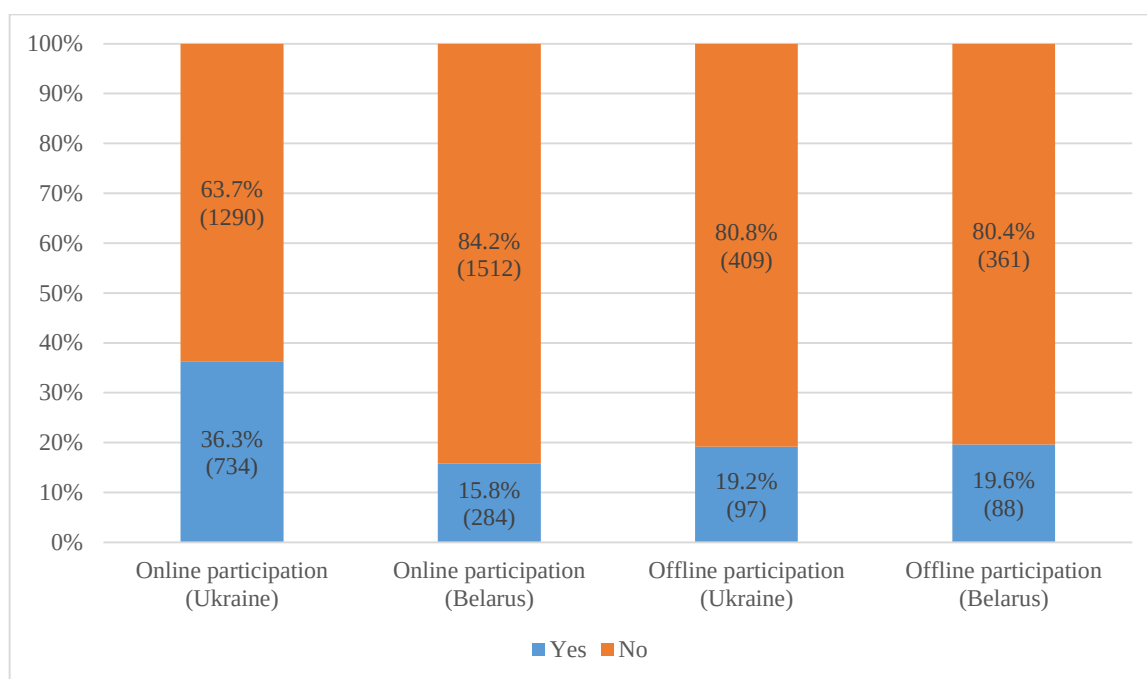
Fig. 169. Correspondence of the content to the political preferences on social media



Source: Own elaboration.

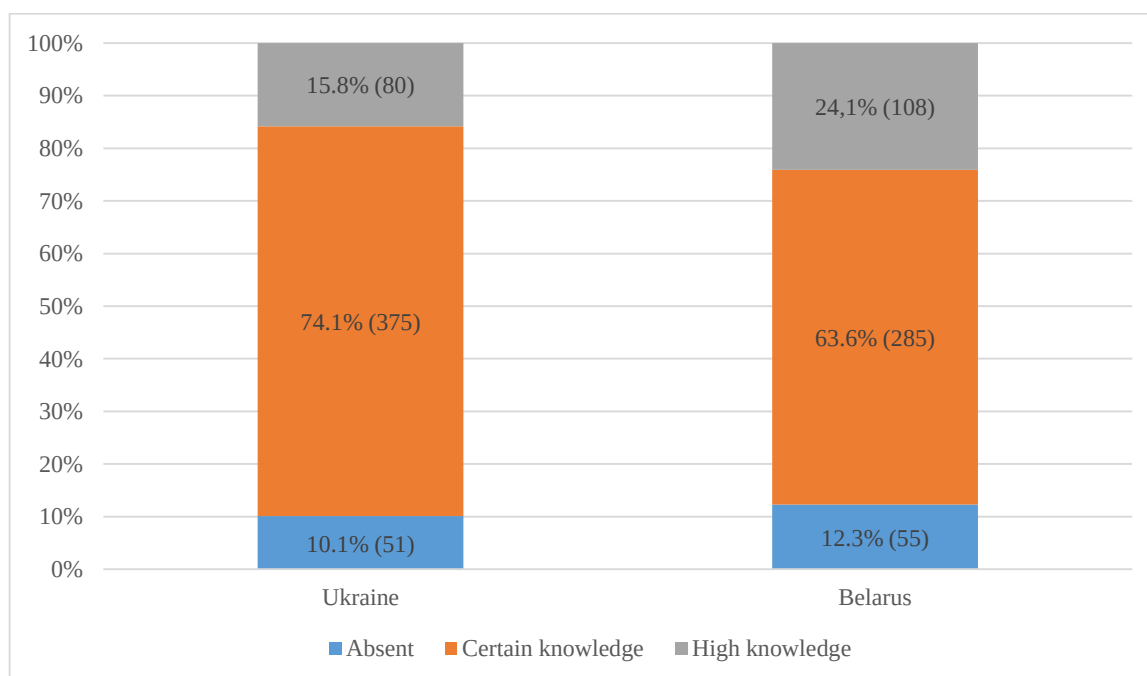
Since the majority of respondents from both countries obtain information about political actors via social media, their questionnaires form the basis for answering the RQ3. Despite the large numbers in consumption, its final degree does not have the same tendency. None of the analyzed blocs scored more than 50% of positive responses from citizens in terms of participation (Figure 170). On the one hand, Ukrainians and Belarusians still take part in online and offline activities, which is something. On the other hand, low engagement cannot be a sufficient argument when claiming the unique success of political actors and their strategies in the online environment.

Fig. 170. Indicators of various types of participation among information consumers



Source: Own elaboration.

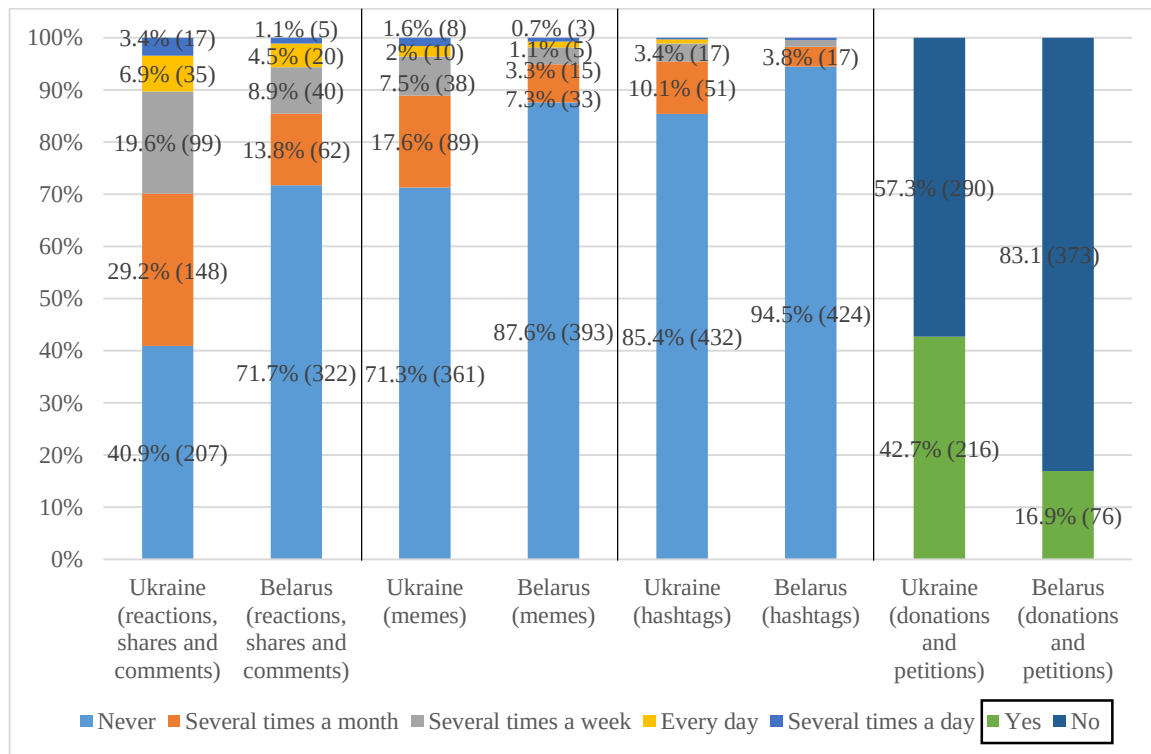
Fig. 171. Indicators of acquired knowledge among information consumers



Source: Own elaboration.

The results of the third block of knowledge are similar considering the two countries, but ultimately promising. Both Ukrainians and Belarusians get “certain” knowledge about political actors from social media (Figure 171). Since this is the case, the potential of these online sources is reaffirmed one more time.

Fig. 172. Detailed analysis of online participation among information consumers



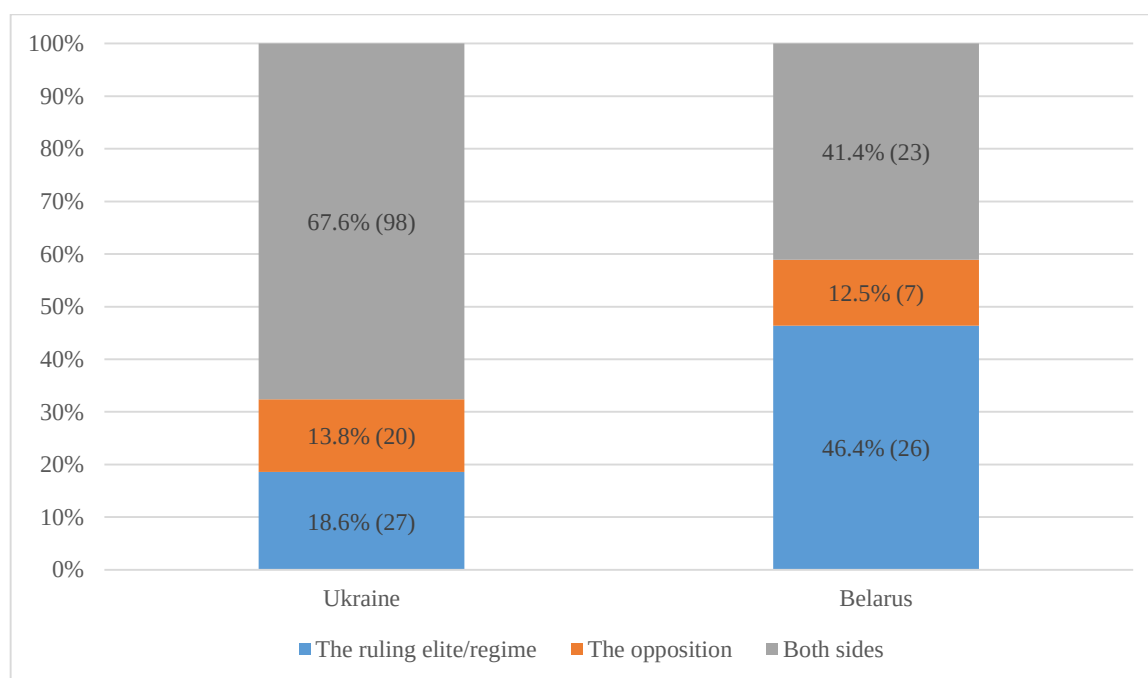
Source: Own elaboration.

Although the main trends in Ukrainian and Belarusian societies are similar, the difference lies in the details regarding online participation. First, the majority of respondents from Ukraine put reactions, comment and disseminate posts of political actors (59.1%) in comparison with Belarusians (only 28.3%). All because legal conditions in Ukraine do not turn them into actions with increased responsibility. Second, there is a contrast in more specific and serious activities. The presented options are the signing of petitions and/or money donation for the needs of political actors. They require a greater level of responsibility than other practices of online participation. In this case, the share of Ukrainians involved is much higher (42.7%) than the share of Belarusians (16.9%). It can be explained by the effectiveness of the petition instrument in Ukraine (President must consider an appeal that

will collect 50 000 signatures) and the widespread practice of donation during wartime. All other results are quite close in numbers. Figure 172 presents their detailed frequency measurements.

Considering the issue of memes, Belarusians laughed the most at Lukashenko (Figure 173). Anonymous authors compare him to a cockroach because of a mustache and spread the narrative about his crushing defeat in the election with only 3% of the vote. Such content serves as a form of criticism, but can have a counter-productive effect. It distracts from promoting alternative solutions and cannot be a convincing argument for supporters of the political actor. As for Ukrainians, they freely mock all those who fell into their disfavor (Figure 173). According to Chapter 4, some political actors can use this move even in their strategies.

Fig. 173. The main characters of political memes



Source: Own elaboration.

Another important point is the potential fear of Belarusians when filling out the questionnaire. About 19.7% (or 71 people) were afraid to take part in online and offline events, while 26.8% (97) refused to indicate the reasons (the lack of an answer was counted in the same way). Both choices can be regarded as a potential concealment of participation.

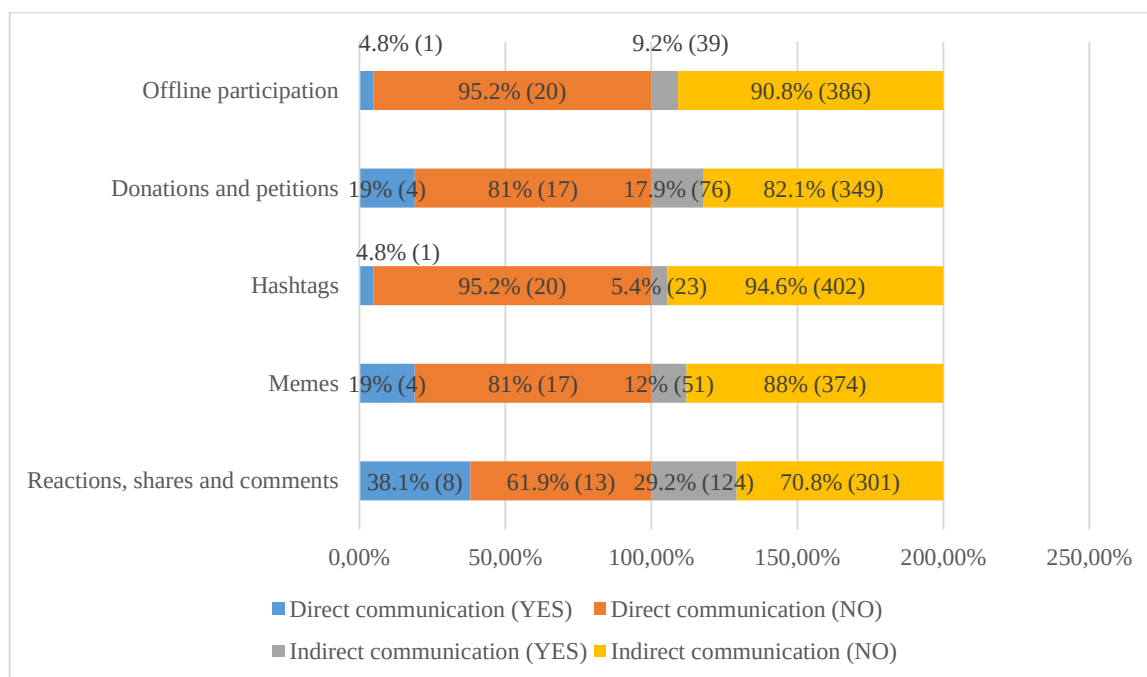
They are provided as a review for a better understanding of the situation. Any of them could potentially improve the statistics of the above questions among the citizens of this country. The largest proportion of people (53.5% or 193) indicated a lack of desire for such participation.

Returning to the main point, the similar trends in terms of the RQ3 give reasons to combine the answers from both countries in order to verify the presented H3. It indicates a potential direction for the development of political actors on social media, especially in the context of an unsatisfactory level of exposure. Hence, following represents direct communication and conscious choice of users. Incidental exposure lives up to its risky name, but can take many different forms. It increases the chances of delivering information to the audience. Taken together, there were 21 respondents who follow political actors in isolation and 425 respondents who consume information solely through incidental exposure. Despite the uneven numbers, these results can provide grounds for preliminary thoughts at least.

There are 6 different activities. Considering online participation (Figure 174), the process of following shows better indicators in the case of reactions, comments and shares, in the case of online actions with memes, as well as in the case of donations and petitions. Knowledge can also be recorded as an advantage of direct communication (Figure 175). In turn, incidental exposure is a better motivation to spread hashtags. Offline participation correlates slightly better with it too (Figure 174). As a result, there is a 4 to 2 advantage in favor of the process of following. Since incidental exposure generally prevails in the two countries (see previous results from the chapter), it seems that some political actors should reconsider the attractiveness of their social media profiles in order to get a boost in the number of unique subscribers. More active distribution of links to their accounts can be an auxiliary method to persuade the citizens.

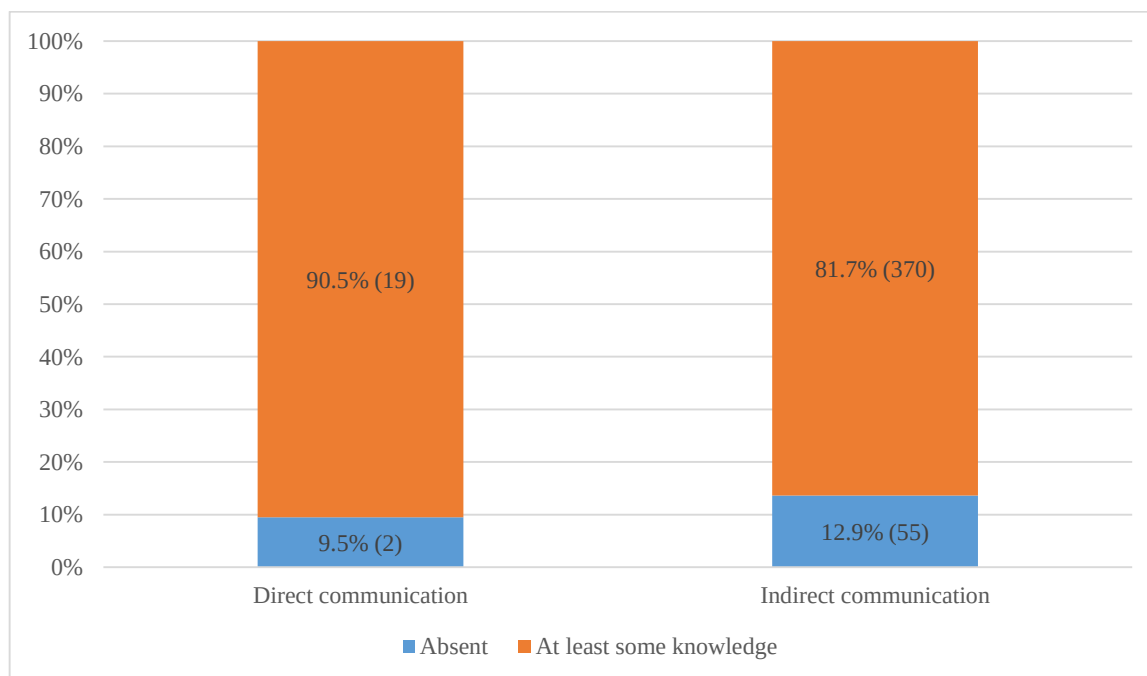
As for the young audience, there were only 2 respondents who exclusively follow political actors compared to 80 respondents who receive information via incidental exposure in isolation. Other participants chose either two options at once or none of them. Their inclusion would not give a clear answer to the hypothesis. Since there was not at least a small group of respondents to analyze the possible benefits of direct communication among young people, H3 can only be partially accepted.

Fig. 174. Different types of communication in terms of benefits (online/offline participation)



Source: Own elaboration.

Fig. 175. Different types of communication in terms of benefits (knowledge)



Source: Own elaboration.

This chapter presents a comparative analysis between the answers of 531 Ukrainians and 506 Belarusians. It reflects the trends in the two countries as of the end of 2023-beginning of 2024. The survey was conducted after the mass protests in Belarus and during the full-scale war between Russia and Ukraine. Thus, the experience of the participants accumulated at least the victory of President Zelenskyy, the COVID-19 pandemic, numerous protests against Lukashenko in Belarus, the work of the democratic Belarusian opposition in exile, and other crucial events.

The majority of Ukrainian respondents use social media several times a day. They follow political actors on social media, but the share of obtaining information via incidental exposure is greater. Although this transforms into high levels of information consumption about political actors (the authorities outweighs the opposition), there are no corresponding results for further actions of citizens. The minority engages in online participation (excluding the question of reactions, comments, shares) and offline participation, but the majority of Ukrainian users rate their knowledge about political actors as certain. With a few minor exceptions, a similar situation is observed in Belarus. Most of its citizens use social media every day. A smaller part follows political actors, while the majority receives information about them via incidental exposure. Taking this into account, the indicators of information consumption are not much lower than Ukrainian ones. However, the situation is repeated with online participation (all variants in this case) and offline participation. They also rate their knowledge as certain.

To conclude, Ukrainians and Belarusians have a very low extent of exposure to information about political actors (RQ3). Despite the high frequency of social media use and encountering this content, the only positive correlation is with the certain level of knowledge. Such results cannot be enough for any political actor. Importantly, all the small differences in online participation cannot be the sufficient factor to make any dramatic change in the already identified levels of Ukraine and Belarus. For example, reacting, commenting, and sharing posts require less responsibility than donating or signing petitions on social media. They cannot be the dominant online factor. No significant conclusions can be drawn from the smaller or larger indicators in terms of monetary donations and petitions either, since they reflect low involvement in both countries.

The main result is the same degree of exposure to information about political figures in the democratic country and the authoritarian country. All potential reasons are proposed in the final section of this research. For now, it is clear that social media platforms indeed provide “independent communication islands” for political actors in the media system. Their messages reach audiences. The task is to use this opportunity with better indicators.

Among other things, it is recommended to further develop direct communication between political actors and their audiences. They have all the necessary tools thanks to social media. Attracting more followers is always a guarantee of delivering at least some information. This practice provides more benefits than random exposure without considering a specific age group (H3). In fact, indirect communication continues the tradition of third-party mediation (e.g. news media, friends, the platform itself). It does not correspond to the fundamental idea of social media functioning.

Conclusions

This PhD dissertation provides insights into political communication via social media in post-Soviet countries, or Eastern European countries. Its description consists of contexts (political and media systems), social media content (produced by political actors), and possible correlations (consumption - online participation, offline participation, knowledge). The main research aim is to describe and compare the practices of using social media by political actors from Ukraine and Belarus. It covers Facebook in Ukraine and Telegram in Belarus due to the high presence of political entities on these platforms.

The first two chapters focused on the theoretical description of the selected terms. Regarding the concept of political communication, it is adopted as a strategic process of creating, controlling and transmitting information from political actors to citizens in order to achieve their goals. The main knowledge comes from *McNair's book entitled "An Introduction to Political Communication."* Regarding the concept of social media, the definition of *Carr and Hayes* is considered the most suitable for the research. These are "Internet-based channels that allow users to opportunistically interact and selectively self-present, either in real-time or asynchronously, with both broad and narrow audiences who derive value from user-generated content and the perception of interaction with others"¹. The chapter cites 53 other definitions as evidence of evolution.

After that, the high political representativeness on Facebook and Telegram is explained by digital architecture. The main reasons for choosing the American online platform can be the content recommendation system, the algorithmic feed, and the targeted advertising. It benefits political actors through ideological "filter bubbles," which increase the polarization of society. In turn, the issue of political competition is irrelevant for Belarusians. Their priority is security under the Lukashenko regime. Telegram satisfies this request by placing encryption keys for cloud chats in different data centers. The end-to-end encryption technology in secret chats leaves no traces on servers at all. Users can voice opinions and disseminate information anonymously. They can also configure auto-deletion of all messages

¹ C.T. Carr & R.A. Hayes, *Social Media...*, op. cit., p. 53.

from any chat after a specific time. Additionally, there is a limited list of justifications for transferring personal data to law enforcement agencies of certain countries.

The third chapter describes the political and media systems of Ukraine and Belarus, with the inclusion of social media platforms as modifiers. In this case, the classic work of *Hallin and Mancini* turned out to be of little relevance for this study. It focused exclusively on Western countries. The book entitled *“Four theories of the press: The authoritarian, liberal, social responsibility and Soviet Communist theories of what the press should be and do”* was more relevant to the realities of post-Soviet countries. Among all, the most useful were the scientific materials of *Dobek-Ostrowska*. Her study *“25 years after communism: Four models of media and politics in Central and Eastern Europe”* covered both Ukraine and Belarus, as well as presented a clear methodology.

According to the literature review, there was a limited number of scientific publications describing the media systems of Ukraine and Belarus. Some of them lost their relevance, while others had a high price tag. The biggest problem was the description of the entire post-Soviet region through the lens of the Russian media system. Ignoring the unique experience of other countries was a typical mistake of the past. Thus, it was decided to take the structure of old scientific materials and update their data with the help of journalistic sources. Among the fundamental research works were *“System medialny niepodległej Ukrainy”* by *Ratajczak and Baluk*, *“Emergence of the media system in Ukraine following the collapse of the USSR”* by *Nesteriak*, *“The media system in Ukraine. Political science approach”* by *Hajduk*, *“The media market and media ownership in Post-Communist Ukraine”* by *Ryabinska*, *“Characteristics of the Belarusian media system”* by *Usov*, *“Media in post-Soviet Belarus: between democratization and reinforcing authoritarianism”* by *Manaev*, *“Comparing Media Systems Applied in Post-Soviet Countries Political Parallelism and Role of the State in Armenia, Belarus and Russia”* by *Kocharyan*. Another important source was *“Monitoring Media Pluralism in the Digital Era: Preliminary study to the implementation of the Media Pluralism Monitor: Ukraine”* by *Opryshko*.

The political systems of Ukraine and Belarus are typical of the entire post-Soviet area, excluding the current EU member states. Both countries operate on the basis of a strong leader. Ukraine has a transitional or hybrid regime that leans towards the West. There is a

constant rotation of presidents who use authoritarian and democratic methods of exercising power. Oligarchic clans are the main legacy of the Soviet era. The country is in a state of war. In contrast, Belarus is an authoritarian regime that cooperates with the East. Its only president is Lukashenko. All processes in the country are subordinate to him. “The last dictator of Europe” also dragged his country into the Russia-Ukraine war.

The state of affairs in the political systems is connected with the media systems of Ukraine and Belarus. The former country has freedom of speech and pluralism of opinions. Any encroachment on them meets with solid resistance. Despite some changes, the main media assets still belong to the oligarchs. They demonstrate loyalty to certain political actors in exchange for benefits. At the same time, Belarusian state media are not national media. Their representatives broadcast exclusively Lukashenko’s agenda. There are subcategories of state media and independent media. The latter can operate from abroad.

The choice of social media for political communication is justified in the two countries (**RQ1**). From one perspective, these online platforms are the most popular source of information in Ukraine. They can expand the capabilities of Ukrainian political actors. Although Zelenskyy had no previous political experience, he successfully mastered social media and won the 2019 presidential election. This tool also constantly maintains the balance of opinions in Ukrainian politics. From another perspective, social media are practically the only chance for Belarusian democratic forces to communicate with their citizens. The 2020 opposition political campaign took place thanks to this tool. In particular, NEXTA Live coordinated the actions of protesters within Belarus from Poland. The democratic leader Tsikhanouskaya announced her next actions via Telegram channels. She continues to use them in exile and recognizes their importance for the Belarusian struggle against the regime.

The political system certainly has less control over the media system modified by digital factors. The former makes classic attempts to limit the latter through the legislative component. However, it is unclear how to incorporate all their dynamic elements into laws. It is also extremely difficult to control them from the technological point of view. Social media consists of millions of elements and web pages that are linked to other Internet websites. Applications such as VPN and Tor help to bypass their state-imposed blocking.

Moreover, it is practically impossible to absorb these online platforms like traditional media organizations. Therefore, **H1** is confirmed.

The political system and the media system are factors that influence the construction of digital communication strategies in the two countries. They were analyzed based on 19 categories in order to answer **RQ2**. The following universal practices could be listed: 1) publication of original posts; 2) presence of hyperlinks to social media sources; 3) inclusion of the vlog genre; 4) short length of posts; 5) formal language style; 6) priority of photos, and equal number of videos in posts; 7) greatest emphasis on professional personalization, lesser consideration for emotional professionalization, least attention to private personalization. As can be seen, most of these elements were related to post design.

The main contextual differences were in the content of these posts. On the one hand, political actors from democratic Ukraine published messages in their native language. They focused on professional updates. While images dominated the messages, hashtags had limited presence. Their posts had a positive valence. Their online strategies were person-oriented. On the other hand, political actors from authoritarian Belarus published messages in Russian and almost completely ignored Belarusian. They focused on information dissemination. Their posts had a negative valence. Some of them were organized using emojis. Their online political communication centered around society and members of a specific political team. Additionally, the genre of short news had the same percentage as vlogs in the Belarusian case.

Although the priority topics on the general agenda were the Russia-Ukraine war and international relations, the online strategies of democratic Ukraine and authoritarian Belarus did not coincide in 16 out of the 20 proposed themes. Their functions also did not coincide in 8 out of the 11 analyzed items. Other findings only partially confirmed the proposed hypothesis (**H2**). Contrary to the post frequency indicators, Ukrainian political actors were more diverse than Belarusian political actors in terms of topics and functions.

Considering all these, the Ukrainian online strategy can be called a “strategy of professional activation on crisis topics,” while the Belarusian one – a “strategy of diluting authoritarian discourse.” The former combines various elements of professional behavior (formal language, priority functions, personalization) in the context of the war that has been ongoing

since 2014. The latter is less diverse and focuses on the dissemination of independent information. Importantly, NEXTA Live had a significant influence on the final shape of the Belarusian online strategy.

The final chapter reveals the general reaction of citizens to political communication via social media. It was important to identify not the “dynamics,” but the “state” of society (how is it?) after the proposed digital communication practices. As a result, 95.3% of Ukrainian respondents and 89.3% of Belarusian respondents consumed information about political actors via social media. More Ukrainians than Belarusians followed political entities on these online platforms, while indirect communication prevailed over direct communication in both cases. Nonetheless, this optimism was transformed into a very low level of active exposure to political communication among citizens of the two countries (**RQ3**). Neither online participation nor offline participation showed significant results. The only correlation was with a “certain” level of knowledge acquired by Ukrainians and Belarusians. Direct communication brought more benefits than indirect communication (**H3**). After all, such results cannot be enough for any political actor.

To sum up, political communication via social media has already changed the functional basis of political and media systems, more specifically in Ukraine and Belarus. Regardless of the regime or crisis, this tool creates an “independent communication island” with its own climate. Since it is not subject to government censorship and traditional mediators, any user can freely develop and implement their communication strategies on these online platforms. It is not required to be a politician. It is not necessary to stay within a certain country. The main condition is access to the Internet. These arguments are confirmed by the examples of NEXTA Live and Shariy.

While the 2019 presidential election was associated with an “electoral revolution” against traditional elites in Ukraine, the 2020 presidential election turned into the longest protests in the history of Belarus. These two dates can be considered as turning points for online political communication in the post-Soviet area. They showed that changes are possible. The generation of new political actors without experience (e.g. Zelenskyy, NEXTA Live, Tsikhanouskaya) has demonstrated the real potential of social media. Respondents still note them in the survey.

While their allies and competitors should have developed these practices, it seems that they have not drawn sufficient conclusions as of late 2023-early 2024. On the one hand, Ukrainian and Belarusian political actors have similar and distinct patterns of using social media for political communication in the relevant conditions. These online platforms ensure the delivery of political content to the majority of users from both countries. On the other hand, their passive consumption does not develop into active exposure (online and offline participation). This is a vulnerable spot with low indicators. Thus, journalistic references to the “Facebook uprising” and the “Telegram revolution” may be correct, but they do not have a long-lasting legacy.

The possible reasons are listed as follows. From a communication perspective, political actors can choose ineffective online strategies. They may include less engaging or unclear content. Posts may lack creative elements. Topics and functions may not match the audience’s needs. From a political perspective, political actors may lose the trust of citizens due to unfulfilled promises and lack of concrete results. They may have a negative image in society. After all, both positions can be improved by adjusting political communication via social media.

At this stage, political actors are recommended to develop political communication via vlogs. They should find a balance between formal and informal language styles in order to reveal individuality as well. They need to raise more issues that concern their citizens (health and social policy, economy, corruption – Ukraine; persecution, economy, health and social policy – Belarus²). It is necessary to constantly measure their demands and expectations. Hashtags are likely to enhance the promotion of this content.

There are several other contextual recommendations. As for Ukrainian political actors, more videos and emojis have potential to improve the attractiveness of their information. The presence of private personalization can provoke greater engagement. As for Belarusian

² *Ukrayintsi nazvaly holovni problemy v krayini, - opytuvannya, https://lb.ua/news/2021/04/08/481840_ukrayintsi_nazvali_golovni_problemi.html (accessed on 09.04.2023); Issledovaniye: bol'she vsego naseleniye volnuyut temy urovnya dokhodov i sostoyaniya zdorov'ya, <https://belta.by/society/view/issledovanie-bolshe-vsego-naselenie-volnujut-temy-urovnja-dohodov-i-sostojaniya-zdorov'ya-468726-2021/> (accessed on 10.04.2023); A. Rodnenkov, *Chto volnuyet belorusov? Issledovaniye problem i strakhov zhiteley belorusskikh regionov, https://www.kas.de/documents/285805/285854/Что+волнует+белорусов_RUS.pdf/61781944-4af4-e22c-7251-a4da863a6816?version=1.0&t=1633705465157 (accessed on 10.04.2023).**

political actors, they should increase the share of posts in Belarusian. The functions of their posts can be more diversified. Since it is not enough to disseminate information, some political actors should provide more concrete plans and solutions in posts. Moreover, it is necessary to boost the share of multimedia elements.

In the end, this PhD dissertation is an entry point into political communication via social media in Ukraine and Belarus. First, this research updates knowledge about their political and media systems, including this important communication tool. Second, it identifies and compares the practices of social media use among Ukrainian and Belarusian political actors. Detailed BIOs and general statistics are also included. Third, it provides the first results on the interconnection between social media practices and online participation, offline participation, as well as knowledge. Most importantly, this study moves away from the generalization of the entire post-Soviet space through a Russian lens. It reveals the unique experiences of Ukraine and Belarus for an international audience.

In addition, this work provides the essential scientific tools to facilitate further research into online political communication within the post-Soviet region. It presents the largest list of all political actors from Ukraine and Belarus with links to their social media pages. It offers a unique methodology that manages to combine different social media platforms, research periods, and groups of political actors. The latter includes bloggers/influencers with blurred boundaries of political activity. This approach is justified. As Belarusians confirm, this research covers all the most important political actors from their country.

There are three main limitations to this work. First, the lack of applications that could accurately collect data from social media platforms. Apps with archival data for Ukraine and Belarus are completely absent as well. Since Ukrainian and Belarusian political actors produce many posts per day, it takes a lot of time to collect and code all of them. Second, the lack of the opportunity to conduct interviews with representatives of Ukrainian political teams due to wartime circumstances. They could reveal their plans and experiences with using social media. Third, the lack of sufficient time and funding to construct more detailed surveys.

It is recommended that future studies should choose other social media for analysis. Particular attention should be paid to Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, where graphic

content is dominant. Since there are doubts among Ukrainian experts, Telegram can be considered from the perspective of its constructive or destructive nature. Furthermore, other countries of the post-Soviet area shall be investigated.

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Znishchennye

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Appendices

Appendix A. Evolution of the term “social media” and its functions

Author(s), year, page	Term (defined as)	Function(s)	Number of article citations (25.09.2022)
(Wellman, 1996, 214)	Computer-supported social networks	“...link people as well as machines...”	2090
(Romm, Pliskin & Clarke, 1997, 261)	Virtual communities (as groups of people)	Communication	392
(Garton, Haythornthwaite & Wellman, 1997)	Social network (as a set of people)	Connection	2447
(Lindlof & Schatzer, 1998, 174)	Virtual community	N/A	228
(Hagel, 1999, 57)	Virtual community	To bring people together	3717
(Balasubramanian and Mahajan, 2001, 108)	Virtual community (as any entity with specific characteristics)	Interaction, social exchange	768
(Ridings, Gefen & Arinze, 2002, 273)	Virtual communities (as groups of people)	N/A	2223
(Blackshaw, 2006; Xiang and Gretzel, 2010, 180)	Social media (as Internet-based applications)	“...carry consumer-generated content...”	4312
(Acquisti & Gross, 2006, 38)	Online social network (as Internet community)	Interaction	3086
(boyd & Ellison, 2007, 211)	Social network sites (as web-based services)	“...allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those	25044

		made by others within the system”	
(Russo, Watkins, Kelly, and Chan, 2008 , 22)	Social media	“...facilitate online communication, networking, and/or collaboration”	324
(Joinson, 2008 , 1)	Social networking sites	“...provide users with a profile space, facilities for uploading content, messaging in various forms, and the ability to make connections to other people”	2644
(Shirky, 2008 , 39)	Social media and social software (as tools)	“Increase our ability to share, to co-operate, with one another, and to take collective action...”	7111
(Sweetser & Lariscy, 2008 , 180)	Social media (as a set of technology tools)	“mediated opportunities for bringing people together,” social networking, dialogic communication	394
(Finin, Joshi, Kolari, Java, Kale & Karandikar, 2008 , 77)	Web-based social media systems (as a new way)	Publication of information, engagement in discussions, formation of communities	102
(Terry, 2009 , 507)	Social media (as user-generated content)	N/A	152
(Fuchs, 2009 in Fuchs, 2017, 183)	Integrated social networking site (as web-based platforms)	Integration of information, communication, and media technologies. Creation of profiles with information about users, their connections. Establishment of	216

		connections and communication.	
(Komito & Bates, 2009, 233)	Web 2.0, social media (as Internet applications)	Interaction	186
(Lewis, 2010, 12)	Social media (as a label for digital technologies)	Connection, interaction, production, and sharing of content	252
(Kent, 2010, 645)	Social media (as any interactive communication channel)	Two-way interaction, feedback	322
(Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, 61)	Social media (a group of Internet-based applications)	“...creation and exchange of User Generated Content”	27827
(Correa, Hinsley & de Zúñiga, 2010, 247-248)	Social media (as a mechanism)	Connection, communication, interaction	2936
(Bertot, Jaeger & Grimes, 2010, 266)	Social media (as Web-based technologies)	Creation of content and interactions	2923
(Sweetser, 2010, 289)	Social media (as a means)	Communication	168
(Zeng, Chen, Lusch, & Li, 2010, 13)	Social media (as a conversational, distributed mode)	“...content generation, dissemination, and communication among communities”	751
(Greysen, Kind & Chretien, 2010, 1227)	Social media	Content creation	387
(Ahlqvist, Bäck, Heinonen & Halonen, 2010, 4)	Social media	Social interaction, communication, content creation and sharing	133
(Fischer & Reuber, 2011, 2)	Social media channels (as user-friendly, inexpensive, scalable internet- and mobile-based technologies)	“...sharing of user-generated material”	1107
(Yates & Paquette, 2011, 6)	Social media (as a technology)	Disaster response, “...open online	1267

		exchange of information through conversation and interaction”	
(Fotis, Buhalis & Rossides, 2011 , 4)	Social media (as a group of online software platforms)	“...sharing of user generated content”	319
(Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre, 2011 , 241)	Social media	“...create highly interactive platforms via which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content”	7451
(Sui & Goodchild, 2011 , 1738)	Social media	Social interaction	509
(Hughes, Rowe, Batey & Lee, 2012 , 561)	Social networking sites (as virtual collections of user profiles)	Sharing of user profiles	1454
(Norris, 2012 , 3)	Social media (as online technologies)	Interactive communication with diverse networks	18
(Bonsón, Torres, Royo & Flores, 2012 , 123)	Social media (as applications)	“...offer services to communities of on-line users... promote collaboration, joint learning, and the speedy exchange of information between users”	1269
(Howard & Parks, 2012 , 362)	Social media	“...produce and distribute content”	565
(McGowan, Wasko, Vartabedian, Miller, Freiherr & Abdolrasulnia, 2012 , 2)	Social media (as online environment)	“...where users contribute, retrieve, and explore content primarily generated by fellow users”	436

(Gruzd, Staves & Wilk, 2012 , 2341)	Social media (as any website or web-based service)	N/A	520
(Bertot, Jaeger & Hansen, 2012 , 30)	Social media (as a set of online tools)	Social interaction	1099
(Dabner, 2012 , 69)	Social media (as Internet and mobile-based tools and devices)	“...integrate technology, telecommunications and social interaction enabling the construction, co-construction and dissemination of words, images (static and moving) and audio”	350
(Albarran, 2013 , 2 in Fuchs, 2017, 38)	Social media (as technologies or applications)	They are used to develop and maintain social networking sites	185
(Ellison and boyd, 2013 , 158)	Social network site (as a networked communication platform)	“...in which participants (a) have uniquely identifiable profiles that consist of user-supplied content, content provided by other users, and/or system-level data; (b) can publicly articulate connections that can be viewed and traversed by others; and (c) can consume, produce, and/or interact with streams of user-generated content provided by their connections on the site”	67
(Standage, 2013 , 3 in Fuchs, 2017, 38)	Social media (as an environment)	Information passing in order to create a	290

		“distributed discussion” or community	
(McIntyre, 2014 , 6)	Social media (a form of computer-mediated communication)	N/A	85
(Kane, Alavi, Labianca and Borgatti, 2014 , 279-280)	Social media networks	“...users (1) have a unique user profile...; (2) access digital content through, and protect it from, various search mechanisms provided by the platform; (3) can articulate a list of other users with whom they share a relational connection; and (4) view and traverse their connections and those made by others on the platform”	1116
(Otieno & Matoke, 2014 , 962)	Social media (as a collection of Internet websites, services and practices)	“...support collaboration, community building, participation, and sharing”	31
(El Ouiridi et al., 2014 , 119)	Social media (as a set of mobile and web-based platforms)	“...allowing users at the micro-, meso- and macro-levels to share and geo-tag user-generated content (images, text, audio, video and games), to collaborate, and to build networks and communities, with the possibility of reaching	100

		and involving large audiences”	
(Hunsinger & Senft, 2014 , 1 in Fuchs, 2017, 38)	Social media (as networked information services)	“...support in-depth social interaction, community formation, collaborative opportunities and collaborative work”	82
(Carr & Hayes, 2015 , 49-50)	Social media (as Internet-based, disentrained, and persistent channels of masspersonal communication)	Opportunistic interaction and selective self-presentation of users	1158
(Meikle, 2016 , x in Fuchs, 2017, 38)	Social media (as a specific set of internet-based, networked communication platforms)	“These use a business model of a database built by its own users. And they enable the convergence of public and personal communication”	287
(Miller, Sinanan, Wang, McDonald, Haynes, Costa, Spyer, Venkatraman & Nicolescu, 2016 , 9)	Social media	“Colonization of the space between traditional broadcast and private dyadic communication, providing people with a scale of group size and degrees of privacy that we have termed “scalable sociality”	1063
(Lundmark, Oh & Verhaal, 2017 , 1410)	Social media (as a means)	“...dissemination of both internally and externally generated information pertaining to firms, industries, and society in general”	24

(Leyrer-Jackson & Wilson, 2018 , 2)	Social media (as Web sites and Technological applications)	“allow its users to share content and/or to participate in social networking”	50
(Kapoor, Tamilmani, Rana, Patil, Dwivedi & Nerur, 2018 , 536)	Social media	“...facilitate diffusion of compelling content, dialogue creation, and communication to a broader audience,” “...provides an environment that is conducive for interactions and networking to occur at different levels (for instance, personal, professional, business, marketing, political, and societal)”	952

Source: Own elaboration based on T. Aichner, M. Grünfelder, O. Maurer & D. Jegeni, *Twenty-Five Years of Social Media: A Review of Social Media Applications and Definitions from 1994 to 2019*, “Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking” 2021, 24(4), pp. 215–222.

Appendix B. Online presence of Ukrainian political actors on Facebook (as of the end of 2021)

Political actor	Political role	Registration date (or first post)	Page link
	Presidential candidates		
1. Volodymyr Zelenskyy	President	30 December 2018	https://www.facebook.com/ze2019official
2. Petro Poroshenko	Ex-president, candidate, leader of the party	12 July 2014	https://www.facebook.com/petroporoshenko

3. Yulia Tymoshenko	Candidate, leader of the party	04 March 2011	https://www.facebook.com/YuliaTymoshenko
4. Yuriy Boyko	Candidate, leader of the party	18 December 2018	https://www.facebook.com/official.yuriy.boyko
5. Anatoliy Hrytsenko	Candidate	16 January 2019	https://www.facebook.com/Grytsenko.Anatoliy
6. Oleksandr Vilkul	Candidate	21 January 2013	https://www.facebook.com/OleksandrVilkul
7. Ihor Smeshko	Candidate	6 March 2012	https://www.facebook.com/ipsmeshko
8. Oleh Liashko	Candidate	13 May 2015	https://www.facebook.com/LiashkoOV
9. Ruslan Koshulynskyy	Candidate	29 November 2018	https://www.facebook.com/koshulynskyy.ruslan
10. Yuriy Tymoshenko	Candidate	14 March 2019	https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100063571016722
11. Oleksandr Shevchenko	Candidate	10 September 2012	https://www.facebook.com/YaShevchenkoUa
12. Valentyn Nalyvaichenko	Candidate	18 September 2015	https://www.facebook.com/nalyvaichenko.valentyn
13. Olga Bogomolets	Candidate	19 May 2011	https://www.facebook.com/doc.olga.bogomolets
14. Gennadiy Balashov	Candidate	27 January 2011	https://www.facebook.com/balashov.gennadiy
15. Roman Bezsmertnyi	Candidate, ex-member of Tripartite contact group with Russia	28 June 2018	https://www.facebook.com/bezsmertnyi
16. Sergiy Taruta	Ex-mayor of Donetsk, candidate, member of the Verkhovna Rada	30 June 2014	https://www.facebook.com/taruta
17. Ihor Shevchenko	Candidate	23 June 2015	https://www.facebook.com/igorshevchenkopage
18. Inna Bogoslovska	Candidate	12 May 2017	https://www.facebook.com/inna.bogoslovska.official/
19. Viktor Bondar	Candidate	8 April 2014	https://www.facebook.com/bondarvictoryv

Yuriy Derevyanko	Candidate	18 November 2015	https://www.facebook.com/derevyanko.yuriy
20. Yuriy Karmazin,	Candidate	7 August 2014	https://www.facebook.com/YuriyKarmazin
21. Vitaliy Kupriy	Candidate	24 January 2017	https://www.facebook.com/kupriyofficial/?ref=page_internal
22. Illya Kiva	Candidate	5 October 2012	https://www.facebook.com/kivaillya
23. Andriy Novak	Candidate	20 June 2012	https://www.facebook.com/novak.andriy.yaremovych
24. Mykola Haber	Candidate	22 May 2014	https://www.facebook.com/mykolagaber
25. Volodymyr Petrov	Candidate	12 April 2009	https://www.facebook.com/greatlumpen/
26. Vitaliy Skotsyk	Candidate	10 December 2014	https://www.facebook.com/VitaliySkotsyk
27. Sergiy Kaplin	Candidate	24 November 2010	https://www.facebook.com/sergiikaplin
28. Viktor Kryvenko	Candidate	16 May 2016	https://www.facebook.com/kryvenko.org
29. Arkadiy Kornatsky	Candidate	30 June 2017	https://www.facebook.com/ArkadiiKornatsky
30. Roman Nasirov	Candidate	27 October 2014	https://www.facebook.com/rmnukr
31. Ruslan Ryhovanov	Candidate	23 December 2016	https://www.facebook.com/Don.RUS.UA
Political parties			
1. Servant of the people	Political party	23 May 2019	https://www.facebook.com/slugarodu.official
2. Opposition Platform – For Life	Political party	8 September 2014	https://www.facebook.com/OppositionPlatformForLife
3. Motherland	Political party	8 August 2012	https://www.facebook.com/Batkivshchyna
4. European Solidarity	Political party	26 September 2014	https://www.facebook.com/EuropeanSolidarity.official
5. Voice	Political party	13 May 2019	https://www.facebook.com/GolosZmin

6. Radical party	Political party	21 April 2016	https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100069220119532
7. Power and honor	Political party	29 May 2019	https://www.facebook.com/sylaichest.org
8. Ukrainian strategy of Groysman	Political party	-	https://www.facebook.com/ustrategy
9. Shariy's party	Political party	3 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/sharij.official
10. Svoboda	Political party	23 January 2011	https://www.facebook.com/svoboda.ua/?locale=uk_UA
11. Civic position	Political party	10 September 2014	https://www.facebook.com/GromadianskaPozytsiia?locale=uk_UA
12. Green party of Ukraine	Political party	20 April 2016	https://www.facebook.com/GreenPartyofUkraine
13. Samopomich	Political party	5 April 2014	https://www.facebook.com/samopomich.ua
14. Agrarian Party of Ukraine	Political party	12 September 2018	https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100066928088974
15. Power of people	Political party	13 April 2013	https://www.facebook.com/sylalyudey
16. Power of law	Political party	27 September 2015	https://www.facebook.com/NGOSilaPrava/
Members of Parliament			
1. Sergiy Alekseev	European Solidarity (ES)	4 January 2015	https://www.facebook.com/deputy.alekseev/
2. Oleksandr Aliksiychuk	Servant of the People (SP)	24 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/slugararodu.alksiichuk.154/
3. Mykhailo Ananchenko	SP	20 September 2019	https://www.facebook.com/MykhailoAnanchenko/
4. David Arakhamia	SP	22 September 2020	https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100076214291894&sk=about
5. Yuriy Aristov	SP	3 September 2019	https://www.facebook.com/yuaristov/

6.	Oleh Arsenyuk	SP	22 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/slugararoduar_senyukoleg.195
7.	Pavlo Bakunets	Trust	23 May 2019	https://www.facebook.com/bakunetspavlo
8.	Viktor Baloga	For Future	18 July 2012	https://www.facebook.com/ViktorBaloga/
9.	Taras Batenko	For Future	31 October 2014	https://www.facebook.com/batenko123
10.	Zhan Beleniuk	SP	22 September 2016	https://www.facebook.com/beleniuk
11.	Maksym Berezin	SP	9 February 2020	https://www.facebook.com/Офіційна-сторінка-народного-депутата-України-Березіна-Максима-Юрійовича-112806520286743
12.	Larysa Bilozir	Trust	17 April 2018	https://www.facebook.com/larysabilozir
13.	Andriy Bobliakh	SP	26 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/slugararodu.bobliakh.145/
14.	Solomiya Bobrovska	Voice	27 February 2020	https://www.facebook.com/BobrovskaMP
15.	Andriy Bohdanets	SP	June 2021	https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100071495554798
16.	Valeriy Bozhyk	SP	7 September 2021	https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100075532045089
17.	Hanna Bondar	SP	1 July 2019	https://www.facebook.com/slugararodu.bondar.220/
18.	Oleh Bondarenko	SP	17 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/bondarenko.oleg.volodymyrovych
19.	Kostyantyn Bondarev	Motherland	7 February 2018	https://www.facebook.com/konstbondarev/
20.	Iryna Borzova	SP	1 November 2017	https://www.facebook.com/borzova.iryana
21.	Evheniy Bragar	SP	28 August 2019	https://www.facebook.com/yvbragar
22.	Lada Bulakh	SP	8 September 2019	https://www.facebook.com/Народний-депутат-України-Лада-Булах-101567531234472/

23. Serhiy Bunin	SP	24 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/serhii.bunin
24. Viktoriya Vagner	SP	29 August 2019	https://www.facebook.com/Vagner.Viktoria/
25. Olga Vasylevska-Smahluk	SP	15 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/zeolga96/
26. Lesia Vasylenko	Voice	14 September 2011	https://www.facebook.com/lesiav
27. Igor Vasiliyev	SP	23 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/zedeptyat.igor.vasiliyev
28. Igor Vasyliv	SP	24 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/vasyliv.sluganarodu
29. Igor Vasylovskiy	SP	June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/sluganarodu.vasylovskiy.139
30. Halyna Vasylchenko	Voice	9 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/halyna.vasylchenko.golos/
31. Hennadiy Vatsak	Trust	26 February 2019	https://www.facebook.com/vatsakgennadiy/
32. Mykola Velychkovych	ES	18 May 2021	https://www.facebook.com/Микола-Величкович-110862677851030
33. Vasyl Virastyuk	SP	4 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/virastyuk87/
34. Vitaliy Voitsekhivskiy	SP	August 2021	https://www.facebook.com/v.voitsekhivskiy
35. Mykhailo Volynets	Motherland	8 February 2018	https://www.facebook.com/MykhailoVolynets/
36. Daria Volodina	SP	21 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/dariavolodinaofficial/
37. Oleh Voronko	SP	23 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/sluganarodu.voronko.103/
38. Vadym Galaychuk	SP	3 October 2019	https://www.facebook.com/vadym.galaychuk/
39. Volodymyr Gevko	SP	24 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/gevko.sluganarodu.167/

40. Oleksandr Gerega	For Future	25 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/Gerega.Oleksandr/
41. Denys Herman	SP	29 May 2019	https://www.facebook.com/slugararodu35/
42. Danylo Hetmantsev	SP	28 June 2021	https://www.facebook.com/d.getmancev/
43. Robert Gorvat	Trust	3 September 2014	https://www.facebook.com/R.Gorvat/
44. Oleksandr Gorenjuk	SP	14 December 2018	https://www.facebook.com/OleksandrGorenjuk/
45. Oleksandr Gorobez	SP	18 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/gorobez.oleksandr/
46. Viktoria Grib	-	4 November 2019	https://www.facebook.com/viktoria.grib.p ublic
47. Sergey Grivko	SP	12 March 2020	https://www.facebook.com/Sergey.Grivk o110
48. Nataliya Korolevska	Opposition Platform – For Life (Opposition Platform)	8 August 2011	https://www.facebook.com/Nataliya.Koro levska
49. Tetyana Hryshchenko	SP	24 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/slugararodu.h ryshchenko.66/
50. Roman Grishchuk	SP	22 May 2017	https://www.facebook.com/romagrishchu k/
51. Maksym Guzenko	SP	2 July 2019	https://www.facebook.com/ze.maksymgu zenko
52. Igor Guz	SP	27 May 2011	https://www.facebook.com/Guz.Igor/
53. Anatolij Gunko	SP	26 August 2020	https://www.facebook.com/anatolij.gunk o1/
54. Serhiy Demchenko	SP	23 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/okrug29/
55. Dmytro Hurin	SP	4 July 2019	https://www.facebook.com/slugararodu.h urin.218
56. Mustafa Jemilev	ES	19 November 2019	https://www.facebook.com/mustafa.abdul jemil/
57. Maksym Dyrdin	SP	23 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/DyrdinMaksy m

58. Oleksandr Dubinskiy	former SP	7 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/alexandrubinskiyi
59. Oksana Dmytriieva	SP	10 July 2020	https://www.facebook.com/Dmytriieva.Official/
60. Artem Dmytruk	SP	23 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/dmytruk.a/
61. Oles Dovgiy	-	12 February 2015	https://www.facebook.com/olesdovgiy/
62. Anatoliy Drabovskii	SP	12 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/ZeDrabovskii/
63. Artem Dubnov	SP	22 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/slugararodu.dubnov/
64. Oleh Dunda	SP	22 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/dunda.slugararodu/
65. Mariana Bezuhla	SP	15 October 2008	https://www.facebook.com/bezuhlamariana/about_profile_transparency
66. Serhii Babak	SP	26 December 2013	https://www.facebook.com/sergey.babak.94
67. Viktor Medvedchuk	Leader of the party	21 February 2017	https://www.facebook.com/MEDVEDCHUKVV
68. Serhiy Evtushok	Motherland	27 October 2021	https://www.facebook.com/evtushok.ok
69. Oleksii Zhmerenetskyi	SP	28 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/oleksii.zhmerenetskyi/
70. Mykhaylo Zbrodskyy	ES	18 February 2020	https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100050496309386
71. Lesia Zburanna	SP	27 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/lesiazaburanna/
72. Mykola Zadorozhnyi	SP	8 July 2019	https://www.facebook.com/mykola.zadorozhnyi.okrug162
73. Maksym Zaremskyy	SP	21 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/Слуга-Народу-Заремський-Максим-Округ-202-381171362507558/
74. Yuriy Zdebsky	SP	21 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/slugararodu.zdebsky/

75. Yana Zinkevych	ES	18 October 2019	https://www.facebook.com/Zinkevych2019
76. Valeriy Zub	SP	24 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/zub.valeriy
77. Roman Ivanisov	SP	24 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/slugararodu.iivanisov.153/
78. Volodymyr Ivanov	SP	15 August 2019	https://www.facebook.com/Zelvanov185/
79. Andriy Ivanchuk	Trust	16 March 2018	https://www.facebook.com/andriy.ivanchuk.111/
80. Vadym Ivanchenko	Motherland	26 November 2014	https://www.facebook.com/vadym1ivchenko/
81. Ivan Kalaur	SP	2022	https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100076811984046
82. Yuriy Kamelchuk	SP	10 August 2014	https://www.facebook.com/yuriy.kamelchuk/
83. Roman Kaptelov	SP	18 October 2018	https://www.facebook.com/slugararodu.kaptelov.36/
84. Kostyantyn Kasai	SP	23 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/kostyantynkasai.149okryg/
85. Oleksandr Kachniy	Opposition platform	26 November 2019	https://www.facebook.com/a.kachniy/
86. Oleksandr Kachura	SP	30 July 2019	https://www.facebook.com/kachuratur/
87. Dmytro Kisilevskiy	SP	21 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/kisilevskiy.dp.ua/
88. Bohdan Kytsak	SP	11 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/bohdan.kytsak/
89. Viktoriya Kinzburska	SP	21 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/Kinzburska.V/
90. Ihor Kisilov	Opposition platform	15 July 2020	https://www.facebook.com/kisilov.online/
91. Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze	ES	9 September 2019	https://www.facebook.com/IKlympushTsintsadze/
92. Andriy Klocho	SP	5 September 2019	https://www.facebook.com/Andriy.Klocho/

93. Mykola Kniazhytsky	ES	18 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/MykolaKniazhytsky/
94. Oleksandr Kovalchuk	SP	24 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/slugararodu.kovalchuk.152/
95. Serhiy Kozir	SP	4 December 2020	https://www.facebook.com/serhiikozir
96. Serhiy Kaleboshyn	SP	16 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/slugararodu.kaleboshyn.140/
97. Oleg Kolev	SP	26 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/slugararodu.oleg.kolev.134/
98. Valeriy Koliukh	SP	22 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/slugararodu.koliukh.92/
99. Olena Kondratiuk	Motherland	18 May 2021	https://www.facebook.com/kondratiukolena
100. Iryna Konstankevych	For Future	19 June 2017	https://www.facebook.com/IrynaKonstankevych/
101. Olena Kopanchuk	SP	2 March 2016	https://www.facebook.com/kopanchuk
102. Ihor Kopytin	SP	23 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/Kopytin.Ihor/
103. Oleksandr Korniyenko	SP	7 April 2019	https://www.facebook.com/oskorniyenko
104. Yuriy Koriavchenkov	SP	22 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/slugararodu.koriavchenkov.33/
105. Dmytro Kostiuk	SP	18 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/DmytroKostiuk.SlugaNarodu/
106. Yevheniya Kravchuk	SP	21 April 2021	https://www.facebook.com/YevheniyaKravchuk/
107. Oleksii Krasov	SP	22 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/oleksiikrasov/
108. Volodymyr Kreydenko	SP	11 September 2019	https://www.facebook.com/KreydenkoVolodymyr/
109. Olena Kryvoruchkina	SP	22 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/slugararodu.kryvoruchkina.32/

110.Ivan Krulko	Motherland	26 November 2014	https://www.facebook.com/ikrulko/
111.Yuriy Kuzbyt	SP	25 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/slugararodu.kuzbyt.101/
112.Oleksiy Kuznetsov	SP	23 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/Olexiy.Kuznetsov/
113.Renat Kuzmin	Opposition platform	22 March 2014	https://www.facebook.com/RRKuzmin/
114.Serhiy Kuzminykh	SR	21 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/ze.zhytomyr67/
115.Oleh Kulinich	Trust	1 October 2014	https://www.facebook.com/OlehKulinich/
116.Artem Kunaev	SP	9 February 2021	https://www.facebook.com/kunaev.a/
117.Artem Kulenko	SP	9 August 2019	https://www.facebook.com/kulenko.artem.sn
118.Artem Kunayev	SP	9 February 2021	https://www.facebook.com/kunaev.a
119.Mykola Kucher	Trust	5 April 2015	https://www.facebook.com/KucherMykola/
120.Oleksiy Kucherenko	Motherland	16 January 2019	https://www.facebook.com/kucherenko2021/
121.Mykhailo Laba	SP	21 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/myhailolaba/
122.Serguy Labazyuk	For Future	11 August 2021	https://www.facebook.com/SergiyLabazyuk
123.Sergey Larin	Opposition platform	20 April 2015	https://www.facebook.com/sergeylarinpublic/
124.Alexey Leonov	SP	15 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/slugararodu.alexyleonov.135/
125.Oleksandr Litvinov	SP	19 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/slugararodu.litvinov/
126.Hanna Lichman	SP	25 March 2020	https://www.facebook.com/hanna.lichman.30okrug/
127.Dmytro Lubinets	For Future	30 July 2017	https://www.facebook.com/lubinetsdmytro

128.Alexander Lukashev	Opposition platform	6 July 2019	https://www.facebook.com/ukr.alexandr.lukashev/
129.Valeriy Lunchenko	SP	29 May 2019	https://www.facebook.com/lunchenkovaleriy/
130.Dmytro Liubota	SP	June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/zedeputat177
131.Mykola Lyushniak	Trust	19 September 2020	https://www.facebook.com/mykola.lyushniak/
132.Serhiy Magera	-	1 November 2019	https://www.facebook.com/magera.official/
133.Musa Magomedov	-	12 November 2019	https://www.facebook.com/magomedov.public/
134.Heorhiy Mazurasu	SP	15 January 2020	https://www.facebook.com/mazurasu
135.Grigory Mamka	Opposition platform	20 December 2018	https://www.facebook.com/mamka.grigory/
136.Oleh Marusyak	SP	14 September 2021	https://www.facebook.com/Олег-Марусьяк-народний-депутат-України-103717185398129/
137.Ihor Marchuk	SP	28 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/slugararodu.marchuk.igor.193/
138.Denys Maslov	SP	31 May 2021	https://www.facebook.com/maslov.denys/
139.Oleksandr Matusevich	SP	24 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/the.matusevich.86/
140.Vyacheslav Medyanik	SP	29 May 2019	https://www.facebook.com/slugararodu.medyanik.27/
141.Maria Mezentseva	SP	20 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/slugararodu.mezentseva.168/
142.Oleh Meidych	Motherland	6 September 2021	https://www.facebook.com/Oleh.Meidych/
143.Dmytro Mykysha	SP	18 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/slugararodu.mykysha.181/
144.Yuriy Mysyagin	SP	24 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/Slugararodu.Mysyagin.28/
145.Galyna Mykhailiuk	SP	9 December 2019	https://www.facebook.com/galyna.mykhailiuk.mp/

146.Sergey Minko	For Future	17 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/sergeyminko2019/
147.Oleksiy Movchan	SP	25 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/oleksiymovchan/
148.Vasyl Mokań	SP	16 September 2019	https://www.facebook.com/Mokań.Vasyl/
149.Ihor Molotok	For Future	19 September 2012	https://www.facebook.com/igor.fedorovich.molotok/
150.Vladimir Moroz	Opposition platform	30 October 2021	https://www.facebook.com/moroz.vladimir.donbass/
151.Olena Moshenets	SP	1 September 2019	https://www.facebook.com/olena.moshenets.vru/
152.Ihor Murdiy	SP	24 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/Слуга-Народу-Ігор-Мурдій-100-округ-999098867102373/
153.Viktor Myalyk	For Future	21 October 2019	https://www.facebook.com/Віктор-Мялик-102410297857964/
154.Artem Nahaevskyi	SP	19 September 2020	https://www.facebook.com/iamnahaevskyi/
155.Serhiy Nagorniak	SP	28 June 2019 10 January 2016	https://www.facebook.com/ze.nagorniak/ https://www.facebook.com/nagorniaksv/
156.Dmytro Naletov	SP	26 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/slugararodu.naletov.144/
157.Dmytro Natalukha	SP	15 June 2021	https://www.facebook.com/D.Natalukha/
158.Ihor Negulevskyi	SP	22 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/Slugararodu.IhorNegulevskyi/
159.Vladlen Nekludov	SP	9 September 2021	https://www.facebook.com/Nekludov.Vladlen/
160.Maryna Nikitina	SP	18 June 2020	https://www.facebook.com/slugararodu.nikitina.82/
161.Andriy Nikolaenko	Motherland	3 March 2017	https://www.facebook.com/andriynikolaenko/
162.Vadym Novynskyi	Opposition platform	30 November 2015	https://www.facebook.com/novynskyi/

163.Yuliya Ovchynnykova	SP	23 September 2019	https://www.facebook.com/ovchynnykov a/
164.Yuriy Pavlenko	Opposition platform	15 May 2015	https://www.facebook.com/Юрій-Павленко-774113416037869/
165.Pavlo Pavlish	SP	22 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/slugararodu.pavlish.182/
166.Petro Pavlovskiy	SP	13 July 2019	https://www.facebook.com/PetroPavlovskiy/
167.Ihor Palitsa	For Future	16 July 2020	https://www.facebook.com/PalitsaIgor/
168.Andriy Parubiy	ES	5 February 2018	https://www.facebook.com/Parubiy.supporters.page
169.Oleksandr Pasichnyi	SP	23 May 2019	https://www.facebook.com/PasichnyiOleksandr/
170.Maksym Pashkovskiy	SP	23 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/m.pashkovskiy/
171.Maxim Perebyinis	SP	21 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/Народний-депутат-Максим-Перебийніс-212-округ-722329028202267/
172.Vasyl Petyovka	Trust	5 November 2019	https://www.facebook.com/vasylpetyovka a
173.Nataliya Pipa	SP	10 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/NataliyaPipaOfficialPage/
174.Tetiana Plachkova	Opposition platform	3 December 2019	https://www.facebook.com/tetianaplachkova/
175.Vladislav Poliak	Trust	17 February 2020	https://www.facebook.com/poliakvladislav/
176.Boris Prykhodko	Trust	11 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/borisprykhodko/
177.Natalia Prykhodko	Opposition platform	18 September 2019	https://www.facebook.com/Nataliya.Prykhodko.nardep/
178.Eduard Proshchuk	SP	11 September 2020	https://www.facebook.com/deputat.proshchuk/
179.Andriy Puziichuk	Motherland	19 March 2021	https://www.facebook.com/a.puziichuk/
180.Anna Purtova	SP	5 March 2019	https://www.facebook.com/purtova.aa/

181. Vadim Rabinovich	Opposition platform	28 March 2014	https://www.facebook.com/vadymrabinovich
182. Myhailo Radutskyi	SP	26 March 2020	https://www.facebook.com/radutskyi/
183. Vyacheslav Rublev	SP	10 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/RublevVyacheslav/
184. Kira Rudyk	Voice	June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/kira.rudik.politician
185. Serhiy Rudyk	For Future	5 November 2018	https://www.facebook.com/rudyk.comand/
186. Yaroslav Rushchysyn	Voice	10 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/rushchysyn.yaroslav
187. Oksana Savchuk	-	12 January 2016	https://www.facebook.com/SavchukOks/
188. Olha Saladuha	SP	11 September 2019	https://www.facebook.com/saladukhaolga/
189. Orest Salamakha	SP	24 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/slugararodu.salamakha.121/
190. Oleksandr Saliichuk	SP	5 November 2020	https://www.facebook.com/Oleksandr.Saliichuk/
191. Oleksandr Sanchenko	SP	27 January 2020	https://www.facebook.com/SashaSanchenko/
192. Yuliia Svitlychna	-	11 July 2020	https://www.facebook.com/YuliiaSvitlychnaOfficial/
193. Oleh Seminsky	SP	24 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/Slugararodu.Seminsky.205/
194. Oleg Synyutka	ES	23 March 2020	https://www.facebook.com/Oleg.Synyutka.official/
195. Mykola Skoryk	Opposition platform	15 January 2015	https://www.facebook.com/SkorykOfficial/
196. Anna Skorokhod	For Future	28 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/A.Skorokhod/
197. Antonina Slavitska	Opposition platform	20 January 2020	https://www.facebook.com/antonina.slavitska/
198. Oleksandr Sova	SP	26 July 2021	https://www.facebook.com/slugararodu.sova.o/
199. Inna Sovsun	Voice	27 March 2019	https://www.facebook.com/sovsun.inna/

200.Yuriy Solod	Opposition platform	22 September 2014	https://www.facebook.com/SolodYuriy/
201.Dmytro Solomchuk	SP	23 September 2019	https://www.facebook.com/d.solomchuk/
202.Valerii Sterniichuk	SP	23 November 2017	https://www.facebook.com/valeriistern
203.Olha Stefanyshyna	Voice	16 October 2020	https://www.facebook.com/ostefanyshyna/
204.Mykola Stefanchuk	SP	25 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/slugararodu.stefanchuk/
205.Andriy Strikharskyi	SP	23 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/strikharskyi/
206.Pavlo Sushko	SP	8 February 2019	https://www.facebook.com/sushko.pavlo/
207.Taras Tarasenko	SP	9 December 2019	https://www.facebook.com/tarasekomp/
208.Oleh Tarasov	SP	23 April 2021	https://www.facebook.com/OlehTarasovMP/
209.Mykola Tyshchenko	SP	22 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/slugararodu.tyshchenko/
210.Rostyslav Tistyk	SP	20 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/rotyktyktyk.lviv/
211.Rustem Umerov	Voice	27 July 2019	https://www.facebook.com/rustemumero.v.ua/
212.Anatolij Urbanskij	For Future	28 November 2016	https://www.facebook.com/Urbanskij.Anatolij/
213.Oleksii Ustenko	SP	17 May 2021	https://www.facebook.com/Oleksii.Ustenko.deputy/
214.Sofiya Fedyna	ES	31 January 2014	https://www.facebook.com/FedynaSofiya/
215.Oleksandr Fediienko	SP	10 March 2021	https://www.facebook.com/98fediienko/
216.Alexander Feldman	Opposition platform	5 June 2016	https://www.facebook.com/FeldmanAleksandr/
217.Iryna Friz	ES	22 November 2014	https://www.facebook.com/Iryna.Friz/
218.Ihor Fris	SP	14 April 2018	https://www.facebook.com/the.igorfris.84

219.Mykhailo Tsymbaliuk	Motherland	10 May 2016	https://www.facebook.com/mykhailotsymbaliuk/
220.Ivan Chaykivskyy	For Future	10 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/I.Chaykivskyy/
221.Stepan Cherniavskiy	SP	21 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/cherniavskiy.official/
222.Viktor Chornyi	Opposition platform	10 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/chornyi.info/
223.Dmytro Chornyi	SP	22 October 2017	https://www.facebook.com/slugararodu.chornyi.34/
224.Artem Chornomorov	SP	26 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/chornomorovartem/
225.Yuriy Shapovalov	For Future	27 July 2014	https://www.facebook.com/shapovalov.kremenichuk/
226.Andriy Sharaskin	Voice	9 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/Андрій-Шараскін-440859423137679/
227.Serhii Shakhov	Trust	8 August 2020	https://www.facebook.com/SerhiiShakhov/
228.Dmytro Shentsev	-	28 August 2018	https://www.facebook.com/shentsev.official/
229.Dmytro Shpenov		16 September 2014	https://www.facebook.com/shpenov.official/
230.Serhiy Shtepa	SR	21 September 2017	https://www.facebook.com/shtepadeputy/
231.Olena Shuliak	SR	16 September 2019	https://www.facebook.com/ShuliakOlena/
232.Nestor Shufrych	Opposition platform	1 April 2014	https://www.facebook.com/Пещ-служба-Нестора-Шуфрича-1525179317705986/
233.Oleksandr Yurchenko	SP	16 July 2018	https://www.facebook.com/slugararodu.yurchenko.211/
234.Ivan Yunakov	SP	-	https://www.facebook.com/deputyivanyunakov
235.Petro Yurchyshyn	For Future	11 January 2015	https://www.facebook.com/YurchyshynPV/

236. Bohdan Yaremenko	SP	25 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/slugararodu.yaremenko.215/
237. Elizaveta Yasko	SP	29 September 2020	https://www.facebook.com/lisayasko.ukraine/
238. Anton Yatsenko	Motherland	6 December 2017	https://www.facebook.com/antonyatsenko200/ https://www.facebook.com/Яценко-Антон-Прес-служба-1547853988860410/
239. Yulia Yatsyk	SP	10 September 2019	https://www.facebook.com/79SlugaNaroduVasylivka
240. Dmytro Razumkov	Ex-leader of the party and ex-speaker of Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine	25 January 2021	https://www.facebook.com/dmytro.razumkov
241. Ruslan Stefanchuk	Before politician, now speaker	17 October 2019	https://www.facebook.com/stefanchuk.official
Mayors			
1. Vitaliy Klychko	Mayor of Kyiv	26 November 2013	https://www.facebook.com/Vitaliy.Klychko/
2. Andriy Sadovyi	Mayor of Lviv	7 October 2020	https://www.facebook.com/andriy.sadovyi/about
3. Oleksandr Lysenko	Mayor of Sumy	23 August 2019	https://www.facebook.com/LisenkoOleksandr
4. Gennadiy Truhanov	Mayor of Odesa	25 June 2013	https://www.facebook.com/gennadiytruhanov
5. Volodymyr Buryak	Mayor of Zaporizhzhia	12 February 2017	https://www.facebook.com/Володимир-Буряк-1830261627246287
6. Anatoliy Bondarenko	Mayor of Cherkasy	23 May 2018	https://www.facebook.com/merbondarenko
7. Borys Filatov	Mayor of Dnipro	29 September 2014	https://www.facebook.com/filatovborys
8. Sergij Nadal	Mayor of Ternopil	5 March 2013	https://www.facebook.com/Nadal.Sergij
9. Ruslan Martsinkiv	Mayor of Ivano-Frankivsk	18 November 2014	https://www.facebook.com/ruslan.martsinkiv
10. Vladislav Atroshenko	Mayor of Chernihiv	19 June 2012	https://www.facebook.com/AtroshenkoVladislav

11. Bohdan Andriyiv	Mayor of Uzhhorod	11 June 2019	https://www.facebook.com/BohdanAndriyivPolitics
12. Serhiy Morhunov	Mayor of Vinnytsa	4 August 2015	https://www.facebook.com/SAMorgunov
13. Oleksandr Mamay	Mayor of Poltava	30 December 2018	https://www.facebook.com/Mamay.O.F
14. Oleksandr Syenkevych	Mayor of Mykolayiv	27 October 2015	https://www.facebook.com/SenkevichNikolaev
15. Serhiy Sukhomlyn	Mayor of Zhytomyr	30 October 2019	https://www.facebook.com/mersukhomlyn
16. Ihor Polishchuk	Mayor of Lutsk	31 May 2011	https://www.facebook.com/ihor.polishchuk?locale=uk_UA
17. Oleksandr Symchyshyn	Mayor of Khmelnytskyi	1 April 2010	https://www.facebook.com/symchyshyn?locale=uk_UA
Others			
1. Volodymyr Groysman	Former Prime Minister	10 September 2014	https://www.facebook.com/volodymyrgroysman
2. Oleksiy Honcharuk	Former Prime Minister	29 August 2019	https://www.facebook.com/Oleksiy.Honcharuk
3. Denys Shmyhal	Prime Minister	4 February 2020	https://www.facebook.com/dshmyhal
4. Andrey Portnov	Ex-politician, shadow actor	8 February 2020	https://www.facebook.com/aportnovua
5. Andriy Karpov	Blogger	-	https://www.facebook.com/AndreyPoltava
6. Anatolij Sharij	Blogger/politician	17 September 2008	https://www.facebook.com/anatolijsharij
7. Olha Sharij	Blogger/politician	-	https://www.facebook.com/bondarenkoolyaa
8. Serhiy Leshchenko	Blogger/works in the government, former MP	29 October 2010	https://www.facebook.com/leshchenko.ukraine
9. Alexander Dubinskiy	Blogger, politician	-	https://www.facebook.com/dubinskiy https://www.facebook.com/alexandrdubinskiy/ https://www.facebook.com/dubinsky.pro
10. Borislav Bereza	Blogger, ex-politician	25 November 2009	https://www.facebook.com/borislav.bereza

11. Semen Semenchenko	Military, ex-politician	2 February 2010	https://www.facebook.com/dostali.hvatit
12. Yuriy Biriukov	Military	17 February 2014	https://www.facebook.com/yuri.biriukov
13. Dmitriy Chekalkin	Blogger	22 January 2012	https://www.facebook.com/Dmitriy.Chekalkin
14. Roman Shrike	Blogger	29 October 2009	https://www.facebook.com/roman.shrike
15. Bohdan Protsyshyn	Blogger, art, humor	14 July 2016	https://www.facebook.com/ProtsyshynOfficial
16. Yuriy Hudymenko	Blogger, Democratic Ax	25 January 2012	https://www.facebook.com/hudymenko
17. Roman Donik	Blogger	22 December 2010	https://www.facebook.com/skitalec
18. Taras Berezovets	Blogger, journalist	28 December 2009	https://www.facebook.com/taras.berezovets
19. Vitaliy Haydukevych	Blogger, journalist, politician	-	https://www.facebook.com/v.gaydukevich
20. Volodymyr Omelyan	Blogger, ex-politician	April 2008	https://www.facebook.com/volodymyr.omelyan
21. Serhiy Prytula	Blogger, possible politician	3 March 2014	https://www.facebook.com/serhiyprytula
22. Serhiy Sternenko	Blogger, activist	17 March 2014	https://www.facebook.com/sternenko
23. Sergey Fursa	Blogger	12 September 2011	https://www.facebook.com/sergey.fursa

Appendix C. Online presence of Belarusian political actors on Telegram (as of the end of 2021)

Political actor	Political role	Registration date	Page link
	Presidential candidates		

1. Alexander Lukashenko, Pool of the First	Nominally President	7 November 2019	https://t.me/pul_1
2. Sergei Tsikhanouskiy, Country for life	Activist, blogger/influencer, potential presidential candidate	19 June 2020	https://t.me/strana_official
3. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya	Presidential candidate	23 July 2020	https://t.me/tsikhanouskaya
4. Viktor Babaryka	Potential presidential candidate	13 May 2020	https://t.me/viktarbabarykaofficial
5. Valeriy Tsepkalo	Potential presidential candidate	8 May 2020	https://t.me/valerytsepkalo
6. Pavel Latushka	Potential presidential candidate	22 August 2020	https://t.me/latushka
7. Sergei Cherechen	Presidential candidate	12 December 2019	https://t.me/zacherechen
8. Andrey Dmitriev	Presidential candidate	4 April 2020	https://t.me/DzmitryeuA
	Political parties		
1. Liberal Democratic Party of Belarus or The truth of Gaidukevich	Political party	13 August 2019	https://t.me/ldprb
2. White Rus	Political party	16 June 2020	https://t.me/roobelayarus
3. Communist Party of Belarus	Political party	28 July 2020	https://t.me/kom_party_belarus
4. Narodnaya Hramada. Party of Nikolay Statkevich	Political party	11 November 2017	https://t.me/narodnaya_hramada
5. National Anti-Crisis Management	Potential political party	4 November 2020	https://t.me/nau_belarus

6. Together	Potential political party	29 March 2021	https://t.me/vmeste_party
7. Diplomacy (former Belarusian Social Democratic Party)	Potential political party	8 April 2018	https://t.me/gramada
Members of Parliament			
1. Oleg Gaidukevich	Member of Parliament (VII convocation), Liberal Democratic Party of Belarus	23 November 2020	https://t.me/gajdukevichh
2. Yuriy Derkach	MP (VII)	3 June 2020	https://t.me/soviet_respubliki_derkach
3. Lyudmila Zholnerchik	MP (VII)	20 July 2021	https://t.me/L.Zholnerchik
4. Vitaliy Utkin	MP (VII), White Rus	28 October 2019	https://t.me/utkin_vitaliy
5. Irina Dovgalo	MP (VII)	21 September 2019	https://t.me/ivdovgalo
6. Alexander Mashkarov	MP (VII)	21 October 2019	https://t.me/mashkarov
7. Zhanna Chernyavskaya	MP (VII), Communist Party of Belarus	26 September 2019	https://t.me/jannachernyavskaya
8. Irina Rineyskaya	MP (VII)	2 July 2020	https://t.me/ryneiskaya_irina
9. Vera Shyrokaya	MP (VII), White Rus	10 March 2021	https://t.me/shirokayaVera
10. Vladimir Gatsko	MP (VII), White Rus	21 July 2020	https://t.me/gatskovv
11. Andrey Savinykh	MP (VII)	1 September 2021	https://t.me/AndreySavinykh
12. Sergey Klishevich	MP (VII), Communist Party of Belarus	7 October 2019	https://t.me/sergejklisevic
Mayors			

1. Alexander Rogachuk	Mayor of Brest	9 July 2020	https://t.me/Rogachuk
	Others		
1. Coordinating Council	Political platform	18 August 2020	https://t.me/rada_vision
2. NEXTA	Bloggers/influencers	19 April 2018	https://t.me/nexta_tv
3. NEXTA Live	Bloggers/influencers	14 February 2019	https://t.me/nexta_live
4. Belarus of the brain	Bloggers/influencers	15 May 2016	https://t.me/belamova
5. My country Belarus	Bloggers/influencers	20 November 2017	https://t.me/mkbelarus
6. Motolko help	Bloggers/influencers	5 September 2017	https://t.me/motolkohelp
7. Yellow plums	Bloggers/influencers (pro-government)	29 May 2020	https://t.me/zheltyeslivy
8. Franak Vyacherka	Tsikhounskaya's team, potential MP	22 July 2017	https://t.me/viacorka
9. Sprava, Roman Protasevich	Bloggers/influencers (pro-government, former oppositionist)	4 August 2021	https://t.me/sprava_by
10. Fair World	Political party, eliminated	10 July 2018	https://t.me/bel_left
11. Alexander Skurchayev	Potential politician	29 August 2020	https://t.me/alexandrskurchaev
12. Yury Voskresensky	Pro-government politician, former member of Babaryka's team	21 October 2020	https://t.me/yuryvoskresensky
13. Green party	Political party, eliminated	18 May 2018	https://t.me/belgreens
14. ByPOL	Activists	2 November 2020	https://t.me/belpol
15. Cyber partisans	Activists	6 February 2021	https://t.me/cpartisans_by
16. House of Representatives	Government	11 February 2021	https://t.me/housegovby

17. Council of the Republic	Government	9 April 2021	https://t.me/sovrep

Appendix D. Construction of the database (Belarus)

	11.05.2020 start of the campaign	First day of active publishing	A month later	25.03.2021 - end of the protests/ campaign	New week (Monday)	Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine
Viktar Babaryka (https://t.me/viktarbabarykaofficial)	13.05.2020-12.06.2020 / Month: numbers 13.05.2020-19.05.2020 7 days - content analysis	13.06.2020-13.07.2020 / 13.06.2020-19.06.2020	29.03.2021-28.04.2021 / 29.03.2021-04.04.2021 6 months	04.10.2021-03.11.2021 / 04.10.2021-13.10.2021	24.02.2022-26.03.2022 / 24.02.2022-04.03.2022	

Construction of the database (Ukraine)

	Start: 01.01.2019 or 24.05.2019	First day of publishing	A month later	End of the campaign (03.08.2019)	New week	Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine
Yulia Tymoshenko (https://www.facebook.com/YuliaTymoshenko)	03.01.2019- 02.02.2019 / 03.01.2019- 13.01.2019	03.02.2019- 05.03.2019 / 03.02.2019- 09.02.2019	05.08.2019- 04.09.2019 / 10.08.2019- 24.08.2019 + 6 months	24.02.2020- 25.03.2020 / 24.02.2020- 02.03.2020	24.02.2022- 26.03.2022 / 24.02.2022- 02.03.2022	

Appendix E. Specific dates of data collection

Political actor (link to the profile)	Election period (start): month / 7 days	Election period (development): month / 7 days	Post-election period: month / 7 days	Routine period: month / 7 days	War period: month / 7 days
1. Alexander Lukashenko (https://t.me/pul_1)	11.05.2020-10.06.2020 / <u>11.05.2020-20.05.2020</u>	11.06.2020-11.07.2020 / <u>11.06.2020-20.06.2020</u>	29.03.2021-28.04.2021 / <u>29.03.2021-04.04.2021</u>	04.10.2021-03.11.2021 / <u>05.10.2021-13.10.2021</u>	24.02.2022-26.03.2022 / <u>24.02.2022-03.03.2022</u>
2. Viktar Babaryka (https://t.me/viktarbabarykaofficial)	13.05.2020-12.06.2020 / <u>13.05.2020-19.05.2020</u>	13.06.2020-13.07.2020 / <u>13.06.2020-19.06.2020</u>	29.03.2021-28.04.2021 / <u>29.03.2021-04.04.2021</u>	04.10.2021-03.11.2021 / <u>04.10.2021-13.10.2021</u>	24.02.2022-26.03.2022 / <u>24.02.2022-04.03.2022</u>
3. Valeriy Tsepkalo (https://t.me/valerytsepkalo)	11.05.2020-10.06.2020 / <u>11.05.2020-20.05.2020</u>	11.06.2020-11.07.2020 / <u>11.06.2020-21.06.2020</u>	29.03.2021-28.04.2021 / <u>01.04.2021-12.04.2021</u>	12.10.2021-11.11.2021 / <u>12.10.2021-18.10.2021</u>	24.02.2022-26.03.2022 / <u>24.02.2022-02.03.2022</u>
4. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya (https://t.me/tsikhanouskaya)	23.07.2020-22.08.2020 / <u>23.07.2020-29.07.2020</u>	23.08.2020-22.09.2020 / <u>24.08.2020-03.09.2020</u>	29.03.2021-28.04.2021 / <u>29.03.2021-04.04.2021</u>	04.10.2021-03.11.2021 / <u>05.10.2021-14.10.2021</u>	24.02.2022-26.03.2022 / <u>24.02.2022-02.03.2022</u>
5. Pavel Latushka (https://t.me/latushka)	23.08.2020-22.09.2020 / <u>23.08.2020-29.08.2020</u>	23.09.2020-23.10.2020 / <u>23.09.2020-29.09.2020</u>	29.03.2021-28.04.2021 / <u>29.03.2021-04.04.2021</u>	04.10.2021-03.11.2021 / <u>04.10.2021-10.10.2021</u>	24.02.2022-26.03.2022 / <u>24.02.2022-02.03.2022</u>

6. Liberal Democratic Party of Belarus or The truth of Gaidukevich (https://t.me/dprb)	12.05.2020-11.06.2020 / <u>12.05.2020-20.05.2020</u>	12.06.2020-12.07.2020 / <u>12.06.2020-17.07.2020</u> (exception, still election period)	29.03.2021-28.04.2021 / <u>29.03.2021-04.04.2021</u>	04.10.2021-03.11.2021 / <u>04.10.2021-11.10.2021</u>	24.02.2022-26.03.2022 / <u>24.02.2022-03.03.2022</u>
7. White Rus (https://t.me/oobelayarus)	16.06.2020-16.07.2020 / <u>16.06.2020-11.07.2020</u>	16.07.2020-15.08.2020 / <u>16.07.2020-22.07.2020</u>	29.03.2021-28.04.2021 / <u>29.03.2021-04.04.2021</u>	04.10.2021-03.11.2021 / <u>04.10.2021-10.10.2021</u>	24.02.2022-26.03.2022 / <u>24.02.2022-02.03.2022</u>
8. Communist Party of Belarus (https://t.me/kom_party_belarus)	28.07.2020-27.08.2020 / <u>28.07.2020-04.08.2020</u>	28.08.2020-27.09.2020 / <u>30.08.2020-08.09.2020</u>	29.03.2021-28.04.2021 / <u>30.03.2021-06.04.2021</u>	06.10.2021-05.11.2021 / <u>06.10.2021-12.10.2021</u>	24.02.2022-26.03.2022 / <u>25.02.2022-03.03.2022</u>
9. Narodnaya Hramada. Party of Nikolay Statkevich (https://t.me/narodnaya_hramada)	11.05.2020-10.06.2020 / <u>11.05.2020-17.05.2020</u>	11.06.2020-11.07.2020 / <u>11.06.2020-17.06.2020</u>	29.03.2021-28.04.2021 / <u>01.04.2021-07.04.2021</u>	07.10.2021-06.11.2021 / <u>07.10.2021-14.10.2021</u>	24.02.2022-26.03.2022 / <u>24.02.2022-02.03.2022</u>
10. National Anti-Crisis Management	04.11.2020-04.12.2020 /	05.12.2020-04.01.2021 /	29.03.2021-28.04.2021 /	06.10.2021-05.11.2021 /	24.02.2022-26.03.2022 /

(https://t.me/nau_belarus)	<u>04.11.2020-</u> <u>14.11.2020</u>	<u>14.12.2020-</u> <u>20.12.2020</u>	<u>30.03.2021-</u> <u>06.04.2021</u>	<u>06.10.2021-</u> <u>12.10.2021</u>	<u>24.02.2022-</u> <u>02.03.2022</u>
11. Oleg Gaidukevich (https://t.me/gajdukevichh)	23.11.2020- 23.12.2020 / <u>23.11.2020-</u> <u>02.12.2020</u>	24.12.2020- 23.01.2021 / <u>24.12.2020-</u> <u>06.01.2021</u>	29.03.2021- 28.04.2021 / <u>29.03.2021-</u> <u>04.04.2021</u>	04.10.2021- 03.11.2021 / <u>04.10.2021-</u> <u>12.10.2021</u>	24.02.2022- 26.03.2022 / <u>24.02.2022-</u> <u>02.03.2022</u>
12. Alexander Rogachuk (https://t.me/Rogachuk)	15.07.2020- 14.08.2020 / <u>15.07.2020-</u> <u>21.07.2020</u>	15.08.2020- 14.09.2020 / <u>15.08.2020-</u> <u>21.08.2020</u>	29.03.2021- 28.04.2021 / <u>29.03.2021-</u> <u>05.04.2021</u>	05.10.2021- 04.11.2021 / <u>05.10.2021-</u> <u>11.10.2021</u>	24.02.2022- 26.03.2022 / <u>27.02.2022-</u> <u>05.03.2022</u>
13. NEXTA Live (https://t.me/nexta_live)	11.05.2020- 10.06.2020 / <u>11.05.2020-</u> <u>17.05.2020</u>	11.06.2020- 11.07.2020 / <u>11.06.2020-</u> <u>17.06.2020</u>	29.03.2021- 28.04.2021 / <u>29.03.2021-</u> <u>04.04.2021</u>	04.10.2021- 03.11.2021 / <u>04.10.2021-</u> <u>10.10.2021</u>	24.02.2022- 26.03.2022 / <u>24.02.2022-</u> <u>02.03.2022</u>
14. Petro Poroshenko (https://www.facebook.com/petroporoshenko)	01.01.2019- 31.01.2019 / <u>01.01.2019-</u> <u>07.01.2019</u>	01.02.2019- 03.03.2019 / <u>01.02.2019-</u> <u>07.02.2019</u>	05.08.2019- 04.09.2019 / <u>05.08.2019-</u> <u>11.08.2019</u>	11.02.2020- 12.03.2020 / <u>11.02.2020-</u> <u>17.02.2020</u>	24.02.2022- 26.03.2022 / <u>24.02.2022-</u> <u>02.03.2022</u>
15. Volodymyr Zelenskyy	01.01.2019- 31.01.2019 / <u>01.01.2019-</u> <u>07.01.2019</u>	01.02.2019- 03.03.2019 / <u>01.02.2019-</u> <u>07.02.2019</u>	05.08.2019- 04.09.2019 / <u>05.08.2019-</u> <u>11.08.2019</u>	11.02.2020- 12.03.2020 / <u>11.02.2020-</u> <u>18.02.2020</u>	24.02.2022- 26.03.2022 / <u>24.02.2022-</u> <u>02.03.2022</u>

	https://www.facebook.com/ze2019official)	https://www.facebook.com/ze2019official)	https://www.facebook.com/president.gov.ua)	https://www.facebook.com/president.gov.ua)	https://www.facebook.com/president.gov.ua)
16. Yulia Tymoshenko (https://www.facebook.com/YuliaTymoshenko)	03.01.2019-02.02.2019 / <u>03.01.2019-13.01.2019</u>	03.02.2019-05.03.2019 / <u>03.02.2019-09.02.2019</u>	05.08.2019-04.09.2019 / <u>10.08.2019-24.08.2019</u>	24.02.2020-25.03.2020 / <u>24.02.2020-02.03.2020</u>	24.02.2022-26.03.2022 / <u>24.02.2022-02.03.2022</u>
17. Yuriy Boyko (https://www.facebook.com/official.yuriy.boyko)	02.01.2019-01.02.2019 / <u>02.01.2019-10.01.2019</u>	02.02.2019-04.03.2019 / <u>04.02.2019-11.02.2019</u>	05.08.2019-04.09.2019 / <u>06.08.2019-13.08.2019</u>	13.02.2020-14.03.2020 / <u>15.02.2020-25.02.2020</u>	24.02.2022-26.03.2022 / <u>24.02.2020-05.03.2020</u>
18. Anatoliy Hrytsenko (https://www.facebook.com/Grytsenko.Anatoliy)	16.01.2019-15.02.2019 / <u>16.01.2019-23.01.2019</u>	16.02.2019-18.03.2019 / <u>16.02.2019-22.02.2019</u>	05.08.2019-04.09.2019 / <u>05.08.2019-17.08.2019</u>	17.02.2020-18.03.2020 / <u>18.02.2020-28.02.2020</u>	24.02.2022-26.03.2022 / <u>24.02.2022-02.03.2022</u>
19. Servant of the People (https://www.facebook.com/slugarod.u.official)	07.06.2019-07.07.2019 / <u>07.06.2019-14.06.2019</u>	08.07.2019-03.08.2019 (exception, decision of the party to register on 07.06.2019) /	05.08.2019-04.09.2019 / <u>05.08.2019-14.08.2019</u>	14.02.2020-15.03.2020 / <u>14.02.2020-20.02.2020</u>	24.02.2022-26.03.2022 / <u>24.02.2022-02.03.2022</u>

		<u>08.07.2019-</u> <u>14.07.2019</u>			
20. Oppositional Platform – For Life (https://www.facebook.com/OppositionPlatformForLife/)	24.05.2019- 23.06.2019 / <u>24.05.2019-</u> <u>30.05.2019</u>	24.06.2019- 24.07.2019 / <u>24.06.2019-</u> <u>30.06.2019</u>	05.08.2019- 04.09.2019 / <u>05.08.2019-</u> <u>12.08.2019</u>	12.02.2020- 13.03.2020 / <u>12.02.2020-</u> <u>18.02.2020</u>	24.02.2022- 26.03.2022 / <u>26.02.2022-</u> <u>04.03.2022</u>
21. Motherland (https://www.facebook.com/Batkivshchyna)	24.05.2019- 23.06.2019 / <u>24.05.2019-</u> <u>31.05.2019</u>	24.06.2019- 24.07.2019 / <u>24.06.2019-</u> <u>30.06.2019</u>	05.08.2019- 04.09.2019 / <u>06.08.2019-</u> <u>15.08.2019</u>	15.02.2020- 16.03.2020 / <u>15.02.2020-</u> <u>22.02.2020</u>	24.02.2022- 26.03.2022 / <u>24.02.2022-</u> <u>04.03.2022</u>
22. European Solidarity (https://www.facebook.com/EuropeanSolidarity.official)	24.05.2019- 23.06.2019 / <u>24.05.2019-</u> <u>30.05.2019</u>	24.06.2019- 24.07.2019 / <u>24.06.2019-</u> <u>30.06.2019</u>	05.08.2019- 04.09.2019 / <u>05.08.2019-</u> <u>11.08.2019</u>	11.02.2020- 12.03.2020 / <u>11.02.2020-</u> <u>17.02.2020</u>	24.02.2022- 26.03.2022 / <u>24.02.2022-</u> <u>02.03.2022</u>
23. Voice (https://www.facebook.com/GolosZmiin)	24.05.2019- 23.06.2019 / <u>24.05.2019-</u> <u>30.05.2019</u>	24.06.2019- 24.07.2019 / <u>24.06.2019-</u> <u>30.06.2019</u>	05.08.2019- 04.09.2019 / <u>05.08.2019-</u> <u>13.08.2019</u>	13.02.2020- 14.03.2020 / <u>13.02.2020-</u> <u>19.02.2020</u>	24.02.2022- 26.03.2022 / <u>24.02.2022-</u> <u>04.03.2022</u>

24. Volodymyr Groysman (https://www.facebook.com/volodymyr.groysman)	24.05.2019- 23.06.2019 / <u>24.05.2019-</u> <u>30.05.2019</u>	24.06.2019- 24.07.2019 / <u>24.06.2019-</u> <u>30.06.2019</u>	05.08.2019- 04.09.2019 / <u>05.08.2019-</u> <u>11.08.2019</u>	11.02.2020- 12.03.2020 / <u>14.02.2020-</u> <u>08.03.2020</u>	24.02.2022- 26.03.2022 / <u>24.02.2022-</u> <u>02.03.2022</u>
25. Andriy Sadovyi (https://www.facebook.com/andriy.sadovyi)	24.05.2019- 23.06.2019 / <u>24.05.2019-</u> <u>03.06.2019</u>	24.06.2019- 24.07.2019 / <u>24.06.2019-</u> <u>30.06.2019</u>	05.08.2019- 04.09.2019 / <u>05.08.2019-</u> <u>15.08.2019</u>	15.02.2020- 16.03.2020 / <u>15.02.2020-</u> <u>22.02.2020</u>	24.02.2022- 26.03.2022 / <u>24.02.2022-</u> <u>02.03.2022</u>
26. Anatoliy Shariy (https://www.facebook.com/anatolijscharij)	01.01.2019- 31.01.2019 / <u>01.01.2019-</u> <u>07.01.2019</u>	01.02.2019- 03.03.2019 / <u>01.02.2019-</u> <u>07.02.2019</u>	05.08.2019- 04.09.2019 / <u>05.08.2019-</u> <u>11.08.2019</u>	11.02.2020- 12.03.2020 / <u>11.02.2020-</u> <u>17.02.2020</u>	24.02.2022- 26.03.2022 / <u>24.02.2022-</u> <u>02.03.2022</u>

Appendix F. Codebook: Strategies of political actors on Telegram (Belarus) and Facebook (Ukraine)

Version: 10.03.2024

General coding guidelines: Analysis of a full social media post with information from graphic elements, hyperlink previews, etc. Apart from the specified exceptions. There is no point in following the link in the post. Not all users do this. It is necessary to analyze everything that a user sees at first glance.

Perspective of a post is the main during the content analysis, not a specific political actor!

In this content analysis, political actors are considered to be politicians of various levels, representatives of political teams (including political analysts), opinion leaders and influencers. Neither media representatives, nor military representatives, nor diplomats. The focus is on Ukraine and Belarus.

I. Input criteria

Category 1. Text ID

Please assign a unique text ID to a social media post. – 001, 002, etc.

Code:

xxxx Text ID in digits

Category 2: Country and social media platform

Question: What country and social media platform does the coder analyze?

Code:

1 = Ukraine (Facebook)

2 = Belarus (Telegram)

Category 3: Political actor

Question: Who is the author of the post?

Code:

1 = Alexander Lukashenko, Pool of the first (Belarus, President)

2 = Viktor Babryka (Belarus, potential presidential candidate)

- 3 = Valeriy Tsepkalo (Belarus, potential presidential candidate)
- 4 = Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya (Belarus, presidential candidate)
- 5 = Pavel Latushka (Belarus, potential presidential candidate)
- 6 = Liberal Democratic Party of Belarus or The truth of Gaidukevich (Belarus, political party)
- 7 = White Rus (Belarus, political party)
- 8 = Communist Party of Belarus (Belarus, political party)
- 9 = Narodnaya Hramada. Party of Nikolay Statkevich (Belarus, political party)
- 10 = National Anti-Crisis Management (Belarus, potential political party)
- 11 = Oleg Gaidukevich (Belarus, House of Representatives of the National Assembly)
- 12 = Alexander Rogachuk (Belarus, mayor)
- 13 = NEXTA Live (Belarus, blogger/influencer)
- 14 = Petro Poroshenko (Ukraine, former President)
- 15 = Volodymyr Zeelenskyy (Ukraine, current President)
- 16 = Yulia Tymoshenko (Ukraine, presidential candidate)
- 17 = Yuriy Boyko (Ukraine, presidential candidate)
- 18 = Anatoliy Hrytsenko (Ukraine, presidential candidate)
- 19 = Servant of the People (Ukraine, political party)
- 20 = Oppositional Platform – For Life (Ukraine, political party)
- 21 = Motherland (Ukraine, political party)
- 22 = European Solidarity (Ukraine, political party)
- 23 = Voice (Ukraine, political party)
- 24 = Volodymyr Groysman (Ukraine, Verkhovna Rada)
- 25 = Andriy Sadovyi (Ukraine, mayor)

26 = Anatoliy Shariy (Ukraine, blogger/influencer)

Category 4: Publication date

Question: When was the post published? Please indicate the date in the following format.

Code:

DD/MM/YYYY Day Month Year of the post

II. General characteristics of the post

Category 5: Type of the post

Question: What is the type of the post? Whether the post is written by the political actor or shared from other sources. Consider only the primary type, for example, repost. Do not count all as repost, hyperlink, etc.

Code:

1 = Original post (including only emoji(s), graphic element(s), reel(s), LIVE stream(s), survey(s) and event(s) without any other text)

Specify if only (distinctive features):

111 = Survey

112 = Screenshot from social media

2 = Reply (Shared on Facebook, forwarded from another channel on Telegram. An additional comment of the author is a distinctive feature)

3 = Repost (Shared on Facebook, forwarded from another channel on Telegram, but there is no additional comment of the author)

4 = Hyperlink (internal or external, only hyperlinks posted by the author)

99 = Other(s), specify _____ (posts that cannot be placed in any of the above categories)

0 = Unidentifiable

Category 6: Specification of replies, reposts, hyperlinks (if present)

Question: Who/what are the sources of information? (TO LIST THEM ALL)

Code:

1 = Website(s), webpage(s), and/or contact form(s) of political actors (a separate platform for information, discussions, feedbacks, without self-references) + website(s) in general with valuable information

2 = Social media page(s) of political actors (an equal platform for information, discussions, feedbacks, without self-references), their bots (e.g. Telegram)

3 = Media (professional news sources, journalists, media workers on different platforms)

4 = Ordinary users (from different platforms, including discussion and debate forums, small audience, including anonymous users)

5 = Self-reference (to old information of the author)

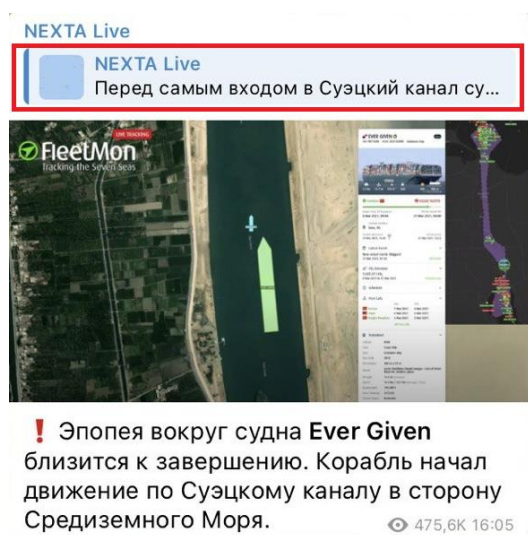
99 = Other(s), specify _____ (posts that cannot be placed in any of the above categories)

0 = Not present

Category 7: Genres (if present)

Question: What is the genre of information material included in the post? (if possible to determine). It is allowed to follow the link in this case. The name of the genre can be also mentioned in the post. Do not define the genre of the post itself. Importantly, it must be prepared by some external actors (ignore if the material is prepared by their own press office

– formality, no standards, blurred boundaries, except for Indicator 6 due to its uniqueness for the online environment).



Ignore if it is a self-reference like in the photo above.

Code:

1 = Brief news (a short information message, facts without opinions, no need to indicate an author, classic structure: who-what-where-when-why-how)

2 = Article

211 = News article (events from local and international life, full of facts and statistics, formal style, neutral tone, with some opinions)

212 = Feature article (focus on a specific story or issue, in-depth investigation, inspired by the topic of a news article, with a number of opinions)

213 = Editorials, columns and opinion articles (focus on the uniqueness of the author, characterized by a personal writing style, the name of the article type is often mentioned in the title)

3 = Interview, comment (between the interviewer and interviewee), press-conference

4 = Talk show (several people are involved, political or entertaining character) or Latest News

5 = Report (analytical document), or report from the event, or reportage

6 = Blog / Vlog (including an online video appeal) / Podcast

99 = Other(s), specify _____ (posts that cannot be placed in any of the above categories)

0 = Not present at all / hard to determine (cannot be placed in any of the above categories, cannot be identified)

Category 8: Length of the post

Question: How long is the post with spaces? Do not count text from graphic elements. Count text from hyperlinks. Separate emojis are included in the character count.

Code:

1 = Short size (less than 140 characters)

2 = Middle size (141-280 characters)

3 = Long size (more than 280 characters)

0 = No text

III. Content of the post

Category 9: Language(s)

Question: What are the languages of the post? (TO LIST THEM ALL)

Check text and graphics. Do not follow the link.

Code:

1 = Ukrainian

2 = Belarusian

3 = English

4 = Russian

99 = Other(s), specify _____ (posts that cannot be placed in any of the above categories)

0 = No text

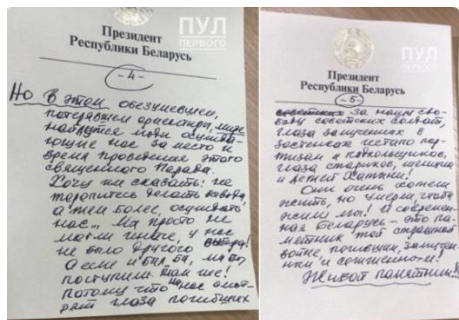
Category 10: Language style

Question: What is the language style of the post?

Code:

1 = Formal (e.g. official language with specialized terminology, large vocabulary, structured text, seems like a news report, objective tone, dominance of facts and data)

2 = Informal (the post's text is written in casual language, more personal, dominance of emotional or humorous tone, including vernaculars, jargon, abbreviations, play-on-words, puns, emojis of body parts)



Есть ли спичрайтер у Лукашенко?
Конечно, есть.

Но по опыту знаем, самые мощные
фрагменты своих выступлений
президент всегда пишет сам. Вот
пример. Эти слова Лукашенко
произносил на параде. Хорошо, что
пишет разборчиво. Помощникам
повезло 🤪

26,4K edited 09:07

- emoji of body parts (head)

3 = Mixed (including both formal and informal styles, or when hard to determine, unclear)

0 = No text

Category 11: Topic(s), issue(s) of the post

Question: What topics, issues are presented in the post? (TO LIST THEM ALL)

It is important to have knowledge of political events in the specified countries in order to understand the context behind each post!

Code:

1 = Business and economy (posts including subjects such as budgeting, contracts, crisis, debt, deficit, economic sectors (agricultural, energy, gas, trade, tourism, industry), entrepreneurship, inflation, jobs, public spending, salaries, self-employed people, taxes, employment, unemployment, prices, sanctions, sponsors, and so on)

2 = Health and social policy (posts including subjects such as childbirth, coronavirus, equality/inequality (including gender-based violence), education (in terms of money issues), health, housing, immigration (except war related issues), pensions, the welfare state, support of certain vulnerable population groups, support of vulnerable sectors of a state, and so on)

3 = War, conflicts and terrorism in the world (including military, security and defense issues, as the entire region is at war, mostly violence). Note: Ukraine, Belarus and Russia are not foreign countries in the context of war.

Specify if there are cross-country connections (distinctive features):

311 = Posts related to Belarusian political actors (for the Ukrainian political actors)

312 = Posts related to Ukrainian political actors (for the Belarusian political actors)

4 = Foreign affairs, international relations, world events, globalism, global politics, international news (more diplomacy, except war issues), international actors. Note: Ukraine, Belarus and Russia are not foreign countries in the context of war.

Specify if there are cross-country connections (distinctive features):

411 = Posts focusing on Belarusian political actors (for the Ukrainian political actors)

412 = Posts focusing on Ukrainian political actors (for the Belarusian political actors)

Note: doctors, diplomats and military representatives are not political actors.

5 = Culture, education and sport (posts including subjects related to cultural industries (cinema, literature, art, mainstream media, social media, etc.), education and sport)

6 = Science, technology, environment and animal rights (posts including subjects related to research, network infrastructure (such as Wi-Fi), social media, websites, pollution, flora and fauna protection, climate change, and so forth)

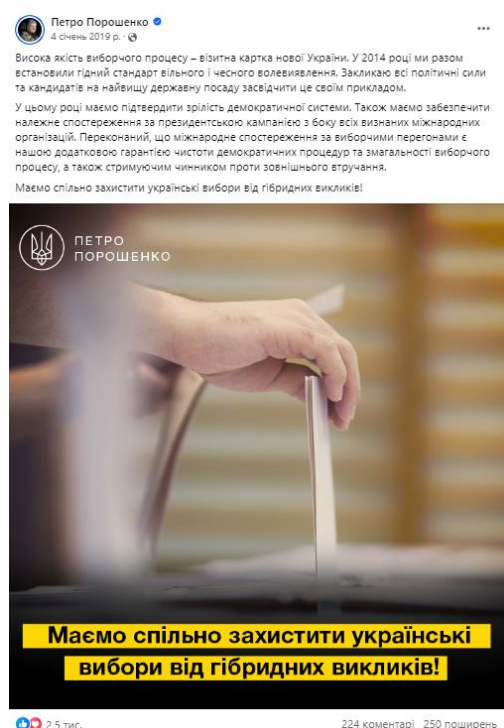
7 = Infrastructure (posts including subjects related to transport services (railway, airports) and infrastructure like roads, construction, and so on)

8 = Corruption (posts including subjects concerning all types of corruption, as well as transparency, irrational money spending, stealing of money)

9 = Legislation (e.g. adoption of laws, issuance of decrees, changes in a constitution, laws, norms, rules, except international documents)

10 = Democracy (posts that mention specific mechanisms/principles of democracy functioning)

Example:



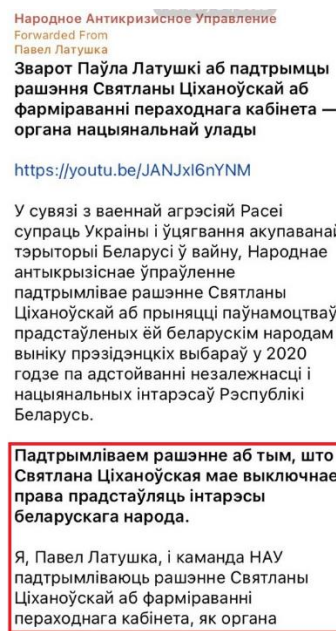
11 = Religion

12 = Socio-cultural and mourning events (holidays, memorial days, and so on)

13 = Relationships with other specific political actors (they need to represent another team, can be an ally as well as an enemy, names or references have to be present. Not a message that simply mentions them, but a connection post showing an attitude to them)



- just mention



- relationship

14 = Relationships with media (showing attitude to media work, not just a kind of announcement)

15 = Prosecution, civil and human rights, criminal actions (e.g. criminal and judicial proceedings, surveillance, political imprisonment, police, court, investigation, prevention of possible crimes, occasional shooting, violation of laws, and so on)

16 = Personal issues and backstage (posts referring to personal life of political actors, showing or explaining things from their private life (leisure, hobbies, sport, etc.), backstage of political events or professional activity, informal information, informal events)

17 = Election (candidate registration process, campaign organization, campaign events, posts referring to the actions of voting, the 2020 Belarusian protests)

18 = Rankings and results (posts on questionnaires, surveys, information, analysis, assessment of particular results, approval rating, election results, number of supporters, a logic of numbers, other types of obtained numbers, etc.)

19 = Media literacy (fake news, verified sources, fight against propaganda, information war)

20 = News and views overview (post includes wide thematic orientation with more than three topics)

99 = Other(s), specify_____ (posts that cannot be placed in any of the above categories)

0 = Unclear topic (not present, cannot be defined)

Category 12: Function(s) of the post

Question: What are the function(s) **of the post**? (TO LIST THEM ALL)

Can refer to oneself and other political actors.

It is important to have knowledge of political events in the specified countries in order to understand the context behind each post!

Code:

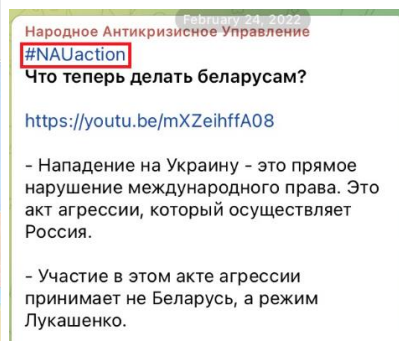
1 = Professional updates (daily activities regardless of a period: political announcements, proposals, positions, priorities, plans, strategies, decisions, vision, work activity, attendance of events, statements, and so on, except criticism)

2 = Image building (skills, abilities and characteristics considering professional and private life, personal preferences)

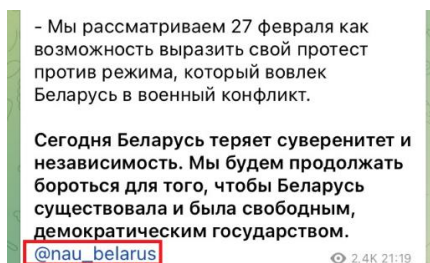
3 = Manners and protocol (actions of gratitude, sympathy, compassion, greetings, special occasions, act of awarding, and so on)

4 = Accomplishments (achievements, solutions, as well as benefits for people/country)

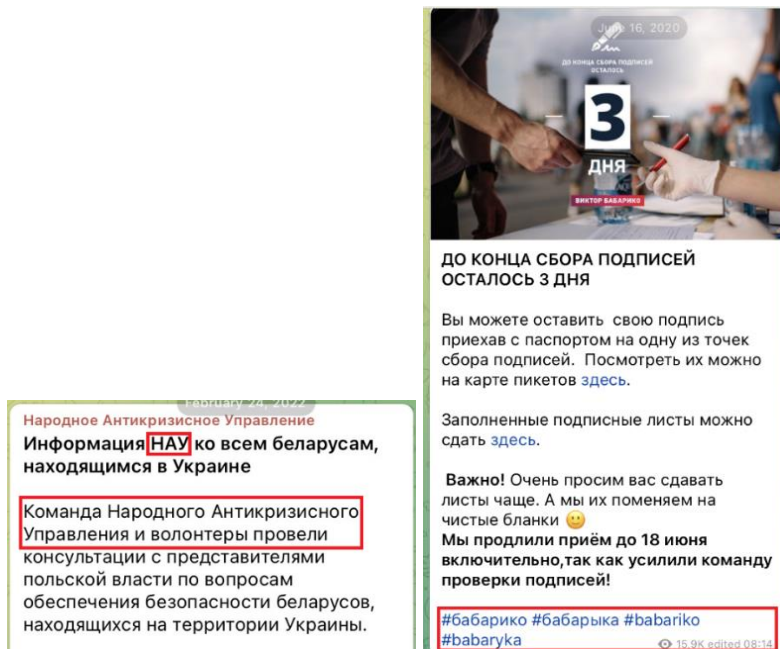
5 = Political advertisement (posts with exclusive slogans of political actors (e.g. “Army. Language. Faith” – Poroshenko; “Let’s do them together” – Zelenskyy; may include the appropriate advertising label, symbol of a political actor, specific elements that distinguish political actors, any activity in the media format only for politicians as the chance to promote their narratives, presence of bloggers/influencers in other programs)



- unique symbols



- unique symbols



6 = Commercial advertisement (non-political commercial posts, may include the appropriate advertising label)

7 = Criticism (posts criticizing any political actor, action, policy, event, date, negative coloration, and so on)

8 = Humor and entertainment (posts aim to trigger laughter or amusement, containing memes, jokes, or other humorous resources, creative posts, entertainment-based focus)

9 = Call to action (exhorting people to come out and vote/support the party, posts directly looking for votes, requesting financial donations, mobilizing voters, motivation to act, information on specific actions (can include time and place), appeal to other political actors, wide range of online/offline activities, and so forth)

10 = Dissemination of information (increasing awareness of local and international events, not specifically related to political actors from Ukraine and Belarus at all)

11 = Multifunctional post (more than three functions)

99 = Other, specify _____ (posts that cannot be placed in the above categories)

Category 13: Hashtag(s)

Question: Does the post contain hashtag(s)? Count only in the text. Other forms will not redirect to a political actor.

Code:

1 = Yes, specify _____

0 = No

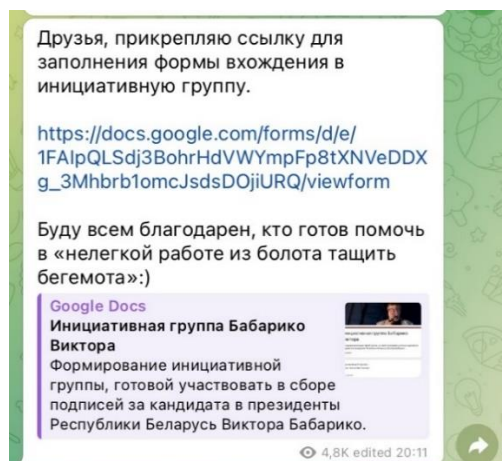
Category 14: Graphic element: photo(s), picture(s)

Question: Does the post contain photo(s) or picture(s)? Including hyperlinks.



photo in the post

- hyperlink to the video, but it looks like a



- small picture is present

Code:

1 = Yes

211 = Meme (type of political humor, joke, caricature)

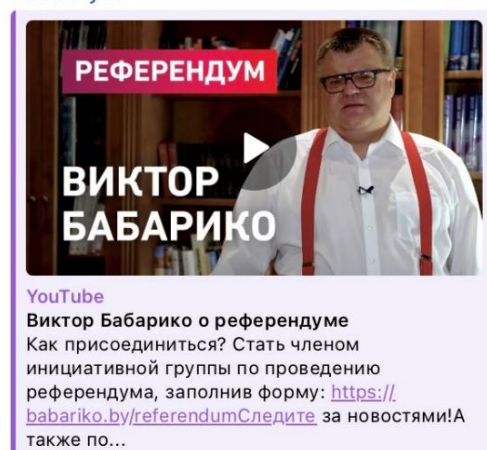
212 = GIF

0 = No

Category 15: Graphic element: video(s)

Question: Does the post contain video(s)? Including hyperlinks.

#бабарико #бабарыка #babariko
#babaryka



50K edited 20:51 - the video can be opened directly in the post

Code:

1 = Yes

211 = Reels

0 = No

Category 16: Graphic element: emoji(s)

Question: Does the post include emoji(s)?

Code:

1 = Yes

2 = Only emoji(s) without text

0 = No

Category 17: Emotional valence of the post

Question: What is the emotional tone of the post?

Code:

1 = Positive (the positive tone prevails in the post: connected to development, cooperation, innovation, progress, success, support, trust, victory, optimism, hope, achievement, praise, positive emojis, happy occasions, heroization, and so on)

2 = Negative (the negative tone prevails in the post: connected to disappointment, frustration, defeat, critics, refusal, conflict, danger, tension, pessimism, rage, irony, sarcasm, casualties, negative emojis, sad occasions, and so on)

3 = Mixed (positive and negative emotions in the post, or when it is not clear which tone prevails)

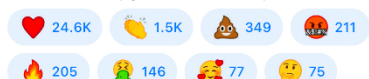
4 = Neutral (the neutral tone prevails in the post: balanced presentation of information)

Note:

The emotional tone depends on the position of each political actor. For example, NEXTA clearly supports Ukraine (see examples below). Russia is the aggressor country, the occupying country in relation to Ukraine. Thus, any actions against Russia is seen by NEXTA as positive (another confirmation below).

Наша редакция полностью состоит из белорусов, и мы — на стороне правды и справедливости. Мы на стороне Украины. Не дадим же врагу рассорить наши народы, которые веками жили в дружбе и согласии.

Жыве Беларусь! Слава Україні!



950,3K 09:40

✅ Киностудия Universal Pictures объявила о приостановке выхода в прокат своих фильмов в российских кинотеатрах

✅ Ford заявил, что приостанавливает деятельность компании в России



862K 23:03

Category 18: Personalization

Question: Who is the main character in the post? Focus of the post (for instance, most of specific references in order to be able to count: surname, pronouns, working position, addresses such as “friends,” “folks,” etc., first and third person + words with corresponding endings). Count in text and graphic elements. Count only political actors from Ukraine and Belarus.

Collective approach when “we” = citizens + team, just citizens, just team, sometimes unclear.

Example:



Роман Костенко
26 лютий 2022 р. · 🇺🇦

За дві крихітні доби український народ підтвердив право називатися нацією. За дві доби нелюдських випробувань українська держава довела свою стійкість. За дві доби невідворотних втрат українські збройні сили довели свою спроможність битися до кінця.

За дві доби неймовірного навантаження президент України став повноцінним верховним головнокомандувачем.

Будь які перемовини з ворогом і агресором на тлі цього втрачають зміст і сенс. Це - наруга щодо пам'яті загиблих і зневага щодо живих.

Будь яка пропозиція з боку агресора є облудною.

Ми живемо до поки стоїмо. Ми стоїмо до краю. За краєм - перемога

Ми живемо поки б'ємось. Ми, український народ, Президент, Збройні сили.

Ми зупинимо потвору. І нам для цього не потрібні переговори.

387

8 коментарів · 27 поширень

Tsikhankouskaya is the exception, as she often publishes posts on behalf of herself, Kalesnikava and Tsepkala (united opposition). Hence, this “we” is counted as the form of personalization.

Carefully distinguish between the promotion of a political actor (as the central figure of a post) and the attitude towards a political opponent (as the secondary figure in a post).

Code:

1 = Political individual (personal actions, can be leader or not, can refer to oneself and other political actors = present)

2 = Balanced (the same number of references to a political individual and a political party/movement, other individual(s) = absent)

0 = No references (absent, unclear, disputable, when Function 10 is chosen)

TO LIST if 101 = Supporters, citizens (absent)

102 = Political party / team / movement (absent)

Additional notes:



- This case is considered as the example of personalization due to the presence of a political actor in the center of the frame (excessive focus). He is the main character throughout the whole duration of the video.

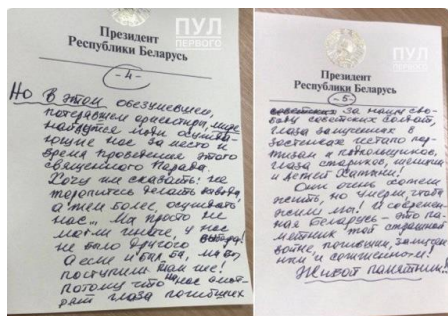
Category 19: Type of personalization (if present)

Question: What type of personalization is presented in the post? (TO LIST THEM ALL)

Code:

1 = Professional (showing professional activities, professional qualities, election campaigning, etc.)

2 = Emotional (showing emotions, posting emotional content like memes, humor, emojis of body parts, etc.)



Есть ли спичрайтер у Лукашенко?

Конечно, есть.

Но по опыту знаем, самые мощные фрагменты своих выступлений президент всегда пишет сам. Вот пример. Эти слова Лукашенко произносил на параде. Хорошо, что пишет разборчиво. Помощникам повезло 😊

26,4K edited 09:07

- emoji of body parts (head)

3 = Private (exposing personal thoughts/desires, opinion verbs, private life, intimate actions like taking a selfie, expressing close personal feelings, personal issues, etc.)

0 = No personalization

Appendix G. Survey for Ukrainians

Мене звати Владислав Зініченко. Я навчаюсь на третьому році Докторської школи соціальних наук Університету Адама Міцкевича в Познані.

Я проводжу дослідження для здобуття наукового ступеня «доктор» під керівництвом професора Скушпача і доктора Якубовського. Метою моєї роботи є аналіз активності політичних діячів України та Білорусі у соціальних медіа (Фейсбук, Телеграм тощо).

Результати допоможуть краще зрозуміти практику використання цього інструменту у Східній Європі.

Прошу Вашої допомоги у заповненні цієї анкети. На це піде близько 10 хвилин. Запевняю Вас, що надані відповіді залишатимуться конфіденційними та повністю анонімними. Результати використовуватимуться виключно у наукових цілях.

Опитування спрямоване на людей старше 18 років, які користуються соціальними медіа. Якщо Ви заповнювали цю анкету раніше, не потрібно робити цього знову.

Якщо у Вас виникнуть запитання щодо дослідження, то Ви можете зв'язатися зі мною за допомогою електронної пошти: vlazin@amu.edu.pl. Дякую за інтерес до участі в цьому дослідженні!

I. Яким є Ваше громадянство?

1 = Україна

2 = Білорусь

II. Як часто Ви користуєтеся соціальними медіа (Facebook, Telegram і т. д.)?

1 = Раз на місяць або рідше	2 = Кілька разів на місяць	3 = Кілька разів на тиждень	4 = Кожного дня	5 = Кілька разів на день

III. Яку сторону в політиці Ви підтримуєте?

1 = Правляча верхівка (Президент і/або партія “Слуга народу”)

2 = Опозиційні сили

3 = Проти всіх (проти правлячої верхівки та опозиційних сил)

4 = Не цікавлюся політикою

IV. Як часто Ви стикаєтеся з інформацією про політику (загалом) у соціальних медіа?

1 = Ніколи	2 = Кілька разів на місяць	3 = Кілька разів на тиждень	4 = Кожного дня	5 = Кілька разів на день

V. Як часто Ви зустрічаєте інформацію про правлячу верхівку (Президент і/або партія “Слуга народу”) в соціальних медіа?

1 = Ніколи	2 = Кілька разів на місяць	3 = Кілька разів на тиждень	4 = Кожного дня	5 = Кілька разів на день

VI. Як часто Ви зустрічаєте інформацію про опозиційні сили в соціальних медіа?

1 = Ніколи	2 = Кілька разів на місяць	3 = Кілька разів на тиждень	4 = Кожного дня	5 = Кілька разів на день

VII. Чи підписані Ви на сторінки українських політичних діячів у соціальних мережах зі списку нижче? Можна зазначити більше однієї відповіді.

Володимир Зеленський, Партія “Слуга Народу” – **правляча верхівка**.

Петро Порошенко, Юлія Тимошенко, Юрій Бойко, Анатолій Гриценко, Олег Ляшко, Партія “Опозиційна Платформа за Життя”, Партія “Батьківщина”, Партія “Європейська Солідарність”, Партія “Голос”, Партія “Сила і честь”, “Партія Шарія”, Ірина Геращенко, Володимир Гройсман, Андрій Садовий – **опозиція**.

Анатолій Шарій, Олександр Дубінський, Юрій Бірюков, Сергій Лещенко – **лідери думок/інфлюенсери**.

0 = Я не підписаний/а ні на кого з цього списку, і я не підписаний/а на українських політичних діячів загалом.

1 = Я підписаний/а на представників правлячої верхівки зі списку.

2 = Я підписаний/а на представників опозиції зі списку.

3 = Я підписаний/а на лідерів думок/інфлюенсерів із цього списку.

4 = Я підписаний/а на українських політичних діячів, яких немає в цьому списку.

VIII. Чи підписані Ви на сторінки білоруських політичних діячів у соціальних мережах зі списку нижче? Можна зазначити більше однієї відповіді.

Пул Першого (Олександр Лукашенко) – **правляча верхівка**.

Ліберально-демократична партія Білорусі” (Правда Гайдукевича), Партія “Біла Русь”, Ірина Ринейська, Олександр Рогачук – **провладні політичні діячі**.

Віктор Бабарика, Валерій Цепкало, Світлана Тихановська, Павло Латушко, Сергій Черечень, Франак Вячорка, Координаційна Рада, Народне Антикризове Управління,

Народна Грамада (Партія Миколи Статкевича), Партія “Грамада”, Партія “Справедливий мир”, Олександр Скурчаєв – **опозиція**.

NEXTA Live, Білорусь головного мозку, Моя Країна Білорусь – **лідери думок/інфлюенсери**.

0 = Я не підписаний/а ні на кого з цього списку, і я не підписаний/а на білоруських політичних діячів загалом.

1 = Я підписаний/а на представників правлячої верхівки зі списку.

2 = Я підписаний/а на представників провладних політичних діячів зі списку.

3 = Я підписаний/а на представників опозиції зі списку.

4 = Я підписаний/а на лідерів думок/інфлюенсерів із цього списку.

5 = Я підписаний/а на білоруських політичних діячів, яких немає в цьому списку.

ІХ. Де ще Ви зустрічаєте інформацію про політичних діячів у соціальних медіа? Можна зазначити більше однієї відповіді.

0 = Не зустрічаю

1 = У дописах новинних медіа (NV, Українська правда, ТСН тощо)

2 = У дописах або повідомленнях друзів

3 = У рекламних дописах

4 = У рекомендаціях соціальних мереж

Х. Як часто Ви або реагуєте (ставите лайк або одну з емоцій: радість, сум, злість тощо) на дописи, або ділитесь дописами, або коментуєте дописи українських політичних діячів?

1 = Ніколи	2 = Кілька разів на місяць	3 = Кілька разів на тиждень	4 = Кожного дня	5 = Кілька разів на день

ХІ. Як часто Ви публікуєте або коментуєте меми про українських політичних діячів?

1 = Ніколи	2 = Кілька разів на місяць	3 = Кілька разів на тиждень	4 = Кожного дня	5 = Кілька разів на день

XII. Якщо так, то меми про яких українських політичних діячів?

1 = Відносяться до правлячої верхівки

2 = Відносяться до опозиції

3 = Відносяться до правлячої верхівки та опозиції

XIII. Як часто Ви публікуєте дописи або коментарі з хештегами, запропонованими українськими політичними діячами?

1 = Ніколи	2 = Кілька разів на місяць	3 = Кілька разів на тиждень	4 = Кожного дня	5 = Кілька разів на день

XIV. Чи жертвували Ви гроші або підписували петиції на справи, про які оголошували українські політичні діячі виключно в соціальних мережах?

1 = Так

2 = Ні

XV. Чи брали Ви участь у офлайн-заходах (мітингах, акціях протесту, демонстраціях, зборах коштів, були волонтерами тощо), організованих українськими політичними діячами?

1 = Так

2 = Ні

XVI. Якщо так, то як ви про них дізналися?

1 = Із соціальних медіа (Фейсбук, Телеграм тощо)

2 = Із вебсайтів

3 = Із традиційних медіа (телебачення, радіо, преса)

4 = Інше

XVII. Наскільки Ви базуєте свої знання про політичних діячів виходячи з інформації у соціальних медіа?

1 = Зовсім ні	2 = Лише трохи	3 = Помірно	4 = Значно	5 = У великій мірі

XVIII. Скільки Вам років?

1 = 18-24

2 = 25-34

3 = 35-44

4 = 45-65

5 = 66+

XIX. Ваша стать?

1 = Чоловік

2 = Жінка

3 = Не хочу відповідати

XX. Ваше місцезнаходження на даний момент? (виключно для правильного оформлення дослідження)

1 = У межах території своєї країни

2 = За кордоном

3 = Не хочу відповідати

Appendix H. Survey for Belarusians

Меня зовут Владислав Зиниченко. Я учусь на третьем году Докторской школы социальных наук Университета Адама Мицкевича в Познани.

Я провожу исследование для получения ученой степени «доктор» под руководством профессора Скшипчака и доктора Якубовского. Целью моей работы является анализ активности политических деятелей Украины и Беларуси в социальных медиа (Facebook, Telegram и т. д.). Результаты помогут усовершенствовать знания касательно практики использования этого инструмента в Восточной Европе.

Прошу Вашей помощи в заполнении этой анкеты. Это займет около 10 минут. Уверяю Вас, что ответы будут оставаться конфиденциальными и полностью анонимными. Результаты будут использоваться исключительно в научных целях.

Опрос предназначен для людей старше 18 лет, которые пользуются социальными медиа. Если Вы уже заполняли эту анкету ранее, пожалуйста, не делайте этого снова.

Если у Вас возникнут вопросы касательно данного исследования, то Вы можете связаться со мной по электронной почте: vlazin@amu.edu.pl. Спасибо за проявленный интерес к участию в этом исследовании!

I. Какое у вас гражданство?

1 = Украина

2 = Беларусь

II. Как часто Вы пользуетесь социальными медиа (Facebook, Telegram и т. д.)?

1 = Раз в месяц или реже	2 = Несколько раз в месяц	3 = Несколько раз в неделю	4 = Каждый день	5 = Несколько раз в день

III. Вы поддерживаете политику, которая проводится в Вашей стране?

1 = Скорее да

2 = Скорее нет

3 = Не интересуюсь политикой

IV. Как часто Вы сталкиваетесь с информацией о политике (в целом) в социальных медиа?

1 = Никогда	2 = Несколько раз в месяц	3 = Несколько раз в неделю	4 = Каждый день	5 = Несколько раз в день

V. Как часто Вы сталкиваетесь с информацией о правящем режиме в социальных медиа?

1 = Никогда	2 = Несколько раз в месяц	3 = Несколько раз в неделю	4 = Каждый день	5 = Несколько раз в день

VI. Как часто Вы сталкиваетесь с информацией об оппозиции в социальных медиа?

1 = Никогда	2 = Несколько раз в месяц	3 = Несколько раз в неделю	4 = Каждый день	5 = Несколько раз в день

VII. Подписаны ли Вы на страницы украинских политических деятелей в социальных сетях из списка ниже? Можно указать более одного ответа.

Владимир Зеленский, Партия "Слуга Народа" – **правлящий режим**.

Петр Порошенко, Юлия Тимошенко, Юрий Бойко, Анатолий Гриценко, Олег Ляшко, Партия "Оппозиционная Платформа за Жизнь", Партия "Батьківщина", Партия "Европейська Солидарність", Партия "Голос", Партия "Сила і честь", "Партия Шария", Ирина Геращенко, Владимир Гройсман, Андрей Садовый – **оппозиция**.

Анатолий Шарий, Александр Дубинский, Юрий Бирюков, Сергей Лещенко – **лидеры мнений/инфлюэнсеры**.

0 = Я не подписан ни на кого из этого списка, и я не подписан на украинских политических деятелей в целом.

1 = Я подписан на представителей правящего режима из списка.

2 = Я подписан на представителей оппозиции из списка.

3 = Я подписан на лидеров мнений/инфлюэнсеров из этого списка.

4 = Я подписан на украинских политических деятелей, которых нет в этом списке.

VIII. Подписаны ли Вы на страницы политических деятелей из Беларуси в социальных сетях из списка ниже? Можно указать более одного ответа.

Пул Первого (Александр Лукашенко) – **правлящий режим**.

“Либерально-демократическая партия Беларуси” (Правда Гайдукевича), Партия “Белая Русь”, Ирина Рынейская, Александр Рогачук – **провластные политические деятели**.

Виктор Бабарыка, Валерий Цепкало, Светлана Тихановская, Павел Латушко, Сергей Черечень, Франак Вячорка, Каардынацыйная Рада, Народное Антикризисное Управление, Народная Грамада (Партия Николая Статкевича), Партия “Грамада”, Партия “Справедливый мир”, Александр Скурчаев – **оппозиция**.

NEXTA Live, Беларусь головного мозга, Мая Краіна Беларусь – **лидеры мнений/инфлюэнсеры**.

0 = Я не подписан ни на кого из этого списка, и я не подписан на политических деятелей из Беларуси в целом.

1 = Я подписан на представителей правящего режима из списка.

2 = Я подписан на представителей провластных политических деятелей из списка.

3 = Я подписан на представителей оппозиции из списка.

4 = Я подписан на лидеров мнений/инфлюэнсеров из этого списка.

5 = Я подписан на политических деятелей из Беларуси, которых нет в этом списке.

IX. Где еще вы встречаете информацию о политических деятелях в социальных медиа? Можно указать более одного ответа.

0 = Не встречаю

1 = В постах новостных медиа (BELSAT, TUT.BY, Радыё Свабода и т. д.)

2 = В постах или сообщениях друзей

3 = В рекламных постах

4 = В рекомендациях социальных медиа

X. Как часто Вы реагируете (ставите лайк или одну из эмоций: радость, печаль, злость и т.д.) на посты, или делитесь постами, или комментируете посты политических деятелей из Беларуси?

1 = Никогда	2 = Несколько раз в месяц	3 = Несколько раз в неделю	4 = Каждый день	5 = Несколько раз в день

XI. Как часто Вы публикуете или комментируете мемы о политических деятелях из Беларуси?

1 = Никогда	2 = Несколько раз в месяц	3 = Несколько раз в неделю	4 = Каждый день	5 = Несколько раз в день

XII. Если да, то мемы о каких политических деятелях из Беларуси?

1 = Относятся к правящему режиму

2 = Относятся к оппозиции

3 = Относятся к правящей режиму и оппозиции

XIII. Как часто Вы публикуете сообщения или комментарии с хештегами, предложенными политическими деятелями из Беларуси?

1 = Никогда	2 = Несколько раз в месяц	3 = Несколько раз в неделю	4 = Каждый день	5 = Несколько раз в день

XIV. Жертвовали ли Вы деньги или подписывали петиции на дела, о которых объявляли политические деятели из Беларуси исключительно в социальных сетях?

1 = Да

2 = Нет

XV. Участвовали ли Вы в офлайн-мероприятиях (митингах, акциях протеста, демонстрациях, сборах средств, были волонтерами и т.п.), организованных политическими деятелями из Беларуси?

1 = Да

2 = Нет

XVI. Если да, то как Вы о них узнали?

1 = Из социальных медиа (Facebook, Telegram и т. д.)

2 = С вебсайтов

3 = Из традиционных медиа (телевидение, радио, пресса)

4 = Другое

XVII. Если вы не принимаете участия в вышеуказанных онлайн или офлайн действиях, то какова главная причина?

1 = Боюсь

2 = Не имею желания

3 = Отказываюсь отвечать

XVIII. Насколько Вы оцениваете свои знания о политических деятелях исходя из информации в социальных медиа?

1 = Совсем нет	2 = Только немного	3 = Умеренно	4 = Значительно	5 = В большой степени

XIX. Сколько Вам лет?

1 = 18-24

2 = 25-34

3 = 35-44

4 = 45-65

5 = 66+

XX. Ваш пол?

1 = Мужчина

2 = Женщина

3 = Не хочу отвечать

XXI. Ваше местонахождение на данный момент? (исключительно для правильного оформления исследования)

1 = В пределах территории своей страны

2 = За границей

3 = Не хочу отвечать

Appendix I. Survey in English

My name is Vladyslav Zinichenko. I am a third-year student at the Doctoral School of Social Sciences at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań.

I am conducting research to obtain the PhD degree under the supervision of Prof. Skrzypczak and Dr. Jakubowski. The purpose of my work is to analyze the activity of Ukrainian and Belarusian political figures on social media (Facebook, Telegram, etc.). The results will help to understand the practice of using this tool in Eastern Europe.

I am asking for your help in filling out this questionnaire. It will take about 10 minutes. I assure you that all the answers will remain confidential and completely anonymous. The results will be used exclusively for scientific purposes.

The survey is aimed at people over 18 who use social media. If you have filled out this form before, you do not need to do it again.

If you have any questions about the research, you can contact me by e-mail: vlazin@amu.edu.pl. Thank you for your interest in this study!

I. What is your citizenship?

1 = Ukraine

2 = Belarus

II. How often do you use social media (Facebook, Telegram, etc.)?

1 = Once a month or less	2 = Several times a month	3 = Several times a week	4 = Every day	5 = Several times a day

III. Which side of politics do you support? – Ukraine

1 = Ruling elite (President and/or the “Servant of the People” party)

2 = Opposition forces

3 = Against all (against the ruling elite and opposition forces)

4 = Not interested in politics

III. Do you support the policy being pursued in your country? – Belarus

1 = Rather yes than no

2 = Rather no than yes

3 = Not interested in politics

IV. How often do you encounter information about politics (in general) on social media?

1 = Never	2 = Several times a month	3 = Several times a week	4 = Every day	5 = Several times a day

V. How often do you encounter information about the ruling elite (President and/or the “Servant of the People” party) on social media? – Ukraine

V. How often do you encounter information about the ruling regime on social media? – Belarus

1 = Never	2 = Several times a month	3 = Several times a week	4 = Every day	5 = Several times a day

VI. How often do you encounter information about opposition forces on social media?

1 = Never	2 = Several times a month	3 = Several times a week	4 = Every day	5 = Several times a day

VII. Do you follow the social media pages of Ukrainian political figures from the list below? You can choose more than one answer.

Volodymyr Zelenskyy, “Servant of the People” party – **the ruling elite**.

Petro Poroshenko, Yulia Tymoshenko, Anatoliy Hrytsenko, Oleh Liashko, “Opposition Platform for Life” party, “Motherland” party, “European Solidarity” party, “Voice” party, “Strength and Honor” party, “Shariy’s party,” Iryna Gerashchenko, Volodymyr Groysman, Andriy Sadovyi – **the opposition**.

Anatoliy Shariy, Oleksandr Dubinskiy, Yuriy Biryukov, Serhiy Leshchenko – **the opinion leaders/influencers**.

0 = I do not follow anyone on this list, and I do not follow Ukrainian political figures in general.

1 = I follow the representatives of the ruling elite from the list.

2 = I follow the opposition representatives from the list.

3 = I follow the opinion leaders/influencers from this list.

4 = I follow Ukrainian political figures who are not on this list.

VIII. Do you follow the social media pages of Belarusian political figures from the list below? You can choose more than one answer.

Pool of the First (Alexander Lukashenko) – **the ruling elite**.

Liberal Democratic Party of Belarus (The truth of Gaidukevich), “White Rus” party, Irina Rineyskaya, Alexander Rogachuk – **the pro-government political figures**.

Viktar Babryka, Valeriy Tsepalo, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, Pavel Latushka, Sergei Cherechen, Franak Vyachorka, Coordination Council, National Anti-Crisis Management,

Narodnaya Hramada (Party of Nikolay Statkevich), “Hramada” party, “Fair World” party, Alexander Skurchaev – **the opposition**.

NEXTA Live, Belarus of the Brain, My Country Belarus – **the opinion leaders/influencers**.

0 = I do not follow anyone on this list, and I do not follow Belarusian political figures in general.

1 = I follow the representatives of the ruling elite from the list.

2 = I follow the representatives of the pro-government political figures from the list.

3 = I follow the opposition representatives from the list.

4 = I follow the opinion leaders/influencers from this list.

5 = I follow Belarusian political figures who are not on this list.

IX. Where else do you receive information about political figures on social media? You can choose more than one answer.

0 = Do not receive

1 = In news media posts (examples of news media of the respective country)

2 = In posts or messages from friends

3 = In advertising posts

4 = In social media recommendations

X. How often do you either react (put like or one of the emotions: joy, sadness, anger, etc.) to posts, or share posts, or comment on the posts of Ukrainian/Belarusian political figures?

1 = Never	2 = Several times a month	3 = Several times a week	4 = Every day	5 = Several times a day

XI. How often do you post or comment on memes about Ukrainian/Belarusian political figures?

1 = Never	2 = Several times a month	3 = Several times a week	4 = Every day	5 = Several times a day

XII. If so, which Ukrainian/Belarusian political figures are the main characters of these memes?

1 = The ruling elite/regime

2 = The opposition

3 = The ruling elite/regime and the opposition

XIII. How often do you publish posts or comments with hashtags proposed by Ukrainian/Belarusian political figures?

1 = Never	2 = Several times a month	3 = Several times a week	4 = Every day	5 = Several times a day

XIV. Have you donated money or signed petitions after announcements made by Ukrainian/Belarusian political figures exclusively on social media?

1 = Yes

2 = No

XV. Have you participated in offline events (meetings, protests, demonstrations, fundraisers, volunteered, etc.) organized by Ukrainian/Belarusian political figures?

1 = Yes

2 = No

XVI. If so, how did you find out about them?

1 = From social media (Facebook, Telegram, etc.)

2 = From websites

3 = From traditional media (TV, radio, press)

4 = Other

XVII. If you do not participate in the above online or offline activities, what is the main reason? (Only for Belarusians)

1 = Afraid

2 = No desire

3 = Refuse to answer

XVIII. To what extent do you base your knowledge of political figures on social media?

1 = Not at all	2 = Just a little	3 = Moderately	4 = Significantly	5 = To a great extent

XIX. How old are you?

1 = 18-24

2 = 25-34

3 = 35-44

4 = 45-65

5 = 66+

XX. What is your gender?

1 = Male

2 = Female

3 = Do not want to answer

XXI. What is your current location? (Solely for the purpose of proper research design)

1 = Within the territory of your country

2 = Abroad

3 = Do not want to answer

Appendix J. Inquiry



Poznań, 17.07.2023

Vladyslav Zinichenko

Szkoła Doktorska Nauk Społecznych UAM

Wydział Nauk Politycznych i Dziennikarstwa UAM

Ul. Uniwersytetu Poznańskiego 5, 61-614 Poznań

ZAPYTANIE OFERTOWE

Zwracam się z prośbą o wycenę realizacji badania opinii publicznej (metodą CAWI). Temat: Percepcja komunikacji aktorów politycznych za pośrednictwem mediów społecznościowych przez obywateli Ukrainy i Białorusi.

Opis przedmiotu zamówienia:

- Metoda: CAWI.
- Grupa docelowa: 18+. Osoby korzystające z mediów społecznościowych.
- Próba: N=400 obywateli Ukrainy i N=400 obywateli Białorusi. Nie chodzi o próbę reprezentatywnej, ale chciałbym poprosić o zróżnicowaniu tych uczestników, żeby nie byli podobni i to mogło wzmocnić wyniki.
- Ilość pytań: 16 (szesnaście) jednokrotnego wyboru, 3 (trzy) wielokrotnego wyboru.
- Ankieta została przygotowana w dwóch językach: ukraińskim (dla Ukraińców) i rosyjskim (dla Białorusinów). Białoruskie polityczne uwarunkowania spowodowały, że w ankiecie do Białorusinów znalazło się jeszcze jedno dodatkowe pytanie (łącznie dwadzieścia).
- Wyniki przesłane jako baza danych w formacie Excel.
- Termin realizacji: wrzesień-październik 2023 roku.

Doktorant

Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu

Appendix K. Invitation to participate in the survey



Нужна помощь в исследовании!



- Меня зовут Владислав Зиниченко, я докторант в Университете им. Адама Мицкевича.
- Тема моей диссертации касается коммуникации политических деятелей Беларуси и Украины через Telegram и Facebook.
- **Обращаюсь с просьбой пройти ПОЛНОСТЬЮ АНОНИМНЫЙ ОПРОС!**
- Спасибо большое. Жыве Беларусь!

 Контакт: <https://www.facebook.com/vzinichenko>



Appendix L. Database

Content analysis: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1ueKHPHSGgF3v766jJ-A-WQzbgWMFHM6?usp=sharing>

Survey:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1pYPT6RX0xbUslvvH8T3QQJmMdfQsYX7w?usp=sharing>