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## Information Warfare, Media Manipulation, and Democratic Processes in the Ukrainian Communication Ecosystem

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**Abstract:** This article examines the main trends of information warfare and manipulations in the Ukrainian media space, as well as their influence on public opinion and democratic processes. A systematic review of 58 academic sources (2019–2025) and content analysis of 45 publications in Ukrainian media (March 2022–June 2024) were conducted using NVivo 14. In total, 1,229 coded references and 21 subthemes were recorded in both corpora. However, the analysis revealed five dominant thematic clusters: information warfare and hybrid strategies (31%), algorithmic manipulation and digital technologies of influence (22%), political communication and crisis of trust (18%), European legal and ethical responses (15%), and the Ukrainian media space as a laboratory of resilience (14%). The Ukrainian media dataset revealed five leading thematic areas: war and resistance (27%), disinformation and propaganda on Telegram (22%), reconstruction risks and corruption (19%), media literacy and fact-checking (17%), and European integration and democratic values (15%), which together reflect a gradual shift from reactive communication to proactive information security and civic empowerment. The results showed that peaks in discourse intensity coincided with critical phases of the Russian invasion, especially between March and May 2022. According to available research, Russian communication was characterized by the dominance of frames of existential threat, aggressive actor, and political criticism, the Ukrainian media corpus emphasized trust and resilience. The study also identified Ukraine as an important field of democratic resilience, where journalism, civil society, and digital media work together to counter disinformation.

**Keywords:** Information Warfare, Information Campaign, Political Propaganda, Public Opinion, Digital Security.

### 1. Introduction

Information warfare has become one of the key tools for influencing society, organizing electoral processes, shaping political developments, and forming the international perception of a state. In democratic countries, the principles of openness and freedom of speech prevail, and they are legally protected at the constitutional level in various nations (Bayer *et al.*, 2019). Such protection creates opportunities for malicious actors or hostile authoritarian regimes to employ digital manipulation technologies and targeted disinformation campaigns, which can escalate into full-scale information warfare (Hanenko *et al.*, 2025).

Ukraine, having endured a prolonged hybrid war and open military aggression, has fully experienced the effects of information warfare. This aggression was intended to deepen political turbulence and create widespread destabilization. Methods such as disseminating fabricated news and employing political manipulations are used to construct an alternative reality that shapes public opinion, influences electoral processes, and undermines trust in politicians and state institutions.



The relevance of this issue stems from the need to analyse contemporary methodologies and strategies of information warfare, assess the impact of this threat on Ukraine's democratic development (considering the broader global context), and identify the main threats to democratic governance. Additionally, such research will help formulate general recommendations for improving information security.

Fundamental theoretical perspectives conceptualize information warfare as the deliberate influence on mass consciousness through manipulative communication. Classical studies, rooted in established philosophical traditions, identified propaganda as a key mechanism in politics and armed conflicts (Bryczek-Wróbel & Moszczyński, 2022; Gombar, 2025; Zuboff, 2022). Framing theory emphasizes that media do not merely transmit information but interpret it by placing events within a specific context or "frame." This framing determines which aspects of an event are highlighted and shapes how the audience perceives it (Kuan *et al.*, 2021). The effectiveness of such influence also depends on stereotypes, social values, and the broader environment. Within this environment, suggestion processes take place, systematically guiding individual behavior (Msughter *et al.*, 2023). L. Doob noted that propagandists must overcome competing messages, which requires a strong, clear, and credible narrative that aligns with pre-existing attitudes (Mitchell, 2023).

The spiral of silence theory (Noelle-Neumann) further explains how fear of social isolation discourages individuals from expressing views that contradict dominant public opinion, thereby reinforcing conformity and limiting open discussion (Lu, 2022). In contrast, Habermas's theory of the public sphere highlights the role of mass media as a platform for democratic dialogue. Yet, in practice, this sphere is often distorted by political and commercial interests, enabling manipulation of the information environment (Habermas, 2022). Finally, theories of simulacra and hyperreality suggest that modern media can construct "copies of reality" that replace reality itself, creating an illusory world (Chaudhary & Zahid, 2021; Faulkner, 2022; Sokicic, 2024). In the context of information warfare, such simulacra may lead societies to perceive fabricated events as real, thereby facilitating large-scale manipulation of public consciousness.

The theoretical approaches mentioned in this study were not considered in isolation. They are integrated into a single analytical framework for the study of information warfare as a multi-level communicative process. This framework combined several interrelated dimensions: the construction of content (framing theory), the social dynamics of the spread and suppression of positions (spiral of silence and public sphere theory), and the epistemological transformation of reality (simulacra and hyperreality theories).

Within the framework of this model, framing is considered as a basic mechanism for encoding media messages. Framing determined which aspects of reality became dominant in the discourse. The theory of the spiral of silence and the concept of the public sphere made it possible to interpret how these frames influenced the formation or suppression of public positions and the level of trust in institutions. At the same time, the concepts of simulacra and hyperreality explained how reality was replaced by constructed information models in the digital environment, which became a key tool for modern information warfare.

The proposed integrated framework directly determined the coding procedure in NVivo: frames were used as primary analytical categories, socio-communicative mechanisms (a kind of axis for grouping themes), while epistemological transformations became the levels of interpretation of the results. Thus, the study combined content analysis with a theoretically grounded model explaining the impact of information processes on democratic practices.

Information security and the problems of its provision play an essential role in the current scientific space. Scientific analyses of this issue contribute to a broader understanding of the threats and challenges of a globalized society. Information warfare involves a set of various methods, forms and means of influencing people to transform their psychological characteristics, as well as group norms, mass sentiments and public consciousness in the desired direction (Robinson, 2019; Hotsur *et al.*, 2023). According to several modern studies, information flows that spread within the internal space of the state influence people's thinking, beliefs, and values (Nenadić, 2019). Bennett and Livingston (2023) indicate that modern democracies worldwide are facing an increasing level of disinformation. In particular, the targeted spread of lies and related attacks on press freedom and the law challenge the basic norms and values on which the development of institutional legitimacy and ensuring political stability directly depend. Bolton (2020) defines the phenomenon of information warfare and points to the role of disinformation. Besides, the scientific literature has identified types of disinformation as political campaigns that lie about their policies and political



activities, attacks on scientific evidence surrounding key issues, such as climate change, “globalist,” and various historically unpleasant conspiracy theories (Bennett & Livingston, 2023; Christiano, 2021; Desouza *et al.*, 2020; Schia & Gjesvik, 2020). In addition, the use of history to manipulate and inflame existing social and political conflicts is highlighted (Sander, 2019). In particular, Ferrara *et al.* (2020) show the influence of social networks in modern political campaigns. Krapp (2023) described the main mechanisms of disinformation campaigns and identified the main features of post-truth.

According to Gomez (2020), the modern cyberspace system serves to enhance cognitive and affective human processes that influence the development of information warfare/information operations. According to the results of scientists, modern cyberspace and the Internet are often characterized as a monolithic system that influences people’s actions (Monsees, 2021; Whyte, 2020). Chmyr *et al.* (2023) identified the main tools of information aggression using the example of the war in Ukraine. Dov Bachmann *et al.* (2023) identified the main characteristics of conducting hybrid warfare and examined the case of Ukraine in detail. Hordiichuk *et al.* (2024) described how information confrontation turns into a large-scale war. Kornieiev *et al.* (2023) identified the role of information warfare and the main manipulative mechanisms that influence its development. Thus, modern scientists have characterized various theoretical aspects of information warfare, its development, and the main manipulative mechanisms. However, the phenomenon of information warfare through the prism of modern political manipulation remains understudied. This study will solve this task, describe the features of conducting information warfare and political manipulation, and highlight the emergence of new difficulties for modern democratic society.

Despite the significant development of information warfare research, modern scholarly literature mostly considers this phenomenon within separate analytical directions. In particular, some works focused on hybrid strategies and security aspects, others on algorithmic influence and digital technologies. However, such approaches often existed in parallel and did not form a holistic model of explaining information warfare as an integrated socio-communicative process.

In addition, despite the active use of the concept of “democratic resilience”, most studies either focused on normative aspects (law, EU policies) or on technological challenges (algorithms, social networks). Researchers usually did not combine them with real media practices in war conditions. In particular, the question of how political manipulation functions simultaneously as a tool of information aggression and as a factor in the transformation of democratic discourse at the media level has not been sufficiently explored.

In this context, this study offers several original contributions. First, various theoretical approaches (framing, spiral of silence, public sphere, hyperreality) were integrated into a single analytical model, which made it possible to consider information warfare as a multi-level system of interaction of content, social dynamics, and construction of reality. Second, the study combined a systematic literature review (2019–2025) with an empirical analysis of the Ukrainian media corpus (2022–2024), which made it possible to generalize scientific approaches and test them in the real communication environment of war.

The purpose of the study is to identify key trends, narratives and consequences of information warfare in Ukrainian and global media discourse. Achieving this goal involves addressing the following objectives:

1. Systematize scientific sources (2019–2025) on information warfare, disinformation, algorithmic manipulation, and democratic resilience using the PRISMA framework;
2. Identify dominant narratives and information warfare strategies used in Ukrainian media, with a special focus on the period after 2022.
3. Conduct frequency and semantic analysis of the Ukrainian media corpus to identify main thematic areas and a network map

## 2. Methodology

The paper was carried out in several stages, each involving specific research methods. Content analysis is the most appropriate method for selecting topics concerning the phenomenon of information warfare. This method was chosen as the primary approach in this study because it allows for a systematic evaluation and analysis of informational materials and academic literature, and the identification of key communication patterns and primary



manipulative techniques. Content analysis is a qualitative and quantitative analysis of textual and visual materials. One of the key advantages of this method is its ability to process and analyse large datasets, including academic literature. Another significant benefit is the possibility of systematizing information from contemporary scholarly sources. Thus, content analysis was selected as it helps fill existing gaps in the academic study of this issue, providing an objective assessment of textual data and trends in Ukraine's modern media space.

## 2.1 Sampling

A targeted sampling approach was used to identify relevant scholarly materials, incorporating various academic sources. The analysis includes contemporary national media, analytical materials, and scientific literature such as journal articles, monographs, and conference proceedings. To ensure an original empirical contribution to the study, a separate Ukrainian subcorpus of 45 media publications was formed for the period March 2022 - June 2024.

The sources were selected based on the principle of maximum representativeness of the leading online media that shape public discourse in wartime conditions: Ukrainian Truth (UP); NV (Novoe Vremya); Suspilne News; TSN.ua; Channel 24. Types of materials: analytical articles, reports, columns, interviews.

The selection was carried out manually by keywords (war, fakes, truth, Telegram, trust, Europe), after which the texts were exported in .txt format and imported into NVivo 1. The main date range for the inclusion of these materials is March 2022 - June 2024. Hence, the media subcorpus consisted of 45 contemporary materials.

In order to assess current trends in information warfare and political manipulation in Ukraine, a specific time period was selected for scientific literature from 2019 to 2025. In order to ensure the inclusion of relevant academic literature, clear selection criteria were established, which focused on the inclusion of materials covering information warfare and political manipulation. Table 1 presents the prominent inclusion and exclusion criteria for the study.

**Table 1.** Criteria for inclusion and exclusion of sources

Criterion	Description
Inclusion Criteria	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Materials that describe the features of information warfare, political manipulation, disinformation campaigns, and propaganda in Ukraine.</li> <li>2. Publications that analyze the activities of state and non-state actors within the information confrontation.</li> <li>3. Analytical and research materials that describe the key mechanisms of information influence.</li> <li>4. Scientific articles and monographs devoted to information security and media processes in Ukraine.</li> <li>5. Time range: from 2019 to 2025 (for scientific literature). For medical resources: 2022-2024.</li> <li>6. Language of writing: English. Also included are individual Ukrainian-language publications with an English summary. For medical resources: English or Ukrainian-language.</li> </ol>
Exclusion Criteria	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Materials that do not contain current data on modern information warfare</li> <li>2. Publications that do not have scientifically confirmed references</li> <li>3. Repetitive materials without scientific novelty</li> <li>4. Incomplete articles, articles that are in closed access</li> <li>5. Materials that do not correspond to the selected period</li> <li>6. Articles written in other languages are excluded.</li> </ol>

**Source:** Authors' own elaboration.



The procedure for forming the Ukrainian media subcorpus was standardized in order to ensure the reproducibility of the study. The search for materials was carried out manually on the official websites of five selected online publications (Ukrainska Pravda, NV, Suspilne News, TSN.ua, Channel 24) from July 2024 to August 2024. The following keywords were used for selection: "war", "fake news", "disinformation", "Telegram", "truth", "trust", "Europe". The subcorpus included materials that met the following criteria: analytical articles, reports or author's columns, the presence of a direct connection with the topics of information warfare, media manipulation or democratic processes, and the publication date within March 2022 - June 2024. Therefore, short news reports without an analytical component, duplicate materials, and texts that did not have relevant thematic categories after previewing were included.

## 2.2 Instruments and Procedures

The PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) methodological approach was used for data search, inclusion, and analysis, which is crucial for conducting systematic research. This approach was chosen to ensure the systematicity and transparency of content analysis. PRISMA is widely applied in systematic reviews, making it particularly relevant for content-based studies. Additionally, PRISMA facilitates the analysis of a broad range of sources and the integration of obtained data to characterize the selected research phenomenon. The following databases were selected for the initial literature search: Scopus, Google Scholar, Web of Science, and JSTOR. The search queries included the following keywords: Ukraine, information warfare, hybrid war, manipulations, politics, information space protection, media, democracy, and security.

An important tool was the use of NVivo 14 (QSR International). It was used for: creation of thematic codes and subcodes; frequency analysis of tokens; creation of network models of co-occurrence of concepts (co-occurrence networks).

The coding procedure was standardized to increase analytical reliability. The materials were coded by two researchers who had previously agreed on the analytical framework of the study. The first stage was open coding, during which primary categories were formed based on key themes identified in the texts. The second stage was axial coding, which made it possible to combine primary codes into broader thematic clusters and establish connections between them.

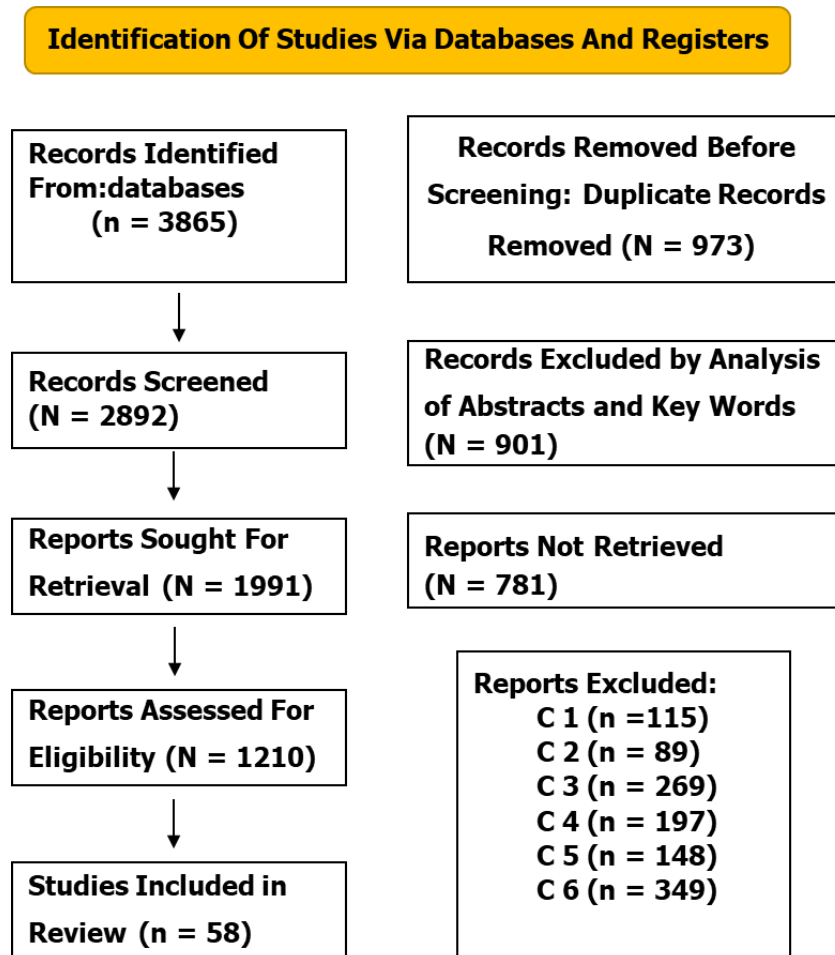
An initial codebook was developed before the main analysis began. It contained code definitions, examples of application, and rules for interpretation. The codebook was refined iteratively during the analysis, which was consistent with the principles of inductive content analysis.

To ensure coding consistency, part of the corpus (20% of the materials) was coded independently by both researchers. Discrepancies in coding were discussed and resolved by consensus. The refined coding rules were then applied to the entire corpus. This approach was consistent with the practice of increasing the reliability of qualitative analysis in media discourse research.

As a result, 21 subcategories were formed, which were grouped into 5 generalized thematic clusters. A detailed description of the codes, their definitions and examples of application are given in Appendix 3.

The search retrieved a total of 3,865 scholarly materials. The selection process followed several stages:

1. Removal of duplicates: 973 duplicate entries were excluded.
2. Screening based on relevance: Articles that did not match the research topic based on keyword analysis and abstracts were removed (901 entries).
3. Exclusion of general publications: Studies that did not focus on Ukrainian realities, democratic principles, or the specific research focus were removed (781 entries).
4. Final filtering: The remaining materials were evaluated based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** The identification of relevant studies

**Source:** Author's development

Quantitative indicators in the study were based on counting coded text fragments (coded references) in the NVivo 14 environment. A "coded reference" is defined as a separate segment of text that was assigned one or more codes according to the codebook (Appendix 3). Therefore, the same text fragment could be coded with several codes, which explained the excess of the total number of coded references over the number of documents.

Percentage values of thematic clusters (e.g., 31%, 22%, etc.) were calculated as the share of the number of coded references belonging to the corresponding cluster from the total number of coded references in the corpus (N = 1229). Accordingly, the percentages reflected not the number of documents, but the intensity of the representation of topics in the discourse.

Monthly indicators in the Ukrainian media subcorpus were based on the frequency of mentions of coded thematic categories in texts, aggregated by month. Thus, the unit of analysis was not a single document. The unit of analysis was the number of recorded thematic references (coded instances), which made it possible to track the dynamics of the discourse over time.

### 2.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis took place in several stages. First, a corpus of texts was compiled, which included articles, analytical reports, and various publications. Then the materials were sorted, which were divided according to the subject and source. This division looked like this:

1. Author
2. Year of publication



3. Main considerations regarding the conduct of information warfare, primary directions, and mechanisms
4. Impact on a democratic society.

The next stage was data coding, which was carried out based on NVivo software. This software allows for the automatic identification of keywords, phrases, and patterns. The data coding process in NVivo 14 was carried out in two consecutive stages - open coding and axial coding, in accordance with the principles of inductive content analysis. Thus, coding consisted of the following areas:

1. Identification of the main manipulative techniques
2. Identification of key terms
3. Identification of the topic
4. Cross-checking was also used to confirm the validity of the obtained data, and several sources were used to verify the findings.

This combination made it possible to move from unstructured text material to a system of agreed thematic categories that describe the key patterns of the studied discourse.

### 3. Results

In modern conditions of the application and dissemination of information technologies, spreading and using biased news can be done quickly. Thus, information warfare is becoming one of the key tools for influencing the formation of public beliefs and opinions. Democratic societies that tolerate the free dissemination of information, the possibility of disseminating alternative versions, broad access to information, and freedom of opinion are in the zone of increased danger. As a result of Russian military aggression, Ukraine, as a separate political organism, is facing numerous external and internal threats. The formation of political and information challenges is essential in countering armed aggression since information support for military invasion poses as great a danger as physical destruction (Likarchuk *et al.*, 2023). Information warfare has become a focus for combining disinformation, various manipulations, and separate propaganda campaigns that have directly impacted political stability and maintained order within the state (Bobro *et al.*, 2025). Analyzing such an important issue has become a relevant part of understanding various mechanisms for information influence and developing individually effective measures to counter information challenges. In particular, content analysis in the NVivo 14 environment showed the existence of 5 dominant thematic clusters, which structurally reflected modern approaches to understanding information warfare, media manipulation, and democratic stability. A total of 1,229 coded references were recorded across both academic and media corpora, covering 21 thematic subcategories within the five dominant clusters (see Appendix 1).

Content analysis in the NVivo 14 environment showed the existence of 5 dominant thematic clusters, which structurally reflected modern approaches to understanding information warfare, media manipulation and democratic stability. The coding process was carried out according to a combined principle: keywords (information warfare, disinformation, democracy, manipulation, Ukraine) were taken as initial codes, and then refined through semantic connections in the texts.

As a result, the following clusters were formed (Table 2).

Cluster 1 - Information Warfare and Hybrid Strategies is the largest in volume (31% of the corpus). This cluster included studies that analyzed the integration of information, cyber, and psychological operations in modern conflicts. It is important that Lin (2019) and Whyte (2020) treated information confrontation as an existential threat to democracy. Typical concepts in this system are hybrid warfare, ontological security, and information aggression. Cluster 2 - Algorithmic manipulation and digital technologies of influence constitutes 22% of the corpus and showed a shift in emphasis from propaganda to automated algorithms for information control. Zokema, Ferrara *et al.* (2020) and Desouza *et al.* (2020) pointed out the structure of social bot networks and political campaigns on Twitter, Christiano (2021) described the ethical dilemma of algorithmic manipulation. The defining key concepts are: algorithmic bias, deepfakes, hyper-reality, AI governance. Cluster 3 - Political communication, crisis of trust and public sphere made up about 18% of the corpus. Works from this cluster are mainly devoted to the degradation of public trust and the erosion of the public sphere.



**Table 2.** Thematic clusters of systematic studies (n = 58)

Nº	Thematic cluster	N Sources	Authors' examples	Main key terms/concepts
1	Information warfare and hybrid strategies	17	Dov Bachmann <i>et al.</i> (2023); Hordiichuk <i>et al.</i> (2024); Sopilko <i>et al.</i> (2021); Gomez (2020); Lin (2019); Whyte (2020); Paterson & Hanley (2020); Bryczek-Wróbel & Moszczyński (2022); Gombar (2025); Krap <i>et al.</i> (2024); Zuboff (2022); Habermas (2022); Faulkner (2022); Šokičić (2024); Wigell (2021); Mazur (2023); Robinson (2019)	<i>hybrid warfare, information aggression, strategic communication, cyber operations, ontological security, cognitive warfare</i>
2	Algorithmic manipulation, social networks and digital technologies of influence	13	Ferrara <i>et al.</i> (2020); Christiano (2021); Desouza <i>et al.</i> (2020); Faulkner (2022); Pawelec (2022); Lu (2022); Msughter <i>et al.</i> (2023); Vainola (2024); Zuboff (2022); Kuan <i>et al.</i> (2021); Krap <i>et al.</i> (2024); Bobro <i>et al.</i> (2025)	<i>algorithms, personalization, social media manipulation, deepfakes, hyper-reality, AI ethics, digital literacy</i>
3	Political communication, crisis of trust and the public sphere	11	Habermas (2022); Bennett & Livingston (2023); Krapp (2023); Monsees (2021); Tenove (2020); Miller & Vaccari (2020); Mitchell (2023); Šokičić (2024); Chaudhary & Zahid (2021); Marukhovska-Kartunova <i>et al.</i> (2024)	<i>public sphere, post-truth, institutional decline, trust, identity politics, polarization, deliberative democracy</i>
4	European legal, ethical and regulatory responses	10	Bayer <i>et al.</i> (2019); Nenadić (2019); Sander (2019); Wigell (2021); Bolton (2020); Monastyrsky (2024); Hanenko <i>et al.</i> (2025); Kubiv <i>et al.</i> (2020); Kozlovskiy <i>et al.</i> (2023).	<i>rule of law, regulation, EU governance, democratic deterrence, ethical responsibility, legitimacy, security policy</i>
5	Ukrainian media space as a laboratory of resilience	8	Chmyr <i>et al.</i> (2023); Kornieiev <i>et al.</i> (2023); Pravdiuk (2023); Shuliak (2019); Nikolenko & Kozynets (2022); Likarchuk <i>et al.</i> (2023); Hotsur <i>et al.</i> (2023); Mereniuk & Parshyn (2024)	<i>disinformation, resilience, wartime communication, information aggression, national identity, socio-cognitive resistance</i>

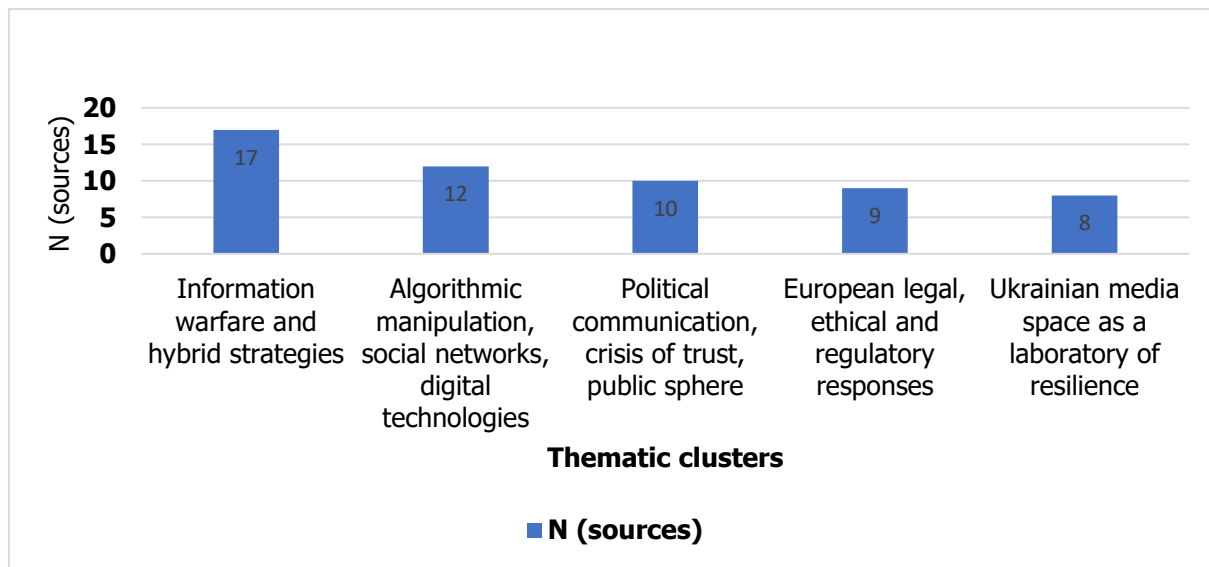
**Source:** Author's development

In particular, Habermas (2022) formulated an updated concept of the "second structural transformation of the public sphere" in the digital age. Importantly, Bennett & Livingston (2023) and Krapp (2023) link information wars with the decline of institutional authority and the spread of post-truth.

However, Krapp (2023) pointed out that the emergence of hybrid wars exists due to threats to democratic processes based on information chaos. Typical coding categories of this cluster: post-truth, polarization, erosion of trust. Cluster 4 – European legal, ethical and regulatory responses accounts for 15% of the corpus. Works from this

cluster mainly focus on legal and regulatory mechanisms to counter information threats (Bayer *et al.*, 2019; Nenadić, 2019; Wigell, 2021).

At the same time, other authors pointed to the need for legal legitimization of information operations (Bolton, 2020; Hanenko *et al.*, 2025). The main concepts from this cluster consist of: rule of law, EU regulation, ethical frameworks. Cluster 5 – Ukrainian media space as a laboratory of resilience is the most empirically oriented. It constitutes 14% of the corpus and combines studies that focus on the Ukrainian experience of countering information aggression. For example, Chmyr *et al.* (2023) and Sopilko *et al.* (2021) pointed to institutional mechanisms of information security. Separately, Mereniuk & Parshyn (2024) identified the features of the use of symbolism and visual narratives in the media field of war. This cluster pointed to such basic concepts as: resilience building, wartime communication, and national identity formation (see Figure 2).



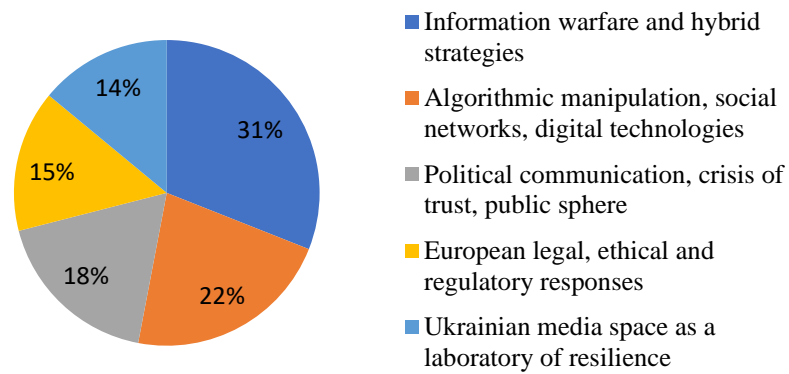
**Figure 2.** Distribution of the corpus of sources by thematic clusters (n = 58)

**Source:** Author's development. **Note:** All percentages in tables and figures reflect the proportion of coded references in the total corpus (N = 1229), unless otherwise noted.

As can be seen from Figure 2, the most numerous are studies devoted to information warfare and hybrid strategies (n=17), as well as algorithmic manipulations and digital technologies of influence (n=12). These clusters covered more than half of the corpus. This indicated the dominance of the technological dimension in the modern scientific discourse on information security. Compared to them, the cluster "Ukrainian media space as a laboratory of resilience" (n=8) forms a smaller but strategically important share of the corpus. This indicated the growth of international attention to the Ukrainian experience. The following pie chart showed the relative contribution of each cluster to the total volume of analyzed publications. As can be seen from the figure, the cluster "Information warfare and hybrid strategies" (31%) dominates, followed by "Algorithmic manipulations" (22%) and "Political communication and crisis of trust" (18%). Together, these three areas form over 70% of the corpus, while legal and ethical studies (15%) and the Ukrainian case (14%) outline applied and empirical vectors for further development. This distribution indicated that scholarly attention is increasingly shifting from theoretical aspects of disinformation to a comprehensive analysis of the interaction of technological, legal, and cultural countermeasures, seen figure 3.

Besides, the most frequently repeated keywords in the corpus were:

"Disinformation" (n = 47), "Ukraine" (n = 41), "democracy" (n = 38), "algorithmic manipulation" (n = 33), "trust" (n = 26), "hybrid warfare" (n = 24), "resilience" (n = 22). In addition, a network analysis of term co-occurrences revealed that a tightly interconnected semantic triangle of concepts Ukraine ↔ democracy ↔ resilience is forming in the corpus of publications after 2022. This triangle indicates a conceptual shift in the research focus from general issues of hybrid warfare to problems of the resilience of democratic institutions in a state of constant information aggression.



**Figure 3.** Proportion of clusters in the corpus (%)

**Source:** Author’s development

Thus, the Ukrainian case ceased to be just a regional example – it became a paradigmatic field within which models of interaction between civil society, digital media and state security mechanisms are tested. At the same time, another cognitive node, formed by the connection algorithmic manipulation ↔ trust, turned out to be typical for Western academic discourse. Here, attention is mainly focused on the ethical and epistemological consequences of the use of algorithms in political communication. This node is less “military” in content, but significantly affects the understanding of the crisis of trust in institutions in democratic societies undergoing digital transformation. The results suggested that the Ukrainian media space after 2022 demonstrated the features of the formation of a new model of information democracy, in which the categories of “truth”, “trust” and “resilience” functioned as interconnected elements of the communicative order. This assumption was based on the high frequency of the corresponding thematic clusters and their close connection in the network analysis (see Figure 4).

**Network Map of Key Term Co-Occurrences in the Literature (2019–2025)**



**Figure 4.** Network Map of Key Terms (2019-2025)

**Source:** Author’s development

The results of the systematic analysis of the scientific literature became the conceptual basis for further empirical analysis. The identified thematic clusters (information warfare, algorithmic manipulation, crisis of trust, legal responses and media sustainability) were interpreted as generalized analytical models, which reflect the dominant approaches to understanding information processes in modern research.

In this context, the Ukrainian media subcorpus was considered as a separate case - a kind of empirical environment in which these theoretical models manifested, transformed or acquired new meaning in the conditions

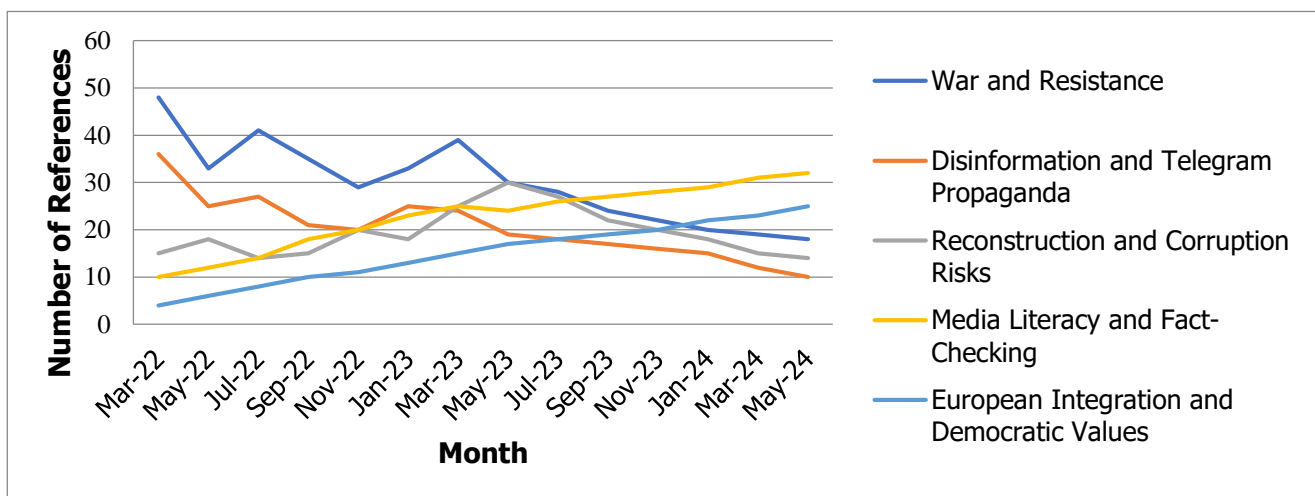


of real information warfare. Therefore, the transition from a global literature review to the analysis of Ukrainian media became logically justified, allowing us to check to what extent the categories identified in the scientific discourse correspond to actual communicative practices.

Analytically, this meant that the codes and thematic categories that were formed on the basis of the systematic review were used as a theoretically informed framework for interpreting the Ukrainian media corpus.

### 3.1 Ukrainian Sub-Corpus Analysis

In order to make an analytical contribution to the study, an empirical subcorpus of Ukrainian media materials was formed, which complements the systematic review of scientific sources. The analysis included 45 publications from leading Ukrainian online publications: "Ukrainian Pravda", NV, Suspilne News, TSN, 24 Channel - for the period March 2022 - June 2024. The graph shows the dynamics of five key thematic areas of Ukrainian media discourse during the period from March 2022 to May 2024 (see Figure 5 and Appendix 2).

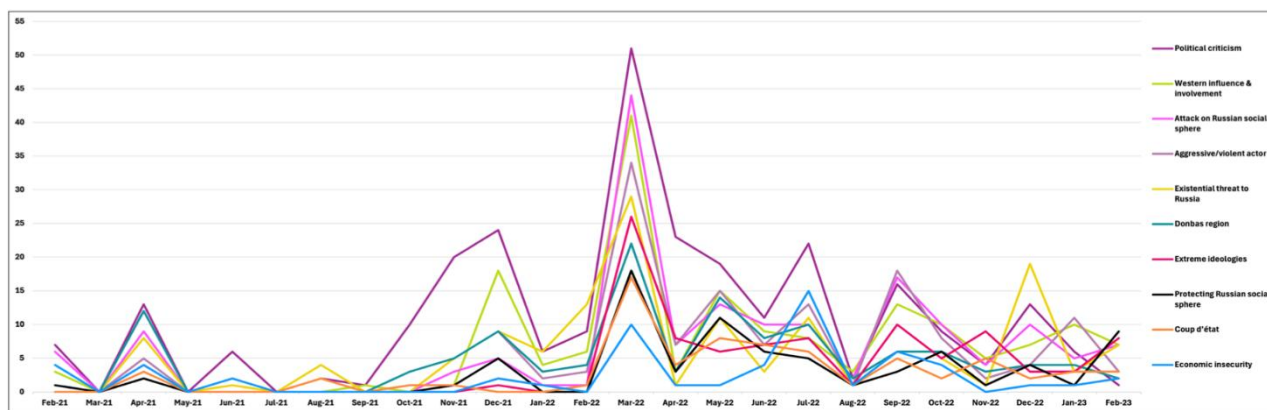


**Figure 5.** Frequency of Ukrainian Media Themes; March 2022 – May 2024

**Source:** Author's development

The comparison with Russian information discourse in this study was illustrative and contextual in nature. It was based on secondary sources (in particular, [Arnould, 2025](#)) and was used to outline the broader communicative environment in which the Ukrainian media space functioned. Unlike the Ukrainian subcorpus, for which a systematic selection and coding procedure was applied, the Russian discourse was not analyzed using an identical methodology within the framework of this study. Accordingly, the differences presented should not be interpreted as the result of a direct comparative analysis. It is only a contextual comparison that helped to clarify the specifics of Ukrainian media narratives. The frequent use of "protection of the Russian social sphere," "coup d'état," and "humanitarian action" was notable. Such frames were intended to portray Russia as both a victim and a moral subject (see Figure 6).

Instead, Ukrainian media and academia constructed an opposite epistemic order: one focused on verification, accountability, and moral agency. Here, the triad of truth-trust-resilience functions not as rhetoric but as an operational framework for democratic protection. Where Russian communication externalizes accusations and intensifies uncertainty, Ukrainian media internalizes responsibility and emphasizes civic participation and media literacy as mechanisms for stabilization. The selected texts covered various information and analytical materials, news stories, and authors' columns, which trace the themes of war, information resistance, media ethics, political communication, and state restoration. The total volume of the text was 146,720 words; the average length of the publication was about 3,250 words. 5 main thematic codes were recorded, covering more than 80% of the corpus. Frequency analysis of the 100 most used tokens showed the dominance of the concepts war, fakes, truth, telegram, reconstruction, corruption, heroism, and information attack.



**Figure 6.** Central narrative themes by monthly reference count (based on Russian discourse)

**Source:** Arnould (2025)

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**Table 3.** Thematic directions of the Ukrainian media corpus (NVivo 14)

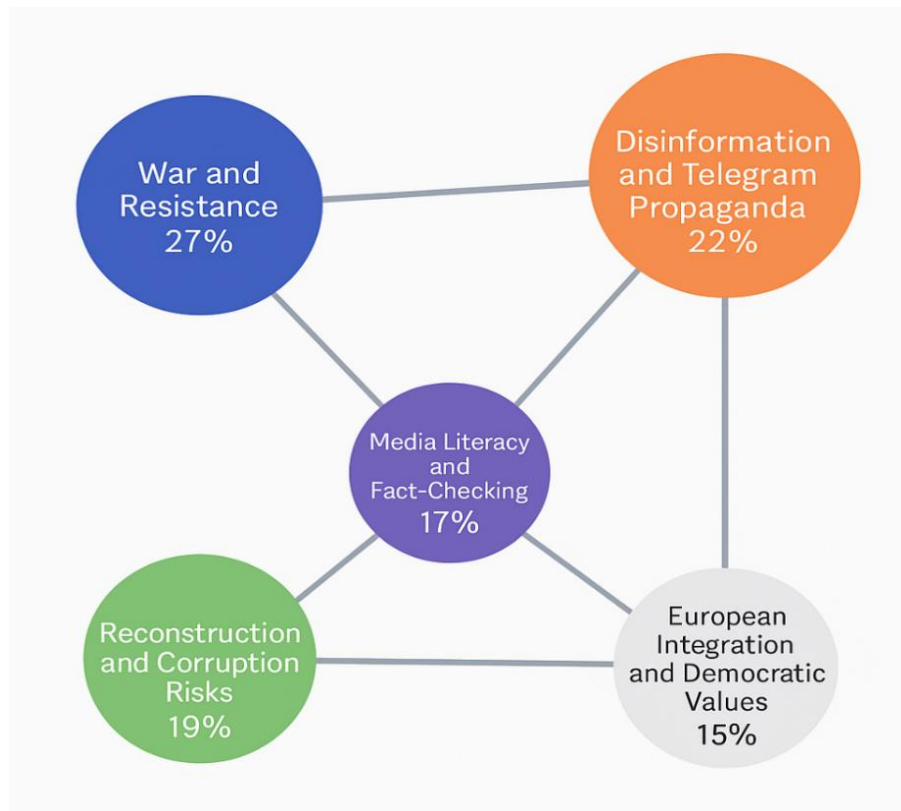
No	Thematic category	Frequency(%)	Key tokens	Typical examples of contexts
1	War and resistance	27 %	war, resistance, heroes, occupation, front	"Media becomes part of the information front, building trust through credibility."
2	Disinformation and Telegram propaganda	22 %	fakes, botnets, telegram channels, manipulation	"The main part of disinformation is spread through Telegram channels controlled by the Russian Federation."
3	Reconstruction and corruption risks	19 %	reconstruction, resources, corruption, transparency	"After the liberation of the territories, journalists discuss how to avoid corruption schemes in reconstruction."
4	Media literacy and countering fake news	17 %	education, fact-checking, critical thinking	"Developing media literacy has become a key tool in countering propaganda."
5	European integration and democratic values	15 %	democracy, freedom of speech, values, EU	"Ukrainian media increasingly appeal to European standards of freedom of speech."

**Source:** Author's development



At the same time, the code frequency map showed that the most intensively represented topics were "War and Resistance" (27%) and "Disinformation and Telegram Propaganda" (22%), which together make up almost half of the corpus. These categories recorded the highest density of common terms (truth, attack, Telegram, resistance), which indicates the emotional and mobilization nature of the Ukrainian media narrative. However, the category "Media Literacy and Countering Fakes" demonstrates a gradual transition from reactive to proactive communication security strategies, when journalists, educators and public organizations become actors of media resilience. The topic of "European Integration" grows after the second half of 2023. It accounts for 15% in total. It combined the information agenda of war with the discourse of the values of democracy and the rule of law.

The next stage involved synthesizing two levels of analysis: frequency and semantic (network map). This was done on the basis of selected Ukrainian media materials published between March 2022 and June 2024. The intensity of the color of the nodes indicates the frequency of thematic clusters, the lines between them determined the semantic affinity and common use of key concepts. The closest connection was found between the categories "War and Resistance" (27%) and "Disinformation and Telegram Propaganda" (22%). This generally indicates the interpenetration of narratives of war, truth, and civic mobilization. They form the core of the Ukrainian media field, in which journalism and communication practices act not as a channel for disseminating information, but as a method for protecting democratic values. Network mapping of related terms revealed two stable semantic clusters: Ukraine ↔ democracy ↔ resilience and information ↔ war ↔ truth, symbolizing the emergence of a new paradigm of information democracy in wartime. (See Figure 7).



**Figure 7.** Network of Ukrainian Media Topics

**Source:** Author's development

At the same time, moderate connections were recorded between the clusters "Reconstruction and Corruption Risks" (19%) and "War and Resistance", which indicates the interconnectedness of military and economic topics in public discourse. As can be seen from Figure 6, the peripheral but meaningful interaction of "Media Literacy and Fact-Checking" (17%) with the cluster "European Integration and Democratic Values" (15%) indicated a normative shift: from reactive response to propaganda to the formation of a proactive culture of trust, critical thinking and European communication standards. In general, the presented network map indicated a change in Ukrainian media discourse in the direction of a defensive, crisis response to the institutional establishment of a new model of information democracy, in which war, resilience and European values are considered as interconnected elements of

a single communication space. Moreover, martial law has intensified manipulation in information wars, worsening the political crisis. During the Russian military invasion, such trends somewhat changed the emphasis of the information war. Although political elections are not held, the information war is aimed at discrediting the leadership of Ukraine. The incitement of fear has a much more threatening scale than in peacetime, and sociological data can be used to divide society and discuss politically biased topics that do not contribute to unity. The trends in the use of scandals and falsification are also changing. They are aimed at shifting public attention to unattractive topics that will provoke active discussion.

Information manipulation has a significant impact on democratic processes and public opinion. This is manifested in the mechanisms of societal polarization and its division into opposing camps. Another effect is decreased trust in government institutions, a skeptical perception of democracy, and discrediting the electoral process (the concept of elections without choice). The other extreme is an emphasis on emotional choices made under the influence of psychological manipulation (Tenove, 2020). Thus, information warfare creates a large field for manipulation. At the same time, according to scientists, fact-checking is a crucial way to counter disinformation (Wigell, 2021). Checking information for authenticity can be carried out independently if you have the necessary digital competencies and critical thinking skills. Several open fact-checking platforms operate in Ukraine to counter Russian aggression (VoxCheck, StopFake, etc.). Specialists search for fakes and distribute truthful information instead. Other fact-checking resources operate internationally (including FactCheck.org, Politifact, Snopes, IFCN, and others), whose administrators cooperate with the media and social media owners to jointly combat fake news. In addition, specialists from these and other resources are engaged in improving media literacy, which is the dissemination of explanatory materials simultaneously with educational activities to develop the competencies necessary for working with digital sources.

#### 4. Discussion

The importance of information warfare research allows us to assess the impact of this phenomenon on the development of democracy in Ukraine. The conducted systematic review and content analysis showed that research on the phenomenon of information warfare in 2019–2025 formed a complex picture of the interaction between the security, technological and democratic dimensions of modern communication. Five isolated clusters, consisting of information warfare and hybrid strategies, algorithmic manipulation, crisis of trust and the public sphere, European legal responses and the Ukrainian media space as a laboratory of resilience, identified the leading directions of modern media discourse.

These results indicated a shift in research optics from narrow military-communication approaches to an interdisciplinary understanding of information democracy, in which technological risks are combined with issues of trust, ethics and normative legitimacy. A special place in this system was occupied by the Ukrainian experience, which after 2022 became a key empirical field for testing the concepts of “resilience”, “truth defense” and “hybrid deterrence”. As the analysis data show, the concepts of Ukraine, democracy and resilience formed a central cognitive triangle, which is increasingly used in English-language scientific literature as a model of democratic resilience in the context of information aggression. In turn, another semantic node - algorithmic manipulation ↔ trust pointed to the Western academic discourse, which is dominated by issues of ethics, privacy, algorithmic management and the crisis of institutional trust. Thus, the results indicated a geographical and conceptual polarization between the security paradigm of Eastern Europe and the cognitive-ethical paradigm of the West. Ukraine in this configuration acts as a zone of intersection and integration of both approaches. Besides, according to previous articles the identified trends correspond to the evolution of the global discourse on post-truth and hybrid information threats (Dei *et al.*, 2019; Lu, 2022). In particular, as Bennett and Livingston (2023) pointed out, the modern era of disinformation has been defined by the “decline of institutional authority” and the blurring of the boundaries between informational and political acts. At the same time, Habermas (2022) in turn described the “second structural transformation of the public sphere”, in which algorithms and social networks replace rational discussion with emotional triggers. The results of our study develop these theses and indicate that the Ukrainian space reflects and changes these processes. Besides, the works of Bayer *et al.* (2019) and Wigell (2021) have indicated that European policies to combat disinformation are normative, not just security-related. Modern authors have proven that they are based on a balance between freedom of expression and protection from manipulation.



The results confirm that this is the model that is currently actively forming in the Ukrainian media space, where the ethics of responsible journalism, a proactive fact-checking environment, and volunteer networks of digital safety are developing. However, the connection between the Media Literacy and European Values clusters identified in our subcorpus suggests the emergence of a new “pedagogy of resilience” that combines education, digital competence, and civic engagement.

Analysis of the Ukrainian media subcorpus (publications from leading online publications - Ukrainska Pravda, NV, Suspilne, TSN, 24 Channel) indicated that the information field of Ukraine in 2022–2024 was determined by the evolution of thematic accents. In particular, this is noticeable from the mobilization rhetoric of war to the discourse of restoration, trust and European values. The results of the frequency analysis indicated that the leading categories remain war, resistance, fakes, Telegram and truth, which form the core of the communication structure. The closest semantic connection was recorded between the topics “War and resistance” and “Disinformation and Telegram propaganda”, which reflects the dual nature of the Ukrainian information space: the media simultaneously perform the functions of a defense tool and a mechanism for education. This symbiosis of military and educational narratives indicated a rethinking of the role of journalism in wartime. Further analysis of network term co-occurrences showed that the topics “Media literacy and fact-checking” and “European integration and democratic values” form a peripheral but strategically important cognitive node. Other authors also point to the importance of this direction, which has shaped the transition from reactive response to fakes to proactive formation of a critical culture of information consumption. Thus, as proven in other works, Ukrainian media discourse is gradually moving from the phase of the “information front” to the phase of “information ethics”.

The results obtained from the Ukrainian media corpus confirmed and clarified existing approaches to the study of information warfare and democratic resilience, which were proposed in previous works. The key difference is that the Ukrainian material demonstrates a transition from a passive description of disinformation to an active construction of media subjectivity. In particular, in [Monsees \(2021\)](#), [Ferrara \*et al.\* \(2020\)](#) and [Tenove \(2020\)](#) describe information warfare primarily as a crisis of trust and a consequence of the blurring of boundaries between politics, algorithms, and public perception.

Our results confirm these findings, but add that in the Ukrainian context, trust is a victim of information attacks. The constant appeal of journalists to “truth”, “verified sources”, “fact-checking” in the texts of 2022–2024 determined that the media are trying to redefine the criteria of truthfulness. This was consistent with the approach of [Hordiichuk \*et al.\* \(2024\)](#) and [Sasko \*et al.\* \(2026\)](#) who pointed to the Ukrainian experience as “communicative resilience”. In this way, the authors defined the ability of society to transform information attacks into important sources of solidarity. Besides, in the studies of [Christiano \(2021\)](#), [Gombar \(2025\)](#) and [Zuboff \(2022\)](#), the main emphasis is on manipulation and the threat of “surveillance capitalism”, which undermines the autonomy of the citizen. However, in Ukrainian media, unlike Western ones, this topic acquires an empirical and practical dimension ([Tenove, 2020](#)). In particular, instead of theoretical considerations about ethical risks, journalists directly write about Telegram bots, artificial accounts, and coordination of disinformation campaigns. Thus, the Ukrainian corpus showed a new version of [Zuboff's \(2022\)](#) theory. Thus, it is not so much control over the user as a struggle for information subjectivity in the digital environment. This approach is closer to the concept of [Bryczek-Wróbel & Moszczyński \(2022\)](#) about “post-truth resistance” - resistance to manipulation through social self-organization.

The proposed results note that information manipulation significantly impacts democratic processes and public opinion. This is manifested in the mechanisms of societal polarization, its division into opposing camps. Another effect is decreased trust in government institutions, a skeptical perception of democracy, and discrediting the electoral process (the concept of elections without choice). The other extreme is an emphasis on emotional choices made under the influence of psychological manipulation. Such results confirm the conclusions of other scientists who also emphasized such manifestations of negative influence ([Nikolenko & Kozynets, 2022](#)). We can also agree with other scientists that the development of primarily digital technologies is taking place rapidly ([Bobro \*et al.\*, 2025](#)). Accordingly, the future of manipulation is also associated with their development, which will require taking this aspect into account in the future. The results indicated specific opportunities for countering manipulation, which were also used in Ukraine. First, fact-checking, the development of digital competencies and critical thinking skills, and the constant improvement of media literacy were noted. It was established that several open fact-checking platforms operate in Ukraine (VoxCheck, StopFake, etc.), while other fact-checking resources operate internationally (in



particular, FactCheck.org, Politifact, Snopes, IFCN, etc.). The joint efforts of enthusiasts, professionals, and employees of the media and social networks are aimed at countering aggressive information campaigns. Other researchers also note the importance of joint initiatives to counter the spread of fake news (Yurko & Riabtsev, 2024; Marukhovska-Kartunova *et al.*, 2024). The impact of information campaigns is generally noted as quite destructive, which is also confirmed in other studies (Pawelec, 2022; Shuliak, 2019; Gumenyuk *et al.*, 2021).

Overall, the results of the analysis indicated that Ukrainian media reflected the realities of war and rethought the very structure of the public sphere (Khalymon *et al.*, 2021; Danilyan *et al.*, 2024). The results of the analysis allowed us to interpret modern Ukrainian media as a channel for disseminating information and as an important element of supporting democratic processes (including through mechanisms of fact-checking, building trust and developing media literacy, etc.). In this sense, the media is considered as a component of the infrastructure of democratic stability, which, however, will require further empirical verification in comparative studies.

Although the results of the study generally demonstrated the formation of media resilience practices, alternative interpretations also needed to be considered. First, the observed cohesion of Ukrainian media discourse in wartime conditions could also be due to both the growth of trust and responsibility, and the effect of mobilization communication. It was about the dominance of certain narratives and the limitation of the spectrum of public discussion. In this context, the theory of the spiral of silence made it possible to assume that certain critical or alternative positions could be underrepresented due to social pressure or wartime priorities. In addition, it is worth considering possible gaps between declarative media standards and real communication practices. In particular, the issues of media heterogeneity, regional differences and the role of political actors in agenda-setting are still open. Wartime conditions may also have contributed to the simultaneous coexistence of several trends: the consolidation of the information space and the emergence of tension between security needs and the principles of pluralism and open debate. Thus, the Ukrainian media experience became a complex balancing act between mobilization, information control, and the preservation of democratic standards.

At the same time, the methodology proposed in the study has certain limitations that should be considered during the subsequent interpretation of the results obtained. First, the imperfection of the PRISMA scientific approach is worth noting. On the one hand, updating the latest research literature made it possible. On the other hand, the issue of information warfare is quite old, and therefore, some important studies were not considered during the content analysis. It is also worth considering that the corpus covers only the period 2019–2025 and does not include internal documents of media organizations or informal digital channels (Telegram, Discord, etc.). Secondly, the number of Ukrainian publications in the subcorpus is representative for trend analysis, but not for statistical generalization. Thirdly, the study relies on manual coding in NVivo; automated machine learning algorithms could reveal deeper latent connections between concepts. In the future, it is advisable to expand the corpus by automated data collection from social networks and conducting comparative analysis with the Baltic countries, Poland, and the Czech Republic, where information resilience strategies are also being formed. It should be noted that the proposed interpretations were explanatory in nature and were based on content analysis of a limited corpus of sources. They do not claim to be universal and exhaustive generalizations but outline analytical trends that required further verification in broader comparative and quantitative studies. The comparison of Ukrainian and Russian discourses in this study was of an auxiliary nature and did not pretend to be a full-fledged two-way corpus analysis, which would require symmetrical selection and coding procedures.

## 5. Conclusions

The study made it possible to clarify modern approaches to understanding information warfare as a complex socio-communicative phenomenon. This phenomenon combined technological, political and cognitive dimensions. The main scientific contribution of the work lay in several aspects. First, an integrated analytical framework was proposed, which combined the theories of framing, the spiral of silence, the public sphere and hyperreality to explain the mechanisms of information influence. Based on a systematic review (2019–2025), five key thematic clusters were outlined that structure the modern scientific discourse. Third, an empirical analysis of the Ukrainian media corpus (2022–2024) led to an assessment of theoretical models that manifested themselves in the real conditions of information warfare. The results obtained should be interpreted considering their boundary conditions. The study was based on content analysis of a limited corpus of scientific and media sources and reflected the Ukrainian context



of the period of full-scale war. Accordingly, the revealed patterns should not be automatically generalized to other countries. At the empirical level, the results of the study confirmed the dominance of the themes of war, disinformation, trust, and resilience in the contemporary Ukrainian media discourse. Attention was also paid to the formation of stable semantic connections between such categories. At the same time, the obtained results indicated general trends in the communication field, which was not direct evidence of the transformation of democratic practices. In the normative dimension, the results obtained made it possible to determine that the development of media literacy, fact-checking, and responsible journalism played an important role in supporting democratic resilience in the conditions of information warfare. At the same time, such interpretations will require further verification in comparative and interdisciplinary studies, which will become a significant vector for future scientific work. Thus, the study summarized modern scientific approaches to the analysis of information warfare, offered a basis for further empirical and theoretical research aimed at studying the interaction between information processes, political manipulations, and the functioning of democracy.

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### Author Contribution Statement

Nataliia Dubovyk: Conceptualization, Methodology, Software, Validation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Data Curation, Writing – Original Draft, Writing – Review & Editing, Visualization, Project administration. Ivan Kydriavskiy: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Software, Validation, Writing – Review & Editing. Tetyana Plazova: Investigation, Data Curation, Writing – Original Draft, Visualization. Valentyna Stiekolshchikova: Conceptualization, Methodology, Supervision, Writing – Review & Editing. Nataliya Marchuk: Supervision, Writing – Review & Editing, Funding acquisition. All the authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

### Does this article screen for similarity?

Yes

### Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare. There is also no financial interest to report. The author certifies that the submission is original work and is not under review at any other publication.

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