



Research Article

Communicating (In)Security in Ukraine

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Abstract: This article aims to characterize the strategic communication system that was shaped before the war in Ukraine and has been evolving since February 24, 2022. It highlights Ukraine's institutional efforts to develop its capabilities in information warfare and its journey in crafting a wartime strategic narrative. This system encompasses strategic communication with different target audiences, determining the appropriate credible war communicators, communication channels, and strategic narratives to govern the information landscape. The analysis of internal strategic narratives reveals a notable shift from promoting exaggerated myths and comforting messages to highlighting the bravery of both military personnel and civilians. Concurrently, the external narratives directed at the West have evolved from pleading for weapons and aid to conveying proactive messages that emphasize collective engagement for future success. These developments in Ukraine's information strategy influence domestic and international perceptions, shedding light on the intricate dynamics of narrative construction in times of war.

Keywords: strategic communication, stratcom, narrative, media, war, Russo-Ukraine war.

Introduction

The information and communication domains have become the primary battlefields in modern hybrid warfare. Strategies, tactics, policies, planning and engagement principles are defined and applied for information and communication much like in other warfare domains. At the same time, modern warfare exploits a wide arsenal of conventional and unconventional tools, constantly seeking new options.

With the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, strategic communication has become essential as the coordinated and purposeful use of a state's communication capacities—public diplomacy, public relations, civil-military cooperation, in-

formation operations, and psychological operations—to promote national objectives. In wartime, weaponized communication impacts security at all levels – from individual to geopolitical.

Our hypothesis is that a state requires a comprehensive and adaptable strategic communications system, particularly during wartime. This system should be capable of navigating the evolving information landscape, effectively communicating strategic narratives to domestic and international audiences, and countering enemy disinformation and propaganda. We posit that such a system must delicately balance the need for robust communication with the risk of veering toward censorship.

This study aims to characterize the strategic communication system that shaped and communicated the Ukrainian (in)security narrative in 2022–2023 following Russia’s full-scale invasion. It is pivotal to highlight Ukraine’s institutional efforts to develop its information warfare capabilities and approach to establishing a coherent strategic wartime narrative.

Development of Ukraine’s Information Warfare Capacities

Before analyzing the wartime state of the Ukrainian strategic communication system, it is essential to address key milestones in its development prior to 2022. Drastic changes took place in 2021, marking a turning point in the evolution of the state’s strategic communication infrastructure. That year, two key centers were established:

- *The Center for Countering Disinformation*¹ under the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine, established by the decision of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine on March 11, 2021, “On the Establishment of the Center for Countering Disinformation,” and enacted by the Decree of the President of Ukraine No. 106 of March 19, 2021.
- *The Center for Strategic Communications and Information Security*,² created under the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy and officially presented on March 31, 2021.

The mandates and functions of these centers appear to overlap. According to official documents,

In its activities, [the Center for Countering Disinformation] covers trends in informing about the state of military affairs, defense industry, fight against crime and corruption, foreign and domestic policy, economy, critical infrastructure, ecology, health care, social sphere, formation of public conscious-

¹ “Center for Countering Disinformation: Activities of the Center,” Official Website, accessed September 26, 2023, <https://cpd.gov.ua/en/>.

² “Center for Strategic Communications and Information Security.”

ness, scientific and technological direction, etc. The main focus is on countering the spread of false information and combating information terrorism.³

Meanwhile, the Center for Strategic Communications and Information Security is believed to be a “state mechanism for countering disinformation through the joint efforts of the state and civil society, aimed at protecting the information space from distortions.”⁴ It seeks to unify the efforts of public organizations and authorities in the fight against disinformation, enabling quick responses to fake news and promoting Ukrainian narratives. The Center focuses on communication efforts to counter external threats, particularly information attacks from the Russian Federation. It is designed to cooperate with the Center for Countering Disinformation, which retains a security function and serves as an international hub.

On December 22, 2021, the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyi, signed Decree No. 671/2021,⁵ stipulating that only the President, the Prime Minister, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs are authorized to make official statements on international issues. The decree was issued to “ensure the unity of the foreign policy course of the state.”

The year 2021 was significant in launching and consolidating the strategic communications system at the state level, enabling the formation and dissemination of national narratives. This system is based on the shift in consciousness over the last decade, from mass consciousness to media consciousness, with television series and talk shows playing a dominant role in shaping audience behavior.

Since media—with the power of news broadcasts and the dominance of talk shows—are crucial for the operability and sustainability of strategic communication, TV channels have come under scrutiny. On February 2, 2021, President Volodymyr Zelenskyi enacted the decision⁶ of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine to impose sanctions against the TV channels “NewsOne,” “ZIK” and “112 Ukraine,” as well as their owner, Taras Kozak, a member of parliament from the “Oppositional Platform – For Life.” The sanctions included revoking the licenses of these pro-Russian TV channels. Mykhailo Podolyak, Advi-

³ Quoted in Svitlana Vnuchko, Viktor Teremko, Olena Polovko, and Anna Stychynska, “Information Terrorism and its Prevention in the Global Political Environment in the 21st Century,” *Ad Alta: Journal of Interdisciplinary Research* 1 (2024): 63-68, p. 65, <https://doi.org/10.33543/1401396368>.

⁴ “About the Centre,” Center for Strategic Communications and Information Security, accessed September 26, 2023, <https://spravdi.gov.ua/en/about-us/>.

⁵ Decree of the President of Ukraine No. 671/2021 – On the Issue of Coordination of Foreign Policy Activity of the State, signed December 22, 2021, <https://www.president.gov.ua/documents/6712021-41005>. – in Ukrainian

⁶ Decree of the President of Ukraine No. 43/2021 – On the Decision of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine dated February 2, 2021, “On the Application of Personal Special Economic and Other Restrictive Measures (Sanctions),” www.president.gov.ua/documents/432021-36441. – in Ukrainian

sor to the Head of the Presidential Office, considered these sanctions a natural response to “daily informational and propaganda attacks on the state by those who play into foreign interests and someone else’s game.”⁷

Although the role of media in strategic communication is hard to overestimate, traditional (or “legacy”) media enjoy less credibility today. With Facebook and Instagram influencers gaining greater power in shaping public opinion, Ukrainian politicians and public officials at various levels have become active social media users. Their audiences span different age groups and professions, including both youth and retirees.

Despite some initial challenges with the newly established strategic communication centers and questions regarding their leadership choices and subordination, by the end of 2021, Ukraine had developed a state strategic communications system. This included a chain of TV channels loyal to the government, a diversified group of public speakers, and social media influencers with a significant number of followers.

It is noteworthy that, following the annexation of Crimea and the occupation of parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, Ukraine has been actively working to mitigate the informational and psychological impact of Russian propaganda. One of the primary objectives, particularly during wartime, is to assert control over the information domain. This entails not only countering disinformation and propaganda but also effectively communicating the government’s messaging to domestic and international audiences.

The success of a security narrative depends on the point of focalization – a perspective aligned with one of the characters or voices in the narrative.⁸ Nowadays, widely used external focalization gains more credibility when supported and presented by celebrities and experts. A credible point of focalization can automatically grant the information the status of unquestionable truth, effectively blocking potential criticism from the audience.

Immediately after the full-scale invasion in 2022, a network of influencers loyal to the President of Ukraine was established. These individuals communicated the official narrative through TV and social media. This constellation included:

- The President himself
- Regional (oblast) Governors or heads of Oblast Military Administrations during wartime (e.g., Oleh Syniehubov from Kharkiv and Vitalii Kim from Mykolaiv, among the most active)

⁷ “Podolyak: Sanctions against Kozak’s Channels Are Not an Assault on Freedom of Speech, but a Counteraction to Fakes and Propaganda,” *Detector Media*, February 3, 2021, <https://detector.media/infospace/article/184523/2021-02-03-podolyak-sanktsii-proty-kanaliv-kozaka-tse-ne-nastup-na-svobodu-slova-a-protydiya-feykam-i-propagandi/>. – in Ukrainian

⁸ Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse. An Essay in Method* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1930).

- An advisor to the President (Mykhailo Podolyak), and
- An advisor to the Head of the Office of the President (Oleksii Arystovych).

We should also note that the First Lady of Ukraine, Olena Zelenska, undertook additional speaking engagements that are not typical for her position. She spoke on behalf of the country to the U.S. Congress, attended the UN General Assembly, and participated in many other summits promoting Ukraine's external strategic narrative.

Some politicians attempted to boost their reputations and join this network of influencers but failed. For example, Mariana Bezuhla was criticized for interfering and posting large volumes of information, including content that could have potentially harmed Ukrainian troops on the frontline.⁹

Shortly after Russia's invasion, a second step was taken to counter disinformation and successfully control the national narrative within the information domain. The country's main TV channels began broadcasting identical content 24 hours a day in what became known as the United News telemarathon.¹⁰ Each channel has a daily time slot in the broadcast, which is shown simultaneously on all participating channels. United News was initially aired by five channels, including privately owned channels by various Ukrainian oligarchs and publicly owned ones. It has since been formalized into law and now includes all Ukrainian channels that previously aired news content.¹¹ The language and messaging are coordinated through editorial meetings involving all participating channels, the Ministry of Culture, and the National Broadcasting Council. There are ongoing debates on how to avoid a heavily censored information space, particularly after the shutdown of some TV channels that had never been labeled as pro-Russian.¹²

The third step was to launch an effective system for monitoring and controlling social media to counter disinformation and enemy propaganda. Since February 24, 2022, social media and messaging service providers have taken various actions in response to the war in Ukraine, most of which are aimed at countering harmful disinformation. These actions include labeling or blocking state-sponsored or state-affiliated media and introducing additional safety measures. Some

⁹ Anhelina Sheremet, "Journalist Yanina Sokolova Stated That a 'Servant' (MP from Servant of the People Faction) Mariana Bezuhla commanded the military in Sievierodonetsk. And She Answered," *Babel*, June 4, 2022, <https://babel.ua/en/news/79465-journalist-yanina-sokolova-stated-that-a-servant-mp-from-servant-of-the-people-faction-mariana-bezuhla-commanded-the-military-in-sievierodonetsk-and-she-answered>.

¹⁰ Isobel Koshiw, "'Death to the Enemy': Ukraine's News Channels Unite to Cover War," *The Guardian*, May 25, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/25/death-to-the-enemy-ukraine-news-channels-unite-to-cover-war>.

¹¹ Koshiw, "'Death to the Enemy': Ukraine's News Channels Unite to Cover War."

¹² "Putin's Way: Ukrainians React to the Shutdown of the 'Pryamyi', 'Espresso', 'Channel 5' TV channels," *Pryamyi*, April 5, 2022, <https://prm.ua/putin-s-way-ukrainians-react-to-the-shutdown-of-the-pryamyi-espresso-channel-5-tv-channels/>.

measures apply to Ukraine or Russia specifically, while others are applicable only in the European Union or globally. A range of factors has driven the decisions: government requests, public pressure, or the companies' own initiatives – sometimes in line with official demands, sometimes in defiance of them.¹³ Social media has fundamentally changed how the war in Ukraine is being reported and perceived around the world.¹⁴

The Ukrainian government and military have used various social media platforms to highlight their successes – and, more importantly, Russia's setbacks. On March 15, 2022, Laws of Ukraine No. 2108-IX and No. 2107-IX on combating collaborationism entered into force, introducing criminal liability for cooperation with the aggressor state in the information, educational, political, military, administrative, economic, or labor spheres. The publication of information potentially useful to the enemy (such as the location of military units or missile strikes) was restricted. As social media channels, particularly Telegram, became a primary source of information about the situation in Ukraine and its regions, they had to adhere to censorship rules concerning "time-location" posts related to strikes.

Social media not only pose a potential security threat but also serve as a valuable tool for obtaining necessary information. They are widely used to gather evidence of war crimes committed in Ukraine:

The chatbot, created by Ukraine's Digital Ministry and dubbed "e-Enemy," is one of half a dozen digital tools the government has set up to crowdsource and corroborate evidence of alleged war crimes. Since the start of the invasion, Ukrainian officials, lawyers, and human-rights groups have scrambled to design new ways to catalogue and verify reams of video, photo and eyewitness accounts of criminal behavior by Russian forces.¹⁵

Social media monitoring helps strengthen strategic narratives and debunk counter-narratives. Social media platforms also have the capacity to evaluate their own influence and gain a clear understanding of their audience, as "they can measure how you react, they know just how to get under your skin."¹⁶

During the war, there is a widespread desire to hear from the military. However, the security and defense sector of Ukraine, being highly rigid, initially preferred to remain silent. It took several months for them to develop an infor-

¹³ "Russia, Ukraine, and Social Media and Messaging Apps: Questions and Answers on Platform Accountability and Human Rights Responsibilities," Human Rights Watch, March 16, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/03/16/russia-ukraine-and-social-media-and-messaging-apps>.

¹⁴ Peter Suci, "Ukraine Is Winning on the Battlefield and on Social Media," *Forbes*, October 13, 2022, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/petersuci/2022/10/13/ukraine-is-winning-on-the-battlefield-and-on-social-media/>.

¹⁵ Vera Bergengruen, "How Ukraine Is Crowdsourcing Digital Evidence of War Crimes," *Time*, April 18, 2022, <https://time.com/6166781/ukraine-crowdsourcing-war-crimes/>.

¹⁶ Jon Berkeley, "Do Social Media Threaten Democracy?" *The Economist*, November 4, 2017, www.economist.com/leaders/2017/11/04/do-social-media-threaten-democracy.

mation strategy. A milestone in this process was the establishment of the Military Media Center – a joint media platform that consolidates all communication capabilities of Ukraine’s security and defense forces¹⁷ to promote a unified information policy countering Russia’s armed aggression against Ukraine.¹⁸

Waldman and Havel argue that, in order “to compete in the narrative battlefield, democratic militaries should enhance their capability for disseminating truthful, close-to-real-time, extended stories of military activities with real-world, value-based stakes, crafted using age-old formulas of characterization and plot to appeal to wide as well as targeted audiences.”¹⁹

In spring-summer 2022, the security narratives of Ukraine’s Ministry of Defense were shaped and promoted by the Directorate of Strategic Communications of the Apparatus of the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, which issued the Framework to Communicate the Issues of the Development of the Security Situation in Ukraine. In 2023, security sector agencies began regularly disseminating key points for information responses related to primary narratives and counter-narratives. However, while this practice has its merits, it may become problematic in the long term as it could hinder the critical thinking capacity of military personnel.

It is worth noting that while many security sector agencies’ communication channels were silent at the beginning of the war, the bravest units focused on their media presence and significantly increased their follower base. For instance, *Azov Media*²⁰ became a popular source of information about Mariupol in March 2022. Their publicity and well-designed communication strategy serve as an excellent example of image restoration.

Ukraine’s Strategic Narrative as a Large-Caliber Weapon

Generally, a narrative is understood as “a story explaining an actor’s actions to justify them to their audience.”²¹ A narrative is a story of a sequence of events with significance for both the narrator and the audience. Thus, it includes stories about events the narrator or communicator defines as relevant to the audience. In other words, “to be effective, narratives must both resonate with the intended audience’s core values and advocate a persuasive cause-effect description that

¹⁷ “Military Media Center Began Its Work in Ukraine’s Defence Sphere,” Article id. 68138, Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, August 18, 2022, <https://www.mil.gov.ua/en/news/2022/08/18/military-media-center-began-its-work-in-ukraines-defence-sphere/>.

¹⁸ “Military Media Center Began Its Work in Ukraine’s Defence Sphere.”

¹⁹ Suzanne Waldman and Sean Havel, “Launching Narrative into the Information Battlefield,” *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 21, no. 2 (2022): 111-122, <https://doi.org/10.11610/Connections.21.2.08>.

²⁰ “Azov Media,” accessed September 26, 2023, www.youtube.com/c/AZOVmedia.

²¹ Norman K. Denzin, *Interpretive Biography* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1989).

ties events together in an explanatory framework.”²² A narrative aims to guide decisions so as to ensure their coherence.²³

Arguing that literary and cultural phenomena are best understood within a consilient disciplinary framework, Landa associates this perspective with “big history,” the broad context of the evolution of societies and life in general.²⁴ Shaped as a part of strategic communication and then circulated in the media, strong narratives can block the audience’s reflection on the situation, as they persuasively provide seemingly sufficient information and interpretations of the facts – facts that tend to become accepted knowledge, translated into the audience’s language and echoed by credible celebrities and experts.

Strategic narratives are “intended to help people make sense of events related to the use of military force in ways that are likely to give rise to a particular feeling or opinion.”²⁵ Four basic elements characterize strong strategic narratives:²⁶ they articulate a clear and compelling mission purpose, hold the promise of [wartime] success, are coherent and consistent, and face few and/or weak competitors.

The success of any narrative depends on the main concepts selected for it and their concrete verbalization across different contexts for different audiences – on the *recipient factor*, since “it’s not what you say, it’s what people hear”²⁷ and if “you want to reach the people, you must first speak their language;”²⁸ on the personal meaning and values brought to the audience; and on the personalization and humanization of the message [within the narrative] to trigger an emotional resonance and remembrance.²⁹

²² Andreas Antoniadis, Alister Miskimmon, and Ben O’Loughlin, “Great Power Politics and Strategic Narratives,” Working Paper No. 7 (Brighton, UK: Centre for Global Political Economy, University of Sussex, 2010), www.sussex.ac.uk/webteam/gateway/file.php?name=cgpe-wp07-antoniadis-miskimmon-oloughlin.pdf&site=359.

²³ Anais Reding, Kristin Weed, and Jeremy J. Ghez, “NATO’s Strategic Communications Concept and Its Relevance for France” (Santa Monica, CA: The French Ministry of Defence and RAND Corporation, 2010), https://www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/TR855z2.html.

²⁴ Jose Angel Garcia Landa, “The Story behind Any Story: Evolution, Historicity, and Narrative Mapping,” in *Emerging Vectors of Narratology*, ed. Per Krogh Hansen, John Pier, Philippe Roussin, and Wolf Schmid (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2017), 567-592, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110555158-026>.

²⁵ Antoniadis, Miskimmon, and O’Loughlin, “Great Power Politics and Strategic Narratives.”

²⁶ Jens Ringsmose and Berit K. Børgesen, “Shaping Public Attitudes towards the Deployment of Military Power: NATO, Afghanistan and the Use of Strategic Narratives,” *European Security* 20, no. 4 (2011): 505-528, 513-514, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2011.617368>.

²⁷ Frank Luntz, *Words That Work: It’s Not What You Say, It’s What People Hear* (New York: Hyperion, January 2007).

²⁸ Luntz, *Words That Work: It’s Not What You Say*, 3.

²⁹ Luntz, *Words That Work: It’s Not What You Say*, 18.

Positive and credible narratives help build the population's resilience against hostilities. It is important, though often neglected, to recognize that maintaining credibility requires deeds to match words.³⁰ Any manipulation or deception can provoke counteractions, although the effectiveness of these depends on the audience's ability to detect manipulation, which in turn requires critical thinking.

At the beginning of the war, Ukraine's strategic narrative was somewhat decentralized and not clearly defined. These early narratives reflected Tolkien's dichotomy, where absolute good must fight for survival against absolute evil. The "Orc-Elf" dichotomy is an example of how strategic narratives function. In an easily digestible way, they explain to ordinary Ukrainians and Russians why they must fight, support their army, or at least write motivational posts on social media. These narratives infiltrate people's minds in the same way great movies do: in the cinema, viewers distance themselves from real life, immerse themselves in a fictional world, and are inspired by the values and principles of their favorite characters.³¹

"Good evening. We are from Ukraine," "No worry, we will rebuild everything," and "Two to three weeks" – these narrative frames have been shaping the information landscape in Ukraine since the spring of 2022. As part of the war communicators' discourse, these narratives help set the strategic messaging. Thus, we disagree with the view that "the Ukrainian strategic narrative is very specific [...]; it is predominantly being created and spread by the Ukrainian people themselves in a horizontal plane of communication, not by the authorities in the vertical plane."³²

Many experts in Ukraine and abroad have acknowledged the power of the Ukrainian strategic narrative:

Zelenskyy's narrative is a brilliant, indispensable wartime invention. But its impact and influence will only endure if, with the help of the rest of us, he can build a different, distinct future—with a quite different governing class than the one we see on the comic TV show *Servant of the People*—for his country once the war is over.³³

³⁰ Antti Sillanpää, "Strategic Communications and Need for Societal Narratives," NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, November 17, 2015, accessed December 1, 2022, <https://stratcomcoe.org/news/article-by-centres-expert-antti-sillanpaa-strategic-communications-and-need-for-societal-narratives/59>.

³¹ Artem Zakharchenko, "The Clash of Strategic Narratives in the Russo-Ukrainian War," *Forum for Ukrainian Studies*, September 18, 2022, <https://ukrainian-studies.ca/2022/09/18/the-clash-of-strategic-narratives-in-the-russo-ukrainian-war/>.

³² Zakharchenko, "The Clash of Strategic Narratives in the Russo-Ukrainian War."

³³ David Ellwood, "Narratives, Propaganda & 'Smart' Power in the Ukraine Conflict, Part 2: Inventing a Global Presence," *CDP Blog*, July 21, 2022, <https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/blog/pd-wartime-narratives-propaganda-smart-power-ukraine-conflict-part-2-inventing-global>.

Personal stories about combatants and non-combatants reduce the distance between people. “You are not alone” and “war has human faces” are just a few of the key messages shared with the audience.

In the first three weeks of the war, Ukrainian government accounts repeatedly circulated the story of the “Ghost of Kyiv” in social media, claiming that a legendary Ukrainian pilot had shot down roughly 40 enemy aircraft (at that point, Russia had only suffered 25 confirmed fixed-wing aircraft losses, most of which were brought down by surface-to-air missile systems or man-portable air defense systems).³⁴ Many people strongly believed this story, as it was spread by seemingly credible sources.

Ironically, the Ukrainian Air Force Command later clarified on Facebook that the “Ghost of Kyiv was a superhero-legend whose character was created by Ukrainians!” They added: “We ask the Ukrainian community not to neglect the basic rules of information hygiene,” urging people to “check the sources of information before spreading it.”³⁵

Narratives as stories of sequences of events that hold significance for both the narrator and the audience exploit the audience’s value system and intrude into the human cognitive space. They aim to resonate with the intended audience’s core values and present a persuasive cause-effect structure that links facts and events together.

The Ukrainian strategic narrative has been actively promoted and broadcast to various audiences inside and outside the country. To draw global attention to the war, additional *supporting narratives* have been tailored to reflect the value systems of target audiences. For example: “Zelenskyi is meeting with Western celebrities and appearing in celebrity-focused magazines because that is the only way to keep the crisis in his country at the forefront of the American public’s mind.”³⁶

Thus, since February 24, 2022, the state’s information strategy has become more polished, coherent, and professional. There is now a clear distinction between internal and external narratives. The internal narratives have shifted from amplifying exaggerated myths to focusing on the courage of ordinary people performing small, meaningful acts of bravery. Externally, narratives directed at Western audiences have evolved from “Help us!” to “Look! We are defending you. Contribute!”

Remarkably, separate narratives have also been crafted specifically for Russian audiences, such as: “All Russians are to blame,” “The Russian nation will pay

³⁴ Ines Eisele, “Fact Check: The ‘Ghost of Kyiv’ Fighter Pilot,” *Deutsche Welle*, April 5, 2022, www.dw.com/en/fact-check-ukraines-ghost-of-kyiv-fighter-pilot/a-60951825.

³⁵ Laurence Peter, “How Ukraine’s ‘Ghost of Kyiv’ Legendary Pilot Was Born,” *BBC*, May 21, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-61285833>.

³⁶ Sonny Bunch, “The Zelenskys Are in Vogue. That Makes Them Smart, Not Silly,” *The Washington Post*, July 28, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2022/07/28/zelensky-vogue-annie-leibovitz-smart/>.

for the war,” and “Surrender! You will stay alive” – particularly targeting ordinary soldiers.

Conclusion

Ukraine’s efforts to build effective information warfare capabilities reveal the critical need for a comprehensive strategic communications system capable of adapting swiftly to the rapidly evolving information landscape, where misinformation and propaganda pose significant challenges.

Recently, Ukraine has developed an efficient strategic communications system to convey its (in)security narrative. The three-step strategy included assigning war communicators (establishing a network of speakers and influencers), asserting control over the information domain through the United News tele-marathon, and launching an effective system for monitoring and countering propaganda and disinformation on social media. These efforts have resulted in the unification of the state’s information strategy. The military’s consistent and coordinated transmission of the strategic narrative has contributed significantly to its success.

Ukraine’s strategic communications system adheres to the core principles of effective strategic communication. It has fostered strong professional relations with the media. It recognizes the importance of the recipient’s factor and the diversity of media channels when selecting the most appropriate platforms for its messages.

Ukraine’s information strategy has improved and become more solidified. Each message aligns with the overall strategic narrative. The internal and external narrative lines can be clearly distinguished in terms of their primary functions. Creating distinct narratives for different target audiences is crucial to ensure they resonate with both domestic and international publics. At the same time, there is a delicate balance between communicating *security* and *insecurity* in Ukraine. It is also about truth and the desperate desire to hear the truth. People have begun seeking alternative sources of information, ranging from well-reputed foreign media to enemy-controlled social media channels.

As Ukraine builds its information warfare capabilities, it must navigate a fine line. On the one hand, it must ensure freedom of expression and uphold democratic principles, avoiding the imposition of undue censorship. On the other hand, it is imperative to prevent the spread of harmful disinformation that threatens national security and stability. This balanced approach will not only enhance Ukraine’s resilience against hybrid threats but also reinforce its position as a democratic nation on the global stage.

Disclaimer

The views expressed are solely those of the authors and do not represent official views of the PfP Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes, participating organizations, or the Consortium’s editors.

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