

UKRAINIAN MEDIA AND THE GREAT WAR

Sonya Koshkina

Content

- **UKRAINIAN MEDIA BEFORE THE GREAT INVASION**
- **HOW THE GREAT INVASION BEGAN**
- **NATIONAL TELEMARATHON "THE UNITED NEWS"**
- **SCANDAL WITH THE DISCONNECTION OF THREE TV CHANNELS**
- **HOW THE WORK OF OTHER MEDIA HAS CHANGED**
- **KILLED AND INJURED JOURNALISTS**
- **JOURNALISM EDUCATION SYSTEM IN UKRAINE**
- **THE PULITZER PRIZE**
- **THE RICHEST UKRAINIAN, RINAT AKHMETOV IS LEAVING THE MEDIA BUSINESS**

UKRAINIAN MEDIA BEFORE THE GREAT INVASION

On the eve of Russia's great invasion of Ukraine, in the period from December 17 to 22, 2021, [a large nationwide survey](#) was conducted by the Ilko Kucheriv Foundation "Democratic Initiatives," in cooperation with the sociological service "Razumkov Center," at the request of the NGO "Detector Media".

Its task was to "compile an idea of the main sources of information, habits and priorities in media consumption of Ukrainians, the level of media literacy and information verification skills, the vulnerability of residents of various regions to Russian propaganda messages."

Such a study is conducted every year, starting from 2017. Thanks to this, one can see not only the general situation, but also the dynamics: how traditional media are gradually losing, and social networks and messengers are gaining their audience; how more and more people learn to discern the messages of the Russian propaganda; how trust to the most popular media is changing.

The 2021 survey included 2,018 respondents across the country, with the exception of the temporarily occupied (since 2014) territories of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. The maximum theoretical error of the survey did not exceed 2.3%.

According to the received data, as of the end of 2021:

- the most common source of information for Ukrainians about events in Ukraine and the world were national TV channels. The share of viewers of Ukrainian television among those surveyed was 67%. Other traditional media, such as newspapers and radio, had significantly less audience outreach. Thus, Ukrainian newspapers accounted for only 6%, and radio - 7%. Social networks accounted for 44% of consumers, Ukrainian online media – 29%, messengers – 16%.
- A rather popular source of information among Ukrainians were personal connections. 28% of the respondents said that they learn about current news from relatives, friends, and acquaintances.

- Among the Russian media, Russian TV channels had the largest share of viewers (5%), which, however, is less than the audience of any Ukrainian media.

According to the cited study, most frequently Ukrainians watched TV channels which combine news programs with entertainment content. The most popular of them are "1+1" (43%), "Ukraine" (34%), STB (32%), and ICTV (31%). Less than 10% of respondents tuned in to TV channels that broadcast mainly news and political talk shows.

It is interesting that there were twice fewer respondents who trust certain TV channels than respondents who watch these TV channels. However, the list of leading TV channels in terms of trust largely coincided with the list of the most popular ones: TV channel "1+1" was trusted by 21% of viewers, "Ukraine" by 17%, STB by 15%, and ICTV by 13%. Despite the status of a national public broadcaster, trust in "UA: First" fluctuated within 5%.

Regarding social networks as a source of information, the indicators were as follows:

- Facebook (56%)
- Instagram (25%)
- Viber (24%)
- Telegram (13%)

By what criteria did people choose this or that media as a source of information?

- interesting materials (57%),
- lack of involvement in providing information (38%)
- efficiency of events' coverage (38%),
- ease of presenting information (33%)
- closeness of views (29%).

HOW THE GREAT INVASION BEGAN

In the first days of the great invasion, the Russians began shelling TV towers in Ukrainian cities. They also attempted to block providers. Their overall task was to stop the broadcasting of Ukrainian TV channels. However, even the physical destruction of TV towers allows to broadcast TV content on the Internet, through cable networks, via satellite, etc.

As you know, the Russians hoped for a lightning-fast military operation. They expected to capture the capital city of Kyiv "in 72 hours at the most." An important component in this operation [is the so-called IPSO](#) – informational and psychological operations and disinformation aimed at sowing panic and distrust. An example of the IPSO was the simultaneous [creation of a large number of telegram channels](#) that reported the "complete capture" of Kyiv, Kharkiv, other cities, or even the complete "surrender of Ukraine".

The most famous among a number of other similar ones was [the attack on the Kyiv TV tower](#) on March 1, 2022. (It is located in the historical area of Babyn Yar, the site of the mass executions of Jews by the Nazis in 1941. As a result of the bombing, the memorial to the victims of the Holocaust was damaged).

The projectile hit the TV tower, and digital broadcasting was stopped. A list of journalists who died in the Great War was also opened. The first was videographer Yevhen Sakun (his death was reported later).

Then they fired at:

- [Kharkiv TV Tower](#)

- the TV infrastructure in the city of Korosten in Zhytomyr Region;
- [Lysychansk, Luhansk region](#) they tried to blow up the TV tower, but failed.

Simultaneously with shelling, numerous attempts were made to suppress the signal through the satellite. The websites of key publications were subjected to massive DDoS attacks.

NATIONAL TELEMARATHON "THE UNITED NEWS"

On February 24, most national TV channels tried to launch their own marathons, continuous special broadcasts or other special formats. However, already on February 25, a decision was made to start a common national telemarathon "Edyni Novyni". The initiators were the heads of the four largest media groups (StarLightMedia, "Inter", "1+1," and "Ukraine"). As its basis was chosen the parliamentary TV channel "Rada." The main coordinator of the project and communicator from the authorities was the Minister of Culture and Information Policy Oleksandr Tkachenko (who previously worked in the television business for more than twenty years; he managed one of the largest Ukrainian channels, "1+1"). The National Television and Radio Broadcasting Council allowed the channels (each of which had their own licensing requirements) to reformat their broadcasts accordingly. Over time, almost all Ukrainian TV channels began to broadcast the marathon in part or in full. Subsequently, one channel from each media group was allowed to broadcast family and children's content.

There was already experience of such format. As you know, the Western intelligence predicted a major invasion on February 16. This day had been declared in Ukraine a "Unity Day", and TV channels then cooperated in marathon mode.

From February 25, the cooperation format was organized as follows. TV channels divided the air network among themselves and worked at intervals of 5-6 hours. Each was responsible for the content of its own time slot, namely, for the preparation of news releases, short conversational studios with guests. After finishing its part, each passes the "baton" to colleagues. Such a scheme ensures non-stop broadcasting. This is also a way to minimize risks that somewhere the signal is interrupted, somewhere the studio can be shelled, somewhere the correspondents are not able to transmit the footage from the front line in time due to communication interruptions, and so on. Very often, especially during the first months of the great invasion, journalists stayed in the studios for several days without leaving them. At night – due to the curfew. During the day – for safety reasons.

Otar Dovzhenko, a well-known Ukrainian media expert, has commented on this: "Would Ukrainian TV channels have coped on their own if they hadn't united? In the current environment, this would be almost impossible even for giants with powerful news services, regional headquarters and large financial resources. Commercial Ukrainian television was too focused on Kyiv, which today is one of the priority targets of the Russian army. It is difficult to move around the country, communication is unstable, it is extremely difficult or impossible for journalists to work in places where fighting is going on. Speakers and sources of information are difficult to access. Even simple information gathering and at least basic fact-checking before they go on the air is quite a challenge for telemarathonists. In addition, during an air raid, the presenters are forced to move to the bomb shelter. To unite and share responsibility and airtime in such a situation was the perfect solution."

A single control centre, where the final decisions "what to show, what not to show, who to invite on the air or not" were to be made, did not exist and still does not exist. In the first weeks, the heads of the key TV channels – people who have known each other for years –

were constantly in touch, discussing the smallest details. The main criteria were: not to harm, not to give the enemy additional clues, and also to maintain a high patriotic spirit and people's faith in a quick victory. The latter intention later played a wicked joke. It soon became clear: the war is dragging on, it is necessary to get ready for a long confrontation and also to report on the losses of the Ukrainian army, on deaths and destruction. Which means, to present a more objective informational picture. This became a serious challenge for the National Telemarathon.

In addition to that, with the beginning of the Great War, [centralized measurements of the television audience stopped](#). Therefore, today it is impossible to determine its current volume, as well as the degree of popularity of a particular type of TV product.

The national marathon "Edyny Novyny" is also broadcast on radio frequencies. The base for the radio marathon was chosen the public "Ukrainian Radio." Its signal, in addition to the three channels of the public radio, is broadcast by dozens of commercial radio networks and many local radio stations. It is worth noting that under the conditions of occupation – in the absence of light, electricity, mobile communication – classical radio remains the main source of at least some information for the inhabitants of such territories.

On March 18, the [joint Russian-language marathon "FreeDom" started](#). It was organized by the media groups StarLightMedia, "Inter", "1+1," and "Ukraine," on the basis of the multimedia platform for foreign broadcasting UATV. The project is positioned as the one that arose with the support of President Volodymyr Zelenskyi. It works under the coordination of the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy, as the joint marathon "Unified News #UARazom".

SCANDAL WITH THE DISCONNECTION OF THREE TV CHANNELS

In addition to the mentioned four main media groups, three other TV channels operate in Ukraine as conditionally oppositional to the current government – due to their affiliation with the groups of influence of the former President Petro Poroshenko and politicians from his Eurosolidarity party. They are "Channel 5", "Priyamii," and "Espresso". The first two previously formally belonged to Petro Poroshenko, but from November 2021, they became the property of the "Free Media" holding, whose shareholders are the journalists of these TV channels and, as noted, politicians from the "European Solidarity" party. The main beneficiary of "Espresso" is the son of businessman Konstantin Zhevago; a share in the company also belongs to the wife of People's Deputy from "European Solidarity" Mykola Knyazhytskyi.

In the first days, "Channel 5", "Pryamiy," and "Espresso" did not broadcast the joint telemarathon, but continued their own broadcasting in the mode of an informational marathon. Soon they began to make insertions from the national marathon. An important point is that these channels are not direct producers, that is, they were broadcasting someone else's content.

On March 18, the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine adopted a number of important decisions. One of them stated that nationwide TV channels "whose program content consists mainly of information and/or information-analytical programs" were obliged to broadcast the informational marathon. The National Council for Television and Radio Broadcasting had to ensure the fulfilment of this requirement. On March 19, by the order of the President of Ukraine, the decision was put into effect.

As soon as in the night [of March 4, the broadcasting of the three mentioned opposition channels on the digital air was stopped](#). As a result of this step, the channels lost a significant part of their audience (more than 40% of Ukrainians watch television "digitally").

It is important to note that this happened without any explanation. These channels work via satellite, cable, and on the Internet. The telemarathon is broadcast "digitally" on their frequencies, but without the logos of the channels themselves. The channels have announced their intention to sue if the situation is not resolved.

A little later, two important explanatory comments appeared. The first came from the Secretary of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine Oleksiy Danilov. [In response to the question from the BBC](#), he said that no one turned off the channels — you can continue to watch them on YouTube, satellite, and cable. "We have a decision of the National Security Council, which states that national channels should participate in the national marathon," said Danilov.

The second explanation came from Mykhailo Podoliak, the adviser to the head of the President's Office, a member of the Ukrainian delegation at the negotiations with Russia, and an informal curator of information policies. In [an interview with the Lb Live channel](#), Podolyak called the "narcissism of Petro Porshenko" the reason for the shutdown of his channels. "This person is in love with himself and the indirect owner of the channels, I don't really understand why, during the war, this narcissism, his narratives should be sold in this way within the framework of a single information package," said Podolyak on May 31.

HOW THE WORK OF OTHER MEDIA HAS CHANGED

According to the data from the National Council for Television and Radio Broadcasting, as of May 27, 2022, at least 214 broadcasters, online and print media (national, regional, and local) have suspended their activities in whole or in part due to hostilities and occupation. These are the media from the Zaporizhia, Kherson, Kharkiv, Kyiv, Donetsk, Mykolaiv, Sumy, Luhansk, and Chernihiv regions. Some of them were captured by the occupiers, some were looted, transferred to rebroadcast Russian channels.

But some simply lost the possibility of independent existence. With the beginning of the great invasion, the advertising market, which provided resources for many mass media, especially small regional ones, practically ceased to exist. Therefore, it became impossible to make a profit from advertising. It hit independent online media particularly hard.

I can confirm the latter situation by the example of my own mass media - Lb.ua. Our revenue has declined by over 40%, which has forced us to adopt a number of changes, including downsizing and firing personnel. Another important source of income for the same electronic mass media was fundraising campaigns, within the framework of which readers' funds were attracted. In the case of Lb.ua, earnings from fundraising were directed to developing new sections, such as "Gastronomy," which was launched in December 2021 (in addition to the "News", "Politics", "Economy", "World", " Society", "Culture", "Sports", which have been operating for 13 years, since the first day of the publication), and "Religion," which was planned to be launched in February 2022.

Printed mass media faced their own difficulties. Before the big invasion, 90% of the paper was imported from Russia and Belarus. Currently, Poland, Belgium, and Finland became the main suppliers. As a result, paper prices have increased significantly due to logistical difficulties. In addition, it has become practically impossible to maintain the entire production chain, including printing, deliveries, distribution. A number of newspapers and magazines have closed (the exact number is unknown), including one of the oldest Ukrainian [newspapers, Den'](#) (published in print since 1996).

As for radio, "Ukrainian Radio" remains the only broadcaster available throughout Ukraine. It plays a very important role in the settlements under occupation. Often without electricity and

communication, Ukrainians still can listen to the "Ukrainian Radio", which speaks on medium waves and often remains the only source of at least some information.

KILLED AND INJURED JOURNALISTS

During four months of full-scale war, the Russian Federation committed 413 crimes against journalists and the media in Ukraine. These are the [monitoring data of the Institute of Mass Information](#). As of June 24, 2022, the Russians killed a total of 33 journalists, including:

- 8 during the performance of professional duties (three Ukrainians and five foreigners);
- 13 media workers died as combatants who joined the ranks of the Armed Forces;
- 12 were killed during shelling (including in Mariupol);
- 14 journalists were injured (from light concussion to amputation of limbs)
- at least 15 journalists have gone missing (journalist Dmytro Hylyuk, who disappeared in the beginning of March in the village of Kozarovichy near Kyiv and other 14 journalists from Mariupol).

One of the saddest and publicly known is the story of the death of the photojournalist, documentarian Maksym Levin. He was a full-time employee of Lb.ua for more than 10 years, and also worked with the Reuters, BBC, TRT World, Associated Press, and Hromadske agencies. His photos were published by Wall Street Journal, TIME, Breaking news Poland, EU AGENDA, World news, etc.

He disappeared in the village of Moschun near Kyiv while working as a photographer on March 13, 2022. According to [the official investigation of the](#) "Reporters without Borders" regarding the death of Levin and his friend Oleksiy Chernyshov, who was with him, they were both killed by the Russians. Maxim, with a high degree of probability, was tortured before his death. He and Oleksiy, most likely, were burned alive. At the same time, Maxim was in civilian clothes, without weapons, and had a camera with him.

Since the war is not yet over, it is clear that the list of journalists killed and injured as a result of large-scale hostilities is not final.

There are numerous testimonies (unfortunately, it is not possible to confirm them officially) that on the occupied territories, the occupiers act according to specially compiled black lists. They kidnap journalists, activists, politicians, and soldiers. In the combat zone, the rule "do not shoot at medics and journalists" does not apply in this war either.

WHAT IS THE JOURNALISM EDUCATION SYSTEM IN UKRAINE?

46 higher education institutions in Ukraine have faculties or departments of journalism. They include, for example:

- The Institute of Journalism of Taras Shevchenko Kyiv National University
- Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv (Department of Journalism)
- National University "Ostroh Academy" (city of Ostrog, Rivne Region), Department of Journalism
- Zaporizhzhia National University (Department of Journalism)
- Uzhhorod National University (Department of Journalism).

There are bachelor's and master's programs in journalism. After 2014, the number of courses on military journalism increased, but this phenomenon is not widespread. It can be definitely

stated that Ukrainian journalists lack thorough knowledge of the specifics of their work, such as safety rules, using special vocabulary, etc. during a large-scale war on the territory of their own country. All this knowledge is acquired in practice.

There are no clear statistics on how many representatives of the national mass media have a professional education. It is considered to be desirable, but not mandatory. Media workers with diplomas in philology, political science, history, etc. are often to be found in the profession. Some take special preparatory courses (and) or "summer schools" that are periodically organized at large editorial offices, including in the regions.

On May 9, 2022, [the Pulitzer Prize Board announced this year's award winners](#) Ukrainian journalists won a special award - Special Citation.

THE RICHEST UKRAINIAN, RINAT AKHMETOV IS LEAVING THE MEDIA BUSINESS

Already after this report was written and prepared for publication, it became known about significant changes in the media market of Ukraine.

On July 11, one of the richest Ukrainian businessmen, [Rinat Akhmetov, announced the "forced exit" of his investment company SCM from the media business.](#)

Akhmetov's media business is "Ukraine Media Group," which includes 11 TV channels (the largest of them are "Ukraine" and "Ukraine 24"), online, print media, and even the Ukrainian version of Vogue magazine. In total, about 4 thousand people worked in the holding.

At the end of 2020, the "Ukraine" channel became the most popular in the region with a rating of 13.4% of all TV viewers (rating measurement stopped after February 24, so the data is currently unknown).

The compulsion, according to the businessman, was due to the so-called "anti-oligarchic law" (adopted by the parliament in September 2021; it is mandatory for Ukraine's accession to the EU), which is now in full force. On June 30, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy by his decree put into effect the Decision of the National Security and Defense Council on the creation of the so-called "register of oligarchs." According to Oleksiy Danilov, the Secretary of the National Security Council, the first names were to be entered in the "register" in the near future.

According to the law, a citizen who meets three of the four following main criteria can be recognized as an oligarch:

- participates in political life;
- has significant influence on mass media;
- is the owner of a monopoly;
- has assets worth more than 1 million subsistence minimums (about UAH 2.5 billion).

A person who is in the "oligarch register" is prohibited from financing political activities and political parties, participating in "large privatization," and must also submit a special declaration.

So, what are the **real reasons** for Akhmetov's exit from the media business? After all, this decision was completely unexpected by the employees of the media holding (the mentioned 4,000 people lost their jobs at the height of the war), by the market in general, and – especially – by the authorities.

1. According to the Minister of Justice Denys Malyuska, currently Akhmetov "has passed the two criteria for recognition as an oligarch." First, he divested himself of his media assets. Secondly, his business partner Vadym Novynskyi stepped down as the People's Deputy. "This removed Mr. Akhmetov's direct connection with the parliament," Malyuska explained.
2. Significant cost savings. All TV channels of "Media Group Ukraine" were subsidized. [According to Ukrainian Forbes](#), with the beginning of the great invasion, Rinat Akhmetov lost 9.5 billion dollars (at the same time, he retained the status of the richest person in the country with the capital of 4.2 billion). According to the data from the statement of the SCM company, the total amount of investments in the media holding exceeded 1.5 billion US dollars. According to Forbes, [the media business can cost Akhmetov at least 100-150 million dollars a year](#).
3. According to the statement of the representatives of the investment company SCM, the exit from the media business means, first of all, the return of television broadcasting licenses to the state. What the state will do with these licenses is its business (in fact, they were revoked).
4. It is important to understand that in the situation when all the leading channels broadcast the same content around the clock - the National Telethon "Edyny Novyni", licenses are not of much value. The commercial channels involved in the telethon produce its content at their own expense (that is, at the expense of the owner) and do not have the opportunity to mix commercial advertising on the air to at least somehow cover the costs. According to official Kyiv statements, the "National Marathon" will work until the end of the martial law regime (during which the state, among other things, has the right to introduce military censorship). How long it will last is currently unknown. Until the end of martial law, it is also forbidden to hold elections, that is, there is currently no political competition in the country.
5. The "refusal of licenses" does not mean the transfer to the state also of equipment, premises and other assets – all this is private property. So Akhmetov's statement does not mean that 11 TV channels will change their owner and the state will simply become their owner. First, it contradicts Ukrainian laws. Secondly, the state is simply unable to maintain such a large number of subsidized channels at the expense of taxpayers.

What will be the consequences of all this?

Currently, the state has a de facto monopoly on television broadcasting through the National Telethon "Edyny Novyni." TV channels conditionally close to Petro Poroshenko were excluded from it. The media group of Rinat Akhmetov ceased to exist. According to a number of media experts, the further fate of the Dmytro Firtash and Serhiy Lvovochkin's media group (its flagship is the "Inter" TV channel) is also in question.

The reasons are the same: too high costs; the owners' loss of their former political weight (being under American sanctions, Dmytro Firtash has been living in Vienna since a long time ago; Serhii Lyovochkin was one of the leaders of the now-banned pro-Russian party "Opposition Bloc", so currently he has lost his influence); the actual absence of political competition, and the unclear dates for the next elections.

Legally, the exit from the media business is formalized in such a way that, if necessary, it can be restored. This includes the possibility of its relocation outside the country, for example in Poland.