JOURNALISM IN CONDITIONS OF ARMED CONFLICT:

MEDIA PRACTICES, TRUST, AND INTERPRETIVE FRACTURES IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

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Editorial Note

This article was first published in the journal *Interview Ukraine*, No. **4-2022** (April 2022), as an analytical reporter-style article devoted to the transformation of journalism and the media environment under conditions of the armed conflict between the Russian Federation and Ukraine, as well as the associated structural changes in public communication and trust.

In 2022, the editorial board decided to republish the article in the *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Research*, **Volume 3, Issue 2 (2022)**, due to its pronounced interdisciplinary character and analytical significance for research in media studies, political communication, and sociology.

Upon republication:

- the content of the article was not subjected to substantive changes;

- the structure and argumentation were preserved in the author's original version;

- the material is presented as an **author-archived version** in order to ensure academic accessibility and international citation.

Abstract

The article analyzes the transformation of journalism under conditions of full-scale armed conflict and radical polarization of the public sphere. It examines changes in media practices in a situation where traditional professional standards function under conditions of high threat, informational pressure, and accelerated erosion of trust between different segments of the audience.

Special attention is given to the role of the journalist under conditions of war, the transformation of the concept of neutrality, and the structural limitations of analytical journalism in a conflict-driven media environment. The changes under consideration are interpreted not as a temporary anomaly, but as a stable shift in the logic of media functioning and public communication.

Keywords

journalism; armed conflict; Ukraine; Russian Federation; media practices; trust; interpretive conflict; public sphere; analytical journalism.

Introduction

April 2022 marks a situation in which the armed conflict between the Russian Federation and Ukraine had already acquired the character of a full-scale confrontation affecting not only the military and humanitarian spheres, but also the fundamental foundations of public communication. For journalism, this meant a transition into a state of high uncertainty, in which the information field becomes part of the conflict, and media practices become elements of symbolic and political confrontation.

Under conditions of war, media lose the characteristics of relative stability. Agenda-setting, terminology, publication priorities, and permissible forms of interpretation begin to be determined not only by professional standards, but also by factors of security, public mobilization, international legitimation, and moral polarization. Any media text, in addition to its informative function, potentially performs the functions of testimony, argument, and instrument of influence.

The purpose of this article is to analyze how armed conflict affects the structure of journalistic practices, transforms the concept of professional responsibility, and changes the mechanisms of trust in the public sphere.

1. Armed Conflict as the Structural Context of Media Transformation

The armed conflict between the Russian Federation and Ukraine in 2022 should be considered not only as a military and political event, but also as a **structural factor** in the transformation of the media system. Unlike local crises or short-term escalations, this conflict affects the foundations of public communication and redistributes the functions of media within society.

Under conditions of war:

- information acquires the status of a resource of strategic significance;

- the media space becomes an arena of symbolic confrontation;

- the boundaries between journalism, strategic communication, and information security become blurred.

Journalism operates in an environment where the stakes of each message increase, competition of interpretations intensifies, and trust emerges as a limited and politically significant resource.

1.1. The Destruction of the Assumption of a "Peaceful Media Context"

Most professional standards of journalism were historically formed under conditions of relative peace, when the public sphere allowed for pluralism of interpretations without a direct threat to the physical safety of participants in communication. Armed conflict destroys this assumption and shifts informational messages into a mode of heightened political and psychological significance.

Armed conflict leads to the loss of a key premise upon which a significant part of journalistic standards was built—the premise of a peaceful media context. Under conditions of war, an informational message ceases to be a neutral element of public exchange and begins to be perceived as a potential factor influencing security, the moral condition of society, and international perceptions of events.

Journalism finds itself in a situation where:

- publication may have direct or indirect consequences for the course of the conflict;

- dissemination of information is evaluated in terms of potential harm;

- the traditional principle of "public interest" requires reconsideration under conditions of threat to human life.

This results in a structural change in the logic of media production, in which professional standards function under a regime of constant limitation and choice between competing forms of responsibility.

1.2. The Media Space as Part of Military and Political Confrontation

Under conditions of full-scale armed conflict, the media space ceases to be a secondary reflection of events. It becomes an independent level of confrontation, alongside the military, diplomatic, and economic dimensions.

Informational messages are used:

- to legitimize the actions of the parties to the conflict;
- to form domestic and international public support;
- to fix interpretations that claim the status of historical testimony.

Journalistic texts, visual materials, and analytical publications are incorporated into processes of symbolic and political confrontation. As a result, not only factual accuracy but also the interpretive context in which information circulates gains increased significance.

1.3. The Normalization of a State of Emergency in Media Practices

Armed conflict leads to the normalization of a state of emergency within journalistic activity. Practices that were previously perceived as exceptional gradually become routine.

Such practices include:

- restriction of access to sources of information;
- accelerated publication of data under conditions of incomplete verification;
- narrowing of the spectrum of permissible interpretations;
- prioritization of operational speed over analytical completeness.

This normalization produces a stable shift in the media environment, in which journalism functions not in a mode of temporary crisis, but under conditions of prolonged tension and a constant deficit of time, resources, and trust.

1.4. Changes in Public Demand for Journalism Under Conditions of War

Armed conflict significantly transforms public demand for journalism. Audiences expect from media not only the provision of information, but also the performance of functions of symbolic support and moral orientation.

Under conditions of war, demand increases for:

- confirmation of collective identity;
- clear delineation between "one's own" and "the other";
- interpretive certainty.

This intensifies pressure on journalists and editorial offices, reducing the space for analytical uncertainty and complex, multi-layered explanations. Journalism faces the need to balance professional reflection with expectations of a mobilizational character.

1.5. The Significance of the Wartime Context for Further Analysis

Considering armed conflict as the structural context of media transformation makes it possible to explain:

- the transformation of the concept of professional neutrality;

- changes in the role of the journalist in the public sphere;

- the systemic nature of the crisis of trust in media;

- the structural limitations of analytical journalism.

Thus, the armed conflict between the Russian Federation and Ukraine functions not as an external background, but as a **key factor** determining the logic of journalism's operation in 2022 and shaping new professional and institutional frameworks of media activity.

2. The Journalist Between Professional Responsibility and Wartime Reality

If Chapter 1 establishes armed conflict as the structural context of media transformation, Chapter 2 focuses on changes in the professional position of the journalist. Under conditions of war, individual journalistic decisions acquire increased significance, as they relate not only to professional standards, but also to issues of security, trust, and social resilience.

The journalist finds themselves in a situation where professional activity is carried out in a space of heightened moral and political tension, and the boundaries of permissible professional action become fluid and context-dependent.

2.1. Professional Responsibility Under Conditions of Armed Conflict

Under conditions of war, the concept of professional responsibility expands and becomes more complex. Journalistic responsibility includes not only obligations to the audience and the professional community, but also an awareness of the potential consequences of publication for society as a whole.

The journalist is compelled to take into account:

- the potential harm resulting from the dissemination of information;

- the impact of publications on the safety of individuals and groups;

- consequences for social stability and trust.

This leads to a situation in which classical norms of journalism require adaptation to conditions of armed conflict without their complete negation.

2.2. The Limitation of Neutrality as a Professional Principle

Armed conflict calls into question the possibility of preserving neutrality in its classical sense. Under conditions of existential threat to the state and society, a neutral position may be perceived as moral evasiveness or as a refusal of civic responsibility.

This does not imply an automatic rejection of professional standards, but leads to a rethinking of how neutrality may be realized under conditions of war—not as the absence of position, but as disciplined analytical integrity.

2.3. Contextual Pressure and the Personalization of Journalistic Responsibility

Under conditions of armed conflict, the personalization of journalistic responsibility intensifies. Individual journalists become publicly identifiable figures whose publications and statements are evaluated not only by their content, but also by their perceived position.

This intensifies:

- the risk of reputational attacks;

- pressure from audiences;

- the vulnerability of the journalist as a professional subject.

As a result, journalistic activity increasingly takes place in a mode of individual risk, which necessitates new forms of professional support and institutional protection.

2.4. The Boundaries of Permissible Interpretation of War

Under conditions of war, new boundaries emerge regarding what is permissible in journalistic interpretation of events. These boundaries are formed at the intersection of:

- professional ethics;

- security considerations;

- public expectations;

- legal restrictions.

Journalism is compelled to operate in a space of incomplete data, contradictory sources, and restricted access to information, which makes interpretive responsibility a central element of professional practice.

2.5. Conclusions to Chapter 2

Armed conflict transforms the professional position of the journalist, shifting their activity into a mode of heightened responsibility and risk. Journalism operates under conditions in

which each professional decision is correlated with a broader context of social and political vulnerability.

Awareness of these limitations and conditions is necessary for understanding subsequent transformations of media practices and the logic of trust in the public sphere.

3. Media Trust and Interpretive Fractures Under Conditions of War

The armed conflict between the Russian Federation and Ukraine in 2022 led to a qualitative transformation of the mechanisms through which media trust is formed. Trust in the media environment ceased to function as a universal characteristic of a source's reputation and acquired a fragmented, asymmetric, and context-dependent nature.

Under conditions of war, trust becomes not so much the result of information verification as the consequence of an identificational choice. Media outlets begin to be perceived as elements of symbolic belonging rather than as neutral intermediaries between events and audiences.

3.1. The Shift from Institutional to Identity-Based Trust

Prior to the onset of full-scale armed conflict, trust in media largely relied on institutional parameters:

- the reputation of editorial offices;

- professional standards;

- publication history;

- transparency of sources.

Under conditions of war, a shift toward identity-based trust is observed, in which the decisive factor is not the method of media work, but the perceived value position of the source. Audiences tend to trust those media outlets that confirm their basic perceptions of the conflict, the nature of threat, and collective identity.

An illustrative example is a situation in which the same report on military actions is assessed as reliable or unreliable depending on whether the source is perceived as "one's own" or "alien," regardless of the quality of verification.

3.2. Interpretive Fractures as a Structural Rather Than Temporary Phenomenon

Interpretive fractures in the media space under conditions of war are not a side effect of informational chaos. They are formed as a stable structural phenomenon caused by the divergence of fundamental interpretive frameworks.

The same events—

- military strikes,

- humanitarian corridors,

- diplomatic statements,

- economic sanctions—

receive fundamentally different interpretations depending on the media environment and the audience. These interpretations do not enter into dialogue, as they are based on different sets of assumptions, values, and symbolic reference points.

3.3. An Example of Interpretive Divergence: Facts and Frames

A characteristic feature of the wartime media environment is a situation in which factual information coincides, while interpretive frames differ radically.

For example:

- the same fact of infrastructure destruction may be interpreted as:

    o a deliberate war crime;

    o an inevitable consequence of hostilities;

    o the result of actions by the opposing side.

In each case, the same visual or textual evidence is used; however, meaning is formed not by the facts themselves, but by the interpretive frame within which they are placed.

3.4. Algorithmic Amplification of Interpretive Fractures

Digital platforms intensify interpretive fractures through algorithmic mechanisms of content distribution. Algorithms prioritize:

- emotionally saturated messages;

- content that confirms existing views;

- materials that provoke strong reactions.

Under conditions of war, this leads to audiences encountering alternative interpretations less frequently and receiving confirmation of their own beliefs more often. As a result, media trust becomes consolidated within closed informational circuits.

3.5. Visual Images as a Factor of Trust and Distrust

War intensifies the role of visual images as sources of trust. Photographs and video materials are perceived as direct evidence of reality, even in the absence of contextual information.

At the same time, visual content becomes the object of the greatest degree of interpretive manipulation:

- identical images are used in different contexts;

- visual fragments are removed from their temporal and spatial frames;

- emotional reaction replaces analytical comprehension.

As a result, visual trust often proves more vulnerable than textual trust, as it relies on the effect of immediate presence.

3.6. The Verification Crisis Under Conditions of an Accelerated Information Cycle

Armed conflict radically complicates verification processes. Access to locations is restricted, sources of information are contradictory, and pressure for rapid publication increases.

An illustrative situation arises when:

- information is published with the qualifier "according to preliminary data";

- subsequent clarifications do not receive comparable attention;

- the initial version becomes fixed in mass perception.

This produces long-term interpretive consequences even when factual data are later clarified or refuted.

3.7. The Role of Language and Terminology in the Formation of Trust

Under conditions of war, journalistic language acquires critical importance. The choice of terminology—

- "shelling" / "strike,"

- "evacuation" / "relocation,"

- "occupation" / "control"—

becomes not merely a stylistic decision, but a marker of interpretive position. For part of the audience, terminology serves as the primary criterion of trust or distrust toward a journalistic text.

3.8. Trust as a Moral and Emotional Resource

Media trust under conditions of war acquires a moral dimension. Support for certain information sources is interpreted as an expression of solidarity, while critical distancing is perceived as a form of disloyalty.

This limits the space for analytical uncertainty and reduces tolerance for complex or multi-layered explanations.

3.9. Analytical Journalism Between Trust and Vulnerability

Analytical journalism under conditions of war occupies an ambivalent position. On the one hand, it is capable of:

- identifying interpretive mechanisms;

- reducing emotional polarization;

- forming more stable forms of trust.

On the other hand, the analytical approach becomes vulnerable:

- due to time constraints;

- due to expectations of moral certainty;

- due to pressure from accelerated media cycles.

3.10. Conclusions to Chapter 3

Chapter 3 demonstrates that media trust under conditions of armed conflict ceases to be a universal category and is transformed into a fragmented, identity-based resource. Interpretive fractures are formed not as temporary distortions, but as a stable characteristic of the conflict-driven media environment.

Awareness of these mechanisms is a necessary condition for further analysis of the ethical, institutional, and professional constraints of journalism under conditions of war.

4. Ethical and Institutional Constraints of Journalism Under Conditions of Armed Conflict

Armed conflict radically transforms not only the content of journalistic work, but also the institutional foundations of the profession. Journalism finds itself in a situation in which traditional ethical norms and organizational models continue to be declared, yet their practical implementation encounters systemic constraints caused by the conditions of war.

Unlike peacetime, when professional ethics functions as a relatively stable normative framework, under conditions of armed conflict it acquires the character of a **context-dependent practice**, constantly correlated with risks, threats, and public expectations.

4.1. The Transformation of Journalistic Ethics Under Conditions of Existential Threat

Armed conflict places journalistic activity in a mode of existential threat, in which information ceases to be exclusively an object of professional processing and becomes a factor potentially affecting the security of society and the state.

Under such conditions, classical ethical principles—objectivity, balance of opinions, and equal distance from the parties to the conflict—encounter limitations caused by:

- the risk of unintended harm;

- the threat of disinformation and psychological impact;

- the necessity of preventing panic and destabilization.

Ethics ceases to function as a universal set of rules and begins to operate as a practice of situational choice, in which each decision requires an assessment of possible consequences.

4.2. Self-Censorship as an Institutionally Conditioned Mechanism

One of the most significant ethical consequences of war is the intensification of self-censorship. Under conditions of armed conflict, self-censorship cannot be regarded solely as an individual journalist's refusal to exercise professional courage. It is formed as an **institutionally conditioned mechanism of adaptation**.

Journalists and editorial offices consciously limit:

- the range of topics;

- the degree of detail;

- formulations and terminology;

- the circle of sources,

based on considerations of security, legal risks, threats of reputational attacks, and pressure from various actors. Self-censorship becomes a means of preserving the functioning of media structures, while simultaneously leading to a narrowing of public discourse.

4.3. Economic Pressure and the Vulnerability of Media Structures Under Conditions of War

Armed conflict exacerbates economic instability within the media sector. The loss of advertising markets, reduction of funding, and rising costs create a situation in which editorial offices are compelled to make decisions under conditions of constant resource deficit.

Economic pressure manifests in:

- the reduction of analytical and investigative formats;

- increased dependence on external donors or platforms;

- orientation toward content with high engagement metrics.

This leads to an institutional shift in priorities, in which long-term analysis gives way to operational and emotionally saturated materials.

4.4. The Blurring of Boundaries Between Journalism and Strategic Communication

Under conditions of war, the boundaries between journalism, state communication, and strategic information practices become less distinct. Media outlets are increasingly involved in processes of:

- informational mobilization;
- formation of international legitimation;
- support of public morale.

This blurring of boundaries generates ethical tension, as journalism simultaneously maintains claims to analytical autonomy while becoming embedded within a broader system of communicative confrontation.

4.5. Institutional Vulnerability of Editorial Offices and the Personalization of Responsibility

Armed conflict intensifies the institutional vulnerability of editorial offices. Under conditions of pressure, limited resources, and accelerated production cycles, responsibility is increasingly personalized and transferred to individual journalists.

This manifests in:

- the growth of public visibility of individual authors;
- an increase in individual risks;
- the weakening of collective protection mechanisms.

Editorial offices find themselves in a situation where institutional support is not always sufficient to compensate for the individual vulnerability of journalists.

4.6. Restrictions on Access to Information and Source Asymmetry

Under conditions of war, access to information becomes fragmented and asymmetric. Restrictions on movement, military secrecy, and security threats complicate independent verification of data.

Journalism is compelled to work with:

- official sources;

- fragmentary testimonies;

- visual materials from open sources.

This increases dependence on a limited range of sources and raises the risk of interpretive distortions.

4.7. Ethical Dilemmas of Visual Journalism Under Conditions of War

Visual journalism occupies a special place in the conflict-driven media environment. Photographs and video materials possess a high degree of impact; however, their use is associated with serious ethical dilemmas:

- the risk of secondary victimization;

- the manipulative potential of visual images;

- the loss of context during repeated dissemination.

Editorial offices are forced to balance the necessity of bearing witness with the risk of exploiting suffering.

4.8. Professional Solidarity and Institutional Forms of Protection

Under conditions of armed conflict, the importance of professional solidarity increases. Collective forms of support—editorial protocols, legal assistance, and professional associations—become a key factor in the sustainability of journalism.

The absence of such mechanisms intensifies:

- the effects of self-censorship;

- the individualization of pressure;

- professional burnout.

Solidarity acquires not only ethical, but also institutional significance.

4.9. Analytical Journalism as a Form of Ethical Resistance

Under conditions of war, analytical journalism performs the function of **ethical resistance to simplification**. It does not deny the conflict-driven reality, but seeks to:

- preserve contextualization;

- avoid reduction of complex processes;

- document long-term consequences of events.

However, the analytical approach requires time, resources, and audience trust, which makes it particularly vulnerable in a wartime media environment.

4.10. Conclusions to Chapter 4

Chapter 4 demonstrates that the ethical and institutional constraints of journalism under conditions of armed conflict are structural in nature. They do not represent a temporary deviation, but form a new professional reality in which journalism is compelled to reconsider its functions, boundaries, and forms of responsibility.

Awareness of these constraints is a necessary condition for understanding further transformations of analytical journalism and its role in the public sphere under conditions of war.

5. Analytical Journalism as a Form of Public Responsibility Under Conditions of War

Under conditions of armed conflict, analytical journalism acquires particular significance as a form of public responsibility. Unlike news-oriented and reactive formats focused on immediate reporting, the analytical approach is aimed at identifying structural relationships, contexts, and long-term consequences of ongoing events. In a wartime media environment, this function becomes not auxiliary, but system-forming.

Analytical journalism does not eliminate interpretive conflict and does not claim to neutralize polarization. Its task consists in reducing the level of semantic reduction characteristic of mobilizational and emotionally saturated media practices and in preserving space for rational comprehension.

5.1. Analysis and the Limits of Operational Speed Under Conditions of War

Armed conflict radically accelerates information cycles. The speed of publication becomes the dominant criterion of media effectiveness, inevitably reducing opportunities for verification, comparison of sources, and contextualization.

Analytical journalism operates within a different temporal logic, which presupposes:

- postponement of publication in order to уточнить data;

- accumulation of empirical material;

- comparison of alternative interpretations;

- refusal of premature conclusions.

Under conditions of war, this logic comes into conflict with audience expectations and editorial demands; however, it is precisely this logic that allows the avoidance of the fixation of simplified and erroneous interpretations.

5.2. The Explanatory Function of Analytical Journalism

In a conflict-driven media environment, explanation becomes a key function of journalism. Audiences face not a lack of information, but its excess and fragmentation. Analytical journalism responds to this challenge by structuring meanings and identifying causal relationships.

The explanatory function manifests itself in:

- differentiation between facts and interpretations;

- identification of the logic of actors' actions;

- analysis of institutional and historical preconditions;

- assessment of probable scenarios of further development.

Such a form of work reduces public perception's dependence on emotional impulses and contributes to the formation of a more stable understanding of events.

5.3. Analysis and Moral Uncertainty

Under conditions of war, the public sphere is characterized by a high degree of moral certainty and intolerance toward ambiguity. Analytical journalism, by contrast, often works with uncertainty, probabilities, and competing explanations.

This creates tension between:

- public demand for clear evaluations; and

- the professional necessity of analytical caution.

The public responsibility of analytical journalism consists not in imposing moral conclusions, but in honestly delineating the boundaries of knowledge and interpretation. Such an approach may be perceived as insufficiently mobilizational; however, it preserves space for long-term public dialogue.

5.4. Analytical Journalism and Trust Under Conditions of Fragmentation

Under conditions of war, trust in media becomes fragmented and identity-based. Analytical journalism does not aim at the immediate restoration of universal trust, which is practically unattainable in a conflict-driven environment.

Its contribution lies in the formation of **stable islands of trust** based on:

- reproducibility of analytical procedures;

- transparency of methodology;

- consistency of argumentation;

- refusal of manipulative simplifications.

Such trust forms slowly, but demonstrates greater stability in the long term.

5.5. The Limits of Analytical Journalism Under Conditions of Armed Conflict

Despite its significance, analytical journalism faces objective limitations:

- shortage of time and resources;

- restricted access to information;

- pressure of editorial and platform-driven logics;

- reduced audience tolerance for complex explanations.

Analytical journalism is unable to replace operational formats, nor can it function in isolation from the media system as a whole. Its role lies not in domination, but in preserving the analytical dimension of public discourse.

5.6. Analytical Journalism as a Form of Professional Resilience

Under conditions of war, analytical journalism performs the function of professional resilience. It enables journalism to:

- maintain discipline of thought;

- resist the reduction of complex processes;

- document long-term consequences of the conflict;

- record events outside the framework of the current mobilizational agenda.

In this sense, analytical journalism functions not only as a genre, but also as a form of professional self-preservation.

5.7. Conclusions to Chapter 5

Chapter 5 demonstrates that analytical journalism under conditions of armed conflict constitutes a key form of public responsibility. It does not eliminate polarization and does not cancel conflict, but creates conditions for a more meaningful perception of reality.

Preservation of the analytical dimension within journalism becomes one of the few mechanisms capable of counteracting the total reduction of public discourse under conditions of war.

Conclusion

The second article records a qualitative shift in the functioning of journalism that occurred under conditions of the full-scale armed conflict between the Russian Federation and Ukraine in 2022. War transforms journalism not only at the level of topics and formats, but also at the level of professional foundations, institutional structures, and mechanisms of trust.

The conducted analysis allows the following conclusions to be drawn:

- armed conflict functions as a structural factor of media transformation rather than a temporary anomaly;

- media trust acquires a fragmented and identity-based character;

- interpretive fractures become a stable characteristic of the public sphere;

- ethical and institutional constraints on journalism intensify and become more complex;

- analytical journalism retains critical importance as a form of public and professional responsibility.

Under conditions of war, journalism operates within a space of heightened vulnerability and uncertainty. Its public significance is determined not by the ability to preserve the illusion of neutrality, but by the capacity to maintain analytical discipline, contextualization, and responsibility toward society.

Thus, analytical journalism in a conflict-driven media environment becomes not only an instrument of understanding, but also a form of preserving the professional and public meaning of journalistic activity under conditions of armed conflict.

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