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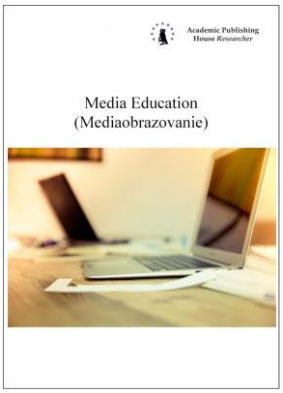

Theoretical Model and Technology of Anti-Russian Propaganda in Internet Communications of Modern Ukraine within the Framework of Various Student Groups' Media Literacy Education

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Abstract

In this article, as a result of content analysis, it is concluded that anti-Russian propaganda in the Internet communications of modern Ukraine in the media education framework of various groups of the population has become a reaction of the Ukrainian government in the field of education, culture, mass communications to the main political, ideological vectors of the Ukrainian state policy having been formed since 2014, and the conflict between Ukraine and Russia. Internet communications were chosen as the field of the anti-Russian media war as the most popular sources of information. Thus, the very process of media education, the positive impact of which is in demand all over the world, has become in Ukraine a kind of convenient, "civilized" cover for an anti-Russian media campaign aimed primarily at such target audiences as schoolchildren, students, young adults, and teachers.

Keywords: theoretical model, technology, anti-Russian propaganda, internet, communications, Ukraine, students, media literacy education.

1. Introduction

In our study, we proceed from a problematic situation, indicating contradictions and conflicts of interest arising within the framework of the thematic field of analysis and synthesis of the theoretical model and technology of anti-Russian propaganda in the Internet communications of modern Ukraine in the framework of media education of various groups. It was necessary to answer a challenging question: why and how has media education in modern Ukraine in many ways become an instrument of anti-Russian propaganda?

As a basic hypothesis that needs to be tested in the course of the study, we assume that anti-Russian propaganda in the Internet communications of modern Ukraine incorporated in media education is the reaction of the Ukrainian leadership in the field of education, culture, mass communications to the main political and ideological vectors of the Ukrainian state policy that have been shaped since 2014, and the conflict between Ukraine and Russia. Internet communications were chosen as the field of the anti-Russian media war as obviously the most popular and sought-after sources of information. To test this hypothesis, we have studied and analyzed several hundreds of Ukrainian media texts relating to media education field, posted on various media platforms.

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2. Materials and methods

We carried out: 1) collection of information about the state variables of the research object in a range of sources in order to identify and update the main features of the studied object, reflecting its essence and the most characteristic forms of its connections with the environment; 2) purposefully organized recording of the features of the research object (the process of anti-Russian propaganda in the Internet communications of modern Ukraine in the framework of media education of various groups of the population), the derivation of such features by means of analyzing the model of the studied object and situations where such features are manifested. In accordance with this, we used the following methods: generalization and classification, verification of the hypothesis, comparison (establishing the similarities and differences of certain phenomena in the Internet communications of modern Ukraine, related to the research topic; as a result of this kind of comparison, both special and common in these phenomena); measurements (in particular, the results of measuring the frequency of repetition of certain concepts, statements, fakes, etc. anti-Russian orientation, obtained in the course of content analysis of media texts posted on Ukrainian Internet portals and media education sites); typological method of analysis, taking into account specific types of media agencies, genres of media texts; a method of content analysis of various content-thematic aspects of anti-Russian propaganda media products, contributing to the shaping of certain opinions of the mass audience in its communication with Ukrainian media educational portals and sites, etc.

3. Discussion

In the course of the research, we studied the content of the main Ukrainian Internet portals related to the topic of media education and media literacy:

Академія Української Преси (Academy of Ukrainian Press) http://www.aup.com.ua/

Медіаосвіта та медіаграмотність (Media awareness and media literacy) https://medialiteracy.org.ua/

Медіапсихологія та медіаосвіта (Media psychology and media awareness) http://mediaosvita.org.ua/pro-nas/

Media Sapiens https://ms.detector.media/

Vox Ukraine https://voxukraine.org/

Stop Fake https://www.stopfake.org

Content analysis of all these portals shows that they all contain anti-Russian materials. Meanwhile, the typology of data of Ukrainian media and media education agencies is dominated by public organizations, often supported by Western state and public organizations and/or foundations: United States of America Embassy, USAID (USA), IREX (USA), Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (Germany), Deutsche Welle Akademie (Germany), Friedrich Naumann Stiftung für die Freiheit (Germany), Vidrodzhennya (J. Soros Foundation in Ukraine), etc.

The main genres used by Ukrainian Internet portals related to the topic of media education and media literacy are as follows: news; reports on current events (seminars, conferences related to media and/or media literacy education); review articles; analytical articles; the results of sociological surveys of various groups of the population; the results of checking media information (fact-checking); guidelines; teaching aids; collections of articles; monographs.

The anti-Russian thrust is, to varying degrees, inherent in the materials of all these genres, however, the media educational orientation is more emphasized, of course, in teaching manuals and textbooks.

For instance, the textbook for teachers “Media Literacy and Critical Thinking in Social Science Lessons” (Bakka et al., 2016: 129) uses a photograph of German officers posted in the LiveJournal by an anonymous person as an example of “fact-checking” and exposing “Russian propaganda” (https://ic.pics.livejournal.com/extra_web/28023659/8080/8080_original.jpg).

Indeed, this anonymous person (by the way, he is really not necessarily from Russia) in his blog in LiveJournal erroneously claims that the Ukrainian Nazi Stepan Bandera (1909-1959) is sitting among the Wehrmacht officers in the photo, and this causes indignation of the authors of the textbook “Media literacy and critical thinking in social studies lessons” (Bakka et al., 2016: 129). However, in fact, the authors of the manual use a simple manipulative technique: a post made by an individual blogger, his/her personal opinion is attributed to the official opinion of Russian media agencies, and thus, the authors of the textbook in this case pass off a marginal post of an anonymous blogger for Russian propaganda. Why are they doing this? The text of the textbook

itself (Bakka et al., 2016: 87) gives an unequivocal answer to this question: to create a positive image of Nazi S. Bandera as a fighter against the Bolsheviks for an independent Ukraine.

By the way, the trend of whitewashing Ukrainian Nazis is far from new for the media education movement in Ukraine. Back in 2010, Kiev published the curriculum "Media culture and media education of secondary school students: visual media culture" recommended by the Academic Council of the Institute of Social and Political Psychology of the National Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of Ukraine (protocol No. 10/10 of 4.11.2010) (Cherepovska, 2010), where it is suggested to instill in students patriotism and love for the homeland using the example of the Nazi Roman Shukhevych's life (1907–1950) (Cherepovska, 2010: 109). At a time when even nationalistic groups of Ukrainian researchers do not deny that R.Shukhevych served in the armed units of Nazi Germany until the beginning of 1943 (Lysenko, 2008).

It must be acknowledged that the propaganda of a positive image of the Nazis and, in particular, R. Shukhevych, continues by the Institute of Social and Political Psychology of the National Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of Ukraine today, too. For example, the employee of this organization N. Cherepovska in her textbook "Media educational resources for the development of patriotism and critical thinking", published in 2017, continues to promote the Nazis R. Shukhekvich, S. Bandera and their accomplices as national heroes of Ukraine for the patriotic education and media education of students and youth (Cherepovska, 2017: 117; 135-137).

N. Cherepovska argues that "a talented commander, a well-known cornet general, a true patriot of Ukraine, unconquered Roman Shukhevych, whose personal life was completely dedicated to serving Ukraine" is an appropriate role model of patriotism (Cherepovska, 2017: 135). S. Bandera's legacy is given a similar evaluation in the textbook "Media educational resources for the development of patriotism and critical thinking" (Cherepovska, 2017: 137).

It is worth mentioning that the most radical-minded activists of Ukrainian media education accuse even the President of Ukraine V. Zelensky of pro-Russian propaganda. Thus, O. Kharitonyuk argues that "everything that is happening now in Ukrainian politics and in Ukrainian society as a whole is the result of a planned, wicked and cold-blooded information war on the part of the Russian Federation. Through television programs and series that promote indifference to moral values, Russia, with the help of its agents of influence, is trying to create a different reality for Ukraine. ... One of such TV series is ... a political satire television series filmed in Ukraine ... about the election of a history teacher as the President of Ukraine. The main role of the history teacher in the series is played by Vladimir Zelensky. ... After analyzing all the seasons of the series, we can draw several conclusions: the series is Ukrainophobic, all characters- corrupt officials and politicians almost always end their speech with the words "Glory to Ukraine! " ...; it contains hints that the reforms that have been introduced in Ukraine are ineffective; ... the role of citizens' trust in the institution of parliamentarism, the role of decommunization is being devalued; the role of the European Union and financial assistance to Ukraine is diminished" (Kharitonyuk, 2020: 491-492).

Based on this kind of analysis of the film series *Servant of the People* comedy series, O. Kharitonyuk draws far-reaching conclusions that "we live in a time when information kills us. It is killing our identity, culture, history and national memory. Putin will not stop in the process of destroying the Ukrainian nation until the nation stops this process itself. To maintain critical thinking at all times of toxic content" one requires media literacy and fact-checking (Kharitonyuk, 2020: 491-492).

The article by O. Kharitonyuk is one of many where the main reason for the development of the media education movement in Ukraine is called "Russian aggression" (see, for example: Dorosh, 2014; Koropatnyk, 2017; 2020; Zental, 2020). Although the factor of "aggression" and "occupation" is presented on Ukrainian Internet portals in other contexts as well (Filonenko, 2020; Lazorenko, 2020; Yuksel, 2020, etc.).

For example, M. Dorosh gives a positive answer to her own question: "Is war the finest hour for media education?" alleging that media literacy is necessary precisely in the context of an information war with Russia (Dorosh, 2014). Of course, the article by M. Dorosh and many other Ukrainian authors "for objectivity reasons" contains references to the European experience of media education, to certain documents of the European Union or UNESCO, but all this is a kind of "smokescreen" in order to redirect readers to the slogan in the title of the article.

Similar messages are contained in the textbook “Media Literacy for Librarians” (Zorya et al., 2021: 27) and in other online publications (Collection ..., 2015; 2017; 2020; Emets-Dobronosova, 2014; Naidenova, Dyatel, 2020 and etc.).

One of the most prominent supporters of the transformation of media education in Ukraine into the process of anti-Russian propaganda is M. Koropatnyk, who claims that the “hybrid war” unleashed by Russia against Ukraine, its informational, propagandistic and psychological components, require significant adjustments to the forms and content of media education, especially from the point of view of the critical thinking development, the ability to adequately assess various types of information. ... there are objective reasons for including media education in educational institutions' programs – from preschool to higher and postgraduate education ... with the obligatory consideration of the “hybrid war” factor. They are the basis for defining one of the competencies of the new Ukrainian school, as information-digital, which provides for the development of media and information literacy, and, consequently, qualitatively new, modern approaches in the professional training of educators and researchers” (Koropatnyk, 2020 : 23-24).

M. Koropatnyk believes that it is necessary “to clearly identify the vulnerabilities of Russian propagandists so as to include them in programs with media and information literacy in order to properly inform the population, including about events in critical regions of Ukraine” (Koropatnyk, 2017: 370).

In so doing, the Ukrainian media educator accuses the Ukrainian authorities of the fact that their reaction “to Russian propaganda was not very successful, since it was based on a policy of prohibitions and gave additional trump cards in the hands of Russian propagandists in the West, as well as in working with the population of the occupied territories” (Koropatnyk, 2017: 357), while the "aggressor country” supplied media “fakes and hate speech directed against Ukraine and everything Ukrainian (in particular, such vocabulary as “punishers", “junta”, “fascists” , “Ukrops”, etc.), manipulative interpretation of political processes in Ukraine, coverage of events from only one side, references to anonymous or unverified sources” (Koropatnyk, 2017: 359).

Further on M. Koropatnyk expresses regret that, “considering the problems of correlation of media educational approaches in the coverage of events in Donbass, it is worth paying attention to a number of features of the region, they do not contribute to the state process and lead to negative consequences. First, Eastern Ukraine and Donbass, as its main part, is poorly integrated into all-Ukrainian processes, the population speaks mainly Russian, listens and watches mainly Russian and local channels, reads Russian and local newspapers, has its own local leaders, recognizes Russian and Soviet heroes” (Koropatnyk, 2017: 367).

Ukrainian authorities turned off the broadcast of the main Russian TV channels on their territory, and on March 13, 2020, V. Zelensky signed the law “On complete general secondary education”, which since September of the same year has liquidated Russian-language schools in Ukraine and abolished programs training in the Russian language (Law ..., 2020), thereby depriving millions of citizens of this country to study in their native language.

In addition, in the collection of articles “Cyber socialization” published by the Institute of Social and Political Psychology of the National Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of Ukraine, the expansion of anti-Russian media activities at the state and public levels is noted with appreciation: “On December 2, 2014, the Ministry of Information Policy of Ukraine was created - the central executive body that ensures the formation and implements state policy in the areas of information sovereignty of Ukraine, state foreign broadcasting and information security. With the support of this Ministry, in February 2015, the Information Forces of Ukraine project was created to recruit and mobilize volunteers to actively participate in the confrontation with the anti-Ukrainian side in the hybrid war. The project was joined by Internet users, including bloggers, journalists and volunteers, whose purpose was to track information provocations against Ukraine, the lies of the propaganda in Russian media and the spread of counter-propaganda. Thus, the importance of ensuring information security in Ukraine during a hybrid war was realized at the national political level using certain institutional innovations. ... On February 28, 2017, the Doctrine of Information Security of Ukraine entered into force, the purpose of which is to clarify the foundations for the formation and implementation of state information policy, primarily to counter the destructive information influence of the Russian Federation in the context of the hybrid war unleashed by it. It is important to note that among the priorities of state policy defined in the Doctrine, the prerequisites for the adoption on May 15, 2017 by Decree of the President of Ukraine No. 133/2017 were identified, which led to the blocking of access to a number of Russian

Internet resources in Ukraine, including popular social networks and postal services" (Zental, 2020: 50 -51).

Certainly, a higher level academic/research materials (although often also anti-Russian) are also published in Ukraine, with media analytics built not on straightforward propaganda and counter-propaganda, but on the generalized laws of information wars (see, for example: Pocheptsov, 2015; 2016; 2017, etc.).

Whilst, continually accusing Russia of aggression and war, there have not been attempts on the part of Ukrainian media culture activists and media educators to ask some questions, very important for understanding the policy of the modern Ukrainian leadership: "Why has Ukraine since the overthrow of the President Yanukovych (2014) not severed diplomatic relations with the "aggressor country"?, "Why is Ukraine continuing to transit gas through a pipe coming from Russia from 2014 to the present?", "Why has Ukraine, in spite of repeatedly declaring "European democratic values", since autumn 2020 deprived millions of its Russian-speaking citizens of the right to study in their mother tongue?"

It should be emphasized that these questions are not being raised by media educators from Europe and the United States too (Culver, Grizzle, 2017; European Commission, 2018; Fake news ..., 2018; Giles, 2016; Murrok et al., 2018; NATO, 2016; Silverman, 2015; Singh et al., 2016; Sturhetski, 2018; UNESCO, 2021; Wilson, 2019). By helping Ukraine to develop democracy and media literacy, Western media educators and researchers of media culture are not bothered by the fact that in Ukraine the Nazis (R. Shukhevych and others) have been turned into national heroes and dozens of monuments in their honour were erected all over the country.

4. Results

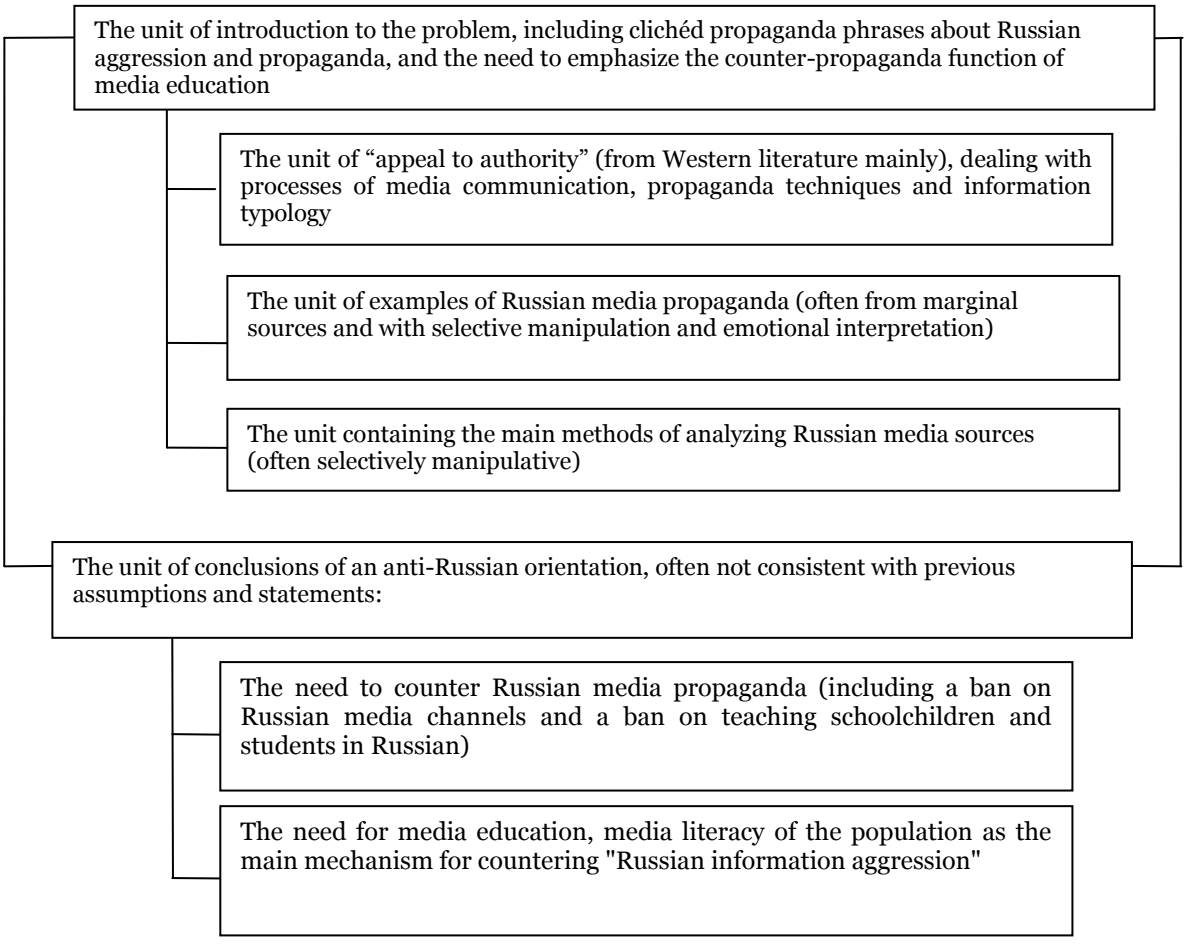

Fig. 1. The basic model of anti-Russian propaganda in the Internet communications of modern Ukraine in the framework of media education for various groups of the population (2014–2021)

The analysis of anti-Russian propaganda technologies in Internet communications in modern Ukraine within the framework of media education for various groups (2014–2021) shows that its basic theoretical model includes the following units:

- a unit of introduction to the problem, including clichéd propaganda phrases about Russian aggression and propaganda, and the need to emphasize the counter-propaganda function of media education;
- a unit of "appeal to authority" (a brief review of literature on media education, media manipulation, information wars with an emphasis on the political positions of the European Union, the United States, the concepts of Western scientists in the field of media culture, media education and political science, UNESCO documents, etc.). Meanwhile, anti-Russian phrases are carefully chosen from a wide range of scientific literature;
- a unit of examples of Russian media propaganda (often from marginal sources and with selective manipulation and emotional interpretation);
- a unit containing the main methods of analyzing Russian media sources (often selectively manipulative);
- a unit of conclusions of an anti-Russian orientation, often in no way arising from the previously cited media examples.

As a result of the analysis of several hundreds sources related to anti-Russian propaganda technologies in Internet communications of modern Ukraine in the framework of media education of various population groups (2014-2021), we have synthesized the following graphically presented theoretical model (Figure 1).

5. Conclusion

The findings of our research have confirmed the hypothesis: 1) on the one hand, anti-Russian propaganda in the Internet communications of modern Ukraine in the framework of Ukrainian citizens' media education has become the reaction of the Ukrainian leadership in the field of education, culture, mass communications to the main political, ideological vectors of the Ukrainian state policy that has developed since 2014 due to the political tension between Ukraine and Russia. Internet communications were chosen as the field of the anti-Russian media war as the most popular and accessible source of information; 2) on the other hand, it should be admitted that the very essence of media education, recognized as means of creatively and wisely engaging with media to promote *equality, intercultural dialogue, peace,* freedom of expression and access to information (https://en.unesco.org/themes/media-and-information-literacy), has become in Ukraine a kind of a convenient "civilized" cover for one-sided, anti-Russian biased media campaign aimed primarily at such target audience groups as schoolchildren, students, young adults, and school teachers.

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