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THE COVERAGE OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE IN ONLINE MEDIA «VIRTUAL POLAND»¹

The aim of the work is to identify the features of the coverage of the war in Ukraine in the online media «Virtual Poland», focusing on the analysis of thematic accents, objectivity and completeness of the presentation of materials, as well as the influence of this media on the formation of public opinion about the war among the Polish audience.

Research methodology. Both theoretical and empirical research methods were used in the research process. The research methodology consisted of several stages. The first stage was a comprehensive review of the literature on the selected topic. This included the analysis of existing studies, articles and reports on the functioning of the media in Poland and the coverage of issues related to Ukraine in them. The next stage was the analysis of empirical data. This method was used as a content analysis of publications about Ukraine in the online media «Virtual Poland».

Results. It turned out that the online media «Virtual Poland» is characterized by excessively sensational headlines, a partial absence of references to primary sources, and a lack of analytical genres. At the same time, regarding the news that related to events in Ukraine, we can also emphasize the lack of interest in them, which was reflected in the limited thematic spectrum and a small number of materials. At the same time, we did not notice any pro-Russian texts. In general, «Virtual Poland» often focuses on the humanitarian aspects of the war, in particular, on the fate of Ukrainian refugees seeking refuge in Poland and in other European countries. The content of the publication is often focused on evoking emotional empathy, which can affect the depth of the analytical approach. Currently this online media actively publishes information on possible negotiations between Ukraine and Russia, covering the position of V. Putin.

Novelty. The novelty of the work is the identified thematic, genre, structural characteristics of materials related to Ukraine in the online media «Virtual Poland».

Practical significance. An analysis of how the Polish media outlet «Virtual Poland» covers the war in Ukraine helps better understanding what techniques, formats and approaches journalists use to inform their audience. This contributes to the development of critical thinking and the ability to assess the quality of journalistic materials.

Keywords: online media, «Virtual Poland», war, Ukraine.

I. Introduction

Formulation of the problem. «Virtual Poland» (Wirtualna Polska, WP) is one of the largest and most influential Internet portals in Poland, which over its long history has become a symbol of the country's modern digital era. Founded in 1995, the portal quickly evolved from the first Polish web directory to a large-scale multimedia space covering news, entertainment, e-mail, thematic blogs and services [12].

Today, *Virtual Poland* is not only an information platform, but also an important player in the Polish media space, influencing public opinion and shaping the country's digital landscape. Due to its multifunctionality and focus on innovation, WP remains a popular resource among millions of users [13].

In this article, we will analyze how *Virtual Poland* has influenced the development of Polish media, what its main features, advantages, and role are in modern society, and also consider how this portal shapes the information environment of Poland in the era of digitalization.

Analysis of recent research and publications. A review of academic sources devoted to the coverage of the war in Ukraine in online media, in particular in «Virtual Poland», reveals a limited number of studies that directly analyze the activities of this online portal. However, there are works that consider the general trends of Polish online media in the coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian war, which can provide valuable context for understanding the role of «Virtual Poland». Researcher L. Chekalenko

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claims that the main topic about Ukraine in Polish mass media was the war in Donbas. However, from the Polish side, fears of being drawn into a military conflict (ATO and JFO) were visible. At the same time, our country is seen as a space for trade and investment, as well as for creating a strong corridor [2, p. 425]. Researcher I. Dobrzahnsky in his work «The Influence of Modern Media on the Formation of Historical Memory of Ukrainians and Poles» noted that news on Polish topics are more represented in the Western regions of Ukraine than in the central ones. At the same time, regional media in Eastern Poland pay more attention to events in the neighboring state. According to the scientist, this is first of all due to territorial proximity, history, culture, and the large number of national minorities in these areas [3, p. 16]. O. Janiszewski in the article «The Problem of the War in Ukraine in the Press and Media of Poland and Ukraine: A Sample Review» provided an overview of the Polish press market in the context of events in Ukraine during 2022. In his article it is noted that «the Polish press (primarily print), as well as the Polish state as a whole at the official level, did not remain aloof from the problems of the Ukrainian people, actively joined the discourse of assistance to Ukraine at the level of biased commenting on events, providing objective facts of the war, the life of refugees, and social communications with Polish citizens» [11, p. 131]. The topic of media coverage issues relevant to Ukrainian refugees in Poland was investigated by A. Baschuk. In particular, she notes that «in order for Ukrainian migrants to receive comprehensive and relevant information about the services they need, there are web resources in the Polish online space that broadcast the content they need for internally displaced persons from Ukraine about the legalization of temporary stay in a foreign country, registration of residence, obtaining housing, educational, medical, social services, provision of food and household goods, the possibility of independent job search, employment and running their own business in Poland» [1, p. 182]. Myroslava Rudyk analyzed some of the most popular Polish media outlets for their coverage of Ukrainian issues and made the conclusions that since the beginning of the full-scale war, all Polish media outlets have been heavily involved in Ukrainian issues, and that the information space has significantly facilitated cooperation and dialogue between Ukraine and Poland. After all, in today's world of information, the media not only publish facts, but also an accurate and truthful interpretation of these facts, calling things by their proper names, and not distancing themselves from the topic behind the veil of so-called objectivity and balance of opinions [9, p. 175]. At the same time, Polish researchers consider the coverage of the war in Ukraine through the prism of formation public opinion in Poland [5; 10].

II. Problem statement and research methods.

The purpose of the article is to find out the features of the coverage of the war in Ukraine in the online media «Virtual Poland», focusing on the analysis of thematic accents, objectivity and completeness of the presentation of materials, as well as the influence of this media on the formation of public opinion about the war among the Polish audience. Within the framework of the set goal, the following tasks are envisaged: to study the thematic content of the materials of «Virtual Poland» dedicated to the war in Ukraine, in particular the key topics (military actions, humanitarian crisis, political consequences, support for Ukraine), to trace how the nature of the publications of «Virtual Poland» has changed from the beginning of the war to the present day, taking into account the evolution of events and the information needs of the audience. Several research methods were used to write the article, allowing for an in-depth study of the specifics of the coverage of the conflict by the Polish media. The main method of collecting empirical data was content analysis. The application of this method allowed the study of specific publications, news and articles related to the war in Ukraine published on online platforms of the Polish media, in particular on the portal «Virtual Poland». A selection of articles for the period from the beginning of the full-scale invasion to the current time provided an opportunity to assess the types of headlines, the context and emotional coloring of the materials, as well as to determine the focus of the coverage of the events. Discourse analysis allowed to learn how Polish media form narrative about the war in Ukraine, as well as through language constructions, images and metaphors are forming perception of conflict. This allows to determine which elements used to create certain images and stereotypes about Ukraine [10, p. 240]. Analysis visual materials (illustrations and photos) allowed us to assess the role of photos, videos and infographics in shaping the image of war in the media. The study of visual elements helps to understand how they support or change emotional perception of the conflict, as well as which images (e.g., violence, destruction, symbols) are used to create certain narratives.

Comparative analysis helped compare, how the war in Ukraine was highlighted early before and after the full-scale invasion in Polish online media. This allows to determine differences or similarities in approaches to coverage was throughout a certain time during which took place certain cultural, political, economic factors events.

III. Results

Presentation of the main research material. The first new website in Poland «Virtual Poland» («Wirtualna Polska») or as it is also called «WP» («WP») appeared in 1995. The web resource was created at the Gdańsk University of Technology by Leszek Bogdanowicz, Marek Borzowski, Jacek Kavaliko and Damian Wozniak. At first it was a complex of websites, and then it was changed into a portal with thematic sections. The site has existed under the current domain since 1998 [4, p. 6].

As of today, the site belongs to «Wirtualna Poland Media SA», which is part of «Wirtualna Poland Holding Company Stock market Group. This is a group of companies operating in the field of mass communication. This union also includes the popular portal «O2» and specialized thematic web resources. Since May 2015, «Wirtualna» Poland Holding» is registered on the Warsaw Stock Exchange [6, p. 147].

Two years ago, the media was accused in collaborating with the Ministry of Justice. In particular, it was about writing materials in support of the ministry under fictitious names and prohibiting any criticism of them. As a result, the editor-in-chief Tomasz Mahala lost his position. At the same time, the company reported that the advertising revenue of the Ministry of Justice and service agencies amounted to less than 1% of the income of «Wirtualna Poland Holding» for the entire 2019 year. After these events, the media presented a new Code of Journalistic Ethics and principles of cooperation between the publishing department and the sales department [7, p. 100].

As for the structure of the materials, first of all, it is important to pay attention to their excessive sensationalism. We can give a few examples: «Gives the green light to Putin». Ukrainians are surprised by the US president's words about a «small invasion»; «Kremlin on Biden's threats: hotheads from Kyiv may perceive this as a signal to retreat in Donbas», «Europe is stoking the fire», «Cuba supports the Russian narrative on Ukraine» and others [13]. In addition, it is worth noting that journalists of the online portal use question headlines very often.

Each material must contain one photo after the first paragraph of text and several keywords. Some publications have screenshots from social networks of various politicians and members of international organizations. All photos have links to the original source. As for informational materials, their size is average – from 5 to 9 paragraphs. However, as a drawback, we can note that when viewing the news, advertisements constantly appear that interfere with reading. More than 4 banners are only presented during a note or interview.

Journalists also divide the text into certain parts. For example, in the article titled «Germany wants to help Poland. It is about the consequences of the conflict in Ukraine» the first three paragraphs refer to a statement by the German Ministry of the Interior. The second part of the text is entitled «A Million of Refugees», and the third – «Violation of international law» [13]. Different items on the topic of the war in Ukraine appeared on his website during the day. However, on February 22, there were only 3 publications, and on February 21, 19, and 18, there was only 1 article.

At the same time, the first mentions about the possibility of war in Ukraine appeared on website of the Virtual Poland on January 18, 2022. At that time, it was an article titled «Russian troops have begun arriving in Belarus. They will practice confronting the «Western forces». This publication was about the beginning of Russian military exercises in Belarus. At the same time, the text says «As the Belarusian Ministry of Defense reported on Tuesday, Russian troops have begun arriving in the country. This is related to the so-called test of the Union State's response forces. Its second stage will be the joint Russian-Belarusian maneuvers «Allied Firmness-2022». The allies will practice confrontation with «Western forces», in particular Poland, as well as Ukraine» [13]. As we can see, already from these words, it was possible to predict how the so-called «Russian military exercises» for Ukraine would end.

More concrete statements on the web resource appeared in February. For example, on February 16, an article appeared under the heading «Will Russia let Ukraine go? «Let's not forget Putin's agents. Journalists took a comment from the former commander of the ground forces, General Waldemar Skrypczak, which stated: «I cautiously put forward the thesis that there will still be a war, but I believe that aggression by Russian services is also possible... The Russians – despite media reports that they are withdrawing their troops to bases – will not give up on destroying and destabilizing Ukraine. They will do this by all possible means. They will do it with the help of special forces, military intelligence, special services, cyber troops, as well as rebels. The goal is one: to destroy the foundations of Ukraine» [13].

Thus, it is obvious that news about events around Ukraine was present in the online media «Virtual Poland» until February 24, 2022. Journalists assessed the situation more from the side of how the possible war could affect Poland. In particular, they paid more attention to what world leaders were talking about and what they would do if Russia attacked Ukraine.

Therefore, it is obvious that in terms of thematic direction, most of the materials were only about how world politicians react to the events taking place. In addition, on the web resource «Virtual Poland» several materials were devoted to the topic of military weapons for Ukraine: «Storm in Germany. «Arms supplies to Ukraine are useless», «Hungary will not send weapons to Ukraine. Orban: we must stay away», «The Jerusalem Post: Israel is afraid of Russia. Ukraine will not get a modern system» [13].

In addition, we can note that Putin and Russia were mentioned more often than the President of Ukraine and our country. Despite the fact that a significant part of the publications on the Virtual Poland website were criticism and condemnation of the actions of the Kremlin leader, he was more often the focus of journalists' attention than Volodymyr Zelensky.

Therefore, the thematic range of news about events around Ukraine on the web resource «Virtual Poland» was presented rather dryly. They only informed about what world leaders said, and were more

concerned about how this whole situation could affect Poland. In addition, the media often paid attention to the statements and actions of Russian politicians. Therefore, it is difficult for us to assess their activities.

As for the genre spectrum, so the most of the publications were just statements by politicians, it is obvious that the web resource was dominated by information genres: notes and interviews. Nevertheless, we managed to find only one material that could be classified as analytical.

For example, the article «Russia is weakening and degrading, but Putin feels strong. Why?» can be considered as an article. The author writes about the wealth and fortune of the President of Russia and those close to him, about how he managed to break public opinion in the country, as well as about the creation of agents of influence. In the end, the author concludes: «Putin is almost eternal» and «A new “cold war” – a mentally clear demarcation of the world, free from the enslaved, can deprive the West of the illusion that the Russian bear can be tamed» [13]. From this we can conclude that the author, despite criticizing Putin believes that Western countries will not be able to do anything about it.

So, the genre spectrum on the web resource «Virtual Poland» is rather vivid – these are notes, mostly extended, and interviews. As for analytical genres, we found only a few materials, no publicist and sketches were found. The structure of the materials of the Internet resource «Virtual Poland» has its own characteristics, which we have already mentioned above. As for the availability of primary sources of information, some materials have links, but some do not. For example, in the publication «Poland calls on Russia». Duda made a strong appeal in Kyiv¹ did not mention the original source of the news. The lead only said that «President Andrzej Duda met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Wednesday» [13]. However, there was no information about where the information and quotes from the Presidents contained in the text were taken from. However, under the photo before the publication it was indicated: «Source: KPRP». This was the official website of the President of the Republic of Poland. We assume that all the data was taken from there, but this was not indicated in the text itself.

The final point of our analysis is the narratives promoted by the media. Even during the analysis of the content of the media «Virtual Poland», we noticed that the Internet resource was not very interested in the events taking place around Ukraine. This is evidenced by the number of materials, their small thematic focus and the uniformity of genres. At the same time, all the news published on the web resource was in one or another way showed through the prism of how this would affect Poland and what consequences it would have for it.

Despite the fact that the media quite often criticized the activities and statements of Russian officials and the President of the aggressor country in their materials, the fact that they were mentioned more often in this media than in others indicates specific attitude of the editorial board to the events in Ukraine.

IV. Conclusions

The web resource «Virtual Poland» is one of the most famous Polish online media. However, we found a number of shortcomings in its work: excessive sensational headlines, partial lack of references to primary sources, lack of analytical genres. At the same time, regarding the news that related to events in Ukraine, we can also emphasize the lack of interest in them, which was reflected in the limited thematic range of materials and a small number of publications. At the same time, we did not find any pro-Russian texts. In general, «Virtual Poland» often focuses on the humanitarian aspects of the war, in particular on the fate of Ukrainian refugees seeking refuge in Poland and other European countries. During 2022–2023 the media actively published the stories of individual people who suffered from the war, trying to arouse empathy in its readers. The content of the publication is often focused on evoking emotional empathy, which can affect the depth of the analytical approach. Since the beginning of 2025, online media «Virtual Poland» has been actively disseminating information about possibility of negotiations to end the war in Ukraine, publishing direct quotes from the Russian president and reducing the presence of materials with Ukraine's position on their portal interface.

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Кица М. О. Висвітлення війни в Україні в онлайн-медіа «Віртуальна Польща»

Мета роботи – з'ясувати особливості висвітлення війни в Україні в онлайн-медіа «Віртуальна Польща», зосередившись на аналізі тематичних акцентів, об'єктивності та повноти подачі матеріалів, а також впливу цього медіа на формування громадської думки щодо війни серед польської аудиторії.

Методологія дослідження. Дослідження передбачало використання як теоретичних, так і емпіричних методів і проведено в кілька етапів. Перший – комплексний огляд літератури на обрану тематику, зокрема аналіз наукових праць і звітів про функціонування медіа в Польщі й

висвітлення в них питань, що стосуються України. Наступний етап – аналіз емпіричних даних, а саме контент-аналіз публікацій в онлайн медіа «Віртуальна Польща», які стосувались України.

Результати. З'ясовано, що виданню «Віртуальна Польща» притаманні надмірна сенсаційність заголовків, часткова відсутність посилань на першоджерела, брак аналітичних жанрів. Водночас щодо тих новин, які стосувались подій в Україні, можна також підкреслити незацікавленість у них, яка відображалась у сухому тематичному спектрі та невеликій кількості матеріалів. При цьому ніяких проросійських текстів не виявлено. Загалом «Віртуальна Польща» часто акцентує увагу на гуманітарних аспектах війни, зокрема на долях українських біженців, які шукають притулку в Польщі та інших країнах Європи. Контент видання часто орієнтований на виклик емоційного співпереживання, що може впливати на глибину аналітичного підходу. На сьогодні це інтернет-ЗМІ активно публікує інформацію про можливі переговори між Україною та Росією, висвітлюючи позицію В. Путіна.

Новизна. Новизною роботи є виокремлені тематичні, жанрові, структурні характеристики матеріалів, що стосуються України, в онлайн медіа «Віртуальна Польща».

Практичне значення. Аналіз особливостей висвітлення польським медіа «Віртуальна Польща» війни в Україні допомагає краще зрозуміти, які прийоми, формати та підходи використовують журналісти для інформування аудиторії. Це сприяє розвитку критичного мислення та вмінню оцінювати якість журналістських матеріалів.

Ключові слова: онлайн-медіа, «Віртуальна Польща», війна, Україна.