

**NININS 2020****International Scientific Forum «National Interest, National Identity and National Security»****MEDIA SPACE AS A “BATTLEFIELD”: A HISTORICAL NARRATIVE OF MODERN UKRAINIAN MEDIA**

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**Abstract**

In this paper forms and types of historical policy and propaganda implementations, made by modern Ukrainian mass media, are analyzed. Objects of the study were Internet versions of popular periodicals and information resources. Historical narrative of the Ukrainian mass media is notable for significant ideological bias and politicization. A Ukrainian unified view is formed by the contradiction, vilification of the adversaries` historical background. Since 2014 sharp deterioration of Russian-Ukrainian relations has finally turned Russia into the main aim of historical promotion and the main adversary in the historical policy of Ukraine. With the purpose to emphasize high degree of conflict and propaganda nature of historical materials placed in media, concepts with the corresponding semantic meaning such as “war”, “fight”, “battle”, “battlefront” and so forth were used. By results of the research the main “fields of fight” were allocated, that is, those historical problems that attract high interest, but at the same time quite often become the subject of author's manipulations and propaganda tricks.

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## 1. Introduction

Analysis of a historical narrative of the Ukrainian mass media, certainly, represents a difficult, but at the same time extremely fascinating, research task. Over the last quarter of the century, public and state institutes of Ukraine are being involved in a contradictory, conflict process of national-state identity construction and formation of historical memory. Political perturbations of the beginning of the 21st century affected intensity, character and content of this process; however, it considerably became more active after the Euromaidan victory at the beginning of 2014. Conditions of internal and foreign policy crisis increased public request for patriotic version of history. For the purpose to emphasize the high level of intolerance, political tendentiousness and undisguised ideological bias of authors, in the analysis of a historical narrative of the Ukrainian modern mass media we suggest using lexemes formally alien to scientific discourse such as “fight”, “battle”, “war”, “battlefront”, “fights” and so forth.

## 2. Problem Statement

Examples of political influence on history can be found in ancient times, however at the boundary of the 20–21st centuries this interrelation acquired not only new forms and contents, but also more effective tools for realization. Itself, politicization of history is an inevitable phenomenon, objectively caused, accompanying any historical analysis, but at the same time substantially surmountable. According to Miller (2009), use of professional skills – research self-checking, an author's reflection, correct statement of the alternative points of view and readiness to consider criticism – minimizes negative impact of subjectivity and political partiality. Let us add that an important condition for the depoliticization of history is a preliminary, conscious and consecutive refusal of considering the past as a "combat zone", as well as abstraction from political likes and dislikes.

Policy of memory is just as natural as the politicization of history. It is connected with the desire of society and state to publicly articulate historical events, important and complementary for them, with the parallel aspiration to ignore and hush up unpleasant facts of the past. It is about shameful pages of history which should not be identified with "historical injuries". On the contrary, the last ones in form of military defeats, unsuccessful revolts, repressions, famine and so forth often become the base of policy of memory. It is worth recognizing that political measurement of historical memory is an important mechanism of collective identity formation. Of course, its selectivity, tendency to mythologization represent a serious problem; however, as well as in the case of politicization of history, it is quite curable. Constructive discussion of excesses and continuous dialogue of society and state are enough to overcome excessive historical fossilization.

The most destructive form of politicization of history is the historical policy. By historical policy it is accepted to understand a practice of imposing certain notions of the past to society by the political forces. For more effective communication the interested party uses the maximum available set of financial and administrative resources (Nikolaev, 2015). Professional historiography acts as a contractor for “the state order”, where state is a customer. Changes in authorities assume replacement of both the customer, and the contractor; however, the society always remains to be the object of historical and ideological influence. The most intense historical policy is implemented in countries of Eastern Europe

and the former USSR that is explained by a number of factors, such as common post-communist experience, existence of common conflict past, weak democratic and civil institutes, etc.

Let us separately allocate historical propaganda which should be considered as one of methods of historical policy and at the same time as a social and political phenomenon. It is necessary to understand that the historical policy always has character of propaganda, but not any historical propaganda is implemented by means of historical policy. Unlike historical policy historical propaganda is to lesser extent tied to interests of the state and is implemented not only by forces of professional historians.

In historical propaganda an ideological component prevails over political at their all dialectic interrelation. In terms of content, propaganda is consciously distorted information. In case of homogenization of historical policy and propaganda an epistemological reduction of a historical narrative is happened, it becomes imperative, uncontested, at the same time gaining the nature of the post-truth as appeals to emotions and subjective experiences, juggling or hushing up objective facts of the past.

Academic science, didactic historiography and mass media act as repeaters of historical policy and historical promotion. At first glance, it seems that it is mostly difficult to implement historical politics and historical propaganda through the scientific community. The existing system of scientific verification is rather an effective mechanism of prevention or, at least, seriously stopping those falsifications of the past that are allowed to please political and ideological interests. Unfortunately, in practice, professional scientists act in the vanguard of the historical revisionism, which is dictated by social and political conditions.

The purpose of didactic historiography is primarily to teach the growing generation of “patriotic history” and reformat established ideas. In the first case, the historical consciousness of young “*tabula rasa*” is influenced by the help of educational literature, created to generate positive knowledge about the countries` past. To change already existing consciousness, they actively use popular science literature and historical non-fiction.

The most effective, available and operational instruments of promoting the past are mass media which include printed periodicals, information websites, video hostings, online media, television and radio. On these platforms, in our opinion, the most fierce and unreasonable historical disputes are conducted, and falsification of the facts is quite often made as the methodological principle accompanying them (Galushko, 2017). Certain authors directly define a historical narrative as the instrument of “information war” where opposite opinions are on the other line of “historical front”, and the opponent of “*a priori*” is considered as a propagandist (Mikhailovsky, 2019). Many Ukrainian media resources are involved in the process of creation of “patriotic” historical memory. Many of them have permanent historical sections (“*Ukrayinska Pravda/Istorichna pravda (Historical Truth)*”, “*Ukrainskyi Tyzhden (The Ukrainian Week)*”, “*Dzerkalo Tyzhnia (The Mirror Weekly)*”, “*Den (The Day)*”, “*Focus*” and so forth). Names of some thematic headings openly declare categorical, conflict historical narrative. So the corresponding section of the “*Delovaya Stolitsa (Business capital)*” website is called “*Likbez: istoricheski front (The elimination of illiteracy: the historical front)*”, and her permanent author – Galushko acts as a coordinator of this website.

Construction of national-state identity starts with a historical isolation, therefore modern Ukraine mass media try to cut off an umbilical cord of common history, forming positive images of its own past.

Making a start from the history of neighboring countries, Ukrainians painfully grope their own “historical biography”, and an important role in this process belongs to media resources. “Historical battles” in the Ukrainian mass media regularly happen with Poland/Rzecz Pospolita, rarely with Turkey/the Crimean Khanate, Hungary, Germany, Lithuania and Belarus (Kalischuk, 2019). Despite the presence of long-standing contradictions with western and southern neighbors, today the Ukrainian mass media express readiness for historical reconciliation and search for unifying plots from the past (Ilchenko, 2018).

Relations between Ukraine and its northern neighbor, with which aggressive “historical war” is held, are more complicated and dramatic (Zaliznyak, 2014). In this “war” Russia acts as an eternal, nearly bestial enemy that throughout centuries interfered with the natural (pro-western) civilizational choice of Ukraine, impudently appropriated its history, methodically destroyed culture and national consciousness of Ukrainians (Nikolaev, 2018). It should be noted that till 2014 Russian history at its different stages was an inexhaustible source of patriotic plots for the Ukrainian media. However, joining of the Crimea to Russia and military conflict in the Eastern Ukraine promoted a monism of author's opinions, strengthened categoricalness, dogmatism and propaganda nature of a historical narrative (Gaydukevich, 2014). In these conditions the aspiration to dehumanize Russian/Soviet history, to present it as full of a lie and clumsily stuck together myths, is noticeable (Krysachenko, 2018). The Ukrainian part of common past – liberal, highly educated and European – is presented as “alter ego” of Russian civilization – Asian, obsequious and obscurantist (Kralyuk, 2016).

If the academic discourse is aimed at clarification of the truth and achievement of the greatest possible consent, the historical narrative in mass media quite often has a character of propaganda, the main goal of which is unconditional and uncontested fixing of own view of the past. As a result, the media space turns into “the field of historical battles”, but “fights” are one-sided, taking place in the absence of other points of view or at best in a comfortable presentation. Therefore, victories in such “battles” are reached without effort, creating illusion of correct interpretation of discussed historical problems. Similar a one-sided approach, for example, differs from the “battles for the history” in the “Wikipedia”, where principle of multilateralism is implemented by default.

### **3. Research Questions**

In our opinion, presentation of history by media, even if it is articulated by a professional scientist, has its own specifics. As a rule, this is a simplified statement of facts devoid of any accompanying academic research and scientific terminology. Historical material oriented on a mass reader is served emotionally, one-sidedly and even tendentiously. As a rule, it is correlated with the general ideological orientation of that of media where it appears. Finally, a historical narrative often becomes an “information echo” of significant sociopolitical events in the country and the world.

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The problem of this research does not include clarification of the degree of reliability and a qualitative level of historical material. The authors seek to reveal the most demanded themes of the past in the Ukrainian media, to define types and methods of historical propaganda implemented in format of

media discourse. This paper tries to categorize historical perspective in the Ukrainian mass media into separate "fields of fights" differing in intensity of discussion and scale of ideological irreconcilability.

## 5. Research Methods

The author's attention was primarily attracted by periodicals of modern Ukraine, the majority of which has corresponding pages on the Internet. Besides that, we analyzed certain news websites. Ukrainian authors, who take part in "historical fights", are using online media (Google+, Livejournal, Facebook, V Kontakte, web forums, video hostings); however, we regard this segment of mass media as requiring special studying. Also we didn't consider audio and video materials (for example, "Istorichna Pravda" ("Historical Truth") with Vakhtang Kipiani on ZIK TV channel), Ukrainian editions of foreign media ("Radio Svoboda" ("Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty"), "BBC", "Deutsche Welle", "Komsomolskaya Pravda" ("Komsomol Truth"), "Argumenty i fakty" ("Arguments and Facts"), "RBK" ("RosBusinessConsulting") and so forth), English-speaking resources ("Kyiv Post"), thematic editions ("Nova Ukraina", "Ukraina Moderna") and Internet resources ("Likbez: istoricheski front" ("The elimination of illiteracy: the historical front")). Chronologically, this research covers the period after "Euromaidan" ("Euro[pean] Square"), which had a great influence on historical narrative's character and content of modern Ukrainian mass media.

## 6. Findings

In our opinion, "fight for the state" should be referred to the number of the most significant plots of the "Russian-Ukrainian historical war". Apart from extremely short period within 1917–1921, Ukraine found its own statehood only after disintegration of the Soviet Union. As a result, Ukrainian mass media are trying to emphasize historical continuity of modern Ukraine which goes back straight to Kiev Rus through Ukrainian People's Republic/Ukrainian State (Hetmanat)/West Ukrainian People's Republic. Moreover, Ukraine is the only true "successor" of ancient Russian statehood, while origins of Russia-Moskovia are derived from the history of the Golden Horde (Vikulov, 2017a). The Russian State at all stages of its development is defined as immanently existing Asian (east) despotism (Burda, 2018a). At the same time Ukrainian authors will not fail to focus attention on a key role that Ukrainians played in development of Russian statehood (Levchenko, 2018).

"Fight for the nation" assumes discussion of national and historical perspective. The Ukrainian mass media regularly discuss theme about significant or even prevailing influence on ethnogenesis of Russian people, being Finno-Ugric group, assimilated by the Eastern Slavs (Grabovskiy, 2018). The narrative "fight for the nation" includes texts about nature of the Ukrainian nationalism, facts of russification, evolution of Russian national idea, anti-colonial fight of the peoples of Russia and so on (Burda, 2018b). The "fight for language" is closely associated with the "fight for the nation", describing development of the Ukrainian language and examples of oppression of "mova" during imperial and Soviet periods (Gorbyk & Pidlisna, 2017). Along the way, the Ukrainian mass media tend to talk about the numerous foreign borrowing in the Russian language and the role of Ukrainians in its formation. Link

between the "fight for the language" and the "fight for the state" can be seen in disputes about translation of lexeme "Rus/Russia" into foreign languages (Efimenko, 2019).

"Fight for territories" is connected with consideration of primordial lost Ukrainian territories (Portnikov, 2018). A separate problem is the description of the past of Eastern, Southern Ukraine and especially the Crimea whose Russian accessory the Ukrainian media actively challenge (Kostenko, 2016).

"Fight for culture and science" is mainly conducted for the national identity of famous writers, composers, artists and scientists. Mass media of Ukraine oppose silencing scientific and cultural contribution of compatriots and their russification. Besides, within the "fight for culture" question about the national identity of separate parts of Russian cultural heritage is raised: from traditional cuisine to iconography (Gudymenko, 2017). A separate plot is debunking of myths about "the Russian superiority", that is, attributing significant discoveries and achievements to Russians. The latter comes down to a discussion of national-state differences that are important for both countries. As a rule, the Ukrainian media are aimed at Russian symbols` demythologization and positive coverage of their own national symbols (Voloshina, 2016).

An important subject of a historical narrative is "fight for heroes and anti-heroes". The Ukrainian media diligently make Russian history less hero; at the same time, they create their own "pantheon of heroes" (Pakhlevskaya, 2017). Quite often the steady image of an "anti-hero" in Russian mass consciousness (Mazepa, Petliura, Bandera, Shukhevich and so forth) acquires opposite features in the media space of Ukraine, turning from the unworthy traitor into a noble patriot (Rudenko & Sinyashchik, 2017). Besides, mass media of Ukraine are ready to defend the Ukrainian accessory of a number of "heroes" who are considered to be Russian (Pilyavets, 2014).

"Fight for victories and defeats" is conducted on a field of discussion of historical fulfillments and national disasters. To the number of "historical victories" we attribute success in war, achievements in politics, economy and social life. Many important victories which can be associated with Russia, on the contrary, are associated with activities of Ukrainians (Vikulov, 2017b). "Defeats" are mostly "historical injuries" and a national martyrology – lost wars and battles, unsuccessful revolts and repressions. A separate and extremely important role in construction of the Ukrainian national identity and historical memory belongs to the subject of famine (Holodomor) of 1932–1933. As in the "hero-anti-hero" binary scheme, individual historical events can be viewed in the Ukrainian and Russian mass media in quite different ways and sometimes diametrically opposed. In other words, the Russian victories can be estimated by the Ukrainian media as defeats and vice versa.

## **7. Conclusion**

In conclusion we note that the space of "historical battles" in the Ukrainian mass media is not something stable and invariable. Their borders constantly fluctuate, thematically intertwine and mix up. The changing conjuncture updates one or another historical plot, turning them into new "fights for the past". Public interest is fuelled by provocative statements of politicians, enhancing the already incredible intolerance of authors. Unfortunately, today there are no signs indicating at least a decrease in the intensity of the "war of history". Certainly, one of the reasons for aggressive recursion, communicative

“deafness” and undisguised partiality is crisis in Russian-Ukrainian relations. Without its solution a normalization of media discourse or, at least, a refuse of the “language of hate” will hardly be possible.

Let us note that the historical narrative in the Russian mass media also deserves closest attention and thoughtful analysis. Since the 2000s, in our country a noticeable growth in politicization of history is observed, to which Russian and foreign researchers repeatedly paid attention. At the same time, implementation of historical policy and historical propaganda in Russia with the help of mass media continues to be a little-studied topic. The coverage of history of Ukraine in Russian media and those “fights for the past” that are conducted in Russian media space deserves special interest, in our opinion.

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