
Miscellaneous

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Mediatization of collective testimonies during the Russian-Ukrainian War 2022-2023

Abstract

The article briefly outlines the directions of the modern theory of the mediatization of war, identifies the main characteristics of participatory initiatives, practices of creating media platforms for collective testimonies and remediation tools for understanding the experience of war. The mass documentation of testimonies during the war contributed to the formation of user-generated content as foundational one in the understanding of modern mediatization processes. New media has become the main tool for collecting, distributing and archiving personal stories and war testimonies. Social networks, digital platforms, online museums, YouTube channels and messengers determine the algorithms for the formation of the collective discourse of war, radically transforming the Ukrainian media landscape. In the process of gathering evidence, various documentation practices were implemented almost simultaneously: mass publication of stories, testimonies, video and photo materials on separate resources, social networks; creation of platforms with digital archiving, processing, cataloging and storage capabilities; creative reinterpretation of the life stories of the victims and witnesses using various media, visual arts, graphics, documentaries, and cinematography. Three thematic areas of collecting collective testimonies are presented: documenting war crimes on state official platforms, websites of public organizations and the online museum; media testimonies and media archives; remediation as a variant of prolonged communication, commemoration, a possible means of destigmatizing traumatic content.

Keywords

Russian-Ukrainian war, mediatization, media archive, media testimonies, collective memory, remediation.

1. Introduction

Mediatization has traditionally been defined as a fundamental factor in the representation of conflict and the ability to reveal different sets of interests and actions when observing events (Cottle, 2006; Mortensen, 2014; Maltby *et al.*, 2020). Some researchers consider the current Russian-Ukrainian war to be the most mediatized and documented event in history (Hoskins & Shchelin, 2023). At the same time, the third year of the war revealed new trends related to the spread of massive user-generated content that is crucial in creating a picture of military everyday life: “Multimedia smartphones, messaging apps and platforms have enabled the individual to become the principal documenter of and the principal subscriber to war” (Hoskins & Shchelin, 2023).

The individual personalized stories of military and civilians, united by traditional media and digital platforms, archives, social networks, video hosting, telegram channels, messengers, have become a powerful discourse that has changed the general understanding of modern warfare (Horbyk, 2022; Boichak & Hoskins 2022). The creation and sharing of information and commenting on it “here and now” has led to the emergence of a radical hyperconnected environment (Ford & Hoskins, 2022). In turn, the rapidly changing military media content requires appropriate methods of scientific research –the current realities of the Russian-Ukrainian war are understood within the real chronotope of events that have been unfolding 24/7 for the third year in a row in front of the whole world (Katerynych, 2022; Horbyk & Orlova, 2023; Turska-Kawa *et al.*, 2023; Ptaszek *et al.*, 2024).

At the same time, the consequences of “a glut of media content of unmanageable complexity and scale” (Hoskins & Shchelin, 2023) are only beginning to be studied today. One of them –habituation to war, its everyday life– has already been the subject of scientific discussion in previous wartime and post-war periods (Wieviorka, 2006; Hoskins & O’Loughlin, 2010; Horten, 2011; Merrin, 2018; Carlton *et al.*, 2023). Currently, the global, and partly the Ukrainian, information space is experiencing a trend toward empathic burnout and information selectivity as a way out of crisis awareness. The decline in the global media environment’s interest in the war requires new forms of mediatization. In the Ukrainian case, they are vital, because the war is in full swing and the narrative of “fatigue” in the sense of the abolition of the war theme by the global media space for us and our fellow citizens has another non-media option –the ruthless reality of the country’s destruction. This emic (Jansson *et al.*, 2020) approach to perceiving war from the inside requires focusing on those ideas and practices that embody new opportunities for working with the powerful media content of war memory in the common military everyday life.

1.1. War in the focus of mediatization theories

Studies of mediatization have gone from interdisciplinary approaches in interpreting mediatization as mediation (Davis, 2007; Verbeek, 2012; Hepp & Krotz, 2014;) to generalized conceptualized metatheories of modern communication studies and the humanities in general (Driessens *et al.*, 2017; Hepp, 2019; Ford & Hoskins, 2022; Kopecka-Piech & Bolin, 2023).

The understanding of mediatization as a dynamic process combined with other meta-processes (globalization, commercialization, politicization, etc.) has made it possible to develop analytical concepts for analyzing institutional changes at various macro-, meso-, and micro-levels (Driessens *et al.*, 2017). At the same time, a broad understanding of mediatization as a fuzzy notion, an umbrella term (Deacon & Stanyer, 2014; Adolf, 2017) has actualized interest in specific methodologies and empirical descriptions: “As a remedy, elaborating mediatization factors is recommended, that is, working out operationalizable elements suitable for researching mediatization in its various forms and scopes” (Nowak-Teter, 2019, pp. 3).

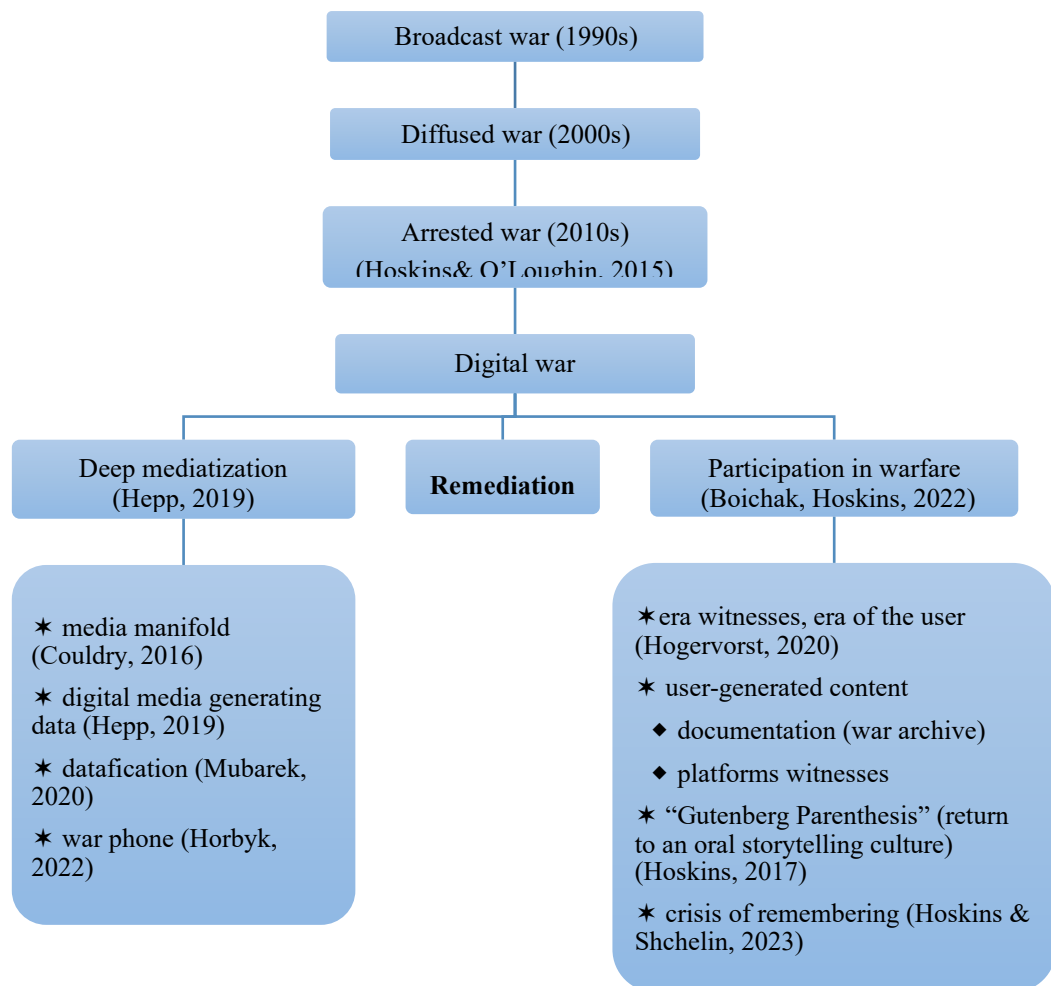
In the diversity of such general and specific empirical approaches, an influential factor emerges –time. The temporal dimensions of cycles and crisis stages are changing (see, for example, Krupskiy & Kuzmytska, 2020; Sardak *et al.*, 2021), and various new tools, techniques, and media practices emerge, spread, and are “forgotten.” The war accelerated these cyclical processes, changed the linear sequence of mediatized stages and transitions (Hoskins & O’Loughlin, 2015),

and provided a tragic opportunity to see the accelerated unfolding of mediatized reality online during the war years against the backdrop of a real bloody war.

The genesis of the emergence and development of different stages of the mediatization of war is traditionally associated with the 3-stage concept of researchers Andrew Hoskins and Ben O’Loughlin (2015): *broadcast phase of war*, *diffused war*, *arrested war*. Systemic changes in the role of media in social and political life, hybridization of war, and the influence of social media played a decisive role in the emergence of new war paradigms. Thus, at the present stage, the *digital* nature of war (see <https://www.digital-war.org/>) is due to the formation of a new media reality (new media ecology), in which user-generated content determines the content and structure of the information space, and deep mediatization covers all social institutions and spheres (Digital war, 2020–2023; Boichak, 2021).

Considering recent studies, we have summarized the current characteristics of digital warfare, taking into account the research topic we have chosen and important actors of influence (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Characteristics of digital war.



Source: Own elaboration.

So, we interpret mediatization as a meta-process in which “a supra-individual structure of communication requires a supra-individual organization” (Krotz, 2014) and leads to changes in social and cultural institutions (Hjarvard, 2013). In times of war, mediatization becomes cross-

cutting and covers all levels of political, institutional and personal spaces: “We take ‘mediatization’ as the process by which warfare is increasingly embedded in and penetrated by media, such that to plan, wage, legitimize, assuage, historicize, remember, and to imagine war requires attention to that media and its uses. It is a means of understanding shifting media power on and its use by a range of actors” (Hoskins & O’Loughlin, 2015, p. 1323).

As part of this approach, we examined Ukrainian online archives of collective testimonies collected during the war by analyzing the mediatized tools for collecting, posting, codifying, and disseminating information.

1.2. *Digital Turn in war documentation*

Digital Turn has actualized the latest problems of collecting, preserving (Bingham & Byrne, 2021), and analyzing content (Wevers, 2020). Modern war documentation has dramatically changed the traditional practice of recording facts and testimonies. The signs of such changes were already known: the emergence of user-generated archives (the September 11 Digital Archive is considered one of the first in this direction), a change in the understanding of the museum as a public space, and the formation of a new type of collection based on the method of collecting rapid reactions (Hudoshnyk & Krupskyi, 2023) with a strong media component at its core. The result of involving the mass audience in the creation of digital archives was the formation of “digital cultural memory” (Kosnik, 2021), and the spread of the practice of using these archives by new platforms and media. It is participation that is becoming a fundamental characteristic of the new realities of social existence and the “digital mundane” (Merrin, 2018), enabling “blurred boundaries between military and civilian, public and private, physical and virtual, personal and geopolitical, domestic and foreign, strategic and vernacular” (Boichak & Hoskins, 2022).

The use of digital media to collect evidence has traditionally been associated with:

- operational capabilities of historical documentation (Carbajal & Caswell, 2021);
- web-based historiography, codification and archiving of life stories, testimonies and memorials with the appropriate strategy and the dangers of historical interpretation through the digital medium (Owens & Padilla, 2021);
- the emergence of Born Digital Collections (email messages, digital photographs, websites, databases), web archives, when it comes not only to digitizing analog archives, but also to automated collection of website content (see, for example, the UK Web Archive, UKWA) with unique aggregation and access capabilities and the corresponding global scaling of long-term preservation and processing of materials (Brügger & Laursen, 2019; Bingham & Byrne, 2021).

The uniqueness and complexity of the analysis of the Ukrainian experience of documenting lies in the non-linear process of its deployment: different practices of recording testimonies were used simultaneously. For example, media activism in personalized forms of self-documentation and collective gatherings of “voices of war” initially determined the strategies for collecting testimonies, especially on social media. At the same time, the transition from individual practices to systematized platforms and websites with their own content policies and archiving algorithms, determined by the situation of martial law, the level of openness and channels of information dissemination, and financial capabilities, began. Some of these practices have been tested since 2014 (it should be noted that the full-scale invasion of February 24, 2022, is a continuation of the Russian aggression and occupation of Ukrainian territories that began in the spring of 2014).

When analyzing the military events in Ukraine since 2014, researchers draw attention to the passage of different phases of mediatization, where at the stage of the capture of Crimea “Western policy makers and journalists alike see the Ukraine crisis through the first phase of mediatization, of linear influence efforts, and are thrown when Russian strategists have embraced the second and third phases of mediatization” (Hoskins & O’Loughlin, 2015, p. 1331). Hybrid warfare as interpreted by the aggressor country relied on the construction of news, and thus the

contradictory nature of any statement. As a result, the “impartial objectivity” of Russian disinformation is legitimized and acquires contextual objectivity: “the free-for-all reestablished mainstream news cultures in the West seem ill-equipped to filter out disinformation from full-scale (Russian) informational war, which exploits politics based on truth” (Hoskins & O’Loughlin, 2015, p.1335).

On the one hand, in this “great blurring” there is a threat of violence spreading with impunity (O’Loughlin, 2020), on the other hand, and a powerful incentive to create and engage new tools and mechanisms for content verification, group journalism, and OSINT techniques. It is eyewitness testimonies, documentation and explanations that become vital in the process of overcoming the “great blurring”: “It is vital we do not succumb to a sense that war is unseeable or accept that our image of war must be a blur. This is why we must find a way to move past the current framing provided by digital war” (O’Loughlin, 2020).

The inclusion of the concept of “media witnessing” in the academic vocabulary testified to the recognition of the new reality of documenting events, and actualised a wide range of issues of trust and the status of truth, morality and communication capabilities (Frosh & Pinchevski, 2009): “media witnessing bears out this cosmopolitanism by both interpellating audiences worldwide as global witnesses of events and at the same time turning anyone with mobile media technology into an event vigilante and testimony producer” (Frosh & Pinchevski, 2014).

The idea of creating documentary, archival, historiographical, and remediation projects and resources was increasingly emphasized by different directions of representing collective memories and war stories (Hudoshnyk, 2023). The institutional ambiguity of testimony as a private form of expression was canceled by the massiveness of such everyday practices, and skepticism about amateur testimonies was removed by the systematic nature of their impact on the modern mediatized world.

The study analyses the trends in a powerful discourse of war testimonies based on a two-year monitoring of the 8 most popular resources. The main goal is to present mediatization as a systemic influence on the body of war memoir in a unique chronotope “here and now.” To achieve this goal, the following research questions were posed:

- RQ1. The Russian-Ukrainian war is defined as the most mediated one. What arguments support this theory are embodied in the discourse of collective testimonies?
- RQ2. What are the significant differences in the strategies of collecting, archiving, and media dissemination of testimonial content implemented by platforms, media channels, remediation resources, and practices?
- RQ3. What national features of remedial practices are visualized in the modern space of documentation?

2. Methodology

The authors’ archive of collective testimonies includes more than 40 resources for collecting and storing memories. The collection process of mass testimonies depends on: the chronotope of the war (disclosure of new facts of crimes against humanity, liberation of occupied cities, change of the front line); the activity of creating user-generated content and participatory practices; media tools for drawing attention to the facts and testimonies of the war.

In this study, we limited ourselves to 8 platforms and channels that had a stated programme, purpose, clearly defined conditions and restrictions on information collection, and stable indicators of audience engagement. These filters made it possible to distinguish three interconnected mediatized processes:

- the mass and chaotic presentation of personal war experience is replaced by targeted documentation of crimes against humanity with partial presentation of individual stories on media platforms of Internet resources;
- personal testimonies and life stories become a component of the media concept of the information site and media archive (media testimonies);

- remediation –representation of one environment in another (Bolter & Grusin, 1998)– is defined as a variant of extended communication, commemoration, a possible means of destigmatizing traumatic content.

In understanding the mediatization of everyday military life, we relied on everyday transformations (Krotz, 2017; Driessens *et al.*, 2017; Jansson *et al.*, 2020) and the Emic approach of analysing the deep experience of mediatization in everyday life (Jansson *et al.*, 2020). With this approach, the process of mediatization is long-term, consisting of sub-processes of mediated communications: deeper integration of media (vertical mediatization), and media influence on different social groups (horizontal) (Jansson *et al.*, 2020).

This approach to analysing mediatization “from the inside” leads us to a non-linear system of media communication where the subjective view within the group, mediated by the media, becomes the focus of understanding the relationship between media and memory (Garde-Hansen *et al.*, 2009; Hoskins, 2017). This in turn confirms the theory of the transition from the era of witnesses to the era of the user (Hogervorst, 2020) when the use of modern digital means of documentation and platform logic (Zhang & Pérez-Tornero, 2022) creates a mediated reality. Life stories through various communication channels acquire a new contextual interpretation.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Testimonies during wartime: Ukrainian context and media landscape

The sense of events happening here and now leaves a special imprint on the perception of the surrounding oversaturated information space: its various registers are filled with subjective grief, fear, empathy, hope and faith, and an almost physical sense of the breakdown and destruction of traditional life. Hence the immense discourse of stories and memories of different genres and qualities, the desire to stop the changing time, to present the war experience as an objectification of one’s own being in the face of the fear of death. From our two-year observation of 8 resources that purposefully collect “voices of war,” this number exceeds 330,000 testimonies. These do not include the still unexplored vast content of the blogosphere, regional media, civic initiatives, industry, school and university projects, untold war stories and testimonies from the occupied territories, etc. The relevance and complexity of combining these “fragments of memory” with modern digital tools, preserving the “voices of war” and archiving them is obvious. Thus, mediatization at this stage is associated with the collection, structuring and archiving of testimonies on platforms and media resources with a clear focus on the effectiveness of investigations, for example, the collected facts of war crimes, and the multichannel distribution of content.

Changes in the Ukrainian media landscape were crucial in the mediatization of the war, the collection and archiving of testimonies –the need for prompt and accessible communication tools led to a rapid migration from traditional media to social networks and messengers. According to sociological surveys (Ukrainian Media, Attitudes and Trust in 2023, 2023), 89% of Ukrainians use the Internet every day, and social media is the main source of news for 76% of Ukrainians. The audience of Telegram channels, which have become the most widespread media segment during the war, has grown from 35,9% (2021) to 72% (2023). 95,5% of Ukrainian Telegram users are primarily interested in news about the fighting, 90% in news about missile/drone launches; 81% of respondents said they were interested in information about political events in Ukraine, and almost the same number (81,5%) are interested in international events (How non-institutionalized news telegram channels of the Ukrainian segment function and gain an audience, 2023).

Another important trend is the combination of information and communication, the possibility of an instant emotional reaction as a decisive factor in using social networks and messengers while developing media-critical skills. At the same time, there is a positive trend in the self-assessment of Ukrainians’ ability to distinguish quality information from disinformation and fakes: “while in February 2019, 52% said they could distinguish quality information, in December 2023,

78% said they could” (Dynamics of Ukrainians’ self-assessment of their ability to distinguish quality information from disinformation and fakes, 2023). However, the extreme subjectivity of such data cannot be ruled out, as the level of critical attitude toward sources that users trust is traditionally lower, and thus confidence in distinguishing between fakes and truth depends on this trust.

Despite Russian cyberattacks on mobile networks (for example, a large-scale outage at Kyivstar on December 12, 2023) and the increasing cost of user packages, 95% of Internet users access the Internet from smartphones (What Ukrainians buy and do online during the war, 2023). New media and social networks have become the most common platforms for publishing life stories and testimonies, and the mobile phone has evolved from a civilian communication tool to an archiving, documenting, and even frontline participatory culture actor (Horbyk, 2022). The ability to document a life story and transfer it to official data collection resources has turned mobile communication into a fundamental tool for working with witnesses.

It is clear that in times of war, it is impossible to characterize at least a mischievously huge amount of user-generated content, the dynamics of its development is variable and depends on many variables: the course of hostilities, the mobility of the front line, martial law restrictions, and the algorithms of social networks themselves. Moreover, according to Hoskins and Shchelin (2023), the processes of mediatization, distribution and archiving of this content are becoming a complex problem and a challenge to both digital technologies and sustainable standards of the information space: “Instead, the splintering of the war feed defines a paradox, of the war in Ukraine being the least and yet most sanitized war in history. Never have so many images and videos of the suffering, injured, captured, mutilated and the dead, civilians and soldiers, been so immediately and easily available from a war zone.”

It should be noted that in the proposed typology of documenting and mediatizing collective testimonies during the war, different functional tasks (documenting crimes, current information, media testimony, remediation) were solved simultaneously.

3.2. Platforms for Collecting Testimonies and Documenting War Crimes

Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion on February 24, 2022, recording war crimes has become one of the main tasks of Ukrainian state and public platforms and media archives.

The creation of a unified state hub for collecting evidence of war crimes (<https://warcrimes.gov.ua/>) with the corresponding presentation of statistics on the website of the Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine (<https://www.gp.gov.ua/>), was an example of the purposeful formation of a database of Russian crimes during the full-scale invasion. The most important archive of evidence of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by the Russian army in Ukraine has registered more than 140 thousand different types of crimes, and formed the main case “February 24” (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Official information of the Office of the Prosecutor General (data as of February 24, 2024) (screen shot).



Source: <https://www.gp.gov.ua/>.

The systematic nature of the hub's work is accompanied by the involvement of various media channels: information about algorithms for online documentation of evidence of crimes is disseminated through the joint efforts of various national authorities (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Verkhovna Rada, Cabinet of Ministers, etc.), foreign prosecutor's offices and police in countries where Ukrainian migrants are staying (Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Germany, Estonia, Latvia). From the very beginning of the war, the hashtag *#YourStoryYourWeapon* became a kind of slogan for the mass collection of war testimonies. For obvious reasons of the closed nature of the pre-trial investigation documents, these testimonies are not public. At the same time, statistical data (updated daily on the website of the Office of the Chief Prosecutor) is a source of verified information for journalists.

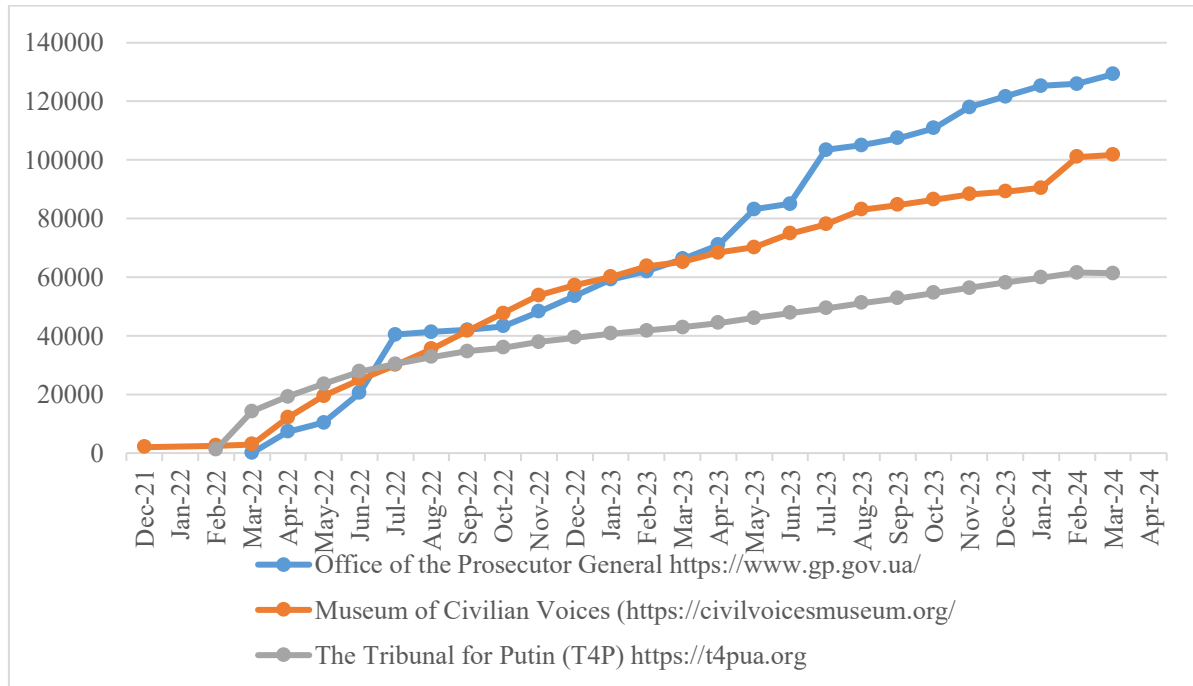
Contrary to the national platform's approach, other testimonial collection initiatives rely on regional branches and a more open media policy. The regional principle of collecting testimonies was implemented by the Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union <https://www.helsinki.org.ua/> in cooperation with national and local human rights organizations. Within the framework of the initiative "Tribunal for Putin" <https://t4pua.org/>, 64895 facts of alleged war crimes have been documented in the form of thematic cases (as of February 24, 2024). The resource contains videos, interviews with victims (section Documenting war crimes in Ukraine), news and analytical articles, reports and appeals from human rights organizations-partners of the resource. For example, the report of the Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group includes photographs, quotes from testimonies, evidence of ill-treatment, and a description of the creation of concentration camps, types of torture, and inhuman treatment (Dolzhko & Tokarev, 2023).

An example of a holistic concept of preserving an archive of life stories with significant information and media support and active public activity is the online Museum of Civilian Voices (<https://civilvoicesmuseum.org/>), which currently collects more than 100,000 testimonies.

Convenient website navigation, the ability to share a story on the website, from phone, or by mail, an intuitive user interface, and a logical search and filtering system for different categories make it easy to work with the resource. A well-thought-out algorithm of tagging and descriptions, as well as detailed data, makes it possible to create up-to-date, coherent collections of civilian stories (for example, *Those who save lives: stories of Ukrainian medics about the war*, "Stronger than death:" a collection of stories about women who lost their husbands because of the war). *The News* section contains information about new collections, joint projects with the media and academic institutions, public initiatives, cultural events, panel discussions and trainings, and reports on humanitarian aid and psychological support. Specific areas of work include the creation and public discussion of common principles in the process of documenting the war in Ukraine (Oral History Forum of Ukraine, October 2023), and sharing our own experience of collecting "real-time living stories of victims, before a person's memory distorts the clarity of their memories" through scientific and practical cooperation with higher education institutions (I International School of Communications "How to Collect Stories of War"), active cooperation with the world and Ukrainian media in disseminating the collected stories (American edition of Wired, Ukrainian resources Gordon.ua and Bukvy).

At the same time, the statistics on access to the resources of official testimonies and museum archiving shows a similar trend – a sharp increase in the spring and fall of 2022 (Figure 3). This is due to the landmark events of 2022: the liberation of the occupied territories and the disclosure of the facts of mass shootings in Bucha, Irpin, Hostomel, and Kharkiv region (see Reports of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine (Human Rights Council, 2022-2023)).

Figure 3. Statistics of requests to the resources of official testimonies and museum archiving.



Source: Own elaboration.

With the gradual realization that the war will be long, new problems with the mediatized discourse of memories are emerging –not only archives but also work with witnesses themselves need new forms. “We are not sprinters; we are marathon runners, and the story of investigating and bringing these criminal proceedings to court will be a long one,” said Veronika Plotnikova, head of the Coordination Centre for Victims and Witnesses, established in April 2023. The change in the vector (and the media vector as well) of this unit of the Prosecutor General’s Office is indicative: from data collection to support and protection of victims from repeated victimisation, intimidation, and retaliation, regular information and explanation of the stages of pre-trial investigation, and provision of targeted assistance. Preparation for long-term cooperation requires scaling up the Center’s tasks, involving regional prosecutor’s offices and NGOs to provide psychological, medical, and social assistance with special attention to vulnerable groups (children, people with disabilities, and victims of sexual violence and torture). The radical reorientation towards the individual indicates a new stage of understanding communication between the government and citizens (a human-centred approach).

This poses a new challenge for the Ukrainian media. It was most clearly formulated by the Media Initiative for Human Rights (<https://mipl.org.ua/>) (MIHR, founded in 2016). During the panel discussion “Justice for Everyone: From Documenting Crimes to Achieving Justice” (International Conference “Freedom or Fear,” Kyiv, 7 December 2023), Olha Reshetylova, Head of the MIHR, noted that for Ukrainian journalists, drawing the attention of the audience to an individual witness, and his/her story usually ends the journalistic work. Such a “consumerist” approach to the tragedy (“we have worked out the topic, move on”) makes it impossible to provide media support for the important algorithm of achieving justice: documentation, investigation, analysis, and advocacy. The absence of the public and the media in courts, the unwillingness to get to the bottom of even high-profile cases and, as a result, radicalisation of society’s approaches and demands to the prosecution, the lack of media attention and support for the justice process. Thus, the questions “why do we need these thousands of testimonies?” and “what should we do with them?” require a change in media tasks and practices.

3.3. National features of creating media archives

The epoch-making changes that have taken place in the last decade in the global impact of media are associated with the transition from the era of the witness (Wieviorka, 2006) to the era of the user (Hogervorst, 2020). The first term was associated with three waves of testimonies about the Holocaust (witnesses, tangents, and tertiary witnessing) and the creation of a broad narrative of collective memory (Wake, 2013), while the second term included the digitization of archives and opening them to a wider audience, publication of collections on social media, and creation of online portals with open search, educational, research, and informational purposes (see, for example, the IWitness platform).

The collection of war stories, their dissemination, and mediatization have become distinctive features of the Ukrainian information space: TV and radio programmes, testimonial collection platforms, sections of national and local media and websites, collective projects to collect “voices of war” in professional associations, unions, NGOs, universities, and schools, the creation of personal archives, and self-documentation.

Not only traditional media but also YouTube channels, social media, and archival platforms played a significant role in disseminating media testimonies. In-depth interviews, on-the-spot reports, live broadcasts, and thematic programmes form the basis of such gatherings.

For example, the all-Ukrainian online platform *svidok.org* not only collects war testimonies and prepares materials for the International Criminal Tribunal but also has its own information and analytical YouTube channel *@svidoknews* has a diverse broadcasting network, live broadcasts, and some collaborations with TV channels. Three times a week, NTN’s “Stories of War” programme publishes individual stories from the archive (more than 170 stories have been published); twice a week, Inter TV’s “Looking for You” project helps to find information about the whereabouts of loved ones in evacuation or in regions with active hostilities.

The *@UkrainianWitness* channel, launched on March 1, 2022, has become a chronicle of the national resistance, presenting both personal interviews and problematic programmes with half a million views. Volodymyr Zolkin’s controversial channel (*@VolodymyrZolkin* –interviews with Russian prisoners of war) has record-breaking views and is a well-known resource even in the aggressor country.

The high ratings and rapid expansion of the viewership (Table 1) of such channels are due to the thematic and genre diversity –from short video memories to analytical programmes and in-depth interviews with witnesses, internally displaced persons, military personnel, volunteers, politicians, and experts.

Table 1. The dynamics of YouTube channel audience growth during the war.

YouTube channels	Year of creation	February 2023 (the first year of the war)		February 2024 (the second year of the war)	
		Audience	Views	Audience	Views
<i>@UkrainianWitness</i>	March 1, 2022	92,000 followers	15 million	191,000 followers	58,929,377
<i>@svidoknews</i>	March 16, 2016	360,000 followers	200 million	524,000 followers	343,597,750
<i>@VolodymyrZolkin</i>	January 18, 2019	639,000 followers	142 million	2,030,000 followers	1,015,251,590

Source: Own elaboration.

The stories are incorporated into essential archives and information resources, and pertinent sections are shown in regional, national, and television media. The widespread practices of journalistic collaboration during the war have led to the practice of coordinated use of materials; media partnerships are a significant component of the activities of these platforms, as are a large number of Ukrainian resources. The platforms adapt the publications of national

and regional media to their own format and objectives and sometimes even transfer them to another media outlet. For example, the digital platform war.ukraine.ua, initiated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, combines the traditional official discourse of events with the latest media forms of collaboration with Ukrainian media: providing their own materials and adjusting stories to the multimedia capabilities of the platform.

At the same time, we should note the processes that have become more pronounced over time:

- the spread of professional collective practices of archiving, cataloguing, describing, and documenting crimes
- the formation of national databases with strong media support, international cooperation, and the creation of their own media products based on the collections and materials already collected.
- creating collaboration projects and developing common standards for collecting media evidence.

Ukrainian volunteers have been working on media monitoring since the beginning of the war. One of the first experiences of creating a single independent open-access database was the DATTALION platform of Ukraine war photos and videos (<https://dattalion.com/>). Since February 27, 2022, it has become a source of information for media professionals around the world, distributing visual materials about the war in Ukraine collected by a volunteer group of founders for free. Today, the database contains 6,100 videos and 40,000 photos. A separate area of the resource's work was the formation of a verified database of witnesses (220+) and cooperation with official authorities (Ministry of Justice, Cabinet of Ministers, Office of the President, Ministry of Defense), media partners (including Time, Fox news, NBC), and the International Renaissance Foundation. The focus on user requests led to the restructuring and acceleration of the data collection algorithm, optimisation of the processes of moderation of archival materials, expansion of the topics of the uploaded files (data on "Rehabilitation" and "Children" were added), and a clearly defined algorithm for journalists' access to the documents collected in the archive.

The global task of uniting the digital materials collected since the beginning of the war was set by the non-profit, non-public information platform *Ukraine War Archive*, created by the team of the largest European documentary film festival, Docudays UA. From an initial repository of scattered videos, the archive has become a powerful platform of unique media files (8 million documents) and interviews (over 300), a collection of 36,000 documented events and potential war crimes. The search for a successful model of archiving media evidence led the project initiators to turn to the experience of Bellingcat, the Syrian Archive, and OSINT techniques; in legal practice, to the classification of war crimes according to the UN Unified System and the Berkeley Protocol on Digital Open Source Investigations; in technical practice, to the use of automatic transcription of interviews into text form and an image recognition system based on artificial intelligence. The project authors see the creative potential in adapting such an archive to a mass audience in the creation of documentaries (the first such project is the film *Witnesses*, prepared by the project team) and in bringing together Ukrainian filmmakers to work on cycles of such materials.

3.4. Remediation: fragmentation of experience, tools to regain attention

The concept of remediation, as "repurposing" the representation of one medium in another medium, is assessed by J. D. Bolter and R. Grusin (1998) as "a defining characteristic of the new digital media" and includes the desire for immediacy and hypermediacy. In the context of our topic, the possibility of remediation to reform reality becomes relevant: "The goal of remediation is to refashion or rehabilitate other media. Furthermore, because all mediations are both real and mediations of the real, remediation can also be understood as a process of reforming reality as well" (Bolter & Grusin, 1998, p. 56).

The problematic focus of understanding the role of remediation is complicated not only by changes in traditional professional practices (Lanzara, 2010) and the possibilities of analysing hybrid environments (Toivanen *et al.*, 2022), but also by the specifics of the mediatization of trauma (Frosh & Pinchevski, 2009; Pinchevski & Richardson, 2023), which is traditionally reproduced in wartime testimonies. Yasmin Ibrahim introduces the concept of ‘technologies of trauma’ and speaks about significant changes in testimonies as a cultural form, the transition from the sensory to the aesthetic mode, turning traumatotropes into cycles (for example, the discourse of 9/11 in American culture), and acts of testimony into artefacts that can be placed in new cultural spaces “to be reposted in new cultural terrains” (Ibrahim, 2021, p. 491), with all the consequences of creating a mass audience as a subject of virtual testimony.

The change in temporal perceptions, where the past cannot become a factor of “forgetting,” actualizes the return to the past. Through new genres, channels, stories, collections, books and films, drawings and exhibitions, the lived experience is intertwined with the perception of the war of today. Perhaps this is why it is so difficult to deal with the narrative of “fatigue” in the Ukrainian information space. On the one hand, despite the duration of the war, people claim that they are not tired of news about the war; in 2023, the share of those who do not feel tired increased to 58% (Ukrainian Media, Attitudes and Trust in 2023). On the other hand, professional burnout has become a widespread phenomenon, the war knows no days off, and sabbatical (long-term leave for reset) is an unfulfilled dream for Ukrainians.

Professional burnout is diagnosed by 54 percent of teachers (GoGlobal, 2023), 61 percent of journalists (The state of Ukrainian regional media in 2023, 2023), and 47,5 percent of doctors (Levin, 2023). More than a third (36%) of the surveyed charity sector employees have experienced professional burnout. Another third (35%) are at the stage of their formation (Charity in Time of War, 2023).

There is another context of this problem, which is extremely acute for Ukrainians: 30% of respondents believe that the World is tired of the war in Ukraine and wants to reach an agreement with Russia (Dynamics of the prevalence of “split” narratives among the population, 2023). This narrative is extremely dangerous: a split in society as a result of despondency and fatigue in public sentiment has a destructive effect on the general atmosphere of life. Reproduced by social media, these deconstructions are replicated in the space of everyday life. That is why initiatives and teams that systematically work on military discourse are so important. The uniqueness of the time in which life stories and testimonies are collected in hot pursuit, structured, and disseminated by new media is precisely the challenge of the simultaneity of these processes. Not losing the voices, details, and sensations of documenting the history of the war through the stories of its eyewitnesses is about memory for posterity, but most importantly, it is about not forgetting now. We also see remediation as an opportunity to maintain attention to the events in Ukraine, which, according to the logic of the media flow, are disappearing from the news agenda, and empathy burnout and selectivity of the information flow are making these phenomena more and more commonplace (Reuters Institute Digital News Report, 2023).

The tools and channels for presenting life stories in other media spaces changed rapidly during the war. At the initial stages, diary entries of those who were in bomb shelters under fire or in the occupied territories were voiced on the political platforms of global organisations. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba read out excerpts from the war diaries of three Ukrainian children at the UN General Assembly: Yehor Kravtsov, Violetta Horbachova, and Arina Pervunina; at cultural events British actress Tilda Swinton read excerpts of Ukrainians’ testimonies from O. Slavinsky’s Dictionary of War at the Deep Water Festival (Narrowsburg, USA).

The phenomenon of documentary films based on eyewitness testimonies became a systemic phenomenon during the war and requires a separate study. Its popularity has become exceptional. These are feature-length films based on the life stories of witnesses, made by Ukrainian documentary filmmakers in collaboration with foreign colleagues (“A House Made of Splinters,” “The Chronicles of Hell,” “Ukraine: Life Under Attack,” “In the Rearview”), news

agencies ('20 Days in Mariupol' received an Academy Award 2024 for Best Documentary Feature), and the already mentioned online museum Voices of the Civilians (the documentary "Mariupol Survivors").

The genre of new verbatim drama is becoming increasingly widespread –documentary performances in which eyewitness accounts become the basis and driving force of the plot. The portal of contemporary Ukrainian drama (<https://ukrdramahub.org.ua/>) includes documentary stories, interviews, plays, and dramas based on war stories in its verbatim section. A well-known Kherson-based verbatim director, Andriy May ("Diary of the Maidan," 2014; "Six a'd a Half," 2021; "About the War," 2022), is working on the play "Putin's Trial."

The dissemination of war stories through visual art and graphic narratives has been embodied in individual author's cycles (Olga Wilson's drawings based on real stories) and co-creative commemorative art projects by Volunteer Animation Ukraine. Among the platforms that visualise collective testimonies are:

Pictoric, where Ukrainian illustrators create illustrations, comics, posters, and animations based on the stories of people who sacrifice their peaceful lives to fight the war (100 stories are presented at <https://www.uastories-pic.com/>);

Incer, a social comic book magazine, which authors see a combination of journalism and art as their fundamental task: "Our journalists are looking for stories... interviewing participants in events, conducting in-depth interviews, collecting photos and video evidence. And our scriptwriters and illustrators create the graphic reportage" (<https://inker.world/>). We would like to draw attention to the project's emphasis on documentation and work with various forms of recording life stories. Each story involves journalists who film and interview the characters of future stories, a screenwriter, an artist, and a translator;

The project *War. Stories from Ukraine*. (website: <https://www.warstoriesukraine.com>) was prepared by a team of professional journalists, editors, illustrators, translators, communicators and designers who set out to collect, record and tell the stories of people in the midst of a full-scale war. To a certain extent, this project can be attributed to the authors, but the means and quality of its implementation testify to the interdisciplinary interprofessional interaction that is important to us.

4. Conclusions

The article focuses on mediatization as a systemic factor that defines the phenomenon of 'real-time war' and has a powerful impact on all areas of life: from everyday experience to the documentation of war events and testimonies. The formation of a new social and media reality is driven by fundamental paradigm shifts in the modern data-mediated society. Mass interaction with datafication allows us to talk about the definition of data which "is defined in function of *what people do with it*, with an emphasis on human and political agency rather than size" (Beraldo & Milan, 2019).

Fundamental changes are occurring in the algorithms of war memorization. The traditional sequential and time-extended linearity (fact (testimony, memory) –documentation, archiving–mediatization) is being replaced by temporal suggestion and the simultaneity of various processes.

- mass publication of stories, testimonies, video and photo materials on definite resources and social networks (user-generated content);
- systematic organisation and algorithmic archiving and dissemination of collective testimonies using media tools and the ability to transmit information remotely (systemic platform level);
- representation of the life stories of victims and witnesses through various media, art, graphics, documentaries, and cinema.

Following the full-scale invasion, the Ukrainian media landscape also underwent significant changes, with the dominance of user-generated content enabling the accelerated spread of news and personal perspectives. The rapid rise of digital platforms facilitated a diversity of

interpretations and key concepts regarding the Russia-Ukraine war: “war of identities,” “narratives clash,” “the first social media war,” and “the most mediatized war.”

The creation of a unified Ukrainian media archive of the war is currently complicated not only by the sheer volume of content but also by the transition from information volunteering to professional concepts involving the technical capabilities of Ukrainian and international documentation experience (such as the software from the British company Infoscope for the *War Archive Project*). This highlights the need for national and international collaborations, media partnerships, expert exchange (crucial for the formation of unified databases of evidence), financial support, and scientific and professional discussion.

The most challenging task, which is recognised by all initiators of public platforms, is the responsible attitude toward the preservation of personal data and the formation of an initial database as a tool for further work by lawyers and law enforcement officers in preparing testimonies as evidence of crimes. The mostly tragic content of the stories and memories presented is also understandable –the war has brought terrible grief to Ukrainian families and human destinies. The prolongation of the war and the disclosure of more and more crimes committed by the aggressor country are unlikely to change it radically. At the same time, various practices of commemoration, conceptualised trauma, the emergence of life-affirming projects, collections, exhibitions, and the active mediatization of a huge array of testimonies and memories by means of culture, art, film, photographic documentary, and graphic narratives allow us to talk about new trends in the processing of the collective trauma of war.

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