



**The role of journalists in the identification  
of informational and psychological operations**  
(in the conditions of the 3rd period of the Russian-Ukrainian war of 2022–2024)

**Annotation**

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the role of journalists, the Russian-  
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*In the article, we investigate the role of journalists in identifying information and psychological operations (PSYOP) of the Russian-Ukrainian war of 2022–2024. We used the method of analyzing the reactions of 100 respondents of different age categories. We reviewed the advice offered by other researchers on identifying IPSO, summarized the data obtained, and highlighted our practical advice for journalists. The research methodology involved creating a questionnaire using the Google Forms electronic aggregate. We posted the questionnaire on a personal page on Facebook and Instagram and asked respondents to fill out the questionnaire, answering 7 main questions. The survey results we reflected in the tables and cyclogramas presented.*

*Based on the survey results, we identified 5 signs of information and psychological operations and the principles of their implementation. We learned that respondents have an idea about IPSO and recorded an increase in the number of respondents in the Ukrainian media space with the beginning of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Journalists played the leading role in identifying information and psychological operations. Media workers acted as teachers in identifying Russian manipulations, informants about the possible threat of Russian propaganda penetration into the information space, and defenders who did not allow provocations to be “thrown” at the aggressor country. Respondents noted that journalists could be part of IPSO.*

*We believe that information and psychological operations improved in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war, so their study remains relevant.*

## Introduction

To date, there is a war going on in Ukraine. Many spheres of social life have undergone great changes, but the media environment has undergone colossal changes. Our information field is «bombarded» daily by Russian «throw-ins», manipulations and provocations needed by the occupier. All this poses a great threat to Ukrainian society and influences the course of the war.

Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, the situation with informational and psychological operations has also worsened. They have become even larger, more insidious and more complex. Although Ukrainian society has already raised the level of its media literacy, the threat level is still very high.

In addition, citizens of our country, at the stage at which the country is now, have intensified mistrust of Ukrainian journalists. However, we must understand that they, in turn, are our helpers in the media environment, not our enemies. Journalists have a leading role in working with information, so they connected with the information and psychological operation (PSYOP).

It is quite difficult to resist information and psychological operations. From 2014 to today, they have only improved. Therefore, the question of their identification is very relevant and urgent.

We believe that the study of the role of journalists in the identification of PSYOP during the war is a work that should take place in a scientific environment. We chose the informational and psychological operations of the Russian-Ukrainian war of 2022–2024 as the object of the study, and the role of journalists in the identification of the informational and psychological operations of the Russian-Ukrainian war of 2022–2024 as the subject.

The purpose of the study is to clarify the role of journalists in identifying informational and psychological operations of the Russian-Ukrainian war of 2022-2024.

The topic of informational and psychological operations is gaining more and more popularity among researchers, both Ukrainian and foreign. Scientists study such systems of manipulation in various aspects of their existence, analyzing the experience of distribution in many countries.

The topic of information and psychological operations was studied by the following foreign scientists: Brett Bemis (Bemis, 2011), Joseph S. Gordon (1988); Hendra Kaprisma (Kapriska, 2020), Matthew Soules (Soules, 2015), Randy Bates and Michael Mooney (Bates, & Mooney, 2014), Joseph Mabima (Mabima, 2018), Anik Lukman Shamsul Afkar, Juriyati Sehu Mohamad (Shamsul Afkar & Sehu Mohamad, 2022), as well as Alzhbeta Kovalova (Kovalova, 2024). The above topic was also studied by Ukrainian researchers: Nataliya Shulska, Nataliya Bukina, Nataliya Adamchuk (Шульська, Букіна, Адамчук, 2023), Kateryna Granatova (2024), Kateryna Polishchuk (2023), Alla Megel and Maria Yaremchuk (Мегель, Яремчук, 2022), Oleksandr Markiv (Марків, 2018); Yury Moroz, Yulia Tverdokhlib (2016); Anton Pecherskyi (2024); Oksana Frolova (2013) and others.

There are quite a lot of studies on informational and psychological operations and they considered from different angles. However, it is worth noting that the role of journalists in the identification of PSYOPs not yet been investigated.

## Research methods and techniques

To achieve the set goals, we used the method of analyzing already existing research, close to the topic we analyzed, conducting a survey among different age categories, covering a significant number of respondents, and analyzing the results obtained. We also reviewed the

advice offered by other researchers regarding the recognition of PSYOPs, summarized the data obtained and highlighted our practical advice for journalists.

With the help of the electronic unit «Google Forms», we created a questionnaire. We posted it on a personal page on Facebook and Instagram. The form stated that anyone could fill it out. It was important for us to get responses from different age groups. All respondents who decided to fill out the questionnaire had to answer seven main questions, as well as indicate their age category, location and type of activity.

## Results and discussion

Information and psychological operations are weapons that stand in the same row next to assault rifles and machine guns. It strikes massively, renders the military incapacitated, and sometimes even kills.

Information and psychological operations have long become part of the life of all nations of our planet. They can have an impact on us in one way or another, using the most effective techniques. What seems scary is that it is impossible to limit their effect on ourselves, since we do not always understand that we controlled through the media space.

The concept of informational and psychological operations is not new; its use seen even during the First World War. American researcher Brett Bemis (2011) gave a clear definition: «Information-psychological operations are actions taken by an organization to reduce the enemy's morale, its effectiveness, reduce their will to fight, and ultimately force them to surrender» (Bemis, 2011). The author adds that within such operations, organizations prepare a special audio, visual or combined product or message. In addition, appropriate media selected for a specific purpose, which will be able to reach the target audience as much as possible and will have a significant effect on it (Bemis, 2011).

Our views on the definition of informational-psychological operations coincide with the article of Brett Bemis (2011), therefore we suggest starting the review of research by foreign authors from the work of the above-mentioned scientist «Preparation of informational-psychological operations: ingredients of successful informational-psychological operations» (Bemis, 2011). In our opinion, this study is quite thorough and important within the scope of the topic analyzed by us. It reveals strategies and methods of influencing audiences based on the US experience in developing information and psychological operations during the Korean War. The author analyzed three specific operations, namely, Operation Moolah, Safe Passage Slip, and Loudspeaker Call for Surrender. The researcher justified his choice of informational and psychological actions by what they were at that time. This was the first war when a group was fully formed that worked continuously in this direction (Bemis, 2011).

In general, the study of Brett Bemis (2011) covers quite extensively many aspects that are relevant to the topic we are analyzing. We consider the second part of the scientific article to be the most interesting and useful for our work, where the author gave a clear definition of the information-psychological operation and described its seven-phase process. It includes the following stages: planning; analysis of the target audience; development of a series of actions; product creation and design; internal review and approval and audience impact assessment (Bemis, 2011).

The American researcher presented material on how to formulate messages for informational and psychological operations, where he noted the importance of all four of his variables: in-depth knowledge of the target audience, information and consumer favorability. Brett Bemis (2011) further describes the evolution and future of information and psychological

operations. The above-mentioned author did not miss the theory of communication in his research (Bemis, 2011).

In conclusion, Brett Bemis (2011) advises analyzing and learning from successful and unsuccessful information and psychological operations, to study the target audience in depth, to form strong messages and to choose effective means of their transmission. The author is convinced that it is necessary to increase the favorability of consumers. In his work, the researcher presented models and matrices that, as he claims can increase the effectiveness of informational and psychological operations (Bemis, 2011).

Researcher Hendra Kaprisma (2020) made a significant contribution to the study of the topic of information and psychological operations in the article «Psychological Operations: from the Point of View of Communication, Mass Media, Propaganda and Socio-Cultural Perspective» (Kaprisma, 2020). He considered informational and psychological operations from four different angles. The first section of the article is devoted to communication, which, according to the researcher, consists not only of three main elements – sender, message and recipient but also of also two additional ones – media and effect. The author also emphasized, «Initial knowledge of the field and socio-cultural conditions is the basis for determining the model, type of messages and media that are suitable for the target audience» (Kaprisma, 2020).

The second section of the aforementioned article describes information-psychological operations from the point of view of mass media, where the media shown as a «conveyor» of messages in the communication space. The author emphasizes that the mass media act as a tool for those who want to spread the message to deliver the necessary information effectively, efficiently and with the ability to reach a wide audience. Also in this section, it said that it is important for the operations team to be able to create even the simplest media themselves. In conclusion, the researcher convinces that it is worth noting that the trust of the target audience in the mass media should be as high as possible, because then the level of influence will be as high as possible (Kaprisma, 2020).

The next chapter of the work of Hender Kaprisma (2020) was devoted to the consideration of informational and psychological operations from the point of view of propaganda. Here, the author provided an understanding of the interpretation of propaganda by such researchers as Matthew Soules (Soules, 2015), Randy Bates and Michael Mooney (Bates, & Mooney, 2014). In summary, propaganda considered the dissemination of a certain true or false thought/idea, which should influence a certain audience and convince them to adopt a certain attitude or incline them to certain actions. It should act not only during armed conflicts but also before and after them (Kaprisma, 2020).

The above section describes the idea that the best propaganda is the truth. In contrast, the worst is a lie (Kaprisma, 2020). In our opinion, such a judgment somewhat destroys the Ukrainian vision, against the background of experience with Russian propaganda, but it is quite correct.

The topic of the fourth chapter of the study by Hendra Kaprisma (2020) is informational and psychological operations from the point of view of a sociocultural perspective. This subsection of the topic analyzed by us is one of the integral components for achieving the goals. In the mentioned part of the work, the author emphasizes that during the development of information and psychological operations, the sender must study in detail the knowledge of his target audience in the social, cultural and physical fields. The researcher argues his statement by the fact that the mentioned factors will shape the content and model of the message (Kaprisma, 2020).

Studying the life and lifestyle of the target audience will help increase the effectiveness of information dissemination. Such knowledge reveals strengths and weaknesses. Distributed

materials should be close to the target audience, as well as appropriate to its culture (Kaprisma, 2020).

In the conclusion of his scientific article, Hendra Kaprisma (2020) emphasized the importance of considering informational and psychological operations through the prism of all the points of view analyzed by him. «All perspectives involve factors that influence the course of psychological operations to achieve a target against targets without the use of tools (firearms) but through 'psychological warfare' which attacks the mind and then changes the target's behaviour and mindset» – emphasizes the researcher (Kaprisma, 2020).

As the next work in the proposed review, we chose the article by the Slovak researcher Alzhbeta Kovalova entitled «What are informational and psychological operations and how can they be used in hybrid warfare?» (Kovalova, 2024). This study is important within the scope of the topic analyzed by us, as it is relevant to us. In it, the author analyzes the issue we are researching based on the operation that carried out on the territory of Ukraine by the occupying country on the eve of the second anniversary of the war. Equally important, in our opinion, is that the analyzed article was published on the website of the software company ESET, which specializes in cyber security (Kovalova, 2024).

In addition to explaining the concept of an information-psychological operation, Alzhbeta Kovalova (2024) described in detail the operation «Toxonto» (as it called in ESET). The article states that Russia conducted the operation in two stages in November and at the end of December 2023. During the first wave of the analyzed information and psychological operation, e-mails sent out that there might be problems with heating, and shortages of medicine and food in the country. They tried to demoralize Ukrainians with the mentioned fact. During the second wave of the operation, attackers, posing as other citizens of our country, urged people to mutilate themselves to avoid military service (Kovalova, 2024).

Alzhbeta Kovalova (2024) stated that «ESET Research» recorded campaigns of one type of phishing, which aimed at stealing credentials of «Microsoft Office 365» (Kovalova, 2024).

In conclusion, the researcher emphasizes, «The change of battlefields, from physical to psychological, aimed at demoralizing and destabilizing communities with the help of disinformation campaigns» (Kovalova, 2024). Alzhbeta Kovalova (2024) also emphasizes that modern information and psychological operations are more insidious and sophisticated (Kovalova, 2024).

The final work of our review is the article by researcher Joseph Mabima (2018) «Social Network Sites as a Tool for Psychological Operations: A Case Study» (Mabima, 2018). This study deserves our attention, as it reveals PSYOP in the context of the popular platforms Facebook and Twitter, through which the most fake messages from Russia flow. Joseph Mabima (2018) also detailed in his research an overview of several information and psychological operations by the occupying country in the Ukrainian media space (Mabima, 2018).

In his article, the author emphasized that Russian «trolls» have existed in our information space for many years and carry out constant psychological operations designed to create discord within the state. The researcher noted the presence of bots of the aggressor country during the Euromaidan, where fake accounts aimed at supporting the small part of the Ukrainian population that was against signing the association agreement with the European Union (Mabima, 2018).

Next, Joseph Mabima (2018) presented materials with screenshots confirming that Russia often uses social networking sites in its information and psychological operations. The author described operations about the oppression of Russian-speaking people in Ukraine, about the fact that Ukrainians are the «axis» of evil in the Baltic region, and about how the annexed parts of our country become better in occupation. The study recorded «throw-ins» into our media space

with slogans that the Russian Orthodox Church is the only true Christian faith, and it also refers to the smearing of our soldiers in Slovyansk (Mabima, 2018).

In the conclusion of his research, Joseph Mabima (2018) emphasizes that social networks have now become an ideal place for informational and psychological operations, where bloggers or even fake mass media can become their reinforcement. The author believes that this trend has led to Russia's active actions in not only Ukraine and the USA, but may also develop in other countries under the same scenarios. The researcher is convinced that in the era of social networks, we must focus on the psychology of decision-making (Mabima, 2018).

During the war between Russia and Ukraine, the information war reached a new level. On the part of the aggressor, a large mass of disinformation, manipulation and other methods of waging hybrid war pour into the Ukrainian media space every day. During the two years of the full-scale invasion, the Ukrainian people significantly improved their knowledge in the field of information hygiene. However, we should not forget that Russian information and psychological operations have improved significantly. In this case, it is important to understand that the identification of the PSYOP is an integral part of the life of Ukrainians.

The issue of informational and psychological operations during the Russian-Ukrainian war was described by the following researchers: Наталія Шульська, Наталія Букіна, Наталія Адамчук (2023); Катерина Поліщук (2023); Алла Мегель and Марія Яремчук (2022) and others.

Important, in our opinion, research for the analyzed topic was conducted Наталія Шульська, Наталія Букіна та Наталія Адамчук (Шульська, Букіна, Адамчук, 2023). Work «Typological Markers of Information and Psychological Operations (PSYOP) in the Conditions of War in the Media» (Шульська, Букіна, Адамчук, 2023) reveals all the tricks and identifiers of Russian «throw-ins» into Ukrainian social networks during a full-scale invasion. The authors single out several typical signs of PSYOP: synchronicity of publications, factual, linguistic or logical errors, and fakeness of the authors of the messages. The study also states that «Russian PSYOP often hide behind blue and yellow flags, tridents, patriotic appeals» (Шульська, Букіна, Адамчук, 2023). In the article, such misinformers are called «virtual saboteurs» (Шульська, Букіна, Адамчук, 2023).

The researchers state in their work that messages about conflicts between residents of the west and east of Ukraine are increasingly becoming a trap for Ukrainians. The fact that the residents of the occupied territories are to blame for the war coming to their homes because they spoke Russian (Шульська, Букіна, Адамчук, 2023).

At the end of her research, the author singles out three more typical signs of informational and psychological operations of Russians in the Ukrainian media space.

1. The effect of exaggerating the power of the enemy. The manipulators create the impression that Russia is winning in intelligence or has an influence on mobile communications, thereby intimidating the Ukrainian people.

2. «Call to active actions due to excessive emotional load of the message» [18]. Using lexical, visual or manipulative means, the enemy causes a strong emotional excitement, during which Ukrainians forget about critical thinking.

3. Discrediting Ukrainian official sources. Propagandists of the aggressor country speculate with the phrases «the government does not say anything», «everything is hidden from us», and «the official mass media is silent» (Шульська, Букіна, Адамчук, 2023).

In summary, the researchers stated that the Ukrainians were able to resist the first aggressive waves of disinformation with the beginning of a full-scale invasion and to develop effective tools and strategies for countering PSYOP, and most importantly, they proved that they could resist information warfare (Шульська, Букіна, Адамчук, 2023).

Within the framework of studying the identification of informational and psychological operations, we must understand that PSYOPs divided into types according to different criteria.

Олександра Марків (2018) – the author of the work «Hybrid War and Journalism. Problems of Information Security» (Марків, 2018) proposed a clear classification of PSYOP. According to her research, information and psychological operations divided into offensive and defensive. According to the purpose and direction, the author identified four types of manipulation systems: those aimed at influencing management decisions; those aimed at compromising material; those that aim to disable or damage something; designed to destabilize the economic or political situation (Марків, 2018).

The researcher stated that there are short-term, medium-term and long-term operations that last 1–2 weeks, 2–4 or more months, respectively (Марків, 2018).

For effectively counteract powerful Russian propaganda and disinformation, which have a great impact, we must clearly understand the mechanisms of information and psychological operations. Based on this, we offer to consider the results of the research of Kateryna Polishchuk (2023) on the topic: «The system of countering information and psychological operations during the full-scale military aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine» (Поліщук, 2023).

In the above work, the author emphasizes that the aggressor country has developed a powerful mechanism of propaganda and influence on all spheres of life. This apparatus consists of well-honed message cases and strategies. To carry out its information and psychological operations against Ukraine, Russia most often uses the following «mouthpieces»: «social networks («YouTube», «TikTok»), foreign mass media, in particular, its channels that still operate in other countries (RT, «Sputnik»); trolls, bloggers and bots (chatbots); leaflets, free campaign newspapers; face-to-face campaigning...» (Поліщук, 2023).

Also in his research Катерина Поліщук (Поліщук, 2023) noticed that in their informational and psychological operations, Putin's propagandists often use the mirroring method, transferring their guilt to our state.

In the process of identifying PSYOP, it is important which topics Russians most often choose for propaganda. The author highlighted the main narratives, which are indicators that the audience manipulated. Such topics include stories that Ukraine is a pseudo-state and it is part of Russia. In addition, in the materials of PSYOP, it often said that Ukrainians are evil, and Russians want the best for people. News that our people are Nazis, fascists, and the like and that Ukrainians, in general, are «puppets of the West» is widespread misinformation. (Поліщук, 2023).

To avoid Russian manipulations in the Ukrainian media space in the future, we should know why some information and psychological operations were successful during a full-scale invasion. The researcher singled out three reasons.

1. Experience of the aggressor country in waging hybrid wars with other countries (Georgia, Moldova, Chechnya). Certain informational and psychological operations have already tested on other people and improved.

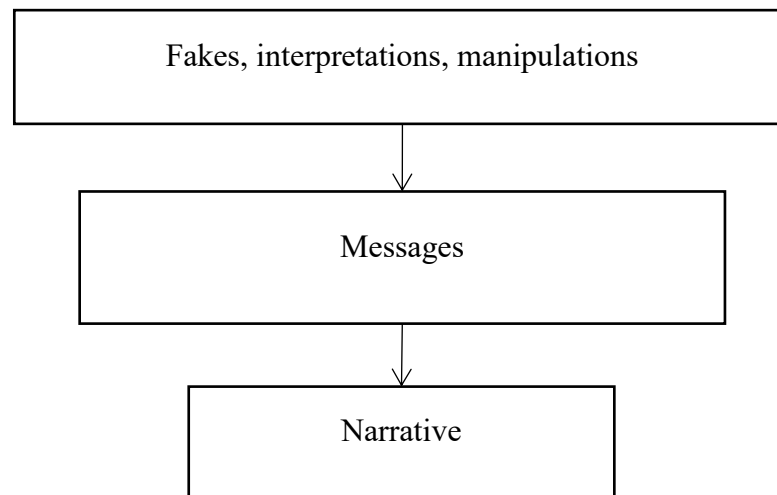
2. Russia has long had many large information resources, which it uses for mass «infusion» of fakes.

3. Ukraine was not economically and politically stable at the time of the full-scale invasion. Inside the state, we had many people (in particular, politicians who worked for Russia for years). Therefore, the Ukrainian people were vulnerable to manipulation (Поліщук, 2023).

Summarizing, Kateryna Polishchuk (2023) added that despite all the successes of Ukraine in countering the PSYOP of the aggressor country, the threat is still very great and we must work effectively on creating an effective mechanism that would quickly discredit the manipulations of the occupiers in the Ukrainian media space.

In our opinion, the work became an important publication for Ukrainian society during the full-scale invasion Алли Мегель та Марії Яремчук (2022) under the name «Enemy PSYOP. How to change and resist?» (Мегель, Яремчук, 2022). Within the framework of the topic we have considered, we will analyze an example of the technology for conducting informational and psychological operations.

According to the authors, Russia can use various tools to integrate into our media field: fakes, interpretations or manipulations. However, the principle of influence on mass consciousness must be the same. Алла Мегель and Марія Яремчук (2022) showed their opinion in a diagram (see Figure 1 below).



*Fig. 1 The principle of informational influence of PSYOP*

According to the diagram in Fig. 1, narratives formed from messages, and those in turn are formed from fakes, interpretations and manipulations. Next, the researchers considered such a theory using real examples. As examples of fakes, interpretations, or manipulations, the authors presented messages such as «everyone in the Armed Forces abuses alcohol», «fighters on the front line fight only with assault rifles and rifles» and «the Ukrainian army is naked, bareheaded, and hungry» (Мегель, Яремчук, 2022). The message that our army is weak and incapable of anything traced in such information leaks. This is where the narrative follows that: «Ukraine is an unsustainable state» (Мегель, Яремчук, 2022).

Such an example Алла Мегель та Марія Яремчук (2022) were able to convey that even the smallest Russian fakes are part of systemic actions in the informational and psychological operation.

Among the large flow of messages about what PSYOP is, how to counter it and their examples, it is still important to highlight systematic instructions on identifying such manipulations by the aggressor country. Just such an article published on the «Media of Great Histories» portal by their authors, where information warfare specialist Dmytro Zolotukhin identified five signs of informational and psychological information (Медіа Великих Історій..., 2022).

1. The goal of any informational and psychological operation is to change the behaviour of a person or a group of people.



2. Someone has a concrete benefit from the fact that the behaviour of a large number of people will change.

3. It is important to check the source of the message. «And if that source is anonymous, people will think that the person concerned has a motive to hide their benefit» (Медіа Великих Історій..., 2022).

4. If certain information creates an involuntary effect of repetition, and the reason for this is not social significance – you should think and understand that there is a resource for conducting an operation.

5. The information cannot be confirmed, there is no objective evidence that it is true (Медіа Великих Історій..., 2022).

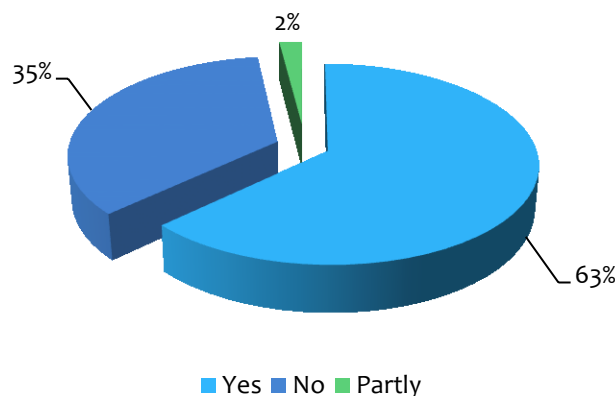
In conclusion, it can be understood that when receiving any message that evokes strong emotions, does not have a clear primary source and has a feeling of intrusiveness, it is worth «turning on» critical thinking and thinking about who benefits from such intrusiveness.

According to the methodology of our practical research, we conducted a survey consisting of seven questions. We received 100 completed forms, the results of which will be described below.

Table 1.  
 The results of respondents' answers to question 1.

| <i>Do you know what such informational and psychological operation (PSYOP)?</i> |     |
|---|-----|
| Options answers   | %   |
| «Yes»   | 63  |
| «No»  | 35  |
| «Partly»  | 2   |
| TOGETHER  | 100 |

Cyclogram 1.  
 The results of respondents' answers to question 1.



The survey was attended by 46 respondents (46%) aged 18 to 24, 29 (29%) from 25 to 44, 19 (19%) from 45 to 60, and 6 (6%) who are over 60. 88 people (88%) of all respondents are in

Ukraine, and the remaining 12 (12%) are outside Ukraine. The majority, namely 65 people (65%) are working, 25 people (25%) are studying and 10 people (10%) are not working.

In the first question, we asked the respondents «Do you know what information-psychological operation (PSYOP) is?»

63 people (63%) chose the answer «yes», and 35 people (35%) – «partially». Another 2 persons (2%) do not know this term (see table 1 below).

The next question was «How do you know the meaning of the above term? »

The largest part of respondents, namely 32 people (32%), marked the answer option «read in an article on a news site» 30 people (30%) heard about information and psychological operations on radio or television. Another 27 respondents answered: «read on Google». The remaining 11 people (11%) offered their option in the «Other» column. Among the answers received were: «professionally related to teaching the specifics of PSYOP in journalistic activities»; «learned in pairs at the university»; «studied at the university»; «I study journalism and study this terminology»; «learned from my daughter»; «from various sources»; «from a friend who studies journalism»; «in the book»; «met at work»; «the book «Political Science»; «video of military analysts» (see table 2 below).

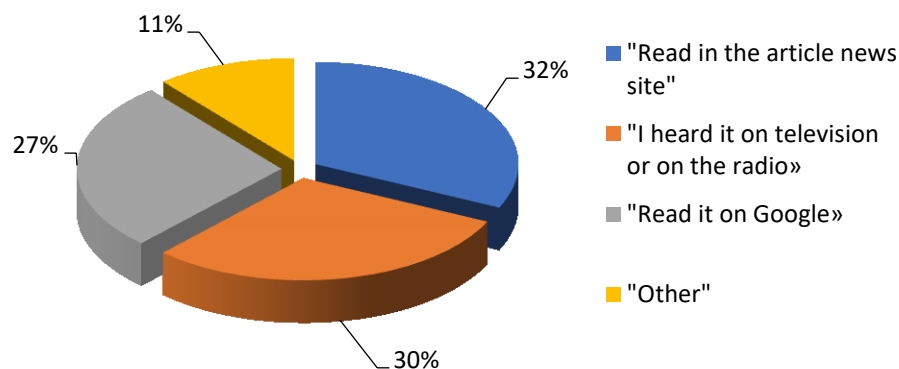
Table 2.

The results of the answers respondents to question 2.

| <i>«How do you know? Value the term above?»</i> |     |
|---|-----|
| Options answers                                 | %   |
| «Read in the article news site»                 | 32  |
| «I heard it on television or on the radio»      | 30  |
| «Read it on Google»                             | 27  |
| «Other»   | 11  |
| TOGETHER  | 100 |

Cyclogram 2.

Results of respondents' answers to question 2  
 "How do you know aforementioned term?"

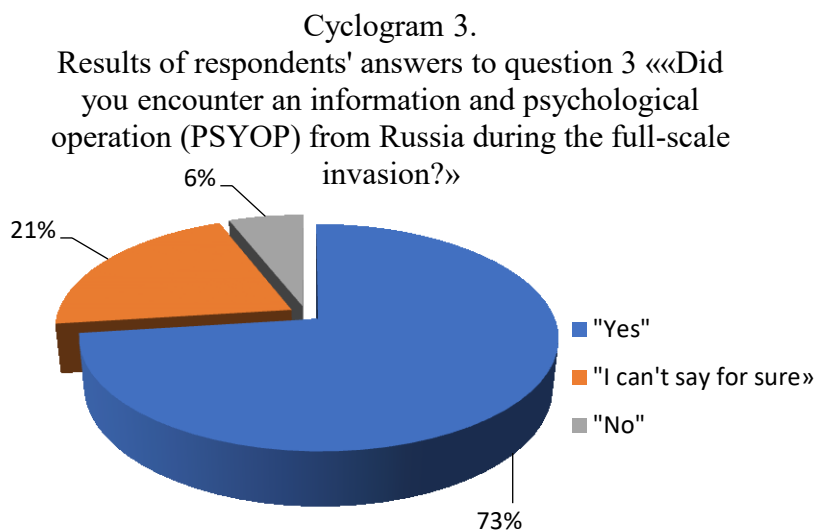


In the third question, we asked our respondents «Did you encounter an information and psychological operation (PSYOP) from Russia during the full-scale invasion?».

An unequivocal majority, namely 73 people (73%), answered «Yes». The other 21 respondents (21%) could not say whether they had encountered PSYOP from Russia during the full-scale invasion. And another 6 respondents (6%) left a mark next to the answer option «no» (see Table 3 below).

Table 3.  
 The results answer respondents to question 3.

| <i>«Did you encounter an information and psychological operation (PSYOP) from Russia during the full-scale invasion? «</i> |     |
|--|-----|
| Options answers  | %   |
| «Yes»  | 73  |
| «I can't say for sure»   | 21  |
| «No»   | 6   |
| TOGETHER   | 100 |



The fourth question was optional for everyone. Those people who faced the PSYOP during the full-scale invasion gave the answer. There are 93 such respondents. The question was: «What helped you recognize the informational and psychological operation?».

54 people (58.1%) answered, «Own critical thinking». Another 22 respondents (23.7%) left a mark next to the option «warning about the possibility of an operation on television/radio/in a newspaper/on a news site.» Another 15 people (16.1%) were helped recognize the information and psychological operation of media literacy skills. 2 respondents

(2.2%) chose the option «Other» wrote: «Own critical thinking and media literacy skills» and «did not collide» (see Table 4 below).

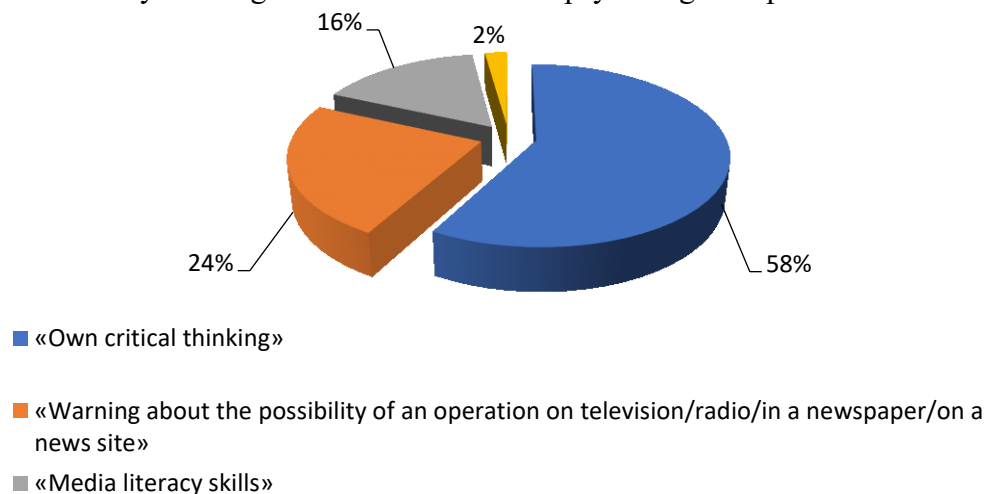
Table 4.

The result answers respondents to question 4 «What helped you recognize informational and psychological operation?»

| «What helped you recognize informational and psychological operation?»                             |      |
|--|------|
| Options answers  | %    |
| «Own critical thinking»  | 58.1 |
| «Warning about the possibility of an operation on television/radio/in a newspaper/on a news site » | 23.7 |
| «Media literacy skills»  | 16.1 |
| «Other»  | 2.2  |
| TOGETHER   | 100  |

Table 4.

The result answers respondents to question 4 «What helped you recognize informational and psychological operation?»



The fifth question was for all 100 respondents and sounded like this: «In your opinion, what role do journalists play in recognising PSYOP during the war?»

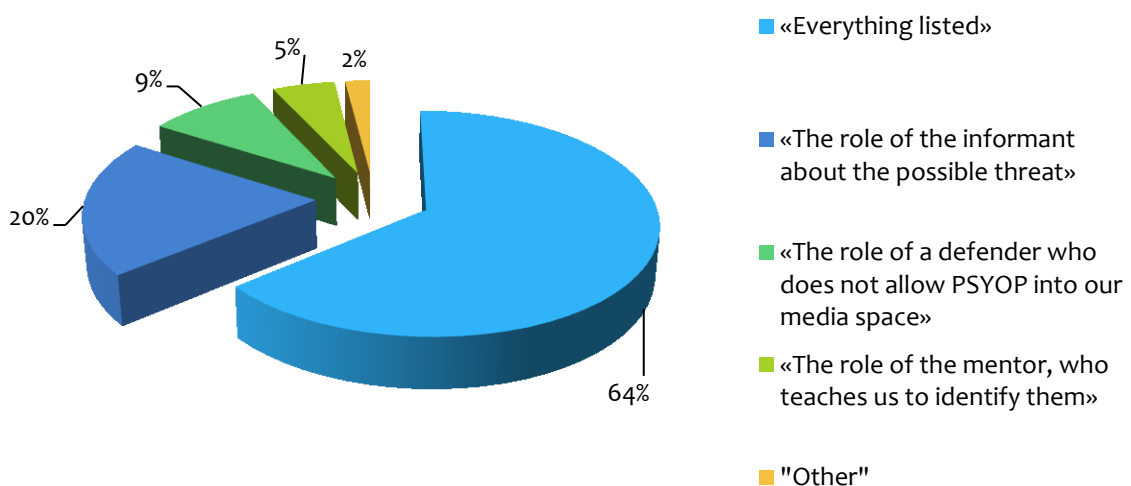
20 respondents (20%) chose «the role of an informant about a possible threat». Another 9 people (9%) believe that journalists perform «the role of a defender who does not allow PSYOP

into our media space». Another 5 respondents (5%) marked the answer «the role of a mentor who teaches us to identify them». However, the majority, namely 64 respondents (64%), chose the «all of the above» option. 2 people decided to offer their answer next to the «Other» mark and wrote: «Is part of the PSYOP scheme» and «the role of an informant about a possible threat, the role of a mentor who teaches them to identify» (see table 5 below).

Table 5.  
 The result answers respondents in question 5 «In your opinion, what is the role in the recognition of PSYOP during the war playback journalists? »

| «In your opinion, what is the role in recognising PSYOP during the war play back journalists?» |     |
|--|-----|
| Options answers  | %   |
| «Everything listed»  | 64  |
| «The role of the informant about the possible threat»  | 20  |
| «The role of a defender who does not allow PSYOP into our media space»                         | 9   |
| «The role of the mentor, who teaches us to identify them»                                      | 5   |
| «Other»  | 2   |
| TOGETHER   | 100 |

Table 5.  
 The result answers respondents in question 5 «In your opinion, what is the role in the recognition of PSYOP during the war playback journalists?»



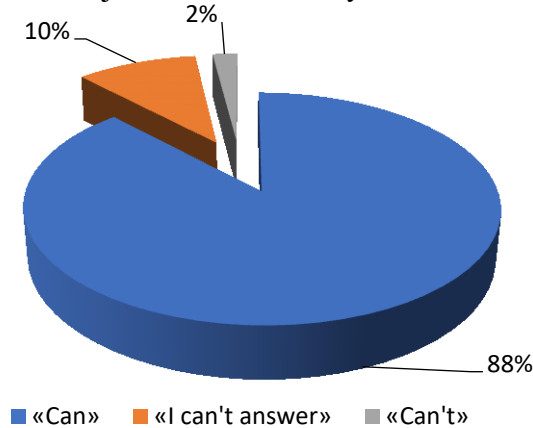
The sixth question to the people we interviewed was «Do you think journalists can carry out PSYOP? »

88 respondents (88%) answered, «Can». The other 10 people (10%) can't answer. 2 respondents (2%) believe that journalists cannot carry out PSYOP (see table 6 below).

Table 6.  
 The results answers respondents in question 6  
 «Do you think journalists can carry out PSYOP? »

| «Do you think journalists can carry out PSYOP?» |     |
|---|-----|
| Options answers                                 | %   |
| «Can»   | 88  |
| «I can't answer»                                | 10  |
| «Can't»   | 2   |
| TOGETHER  | 100 |

Table 6.  
 The results answers respondents in question 6  
 «Do you think journalists can carry out PSYOP?»



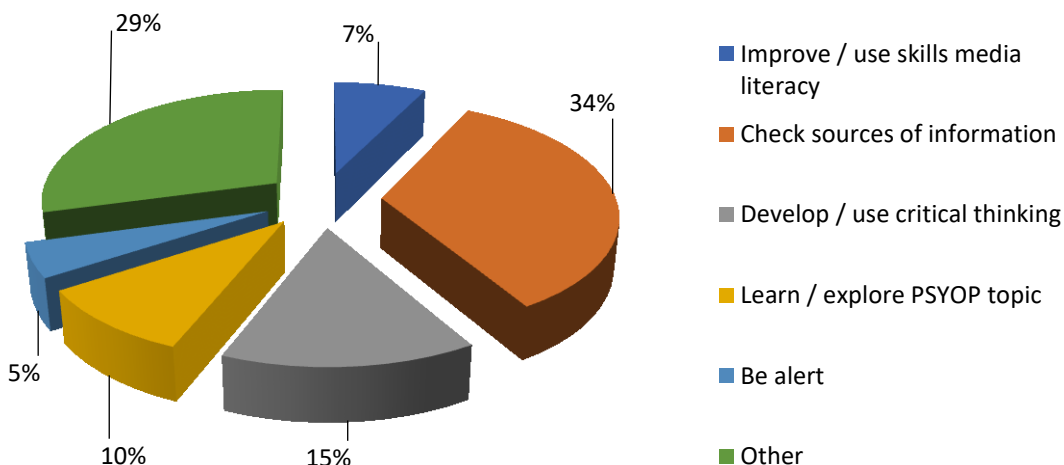
In the final question, we asked respondents to leave advice to journalists so that they could better recognize informational and psychological operations.

We received 83 answers from our respondents to the above question. We decided to group all the tips since most of them repeated. Therefore, we got 7 conditional answers-categories (see Table 7 below).

Table 7.  
 The results answers respondents in question 7  
 «What can you advise journalists to so that they can better recognize PSYOP»

| No<br>s/p | « What can you advise to journalists in order to that they could do better recognize PSYOP?» |     |
|-----------|--|-----|
|           | Options answers  | %   |
| 1.        | Improve / use skills media literacy  | 6   |
| 2.        | Check sources of information   | 28  |
| 3.        | Develop / use critical thinking  | 12  |
| 4.        | Learn / explore PSYOP topic  | 8   |
| 5.        | Be alert   | 4   |
| 6.        | Other  | 24  |
| 7.        | The most interesting and the most meaningful ,<br>on our opinion, answers                    | 18  |
| 8.        | TOGETHER   | 100 |

Table 7.  
 The results answers respondents in question 7  
 «What can you advise journalists to so that they can better recognize PSYOP»



We included the advice of five people (6%) in the first group. The largest number of respondents, namely 23 people (28%), believes that journalists need to check the sources of

information well to recognize the information-psychological operation. We classified another 10 people (12%) into the third category. In addition, 7 respondents (8%) believe journalists should constantly learn the topic of PSYOP. 3 respondents (4%) wrote that it is enough to be vigilant to recognize Russian «throwbacks». In the «Other» category, we included all answers that do not fit into any of the groups. 20 respondents (24%) received advice from her. The answers of the interviewees were as follows:

- «View the list of channels coordinated by Russia (list from the Center for Countering Disinformation)»;
- «Don't trust unofficial Telegram channels, take a «media literacy» course, sign up for fact-checking initiatives»;
- «To act as an informant»;
- «Include critical thinking and do not succumb to temptations (money, career...)»;
- «To be yourself, remember why you are doing it and go to the end»;
- «To be competent and honest in all matters»;
- «Tell the truth»;
- «To be a true patriot of Ukraine»;
- «Receive information from various sources, check it many times, and have intuition, and not to write false titles that do not reflect the content of the text»;
- «Be guided by verified sources. Don't write anything for the sake of likes!»;
- «Pay attention to the details near the location of the PSYOP shooting, look for the primary source»;
- «Turn on the brains»;
- «If you don't see it, don't think it up»;
- «It is important to adhere to professional (journalistic) ethical principles for identifying PSYOP»;
- «To study deeply psychology and types of thinking»;
- «Be patient»;
- «Not to allow negative information about Ukraine into the media space...»;
- «Strength and patience to distinguish between lies and truth»;
- «Good luck»;
- «Only real facts».

We also highlighted 15, in our opinion, specific answers (18%):

- «Analyze all sources of information and news through the lens of your critical thinking. To study human psychology»;
- «Analysis of the situation, trust only the first source of information, double-check information and do not chase sensation»;
- «To think critically, not succumb to PSYOP, also read and learn information about how to properly react and analyze this or that attack by the aggressor. The most important thing is not to spread such information, but on the contrary to tell that this or that information is unreliable and can be considered PSYOP so that other people know about it and do not succumb to propaganda»;
- «Check information in at least three sources. Receive information only from authorized persons. Avoid using techniques that give overload in the emotional colour of information»;
- «Do not use one, or even 10 sources of information. Analyze the «News» of the enemy and compare them with reality. And convey information as it is, without exaggeration and vice versa, even if the conditional situation is not on our side»;



- «First of all, check information by available means, do not be afraid and do not be ashamed to ask for help and advice from colleagues. Seek confirmation or refutation from competent authorities, special services, etc. And to think critically»;
- «At this time, give more priority to studying PSYOP itself, analyze Russia's actions, improve skills in this regard and inform society more about PSYOP»;
- «Work on yourself, constantly improve, develop, learn new information, learn from other people's experience»;
- «Think critically, ask yourself questions about who could benefit or benefit from it and why, be aware of politics and geopolitics, be able to analyze and have a good memory»;
- «Act by the rules of journalistic ethics. Do not try to «sell» information by manipulating headlines or texts that are sharp for society, and in no case do not distribute information from unverified sources. Also, do not spread information that could discredit the Armed Forces in any way»;
- «Study examples of PSYOPs and their methods. Check sources of information Watch for patterns and try to recognize them. Consult with experts. Maintain systematic documentation of PSYOP cases»;
- «Not to present information to society as if tomorrow is the end of the world, thereby provoking panic in all aspects (for example, there will be no sugar, salt, light, water, eggs, etc.)»;
- «It is good to check sources of information, and always focus on official authorities (and not even on popular media). Always be aware of the latest events, because this is how you can critically analyze information and expose PSYOP. Pay attention to the presentation of information (headline, photo, source, possible words of manipulation in the text)»;
- «Learning to detect the fact of the beginning of the PSYOP to have time to prepare for a real conflict.» For this, it is necessary to monitor the information space to detect an information operation»;
- «Communication with society is important for journalists to understand the psychological state of people».

Summing up, we can say that most people know what an informational and psychological operation is. However, opinions about where the interviewees learned the meaning of this term divided: some read it in an article on a news website, others heard it on the radio or television, some learned from Google, and some gave their versions.

A large proportion of people have already had time to face the PSYOP during the full-scale invasion of Russia on the territory of Ukraine. A small part of the respondents confidently testified that they had no contact with such manipulation systems from the aggressor country. There are people who cannot accurately answer the question. They are indicators of people's lack of confidence in the ability to identify informational and psychological operations.

The opinions of the interviewees who encountered PSYOP divided on what helped them to recognize Russian propaganda. Most people guided by criticality when determining an informational and psychological operation. This shows that for more than 2 years of a full-scale invasion, people have learned to process the information presented and be guided by logic, not emotions. We also recorded that a little less than ¼ of the people we interviewed identified the PSYOP after being warned about the possibility of an operation on television/radio/in a newspaper/on a news website. Such indicators show that journalists have become our defenders or helpers in the media environment and play an important role in recognizing Russian propaganda. Many respondents use media literacy skills to identify informational and psychological operations.

Almost all the people we interviewed agreed with the options offered to us regarding the role that journalists can play in the recognition of PSYOP. We recorded that the majority of

people who took part in our research believe that people who work on radio, television, in a newspaper, or on a news website can act as informants about a possible threat, and defenders who prevent PSYOP in our media space, and even mentors who teach them to identify. One respondent believes the journalist may be part of a Russian propaganda scheme. Such a statement may indicate distrust of Ukrainian publicists.

Almost all of the people we interviewed believe that journalists can carry out PSYOP. Only two people out of a hundred are convinced that they cannot. However, there were also those respondents who could not accurately answer the question.

Analyzing the advice of the respondents in the last question of our questionnaire, we can say that most people gave important hints about which journalists are better at recognizing informational and psychological operations. In their answers, the interviewees put the greatest emphasis on the importance of checking any information. We also noted that many respondents advise using media literacy skills and critical thinking when processing messages. Some interviewees are convinced that vigilance and desire to study the topic of PSYOP is an important aspect of the work of journalists.

Looking at the answers that we assigned to the «Other» category, we can assume that some Ukrainians do not completely trust journalists, so they are advised to present only dry, real facts, not to make up anything, not to write «false headlines» and «not to give in to temptations (monetary, career...)».

Comment «Don't write anything for the sake of likes!» led us to think that among Ukrainians there are also those who do not completely distinguish professional journalistic publications from news posts on social networks.

In the answers, which we classified as the most interesting and meaningful, in our opinion, we followed a series of tips about the importance of taking into account other people's experiences, checking information, taking into account the rules of journalistic ethics, early detection of the beginning of an operation and studying human psychology. The respondents also noted that it is worth paying attention to information about the Armed Forces and honestly talking about the situation in the country.

Russian propaganda has been actively trying to interfere in the Ukrainian media space for a very long time. PSYOP performers are increasingly inventing new schemes for spreading their narratives through any available channels of influence on the mass consciousness. Since 2014, Russian bots have even more actively begun to deploy entire informational and psychological operations to achieve the desired reaction inside Ukraine. Every year, such systematic interventions of the aggressor country in our information environment become more and more powerful and influential.

To date, when two years have already passed since the full-scale invasion of Russia, we can state that information and psychological operations are very good at manipulating the emotional state of Ukrainian society. Moreover, although the people of our country have already acquired some media literacy skills during the war, the PSYOP of the aggressor countries are also not standing still, but are only improving every day.

Based on the survey we conducted above, we can state that journalists play an important role in helping society identify Russia's information and psychological operations, especially during a full-scale invasion. False information negatively affects the situation in the country. Access to it should be limited. Information space specialists should know PSYOP and be able to recognize them quickly. For this purpose, we highlight several practical recommendations for journalists regarding informational and psychological operations.

Our survey showed that almost all respondents mentioned checking information and finding sources in their advice to media workers. In our opinion, this is the first and most important recommendation for journalists.

In the modern media space of Ukraine, the competition between mass media is quite high. Everyone wants to publish sensational material and be the first. It is necessary to check the message when the information field of our countries is constantly exposed to bots.

Finding the source is the most important thing when preparing material for mass media. It is unacceptable for professional journalists to broadcast, publish or even hint at information that a media worker has heard or read somewhere, and it is impossible to find confirmation of this.

To help Ukrainian society and journalists in particular, the decision of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine, even before the full-scale invasion of Russia, the Counter-Disinformation Center was established. According to the free online encyclopedia «Wikipedia», it «ensures the implementation of measures to counter current and projected threats to Ukraine's national security and national interests in the information sphere, ensuring Ukraine's information security, identifying and countering disinformation, effectively countering propaganda, destructive informational influences and campaigns, preventing attempts to manipulate public opinion» (Wikimedia project participants, 2024). In addition, its specialists developed a manual for countering disinformation, which analyzed the techniques and tools of influence with the help of information enemy resources and already worked out cases of the Russian Federation.

The next important recommendation for journalists regarding the recognition of PSYOP is to study the psychology of the Ukrainian audience and people in general. Nowadays, it is difficult to work in the field of creating media content without knowing how people will react to it. In our opinion, at a time when the moral state of society is difficult due to constant negativity and pressure, journalists need to control both their emotions and those that arise in people after reading certain material. Since the main tool of Russian propagandists in waging a hybrid war is the manipulation of citizens' consciousness, media workers need to understand what emotions specific information carries.

Knowledge of the working scheme of human psychology will allow you to understand by what means it can influence and be managed.

In addition, a very effective life hack when identifying informational and psychological operations by a journalist is to control one's primary emotions and thoughts when reading a message. In this way, you can catch yourself, before analyzing the information, on what a consumer who is not guided by critical thinking can think, or on violent emotions that propagandists want to get.

Monitoring the current situation in Russia and its media space is also important in the identification by journalists of PSYOP. This will make it possible to control the situation and follow the chain of disinformation leakage or prevent the operation.

A final practical recommendation for journalists to identify information-psychological operations is to ask you the following questions when receiving a report that cannot be verified.

1. What did I feel when I first read the information?
2. Were there sharply positive or negative emotions from what you read?
3. Does it motivate me to take specific actions?
4. Does the distribution of such information violate any ethical values or the Law of Ukraine on the dissemination of messages in times of war?
5. Did I not notice a similar manipulation of my consciousness during contact with informational and psychological operations that have already taken place on the territory of Ukraine?

Summing up, it is worth noting that media workers must always adhere to journalistic standards and rules for the dissemination of information during wartime, be comprehensively informed, control all, their perceptions of messages and study the topic of PSYOP.

## Conclusions

We analyzed Ukrainian and foreign works that studied PSYOP in various aspects of their implementation. Thanks to this, we were an overview of already performed manipulations, to highlight five signs of informational and psychological operations and the principle of their implementation.

Using the analysis and generalization of knowledge from the theoretical part, we created an effective online survey, in which 100 respondents took part. From its results, we learned that most people know what PSYOP is. They see them increasing in our media space with the arrival of a full-scale invasion. Journalists also played a leading role in the identification of informational and psychological operations for a significant number of interviewees. Media workers acted as teachers in recognizing Russian manipulations, informants about the possible threat of Russian propaganda penetrating our space, and defenders who did not allow provocations to be «thrown» at the aggressor country. However, quite a large number of people noted that journalists themselves can a part of PSYOP.

At the end of the survey, respondents gave effective advice to media workers so that they could better identify informational and psychological operations.

Summarizing, we have collected the most effective practical recommendations for journalists.

We found out the role of journalists in the identification of informational and psychological operations of the Russian-Ukrainian war of 2022-2024.

The topic described by us is quite acute and relevant, and its coverage is socially important for Ukraine. This work is a significant contribution both to the development of the PSYOP topic and to helping the citizens of our country. However, unfortunately, the war continues, information and psychological operations are only being improved, so their research will be relevant for a long time for all countries of the world.

## Statement

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### Conflict of interest

There is no conflict of interest.

### Ethics

The material presented in this article meets all the points and requirements put forward by the Ethics Commission of the Editorial and Publishing Department of the public organization «Scientific and Educational Center «SUCCESSFUL».

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### **Роль журналістів у ідентифікації інформаційно-психологічних операцій (в умовах 3-го періоду російсько-української війни 2022–2024 років)**

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У статті ми досліджуємо роль журналістів у ідентифікації інформаційно-психологічних операцій (ІПСО) російсько-української війни 2022–2024 років. Використовували метод аналізу реакцій 100 респондентів різних вікових категорій. Ми переглянули поради інших дослідників щодо ідентифікації ІПСО, узагальнили отримані дані та висвітлили наші практичні поради для журналістів. Методологія дослідження передбачала створення анкети за допомогою програмного забезпечення «Google Форми». Ми розмістили анкету на особистих сторінках у мережі «Фейсбук» і мережі «Інстаграм» і попросили респондентів заповнити анкету й відповісти на 7 запитань. Результати опитування відображено в представлених таблицях і циклограмах.

Відповідно до результатів опитування ми виділили 5 ознак інформаційно-психологічних операцій і принципи їхнього проведення. Ми дізналися, що респонденти мають уявлення про ІПСО й зафіксували зростання кількості респондентів в українському медіапросторі з початком повномасштабного вторгнення Російської Федерації в Україну. Провідну роль у виявленні інформаційно-психологічних операцій відіграли журналісти. Працівники медіа є вчителями у виявленні російських маніпуляцій, інформаторами про можливу загрозу проникнення російської пропаганди в інформаційний простір.

Вважаємо, що інформаційно-психологічні операції вдосконалюються в умовах російсько-української війни, тому їхнє дослідження залишається актуальним. На нашу думку, оскільки російсько-українська війна триває, а разом із нею вдосконалюються інформаційно-психологічні операції, їхнє дослідження буде актуальним ще довго.

**Ключові слова:** роль журналістів, російсько-українська війна, інформаційно-психологічні операції, ідентифікація.

