

National Union of Journalists of Ukraine
June 25, 2024

**Report
on the results of the research of information needs
of residents of the liberated and frontline territories**

I. Introduction

Independent media is an integral part of the infrastructure of any democratic society. For Ukraine, which is inevitably following the path of European and Euro-Atlantic integration, defending its choice in the face of the most difficult conditions of military confrontation with Russian aggression, the values of freedom and democracy are of particular and vital importance. That is why, according to the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine, any programs to restore the regions affected by a full-scale war should include a component to restore and strengthen local media.

In the frontline and liberated regions of Ukraine, local media play a particularly important role: by providing awareness and information to people living there, they directly influence their decision-making about their own security. On the other hand, the function of such media is also to ensure the communication of reforms, public dialogue and public control, in particular over the recovery process.

In general, the future sustainability of local media in the frontline and liberated territories will depend on a number of factors: the introduction of effective targeted government support programs, the continued provision of various types of donor assistance by international organizations, and the readiness of the media themselves for digital transformation, their openness to new experiences and their ability to implement them. At the same time, qualitative changes in the media outlets are impossible without a thorough research of the information needs of their audience. The importance of such a research is especially difficult to overestimate given the extremely dramatic transformations that have taken place in the lifestyles of residents of the frontline and liberated territories. The realities of a full-scale war and the resulting social and behavioral changes could not but affect the information preferences of such people. That is why it is particularly important to find out what sources of information are available to residents of the frontline areas, whether people know enough about vital decisions of local authorities, and whether this information helps them navigate the social space.

Getting answers to these questions was the purpose of this research.

Previously, the NUJU team has studied the needs of print media in the frontline and liberated territories and monitored their progress in the process of participating in donor support programs implemented with the assistance of the Union [*\(territories«Rep» ort on the results of the study of the needs of local newspapers in the de-occupied and frontline - 2023; «Close to Zero: an analytical report on the sustainability of Ukraine's frontline local media outlets based on the*](#)

results of a series of in-depth interviews with local newspaper managers from the frontline and liberated regions» - 2024).

At the same time, previous researches did not cover the behavior and preferences of the audience of these media outlets. The organization has studied the needs of media outlets consumers only in terms of the quality of their satisfaction with the existing system of postal delivery of newspapers ([*«Report on the results of the study of the state of postal delivery of newspapers» - 2023*](#); *«Newspaper delivery through the eyes of editors: analytical note on the results of a survey of local print media outlet managers» - 2024*). However, this is the first time that user preferences have been researched.

The current research adds systematicity to the previous work, and the study of the media landscape in the frontline and liberated territories by experts of the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine thus **becomes comprehensive**.

Obtained results, conclusions and recommendations will become an **important part of the constant research work of the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine team to study the media landscape in the frontline and liberated territories** in order to prepare, publicly lobby and implement solutions aimed at strengthening independent media outlets in such territories as part of the state's infrastructure, information security and democratic society as a whole.

The comprehensive nature of the research makes it possible to use the results, conclusions, and recommendations not only for newsrooms to improve the level of satisfaction of their audience's needs, but also for a wider range of stakeholders, in particular, specialists of communication departments of local authorities and self-government in the respective regions, scientists and experts who study the behavior of media outlet users, employees of donor organizations, etc.

II. Methodology holding the research

Objective

Identify the information needs of information consumers in the frontline and liberated regions of Ukraine and study the extent of their satisfaction through various communication channels by surveying (questionnaires and interviews) audience representatives from all target regions.

Assignments

- To find out and compare the **degree of accessibility of various sources of information** for consumers in the target regions of the research and the **level of trust in them**, and to identify key criteria of trust;

- To investigate **which topics are of the greatest interest to** residents of the frontline and liberated regions and require wider media outlet coverage, to identify the most noticeable «**blind spots**» in local media outlet coverage;
- To assess the availability and identify key **sources of information about local government decisions** for residents of the project's target regions, **their level of satisfaction with the completeness and relevance of such information**, in particular, on security issues; to determine the **extent of impact of disinformation** affects public awareness;
- To identify the best **ways** for citizens to **receive information** and assess the current level of ensuring that they can receive it in a way that is convenient for them.

Participants

For the research, 5 media outlets from 6 regions that are liberated or near the frontline were selected (in alphabetical order): Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, Kyiv, Luhansk, Kharkiv and Kherson regions (*one media outlet from each region, except for Luhansk, which will be explained below*).

The key criterion for selecting the media outlet participants in the research was that their main readership belonged to communities located in the frontline or liberated territories.

Additionally the following criteria were taken into account (compliance with at least two of them):

- the newsroom did not stop working after 24.02.2022 or resumed release after a forced break;
- media outlet retained (at least partially) its editorial staff;
- media outlet has a steady readership;
- media outlet has experience of participating in similar researches conducted by the NUJU and/or other media outlet organizations.

In view of the specifics of the Luhansk region (almost the entire territory is temporarily occupied, all media outlet work remotely), it was decided to cooperate in collecting information not with a single media outlet, but with specific journalists who maintain contact with residents of different communities in the Luhansk region who now live in different regions of Ukraine, in particular, through «hubs» of internally displaced persons from the Luhansk region and in other available ways.

Also, in view of the difficulty of access to a large part of the Kherson region due to constant shelling, several journalists and journalistic teams were involved in the field stage of collecting information from there at different stages.

Besides that, in order to expand the audience of respondents and ensure the fullest possible coverage, the organizers of the research enlisted the help of experienced editors from Donetsk and Kharkiv regions, whose media outlets have a reputation and a stable readership in the frontline and liberated territorial communities of these regions.

The full list of media outlets and journalists who conducted the research in all the regions participating in the project is provided in Appendix 1.

The research included:

- **surveying media outlet audience** (online and offline);
- **conducting a series of blitz interviews** with representatives of the target audience (opinion leaders, influencers, volunteers, active residents of frontline or liberated communities).

The online questionnaire was conducted by posting a standardized questionnaire (Google form) on the digital platforms of the project's media outlet participants, in community groups on social networks, and on the pages of regional communities, with the aim of further filling out these questionnaires by representatives of the target audience of the research (residents of frontline and liberated communities). In order to cover the widest possible area, residents of communities where the media participating in the research was not distributed, but which belong to the category of frontline or liberated communities in the region, could also fill out the questionnaire.

The offline questionnaire and blitz interviews were conducted through direct communication between journalists of the project's media outlet participants and residents of frontline and liberated communities during visits to such communities. In the first case, information was collected by filling out a paper questionnaire by journalists of the respective media outlet, based on the results of communication with respondents, the questions of which were completely identical to the online questionnaire (Google form), with the subsequent transfer of the results to the corresponding Google form. In the second case, information was collected by conducting face-to-face interviews with representatives of the target audience based on a standardized list of questions.

III. Results of the research

Sources of information: accessibility and trust

The results of the research show that **social networks are the absolute leader among the sources of information to which respondents have the easiest access in their region** (86.3%). Websites received 65.1%, television — 35.2%, and newspapers — 29.2%. Also, 27.2% of respondents named acquaintances or relatives as such a source, and 14% — radio).

At the same time, it is quite interesting to compare the data obtained with the answers to the following question: «**Which source of information in your region do you trust the most?**» In this case, the results were distributed as follows:

- social networks - 53.4%
- websites - 43.1%
- newspapers - 26.4%.
- TV - 16.7%.
- acquaintances, relatives - 19.2%
- radio - 4.7%

While social media retain the lead in terms of both accessibility and trust, it is important to consider the results in terms of **accessibility/trust ratio**. Newspapers have the highest

accessibility/trust ratio (hereinafter also referred to as «*relative indicator of trust*»), second place followed by friends and relatives, and the third place – websites:

- newspapers — 90.4% (hereinafter - the percentage of those who trust this source of information relative to those who have the easiest access to it);
- friends and relatives — 70.6%;
- websites — 66.2%
- social networks — 61.9%
- television — 47.4%
- radio — 33.6%

Thus, **newspapers, with their relatively low level of accessibility, in particular, in comparison with other media outlets, have the most loyal audience**, a kind of «core». The fact that friends and relatives are the closest to it in terms of the ratio of accessibility and trust (70.6% vs. 90.4%) may indicate a kind of «**emotional charge**» of trust in this type of media, «attachment» to print media outlets. At the same time, the fact that websites and social networks are next in the ranking of *relative indicator of trust* with a small gap emphasizes the **irreversibility of the digital transformation of user preferences** and can serve as a kind of **clue for print media outlets about the expected trajectory of further development - to use and convert the high trust of readers to actively develop their brands on digital platforms. This could help expand the audience to new segments that find it more convenient and accessible to consume information in digital format, while maintaining a loyal «core» of users.**

The accuracy of this conclusion, in our opinion, can be confirmed by the following answers, which indicate, on the one hand, that there is **no alternative to social networks as the most accessible source of information**, but on the other hand, that **users' trust in the information coming from them is selective. This means that it is possible and important to fill the online space with high-quality verified information** created in accordance with professional media standards. (*Another integral part of promoting better information for citizens is the development of media literacy programs, but this issue, for all its unconditional importance, which we unequivocally affirm, is beyond the scope of this project*).

For example, the following answers were received to the question «**How often do you use social networks to get information?**»:

- daily — 81,3%;
- time to time — 14,5%;
- rarely — 3%;
- never — 1,2%.

Considering that our research is not a sociological research and, therefore, the expected error will be higher than it would be if professional sociological tools were used, we can generalize with a certain, but not too significant, degree of conventionality that **almost all the surveyed residents of the frontline and liberated communities use social media as a source of information.**

On the other hand, the following answers were received to the question «**Do you trust the information received through social networks?**»:

- sometimes — 71,6%;
- rarely — 15,2%;
- always — 10,7%;
- never — 2,5%.

Thus, combining the results with the above-mentioned *relative indicators of trust* in different types of media, we can say that there is **no alternative to social media** as a key source of information and, at the same time, there is a markedly pronounced **selective trust** in it, albeit quite high.

Let's take a closer look at how users explain their trust in a particular **type of media**. We will focus on two types of media outlets - social networks as the leader in terms of accessibility and frequency of use, as well as *absolute trust* (the *difference between absolute and relative trust in different types of media outlets is discussed above*) and **print media outlets** as the leader in terms of relative trust (loyalty of the target audience)

Trust to social media

According to respondents, **the key criteria for trust in social media** are:

- truthfulness;
- accessibility;
- the ability to choose information independently;
- efficiency («*information has saved lives more than once*», «*quick information*», «*they just publish it the fastest*»);
- interactivity («*Live communication, exchange of information with a large number of participants*»; «*There is an opportunity to communicate*»; «*There are comments from readers who care*»; «*It is easy to have discussions that can lead to objectivity*»);
- a large selection of information («*there are more information channels there*»)

Let's take a closer look at the first three criteria that were most often mentioned in the responses.

If we «decompose» the criterion of «**truthfulness**» of information on social networks into components that are clearly visible in the respondents' answers, we can distinguish the following:

- content creation by ordinary people («*real people write most often*», «*there are comments from readers who care*»);
- relevance of the information received to the previous and subsequent life experience of a particular user («*complete coincidence with events*», «*later confirmed*», «*most suit true*»; «*I read telegram channels that have proven the truthfulness of their publications over time*»);
- less influence on the content by the authorities («*no control by the authorities and unnecessary censorship*», «*because these are unofficial sources of information*», «*no censorship at all*»).

«Let there be less information, bad or good, but it will be honest», — shared her vision in a blitz interview with Victoria Havrenkova, co-founder of manufacturing enterprises from Kherson region. *«The official media should work with the same courage and efficiency as telegram channels»*, — believes private entrepreneur Maria Valerzhak from Donetsk region.

To summarize, we note that the **demand for truthful, honest information** is generally quite noticeable both in the results of the survey of local media audiences and in blitz interviews with active community representatives.

When considering the **accessibility** of information on social networks, we can highlight a kind of **«forced accessibility»** sub-criterion that is important for a full understanding of social networks leadership in this survey and, we dare say, at least in some other similar researches. Many answers convincingly show that **some users simply do not have access to other sources of information besides social networks**.

Here is a detailed answer from a user from Zaporizhzhia region: *«There is almost no mobile communication in Huliaipillia. To get to the point of indestructibility, residents of one of the neighborhoods have to walk 6 km one way because the bridge is broken, to find out some news. That's why it takes a very long time to find a place where the Internet is at least a little bit «catchy». Or I find out some information from my neighbors...»*.

Other typical answers illustrating the «forced accessibility» of social networks for some users: *«Because there is nothing else in the rented apartment except the phone»; «Because there is no radio, TV, everything is left at home in Luhansk region, no money for a newspaper, friends and relatives are all over the world, earnings are only used to rent a house»; «it is difficult to use other sources»; «because there are no other sources», «because it is the only one», «I do not have access to other sources»*. The laconic answer is noteworthy: *«because it's the phone»*.

This answer looks alarming: *«I'm not really looking for reliable information, I'm looking for accessible information»* (respondent from Kyiv region, age group 19-30). At the same time, for a fuller understanding of the media landscape, it is important to realize that such a segment of media users does exist, especially given that **not everyone is inclined to openly explain their criteria for choosing information**. (*«Because it's my opinion», «I think so»* are noteworthy answers of some respondents when asked to explain why they choose such information sources).

In our opinion, the **trend outlined above is both a threat and an opportunity**: on the one hand, it is a threat of constant spread of disinformation, and on the other hand, it is an **opportunity for quality media outlets that operate according to standards to «reach out» to their current «non-users» through social platforms**, «balancing» the chaotic content of social networks with reliable information prepared professionally.

In other words, it seems that the **strategic path of development** in this area can be outlined as follows: **making reliable information more accessible**.

The ability to independent searching, selecting and comparing information, mentioned above as one of the criteria for trust in social networks (not the main one, since the main one, in terms of frequency of mention, is the so-called «truthfulness», the phenomenon of

which was partially discussed above), is also a **key criterion for trust in websites** in this study. So here are the relevant explanations of users, which are relevant for both social networks and websites: *«It is possible to verify the accuracy of information by comparing its content in different channels»*; *«It is possible to quickly compare different views»*; *«By comparing the presentation on different sites, one can form one's own opinion»*; *«It is possible to look at several portals, analyze the presentation of the same news or sometimes read details that were not in the previous article or video»*.

In the case of Internet sites, the **ability to search for information independently is combined** in many responses with the **ability to access official Internet sources**. Typical answers: *«official websites contain official information»*; *«reliable information is available only on official websites, other sources contain too many fakes»*; *«I use only trusted websites»*.

At the same time, it should be noted that when talking about the reasons for their trust in online sources of information, some users repeatedly used the term *«alternative»* in the sense of the **presence of topics and points of view on websites and social networks that are alternative to those available in official sources**. (*«Alternative sources are best on the Internet»*; *«The Internet is convenient and allows you to quickly navigate through large amounts of information. The information on it is the most easily accessible and of the highest quality, because there are alternative sources in addition to the state sources»*).

In general, it can be argued that it is the possibility of choice that attracts Internet users the most.

Trust to print media

The key criteria for trust to print media, according to the results of survey, are: **institutionalization** (official establishment, legal entrenchment in its social status); **the presence of authorship** of materials; **the habit of** reading this particular publication, the awareness of its journalists as «ours», representatives of the local community.

It should be noted that, in general, the above mentioned criteria (primarily the first and second) were repeatedly used by respondents to explain their trust in television as a source of information: TV channels operate officially and news is reported by specific journalists who can be identified, unlike the authors of anonymous telegram channels. *«The local TV and radio company is a registered media outlet, it has a license, experience, authority and reputation»*, — said a user from Kharkiv region. *«The author of the news is indicated on TV and in newspapers»* — another answer. In general, these criteria can be considered as criteria of trust in print and broadcast media in general.

In the following, we will focus on newspapers as one of the two target media groups for a more detailed analysis, chosen for the reasons explained in detail above.

Analyzing the answers explaining the reasons for trust in print media, it is impossible not to notice the frequent use of the adjective *«licensed»* (*«licensing»*) by respondents. (Note that

from the point of view of the law, this is not a «license» but a state registration of print media outlet). It can be argued that this is how they explain to themselves and others the feature of the print media outlets that we have outlined above as *institutionalized*. Their **official status** as registered media outlet, which automatically entails responsibility for the information they disseminate and at the same time implies compliance with professional and ethical standards, is certainly a **strength of print media**, and its potential should be used to the fullest extent possible. It seems that this is the case where respondents unwittingly carry out a kind of mini-SWOT analysis, «highlighting» their undoubted strengths to newspaper editors themselves. Considering the trends in media consumption identified above, it seems logical to maximize the transfer of this strength to online communications between print media outlets and their audience. (*Content for social networks from a professional media outlet*). After all, **professionalism** can be seen as a variant of a kind of generalized term to characterize traditional media, which would include **institutionalization** (*formality, legality, «licensing»*) and **compliance with standards** (professional and ethical) as a consequence and integral part of it.

«For example, I read the «Golos Huliaipillia» newspaper and the «Huliaipole City» website. Here I clearly realize who created the material, because I can see the authorship. And whose face can be seen in the nameless telegram channel? Unfortunately, this is a rhetorical question. That is why I am deeply convinced that society should move away from nameless telegram channels, pro-Russian social networks, and fake media that do not bear any responsibility to citizens», — convinced Dmytro Korosteliiov, a farmer from Zaporizhzhia region. His fellow from Zaporizhzhia is Maksym Tur, an oncologist, said: «I am deeply convinced that reliable, licensed sources of information should work in our region».

Another representative of Zaporizhzhia region, teacher Valentyna Pavlovych, emphasizes: *«For quality journalism in our region, there must be reliable and licensed sources of information, not nameless telegram channels that you just believe on their word of honor».*

The trust in newspapers as a source of information with official status («licensed») is related to the **second key advantage of print media outlets** identified by the research - the **presence of authorship of materials** and, therefore, **responsibility for what is written by specific people**. (*«I trust the newspaper, because in most cases the editor takes responsibility for the information provided»; «If there is a signature, the author is responsible for the content, which means the information is verified»; «At least it is clear who wrote»; «The materials are authored, which is extremely rare in local periodicals»; «Editors and the whole team are responsible for the newspaper, it is like a brand of the editorial office»).*

From the above, we can clearly conclude that **the personal brand of editors and journalists** is not only an integral part of the media brand as a whole, but also, and perhaps more importantly in the context of our study and, above all, the practical conclusions from it, an **extremely important and, it seems, somewhat underestimated asset of «traditional» newsrooms**. In the context of the popularity of social platforms, discussed in detail above, it seems reasonable to **develop and broadcast this strength as much as possible through social media**. Finally, the component of the authors' personal brand is also present to some extent in the

explanations of some respondents about the reasons for their trust in online platforms: *«I trust individual experts. I listen to them»*; *«Internet sites are run by well-known journalists in the region whom I trust»*.

The importance of this component is also emphasized by the responses in favor of the «local connection» of print media outlet, their **rootedness in the regional context, the presence of tradition, and continuity in reader preferences**: *«The newspaper is local - journalists live nearby and have information»*; *«We have always read the newspaper because it had all the information we needed, and it was the one we could trust because it was truthful»*; *«I have been reading my newspaper for a long time and trust the website they run»*.

«I would really like to see a larger circulation of our local newspaper, because it is the history and heroic present of our region, — says museum employee Oleksandr Magda from Kharkiv region. «I share the newspaper with my neighbors because the elderly rarely have access to the Internet, they wait for the printed edition and enjoy it, but sometimes the delivery of the press leaves much to be desired».

His fellow from Kharkiv region, veterinarian Volodymyr Yakovenko, confirms: *«Thanks to the World Wide Web, information is available. But for many people, especially the elderly, print media are important. So it would be nice if the circulation was bigger and the distribution better»*.

«We lack a printed source of objective information about the region, — says Veronika Mytrofanova from Kyiv Oblast, an unemployed human, be education is resources manager. — «It would be good to restore and develop the «Slovo» newspaper. Because the information that is currently available to the public is very subjective and presented from a certain angle». «We need to bring back the printed version of the district newspaper «Slovo»» — confirms her fellow from Kyiv region, economist Tamara Ovchinnikova.

In this context, the opinion about the need for **professional journalists to be present and active in the frontline and liberated regions** is important and, to some extent, summarizing. *«In order to improve the quality and accessibility of information in our region, I believe that the presence of professional media representatives who are committed to presenting information objectively is essential», — said judge Natalia Korolchuk from Kherson region.*

Finally, it should be noted that the low level of trust in radio, among other reasons, where the low level of accessibility in the overall rating is perhaps the most important, can be explained by the fact that in some of the areas where the survey was conducted, programs of Russian radio stations are still available, as indicated by some respondents. *«Unfortunately, in Kherson, you can still listen to Russian FM radio stations», — says university professor Ihor Tsurkan. Dmytro Korostelev, an agrarian from Zaporizhzhia region, is sadly telling: «My agricultural enterprise is located in close proximity to the front line. Unfortunately, as soon as the frontline was established here, three days after the occupation of the neighboring town of Polohy, which is 20 km away from Huliaipillia and Orikhiv, and 40 km from Vasylivka, the Russian occupier's radio station began broadcasting. Since I am constantly traveling by car, the fastest and easiest way to get the news is through the radio. Unfortunately, as soon as I get to this 100 km zone, the*

occupier's radio wave is turned on in my car and Russian songs and news start to sound. Unfortunately, these radio waves often reach Zaporizhzhia itself. Therefore, for such small frontline towns as Huliaipillia and Orikhiv, where many military and civilians live, this is a big problem».

Therefore, when talking **about trust to the media outlets, it is impossible to ignore the issue of their accessibility**. This once again confirms the importance of the point made at the beginning about the inherent **belonging of local media to the critical infrastructure system** and the need for their presence in all recovery programs, as well as the point made above about the importance of **making reliable information accessible**.

Information needs of the audience

«**What news topic are you most interested in?**» Respondents were asked to make a choice from a pre-formed list of topics. In the answers to this question, news related to the war in Ukraine came out on top, quite expectedly and logically.

In general, the results look like this:

- the events of the war in Ukraine — 84.5%;
- the security situation in your city, district, or village — 75.3%;
- local events — 72.3%;
- international events — 44.1%;
- life stories, stories about the fate of fellows — 38.2%;
- politics — 37.7%;
- economy — 34.2%;
- health — 29.4%;
- Science and education — 27.7%;
- culture — 26.9%;
- useful tips for health and household — 21.9%;
- environment — 19.2%;
- entertainment information (crossword puzzle, horoscope, birthday parties) — 11.7%.

The security component, especially in the local context, is also clearly in the lead among the answers to the next question, which is intended to expand the information field outlined by the previous one. In general, the answers to the question «**What topic should be covered in the media more?**» were distributed as follows:

- about security in the region — 63.1%;
- about clarification of the law (mobilization, benefits, subsidies, social assistance) — 60.6%;
- about the possibility of receiving state or humanitarian aid — 50.1%;
- about restoration work and infrastructure — 43.6%;
- about psychological support and services — 35.9%;
- about the availability of medical services and pharmacies — 33.7%;
- about the possibility of evacuation — 32.9%;

access to education — 25.4%.

In addition to the previous information, it is important to provide another question that is important in the context of analyzing the information needs of the project audience: **«Do you think that the information about the security situation in your community is sufficiently complete and up-to-date?»**

- no, there should be more information - 50.4%;
- yes, it is quite complete - 30.7%;
- difficult to answer - 19%.

«I found the information on first aid and mine safety interesting and important», — said university professor Ihor Tsurkan from Kherson. In general, the **priority of information on security issues is extremely clear** in all the responses of both survey participants and blitz interviewees. This applies to the importance of information about the situation in the respondent's region of residence and at the frontline in general, and to a certain change in people's life priorities, which has made personal security issues a priority.

«Most of the news I read from various sources is about the Zaporizhzhia section of the frontline», — says teacher Valentyna Pavlovykh from Zaporizhzhia. *«Of course, we are concerned about the whole of Ukraine, but the news from our native land sticks in my heart the most».*

«Every day now begins with reading the news about what is happening at the front, whether aid is coming to Ukraine from our Western partners», — says Tetiana Pelypenko, an employee of the city military administration in Donetsk region.

The priority of security news is superimposed on the priority of security needs for respondents personally.

«The population of the Barvinkivska community has a daily emotional swing, — says psychologist Liudmyla Skliarova from Kharkiv region. — «They are swinging from a state of confidence to despair and despondency. This is because there is a powerful information and psychological war going on at home, at markets, bus stops, in the media...».

The respondents aptly and strikingly frankly characterize the change in their life priorities, in which the **security component has come to the fore** and the key word is *«survive»*.

«My main interests have changed radically. Now the main goals are: not to get under fire, not to lose the opportunity to earn money for my family, to survive!» (Maria Valerzhak, private entrepreneur, Donetsk region).

«The attitude to life has changed. What used to be «cool» and valuable - a career, some material achievements — has faded into the background or even the third plan. Now, the main thing is life, communication with family and true friends. And to see this world in general». (Volodymyr Yakovenko, veterinarian, Kharkiv region).

«Since the beginning of the war, you pay more attention to security than to the simple things you used to pay attention to... Life priorities have changed, in particular, before the war, the material component was important, but today it is not a priority. The main thing is to live through the day and thank God for that». (Tamara Ovchinnikova, economist, Kyiv region).

«When the windows were flying out and the splinters from the cassettes were pouring all around, when you could lose your property in a second, you realized that this was not the most important thing in this life. And I didn't care much about it. I was worried about my family, children, and friends. I would also say that work helped a lot. Despite everything, we were cultivating the land, digging potatoes under the whistle of shrapnel. This is probably the Ukrainian nature. We were on duty at the museum to save valuable exhibits in case of an air raid or fire. I took a lot of pictures. Now I have a whole series of photos called «Satans marks» - the shots are eerie and scary — houses, buildings, and lives destroyed by shelling. But the main thing that gives me strength is hope for the best, confidence in the Victory, in the fact that we must live and survive». (Oleksandr Magda, museum employee, Kharkiv region).

«You used to want to develop, but now you think about how to survive». (Veronika Mytrofanova, unemployed, Kyiv region)

«What is important for us today is to survive!» (Valentyna Pavlovyh, teacher, Zaporizhzhia).

Disinformation and fakes: users experience

It is noteworthy and generally consistent that **almost 80% of respondents have encountered cases of disinformation**, and almost one in **three of them have done so frequently**. In general, the answers to the question **«Have you encountered cases of someone spreading disinformation about military operations in your region or false information about local government decisions?»** were as follows:

- rarely — 46.1%;
- often — 32.2%;
- never — 21.7%.

Fakes about the seizure of new territories by the Russian occupation forces caused the most acute emotional reaction of many respondents.

«The most unpleasant impression was the fake that in the summer of 2022 our city was occupied by the enemy». (Volodymyr Yakovenko, veterinarian, Kharkiv region).

«I just remembered a fake I read in one of the telegram channels about the surrender of the village of Robotyno, which is located in the Orikhiv direction. Russian news channels deliberately spread such information to disorient Ukrainians and spread panic among us». (Valentyna Pavlovyh, teacher, Zaporizhzhia)

«The most emotional was the information that Russia is in Kherson forever». (Alyona Movchan, theater worker, Kherson).

A relevant issue in the context of the spread of fakes was raised by student Oleksandr Sipko from Kherson:

«I was most impressed by the professionally «photoshopped» photos. Indeed, this is something that is sometimes quite impressive. Text is one thing, but if it is also supported by visual material, it really has a great impact on the audience. For example, the insignia of the

Armed Forces of Ukraine «superimposed» on a photo of destroyed military equipment, which later turns out to have been destroyed in another armed conflict, for example, in Syria. Or a photo where the usual greeting of Boris Johnson was turned into a «Nacist greeting» by Russians using photoshop. Recently, I've been most afraid of the use of artificial intelligence, because such videos have already appeared online, for example, a video-fake with Volodymyr Zelenskyy, although it was of poor quality, but the very fact that it was created with the help of artificial intelligence already makes me critically look at any photo or video».

The relevance of these words is especially perceived in combination with the answer of one of the respondents about the reasons for his special trust in information from social networks: *«Social networks, in particular, telegram and twitter, provide video/photo confirmation of a particular event...»*

In this context, the suggestion of the same student Oleksandr Sytko from Kherson, mentioned above, is worthy of attention: *«To ensure the quality of information, it would be good to create so-called «fact-checking columns² or sections that would write about recent Russian infiltrations and provide advice on how to recognize disinformation and fakes. By the way, this format can be integrated into radio and TV programs as well».* Larysa Kalinkevych, a library director from Kyiv region, also said the same thing: *«[It is necessary] to increase knowledge of information culture and media literacy».*

At the same time, it should be noted that the analysis of open-ended responses to the question «What information do you lack?» did not reveal any clear demand for media literacy information. However, it seems that this is exactly the case where «anticipatory supply», supply from the media that is ahead of the demand from the audience, will not only look justified, but also socially appropriate and useful.

«Growth zones» to improve communication efficiency in frontline and liberated regions

The analysis of the detailed answers to the open question about the information needs of residents of the frontline and liberated regions who are still not sufficiently satisfied with the existing media offer helped to «highlight» certain «blind spots» in the content that clearly require more attention from the media outlets.

On the one hand, the key thematic priorities revealed by the analysis of answers to the question «What topics should the media cover more?» were confirmed. In addition to the security component discussed in detail above, the detailed responses showed, in particular, **what kind of explanations of legal norms media consumers expect most.** *(These were the topics that led the answers to the question what kind of information should be provided in the media discussed above).*

The key **topic** in this context is the **rights of internally displaced persons.** Here are typical answers: *«accessibility of services for IDPs», «any support for IDPs», «assistance and*

opportunities for IDPs», «rights of IDPs to receive subsidies, social assistance, housing», «possibility of obtaining housing for IDPs of respectable age», «housing for IDPs».

In general, the **topic of housing** is quite common in the responses received. On the one hand, it is considered in the context of providing housing for IDPs. On the other hand, many respondents are interested in their own housing, which they lived in before the outbreak of active hostilities, namely the fate of housing remaining in the temporarily occupied territories and the prospects of receiving compensation for damaged housing and its restoration. Here are typical answers: *«When will there be an answer about the destroyed property?», «How to receive compensation for the loss of housing?», «About the restoration of destroyed housing», «How to restore house after damage?», «About my house in the combat zone», «What is happening to our houses in the «gray» zone»; «Will Huliaipillia and my apartment be restored. Will they provide funds on (apparently, «for» - author's note) restoration?»; «What will happen to my house in Luhansk?».*

On the other hand, the largest share of responses, perhaps even somewhat unexpectedly for the authors of the research, were given to the **topics of transparency and accountability of local authorities and the efficiency of using budget funds**. Perhaps, this result is unexpected due to the absence of the relevant topics as a separate option among the proposed answers to the question «What topic should the media cover more?». That is why there is a need to analyze in more detail the responses to this topic area.

First of all, there is a **rather noticeable demand for greater transparency in the work of local authorities through media coverage of their activities**. Here are some typical answers: *«Information on plans and decisions of local authorities, decisions of the session, executive committee»; «Report on the work of local authorities»; «On the logic of decision-making»; «There is a lack of transparency»; «What local authorities do»; «Concerning the specific work and real results of local authorities of the community»; «What decisions are made by local authorities of the community»; «Specific activities of local authorities»; «Plans of the authorities»; «Decisions of sessions»; «On the implementation of restoration work»; «Information on the reconstruction of the region».*

In our opinion, the availability of such information in a sufficient amount and in a form that is easy to understand, as discussed below, will not only help to raise awareness among community residents and increase their sense of involvement in community life and in solving its current problems. (*«I would like to know what projects are being implemented. Perhaps I could be useful»* was one of the responses). At the same time, we are talking about an **important psychological component**: a sense of perspective, faith in the future, a certain, at least partial, predictability, logic, and controllability of the processes around us-to the extent that this is possible in the current unstable environment. The answer to the question of what information is missing is noteworthy: *«Development, recovery, demining program. Prospects. Do the community and the country need people?».*

On the other hand, in the context of responses about the importance of better coverage of local government activities, the **request for reporting on the use of budget funds** is extremely

expressive. Here are some typical answers that are quite common: «*[There is a] lack of full reporting on the use of budget and volunteer funds, with photos*»; «*Where and what the authorities spend money on during the war*»; «*[There is a] lack of monthly reports to the community on the funds spent*»; «*Control over the spending of budget funds*»; «*Where the local budget funds go*»; «*Reporting on the spent budget funds*»; «*The authorities lack contact with people, explanatory work, informing about decisions or budget expenditures that are not timely or overstated*».

It can be concluded that a **thorough public control over budgetary processes in communities could become one of the main thematic areas for strengthening the content component of local media outlets**, in particular, print media, as opposed to telegram channels and social networks, where «lighter», more newsy formats prevail.

Considering the above responses in their entirety, three key conclusions can be drawn: **The unique niche of local media** that covers the lion's share of the audience's information needs is to **talk about the security situation in a particular region**. There is a clear demand from the audience for this, which is not fully met today.

The «development zones» for local media in the frontline and liberated territories include an **increase in the share of explanatory materials** (legal norms, opportunities to receive assistance, state, humanitarian, psychological, medical, and reconstruction work) with a focus on meeting the needs of IDPs and addressing housing issues.

Special attention should be paid to the exercise by local media of **public control over the use of budget funds** in communities.

The implementation of these tasks requires not only the professionalism and sustainability of local media, but also well-established processes of communication with local authorities and self-government. In this regard, it is important to analyze the answers to the question «**How do you assess the availability of information about decisions made by local authorities?**»

Respondents' answers were distributed as follows:

Accessible, but not always understandable — 29.4%;

Sufficiently accessible and understandable — 25.2%;

Insufficiently accessible — 17.2%;

Inaccessible and incomprehensible — 13%;

It is difficult to answer — 15.2%.

It should be noted that this question is one of several where there is a relatively small percentage gap between the answer options with no clear «leader» among them. At the same time, the percentage of those who found it difficult to answer is also relatively high. In our opinion, this, in particular, may indicate the **heterogeneity of the situation in the context of different communities**. In any case, the results obtained, combined with the responses of the survey participants and blitz interviews, indicate that **there is room for improvement in the communication component of local government activities in the respective territories**.

Here are some answers from the Google form: «*There is a lack of interaction with local authorities. They seem to have launched pages-channels-a website, but there is not enough local*

news. And there is no feedback»; «Local authorities are very weak in their work on citizen security. They inform through social media, but in a confusing way and with nothing concrete»; «Unclear bureaucratic language does not help perception, and information is often suppressed».

The participants of the blitz interviews also talked about the reserves of quality communication between local authorities and the community.

«The authorities should communicate more and get in touch with people through reliable sources of information, such as newspapers and websites», — says oncologist Maksym Tur from Zaporizhzhia in a blitz interview.

«Media workers should be provided with free access to the information held by local authorities, — said Olena Golovko from Donetsk region, a student and former head of the archive. — «This will enable journalists to provide relevant and reliable information to the audience of websites and newspapers».

«Write accessible (without abbreviations and heavy sentences) posts on the social media of the authorities», — advises Anastasia Litashova, deputy director of a library in Luhansk region.

The importance of accessible, clear, understandable language in messages from local authorities addressed to community residents is also emphasized by the distribution of answers to the question «If you have a choice, how would you like to receive information?», as the **majority of respondents (over two-thirds) preferred text-based messages:**

Text (social networks posts) — 28.2%;

Text (publication in a newspaper, on a website) — 24.9%;

Video (YouTube, social networks and other platforms) — 19.7%;

Text with illustrations (photos, infographics) — 18.2%;

Video (TV) — 3.5%;

Ads in public places — 3.2%;

Audio (radio, podcasts) — 0.7%.

Against this background, it is encouraging to see that the **majority of respondents have the opportunity to receive information in a way that is convenient for them** (75.6% said «yes», 23.2% said «not always», and only 1.2% said «no»).

Currently, the majority of respondents receive information about vital events and decisions of local authorities in the frontline area through social online platforms, such as Viber groups and Telegram channels (43.1%). A slightly smaller number of respondents receive information through the media outlets (36.4%). In direct communication, 20.5% of respondents receive such information, including 10% from government officials, 9.5% from friends, relatives or neighbors, and 1% from volunteers.

Improving the quality of communication between local authorities and citizens requires, in our opinion, periodic **training for local community professionals responsible for communication**. Such **trainings would be much more effective if the top officials of the respective authorities, along with the communicators of the respective authorities, participated in them**. After all, understanding the importance and nature of communication

processes by the respective leaders would give more freedom to lower-level specialists (communicators) in the implementation of their tasks, a sense of «political will» for qualitative changes.

At the same time, in our opinion, the effective performance by local media of the functions of public control over the processes of recovery and use of budget funds requires training in **monitoring budget expenditures for media professionals**. After all, the absence of a sustainable practice of such public control in Ukraine, on the one hand, and the staffing problems in local media, which have become even more acute during the full-scale war, on the other hand, lead to an insufficient level of relevant knowledge and skills among journalists and editors.

Cooperation with organizations that, on the one hand, unite representatives of territorial communities, and, on the other hand, have relevant experience in analyzing budget processes, is promising in this area. The National Union of Journalists of Ukraine, for its part, could act as a communication platform for organizing and conducting such trainings, as well as provide its own experts in effective communications.

IV. Conclusions

The analysis of the results of the research shows that social media remains the most accessible source of information for residents of communities in the frontline and liberated regions. They also have the highest level of trust among media sources. At the same time, newspapers have the best accessibility/trust ratio. The respondents mentioned the official nature of their activities and the availability of copyrighted materials as their key advantages. It seems reasonable to recommend that print media editors transfer their experience to online platforms as actively as possible, using the strengths that users themselves emphasized.

Among the topics of greatest interest to the project's target audience, security clearly prevails, particularly in the context of the respective communities and regions. The importance of security issues is due not only to external circumstances, but also to internal changes, such as a reassessment of values and a «rearrangement» of life priorities. However, these internal changes are undoubtedly also caused by external circumstances - the realities of a full-scale war.

Respondents lack complete and up-to-date information about the security situation in the region (more than half of the respondents said that there should be more information). More than three-quarters of respondents have encountered cases of disinformation about military operations in the region or false information about local government decisions. At the same time, the availability of information about decisions made by local authorities has no room for improvement. There is a clear demand for greater transparency in the actions of local authorities, publication of decisions, and reporting on the use of budget funds. Strengthening this area in public communications will help build trust and improve the psychological climate.

«We need to improve communication with all media outlets that remain working in the frontline areas. It is important to establish personal contacts with local journalists», — said Tatiana Pelypenko, an employee of the city military administration from Donetsk region.

Local media in the targeted regions should provide more coverage of the problems of internally displaced persons, housing issues, and explain the norms and innovations in legislation, in particular on the provision of various types of assistance.

Summarizing the work done, we hope that the use of the research results in everyday communication practice will help to better meet the information needs of residents of the frontline and liberated territories by strengthening local media as effective communication platforms and public controllers of the reconstruction process. After all, only free, independent and economically sustainable local media outlets can ensure greater citizen participation in the development of their territories and local decision-making.

This, in turn, will help to intensify public dialogue, build trust between local authorities and citizens, implement democratic values, and build unity in Ukraine by countering the divisive influence of Russian aggression. These processes will have a long-term positive impact on public support for reforms, European and Euro-Atlantic integration, and democratic transition in Ukraine.

Appendix 1. Information about the study

Research period — June 2023;

11.06 — 19.06 — field stage of the study (online and offline surveys, in-depth interviews);

20.06 — 25.06 — analysis of the research results, preparation of the final report.

List of regions (*in alphabetical order*): Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, Kyiv, Luhansk, Kharkiv, Kherson regions.

For the research, **5 media outlets from 6 regions** that are liberated or frontlined were selected.

Media outlets that helped to conduct the research (*in alphabetical order of regions*):

Donetsk region – newspaper «Visti» (along with the «Karachun» website);

Zaporizhzhya region – newspaper and website «Holos Huliaipillia»;

Kyiv region – newspaper and website «Slovo»;

Kharkiv region – newspaper «Visti Barvinkivshchyny»;

Kherson region – radio «X.ON».

Collection of information in **Luhansk region** was provided by journalists Yulia Sabaieva, Maryna Zhyvotkova, Yana Velychko and Oleksandr Zabrodin.

In addition, the following media professionals took part in the collection of information: Maksym Zabelia, editor of the newspaper «Ridne Misto» (Myrnohrad, Donetsk region), Kostyantyn Hryhorenko, editor of the newspaper «Obriy Iziushchyny» (Izium, Kharkiv region), Anatolii Zhupyna, editor of the newspaper «Novyi Den» and Anzhela Slobodian, TV journalist (Kherson region).

The number of participants in the research was 423, including:
402 participants in online and offline surveys (at least 50 people for each of the 6 regions);
21 participants of blitz interviews (3 respondents for each of the 6 regions).

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