

The Russian War in Ukraine and the Implications for the News Media

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Since the Russian invasion on the 24th of February 2022 the war in Ukraine has been horrific and tragically impactful. The consequences of the Russian invasion of Ukraine are far reaching, ranging from at least 3,496 civilian deaths, including at least 69 children, to the displacement of at least 14 million of persons (confirmed by the United Nations, Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 10 April 2022, Sugden et al., 2022), and to the massive destruction of Ukraine's infrastructure. Similarly profound are the implications of the war in Ukraine for the journalistic media of mass communication. In this paper I examine ten sets of major implications of the Ukraine war for the news media.

Keywords: Ukraine, Russia, war, journalism, news media

The Pursuit of Truth

Reporting in pursuit of the truth is the first of these implications. Journalists it is often said write the first draft of history. As such, they play a key role in establishing what society knows or at least believes to be the truth about the war in Ukraine. Yet, truth itself is elusive and hard to define. Philosophers since at least the time of the ancient Greeks have debated the nature of what is truth and how or even if we can ever know it. Journalists often accept the contested nature of truth and instead set their sights on the pursuit of truth, knowing that like the horizon, they may never reach it but they can be confident the facts and stories they are reporting are accurate and truthful. Philosopher of science Karl Raimund Popper (1963) has argued that rather seek to prove truth, but science should instead seek to disprove through systematic inquiry falsehood. And in many ways this is an approach journalists reporting in Ukraine may need to accommodate.

Before reporting any information about the war, it is essential that journalists verify the accuracy of that information. This is often called fact-checking. Among the most important tools journalists have in this regard is direct observation, including the events that occur during the war, the people and places impacted, and the circumstances that unfold. Direct observation inside the conflict zone is a vital mechanism for journalists and the news media to establish what may be true and what can be demonstrated to be false. Supplementing direct observation with interviews, including with combatants as well as civilians can add further detail and nuance to what is being reported. The combination of direct observation and interviews inside Ukraine or at refugee sites in neighboring countries such as Poland can increase the accuracy of what is being reported and add more facts to

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news reports. Relying on open-source intelligence (OCIT), or information about the conflict available via the Internet, has also proven valuable. Investigative journalism site Bellingcat, for instance, has used OCIT in its reporting on the war (Bellingcat, 2022). CCTV camera footage has also proven important. In May 2022 the BBC acquired such video that showed Russian soldiers shooting dead unarmed civilians (Rainsford, 2022).

To report on the war, reporters have relied on a spectrum of primary sources to get reliable and timely information. Mykhailo Shtekel, a Radio Free Europe (RFE/RL) Ukrainian Service Correspondent (Alazab and Macfarlane, 2022), has reported that in Ukraine reporters have utilized the mobile messaging platforms *Telegram* and *Viber* to obtain not only reliable information but also analytics about those being reached.

Unfortunately, as British journalist Phillip Knightley wrote in 1975, truth is often the first casualty of war. Knightley's words resonate loudly during the Ukraine war. Knightley was a special correspondent for *The Sunday Times* for 20 years (1965-85) and was twice named Journalist of the Year (1980 and 1988) in the British Press Awards. He wrote of his own experience as a war correspondent and in his book analyzed journalism in wars from Crimea to Iraq.

Lu Yuguang of Chinese news outlet Phoenix TV appears to have unique access to Moscow's view of the Russian invasion of Ukraine (Davidson, 2022). Yuguang has been reporting as a correspondent embedded with Russian troops inside Ukraine. It's not clear to what extent his reporting is independent, truthful or censored, though journalists traditionally embedded with the military must submit their reports for approval to military authorities before they may be transmitted. Moreover, an embedded reporter must have approval from military authorities as to where they may do their news gathering. It's likely that the stories emerging from this embedded reporting are highly sanitized and controlled by government censors, and they are presented to the public as independent journalism though far from it, and more akin to simply propaganda.

Freedom of Speech and Press

The reasons truth is the first casualty of war are many. Perhaps the most important reason is the restrictions government and military place on freedom of speech and press during war dramatically distort what is reported and lead to many inaccuracies, falsehoods, and even outright lies. The importance of freedom of speech and press to establishing the truth is the second set of implications of the Ukraine war for news media.

Soon after the invasion of Ukraine, Russian President Putin instituted a new law restricting freedom of speech and press regarding the war. In particular, the law prohibits any reporting that does not conform to the official governmental position on what is the truth. This means use of the word "war" or "invasion" are prohibited in Russia, whether in print, on air, or online, on news sites or social media platforms (Tebor, 2022). Only descriptions of the conflict as a special military operation are permitted. For any one inside Russia, whether a journalist or

a private citizen, violating this law, or failing to conform to the government's draconian censorship, comes with a severe penalty. Violating the law comes with prison sentence of up to 15 years or worse. Enactment of the law dramatically impacted all news media in Russia and points to the third set of implications of the Ukraine war for news media. Associated Press reporter David Bauder says the law is more an impediment than a muzzle for journalists operating inside Russia. Observes Bauder (2022a), "In a recent dispatch from Moscow, BBC correspondent Steve Rosenberg noted that a new Russian law required him to refer to the invasion of Ukraine as a "special military operation." Then he quoted a Russian human rights lawyer who liberally used what is now a forbidden word: "war."

Independent Journalism

This conflict in Ukraine highlights the importance of independent news media. The last few remaining independent Russian news media inside Russia chose to close rather than report the falsehoods required by the country's new law (Kirby, 2022). Meduza, a Russian news site based in Latvia, is struggling for support to continue to deliver independent news to Russia (Baer, 2022). Western media also had to adapt to the new law, avoiding the terms "war" or "invasion" and many including the BBC closed their operations in Russia. And those few Western journalists that remained inside Russia were forced to adapt or face arrest.

Only independent news media can hope to cut through the fog of war and possibly report the truth. State media are incapable of reporting the truth about the war. State media are instruments of government propaganda. In fact, Russia has criminalized critical reporting about the war (Thompson, 2022c). Russian propaganda is apparently designed to achieve multiple goals, including to influence public opinion to support Russia's invasion of Ukraine and to deflect blame for the atrocities from the Russian military and onto the Ukrainians themselves. The last independent TV news operation in Russia closed immediately following the passage of the Russian law requiring conformity to the official government position on the Ukraine war. In a final act of ironic truth telling, the TV station staff closed their final independent broadcast by airing video of a performance of Swan Lake which had famously aired thirty years earlier to signal the demise of the Soviet Union. The Committee to Protect Journalists (2022) reports that at least 150 Russian journalists have fled in the aftermath of Putin's war on information. Nobel Peace Prize winner Dmitry Muratov, the editor of Russian independent newspaper *Novaya Gazeta*, has been called "all but the last man standing between Putin and an independent media in Russia" (Sonne and Ilyushina, 2022). Unfortunately, in late March *Novaya Gazeta* ceased operations after an official warning (Saric, 2022). However, in April he led his staff to launch *Novaya Gazars*, a new Russian-language news outlet based in Europe to provide uncensored reporting (Reuters, 2022).

The U.S. government also has used leaks to the press in an effort to shape the direction of the war. Allsop (2022a) points to a pair of leaks to the press. In one, Barnes et al. (2022) reported Ukrainian officials with locational details of Russian

movements that they have subsequently combined with their own information and used to target and kill Russian generals—a flow of intelligence, the *Times* wrote, that “has few precedents.” In a second, Dilanian et al. (2022), cited “US officials” who claimed to have “helped Ukrainian officials to locate the Moskva, Russia’s flagship in the Black Sea, which they subsequently sank.”

Fighting Disinformation

The next set of implications for news media of the Ukraine war revolves around another war that is being waged inside Russia and even beyond. This is the disinformation war. It is a propaganda war. Journalists must fight this disinformation war, though only independent journalists and independent news media are capable of fighting this war effectively. It is essential that journalists question all “information” regardless of the source. The most blatant disinformation is being disseminated by Russian authorities, from Putin to his generals and other government officials.

There are many lies and falsehoods Russians are being told about the Ukraine War. In March 2022, *The New York Times* reported four of the most significant falsehoods (Thompson, 2022a). These are 1) After Russian shellings killed many Ukrainian civilians, Russia blamed “neo-Nazis” inside Ukraine. 2) After Russia shelled a residential neighborhood, Russians claimed Ukrainians did the shelling. 3) After Russian military lay siege to the Chernobyl nuclear facility causing it to catch fire, Russians claimed they were actually there to protect it. And 4) after attacks bloodied and killed civilians at a Children’s and Maternity hospital, Russian officials claimed the injured Ukrainians seen in photographs and video were actually “crisis actors.” In March, Russia’s defense and foreign ministries issued statements “falsely claiming that the Pentagon was financing biological weapons labs in Ukraine.” U.S. sources have countered that these Russian allegations are a “false flag” providing potential justification for Russia’s own possible future use of biological or chemical weapons. Chinese diplomats and state media have repeated this Russian conspiracy theory and posted it to official social media accounts. Russian state media have even repeated Fox News reports to advance its narrative (Thompson, 2022b).

At least anecdotally, many Russians believe lies such as these because the falsehoods are all they see or hear and nationalism is on the rise. The information silos people now can reside within further fuels the likelihood they will believe these lies; they are often not exposed to any information that contradicts the Putin disinformation campaign. To illustrate the power of disinformation about the war, Hewitt (2022) reported on one case in which “Sergei,” a Russian-American, told him he relied on YouTube and Russian TV, also online, to get his news. Sergei was alarmed by the “Azov Nazi” videos he saw online that depicted far right-wing militias in Ukraine.

Moreover, support for Putin has increased since the invasion (TheConversation, 2022). Russian polling agency the Levada Center (2022) shows that as of the end of March 2022, 83% of Russians approved of Putin, up from 69% in February,

and up from 61% who approved of him in August 2021. It's unclear whether support for Putin will wain as the Russian economy declines under the weight of the world's economic sanctions, but as of this writing his support is soaring, and the Russian propaganda machine seems to be working, creating for the Russian people something of a Potemkin Village (Goldberg, 2000), although more research is needed to test this hypothesis. These lies echo the same types of lies told by former U.S. President Donald Trump and other Republican political extremists following the insurrection at the US Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.

Questioning all "information" whether from Russia, China, USA or even Ukraine if important. In other words, misinformation, whether intentional or not can come from both the main combatants as well as third parties. These include China, which has been ramping up its own disinformation campaign about the war in Ukraine (Mozur et al., 2022). Journalists should also not simply accept without question information provided by American officials. In early March 2022, U.S. Pres. Biden stated that rising gasoline prices were caused by Putin (Boyer and Mordock, 2022). Although it's certainly possible that Russian actions are influencing fuel prices, the rising price of gas had already been underway long before Russia invaded Ukraine, suggesting fuel prices were on the rise for other reasons, likely including the Pandemic and problems in the overall supply chain.

News Media Coverage

Patterns in how the news media have covered the war in Ukraine is a key issue. Research has shown (Dennis et al., 1991) that how news media cover military conflicts often evolves over time. Moreover, its character often depends on contextual factors such as whether a news organization is headquartered in the country of one of the combatants or within a country with a vested interest in the outcome. With regard to the current war in Ukraine, there is little research as of this date to draw upon to determine how these patterns may or may not hold. However, Papanikos (2022b) has published the results of an early qualitative analysis of coverage of the conflict in three Greek newspapers. His study reveals that these papers have unequivocally condemned the Russia-Belarus invasion. This is surprising, Papanikos observes, noting that Greece has had long "historical, economic, and cultural (religion included) ties with Russia", yet the invasion was considered unacceptable. It's also worth noting that news media have made covering the war a major priority, and in some cases, such as the *Wall Street Journal*, developed new sections devoted to the topic. Titled "Russia-Ukraine War," [WSJ.com](https://www.wsj.com) provides full coverage of the conflict, including a regularly updated and interactive map of the conflict, text and multimedia reports. New news media have similarly introduced such sections, including the *Washington Post*, whose special section is titled War in Ukraine.

Another way truth has become a casualty in the Ukraine war is through patterns of bias in news media coverage, particularly racial and cultural. As noted by Rutgers journalism professor David Love, a broad cross-section of news media, including media from the U.S., Europe and the Middle East, have described the

victims of Putin's Ukraine invasion in very different terms than the victims of conflicts in other parts of the world. "This isn't Iraq or Afghanistan," said CBS News foreign correspondent Charlie D'Agata of Kyiv, speaking on the American television news network. "This is a relatively civilized, relatively European city." D'Agata soon apologized for his comments, but what he said may have been a truth of many news media observers of the war, whether spoken openly or not. A similar view was offered on air by Al-Jazeera anchor Peter Dobbie (Love, 2022). Speaking on the Qatari news network, Dobbie said, "What's compelling is looking at them, the way they are dressed. These are prosperous, middle-class people... These are not obviously refugees trying to get away from the Middle East...or North Africa. They look like any European family that you'd live next door to."

Reporting without bias, or being what journalists call objective, is central to providing news coverage of the war that is credible to the public. Research shows that perceived bias in the news is a primary factor in the erosion of public trust in journalism (Pew Research Center, 2022). Like truth, objectivity may be an unobtainable goal for any human journalist. But it is essential that journalists covering the war in Ukraine strive for being free of bias in their reporting or the public will lose confidence in the news and no longer believe the stories they see, hear or otherwise experience.

Journalists have faced other challenges in covering the war, such as a now-famous apparently off-the-cuff remark by U.S. Pres. Joe Biden in late March after a major speech on the war during a visit by the president to Poland. Known for his gaffes, Biden said of Putin, "For God's sake, this man cannot remain in power" (Allsop, 2022b). News media, political pundits and others immediately responded to the statement, with White House officials saying the President was not calling for regime change. Biden subsequently said he meant what he said, but he was expressing his "moral outrage" and not about policy (Shear, 2022). Yet, for journalists how to frame the comment was problematic. Should they dismiss it as possibly an emotional outburst? Or should they read deeper meaning into it, perhaps the truth, even if it might escalate the war? Similarly, whether journalists should use the term "genocide" to describe the Russian atrocities is another key issue. U.S. Pres. Biden and others have called the Russian invasion genocide, and journalists have used the term genocide via attribution to these sources (Pietsch et al., 2022). Choice of words is an essential dimension of covering the war, including in headline writing, sometimes considered more art than science. In an allusion to Paul Simon's classic song, *The Boxer*, the *Washington Post* published the following headline for a story about the mayor of the Ukrainian capital then under siege from Russian forces: "In Kyiv stands an ex-boxer, and a mayor by his trade." Simon's lyric: "In the clearing stands a boxer and a fighter by his trade." *Post* editors explained that the headline was meant to honor "the courage and leadership of Vitali Klitschko, mayor of Kyiv and an ex-world heavyweight boxing champion (Washington Post, 2022).

Public Engagement

Audience interest in news about the war in Ukraine and its consequences has surged. Kersley (2022) reports that during first few weeks of the war, many news outlets recorded record-breaking levels of audience engagement. *The Guardian*, for instance, said February 2022 was its fifth-largest month ever for page views. Likewise, *The Sun* reports it had 70 million page views on its websites for Ukraine-related stories in the month since the start of the invasion. The BBC News live page about Ukraine had 396 million page views between 24 February and 13 March. *Times* digital reports it gained 1,000 new subscribers a day during the first two weeks of the war (Kersley, 2022). Data show traffic to the top news sites has continued to surge through at least March of 2022 (Majid, 2022), although it's unclear how long this surge in audience demand will continue. Google Trends data show a decline in April in terms of how many are searching for Ukraine-related content. Friedman (2022) of *The New York Times* notes that "virtually everyone on the planet can either observe the fighting at a granular level, participate in some way or be affected economically." *The Washington Post* has lowered its paywall for those in Russia and Ukraine, potentially increasing audience engagement (Pietsch et al., 2022).

Another important development in the nature of public engagement with the news media and the Ukraine war is the rise of social media, which has played a key role in transforming how people know about the war. The social media audience is largely a global one, although Russia has blocked Twitter and a Russian court has outlawed Facebook and Instagram. Yet through social media, the public across almost most audience segments in most of the world is highly engaged in news and information, as well as mis and disinformation. However, in an effort to prevent Russian disinformation, YouTube and Facebook have blocked Russian-affiliated content on their platforms globally (Dwoskin et al., 2022).

Social media are a double edged sword. They can be used to engage the public in quality journalism. The mobile app *Telegram* has proven valuable in distributing news and messaging during the conflict, and as of this writing has been able to evade Russian censorship. Telegram is one of the most popular social apps in Ukraine and Russia, and has been since before the invasion began (Alazab and Macfarlane, 2022). Created in 2013 by Russian-born tech entrepreneur Pavel Durov, Telegram is a free cloud-based app that allows users to send and receive messages, calls, photos, videos, audio and other files. NPR says (Allyn, 2022) that Telegram "has emerged as the go-to place for unfiltered live war updates for both Ukrainian refugees and increasingly isolated Russians alike." Telegram operates out of Dubai.

The U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM, 2022) also has utilized virtual public networks (VPN) to provide secure and unrestricted Internet access in Russia, and has made VPNs available via its website to those inside Russia. Reporters Without Borders (RSF) has devised another hack to evade Russian censors. RSF has set up a Twitter account linked to the week's winning lottery number, essentially using the number as a type of secret code to encrypt the information that would change each week and stay one step ahead of the censors

(Peters, 2022). Peters (2022) reports, “Anyone searching the daily lottery number on Twitter could find it. Journalists can also add the number to their bio so they show up in search results. The nonprofit is now launching an account on VK, the Russian equivalent of Facebook.” VK has not yet been banned.

Russian censors also have taken steps to limit access to Radio Free Europe (RFE) broadcasts (e.g., by blocking transmission frequencies). Based in Prague (Czech Republic), RFE/RadioLiberty operates in 27 languages in 23 countries, including Russia (Ruffini, 2022). Traffic to the RFE website has surged during the war. Sullivan (2022b) reports, “In the first three weeks after the invasion, page views from Russia to Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty sites skyrocketed to 26 million, more than 50 percent more than an earlier corresponding period. Video views from Russia to their YouTube channels more than tripled to 237 million. And this was happening despite sites being blocked within Russia.”

However, social media platforms also can be used as an effective vehicle for propaganda. Russian state TV has turned to the video sharing social media platform *Rumble* to distribute its propaganda. *Rumble* is a platform favored generally by conservatives and the far right and has not been banned by Russia (Fuchs, 2022).

Lessons we can draw upon here echo back to Nazi Germany. A half century ago German political philosopher Hannah Arendt (2006) observed that authoritarian leaders often invoke a strategy in which they call the truth lies and thereby control their populace. A Holocaust survivor, Arendt explained, “If everybody always lies to you, the consequence is not that you believe the lies, but rather that nobody believes anything any longer.” In such a situation, Arendt added, the public becomes confused and uncertain. They lose the ability to act, to think, to judge. “And with such a people,” she concluded, “you can then do what you please.” This may well be Putin’s strategy.

Sullivan (2022a) has reported that Putin’s regime has produced a “raft of Russian-language videos that bill themselves as fact-checks of falsehoods by Ukrainian propagandists — but are actually fakes themselves.” In one such case, confirmed by an analysis by the investigative news outlet ProPublica, Pro-Russian sources used social media to claim that a video showing a recent missile strike in Kharkiv was actually an unrelated explosion from 2017.

Deciding what Images of War to Show

Since soon after the invention of the Daguerreotype in the 19th century, news media decision makers have had the option to not only describe war in words, but also to show it in photographs. With the invention of motion picture photography and videography, the tools for visual storytelling in war time have advanced even further. The rise of Internet-connected smartphones, images and video of war have become an even more ubiquitous. While professional photo and video journalists have the tools to report the war visually, citizens acting as civilian war correspondents throughout Ukraine also have the tools to capture photographs and video of the Russian invasion and have produced extensive user-generated content (UGC) documenting the war as eye-witness to events on the ground. Moreover,

citizen journalists across the globe have utilized a spectrum of digital tools to help verify reporting about the war. Social media users have used Google maps and other online resources to authenticate video content posted online. In one case, a Twitter user examined a video shared on Telegram. “He found a landmark — an Orthodox church with four golden domes. He located it in Irpin, using Google Maps and a file photograph from the Associated Press to generate its precise coordinates. A scan of Discord, Reddit, and Twitter revealed chatter from witnesses of the bombing. Twelve minutes after spotting the footage, he felt confident the video was real, and posted the work on his Twitter account” (Verma, 2022).

For news media, decisions about what images, photographic or videographic, have become an intense and urgent matter (Coleman, 2022). Advocates for Peace Journalism caution that journalists should show the dead only when thoughtfully justified (Youngblood, 2022). As Lithgow (2022) notes, photographs and video are not facts. These illustrations do not equal the truth. Photos and videos are always from an angle, and they may have an agenda, a political or military purpose. It is essential to interrogate the relationship between any image and truth, considering the context and what may lay outside the field of view or frame, even a 360-degree photo or video.

Still, photos and video provide an extraordinary and potentially authentic and trustworthy source of evidence of the war and can prove vital in truthful news reporting about the war in Ukraine. On March 6, *The New York Times* featured a photograph of a family killed in Russian shelling near Kyiv (Huggins 2022). Award-winning photojournalist Lynsey Addario took the photo. *Guardian* news editor Joanna Walters called the decision to publish the photo “brave.” Walters added that it is “always an agonised debate, how to depict war, how to get the balance right.” Publishing uncensored images of the dead is uncommon. *The Times* has done so on some occasions, including after a 2019 attack at a Nairobi hotel. In a statement to the *Poynter Institute*, *the Times* defended its decision as “balancing the need for sensitivity and respect with our mission of showing the reality of these events.” *The Times* added, “We want to be respectful to the victims and to others affected by the attack.” Concluding, “But we also believe it is important to give our readers a clear picture of the horror of an attack like this. This includes showing pictures that are not sensationalized but that give a real sense of the situation.” This same rationale applies to depicting photos or videos of the Ukraine war, including imagery of dead civilians or soldiers. Through publication or broadcasting, online or over the air, these images can help reveal the truth about the Russian invasion of Ukraine and its horrific consequences, including the apparent acts of genocide by Russian forces during their occupation of Bucha (AFP, 2022). But it is also possible that the substantial number of images of the dead may have unintended consequences, possibly desensitizing or even traumatizing those who see them. Alongside mainstream news sources are the steady stream of images also flooding social media news feeds, and these may be equally impactful, though potentially unverified in their truthfulness.

Some have questioned whether a photo or video journalist has an ethical duty to help the wounded rather than capture a grisly scene on their camera. But as *New*

York Times diplomatic correspondent Edward Wong said on Twitter, in the case of the Addario photo, *The Times*' security employees "raced out first to give aid."

Role of Media in Democratic Society

Reflecting on the war in Ukraine highlights the essential role that news media play in democratic society, particularly during times of war. Papanikos (2022a) has written about the evolution of democracy since the times of ancient Athens. Although much has changed over the millennia, one of the elements that has not changed is the need for truthful, accurate, quality information in a democracy. Without that, a democracy cannot function in an effective fashion. And this need is particularly acute during times of conflict, including the Ukraine war.

Yet the role of journalism in democratic versus authoritarian states is dramatically different. In a democracy, independent journalism acts as the Fourth Estate, essentially a check on government. This is a vital role during war when lives are at stake. But in an authoritarian or totalitarian state such as Russia, the role of the media is far from a Fourth Estate or government watch dog. During the war in Ukraine, the Russian media have been reduced to the role of government lapdog and act as a propaganda mechanism for the Putin regime. The result is increasingly a society living in an alternate, untruthful reality. Moreover, Russia has weaponized its state media propaganda. In April 2022 Russian television's Rossiya-1 news channel threatened Britain with nuclear annihilation by airing a simulation of nuclear strikes by air and by sea destroying Britain and Ireland (Ilyushina et al., 2022).

The Safety of Journalists

Journalists are among the most courageous and at-risk front-line workers in the Ukraine war. Despite being unarmed, wearing vests clearly labeled "press", and protected by the Geneva Convention 2013, doing their reporting puts war correspondents at significant risk of death or serious injury. Death or injury is a real threat to any journalist reporting on the Ukraine war. With the indiscriminate shelling of the Russian military, reporters throughout the country are in jeopardy. In March of 2022, Taisia Bekbulatova, chief editor of independent news site *Holod*, told CPJ that reporters face "shelling, shooting and detention by Russian forces" (CPJ, 2022). The Geneva Convention prohibits attacking journalists in a war zone, and Russia's actions in this regard may thus constitute a war crime. Chernov (2022) of the Associated Press reports that Russian forces even have actively hunted journalists on the ground in an effort to capture them or worse, to prevent them from reporting. Further, the Kyiv-based Institute of Mass Information, a non-governmental organization, reports that "eleven journalists have been threatened by the Russians, five have been shot at but not killed, and six have been kidnapped" (Sergatskova, 2022).

At least seven journalists have been killed in the Ukraine conflict, the first being acclaimed American filmmaker Brent Renaud, who was shot and killed by Russian forces in an attack on 13 March, according to the Sampson (13 March 2022). Also killed in the conflict are Fox reporter, Pierre Zakrzewski, 55, Ukrainian producer Oleksandra “Sasha” Kuvshynova, Evgeny Sakun, a cameraman with Kyiv Live TV, Russian journalist Oksana Baulina, Ukrainian photojournalist Make Levin and Radio Liberty Journalist Vera Girich (Dorman, 2022; Hall, 2022; Vivarelli, 2022). On March 15 2022, Reporters without Borders (RSF) opened a press freedom center in Lviv, and delivered the first bulletproof vests for journalists in the conflict.

Journalists have been increasingly at risk in recent years globally. The United Nations Educational and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2022) reports that 55 journalists were killed worldwide in 2021 and largely with impunity.

Women reporters are among the front-line journalists covering the war and telling the truth (Ruiz, 2022). Among the most courageous of journalists in the conflict has been Marina Ovsyannikova, an editor who protested live on Russian TV news in March of 2022 (McGuinness, 2022). During a live broadcast, she bravely walked onto the set in front of the camera and next to the anchor, carrying a sign written in Russian calling for peace and protesting the Ukraine war ordered by Putin. CBS Weekend News (2022) reports that the show reaches an estimated 200 million Russians, and for many it may have been the first time they heard anything about the war, much less Putin’s responsibility for it. Immediately after her actions, Ovsyannikova was arrested and her fate is uncertain. Subsequently, Russian state TV has been hit by a series of resignations, including at four journalists (Troianovski, 2022).

Immersive, Interactive and Mobile Media

Research shows that immersive news narratives can help increase both understanding and empathy. As news media report on the Ukraine war, especially its aftermath, employing reporting tools that can support the production of immersive journalism about the conflict can have enormous value. Among these tools are cameras that can take high resolution photos and video, imagery and video that is 360 degree in format, and satellite imagery. Some of the reporting to date already reflects the use of some of these tools. Satellite imagery has been used by a variety of news media, from CBS News to *The New York Times* to document before and after views of Ukraine, documenting the destruction wrought by Russia’s shelling of the country’s infrastructure. *The Times*, for example, has produced interactive content that combines textual and visual reporting elements in its coverage of Russian attacks on civilian targets (Collins et al., 2022). Moreover, *The Times* made this reporting available for all persons regardless of whether they have a subscription (i.e., the paywall has been lowered).

But using other reporting tools can enable news media to create immersive stories as well. *The Times* and other news media have created immersive stories about other conflicts, including terrorist attacks in Paris, France. Research by

Sundar et al. (2017) and Archer and Finger (2018) at the Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia University has demonstrated that in contrast to traditional linear narrative techniques, immersive journalism can better engage the audience, increase understanding of the events depicted, and generate greater empathy for those whose stories are told. In the Ukraine war, immersive journalism can prove particularly important including for stories about the estimated 6 million refugees and many more Ukrainians who have been displaced from their homes (Sugden et al., 2022). High resolution digital photos that contain geolocation data can also be utilized effectively in reporting about the Ukraine war. These photos can be merged to create photogrammetry, or 3D mapping of Ukraine and the devastating consequences of the Russian invasion, such as the destruction of infrastructure. CBS News has aired video of three-dimensional models illustrating the destruction in Ukraine's cities (CBS Weekend News, 2022).

Concluding Reflections

The war in Ukraine brings profound implications for the media of mass communication, especially the news media. It is increasingly clear that only independent journalism can help provide an accurate understanding of the war and put us all on a journey in the pursuit of truth about the conflict. But it is also clear that journalists face enormous risks in doing their reporting and demonstrate courage to tell their stories honestly and without censorship. Yet disinformation campaigns are being actively waged, and through the use of social media, the public in Russia and many other parts of the world are seeing only a highly distorted picture of the reality of the war in Ukraine.

Moving forward, news media should utilize the full range of storytelling tools available in the digital age to create more immersive news narratives. These can help better engage the public, increase understanding and build empathy.

Media scholars play a vital role, as well (Dennis et al., 1991). By turning their research attention to the aftermath of the Russian invasion, scholars can provide vital insight about the war and its media implications. This scholarship can shape not only academic inquiry into media and the war, but it can also help improve public understanding, influence public policy, and even shape media activity and practice in Ukraine and beyond.

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