



ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION

## Crisis Management in the Media Sector: Analyzing Brand Communication Strategies and Public Relations Technologies

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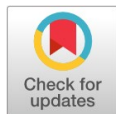
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**Abstract**— Although there are large advantages of coaching interventions, some limitations to our study are the imbalance of the coaching experience of participants, varying length of the programs, and the heterogeneity of professional groups. These variables can have some role in the nature of change, and, therefore, the conclusions must be generalized with care. Further research must concentrate on causal interactions among personal psychological processes of coaching, the effects in steady and crisis environments with long-term outcomes, and the simulation of the effects of digital platforms on professional identity and autonomy of professionals. The article is a combination of statistical analysis of sociological data (2020-2025), case studies of the most popular Ukrainian media in the war, and a survey of the audience perception ( $n = 347$ ). The effectiveness of crisis communication in relation to media literacy, information consumption, and trust was evaluated by means of statistical analysis. The common digital media crisis-management mechanisms were identified in case studies, and the effect of age, source type, and frequency of news consumption on audience reactions was analyzed by the MANOVA. The outcome of empirical research revealed the statistically significant age-based differences in perception of crisis brand communication by media (Trace = 0,380;  $F(51, 987) = 2,806$ ;  $p < 0,001$ ). Likewise, the rate of news consumption has a great influence on the list of evaluations of media messages in crisis (Trace = 0,415 by Pillai;  $F(34, 658) = 5.061$ ;  $p < 0,001$ ). Moreover, there were major disparities in the audience evaluation of the crisis communications based on the type of the main channel of news receipt (Trace of Pillai = 0,579;  $F(34, 658) = 7,892$ ;  $p = 0,001$ ). Therefore, the results substantiate the fact that the age, the degree of involvement in the media content, and the information format are major factors that alter cognitive and evaluative responses of the audience. The findings indicate that the perception of crisis communication depends on age, source type, and news consumption, so it is suggested to use segmented approaches to the target audience, and media literacy, media transparency, and regulation of information loads can be used as methods to build trust in and the effect of messages.

**Index Terms**— Communication culture, Psychology of trust, Emotional reaction, Brand management, PR technologies, Crisis management

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### Introduction

The culture of brand communications and public relations tools is gaining more and more prominence in the media, especially in the domain of crisis, in the manifestation of modern media. Media platforms, government institutions, and civil society groups are not just channels for information, but they also influence trust, credibility, and public views. The significance of strategic communications has been heightened by the extraordinary challenges of the last 10 years, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine, which have

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challenged the stability and competence of media organizations worldwide (Chen, 2024; Maulana, 2024). These crises have demonstrated that news organizations must develop flexible, transparent, and audience-focused communication practices.

There is too little research investigating the role of crisis communication as a long-term strategic process and a comparison of different approaches to relationship crisis communication (Ulmer et al., 2025). Recent research indicates that successful crisis communication is highly dependent on being responsive, transparent, and consistent as well as modifying messages for target audiences in utilizing digital and traditional media (Chernobrovkina & Chernobrovkin, 2025; Louisot, 2024). Particularly, digital media have become the key platform of crisis brand management to strive for continuity of interaction, to reduce false information, and to build media literacy among the public (Morokhova et al., 2023; Viazova et al., 2023).

Although research on crisis management has proliferated over recent years, there is still a lack of a comprehensive understanding of the culture of brand communication and the use of PR technologies in the media during crises. The current literature predominantly addresses organizational tactics either in isolation or regarding particular technological solutions, failing to consider audience perception, media literacy, and demographic traits holistically. This gap is especially noticeable in the Ukrainian context, as the war has created exceptional communication challenges and an unparalleled strain on information ecosystems (Olanrewaju et al., 2023; Yermachenko et al., 2023).

Although the international literature provides insights into crisis communication in corporate or government organizations, there is a lack of empirical studies that focus on three crucial aspects: the culture of media brand communications, the application of PR technologies, and audience understanding in extreme crises. Additionally, the Ukrainian media system is a particular instance of concurrent susceptibility to military conflict, cyberattacks, and disinformation strategies, offering a holistic examination of anti-crisis communication strategies in an increasingly high-stakes environment (Louisot, 2024).

With this study, the authors try to address this shortcoming by combining quantitative and qualitative analysis with the focus of: (a) The influence of brand communication elements (trust, effectiveness, emotional support) on perception of the audience in times of crisis; (b) The impact of audience factors relating to demographics and their use of media (age, usage frequency of media, information source-type) on the perception of anti-crisis strategies; (c) Structural characteristics, processes, and practical approaches of wartime senior Ukrainian media (2022–2025).

Hence, the study advances the literature by presenting a comprehensive model of crisis brand communication in media and provides practically applicable knowledge to media firms and policy makers, while identifying novel PR-related mechanisms for building trust and reputational protective shields during times of crisis. Unlike existing research studies, which typically solely use strategic case studies, this approach integrates audience-focused empirical work with strategic case study analysis to provide both theoretical and practical insights.

The purpose of this research article is to conduct a comprehensive study of the culture of brand communications and PR technologies in media crisis management and to identify mechanisms for optimizing PR strategies and crisis management technologies in the media environment. The article is aimed at statistically substantiating the impact of brand communication elements (trust, effectiveness, emotional support) on the perception of crisis communication depending on age, frequency of news consumption, and type of source. The study also needs to analyze cases of anti-crisis strategies of Ukrainian media in the period of full-scale war, as well as to empirically substantiate the peculiarities of the audience's perception of brand communications in a media crisis in order to identify effective communication patterns that strengthen crisis management and ensure the sustainability of the relationship between the media brand and the consumer.

Although crisis communication theory and practice have developed over time, media institutions still often find it difficult to retain audience trust and attention in times of profound instability. Traditional methods of information dissemination are weak in the face of fast-moving misinformation, cyber intrusion, and varied audience requirements. Without an analytical knowledge of the way in which brand communication culture, and the technologies of PR in its broadest sense, impact upon perception and behaviour, media organisations face the possibility of losing both legitimacy and effectiveness in times of crisis. In the context of Ukraine, where the media is confronted with both external pressure and internal audience issues, the demand for empirically grounded approaches to this problem is especially pressing.

The central problem addressed by this research is therefore: how can the culture of media brand communications and the application of PR technologies optimize crisis management and enhance audience trust in conditions of sustained crisis? To address the identified problem, the study formulates the following research questions:

- How do elements of brand communication (trust, message consistency, emotional support) affect the audience's perception of media during crises?
- What is the role of socio-demographic and behavioral factors (age, frequency of media consumption, type of sources) in shaping audience reception of crisis communication?
- What are the most effective PR tactics and mechanisms used by Ukrainian media in the times of the full-scale war, and what are the main structural and operational characteristics of them?
- What can the combination of quantitative audience analysis and qualitative case studies tell us about developing resilient, adaptive communication strategies of the media in a crisis situation?

The study will also ensure that answers to such questions offer clarity in theory and practical advice to media organizations dealing with crisis situations.

In theory, the given study contributes to the further development of communication science through the introduction of the holistic model

of brand communications, PR tools, and perception of the audience during the crisis. It empirically has statistically validated evidence of the impact of age, media literacy, and consumption styles on trust and engagement. As it concerns practice, it at least pulls certain suggestions on the organization of media to make them more resilient to crises, more transparent, and more resilient in terms of their relation to the audience. Overall, the study is valuable because it brings together media brand culture, PR technologies, and audience perception into a single conceptual umbrella through the use of empirical evidence brought about by an extreme crisis. It fills significant gaps in national and international literature and is of interest to academics, practitioners, and policy makers focused on understanding and enhancing crisis communication in a 21st-century media environment.

## Literature Review

In today's media environment, the culture of brand communications and PR technologies is especially important in times of crisis. It serves as a tool for maintaining trust, reputation, and effective management of information flows in unstable situations. Crisis brand communications are not only about commercial brands, but also media platforms, governmental agencies, and NGOs as reliable sources of information. (Chen, 2024). The large-scale crises of the last decade, such as the COVID-19 pandemic or Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, have become a catalyst for rethinking approaches to communication management in various institutions, including the education sector. For example, a study by Mialkowska et al. (2025) revealed a change in the strategies of European higher education institutions: from online document acceptance to the growing role of digital marketing and management of students' psycho-emotional state. In these conditions, media and PR technologies have become tools to support both internal and external communication loops. On the other hand, as Chernobrovkina and Chernobrovkin (2025) emphasize, in the context of military conflict, digital communication channels play a key role in maintaining the sustainability of enterprise brands, allowing for minimizing the risks associated with political chaos, resource constraints, and changes in consumer behavior, and creating the preconditions for effective crisis brand management. Therefore, crisis communication is a key tool for strategic reputation management of organizations. In situations where events are developing rapidly, effective communication management helps to minimize reputational risks and avoid misinformation (Louisot, 2024). Real-time monitoring, crisis preparation, and message preparation that addresses expectations of various target audiences are important elements of such a strategy (Chernobrovkina & Chernobrovkin, 2025; Matías & Cardoso, 2023; Vdovichen et al., 2023). Simultaneously, domestic studies also highlight the necessity to introduce the systematic examination of the image of the population, design a crisis communication strategy, and provide a sustainable communication plan with stakeholders (Morokhova et al., 2023; Viazova et al., 2023).

Based on these findings, the literature posits that in the case of a crisis, transparency and responsiveness in communication are likely to have a positive impact on the audience's trust. According to Chiames and Smulyan (2024) and Maulana (2024), responsiveness and openness of the information are the critical elements in saving the corporate image during the crisis; building a sustainable culture of communication in daily activity is the foundation of successful anti-crisis measures. Meanwhile, over-technologization of communication may lead to the fact that only superficial contacts with the audience are formed, which poses a threat to true trusting relationships. Viazova et al. (2023) claim that PR serves as a promising instrument for the crisis management of enterprises. It entails image management, mediating with the media, hosting events, and well as relationships with stakeholders being maintained in a sustainable manner. Based on this line of reasoning, it is anticipated that the involvement of integrated and interactive PR instruments increases involvement and perceived credibility, and the study by Mialkowska, Hrysiuk, et al. (2024) and Wiwitan et al. (2024) support the given notion that gamified and participatory communication formats create an emotional involvement and social responsibility, which align with the engagement theory and the elaboration likelihood model. To ensure the effective application of anti-crisis PR strategy, the public opinion should be monitored, the development of crisis scenarios, and the broadcasting of the position of the organization in a timely manner should reduce the reputation risks (Olanrewaju et al., 2023; Yermachenko et al., 2023). Integrated communication models help in building trust in information sources, among the consumers of content, as well as at the institutional level. This is where the issues of digital transformation, information transparency, and linguistic and cultural adaptation become highly significant as they are the critical components of communication effectiveness in the sphere of European multilingualism (Mialkowska, Cherneta, et al., 2024).

PR tools that have the potential to elicit an emotional reaction and offer unvarying brand representation are important when dealing with crisis communication. Scholars emphasize that there is a need to create deep semantic stories that would be encompassed across all communicative platforms and would form a value-filled, recognizable pattern of brand behavior in the minds of the audience (Morokhova et al., 2023; Wiwitan et al., 2024). Based on this, the hypothesis is that consistency in both visual and narrative communication has a positive influence on the brand perception of audience stability and reputation, as put forward by Pettey (2023) and Toff et al. (2021). Reliable and predictable signals presented by coherent visual and semantic signs are consistent with the signaling theory and reputational branding frameworks. The concept of reputational branding, when the news organization/institution actively works to build the image of a credible and authoritative source of information by relying on the consistent traditions, presentation conventions, tone, and visual design, is a relevant characteristic (Toff et al., 2021). Meanwhile, interactive communication, including gamified forms and formation of relationships with the communitarian space of the public, along with new digital channels, is even more involving and mobilizing the social responsibility of the audience (Mialkowska, Hrysiuk, et al., 2024). This has been particularly the case when it comes to marketing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Being part of a crisis response, the way you speak is significant and not only what you say: trust here is mostly visual and based on communicative gestures of calm, such as following a common visual

vocabulary, color scheme, or even vocal pattern (Petty, 2023). Moreover, digitalization of the work with communication opens the opportunity of faster reaction to the threats and, at the same time, introduces new challenges in the form of digital divide and personal data protection (Alazzam et al., 2023; Mialkowska, Hrysiuk, et al., 2024; Morokhova et al., 2023; Nieminen, 2019; Pierson, 2022). The issue of transparent access to informative material and linguistic and cultural conversion is especially relevant during a transnational crisis. Storytelling as a human tale, a personalized testimony or commentary by experts, is another effective instrument that increases confidence in information and reduces the fear of experiencing the disastrous or complex events (Dessart & Standaert, 2023). In addition, the now more interactive platforms, where users are contributors in a two-way dialogue and content creators, have begun to be influential in facilitating the transparency and accountability of the public discourse (Malmelin & Villi, 2017; Zhao & Chen, 2022). Through this interaction, organizations not only broadcast their position but also create conditions for prompt feedback, which is critical in times of crisis.

Given that the modern culture of brand communications in the context of crisis management is based on a comprehensive toolkit (dominated by emotional accuracy, consistency of messages, and active participation of the audience), it is necessary to introduce effective tools for responding to external challenges, as well as to build a sustainable level of trust in the brand as an integral social entity. However, despite the growing interest in crisis communication, the scientific literature still lacks systematic studies that comprehensively analyze the culture of brand communications and PR technologies in the context of crisis management in the media sphere, which emphasizes the relevance of further research and empirical understanding of their impact on trust, reputation, and interaction with stakeholders in a crisis.

## Methods

The method of statistical analysis was used to verify the impact of the level of media literacy, types of information consumption, and trust in various media platforms on the potential for anti-crisis effectiveness of brand communications in the modern Ukrainian media environment. The analysis is based on aggregated sets of secondary data collected by independent organizations in 2023-2025. The sources of secondary data were: an annual monitoring study conducted by the analytical unit of the NGO Detector Media in the first quarter of 2025 ( $n \approx 1200$ ), which was conducted using the CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) methodology with representation by age, gender, region, and type of settlement; a specialized sociological survey ( $n \approx 2000$ ) initiated by the international program USAID Internews, implemented in 2024 using a hybrid toolkit (CATI and online panel), where the sample was stratified by key demographic characteristics; a quantitative study conducted by OPORA (2024) based on a face-to-face survey of respondents aged 18+ ( $N = 2011$ ) in all regions of Ukraine controlled by. All surveys used a stratified representative sample of the adult population of Ukraine. This methodological approach focused on tracking empirical trends that allow us to outline the relationships between key indicators: the level of media literacy, typical channels of information consumption (digital, traditional, hybrid), and the level of trust in information sources. The chosen research design allows us to integrate numerical dynamics (2020-2024) with sociological observations on the reduction of cognitive stress and media fatigue.

The case analysis was used to identify structural features, mechanisms, and practices of crisis management in the activities of leading Ukrainian media during the period of full-scale military aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine (2022-2025). The study has the features of a case-based qualitative analysis focused on the study of real situations that arose in the crisis conditions of martial law. The methodological basis of the analysis is the multiple-case study design strategy (Yin, 2017), which involves a comparative analysis of several unique but typical cases.

To conduct the case analysis, an analytical corpus of 10 cases of leading digital news platforms was formed according to USAID (2024), selected by the criterion of their high social significance, large audience, influence in shaping public opinion, and open public availability of information about crisis events and management decisions. The data sources were the content and public statements of the respective media in 2022-2025; social media posts regarding the reaction of editorial offices during the crisis; materials from open journalistic investigations and expert interviews. The analytical procedure involved systematizing the cases by three key dimensions: type of crisis (cyberattack, disinformation, reputational crisis, infrastructure threat, etc.); response mechanism (internal/external resources, technical, organizational, and communication solutions); and compliance of measures with international crisis management standards (ISO/IEC 27035, business continuity principles, crisis communication protocols, etc.).

The empirical study aims to empirically examine the perception of brand communications by the media audience in times of crisis. To comprehensively analyze such differences, Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was chosen to assess the impact of several independent variables on a number of interdependent dependent variables representing cognitive, emotional, and ethical perceptions of media communication strategies. The empirical study is grounded upon an online survey carried out among 347 respondents in Ukraine in 2024. The sample consists of people between the ages of 18 and 60, stratified according to age, behavioral, and information and consumer attributes. The sample is representative in terms of key demographics, which enables us to generalize the findings. The questionnaire consisted of 17 statements (Appendix A) that reflect the key aspects of media interaction in times of crisis: media interaction with the audience; the role of brand communications; assessment of PR technologies; and the impact on loyalty and behavior. The evaluation was based on a Likert scale (where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree). Generalized scores of each dimension were used as dependent variables in MANOVA.

In order to study the influence of socio-demographic and behavioral factors on media reception, the following grouping variables were used: age: 18-25 (Group 0), 26-35 (Group 1), 36-45 (Group 2), 46-60 (Group 3); regarding the frequency of news consumption: Daily (Group 0),

Several times a week (Group 1), Less frequently (Group 2); in terms of media consumption channels: where online media and social networks are classified as Digital/New Media (Group 1); television, radio and print media as Traditional Media (Group 0); and the use of several different media channels is classified as Mixed (Group 2). Therefore, given the presence of several related dependent variables and the aim of the study - to identify the effect of several independent variables (age, frequency of consumption, type of sources) – three separate MANOVAs were applied for each predictor. In each case, four classical statistics were used: Pillai's Trace, Wilks' Lambda, Hotelling-Lawley Trace, and Roy's Largest Root.

At the stage of formulating the hypotheses, it was assumed that:

**Hypothesis (H1):** The formation of a culture of brand communications by Ukrainian media during the crisis has a positive impact on the level of audience trust, media literacy, and frequency of news consumption.

**Hypothesis (H2):** Institutionalized crisis management practices implemented by leading Ukrainian media resources in the context of a full-scale war help maintain audience trust and foster a culture of responsible brand communication.

**Hypothesis (H3):** There is a statistically significant multivariate influence of socio-demographic characteristics and behavioral parameters on the integral indicators of perception of the communicative characteristics of media messages.

The expected result was the identification of a significant multivariate effect for each of the independent variables, which allows us to empirically confirm the role of socio-demographic and behavioral factors in the perception of anti-crisis media communication.

## Results

### Statistical substantiation of the impact of brand communications on the anti-crisis effectiveness of the media

In response to the unprecedented challenges of a full-scale war, the Ukrainian media were forced to rethink their communication policy, forming a new culture of brand communications. The modern culture of brand communications is based on the values of transparency, credibility, adaptability, and responsibility, and involves active interaction with the audience that goes beyond traditional information. As part of anti-crisis management, the media have begun to consistently form their own communication identity as reliable and socially oriented sources, which has allowed them not only to maintain trust but also to increase the level of critical thinking among information consumers.

In the context of a protracted war and information pressure from the Russian Federation, Ukrainian society is in a state of constant communication turbulence. In the context of the expanding scope of the information crisis, it is the ability of the media to maintain effective communication with the audience that determines their anti-crisis resilience. One of the key areas of anti-crisis management was the formation of a new culture of brand communications – a strategic style of interaction with the audience that involves transparency, consistency, adaptability, and an emphasis on trust. In this context, the media themselves acted as active agents of change, contributing to raising the level of media literacy and maintaining trust among Ukrainian consumers through quality information, educational campaigns, and new content formats.

According to the results of a quantitative study conducted by DM (2025), a noticeable trend was the positive dynamics of the audience's self-assessment of information verification skills, which indicates the effectiveness of media efforts in the field of educational brand communication (Figure 1). The growth of media literacy is not accidental, but is the result of systematic work by the Ukrainian media to establish standards for verified information, explain fact-checking methods, and launch special sections/projects aimed at increasing critical thinking.

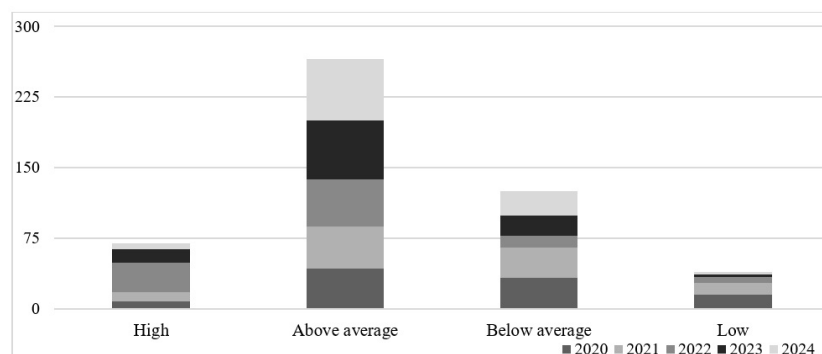


Fig. 1 Dynamics of the level of media literacy of Ukrainians as a result of changes in the culture of media brand communications in 2020-2024  
Source: DM (2025)

An analysis of the frequency of use of different types of media showed that online resources (online publications, social networks, etc.) dominate among information sources, especially among younger audiences; this indicates that brands that successfully communicate in the digital environment have an advantage in maintaining the attention and trust of the audience in times of instability (Figure 2). However, the digital environment also poses significant risks of spreading disinformation, in particular due to the high speed of content circulation, low entry threshold

for unverified sources, and algorithmic news selection, which can amplify information distortions (Lemos, 2024). This situation is particularly critical in the context of Russia’s information war against Ukraine, which is also accompanied by the lack of media literacy among some Ukrainian audiences. Thus, according to the above data, in 2024, only 7% of respondents rated their critical information consumption skills as high, while 28% remained at below average or low levels. After a peak in 2022 (31% with a high level), there has been a decline, which may indicate fatigue or reduced attention to the topic of checking information. In this context, disinformation undermines the credibility of domestic media resources while complicating the effectiveness of brand communications in times of crisis.

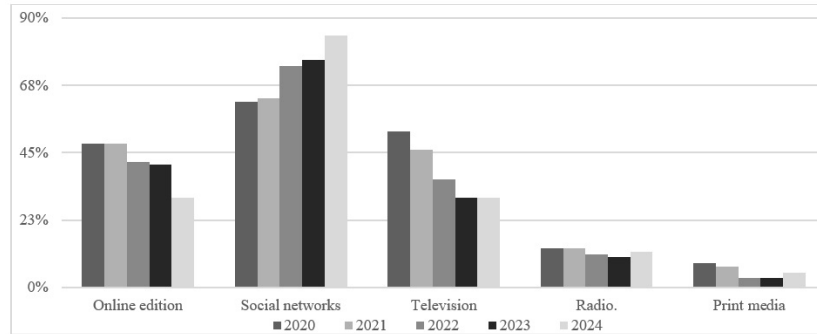


Fig. 2 Frequency of use of the main types of media in Ukraine as a result of changes in the culture of media brand communications in 2020-2024  
Source: USAID (2024)

In the third year of the full-scale invasion, disinformation, psychological operations, and a consistent loss of trust in traditional media have led to a large-scale crisis of trust in the media environment. A survey conducted by the (OPORA, 2024) among 2011 respondents from all government-controlled regions of Ukraine (Figure 3) showed that 15.2% of Ukrainians in 2024 do not trust any of the sources of information at all, which is three times higher than in 2022. Television (a 27-33% decrease in trust among different age and gender groups), radio, and print media suffered the greatest losses.

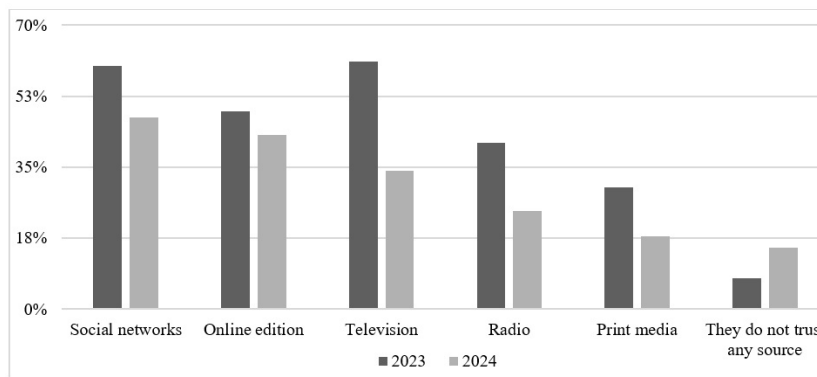


Fig. 3 The level of trust of Ukrainians in the main types of media as a result of changes in the culture of media brand communications in 2023-2024, %  
Source: OPORA (2024)

Despite the overall decline in trust in some types of traditional media, large national online resources that demonstrate strategies of transparency, effective crisis communication, and active interaction with the audience maintain a consistently high level of trust, which indicates the successful implementation of brand communication principles, including media reputation, crisis competence, and digital flexibility.

A more detailed analysis of the sources used showed that the most trustworthy are the websites of large national media, which demonstrate the stability of information and adaptability to information challenges (Figure 4). Such sources are the channels of dissemination of effective anti-crisis brand communications, as they combine trust, coverage, and efficiency.

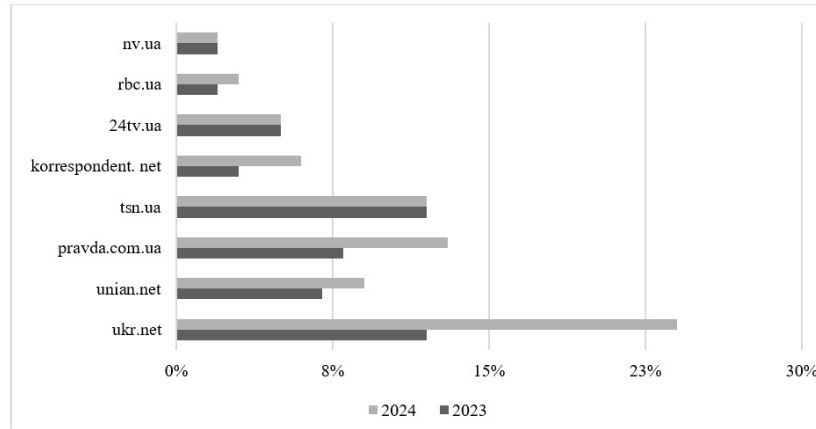


Fig. 4 Popularity of national media resources in Ukraine, %, 2023-2024 Source: USAID (2024)

The most popular media websites, such as UKR.NET, RBC-Ukraine, and Channel 24, are now key communication channels through which media brands can deliver verified and relevant information during crisis situations. Thus, the level of media literacy, trust, and sustainability of consumption are not only characteristics of the audience, but also direct results of a targeted anti-crisis strategy by the Ukrainian media, which is implemented through the culture of brand communications. Thus, the findings of the study confirm that the development of a culture of brand communications in the Ukrainian media during the crisis is a factor in building audience trust, increasing media literacy, and maintaining a stable frequency of news consumption, which is consistent with the primary hypothesis (H1) of the analysis.

Crisis situations on a large scale require effective crisis management in the field of communications, focused on the dissemination of truthful information, as well as on rethinking the brand strategy of media, government, and public communications. The main condition for such management is the psychology of trust – the ability of an information source to maintain a stable emotional connection with the audience, evoking a sense of reliability, security, and control (Akimova et al., 2023; Viazova et al., 2023). This, in turn, is impossible without a well-built culture of communication – clear, transparent, consistent in its messages, based on the principles of human dignity and truth.

The statistics indicate that the trust in even the most favored resources, such as social media (73.4% of respondents) and the Internet (59.7%), is decreasing at a slow pace. This indicates the high emotional tension that accompanies information consumption and fatigue from fragmented, contradictory, and often disturbing content. That is why the key factor in maintaining effectiveness in communication is the emotional response of the audience – the ability of the content not only to inform, but also to emotionally support, calm, and inspire.

In this situation, brand communications can and should serve as a tool to restore trust in the media. Authors are talking about both commercial brands and the branding of media platforms, government agencies, and civil society organizations as sources of reliable information. PR technologies focused on emotional resonance and sustainability of messages, in particular, are the most effective here:

- Narrative PR: involves creating sustainable stories and value messages that are repeated across all communication channels (Wiwitan et al., 2024);
- Reputation branding: involves developing the image of a media outlet or organization as an honest, trusted, independent player (Toff et al., 2021);
- Crisis storytelling: allows covering crisis situations through personal stories, eyewitness accounts, or credible experts (Dessart & Standaert, 2023);
- Interactive platforms: allow for increased audience involvement in content co-creation, public dialog, and prompt response to requests (Malmelin & Villi, 2017; Zhao & Chen, 2022);
- Visual elements of the brand: consistently using colors, style, and voice that are associated with calmness and professionalism (Petthey, 2023).

The analysis of age and regional differences in media consumption also emphasizes the need for targeted brand management. Young people (18-25 years old) are abandoning television in large numbers and prefer Telegram, YouTube, and the Internet. Older audiences remain loyal to traditional media, but also show a decline in trust. In villages, television continues to be influential, but even there, there is a crisis of faith in information OPORA (2024). Thus, there are no more universal channels - communications should be segmented, adapted to the characteristics of each group, and the brand should acquire a humanitarian face, backed by authority, not just information.

Thus, the statistics prove the need to move from informational broadcasting to trustful, empathetic, and emotionally stabilizing brand communication. Without this, any policy of countering disinformation will remain ineffective, and the media themselves risk losing their status as a legitimate source in the minds of citizens.

### Case study of crisis management of Ukrainian media during the war

In the current context of the armed conflict, Ukraine's information space is under considerable pressure from both external and internal threats, which significantly affect the functioning of media resources. Leading media platforms, which are key channels for shaping public opinion, are being targeted by cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns, and operations aimed at destabilizing the socio-political situation. In this situation, media crisis management is turning essential, forcing media management and editorial staff to react quickly to challenges, keep the flow of information moving, and provide reliable content. Table I, case study of the response of the Ukrainian media to the full-scale war in 2022-2025, provides the description of the nature of the crises and the strategic solutions that were established to deal with the crises.

Table I  
Crisis management cases of leading Ukrainian media resources during a full-scale invasion (2022-2025)

Resource	Case Description	Solution
ukr.net	In 2022 an official spear-phishing cyberattack on the ukr.net platform posed as authoritative messages in order to steal personal data and disrupt the service. This type of attack is an informational threat commonly employed in contemporary hybrid warfare to discredit users and interfere with the information sphere.	To mitigate the risk, appropriate measures were taken in coordination with Ukrainian CERT (CERT-UA), and internal cybersecurity protection was reinforced: introduction of multi-factor authentication, monitoring of traffic and training of employees. This approach conforms to the globally recognized good practice for crisis cyber management (ISO/IEC 27035).
pravda.com.ua	In the course of the fight, pravda.com.ua came under multiple DDoS attacks that led to a high level of loss of the availability of the site to the users. Such an attack is a classic illustration of cyber warfare aimed at disrupting the normal operations of the society in time of war.	The resource quickly added other security measures, such as the use of a CDN (Content Delivery Network) that has anti-DDoS capabilities, and cooperated with the Ukrainian cyber police. It is important to note that the measures taken are in line with the principles of flexibility and resilience of information systems in a crisis.
sensor.net	Journalists from sensor.net have published an in-depth investigation into corruption schemes in the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine that threatened the effectiveness of military operations. Investigations of this type under martial law are high-risk and require a high level of security for journalists and sources.	The editorial staff protected sources by using encrypted communication channels (e.g., Signal) and cooperated with law enforcement agencies to ensure a legitimate investigation. Such actions are an example of adaptive crisis management in the media sector.
rbc.ua	During the period of intense hostilities in 2023, rbc.ua was found to be disseminating inaccurate information about the course of military operations, which created risks of panic among the population.	The editorial staff strengthened the verification of information by using multichannel fact-checking and cooperation with international fact-checking organizations (e.g., IFCN). Refutations were promptly disseminated through all information platforms.
tsn.ua	As a result of the rocket attack, the tsn.ua editorial office was damaged, threatening the continuity of news coverage.	The service ensured the rapid evacuation of personnel and the establishment of work through remote offices and mobile platforms, which is in line with the concept of business continuity in crisis situations.
24tv.ua	During the war, the 24tv.ua domain was temporarily hijacked by intruders, which jeopardized information security and audience trust.	The domain was restored thanks to backup technologies and prompt interaction with the registrar, as well as communication with the audience via social media, which is an example of effective crisis PR and cybersecurity.
nv.ua	The spread of fake news about mass evacuation created panic among residents, which undermined social stability in the war zone.	The editorial staff of nv.ua promptly published refutations using official statements from local authorities and intensified communication with the community through messengers, which is in line with the practices of crisis communications in the media.
unian.net	Due to constant power outages, it was impossible to update the content in a timely manner, which reduced the information capacity of the resource.	To maintain business continuity, it was used autonomous power supplies and increased our presence in mobile applications, which is in line with modern practices of ensuring information security in crises.
korresponden.net	The spread of disinformation about the hostilities had a negative impact on public opinion, threatening social unity.	The introduction of an internal fact-checking system and partnership with international organizations to refute fakes demonstrate a systematic approach to crisis management.
focus.ua	Due to the disruption of logistics during the hostilities, the website had difficulty updating its content, which affected its information availability.	Authors have introduced the use of remote editorial teams and partner resources, which is in line with the principles of business process flexibility in a crisis.

Compiled by the author

The analysis of crisis management cases of leading Ukrainian media resources confirms the hypothesis (H2) that effective overcoming of crisis challenges in wartime is based on the integration of comprehensive cybersecurity strategies, operational communications, and partnership with government and international organizations. Important success factors are the use of advanced technological solutions (in particular, multi-factor authentication, CDN with anti-DDoS protection), the introduction of fact-checking systems, and the adaptation of business processes to business continuity through decentralization of offices and the involvement of remote teams. The variability of crisis situations – from cyber threats to

physical destruction of infrastructure – requires a flexible and systematic approach from modern media companies, which emphasizes the need to develop specialized crisis protocols for the media sector. The results obtained have significant applied potential for increasing the resilience of the information environment in the context of military operations and other emergencies, and also contribute to the theoretical understanding of crisis management mechanisms in the field of journalism and media management. At the same time, given the importance of maintaining audience trust, further research on the perception of brand communications by different audience groups in crisis conditions is relevant.

### An empirical study of the audience's perception of brand communications in times of crisis

Within the framework of modern communication science, there is an urgent need for an empirical understanding of the mechanisms of interaction between media brands and the audience in times of crisis fluctuations in the information environment. The emergence of new formats of trust, loyalty, and cognitive responsibility on the part of the consumer requires a systematic analysis of how media brand communications are perceived, interpreted, and evaluated by the audience in conditions of increased social tension. Given this, a multidimensional empirical study is needed to identify structural patterns of media strategy reception and to trace how existing patterns vary depending on the demographic and behavioral characteristics of respondents.

Given the age determinism of media consumption, it is advisable to conduct an empirical study of how representatives of different age categories identify the effectiveness of crisis communication by the media, brand strategies, and PR tools. That is, the results of the analysis presented in Table II suggest that there are deep cognitive and attributive differences in the perception of media behavior depending on age socialization.

Table II  
Multivariate analysis of variance of differences in the perception of brand communications by the audience during crises, depending on the age category

Result MANOVA						
MANOVA: Pillai Test						
Cases	df	Approx. F	Trace Pillai	Num df	Den df	p
(Intercept)	1	316.364	0.943	17	327.000	< 0.001
Age	3	2.806	0.380	51	987.000	< 0.001
Residuals	343					
MANOVA: Wilks Test						
Cases	df	Approx. F	Wilks' $\Lambda$	Num df	Den df	p
(Intercept)	1	316.364	0.057	17	327.000	< 0.001
Age	3	3.040	0.644	51	974.337	< 0.001
Residuals	343					
MANOVA: Hotelling-Lawley Test						
Cases	df	Approx. F	Trace(H) (-L)	Num df	Den df	p
(Intercept)	1	316.364	16.447	17	327.000	< 0.001
Age	3	3.290	0.515	51	977.000	< 0.001
Residuals	343					
MANOVA: Roy Test						
Cases	df	Approx. F	Largest Root	Num df	Den df	p
(Intercept)	1	316.364	16.447	17	327.000	< 0.001
Age	3	8.404	0.434	17	329.000	< 0.001
Residuals	343					

Compiled by the author

To evaluate the effect of age on the set of dependent variables reflecting aspects of the perception of crisis communication by the media, a multivariate analysis of variance was used with the use of four classical tests. In particular, the Pillai's Trace test (Pillai's Trace = 0.380;  $F(51, 987) = 2.806$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), which is considered one of the most conservative and resistant to violation of the assumptions of homogeneity of variance and covariance matrices. The obtained value indicates the presence of a moderate effect of the independent variable "age" on the linear combination of dependent variables, which is confirmed by a high level of statistical significance. Wilks'  $\Lambda = 0.644$ ;  $F(51, 974.34) = 3.040$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), which is one of the most common indicators of multivariate effect, demonstrates an inversely proportional relationship: a smaller  $\Lambda$  value indicates a greater effect, which in this case is consistent with the hypothesis (H3) about the significant influence of age category on the overall response profile. A similar picture is confirmed by the Hotelling-Lawley Trace test (Hotelling-Lawley Trace = 0.515;  $F(51, 977.00) = 3.290$ ;  $p < .001$ ), which is more sensitive to differences in sample sizes between groups and, in the context of the data, demonstrates a significant multivariate effect, supported by a high  $F$ -statistic. Roy's Largest Root (Roy's Largest Root = 0.434;  $F(17, 329.00) = 8.404$ ;  $p < .001$ ) focuses on the most pronounced axis of variation between groups, and although it is prone to overestimating the effect in the context of multicollinearity, the high  $F$ -statistic and

the significance of the result indicate that there is one dominant linear combination of dependent variables that best distinguishes between age groups.

Thus, the consistency of the results of all four criteria confirms the stability of the effect of the independent variable and allows us to conclude that there are statistically significant age differences in the perception of crisis communication by the media. This interaction indicates that age is a relevant factor that determines the peculiarities of the reception of the content and ethical aspects of media messages during the war (according to hypothesis H3).

Given that the level of involvement in the information space directly correlates with the criticality of the assessment of sources, which is especially relevant in the crisis conditions caused by Russia’s ongoing armed aggression on the territory of Ukraine. The results of the analysis in Table III reveal statistically significant differences in the perception of the communicative effectiveness of the media among respondents with different frequencies of media consumption.

Table III  
Multivariate analysis of variance of attitudes toward brand communications in crises in relation to the level of media engagement

Result MANOVA						
MANOVA: Pillai Test						
Cases	df	Approx. F	Trace Pillai	Num df	Den df	p
(Intercept)	1	329.913	0.945	17	328.000	< 0.001
Consumption	2	5.061	0.415	34	658.000	< 0.001
Residuals	344					
MANOVA: Wilks Test						
Cases	df	Approx. F	Wilks’ $\Lambda$	Num df	Den df	p
(Intercept)	1	329.913	0.055	17	328.000	< 0.001
Consumption	2	5.490	0.606	34	656.000	< 0.001
Residuals	344					
MANOVA: Hotelling-Lawley Test						
Cases	df	Approx. F	Trace(H) (-L)	Num df	Den df	p
(Intercept)	1	329.913	17.099	17	328.000	< 0.001
Consumption	2	5.925	0.616	34	654.000	< 0.001
Residuals	344					
MANOVA: Roy Test						
Cases	df	Approx. F	Largest Root	Num df	Den df	p
(Intercept)	1	329.913	17.099	17	328.000	< 0.001
Consumption	2	10.735	0.555	17	329.000	< 0.001
Residuals	344					

compiled by the author

The results of the multivariate analysis of variance suggest that the frequency of news consumption is a statistically significant factor that affects the set of assessments related to the perception of crisis communication by the media. All four main multidimensional criteria show a convergent confirmatory picture. In particular, the Pillai’s Trace criterion (Pillai’s Trace = 0.415;  $F(34, 658) = 5.061$ ;  $p < .001$ ), which is resistant to homoscedasticity, indicates the presence of a pronounced multivariate effect that covers a number of dependent variables simultaneously, indicating complex differences in respondents’ attitudes depending on the frequency of their information contact with the media. At the same time, Wilks’  $\Lambda = 0.606$ ;  $F(34, 656) = 5.490$ ;  $p < .001$  demonstrates a relatively low value of  $\Lambda$ , which confirms the statistical significance of the differences between the groups: the lower the  $\Lambda$  coefficient, the greater the variability of responses between the studied conditions. The value of the Hotelling’s Trace criterion (Hotelling’s Trace = 0.616;  $F(34, 654) = 5.925$ ;  $p < .001$ ) indicates a moderate strength of the effect, characterizing the overall impact of the variable “consumption” on the space of the multidimensional dependent variable, while maintaining sensitivity to intergroup variations. The Roy’s Largest Root criterion (Roy’s Largest Root = 0.555;  $F(17, 329) = 10.735$ ;  $p < .001$ ), which focuses on the most distinct axis of separation of the groups, demonstrates a high degree of divergence within one dominant latent factor, which is likely responsible for differences in the perception of the emotional tone, openness, or strategic response of the media in crisis situations.

Thus, the results confirm the hypothesis (H3) that the degree of engagement with news content (as a frequency characteristic) significantly modifies respondents’ perceptions of the quality, ethics, and effectiveness of crisis communication. A high frequency of consumption forms a more critical or, conversely, informed approach to assessing media messages in an information war, while rare access to news sources leads to a fragmented or less sensitive perception of crisis narratives. This demonstrates the importance of taking into account the information behavior of the audience in the formation of public communication strategies aimed at strengthening trust, loyalty, and social responsibility of the media in the context of crises.

Next, in order to identify the impact of the type of the main news source on respondents’ assessments of anti-crisis media communication,

a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted by the type of news consumption channel (Table IV), which allows us to identify structural differences in assessments depending on the information behavior of the audience.

Table IV  
Multivariate analysis of variance of differences in the perception of brand communications in crises, depending on the channel of media consumption

Result MANOVA						
MANOVA: Pillai Test						
Cases	df	Approx. F	TracePillai	Num df	Den df	p
(Intercept)	1	475.700	0.961	17	328.000	< 0.001
Type	2	7.892	0.579	34	658.000	< 0.001
MANOVA: Wilks Test						
Cases	df	Approx. F	Wilks' $\Lambda$	Num df	Den df	p
(Intercept)	1	475.700	0.039	17	328.000	< 0.001
Type	2	9.731	0.442	34	656.000	< 0.001
Residuals	344					
MANOVA: Hotelling-Lawley Test						
Cases	df	Approx. F	Trace(H) (-L)	Num df	Den df	p
(Intercept)	1	475.700	24.655	17	328.000	< 0.001
Type	2	11.685	1.215	34	654.000	< 0.001
Residuals	344					
MANOVA: Roy Test						
Cases	df	Approx. F	Largest Root	Num df	Den df	p
(Intercept)	1	475.700	24.655	17	328.000	< 0.001
Type	2	22.721	1.174	17	329.000	< 0.001
Residuals	344					

compiled by the author

The results of the analysis indicate a statistically significant multidimensional effect of the studied factor on all four criteria. In particular, the Pillai's test revealed a significant effect of the type of news channel on the aggregate dependent variables (Pillai's Trace = 0.579,  $F(34, 658) = 7.892$ ,  $p < .001$ ), indicating that there is a significant difference between groups with different news sources. Wilks'  $\Lambda$  ( $\Lambda = 0.442$ ,  $F(34, 656) = 9.731$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) further confirmed the existence of a significant difference, showing a relatively low lambda value, indicating high variation between groups compared to within-group variance. The Hotelling-Loley test also revealed a significant effect (Trace = 1.215,  $F(34, 654) = 11.685$ ,  $p < .001$ ), emphasizing the significant level of differences in the dependent variables between the consumption type categories. Similarly, the Roy's test indicated the largest contribution of a single linear combination of variables to the total variation (Largest Root = 1.174,  $F(17, 329) = 22.721$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), which also indicates the presence of a distinct group difference structure.

The findings confirm the hypothesis (H3) that respondents with different main channels of news receive statistically significant differences in the perception of crisis communications by the media, brand behavior, and relevant PR practices. Such differences are due to the specifics of media formats, the level of emotional involvement, trust in sources, and differences in the style of information presentation. Thus, the results of MANOVA confirm the significance of the type of information channel as a factor influencing the value and behavioral aspects of media consumption in times of crisis.

## Discussion

The findings confirm the key hypothesis of the study that the perception of crisis communication by the media has a pronounced dependence on age characteristics, level of media engagement, and the type of main information channel. The statistically significant multivariate effects found in three separate MANOVA analyses indicate that socio-demographic and behavioral factors significantly modify the reception of media messages in crisis conditions. In particular, the dependence of respondents' assessments on age is consistent with the findings of previous studies that emphasize age-related variations in the ways in which people interact with the media (Chen, 2024; Louisot, 2024). Older age groups are likely to be more reliant on institutional authority figures and traditional communication channels, while younger age groups are more sensitive to the emotional and visually rich formats that dominate the digital environment. This confirms the opinion of Wiwitan et al. (2024), according to which presentation formats and communication style should be adapted to the specifics of target groups to achieve effective impact in crisis situations.

The analysis of the influence of age showed a significant multivariate effect (Pillai's Trace = 0.380;  $F(51, 987) = 2.806$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), which means that the age group has a small but significant impact on the perception of crisis communication. In particular, respondents aged 60+ rated emotional support and trust in the media higher than younger respondents (18-25), who, on the contrary, demonstrated lower levels of trust and perceived the messages as less effective. These results are in line with the findings of Wiwitan et al. (2024) and Chen (2024), who indicate that

older audiences tend to trust traditional media more, while younger audiences tend to distrust and emotional distance. In our case, younger respondents are likely to be more critical of messages, especially if they do not follow the usual format of social platforms or seem "official". This provides empirical support for H1, suggesting a theoretically grounded relationship between age and trust/perceived effectiveness of media messages.

Similarly, the observed effect of frequency of news consumption correlates with assumptions about the criticality of information perception depending on the level of information engagement (Maulana, 2024; Viazova et al., 2023). Individuals who actively follow the news show a higher level of awareness and critical thinking, which may increase the requirements for transparency and quality of communication. On the other hand, low media consumption leads to a fragmented or superficial understanding of crisis messages, which makes this audience more vulnerable to manipulation and disinformation. This is fully consistent with the observations of Chernobrovkina and Chernobrovkin (2025) regarding the relationship between media consumption and the level of communicative resilience of the audience in the context of conflict events. This observation supports hypothesis H2, which posits that the level of media engagement predicts the perception and critical evaluation of crisis communication, consistent with uses and gratifications theory and elaboration likelihood models.

Frequency of news consumption is also a significant predictor (Pillai's Trace = 0.415;  $F(34, 658) = 5.061$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). This effect was even stronger than the age effect, suggesting a strong reliance on information seeking. People who consume the news multiple times a day rated source trust and crisis communication effectiveness significantly higher than those who consume the news less than once a week. Our results provide strong support for the findings of Viazova et al. (2023) and Maulana (2024), who recommend that information-seeking audiences are better able to discern relevant information and are more likely to develop stable beliefs about the trustworthiness of a source. They are also less emotional in reaction to the messages, lessening the risk of being influenced by/affected by disinformation. These results align with H2 and reinforce the theoretical argument that higher media engagement fosters information literacy, critical evaluation, and trust formation (Maulana, 2024; Viazova et al., 2023).

A further significant finding of the study is the confirmation of a conjecture (H3) concerning the influence of the type of main source of news on the perception of efficiency of crisis communication. Analysis gives an insight that the people who use online as their primary source of news are more likely to have a different perception about things compared to those who use traditional media as their primary source of news. These loopholes can be explained by the technical mode of information delivery, as well as the level of individualization, emotionality, and the general style of communication (Mialkovska, Hrysiuk, et al., 2024; Toff et al., 2021). Online sources often create an environment of instant reaction, which leads to the rapid formation of ideas and positions, often based on emotional or visual impulse rather than systematic analysis. This finding supports H3 and is theoretically grounded in media richness theory, which predicts that the communication channel characteristics influence how messages are interpreted and trusted.

The analysis of the type of the main news source (online platforms, social media, television, etc.) has the strongest multivariate effect (Pillai's Trace = 0.579,  $F(34, 658) = 7.892$ ,  $p < .001$ ), which indicates a pronounced dependence of the perception of crisis communication on the media channel through which the audience receives information. The findings partially agree with, but also contradict, the conclusions of Toff et al. (2021), who described in their study that users of digital platforms often experience emotional stress and distrust of sources due to fragmented content. At the same time, in our study, trust in online media was higher than in social media, and even partially exceeded television in terms of effectiveness, which indicates the maturity of Ukrainian online journalism, which was able to demonstrate efficiency and a sustainable editorial policy during a crisis (for example, a full-scale war). This provides empirical evidence that supports H3 and highlights the moderating role of media platform credibility on audience perception.

At the theoretical level, the results complement current approaches to the study of strategic crisis communication. They confirm the relevance of the ideas about the need for a segmented approach to the formation of information messages that takes into account the demographic and behavioral profile of the target audience (Olanrewaju et al., 2023; Zayed et al., 2022). In applied terms, this opens up prospects for the development of differentiated anti-crisis information strategies, which may include, in particular, combining emotional and rational messages depending on the type of source, increasing transparency and reputational reliability for critical users, or using interactive channels to attract young audiences (Chiames & Smulyan, 2024; Louisot, 2024; Zhao & Chen, 2022). In addition, the results of this study complement the concept of reputational branding of media as institutions that not only broadcast information, but also build social capital through the sustainability, ethics, and responsibility of their messages (Toff et al., 2021). In this context, PR tools acquire not just an instrumental but also a value dimension: they are aimed at building trust, solidarity, and a coherent information picture of reality in times of crisis.

## Conclusions

The results show that the perception of crisis communication varies significantly depending on age, type of news source, and frequency of consumption. Based on this, there should be age-group and information channel-specific crisis communication strategies. Younger viewers will be more interested in interactivity and visual images that are common in digital media, and older viewers (above 50s) need to be presented with information in traditional media in a manner that is plain and simple to comprehend. The need to enhance media literacy of the populace is an urgent issue in the reduction of the effects and the improvement of risk communication. Meanwhile, the media transparency must be augmented

by ensuring the process of news production is more transparent and by introducing fact-checking processes that help in improving the trust of the audience. The speed of information delivery has to be observed as well, since excessive access to crisis news causes information fatigue that hinders the quality of people reacting appropriately to events.

#### **Limitations and directions for future research**

Although the findings are meaningful, the study suffers from limitations, especially related to sample representativeness and the absence of a multicultural context, which may hinder the generalizability of the results. Further, research should in the future focus on cross-cultural comparisons of perceptions of crisis messages and consider also the role of algorithmic mechanisms in information environment shaping. Moreover, it is crucial to investigate the influence of various content formats on audience perception and behavioral responses, which will enable the creation of more efficient crisis communication instruments.

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## Appendix

### General Questions

#### 1. Your age:

18-25

26-35

36-45

46-60

#### 2. Frequency of news consumption:

Daily

Several times a week

Less frequently

#### 3. Main channels for receiving news (you can select several):

Online edition

Social networks

Television

Radio

Print media

### Thematic issues

#### I. Media interaction with the audience in crisis

1. During crisis situations, the media should inform the audience about the events as openly as possible.
2. I feel that the media change the tone and style of their messages during crises to reassure the audience.
3. The emotional component of communication (sympathy, understanding) of the media during a crisis affects my attitude towards them.
4. I trust the media to publicly admit their mistakes in times of crisis.
5. The lack of clear explanations from the media in crisis cases reduces my trust in them.

#### II. The role of brand communications

6. The media brand affects how much I am willing to forgive its mistakes in a crisis.
7. I pay attention to how consistently and coherently the media communicate their values in times of crisis.
8. The positive image of the media brand helps me to remain loyal even in difficult times.
9. The culture of communication in the media (ethics, style, tone) is a determining factor in my trust in a crisis.

#### III. Evaluation of PR technologies

10. Public apologies by the media are an effective way to restore reputation after a crisis.
11. The use of professional PR tools (press releases, briefings, official statements) increases trust in the media.
12. Crisis communications by the media should be based on facts and avoid manipulation, even if it harms their reputation.
13. Openness to dialog with the audience (through social media, comments, live broadcasts) helps the media to better overcome the crisis.

#### IV. Impact on loyalty and behavior

14. When the media communicate well in a crisis, I am more likely to recommend them to others.
15. In crisis situations, I tend to switch to other news sources if the media are not open enough.
16. Well-constructed brand communications help me to turn to the same media outlet again after the crisis.
17. It is important for me that the media have a clear strategy for anti-crisis communications.