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Qualifying scientific work on
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DISSERTATION

**THE USE OF DIGITAL PLATFORMS IN A CRISIS: THE CASE OF
TELEGRAM DURING THE FULL-SCALE INVASION OF UKRAINE**

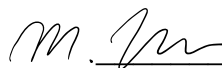
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The dissertation contains the results of one's own research. The use of ideas, results, and texts of other authors has a reference to the appropriate source

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PhD thesis supervised by Dr. Dariya Orlova, PhD in Mass Communications



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ABSTRACT

Gordiienko T. O. The use of digital platforms in a crisis: the case of Telegram during the full-scale invasion of Ukraine 2022. — Qualifying scientific work on the rights of the manuscript.

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The dissertation examines the use of the Telegram digital platform as a source of information during crisis situations, focusing on the case of Ukraine following the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022. It investigates the motivations and selection rationale behind user adoption, the role of platform affordances in shaping media consumption patterns, and the strategies employed by both users and media professionals.

On February 24, 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. These events led to large-scale destruction, a migration crisis, and the biggest global human-caused shock the world has experienced in recent decades. In addition to the above-mentioned series of changes, this disruptive event also triggered alterations in the distribution and consumption of news in digital space. According to the NGO Ukrainian Institute of Media and Communication, since the invasion of the Russian army in February 2022, the number of Ukrainians who primarily read news on Telegram channels has almost doubled (UIMC report contains data for 2023). However, digital platforms increasingly became linked to the spread of propaganda, misinformation, disinformation, and the manipulation of the information environment. And in the case of the Telegram platform, this is not the only peril that is associated with its functioning.

A number of risks associated with using the Telegram platform include privacy and security concerns, as end-to-end encryption in the messenger is not

used by default, which can mislead users; almost no moderation and the associated spread of misinformation, disinformation, propaganda, and other harmful content; illicit activities such as fraud, sale of illicit substances or hacking tools; anonymity abuse, as it is easy to hide one's identity or commit identity fraud using Telegram; risks associated with data storage, as Telegram stores messages (outside secret chats) on its servers, which are subject to legal demands depending on jurisdiction; and risks related to abuse and harassment, as Telegram has been used to spread personal information or private content without consent, especially in unmoderated groups. Although these risks were not in the focus of research questions that were posed within the study, related reflections were present in the self-reporting of the study respondents, both from the side of users and from the side of media professionals who actively use the Telegram platform.

There are three primary research questions posed within the study: (1) What features guided users in choosing Telegram as their main platform for news consumption during the crisis? (2) How did the platform's affordances influence the formation of user news routines? and (3) How do Ukrainian media professionals adapt their professional practices on Telegram in response to user needs and platform constraints during crisis conditions? The study builds on qualitative methods and is situated within the frameworks of Uses and Gratifications, Media Affordances, and Crisis Communication.

Drawing on a qualitative methodology involving semi-structured in-depth interviews with both Telegram users and media professionals, the research uncovers how the affordances of Telegram aligned with the urgent information needs of users during a major crisis. The study is based on two datasets, which total 50 in-depth interviews. The first dataset contains 40 interviews with users, while the second dataset contains 10 interviews with editors and media professionals. Including both users and media professionals as informants enhances the analytical depth of the study by allowing a comprehensive,

two-sided perspective on the use of Telegram for media consumption during crisis situations. Users provide insight into motivations, routines, their subjective responses, and perceptions of trust, control, and information relevance. Media professionals, in turn, offer understanding of platform-specific constraints and editorial strategies they employ in order to address perceived audience needs and expectations. This dual approach reveals the interaction between audience needs and media production choices.

The study employed an iterative analysis approach, which allowed for a systematic yet flexible exploration of qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews. The analysis process was initiated early in the research cycle and continued throughout data collection, emphasizing ongoing reflection and theoretical engagement. The analysis began with first-level descriptive coding to capture recurring patterns. These were followed by the development of second-level analytic codes, enabling the identification of deeper thematic structures. A comprehensive codebook for both datasets was constructed to ensure consistency and alignment with the research questions.

The findings reveal a complex intertwining between user agency and platform's design. Ukrainian users prioritized speed, local specificity, and a sense of control over information consumption, while also encompassing issues of misinformation, emotional overload, and digital security. Important factors for users were also the ability to receive timely notifications about air raid alerts and air threats. In this way, the platform performed a full information cycle, from the initial dissemination of threat warnings to monitoring and then post-event information.

User behavior also revealed patterns of selective engagement and self-regulation. While some users engaged heavily, monitoring multiple channels hourly, others implemented limits to manage psychological stress, including muting channels or setting boundaries on news exposure. Telegram's interface facilitated such strategies through its notification settings, the ability to

subscribe discreetly, and an interface free from algorithmic recommendations. Participants highlighted the importance of emotional control and the need to avoid 'doomscrolling,' particularly during periods of high military activity. Features that motivated users to turn to Telegram as their primary platform for media consumption during the crisis period fell into two classes of affordances, according to the MAIN model (Sundar, 2008), namely Modality and Navigability. This finding underscores that though platform features enable certain users' practices, their needs and experiences influence how those features are regarded and utilized.

Telegram's evolving role is also perceived to be driven both by its affordances and by the broader socio-political context. The research highlights that media professionals adjusted their distribution and operational strategies to meet growing user demand on Telegram, despite limitations in audience analytics and content moderation, and control over its spread and visibility. While media outlets initially perceived the platform as a tool for content distribution, the study found that large newsrooms began to assess the platform differently, giving teams working within it more editorial autonomy and freedom in organizing workflow. Respondents from among media professionals noted that certain types of content are created specifically for Telegram, and in some cases, content on Telegram is published faster, without delays or limitations of editorial practices connected to other media's channels. Media professionals also emphasized the tension they experience between reach and reliability, noting that Telegram allowed faster reporting but raised concerns about source verification, misinformation, and content proliferation by non-journalistic actors. Informants among media professionals in the study noted that they are able to notice and monitor such manipulative information campaigns implemented within the Telegram platform, but at the same time they feel compelled to also respond to such information waves in some way, even by simply publishing fact-checking or refutation of false rumors or

manipulative posts. Thus, the media find themselves involved in such information campaigns although it was not initially part of their strategic and operational plans and workflow.

Ultimately, the dissertation contributes to the understanding of emerging digital platforms in crisis communication and audience studies. It underlines the importance of examining under-researched platforms like Telegram, especially in contexts where mainstream media infrastructures are under pressure and the platform in question itself carries a variety of security threats and risks. The study also takes into account the experiences of users in the extreme conditions of full-scale war, presenting a unique perspective for research and policymaking in crisis situations. The study's implications extend to fields of media studies, digital communication, and crisis communication, offering insights into user behavior, platform affordances, and the evolving digital media landscape in Central and Eastern Europe.

Keywords: media, journalism, social media, digital platforms, Telegram, media consumption, media affordances, crisis communication, war, information war, security, disinformation, propaganda, conflict, Ukraine.

АНОТАЦІЯ

Гордієнко Т. О. Використання цифрових платформ у кризових ситуаціях: кейс Telegram під час повномасштабного вторгнення в Україну 2022 року. — Кваліфікаційна наукова праця на правах рукопису.

Дисертація на здобуття наукового ступеня доктора філософії у галузі «06 Журналістика» за спеціальністю 061 «Журналістика». — Національний університет «Києво-Могилянська академія», Київ, 2025.

У дисертації розглядається використання цифрової платформи Telegram як джерела інформації під час кризових ситуацій, зосереджуючись на кейсі України після повномасштабного вторгнення

Росії у 2022 році. В роботі досліджуються мотивація та обґрунтування вибору користувачів, роль медійних та технологічних можливостей платформи у формуванні їх підходів до споживання медіа, а також стратегії, що використовуються як самими користувачами, так і медіафахівцями.

24 лютого 2022 року Росія розпочала повномасштабне вторгнення в Україну. Ці події призвели до масштабних руйнувань, міграційної кризи та найбільшого антропогенного потрясіння, яке світ пережив за останні десятиліття. Окрім вищезгаданої низки змін, ця руйнівна подія також спровокувала зміни в розповсюдженні та споживанні новин у цифровому просторі. За даними громадської організації «Український інститут медіа та комунікації» (УІМК), з моменту вторгнення російської армії у лютому 2022 року кількість українців, які переважно читають новини на Telegram-каналах, майже подвоїлася (звіт УІМК містить дані за 2023 рік). Однак цифрові платформи все частіше пов'язують із поширенням пропаганди, дезінформації, неправдивої інформації та маніпуляціями в інформаційному середовищі. Водночас, у випадку платформи Telegram це не єдина небезпека, пов'язана з її функціонуванням.

Низка ризиків, пов'язаних з використанням платформи Telegram, включає проблеми конфіденційності та безпеки, оскільки наскрізне шифрування в месенджері не використовується за замовчуванням, що може вводити користувачів в оману; майже відсутня модерація та пов'язане з цим поширення дезінформації, пропаганди та іншого шкідливого контенту; незаконна діяльність, така як шахрайство, продаж заборонених речовин або інструментів для кібератак; зловживання анонімністю, оскільки за допомогою Telegram легко приховати свою особу або вчинити шахрайство з особистими даними; ризики, пов'язані зі зберіганням даних, оскільки Telegram зберігає повідомлення (поза секретними чатами) на своїх серверах, які підпадають під юридичні вимоги щодо розкриття даних

залежно від юрисдикції; та ризики, пов'язані з цюванням та переслідуваннями онлайн, оскільки Telegram раніше вже використовувався для поширення особистої інформації або приватного контенту без згоди інших користувачів, особливо в немодерованих групах. Хоча ці ризики не були відображені в дослідницьких питаннях даної роботи, респонденти рефлексували та обмірковували їх, як серед користувачів Telegram, так і серед респондентів-медіафахівців, які активно використовують платформу в своїй роботі.

У дослідженні поставлено три основні дослідницькі питання: (1) Які особливості спонукали користувачів обирати Telegram як основну платформу для споживання новин під час кризи? (2) Як можливості (affordances) платформи вплинули на формування новинних звичок користувачів? та (3) Як українські медіафахівці адаптують свої професійні практики в Telegram у відповідь на потреби користувачів та обмеження платформи під час кризових умов? Дослідження базується на якісних методах та теоретичних підходах використання та задоволення (Uses and Gratifications), технологічних та медійних властивостей платформ (Media Affordances) та підходах кризових комунікацій (Crisis Communication).

Спираючись на якісну методологію, що включає напівструктуровані глибинні інтерв'ю як з користувачами Telegram, так і з медіафахівцями, дослідження розкриває, як можливості Telegram узгоджувалися з нагальними інформаційними потребами користувачів під час масштабної кризи. Дослідження базується на двох наборах даних, які загалом містять 50 глибинних інтерв'ю. Перший набір даних містить 40 інтерв'ю з користувачами Telegram, а другий набір даних містить 10 інтерв'ю з редакторами та медіафахівцями, які використовують Telegram в своїй роботі. Включення як користувачів, так і медіафахівців до числа респондентів підвищує аналітичну глибину дослідження, дозволяючи отримати комплексний, двосторонній погляд на використання Telegram для

медіаспоживання під час кризових ситуацій. Глибинні інтерв'ю з користувачами дають уявлення про мотивацію, звички, суб'єктивні реакції та сприйняття довіри, контролю та релевантності інформації в межах платформи Telegram. Фахівці з медіа, у свою чергу, пропонують розуміння обмежень, специфічних для платформи, та редакційних стратегій, які вони використовують для задоволення потреб та очікувань аудиторії. Цей подвійний підхід розкриває взаємодію між потребами аудиторії та вибором медіаконтенту.

У дослідженні використовувався ітеративний підхід до аналізу, який дозволив систематично, але гнучко досліджувати якісні дані, зібрані за допомогою напівструктурованих інтерв'ю. Процес аналізу був розпочатий на початку дослідницького циклу та продовжувався протягом усього збору даних, з акцентом на постійній рефлексії та використанням обраних теоретичних підходів. Аналіз розпочався з описового кодування першого рівня для фіксації повторюваних закономірностей, звичок, стратегій респондентів. Після цього було розроблено аналітичні коди другого рівня, що дозволило ідентифікувати глибші тематичні структури. Було створено комплексні книги кодів (codebook) для обох наборів даних, щоб забезпечити узгодженість та відповідність дослідницьким питанням.

Результати дослідження розкривають складний взаємозв'язок між активністю користувачів та дизайном платформи. Українські користувачі надавали пріоритет швидкості, локальній специфіці та відчуттю контролю над споживанням інформації, водночас враховуючи проблеми дезінформації, емоційного перевантаження та цифрової безпеки. Важливими факторами для користувачів також була можливість своєчасно отримувати сповіщення про повітряні тривоги та повітряні загрози. Таким чином, платформа виконувала повний інформаційний цикл, від початкового поширення попереджень про загрози до моніторингу та подальшого інформування після подій.

Поведінка користувачів також виявила стратегії щодо вибіркової залученості та саморегуляції. У той час як деякі користувачі активно взаємодіяли, щогодини моніторячи кілька каналів у Telegram, інші впроваджували обмеження у споживанні контенту аби керувати рівнем свого психологічного стресу, вимикаючи сповіщення в каналах або встановлюючи межі у споживанні новин. Інтерфейс Telegram сприяв таким стратегіям завдяки налаштуванням сповіщень, можливості непомітно підписатися на канал та інтерфейсу, вільному від алгоритмічних рекомендацій. Учасники наголосили на важливості емоційного контролю та необхідності уникати безкінечного гортання стрічки новин (doomscrolling), особливо в періоди високої військової активності. Функції, які мотивували користувачів звертатися до Telegram як до основної платформи для споживання медіа в період кризи, поділялися на два класи можливостей, згідно з моделлю MAIN (Sundar, 2008), а саме: модальність (Modality) та навігаційність (Navigability). Цей висновок підкреслює, що хоча функції платформи дозволяють користувачам здійснювати певний набір дій, їхні потреби та досвід впливають на те, як ці функції розглядаються та використовуються.

Еволюція ролі Telegram також сприймається як така, що є зумовленою як його дизайном та можливостями, так і ширшим соціально-політичним контекстом. Дослідження підкреслює, що медіафахівці коригували свої стратегії розповсюдження новин та операційні стратегії, щоб задовольнити зростаючий попит користувачів на використання Telegram, незважаючи на обмеження щодо аналітики поведінки аудиторії та модерації контенту, а також контролю над поширенням та видимістю контенту. Хоча спочатку медіа сприймали платформу як інструмент для розповсюдження контенту, дослідження виявило, що великі редакції почали оцінювати платформу по-іншому, надаючи командам, які працюють з Telegram, більше редакційної автономії

та свободи в організації робочого процесу. Респонденти з числа фахівців з медіа зазначили, що певні типи контенту створюються спеціально для Telegram, а в деяких випадках контент у Telegram публікується швидше, без затримок чи обмежень, пов'язаних з іншими каналами дистрибуції, які використовує медіа. Медіафахівці також наголосили на суперечності, яку вони відчують між охопленням аудиторії та надійністю інформації, зазначивши, що Telegram дозволяє швидше повідомляти про новини, але водночас є занепокоєння щодо перевірки джерел, дезінформації та поширення контенту через канали, які не пов'язані з медіа та журналістикою. Респонденти серед медіафахівців, які брали участь у дослідженні, зазначили, що вони здатні помічати та контролювати такі маніпулятивні інформаційні кампанії, що реалізуються на платформі Telegram, але водночас вони відчують себе зобов'язаними також певним чином реагувати на такі інформаційні хвилі, навіть просто публікуючи перевірку фактів або спростування неправдивих чуток чи маніпулятивних постів. Таким чином, медіа опиняються залученими до таких інформаційних кампаній, хоча спочатку це не було частиною їхніх стратегічних та операційних планів і робочого процесу.

Дисертаційна робота сприяє розумінню нових цифрових платформ у кризових комунікаціях та дослідженнях аудиторії. Вона підкреслює важливість вивчення малодосліджених платформ, таких як Telegram, особливо в контекстах, коли інфраструктура мейнстрімних медіа перебуває під тиском, а сама платформа несе різноманітні загрози та безпекові ризики. Дослідження також враховує досвід користувачів в екстремальних умовах повномасштабної війни, представляючи унікальну перспективу для досліджень та розробки політик в кризових ситуаціях. Результати дослідження охоплюють галузі медіа, цифрових комунікацій, кризових комунікацій, пропонуючи розуміння поведінки користувачів, можливостей

платформи та розвитку цифрового медіаландшафту в Центральній та Східній Європі.

Ключові слова: медіа, журналістика, соціальні мережі, цифрові платформи, Телеграм, медіаспоживання, властивості медіа, кризові комунікації, війна, інформаційна війна, безпека, дезінформація, пропаганда, конфлікт, Україна.

List of the applicant's publications

Articles in which the main scientific results of the dissertation are published

1. Gordiienko, T. O. (2024). Від приватного спілкування до інформаційних бульбашок: як месенджери змінюють споживання новин [From private communication to information bubbles: How messengers change news consumption]. *Scientific notes of VI Vernadsky Taurida National University, Series: Philology. Journalism*, 35(74)(6), 280–289. <https://doi.org/10.32782/2710-4656/2024.6/44>
2. Gordiienko, T. O. (2025). Вплив додатків для обміну повідомленнями на кризові та ризик-комунікації [The impact of messaging applications on crisis and risk communications]. *Scientific notes of VI Vernadsky Taurida National University, Series: Philology. Journalism*, 36(75)(1), Part 2, 230–238. <https://doi.org/10.32782/2710-4656/2025.1.2/36>
3. Gordiienko, T. O. (2025). Методологічні підходи до вивчення цифрових платформ [Methodological approaches to studying digital platforms]. *Communications and Communicative Technologies*, (25), 67-74. <https://doi.org/10.15421/292508>

Approbation of the dissertation materials

1. Gordiienko, T. O. (2025, March 7) *Цифрові платформи: методологічні аспекти дослідження* [Digital platforms: Methodological aspects of research. Conference presentation]. Scientific-Practical Conference "Russian War Against Ukraine: Transformations of Social Institutions and Practices," National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, Kyiv, Ukraine.
2. Gordiienko, T. O. (2023, October 3). *War propaganda and media ethics in the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine* [Conference

presentation]. Media Ethics Conference: The War on Truth, University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond, OK, United States.

3. Gordiienko, T. O. (2022, October 5). *The Aspects of Digitalization in Visual Studies* [Conference presentation]. Societies, Cultures, Critical Theories, Södertörn University, Stockholm, Sweden.

4. Gordiienko, T. O. (2021, August 18) *Digital Visual Communication in Contemporary Journalism*. [Presentation]. 5th International PhD Summer School at Kaunas University of Technology, Kaunas, Lithuania.

Papers that additionally reflect the scientific results of the dissertation

1. Gordiienko, T. O. (2021). The rise of membership model in the Ukrainian media. In *World trends in modern journalism: International scientific conference* (pp. 53–56). ISMA University of Applied Sciences. Baltija Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.30525/978-9934-26-118-3-13>

2. Gordiienko, T. O. (2024). News deserts in Ukraine. [Discussion moderator]. Practical conference *b° future festival 2024*, Bonn, Germany.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

ATO – Anti-Terrorist Operation

DPR – self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DNR)

ICTs – Information and Communication Technologies

ISP – Internet Service Provider

LPR – self-proclaimed Luhansk Donetsk People's Republic (LNR)

SCCT – Situational Crisis Communication Theory

U&G – Uses and Gratifications

UAH – Ukrainian Hryvnia, the national currency of Ukraine

UGC – User-Generated Content

UIMC – Ukrainian Institute of Media and Communication

UNICEF – United Nations Children's Fund (formerly United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund)

VPN – Virtual Private Network

INTRODUCTION

Social media and digital platforms have become deeply embedded in people's daily routines, evolving into salient tools for both interpersonal communication and the widespread distribution of information. Speed and accessibility have made social networks, and more broadly, digital spaces, new important stakeholders in crisis communication specifically. During emergencies, platforms such as X and Facebook are often used for disseminating crisis-related updates, coordinating responses, and seeking or offering assistance. A growing body of research has explored these dynamics (Eriksson, 2018; Eriksson & Olsson, 2016; Stephens & Robertson, 2022). However, these studies in the vast majority of cases cover the big tech platforms and companies (like X, Meta or Google) leaving alternative networks little explored. In this context, the case of Ukraine is unique from several perspectives.

First of all, the war and full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has become one of the largest man-made crises of our time. In addition, it is often described as hybrid (Schmid, 2019), when actual active hostilities are combined with information threats and attacks. Andrew Hoskins and Ben O'Loughlin considered the ongoing war in Ukraine as a key example of "Arrested War" (Hoskins & O'Loughlin, 2015). The authors describe the paradigm of "Arrested War" as a situation in which mainstream media, and more gradually government and military policymakers, begin to appropriate and exert control over previously chaotic dynamics in digital spaces. They also point out that the ongoing war triggered claims about Russia's successful use of media to shape responses, employing a model of "hybrid warfare" that blurs distinctions between war/peace and physical/virtual (Boichak & Hoskins, 2022; Hoskins & O'Loughlin, 2015). In another text, Hoskins & Merrin use the concept of "Sharded War" to describe how the ongoing Russian war against

Ukraine is experienced through split, fractured, personalized, streamed, and shattered digital feeds, meaning that no one experiences the same war (Merrin & Hoskins, 2024). All these new paradigms and concepts relate to the information dimension of war and were developed to advance the understanding of how digital media reshape the experience, perception, and conduct of contemporary conflict and the risks inherent in it.

Full-scale war in Ukraine creates a distinctive setting for studying alternative digital platforms that gained popularity during the war, as these spaces operate outside mainstream narratives and offer insights into more decentralized, grassroots modes of engagement with conflict. Studying the case of Ukraine allows researchers to consider this new dynamic in the combination of a unique context and an atypical experience. Those standout features, that are offered by little-explored alternative platforms under such conditions, make them noticeable stakeholders in the digital space and allow them to compete for users' attention on a par with tech giants with much greater resources.

Russian military aggression against Ukraine began back in 2014, with it reaching a new level of intensity in 2022 and an onset of full-scale invasion of the country. The morning of February 24, 2024, for many citizens of Ukraine, began with missile strikes and the sounds of shelling. It is safe to refer to those events as one of the most significant human-made crises the world has experienced in recent decades.

A previous body of research has shown that during crisis events, the demand for information increases among both the directly involved parties and the global community as a whole (Bolin & Ståhlberg, 2023b; Coombs & Holladay, 2022). However, the rapid and constant development of technologies affects the infrastructures for the information distribution, media consumption, and the ways in which knowledge about events is formed are also changing. Thus, it is the task of researchers to keep these transformations in view and examine them closely.

One of the important new trends that surfaced during the full-scale war is a significant change in media consumption patterns, and the emergence of Telegram as a major source of news. Therefore, the proposed study seeks to investigate the rapid increase in news consumption through one largely unmoderated platform, which appeared in Ukraine with the beginning of the full-scale invasion of 2022. According to a study of media consumption of Ukrainians by Internews, in 2023, 72% of Ukrainians used the application to get news, compared to 20% in 2021 (Detector Media, 2023). Studying the motivations and experiences of Telegram users is also important given that Telegram has been repeatedly accused of being a platform linked to Russian intelligence services, as well as due to the risks associated with the platform's features such as lack of moderation, abuse of anonymity, enabling illicit activities, online harassment, etc. (Anin & Kondratyev, 2025). Ukrainian users during the 2022 war escalation started consuming news en masse through the social media platforms, in particular through YouTube and Telegram (Boyko & Horbyk, 2023; Dutsyk et al., 2023; Opora, 2023). A report by the Ukrainian Institute of Media and Communication (UIMC) provides data that since the invasion of the Russian army in February 2022, the number of Ukrainians who primarily read news on Telegram channels has almost doubled (as of the time of the report's release in 2023).

The **relevance of the study** is determined by apparent growth of the role of Telegram in Ukraine during the full-scale Russian invasion, which shifted the platform's perception from a marginal app into a widespread source of news and information for millions of users. In a crisis-driven environment where traditional media infrastructure was strained or disrupted, Telegram's affordances created new opportunities and new threats in how people accessed, shared, and made sense of information. By focusing on Ukrainian users and media professionals, this study provides crucial insights into the evolving digital media landscape under extreme conditions, addressing a gap in both academic

literature and crisis communication practice. It contributes to understanding how alternative platforms fit in public knowledge, users' needs and motivations, and media strategies during war, offering lessons with relevance for crisis response, media policy, and platform governance.

Telegram was launched in 2013 by Nikolai and Pavel Durov and was initially positioned as a messaging application with further expansion of functions, including creating groups and channels. This allowed users of the platform to share and consume information with a near-total lack of moderation. Since its inception in 2013, Telegram has grown exponentially in popularity, and at the time of implementation of this study, it claimed to have over 400 million monthly users. The feature of creating channels within the Telegram platform was launched in 2015 and allows users to broadcast messages to a large audience, which created the prerequisites that became crucial for this research. However, this function also carries significant risks, as it enables the rapid spread of unverified information, propaganda, and disinformation without editorial oversight or accountability (Gurzhiy, 2021). Kyrychenko, Nelimarkka and Weninger describe how Telegram channels are used to spread Russian narratives, using the so-called Trojan Strategy, which embeds hostile messaging discreetly within channels that appear trustworthy, so they steer the discourse from within (Kyrychenko, Nelimarkka, & Weninger, 2025). Thus, on the one hand, the channels function provided opportunities for quick communication with channel subscribers, but on the other hand, it also held all the risks associated with the functioning of the platform.

The **objective of the study** is to explore what features the users are guided by when choosing Telegram as the main platform for news consumption in the context of a crisis. Consistently, the objective of the study includes investigating how the platform's affordances (Ronzhyn et al., 2023; Treem & Leonardi, 2013) affect the choice of the users when forming news consumption

routines, also including the experience and perspective of media professionals who use the platform in their work.

The implementation of this objective involves a number of **research tasks**:

- to examine the theoretical frameworks of Uses and Gratifications, Media Affordances, and Crisis Communication in relation to digital news consumption.

- to conduct a review of existing studies on the Telegram platform to identify gaps in the current literature to which the present dissertation study can contribute.

- to explore the motivations and behavior of Ukrainian users in adopting Telegram as a primary source of news during a crisis.

- to identify the specific affordances of the Telegram platform that influence news consumption routines.

- to explore how users navigate the security risks and challenges of using the platform.

- to investigate the perception of audience needs and motivations from the point of view of media professionals.

- to explore how media professionals adjust their engagement tactics, content formats, and posting routines in response to evolving user behavior and feedback on Telegram.

- to assess the interaction between user needs, platform features, and information practices during crisis conditions.

- to contribute to academic discourse on emerging digital platforms and their role in shaping crisis communication in high-risk environments.

The **object of the study** is Telegram usage practices of Ukrainian users during the crisis situation of the full-scale war with Russia.

The **subject of the study** is user motivations to utilize Telegram as a source of news during the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, with a focus

on user motivations, platform affordances, and communication practices in crisis conditions from the perspective of both audience and media professionals.

The **source base of the study** consists of 50 semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted with Ukrainian Telegram users and media professionals, as well as academic literature on media studies, digital communication, and crisis communication. Additional sources include analytical reports and secondary data on Telegram's use in Ukraine, and in particular during the 2022 full-scale invasion. The theoretical frameworks of the study are based on works within the approaches of Uses and Gratifications (Katz et al., 1973; McQuail, 2000; Ruggiero, 2000) that places the audience and its needs as the starting point for research; Media Affordances (Bucher & Helmond, 2018; Gibson, 1982; Ronzhyn et al., 2023) which allows researchers to identify the unique properties of digital platforms, not limited to their technological side, and Crisis Communication (Coombs & Holladay, 2022; Palenchar, 2009; Rubin, 2007) which allows the study to take into account the specifics that an emergency situation imposes on user behavior patterns.

Methodologically, the research employed a qualitative research design based on semi-structured in-depth interviews, enabling a comprehensive analysis of user experiences and professional media practices related to Telegram-based news consumption during crisis conditions. An iterative analysis approach was applied as the primary analytical strategy for the study (Tracy, 2020). It entails coding the data using descriptive first-level codes and more interpretive second-level codes, accompanied by the development of a codebook. Ongoing review, comparison, and refinement of codes facilitate a comprehensive and nuanced analysis of interview transcripts, while also allowing for the integration of research notes and memos during the coding process.

The **scientific novelty of the study** lies in its focused exploration of Telegram's utilization by users for media consumption during a large-scale

crisis, using the case of Ukraine in 2022. In the context of hybrid warfare, the crucial issue is the users' exposure to risks and vulnerabilities through the platforms they depend on as main information sources. Unlike previous studies that largely overlook smaller platforms or concentrate on Western media environments, this research offers an original contribution by combining audience-centered and production-centered perspectives. It introduces new empirical material based on interviews with both users and media professionals, highlighting how Telegram's specific affordances, such as real-time delivery, anonymity, and low content moderation, shape information behavior under extreme conditions. The study reveals that users develop strategies to mitigate platform-specific risks, such as verifying information through cross-referencing, limiting exposure to distressing or malicious content, controlling the degree of interaction with other users, and customizing notification settings to maintain psychological well-being. These practices reflect a form of digital resilience that emerges in response to the platform's risks and vulnerabilities. Thus, the research results provide valuable and novel insights also for policymakers regarding digital platform governance, crisis communication planning, and media literacy.

The main findings of the study include: (1) the identification of specific platform features, such as chronological feed, low-friction access, and real-time notifications, as key factors influencing user behavior during emergencies; (2) the integration of user and media professional perspectives, offering a dual insight into both consumption and content production practices; and (3) the empirical expansion of the Uses and Gratifications and Media Affordances frameworks through the context of wartime media use. These findings differ from previously known results by highlighting the adaptive strategies of audiences and journalists under conditions of digital uncertainty and information overload. They also provide users' approaches to navigating the risks and challenges that are associated with the Telegram platform, such as

dissemination of malicious content, information manipulation, dissemination of graphic or violent content, abuse of anonymity, etc.

Furthermore, the study extends and integrates the Uses and Gratifications, Media Affordances, and Crisis Communication frameworks to better understand platform-driven media practices during wartime. By doing so, it broadens the theoretical and empirical scope of media studies in high-risk, digitally mediated environments.

The **theoretical significance** of the study lies in its contribution to the understanding of audience behavior, platform dynamics, and information practices during emergencies, particularly in underexplored geopolitical settings. It also highlights the need to adapt and refine existing theoretical models to account for the specificities of decentralized, minimally moderated platforms like Telegram, thereby expanding their relevance for contemporary digital environments.

The **practical significance** of the obtained results lies in their potential application for media practitioners, crisis communication professionals, and policymakers. The study offers insights into how users engage with Telegram during emergencies, which can inform the development of more effective communication strategies, especially in conflict zones or under conditions of disrupted media infrastructure. It also sheds light on what digital resilience practices users have developed for themselves to navigate a complex digital environment full of information overload and platform inherent vulnerabilities and security risks. Understanding user motivations and behavior patterns is an important foundation for developing activities to counter disinformation, misinformation, and propaganda on alternative digital platforms, and media literacy campaigns.

The findings can assist media outlets in optimizing their use of digital platforms for timely and trustworthy information delivery. The research highlights user needs and platform-specific risks, such as exposure to malicious

content and emotional overload, which are relevant for designing media literacy programs, and improving digital communication policies in crisis settings, as well as digital platform governance policies.

Personal contribution of the applicant. The dissertation is an independent scientific study; all publications on the topic of the dissertation are written solely by the applicant.

Approbation of research results. The main provisions of the dissertation were outlined during several academic and practical conferences: "Russian War Against Ukraine: Transformations of Social Institutions and Practices," National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy (2025, Kyiv, Ukraine); "Media Ethics Conference: The War on Truth", University of Central Oklahoma, (2023, Edmond, Oklahoma, United States); "World trends in modern journalism", ISMA University of Applied Sciences (2021, online).

Publications. The theoretical and practical results of the dissertation research are covered in 3 publications, published in professional publications of category "B".

Structure and volume. The dissertation consists of an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, a list of references (180 items), a list of sources of illustrative material, and an appendix. The total volume of the dissertation is 242 pages, including 190 pages of the main text.

CHAPTER 1. UKRAINE’S EVOLVING MEDIA LANDSCAPE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS FOR PLATFORM USE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CRISIS

This chapter provides the general context necessary for understanding the scope of the research. It outlines the development of Ukraine’s media landscape, with particular attention to the historical conditions that shaped the country's media system and its ongoing transformation. The chapter also examines the emergence and growing influence of social media as both a source of information and a tool for public engagement, alongside the challenges these platforms bring: most notably, the increasing prevalence of misinformation, disinformation, propaganda, and other forms of malicious content.

Special attention in this chapter is given to the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, a pivotal moment that intrinsically reshaped the information environment and accelerated shifts in media consumption. Within this high-risk context, Telegram emerged as a particularly influential platform, gaining widespread popularity among Ukrainian users as a primary source of news and communication. The chapter sets the overview of the background and theoretical frameworks for the research by detailing these interrelated developments and highlighting the unique confluence of crisis, technology, and media behavior that frames the study.

The chapter further elaborates on core research concepts such as active audience behavior, platform affordances, crisis communication, and the evolving nature of “news” in digitally mediated environments. Finally, it identifies key gaps in existing scholarship, particularly the lack of research on alternative digital platforms like Telegram in non-Western and conflict-affected settings, and thereby establishing the relevance and originality of the present study.

1.1 The evolution of Ukraine's media landscape

Understanding the broader social, political, and technological context in which a study takes place is essential for framing its significance and interpreting its findings. As Sarah J. Tracy (2020) emphasizes, qualitative studies are rooted in the principle of contextualization—understanding social phenomena within the settings in which they naturally occur. The setting for this study will be reviewed below.

Ukraine has its own definable experience with the use of social networks as the predominant source of news. In this context, it is worth noting that the history of independent Ukrainian media is relatively short. The Act of Declaration of Independence of Ukraine was adopted on 24 August 1991. It is safe to consider that the formation of independent media in Ukraine started along with the country gaining independence.

Thus, the period for the institutionalization of independent media in the country is relatively short. Legal reforms that were introduced in 1992 included the regulations of private media ownership (Ryabinska, 2011; Ryabinska, 2014). As a result, the state retained control over a significant portion of media outlets, including national and local television and radio, numerous print outlets, and a news agency. Also hundreds of local newspapers became municipal property. In addition, this period is marked with the emergence of a significant cohort of media organizations controlled by industrial-financial magnates, commonly referred to as oligarchs (Orlova, 2016; Ryabinska, 2014). The main task of these media was to influence public opinion and promote the interests of their owners, while the ownership of media outlets remained very opaque. This has further increased the imbalance in the media market, creating a large number of media outlets, especially TV channels, with limited advertising revenues and other sources of funding. Thus, this only increased the media's dependence on their oligarchic owners. At the same time, independent media outlets emerged in a

fairly overheated media market and had to enter rather unequal competition with oligarchic outlets (Ryabinska, 2011; Ryabinska, 2014). Censorship practices or attempts to limit media access to information were quite common (Dyczok, 2006; Orlova, 2016). Under President Kuchma, the presidential administration issued so-called "temnyky", informal but obligatory instructions on what topics should be covered and how. This practice returned under President Yanukovich in a more sophisticated form, communicated privately to avoid a paper trail (Ryabinska, 2011).

Under such conditions, in the 2000s online media emerged as an alternative to the mainstream media landscape that had formed after the 1992 reform. With the further expansion of media consumption in the digital space, not only through online media but also through social networks and messaging applications.

As a result, Ukrainian media are likely to have less margin of resources in the face of a variety of crises, ranging from the events of the 2004 Orange Revolution, the 2014 Revolution of Dignity, annexation of Crimea and the beginning of the war, the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, and a full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. This context is important for a more complete understanding of the media landscape in which media and their audiences function and interact. The comparatively high mobility and volatility of the media landscape in Ukraine could potentially become one of the prerequisites for the use of social media by media outlets as “extended distribution channels” (Bolin & Stahlberg 2023a, p. 24).

The growing role of social media in Ukraine. The Orange Revolution of 2004, a protest movement caused by the falsification of presidential elections, was the first impetus for the utilization of digital technologies for the dissemination and consumption of news in an online format. The role of digital technologies and media in the Ukrainian Orange Revolution was significant, as highlighted by several studies. Goldstein (2007) and Lysenko & Desouza (2010)

underscore the crucial role of the Internet and mobile phones in facilitating communication and information dissemination among activists and citizens. And although they approached the topic from the perspective of building democratic processes, rather than the specifics of media consumption, their work is one of the first attempts to shed light on the relationship between audiences and digital technologies in Ukraine.

Engaging digital platforms and new media was also particularly important given the information blockade and censorship by mainstream media during the Orange Revolution, as noted by Dyczok (2005). However, the author herself clarifies that during the described period, the media were still at the stage of institutionalization, when they had already departed from the practices of the Soviet era but had not yet moved to the type of functioning within a democratic society. Thus, the complete transition to new models of functioning, including the mass use of new digital technologies, has not yet taken place.

Brantly (2019) further emphasizes the impact of social media and digital platforms on physical protest mobilization during the Euromaidan revolution (also known as the Revolution of Dignity), indicating a shift in the landscape of organization and mobilization for large-scale social and political movements. The Revolution of Dignity, also known as Euromaidan, was a series of mass protests in Ukraine from late 2013 to early 2014, sparked by the government's decision to halt European integration, which ultimately led to the ousting of President Yanukovich and marked a turning point toward democratic reform in the country. Following this, Lokot (2021) introduces the concept of "augmented dissent" to describe how digital media not only facilitate coordination and communication among protestors, but also reshape public space and civic identity. Complementing this perspective, Onuch (2015) emphasizes that digital media acted as a catalyst in mobilizing protestors during Euromaidan while traditional social structures remained central to sustained participation and protest momentum. These studies emphasize the transformative role of digital

technologies and media in the Ukrainian Orange Revolution and Euromaidan revolution. However, these are not the only examples of the use of digital platforms in Ukraine.

President Volodymyr Zelensky's election campaign is credited with significant success and influence on the young segment of the electorate through the use of the Instagram platform (Drach 2020). At the same time, Facebook stands out as a significant channel for the distribution of content by Ukrainian media organizations and platform for public debate among users (Bodine, 2023). Both Instagram and Facebook belong to the technology conglomerate Meta (Reiff, 2024). These are large digital platforms with a large reach of users worldwide.

However digital platforms like Facebook began to be increasingly associated with the challenges of the spread of propaganda, misinformation, disinformation and manipulation of the information space (Galus & Nesteriak, 2019; Orlova & Taradai, 2016; Zhdanova & Orlova, 2017). In particular, well-known examples of abuse of capabilities of digital platforms are the spread of Russian propaganda and interference in the 2016 US presidential election (Tucker et al., 2018). In the Ukrainian context, manipulation and disinformation on social networks were closely tied to Russia's direct intervention during the Euromaidan protests, the annexation of Crimea, and the onset of armed conflict in eastern Ukraine in 2014. Galus & Nesteriak (2019) emphasize the role of social platforms as tools of information warfare within the ongoing war between Ukraine and Russia.

Full-scale war of Russia against Ukraine. Another important component to understanding the background of the study, is Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which constitutes a significant human-caused disruptive event. Russia started a war with Ukraine back in 2014, right after the Revolution of Dignity (Denisova, 2024). The beginning of the war was marked by the

annexation of the Crimean peninsula in February 2014 and the onset of hostilities in the eastern regions of Ukraine in April of the same year.

The annexation of Crimea, a strategic and geopolitically important territory, was a brazen violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, setting the stage for the wider conflict that would unfold in the coming years. Following the invasion of Donetsk and Luhansk regions Ukraine launches an Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) as a response. ATO was later renamed as the Joint Forces Operation. In September 2014, Ukraine and Russia signed the Minsk Protocol, which, however, was not successful since Russian troops violated the agreement almost immediately. In February 2015, the parties signed a revised version of the agreement, known as Minsk Protocol II, which, however, also did not bring the desired results and was widely criticized for its inability to resolve the conflict.

In April 2021, reports began to appear about the mass movement of military forces by Russia to the borders of Ukraine.

The full scale invasion of 2022 began at 3:40 a.m. with the column of Russian tanks entering the territory of Luhansk region and missile strikes of major cities of Ukraine, in particular the capital city of Kyiv. Russian troops also made an attempt to reach the capital from the northern direction from the territory of Belarus. However, after about a month of fierce fighting, the Kyiv region was completely freed from Russian troops at the beginning of April 2022. At the same time, evidence of war crimes against the civilian population of Ukraine began to appear.

Two months after the invasion, one of the large southern cities of Mariupol was completely occupied by Russian troops. The defenders of Mariupol became one of the important symbols of Ukrainian resistance and resilience (Engelbrecht, 2022). Also, one of the large cities that were occupied by Russian troops was the city of Kherson, which was later liberated by the Ukrainian army in November 2022.

The war created a large-scale crisis of internally displaced persons, refugees, and asylum-seekers. According to UNICEF data, over 7.6 million refugees from Ukraine were recorded across Europe as of 4 October 2022. Another 7 million people have been recorded as internally displaced within the country.

At the time of conducting this study, the full-scale war phase has been ongoing for over two years.

Major crisis events, both natural and human-made disasters, have the ability to disrupt communities and infrastructures, shift geographies and cultures (Aldrich, 2012; Potts, 2014). Concurrently, the possibilities of the Digital Era create the potential for the formation of new networks, connections, and communities. The grouping of users around open online channels in the Telegram platform can be an example of such a transformation. Next, the focus turns to the Telegram platform and a review of existing studies and investigations concerning it.

1.2. Telegram in research and unexplored areas

On the one hand, social media has democratized the sharing of information, allowing individuals and groups to quickly and widely distribute and consume content. However, this same ease of information diffusion has also enabled various manipulations and these phenomena have become increasingly problematic in recent years (Nemr & Gangware, 2019; Tejedor et al., 2020). The questions about media literacy and media hygiene of users are entailed as part of the ongoing discussion regarding digital platforms and their functioning within the information field (Haigh et al., 2019). There is growing concern about how often (and if at all) users pay attention to what sources they are consuming information from, whether these sources are credible, and who is really behind anonymized social media profiles engaged in news distribution.

And this set of challenges applies not only to the Big Four tech companies (Google, Meta, Apple, and Amazon), but also to smaller emerging digital platforms that typically receive less attention from both the research community and the public at large. The same critical framework can be applied to the Telegram platform, which is in the focus of this dissertation research. Several researchers (Ronzhyn et al, 2023) have previously noted that research into smaller digital platforms is a promising direction for further studies. This avenue for research lays the foundation for this study.

The launch of Telegram and the extension of its functions. Telegram was launched in 2013 by natives of Russia Nikolai and Pavel Durov as a messaging application, later expanding its functionality with features such as groups and channels. These additions enabled users to disseminate and access information with minimal moderation. The expansion of functions has also led to the app, which was initially positioned as a messenger, beginning to perform a wider set of tasks and evolving into a digital platform for interaction and information sharing. Telegram's messaging system is encrypted (but with certain limitations) and allows users to exchange messages, photos, videos, large files and documents. In sum, all these additional functions expanded the possible ways of its use and attracted a wider circle of users over the years of its functioning. At the time of this study's implementation, Telegram stated that it had over 400 million monthly users.

Criticism of the platform in the context of a full-scale invasion. Over the following decade after the launch, Telegram's growth was accompanied by increasing concerns about its vulnerabilities, including limited moderation, anonymity, and potential misuse, which was highlighted in a major journalistic investigation published in 2023 that gave clearer shape to these risks in the Ukrainian context which was particularly constrained by full-scale invasion and threats of hybrid warfare. The investigation concerned one of the most prominent Telegram channels in Ukraine, 'Truha' (Rodak, 2023), raising

questions about the transparency of the functioning of channels that reach multimillion audiences. According to the NGO Ukrainian Institute of Media and Communication, since the invasion of the Russian army in February 2022, the number of Ukrainians who primarily read news on Telegram channels has almost doubled (Dutsyk et al., 2023). The same report provides data that the most popular channel “Truha Ukraina” had 2.8 million subscribers at the time of the report's publication. Nonetheless, the above mentioned journalistic investigation points to attempts to hide the real owners of the channel and draws attention to numerous accusations of spreading fakes through this channel, playing along with Russian propaganda and publishing videos or photos of the consequences of Russian missile strikes, which is prohibited in Ukraine (Rodak, 2023; Zolotukhin, 2022). Later, another investigation debunked more strategies to manipulate users on Telegram, motivating them to subscribe to a number of channels that promise them the most up-to-date information about air alerts and air threats (Kelm, Holovinskyi, & Mikhalkov, 2025). According to the investigation, on the one hand, more accurate user data is collected through tangled networks of links and subscription bots, and on the other hand, online casino ads or concealed political ads are shown to users among the posts.

Because of the Telegram's connection with Russia, more criticism was voiced in the Ukrainian information field. For example, in June 2023, the well-known Ukrainian civil network “Opora” announced that it would stop using Telegram to communicate with its audience (Opora, 2023). Among the reasons for such a decision, the network notes suspicions about the financing of the platform by Russian oligarchs and connections with Russian special services. The network also expressed concern about the digital security and data protection of Telegram users. Opora also drew attention to the fact that this is a largely unmoderated platform, which therefore provides an opportunity for the spread of disinformation and propaganda through its functionality (Adamovych, 2023; Opora, 2023). Next, it will be explained how one of the later embedded

Telegram functions works, which creates an opportunity for mass distribution of content.

The function of channels and the risks of a lack of moderation. The feature of creating channels within the Telegram platform was launched in 2015 and allows users to broadcast messages to a large audience. In this case, communication is implemented unilaterally. A channel owner or administrator posts messages, while channel subscribers cannot post any content. Over time, channel subscribers have become able to react to posts in the form of emojis, while commenting or other forms of interaction with the posted messages require certain specific settings in the channel to be enabled. In this context Telegram channels act as public forums where users can subscribe to receive updates on specific topics of interest, such as news, technology, or entertainment.

The founders of the channels can be media organizations themselves or individual journalists who openly indicate their authorship in the channels, as well as bloggers or anonymous authors who hide their true identity. The attention was already drawn to the fact that Telegram is a largely unmoderated platform which creates a lot of risks for inappropriate or harmful content to be shared and disseminated (Adamovych, 2023; Herasimenka et al, 2022; Opora, 2023).

The feature of channels has been widely utilized by various organizations, media outlets, and influencers to disseminate news, updates, and other relevant information to their followers. Telegram's channels have become a prominent platform for news consumption and information dissemination, offering users the ability to stay informed on a wide range of topics.

At the same time, attempts to investigate the functioning of this platform with the audience in Ukraine have not been made for a long time. One of the first such reports was an analysis by marketing company Kantar TNS in 2018 (MediaSapiens, 2018). Then Telegram ended up in the company's rating among

the top 5 messengers used by Ukrainians. The report states that most of the users of the digital platform were young people living in big cities and that a significant share of Telegram users did not consume news from TV or radio. However, it should be noted that this was not an academic study, but rather a market analysis.

The next attempt to cover the phenomenon of the growing role of the Telegram platform among the Ukrainian audience was the UIMC (Ukrainian Institute of Media and Communication) report. The main focus of the report was the popularity of non-institutionalized channels, that is those that are not created by the newsrooms of traditional and online media. The analysis covers the top 10 channels of the Ukrainian segment in the TGStat rating for the period of almost the entire year of 2022. The research includes content monitoring and quantitative data analysis and suggests that the popularity of Telegram channels among the audience is due to their convenience and ability to receive news in real time using a smartphone.

While applied and marketing research has primarily examined Telegram's functionality and user engagement, academic studies offer a deeper exploration of its broader communicative implications and they are reviewed further in this chapter.

Scoping literature review of academic studies of Telegram. To clearly situate the present research within the existing body of scholarly work, the following part of the chapter focuses specifically on academic studies that have examined Telegram. While earlier sections have addressed marketing research, applied analytics, and practical assessments of the platform, these contributions offer a foundation for further research inquiry. Building on this groundwork, the following review considers how Telegram has been studied across various disciplines, including political communication, digital activism, cybersecurity, and media studies. This overview also identifies key research gaps, with

particular attention to the limited examination of Telegram's role in news consumption during crisis events, which the present study seeks to address.

Given that the platform itself was founded in 2013, the body of research texts on its use is moderate in size. Given that the platform itself was founded in 2013, the body of research texts on its use is moderate in size. In order to assess the previous developments regarding the Telegram platform, a **scoping review** was performed, covering the period from 2013, when the Telegram platform was founded, to mid-2025. The peculiarity of this type of literature review is that it allows to assess the extent, volume, and thematic focus of existing literature on a given topic and can be performed by one researcher without the need to involve review groups, as in the case of a systematic literature review (Munn et al., 2018). It is also an acceptable approach to include so-called "grey literature" in a scoping review, such as preprints, handbooks, white papers, technical reports, etc. Thus, for conducting a scoping review regarding Telegram platform, academic search engine Google Scholar was used since it indexes scholarly literature across various disciplines, including peer-reviewed papers and "grey literature" as well. Unlike some proprietary databases that may restrict access to specific journals or articles, Google Scholar aggregates content from a diverse range of academic sources. This wide coverage is beneficial in the initial (primary) stage of literature selection, where the goal is to capture as many potentially relevant sources as possible.

Two keywords were used to perform search for relevant texts: Telegram and "Телеграм" (in Cyrillic, in Ukrainian language). Thus, the final sample included texts about the Telegram platform in both English and Ukrainian. The search was conducted sequentially in annual cycles: initially filtering all texts published in 2013 using the specified keywords, followed by separate searches for each subsequent year. The next stage was manual verification and selection of relevant texts. The articles that did not relate to the modern digital platform Telegram, but to an older technology invented in the late 18th century, were

excluded at that stage. Ultimately, the scoping literature review allowed to identify 380 texts in English and Ukrainian that were directly related to research on the Telegram platform in various fields.

The next step was to analyze and classify the texts included in the dataset. This analysis made it possible to organize the literature into clear thematic areas, helping to identify the main research trends, gaps in the literature, and areas of disciplinary focus. Grouping the texts by topic allowed the review to go beyond simply listing sources and instead offered a more structured and systematic overview of the field. This approach supports a clearer and more complete understanding of the existing research on the Telegram platform.

The analysis took place in two stages. First, all texts were categorized by keywords and thematic groups. The next stage was to review and refine the resulting list of thematic groups. For example, texts on radicalization, hate speech, and far-right movements were identified as separate thematic groups.

Figure 1. Analysis and classification of texts in scoping literature review.

Classification	Number of Articles
Education and learning	64
Disinformation, misinformation, propaganda, censorship, surveillance	46
Computer Science	41
Radicalization and conspiracy theories	35
Bots and automation	32
Use in media and journalism	31
Other	31
Political participation, mobilization, and elections	25
Cybersecurity	22
User behavior	18
Hate speech	13
Far-right movements	12
Archiving and memory formation	6
Strategic communications	4

In the total set of 380 selected texts, 31 studies related to the Telegram platform, but could not be attributed to any of the classified categories and were included in the "Other" group.

The most prominent category is Education and learning, comprising 64 articles. This suggests that researchers are highly engaged with how Telegram is used as a tool for educational communication, remote learning, collaborative platforms, and knowledge dissemination. It is especially relevant in contexts where traditional educational infrastructure is supplemented or replaced by digital platforms with distinctive messaging functions. Following that, Disinformation, misinformation, propaganda, censorship, and surveillance represents the second-largest group, with 46 articles. This reflects ongoing scholarly concern over Telegram's role in the spread of false information and its positioning as a platform resistant to regulation and censorship. Closely tied to this are Radicalization and conspiracy theories (35 articles) and Political participation, mobilization, and elections (25 articles), indicating the platform's role in political discourse and activism, particularly in authoritarian contexts.

Computer science, with 41 articles, remains a major classification as well, focusing on encryption, data structures, network behavior, and app architecture. Meanwhile, topics such as Bots and automation and Cybersecurity, reflect the growing interest in Telegram's technical affordances and implications for automated communication and interaction.

Also, the analysis and classification of texts shows that there are relatively few studies that deal with user behavior and place users as the starting point for research (18 articles). There is also a sparse amount of research that studies the use of Telegram by journalists and media outlets (31 texts). The present research addresses this gap by focusing directly on user practices and experiences, offering empirical insights into how Telegram is adopted, interpreted, and integrated into routines by user groups. It also includes the

perspective of media professionals themselves on how they approach understanding their audiences and users and what strategies they employ to meet their needs and expectations.

These broader patterns offer a foundation for understanding how research on Telegram has evolved and where scholarly attention has tended to concentrate. To further contextualize these trends, it is useful to consider how individual studies engage with specific themes, especially in areas that are close to the topic of this dissertation study.

Early academic studies on Telegram examined its role as a communication platform in contexts characterized by political unrest and restricted media environments. Scholars analyzed its use in facilitating decentralized protest coordination, as seen during events such as the 2020 Belarus demonstrations or 2019 protests in Hong Kong (Herasimenka et al., 2020; Urman, Ho, & Katz, 2020). Another area of inquiry focused on the circulation of misinformation and professional news content. Studies found that while links to misleading sources were frequently shared, they tended to be concentrated within a limited number of channels, suggesting constrained reach rather than widespread dissemination (Herasimenka, Bright, Knuutila, & Howard, 2022; Knuutila et al., 2020). Researchers also addressed the platform's limited content moderation, assessing its implications for information governance and media ecosystems (Rogers, 2020). Overall, this body of research contributed to an initial understanding of Telegram as a digital space with distinct patterns of information flow, user behavior, and political communication.

The next notable cohort of Telegram related research focused on radicalisation, conspiracy theories, and spread of far-right narratives on social platforms, including Telegram. Urman and Katz (2020) examined far-right networks on Telegram, revealing they are decentralized and divided by ideology and geography. According to the study, these groups grew rapidly after far-right

actors were banned from mainstream platforms, showing how deplatforming can push extremists to less-regulated spaces. Some Telegram channels acted as bridges, spreading far-right content beyond their core communities. In the same line of inquiry, Schulze et al. (2022) conducted a longitudinal study of German-language conspiracy groups on the platform during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their findings show increasing radicalization over time, with rising use of conspiracy narratives, anti-elitist rhetoric, and political violence, particularly within QAnon and Identitarian Movement channels.

Jost and Dogruel (2023) also examined how far-right and conspiracy groups in Germany utilized Telegram during the pandemic. Their study revealed that these groups employed calls to action, such as protests and civil disobedience, to foster a sense of collective identity and urgency among followers. This strategic use of mobilization tactics accentuates Telegram's role as a critical platform for far-right actors to coordinate and amplify their activities during periods of societal crisis.

At the same time, researchers began to position the Telegram platform among the so-called fringe social media and fringe communities (Boccia Artieri et al., 2025; Hoseini et al., 2024; Schulze et al., 2022). By fringe social media platforms researchers mean alternative online spaces that operate with minimal moderation and are often used by groups that feel censored or excluded from mainstream platforms (De Winkel, 2023). These platforms, like Telegram or Reddit, frequently attract fringe communities, which are loosely organized groups that promote ideologies or narratives outside of mainstream discourse, including conspiracy theories, extremist views, or disinformation (Russo et al., 2024). Such communities use fringe platforms to organize, communicate, and amplify their messages without the constraints typically found on larger, more regulated networks.

Thus, this group of earlier academic studies covered research topics at the intersection of mobilization, misinformation and news flows, and platform

governance and moderation. However, there is a scarcity of user-centric studies focusing on accessibility and usability across diverse user demographics. Lou et al. (2021) attempted to investigate the motivation of users to receive news from Telegram in the case of Singapore. The authors of the study drew attention to the phenomenon of news grazing or news snacking, when users prefer media consumption in short, concise formats and in a convenient, habitual way. And while it offers a basis for further research, the study is not exhaustive and representative and leaves room for further and more nuanced development of the topic. It also does not take into account the peculiarities of media consumption under extraordinary conditions, such as human-made crises or natural disasters.

At the same time, it is worth reviewing the array of studies by Ukrainian researchers who have drawn attention to the growing popularity of Telegram. Butyrina (2020) is one of the first Ukrainian researchers who drew attention to the growing popularity of Telegram in Ukraine, considering it in the context of "meta media", which exist entirely in the ecosystem of a social network or messenger, without their own website. Zhugai and Kuznetsova (2021) in their research took the perspective of the owners of Telegram channels (individual Ukrainian politicians, media and anonymous channels) and their utilizing the platform as a tool for disseminating information. The authors point out that the channels were also used for broader influence, such as shaping public opinion. Gurzhiy (2021) explored Telegram's features, such as the anonymity of channels and the speed of information dissemination, that make it an effective tool for hybrid threats. He also emphasized the need for legislative regulation of Telegram in Ukraine and increasing media literacy to counteract its associated risks.

Dosenko (2023) argues that Telegram has shifted from being a fringe communication tool to a mainstream and strategic medium in Ukraine, yet still viewing the platform as an extension of mainstream avenues for information.

Building on the overview of existing research into Telegram's role in mobilization, political communication, misinformation, and fringe media ecosystems, a significant gap remains in the scholarly understanding of how audiences themselves experience and engage with the platform. In this context, the works of Lou et al (2021) and Bader et al (2025) are relevant and worthy of attention. However, they do not take into account the complex contexts that arise in crisis situations and can bring to the forefront different needs of audiences and the special features of Telegram as an emerging platform.

While prior studies have examined the behaviors of content producers (including political actors, extremist groups, and media channels) they have largely overlooked the perspectives of users. This includes a limited exploration of how various users perceive Telegram's affordances, such as anonymity, speed, and minimal moderation. There is also a noticeable lack of research into how these affordances influence user behavior and platform preference, particularly in comparison to other social platforms and applications.

These omissions suggest the need for more audience-centered studies that examine Telegram as a digital environment, with attention to user agency, perception, and connection within the broader digital media landscape. It is to these research gaps that this dissertation seeks to contribute.

1.3 Research questions and concepts: Active Audience, Media Affordances, Crisis Communication

The current success of the Telegram platform among Ukrainian users can be summed up in a following research questions:

RQ1. What features were the users guided by when choosing the Telegram as the main platform for news consumption in the context of crisis/emergencies?

RQ2. How do the platform's affordances affect the users' choices when forming news consumption routines?

RQ3. How do Ukrainian media professionals adapt their professional practices on Telegram in response to users' needs and platform constraints during crisis conditions?

The next part discusses the **key research concepts** informing this study, along with their interpretation and conceptualization. First of all, the Uses and Gratifications approach with the concept of an Active Audience built into it is used to position the research. Secondly, the concept of Media Affordances is used in the study. And the next key concept for research is Crisis Communication which supports the objective of nuanced study of the case of Ukraine. Also, to clarify the meaning of “news,” the following section will provide a definition based on established academic and scientific literature. Next, they are considered in greater detail.

Uses and Gratifications approach and concept of Active Audience. The concept of Uses and Gratifications approach in the field of media studies revolves around understanding why people use certain media platforms or content, and what gratifications they receive as a result. Instead of viewing audiences as passive consumers of media, this approach posits that individuals make intentional choices in selecting and using media based on their personal motivations and needs.

The Uses and Gratifications approach was first introduced by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch in the 1970s, and since then, it has been a widely studied and applied framework in media research. This study engages their work as a point of departure and looks at the audience from a positional perspective of active engagement.

Uses and Gratifications approach suggests that individuals actively choose specific media platforms or content to fulfill their needs and desires. These needs can be categorized into four main dimensions: information, personal identity, social interaction, and entertainment (McQuail, 2000). As Sundar and Limperos argue, with the advent and spread of the Internet, the concept of an active audience "has now reached a pinnacle" and "moved from an assumption to obvious reality" (Sundar & Limperos, 2013, p. 504). Researchers also draw a parallel between the concept of an active audience, adopted in the body of works of the Uses and Gratifications approach, and spawned by the digital era concept of "users".

As the media industry continues to evolve, the role of the active audience will become increasingly important in shaping the production, distribution, and consumption of media content. Thus, the concept of Active Audience is embedded in this research to better understand what features were the Ukrainian users guided by when making decisions about media consumption during the crisis situation of 2022.

Media Affordances. The concept of "media affordances" is applicable to examine how the technical features and design of digital platforms shape the communicative possibilities available to users (Habermas, 2022; Kaul, 2012; Silva et al., 2023). For example, the ability to easily create and share multimedia content, engage in real-time conversations, and bypass journalistic gatekeepers are some of the key affordances of messaging apps that differentiate them from legacy media (Leonardi & Vaast, 2017). These new media forms have empowered users to become active participants in content creation and dissemination, shifting their role from passive consumers to engaged participants who can influence and shape the flow of information through direct interaction with others (Habermas, 2022).

However, a systematic literature review revealed some vagueness and broad interpretation of media affordances concept (Ronzhyn et al, 2023). In

particular, when it comes to its application in relation to social media. For this dissertation study, the definition of affordances for social media proposed by Ronzhyn et al. will be used:

Social media affordances are the perceived actual or imagined properties of social media, emerging through the relationship of technological, social, and contextual, that enable and constrain specific uses of the platforms (p. 3178)

At the same time, the platform architecture and algorithmic curation of content on digital platforms can also constrain and shape communication in ways that may have significant sociopolitical implications (Silva et al., 2023). For instance, the lack of robust content moderation on some platforms has enabled the proliferation of misinformation, while the collection and monetization of user data raises privacy concerns (Lee & Wang, 2023).

Ultimately, the media affordances framework provides a solid foundation for exploring alternative emerging platforms and understanding unique affordances that they provide to users.

Crisis Communication. Crises can be defined as "a critical event or point of decision which, if not handled in an appropriate and timely manner, may turn into a disaster or catastrophe" (businessdictionary.com, as cited in Chattaraj et al., 2021, p. 167). There are different types of crisis events which in nature can vary from natural disasters to human-made ones such as wars.

Coombs and Holladay distinguish four areas of crisis communication: organizational crises, political crises, disasters, and public health crises (Coombs & Holladay, 2022). Researchers draw attention to the fact that some elements of crisis communication appear across areas, but warn against overgeneralizing. Thus, this study will take into account the approaches and practices of crisis communication for disasters as the most proximate and

relevant types of crisis events, bearing in mind the caution in transferring these approaches to other cases. It is also worth considering the nuance that natural disasters are crisis events that are not caused by human factors, as is the case with wars and armed conflicts. Audiences perceive and experience news about human-triggered crisis events in different ways, which confirms caution about excessive generalization and transferring of experiences between different areas. In conclusion, crisis communication is a framework that has the potential to enrich and provide more detail to the research.

Another important concept to understand within the framework of this study is **news**. The term “news” has been subject to extensive academic investigation and is defined differently depending on disciplinary and contextual factors. While in everyday usage it typically refers to reports about recent events, academic definitions reveal news to be a socially constructed phenomenon shaped by professional routines, audience expectations, and cultural norms.

Foundational research by Galtung and Ruge (1965) identified twelve "news values", which include frequency, negativity, and relevance, and that influence whether an event is deemed newsworthy. Their study remains as the basis of journalism studies, showing that news is not merely about events, but about the selection criteria that shape what is presented as news.

Building on this framework, Harcup and O’Neill (2017) proposed an updated taxonomy reflecting digital-era influences, including audience engagement and shareability, thereby emphasizing that news values are not static but evolve with media practices. These studies demonstrate that news is not a transparent reflection of reality but a curated product shaped by institutional routines and cultural expectations.

Within the framework of this study, we will interpret the concept of "news" from the perspective of Harcup and O’Neill (2017), who view news as a socially constructed selection process, where editorial decisions are shaped by

evolving criteria, which they describe in their study as news values, and which reflect both journalistic norms and audience expectations.

In the following parts of this chapter, a literature review will be provided regarding the selected theoretical frameworks, as well as regarding Telegram as the subject of this study.

1.4 Theoretical frameworks: current scholarship and gaps

There is an extensive body of previous research using the Uses and Gratifications theoretical framework. These studies focused both on the role of the audience in content consumption, and on the psychological and social foundations for a certain type of media consumption, or on the characteristics of the mediums themselves (Leung & Wei, 2000; Ruggiero, 2000; Sundar & Limperos, 2013).

Likewise, the pool of research works that rely on media affordances approaches (Bucher & Helmond, 2018; Ronzhyn et al, 2023) or focus on crisis communication is becoming larger. There were also studies aimed at investigating the use of the Telegram in Belarus and Singapore (Herasimenka et al., 2020; Lou et al, 2021). Several reports were also published regarding the Ukrainian audience and its use of the platform (Dutsyk et al., 2023; MediaSapiens, 2018; Opora, 2023; Tonkikh, 2023). However, these were predominantly non-academic studies, though useful in terms of empirical evidence, yet lacking links with the existing body of academic research and clear theoretical framework. The importance of these attempts to explore the phenomenon of the popularity of the Telegram platform is not rejected in this paper, but is used as a basis for carrying out further nuanced inquiry.

The proposed dissertation study lies at the intersection of all these concepts and aims to address the gap in 1) examining the choices that audiences make when choosing a specific digital platform as the main source of media

consumption, 2) the affordances of alternative emerging platform and 3) the role of crisis situation in such intensified interactions between the audience and the digital platform. As Ronzhyn et al (2023) suggests, “exploring less popular or alternative platforms may provide interesting results, both empirically and theoretically, by improving our understanding of affordances. It is likely that the whole reason why alternative platforms emerge is because they aim to provide affordances that are not present on the major platforms” (p. 3182). At the same time, it is worth noting a number of channels on Telegram that represent state authorities and key political figures in Ukraine, which makes the platform's position even more unique and worth exploring. Thus, the perception of the platform as alternative in the Ukrainian context requires separate consideration.

Taking into account the data on the distribution and coverage of various platforms, Telegram, despite the rapid growth, should still be considered as an emerging one. For comparison, WhatsApp in 2022 had approximately 2 billion users in 150 countries. According to data for the same year, Facebook Messenger had around 1.3 billion users registered worldwide. WeChat, founded in China and the most widespread in this country, had 1.2 billion active users per month. At the same time, Telegram had 200 million active users per month in 2022 with the majority of users concentrated in certain European countries (Glowing, 2022).

Sundar and Limperos (2013) also propose looking more closely at new media as they are a source for more nuanced gratifications obtained by the audience. They also suggest a combination of concepts and typologies developed by U&G research for old media (such as television, radio, print newspapers) while taking into account new concepts that have arisen under the influence of new technologies. One of these new and actively developing frameworks for research is media affordances (Norman, 2004; Sundar and Limperos, 2013).

Among researchers in the field of crisis communication, there is also a demand for studies that would analyze the situation not from the point of view of the source of the crisis, but from the point of view of the audience (Brown 2016; Coombs & Holladay, 2022). This approach to the analysis of crisis communication has its limitations, as it approaches the topic of coverage from one side. Nevertheless, it reflects a demand for audience-oriented analysis from the scientific community and market practitioners. This gap is aimed to be taken into account in current research. Accordingly, this dissertation seeks to respond to the call from previous scholars to contribute to the proposed line of research.

Scholarship in many areas takes into account the digital rupture and the continuous development of new technologies. For many areas of science, this has become an impetus for revision, and sometimes quite significant updating of previous research frameworks and approaches. This was no exception to the Uses and Gratifications (U&G) approach and Crisis Communication.

Below, an overview of the gradual development of U&G approach, with consistent criticism taken into account. But more importantly, this section also outlines the debate regarding the application of the U&G in the context of new media and new technologies, also known as Uses and Grats 2.0. As Thomas E. Ruggiero summarized, “If the Internet is a new dominion of human activity, it is also a new dominion for U&G researchers” (Ruggiero, 2000, p. 28).

The Uses and Gratifications framework has its roots in early communication research, emerging as a counterpoint to traditional media effects models in the mid-20th century (Christensen et al., 2018). This framework is based on the previous studies developed back in the 1940s and 1950s, with scholars positing that media audiences are not passive but instead actively engage with media to fulfill specific needs and desires (Papacharissi, 2008; Ruggiero, 2000).

Thus, the theoretical lens of U&G is relevant and applicable for exploring what features were the users guided by when choosing the Telegram as the main

platform for news consumption in the context of a crisis. And while the U&G approach will be used as a point of departure for this research, it will also include Media Affordances and Crisis Communication approaches. The arguments as to how these approaches are related to each other will be provided below. Therefore, the second section of this chapter will examine the Media Affordances approach and its relationship to Uses and Gratifications with the following emergence of Uses and Grats 2.0. Consequently, the third section explores Crisis Communication and Crisis Management, their gradual evolution and transformation associated both with changes in society and the growing diversity and scale of crisis events, as well as with the impact of new technologies.

As boundaries between forms of communication have blurred due to technological advancements, theories and studies of media effects have started to encompass newer audience activities such as the use of social media, streaming online content, and electronic gaming (Neuendorf & Jeffres, 2017). Particular attention was paid also to the use of new mediums and devices, such as mobile phones, tablets, MP3 players (Ferguson et al., 2007; Leung & Wei, 2000). In turn, this led to a discussion of whether the old U&G typologies properly reflect the new uses and gratifications that audiences receive from new media (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). This has broadened the scope of inquiry to include new emerging digital platforms such as Telegram including. Scholars have also begun to consider combining U&G and affordance frameworks to better understand the nuanced behavior and motivations of the audiences (Ruggiero, 2000; Sundar & Limperos, 2013).

Taking into account this development of the U&G-related studies and the research questions posed in this dissertation, the application of both concepts of U&G and Media Affordances is beneficial for this research.

It is safe to assume that the general background of crisis and crisis communication significantly affects the behavior of audiences. Researchers in

the field of U&G have also noted that different communication settings, time, and communication processes influence what behavior patterns individuals display when choosing media and content (Levy & Windahl, 1984; Ruggiero, 2000). Furthermore, Eriksson and Olsson (2016) argue that digital platforms are playing a bigger and bigger role in crisis management and communication with their ability to provide opportunities for situation monitoring and “decentralized speedy communication” (p. 198).

Thus, the communicative setting formed under the influence of the full-scale invasion of Russia in Ukraine in 2022 could become the factor that deformed the consumer patterns of Ukrainian users in such a way as to push them to satisfy the need for access to information against the background of the crisis via one dominant digital platform.

As follows, the combination of the three approaches Uses and Gratifications, Media Affordances, and Crisis Communication form the basis for this research. From there, this chapter will provide an overview of these approaches along with identified research gaps.

1.4.1 The Uses and Gratifications (U&G) approach

The uses and gratifications (U&G) approach in the field of media studies revolves around understanding why people use certain media platforms or content, and what gratifications they receive as a result. Instead of viewing audiences as passive consumers of media, this framework posits that individuals make intentional choices in selecting and using media based on their personal motivations and needs. Thus, the U&G theoretical lens provides a substantial basis for investigating the role of emerging digital platforms as a source of news for users.

The following section describes main concepts and developments of U&G approach and its redefining with the emergence of new media and

technologies. However, the lack of research on smaller emerging digital platforms and some methodological limitations proves this redefining to be a challenging and ongoing process. And while researchers see this as one of the concerns for this line of inquiry, they also see it as a rich source of new avenues for investigation (Ronzhyn et al, 2023; Sundar and Limperos 2013). It also corresponds sufficiently with the parameters of the research gap to which this dissertation aims to contribute.

The Uses and Gratifications approach was first introduced by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch in the 1970s, and since then, it has been a widely studied and applied framework in media research:

Some of these [early] investigations begin by specifying needs and then attempt to trace the extent to which they are gratified by the media or other sources (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973, p. 510).

U&G is associated with media effects research that dives into various aspects of how media content affects the attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions of media consumers (Ruggiero, 2000). The novelty of the approach was that it positioned the audience itself as a point of departure for research, in contrast to established media effects studies, which looked primarily at communicators in the mass communication processes (Ruggiero, 2000; Windahl, 1981). In addition, the approach has a pronounced psychological and social origin which became one of the factors that supported its crystallization (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). For example, later U&G studies began to take into account the social characteristics of audiences to better understand their needs and patterns of media consumption.

At the same time, the U&G approach was subject to systemic criticism. The first wave of criticism pointed to the theoretical blurriness of the concepts of the U&G, methodological limitations with excessive reliance on

self-reporting of respondents, lack of attention to the connections between audience gratifications and social or psychological parameters of individuals (Ruggiero, 2000). Further rounds of scholarly discussions brought up hesitation to include the audience's perspective regarding media content and the necessity to distinguish between gratifications sought and gratifications received (*ibid*). Another side of criticism concerned the lack of consideration of effects connected with power and media ownership (Gitlin, 1981). Nevertheless, all these criticisms served as an adequate driver for further development and refinement of the U&G approach.

As Rubin (1983) notes, in the 1980s a sufficient research corpus with the application of the U&G approach was formed. It allowed a comparative analysis of the obtained results in order to further develop this line of study. The increase in the number of scientific investigations also made it possible to reproduce previous studies with some modifications to test and enrich the application of U&G (*ibid*).

Another important development in the 1980s was a clearer refinement and reevaluation of the concept of an active audience. As mentioned above, it is one of the central concepts for the U&G framework. Rubin (1983) suggested that audience activeness is a variable rather than an absolute and constant. Levy & Windahl (1984) pointed out that the audience may have different levels of engagement and activity, depending on communicative settings, etc. In summary, using the audience's perspective as a starting point for research has become a prominent and differentiating feature of the U&G framework (Ruggiero, 2000; Windahl, 1981). And later the researchers indicated that the concept of an active audience should be included in the research of new media and internet based platforms (Morris & Ogan, 2018).

Later studies also contributed to the clearer explanation and description of the main concepts of the approach. For example, the term gratification is interpreted as the fulfillment or satisfaction that users derive from their media

consumption and interactions (Ruggiero, 2000). Motives are described as “general dispositions that influence people's actions taken for the fulfillment of a need or want and behavior” (Papacharissi, 2008, p. 141). The needs are interpreted as expressed “motives for adopting particular medium use” (ibid). The needs initially were categorized into four main dimensions: information, personal identity, social interaction, and entertainment (McQuail, 2000; Rubin, 1983). The proposed categorization of needs became the basis for further understanding why people consume media and attempts to study diverse patterns of media usage. However, as the U&G approach developed, researchers proposed new categories to better understand needs, motives, and gratifications. Stafford et al. (2004) describe the broad distinction between content gratifications and process gratifications and later suggest social gratification which is inherent in Internet use (also in Stafford & Stafford, 1996).

Equally important, Rubin (1983) extended the U&G theory by exploring how different viewing patterns (in reference to television viewing) interact with motivations. He identified three patterns: habitual viewing, less frequent but regular viewing, and infrequent or irregular viewing. These patterns are shaped by needs and motivations such as entertainment, information, and personal identity. This is another attempt to address criticisms of the overall robustness of the U&G perspective and to develop a more detailed approach to understanding audience behavior.

Summarizing this early stage of the development of the U&G framework, it has been criticized not least for ignoring the role that new technologies play in the behavior and motivations of active audiences. Attempts to address this gap have been made by a number of researchers in the following years, including making the connection between how the affordances of new media and technologies can give rise to the emergence of new gratifications (Lou et al, 2022; Sundar and Limperos, 2013). In addition, new emerging media and digital platforms may be a source of new affordances and gratifications not previously

described by researchers. Taking into account all the changes and transformations of the U&G perspective described above is important to better understand how it applies to the new cohort of digital media and emerging platforms. And this next evolution of the U&G perspective, known as Uses and Grats 2.0, will be discussed next.

Uses and Grats 2.0 can be broadly construed as an updated approach to understanding media gratifications, addressing the need for refinement in studying new media (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). Simply put, it proposes that media technology affordances can shape user needs, leading to distinctive gratifications beyond innate needs. This emphasis on the role of technology is one of the distinguishing features of the updated U&G perspective, making it one of the most widely used frameworks for explaining various media uses and consumption.

Ruggiero (2000) emphasizes the adaptability of the U&G approach to changing media technologies and consumption patterns. He argues that in the 21st century, with the rise of digital media and online platforms, the Uses and Gratifications approach needs to expand its framework to account for new media technologies and platforms. Sundar and Limperos (2013) further developed on the idea by suggesting for future research to look into a combination of gratifications obtained from digital platforms and the “possibility that the technology itself could be responsible for creating” these gratifications (p. 506). This view is both a critique regarding user-centered measures (Rathnayake & Winter, 2018) and an attempt to address criticisms of the approach by taking into account not only social or psychological factors when it comes to the audience, but also the features of new technologies and media (Sundar and Limperos, 2013).

Thus, the combination of these two approaches (U&G and affordances of media technology) creates opportunities for a new corpus of research that embeds the nuances of interaction between audiences and new media. This

research gap is principal to this study as it aims to investigate the use of a new emerging digital platform Telegram whose uses and gratifications are insufficiency examined. At the same time, the role and visibility of Telegram is growing significantly, making it a more considerable subject for research.

During the period of revision and updating of the U&G approach, a number of studies have appeared that employed the new Uses and Grats 2.0 perspective. For example, Eighmey and McCord (1998) applied the U&G framework to website usage and suggested new dimensions of personal involvement and continuing relationships as factors that explain the reaction of the audience to interaction with websites.

Stafford et al. (2004) examined consumer Internet use and described three key dimensions that were identified as a result of studying the usage gratifications among customers of a prominent Internet Service Provider (ISP). The researchers brought to attention entirely new social gratification (in addition to process and content gratifications) that is unique to Internet use.

Joinson (2008) investigated the uses of social network Facebook, and the gratifications users derive from those uses. The study identified seven unique uses and gratifications: social connection, shared identities, content, social investigation, social network surfing and status updating.

All these studies demonstrate how a revised and updated U&G approach is applicable and relevant for new media. They also demonstrate a methodological shift, which gradually began to manifest itself in the corpus of U&G based research. With the emergence of new media and mediums, new multifaceted approaches to research and data collection are applied. This includes incorporating data analysis of user behavior, platform features, and content analysis to gain a more comprehensive understanding of gratifications.

Another feature of the updated Uses and Grats 2.0 perspective, which researchers emphasize, is that with the development of new media, the line between content consumers and content creators begins to blur. This contrasts

quite strongly with older legacy media where this division was very clear, as in the case of television, print newspapers, radio. Users are no longer passive recipients of information but active creators and participants.

To sum up, the Uses and Gratification 2.0 perspective posits that affordances of new media technologies could create or shape certain needs and gratifications that were not present when studying earlier media forms (Quan-Haase, 2012). At the same time, it inherited some of the criticism that the U&G approach applied to old legacy media faced previously. Among these criticisms is the need to involve a qualitative research paradigm, and the need to go beyond the perspective of users, taking into account the characteristics of the media and technologies themselves. Nevertheless, it is still a useful framework for understanding the gratifications sought and received from dynamic, interactive media platforms.

1.4.2 Media Affordances

The concept of "media affordances" can be applied to examine how the technical features and design of digital platforms shape the communicative possibilities available to users. However, the notion of affordances was first introduced by Gibson in the field of ecological psychology, where it was employed to describe the action possibilities that an environment offers an individual based on their capabilities (Gibson, 1982; Ronzhyn et al., 2023; Scarantino, 2003). As Bucher and Helmond point out, the original definition of affordances by Gibson seems to be more focused on "specific environmental properties [they] have to offer an animal" (Bucher & Helmond, 2018, p. 4), although at the same time he meant the relative properties of the affordances. Given Gibson's background in ecological psychology, his work suggested that the experiences of different species within the same environment can vary, as they may perceive and interact with their surroundings in distinct ways.

Consequently, he encouraged a perspective that views environments not as homogeneous spaces, but rather in terms of the specific action possibilities, or affordances, that they offer to the individual organisms inhabiting them. This shift in perspective encouraged researchers to consider how the physical and perceptual characteristics of a given environment can shape the capabilities and behaviors of the creatures that occupy it, rather than treating the environment as a uniform, neutral backdrop. One can use affordances or not, perceive them or not, but according to Gibson's perspective affordances are invariant and always presented in the environment (Gibson, 2015; Bucher & Helmond, 2018).

The idea of affordances was later expanded upon in the field of design by Donald Norman (1988). The conceptualization of the idea of "perceived affordances" has also been further developed and refined within the design field. In his book "The Design of Everyday Things," Norman uses the terms affordances to describe the relationships between an object's attributes and the user's capabilities (Scarantino, 2003). Norman explored how an object's attributes can shape a user's perceptions and understandings of its potential uses. This "perceived affordance" is a crucial aspect of how individuals interact with and make sense of the technologies they engage with. The idea of perceived affordances emphasizes that the potential uses or action possibilities of an object or environment are not solely determined by its objective, physical properties. According to Norman's view, it also depends on how the user perceives and interprets those properties in relation to their own abilities and goals. This reinforces the importance of design in shaping user experiences, as the way an object or interface is designed can profoundly influence how it is understood and utilized by people. The concept of perceived affordances has been widely applied in fields such as human-computer interaction, user experience design, and organizational studies to analyze and optimize the design of technologies and shape user behaviors.

The concept of affordances has since been applied to the study of digital media, as researchers started showing interest in how the technical features and design of digital platforms shape the communicative practices and patterns of use by people (Cousins & Robey, 2015; Steffen et al., 2019). For instance, the mobility, connectedness, and personalization affordances of mobile devices can influence how users manage work-life boundaries (Cousins & Robey, 2015). Similarly, the editability, scalability, and persistence affordances of social media platforms can shape how users present themselves and engage with others online (Moreno & D'Angelo, 2018). However, a more detailed and consistent overview of the different typologies of affordances will be provided in the next subsection. At the same time, researchers have found that variations in platform features, norms, and affordances make it difficult to generalize findings from one social media platform to another (Gilbert et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, Ronzhin et al. draw attention to the fact that for a long time there was a lack of a clear understanding and a single definition of affordances among researchers. After conducting a systematic literature review through the Scopus database, the authors identified 357 publications that describe or use the “media affordances” approach. Based on a review of the existing literature, this group of researchers proposed the following definition:

“Social media affordances are the perceived actual or imagined properties of social media, emerging through the relation of technological, social, and contextual, that enable and constrain specific uses of the platforms.” (Ronzhin et al., 2023, page 3178)

In this dissertation study, I will rely on the aforementioned definition. Additionally, I will review and analyze the proposed typologies and approaches to understanding affordances in the next subsection of this chapter.

Typologies of Media Affordances. Having considered the development of the concept of media affordances, it is also necessary to overview and analyze existing typological and systematization efforts within this approach. In fact, one of the main criticisms that the media affordances approach has faced is the lack of clarity in conceptualization and operationalization. This subsection also aims to identify what limitations this challenge potentially imposes on research and what research opportunities it offers at the same time.

One of the first holistic models for typologizing and interpreting affordances was proposed by Sundar (2008). Sundar's **MAIN model** identifies four classes of technological affordances in digital media: modality, agency, interactivity, and navigability. In this typology, **modality** refers to the sensory affordances of an environment, such as text, audio, video, and images. **Agency** refers to the perceived autonomy of the environment. **Interactivity** is related to the perceived level of control and two-way communication offered by digital media or digital environment. **Navigability** refers to how easy it is to explore and interact within a digital environment.

The MAIN model highlights how the unique affordances of digital platforms can satisfy existing user needs, as well as give impetus to the formation of new needs that were not associated with traditional media. By providing a range of modalities, agency, interactivity, and navigability, modern digital platforms offer users distinctive levels of control, personalization, and engagement that were previously unavailable or limited in traditional media formats.

In addition to the MAIN model, other scholars have proposed alternative typologies and frameworks for understanding media affordances. For example, Rice et al. identified six key media affordances based on the analysis of a large Nordic media organization: **pervasiveness**, **editability**, **self-presentation**, **searchability**, **visibility**, and **awareness** (Rice et al., 2017; Evans et al., 2017). This study focuses on information and communication technologies (ICTs) and

organizational settings and is an attempt to explore perceived affordances in a more quantitative way, through different levels and types of media use. This is a noteworthy attempt to circumvent the limitations and criticisms of the approach in its vagueness and lack of a clear methodological framework.

Organizational communications is another prominent area of application of the affordances concept. As social media adoption increases in organizational settings, understanding these affordances becomes crucial for managers seeking to improve organizational processes and governance (Leonardi & Vaast, 2017; Treem & Leonardi, 2013). Thereby, social media affordances have been extensively studied in organizational contexts, with researchers identifying four key affordances: **visibility**, **persistence**, **editability**, and **association** (Treem & Leonardi, 2013). This typology, proposed by Treem & Leonardi, was one of the first and quite influential in attempting to combine the media affordances approach and organizational-centered research. In this typology, visibility refers to the ability of organizational members to make their behaviors, knowledge, and contributions visible to others within the organization. Persistence is the way in which communications and content shared on social media platforms are permanently recorded and archived, enabling organizational members to revisit, reference, and build upon past interactions and information. Editability offers the capacity for organizational members to revise and refine their communications before publicly sharing them. This editability affords users more control and the ability to carefully curate their online presence and messaging, which can shape organizational narratives and power dynamics. Association indicates the ability to establish direct connections between individuals, content, and networks within the organization. These affordances enable behaviors that were previously difficult or impossible to achieve in combination, potentially influencing processes such as socialization, knowledge sharing, and power dynamics in organizations (Leonardi & Vaast, 2017; Treem & Leonardi, 2013).

Vaast and Kaganer (2013) used the affordances framework to investigate the relationship between the use of social media by employees in organizations and how the organization itself perceives such communication practices and what the response to them is at the level of organizational policies and regulations. According to their findings, organizational policies address primarily visibility and persistence affordances, while also focusing more on risks associated with social media, rather than potential benefits from creating new meanings and values (Vaast & Kaganer, 2013).

Consequently, recent scholarship proposed new ways to interpret and analyze affordances in social media contexts (Bucher & Helmond, 2018). The exploration of media affordances has extended beyond the organizational context, delving deeper into digital media and online media consumption. Researchers have examined how the unique affordances of various digital platforms influence communicative practices and habits of users in their everyday lives (Moreno & D'Angelo, 2018; Sundar & Limperos, 2013). Sundar and Limperos link the technological and media affordances of digital platforms to the theoretical framework of Uses and Gratifications, proposing an updated approach that they call "Uses and Gratifications 2.0" (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). The combination of these two approaches can be broadly interpreted as an updated approach to understanding audience satisfaction in the context of new media and the set of new affordances they offer. This combination is also promising for researchers of new digital platforms, although it is not central to the abovementioned Sundar's MAIN model (Sundar, 2008).

Building on previous work, Bucher and Helmond described five different but related ways of conceptualizing media affordances (Bucher & Helmond, 2018). The first approach considers the affordances of digital platforms as relative, not rigidly fixed, properties, and is based on Gibson's early work in environmental psychology (Gibson, 1982). Gibson considered the idea that people perceive the environment in terms of the opportunities for action it

provides them (Scarantino, 2003). However, since different people have different sets of skills and abilities, they will have different ideas about possible actions, and therefore perceive the environment differently. As an example, the authors quote: “what is at the height of a child’s knees is not the same for an adult”, so the opportunities for action will be different for them (Bucher & Helmond, 2018, p. 5).

The second approach, described by Bucher and Helmond, focuses on perceived affordances and is largely based on the work of Donald Norman (1988) in the field of design. His conceptualization of the approach was that designers can guide users in how to interact with objects or devices. According to Norman, if the design is poorly executed, it distorts the user's experience of interacting with it and creates discomfort for them (Bucher & Helmond, 2018).

The third approach focuses on technological affordances. This approach was described by William Gaver, who believed that people can not only perceive the affordances of objects or devices at the level of their senses (for example, through vision), but that they should actively embody and use them (Gaver, 1991). He also suggested considering the hidden affordances of objects or devices: for example, designers may not have predicted a certain way of using an object, but users themselves can invent it in the process of interaction (Bucher & Helmond, 2018). As noted by Masip et al. in study of the WhatsApp messenger, it is unlikely that the creators of messaging applications included the function of news distribution and consumption when they created them (Masip et al., 2021, p. 1064).

The fourth approach described by Bucher and Helmond is social enablement. This approach to conceptualizing “media enablement” has been most developed by scholars in the fields of sociology and mass communication. Its essence is that social activity is embedded in and shaped by the material environment and that new technologies provide an impetus for the construction

of new social connections and social practices that would not be possible without these technologies (Bucher & Helmond, 2018).

The fifth approach considers the conceptualization of media affordances through communicative capabilities. It builds on the work of Ian Hutchby, who proposes to consider media affordances not only in terms of technological properties or social constructivism (Hutchby, 2001). Hutchby believes that the concept includes both aspects. On the one hand, the ways in which users incorporate new technologies into their daily lives are socially constructed, and on the other hand, the technological features of platforms create material constraints or opportunities for use. The approach proposed by Hutchby emphasizes that affordances are both functional and relational (Bucher & Helmond, 2018).

In summary, Bucher and Helmond, in their attempt to systematize approaches to conceptualizing media affordances emphasize that the affordances of digital platforms are not fixed, but rather are constantly being shaped through the interaction of algorithms, user interaction, and the design of the platforms themselves.

While the affordances framework has proven valuable in understanding the impact of digital media on user behavior and organizational processes, it has also faced some criticism.

One criticism is that the notion of affordances can be overly deterministic, implying that the design of a technology necessarily leads to certain user behaviors. This is perceived to be a limitation as it disregards the agency of users and the complex social and contextual factors that shape technology use (Nagy & Neff, 2015).

Additionally, the affordances approach has been criticized for its lack of specificity. Critics argue that the concept of affordances is often used as a catch-all term to explain any relationship between technology and user

behavior, without providing a clear and consistent definition or analytical framework.

Furthermore, the affordances approach has been accused of prioritizing technological capabilities over other important factors, such as user motivations, social norms, and organizational policies, which also play a crucial role in shaping technology use (Conole & Dyke, 2004).

To address these criticisms, scholars have called for a more nuanced and contextualized understanding of affordances, one that recognizes the dynamic interplay between technology, users, and the broader social, cultural, and organizational environment. And also refrain from excessive generalizations and take into account the specifics of various technologies and digital platforms, especially newer and less studied ones.

From the above-described ways of development and formation of the approach, typologies and conceptualizations, the main research gaps within the Media Affordances framework emerge. While existing studies provide a broad understanding of media affordances, there is a need to explore how these affordances function in specific cultural, regional, or demographic contexts. Another gap for possible consideration is the study of the dynamics of media affordance's manifestations and perceptions over time. Longitudinal studies are a possible fit for understanding how affordances adapt to changing user needs, technological advancements, and societal shifts. Also, many affordances facilitate unintended or emergent uses, such as the repurposing of messaging platforms for news dissemination. It is this research gap that this dissertation study aims to contribute to.

Investigating how the Telegram messenger became a primary source of news for users in Ukraine during a period of acute crisis of 2022 could provide valuable insights into the dynamic and multifaceted nature of affordances. This line of inquiry could shed light on how users adapt and leverage technological

capabilities in unexpected ways, potentially leading to the development of new communication practices and information-sharing models.

By looking into this research gap, the study aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the complex interconnections between technological affordances, user behaviors, and the broader social and contextual factors that shape technology use, particularly in the context of crisis communication and information dissemination. The next section will focus on crisis communication in more depth and detail.

1.4.3 Crisis Communication

The concept of crisis communication is an important component of this study as it allows taking into account the complex political and social context in which the shift in news consumption among Ukrainians took place in 2022 against the backdrop of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

This section aims to provide a comprehensive overview of crisis communication, exploring its theoretical foundations and key concepts. By examining essential studies and core developments in the area of crisis communication and crisis management, this section of literature review seeks to identify critical gaps and opportunities for further research.

Crisis communication has emerged as a critical field of study, bridging theoretical basis and practical applications across multiple disciplines. As Frandsen (2020) argues, the fields of crisis management and crisis communication have not developed uniformly and, moreover, this process took place with different intensity in different parts of the world. Also, for a long time, crisis management and crisis communication developed in such close connection that one was very rarely considered separately from the other.

It is difficult to name a single crisis event or case that can be unequivocally called the starting point for the launch of crisis communication

(Palenchar, 2009). Among such events that significantly influenced the development of this practical, and later research field, scholars name the Atlantic City train crash in 1906, the case of Extra Strength Tylenol pills filled with cyanide in Chicago area 1982, the massive chemical leak from the Indian Bhopal plant in 1984, and the accident at the Chornobyl nuclear power plant in 1986 (Churella 2012; Frandsen & Johansen, 2020). What all these cases have in common is that they require the stakeholders involved to respond and take managerial actions to overcome the crisis and work through its consequences.

At the same time, two directions can be distinguished here that the development of crisis communication has taken: namely, the practical side, which was driven by the practitioners of communications and management, and the research or intellectual side, which was developed by researchers and scholars (Frandsen & Johansen, 2020). The fundamental objective of crisis communication is to manage the flow of information to minimize harm, maintain trust, and facilitate recovery. At its core, it involves the dissemination of accurate, timely, and transparent messages to diverse stakeholders in times of uncertainty and heightened emotional pressure and responses. This process requires strategic planning, adaptability, and a deep understanding of audience dynamics.

Researcher Claire B. Rubin made one of the first attempts to systematically describe the emergence and development of crisis management and crisis communication and based her work on the idea that most change and progress occurred as a result of crisis events, which acted as a driver and catalyst for the emergence of this field among both communication practitioners and crisis communication researchers (Rubin 2007).

As the scale and diversity of crisis events increased, the 1980s became a period when crisis management and crisis communication underwent a process of rethinking and reconceptualization. From the point of view of sociology, the concept of **risk society** began to be applied to crisis situations (Beck 1987), and

the focus of research began to include not only human-made and natural crises, but also institutional and organizational ones (Beck 1992; Frandsen & Johansen, 2020). A specific feature of the risk society approach was to think of crisis management and crisis communication not as an event-driven transformation, but as a broader social change in society and in the way organizations function (Beck, 1987; Frandsen & Johansen, 2020; Lagadec, 1987).

In the next stage of development, the idea of risk society and the reflections on the institutionalization of organizations were important shifts in the development of crisis management and crisis communication. Also during this period of development in the nineties, the concept of **crisis preparedness** emerged (Røvik, 1998) which refers to organizations adapting standardized practices to manage crises. Ulrich Beck's risk society concept describes a modern society increasingly focused on managing risks and uncertainties created by its own advancements, especially in science and technology (Beck, 1992). Eventually, this idea gained wider acceptance in society, which started acknowledging that these risks are global and unpredictable. Unlike earlier societies concerned with natural threats, the risk society deals with human-made risks, such as climate change, nuclear disasters, and economic crises.

In this context, there was also ongoing rethinking of institutionalization of organizations as the process by which organizations become established and widely recognized as legitimate, enduring entities within a society. Organizations began to be treated as active producers of norms, rules, and traditions that shape how organizations operate and evolve (Deephouse and Suchman 2008). This process of rethinking also included norms and rules regarding risk management and response to crisis events within organizations.

In conclusion, the wider acceptance of the risk society concept and the institutionalization of organizations significantly influenced the evolution of crisis management and communication. Beck's idea of a risk society highlighted the global and unpredictable nature of human-made risks, prompting society to

prioritize risk awareness and preparedness. Simultaneously, the institutionalization of organizations underscored their role in creating and maintaining norms, rules, and plans for risk management and crisis response. Together, these shifts have shaped a more structured and proactive approach to addressing modern crises.

It is worth noting once again that the development of crisis management and crisis communication did not occur simultaneously and evenly in all countries. One of the largest early adopters and consistent producers of new knowledge in the field was the United States. The bibliometric study conducted by Avery, Lariscy, Kim and Hocke (2010) analyzed publications between 1991 and 2009 regarding crisis communication theory in public relations. The results showed that half of all articles were written by American authors, Benoit and Coombs. Within the framework of this study, the authors also analyzed the main trends and theoretical changes and noted that the theoretical frameworks of these same two authors (Benoit's Image repair theory and Coombs' Situational Crisis Communication Theory, SCCT) have been dominant in the field since 1995. As Frandsen & Johansen (2020) argue, these two theoretical frameworks remain the most influential to this day in the field of crisis management and crisis communication.

However, it is also worth noting the body of work created by the so-called Scandinavian School of crisis management and crisis communication. It focuses on the interplay between organizations, societal norms, and cultural contexts in shaping crisis responses. The most influential contributors to this direction of scholarly works are Bengt Sundelius and Evert Vedung. Karl E. Weick, while not Scandinavian, had a significant influence and relevance to the Scandinavian approach with his research on sensemaking during crises, organizational behavior and learning.

The next significant cycle of development of crisis management and crisis communication took place under the influence of new technologies and

the growing penetration of the Internet. Digital media has transformed crisis communication, enabling faster information dissemination and two-way interactions between organizations and the public (Moreno & D'Angelo, 2018). There are examples of how crisis communication researchers have applied a media affordances approach to understanding the role of digital platforms in crisis communication and crisis management. Affordances such as visibility, editability, and association have allowed organizations to rapidly share updates, engage with stakeholders, and coordinate emergency response efforts (Fox & McEwan, 2017; Moreno & D'Angelo, 2018).

Another noteworthy point is that in the early stages, crisis management and crisis communication were perceived as very closely intertwined areas, only in recent years have the latter begun to stand out as a separate independent direction within its own right (Coombs and Holladay 2010: xxvi). Given the objectives and research focus of this dissertation study, I will focus specifically on crisis communication, although not denying the closeness and interconnectedness of these two concepts.

In summary, crisis management and crisis communication are usually perceived as comparatively new fields with a relatively short but intense history of development. These two fields have a characteristically close connection between the practical side, which offers a wide scope for the development and application of communication strategies, and the research side, which is aimed at both applied and academic endeavors.

The next subsection takes a closer look at current scholarly work specifically on crisis communication in the context of the development and growing influence of digital platforms.

Crisis communication and digital platforms. First of all, it is worth positioning some distinction between the existing different directions of crisis communication. Coombs and Holladay identify four areas of crisis

communication (Coombs & Holladay, 2022): organizational crises, political crises, disasters (both human-made and natural), public health crises.

Researchers note that some elements of crisis communication can be applied in different areas, but warn against overgeneralization: what is relevant in one area of crisis communication may be inappropriate or ineffective in another (Coombs & Holladay, 2022). In the context of this study, we will refer to previous developments in the field of the third type, as the most relevant to the context of Ukraine and the consumption of information in the context of the crisis through the Telegram application.

Veil, Buehner and Palenchar note that communication practitioners distinguish between **risk communication** and **crisis communication** itself (Veil, Buehner, & Palenchar, 2011). Risk communication is carried out at a stage when the threat and its potential negative consequences are already known and the task of communication is to avoid or minimize the likely harm or to best inform and prepare all those who are at risk. Crisis communication involves the dissemination of information directly during a crisis event in order to minimize harm, maintain public trust and manage an appropriate response to the crisis.

Lundgren and McMakin (2004) proposed an approach in which they distinguished several levels of communication in the context of crisis events: **communication of care**, **communication of consensus**, and **crisis communication**.

According to their definition, communication of care concerns risks that are already known to the audience or relevant experts, and management/harm reduction processes for which have already been defined and accepted by the audience (Lundgren & McMakin, 2004). Consensus communication is designed to disseminate risk management messages that are both informative and persuasive. Researchers note that such communication is, in essence, a dialogic process focused on solving a problem, on achieving agreement between stakeholders and decision-makers about risk management, on adoption of

specific behaviors or actions (Cole & Fellows, 2008). Crisis communication exists within a broader communication continuum and alerts audiences to danger and offers options for minimizing risk (Lundgren & McMakin, 2004). In particular, it serves a motivational, time-critical function of persuasion in an emergency (Rowan, 1991).

For example, Terry Cole and Kelli Fellows used Lundgren and McMakin's model of communication levels to analyze the 2005 Hurricane Katrina and how the city of New Orleans carried out the communication with the citizens, especially with the most vulnerable segments of the population. They concluded that while the care communication was performed at an adequate level, the strategies for consensus communication and crisis communication were failing as they lacked credibility, clarity and were not adapted for the audience (Cole & Fellows, 2008).

The number of studies looking at how digital media are used for crisis or risk communications is continuously growing. Mats Eriksson (2018) conducted a systematic literature review on practical advice on using social media in crisis communication. Based on the 104 publications included in the sample, he identified five general thematic "lessons" for crisis communication practitioners, among which he mentioned the opportunity to engage in dialogue with the audience through social networks, the importance of understanding the logic of social networks, and the possibility to use social networks to monitor crisis events.

For example, in 2010, after a powerful earthquake in Haiti, there was a case of interactive mapping of the crisis response based on the SMS service (Meier, 2010). A group of volunteers and technology experts quickly developed and launched an SMS-based system for emergency notification and response. Initially, the system was designed to collect information about missing people. But the system's functions were quickly expanded to collect information and requests for critical needs (such as medicine or drinking water), organize data

into a “live map” of current needs, and disseminate information and announcements about aid stations and updates on the aftermath of the earthquake. And although this case does not directly relate to digital platforms as they are understood these days, it is an vibrant illustration of how new communication features and practices can be implemented in crisis communication and crisis management.

At the same time Stephens & Robertson (2022) take more of a critical position by pointing out that it is risky to rely solely on social media as core channels for carrying out crisis communication as not all of the interested stakeholders have the necessary means and resources to access them. They argue that digital platforms should be employed within crisis communication but as a part of a wider and comprehensive set of channels and mediums to spread the crisis related messages. Eriksson & Olsson (2016), Cooley & Jones (2013) also hold a similar opinion in their works.

Debnath et al. (2016) focused their study on WhatsApp group chats among emergency response providers in the aftermath of Nepal earthquake and Chennai floods in 2015. The post-disaster situational analysis that was conducted by the group of researchers highlighted the opportunities for rapid dissemination of information and collaboration among the members of the response teams, but also shed some light on the downfalls of the WhatsApp group chats use under those circumstances. The dissemination and exchange of information lacked a structured and centralized nature. These features can make it difficult to coordinate and effectively manage a crisis response, as information can be scattered across multiple channels and groups. At the same time, there are known cases when the messengers Line and WeChat (Chan, 2014; Liu et al, 2014) were used as an experiment in Southeast Asian countries as a way to establish communication between disaster victims and government agencies carrying out the crisis response. In summary, the WhatsApp use case shows that such applications have greater potential than being an additional communication

channel during a crisis. They can also be a tool for monitoring and searching for information about the course of a crisis event.

Stephens and Robertson (2022) point out that during a crisis, users of digital platforms and stakeholders involved in the crisis response perceive and use them differently. For example, Twitter (or X) is more effective for distributing notifications and warnings, but only for people who regularly use this platform (Eriksson & Olsson, 2016). Facebook has a geolocation function and there are known cases when people used this feature to ask for help and indicate where exactly this help is needed (Stephens & Robertson, 2022). However, there is still quite a small number of studies that would consider these aspects, so the potential of this type of digital platform remains poorly explored.

Given these complexities, the integration of traditional crisis communication principles with digital platforms requires careful planning and strategy. Organizations must not only respond swiftly but also be mindful of the broader implications of their communication tactics, taking into account the diverse needs of audiences and the evolving nature of digital information environments.

In the case of the ongoing crisis in Ukraine, where Telegram has emerged as a primary platform for communication, understanding how to balance speed, accuracy, and audience engagement becomes essential in managing the crisis effectively and mitigating its impact. This dissertation research has the potential to contribute to a better understanding of these processes and practices and become a driver for the review and emergence of communicative practices that take into account all these risks and concealed imbalances.

Chapter Summary

This chapter established the general context and theoretical orientation of the study by presenting an overview of Ukraine's media landscape, the growing

role and influence of digital platforms, the unfolding crisis situation (namely, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022) as an important context for this study, and the theoretical frameworks guiding the research inquiry.

The chapter is set off by situating the study within the broader research background, emphasizing Ukraine's relatively recent history of media market development following its 1991 independence. It highlighted the challenges that Ukraine's media institutions have faced due to successive crises, including the Orange Revolution (2004), the Revolution of Dignity (2014), the COVID-19 pandemic (2020), and most significantly, the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022. These events have contributed to the volatility and transformation of the country's media ecosystem and have facilitated the increasing reliance on digital platforms for news consumption.

Historical developments in the instrumentalization of digital technologies during protest movements, such as the use of the internet and mobile phones for mobilization and coordination, were discussed. Special focus was given to Telegram, the emerging digital platform that forms the centerpiece of this dissertation research. The chapter outlined its evolution from a messaging app to a multi-functional information platform, the features that distinguish it (e.g., channels, low moderation, real-time broadcasting), and the controversies surrounding its use in Ukraine. This includes concerns about anonymous ownership, the spread of propaganda, and its role in disseminating crisis-related content during the war.

The research questions were then presented, centering on user motivations for adopting Telegram during crises (RQ1), and how the platform's affordances influence the formation of news consumption routines (RQ2), as well as media professionals' adaptation to utilizing Telegram platform (RQ 3), specifically in the context of crisis events.

In addition, the section identifies key research concepts and outlines the definition of news as a key term for research. To explore the research questions

posed, the chapter introduced and elaborated on three interrelated theoretical frameworks: Uses and Gratifications, Media Affordances, and Crisis Communication.

The Uses and Gratifications approach provides valuable insight into how individuals actively seek out and use media to fulfill specific needs and goals, moving away from the passive audience model.

The Media Affordances perspective examines how the unique capabilities of digital media platforms, such as modality, agency, interactivity, and navigability, can shape user experiences and communication patterns.

Crisis communication research highlights how the affordances of digital platforms can enhance the ability to rapidly disseminate information, engage with stakeholders, and adapt to unfolding events during a crisis.

Together, these theoretical lenses offer a nuanced understanding of the complex, interactive processes involved in online news consumption and crisis communication in the digital age. Furthermore, the section also positions this dissertation research within the existing body of research and examines the research gaps that it seeks to address.

CHAPTER 2. METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN AND QUALITATIVE INQUIRY INTO TELEGRAM USE DURING CRISIS

2.1 Overview of research design and methodological justification

The objective of this study is to investigate what features were the users guided by when choosing the Telegram as the main platform for news consumption in the context of crisis/emergencies and how does the platform's affordances affect the choice of the users when forming news consumption routines. The objectives of the study and the nature of the research questions compels a qualitative approach, as they aim to explore the subjective experiences and perceptions of users rather than measure quantifiable phenomena.

A qualitative methodology is particularly well-suited for uncovering the complex combination of factors guiding user decisions and behaviors (Creswell, 2014; Tracy, 2020). The study draws on the methodological conceptualization that views interview-based research as a way of studying “people’s ways of making sense of their activities, experiences, and relationships” (Magnusson and Marecek, 2015, p. 2). Magnusson and Marecek also argue that the best way to learn about people’s experiences is to ask about them and listen to what respondents say about it and how they do it.

Nevertheless, the qualitative approach has its limitations, which will be addressed in the relevant subsection. This study turns to the methods of semi-structured in-depth interviews in order to look into users' experience with employing Telegram as the source of news. However, it was decided to also include stakeholders on the other side of this process in the sample, namely media professionals who are behind the creation and distribution of news via Telegram. This methodological decision is two-pronged, as on the one hand it helps address limitations regarding the subjectivity of user experiences and

self-reporting. On the other hand, it provides the opportunity to look at what users' needs media professionals notice and take into account while choosing to be active within the Telegram platform, despite the growing criticism towards it, which have already been reviewed in the previous chapter.

The time frame of 2022 was chosen as the research period. I was directed by several considerations when making this choice. One of them is that the most acute moment of the crisis is associated with 2022 because the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine took place within this timeframe (to be precise, February 24, 2022). Secondly, the largest migration of users to the Telegram digital platform also occurred during this period. Thus, to investigate this phenomenon, the time period of 2022 is the most relevant.

The participant screening and selection employed a two-phase recruitment technique to ensure a diverse and relevant sample and obtain the most comprehensive Dataset to address the research questions. This approach is based on suggestions by Magnusson and Marecek (2015) for developing research design for interview-based qualitative research. The two-phase recruitment technique involves careful monitoring and tracking data obtained from initial participants with the possibility of adding more participants with experiences and specifications that meet the criteria of research design. Thereby, the research includes two sets of interviews, with active Telegram users and media professionals that employ Telegram as part of their media outlets content distribution strategy.

This chapter will also explain ethical considerations, limitations associated with the methodological decisions made, and the positioning of the study. Also analytical strategies that are determined by the choice of theoretical frameworks of Uses and Gratifications, Media Affordances and Crisis Communication will be described.

The chapter further in more detail discusses the research design and procedures used to collect, process, systematize and analyze the collected data.

2.2 Research questions and analytical focus

This section explicitly outlines the research questions that guide the study, providing a framework for the methodological choices and analysis. The research questions are as follows:

RQ1. What features were the users guided by when choosing Telegram as the main platform for news consumption in the context of crises/emergencies?

RQ2. How do the platform's affordances affect the choice of the users when forming news consumption routines?

RQ3. How do Ukrainian media professionals adapt their professional practices on Telegram in response to users' needs and platform constraints during crisis conditions?

These questions are central to understanding the motivations, perceptions, and behaviors of users in adopting Telegram as a news platform, particularly in high-stakes contexts such as crises and emergencies. The questions also align with the study's qualitative approach, as they emphasize the exploration of subjective experiences and the contextual dynamics influencing user decisions.

2.3 Semi-structured in-depth interviews as a primary data collection method

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the primary data collection method for this study. This approach combines necessary flexibility and focus of structured interviews, enabling the researcher to inquire regarding relevant topics while still following a predefined interview guide. The method also provides the researchers with "rich talk" that is saturated with information and reflections on the respondents' experiences (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015).

The methodological choice for recruiting research participants involved identifying two distinct groups for semi-structured in-depth interviews. These

groups were selected to align with the study's focus on Telegram use: (1) individuals who consume news through this digital platform, and (2) media professionals who utilize the platform for news distribution.

In order to take into consideration the unique experiences of each group, two separate interview guides were developed and tested. Developing separate interview guides for each group of respondents ensured that the interview questions were formulated to address the specific practices of each participant type, facilitating exploration of the research questions.

I will not emphasize on the line of thinking behind the decision to include active Telegram users as the respondents in this study. Their role as a source of data and their descriptions of experiences and news consumption patterns are undoubtedly relevant to the objectives of this research. At the same time, I will explain in more detail the logic of including the second group of respondents, namely media professionals who use the Telegram platform for news distribution.

Media professionals play a dual role on digital platforms like Telegram: as content creators and moderators or editors. Their expertise and strategic use of Telegram's features (e.g., channels, groups, and multimedia capabilities) shape the way information is presented to users. Exploring their practices can highlight the specific affordances of Telegram that professionals prioritize to take into account, as well as the behavior patterns of their audiences in order to optimize audience engagement. It also contributes to revealing how media professionals adapt their content strategies during crises/emergencies, thereby influencing users' decisions to rely on Telegram.

A two-phase recruitment technique was employed for the selection of participants (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015). First of all, an important criterion for inclusion in the sample was the participant's active use of the Telegram platform for news consumption. Potential participants who did not have experiences of interest for the study were not included in the final sample and

were not interviewed. In order to establish this, a short list of screening questions was created. These included information on the name and contact details of the potential participant, experience of interacting with the Telegram platform, the purposes for which the potential respondent uses the platform. If the individual indicated significant activity in using Telegram and agreed to participate in the study, he or she was arranged for an in-depth interview. Also, during the screening phase of potential participants, they received brief information about the purpose of the study, protection of their confidentiality during the interview and when publishing the study results, and an approximate timeframe for their participation in the study. They were re-briefed on this set of matters also at the beginning of the in-depth interviews.

As proposed by Magnusson & Marecek for implementing a two-phase recruitment technique, the first phase was carried out by using *chain referral* (also known as snowball sampling). Among the advantages of this method is the rapid recruitment of participants who have experience relevant to the study, enhancing the likelihood of gathering data that directly addresses the research questions. At the same time, this also causes a drawback of this method, in particular, the formation of an overly homogeneous sample, which may not provide sufficiently rich and diverse data.

To address this, the second phase uses the *targeted nominations* approach for the recruiting. This approach involves requesting non-participants to identify appropriate individuals to participate in the study. It entails asking various individuals to suggest one potential participant who meets a particular set of characteristics. Thus, during the interviews with participants, the collected data was constantly monitored in order to effectively apply targeted nomination in case the data obtained were not rich and diverse enough to inform the answers to the research questions. In order to ensure the effective implementation of the second phase of recruitment, it was decided to follow the methodological suggestion by Magnusson & Marecek and transcribe the audio recordings from

the in-depth interviews as soon as possible after they were conducted. It allows for the most accurate and timely account of the collected data and to track the diversity of the array of qualitative data that was collected in the process.

Two interview guides were developed and tested to conduct semi-structured in-depth interviews. The guides included open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses without imposing ideas or opinions that could affect the answers of the participants. Questions were organized into thematic areas such as general information, strategies of employing Telegram, platform's functions and affordances, experiences of crisis informing, and information search.

To ensure that the interview guides cover the full range of nuanced experiences of individuals (both Telegram users and media professionals who use Telegram to distribute news), two sets of trial interviews were conducted (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015). The first set consisted of pretest mock interviews that simulated interviewing participants. At this stage, the guides were tested for clarity of question wording, how long the interview took, and the overall experience of interaction between the interviewer and the potential participant. The second set consisted of pilot tests conducted with individuals who were similar in characteristics to the target participants. The purpose of this stage is to ensure that the interview guides are allowing to obtain the data necessary for the study through the list of questions included in the guides.

After both interview guides were properly tested and refined, they were applied to collect data directly from the target participants.

2.3.1 Interviewing Telegram users

The procedure for conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews was followed equally for both groups of respondents. All potential respondents were pre-screened and approved for participation in the study on a transparent and

voluntary basis. All respondents were informed of the main objectives and conditions of participation in the study at least twice, during screening stage and at the beginning of the interview. One of the important points was to ensure that participants were properly informed about the research itself, confidentiality, protection of their data, the possibility of withdrawing their consent to participate, and the transparency of the research process.

The interviewing of the first group of respondents, which included Telegram platform users who confirmed their activity in using the platform for news consumption and agreed to provide an account of their experience, was carried out using interview guide number one.

The initial set of Telegram users interviews was carried out using a two-stage recruiting approach: a chain referral and later supplemented with the targeted nominations.

Participants were encouraged to share their experiences regarding their motivations for selecting Telegram as a primary news source, the specific affordances of the platform that shaped their consumption routines, and the experience with employing Telegram during crisis situations. The interviews provided a corpus of data regarding the user perspectives necessary for addressing the study's research questions.

2.3.2 Interviewing media professionals that use Telegram

In addition to interviews with Telegram users, the study also included in-depth conversations with media professionals who actively utilized the platform for news distribution. This second group of respondents was interviewed using the same procedure as the first, with the only difference being that interview guide number two, specifically designed for collecting data among media professionals, was used for the process. The group of media

professionals for interviewing was recruited through a two-stage approach (a chain referral and later supplemented with the targeted nominations).

The main objective of interviews was to explore various aspects of the media professionals' use of Telegram, including their motivations for choosing the platform, the strategies employed for engaging audiences, and the affordances of Telegram that shaped their content distribution practices.

By capturing insights from both user and professional perspectives, the study aims to comprehensively consider the phenomenon of the platform's increasing popularity among users. Also, media professionals' observations of audience behavior patterns will help balance and validate self-reporting by users themselves.

2.4 Data collection, processing, and systematization

Once all key decisions for the study design have been made and all preparations for conducting interviews have been completed, data collection was conducted. Given the identification of two primary groups of respondents — individual Telegram users and media professionals using Telegram for news distribution — two distinct interview guides were developed and applied for each category, resulting in two corresponding datasets.

Interviews were conducted either in person or via video conferencing to accommodate logistical constraints and ensure participant convenience. Before each interview, participants were provided with information about the study's purpose, the interview process, and measures for maintaining confidentiality. Participants were also informed about the estimated duration of the interview process and were reminded of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. All participants were required to confirm their informed consent prior to participation and confirm consent to audio recording of the interview.

To ensure the confidentiality and protection of participant data, all audio recordings and transcripts were stored in separate digital folders and separate datasets. The first dataset included interviews with Telegram users who consume news content primarily on the platform, while the second dataset included interviews with media professionals using Telegram for news distribution.

All recordings and transcripts in the first dataset were numbered using "01" as the first two digits in the title. All recordings and transcripts in the second dataset were numbered using "02" as the first two digits in the title. I will use this naming system to provide quotes or excerpts from the in-depth interviews later in the study while bringing examples and providing discussion of the results.

The two datasets were organized into different folders and each included a document with a protocol for file storage, file naming, transcription, security instructions, and data confidentiality. As noted above, in order to effectively implement the two-stage approach to recruiting (chain referral and target nominations), the in-depth interview recordings were transcribed and stored within a short period of time after the interview. Access to the datasets was restricted to maintain data integrity and participant privacy.

2.5 Analytical strategies and data coding

This section outlines the analytical strategies employed to interpret the data collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews within two groups of participants, namely individual Telegram users and media professionals using Telegram for news distribution. The analysis is informed by three theoretical frameworks: the Uses and Gratifications approach, Media Affordances approach, and Crisis Communication.

Uses and Gratifications Approach. This framework previously proved to be useful in studies of the motivations and gratifications driving users to select certain media for content consumption. Traditionally, the methodological approach of surveys has been employed in an extensive body of U&G driven research. However, with the revision and updating of the approach, it began to include more qualitative methods, such as qualitative media diaries or in-depth interviews (Bracken & Lombard, 2001). This transformation and expansion of methodological approaches is partly a response to previous criticisms of the U&G. The integration of the approach into this study involves describing the specific needs (e.g., information-seeking, crisis related informing) that Telegram fulfills for users.

Media Affordances approach. Studies with this framework tend to use mixed methods, for example combining surveys and interviews or employing various forms of digital ethnography (Leonardi & Vaast, 2017). However, for this study, it was decided to choose a qualitative approach, given the research questions posed. By examining what users report regarding their interaction with Telegram's features, Media Affordances framework elucidates the role of platform affordances (e.g., accessibility, anonymity, speed) in shaping news consumption routines. The analysis highlights how these affordances influence user decisions and behaviors.

Crisis Communication. Research applying the Crisis Communication framework often employs a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. Content analysis is frequently used to examine crisis-related media coverage, organizational statements, or social media discourse (Eriksson, 2018; Stephens & Robertson, 2022). The Crisis Communication framework provides insights into the dynamics of information dissemination and consumption during crises. The relevant themes are explored to understand how Telegram prevailed among the users in navigating crisis situations effectively.

Within this study, I will follow the suggestions of a number of authors and researchers, who have extensively practiced and contributed to the development of qualitative research, that the work on analysis begins at the very initial stages of the research process, and not just concentrated when describing, interpreting, and discussing the collected data (Daly, 2007; Magnusson and Marecek, 2015; Tracy, 2020). As put by Kerry J. Daly:

Analysis occurs at all stages of the research, from the articulation of the research problem to the discussion of implications for theory and practice. If we think about analysis as having to do with processes of selection, interpretation, and decision making, then when we make choices about who to talk to and the kinds of questions we want to ask, we are being analytic by virtue of setting a course for the research. Exclusion of some aspects of reality and inclusion of others at an early stage in a project profoundly shape the course of analysis in a project. (Daly, 2007, p. 210)

However, systematic in-depth analytical work with the collected data is planned at the stage when there is enough of it to start a) conducting monitoring of the data in order to initiate the targeted nominations for the participant recruiting in a timely manner and b) transcription and thorough reading of the interview data to ensure accuracy and familiarity with the content. This stage allowed for the identification of initial themes and patterns in the participants' responses.

The primary analytical strategy for this study is the iterative analysis approach, which involves identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning within the qualitative data (Tracy, 2020). As the author describes this strategy:

An iterative approach focuses on specific aspects of the data that extend theory or address practical problems, and encourages reflection upon the active interests, current literature, granted priorities, and various theories the researcher brings to the data (Tracy, 2020, p. 209).

This iterative analysis is particularly suited to the research objectives, as it allows for a detailed exploration of how participants describe their motivations, experiences, and interactions with Telegram, also taking into account the context of crisis situations. This type of analysis involves coding data into descriptive first-level codes, analytic second-level codes, and crafting a codebook. Continuous review, comparison, and refining of codes allows for deep and nuanced analysis of interview transcripts, as well as the inclusion of research notes and memos during the code generation stage.

By employing these analytical strategies and approaches, this study aims to generate a refined understanding of user motivations, platform affordances, and crisis-related dynamics, contributing to a comprehensive exploration of Telegram as an emerging digital platform.

The following part of the section outlines the detailed process of coding and analyzing the data collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews. The goal of this stage is to systematically identify patterns and themes that address the study's research questions regarding the adoption of Telegram as a prevailing news platform in the context of crises and the role of the platform's affordances in shaping news consumption choices.

The preliminary stage included transcribing the audio recordings of the interviews using digital software Fireflies. Transcriptions were reviewed for accuracy by cross-referencing them with the original recordings which the interface of the selected software allows to do.

The next step was to organize the data in two datasets based on the source (first group of respondents or second group of respondents). Each transcript was

assigned a unique identifier to maintain participant anonymity while enabling efficient organization of data.

The coding process involves a number of successive stages in accordance with the iterative analysis approach. Each transcript was coded manually using qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti to ensure consistency and traceability. An analysis procedure, based on that proposed in Sarah J. Tracy (2020), was accommodated for the purposes of this study:

- Familiarization with the data: immersion in the interview transcripts through repeated reading to gain a deep understanding of the content.
- Research notes: review and familiarization with notes taken during semi-structured in-depth interviews.
- Generating descriptive first-level codes: systematic coding of data segments that are relevant to the research questions.
- Searching for patterns: grouping codes into potential themes that represent significant patterns in the data.
- Reviewing codes, identifying analytic second-level codes: refining themes by checking their alignment with the coded data and overall dataset.
- Creating codebook: developing clear definitions for each code, pattern, and theme to ensure they capture the essence of the data.
- Matching codebook and research questions: make sure that the identified themes and codes provide a basis to answer the research questions posed.
- Describing the results: integrating the coded data into a coherent narrative that addresses the research questions.

A clear audit trail was maintained, documenting every step of the coding and analysis process. This ensured that the methodology could be replicated or scrutinized if necessary.

Research also included reflexive practices, such as journaling, to acknowledge and mitigate potential biases during data analysis. By employing rigorous methods and aligning codebook with the research questions, the analysis provided a solid foundation for addressing them.

2.6 Ethical considerations and limitations

Ethical considerations of this study include issues of informed consent, confidentiality, data protection, and transparency of the research process. They were addressed to the best possible level at the stage of research design and establishment of researcher/participant relationship which is determined by the specificities of the method of semi-structured in-depth interviews (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015; Morris, 2015; Tracy, 2020).

Thus, ethical considerations are integral to the design and execution of this study, ensuring the protection and respect of participants throughout the research process. The following measures are implemented to uphold ethical standards:

Informed consent. Participants are provided with detailed information about the study, including its objectives, methods, potential risks, and benefits. This information was provided twice, at the screening stage of participants and immediately before conducting in-depth interviews. Verbal consent was obtained before participation, ensuring that individuals voluntarily agree to take part in the research.

Confidentiality and anonymity. To protect participants' identities, all personal information is anonymized during data collection, analysis, and reporting. All audio recordings and transcripts were stored in separate digital folders and separate datasets. Unique identifiers were assigned to participants, and any identifying details are removed from the transcripts and research outputs. Data was securely stored and accessible only to the researcher.

Voluntary participation. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without any consequences. This ensures that individuals feel comfortable and uncoerced to share their experiences.

Minimizing harm. The study is designed to minimize any potential harm to participants. Questions are framed sensitively, particularly when discussing crisis-related experiences, to avoid causing distress. Since the time frame for the study was set at 2022, when Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine took place, this required consideration when bringing up this context during the interviewing process. Links for support resources were provided to participants who may need assistance following the interviews.

By prioritizing these ethical considerations, the study fills the fundamental components of ethical research (Morris, 2015). It seeks to set a respectful and trustworthy research environment, ensuring the well-being of participants and the integrity of the research process.

Since the choice of the main data collection method was made in favor of semi-structured in-depth interviews, the limitation connected with this method should be acknowledged and discussed. Creswell (2014) points out the following **limitations** associated with in-depth interviews:

- indirect information filtered through the views of interviewees;
- information obtained in a designated place rather than the natural field setting;
- researcher's presence may bias responses;
- not all people are equally articulate and perceptive (Creswell, 2014, p. 241).

Morris (2015) highlights issues of self-reflexivity, difficulties in generalizing the results obtained, time-consuming process and high cost while conducting qualitative interview-based research.

With the application of semi-structured in-depth interviewing method, the data collection and analysis process often depend on the researcher's interpretation. Additionally, the open-ended nature of qualitative interviews may lead to inconsistencies in the data obtained from different participants, making it difficult to ensure a uniform research approach (Creswell, 2014; Tracy, 2020).

Another limitation is connected with the sample sizes and consistently brings us back to the question of generalizability. Due to the typically small sample sizes used in qualitative studies, the findings may not represent the experiences or perspectives of larger populations. Furthermore, the time and resource-intensive nature of qualitative research can restrict the breadth and scale of investigations, limiting the scope of analysis.

The research design of this dissertation also includes limitations associated with using a chain referral approach to recruiting participants (also known as snowball sampling technique). This approach, while effective in rapid recruitment of participants with similar experiences that are relevant to the study, carries an inherent risk of sample bias. Chain referral, in particular, involves asking initial participants to refer to others, which often leads to recruiting individuals within the same or similar social networks. As a result, the diversity of perspectives within the sample may not be ensured, limiting the breadth of insights that the research can offer. This issue becomes particularly critical when examining behaviors and motivations that may vary significantly based on user contexts.

Having outlined the limitations inherent in this research design, I will turn to strategies aimed at addressing them and minimizing their impact. First of all, the study includes two sets of data collected among two groups of stakeholders actively involved in the process of distributing and consuming news using the Telegram platform. Accounts from individuals who consume news through Telegram are balanced out by the accounts of media professionals who utilize the platform for news distribution. Due to the specifics of their work, media

professionals regularly have to deal with tracking audience activities, online behavior patterns of their readers, and strategies for staying connected with their audiences. Comparing these two perspectives of the Telegram experience will help address the risks associated with self-reflectivity. And while generalization is not the primary aim of this study, it provides thick descriptions and contextual immersion (Tracy, 2020) that can inform understanding of similar contexts. Future research directions are also suggested to validate findings quantitatively within the discussion section of this dissertation.

Additionally, interviews will be conducted in neutral and comfortable environments to encourage open and honest responses from participants and minimize biases. Also recognizing that not all participants may be equally articulate, interview protocols included possible additional or follow-up questions designed to obtain detailed responses.

The set of notes and memos was kept throughout the data collection and analysis process to ensure accountability and mitigate potential preconceptions in the research process.

In order to address the challenges associated with the chain referral recruitment approach, this study adopted the two-stage scheme proposed by Magnusson and Marecek (2015). Thus, the participant sample is balanced through the use of targeted nominations. This approach involves constant monitoring of the collected data and rather rapid processing of interview transcripts, while ensuring greater rigor of the research process and results.

In order to address the issues of high cost and resource intensity of qualitative research of this design, modern software such as Fireflies for transcribing audio recordings of interviews and Atlas.ti for systematizing, coding, and analyzing the collected data were used. The use of these tools allows for faster and more efficient implementation of the research.

By acknowledging these methodological limitations and adopting strategies to manage them, this study seeks to ensure credible and insightful

findings. These strategies not only strengthen the validity of the research but also contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of user motivations and platform affordances in crisis contexts.

The study's methodological rigor ultimately positions it to offer meaningful insights that can inform both academic discourse and practical applications related to digital platforms and their use during emergencies.

2.7 Researcher positionality and reflection

In qualitative research, the role of the researcher is not merely observational but inherently intertwined with the research process. This section explores the researcher's positionality, reflexivity, and the measures taken to manage subjectivity, acknowledging how personal background, perspectives, and experiences may shape the research process. Recognizing these influences not only enhances transparency but also strengthens the interpretative side of the research.

I'll follow Brown's approach to distinguishing between reflexivity and positioning in the context of qualitative research (Brown, 2023). Thus, reflexivity refers to the researcher's personal efforts to build and explain connections between their own experiences and research approaches. While positioning refers to a more public statement about the research, the chosen research approaches and methods, possible connection between the role of the researcher himself and the research that was carried out.

One of the important factors underlying the reflexivity within this study is my experience working in the media. As a journalist by training, I have about 5 years of previous experience working in print and online media outlets. Within this period of my career path, I observed how digital platforms and social networks have become increasingly important stakeholders and were catching up with legacy media in terms of influence and engagement. On the one hand,

this has led to my research interest in the growing popularity of Telegram in Ukraine. On the other hand, it also allows me to better understand and more deeply analyze the data collected among media professionals who use the Telegram platform in their work, trying to connect with their audiences and set the most effective content distribution systems.

At the same time, part of my research motivation is that I directly observed the events of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. And like millions of other Ukrainians, I tried to find the most relevant and reliable ways to be informed in the extraordinary conditions of war. This shared lived experience also gives me the relevant perspective to analyze and try to provide insightful explanations for the search for and consumption of information in such a situation.

These reflexivity points have both their strengths, such as motivation and interest in finding answers to the research questions posed, and limitations, as they can potentially carry the risks of subjectivity or tunnel vision due to my own lived experiences. However, the study design is structured to minimize these limitations and risks by involving two Datasets collected from two relevant groups of respondents, a two-stage recruitment technique for respondent selection, and an iterative analysis approach. Also research notes and memos will be thoroughly kept during the research process as part of necessary documentation to eliminate bias and ensure precision and impartiality during the code generation stage within iterative analysis.

As Burke argued, “*qualitative research seeks to provide an understanding of a problem through the experiences of individuals, and the particular details of their lived experiences*” (Bourke, 2014, p. 2). Having an understanding of the perspectives and experiences of both groups of respondents, both media professionals and individual users of the Telegram platform in the context of the crisis, provides me with rather advantageous conditions for this study.

This dual role — that of a researcher and a participant in the evolving media landscape — shapes my positionality and influences the lens through which I conducted this research.

Chapter summary

The research adopts a qualitative approach, appropriate for exploring the subjective experiences, perceptions, and decision-making processes of users and media professionals engaging with the platform and taking into account the specifics of crisis conditions.

The study is guided by three central research questions, and employs semi-structured in-depth interviews. Two distinct participant groups were outlined: active Telegram users and media professionals utilizing the platform for news dissemination. A two-phase recruitment strategy (comprising chain referral sampling and targeted nominations) was implemented to ensure both relevance and diversity in the sample. Separate interview guides were developed and tested for each participant group to ensure alignment with their distinct roles and experiences.

Data collection was conducted in accordance with ethical standards, including informed consent, participant anonymity, and sensitivity to the context of war-related trauma. All interviews were audio-recorded (with consent), transcribed, anonymized, and organized into two separate datasets. The research employed a transparent file-naming and data management protocol to ensure consistency and confidentiality.

Data analysis was conducted using an iterative approach, informed by the theoretical frameworks of Uses and Gratifications, Media Affordances, and Crisis Communication. Transcripts were coded using Atlas.ti software, and second level analytical codes were identified through multiple rounds of reading, coding, and reflection. The approach enabled an in-depth

understanding of the motivations, behaviors, and adaptive practices of both users and professionals operating on Telegram.

The chapter also acknowledged key methodological limitations, including potential bias from the chain referral sampling technique, challenges to generalizability, and interpretative subjectivity inherent in qualitative research. These limitations were addressed through methodological triangulation, reflexive practice, and the incorporation of dual data sources to enhance analytical depth and reliability.

Finally, the chapter discussed the researcher's positionality and reflexivity, recognizing the influence of professional experience and personal involvement in the Ukrainian crisis on the research process. These factors were systematically managed through structured documentation, iterative analysis, and a critical awareness of potential biases.

In sum, this chapter provides a comprehensive account of the methodological decisions underpinning the research and establishes a foundation for the subsequent analysis of data presented in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 3. APP SELECTION RATIONALE AND UTILIZATION PRACTICES AMONG USERS AND MEDIA PROFESSIONALS

Telegram was originally positioned as a messenger with an emphasis on security and speed (Sayf, 2024; Telegram, 2017). However it has evolved over the past few years, becoming not only a platform for communication but also a medium for news consumption (Internews, 2022). Users are finding various ways to utilize digital spaces and applications to their advantage, sometimes in unpredictable ways. Based on data collected among respondents for this study, Telegram also serves as a tool for managing business processes, storing large files and multimedia elements, and as an archiving instrument as well. However, this is just a brief series of examples regarding how users employ the platform. These examples approaches of app's practical utilization are referring to the perceived or implicit media affordances of digital platforms, which with high probability could not have been foreseen by their creators, but instead are actively developed and employed by the users themselves (Masip et al., 2021).

In Ukraine this transformation in the ways of platform's use is particularly noticeable with Telegram gaining significant popularity as a source of information, especially in the context of political and military upheaval (Internews, 2022; Internews, 2023). The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 marked a pivotal moment, significantly increasing the need for rapid, accessible, and reliable information, and boosting Telegram's user base for news consumption (Voinea, 2022). This pattern of behavior was also confirmed by respondents interviewed within this study.

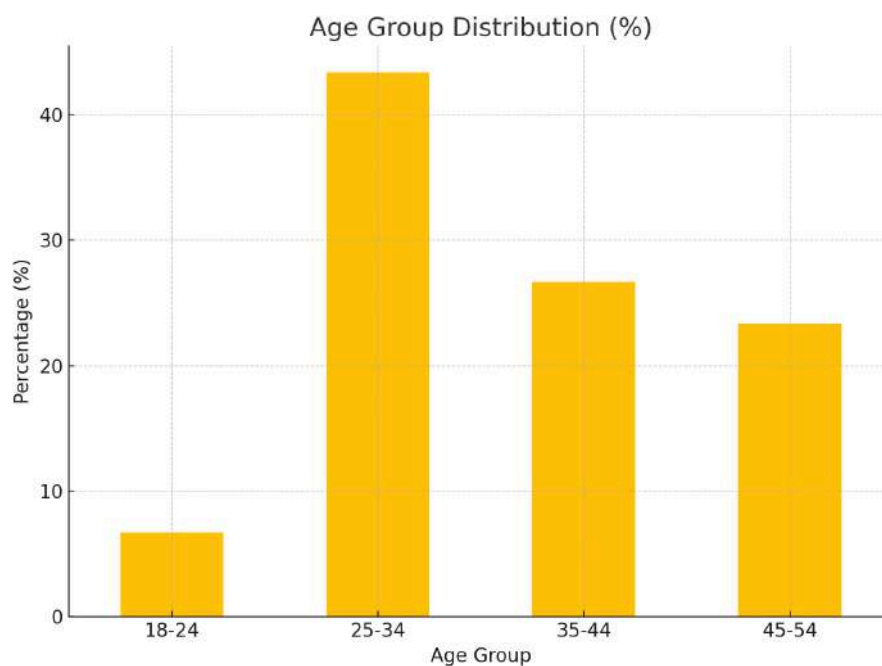
Understanding how users began utilizing Telegram for consuming news, including their initial motivations, evolving routines, and the platform-specific factors that shaped these choices, contributes to understanding the modern information ecosystem. Moreover, analyzing these behavioral patterns allows for

deeper insight into the ways digital affordances influence media consumption habits in urgent and high-risk contexts.

This chapter presents the analysis of data collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews with active Telegram users. This first dataset consists of 40 interviews, gathered using a two-phase recruitment strategy combining chain referral and targeted nomination approaches. This method ensured both the efficiency of participant recruitment and the diversity of experiences captured. The sample maintained a relative gender balance (45% male and 55% female respondents) and included a broad range of age groups, enhancing the representativeness and richness of the data.

Figure 2.

Age group distribution in dataset 1.



According to DemandSage, as of March 2025, over half of Telegram users were aged between 25 and 44 years (Singh, 2025). Specifically, 53.2% of Telegram users fall within this age range. Additionally, 18.8% of users are aged

18 to 24, and 23.8% are aged 35 to 44. This indicates that a significant portion of Telegram's user base is within the 18–54 age bracket, aligning closely with the pool of respondents that were engaged in this study.

The interviews included in Dataset 01 explored participants' motivations for choosing Telegram as a news platform, their patterns of engagement with the app's features, and their reflections on using the platform during the unfolding crisis. The study examined Telegram's functional characteristics, including the speed of information transmission, perceived security, access to multiple sources, and the use of channels and groups. It also analyzed how these characteristics shaped users' decision-making processes and patterns of news consumption.

Telegram users' reflections during interviews also revealed worthwhile strategies for quickly scanning the news, protective mechanisms from the perspective of caring for one's own psychological health, and a certain routinization of air raid alert notifications, the movement of air threats (drones, missiles, rockets, guided bombs, etc.), and tracking the consequences of air attacks. Another interesting observation concerns how users negotiate the quality of the information they receive, the trust in that information, and the perceived control over it. And although this is not the central question for this study, the very tendency for respondents to frequently return to this issue during interviews indicates that the aspect of trust or distrust in the news consumed by users through Telegram channels is implicitly present.

Reflections from respondents from the media professionals show how they have adapted to utilizing the platform as one of the ways to inform their audiences, as well as how they see the needs and how they try to meet the audience's needs.

The findings presented in this chapter are guided by the previously formulated research questions:

RQ1. What features were the users guided by when choosing the Telegram as the main platform for news consumption in the context of crisis/emergencies?

RQ2. How do the platform's affordances affect the users' choices when forming news consumption routines?

RQ3. How do Ukrainian media professionals adapt their professional practices on Telegram in response to users' needs and platform constraints during crisis conditions?

The chapter is structured in such a way as to yield the results in order to address the research questions posed by analyzing data collected among active users of the Telegram. First, the chapter considers the general patterns of platform adoption and, in particular, its adaptation for news consumption in the context of an acute crisis situation, namely, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The following subsections include data analysis and results related to the research questions posed in the dissertation. Concise summary is also provided at the end of the chapter.

The thematic analysis of both collected datasets draws on frameworks of Uses and Gratifications (Katz et al., 1973; McQuail, 2000; Ruggiero, 2000), Media Affordances (Bucher & Helmond, 2018; Gibson, 1982; Ronzhyn et al., 2023; Treem & Leonardi, 2013), and Crisis Communication (Coombs & Holladay, 2022; Palenchar, 2009; Rubin, 2007), offering a comprehensive examination of Telegram's role as a salient information platform during one of the most critical periods in recent Ukrainian history.

The coding process for thematic analysis was carried out using Atlas.ti qualitative data analysis software. Separate coding was performed for each of the two Datasets and a separate coding manual was developed. The coding process itself took place in several stages:

- The first stage involved an initial familiarization with the data collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews.

- The second stage involved coding all interview transcripts and extracting first-level descriptive codes. These included frequently repeated themes or patterns of behavior, thematic units that indicated media affordances relevant to the research questions posed.
- The third stage involved the identification of second-level analytical codes, which was guided by the research's main focuses and research questions.

Redundant codes that did not fall within the scope of this study were removed at this stage. Codes that specifically addressed various forms and levels of control within the application were combined into one second-level code.

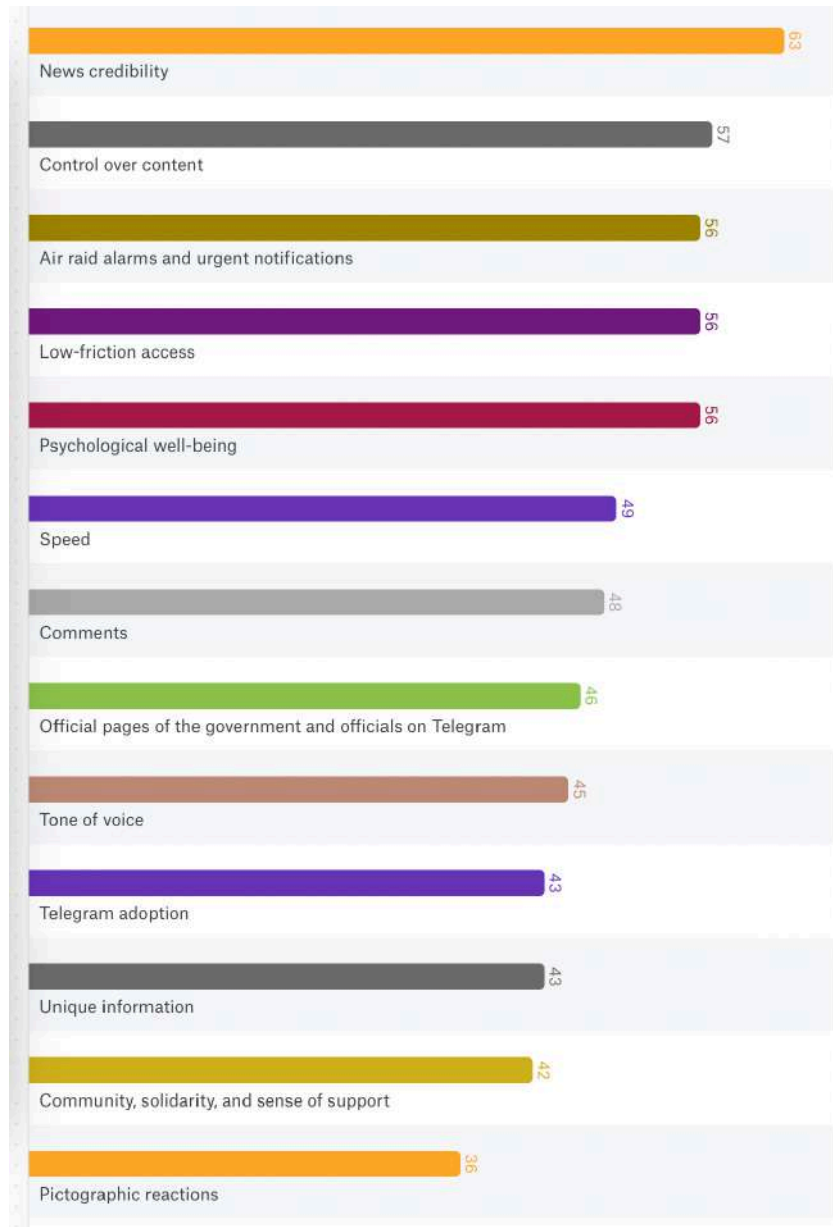
The full codebook that allows to track this line of analysis and code development is available in the appendices.

For Dataset 01, 29 second-level codes were identified. During the next level of coding, they were systematized into 7 analytical codes that reflect the main findings of the analysis.

Based on the analysis of Dataset 02, 19 first-level descriptive codes were initially identified. Upon further in-depth analysis, 5 second-level analytical codes were identified (Code books for both Datasets with complete code lists are available in the appendix section,).

Figure 3.

First-level descriptive codes most frequently used across the Dataset 01.



Note. Created by the author using data from semi-structured in-depth interviews with active Telegram users and coding in Atlas.ti qualitative data analysis software.

Below in this section, the main findings of the study are presented, following a consistent path from how users initially adopted the application to how they increased their media consumption within it and used (and continue to use) it in emergency and crisis situations. The findings also describe how media

outlets have followed a similar path, from the first attempts to adapt the platform in their work to wider use, with attempts to understand the needs and requests of the audience and adjust editorial processes accordingly.

3.1 Patterns of Telegram adoption among users

Many interviewed users claimed that they switched to Telegram after a number of Russian social networks, including Vkontakte, were blocked in Ukraine. In 2017, a decree was signed by the President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko regarding blockage of several Russian companies, including the social networks VKontakte and Odnoklassniki, as well as Yandex services (Khomenko; 2017). From a technical point of view, blocking Russian social networks is possible at the level of Internet service providers. However, using VPN (virtual private network) services allows users to bypass this restriction. Data from marketing and communications agencies shows that the use of these platforms had begun to decline since the introduction of sanctions of 2017, as has the number of contacts with banned Russian social media and services (Savoskina, 2020).

On May 14, 2020, the National Security and Defense Council and President Volodymyr Zelenskyy extended these sanctions that restrict users' access in Ukraine to platforms under consideration. Later in September of 2020, Ukrainian users began receiving notifications that the VKontakte application had been updated and now is available in Ukraine without a VPN (Solonyna, 2020). The Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council called an updated application that bypasses blocking “a threat to national security.” The council believed the goal of these efforts was to collect personal data of users and interfere with the local elections in Ukraine. At the same time, as of 2020, the social network Vkontakte fell out of the top 3 most popular applications in Ukraine and did not make it into the top ten.

One of the respondents recalls that he started using the Telegram application on the same day that VKontakte was blocked in Ukraine:

“Exactly on the day when VKontakte was blocked, I switched to Telegram, because up until that moment, all my communication with friends, with everyone, was in VKontakte chats” — male, 36 years old (Respondent 16, Dataset 01)

“This was the [place - ed.] where we started to correspond and communicate or send some media files, photos, and memes after VKontakte was shut down in Ukraine”— female, 31 years old (Respondent 19, Dataset 01)

“I started [using Telegram - ed.] from the moment VKontakte was banned, that's for sure... The first social network I registered with was VKontakte, where Durov was its owner and founder. So, honestly, nothing has changed much for me.” — female, 26 years old (Respondent 22, Dataset 01)

For some users, their first introduction to Telegram was through work related communication and processes. It was used to interact with colleagues and share files. One respondent recalls clearly that initially Telegram was used only for work, and later it became a platform for reading news as well.

Respondents who mentioned their work in creative and related industries indicated that the application's functionality helps them systematize file sharing and the sequence of discussions with customers and clients. Another respondent specifically noted the option of creating a chatbot in Telegram that would handle initial communication with clients and customers, saving time and effort for the

creative part of the job. The emphasis was also made on chronological sequence of communication and archiving.

“There was a period when everyone switched to Telegram and I did the same. I was no different. It was more for work... and since Telegram provides the ability to save files, I actively used it. And this is, let's say, an intermediate option for email” — female, 42 years old (Respondent 28, Dataset 01)

“I liked the ability to immediately save [posts], then forward the saved messages [to someone else - ed.]. Back in the day, when I was collecting information, I could immediately save every post I was interested in saving and then come back to them” — male, 28 years old (Respondent 07, Dataset 01)

Adaptation of Telegram also occurs through recommendations from friends, colleagues, family members etc. Interviewed users note that the combination of recommendations and the presence of a large number of users from their immediate environment was the mechanism that gradually led them to use the application as well:

“We [as a family - ed.] used Viber. Somehow later my husband mentioned it [Telegram - ed.] And my daughter is always on the Telegram too, so finally I installed it for myself as well” — female, 44 years old (Respondent 27, Dataset 01)

“In general, I was still quite young then and my friends just told me that it was a very cool social network, it was convenient to communicate on it. I didn't consider it at all as a social network where you could read

news and so on. It was purely for chatting there. And well, mainly due to the fact that my friends were there” — male, 25 years old (Respondent 23, Dataset 01)

“I switched to Telegram because there was a lot of news there. And then all my friends switched there. At the beginning of the full-scale invasion [of Russia into Ukraine - ed.], they also said that... in Viber many accounts were hacked. There were also questions about Facebook, how much anonymity was there, how much you could feel free to write there. So at the beginning of the [full-scale - ed.] war, everyone switched to Telegram and I switched too.” — female, 30 years old (Respondent 03, Dataset 01)

Also, a relatively small proportion of respondents were so-called “early adapters” (Rogers, 2003). These participants were already using Telegram for news consumption prior to the full-scale invasion and thus did not require a crisis to prompt their shift in behavior. According to their recollection, they installed the app in the early stages of its launch out of curiosity or on the recommendation of technology bloggers.

“I joined Telegram when it launched. I was one of the first users. Well, I definitely started reading news as soon as the channels feature came out. Bloggers started using it. They started testing this feature and later news media joined in” — male, 29 years old (Respondent 17, Dataset 01)

“I have a friend who is a very modern man... and he is interested in technology news, gadgets and everything else. And he sent me a message: "Register for Telegram". Well, Viber had already been around at that time and it was like some kind of old grandpa who no longer seeks to develop

somehow. I remember my friend saying: "Telegram is faster and more convenient". And I tried it, because why not? Back then it wasn't about news, but about a means of communication. [...] And so I tried Telegram and really liked it for its speed" — male, 45 years old (Respondent 25, Dataset 01)

Thus, the adoption of Telegram as a news platform unfolded gradually, starting with its use as a messaging service which was its initial function. The onset of the full-scale invasion served as a critical catalyst, sharply revealing Telegram's features that appeared to be distinctive for users — including its speed, accessibility, immediacy, and capacity to deliver information directly from various sources, including official ones as well as user generated content.

Additional factors, which were listed by respondents within the scope of the study, included platform's perceived ease of use and control over content, as well as chronological timeline structure. These factors contributed significantly to Telegram's widespread uptake. In the following sections, these application properties and features will be discussed in more detail.

3.2 Experiencing the “news bump”

The concept of "news bump" refers to a temporary increase in attention, popularity, or engagement that happens when something or someone is featured in the news. For example, the media observed a phenomenon of boosted attention and engagement with news following the first and second elections of Donald Trump as US President. This was dubbed the "Trump bump" and "Trump bump 2.0" respectively (Mullin, 2024). Media companies adapted to this intensified news consumption by engaging more of first-party data (information that is collected directly from its own audience) and deepening their focus on political reporting to sustain engagement (Bishop, 2025; Newman, 2024).

However, it is not only election cycles that can have such an effect. An example closer to the Ukrainian context illustrates the significant increase in media consumption after the incident back in 2018. The Russian navy attacked a Ukrainian ship group and wounded 6 servicemen (BBC News, 2018). At the time, the media recorded a significant jump in traffic across all its content distribution platforms, including the main website and social media.

Respondents who are active Telegram users within this study also noted an increase in their news consumption and a behavioral pattern in which they subscribed to a large number of Telegram channels in a relatively short period of time. This ranged from one week to several months after the start of a full-scale invasion in February 2022.

“I started reading the news a lot more after the invasion. First, I wanted to find out when it would all end, and I felt the danger acutely, so every piece of information improved my safety” — female, 47 years old (Respondent 11, Dataset 01)

“With the beginning of the invasion there was 90% more news in my life, than before, because I didn't read the news so often [...] After the full-scale war started, I needed to know everything, to understand. Where and what kind of missiles are flying, from where, who is advancing where, where are my family members, where are my loved ones, where am I, what to do. Maybe I need to evacuate now. That is, there were many risks to life and I needed to control my situation and understand where I am and what I am” — female, 31 years old (Respondent 12, Dataset 01)

“When the [full-scale - ed.] war started, we were all on the news 24/7. There were literally 100 news stories a day [in each Telegram channel - ed.] and that wasn't enough for you, you had to read a lot of everything.

So... for about the first six months, that's exactly how everyone lived — female, 26 years old (Respondent 15, Dataset 01)

Many respondents started treating Telegram as their main platform to access the news. Some even described it as their “*key platform*” (female, 30 years old, Respondent 20, Dataset 01) or “*only source*” for updates (female, 31 years old, Respondent 12; female, 51 years old, Respondent 06; female, 31 years old, Respondent 19, all from Dataset 01). Several respondents mentioned moving away from Facebook, traditional news websites, or TV toward Telegram, especially against the backdrop of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. This transition was largely fueled by a desire for faster, more concentrated updates during a time of national crisis.

Several interviewees noted that platforms like Facebook felt increasingly cluttered with content that users perceived as uninteresting, unhelpful, or even annoying from their perspective or less trustworthy. For instance, one respondent said:

“On Facebook, for example, when you just scroll through the feed [...] there's often some trash [content - ed.], like there's a video from a “Bachelor”. Something of that type. Well, now I don't come across that anymore, fortunately, but sometimes it also happens like... “Oh, no one wished happy birthday to this hero” and there are AI generated pictures. Well, that's the kind of crap that's constantly circulating on Facebook” — female, 26 years old (Respondent 15, Dataset 01)

“These days Facebook for news[...] definitely won't use it. A very strange selection of news that I see there. That is, it often surprises me very much. I can't understand how it happens [formation of the news feed - ed.]. But still, when I scroll through the feed, I still see some news. I am subscribed

to some French and English sources. To Reuters, Telegraph, that is, they get into my feed, but very randomly. So, to find out something quickly - well, that is definitely not [on Facebook - ed.]” — female, 31 years old (Respondent 24, Dataset 01)

“Algorithmic feeds capture a lot of things that I didn't really want to see. And here [on Telegram] I have the pretty convenient option of limiting my information consumption to around five media outlets that I like and that's it” — male, 29 years old (Respondent 17, Dataset 01)

This migration of users was not only about the platform's operating features and algorithmic specificities but also about the type of information needed by the users. During times of emergency, traditional news cycles were perceived by the users as too slow or broad, while Telegram allowed users to follow specific channels, specific local news, government alerts, or trusted influencers in real time.

“The motivation [to use Telegram - ed.] is its speed. It's quick to understand what's going on. Because to publish news on some official website, you need to at least edit it, put a picture, and write tags. That takes time. And for Telegram, you can just write two sentences” — female, 47 years old (Respondent 11, Dataset 01)

“It's about the speed of information delivery. The fact that people posted right there, posted everything live, everything happened live. While journalists were going there, filming a report, submitting it all, you already knew what was happening through the Telegram channel. Speed was important here, yes, and convenience. Well, in general, Telegram was

3.3 Features influencing Telegram's use in crises

The adoption of Telegram as a primary platform for news consumption during crises is shaped by a complex interplay of factors. While the platform was initially utilized for communication, the escalation of the crisis context revealed additional attributes that resonated with users' informational needs. Thematic analysis of collected qualitative data was employed to identify and analyze Telegram's relevant features.

Thus, this section explores the key features that influenced users' decision-making and addresses **RQ1**: "What features were the users guided by when choosing the Telegram as the main platform for news consumption in the context of crisis/emergencies?"

Drawing on the qualitative data collected from in-depth interviews, the analysis highlights how Telegram was positioned as a widespread digital platform for news consumption during moments of acute crisis and heightened uncertainty.

Speed and access to real-time information. Access to real-time information plays a critical role in shaping individual and collective responses during crises (Palen et al., 2015). In highly dynamic and uncertain environments, the demand for immediate updates about safety or emerging threats becomes central to decision-making processes. Thereby, communication platforms that offer rapid information flows are often integrated into daily routines, supporting users' needs to monitor developments and maintain situational awareness.

The analysis of user experiences within this study revealed that speed and real-time access were among the primary factors influencing Telegram's adoption as a source of news during crisis events. Participants described using Telegram channels to follow urgent updates, verify unfolding situations, and coordinate actions within family groups or wider communities.

“The speed, the efficiency [of the distribution - ed.] of news... for me it just kind of characterizes reality and how everything happens. Well, for example, watching the war almost live, there, with a delay of 3-4 hours. I think that's never happened before” — male, 31 years old (Respondent 29, Dataset 01)

“There are, for example, Telegram channels that during the most acute moments of the war in 2022, they covered specifically and directly the events that were happening around. And what was happening in Ukraine. It was interesting, useful to read when it is not known at all where the Russian troops are and so on” — male, 25 years old (Respondent 37, Dataset 01)

The platform’s structure, which allows for rapid dissemination of messages across large audiences, was perceived as fitting these informational needs. However, the emphasis remained on the functional characteristics rather than on the platform itself, highlighting the broader importance of immediacy in crisis communication ecosystems.

“It seems to me that young people, who have already grown up in the digital age, it's just somehow easier for us, like this quick access to reading. For example, if I'm reading something on "Babel" in their Telegram channel, and I'm interested, I can then go to the site if I want to read more about this topic”— female, 25 years old (Respondent 39, Dataset 01)

“It seems to me that for my generation, searching on websites is simply not the first option. It's kind of like Telegram, it's just an automatic thought. I got used to consuming information through Telegram. And then

I just subscribed to a million different channels, just like “Ukrpravda” or Lachen. I also subscribed [to a lot of channels] in the first days of full-scale invasion. And it was all not enough for me, not enough. I subscribed to everything I could and just read it endlessly — female, 26 years old (Respondent 15, Dataset 01)

While speed and immediacy were critical for users during the early stages of crises, they also introduced challenges related to information overload and emotional exhaustion.

Several participants described the overwhelming experience of following hundreds of simultaneous updates, which eventually led to a saturation point where information was no longer processed meaningfully, but merely consumed habitually. It was also a motivation for some respondents to review their sets of channels and unsubscribe from those that often duplicated information or published so many posts that it took too much time to read them all.

“With the start of the full-scale war, since there was so much news, I immediately subscribed to a whole bunch of different Telegram channels. After a short period, from three to six months, I think, I started actively unsubscribing from everything that didn't carry a very large information load. Plus, I started unsubscribing from those who duplicate [information - ed.], because there are so many channels, they repost each other and when you read all this there, you come across the same thing 10 times a day and it gets really annoying” — male, 34 years old (Respondent 16, Dataset 01)

“I deleted those channels that had a lot of information. Well, you don't check it all the time. You have to work, you probably check it at the end of the day and you see that you have 100 unread messages in the channel.

Well, if you read them all, it will probably be about morning. These news are important, most likely, but I just don't have time to look through them all. Therefore I just kept such channels that I could check during the day, just take a sneak peek. Even if in the evening I see 20-30 unread messages, I'll have time to read them” — female, 53 years old (Respondent 31, Dataset 01)

“I think I started deleting channels quite fast, like in two weeks. It was the most intense, yes, like in the first days. So we read something [on Telegram - ed.] every 5 minutes and read it out loud to each other, who read what. And then I evacuated, I went to stay with my parents. And there I stopped reading [so much news - ed.]” — male, 29 years old (Respondent 17, Dataset 01)

The dynamic of real-time access to updates highlights a paradox: while real-time information fosters situational awareness, excessive immediacy without structure or mediation can contribute to user fatigue and cognitive strain (Stephens & Robertson, 2022). Telegram’s low-friction, high-velocity environment thus simultaneously assisted users in being informed and burdened them at the same time, shaping news consumption into a continuous, emotionally charged monitoring practice.

“When there's a trigger point in history, you need to know more. You need to understand what's happening, roughly speaking, to create this, I don't know how to put it, an illusion of control over situations that you actually can't control” — female, 30 years old (Respondent 20, Dataset 01)

In the context of this study, it becomes evident that the affordance of speed both facilitated initial platform adoption and influenced later patterns of

selective engagement, withdrawal, or moderation of information intake. Consequently, real-time access should be understood not only as a functional advantage but also as a factor requiring individual strategies for psychological self-regulation — a point further explored in the analysis of psychological well-being in subsequent sections of this chapter.

Unique information and user generated content (UGC). In crisis situations, the need for diverse and localized information often exceeds what traditional or official sources can provide. Respondents accounted for how they seek not only verified updates but also firsthand accounts, situational insights, and practical knowledge relevant to their immediate environment. This has already been partially touched upon above, in the recollections of those users who compare that user-generated content that is created on the spot and distributed online was, from their point of view, faster than the one from media organizations.

User-generated content (UGC) can be approached as a supplement that fills gaps left by formal communication channels and offers a less moderated and more dynamic flow of information. At the same time, not all respondents in the study unanimously perceive it as trustworthy and credible, and have their reservations about UGC.

“There was such an imbalance in official news sources, for example, on TV, what we saw and what we really needed to see and hear, what was happening. Telegram gave real pictures, real videos here and now, which were not being processed at that time, and that was “Truha” channel. It was rapidly gaining popularity. I think that's why it expanded quickly, because it had “hot” content, in fact, without any moderation. And you could understand where and what was happening, where the military actions were taking place, what was there, what the situation was. Well, it

probably was then, but I unsubscribed from “Truha” in the end” — male, 38 years old (Respondent 13, Dataset 01)

“I use Telegram to understand more about what is happening in my city. Especially all these air raid alarms, explosion sites, where it got, where it exploded. And plus it is useful, because in Telegram there are channels that write about the city, where there is an explosion, where there is a repair, where there is an accident, these things. By the way, when I travel to another city now, I find the channels of this city and subscribe to them while I am there, to know the news about this city. That is, Telegram is more utilitarian and operational” — male, 35 years old (Respondent 14, Dataset 01)

“The efficiency [of information - ed.] was more in demand than the volume or verification of information. Sometimes even good Telegram channels wrote that they were giving false information, that their source had made a mistake somewhere. But at a stage when decisions had to be made very quickly, and sometimes, as it seemed to me, people's lives depended on these decisions, it was so adequate for me” — female, 45 years old (Respondent 40, Dataset 01)

The analysis of users' responses within the study indicated a number of types of information that users were looking for in Telegram channels:

- **Quick information about events “here and now”:** Some respondents utilized Telegram for its speed of information dissemination, especially during crisis situations. Users could receive short messages about events almost instantly, which was important for making quick decisions.

- **Information about air threats and the security situation:** Many respondents used Telegram to receive quick notifications about air threats, and

the consequences of attacks, especially at the beginning of a full-scale invasion. Users subscribed to specialized channels such as the “Air Force of the Armed Forces of Ukraine” or local channels to stay up to date with events in their city or region.

- **Local and hyperlocal information:** Respondents reported using Telegram to receive news and information relevant to their city or a specific area. This could be information about local utilities, repairs, accidents, or other events important to daily life in a specific area. A common motivation for monitoring local news and events in different regions of Ukraine was to ensure the safety of family members or friends who live there.

- **"Informal" information and everyday life:** Some respondents believed that Telegram, especially so called “publics”, have “more life” and provide more "live" information, that is less formal compared to traditional media or official channels who represent governmental institutions or officials and political figures.

- **Direct information from official sources and government positions:** One respondent valued Telegram for the opportunity to have direct access to the statements and opinions of officials and politicians, as well as to official messages from government bodies such as the Kyiv City State Administration, the President's Office, and the police. In general, among pages representing government bodies or state institutions, the Air Force of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, local administrations, and pages of city mayors were most often cited as Telegram channels representing official bodies to which respondents subscribed.

- **Information from temporarily occupied territories and about missing persons:** Several respondents noted the functioning of Telegram publics that distribute graphic content about killed in action, wounded, and captured Ukrainian servicemen and servicewomen. According to respondents' recollections, viewing such content is very psychologically traumatic, and in the

absence of any official information about missing family members or friends, this remains one of the few options to get any information about missing persons. Also, through the channels, users could receive at least some information about temporarily occupied territories. At the same time, verification of such information, and sometimes even of the authors of Telegram channels of this type, is practically impossible.

“A little over a year ago, in February 2024, our close friend went missing. There was a high probability that he was captured [during combat - ed.] and... Well, I spent several months on these different Russian channels like “Opoznai hohla po chubu” and channels like that. I tried to find at least some trace, some clue, just something. [...] This is a kind of resource where they post photos of the bodies, photos of our prisoners, well, from all angles. And they comment. [...] I couldn't imagine that I would end up [monitoring - ed.] such resources. Where they, without being shy in their expressions, without holding back, comment... well, you see, the circumstances were so bad that, a little bit, I almost went crazy from all this. But it had to be done”— female, 44 years old (Respondent 27, Dataset 01)

“My friend's son is missing. There is a group, I think it's called "Iryna Ukraina", where they post photos of those who were captured and died. And she had difficulties with access. Then she asked me to write there and if I could ask some questions, because there was a guy who looked very similar to her son... in short, they have their own rules, I just corresponded with them there. Well, it was a very difficult task for me, let's put it this way, well, just morally difficult. [...] Well, in general, people go there out of some kind of hopelessness. I think so”— female, 53 years old (Respondent 31, Dataset 01)

“When we start looking for missing people, we start first with official sources, right? When there are no options with official information, then people start looking for some unofficial information, whether black, or some gray, well, at least some information. To somehow find out [about missing people]” — female, 50 years old (Respondent 30, Dataset 01)

Respondents who have had to search for such unofficial information through Telegram channels and groups say that in some of them, graphic images may be somewhat blurred, and in some they are published without any processing or editing. Thus, Telegram’s platform design offers specific affordances that make dissemination of such information possible in general. At the same time, these affordances come with significant drawbacks. Telegram’s low level of content moderation enables the circulation of graphic, emotionally distressing material that can be deeply traumatic for users engaged in such searches. The anonymity of channel administrators and the difficulty of verifying sources add to users’ vulnerability, often leaving them to navigate a space filled with potentially misleading or harmful content.

In summary, all of these types of unique information were perceived by users as distinct features that were little or not available to them on other digital platforms.

“There is no news on other platforms. For example, I read the news on Instagram, I am subscribed to major international agencies there. But, unfortunately, Reuters or BBC do not write about whether missiles are flying over Kyiv. Therefore, the information that I need is only available on Telegram. This is the unique content offer that Telegram makes, compared to others. I simply have no other choice” — female, 45 years old (Respondent 40, Dataset 01)

*“Sometimes I need to look for something specific or something that won't be published in the regular news. Then I'll go to "Truha" and it will be posted there, because they usually publish some photos, like something was bombed somewhere or some accident, if I need something like that. Or I can go check some local publics. We have this public "The Good Chernivtsi", it used to be "The F*** Chernivtsi", but they got renamed” — male, 34 years old (Respondent 16, Dataset 01)*

“Most people are interested in seeing reality. For example, me. I sometimes go to “Truha”, but I have a normal attitude towards what I can generally [see - ed.] there. Pictures that may look like wounds, explosive injuries. When I was a student, I once had a seminar in the morgue, I basically saw everything and so I am not scared by it” — female, 26 years old (Respondent 22, Dataset 01)

While Telegram offers access to otherwise unavailable information, it does so in a way that places the burden of interpretation, verification, and emotional processing entirely on the user. This dual nature of informational immediacy and cognitive and psychological risks outlines Telegram’s characteristic role in the informational ecology of digital platforms.

Negotiating credibility and trust. Thematic analysis based on the first set of data collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews with Telegram users showed that they have their own strategies and approaches to assessing information credibility and reliability. Although the research questions posed in this study do not touch upon challenges such as the spread of disinformation, misinformation, and propaganda through the Telegram platform, it would also be ill-considered to ignore these respondents' reflections, which often surfaced during the interviews with users.

“Probably, in terms of reliability, Telegram is not the best option, because there were cases, and not isolated ones, when news were posted on Telegram, then the guys checked the information and it turned out to be false. The news did not get on the official website, did not get on any official broadcast, and it was simply removed from Telegram. But it had already been noticed there. The disadvantage is the greater likelihood of unreliable information, even on verified channels” — female, 47 years old (Respondent 11, Dataset 01)

Rather than fully trusting or distrusting the platform, users described a process of selectively negotiating credibility, based on a combination of personal judgement, past experience, and social cues. Trust was often extended to specific channels rather than to the platform as a whole. Participants reported favoring channels they perceived as consistent, well-sourced, or affiliated with known institutions or journalists.

“There are Telegram channels that I completely trust and there is no reason not to trust. Like the channel that I subscribe to, “Suspilne”. I know that I trust “Suspilne” 100%. But they don't write about missiles and all” — male, 34 years old (Respondent 16, Dataset 01)

“You have to be careful with any news. It's easier with Telegram, because you just don't subscribe to channels like "Truha" or something like that, and it somehow bypasses you” — female, 30 years old (Respondent 03, Dataset 01)

“I honestly haven't encountered such unreliable news, because I read [channels] like Babel, I never noticed them having this issue. But in

general, I understand that it is extremely easy to launch some unreliable news and it will spread very, very quickly, because all these channels can be so skillfully faked. [...] Well, it seems to me that it is very difficult to track it later” — female, 31 years old (Respondent 24, Dataset 01)

Thus, by limiting the number of channels to which users subscribe and making active choices about the types of channels themselves, users build boundaries with information, trying to reduce the intensity of news consumption processes and the time and effort spent on their processing or the potential need for verification. Respondents who choose this strategy also noted that they rarely encountered the need to additionally verify information or search for its original source.

“For me, Telegram is just like a mailbox. Whatever you subscribe to, they'll just throw it in your mailbox, that's all. I don't see Telegram influencing the editorial policy of any channels or publics. For God's sake, write whatever you want”— male, 34 years old (Respondent 16, Dataset 01)

Several noted that channels with large followings or verified authorship held more weight in their assessments, while others emphasized the importance of tone and language in evaluating trustworthiness. At the same time, some respondents voiced skepticism about Telegram channels that posted overly emotional or sensational content, which they associated with lower credibility.

“I am questioning the reliability of this [news]. I understand that even our government can manipulate us through this news, through these Telegram channels, because they can distort something, present something from a different perspective. And if you go through different Telegram channels, you can understand whose channel it is, because in one channel they will

praise Klitschko [Mayor of Kyiv Vitaliy Klitschko - ed.], in another channel they will praise Poroshenko [former president of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko - ed.], and there [somewhere else] they will praise someone else” — female, 31 years old (Respondent 12, Dataset 01)

“I like [channels - ed.] with no likes, no reactions, no comments. It is just an information publication, I trust it. And I don't perceive these emotions in news, I don't perceive news as emotionally as, for example, on other channels. Because when you see there: "Oh, God, what a trash!", you are already emotionally, negatively disposed, it already affects you” — female, 30 years old (Respondent 03, Dataset 01)

This negotiation process frequently involved cross-checking across multiple channels or platforms. One participant described using numerous Telegram channels not as a sole source, but as part of a triangulation strategy to confirm information: *“In fact, it's just for triangulating data”* (male, 29 years old). However, sometimes comparing information from multiple channels can be quite superficial and to some extent lose its benefits. For example, one of the respondents noted channels from the “Truha” network as his main sources of information (Respondent 02, Data set 01). Thus, comparing information between these channels does not create additional verification of the content consumed.

“Channels often duplicate each other, but I subscribed to both so that there were two sources through which I could check them. It's more reliable. There's a better chance of getting a prompt and accurate picture” — male, 31 years old (Respondent 29, Dataset 01)

“I chose a few channels that are always, well, the kind that write up-to-date information that you can trust. And that's it, that's [enough - ed.]”— female, 30 years old (Respondent 20, Dataset 01)

Respondents also mentioned comparing updates from Telegram with traditional media, YouTube, or other social networks to evaluate the reliability of claims. The most frequently mentioned strategies were to search for similar information or news on channels of large institutionalized media organizations, such as “Ukrainska Pravda”, “Suspilne”, “Babel”, or “Dzerkalo Tyzhnia”. Searching for the original source was also part of the strategy for verifying information by Telegram users. These practices reflect users’ active role in shaping their informational environment, often compensating for Telegram’s lack of editorial oversight with their own vigilance or media literacy.

At the same time, trust was also relational and contextual. In closed or private channels, trust could be based on familiarity with other members or the shared purpose of the group. Participants described feeling more confident in the reliability of information within community-based spaces, especially when tied to volunteer efforts, neighborhood alerts, or personal connections. This suggests that the perception of trustworthiness was not fixed, but shaped dynamically through usage patterns, interpersonal networks, and the broader media landscape during wartime. However, later I will return in greater detail to the formation of communities and mutual support systems around the platform's channels in one of the following subsections.

Thus, Telegram’s affordance of both wide-reaching broadcast capabilities and individualized information streams positioned it as a flexible tool in complex crisis environments.

Air raid alarms and urgent notifications. Many respondents within the study noted that they receive notifications about air raid alarms and the

movement of air threats, as well as the consequences and aftermath of attacks via Telegram channels.

Respondents paid attention to local specificity and that some Telegram channels provided localized information about air threats — for example, specifying which neighbourhood, city or which part of Ukraine was targeted by missile or drone strike. This was seen as more useful than generalized national-level alerts:

“I can check the news throughout the day [...] especially if it's related to an air raid, I especially read a lot about where there are explosions and what to prepare for. Especially if there are assault drones going somewhere [on the territory of Ukraine - ed.]” — female, 26 years old (Respondent 15, Dataset 01)

“I am subscribed to several Telegram channels, where usually [I get - ed.] air raid alerts, reports about the missile danger, how it all happens there. About the frequency of alerts. Well, but again it's situational, when, for instance, Shahed drones target the Lviv region. I need to know where they are” — female, 26 years old (Respondent 22, Dataset 01)

“I don't rely on one source. I have about four or five of them. And those that I've been using for a long time. Well, both for personal security and for work, I need them. In addition, you can see statistics, in a timeline format. It's convenient, for example, to look at statistics on air attacks for a month on the channel of the Air Force of the Armed Forces of Ukraine” — male, 28 years old (Respondent 18, Dataset 01)

“Here, the details are also important [ed.]. For example, if the Ukrainian Air Forces wrote that drones are being shot down over Kyiv, then

Telegram channels will write that they are being shot down over Troyeshchyna neighbourhood. And I know that I don't have to worry so much, because Troyeshchyna is far away. Or if they write that it's Shevchenko district, near the Artem plant, then for me it will be more important. That is, details are also important”— male, 35 years old (Respondent 14, Dataset 01)

However, the reliance on Telegram for urgent notifications also introduced tensions around reliability and emotional impact. Several participants noted the overwhelming frequency of alerts or expressed concern about the accuracy of certain reports. Others limit notifications for reasons of reducing psychological pressure and stress. As one of the reposts noted:

“It seems to me that it is not useful for me to know in detail what kind of air threat is there, where it is approaching from. It seems to me that it only tires me out. I think that this is not useful, irrelevant information for me”— male, 29 years old (Respondent 17, Dataset 01)

“I think that when it starts to explode there, then you rush to check the news. I turn off the internet at night and I can be woken up only like today [because of explosions - ed.]. When it starts to boom a lot and the air raid alarm goes off, and the dog starts barking nearby, then I'm like that [checking news and updates - ed.]. I don't follow them 24/7” — female, 53 years old (Respondent 31, Dataset 01)

Despite these challenges, the platform's ability to deliver fast, location-specific warnings in real time was widely acknowledged as a crucial feature supporting its widespread adoption during periods of acute crisis. It also became a source of alerts for aftermath and recovery. Telegram was not only

used during the attack ("air raid alert active") but also after attacks — to get updates about damages, casualties, power outages, or safety instructions. Thus, Telegram served the full cycle, starting from warning to monitoring and then post-event information.

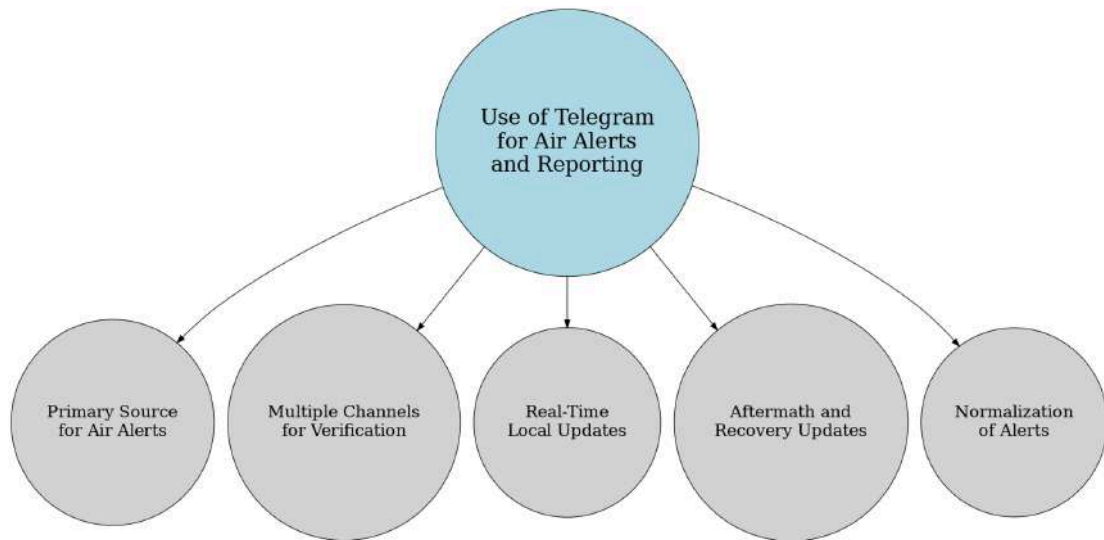
The respondents' testimonies also point to a certain process of normalization of constant alerts. Some respondents indicated they received so many warnings that it became part of their background awareness. Constant exposure to alerts shifted how they reacted or in some cases, even chose to turn off these notifications and not respond to them.

“Well, we get notifications... So, well, it's an air raid alert, and ok, it's an air raid alert. Okay. We're used to it. I get notifications from Kyiv Digital. And on Telegram. And that's all. I don't particularly follow this, when there's an alert, when the alert is over. Let's say, my rhythm of life changes little” — male, 38 years old (Respondent 13, Dataset 01)

“It is clear that we are already in the second, third year of the [full-scale - ed.] war. We started to set some security limits for ourselves, to decide when to hide [in the bomb shelter - ed.] and when not. And I switched to Telegram, because it is more accurate. I subscribed to several channels at first, but then I realized that they simply duplicate or repeat information one after another. And in order not to worry too much about it, I kept one channel for myself and I track [air raid alerts - ed.] through it” — male, 31 years old (Respondent 29, Dataset 01)

Figure 5.

Use of Telegram for air raid alerts and reporting on air threats.



Note. Created by the author using data from semi-structured in-depth interviews with active Telegram users.

The integration of Telegram into users' daily practices for receiving air raid alarms and urgent notifications reflects the platform's distinctive role during periods of acute threat. Interviewees reported relying on Telegram for near-instant alerts about air attacks, often describing it as faster and more regionally precise than traditional warning systems, like a push notification on phone, TV announcements, notifications through specialized applications such as "Kyiv Digital". However, "Kyiv Digital" is focused locally on the city of Kyiv and city services for the capital. So this app has a narrowly focused application and target audience of users. Respondents also rarely mentioned alternative ways to set up and receive timely personalized notifications about air raid alerts and air threats.

“In terms of air raid alerts, in my opinion, nothing has been invented better than Telegram. Because at the beginning of the invasion, we tried to watch the live broadcast of “Suspilne”, tried to follow some news sites,

but it turns out that both the mayor's channel and the channel of [local - ed.] Suspilne work better than their official pages or sites” — female, 47 years old (Respondent 11, Dataset 01)

“Especially at the beginning, when the air raid alarm could last for 3 hours and you didn't know what was happening. Providing real information allowed you to at least not be in absolute anxiety for three hours. Still, when there is this uncertainty, it puts quite a lot of psychological pressure, so when you can see if something is happening or if it's just an air alarm all over the country because a MIG plane took off - it's a completely different feeling. So I would say that it had a very, very big importance. Would it be good if there was an application like "Digital Ukraine" from the very beginning, where it would be written about it, or would people use it? Yes. Is there such an application? No” — male, 27 years old (Respondent 38, Dataset 01)

“As a news source, I would happily not use [Telegram] at all if there weren't air threats, air attacks. If there weren't, I think I would only use it as a messenger” — male, 35 years old (Respondent 14, Dataset 01)

In addition to real-time alerts, participants used Telegram to access information regarding the aftermath of attacks, including infrastructure damage, safety advisories, and service disruptions. Several users noted that in search of this type of information, as well as photos and videos from places that were attacked, they can even go to monitor channels that they usually don't subscribe to and don't consume much news from.

“But sometimes I can go to some "Truha" or a network of channels "Realnyy", whatever. I search for where I can theoretically see some

information leaks. I know it's bad, but when I hear explosions up close, I need to know what it was and where. But I don't subscribe, I can just go in, search for photos and leave” — female, 26 years old (Respondent 15, Dataset 01)

In sum, integration of Telegram into users’ daily routines for monitoring air raid alarms and air threats illustrates the platform’s peculiar role in personal risk management during a crisis. Respondents valued its capacity to provide rapid, real-time alerts, as well as localized information that allowed them to assess immediate danger by district, city, or region.

Telegram’s chronological feed, channel-based architecture, and ability to follow multiple sources simultaneously enabled users to construct personalized notification ecosystems. These affordances supported users in tracking not only incoming threats but also the aftermath of attacks, such as reports on damage and recovery efforts. While some participants acknowledged psychological strain and alert fatigue, the platform’s flexibility, location-specific updates, and ease of access remained key factors contributing to its widespread adoption in high-stakes, time-sensitive situations.

As users adapted to the need for immediate situational awareness, concerns regarding the privacy, confidentiality, and security of their communication also became more prominent.

Confidentiality and anonymity in the context of war. In terms of internet use and digital platforms functioning, **anonymity** refers to the ability of users to engage with online content, services, or communication platforms without disclosing identifiable information (Nitschinsk et al., 2023). An anonymous user cannot be easily traced or associated with their real identity, allowing minimal personal exposure.

At the same time, **confidentiality** relates to how a platform or service manages and protects the personal information that it does collect (Novak,

2014). In ideal situations, platforms ensure that any identifiable data is stored securely and not disclosed without the user's consent. Thus, while anonymity removes or masks the identity, confidentiality safeguards it when it must be known.

Both concepts are at the core of the notion of internet privacy and directly influence how users perceive safety and trust in digital environments. In periods of political and military upheaval, maintaining anonymity can shield users from surveillance or targeted attacks, while strong confidentiality practices can protect sensitive communications from interception or unauthorized access (Asenbaum, 2018; Marwick & boyd, 2014).

Telegram positions itself as a platform that supports both anonymity and confidentiality to varying degrees (Telegram, 2017). Users are not required to reveal their real names and can limit the visibility of their phone numbers, allowing for a degree of anonymity. At the same time, it is not an absolute mechanism for protecting online privacy and personal data (Doffman, 2024).

Among respondents, attitudes towards issues of anonymity and privacy when interacting with the Telegram app varied. The majority of respondents indicated that they gave little thought to anonymity and confidentiality when interacting with the platform. At the same time, the anonymity of Telegram channels had mostly negative connotations among users.

“Well, these “public” type channels can be awful. And they are usually anonymous. That's the basic idea, when they're anonymous, it gives them free rein and there's always a lot of cringe going on there” — female, 53 years old (Respondent 31, Dataset 01)

“I don't really care. Well, if I want maximum anonymity, I'll just open an incognito window from my laptop or from my phone. And actually I'll be surfing those sites where I don't care [about anonymity - ed.]. And if we're

talking about news, then, well, like, whatever” — female, 31 years old (Respondent 19, Dataset 01)

“I won't read news channels where I don't understand who writes in them. That's the 100% factor. As for my anonymity, I don't have any concerns about the channels I read. I don't really see any threat in whether it's visible who reads it, who is subscribed to it, or not” — female, 22 years old (Respondent 21, Dataset 01)

Nevertheless, users who have had specific experiences related to full-scale war have noted that in certain contexts they consider issues related to digital security. They reported exercising greater caution, which included limiting interactions with unknown channels, avoiding public comments, and being more selective in forwarding sensitive content. As a result, a few users described adopting personal strategies for digital hygiene, such as consuming information passively without interacting (no comments, reactions, or forwarding posts). Nonetheless, the majority of respondents interviewed for this study did not report such strategies.

“I think that in some cases it is important. There are sensitive topics now, in our situation, military related [topics - ed.]. For example, I remember the situation when I deleted everything, my photos from social networks, from messengers and I unsubscribed from local channels. I was in Irpin and there were battles nearby. Some anonymity was needed. I didn't understand what would happen here tomorrow, if there was an occupation. And maybe then they will search through these Telegram channels, sources, then you will end up in some kind of “purge” at the FSB or somewhere else. Well, that is, this is a moment of anonymity. It is important. Sometimes it is important. Yes, therefore, yes, especially in our

war-related circumstances”— male, 38 years old (Respondent 13, Dataset 01)

“Anonymity and confidentiality were not very important to me... Although I have a certain fear that I will be stopped at a checkpoint, that my phone will be checked, I have that fear. But I don't have anything that I would be ashamed of, and that I could be arrested for. But yes, for men there's still this probability, that they will stop you, that your phone will be checked. And that's why I can't read various public forums...” — male, 29 years old (Respondent 17, Dataset 01)

Overall, the experiences shared by respondents illustrate that exposure to real wartime conditions prompts a more nuanced and situational approach to digital security. Users who are closer to hostilities and war affected zones demonstrated an elevated and context-dependent vigilance regarding what information they accessed, shared, and trusted.

“This is the price we pay for anonymity, that everyone can be anonymous to one degree or another. I remember that when I worked at my previous job, we also looked for information from the so-called DPR, LPR [self proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) and Luhansk Donetsk People's Republic (LNR) - ed.]. You couldn't access their websites or you could only do it through a VPN, well, to make it more difficult. And they posted on Telegram absolutely freely. This was important and it was an opportunity to feel somehow safer when you had to conduct research. So, it's not you from your personal Facebook page subscribing to some LPR militia. You can just search [information in Telegram channels - ed.] without any subscription, take a look at the information and leave” — male, 28 years old (Respondent 18, Dataset 01)

“I sometimes read Telegram channels of Melitopol. To know what’s happening in the city, to understand how it is there, in the occupied territory... I just look, I ponder about it... there are many stories that can be told from the temporarily occupied territory”— female, 27 years old (Respondent 38, Dataset 01)

For most users, anonymity was perceived as a background feature rather than an active concern, and the anonymity of channel authors often raised skepticism about trustworthiness rather than providing a sense of safety.

The interviews suggest that confidentiality and anonymity on platforms like Telegram are constructed over time based on perceived personal threat levels. While everyday information consumption habits remained largely unchanged for many, the pressures of full-scale war prompted a portion of users to engage in thoughtful control over their digital activities and presence. This highlights the contextual and experience-based nature of privacy needs during wartime, where trust in the platform's technical protections intersected with personal strategies for minimizing exposure.

It is noteworthy that several users mentioned the Russian origin of the Telegram in this context. At the same time, the respondents did not have a clear position on the matter.

“Telegram is also under a question, because of Pavel Durov, because it has Russian roots. [...] And it can be controlled, well, let's say, either by the Russian authorities, or I don't really understand how everything works there now in terms of independence...”— male, 36 years old (Respondent 26, Dataset 01)

“I'm really worried about Telegram, its Russian origin, it really worries me. But I'm also worried that there's no really good analogue, that is, I can't find somewhere where I could read the news more comfortably. And it's really sad that there's no such distinction”— female, 22 years old (Respondent 21, Dataset 01)

“Yes, I use it, and I suffer [because of it - ed.] ... well, as long as the Armed Forces are there, at least, I will also use it. Because it is really convenient, it is compact, it is fast, it is always on my smartphone. So yes, I do not plan to give it up yet. But if Telegram finally is banned everywhere, then I will be happy to switch to WhatsApp”— female, 31 years old (Respondent 24, Dataset 01)

At the same time, the respondents considered the WhatsApp platform to be the closest potential alternative to Telegram, as the platform that has the most similar set of features and affordances to Telegram.

Community, solidarity, and sense of support. Another feature that was regularly mentioned in respondents' testimonies concerned the sense of belonging and community that was formed in the context of users' interaction with the Telegram digital platform. During intensive monitoring of news on Telegram at the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, respondents noted a sense of security not only from the information itself (notifications and messages about danger or possible threats), but also from a certain solidarity with others. As one respondent put it:

"It's one thing to sit in a basement and think: 'A rocket is going to kill me right now.' And another thing is when people write in the comments: 'I'm scared too,' and someone there supports me" — male, 28 years old (Respondent 18, Dataset 01)

Observing other users' reactions (likes, dislikes, emoticons) gave an understanding of the "*median temperature in the room*", that is, the general mood of the audience (female, 26 years old). For some respondents, it was a way to see how others reacted to certain news and events, and this could confirm their own thoughts and feelings. It gave the feeling that "*I'm not the only one who thinks this way*" (female, 50 years old). Reading the comments, although with certain caveats and caution, also allowed users to understand what other people thought about a particular event.

“Again, when the conflict between Zelensky and Trump took place [Trump–Zelenskyy Oval Office meeting on February 28, 2025 - ed.]. I read almost all the comments I came across. I want to know what my nation thinks about it. ... Well, again, this is also monitoring your own bubble. That's what people generally think about this situation and how comparable my reflections are with these people” — female, 30 years old (Respondent 20, Dataset 01)

Telegram channels also began to perform the function of monitoring needs within smaller communities and organizing aid or volunteer initiatives. At the same time, these are not necessarily specialized channels created specifically for such purposes.

“We have a local channel that notifies us about air raid alarms, about threats... but we live in an area where there are less threats. And something is needed somewhere, and we have volunteers... So I have two channels that are active every day, and they are not muted, they are constantly active. And this is with alarms, notifications and plus where volunteers are engaged. To collect something for someone, for our guys

and girls (in the Armed Forces of Ukraine - ed.), to go somewhere, if someone needs help. We can have [humanitarian - ed.] aid accumulated on our base too, so we can distribute it as well” — female, 42 years old (Respondent 28, Dataset 01)

Several respondents also noted cases of subscribers of certain channels joining together for charity collections in favor of the Ukrainian Armed Forces. These examples indicate that Telegram was used not only for receiving information, experiencing a sense of solidarity and involvement in the events in the country, but also for mobilizing practical support within communities, including digital ones.

“Probably, all pro-Ukrainian Telegram channels regularly hold fundraisers or repost about fundraisers [for the army - ed.]. And this is also an opportunity to do it quite easily. I don’t have to consciously think that I need to donate, to go to some website, find the details, and so on. There is a post [in Telegram - ed.] right away, what unit it is for, there may be a link [for additional information - ed.] There is a link to Monobank right away, for example, and this is very convenient. It is like a reminder, if you don’t want to, then you don’t want to donate, and if you want to, you can throw in some money. And this is also convenient. I think it also forms a certain community, because we collected, for example, 200,000 UAH in one day. Whatever it was, it gives me at least a little charge of positive emotions” — male, 28 years old (Respondent 18, Dataset 01)

The same respondent also noted that channels that have active and detailed air threat alerts sometimes post requests for donations for their operation, and he considers these requests appropriate: *“Since I actually use these channels, I feel grateful, and I have the opportunity to donate for them easily... For me it shows*

that I'm willing to pay for quality information, especially when I'm not kind of forced to.”

Another user noted that she has a channel where she receives psychological support from other participants. This is a small closed community, the number of members of which does not exceed 250 people. It was once a public channel with a large number of subscribers, which later transformed into a closed space for its limited number of members.

“When the full-scale invasion began in 2022, this community became closed. It's quite local, someone has to know someone to join. Let's say, there are no strangers. But it's very interesting and supportive, and we communicate there both when there are missile strikes and when there are fundraisers for one of our female friends, because many of them have either husbands or children fighting [in the Armed Forces of Ukraine - ed.]. We help each other. Well, in general, you could say it's [community - ed.] for the soul, because sometimes there are things that I can't tell my family. I write there first and somehow the girls will share this experience with me” — female, 53 years old (Respondent 31, Dataset 01)

At the same time, respondents also noted negative aspects in the formation of communities around Telegram channels. Most often, they drew attention to the large number of bots that could leave comments or reactions that annoyed or caused negative emotions among users. Another negative aspect was that the ability to use the platform anonymously led to users starting conflicts online, mostly through the commenting feature. This was perceived as the downside of anonymity, which undermined constructive communication within channels:

“The downside is that people can allow themselves to conflict, write some nasty things. This very often ends up in mutual insults in the comments.

And it's clear that no one sees who wrote this. And people just go wild, allow themselves this negativity. This is really bad. This is the bad side of anonymity, let's say” — male, 38 years old (Respondent 13, Dataset 01)

“Comments are now filled with bots or inadequate people. And this has already ceased to be some adequate discussion between living people who really share some of their thoughts. Comments are used as one of the tools of political confrontation, disinformation, imposing narratives... I have no desire to comment on any news” — male, 45 years old (Respondent 25, Dataset 01)

In summary, Telegram users described their experiences in employing this application as a space for experiencing a sense of community, solidarity, and emotional support. Affordances connected with news consumption, combined with messenger functions for communication, and partial embedding of commenting sections and pictographic reactions, provided means to exercise those community building aspirations.

While these processes go hand in hand with negative aspects, like bot activity or heated discussions and arguments in the comments, the processes of emotional resilience and civic participation were prominent reflections noted by respondents when describing their experiences interacting with the app.

3.4 Platform’s affordances and user’s choices while forming news consumption routines

The development of users' news consumption routines on Telegram during the full-scale invasion was strongly influenced by the platform’s specific affordances — the technological features and interaction possibilities that it offers. Telegram's channel structure, notifications, the ease of joining or leaving

content streams, and the option of anonymity shaped how users navigate their daily information practices and news consumption. Therefore, this subsection contributes to addressing the **RQ2**: “How do the platform's affordances affect the users' choices when forming news consumption routines.”

Respondents emphasized that the flexibility and immediacy of Telegram allowed them to construct personalized flows of information, adjusting the number and type of channels they followed according to perceived relevance, trustworthiness, and emotional capacity to process the content.

Many users developed selective habits over time, choosing to mute certain channels or limit their exposure to distressing content. Such strategies became means of managing information overload and emotional fatigue which was addressed to some extent earlier in this chapter. While at the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion some participants actively sought as much information as possible, over time they reported becoming more selective, curating a smaller set of channels that provided timely but not overwhelming updates. The availability of private or specialized channels enabled users to control their information intake and to align it with their specific needs—whether it was receiving localized air raid alerts, news about military developments, or updates from trusted volunteer networks.

Telegram's affordances also allowed users to navigate between passive and active forms of news engagement. Some respondents preferred to consume news passively by reading short summaries without participating in discussions, taking advantage of Telegram's unidirectional information flows.

Others engaged more interactively, using comments, reactions, and reposting functions to express opinions or sharing information with their close circle of family members, friends, and colleagues. The platform's features thus accommodated different levels of participation depending on individual users' emotional states, trust levels, and perceived need for expression or connection at any given moment.

Overall, Telegram's technological structure did not simply deliver news but actively shaped users' routines of information gathering, emotional regulation, and even indirectly civic engagement as well. The combination of speed, personalization, and low barriers to switching between channels enabled users to exercise significant agency in how they consumed and interacted with news.

However, the very flexibility that empowered users also placed the burden of information management on individuals, requiring ongoing adjustments to maintain a balance between staying informed and users' personal psychological well-being.

Sensing and exercising control. Respondents reflected a lot about control they have within Telegram, which comes in many forms and at many levels, when they were asked about their interactions and choices made while using the application. This included control over the volume and intensity of information flow, control over notifications, management of channels and sources of information, control over interaction with other users within the application, control over the amount of time spent within the platform, and control over personal data and shared files.

All of these nuanced forms of control were identified during thematic analysis in the first and second stages of coding at the descriptive code level. However, they were later synthesised into a single code group that encompasses users' sensing and exercising control within the Telegram in general.

The vast majority of users engaged in the study described developing conscious strategies to manage the stream of incoming information, particularly during periods of heightened threat as in 2022, with the beginning of a full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. Initially, many users subscribed to a wide range of channels to maximize situational knowledge; however, over time, most respondents reported on actively curating and controlling their subscriptions — unfollowing sources that were repetitive, overly emotional, or contributed to

anxiety. This selective engagement allowed users to feel like they are actively in charge of their informational environment, balancing the overwhelming influx of news and alerts.

“It seems to me that the first thing [that is important - ed.] is the concise format of messages. That is, a very, very high concentration of what you need. And the second point is that you can quickly personalize what you want to read. You make a news feed for yourself. You subscribe and unsubscribe to the channels that you want to read. Telegram will never shove some "Life Stories" group into my feed, one where content like "Mom called that she wouldn't live any longer." And then there's the continuation of the story in the comments, where there's also dad [getting involved - ed.] I don't know at what point Facebook started pushing and pushing this type of pages, some people, no-names, some stupid posts that I'm absolutely not interested in. I am already tired of clicking on these buttons that I'm not interested in. And that's why I stopped going there [to Facebook]”— male, 34 years old (Respondent 16, Dataset 01)

“In Telegram, I simply choose what to read. For example, in Facebook, the feed shows me something that is currently popular, or controversial, or resonant. But if I have to choose, my choice is much more limited than what is offered to me”— female, 47 years old (Respondent 11, Dataset 01)

“In Telegram, you can subscribe, generally speaking, to a Telegram channel and you won't have a feed where posts from all over Telegram will be thrown in. Suppose your aunt from the Mykolaiv region posted something because she saw the news, it seemed true to her or she was outraged. [...] The problem with Facebook is that, for example, when you

scroll through the feed, there is a lot of what your acquaintances, friends are posting. All your relatives, who are 40+, are on Facebook, this is one of the few places to communicate with them. They post a lot of news that you don't want to see” — male, 25 years old (Respondent 23, Dataset 01)

This flexibility in choosing channels and the variety of content they offer, the ability to quickly subscribe and unsubscribe from channels, is also perceived by users as a form of control over their information sources and the quality of information itself. They express that they feel more in charge of what ends up in their newsfeeds and that they can exclude not only content they don't like, but also content they don't trust.

“Telegram is almost an unmoderated network... But I try to get my information from more or less official sources. Hromadske, for example. It is a media with a reputation. If some strange things happen there, like irrelevant or unreliable news, there will be a refutation [...] Well, it's easier with Telegram, because you simply don't subscribe to things like "Truha" or something like that, and somehow you stay out of it”— female, 30 years old (Respondent 20, Dataset 01)

“This is a real discomfort [doubts about the credibility of news - ed.], but you still continue to use this application. It makes me uncomfortable when other people share unverified news with me. And not just news, but some very strange analytics or interpretation of this news. I really don't like that” — male, 29 years old (Respondent 17, Dataset 01)

Notification management is another aspect of how users exercised control. Respondents often muted the vast majority of channels or configured their notification settings to receive only high-priority alerts, such as air raid warnings

or personal messages. This ability to customize the flow of interruptions was perceived as a vital tool for self-regulation.

“A big advantage is that you can turn off notifications. In all my Telegram news channels and those [about professional development - ed], when I read something, I have notifications turned off so that they don't bother me. That is, only personal messages, when someone messaging me [directly -ed.], I get notifications”— female, 31 years old (Respondent 32, Dataset 01)

“The first thing I do is mute notifications because I don't like being distracted. My job is already connected with being contacted by other people constantly, and therefore I don't want unnecessary notifications that are of low priority. And reading the news in such an active phase of my day is a low priority for me. I don't let myself be distracted. But I want to read them when I have time”— female, 47 years old (Respondent 11, Dataset 01)

Some users noted that, without actively managing notifications, the constant stream of alerts could produce a sense of helplessness or chronic stress. Thus, notification settings were not just technical features but also became integral to users' coping strategies during the acute crisis and also in times of relative stability.

“There was a period when the only news that was consumed was Telegram, well, besides the TV. It was that endless doom scrolling, when you refresh the feed, look at what's new, when you have a bunch of notifications. Probably my desire to mute everything [all notifications - ed.] comes from that time, when it was really important to know what was

happening. Because you're in a small town in the Lviv region, here everything is calm and quiet, people go shopping, everything seems to be fine. And there half the country is set on fire. That's why it was a crazy flow of news, a crazy amount of information consumed at that time. This doom scrolling, it was just crazy then” — female, 30 years old (Respondent 20, Dataset 01)

“I heard some echoes of it, a plane flying by or some kind of explosion, but in fact I got all the information from the news. And so the first few days it was just some kind of continuous doom scrolling. Scanning channels just trying to understand what was happening and how” — male, 31 years old (Respondent 29, Dataset 01)

In this sense, Telegram’s infrastructure supported a form of situational agency, where individuals could maintain proximity to critical alerts (such as air raid alerts) while distancing themselves from non-essential or emotionally burdening content. Such affordances did not eliminate the pressures of constant connectivity, but they enabled a degree of user-driven adaptation within a volatile informational landscape.

Interpersonal interactions within Telegram was another identified dimension for control. This includes both direct communication in personal messages and interaction through comments or pictographic reactions. While some respondents valued the ability to comment and engage with others, many expressed a preference for limiting direct interactions to avoid unnecessary conflict, exposure to misinformation, or emotional volatility.

“I practically don't do this [comment - ed.]. Because I understand that there are hundreds of comments posted at once. No one actually reads them. Maybe people read the first dozen comments there, but then it's

simply physically impossible to read. So writing something there or getting involved in arguments... Well, I don't like that either" — male, 38 years old (Respondent 13, Dataset 01)

"I sometimes look at my friends when someone writes [comment - ed.]: "Well done Klitschko" [Mayor of Kyiv Vitaliy Klitschko - ed.], and this immediately causes some controversy further in the comments, it can already be a certain conflict, because a person writes you arguments why he is not a good guy, that he did something bad. And immediately the argument begins, the exchange of comments. And I would not want to do that. I do not take part in this and I do not see the point in it"— female, 31 years old (Respondent 12, Dataset 01)

Several participants highlighted the importance of choosing when and how to engage with discussions, relying on Telegram's affordances (such as disabling comments or simply lurking through comments sections) to maintain autonomy over their level of participation. In this way, the platform's design offered mechanisms to exercise not only informational but also social control. As one of the respondents put it, it is convenient for her to *"go to the channel, read, and then leave unnoticed"* (female, 31 years old, Respondent 19, Dataset 01).

Several users also reported that they noticed how channel administrators disabled the comments section in advertising or posts they identified as sort of online "puff pieces". Thus, for them, it was another quick mechanism to assess the independence and reliability of information within the platform, without involving more complex and time-consuming verification methods.

Finally, control over personal data and digital traces was mentioned by a subset of respondents, especially those more sensitive to privacy and security risks. Some users described managing their profile visibility, controlling who

could see their phone number, photograph, and other profile details. They also limit the app's access to their list of contacts and media files on the phone.

“I use Telegram a lot, but everything is concealed there [personal information - ed.] and I don't give access to my photos, videos, or contact list. That is, as much as it could be done so that it can't be used [by the app - ed.]. I did it”— female, 31 years old (Respondent 24, Dataset 01)

Another form of control reported by respondents was time spent within the app. And while it was one of the less mentioned forms of control, it overlapped significantly with routines such as source diversity in feed sets, verification of information, and engaging with comments and pictographic reactions. For many, this also involved establishing personal routines — checking updates periodically, often at predictable intervals during the day, rather than remaining constantly connected.

One user reported accessing the app *“almost constantly [...] every hour or two”* (male, 28 years old, Respondent 18, Dataset 01), suggesting a habitual but spaced pattern of engagement. Others, particularly during nighttime hours or moments of psychological strain, deliberately disengaged from Telegram, turning off notifications or disconnecting from the internet altogether. This form of time-bound regulation helped users avoid the emotional fatigue associated with continuous alerts and updates. In this way, temporal control emerged as both a coping mechanism and an active strategy of media engagement.

These temporal practices, like pacing, muting, turning off access at night, show that users not only managed what information they consumed, but when and how often they did so, reflecting a nuanced form of self-regulation shaped by both the app's affordances and the general backdrop of prolonged crisis.

Respondents' reflections thus illustrate that exercising control on Telegram involved an active, ongoing negotiation across informational,

emotional, social, and security domains, all of which were crucial for sustaining agency in an unstable environment.

Chronological, non-algorithmic feed. Unlike platforms that employ algorithmic curation to sort and prioritize content, Telegram presents messages in the order they are posted. For several participants, this feature contributed to a more predictable and manageable flow of information, particularly during periods of intense news monitoring. The absence of algorithmic filtering was seen as enabling users to receive updates based on time of publication rather than system-driven relevance or popularity.

“I go in and see some recent news, not the ones that were about three months ago. And I don't have to waste time setting the date or filtering them somehow, or looking for how to do it. That is, it's convenient” — female, 31 years old (Respondent 32, Dataset 01)

Participants often contrasted Telegram's chronological display with what they described as the algorithmic nature of other platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, or TikTok. These platforms were viewed as offering less control over the content users encountered. Comments reflected a perception that algorithmic feeds sometimes emphasized content that was either irrelevant or emotionally loaded. As one participant put it, *“Algorithmic feeds show a lot of things I actually didn't want to see”* (male, 29 years old, Respondent 17, Dataset 01), and seeking for more direct user navigation.

The temporal ordering of content on Telegram was seen as consistent with users' efforts to monitor news in a more structured way. This format also enabled users to return to specific updates without concern that content might shift in position based on algorithmic recalibration.

“For example, you read the news in the morning. You finish reading at some point and that's it, [you stop there - ed.]. And then if you go back [to this channel], to that point when you stopped reading, and that's it, you just go further from there, otherwise you might miss something”— male, 34 years old (Respondent 16, Dataset 01)

“There is no intellectual shuffling according to my behavior. For example, the Facebook feed pulls up for me those users whom I liked, or on whose posts I stopped longer. After a while there are more of them, and objectively my feed changes. In fact, it is no longer a feed, but just a bubble of those people whom I like, and that's it. And in Telegram there is simply time as the main factor in ranking channels. Whoever wrote later, is on top” — female, 47 years old (Respondent 11, Dataset 01)

Overall, Telegram’s chronological feed was not only perceived as a functional advantage, but as an affordance that shaped user autonomy and information navigation. Moreover, this affordance supports users in constructing their own mental narratives of what has occurred. One participant described this as a form of *“storytelling”*—not in the authored sense, but in the ability to trace how a situation has developed over time (female, 30 years old, Respondent 20, Dataset 01). By reviewing earlier posts and updates, users could contextualize newer ones, contributing to a more full understanding of complex or evolving situations. This contrasts with platforms where fragmented or reshuffled feeds often obscure causality or continuity, leading to feelings of disorientation or confusion.

At the same time, the unfiltered, real-time nature of Telegram’s feed posed challenges as well. Several participants noted that when message frequency becomes very high, particularly during active crises, the linear stream can become overwhelming or difficult to follow. As one respondent commented, *“It*

starts to lose meaning... you start wishing for summarizing posts” (male, 25 years old, Respondent 07, Dataset 01). Thus, while the chronological structure was generally appreciated, it also required users to actively manage content density, often by subscribing only to selected channels or developing habits of catching up in retrospect.

While some respondents preferred the perceived neutrality and consistency of this format, others focused more on the broader ability to choose which channels to follow and how frequently to engage. The absence of an algorithm was not universally central to users’ choices but appeared as one factor among several that shaped their media practices on the platform.

Low-friction access. Respondents frequently emphasized convenience and ease of use as reasons for utilizing Telegram for news consumption and information surfing. The platform’s structure enabled a form of consumption that on one hand can be viewed as passive since it did not require active searching or engagement with external systems or digital platforms. On the other hand, users reported the need for more active behavior when forming sets of channels for news consumption. One of the respondents simply noted, *“It’s convenient”* when asked what motivated them to start following news on Telegram (male, 36 years old). This reflection captures a broader theme that emerged across interviews: Telegram allowed users to quickly access content relevant to them without facing interactional or technical obstacles.

The low-friction access affordance is interpreted by users as a combination of features that minimizes the number of steps, decisions, or barriers required to consume or monitor information. This framing of Telegram speaks to its utilization as a communication and information environment that reduces switching costs and entry thresholds across tasks—from news reading to search, messaging, verification, and in some cases, business-related and work-related tasks and activities.

“You don't need to install a bunch of different apps. You don't need to keep a lot of site tabs in your browser, on your phone, on your computer, on your laptop, or somewhere else. Just one app and you have universal access to everything” — male, 35 years old (Respondent 14, Dataset 01)

Within the media affordances framework, this ease of entry can be seen as “immediate accessibility”—a condition where the technical design of the platform supports frictionless interactions across different informational needs. Respondents noted that they could follow links directly, scroll back through timelines, access summaries with optional links to full texts, or casually monitor content without committing to deep engagement. As one user explained:

“I don't post anything anywhere, I don't share anything, no photos, no videos, no articles, absolutely. I'm there and I'm just watching everything that's happening there. From the outside, as I'd call it” — male, 36 years old (Respondent 26, Dataset 01)

This illustrates the platform's low-friction affordances: users could subscribe to multiple channels, receive updates, and choose when and how to engage, all without the need for sustained attention or active navigation through complex interfaces.

At the same time, low-friction access has its drawbacks and negative aspects. The platform's ability to deliver immediate, unfiltered content to large audiences — without editorial checks or application of journalistic professional standards — was seen by several participants as a double-edged sword. For example, one respondent remarked that Telegram channels they once trusted had become *“too propagandistic”* over time (male, 36 years old, Respondent 26, Dataset 01), suggesting that the lack of moderation or verification mechanisms could contribute to shifts in content quality or agenda without users' awareness.

Low entry barriers also meant that users were often exposed to content they might not have actively sought out, especially when channels forwarded posts from others. This sometimes led to information fatigue, or the circulation of overly emotional or manipulative content, especially during peak phases of conflict. Because subscribing to and consuming content on Telegram required very little effort, participants occasionally described feeling overwhelmed by the volume and intensity of updates, even from channels they had voluntarily followed.

In addition, the absence of structural friction can complicate source evaluation and critical engagement. Since anyone can start a channel or repost information, users bear the responsibility of constantly assessing credibility and intent within the channels. One respondent described relying on cross-checking content between multiple sources “*just to be sure*” but acknowledged the cognitive load of doing so regularly (male, 29 years old, Respondent 17, Dataset 01). This suggests that while Telegram facilitates rapid access, it can also demand significant media literacy and self-regulation to avoid misinformation or emotional overexposure.

In this sense, Telegram’s low-friction access model enabled flexible and decentralized information consumption but also introduced new challenges. Without structural safeguards or curated sets of channels, the user experience depended heavily on individual practices of filtering, evaluating, and disengaging when needed. These findings point to a more nuanced understanding of access as something that also reshapes user responsibility and cognitive burden, especially in the context of crisis situations.

In sum, Telegram’s low-friction access was not framed in highly technical terms by users, but rather experienced as a practical advantage in the context of everyday news navigation. The platform’s structure supported rapid, on-demand, and lightweight engagement with content, which aligned with respondents’

needs for immediacy, simplicity, and reduced cognitive load during a prolonged period of informational and emotional pressure.

Psychological well-being and news avoidance. Many respondents within the study described a conscious effort to regulate their news consumption in response to its impact on psychological well-being. Interviewees recalled phases of near-constant news and updates monitoring, especially at the beginning of the full-scale invasion, which later gave way to deliberate disengagement. This shift was often prompted by symptoms of fatigue, anxiety, memory lapses, and emotional overload. For instance, one participant reflected, *“I read them [the news - ed.] at first in a daze, like everyone else... Then my memory and working capacity started to decline. Then I realized it, and took a break for a while...”* (female, 31 years old, Respondent 12, Dataset 01). Such personal experiences illustrate a broader behavioral adaptation where news consumption was no longer merely informational, but deeply intertwined with users’ mental and emotional regulation.

From the perspective of media affordances, Telegram’s structure and design enabled both intensive and minimal interaction, thereby supporting different levels of exposure from the perspective of platform users. The platform’s temporal flexibility—users could check it multiple times a day or abstain entirely—afforded control over engagement rhythms. The users could have asynchronous access which allowed them to withdraw without losing significantly the ability to catch up later, and its customizable notification system permitted selective muting of channels. Users leveraged these features to impose self-protective limits. One respondent explained this as a form of emotional boundary-setting: *“Now I try to read them [news - ed.] once every three days... Because there was a moment when you just waited for some new news... I just try not to read during the day, for me it's my control.”* (female, 22 years old, Respondent 21, Dataset 01).

However, disengaging from news was rarely a neutral decision. Several respondents reported internal conflict, expressing feelings of shame, social pressure, or civic inadequacy when they avoided reading news. *“This makes me feel guilty because I feel like an ignorant citizen,”* one respondent admitted (female, 26 years old, Respondent 15, Dataset 01). This illustrates how the affordance of persistent visibility — unread messages piling up, channels left unchecked — produced psychological cues that some interpreted as moral or social obligations. Others described these pressures as internally generated, linked to a sense of duty to remain informed despite emotional exhaustion.

“I need to minimize the number of news, the number of channels and in general the number of unread messages in Telegram, it also drove me crazy, by the way, and that's when I decided to clean it up, look into how to check news and unsubscribe from some Telegram channels” — female, 26 years old (Respondent 22, Dataset 01)

While Telegram’s structure made it easy to consume large volumes of news quickly, it also lacked affordances that might support emotional pacing or content prioritization. With posts presented in a real-time stream and channels typically undifferentiated in tone, users often had to construct their own strategies for emotional distancing. These included following only certain types of channels (e.g., those with analytical content or lighter cultural topics), imposing time-based limits, or using Telegram exclusively for specific non-news purposes like community support. The same affordances that enabled high-volume, real-time access also contributed to what some described as cognitive saturation or “information-caused trauma” over time:

“After another massive air attack, when many people died there, I don't remember exactly when it was, but somewhere around a year of reading a

lot of things like that, I realized that it was traumatizing my mental health. And I also learned that it doesn't matter to our brain that we read about some bad event in different sources, that our brain perceives it as new traumatic events. And I was just stuck in it, over and over again. I just couldn't cope with that because I'm a sensitive person, as it turned out"— female, 31 years old (Respondent 24, Dataset 01)

Ultimately, the negotiation between psychological well-being and informational engagement reveals an important paradox of Telegram's affordances: its design maximizes user control over access and exposure, yet offers little structural support for managing the emotional consequences of persistent news consumption and crisis communication, given the context of this study. Therefore, users reported adapting to it by withdrawing, filtering, or redefining their relationship to news itself — balancing or shifting away from information-seeking to emotional self-preservation.

Pictographic reactions and comments. Telegram's comment and reaction functions elicited varied responses from users, reflecting diverse orientations toward participation, expression, and interpretation in digital news environments. Many participants referenced the use of pictographic reactions (Logi & Zappavigna, 2023), emojis such as hearts, flames, or angry faces, not only as a means of expressing emotion but as a tool for scanning and determining community sentiment. Thus, this feature worked within the platform for two contexts at once: quickly monitoring information and related sentiment, and understanding the general mood within a community or channel.

Several respondents described reactions as a lightweight, low-effort way to provide feedback to content producers or to signal emotional resonance. As one participant put it, *"I always leave a reaction, it's a free way to express gratitude, like a "thank you." That I didn't just read it, but left a response."* (male, 34 years old, Respondent 16, Dataset 01). This framing reflects an

affordance of expressive economy, where users can signal engagement or alignment with minimal friction (Gerlitz & Helmond, 2013).

The use of reactions also enabled a form of ambient awareness, allowing users to perceive how others in the audience were emotionally responding to a post.

“Sometimes it enlivens the channel, the news, and you can see a cross-section, the attitude of people there to some news or trend, for example”— male, 38 years old (Respondent 13, Dataset 01)

“I like looking at emoticons. If I see that it's a red crooked face, then I already understand that there will be something there, that if it's political, then there's something bad for Ukraine. If the first [emoticon - ed.] heart or flames is, then I immediately understand [what to expect - ed.], somehow I relax and start reading. If I see some negative emoticon at first, and it dominates among the reactions, then I feel tension before I start reading”— female, 31 years old (Respondent 19, Dataset 01)

“Well, there are some cool funny stickers that you can make yourself. Like a sticker pack with your friends. Well, when you're a teenager, that's a good reason [to use Telegram]” — male, 26 years old (Respondent 23, Dataset 01)

This corresponds to what media theorists identify as the affordance of visibility—the ability to monitor social cues and perceived consensus without direct interaction. Others used reactions strategically to signal solidarity, humor, or critique, including in contexts of political satire or war-related updates. Still, some respondents expressed skepticism toward the curation of available reaction

options, noting that certain channels disabled negative emojis, thereby subtly shaping perceived sentiment.

“When channel administrators remove negative reactions [under the posts - ed.], it annoys me... It feels like some kind of restriction on my freedoms” — female, 31 years old (Respondent 24, Dataset 01)

“There is also an option to disable negative likes, or basically any likes. To set certain likes that can be used under this post. And I understand that negative likes are simply disabled, so when look [closer - ed.], there are none under the post. There are either neutral ones, or only positive ones. And that is not fair” — female, 30 years old (Respondent 03, Dataset 01)

However, this is not the only way to interfere with the pictographic reactions section in Telegram. Respondents note that they see a large number of atypical reactions under posts in channels and attribute this to bot activity.

“As for reactions... if some news and it is related to Ukraine and there are some negative reactions there, then I understand what percentage of Russians... or bots... came to the channels and viewed the post” — female, 22 years old (Respondent 21, Dataset 01)

“I would say that these reactions are not so important, because anyway among the 95% of them there will be like 80% positive, and 20% other reactions. And there is no strong significance. Well, sometimes someone there puts a heart as a reaction to news about explosions and then they say: "Ah, you Russian, you are monitoring our groups again". Well, but that's expected” — male, 27 years old (Respondent 38, Dataset 01)

Some respondents noted specific rules in communities or symbolic ways to use pictographic reactions in Telegram channels. For example, one respondent noted the use of a clown head emoji to react to political news. Another recalled examples of emojis with a hot dog, dolphin, or monkey head closing its eyes being used for this purpose. In the context of news, the dolphin emoji indicates that the information seems “shady” or “creepy” (TikTok, n.d.-a). The one with the hot dog — that the user finds this piece of information funny (TikTok, n.d.-b). The monkey head emoji typically refers to secrecy or feeling of embarrassment. However, it should be noted that the meanings and contexts of emoticon use can change over time. For example, the hot dog emoji was previously used in a more sexualized context, in some cases also to refer to a weapon, in particular a gun. Nevertheless, the hot dog emoji has now been gaining a new meaning and is now used to denote something funny or amusing.

Comments, by contrast, elicited more ambivalent responses. While a subset of users appreciated the opportunity to post remarks or read others’ perspectives, many viewed comment sections as emotionally exhausting, polarizing, or vulnerable to manipulation. Several interviewees noted they preferred channels without comments, citing emotional overload, toxic discourse, or the presence of bots. One participant remarked, “*I don't see the point [in commenting - ed.]... it could be some kind of conflict*” (female, 31 years old, Respondent 12, Dataset 01), while another emphasized a preference to observe silently, “*I like reading comments, not writing them*” (female, 26 years old, Respondent 15, Dataset 01). These experiences reflect the affordance of selective engagement—users can choose the depth of their participation, even within interactive media.

Nevertheless, comment sections did serve specific purposes for some users. In select cases, users sought to validate their own views by scanning reactions or reading top comments during controversial events. Others interpreted comment threads as part of their “*bubble monitoring*”, a way of

tracking social sentiment or testing the boundaries of their own perspective within the digital platform.

“To be honest, I don't even know why I'm so addicted. I feel like it's an addiction. When I watch a movie on Netflix and there are no comments on Netflix, it drives me crazy. Sometimes, when I'm really angry, I can go to some other site just to read the comments, because people can write them there... I think it's an opportunity to talk about it with someone without talking about it with anyone”— female, 26 years old (Respondent 15, Dataset 01)

“If I have time and it interests me, I'll go and have a look. Especially if it's a meme, to see who got the most likes and the comments and all that kind of stuff. It's more of an entertaining thing for me. For me, comments are not like keyboard warriors”— female, 30 years old (Respondent 20, Dataset 01)

This aligns with the interpretative flexibility of media affordances: while the same feature (e.g., comments) may support civic dialogue for one user, it may represent emotional strain or reputational risk for another. Telegram's configuration where channel owners can enable or disable both comments and reactions may shape a negotiable media environment, filtered through both editorial choices and individual preferences.

Overall, users' engagement with pictographic reactions and comment sections on Telegram reflects a spectrum of approaches to expressing presence, interpreting others' responses, and navigating visibility in digital communication spaces. Rather than treating comments or reactions as inherently participatory, users shaped them into tools for observation, filtering, and boundary-setting,

revealing the nuanced, often strategic ways people adapt interaction features to fit their evolving communication needs.

“News grazing” and “news snacking”. Participants’ accounts revealed a mode of news consumption that aligns with what communication scholars have described as “news grazing” or “news snacking” — patterns of intermittent, surface-level engagement with information throughout the day rather than structured or deep reading sessions. These patterns reflect what Molyneux (2018) refers to as “news grazing” which is a form of fragmented, episodic news engagement, while also aligning with Boczkowski et al.’s (2018) concept of “news snacking,” where users consume news in brief, low-effort intervals during moments of downtime or transition.

Participants frequently described engaging with news on Telegram through short, repeated, and often habitual check-ins throughout the day. These behaviors were typically integrated into moments of transition or downtime: while drinking coffee, commuting, waiting in line, or winding down at night. As one respondent explained, *“throughout the day, whenever I have free time, I scroll through them [the news - ed.]”* (male, 35 years old). Another respondent shared that his pattern is to check the news on Telegram *“every hour or two, something like that. Sometimes more often, sometimes less often”* (male, 28 years old). These descriptions illustrate Telegram’s integration into users’ everyday temporal rhythms, where the app is not used for extended reading sessions, but rather as a tool for frequent micro-updates.

“Usually it's in the morning when I wake up, first I look at the ceiling for 10-15 minutes, of course, and then I check my phone to understand what happened at night. In general, I read often, as soon as I have a free minute. Sometimes on the route, in the subway and either sit on a bench somewhere, or while working. I can even look at it at home in the evening, especially if it's related to an air raid alert. Especially if there are

explosions and [I need to know - ed.] what to prepare for. Especially if there are drones flying somewhere. I will say that I often consume news, and I often use [Telegram - ed.]” — female, 26 years old (Respondent 22, Dataset 01)

Telegram’s design facilitates this fragmented engagement through several key affordances. Its persistent chronological feed enables users to catch up on updates quickly and sequentially without fearing loss of context. Users can open the app, scan the latest messages, and close it again in seconds. One respondent described this clearly: *“Well, my day begins with catching up with the news... to find out what important news happened overnight... then... I quickly read one or two pieces of news somewhere, think about them, and digest them.”* (male, 45 years old, Respondent 25, Dataset 01). This highlights how Telegram supports an episodic and on-demand model of engagement, where users can dip in and out of content in a fairly flexible way.

The platform also provides an indirect form of emotional pacing by allowing users to control the frequency and depth of their exposure. Many interviewees described a preference for brief, surface-level scanning over deep reading, unless an event required closer attention. This was often a deliberate choice to avoid emotional overload while still *“keeping a finger on the pulse.”* For example, one of the respondents formed a more stable routine for reading the news: *“I try to read the news more rarely... I allocate about 20 minutes a day for it”* (male, 36 years old, Respondent 26, Dataset 01). Another participant remarked that she tends to catch up once in the morning and once in the evening: *“Usually it’s in the morning... then during the day I might open the news two or three times and in the evening too”* (female, 31 years old, Respondent 32, Dataset 01). This kind of self-regulation reflects an affordance of user-paced access, giving individuals control over when and how much they engage.

Importantly, this lightweight pattern of consumption does not suggest disengagement. On the contrary, it points to how Telegram allows for ambient information awareness as a way of staying informed without engaging in heavy informational load and information processing load. Whether through compulsive checking, as one user described (“*a compulsive desire to read the news feed... every 20 minutes*” – male, 29 years old, Respondent 17, Dataset 01), or more structured routines, users leveraged Telegram as a low-effort, high-frequency news source that could be accessed spontaneously and used flexibly across varied contexts of daily life. However, as one respondent noted, Telegram “*is not the place where you look for analytics,*” and that users turn to other digital platforms for extensive analytical materials.

In summary, findings point to a mode of news use that is flexible and routine-based, shaped by both individual preferences and the affordances of the platform’s structure.

The phenomenon of junk news channels. Across interviews, respondents identified a distinct category of Telegram channels they referred to as “junk” or “trash” channels, both explicitly or implicitly. These channels were typically described as emotionally charged and highly visual, with content characterized by clickbait headlines, rapid reposting, and low editorial standards. For many users, such channels held a contradictory appeal: they were simultaneously annoying, sensationalist, and untrustworthy, yet at times difficult to ignore—particularly during urgent events when mainstream or official channels had not yet published information. As one participant explained, “*I can sometimes go to ‘Truha’, but I don’t subscribe [to the channel - ed.]... I can just go in, look for photos and leave.*” (female, 26 years old, Respondent 15, Dataset 01).

From an affordances perspective, junk news channels leverage the low entry barriers, anonymity, and real-time distribution affordances of Telegram. Their rapid publication pace and ability to disseminate raw images and videos

position them as “first responders” in the informational ecosystem, even though the content is often posted without verification. One user noted that such channels “*are often the first to post videos from the scene of events*” (female, 25 years old, Respondent 08, Dataset 01), highlighting how speed, more than accuracy, defines their perceived utility. However, this same speed frequently came at the cost of credibility, as users expressed frustration with unverified claims, embedded political agendas, and intrusive advertising. As one participant put it, “*the channel seemed like it’s paid by someone and it is not independent... I unsubscribed*” (female, 31 years old, Respondent 12, Dataset 01).

A recurring theme among respondents’ reflections was the emotional design of these channels: excessive use of emojis, provocative language, and unfiltered imagery were seen as tools to capture attention and manipulate response. One respondent remarked on how “*very competently work with emoticons*” and “*headlines appeal to emotion*” (female, 31, Respondent 19, Dataset 01; female, 30; Respondent 20, Dataset 01). This aligns with what the media affordances literature refers to as affective capture (Nemorin, 2017), the use of visual and emotional cues to draw users into repeated engagement. Yet many interviewees also reported consciously resisting this pull. Several described unsubscribing or limiting exposure, noting that such channels triggered fatigue, irritation, or even a sense of distrust, despite continuing to monitor them in moments of urgency.

Interestingly, some participants reflected on the sociocultural role of these channels, suggesting they served specific psychological or informational needs. For example, one user argued that people turn to junk channels “*I think that people are primarily looking for a sense of security there. A sense of security from the available information*” (male, 28 years old, Respondent 18, Dataset 01). Others suggested their popularity reflected a desire for immediacy, emotional resonance, even when users were fully aware of their shortcomings. In this way, junk channels reveal an ambivalent affordance structure: they offer rapid,

decentralized access to unfiltered content, but require users to bring their own strategies of verification, distance, and emotional regulation.

Summarizing all the users' reflections on their experience interacting with Telegram, the features that were most important to them are attributed to two classes of affordances, according to the MAIN model (Sundar, 2008): Agency and Navigability. The Agency refers to users' perception of control over their media environment and content exposure and consumption. While Navigability relates to the perceived ease with which users can find, access, and move through information within a digital environment. Thus, these two classes of affordances most fully encompass those features that provide the desired combination of functions and access to information for users.

3.5 Telegram in media outlet's strategies

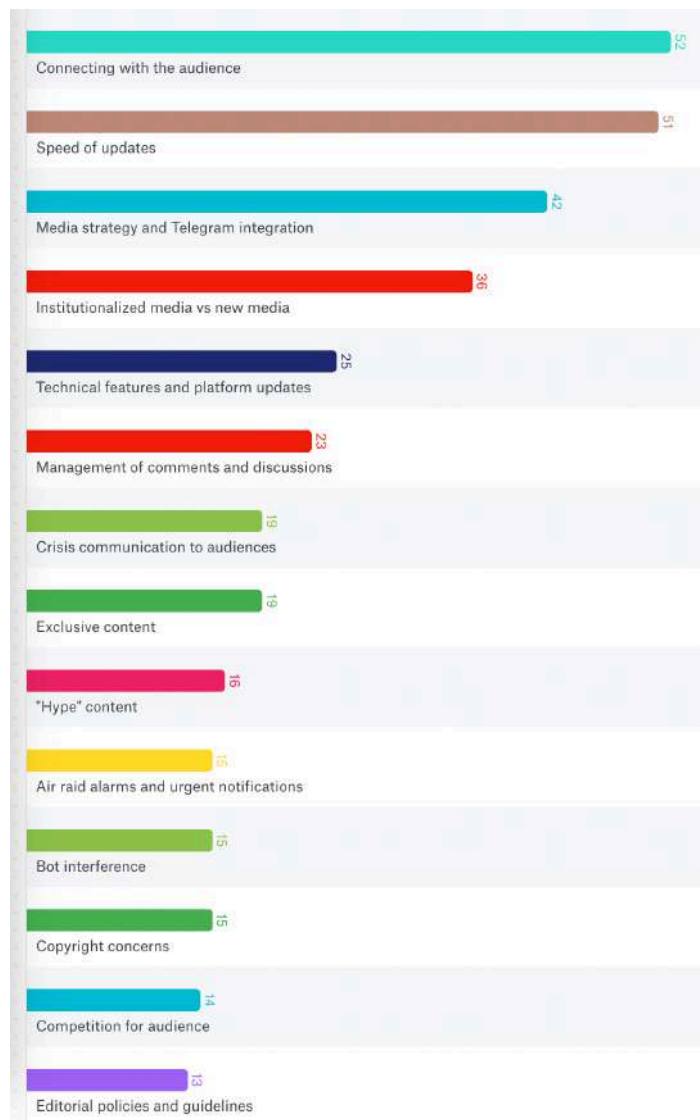
Above in this chapter, I discussed the perspective of users in utilizing Telegram, but below we will discuss the perspective of media organizations and media professionals. Therefore, this subsection contributes to addressing **RQ3**: How do Ukrainian media professionals adapt their professional practices on Telegram in response to users' needs and platform constraints during crisis conditions?

While users often addressed the topic of the reliability of the news they consume via Telegram in their interviews, editors expressed this tension in their constant comparison of channels run by media organizations and public channels or so-called "junk channels". Nonetheless, one of the focuses of this tension is copyright and the ethical reposting of exclusive or unique content. Telegram is a virtually unmoderated platform that also does not provide editors with effective tools to track the distribution of their unique content through other channels. Thus, controlling or tracking reposts of their unique content is only possible manually, with little involvement of automated tools. This and the

accompanying set of challenges in competing for audience attention will be described in more detail later in the chapter.

Figure 6.

First-level descriptive codes most frequently used across the Dataset 02.



Note. Created by the author using data from semi-structured in-depth interviews with media professionals and coding in Atlas.ti qualitative data analysis software.

Almost all interviewed editors noted that over the past year, Telegram has made a number of updates to the platform that are aimed specifically at the

convenience of content creators. These updates include the ability to add photos and videos to posts after they have already been published, add multiple links to posts, and choose which link will be displayed in the preview. All of these features were noted by editors as important and motivating them to use Telegram for news distribution more actively, compared to similar platforms like WhatsApp or Viber.

While editors reflected on their use of Telegram to disseminate news with a noticeable professional imprint, a wide range of insights were also useful for verifying and comparing findings obtained from interviews with the users themselves. The inclusion of interviews with media editors and professionals serves a critical methodological function in triangulating the study's results. Interviews with editorial staff involved in the daily production and dissemination of news on Telegram provide an institutional perspective that complements and, in many cases, substantiates users' accounts.

This dual-layered approach strengthens the validity of the study's central research questions. It allows a cross-verification of how platform affordances are perceived and operationalized from both the audience and production sides. It also enables a more nuanced understanding of the alignment between audience needs and editorial strategies during crisis communication.

This chapter also contains a summary that positions key findings in the overall structure of the study and explains how they contribute to addressing the research questions posed within the dissertation.

Editors and media professionals who use Telegram to distribute news to their audiences shared their experiences integrating the platform into their overall media strategy. According to their recollections, at first most of them approached the platform as a space for experimenting and innovation. In most cases, not many resources were invested in maintaining the channels and they were more of a tool for distributing content than a separate product. However, full-scale invasion and the rising interest of the audience in Telegram served as a

catalyzing impulse for forming more precise strategies and even editorial guidelines for media's presence on the platform.

“When we launched a Telegram news channel, at the beginning the concept was to publish only the main news from the website. I constantly reviewed it, checked the news chat, observed what publications were planned, what sources. But with the outbreak of the war, of course, everything changed.” — Media 04, Dataset 02

It is also worth noting that editors and media professionals from large national media outlets reported a distinctive shift from using Telegram as a tool for news distribution to a separate independent product or media brand's extension. In some cases, Telegram channels got the mandate to post urgent updates independently and before they are published on the main website. At the same time several editors emphasized that it was organic development that came naturally within the overall workflow in newsrooms. This dynamic clearly indicates that what was perceived as a tool for merely spreading the information grew into a significant part of the media outlet's operations and strategies.

This section further examines how newsrooms conceptualize Telegram's role in their overall media strategies, highlighting its integration as a medium shaped by the interplay between audience demands and organizational constraints.

Organic development and early adoption. A recurring theme among interviewed media professionals is the organic nature of Telegram's adoption. For several media organizations, its use emerged not from a formalized strategic decision but as a natural response to changing media environments and communication dynamics. As one of the respondents observed, *“It developed organically, in my opinion... It wasn't like: “Oh, everyone is boosting their*

channels, we should do the same". We are counting on such organic growth" (Media 01, Dataset 02).

The notion of Telegram as an experimental platform was echoed by another respondent, who recalled, *"In the beginning, it was more of an experiment... but with the start of the full-scale war, it became a full-fledged (adoption of - ed.) platform"* (Media 02, Dataset 02). This transition from experimentation to consistent and intentional use illustrates a shared experience across media outlets: Telegram was initially used casually, often driven by individual initiative rather than managerial decision.

"I joined the team in 2019. One of my first ideas was to launch several Telegram channels. I saw a lot of potential in this direction. There were several other channels with news, but they were not so popular. Telegram wasn't so popular before the [full scale - ed.] war. It was all just the beginning in Ukraine" — Media 04, Dataset 02

One of the respondents described a similar process, initially viewing Telegram as a secondary channel with limited support: *"Our top management at that time treated Telegram as some kind of Russia-FSB-related thing that was not worth pursuing"* (Media 08, Dataset 02). Over time, however, Telegram gained more traction through consistent use, primarily driven by proactive team members in newsrooms and the growing attention from the audience.

Step by step, the media recognized the need to evolve beyond casual usage. Initially, social media responsibilities were assigned to whoever had time: *"The website was the priority... and then whoever had free hands would handle the rest. It was before the big war, it was a different workload and different tempo"* (Media 07, Dataset 02). As a result, respondents in the study reported that dedicated teams were established, allowing for more structured and consistent use of Telegram. Moreover, these teams have developed over time

their own work schedules, contact and source databases, and guidelines for operating on the platform (whether written or even simply spoken within the teams).

“I usually have a document for Telegram and Facebook that describes how we should work. It's like a cheat sheet that a new person can go in and look at. Sometimes it describes certain situations, what to do in certain situations, it describes the timing with which to post and how the timing should change in certain situations” — Media 08, Dataset 02

Another reason for having a dedicated team for maintaining Telegram channels was the set of specific skills required for this position. It includes the ability to work in a very fast news cycle, and to be able to identify so-called “flushes” or “floods” on Telegram (original name in Ukrainian - “залив”). As editors explained themselves, “flushes” are the deliberate informational campaigns launched on Telegram in order to spread specific messages; promote political figures, parties or political positions; spread targeted propagandistic narratives. Sometimes the goal of “flushes” can be to engage more new subscribers for the channel and activate the attention of core loyal subscribers.

“It is also important to understand that team members who work at the website were trained for different kinds of story writing. Telegram requires it to be written fast, to be concise and precise. Here and now. Because in half an hour, when the story is all over the other channels, well, what's the point then?” — Media 07, Dataset 02

For smaller local media outlets Telegram channels often still are serving as an extension for main platforms and mediums, like websites or printed newspapers. However, they also note faster adaptation of Telegram after

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. As one of the editors who works with a smaller local channel with about 44 thousand subscribers (Media 03, Dataset 02) explains, the newsroom updated the strategy after there was a major interest in urgent updates regarding air raid alerts, air threats and aftermath of explosions. It served as a primary driver to review the time gaps between the posts and post all urgent news and updates immediately. Another editor who maintains a local channel with almost 54 thousand subscribers (Media 05, Dataset 02) also noted a strategic revision after the interest for local updates and breaking news within the community spiked.

Collectively, these insights suggest that Telegram's integration into Ukrainian media strategy was shaped less by top-down planning and more by grassroots adaptation, often catalyzed by necessity, experimentation, and individual agency of separate team members.

Transformation during the crisis. The full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 marked a decisive moment in the evolution of Telegram usage. Media outlets transitioned from sporadic engagement to systematic, high-frequency posting, often driven by the need to rapidly inform the public during a time of emergency.

"Since the beginning of the full-scale war, it has become a full-fledged platform for news dissemination and it was even more prioritised at some points. Now it is also very important for our news and I consider it to be very effective. We put a lot of effort into it. It's equal, as our website" —
Media 02, Dataset 02

Another editor reported the need to scale the team significantly in order to meet rising information demands: *"The team [for social media department - ed.] grew three to four times... we got the green light not to wait until news are published in the main newsfeed, but to publish it to Telegram [immediately -*

ed.]" (Media 04, Dataset 02). In practice, this meant journalists actively monitored official sources and shared news updates directly through Telegram with little effort for editing or formatting the post.

The impact of crisis conditions led media outlets to a shift from partial to continuous coverage. Telegram was identified as the most immediate and direct medium: "*Telegram is your first, fastest messenger...*" (Media 07, Dataset 02). At operational level, teams reorganized to maintain a near-constant information feed, with posts prioritized during air threats, political developments, and international news cycles. The respondents among media professionals described an intense workload and operational burnout, working in shifts without formal breaks:

"It was a crazy rush of adrenaline. For about a month, it was like this: my colleague sleeps, I work; I sleep, she works. Our editor in chief sometimes would pitch in. We had to distribute the workload on the go. And we realized we need to hire more people. Because we simply didn't sleep." —
Media 07, Dataset 02

The editor who works within a large media holding and oversees not one, but a network of national level Telegram channels, noted the onset of a more reactive model for posting driven by urgency. Based on the previous experience, the team knows that users can be annoyed by large numbers of notifications and unread posts. So in order to keep the subscribers engaged and loyal, there were written guidelines developed about the intensity of posting and embedding of the advertisement among the news content. However, the audience's need for urgent updates required changes in those guidelines and strategies. As it was formulated by the respondent himself: "*If there is breaking news, there's no strict timing, you post all [urgent updates].*" This flexibility allowed for real-time responses to emerging crises.

It is also noteworthy that respondents from the circle of editors and media professionals rarely mentioned air alerts and air threats in their reflections. While a group of user respondents often spoke about using Telegram in this context. On the one hand, this may indicate that the dissemination of information about airstrikes has begun to be normalized not only by users but also by the media, and for the latter, this process may have occurred faster.

“There is a huge demand for information about this now, and in my opinion, refusing it is like shooting yourself in the foot. But maybe after, if the active phase of the war ends... I think that when there are no more anxiety about it, it will be a very important moment, when people will understand that there are no missiles in the air, so you can unsubscribe from “Nikolaevsky Vaniok” and the rest of the channels” — Media 01, Dataset 02

Thus, the full-scale invasion acted as a catalyst not only for increased volume but also for structural and editorial changes. Telegram shifted from a complementary or experimental channel to a more detached instrument for real-time updates, with dedicated personnel, adjusted policies, and audience-driven urgency defining its new role and functions.

Operational and editorial adaptations. Previous findings have partially touched on structural changes taking place in media organizations with the increasing integration of Telegram into their internal processes. However, they deserve a more systematic overview as they contribute to explaining the specific media affordances inherent to the platform.

Among operational and editorial adaptations, editors of large channels (70 thousand subscribers and more) described having dedicated staff for maintaining Telegram channels, developing guidelines, norms, and practices for running channels, and negotiating a certain level of editorial autonomy. Similar

processes were also noticeable in local newsrooms, although on a smaller scale. This is explained by their smaller size and lack of a large number of resources compared to larger Ukrainian national media.

The operational use of Telegram by media outlets was shaped by the platform's particular affordances, namely, its non-algorithmic, chronological feed; low-threshold publishing model; and asynchronous, broadcast-style communication. These features collectively enabled rapid and direct dissemination of information, but also introduced new editorial pressures and risks that outlets had to manage in real time.

“In the first weeks and months after the invasion, there was a lot of news. A lot, really. And by the time the news was posted on the website, the situation could have already changed [...] In fact, when some news appears, while it is still being worked on to be published on the website, it should already be in Telegram” — Media 01, Dataset 02

“We definitely have to fight for attention, for the audience too. What we feel is precisely the speed of searching for some information. When many media outlets publish the same news at the same time, we always need to think about how it will be better than the one written by others. How to present it, how to structure it, design it, and make this news with maximum added value for the reader - this is the great competition for the media” — Media 01, Dataset 02

One of the central adaptations involved a shift toward accelerated production cycles. The chronological, unfiltered nature of Telegram's feed created implicit expectations for continuous updates. Editors described the necessity of frequent posting and not only to remain visible in users' feeds but also to maintain a sense of responsiveness during unfolding events. This led to a

restructuring of newsroom routines to include Telegram, with some outlets delegating specific staff to manage the flow of content and monitor user reactions. For smaller teams, this often created strain, as maintaining a high-output Telegram presence required more staff and capacity.

“Our channel was not 24/7. Now it is constantly on, and at night too. First of all, at night we orient ourselves if there are air raid alarms, explosions, and destruction. And now international news is important, now when we have night, America is awake, then there is news that needs to be posted”
— Media 07, Dataset 02

Telegram’s low-friction publishing interface that requires minimal formatting or editorial processing, also influenced how news are produced and posted. Content intended for Telegram was often adapted to be shorter, more direct, and visually anchored, such as with embedded videos, photos, memes or collage-format images. While this allowed for agility in coverage, it also encouraged surface-level engagement with complex issues.

“I sometimes have to tell my colleagues that your analytical pieces are so huge, that first of all, I won't be able to fit it into a post. Secondly, very few people will be interested, because they don't follow analytics in Telegram. People won't be interested in your analytics [...] You can do a titanic job, everything is being done brilliantly, and that's very good. But Telegram is not the place for your investigation, analytics, and so on.”
Media 08, Dataset 02

“We try really hard to make something smaller from something big, without losing any detail. And that's really difficult sometimes... When we have some extensive news on Telegram... we have already analyzed it, we

have already obtained all the information, then we have formatted it on Telegram in a reduced format” — Media 02, Dataset 02

Another affordance frequently cited was the platform’s asymmetrical communication model: audiences could consume content passively, without needing to interact or provide feedback. The active choices that users have to make in this context are the set of channels they choose to subscribe to and the choices they make regarding strategies and patterns of interaction. While this asymmetrical structure facilitated broad reach, it limited editorial insight into audience reactions beyond basic metrics (e.g., location, language, age groups, views or emoji-based reactions). Editors reported a lack of rich data regarding user behavior or retention, which in turn constrained their ability to make data-informed decisions about content strategy.

Furthermore, the platform’s limited moderation infrastructure and anonymity features posed ongoing editorial challenges. Unlike platforms with more visible content governance systems, Telegram placed the burden of editorial discernment and audience management almost entirely on channel editors. This increased the demand for internal verification processes and self-regulation, even as the platform’s design rewarded immediacy over deliberation and credibility.

“This is a double level of competition. I don't know if it's possible to compete with such “junk” channels, because when they give information in one sentence, without citing the source... that is, their content has zero added value, but if it emotionally appeals to the reader, that's their choice. And usually such readers don't really go for something deeper. They are satisfied with a superficial perception of information. To know for the sake of knowing, not to understand” — Media 02, Dataset 02

In essence, the operational integration of Telegram into newsroom routines illustrates how platform affordances can both enable and constrain crisis communication. Newsrooms adapted to its speed, simplicity, and reach, while also developing informal safeguards to mitigate its structural weaknesses, such as information overload, editorial fatigue, and exposure to unmoderated content ecosystems. These adaptations reflect a pragmatic engagement with Telegram's infrastructure, shaped by both the affordances it offers and the liabilities it imposes.

Audience orientation and engagement. A recurring pattern across interviews with editors and media professionals is that they all noted the importance of monitoring the behaviour and reactions of their Telegram subscribers and taking their needs into account when running channels. At the same time almost all editors noted that there's very limited options to access any information or insights regarding the subscribers. The respondents named three options for working with audience data: built-in Telegram statistics, and external tools TGStat and Telemetrio. However, they all provide rather superficial information (e.g., location, language, age groups).

According to the editor's accounts, the most informative in this context are reposts and statistics on channel unsubscribes. The content that receives the most reposts from users is perceived by editors as important and necessary for the audience. Similarly, if editors noticed an increase in unsubscriptions from a channel, they analyzed the content that had been published on the channel recently to determine the potential cause.

“At some point we wanted to stop posting about air raid alerts. And we noticed that people started unsubscribing. It was an experiment. We have brought these posts back. In general, we understand that for many people, and I don't know if it's hundreds or thousands, we also act as a source of information regarding the security situation” — Media 01, Dataset 02

Editors of large national level channels also operate based on the assumption that the Telegram subscribers are very similar to the core audience of the website and Facebook page. Also, according to interviews conducted for this study, editors of local channels more often engage in active strategies for getting to know their Telegram subscribers through audience surveys within Telegram, active comment section and bots for receiving user generated content which is also highlighted in Telegram channel's feeds.

“There was a huge car accident in our city... and our readers asked us for updates on that constantly. And we were contacting the hospital [to provide the updates on the situation - ed.] We do our best to listen to our readers, what they want” — Media 03, Dataset 02

User generated content in this context came across both as the way to obtain unique exclusive information and as the way to engage the audience. However, media outlets have different approaches to this. Several middle size channels (about 70 - 150 thousand subscribers) indicated that the operational cost of filtering all incoming messages, video clips, photos, and story suggestions with later need of verification and fact checking just didn't justify it.

“We receive between 10 to 20 messages from users per day. A lot of more local stories, people noticed something and they want us to investigate. We respond to this as much as we can. But there's rarely a really good story that we then decide to pursue”— Media 06, Dataset 02

“Our focus is on life in Kyiv [...] We encourage our readers to send us some content. We pay on average 80-100 hryvnia, basically the price of a cup of coffee. If someone was an eyewitness of some events, they can send

it over to us. Quite often, taxi drivers do that, as they move a lot around the city.” — Media 09, Dataset 02

“Sometimes subscribers leave us videos in the comments under the post if it is some kind of unusual event. We monitor our comments closely. And if it's good, we use it” — Media 03, Dataset 02

Editors of local channels also noted that user generated content that is not strictly newsworthy, but reflects the life of a local community, is highly popular within the channels. As one of the respondents mentioned, she decided to post a set of photographs of their home town made by various subscribers in the channel. Eventually, it gained more reactions and comments than any other post that day and arguably that week as well. After that, the media began to engage the audience more often in creating posts of that type, so that *“readers can immediately see that there is interaction, that they too are seen, heard, and understood”* (Media 03, Dataset 02)

At the same time, surveys that are run through Telegram may not only focus on getting basic socio demographic information about the subscribers, but also their opinion about various topics, like blackouts, city renovations, shelters etc. According to one of the study participants (Media 08, Dataset 02), comments are an effective strategy for getting subscribers to spend more time on a channel, but they don't work very well as a strategy for attracting new subscribers.

Another option to understand and engage the audience on Telegram is comments and pictographic reactions. However, not all editors are able to effectively use these options.

“For us, reactions are a main way of communication with our audience. But since the invasion, we turned them off because of the constant bot

activity. It's just pointless, to keep cleaning them up, deleting all junk. In most cases, it's not worth it" — Media 02, Dataset 02

"The bots can spread some messages, like "There's going to be a massive air strike today". We delete it all, all scam messages and links as well. We don't want to freak out our audience, to trigger some panic. I feel like we are responsible for this" — Media 02, Dataset 02

"We turned off the comments. And since this conversation is anonymous, I can tell you that we have enough dealing with comments on Facebook and YouTube. The level of aggression just keeps rising. And we understand that comments can be used for propaganda." — Media 01, Dataset 02

The editors reported that bot activity affects the section with pictographic reactions as well. Some news posts can receive large numbers of reactions in a relatively short period of time, and those reactions may be atypical or manipulative as well. For instance, one of the editors noticed that news about any kind of military support for Ukraine from the international community would be getting sad or negative reactions.

"I am under the impression that we are somehow "oh the hook" of bot farms because the speed is impressive. It takes just up to 3 minutes for some posts to get 300 or 500 negative reactions for news that are actually good for Ukraine. I don't know how to check it, but I've heard the same feedback from my other editors" — Media 01, Dataset 02

"At a certain point, Skabeeva (Russian TV personality - ed.) liked to mention us, and "RIA Novosti" (Russian website- ed.). And it [bots - ed.] started to come in, and you think: well, we won't clean up comments after

them. I can't let the editors do this, because I understand that the quality of the posts will start to drop, because they will only deal with comments"
— Media 08, Dataset 02

So while media outlets realize the possible benefits from comments and pictographic reactions, most of them decide to restrict or disable them completely thus limiting already limited options for research and interaction with channel subscribers on Telegram.

In sum, Telegram offers media outlets basic affordances such as built-in statistics, repost metrics, comment sections, user-generated content (UGC) submissions, and reaction buttons. However, the practical utility of these affordances is often constrained by platform limitations, operational burdens, and external threats like bot activity. While external tools like TGStat and Telemetrio exist, they offer only superficial insights, forcing editors to interpret audience behavior through circumstantial feedback rather than comprehensive data.

"But the trend is that Ukrainian media in Telegram do not work [efficiently - ed.] enough, in my opinion. They do not cooperate enough, they do not use the tools enough and they do not have enough money to develop their Telegram channels at an adequate level, which is super important. We are sliding towards very negative trends, when "Truha" will be on a par with "Ukrainska Pravda", with us, with "NV". And people do not notice it" — Media 08, Dataset 02

Ultimately, the Telegram environment shapes how media can and do engage their audiences. While the platform allows for basic user interaction and feedback, its affordances are not robust or reliable enough for systematic audience analysis. Editors often compensate through experimentation, intuition,

and selective interaction, navigating between the affordances offered and the constraints imposed, both technical and social.

This illustrates a broader tension as digital platforms like Telegram theoretically expand avenues for participation and feedback, in practice, the utility of these affordances depends heavily on editorial capacity, perceived risk, and the socio-political context in which the media operate.

3.6 Institutionalized and non-institutionalized channels

The respondents among Telegram users in their reflections quite often negotiated with themselves reliability of the news they consume on the platform. And although this was not the focus of this study, the topic emerged from the analysis of the collected material in both Datasets. However, in the dataset obtained from interviews with editors and media professionals working on managing Telegram channels, this topic took on a different form and formulation, namely comparing and contrasting institutionalized channels and non-institutionalized ones. In this case, by institutionalized channels, the editors meant those that represent professional media and operate in accordance with professional standards.

“There is one very illustrative example. This is the last press conference of the president of Ukraine. And somewhere in the second row there was a representative of a well-known Telegram channel, which has two and a half million subscribers. But this person is public. He positions himself as the owner of the channel [...] but it belongs to certain other people. But in any case, both law enforcement agencies and government agencies know who to contact”— Media 01, Dataset 02

Thus, media professionals are increasingly noticing the new role and place that non-institutionalized channels are beginning to claim in the overall media system. The respondents of institutionalized outlets consistently emphasize adherence to professional standards, editorial verification, and journalistic responsibility during interviews and contrasted this with the almost complete lack of accountability of public and non-institutionalized channels.

“I would like [the young audience - ed.] to less trust the bloggers who do not adhere to journalistic standards, and often they may not understand what they are writing about. And I say this not out of malice, but simply that we have much higher requirements for the selection of content, for its verification and for the editorial process itself, as it happens.” — Media 02, Dataset 02

“In our dimension of channels, we represent a specific media. Reputation is important here. And for large Telegram channels, reputation is not very important, because they have a million, two, three subscribers there. Why should they worry if people still don't unsubscribe en masse. They refute and move on. And for the media, the fewer refutations, the better. Because the audience is small and it needs to be constantly protected. That's why everyone in the media has always adhered to standards” — Media 04, Dataset 02

This content disparity reflects broader audience behaviors. Emotional engagement appears to be a defining driver of media consumption. As one of respondents observed, *“Where there are a lot of emotions, there is little factual content... When information is presented neutrally in our country, people can be simply bored.”* (Media 02, Dataset 02). This preference for affective rather than

factual content complicates the mission of institutional media to inform in a balanced and reliable manner.

Moreover, trust and identity emerge as crucial dimensions. While editors mentioned that they face skepticism and are portrayed as either aligned with state interests or elite agendas, informal media figures cultivate personas of authenticity and proximity. *“Take the channel for example... This is Lachen, he's just, like, an ordinary guy, he tells the truth... Some people don't even understand that he's not the one writing posts... that there's a full-fledged editorial staff”* (Media 07, Dataset 02) This personalization strategy fosters a sense of direct connection, undermining the perceived credibility of professional journalists.

Compounding these issues is the lack of regulatory mechanisms and the monetization of virality. Interviewees described the difficulties in competing with Telegram channels that employ targeted advertising and operate with significant financial backing. This commercial advantage enables certain channels to expand influence rapidly, while institutional outlets are constrained by resource limitations and professional codes.

“It's actually difficult to see where this will go. For me, there came a dead-end moment when you don't know how to grow adequately. Now there's Telegram Ads, which I've tried to launch several times, and somehow it didn't let me through. Resellers [of advertisement - ed.] appeared and you can advertise through them, but it's too expensive” —
Media 08, Dataset 02

Finally, there is a shared concern among participants of the study for media literacy and societal resilience. Respondents repeatedly emphasized the necessity for critical thinking and information verification: *“There are other platforms, or they will appear... but awareness and the ability to distinguish*

truth from manipulation are things that you need to be able to do. And this will be [a sign - ed.] of Ukraine's maturity” — Media 04, Dataset 02

At the same time, none of the study participants are going to stop their activity within the platform. As one editor noted, the creation of information voids, especially in turbulent times like a full-scale war, is risky, as such vacuums are quickly filled with poor-quality and harmful information. In his opinion, “*the media should be there*” (Media 01, Dataset 02).

Copyright challenges and informal practices in content sharing. One of the concerns that came up in conversations with editors during in-depth interviews was about reposting and sharing exclusive or unique content. Traditional notions of intellectual property are often strained in environments where reposting, copying, and content automation are common practices. Almost all the interviewees describe routine instances of their content—text, images, and even full posts—being copied by other Telegram channels without permission or attribution. This practice includes the removal of watermarks, logos, and any indicators of the original source.

“We had an interesting case with the Telegram channel of a media outlet from Volyn. And for a year, as we later discovered, just about every third post on their channel was copied from ours. We discovered this simply because our journalist’s mother is from Volyn, and she was subscribed [to both channels, ed.] and noticed this. We dealt with it, our editor-in-chief intervened, and then they deleted every post that was copied. However, there are many more such cases. These are not isolated cases” — Media 02, Dataset 02

Most of the time, tracking of such arbitrary content reposts is done either manually or through bots. However, at the time of the study, respondents noted

a lack of more sophisticated and automated tools to control and track how their content is being distributed on the platform. Such behavior undermines original creators' visibility and brand identity, complicating efforts to assert authorship or maintain journalistic integrity. Another recurring theme is the absence of formal mechanisms to enforce copyright on Telegram. Unlike web platforms that may offer takedown tools, Telegram's decentralized and largely unmoderated environment limits such options.

“In most cases, in 95% of all cases, moderators of million-dollar channels respond [to complaints about content authorship - ed.] and correct them. That is, there is no copyright in Telegram, roughly speaking. But there is communication with the admins, and they often react. Although they do not have to do this. It's about a certain kind of unspoken solidarity”— Media 01, Dataset 02

Media outlets not only strive to inform but also to retain and grow their audiences on a digital platform that has a huge volume of overlapping content. In this context, unique and exclusive materials, such as eyewitness footage, first-hand reports, or specially crafted analysis, are important for media outlets in order to stand out.

However, the competitive advantage afforded by exclusivity is increasingly undermined by the platform's largely unmoderated structure. As noted earlier, content published on Telegram is often reproduced by third-party channels without attribution or acknowledgment of source. This practice is especially detrimental when it concerns exclusive content that requires significant resources to obtain or produce. The rapid and unregulated redistribution of such content dilutes its impact and deprives original creators of the recognition and audience engagement that would otherwise accompany it.

“We simply monitor during the period when our media releases exclusive news. We also need to understand that good exclusives probably don't come out every day. But when they do, it can be easily tracked. The same news on different channels. In general, you can see who posts it and how presents it”— Media 06, Dataset 02

“Sometimes in public transport, you see a person who reads a Telegram channel that is complete junk, or which just steals posts and simply makes money. It's a business. Moreover, I talked to one “flusher”, as they are called, who said that there is a bot that simply steals content from the pool of channels. You choose a set of channels, it takes posts from there with a certain frequency, and posts them automatically. There is not even an editor there. In general, no one cares”— Media 08, Dataset 02

The vulnerability of media channels in this setting is exacerbated by the lack of enforceable copyright protections on Telegram. There is no institutional mechanism within the platform to prevent or address unauthorized copying, and the decentralized nature of the ecosystem leaves media professionals with few options.

Attempts to maintain competitive integrity rely heavily on informal arrangements, such as direct appeals to channel administrators or peer-based pressure, which are uneven in their effectiveness. While some actors respond cooperatively, others operate with impunity, confident in the absence of consequences.

In effect, copyright violations on Telegram do not merely pose a legal or ethical concern; they constitute a direct threat to the media's economic sustainability and reputational capital.

The unacknowledged appropriation of exclusive content transforms high-investment journalism into a low-cost source of content for

non-institutionalized channels, undermining incentives for original reporting. As audience competition intensifies, the erosion of content ownership rights places responsible and resource-intensive media practices at a systemic disadvantage.

3.7 Creator-centric updates and feature enhancements

Telegram’s strategic positioning as a media distribution and communication tool has been significantly reinforced through its continuous technological enhancements. During in-depth interviews, editors spoke in greater detail about how recent platform updates gave them a number of new convenient posting options, such as the ability to add multimedia elements to posts after they have already been published, add multiple links to one post, and choose which link will be displayed in the preview, format and highlight quotes in posts.

These updates, while often framed as usability improvements, play a noticeable role in sustaining the platform’s appeal among content creators and news organizations. The features developed and rolled out in recent years not only reflect Telegram’s responsiveness to user needs but also its competitive ambition in the media ecosystem.

“I guess there's something to this, in these recent updates... They even recently updated it so that if you post a video, you can choose a preview image. That wasn't the case before. It also simplifies everything, you can do everything from your phone very conveniently, anywhere. In the store, in transport, no one will even distinguish where I was when I made this post, whether in front of the computer or somewhere on my phone”— Media 03, Dataset 02

These technical updates, which were described by the editors and media professionals, have contributed to more flexible, precise, and engaging content

delivery. Content creators also noted the platform's intuitive editing interface and how it supports dynamic news workflows, particularly in fast-paced or sensitive reporting environments.

Several respondents pointed to the absence of throttling mechanisms or algorithmic opacity, enabling them to post as frequently (or infrequently) as needed without concerns about how the platform's algorithms will influence the content visibility in this case.

The practical design of the platform (including folders, fixed posts, and delayed posting) and advanced formatting were consistently cited as useful in managing large volumes of content. These features allow for clearer navigation, better content organization.

“The war probably also really accelerated it, because we see how X is used very often in America and Europe to consume news. That's why, I think, Telegram doesn't want to lag behind and also helps content makers in every way they can, in how they can operate with posts. And this encourages you to stay, let's say, because the functionality is added and updated... You don't think about other platforms that way anymore, or you still want to continue publishing here, because you see that they are adapting to you” — Media 04, Dataset 02

Whether through interface refinements or structural functionalities, the platform was perceived as increasingly responsive to the needs of content creators operating in time-sensitive, information-heavy, and visually-driven environments.

Ultimately, Telegram's sustained focus on user-oriented innovation underlines its dual function: both as a messaging app and as a creator-friendly media platform. The continual rollout of enhancements demonstrates an intentional effort to retain and support content creators by reducing friction,

expanding control, and enabling editorial agility in the shifting informational landscape.

Chapter summary

This chapter presented an in-depth analysis of how Ukrainian users and media professionals adopted and utilized Telegram as a primary news and communication platform during the ongoing crisis triggered by Russia's full-scale invasion. Drawing on two qualitative Datasets — Dataset 01, which includes 40 semi-structured in-depth interviews with Telegram users, and Dataset 02, comprising 10 interviews with media professionals — the chapter explores evolving patterns of use, platform-specific motivations, and the implications of Telegram's media affordances under crisis conditions.

The initial uptake of Telegram among users was shaped by earlier restrictions on Russian social media platforms and further accelerated by the need for timely, localized, and reliable information following the onset of the full-scale war. Participants of the study identified several affordances of Telegram that supported its use in this context, including rapid information dissemination, chronological feeds, access to official and user-generated content, and a low-friction interface that enabled passive as well as active engagement.

The findings indicated that users' news consumption routines were dynamic and adapted over time. While the early stages of the invasion prompted intensive information-seeking behavior, often described by respondents as overwhelming or compulsive, many users later implemented strategies to moderate exposure, reduce emotional pressure, and compare information across sources. These adaptations were facilitated by Telegram's flexible features, such as channel management, notification controls, and varying levels of interaction.

A significant factor in Telegram's adoption during the full-scale invasion was its role in delivering real-time air raid alerts and localized threat

notifications. Users relied on the platform's capacity to provide timely, region-specific updates that were often perceived as faster and more detailed than other sources, like mainstream media.

These alerts contributed to Telegram's utility as a personal risk management tool. Despite concerns about emotional fatigue due to frequent air raid notifications, many users continued to rely on the platform, highlighting the perceived importance of immediate and geographically relevant information during periods of heightened insecurity.

The platform's notification system enabled users to receive news directly and continuously, without the need to actively search for updates. This consistent flow of time-sensitive information provided users with a sense of informational proximity and situational awareness. As reflected in user interviews, the platform's structure was perceived as offering unmediated access to news, enhancing the feeling of being "in the know" during emergency situations.

In addition to its informational role, Telegram served as a space for social connection and informal community support. Respondents described experiencing a sense of solidarity through shared reactions, commentary, and participation in volunteer initiatives. However, concerns were also raised regarding the spread of misinformation, the emotional impact of graphic or repetitive content, and the challenges of content moderation on the platform.

The empirical data collected within Dataset 02 demonstrates that editors have very few practical tools to establish a close connection with their audience and track data about their subscribers at a deep level, they were nevertheless important in gaining a more complete picture of the functioning of the Telegram platform as a place and medium for consuming and distributing news. Based on a set of interviews conducted with editors and media professionals, there's a pattern of organizational and structural changes to fit into this accelerated news cycle, meeting the needs of their readers.

Notably, there has been a discernible shift in Telegram's role, from serving primarily as a distribution tool to evolving into a more autonomous component within media organizations, characterized by dedicated guidelines, strategic frameworks, assigned personnel, and distinct operational workflows. Journalists and editors adapted their tone of voice and format to meet Telegram's informal, concise, and real-time norms, often balancing factual reporting with the accelerated news cycle. They also responded to user needs by addressing safety concerns, recognizing the mental toll of wartime news consumption, and the potential toxicity of open, unmoderated comment sections.

The following concluding chapter will synthesize these insights within the broader scope of the study's research questions and theoretical frameworks, offering a comparative reflection on the user and producer perspectives and situating the role of Telegram within the contemporary Ukrainian media landscape. It will also address the implications of these findings for platform governance, media literacy, and the future of digital crisis communication.

CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation research explored how Ukrainian users adopted and utilized the Telegram platform for news consumption during the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The summary chapter is set out to synthesize the key findings of the dissertation, focusing on the research tasks outlined in the introductory chapter. It provides a comprehensive overview of how the study's objectives and research tasks were fulfilled, drawing together theoretical insights, empirical evidence, and methodological outcomes. The discussion highlights the interplay between digital platform features, audience behavior, and crisis communication processes within the Ukrainian context, offering both conceptual contributions and practical implications. In doing so, the chapter consolidates the study's contributions to the fields of media studies, digital communication, and crisis communication.

Theoretical frameworks informing the use of Telegram. The examination of the theoretical frameworks of Uses and Gratifications, Media Affordances, and Crisis Communication revealed their relevance and complementarity in explaining the use of Telegram digital platform during crisis conditions. The Uses and Gratifications approach provided a foundational understanding of user motivations, emphasizing the active role of the audience while utilizing Telegram for its informational and instrumental value in a high-risk environment. This framework highlighted how audiences sought immediacy, relevance, control, and emotional regulation in their media use.

The Media Affordances perspective contributed to understanding how specific features of the Telegram platform—such as real-time notifications, chronological feeds, anonymity, and lack of algorithmic curation—enabled and shaped user practices. The concept of affordances allowed for an analysis of how technological design interacts with social and situational contexts to produce distinctive media routines.

The framework of Crisis Communication contextualized these behaviors within the broader dynamics of information practices under disruptive conditions. It underscored how the urgency, unpredictability, and emotional intensity of wartime circumstances influenced both user demand for timely information and the adaptation of communication strategies by media professionals.

Together, these frameworks supported a multi-dimensional interpretation of Telegram's role as an emerging digital platform in Ukraine's media ecosystem, enabling a nuanced analysis of the interplay between user agency, platform architecture, and crisis-induced media behavior.

The rise of new digital platforms and social networks presents researchers with opportunities to apply existing theoretical frameworks to contexts that these theories have yet to fully address. As Ronzhyn et al. (2023) argue, alternative platforms can offer unique affordances absent from major ones. "It is likely that the whole reason why alternative platforms emerge is because they aim to provide affordances that are not present on the major platforms" (Ronzhyn et al., 2023, p. 3182). Another gap that the literature review revealed is that the vast majority of work on crisis communication tends to be Western-centric and focuses more on organizational crises than other types of crisis events. Also, research that directly relates to the Telegram application covers the areas of political communication, digital activism, cybersecurity, and media studies. However, relatively fewer researchers examine the perspective of the audience and audience motivations. Thus, combining all these features, this dissertation aims to address this research gap, taking into account the unique context of Ukraine, the features of the platform as an alternative digital platform with its specific affordances, and the unique needs of Ukrainian users that arose against the backdrop of the large-scale crisis event.

A **scoping literature review** was also conducted to review the previous body of work on Telegram, classify the most common areas and topics for

Telegram related research, and situate this dissertation research within the existing research gap. In sum, 380 texts in English and Ukrainian were identified and consistently analyzed revealing that the most common areas for studying Telegram were Education and learning; Disinformation, misinformation, propaganda, censorship, and surveillance; Computer science; Radicalization and conspiracy theories; Bots and automation. At the same time, relatively few studies have addressed user behavior and the use of Telegrams in media and journalism. This research fills the gap by examining user practices and experiences, providing empirical insight into how Telegram is adopted and integrated into daily routines. It also explores how media professionals understand their audiences and tailor strategies to meet their needs.

User motivations and behavior in adopting Telegram. The study examined the motivations and behavior of Ukrainian users in adopting Telegram as a primary news source during the full-scale invasion. Drawing on insights from in-depth interviews, the findings indicate that user decisions were shaped by a combination of informational urgency, perceived platform reliability, and the need for emotional regulation. Participants highlighted Telegram's immediacy, real-time notifications, and the ability to access geographically specific content (air raid alerts and local damage reports) as key features that informed the motivations for use.

These motivations align with core principles of the Uses and Gratifications framework, demonstrating how users actively selected Telegram to meet specific needs for timely information, psychological control, and situational awareness during a rapidly evolving crisis. Moreover, user behavior reflected both high-frequency engagement and selective avoidance strategies, with some participants deliberately limiting exposure to avoid emotional exhaustion. The platform's affordances, such as mute functions, channel-based architecture, and absence of algorithmic feeds, enabled these self-regulation practices.

Simultaneously, users consistently negotiate credibility and trustworthiness when using Telegram, particularly given the platform's lack of moderation, rapid flow of information, and anonymity. For respondents, this engagement involves relying on familiar or verified channels, cross-checking sources, and limiting exposure to potentially manipulative content. These behaviors unfold against the backdrop of hybrid warfare in Ukraine, where digital platforms serve as contested arenas for both information and disinformation, amplifying the stakes of everyday media choices. Thus, users have to compensate for Telegram's lack of editorial oversight and moderation with their own digital resilience and adaptation practices.

Overall, Telegram was perceived not only as a source of news but also as a tool for personal agency and adaptive media use under crisis conditions.

Modality and Navigability as core affordances. The results of the study showed that a number of features that were most important to Telegram users fell into two classes of affordances, according to the MAIN model (Sundar, 2008).

The **Agency** class of affordances refers to users' perception of control over their media environment and content exposure. Telegram provides this sense of agency through several distinct features. First, the subscription-based channel model gives users the ability to actively choose which sources to follow without algorithmic interference. This allows individuals to curate personalized information environments based on relevance or thematic interest. Second, Telegram offers notification controls, including the ability to mute specific channels, which enhances user autonomy in managing emotional or cognitive overload during crisis periods. Lastly, users can leave or delete channels at any time without consequence, reinforcing the perception that they retain full control over their information inputs.

The **Navigability** class of affordance, as defined in the MAIN model (Sundar, 2008), relates to the perceived ease with which users can find, access,

and move through information within a digital environment. Telegram offers a set of features that strongly support this class of affordances, particularly in the context of crisis-driven media use. Most notably, its chronological content structure ensures that messages are delivered and displayed in linear order, allowing users to follow the unfolding of events without algorithmic reshuffling. The platform's minimalist interface further reduces cognitive load, enabling quick orientation even in high-stress situations. Users can pin key messages within channels, facilitating easy access to critical information such as safety instructions, contact details, or real-time alerts. Additionally, Telegram's channel-based organization permits users to compartmentalize different information streams (national news, local alerts, or humanitarian updates), making the navigation of content purposeful and efficient. Together, these features provide a high degree of navigational clarity, enabling users to engage in sustained, structured, and context-sensitive information tracking during periods of uncertainty.

Thus, the study highlights Agency and Navigability as core affordances that give Telegram users both control over their information environment and clarity in accessing it. Together, these affordances make Telegram especially effective for managing information during crises, where flexibility in control and ease of use are crucial. However, these same affordances also have a reverse side. The ease of creating and accessing content, combined with minimal platform moderation, facilitates the rapid spread of misinformation, disinformation, propaganda, and other forms of malicious content. In crisis conditions such as war, this can amplify confusion, erode trust, expose users to coordinated information manipulation campaigns and undermine security at numerous levels (ranging from cybersecurity and information security up to national security). Thus, while Agency and Navigability empower users, they also demand greater media literacy and critical awareness to mitigate the risks embedded in Telegram's open and flexible structure.

Media professionals' perceptions of audience needs and motivations.

The research investigated how media professionals operating on Telegram perceived the needs and motivations of their audiences during the crisis. Interviews with editors and media professionals revealed a growing awareness of users' expectations for immediacy, clarity, and emotional sensitivity in news delivery. Media professionals recognized that, under conditions of heightened risk and uncertainty, audiences turned to Telegram for rapid and actionable information, particularly during air raids, military escalations, and infrastructure disruptions.

At the same time, a group of media respondents noted a lack of tools to perform in-depth audience analysis or directly track audience feedback and reactions. Thus, they rely more on indirect signals from the audience, such as the number of new followers or unfollows, reposts of certain content, and in some cases, comments and pictographic reactions, if channel editors choose to enable them. Often, comments and reactions are heavily distorted by bot activity, so editors of large channels disable them due to the lack of adequate moderation. The collected insights informed editorial decisions, including the prioritization of speed, tone, and format. In response to perceived audience needs, media professionals adapted by increasing the frequency of updates, simplifying language, and using visual formats.

Editors also noted that Telegram's limited analytics and interactivity constrained their ability to fully gauge user sentiment, which led to a reliance on informal feedback loops and intuitive editorial judgments. Nevertheless, they viewed the Telegram audience as more selective and crisis-aware than on other platforms, which led some newsrooms to grant greater editorial autonomy to Telegram-specific teams.

Media professionals highlighted the tension between reach and reliability, acknowledging that while Telegram enables faster reporting, it also complicates source verification and exposes them to misinformation spread by

non-journalistic actors. Informants noted they can identify manipulative campaigns on the platform, but often feel compelled to respond, either by publishing fact-checks or refuting false claims. As a result, they become involved in information dynamics that were not part of their original plans or workflows. The need to respond to cycles of distribution of various malicious content disrupts planned workflows, forcing media actors into a reactive role rather than a purely strategic or editorial one.

Overall, media professionals demonstrated a clear and evolving understanding of audience motivations, including the desire for real-time situational awareness, emotional regulation, and ongoing tension between speed of updates and source credibility. These features shaped both their content strategies and platform engagement practices.

Adaptation of engagement tactics, content formats, and posting routines by media professionals. The study found that Ukrainian media professionals actively adjusted their engagement strategies on Telegram in response to users' evolving behaviors and perceived needs during the full-scale invasion. These adjustments reflected both a recognition of Telegram's unique affordances and an awareness of the shifting informational and emotional expectations of audiences under crisis conditions.

One notable adaptation was the transition from using Telegram as just a tool for disseminating information to perceiving it as a more independent and distinctive extension of the media. Media professionals working within the platform gain more autonomy (while still operating as part of the media outlet), create their own sets of guidelines and rules, and approaches to organizing workflows.

Content formats were also tailored to the relevant context (a relatively safe situation or phase of intense danger, such as during a massive missile attack) and the nature of Telegram's interface. Media professionals increasingly use brief text updates, bullet points, and visuals (e.g., infographics, short videos)

to deliver information quickly, clearly, and in an engaging way. Some content was designed specifically for Telegram, often bypassing longer editorial processes typical of websites or print publications.

Posting routines became more agile and event-driven. Media professionals reported increasing the frequency and responsiveness of posts during high-intensity periods (e.g., missile strikes, political announcements), while adopting more structured, scheduled posting during calmer intervals. Editorial teams often monitored user behavior in real time and adjusted posting rhythms accordingly, balancing the urgency of updates with the need to avoid overwhelming users.

Additionally, some newsrooms restructured internal workflows to reflect Telegram's growing role, assigning dedicated staff or teams to manage Telegram content independently. This shift acknowledged both the platform's distinct dynamics and its perceived centrality in reaching crisis-affected audiences.

In summary, media professionals' adaptations on Telegram demonstrate a platform-aware editorial strategy that is increasingly shaped by user behavior, contextual demands, and the affordances of real-time mobile communication during crisis.

Interaction between user needs, platform features, and information practices. The study assessed the dynamic interplay between user needs, platform affordances, and emergent information practices during the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Findings demonstrate that Telegram's structural and functional features aligned closely with user demands for real-time, localized, and minimally filtered information. Users engaged with the platform in ways that reflected both situational urgency and emotional self-regulation, navigating between high-frequency monitoring and selective avoidance.

Telegram's features, such as chronological feeds, customizable notifications, anonymity, and the absence of algorithmic filtering, enabled specific information practices that were adapted to crisis conditions. These

included subscribing to both official and non-official channels for air raid alerts and situational updates, using pinned messages to track essential content, and revisiting chronological posts to reconstruct the development of an event. Users relied on platform's ability to deliver immediate, contextually relevant content without information overload, and shaped their media routines accordingly.

Simultaneously, the nature of the crisis shaped how users interpreted and interacted with platform features. User needs were not static but evolved in response to the rhythm and intensity of the war, prompting shifts in how Telegram was used. For instance, increasing reliance during escalations and selective disengagement during emotionally intense periods was frequently reported by the respondents. These behaviors illustrate a recursive relationship: platform features enabled certain practices, while user needs and experiences influenced how those features were perceived and used.

The study shows that the interaction between user needs, Telegram's platform-specific affordances, and the crisis-driven information environment produced distinct and adaptable news consumption practices. This interdependence accentuates the importance of examining digital media behavior not only in terms of user intention or platform design in isolation, but through the convergence of both under specific socio-political conditions.

Discussion. This dissertation study has explored the utilization of Telegram as a distinctive news platform during the 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine, focusing on user motivations, technological affordances, and patterns of information engagement under crisis conditions. Through a dual-perspective qualitative methodology that combines interviews with both Telegram users and media professionals, this study has generated a detailed and context-specific understanding of how emerging digital platforms are adopted and appropriated during periods of acute disruption.

The research findings reveal that Telegram functioned not merely as a messaging service but as a digital environment that enabled rapid, decentralized,

and highly personalized information flows. This transformation was driven by both the platform's technical features and the specific needs of users navigating the uncertainties of war. Users actively leveraged Telegram's affordances (such as chronological feeds, customizable alerts, and anonymous browsing) to fulfill both informational and emotional needs, including real-time situational awareness, personal safety monitoring, and psychological coping. However, the same affordances of the platforms pushed them to form digital resilience and adaptation practices, as the intense information flow contained not only the information needed by users, but also a variety of malicious content, such as disinformation, misinformation, propaganda, and paid puff pieces. These findings are significant for the broader research field, as they highlight how users navigate both informational needs and psychological strain within digital environments used for the purposes of hybrid warfare. They emphasize the risks posed by largely unmoderated platforms like Telegram, which not only support real-time awareness but also serve as vectors for disinformation and manipulation during conflict.

Crucially, this study addresses several important gaps in the existing body of research on digital platforms and media consumption. While previous scholarship has extensively explored mainstream platforms like Facebook, Twitter (X), and Instagram, relatively little empirical work has been dedicated to understanding the unique role of alternative or emerging platforms, particularly in crisis contexts. Telegram's position outside the "Big Tech" ecosystem has often led to its marginalization in public and scholarly discourse, despite its growing influence in information dissemination, particularly in Eastern and Central Europe.

This research responds directly to that omission by offering a case study that captures the real-time integration of Telegram into the media habits of millions of Ukrainians during wartime. It extends existing literature by empirically documenting how users engage with a non-algorithmic,

low-moderation platform in ways that depart significantly from interaction norms on more commercialized, curated platforms.

The dissertation is situated within and contributes to three intersecting theoretical frameworks: Uses and Gratifications (U&G), Media Affordances, and Crisis Communication.

Within the **Uses and Gratifications framework**, the study reinforces the conceptualization of users as active agents who selectively engage with media to satisfy informational, psychological, and social needs. Ukrainian Telegram users sought not only timely updates but also emotional reassurance and a sense of agency in chaotic conditions. The findings affirm the enduring relevance of U&G, while also highlighting the need to adapt its typologies to contemporary digital environments characterized by fragmented, real-time media flows.

The study also contributes to the **Media Affordances** literature by identifying how Telegram's specific design features, such as low-friction access, non-algorithmic feeds, and engagement tools, create distinct modes of news consumption and audience behavior. Using MAIN model Sundar (2008), it highlights how Agency and Navigability stand out from other classes of affordances of digital platforms in an environment where rapid crisis information is at the center of audience needs. Telegram's affordances enabled practices such as "news grazing," continuous micro-monitoring, and asynchronous engagement. At the same time, the research points to the limits of affordances in environments where users must independently negotiate risks related to source credibility, emotional exposure, and platform governance. Thus, it strengthens calls within the literature for more contextual and user-centered analyses of affordances, especially in platforms with minimal moderation or formal structure.

From the perspective of **Crisis Communication**, the study accentuates the evolving role of digital platforms in shaping how information is distributed, interpreted, and acted upon during emergencies. Telegram's role in distributing

air raid alerts, threat updates, and post-event reporting exemplifies how platforms can become infrastructural to personal and collective safety during crises. Users turned to Telegram not only for news, but for immediate signals that guided movement, sheltering, and decision-making in real time. This reframes Telegram as a component of crisis communication systems, functioning alongside or in place of official government channels and media institutions.

By validating user experiences with insights from media professionals, the study also reveals how media outlets adapt their strategies within platforms that lack traditional analytics, moderation, or licensing mechanisms. These adaptations underscore the challenges faced by professional journalists in maintaining credibility and public service within fast-paced, user-dominated ecosystems.

In sum, this dissertation advances the understanding of how users interact with emerging digital platforms under crisis conditions. It fills a critical research gap by centering a non-Western, high-stakes context; by focusing on an under-researched platform; and by integrating theoretical frameworks that foreground both user agency and technological structure.

The study's findings offer not only academic contributions but practical implications for media practitioners, crisis communication planners, and platform designers seeking to understand how digital infrastructures are used, adapted, and relied upon in moments of profound uncertainty. The obtained results also offer valuable insights for policy makers working to counter the spread of disinformation, misinformation, propaganda and other types of harmful content. Future research may have avenues to build upon this work by examining the longer-term evolution of platform trust, institutional-media adaptation, and the comparative role of Telegram in other regional or global crisis contexts.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Interview guide for semi-structured in-depth interviews with Telegram users

This conversation is completely anonymous; no information that could identify you will be included in the research (only quotes, generalized data such as gender, age, and occupation may be used). The goal of the study is to understand why users turn to Telegram as a source of news and information, and what specific features of Telegram attract them. To better document your responses, the conversation will be audio recorded. Do you consent to being recorded?

Questions

Section 1. General Information

Please tell a bit about yourself: where and in what capacity do you work? Where do you currently live? How old are you?

How do you usually consume news throughout the day:

- How often do you check the news? Where?
- Do you have any favorite news sources? If so, which ones?
- What sources do you use besides Telegram?

How long have you been using Telegram?

How did you first start using Telegram for news?

- Was there a specific event, a recommendation, or another reason?

What kind of news do you mainly read on Telegram (e.g., local, national, international, specific topics)? What are your favorite channels?

Section 2. Reasons for Choosing Telegram

Why do you choose to use Telegram for reading news instead of other platforms? (Capture specific reasons or advantages that make Telegram attractive to the user)

What unique features does Telegram offer for reading news that other social networks or apps do not?

Are there social networks/apps you avoid using for consuming news? Why?

How reliable do you find the news you receive on Telegram? (Follow-up: Are there specific Telegram channels you consider more reliable? Why?)

Section 3. Affordances of Telegram

Are there specific features of Telegram that enhance your news consumption experience? (Examples: channels, groups, notification settings, privacy features, media sharing capabilities, etc.)

How important is anonymity to you when viewing or sharing news on Telegram? (Capture whether anonymity influences the decision to use Telegram for reading news.)

How much faster do you receive news via Telegram compared to other platforms?

How often do you interact with news on Telegram (e.g., commenting, sharing)?

Section 4. Limitations or Issues

Have you noticed any disadvantages of using Telegram for news? (Follow-up: Are there features you would like to see added to Telegram for news consumption?)

What is your opinion on the problem of misinformation on Telegram?

If you could change something about how news is distributed or displayed on Telegram, what would it be?

Section 5. Use of Telegram During Crises or Emergencies

Can you recall a specific crisis or emergency when you relied on Telegram news?

Why did you choose Telegram as your main news platform at that time?

What factors were most important to you when deciding to use Telegram for news during a crisis or emergency? (Examples: speed of information, trust in sources, availability of local updates, anonymity, or low data usage).

Follow-up: Did the availability of certain features (e.g., channel notifications, group discussions) influence your choice?

Did you pay attention to which government bodies were represented on Telegram (e.g., Office of the President, Ukrainian Air Force, etc.)?

Did you consider the news on Telegram to be more credible or accurate during the full-scale invasion or crisis?

How did you verify or evaluate the credibility of information received on Telegram?

During emergencies, did you interact more with Telegram content (e.g., sharing news, participating in discussions)?

Did you use other platforms alongside Telegram during the crisis? How does Telegram compare in terms of meeting your information needs?

In future emergencies, would you turn to Telegram first for news? Why?

Section 6. Final Questions

Do you plan to continue using Telegram as your main news source in the future? Why?

Is there anything else about your experience using Telegram for news that you would like to share?

Appendix B

Interview guide for semi-structured in-depth interviews with media professionals

This conversation is completely anonymous; no information that could identify you will be included in the research (only quotes, generalized data such as gender, age, and occupation may be used). The goal of the study is to understand why users turn to Telegram as a source of news and information, and what specific features of Telegram attract them. To better document your responses, the conversation will be audio recorded. Do you consent to being recorded?

Questions

Section 1. General Information

Can you tell a bit about your role in the newsroom and your responsibilities?

What is your overall experience in news distribution?

What digital platforms or social networks does your media outlet use to distribute news?

How long have you been using Telegram as part of your news distribution strategy?

What prompted your media organization to start using Telegram for news distribution?

Are there specific goals you aim to achieve with Telegram compared to using other platforms for news distribution?

How would you describe the typical subscribers of your Telegram channel?

Who is the target audience for the news you share on Telegram? (Follow-up:

How does it compare to the audience on other platforms?)

How do you research your Telegram channel's audience? (Follow-up: Do you use any digital tools, key metrics? What are the main findings or insights you've gathered?)

Section 2. Editorial Use Strategies for Telegram

What types of news content do you usually distribute through Telegram (e.g., breaking news, updates, specific topics)?

How frequently do you publish news on Telegram? Are there specific strategies regarding timing or post frequency?

Do you share any exclusive or unique content on Telegram that is not available on other platforms? (And why?)

What specific audience behaviors have you noticed on Telegram? Are there particular user reactions or preferences?

Do you interact with your audience on Telegram? In your opinion, is audience interaction more important on Telegram compared to other platforms?

What interaction patterns with the audience have you noticed on Telegram compared to other platforms?

Section 3. Platform Affordances and Features

Which Telegram features (e.g., channels, groups, notification settings) do you find most useful for distributing news?

How do Telegram's features help you achieve your media outlet's goals for reach, engagement, or content distribution?

To what extent do you feel you control the reposts, visibility, and reach of your content on Telegram?

Do you use any specific settings or strategies in Telegram (e.g., pinning important messages, using analytics, enabling comments)?

How critical is the speed of information distribution on Telegram compared to other platforms?

From your experience, how effective is Telegram for real-time updates, especially for breaking news?

Section 4. Limitations and Future Use

Do you face any challenges related to misinformation or content moderation on Telegram?

Are there any Telegram features or limitations that hinder or complicate news distribution?

Are there any trends you've observed in how media are using Telegram?

(Follow-up: What role do you see Telegram playing in future news distribution?)

Do you feel competition from other Telegram channels, and what strategies do you use to compete for audience attention? (Follow-up: How do you compete with bloggers or anonymous Telegram channels that also distribute news?)

Do you plan to continue using Telegram for news distribution?

Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience using Telegram for distributing news?

Appendix C
Codebook for dataset 01

Analytical Codes	Descriptive Codes	Definition	Indication	Example Quote
Crisis Response & Communication	Air raid alarms and urgent notifications; Information during a crisis; Local news and notifications; Speed; Unique information User-generated content Real-time news updates	The use of Telegram during high-stakes or emergency events.	Respondents reflect on their experience of being informed in times of crisis and consuming news in emergency situations.	When I read the news, it's usually after shelling or when there's an air raid alarm, and I hear some explosions, then I read [news - ed.] to understand where the danger is, what it is, and how, to be a little aware. And this is the first moment when I read the news. And the second, when something is happening in the world, something that everyone is talking about, and then I also want to read about it.
Credibility & Trust	News credibility; Official pages of the government and officials on Telegram; Junk news channels Tone of voice Telaram's Russian origin	How users judge or interact with the reliability of news sources.	Mentions of information reliability or negotiating reliability, channel trustworthiness, or evaluating sources.	I chose a few channels that are always, well, the kind that write up-to-date information that you can trust. And that's it.
Information Control & Personalization	Control over content; Control over notifications; Control over time; Control within the app; Low-friction access	How users manage their content, time, and notification preferences on Telegram.	References to choosing what, when, or how to read content, or customizing notifications or app behavior.	Well, if this is what you have access to, that you can use it, that you can choose what interests you, what suits you. For me, Telegram is just like a mailbox. Whatever you subscribe to, they'll throw it in your mailbox, and that's all.

Psychological Impact	Psychological well-being; Confidentiality and Anonymity	Emotional or mental health aspects of news use and digital behavior.	Expressions of emotional or mental reactions to news exposure or digital habits.	I read the news in periods. It happens that at the beginning, if we take from the beginning of the war, I read them at first in a jiffy, like everyone, all the Telegram channels. And I spent, I think, several hours a day on this. Then my memory and working capacity began to decline, fatigue, apathy appeared, and there were some such depressive states, because I could not digest all this information. [...] And after this incident, I began to adjust the number of channels that I read.
Community & Social Dynamics	Community, solidarity, and a sense of support; Pictographic reactions; Comments;	Interpersonal or group experiences enabled by Telegram during conflict or crisis.	Discussion of social support, group interactions, forms of expressing community involvement, or shared content among users.	And we communicate there even when there are shellings, and when there are some fundraising efforts for our friends, because many of them have husbands and children fighting [in the army - ed.]. We help each other. In general, that's how it is for me, you could say it's good for the soul, because sometimes there are things that I can't tell my family. I can write there first, and somehow the girls there will share something with me.
Affordances and features	Chronological, non-algorithmic feed; File sharing and saving; Internet speed and quality	The functional and technical characteristics of Telegram that shape how users interact with information. This includes design aspects that enable or	Focus on platform features and functionality, file handling, non-algorithmic flow, or speed of access.	Yes, by the way, yes, because I see some recent news there, not the ones that were there three months ago. And I don't have to waste time setting the date or filtering them somehow, or looking for columns there. Well, that's convenient.

		constrain user behavior, such as chronological feeds, tools for sharing and saving files, etc.		
News Consumption Patterns	Telegram adoption; "News bump"; "News grazing" and "news snacking"	User habits of engaging with news on Telegram, including brief, frequent checking, repeated exposure to trending updates, and the platform's growing role as a news source.	Mentions of checking news frequently, casually, or experiencing repeated exposures. Experience in adapting the platform for various purposes.	Well, every time I have free time or I have the opportunity to do it. That is, I woke up in the morning, watched the news. Then I shower, I make coffee, and watch the news. While I make coffee, I turn on the news on my headphones to listen to it through the audio. While I go to work, I listen to the news, come to work, I reread it. Well, that is, during the day, constantly, when I have free time.

Appendix D

Codebook for dataset 02

Analytical Codes	Descriptive Codes	Definition	Indication	Example Quote
Crisis Response & Communication	Air raid alarms and urgent notifications; Crisis communication to audiences; Impact of a full-scale invasion	How media organizations respond to crises and convey urgent information.	Respondents reflect on their experience of being informed in times of crisis and consuming news in emergency situations.	Regarding breaking news, there is some content that is not published on the site. That is published on Telegram. We publish, for example, air raid alerts. We publish some breaking stories related to official messages from the Air Force. For example, about being careful, ballistic missiles are approaching Kyiv.
Audience Engagement & Strategy	Connecting with the audience; User-generated content; Media strategy and Telegram integration; Notifications and posting; "Hype" content; Competition for the audience	How media outlets connect with, retain, or influence their audiences.	Mentions of strategies to attract or retain audiences, including platform engagement and emotional triggers.	At first, at some point, we wanted to abolish this [air raid alert notifications - ed.], but, by the way, we saw that there was an outflow of audience. This is such an experiment we had. We brought it back, and, in general, we understand that for many people, and I don't know if it's hundreds or thousands, that is, we also act as such a source of information regarding the security situation.
Media Structure & Policy	Editorial policies and guidelines; Institutionalized media vs new media; Specific skills of media professionals	Organizational guidelines and media professionalism.	References to editorial policies, media professionalism, or comparisons between traditional and new media.	When we have some extensive news pieces on Telegram, most often, it has already been posted on the site. That means we have already analyzed it, we have already obtained all the information, and then we have formatted it for Telegram in a reduced format. We really try to make something smaller out of something big, without losing

				details. And this is sometimes really difficult.
Content Production & Platform Features and Use	Speed of updates; Exclusive content; Technical features and platform updates; Copyright concerns	Technical, editorial, and operational aspects of producing and distributing content.	Mentions of technical tools, publishing processes, or platform affordances.	There was a lot of news, and in the first weeks and months of the invasion, there was really a lot of news. And by the time the news item was posted on the website, the situation could have already changed.
Platform Dynamics & Moderation	Information campaigns in Telegram; Bot interference; Management of comments and discussions	External influence and moderation of media content or interactions.	Mentions of interference, moderation of comments, or orchestrated campaigns.	There have been attempts, if we're not talking about our channel, but in general, we see that there's a lot of disinformation, especially on anonymous channels. You can see when there's a campaign against someone very clearly, when on million-dollar channels they're spreading some slander or disinformation about someone, about some situations [...] political figure, an entrepreneur, or someone else. This is such a negative side to this story.

Appendix E

List of the applicant's publications

Papers in which the main scientific results of the dissertation are published

4. Gordiienko, T. O. (2024). Від приватного спілкування до інформаційних бульбашок: як месенджери змінюють споживання новин [From private communication to information bubbles: How messengers change news consumption]. *Scientific notes of VI Vernadsky Taurida National University, Series: Philology. Journalism*, 35(74)(6), 280–289. <https://doi.org/10.32782/2710-4656/2024.6/44>
5. Gordiienko, T. O. (2025). Вплив додатків для обміну повідомленнями на кризові та ризик-комунікації [The impact of messaging applications on crisis and risk communications]. *Scientific notes of VI Vernadsky Taurida National University, Series: Philology. Journalism*, 36(75)(1), Part 2, 230–238. <https://doi.org/10.32782/2710-4656/2025.1.2/36>
6. Gordiienko, T. O. (2025). Методологічні підходи до вивчення цифрових платформ [Methodological approaches to studying digital platforms]. *Communications and Communicative Technologies*, (25), 67-74. <https://doi.org/10.15421/292508>

Approbation of the dissertation materials

5. Gordiienko, T. O. (2025, March 7) *Цифрові платформи: методологічні аспекти дослідження* [Digital platforms: Methodological aspects of research. Conference presentation]. Scientific-Practical Conference "Russian War Against Ukraine: Transformations of Social Institutions and Practices," National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, Kyiv, Ukraine.
6. Gordiienko, T. O. (2023, October 3). *War propaganda and media ethics in the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine* [Conference

presentation]. Media Ethics Conference: The War on Truth, University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond, OK, United States.

7. Gordiienko, T. O. (2022, October 5). *The Aspects of Digitalization in Visual Studies* [Conference presentation]. Societies, Cultures, Critical Theories, Södertörn University, Stockholm, Sweden.

8. Gordiienko, T. O. (2021, August 18) *Digital Visual Communication in Contemporary Journalism*. [Presentation]. 5th International PhD Summer School at Kaunas University of Technology, Kaunas, Lithuania.

**Papers that additionally reflect the scientific results of the
dissertation**

3. Gordiienko, T. O. (2021). The rise of membership model in the Ukrainian media. In *World trends in modern journalism: International scientific conference* (pp. 53–56). ISMA University of Applied Sciences. Baltija Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.30525/978-9934-26-118-3-13>

4. Gordiienko, T. O. (2024). News deserts in Ukraine. [Discussion moderator]. Practical conference b° future festival 2024, Bonn, Germany.

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