

УДК 159.9

DOI <https://doi.org/10.32782/psy-2023-2-3>

**Kyrychenko Viktor**

*Doctor of Psychological Sciences, Associate Professor,  
Professor of the Department of Social and Practical Psychology  
of Zhytomyr Ivan Franko State University*

## THE INFORMATION SPACE OF UKRAINE IN THE CONTEXT OF HYBRID WARFARE

**Abstract.** The article presents a theoretical analysis of the problem of the impact of hybrid warfare on society. The main strategies of ideological and cultural influence of the enemy on the mass consciousness of people are highlighted. We have established that a conventional war in the conditions of the information society has no expediency and cannot lead to a constructive result. War in modern conditions is an archaic phenomenon, therefore the entire civilized world condemned Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine. One of the tasks of the hybrid war is to disrupt the objective perception of the world, distort the surrounding reality and make people despair in the future. In the conditions of the Ukrainian-Russian war, the informational and ideological confrontation did not give the Russians success on the battlefield, on the contrary, the beginning of the conventional war was the result of a loss on the informational front. The article describes the results of research into the locus of control over the future of Ukrainians who have not left the territory of Ukraine since the beginning of the war. One of the components of the apperception of the future is information resources that help a person to construct reality in the near and far perspective. According to the results of the survey, Ukrainians perceive the future positively, even in conditions of war. The subjects were found to have an external locus of control and a tendency to rely on themselves in solving life tasks. The main information resources used by the researched for a positive apperception of the future are sources that distribute not objective, but desired information. One of the factors that leads to the destabilization of the apperception of the future is the long-term lack of connection of the individual with the information space, which disappears after the long-term mass missile strikes on the critical infrastructure of Ukraine by Russia. Information and access to it is one of the basic needs of an individual to maintain a positive perception of objective reality and counteract the negative perception of the consequences of war. The research used informational materials that were created after the start of a full-scale war between Ukraine and Russia. Based on the results of the research, we found that topics related to military events or facts that illustrate victory over the enemy are popular among youth and early adulthood. Such texts evoke strong positive emotions in the researched. The topics of war in the information space distort the perception of reality and form an inadequate attitude towards the war and its consequences. Content that is related to aggression, military victories, casualties from the enemy causes more interest than topics that are not related to war. Militarily neutral topics are perceived as emotionally neutral and of little interest. As a result, Ukrainian society becomes oriented towards the consumption of information of a military nature, which affects the media market. War becomes an adequate period of society's functioning, and its methods become a norm of social life, which poses a significant danger for ensuring the mental health of Ukrainian society. Spending a significant part of time for the consumption of militarized content, the subject of information relations becomes a participant in the war at the level of media texts, audiovisual content and involvement in digital activity. In the post-war period, Ukrainian society will need psychological demilitarization of many spheres of social life. Not only military personnel who have certain psychological training, but also ordinary citizens became participants in military events. It is they who do not have an adequate idea of war and its consequences, they consider it an adequate and socially acceptable way of resolving conflicts.

**Keywords:** war, locus of control, apperception of the future, information space.

**Кириченко Віктор**

*доктор психологічних наук, доцент,  
професор кафедри соціальної та практичної психології  
Житомирського державного університету імені Івана Франка*

## ІНФОРМАЦІЙНИЙ ПРОСТІР УКРАЇНИ В КОНТЕКСТІ ГІБРИДНОЇ ВІЙНИ

**Анотація.** У статті здійснюється аналіз сучасного українського медіапростору та його вплив на ключові елементи психологічної безпеки особистості в умовах гібридної війни. Гібридна інформаційно-психологічна

інтервенція росії почалася задовго до початку повномасштабного вторгнення на території України, що знайшло певний відгос у міграційних тенденціях та загальному психологічному стані населення України, готовності до протистояння, до ведення затяжної війни. Інформація в умовах війни є вагомим ресурсом побудови образу майбутнього на основі узагальнення прогностичних показників розвитку подій, учасником яких є українці. В контексті українського досвіду ведення війни ми можемо констатувати, що українське суспільство виявилось психологічно стійким до ведення війни та аргументованого сприйняття можливих варіантів майбутнього. За результатами нашого дослідження було встановлено, що українці мають позитивний стійкий образ майбутнього, розглядають військові негаразди як тимчасове явище, яке матиме позитивне завершення для українського суспільства. Українці частіше усього використовують інформаційні ресурси, які поширюють не правдиву інформацію, а ту, яка відповідає їх позитивним очікуванням. Найбільш популярними ресурсами є месенджери та відеохостингові сервіси, які важко контролюються на предмет об'єктивності контенту, а отже дають можливість достатньо серйозно змінювати інформацію відповідно до редакційної політики ресурсу. Ми встановили, що між показниками оцінки об'єктивності інформаційного ресурсу та його популярністю (частотою використання) існує обернений кореляційний зв'язок. Тематика найбільш популярного інформаційного контенту стосується військових перемог українців на фронті, занепадом росії, закінченням війни в близькому майбутньому, перемогою України у війні. Такі тенденції в інформаційному просторі мають також негативні наслідки у майбутньому, оскільки матимуть інертність впродовж тривалого часу та формуватимуть в українців культ війни.

**Ключові слова:** гібридна війна, локус контролю, апперцепція майбутнього, інформаційний простір.

In the conditions of hybrid warfare, the informational and ideological confrontation begins when conventional weapons fail to produce results. Its goal is to undermine the trust of the population in the government and its ability to ensure a desirable future. The informational and ideological confrontation is the primary tool of 21st-century warfare and is a result of the evolution of human culture, which has turned destructive weapons into weapons that create. In the modern media environment, when it comes to information society countries, terms like «trade», «market», «technological» and «paradigmatic» wars are increasingly encountered. War, no matter how inhumane it may seem, has become a driving force of human evolution.

The earliest tools were primarily used for aggression, and the first craft mastered by humans was the art of war. American neuroendocrinologist R. Sapolsky suggests that the emergence of the human species is a result of a shift in the role of evolutionary fitness of aggression for the survival of the species [8]. Human intelligence has led to a gradual departure from animalistic forms of aggression and a shift towards conflict in a different dimension. The early hominids learned to restrain their «killer instincts» and being «intelligent human» means precisely not to kill or to do so only out of necessity. Archaic forms of warfare are perceived in any 21st-century culture as an unacceptable manifestation of inhumanity, a violation of traditional values. No culture can justify even conventional warfare, and the concept of a «humane war» is absurd.

Hybrid warfare expands the range of tools that can be used in military confrontation. In the context

of an information society, ideologies, culture, religion, and other centers of group values serve as weapons that aggressors seek to propagate within the territory of the opponent using modern information and communication technologies [2]. Hybrid warfare arises as a result of recognizing the destructiveness of any armed resolution of local or geopolitical conflicts. This particularly applies to the economic infeasibility of using conventional weapons in an information society, as the destruction, primarily of economic infrastructure, has a negative impact on the global economy. The consequences of war in the context of the global economy will be felt not only by the warring countries (assuming they are participants in the global market), as illustrated by the Ukrainian-Russian war, the full-scale phase of which began in 2022. The laws of social organization in an information society do not adhere to archaic rules of warfare that were established in colonial societies. According to Yevhen Mahda's definition, «hybrid warfare is the desire of one state to impose its political will on another (others) through a complex of political, economic, and information measures without declaring war in accordance with the norms of international law» [7, P. 4]. While aggressive physical warfare is condemned by the global community, the tools of hybrid warfare are considered entirely legal and justified from the perspective of evolutionary fitness. The ideological battle is a new form of human confrontation, where bloggers and journalists take on the role of soldiers, and the battlefield extends across the expanses of the global information network. Instead of military equipment and ammunition, the weapons employed are audiovisual content.

The global community is witnessing one of the largest conflicts between colonial autocracy and civilized democratic information society. However, the «last empire of the world» seeks to use the weapons of the civilized world – information – to gain an advantage on the battlefield. For them, the information-psychological confrontation serves as an auxiliary tool, used in preparation for conventional warfare. Recognizing that they lack sufficient informational resources to popularize their worldview, they attempted an aggressive military-tactical operation simultaneously utilizing the potential of instruments for conducting information-psychological attacks. In the context of the Ukrainian-Russian war, these tactics are used to demoralize the personnel of the security forces and undermine the trust of the civilian population in them. The hybrid war unleashed by Russia against Ukraine has undergone a series of transformations: from the informational popularization of fraternal relations to the ideological legitimization of genocide against Ukrainians. The hybrid war, which can confidently be stated, Russia lost to Ukraine and the civilized information society. The systematic information-psychological attacks failed to convince Ukrainians that their future prospects within any union with Russia were better than a union with the European community. Russia suffered an ideological defeat because Ukrainians had the opportunity to realistically assess the quality of their visible future within each of these «unions» and the obvious civilizational choice of the European community destroyed all plans for the «peaceful» absorption of Ukraine. Russia lost to Ukraine twice in the hybrid war: in 2005 and 2014, each time culminating in massive protests by Ukrainians against despotism and a change in the geopolitical vector of activity. This led to a change in Russia's foreign policy and a focus on preparing for the armed occupation of Ukraine. Russia's defeat in the hybrid war against Ukraine became the reason for the full-scale war in 2022.

The overall objective of the information-ideological confrontation in the context of hybrid warfare is to discredit the values of the enemy and instill disillusionment in people about the future. The enemy's information-psychological attacks are aimed at creating an anxious state (generalized anxiety about the future), which arises from the inability to apprehend the future. These measures in the information space are primarily conducted to catastrophize the future. This leads to the emergence of panic moods, depression, and anxiety disorders. The basis of internal locus of control is the

individual's awareness of their ability to control any situations that arise in the foreseeable future. Military psychologist Oleg Karachynsky believes that one of the consequences of war (or its instruments) is the loss of the future: «Our 'self' is not limited to the body and worldview; our self is also a projection of our own future. Currently, there are attempts to steal this future from Ukrainians»<sup>1</sup>. Eric Anderson, Nicholas Carlton, Michael Difenbach, and Paul Han note that the state of uncertainty that arises in the context of hybrid warfare exhausts individuals. Situational mobilization of human resources at the physiological and cognitive-emotional levels eventually becomes oppressive, leading to war fatigue [9]. Over time, the emotional reaction to events of war becomes suppressed, and the predominant emotions associated with future events take on a negative tint. The main sources of uncertainty in this regard are the implication of future scenarios, inadequate understanding of one's own behavior in an unstable future, and limited access to information [10].

In the context of hybrid warfare, uncontrolled information flows have a destructive impact on individuals, with a portion of it being produced by the enemy to further destabilize them. According to the research conducted by T.S. Hurlieva and N.Yu. Zhuravlyova, in conditions of informational uncertainty, the overall level of internality in personality decreases, as well as the level of basic self-trust [1]. Self-doubt is a consequence of the destruction of the future image, as individuals lose the ability to influence it, and their functions within it are limited to basic survival needs (for many Ukrainians during the war, the need to «survive» became paramount). All other functions are put on hold or delegated to someone else. The sense of helplessness that arises in the context of hybrid warfare leads to a loss of initiative in resolving everyday tasks, reduces overall activity levels, and fosters a feeling of personal powerlessness.

War, like other complex social phenomena, finds its reflection in the media space. As an inherently non-humane phenomenon from the perspective of the values of an information society, it never acquires a positive portrayal and is exclusively viewed as a form of aggression that contradicts the fundamental tenets of modern humanism. There can be no positive image of war, especially in the context of confronting aggression (defense, protection), and

<sup>1</sup> <https://forbes.ua/lifestyle/trivoga-neviznachenist-maybutnogo-isterika-11-nayposhirenishikh-mentalnikh-problem-cherez-viynu-ta-sposobi-ikh-virishennya-vid-viyskovogo-psikhologa-16032022-4701>

attitudes towards its outcomes invariably evoke negative emotions. However, as evidenced by the practice of media discourse and the information representation of the Ukrainian-Russian war, the informational content disseminated by all media resources under Ukrainian control currently elicits indifferent feelings in the average content consumer and, to some extent, contributes to the emergence of positive emotions. This serves as a signal of societal attitudes towards «war» and a symbolic reflection of the people's motivation to continue it. At a certain stage of the military-ideological confrontation, Ukrainian society transitioned from collectively realizing the necessity of peace through negotiations (minimizing the inhumane consequences of the confrontation) to a vividly and semantically articulated societal awareness of the categorical pursuit of peace through victory (which inevitably leads to inhumane consequences such as human casualties, infrastructure destruction, and a decline in well-being). As a result, the contextual rhetoric of portraying military events changes: it is no longer about good triumphing over evil, but rather only evil being capable of defeating evil. Consequently, all inhumane and antisocial actions by the «victims» (this term is rarely used in such circumstances) are not only justified but also encouraged. The media space, following the laws of the market (due to the formation of significant demand), becomes filled with content that shifts from traditional themes of peace to sharp and socially popular themes of war. It resonates so strongly within society that it becomes a subject of discussions in online news, television shows (even of an entertainment nature), literature, and art. War, in all its inhumane bloodshed, leading to victory, evokes positive emotions and generates a certain demand for consuming corresponding content. The Ukrainian media market quickly responds to this demand, producing a large quantity of content of varying quality, ranging from objective depictions of war events to blatant emotional manipulations, fabrication of facts, or distortion. The theme of war currently has no age, social, or ideological limitations.

The main challenge for individuals in post-war reality lies in the constant inertia of perceiving reality through the lens of wartime. Post-war memories intrude into post-war realities, compelling individuals to live by the laws of wartime and analyze media content for the presence of information directly or indirectly related to military events. In the post-war period, psychological rehabilitation will be needed not only for direct participants in active combat but also for society as a whole, which will continue to

instinctively live by the laws of wartime. The horrors of war can, at some point, become a part of the everyday reality of the future, posing a challenge for the subsequent restoration of the mental well-being of Ukrainian society.

In the context of the Ukrainian-Russian war, the enemy attempts to demoralize the population of Ukraine by using the following blocks of informational content<sup>2</sup>: 1) «Ukraine is destined to lose» (instilling doubt and demoralization in the population and among the ranks of the security forces regarding victory); 2) «The war will be long» (deterioration of well-being and potential losses: housing, employment, loss of relatives, or personal death); 3) «Europeans are not your friends» (implying potential occupation of Ukrainian territory by neighboring countries). Content promoting ideological, cultural, and historical affinity between Ukrainians and Russians disappears. Based on the results of our research conducted in 2018 as part of an international scientific seminar «Political representation of national minorities» in collaboration with the Institute of Sociology at the University of Warsaw, we conducted research that revealed a cultural and historical distancing between Ukraine and the CIS countries, particularly Russia and Belarus, has already taken place. Therefore, in the hybrid confrontation of the Russian-Ukrainian war, the enemy does not count on cultural and political rapprochement [3]. Instead, historical traumas of past interactions between Ukrainians and Russians have been reactivated. This is particularly true for events such as the Holodomor of 1932-1933 and the Great Terror of 1936-1937. Ukrainians develop phobic reactions towards Russians, which are linked to the previous traumatic experience of historical coexistence [6]. Russian attempts to intimidate Ukrainians involve spreading information about the «atrocities» committed by Russian soldiers on Ukrainian territory, which are portrayed as a «punishment» for Ukrainian disobedience. In the Russian media space, the openly criminal actions of the Russian army are not denied but rather justified as «necessary measures to achieve the stated goals».

The enemy understands that Ukrainians have, to some extent, adapted to the war and developed a complex set of adaptive mechanisms for survival in conditions of potential danger. For this reason, they have begun to destroy the energy and information-communication network, with a particular focus on the energy infrastructure. One of the objectives of

<sup>2</sup> According to the generalizations of audiovisual and textual content of advertising nature (non-organic promotion) on the social media platform Facebook.

these measures is to promote information deprivation among Ukrainians. Information is a vital resource for interpreting the external world, and in times of uncertainty, the need for information grows exponentially. According to our research, it has been found that during periods of social tensions, there is a significant increase in the duration of information consumption sessions. In 2014, the average duration of an information consumption session among young and early adult individuals was 144 minutes, while in 2022, it increased to 189 minutes. In contrast, in 2016, it was 128 minutes [4]. The lack of electricity not only deprives Ukrainians of essential household resources such as heating, water, and light, but also of information, which is particularly crucial in times of uncertainty.

In December 2022, we conducted a survey among residents of the Zhytomyr region aimed at assessing the level of subjective perception of military actions in regions that are not directly involved in active combat operations. These regions are considered rear areas, and therefore the enemy employs methods of information-psychological pressure against them, including demoralization, undermining confidence in victory, information deprivation, and catastrophizing the future. To achieve these goals, the enemy attempts to damage critical infrastructure in Ukraine, particularly the energy and information-communication sectors. The study involved 75 adult participants. According to the results of our study, the absence of telephone communication (36.36%) and the lack of information about the course of the war (24.24%) caused the greatest concern among the participants during periods of power outage. The absence of water (3.03%) and heating (18.18%) generated the least amount of anxiety. A majority of the respondents (54.55%) expressed relatively strong confidence in the future, while 18.18% were uncertain about their future. However, 93.94% had a positive outlook on the future. The highest level of confidence was placed in the Armed Forces of Ukraine (45.45%) and their families and loved ones (33.33%). The lowest level of confidence was found in faith in God (9.09%) and the ability to contribute to the fight against the enemy (3.03%). In terms of their perception of the future, the participants were divided, with 39.39% having a clear vision of the future within a year and 27.27% envisioning it for the rest of their lives. The participants unanimously considered a positive outcome of the Ukrainian-Russian war and firmly believed in Ukraine's victory, seeking to emphasize it. According to the results mentioned above, when asked about their opinion

on the outcome of the Ukrainian-Russian war, all respondents expressed confidence in Ukraine's victory. Among them, 65% were confident in the restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity as of 1991, 27% believed in the return of territories as of February 23, 2022, and only 8% envisioned a frozen conflict with an indefinite timeline and gradual withdrawal of Russian forces from Ukrainian territory. These results indicate that after almost a year of full-scale war with Russia, Ukrainians do not exhibit catastrophic thinking about the future, although there are some limitations to their positive perception of it.

By choosing the strategy of destroying the energy infrastructure, the enemy demonstrates a military mindset aligned with colonial society. In an information society, information is of the utmost value as it allows for the resolution of various everyday, production, and social problems. A person deprived of basic means of existence, such as water, food, and warmth, but having access to the internet and cellular communication, can easily solve these problems in cooperation with others who find themselves in a similar situation. The military destruction of the information infrastructure, considering its extensive nature, is not feasible in Ukraine. Among the main resources of the locus of control over the future for the participants, the informational network remains significant. Most frequently, the participants utilize the Internet: social media and search engines, which are the most accessible and trusted by the participants (Tab.1).

Table 1  
Features of Interaction with Information in the Context of War

	List of information resources used by Ukrainians	Degree of trust	Degree of availability	Frequency of use
1	TV	3,9	6,4	4,2
2	radio	7,8	3,6	3,1
3	press	3,6	2,7	2,7
4	public libraries (including electronic)	8,8	2,3	1,8
5	web resources	3,8	8,8	7,5
6	social networks	6,1	9,2	8,4
7	telephone services	2,8	6,5	4,2
8	correspondence, e-mail	3,3	7,2	3,2
9	search engines	7,4	8,3	7,2

The statistical correlation between the trust level indicators and the frequency of usage is  $p = -0.041496291$ . This suggests that the trust level does not influence the number of references to

informational resources in the search for objective information. It can be concluded that the average Ukrainians seek not truthful but rather optimistic information, which is supported by the results of our previous research [5]. Such content supports Ukrainians and counteracts the emergence of depressive states, despair, and demoralization. This is also indicated by the statistical correlation between the indicators of «accessibility» and "trust" to informational resources, which is  $p = -0.301090716$ . This may be the result of a certain state information policy or a temporary, chaotic phenomenon against the backdrop of the military confrontation. However, for Ukrainians at the moment, the important aspect in terms of accessibility is not objective sources of information, but those that disseminate expected and psychologically supportive information. The correlation between the degree of «accessibility» and the «frequency of usage» of content from specific informational resources is expected to be high. During times of war, false information takes precedence over truthful information. The information that contains a desired description of the surrounding reality is emphasized, even if it violates the requirements of impartiality and objectivity. In our opinion, this is a temporary state that normalizes towards the norms of objective perception of reality that exist in an information society. One of the norms of an information society is the ability to verify information by any of its members. In comparison with the 2018 study, the results have not changed significantly:

adult respondents continue to predominantly use digital social networks and Internet search engines to obtain up-to-date information about the situation in Ukraine and the world [4]. Overall, the obtained results from previous periods and after the onset of full-scale invasion indicate that during periods of societal upheaval, including conditions of war, both conventional and information-ideological, an important aspect of psychological resistance is the individual's ability to perceive the future positively and search for or produce corresponding informational content. It instills a belief in a positive future in people and generates possibilities that prevent the fatalistic view of the consequences of war within individual life histories.

Up-to-date information of a positive nature is extremely important for projecting the future. Ukrainians need positive informational reinforcement that enhances their confidence in the future and their ability to influence its course. This poses a danger in terms of the enemy conducting information-psychological attacks within the framework of hybrid warfare. The Ukrainian security and defense system needs to develop an effective system of hybrid defense for the population against the influence of destructive and harmful content. The internal locus of control over the future is one of the indicators of the readiness of the Ukrainian population for prolonged resistance on the information front, provided there is a preserved adequate understanding of the problems and challenges that Ukrainians face during and after the war.

#### Список використаних джерел

1. Гурлева Т. С., Журавльова Н. Ю. Довіра до себе як важливий атрибут стресостійкості особистості в умовах інформаційної війни: взаємозв'язок понять. *Вчені записки ТНУ імені В.І. Вернадського. Серія: Психологія*. 2022. Том 33 (72), № 4. С. 76–82.
2. Дорошкевич А. С. Гібридна війна в інформаційному суспільстві. *Вісник Національного університету «Юридична академія України імені Ярослава Мудрого»*. Серія: Філософія, філософія права, політологія, соціологія. Харків : Право, 2015. № 2(25). С. 21–28.
3. Кириченко В. В. Зміни стереотипів міжетнічного сприйняття українців північно-західного регіону в період з 2002 по 2015 рік. *Studia Politologica Ucraino-Polona*. Випуск 6. Житомир-Київ-Краків : Вид. О.О. Євенок, 2017. С. 137–144.
4. Кириченко В. В. Особистість у сучасному інформаційному суспільстві. Житомир : Вид-во ЖДУ імені Івана Франка, 2020. 245 с.
5. Кириченко В. В. Психологічний аналіз медійного дискурсу російсько-української війни. *Габітус*. 2022. Випуск 41. С. 239–244.
6. Кириченко В. В., Савиченко О. М. Genocides in the collective memory of ukrainians: the psychological practice of coping. *Десятий Міжнародний Симпозіум з Мультидисциплінарного Вивчення Пам'яті «Пам'ять геноцидів / Геноциди пам'яті», 13-14 жовтня 2022*, Інститут соціальних і гуманітарних наук «Альфонсо Велес Плієго» Заслуженого Автономного Університету Пуебла (Мексика) і Науково-дослідний інститут Історичної урбаністики. URL : <https://view.genial.ly/63465456d1252f0011938b12>
7. Магда Є. В. Гібридна війна: вижити і перемогти. Харків : Віват, 2015. 304 с.
8. Сапольскі Р. Біологія поведінки. Причини доброго і поганого в нас / пер. з англ. Любенко. Київ : Наш Формат, 2021. 672 с.
9. Anderson E. C., Carleton N., Diefenbach M., Han P. K. J. The Relationship Between Uncertainty and Affect [Electronic resource]. *Frontier Psychol., Sec. Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology*. 2019. November, 12. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02504>
10. Han P. K. J., Klein W. M. P. P., Arora N. K. Varieties of uncertainty in health care: a conceptual taxonomy [Electronic resource]. *Medical Decision Making*. 2011. Vol. 31, Is. 6. P. 828–838. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0272989X10393976>