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UKRAINIAN CONTRIBUTION INTO THE US INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

GRESKO Olga,

PhD (Philology),

Educational and Scientific Institute of Journalism of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Kyiv, Ukraine, Fulbright Research and Development Program (FRDP) 2023–24, e-mail: greskovolga@gmail.com.

ORCID – <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5630-1484>.

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Introduction. Intercultural communication is a powerful tool of public diplomacy in the conditions of hybrid wars of the XXI cent. In the USA, the national identity of different ethnic groups complements the overall cultural diversity. Ukrainian contribution to American society is remarkable as a result of the professional realization of individuals and the proactivity of Ukrainian communities and organizations. This study is a continuation of my aspirations to present Ukraine as an independent sovereign state, Ukrainian culture and media in international communication.

The relevance of the study is due to the fact that in a globalized and multicultural environment it is necessary to develop certain communication skills for effective interaction with different peoples. The purpose of the study is to show the presence of Ukrainian culture in the US media and communication landscape and demonstrate public diplomacy as a “soft power” to debunk myths about Ukraine.

Methodology of this research is based on comprehensive and systems approaches. Methods of analysis and synthesis, observation and survey, induction and deduction are applied. General trends regarding the Ukrainian presence in the the US intercultural communication were defined via series of developed questionnaires, focus group discussions, and the monitoring of the US media.

Results. US intercultural communication with its own peculiarities are open for new contributors. Ukrainian impact became much more obvious during Russian-Ukrainian War, especially since full-scaled invasion Feb. 24, 2022. US universities play a prominent role on the development of cross-cultural communication studies giving the opportunity to international students to present their own cultures.

Conclusions. Ukrainian diaspora in the US made a prominent contribution into the US intercultural communication by saving national traditions and identity. Image of Ukraine in the US media is positive. Americans support Ukrainians in their fight for freedom and democracy. Cultural Ambassadors’ mission of the myth debunking is finally fixed in the American people mind truth narratives about Ukraine which is a part of European civilization.

Keywords: *disinformation, image, US intercultural communication, public diplomacy, Ukraine.*



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Introduction. The US society is famous of its cultural and ethnical diversity with common rules for citizens shaping general American culture nationwide. At the same time there are many local communities inside the country with strong characteristics and their origin identity such as: national cuisine and traditions, clothes, native language, religion and rituals, etc. Ukrainians and Ukraine also have own impact on the US media and communication environment.

The best solution to understand each other in diverse and globalized society with representatives of almost all nations of the world is the development of *intercultural communication*. There are many different definitions which are transforming nowadays because of modern technologies and other challenges.

Daniel Chandler and Rod Munday define intercultural communication as “a term for interaction between people from different cultural or subcultural backgrounds intended to lead to shared understandings of messages” [1]. Everett Rogers and Thomas Steinfatt consider it “as the exchange of information between individuals who are “unlike culturally” [2].

Acceptance and adaptation to different cultural aspects and customs can promote beneficial interaction between all participants, which builds intercultural competence. Myron W. Lustig and Jolene Koester confirm: “Intercultural communication is competent when it accomplishes the objectives in a manner that is appropriate to the context and relationship. Intercultural communication thus needs to bridge the dichotomy between appropriateness and effectiveness [3]. Otherwise, rejection, disrespect, prohibition of manifestation of another identity or imposition of one’s vision by harsh methods leads to aggression, authoritarianism, disinformation and propaganda, etc. Ukrainians have a vast experience of preserving and developing their identity in conditions of complete prohibitions by the former Russian Empire, the former Soviet Union and other countries, which lasted for centuries. On the one hand, this hardens and crystallizes new features of the people. On the other hand, it encourages the search for new allies who share the same values.

Despite peaceful coexistence of different cultures in American society the problem of foreign disinformation and propaganda still exists. As Sarah Oates and Gordon Neil Ramsay [4] argue, this is in part due to exploitation of the American tradition of free speech and the open nature of the U.S. media system. In their book “Seeing Red: Russian Propaganda and American News” the role of Russian and domestic propaganda in U.S. news are analyzed in the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine and how AI can help detect propaganda narratives in U.S. news.

To present disinformation protection tools by sharing Ukrainian experience of promoting own culture abroad and the examples of human stories of resilience of Ukrainian people during Russian-Ukrainian War, especially since Russian full-scaled invasion (Feb. 24, 2022) is the novelty of this article. To provide the model of intercultural communication based on true and verified messages is an actual issue globally. The purpose of the article is to determine Ukrainian contribution as a part of the US culture with democratic principles values separating it from the rest of influencers who is still spreading false information. Objectives are to describe public diplomacy examples as efficient tools of “soft power” debunking myths and false narratives about Ukraine, to develop questionnaires for Americans to realize typical stereotypes about Ukraine, to analyze the results of information campaigns and missions of key stakeholders who are shaping image of Ukraine in the US.

Methodology combining quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis is based on comprehensive and systems approaches. Methods of analysis and synthesis, observation and survey, induction and deduction, media monitoring, focus group discussions are applied. Research mechanisms include a series of developed questionnaires to reveal myths and stereotypes about Ukraine, the cause-and-effect relationships of understanding the Russian-Ukrainian war, etc. Respondents were presented mainly by academic society of American Universities. All of them had an opportunity to express themselves freely during the focus-group discussions on the transformation of Ukraine’s image, understanding of Ukrainian identity, cultures and values, etc. To demonstrate the efficiency of public diplomacy as a tool

of “soft power” in debunking false narratives about Ukraine a number of online and offline events such as American-Ukrainian Television Bridge, Photo Exhibition with images of leading world’s media coverage of Russian-Ukrainian War and others were organized and analyzed. Specific cases and examples of the Ukrainian contribution and impact into the US intercultural communication are considered in the article.

Results and discussions. US intercultural communication has its own peculiarities. Americans prefer mainly open and direct communication with clear, straight and argued points. Giving the interlocutor the opportunity to choose looks like a popular practice or even a habit. Normally, written communication prevails over the oral one to fix mutual agreements properly both in professional and informal circumstances. Besides, American culture adopts to avoid direct criticism in order to remain polite and not to be rude. Following these basic generally accepted norms with appreciations to others is the key to successful communication in the US.

As I mentioned in the interview for Mariland Global Editorial Staff, “Americans have impressed me with their positive thinking and ability to move on with new ideas and projects” [5]. Being a participant of the Fulbright Research and Development Program (FRDP) 2023-24 from Ukraine affiliated with the Phillip Merrill College of Journalism at University of Maryland I discovered new approaches in professional and intercultural communication. US Universities are the place where almost all mentioned above communication skills and principles are formed both for American and international students all over the world. “The most surprising thing I’ve found in my scholarship is people in the USA who put Ukrainian flags next to American ones on their houses, who say “Slava Ukrayini! Heroyam Slava!” upon seeing me dressed with Ukrainian national costume in Washington D.C. Additionally, those who kindly remark “what nice sunflowers” when I carried them to the Holodomor Memorial to Victims of the Ukrainian Famine-Genocide of 1933-1933 on the 90th anniversary. I appreciate all the support of Americans who stand with Ukraine fighting for freedom and democracy, especially in this hard time of aggression from the Russian Federation since 2014” [5].

War is very attractive for global media coverage. There were news packages about Ukraine in almost each news program since full-scaled Russian invasion Feb. 24 2022 according to the monitoring of Public Broadcasting Service News Hour. Since that time US private media also had a huge interest to cover events in Ukraine. Later leading US media suddenly changed their focus to another global hot spot on the planet. “Since October 7, 2023, Israel has been at war with the Palestinian Sunni Islamist group Hamas (a U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organization, or FTO), which led an attack that day from the Gaza Strip into Israel” [6]. It’s hard to maintain the media interest globally even with very shocked news about number of victims, destroyed cities and other terrible consequences of war.

Media shape and reflect public opinion: “Thanks to the open and consistent US media coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian war since 2014 and the full-scaled Russian invasion since 2022 the number of supporters among US citizens is growing up on the 34th year of Ukraine’s independence. Since then, as a sign of respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, many Americans in various states have placed Ukrainian flags next to American ones. The state symbols of Ukraine on private homes testify to the solidarity and strong support of Ukrainians. Both flags also fly at the Divine Service in the St. Andrew’s Cathedral of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA, the Greek Catholic Church of the Holy Trinity (Silver Spring, Maryland) and other Ukrainian churches!” [7].

Intercultural communication accompanied with diplomatic efforts and also efficient pressure methods provided in time can reduce the number of conflict and war in the world. Strategic media and communication campaign as a powerful long-term part of hybrid wars of the XXI cent. can be implemented both with positive and negative purpose. Unfortunately, during the war media is blamed in spreading untrue information as a state propaganda or counterpropaganda. Fake phenomenon is not new approach via media. There are consequences of Soviet (in past) and Russian (at present) disinformation and propaganda targeted the audience with false, manipulation, half true, etc. by means of traditional and

social media globally. Professionals trying to stop it by fact-checking, media literacy, high quality journalism and ethical standards, etc.

Sarah Oates and Gordon Neil Ramsay explain “what is different about Russia’s 21-st information strategy? It combines three elements that significantly amplify its traditional projection of power. First, Russia has shown it will savagely punish neighboring countries for even appearing to side with the West. This was seen in Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Secondly, Russia uses its formidable media presence in the post-Soviet region to engage in massive propaganda campaigns. Third, Russia is leveraging current opportunities in the global media ecosystem, notably the lack of regulation of online and social media, to wage an aggressive propaganda campaign against a range of countries in the West [4, p. 8]”.

There are still common myths and stereotypes in the US communities about Ukraine besides mentioned above changes. “There are still numerous narratives in the minds of Americans that are based on the substitution of concepts, manipulation, false data, etc. as a result of the imposition of myths and stereotypes within the framework of Russian disinformation and propaganda. One of the reasons for this phenomenon is the following fact. After the collapse of the former Soviet Union (1991), the Washington-Moscow information and communication axis were determined as a priority in matters of international security, potential nuclear threats, and other global challenges.

The discussion of the illegal temporary annexation of Crimea (Ukraine) in 2014 by Russia and the consequences of the Russian-Ukrainian war with representatives of the American academic community even prompted some to take a course on the history of Ukraine and share their knowledge with their colleagues about Kyivan Rus’ (882-1240) with its capital in Kyiv - the largest among the states in Europe!

Many Americans, who are so patriotically proud of their democracy, freedom of speech, etc., still find it hard to believe and admit their long captivity in a lie. That is why you can hear sincere surprise in the lively queue that traditionally forms at the famous Ukrainian restaurant “Veselka” in the East Village of New York City: “Why did we say “Kiev” before, and now – “Kyiv”?” [7, p. 195]

There are intercultural communication and image transformations the US media and American mind since full-scaled Russian invasion Feb. 24 2022 also because of stakeholders’ contribution to shape image of Ukraine in the US:

- Analytic and Educational Centers
- Americans who attended Ukraine
- Cultural Ambassadors
- Ukraine House
- Ukrainian Embassy in Washington DC
- Ukrainian diaspora
- Ukrainian students from the US universities
- US media
- Refugees from Ukraine since 2014 and 2022
- Religion (mainly Christian) communities

Intercultural communication is a priority discipline at US universities. “Human communication is just as necessary today as it was hundreds of centuries ago, but social exchange and the cultural domains that human interactions help create assume radically different forms and formats in the era of globalization [8, p.10-11]”. New comers among international students bring something special from their homes to share with academic society and globalized culture. “Globalization plays a central role in theorizing for mass communication, media, and cultural communication studies” [9]. So called Cultural Ambassadors who are mainly participants of international exchange programs as usual debunking myths and stereotypes, explaining peculiarities of their national traditions within personal story.

Let me share my own experience in presenting Ukraine by organizing at least three events at Philip Merrill College of Journalism. The first one was an open discussion “Building

Bridges Between the United States and Ukraine” about the challenges and opportunities of educational and research collaborations between UMD and Ukrainian universities Oct. 26 2023. There were around 30 motivated people registered in advance. Interpersonal communication is the first step in ice-breaking technique during introduction. The audience prefer trust relations with the speaker, exclusive information, Q&A session without any barriers, etc. Even if you know nothing about the country but you like a presenter’s manner to talk with open heart and emotions, you are a great listener and follower! That is the unique human characteristic which is not easy to get by AI. According to the questionnaire in focus group 75% of the audience got new information about current situation in Ukraine.

The second event I was deal with my colleagues is “The American-Ukrainian Television Bridge “Journalism Education in Times of War and Peace” between the Educational and Scientific Institute of Journalism of the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv and the Philip Merrill College of Journalism of the University of Maryland on April 8, 2024, launched a new tradition of intercontinental communication. Students and professors on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean shared their success stories and also found out that they have many common challenges in journalism education in the XXI century” [10]. Young generation demonstrated mutual interests. American students asked about life reality in conditions of war. Ukrainian students showed their readiness to develop international collaboration with US partners, etc.

The third event demonstrated influence of Visual Communication. The Photo Exhibition with 42 images about Russian-Ukrainian War was opened on April 16, 2024 just after a long-awaited meeting of three prominent journalists and Merrill alums “Covering the War in Ukraine: reflections from Merrill Alumni”. Robert Klemko and Joyce Koh of The Washington Post, Ashley Westerman Loboda of NPR shared their experiences covering the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine and thoughts about the modern-day war correspondent. Each of them mentioned about huge transformation before and after visiting Ukraine. The same feeling of changing mind had visitors of Photo Exhibition who put questions and discuss mainly the humanitarian vector devoted to resilience of Ukrainian people.

Conclusions and prospective. Ukrainian contribution in the US intercultural communication is made by different actors like academic communities, analytic centers, diplomatic mission, etc. Ukrainian diaspora in the US has the biggest impact and long-term action to popularize Ukrainian culture and shape positive image of Ukraine. “According to the research center for the study of the Ukrainian diaspora in the United States of America, which operates at the Taras Shevchenko Scientific Society in New York, currently there are 930,434 people of Ukrainian origin living in America (0.3% of the total population of the country). According to estimates from most diaspora sources, there are about 1.5-2 million Ukrainians living in the USA” [11].

Public diplomacy as a soft power is transforming stereotype thinking of Americans about Ukraine which is still exist in the US. There is a series of typical historic stereotypes about Ukraine which is still hard for Americans to admit. The mission of Cultural Ambassadors is huge. There are key image transformations about Ukraine in the US society:

- Kiev => Kyiv
- Ukraine as a former Soviet Republic => Ukraine as a European country
- Internal conflict => Russian-Ukrainian War
- Russian Borshch => Ukrainian Borshch
- Pierogi => Ukrainian Varenyky, etc.

Image of Ukraine in US media is positive. Americans support Ukrainians in their fight for freedom and democracy, especially in the context of unprovoked Russian aggression and war in Ukraine. But public opinion depends on media coverage so fake news and propaganda protection mechanisms should be explored, updated and implemented by means of new technological approach, AI, etc.

Intercultural communication is a dynamic field with a growing demand of new researches moving beyond traditional frameworks to offer a more comprehensive understanding, influence and mission of intercultural communication in the XXI century.

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УКРАЇНСЬКИЙ ВНЕСОК У МІЖНАРОДНУ КОМУНІКАЦІЮ США

Греско Ольга, канд. філол. наук, доцент,

Навчально-науковий інститут журналістики Київського національного університету імені Тараса Шевченка, Київ, Україна, e-mail: greskovolga@gmail.com.

ORCID – <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5630-1484>

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Вступ. Міжкультурна комунікація є потужним інструментом публічної дипломатії в умовах гібридних воєн ХХІ століття. У США національна ідентичність різних етнічних груп доповнює загальне культурне розмаїття. Український внесок в американське суспільство є визначним завдяки професійній реалізації окремих осіб і проактивності українських

громад і організацій. Це дослідження є продовженням моїх прагнень представити Україну як незалежну суверенну державу, українську культуру та медіа в міжнародній комунікації.

Актуальність дослідження зумовлена тим, що в глобалізованому і мультикультурному середовищі необхідно розвивати певні комунікаційні навички для ефективної взаємодії з різними народами. Мета дослідження – показати присутність української культури в медіа- та комунікаційному ландшафті США та продемонструвати публічну дипломатію як «м'яку силу» для розвінчування міфів про Україну.

Методологія дослідження базується на комплексному та системному підходах. Застосовано методи аналізу та синтезу, спостереження та опитування, індукції та дедукції. Загальні тенденції щодо присутності України в міжкультурній комунікації США визначено за допомогою серії розроблених анкет, дискусій у фокус-групах і моніторингу американських медіа.

Результати. Американська міжкультурна комунікація з її особливостями відкрита для нових учасників. Український вплив став набагато очевиднішим під час російсько-української війни, особливо після повномасштабного вторгнення 24 лютого 2022 року. Університети США відіграють помітну роль у розвитку досліджень міжкультурної комунікації, надаючи іноземним студентам можливість презентувати свої власні культури.

Висновки. Українська діаспора в США зробила вагомий внесок у міжкультурну комунікацію США, зберігши національні традиції та ідентичність. Імідж України в американських ЗМІ є позитивним. Американці підтримують українців у їхній боротьбі за свободу та демократію. Місія культурних послів щодо розвінчування міфів полягає в тому, щоб остаточно закріпити в американській свідомості правдиві наративи про Україну, яка є частиною європейської цивілізації.

Ключові слова: дезінформація, імідж, міжкультурна комунікація США, публічна дипломатія, Україна.

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