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THREAT, SAVIOR, OR VICTIM? HOW UKRAINIAN ONLINE NEWS MEDIA REPRESENT LABOR MIGRANTS DURING RUSSIA'S AGGRESSION AGAINST UKRAINE

Abstract: The socio-economic crisis in Ukraine after the start of Russia's aggression against Ukraine in 2014 and Ukraine's signing of the Association Agreement with the EU increased labor migration from Ukraine to EU member states. Based on the application of A. Tymczuk's model of media frames regarding Ukrainian labor migrants, and using a qualitative thematic and frame analysis of selected online news media in Ukraine, I conclude that the media represent the Ukrainian labor migrant as a "threat" to the economic situation of Ukraine, and as a "savior" for the economies of their host countries in the EU. At the same time, there is less media representation of Ukrainian labor migrants as a "victim" of the difficult internal situation in their country or in their host countries. This conclusion corroborates the academic debate on Ukrainian labor migration by addressing positive and negative aspects of external labor migration.

Keywords: labor migrant, media, media representation, Ukraine, EU, European integration, Russo-Ukrainian war

Introduction

Russia has engaged in acts of aggression against Ukraine, beginning with the annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the armed conflict in parts of the Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts of Ukraine in 2014, and culminating in a full-scale military invasion on February 24, 2022. The onset of the Russo-Ukrainian war (Delanty 2023; Plokhy 2023; Sassy 2023) in 2014 triggered a deep socio-economic crisis within Ukraine. An increase in external labor migration was among the most significant consequences of that phenomenon (In-Out… 2021, 1; Mihratsiya… 2021, 13). The situation has been further complicated by the absence of a comprehensive state policy on labor migration and the lack of systematic statistical data (Kravchuk 2019, 3).

News media play an essential role in shaping the public opinion about who migrants are. Furthermore, the coverage of migrants in the media often relies on general narratives surrounding migrants, and the media further rebroadcast them

(McCann | Sienkiewicz | Zard 2023, 6). Therefore, it becomes crucial to examine the media coverage of labor migration. Specifically, this study investigates how Ukrainian online news media represent Ukrainian labor migrants, exploring media frames between the early 2014 (the beginning of Russia's aggression against Ukraine) and February 24, 2022 (the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine).

1. External Labor Migration in Ukraine: Main Trends and Discussion in Literature

This research is based on the definitions of the terms "external labor migration" and "labor migrant" in the Law of Ukraine "On External Labor Migration" (2015). External labor migration is "the movement of citizens of Ukraine, connected with the crossing of the state border, to carry out paid activities in a host country" (Pro zovnishnyu… 2015). Accordingly, a labor migrant is a "citizen of Ukraine who has performed, is performing or will perform paid activities in a host state, not prohibited by the legislation of this state" (Pro zovnishnyu… 2015).

The direction of external labor migration of Ukrainians has changed since Ukraine implemented the Association Agreement with the EU in 2014. Labor migration to Russia, which used to be quite massive, has been steadily decreasing since 2014, when Russia launched aggression against Ukraine in the early 2014, and Ukraine signed the Association Agreement with the EU, as Ukrainians increasingly emigrate to the EU countries (In-Out… 2021, 1; Mihratsiya… 2021, 13). The liberalization of the visa regime with the countries of the Schengen zone since 2017 has become another factor in the reorientation of Ukrainian labor migrants to the EU member states (Pieńkowski 2020). For instance, "if during 2015-2017, about 1.3 million Ukrainians left Ukraine in search of work (the total scale of labor migration could be estimated at 2-3 million people), most of whom were short-term migrants, then in 2018 the number of migrants tripled" (Burov 2017, 170). E. Libanova explains that due to Ukraine's acquisition of the visa-free status, Ukrainians can legally stay in the EU countries for three months while looking for an acceptable job (Libanova 2018, 15). Before the full-scale military invasion of Russia against Ukraine in 2022, the primary recipient countries of the Ukrainian labor migrants were, as before, Poland, Germany, and the Czech Republic (Kulchytska | Kravchuk | Sushko 2020, 5; Mihratsiya… 2021, 13).

As for the negative consequences of foreign labor migration, it is "frequently considered by politicians and in the media that the rather high level of foreign labor migration of Ukrainians seriously affects the economic development of the entire country" (Kravchuk 2019, 3). Challenges to economic development are a significant negative factor in the conditions of the threat to national security during Russia's war against Ukraine (Pietnoczka 2023). The danger lies in the migration

of non-disabled people and the loss of the state's human capital. According to Eurostat, the number of Ukrainian citizens with a long-term migrant status in the EU has increased 2.5 times over the last decade (Mihratsiya… 2021, 16). The above indicates that the transformation of the temporary labor migration of Ukrainians abroad into resettlement migration, that is, into permanent migration, is a trend of a recent decade in the conditions of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, despite the COVID-19 pandemic.

As for the positive consequences of foreign labor migration, scientists, for example, B. Sitarskyi (2021, 180), determine the direction of significant financial flows to Ukraine as the foremost positive effect of foreign labor migration. As the National Bank of Ukraine claimed, private transfers to Ukraine amounted to about 12 billion US dollars in 2020, the same as in 2019. Moreover, private remittances to Ukraine significantly exceed the volume of direct foreign investments and constitute 7.7% of the country's GDP (Mihratsiya… 2021, 17).

Therefore, there is a steady trend towards an increase in Ukrainians' external labor migration, primarily to the EU countries, due to factors since 2014, such as Russia's aggression against Ukraine, the economic crisis, and the process of European integration of Ukraine, including the liberalization of the visa regime with the EU. Since labor migrants from Ukraine are mainly non-disabled people whose labor migration is irreversible or long-term, this poses challenges to the economic development of the state of Ukraine, ensuring its social stability and national security.

2. Studies on Media Presentation of Ukrainian Labor Migrants and Research Methodology

Considering the characteristics of the positive and negative consequences of foreign labor migration in the conditions of Russia's aggression against Ukraine defined in the previous section, it is relevant to study how the media represented the Ukrainian labor migrants at that time. The investigation (Vysvitlennya… 2021) on the coverage of migration and migrants in the Ukrainian media (September 6-12 and October 4-10, 2021) was carried out on the national media: 1) TV channel websites (Ukraine 24, Podrobnosti.Inter, Suspilne, 1+1 (TSN), Facts.ICTV, First Independent, Channel 5, Channel 24, Espresso TV; and 2) online media websites: Obozrevatel, Gordon, Ukrainska Pravda, Correspondent, Politeka, RBC-Ukraine, Censor, NV, UNIAN, Visti, Segodnia). It revealed eight narratives towards the migrants from Ukraine and the migrants to Ukraine. The following narrative prevails: the Ukrainian labor migrants abroad face significant risks (Vysvitlennya… 2021). The study by L. Yuzva and A. Tashchenko showed that the opinions of Ukrainians regarding what the media should have shown were clearly in favor of what the country of destination offered to the migrants (Yuzva | Tashchenko 2021). However,

the main problem of the coverage of the Ukrainian labor migration in the media is the problem of evaluation (Kravchuk 2019, 10). Thus, research on the media representation of the Ukrainian labor migrants in Ukraine is quite limited, so it seems relevant to continue to expand research on this topic.

The present analysis is based on a qualitative and inductive thematic and framing analysis, inspired by a methodology outlined by A. Tymczuk in the article "Bringing the Virus Back Home: Media Representations of Ukrainian Labour Migrants in a Time of Pandemic", published in "East European Politics and Societies":

> Thematic analysis is a qualitative data analysis technique that seeks to identify common themes, ideas, and patterns within a given data set, whereas qualitative framing analysis is an often used methodology for analysis of the mass media, which enables the researcher to investigate how information, events, and specific issues are presented to the public (Tymczuk 2022).

I applied the model of media frames regarding the Ukrainian labor migrants in the Ukrainian online news media by Tymczuk (2022), who, using a thematic and frame approach, identified three clear frames: "labor migrants as a danger", "labor migrants as a savior", and "labor migrants as victims".

Moreover, I modified the main categories of Tymczuk's media frames from the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic to the conditions of Russia's aggression against Ukraine as follows:

- labor migrants as a threat – a socio-economic danger for Ukraine from many Ukrainian labor migrants abroad (Tymczuk 2022, 922). N. Senchylo notes that journalists actively use several popular clichés of labor migration in "headlines and articles of the Internet media, as well as in political rhetoric, which have a mostly negative sound: "brain drain", "labor drain", "employment hunger" (Senchylo 2018). In this category, I consider labor migrants a threat to the economic situation in Ukraine or abroad (in host countries);
- labor migrants as a savior – labor migrants are a resource for Ukrainian and foreign economies (Tymczuk 2022, 924);
- labor migrants as victims – labor migrants are, first of all, victims of the results of Russia's aggression against Ukraine and the economic crisis in Ukraine (Tymczuk 2022, 924). Second of all, "Ukrainian migrant workers face the risks of fraudulent recruitment, exploitation, and abuse" (In-Out… 2021, 2) in the host countries.

The period of analysis is from the beginning of 2014 – the onset of Russia's aggression against Ukraine (the annexation of the Ukrainian Autonomous Republic of Crimea by Russia and the beginning of an armed conflict in the east of Ukraine) to February 24, 2022 – the start of Russia's full-scale military invasion of Ukraine. The author limits the research period to the beginning of the full-scale Russian

military invasion of Ukraine since the conditions of the labor migration have changed since then. Firstly, the Law of Ukraine "On the Legal Regime of Martial Law" (Pro pravovyy… 2015), which was enacted by the decree of the President of Ukraine "On the Introduction of Martial Law in Ukraine from February 24, 2022" (Pro vvedennya… 2022) prohibits the male citizens of Ukraine of the working age (18-60 years, except for some categories) from leaving Ukraine as conscripts. Secondly, millions of Ukrainian citizens who left Ukraine after Russia's full-scale military invasion of Ukraine (primarily women, children, seniors, and people with disabilities) are under temporary protection, not as labor migrants (according to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (Ukraine… 2023).

As there is no media monitoring database of Ukrainian online news sites (Tymczuk 2022), I chose to analyze "Ukrainska Pravda", "Censor.net", and "Tsn ua" due to their significant reach and influence among nationwide Ukrainian online news media, as indicated by data from Similarweb (2023). Although Similarweb is not a perfect tool for measuring media popularity, the Institute of Mass Information (IMI), a Ukrainian public media organization, also uses it in its research. I base the characteristics of selected online news media in Ukraine on the IMA's monitoring of compliance of Ukrainian online media outlets with professional standards and the Media Ownership Monitor Ukraine. "TSN.ua" is owned by 1 + 1 Media Group, which is affiliated with the oligarch I. Kolomoisky. It was originally established as the TSN.ua news programme website. However, it subsequently evolved into an independent online news media. The "Censor.net" was founded by Y. Butusov, who is the editor and possibly the owner. It has been critical to the Ukrainian authorities and Russia after its aggression against Ukraine. "Ukrainska Pravda" was founded by G. Gongadze and O. Prytula and has been one of the top Ukrainian online news media in compliance with journalistic standards (Media… 2016).

I searched for articles by the keyword (tag): "labor migrant", and the publication date. I sorted the articles by relevance and evaluated them by their content by looking at the title and quickly reading the article. The articles containing only superficial references to migrants were excluded from the analysis. I also excluded articles that were not related to the topic of Ukrainian labor migration, for example, the migration crisis in the EU in 2021 with Belarus, migration to the EU from Asian and African countries, and the organization of illegal migration by Ukrainians to other countries, internally displaced persons in Ukraine since the beginning of Russia' aggression against Ukraine in 2014.

In general, I compiled a database of 70 relevant news articles from the following online news media: "Ukrainska pravda" (pravda.com.ua) – 45 texts, "Censor.net" (censor.net) – 18 texts, and "Tsn.ua" (Tsn.ua) – 7 texts. The unit of analysis is a study of headlines and the content of the articles. I analyze the headlines separately from the content of the articles because the headlines are essential to the entire material (Palagnyuk | Grzonka 2023, 115; Ślawska 2008).

The following research question was formulated based on an analysis of the literature on the positive and negative aspects of external labor migration, and the application of Tymczuk's media frame model regarding Ukrainian labor migrants (Tymczuk 2022) – how Ukrainian online news media represent Ukrainian labor migrants during Russia's aggression against Ukraine: as a "threat", a "savior" or a "victim"?

The coding process was inductive (Tymczuk 2022). I coded the texts of the articles according to themes, such as "LM (labor migrants) negatively affects the development of the Ukrainian economy" or "LM is necessary for foreign economies." The coding was modified and developed while exploring the data material, and the themes I identified were abstracted to a frame component and then to a frame (Table 1). For instance, an article that describes labor migrants' money transfers to Ukraine was coded as "LM send money home," aggregated to a frame component "LM as resource for the Ukrainian economy," and the frame was labelled "LM as a savior." The subsequent section provides a more detailed description of each of the codes in Table 1.

Table 1. Themes, Frame components, and Frames

Frame (number of articles)	Frame Component	Theme
LM as a threat (26)	LM as a risk for the development of the Ukrainian economy LM as risk for the economies of foreign countries	LM negatively affects the development of the Ukrainian economy LM causes risks for the national security of Ukraine LM causes a 'brain drain' from Ukraine LM described negatively for economies of foreign countries
LM as a savior (28)	LM as a resource for the Ukrainian economy LM as a resource abroad	LM send money home LM bring experience, knowledge, and skilled labor force to Ukraine LM is necessary for foreign economies LM necessary for harvest
LM as victims (16)	LM as victims of an economic crisis in Ukraine LM as victims of work conditions, legalization policies abroad	LM as a consequence of an economic crisis in Ukraine LM affected by the policies of Ukraine on migration and unemployment LM is exploited in foreign countries LM suffers from legal insecurity in foreign countries

Source: The author's own elaboration based on Tymczuk's methodology (Tymczuk 2022).

3. How Ukrainian Online News Media Represent the Ukrainian Labor Migrants during Russia's Aggression against Ukraine

The analysis of headlines in the Ukrainian online news media about Ukrainian labor migrants shows that they predominantly summarize the material in the articles, that is, they are informative: "Over 400,000 Ukrainians found work in Poland in six months" (Ponad… 2015); "Not for the sake of marriage: why Ukrainian women go to Poland to earn money and what job they most often choose" (Ne… 2021). In general, there are no emotionally colored, evaluative headlines. Moreover, the journalists did not formulate headlines as questions for the reader to answer. As for the linguistic level, there are no colloquial phrases or controversial, non-literary expressions in the titles. However, the headlines sometimes contained quotes: "The authorities should create conditions that will allow labor migrants to return and easily open a business here – an expert" (Potikha 2018b); "Zeman is waiting for migrants from Ukraine in the Czech Republic.: They are hardworking and able to assimilate" (Zeman… 2015). This indicates that the editors perceived the dialogue as a way to attract the attention of the recipient of information.

It was not always possible to assign a publication to one or another category of analysis based on the article's title. Therefore, the main thematic logic of the article was analyzed. According to it, the tonality of the published materials is primarily neutral, justifying one or another representation of the Ukrainian labor migrant depending on the topic of the article.

A total of 26 publications represent Ukrainian labor migrants as a "threat": 18 articles in "Ukrainska Pravda", 6 – "Censor.net", 2 – "Tsn.ua". For example, the article in "Censor.net" directly stated that "among the main threats to Ukraine is labor migration" (Potikha 2018b). The threat is, for instance, to the economic development of Ukraine from labor migration from Ukraine. "Ukrainska Pravda" provides a quote from the Head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, P. Klimkin, who emphasized: "We have a truly catastrophic situation. Approximately 1 million Ukrainians leave every year. Basically, Ukrainians leave their country to work abroad" (Pavlysh 2018). S. Shakhov, an opposition deputy in the Parliament of Ukraine, blames the ruling political elites in Ukraine for such a significant number of labor migrants to other countries, which is expressed in the article in "Censor.net": "the government's inaction on this crucial issue for Ukraine's well-being and security has transformed Ukrainians into a nation of labor migrants" (Dzhuma 2019).

The journalists of "Censor.net" show that the external labor migration from Ukraine is a threat not only to the country's economic development but also to the national security. One of the arguments relates to the fact that after the start of Russia's aggression against Ukraine in 2014, a significant number of Ukrainians remained labor migrants in Russia (40%… 2016). In addition to moral and ethical aspects, this situation directly threatens the national security. For example,

"Censor net" provides materials about an agent of the Russian special services who recruited Ukrainian labor migrants to participate in various actions beneficial to Russia (Ahent… 2017).

A total of 28 publications represent the Ukrainian labor migrants as "saviors": 19 articles in "Ukrainska Pravda", 7 – in "Censor.net", and 2 – in "Tsn.ua".

The representation of a Ukrainian labor migrant as a savior for Ukraine was only through one economic aspect: the positive effect of large financial transfers by labor migrants to Ukraine. For instance, a title of an article in "Censor.net" provides data from the National Bank of Ukraine that "labor migrants transferred five times more money to Ukraine than investors in 2017" (Potikha 2018a). This information in the media corresponds to the conclusions of scientists (Kulchytska | Kravchuk | Sushko 2020, 5; Mihratsiya… 2021, 13), presented in the theoretical section of this study.

Labor migrants as "saviors" are represented for those countries to which Ukrainians have moved to work. The journalists explain that the need for external labor migrants arises due to the economic development of the EU countries, which is precipitated by the deterioration of their demographic situations (Kizilov 2018). For example, the Minister of Labor and Social Policy of Poland, E. Rafalska quoted by "Censor.net" said: "Poland will implement measures to attract workers from Eastern Europe, in particular from Ukraine, due to the unsatisfactory demographic situation in the country" (Polscha… 2017). Indeed, "annual economic migration to Poland exceeds one million people, mostly from neighboring non-EU countries" (Sawicka | Szewczyk-Jarocka | Nowacka 2021, 198).

As a result of the analysis, it is possible to distinguish the following positive factors regarding Ukrainian labor migrants in the host countries. Firstly, the education and diligence of Ukrainian labor migrants (Potikha 2017; Zeman… 2015). Secondly, the cultural closeness of Ukrainians to European countries and their quick adaptability to life and work in a new country compared to labor migrants from other regions (for example, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East) (Zeman… 2015). C. Kaźmierczak, the President of the Union of Entrepreneurs and Employers in Poland, describes the Ukrainian labor migrants in such a way: "This is an emigrant of the highest class; you do not need to teach him/her the language, you do not need to give him/her apartments, you do not need to teach him/her profession. They cope very well" (U Polshchi… 2016b). The Ambassador of Ukraine to Poland, A. Deshchytsia, in his interview to "Ukrainska pravda", confirms the positive characterization of the Ukrainian labor migrants by foreign politicians and employers: "[they] have a good reputation and work for the growth of the Polish economy" (U Polshchi… 2016a).

The Ukrainian labor migrant as a "victim" is less represented in the Ukrainian online news media compared to the frames of a "threat" and a "savior", with a total of 16 articles: 8 articles in "Ukrainska Pravda", 5 articles in "Censor.net"

and 3 – in "Tsn.ua". Journalists of "Tsn.ua" cover the following problems faced by the Ukrainian labor migrants abroad: legal insecurity, unsatisfactory working conditions, and low payment from foreign employers (Ni… 2018). In addition, there are potential future problems because labor migrants will not receive a decent pension or social benefits after returning to Ukraine (Dzhuma 2018).

Conclusion

The analysis of the articles published in the online news media in Ukraine reveals a predominant focus on the Ukrainian labor migrants in countries where, according to the official data presented in the initial section of this study, the Ukrainian labor migration increased following Russia's aggression against Ukraine in 2014 and the enactment of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement. These countries include: Poland, the Czech Republic, and other European Union member states. The titles of the analyzed articles are informative, and the tone of the materials is primarily neutral, with a justification of one or another representation of the Ukrainian labor migrant, depending on the topic of the article.

The primary conclusion of the research is that the online news media in Ukraine represent the Ukrainian labor migrant as a "threat" to the economic situation of Ukraine, but as a "savior" for the economies of the EU member states, showing the demand for labor migrants in those countries. The Ukrainian labor migrant is only represented as a "savior" of the Ukrainian economy through the theme of sending money earned in foreign countries back to Ukraine. The frame of the Ukrainian labor migrants as "victims" of domestic challenges after 2014 or in their host countries is rarely represented.

Therefore, the Ukrainian online news media represent labor migrants with reference to risks (representation of the "threat" frame) or advantages (representation of the "savior" frame) they bring to the state. This conclusion corroborates the researchers' discussion on Ukrainian labor migration by addressing positive and negative aspects of external labor migration, as discussed in the theoretical part of the article. This finding can be attributed to the journalists' use of comments and data from migration experts, Ukrainian and foreign policy makers, when writing articles for the analyzed Ukrainian online news media.

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