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ONLINE MEDIA COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES: FUNCTIONS AND STRUCTURE

The article provides a comprehensive analysis of communication strategies employed by online media in the context of transformations within the contemporary digital media landscape, characterized by the platformization of content distribution, shifts in audience behavior, and intensified competition for user attention. The study systematizes the approaches of Ukrainian and international scholars to defining communication strategies and identifies a broad consensus regarding their essential components: the presence of clearly articulated communication goals, a sustained focus on audience engagement, influence on audience perceptions of the media brand, and the formation of long-term relationships and loyalty. The article proposes a structure of communication strategy adapted to the specific nature of online media, which encompasses the formulation of strategic objectives, analysis of the market and competitive media environment, identification and segmentation of target audiences, development of content policy, selection of distribution channels, and the application of mechanisms for evaluating communication effectiveness. Particular attention is devoted to the role of multimedia, cross-media approaches, and multichannel distribution, which ensure the coherent presentation of content across platforms and enhance the overall communicative impact. The importance of technological innovations – such as modern web design solutions, personalization tools, and automated audience interaction supported by artificial intelligence – is emphasized as an expanding component of contemporary strategic communication. The study demonstrates that the audience constitutes the central element of online media communication strategies, understood not merely as a passive recipient of information but as an active participant in the communicative process through mechanisms of interactivity, including feedback and content co-creation. The article concludes that a systematic approach to developing communication strategies – one that integrates analytical, creative, and technological components – is essential for ensuring the sustainable development of online media and strengthening the effectiveness of their interaction with audiences in a highly competitive digital environment.

Key words: communication strategy, online media, audience engagement, interactivity, multimedia, digital journalism.

Statement of the problem. In the contemporary digital media environment – marked by rapid technological change, the growing influence of social networks, the platformization of content distribution, and intensified competition for user attention – online media face the need to reconsider their approaches to communication. Shifts in media consumption patterns and the decreasing attention span of audiences render traditional editorial practices less effective. Under these conditions, it becomes essential not only for online media to respond promptly to external developments, but also to build long-term, coherent communication strategies that integrate editorial objectives, the tools for achieving them, and models of audience interaction. The absence of a systematic understanding of the functions and structure of online media communication strategies complicates their effective design and implementation; therefore, estab-

lishing such an understanding constitutes the central problem addressed in this study.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Despite the growing importance of communication strategies in shaping editorial vision and outlining pathways for achieving the media's communication, social, and business goals, their representation in scholarly discourse remains fragmented. Researchers tend to focus on isolated components of this phenomenon – primarily micro-level tactics and editorial approaches – while comprehensive models of strategic communication in online media remain insufficiently developed.

At the micro level, communication strategies are examined as ways of implementing communicative intentions within texts and as editorial approaches to covering specific topics. For example, Viktoriia Posmitna identifies strategies of emotional influence,

manipulation, reshaping the audience's worldview, and critically analyzing the activities of state institutions [1], and in the war context – strategies for constructing a positive image of defenders, creating an image of the enemy, and shaping the audience's emotional alignment [2]. Iryna Grabovets and Lyudmyla Chernous expand this spectrum by adding strategies of discreditation and cooperation [3], while Vladyslav Zahorodniuk proposes considering edutainment as a distinct communication strategy that combines entertainment formats with educational content [4].

At the macro level, communication strategies are understood much more broadly – as an organizational approach to audience interaction, and to the production and distribution of content in the digital environment. Anke Wonneberger and Sandra Jacobs conceptualize communication strategy as an “umbrella” term encompassing all types of purposeful communicative practices within an organization [5]. This macro-level interpretation aligns with the focus of the present study. In a broader business and organizational context, the issue of strategic communication has been advanced in the works of Ukrainian scholars such as Halyna Shapoval, Tetyana Prymak, Viktoriia Bereshchak, Mariia Poberezhna, and Oleksii Krasnorutskyi. Among foreign researchers, notable contributions have been made by Phil Malone, Teun van Dijk, José Sixto-García, Nindyta Aisyah Dwityas, and others. Collectively, these studies form the theoretical foundation for the analysis of online media communication strategies undertaken in this article.

Task statement. The purpose of the study is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of online media communication strategies – specifically their functions, structural components, and implementation mechanisms – in order to identify the principles of effective interaction between media and audiences in the context of digital transformation.

Outline of the main material of the study. The almost instantaneous spread of information on the Internet, as Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel rightly observe, reshapes the value of journalistic work and, consequently, the focus of online editorial activity. This shift requires newsrooms to serve not merely as sources of information but as its interpreters, helping audiences find order within an oversaturated information environment [6]. A similar view is expressed by Viktoriia Shevchenko, who emphasizes that the systematization of information – “the ability to evaluate, sort, and discard the unnecessary, the fake, or mere informational noise” [7] – comes to the forefront of contemporary media practices. Accordingly, media outlets must adopt communication approaches that

enable readers to process information about the surrounding world rationally.

Teun van Dijk defines strategy as “a more or less precise plan of action... with a greater or lesser purpose,” a formulation that, despite its apparent paradox, captures the inherent flexibility of the concept. The combination of “plan” and “uncertainty” illustrates that within the social and communication sciences, strategy often acquires a procedural character – a dynamic tool for interaction rather than a fixed scheme of actions [8].

With regard to communication strategy specifically, Halyna Shapovalova defines it as “the rules and sequences of actions followed by an editorial office in order to achieve a certain communicative goal” [9]. Mariia Poberezhna characterizes communication strategy as “the complex interaction of an organization with its internal and external environments aimed at creating favourable conditions for stable and profitable market activity,” operating in a two-way dimension – both influencing the target audience and receiving feedback from it [10]. Viktoriia Bereshchak likewise underscores the importance of bidirectional communication, describing communication strategy as a “coordinate system” designed to ensure effective information exchange with target audience segments in order to address business and marketing objectives, including loyalty building, brand promotion, and the collection of audience feedback [11]. Tetyana Prymak also highlights the centrality of audience focus, noting that the ultimate purpose of a communication strategy is “the formation of long-term partnerships” [12]. Trust, respect, and mutual benefit, according to Bereshchak, serve as the foundation for such durability [11].

While definitions of communication strategy vary depending on scholarly perspective, most researchers converge on several common elements: the presence of a clear communication objective, an emphasis on strengthening interaction with the audience, an ability to influence audience perceptions, and a commitment to fostering loyalty and long-term engagement.

Although the development of a communication strategy cannot be reduced to a template – given that each newsroom operates according to its own understanding of the media market, overarching goals, and strategic priorities [13] – researchers nevertheless largely agree on the core structural components of such strategies. According to Viktoriia Bereshchak, a communication strategy includes an analysis of the market environment, identification of the target audience, formulation of goals and objectives, selection of appropriate communication models and tools for

achieving them, and evaluation of the outcomes [11]. Phil Malone, a former BBC journalist and specialist in communication strategy implementation, notes that strategy development requires answering a series of key questions: What is the overall goal? Which audience needs to be engaged? What behavioral changes are desired? Which messages are appropriate for achieving them? Through which channels can these messages be communicated most effectively? And how will the communication process be monitored and evaluated? [14].

The stages of implementing an online media communication strategy in practice were examined by a group of researchers at Mercuri Buana University (Jakarta, Indonesia). At the initial stage, the newsroom of the studied outlet defined its strategic goal – namely, increasing the number of paid subscriptions. The next step involved identifying the target audience by analyzing available data about current readers through Google Analytics, including their demographic characteristics and behavioral patterns on the website. After establishing an audience profile, the editorial team conducted a deeper exploration of the audience’s needs, desires, fears, weaknesses, and ideals, and assessed how the publication could address these aspects through its content. The following stage involved determining the communication mix – a set of channels and tools for audience engage-

ment. In addition to publishing materials on the outlet’s website, this included posting on social media, using banner advertising, and participating in online or offline events. The final stage concerned assessing the effectiveness of implemented measures and evaluating progress toward the media’s strategic goals [15].

Drawing on the scholarly perspectives discussed above, we propose an adapted structure of a communication strategy specifically tailored to online media (Fig. 1). The proposed structure ensures the consistency, coherence, and reproducibility of communication decisions, while integrating the analytical, creative, and technological dimensions of editorial work.

The Handbook for Developing a Communications Strategy prepared by the international organization PARIS21 emphasizes the key role of preliminary analysis – both of the environment and the audience – for the effectiveness of any future strategy [16]. An analysis of the media environment, as well as the position and potential of a publication within it, can be conducted using marketing frameworks such as the BCG (Boston Consulting Group) matrix or SWOT analysis [13]. When adapted to media realities, the BCG matrix can help identify the topics, sections, and content formats most conducive to the growth of an online media outlet. Equally important is the stage of audience analysis. The authors of the guide caution against treating the audience as a monolithic whole, since ignoring seg-



Fig. 1. Structure of an online media communication strategy

mentation can result in overly broad communication that fails to resonate with readers' interests and needs and ultimately diminishes communication effectiveness. In-depth interviews with representatives of different audience segments can offer valuable insights into their concerns, motivations, expectations, and preferred communication channels [16].

Research on a media outlet's target audience may also be conducted using the avatar method, which involves defining composite profiles and key characteristics of different reader segments. This approach helps clarify "what these people live by, what they aspire to, how they perceive your brand within their own frame of reference, and, most importantly, how you can be mutually useful" [11]. For each identified avatar, functional needs are then determined (what motivates a given segment to use the media), self-identification needs (how the outlet can help users express themselves), and emotional needs (and how the media can address them).

In the era of big data, online newsrooms have unprecedented opportunities to analyze the real interests, preferences, and behaviors of their audiences, and these capabilities should be leveraged to enhance the personalization of news content. Sources of such data include Google Analytics, Similarweb, Microsoft Clarity, and other analytical tools that allow editors to track both audience profiles and on-site behavior. Understanding the audience, involving it in shaping media discourse, encouraging active participation in content creation, and strengthening interaction with readers overall are essential conditions for the survival and development of online media in the communication environment of the digital age.

The foundation of the strategic development of online media also lies in the quality of their content. Oleksii Sytnyk notes that content is "a fundamental unit, without which the further effective development of a media is impossible," and "the main driver that gives meaning to all other efforts and actions aimed at developing an online media outlet" [13]. According to Randy Fishkin, effective online media content serves users' needs, ensures easy and pleasant consumption across devices and browsers, and promptly provides accurate and up-to-date information [7]. At this stage of strategic planning, it is also essential for editorial teams to consider formats that involve audiences in the creation of media content. Reader co-authorship is a natural extension of the participatory potential of the Internet. Among the benefits of user-generated content, Kateryna Horska identifies the expansion of information sources, a shift in the informational balance toward greater proximity to the audience,

increased trust in the media, and the potential growth of its readership [17].

However, the concept of content encompasses more than the message itself [7]. An important aspect of strategic content planning is the compositional and graphic component. Since "a high-quality compositional and graphic model of a news portal significantly increases its effectiveness and promotion" and can "turn a casual visitor into a regular one" [13], online newsrooms should also consider intuitive navigation, user-friendly interface design, and carefully constructed interactive logic – including efficient search tools for archived materials and opportunities for communication through commenting and discussions. At this stage, a key task for online media is to fully utilize the inherent affordances of digital communication. As Viktoriia Shevchenko notes, through interactive genres online media "make use of multimedia and hypertextual capabilities, update information several times a day, and communicate with readers in real time" [7].

Phil Malone underscores the importance of interactivity in communication strategies, arguing that it is not enough to simply tell or show; media must actively engage with their audiences ("Don't just tell them, don't just show them, do it with them") [14]. Yevheniya Kyyanytsya highlights that through audio-visualization (the use of multimedia elements that can transform content perception, enrich it emotionally, and influence behavioral and cognitive responses) and interactivity (audience engagement through commenting, reactions, and sharing), online media can increase the emotional resonance of content, thereby enhancing communication impact and message effectiveness [18]. To remain current, online newsrooms should also account for technological innovations in their communication strategies. For example, automating audience interaction through AI-powered chatbots can enhance reader engagement and improve brand perception, while implementing modern web design solutions can positively influence user interest in the outlet.

In the distribution of online media content, multichannel communication plays a decisive role, as it ensures a broad presence in the digital space and maximizes audience reach. As Hanna Sarmina notes, cross-media journalism is inherently strategic, since "all channels are usually interconnected at various levels, and it is the existence of these connections that facilitates coordinated editorial work" [19]. This approach involves not merely duplicating content across platforms, but developing a holistic cross-media strategy that integrates forms, channels, and the temporal sequence of content delivery. Major

cross-media strategies include an advanced online-first approach, which determines the initial release of an information product in the digital environment, as well as the “second-wave” principle, which involves further elaboration and dissemination of materials across additional formats and platforms. The goal of multichannel distribution is to create a comprehensive communication effect capable of engaging audiences across diverse informational contexts, ensuring a cohesive and reinforced perception of the topic.

In their study of online media distribution channels, a group of scholars from the University of Santiago de Compostela concluded that newsrooms predominantly gravitate toward a free-access distribution model, with no substantial differences observed in the personalization or interactivity of content between outlets offering open access and those operating on a subscription basis [20]. Given the growing role of social networks and messaging platforms in contemporary communication processes, these channels most often serve as additional means of content distribution and audience acquisition, as well as platforms for direct interaction between newsrooms and readers.

Viktorii Ivashchenko and Mykhailo Hryshyn analyzed media communication strategies on social networks in detail, focusing on manipulative practices and, conversely, on “strategies for countering manipulation” [21]. Research also shows that media outlets operating exclusively online are more inclined to use clickbait – texts with hyperbolic, emotionally charged, or deliberately intriguing headlines designed to encourage clicks – particularly on social platforms. Empirical evidence confirms that such materials generate higher levels of audience engagement [22]. Differences in editorial approaches to social media usage have also been documented: on Facebook and Twitter (X), content tends to be published inconsistently, whereas on Instagram, live broadcasts and stories are used to highlight topics deemed especially important by editors [20]. In the Ukrainian media environment, the carousel format – where a story is unfolded through a sequence of images combining text and graphics – has also become a popular way to draw attention to significant themes.

Other important channels within online media communication strategies include organic and paid traffic. Traffic volume directly affects the business performance of online media, as higher visitation typically translates into greater advertising revenue. As Oleksii Sytnyk notes, despite a decline in the use of search engines such as Google for accessing current news, rankings in these systems remain crucial for online outlets, since search result positioning – and

consequently, a site’s visibility for popular or unique queries – depends on them. High-quality SEO optimization therefore remains essential [13]. Among paid traffic channels, online media often rely on Google Ads –enabling placements in the search network, display network, YouTube, Gmail, and other environments – as well as targeted advertising on social networks such as Meta Ads, TikTok Ads, and LinkedIn Ads. The effectiveness of these promotional channels depends heavily on the quality of the content and site structure, as the user’s visit must generate interest and convert a one-time visitor into a regular reader [13].

According to Bereshchak, indicators of communication strategy effectiveness fall into two major groups: outputs – quantitative indicators – and outcomes – qualitative indicators. Outputs include the number of publications and their prominence, audience reach, mentions in media, the tone of these mentions, brand share of voice, and audience engagement metrics. Outcomes should reflect the target audience’s awareness of the brand, their perception of key messages, their articulated responses, and their level of trust and loyalty. These indicators collectively demonstrate the quality of communication with the audience. Effective communication should ultimately lead to the formation or strengthening of audience knowledge, understanding, loyalty, and trust in the media.

Conclusions. The study demonstrates that an effective communication strategy for online media can be developed only through a systematic approach that integrates analytical examination of the media environment, a segmented understanding of audience needs, a well-designed content policy, cross-media distribution, and the use of modern digital technologies. At the core of the strategy is the audience, understood as an active participant in the communication process. The growing importance of user interaction is evidenced by the emergence within newsrooms of new professional roles and teams responsible for analyzing behavioral patterns, facilitating dialogue through social networks, moderating comments, developing interactive formats, and organizing communities engaged in co-creating content [20]. Interactivity – together with personalization, multimedia, and multichannel communication – serves as a key tool for establishing a lasting connection between media and readers, strengthening the ability of online media to adapt to the challenges of the digital environment and to improve both editorial and business outcomes. Real-world practices of implementing communication strategies in online media, as well as the specific role of interactivity in enhancing their effectiveness, represent promising directions for future research.

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Загорулько Д. І. КОМУНІКАЦІЙНІ СТРАТЕГІЇ ОНЛАЙН-МЕДІА: ФУНКЦІЇ ТА СТРУКТУРА

У статті виконано комплексний аналіз комунікаційних стратегій онлайн-медіа в умовах трансформацій сучасного цифрового медіаландшафту, що характеризується платформізацією дистрибуції контенту, зміною поведінкових патернів аудиторії та зростанням конкуренції за її увагу. Систематизовано підходи українських і зарубіжних дослідників до визначення комунікаційних стратегій, встановлено консенсус щодо ключових їх елементів: наявності чіткої мети комунікації, послідовної орієнтації на взаємодію з аудиторією, впливу на сприйняття медіабренду аудиторією, формування довготривалих відносин і лояльності. Запропоновано адаптовану для специфіки онлайн-медіа структуру комунікаційної стратегії, що охоплює формування стратегічних цілей, аналіз ринкового та конкурентного середовища, ідентифікацію та сегментацію цільової аудиторії, розробку контентної політики, визначення каналів дистрибуції, а також механізми оцінювання ефективності комунікації. Okремо підкреслено роль мультимедійності, кросмедійних підходів і мультиканальності, які забезпечують послідовне представлення контенту на різних платформах та посилюють комунікаційний вплив. Наголошено на важливості технічних інновацій (сучасних рішень вебдизайну, персоналізації й автоматизованої взаємодії з аудиторією засобами штучного інтелекту) як чинників, що розширюють можливості комунікації. Доведено, що центральним елементом комунікаційних стратегій онлайн-медіа є аудиторія, яка розглядається не лише як отримувач інформації, а як активний учасник комунікаційного процесу через механізми інтерактивності, зокрема, співтворення контенту та зворотного зв'язку. Показано, що системний підхід до розробки комунікаційної стратегії, який інтегрує аналітичні, креативні та технологічні компоненти, є ключовою умовою стійкого розвитку онлайн-медіа й підвищення ефективності їхньої взаємодії з аудиторією в конкурентному цифровому середовищі.

Ключові слова: комунікаційна стратегія, онлайн-медіа, інтерактивність, мультимедійність, інтернет журналістика.

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