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THE IMPACT OF MASS MEDIA ON THE EMOTIONAL STATE OF ADOLESCENTS IN WARTIME

Анотація. Мета статті — провести теоретичний аналіз та емпіричне дослідження впливу засобів масової інформації на емоційний стан підлітків у воєнний час. У статті розглядається сутність інформаційного та психологічного впливу, визначаються особливості сприйняття підлітками медіа-контенту, а також окреслюються основні психологічні наслідки деструктивного інформаційного впливу в умовах збройного конфлікту. Методологія. Дослідження проводилося з використанням комплексу психодіагностичних методів, зокрема тесту «Рівень емоційної стабільності» (Е. Тарасов), методу SAN (самопочуття, активність, настрої), Чотиримодального опитувальника емоційного стану (Л. Рабінович) та Шкали тривожності Спілберґера–Ханіна. Застосовано експериментальний підхід, що передбачав порівняння показників емоційного стану підлітків до та після перегляду інформаційних відеоматеріалів. Наукова новизна. Обґрунтовано роль засобів масової інформації як чинника інформаційного та психологічного впливу в контексті гібридної війни. У дослідженні визначено специфічні особливості емоційних реакцій підлітків на медіаконтент, пов'язаний з війною, та продемонстровано, що інтенсивний вплив ЗМІ призводить до зниження емоційної стабільності, підвищення рівня тривожності та посилення негативних емоційних станів, таких як страх, гнів і смуток. Встановлено, що недостатній розвиток критичного мислення підвищує вразливість підлітків до деструктивних інформаційних впливів. Висновки. Доведено, що засоби масової інформації суттєво впливають на емоційний стан підлітків у воєнний час, посилюючи тривожність, емоційну нестабільність та негативні переживання. Спостерігалось підвищення як ситуативної, так і рисової тривожності, погіршення настрою та зниження емоційної стабільності після впливу медіаконтенту, пов'язаного з війною. Отримані результати підкреслюють необхідність розвитку критичного мислення підлітків, навичок емоційної регуляції та заходів, спрямованих на забезпечення їх інформаційної та психологічної безпеки.

Ключові слова: засоби масової інформації, підлітки, емоційний стан, час війни, інформаційний та психологічний вплив, тривога, емоційна стабільність, психологічна травма, медіаконтент, інформаційна безпека.

Abstract. The purpose of the article is to provide a theoretical analysis and empirical study of the impact of mass media on the emotional state of adolescents in wartime. The article examines the essence of information and psychological influence, identifies the peculiarities of adolescents' perception of media content, and outlines the main psychological consequences of destructive informational influence under conditions of armed conflict. Methodology. The study was conducted using a set of psychodiagnostic methods, including the "Level of Emotional Stability" test (E. Tarasov), the SAN method (well-being, activity, mood), the Four-Modal Emotional State Questionnaire (L. Rabinovich), and the Spielberger–Khanin Anxiety Inventory. An experimental approach was applied, comparing indicators of adolescents' emotional state before and after exposure to informational video materials. Scientific novelty. The role of mass media as a factor of information and psychological influence in the context of hybrid warfare is substantiated. The study identifies specific features of adolescents' emotional responses to war-related media content and demonstrates that intensive media exposure leads to decreased emotional stability, increased anxiety levels, and the intensification of negative emotional states such as fear, anger, and sadness. It is established that insufficient development of critical thinking increases adolescents' vulnerability to destructive informational influences. Conclusions. It has been proven that mass media significantly affect the emotional state of adolescents in wartime, intensifying anxiety, emotional instability, and negative experiences. An increase in both state and trait anxiety, a decrease in mood, and reduced emotional stability after exposure to war-related media content were observed. The findings highlight the need to develop adolescents' critical thinking, emotional regulation skills, and measures aimed at ensuring their information and psychological safety.

Keywords: mass media, adolescents, emotional state, wartime, information and psychological influence, anxiety, emotional stability, psychological trauma, media content, information security.

Introduction. The relevance of studying the impact of mass media on the emotional state of adolescents in the context of modern warfare is обусловлена the intense information and psychological pressure accompanying wartime events, which significantly transforms the psycho-emotional well-being of the younger generation. Continuous exposure to traumatic media content, including news about hostilities, losses, and threats, acts as a powerful stressor that activates mechanisms of emotional dysregulation, increases anxiety levels, and disrupts adolescents' adaptive capacities.

In this context, mass media cease to be merely channels of information transmission and instead acquire the function of psychological influence, shaping emotional reactions, worldview orientations, and behavioral patterns. Under wartime conditions, the media space becomes an environment where information dissemination intertwines with manipulation, which is particularly dangerous for adolescents due to their insufficiently developed critical thinking and psychological defense mechanisms.

Under the pressure of information overload and destructive media content, states of chronic anxiety, fear, aggression, or emotional exhaustion may develop, creating risks for the emergence of psychotraumatic reactions and mental health disorders. Thus, studying the role of media in shaping the emotional state of adolescents in wartime is important both from a scientific and practical perspective, particularly for the development of effective strategies for psychological support and information security.

Analysis of the problem and the essence of the study. Contemporary research indicates that information and psychological influence is one of the key factors shaping the mental and emotional state of an individual, especially under conditions of armed conflict. An intensive information flow saturated with traumatic content activates stress responses, increases levels of anxiety, fear, and emotional tension, which is particularly evident during adolescence due to the insufficient development of psychological defense mechanisms and critical thinking.

Studies in the field of information warfare (I. Aristova, O. Baranov, K. Bieliakiv, V. Bryzhko, Ya. Zharkov, V. Petryk, M. Prysiazhniuk, N. Savinova) demonstrate that modern media function not only as sources of information but also as instruments of targeted influence on human consciousness and behavior. Information and psychological influence is implemented through mechanisms of suggestion, persuasion, and manipulation, leading to transformations in emotional states, distorted perception of reality, and changes in behavioral patterns [8; 2].

Clinical and psychological studies on the consequences of armed conflicts (Murthy R. S., Lakshminarayana R.) convincingly show that prolonged exposure to war-related stressors leads to the development of anxiety disorders, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and behavioral disturbances among children and adolescents. International research findings indicate that a significant proportion of adolescents living in conflict zones exhibit aggression, fears, emotional instability, and psychosomatic disturbances, confirming the profound impact of traumatic experiences on their psycho-emotional state [7].

At the same time, mass media play a crucial role in shaping adolescents' emotional states, especially in the context of hybrid warfare, where they are actively used as tools of propaganda and manipulation. Researchers (N. Vakulich, O. Horban, N. Semen) note that systematic exposure to destructive media content contributes to the formation of distorted value orientations, increased levels of aggression, fear, and anxiety, as well as disorientation in the social environment [3; 2; 4].

Thus, the essence of the study lies in identifying the specific features of the impact of mass media on the emotional state of adolescents in wartime, particularly changes in emotional stability, anxiety levels, and dominant emotional experiences under the influence of war-related media content.

Theoretical foundations of the study. Information and psychological influence is understood as a purposeful impact of information on an individual's consciousness and psyche, implemented through mechanisms of persuasion, suggestion, and manipulation, with the aim of transforming emotional states and behavioral responses. In the context of modern warfare, mass media act as powerful instruments of such influence, shaping adolescents' emotional experiences, worldview orientations, and behavioral patterns, often bypassing conscious control.

A key psychological mechanism underlying media influence is the activation of the stress response, which is accompanied by disturbances in emotional regulation processes. Theoretical and empirical studies indicate that prolonged exposure to traumatic events, including those mediated through mass media, leads to the development of anxiety, fear, aggression, and emotional instability. These effects are particularly pronounced in adolescence due to the immaturity of adaptive mechanisms. According to Murthy and

Lakshminarayana, long-term exposure to war-related stressors results in persistent changes in the psycho-emotional state of children and adolescents, including the development of post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health disturbances.

The theoretical framework of the study is grounded in the concept of psychological trauma, which emphasizes that trauma is determined not only by the event itself but also by its psychological and emotional consequences for the individual. Psychological trauma is viewed as the result of affective experiences triggered by external stressors that disrupt the integrity of mental functioning and adaptive capacities. A critical factor is adolescents' limited ability to regulate their emotions effectively, which contributes to the formation of maladaptive responses such as avoidance, denial, and emotional detachment.

Within psychoanalytic and socio-psychological approaches (A. Adler, C. G. Jung, E. Erikson), destructive personality changes are interpreted as the result of interaction between the individual and the social environment, a process that becomes particularly intensified under conditions of informational pressure and armed conflict. Media influence, amplified by propaganda, contributes to the formation of a distorted perception of reality, where adolescents' emotional responses are shaped not only by actual events but also by imposed interpretations.

Thus, the theoretical foundations of the study are based on the interrelation between information influence, stress responses, and disruptions in emotional regulation, which collectively determine the emotional state of adolescents in wartime.

Experimental part. To investigate the impact of mass media on the emotional state of adolescents in wartime, a confirmatory experimental design was employed. The study involved a comparative analysis of adolescents' emotional states before and after exposure to informational video materials related to wartime events.

The research was conducted using a комплекс psychodiagnostic methods, including the "Level of Emotional Stability" test (E. Tarasov), the SAN method (well-being, activity, mood), the Four-Modal Emotional State Questionnaire (L. Rabinovich), and the Spielberger-Khanin Anxiety Inventory. These instruments made it possible to assess changes in emotional stability, emotional reactivity, dominant emotional states, and levels of both state and trait anxiety.

The experimental procedure consisted of two stages: initial assessment of the participants' emotional state, followed by exposure to video content reflecting wartime realities (including fragments of informational марафон and materials related to internal and external state policy), and subsequent повторне вимірювання показників. This design allowed for identifying the dynamics of emotional responses under the influence of media content.

The study was conducted in accordance with ethical standards of psychological research. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed about the purpose and procedures of the study.

Results and Discussion. As a result of the experimental study using the "Level of Emotional Stability" test (E. Tarasov), it was found that before viewing the video material, 24.3% of participants demonstrated a high level of emotional stability, whereas after viewing the video this indicator decreased to 19.7%. Emotional stability is manifested in the ability of the psyche to maintain a high level of functional activity under the influence of stressors, both as a result of adaptation and due to a well-developed level of emotional-volitional self-regulation. Owing to emotional stability, participants are able to regulate their emotions and cope with heightened emotional arousal while performing complex tasks and functioning under difficult life conditions.

A balanced emotional state was identified in 35.8% of participants before viewing the video and in 31.6% after exposure to the proposed video material. This state is reflected in the respondents' ability to control the level of emotional tension through an adequate assessment of the situation and their own capabilities.

An increased level of emotionality was observed in 32.1% of participants after viewing the video material, which significantly differs from its manifestation before viewing (24.3%). This indicates that the video content triggered an emotional surge among the participants. It can be assumed that this group is more susceptible to stressors, which may manifest in difficulties in regulating their emotional states.

It is also worth noting that some participants demonstrated a very high level of emotional excitability. In this group, the indicators before and after viewing the video did not show significant differences (15.6% and 16.6%, respectively). These participants tend to react intensely to stressors and experience difficulties in adapting to challenging circumstances and changes in the surrounding environment.

The indicators of adolescents' emotional stability before and after viewing the video material are presented in the diagram in Figure 1.

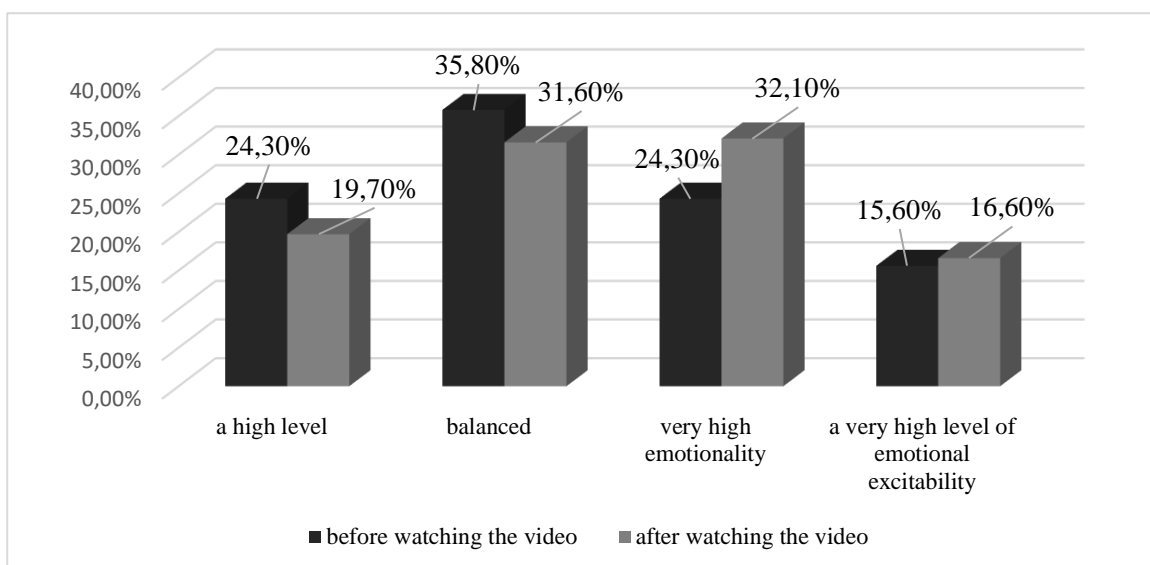


Fig. 1. Indicators of adolescents' emotional stability before and after viewing the video material (according to Tarasov's method).

This figure significantly exceeds the typical 10–20% of respondents exceeding the clinical threshold of the EAT-26 in non-clinical populations [5], indicating a prevalence of body dissatisfaction, weight-based self-esteem, and heightened cognitive control over eating. The results are consistent with Fairburn's cognitive model, in which the central mechanism is the overvaluation of weight and body shape control [4].

On the dieting/restriction scale, 45 % of respondents demonstrate a moderate (40 %) or high (5 %) level, confirming the significant prevalence of restrictive cognitive attitudes in the sample. Psychologically, this reflects perfectionistic tendencies, fear of weight gain, a propensity for rigid self-control, and the internalization of the sociocultural thinness ideal.

Noteworthy are the results of 3,75% of respondents who exhibit a high level of bulimic manifestations, while 73,75% show a low level. This indicates a relatively low prevalence of the impulsive-compulsive pattern. Research shows that the Bulimia and Food Preoccupation subscale in non-clinical samples has lower internal consistency and a less clear factor structure [5].

Thus, in the studied group, it is not behavioral loss of control (overeating, purging) that dominates, but rather cognitive preoccupation with the topic of food and weight. This is characteristic of subclinical forms of the anorexic spectrum or so-called «normative» dietary attitudes [3].

The obtained data characterize the sample profile as cognitively restrictive, with a predominance of attitudinal components over behavioral symptoms. A high overall risk was identified in 28,75% of individuals, which, for a non-clinical sample, constitutes a significant indicator of psychological vulnerability.

In the structure of the disturbances, dietary attitudes dominate over bulimic manifestations: fear of weight gain, rigid control over eating, and the division of food into «allowed/forbidden». Impulsive episodes of overeating are minimal, indicating subclinical forms with cognitive fixation on control. The issue is internally determined: the sources are perfectionism and internal standards, rather than external pressure. Food serves a regulatory function—reducing anxiety through the implementation of control. Such a profile corresponds to the transdiagnostic model of Fairburn, in which the central mechanism is the overvaluation of weight and body shape, upon which self-esteem depends [4]. Restriction is considered the primary control strategy, whereas bulimic symptoms may emerge secondarily – as breakdowns following rigid constraints.

Thus, the studied sample demonstrates a moderate overall risk with a predominance of the cognitive component, indicating psychological vulnerability without established clinical disorganization. This state can be viewed as a latent phase, in which preventive psychoeducational and psychocorrective interventions may be particularly effective, as behavioral disturbances have not yet become entrenched as a stable pathological pattern.

Content analysis of self-monitoring food behavior diaries revealed a spectrum of eating disorder risks determined by war-related stress. As shown in Figure 2, the analysis of empirical data demonstrated a specific impact of the traumatic context on various components of eating behavior, manifested in the formation of maladaptive patterns.

According to the results of the SAN test, it was found that on the “Well-being” scale, a medium level predominated among the majority of participants both before and after viewing the video (48.8% and 51.7%, respectively). This suggests that, overall, the video material did not significantly affect their well-being, although the influence of negative events and constant exposure to stressors still had an impact on the respondents.

A high level of well-being was identified in 38.4% of participants before viewing the video and in 37.1% after. As the results indicate, there were no significant changes in this level before and after the experiment.

A low level of well-being was diagnosed in 12.8% of participants before viewing the video and in 11.2% after. These findings may indicate that even under difficult life conditions, respondents tend to seek positive aspects, which was also observed during the experiment. It is worth noting that some improvement in well-being was observed after viewing a segment related to the state’s foreign policy during wartime.

On the “Activity” scale, a medium level of activity was found in the majority of participants both before and after viewing the video (50.1% and 51.7%, respectively), with no significant differences identified. A high level of activity was observed in 14.1% of participants before and in 16.7% after viewing the video material. It should be noted that a considerable proportion of participants demonstrated a high level of activity before viewing the video (35.8%), while a slightly lower percentage (31.6%) was observed after viewing.

On the “Mood” scale, a medium level predominated in 48.8% of respondents before and in 51.7% after viewing the video. A high level of mood was identified in 38.4% of respondents before the experiment, which decreased to 26.9% after viewing the video material. A low level of mood was diagnosed in 12.8% of participants before and increased to 21.4% after viewing.

The results of the Four-Modal Emotional State Questionnaire (L. Rabinovich) indicate that fear was the dominant emotion among most participants before viewing the video material (35.8%), and this indicator increased after viewing (39.7%). These findings can be explained by the fact that participants are already continuously exposed to stressful conditions. It can be assumed that typical adolescent fears (such as fear of loneliness, social judgment, or ridicule) are supplemented by war-related fears, including fear of death and fear of losing loved ones. Therefore, fear was already dominant even prior to exposure to the video material.

In addition to fear, a significant proportion of participants demonstrated sadness both before and after the experiment (26.9% and 25.6%, respectively). This may be associated with experiencing difficult living conditions during wartime, the loss of a привычного життя, and a sense of uncertainty.

It is worth noting that after viewing the video material, the proportion of respondents for whom anger was the dominant emotion increased (from 19.4% to 25.6%). This may indicate that the video content activated negative emotional experiences, particularly anger. In this context, anger may reflect not only a negative attitude toward the war or external threats but may also be self-directed, associated with feelings of helplessness and inability to influence the situation.

Interestingly, some participants reported joy as a dominant emotion, although its prevalence decreased after the experiment (from 17.9% to 9.1%). This emotion may reflect psychological defense mechanisms, selective awareness of reality, or an attempt to maintain positive thinking in extreme conditions. However, after viewing the video material, this indicator significantly decreased and уступив негативним емоціям. This suggests that mass media influence adolescents’ emotions by intensifying negative experiences. The more intense and prolonged this influence is, the more difficult it becomes for adolescents to cope with negative emotional states.

The results of the Spielberger–Khanin Anxiety Inventory showed that on the “Trait Anxiety” scale, a high level predominated among most participants both before and after the experiment (44.8% and 51.7%, respectively), with a noticeable increase after viewing the video material. A medium level was identified in 35.8% of adolescents both before and after the experiment, while a low level decreased from 19.4% to 12.8%. Trait anxiety refers to a stable tendency to experience anxiety and worry without sufficient objective reasons. Under wartime conditions, elevated levels of anxiety are expected; however, adolescents prone to exaggeration and негативізм demonstrated even higher levels, confirming the negative impact of continuous media exposure.

It should be noted that the causes of trait anxiety operate at social, psychological, and psychophysiological levels. Social factors are related to communication difficulties; psychological factors involve distorted self-perception and internal conflict; psychophysiological factors are associated with the functioning of the central nervous system.

Unmotivated anxiety is characterized by an irrational expectation of negative events and constant tension, which reduces conscious control over behavior and brings this state closer to affect. Psychological determinants of anxiety may include internal conflict, unrealistic aspirations, insufficient goal clarity, anticipation of difficulties, and conflicting motivational tendencies.

On the “State Anxiety” scale, a high level predominated both before and after the experiment (46.3% and 53.8%, respectively), with an increase after viewing the video material. A medium level was also observed in a considerable number of participants, while a low level decreased significantly (from 19.4% to 7.8%). State anxiety reflects a situational emotional response characterized by tension, worry, and nervousness, which is expected under wartime conditions.

Thus, the results of the study indicate that mass media significantly affect adolescents, who, due to insufficiently developed critical thinking and active involvement in the information space, are unable to resist this influence. This is reflected in their behavior, emotions, and perception of reality.

Statistical analysis confirmed the presence of differences after viewing fragments of informational марафон and other video materials related to domestic and foreign policy during wartime across the following scales: balance ($p \leq 0.467$), very high emotionality ($p \leq 0.338$), high level of emotional stability ($p \leq 0.367$), anger ($p \leq 0.370$), joy ($p \leq 0.489$), high level of trait anxiety ($p \leq 0.267$), low level of trait anxiety ($p \leq 0.732$), high level of state anxiety ($p \leq 0.497$), and low level of state anxiety ($p \leq 0.478$).

Overall, the statistical analysis confirmed significant differences after exposure to the video material across the following indicators: balance, very high emotionality, emotional stability, anger, joy, trait anxiety, and state anxiety.

Conclusions. The conducted empirical study made it possible to identify specific features of the emotional state of adolescents under conditions of chronic wartime stress and to determine the psychological mechanisms underlying the impact of mass media on their psycho-emotional sphere. The studied sample demonstrated a predominance of negative emotional experiences, particularly fear (an increase from 35.8% to 39.7%), anger (from 19.4% to 25.6%), and consistently high levels of sadness, indicating emotional tension and psychological destabilization.

It was established that exposure to war-related media content leads to a decrease in emotional stability (from 24.3% to 19.7%) and mood (a reduction in the high level from 38.4% to 26.9%), along with an increase in emotionality (from 24.3% to 32.1%), which reflects heightened affective reactivity. At the same time, the proportion of adolescents with a very high level of emotional excitability remained relatively stable, indicating the presence of a high-risk group with limited adaptive capacity under stress.

A key component of emotional destabilization is anxiety: the high level of trait anxiety increased from 44.8% to 51.7%, while state anxiety rose from 46.3% to 53.8%. This reflects the formation of a persistent anxiety-tension pattern, which is further intensified by continuous exposure to the information environment. In parallel, a decrease in positive emotional states was observed, particularly joy (from 17.9% to 9.1%), indicating the displacement of positive affect by negative emotional experiences.

The findings suggest that mass media in wartime function as a powerful factor of information and psychological influence, not only reflecting reality but also amplifying adolescents' emotional responses, contributing to heightened anxiety, fear, and emotional instability. Adolescents' vulnerability to this influence is обусловлена insufficiently developed critical thinking and emotional regulation mechanisms.

Statistical analysis confirmed the presence of significant differences after exposure to video materials across such indicators as emotional balance, emotionality, emotional stability, anger, joy, as well as trait and state anxiety, which indicates the systemic nature of media influence on adolescents' psycho-emotional state.

Prospects for further research should focus on an in-depth analysis of the mechanisms of adolescents' psychological resilience to information and psychological influence, particularly the development of critical thinking, emotional self-regulation, and media literacy as key protective factors.

It is also advisable to investigate individual psychological differences in responses to wartime media content, including age and gender characteristics, as well as to examine the long-term effects of the information environment on adolescents' mental health.

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