

MANAGEMENT OF IMPRESSION IN SOCIAL MEDIA IN WARTIME (THE VALERII ZALUZHNYI CASE)

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The article emphasizes the unique role of information use in hybrid warfare in wartime based on the management of reputation by Valerii Zaluzhnyi – former Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, data through Schulze's Society of Impression theory. The research object includes the analysis of his social network accounts during the period of Ukraine's announced counter-offensive, from 04 to 30.06.2023, and the two weeks before his resignation as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, from 25.01 to 08.02.2024.

Social media content analysis is chosen as the primary research tool.

The results obtained testify that Valerii Zaluzhnyi's reputation can be described as balanced, laconic, and restrained. The focus on cultural code: Traditional norms and values inherent in society, the peculiarities of a person's work in community and for the community in wartime, and the selection of «personal» topics that demonstrate the leader's "belonging" and «co-working» with society, provides the main components for his reputation building. The symbolic image of the Defender plays a pivotal role in his reputation.

Among the factors that influence the image promotion of Defender, one can identify the values and cultural characteristics of the target audience, the duration of reputation, the lexical coloring use (emotionally colored words are expressions that allow expressing a person's attitude to people's deeds, actions), and the orientation to social traditions.

Key words: online reputation; opinion leader; social media; management of impression; Valerii Zaluzhnyi; wartime.

Introduction. In wartime, a unique role in the information component of hybrid warfare is provided by communication between authoritative opinion leaders and the audience, which is interested in receiving vital and relevant information, balanced assessments, and the most accurate forecasts.

A speaker's credibility depends on reputation. Different researchers understand reputation in various ways. As the "simple" definition, reputation is "one of many signals providing information about the likely behavior of an individual" [Tennie, Frith, & Frith 2010: 482], as the sophisticated one, it is a "socially transmitted typically evaluative judgment that is presented as consensual or at least widely shared" (Conte & Paolucci 2002: 37).

Many scholars are engaged in research on reputation management, but they often analyze reputation cases in the context of several disciplines: politics, economics, and communication sciences. For example, business reputation research is carried out within the framework of economics by A. Bogoyavlensky, S. Gorin, O. Grebeshkova, O. Derevyanko, O. Shymanskaya, G. Daulin, M. Purlmel. Issues of online reputation management are more often covered by foreign researchers, among them -P. Brian, J. Weinzier,

G. Woodfin, working in economics and politics. The sociological study of reputation traces its roots to foundational works by M. Weber, G. Simmel, E. Durkheim. Contemporary researches study reputation as a form of accumulated recognition that can be converted into other forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986), reputation as both structure and practice (Giddens, 1984), reputation and trust (Aberer and al., 2006), reputation in sociology of reputation (Chauvin, 2013).

One can emphasize that within the context of war, reputation management is examined by M. Crescenzi, S. B. Long, A. Dafoe, J. Renshon, F. Giardini, R. Wittek, P. Huth, J. C. Morse, T. Pratt, etc.; crisis management of reputation is studied by J. Wang, A. Goztas, N. Erdem Koker, M. Ye. Alemdar, and others.

The first works on dramaturgical analysis and impression management theory that provided crucial insights into how actors strategically construct and maintain reputational images was presented by E. Goffman (1959). Impression management during conflict explores strategic humility as a defense mechanism (McLuhan, 2020), organizational image management under crisis (Audia, Rousseau, Stimmler, 2023) studies about during conflict, how military actors perform legitimacy in wartime (Banerjee&MacKay, 2020).

Digital reputation politics and character assassination are studied by S. Samoilenko, E. Shiraev, and the CARP lab, as well as research on digital smear tactics and cancel culture (Samoilenko & Langley, 2023; Samoilenko, Eremina, & Gumensky, 2023), propaganda, and fake news deployed in information warfare (Kolinko & Petryshyn, 2022). However, it should be noted that there is practically no research on reputation management in the context of the Ukrainian-Russian military conflict. Hence, the main objective of this study is to trace how the reputation of personality is being built in social media during wartime, its main components, and what factors influence the construction and destruction of reputation (character assassination) in the rapidly changing wartime information environment.

The interest in information about leaders of opinions in social networks and their image construction and promotion development are considered one of the main trends in Social Media Studies recently. The global COVID-19 pandemic has further contributed to the popularity of social media and the rapid increase in their users: At the beginning of 2020, there were 19 million social media users in Ukraine, and in 2021, the figure reached 25.70 million. Social media penetration increased from 43% in January 2020 to 58.9% in January 2021 (DataReportal 2021). As of July 2022, about 76.6% of Ukrainians use social media (GlobalLogic 2022). Thus, in Ukraine during the COVID-19 pandemic, one can observe the social media development, where the number of social media users in the first quarter of 2021 grew twice as much as in the autumn of 2020.

The number of social media users in Ukraine has increased from 60% of the population in 2021 to 76.6% in July 2022. Among 76.6% of citizens, 66% choose Telegram, 61% use YouTube, and 58% use Facebook (GlobalLogic 2022). It should be emphasized that over 60% of Ukrainian audiences are most interested in entertainment content (Shevchuk 2021: 18). However, in Ukraine, the current situation has changed. GlobalLogic research shows that during wartime, there was a sharp increase in social media use as news sources, with 76.6% of Ukrainians using social networks for information (GlobalLogic 2022). The real-time information of military operations and painful images of deaths and destruction are immediately shared to social media as well as in the streets of major capitals around the world (Shamsi 2023: 205), online journalism allows you to provide up-to-date information in real time. This is especially important when covering fast-moving events such as emergencies or political changes.» (Marukhovska-Kartunova et al. 2023: 147).

Theoretical background. The motivation of the audience for such communication is analyzed within the framework of the cultural and sociological theories of the society of experiences or the society of impressions by Gerhard Schulze (Schulze 2005). Schulze argues that social behavior is formed and based on internal experiences and feelings of an individual. The new version of social behavior is associated with a different vision of rationality regulating human behavior; now, it is aimed at understanding experience as a consumption process. In wartime, the transformation of individual and social values also shifts from rationality, characteristic of the stable period of society development, to emotional perception and choice, which helps to feel the effect of consumption more quickly and get pleasure and experience more speed.

G. Schulze, in his work, *Society of Experience: The Cultural Sociology of Modernity* (1992), notes that the post-war period was a particular time when the emotional component of consumption became an essential factor instead of traditional functionality and status.

It should be noted that with the outbreak of war, the lives of most Ukrainian citizens became more connected with the situation caused by wartime: participation in the defence of the country, volunteer work, security problems, temporary escape from the country or evacuation to safer territories, and other problems.

Article: *"Opinion Leaders and the Military: The Role of Local Influencers in Conflict Zones"*

Authors: *Ahmed Shokr and Susanne Carpenter*

Key insights:

- The article examines how local opinion leaders (e.g., tribal elders, community influencers, religious figures) are often embedded within or aligned with military or peacekeeping operations—not just as messengers, but as active participants or logistical facilitators.

- It emphasizes that their reputation is highly volatile, shaped in real time by wartime events: successes on the frontlines can boost status, while civilian casualties or perceived betrayal can instantly erode it.

- The authors argue that this dynamic reputation becomes a strategic asset: militaries carefully cultivate or distance such figures depending on shifting public sentiment and tactical needs.

This study offers both a conceptual framework and empirical case studies that align with your focus.

Furthermore, in the public space, opinion leaders actively participate in military operations or help the military. Also, they actively participate in communications and live stream their war stories, working for personal branding and promotion. One can stress that the social media trends are not of a permanent nature, and quickly shift their focus to an evolving environment, especially in wartime (Shamsi 2023: 206). So, its maintenance and strengthening require active accumulation of successes in the company's activities and disseminating knowledge about its achievements among stakeholders (Derevianko 2018: 133).

Since the work with reputation is based on building the trust of audiences, namely for the groups of people with whom the leader is interested. Depending on such groups, managers and leaders coordinate their activities concerning the specific components and use various communicative tools to ensure trust with their audience, which provides the basis for reputation management.

Reputation presents a conditional, provisional, and localized social representation associated with a name resulting from more or less weighted and formalized social evaluations (Chauvin, 2013). Moreover, its social coherence should be emphasized, based on the fact that it is shared by a group of people, a community of stakeholders, which helps us to understand why we often believe that «our reputation precedes us»: Reputation is a pre-existing state created by third parties on which others rely on when making judgments or decisions. A reputation can be seen as an evaluation of an individual based on their past action(s) (Számadó et al., 2021).

Interest in such opinion leaders is based on emotional openness, expressed in posts with information about the speaker's life situations. Emotions are a social construct, a particular set of experiences...in a specific cultural environment (Fitch-Godbehere, 2021: 11). In society, people live in what is known as "an emotive regime" – the set of normative emotions and the official rituals, practices, and 'émotives' that express and inculcate them (Reddy, 2001: 129). In this regime, a person must work according to the concept of 'emotional labour' to be accepted in the society of the emotional regime. A. Hochschild in her book "The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling" (1983) says emotional labor requires one to induce or suppress feelings to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others, in this case, the sense of being cared for in a convivial and safe place. This kind of labor calls for a coordination of mind and feeling, and it sometimes draws on a source of self that we honor as deep and integral to our individuality (Hochschild 1983: 7).

It should also be emphasized that despite the desire to present oneself, to 'play', emotional work is better perceived when the speaker conveys more real, inherent his/her emotions, and feelings. In this way, the interaction with the target audience is more straightforward and lasts longer.

Today, network users often follow a blogger/speaker/opinion leader if they trust them. The theoretical notion to the two-step flow theory, opinion leaders are individuals who are more attentive to mass media content and serve as intermediaries, interpreting and transmitting information to members of their social networks who pay less direct attention to mass media messages (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). Trust provides the basis of reputation. In Ukraine, trust in the information users receive through social media and print media increased over the past year among all age categories. Trust in social media increased the most among young people (18-29 years old), from 67.45% to 76.1%, and among people aged 30-39, from 63.8% to 71.8% (Opora.ua 2023).

The study "Ukrainian Media, Attitudes and Trust in 2022" shows that Ukrainians in 2022 are reading more news, becoming more resistant to misinformation, and trusting national media more during the Russian-Ukrainian war.

Internews research indicates that the use of television for news has fallen from 85% in 2015, when USAID/Internews first conducted this study, to just 36% in 2022. In 2022, 74% of people read news on social media (Ukrainian media use and trust in 2022: 6). According to their findings, there was a significant improvement in assessing familiar false narratives this year. In particular, trust in false anti-Ukrainian narratives significantly decreased. Ukrainians are much less likely than in previous years to believe statements that diminish Ukraine's authority and importance in decisions concerning the country's

future. Society is becoming more consolidated on several important issues related to national identity and views on the development of events in the country. The period since 24th February 2022 can be defined as a new state of the Ukrainian political nation, where substantial changes have occurred in Ukrainians' understanding of their own identity (Didonova, 2024: 74).

One can specify that the impression society offered an exit from the consumer society. Nowadays, in the experience economy, work functions as theatre and every business operates as a stage (Pine II and Gilmore 1999). In this new reality, we often collaborate with companies and organizations whose representatives we have not seen before in «offline» life and may never meet in person. Therefore, what they write on social networks and say in the media becomes almost the primary source of information about them and is perceived as their actual actions. Since the reputation of a person or an organization must serve as a «currency,» like a «fuse» of risks of unsuccessful cooperation or unexpected actions. But no – the more significant and mass audience it is, the «shorter» its memory is, and the faster words and actions considered inadequate yesterday are forgotten (Starodubskaya 2022).

This paradox occurs at different levels: individuals, businesses, and even states. Let us ask ourselves why this happens. One can argue that the new ICTs don't revolutionize political communication because what we observe is a 'spectacular' development, an adaptation to the information environment, where the process is sometimes faster, or sometimes slower.

One can delineate that most of the studies in this area concern peacetime cases (Kendal, 2006). However, reputation management in wartime is a practically unexplored area, which causes additional difficulties in understanding social preferences and opinions that create a «mood» in a difficult period of society's development. Collecting and analyzing this kind of data helps to describe and formulate the actual directions of reputation management within wartime.

Our research is concentrated on *attention-based politics* and the phenomena around it (network logic, self-mediatization, popularization, and populist political communication). Political attention is about political agendas, that is, how a particular topic reaches the attention of decision-makers (policy agenda) and opinion influencers (media agenda), the way it becomes understandable and important to public opinion (public agenda), and the way decisions are made based on all this. Attention-based politics addresses the issue differently. It makes political actors communicators, who have to reach voters in competition with other, non-political actors (e.g., celebrities). Attention-based politics emphasizes this particularly communicative character of political participation (thus referring neither to the activist nor the regulative aspects).

In Ukrainian political communications, a new trend can be traced – a high level of its digitalization: Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, and Telegram were successfully used in the presidential elections in Ukraine in 2019 (Zhosan 2020; Gotsur 2021). Interactivity and multimedia became necessary for the candidate who effectively used digital technologies in social media and political PR in Ukrainian and foreign election campaigns. A politician's popularity began to be measured not so much by ratings but by the number of likes, shares, subscribers, or followers to the candidate's account, etc. (Gotsur 2021).

Methodology. Hypotheses: The authors suggest that the content analysis of opinion leaders' accounts on social networks in the Ukrainian socio-political information space helps to find distinctive components of reputation building, data on the peculiarities of the use of emotionally colored vocabulary in social media posts, and analysis of the description of events involving the opinion leader Valerii Zaluzhnyi's posts in the period of the beginning of the counter-offensive of the Armed Forces of Ukraine from 04 – 18.06.2023 and at a turning point in the career from 25.01 to 08.02.2024 helps to collect information on reputation building in wartime, revealing and describing factors of influence and dominants of reputation management in these periods.

The beginning of the military aggression on the territory of Ukraine marked a new stage in the popularity of social media and individual accounts of opinion leaders as sources of up-to-date information about the war and military actions. Thus, due to the increasing importance of social and political news, trust in speakers – opinion leaders and stakeholders of the country's public discourse – is also growing.

For the selection of opinion leaders as subjects of analysis, the authors relied on six nationwide Ukrainian rankings conducted between 2022 and 2025. Valerii Zaluzhnyi appeared in the TOP-5 or even TOP-3 of these rankings starting in 2022, and in some surveys from 2023 onward. It is noteworthy that in 2021, before the outbreak of the war, Zaluzhnyi's name was absent in such rankings (Dynamics of Trust in Individual Institutions in 2021–2023, KIIS 2023). This absence is likely because most military leaders in peacetime were known only within a limited circle of professionals and political actors who interacted with them directly. Hence, it can be inferred that Zaluzhnyi, as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, gained public prominence as the head of the Ukrainian army embodying the values of society during wartime.

According to the sociological group "Rating," the level of trust in Zaluzhnyi stood at 80% (DSNEWS 2023), while a survey by Active Group recorded a trust level of 70% (Trust Ranking, Active Group 2024),

indicating both a decline and subsequent resurgence of public confidence in him. The "Rating" group later reported a trust level of 73% in the former Commander-in-Chief (Rating 2025), while Info Sapiens registered a comparable 70.9% (Info Sapiens 2025).

In the Focus magazine's annual ranking of Ukraine's most influential figures for 2025, Zaluzhnyi was placed the eighth position. Since his dismissal from the position of Commander-in-Chief, Ukrainians and the media have periodically referred to him as a politically influential figure, although he has not engaged in any political movement nor officially announced an intention to do so.

A. Antypovych argues that, the decline in Zaluzhnyi's approval rating was minimal—around 1–5%—and he continues to remain among the top trusted leaders. Zaluzhnyi is perceived as a father-protector who defended the country and as a modern military leader rather than a Soviet-era generalissimo... Zaluzhnyi evokes a perception that is more emotional than rational (Mahdyk, TSN, 2025).

Among the surveys of Ukrainians during the full-scale invasion of Ukraine concerning significant socio-political leaders, the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) and the Razumkov Centre have been conducting long-term research on various aspects of life in independent Ukraine. Comparison of the data of surveys dedicated to identifying leaders in the socio-political field of the country, in wartime KIIS and Razumkov Centre, shows the following top-5 leaders [<https://razumkov.org.ua>, 21.12.22-03.03.2023; Oporaua.org, July, 2022]. Firstly, we selected social media accounts of active leaders of the country's socio-political sector who are among the top 5 opinion leaders in 2022–2023, except the accounts of the President of Ukraine, then we examined the accounts of the most influential opinion leader from this list, who has the highest support according to opinion polls. According to both polls, most citizens see President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy as the leading politician of 2022 and opinion leader: 59% – Razumkov Centre, 29% – KIIS. According to the results of polls, at the beginning of the war, the trust and rating of the country's president – Volodymyr Zelenskyy, in 2021 – 17% [Razumkov 2022] and 2023 – 81% [Razumkov 2023] increased. However, given the unique status of the President of the country the authors consider it incorrect to compare him with other socio-political leaders in Ukraine, and his social media accounts are not included in this study.

According to the ratings obtained, the Commander-in-Chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces Valerii Zaluzhnyi, who held this position from 27.07.2021 to 08.02.2024, received full support and great sympathy from the military and citizens of Ukraine (KIIS – 9%, Razumkov Centre – 10%). Hence, we would like to focus on analyzing Valerii Zaluzhnyi's reputation-building, who was the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine in 2022-2023. Two periods have been selected:

– 1st period – posts from 04.06 to 18.06.2023, two weeks, the period of the beginning of the counter-offensive of the AFU, which was announced by the experts of the American Institute for the Study of War (ISW). According to their data, Ukraine has already conducted counter-offensive operations «with varying outcomes» on at least three front sections as part of a broader counter-offensive. unfolding from 4 June, – Deutsche Welle reports 09.06.2023.

– 2nd period – before Zaluzhnyi's resignation as Commander-in-Chief of the AFU, from 25.01–08.02.2024.

Valerii Zaluzhnyi's social network accounts are described in Table N1.

Results and Discussion. Valerii Zaluzhnyi's profile has a confirmed official status only on Facebook in 2023 and Telegram in 2022-2023. It should be noted that the profile needs to be constantly maintained. From Facebook, Instagram, and Telegram channels, only the latter is continuously filled and can be rendered as a useful tool for communication with the audience. A less official communication channel – Instagram profile, according to Zaluzhnyi himself (Ukrainska Pravda, 2022), was compromised by hackers in November 2022. The account was without any official confirmation tick, and then it was deleted. The information from Zaluzhnyi's accounts is partially duplicated from other social networks in the Instagram account @uaf_general_staff. These changes are likely related to hacking the profile of the Commander-in-Chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces. On Facebook, the primary information about the Commander-in-Chief is transmitted through the account of the General Staff of the AFU of Ukraine @uaf_general_staff.

In 2024, these accounts were still active, however, only the Instagram account uaf_general_staff was filled with more information.

The social networks of Valerii Zaluzhnyi can be analyzed by taking in mind the specifics of the interaction of a high-ranking official, whose activities are considered within the framework of the sociology of war, the subject of which is to analyze the causes of war and the conditions for maintaining or achieving peace (Hobta, 2016).

During the studied periods, there were 14 publications in June 2023 and 66 publications in January-February 2024, where textual information prevailed. It was also supplemented by video or photos. Thus, one can talk about a significant percentage of visual information – this helps people with different types of memory (visual, kinesthetic, auditory) to perceive information in a more convenient form (Tomić et al. 2023).

Table 1

Valerii Zaluzhnyi's Social Network Accounts

	Facebook	Instagram	Telegram
1	2	3	4
	Facebook Головнокомандувач ЗС України / CinC AF of Ukraine	Instagram https://www.instagram.com/ uaf_general_staff/	Telegram Valery Zaluzhnyi, Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine https://t.me/s/ CinCAFU?before =624
Number of subscribers as: Of August 2023 vs. 11.12.2023	542 000 vs. 612 000	61, 3 00 vs.71,200.	More than 187 000 vs. more than 309, 500.
January 2025	49000	609 000	257633 *(after Ukraine's official authorities rejected the Telegram accounts)
Intensity of communication: 11.12.2023	1 publication/ 2-4 days	Partially duplicates information from Facebook, and Telegram. (Personal account has been hacked)	
08.02.2024		3-6 publications/day (on average)	
Language and communication style: 11.12.2023	In the Ukrainian language, all posts are in Ukrainian, and an official communication style is used.		Ukrainian, news of international importance – with translation into English, official style of communication
08.02.2024		All posts are in Ukrainian, and an official communication style is used in posts about everyday activities such as training, meetings, facts, opinions; The posts dedicated to ordinary military men are more like reportage sketches, with optimism, as in conversation, telling about ordinary people-heroes, creating a kind of gallery of portraits of the Ukrainian defenders in the current war. The language here is more descriptive, with adjectives and action verbs.	
Stakeholders: 11.12.2023	Citizens of the country, socio-political institutions inside and outside the country, representatives of the authorities, and the military.		Citizens of the country, socio- political institutions inside and outside the country, representatives of the authorities, the military
08.02.2024		Citizens of the country, socio-political institutions inside and outside the country, representatives of the authorities, the military, the global society representatives	

1	2	3	4
Profile assessment: 11.12.2023	created based on feedback as part of the feedback, mostly positive, is 4.9 out of a possible 5		–
08.02.2024		created based on feedback as part of the feedback, mostly positive	
Content: 11.12.2023	official information, facts, in the course of military operations, based on understanding the strategy of the course of military operations, reserved optimism and support, stories about the current heroes of Ukraine defending the country, and official information about meetings of the Commander-in-Chief with representatives of foreign countries. Official information about meetings of the Commander-in-Chief with representatives of foreign agencies, congratulations on national holidays.	According to Zaluzhnyi, more personal data concerning his family and hobbies	Content duplicates the Facebook page
08.02.2024		Mostly posts devoted to defenders of Ukraine, Only 4 posts are signed by Zaluhnyi	
Interaction with channel subscribers: 11.12.2023	Indirect, with quite a few comments, averaging between 100 and 300 comments under each post		Very active, high level of likes-reactions, averaging between 10-14k.
08.02.2024		Indirectly, more information from the only official channel	
notes		No official confirmed the account, no tick, closed account.	

After selecting the publications, the posts were grouped into some thematic areas (socio-political, work, private and etc.) described in Table N2 (See Table 2).

As can be seen from the table, the majority of posts are related to socio-political events and information about current events in the first period, and the majority of posts are about the Defenders of Ukraine and their service in the army in the second period.

The content analysis reveals that the posts of the first period are characterized by brevity, restraint, and informative value, and the second period is more characterized by sketches, and stories of soldiers-heroes of our time about the work of different brigades). Frequent reference to this theme and stories creates high dynamics of persuasion of the audience and effectively broadcasts the message that convinces all stakeholders to believe in the Army and cooperate with it. The analysis testifies that short posts with a lot of pics are dominated as the followers could see the focused work without many words.

In most cases, the first-period posts received a positive response from the audience through supportive and approving likes, except for two posts with minor criticism in the form of dislikes (a laughing

Table 2

Social Media Posts by Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine Valerii Zaluzhnyi

Topics of the posts	Telegram (quantity of posts) 12.2023/ 08.2024	Facebook (quantity of posts) 12.2023/ 08.2024	Instagram (quantity of posts) 12.2023/ 08.2024
Socio-political events and current affairs opinions are devoted to, with posts mostly about military actions, infographics (war in figures)	11		/10
Participating in media debates	0 /0		0/1
Humorous posts and trolling on topics of the day	0/0	0/0	0/0
Zaluzhnyi's work and interaction with people, participation in events (levy announcements and reports)	3		/1
Portraits of the Ukrainian Defenders during the full-scale Russian aggression against Ukraine			0/54
Private posts	0/0	0/0	0/0
Total	14		66

whale and an emoticon with a tear). The commander-in-chief's feed contains little graphic information. The verbal information dominates with videos or photos supplemented by official details.

The audience response in the second period is less active. This may be due to the frequency of similar publications on the topic or the desire to get more information about the Commander-in-Chief from his official social networks.

During the first research period, the most significant number of likes, 41 thousand, was gained by a post with video and text accompaniment from 19.06.2023 about the joint work of Zaluzhnyi and the Chief of the General Staff of the AFU, Lieutenant General S. Shaptaloyu. The least number of likes, about 14 thousand likes, from the 24.06.2023 infographic about the destruction of enemy air targets; this post was marked by 121 people with a tear emoticon, which can convey the audience's problematic vision, sympathy, or regret. It is worth noting that infographics of destroyed enemy targets are published daily, reducing interest in them (24.06.2023 – Meeting with the Chief of General Staff of the AFU – S. Sheptalo, Infographics (Telegram).

Another post from 23.06.2023, with video and text information about the fact that already in Ukraine, multiple launch rocket systems HIMARS have been working for a year. This post was liked over 19 thousand times. However, this post also received a lot of «crying» reactions – about 3.8 thousand, which may indirectly indicate sadness, grief, or regret; it can also be used to express sympathy or compassion for someone who is going through difficult times, indicating that you share someone's sadness or disappointment. The post from 07.06.2023? about extra Training for Militaries during Wartime in Telegram had 13.6 K Burning Heart and 2,8K likes, 1,3K Heart, all the reactions are positive and support the leader.

The posts of the first period demonstrate official business style, which reflects the status, restraint, and competence of the head of the Ukrainian Armed Forces. One can fix word combinations with a verb emphasizing actions, with the help of emotionally colored adjectives, such as “buty` sy`l`nishy`my`!” (English: to be stronger), “jdut` vazhki boyi” (English: difficult battles are going on), “b`yut` po pravy`l`ny`x cilyax”, (pro-Ukrayinu) (English: hitting the correct targets,» (about Ukraine), “suverenetsna, nezalezna, demokraty`chna, social`na, pravova...” (English: sovereign, independent, democratic, social, legal)...“yedy`na, sy`l`na, smily`va i gotova do oporu”, “najskladnishi zavdannya, najzapeklishi boyi” (English: united, strong, brave and ready to resist», «the most difficult tasks, the fiercest battles).

The least number of likes, nearly 18,000 likes, during this period, gained a post about the possibility of additional training for the Ukrainian military, where Zaluzhnyi uses verbs (emphasizing actions) – “my` trenuyemosya, shop buty` sy`l`nishy`my` v boyu” (English: we train to be stronger in battle) – and nouns – “boyezdatnist` i boyegotovnist`” (English: combat and combat readiness), related to professional military vocabulary. All these details push the audience to be more involved in the war period, to feel it brightly, even feel like a co-defense, and then to relate the content to their reality and feel safer and stable in a volatile time of war.

The posts often contain the slogan or motto that underlines the core of the publication as “Dyakuyu kozhnomu, xto nably`zhaye peremogu! (English: Thanks to everyone who brings the victory closer!),

“try`nuyemosya, shhob buty` sy`l`nishy`my` v boyu” (English: We’re training to be stronger in battle), “Ukrayinci obov’yazkogo peremozhut`. Slava Ukrayini!” (English: Ukrainians are bound to win. Glory to Ukraine!). This is reminiscent of the cultural and historical context of a military commander inspiring his army before a battle. In the book dedicated to Valerii Zaluzhnyi, Ludmila Dolhonovska, his strategic communications advisor, emphasizes that the slogan or motto at the end of the text was suggested by Zaluzhnyi himself (Dolhonovska 2025: 54). It helps to consolidate the audience, instill sensible behavior, motivate, and convey an emotional message to the audience.

The analysis of the posts’ content shows that narrowly professionally oriented posts written in an official style, designed to give a brief report on military operations and to strengthen the spirit of the military and citizens of Ukraine, which are supported by the audience, dominate. Of the 14 posts in the first period, 11 are about socio-political events related to Zaluzhnyi’s activities. In the second period, only 10 of 60 posts are about current news.

The publications form Zaluzhnyi’s image as a reserved leader, a charismatic «commander of victories» (New Voice, 2023). In almost all his photos, Zaluzhnyi wears a military uniform. He is often shown smiling, emphasizing his optimism and courage. He is referred to as a “21st-century general”, «ataman», «father,» and «iron,» and he is a symbol of the Ukrainian nation (TSN, 2023).

His strategic communication manager Ludmila Dolhonovska indicates that among Zaluzhnyi’s qualities, one can mention a sense of humor, humanity, and patience, which fit the image of a genuine modern military leader (Dolhonovska 2025: 114). The job, the actions, the behavior, and the style of communication of this period add to Zaluzhnyi’s reputation the trust of the Ukrainian people. It helps him to fulfil his duties successfully.

For the second studied period, only 4 posts out of 66 are signed by Valerii Zaluzhnyi.

Zaluzhnyi’s Posts about:

Conversation with the Chief of General Staff of the Republic of Poland, 25.01.2024,

Post is devoted to the Historical Date, when, in 1918, the Army of the Ukrainian National Republic stopped Russian Invaders, who were rushing to Kyiv, 29.01.2024,

Partial summary of Zaluzhnyi’s article in CNN column, devoted to the analysis of the current war and the general’s vision of how to win this war (with the link to the full text), 02.02.2024,

Text on behalf of Zaluzhnyi, thanking the military, partners, and the President, with whom the general cooperated, and on his behalf informing that “there was a serious conversation with the President: “It’s necessary to change approaches and strategies”... and I’m grateful to everyone” about his resignation as Commander-in-Chief, 08.02.2024. (All the posts are from Zaluzhnyi’s Instagram account)

These three posts are selected to illustrate the second period (25.01, 29.01, 28.01, 2024) signed by the PR departments of different brigades of the AFU. Most of the publications are dedicated to portrait sketches of the AFU soldiers or the work done by different AFU units:

“Pixota – zalizny`j kulak peremogy`! Vy` – najmobil`nisha ta najuniversal`nisha chasty`na nashoyi armiyi! Pixota – ce nasha shkola stijkosti, muzhnosti, braterstva ta nezlamnosti duxu, ce vtomleni ruky`, shho sty`skayut` xolodnu zbroyu starogo, ale nadijnogo avtomata. Vy` mozhetе diyaty` v bud`-yaky`x umovax i na rizny`x prostorax i ne boyaty`sya, bo vy` – ti, xto dy`vy`t`sya smerti v ochi, poky` vona ne vidvernet`sya. Pixota – ce ti, chy`yimy` krokamy` vy`miruyet`sya cina nashoyi svobody” (English: Infantry is the iron fist of victory! You are the most mobile and versatile part of our army! Infantry is our primer of steadfastness, courage, brotherhood, and unclouded spirit, these are the tired hands that clench the cold steel of an old but reliable machine gun. You can act in any condition and different spaces and have no fear because you are those who look death in the eye until it looks away. Infantry are the ones by whose steps – the price of our freedom is measured) ... signed by the Public Relations Service of 57 brigade, 25.01.2024;

Photo with the caption “Dobroho ranku, Ukraino! Vohneva pidhotovka v temnu poru doby (English: Good morning, Ukraine! Fire training in the dark hour of 24 hours)”, 26.01.2024’;

Photo with a story about a soldier Viktor: “prosty`j skromny`j cholovik. Jomu shhe nemaye 40, ale vy`glyadaye vin starshy`m za svij vik: za jogo plechy`ma vazhka Baxmuts`ka kampaniya, misyaci i misyaci vazhky`x boyiv «na nuli” (English: a simple modest man. He is not yet 40, but he looks older than his age: behind his shoulders there is difficult Bakhmut campaign, months and months of difficult fights ‘at zero’) (on the front line)... With the caption: PR Service of the 58th separate infantry brigade named after Hetman Ivan Vygovsky, 28.01.2024. (All the posts are from Zaluzhnyi’s Instagram account)

Mostly in the posts – sketches we see few words, much visual information, emotional language: use of adjectives to describe heroes and actions “mobil`ny`j, universal`ny`j, bezxmarny`j” (English: mobile, versatile, unclouded and etc.), metaphors “zalizny`j kulak peremogy`, osnova stijkosti, muzhnosti, braterstva”(English: iron fist of victory, primer of steadfastness, courage, brotherhood, etc.).

The followers can perceive Zaluzhnyi as calm, positive, and optimistic as usual, smiling, even at the meeting when he knew about the decision concerning his resignation. This post is the answer to the

resignation, which could be an example of a character assassination attempt, but it's also an example of building a new reputation, which forms a renewal of image and a renewal of reputation, at a deeper level and with a long-term perspective. Also in the second period, the post about the resignation of Zaluzhnyi attracted the most quantity of likes.

In general, the publications of the second period of the Commander-in-Chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces are written in a less official style, more emotional, telling heartwarming stories about the simple heroes of this war. The posts signed by Zaluzhnyi himself are more official: they convey facts. For example, the post is dedicated to a historical date – the 100th anniversary of the expulsion of the Russian army, which was marching towards Kyiv, by soldiers of the Ukrainian People's Republic – is the accent of a professional who sees analogies in the past, present, and future.

These posts also express the competence of the head of the Ukrainian military forces and demonstrate his kindness. The sketches help readers co-feel, empathize, and attune to the military to immerse themselves in military reality, even while living outside the war zone. The posts also contain a couple of slogans: "Pixota – zalizny'j kulak peremogy!" (English: Infantry is the iron fist of victory!), "Ukryinci obov'yazkovo peremozhut!" (English: Ukrainians will win!).

The first-period messages are more personalized, and the second one, most posts reflect metaphorically speaking, the view 'from the outside'.

Zaluzhnyi's channels are more formal in the first period. It is important to note how the opinion leader discusses popular topics, the so-called «evil of the day»: Zaluzhnyi conducts his daily work without unnecessary comments and explanations. Among the peculiarities of the work of opinion leaders' reputologists, the following peculiarity should be noted: Zaluzhnyi provides a minimum of information. The dynamics are also evident in the first period – a few posts, and there are more messages in the timeline in the second period.

Zaluzhnyi's posts are essential for the country and military operations concerning the image of Defender: without negativity, with praise deserved by the Ukrainian military, which emphasizes the monotony of the work, conveys a sense of competence in the military, and inspires faith and hope for victory. Zaluzhnyi's social network accounts are characterized by reliance on concrete facts, figures, and stories of people without commentary, the emotional coloring of the posts is mainly due to the use of words with emotional connotation, and the slogans that end the text.

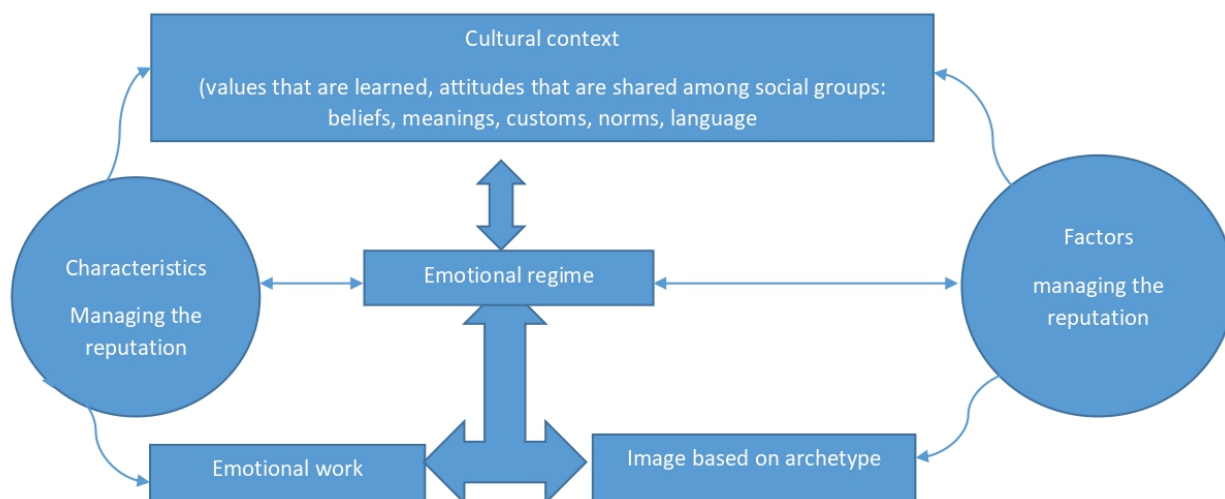
The selected content reflects distinctive messages that evoke an emotional response from wartime, facilitating the reader's actual experiences and impressions, so, according to Goffman's sociology, such issues establish mutual trust and confidence which are important components which manage social interaction and relationships (Johansson, 2007). That is why among the opinion leaders in wartime, Valerii Zaluzhnyi occupies the top place.

The analysis of opinion leaders' content, paying attention to the emotional perception of social network readers, testifies that the actions narrated by social media need to 'turn on' emotions to engage the audience and attune them to empathy and sympathy according to Schulze's theory. These actions can be reinforced by high-profile leaders in society and the media. Social media effective connectivity with people and instant communication has made it a favourite

tool for the leaders across the globe (Shamzi, 2023). Zaluzhnyi perfects his emotional activities, especially on social media. Stakeholders read the information and, if it fits their socio-cultural patterns, their understanding of the emotional work of the chief military, then they incorporate the cultural code (see Pic. 1).

The notion of reputation, according to Schulze, is fundamentally tied to the way that people present themselves to others. These are the visible actions, statements, or symbolic gestures through which individuals or organizations express their identity or values. Expressive acts such as sharing with society every day the AFU activities, successful professional achievements of their different groups, optimism, and personal responsibility are measurable, observable, and interpretable within cultural norms. In both 2023 and 2024, followers see work under the leadership of the statesperson, aimed at the benefit of citizens and the country. This is the service to the people and the country, which reflects the trend of the difficult war period – contribution to the common goal as a social responsibility, close to social asceticism – to be active and co-working for the society.

The publicity of the Commander-in-Chief is a factor that strengthens all his actions and imposes even greater responsibility on his acts, initiating trust as the basis of reputation management. During wartime, you can't plan for a long-term period, just for some hours or days. Thus, citizens of Ukraine are more grateful for such Valerii Zaluzhnyi's behavior. They believe in his words and actions. They are ready to trust him more. One can suggest that this is related to both the leader's real-life activities and cultural attitudes – Zaluzhnyi is not only a modern military leader, but he also represents the archetype of the Defender. According to the alarming trend in Ukraine now, to live "stable in changeability, the rate of trust among the Ukrainians



Pic. 1. Components of Reputation Management Structure in Sociological Perspectives

Source: Developed by the authors

is predictable. The results of the sociological survey confirm this: the highest level of trust was given to AFU in December, 2022 and December 2023 – 96% against 72% in December 2021, while 88% of Ukrainians trusted Zaluzhnyi personally as Commander-in-Chief in December 2023 (Dynamics of Trust in Social Institutions in 2021-2023', 29.11-09.12.2023, Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (abbr.: KIIS) (KIIS, 2023). Another survey (see above) of KIIS (July 2022) devoted to seven Ukrainian leaders showed Zaluzhnyi as a leader supported by 9% of the Ukrainian population.

Zaluzhnyi, as the official, deliberately took little part in the discussions in the mass media. Perhaps, this is due to the unexpected for the society rapid creation and the increased popularity of the new leader. That is why his comments were more valuable for all stakeholders. For example, his exclusive essay for CNN, where Zaluzhnyi described his view on military perspectives, "On the Modern Design of Military Operations in the Russian-Ukrainian War: in the Fight for the Initiative" (CNN, World, Europe 2024). Some extracts from Zaluzhnyi's essay have been published on his social media accounts; a link to the full text is also present. This document is Zaluzhnyi's 'response' to the leadership, citizens of the country, and foreign partners. The essay is characterized by brevity. It gives an insight into the traditional approach known to the Russian and Ukrainian armies, and captures data on the current situation on the battlefield. Zaluzhnyi offers his vision of how to change the situation and win. We consider that the essay gives a professional assessment of war results and provides relevant recommendations. His essay presents a professional response "ahead of the situation". It characterizes him as a visionary statesman, a responsible and honest leader. The essay is focused on the future. With the help of this essay, Zaluzhnyi strengthens the confidence of the audience in himself and responds to criticism in a dignified, calm, and respectful manner.

Professional achievements for the benefit of society, humanity, calmness, and confidence of a professional, and responsibility for his work at the level of sociocultural patterns of behavior, including the cultural codes of the nation, because people respect such qualities.

In our opinion, the high dynamics of Zaluzhnyi's rapidly growing popularity may be generated by the right emotional work in the Ukrainian and Western countries' emotional regimes, other, properly accentuated, components of the cultural code of Ukrainians.

Bourdieu emphasized the importance of cultural norms and symbolic systems using concepts like *habitus* and *cultural capital*. Clifford Geertz focused on the interpretative nature of culture as a «text» in social life. Cultural codes are defined as *symbols* and *systems of meanings* that are relevant to members of a particular culture (or subculture). These codes can be utilized to facilitate communication within the 'inside group' and also to obscure the meaning of 'outside groups' (Hyatt, Simons 1999). Zaluzhnyi speaks mostly in Ukrainian, always positively and professionally. He speaks less, does more. In Western mass media, he is described as an "iron general" (Why Zaluzhnyi is called the 'iron general' and what the allies said about him 2024). Dolhonovska, in her book "Iron General," devoted to Zaluzhnyi, describes him as a person who does his work. He didn't serve in the Soviet army. She presents him as the innovator in the Ukrainian army, he is eager to introduce new leadership skills, respects military men from all countries, responsible for his successful and unsuccessful actions, also he is interested in Ukrainian literature, and history, believes in Ukrainian values and the soldiers, work hard for the goodwill of his citizens and country. The followers of his accounts, reading and watching his posts, can find confirmation of these words. For example, such

components as speaking the Ukrainian language, visual symbols (such as military uniform, his hand gesture, smile), social norms, beliefs, and values (courage, professionalism, responsibility, calmness, love for the country) are part of a known cultural code for Ukrainian society. In most cases, his actions are perceived as sincere and professional, and the number of “likes” on social media confirms that. According to Time magazine, on 23 January 2022, Zaluzhnyi was included in the list of the 100 most influential people of 2022 (Dolhonovska 2025: 143).

Thus, Zaluzhnyi's actions cause positive emotions in the audience (support, admiration, respect). Naturally, when stakeholders often reveal such emotions when reading or watching information about Zaluzhnyi or with his participation, a stable, positive emotional resonance is created.

Leaders work in all directions to harmoniously manage their reputation and maintain the trust of their stakeholders. Still, depending on the official or unofficial status and the type of activity, the opinion leader's concepts of developing information about social responsibility and working with the public differ.

In Schulze's theory of expression, reputation presents a social construct deeply embedded in the cultural and symbolic systems of a society. This theoretical perspective provides a way to measure reputation by focusing on expressive acts and their interpretation within a specific cultural context.

So, the content of the social networks of the studied opinion leader, posted in wartime, helps to get the reader's actual experiences and impressions, and becomes more involved in the military issues. He is directly engaged in the current military agenda, and his optimism about the events of the war helps Ukrainians to empathize with the war events and trust the one who took responsibility. Thus, one can assume that the opinion leader, in his way, complements the picture of the world of their audience through posts reflecting fragments of the opinion leader's social behavior: introducing thoughts, facts, impressions, and emotions of wartime.

The concept of the society of impressions captures the complex cultural changes that have taken place in modern society. The shift in consumer orientation from external to emotionally internal items allows us to talk about the cardinal change in contemporary society's cultural, social, and political aspects, the *theatricalization* of which is becoming increasingly expressive (Komykh 2021). Zaluzhnyi's reputation is considered more balanced, laconic, and directed to tolerance, with the peculiarities of the position held. It requires less private information and does not perceive random actions and statements. Therefore, among the characteristics of reputation building, one can identify the focus on social cohesion, identity formation, and traditional values.

The factors that influence Zaluzhnyi's image promotion cover the target audience's values and cultural characteristics to which the accounts are oriented, duration of the reputation, the lexical coloring of the image, and the orientation towards the social norms and values prevailing in wartime.

Горошко О., Каширова Н. Управління враженням у соціальних мережах у воєнний час (кейс Валерія Залужного)

У статті підкреслюється унікальна роль використання інформації в гібридній війні в умовах воєних дій на основі управління репутацією Валерія Залужного – колишнього Головнокомандувача Збройних Сил України, які досліджуються за допомогою теорії Суспільства вражень Шульце. Об'єктом дослідження є аналіз його акаунтів у соціальних мережах у період оголошеного Україною контрнаступу, з 04 по 30.06.2023, та за два тижні до його відставки з посади Головнокомандувача Збройних Сил України, з 25.01 по 08.02.2024.

В якості основного інструменту дослідження обрано аналіз контенту соціальних мереж.

Отримані результати свідчать, що репутацію Валерія Залужного можна охарактеризувати як збалансовану, лаконічну та стриману. Є акцент на культурному коді: традиційних нормах та цінностях, притаманних суспільству, особливостях роботи людини в суспільстві та для суспільства в умовах війни, а також вибір «особистих» тем, що демонструють «належність» та «співпрацю» лідера з суспільством, які є основними компонентами формування його репутації. Символічний образ захисника відіграє ключову роль у його репутації.

Серед факторів, що впливають на просування іміджу Захисника, можна виділити цінності та культурні особливості цільової аудиторії, тривалість репутації, використання лексичного забарвлення (емоційно забарвлені слова – це вирази, що дозволяють висловити ставлення людини до вчинків, дій інших людей) та орієнтацію на соціальні традиції.

Ключові слова: онлайн-репутація; лідер думок; соціальні медіа; управління враженням; Валерій Залужний; воєнний час.

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