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## Internet journalism in modern society: an overview of mechanisms for resisting media manipulation

### Periodismo en Internet en la sociedad moderna: una visión general de los mecanismos de resistencia a la manipulación mediática

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#### Abstract

At the current stage of the development of the information society, the influence of Internet journalism on the formation of public opinion (in particular, if we are talking about outright manipulation) is extremely noticeable. The purpose of the article is to analyze these influences in modern society in terms of the presence and use of media manipulation mechanisms and ways to counter them. The main research methods were general scientific (analysis, synthesis) and special scientific (abstraction and concretization). Manifestations of the manipulative influence of Internet journalism on human consciousness are traced in the results. The main attention is paid to the analysis of the mechanisms of resistance to manipulation in the media. In particular, an analysis of fact-checking, legal methods of combating fakes was carried out, the peculiarities of protection against manipulation based on the

#### Resumen

En la fase actual de desarrollo de la sociedad de la información, la influencia del periodismo en Internet en la formación de la opinión pública (en particular, si hablamos de manipulación descarada) es extremadamente notable. El propósito del artículo es analizar estas influencias en la sociedad moderna en términos de presencia y uso de mecanismos de manipulación mediática y formas de contrarrestarlos. Los principales métodos de investigación fueron científicos generales (análisis, síntesis) y científicos especiales (abstracción y concreción). En los resultados se rastrean las manifestaciones de la influencia manipuladora del periodismo en Internet sobre la conciencia humana. Se presta especial atención al análisis de los mecanismos de resistencia a la manipulación en los medios de comunicación. En particular, se realiza un análisis de la comprobación de hechos, los métodos legales de lucha contra las falsificaciones, se investigan las

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verification of photo and video materials were investigated. The results also highlight the video verification algorithm. The conclusions summarize that critical thinking and acquisition of media competence and media literacy skills are a relevant way to resist manipulative influences on the Internet. Despite this, fact-checking and verification of photos and video materials that are distributed on the Internet are effective mechanisms for resisting manipulation.

**Keywords:** media resources, Internet journalism, manipulation, propaganda.

## Introduction

The leading role in the formation and dissemination of public opinion is played by the media, it is interpreted as a set of modern channels of communication (press, television, radio, Internet), through which information is distributed. However, the mechanisms used in the media often have a manipulative and controlling potential, influencing the perception of reality, social attitudes, and behavior patterns of individuals. At the same time, under the conditions of information society and globalization, Internet journalism occupies a notable function; it is a tool through which direct influence on human consciousness is exercised.

Manipulative mechanisms used in the media can noticeably influence public opinion, so an important task of modern journalism is to identify the key characteristics of manipulative messages and to study the main mechanisms of counteracting manipulation.

Note that the authors of the article interpret the term “manipulation” as a special type of mental influence exercised through the press (newspapers, magazines), the Internet, television, audio, video recordings, advertising, social networks, etc., which leads to awakening in the object of influence intentions that transform its moods, thoughts, values, attitudes, views, etc.

The purpose of the article is to analyze the influence of Internet journalism in modern society on the presence and use of media manipulation mechanisms and to determine the main effective ways of countering them. For this, the research first describes the possibilities of the manipulative influence of Internet media on people’s consciousness, highlights the key

peculiaridades de la protección contra la manipulación basada en la verificación de materiales fotográficos y de vídeo. Los resultados también ponen de relieve el algoritmo de verificación de vídeo. Las conclusiones resumen que el pensamiento crítico y la adquisición de competencias mediáticas y de alfabetización mediática son una forma pertinente de resistir a las influencias manipuladoras en Internet. A pesar de ello, la comprobación de los hechos y la verificación de las fotos y los vídeos que se distribuyen por Internet son mecanismos eficaces para resistir a la manipulación.

**Palabras clave:** medios de comunicación, periodismo en Internet, manipulación, propaganda.

mechanisms of countering manipulation. The following sections examine the practical use of anti-manipulation mechanisms through the prism of fact-checking, checking photo and video content.

## Theoretical Framework or Literature Review

The methodological basis of the article is the work of European, American, and Asian scientists. In particular, Abbas Naqvi et al., (2020) characterized the influence of social networks on the development of public institutions and businesses. The authors focused on the manipulative potential of advertising. Brooks & Porter (2020) developed a model of media influence on political ideology in the context of globalization and information transformation. Karlsen & Aalberg (2021) conducted an experiment designed to determine the impact of news distribution on social media (Facebook) on the emergence of news credibility. The results of their study demonstrated that spreading news through Facebook affects trust. The researchers note that the effect is strong, while politicians are mediating senders. At the same time, Kaur & Verma (2018) characterized the manipulative influence of social media. Rogers & Niederer (2021) also identified the manipulative significance of social media and characterized its role in influencing human consciousness, making all kinds of decisions, including political decisions. Tuters (2020) investigated the problem of the spread of fake news to the Dutch political debate space on YouTube.

At the same time, Vysotska & Vysotska (2020) characterized some mechanisms to counter fake news manipulation. In particular, the authors

note the importance of teaching students to show bias and manipulation based on events in Ukraine. Mykolaienko (2019) investigated the problem of manipulateness and false news in the Ukrainian media space.

As can be seen from the analysis of the literature, modern researchers have paid much attention to the analysis of the manipulative influence of social media resources, while other Internet resources (including official news sites) were not subject to detailed research. At the same time, the review of mechanisms of resistance to manipulation remains a topical problem for research.

### Methodology

The realization of the research goal involved the use of general scientific research methods. In particular, based on the analysis, the research subject (mechanisms of resistance to manipulative influence) is divided into smaller parts: the study of the main manipulations used in Internet journalism, the characteristics of resistance to manipulations through the prism of fact-checking analysis, the analysis of resistance to manipulations using the analysis of photo and video materials. With the help of synthesis, the specified elements were synthesized and own conclusions and recommendations were formed.

The study was implemented in several stages. The first stage involved a theoretical review of the main features of manipulative messages used in the media. In the second stage, the main mechanisms for countering manipulation (fact-checking, legal verification methods, etc.) were reviewed. In the third stage, a thorough analysis of countering manipulation through photo and video content verification was conducted. On the basis of modeling, a model of photo and video content verification was developed through the prism of the use of modern online resources. At the last stage the results were summarized, and own judgments and conclusions were formed.

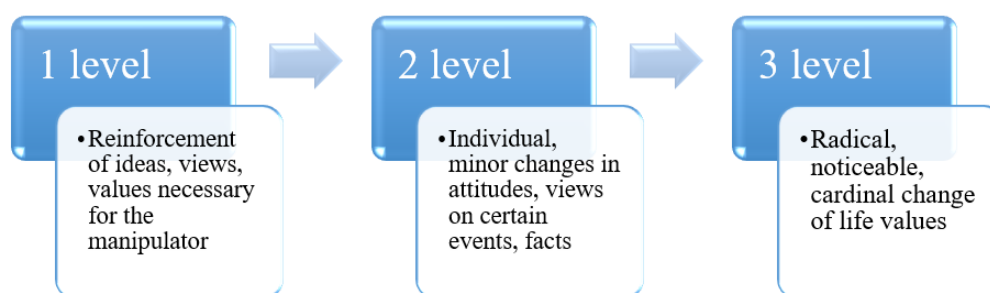
The results of the study are based on an analysis of news sites such as BBC News, “Metro” the factcheck media “Slovo i Dilo”, etc. The study was prepared based on the analysis of such sites as Pipl. Com, deepWeb, Yomapic, JPEGsnoop, Findexif, Jeffreys Exif Viewer, etc. In addition, particular attention is paid to the analysis of Google’s fact-checking sites: Google Imagine, Google Earth.

### Results and Discussion

#### Protection from manipulation: signs of a manipulative Internet message

Various characteristics of manipulation have been described in the scientific literature, among them two leading characteristics: asymmetric and covert (Brooks & Porter, 2020). The informational action of the source of manipulation is targeted at the mass psyche of society. Most technologies of manipulative influence are based on the creation of artificial reality, the implementation of an external stimulus that focuses the attention of the object and is meaningful to him (Karlsen & Aalberg, 2021). Consequently, modern researchers distinguish several levels of the manipulation process (see Figure 1).

In general, the information provided to us by the media passes through the censorship of the psyche (Kaur & Verma, 2018). The latter stands in the way of the message that appears in the center of human perception of it (through representational and signaling systems). The human consciousness is capable of redistributing information and perceiving it in its own way. One part of the information message, as a result of mental censorship, reaches consciousness, while others (much larger in volume) go to subconsciousness. At the same time, the information message received in the subconscious begins to influence the consciousness after a certain period of time (Shafi & Vultee, 2018).

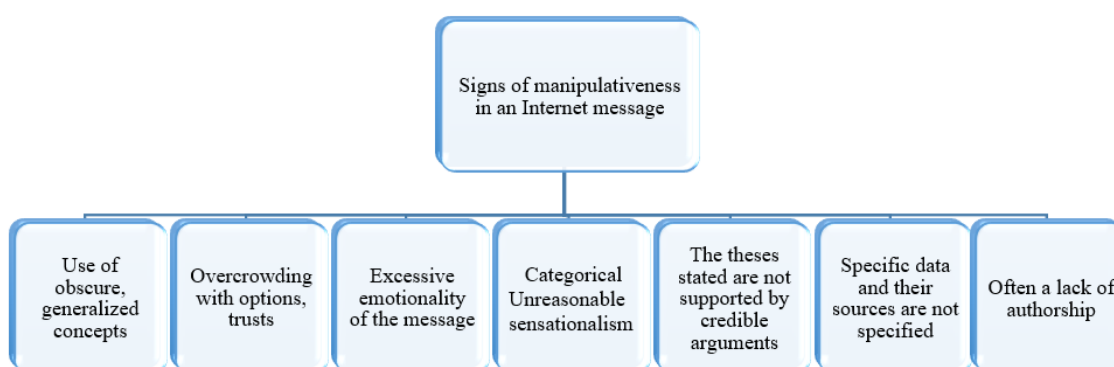


**Figure 1.** The main levels of manipulation used in Internet media  
*Authors' development*

A sign of manipulation is the language that politicians, presenters, and article writers use. If they use obscure or generalized concepts, it is more likely that they are trying to hide something (Cheung et al., 2020). If the material is addressed to a general audience but is oversaturated with opt-outs, trusts, etc. - the audience is being manipulated. On the other hand, another criterion is excessive emotion. When the author of an Internet message in a text is very emotional, one should look for a catch. In the material, emotion is used to form a specific, necessary condition in the reader of the manipulator. The use of emotionally colored words: outrageous, unacceptable, perfectly indicative of manipulation, because the goal is to create a certain impression. Another sign is sensationalism – when authors try to emphasize the information’s weightiness and importance

and induce a corresponding state in readers (Abbas Naqvi et al., 2020).

In many cases where categoricalness appears, there are signs of manipulateness. For example: “Every one of us is president,” “I will hear everyone.” One should also be wary of the mode of grouping. When the source of information begins to emphasize that we belong to one group, and they do not understand them - to another. At the same time, in a manipulative Internet message, the opinions stated are unsubstantiated credible arguments, there is no specific data and no references to Internet sources (if there are any, they are difficult to verify). A separate tendency of manipulative messages often spread in various Telegram channels, is the lack of authorship. (See Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Signs of manipulateness in an Internet message  
Authors’ development

Taking into account the indicated signs, it is possible to distinguish a manipulative message from a true one. At the same time, it should be taken into account that a manipulative message gives away its header. A headline like: «Sensation...», «You won’t believe...», «Shocking truth» is manipulative. In the name of this type, excessively emotional vocabulary is mostly used. The main goal of such Internet headlines is for the reader to click on them and open the message. At the same time, there will often be no sensationalism in the text. There is another purpose for using such headers. Due to the fact that there is a lot of news on social networks, people do not open all of them, but only skim the titles. In such a situation, the manipulation will be aimed at the reader forming the desired opinion of the manipulator based only on the title.

### Basic mechanisms for resisting manipulation on the Internet

A powerful defense against manipulative influence is the acquisition of media literacy and media competence skills. These skills are especially important in view of the Russia-Ukraine war and Russia's use of various means of propaganda. For this reason, one must learn to analyze information, find contradictions in it, and interpret it. Since the manipulator always affects the emotional state, you should try to blunt your emotions. First of all, you should perceive the author's words rationally and impartially. If the Internet message contains signs of sensationalism and categorical, you should check the information with other sources. In particular, if the message is categorical, one should immediately think “What will happen if he hears everyone?” Internal conversations and arguments should be had. As soon as an alternative opinion emerges that differs from the

considerations of the manipulator, its zombifying effect is suspended.

At the same time, it is important to remember that no source of information in a confrontational environment provides a realistic assessment of the state of affairs. Internet manipulation loosens up users on a kind of emotional swing of “victories” and “failures,” which leads to gradual internal exhaustion. For this reason, anxiety or aggressiveness must have a kind of application. Physical activity (physical work) allows one to take away aggression and fears, to soberly assess the news, and to exert manipulative influence in the future.

A separate method for countering the spread of manipulation by journalists in the digital environment is fact-checking, i.e. a detailed verification of the information received, including an analysis of the completeness, authenticity and manipulative content. Factchecking can be considered an extension of media competence, with the difference that it can be performed not only by individuals, but also by groups of Internet users united for the purpose of countering the spread of lies (Hirst, 2018). In the context of political destabilization and open armed aggression, the existence of enthusiastic groups and the efforts of individual users who create relevant pages where they oppose the spread of disinformation, false political discussions, etc.

Factchecker implements verification of information only in open official sources. A key difference between factchecker and media investigation is the absolute rejection of insider information and unofficial information.

Factchecker uses only official sources of information, both Ukrainian and foreign answers to inquiries to governmental bodies and foreign institutions to create research (See Figure 3).

So, as shown in Figure 3, the fact checker first selects material and identifies the main points to be verified. The next step is to search official sources to verify the information. This will help determine whether the Internet message is true, false or contains misleading statements. After that, the analyzed message is accompanied by comments that justify the result, then another expert verifies the comment. If the comment passes the check, a final check for internal logic is implemented. Then there is a publication of the verified data, which contains links to the sources of verification.

At the same time, the possibilities of legal opposition to manipulation are discussed. In particular, researchers identify several major manifestations of manipulation on the Internet (Spencer, 2019). First, manipulation is not conducive to an individual's autonomous existence, as it causes tangible harm to the freedom to make personal decisions. Second, manipulation entails ineffective outcomes or negative consequences because it forces individuals to take actions and make choices that may be harmful and not in line with their actual preferences (Warwick et al., 2021). In the political arena, manipulative behavior leads to decreased trust in democratic institutions. Also, the use of manipulation harms the concept of human dignity because people become certain subjects of externally imposed experiments, they are only used to achieve a certain goal.

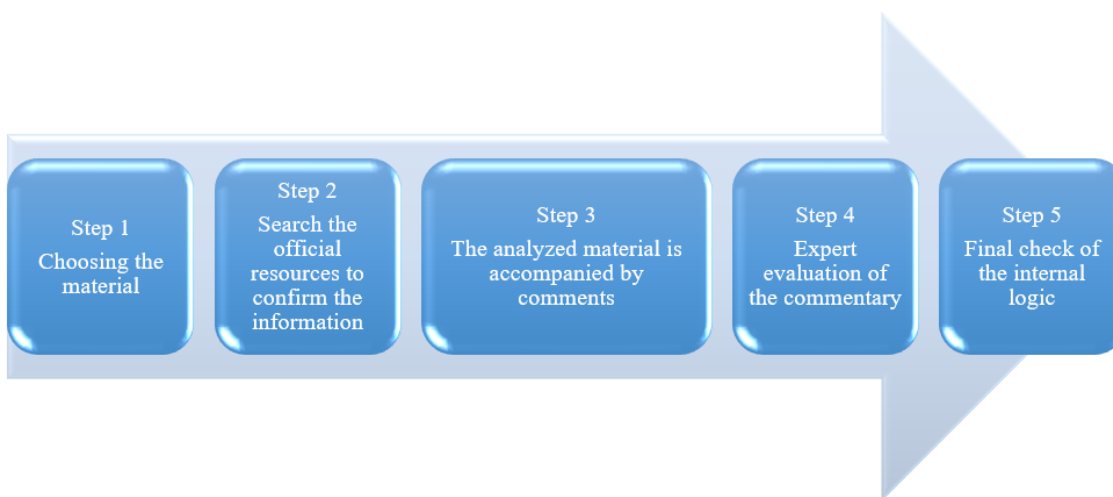


Figure 3. Basic check algorithm for fact-checkers

The use of manipulation in online journalism, through opinionmakers, can deal all of the above “blows” simultaneously, but have a certain particularly harmful direction. For this reason, there is a legal problem between defining the boundaries of free speech, the right to err (because some manipulative information is distributed erroneously), and conscious propaganda. One compromise solution is to block platforms that deliberately spread misinformation. It is not the personal opinion of the author that is taken into account, but the methods of spreading disinformation - that is, first and foremost, the platform that provided the opportunities for broadcasting materials with manipulative content is sanctioned. The possibilities of direct legal regulation regarding the threats of online manipulation are also discussed - the use and addition of certain data protection legislation clauses on the exercise of misconduct with appropriate administrative or criminal penalties (Spencer, 2019). This tool is particularly valid for Influencers, who disseminate manipulation and propaganda materials, but cover themselves with the interest of the audience, in particular, anyone who is not interested in their opinions can leave the digital channel of its retransmission. Perhaps in the future the deliberate dissemination of manipulative information will have problems with the law.

### **Avoiding manipulation through photo verification**

The active development of Internet journalism has influenced the fact that the copyright of photos is not always used. At the same time, the use of photos in social networks without a signature and the right to use them has become common practice. This is also noticeable in Ukrainian media, using other people's professional photos to better showcase content. For some editors, other people's photos are the basis for social media promotion (Singh, 2021). This is what manipulative media resources take advantage of, using photos from search engines for manipulative purposes. BBC News editor T. Barot talks about the mechanism of image verification (Dorosh, 2014). First, the author of the photo must be identified. The most common and effective way is to contact those who sent the photo to the editor (or uploaded it), and ask this person herself took the photo. A separate effective method is to search for the photo through reverse image surfing. Often the Google network will show such images, which helps to see if the photo has been edited. The researcher

notes that the link to the photo in the best extension is the original source (Dorosh, 2014).

Separately, one should check the person who is distributing the informational message in order to gather more information about them there are a number of different platforms, but predominantly they are created for U.S. residents (Hirst, 2018). However, there are some that will be useful for Ukrainians as well. In particular, the platform Pipl. com - is designed to find a user of the Internet, by entering the name and surname of the author of the content you can identify him, find the main of his photos. This program implements a search on all known social networks, its peculiarity is that it searches on the basis of deepWeb, which is ignored by simple search engines.

In a photo verification system, it is important to identify small details and discrepancies. To do this, there are special tools for checking photos. The easiest tool is the Google Image reverse search. By uploading the photo to the system Google finds similar pictures. In the case where the system finds hundreds of steps of photos, you should enter keywords. A reverse photo search is implemented by the TinEye service, which filters out similar images by time. There is a program Google Earth (Dorosh, 2014) to check the photo from the scene. For example, the message indicates that the streets of Kharkov are depicted. In order to check this, you can use the specified program, which shows the panorama of any streets. Service Yomapic finds with the help of social networks to find photos taken in a certain place. Ukrainian journalists use this resource to find out if people live in the occupied territories (Dorosh, 2014). JPEGsnoop is a resource that allows you to view photo metadata, it detects if an image has been edited and highlights errors in corrupted files. At the same time, the Findexif platform identifies EXIF data (i.e., basic information about how, where and when the photo was taken, what device, indicates the main characteristics of the image. Another online resource that reveals the purpose of the data is Jeffreys Exif Viewer. Another way to check the photo is to determine what the weather conditions were in the analyzed place on a particular day.

### **Protection against manipulation: checking video products**

Another mechanism for countering manipulation is video product verification. The authors propose a basic algorithm for video verification,

taking into account such criteria as origin, location, and source.

The first important step is to identify the genesis of the video. Predominantly the video is accompanied by tags, its descriptions, and comments that affect its identification (Tuters, 2020). In order to start verification, keywords from this information should be identified and searched. Separately, a search for early videos matching the keywords should be implemented: this will allow the results to be viewed and compared. The next step involves checking online visitor profiles. Many modern resources allow you to contact those who have distributed or downloaded content. Analyzing these people will allow you to analyze exactly who was interested in the video message. When researching a video owner's account, the following information should be considered: where the account is registered, where the account is located, or the dated video content they are distributing, the quality of the content distributed. If the videos have the extension AVI or .MP4, it indicates that they are downloaded directly from the device. In case the video description contains the phrase "Uploaded via YouTube Capture" it indicates that the video was taken with a smartphone. A separate step is to check the personal information of the person who uploaded the video. First, you should determine if there are related accounts online and find out if they are active now. After that, find out if the account in question is connected to social networks and if there is information about the person in directories such as LinkedIn and Spokeo. Separate to this system is the location of the video. This procedure begins with establishing the location covered in the video. Resources such as Wikimapia or Google Earth can be used for this (Dorosh, 2014).

An analysis of this data will determine if the video messages uploaded from the profile being analyzed should be trusted.

### **The practice of creating organizations resisting media manipulation**

In European countries there is a whole network of special organizations engaged in the formation of media literacy among the entire population. A typical way for a fact-checking organization to emerge is through the formation of fact-checking organizations in media editorial offices. In particular, in 2014 the newspaper "Metro" created a fact-checking project called "Viralgranskaren". "PolitiFact" is one of the best-known American fact-checking

organizations, with 15 regional chapters. This organization is owned by the "Tampa Bay Times newspaper". There are also factcheck media resources in Ukraine: "the Stop Fake" project, the analytical resource "Vox Check" and the factcheck media "Slovo i Dilo". The project "No Lies" was the first to show fact-checking in a television format, founded a number of correctional projects, and created the first methodical manual on fact-checking in Ukraine. On the other hand, the Academy of the Ukrainian Press is also engaged in the implementation of various projects on media education of all categories of citizens.

There are also special organizations, which are not subordinate to the media. In particular, in Great Britain there are two projects "Newswise" and "News Literacy Network", which organize various events that contribute to the support of media competencies. As part of these projects, numerous trainings are held to promote critical thinking and an analytical view of the media. Participants in such events learn to emphasize the source of information, whether it is trustworthy or spreads rumors, it is balanced. Note that in the UK there are many officially supported media literacy initiatives that are implemented by both the media and the educational community. In Germany, the media regulator's "Zeebra" project is popular. It is a special line of help and questions about everyday digital life. This resource answers personal and anonymous calls. Within the established network there is close cooperation with various public institutions and organizations. If citizens often have similar questions, the "Zeebra" team forms special explanatory materials on its pages. Between the topics with which citizens address, the most popular whether certain information is true, what is misinformation. At the same time people often do not share different problems - hoaxes, fakes, propaganda, so the outlined network offers a broad analysis of these phenomena, helping the population to understand the manipulative mechanisms.

Factchecking organizations are also being created at universities. In particular, in 2012, at the initiative of Czech students at T. G. Masaryk University, a project called "Demagog.cz" appeared, the purpose of which is to check factual statements and determine their credibility.

The process of manipulating public opinion is especially active during elections (Shafi & Vultee, 2018). However, the electoral legislation of Ukraine, unfortunately, does not regulate the

rules of election campaigning on the Internet and social networks, which is used by influential politicians. In 2016, on the eve of the presidential election, the University of Wisconsin-Madison created “The Fact Checks”, the content of which consists of students and professors checking local politicians. Students from the University of Cologne founded the “Faktenzoom Project”, which aims to analyze statements made by politicians on the eve of an election. At the same time, some leading European states prohibit paid campaigning on certain Internet resources and television. We are talking about such states as France, Denmark, Belgium, Britain, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, etc. This is due to make the electoral process as transparent and fair as possible. Such a ban was caused by considerations about the violation of the principle of equality of candidates: the rich have much more opportunities and resources to distribute advertising, and the election campaign is transformed into a “confrontation of financial weapons”. In addition, in most European states, television channels must serve an equal amount of free airtime to each candidate. At the same time, in France, 6 months before the election, any paid advertising in any type of media is banned (Hirst, 2018). For this reason, to counteract manipulation, public policy must first rely on journalism and media literacy, where the former acts as an activity to gather and release information in such a way as to organize the news chain.

### Conclusions

Therefore, Internet journalists have opportunities to manipulate public consciousness, but also to resist such influences. An important means of resisting manipulative influence is to resort to internal critical thinking and to acquire media literacy and media competence skills. This will allow us to analyze information, find contradictions in it, and interpret it. An important internal way to fight against manipulation is a balanced emotional state because articles on the Internet and comments on them can irritate, sow discouragement and neglect, and perceiving materials rationally and impartially will help to combat the distortion of information.

Modern mechanisms for countering manipulation in journalism also include fact-checking, which describes not only individual users, but also special groups of persons who leave themselves for the purpose of countering manipulation in the information space. Separate mechanisms of resistance to manipulations in the Internet media are verification of photo and video

content, as shown in the study, it can be carried out on many free online resources. Note the prospects of a legal response to manipulative actions, which, however, require further consideration through the discussions of scientists regarding deliberate manipulation and freedom of speech.

The experience of European countries in creating fact-checking organizations is important for Ukraine: they are created not only at the level of public media structures, but also on the basis of universities, involving active young people in this activity.

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