

Ukrainian Wartime Posters as a Tool of Participatory Propaganda During the Russian Invasion of Ukraine

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ABSTRACT

Drawing inspiration from the Ukrainian poster boom during the Russian invasion of Ukraine, this article explores the role of war-related posters in today's world, where printed media is no longer dominant, and images can travel across different media platforms. The example of wartime Ukraine shows that the poster remains an essential tool of wartime propaganda, promoting patriotic and proactive attitudes and encouraging action to support the war effort, while experiencing substantial changes in its form and means of dissemination. Analyzing various types of grassroots and institutional initiatives related to creating and disseminating war-related posters in Ukrainian offline and online public spaces made it possible to focus on two issues: firstly, how online media facilitate the creation and distribution of posters in offline formats and allow them to transcend the traditional printed form; and secondly, how posters become a convenient tool of participatory propaganda, involving various state and non-state actors in their production and dissemination.

KEYWORDS

poster, participatory propaganda, wartime propaganda, Russian-Ukrainian war, Ukrainian poster, convergence culture

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INTRODUCTION

When on February 24, 2022, after eight years of hostile hybrid operations, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the public space of many cities and towns – not only in Ukraine but also in countries throughout Europe and the world – was filled with visual signals and symbols of support for the Ukrainian resistance. Blue and yellow flags adorned numerous locations, famous buildings were illuminated with these colors, and murals referring to Russian aggression, the refugee crisis, and the heroism of Ukrainians appeared on the streets. The war also sparked a genuine revival of poster art. Many war-related posters were prominently displayed on the streets of Ukrainian cities, at domestic and international exhibitions, and on banners during demonstrations worldwide to boost the fighting spirit, foster patriotism, and promote social unity.

Drawing inspiration from the Ukrainian poster boom, this article explores the role of war-related posters in today's world, where printed media is no longer dominant, and images can travel across different media platforms (JENKINS 2006; CF. FERENC – DYMARCZYK – CHOMCZYŃSKI 2014; JARECKA 2014). Using Ukrainian posters from the period of the Russian aggression as an example, I intend to show how posters continue to serve as a significant propaganda tool during times of war while experiencing substantial changes in their form and means of dissemination.

A poster typically depicts a single-sided, large-scale printed artwork combining textual and graphic components (BOICHUK 2013; KRASIŃSKA 2016). Being a form of graphic art designed for a mass audience, it combines a visual appeal capable of capturing the viewer's attention even from afar, with a straightforward simplicity of content. Traditionally, posters were designed to inform, educate, advertise, or convey ideas by displaying them in public places on a vertical surface, typically a wall (AULICH 2007). While the poster's origins as a means of communication may be traced back to the 17th century, it was not until the transition from the 19th to the 20th century that we witnessed a remarkable increase in the production of posters (FERENC – DYMARCZYK – CHOMCZYŃSKI 2011). During the early 20th century, when access to radio and television was primarily restricted to individuals of specific socioeconomic backgrounds, posters emerged as a popular form of mass communication between the government and society. This was

facilitated by advancements in color printing methods, which made poster production more efficient and cost-effective (PETRONE 2008; FOX 2009; SZURMIŃSKI ET AL. 2022; NGUYEN 2023).

Since World War I, inexpensive, colorful, and quickly mass-produced posters have also become indispensable for war propaganda (FERENC – DYMARCZYK – CHOMCZYŃSKI 2011). Numerous studies (E.G., AULICH 2007; GREEN 2014, 2015; RYAN 2012; TOON 2022) demonstrate that during the World Wars of the 20th century, posters became “real war ammunition,” informing, mobilizing, and legitimizing the armed conflict. Posters were utilized to encourage individuals to enlist in the army, contribute to the war effort, or work for the domestic arms industry. Visual means and short slogans also identified enemies and aroused strong negative emotions toward them. Wartime posters were a key “*morale builder*” (TOON 2022: 79), raising the fighting spirit among soldiers on the battlefield and civilians on the home front.

However, in the second half of the 20th century, the gradual spread of new media, led by cinema and television, strongly influenced the form and content of war propaganda (HOSKINS – O’LOUGHLIN 2015; JARECKA 2008). The emergence of new communication technologies associated with the advancement of Web 2.0 contributed to a further decline in the importance of print media as instruments for shaping public consciousness in times of war. According to scholars, today’s wars are accompanied by an explosion of information produced by state and non-state institutional actors, journalists, conflict participants, and witnesses (HOSKINS – O’LOUGHLIN 2015; PATRIKARAKOS 2017; MERRIN 2018; BOICHAK – HOSKINS 2022). Both state and non-state actors use digital technologies to inform, legitimize, and mobilize in war conditions, blurring the boundaries between military and civilian actors, and physical and virtual battlefronts (BOICHAK 2021).

In today’s world, which is predominantly influenced by digital media, the poster may appear to be an antiquated form of mass communication. Nevertheless, the cases of political protests in Russia, Syria, and Iran have demonstrated that posters continue to serve as a means of widely spreading information and rallying people during revolutions and conflicts (ASMOLOV 2012; HALL 2019; GORNY 2022; CF. FERENC – DYMARCZYK – CHOMCZYŃSKI 2014). Unfortunately, while researchers have carefully scrutinized the significance of memes in digitally driven “participatory propaganda” (ASMOLOV 2019; CF.

MUNK 2023; HORBYK – ORLOVA 2023), the utilization of posters in contemporary war is less recognized.

Despite the rich literature on the aesthetics, role, and purpose of wartime propaganda posters, the majority of these studies focus on the two major world wars (E.G., GREEN 2014, 2015; HARDIE AND SABIN 2016; RYAN 2012; TOON 2022) and hardly extend beyond this particular historical context (E.G., FERENC – DYMARCYK – CHOMCZYŃSKI 2014; YAOCHANG 2014; NGUYEN 2023; KALKINA 2020; SZURMIŃSKI ET AL. 2022). Furthermore, the dynamically developing studies on war propaganda and visual war imagery shared via social media (E.G., MAKHORTYKH – SYDOROVA 2017; KHATIB 2012; ASMOLOV 2019; SEO 2014) only consider the poster to a small extent as a vital and effective tool for influencing society during contemporary war. Therefore, in the first part of the article, I analyze the changing role of posters in contemporary, digitally mediated wars within the framework of participatory propaganda.

Subsequently, I focus on empirical material describing the poster boom in Ukraine that has been ongoing since the autumn of 2013 and which experienced a further resurgence following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Today's wartime Ukraine is an interesting case for expanding and reconceptualizing the relationship between posters and war propaganda. Current research on Ukrainian posters, however, primarily focuses on revolutionary and Soviet posters, looking for connections with national aesthetics and Ukrainian identity (DONETS 2012; VELICHENKO 2019; PRYSHCHENKO 2021; ZALEVSKAYA 2018; SOSNYTSKYI 2022). The surge in “patriotic posters,” which began after the Revolution of Dignity in 2013/2014 and the onset of the Russian aggression, has not yet been thoroughly analyzed (PORFIMOVYCH 2014).

Consequently, in the second part of the article, I examine the role of war-related posters in the Ukrainian public sphere, which encompasses their presence in both conventional print and digital formats. I demonstrate two main points by analyzing material from Ukrainian online media, on-line platforms, and social networking sites related to creating and disseminating posters, and obtained through field research conducted between 2017 and 2019. Firstly, I show how online media facilitate the creation and distribution of war-related posters in offline formats and allow them to transcend the traditional printed form. Secondly, I explore how different

actors involved in the Russian-Ukrainian war utilize posters. Hence, my analysis focuses on decentralized online and offline grassroots efforts instigated by artists and activists who employ posters for political objectives, alongside the competitions, exhibitions, and online platforms which are influenced by organizations and state institutions.

POSTERS AND WAR PROPAGANDA IN THE SOCIAL MEDIA ERA

In the 20th century – the century of mass and total war – propaganda also became massive, and was designed to reach as much of the population as possible and convince it to be utterly loyal to the state. During World War I posters widely distributed in public spaces, became the primary tool for influencing mass audiences (GREEN 2014; HARDIE – SABIN 2016; TOON 2022; JARECKA 2008: 75). As Tomasz Ferenc, Waldemar Dymarczyk, and Piotr Chomczyński (2011: 12) noted, in the 20th century, *“The poster became part of a directed relationship between the state and the citizen, instilling in the latter a specific vision of the world promoted by the state.”* The poster’s format, predominantly composed of visuals, facilitated the creation of a clear and direct message that could be decoded by virtually anyone, regardless of their level of education (AULICH 2007). The combination of simple graphics using commonly known cultural codes, vibrant colors, large fonts, and strong slogans made the poster a compelling visual medium capable of evoking viewers’ emotions and shaping their attitudes (NGUYEN 2023; AULICH – HEWITT 2007).

The poster’s egalitarianism, which allowed it to be received by a mass audience, was reinforced by its display and distribution methods. As Peter Kenez (1985: 112) noted in his work on Soviet forms of mass mobilization, posters were inexpensive to produce in many identical copies and could be conveniently transported and widely disseminated. *“Once the poster was affixed to a wall in a suitable location, it could be viewed by many people many times, reinforcing the message,”* Karen Fox (2009: 77) added. While posters could be displayed in galleries and museums, which also applied to propaganda posters created during times of war (E.G., TOON 2022; JARECKA 2008: 75), their primary purpose was to be placed in public spaces accessible to the general population, such as streets, shops, workplaces, and educational institutions. As a result, the individuals did not have to incur any expenses related to the consumption of the poster, such as the cost of purchasing a magazine or newspaper or an exhibition ticket (FERENC – DYMARCZYK – CHOMCZYŃSKI 2011: 12).

Furthermore, the influence of posters displayed in public spaces was frequently unintentional and involuntary, as the visual content can be apprehended even by individuals who quickly pass by without consciously interpreting it (FOX 2009: 77). Therefore, posters could be “*seen by everyone and understood by all. [...] They could be placed anywhere with ease, and their ubiquity offered huge potential for public consumption regardless of literacy*” (TOON 2022: 79).

In contrast to the wars of the 20th century, where “*governments and the military were able to control the flow of information around their operations,*” including the manipulation of propaganda, contemporary conflicts exhibit a more decentralized and participatory nature (BOICHAK – HOSKINS 2022: 1; CF. MERRIN 2018; HOSKINS – O’LOUGHLIN 2015). The actual game changer was the emergence of new information and communication technologies, including smartphones for the general public that allow anyone to view, communicate, and interpret the war in real time, and social networking sites, where there is a constant, decentralized, and chaotic flow of information, comments, images, sounds, and videos related to the war. This has resulted in the erosion of states’ information monopoly and their ability to control the dissemination of news (MERRIN 2018; BOICHAK – HOSKINS 2022).¹

At the same time, the wide range of actors that participate in the war is connected in a new, immediate way through online media (BOICHAK – HOSKINS 2022: 2; PÖTZSCH 2015; MERRIN 2018; PATRIKAROS 2017; ASMOLOV 2022). They produce posts reporting, commenting on, or interpreting war activities, create and share memes, graphics, photos, or videos, post data on special maps or platforms prepared by state and non-state institutions, and pay money to various causes through crowdfunding platforms. When observing recent activities around Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, it should be noted that the extraordinary number of types of these crowdfunding activities – from large campaigns, coordinated by the state and supported by public figures, to small actions among friends, from collecting money for ammunition, drones, or bulletproof vests to supporting wounded children, scholarships for artists and scientists, and even animals evacuated from a war zone – makes it possible for users to decide for themselves how their money will be spent. Although these actions do not require someone to leave their couch, they can have a tangible impact on the outcome of the war. Because of this, when describing the contemporary “radical war,”

Ford and Hoskins (2022) write about “intimate connections” between life at home and in places of violent conflict.

In this new reality, propaganda has also undergone a profound transformation, becoming participatory, decentralized, and deinstitutionalized. Developing the concept of “participatory propaganda,” Gregory Asmolov (2019) draws attention to a kind of intimacy in propaganda related to blurring the line between private and public when using online media. The researcher noted that *“propaganda infiltrates our most intimate spaces, where users interact with their laptops and mobile devices. The location of technological interaction is not simply the household, but the bed or sofa – spaces commonly associated with relaxation and entertainment. Propaganda moves from the living room to the bedroom, follows people as they travel to work on crowded public transport, and remains with them in office time. We can wake up and fall asleep with propaganda in our hands. It finds us at the university, in the bathroom, or on the beach”* (IBID.: 7).

In addition, the consumption of propaganda content is today closely connected with social interaction when we share a post, image, video, or meme found on the Internet with our friends. The participatory and socializing nature of propaganda is clearly expressed when *“ordinary people experience propaganda posts as something shared by their own trusted friends, perhaps with comments or angry reactions, shaping their own opinions and assumptions”* (HAIGH – KOZAK 2017: 2080). Therefore, *“in online environments, the consumption of propaganda is deeply embedded in the structure of social relations, which allows the propaganda to further infiltrate our everyday lives”* (ASMOLOV 2019: 8).

New communication and information technologies also enable the immediate spread of propaganda and encourage viewers to take actions directly proposed by the propaganda (IBID.). This may include public acts of support for a cause (for example, signing an open letter), donating money to a cause indicated by the creator of the propaganda message, or taking part in some indicated initiative. Furthermore, *“propaganda distribution, consumption, and participation often share the same platform and are mediated by the same digital devices (such as mobile phones or laptops)”* (IBID.). This means that by scrolling our Facebook wall, between watching an ad for new shoes and “liking” a photo of our friend’s child, we can click on the

link posted by our boss and support the purchase of a new ambulance for Ukrainian volunteers. We then become part of the “sofa troops,” to use a term coined by Alexander Shalotov ^(CITED IN ASMOLOV 2021), who take part in a conflict without leaving their own sofas.

As researchers note, a convenient tool for participatory online propaganda is a meme, which is both an element of digital participatory culture and a part of an organized activity aimed at controlling the narrative around warfare ^(CF. MUNK 2023; HORBYK – ORLOVA 2023; KREPS – LUSHENKO – CARTER 2023). A digitally generated poster, akin to a meme, could also function as a convenient tool for engaging in participatory propaganda, as I will show with the example of Ukrainian wartime posters.

Computer graphics, the primary method for producing posters in recent times, impacts the development of novel formal solutions, the evolving aesthetics of poster art, and the methods of distributing and utilizing posters ^(CF. JARECKA 2014; ZALEVSKAYA 2018). Due to new information and communication technologies, it is now possible to design and replicate a poster in an extremely short time and in unlimited copies. In addition, in contrast to earlier periods, the contemporary war-related poster is now visible not only in physical form, in which it is displayed on poles, walls, bus stops, and billboards, and carried as a banner during demonstrations and marches, but also in virtual spaces. Posters disseminated digitally via diverse online platforms and social networking sites have the potential to reach a wide audience irrespective of geographical location, and effectively raise social consciousness. Two smartphones with Internet access are enough to connect an artist creating content in a bombarded city with a viewer who can consume wartime art from their own safe sofa ^(CF. ASMOLOV 2021).

However, in contrast to the meme, the poster has continued to operate in its original physical form since its inception. In addition, within the context of convergence culture ^(JENKINS 2006), the same poster can circulate among different media platforms, sometimes experiencing modifications and remixes initiated by individual users ^(CF. FERENC 2014; KALKINA 2020). In contrast to the original, producing these remixes does not necessitate artistic ability. The online poster can be conveniently printed and exhibited at many locations as well as replicated in leaflets, stickers, banners and murals, or even printed on garments ^(CF. JARECKA 2014: 177). As I will show, online

media greatly enhances the distribution of posters in offline formats, including both traditional forms, such as large-format prints, and non-traditional and innovative forms. Consequently, the online poster, more so than its printed counterpart, becomes a component of both participatory culture (CF. KALKINA 2020) and participatory propaganda.

Furthermore, posters, being a form of popular art, continue to serve as a commodity purchased for decorative purposes. Thus, wartime posters, especially those created by renowned artists, can easily become a war crowdfunding tool facilitating the gathering funds for war purposes. This is achieved through special on-site exhibitions, during which everyone can buy a copy of the poster, thus supporting the war effort. Such exhibitions may be organized both in the country where hostilities are ongoing and abroad. In addition, online platforms greatly facilitate the sale of posters. Many of these platforms, as shown by the current situation in Ukraine, serve to present art, inform about war activities, and sell posters to collect money for the struggle. Purchasers can either be satisfied with their digital form or print the poster themselves and utilize it according to their preference.

These aims may pertain to interior decoration as well as the expression of political opinions in public spaces. It should be noted that online posters distributed through private channels on social networking sites and through personal interactions, are not subject to the control of state and military institutions, at least in countries lacking centralized Internet control (CF. HOSKINS – O'LOUGHLIN 2015). As a result, posters can now play a role not only in institutionalized political campaigns organized by government and military institutions, but also in the independent activities of various groups and people.

Recent observations in various global locations have revealed that online platforms not only facilitate the organization and mobilization of participants in political protests, but also play a role in the distribution of visual propaganda through both online and offline means (E.G., ASMOLOV 2012; KHATIB 2012; ONUCH 2015; GORNY 2022). Digital media, as noted by Olga Onuch (2015), have resulted in the emergence of a new type of protester who uses them to become organized faster and more effectively and expand the repertoire of collective action. One eagerly undertaken activity is the production and sharing of visual material to inform and mobilize the public. For example,

during the 2011–2012 election-related protests in Russia, specific internet platforms were established to simplify the production and dissemination of political posters and leaflets (ASMOLOV 2012). As a result, every participant in the protest could design and produce their own poster, which they could then carry to the demonstration.

Simultaneously, while states lack the ability to exert direct control over the distribution of content through social networking platforms, they actively seek to shape the public perception of war and rally societal support for military operations. As highlighted by Olga Boichak and Andrew Hoskins (2022: 1), the new information environment of war is “*difficult to control, but easy to weaponize*.” States, through their military and cultural institutions, can provide online platforms that enable the integration of various dispersed initiatives and guide users toward specific objectives (ASMOLOV 2022). This is also applicable to war art and propaganda, which loses its scattered nature due to its concentration on platforms and becomes “arrested” by state institutions (CF. HOSKINS – O’LOUGHLIN 2015).

WARTIME POSTERS IN UKRAINIAN PUBLIC SPACES

Revolution and War: the Birth of the Ukrainian Patriotic Poster

In the autumn of 2013, during the Revolution of Dignity, a surge in artistic expression led to a real poster boom (CF. PESENTI 2020). As a result of the involvement of artists associated with the Kyiv art gallery and club “*Mystets’kyi Barbakan*,” an art barricade was created in Kyiv’s Independence Square (MARAKYN 2015; SERHATSKOVA 2014). The works of renowned Ukrainian artists, such as Oleksa Mann, Andriy Yermolenko, and Ivan Semesiuk, including posters, were exhibited there. Posters were additionally used during protests, where they were replicated in several copies and carried by protesters in the form of banners or affixed to walls and poles.

The online media facilitated the widespread distribution of these posters, thus amplifying their influence. An important “Maidan” initiative was StrikePoster (*StraiĭkPoster*), an online group formed to create and share posters to be used during the protests. As one of the initiators of the initiative explained the significance of the poster in fostering protests and

mobilizing society: *“Today, in times of crisis, the poster has become an indispensable tool for many people to express their positions and views. Not everyone speaks from the stage, but everyone can bring a simple, concise poster that reflects emotions”* (DESIATERYK 2014). Strike Poster engaged both artists – in creating new works – and ordinary users – in modifying and using them. As the initiators wrote on the initiative’s Facebook page: *“We are convinced that the fate of the country is being decided today. We encourage all creative people to join the nationwide strike and make posters or any other materials. We have created a resource where artists, illustrators, and designers can post their works, and anyone can download them to print or put on their pages on social networks”* (UKRAÏNS’KA PRAVDA 2013). Moreover, protesters could download poster templates from the project’s website and customize the text so that it would reflect their thoughts and emotions.

Hence, the initiative allowed poster creators and their viewers to participate in the revolution by creating, sharing, and using posters in physical and virtual spaces. The most widely recognized poster produced by StrikePoster featured a yellow drop against a blue background accompanied by the slogan *“Ia kraplia v okeani”* (I am a drop in the ocean). This poster was frequently utilized during protests in many Ukrainian cities (Picture 1).

PICTURE 1: THE MOST FAMOUS POSTER OF THE STRIKEPOSTER INITIATIVE, “I AM A DROP IN THE OCEAN,” DURING THE EUROMAIDAN PROTESTS, FEBRUARY 2, 2014



Source: Strike Poster.

Another initiative facilitated on a grand scale by online media, was establishing a digital collection of amateur and professional posters regarding the Revolution of Dignity. This task was undertaken by the Poster Museum, founded in 2011 by Viktor Tryhub in the open space of the “Battle

of Kyiv 1943” museum, and initially focused on posters from the “totalitarian period” (Poster Museum n/a). In December 2013, the museum launched a Facebook page and began sharing patriotic posters online.² The extensive collection of posters was also utilized offline, not only in Ukraine but also during demonstrations organized by the Ukrainian diaspora in numerous global locations.

In March 2014, one of the initiators of StrikePoster predicted that as *“demand for the poster skyrocketed with the beginning of the revolution, it will fall just as sharply after the final victory”* (DESIATERYK 2014). However, despite this prediction, the significance of the posters continued during the onset of the war against Russia and the Russian-backed separatists in the eastern part of the country. Russia’s actions had a hybrid character, as the Russians skillfully used their cultural and media industries to conduct disinformation campaigns and shape local and international public opinion (KUZIO 2020). Thus, to successfully resist Russia’s hybrid attacks, the Ukrainians created a networked “information and cultural front,” in which art also played a significant part (PESENTI 2020; OLZACKA 2023). One of the most recognizable Ukrainian poster artists, Andriy Yermolenko, stated in 2015: *“There was practically no such Ukrainian content before. Nevertheless, in the last two years, the Internet has exploded with patriotic posters and symbols. We realized that we had lost and were losing the information war. And posters are weapons that help us fight”* (FIALKO 2015).

The StrikePoster initiative continued its online activities by displaying posters regarding military operations in Donbas, the annexation of Crimea, and the downing of the Malaysian Airlines aircraft MH17, which occurred in July 2014 and was caused by pro-Russian separatists. Also, the Poster Museum furthered its endeavors by establishing a website and progressively expanding its collection of posters. These posters increasingly came to be called “patriotic.” Their recurring topics revolved around the “anti-terrorist operation” against the pro-Russian separatists in Donbas, Russian aggression and the Russian occupation of Crimea. They also discussed the increasing national consciousness among Ukrainians, referencing the Ukrainian language and military customs, particularly those of the Cossacks. Additionally, they invoked significant figures from Ukrainian history and culture, including the 20th-century Ukrainian liberation movement.

Patriotic poster competitions and associated stationary exhibitions gained popularity in Ukraine after the Revolution of Dignity. In 2014, soon after the transfer of power in Ukraine, the M17 Contemporary Art Center, an independent, non-governmental cultural institution, organized the inaugural “International Competition of Ukrainian Patriotic Posters (Uncensored!)” – a first in the country’s history. The competition was co-organized by the informal grassroots art platform “Ukrainian Cultural Front” (*Ukraïns’kyi kul’turnyi front*), founded during the Euromaidan by the well-known Ukrainian artist and cultural animator Antin Mukharsky. The final exhibition of the competition featured one hundred winning posters created by sixteen authors. Notably, as a result of the limited availability and subpar quality of Ukrainian works, about half of the posters were created by the Russian artist Anton Myrzin, who used the pseudonym Paperdaemon to avoid potential repercussions from the Russian judiciary.³

The co-curator of the exhibition, Yelyzaveta Bielska, emphasized that *“in Soviet times, posters were a widespread thing. Now this art is fading away, although it is mass art that is available to everyone. It is important to revive the Ukrainian poster.”* The other curator, Antin Mukharsky, spoke in a similar tone: *“I used to serve in the Soviet army. In ‘Lenin’s’ rooms, there were always posters with portraits of strong warriors. We, weak soldiers, associated ourselves with them, increasing morale. So, the poster must encourage and serve as a decoration”* (PROKOPENKO 2014). Therefore, as announced by the event organizers, the winning posters, whose central motif was the Ukrainian warrior, were intended to be printed in many copies and sent to the front line so that they would reach *“every Ukrainian tank”* (IBID.).

The competition’s next edition, held in 2015, was much more diverse and attracted more artists interested in creating political posters, including well-known Ukrainian artists such as Andriy Yermolenko, Mykola Honcharov, Ivan Semesiuk, Sviatoslav Pashchuk, and Dmytro Kryshovs’kyi. According to Bielska, this fact demonstrated the resurgence of poster art in Ukraine (FIALKO 2015). In 2015, poster creators could choose from six topics: “Support for the Ukrainian Army,” “Freedom for political prisoners,” “One indivisible, independent Ukraine,” “New Ukrainian heroism,” “Our mother tongue,” and “Prayer for Ukraine.” According to the organizers, posters focusing on these subjects, particularly when exhibited where conflicts occur, can bolster the army’s morale and evoke patriotic sentiments

among the general public (IBID.). Furthermore, in both 2014 and 2015, the final exhibition was accompanied by a charity auction, with the proceeds from the poster sales being designated for the medical care of Ukrainian soldiers residing in the Main Military Clinical Hospital in Kyiv.

Furthermore, the newly established government promptly recognized the immense potential of the poster as a means to mobilize individuals for combat. In May 2015, the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine initiated the “Ukrainian Patriotic Poster 2015” competition, replicating the title and subject matter of the competition established in 2014 by independent activists. The competition, as stated in the regulation signed by Minister of Culture Vyacheslav Kyrylenko, was aimed to *“shape the national awareness of Ukrainians and an active patriotic society through visual art, drawing public attention to the history of Ukraine and the feat of the Ukrainian warrior-defender; raising the young generation in the steadfast spirit of freedom, honor, and dignity; supporting military personnel ensuring the protection and restoration of Ukraine’s territorial integrity; and supporting the voluntary movement.”*⁴ In contrast to the competition organized by the M17 Contemporary Art Center and the Ukrainian Cultural Front, the ministerial competition welcomed submissions from both professional artists and amateurs, including individuals who participated in military operations in Donbas and activists from territories where separatists established “independent” people’s republics.

The competition organizer underlined that the winning works would be utilized in printed format for educational institutions, state and public institutions, and military units. Additionally, they would be displayed as large-format advertisements, banners, and billboards in places of mass residence of citizens. In 2016, on Ukraine’s 25th anniversary of independence, the Ministry of Culture donated three thousand posters based on the winning works to the Donbas Reconstruction and Development Agency. These posters were intended to be distributed in the frontier territories

(URIADOVYÍ PORTAL 2016).

In subsequent years, state and military institutions also arranged amateur competitions for “patriotic posters,” which became a crucial component of society’s patriotic education, encompassing children and youth. The purpose of these competitions was to instill in the younger generation a strong sense of patriotism, loyalty, love for their country, concern for the

welfare of their nation, and willingness to fulfill their civic and constitutional obligation to safeguard Ukraine's national interests, integrity, and independence (LELYK 2017). For example, in March 2016, the Lviv Military Academy announced a patriotic poster competition titled "Our Destiny Is to Defend Ukraine!" The purpose of the competition was *"the patriotic education of cadets, gaining experience in using visual propaganda tools in working with personnel, improving skills and abilities to create propaganda tools, and finding non-traditional and creative forms of training military personnel."* Three poster themes were recommended: "Ukraine is our homeland," "Without faith, there is no victory," and "The Cossack spirit in all of us" (DAILYLVIV 2016). In turn, as part of the celebration of Constitution Day in 2019, the poster competition "I am Ukraine!" for children and youth was organized by the command of the Infantry Forces of the Armed Forces of Ukraine together with the volunteer movement "Batalion Sitka", with the support of the Ministry of Youth and Sports of Ukraine, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, and the State Youth Library of Ukraine (MINISTERSTVO MOLODI TA SPORT UKRAÏNY 2019).

Exhibitions of contemporary patriotic posters have also been organized since 2014 by the Poster Museum. Yuri Neroslik, the museum's artistic director and primary creator, volunteered for the Ukrainian Armed Forces at the onset of the conflict. Throughout his time at the front, he actively engaged in combat operations and orchestrated poster exhibits directly "on the front line." These unique exhibitions were arranged under rudimentary circumstances within combat units. They were also organized in local museums in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, with the assistance of the Department of Culture and Tourism of the Donetsk State Administration. The Poster Museum referred to itself as the "Wandering Front Poster Museum" (*Mandrivnyi frontovyi Muzei plakatu Ukraïny*) from 2014 to 2016 to highlight the nature of its activities.

Furthermore, alongside these extensive endeavors undertaken by non-governmental organizations and governmental institutions, posters were frequently employed in smaller-scale local campaigns. Following the Maidan revolution, many Ukrainian cities designated specific locations, adorned them with street plaques to honor "new heroes" and exhibited political posters and cartoons at these locations (Picture 2). These were local and grassroots initiatives, possible mainly due to the accessibility of

online media, which allows anybody to print a poster or graphic from the Internet using a personal printer and display it in the city's public spaces.

PICTURE 2: THE CENTER OF KHARKIV, WHERE THE "EVERYTHING FOR VICTORY" TENT HAS BEEN STANDING SINCE 2014 AND WHERE VARIOUS KINDS OF PATRIOTIC CONTENT ARE PRESENTED, MAY 2019. FROM FEBRUARY 2022, IT IS ALSO A PLACE WHERE WAR-RELATED POSTERS ARE EXHIBITED



Source: Author.

Online media also facilitated the use of the poster as a mass medium that would not let Ukrainian society forget that the country was still at war. Posters were an essential tool in online campaigns to support the starving political prisoner Oleh Sentsov (#SaveOlehSentsov) and other individuals imprisoned by the Kremlin (e.g., #LiberateCrimea). The posters were shared on the poster artists' social media profiles, accompanied by a relevant campaign hashtag, and disseminated digitally by organizations and individual users.⁵ Furthermore, they were also employed in printed format during public demonstrations (PAVLOVA – SHAKYROV – MAETNAIA 2018).

One of the most recognizable Ukrainian poster artists, Andriy Yermolenko, also initiated an individual action during the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia. Uncompromising posters depicting Russia as a violent and ruthless aggressor kicking a ball crafted from a human skull, highlighted the ethical dilemma of attending football matches hosted in the territory of the aggressor state. Initially shared on his Facebook profile,

the artist's posters were disseminated digitally by individual users. In addition, activists in Ukrainian cities printed and displayed them (Picture 3), while they were also utilized during demonstrations held in front of the Russian embassy in Kyiv (KYSELEVSKAIA 2018; VANNEK 2018).

PICTURE 3: ANTI-RUSSIAN POSTERS BY ANDRIY YERMOLENKO, KYIV'S INDEPENDENCE SQUARE, JUNE 2018



Source: Author.

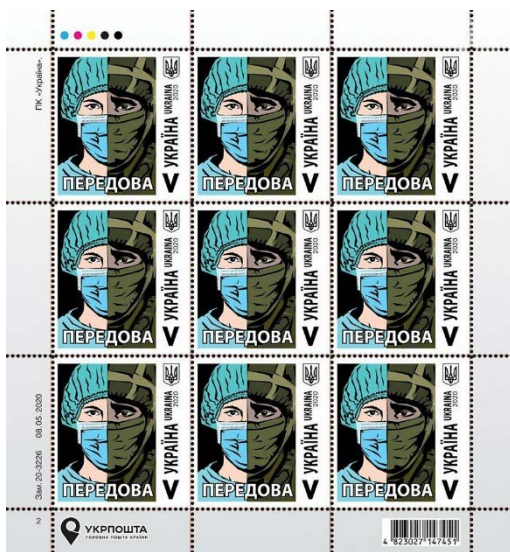
In addition, a digitally created poster is no longer limited to its printed version and can be displayed through other media. An interesting example of this phenomenon is Nikita Titov's poster "Frontline," which was made and shared on the artist's Facebook page on March 19, 2020, during the coronavirus pandemic (Picture 4). The poster, referring to the analogy between war and a pandemic, shows a face divided in half – one half is a soldier's face, and the other is a doctor's face. This work gained popularity and was shown in printed form at many individual and collective exhibitions. Furthermore, a commemorative coin based on this poster was coined by the Bank of Ukraine (Picture 6), and a stamp based on it was issued by the Ukrainian Post (Picture 5).

PICTURE 4: POSTER “FRONTLINE” BY NIKITA TITOV, POSTED ON HIS FACEBOOK PROFILE



Source: <<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=3031398500260617&set=pb.100001714917168.-220752000&type=3>>.

PICTURE 5: THE “FRONTLINE” POSTAGE STAMP INTRODUCED INTO CIRCULATION IN MAY 2020 BY THE NATIONAL POSTAL OPERATOR UKRPOSHTA



Source: <<https://www.057.ua/news/2907844/peredovaa-plakat-harkovskogo-hudoznika-titova-nacbank-otcekanil-na-pamatnoj-monete-foto>>.

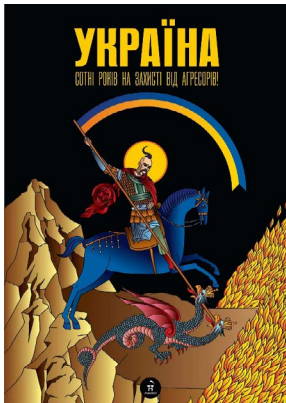
PICTURE 6: REVERSE OF THE “FRONTLINE” COIN RELEASED BY THE NATIONAL BANK OF UKRAINE IN OCTOBER 2020



Source: <<https://psm7.com/ru/money/zavershilsya-pervyj-etap-konkursa-na-luchshuyu-monetu-v-ukraine-kakie-monety-proxodyat-dalshe.html>>.

Another interesting example of the convergence of online and of-fline media is Yermolenko’s poster “Hundreds of Years of Defense from Aggressors,” created on the occasion of Ukraine’s Independence Day and dedicated to the Security Service of Ukraine. The author initially shared the poster on his Facebook profile on August 24, 2018 (Picture 7). Subsequently, several Ukrainian cities in western Ukraine utilized this poster in the form of billboards and commercials for the Defender of Ukraine Day campaign (Picture 8) (BUKNEWS 2018). Furthermore, Andriy Garin was commissioned by the Security Service of Ukraine to transform the poster into a short animated video, which was shared on the institution’s social media platforms.⁶

PICTURE 7: THE POSTER “HUNDREDS OF YEARS OF DEFENSE FROM AGGRESSORS” BY ANDRIY YERMOLENKO, POSTED ON HIS FACEBOOK PROFILE



Source: <https://www.facebook.com/andrey.ermolenko/posts/2265081266838930?ref=embed_post>.

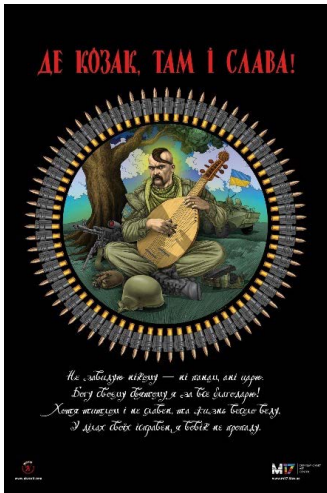
PICTURE 8: THE POSTER “HUNDREDS OF YEARS OF DEFENSE FROM AGGRESSORS” IN THE
FORM OF AN ADVERTISEMENT ON THE STREETS OF IVANO-FRANKIVSK, OCTOBER 2018



Source: Author.

Another Yermolenko poster titled “Wherever the Cossack Stands, There Is Glory!” (Picture 9), which won third prize in the patriotic poster competition organized by the M17 Contemporary Art Center, was reproduced by an anonymous author on a mural in the center of Lviv next to a quote from a poem by the Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko (Picture 10).

PICTURE 9: THE POSTER “WHEREVER THE COSSACK STANDS,
THERE IS GLORY!” BY ANDRIY YERMOLENKO



Source: <<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=992989854091944&set=pcb.992990227425240>>.

PICTURE 10: THE IMAGE OF THE COSSACK MAMAI FROM YERMOLENKO'S POSTER ON THE LVIV MURAL, OCTOBER 2018



Source: Author.

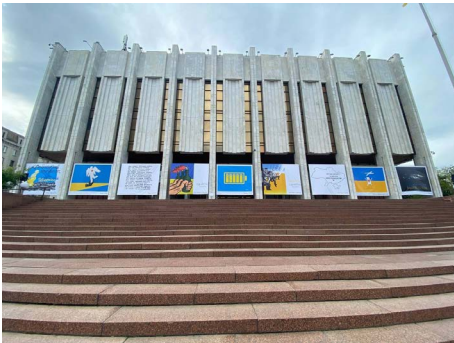
Russian Aggression Against Ukraine: Posters at War

The February 2022 full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine catalyzed the intensification of Ukrainian war-related art. Since the onset of the invasion, the artists promptly responded by producing posters, graphics, pictures, and paintings that reflected their sense of threat, anger, despair, and hope. The Russian aggression has mobilized Ukrainian artists to create art with a simple message and a clear goal: to oppose the Russian aggression and mobilize Ukrainians and the global community to resist and struggle against it. Consequently, the poster has emerged as a clear preference for numerous artists, including those who previously engaged in different art forms. Oleksii Sai, a conceptual artist and an author of multimedia projects who ultimately refocused on the war after February 24, expressed this spirit: *“Now I do something akin to propaganda: posters, banners, and such. I try to work as much as I can to be helpful to everyone here and now and donate many of my works to various auctions to support Ukraine”* (CHERNYCHKO 2022).

The public can see the war-related artworks of Ukrainian artists in the public spaces of many Ukrainian cities. They are showcased on billboards, in street advertising displays, and in the windows of residences, stores, or institutions (ROCHOWICZ 2022). Furthermore, alongside these dispersed and independent efforts, special exhibitions of war posters are organized. In May 2022, in “semi-empty” Kyiv, employees of the Ukrainian House hung nine large-format war-related posters on the facade of the building (Picture 11). These works, often shocking in their expressiveness and content, were exhibited to *“inspire and support Kyivans who are still in the capital or have just returned home”* (KATAIEVA 2022). In July, this exhibition,

supplemented with further works, moved to the interior of the Ukrainian House, presenting more than a hundred posters by 38 artists. As the exhibition organizers emphasized, posters “became the voices of resistance” and “one of the forms of dialogue within Ukrainian society” (DEN’ 2022). “Through the poster, the artists managed to express the complex range of emotions and the horror of the events that all Ukrainians are experiencing and going through today,” explained the project curator, Alisa Hryshanova, at the opening of the exhibition (IBID.).

PICTURE 11: THE EXHIBITION OF WAR POSTERS ON THE FACADE
OF THE UKRAINIAN HOUSE IN THE CENTER OF KYIV



Source: <<https://uadim.in.ua/magazine/tpost/a7k8b0g921-ukranskii-dm-vihodit-u-publchnii-prostr>>.

Zaporizhzhia became the second center of the Ukrainian wartime poster. In the framework of a joint project of the Department of Culture and Tourism of the City Council and the BIRUCHIY contemporary art project, since June 2022, many well-known Ukrainian artists, such as Andiy Yermolenko, Oleskii Sai, Mykola Honharov, and Nikita Titov, presented their works in special exhibitions in the city center.⁷ Exhibitions of wartime posters are also held in other Ukrainian cities. For example, in the project “Ukraine above All!,” posters by Ukrainian artists were presented not only in Kyiv, but also in Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk, and Khmelnytskyi. Many of these exhibitions are accompanied by meetings with artists, which often have a mobilizing dimension, as well as poster auctions and fundraisers organized to help war-related causes or artists facing challenging conditions during the conflict.

Posters have also become a form of international communication and mobilization of the global community. Ukrainian embassies, consulates, municipal halls, and educational institutions (E.G., UNIWERSYTET WROCLAWSKI 2023; UKRINFORM 2023) support the organization of Ukrainian wartime poster

exhibitions in various places worldwide. The “BIRUCHIY Contemporary Art Project” contributed to this vibrant and extensive activity. In 2022, in collaboration with the NGO “Contemporary Art Researchers Union,” they organized a series of exhibitions titled “Ukrainian Wartime Posters” in various European cities, including Oxford, Oberhausen, and Paris.⁸ In addition, they arranged similar exhibitions in the United States, receiving assistance from the Consulate General of Ukraine in New York, the National Center “Ukrainian House,” and sponsors. As was highlighted in the exhibition’s description, which was crafted by the organizers: *“Meet key Ukrainian contemporary artists and graphic designers who were forced to leave their homes due to military aggression and became temporarily displaced within the country. Most of them still continue to work in Ukraine creating wartime posters in order to fight the propaganda of the aggressor”* (UKRAINIAN WARTIME POSTERS 2022).

Foreign exhibitions have the dual objective of presenting Ukrainian art and artists, and raising awareness about the current brutal war in the country and its repercussions. As Olena Speranska, an exhibition curator, emphasized: *“Our goal is to show the world Ukrainian contemporary art that reflects the brutal events of today: bloody murders, torture, abuse of women, children, and prisoners of war, destruction of Ukrainian cities and genocide of the Ukrainian people”* (IBID.). Exhibition visitors are also encouraged to donate funds to support Ukrainian artists *“who continue to work under attacks against Russian propaganda”* and support destroyed hospitals destroyed by the Russians. Additionally, some of the exhibitions were co-organized by activists of Ukrainian descent, thus becoming a tool for integrating the Ukrainian diaspora and mobilizing the entire local community to support Ukraine’s resistance against Russia.

Aside from on-site exhibitions, posters distributed via internet platforms and social networking sites can reach a larger audience and impact social consciousness. Profiles of poster artists on social media can serve as a means of wartime mobilization, enabling them to present their artwork, engage with their audience, express gratitude towards the military, authorities, and specific individuals, and seek financial support. Online viewers emotionally stimulated by the poster can get involved in activities supporting the war effort by donating money to fundraisers proposed by the artist or engaging in volunteer work. Social networking sites also

allow the public to express their reactions to the posters. These reactions can be a comment under the post, “liking,” or sharing a poster on someone’s profile. By engaging in these online content-related activities, both the creator and the viewers contribute to spreading propaganda without leaving the metaphorical sofa, which represents a secure and private environment (CF. ASMOLOV 2019, 2021; FORD – HOSKINS 2022).

In addition, special Internet platforms provide the widespread distribution of propaganda online, allowing a larger audience to be exposed to the wartime art than in the case of a traditional stationary exhibition. Furthermore, physical constraints are irrelevant in this context. For example, the Poster Museum initiative continues its online activities, collecting and displaying posters via its website and Facebook page. A virtual collection of posters about the Russian aggression against Ukraine is also collected on the online open platform “Creatives for Ukraine,” created by Lithuanian creative sector representatives.

The creators of the platform believe that *“creativity is a significant weapon in showing what is happening in the eastern European country”* (CREATIVES FOR UKRAINE 2022). Therefore, they encourage *“the global creative community to share photographs, images, illustrations, and art to give a face to the War in Ukraine.”* The portal aims to provide free access to selected graphics depicting the war in Ukraine to media, non-profit organizations, and other foundations, enabling them to showcase these visuals to a broader audience. Through the platform, it is possible, among other things, to download war posters at a higher resolution and *“spread them as widely as possible”* to *“help fight the information war in a practical way”* (COWAN 2022).

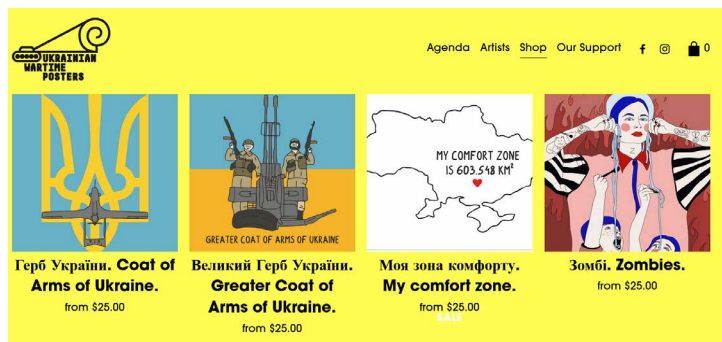
Simultaneously, as Hoskins and O’Loughlin (2015: 1320) note, state and military institutions try to gain control over the chaotic social media dynamics and use them for their own purposes in the era of “arrested war.” One of the strategies the state uses is establishing online platforms, gathering the works of various artists, and disseminating information about various initiatives conducted as part of a decentralized, digitally driven “cultural front” (OLZACKA 2023). Just one day after the Russian invasion, on February 25, 2022, the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy launched the bilingual website “Ukraine War Art Collection.”⁹ At the end of March 2023, the collection included 352 projects of Ukrainian war art, including

artworks by renowned Ukrainian poster artists such as Yerlomenko, Titov, and Honcharov. These posters are organized in chronological order on the respective subpages. In addition, the Ukrainian Cultural Foundation, a state-owned institution established in 2017, initiated the “Art of Victory” portal during the initial stages of the invasion. This platform showcases a collection of wartime murals, posters, illustrations, caricatures, and memes.¹⁰

Both sites actively encourage artists to share their work. On the portal “Art of Victory,” “anyone can share their art/graphic work in support of the invincible spirit of Ukrainians in the face of russian aggression” (UCF 2022). For both initiatives, special forms are used to upload a file to the server. The viewers are also encouraged to disseminate the posters as widely as possible in the virtual space. According to the appeal drafted by Vladyslav Berkovski, the head of the Ukrainian Cultural Foundation, *“You may share already published artworks with friends in Ukraine and around the world; use them as images in your posts on social networks, but make sure to mention the authors. Everyone should know and remember the russian invasion of Ukraine, the struggle of Ukrainians against the russian army! And art will help!”* (IBID.). Therefore, the dissemination of wartime art is recognized as helping to fight the information war, and the state, utilizing online platforms monitored by its institutions, seeks to maintain control over this process.

Online platforms can also facilitate war-related fundraising activities (CF. BOICHAK – ASMOLOV 2021). For instance, a dedicated online platform has strengthened the impact of the aforementioned “Ukrainian Wartime Posters” in-site exhibition initiative. This platform enables viewers to both explore the works of Ukrainian poster artists who address the issue of the Russian aggression and purchase a poster to support Ukraine’s fight (Picture 12). The purchaser can conveniently select the poster they desire and also select the preferred size for printing and delivery.

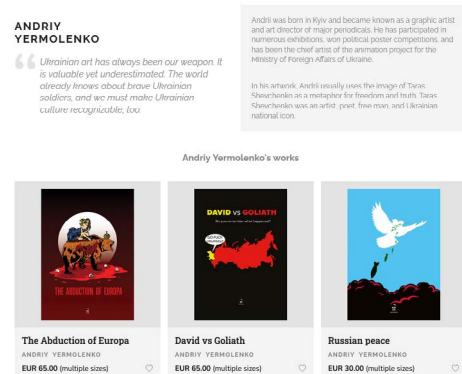
PICTURE 12: THE ONLINE PLATFORM “UKRAINIAN WARTIME POSTERS”



Source: <<https://www.ukrainianposter.com/shop>>.

Another online platform for the dissemination and sale of Ukrainian wartime posters that was established in response to the Russian invasion is “Sunseed ART.” This platform was founded by the Ukrainian artists and cultural activists Olesya Drashkaba and Natalia Popovych. As declared, they are dedicated to supporting *“forging rage into art”* and utilizing this war art to achieve victory: *“Every poster is a reminder that in Ukraine people die for precious values, but art makes them immortal and contributes to the emergence of new, even more resilient generations of people of free will”* (SUNSEED ART 2022A). Currently, the platform contains the works of nineteen Ukrainian artists who stayed in Ukraine during wartime. Each has a subpage containing not only the posters by them available for purchase but also a personal profile and a significant quote from them about the present circumstances. For instance, Andriy Yermolenko articulates his viewpoint by stating, *“Ukrainian art has always been our weapon. It is valuable yet underestimated. The world already knows about brave Ukrainian soldiers, and we must make Ukrainian culture recognizable, too”* (SUNSEED ART 2022B), (Picture 13).

PICTURE 13: THE ONLINE PLATFORM “SUNSEED ART”



Source: <<http://sunseed-art.com/en/artist/6295c63172ced7045c5ac6d5/andriy-yermolenko>>.

The bilingual Sunseed ART platform combines the goals of promoting and supporting Ukrainian art and artists and generating profits. However, as a “socially responsible business,” the platform has pledged to contribute 10% of its income to the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the “Come Back Alive” fund, or the Charitable Foundation “Voices of Children” until victory day. Furthermore, the platform aims to foster patriotic and anti-colonial sentiments related to the Russian aggression. The platform’s developers’ words, which are quoted on the website, highlight this ideological agenda. For instance, Kateryna Melnyk, the director and project manager, notes that *“the full-scale invasion started in 2022, but in reality, this war has been going on for centuries, and this fight is above all for Ukrainian culture and identity. It is impossible to overestimate the capacity of Ukrainian artists to resist, both in the past and the present. In spite of what life has delivered to them, they continue to create incredibly valuable cultural output. I am very happy to be a part of a project that will inspire the whole world in a struggle for goodness and which will represent the strength and beauty of Ukrainian art”* (SUNSEED ART 2022C).

Some other examples of hybrid initiatives that merge the commercial sale of posters with the goal of mobilizing buyers to support Ukraine are “ArtDopomoga,”¹¹ co-organized by the International Book Arsenal Festival (Kyiv) and promoted by the American band Gogol Bordello, and “Artists Against War,”¹² an online store with artworks created by artists from all over the world as a response to the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war. According to the creators of these platforms, when you buy war-related posters, you not only provide financial assistance to the defenders, but also can participate in disseminating information about the war and expressing solidarity with the fighting country. *“You can use printed posters to show your support by placing them in public spaces,”* as the “Artists Against War” website emphasizes. Thus, the trade in posters transcends consumerism and transforms into a mode of struggle and resistance. Not only the act of creating, but also the selling and purchasing of posters are depicted as a means of combating the aggressor and demonstrating solidarity with the Ukrainian resistance.

Undoubtedly, the digital format of the poster simplifies this process by enabling the sale of the “original layout” itself, rather than solely the physical product that necessitates manufacturing and transportation. The platforms mentioned above provide digital posters for sale, which may be

downloaded and printed by the buyer. The creators of the Sunseed ART platform underline that *“this way the processes will be optimized, and our product will be the most optimal to your needs. You won’t have to wait for the delivery and pay an additional fee”* (SUNSEED ART 2022A). Moreover, this method is advantageous for sellers who are now residing in Ukraine and may encounter temporary difficulties in both producing physical copies and delivering them domestically and internationally.

The digital format also facilitates the reproduction of the poster in non-traditional, non-paper forms. For example, Yermolenko and Titov, through their social media profiles, offer for sale clothes decorated with their wartime posters. The profits are to be allocated to war-related charities. Thus, by choosing to buy and wear such clothes, individuals can openly express their ideas through posters on T-shirts, sweatshirts, caps, or bags, while supporting the war effort.

PICTURE 14: A T-SHIRT WITH THE POSTER “I BELIEVE IN THE UKRAINIAN ARMED FORCES” BY YERMOLENKO. HALF OF THE PROFITS FROM THE SALE WILL BE ALLOCATED TO PAYING FOR THE NEEDS OF THE UKRAINIAN ARMED FORCES



Source: <<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=5926887673991586&set=pb.100000112372547.-2207520000.&type=3>>.

PICTURE 15: A T-SHIRT WITH A POSTER BY TITOV, PRODUCED BY BARMASH STUDIO. ALL PROFITS FROM THE SALE WILL BE ALLOCATED TO PAYING FOR THE NEEDS OF THE UKRAINIAN ARMED FORCES



Source: <<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=4841934745873641&set=pb.100001714917168.-2207520000&type=3>>.

CONCLUSION

In the reality of participatory warfare and culture, where visibility and the fast communication of an emotional message are so important, the poster gains a new life and an even greater ability to influence. The advent of online media did not diminish the significance of posters as a printed medium. Instead, it enhanced the process of creating and distributing posters both through digital channels and in the physical world. As part of a convergence culture in which old and new media collide (JENKINS 2006), the poster can take on new forms, embracing both offline and online public spaces. This article draws attention to how online media facilitate the creation and dissemination of posters in offline forms while enabling them to go beyond the traditional paper form. War-related posters can be reproduced in other media, such as stamps or clothing, which increases their power and range of influence in various private and public contexts. The interpenetration of various forms and content is also visible on the Internet, where posters become a part of the digital participative culture (JENKINS 2006; KALKINA 2020). Online media, for example, facilitates the creation of personalized versions of political posters by enriching the template with someone's own slogan.

Furthermore, thanks to online media, posters can be an element of institutionalized campaigns conducted by state and military institutions, but also a part of the decentralized activities of groups and individuals. This deinstitutionalization of propaganda is visible in the example of Ukraine, where the contemporary political poster was born in social and grassroots revolutionary conditions. With the help of social networking sites and initiatives such as Strike Poster, artists could spread their art and influence events. Also, the viewers were not compelled to remain passive recipients of the poster art but could become active participants by downloading and printing posters, and using them in public spaces. Also, in the conditions of the full-scale Russian invasion, the creation and dissemination of posters in Ukraine have not been subject to state control and censorship, even if state institutions try to create online platforms collecting various scattered initiatives and use them for their own purposes.

The case of wartime Ukraine was also useful for exploring how contemporary war-related posters broaden and alter the boundaries between

online and offline forms of participatory propaganda. In the reality of Web 2.0, anyone can be a “sofa warrior,” and disseminating wartime propaganda in the form of a poster becomes a convenient and attractive way of fighting. However, unlike a meme, which functions primarily in the online environment, a poster, even if created online and distributed primarily on the Internet, still retains its potential to perform in physical public spaces.

Wartime posters, especially those created by well-known artists, often evoke aesthetic pleasure in viewers. As a type of mass art, the war poster becomes a commodity, and its sale is often associated with raising funds for war purposes. Thus, looking at them and posting them on social media profiles, or printing them and hanging them in home spaces, can be simultaneously related to entertainment, the need to consume “fashionable” content, and military combat (CF. JARECKA 2014). Additionally, posters that have been replicated on clothes and accessories serve as a tool for the expression of one’s political views in public spaces in addition to being a stylish accessory. In this way, the boundary between the public and intimate dimensions of propaganda is blurred, not only in the virtual world (ASMOLOV 2019) but also in the physical world.

Without doubt, it is crucial to acknowledge that this study on the changing role of posters in contemporary, digitally mediated war is preliminary and requires additional investigation in future research. One area that has yet to be considered is the role of wartime posters in diaspora mobilization, which seems to be a promising direction for future studies (CF. CHERNOBROV 2020). Also, the significance of the art industry and artists in fostering participatory propaganda deserves further investigation, as do the connections between posters, memes, internet graphics, and street art in terms of their purpose, form, and content. Finally, expanding the examination of posters as a means of participatory propaganda to different cultural and political contexts is necessary for enhancing our comprehension of contemporary conflicts.

ENDNOTES

- 1 The article does not refer to the significant changes in war propaganda related to the emergence of radio, cinema, and television. There is an extensive literature on this topic, for example, Short 1983; Robinson 2003; Kellner 2004; and Jarecka 2006.
- 2 Official "Poster Museum" Facebook profile: <<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100081286584781>>.
- 3 Indeed, the Russian FSB brought two criminal proceedings against Anton Myrzin (Paperdaemon) for his participation in the exhibition and open support for the new Ukrainian government. As a result, in 2015, the artist left for Ukraine. The Russian media also spoke very negatively about the exhibition, which is why, in 2015, the organizers decided not to invite their representatives to the final exhibition (Fialko 2015).
- 4 Full text available at: <<https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/z0562-15#Text>>.
- 5 For example, posters from the #LiberateCrimea series created by Andriy Yermolenko and posted on his Facebook profile: <https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid02zn3zYZKSTupu3tAvKeVsGBwyDGjDRN3iq4xmQrjmr2RHji-WHUGPbVbLivqs77Xdel&id=100024825341857>.
- 6 Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KUJXKfBwFu4>>.
- 7 The full list of exhibitions: <<https://www.biruchiyart.com.ua/news.html>>.
- 8 The full list of exhibitions: <<https://www.biruchiyart.com.ua/news.html>>.
- 9 Official project website: <<https://war-art.mkip.gov.ua/>>.
- 10 Official project website: <<https://milart.ucf.in.ua/>>.
- 11 Official project website: <<https://artdopomoga.com/>>.
- 12 Official project website: <<https://againstar.gallery>>.

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