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DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN POLISH MEDIA: A LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF NEWSROOM DECISIONS BEFORE AND DURING THE WAR IN UKRAINE

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Abstract

This paper examines how Polish media managers have navigated issues related to Ukraine and Poland's Ukrainian community during both pre-war and wartime periods. The study aims to uncover the specific practices of diversity management employed during this time by analysing actual media strategies in use. It is based on a thematic analysis of 16 in-depth interviews with media managers, conducted at three critical points: one month before the war (five interviews), immediately after its onset (eight interviews), and approximately one year later (three interviews). This methodology captures the shifting perspectives of editors as the war progressed. The analysis identified key thematic categories, framed through the lens of diversity management in the media. These categories include (1) selection of (co)workers, (2) editorial management (planning, topic selection, and omission; news acquisition and verification; psychological support and language), (3) media managers' perceptions of Poles' attitudes toward Russians, Belarusians, and non-Ukrainian residents, (4) audiences, and (5) corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives of media companies.

Keywords

media, editorial practices, diversity management (DM), war in Ukraine, migrants, refugees

Introduction

In the initial months after the Russian invasion, millions of Ukrainians fled to Poland. The Border Guard reported nearly seven million arrivals between February and September 2022, while UNHCR noted around 15 million border crossings during that period (Kostrzyński 2022). Most were women, children, and older people (Bojarczuk 2022). In 2024, approximately two million Ukrainians remained in Poland (Onet.pl 2024). Experts suggest that Poland is shifting from a permanent destination to a transit country as pre-war migration levels return (eGospodarka.pl 2024). Even before 2022, significant numbers of Ukrainians, primarily young men proficient in Polish, were already living in Poland (Bojarczuk 2022; Selectivv.com 2024).

The situations of pre-war migrants and recent refugees differ significantly. Pre-war migrants, driven by economic needs, largely contributed to sectors such as services and construction (Bojarczuk 2022; Selectivv.com 2024). Kindler and Wójcikowska-Baniak (2018, 3) highlight that pre-war migrant networks were characterised by homogeneity in terms of nationality, regional origin, migration experiences, and socio-occupational status, shaped by both structural factors and personal preferences, which led many migrants to “stay among their own” (ibid., 37). The war has brought a new wave of Ukrainian refugees into Poland, seeking temporary safety, with many hoping to return home (NBP 2023). Unlike the pre-war economic migrants, the recent arrivals include individuals from wealthier and more educated backgrounds (Bojarczuk 2022).

The significant movement of people, combined with the war’s proximity, has triggered a substantial response from Polish society (Krakowska 2023; Kalinowska et al. 2022). This situation required formal solutions, leading to new regulations to address emerging challenges (the updated review on legal, multi-faceted support is available on the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration website; MSWiA 2024). However, the rapid changes and instability have drawn criticism. The government was accused of a slow response and lack of strategy, with much of the assistance burden falling on local authorities and volunteers (Amnesty International n.d.). Experts warn of potential crises, including inefficiencies in state sectors and growing fatigue among Poles as charitable activities decline and anti-Ukrainian propaganda intensifies (Jakubowski & Tatar 2023; Demagog & IMM 2023; Amnesty International 2024). In this context, the principles of inclusivity are essential to sustaining aid efforts and upholding values such as solidarity, tolerance, and acceptance.

The media play a pivotal role in the transition from pre-war to wartime. Their response, especially in conflict situations, is crucial. Klepka and Piekarz (2017, 93) state, “It might seem that the media merely document and relay information... In practice, their influence is broader, affecting decision-makers and the actions of parties involved in the conflict.” Media shape public opinion, attitudes, and behaviours, combat disinformation, and “build ideological hegemony” by representing the interests of states involved in the conflict. They also shape perceptions of key actors, including refugees (Wolska-Zogata 2012; Allan & Zelizer 2004; Klepka & Piekarz 2017; Baker & Gabrielatos 2008; Zawadzka-Paluckta 2022; Skibińska 2023).

Media narratives play a central role in shaping societal reactions (Gordon 2018). These narratives are formed through editorial decisions about which information is selected and how it is framed, based on criteria for newsworthiness (Galtung & Ruge 1965; Harcup & O’Neill 2001; Chyliński & Russ-Mohl 2007). Media companies establish and apply these

criteria, making them central to editorial policies. These policies often align with diversity management, which is argued to be a standard for ethical and responsible business practices, though it remains more of an aspiration in many contexts (Syed & Özbilgin 2009; Nkomo et al. 2015).

Brazzel (2023, 51) defines diversity management as the process of managing “organisational change and stability processes that... eliminate oppression based on race, gender, sexual orientation, and other human differences... to improve the health and effectiveness of organisations while affirming the values of respect for human differences, social justice, participation, community, authenticity, compassion, proaction and humility, effectiveness, and life-long learning.” According to Trittin and Schoeneborn (2017, 305), diversity management also involves an organisation’s ability to recognise, listen to, and respond to a “plurality of ‘voices,’” understood as the range of individual opinions and societal discourses expressed in organisational settings. Diversity management (DM) is thus a multifaceted concept influencing all aspects of a company’s operations, shaping its relationships and communication with the broader environment (Jönhill 2016; Brazzel 2023). Given their role, media companies’ decisions related to DM have a significant social impact, making the understanding of their specifics particularly crucial during times of war.

Our paper integrates these themes to analyse how Polish media managers have addressed issues concerning Ukraine and the Ukrainian community in Poland during both pre-war and wartime periods. We aim to identify and describe the specific diversity management (DM) practices employed by media during this time. The literature on media DM during the war in Ukraine remains limited, particularly in terms of decision-makers’ perspectives, which are needed to complement the existing focus on content diversity, especially in news. To fill this gap, we explore the following research questions:

- RQ1) How can DM practices related to Ukraine and Ukrainians before and during the war be systematised?
- RQ2) How did the war influence media managers’ decisions regarding DM?

The text is structured as follows: a theoretical section that explores diversity management (DM) within the media, a methodological section detailing the use of individual in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, and an empirical section that presents the findings. The paper concludes with a discussion, offering potential directions for future research. It is important to note that no hypotheses are presented, given the exploratory nature of this study.

Literature Review

Diversity Management and the Media: General Context

Diversity management (DM) in the media industry can be approached from multiple perspectives. Hendrickx et al. (2022) propose a typology of media diversity categories, including ownership, brand, production, content, and consumption, which they classify across three levels: macro (media market), meso (media company), and micro (media brand). Similarly, Hipfl (2023, 6) identifies three key fields of DM: production (encompassing outlets, formats, ownership, and decision-making), representation (focusing on discourses of difference, portrayals of “normal” versus “different”, and re-established hierarchies and

inequalities), and media use (highlighting accessibility, societal participation, and addressing inequalities and discrimination). Thus, DM involves the management of media organisations and their content, including sources, circulation, and audience engagement (Ojebod 2009).

While much research focuses on the content aspect of diversity management (DM) (Graf & Jönhill 2011), the organisational dimension plays a significant role in shaping media company policies and practices. Kerrigan et al. (2023, 223) categorise these organisational aspects into four key areas: diversity standards; leadership objective setting and incentivisation; targeted talent development; and diversity monitoring. Other studies offer DM solutions but do not fully systematise them (Ojebode 2009; Hultén & Graf 2011; Jönhill 2016; Vandenberghe et al. 2015). Examples include codes of conduct, diversity strategies, and regulations with implementation reporting; recruitment targeting minorities; data collection on workplace diversity; mentoring and leadership training; employee workshops; integration programs for minority individuals; the creation of diversity-promoting departments and roles; technical support for diversity (e.g., real-time audio translation); expert databases based on minority representation; encouraging participation in diversity-focused journalist networks; and media products created by and for diverse audiences.

Given the variety of solutions available, it is evident that implementing diversity management (DM) requires significant time and effort. Lück et al. (2020, 20) note that this process occurs gradually. At the social system level, DM involves comparing the diversity of editorial staff with that of the industry and society to monitor management goals related to proportional representation and to identify inequalities. At the social and institutional level, it requires media companies to engage in self-awareness and critical reflection on their role and journalistic standards. The organisational level focuses on increasing employee diversity and cultivating a diversity-sensitive work environment. At the routine level, the aim is to enable editorial staff to contribute diverse perspectives without being confined to those perspectives, which requires continuous development of editorial culture. Finally, at the individual level, the focus is on leaders' commitment to long-term strategic management.

Additionally, Vandenberghe et al. (2015, 218) identify three types of media diversity policies: centralised and comprehensive; centralised with an emphasis on workplace diversity as a means to achieve content diversity and connect with audiences; and policies characterised by fragmented measures and objectives. While some media organisations still do not implement DM, they are becoming increasingly rare within the industry.

Diversity Management and the Media: Migrants, Refugees, and the War

Diversity management (DM) within organisations encompasses various areas, including gender, age, sexuality, religious and political beliefs, language, disabilities, and ethnicity, which also covers membership in migrant or refugee communities (Ojebode 2009; Hultén & Graf 2011; Graf 2011; Festing et al. 2014; Vandenberghe et al. 2015; Hipfl 2023). Research often emphasises migrant and refugee communities, particularly in light of the increasing global challenges of migration, and more recently, the war in Ukraine.

In this context, Horsto and Hultén (2011, 214) define DM as “the representation and participation of ethnic minorities to enhance diversity in media content and staffing.”

They describe it as involving “strategies to increase the recruitment of journalists with minority backgrounds into mainstream media” (ibid., 209). Hultén (2011, 103) notes that such backgrounds can contribute to journalists’ professional skills, enabling them to “think of angles other reporters don’t.” These backgrounds can also facilitate communication, as immigrants often prefer speaking to someone with similar experiences they can trust (Jönhill 2016). In this sense, descent becomes a competence, reflecting an “ability to communicate and perform in a given social and cultural context in a work organisation” (ibid., 9). This competence manifests in three aspects: perspectives (cultural-social heritage and insider knowledge about communities), networks (connections with minority groups), and languages (ability to communicate effectively with community members). Communication-centred DM has gained prominence in recent years, particularly as it emphasises the importance of diverse voices and perspectives in media. As Mathies (2023, 650, cited in Sjøvaag 2018), states, “The more variety of voices and sources represented on the media agenda, the more diversity.” This reflects the growing recognition that diverse representation is crucial for effective and inclusive media practices.

As previously discussed, DM is a complex process, with several critical issues particularly relevant to migrants. A significant concern is ensuring equal career opportunities and a supportive work environment. One issue is “ghettoisation,” where journalists from minority backgrounds are assigned only to cover topics related to their communities. Lück et al. (2020) refer to a similar phenomenon as “typecasting,” where assignments are based on journalists’ backgrounds rather than their skills. Additionally, membership in a minority group can sometimes become the primary criterion for hiring, overshadowing achievements and competencies (Hultén 2011). Graf (2011, 148) describes this as “tokenisation,” where a migrant background may be perceived as an advantage for securing a job, but it can imply a lack of corresponding competence.

Other obstacles to effective DM include job cuts, a shortage of journalism students from minority backgrounds, the time-intensive nature of the DM process, employee resistance to change, lack of awareness among key company figures, insufficient language skills among both immigrants and non-immigrants, superficial approaches to DM, and discrimination against ethnically diverse individuals (Camauër 2006; Horsto & Hultén 2011; Hultén & Graf 2011; Jönhill 2011; Jongill 2016; Gober & Jupowicz-Ginalska 2023a). Furthermore, hiring minorities does not necessarily improve news reporting or content diversity (Graf & Jönhill 2011). As Lück et al. (2020) note, increased staff diversity can sometimes lead to homogenisation at the content level, and greater content diversity does not automatically result in more diverse consumption (d’Haenens et al. 2018, 209). It is therefore unsurprising that Vandenberghe et al. (2015, 210) find ethnic diversity in the media is often stereotyped and “is not reflected in the news media, even though immigration has transformed European countries into multicultural and ethnically diverse societies.”

The ongoing war in Europe is likely to affect DM in the media, particularly in the areas highlighted by Hendrickx et al. (2022), Hipfl (2023), and Ojebode (2009). War, with its disruptive effects, significantly alters the media landscape. It shifts the focus of media content from comprehensive programming to individual news items, bringing war-related topics to the forefront while sidelining other issues. This shift impacts news diversity both in terms of content and in shaping audience attitudes, particularly towards war victims, including refugees.

The impact extends to management practices. While the “value of diversity in editorial practices... seen as a moral and ethical stance with human rights and dignity” remains unchanged (Gober & Jupowicz-Ginalska 2023b, 42), certain aspects are adjusted. These adjustments include changes in content (e.g., more live coverage and investigative journalism) and human resources (e.g., hiring additional war correspondents). There is also a tendency to “opt-out or delay publishing certain stories or mute certain audience voices” (ibid., 192) or changes in the selection of information sources are also notable (Ofori 2024).

Methodology

This paper is part of the “Diversity Management as Innovation in Journalism” project, which aims to identify innovative approaches to diversity management (DM) in selected news media organisations in Poland, Sweden, and the UK. Although the war was not initially part of the research focus, it was incorporated due to its profound impact on diversity-related issues.

Research Sample and Research Tool

The research sample was selected using the “windows studies” approach (Czarniawska 2014), based on the observation that “something interesting” in the area of DM was happening in the chosen newsrooms. This process involved desk research, reviewing industry reports, academic and popular publications, and analysing media websites. For example, some organisations had launched initiatives such as the BBC’s 50:50 Project, aimed at achieving gender balance in content, while others experienced challenges, such as a protest letter written by employees of Swedish Radio (SR) addressing racism and discrimination within the organisation. Invitations were then sent to media managers and journalists, asking them to participate in the study. These invitations sought information on recent or innovative DM initiatives, best practices, and training programs aimed at increasing diversity among both employees and content. Journalists were also asked to confirm and assess these developments.

In Sweden, we interviewed representatives from public-service broadcasters (SVT, SR), newspapers (“Dagens Nyheter” – broadsheet, and “Aftonbladet” – tabloid), and the digital minority news platform Feminist Perspective. In the UK, we spoke with public-service broadcasters (BBC, Channel 4), commercial television (ITV), and “The Guardian” (broadsheet). In Poland, we interviewed representatives from commercial radio (TOK FM), a digital newspaper (Gazeta.pl), web portals (Onet.pl, Noizz.pl), and the investigative journalism site OKO.Press.

Between January and November 2022, 61 interviews were conducted—20 in Sweden, 15 in the UK, and 26 in Poland. The sample consisted of 33 interviews with media managers and 28 with journalists. Each in-depth interview, guided by a semi-structured format, lasted between 60 and 120 minutes and was conducted by one or two researchers. All interviewees’ names were anonymised for privacy protection, following a pattern of assigning a nickname and job position.

A standardised interview guide was used, with questions divided into four main categories: 1) self-introduction (seniority, current position, place of work, and media profile), 2) understanding of diversity (personal definitions, the legitimacy and benefits of me-

dia diversity efforts, and diversity as a challenge), 3) organising and managing diversity (strategies, regulations, formal and informal practices, motivations for DM, obstacles, and outcomes of implementing DM in the media), and 4) individual work and personal experience (personal DM strategies, DM-based hiring and promotion, positive and negative personal experiences with DM, and media content related to DM).

When the war erupted, a fifth category was added to address how the war influenced DM practices. Given the exploratory nature of the research, open-ended questions were asked to allow interviewees to share their experiences freely.

Research Process

This paper draws on a unique dataset from the broader project, focusing specifically on 16 in-depth interviews (IDIs) conducted with eight Polish media managers representing five newsrooms. We conducted five interviews one month before the war, which were later followed up after the war began. In addition, three new interviews were conducted after the war started, with follow-ups approximately one year later. This approach created two cohorts: one group interviewed before the war and followed up afterward, and another group interviewed after the war began and followed up one year later. The interviewees, six women and two men, were drawn from the same outlets included in the broader project: commercial radio (TOK FM), a digital newspaper (Gazeta.pl), web portals (Onet.pl, Noizz.pl), and the investigative journalism site (OKO.Press).

This longitudinal approach allowed us to track how perspectives and practices evolved in response to the war. This subset of 16 interviews is part of the 26 interviews conducted in Poland, offering specific insights into how media managers' perspectives evolved in response to the crisis.

Both open and theory-driven coding were applied to analyse the verbatim transcripts, following the principles of thematic analysis (Flick, 2006; Naem et al. 2023). The theory-driven codes were initially based on diversity management (DM) typologies, as outlined in the literature review, and provided the main categories for coding: reasons for engaging in DM, primary methods of organising DM, internal (journalists') and external (audience) experiences related to DM, and other actors involved in the DM process.

During the open coding phase, we systematically reviewed the transcripts, identifying additional themes that emerged from the data. This allowed us to move beyond the initial theoretical categories and capture more specific insights. The final set of five thematic categories that form the foundation of our analysis includes: 1) selection of (co)workers; 2) editorial management (editorial planning–selection and omission of topics; news management–acquisition and verification of information sources; psychological support and language); 3) media managers' perceptions of Poles' attitudes toward Russians, Belarusians, and non-Ukrainian residents; 4) audiences; and 5) corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities of media companies.

This iterative process refined the initial framework, and NVivo software facilitated the organisation of themes.

It is also important to note that the interviews conducted before the war did not focus specifically on Ukraine, and thus, the appearance or absence of certain themes may be coincidental. However, the thematic analysis remains valuable for comparing how perspectives shifted across different periods.

Results

The results are structured around the five thematic categories identified during the analysis, each reflecting key aspects of DM practices in Polish media. These categories highlight the different operational and managerial DM practices, offering insights into how media managers navigated issues related to staffing, editorial decisions, audience engagement, and corporate responsibility. The findings will be presented in two main sections: Ukraine in the media before and during the war, allowing for a comparison of how media DM practices and strategies evolved in response to the crisis.

Ukraine and Diversity Management Before the War

Ukraine is a topic in all five interviews conducted before the war. It is discussed across three key categories: selection of (co-)workers, editorial management (particularly in editorial planning and language choice), and media managers' perceptions of Poles' attitudes toward Russians, Belarusians, and non-Ukrainian residents.

Selection of (Co-)Workers Before the War

The interviewees indicate that collaboration with Ukrainian journalists has been ongoing, emphasising commitment to equality within their newsrooms. For instance, Kacper, a head of information, remarked that Ukrainian journalists “create content, read their texts on air, and do what everyone else does.” A generally positive atmosphere prevailed across the interviews. However, Joanna, a deputy editor-in-chief, was more pragmatic, acknowledging the “crisis in Ukraine” and the need to deepen cooperation with Ukrainian correspondents. She preferred working with experts on the subject rather than journalists, indicating a strategic approach to preparing for potential developments.

Editorial Management Before the War

From the perspective of editorial planning, the growing sense of impending conflict influenced the selection of editorial topics. Interviewees mentioned including Ukrainian issues, particularly regarding Poland's readiness to receive refugees from Ukraine and the corresponding adjustments in editorial plans. As a result, other diversity topics, such as LGBT+ issues, were deprioritised. Joanna succinctly captured this shift, noting, “Everything is happening together now.”

Regarding language and editorial sensitivity, the looming spectre of war also began to shape the language used in media. Kacper described how a Ukrainian reporter was tasked with creating content in Ukrainian, ensuring that listeners “hear that their voice matters.” This period also marked a significant shift in Polish language usage. Iwona, an editor-in-chief, shared that her team was among the first to change how they referred to Ukraine in their reporting. Traditionally, the phrase “na Ukrainie” (“on Ukraine”) was used, but her team decided to switch to “w Ukrainie” (“in Ukraine”). The difference is more than just a grammatical nuance—it carries cultural and political significance. The change was a deliberate move to acknowledge Ukraine as a fully sovereign state and to distance the language from outdated, imperialistic connotations. However, this shift initially confused or upset some people, leading the editorial team to consult linguists to justify that the change was “not a crime against the Polish language” and was correct and meaningful.

The discussion also addresses the differing attitudes towards Russians and Ukrainians in Poland. Anna, an editor-in-chief, notes that Poles generally negatively perceive Russians due to historical conflicts. In contrast, Ukrainians are more accepted, as they have been living in Poland for a while, allowing time for mutual familiarity. Anna emphasised that this acceptance is rooted in shared experiences and cultural connections between Poles and Ukrainians, which have fostered a sense of commonality and coexistence.

Ukraine and Diversity Management During the War

In this section, we focus on the insights gained from interviews conducted during the war. Ukraine is a central topic in nine interviews, spanning five key categories: 1) selection of co-workers; 2) editorial management, which includes all four subcategories: editorial planning, news management, psychological support, and language; 3) media managers' perceptions of Poles' attitudes toward Russians, Belarusians, and non-Ukrainian residents; 4) audience engagement; and 5) corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities.

Selection of (Co-)Workers During the War

The war has intensified the need for closer collaboration with Ukrainian journalists and experts and highlighted language barriers and a lack of contacts in Ukraine, which complicate reporting on the conflict. New cooperation occurs at various levels (editorial–managerial, remote–on-site) and ranges from working on specific stories to forming long-term relationships with Ukrainian media outlets.

Joanna, the deputy editor-in-chief, highlights the importance of incorporating Ukrainian perspectives: “It’s about giving them a voice, not just writing from a Polish perspective, because after all, the war is happening there.” The need for Ukrainian voices has led to the expansion of their editorial teams. For instance, partnering with a journalist from Kherson has enhanced their ability to produce more detailed and accurate reports, reflecting a growing commitment to authentic and comprehensive coverage.

Editorial Management During the War

In the context of editorial planning, Ewelina (senior editor) states, “Finding a good story is the essence of journalism.” The research reveals several key points in this context. Media managers agree that the Russian invasion has significantly disrupted their operations. Iwona (editor-in-chief) said, “All topics, series, and marketing plans had to be put aside.” The challenges include operating around the clock, coping with shock, and adapting to the evolving situation (Iwona, editor-in-chief). Teams are grappling with “chaos and drama” (Justyna, senior editor), psychological strain, and intense pressure (Ewelina, senior editor) while also needing to introduce new formats.

These challenging conditions have led to staff shortages. With an overwhelming workload, teams struggle to cover other topics (Ewelina, senior editor), causing a reduction in staff (Iwona, editor-in-chief). To adapt, media outlets are reconfiguring their operations. They are moving from an initial focus on breaking news to in-depth content, implementing shift work and night duty, and developing new formats such as live broadcasts and reports. New segments offering advice and materials introducing Ukrainian culture are also emerging. Marta (program director) adapts pre-war decisions and releases a guide on mental health and how to talk to children about the war.

The content primarily focuses on Ukrainians. Editorial teams are centring their coverage on human stories to “consider the perspective of those affected by the issue” (Magdalena, senior editor), adopting an inclusive approach (Marta, program director), and “debunking fake news to ensure a realistic portrayal of the people who have arrived here” (Joanna, deputy editor-in-chief). This strategy helps outlets maintain coherence between their pre-war thematic focus on diversity and the need to address current events. For instance, a sports portal features the story of a Ukrainian boy training at a football academy in Warsaw (Patryk, program director). Another example is addressing the supposed reluctance of Ukrainian women to work in the service sector. Iwona (editor-in-chief) stresses the importance of reshaping the image of female refugees, highlighting that many new arrivals are educated and professionally accomplished women who are not seeking jobs below their qualifications.

Some media outlets adopt a broader approach, addressing ongoing developments and anticipating future challenges, such as the impact of hosting many refugees. Joanna (deputy editor-in-chief) oversees a department dedicated to solution journalism, which explores ways to “integrate Ukrainians with respect and dignity.” This includes topics like learning Polish, school education, social support systems, and employment for immigrants, including “non-Ukrainian refugees from Ukraine.” She adds, “The most interesting aspect from a journalistic perspective is what happens... when people start to feel fatigued.” However, interviewees also observe that, as the weeks go by, war coverage gradually fades (Kacper, head of news), and media outlets shift back to previously neglected topics due to “staff shortages” (Joanna, deputy editor-in-chief).

The interviews highlight a recurring theme of delaying or avoiding specific topics to manage sensitive issues. This approach emerged as initial enthusiasm for Ukrainians led to more critical opinions. The aim is to “mitigate hostility” and avoid inciting fear (Iwona, editor-in-chief). Media managers also face the challenge of addressing sensitive issues in a way that “prevents frustration among Ukrainians living here who want to live normally, but also among Poles” (Joanna, deputy editor-in-chief). Strategies include avoiding specific topics, delaying publication until facts are confirmed, and modifying content to maintain social sensitivity. For example, Ewelina (editor) mentions skipping a right-wing conference critical of refugees, while Iwona holds back a report on sexual assaults against female refugees until verified. Marta (program director) emphasises timing and social sensitivity over breaking news, saying, “We see it on the radar, but not now.” Iwona adds, “I’m not in favour of not showing it... but it needs to be done skilfully.” The focus remains on ethical reporting, with Kacper (head of news) noting that some topics are presented in a “soft, non-offensive” way to avoid causing harm.

Regarding news management, interviewees emphasise the importance of acquiring and verifying information sources during wartime. While Ewelina (editor) describes the topic discovery as a “professional secret,” others, like Joanna (deputy editor), openly share their methods, such as collaborating with university centres focused on migration and directly engaging with refugees. This human-centred approach results in on-the-ground reports from volunteer points and interviews with refugees. However, scoping social media for stories during the war presents challenges. Iwona (editor-in-chief) specifically mentions Instagram as a problematic source due to the uncertainty of its content. She recalls a “PR crisis” when an article based on an Instagram survey claimed that young Poles wouldn’t fight if war broke out, leading to significant backlash.

Verifying information is described as a difficult task. Internally, issues like time constraints and the fast-paced nature of editorial work complicate fact-checking. Magdalena (editor) suggests delegating topics to those who understand them can help improve accuracy. Externally, factors such as social media overactivity, deliberate disinformation, and societal misunderstandings add to the challenge. Marta (program director) notes that despite their efforts, the media often faces harsh criticism and feels under constant attack from trolls who undermine their work.

Psychological support addresses the challenging conditions and constant exposure to distressing content that take a toll on media professionals' mental health. Magdalena (editor) shares that a colleague has "lost a few kilos and can't read this stuff anymore," while Marta (program director) describes the pressure as "unpleasant, extremely uncomfortable." In response, employers provide psychological support through helplines and expert consultations, although participation is optional. Ewelina (editor) expresses that making it mandatory could feel like an "assault on personal space." Despite the availability of these resources, many interviewees do not utilise them due to time constraints. However, they recognise that such support "might help organise certain things," especially in managing stress, burnout, and isolation.

There are also language and editorial sensitivity issues. Managers address them in two primary contexts: as a barrier to mutual understanding and as a necessity for broader linguistic collaboration, including translations and hiring Ukrainian speakers with unique contacts (Joanna, deputy editor). Ukrainian texts authored by Ukrainians reflect their perspective, with Marta (program director) noting, "You can see that it's their language and narrative—a bit of their war propaganda." Polish media thus offer a platform for Ukrainians to share their voices. The interviewees also grapple with inclusivity in language, debating terms like "refugees," "migrants," or "displaced persons," and whether to say "in Ukraine" or "on Ukraine." While some, like Marta, feel the war isn't the ideal time for such discussions, they agree on the value of turning debates into concrete solutions. Kacper (news editor) emphasises the importance of "gathering all language tips," which are "useful in non-media life" as well.

Media managers' perceptions of Poles' attitudes toward Russians, Belarusians, and non-Ukrainian residents During the War

Managers highlight the need to distinguish between Russians and Belarusians living in Poland and those aligned with Putin's policies. The media aim to reduce hostility towards long-term residents without ties to the regime. Iwona (editor-in-chief) shares the story of a Russian restaurant owner in Warsaw who faced harassment due to the war, advocating for her story to be told to show that "there are Russians in Poland who also need to be heard." Ewelina (editor) emphasises giving a voice to Russian and Belarusian immigrants, stressing that they have nothing to do with Putin's regime. The issue of non-Ukrainian residents fleeing the war is sensitive, mainly due to "racist incidents at the border," which were initially exaggerated, leading to international criticism of Poles. Media efforts include assisting such individuals by providing accommodation and support, like helping Nepali students return home and offering emergency shelters for those in „double trouble" (Joanna, deputy editor-in-chief).

Conversely, Polish media also exposed the pro-Putin side of Russia and Belarus. Joanna (deputy editor-in-chief) mentions “Goworit Moskwa,” which focuses on debunking Russian propaganda. Iwona highlights articles revealing the hypocrisy of Russian influencers who publicly “destroyed their designer handbags” to show indifference to sanctions but privately “flew to Dubai to get their Chanel gadgets.”

Audience During the War

Interviewees understand the significant impact of audience interest in the war on editorial decisions. Ewelina (editor) notes, “If all of Poland is focused on it, we need to provide that information rather than try to stand out by covering something else.” Meeting audience needs has become a priority, leading to expanded reach and increased popularity. Iwona (editor-in-chief) observes that “the war made this happen – men are also reading what we write... Human stories interest them too.” Kacper, head of information, agrees but also stresses the need to amplify the audience’s voice. He believes that expert opinions alone don’t fully capture Polish attitudes toward the war and refugees. Kacper suggests, “It would be great to do a street survey and then discuss it with an expert because right now, we’re missing the voice of the people, the vox populi.” His approach reflects a desire to balance the perspectives of everyday citizens with those of commentators.

However, audiences present challenges, accusing the media of being superficial, unreliable, and insensitive. Marta (program director) notes that journalists face under-appreciation and accusations of carelessness, which she equates to facing an “army of Robin Hoods” or even an “army of trolls.”

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities During the War

Polish media are responding to the war with initiatives that extend beyond traditional reporting. Interviewees provided several examples of their proactive efforts. For instance, Iwona (editor-in-chief) mentions the creation of a section dedicated to Ukraine. Marta (program director) describes an entirely new Ukrainian brand developed by her outlet, which has become a “Ukrainian kingdom,” where Ukrainians “write about what they need to inform each other.” She also discusses collaborations with Ukrainian media, where Polish outlets offer space for Ukrainian narratives, including what Marta refers to as “their wartime propaganda.” Justyna (editor) highlights a visual redesign of her portal to feature the Ukrainian flag, emphasising its importance given the situation.

Additionally, media initiatives include organising material and financial collections, setting up a nursery and co-working space for Ukrainian women with children (Iwona), and hosting charity concerts to raise funds for Ukraine (Kacper).

Discussion

Our research enhances the understanding of media DM in times of war and crisis, particularly in the context of the Ukraine war. Interviews with media managers offer a rare glimpse into the inner workings of media companies during a critical period, capturing their reactions before and throughout the conflict. This study reveals the hidden aspects of decision-making, including the challenges, crises, and adaptations professionals face. By documenting how media professionals navigate and transform difficult emotions into

action, our data provides valuable insights into media DM practices and the overall functioning of media organisations during disruptive events.

The findings align with some DM typologies in the literature review. According to Hendrickx et al. (2022), it pertains to the macro level (how armed conflict destabilises the media sector), the meso level (specific practices), and the micro level (CSR activities linked to media brands). DM is evident in categories such as ownership (cooperation between Polish and Ukrainian media), brands (new media brands), production (development of skills due to increased responsibilities), content (dominance of news about Ukraine, modifications in programming, role of information sources), and consumption (audience preferences, critical reactions).

The findings can be placed within Hipfl's (2023) framework: production (new formats like documentaries and live broadcasting) and decision-making processes. Another aspect is representation, highlighted by the focus on Ukrainian topics before and during the war, including problems and solutions. The theme of "re-established inequalities" shows social hostility towards Russians and Belarusians, becoming widespread during the conflict. This ties into the category of media use, focusing on audiences. The media explained that not everyone should be judged equally, as war has many facets. There is also a focus on other topics like rape and exploitation of refugees, contrary to the prevailing belief in Poles unconditional aid for the refugees.

However, the described DM practices seem to challenge Awad-Cherit's (2014) position that "treated as a business asset, diversity serves, rather than challenges, the existing media system." During the war, the media remained as businesses competing for market position, but the conflict challenged DM. Despite a pro-Ukrainian stance and initial sidelining of other topics, Polish media do not entirely fail to "open sufficient spaces for alternative social voices." Following Jönhill (2016, 223), their "mission and market perspectives are not opposites but have come together".

Decisions regarding media DM during the war involve internal processes of managing media organisations, participants, and content production (Horsto & Hultén 2011). It is crucial to agree with Ojebode (2009) that content is not just the final product (i.e. the publication) but also the process of creating it. In this context, selecting information sources is particularly crucial, forming the core of news production (O'Neill & O'Connor 2008). As Mathisen (2023, 647) emphasises, it is at this stage that sources possess "the power to comment, define, protest or agree, as well as the authority to view and interpret reality". More sources thus lead to more voices and a greater chance for diversity. Single sourcing, in contrast, "contributes to a narrowed and limited view of reality" (ibid., 660).

Is DM justified in the context of war? The answer is not straightforward. A range of voices reveals multiple perspectives, offering a more nuanced view of reality (e.g., "good Russians and Belarusians"). On the other hand, a "single voice" can demonstrate a stance of solidarity and support, which might limit diversity, but relying only on Ukrainian sources may spread Ukrainian propaganda. Still, verifying sources is central to professional media, and managers underline its importance, viewing mistakes as opportunities for change (e.g., ceasing to use social media as a source).

At the heart of our research findings is the human aspect, both before and during the conflict. This manifests in various ways: cooperation with Ukrainian journalists that started before the war, refugee stories—which add depth to the Ukrainian narrative—and the newsroom staff, who work under immense pressure due to time constraints and

the weight of human tragedy. Additionally, there is a heightened sensitivity to language and words, the fundamental tools of communication. Respect for diversity, awareness of human emotions, behaviours, and reactions, empathy for oneself and others, and occasionally prioritising these over the pursuit of a “news story at all costs” have become crucial elements of media operations in times of war. As we note elsewhere (Gober & Jupowicz-Ginalska 2023), these reactions tend to stabilise over time, with topics related to Ukraine eventually giving way to others, including those neglected due to the war. However, it is essential to note that they do not disappear entirely, as evidenced by the news services in 2024 (see: TVN24.pl 2024; Interia.pl 2024).

Conclusions

This analysis examines the impact of the armed conflict on Poland’s eastern border on Polish media practices. Our research focuses on two key objectives: to assess media dynamics before and during the war through a diversity management (DM) lens, and to evaluate how these dynamics influence newsroom operations and public perceptions.

The study involved sixteen interviews with media managers, revealing notable shifts in their perceptions and routines. We propose that DM represents a practical approach to managing newsrooms, particularly in shaping narratives around refugees and other marginalised groups.

The qualitative analysis identified specific categories of media DM, highlighting changes in their implementation during the periods studied. Table 1 presents a comparison of these practices and addresses RQ1, demonstrating the ways in which the war has influenced diversity management strategies within Polish media.

Table 1. Diversity Management (DM) Practices in Polish Media Before and During the War

Practices	Categories of practices	Subcategories of practices	Before the war	Since the war
Selection of (co-workers)	no categories	no subcategories	X	X
Editorial management	editorial planning	selection of topics	X	X
		omission of topics		X
	news management	acquisition of sources		X
		verification of sources		X
	psychological support	no subcategories		X
	language	as barrier	X	
		as an opportunity		X
		as inclusivity issue	X	X
Media managers’ perceptions of Poles’ attitudes toward Russians, Belarusians, and non-Ukrainian residents	supporting	no subcategories		X
	critical	no subcategories	X	X
Audiences	no categories	no subcategories		X
CSR activities	no categories	no subcategories		X

Source: Authors’ own work.

The analysis of Table 1 provides insights into how the war has impacted media managers' decisions regarding DM (addressing RQ2). Notably, more DM challenges have emerged since the war's outbreak, with one exception: the pre-war perception of language as a barrier, which has shifted. The Ukrainian language has become crucial for acquiring, understanding, and sometimes even publishing information. Language is no longer a barrier but an opportunity for communication and diversifying programming content, especially for refugees. Interestingly, language inclusivity and sensitivity were more prominent concerns before the war. However, the outbreak of conflict has shifted these issues, with terminology concerns becoming secondary as more pressing challenges arise.

Among other aspects of newsroom management, topic selection is a constant across both periods. Just before the war, a growing sense of threat and anticipation led to the gradual postponement of previously planned content. The invasion accelerated this process, with media activities fully adapting to current events and programming becoming war-focused. Managers more readily admit to deliberately omitting or delaying the publication of sensitive topics to calm emotions, defuse potential conflicts, and show empathy toward Ukrainians. Simultaneously, media outlets paid attention to the diversity within the Ukrainian community, including the wealthy and educated. Newsrooms also worked to explain behaviours such as the reluctance of some Ukrainians to undertake tasks below their competence.

Publishing has always been closely tied to information sources, but this connection became even more significant with the outbreak of the war. Interviewees emphasised the importance of reliable sources and openly discussed the challenges of the internet, particularly social media. They highlighted the labour-intensive process of verification, the prevalence of fake news and propaganda, and the sting of audience criticism. Despite their best efforts, managers admitted that mistakes sometimes occur, leading to criticism, emotional and physical exhaustion, and a sense of futility and injustice. Mental health issues, including burnout and breakdowns, have become more commonly mentioned since the war began, underscoring the significant burden it imposes.

Notably, media managers' perceptions of Poles' attitudes toward Russians, Belarusians, and non-Ukrainian residents have evolved. In interviews conducted before the war, these groups were mostly absent. However, since the conflict began, the media has made a concerted effort to highlight that the victims of Putin's regime include not only Ukrainians but also Russian and Belarusian refugees, Ukrainian Roma, and residents from Asia or Africa who were in Ukraine for economic or educational reasons. The media appeals to Poles for tolerance while maintaining a pro-Ukrainian stance in the content they publish and their managerial activities, including those beyond the editorial scope.

In conclusion, this paper contributes to the understanding of how Polish media managers navigated the complexities of diversity management (DM) related to Ukraine and its community during both pre-war and wartime periods. By focusing on decision-makers' perspectives, our study sheds light on the specific DM practices employed in response to the evolving crisis. The findings reveal significant shifts in media strategies, illustrating how these practices adapted over time.

Despite the limitations of our research, including a focused sample that may not represent the full spectrum of media perspectives and the absence of certain ideological viewpoints—such as those from right-wing and religious editorial teams—the insights gained underscore the importance of DM in media operations during conflict. Additionally, the

lack of a contemporary perspective reflecting Ukraine's situation in 2024 further highlights the need for ongoing research in this area. Future research could explore the role of ideology in shaping DM practices and consider contemporary perspectives on Ukraine as the situation develops.

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