

Gerontological ageism as a social challenge and its detection in Ukrainian news media content

El envejecimiento gerontológico como desafío social y su detección en el contenido de los medios de comunicación ucranianos

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ABSTRACT

The mass media, being a significant factor influencing the audience, form stereotypes of old age in the mass consciousness and determine behavioral patterns in relation to the elderly. The purpose of this investigation is to identify significant trends in news content in Ukraine, including the identification of specific features of gerontological ageism, to identify discriminatory practices and to identify gerontophobic components of the media image of the retiree. The study has identified the specifics of ageism in the Ukrainian media, in particular its institutional nature, the presence of open and latent forms. It has been proved that the media promote age exclusions – the process of alienation from social and economic life, reduction of social roles using discriminatory practices of biomedicalization, marginalization, invisibilization, infantilization, dehumanization, trivialization, and patronage. Content analysis of news has allowed to construct a gerontophobic media image of people aged 60+, the core of which is the sign of the victim, the center – the offender, aggression, the near periphery – poverty, unattractiveness, inadequacy, disorientation in space, carelessness, corruption; distant periphery – selfishness, weakness, loneliness, hypertrophied thrift. The investigation has found that this is not only a problem of gerontophobia, but also in the country as a whole, because the media, on the one hand, spread what is happening in society, and on the other, determine what stereotype of old age is cultivated in mass consciousness by the Ukrainian media.

Keywords: Human rights; Gerontophobic ageism in Ukraine; News; Age exclusion; Discriminatory practices; Senior citizen's media image.

RESUMEN

Los medios de comunicación, al ser un factor significativo que influye en la audiencia, forman estereotipos de vejez en la conciencia de las masas y determinan patrones de comportamiento en relación con los ancianos. El propósito de esta investigación es identificar tendencias significativas en el contenido de noticias en Ucrania, incluida la identificación de características específicas de la discriminación por envejecimiento gerontológico, identificar prácticas discriminatorias e identificar componentes gerontofóbicos de la imagen mediática del jubilado. El estudio ha identificado las especificidades de la discriminación por edad en los medios ucranianos, en particular su naturaleza institucional, la presencia de formas abiertas y latentes. Se ha comprobado que los medios de comunicación promueven exclusiones por edad – proceso de alienación de la vida social y económica, reducción de roles sociales mediante prácticas discriminatorias de biomedicalización, marginación, invisibilización, infantilización, deshumanización, banalización y clientelismo. El análisis de contenido de las noticias ha permitido construir una imagen mediática gerontofóbica de las personas mayores de 60 años, cuyo núcleo es el signo de la víctima, el centro – el delincuente, la agresión, la periferia cercana – la pobreza, la falta de atractivo, la insuficiencia, la desorientación en el espacio, descuido, corrupción; periferia lejana – egoísmo, debilidad, soledad, frugalidad hipertrofiada. La investigación ha constatado que no se trata solo de un problema de gerontofobia, sino del país en su conjunto, pues los medios de comunicación, por un lado, difunden lo que ocurre en la sociedad, y por otro, determinan qué estereotipo de vejez es cultivado en la conciencia de las masas por los medios ucranianos.

Palabras clave: Derechos humanos; Discriminación por envejecimiento en Ucrania; Noticias; Exclusión por edad; Prácticas discriminatorias; Imagen mediática de la tercera edad.

1. Introduction

The process of population aging has become inevitable and global. According to the UN forecast, by 2050 the category of 60+ people will be 21% of the world's population (United Nations, 2013). Ukraine is one of the thirty countries in the world with the oldest population (Gladun, 2020). According to

international criteria, a population is considered old if the number of people aged 65 and over exceeds 7% (Sidorenko, 2003). According to the State Statistics Service of Ukraine, citizens of category 60+ (these are the years of retirement) are 23.9%, and 65+ – 17.1% (Timonina, 2020).

Progressive aging of the population causes an increase in the demographic burden on the able-bodied contingent, affects the relationship between generations, quality of life. According to the Global Age Watch Index (HelpAge International, 2015), which assesses the socio-economic well-being of 60+ people in 96 countries, Ukraine ranks 73rd due to problems in such key indicators as health, material security, ability to overcome difficulties and the availability of favorable environments for independent and self-sufficient living. Studies on the quality of life of the elderly have shown that the lifestyle of the elderly is one of the prerequisites for longevity and the preservation of intelligence (Boyko & Radysh, 2014).

The current economic condition and demographic situation provide little reason for optimism. To objectively and comprehensively assess the difficult situation and outline prospects for the future, the country conducts opinion polls (see, for example: National Institute for Strategic Studies, 2013), public hearings (Kharkiv Institute for Social Research, 2012), M.V. Ptukha Institute for Demography and Social Research of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine developed a comprehensive demographic forecast of Ukraine until 2100 under different scenarios. Recently, publications have become more active, the object of which is the study of economic, social, legal, psychological issues of the elderly. Thus, Kipen (2019) presented the needs of people of respectable age, their values, Kukhta (2019) showed social potential, Hapon (2006) articulates the issue of ageism for older women, which causes them to go abroad in search of work.

It should be noted that the issues of aging, including negative stereotyping are characteristic not only of Ukrainian society, they have been the subject of a number of studies by foreign experts conducting interstate (Palmore, 2004), gender (Chrisler et al., 2016), age (McNair, 2013) and other comparisons, assess the situation of successful aging (Katz & Cajasanti, 2015), study the strengthening of ageism in COVID-19 (Brad & Meisner, 2021). Most domestic and foreign publications conclude that the aging of modern society requires a transformation of social consciousness, which is rooted in archaic stereotypes about old age as a threat.

Ukrainian media are involved in covering the problem, updating it at the level of mass audiences, but the number of such materials is still insignificant (Ivashchenko et al., 2018). According to the results of the monitoring of the Institute of Mass Media in 18 national online media in March 2020, only 1.75% of news about the category of citizens 60+ of the total number of news items were recorded. The monitoring results also showed that “if it were not for the coronavirus / quarantine, the percentage of news about and for the elderly would be meager (three times less)” (Mashkova, 2020). It is also alarming that the modern model of mass communication shows trends related to gerontophobia, age discrimination, which is commonly called ageism.

It is alarming, dangerous and even pathogenic that neither superficial nor deep manifestations of ageism provoke public resistance, as they are not perceived by either the subjects or the objects of discrimination. The reason for this condition Nelson (2005) sees the institutionalization of ageism as evidenced by the search for documents on racism, sexism, and ageism: 3.111 documents were found on racism, 1.385 on sexism, and only 294 on ageism.

Nevertheless, the manifestations of ageism in the media space do not go unnoticed by scientists. Recently, there have been publications on the issues of presenting images of old age in the media (Vickers, 2007), on the spread of stereotypes that traumatize human dignity (Lester & Ross, 2003),

analyzed images of older men and women on television in prime time (Vernon et al., 1991), concluded that older people are underrepresented in TV series compared to gerontological data (Kessler et al., 2004), about positive changes in the media – print advertising, television advertising and television programs – from negative stereotypes to more positive (Loos & Ivan, 2018) and others.

Scientific knowledge of the manifestations of ageism in the Ukrainian media space is in its infancy. Some publications on age discrimination only occasionally indicate that the media are propagators of ageism, but there is no deeper analysis. At the same time, it should be noted that there are works of an applied nature to combat discrimination, including by age (for example, Virtosu & Shenderovsky, 2018). Considering that in Ukraine there is not enough research in this area, the aim of the research is to ascertain the specific features of gerontological ageism Ukrainian news media, identify discriminatory discursive practices of the mediator and establish gerontophobic components of the senior citizen's media image.

The search for the empirical base was carried out using content analysis of news submitted by Ukrainian electronic media during the year, from 01/01/2020 to 01/01/2021, including 40 central and 129 local. An expanded computer search for the keywords “news elderly people”, “news elderly person”, and “news retiree” included a sample of 296 examples of ageism. This number did not include versions of the same news provided by different media. When allocating units that included the value of “ageism”, the generally accepted requirements for content analysis were taken into account: a) the unit must be large enough to express the value; b) the unit must be small enough not to express many values; c) should be easily identifiable; c) the number of units should be large enough to be sampled (Pocheptsov, 2001). Age meanings were recognized at the level of individual lexical units, phrases and in broader contexts. The choice of content analysis as the main research method allowed to avoid the problems of the descriptive method, which allows personal interpretation of the text; in addition, individual reading of individual texts would not make it possible to see what large amounts of information show. The analysis of the collected material was also accompanied by a discursive-pragmatic approach, typical of interdisciplinary research, in particular related to social communications, which allows to identify superficial or deep socio-cultural meanings of certain statements and strategies of their authors.

2. The concept of ageism in the media

To clarify the features of ageism in the media, we present its common understanding, the actualization of which in science is associated with the name of R. N. Butler, the Director of the US National Institute on Aging, who in 1969 proposed to use the term ageism to denote age discrimination. R. N. Butler (1969) presented it as a combination of stereotypes, prejudices and discriminatory practices that are characteristic of both social institutions and everyday life. This definition already includes typological features of ageism – institutional and domestic. In addition to institutional and domestic, there are explicit and latent, intentional and unconscious (see, i.e., Ventrell, 2018; Branch et al., 2005). At the institutional level, ageism is traced to legally enshrined direct or covert discrimination against the elderly by specific medical institutions, the councils that regulate their work, and the various structures that provide social services (Liubarets & Vasylieva, 2021; Parfanovych & Parfanovych, 2020). At the household level, it is inherent in various microsocial practices (Parfanovych & Parfanovych, 2020; Kartashova & Liubarets, 2019) and manifests itself in abusive language, arrogance, ignorance, as well (Syroid, 2020) as mental and physical violence (Parfanovych & Parfanovych, 2020).

The institutional and domestic levels are characterized by open (direct) and latent (hidden) ageism (Kolpina, 2015). Openness manifests itself in intentional discrimination against older people, including laws or policies that directly restrict access to certain goods and services; in unreasonable age restrictions for candidates for work, position; late arrivals of ambulances on call of an elderly

person; the behavior of public transport drivers who, knowing that the elderly have travel benefits, do not stop, pass by, and so on. An example of latent discrimination is the position, “which is clearly rare but clearly seen in social policy: the elderly are a ballast of a society that inhibits reform”. Latent ageism is rooted in sociocultural norms that recommend to older people certain forms of self-restraint, which, internalizing, cause their self-discrimination and self-isolation, have a negative impact on human productivity, psychological status, somatic condition.

Ageism can be intentional when the process of thinking and acting is deliberately directed at the use of age-based stereotypes. But most often it happens unintentionally, when people unconsciously associate certain characteristics of a person with his age. In addition to the levels, we should also identify areas of ageism manifestation. Thus, ageism is most often discussed in the professional sphere - in the context of the employment of the elderly and their «voluntary» retirement, in the areas of health care, social protection, in the family, including by persons caring for the elderly, in penitentiary institutions. It is quite fair to single out the sphere of mass communications, because it, in the figurative words of Denis McQuayl, is an arena where public, national and international life takes place.

As it has been already mentioned, the media, although insufficiently, cover the social problems of the 60+ category, but in the context of talking about ageism, they are, on the one hand, its exposer: publish incorrect statements of government officials, report harassment regarding older peoples of retirees in areas where they can still prove their professional ability, etc. In this way, the media act as agents of informing and educating a new morality, a new type of attitude to old age. In separate articles, in the specialized editions intended for age audience, like “Life of the senior citizen”, “Retirement universal education”, “Healthy way of life in Ukraine (Happy senior citizen)” there are samples of productive old age. However, on the other hand, some of their materials, ill-considered statements contribute to the spread of ageism. And if the general public was unaware of the positive experience, the risk of seeing older peoples as physically and intellectually exhausted, informationally deprived, uninitiated, dependent on the government and its political vector would increase (Abraham et al., 2018).

It should be noted that ageism is characteristic of both artistic (Afanasieva, 2016) and academic discourses (Rovenskaya, 1999), but the potential influence of mass communications is much greater, especially when it comes to the central media, and therefore the negative consequences are larger. It should be noted the special role of authoritative media in forming a set of topical issues, the so-called agenda in covering the lives of retirees, as regional institutions follow in the footsteps of the central ones. Audience reach increases many times when the same news is spread through different media and across different platforms, and especially if it is presented as sensational. To attract attention, to dramatize the event, loud headlines are used, such as: “*All retirees will die. The Minister of Healthcare made a ruthless statement*” (Vysoky Zamok, 2020), “*He wanted to draw attention: in Odesa region, a senior citizen threatened to blow up a police station*” (Unian. Information Agency, 2020). Here are just a few examples of phrases where the subject or object of action in the title is an older person in his destructive manifestations: *the senior citizen threatened (stormed, stole, raped, behaved aggressively, attacked with a knife, wounded, shot); (calmed down, detained) stopped the senior citizen*. This policy is quite clear: the story of a charity event, the active work of a particular person will have less effect than the events associated with scandals, fights, thefts, murders, and especially if they involve citizens of category 60+.

The institutionality of mass communications is difficult to deny: they are organizational and technical institutions professionally engaged in collecting, processing and disseminating information to numerous audiences; their main function is to influence public opinion; media activity is conditioned by a system of socially significant norms, patterns and rules of communication (Kovalenko, 2016). This gives grounds to attribute ageism, spread through mass communications, to the institutional.

Returning to the dichotomy of open / latent ageism, in this case both forms are traced. Following the openly discriminatory practices of the media, the media verbalize the idea of medicalization of old age and the need for patronage, thus continuing the old media history dating back to Soviet times, when a vector like “the government cares about you” prevailed. Other practices (marginalization, improvisation, infantilization, dehumanization, etc.), which will be discussed below, are mostly latent, but their manifestations are most likely caused not by malicious intent, but by a low level of communication culture and lack of responsibility for the word, which provokes no less devastating consequences: barriers between the elderly and other age groups are strengthened and thus social distance increases. Social distance, according to Smirnova (2008), causes separation, desocialization and disintegration, orienting the older generation to the program of “survival”.

Latent ageism is dangerous because it implicitly, at the subconscious level, pushes mass audiences to accept age stereotypes as natural. It is noteworthy that the negative assessments of senior citizens such as aggressive, angry, inadequate, drunk, convicted, brawler do not provoke resistance from the public or the elderly, which is evidence of conformism as a way of life. The media themselves do not reflect on the manifestations of ageism and its social consequences. Thus, the “spiral of silence” unfolds in society, which was theoretically substantiated by Noelle-Neumann (1996). According to her, a person is less likely to express his view on a problem if he feels that he is in the minority because he is afraid of retribution or isolation. In a society where there is a well-established practice of nonresistance to prejudice, there is a growing risk of increasing gerontophobic stereotypes, especially due to the aging population.

Typical examples of latent institutional ageism are drug advertising involving elderly people. Its hosts are newspapers, radio and television – in news, series, shows and more. The institutionality and publicity of media content does not guarantee the observance of ethical norms in communication with mass audiences (Petrov & Serdyuk, 2008). The guarantor in a situation of normative uncertainty can be the conscience of a specialist as a result of education. Thus, the specificity of gerontological ageism in the media is that it is institutional, has an open and latent form and inadvertently promotes gerontophobic stereotypes that degrade human dignity, move retirees to the periphery of public life, and deprive them of the right to civil prerogatives.

3. Age exclusion and its inherent discriminatory practices

The selected factual material (296 examples from 169 electronic media) showed that the formation and dissemination of age-specific gerontostereotypes by the Ukrainian media is due to two interrelated basic processes: exclusion and image construction. The exclusion is based on the principle of removing age groups from the social community on the principle “we are not like them; we are better than them”. The basis for the construction of the image is not quite objective reflection of these groups in the media, the choice of the most effective in terms of the mediator characteristics to attract the attention of the audience. Analysis of the processes of exclusion and image construction allows us to show the multi-vector discursive field of aging gerontostereotypes.

Age exclusion is a process of alienation from social and economic life, reduction of social roles through the use of various discriminatory practices – “negative attitude towards individuals or groups, which is manifested in the willingness to adequately perceive only those people who meet a predetermined age criterion” (Biskup, 2008). These include biomedicalization, marginalization, improvisation, infantilization, dehumanization, trivialization, patronage. The given list was made on the basis of universal discriminatory practices “in situations in which differences are perceived not as a resource, but as a threat”, proposed by Yeligulashvili et al. (2015), with certain modifications and clarifications. Thus, the practice of stereotyping singled out by the authors was not included in the list, as it, in our

opinion, is the result of exclusion and is the core of the aging gerontostereotype. The definition of each of the discriminatory practices is also clarified, taking into account age exclusion. It should be noted that the selected and analyzed below practices are presented for the purpose of systematization, but there is no sharp boundary between them, they are able to move into each other, combine and intensify (Levchenko & Britchenko, 2021). The audience is attracted by the drama, but if it is not enough, the media artificially inflates it. Among these practices are traditional, deep into antiquity, and operational, adjusted to modern realities.

Biomedicalization is a traditional practice that manifests itself through the attribution of a disease to the elderly, which reinforces the stereotype of old age as a disease, often with mental disorders, that makes a person incapacitated and close to death. This approach, according to scientists, was formed not without the participation of medicine, which articulated the negative aspects of old age as a life experience, which, of course, contributed to its stereotyping (Chernyshkova, 2008). Following the medical discourse, Ukrainian news abounds with the words *sick, unhealthy, sick, incapable, infirm; illness, medication, hospital, pharmacy, serious / critical condition, medical care* (*During this period, the elderly may need even more medication, because ... some grandmothers cannot take care of themselves...* (The Village, 2020). The sad medical picture of old age is reinforced by the large number of materials on life expectancy, which Ukrainians cannot boast of against the background of citizens of other countries. Thus, it is reported that *Ukraine recorded the lowest rate of healthy living in 2019 among all European countries* (Hromadske, 2020). Such pieces of news serve as a means of emotional influence, homonization of ideas, intimidation of other age groups. Negative stereotypes may lead one to think that all older people are in poor health or well-being and unable to learn new things, such as technology (Chrisler et al., 2016).

Despite the fact that people do not get younger with age, most of them are completely independent and can do without assistance. Moreover, the elderly “Indeed, there are some problems with impaired vision, hearing, coordination of movements in old age, but not with mental characteristics. Studies by physiologists and psychologists show that the differences in the ability of young and old to learn are insignificant, and most people of retirement age (At least up to 70-75 years) largely retain their ability to work, competence, intellectual potential” (Starikova, 2011). Sometimes they show political and civic activity that has no parallels in other age groups. Accordingly, we should approach the awareness of old age as a unique stage of life, full of new meanings and new associations.

Marginalization is the latent “removal” of older people from the “mainstream”, in which key social, economic, political decisions, allocation of resources, etc. take place. One example of marginalization is the election campaign, a period in which there is a significant fragmentation of the population according to political preferences. At this time, even authoritative publications cannot refrain from neutrality and openly express their political sympathies, becoming symbolic representatives of individual parties or party blocks and a means of accusation or even the destruction of opponents. Exposing the populism of certain parties, showing their hopelessness, obsolescence of programs, journalists use the generalized image of pensioners as sympathizers of such parties (*senior citizen's' / regional party, party of Ukrainian senior citizens, favorites of senior citizen*), investing new meanings far from understanding old age as wisdom, self-sufficiency, and experience.

As A. Levinson (2005) ironically points out, “Basic values are now transmitted not through grandparents – grandchildren, but through a shorter and faster path: the media – children”. To increase the persuasiveness of their arguments, the media provide statistics, sometimes contrasting the electoral preferences of young people and people in the 60+ category. Opposition also occurs with the involvement of various means of expression and figures of speech. Thus, the authoritative publication “Ukrayinska Pravda” (Ukrayinska Pravda, 2019) in the title used the metaphor of war “battle of

generations”, which allows you to gently, indirectly evoke the necessary thoughts and emotions of the mediator. The metaphor relays the idea that retirees lose in the political struggle and will therefore be less likely to make key decisions in the state. Consequently, new meanings are formed on the political and demographic map of Ukraine, where the discourse of the older generation, based on nostalgia and resentment, moves to the periphery (Galkin et al., 2021).

Invisibilization is the elimination of age groups from participation in public life of the state, deprivation of civic prerogatives, ignoring their needs and interests. In this case, the stereotype of “exhaustion” is activated, the practice of attributing inadequacy, noncompliance with social norms, propensity to delinquency, etc. is legitimized. Social exclusion in this case can be equated as a stimulus to physical destruction. The practice of invisibilization is especially characteristic of the tabloids, especially in a pandemic: *Doctors have decided not to treat senior citizens – coronavirus put a cross on the older generation* (Znaj.ua, 2020), in reports of digital divide (digital inequality) between generations, which is illustrative a new type of social differentiation by age, resulting from various opportunities for access to information technology, use of the Internet, and thus contributes to the emergence of information barriers, which in turn affects the reduction of civil rights and deteriorating quality of life. Thus, if at the initial stage of e-commerce development, the age group of online consumers was mostly 16-25 years, now – 16-45 years, while the older generation also joins the shopping in online stores (Lytvyn et al., 2021).

Headlines like *The 87-year-old Ternopil resident formatted a tablet for her grandson* (Pro.te.ua, 2020) look witty from the point of view of the younger generation, but from the humanistic point of view they are rather dubious, as they deny the possibility of including representatives of the gerontological group in the field of information technology, they spread the stereotype about their digital inability, which cultivates information self-exclusion. This stereotype is reinforced by the fact that in our time “The status of a person endowed with life experience has been less valuable compared to the ability to adapt to change in general and to new technologies in particular” (Kolpina, 2015). And, on the contrary, contribute to the increase of self-esteem and inspire optimism of an article like *The Ukrainian senior citizen became an e-sportswoman* (Korrespondent, 2020). Also indicative is the article entitled *Digital split in leadership: how the conflict of generations slows down the introduction of new technologies* (Ekonomichna Pravda, 2020), which, at first glance, is age-oriented, but its content in the spirit of progressive journalism offers possible solutions to overcome the issue primarily by changing the mentality of citizens and social institutions.

Infantilization is the public imposition on the elderly of the signs of immaturity inherent in children, which makes them think of them as incapable of making serious decisions, of limited capacity. Characteristic of this practice is the use of appropriate verbs marked by a sign of childhood: *to accumulate, to capture, to wander, to appropriate, to laugh, and so on*. The subtext “The old is like the small” sounds in reports of retirees who, despite quarantine, accumulate in the branches of the Oshchad Bank to pay utility bills, using aphoristic headlines such as “*Coronavirus will not stop grandmas*” (Znaj.ua, 2020). Older people are reprimanded for their credulity during elections. Bribery of pensioners by politicians is a significant issue, the topic in its various variations is promoted in the media, but most often the rink of condemnation is not those who want to break into power and hand out handouts, and the elderly.

Dehumanization is the deprivation of the right of people in old age to have signs of activity, initiative, ability to overcome difficulties, to participate in the social life of the state. Active old age in this case is perceived as an exception, and weakness, passivity is presented as the norm. And this is happening at a time when the world community is cultivating a new model of old age, which is reflected in the “United Nations Principles for Older Persons” (General Assembly of the United Nations, 1991). However, in the press, primarily of a tabloid nature, there are examples of devaluation of even the

neutral meaning of the word *senior citizen*: it is used as a label with the meaning of “exhausted, used material”. Most often, emotional labeling is used in materials about famous people, primarily from the world of show business, who continue their activities in their traditional roles. Spreading aggressive “fashion for youth”, the media are ruthless to the stars: *Foiled in old age: Madonna showed a nude photo* (Znaj.ua, 2020), *Fedir Dobronravov from “The In-Laws” turned into a deep old man...* (Politeka, 08/07/2020). In this regard, journalists mostly use a lexicon that includes the same “old”: old age, old man, got aged, aged, or focus on the years: *A new photo of 72-year-old Sofia Rotaru stirred up the network: recovered and aged* (Clutch, 2020). The practice of dehumanization is presented in the title “*In Mechnikov hospital grandfathers defeated COVID*” (Dnipro City Site, 2020).

The age sound is provided not only by the familiar nomination of *grandfathers*, but also by the fact that it is used in conjunction with *grandfather defeated*, the author's oxymoron with the meaning of the type “this cannot be, but it happened”. The practice of dehumanization is most often resorted to by the local press, but elsewhere it can be found in the central media, as well as in state news agencies: *The Tariff Commission has calculated the heat costs for senior citizens. Expenditures on heat supply services for the elderly account for about 25% of income, which is a critically high level* (Ukrinform, 2020). In such statements, senior citizens appear as a financial burden for the state. The extreme manifestation of dehumanization is low-quality, psychologically murderous material, which includes harsh words of evaluative semantics that degrade human dignity: *inadequate, clumsy, weak: Tramp at 85: due to loss of documents, a grandmother from Crimea*. According to the explanatory dictionary of the Ukrainian language, the word *tramp* is considered derogatory and means “A homeless person who does not work, but lives from theft, begging, etc., constantly changing his whereabouts; *tramp, rascal*” (Dictionary of the Ukrainian language, 1970). The verb *hung* also enhances the negative tone. For comparison, similar information, but without contempt, is transmitted by another mediator: *In Ternopil, a senior citizen forgot the way home 85-year-old grandmother, elderly lady, an old traveler* (Galas, 2020).

The discriminatory practice of *trivialization* is manifested in the concentration of attention on small things in order to minimize the problem. In agreement with the cheap popularity and the need for undemanding tastes in the coverage of serious offenses involved elements of humor, in which you can recognize the ridicule. Thus, often the offenses committed by senior citizens occur in the frame of such banal household items as *pots, glasses, pitchforks, etc.*: *Near Kharkiv, an angry senior citizen put a cop on a pitchfork: “I was slandered!”* (Znaj.ua, 2020). *Kremenchug passions: a senior citizen smashed a beer glass on a woman's face* (Programa Plus, 2020), *In Sumy region, a senior citizen received seven years for killing her husband with a pan* (Odin Doma, 2020). To paraphrase the phrase-symbol of the yellow press “If a dog bites a person – not news. News – when a person bites a dog”, then in the case of trivialization of offenses, the media are guided by the rule “If a person is killed – not news. The news is when a senior citizen kills a person with a pan”.

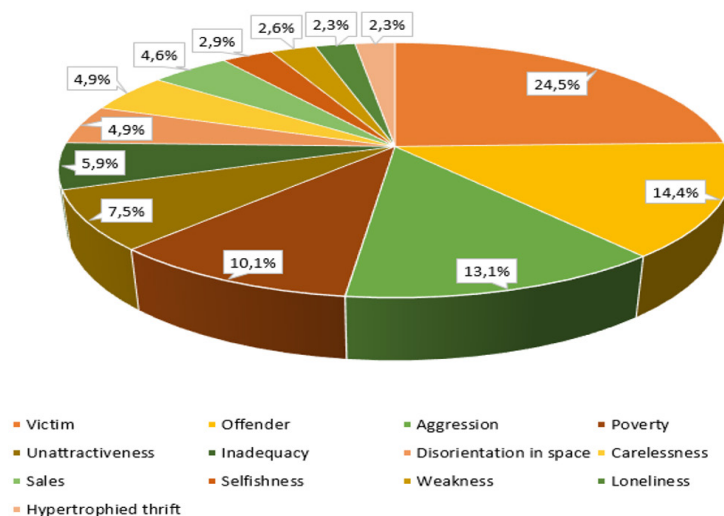
Patronage is the perception of this age group exclusively as an object of social assistance and support, which presents it as passive and dependent. This practice is based on the common myth that “an old man is a sick, weak creature, without means of subsistence, who cannot work and needs constant help and care, that is, it is a burden for family and friends and society as a whole” (Krasnova, 2000). In this case, a logical chain is traced: the problem is its solution. On the one hand, the news reports on insecurity, poverty, loneliness (Gordon, 2020), and on the other hand, they cover the state's efforts to overcome this problem (Ukrinform, 2020). Such materials do not seek to degrade human dignity, but indirectly impose the image of the senior citizen as passive, dependent on state support. This, in turn, can increase tensions between generations, each of which is trying to protect its interests. In reality, most elderly people organize their lives independently and depend on the circumstances of life no more than other categories of citizens.

Thus, the process of exclusion marked by ageism is heterogeneous, on the one hand, it occurs due to the medicalization of old age, its devaluation in the practices of marginalization, improvisation, infantilization, dehumanization and trivialization, and on the other, under the guise of social solidarity, protection and attention to seniors, i.e. patronage. Castells (1996) drew attention to exclusion as a three-stage process that moves from full integration through partial, part-time employment and relationship breakdown. The media play a huge role in this process, starting from the initial stage - partial exclusion. It is expressed in the dominant “fashion for youth”, with the focus being on youth culture. The reasons for this attitude are also related to market imperatives, the need to make a profit. The media industry focuses on relevant audiences (target audiences), which include people aged 14 to 49 (Seiko, 2014). Moreover, this is a global trend, which is noted by foreign researchers. Thus, Bell (1992) proved the prevalence of age discrimination in television programs.

4. Gerontophobic media image of older persons

On the basis of discriminatory practices, an unattractive portrait (image) of a senior citizen is constructed as a degraded person, desperate, neglected, poor, with a disturbed psyche, which is often used by criminals. The following portrait features are highlighted on the basis of content analysis of news on relevant topics, presented primarily in the headlines, as well as in the leads and in the “body” of news and ranked based on the frequency of mentions in the media. The clarification of the meaning of aging was based on the lexical analysis of the language unit, as well as the immediate and broader contexts. The immediate context includes various distributors of the language unit, mostly attributive in nature, emotional intensifiers and concretizers by place, time, and so on. Among the 296 cases of aging statements, the largest group are those that construct the image of the victim (a total of 75 such news was found, which is 24.4%), then – the offender and the offender (44 – 14.3%), a sign of aggression is presented in 40 materials – 13%, poverty – 31 – 10.1%, unattractiveness – 23 – 7.5%, inadequacy – 18 – 5.9%, disorientation in space – 15 – 4.9%, carelessness – 15 – 4.9%, sales – 14 – 4.6%, selfishness – 9 – 3.1%, weakness – 8 – 2.7%, loneliness – 7 – 2.3%, hypertrophied thrift – 7 – 2.3%. These statistical data are illustrated by Figure 1.

Figure 1. *The distribution of senior citizens' media image in Ukrainian news media content*



Source: Own elaboration.

In fact, these features are the subject of interest of Ukrainian journalists to citizens of category 60+ and, if we group them by concentrates, taking into account the frequency of use, the core image is the sign of victim, center – offender, aggression, near periphery – poverty, unattractiveness, inadequacy, disorientation in space, carelessness, marketability; distant periphery – selfishness, weakness, loneliness, hypertrophied thrift (Figure 2). Of course, there is no sharp line between these features, some materials may include two or more features at the same time. Only a cursory review shows that the media, under the pressure of certain external factors, especially the taste culture of the audience, market imperatives and sensationalism, offer audiences undifferentiated and biased judgments about the older generation, presenting a distorted picture of the world, creating an artificial construct.

Figure 2. *Signs of senior citizens' media image in Ukrainian news media content*



Source: Own elaboration.

The *victim* sign is represented by the largest number of news about citizens of category 60+ – 24.4%. Coverage of cases of violence and cruelty, when senior citizens become victims of fraud, criminals, is informative and in itself is not a manifestation of ageism – by the media, on the contrary, the media thus exposes it, sometimes giving advice on how to behave in a situation of threat. The issue is that the assessments and comments often openly or covertly introduce the idea that the victim herself is guilty of being robbed of money, robbed, deceived because of gullibility bordering on infantilism and inadequacy, for example: *A senior citizen from Lutsk gave 30.000 hryvnia to a swindler* (Volyn Post, 2020), *In Sumy, a senior citizen fell victim to a pseudo-gasman* (Sumy Life, 2020) and others. In this regard, there is reason to interpret the sign of the victim as ambivalent – as a revelation of ageism and ageism, which is not always easy to distinguish in such cases.

The constructed portrait is complemented by the features of the offender, the offender, which is 14.3%. News consumers may have the false impression that significant offenses and crimes are committed by people of retirement age. They are credited with such destructive actions as *to rob/steal, to burgle, to tear up/kill, to shoot, to blow up (grenade), to maim, to stab/shred, to corrupt, to rape*: *The court fined a senior citizen who stole products in the Novovolynsk supermarket* (bug.org.ua, 2020); *He killed to death and tore up an acquaintance: a 76-year-old senior citizen was detained in Cherkasy for murder*

(News24ua, 2020). Presumably, the retirement of offenders and criminals in the spotlight is due to the fact that offenses and crimes committed by people of non-retirement age have less potential for sensationalism. This is confirmed by the response from the Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine for No. 274_42 dated 06/01/2021, received at our request regarding the number of persons prosecuted administratively and criminally during 2020. A total of 126.110 people were involved, of whom only 4.806 were aged 60+. However, the competitive struggle of the media based on sensationalism leads to triviality and monotony.

In third place is the sign of aggression (13%). Situations involving aggression and inadequacy have traditionally attracted attention. The basic concepts in this case are scandal, quarrel, and fight. It is known that aggression is enough in life, but its manifestation on the part of a senior citizen is an extraordinary phenomenon, so the news material is full of reports such as: *In Lviv region, an aggressive senior citizen wounded a security guard with a gun* (Magnolia-TV, 2020); *In Odesa, an angry senior citizen ran over a police officer* (Lenta.ua, 2020). The media do not pass by the Ukrainian color – aggression in transport: *In Rivne region, a senior citizen beat a senior citizen for a place in a minibus* (Rivne News – Charivne, 2020). Typical predicates in such messages are verbs of aggression, threats: *to threaten, to attack, to beat, to scratch, to tear, to break, to resent, to (obscenely) swear, to break the silence, and the signs: aggressive, angry, drunk, etc.* At a time when the information field is already saturated with “heavy news”, it is at least inhumane to focus on this.

The annual increase in the number of people in the 60+ category leads to an increase in the consumption of public resources. Due to their limitations, the material opportunities of senior citizens are significantly reduced, most of them live below the poverty line. Inflation, unemployment, the conflict in Donbas, the pandemic only worsen the situation. The sign of *poverty* (10.1%) can be traced in three thematic news blocks: 1) The media show the objective difficulties faced by older people: first of all, low pensions and, accordingly, the inability to pay high tariffs for gas, electricity, buy the necessary drugs etc.: *80% of senior citizens in Ukraine live below the monetary poverty line – ombudsman* (Ekonomichna Pravda, 2020), *81-year-old senior citizen cut off from gas for non-payment – Akhmetov owes billions and buys a villa* (24tv.ua, 2020); 2) inform about the positive efforts of the authorities to overcome poverty: *Senior citizens over 75 years will be paid an additional 500 UAH per month* (Slovo I Dilo, 2020); 3) criticize the government for not keeping promises: *No promised recalculation, no reduction in price: in January, Ukrainians will have to pay more for heat* (Vysoky Zamok, 2020).

The sign of unattractiveness (7.5%) is mostly aimed at well-known representatives of show business at the age. This time it's not about recognizing artistic talents, but only about the loss of attractiveness and sexuality: the content intensifies the use of the words *old man/old woman, aged man/aged woman, elder, grandfather/grandmother*, which are enhanced by graders and concretizers *all in wrinkles and gray, too many wrinkles and bumps, flabby skin, disgusting, disgraceful appearance*. Not surprisingly, such assessments of “stars” in the press serve as a catalyst for even sharper comments from readers: *Like an old lunatic. What are these braids for?, Terrible hairstyle. What happened to her teeth?* Some tolerate the age of domestic “stars”, but most criticism is directed at foreign celebrities: Madonna, Stallone, Schwarzenegger, Dobronravov, Pugacheva, Babkina, etc., as well as “stars” of Ukrainian origin who now live in Russia: Povaliy, Lolita. In this regard, it is quite possible to agree with the opinion of Kon (2001) who considers ageism to be a philosophy of life that absolutizes age and creates an unrealistic and cruel cult of youth.

The above given characteristics correlate with such features as: 1) *disorientation in space* (4.9%) – in the media, primarily regional, it is reported that the elderly cannot remember their home address, find a way home: *In Boryspil found a senior citizen who forgot where she lived* (My Kyiv Region, 2020), *In Zhytomyr region, a senior citizen wandered in the woods for two days* (Chas Polissya, 2020); 2)

carelessness (4.9%) – this sign is traced in the news about senior citizens who through carelessness cause harm to themselves and others: *From a cherry tree to resuscitation: Lutsk senior citizen fell from a tree* (Volyn, 2020), *He was burning stubble: a senior citizen from Kirovohrad region caused grief to his neighbors and was hospitalized* (CB News, 2020); 3) *hypertrophied savings* (2.3%): *In Lutsk, firefighters saved a senior citizen from a fire in a pile of rubbish*. The Ukrainian phenomenon of voter bribery is one of the current dirty political technologies, the main target of which are older persons as the most vulnerable segments of the population, who are at the same time the most conscientious voters, as they always go to the polls honestly. In general, *corruptibility* is 4.6%.

During the election campaign, politicians demonstratively meet with retirees, distribute free printed publications, distribute money, medicines, food kits under the guise of charity, conduct medical examinations, introduce preferential travel on transport, etc.: *In Odesa, before the election, senior citizens are given medicine on behalf of Mayor Trukhanov* (24tv.ua, 2020), *Vote for glasses: the candidate for the position of Mlyniv mayor organized an action for senior citizens* (Novyny Dubno, 2020). The news reports that senior citizens are bribed even with goods that have expired (Chernivetsky Promin, 2020). The Ukrainian phenomenon of bribery is that buckwheat groats, which are popular in the national cuisine, are often part of food kits for older persons. It is this fact of “cheap sales for buckwheat” by the media that has given rise to a new meaning in the word buckwheat – “cheap object of bribery of older persons”: *Premature campaigning and “buckwheat” in Poltava: how the unofficial election campaign started* (Chesno, 2020), *“Buckwheat” is generously scattered throughout the country* (Znaj.ua, 2020). Of course, not only do older persons “sell” their vote for buckwheat during the election, but it is their have become the stuff of legend in the news.

Peripheral signs include *selfishness*, *weakness*, *loneliness*. The news, which talks about *selfishness* (3.1%), shows first of all the reluctance or refusal to wear a protective mask in public places during quarantine: *“We don't care!”* (Ukrayinski Novyny, 2020). However, such publications, in our opinion, exaggerate the egocentrism of the elderly, as other segments of the population also avoid wearing protective masks. Perhaps there are even more of them, and perhaps because of this, they are ignored by the media, which leads to the conclusion that there is no balance in the coverage of such violations, and therefore objectivity, and this is a problem of professionalism of journalists.

Signs of *infirmity* (2.7%) and *loneliness* (2.3%) appear in the news about the so-called fourth age, about the assistance provided to them or about extraordinary events related to them: *The specialists of the Foundation go to the infirm senior citizens' homes* (Pensions Fund of Ukraine, 2020), *There is nothing to eat: my grandfather called the police and asked for help* (Khreschatyk, 2020). Loneliness and infirmity are also represented in the bleak stories of dying villages. The image of a person who evokes compassion and pity, does not fit into the path of successful aging, and thus undergoes exclusion.

Thus, the selected features of the older person give reason to talk about artificial media reality, based on information that should cause a strong, sharp reaction in a person, to bring it out of an inert state, to excite. For obvious reasons, the media tends to have more views, likes and clicks. For the most part, according to Sukhorukova (2006), natural fears of people (death, violence, destruction, etc.) and natural weaknesses (greed, laziness, lust, envy, etc.) are used. News, as we know, is aimed at the present, and in this case the editors do not care what is a factor of destructive behavior, and when the causes of such phenomena do not deepen, reproduced, constructed portrait, organizing meaning, will only be fixed in the minds of mass audiences and cause new waves of discriminatory behavior. At one time, Lippman (2004) suggested that our perception of reality is often based on “shadows on the walls” - media reports.

Thus, the media is the link between world events and people, and they determine how these events

will be reflected in public opinion. In addition, as noted by Loos and Ivan (2018), “Media content is a constant reflection of social practices. This affects daily interactions, including how we treat the elderly, as well as how we perceive ourselves as “old”. A similar opinion is voiced by senior citizens themselves, who, for example, “seniors prefer those advertisement casts that portray them as active people who play an important part in the lives of those close to them (i.e. grandchildren and children) and in society, in general (i.e. mentoring young people on the labour market)” (Duduciuc, 2017). More positive gerontological images of people in the media would significantly reduce ageism in any communicative culture. Showing healthy, self-sufficient, active and successful older persons not only in the news, but also in the media content in general will be able to neutralize the negative perception of old age.

5. Conclusions

The study shows the spread of gerontological ageism in the news content of Ukrainian media, which contributes to the rooting of gerontophobic stereotypes that degrade human dignity, move older persons to the periphery of public life, deprive them of the right to civic prerogatives. Discriminatory practices of exclusion (biomedicalization, marginalization, improvisation, infantilization, dehumanization, trivialization, patronage) introduced by the media and their artificially constructed image of persons of category 60 as a victim, offender, with signs of aggression, poverty, inadequacy, poverty, inadequacy, poverty, inadequacy etc. is a manifestation of institutional media ageism, which manifests itself in open or latent forms. Undoubtedly, this image, far from real and inhumane, is the result of the selection of information for the purpose of sensationalism, in which, as we know, there are no halftones. The danger of such actions is that they not only degrade human dignity, but also force them to follow established patterns of behavior, voluntary “social resignation”.

The revealed practices of exclusion and artificial construction of the image testify to the unjustified spread of hate speech, which can be equated to the same aggression, oppression, which is experienced by older person as victims of rapists and fraudsters. Therefore, it should be said that this is not only an issue of gerontophobia in the media, but also in society as a whole. The media, on the one hand, spread what happens in society, and on the other hand, determine what stereotype of old age will appear in the mass consciousness. The role of the media is growing tremendously in the context of population aging, which requires the use of systematic and systematic practices by both the media and the state and civil society. It is positive practices, including from and with the help of the media themselves that may be the subject of future intelligence. Interesting in terms of research is the media content, which destroys the ingrained negative stereotypes of old age, and the image of older person is the embodiment of new positive meanings.

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