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## Visual representations of Russia's war against Ukraine in the socio-political weekly *Wprost* (2022–2024)

### Abstract

The article examines the visual images of the covers of the weekly *Wprost* on the topic of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine in 2022–2024. In the context of information warfare, the analysis of visual images in the media becomes critical to understanding their impact on the formation of public consciousness. The thematic covers of the weekly are considered as an example of the original practice of using visual representations in a journalistic context, and the social responsibility of the publication through the initiatives they offer is analyzed. This makes the study valuable in the context of understanding the mechanisms of influence of visual content on the coverage of complex socio-political issues.

**Keywords:** Russia's war against Ukraine, visual representations, soft power, *Wprost*

Russia's war against Ukraine has been going on for 11 years, and its full-scale phase has lasted more than 800 days. During this time, the world has irrevocably changed: a large part of it, based on democratic values, supports Ukraine's desire to preserve its statehood, while another part, professing authoritarian and totalitarian values, provides military assistance and political support to Russia. Such an unprecedented military intervention in the center of Europe, unprecedented in its scale and consequences, cannot help but attract daily attention of the world media. Thousands of world journalists are now broadcasting events in Ukraine to the general public through their periodicals. The Polish weekly *Wprost*, whose concept was developed

based on the format of such magazines as *Time* and *Newsweek*,<sup>1</sup> is no exception. Since the coronavirus pandemic, the magazine has been published online only, which helps to further popularize the news published there. According to the results of the Mediapanel study prepared by *Wirtualne media*, in August 2022, *Wprost.pl* was visited by 8.16 million Internet users, each of whom spent an average of 6 minutes and 7 seconds on the site – the best indicator among the 10 most popular pages of Polish weekly magazines.<sup>2</sup>

Since February 2022, the editors of the weekly have devoted about 20 covers to the events of Russia's war against Ukraine, supporting the information on the pages with visual images. Given that images allow us to "see" a concept, idea, or physical object even when it is not in front of our eyes, images have undoubtedly become one of the foundations of human understanding of the world and an important means of receiving, expressing, and transmitting information.<sup>3</sup> Throughout its existence, humanity has been trying to store and transmit information. Initially, it was important for basic survival, and later it grew into a desire to pass on knowledge to future generations. The press plays an important role in preserving and transmitting information, and in recent years, it has been dynamically adapting to the technological requirements of the times. Today, the functions of the media are changing and gaining new meaning. Harold Laswell, an American political scientist and communication theorist, identified three basic components of the media: monitoring events and changes in society, shaping public reaction to events, and broadcasting cultural values.<sup>4</sup>

It is noteworthy that in the twenty-first century, the image has gained almost equal weight in the press with the word itself. With the advent of the Internet, the world has been filled with billions of images that begin to interact with readers on their own, influencing their thoughts and shaping their views. According to the classification of the Polish researcher Piotr Sztompka, there are three criteria that visual images have and that should be taken into account:

- creation technique (this includes various subtypes of visual images – painting, photography, digital image, performance, etc.; all of them are united by the possibility of multiple reproduction);

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<sup>1</sup> Millard, F. (1998). Democratization and the Media in Poland 1989–1997. *Democratization*, 5(2), 85–105. <https://tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13510349808403560> [accessed 10.11.2023].

<sup>2</sup> Wirtualne media. (2023). *Wprost.pl z 8 mln internautów, Niezależna i wPolityce przyciągają na najdłużej*. <https://www.wirtualnemedia.pl/arttykul/wprost-pl-z-8-mln-internautow-niezalezna-i-wpolityce-przyciagaja-na-najdluzej> [accessed 15.11.2023].

<sup>3</sup> Ma, X. (2022, April). A review of the studies on social media images from the perspective of information interaction. *ScienceDirect*, 6(1), 100004. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2543925122001024> [accessed 12.10.2023].

<sup>4</sup> Parubets, O. (2014). Functions of the press in the context of media system transformation. *Osvita rehionu*, 4, 55. <http://social-science.uu.edu.ua/article/1279> [accessed 16.10.2023].

- localization (media space, city square, museum, gallery; each individual place determines the specifics of the perception of the object);
- function (here, it is important to note what exactly the image does and what its purpose is – aesthetic, informational, commercial, etc.).<sup>5</sup>

It is important to note that visual representations are not limited to one form. They can take on different formats, each with its own unique benefits and uses, and contemplation of visuals can affect cognitive reactions and memory.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, it is not without reason that journalists often use visualization to enhance the emotional component of information content.

Russia's full-scale invasion into Ukraine on February 24, 2022, received a lot of publicity: for 5 weeks in a row, the front page of the *Wprost* weekly was occupied by news about Ukraine, which was presented in a creative way, including through the use of thematically designed magazine covers. For example, in issues 7/22 (2024) and 11/2022 (2028), the metaphorical image of a bear was used as a symbol of Russia. In the first case, it symbolized the impending crisis,<sup>7</sup> and in the second case, it symbolized the Russians' denial of unauthorized methods of warfare.<sup>8</sup> Notably, the very fact that this image appeared is interesting. One of the first uses of the phraseology "Russian bear" is recorded in William Shakespeare's tragedy *Macbeth* (Act 3, Scene 4), where the protagonist mentions a "harsh Russian bear." The use of the word "Russian bear" in *Macbeth*'s remark was rather an image of wildness and untamedness, as this is what most Europeans of the time associated with Russia.<sup>9</sup>

The issue 8/2022 (2025) is also worthy of note, in which the Polish editorial board addressed Ukrainians on the cover with a simple and clear message: "Ukrainians, we are with you."<sup>10</sup> From the first days of the full-scale invasion, the Poles stood shoulder to shoulder with the Ukrainians, helping in every way possible in the fight against the aggressor. Their help is illustrated on the cover of 9/2022 (2026), where the red hand of the Russian invasion from the East seems to be holding out refugees in its palm, and the light hand of the West is covering them from the weather.<sup>11</sup> It is also significant that, according to *Wprost*, the most influential people in Poland in 2022 were all Poles

<sup>5</sup> Sztompka, P. (2008). *Socjologia wizualna*. Polska Akademia Nauk.

<sup>6</sup> Psychology Tips. (2023). *Visual Imagery*. [https://psychology.tips/visual-imagery/?utm\\_content=cmp-true](https://psychology.tips/visual-imagery/?utm_content=cmp-true) [accessed 18.12.2023].

<sup>7</sup> Wprost. (2022). *Issue: 7/2022 (2024)*. <https://www.wprost.pl/tygodnik/archiwum/2024/Wprost-7-2022.html> [accessed 21.11.2023].

<sup>8</sup> Wprost. (2022). *Issue: 11/2022 (2028)*. <https://www.wprost.pl/tygodnik/archiwum/2028/Wprost-11-2022.html> [accessed 26.11.2023].

<sup>9</sup> Platoff, A. M. (2012). The "Forward Russia" Flag: Examining the Changing Use of the Bear as a Symbol of Russia. *A Journal of Vexillology*.

<sup>10</sup> Wprost. (2022). *Issue: 8/2022 (2025)*. <https://www.wprost.pl/tygodnik/archiwum/2025/Wprost-8-2022.html> [accessed 01.12.2023].

<sup>11</sup> Wprost. (2022). *Issue: 9/2022 (2026)*. <https://www.wprost.pl/tygodnik/archiwum/2026/Wprost-9-2022.html> [accessed 05.12.2023].

who helped Ukrainians who were forced to flee the war<sup>12</sup> – it is demonstrated on the cover of the issue 45/2022 (2062).<sup>13</sup>

The cover of the next issue (10/2022 (2027)) is much deeper in content and tells the story of Ukrainian refugees.<sup>14</sup> In the foreground, a child is holding the hand of an adult who is leading her through the bad weather to safety. Behind her is a knapsack house with smoke coming from the fireplace, as if to tell the reader that someone has just been there, or perhaps that this house was taken “on the shoulders” in a hurry and the fire in the stove is still smoldering. The house has been uprooted, and it is not known whether it will ever be possible to return. The fact that the central characters are not alone adds to the dynamics of these images – people are running *en masse* behind them. The theme of the weekly’s cover was not accidental, as according to *Forbes* and *Radio Svoboda*, as of November 2022, Poland has accepted about 42% of the total number of all Ukrainian refugees<sup>15</sup> of whom the vast majority are children and women, most often aged 35–49.<sup>16</sup>

The cover of issue 14/2022 (2031) reflected the reaction to the de-occupation of Kyiv region and revealed the inhuman crimes committed by the Russian military.<sup>17</sup> In the image, you can see the entrance to one’s cozy house with the inscription “Sweet Home” on the rug. However, it is immediately obvious that the murderers have been here: the bullet-riddled door and the reproduction of a stunningly painful photograph of a woman’s hand with red manicure. The author of the image, which was used for this cover, is Reuters photographer Zohra Bonsemra.<sup>18</sup> The central image is the hand

<sup>12</sup> Potocka, J. (2023, March 6). Ranking of the most influential Poles according to Wprost. *RMF24*. [https://www.rmfm24.pl/fakty/polska/news-ranking-najbardziej-wplywowych-polakow-wg-wprost,nId,6409848#crp\\_state=1](https://www.rmfm24.pl/fakty/polska/news-ranking-najbardziej-wplywowych-polakow-wg-wprost,nId,6409848#crp_state=1) [accessed 10.12.2023].

<sup>13</sup> Wprost. (2022). *Issue:45/2022 (2062)*. <https://www.wprost.pl/tygodnik/archiwum/2062/Wprost-45-2022.html> [accessed 12.12.2023].

<sup>14</sup> Wprost. (2022). *Issue:10/2022 (2027)*. <https://www.wprost.pl/tygodnik/archiwum/2027/Wprost-10-2022.html> [accessed 15.12.2023].

<sup>15</sup> Kalashnyk, P. (2023, September 5). Better at home? Up to 3.3 million refugees may not return to Ukraine, costing 7% of GDP. Key points from the CES demographic report. *Forbes*. <https://forbes.ua/money/bizhentsi-doslidzhennya-0409202315788#:~:text=%D0%A3%20%D0%BF%D0%BE%D1%80%D1%96%D0%B2%D0%BD%D1%8F%D0%BD%D0%BD%D1%96%20%D0%B7%20%D0%BA%D1%96%D0%BD%D1%86%D0%B5%D0%BC%202022,%2C%20%D1%83%20%D0%9F%D0%BE%D0%BB%D1%8C%D1%89%D1%96%20%E2%80%93%20990%20000%20> [accessed 18.12.2023].

<sup>16</sup> Horban, M. (2023, September 7). Ukrainian Refugees May Remain Abroad: Research. *Radio Svoboda*. <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/ukrayinski-bizhentsi-mozhut-zalyshytysya-za-kordonom-doslidzhennya/32582546.html> [accessed 20.12.2023].

<sup>17</sup> Wprost. (2022). *Issue: 14/2022 (2031)*. <https://www.wprost.pl/tygodnik/archiwum/2031/Wprost-14-2022.html> [accessed 25.12.2023].

<sup>18</sup> Gardner, S. (2022, 11 April). In Ukrainian Street, a Corpse with Hands Bound and a Bullet Wound to the Head. Reuters. <https://widerimage.reuters.com/story/>

of Iryna Filkina from Bucha, one of the hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians whose lives were taken by the war. Obviously, the Western viewer was disturbed to realize how similar to the average European world Ukrainians lived in before the full-scale invasion – the same rugs used with the desire to make the house more cozy and the gel polish on women's nails that is applied in beauty salons all around the world.

The next cover of the weekly 15/2022 (2032) was equally heartbreaking. Against the backdrop of the de-occupied territories, an angel in work clothes cleans up the ruins, using his own wing instead of a broom. Illustrator Paweł Kuczyński managed to subtly reflect the emotional shock of the world from what it has experienced and the fact that it does not negate the need to continue living. It is worth noting that almost half of the articles in this issue are devoted to the topic of war. The cover of the issue itself has increased collective attention to the consequences of war, which usually do not come to the public's attention.<sup>19</sup> This magazine also found a place to cover the "Victory Parade" in Moscow.<sup>20</sup> The journalistic text was also supported by an image in which artist P. Kuczyński ironically demonstrated the "power" of the Russian army and the lack of new equipment at the parade by depicting one damaged tank and three soldiers nearby. The parade was one of the smallest in history: no foreign leaders attended, and the event lasted about 45 minutes. In contrast to the Russian parade, a parade of destroyed Russian equipment was organized in the capital of Ukraine.<sup>21</sup> The Ministry of Defense of Ukraine commented: "In February, the Russians planned a parade in the center of Kyiv. Six months after the outbreak of full-scale war, this shameful display of rusty Russian metal is a reminder to all dictators that their plans can be thwarted by a free and courageous nation."<sup>22</sup>

Russia as an aggressor appeared in many issues of the magazine in 2022, in particular, the cover of issue 22/2022 (2039) illustrated the unclear position of French President Emmanuel Macron and the pro-Russian position of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, who constantly tried to persuade the West to cooperate with Russia.<sup>23</sup> On the eve of the war, V. Orban visited Moscow and emphasized the long-term cooperation

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in-ukrainian-street-a-corpse-with-hands-bound-and-a-bullet-wound-to-the-head [accessed 02.01.2024].

<sup>19</sup> Bradford, V. (2007). *In the Regard of the Image*, 27(3/4), 471–504.

<sup>20</sup> Wprost. (2022). *Issue: 18/2022 (2035)*. <https://www.wprost.pl/tygodnik/archiwum/2035/Wprost-18-2022.html> [accessed 10.01.2024].

<sup>21</sup> Reuters. (2022). *Ukraine Puts Destroyed Russian Tanks on Display*. <https://www.reuters.com/news/picture/ukraine-puts-destroyed-russian-tanks-on-idUSRTS82NEY> [accessed 15.01.2024].

<sup>22</sup> Twitter. (2022, August 20). *Defense of Ukraine*. [https://twitter.com/DefenceU/status/1560933336557801472?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1560933336557801472%7Ctwgr%5E4b277cf8646b9dd647e424e208d82066255969fe%7Ctwcon%5Es1\\_%ref\\_url=https%3A%2Fpulsembd.eu%2Fp2em%2F0si200N%2F](https://twitter.com/DefenceU/status/1560933336557801472?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1560933336557801472%7Ctwgr%5E4b277cf8646b9dd647e424e208d82066255969fe%7Ctwcon%5Es1_%ref_url=https%3A%2Fpulsembd.eu%2Fp2em%2F0si200N%2F) [accessed 20.01.2024].

<sup>23</sup> Wprost. (2022). *Issue: 22/2022 (2039)*. <https://www.wprost.pl/tygodnik/archiwum/2039/Wprost-22-2022.html> [accessed 25.01.2024].

between the two countries.<sup>24</sup> Meanwhile, E. Macron reported that since December, he had had more than 100 hours of phone conversations with the Russian president.<sup>25</sup> The latter was presented in the weekly in various roles, for example, as Adolf Hitler (instead of a mustache, the main manipulative tool of the Russians was a battery with Russian gas) 38/2022 (2055).<sup>26</sup> This image won the main prize of the All-Ukrainian Oleksandr Volos Press Drawing Contest.<sup>27</sup> In addition to this image, there was also a suicidal man preparing to use nuclear weapons 40/22 (2057)<sup>28</sup> or an autumn tree on the roadside that is gradually falling off 27/2023 (2095).<sup>29</sup> In general, it is worth noting that the editors of the magazine use the covers to form a certain visual narrative that evokes a range of emotions and encourages analysis.

This war is one of the first to be actively broadcast online, and it has a certain surreal tone. Issue 32/2022 (2051) shows a viewer sitting in front of a large TV screen watching Ukrainian houses burning while soldiers nearby protect him from a possible attack.<sup>30</sup> These contrasts are also shown in the December issue of 50/2022 (2067), which depicts the perspective of a long Christmas feast table, with children and their mother sitting on one side and soldiers eating austere dinner in a trench on the other.<sup>31</sup> This was the first Christmas after the full-scale invasion, cold, divided, but emotionally united for the whole of Ukraine. It is worth noting that the following year, the 52/2023 (2120) Christmas cover of the weekly also focused on military events.<sup>32</sup> It is proportionally divided into two parts: the outer, smaller one, where destroyed houses and military equipment are visible, and the inner one, where the ground is covered with

<sup>24</sup> Herszenhorn, D. M. and Bayer, L. (2022, February 1). Strongmen strut their stuff as Orbán visits Putin in Russia. *Politico*. <https://www.politico.eu/article/viktor-orban-vladimir-putin-hungary-russia-kremlin-meeting/> [accessed 30.01.2024].

<sup>25</sup> Sabbagh, D. (2022, 4 June). Russia Must Not Be Humiliated, Says Emmanuel Macron. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jun/04/russia-must-not-be-humiliated-ukraine-emmanuel-macron> [accessed 05.02.2024].

<sup>26</sup> Wprost. (2022). *Issue: 38/2022 (2055)*. <https://www.wprost.pl/tygodnik/archiwum/2055/Wprost-38-2022.html> [accessed 10.02.2024].

<sup>27</sup> Wprost. (2023). *Autor okładek „Wprost” z kolejną nagrodą. II miejsce w międzynarodowym konkursie*. <https://www.wprost.pl/kultura/11413648/autor-okladek-wprost-z-kolejna-nagroda-ii-miejsce-w-miedzynarodowym-konkursie.html> [accessed 15.02.2024].

<sup>28</sup> Wprost. (2022). *Issue: 40/2022 (2057)*. <https://www.wprost.pl/tygodnik/archiwum/2057/Wprost-40-2022.html> [accessed 20.02.2024].

<sup>29</sup> Wprost. (2023). *Issue: 27/2023 (2095)*. <https://www.wprost.pl/tygodnik/archiwum/2095/Wprost-27-2023.html> [accessed 25.02.2024].

<sup>30</sup> Wprost. (2022). *Issue: 34/2022 (2051)*. <https://www.wprost.pl/tygodnik/archiwum/2051/Wprost-34-2022.html> [accessed 01.03.2024].

<sup>31</sup> Wprost. (2022). *Issue: 50/2022 (2067)*. <https://www.wprost.pl/tygodnik/archiwum/2067/Wprost-50-2022.html> [accessed 05.03.2024].

<sup>32</sup> Wprost. (2023). *Issue: 52/2023 (2120)*. <https://www.wprost.pl/tygodnik/archiwum/2120/Wprost-52-2023.html> [accessed 10.03.2024].



large cracks in the shape of a Christmas tree (indicating the holiday season), and soldiers with candles are hiding in each "branch" (trench). This symbolizes the protracted period of war in which Ukraine is currently engaged. In addition, while the Christmas cover of issue 50/2022 (2067) had a slightly warmer atmosphere due to the predominance of light colors, the cover of issue 52/2023 (2120) has a much darker palette and the soldiers are exhausted, symbolizing the complexity of the war.

In 2023, *Wprost* continued to create thematic covers, highlighting German Chancellor O. Scholz's indecision to provide military aid to Ukraine (4/2023 (2072)),<sup>33</sup> Ukraine's firm position on Russian war crimes (24/2023 (2092)),<sup>34</sup> and Ukraine's desperate attempts to obtain weapons to fight the occupier (33/2023 (2101)).<sup>35</sup> Issue 9/2023 (2077) demonstrates America's continued support.<sup>36</sup> The cover theme of this issue reflects the confrontation between the two powers of America and Russia. The cover depicts the Russian president sitting alone and isolated in a room at a long, empty table, while the much larger American president is outside the window, open to communication. The image used is inspired by real events, namely J. Biden's visit to Kyiv on February 20, 2023, and Putin's meetings with world leaders on the eve of a full-scale invasion at the long table. J. Biden's visit was a demonstrative gesture of support for Ukraine by its strongest ally on the eve of the first anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion.<sup>37</sup> In an official statement, the White House said that J. Biden had come to reaffirm "Ukraine's unwavering and unwavering commitment to democracy, sovereignty and territorial integrity."<sup>38</sup> It is worth noting that the visit made a great impression on the international community and was widely covered by the world media, as the US President visited the capital of a warring country, demonstrating support for Ukraine in every possible way.<sup>39</sup> Meanwhile, the long oval table at which V. Putin met with E. Macron and A. Scholz and which was used to emphasize the image of the

<sup>33</sup> Wprost. (2023). *Issue: 4/2023 (2072)*. <https://www.wprost.pl/tygodnik/archiwum/2072/Wprost-4-2023.html> [accessed 15.03.2024].

<sup>34</sup> Wprost. (2023). *Issue: 24/2023 (2092)*. <https://www.wprost.pl/tygodnik/archiwum/2092/Wprost-24-2023.html> [accessed 20.03.2024].

<sup>35</sup> Wprost. (2023). *Issue: 33/2023 (2101)*. <https://www.wprost.pl/tygodnik/archiwum/2101/Wprost-33-2023.html> [accessed 25.03.2024].

<sup>36</sup> Wprost. (2023). *Issue: 9/2023 (2077)*. <https://www.wprost.pl/tygodnik/archiwum/2077/Wprost-9-2023.html> [accessed 30.03.2024].

<sup>37</sup> Welt. (2023). "Putin's war of conquest is about to fail," says US President Biden. <https://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/article243860437/Ukraine-Joe-Biden-reist-nach-Kiew-Putins-Eroberungskrieg-steht-vor-dem-Scheitern.html> [accessed 05.04.2024].

<sup>38</sup> US Embassy in Ukraine. (2023). *Statement from President Joe Biden on Travel to Kyiv*. <https://ua.usembassy.gov/uk/statement-from-president-joe-biden-on-travel-to-kyiv-ukraine/> [accessed 10.04.2024].

<sup>39</sup> Wprost. (2023). *Issue: 9/2023 (2077)*. <https://www.wprost.pl/tygodnik/archiwum/2077/Wprost-9-2023.html> [accessed 15.04.2024].

Russian dictators strong power<sup>40</sup> became a well-known Internet meme, depicted as an ice rink, a tennis court, and a swing.<sup>41</sup>

The September cover of 36/2023 (2104) featured Pope Francis riding in a papal car attached to a Russian tank with a distinctive “Z” on it.<sup>42</sup> It was unexpected to see such a visual image in the influential media of a Catholic country, but there were reasons for this. On the eve of the issue’s release, the Pope urged young Russians not to abandon the imperial heritage of Russia under Peter the Great and Catherine the Great, thus demonstrating support for the Kremlin’s narrative. Although everyone knows that all they have demonstrated and continue to demonstrate is the oppression and enslavement of other peoples. In general, the Pope’s position in this war is quite ambiguous: on the one hand, he meets with Ukrainian children and kisses the Ukrainian flag,<sup>43</sup> and on the other hand, he believes that Russian propagandist Daria Dugina was an innocent victim<sup>44</sup> and encourages Ukrainian and Russian women to carry a cross during the pre-Easter procession, equating the suffering of both peoples.<sup>45</sup>

In 2024, the weekly continued to cover important events of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Thus, in February, the cover depicted V. Orban smiling at dictator V. Putin and burying one of the EU’s stars (6/2024 (2126)).<sup>46</sup> The image illustrated Hungary’s veto of the European Union’s decision to allocate 50 billion euros from the EU budget to Ukraine.<sup>47</sup> It is important to emphasize that V. Orban is the only EU leader to have

<sup>40</sup> Holmes, O. (2022, 8 February). Putin’s massive table: powerplay or paranoia?. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/08/vladimir-putin-massive-table> [accessed 20.04.2024].

<sup>41</sup> Balmer, C. (2022, 15 February). To Russia with love: vast Italian table in Kremlin turns heads. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-with-love-vast-italian-table-kremlin-turns-heads-2022-02-15/> [accessed 25.04.2024].

<sup>42</sup> Wprost. (2023). *Issue: 36/2023 (2104)*. <https://www.wprost.pl/tygodnik/archiwum/2104/Wprost-36-2023.html> [accessed 30.04.2024].

<sup>43</sup> Rzeczpospolita. (2022). *Papież Franciszek Ucałował Flagę Ukrainy z Buczy*. <https://www.rp.pl/kosciol/art36022911-papiez-franciszek-ucalowal-flage-ukrainy-z-buczy> [accessed 05.05.2024].

<sup>44</sup> Pulella, P. (2022, August 22). Ukraine envoy criticizes pope over comments on Russian killed by car bomb. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/pope-warns-potential-nuclear-disaster-ukraines-zaporizhzhia-plant-2022-08-24/> [accessed 10.05.2024].

<sup>45</sup> TVN24. (2022). *Droga krzyżowa z udziałem papieża Franciszka. Ukrainka i Rosjanka wspólnie trzymały krzyż*. <https://tvn24.pl/swiat/rzym-droga-krzyzowa-z-udzialem-papieza-franciszka-ukrainka-i-rosjanka-wspolnie-trzymaly-krzyz-st5676922> [accessed 15.05.2024].

<sup>46</sup> Wprost. (2024). *Issue: 6/2024 (2126)*. <https://www.wprost.pl/tygodnik/archiwum/2126/Wprost-6-2024.html> [accessed 20.05.2024].

<sup>47</sup> O’Carroll, L. (2023, December 15). Hungary Blocks €50bn in EU Aid for Ukraine Hours After Membership Talks Approved. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/dec/15/>



met with the Russian president after the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for him in March 2023.<sup>48</sup>

The images created by the covers of the *Wprost* weekly are part of the so-called soft power. The term “soft power” was first coined by American political scientist Joseph Nye in the late 1980s to describe the ability of one country to influence others or shape the opinions of its citizens through culture and ideas, rather than through economic or military means.<sup>49</sup> In the visual context, soft power can be manifested through the impact of visible images and their combinations on the collective consciousness and emotional state of society – sometimes the result is manifested before the viewer is aware of the content they consume. Visual images, like drawings, reflect the views of the author. So who created the images that are the subject of our research? Many of them are the works of the world-famous Polish artist and philosopher Paweł Kuczynski, who has received more than 140 awards and honors.<sup>50</sup> His style is quite recognizable, and his drawings interact with the viewer, prompting them to reflect on important social, economic, and political topics. If we analyze the works he created according to P. Stompka's classification, the technique of their creation is graphics, the location is the Internet, and the main function is to convey information. In addition, the author claims that such a wide publicity and prolonged public attention to the drawings surprises him<sup>51</sup> In fact, there is nothing surprising in this – they resonate in the minds of readers because they speak about important things.

Creating and publishing such digitalized images and images makes an important contribution to setting the record straight and shaping the public's understanding of events. A study conducted at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology showed that people can process images in as little as 13 milliseconds – eight times faster than

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hungary-blocks-50bn-in-eu-aid-for-ukraine-hours-after-membership-talks-were-approved [accessed 25.05.2024].

<sup>48</sup> Sadecki, A. (2023, October 19). Orbán-Putin meeting in Beijing: Hungary getting further and further away from the West. *OSW*. <https://www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/analizy/2023-10-19/spotkanie-orban-putin-w-pekinie-wegry-coraz-dalej-od-zachodu> [accessed 30.05.2024].

<sup>49</sup> Sassen, S. (2013, April 22). The End of Power: Why Being in Charge Isn't What It Used to Be. *Americas Quarterly*. <https://www.americasquarterly.org/fulltextarticle/the-end-of-power-from-boardrooms-to-battlefields-and-churches-to-states-why-being-in-charge-isnt-what-it-used-to-be-i-by-moises-naim/> [accessed 07.05.2024].

<sup>50</sup> Pictorem. (2023). *Paweł Kuczynski's Profile*. <https://www.pictorem.com/profile/Pawel.Kuczynski> [accessed 10.05.2024].

<sup>51</sup> Niesłuchowska, A. (2022, June 12). Author of the notorious “Wprost” cover story: I'm not interested in what Scholz and Macron think about my work. *Wprost*. <https://www.wprost.pl/kraj/10747660/okladka-wprost-komentowana-na-calym-swiecie-autor-zabral-glos.html> [accessed 16.05.2024].

previously thought.<sup>52</sup> This means that digital images can quickly influence public opinion by providing instantaneous information.

It is worth noting that the support of the weekly's creators was not only in articles and images, but also in practice: since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, *Wprost* has created a separate bilingual page, [www.wprostukraine.eu](http://www.wprostukraine.eu), where they still publish the most important news and practical information for Ukrainians living in Poland. The main goal of this page is to support Ukrainian journalists, as well as to fight disinformation on the Internet and debunk fake news.<sup>53</sup> The project was funded in the amount of PLN 4,030,296.40 by the Prime Minister's Office as part of the public task "Assistance to Ukrainian journalists and the Ukrainian community in Poland – popularization of knowledge and formation of public awareness of refugees from Ukraine."

All of the above prompts us to ask: What is the actual power of images in creating journalistic impact? The research findings reflect the majority view that images can be agents of change.<sup>54</sup> In the case of Russia's war against Ukraine, we can see that images in the media have become an integral part of political news coverage. Such images have a powerful potential to focus attention, condense information, encourage further reading and searching, and inspire the reader to take further actions related to civic engagement. Nevertheless, there are certain requirements for such images: they evoke a reaction when they correlate with such categories as emotionality, newsworthy information, controversy, relevance, etc.<sup>55</sup> Each thematic cover created by the weekly had the following characteristics, encouraging the reader to interact with the content, which can be traced on their Instagram account.<sup>56</sup> In an article exploring the visual as a source of historical research, Oleh Rabenchuk emphasizes that modern visual media are an important way of recording, storing, and communicating historical knowledge that organically complements verbal means.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Trafton, A. (2014, January 16). In the Blink of an Eye. *MIT News*. <https://news.mit.edu/2014/in-the-blink-of-an-eye-0116> [accessed 21.05.2024].

<sup>53</sup> Media for Ukraine. (2023). *Media for Ukraine*. <https://mediaforukraine.org/> [accessed 26.05.2024].

<sup>54</sup> Dahmen, N., Miller, K. C., and Walth, B. (2021, January). The Power of Images? Visual Journalists' Assessment of the Impact of Imagery. *Visual Communication Quarterly*, 28(1), 34–44. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349981243\\_The\\_Power\\_of\\_Images\\_Visual\\_Journalists'\\_Assessment\\_of\\_the\\_Impact\\_of\\_Imagery](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349981243_The_Power_of_Images_Visual_Journalists'_Assessment_of_the_Impact_of_Imagery) [accessed 27.05.2024].

<sup>55</sup> Geise, S., Heck, A., and Panke, D. (2020, February 21). The Effects of Digital Media Images on Political Participation Online: Results of an Eye-Tracking Experiment Integrating Individual Perceptions of "Photo News Factors". *Policy & Internet*, 13, 54–85. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/poi3.235> [accessed 18.05.2024].

<sup>56</sup> Instagram. (2023). *Tygodnik Wprost*. <https://www.instagram.com/tygodnikwprost/> [accessed 28.05.2024].

<sup>57</sup> Rabenchuk, O. (2012). On the Question of the Visual as a Source of Historical Research. *Ukraine of the XX Century: Culture, Ideology, Politics*, 17, 29–39. [http://history.org.ua/JournALL/xxx/xxx\\_2012\\_17/4.pdf](http://history.org.ua/JournALL/xxx/xxx_2012_17/4.pdf) [accessed 21.05.2024].

Summarizing the above, it should be emphasized that visual images of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine have become a frequent theme of the covers of the Polish socio-political weekly *Wprost*. The magazine's editorial board actively broadcasts key events both in the format of articles and visuals. The most prolific author of visual content for *Wprost*, Pawel Kuczynski, gained international recognition and received an award for one of his images. It was his images that became the most striking visuals of this period in the Polish cultural space. In general, by creating a cultural and emotional narrative, the weekly *Wprost* not only reproduces events, but also effectively shapes emotional perception and collective social consciousness, calling for practical actions to help Ukraine. The analysis of the weekly's information content, especially visual content, suggests that the weekly's staff is actively fighting fakes and Russian propaganda in the information sphere, presenting a high-quality selection of news not only for Polish but also for Ukrainian and European readers.

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