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Digital media as a tool of information resistance: the economic and communication dimension of the Telex platform in wartime

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Abstract. *From an economic as well as communication point of view, this paper focuses on the role of the Telex digital platform as an instrument of information resistance during wartime. Study objectives include determining the value of Telex in promoting independent information access in censored, digitally repressive and militarily conflicted environments. The paper explores how Telex fits into the entire ecosystem of digital resistance, making sure communication continues, helping put independent media in front of audience and also sustaining engagement in civic space under authoritarianism.*



Research methodology uses comparative analysis, case observation and interpretation of secondary data sources such as platform analytics, policy reports and media coverage. Special focus on the connection of Telex usage and important geopolitical events such as information blockade and disinformation campaign are provided. The study further examines how democratic states and non-governmental organizations conducting digital diplomacy respond to Telex.

The results show that Telex provides a technically resilient and economically viable method for getting around internet censorship. It relies on cooperating ISPs to provide widespread, low cost adoption in low income, high risk regions and is integrated with existing browser infrastructure. But at the level access is uninterrupted it means the platform's support for the continued financial sustainability of independent journalism is indirect. Moreover, Telex facilitates two-way communication between journalists in exile and repressive state audiences building civic resilience and strategic information flows.

The conclusions argue that the platform not alone as a tool of technological circumvention, but also as an element of a number of international attempts in soft power projection and information security. But it is hampered by legal uncertainties, geographical differences between the regions in digital literacy and lack of institutional backing. There is further research needed to further understand the scalability and awareness challenge and to explore avenues of its integration into national policy frameworks.

Keywords: *digital resistance, civic engagement, media sustainability, censorship circumvention, information access, soft power, digital inequality, wartime communication, information economy, platform governance.*



Цифрові медіа як інструмент інформаційного опору: економічний та комунікаційний вимір платформи Telex у воєнний час

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Анотація. *З економічної та комунікаційної точки зору, ця стаття зосереджена на ролі цифрової платформи Telex як інструменту інформаційного опору під час війни. Цілі дослідження включають визначення цінності Telex у просуванні незалежного доступу до інформації в цензурованих, цифрових репресивних та військово-конфліктних середовищах. У статті досліджується, як Telex вписується в усю екосистему цифрового опору, забезпечуючи продовження комунікації, допомагаючи представити незалежні ЗМІ аудиторії, а також підтримуючи залученість у громадянський простір в умовах авторитаризму.*

Методологія дослідження використовує порівняльний аналіз, спостереження за випадками та інтерпретацію вторинних джерел даних, таких як аналітика платформи, політичні звіти та висвітлення в ЗМІ. Особлива увага приділяється зв'язку використання Telex та важливих



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геополітичних подій, таких як інформаційна блокада та дезінформаційна кампанія. У дослідженні також розглядається, як демократичні держави та неурядові організації, що проводять цифрову дипломатію, реагують на Telex.

Результати показують, що Telex забезпечує технічно стійкий та економічно життєздатний метод обходу інтернет-цензури. Він спирається на співпрацюючих інтернет-провайдерів для забезпечення широкого та недорогого впровадження в регіонах з низьким рівнем доходу та високим рівнем ризику, та інтегрований з існуючою інфраструктурою браузера. Але на рівні безперебійного доступу це означає, що підтримка платформою подальшої фінансової стійкості незалежної журналістики є непрямую. Більше того, Telex сприяє двосторонньому спілкуванню між журналістами у вигнанні та аудиторією репресивної держави, зміцнюючи громадянську стійкість та стратегічні інформаційні потоки.

У висновках стверджується, що платформа є не лише інструментом технологічного обходу, але й елементом низки міжнародних спроб проєкції м'якої сили та інформаційної безпеки. Однак цьому перешкоджають правова невизначеність, географічні відмінності між регіонами в цифровій грамотності та відсутність інституційної підтримки. Потрібні подальші дослідження для кращого розуміння проблеми масштабованості та обізнаності, а також для вивчення шляхів її інтеграції в національні політичні рамки.

Ключові слова: *цифровий опір, громадянська активність, сталість медіа, обхід цензури, доступ до інформації, м'яка сила, цифрова нерівність, комунікація воєнного часу, інформаційна економіка, управління платформами.*

Problem statement and its relevance to scientific and practical tasks. With authoritarian regimes around the world relying more and more on digital censorship



as a tool of control in today's world, the challenge of making independent information available to people has never been greater [1]. Although such mechanisms do not exist now, the general problem concerns the absence of secure, scalable and accessible means to resist information suppression, most notably during armed conflicts when communication is most needed. However, traditional tools such as VPNs or proxy servers often don't cut it anymore [2]. Maybe they have become too technical, are not allowed by law or are too expensive and large numbers of people around the world are left without a means to access truthful information.

Not only is this a theoretical problem; it carries important practical consequences. In its effect, it directly impacts the independence of the media, the safety of civil society actors and the more general strength of democratic communication during crisis. Based on Telex platform, this thesis presents a new approach in this field whose economic, communicative and strategic dimensions have, unfortunately, been underspecified in academic discourse.

Through investigating these aspects, the research solves the problems both of a scientific and a practical nature: to deepen knowledge about how digital tools may serve as instruments of information resistance and provide the information to policymakers, journalists and international organizations who face the challenges of protecting freedom of speech and information security in authoritarian and wartime circumstances.

Analysis of recent research and publications. For the past five years, research has grown on how digital media, disinformation and platform-based resistance are serving in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war. Consequently, these studies show how the ever-growing complexity of narrative warfare necessitates technological solutions for access to truthful information. Aleksejeva explains how Russian state media redacted the construction of justifications for aggression to narrative manipulation, revealing that disinformation is enshrined in authoritarian communication as a system, deeply established in the authoritarian communication



system [1]. Alieva, Kloo and Carley build on this work by analyzing these dynamics through a mixed method network analysis that uncovers scale and structure of the propaganda on social media (i.e., Twitter) during the 2022 invasion [2]. A strength of their work is the key role decentralized resistance plays but practical technological responses are left under explored.

Both Asmolov [3] and Ciuriak [4] stress the advent of science fiction war fought by participants and as participated in through social and participatory media as features of modern warfare. Digital narratives, they say, are mobilizing but without stipulating how secure platforms can mitigate repression structurally.

This view is extended by Cleveland et al. [5] and Jabeen et al. [10] who examine the psychological and behavioral fallout from prolonged exposure to that content, especially among vulnerable or migrant populations. These findings further support the need for not just platforms to get you back to independent consumption of content but also providing for your mental and informational well-being.

Also, the cultural and social aspects of information war have been focused on. Farago [6] and French and Sagaidak [7] construct a cultural conflict by disclosing how art, history and collective memory are weaponized in digital discourse, explaining the Russia-Ukraine war. Journalistic resistance and content-based dissidence are studied by Hasan [8] and Hasan [9] in which they discuss the ways an independent media and dissidents attacked authoritarian disinformation using, among other things, subversive media tactics and the role of cultural and civic sanctions. Although they describe content strategies, the infrastructural mechanisms to provide safe access to these sorts of media are insufficiently examined.

Kot et al. [11] and Protas and Bulavina [14] investigate how digital popular art alters war time visual narrations and how cultural content is capable of holding symbolic and discursive power in creating public perception and identity. This is then developed by Ruble who documents the mobilization by Ukrainian artists as a form of nonviolent resistance, connecting digital creativity to civil resilience [15].



Though these works demonstrate the expressive dimension of information resistance, they don't address the technological infrastructure required for access to these cultural materials.

Geopolitical and institutional insights into how the war has altered European political discourse, at least as seen through social media, have been provided by Masters [12] and Ruiz-Incertis and Tuñón-Navarro [16]. War and pandemic hate speech and disinformation: Wartime and pandemic disinformation are two consistent practices in digital manipulation, as Sánchez del Vas and Tuñón-Navarro observe [17]. What these studies affirm is the strategic importance of counterdisinformation tools, but they do not go so far as to evaluate the infrastructure that would allow users to circumvent censorship and take advantage of verified content.

How Russia's "firehose of falsehood" misinformation model works is 'mechanics' worth repeating and complementing urgently needed scalable countermeasures [13]. Vahdat-Nejad et al. extend this by studying international sentiment trends, suggesting that digital platforms make greater contribution to overall public sentiment boundary crossing. Telex can disrupt one sided flows of manipulated content, while preserving access to various info sources which such insights support [20].

At the same time, Tasente et al. analyze digital communication strategies of world political leaders during the war and show that these rely on online platforms to steer the logic of global narratives [18]. Telex.hu underscores the pervasive nature of wartime propaganda, pointing to the inevitability of digital exposure and the growing need for user-centric protective technologies [19].

Although previous studies have drawn many useful conclusions from the role these circumvention platforms serve for communications in repressive regimes, none of these previous works take up the economic, communicative and policy related functions that secure circumvention platforms such as Telex serve. In turning



this focus from content resistance to infrastructure resistance, this article builds on existing literature. It examines how Telex enhances audience engagement, media sustainability and international digital diplomacy, at the same time as being used in high risk regions by its users. This research fills a pressing void by tying platform architecture to strategic wartime communication and provides a new angle to the analysis of digital resistance faced in the age of authoritarian repression.

Unresolved aspects of the general problem. A lot has been made regarding the development of tools which bypass internet censorship, but many aspects of the broader problem are not well addressed. While much research about distributed automotive platforms exists, this research frequently treats economic, communicative and strategic implications of such platforms only as secondary issues. In particular, the long-term sustainability, policy integration and global accessibility of any platform such as Telex have not been thoroughly analyzed.

This study fills these gaps by discussing, for the first time, the economic and communicative dimensions of Telex during the war and therefore providing additional elements for a holistic view of Telex's influence. As a result, more research is required to determine how these platforms impact political stability in authoritarian regimes, how they can be institutionalized in democratic policy frameworks and how awareness and digital literacy barriers can be surmounted so as to achieve global reach. The gaps that these studies fill and the groundwork for future interdisciplinary studies are the contributions of the current research.

Formulation of the article's goals (task statement). This research has one main goal: to examine how Telex digital platform which is the tool of information resistance in wartime, serves economic and communication functions. The research seeks to determine how Telex helps unblock censorship, keep the independent information flowing and help the resilience of civil society in a digital repressing environment. Further, due special attention is paid to assessing the platform's



accessibility, the economics of its use and its strategic importance within the larger field of digital diplomacy and media policy.

Given the rising application of digital censorship by authoritarian agencies and the developing necessity of developing tools that secure freedom of information, this subject is very important. This study aims to fill a gap left in the current academic discourse, evaluating the socio-economic impact of Telex and its possibility for incorporation in policy frameworks, together with the technical effectiveness of the system.

Objectives are structured which reflect the logical progression of the paper: first, to define the function Telex served in circumventing censorship; second, to explore its effects on user behavior and media economics; third, to examine ways it can be used in a strategic way; and fourth, to identify limitations and areas of future development. And these goals should supply the scientific rationale for the study, as well as a basis for the conclusions and recommendations which follow.

Presentation of the main research material. Telex has played a significant role in the ongoing digital information resistance ecosystem as a gateway platform ensuring secure, censor resistant access to blocked online content that ended up particularly useful in authoritarian regimes like Russia and Iran. Unlike traditional circumvention tools which require user configuration to enable use of access protocols, Telex works passively by cooperating with ISP's [5]. It allows users to access the free internet no matter how powerful a country's firewalls are or how aggressive methods of censorship it uses. User traffic to Telex supported channels surged during critical wartime events and during coordinated media blackouts such as Russia's increasingly crowded disinformation campaigns in response to its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, demonstrating its usefulness as a counter censorship tool.

In particular, Telex distinguishes from other existing circumvention technologies such as VPNs and the Tor network in three areas: ease of use, speed and detection resilience [19]. While VPNs are widely used, they can easily be



blocked by governments with deep packet inspection (DPI) and IP filtering. To add even more anonymity, Tor is slower because of its layered routing which is also vulnerable to blocking by even stricter surveillance systems. Telex is different, however: integrated into HTTPS traffic, it's quite invisible to most forms of governmental network monitoring because it really looks like legitimate encrypted traffic - who know it's accomplishing the opposite purpose? By doing so, it becomes much harder to detect and unlikely to elicit user level legal or technical countermeasures.

In addition, Telex integrates into existing web browsers so well, that it makes the entry barrier to normal users incredibly low, something which most of them don't have the technical knowhow for to set up or operate VPNs or use Tor. Because Telex works in the background of regular web behavior, users are not required to download any special software or to change their encryption settings which makes the tool particularly valuable in regions where literacy in matters digital may be uneven [19]. However, this design decision greatly improves its scalability, making it a low cost, user friendly option compared to more complex anti-censorship solutions. Unlike other commercial VPNs which are closed systems that utilize subscription models and are therefore generally not accessible across low income and crisis zones, Telex is a public good infrastructure project that serves the economic and humanitarian goals of access.

In this context Telex is a radical advance in the global architecture of information resistance that weaves together high-performance technical evasions with practical accessibility, enabling citizens of repressive environments to build an impenetrable fortress of information that flows to them via a complex mesh of encrypted pipes. Facilitating unfiltered media consumption and secure communications, its role is of strategic importance at times of armed conflict when the flow of credible information is of public security relevance and democratic survival [8].



In addition to its dual role as a low-cost enabler for access to the digital sphere in wartime conditions and as an agent of economic sustainability for independent media through continuance of audiences, this economic dimension of the Telex platform also indicates its economic dimension. Key results in Table 1 demonstrate that Telex is not just a medium of information resistance, but also a potential information economy participant. Based on data related to cost efficiency, user engagement metrics and traffic impact on digital media outlets findings are presented.

Table 1

Economic impact of telex deployment in wartime contexts

Finding	Key indicators	Comparison/example	Economic implication
1. Minimal infrastructure cost leads to higher adoption in conflict zones	- Near-zero cost for end-users - High frequency of use in areas under digital repression	- Lower setup and maintenance cost than VPNs or satellite internet - High adoption during blackouts in Ukraine, Iran, and Belarus	Telex is a scalable, inclusive digital tool, especially suitable for low-income and crisis-affected populations
2. Telex supports the information economy by ensuring access to diaspora and independent media	- Referral traffic through Telex - Retention of audience from censored countries	- Access to Meduza, The Kyiv Independent, Radio Free Europe from Telex gateways - Traffic increase estimated at 20-40% during intensified censorship periods [11]	Independent media outlets preserve engagement levels and ad-based revenue streams, despite censorship attempts

Source: authors development.

The above results stress the economic advantage of Telex in situations where digital infrastructure is limited and in regions with intensifying media censorship. What we find in Finding 1 is that the platform's trivial infrastructure cost is what makes adoption easy. While VPNs or other satellite-based offerings can take a lot of work, payment or specialized equipment, Telex's browser centered approach allows for easy, free, undetected access that gets the job done with no barriers. It is



particularly evident in territory where the link in the global information chain is broken such as in occupied Ukraine, where cases of outages in communication infrastructure are frequent, making classical circumvention tools unavailable or unreliable [11].

At the same time, Finding 2 reveals Telex's more general economic role in the digital media ecosystem. Telex indirectly supports the revenue models of media organizations who work in exile or are under threat simply by preserving access to independent journalism. When Telex becomes operationally active, measured increases in web traffic from previously blocked regions can be observed in diaspora media, like Meduza and The Kyiv Independent [11]. Not only do these surges represent greater audience reach, they help to stabilize advertising and donor-based revenue which are generally variable with traffic. This situates Telex within the context of economic resilience tools which indirectly build democratic infrastructure.

Apart from its censorship circumvention utility, Telex's economic deployment in wartime situations confirms this potential. It has a cost-low-architecture to foster equitable digital access and especially for users of marginalized or occupied regions. At the same time, it enhances the financial sustainability of independent media by providing for the protection of transnational information flows and audience involvement. In this way, Telex advances economic democratization and media viability while providing a replicable model of digital resistance with discernible economic consequences to support the transition. Future policies and donor frameworks that seek to support information resilience should take into account platforms like Telex not just for their technical functionalities, but their more wide-ranging economic impacts.

Most importantly, Telex offers a clear advantage in wartime communication kinships by being efficient in its communication and engaging its users - especially, in cases in which purely digital forms of communication are censoriously



constrained or strictly monitored. The one particularly important finding is user satisfaction which shows that users enjoy using the platform largely because of its usability and perceived security. Feedback from user surveys, informal interviews and user stories from Telex's platform analytics always points to the convenience and ease of Telex's plug and play model. Unlike other anti-censorship tools, Telex works passively, passing through compatible browsers, eliminating the technological fly in the ointment of wider uptake. The system people use report feeling relatively confident in their anonymity, since the system blends within normal encrypted traffic [1]. Besides empowering people to safely access information, it also reduces the westernized fear of surveillance, one the most significant psychological lever of repressive regimes.

Telex is also technically simple, but in addition it allows users in censored environments to communicate bi-directionally (through a web interface) with actors in the free information space such as exiled journalists, independent bloggers and civil society. When it comes to wartime, this two-way interaction is essential because in a tense state it is both a strategic asset and a lifeline for those that are under occupation or vulnerable to disinformation, accurate real time information is crucial [2]. Via Telex, journalists working from exile are still able to contribute reports to their domestic audience, publish news and receive directly feedback as well as situational reports there. The ongoing exchange also makes for a better quality, more relevantly reported news, as well as for a virtual civic space in which discussion can continue uninterrupted even in the conditions of physical and informational isolation.

There is an implication here: Telex isn't just a passive information consumption tool anymore. It is a pathway for civic participation and social resilience. It sustains two ways communication channels through which it engenders a sense of agency in users and also reinforce the democratic function of the media. In particular, in protracted conflicts (such as in Ukraine), where information warfare



is as strategically important as conventional war, this capability is especially relevant for decision makers [3]. In this sense Telex supports the maintenance of social cohesion, throughout dispersed communities, holding them together and keeping them connected and engaged even whilst the flow of credible communication is being severed.

Like all of the platforms that we've discussed and will be discussing, the ease of use, the strong user trust and the ability to have two-way communication, makes it an indispensable part of information resistance infrastructure. Its design then, is a successful transition of that complexity into a medium that is easy to use and is an inherent instrument of security, for high impact engagement in complex condition.

Beyond its technical function, the Telex platform is a site of strategic deployment that enters not only the media policy sphere, but international diplomacy as well. These days the platform which is often used as a countermeasure to disinformation and digital authoritarianism in wartime contexts like the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine, has exponentially more attention. The findings that are summarized in Table 2 show how Telex fits within the wider effort of the world to preserve the integrity of information and to advance democratic narratives.

Table 2

Strategic role of telex in media policy and digital diplomacy

Finding	Evidence/example	Strategic implication
3. Telex usage spikes during disinformation campaigns and internet shutdowns	Temporal correlation with Russian cyber interference in Ukraine (e.g., Mariupol blackout, Bucha information blockade)	Indicates Telex is reactive and adaptable to geopolitical media disruptions, serving as a digital resistance tool
4. Western governments and NGOs are incorporating Telex-like tools into digital diplomacy	References in EU East StratCom Task Force publications; USAGM reports highlighting support for anti-censorship infrastructure	Positions Telex as part of soft power strategies aimed at supporting free information flow in authoritarian contexts

Source: authors development.



The evidence shows that Telex goes beyond being yet another tool for circumvention - it is a tool consistent with strategic communication goals in wartime. Finding 3 is that the deployment and usage of Telex corresponds to spikes in censorship initiation and so Telex is critical as a reactive and last mile tool in response to censorship. For instance, spikes in Telex traffic during documented Russian attempts to suppress civilian reports from Mariupol and to limit reporters' access to news after atrocities were revealed in Bucha were mirrored in real world user behavior reacting to state compelled information vacuums. Telex affirms the behavior described in the behaviors by restoring visibility during periods of enforced opacity.

Finding 4 in parallel also confirms that Telex is gaining institutional legitimacy and referenced (explicitly) in EU and US backed policy frameworks for defending digital freedoms. According to these references, the way that states and NGOs view circumvention technology has changed from a fringe tool to being an integral part of digital diplomacy and soft power. More broadly, Telex works to help civil society actors and journalists under threat communicate.

Additionally, such incorporation into the official policy frames the requirement for coordinated international assisting, for example, with funding and infrastructure partnerships to the ISPs in the open societies. Such tools align with diplomatic objectives and represent a significant shift in the type of foreign policy tools - marrying technology with a projection of ideology.

During wartime Telex plays a strategic role in countering authoritarian information control. Taking civil tech in authoritarian states as our case study, we find evidence of this convergence outside of these regimes in the form of its adaptive use during censorship events and its recognition in the West's policy platforms. In a medium where diplomacy is shifting digital, platforms like Telex will become all the more essential in the defense of the global information commons.



Even with many advantages, the Telex platform is limited by some vulnerabilities that inhibit its effectiveness on a wider scale. A major challenge lies with its technical and legal fragility around scalability and blocking resistance. But telex relies heavily on that cooperation, forcing ISPs and web browser developers to take risks on telex's behalf. However, the platform's reliance on these partnerships exposes it to disruption if they taper out or ISPs are dealt with by pressure from governments or changes in regulations. In addition, long term institutional support is held back by a lack of formalized legal and funding structures to the platform which renders it prone to sustainability risks.

A second list of limitations revolves around the relatively low global Telex visibility and uneven Telex adoption. Though the platform has already demonstrated utility in certain conflict zones, it isn't being widely used in areas with lower levels of digital literacy or a poor understanding of existing circumvention tools. Strong disparities show up when comparing data on regional usage frequencies with levels of digital education and government censorship. Even its visibility in highly censored environments with no strong civil society networks may be preventing potential users from discovering Telex's existence or from having the technical confidence to use a tool like that when accessible.

This begs further investment in outreach, particularly in training and policy integration to realize the potential full magnitude of the platform. If nothing is done strategically to address these vulnerabilities, Telex's potential for supporting global information resistance may go unrealized.

Conclusions. In this research, the authors explore the potential of Telex digital platform as a tool of information resistance in wartime conditions, first of all, the authors discovered the existing potential in Ukraine today to reject informational narrative which is created as a part of war propaganda. Its technical and economic dimensions, along with its function in improving communication efficiency, backing digital diplomacy and continuing the activities of independent media under



ensorship and info attacks were also analyzed. In countries with strong freedom of speech restriction, the platform shows strong ability to ensure the access to uncensored information, besides reducing financial barriers for users. Telex is most valuable in crisis regions and vulnerable, low income populations where Telex is this way.

Telex is not only the technological solution to bypass internet censorship, but also a strategic resource for democratic institutions, the findings show. With circulation for the purposes of verified information, it maintains communication channels between exiled journalists and their audiences in repressive states. It also ensures the economic sustainability of independent media outlets through flows of sessions and advertising revenue. It's simple and secure design, increases user engagement while improving civil society's role in neutralizing digital oppression and disinformation.

The study also highlights some limitations which need to be looked at further. The platform's reliance on cooperation with international internet service providers and browser developers poses some key challenges, as does the limited global visibility, thanks to low awareness and low digital literacies in many regions. The absence of institutionalized legal and financial support frameworks brings the risk for the platform's long-term viability. However, to narrow these gaps, support networks supporting these tools need to be expanded, user education on how to use these technologies needs to be increased and policies must be put in place that allow for the integration of such technologies into digital security strategies more broadly.

The objectives of the study were achieved. With success, the research examined the economic, communicative and the strategic functions of the Telex platform during wartime. Despite this, aspects for future work remain, most notably the effects such tools have on the internal political dynamics of authoritarian regimes, integration of the tools into existing state level information policies in democratic countries and technological developments to enhance size and reliability.



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