Cross-cultural communications in shaping the cultural image of Ukraine in the international information environment

Кроскультурні комунікації у формуванні культурного іміджу України в міжнародному інформаційному середовищі

Written by:
Antonina Ivashchuk[1]

https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0209-148X

Abstract

This research aims to highlight the importance of Ukrainian culture within the international information environment. The cross-sectional survey study involved purposive sampling of 28 participants whose attitudes towards Ukraine's cultural image and diplomacy were evaluated. The findings showed that cultural image belongs to the international information environment, and Ukraine is characterised by its ability to counteract several external pressures. The research resulted in the development of effective mechanisms to form Ukraine's positive cultural image internationally, including long-term cultural diplomacy oriented towards deeper collaboration with other nations, the global dissemination of accurate narratives about Ukraine, and the counteraction of stereotypes or misinformation. The authors described the challenges of forming Ukraine's positive image in detail. The article demonstrated that it is essential to differentiate Ukrainian culture from external influences, such as the Soviet-era discourse and modern Russian narrative. The research admitted that spreading the facts about Ukraine will help build the country's cultural image in the international information environment. Besides, the research resulted in the development of effective mechanisms to form Ukraine's positive cultural image internationally. The study outcomes can be used to elaborate on long-term cultural diplomacy oriented towards deeper collaboration with other nations, the global dissemination of accurate narratives about Ukraine, and the counteraction of stereotypes or misinformation.

Анотація

Мета дослідження – продемонструвати важливість висвітлення української культури в міжнародному інформаційному середовищі. Під час крос-секційного опитування було залучено 28 учасників для оцінювання їхніх поглядів на культурний імідж України та дипломатію. Результати показали, що культурний імідж є складовою міжнародного інформаційного середовища, а Україна характеризується здатністю протидіяти численним зовнішнім впливам. У ході дослідження були розроблені ефективні механізми формування позитивного культурного іміджу України на міжнародній арені, зокрема довгострокова культурна дипломатія, спрямована на глибшу співпрацю з іншими країнами, глобальне поширення достовірних наративів про Україну та протидія стереотипам або дезінформації. Авторами статті продемонстровано важливість диференціювання української культури від зовнішніх впливів, які зумовлені, перш за все, дискурсом радянської доби, а також сучасним російським наративом, в якому поширене використання неправдивих стереотипів та дезінформації про українську культуру. У дослідженні доведено, що поширення реальних фактів про Україну допоможе побудувати культурний імідж країни в міжнародному інформаційному середовищі. Крім того, результатом дослідження було визнано розробку ефективних механізмів формування позитивного культурного іміджу України на міжнародному рівні. Результати дослідження можуть бути використані для розробки стратегій довгострокової культурної дипломатії,

[1] Ph.D. in Social Communications, Head of the Department of Advertising and Public Relations, State University "Kyiv Aviation Institute", Ukraine. ☉ WoS Researcher ID: AEE-9583-2022 - Email: iva.tonya@gmail.com

Introduction

General presentation of the topic

Currently, cross-cultural communication shapes the perception of nations within the global information landscape. For Ukraine, effectively conveying its cultural heritage and values is essential to building a positive image internationally. Obviously, when dialogue and collaboration across cultures are fostered, Ukraine strengthens its presence and counteracts stereotypes or misinformation in the international arena. In this context, it is important to interpret the main concepts related to the research problem and outline their characteristics in detail.

The international information environment is a key concept of the research. It refers to rapid digitisation, the dominance of social media, and the increasing role of artificial intelligence in shaping information (Wardle & AbdAllah, 2023). The modern information environment encompasses all spheres of society, influencing politics by shaping public opinion and enabling digital diplomacy using social media (Kryvoshein, 2023). It integrates medicine through telemedicine platforms and health data analytics (Yuryk et al., 2022). It drives e-learning innovations and online collaboration in education, underscoring its pervasive role in societal development (Prokopenko & Sapinski, 2024). The information environment significantly impacts the financial sector by shaping market perceptions and influencing investor behaviour (Sunduk et al., 2024).

At the same time, this environment affects culture and cross-cultural relations, promoting the global exchange of traditions, art, and values through media (Dobrolyubska et al., 2024). It also fosters dialogue between diverse cultures since it amplifies cultural diplomacy and addresses stereotyping (Wardle & AbdAllah, 2023). A country's cultural image is an integral component of the international information environment, as it is expressed through media, art, tourism, diplomacy, and public perception, all caused by information dissemination (Tereshchuk, 2019).

Ukraine's cultural image reflects how the country is understood through its history, traditions, and modern contributions (Tkachenko et al., 2021). Cultural image remains ambiguous due to its complex historical narrative. In the past, Ukraine's cultural image was overshadowed by its historical ties to larger empires, such as the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, leading to a limited global understanding of its distinct identity (Kravchenko, 2023; Vasylchuk & Drozdov, 2023). Ukraine was frequently perceived as a peripheral region rather than a sovereign cultural entity. Despite being constrained by imperial and later Soviet policies, Ukraine's cultural image endured in diaspora communities worldwide (Trzeszczyńska et al., 2024). After 2014, Ukraine's cultural image underwent a significant transformation, marked by its resilience and determination to declare its identity during Russian full-fledged aggression (Ventura, 2024).

The Revolution of Dignity and the subsequent annexation of Crimea by Russia drew global attention to Ukraine's struggle for democracy (Tarnavska, 2019). The full-scale Russian invasion in 2022 solidified Ukraine's cultural image in the face of unprecedented adversity (Szerszeń, 2024).

Research problem

This proves that the study of Ukraine's cultural image is essential in modern scientific discourse, as it provides valuable information about cultural diplomacy, geopolitical influence, and the dynamics of national identity in the context of a rapidly changing global landscape. Understanding how Ukraine's cultural image has evolved allows us to explore the intersections between culture, politics, and international relations. It also helps to challenge misrepresentations and stereotypes that have historically overshadowed

Ukraine's distinctiveness. As Ukraine continues to assert its sovereignty and strengthen its ties with other nations, the study of its cultural image serves as a vital tool in shaping international perceptions and fostering cross-cultural understanding, making it an essential area of research.

Research objectives

This research aims to show the importance of presenting Ukrainian culture in the international information environment to transform Ukraine's image positively. Accordingly, the study addresses three questions:

1) How can Ukraine use its cultural heritage and artistic expressions to strengthen its cultural image in the international information environment?
2) How is Ukrainian culture different from the unified Soviet identity and today's Russian culture regarding the recent geopolitical tensions and the ongoing war? How have prominent figures from Ukrainian heritage shaped national identity and cultural development?
3) What mechanisms can Ukraine implement to form a positive cultural image internationally?

Structure of the article

The article begins with an introduction outlining the significance of cross-cultural communication in shaping the cultural image of Ukraine globally. The literature review explores the theoretical frameworks of cultural diplomacy and international communication. The primary attention is paid to the recent investigations concerning the international information environment, cross-cultural communication, principles, and approaches to the formation of a positive image of a country. It then presents the research methodology, including participant selection and data collection techniques. The results and discussion section describes Ukraine's cultural heritage and artistic expressions to strengthen its cultural image in the international information environment. Also, the section explains the differences between Ukrainian culture, the unified Soviet identity, and today's Russian culture, particularly in the context of recent geopolitical tensions and the ongoing war. Additionally, the mechanisms to form a positive cultural image of Ukraine internationally were studied and discussed. Finally, the conclusion outlines the novel contributions of the study and their relevance to the field of research.

Literature Review

Cultural image is a topic of significant interest for researchers across various scientific fields, including sociology, political science, cultural studies, and communication (Obenza & Rabaca, 2024). Scholars examine how cultural images are constructed, maintained, and transformed through media, art, literature, and public diplomacy, exploring their impact on national identity and international perceptions (Galchynska et al., 2024). The study of cultural image also delves into issues of representation, stereotyping, and the role of soft power in shaping how cultures are viewed globally (Borysenko et al., 2024). Researchers investigate how historical events, social movements, and geopolitical dynamics contribute to forming a country's cultural image and how these images can evolve in response to shifting political or social contexts. With the rise of digital platforms and global interconnectedness, cultural image has become even more complex, making it a rich and ongoing area of scholarly inquiry (Owusu et al., 2023).

Many researchers study the cultural image of Ukraine to understand how its national identity has evolved, particularly in the context of historical, political, and social changes (Szerszeń, 2024; Tarnavska, 2019). Scholars explore how Ukraine's cultural image has been shaped by its struggles for sovereignty, its relationship with neighbouring countries, and its efforts to assert a distinct identity. Tkachenko et al. (2021) outlined the European view on the image of Ukraine. Andryczyk (2022) analysed cultural responses and reverberations after the war in the Donbas, and Olzacka (2023) investigated Ukrainian cultural policy in the context of Russian hybrid aggression. Tarnavska (2019) studied the media image of Ukraine in foreign newspapers. Dombrowski et al. (2022) explained the mechanisms of saving Ukrainian heritage. It is necessary to pay attention towards the works of Szerszeń (2024), who revealed the transformation of traumatic images of Ukraine through photography. This article analysed specific projects made in three chronological moments: the first half of the 1990s, after 2014, and now, in response to the ongoing war.

The interpretation of the notion of cultural diplomacy, its past and future, was described by Grincheva (2023). Hololobov (2022) investigated cultural diplomacy as a component of state policy. Ocón (2021) revealed the positive role of cultural diplomacy and analysed its contribution to reducing political tension.

Similarly, Antonova and Shevchenko (2023), studying Ukraine's cultural diplomacy, paid attention towards its place in consolidating the country's image within the global community. Filatova (2021) outlined the main approaches of Ukraine as a fully-fledged actor in the international arena. Also, scientists introduced progressive diplomacy methods widely applied by the modern Ukrainian state. It is worth mentioning the works of Tereshchuk (2019), who defined cultural diplomacy as a tool of Ukraine's foreign policy.

Notably, many researchers focus on the mechanisms of forming a positive cultural image, as this process is necessary for shaping public perception (Lee, 2023). They examine the various strategies countries or individuals employ to create and maintain a favourable image, emphasising the role of media, public diplomacy, and cultural exchanges. These mechanisms often include crafting narratives through storytelling highlighting positive aspects of culture, such as artistic achievements, historical milestones, or social progress, and leveraging international events to showcase a nation's strengths (Dobrolyubska et al., 2024). Researchers also explore the influence of soft power in image building, where countries use cultural exports, such as music, literature, and cinema, to project an appealing image to global audiences (Mashiah, 2024).

In addition to media and cultural exports, scholars investigate the role of political leadership, international alliances, and crisis management in shaping a positive image (Galchynska et al., 2024). They analyse how political figures and diplomatic efforts contribute to projecting a unified and attractive national identity, especially in conflict or instability. The impact of digital platforms and social media on image formation is another key area of research, as these tools allow for real-time, direct engagement with global audiences, enabling countries to counter negative perceptions and actively promote positive narratives (Owusu et al., 2023). Through these multifaceted approaches, researchers aim to understand how a positive cultural image is strategically built and maintained across different contexts and periods.

The topic of cross-cultural communications as an important aspect of the formation of the cultural image of Ukraine in the international information environment is especially relevant today, as Ukraine continues to navigate complex geopolitical challenges and asserts its national identity on the global stage (Ventura, 2024). In an era of rapid digital communication, where information spreads instantly across borders, the role of cross-cultural communication in shaping Ukraine's cultural image is getting even more critical. This is mainly explained by the conflict in the east of Ukraine since 2014 and the full-scale war in 2022. Its cultural narratives increasingly shape Ukraine's global reputation and international support.

Therefore, the literature review on the cultural image of Ukraine reveals specific conflicting perspectives regarding its portrayal in the international information environment. Some studies emphasise the rich cultural heritage of Ukraine and its potential for promoting a positive global image (Olzacka, 2023). Other perspectives criticise the challenges posed by several stereotypes, historical misconceptions, and geopolitical influences that distort the cultural identity of Ukraine (Kuzio, 2019). These debates often focus on the tension between the efforts of Ukraine to assert its distinct cultural narrative and the external pressures of misinformation campaigns. Some scholars diverge on strategies for addressing these issues through intensified state-led cultural diplomacy (Filatova, 2021), while others call for initiatives to reshape people's stereotyped perceptions (Lee, 2023). This diversity of viewpoints justifies a necessity to study the topic "Cross-cultural communications in shaping the cultural image of Ukraine in the international information environment".

Methodology

Research design

The theoretical framework for this cross-sectional survey study is developed using several interrelated approaches from communication, cultural studies, and international relations. Firstly, cultural diplomacy, as an extension of soft power, is a basis for this study, focusing on the ability of a nation to shape global outcomes through attraction rather than violence (Zguric et al., 2023; Nye, 2021). This approach emphasises culture's importance in forming Ukraine's international image, particularly during geopolitical tensions with Russia. Secondly, cross-cultural communication theory focuses on how communication varies across cultures and how misunderstandings occur when individuals from different cultural backgrounds interact (Drion, 2022; Li, 2023; Zhu, 2022). In the context of Ukraine, this theory examines how the cultural differences between Ukraine and other countries are understood in cross-cultural exchanges. Thirdly,

framing theory, as applied to mass media and communication studies, examines how media present or "frame" an issue, influencing how the public perceives it (Cheon et al., 2021). Regarding Ukraine, framing theory analyses how Ukrainian culture is represented in international media and how these representations build its global understanding. And fourthly, the theory of identity examines how nations construct their identities to the world (Damkier & Ozer, 2022; Wang & Hu, 2022). This theory explains the strategy for forming Ukraine's cultural image from internal and external perspectives and how the international community interprets Ukrainian culture.

Samples and participants

The present cross-sectional survey study involved twenty-eight (28) participants who represented diplomatic service, journalism, art, and social media. The purposive sampling of participants considered their involvement in developing, disseminating, or interpreting Ukraine's cultural image through cross-cultural communication. The participants included the employees of diplomatic departments who organised cultural events abroad (6); journalists who reported on Ukrainian culture or covered the ongoing geopolitical situation (7); international relations specialists who explored the problems of cultural diplomacy and geopolitical communication (3); Ukrainian cultural ambassadors and artists serving as representatives of Ukraine's cultural image abroad (4); social media influencers and digital content creators who shape public opinion and cultural photos (8).

Instruments and procedures

A close-ended questionnaire was applied to evaluate the participants' perceptions. It was structured in five blocks. Block 1 focused on how Ukraine can leverage its cultural heritage and artistic expressions to strengthen its cultural image internationally. Block 2 addressed how Ukrainian culture distinguishes itself from Soviet identity and contemporary Russian culture, particularly in the context of the war and political tensions. Block 3 referred to the influences of prominent historical and contemporary figures from Ukraine's cultural heritage and their contribution to shaping its national identity and cultural development. Block 4 explored the potential mechanisms Ukraine can employ to form a positive cultural image internationally. Block 5 enabled us to assess the general international perception of Ukraine's cultural image and its possible improvements. The questionnaire form was distributed through online survey platforms (Google Forms and SurveyMonkey) within professional networks, including diplomatic or cultural associations and targeted social groups related to cultural studies and international relations.

Data analysis

The data analysis required the implementation of qualitative and quantitative methods. Quantitative data from the closed-ended questionnaire was analysed using descriptive statistics. This included calculating the frequency of answers and standard deviations for questions related to perceptions of Ukraine's cultural image, the influence of cultural heritage, and the meaning of cross-cultural communication. Qualitative data was analysed using document analysis (reports, articles, websites, official communications, and media) that provided contextual data and enabled us to understand the case deeply. This method helped to identify key themes related to how Ukrainian culture is perceived internationally, the differences between Ukrainian and Russian cultural identities, and suggestions for improving Ukraine's cultural image through communication strategies. Besides, document analysis allowed for the deep exploration of participants' views on the research questions.

Validity and reliability of the research instruments

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research instruments, the study employed a well-structured survey design developed based on existing theoretical frameworks in cross-cultural communication and cultural diplomacy. The close-ended questionnaire was pilot-tested with a small sample to prove their clarity, relevance, and correspondence with the research objectives. Its logical structure was measured using statistical methods to verify the scales' reliability in assessing attitudes towards the cultural image of Ukraine.

Throughout the research process, ethical considerations were prioritised to ensure the study adhered to moral standards. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were informed about the purpose, scope, and confidentiality of the research. The study was conducted according to ethical

guidelines, which provided all the participants the option to withdraw at any stage without penalty. The research was transparent, which means that the findings were reported accurately and without bias.

Results and Discussion

The modern cultural image of Ukraine in the international information environment

The previous findings showed that the problem of strengthening the cultural image of Ukraine is an essential theme in scientific literature and related documents. The modern cultural image of a nation reflects its identity, values, and global relevance, shaped by its historical heritage, artistic achievements, and contemporary innovations (Tkachenko et al., 2021). Importantly, it was admitted that the cultural image of Ukraine is deeply intertwined with historical discourse, reflecting its rich heritage and complex past shaped by diverse influences (Kravchenko, 2023; Olzacka, 2023; Vasylchuk & Drozdov, 2023). Today, this image is predominantly influenced by the international information environment, where digital platforms, media narratives, and cultural exchanges play a pivotal role. The recent findings demonstrate that, for Ukraine, its modern cultural image is defined by resilience, creativity, and a deep-rooted heritage, all of which have been brought to global attention, particularly during times of crisis like the ongoing war (Szerszeń, 2024; Ventura, 2024).

At the same time, the questionnaire showed that the individuals participating in the study see Ukraine as innovative, determined, vibrant, independent, creative, patriotic, courageous and resilient (Figure 1). In the context of cultural image, Ukraine is characterised by its ability to withstand external pressures, particularly during the ongoing war. According to the participants, the bravery of the Ukrainian people, especially soldiers and civilians, is seen as a notable feature. Besides, a strong sense of national pride concerns Ukraine's culture. It was found that creativity, desire for independence, vibrancy, innovation, and determination are the foundation of Ukraine's modern image on the international stage today. These results prove that Ukraine has a multidimensional cultural image and specific approaches are needed to make it a positive phenomenon globally.
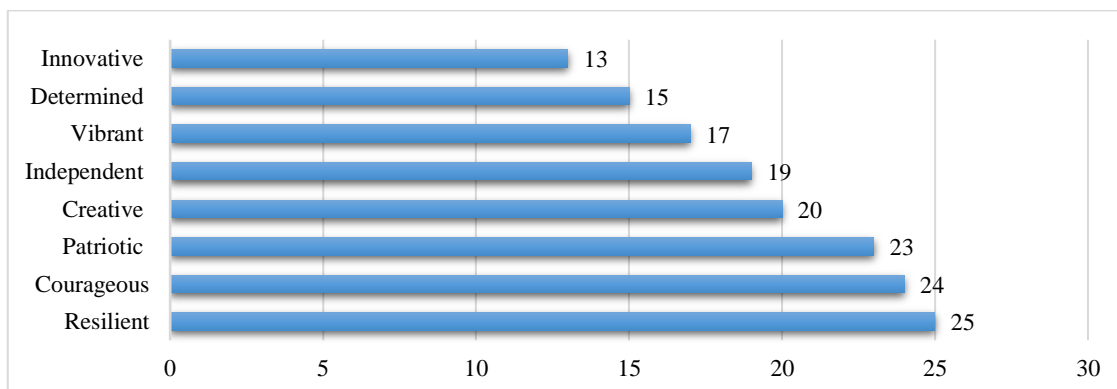

Figure 1. Description of the image of Ukraine.
Source: Author's development.

Studying cultural diplomacy, the literature review showed that it requires strategic planning, inclusivity, and adaptability to achieve meaningful engagement with international audiences (Hololobov, 2022). Cultural diplomacy activities usually correspond with a country's broader foreign policy and cultural identity, ensuring that all efforts are purposeful. The findings demonstrated that authenticity is essential; cultural diplomacy reflects a nation's heritage, values, and contemporary achievements to build trust and credibility (Filatova, 2021). Practical communication tools – digital platforms, traditional media, and public events – are used to reach diverse global audiences (Drion, 2022). Diversity plays a significant role since it requires the active participation of cultural leaders to represent the nation's richness (Grincheva, 2023). The participants were asked about the recent successful examples of Ukrainian cultural diplomacy: table 1 analyses Ukrainian cultural diplomacy events and their advantages for forming a positive image of Ukraine.

Table 1.
Examples of Ukrainian cultural diplomacy.

Campaign/Project	Number of participants	Advantages
The Ukrainian Institute	12	Promotes Ukrainian educational programs and cultural events.
Kyiv Biennial	11	Serves as a platform for Ukrainian artists.
Eurovision Song Contest	19	Showcases Ukrainian music and creativity; It symbolises Ukraine's ability to stand against external challenges (Jamala's "1944" in 2016 and Kalush Orchestra's "Stefania" in 2022).
Ukrainian Film Festival	15	Expresses Ukraine's national identity; Promotes the growth of the Ukrainian film industry.
"Ukraine NOW" campaign	16	Emphasises Ukraine's rich traditions; Rebrands the nation; Fosters a sense of national pride.

Source: Author's development.

The findings correspond with the outcomes from the existing scientific literature, which suggests that cultural diplomacy can promote Ukraine's identity and strengthen its international presence (Tereshchuk, 2019). However, the current context of ongoing war necessitates more innovative and practical approaches to maximise its impact (Klavdienko, 2024). The survey shows that traditional methods, such as exhibitions and cultural exchanges, remain valuable but must be complemented with modern strategies, including digital platforms, social media, and virtual reality, to reach global audiences effectively.

The formation of a positive cultural image of a country faces several potential challenges. According to Akaliyski and Welzel (2020), historical and geopolitical conflicts diminish cultural achievements. Braslauskas (2023) states that stereotypes create negative perceptions, making it challenging to present an authentic image. Economic limitations, regional disparities, and language and cultural differences also pose obstacles to the effective presentation of a country to global audiences (Xing & Jin, 2023). It was found that prevailing socio-cultural trends deeply influence the formation of a cultural image, as they shape public perceptions, social values, and how cultural identities are understood (Dobrolyubska et al., 2024). Socio-cultural trends such as globalisation, technological advancements, and shifting attitudes toward diversity directly impact how a nation's culture is perceived internationally. Misinformation and propaganda campaigns are widely used to manipulate public opinion and shape perceptions in the international information environment (Kravchenko, 2023). As a result, these undermine trust in the country's image. The current research outlines several challenges for forming Ukraine's positive image (Figure 2). It was found that most of the respondents mentioned geopolitical conflicts, stereotyping, and political instability. Other challenges include Soviet-era legacy and international media influence. Special attention was paid towards Russian propaganda that targets Ukraine's global reputation, spreading false narratives.
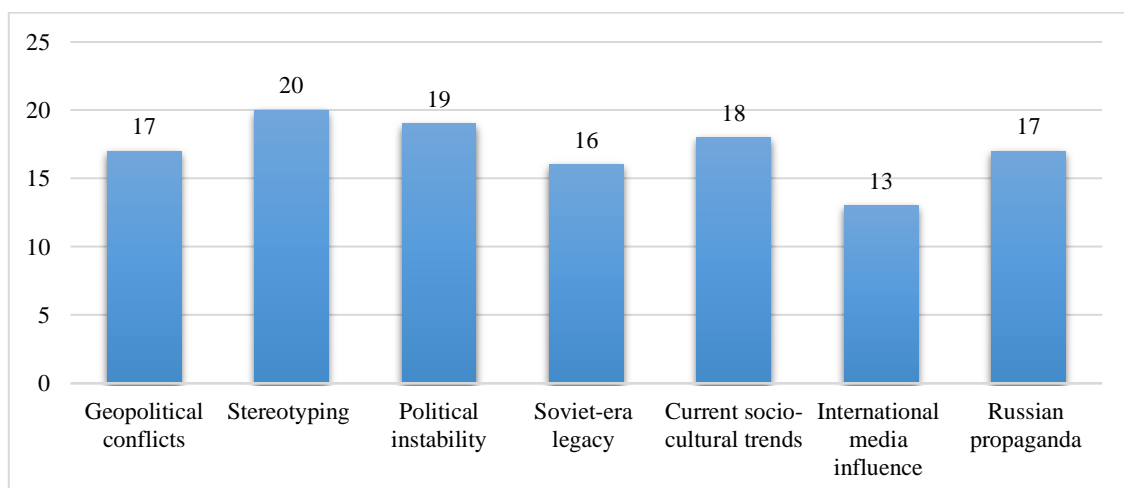

Figure 2. Challenges for the formation of Ukraine's positive image.
Source: Author's development.

The uniqueness of Ukrainian culture in the context of recent geopolitical tensions and the ongoing war

Ukrainian culture has a unique identity that has evolved through centuries of distinct historical, social, and political developments, setting it apart from the Soviet-era and modern Russian cultures (Botvyn et al., 2022). The findings insist that differentiating Ukrainian culture from external influences is essential for ensuring that Ukraine's heritage is accurately represented (Olzacka, 2023). The Soviet era left a lasting impact on many nations within its sphere of influence, often attempting to homogenise diverse cultural identities under a unified Soviet narrative (Zhurzhenko, 2021). However, Ukrainian culture has always retained its distinctive features despite these pressures. Similarly, modern Russian culture, shaped by its political realities, is distinct from Ukraine's cultural identity. Recognising this difference is vital in resisting external narratives that seek to combine the two cultures for ideological purposes (Grusheva, 2023). In the current context of geopolitical tensions, this differentiation is a matter of historical accuracy and a strategic imperative for Ukraine's cultural diplomacy.

Considering the recent findings studied during the literature review (Kravchenko, 2023; Ventura, 2024), it was found that distinguishing prominent Ukrainian figures from Russian and Soviet culture is essential for forming Ukraine's cultural image, especially in recent geopolitical tensions. Throughout history, many notable Ukrainian figures have been overshadowed by the larger narrative of Soviet and Russian influence, leading to a hidden identity. To study this aspect, the respondents were asked to describe the unique contributions of Ukrainian cultural personalities, whether in art or science. Table 2 shows these personalities and their contribution. During the study, cultural diplomacy experts and ambassadors admitted that spreading the facts about these prominent figures may help build a cultural image of Ukraine in the international information environment. These findings confirm the statements in the works of Antonova and Shevchenko (2023), who studied consolidating the country's image in the international arena. At the same time, the survey contributed to building the cultural image of Ukraine by revealing the historical facts about Ukrainian cultural personalities and their contribution.

Table 2.
Underestimated Ukrainian cultural personalities and their contribution

Personality	Number of participants	Contribution
Anna Yaroslavna (born approximately in 1032)	25	Cultural exchange and diplomacy; Education and religious influence.
Illia Repin (1844–1930)	12	Pioneering realist art; Masterful portraiture.
Ivan Pulyuy (1845–1918)	14	Pioneering work on X-ray technology; Study of electromagnetic waves.
Waldemar Haffkine (1860–1930)	11	Development of cholera and plague vaccines; Pioneering work in immunology.
Volodymyr Vernadskyi (1863–1945)	18	Founding the phenomena of the biosphere and noosphere; Biogeochemistry and geochemistry.
Mykola Leontovych (1877–1921)	23	Creation of "Shchedryk" (Carol of the Bells); Revival and arrangement of Ukrainian folk music; Development of choral music.
Kazymyr Malevich (1879–1935)	21	Founder of suprematism; Artwork "Black Square".
Olha Ekster (1889–1950)	14	Development of abstract art; Integration of Ukrainian heritage and European modernism.
Oleksandr Arkhypenko (1887–1964)	9	Pioneer of modern sculpture.
Ihor Sikorskyi (1889–1972)	22	Pioneering helicopter development.
Serge Lifar (1905–1986)	19	Blending traditional classical choreography with avant-garde modernism; Promotion of male dancing.
Sofiia Yablonska (1907–1971)	15	Travel literature; Photography.

Source: Author's development.

Mechanisms for formation of Ukraine's positive cultural image internationally

The recent findings emphasise that a cultural image is constructed through distinctive symbols, narratives, and practices that reflect shared values and ideals. According to the theory of representation, cultural identity is produced and reshaped through unique symbolic systems such as art, language, and media (Rojas-Méndez & Davies, 2024). The analysis of recent scientific sources revealed that image formation involves deliberate efforts to highlight positive attributes while downplaying negative stereotypes or misconceptions (Braslauskas, 2023; Eriss & Khoshsaligheh, 2023). Besides, the mechanisms for forming a positive cultural image are based on branding and impression management theories, particularly concerning cultural diplomacy (Biletska, 2021). Scholars such as Vecchi et al. (2021) argue that national or cultural branding operates similarly to corporate branding. Accordingly, iconic representations and strategic storytelling are widely used to create an attractive image. The findings show that mechanisms such as international cultural exchanges, educational programs, and global media campaigns are strategically essential, and they are introduced to interpret a country's realities appropriately (Antonova & Shevchenko, 2023).

Notably, many academic works focus on using innovative technologies to form a positive image of a country (Bode, 2024; Konovalova, 2023). Technologies such as artificial intelligence, virtual reality, augmented reality, and social media enable nations to create immersive and engaging narratives that showcase their cultural heritage, achievements, and values (Bode, 2024; Jin, 2024). For instance, virtual and augmented reality tools create virtual tours of iconic landmarks or cultural festivals, providing international audiences with an authentic experience beyond geographical boundaries (Ouerghemmi et al., 2023). Besides, AI-driven content personalisation ensures targeted communication that resonates with diverse demographic groups, enhancing engagement (Suanpang & Pothipassa, 2024).

The study results showed that these mechanisms include cultural diplomacy supported by Ukrainian embassies and cultural institutions, film festivals, art exhibitions, campaigns to protect Ukraine's UNESCO sites, language promotion, tourism campaigns, participation in global events, and gastronomic diplomacy. The participants admitted that special attention must be paid towards Ukrainian literature translations, education exchanges, and historical education campaigns. It was mentioned that the Ukrainian diaspora plays a vital role in forming the country's positive cultural image. During the ongoing war, diaspora communities amplify Ukraine's cultural and historical narratives, highlight resilience, and increase international solidarity. At the same time, the study outcomes proved that elaborating and implementing strategies for the long-term development of cultural diplomacy in Ukraine is essential for strengthening the country's global presence, fostering international partnerships, and enhancing its cultural influence. The participants noted that long-term strategies enable Ukraine to build positive relationships with other nations, counter misinformation, and project a resilient national identity, especially amidst challenges like war and geopolitical instability. Figure 3 shows the participants' evaluation of the mechanisms of international formation of Ukraine's positive cultural image.
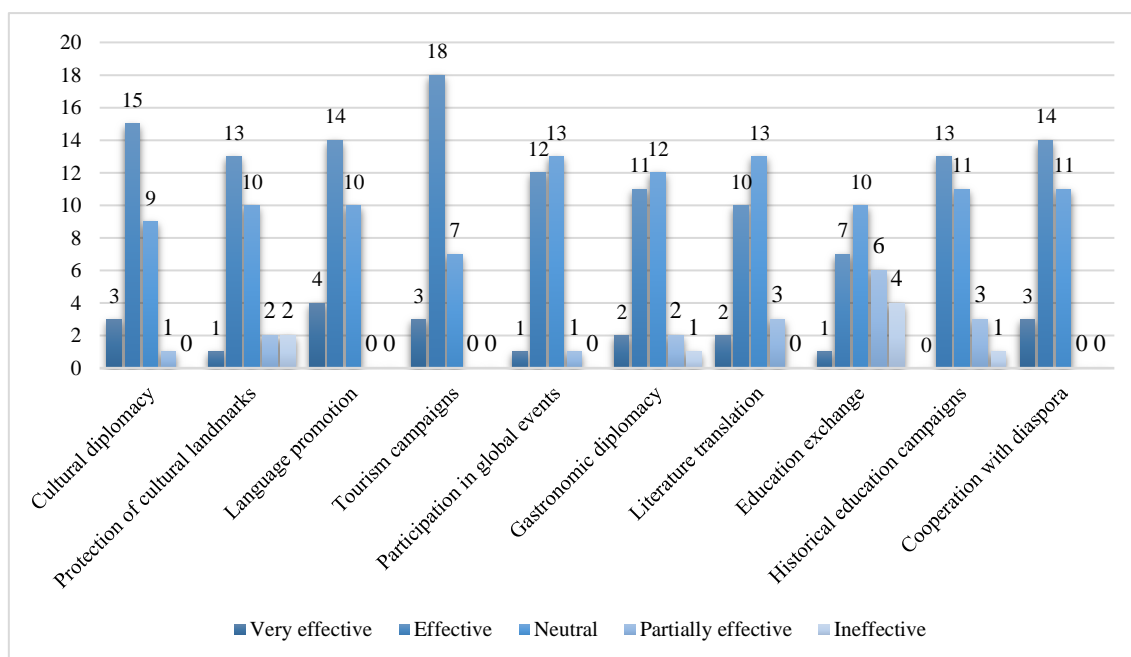
Figure 3. Evaluation of mechanisms of formation of Ukraine's positive cultural image internationally.
Source: Author's development.

The study of mechanisms of the formation of a positive cultural image of Ukraine internationally corresponds closely with the existing literature, which emphasises the importance of cultural diplomacy (Hololobov, 2022), strategic communication (Filatova, 2021), improvement of cultural and historical narrative (Olzacka, 2023). However, while the literature broadly highlights short-term efforts to address immediate challenges (Lee, 2023), this study emphasises the need for a long-term perspective to ensure sustainable impact. Besides, the survey proved that applying a multifaceted approach that combines traditional methods with innovative measures can enhance the efficiency of cultural diplomacy and cross-cultural communication and maximise the ability of Ukraine to shape a positive cultural image that is clearly understood by the global audience.

Therefore, Ukraine can effectively convey its values and heritage by fostering cross-cultural dialogue. Ukraine can counter misinformation, highlight its resilience, and strengthen its soft power by implementing effective mechanisms for forming a positive cultural image. As the country navigates complex geopolitical challenges, cultural diplomacy is sufficient for building positive relationships and describing Ukraine's cultural identity on the world stage.

The study outcomes have essential implications for Ukraine's international engagement. They open opportunities for deeper collaboration with other nations, facilitate the global dissemination of accurate narratives about Ukraine, and combat stereotypes or misinformation. Integrating long-term cross-cultural strategies into diplomatic, educational, and media efforts can enhance Ukraine's soft power and attract tourism and investment. Moreover, effective cultural diplomacy during the ongoing war ensures that Ukraine's cultural contributions remain prominent in global discussions and shape a favourable reputation of the country.

Conclusions

The research proved that the modern cultural image of a nation reflects its identity, values, and global relevance, shaped by its historical heritage, artistic achievements, and contemporary innovations. Today, this image is influenced by the international information environment. In the context of cultural image, Ukraine is characterised by its ability to withstand external pressures, particularly during the ongoing war. The formation of a positive cultural image of a country faces several potential challenges that can hinder its effectiveness. In the Ukrainian context, the formation of Ukraine's positive cultural image is challenged by geopolitical conflicts, stereotyping, and political instability. Besides, Soviet-era legacy, international media influence, and Russian propaganda often target Ukraine's reputation, spreading false narratives.

The article demonstrated that it is essential to differentiate Ukrainian culture from external influences, particularly considering the Soviet-era discourse and modern Russian narrative. The research insists that this differentiation is a matter of historical accuracy and a strategic imperative for Ukraine's cultural diplomacy. The study showed that the formation of Ukraine's cultural image requires the creation of a pantheon of prominent Ukrainian figures. Special attention must be paid to personalities overshadowed by Soviet and Russian influence. It was admitted that spreading the facts about these notable figures may help build Ukraine's cultural image in the international information environment.

Image formation involves several efforts to highlight positive attributes and downplay negative stereotypes. The research developed effective mechanisms to form Ukraine's positive cultural image internationally. They include cultural diplomacy supported by Ukrainian embassies and cultural institutions, film festivals, art exhibitions, campaigns to protect Ukraine's UNESCO sites, language promotion, tourism campaigns, participation in global events, gastronomic diplomacy, Ukrainian literature translations, education exchanges, and historical education campaigns. Also, the authors emphasised that creating strategies for the long-term development of cultural diplomacy is essential for strengthening Ukraine's global presence and enhancing its cultural influence.

This study makes several novel contributions to cross-cultural communications and cultural diplomacy. Firstly, unlike the previous research that often focuses on general principles of cultural promotion, this study describes mechanisms for forming a positive cultural image of Ukraine to counteract stereotypes and misinformation during conflict. Secondly, the study emphasises the strategic use of digital platforms and long-term cultural diplomacy as primary instruments to enhance the global presence of Ukraine. And thirdly, the study introduces a cross-disciplinary perspective, combining the findings from communication theory, cultural studies, and international relations, to offer a comprehensive understanding of the issue being investigated.

Future research could investigate the role of digital media platforms in forming Ukraine's cultural narrative, particularly in the context of ongoing geopolitical challenges. It could also concentrate on the impact of cross-cultural communication strategies employed by Ukrainian diaspora communities in different countries and assess their effectiveness.

Bibliographic references

Akaliyski, P., & Welzel, C. (2020). Clashing Values: Supranational Identities, Geopolitical Rivalry and Europe's Growing Cultural Divide. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 51*(9), 740–762. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022120956716

Andryczyk, M. (2022). (After) Five Years of War in the Donbas: Cultural Responses and Reverberations. *East/West: Journal of Ukrainian Studies, 9*(1), 11–16. https://doi.org/10.21226/ewjus705

Antonova, L., & Shevchenko, L. (2023). The place and role of cultural diplomacy in the process of consolidating the country's image on the international arena. *Public Administration and Regional Development, 22*, 1043–1062. https://doi.org/10.34132/pard2023.22.07

Biletska, O. (2021). Culture as a nation branding tool within the international interaction system. *Culture and Arts in the Modern World, (22),* 22–33. https://doi.org/10.31866/2410-1915.22.2021.235887

Bode, I. (2024). AI Technologies and International Relations: Do We Need New Analytical Frameworks? *The RUSI Journal, 169*(5), 66–74. https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2024.2392394

Borysenko, O., Marukhovska-Kartunova O., Volkova, V., Baran, A., & Maraieva, U. (2024). The Influence of Social Networks on the Formation of Modern Culture and its Relationship with Philosophy. *Futurity Philosophy, 3*(3), 80–94. https://doi.org/10.57125/FP.2024.09.30.05

Botvyn, T., Aleksandrova, M., Krymets, L., Dobrovolska, R., & Rudenko, O. (2022). Philosophical comprehension of the formation and development of Ukrainian culture in the context of military realities: The geopolitical aspect. *Amazonia Investiga, 11*(58), 84–92. https://doi.org/10.34069/AI/2022.58.10.9

Braslauskas, J. (2023). Intercultural stereotypes and the role of critical and creative thinking in overcoming them. *Creativity Studies, 16*(1), 255–273. https://doi.org/10.3846/cs.2023.17187

Cheon, J. E., Nam, Y., Kim, K. J., Lee, H. I., Park, H. G., & Kim, Y. H. (2021). Cultural Variability in the Attribute Framing Effect. *Frontiers in psychology, 12*, 754265. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.754265

Damkier, S. A., & Ozer, S. (2022). Social Identity and Well-being: A Cross-Cultural Examination of Social Identity and Well-being in Light of the Accelerating Cultural Globalisation. *Psychology and Developing Societies, 34*(1), 125–145. https://doi.org/10.1177/09713336221080640

Dobrolyubska, Y., Semko, Y., Tytar, O., Yuhan, N., & Byedakova, S. (2024). Art as a tool for socio-cultural transformation: A case study in the context of contemporary social change. *Synesis, 16*(1), 445–460. https://seer.ucp.br/seer/index.php/synesis/article/view/2953

Dombrowski, Q., Kijas, A., & Majstorovic, S. (2022). Digital Cultural Heritage Under Attack: Saving Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Online (SUCHO). *Text and Image: Essential Problems in Art History, 1*(13), 6–12. https://doi.org/10.17721/2519-4801.2022.1.01

Drion, G. J. (2022). Towards a theory and practice of cultural communication. *European Journal of Cultural Management and Policy, 12*. https://doi.org/10.3389/ejcmp.2022.11085

Eriss, A., & Khoshsaligheh, M. (2023). Stereotypes in a Multilingual Film: A Case Study on Issues of Social Injustice. *Languages, 8*(3), 174. https://doi.org/10.3390/languages8030174

Filatova, O. (2021). Cultural diplomacy of Ukraine: Experience, problems and prospects. *The Journal of V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University. Issues of Political Science*, *40,* 50–57. https://doi.org/10.26565/2220-8089-2021-40-06

Galchynska, O., Filonenko, L., Lozev, R., Sydor, M., & Drotenko, V. (2024). Public art as a driver of change: exploring its socio-political impact in the modern era. *Amazonia Investiga, 13*(79), 217–231. https://doi.org/10.34069/AI/2024.79.07.17

Grincheva, N. (2023). The past and future of cultural diplomacy. *International Journal of Cultural Policy, 30*(2), 172–191. https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2023.2183949

Grusheva, T. (2023). Russian Literature as Channel for Spread of 'Russian World': Ukrainian Dimension. *Eminak: Scientific Quarterly Journal, 3*(43), 96–112. https://doi.org/10.33782/eminak2023.3.(43).660

Hololobov, S. (2022). Cultural diplomacy as a component of state policy in the sphere of culture at the current stage of Ukrainian state-formation. *Public Administration and Regional Development, 18*, 1057–1078. https://doi.org/10.34132/pard2022.18.04

Jin, D. Y. (2024). The rise of digital platforms as a soft power apparatus in the New Korean Wave era. *Communication and the Public, 9*(2), 161–177. https://doi.org/10.1177/20570473241234204

Klavdienko, S. (2024). Cultural Diplomacy of Ukraine in Conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian War. *Language – Culture – Politics, 1*, 147-159. DOI: https://doi.org/10.54515/lcp.2024.1.147-159

Konovalova, M. (2023). AI and diplomacy: Challenges and opportunities. *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs, 9*(2), 520–530. https://doi.org/10.47305/JLIA2392520k

Kravchenko, N. (2023). Anti-Ukrainian Discourse of Russian Media: Elimination Via Manipulation. *Political Studies, 50*(4), 97–122. https://doi.org/10.35757/STP.2022.50.4.01

Kryvoshein, V. (2023). Transformation of Political Perceptions in the Age of Information Technologies: Analyzing the Impact on Political Beliefs. *Futurity of Social Sciences, 1*(3), 20–32. https://doi.org/10.57125/FS.2023.09.20.02

Kuzio, T. (2019). Russian stereotypes and myths of Ukraine and Ukrainians and why Novorossiya failed. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies, 52*(4), 297-309.

Lee, S. T. (2023). A battle for foreign perceptions: Ukraine's country image in the 2022 war with Russia. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy, 19*, 345–358. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41254-022-00284-0

Li, N. (2023). Cross-Cultural Communication in English Interpretation Teaching of Higher Education: Challenges and Strategies. *EIKI Journal of Effective Teaching Methods, 1*(4). https://doi.org/10.59652/jetm.v1i4.81

Mashiah, I. (2024). "We are a hub for tech, innovation, and entrepreneurship": how places use tech-driven storytelling for nation branding. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy, 20*, 451–467. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41254-024-00341-w

Nye, J. S. (2021). Soft power: the evolution of a concept. *Journal of Political Power, 14*(1), 196–208. https://doi.org/10.1080/2158379X.2021.1879572

Obenza, B., & Rabaca, B. H. D. (2024). The Nexus between Political Awareness and Social Media Political Participation as Mediated by the Political Efficacy Among Youth in Region XI Philippines. *Journal of Contemporary Philosophical and Anthropological Studies, 2*(3). https://doi.org/10.59652/jcpas.v2i3.276

Ocón, D. (2021). Cultural Diplomacy and Co-operation in ASEAN: The Role of Arts and Culture Festivals. *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, *17*(2), 277–305. https://doi.org/10.1163/1871191X-bja10081

Olzacka, E. (2023). The development of Ukrainian cultural policy in the context of Russian hybrid aggression against Ukraine. *International Journal of Cultural Policy, 30*(2), 141–157. https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2023.2187053

Ouerghemmi, C., Ertz, M., Bouslama, N., & Tandon, U. (2023). The Impact of Virtual Reality (VR) Tour Experience on Tourists' Intention to Visit. *Information, 14*(10), 546. https://doi.org/10.3390/info14100546

Owusu, E., Arthur, J. L., & Amofah, K. (2023). Cross-Cultural Communication Strategies in the Digital Era: A Bibliometric Analysis. *Virtual Economics, 6*(2), 55–71. https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=1161733

Prokopenko, O., & Sapinski, A. (2024). Using Virtual Reality in Education: Ethical and Social Dimensions. *E-Learning Innovations Journal, 2*(1), 41–62. https://doi.org/10.57125/ELIJ.2024.03.25.03

Rojas-Méndez, J. I., & Davies, G. (2024). Promoting Country Image and Tourism in New or Underdeveloped Markets. *Journal of Travel Research, 63*(3), 755–768. https://doi.org/10.1177/00472875231164967

Suanpang, P., & Pothipassa, P. (2024). Integrating Generative AI and IoT for Sustainable Smart Tourism Destinations. *Sustainability, 16*(17), 7435. https://doi.org/10.3390/su16177435

Sunduk, T., Fadyeyeva, I., Yatsenko, O., & Pitel, N. (2024). Innovations and Technological Development in the Financial Sector of Ukraine: SWOT Analysis and Comparison of Opportunities. *Futurity Economics & Law, 4*(1), 52–63. https://doi.org/10.57125/FEL.2024.03.25.04

Szerszeń, T. (2024). Painful Images: Ukraine 1993, 2014, and 2022. *Arts, 13*(1), 8. https://doi.org/10.3390/arts13010008

Tarnavska, I. O. (2019). External media image of Ukraine (based on "The Guardian" materials). *International Journal of Innovative Technologies in Social Science, 6*(18), 28–36. https://doi.org/10.31435/rsglobal_ijitss/30092019/6674

Tereshchuk, V. (2019). Cultural Diplomacy as a Tool of Ukraine's Foreign Policy: Institutional Dimension. *History and Politics, 28*(35), 59–70. https://doi.org/10.12775/HiP.2019.015

Tkachenko, O. H., Sydorenko, O. P., Melnikova, I. O., Myronets, N. R., & Smus, A. H. (2021). The media image of Ukraine: An European view. *Linguistics and Culture Review, 5*(S4), 203–217. https://doi.org/10.21744/lingcure.v5nS4.1574

Trzeszczyńska, P., Demel, G., & Błaszczak-Rozenbaum, B. (2024). Heritage in Diaspora-Forming Processes: Encounters of Local Ukrainians and Migrants from Ukraine in Poland. *Journal of International Migration and Integration, 25*, 171–190. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-023-01064-2

Vasylchuk, H., & Drozdov, V. (2023). Soviet mythtaking in the Stalin era: Constructing the myth of "The Ukrainian People's Reunification". *East European Historical Bulletin, (28)*, 170–186. https://doi.org/10.24919/2519-058X.28.287542

Vecchi, A., Silva, E. S., & Jimenez Angel, L. M. (2021). Nation branding, cultural identity and political polarization – an exploratory framework. *International Marketing Review, 38*(1), 70–98. https://doi.org/10.1108/IMR-01-2019-0049

Ventura, S. (2024). War and Its Imagery: The Visual Narrative of the Ukrainian State's Instagram Account Ukraine.Ua as a Tool of Digital Public Diplomacy. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 1–25. https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2024.2395407

Wang, G. F., & Hu, X. (2022). Research on Intercultural Communication in International Business. *Open Access Library Journal, 9*, 1–7. https://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1109064

Wardle, C., & AbdAllah, A. (2023). The Information Environment and Its Influence on Misinformation Effects. In T. D. Purnat, T. Nguyen, & S. Briand (Eds.), *Managing Infodemics in the 21st Century* (pp. 41–51). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-27789-4_4

Xing, Y., & Jin, C.-H. (2023). The Impact of Cultural Values on Attitude Formation toward Cultural Products: Mediating Effects of Country Image. *Sustainability, 15*(14), 11172. https://doi.org/10.3390/su151411172

Yuryk, O., Barabanchyk, O., & Malets, M. (2022). Innovations in medicine: Modern challenges, future definitions: A narrative review. *Futurity Medicine, 1*(2), 26–34. https://doi.org/10.57125/FEM.2022.06.30.03

Zguric, B., Kos-Stanisic, L., & Lusa, D. (2023). Digital soft power diplomacy: The cases of Germany, Italy, and Spain in the countries of Eastern Partnership and central Asia. *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs, 9*(2), 242–260. https://doi.org/10.47305/JLIA2392298z

Zhu, Y. (2022). China's 'new cultural diplomacy' in international broadcasting: branding the nation through CGTN Documentary. *International Journal of Cultural Policy, 28*(6), 671–683. https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2021.2022651

Zhurzhenko, T. (2021). Fighting Empire, Weaponising Culture: The Conflict with Russia and the Restrictions on Russian Mass Culture in Post-Maidan Ukraine. *Europe-Asia Studies, 73*(8), 1441–1466. https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2021.1944990