

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES OF SMALL BUSINESS IN THE CONTEXT OF MEDIATISATION (UKRAINIAN CASES OF THE MARTIAL LAW PERIOD)

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Abstract. In the context of martial law, modern business in Ukraine requires the development and constant updating of effective strategies to support small enterprises. This article examines the role of information and communication tools in the context of mediatization, digitalization, and socio-political challenges. The study aims to identify and analyse the communication strategies and external communication tools used by small enterprises during martial law. To achieve this, the study focuses on small restaurant businesses, specifically coffee houses in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine, in times of uncertainty. The paper conducts a discourse analysis of communication practices of Ukrainian small enterprises, a case study of Zaporizhzhia coffee houses, a comparative analysis to compare the information and communication activities of these enterprises, and uses methods of classification and systematisation. The scientific novelty of the results obtained is that the paper proposes a systematisation of the views of European scholars on communication tools for supporting small businesses. Research on information and communication tools for supporting small businesses during martial law has the potential to contribute to the preservation and support of small enterprises. Furthermore, such research can also help to establish work, speed up work processes, reduce costs and preserve jobs in difficult conditions of military conflict. The results of the study can be used to substantiate political and economic decisions to support small businesses during martial law. The analysis of the impact of information and communication tools, and the development of strategies for their utilisation, can serve as the foundation for the creation of programmes, thereby playing a pivotal role in the support and regulation of small businesses. It has been determined that a detailed study in this area can contribute to the development of new innovative solutions and improve the effectiveness of support for enterprises in wartime. It is evident that small businesses play a pivotal role in the economic development and job creation of a nation. The effective operation of these enterprises has a considerable impact on the state's economy, contributing to the development of employment opportunities in the field of information and communication technologies.

Keywords: communication strategies, mediatization, digital tools, small business, public procurement, social networks, internal communications, external communications, visual communication, communication through printed materials.

JEL Classification: D83, H11, M38

1. Introduction

The imposition of martial law in Ukraine has precipitated a state of emergency, exerting considerable influence on the business sector, particularly with regard to small enterprises. The

invasion of the aggressor country has precipitated a series of adverse consequences, including crises and restrictions, a decline in sales, delays in deliveries, changes in consumer demand and other problems. It is imperative to acknowledge the pivotal role

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that effective communication strategies play in the functioning of a business. This assertion is particularly salient during periods of martial law, where the efficacy of communication strategies becomes of paramount importance. These technologies facilitate timely and active communication with customers, expedited communication with suppliers and partners, effective management of business processes, statistics, data monitoring and analysis, and more. In the context of martial law, where conventional modes of communication and commercial activity have been severely curtailed, it is imperative to examine the role of communication strategies as a means of supporting small businesses.

A considerable body of research has been dedicated to the examination of communication tools, digital technologies in the enterprise, and the provision of information support for business activities. The peculiarities of small businesses and the construction of their communication strategies for successful functioning have been considered by Murillo & Lozano (2006), Lampadarios et al. (2017), Sandberg & Håkansson (2020), and Sigurdsson et al. (2025). "Effective communication interaction between the enterprise and its customers and a qualitatively new model of communication processes management" (Gudz et al., 2024) was considered as the basis for developing the potential of enterprises by both "classics" of communication studies (Rosenblatt, 1982, Castells, 2009) and modern scholars (Kisieliuskas et al., 2018; Putraruri, 2024; Yashan et al., 2024).

In recent times, as K.-N. Koh's assertion is that organisations have become inherently intertwined with their media surroundings. In the context of organisations, mediatisation highlights how media have become deeply integrated and institutionalised within organisations and their practices" (Koh, 2022), especially the role of social media has increased. The impact of mediatisation on modern Ukrainian small business is realised through the rapid growth of companies' representation in social media. Consequently, since the advent of the twenty-first century, there has been a concerted focus on the mediatisation of business (Pallas, Josef & Fredriksson, 2013; Ihlen & Pallas, 2014; SaviÄ, 2016; Koh, 2022) and the integration of digital technologies into business processes (Kolomiyets et al., 2019; Fuerst, 2023; Kraus, 2025). However, the issue of crisis communication strategies employed by Ukrainian small businesses in the context of martial law, digitalisation and mediatisation has not been addressed by researchers, which is the gap that this study aims to fill.

The objective of the present study is to identify and analyse communication strategies and external communication tools employed by small businesses during martial law in the context of mediatisation and

digitalisation. In order to analyse communication strategies during martial law, a case study of small restaurant businesses was conducted. The businesses selected were coffee houses in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine, namely "JAYS: COFFEE BREWERS", "Coffee time" and "Zappa".

2. Communication Strategies of Small Business in Ukraine During Martial Law

Communication plays a special role in how an enterprise functions, as it is a tool that ensures the enterprise can adapt to relevant changes and form organisational culture. In his work, R. Daft offers the following behavioural-focused definition of communication: "Communication is a process by which two or more people exchange understandable information, usually with the aim of motivating or influencing behaviour." (Daft, 2010) At its core, communication involves the flow of information in the sender-channel-receiver chain, as well as real or potential communication in the form of dialogue. It also encompasses the impact on the controlled object that is achieved through the exchange of messages. Traditionally, there are two main types of communication strategy: internal and external. The main directions of these are shown in Figure 1.

It is imperative for the optimal functioning of the company, the resolution of business issues, and the fulfilment of employees' professional obligations that effective communication be established at all levels and between all parties. It is evident that communications represent a strategic asset for any given enterprise, given their pervasive involvement in all business processes. The development strategy that has been formulated in accordance with certain principles enables the effective management of the system and the reduction of risks, even in conditions of uncertainty such as those that may prevail during periods of martial law.

In addition to the differences in the addressee and purpose of communication, the channels and tools of external and internal communication are also different, as demonstrated in Table 1.

Martial law can significantly impact the internal and external communications of a small business. For internal communication, it is important to have a resilient system for exchanging information and communicating that can withstand possible interruptions to the power supply and communication channels. In addition, businesses are forced to change their usual strategy and established work planning in wartime, taking into account all the restrictions imposed by martial law.

It is an irrefutable fact that external communications for small businesses invariably entail interaction with the state, customers, partners, suppliers and

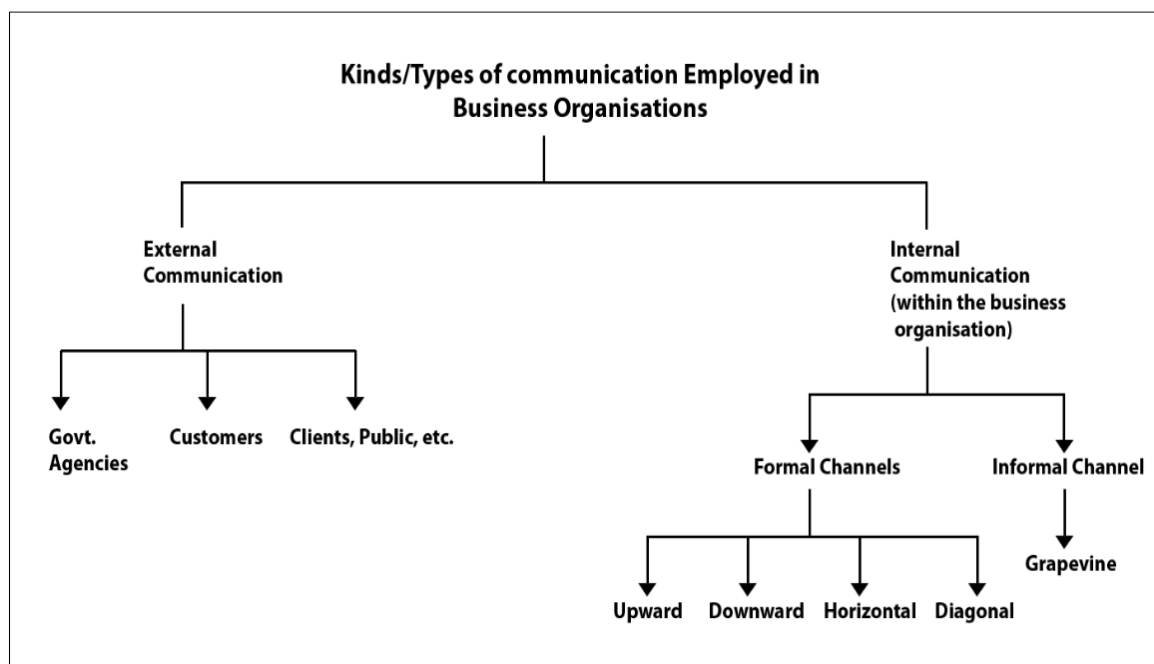


Figure 1. Directions of communication strategies in business

Source: (*Types of Business Communication*, 2025)

Table 1

Small business communication tools and channels

| Company's external communications | Company's internal communications |
|---|---|
| Communication with suppliers via <i>Viber and Telegram</i> messengers | Communication with employees via <i>Telegram chats</i> |
| Communication with guests using printed materials: <i>posters, newsletters, and announcements</i> | Communication and internal accounting using the <i>Poster Programme</i> |
| Communication with guests on social networks (<i>Instagram, Facebook, TikTok</i>) | For financial communications and statistics on the use of <i>EXCEL spreadsheets</i> |
| Communication with guests with the help of company employees – <i>Face to Face communication</i> | |

other stakeholders. This approach is instrumental in ensuring the company's successful operation within the Ukrainian economy. During periods of war, external communications for small businesses are rendered considerably more complex due to restrictions on movement and other factors that exert a direct influence on economic activity.

One of the most significant changes during wartime is the shift in business priorities. For example, during martial law, businesses redirected their efforts towards producing goods and services needed by the army and the local population, including temporarily displaced persons and refugees from occupied territories. This led to more time and resources being devoted to advertising campaigns and customer interaction via social media, with the aim of engaging as many people as possible in the campaign and getting their help.

Changes in external communication have been shown to have a significant impact on the sphere of

communication with customers and partners of small businesses, including suppliers and sponsors. In times of war, restrictions are often imposed on the ability to meet and communicate in physical buildings. Consequently, small businesses often begin to reorient themselves towards remote interaction, using such means of communication as phone calls, email, social media and other online tools. Furthermore, in times of war, businesses modify their advertising strategy, adopt new media channels and adjust the tone and style of communication. This is done with a view to taking into account new realities and circumstances, thereby avoiding any violation of moral boundaries and the involvement of parties that could damage the business's reputation.

In the context of martial law, businesses have been compelled to modify their products and services in response to emerging needs and shifting requirements. For instance, the company might modify its products to offer more affordable options, introduce new

military and patriotic merchandise to the sale, suspend advertising campaigns or initiate new ones that emphasise patriotism, support for the Ukrainian Armed Forces, or charitable causes.

3. Communications with the State

Martial law conditions have led to closer cooperation between small businesses and the state than would be the case in normal times. Small businesses are turning to the state for help in providing the necessary resources, support, coordination and financial assistance. The modern Ukrainian portal Diia. Business was created to support businesses, including during wartime. Its information section contains details of government and donor programmes and private initiatives designed to support entrepreneurs during wartime. These initiatives will help preserve businesses and jobs, thereby supporting the Ukrainian economy.

State assistance that small businesses can receive from the beginning of the full-scale invasion:

- Compensation for the employment of IDPs;
- payments for individual entrepreneurs and employees for partial unemployment during the war;
- assistance in business relocation.

In the context of martial law, effective communication between the state and small businesses is of paramount importance. Such communication fosters mutual understanding and facilitates cooperation between the two parties, thereby contributing to the maintenance of order and stability in society. It is incumbent upon the state to engage proactively with small businesses, ensuring the provision of timely and accurate information regarding the support and assistance available during martial law. Consequently, small businesses are expected to furnish quality and timely information regarding their capabilities and current needs, in addition to the outcomes of their activities. It is incumbent upon businesses to be receptive to communication with other businesses and to cooperation with the state, all of which can assist in the resolution of common problems.

A further instrument of economic interaction between the state and small businesses is the public procurement system. Participation in state and municipal tenders enables businesses to receive stable orders, especially during periods of general economic downturn when the private sector is inactive. Frequently, such contracts represent the sole source of revenue for companies, thereby enabling them to maintain employment levels and undertake socially significant operations. In recognition of these challenges, the government is implementing measures to facilitate the participation of small businesses in tender procedures on an equal footing with larger entities. Concurrently, effective positioning of itself

as a reliable partner in public procurement requires proper communication from businesses: open information about contracts received, transparent coverage of the terms and results of fulfilling obligations, and emphasis on the social value of the work performed.

It is evident that during periods of martial law, the successful functioning of the economy is contingent on the cooperation of small businesses and the state. The ability of small businesses to adapt to new conditions and continue operating under the restrictions imposed by martial law is contingent on effective communication. Such communication is also instrumental in ensuring economic stability and preserving employment opportunities.

Various tools are used to ensure effective communication between the state and small businesses during the martial law period, such as:

- State information campaigns, advertising campaigns to promote support and assistance to small businesses.
- Organisation of conferences, meetings, gatherings and other events for small business representatives. They provide an opportunity to discuss the problems and challenges faced by small businesses during the martial law period and propose joint solutions.
- Creation of specialised information centres and hotlines to provide advice on financial and legal support for small businesses.
- Development of modern small business support programmes that take into account the specifics of martial law and help small businesses adapt to martial law conditions.
- Support for specialised platforms for public procurement.

4. Customer Communications

The following tools and approaches can be used for effective external communication of small businesses under martial law:

- Using social media and modern internet technologies is an effective way to attract new customers, retain old ones and conduct transactions. Furthermore, since the outbreak of the pandemic, many companies have switched to communicating with customers and other stakeholders online, and this approach has remained relevant ever since.
- Organisation of special events, including charity and various promotions during martial law. Many consumers prefer goods and services related to national security or patriotic themes. Therefore, one of the possible ways to attract customers and increase sales is to organise special promotions that stimulate demand for the company's goods and services. Such promotions include gifts for customers, free delivery, discounts on goods, etc.

– Working with partners and suppliers. Under martial law, both the range of goods available for sale and the partner base of small businesses change significantly. Ties with the aggressor country are excluded, and Russian-made goods are removed from the product range. Therefore, it is important to be able to maintain communication with Ukrainian partners, manufacturers and suppliers in order to be able to respond quickly to changes in the market situation and maintain the reputation of one's company in Ukraine.

– Supporting customers and maintaining a positive company image during martial law. During martial law, it is important to maintain a positive image of the company among customers. To do this, various tools are used, such as convenient chatbots, loyalty and customer support programmes, social media and other relevant communication channels. The company should always respond quickly to customer requests and questions, provide high-quality and prompt support for any issues that arise.

– Compliance with rules and laws. During martial law, businesses receive a lot of loyalty from the state, but at the same time, the company's activities may be restricted by various rules and laws that arise during martial law. It is important to comply with them in order to avoid problems with the authorities and maintain a positive image of the company among customers and partners.

The following channels and tools are used for external communications.

1. *Communication with guests on social media*, the most popular of which is Instagram. In the last two decades, due to mediatisation "as a dominant transformation affecting the communication activities of both individuals and organisations" (Pallas & Fredriksson, 2013), "companies are turning into producers of their own media and media content, and through their own media they manage communication with stakeholders" (SaviÄ, 2016).

Since the first days of the full-scale invasion, Ukrainian small businesses have been actively engaging with guests via social media, including direct mail. The most frequently asked questions are as follows:

- Whether the establishment is open during an air raid or power outage;
- location of the nearest shelter;
- working hours.

Social media is currently one of the most popular communication channels in the modern world for both internal and external use. It allows people to easily exchange information, find and communicate with each other, carry out transactions, and run advertising campaigns. Social networks provide small businesses with a wide range of opportunities. Social media has also been used to coordinate fundraising for the Ukrainian Armed Forces and charity events.

Social media has become an integral part of any business. While a restaurant can operate without a website, it cannot operate without social media. Users turn to social media to find restaurants, make table reservations and leave feedback. The following objects should be analysed in relation to social media (Figure 2).

It is imperative to allocate a significant proportion of the research endeavour to the analysis of high-quality content on social media. It should not only satisfy customers' aesthetic preferences but also influence purchases and increase the number of transactions. It is becoming increasingly evident that content, advertising, the utilisation of hashtags, and interaction with popular review services are becoming pivotal elements for ensuring competitiveness and development. It has been demonstrated that users place a greater degree of trust in reviews than in advertisements. Consequently, the analysis and management of these factors are of paramount importance for all restaurant establishments. The analysis of reviews constitutes a potent instrument for enhancing the operational performance of food outlets. It is from these sources that one can obtain information regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the establishment, as well as maintain awareness of current developments in the business. Such an analysis should be conducted on an annual basis, with monthly dynamics also being monitored, as only such a methodology will be able to demonstrate changes in the analysed indicators and the work that has been done.

2. *Communication with guests through printed materials*: posters, newsletters and announcements. In addition, telephone communications of small businesses were improved through the placement of posters used as a means of visual communication. The posters were placed in prominent locations in the workplace and on building facades. They serve to convey important information to employees and customers. Here are some ideas that have been implemented in the analysed companies using posters to improve internal communications:

– To underline and highlight the company's mission, values and goals. A poster was created with the objective of highlighting the company's mission, values and goals. This initiative has enabled the dissemination of information regarding our company to a wider audience, comprising IDPs who are acclimatising to urban life and seeking leisure or employment opportunities. Furthermore, it facilitated the attraction of new customers and the sale of additional products.

– Key messages. Messages were formulated and disseminated to consumers via poster. These included reminders of significant dates, notifications regarding the scheduling of promotions, dates of charity events, and the establishment's opening hours.

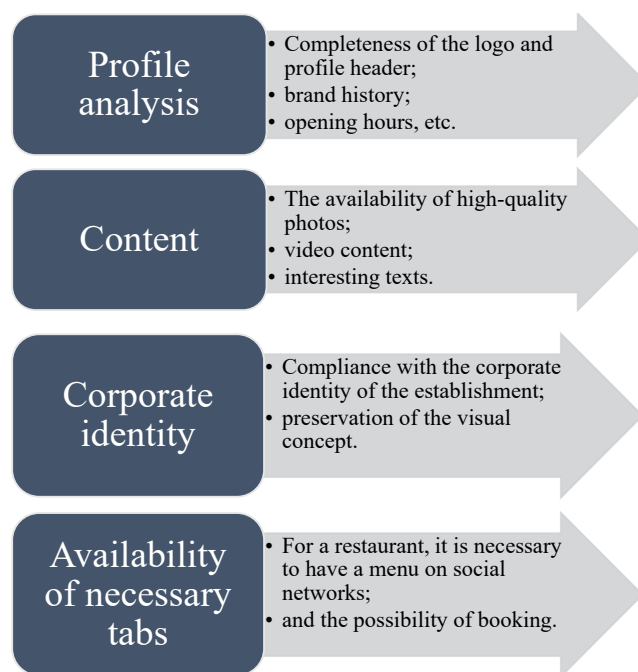


Figure 2. Main objects of analysis in social media

– Key procedures and rules. In order to raise awareness of the necessary actions to be taken in the event of an air raid, posters were developed to provide clear guidance on the appropriate response to power outages.

– Internal programmes and initiatives. The current internal programmes and initiatives were highlighted, and posters were created for the purpose of promoting them. These included charity events, fundraisers to support the Armed Forces, and the provision of complimentary coffee to members of the Armed Forces.

– Encouraging consumers. Information posters were developed to provide consumers with information regarding discounted items in the coffee house. These included information on discounted desserts and combination menus, the latter of which were designed to stimulate consumer demand.

3. Communication with guests through company employees.

Communicating with guests through the company's employees is an important element of customer interaction and creating a positive impression of the company. Here are some practical steps that have been taken to communicate with guests through employees during the period of martial law:

– Employee training – all employees have been properly trained to ensure that they have the necessary knowledge of the company's products or services and the skills to communicate effectively with guests. Guidelines were created to effectively present the product, answer questions and resolve issues that arose.

– Politeness and professionalism. It is imperative to consistently underscore the significance of politeness,

professionalism, and amiability in interactions with guests. Employees are expected to adhere to a standard of courtesy, attentiveness to guests' needs, and the provision of quality information or assistance to customers.

– Clear communication. It is imperative that communication with guests is characterised by clarity and comprehensibility. Employees undergo rigorous training to ensure they are equipped with the necessary skills to articulate complex concepts and processes in a comprehensible manner. As previously mentioned, well-written scripts were utilised for this purpose.

– Development of active selling skills. Employees are instructed in active selling techniques, enabling them to offer products and services to guests in an effective manner. These individuals possess the ability to articulate the unique attributes and advantages of the company's offerings to customers in a persuasive manner.

– Developing effective communication at a distance. In instances where interaction with guests occurs remotely (e.g., via phone, email or chat), the responsibility for this falls under the remit of the SMS manager. This encompasses the formulation of unambiguous messages, meticulous attention to detail, and the capacity to address unanticipated issues without the necessity for direct interaction with the guest.

– Collecting feedback from guests. Employees participated in the process of collecting feedback from guests. Anonymous surveys were distributed to guests, who were invited to provide feedback on their experience of visiting the establishment. In addition

to the survey, guests have the opportunity to provide feedback or communicate directly with the hotel to ascertain their opinions, wishes and suggestions. This contributes not only to the enhancement of services, but also to the demonstration to guests of the consideration and value accorded to their opinions and the fulfilment of their needs.

– Consistent communication. It is vital to emphasise the importance of consistent communication with guests in order to ensure their engagement, connection and familiarity with the company. This included the dissemination of regular information regarding new products, promotions, and events through various communication channels, including email and social media platforms such as Instagram.

Good communication with guests at the analysed enterprises was achieved through well-written scripts for dealing with specific situations, effective outdoor advertising using printed materials, and hard work with company employees to conduct training sessions, meetings and anonymous surveys. The results of these were analysed and used to improve external communications.

5. Conclusions

The contemporary state of the Ukrainian business sector is characterised by instability, declining corporate revenues and contributions to the national economy, decay and destruction of physical assets, and growing needs of society and small businesses. The majority of these challenges can be mitigated through the implementation of robust internal and external communication strategies. The article

examines various aspects of external communication in small business, such as the use of communication channels (digital platforms – Diia.Business, social media, email, telephone, face-to-face communication), communication tools (printed materials, special events), the effectiveness of communication processes and the impact of communication on interaction with external stakeholders – the state, customers and partners.

In conclusion, external communications of small businesses during periods of martial law are subject to a number of challenges. However, the utilisation of internet technologies and social media, interaction with the media, organisation of special events and promotions, collaboration with partners and suppliers, customer support and compliance with rules and laws can facilitate effective communication with external partners and stakeholders. In the context of the prevailing state of martial law, small businesses have assumed an active role in supporting the state, offering their goods and services for defence, humanitarian aid and rehabilitation purposes.

In contemplating the prospects for contemporary small business in Ukraine, it is imperative to underscore the necessity of transcending the constraints imposed by the post-war era through the implementation of proactive global communication strategies. It is evident that a multitude of problematic issues can be resolved through innovative communication, digital and media technologies. In the contemporary business environment, it is imperative to integrate both online and offline strategies to ensure effective communication and customer engagement.

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