

Character Assassination Practices in Reputation Management in Wartime in Ukraine in Social Media (the Alexey Arestovich Case)

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15421/172574>**Kashyrova Nataliia**Ph.D. Student, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6893-8754>, mnala2328@gmail.com

National Technical University 'Kharkiv Polytechnic Institute' (Kharkiv, Ukraine)

Abstract.

The article was written during wartime, when an important role in the information component of hybrid warfare is played by effective communication among actors involved in social practices of character assassination.

The aim of this study is to describe and classify the methods and features of reputational destruction as a socio-cultural phenomenon within Ukrainian discourse during wartime. The objective is to identify the socio-cultural dynamics of societal development involved in the interaction between identity and power within Ukrainian society, from the beginning of the full-scale war in 2022 to 2025.

The article analyses the messages of the opinion leader, whose reputation is being studied, within the framework of CARP Research Lab and S. Samoilenko's research. The research objective is to describe and classify the examples of attacks on a famous person that destroy his reputation through the techniques of character assassination. For analysis, the social network accounts of O. Arestovych, from January 2023 to February 2025, were chosen.

According to the results, the author suggests that the reputation of a famous person, who was in the pro-governmental group and then left it, on the contrary, is built on the desire to interest the audience and requires ambiguous statements, provocations, and emotionally colored vocabulary. The results obtained illustrate examples of the destruction of reputation as a social practice in wartime. At the micro-sociological level, this phenomenon is analyzed through the behavior of opinion leaders who influence specific social groups within society and shape the socio-political information landscape. At the macro-sociological level, such practices are viewed as part of the broader process of understanding Ukrainian identity during wartime, reflecting collective behavior that impacts social groups and the transformative processes characteristic of society in times of war.

Keywords: character assassination, reputation management, online reputation, opinion leader, social media, wartime

Практики вбивства персонажів в управлінні репутацією під час війни в Україні в соціальних мережах (кейс Олексія Арестовича)

Каширова Наталія

Національний технічний університет "Харківський політехнічний інститут" (Харків, Україна)

Анотація.

Статтю написано під час воєнного стану, коли важливу роль в інформаційній складовій гібридної війни відіграє ефективна комунікація між акторами, залученими до соціальних практик репутаційного знищення. Метою цього дослідження є опис і класифікація методів та особливостей репутаційного знищення як соціокультурного феномену в українському дискурсі під час війни. Завдання полягає у виявленні соціокультурної динаміки суспільного розвитку, яка проявляється у взаємодії між ідентичністю та владою в українському суспільстві від початку повномасштабної війни у 2022 році до 2025 року.

У статті проаналізовано повідомлення лідера думок, репутація якого стала об'єктом дослідження, в межах методології CARP Research Lab та досліджень С. Самойленка. Метою дослідження є опис і класифікація прикладів атак на відому особу, які руйнують її репутацію за допомогою технік репутаційного знищення. Для аналізу було обрано облікові записи О. Арестовича в соціальних мережах за період з січня 2023 року по лютий 2025 року. На основі отриманих результатів автор стверджує, що репутація відомої особи, яка раніше була в провладній групі, а потім залишила її, навпаки, формується через прагнення зацікавити аудиторію та вимагає неоднозначних висловлювань, провокацій і емоційно забарвленої лексики.

Отримані результати ілюструють приклади руйнування репутації як соціальної практики в умовах воєнного часу. На мікросоціологічному рівні це явище аналізується через поведінку лідерів думок, які впливають на окремі соціальні групи суспільства та формують соціально-політичний інформаційний ландшафт. На макросоціологічному рівні подібні практики розглядаються як частина ширшого процесу осмислення української ідентичності в умовах війни, що відображає колективну поведінку, яка впливає на соціальні групи та трансформаційні процеси, притаманні суспільству в період війни.

Ключові слова: репутаційне знищення, управління репутацією, онлайн-репутація, лідер думок, соціальні мережі, воєнний час.

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Introduction.

Wartime constitutes one of the most intense expressions of conflict and crisis, compelling both society and the state to undergo a profound transformation. Since the onset of the full-scale war in Ukraine in 2022, society and socio-political institutions have been confronted with critical challenges, the resolution of which directly affects the lives of citizens and shapes trajectories that either promote societal development or erode national sovereignty.

A key dimension of this process involves the construction of a renewed national identity, alongside the deconstruction of identities inherited or imposed by prior historical contexts. This is essential for defining social boundaries, determining trust, and identifying those perceived as part of the collective “we”.

In times of war, such questions acquire heightened salience within socio-political discourse. Accordingly, it becomes imperative to examine contemporary modes of communication, particularly social media and digital platforms, where narratives concerning individuals and groups circulate rapidly, manipulate audiences, and exert significant influence over public opinion and social norms. These dynamics, in turn, have a tangible impact on social cohesion and the distribution of power within Ukrainian society under conditions of armed conflict.

Sociological research on the management of opinion leaders' reputation can contribute to a deeper understanding of the roles played by both formal and informal individuals and institutions in shaping social discourse and influencing political structures, mass communication, and representatives of various social groups, especially in wartime.

By examining the personal experiences of opinion leaders in social media and mass communication channels within broader socio-political and cultural contexts, as well as the practices of reputational damage and character assassination, it becomes possible to gain insights into how different factors impact on person and group beliefs, how the social impression and reputation is constructed.

Social impression or impression formation: the process by which individuals perceive, organize, and ultimately integrate information to form unified and coherent situated impressions of others. It is internalized expectations for situated events condition what information individuals deem is important and worthy of their attention (Moore, 2015). This reality, in turn, underpins the formation of trust, reputation, and identity – key elements in environments marked by acute conflict and uncertainty.

Thus, the sociological examination of reputational destruction during wartime in Ukraine may reveal complex interrelations between identity, power, and socio-cultural dynamics. Such analysis is vital for understanding the resilience of reputation-related factors, grounded in trust, as well as the trajectories of societal

development, the character of Ukrainian society during the war, and its post-war transformation.

Aims and objectives of the research. The aim of this study is to describe and classify the methods and features of reputational destruction as a socio-cultural phenomenon within Ukrainian discourse during wartime. The objective is to identify the socio-cultural dynamics of societal development involved in the interaction between identity and power within Ukrainian society, from the beginning of the full-scale war in 2022 to 2025.

Literature Review. The evolution of information and communication technologies (ICT) has significantly transformed social realities, particularly through the emergence of virtual communities – groups of individuals who interact based on shared interests through digital platforms (Parsell & Townley, 2012). In Ukraine, this transformation has been sharply pronounced due to the ongoing full-scale war with Russia. Social media platforms such as Telegram (71.3%), YouTube (66.2%), and Facebook (55%) have become the primary sources of news for the population, with 77.9% of respondents preferring these media over traditional sources (Civil Network Opora, 2023).

The Russian-Ukrainian war has intensified the strategic role of social media in information warfare. These platforms not only disseminate real-time visual content of hostilities but also serve as primary channels for both information and disinformation (Afanasiev, Novokhatko, & Sinko, 2023). The war has triggered a transformation in the function and perception of social media, including heightened participation, increased information flows, and a noticeable rise in public trust toward social media – 6% higher than in other online sources (Vaskivska, 2023).

In the virtual environment, individuals curate their identities and manage their public images independently. This self-presentation fosters engagement and loyalty, leading to the emergence of opinion leaders who maintain long-term reputational assets. These leaders often play influential roles in shaping socio-political and cultural discourse.

Leadership, traditionally studied in psychological and sociological contexts, is closely tied to personal charisma (Weber, 1978), situational adaptability (Stogdill, 1974), and systemic function (Parsons, 1951). Leaders engage with their social environments dynamically, and their reputations – constructed and contested in public view – become central to their social power.

In a competitive external environment, character assassination (CA), a critical facet of reputation management, was first introduced academically by Jerome Davis (1950). It has since evolved into a multidisciplinary concept studied across history (Hofstadter, 1955), political science (Matto, Smart), and communication (Keohane, Icks, Samoilenko). CA is increasingly recognized as a strategic tool within ideological and power struggles (Samoilenko, 2021).

The interdisciplinary Character Assassination and Reputation Politics (CARP) Lab has substantially advanced this field, highlighting CA's manifestations in rhetorical, sociopsychological, and sociocultural dimensions (Samoilenko, 2020; Icks & Shiraev, 2014). From a sociocultural standpoint, CA not only reflects power dynamics but also serves a functional role in structuring social norms and identities (Samoilenko, 2021; Giddens, 1984; Lizardo, 2010).

In wartime and crisis conditions, reputation becomes

a vital asset, analyzed by scholars like Mark JC Crescenzi, Paul K. Huth, Yufend Wang, and Janise M. Morse. CA emerges as a core component of political communication strategies, including negative campaigning and information warfare (O'Leary, 2006). It involves both individual and collective attacks, employing verbal and visual tools such as rumors, accusations, innuendo, and even vandalism (Icks & Shiraev, 2014).

There are several types of character assassination, which depend on reasons and objectives (Table.1):

Table 1.

Types of Character Assassination

Type of Character Assassination	Description
Anonymous lies	Falsification of biographical facts
Misquoting	Omitting details from the context of one's quote
Silencing	("Erasing" the opponent from collective memory)
Acts of vandalism	Performed on objects symbolizing the victim
Name-calling	The usage of short negative labels, i.e., "terrorist", "communist"
Appellation to mental illness	Stigmatization of psychological disorders
Appellation to sexual deviations	allegations of sexual misconduct

These methods aim to delegitimize public figures or institutions, and their social significance invites sociological analysis (Bondarenko, 2020).

Reputation is a complex social construct. It presents a form of consensual or widespread social evaluation (Conte & Paolucci, 2002; Chauvin, 2013). It is conditional, localized, and multidimensional: Functional, moral, and identity-based (Voswinkel, 2011). Effective reputation management, particularly during crises, involves strategic communication aimed at stakeholder trust, influence retention, and damage control (Derevianko, 2022).

Numerous models illuminate the mechanics of CA. Samoilenko (2019, 2021) identifies five key elements: the Target, the Attacker, the Medium, the Audience, and the Context.

The following verbal techniques are used in the practice of attacks (Samoilenko, 2018; Samoilenko, 2021):

1. Doublespeak (distorting and disguising the meaning of words);
2. Spin (biased interpretation of an event to convince the audience that the author's judgment is correct);
3. False Accusations (unsubstantiated false accusations);

4. Rumors (allegations whose veracity is not confirmed);

5. Spreading Innuendo (implies negative content or misunderstanding, from the societal point of view, by innuendo).

Bondarenko (2020) advocates for a sociological conceptualization of CA, drawing on Goffman's dramaturgical model and Andrew Phelps' three-part structure of social interaction. This perspective positions CA as a form of social dramaturgy, embedded in both micro-level interactions and macro-level social structures. Phelps' Three-Part Structure of Social Interaction includes:

1. The Actor (or Sender) – the individual who initiates communication or performs an action.
2. The Message or Action – the content or behavior conveyed to others.
3. The Audience (or Receiver) – those who interpret or respond to the message.

This triadic structure emphasizes relational dynamics – each part existing in interaction with the others, shaped by mutual perception and meaning-making.

This interpretation suggests analyzing the phenomenon through the lens of the symbolic interactionist paradigm. Within the framework of

dramaturgical theory, social performance is conducted according to certain rules, but it also presumes that at times actors behave spontaneously. The latter implies that such activity is better understood not as a fixed system, but as a continuous process (Macionis, 2003).

It is important to underline that the way people behave in this process changes over time, and each person involved forms their views of what's going on. These views are shaped by their own experiences, emotions, and feelings, impacting the situation perception.

Methodology. To investigate the CA practices of individual opinion leaders, in social media, in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian full-scale war, public opinion polls in Ukraine are analyzed (Comparison of the data of surveys dedicated to identifying leaders in the socio-political field of the country, in wartime KIIS and Razumkov Centre, shows the following top 5 leaders (Razumkov Centre, 2023).

The author suggests that content analysis of opinion leader social networks and examples of CA in the socio-political information field of Ukraine will help to analyze the description of events involving opinion leaders in CA attacks and to find distinctive components of CA type, to collect information on reputation building in wartime, which will help to find factors of influence and dominants of reputation management in this period.

Taking into account the interdisciplinary nature of this research, a more comprehensive and in-depth analysis must incorporate insights from social psychology, public relations, communication practices, and sociology. In the process of describing and classifying reputational destruction, particular attention is paid to its social impact, both on the targeted actor and the audience.

Thus, the study employs a combination of methodological approaches, including content, discourse, and structural analyses. Content analysis facilitates the identification and categorization of patterns within verbal communication. Discourse analysis enables a deeper interpretation of texts, incorporating extra-linguistic features such as psychological, sociolinguistic, and cultural dimensions. Structural analysis, meanwhile, allows to consider the norms and values inherent in the society under study.

The accounts in social media (Facebook, Telegram, Instagram) among the top 5 opinion leaders for 2022-2023 are selected for analysis (KIIS, 2022; Razumkov Centre, 2023).

One of the interesting examples of how the popularity of a leader who has created a positive reputation for himself grows, how it changes due to his incorrect statement and dismissal, and how it develops, withstanding information attacks and media attacks in Ukrainian society, was demonstrated by Oleksiy Arestovich, one of the few official speakers (representing the Office of the President of Ukraine), at the beginning of the war, who became an opinion leader in the society and is known as "mister two-three weeks" (RBC Ukraine, 2022), (due to his statement

in the first days of the war that "active fighting will stop in 2-3 weeks" (RBC Ukraine, 2022)). For millions of his listeners, he became an idol and a voice of truth about the war, which relieved evening stress and allowed them to sleep. Others criticized him mercilessly for what he told people." (Rop, 2022).

Arestovich, who presents himself as a public figure and political leader on his Telegram channel and Facebook and Instagram social networks, was appointed as an adviser to the Office of the President of Ukraine since the beginning of the war. Later, he became a media celebrity and constantly appeared in the ratings of opinion leaders, occupying top positions.

Alexey Arestovich (Oleksiy Mykolayovych Arestovich) is a former information policy adviser to the head of the Ukrainian delegation to the Minsk Group, speaker of the TCG (Trilateral Contact Group), former adviser to the head of the Presidential Office, actor, blogger, military and political commentator. The head of the TCG, Leonid Kravchuk, noted that Arestovich was chosen because of his military experience and his vision and position on the issues under consideration by the TCG (LB.ua, 2025). He set up a charitable foundation to provide psychological support to the military in the ATO zone. In the winter of 2020, he was appointed a freelance adviser to the Head of the Presidential Office, Andriy Yermak, on strategic communications in national security and defense.

His controversial statements and comments on wartime situations attracted many admirers and opponents. It is interesting that the growth of his popularity and his "recognizability" started with the beginning of the Russian military aggression, when in the first days, most officials were silent, while Arestovich was actively speaking and conducting social networks, where he shared information and broadcast optimism, remembering at least his famous "2-3 weeks, - and the war will be over". Later, one of his statements, in particular, that a missile shot down by Ukrainian air defense fell on a multi-story building, was refuted by the Ukrainian Air Force, caused a scandal, and played the role of a catalyst as a result of which he had to write a statement on resignation from the post of advisor. The leader commented on this act as "showing an example of civilized behavior" (BBC, 2023). In this case, incorrectly transmitted information about military actions, with further assessments and comments on social networks, can be qualified as CA case. However, Arestovich's timely response and voluntary resignation from the President of Ukraine Office can be considered as a variant of effective reputation management, taking into account long-term plans, where prompt reaction (acknowledgment of guilt and apology to the audience) helped quickly "whitewash" the leader and restore the trust of his audience.

To define information attacks and assaults, the features, the author will research information in open channels of mass communication as Attacker data and

content of Arestovich's profiles, in social media (officially from 01.05.2025 the President of Ukraine signed a decree on imposing sanctions against the former freelance adviser to the head of the Office of the President, in this regard, access to Arestovich's channels in social networks YouTube, Facebook, Instagram Telegram (Ukrinform, 2025) will be banned in Ukraine as the Target (who is under attack, according to the CA concept). It is worth mentioning that in the context of this interaction, the roles are periodically changed as Arestovich also makes information attacks, thus forcing the representatives of the mass communication channels to respond.

Results and Discussion.

Arestovich's profiles on social media include Alexey Arestovych (YouTube), @alexey.arestovych

(Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/alexey.arestovich/>), O_Arestovich Official (Telegram: https://t.me/s/O_Arestovich_official?before=7363), Alexey Arestovich (Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/alexey.arestovich/?locale=ru_RU).

In most cases, the content of Arestovich's social networks is similar, so the screenshot of the content is taken from the social network Instagram there's a difference in the spelling of the first and last names in his profiles.

Analyses of O. Arestovich's profiles on social networks Facebook, Instagram, and Telegram show that the Telegram channel by O. Arestovich gained the most incredible popularity (Table 2).

Table 2.

O. Arestovich's profiles on social networks

	Facebook Oleksiy Arestovych https://www.facebook.com/alexey.arestovich	Instagram Alexey.arestovich https://www.instagram.com/alexey.arestovich/	Telegram Arestovich Official https://t.me/s/O_Arestovich_official
Number of subscribers in August 2023; 11.12.2023; 10.07.2025	886 000; 832 000; 753 000	1,300 000; 924 000; 738 000	444 946; 333 059; 300574
Intensity of communication	1-2 publications/day	1 to 3 publications/day	1 to 5 publications/day
Language and communication style	Russian, Ukrainian, from business to informal style in covering news and opinions on any aspect of life, values, and beliefs	Russian, more lively communication, with a lot of diverse content (from politics and training in NLP, rhetoric in our project "Apeiron" to issues of psychology, religion, and philosophy	Russian, a wide range of topics in different spheres, a variety of issues, and proposals for discussion
Stakeholders	Citizens of the country, socio-political institutions in the country, and abroad	Citizens of the country, the socio-political institutions of the country	Citizens of the country, socio-political institutions in the country, and abroad
Content	News, opinion, comments, reflections	News, opinion, comments, reflections	News, opinion, comments, reflections
Interaction with the subscribers	Direct, with lots of likes, from 1-7k lots of comments, with an average of 12-1k comments under each post	The number of likes is 10-50,000 under the post, and the number of comments is 300-12,000	6-15 thousand likes and reactions

It should be noted that with the outbreak of the war, the lives of most Ukrainian citizens are now more connected with those issues that the situation has caused: participation in the defense of the country, volunteer work, security problems, temporary departure from the country or evacuation to safer territories, and much more. Empathy and sympathy toward past events, along with discussing them, sharing emotions and emotional assessments, and employing emotionally charged vocabulary, help the audience feel like 'one of us' or that they 'belong to the group. In the public space, opinion leaders actively participate in military operations or help the military. In wartime, opinion leaders actively

participate in military communications and share their war stories, working for themselves and society. Thus, it produces in-group identification and emotional response.

So, Arestovich in the recent past was an advisor to the President's Office, and now establishes itself as a voice of opposition, a political figure, mentor, and analyst.

It should be noted that this particular opinion leader most frequently writes in Russian on all social media platforms, and this was the case both during his tenure as adviser and thereafter. It bears noting that for many Ukrainians, the Russian language has become odious due to the aggression of the neighboring state and is socially unacceptable; moreover, this language is officially

prohibited for public official use in Ukraine. It should be noted that this particular opinion leader most frequently writes in Russian on all social media platforms, and this was the case both during his tenure as adviser and thereafter. It bears noting that for many Ukrainians, the Russian language has become odious due to the aggression of the neighboring state and is socially unacceptable; moreover, this language is officially prohibited for public officials in Ukraine. Such a step demonstrates freedom of speech and a desire to convey information to the Russian speaking audience in Ukraine and abroad, inclined to perceive different information or information against the war. It is worth noting that Arestovich frequently interacts with the audience, as his pages are updated from 1 to 5 times a day: he reacts most promptly to all topics of the day that are important for the citizens of the country, also this opinion leader expresses opinions that he is ready to discuss and debate, gives comments without being afraid of "uncomfortable", funny or judgmental reactions. He is also the one who communicates on any topic, from politics and the activities of journalists to the teaching of philosophy and psychology. Covering topics of philosophical and psychological nature, the author promotes his training project, the Apeiron School, which emphasizes the uniqueness of the leader and helps him get into the trend of the world's successful people who pass on their experience through mentoring. All the content since the beginning of hostilities was directed toward interaction between pro-government structures and various audiences within society.

In general, the leader discusses ideas about new rules and values for society, ideas for a new Ukrainian identity as part of a new stage in the development of Ukrainian society, relevant social phenomena, interacts and works effectively within the mass communication stream, securing credibility in mediated communication, which builds a sustainable reputation and promotes positive recommendations in mediated communication.

For the study the period from August 2022 to August 2023 was chosen, taking into account the main event, namely, before and after Arestovich's dismissal, at his request, from the Office of the President of Ukraine: 'On 17 September 2023, he wrote an application for dismissal from the post of the Chief of Staff of the Office of the President of Ukraine. Later, the Office of the President satisfied Arestovich's request for dismissal from his post' (LB.UA, 2023)

Dismissal of an official, in socio-political discourse, is often an attempt to destroy reputation, that can be rendered as CA case. Moreover, CA is understood as both the communication process itself and its result (spoilt reputation) (Samoilenko, 2023).

For further consideration, one should focus on the details that allow us to identify the type of attacks within the socio-psychological and socio-cultural traditions.

On 14 January 2023, a Russian missile hit a multi-story building in the Peremoha residential area in Dnipro.

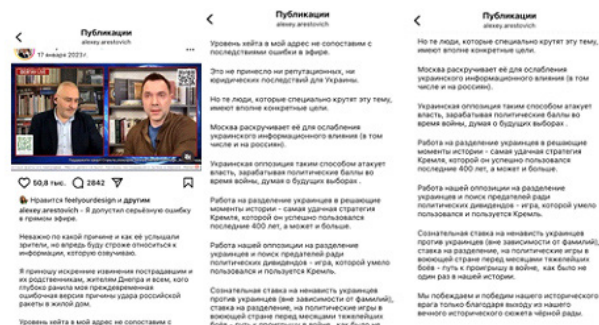
It killed 46 people, including 6 children, and injured about 80 people (Suspilne, 2023).

"Arestovich resigned amid a barrage of criticism sparked by a statement he made that a Russian missile could have hit a residential building in Dnipro only because it was shot down by Ukrainian air defenses (Russian propaganda happily picked up this statement; the politician later said that he simply misspoke due to overwork)" (Meduza, 2023). On 11.05.2023, Rosmonitoring added him to the list of those involved in extremist activities or terrorism. In September 2023, Arestovich left Ukraine, saying that he would have to be an "opposition politician in exile" (Melezhkyk, 2022).

Some posts on 15 January 2023 were deleted. Now (10.07.2025) there are such publications.

On 17 January 2023, the following materials were posted a video stream dated 16 January 2023 with Russian opposition politician and public figure Mark Feygin, during which Arestovich publicly acknowledged (with 50.8k likes and 2,844 comments):

"I made a serious mistake during the live broadcast... I sincerely apologise to the victims and their families... Those who are deliberately circulating this issue have very specific objectives." Transliteration: "Ya sovershy'l ser'eznyuyu oshy'bku vo vremya pryamoj translyacy'y'... Ya y'skrenne pry'noshu y'zvy'neny'ya zhertvam y'y'sem'yam... Te, kto namerenno rasprostranyayut etu y'nformacy'yu, presleduyut ochen' konkretnye cely'."



Pict. 1-3: the post on 17.01.2023

He further stated: "The level of hate directed at me is disproportionate to the consequences of a mistake on air... But those who deliberately stir up this issue have very specific goals. Moscow is promoting it to weaken Ukraine's information warfare capabilities (including its influence on Russians). The Ukrainian opposition is using this method to attack the government, earning political points during wartime with an eye toward future elections. Dividing Ukrainians at decisive moments in history is the Kremlin's most successful strategy, which it has employed successfully for the last 400 years, perhaps longer. Our opposition's efforts to divide Ukrainians and search for traitors for political gain are part of a game that the Kremlin has skillfully used and continues to use..."

(Transliteration: Uroven' hejta v moj adres ne

sopostavim s posledstviami oshibki v jefire...No te ljudi, kotoryye special'no krutjat jetu temu. Imejut vpolne konkretnye celi. Moskva raskruchivaet ee dlja oslablenija ukrainskogo informacionnogo vlijanija (v tom chisle i na rossijan). Ukrainskaja opozicija takim sposobom atakuje vlast', zarabatyvaja politicheskie bally vo vremja vojny, dumaja o budushhij vyborah. Rabota na razdelenie ukraincev v reshajushhie momenty istorii – samaja udachnaja strategija Kremlja, kotoroj on uspesjno pol'zuetsja poslednie 400 let, a mozhet byt' i bol'she. Rabota nashej opozicii na razdelenie ukraincev i poisk predately radi politicheskikh dividendov – igra, kotoroj umelo pol'zovalsja i pol'zuetsja Kreml'...).

The conclusion of the text with the collective we – “Ukrainians” indicates the author's political ambitions and his desire to gain the support of his audience. Arestovich also mentions the historical context.

Arestovich considers himself one of those who 'suffered' and distinguishes himself from those who exploited the situation 'to pursue very specific goals.' Ukrainian society sympathizes with the victims of war, and Arestovich also empathizes with them, thereby conveying shared values to his audience. He endeavored to secure audience support by "aligning himself" with citizens' emotions. The authors believe that Ukrainians have become increasingly emotional during wartime and base their decisions concerning positive or negative attitudes towards leadership upon emotional considerations.

The photo of the statement and text has (likes: 96.2 thousand, comments: 11.2 thousand): 'Wrote a statement on resignation from the post.

I want to show an example of civilized behavior:

- A mistake of principle means resignation. (Transliteration: *Ja hochu pokazat' primer civilizovannogo povedenija:*
- *Oshibka v principe oznachaet otstavku)*



Pict.4 - the post with the photo of the statement on 17.01.2023

The defense strategy employs hedging language ('my assumption,' 'The level of hate directed at me is disproportionate to the consequences of a mistake on air.'), followed by accusations ('the Kremlin and Ukrainian oppositions'), and emotionally charged colloquial vocabulary ('Moscow lice,' 'Ukrainian nits' which were in the deleted posts on 15 January 2023). Subsequently, the author addresses someone directly using informal pronouns, employing public space for personal disputes.

The peculiarities of such actions are studied through the prism of the circumstances and context of the attack (Authors: Sergei A. Samoilenko (George Mason University), Martijn Icks (Queen's University Belfast), Eric Shiraev, & Jennifer Keohane (George Mason University) Prepared for Global Encyclopedia of Informality).

In this case, The Attacker and the Media - mass communication media (MCM) are the subject of the research, and its aim is the discrediting of the reputation of the media person and the former official speaker, Arestovich, who was fired for spreading unverified information.

In this case, the MCM notes that Arestovich, the OP's advisor, said that he wrote a statement about his dismissal from the President's Office after a 'principled mistake' and 'showed an example of civilised behaviour', then, in an official style, quite objectively convey the facts, but in many sources, the circumstances are accompanied by a screenshot with a list of Russian publics that used Arestovich's message and remarks:

Ukrainian media reacted to this news as follows (Top 7 news on page 1, from the search query "Arestovich January 17 2023" in Google, Table 3).

According to the content and type of attack (Samoilenko, Icks, Keohane, & Shiraev, 2021), all media communications listed in the table, in addition to official information and factual reporting, contain evaluative linguistic means concerning Arestovich's personality or behavior. These rhetorical elements imply incompetence, irresponsibility, and a lack of awareness of the social and political context during wartime, contrasting with his claims of representing a "model of civilized behaviour" (a reference to European socio-political norms allegedly disregarded by other Ukrainian opinion leaders). The table demonstrates considerable emotionally charged vocabulary and accusations. It is unlikely that Arestovich, as a media favorite, suddenly lost his competence and other qualities overnight. Consequently, segments of his audience, individual journalists, and social groups evaluated him emotionally and rapidly. Furthermore, the media remarks guide readers towards questioning the values and identity Arestovich conveys, ranging from his apology and its subsequent retraction to his joking tone in comments despite the tragic nature of the initial news item, and his continued use of Russian as the primary language of communication.

Table 3:

Ukrainian media reacted

Mass communication channel	Quote(s)	Result
№1: Detektor Media, 2023	The news of Aleksiy Arestovich's resignation included, in its coverage, a statement from Oksana Sokolova, television presenter and editor-in-chief of the Fakty Tyzhnia programme on ICTV. Sokolova asserted that Arestovich "must be punished for his statement regarding the missile strike on Dnipro. Like a criminal who inflicted a powerful blow on Ukraine – on the informational front – at an extremely difficult time."	negatively evaluating behavior and suggesting punishment
№2: LB.UA, 2023	facts, but then writes: 'As a reminder, recently Arestovych withdrew his apology and deleted a post on social media explaining why he had mistakenly said that a missile had destroyed a house in Dnipro after it was allegedly shot down by Ukrainian air defence'	remark on public apology and subsequent change of opinion - withdrawal of apology
№3: Ukrainska Pravda, 2023	The Presidential Office adviser also "joked" in a comment under his own social media post. According to him, the last time he wanted to resign, a full-scale invasion began... For reference: Arestovich is known for his "calming videos", as well as his claim that active fighting on Ukrainian territory would end "within 2–3 weeks". His phrases (and even photos) often become memes. In 2017, Arestovich referred to the ATO as "a holiday resort for boys". The remark sparked a wave of outrage	reference to inappropriate behaviour involving the bullying of public values
№4: Suspilne, 2023	However, he later re-listened to what he said on the air and retracted his apology. According to Arestovych, it was an assumption, not an agreed fact	remark on public apology and subsequent change of opinion - withdrawal of apology
№5: Novynarnia, 2023	Thus, Arestovych, who had previously acted as a crisis military spokesperson for the Presidential Office, denied the official position of the Ukrainian Air Force Command and the General Staff of the Armed Forces. The General Staff claimed that a Russian missile hit a residential apartment building in the city of Dnipro on the afternoon of 14 January. The Ukrainian Air Force stated that the house in Dnipro was destroyed by a Russian X-22 missile and that our air defence system is currently unable to shoot down such missiles. Instead, Arestovych's words immediately became a tool of Russian propaganda	Malpractice claim, Social pesting (public harm)
№6 Hromadske.radio	The news and a screenshot of the comments under Arestovich's post and his responses: 'last time I left, a month and a half later the war started. Let's see what will happen this time.'	focus on behavior, specifically an emphasis on Arestovich's cheerful response related to the tragic news for the whole country
№ 7 BBC.COM	In this message, already in the headline, the action is assessed as a scandal: 'Arestovich resigns. What is the essence of the scandal', as well as this information was immediately picked up by the Russian media. After all, this show has more than a million views every day. And Aleksey Arestovich positions himself as an advisor to the President's office and a former intelligence officer... He also said that he trusted the words of his friend, who had previously served in the air defense forces... However, in the evening of January, 15 Arestovych changed his position	assessing the situation and behavior as a scandal, malpractice claim

In wartime, society is unlikely to support such portrayals when framed as ridicule. Thus, the strategic goal of the mass communications media is to expose Arestovich as an unfit spokesperson during a period of national crisis, aiming to erode public trust in his statements and shift his reputation from positive to negative.

Arestovich employs emotionally charged lexicon in both spoken and written Russian, frequently and consistently varying his stylistic register and thematic focus: from everyday to socio-political and international, from colloquial style to official, from emotionally neutral contexts to square language (Moscow lice, Ukrainian nits and etc.). These changes create a verbal portrait of the 'living' leader, 'switch on' the readers and help to draw more attention to the leader.

The media try to "enroll" him in the enemy camp, while his team, on the contrary, through verbal communication, creates a reputation of 'their guy', well educated, who "is never at a loss for words". In this case, the attack may be classified as horizontal, occurring between a public opinion leader, a contemporary political commentator, and the media. In terms of complexity, the attack may be considered moderate, as it includes additional content designed to distort Arestovich's previously favorable image and undermine his reputation as a competent wartime political figure with privileged knowledge that supported the optimistic tone of his assessments.

Arestovich initially made an inaccurate statement, then attempted to justify his actions, later withdrew his apology, yet acknowledged his mistake and admitted that he had shared unverified information during wartime – information that was subsequently exploited by the Russian side for its purposes. His profiles are 'lively': the audience sees quick reactions to current events, an active actor in the 'socio-political theatre' who has a lot of information, which is unstructured but offers a wide range of topics, opinions, and different points of view.

The content of the accusations is generally personal

in nature. The initiator employs various forms of attack, including oral and written statements.

The information attack that occurred between January 15-17, 2023 was individual and aimed at altering public perception and trust in the speaker, an opinion leader, thereby affecting his reputation. Based on its characteristics, this attack may be classified as misquoting, since the mass communication media (MCM) included only a fragment of Arestovich's original statement.

Within this practice, the rhetorical techniques employed – aligned with socio-cultural conventions – included the following from the MCM side: **spin** (biased interpretation of events while omitting contextual elements) and **spreading innuendo** (implying inappropriate behavior or attitudes that society is unlikely to endorse). In response, Arestovich's team sought to counter these strategies by invoking **false accusation** tactics, which they claimed were used against him without substantiated evidence.

Among the models of communicative action used by the attackers, one can identify the strategy of **creating uncertainty** – a form of persuasion designed to attract sympathizers to an opposing viewpoint. Meanwhile, the public processed the attack using what may be described as a **hybrid processing model**: this model suggests that individuals perceive and assess information based on a combination of prior knowledge (long-term memory) and new, incoming data, continually updating their interpretive framework and judgment.

At the same time, Arestovich continued to make high-profile and provocative statements. For instance, on 30 January 2025, he published a post titled "*The First Ten Decrees as President of Ukraine*", and the following day, he stated that "*we never had independent media. Ukrainian humanities and media were co-opted and brought under control back in the 1990s*" (31 January 2025).

In response, the MCM produced a selection of trending content (Top 6 Google search results in Ukrainian for "Arestovich February 2025"):

Table 4.

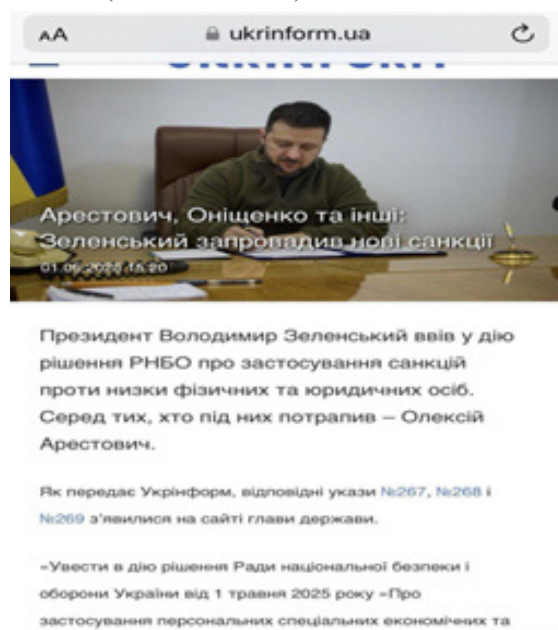
Top 6 Google search results in Ukrainian for "Arestovich February 2025"

Source	Headline and description	Result
Instagram @alexey.arestovich	The post 'For a year and a half I've been living on aeroplanes...'	Desire for sympathy, emotional support
Facebook, аккаунт Рух ЧЕХО 03.02.2025	The post 'Intelligence actor: what do we know about Arestovych? ... the text accuses the fugitive of 'making a number of scandalous statements'	accusation
Instagram @alexey.arestovich 16.02.2025	'I cannot but applaud Zelensky's willingness to stand up for part ...'	Willing to join the decision and actions of the Office of the President of Ukraine and to play a role of pro-government person
Detector Media 28.02.2025	'Lyakalki, 'arestovichi' and Russians. How Ukrainian YouTube...'	Impairing, erasing the reputation of an opinion leader and joining him to the opposing side

Source	Headline and description	Result
EADaily 21.02.2025	Arestovich*: 'Peaceful settlement in Ukraine...'	The statement does not correspond to the level of responsibility of the speaker, respectively, demonstrating his unsubstantiatedness
Glavcom 17.02.2025	'Arestovich enraptured the merezha with his scenarios of the completion of the war ...'	The same

The result of such messages was announced on 01.05.2025: President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has enacted the National Security and Defence Council's decision to impose sanctions on a number of individuals and legal entities. Among those affected is Oleksiy Arestovych, Decree No. 267... appeared on the head of state's website.

'To enact the decision of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine of 1 May 2025 'On the application of personal special economic and other restrictive measures (sanctions), according to three documents (Ukrinform, 2025).



Pict.5. V. Zelenskyy signs a decree on the application of sanctions against a number of individuals and legal entities

Conclusions.

The research shows that leaving the pro-governmental environment implies a desire to separate and use the accumulated experience in one's career; however, based on psychological peculiarities, one can assume a desire for revenge inherent in a person who left office involuntarily.

This case can be classified as character assassination because:

- the public actions of the opinion leader (responses to attacks and assaults) and information oral and written attacks by the audience of his social media accounts and MCM led to the resignation, a decrease in trustworthy and the number of subscribers (see statistics on followers

dynamics on social media in Table 2), which can be regarded as a strategic effort to discredit an individual or group target via subversive communication (Samoilenko, 2021);

- one can differentiate five key elements in this case: the Target, the Attacker, the Medium, the Audience and the Context (Samoilenko, 2019; Samoilenko, 2021);

- the audience in this case uses hybrid processing model, 2 elements: the Audience and the Medium use strategy of creating uncertainty (Samoilenko, 2016);

- there is the certain type of CA: misquoting (Icks&Shirayev, 2014);

- there are some verbal techniques as spin and spreading innuendo;

- Arestovich uses false accusation tactic (Samoilenko, 2018; Samolilenko, 2021);

- this case serves a functional role in structuring social norms and identities (Samoilenko, 2021);

- the case examines character assassination as a structural phenomenon, exploring how it shapes and is shaped by social structures and power relations (Samoilenko, 2021).

The results demonstrate the social practice during wartime, where, at the micro-sociological level, the behavior of an individual – an opinion leader – who influences social groups within Ukrainian society and the socio-political information field is examined. Within this structure, ideas and directions that contribute to political decision-making are considered. At the macro-level, collective behavior influencing individuals and social groups is analyzed.

Reputation, which largely depends on the opinion of social groups, is created by the leader and his team by identifying certain character traits, information, and actions that convey norms of behavior and effective interaction between the leader and the social groups that support him. It should be noted that during wartime, unlike peacetime, many social groups make decisions regarding positive or negative attitudes towards opinion leaders rapidly and based on emotional considerations.

However, CA practices are an integral part of the socio-political struggle in society, especially in times of war. Studying the practices of CA helps to understand social interaction in society, how opinion leaders operate, and how to interact more effectively to consolidate and work together. It helps to increase the dynamics of public life and to choose the most viable and socially supported ideas for further development.

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