The Pragmatic Pivot: Ukraine's Future Digital Media Workforce

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The Pragmatic Pivot: A Longitudinal Analysis of Professional Motivation among Ukraine's Future Digital Media Workforce (2022–2024)

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Abstract. The post-war recovery of Ukraine depends on preserving human capital, particularly the skilled workforce needed to rebuild democratic institutions. The present longitudinal study investigates the structural transformation of professional motivation among Ukrainian media students with a view to informing post-war educational and labour policies in the context of the digital economy.

The research employs a comparative quantitative analysis of the same demographic cohort (BA and MA media students) surveyed at two critical junctures: the pre-full-scale invasion baseline (February 14–23, 2022, N=133) and the protracted war phase (April–May 2024, N=133).

The findings reveal a fundamental pragmatic pivot in the digitally transformed labour market. The predominant motivation of "creative realisation" declined significantly, from 39.8% to 29.3%, and was superseded by a demand for "career in media" (33.1%) and "earn decent money," which nearly doubled in importance (from 12.0% to 19.5%). Furthermore, the study documents a radical linguistic homogenisation: daily Russian usage collapsed from 82.7% to 22.6%, with 79.7% of the future workforce planning to operate exclusively in Ukrainian. Additionally, the notion of passive educational identities, often referred to as "objects of knowledge," has been superseded by active professional agency to combat digital information warfare and infodemics. This shift has led students to place greater value on securing immediate employment than on academic theory.

It is concluded that reconstruction strategies must look to models of "journalistic idealism" that are not predicated on those employed in the pre-war period. To combat "brain drain" and retain this workforce, universities and employers must prioritise economic viability and instrumental skills, particularly digital

Meet Darka (empirical baseline)

- A composite persona (N=266)

Quantitative surveys:
early 2022 (N=133) & 2024 (N=133)
+ Focus groups (2025)

- 2022: Peacetime Kharkiv student, pursuing creative realization, working bilingually, and expecting a predictable European job market

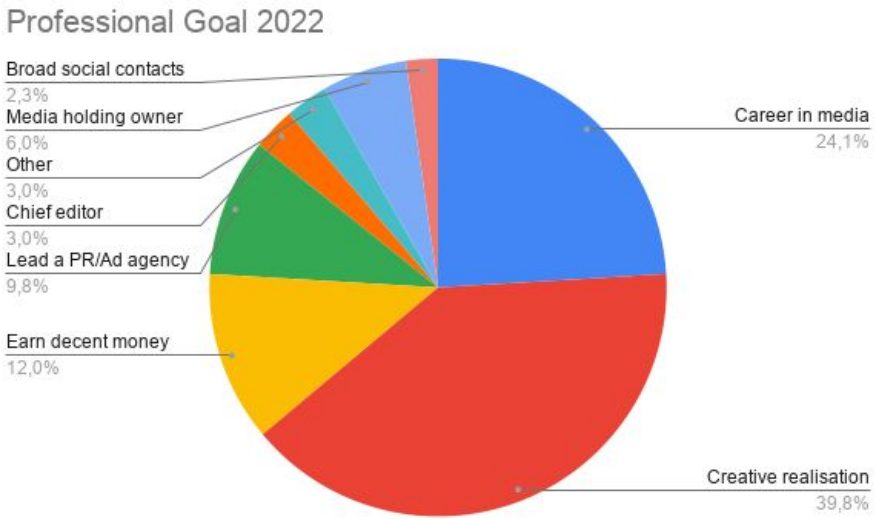


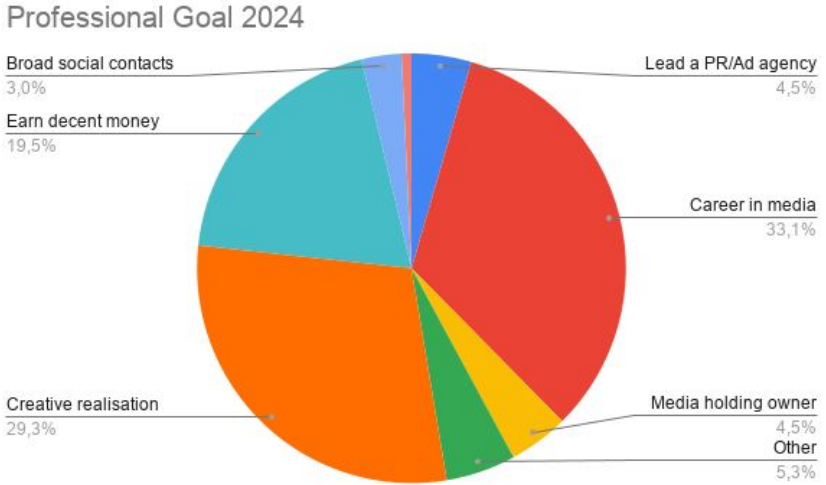
Meet Darka (empirical baseline)

- 2024: A hyper-pragmatic practitioner operating on the frontline of information defence
- Pragmatic pivot: From passive student to “Militant Agent”



The Pragmatisation of Motivation: Survival Over Self-Expression

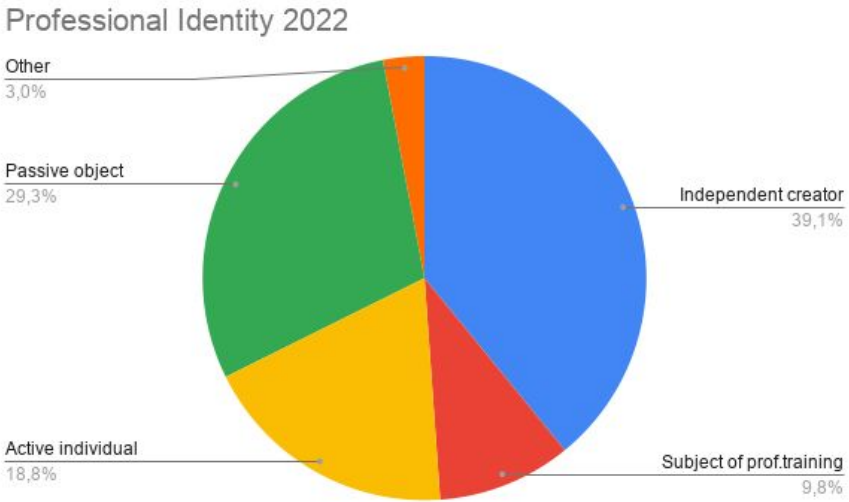


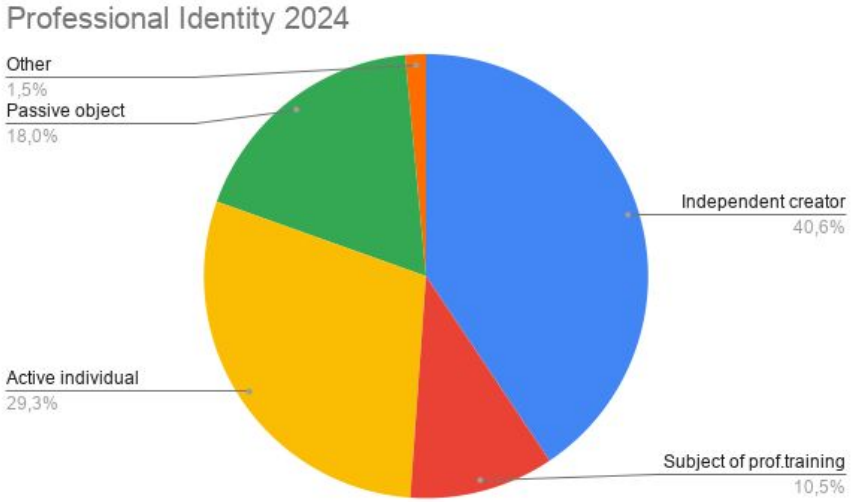


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From Passive Student to “Militant Agent”





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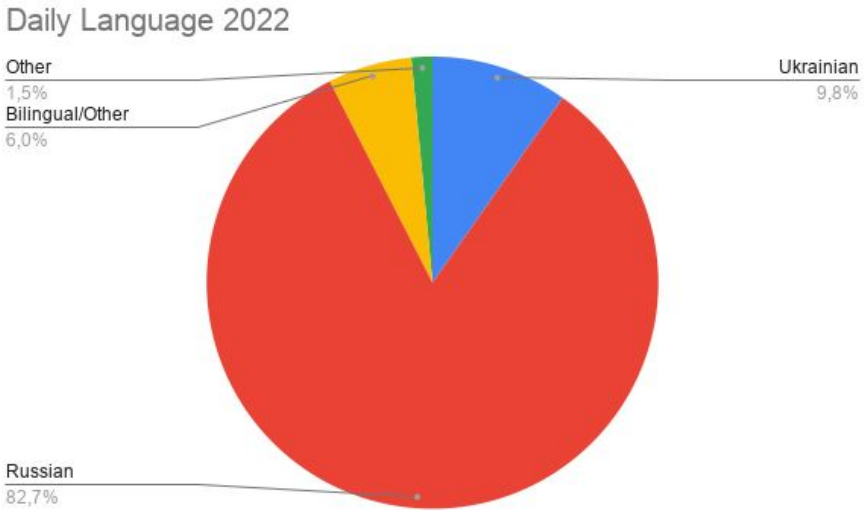
Interest in “sensationalism” fell by half to 13.5%, while demand for “accuracy” (89.5%) and “professional responsibility” (59.4%) skyrocketed

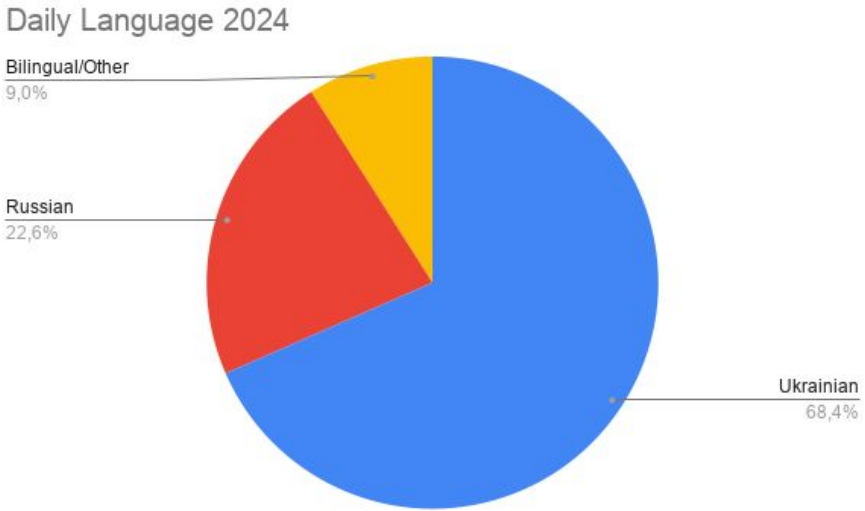
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Linguistic Shibboleth & The English Paradox

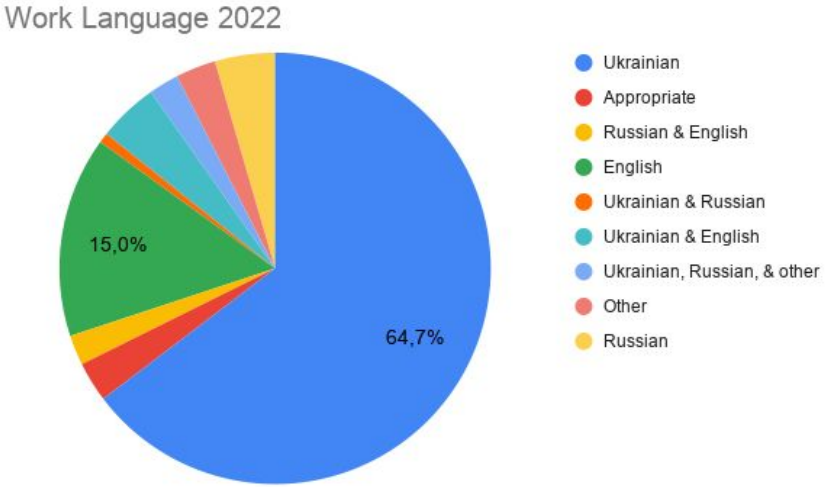


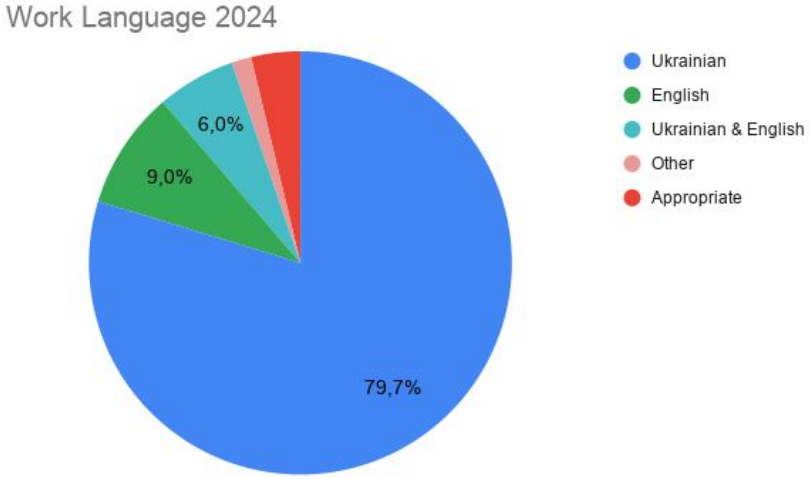


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3 Policy Pillars

- Labor

  Abolish the “passion tax”. Donors must mandate paid junior positions

- Education

  Digital competencies first: OSINT, grant management, EMI…

- Language




THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!
QUESTIONS? LET'S TALK!
DARKA
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