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SOCIOCULTURAL MISSION OF MYRON SURMACH IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF UKRAINIAN DIASPORA RADIO BROADCASTING IN THE USA

The aim *of this study is to highlight Myron Surmach's sociocultural mission and to provide a comprehensive analysis of social communication mechanisms in the development of Ukrainian radio broadcasting in the United States in 1930–1935 as a means of preserving the national identity and consolidating the ethnic community.*

The methodological framework *of this study is based on a comprehensive approach that combines content analysis of announcements on the front pages of the newspaper Svoboda with discourse analysis of detailed reports on radio broadcasts published in its internal sections. A historical-genetic approach was used to trace the evolution of broadcast formats (from 15-minute segments to the Ukrainian Hour), and a systems approach was employed to analyze the interaction between the bookstore Surma and radio projects as a unified communication system.*

Results. *The study demonstrates that M. Surmach developed a resilient model of media operations based on a combination of institutional support, community-based funding (including early forms of crowdfunding through appeals urging audiences to «send a dollar»), and sociocultural interaction initiatives (such as the organization of Radio Balls events). The study further reveals that radio broadcasting served as a platform for popularizing national cultural products (sheet music, records, tickets to the opera Mazepa). Within this context, educational lectures functioned as a key instrument for audience engagement and for consolidating the ethnic community around shared values.*

Novelty*. For the first time, based on the systematic analysis of archival data from the newspaper Svoboda, the social communication activities of the enterprise Surma have been reconstructed. This allows the interpretation of early Ukrainian radio broadcasting in the United States not merely as a cultural project, but as a successful model of independent broadcasting that surpassed the standards of other émigré media at the time. The study demonstrates that the integration of educational lectures, interactive formats, and community-based funding established a unique precedent for self-organized media.*

Practical significance. *The findings of this study can be used in the development of courses on the history of journalism, media management, and applied communication practices. The experience of Surma in financial self-organization remains relevant for contemporary independent media and digital diplomacy initiatives of the Ukrainian diaspora.*

Key words: *history of radio, crowdfunding, Ukrainian diaspora radio broadcasting, social communication, social communication technologies, Ukrainian diaspora, Ukrainian-language broadcasting, media funding.*

I. Introduction

The resilience of ethnic media and search for effective models of media funding is especially relevant for Ukraine, with its substantial diaspora. Examining the experience of the first half of the 20th century reveals the mechanisms for preserving national identity in a foreign-language environment without any state support.

The relevance of this study stems from the need to analyze the activities of the Ukrainian radio broadcasting pioneers in the United States in detail, particularly Surma (lit. Horn), a music and publishing enterprise, and its founder, Myron Surmach, an active member of the Ukrainian community. Amid fierce competition in the American market and the financial depression of the 1930s, Ukrainian media startups were forced to create business models that were innovative for their time, combining commercial marketing with patriotic crowdfunding. Sociocultural aspects of émigré radio activities have long been overlooked by scholars, despite the fact that these aspects ensured the institutional stability of the «Ukrainian voice» on American broadcast stations. Examining the strategies of that period – from «virtual storefronts» to «radio balls» events – sheds light on the origins of modern social communication technologies used to support independent media. An objective analysis of archival materials from the newspaper *Svoboda* (lit. Liberty), covering 1930–1935, enables the reconstruction of past events and the

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identification of effective media management practices that can be adapted to the contemporary challenges of Ukraine's sociocultural development and its diaspora.

Research into the history of Ukrainian media in the context of emigration is based on the works of N. Sydorenko, who defined the role of the press in the community's cultural self-assertion [15, pp. 298–306], O. Bohuslavskyi, who analyzed the sociocultural conditions of the émigré press activities during the interwar period [1, pp. 3–7], and O. Vovk [7, pp. 187–194]. The digital archives of *Svoboda* remain the primary source for reconstructing media history [13, p. 4]. A systematic study of radio broadcasting is presented in the works of T. Hirina. She examined the mechanisms of program promotion (1930–1932) [22, pp. 22–28], the musical content of broadcasting (1933) [21, pp. 12–17], and the explication of national identity of the Ukrainian community in radio broadcasts in North America in 1933 [9, pp. 26–31]. In her works from 2022–2025, she highlights the success of V. Sharvan's project, the Canadian radio landscape (*Ukrainskyi chas*, *Pisnia Ukrainy*) [8, pp. 33–38], and the transformation of communication in the digital age [10, pp. 173–188]. The nature of early radio, its cultural potential, and the commercial mechanisms employed remain subjects of debate. An analysis of business structures, such as M. Surmach's enterprise Surma, points to a multidimensional symbiosis of factors that allows early broadcasting to be interpreted as a distinctive social communication startup.

II. Research objectives and methods

The aim of this study is to highlight Myron Surmach's sociocultural mission and to provide a comprehensive analysis of social communication mechanisms in the development of Ukrainian radio broadcasting in the United States in 1930–1935 as a means of preserving national identity and consolidating the ethnic community.

The research methodology was based on a comprehensive approach that enabled an objective reconstruction of M. Surmach's activities. Content analysis was used to classify announcements on the front pages of *Svoboda* in order to determine the frequency of marketing messages. Discourse analysis was employed to examine detailed reports on listening to radio broadcasts and to identify strategies for audience feedback. The historical and genetic method made it possible to trace the evolution of formats from 15-minute segments to the full-fledged radio program *Ukrainska Hodyna* (*Ukrainian Hour*). A systems approach was used to analyze the interaction between Surma and the media as a holistic communication mechanism. The historical and biographical method was applied to highlight M. Surmach's role as a pioneer of media management. The hermeneutic method enabled an in-depth interpretation of the radio lectures' and sketches' content as tools for shaping national identity. The comparative method was used to compare the financial models of early radio with modern crowdfunding technologies.

III. Results

The institutionalization of Ukrainian radio broadcasting in the United States in the 1930s became a unique example of the self-organization of an ethnic community without state support and amid intense competition in the American media landscape. A key role in this process was played by the music and book publishing company Surma headed by M. Surmach, which transformed from a commercial business into a powerful social communication hub.

At the initial stage (January 1930), the main challenge was not only the technical organization of broadcasts, but also the development of a radio-listening culture among Ukrainian emigrants. Archival records demonstrate that the first steps were aimed at the «promotion of radio as a tool» for national consolidation. An important confirmation of the success of this strategy is the rapid audience growth: «As a result of publicity through the WAAT station, a large number of Ukrainian listeners became interested in the Ukrainian radio program and in radio itself» [3, p. 4]. This success stimulated a shift to a more complex form of organization – the creation of a separate public association. Consequently, the *Ukrainian Radio Club* project became a logical response to the audience's request. The newspaper *Svoboda* recorded that active listeners «approached Surma with a project to organize a separate *Ukrainian Radio Club* to spread interest in the radio movement among Ukrainians in general» [3, p. 4]. Such activity can be interpreted as the emergence of an interactive broadcasting model, where information consumers became co-authors of the Ukrainian community's media policy. The *Radio Club* aimed not only at technical support, but also at popularizing radio as an innovative means of communication with the world. The press of that time actively promoted this initiative, portraying radio as a sign of prestige and comfort: «Radio in cars… Car passengers shortened their rides by listening to opera, concerts, or news broadcasts» [14, p. 1].

M. Surmach, aware of the financial risks, built a stable sociocultural system. The first broadcasts on the WAAT station demonstrated that the Ukrainian program attracted a large audience, but renting time on major stations remained financially burdensome. Aware of this, the organizers introduced a system of «honorary membership», which allowed them to attract funds from benefactors. This was critically important, because, as was later noted: «One good hour with an orchestra, singers, and a lecture costs the enterprise Surma from 111 to 125 dollars. Advertising could bring in 50 to 60 dollars, and the remainder had to be covered by the company Surma» [6, p. 4]. Such transparency in reporting to the community fostered trust and attracted new sponsors.

The content of the first broadcasts was based on the enlightenment principle. Surma's programs were the first to alternate musical numbers with popular science lectures. This was a carefully designed

strategy of «cross-promotion». For example, when advertising a performance, the radio served as an educational platform: «every Sunday, as part of the radio concert organized by Surma, a short lecture on Mazepa and the events associated with his renowned name is delivered» [2, p. 4]. The popularity of M. Surmach's audiovisual projects, along with the trust he enjoyed, drew the Ukrainian community's attention not only to these initiatives but also to his commercial ventures, particularly the sale of literature and sheet music in the store of the same name.

An important aspect was the involvement of the intellectual elite in the broadcasts. Listeners received the highest quality content, as evidenced by reviews of professionals. For example, the composer P. Uhlytskyi noted in his letter: «A beautiful mixed quartet, wonderful singers... I sincerely thank you, Mr. Surmach, for this pleasure» [5, p. 4]. However, the organizers did not stop there, constantly emphasizing the need for expansion: «I would like to present programs that would reach not only our fellow Ukrainians, but even foreigners» [5, p. 4]. This reflects an understanding of radio as a tool of foreign cultural diplomacy. The organization of the *Radio Club* and the activity around the WAAT radio station also aimed to foster national consciousness in youth. The texts of that time often contain calls for preserving identity: «And we will still need a lot of radio for national and cultural promotion. Therefore, it is better for us to ask for dollars than to curtail the program, or even spoil it with cheap productions, for there are thousands of listeners» [6, p. 4]. Radio broadcasting overcame the territorial disunity of emigrants, creating a single information space, because: «from all parts, territories, Ukrainians are of one spirit, with one love for Ukrainian song» [6, p. 4]. Using the *Radio Club* as a base for crowdfunding and popularization of the «radio tool» by M. Surmach allowed the creation of an independent media, which for years remained the main voice of Ukrainians in the United States.

The sociocultural strategy of Surma was built on a deep understanding of the psychology of emigrants, for whom radio was not only entertainment but also the primary link to their native culture in a foreign environment. M. Surmach was the first to realize that airtime could be used as a «virtual showcase», where each musical number became a direct advertisement for sheet music or records available in his bookstore. Documentary evidence indicates that Surma promptly responded to listeners' requests, turning them into printed editions. A vivid example is the story of *Sadovskyi's March*: «There was a great demand for that march among listeners of the radio program. On their advice, it was given to the composer P. Uhlytskyi. He transcribed it for piano and violin, and the following week *Sadovskyi's March* will be published for the first time in America» [4, p. 4]. The sale of sheet music was accompanied by an emotional appeal: «Now every musician will play that march at home and recall the joyful moments often experienced during Surma's radio programs» [4, p. 4].

The largest-scale case in the sociocultural mission of Surma was the preparation for the staging of the opera *Mazepa* in 1933. M. Surmach used the radio broadcasting to create a multi-week «warm-up» of the audience. The newspaper reported: «The Surma Bazaar readily supports all Ukrainian cultural initiatives and is now advertising on a large scale Tchaikovsky's renowned opera *Mazepa*, which is to be staged on February 4 of this year at the Mecca Auditorium» [2, p. 4]. The mechanism for stimulating ticket sales included not only musical announcements, but also educational components: «To date, three such lectures have been given: one in English and two in Ukrainian. Feedback from the public showed that people enjoyed such lectures. In four weeks, similar lectures will be delivered, and some of the artists participating in the opera *Mazepa* will also perform in Surma's radio concerts» [2, p. 4]. Thus, radio lectures prepared the audience for the perception of the opera, making them active participants in the cultural process, which was directly reflected in the box office.

Theatrical sketches occupied a special place in the sociocultural mission, designed to maintain listener loyalty. M. Surmach personally worked on scripts that combined everyday humor with musical novelties: «Surma's 171st Ukrainian program on the radio will be broadcast from the WOV station... There will be a 'sketch,' "The Engagement of Vasyl and Marusia," specially prepared by M. Surmach for that program» [18, p. 4]. The recurring sketches encouraged regular listening, and therefore reinforced the effect of advertising the store's products. In October 1933, the strategy continued with new episodes: «In Surma's program, there will be a further installment of "Vasyl and Marusia" titled "Vasyl Goes to War"... The Sokil Orchestra, which has 18 musicians on the station, will also perform two new works specially adapted for the 'sketch'» [20, p. 4]. The sketches were so professionalized that suitable performers had to be found for every role, even the youngest: «We are still looking for a way to cast the role of a little neighbor boy (one and a half years old), because we cannot do without him» [12, p. 4]. Surma's marketing was aggressive but justified in patriotic terms. M. Surmach was not afraid to compare media costs with other community expenses, trying to prove the value of radio programs. He directly addressed the audience: «Is it really impossible to save another dollar for such a thing as a good program?» [6, p. 4].

Another direction was the promotion of technological innovations that allowed the community to better hear its voice. The store offered advanced equipment, emphasizing its ability to reproduce Ukrainian records in the highest quality. These advertisements often included urgent calls to action: «It would be worth it for our people to pay attention to them while the price is still reasonable, otherwise the prices may rise, as other companies have already increased the prices of their products by 20 to 50%» [12, p. 4].

An important element of sociocultural success was the combination of entertainment with charity. The organization of "Radio Balls" events became a key method for raising funds: «The radio program of 'Surma' has now become a national institution, like a good periodical. Therefore, there is no shame in appealing to the public for its support... The 'Radio Ball,' attended by 1,670 people, is proof of this» [6, p. 4]. Each such event was promoted on the air, creating excitement and a sense of participation in an important cause. Documents indicate that M. Surmach not only sold goods, but also cultivated demand through enlightenment programming. For example, special programs for the month of T. Shevchenko not only honored the poet, but also encouraged demand for sheet music of his works: «The music and book publishing enterprise Surma dedicated all its radio programs in March this year to honor the memory of T. Shevchenko... The quartet of Ms. Maria Krebenetska performed Lysenko's cantata set to Shevchenko's poem "The Rapids Rage"» [16, p. 4].

The first broadcasts of the 1930s established a model that later enabled Ukrainians to appear on major American networks such as NBC and WABC, demonstrating the diaspora's ability not only to preserve its culture but also to adapt it professionally to the demands of a modern information society. This recognition began precisely with the first *Radio Club* gatherings and the earliest sounds of the Ukrainian language transmitted by WAAT.

Thus, the sociocultural mission of Surma was based on three pillars: the «live» demonstration of the product range on the air, educational support for commercial projects (through lectures), and the creation of interactive formats (such as sketches and balls). This made it possible to transform radio broadcasting into a self-sufficient system in which the cultural mission and business interests reinforced one another, creating a precedent for a «national media institution» in emigration. M. Surmach demonstrated that radio is not only an expense but also an investment: «The program... teaches our youth» [6, p. 4]. Materials published in *Svoboda* confirm that, thanks to this strategy, the Ukrainian community in the United States not only gained continuous access to its native culture but also demonstrated to American society a high level of sociocultural organization.

Analysis of archival materials from *Svoboda* makes it possible to reconstruct a financial model of Ukrainian radio broadcasting in the United States that was unique for the 1930s. It was based on a three-level budget revenue model, within which M. Surmach, being aware of the high cost of airtime on American stations, developed a strategy that combined direct corporate subsidization, listener-based microfinancing mechanisms, and mass charitable events.

The foundation of programs' financial stability was direct sponsorship from Surma. The archive of *Svoboda* contains references to a significant gap between the cost of broadcasting and revenue from external advertising. M. Surmach openly reported financial challenges to the community, seeking to legitimize the need for donations. Such a model meant that more than 50% of the Ukrainian-language broadcasting costs were covered by the profits of a single private company. This constituted a strategic investment in market development: by popularizing Ukrainian music through radio, M. Surmach created demand for the products of his bookstore. However, as program duration increased to an hour, the burden on the budget became critical: «It is shameful to abandon it, and hard to maintain. If all those listeners who have been tuning in every Sunday for at least a year would take an envelope and put in one dollar for the program, how wonderful that would be…» [5, p. 4].

The second level of the financial model was crowdfunding – a direct appeal to the solidarity of the audience. M. Surmach used the airtime to explain the value of the «native word» in America, trying to instill a sense of responsibility in listeners: «And how wonderful and easy it would be if only the "enthusiasts" of a good program, those who listen together with their families, at least once a year, sent, say, one dollar to the program as a contribution. Would they be any poorer?» [6, p. 4]. He convinced the audience that high-quality content cannot be free: «Why would they rather buy a book for 2–3 dollars to learn something, yet expect a good radio program with opera singers, educated musicians, and speakers for free?» [6, p. 4]. Appeals to send «at least one dollar» were aimed at establishing a stable fund of support, while the organizers also reminded listeners of the cost of the radio equipment itself: «Consider this: you buy a radio and pay maybe 100 or 200 dollars. But what would that radio be worth without the program?» [6, p. 4]. The effectiveness of this model was confirmed by letters in which listeners expressed their willingness to donate. The community's response was so lively that even composers expressed their appreciation: «It's nice that the programs received such letters; I would like to offer programs ever more frequently and beautifully» [5, p. 4].

The most effective tool for rapid accumulation of funds was mass events – «Radio Balls». This was an innovative approach that transformed passive listening into active public engagement and celebration: «It is not good for a business enterprise to ask for help» [6, p. 4]. Special committees were created to organize the balls. Advertising for the events was carried out aggressively and on a large scale: «Don't forget to tune your radio to this station and listen to the program, which starts at 12:30 p.m.» [17, p. 3].

IV. Conclusions

Due to the diversification of income sources (sponsorship + crowdfunding + events), Surma was able not only to survive, but also to expand its broadcasting. The pages of the periodical recorded announcements about the further expansion of programs, which allowed to attract professional ensembles and experiment with formats, such as involving orchestras: «The musical pieces of this program will be performed by the Ukrainian

Sokil Orchestra from New York, conducted by Osyp Danylovych» [19, p. 1]. Financial independence gave the right to criticism and demand quality: «Let us perform then, as there are voices and when the song is well learned, so that our enchanting song echoes across the world and rings with glory in every heart. So that it brings tears and boundless joy; let us keep the melody dear and true» [11, p. 3].

The financial model of Surma was not merely a mechanism for raising funds, but a complex social communication tool that built a resilient community around the media resource. M. Surmach demonstrated that listeners' patriotism could be converted into financial stability if the media became a «national institution» capable of educating a new generation [6, p. 4]. Analysis of these archival materials confirms that Ukrainian radio in the United States during the 1930s was ahead of its time, employing funding models now regarded as standard for independent media.

Prospects for further research lie in a detailed analysis of the genre transformation of the content from short musical blocks to complex radio plays. Particular attention should be given to the serial nature of the sketches "Vasyl i Marusia" as a tool for audience retention. The study of the dramaturgical features of these sketches in the context of the Ukrainian diaspora mass culture formation is of academic interest.

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Гиріна Т. С. Соціокультурна місія Мирона Сурмача в становленні діаспорного радіомовлення США

Мета дослідження *полягає у висвітленні соціокультурної місії Мирона Сурмача та комплексному аналізі соціокомунікаційних механізмів розбудови українського радіомовлення в США у 1930–1935 рр. як інструменту збереження національної ідентичності та консолідації етнічної спільноти.*

Методологічну основу *становить комплексний підхід, що поєднує контент-аналіз оголошень-анонсів на перших шпальтах часопису «Свобода» та дискурс-аналіз розлогих звітів про радіоефіри на його внутрішніх сторінках. Використано історико-генетичний метод для відстеження еволюції форматів мовлення (від 15-хвилинних блоків до «Української години») та системний підхід для аналізу взаємодії книгарні «Сурма» і радіопроєктів як єдиного комунікаційного механізму.*

Результати. *Доведено, що М. Сурмач сформував життєздатну систему функціонування медіа, що базувалася на поєднанні інституційної підтримки, громадського фінансування (перші спроби спільнокошту через заклики «надіслати долар») та заходах соціокультурної взаємодії (організація «Радіо-балів»). З'ясовано, що радіоефір виступав платформою для популяризації національного культурного продукту (нот, платівок, квитків на оперу «Мазепа»), де просвітницькі лекції слугували інструментом залучення та згуртування аудиторії навколо спільних цінностей.*

Новизна. *Уперше на основі систематизації архівних даних газети «Свобода» реконструйовано соціокомунікаційну діяльність «Сурми», що дозволяє трактувати раннє українське радіо в США не лише як культурний проєкт, а як успішну модель незалежного мовлення, яка випередила тогочасні медійні стандарти еміграції. Доведено, що поєднання просвітницьких лекцій, інтерактивних форматів та громадського фінансування створило унікальний прецедент медійної самоорганізації.*

Практичне значення*. Матеріали дослідження можуть бути використані при підготовці курсів з історії журналістики, медіаменеджменту та прикладних комунікаційних технологій. Досвід фінансової самоорганізації «Сурми» є актуальним для сучасних незалежних медіа та проєктів цифрової дипломатії закордонного українства.*

Ключові слова: *історія радіо, краудфандинг, радіо української еміграції, соціальні комунікації, соціокомунікаційні технології, українська діаспора, українськомовне радіомовлення, фінансування медіа.*

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