



# CASE



“**What the World Wants:  
Understanding Global  
Audiences to Improve Impact**”

# STUDY

## IN SHORT

Ukrainian Witness conducted a research and testing project aimed at understanding and strengthening engagement with international audiences. The team collected cross-platform analytics, launched a multilanguage online survey, tested new content formats, analyzed audience behavior, and used these findings to refine an updated, data-driven content strategy tailored to global viewers.

## ABOUT THE NEWS OUTLET

Ukrainian Witness is an independent media project established on February 25, 2022, to document the realities of Russia’s war against Ukraine and counter Russian propaganda. The outlet focuses on verified frontline reporting, documentation of alleged war crimes, and human stories from affected communities. Its content is widely used by international media — including CNN, CBS, Fox News, and MSNBC — and reaches audiences in more than 25 countries. In just three years, Ukrainian Witness has produced over 400 documentary videos and 1,000 social media posts, generating more than 75 million YouTube views. A team of more than 10 editors, journalists, and technical specialists supports its global reporting mission.



## PROJECT OBJECTIVES

Ukrainian Witness set out to better understand its rapidly growing international audience and improve the impact of its global storytelling. The project aimed to gather insights into audience preferences across platforms, identify which topics and formats resonate most with viewers, and use this knowledge to inform a more effective content strategy for international reach.



## IMPLEMENTED SOLUTIONS

Ukrainian Witness analyzed cross-platform data, ran a multilingual audience survey, and tested new content formats. These insights were used to refine storytelling choices and build a clear, data-driven strategy for engaging international audiences.

## WHY THIS PROJECT?

The team recognized a growing international audience but lacked clear, data-driven insights about what global viewers need, value, or expect from Ukrainian Witness content. To improve impact and ensure that its messaging is effective beyond Ukraine, the organization sought to better understand international user preferences and adapt storytelling formats accordingly.

## HOW DID APPLYING DESIGN THINKING PRINCIPLES HELP?

Design thinking enabled the team to start with real audience needs — not assumptions. User surveys revealed what topics and formats international viewers want most. Prototyping new content formats and testing them across platforms allowed Ukrainian Witness to quickly evaluate what resonated and what did not. Iterative feedback loops — analyzing engagement, comments, and retention — helped refine upcoming content in real time and made the process more efficient and audience-centered.

## DID UKRAINIAN WITNESS'S APPROACH CHANGE ENGAGEMENT WITH ITS AUDIENCE IN ANY WAY?

Yes, though indirectly. By testing new formats and incorporating early insights from surveys and platform analytics, the team observed clearer patterns in what drives engagement. While long-term effects will take time to measure, the project has already strengthened the team's ability to design content intentionally for international audiences, improving clarity, tone, and storytelling structure.

## WHAT CHALLENGES DID UKRAINIAN WITNESS ENCOUNTER AND HOW DID IT ADDRESS THEM?

Limited time was the biggest challenge. Completing research, analysis, and content testing within just two months required strict organization and parallel workflows. Another difficulty was collecting enough high-quality survey responses, as some international audiences were less active in providing feedback than expected. The team also faced complex, cross-platform analytics, as different algorithms influence how content performs. This required a more segmented, platform-specific approach to ensure accurate insights.

## HOW WAS UKRAINIAN WITNESS'S PROJECT RECEIVED BY ITS AUDIENCE?

Engagement data revealed interest in certain topics and storytelling styles, and feedback collected through surveys provided valuable insight into the expectations of international viewers. Although the project was primarily internal, the reactions helped validate which content strategies should be prioritized moving forward.

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## WHAT INSIGHTS OR LESSONS DID UKRAINIAN WITNESS GAIN FROM THIS PROJECT?

A key lesson was the importance of flexible planning: rapid testing, iterative updates, and parallel task management proved essential within the short project window. The project also showed that data collection must be ongoing. Audience behavior shifts, and understanding those changes requires continuous monitoring rather than one-off research.

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## WHAT DOES UKRAINIAN WITNESS PLAN ON DOING NEXT?

The team plans to actively apply the outcomes of this project as the foundation for an improved, data-driven, content strategy. The analytical insights and recommendations gathered during the grant period will guide their choices around which topics, formats, and platforms are most effective for engaging international audiences. These learnings will be fully integrated into their day-to-day workflows as they continue to update content, test new formats, and track shifts in audience preferences across platforms.

Beyond immediate improvements, the project also establishes a long-term development trajectory for Ukrainian Witness. The findings will support efforts to build new international partnerships, expand global media presence, and position content more strategically within the international information space.

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## WHAT ADVICE WOULD UKRAINIAN WITNESS GIVE TO OTHER JOURNALISTS OR ORGANIZATIONS CONSIDERING A SIMILAR PATH?

Plan realistically and stay flexible — short project timelines demand precise coordination and the willingness to adjust as you learn. Diversify outreach early, since international audiences may be less responsive to surveys than expected, and consider multiple channels or incentives to gather sufficient feedback.

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