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Specifics of Violations in Journalistic Standards during Wartime

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The status and challenges of modern journalists who work under wartime circumstances and highlight events at the front in particular are discussed in this article. The difference between war correspondents and journalists who do not have such a status is found out. Additionally, the legal framework of their activities in accordance with the current regulatory acts of the Armed Forces of Ukraine during the martial law is viewed. The difficulties of the information field in conditions of a full-scale war are described. They dictate a necessity in significant concentration and attention on the part of journalists to their own safety, verification of information, avoidance of strategic details' disclosure, and adherence to ethical principles when working with traumatised people who lost their relatives in this war. The influence of military censorship on editorial processes is revealed. As an example, the article provides a mechanism for approving material in accordance with the order of the Commander-in-Chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces. The results of monitoring compliance with journalistic standards in online media and information telemarathons are analysed; problems with reliability, balance of opinions, separation of facts from comments, as well as the distribution of emotionally coloured and commissioned materials are indicated. Special attention is paid to examples of typical violations of ethical standards in headlines and news, particularly, on the example of the telemarathon "United News", the development of problems of political PR and insufficient depth of information analysis. The conclusion is made about the fact that it is necessary to adapt journalistic practice to current challenges of war and to strengthen the role of professional standards in order to strengthen trust in the media under the information crisis conditions.

Keywords: war in Ukraine, journalistic standards, military censorship, information reliability, political PR, manipulations, emotionally charged headlines, information crisis.

СПЕЦИФІКА ПОРУШЕНЬ ЖУРНАЛІСТСЬКИХ СТАНДАРТІВ ЗА ВОЄННОЇ ПОРИ

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У статті йдеться про статус сучасним журналістам, які працюють в умовах війни та висвітлюють події на фронті зокрема, і виклики, що постають перед ними. З'ясовано відмінність між військовими кореспондентами й журналістами, які не мають цього статусу. Також розглянуто правові рамки їхньої діяльності відповідно до чинних нормативних актів Збройних сил України під час воєнного стану. Описано складнощі інформаційного поля в умовах повномасштабної війни, що диктують потребу значної зосередженості та уваги з боку журналістів до власної безпеки, перевірки інформації, уникнення розголошення стратегічних деталей та дотримання етичних принципів під час роботи із травмованими особами, які на війні втратили рідних. Виявлено вплив воєнної цензури на редакційні процеси. Наведено механізм погодження матеріалу відповідно до наказу Головнокомандувача ЗСУ. Проаналізовано результати моніторингів дотримання журналістських стандартів онлайн-медіа та інформаційних телемарафонів; указано на проблемах з достовірністю, балансом думок, відокремленням фактів від коментарів, а також поширенням емоційно забарвлених та замовних матеріалів. Особливу увагу приділено прикладам типових порушень етичних стандартів у заголовках і новинах, зокрема на прикладі телемарафону «Єдині новини», розвитку проблем політичного піару та недостатньої глибини аналізу інформації. Зроблено висновок про потребу адаптації журналістської практики до нових викликів війни та посилення ролі професійних стандартів для зміцнення довіри до медіа в умовах інформаційної кризи.

Ключові слова: війна в Україні, журналістські стандарти, воєнна цензура, достовірність інформації, політичний піар, маніпуляції, емоційно забарвлені заголовки, інформаційна криза.

Relevance of the problem

In conditions of a full-scale war in Ukraine, which has been going on since February 2022, the role of a journalist as a witness and mediator of information acquires special significance, as it is related to numerous challenges and restrictions. Being a civilian, a journalist does not have a right to participate in military operations, but at the same time, he is obliged to work in extremely dangerous conditions, adhering to ethical standards and safety. War requires media professionals to adapt to new information policy's rules, take into account martial law censorship, totally adhere to restrictions on the disclosure of strategic data, as well as carefully stick to the principle of "do no harm" in working with war victims.

Monitoring compliance with professional standards, especially accuracy, balance and separation of facts from comments, shows both positive tendencies and systematic violations that threaten the trust of the audience and the objectivity of the media. The long war and the presence of information censorship create a necessity in a comprehensive analysis of the influence of these circumstances on the journalistic practice, which is extremely important for maintaining professional standards and freedom of speech in crisis times.

Status of studying the topic

Issues of the journalistic work at the front and in places of "arrivals" attract special attention of media researchers. Among them are both Ukrainian scientists and international researchers. They study legal norms that regulate the status of a journalist in war and how they are applied in practice in editorial offices. Attention is paid to the distinction between war correspondents and independent journalists in the aspect of their functions and rights. Researchers analyse certain ethical challenges related to the safety of journalists, compliance with ethical rules in working with war victims and people who have experienced losses, as well as peculiarities of performing editorial tasks during the martial law, in particular, censorship restrictions and military information's approval. Such changes are quite "fresh", so editorial offices do not always adhere to these rules. Monitoring studies indicate this as well, in particular, those conducted by the Institute of Mass Information and "Detector Media". Numerous violations of journalistic standards of coverage of events in news feeds, television stories, etc. are recorded by them. They emphasise the challenges of reliability, balance of opinions, separation of facts from comments and politicians' influence due to the desire for PR. The study of the formation and development of Ukrainian military journalism, as well as the role of individual military units in covering the course of events, was conducted by K. Akopian (2024) in the work "The Role of Journalists of the State Border Guard Service in Military Journalism in Ukraine". A media expert, an executive director of the public organisation "Institute

of Post-Information Society" Dmytro Zolotukhin (2022) depicted the issue "What specifically (and why) cannot be reported and shown in the media during war".

Tasks of the article

- to analyse the legal status and role of a journalist under wartime conditions;
- to study ethical standards and security requirements that a journalist faces during hostilities;
- to research the level of compliance with professional standards in Ukrainian media during the wartime.

The main material

During the wartime, a journalist is not a participant in hostilities and does not have any military status. His role is to observe neutrally, without a right to intervene in military operations, use weapons or be in areas that are important for the country's defense capability and places of equipment production without a permission.

For the first time, the status of a journalist during the wartime was defined by Hague Convention "On the Laws and Customs of Land War" in 1907. In Art. Ann. 13 to the Convention, it is stated the following: Persons accompanying the army but not directly belonging to it, such as newspaper correspondents and reporters, marketers and suppliers, who fall into the hands of the enemy and considered to be advisably detained, use the rights of prisoners of war in case they carry a certificate from the military leadership of the army they accompanied (Kopotun et al., 2023).

In combat zones, journalists are divided into two categories: war correspondents and independent journalists.

First: correspondents who highlight war events. They are often on the line of contact with the enemy and show a "real" picture of what is happening at the front. The duties of war correspondents include communicating with participants in the armed conflict.

Second: correspondents who have a task to prepare a certain material about what is happening at the front and are sent on business trips, which are usually dangerous. At the same time, these correspondents, even under such working conditions, have a status of civilians (Centre for Democracy and Rule of Law, 2022).

There are cases when, while highlighting military events, a correspondent is captured. It should be mentioned that only a military correspondent has a right to prisoner of a war status (Dashkovska & Vasiutin, 2022), and a certificate itself does not provide any special legal status to him (United Nations, 1977).

Since the beginning of 2022, when the full-scale war in Ukraine began, journalism has been in a kind of “epicenter” of a complex information, security and moral crisis. As a military spokesman Dmytro Lykhovii (2025) notes, since the beginning of this war, chaos has arisen in the information space, which has started complicating the perception of facts and contributing to disinformation.

Thus, the work of a modern journalist is no longer the same practice which existed five years ago. It is a daily adaptation to new rules. While filming, a journalist has to take care of his complete safety during Russian shelling, as well as filter the information he publishes, avoid revealing strategic details and adhere to the ethical principle of “do no harm.” Such a principle is especially important when working with people who have experienced psychological trauma. In nowadays realities, these are people who lost relatives in the war or who died as a result of the enemy shelling.

Unfortunately, there are more and more such cases as mentioned above. And this is the situation when a person’s usual life is crossed out and there appears a necessity to live in new realities of nowadays. A journalist should adhere to the boundaries of working with the traumatised people, stop in time during interviews, give time “to think” or to calm down emotions. A professional does not have a right to deepen a person’s trauma. It is also important and necessary to warn the audience (viewers, readers) about some certain shocking content.

An ethical aspect of the problem comes to the fore. M. Tymoshyk (2022) notes: The moral principles of the activities of modern national journalism and its creators should focus around the following fundamental concepts: patriotism, professionalism, tolerance of the national journalism’s traditions; objectivity and truthfulness; self-criticism; openness; argumentation (p. 53).

The martial law has led to the establishment of a certain censorship, which was written about above. It somewhat contradicts some traditional ethical standards. In particular, this concerns the mandatory coordination of military comments and information with the structural units of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. The editorial office of “Suspilne Chernihiv” also operates on such a principle.

It is worth to give an example: material of the author of these lines “Shooting for Accuracy in 120 Seconds: How Future Marksmen are Trained in the Chernihiv Region” (Hornova & Biedna, 2025). The plot deals with the studying and exams of future Marksmen – infantry snipers who undergo intensive professional training at the regional department of the Territorial Defense Forces “Pivnich” (“North”). The text highlights peculiarities of the role of a marksman as an intermediate link between a shooter and a classic sniper, whose task is accurate shooting at distances from 250 to 500 meters from various positions and under conditions of limited time. Training con-

ditions, a role of instructors, as well as personal impressions and motivation of certain servicemen who have undergone training and take exams where they are required to be highly accurate and quick to fire, are described. To collect information for this material, the journalist and the cameraman went directly “to the fields”. Afterwards, everything what was written and shown on the video was coordinated with the military press service.

Information that cannot be disclosed is contained in Appendix 2 to the Order of the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine No. 73 “On the organisation of interaction between the Armed Forces of Ukraine, other components of the defense forces and representatives of the media during the legal regime of martial law”, dated March 3, 2022. This order is in the public access. In order to make it more widely known to the journalistic community, the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine (2024) placed it on its website in 2024. Among the information marked “not for the press”, there is data on the losses of military equipment and personnel (if such information was not placed in the public access by the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and (or) other management government of the Ukrainian defense forces.

During the work with texts on military issues, journalists get used to these rules. They no longer seem so difficult, as the brain immediately analyses the picture that journalist see, whether at the front, or at the training ground, military exercises, etc.

If talking about violations in the journalistic profession during the wartime, particularly, regarding neglect of standards, then in December 2023 the Institute of Mass Information monitored professional standards of leading online media. According to the results, it was found out that compliance with the standard of balance of opinions is more than 96 per cent among the studied media.

In addition to the news that cover only one point of view, which is economically biased or directed at certain political figures, the indicators of preservation of this standard in the texts are worsened by the fact of publishing commissioned materials that are completely not marked as required. The level of compliance with the reliability standard is over 95 per cent on average among all studied media.

A tendency towards a decrease in the number of cases when reactions use Russian resources as basic information has become noticeable. Still, the general statistics are negatively affected by the fact that certain publications continue to quote propaganda statements by Russian functionaries that are meaningless in terms of importance for Ukraine from a political or security points of view. Sometimes, editorial offices fall for the “hook” of Russian special services and unknowingly publish information that may be in the enemy’s hands in cases of spreading propaganda.

Compliance with the standard of separating facts from comments was over 87 per cent (Barkar, 2023). According to the monitoring research, the leaders in submitting journalistic materials in compliance with all relevant standards are the following online publications: "Hromadske", "Suspilne", Liga.net, "Ukrainska Pravda", "Espresso", "Slovo i Dilo". The list with the lowest percentage of compliance with the standards includes the following sites: "RBC-Ukraina", "UNIAN", "Focus", Obozrevatel, "Channel 24", Telegraf, and TSN. 38 per cent of the materials contained violations in the category of separating facts from comments.

Some editorial offices often like to violate journalistic standards precisely in headlines. For example, the headline "Goosebumps from this SPEECH. The hall was SILENT when Zelenskyi spoke. These words sank into everyone's soul." It can be seen on the YouTube page of the media "We are Ukraine." The video is dated April 16, 2025. This headline is a typical example of a journalist doing everything in order to make a sensation out of a speech that is already quite familiar to Ukrainians. It contains several emotional markers: "goosebumps" causes a physical reaction and is associated with strong emotions; "the hall was SILENT" creates an atmosphere of tension and importance of the moment, as if every viewer is afraid to say a word, so as not to lose a single word spoken; "these words sank into everyone's soul" is a statement about a strong emotional influence.

One more example is a phrase "You need to see this". The headline was published on the YouTube channel "News.LIVE." It immediately creates a sense of high urgency and uniqueness of the information offered. Such emotional markers are widely used in the headlines of Ukrainian media, especially in online publications and YouTube. The amount of information published in the media every hour is huge; emotionally coloured headlines stand out and attract users' attention. In addition, emotional headlines encourage viewers to click on the material, which undoubtedly increases its popularity.

The use of such phrases affects the information perception, forming a certain emotional attitude to the event or person. Without manipulation, the headline could have been like the following: "Volodymyr Zelenskyi's speech on...: key moments" or "Zelenskyi addressed... with a speech about...". Such an approach would help to clearly adhere to basic journalistic standards and not affect the emotional perception of readers/viewers.

The leaders of violations in the journalistic profession during the wartime are the marathon "United News". The slogan under which their materials are presented is "Information support of the population". However, at a time when it would seem that they should be an example of responsible coverage of events for others, they serve as an example of a number of specific violations that are inherent in the military information field.

The telethon “United News” began on the first day of the full-scale invasion. On March 21, 2022, this marathon began to be monitored for compliance with standards, in particular, by the public organisation “Detector Media”, specialising in media criticism and monitoring the content created by the Ukrainian media (Kulias, 2025). From March and till the end of 2022, the emphasis was placed on efficiency and informing the population about the progress of hostilities. At that stage, violations often concerned inaccuracy and incomplete information due to the speed of submission, possible cases of patriotism which was too much, and a certain censorship of negative information which would violate the general positive mood. Additionally, there could be problems with the balance of sources and references to official information in the absence of sufficient verification or additions from other resources.

It is worth to make an analysis of the broadcast of “United News” on November 20, 2022. One of those who spoke that day was the channel “My – Ukraina”. In their block, experts recorded 111 rude violations. During the preparation of materials for broadcast, the editorial office neglected the standards of reliability. Such cases were recorded 43 times. It was forgotten about the standard of separating facts from opinions – 41 violations. It was not taken into account the importance of presenting information according to the standards of accuracy and completeness.

A little less, but still a significant number can be noted in the “Rada” channel block – 101 violations of standards. There was a blind eye regarding the separation of facts from opinions in every possible way. This is convenient, because news can be presented under one’s own “sauce”. The “Suspilne” block also came under scrutiny – 42 violations were recorded by “Detector Media” employees. During the broadcast of ICTV and STB channels, tendencies of disregard for standards was clearly traced in 191 cases.

In 2023, with the gradual establishment of the telethon’s work, “Detector Media” began to pay more and more attention to violations of journalism standards, which included unreliability, lack of balance, failure in separating facts from opinions, manifestations of political PR. The number of patriotism manifestations decreased, but on the other hand, the number of materials that could be interpreted as support for certain politicians increased.

Monitoring of the spread of russian narratives was also intensified. Although, isolated cases still remained. In the period from January 2024 to July 2025, monitoring recorded systematic violations of the standards of information journalism, especially regarding the reliability of information and references to sources. The desire of certain politicians who were eager to show themselves and their good deeds while getting into the airtime remained a significant problem, as there were only staged shots. This often manifested itself in the activities of the government as well.

There is growing attention to the lack of pluralism of opinions and representation of different parliamentary factions on the air, with preference given only to some certain chosen personalities. Additionally, “Media Detector” increasingly is pointing to problems with depth of analysis and tendencies to superficial coverage of topics, without any analysis, searching for additional sides for comprehensive information coverage. As a result, although the idea of a marathon at the beginning of a full-scale invasion was justified, its long-term existence without proper observance of journalistic standards is of great concern to media experts.

Conclusions

The urgent requirements for modern Ukrainian journalists of wartime are to adhere to neutrality and departmental censorship in covering military issues, as well as to ensure their own safety in conditions of work in “hot spots”.

Monitoring data indicate a number of violations of professional standards in Ukrainian media regarding the reliability of information, balance of opinions, separation of facts and comments.

For modern media, it is beneficial to use emotionally coloured headlines in the sea of news published in crazy quantities. This is how they can “win” in this pursuit of the audience’s attention.

Political PR in the media, as well as insufficient criticality in highlighting topics are another problems with which modern journalism faces.

In wartime, journalists struggle with challenges every single day. They are required to constantly adapt and strictly adhere to professional standards in order to maintain the audience’s trust, to provide own safety and effectively inform the population. Further work on strengthening professional standards and media literacy is relevant and necessary for the development of responsible and objective media space in Ukraine.

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