

## МЕДІАДОСЛІДЖЕННЯ

Visn. Lviv. Univ., Ser. Zhurn. 2026: 59; 193–203 • DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.30970/vjo.2026.59.13957>

УДК 070:94(477):316.77

### THE IMAGE OF THE HERO IN MODERN UKRAINIAN JOURNALISM: ETHICS, MEMORY, NARRATIVE

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The article analyses the peculiarities of covering the phenomenon of heroism in modern Ukrainian journalism in the context of full-scale war. Heroism is considered as a sociocultural and communicative phenomenon that shapes national memory and moral guidelines for society. Using a series of articles about the Heroes of Lviv Region as an example, the article outlines ethical principles, genre features, and the role of journalists in preserving the humanity and dignity of heroes.

*Keywords:* heroism, memory journalism, national identity, journalism ethics, media narrative, war journalism.

**Statement of the problem.** In the 21st century, Ukraine's information space is seen as a multifunctional environment that, along with its communicative role, participates in the processes of shaping national memory and historical identity. In the context of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine, the importance of journalism as an institutional mechanism for disseminating verified information that influences the formation of public opinion and social assessments of events is growing. In the current environment, journalists focus on documenting events and recording people's life stories. In this context, memory journalism plays an important role. Such materials not only inform but also shape the moral guidelines of modern Ukrainian society. Preserving the memory of Ukrainian defenders is an important task for journalists. However, it should be remembered that working with the topic of war

requires special ethical sensitivity, because journalists must not only convey the truth, but also preserve the dignity of heroes and families, avoiding speculation, stereotypes, and unnecessary drama. In wartime, journalists become chroniclers of the times and witnesses, so it is through documentary and artistic-journalistic texts that the stories of the people who have become the faces of the struggle are preserved.

**Analysis of recent studies and publications.** In scientific studies by I. Krasnodemska, S. Gubskyi, N. Bondarenko, and I. Isakova, heroism is considered a value-driven phenomenon associated with moral consciousness and responsibility to society. In psychology, researchers Z. Franko, F. Zimbardo, A. Cohen, E. Kinsella, and S. Ellison focus on the typology of heroic behavior and the set of traits that determine readiness for risk and self-sacrifice. The cultural and philosophical dimension of the problem is presented in the works and statements of O. Zabuzhko, where heroism is understood as a bearer of collective values and national memory.

**Methodological basis of the study.** The study uses an analytical method to examine sources and media texts, a comparative method to compare Ukrainian journalist" approaches to covering the war, and content analysis.

**Presentation of the main research material.** One of the major topics in the Ukrainian media right now is heroism, which is covered in stories about defenders, volunteers, medical workers, rescuers, and citizens who show resilience and self-sacrifice. A hero in a journalistic text is a manifestation of heroism, a symbol of a certain moral ideal, the embodiment of national spirit, dignity, and humanity. The theoretical foundations of covering heroism in journalism involve understanding the phenomenon of the hero as a sociocultural phenomenon. In society, the hero acts as a moral guide, and the journalist acts as an intermediary between the hero and the audience, not simply providing factual information, but also creating a deeper emotional and ethical context. In the Ukrainian information space, the issue of heroism takes on new meanings: it ceases to be an exceptional manifestation of people and becomes a key element of public discourse, a symbol of identity, a narrative of memory and resilience.

The concept of 'heroism' (from French *héroïsme*; ancient Greek *ἥρως* – warrior, hero) is defined by scholars Krasnodemska I. and Gubsky S. as 'a state in which a highly moral person with strong values demonstrates their best qualities, extraordinary courage and self-sacrifice, the ability to act courageously in critical circumstances; ... a willingness to give their life for their ideals'<sup>1</sup>. Researchers Franko Z. and Zimbardo F.<sup>2</sup> proposed dividing heroic deeds into two large groups: physical-risk heroism and social heroism. The first category includes actions associated with immediate physical danger – participation in combat, saving lives, intervention in extreme situations. The second category includes actions for the sake of ideas and principles that can have serious social consequences: loss of work, isolation, pressure, repression. In this sense, heroism is more about moral risk, loneliness, and unwillingness to remain silent. This definition emphasises two main aspects of heroism: as a moral quality of a person and as an act that goes beyond everyday

<sup>1</sup> Краснодемська, І., Губський, С. (2025), «Героїзм українських воїнів в умовах сучасної російської агресії проти України як чинник формування патріотичної свідомості молоді», *Українознавство*, № 1 (94).

<sup>2</sup> Franco, Z., Blau, K., and Zimbardo, P. (2011), «Heroism: A Conceptual Analysis and Differentiation between Heroic Action and Altruism», *Review of General Psychology*, Volume 15, Issue 2.

experience. Researcher Cohen A. believes that 'a hero is a person who is aware of their vulnerability and mortality, but still takes serious risks or overcomes great difficulties for the sake of principle'<sup>3</sup>. In his article, public figure D. Bloschchynsky noted that all the heroes of his materials were ordinary Ukrainians, but when he talked to them, he realised that they could not have acted differently<sup>4</sup>. He notes: 'After talking to them, I had a strange feeling that they were suited to the drama they had gone through. Not because these trials had to fall on this particular person, but because in retrospect, living through their memories, you looked into the eyes of these people and understood that they could not have acted differently. They couldn't leave, they couldn't not help their friends in the military, they couldn't not save lives, they couldn't not bake bread, carry water, take care of animals, look for medicine, or evacuate people'<sup>5</sup>.

From a philosophical point of view, heroism is considered a form of ethical maximalism, where a person acts not out of obligation, but on the basis of inner moral conviction. As Skovoroda wrote, heroism lies in the willingness to defend one's homeland, which is the highest honor. In contrast, Bloschchynskyi argues that 'the world of free people needs the protection of true heroes – those who have already looked into this mirror and found themselves in it'<sup>6</sup>.

In the social dimension, heroism is a way of reproducing collective values, because heroes become bearers of behavioral models that society uses to mark its ideals. Zabuzhko O. writes that 'true heroes are those who do not seek glory, but simply do their job'.

Kinsella E. and her colleagues identified 12 core traits of heroism, which are: courage, moral purpose, conviction, valor, self-sacrifice, protection, honesty, selflessness, decisiveness, rescue of others, inspiration, and usefulness<sup>7</sup>. Ellison, S. and colleagues found evidence of the 'eight major traits' of heroes, which are wisdom, strength, resilience, reliability, charisma, caring, selflessness, and the ability to inspire. They also identified four main functions of heroism. In their view, heroes provide wisdom, improve us, provide moral modeling, and offer protection<sup>8</sup>.

In journalism, the theme of heroism has a dual nature: it is both documentary (recording an event or fact) and communicative (creating meaning, forming a narrative). Thus, journalism about heroism becomes as much part of a process of creating public memory as it is a story about an exceptional person. As Bondarenko N. notes, 'heroism sets moral and value guidelines for society. Without satisfying the demand for heroism, victory in this war is impossible'<sup>9</sup>. In other words, heroic stories in the media not only inform, but also

<sup>3</sup> Kohen, A. (2013), *Untangling heroism: Classical philosophy and the concept of the hero*, 1-191.

<sup>4</sup> Блошинський, Д. (2023), «Кого ми побачимо в дзеркалі після перемог?», *NV*, 20 червня, URL: <https://nv.ua/ukr/opinion/viyna-v-ukrajini-shcho-formuye-gerojizm-ukrajinciv-novini-ukrajini-50333105.html> (останній перегляд 9.01.2026)

<sup>5</sup> Там само.

<sup>6</sup> Там само.

<sup>7</sup> Kinsella, E., Ritchie, T., & Igou, E. (2015), «Zeroing in on Heroes: A prototype analysis of hero features», *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 108 (1), 114-127. doi:10.1037/a0038463

<sup>8</sup> Allison, S. & Goethals, G. (2011), *Heroes: What They Do & Why We Need Them*, Oxford University Press. ISBN 9780199739745

<sup>9</sup> Бондаренко, Н., Косянчук, С. (2024), «Феномен українського патріотизму: переосмислення, збагачення, трансформація», *Національна наука і освіта в умовах війни РФ проти України та сучасних цивілізаційних викликів : матеріали V Всеукраїнської міжгалузевої науково-практичної онлайн-конференції*, с. 299-313

educate and contribute to the ethical consolidation of society. This is especially important in wartime, when every heroic act has not only current but also memorial significance – it becomes part of a collective narrative that supports public unity and belief in victory. For quality journalism, this means that material about a hero must include context explaining why this action or person became significant, what circumstances contributed to this, what risks were involved, and what the price was. At the same time, modern journalism draws attention to the transformation of the concept of heroism: it no longer necessarily means only military exploits – it can manifest itself in civilian life, in volunteering, in civic activism.

Forbes magazine cites five stories of young people who, despite their age, dreams, and plans, went to war to defend Ukraine as examples of heroism<sup>10</sup>.

The first hero, Myroslav Oliinyk, 24, said that he does not know what he will do after the war ends. ‘I know how to conduct reconnaissance, climb into the gray zone, dig in, shoot back – what will I do with all this in civilian life? What have I learned besides how to fight?’ The next heroine is Nika Chernyavskaya, 19, who joined the Hospitallers, a volunteer paramedic organization, as soon as she turned 18. The girl said that she was one of the first volunteers to arrive in Irpin and Bucha to clear the rubble. That’s when she realized she wanted to do something that would bring change here and now. Maksym Hromov, 26, is the next hero of the story. ‘When Maksym got a call from the Lviv Academy of Land Forces in August 2014 saying that he had passed his external independent testing with flying colors and was expected to start training, the 17-year-old Hromov was defending Savur-Mohyla as part of the Crimea volunteer unit – a hill that Russian artillery had razed to the ground in the summer of 2014. Maksym could have chosen university instead of war – he was a minor. So, when he joined the volunteer unit, he lied<sup>11</sup>. The young man says that he would not change his decision now because, in his opinion, war embodies the qualities he values in himself: patriotism, maximalism, and romanticism. 20-year-old Oksana Rubanyak dreamed of becoming Ukraine’s first female president, but when full-scale war broke out, she joined a volunteer unit and is now a machine gunner in one of the units of the 72nd Brigade named after the Black Cossacks. She is spending her youth on the front lines because she wants her family, including her future family, to never know what war is. Yegor Shapovalov, 21, is a soldier who was in a coma for over a year due to a blind shrapnel wound and damage to his brain stem. Before that, he lived a normal but very interesting civilian life and was actively involved in public affairs. He went to the military registration office on the first day of the full-scale invasion. His father said that ‘Yegor didn’t understand a lot of things in the army; he was upset by the chaos, the lack of well-thought-out logistics, and the older men who could drink and had no interest in the world’<sup>12</sup>.

In the modern context, heroism is just courage in the context of struggle, conflict, and risk. A journalistic approach to this topic should take into account:

- the hero’s internal motivation and moral position;
- the circumstances and risks of the act;

<sup>10</sup> Курико, В. (2023), П’ять історій молодих українців, які пішли на фронт, *Forbes.ua* Бізнес, мільярдери, новини, фінанси, інвестиції, компанії. URL: <https://forbes.ua/war-in-ukraine/viyina-i-molodist-chim-nadikhayutsya-ta-yak-prozhivayut-svoju-molodist-v-okopakh-yuni-geroini-29092023-16356> (останній перегляд 9.01.2026)

<sup>11</sup> Там само.

<sup>12</sup> Там само.

- the connection to the values of the community or nation;
- a form of presentation that allows the audience to experience the story, not just state the facts;
- an ethical approach that preserves the power of example.

At the same time, it is important to remember that excessive heroization can distort reality, turning heroes into idealised symbols devoid of human traits. Journalism must strike a balance between emotional impact and credibility, between respect for the feat and critical thinking about its context.

Lviv journalist Viktoria Viter created a series of articles about the Heroes of Lviv Region. It became both a journalistic experience and a deeply personal one, combining her professional mission with her human duty to remember. The idea for this series arose as a response to an inner need to preserve the stories of those who gave their lives for Ukraine, as well as to tell the stories of those who continue to fight, risking their lives every day for the sake of peace. 'In the course of my work, it became clear that journalism on such topics is not just a recording of facts, but a form of service to the truth and a mission to comprehend heroism through the prism of humanity' (Viktoria Viter).

The materials in this series cover two key groups of stories. The first is stories about the fallen defenders of Lviv region, who left their mark not only on the battlefield, but also in the hearts of their relatives, friends, comrades, and community. The journalist sought to tell their stories in a way that would touch the hearts of readers, to show the inner world of our fallen heroes and that they were all ordinary people who sacrificed themselves for us at a certain point in their lives. Talking about them means not allowing them to disappear from collective memory, so that their faces do not become mere statistics of losses.

The second group of materials consists of stories of those who are still fighting, who remain on the front lines or return home briefly only to return to where the fate of the country is being decided. These stories reveal another aspect of heroism – one that is everyday, yet full of dignity and strength.

When preparing her materials, Viktoria Viter used a comprehensive approach that combines methods of reportage, documentary, and interview journalism. Each story required in-depth prior research: searching for contacts among family members or friends, analyzing social media posts, reviewing photo archives, and communicating with people who could reconstruct the hero's life and tell his true story. It was important not just to gather information, but to build trust, to give interviewees a sense of security and understanding that the journalist was not exploiting their pain, but helping to preserve it in a dignified manner. While working on stories about fallen defenders, ethical challenges constantly arose. How to talk about death without traumatizing the family? What details should be included and what should be omitted so that the text does not become sensationalist or emotionally shocking? The answer was the principle of sensitivity and respect. Each piece was built not around the circumstances of death, but around life – childhood, hobbies, profession, relationships with loved ones. It is through these fragments that the image of a living person emerges, not just a soldier. It is this perspective that allows the reader not only to sympathize, but to feel a connection with the hero, to realize that the history of war is the history of each of us.

The other part of the series – stories about those who continue to defend the country – proved to be no less difficult. These interviews required tact, because journalists must understand that they are dealing with people who live in a reality of constant danger, loss,

and responsibility. Often, the subjects of these stories did not seek publicity. They spoke about their comrades, about the daily routine at the front, about how the war had changed their attitude to life. For the author of these texts, it was important to create a space where soldiers could speak honestly, without fear that their words would be taken out of context. Each meeting, each interview with the military became not only professional work, but also an act of ethical interaction. Often, after talking with them, there was a feeling of empathy, because it is impossible to hear these stories and remain indifferent. However, it is through them that we come to understand that true journalism is not about sensational headlines, but about honesty, attentiveness, and trust. The author paid special attention to the language of the texts during the creation of the series. It had to be simple, sincere, devoid of artificial pathos, and most importantly, remain human. After all, true heroism does not need embellishment – it manifests itself in details, in ordinary words and deeds. In each piece, it was important to maintain a tone of respect, not reducing the hero to a symbol, but leaving them as a person with emotions, fears, hopes, and dreams.

When working on her stories, the journalist always tried to strike a balance between objectivity and emotion. It is impossible to talk about loss without sympathy, but one cannot allow empathy to replace the analytical component. Therefore, each text was constructed as a combination of facts and emotional context. In my opinion, this allows one to preserve the authenticity of the story and at the same time achieve depth of perception. Communication with the families of the heroes was an equally important part of this work. Often, they became co-authors of the materials, providing photos, memories, and personal notes. In such conversations, the journalist acts not only as a mediator between the private and the public, but also as a psychologist, because it was important for the relatives to be listened to and understood.

Two articles from the series about Heroes of Lviv Region deserve special attention: «He was the man who gave me wings» – wife of Hero Bohdan Holub» and «A year for her beloved and nine days for her father: the story of a Lviv woman who joined the Armed Forces of Ukraine for her dearest men.»

The publication «He was the man who gave me wings» – wife of Hero Bohdan Holub»<sup>13</sup>. – is the story of Bohdan Holub, a soldier who died defending Ukraine. It is based on the memories of his wife Natalia and daughter Maria. This text tells of a loss that remains forever, but at the same time becomes a source of light, memory, and love. The main purpose of the material is to show not only the death of a soldier, but also the life he lived, his humanity, and his devotion to his family and homeland. The material is structured into several meaningful parts that recreate the hero's life through the prism of his family's memories. The introduction provides a brief portrait of Bohdan – his age, profession, life circumstances, and decision to go to the front despite health problems. The story then shifts to the emotional testimony of his wife: her memories of how they met, their married life, their shared dreams, and the pain of loss. The following parts are the stories of his daughter Maria, who talks about her father's love, upbringing, relationships, and experiences after his death. The finale has a philosophical and civic tone, with the

<sup>13</sup> Вітер, В. (2025), «Він був людиною, яка мені дарувала крила» – дружина Героя Богдана Голуба, Львівська мануфактура новин – свіжі новини Львова та області. 15 травня. URL: <https://www.lmn.in.ua/project/vin-buv-liudynoiu-iaka-meni-daruvala-kryla-druzhyna-heroia-bohdana-holuba/> (останній перегляд 9.01.2026)

family's reflections on memory, conscience, and the moral responsibility of those who remained behind.

In terms of genre, the publication is an emotionally charged interview-monologue with elements of a portrait sketch. It is based on the vivid testimonies of the wife and daughter, who convey the depth of loss, but also the power of love. This form allows us to talk about war through personal stories rather than statistics, creating an effect of presence and empathy. In this text, the author sought to avoid pathos or formality – instead, the emphasis is on sincerity, the silence of pain, and the naturalness of emotions. The quotes are presented without stylistic embellishment in order to preserve the authenticity of the wife and daughter's voices. Their words sound like a direct appeal to the reader, which enhances the emotional impact.

The theme of loss is explored through contrast – memory versus oblivion, life before and after the war, the warmth of love and the coldness of absence. Particularly significant are the wife's words about how she picks up her husband's old phone during times of anxiety as a symbol of the presence of someone who is no longer there. Such details create an image of grief, image of undying love that turns into memory.

An important element is the ethical balance in the depiction of pain. The text does not exploit the tragedy, but rather honors it. The main emotion is not pity, but dignity. The focus is not on death, but on people learning to live with it. This is what gives the story its universal resonance – it is about every Ukrainian family that has paid the highest price for freedom. The final part of the material is particularly significant, where Bohdan's wife talks about memorial plaques and the phrase «Heroes never die.» These words convey not only pain, but also a moral message: memory should not only be symbolic, but also alive; it should awaken conscience and responsibility.

Thus, the text not only honors the memory of one hero, but also performs a social and educational function, reminding us of the price of freedom.

Another publication, «A year for her beloved and nine days for her father: the story of a Lviv woman who joined the Armed Forces of Ukraine for her dearest men»<sup>14</sup>, is one of the most emotional texts in the series about the Heroes of Lviv Region. It tells the story of 25-year-old Yaryna Chuchman-Minyo from Lviv, who lost two of her dearest people – her beloved Ivan and her father – but, despite her incredible pain, found the strength to continue living and joined the army. This story is more a testament to the great strength of spirit of Ukrainian women who transform their pain into action than just an example of personal loss.

The main focus of the article is on the heroine's inner transformation. Yaryna appears not only as a daughter and bride who has lost her loved ones, but also as a woman who has decided to devote her life to serving her country in order to continue the path of her men and honor their memory. Her decision to join the army is not an emotional impulse, but a conscious and deeply symbolic one. This article shows how pain can become a driving force and memory the foundation for a new goal. An important part of the text is the contrast between dreams of a «peaceful» life and the harsh reality of war. Before the invasion,

<sup>14</sup> Вітер, В. (2025), «Рік за коханим і 9 днів за батьком: історія львів'янки, яка пішла в ЗСУ за найдорожчих чоловіків», Львівська мануфактура новин – свіжі новини Львова та області, 1 жовтня. URL: <https://www.lmn.in.ua/project/rik-za-kokhanym-i-9-dniv-za-batkom-istoriia-lviv-ianky-iaka-pishla-v-zsu-za-najdorozhchikh-cholovikiv/> (останній перегляд 9.01.2026)

Yaryna planned to open her own tattoo studio, start a family, and develop her creativity. But the war destroyed these plans, and the girl found herself in a different world – one of discipline, fatigue, constant danger, and loss. This contrast allows the reader to more deeply feel the price that a generation of young Ukrainians is paying for freedom.

The material is built on an emotional balance between narrative and reflection. Yaryna's quotes convey sincerity and pain, but also awareness, strength, and wisdom. She does not romanticize war or use slogans; her words are simple and very honest. Her phrase, «It is difficult not for those who died, but for those who remained,» is particularly striking. It is a kind of moral axis of the entire material, revealing the depth of the experience and how war changes the perception of life and death. A separate emotional layer of the text is devoted to the heroine's adaptation after her service. Yaryna shares her pain from society's indifference, from the fact that civilians forget that there is a war going on. Her words convey disappointment, but there is also a call to learn to think, feel, and be aware. Her criticism of indifference sounds not like condemnation, but like a request not to turn away from the war, because it affects everyone. The final part of the material is structured as Yaryna's reflections on victory. For her, this is not just a military term, but the internal state of the nation, which begins with language, consciousness, and responsibility. Her words that «victory is when even the smallest children will know who the russians are» become a powerful conclusion to the story.

The main purpose of this article is to show that true strength is not always manifested in weapons or combat. Sometimes it lies in a woman's ability to endure unspeakable pain and continue to live, serve, and remind others of the value of human life. Through Yaryna's story, journalist Viktoriya Viter wanted to give readers a sense that Ukrainian resilience is not only the courage of soldiers on the front lines, but also the steadfastness of those who have lost loved ones but have not been broken.

**Conclusion.** The modern interpretation of heroism in Ukrainian journalism has a deeply sociocultural character. Heroism appears not only as a manifestation of exceptional courage or self-sacrifice, but as a complex communicative phenomenon formed at the intersection of personal history and social interpretation. Journalistic materials are becoming important elements of contemporary cultural heritage, because it is through them that the experience of struggle and resistance will be perceived in the future.

Journalists strive to show not only the feat, but also the path, circumstances, doubts, values, and motivation. This approach fosters a deeper identification of the audience with the heroes, promotes emotional and civic engagement of society, and strengthens social cohesion. At the same time, journalists may experience emotional exhaustion when working with such material. Each piece required not only time and effort, but also considerable emotional resources. After talking to people who have lost loved ones or soldiers who have seen death, journalists need a period of recovery. That is why, in the process of preparing publications, it is important to take care of one's own psychological balance, maintaining empathy but not allowing pain to completely consume oneself. This aspect once again underscores the importance of ethical and emotional readiness to work with military topics.

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## ОБРАЗ ГЕРОЯ У СУЧАСНІЙ УКРАЇНСЬКІЙ ЖУРНАЛІСТИЦІ: ЕТИКА, ПАМ'ЯТЬ, НАРАТИВ

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Статтю присвячено аналізу образу героя в сучасній українській журналістиці як важливого елемента воєнного медіадискурсу та механізму формування національної пам'яті. В умовах повномасштабної війни росії проти України журналістські тексти про герой виконують не лише інформаційну, а й ціннісно-орієнтаційну функцію, впливаючи на суспільні уявлення про відповідальність, жертовність, гідність і громадянську позицію. У цьому контексті героїзм осмислюється як соціокультурний і комунікаційний феномен, що формується на перетині особистого досвіду, колективних цінностей і журналістської інтерпретації.

У статті простежено еволюцію поняття героїзму в журналістиці воєнного часу – від зосередження на винятковому подвигу до акценту на повсякденному героїзмі, що проявляється у волонтерстві, служінні, цивільній стійкості та моральному виборі.

Методологія дослідження базується на застосуванні аналітичного, порівняльного методів і контент-аналізу. Емпіричним матеріалом слугує цикл публікацій про Героїв Львівщини, у яких поєднано елементи портретного нарису, інтерв'ю та документальної розповіді. Проаналізовано жанрові особливості текстів, наративні стратегії, способи персоналізації героїв і роль емоційних деталей у формуванні ефекту співпереживання.

Окрему увагу зосереджено на етичному вимірі журналістської роботи з воєнною тематикою. Підкреслено значення принципів делікатності, поваги до приватного болю, уникнення пафосу та надмірної героїзації. Наголошено, що журналіст у таких матеріалах виступає не лише фіксатором подій, а співтворцем наративу пам'яті, відповідальним за збереження людяності й гідності героя. Зазначено, що образ героя в сучасній українській журналістиці є важливим чинником суспільної консолідації та культурного осмислення війни. Журналістські наративи героїзму формують моральні орієнтири, за-кріплюють досвід спротиву та стають частиною національної пам'яті.

**Ключові слова:** героїзм, журналістика пам'яті, національна ідентичність, етика журналістики, медіанаратив, воєнна журналістика.

Отримано редакцією видання / Received: 11.01.2026

Прорецензовано / Revised: 12.01.2026

Схвалено до друку / Accepted: 12.01.2026

Опубліковано на сайті видання / Published on the publication's website: 06.02.2026