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## THE IMPACT OF INFORMATION DISCLOSURE ON THE FORMATION OF PUBLIC OPINION ABOUT VETERANS

*Coverage of veteran topics in the media plays an extremely important role in shaping public opinion about veterans, their needs, problems and place in society. The media is a tool that can both combat stereotypes and reinforce them, depending on how the information is presented. Inattentive or biased coverage can consolidate negative stereotypes about veterans in the public consciousness, strengthen stigmas and promote discrimination. Conversely, proper information support, the presentation of information about veterans in a positive way contributes to the positive perception of the latter by Ukrainian society.*

*The representation of a positive image of the veteran community in the information space has been relevant since 2014. It is important even today, when Russian pro-Kremlin media spread fake and propaganda information about Ukrainian military personnel in order to discredit Ukrainian defenders and the entire Ukrainian army.*

*This article elaborates and presents a set of recommendations for the media aimed at improving communication between the public, the veteran community and the media. They are based on the key ethical principles of journalism: truthfulness, objectivity, respect for dignity, confidentiality and responsibility. The implementation of these recommendations by editorial offices will contribute to the creation of a balanced and supportive information environment, increasing public awareness of the problems of veterans and improving the conditions for their reintegration into society.*

*The measures we have proposed are aimed at creating a favorable information environment, ensuring transparency and openness of the media as a social institution for establishing effective dialogue and information exchange, as well as at forming a positive image of veterans in Ukrainian society.*

**Key words:** *image of a veteran, information coverage, media, advocate, public opinion, stigmatization.*

**Statement of the problem.** Ukraine has been at war for the fourth year in a row, and the issue of society's perception of citizens with service experience remains relevant today. The impact of information coverage on the formation of public opinion about veterans is extremely important, as the media play a key role in creating the social image of the veteran community. The analysis of this impact requires a comprehensive approach that will allow us to determine the basic principles of forming the image of veterans in the information space.

**Analysis of recent research and publications.** The role of the information component and its influence on the formation of public opinion regarding the image of a veteran/veteran attracts the attention of many scientists. In particular, O. Tron and M. Salyuk

in their study "The Influence of the Media on the Formation of the Image of the Ukrainian Military during the Russian-Ukrainian War" concluded that the media not only participate in creating the image of a veteran/veteran, but also have a direct impact on the public perception of defenders/defenders and the army in general. A. Gudz, using examples of publications by civilian and military media, investigated the features of the formation of the image of a warrior and women defenders. The author studied the genre and thematic features of publications about the military, in particular, the coverage of the topic of a female military serviceman in the media. S. Ilchuk in her scientific research "On War, Gender Stereotypes and Social Exclusion" reveals the problem of the presence, in particular, of women in the ranks of the

Armed Forces of Ukraine through the prism of gender prejudices. L. Khyzhnyak and V. Sychova emphasize the actualization of the application of the archetypal approach and the use of symbols and images common to the Ukrainian nation in the resocialization of veterans. Scientists believe that it is archetypes that act as a source of media images that function in the communicative space, etc. However, in scientific discourse, the systematization and generalization of the main approaches to veteran topics and the provision of an information component in the formation of the image of veterans still remain relevant.

**Task statement.** The goal of scientific research is to systematize the basic principles and approaches to covering veteran topics in the media, followed by compiling recommendations for choosing topics, frames, and key approaches using media technology tools.

**Outline of the main material of the study.** Modern realities in Ukraine in the context of the military struggle against the enemy create new challenges for the state and society as a whole. With the potential growth in the number of veterans in Ukrainian society, the latter require high-quality informational reflection and the formation of an appropriate attitude towards this category of society in the public. The issue of reintegration, building trust and ensuring the adaptation of veterans and their involvement in civilian life remains important. The representation and perception of veterans by society today occurs mainly in the context of the representation of this image in the media. The concept of “image” is sufficiently developed in the scientific field. Thus, O. Ovcharuk considers the concept of “image” as a phenomenon of culture and interprets it as “... the inner world of feelings, thoughts, ideas and other spiritual phenomena that are not perceived directly by the sense organs, but in principle cannot become the object of a person’s substantive and practical activity.” [6, p. 25-26]. O. Skalatska believes that the image is based on the visual component and performs symbolic, mythological functions and is an encrypted message that needs to be “decoded” by the audience [9]. According to A. Zadorozhnaya, “image” is a set of ideas that determine the attitude towards this phenomenon [3, p. 171]. So, within the framework of our scientific exploration, we understand the image as a model that combines a set of generally accepted features formed under the influence of social, socio-political, cultural and national factors about a certain object of the surrounding reality, and which has a specific perception and reflection in the public consciousness.

One of the tools that broadcast, construct and distribute images in the information field is the media. The Ukrainian information space is saturated with veteran topics today. Hyperlocal and national media constantly cover various aspects of this issue, but still those around them do not have a clearly formulated understanding of how to properly treat military veterans. Thus, the results of the study “Stigmatization of Veterans: The Situation in Ukraine and the Experience of the USA”, conducted by the Ukrainian Veterans Fund of the Ministry of Veterans Affairs together with Syracuse University (USA) and the Sociological Group “Rating” in 2024 indicate that after February 22, 2024, the attitude towards veterans in society has significantly improved. However, there is a significant decrease in trust in veterans of the ATO and JFO – those who fought before 2022. Such a situation can cause conflicts between veterans and the civilian population and cause distrust of defenders [7]. Therefore, it is important to properly shape public opinion using all media capabilities and to maintain a respectful attitude towards veterans. After all, according to L. Khyzhnyak and V. Sychova “The image of a veteran of the Russian-Ukrainian war acts as an important element-mediator of communicative interaction with the veterans themselves and veterans with the surrounding world (close environment, institutional formations) [12, p. 176].

The media provide information about veterans, their experiences, problems and needs, thereby shaping society's perception of this social group. The selection and presentation of information determine which aspects of veterans' lives become known to the public. At the same time, certain frames are used - ways of presenting information that affect the interpretation and perception of information by the audience. For example, the “hero” frame emphasizes feats and courage, while the “victim” frame emphasizes suffering and problems. As researcher A. Zadorozhna emphasizes, it is the moral, cultural, ethical and professional qualities that are components of the overall image of a veteran that determine their behavior model and their perception by society [3, p. 173]. Correctly selected accents aimed at overcoming prejudices and social fears are important in covering veteran topics. Coverage of veteran topics should be responsible and contribute to the formation of a tolerant and supportive society, where veterans feel worthy and receive the necessary support. An important aspect of journalistic activity is the prevention of stigmatization - the negative selection of an individual, a social group on certain characteristics with certain stereotypical reactions to this individual

(social group) [10]. Veterans are already feeling the impact of stigma. In Ukrainian society, beliefs about the psycho-emotional instability of veterans, their excessive aggressiveness, radicalism in their views on freedom are widespread. They can also be perceived as inferior individuals who need social protection.

The formation of stigma in society occurs at two levels of communication: interpersonal and mass. It is mass communications that influence the formation of the second level [10]. For example, positive media coverage of successful reintegration stories can help build a positive image and encourage other veterans to become active. However, excessive emphasis on negative aspects, such as PTSD, can reinforce stigma and deter veterans from seeking help. Or, active coverage of benefits issues can attract the attention of the authorities and encourage policy changes [8]. Therefore, when creating content on veteran topics, it is important for media workers and journalists to adhere to ethical and professional standards, take a special approach to the choice of topics, language and visual means, and consider the following aspects:

*General ethical principles.* The foundation for professional and responsible coverage of veterans is adherence to general ethical principles. These principles are based on respect for human dignity, truthfulness, objectivity, confidentiality, and an awareness of the social responsibility of journalists.

Adherence to these principles is not a mere formality, but reflects a deep understanding of the complexity and sensitivity of the veteran experience. It involves a balanced approach to the selection of topics, the formulation of questions, the use of language and visual materials, as well as maintaining confidentiality and obtaining informed consent.

The following recommendations identify the basic ethical principles that journalists and other media workers should follow when covering veterans, thereby ensuring a dignified and respectful attitude towards veterans, contributing to the formation of a tolerant and supportive society:

**Respect for dignity.** Any form of discrimination, stigmatization or disparaging treatment of veterans should be avoided. Their experiences and experiences should be taken into account;

**Truthfulness and accuracy.** Information should be verified from multiple sources, and false or misleading information should be avoided;

**Objectivity and impartiality.** It is important to present different perspectives on veterans' issues, and to avoid biased assessments and manipulations.

**Confidentiality.** It is necessary to maintain the confidentiality of veterans' personal information,

especially in sensitive matters such as psychological problems or personal tragedies;

**Responsibility.** It is necessary to be aware of the influence of media content on the formation of public opinion and to be responsible for one's publications [5].

*Recommendations for choosing topics and frames.* The media is a powerful tool for influencing the audience's consciousness, so a responsible and balanced approach to choosing topics and frames is critically important for ensuring objective and tolerant coverage. It is the choice of topic that determines which aspects of veterans' lives will come into the focus of public attention. It can focus on heroism, trauma, social problems, successful reintegration or other aspects. The frame, in turn, determines how this topic will be presented, what context will be created and how the information will be interpreted.

The wrong choice of topic or the use of an incorrect frame can lead to the spread of stereotypes, stigmatization of veterans, the formation of a negative image and the complication of their reintegration into society. Journalists need to be especially vigilant about "heroization". As noted by Anastasia Selyaninova, head of the educational and analytical department of the Ukrainian Veterans Fund, the heroization of the image of veterans contains not only a positive connotation, but can also form inflated expectations from military personnel, namely, shifting responsibility for the security and stability of the state solely onto the shoulders of defenders [7]. On the contrary, a balanced and responsible approach allows you to create an objective and complete picture of the lives of veterans, contribute to the formation of respect and support, and stimulate the solution of existing problems [13]. In this case, it is worth paying attention to:

**Balanced coverage.** Present both positive stories of successful reintegration and real problems faced by veterans. Avoid one-sided coverage that can lead to stereotyping.

**Avoid sensationalism.** Do not sensationalize veterans' stories, avoid overemphasizing traumatic experiences or negative aspects.

**Focus on solutions.** Do not just state the problems, but also suggest ways to solve them, talk about successful practices and support programs.

**Diversity of frames.** Use different frames to present veterans, for example, avoiding using only the "hero" or "victim" frames. It is important to show veterans as active members of society, with different professions, interests and life stories.

*Recommendations for the use of language and visual materials.* Language and visual materials

are powerful communication tools that play a key role in shaping public opinion about veterans. The words we use and the images we show can both contribute to understanding and support for veterans and reinforce stereotypes, stigmatize them and cause psychological harm. It is important to realize that each word and each image carries a certain meaning and can evoke different emotions in the audience, especially in the veterans themselves and their family members. Incorrect use of language, the use of stereotypical or derogatory expressions, the use of traumatic images or videos can lead to retraumatization of veterans, increasing their social isolation and the formation of a negative image in society. Conversely, a balanced and ethical approach to the choice of language and visual materials contributes to the formation of a tolerant and supportive environment where veterans feel worthy and receive the necessary support [1]. When creating a journalistic piece on veterans' topics, it is important to:

Correct terminology. Use correct terminology, avoid words and expressions that may be offensive or derogatory to veterans, such as "Afghan" or "ATO soldier", it is better to use "Afghanistan war veteran" or "ATO participant".

Avoiding stereotypes. Avoid using stereotypical images and language that may reinforce negative stereotypes about veterans;

Responsible use of visual materials. Avoid using photographs or videos that may be traumatic or violate the dignity of veterans. Obtain consent to use images;

Context. Provide context and explanations for terms and events used to avoid misinterpretation of information.

**Conclusions.** It is important to remember that veterans are not a homogeneous group, each of them has their own unique history, experiences and needs. The media is an important channel of communication between veterans, state bodies, public organizations and the general public. The level of public awareness, attitude towards veterans, the effectiveness of the implementation of veteran policy and the success of veterans' reintegration into civilian life depend on how the media cover veteran issues. To form an appropriate public opinion about veterans, a journalist must adhere to the principles of truthfulness, objectivity and ethics when covering veteran issues. Involve specialists in veteran policy, psychologists, lawyers and representatives of veterans' organizations in commenting. Tell about successful stories of veterans' reintegration, their achievements and contribution to society. Debunk stereotypes, forming an objective image of veterans in the public. Create specialized projects dedicated to veteran topics (for example, talk shows, documentary projects, columns in the press and on websites), etc.

Forming a positive image of a veteran requires journalists not only professionalism, but also high ethical responsibility. The media have a powerful influence on the formation of public opinion about veterans, their place in society, their needs and problems. Incorrect or unethical coverage can lead to the spread of stereotypes, stigmatization, retraumatization of veterans and complications in their reintegration into civilian life.

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## **Горчикова А. О., Зубарець А. В. ВПЛИВ ІНФОРМАЦІЙНОГО ВИСВІТЛЕННЯ НА ФОРМУВАННЯ СУСПІЛЬНОЇ ДУМКИ ПРО ВЕТЕРАНІВ**

*Висвітлення ветеранської тематики в медіа відіграє надзвичайно важливу роль у формуванні суспільної думки про ветеранів, їхні потреби, проблеми та місце в суспільстві. Медіа є тим інструментом, який може як боротися зі стереотипами, так і підсилювати їх, залежно від того, як подається інформація. Неуважне або упереджене висвітлення може закріпити негативні стереотипи про ветеранів у суспільній свідомості, зміцнити стигми та сприяти дискримінації. І навпаки, належний інформаційний супровід, подача інформації щодо ветеранів/ветеранок у позитивному ключі сприяє позитивному сприйняттю останніх українським суспільством.*

*Представленість позитивного образу ветеранської спільноти в інформаційному просторі є актуальним ще з 2014 року. Важливим це є й сьогодні, коли російські прокремлівські медіа поширюють фейкову та пропагандистську інформацію про українських військових з метою дискредитації українських захисників, захисниць та всієї української армії.*

*У цій статті опрацьовано та подано комплекс рекомендацій для медіа, спрямованих на покращення комунікації між громадськістю, ветеранською спільнотою та медіа. Вони базуються на ключових етичних принципах журналістики: правдивості, об'єктивності, повазі до гідності, конфіденційності та відповідальності. Впровадження цих рекомендацій редакціями сприятиме створенню збалансованого та підтримуючого інформаційного середовища, підвищенню рівня обізнаності суспільства про проблеми ветеранів/ветеранок і покращенню умов їхньої реінтеграції в соціум.*

*Запропоновані нами заходи спрямовані на створення сприятливого інформаційного середовища, забезпечення прозорості та відкритості медіа, як соціального інституту щодо налагодження ефективного діалогу та обміну інформацією, а також на формування позитивного іміджу ветеранів в українському суспільстві.*

**Ключові слова:** образ ветерана/ветеранок, інформаційне висвітлення, медіа, захисник, громадська думка, стигматизація.