

# Personal Factors Shaping Journalists' Professionalism in Today's Military Journalism

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**Abstract:** *This article introduces the concept of today's military journalism, drawing on the experiences of journalists operating in hybrid warfare contexts. It explores character-skill challenges that were absent in earlier, pre-digital wars. The article pursues a threefold aim: to review and analyze existing practices, identify emerging key concepts and challenges, and develop a framework for optimizing and enhancing the personal factors shaping professional skills of media professionals in today's hybrid-information military journalism. The research employs interdisciplinary methods, including theoretical approaches (systematic reviews, definitional and generalization methods) and practical techniques (content analysis, socio-communicative modelling, and educational simulations). The article's primary contribution is a new educational model for training and retraining journalists in the context of today's military journalism. This model addresses the complexities of distinguishing between fake and factual, objective and subjective, and ethical and unethical phenomena. Theoretical insights provide a comprehensive understanding of the evolving mass-communicative landscape, where journalists act as versatile yet dependent players alongside bloggers, military personnel, politicians, and media consumers. Finally, the article offers classifications and generalizations related to emerging principles, standards, dilemmas, and challenges in today's military journalism.*

**Keywords:** *affective proximity, objectivity, balance, personality-driven skills, virtual reality in media, online warfare, a model for enhancing journalists' professionalism, resilience, emotional intelligence.*

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## Introduction

Journalists covering Russia's hybrid war against Ukraine find themselves in a situation where the lines between objective and subjective, fact and fake, have become increasingly blurred due to the aggressor's widespread use of disinformation, propaganda, and manipulation. This challenge is further intensified by the fact that the war is not only occurring on the battlefield but also in the digital realm, where information warfare has become an integral part of the overall confrontation. Indeed, journalists are constantly required to verify the truthfulness of information while facing attacks on freedom of speech, censorship, and propaganda, all while enduring immense psychological and informational pressure. The term "hybrid war" was first coined by Hoffman (2007) to describe current wars that combine traditional military actions with asymmetric economic and information-technological strategies.

Since 2022, Russia's war against Ukraine has proven to be more complex, as it is largely unfolding "online," where the speed of information dissemination and its reception by millions of people often surpasses its verification for accuracy and balance. Moreover, the rapid pace of events and the multi-channel nature of data, along with deliberately orchestrated manipulations, have created a situation where the boundaries between objective and subjective, fact and fake, technology and methodology, as well as emotion and interpretation, are no longer clear-cut.

This evolving landscape requires a new perspective on the personal factors that shape journalists' professionalism. The ambiguous nature of their work and behaviour in this context can be best described by the emerging concept of today's military journalism (see below).

## Research relevance

In standard conditions, the perception and analysis of facts within the media sphere can be divided into two categories: professional (journalists) and consumer (viewers, readers, listeners). For effective operation and to avoid manipulation and defamation, media consumers are provided with media literacy tools and materials, while journalists are trained in relevant areas, standards, deontology, and ethics. However, in total hybrid warfare, this distinction becomes blurred, and journalists (unless military censorship or content restrictions are implemented) become victims of information manipulation or face confusion when dealing with data.

Russia's war against Ukraine, as covered in the media, presents specific challenges that test journalists' personal and professional readiness. In the past, when covering 21<sup>st</sup>-century wars, the lack of journalistic competence mainly related to issues of humanitarian and international law, and a tendency to fall into propaganda, either by exaggerating or downplaying war crimes (Nohrstedt & Ottosen, 2014). In contrast, the high-tech hybrid war with complex manipulations, online battles (where nearly everything is recorded and shared on social media), the automated spread of numerous fakes, and multi-polar propaganda place immense pressure on military and civilian journalists. This forces teachers in communication fields to rethink the methods of preparing journalists, particularly regarding how personal factors influence their professional competence.

A significant contribution to this area comes from Ukrainian scholars (Boretskyi et al., 2020), who, drawing on the experience of the 2014 Russian invasion of Eastern Ukraine, systematically examined the personal factors involved in preparing future journalists in Ukraine. Additionally, Akopian (2023) provides valuable insights, emphasizing that ethical competence and social responsibility become critical in hybrid warfare, especially when the journalist is a citizen of the defending nation. This passionate involvement often triggers empathy and leads to the heroization of Ukrainians, sometimes even exaggerating their successes. However, fear and stress may also hinder a journalist's performance from a neurophysiological standpoint.

These issues, compounded by the almost limitless capabilities of digital technologies and artificial intelligence (AI), have led teachers who train or retrain journalists to emphasize the "do no harm" principle. This principle, which has roots in medicine, has become particularly relevant in hybrid warfare, which resembles an organism with various functions and systems interconnected.

After the first invasion in 2014, Ukrainian scholars shifted their focus to personal factors influencing the development of social competence in future journalists, examining these issues at the early stages of their professional training. Boretskyi et al. (2020) found that young journalists' initial social intentions are often irrational and self-centred, driven by desires for self-expression, popularity, and personal achievement. However, as they advance in their careers, these intentions gradually become more outward-focused and rational. If these journalists were working under the strict conditions of military journalism (including military censorship) in a conventional war, the personal factors shaping their professional skills would be more structured. In contrast, the current situation is more chaotic, marked by multiple levels of entropy and an overload of multi-channel information,

where fake news, manipulation, and personal experiences intersect, creating both deontological and methodological challenges. The lack of military censorship in Ukraine, the shared information space across countries with differing geopolitical orientations, the rise in cyberattacks, and the difficulty in quickly verifying facts further complicate the situation. Moreover, real-time reporting is often conducted directly from a drone camera during an attack.

Thus, this article aims to systematically review previous studies addressing the personal challenges journalists face in the context of current hybrid warfare. The goal is to summarize the emerging challenges, define the key concepts and characteristics of today's military journalism, and propose a general model for training journalists. This model will focus on retraining and advanced training of journalists who cover wars or are affected by them.

### **Research methodology**

A systematic review of relevant sources was first conducted to identify key themes in the current discourse. The primary approach involved defining and conceptualizing today's military journalism through definitional and explanatory methods. Additionally, content analysis was employed to examine the coverage of the war from three different perspectives (Russian, Ukrainian, and international), offering a comprehensive understanding of both personal and professional challenges faced by journalists in the hybrid environment. Drawing on existing experiences along with educational and socio-communicative models, methodological and deontological guidelines were developed to enhance the personality-driven skills of journalists within an educational framework. The reader may observe that this article does not employ statistical methods, and the number of analyzed materials is relatively limited (150 texts). This is a deliberate choice. The article's primary aim is to outline a general framework and highlight emerging trends that can help develop a broader model. A more detailed quantitative analysis, including the prevalence of destructive information-hybrid determinants affecting journalists' personal competencies, is addressed in the authors' subsequent publications.

Akopian (2023) effectively and precisely addressed the issue of personal factors in professionalism competence in the context of today's military journalism. He noted that journalists, who had once based their reports solely on daily updates from the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, were now forced to become direct witnesses to the armed aggression. In some cases, they observed these events from the window of their own homes.

Therefore, it is essential to explore how neutral journalistic competence interacts with the coverage of tragic or unverified events, as well as the journalist's side. Journalists are susceptible to stress, manipulation, empathy, and burnout, which can impact their work. The primary aim of this article is to identify educational (self-educational) tactics and strategies that can help balance these conflicting aspects, ultimately improving both the quality of journalists' work and the content they produce. The key methodological concepts are the personal factors influencing a journalist's performance and today's military journalism as a unique professional mode. This is especially relevant in environments where military censorship and military journalism are absent, yet the multi-channel, fake, manipulative, and hybrid tactics of opposing parties challenge journalists. These factors significantly impact journalists' work, influencing their personal parameters, qualifications, and professional behaviour.

### **International relevance**

In recent years, the blurring of boundaries between investigative, military, and civilian journalism has become increasingly evident, particularly in the context of broader forms of journalism such as blogging, insider reporting, travel journalism, and citizen journalism (Cooper & Mutsvairo, 2021). This shift affects professionals and social media creators. Since 2022, Ukraine has experienced a surge in newly trained civilian reporters eager to cover the ongoing Russian invasion, often without considering the "pyramid of responsibilities" and the personal competencies associated with it (Boretskyi et al., 2020). Globally, many specialists and amateur bloggers have entered the realm of today's military journalism, driven by what is referred to as "extreme journalism." Their motivations range from patriotism to seeking adrenaline rushes or boosting social media views. However, professional competencies related to personal factors are often overlooked.

This article aims to contribute based on two key factors. The first is the assumption that a military journalist should be specifically trained and accredited within regular military units or be a civilian journalist. This distinction imposes clear ethical and deontological guidelines on media professionals (Cassese, 1984). The second factor stems from the unforeseen consequences of covering hybrid wars, which are undeclared and do not introduce traditional military censorship or military journalism in the territories of the conflicting parties. These cases demand emotional detachment, balance, and adherence to legal standards. Still, due to the hybrid nature of current warfare, the constant online presence of military events, and the difficulty of fact-checking amid high-tech information manipulation, the

central issue in this type of journalism lies in the media professional's personality. Journalists find it difficult to separate their high-level competencies from their human, emotionally sensitive sides.

### **Personality and competence of military journalists in global academic discourse**

Reflecting on the recent wars, particularly the Gulf War, when information technology had not yet become essential, social communication professionals often criticized journalists for their poor legal and ethical awareness while covering these events (Nohrstedt & Ottosen, 2014). It was believed that journalists with less legal expertise were more vulnerable to propaganda and biased reporting.

Academic discussions in related fields primarily focus on the physical and psychological safety of journalists, alongside the ethical and legal challenges they face while reporting on wars. However, limited attention has been given to the personal traits and factors essential for performing this work, especially within the unique context of today's military journalism, which operates as a specialized media space during wartime. To bridge this gap, this article reviews and systematically analyzes existing research, providing a foundation for practical applications discussed in later sections.

While general coping strategies in socially significant professions have been widely researched (Buchanan & Keats, 2011; Urbániková & Haniková, 2022), a distinct body of literature emphasizes journalists' safety as a critical factor. Research from the 21<sup>st</sup> century, particularly studies focused on the Iraq War, reveals striking parallels in the detrimental personal impacts faced by journalists and soldiers. Both groups commonly experience a "standard set" of psychological and psychiatric disorders, including depressive disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), dissociative disorders, and substance abuse (Feinstein et al., 2002). These conditions often arise during war reporting and significantly undermine journalists' personal and professional skills.

Younger journalists demonstrate greater resilience, while more experienced journalists are generally more susceptible to the psychological challenges outlined above. Despite having higher stress tolerance, experienced journalists often lack the neuroplasticity and adaptability needed to navigate these challenges effectively. They also tend to be more reactive and influenced by their environment. Researchers argue that the core issue lies not in a lack of awareness of coping strategies but in the inability or reluctance to apply them effectively (Heffer & Willoughby, 2017). This paradox highlights how

professional experience, which defines a journalist's established style and approach, can, under such conditions, become a significant disadvantage.

The authors of this article have noted that personal threats and personality-driven skills are closely intertwined, posing one of the most significant challenges for military journalism. In the digital age, military journalism faces additional hidden dangers unrelated to physical safety or health. These challenges are primarily psychological and informational in nature. As Pedelty (2020) states, in hybrid wars, the essence and purpose of true journalism become nearly unattainable due to the complex layers of manipulation and misinformation that subtly influence journalists. These influences often manifest as tendencies toward conspiracy theories, magical thinking, myths, and rituals. Consequently, psycho-cultural factors play a critical role in shaping journalists' professional competence in the context of today's military journalism. This is particularly relevant given the prominence of social communications today, which intersects with culture, politics, education, business, sports, and other spheres (Redchuk et al., 2020).

At this point, the authors propose analyzing and defining the concept of "today's military journalism." With the proliferation of the Internet, social media, and advanced information-gathering technologies such as drones, surveillance systems, fake news generation tools, bots, and simulation technologies, the techno-informational landscape has become both a valuable resource and a significant challenge for journalists. Nearly two decades ago, Feinstein (2006) recognized varying levels of threats faced by journalists armed with basic tools, including a pen, notebook, camera, or the ability to report "live" from conflict zones, witnessing destruction, casualties, and survivor testimonies. He singled out untrained insiders and freelancers entering war zones as especially vulnerable. Today journalists can engage in war simply by accessing platforms such as Telegram or TikTok, where uncensored drone footage and other raw, unverified content are readily available.

Consequently, the following definition is proposed: today's military journalism is a specialized form of journalism that emerges within the context of hybrid, asymmetric, techno-informational conflicts. These conflicts blend elements of information warfare, cyberattacks, political pressure, propaganda, and the blurring of psychological boundaries between real events and their simulations, between experiencing a "live" tragic incident and reporting on it. This type of journalism occupies an intermediary space between civilian and high-tech military reporting. Military journalists operate in environments where the distinction between wartime and peacetime is often unclear, military

ensorship is absent, and information warfare plays a central role in the conflict (see Table 1).

Table 1. Differences between traditional military journalism and today's military journalism

The nature of the activity	
<b>Traditional military journalism:</b> Journalists operate in the context of an active war, where combat takes place between armies. Their work focuses on covering military operations, soldiers' lives, the state of the frontlines, and the humanitarian consequences of the war.	<b>Today's military journalism:</b> Journalists work in the context of hybrid warfare, where the boundaries of the front are blurred, and military actions are intertwined with information attacks, propaganda, and other unconventional tactics of warfare.
The type of information environment	
<b>Traditional military journalism:</b> Information is sourced from official military channels, and reports are grounded in direct observation of combat operations, along with interviews with military personnel and civilians impacted by the war.	<b>Today's military journalism:</b> Much of the information may be manipulative or fabricated. Journalists are required to navigate substantial amounts of disinformation, verify sources, and be skilled at recognizing fake news.
The journalist's professional roles	
<b>Traditional military journalism:</b> Journalists serve as intermediaries between the front lines and the public, offering objective updates on the progression of the war. They may be embedded with military units to provide direct, on-the-ground reports from the battlefield.	<b>Today's military journalism:</b> Journalists serve as multifaceted participants, taking on roles as analysts, social psychologists, detectives, and even cybersecurity experts. They need to have a solid understanding of cybersecurity, be proficient in handling big data, and cultivate critical thinking skills to effectively combat disinformation.
Ethical challenges	
<b>Traditional military journalism:</b> Ethical challenges mainly arise in reporting on military operations, with a focus on balancing national security concerns and the public's right to access information.	<b>Today's military journalism:</b> Additional ethical challenges arise from the need to counter propaganda and misinformation, adhere to digital and neuroethics, and distinguish between virtual and real discourses.

Source: the authors' own conception

Addressing these challenges requires a radical solution to two key issues: the development of new coping strategies for journalists and the creation of educational approaches grounded in the latest advancements in information technology, neuropsychology, and social communications. The focus is on the latter, as it relates to media education and professional training of future journalists.

As demonstrated in previous studies, personality-driven motives and basic skills are most prominent at the beginning of a journalist's career, when their sense of "self" often outweighs ethical and altruistic concerns (Boretskyi et al., 2020). A deeper examination of this aspect during further professional development reveals that the effectiveness and accountability of journalists in both regular and freelance situations (such as during disasters or wars) differ in terms of their attachment and empathy. This increases their subjective responsibility but undermines the deontological aspects of their work. Emotional intensity and personal experiences of fear may promote caution but hinder balanced judgment and analytical thinking, leading to glorification and propaganda. The consequences are far-reaching, as public opinion, and even governments and diplomacy, become reliant on war journalism and are thus exposed to defamation and manipulation (Ibrahim et al., 2011).

There is a marked difference between journalists representing one of the warring sides and those from countries not involved in the war. In this case, personal factors of professional competence, and consequently the media content, vary greatly. To illustrate this, content from three distinct perspectives of today's military journalism was analyzed, focusing on Russia's war against Ukraine since the onset of the full-scale invasion in 2022. A random selection of 50 pieces of content was taken from three groups: pro-Russian journalists, Ukrainian patriotic journalists, and Western European journalists – totalling 150 journalistic texts. Even though this sample may not yield statistically significant results, it provides a symptomatically revealing snapshot that illustrates key emerging trends. The analysis showed that the level of dependency between journalists' competencies and their personalities in covering the hybrid war was lowest and only acceptable among journalists not aligned with the opposing sides. Russian journalists from official publications were deemed incompetent and biased, Ukrainian journalists often displayed patriotism and empathy that outweighed deontological principles, and only foreign journalists exhibited an acceptable level of dependency between professional competencies and personal traits and psychological states. For foreign journalists, the most destructive factors were personal safety and stress.

One of the most notable observations from the content analysis was that Russian journalists were the most ardent supporters of aggressive war, Ukrainian journalists strongly advocated for a war of liberation, and only foreign journalists frequently expressed, either directly or implicitly, pacifist sentiments and a desire to end the war under any circumstances. The overall conclusion is that personal factors influencing professional competence of journalists from both Russia and Ukraine, shaped by existential biases,

hindered their ability to uphold the objectivity, balance, and impartiality that are essential journalism skills. The hybrid nature of the war further complicated the situation, as the uncertain and complex parameters (entropy) often surpassed the journalistic competence and human analytical and creative abilities required to navigate them effectively.

The saying "The further it goes, the more complex it becomes" has only intensified by 2024, as recent studies show. The hybrid, multi-channel information space has become an everyday reality for everyone, and drone footage has emerged as the most reliable source of information (Tvardovska, 2024). Interestingly, over time, both among journalists and politicians, representatives of "peace journalism" and "hawkish media coverage" have become increasingly visible. This peculiar effect of bias can serve as both a positive and a negative personal factor of journalistic competence during wars.

Currently, discussions on "peace journalism" are gaining traction among media scholars. This approach seeks to balance detached reporting with patriotic perspectives. It is seen as a viable solution to the challenges faced in contemporary military journalism. Additionally, it addresses personal motivations that influence professional competence of media practitioners.

Journalism, in its broadest sense, from blogging to analytical commentary, can be effectively understood within this context as a journalistic role. In prolonged wars, peace journalism often becomes more prominent. However, as Adegbola & Zhang (2022) note, "while empathic concern and conflict reporting efficacy can enhance adherence to peace journalism, inadequate training may undermine efforts to promote peace through reporting" (p. 282). Thus, even though the affective aspect is crucial as a personal factor of competence, educational components ultimately play a more decisive role.

This is significantly hindered by social and even political pressures. According to Konieczny (2020), society and even politicians allow journalists and media outlets not only to broadcast and comment but also to shape reality. This phenomenon leads journalists to abandon their collective and personal skills and ethics, instead becoming, if not manipulators, then marketers who "sell military reality." Unfortunately, this applies not only to Russian or Belarusian journalists who produce dictatorially biased content but also to representatives of democratic media. Konieczny (2020) argues that in the hybrid society one lives in, there is simultaneously a demand for both truth and optimism (peace and joy). This forces journalists to adopt a compromising approach to personal professional determinants.

This situation highlights the intersection of personal and socio-psychological factors influencing professional behaviour in today's military

journalism landscape. Research conducted during the war in Cyprus, for example, revealed that the quantity and quality of interpersonal and other social interactions military reporters experienced directly impacted the nature and rhetoric of the media content they produced. The primary obstacles to adhering to professional journalism standards included ownership rights to mass media, socio-political censorship, ethnic division, and lack of professional training (Yontucu et al., 2022). The quality of professional training is crucial among the subjectively dependent factors, yet it is often overshadowed by external influences or lacks adequacy by itself.

It is also important to focus on computational propaganda, which has become a personal challenge for every journalist. Since 2022, Russia has actively used bot farms to promote narratives such as “things aren’t so clear-cut,” “the Ukrainian Armed Forces are shelling their own,” and “Ukraine is just a pawn of the West.” As a result, many journalists have been forced to constantly debunk fake news, diverting them from their primary media tasks.

This phenomenon has already been thoroughly studied. Scholars believe that computational propaganda, as a tool of mass influence, significantly changes the methodological and ethical foundations of Ukrainian military journalism. This particularly affects areas such as identity, professional autonomy, and responsibility for truth.

As noted by Woolley & Howard (2018), computational propaganda shapes the information environment, as well as alters the cognitive framework for perceiving facts. Journalists must navigate this changed landscape, balancing objectivity with national loyalty.

In the context of Russia’s war against Ukraine, where information has become a battlefield, journalists are no longer mere observers. They have become “media soldiers,” compelled to respond to ongoing attacks from bots, fake campaigns, and hostile narratives.

Indeed, computational propaganda changes the structure of ontological trust. Truth is no longer seen as the result of fact-checking but as a product of digital legitimization, determined by reposts, reactions, and algorithmic visibility (Howard et al., 2023). This shift forces military journalists to rethink their authenticity. They must move from simply reflecting events to ethically curating the truth. Still, they face constant cognitive pressure and the risk of professional devaluation.

Thus, today’s military journalism has become not only the “fourth estate” but also the “third party” in the war. The media is now seen not as a source of reliable information, but as both “medicine and weapon”.’ At the same time, personal factors of journalistic competence have fully manifested through danger (fear, coping, stress, risk), bias toward one party in the war,

and high information entropy produced by hybrid methods of warfare (from propaganda and fake news to technologically generated or manipulated information).

### **Developing personality-driven skills in media professionals within the context of today's military journalism**

Indeed, much emphasis has been placed on coping strategies for journalists' physical safety and corresponding skills (Hamada, 2022; Slavtcheva-Petkova et al., 2023). This section, however, focuses on the development of personality-driven journalistic competence. It is particularly shaped by the unique challenges of hybrid warfare and today's military journalism, including issues related to standards, ethics, subjective resilience, and existential value commitment.

Research suggests that personality-driven skills in journalists, influenced by social interests and an extroverted disposition, develop through continuous professional growth and activities extending beyond today's military journalism. Initially, content creation and presentation methods may lack competence or be spontaneous, with successful outputs often stemming from the intuitive instincts of young journalists (Boretskyi et al., 2020). These skills evolve through the interaction between the "self" and the surrounding subjective environment. A significant risk emerges when journalists engage with social stereotypes, and vulnerable groups, and activate socially motivated altruistic or egoistic drives and needs.

In the context of Russia's hybrid war against Ukraine and today's military journalism, the distinctions between military and civilian journalists, media producers and consumers, and even between truth and misinformation, are increasingly becoming blurred. Journalists who have recently begun covering military topics have found their proximity to audiences has grown. Consequently, the line between journalists and content consumers has become less distinct. This situation raises an important question: whether media education is solely aimed at consumers, or if it also serves journalists. Additionally, there is the issue of whether it is possible to retrain or prepare existing journalists to report on military events effectively. A unique challenge in this regard is that war has become a constant, low-intensity daily news topic, where the most notable changes often involve individual tragic incidents, interpretations, and a cascade of unverified facts, which may include misinformation.

It is crucial to consider the following specific factors related to journalism in the context of Russia's war against Ukraine:

1. Russian media use disinformation and manipulation to create false narratives, complicating the work of independent journalists. In response, Ukrainian journalists often become part of the information resistance, taking on the roles of both reporters and activists.

2. Many Ukrainian journalists work on the front lines, reporting directly from combat zones. This blurs the boundaries between military and civilian journalists, as they share the same dangerous conditions as soldiers or civilians caught in the crossfire.

3. Military journalists or press officers often provide information to civilian journalists, acting as intermediaries or even co-authors of reports. This leads to the blurring of professional roles.

4. Military journalists are tasked with boosting the morale of the army and the public, while civilian journalists are expected to maintain objectivity. However, in times of war, civilian journalists frequently align with their country, which blurs the line between objective journalism and patriotic propaganda.

5. Ordinary citizens now play a much larger role in the dissemination of information through social media. As a result, they often take on the role of journalists by sharing news, photos, and videos from the front lines or occupied territories. This creates a new form of journalism where it is difficult to distinguish between professionals and amateurs.

Therefore, the activities of professional and citizen journalists during Russia's hybrid war against Ukraine (today's military journalism) reveal that personal and professional qualities are often intertwined, making it challenging to separate or develop them independently, whether at an institutional or individual level. Many of the challenges and risks (beyond the physical ones) overlap for military personnel, civilians, and even social and political actors.

Moreover, the valid coverage of this war is further complicated by information flows related to the Middle Eastern conflict. Social media, often referred to as "new media," has a particularly hybrid influence in this context. According to Lokman et al. (2022), this pseudo-journalistic activity on social platforms helps reinforce identities and foster an "own truth" among individuals on both sides of the conflict. In turn, this longstanding experience has been transferred to Russia's hybrid war against Ukraine, making it even more challenging to separate facts from opinions.

It is essential to analyze the previously described methodologies before modelling an integrated system to optimize personal factors of journalistic competence in the context of today's military journalism. First, journalists must make personal decisions about whether to publish information that could harm military operations, jeopardize lives, or be

unreliable (Weaver & Willnat, 2012). Second, they must collaborate with IT specialists to distinguish accurate information from fake news, video simulations, or outdated or unrelated videos presented as current. Third, media professionals must resist constant multi-channel psychological pressure, ranging from threats and anonymous messages to issues of self-censorship, all of which are linked to questions of competence. Regarding the latter, journalists need new professional skills without negating traditional ones (Weaver & Willnat, 2012).

However, the greatest cognitive dissonance arises from the fact that journalists are, on one hand, overwhelmed by multimedia information, while on the other, they often witness horrific events and human suffering. This can evoke strong emotional responses, amplified by values and ideological motives tied to justice, victory, and heroism, which ultimately influence the production process and the rhetoric of media content.

The final foundations for selecting principles, followed by strategies, tasks, and methods to optimize the personality-driven skills of media professionals in today's military journalism, are grounded in a decade of experience from Ukrainian journalists. Key elements include the concept of balance, along with the factors that either hinder or foster it, as well as the notion of resilience as an essential personal quality.

Regarding balance, it is traditionally understood that a military reporter should avoid categorizing the conflicting sides as "good" or "bad" to prevent oversimplification, personal bias, or manipulation by authorities (Buromenskyi et al., 2016). However, when considering the existential nature of Russia's war against Ukraine for Western civilization, and recognizing that today's military journalism reflects a "blurring of boundaries," it becomes acceptable for journalists to adapt their coverage in alignment with the political stance of the "defending side" or the "supporting side."

Resilience, as an emerging concept, refers to journalists' ability to perform their professional duties effectively in the face of unpredictable changes. It involves maintaining psychological stability, safeguarding their health and safety, and remaining ethical and objective when reporting events. This is especially challenging in the context of stress, danger, and the various obstacles associated with working in war conditions (Hou, 2020)

Therefore, it is important to summarize the principles guiding journalists' handling of information during hybrid warfare, aligning them with the characteristics of the information (content) itself (see Table 2).

Table 2. Attribution principles for handling information in today's military journalism

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<b>Attribution</b>	<b>The essence</b>
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<b>Integrity</b>	The information must be accurate, complete, and unaltered. Journalists should provide all important aspects of events or facts, ensuring they are not taken out of context or edited in a way that alters their meaning.
<b>Accuracy</b>	Information must be truthful, verified by facts, and derived from reliable sources.
<b>Completeness</b>	It provides the audience with a full understanding of events, helping to eliminate ambiguity and prevent manipulation.
<b>Reliability</b>	Journalists must critically evaluate sources and use only trustworthy ones to avoid spreading false or misleading information (sources verified by experience).
<b>Cybersecurity</b>	Engaging IT specialists to prevent fake news, information attacks, bot activity, and other automated tools used in hybrid warfare.
<b>Purposefulness</b>	Understanding the objectives and impact of the information being shared; tailoring it to a specific type (or all) of mass communication recipients.
<b>Objectivity</b>	Avoiding personal biases and subjective assessments, including through the correction of personality-driven skills and tools.
<b>Responsibility</b>	Recognizing the consequences of publishing information, adhering to ethical standards, and preserving the journalist's "good reputation."
<b>Transparency</b>	Clear understanding of information sources, methods of acquisition, and presentation.
<b>Ethicality</b>	Adherence to ethical standards, particularly in sensitive situations such as wartime.
<b>Impartiality</b>	Avoiding emotional or biased approaches, including those aimed at "serving good" (e.g., glorification, exaggeration, excessive empathy).
<b>Timeliness</b>	Responding quickly to events and publishing information promptly, which may sometimes hinder thorough fact-checking or critical analysis.
<b>Verification</b>	Diligently verifying facts through multiple reliable sources before publication.
<b>Critical thinking</b>	Analyzing and evaluating information from diverse sources, considering its objectivity, adequacy, relevance, and accuracy before using it.
<b>Balance</b>	
<b>Resilience</b>	The ability to withstand pressure and manipulation.
<b>Adaptability</b>	The capacity to swiftly adjust to changing circumstances and methods of warfare.
<b>Patriotism</b>	Prioritizing national interests and safeguarding state security.
<b>Discretion</b>	Protecting sources and confidential information.
<b>Communication skills</b>	The ability to build connections and engage with various parties in a war.
<b>Analytical ability</b>	The ability to deeply analyze information and detect hidden threats.

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<b>Innovation</b>	Using the latest technologies and methods for collecting and distributing information.
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Source: the authors' own conception

The inductive-typological approach to this open set of attribution principles reveals that the personality-driven skills of journalists in the context of today's war journalism form a triadic hierarchy: personal, competence-based, and institutional (educational). This hierarchy is conditional, as each level includes personal qualities and abilities that depend on the individual traits of the journalist, their acquired skills, and their openness to external development and optimization. To summarize, the components of this hierarchy vary in their degree of dependence on personal determinants:

- *Personal aspect* (as the most dependent one). Journalist training requires the independent development of stress resilience, emotional stability, and resilience. These qualities are crucial for maintaining mental balance under constant stress and while handling traumatic events. Journalists should focus on developing and managing empathy, critical thinking, and self-reflection.

- *Competency-based aspect*. From this perspective, journalism education primarily includes skills in perceiving, gathering, verifying, and analyzing information in environments with limited access to reliable sources and unlimited access to unverified ones.

- *Institutional preparation*. Beyond university education, an essential component is additional institutional support from media organizations, courses, seminars, workshops, and professional associations. This support provides both theoretical and practical training, including simulation exercises and handling crises with high information uncertainty (entropy).

Thus, one can develop a framework model for enhancing personal factors of journalistic competence within the context of Russia's hybrid war against Ukraine, specifically for military journalism in the innovative era. The model takes into account the analyzed specific challenges, general professional requirements, and unique factors, as outlined in Table 3.

Table 3. An expanded model for enhancing personal factors of journalistic competence

<b>Areas for improvement</b>	<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Methods</b>
Developing critical thinking	Developing the ability to analyze and verify information, particularly in the context of mass disinformation.	Intensive media literacy training. Conducting fact-checking workshops and working with information sources. Implementing regular analysis of one's materials and their impact on the audience.
Enhancing moral resilience and ethical responsibility	Developing resilience to pressure from propaganda and external influences, as well as the ability to make ethical decisions in complex situations.	Studying ethical standards of journalism in the context of war. Psychological training to develop resilience to stress and moral challenges. Organizing discussion clubs to analyze real-life cases where journalists face moral dilemmas.
Psychological preparation and emotional intelligence development	Developing the ability to manage emotions effectively, maintain motivation, and respond appropriately to psychological challenges.	Psychological counselling and training for developing emotional resilience. Introducing practices of self-reflection and personal development. Teaching techniques for emotional self-control and stress management.
Acquiring technological tools and developing digital skills	Ensuring proficiency in using the latest technologies for information security and gathering reliable data.	Training on using programmes for source verification and fact-checking. Courses on cybersecurity and personal data protection. Mastering analytics tools and working with large data sets.
Deepening knowledge of hybrid warfare and information operations	Understanding the specifics of hybrid warfare, its impact on the information landscape, and the role of journalists in countering disinformation.	Offering specialized courses on information security. Analyzing successful and unsuccessful cases of information campaigns. Studying the fundamentals of strategic communications and countering disinformation.
Developing skills in international communication and collaboration	Providing opportunities for experience exchange and supporting international connections within the professional environment.	Organizing international conferences and seminars for journalists. Establishing partnerships with international media organizations. Internship and exchange programmes for Ukrainian journalists abroad.
Integrating into curricula and lifelong learning	Integrating all of the above aspects into the curricula of journalism departments and professional development programmes.	Updating curricula to include modules on information warfare, media literacy, and ethics. Conducting regular seminars, workshops, and webinars for active journalists. Supporting continuous professional development through online courses and access to up-to-date resources.

Source: the authors' own conception

This model presents challenges, especially in terms of implementation, including external organization and personal motivation. Consequently, future research should explore how individual journalists or journalist groups optimize and manage their personality-driven skills. Despite the theoretical coherence and relevance of the expanded educational model for training military journalists in the context of hybrid warfare, its practical implementation faces several obstacles. Key challenges include institutional resistance, limited funding, and the low flexibility of traditional university programmes. Therefore, the authors of this article believe the model should incorporate new educational modules, such as emotional resilience training and the development of skills in digital fact-checking and cybersecurity.

However, most Ukrainian universities lack the resources and expertise required to offer such interdisciplinary courses. Moreover, state standards for journalism education are updated at a slow pace. These standards still prioritize universal deontological principles, which fail to address the specific needs of today's military journalism.

## **Conclusion**

Hybrid wars create complex challenges for journalists, who are forced to adapt to new realities and develop unconventional abilities. They must be capable of effectively countering propaganda and disinformation, working under psychological pressure, and maintaining professional ethics. At the same time, personal factors of journalistic competence in today's military journalism involve a wide range of qualities and skills, from critical thinking and emotional intelligence to technical knowledge and adaptability, which can more accurately be described as resilience.

The military-political, social, and technological context in which journalists develop personality-driven skills while covering hybrid warfare is known as today's military journalism. In this phenomenon, journalists do more than report on military actions; they actively engage in the war, often attempting to influence its outcome. Information technologies no longer merely capture and broadcast events, as they collaborate with participants to shape a new reality in media. This environment presents not only ethical challenges but also significant risks to journalists' lives, mental well-being, and professional reputations.

In the context of hybrid wars, such as Russia's war against Ukraine, journalists face numerous personal and professional challenges. Hybrid warfare combines elements of conventional conflict, information warfare, cyberattacks, and other nonlinear tactics. These conditions demand new approaches and skills from journalists, with the most important being a)

ethical dilemmas, b) the impact of propaganda and disinformation, c) psychological pressure and threats, d) working with sources of information, e) empathy and personal beliefs, and f) combatting technologically-driven alternative realities.

A systemic-typological analysis of relevant literature reveals that the first group of studies focuses on the competencies related to the personal security of military journalists, while the second group addresses professional threats. Further examination shows that personality-driven skills in today's military journalism remain largely unexplored, despite their crucial significance.

This article highlights the key differences between traditional and today's military journalism, focusing on the context of activities, the information environment, journalistic functions, and ethical challenges. It also demonstrates a significant distinction between journalists representing different sides of a war or adopting a neutral stance. The issue is further complicated by societal and political influences that encourage young military journalists, alongside social media activists, to create an alternative reality free from military censorship, diverging significantly from traditional journalism.

The development of personality-driven skills in media professionals working in today's military journalism is influenced by various factors. They include 1) the prolonged and often unchanging nature of war, which becomes a constant backdrop to everyday life; 2) the uncontrolled flow of facts and misinformation, which amplifies uncertainty; and 3) the difficulty of separating professional qualities from personal traits. Additionally, the roles of military personnel, civilians, politicians, bloggers, and other activists in the media are becoming increasingly blurred.

This complex environment demands both institutional and personal efforts in the following areas: a) enhancing critical thinking, b) mastering new tools and techniques for stress resilience, c) applying emotional intelligence, unclouded by uncontrolled emotions, d) demonstrating ethical behaviour and moral resilience, e) developing technical, technological, and informational skills, f) fostering professional and personal flexibility and adaptability, and g) balancing patriotism and humanitarian values with professional skills in information management.

In response to these challenges, the authors of this article have identified more than ten principles for working with information. For educational modelling, they were condensed into two main points: resilience and balance. The newly proposed, conditionally hierarchical model is based on personality factors, skills, and institutional preparation.

The key result of this article is the development of an expanded model for enhancing personal factors of professional competence in journalists. This model includes seven areas of educational and self-educational activity that could help address the primary challenges faced by media professionals in the context of today's military journalism.

### Research limitations

The article highlights the unresolved issues of personality-driven skills for military journalists within the context of post-industrial society, where even military topics in the media are treated as commodities and brands. While existing research has explored the value and cultural discourse (Hurzhyi et al., 2022), today's military journalism as a space for marketing and branding remains largely unexplored. To gain a more comprehensive and systematic understanding of the factors influencing journalists' professional competence within the current hybrid information continuum, further research is necessary. This research should involve a larger and more representative sample of relevant media texts.

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