

UDC 070.4:316.77:159.9

DOI <https://doi.org/10.32689/maup.philol.2026.1.27>

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## **EDITING TRAUMATICALLY SENSITIVE MEDIA TEXTS: THE ASPECT OF MEDIA TRAUMA LITERACY**

*The article provides a theoretical justification for the peculiarities of editing trauma-sensitive media texts as a component of media trauma literacy in the context of a war and crisis information environment. The relevance of the study is due to the growing number of materials related to war, violence, loss, forced displacement, and human rights violations, which increases the risks of retraumatization of the subjects of publications and secondary traumatization of the audience. It has been proven that the editorial stage of media text creation is a critically important link in the transformation of individual traumatic experiences into public discourse. It is at this level that decisions are made regarding wording, headlines, structure, visuals, and emphasis, which determine not only the informativeness of the material but also its psychological impact.*

*In this work, media trauma literacy is defined as an integrative professional quality of a journalist who combines psychological knowledge about the nature of trauma, ethical reflection, and practical skills of safe communication. A structural model of media trauma literacy is proposed, covering five interrelated components: ethical, psychological, communicative, analytical, and editorial-technological. Each of them is considered as a system of professional skills aimed at minimizing harm, avoiding stigmatization, and ensuring a balance between the public's right to information and the protection of human dignity.*

*The necessity of integrating the principle of “do no harm” into all stages of media production is substantiated.*

*The necessity of integrating the principle of “do no harm” into all stages of media production – from interview preparation to final publication approval – is justified. The importance of informed consent, the use of neutral language, the labeling of sensitive content, and the restriction of shocking visual materials is emphasized. Particular attention is paid to the problem of secondary traumatic stress among journalists and the need to institutionalize trauma literacy in educational programs and editorial policies. It is concluded that media trauma literacy is a systemic factor in the humanization of journalism and increasing trust in the media in wartime.*

**Key words:** media trauma literacy, trauma-sensitive editing, retraumatization, journalism ethics, editorial policy.

### **Наталія Пономаренко, Марина Садівнича, Вероніка Кульгова. РЕДАГУВАННЯ ТРАВМАТИЧНО ЧУТЛИВИХ МЕДІАТЕКСТІВ: АСПЕКТ МЕДІЙНОЇ ТРАВМОГРАМОТНОСТІ**

*У статті здійснено теоретичне обґрунтування особливостей редагування травматично чутливих медіатекстів як складника медійної травмограмотності в умовах воєнного та кризового інформаційного середовища. Актуальність дослідження зумовлена зростанням кількості матеріалів, пов'язаних із війною, насильством, втратами, вимушеним переміщенням і порушенням прав людини, що підвищує ризики ретравматизації героїв публікацій і вторинної травматизації аудиторії. Доведено, що редакційний етап створення медіатексту є критично важливою ланкою, на якій відбувається трансформація індивідуального травматичного досвіду в публічний дискурс. Саме на цьому рівні ухвалюються рішення щодо формулювань, заголовків, структури, візуального ряду та акцентів, які визначають не лише інформативність матеріалу, а й його психологічний вплив.*

*У роботі медійну травмограмотність визначено як інтегративну професійну якість журналіста, що поєднує психологічні знання про природу травми, етичну рефлексію та практичні навички безпечної комунікації. Запропоновано структурну модель медійної травмограмотності, яка охоплює п'ять взаємопов'язаних компонентів: етичний, психологічний, комунікативний, аналітичний та редакційно-технологічний. Кожен із них розглянуто як систему професійних умінь, спрямованих на мінімізацію шкоди, уникнення стигматизації та забезпечення балансу між суспільним правом на інформацію і захистом гідності людини.*

*Обґрунтовано необхідність інтеграції принципу «не нашкодь» у всі етапи медіавиробництва – від підготовки до інтерв'ю до фінального затвердження публікації. Наголошено на важливості інформованої згоди, використання нейтральної мови, маркування чутливого контенту та обмеження шоківих візуальних*

матеріалів. Окрему увагу приділено проблемі вторинного травматичного стресу журналістів і потреби інституціоналізації травмограмотності в освітніх програмах та редакційних політиках. Зроблено висновок, що медійна травмограмотність є системоутворювальним чинником гуманізації журналістики та підвищення довіри до медіа в умовах воєнного часу.

**Ключові слова:** медійна травмограмотність, травматично чутливе редагування, ретравматизація, етика журналістики, редакційна політика.

**Statement of the problem.** The modern media space is characterised by the constant presence of traumatic topics, in particular, military events, violence, loss, forced displacement, and human rights violations. In such conditions, not only the process of gathering information but also the editorial processing of material, during which key decisions are made regarding wording, emphasis, headlines, visuals, and ways of presenting the story, become particularly important. It is at the editing stage that the transformation of the protagonist's individual experience into a public text takes place, potentially influencing a wide audience.

International standards, in particular the recommendations of the Global Centre for Journalism and Trauma [6], UNESCO [11], and the OSCE [9], emphasize the principle of 'do no harm' and the need to take into account the psychological consequences of media publications. However, in the practice of many editorial offices, the issue of trauma literacy often boils down to the stage of interviewing or communicating with the protagonist, while the editorial and technological level (selection of facts, stylistic editing, visual design) remains outside the scope of systematic consideration.

When editing content, there can be conflicts between ethical requirements and the commercial logic of the media. The desire to increase clickability, emotional expressiveness, or publication speed can encourage the use of sensational language, dramatic headlines, and shocking images. Even when the information is accurate, such decisions can lead to the retraumatisation of the subjects of the material, increased anxiety among the audience, and the formation of stigmatising narratives. This problem is particularly acute in times of war and social crisis, when journalists and editors themselves are under the influence of collective trauma.

The Ukrainian media environment is gradually introducing protocols for sensitive reporting, but there is no comprehensive, theoretically grounded criteria for editing traumatic content as a component of professional competence. Existing research focuses mainly on ethical standards or the psychological impact of the media, while the editorial process as a separate link in the decision-making chain remains insufficiently conceptualised.

Thus, a scientific problem arises: insufficient development of principles and mechanisms for trauma-sensitive editing of media content that would ensure a balance between the public's right to information and the protection of the dignity and psychological safety of the subject and the audience. The question of how to integrate ethical, psychological and technological components into a single system of editorial decisions – from structuring the material to final approval of publication – needs to be addressed.

Thus, the relevance of the study is determined by the growing number of traumatic topics in the media space and the need to rethink the editing process as an area of increased professional responsibility. The formation of the concept of trauma-informed content editing is an important condition for ensuring the humanity, truthfulness and social sustainability of modern journalism.

The study is being conducted as part of the scientific research project "The Concept of Media Trauma Literacy: Forming a Theory of Social Impact and Information Resilience" (0126U001235).

**Analysis of recent research and publications.** Contemporary scientific discourse surrounding the professional activities of media workers in crisis situations is characterised by a shift in emphasis from purely technological aspects of information gathering to the ethical and psychological components of interaction. The issues of developing media trauma literacy and implementing the principles of trauma-informed journalism are becoming increasingly relevant in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war, which necessitates the systematisation of existing approaches [2].

Fundamental research into the psychological nature of trauma conducted by J. Herman [7] and B. van der Kolk [12] indicates that traumatic experiences are deeply individual and cannot be ranked in terms of severity. In the media sphere, this translates into a requirement to respect each story without comparing the depth of suffering. V. Stanchyshyn [3] emphasises that the perception of traumatic information in itself can have a traumatic effect, since about 70 % of people in the world have experienced at least one traumatic event, which increases the risk of retraumatisation through media content.

A separate body of research is devoted to the impact of traumatic topics on journalists themselves. The work of specialists at the Dart Centre for Journalism and Trauma [6] and the work of S. Onufriy [8] confirm the existence of the phenomenon of secondary (vicarious) traumatic stress. Journalists, working as intermediaries between the pain of their subjects and the demands of their audience, risk emotional exhaustion and loss of empathy. According to research, up to 28.6 % of media professionals covering conflicts show signs of PTSD, which correlates with the prevalence among the civilian population in combat zones.

The practical aspect of trauma literacy is considered through the prism of sensitive interviewing. T. Troshchynska [4] defines this format as the journalist's agreement to become a safe platform for the subject's version of events. Let us consider the key principles of this format. First, the principle of 'do no harm,' which prioritises the psychological state of the respondent over the speed of obtaining news. Second, the principle of the subject's control over the story, where the respondent has the right to refuse to answer or terminate the conversation at any time. Third, avoiding stigmatisation: refraining from sensationalist language and stereotyping vulnerable groups.

Despite the noticeable dynamics of research in this area, there are several groups of problems that require scientific consideration. In particular, most studies lack a comprehensive approach to analysing the editorial process as a separate, systemic link that determines the quality and consequences of publishing traumatic content. There are also no clear methodological recommendations for integrating psychological knowledge about trauma into editorial practices: most studies are either descriptive in nature or fragmentarily consider certain components (ethical analysis, individual cases). At the same time, insufficient attention has been paid to researching the cognitive, emotional and behavioural effects that editorial decisions can have on the audience, particularly on vulnerable groups of media content consumers.

Thus, an analysis of recent studies and publications indicates significant activity in scientific work on the topics of media trauma, ethics and social responsibility in journalism, but at the same time highlights the existence of scientific gaps related to the systematisation and operational testing of mechanisms for trauma-informed editing of media content. This creates a basis for further theoretical and empirical

research aimed at developing a comprehensive concept of a trauma-informed editorial approach.

**Task statement.** The problem of the study lies in the contradiction between public demand for prompt, emotionally charged coverage of military events and the need to adhere to the principle of 'do no harm' when dealing with traumatic experiences. Information competition, an emphasis on visual dramatisation and the use of shocking details can increase audience attention, but at the same time cause secondary traumatisation, anxiety, helplessness or emotional burnout.

In this context, there is a need for a scientific understanding of media trauma literacy as an integrative quality of a journalist, combining psychological knowledge, ethical considerations and practical skills for safe communication. It is also important to consider the provisions of psychological trauma theory, in particular Judith Herman's [7; 1] conceptual approaches to the social context of traumatic experiences, as well as the ideas of post-traumatic growth proposed by Richard Tedeschi [5; 10] and Lawrence Calhoun [5]. Integrating these into media practice allows us to shift the focus from sensationalism to support, dignity and human agency.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to provide a theoretical justification for media trauma literacy as a factor in the safe creation of media content and to identify its structural components in the professional activities of journalists.

**Outline of the main material of the study.** Understanding media trauma literacy as a factor in the safe creation of media content requires an interdisciplinary approach that combines the achievements of journalism studies, trauma psychology, communication ethics, and media education. In contemporary international discourse, a similar concept is trauma-informed journalism, developed by specialists at the Dart Centre for Journalism and Trauma [6], which involves taking into account the psychological consequences of trauma when collecting, processing and disseminating information. At the same time, media trauma literacy is a broader concept, as it covers not only journalistic practice, but also the level of perception and interpretation of content by the audience.

Trauma literacy in a media context can be defined as a journalist's ability to understand the nature of psychological trauma, recognize potentially triggering elements in communication, minimize the risks of re-traumatization, and ensure ethical and safe interaction with respondents and audiences. This does not mean avoiding difficult topics, but rather covering them responsibly.

The theoretical basis for this approach is the concept of psychological trauma developed, in particular, by Judith Herman [7], who emphasizes the importance of a safe social context for discussing traumatic experiences. In the media, this means creating a space of trust, voluntariness, and respect for personal boundaries. It is also important to consider the ideas of post-traumatic growth proposed by Richard Tedeschi [5; 10] and Lawrence Calhoun [5], who argue that traumatic experiences can become a source of new meaning and inner strength. For journalists, this opens up the possibility of shifting the focus from describing suffering to emphasizing the subject's resourcefulness and agency.

To systematize the components of a media professional's readiness to work with vulnerable categories of respondents, a structural model of media trauma literacy was developed (Table 1). The proposed model is based on a comprehensive approach, where trauma literacy is considered not only as an ethical standard, but as a multi-level system of knowledge and practical skills.

The model structure identifies five basic components. The ethical component focuses on unconditional respect for human rights and confidentiality standards, which allows journalists to make decisions without risking harm to the subject. Typical mistakes at this level include publishing the personal data of victims or their images without proper consent.

The psychological component involves a deep understanding of the emotional processes of both the respondent and the journalist. It aims to prevent burnout through self-regulation mechanisms, while ignoring these aspects leads

to pressure on the subjects and retraumatization during the interview.

The communicative component determines the quality of sensitive interviewing through building trust and rapport. The model indicates that the use of sensational vocabulary or intrusive questions are critical mistakes that destroy the safe space for communication.

The analytical component is responsible for predicting the social impact of the material. The key skill here is the ability to avoid stigmatizing vulnerable groups, as opposed to falsely exacerbating panic among the audience.

The editorial and technological component covers the stage of direct content production: selection of facts, headlines, and visual material. The use of shocking images without warning triggers or clickbait headlines based on human tragedies is defined as a sign of low technological trauma literacy.

Thus, the presented model demonstrates that every step in media production – from preparation to publication – requires a conscious choice of tools that minimize psychological risks for all participants in communication.

One of the key problems in working with traumatic topics is the risk of retraumatization – the re-experiencing of painful experiences under the influence of reminders, particularly through media content. Retraumatization can occur both in respondents during interviews and in the audience while consuming news.

Common risk factors for retraumatization in the media environment include, first and foremost, overly detailed descriptions of scenes of violence that focus on physical suffering, bodily harm, or the circumstances of death and

Table 1

**Structural model of media trauma literacy**

Component	Content	Professional skills	Examples of mistakes
Ethical	compliance with standards of confidentiality, security, and human rights	decision-making without harm	Publishing personal data of victims or their photos without consent; ignoring the right to privacy of the subjects.
Psychological	understanding the emotional state of the subject, preventing journalist burnout	self-regulation, resilience	Pressuring the subject for an “exclusive”; ignoring signs of retraumatization during interviews; neglecting one's own emotional exhaustion.
Communicative	building trust, rapport, nonviolent communication	sensitive interviewing	Using derogatory or sensational language; intrusive questions that force the person to relive their pain.
Analytical	predicting the impact on the audience	avoiding stigma and bias	Forming negative stereotypes or stigmatizing vulnerable groups; increasing panic through incorrect emphasis.
Editorial and technological	safe selection of facts, headlines, and visual materials	conscious content production	Using shocking images without warning (triggers); clickbait headlines based on tragedy.

may cause respondents or audiences to relive traumatic events; the display of dead bodies or the actual moments of death, which violates human dignity and turns tragedy into a visual object of consumption; aggressive, clickbait headlines and deliberate dramatization of events, which increase emotional tension and create an atmosphere of fear and hopelessness; lack of necessary context or explanations, which makes the event appear chaotic and uncontrollable, fueling anxiety and a sense of danger; as well as the repeated repetition of shocking images in news feeds and on television, which reinforces traumatic images in the audience's memory and creates the effect of a constant threat. Taken together, these practices can not only cause psychological harm to individuals, but also create a state of collective vulnerability, reducing public resilience and trust in the media as a responsible social institution.

In the digital age, these risks are exacerbated by the algorithmic promotion of emotionally charged content. Clickability and the speed of information dissemination often conflict with the principles of psychological safety. In this way, trauma literacy becomes a tool for balancing public interest and responsibility for the consequences of publishing material.

It is also important to consider the phenomenon of secondary traumatization of the audience. Constant exposure to war-related information can lead to chronic anxiety, helplessness, or emotional numbness. In such situations, journalism must not only inform, but also support a sense of agency and hope.

Safe media content creation involves combining professional standards of accuracy and efficiency with principles of psychological sensitivity. Practical implementation of media trauma literacy requires a systematic and consistent approach to each stage of work on the material—from preparation for the interview to its publication and further dissemination. First and foremost, this involves thorough preparation on the part of the journalist: studying the life and event context in which the respondent finds themselves, clarifying the facts, understanding the sensitivity of the topic, as well as agreeing on the format of the conversation in advance and warning about possible difficult questions so that the person can prepare themselves psychologically or refuse to discuss certain aspects. Equally important is ensuring informed consent, which involves clearly explaining the purpose of the material, how it will be used, the potential audience, the possible risks of publicity, and the right to anonymity or to edit sensitive passages.

The use of neutral, non-dramatic language is also a key principle of trauma literacy: journalists should avoid labels and reducing individuals to the status of “victims” or “survivors,” as such vocabulary reinforces trauma as a person’s primary identity and deprives them of their agency. At the same time, it is important to shift the focus of the conversation from an exclusive description of pain to the identification of resources and coping strategies—asking questions about support, mutual aid, inner strength, and life guidelines, which allows for a more balanced and humane narrative. The final element is editorial responsibility, which includes labeling sensitive content, warning about possible triggers, consciously limiting shocking images, and refusing to exploit emotions to increase views. Together, these steps form a safe communication framework that minimizes the risk of retraumatization and promotes ethical standards in modern journalism.

In this context, it is appropriate to consider media content as a potentially therapeutic resource. Materials that demonstrate examples of solidarity, mutual support, and recovery can contribute to the formation of collective resilience and trust.

Institutionalizing media trauma literacy involves integrating it into journalism education programs, editorial standards, and the internal policies of media organizations. This means creating a professional culture in which psychological safety is seen as an integral part of content quality.

In the context of martial law in Ukraine, this issue is especially relevant. Journalists are simultaneously witnesses, participants, and communicators of traumatic events, which increases their emotional burden. Therefore, supporting the psychological resilience of media professionals and creating conditions for supervision and professional reflection are necessary prerequisites for safe media production.

Thus, media trauma literacy is not only an individual competence of a journalist, but also a systemic factor in the formation of a responsible information environment. Its implementation contributes to reducing the risks of retraumatization, increasing trust in the media, and establishing humanistic standards in wartime journalism.

**Conclusions.** Thus, the issue of trauma-informed editing of media content is one of the key issues in today's information environment, marked by the constant presence of military, crisis, and socially traumatic events. The study

confirmed that the editorial stage of content creation is a critically important link where private traumatic experiences are transformed into public discourse. The nature of editorial decisions—the wording of headlines, the selection of facts, the style of the text, the visual design—determines not only the informativeness of the material, but also its psychological impact on the subject and the audience.

Media trauma literacy should be considered an integrative professional quality of a journalist, combining ethical, psychological, communicative, analytical, and editorial-technological components.

The proposed structural model allows for the systematization of professional skills necessary to minimize the risks of retraumatization, stigmatization, and secondary traumatization of the audience. This approach broadens the understanding of editorial work: it is seen not only as technical refinement of the text, but also as a space of heightened ethical responsibility and psychological sensitivity.

Safe media content creation requires a systematic approach: ensuring informed consent, using neutral language, labeling sensitive content, consciously limiting shocking visual material, and supporting the psychological resilience of journalists themselves. In wartime, when media professionals are both witnesses and par-

ticipants in traumatic events, the problem of secondary traumatic stress becomes particularly relevant.

Trauma literacy should be established not only as an individual competence, but also as an element of editorial policy and professional culture.

The study confirmed the existence of scientific gaps in the conceptualization of the editorial process as an independent system for making decisions about traumatic content. The proposed model creates a theoretical basis for further empirical research aimed at studying the impact of specific editorial strategies on the psychological state of the audience and trust in the media.

Thus, media trauma literacy emerges as a system-forming factor in the humanization of journalism in wartime. Its implementation contributes to reducing the risks of retraumatization, forming collective resilience, increasing professional responsibility, and strengthening public trust in the media as a social institution. Prospects for further research are related to the development of practical tools for assessing the level of trauma literacy of editorial offices, the creation of training modules for journalism programs, and the implementation of interdisciplinary standards for safe media production.

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Дата першого надходження статті до видання: 21.03.2026

Дата прийняття статті до друку після рецензування: 20.04.2026

Дата публікації (оприлюднення) статті: 29.05.2026