



## Historical evolution of the media representation of kickboxing in sports periodicals (1990-2024)

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**Abstract.** The research relevance is determined by the need to understand how the historical evolution of sports periodicals influenced the perception of martial arts in different periods of martial arts in the digital age, the growth of global mobility and cultural hybridisation. The study aimed to analyse the peculiarities of kickboxing representation in Ukrainian and international sports periodicals, incorporating the historical and cultural context and the transformation of the media image of this sport. The research addressed sports journalism as a source of socio-cultural information that traced the evolution of public perception of martial arts in the media space. A set of methods was used: historical and cultural analysis, source studies, content analysis of media texts, critical discourse analysis, and linguistic and stylistic reading of texts. The materials were based on eight publications in sports periodicals in Ukraine, the United States, the United Kingdom and international platforms published from 1997 to 2024. All texts were analysed by format, genre, style, audience and content focus. The study determined that Ukrainian sports periodicals focused mainly on institutional and applied aspects of kickboxing functioning – the activities of sections, the role of coaches, organisational conditions and the achievements of athletes. The international media, on the other hand, demonstrated a personalised and narrative approach, emphasising stories of personal transformation, social context and cultural symbolism. The study determined that the media image of kickboxing in the global discourse was shifting from a technical discipline to a means of self-expression, representation of identity and an element of pop culture. The study also noted a tendency towards genre hybridisation, in which traditional forms of sports journalism were combined with elements of cultural storytelling, entertainment content and symbolic interpretation, which led to the complication of the information code of martial arts in the media space. The practical significance of the results is determined by an outline of the mechanisms of influence of sports journalism on the formation of ideas about martial arts, which can be used in the training of specialists in sports communication, media education and cultural analysis

**Keywords:** analytical articles; popularisation; reportage; interviews; sports clubs; federations

### Introduction

Kickboxing has evolved from a marginalised sport to an institutionalised discipline with international recognition, and its media coverage is not only informative but also a socio-cultural function. The problem was the lack of a systematic study that would combine historical,

communication and cultural approaches to analyse how martial arts, including kickboxing, were represented in the media in different countries and different periods. The definition of the role of sports periodicals as a source of shaping the mass imagination about

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sports, identity, social mobility and cultural codes that accompanied the public coverage of martial arts was emphasised. In this context, the study of publications dedicated to kickboxing identified not only the dynamics of its popularisation but also changes in the ways of presenting content, genre palette, rhetorical strategies and target audience. The research relevance is determined by the need to integrate media analysis into the historical and cultural context of the development of sports, which would further determine how the social function of kickboxing has changed in the Ukrainian and international information environments.

In historical research, sport periodicals are considered an important source for reconstructing the cultural history of sport and public perceptions of athletic practices. The historical analysis of sports media allows researchers to trace how different sports disciplines were legitimised, popularised and integrated into social life. Despite the growing number of studies on martial arts and sports communication, the historical evolution of kickboxing representation in periodicals remains insufficiently explored. In the scientific literature, aspects of kickboxing, media representation of sports and martial arts were studied by individual studies, which have become a source of important analytical information. In the field of sports training, a study on the use of digital technologies in the training process has attracted considerable attention. O. Roshak & Y. Yatsiv (2024) proved that the use of virtual reality contributed to the more effective development of kickboxers' professional skills, which reflected the general trend of technological modernisation in sports. A generalisation of scientific events dedicated to martial arts was conducted by W. Blach *et al.* (2021). The analysis covered philosophical, anthropological, and cultural approaches to understanding martial arts, which were seen as an interdisciplinary phenomenon that goes beyond purely sporting activity.

In the study of the media and cultural aspects of martial arts, P. Bowman (2020) traced how these types of practices have become part of the global information space. The study showed that the representation of martial arts in the media formed stable symbolic images that influenced the perception of martial arts in society. In the context of promoting sports through the media, the results of the study by J. Cvejić *et al.* (2024) are noteworthy, proving that regular and positive coverage of combat sports stimulate an increase in interest among young people. The media space, according to their findings, is a factor in the social prestige of martial arts. The technical aspect of kickboxers' training was revealed in the study by R. Deliu *et al.* (2022). Based on the kinematic analysis, the authors established the regularities of striking actions and proved the importance of analytical methods in improving the effectiveness of sports techniques. The study of the transformation of sports journalism in the context of digitalisation was carried out by V. Tarasiuk (2023), who analysed the change in the genre

and style characteristics of sports publications. The study emphasises the growing influence of Internet resources and the decreasing informational role of the traditional press in modern sports communication.

Y. Sazonova (2021) revealed the business model of sports in the Ukrainian press, tracing how commercial factors influenced the format and content of coverage of sports events and personalities. The author concluded that sports journalism increasingly functioned in the context of economic strategies and the media market. In the context of social perceptions of morality in sports, B. Synchak *et al.* (2022) studied the religious beliefs of boxers. The study determined that athletes' spiritual guidelines influenced the public's perception of their social image, linking sporting success with moral responsibility. The problems of transformation of the sports sector in the period of post-socialist changes were highlighted by M. Krugliak & O. Krugliak (2020). The study outlined new models of organising sports activities, the emergence of alternative federations and the changing role of the state in the development of sports in Ukraine. The historical and cultural plane of the Soviet media space was analysed by B. Shumylovych (2020) analysed the historical and cultural dimension of the Soviet media space, focusing on television as an instrument of ideological influence. The study demonstrated how media narratives in the Soviet Union shaped mass consciousness through cultural and information practices, which became the basis for further changes in the post-Soviet media system. A synthesis of the above studies demonstrated that scholars address the philosophical, social, technical and media aspects of martial arts, including their impact on the athlete's personality, popularisation in mass culture and innovative training methods. At the same time, the historical peculiarities of kickboxing coverage in the Ukrainian press remained insufficiently studied and required a deeper analysis.

The study aimed to analyse the historical aspects of kickboxing representation in sports periodicals, identifying the nature of the presentation of this sport, the peculiarities of the genre structure and the content dynamics of publications in national and international contexts. To achieve this goal, the following tasks were set: (1) to characterise sports periodicals as a source of historical and cultural analysis, defining their typology, functions, genres, linguistic and stylistic features and audience focus; (2) to investigate the reflection of kickboxing in sports journalism in different countries, taking into account the history of the sport and the analysis of publications in Ukrainian and international media; (3) to summarise the results to identify trends in kickboxing coverage and the peculiarities of its media image formation in the socio-cultural context.

## Materials and Methods

A set of methods that combined a historical and cultural approach, source analysis, structural and semantic reading

of media texts, and critical discourse analysis was used in the study. The research also applied the historical-comparative method, the historical-genetic method and elements of historiographical analysis in order to trace the evolution of the media image of kickboxing in different historical contexts. The study addressed publications on kickboxing in sports periodicals in Ukraine, the United States, the United Kingdom, and international digital media platforms. The research materials included eight original articles published between 1997 and 2024, reflecting different types of publications, genre strategies, and stylistic features of martial arts representation. The source base includes the following publications: the article "Kickboxing in Lviv: Development, problems and sections" (n.d.) on the Dreamtame.com portal; analytical material by E. Tyutyunyk (2012) "A place under the sports sun" in the newspaper *Uryadovi Kurier*; USA Today news article about a conflict incident at a kickboxing match; review of Alex Pereira's fight in the USA Today; interview with Omid Ahmadi on Olympic.com; the article "Best kickboxing fight of 2023: Chingiz Allazov finishes superb in world title thriller" (2023) on the ONE Championship portal; a story in the Irish regional newspaper *Enniscorthy Guardian* (*Irish Independent*, n.d.); and a report on kickboxing training programmes in the *Northampton Chronicle and Echo* (n.d.) (Tsuji, 2017; King, 2022; Hincks, 2024).

All sources were analysed incorporating the format of the publication (national/regional newspapers, news portals, professional sports platforms), genre specificity of the text (report, interview, note, review), type of audience and context of the publication. The content analysis identified key thematic focuses, repetitive structures, language clichés, as well as methods of visual and textual support for publications. The articles were viewed as sources of historical information that reflected the transformation of kickboxing's status in the media space from a marginal sport to an independent cultural phenomenon. The linguistic and stylistic analysis included the study of terminology, metaphor, and language constructions typical for sports journalism, as well as rhetorical techniques aimed at forming an idea of kickboxing as a discipline that has not only a physical but also a social dimension.

In the context of cultural differences, a comparison of the Ukrainian and international press in terms of several parameters should be emphasised: communicative purpose, information depth, presence of social context, the role of the athlete's personality in the story, entertainment value and the degree of emotional involvement of the reader. The use of critical discourse analysis made it possible to identify hidden narrative models, ideological codes and cultural frameworks within which kickboxing was presented as an object of public attention. The sources were processed incorporating the historical moment of publication, the specifics of the media organisation, the type of publication, and the genre and stylistic

implementation. This methodological approach not only recorded the factual characteristics of the publications but also identified the peculiarities of media representation of kickboxing as a complex socio-cultural phenomenon that changed under the influence of time, audience demands and global trends in sports journalism.

## Results

### Sports periodicals as a source of historical and cultural analysis

Sports periodicals cover systematic, thematically oriented coverage of the sporting life of society, which is manifested in various formats – both in traditional print media and in the digital environment. Sports periodicals cover sporting events, athlete personalities, competitions, training processes or organisational aspects of the sports industry. The main feature of sports periodicals is their regularity, address prompt information and the formation of a stable connection with an audience that is actively interested in events in the field of physical culture and sports. The frequency of material updates, quick response to sporting events, adaptation of content to the reader's expectations and thematic structuring of content defines it as a special communication segment of the modern media field.

The typology of sports periodicals is based on both the format of the material and the degree of its specialisation. The first group includes specialised sports publications that are entirely dedicated to sports topics. These can be printed in weekly or monthly magazines, as well as professional journals of federations or coaching associations. Such publications often contain not only news, but also in-depth tactical analyses, methodological recommendations, analysis of performance techniques, and expert articles on physiology, sports psychology, and coaching practice. This group also includes the official newsletters of sports organisations, which are distributed within certain structures – clubs, associations, and leagues. The second category is general information publications with separate sports sections. The category has a wide audience and often includes sports as part of a larger information complex, along with politics, economics, and culture. In such publications, sports topics are usually not primary, yet common in the structure of publications. Within this category, sport is viewed in the context of socio-political or cultural life, and texts may focus not only on results, but also on the media image of athletes, social conflicts, and ethical issues. The third group is made up of digital platforms on sports topics, which include both global online media and regional resources. This format includes mobile applications, websites of sports federations, YouTube channels with broadcasts of competitions, streaming services, and blogs of coaches and athletes. The peculiarity of this type of periodical is its multiformat: texts are combined with video analytics, photo galleries, live broadcasts, podcasts and interactive formats. The information content is often updated

hourly, and synchronisation with social media is maintained, which ensures a quick response to user requests. There is a trend towards personalisation of content in digital periodicals, enabling users to choose the sports, clubs or athletes to follow, creating an individualised news feed (Zimmerman *et al.*, 2024).

Thus, modern sports periodicals are a complex, multilevel communication environment that integrates traditional journalistic practices with new media forms. Its

typology covers not only content but also technological aspects, which determines its importance in the processes of social communication, shaping public opinion about sports and body culture. The structure of modern sports journalism clearly distinguishes key functions that determine its place in the system of mass communication and cultural reflection of sports. Depending on the thematic focus, target audience and format of the material, the sports press implements several systemic tasks (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Functional areas of sports periodicals as a source of socio-cultural information

Function	Function content	Forms of implementation
Informative	Dissemination of up-to-date information on sporting events	News about competitions match results, transfers, announcements of changes in the tournament grids, notifications of decisions of sports authorities, telegrams, reports
Promotional	Forming a positive image of sport and its role in society	Success stories, coverage of sports schools and clubs, publications on the benefits of sports, materials for young people
Ideological	Confirmation or formation of national, social or political identities through sporting achievements	Patriotic narratives, symbolic interpretation of victories, emphasis on "national pride", promotion of state policy through sport
Analytical	Determination of the underlying processes in the sports environment, expert assessment of events	Reviews of training strategies, analysis of tactics, author's columns, expert commentary, special issues and thematic supplements

Source: compiled by the author based on V. Harrison & J. Boehmer (2019), M.H. Zimmerman *et al.* (2024)

Sports periodicals are a multifunctional communication tool that not only acts as an intermediary between the event and the reader but also shapes public perceptions of sport as a cultural, social and ideological phenomenon. The combination of informational, analytical, promotional and ideological functions ensures the depth of coverage and a stable connection between sports journalism and the cultural space of society. The linguistic and stylistic characteristics of sports periodicals are some of the most important features that distinguish this type of journalism from other areas of mass communication. The specificity of sports discourse lies in its dynamism, imagery, structural conciseness and close connection with emotionally charged events. One of the defining features is the dynamism of the language, which is manifested in the use of active verbs, short phrases, rhythmic sentences and constant appeal to action. Typical vocabulary includes verbs related to movement, confrontation, speed, and physical effort: "broke through", "brought the team forward", "attack from the flank", and "lightning strike". The texts often use metaphors and epithets to enhance the expressiveness of the message, in descriptions of competitions or characteristics of athletes. This creates the effect of the emotional involvement of the reader in the events. The second important feature is the standardisation of language constructions. In sports texts, there is a stable set of language patterns that are read automatically and ensure the recognisability of wording. Such phrases include "won a well-deserved victory", "retained the lead", "fought to the last second", and "sensational defeat". The presence of stable linguistic clichés helps to save linguistic effort, conveying information quickly and at the same time forming genre style. In addition

to linguistic means, an important element is informative compactness. The materials are presented in logically organised blocks, with the most important information placed at the beginning of the text. The structure usually includes a heading, a subheading, a short introduction, a statement of facts and, if necessary, comments. Lists, infographics, and bullet points are used to structure the content and ensure easy perception of information in conditions of limited reading time (Wiener, 2020).

Visual support in sports periodicals is no less important. Photos of competitions, portraits of athletes, tournament tables, statistical charts, and results in the format of grids or protocols are an integral part of the presentation of the material. Visual material not only complements the text but also often replaces some of the linguistic information, acting as an independent source of data. Articles are often accompanied by a selection of photos of the highlights, and on digital platforms, interactive visual elements. In terms of audience focus, sports periodicals demonstrate flexibility and the ability to adapt their presentation to the interests of individual readership groups. The mass audience is characterised by the creation of emotionally charged content that appeals to personal stories, conflicts, intrigues, curiosities, and dramatic outcomes. This increases engagement and maintains interest in sports even among those who are not regular consumers. The professional audience, on the other hand, expects details, specifics and technical analysis: in particular, attention is paid to new training schemes, recovery techniques, and analysis of tactical decisions during the game. The youth audience, which actively consumes visual and short-form content, tends to be lifestyle-oriented: texts are supplemented with materials about images, motivational quotes, fashion trends in equipment, and the

integration of sports into everyday life. The genre palette of sports periodicals includes both classic (notes, interviews, reports) and modern forms (podcasts, streams, video analysis, interactive tests, social media posts). This ensures multi-vector communication, ensuring reach to both traditional and digital audiences. The change in the genre structure indicates the adaptation of sports journalism to new media environments and the transformation of the way people perceive information in the digital age (Rowe, 2023). The sports press is not only a source of facts, but also a means of representing cultural norms, values and behavioural patterns. Repeated schemes of information presentation (narratives of victory, overcoming, rivalry) create archetypal images of athletes as heroes, victims or ideal representatives of the nation. Thus, sports periodicals participate in the formation of mass consciousness, the symbolic field of culture, in which sport appears as a system of meanings, not just an activity.

### **Kickboxing in the focus of sports journalism: Historical overview and media analysis**

Kickboxing as a separate martial art form was formed at the intersection of several traditional striking techniques in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Its origins are linked to the development of Japanese karate, and American boxing, as well as elements of taekwondo and Muay Thai. The term “kickboxing” began to be actively used in Japan in 1960, when an attempt was made to combine traditional oriental techniques with the ring as in professional boxing. At the same time, the United States was adapting martial arts to the format of a sports competition with simplified rules. This process was aimed at making martial arts more spectacular and accessible to the public. In the 1970s, kickboxing began to gain popularity in Europe, where it was perceived as an alternative to traditional martial arts with strict technical canons. In Western Europe in France, Germany, and Italy, the first clubs with mixed rules began to operate. During this period, the first continental competitions also appeared, and the discipline gradually turned from an amateur initiative into an organised sport (Gümüşay & Koç, 2022). A key stage in the institutionalisation of kickboxing was the creation of the international organisation World Association of Kickboxing Organizations (WAKO) (n.d.) in 1976. The WAKO was founded as a structure that aimed to unify rules, define safety standards, and organise a system of international tournaments and official refereeing. Recognition by international sports bodies contributed to the expansion of the network of national federations and the formation of common regulations for disciplines such as full contact, light contact, kick light, K-1, etc. Already in the early 1990s, the WAKO system hosted world championships, and the number of member countries was growing rapidly.

In the second half of 1990 and early 2000, kickboxing became part of the physical training systems in sports clubs in many countries, including the post-Soviet space.

State federations, clubs, licensed coaches, and national championships appeared. For example, in Ukraine, kickboxing developed in parallel in two main versions – according to WAKO and International Sport Karate & Kickboxing Association (ISKA) (n.d.), which showed an active interest in the discipline and the existence of different approaches to its organisation. Despite the competition, kickboxing has retained its autonomous niche and continues to function as a full-fledged sports discipline with a clear organisational vertical and international recognition. In 2018, WAKO was officially recognised by the International Olympic Committee as a non-Olympic sport governing body, which was an important step in the legitimisation of kickboxing at the global level (IOC Executive Board..., 2021). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, kickboxing received a new impetus for development due to the globalisation of martial arts, the broadcasting of competitions in the media and the growing popularity of mixed martial arts (MMA), which has attracted many athletes who were formed in kickboxing.

In Eastern Europe, including Ukraine, the development of kickboxing intensified after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when new sports federations and independent media platforms emerged. In the context of kickboxing’s institutionalisation and international recognition, an important aspect is the peculiarities of its representation in the national information space. Ukrainian sports periodicals perform a key function of promoting martial arts at the level of both national processes and regional sports life. The coverage of kickboxing in the Ukrainian media mainly addresses examples of the functioning of sections, the achievements of athletes, the role of coaches and the development of sports infrastructure. In the article “Kickboxing in Lviv: Development, problems and sections” (n.d.), Dreamtame addressed the local context of kickboxing’s emergence as a part of the city’s sports culture. The material provides an overview of the state of the sections in Lviv, mentioning specific clubs, coaches, number of students and achievements at the national level. The text emphasises the importance of support from the local authorities, the availability of material resources and qualified staff. The role of coaching teams in shaping the motivation of children and adolescents is particularly emphasised. The study presented kickboxing to socialise with young people and develop discipline, endurance, and respect for the opponent. The genre of the publication combines reportage and analytical elements, but the structure remains simple and focused on a wide range of readers. The presence of photos and quotes from coaches and athletes provides visual support for the material, which is typical for local journalism.

A different approach is demonstrated by the article by E. Tyutyunnyk (2012) “A place under the Sports Sun”, published in the *Uryadovyi Kurier*. The author examines kickboxing in the all-Ukrainian context, against the backdrop of difficult competition with other martial arts and team sports. The text raises the problem of uneven state

attention to non-Olympic disciplines, which complicates their financing, infrastructure development and mass popularisation. At the same time, the author emphasises the high results of Ukrainian kickboxers in international competitions, which, according to the author, do not always receive proper media coverage. The article contains references to statistics, a list of federations, and mentions of sports schools. The presentation aimed not only at informing but also at problematising the issue of the balance between the state priority and the actual success of athletes in kickboxing. A comparison of these two materials can be used to state that Ukrainian sports periodicals use different genre and communication strategies to represent kickboxing: local media focus on examples and personalities, while national media focus on analytical understanding of the systemic position of the discipline in the structure of Ukrainian sport. Both approaches contribute to the legitimisation of kickboxing as a socially significant sporting practice.

While Ukrainian sports periodicals mainly prioritise the internal aspects of kickboxing development – the functioning of sections, the coaching environment, organisational difficulties and systemic achievements, international publications present the sport in a much broader and multidimensional context. The foreign press is characterised by a shift from classical reporting to creating vivid narratives, focusing on spectacle, personal stories and the interconnections of sport with cultural and social themes. This section examines four publications by leading English-language resources in which kickboxing appears as an object of media representation with different communicative functions. The USA Today article entitled “Kickboxing fight ends with fans attacking fighter” (Tsuji, 2017) presents an extremely emotional and sensational interpretation of the events surrounding a kickboxing match. The text focuses on an incident that took place after the fight: one of the athletes struck the opponent after the fight had stopped, which led to physical intervention by spectators and a conflict in the ring. The article is accompanied by a video that focuses on aggression, conflict and violation of the rules rather than on the sporting result or technique. The coverage of the event is based on the classic crisis model, where sport becomes the backdrop for the dramatic development of the conflict. The use of expressions such as “fans attacking fighter”, and “sucker punch chaos” creates the idea of kickboxing as a dangerous, almost uncontrollable spectacle. This approach represents the tendency for sports journalism to turn into a form of infotainment – a combination of information and entertainment with emotional presentation dominating over structured analysis. In this case, kickboxing is portrayed not as a discipline with clear rules, but as a space of potential disorder, which correlates with the general media logic of crisis content.

USA Today article “King Israel Adesanya with fifth-round TKO to capture Ultimate Fighting Championship

(UFC) middleweight title” (King, 2022) demonstrates a different angle, shifting the focus from the discipline of kickboxing to its impact in MMA. Alex Pereira, a multiple world kickboxing champion, moves to the UFC and wins the title by knockout in the fifth round. The article provides a detailed description of the fight, the personal characteristics of the athlete, and the chronology of the fight, accompanied by quotes and analytical conclusions from commentators. Kickboxing in this article functions as a fundamental training that gave Pereira a technical advantage in punches and kicks. Unlike the previous article, a balanced style is used here, with an emphasis on professionalism, sportsmanship, and the history of rivalry with Adesanya. Thus, kickboxing is presented as a platform that forms high-class athletes capable of dominating in more complex, multi-component disciplines. This approach demonstrates the integration of kickboxing into the broader landscape of modern combat sports and the recognition of its technical value at the global level.

Another type of presentation is featured on Olympic.com in the article “Omid Ahmadisafa: The kickboxing world champion representing the Refugee Olympic Team in boxing at Paris 2024” (Hincks, 2024). The material is an in-depth interview with Omid Ahmadisafa, the world kickboxing champion who will compete for the Refugee Olympic Team in boxing in 2024. The focus is not on sporting achievements, but on the athlete’s personal story: escape from Iran, adaptation to life in Europe, the difficulties of integration, and participation in international tournaments in a new status. In this case, kickboxing not only retains its role as a professional base but also acquires a symbolic dimension: it is portrayed as a tool for preserving dignity, strength and inner support in the face of losing one’s homeland. The interview genre preserves the authenticity of the protagonist’s voice, while the editorial presentation forms a humanistic framework for perception. The publication fulfils a clear socio-cultural function, demonstrating how sport can be a means of personal and political representation. In this context, kickboxing emerges not as a spectator sport, but as a tool for profound self-affirmation.

The article on the ONE Championship platform titled “Best kickboxing fight of 2023: Chingiz Allazov finishes superb in world title thriller” (2023) is an example of the representation of kickboxing as a spectacular and emotionally charged sporting event that combines technical skill with the drama of the fight. The article describes the fight between Genghis Allazov and Superbon Singh Mawin at the ONE Fight Night 6 tournament, which was recognised as the fight of the year. The text focuses on the dynamics of the fight, technical aspects and emotional tension that accompanied each round. The description of the fight emphasises not only the physical endurance of the athletes but also their psychological stability and strategic thinking. This approach to media coverage of kickboxing contributes to the formation of the image of

this sport as an intellectual and aesthetic phenomenon that goes beyond mere physical struggle. Stylistically, the article uses elements of artistic description, metaphors and emotionally coloured vocabulary, which creates the effect of presence and involves the reader in the events in the ring. In this context, kickboxing appears as an art form where every movement matter, and every punch is part of a great story about strength, will and skill. In this way, ONE Championship demonstrates an approach to kickboxing coverage where the sport becomes not only a competition but also a cultural narrative that reflects deep aspects of human nature and social interaction. In an article published on 26 February 1997 in the Enniscorthy Guardian, kickboxing was presented through the participation of an Irish athlete in a Muay Thai championship in Bangkok (Fig. 1).



Figure 1. The Enniscorthy Guardian newspaper with a story about the participation of an Irish athlete in the championship  
Source: compiled by the author based on Irish Independent (n.d.)

The format of the publication is concise, and structured, with a clear account of the fight, the result and the participant's reaction. The hero is described as a "super-fit bartender", associating the reader with the participant. The tone of the material is neutral: defeat is accepted without complaint, and the result is seen as an honest victory for the opponent. The heat in Thailand is mentioned as context, not as an excuse. The article does not focus on spectacle or emotions but presents the sport as a test. The language is simple, the terminology minimal, and the style restrained. This is an example of kickboxing being represented as a morally charged practice where endurance, self-discipline and dignity are key. All attention is focused on personal participation rather than showmanship or public image. An article published on 5 February 2000 in the Northampton Chronicle and

Echo, a regional British newspaper, reports on the opening of new classes at a local martial arts centre for students interested in learning ancient self-defence techniques (Fig. 2).



Figure 2. An article in the Northampton Chronicle and Echo about the opening of new kickboxing classes  
Source: compiled by the author based on Northampton Chronicle and Echo (n.d.)

The content addresses a kickboxing programme that is not presented as a separate sport but as part of a broader disciplinary model called Te-Geri, which is positioned as an intense but safe form of training. The key feature of this publication is the interpretation of kickboxing as part of the educational process and a wellness initiative. The text emphasises that the classes have a social and educational function, are accessible to a wide audience and are suitable even for those who have no previous experience in martial arts. The reference to the identity of the instructor – a woman with a third black belt – emphasises the inclusiveness and professionalism of the coaching staff. In contrast to the notes focused on competitions or dramatic events, this material is applied and informative. The use of phrases such as "designed to give students the chance to master..." or "provides an intense workout" indicates a marketing discourse in which kickboxing functions as a means of physical development, not just a sporting achievement. Thematically, the article demonstrates the integration of martial arts into everyday life, including education, fitness and self-defence. It does not appeal to spectacle, emotion or risk, but instead focuses on benefits, safety and accessibility. In this way, kickboxing is presented as an element of socially-oriented practice that builds healthy behavioural patterns and positive self-discipline.

A comparison of the above-mentioned publications reveals several characteristic trends in the international

coverage of kickboxing. The genre diversity of materials includes both emotionally coloured reports and balanced technical reviews, interviews, as well as publications with elements of cultural irony. In the international media environment, kickboxing is mostly presented not as an isolated sport discipline, but as a component of global social and sporting processes that cover the areas of commercialisation, media coverage, migration stories and cultural symbolism. Special attention is focused not on the technical aspects or institutional organisation of the discipline, but on the personal dimension: the narratives of athletes, their life paths, psychological traits and public image often come to the fore, forming a new model of martial arts presentation

in the world's periodicals. This indicates a change in the focus of sports journalism – from institutional to personalised, from normative to narrative. In this coordinate system, kickboxing appears not only as a sport, but as a multilevel phenomenon that functions at the intersection of physical practice, media interest, and socio-cultural symbolism. Ukrainian and international media have significant differences in their approaches to covering kickboxing. The content emphasis, genre organisation of materials and value orientations reflect the specifics of each information space. The table below provides a comparative description of the key parameters of the representation of this sport in national and foreign sports journalism (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Comparative characteristics of kickboxing coverage in Ukrainian and international sports periodicals

Comparison criterion	Ukrainian sports periodicals	International sports periodicals
Target topics	Development of infrastructure, functioning of clubs, interaction between coaches and youth	Personal stories of athletes, contexts of social choice, participation in global events
Format of presentation	Factual journalism, educational materials, and reviews with a local focus	Narratives, interviews, and analytics based on emotional and social stories
Genre dominance	Announcements, reports, institutional reviews	Reportage with elements of drama, portraits, ironic journalism
Thematic focus	Training system, human resources, regulatory issues	Transformation scenarios, athlete mobility, image presence in public space
Tonality of materials	Objective, informative, with a commitment to neutral assessment	Subjective, expressive, using cultural codes and symbolic frames
Recipient type	Readers interested in systemic sports development, coaches, local spectators	A global audience interested in cultural meanings, social challenges and spectacle
The media image of kickboxing	Type of activity with educational and upbringing potential	A space of self-expression, an element of identity, an intersection of sport and social experience

**Source:** compiled by the author based on E. Tyutyunyk (2012), Kickboxing in Lviv: Development, problems and sections (n.d.), N. King (2022), M. Hincks (2024)

A comparative review shows that Ukrainian sports periodicals emphasise structural and applied aspects of kickboxing, while international media focus on individualised and culturally framed representations of the sport. This division of information strategies is due to differences in media policy, audience expectations, and the degree of integration of sport into the socio-cultural discourse. The general picture of kickboxing representation in periodicals shows a multidirectional approach to this sport, depending on the historical period, geographical context and type of media. Ukrainian sports periodicals demonstrate a steady focus on systemic and institutional parameters, while international sources record a gradual transformation of emphasis – from reportage conciseness to a personalised narrative, from competition to socio-cultural symbolism. The range of genre forms, linguistic and stylistic features, and functional directions of presentation indicate that kickboxing in the modern information space functions not only as a sports discipline, but also as a media event that reflects the dynamics of cultural processes, changes in the mass consciousness, and the growing importance of individual experience in sports discourse.

## Discussion

One aspect of the results of this study was the historical transformation of the public perception of kickboxing from institutionally sporting to narratively cultural, which interpreted this sport as part of a broader socio-cultural discourse. This conclusion was reinforced by observations made in a study by D. Antunovic & S. Bartolucci (2022) on the analysis of the representation of gender and national interest in the media during the Olympic Games in Central and Eastern Europe. The study analysed how media narratives construct identity through sport. In contrast to the study, which addressed Olympic disciplines, the current study broadened the scope of analysis, pointing out that non-Olympic sports, such as kickboxing, also shape symbolic images that can be used as social representations.

The issue of cultural continuity of martial arts, considered by J. Cao (2023), correlated with the conclusion of this study on the transformation of kickboxing into a tool of personal expression in the context of new media. The study analysed how traditional martial arts have adapted to the digital age, preserving key elements of cultural authenticity through visual reproduction, broadcasting

techniques, and popularising the discipline's philosophy and symbolism. At the same time, J. Cao emphasised the importance of preserving hereditary ties between generations of practitioners, despite the fragmentation of attention in modern online environments. The present study complements these findings by showing that new media not only ensure the transmission of tradition but also reinterpret it following the expectations of the audience. Sport, and kickboxing in particular, appeared not only as a discipline with clear technical canons but also as a multifunctional space where personal experience, traumatic events, integration processes, cultural resistance and internal transformation took place. This reorientation created new semantic horizons for the representation of martial arts in contemporary journalism. The genre shift towards emotionally oriented content identified in this study also overlapped with the findings of B. Kim (2020), studied the characteristics of strategic communication in the context of the online promotion of martial arts. The study addressed media planning, visual style, content marketing, and social interaction aimed at increasing the engagement of the target audience. The study determined that such a strategy was outside of marketing and acquired features of discursive construction: through emotional drama, visual expression, and personalised stories, a media image of kickboxing was formed as a phenomenon accessible to empathy and social recognition. In this way, sports journalism did not simply inform but created a symbolic space for the cultural legitimisation of martial arts.

The analysis of the institutional status of kickboxing as a discipline conducted in this study found a conceptual resonance with the work of L.V. Podrigalo *et al.* (2022), which, based on a content analysis of scientific publications from the Web of Science database, identified the main areas of academic study of kickboxing. The areas include topics related to physiology, sports medicine, injuries, rehabilitation practice, and aspects of technical training dominated. Thus, kickboxing appeared as a discipline that required scientific support from medicine and biomechanics. In the present study, the focus was shifted from academic legitimation to the analysis of media representation. Publications in periodicals, in contrast to highly specialised articles, not only informed about the technical side of martial arts but also created a new interpretive framework where kickboxing appeared as part of social and cultural discourse. This discovered that the sports discipline could function in the media not only as a subject of professional attention but also as a symbol and a means of socio-cultural expression.

The refutation of the unified image of kickboxing and the identification of its multidirectional representation in the media, established as a result of this study, complemented the findings of J.D.R.D.S. Duarte *et al.* (2024). A bibliometric analysis of scientific products on kickboxing indexed in PubMed, was conducted, identifying the thematic focus of publications, the number of citations and

the structure of scientific interests. The analysis revealed the dominance of papers on medical issues, which reflected the need to prove the benefits or risks associated with kickboxing. The study demonstrated that the media representation of this discipline went beyond the analysis of the physical condition of athletes and acquired a broader meaning. The media interpreted kickboxing not only as a sport but also as a form of expression of ethical positions, social struggle, traumatic experience or integration potential. In this way, the findings expanded the academic perspectives of kickboxing, demonstrating that outside the scientific field, this discipline functioned as an important marker of cultural dynamics.

The findings of this study on identity formation through kickboxing revealed parallels with the findings of a study by A. Singh (2022), which used an ethnographic methodology to study martial arts as a tool for constructing subcultural belonging among young people in London. The study demonstrated that kickboxing formed alternative identities among young people in response to social exclusion, economic marginalisation, or ethnic stigma. The study determined that similar processes were reflected in the media: journalistic publications not only recorded narratives about the "fighter", "immigrant", "hermit" or "hero", but also actively shaped these images as part of public discourse. Thus, kickboxing in the media served as a transmitter of symbolic roles that represented not only physical abilities but also social, cultural and identifying characteristics of an individual.

The tendency towards personalised and emotional coverage of kickboxing identified in this study was consistent with the findings of a study by J. Woods (2021), which analysed the impact of social and traditional media on the growing popularity of atypical sports. The study demonstrated that alternative disciplines gain audience attention not through institutional support, but through new formats of engagement. The study elaborated on this approach by showing that it was the transformation of genres, narrative structures and media broadcasting that contributed to the legitimisation of kickboxing in the public space. In the same aspect, the findings of M. Xie *et al.* (2022), who investigated the effectiveness of social media in shaping motivation to practice martial arts, were compared. The authors determined that the emotional intensity of the content had a significant impact on audience intentions. These findings were consistent with the results of the present study, which showed that not only training or technical information, but also personal stories, crises and symbolism were central in generating media interest in kickboxing.

The analysis of sports journalism as a multi-component system in this study revealed structural diversity and a shift in the media's focus to personalised, emotionally charged stories. These findings resonated with the results of J. Calaf *et al.* (2023), who conducted a comparative analysis of three models of sports media functioning public, private and hybrid. The study demonstrated that

editorial policy and business strategy directly influenced the format of the material, the depth of analysis, and the ability of the media to form a sustainable cultural narrative around sports. The study complemented this perspective by focusing not on the ownership model or editorial practices, but on the resulting discursive effect: how different types of media represented kickboxing as a phenomenon. In summary, the study confirmed, supplemented or reinterpreted the findings of other authors, in terms of representing sport as a cultural code, communication strategy, narrative practice and a means of forming social identity. Kickboxing appeared not only as an object of sports journalism, but also as a dynamic element of public culture that was constantly changing in response to media formats, audience demands, and global discursive changes.

### ■ Conclusions

The study determined that sports periodicals were an important source of historical and cultural analysis that traced the transformation of public perception of sports, including kickboxing, through media practices in different countries. The typological structure of sports periodicals included specialised sports publications, general information resources with separate sports sections, and digital multimedia platforms. Each of these types performed a separate function in the communication space: from prompt information to in-depth analysis of the processes in the sports environment. The study determined that the genre spectrum included news, reports, interviews, authors' columns, podcasts and visual and textual formats. Emotionally coloured vocabulary, templated language constructions, dynamic syntactic structure and compact form of presentation prevailed stylistically. The historical overview of kickboxing development demonstrated its transformation from an amateur initiative in Japan and the United States in 1960-1970 to a full-fledged institutionalised discipline with international recognition. An important milestone was the creation of the WAKO organisation in 1976, as well as the official recognition of kickboxing by the International Olympic Committee in 2018 as a non-Olympic sport. The analysis revealed that the coverage of this type of martial arts varied significantly depending on the media context.

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The Ukrainian periodicals demonstrated a predominantly institutional and applied approach: the materials addressed the sports sections, the activities of coaches, organisational problems and achievements. The local media addressed information, while the national media included elements of critical analysis and raised issues of public policy regarding non-Olympic sports.

In international sports periodicals, kickboxing was covered through the prism of personal stories, social context, spectacle and symbolic load. The articles in USA Today, Olympic.com, BBC Sport and regional British newspapers presented kickboxing as a part of the cultural code, a space of self-realisation and media interest. The study highlighted a tendency towards hybridisation of genres, the emergence of narrative models of presentation, and the interpretation of sport as an event with multi-layered social and identification significance. The media image of kickboxing was gradually shifting from demonstrating technical characteristics to focusing on personalities, symbols and stories that were able to form an emotionally resonant public discourse. A limitation of the study was the insufficient number of available archival publications, as well as the uneven coverage of kickboxing in the periodicals of different countries and time periods, which made it difficult to build a holistic comparative analysis. Promising areas for further research include expanding the source base by involving little-studied regional publications, comparative analysis of kickboxing coverage with other non-Olympic sports and studying the evolution of the media image of kickboxing in the dynamics of digital transformation of sports journalism. Thus, sports periodicals can be considered an important historical source that reflects the transformation of the cultural status of combat sports in different periods.

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### ■ Conflict of Interest

None.

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## Історична еволюція медійного представлення кікбоксингу в спортивних періодичних виданнях (1990-2024)

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**Анотація.** Актуальність дослідження визначається необхідністю зрозуміти, як історична еволюція спортивних періодичних видань вплинула на сприйняття бойових мистецтв у різні періоди розвитку бойових мистецтв у цифрову епоху, зростання глобальної мобільності та культурної гібридизації. Метою дослідження було проаналізувати особливості репрезентації кікбоксингу в українській та міжнародній спортивній періодиці з огляду на історико-культурний контекст і трансформацію медіаобразу цього виду спорту. У фокусі дослідження перебувала спортивна журналістика як джерело соціокультурної інформації, що дозволяє простежити еволюцію суспільного сприйняття бойових мистецтв у медійному просторі. У процесі роботи застосовувався комплекс методів: історико-культурний аналіз, джерелознавчий підхід, контент-аналіз медіатекстів, критичний дискурсивний аналіз, а також лінгвостилістичне прочитання текстів. Матеріалами стали вісім публікацій у спортивній періодиці України, США, Великої Британії та на міжнародних платформах, опублікованих у 1997-2024 роках. Усі тексти аналізувалися за форматом, жанром, стилістикою, аудиторною спрямованістю та змістовим фокусом. У ході дослідження було встановлено, що українська спортивна періодика зосереджувалася переважно на інституційно-прикладних аспектах функціонування кікбоксингу – діяльності секцій, ролі тренерів, організаційних умовах і досягненнях спортсменів. Міжнародні ЗМІ натомість демонстрували персоніфікований і наративний підхід, акцентуючи на сюжетах особистих трансформацій, соціального контексту й культурної символіки. Було виявлено, що медіаобраз кікбоксингу в глобальному дискурсі зміщувався від технічної дисципліни до засобу самовираження, репрезентації ідентичності та елементу попкультури. Також простежувалася тенденція до жанрової гібридизації, у межах якої традиційні форми спортивної журналістики поєднувалися з елементами культурної розповіді, розважального контенту та символічної інтерпретації, що зумовлювало ускладнення інформаційного коду бойових мистецтв у медійному просторі. Практичне значення результатів полягає в окресленні механізмів впливу спортивної журналістики на формування уявлень про бойові мистецтва, що може бути використано в підготовці фахівців зі спортивної комунікації, медіаосвіти та культурної аналітики

**Ключові слова:** аналітичні статті; популяризація; репортажний огляд; інтерв'ю; спортивні клуби; федерації