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DIFFERENT REALITIES SURROUNDING THE 2022 RUSSO-UKRAINIAN CONFLICT: THE CASES OF *RUSSIA TODAY* AND *CNN*

The aim of this small-scale research is to provide a combined quantitative and qualitative analysis of the framing of news articles about the 2022 Russo-Ukrainian conflict, focusing on online news portals *Russia Today (RT)* and *CNN*. The 5 generic frames: Attribution of responsibility, Human interest, Conflict, Morality, and Economic consequences, developed by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), were used to perform the analysis. The purpose of this study was to compare the dominant frames and the extent of their usage in the two outlets. Following the compilation of two separate corpora with an equal distribution of 100 articles from each outlet, the articles were classified according to the frames they exhibited by utilizing a set of yes/no questions. To ensure reliability, the classifications were performed independently by both authors. The results of the analysis showed on one hand significant differences in the framing of the war between the two outlets, and on the other similarities in the extent to which framing was utilized. *RT* mostly relied on the Attribution of responsibility frame to present the West as responsible for the outbreak of war, as well as the Economic consequences frame to portray the Russian economy as resilient despite the Western sanctions. On the other hand, the most frequent frames in *CNN's* articles were Conflict and Human interest, which focused on battlefield reports and the portrayal of the Ukrainian side as worthy of assistance, respectively.

Keywords: framing theory; *RT*; *CNN*; Russo-Ukrainian war

1. INTRODUCTION

On 24th February 2022, following years of tensions, Russia launched an attack on the neighboring Ukraine. The world stopped in its tracks and watched what was described as 'the most significant conflict of the 21st century' unfold. Apart from the physical conflict, an even more dangerous battle was fought in the media - the information warfare. As Pasitselska (2017: 592) aptly observed: "With new technological abilities…media became a central battlefield…where discourse has social consequences and ideological effects". Navigating the media in times of crisis is not an easy task, as it requires that each individual interpret oftentimes contradicting information coming from various sources. This becomes evident if we consider the differences in the language used to describe the events in Ukraine – the phrases range from "special military operation", to "armed conflict", "full-scale invasion", and "bloody war". Needless to say, different perspectives correspond to distinct geopolitical outlooks, allowing for conflict to be interpreted as a necessary step to protect Russian interests and integrity, a tactical operation with concrete objectives, or alternatively, as unprovoked aggression against a sovereign state. In order to provide background for our study, the introduction of some political context seems necessary. Apart from Ukraine, the two main actors in the conflict are Russia and the West. Even though the latter term encompasses a wide range of actors, this paper will narrow its focus to the U.S.

From the Russian perspective, there are 3 main reasons behind the operation, evident from Putin's speech in the wake of the conflict:

1. Ukraine's inclinations towards NATO membership, a "red line" which resulted in demands for legally binding guarantees that the country will never join the alliance. According to Putin:

> "In response to our proposals, we constantly faced either cynical deception and lies, or attempts to pressure and blackmail, while NATO, despite all our protests and concerns, continued to steadily expand. The war machine is moving and, I repeat, it is coming close to our borders." (Putin 2022)

2. The protection of the Russian population in Donbas and Crimea: "It is necessary to immediately stop this nightmare – the genocide against the millions of people living there …" (Putin 2022)

3. The denazification of Ukraine:

> "What I think is important to emphasize further is that the leading NATO countries, in order to achieve their own goals, support extreme nationalists and Neo-Nazis in Ukraine … [who] will crawl into the Crimea, just like in the Donbas, in order to kill …" (Putin 2022)

On the other hand, the U.S. official stance is that:

1. The attack on Ukraine was unprovoked and unnecessary. According to Biden, Putin: " rejected every good-faith effort the United States and [their] Allies and partners made to address [their] mutual security concerns through dialogue to avoid needless conflict and avert human suffering." (Biden 2022)

2. The Donetsk and Luhansk Republics proclaimed independent by Russia are described as: "a flagrant violation of international law in attempting to unilaterally create two new so-called republics on sovereign Ukrainian territory" (Biden 2022).

3. Claims of genocide are false: "We saw a staged political theatre in Moscow — outlandish and baseless claims that … Ukraine committed a genocide – without any evidence. (Biden 2022)"

Apart from the official stances, many analysts view the conflict as a proxy war the U.S. is waging against Russia, while one of the most prominent modern intellectual figures, Noam Chomsky, observes the many benefits for the U.S. in weakening Russia's military at a relatively low cost, claiming also that "[the one responsible] for the immediate aggression [is] of course Putin … On the other hand if you look back further … it's been understood for years … that expanding NATO to Russia's border … is reckless and provocative (TV Rain Newsroom 2023).

With the political context in mind, the choice of online outlets to include in this small-scale study seemed obvious: *CNN* as one the most prominent media in the U.S, and *RT* – not only due to its prominence, but also the fact that it has been banned throughout the Western world since the onset of war and thus excluded from mainstream Western discourse. The examination of the two media giants in their attempt to sway public opinion was performed by observing their framing strategies. Frames are "conceptual tools the media and individuals rely on to convey, interpret and evaluate information" (Neuman et al. 1992: 60). Framing news stories and resorting to biased and subjective reporting under the influence of national interests and alliances has potentially far-reaching consequences for the (de)escalation of the conflict, marginalization of certain groups, legitimization of violence, and more generally, the public's trust in the mass media, to name a few.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section presents the theoretical framework the authors drew upon in the analysis. The framing theory originated in the field of sociology and communication studies in the 1970s. Since then, it has established itself as a prominent framework for studying the role of media and communication in shaping public opinion and discourse. Even though numerous scholars from the field of communication studies have remarked on the inconsistencies in the application of the theory of framing, attempts at its systematization are part of an ongoing effort, testifying to the fact that it is a valuable tool for media studies. Literature defines the concept of framing in many different ways. Gitlin (1980: 7) emphasizes that framing is a "persistent selection, emphasis, and exclusion". According to Entman (1993) frames have several locations, including the communicator, the text, the receiver, and the culture. De Vreese (2005: 51) lists these components as essential to the process of framing, which consists of "frame-building, frame-setting and individual and societal level consequences of framing". Furthermore, he explains that frame-building involves the interaction between internal journalistic practices and external influences, including interactions with elites and social movements, while frame-setting refers to the way media frames interact with individuals' pre-existing attitudes, aiming to uncover the extent to which audiences adopt the frames. As for the consequences, they can be conceived on the individual level, as altered attitudes about an issue, or the societal level, when they influence political socialization, decision-making, and collective actions (De Vreese 2005: 51). When it comes to the use of framing in the news, two approaches have been described in literature: inductive and deductive. The inductive approach does not predefine frames, but rather identifies them as specific to the corpus in question. According to Hertog & McLeod (2005) as cited in de Vreese (2005: 53), "studies taking an inductive approach have been criticized for relying on too small a sample and for being difficult to replicate". On the other hand, the deductive approach relies on predefined frames and aims to study their frequency in the corpus. Semetko and Valkenburg (2000: 95) claim that "this approach can be replicated easily, can cope with large samples, and can easily detect differences in framing between media (e.g., television vs. press) and within media (e.g., highbrow news programs or newspapers vs. tabloid-style media)". Deductive approach is what Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) applied in their work, which resulted in the 5 generic frames the present research utilizes:

1. Conflict frame. According to Bartholomé et al. (2018: 1690) "in political news, conflict frames are showcased through critique or attacks from and towards political actors, or the visibility of diverging political views in the media".

2. Human interest frame. Most definitions of human interest framing state that a broader issue is explained by portraying one or more specific persons who are personally involved with that issue. (Boukes et al. 2014: 4)

3. Economic consequences frame. This frame reports an event, problem, or issue in terms of the consequences it will have economically on an individual, group, institution, region, or country. (Semetko and Valkenburg 2000: 96)

4. Morality frame. This frame puts the event, problem, or issue in the context of religious tenets or moral prescriptions. Because of the professional norm of objectivity, journalists often make reference to moral frames indirectly. (Neuman et al. 1992)

5. Responsibility frame. This frame presents an issue or problem in such a way as to attribute responsibility for its cause or solution to either the government or to an individual or group. (Semetko and Valkenburg 2000: 96)

Given that the lack of standard content analytic indicators is often cited as the main drawback of the framing theory, Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) devised a set of 20 yes/no questions to help them identify frames. If both coders agreed that the answer to three of the questions from a particular frame set was positive, the article was classified as being framed a certain way.

3. REVIEW OF PREVIOUS STUDIES

Literature offers a variety of articles on the framing techniques used in the context of international conflicts worldwide. This section presents an overview of the relevant studies that have examined how both the western and pro-Russian media frame conflicts to suit their agendas. To begin with, we present an interesting study conducted by Vira Diukanova (2018) titled "Framing of the Ukrainian Crisis in Russian Television Media." The research focuses on the use of five generic frames (human interest, conflict, morality, responsibility, and economic consequences) and two issue-specific frames (violence and Great Patriotic War[1]) to depict the information warfare surrounding the events in Ukraine in 2014. She concludes that: "Russia tries to legitimate its behavior" by using "emotionally charged frames, such as: Conflict, Human Interest, and Morality" (Diukanova 2018: 25). Another important contribution is the work of Lichtenstein et al. (2019), who compared talk show debates on Russian and German television, concluding that the shows "fail to enable a deeper understanding of

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[1]   The term 'Great Patriotic War' is commonly used in Russia and other ex-Soviet nations to refer to the Eastern Front battles of World War II, especially those between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany from June 22, 1941, to May 9, 1945. (Wikimedia Foundation 2023).

different national perspectives on the crisis" (Lichtenstein et al. 2019: 19). Destructive frames were found to be dominant in both countries' talk shows on the topic, justifying confrontational rhetoric and actions, but also continuing the Cold War narrative. Yet another research, an in-depth study by W. A. Hanley et al. (2023) comparing media coverage of the conflict by the Russian, Chinese, and Western media, concluded that the Western press tends to focus on the military aspects of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict. The results of their research showed that the Western media habitually emphasize casualties, destruction, and acts of crimes and violence committed in Ukraine, as well as the harsh circumstances Ukrainian refugees find themselves in. A notable characteristic of the Western media is the insistence on the use of Ukrainian spellings for Ukrainian toponyms and the name of president Volodymyr Zelensky, which carries political significance. Based on a number of studies of the way foreign countries are represented in U.S. media Noshina (2021) focused on, several conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, the U.S. government has a huge influence on how the media frame foreign countries. This reliance on government sources portrays foreign countries in the context of national interests. For example, the government's labeling of countries like Iran and North Korea as "Axis of Evil" shapes media coverage of these countries. Finally, countries where the U.S. are engaged in a war are without exception portrayed negatively, for the purpose of legitimizing U.S. military actions. U.S. military successes are praised, while enemy atrocities are highlighted and condemned. A recent study by Vrba (2022) focused on how *CNN* framed, among other things, Russia, Ukraine and their respective presidents before and after the war. Even in pre-war periods, the frames connected to the word "Russia" were predominantly negative, while frames related to President Putin remained neutral. After the 24th of February, however, the negative framing of Russia intensified, and at the same time negative frames about Putin being a war criminal and war machine appeared. These studies provide valuable insights into the framing techniques used by different pro-Russian and pro-Western outlets and their potential implications for shaping public understanding, perception, and memory of the conflict.

4. THE RESEARCH

4.1. Objectives and Hypotheses

The main objective of this research is to analyze the framing techniques used by *RT* and *CNN* in their reporting on the Russo-Ukrainian conflict. The research question

this study focuses on is: What are the differences between the way *RT* and *CNN* frame and present the news to their audiences in relation to the 2022 Russo-Ukrainian conflict? Since the two outlets come from countries with opposing political and ideological stances, our hypotheses are as follows:

1. The two outlets will significantly vary in the way they frame and present the news.
2. *CNN* will utilize framing considerably less, i.e. report in a more factual manner, given the U.S. press freedom index.

4.2. *CNN* and *RT*

RT is a Russian state-controlled international news television network funded by the Russian government and directed to audiences outside of Russia, providing Internet content in a number of languages (RT (TV network), 2024). *RT*'s news agenda is aimed at counterbalancing the 'information monopoly' of Western media (Simonyan 2013, as cited in Yabolkov 2015: 305), while its audience supposedly comprises 'people who understand that the whole truth cannot be told by Anglo-Saxon television channels' (Gabuev 2012, as cited in Yabolkov 2015: 305). It is often portrayed by the West as means of spreading propaganda and conspiracy theories. The World Press Freedom Index of 2022 ranked Russia at 155th place out of 180 countries, indicating a challenging environment for press freedom (Reporters without borders 2024).

 CNN is a multinational news channel and website headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia, U.S. Founded in 1980 as a 24-hour cable news channel, it is presently owned by Warner Bros (CNN 2024). Its website, *CNN.com* was launched in 1995. Literature widely explores the so-called '*CNN* effect', i.e. the ability of this media to influence the policy agendas and outcomes of international events, which is particularly evident during the 'military interventions' of the U.S. As for The World Press Freedom Index of 2022, the U.S was ranked 45th out of 180 countries, which is significantly better than Russia's ranking.

 Despite their different origins and editorial perspectives, *RT* and *CNN* both have extensive global reach and audience. The choice to compare these two outlets was, therefore, an attempt to diverge from the dominant Western-centric views, which perpetuate the notion that "the Russian government 'still pressurizes the media', betraying the existence of a common though usually silent assumption that Western governments have ceased to do so" (Koltsova 2006: 4). Koltsova (2006) also writes that accounting for one way control is exercised in the media, while disregarding oth-

ers can be highly misleading. Moreover, since *RT* has not only been banned throughout the Western world since the onset of the conflict, but also limits access to its archive beyond several months, its inclusion in the analysis offers a wider audience a valuable insight into the alternative perspectives.

4.3. Methodology and corpus

A corpus of 200 newspaper articles was collected, with an equal distribution of 100 articles from each outlet: *RT* and *CNN*. The corpus consisted of a convenient sample formed by typing the keyword "Ukraine" into the search field. The first 100 articles which appeared on both outlets were used to form the sample, with the exclusion of those consisting of the title and video material without any text. The search yielded results spanning from the initial invasion in February 2022, to May 2022, ensuring that the first few months of the conflict are consistently covered. The articles were collected from *RT*'s English-language website, which has been banned in most of the Western countries since the onset of the conflict. The articles were read and coded so as to include the abbreviated name of the outlet and the number indicating the order in which the article was excerpted and added to the corpus. For example, article 81 from *Russia Today* was coded as:

  [RT081] Ukraine considers depriving citizenship.

  The articles were classified into five frames: Attribution of responsibility, Human interest, Conflict, Morality, and Economic consequences. Both authors were involved in the process of classification to improve reliability and reduce potential subjectivity. In line with the original procedure from the study by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000: 100), a set of 20 yes/no questions was applied to the articles in the corpus in order to establish which of the five frames were present (Table 1).

Table 1. A set of 20 yes/no questions used to classify article according to frames

News frames and measuring questions (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000)				
1. Attribution of Responsibility	2. Human interest	3. Conflict	4. Morality	5. Economic consequences
Does the story suggest that some level of gov't has the ability to alleviate the problem?	Does the story provide a human example or "human face" on the issue?	Does the story reflect disagreement between parties-individuals-groups-countries?	Does the story contain any moral message?	Is there a mention of financial losses or gains now or in the future?
Does the story suggest that some level of the government is responsible for the issue/problem?	Does the story employ adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings of outrage, empathy-caring, sympathy, or compassion?	Does one party-individual-group-country reproach another?	Does the story make reference to morality, God, and other religious tenets?	Is there a mention of the costs/degree of expense involved?
Does the story suggest solution(s) to the problem/issue?	Does the story emphasize how individuals and groups are affected by the issue/problem?	Does the story refer to two sides or to more than two sides of the problem or issue?	Does the story offer specific social prescriptions about how to behave?	Is there a reference to economic consequences of pursuing or not pursuing a course of action?
Does the story suggest that an ind. (or group of people in society) is resp. for the issue-problem?	Does the story go into the private or personal lives of the actors?	Does the story refer to winners and losers?		
Does the story suggest the problem requires urgent action?	Does the story contain visual information that might generate feelings of outrage, empathy-caring, sympathy, or compassion?			

To analyze the framing of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict in our corpus, we used a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative (numeric) and qualitative (descriptive) research elements to gain a well-rounded study. Since one of the hypotheses pertains to the extent to which the outlets used framing, the quantitative aspect was necessary. On the other hand, the qualitative analysis offered deeper insights into standpoints and tendencies behind the frames. The following section presents the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the corpus.

5. RESULTS

This section presents the results of the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the corpus and will be divided into two parts. In the first part, the overall number of appearances of the five frames in the *CNN* and the *RT* sections of the corpus will be presented, whereas the second part will be dedicated to qualitative analysis of the corpus, and illustrative examples.

5.1. Quantitative analysis

Table 2. Results of the quantitative analysis

Frame	Russia Today	CNN
Attribution of responsibility	33	9
Human interest	6	21
Conflict	21	36
Morality	1	1
Economic consequences	25	11
None	14	22

The most prominent frame in the articles from *RT* was Attribution of responsibility, appearing in 33 articles, followed by Economic consequences and Conflict, which appeared 25 and 21 times respectively. Human interest was less frequent with only 6 articles, while Morality appeared once.

As for the *CNN* articles, Conflict was the most prominent frame, with 36 instances, followed by Human interest, appearing 21 times. Attribution of responsibility and Economic consequences were less prominent, occurring 9 and 11 times respectively, while the Morality frame appeared once.

Finally, it should be noted that articles displaying no particular frame were also detected. While 14 articles from *RT* had no frames, this number was slightly larger in *CNN*, which featured 22 articles with no noticeable frames.

Tables 3 and 4 present the topics appearing within the five frames in both outlets, which will be elaborated in the Qualitative analysis section.

Table 3. Frequency of appearance of the topics of the articles in the RT section

RT		
Frame	Topic	Percentage of appearances within the respective frames
Attribution of responsibility	Blaming the West for provoking Russia into attacking	27%
	International relations between other countries	42%
	Blaming Ukraine	15%
	Other	16%
Human interest	Russo-Ukrainian relations	50%
	Consequences of sanctions imposed on Russia for the rest of the world	33%
	Other	17%
Conflict	Altercations between other countries and individual condemnations of the war	33%
	Russo-Ukrainian war and relations	19%
	Other	48%
Morality	Ukraine – Russia relations	100%
Economic consequences	Economic consequences of sanctions imposed on Russia for the rest of the world	28%
	The strength of Russian economy and military	16%

Table 4. Frequency of appearance of the topics of the articles in the CNN section

CNN		
Frame	Topic	Percentage of appearances within the respective frames
Attribution of responsibility	Blaming Russia for the current state of the war	56%
	American external politics	33%
	Other	13%
Human interest	Building sympathy towards Ukrainians	80%
	Other	20%
Conflict	Reports on the state of the Russo-Ukrainian war	42%
	The Quad meeting in Asia	39%
	Other	19%
Morality	Inspiration into aiding Ukrainians	100%
Economic consequences	Providing aid to Ukraine	55%
	Discussions of the American recession	27%
	Other	18%

5.2. Qualitative analysis

The qualitative analysis considers in greater detail the frames from both *RT* and *CNN*. Even though the research analyzed complete articles, for the sake of brevity, the illustrative examples will feature only headlines which best summarize the contents of the given article.

5.3. Qualitative analysis - *RT*

As mentioned in the previous section, Attribution of responsibility was a frequent frame in *RT* articles, exhibiting dominant narratives about Russia being provoked by the West and left with no other option but to act or attack. This framing was evident in the following examples:

> *[RT007] (1) London pushing Kiev 'down warpath' – Russia*, and
> *[RT047] (1a) West used Ukraine as pretext for 'undeclared war' with Russia – Moscow*

Example [RT047] suggests the existence of hidden motives behind the actions of the West, rather than genuine concern for Ukraine. These claims echo not just the official stance of Russia and the Global south[2], but also claims made by a number of Western analysts and political figures, the principal ones being Noam Chomsky, Condoleezza Rice and former secretary of defense Robert Gates.

In order to understand the heavy emphasis Russia places on attributing responsibility to the West, we must consider the events which took place at the end of the Cold War, when Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev insisted that Russia would "never agree to assign [NATO] a leading role in building a new Europe" and that America's efforts to expand their influence would be considered as a threat (Schwarz & Layne 2023). Although the American secretary of state, James Baker, promised in February 1990 to the leader of the Soviet that NATO would advance "not one inch" east of a unified Germany (Sarotte 2021:1), the Alliance added three former Warsaw Pact nations in 1999, and three more in 2004, in addition to three former Soviet republics and Slovenia. Ever since, Russia has insisted that broken assurances and injustices be acknowledged, emphasizing its contention with the West.

Within the attribution of responsibility frames identified in the *Russia Today* (*RT*) articles, a notable proportion of the articles focus on international relations, specifically highlighting countries or individuals pointing fingers at each other amid the conflict. Two examples that illustrate this pattern are:

> *[RT064] (2) "China denies snubbing Zelensky"* and
> *[RT013] (2a) "Poland 'very disappointed' with Germany."*

Examples [RT064] and [RT013] feature diplomatic disputes, betraying *RT's* standpoint that Europe does not really stand united against Russia as much as the Western

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2   China, India, Indonesia, Brazil and Pakistan

media would like the public to believe. Along with its editorial policy, *RT* is providing an alternative version of the story, the one in which numerous European countries realize the detrimental aspect of aligning with the U.S. strategies.

Finally, several *RT* articles classified under the Attribution of responsibility frame allocate blame to Ukraine. Two articles which exemplify this trend are:

> *[RT082] (3) "Ukraine has 'suspended' peace talks – Putin"* and
> *[RT083] (3a) "Ukraine targeted children with TB plot – Russia."*

Example [RT082] insists on Russia's willingness to resolve the conflict, despite Ukraine's hindrances, while [RT083] aims to reinforce a negative portrayal of Ukraine's actions and intentions. This intentional juxtaposition of Russia and Ukraine serves the purpose of public diplomacy, which aims to "engage foreign individuals, communities and governments in support of national objectives and foreign policies of an international actor" (Snow 2009: 6).

Within the Conflict frame, frequent topics of the *RT* articles include the altercations between other countries and individuals' condemnation surrounding the war in Ukraine. This can be seen in the following articles:

> *[RT027] (4) "EU seeks to criminalize sanctions evasion"* and
> *[RT062] (4a) "Djokovic slams Wimbledon's Russia ban."*

The first example draws attention to the tensions within the EU by focusing on the revolt several countries expressed against the proposed measures. Amongst them, Hungary seems to have been the loudest in voicing its concerns. Similarly, [RT062] proves that conflicts stretch beyond political and military domains. By reporting on prominent individuals' condemnations of the Western countries' actions regarding the war, *RT* adds credibility to the Russian side. It is interesting to note that Russia places heavier emphasis on relations amongst European countries than on the actual physical war in Ukraine. This could have two possible aims: to avert attention from the bloodshed and reduce it to a mere strategy in global power relations, and to make the global audiences aware of the numerous consequences which ensue when Russia's interests are encroached upon.

The direct address of the Russo-Ukrainian relations pertaining to war was also found in the articles categorized under the conflict frame. The two representative examples are:

> *[RT022] (5) "Russia won't just 'grasp' any proposal on Ukraine - Moscow"* and
> *[RT017] (5a) "Ukraine pledges to enter Crimea 'by the end of the year'"*

In [RT022], *RT* takes a firm stance on Russia's interests, while [RT017] assigns Ukraine an active role, since this is the image that *RT* generally wants to project: Ukraine had consistently acted in ways which resulted in the "military operation". These two examples emphasize direct confrontation between Russia and Ukraine, which is overall not the style of writing *RT* habitually resorts to, choosing rather to focus on the ripple effects of the conflict.

The morality frame is the least frequent among the five frames in the *RT* corpus, appearing in only 1 of the articles analyzed. The example of this frame is:

> *[RT081] (6) "Ukraine considers depriving citizenship"*

The Economic consequences frame was the second most frequent frame in *RT* articles. Within this frame, a noticeable fraction focuses on the economic consequences other countries must face as a result of the war in Ukraine or the sanctions the West imposed on Russia.

> *[RT011] (7) "Bulgaria reconsidering ruble gas payments",* and
> *[RT066] (7a) "EU explains absence of Russian oil embargo"*

stress the importance of Russian energy for Europe by explaining why the EU has still not reached the decision to impose a Russian oil embargo. *RT* will frequently focus on how other countries are faring and the economic implications they must face in the light of the ongoing conflict.

In addition, a relevant topic within the Economic consequences frame is the strength of Russia's economy and military. Articles like:

> *[RT035] (8) "Ruble sets new record against dollar and euro"* and
> *[RT100] (8a) "Russian crude is irreplaceable, former Lukoil boss warns EU"*

emphasize Russia's economic stability and boast about current as well as future economic successes. These examples add to the narrative of Russia's resilience and economic strength in the face of all the challenges imposed on Russia by the West. Overall, the economic consequences frame in the *RT* corpus serves a double purpose: to highlight the consequences other countries face and praise Russia's economic aptitude.

5.3 Qualitative analysis - CNN

In the *CNN* articles, the Attribution of responsibility frame was not too prominent and featured two main topics, one of which was presenting Putin and the Russian forces in general as responsible for the war and the subsequent complications. The second topic was American relations with Asia, with the war being mentioned only tangentially or not at all. An example of this frame can be seen below:

[CNN059] (9) "US intel skeptical Putin will be swayed by Russian public opinion over war in Ukraine"

This article discusses the U.S. perception of the state of affairs in Russia. It attributes the responsibility of the war actions being carried out and the misinformation in Russia regarding the state of the war exclusively to Putin.

Unlike in *RT*, Human interest was a prominent frame in the *CNN* articles. The articles which featured this frame mostly focused on the experiences of Ukrainian soldiers and civilians. These articles featured emotionally-laden language, images and videos to portray the hardships of the Ukrainians. This frame was used in *CNN* articles to arouse sympathy in the readers for the Ukrainian cause and portray Russians as cruel and destructive. As such, the articles with the Human interest frame can be said to support the general view of the war in American circles, which is "Vladimir Putin, an aging and bloodthirsty authoritarian, launched an unprovoked attack on a fragile democracy" (Schwarz & Layne 2023). This frame can be seen in the following example articles:

[CNN009] (10) "Two Ukrainian boxing champions killed in battle, sports officials say"

The presentation of prominent individuals is used to make Ukraine's fight for justice more poignant and provoke sympathy from the global audiences.

[CNN044] (10a) "Exclusive: Trevor Reed recounts his detention in Russia and the prisoner swap that brought him home"

This article discusses the experiences of Trevor Reed, an American veteran who had been arrested in Russia and sentenced in a Russian prison. The article features Trevor's starkly negative descriptions of life in a Russian prison and statements which present Russians as cruel and malicious. The inclusion of these statements by Trevor Reed has the effect of presenting the Russians as a ruthless enemy.

Conflict was the most prominent frame in the *CNN* articles. This frame was used to report from the battlefield, provide information regarding the current state of the

war and the hardships that were created as a result of the struggles between the opposing sides and that the soldiers and civilians suffered under. However, some of the articles reported on the U.S. President Biden's visit to Asia and the Quad meeting there. In these articles, North Korea and China were presented as displaying antagonism towards the U.S. efforts in Eastern Asia. Meanwhile, the Russo-Ukrainian war served as the backdrop for the negotiations described in these articles. Examples of this frame include:

[CNN091] (11) "Snake Island: The tiny speck of land playing an outsized role in Russia's war on Ukraine"

This article discusses the strategic importance and the skirmishes which occurred between the two warring sides. Notably, although the article reports on the war events, it can be perceived that the Ukrainians are depicted as the stronger side. The struggle is presented as a failed attempt on the part of Russians to occupy the island, with an entire section being dubbed "Russian losses at Snake Island". In addition, the article features a quote from president Zelensky, stating that the Ukrainians will defend the island with all their power. The mention of this quote additionally serves to present Zelensky as a heroic figure for Ukraine, which has, according to Noam Chomsky, become a favored representation of the Ukrainian president in Western media (The Intercept 2022).

[CNN055] (11a) "Japan turns away from post-WWII pacifism as China threat grows"

This example portrays Japan, the ally of the U.S. as opposition to China's influence, mirroring the U.S. – Russia dynamic. The article discusses the Russo-Ukrainian war as well, but states that the Prime Minister sees it as a parallel to the current situation in Eastern Asia. The U.S. focusing heavily on the relations in Asia, particularly tensions with China, seems reminiscent of Russia perceiving international events mostly through the prism of its relationship with the U.S.

The Morality frame was detected in only one article:

[CNN014] (12) "Bill Gates: We must remember this takeaway from the Great Recession"

Finally, the Economic consequences frame was the third most frequent frame in *CNN* articles. Two major themes found in the articles with this frame were the aid that the U.S. was providing to Ukraine and the inflation in the U.S. at the time. This frame is exemplified in the following article:

[CNN084] (13) *"Senate votes to pass $40 million Ukraine aid package"*

According to the article, the aid package is meant to bolster Ukrainian defenses by replenishing U.S. equipment and to provide refugees with medical support. Such use of the funds is in line with the previous aid provided by the U.S., wherein military support is provided without the U.S. joining the Ukrainian forces outright (Schwarz & Layne 2023). In addition, the article contains a statement by Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell: "Anyone concerned about the cost of supporting a Ukrainian victory should consider the much larger cost should Ukraine lose" (Zaslav, Foran & Kaufman 2022). The inclusion of this statement serves to augment the relevance of the aid package, and the role of the U.S., by presenting the annihilation of Ukraine as the ultimate consequence of a potential failure to provide support.

6. CONCLUSION

To conclude, we could firstly state that the five generic frames identified by Semetko & Valkenburg (2000) more than two decades ago remain widely applicable to issues commonly covered in the news, including conflicts. The analysis of the frames found in the *CNN* and *RT* articles has confirmed the first hypothesis of this study pertaining to the differences in framing, and refuted the second one about the extent to which framing is utilized.

In relation to the first hypothesis, we can observe that all five frames are present in the corpus, with the Morality frame being least used across the outlets. Secondly, detecting the most prominent frames can point to the main focus the two outlets have. In the case of *RT*, this is definitely Attribution of responsibility, echoing three decades of Russia's bitter cries over U.S.'s broken promises following the Cold War. The West, exemplified mainly by the U.S., is seen as the principal antagonist, blamed for pulling all the strings behind the scenes even when not directly involved in the conflict. However, *RT* also paints the picture of Russia as a proud and powerful country with resources indispensable to most European countries by means of the Economic consequences frame. Together with the particular way the Conflict frame is used, *RT* underscores the grave financial aspects Europe is faced with, revealing cracks in what the Western media portray as a unified Western front against Russia. *RT* exposes countries whose voices seem to be ever louder in expressing concerns or urging their governments to reconsider following agendas set by the U.S. As for the actual war, *RT* chooses to almost completely downplay this aspect which portrays it negatively, utilizing the Human interest frame to talk exclusively about the suffering of its minorities in the Donbas region.

On the other hand, *CNN* focuses heavily on the Conflict frame and battlefield reports, interestingly, often with an attempt to showcase Ukraine's supremacy over Russia. If we consider the fact that most military aid and strategic support comes to Ukraine from the West (Schwarz & Layne 2023), this might signal an attempt of the West to assert dominance over Russia. Furthermore, the Human interest frame utilized by *CNN* mostly covers the suffering and hardship faced by Ukrainians and aims to attract the sympathy of the global audiences. Additionally, it implicitly paints the picture of a merciless and cruel Russia inflicting pain on innocent people. Finally, *CNN* resorts to the Economic circumstances frame, but with a completely different focus compared to *RT*; namely, the emphasis is on the financial aid provided to Ukraine by the U.S., which portrays an extremely favorable picture of the latter, representing it as a generous ally, willing to provide support to a virtuous fragile democracy fighting for a just cause.

As for the second hypothesis, given the respective reputations of the two outlets coupled with the press freedom index of the U.S. compared to Russia, it would have been expected that *CNN* would utilize framing considerably less frequently. However, *CNN* had only eight more articles without frames compared to *RT*, which proves the two are actually very similar in using framing to suit their nations' different agendas. This also indicates that the press freedom index should be approached with caution, as it merely generalizes the overall environment for journalists, without necessarily applying to each and every medium. Furthermore, it points to the fact that stakeholders, regardless of whether they are represented by the state or other figures and agencies of power, resort to the same means in their attempts to influence global perceptions in their favor.

Future research should include news outlets from more parts of the world in order to deepen the understanding of framing practices and their connection to governmental policies. Furthermore, audience reception studies might also prove a valuable piece of the puzzle, since they would reveal the effectiveness of framing. Finally, examining potential changes in framing over the course of a conflict could reveal shifts in media strategies and their implications for public understanding.

Finally, certain limitations of this study must once again be acknowledged. Firstly, the sample size is limited to 200 articles, which may not fully capture the entirety of their coverage. Secondly, the analysis focuses exclusively on online news articles and does not include other media formats, such as televised broadcasts or social media content. Despite these limitations, this study contributes to a broader understanding of nuances in how conflicts are framed and aims to provide insights into the attempts made to influence the public in times of crisis.

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RAZLIČITE STVARNOSTI VEZANE ZA RUSKO-UKRAJINSKI KONFLIKT IZ 2022. NA PRIMERU PORTALA *RUSSIA TODAY* I *CNN*

Ovo istraživanje manjeg obima bavi se kvantitativnom i kvalitativnom analizom uokviravanja novinskih članaka na temu rusko-ukrajinskog konflikta koji je počeo 24. februara 2022. i istražuje suprotstavljena stanovišta prisutna na ruskim i zapadnjačkim novinskim portalima za koje su kao egzemplari odabrani *Russia Today* i *CNN*. Koristeći teorijski okvir koji su osmislile Semetko i Valkenburg (2000), odnosno pet generičkih okvira u koje spadaju Pripisivanje odgovornosti, Ljudska priča, Konflikt, Moralnost i Ekonomske posledice izvršena je analiza novinskih članaka. Cilj ove analize bio je poređenje dominantnih okvira, kao i sveukupne upotrebe istih. Sastavljena su dva korpusa od po 100 članaka sa oba portala, a zatim su određeni dominantni okviri uz pomoć niza pitanja, na koja su oba autora morala da daju tri pozitivna odgovora kako bi se dati članak svrstao u određeni okvir. Rezultati analize pokazali su da su najčešći okviri na *Russia Today* bili Pripisivanje odgovornosti, koji je korišćen da bi se Zapad okrivio za izbijanje rata, i Ekonomske posledice, koji je korišćen da bi se ruska ekonomija prikazala kao rezilijentna uprkos sankcijama nametnutim od strane Zapada. S druge strane, najčešći okviri na *CNN*-u bili su Sukob i Ljudska priča, koji su korišćeni da bi se preneli detalji rata i koji su prikazali ukrajinsku stranu kao dostojnu međunarodne pomoći. S druge strane, rezultati analize ukazuju na to da se oba portala u podjednakoj meri oslanjaju na uokviravanje.

Ključne reči: teorija okvira; *RT*; *CNN*; rusko-ukrajinski rat

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