

Analyzing the European Media Portrayal of the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict: A Qualitative Approach

Atif Ishaq, University of Okara.
Muhammad Ejaz Sandh, Hajvery University Pakistan.
Farhat Gul, University of Sargodha.
Ume Reem, Hajvery University Lahore.

Abstract: This paper examines the intricacies of the complex conflict between Russia and Ukraine, with particular regard to the media's role in shaping the public opinion and geopolitics agenda in Europe. The study centres on the presentation of the war in the European media in order to assess what influence these accounts have on people's sentiments and attitudes to the continuous tensions. This research studies the development of the conflict from 2014 and the use of propaganda by Russia, including the role of online media in both Ukrainian and Russian actors. Using a qualitative content analysis of media coverage as an instrument, this study reveals prominent differences in media depictions being affected by economic involvement and cultural and geographical closeness. As a matter of fact, the author analyzes the influence of the media on the way the Russian-German Aussiedler community is integrated into German society by revealing the issues this ethnic group faces. The need for future study recommendations emphasizes the relevance of long-term studies, comparative analysis and the interdisciplinary approach as they are the key to a full understanding of the dynamics of information warfare. The current armed conflict, which started at the beginning of February 2022, is a complex affair that will be the focus of this study, as the interests of the opposing sides are different and conflicting. The consequence of the work, which is the critical assessment of information warfare and media narratives, is that it surely contributes to the wider discussions regarding the role of media in political decision-making as well as contemporary international conflicts. It does so by providing priceless information about the mechanism of policy formation and the administration of international affairs that are tense.

Keywords: Russian-Ukrainian Conflict, Media, Hybrid Warfare, Information Warfare, Public Opinion

Introduction

The Ukrainian Conflict, which began on February 24, 2022, is the culmination of the long-standing hostility between Russia and Ukraine, which can be traced back to the Russian annexation of eastern Ukraine (Donbas) and Crimea in 2014. The crisis was then compounded by Russia's declaration of the Donetsk and Luhansk Republics in late 2021, a move which preceded its invasion in 2022. The exact manner of the conflict is not senior to the changing political atmosphere back home and abroad, and the media has the most influence on public opinion, as (McNair, 2007) mentioned. In order to support particular narratives, propaganda methods like omitting information selectively, as (Domenach, 2004) has described, are employed. Through the use of analogies of historical clashes, the aggression of Russians against Donbas was justified by the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, as a preventive measure against the threats. This depiction of Russia's actions to fight a "foe" was very instrumental. Through his piece, the author, who asserts that NATO is speaking a different language that Russia does not understand and the West is imposing its policies on others, is representative of the wider geopolitical friction. For example, these countries include Russia, which blames the West for the existing instability in the region (Putin's speech on Victory Day, 2022; Al Jazeera, 2022).

In March 2022, the military actions of Russia in Ukraine, consisting of an assault on Kharkiv, occupation of Chernobyl, and control over Zaporizhzhia's nuclear plant, were considered as an intimidating approach aimed at deterring Ukraine from progressing towards developing its nuclear capability. As a result, the psychological warfare strategy showed its face by using the nuclear threat (Gherman, 2022). Moreover, the micro-filming of Ukrainians apologizing to Russian soldiers was spread via pro-Russian media in the framework of a broader narrative to validate the invasion and denazification efforts. Demonstration of public opinion manipulation includes a woman who reverses her earlier insults against the Russian army and another individual who apologizes for his act of symbol desecration (Pro-Russian networks upload videos, 2022). In addition to that, on January 16,



2022, Ukrainian lawmakers passed legislation mandating all media publications to use Ukrainian only. That was done to cut down the Russian-speaking language influence. Former president Petro Poroshenko advocated for that, and he received the support of Volodimir Zelensky in order to strengthen the Ukrainian language presence in the public sphere. Russia used the Ukrainian language policy as a pretence for the annexation of Crimea and the support of the pro-Russian separatists in the east of the country, assuring that the concern for the Russian speakers' rights was the main reason for these actions. It all started in 2014, and since then, it has taken away 13,000 human lives, according to the statistics (Remshardt & Mancewicz, 2023).

The study will focus on the evolving nature of combat, pinpointing how the impact of fifth-generation tactics, cyber-operations, and hybrid wars has influenced the digital sphere and the manipulation of media. This paper intends to analyze the way E.U. media has been covering the Russian-Ukrainian crisis since it has been intensified in 2014 and again in 2022. The effects of the analysis on how the E.U. responds, and public opinion will be assessed. Notable scholars, such as (Lasswell, 2015), (Creel, 1920), and (Guth, 2009), have done studies on the effect of digital propaganda's transformation on an individual's beliefs about the conflict. Both focused on the significance of propaganda in society and the murky but very close link between contemporary news reports and war. The research aims to examine if advanced warfare tactics affect the way the Ukrainian-Russian conflict is presented by the media across the European Union (E.U.) through the lenses of different narratives that may portray the EU-Russia relationship differently. The article focuses on the issues of the Crimea annexation and the fighting in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions with respect to diplomatic relations and public opinion. Its aim is to create a comprehensive content study from all E.U. member states which is going to reflect on the media narratives and their impact on people's perceptions of the contemporary world as a safe or conflict-ridden place.

This paper is a media analysis of how the European media perceives the Ukrainian-Russian Conflict, using a comparative approach to studying narrative objectives in Europe. It underlines the huge extent media control public debate. This study has to examine the complicated processes of the relations between European Union member states and Russia, with the media being the main tool to influence the Russian aggression against Ukraine. It opts for a qualitative methodology and qualitative analysis, which is the central focus of the research. This analysis draws on the works of (Rondeli, 2014), (Green, 2015), (Ventre, 2016) and (Taddeo, 2020), all of whom have researched international media narratives in the context of present-day warfare and geopolitical tensions. The aim is to assess Russia's influence on the West through its information campaign and the extent to which it affects the Eastern Partnership countries' integration into the European Union. This paper will be interested in the efficiency of Russian propaganda tools and their abilities to manipulate public opinion and political trends. The study's aim is to find out countermeasures and methods to counter information warfare in Russia; this will involve both governmental and non-government bodies that seek to elevate the citizenry's resistance to propaganda.

Additionally, the study includes a comparative investigation of European countries' sports media coverage of the first-year international conflicts. The unit deals with the question of media coverage influenced by geopolitical interests and region specifics. Through this holistic approach, the research gives people helpful insights into how the multifaceted mechanism involving information warfare, political communication, and media narratives interrelate in Europe.

This research is therefore vital to academic scholars, the formulation of policies, the management of activities, the study of the media, comparison, and the study of geopolitical impacts. Before anything else, policymakers shall evaluate how the anti-Western misinformation campaign of Russia, conducted through Eastern Partnership countries, affects their policies, thus generating relevant data for them to understand the spreading and power of disinformation. This awareness would be of great value for us in planning our strategy for not only dealing with propaganda but also supporting European integration as well. Obviously, the attempts to identify measures to stop the spread of the information by Moscow and the provision of a government together with non-governmental organizations with a practical plan to strengthen the democratic process and counteract foreign influence will be highly efficient. Also, through research of the print media of Ukraine and Russia in how the two sides depict the interactions between Ukraine and the European Union, the intertwined biases and narratives may become apparent. Besides that, the fact that a comparative analysis of the E.U. media portrayals of the war in their respective countries would show that the media does make a difference in terms of the way the war is portrayed, the contextual factors surrounding the conflict

are part of a broader discourse about the way the media presents international conflicts. Through analyzing how modern propaganda tactics and these unconventional approaches related to hybrid warfare play out in international politics and security, we can see that what is happening with information in the context of warfare is undergoing a paradigm shift in line with the principles and values of the twenty-first century. Figure 1 and its tabular representation show the bases of typology, shedding light on key features as well as categorizations to carry out an effective analysis.

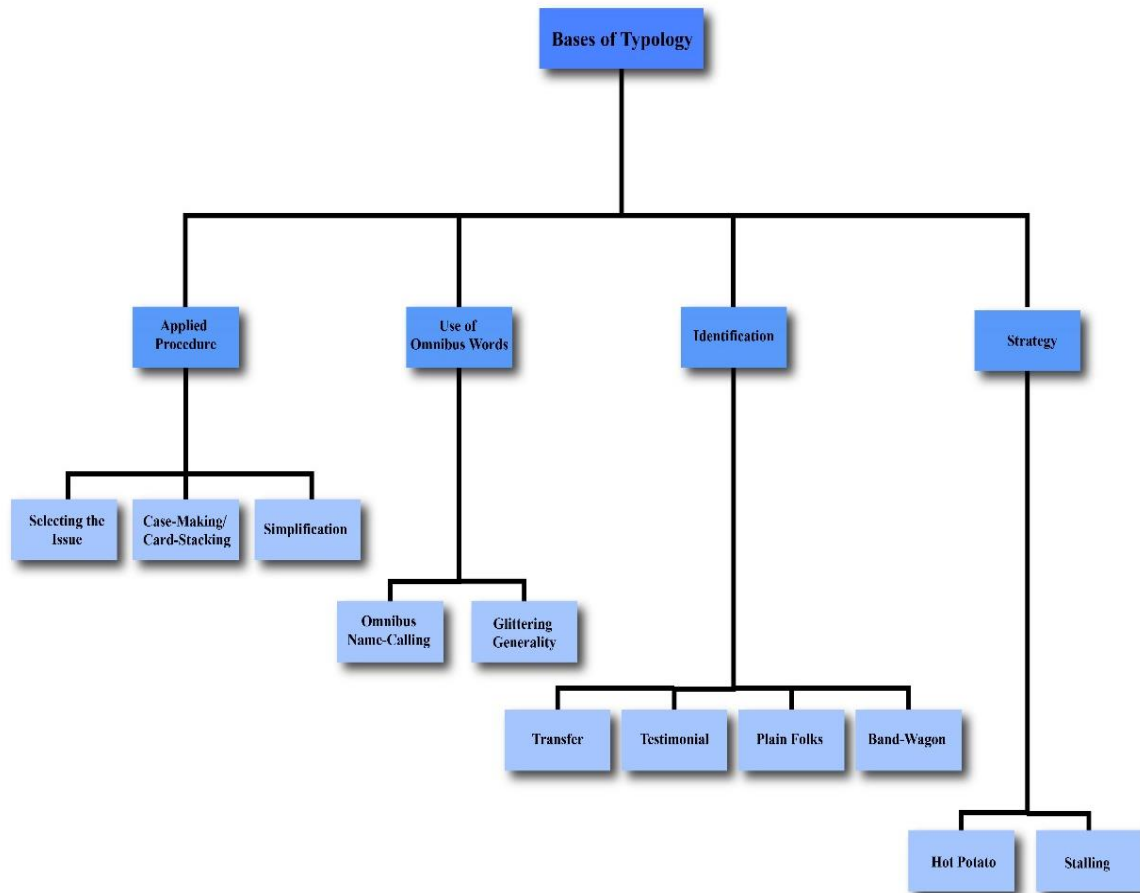


Figure 1: Bases of Typology

In conclusion, a black void will be uncovered following the presentation of the media's coverage of E.U. members based on a critical analysis. Such study results will be of great benefit to the research community in the search for the connection between modern warfare, image creation, and geopolitics.

Literature Review

Ideology Eagleton (2014) considered as a collection of views generally being responsible for the preservation of interests of the ruling class and their power through discursive practices in the media and other kinds of media platforms. Dominant ideologies are constructed and maintained through hegemony. According to Laclau and Mouffe (2014), this claim is true, while Engels and Marx (2011) concur that the ruling class develops prevalent ideologies and legitimizes themselves through this. In "Manufacturing the Consent", Herman and Chomsky (2008) learn that the media operates as an ideological tool that serves the propaganda objectives of the ruling class through the use of market mechanisms and self-censorship that is focused on controlling public opinion. Following Hodgkinson (2016), the media is one of the reasons which shape the ideas in one's mind, and the messages they disseminate are like the unspoken attitudes and culture of the society. The news is a relatively constructed social discourse which is shaped by societal, ideological, and cultural conditions (Van Dijk, 2013). This discourse is a means of strengthening and upholding dominant narratives or societal images of events and also inducing a socialization process.

The importance of media in the making and broadcasting of ideologies comes across in such seminal work as Van Dijk (2013), and especially the language function in which ideologies are created and circulated is highlighted. The individual is the one who thinks that the media is the steward or the ancestor of the ideas that are dominating and can debate them through rhetoric and words. Language is portrayed as an indispensable tool that allows for the expression of power through bargaining, articulating and governing, which are the ways through which values, beliefs and power dynamics are transmitted, constructed, or challenged by ideology. Also, the theory of agenda-setting proposed by McCombs and Shaw (1972) is evidence that the media is a strong instrumental factor in public opinion through its power to create the issues that captivate attention. This study has illustrated a strong link between media concentration and public interest, and the conclusion is that media has the power to set the public agenda of the subjects of discussion. Another significant factor that causes biased coverage is the selective and accentuated news presentation and coverage of certain topics, which forms public opinion and affects public discourse.

Research has shown that the excessive use of media outlets as a point of reference by developed countries for news and political information literally has a profound impact on public opinion and political and social perspectives (Arendt, 2010; Arendt & Matthes, 2014; Maurer, 2014; Shehata & Strömbäck, 2014; Zaller, 1992). The "RAS" model (Receive-Accept-Sample) suggests that people develop their public opinion by consciously selecting information that contradicts their previous beliefs; it can cause media-induced group polarization (Zaller, 1992). The work of Iyengar and Kinder (2010) exemplifies the effect of television news on the people's evaluation of political leaders and their ideas on the magnitude of issues. These two scholars came up with a conclusion that issues that are covered extensively by the news are considered as important. According to Tankard Jr (2001) and Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007), priming and framing stand out as the fundamental methods in the sphere of media research. They prove how such techniques reshape the importance and perception of the issues in our minds and emphasize the importance of empirical research in order to understand how media framing affects public opinion.

In his 1979 book, Horton examines the morality of the "mugging crisis" that took place in that era. He demonstrates how such incidents were not just isolated but rather part of a bigger social, political, and racial dynamics and how media significantly impact the public perception of the crime and justify the government's actions. As per Quillian (1995) group threat paradigm, prejudice grows correspondingly with the rise in the outgroup's numbers as in-group members perceive that this increase in numbers threatens their interests. Social, economic, and cultural factors, according to it, are responsible for the anti-immigrant propaganda and prejudice against races, which highlights the significance of the perceived threats. In such a frame, according to Ceobanu and Escandell (2010), the clash over the distribution of resources would be a determining factor of the attitudes towards minorities and immigrants, and, thus, these groups would face the negative perception of outsiders.

There have been a number of scholarly critiques which doubt if the notion of immigration threat is right (Pottie-Sherman & Wilkes, 2017; Semyonov et al., 2004; Sides & Citrin, 2007). On the one hand, media research has proved that the press and the media in general have a significant impact on the formation of public opinion (Allport et al., 1954). Being based on symbolic interactionist thought, Blumer (1958) emphasizes the importance of the social interactions that are involved in the individuals' formation and socialization. Research outcomes have proven that the media usually focus on the undesirable angles of immigration and, as a consequence, strengthen the negative bias of the public perception (Igartua & Cheng, 2009; Jacobs, 2017; McLaren et al., 2018; Schemer & Müller, 2016). Attitudes of citizens towards migrants are significantly impacted by the immigration type and the country of origin of the migrants (Theorin & Strömbäck, 2020). Refugees normally are taken with greater sympathy and pity by the general public than by the public perception of their need for help (Mayda, 2006; Rasmussen & Poushter, 2019). Dempster et al. (2020) set forth the six most significant factors, which are responsible for change in immigration sentiments among the public. These factors consist of the factors of culturalists and the theory of diversity opposition. In their article, Masuoka and Junn (2013) explore how race plays a role in group identity theory, which explains that American public opinion and policy regarding immigration are, to a great extent, shaped by media depictions of race and immigration -with television having a big influence on the attitudes and assimilation policies.

According to Larson (2006), the media likewise use stereotypes to reflect racial or ethnic minorities, which have the potential to fuel prejudice and the furtherance of falsehoods. She shows how the

stereotypes that we see in the news media, novels, and entertainment are used to reinforce racial biases through the study of them. The established political mindset makes the media further accentuate their view on immigrants (Dennison & Dražanová, 2018). The authors Newman et al. (2015) argue that the media are responsible for not presenting immigrants' cases adequately, which can create the impression that these services are delivered without conditions. However, it is not always so, while the study of Van Klinger et al. (2015) found a link between the favourable attitude of Europeans towards immigrants and the media portrayal of immigration. Based on the results, the impact of mass media on the attitudes towards immigration tends to be ephemeral, as words such as "illegal" and "undocumented" barely leave a durable impression in people's minds (Merolla et al., 2013).

The role of immigration framing in shaping the Conservative voters' minds is underscored by Knoll (2009) and Bloemraad et al. (2016), who point out that Western media usually covers crime and border security. This particular direction is not only up to the conservative principles but also implies that commercial media, for its economic benefit, may sometimes falsify facts (Branton & Dunaway, 2008; Kim et al., 2011). The similarity between the present Russia-Ukraine conflict presentation and the issue of 5th Generation Warfare (5GW) can be explained by the findings of Dijkstra et al. (2022) and Jargin (2023) according to the 5GW theory. These examples illustrate the integration of military and non-military strategies that are carried out both at the level of society and at the cognitive level; this integration is more of a strategic development that is also seen in 4th Generation Warfare (4GW) which prioritizes media manipulation and psychological warfare (Shaheen, 2023). According to Krishnan (2022), it is the media that have a key role in shaping public opinion during war conflicts. It is only a manifestation of the existence of the media narratives that can influence public opinions and perceptions.

In order to discover more about the influence of mass media, recent research such as that of (Boyd-Barrett, 2017), and (Mejias & Vokuev, 2017) study the multidimensional nature of the information war between the United States and Russia. These studies are aimed at the spread of 'conflict propaganda' by Anglo-Saxon media outlets. These findings show that politics usually guides the narratives that media outlets transmit to their audiences by reflecting the political objectives of the governments they are covering. Departing from the studies of (Ojala et al., 2017) along with other researchers (Ojala & Kaasik-Krogerus, 2016; Szostok et al., 2016), the media stereotypes and biases are largely determined by the editorial standpoints and national journalistic. The depth of reporting is yet another aspect, which is affected due to the challenges associated with reporting, which have already been documented, such as the shortage of permanent correspondents in the conflict zones, especially in the German media (Porzgen, 2016). However, many Swedish and Finnish newspapers are entirely dependent on those journalists stationed in Moscow (Ojala & Pantti, 2017).

The very set of scientific articles makes the case for holding more extensive comparative research of media reporting in Europe. Such analysis should also take the different journalistic cultures of the countries that were once part of the Soviet Union in Eastern and Central Europe into account (Brüggemann et al., 2014; Dobek-Ostrowska, 2015; Hallin & Mancini, 2012). Using news cycle models, agenda-setting theory, and the media ties hypothesis, this study aims to constructively disassemble the ways in which different nations rank and cover important conflicts. This approach seeks to understand the role of domestic and foreign relations, cultural similarity, national policies, and internationalization of domestic events on foreign news coverage. Such framing shows how the media mostly represents the conflict in terms of the protagonists and antagonists. Still, it might not necessarily be the most comprehensive approach to the whole matter (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Herbert, 2011; Sreberny-Mohammadi et al., 1985). The film's scrutiny thus reveals the media's dual role of reflecting and influencing the geopolitical environment in times of global crisis.

The theoretical framework highlights the mechanisms through which media affect the ways the event is interpreted and points to particular issues as the decision-makers, causing public opinion to be shaped in a certain way. The role of this process in shaping the public perception of the Russia-Ukraine war is particularly evident in how European media treated the conflict; it can manipulate the public opinion of the conflict, its factions, and the Russia-German minority. Some studies have already shown that a negative attitude and lack of understanding could arise because of the stereotypes and can be seen in the media portrayal, which could have contributed to the situation of Russia during the war. They could be isolated and rejected because of this. It is noted in the text that mass media is a crucial factor in the shaping of general perceptions of conflict and minority groups

during the ongoing conflict. The text is further developed using framework of 5th Generation Warfare (5GW). This is evidence of the fact that the war was fought through the eyes of Europeans.

The table 1 depicts a propaganda classification scheme, identifying types accompanied by definitions, examples, and references. It simply gives relevant methods of propaganda like applied techniques, language, identification strategies, and broad strategies, which show that propaganda is supporting or manipulating public opinion in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

Table 1: Tabular Representation of Typology Bases

Bases of Typology	Type & Definition	Example	Reference
Applied Procedure	Selecting the Issue Refers to selecting issues in the social context of the group, impacting the propagandist's ultimate victory or defeat.	Russia's narrative on "protecting Russian speakers" in Eastern Ukraine and Crimea to justify actions.	Lee (1945)
	Case-Making/Card-Stacking Making a case via evidence, arguments, and illustrations to favour the propagandist's cause, often unfairly by manipulating facts.	One-sided media narratives from both Russian and Ukrainian sources regarding military engagements.	Khaldarova and Pantti (2020)
	Simplification Reducing complex issues to simple, dogmatic statements, leaving little room for logical dialogue.	Simplistic narratives about historical ties and geopolitical interests used by both sides to justify or condemn actions in the conflict.	Snyder (2018)
Use of Omnibus Words	Omnibus Name-Calling Attaching a negative label to an idea, diverting attention from the main issues.	The use of terms like "fascists" or "terrorists" by both sides to describe each other.	Giles (2016)
	Glittering Generality Associating an idea with virtue words to gain acceptance without evidence.	Patriotic language used to rally support, invoking historical narratives and national pride on both sides.	Jowett and O'donnell (2018)
Identification	Transfer Gaining identity with the target group to induce feelings and lend prestige or authority to the program.	Leaders showing themselves as relatable and aligned with everyday concerns of their populations.	Paul and Matthews (2016)
	Testimonial Using respected persons to endorse the program, inducing positive or negative feelings.	Zelensky's use of social media to communicate with citizens in casual attire, emphasizing solidarity.	Kurtz (1998)
	Plain Folks Conveying that the propagandist and their ideas are "of the people", appealing to common values.	Emphasis on international sanctions against Russia as global opposition to its actions.	Lamkin (1955); Pierce (1940); Tilley (2004)
	Band-Wagon Encouraging people to follow the crowd that has already accepted the program, exploiting cognitive shortcuts in decision-making.	Mutual accusations of endangering civilian lives and infrastructure.	Cooper (1971); Curnalia (2005)

Strategy	Hot Potato Discrediting opponents by entrapping them in situations viewed negatively, blaming them for something beyond their control.	Slow implementation of diplomatic negotiations and ceasefire agreements.	Cooper (1971); Curnalia (2005)
	Stalling A delaying technique to make the opposition lose momentum, involving bureaucratic procedures and red tape.	"I'm in favour of your objectives but want to investigate to make certain your methods are best for achieving them."	Cooper (1971); Curnalia (2005)

Methodology

Approach

To create a methodology, a researcher should formulate principles, insights, and guidelines, where methodology becomes theoretical basics for choosing appropriate research methods or "best practices." The type of research is non-doctrinal when societal norms and institutions are important, and it is doctrinal if legal doctrines are involved. Vouch argues that all writing is taken from other sources by the researcher, thus the importance of a librarian-like self-evaluation. The two scholars advocate that research should be done in a way that a librarian will be able to integrate the knowledge of legal resources with her general research expertise to increase the investigation's effectiveness. A comprehensive research strategy is adopted so that resources are online, and books and periodicals are used for the purpose of carrying out an accurate research process.

Framework of Methodology and Theoretical Foundations

On this note, our study focuses on how the media influences the way people think of these international actors, concentrating on the EU-Ukraine relationship through media framing and representation. Being that what the public thinks of foreign policy is greatly influenced by media representations, which are deductively developed on different interpretative approaches, we believe that these depictions are of utmost importance. Based on the works of Cohen (2015) and Bersick et al. (2012), this study focuses on the image composed by the "image maker" (newsmaker). In fact, the image does not represent the world as it is. Instead, it reflects the cognitive state of the maker. Through our selection of certain research design decisions and data collection techniques, we can grasp these cognitive structures and their effect on public opinion via an in-depth analysis of the way the German and Russian information media frame the relationship between the E.U. and Ukraine.

Mass media agenda-setting theory is the core of media effects research, which propounds that through topics chosen and structured, media informs the public's perspective and understanding (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). On the contrary, Cohen (2015) observed that newspapers are better not in providing the public with an opinion on these matters but rather in shaping and directing readers' minds to think clearly about them, especially foreign policy communication. "Short-term cognitive impact" of the agenda-setting effect allows the news organizations to set the order of priorities, namely the topics which will be presented in the reports. This way the public is shown a certain perception of these matters. As Vowe (2002) argues, the media image-makers have the power to shape the content of public debates so that only topics of their own choice become public matters.

According to Entman (2003, 2004), the cascading activation framing model is a concept that restricts the process of news and frames on foreign policy issues among the public through the representatives of the government, media and elites at the levels of the society. This model, however, can show the government's main role in the establishment of frames. Later, the media outlets and the other authorities follow and adapt this frame which means the public will know this frame through the media. To choose as well as emphasize certain aspects of occurrences, frames are used to show and decide on specific interpretations and conclusions. The media is not only an element for the transmission of and for the shaping of foreign policy perceptions, but also its feedback loop with the response of the populace to this policy is an important element. This medley of media frames holds sway over the collective appraisal of public opinion on foreign policy and international relations.

Hence is an important factor which determines how such a perception is brought about (Chaban & Holland, 2014).

Entman (2003) said policy frames are most likely to be successful when they travel down from the government to the public rather than the public initiates such frames themselves. Framing is a powerful cognitive tool that is used by journalists and state officials (aka image-makers) to affect public opinion and, of course, political influence. Here Chaban and Holland (2014) stated that it is also thought of as the actors fighting for the place. The concept of "media frames" brings into focus the way the media world creates a picture of reality for the public by adopting visual and word tools Chaban and Holland (2008). As the public's main source of information, the media often exerts a significant shaping influence on the E.U.'s relations with the outside world as well as on the decisions of policymakers (Chaban & Holland, 2014; Livingston, 1997). Hence, the media plays a very important role in their choices of and presentation of news events, especially when they are of a foreign policy nature. Our research on the EaP initiative, which is a part of the European Union's neighbourhood policy for the countries from the East, has a background in this context.

Sample:

As the EU-Ukraine relations are approaching a significant summit in Prague (2009), Warsaw (2011), Vilnius (2013) and Riga (2015), we focus on monitoring the media coverage of these relations in Germany and Russia. The timeframe for the research covers the period from 2009 to 2015, with the seven weeks from the one week prior to the summit to the three days after each summit taken into account. This methodology will be applied to a large amount of media coverage surrounding summits of the Eastern Partnership, allowing us to dig deeper and identify the progress of media narratives by analyzing the changes in reporting, these frames, and the emotional charge of the EU-Ukraine interactions. Secondly, the research on the representation of the Russia-German détente in the German print media will be done at the beginning of the Ukraine crisis in 2022.

Data Collected Method:

Our research is concentrated on the periods surrounding Eastern Partnership (EaP) summits and relies on content analysis, which is an amalgam of qualitative approaches, to ascertain the media depiction of EU-Ukraine relations in German and Russian news from 2009 to 2015. The coding system employed in the analysis reveals recurring themes, sentiments and contrasts in the coverage of these links. That timeframe is to signify coverage from one week prior to and three days after each respective summit of the E.U.'s Eastern Partnership, which took place in Prague (2009), Warsaw (2011), Vilnius (2013) and Riga (2015), respectively. Such an investigation has been made possible by the analysis of seven weeks of the media coverage of the EU-Ukraine relations that has occurred over seven years. The period is in focus due to the two summits of the EaP and the Russian-Ukrainian crisis that happened subsequently in 2014. Thus, the media attention increased. Additionally, the inception of the conflict in Ukraine in 2022 is examined in the study and the treatment of the Russia-Germany détente in German printed media is studied.

Table 2: Periods of observation

EaP Summit	Duration	Period of observation
Prague Summit	7 May 2009	30 April – 10 May 2009
Warsaw Summit	29 – 30 September 2011	22 September – 3 October 2011
Vilnius Summit	28 – 29 November 2013	21 November – 2 December 2013

Thematic frameworks of our analysis of EU-Ukraine relations are delineated, in terms of which we operate, in the manner suggested by Herrmann (2013), according to which the emotional impact is the main one in the "image theory" tradition. The media uses this scale, which ranges from negative to positive in gradation, to publish the intermediary assessments of negative/neutral and positive/neutral. These further details on emotions can be sought with the help of the Conceptual Metaphor Approach Lakoff and Johnson (1980), which is applied to find out the metaphors. These metaphors are often used to indicate the attitude. The introduction of metaphors like "enemy" and "friendship" into the discourse of the EU-Ukraine relationship provides the viewer with a glimpse of the typical stereotypes that may be associated with such a relationship.

Data Analysis Strategy:

I used a qualitative methodology to explore how Russian media displays the relationship between the E.U. and Ukraine. This approach demonstrated that processes of qualitative research are not a straight line but are closely tied with each other, forming a cycle, as Westle (2009) states. Content analysis of the dominant approach is to conduct a systematic analysis of the development of media coverage by NVivo software. The results of the content analysis derived from the study of the news coverage, including one week before and three days after each major EaP summit held in Riga, Warsaw, Prague, or Vilnius between 2009 and 2015, would help us to measure the level of coverage during that period. The duration of this period is very telling as it provides a useful benchmark for media changes and developments in the portrayal of EU-Ukraine relations after the Russia-Ukraine crisis of 2014. Moreover, we aim to look at including qualitative findings into media framing of the Russia-German Aussiedler in German media during the Ukraine conflict of 2022.

Case Study Analysis

The Influence of Russian Information Warfare on European News and Policy via Propaganda

The main goal of Russian informational warfare is to destabilize the perception of the Western Europeans by generating provocative messages that reduce the approval of the NATO and E.U. enlargement to the East, depict the Eastern Europeans as undemocratic and ungrateful, and recommend the West disregard these issues in favour of security dialogues with Russia. NATO and E.U. propaganda in Eastern Europe pursue the manipulation of gullibility with respect to Western assistance by causing distrust and sowing discord about security assurances and suggesting that there is a better economic prospect with the Kremlin. In addition, it connects the problems with Russia to the Western influence, while it considers E.U. standards as 'decadent' and the E.U. migration policies as stigmatizing. The purpose of the Russian informational warfare is to persuade the public opinion of the Western Europeans using inflammatory messages which undermine the growth of NATO and E.U., represent the Eastern European as those people who are unappreciative and undemocratic, and advise the West to neglect these problems and concentrate on security talks with Moscow. With respect to NATO and the E.U., the propaganda in Eastern Europe aims to undermine trust and to create suspicion towards Western help, to foment discord about security guarantees, and to stir up hope for more favourable economic relations with Moscow. Besides that, it links the tension with Russia to that of the West, branding the E.U. standards as decadent and making the E.U. migration policies taboo.

Russia has already used different hybrid warfare tactics in Ukraine since 2014. These tactics include denying the presence of the army and the deception behind the goals, which are described as peaceful, maintaining a facade of legality through the denial of direct participation, the threat of military force to the West, and controlling the narrative of the conflict through a media propaganda campaign where the Ukrainian army is portrayed negatively and discussions about the origins of the war and Russia's role are omitted. This would suggest that a study of thirteen European countries in the first half of the Ukraine crisis reveals that Russian newspapers, including Kommersant and Rossiyskaya Gazeta, placed the Russian perspective conspicuously and represented the E.U. actors less. The research was greatly focused on the huge impact the media had in shaping the perception of the crisis, as well as the various coverage types that were influenced by economic connections, cultural affiliations, and geographical proximity. Countries like Poland, Latvia, Germany, and Switzerland are close to Ukraine and that's why they showed a lot of interest and media coverage. The Dutch and Portuguese media were not exactly affected by the Russian factor only. Still it could be, however, that the other elements, including the resources of the newsrooms, also played a role. The means by which the conflict is mostly represented in the European media narratives as a Russian one has had a critical effect on the way the situation is framed, and the European nations have been influenced to make policies.

The way in which geographical proximity, cultural relationships, and economic bonds can dramatically influence news coverage of international conflicts in European media. Hence, a comprehensive analysis of the impact of Russian disinformation on European policy and media

should be conducted with these aspects in mind. The representation of conflict actors, media involvement in the crisis, and as well European media narratives and European nations' policy choices are the key factors that shape the narrative. The depiction of conflict actors, particularly those of the Russian-German re-settlers in Russian propaganda, reflects the complexity of integration issues and ethnic identity in Europe. The Aussiedlers, on the legal side of things, enjoy the status of ethnic Germans, but on the social level, they are the ones who are mostly stigmatized and treated as strange people. Here is a case in point of how the media content shapes the policy and societal norms.

Stereotypes and discrimination add an extra burden to the process of assimilation of Russian Germans into the European community, which is also being worsened by their economic, political, and cultural heritage from the East of Europe. Schmalz (2019) notes the upside-down role of media in Europe that is characterized by the adverse portrayal of Russian Germans after the "Lisa case" happened and this might have hindered their integration. Disregarding the fact that the Russian Germans were not unanimous, German media repeatedly perpetuated the misleading idea that they were dangerous during the 2017 federal election. The falsity of this perception was confirmed by Werner (2022), who revealed that it was a mere fabrication promoted by right-wing activists. In a nutshell, the German media dub Russian Germans as a group which does not represent true German values and brands them as a "fifth column" for Russia, even though they are sometimes considered to be more integrated into German society than other diaspora communities. German media, which is an essential factor in maintaining the unique identity of Russian Germans, is not as widely portrayed as a massive danger as compared to other diaspora groups, which consist of threatening people.

Current Scenario of the Conflict

The Western perspectives on the Russo-Ukrainian war are diversified and are changing rapidly as the situation transforms, which is likely to give rise to different opinions. The beginning was marked with the proclamation that Russia would carry out a lightning-like operation to seize Crimea (as it was back in 2014), and the situation that evolved has been a comprehensive interstate armed conflict that has lasted nearly two years, starting from February 24, 2022. In addition to Russia's capability of deploying its enormous stockpile of arms and soldiers and thus the mobilization of North Korea and Iran, which is providing extra support regime-wise, the will and creativity of Ukraine in this conflict so far have played a major role. While on the one hand, the absence of U.S. Congress support hampers the Soviet Union to speed up production, Ukraine remains unable to improve its standards of living. The last months on the battlefield, during which the Ukrainian army lost Avdiivka, only worsened the growing fatigue that the Russian infantrymen forced on Ukrainian soldiers.

Yet, despite the erosion of their military power, Russia will continue to wear down Ukraine, and there are still vestiges of political circles in the West that publicly hope for the peace agreement that calls for Ukraine to stop military operations. Regardless of the meaningful belief in the way the parties could eventually reach the negotiation process, the practicality of such negotiations between the parties is unlikely due to their different targets. To begin with, Ukraine has demonstrated it can hit objects located up to 800 kilometres below the ground in Russia, in the Ust-Luga port close to St. Petersburg, with much success. Nevertheless, both sides spent a huge amount of effort to win the war, but the result was still unclear as well as none of them could possess the Crimean region quickly.

Conclusion

The present research is aimed to analyze the intricate relationship and interdependence among media narratives, geopolitical maneuvers, propaganda and the ongoing confrontation between Russia and Ukraine. This paper focuses on the media depiction of the conflict by the European media, stressing how the media can monitor public opinion and influence the development of policies regarding global crises. This analysis points out a sophisticated area of information control, which is characterized by the conscious selection of facts, using historical parallels as well as narratives in strategic implementation to validate actions, assemble public opinion, and direct geopolitical approaches. According to the research, twenty-first-century wars have evolved into a complex form in which cyber-attacks, hybrid warfare methods, and digital data are strategically used. This highlights the crucial role of resilient public discourse and strategic resistance measures against the

rapid spread of anti-Western propaganda, which in turn guards democratic principles and the fairness of international relations.

While the study focuses on the media representations of conflicts, it also explores the societal impacts of such representations, particularly from the viewpoint of the Russian-German Aussiedler community. This analysis, therefore, emphasizes the wider significance of what conflict narratives entail in the social integration of minority groups. It has been revealed by the comparative assessment of media portrayals from all over Europe that the range of perspectives is affected by region-specific factors, cultural ties, and economic networks. Therefore, readers come with a more complex idea of the different portrayals of war across Europe's various contexts. The success in fighting propaganda relies on global collaboration, media literacy as well as cyber risk management. Governments should rather come up with well-calculated strategies, raise media transparency, as well as allocate more resources to public diplomacy in the bid to prevent the emergence of information war. In the fight against propaganda, policy recommendations would mean that the media is held accountable; thus, national and international coordination is a must. In conclusion, this demonstrates how the data may turn into a major resource in dealing with the issues associated with state-directed propaganda and designing effective policies and strategies to confront and counteract the phenomenon of information warfare.

The Russian information warfare research suffers from an oversimplification in the description of the Russian strategies, the possibility of historical errors connected with the age of technologies and geopolitics, and biases arising from the concentration on media sources. More depth to the findings could be obtained by using a cross-national longitudinal comparative study, a multidisciplinary approach, the investigation of public opinion, updating the methodology to the new and rapidly changing media environment, the assessment of the effectiveness of counter-strategy campaigns, and the strengthening of international collaboration in fighting propaganda. Thus, through the process described, one will be able to work on the most complex and multilateral understanding of information warfare and the relevant countermeasures.

Implication

Through my research, I have discovered essential insights for further theoretical frameworks and practical implementation of how the media addressed the Russia-Ukraine conflict. In other words, it adds to the field of media theory by demonstrating that propaganda and narratives can have a significant effect on how the public thinks and what policies they support during geopolitical conflicts. The media is not just a mirror but also a moulder of societal dialogue. Hence, the role of media in the agenda-setting process, which in turn has a direct impact on global happenings, is still a subject of debate and contentions. Besides, this work brings together information manipulation and digital warfare dynamics to further hybrid warfare theories by applying media strategies as crucial elements of modern geopolitics. The study of the role of media in the German-Russian emigrant community defines a standalone field of study which reaches beyond the traditional academic boundaries and explores the complex interplay between media depiction, social assimilation, and minority viewpoints during times of turmoil. Concretely, the study makes manifest the fact that the authorities should develop comprehensive strategies to tackle dissimulation and propaganda. Here, it is about making sure the implementation of a media literacy program is the main priority and democratic principles are safeguarded.

The study suggests to journalists that they must hold on to ethical standards of reporting by the two factors of fairness and neutrality in reportage that consider the wider effects of conflict reporting. The paper presents approaches to enhance community engagement and aid provision for minorities affected by media whose messages are conflict-driven. The dialogue-centered and inclusive reporting is emphasized, and they are deemed to be an important role player in unity enhancement. On the international stage, the research indicates that cross-border enterprises are better equipped to handle the dynamic environment of information war. It hypothesizes the possibility for countries to strengthen their positions through the introduction of joint regulations and action against false information. The idea of the theory and the practical advice that came along with them altogether provide the comprehensive framework for analyzing the media's presence in geopolitical conflicts and the broader society. The function of the examples is to give the idea of how to develop a multifaceted approach to study and deal with the complexities of the media impact in the modern geopolitical environment.

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