

## **Russia-Ukraine War of 2022: A Descriptive Content Analysis of War News Report Framing by America’s New York Post, China’s Global Times and South Africa’s The Citizen**

*By Oludele Akinloye Akinboade\* , Yunus Heske<sup>±</sup> &  
Victor Sannyboy Molobi<sup>°</sup>*

This paper attempts to understand war reporting of the 2022 Russia-Ukraine conflict from Western, Asian and an African news media during the first two weeks of the war, from 24 February to 11 March 2022. A descriptive content analysis has been made of the war frames as reported online by New York Post (USA), Global Times (China) and The Citizen (South Africa). These communication entities used different news frames in their narrative of this international conflict dictated along differences in ideological orientation and considerations of their target audience. The themes of conflict, human impact, economic consequences, attribution of responsibility, sources and tonality serve as the basis for the content analysis. New York Post labelled the “invasion” as a “war” in which crimes were committed throughout Ukraine, South African Citizen news framing was less vicious, while Global Times simply characterized the invasion as a “crisis”. In general, the New York Post’s coverage of the Russia-Ukraine conflict largely emphasized the Ukrainian victims of the war and depict Russia as the aggressor. Global Times on the other hand promoted the China’s potential role as a mediator, while The Citizen of South Africa sought to maintain the country’s neutral stance.

*Keywords:* war reporting, journalism, framing, news media, political ideologies

### **Introduction**

On the 24<sup>th</sup> February 2022, the world witnessed Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and a war erupted between two neighbouring countries. This event was shocking, newsworthy and well publicised throughout the world. The way in which the Russia-ukraine war was covered by different media organizations across the continents of Africa, Asia, and North America is therefore an interesting discussion. According to Laban et al. (2023, p. 1), readers increasingly access news through multiple channels as a means to complement their understanding of the political and world affairs. Media information has considerable power because it can shape discussions about and, to a certain extent, reality of the war. In the aftermath of the initial invasion, media outlets in various parts of the world covered the war in drastically different tones. In news reporting, Tuchman (1978)

---

\*Professor & Director, Africa Resources in Socio-Economics, South Africa.

<sup>±</sup>University of South Africa, South Africa.

<sup>°</sup>Professor, University of South Africa, South Africa.

explained that perspective is inevitable and that it is a result of routinized, legitimized and institutionalized structures that favour certain ways of reporting the news. This means that though news report framing could manifest the intent of the reporter, but the motives could be unintentional (Gamson, 1989). This is because although journalists may follow guidelines for objective reporting, different cultural and political perspectives do filter into the news making process, leading to a dominant framing of the news event to the target audience.

Russia's decision to frame its aggression as a special operation, instead of a war, was necessary so as to avoid being treated as a side openly declaring war. It could also suggest giving the Russian populace the notion of a potential lesser scale of involvement of the Russian army as well as the

Russian superiority (and not equality) over Ukraine (Gorobets, 2022). According to Phillip (2022) the Western press characteristically labeled the "special military operation" as a "war crime" as it was an "unprovoked invasion" perpetrated by the Russian government. Russian outlets, in turn, have largely denied any war crimes, placing fault for the necessity of the "special military operation" on Western countries (Thompson & Myers, 2022). African as well as South East Asian countries very quickly called for more dialogues among relevant sides to seek a peaceful solution for the Ukraine-Russia conflict.

The lion's share of information content about events in Ukraine in modern mass media is made up of articles and photos (Kutsyk, 2022). According to Boydstun et al. (2013), there are clear distinguishable positive, negative and neutral news reporting tones. In the case of New York Post which is the largest subscription-based news outlet in the United States, the news reporting style and editorial stance is regarded as conservative-leaning and has remained largely consistent over the years. Also, in reporting news about Russia-Ukraine war, the New York Post news outlet have joined other Western news organizations in condemnation of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, describing it as unprovoked. State media outlets in China, however, seem to advocate diplomacy while simultaneously blaming Western powers for sparking the conflict, claiming NATO's expansion into Eastern Europe was a provocation, and justifying Russia's claim that the invasion was a "defensive" one. News from Africa and other developing countries have tended to stay neutral and called for dialogue by affected parties.

Studies demonstrate that political ideology, diplomatic sensitivity, historical factors, and national interests play a crucial role in news framing of international conflicts (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). Some news frames appear to be more suited to particular ideologies than others, implying that news organizations from various nations or countries with different ideologies would cover the same topic and the same issue using different news frames (Liu, 2017). As a result, African, Chinese and US media may use different frames to cover this conflict based on their different ideological persuasions.

However, despite the evident differences and the large impact these differences have had on different population's perception of the war, there are few systematic analyses of the narratives present in Western, Asian and African media news organizations. To report on the war, reporters have relied on a spectrum of

primary sources to get reliable and timely information. Research has shown (Dennis et al., 1991) that the character of how news media cover military conflicts, often depends on contextual factors such as whether a news organization is headquartered in the country of one of the combatants or within a country with a vested interest in the outcome. Only independent news media can hope to cut through the fog of war and possibly report the truth. State media are incapable of reporting the truth about the war, hence state media are regarded as instruments of government propaganda.

Soon after the invasion of Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin, instituted a new law restricting freedom of speech and press regarding the war. In particular, the law prohibits any reporting that does not conform to the official governmental position on what is the truth. This means that the use of the words “war” or “invasion” are prohibited in Russia, whether in print, on air, or online, on news sites or social media platforms (Tebor, 2022). Only descriptions of the conflict as a special military operation were permitted. Also, as they represent vastly different interests, Western, Asian and African media were expected to frame the Russian-Ukraine war differently. International newspapers are, however, an important part of public diplomacy strategies, as they involve ‘the use of electronic media by one society to shape the opinion of the people and leaders of another’ (Price, 2003, p. 53). Such media help deliver messages and images to foreign publics to the advantage of an international actor.

The Russian-Ukrainian War is a global event with implications for every country in the World; hence, it is also of interest to the South African public because South Africa has had historically strong ties with both Russia and Ukraine, when both formed part of the former Soviet Union. In addition, there has been a keen South African interest in Russia’s justification of this particular invasion, given that South Africa has an economic alliance with Russia through the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) grouping of middle-income countries. Also, pro-Russian sympathies, combined with economic motivations, have led to many Africans wanting to join Russian forces. Following social media rumours of a pay of \$2,000, possibly sparked by the news that Russia was exploring recruiting volunteers in the Middle East, hundreds of Ethiopians (including veterans) showed up at the Russian embassy in Addis Ababa in April 2022. Many are disillusioned by the high unemployment and economic situation in the country (Endeshaw, 2022). According to the Ukrainian ambassador to South Africa, Mozambique, and Botswana, Ukraine has been unable to take up offers of help due to the governments of these countries (Ali, 2022).

Furthermore, despite the geographical distance, there are important ties between Ukraine and Africa, including more than 8,000 Moroccans and 4,000 Nigerians studying in Ukraine. There are over \$4 billion in exports from Ukraine to Africa. About 90% of this is wheat, and 6% is sunflower oil. Major importing countries are Egypt, which accounts for nearly half of the imports, followed by Sudan, Nigeria, Tanzania, Algeria, Kenya and South Africa (IOL, 2022).

This paper firstly aimed to describe how differently Western, Asian and South African online newspapers framed the Russian-Ukrainian war between 24 February and 2 March, 2022 in the first period of the study and again at a later

period that covered from 3-11 March. The study then explored the message characteristics (tone) such as words, phrases and statements about the 2022 Russian-Ukraine war as contained in the selected online newspapers. It follows in the tradition of newspaper content analyses of the framings between pro-Russian and pro-Ukrainian online communities regarding the East-Ukrainian conflict in 2014 (Makhortykh & Sydorova, 2017), the study of Papanikos (2022) and of Henley et al. (2022, p. 1) and others who are regarded as pioneers in the study of Russia's "special operation" in Ukraine. Section one of the paper is introductory, while section two presents the literature of newspaper frames and associated propaganda. Research methods are in section three followed by the presentation of results in section four. The last section concludes the paper.

### **Study Aim**

In order to understand and trace the contours of China's response to the Conflict thus far (Greitens, 2022) , the paper seeks to explain the observed differences in war report framing by New York Post, Global Times and The Citizen news of the Russia-Ukraine war, 2022. Two reporting periods are compared viz: the first and second weeks of the war.

### **News Framing**

The importance of framing by news organizations cannot be under-estimated. This is due to the fact that the words they use to communicate the message(s) of a text about an individual, a group of people, an event, a process, a state of affairs or any of the other subjects and themes of newspaper texts, inadvertently frame the story in direct and unavoidable ways (Richardson, 2007, p. 49). According to Entman (1993, p. 52), framing can be regarded as the process of selecting certain parts of reality and making them more salient. The literature, hence, suggests that frames that are adopted and projected through news media can increase the prominence of certain events in ways that may impact audience perceptions and interpretations (Entman, 2007), which are helpful in simplifying complex information and events (Entman, 1993). Such frames also make information "accessible to lay audiences as they play to existing cognitive schemas" (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007, p. 12). It is the view of De Vreese (2005, p. 55) that frames can be categorized as 'issue-specific' frames, which tend to focus on the particularities of certain topics, or 'generic' frames, which deal with broad, wide-ranging contexts. De Vreese (2005) further noted that a news frame usually has distinguishable, identifiable, observable, and recognizable elements or framing devices, such as headlines, phrases, images, keywords, sourcing, leads, and metaphors. It matters because framing conflicts and actors make other options seem natural and others unfathomable. Newspaper "lexical choices of words or labels" can impact audience interpretations (Pan & Kosicki, 1993, p. 62).

### News Framing and Imagery

Analyses of news media coverage of previous wars indicate that each current war is greatly informed by images, symbols, language, and experience associated with previous wars, including the demonization of the enemy, the virtues and necessity of waging war, and the social and political benefits for doing so (Altheide, 1995). According to Seo (2014) images can be weaponized as propaganda items. Also, others, like Zannettou et al. (2018) suggested that Russian state-sponsored Twitter accounts had a marked influence on the memes or images that appeared on Reddit and the alternative social media platform Gab. In addition, Russian bots and troll accounts are also known to be spreading Russian propaganda and disinformation, within Eastern Europe, about Ukraine since Russia's 2014 illegal annexation of Crimea (Hellman & Wagnsson, 2017).

In the 2022 Russia-Ukraine conflict, the Russian military inadvertently created a key symbol in the non-Cyrillic letter Z painted on invasion vehicles that came to embody Russian forces and the operation in general. The Z symbol became a sign of support, throughout Russia, for the claimed effort to "liberate" fellow Russians in Eastern Ukraine. It is also aligned with the liberation theme, denazification efforts, and other propaganda claims (Courter, 2022, p. 8).

### News Framing Themes (Patterns)

A number of studies that have evaluated Western media framing of violent conflicts and the framing of war language, generally point to marginalized and stereotypical coverage patterns in their reporting of conflicts taking place in non-Western, black or brown countries. In the case of the Russia-Ukraine war which has received widespread reporting on various issues, similarly coverage of middle-east conflict and specifically the Iraq war was shaped by themes of (1) victims and suffering (including heroism and compensation), (2) retaliation, (3) the war on terrorism, (4) fear, (5) homeland security, (6) surveillance, and (7) the conduct and preparation for the wars with Afghanistan and Iraq (Altheide, 2004). The Iraq War, like Grenada, Panama, and the first Gulf War, was very oriented to news management. The major theme of the "enemy as terrorist" pervaded news coverage. The studies by Griffin & Lee (1995) and Youssef (2009) both posited that American newspapers tended to neglect Iraqi casualties of war.

Also, In the case of Africa, Patrick (2016) and Gruley & Duvall (2012) analyzed Western news coverage of violent conflicts in Africa and found that Western newspapers generally neglect the issues and exhibit stereotypical war reporting patterns. On the other hand, Patrick's (2016) analysis of American and British newspaper coverage of the Rwandan genocide (1994) showed that reportage of Rwanda was both comparatively scant and grounded in stereotypes about Africa. Again, Gruley & Duvall's (2012, p. 38) examination of *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* coverage of the war in Darfur, Sudan also suggests that coverage lacked contextual background on the origins of the conflict, and highlighted 'the stereotype of tribal conflict in Africa'.

### **Correlation between News Frames and Propaganda**

Authors such as Zhondang & Kosicki (1993), and Chiricos et al. (2000) suggest that news frames of news organizations and their selection of dominant themes structure the selection, presentation, and emphasis of news reports. Authoritarian regimes tend to employ state media to play the role of government lapdog and act as a propaganda mechanism for their regime. For example, Russia has reportedly weaponized its state media as a tool of propaganda. This is apparently was designed to achieve multiple goals which included influencing public opinion in support of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and to deflect blame for the atrocities committed by the Russian military especially on Ukrainians. Such propaganda also has an international objective of delivering a clear message to adversaries. Russian news organization's messaging has traditionally exploited the psychological effects of military exercises to influence internal and external targets, and to demonstrate possession of a credible military, and to deter opponents (Courter, 2022). In April 2022 Russian television's Rossiya-1 news channel, threatened Britain with nuclear annihilation by airing a simulation of nuclear strikes by air and by sea destroying Britain and Ireland (Ilyushina et al., 2022). Disinformation and propaganda campaigns are also sometimes aimed at sowing division (Badawy et al., 2018).

Social media platforms also can be used as an effective vehicle for propaganda dissemination. Russian state TV has been reported to have turned to the video sharing social media platform Rumble to distribute its propaganda. Rumble is a platform favoured generally by conservatives and the far right and has not been banned by Russia (Fuchs, 2022).

Researcher have examined news organizations that use images in the spread of narratives, especially images appearing in the contents of social media misinformation.

Visuals published by news organizations have also been an essential part of recent modern propaganda efforts, as images are often more effective than words in capturing the attention of the public and crystalizing sentiments (Goldstein, 2009; Rose, 2012). This is because visual content generates the most engagements in social media spheres (HubSpot, 2011).

### **Resources and Method**

During the first week of the war, five articles from New York Post, 3 articles from China's Global Times, and 9 articles from South Africa's Citizen newspaper were studied. This period also coincided with the United Nations General Assembly adopting Resolution ES-11/1 on March 2, 2022 describing the conflict as an aggression against Ukraine (Chernov, 2023, p. 1).

In addition, the study extended its coverage to publications from these news outlets from 3-11 March 2022 which increased the number of articles to include five additional news articles from New York Post, 63 from Global Times and 4 from The Citizen. The substantial increase in articles of Global Times was due to

the fact that a continuous online news update on events in Ukraine were published (Global Times, 2022).

Along the lines of Miller, Andsager and Riechert (1998), this study conducted computer assisted frame mapping, a technique based on the notion that frames are manifested in the use of specific words (Entman, 1993). This study identified frames by examining specific vocabularies such as “suffering”, “refugees”, “casualties”, “infrastructure” “schools”, “hospitals” as they portray the themes identified by De Vreese (2005, p. 55). This approach is advantageous for its objectivity in frame extraction, given that frames are not “found” by the researcher but “computed” by the computer program.

This study used content analysis to examine how Western, Asian and African news reporting framed the early stages of the Russia-Ukraine war in 2022. The early stages of the Russian-Ukrainian war coverage could be explored by content analysis and framing (Vrba, 2022).

Chernov (2023) employed content analysis as descriptive statistics to quantitatively measure and compare the number of key terms and articles related to the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

A descriptive content analysis is a quantitative research technique that enables researchers to systematically examine descriptive of the content of media outlets and make inferences from them. Content analysis research on publications of news organizations show how their news frames can shape the discourse and how the language they use conveys the dominant message (Weiler & Pearce, 1992) in the process of assessing the relative extent to which news organizations’ specified references, attitudes, or themes permeate a given message or document (Weber, 1985).

### **Data Collection Process**

Our news article dataset consists of published news from English language Western, Chinese and South African news websites. Following the approach of Henley et al. (2022), the study adopted multi-stage sampling process to select online newspapers that satisfy the criteria of regional visibility, availability in English, and to eliminate non-relevant publications. Newspapers that report in English inevitably have an international audience rather than just a national or regional one. The comparison between the war reporting of Western, Asian and African newspapers is also valuable in itself due to the contrast they provide.

For our list of Western outlets, we manually selected six highly popular mainstream news websites from across the political spectrum (Zannettou et al., 2017). There are seven English-language Chinese news websites identified by the US State Department as Chinese “foreign missions” (Ortagus, 2020), while South African media mainly published in English medium.

The study used Google online engine to search for items such as, “Russian-Ukrainian war”, “propaganda”, “Russia-Ukraine war 24 February - 2 March, 2022” and “Russia-Ukraine war 1 - 2 March 2022”, to produce the total population of all online newspapers from various regions. This stage of the search

effort produced approximately 562 searchable newspaper items for 24-28 February 2022, and 187 searchable items for 1- 2 March 2022. This was to analyse news reporting during the initial stage of the war leading to the adoption of United Nations General Assembly resolution describing the conflict as an act of aggression.

However, during the second stage of the research, the study searched for the same search items for the period 24 February - 31 March 2022. During this time, export disruptions in Ukraine resulted from port closures and uncertainties regarding Russian export capacity. There were also increases in energy prices triggered by the war’s escalation in late February (FAO, 2022). This justify analysing the coverage of the war during this time.

To perform a comparative analysis of the attitudes, narratives, and topics discussed by Western, Asian and South African newspapers, the study selected New York Post, Global Times and The Citizen news published during the first two months of the war. Frequency of language frames became the data obtained by extracting relevant categories used in the selected newspapers invariably used to support the study’s quantitative content analysis.

*Table 1.* News Source Sampling Profile

News medium	News sources	Audience reach	Political orientation or bias	Source of Political orientation
New York Post	APN AFP Kyiv Independent Sputnik Reuters	422,000 daily readers in 2016 (Statista, 2023) Attracts over 80 million monthly visitors to its websites.	Slightly to moderately conservative Far-end of Right-Center bias rating	Mediabias facts check (2023)
Global Times	APN Xinhua, Reuters CGTN Sputnik	1.5 million daily readers (Chinese version) and 200 000 readers (English version) in 2019 (Euro-Topics, 2023)	Exhibits a frequent nationalistic tone Leftist bias rating	Mediabias facts check (2023)
The Citizen	AFP Al Jazeera euro news	276000 daily readerships (PAMS, 2019).	Displays Impartiality Slight to moderate bias rating	Mediabias facts check (2023)

### Language Frame Data Analysis

In keeping with the conventions of quantitative research, data were analysed deductively (Svensson, 2009). Following the approach of Simon and Xenos (2000), prior to data analysis, the study pre-coded data to be collected, reviewed the pre-codes, and later adjusted them before the final data were compiled. The main reason for using a coding scheme is to convert newspaper publication content into data that can be analysed (Du Plooy, 2013, p. 219), to uncover specific attitudes, ideologies, and worldviews, in the language of a transcript when conducting a content analysis (Adampa, 1999, p. 3). In this context, the researchers searched selected newspaper articles for ideas or themes, which are necessary for coding ‘contexts units’ with an eye for ascertaining direction of treatment, and pay due sensitivity to hidden meanings, attitudes etc. While the use



of specific words with strong emotional connotations are associated with Russian fixation on the “Great Patriotic War” (World War II) that still weighs heavily on the national psyche (Courter, 2022, p. 11), the study sanitized such words from the search items and identified and extracted, codes that consisted of words and phrases (for example, “suffering”, “casualties”, “refugees”, “invasion”, “hardline stance”, “impose sanction”, and so on), which are believed to be closer to neutral war reporting frames. These were then analysed in terms of sentiment intensity and the type of message (attitudes) embedded in the codes which were identified in the newspapers selected. This enabled the study to categorize the words, phrases and images for eventual quantitative analysis. This is in line with the process of determining news frames inductively by generating them from media content, or deductively by constructing them prior to the analysis (De Vreese, 2005).

Neuman et al. (1992) and Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), cited in de Vreese (2005, p. 56) identified six war reporting frames namely: conflict, human impact, economic consequences, attribution of responsibility (blaming), information sources and tonality, which form the basis of the quantitative analysis. The coding scheme sought to measure prominence, humanization, dominant frame, links to the West, Asia and Africa, and sourcing. Framing is dichotomously coded. The first code, *conflict frame*, described a battle between individuals, groups, institutions or countries. In this instance, a war between the countries of Russia and Ukraine.

The second code involved *human impact* and described the human suffering involved and how deprivation of normal existence caused by the war has been differently covered by the selected news outlets. Information that connects with group identities or familiar narratives, or that arouses emotion can be particularly persuasive (Christopher & Mathew, 2016). The third code of *economic impact*, focused on infrastructure damaged caused by the war and its consequences for the Ukrainian and Russian people. The fourth code, *attribution of responsibility*, established the proponents of the Russia-Ukraine war and the decision behind their action. The fifth code covered *sources*, these represented the people or institution that contributed to the information contained in the newspaper article. This frame underlined the information authenticity reported about the war and to give credibility to the news outlet. Also, the conventional wisdom is that communication from government or defense sources, is more effective, influential, which traditionally emphasizes the importance of truth, credibility, and the avoidance of contradiction (Christopher & Mathew, 2016). The success of any news frame in affecting audience evaluation “increases when it comes from a credible source, resonates with consensus values, and does not contradict strongly held prior beliefs” according to Chong & Druckman (2007, p. 104). The sixth frame involved tonality which covered two aspects: the strength of words and expressions used, and the inclusion (exclusion) of images by the selected newspapers that was used to amplify reporting of the Russia-Ukraine war.

### Western, Asian, African Media War Coverage Comparison

The study performed a descriptive content analysis of the shared and distinctive narratives and topics discussed within the Russian, Chinese, and Western ecosystems. Our study was inspired by the observed differences in the tone used to present news regarding the Russia-Ukraine war in Asia, the West and South Africa during the researched period. Research results are subsequently explained and presented by means of two graphs that represent one week reporting as compared to a one-month news cycle.

### Descriptive Data Analysis

Our discussion of data analysis is presented in two phases viz: a description of data analysis during the first week of the war and in the second week covering 24 February to 11 March 2022 in all. Following the approach of Haque et al. (2022, p. 3) descriptive statistics have been used to analyse the data collected. A total of eighty-nine articles were sourced from the three-news media, comprising of 17 articles during the first week and 72 articles during the second week of the Russia-Ukraine war.

Table 2. Articles Sampled During First and Second Weeks of Russia-Ukraine War

Phase of research	Periods for which online articles were available	New York Post	Global Times	The Citizen	Comments
1-First week of war	24 February- 2 March, 2022	5	3	9	The Citizen published over one article per day
2-Second week of war	3 -11 March 2022	5	63	4	Global Times news ran at least one story every 1,7 Hours
		10	66	13	

Source: Authors' compilation.

### Discussion

#### Coverage of the First Week of the War, 24 February - 2 March 2022

Results of the news coverage of the first week of the war are shown in figure 1. Within the theme of the conflict frame, New York Post accounted for 44% of war coverage, Global Times 22% while The Citizen accounted for one third. The conflict frame coverage highlighted the extent of the humanitarian crisis that demonstrated instability as people fled their homes to take shelter under difficult conditions. This is in line with the findings of Papanikos (2022) that the news on the Russian-Ukrainian war had a coverage of 57% on the front page of two of the

news media examined. Thus, simple news amounted to 36% of the total issues published, while headline news at 21%.

News coverage on the human impact frame were also very differently covered. Many of the war coverage quantified an overall description of unimaginable tragedy in this frame.

The New York Post and The Citizen contained news reports on the number of Ukrainian refugees who fled to other countries and the number of injured people or those tragically killed. Therefore, the human impact frame coverage by America's New York Post which was indicated at sixty percent (60%), was twice the coverage by South Africa's The Citizen and six times that of the Chinese Global Times.

During the first week of the war, the tone and language (75%) of New York Post and their attribution of responsibility (60%) clearly pointed to Russia as the aggressor, while Global Times joined other Chinese state media outlets to advocate for diplomacy simultaneously blaming Western powers for sparking the conflict (Hanley et al., 2022). During the first week of the war, Global Times' share of attribution of responsibility was only at 20%, while the language of war framing was moderately and diplomatically expressed. The Citizen news on the other hand propagating for negotiation and dialogue, ascribed a limited attribution of responsibility of (2%) and a tonality of (25%) during the first week of the war.

### **War Reporting During 3-11 March 2022 (Second Week)**

During the period 3-11 March 2022, Russia-Ukraine war report framing changed. Within the theme of the conflict frame, the share of New York Post increased to just around 46% of war coverage, while the share of Global Times rose from 22% to 35%. The share of The Citizen news in this war reporting frame declined from one third to 19%. Also, with respect to human impact frame, the share of New York Post in war reporting dropped from about 60% to around 34%, while the share of Global Times now rose from 10% to 58%. Similarly, the share of The Citizen in human impact frame war reporting dropped from 30% during the first week of the war to 8% over the two weeks of the war. News reporting of the economic consequences of the war also followed a similar trend of fluctuation during the second week under consideration. The share of New York Post of economic impact frame reporting dropped from 78% to 20%, while the share of Global Times rose from 22% to 72%. The Citizen news picked up some gain in this war reporting from rising from zero in the first week to 8% when the second week. As for the attribution of responsibility frame, over the second week, the share of both New York Post and Global Times was roughly the same between 45-47%, a shift from the substantial dominance of New York Post of 60% during the first week of the war. Similarly, the dominance of New York Post in both the source as well as tonality frames during the first week were reversed during the second week of the war as Global Times picked up gains in war reporting and The Citizen news also dropped its shares.

This change in war reporting frames during the second week of the war can be attributed to China focusing more on its domestic impact of the war during this

time. China's Foreign Affairs Ministry carefully positions China for improved global importance in the event of a protracted Russia-Ukraine conflict. This is based on the anticipation that protracted conflict could drive a wedge between the United States and other frontline NATO states which are vulnerable to serious energy deficiencies and the burden of the influx of millions of refugees (Hoffman-Martin, 2022). China is regarded as the largest importer of global about 70% of crude oil and 40% of its energy needs. The rising commodity prices, especially of energy and agricultural products, directly affected China which resulted in increased production costs and higher consumer prices for the Chinese State. The Russia-Ukraine war also brought extreme uncertainty to the global stock market, that culminated in global stock market volatility, such that the Chinese stock market sharply declined on 10 March 2022, reaching the lowest level since the 2008 financial crisis (Bo, 2022).

As the Chinese economy felt the negative impact of the war (as shown in Figure 2), Global Times daily war reporting changed such that it emphasized more of each of the reporting frames. The number of Global Times articles reporting the war increased significantly as compared to New York Post and The Citizen. As such, the word frequencies of war reporting codes used in each of the frames increased significantly for Global Times.

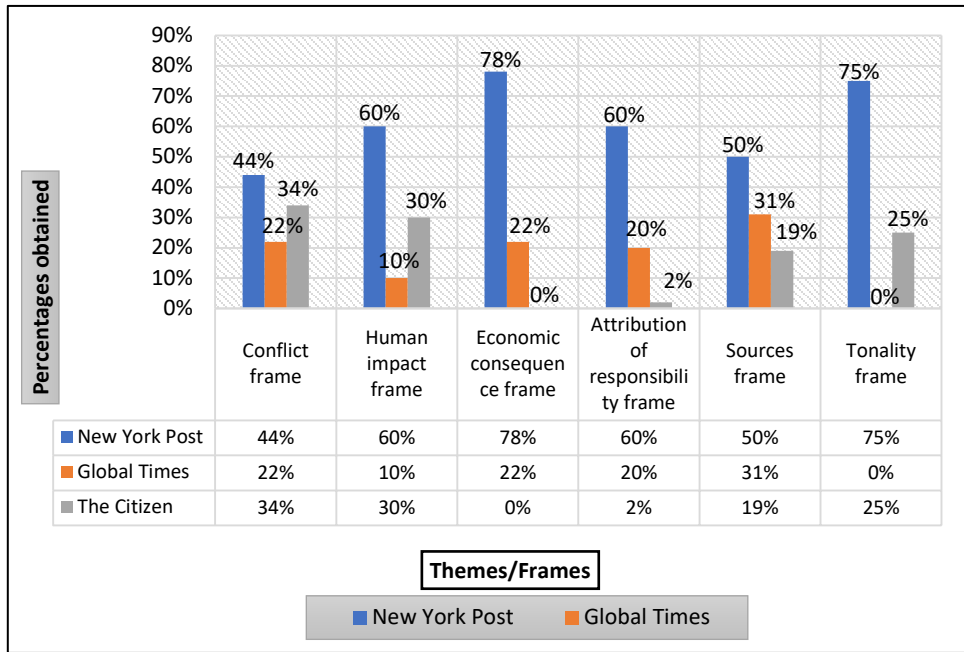
Additionally, New York Post, reported seventy-eight percent of the economic consequences while the Chinese Global Times reported only twenty-two percent of this frame.

In terms of attributing responsibilities New York Post is resolute that Russia is responsible for the war, with a coverage of 60% reporting. Global Times only attributes responsibility for the war through indirect attribution of the conflict to NATO's expansionary ambition, similar to South Africa's Citizen newspaper. Regarding the coverage of the conflict frame, New York Post covers forty-four percent of Russia-Ukraine war reporting. South African Citizen newspaper surpassed the Chinese Global Times by reporting roughly one-third of the conflict frame while the Chinese Global Times reported just above one-fifth of the frame.

Finally, whereas, the war reporting language was initially absent in Figure 1, Global Times accounted for 60% of the war reporting tone in Figure 2, increasing blaming the West and NATO for the escalation of the crisis. China's State media coverage tend to be dominated by a moral evaluation frame with consistent attention to the United States. In most coverages, America is framed as the destroyer of the current international order even though America itself created it (Sun, 2022).

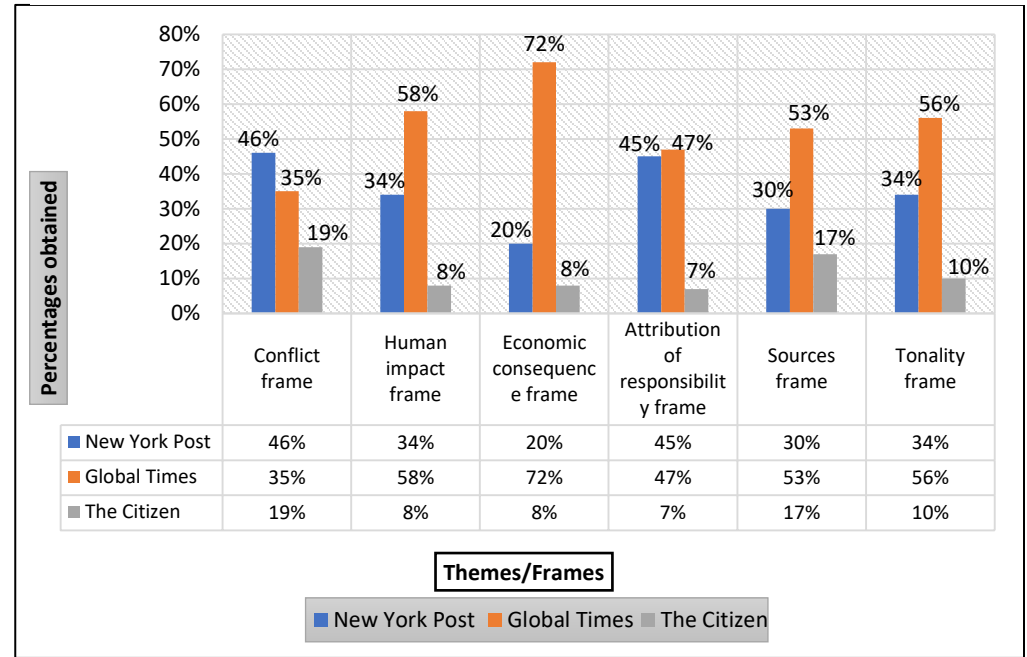
Similarly, the human impact, economic consequences, attribution of responsibilities frames as well as sources reporting frames were higher in Global Times compared to New York Post and The Citizen news. The Citizen news maintained its neutrality as its share of tonality of war reporting dropped from 25% during the first week to 10% in the second.

Figure 1. Descriptive Content Analysis of the Propaganda Frames by New York Post, Global Times and The Citizen Newspapers 24 February- 4 March 2022 (n=17)



Source: Researcher's compilation.

Figure 2. Descriptive Content Analysis of the Propaganda Frames: News Reporting: New York Post, Global Times and The Citizen - 24 February - 11 March 2022 (n=72)



Source: Researcher's compilation.

## Results

Like Henley et al. (2022, p. 1), this study finds that while the Western Press, such as New York Post, has focused on the humanitarian and day-to-day military aspects of the war, the Chinese outlet, Global Times, have concentrated on the diplomatic and economic fallout of the invasion.

In terms of tonation, this study finds that sentiment expressed by the Western media, like New York Post, in their insistence on referring to the Russo-Ukrainian conflict as a “war” and an “invasion” contributes the most to portraying the war in its relative negativity.

This is in line with the findings of Henley et al. (2022, p. 5). Papanikos (2022) reports that the newspaper “Kathimerini” used very soft language to argue that borders do not change using violence. Papanikos (2022) also finds that the newspaper which usually echoes the left ideas in Greece and anti-US feelings used the strongest language to condemn the Russia-Ukraine invasion.

The other two newspapers, especially the one which is allegedly pro-US, used softer language and a sort of blame game on the US’s past behaviour of invading countries thus setting a bad example and essentially a “go-ahead” message to Russia.

The *EFSYN*, a newspaper that was expected to play a blame game, surprisingly did not attach any strings to its front page’s total and unequivocal criticism of Russia. During the second week of the war, the share of tonality of reporting was reversed in favour of Global Times while the attribution of responsibility for the war is shared in almost equal measure, though Global Times split the attribution of responsibility between USA and NATO. The Citizen news remained neutral in war reporting during the second week.

## Study Limitation

This study’s focus on media that news media that cover stories from English-written news sources is inherently limiting. It is fair to consider, though, being English medium newspapers, our selected newspapers might appeal more to pro-Ukrainian and hence anti-Russian readers. Their war reporting might have so impacted on them accordingly. Media that cover diverse international topics are more likely to publish news from non-English news sources, which might enrich the pool from which frames could be extracted. Also, this study has not examined effects of news coverage of Russia-Ukraine war of 2022 and cannot make any definitive statements about how readers might interpret sampled news articles.

## Conclusion

This study has provided a snapshot of war report during the first two weeks of the Russia-Ukraine war of 2022, by *New York Post*, *Global Times* of China and South Africa’s *The Citizen* news. It has been shown that the three news media

adopted different degrees of reporting frames to cover the war with careful consideration of the audience, affecting not just the choice of story but also the tone and style of its presentation (DeWerth-Pallmeyer, 1997, p. 5). One of the key tones of Russian messaging of Russia-Ukraine conflict is the idea that Ukraine itself, the language, and culture are simply just products of Russian history and culture. This tone is targeted at Ukrainians themselves (Courter, 2022, p. 9).

While the American New York Post covered more of pro-Ukrainian, anti-Russia war reporting, Global Times elected for a neutral reporting style and blamed the third party, namely the US and NATO. Interestingly, China, on the one hand, does not seem to openly voice direct support and approval of Russia's "special operation", but in effect tries to demonstrate its neutrality and independence in the Russia and Ukraine conflict. On the other hand, China is indirectly supporting Russia by expressing its understanding of Russia's interpretation of the origins of this conflict (Trush, 2022) in line with their jointly shared view of regional security challenges posed by both Ukraine and Taiwan (Denisov, 2022).

As a whole, the tone of the New York Post and the attribution of blame clearly points to Russia as the aggressor during the war's first week, while Global Times, like other Chinese state media outlets, advocate diplomacy while simultaneously accusing Western powers of sparking the war (Hanley et al., 2022). During the first two weeks of the war, Global Times' share of attribution of responsibility rose in the second week, while the language of war framing was moderate and diplomatic. During this time, The Citizen news ascribed partial blame and used neutral language while calling for cooperation and discussion between affected countries.

The framing differences uncovered in this study, might point to important regional ideological differences between Western, Asian and African news organizations. Stories or accounts that create emotional arousal in the recipient are much more likely to be passed on, whether they are true or not. Angry messages are more persuasive to angry audiences (Christopher & Mathew, 2016). Russian officials have carefully labelled the attack on Ukraine as a *special military operation* rather than an invasion. Though, most in the West rejected the distinction, but widespread media reporting suggests that large numbers of Russians, the domestic audience of the message, appeared to at least initially accept this framing of the invasion, a possible indicator of the effectiveness of Russian influence on domestic populations.

This study underscores that performing analyzes during different research phases, across multiple platforms and media ecosystems is imperative for understanding the nuances of how global events are framed and also how different populations interpret and digest world events.

## References

- Adampa, V. (1999). Reporting of a violent crime in three newspaper articles. The representation of the female victim and the male perpetrator and their actions: a critical news analysis. In *Centre for Language in Social Life, Working Papers Series* 108, 1–31.
- Altheide, D. L. (1995). *An ecology of communication: cultural formats of control*. Hawthorne, New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Altheide, D. L. (2004). Consuming Terrorism. *Symbolic Interaction*, 27, 289–308.
- Badawy, A., Ferrara, E., Lerman, K. (2018). Analyzing the digital traces of political manipulation: the 2016 Russian interference Twitter campaign. In *IEEE Conference on advances in social networks analysis and mining (ASONAM)*.
- Bo, H. (2022). Implications of the Ukraine war for China: can China survive secondary sanctions? *Journal of Chinese Economic and Business Studies*, 21(2), 311–322.
- Boydston, A. E., Gross, J. H., Resnik, P., Smith, N. (2013). Identifying media frames and frame dynamics within and across policy issues. In *New Directions in Analyzing Text as Data Workshop*. London.
- Chernov, G. (2023). The Russian – Ukrainian War: persistence of frames and the media issue - Cycles. *Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications* (forthcoming).
- Chiricos, T., Padgett, K., Gertz, M. (2000). Fear, TV news, and the reality of crime. *Criminology*, 38, 755–785.
- Chong, D., Druckman, J. N. (2007). A theory of framing and opinion formation in competitive elite environments. *Journal of Communication*, 57(1), 99–118.
- Christopher, P., Mathew, M. (2016). The Russian “Firehose of Falsehood” propaganda model why it might work and options to counter it. *RAND Corporation: Perspectives*, 198, 1–15.
- Courter, I. J. (2022). Russian preinvasion influence activities in the War with Ukraine. *Military Review Online Exclusive* (Jul), 1–14.
- De Vrees, C. H. (2005). News framing: theory and typology. *Information Design Journal*, 13(1), 51–62.
- DeWerth-Pallmeyer, D. (1997). *The audience in the news*. Mahwah: LEA.
- Denisov, I. (2022, March 24). *No Limits? Understanding China’s engagement with Russia on Ukraine*. The Diplomat.
- Dennis, E. E., Stebenne, D., Pavlik, J., Thalhimer, M., LaMay, C., Smillie, D., et al. (1991). *The Media at war: the press and the Persian Gulf conflict*. Arlington, VA: The Freedom Forum.
- Du Plooy, G. M. (2013). *Communication research: techniques, methods and applications*. 2nd Edition. Juta.
- Endeshaw, D. (2022). *Ethiopians queue up to volunteer for Russia’s fight in Ukraine*. Reuters.
- Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: towards clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51–58.
- Entman, R. M. (2007). Framing bias: media in the distribution of power. *Journal of Communication*, 57(1), 163–173.
- Euro-Topics (2023). Global Times Daily newspaper. Available at: <https://www.eurotopics.net/en/184047/global-times>.
- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations – FAO (2022). *The importance of Ukraine and the Russian Federation for global agricultural markets and the risks associated with the war in Ukraine*. Information Note, 10 June, Rome, Italy. Available at: <https://www.fao.org/3/cb9013en/cb9013en.pdf>.



- Fuchs, H. (2022). *Russia state media turn to Rumble to get out their word*. POLITICO. Available at: <https://www.politico.com/news/2022/03/24/russia-state-media-rumble-00020184>.
- Gamson, W. A. (1989). News as framing: comments on Graber. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 33(2), 157–166.
- Global Times (2022). *Live updates: Ukraine tensions*. Available at: <https://www.globaltimes.cn/special-coverage/Ukraine-Tensions-Timeline.html>.
- Goldstein, C. S. (2009). *Capturing the German eye: American visual propaganda in occupied Germany*. London, UK: University of Chicago Press.
- Greitens, S. C. (2022). China's Response to War in Ukraine. *Asian Survey*, 62(5–6), 751–781.
- Griffin, M., Lee, J. (1995). Picturing the Gulf war: constructing an image of war in Time, Newsweek, and US News & World Report. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 72(4), 813–825.
- Gruley, J., Duvall, C. S. (2012). The evolving narrative of the Darfur conflict as represented in The New York Times and The Washington Post, 2003–2009. *GeoJournal*, 77, 29–46.
- Haque, U., Naeem, A., Wang, S., Espinoza, J., Holovanova, I., Gutor, T., et al. (2022). The human toll and humanitarian crisis of the Russia-Ukraine war: the first 162 days. *BMJ Global Health*, 7, e009550.
- Hellman, M., Wagnsson, C. (2017). How can European states respond to Russian information warfare? An analytical framework. *European Security*, 26(2), 153–170.
- Hoffman-Martin, D. A. L. (2022). China's balancing act in response to the War in Ukraine. Chapter Five in P. A. Rodell, C. Skidmore-Hess (eds.), *Special Report: The Global South & Ukraine*. The Association of Global South Studies.
- HubSpot (2011). *How to engage fans on Facebook*. Available at: <http://cdn1.hubspot.com/hub/53/How-to-Engage-Fans-on-Facebook-04.pdf>.
- Ilyushina, M., Berger, M., Bella, T. (2022). *Russian TV shows simulation of Britain and Ireland wiped out by a nuke*. Available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/05/03/russia-ireland-nuclear-weapons-video-ukraine/>.
- Independent Online Reporter (2022, February 25). *The Russia-Ukraine Conflict as it happens: Friday Blog*. IOL.
- Kutsyk, R. (2022). Caricature as one of the information mechanisms for constructing the image of Russia's war against Ukraine: Based on the materials of "The Times" and "The Sunday Times". *SKHID (EAST)* 3(3).
- Laban, P., Wu, C.-S., Murakhovs'ka, L., Chen, X. A., Xiong, C. (2023). Designing and evaluating interfaces that highlight news coverage diversity using discord questions. In *Proceedings of the 2023 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI '23)*, April 23–28, 2023, Hamburg, Germany. ACM, New York, NY, USA.
- Liu, N. X. (2017). Same perspective, different effect: framing the economy through financial news translation. *Perspectives*, 25(3), 452–463.
- Mäenpää, O. A. (2022). *A critical discourse analysis on the reporting of the Ukrainian refugees fleeing the Russian invasion: the notions of Eurocentrism and othering in mainstream media*. Credit Thesis. Global Political Studies, Malmo University.
- Makhortykh, M., Sydorova, M. (2017). Social media and visual framing of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine. *Media, War & Conflict*, 10(3), 359–381.
- Miller, M. M., Andsager, J., Riechert, B. P. (1998). Framing the candidates in presidential primaries: Issues and images in press releases and news coverage. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 75, 312–324.

- Neuman, W. R., Just, M. R., Neuman, A. N. C. (1992). *Common knowledge: news and the construction of political meaning*. University of Chicago Press.
- Ortagus, M. (2020). *Designation of additional Chinese media entities as foreign missions*. US Department of State, June 22.
- Pan, Z., Kosicki, G. M. (1993). Framing analysis: an approach to news discourse. *Political Communication*, 10, 55–75.
- Papanikos, G. T. (2022). The Greek newspaper coverage of the Ukrainian War: the preinvasion phase and the day of the invasion. *Athens Journal of Journal of Business & Economics* (forthcoming).
- Patrick, D. (2016). A concern for humanity? Anglo-American press coverage of Bosnia and Rwanda, 1992–1995. *International Politics*, 53(1), 138–153.
- Phillip, B. (2022). *Russia's fumbling invasion, visualized*. The Washington Post.
- Price, M. (2003). Public diplomacy and the transformation of international broadcasting. *Cardoza Arts and Entertainment Law Journal*, 21(1), 51–85.
- Publisher Audience Measurement Survey – PAMS (2019). *The Citizen Press Office*. Available at: <https://themediainline.co.za/the-citizen-press-office/> (accessed on 5 July 2023).
- Richardson, J. E. (2007). *Analysing newspapers. An approach from critical discourse analysis*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Rose, G. (2012). *Visual methodologies: an introduction to researching with visual materials*. London, UK: SAGE Publications.
- Scheufele, D. A., Tewksbury, D. (2007). Framing, agenda setting, and priming: the evolution of three media effects models. *Journal of Communication*, 57(1), 9–10.
- Semetko, A., Valkenburg (2000). Framing European politics: a content analysis of press and television news. *Journal of Communication*, 50(2), 93–109.
- Seo, H. (2014). Visual propaganda in the age of social media: an empirical analysis of Twitter images during the 2012 Israeli–Hammas conflict. *Visual Communication Quarterly*, 1(3): 150–161.
- Simon, A., Xenos, M. (2000). Media framing and effective public deliberation. *Political Communication*, 17: 613–624.
- Statista (2023). *New York Post (NY) circulation in the United States as of September 2016*. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/report-content/statistic/229817>.
- Sun, W. (2022). Division of Chinese opinion on Russia-Ukraine War: analyzing key actors' strategic framing on Weibo. *European Journal of Law and Political Science*, 14(Dec), 2796–1176.
- Svensson, I. (2009) Who brings which peace? *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 53(3), 446–469.
- Tebor, C. (2022). *Russia increases censorship with new law: 15 years in jail for calling Ukraine invasion a 'war'*. USA Today.com.
- Thompson, S., Myers, S. L. (2022). *The lies Putin tells to justify Russia's War on Ukraine*. The New York Times.
- Trush, S. M. (2022). Crisis between Russia and Ukraine: the China factor. *Herald of the Russian Academy of Sciences*, 92(Suppl. 7), S595–S600.
- Tuchman, G. (1978). *Making news: a study in the construction of reality*. New York: The Free Press.
- Vrba, P. (2022). *The framing of the war in Ukraine in the US media*. Brno: Masarykova, Univerzita.
- Weber, R. P. (1985). *Basic content analysis*. New Delhi: SAGE Publications.
- Weiler, M., Pearce, W. B. (1992). *Reagan and public discourse in America*. Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press.

- Youssef, M. (2009). Their word against ours: news discourse of the 2003 Gulf war civilian casualties in CNN and Aljazeera. *Global Media Journal: Mediterranean Edition*, 4(2), 13–24.
- Zannettou, S., Caulfield, T., De Cristofaro, E., Kourtellis, N., Leontiadis, I., Sirivianos, M., et al. (2017). The web centipede: understanding how web communities influence each other through the lens of mainstream and alternative news sources. In *ACM Internet Measurement Conference*.
- Zannettou, S., Caulfield, T., Blackburn, J., De Cristofaro, E., Sirivianos, M., Stringhini, G., et al. (2018). On the origins of memes by means of fringe web communities. In *ACM Internet Measurement Conference*.
- Zhondang, P., Kosicki, G. (1993). Framing analysis: an approach to news discourse. *Political Communication*, 10, 55–69.

