



ORCID of the Journal: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-0723-9485>

DOI Number of the Paper: <https://zenodo.org/records/13715759>

Edition Link: [Journal of Academic Research for Humanities JARH, 4\(3\) July-Sep 2024](#)

Link of the Paper: <https://jar.bwo-researches.com/index.php/jarh/article/view/494>

HJRS Link: [Journal of Academic Research for Humanities JARH \(HEC-Recognized for 2023-2024\)](#)

UNPACKING PERSPECTIVE: APPLYING THE ENTMAN FRAMING MODEL TO ANALYZE DISCURSIVE PATTERNS IN UKRAINE TWEETS

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Paper Information

Citation of the paper:

(Jarh) Ahmad, E., & Hashmat, S., (2024). Unpacking Perspective: Applying the Entman Framing Model to Analyze Discursive Patterns in Ukraine Tweets. In *Journal of Academic Research for Humanities*, 4(3), 198–208.

Subject Areas for JARH:

- 1 Humanities
- 2 Social Sciences
- 3 Communication and Media Studies

Timeline of the Paper at JARH:

Received on: 19-07-2024.
Reviews Completed on: 27-08-2024.
Accepted on: 30-08-2024.
Online on: 10-09-2024.

License:



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Recognized for BWO-R:



Published by BWO Researches INTL.:



DOI Image of the paper:



Abstract

This research observed how the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) employed X (formerly known as Twitter) in presenting its perception of the Russia-Ukraine war that began in early 2022. The study's objective was to examine the textual framing strategies applied by the MFA on its X (formerly known as Twitter) handle. The method adopted for this research was based on the principles of qualitative discourse analysis. Thus, a skip interval sampling technique was employed to gather the population from the tweets during a particular period of selection. The categorization applied was based on the Entman model of framing. The categorization scheme was developed on the frames proposed by Entman for media. Results show that The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine more frequently applied frames that were based on ethical values when appealing for the support of the international community and the imposition of sanctions. It was noticed that emphasis was often put on the stories that elicited certain emotions, and there was relatively less emphasis on the roots and consequences of the conflict.

Keywords: Conflict, Warfare, Twitter, Russia, Communication.

Introduction

On February 24, 2022, Russia began a military invasion of Ukraine on a massive scale. The conflict significantly escalated the long-standing hostilities between the two neighbors (Demir, 2022). It represented a turning point in the eight-year-old conflict between the two nations. Following Russia's invasion, millions of Ukrainians fled to other countries, causing a humanitarian and political crisis. This led to the largest influx of refugees since World War II with over 3.7 million Ukrainians escaping to neighboring nations while the infrastructure of the largest cities was destroyed (The Operational Data Portal, 2022). The nature of the conflict and its devastating subsequent effects on neighboring countries shocked the international community to its core (Ratte, 2023). As of now, the conflict has caused significant global impacts, including European security, power imbalances in the region, energy supply disruptions, and a massive migration crisis, impacting regional stability and international relations. (Chernov, 2023). The conflict has dominated headlines in print and television media, attracting expert analysis and global interest (Landler, 2022). For audiences throughout the world seeking to understand the Russian invasion of Ukraine, social media has emerged as a major source of news (Snowden, 2022). The Russian invasion of Ukraine has already been termed the "First TikTok war" or the "Most online war of all time" (DRI, 2022). This use of social media is particularly important during times of war when nations frequently attempt to justify their policies through visual narrative. Social media platforms are mostly visual, making them an effective tool for creating narratives and frames that influence how viewers perceive and interpret global events (Ilan Manor, 2018). As a result, MFAs may strategically communicate and affect the public conversation on foreign affairs by using digital diplomacy through social media platforms. They can do this by utilizing the

visual elements of these platforms to successfully transmit their views (J. Cassidy, 2016). The objective of this research is to thoroughly examine the framing strategies used by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) of Ukraine in the context of the Ukraine-Russia Conflict of 2022, during which Russia engaged Ukraine in military invasion. The study focuses on how the Ukrainian government and state used the well-known social media site X (formerly known as Twitter) to share their perspective with a wider international audience. A significant aspect of this research relates to analyzing textual frames to discern the methods employed in shaping and reinforcing their opinions for a global viewership.

Research Objectives

- 1.To identify the textual framing strategies outlined by the Entman model that were constructed on the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) (formerly known as Twitter) handle during the Ukraine-Russia conflict in 2022.
- 2.To determine which specific textual framing strategies from the Entman model were most frequently utilized by the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) on X (formerly known as Twitter) during the 2022 Ukraine-Russia conflict.

Research Questions

- 1.What textual framing strategies, as outlined by the Entman model, were employed by the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) on X (formerly known as Twitter) during the Ukraine-Russia conflict in 2022?
- 2.Which specific textual framing strategies, as outlined by the Entman model, were most frequently utilized by the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) on X (formerly known as Twitter) during the Ukraine-Russia conflict in 2022?

Significance of the Study

This research carried out a discourse analysis of the textual frames of tweets related to the war between Russia and Ukraine in 2022. With

the help of inventions of social media platforms, conflicts have also transitioned to digital form enabling both political and non-political players to engage in processes of broadening opinions. Moreover, because this geographical region has not been investigated using framing analysis before or specifically regarding this conflict, this paper can serve an invaluable purpose in putting light on the Russia-Ukraine war in 2022.

Problem Statement

Social media has improved communication by making audiences more accessible and engaged on their platforms. Politicians and governments all over the world intentionally engage in framing processes on applications like X (formerly known as Twitter) to achieve their agendas and cement their positions. Thus, social media and diplomacy, particularly in the context of this research, during the time of conflict, have become important. This paper focuses on the analysis of the textual practices used by the official X (formerly known as Twitter) account of the Ukrainian MFA during the early escalation of the Ukraine-Russia conflict in 2022.

Methodology

This is a qualitative discourse analysis study where the tweets of Ukraine's MFA during the Ukraine-Russia conflict in 2022 were examined. From February 26, 2022, to August 31, 2022, 2511 tweets were collected as data for the research. During the data collection period, platform X (formerly known as Twitter) was undergoing a rebranding and name change, which resulted in the closure of API tools used for data collection. Additionally, internet access in our country was limited, compelling the researcher to rely on secondary sources, such as the "All My Tweets" platform, to gather the necessary data. As mentioned earlier, this is a textual analysis, and the dataset included over 2,500 tweets. Due to time constraints and the fact that this analysis is a segment of a larger research project, a comprehensive examination of the entire

dataset was not feasible, a systematic random sampling method was selected where only 20% of the total Tweets comprising 458 of the selected tweets were nominated for research analysis.

To assess the strategies used by the Ukrainian MFA, the theoretical model proposed by [Robert Entman \(1993\)](#) was applied, which consisted of four frames known as moral assessment, treatment recommendations, causal interpretation, and problem identification. To ensure reliability, the coding schemes developed for analysis were cross-checked by multiple researchers. The results were largely consistent across different evaluators, confirming the robustness of the process.

Literature Review

Russia's war against Ukraine reached a tipping point when Russian forces invaded northern, eastern, and southern Ukraine following Putin's announcement of a "special military operation." Russia portrayed the incursion as a "demilitarization" and "de-Nazification" effort to protect the population of Donbas leaving chaos in its wake ([The Kremlin, 2022](#)). Even now, a year and a half later, the battle continues with new developments and escalation every day, with no clear end in sight. With the regions with a different history, Ukraine proclaimed its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. ([Stebelsky, 1993](#)) in his research underlines Ukraine's distinct regional identities, which in his view can naturally lead to plurality. However, public opinion favors statehood, and polls show a slow but consistent shift in that way toward nationhood ([Kulyk, 2018](#)). But Russia has had a keen interest in Ukraine since its independence for various reasons and its political inclination provides a strong background to the ongoing war. Political associations and the EU have been debated in Ukraine a lot, particularly during the 2004 and 2014 presidential elections ([Feklyunina, 2016](#)) which led to annexation in 2014 ([Coynash, 2021](#)). Russia

invaded Crimea in 2014 and began aiding separatists in the Donbas region of the country's southeast, turning Ukraine into a battleground. When Russia annexed Crimea, it was the first time in Europe since World War II that a state acquired another state's territory (Bebler, 2015). The Russian invasion of February 2022 represented a new chapter in the continuing Russo-Ukrainian war, with significant destruction and battles outside of eastern Ukraine. This move has heightened global anxiety about the worst outbreak of violence in Europe since World War II, as well as increased media attention and 24-hour coverage of the conflict.

Media Background

On February 24, 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine, exploding international public opinion and social media debate making it the world's first-ever "Tik Tok" war (Sessa, 2022). X (formerly known as Twitter), Facebook, and VKontakte had already played important roles in the Ukrainian protests that preceded Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2014 about Russian involvement in Ukraine, but they were vastly different in terms of technological advances (Gruzd, 2015). Both protests were influenced by the participation of pro- and anti-Maidan groups on social media during the events (Joshua A. Tucker, 2015). The media plays a key role in modern warfare, influencing public opinion and the outcome of conflicts both domestically and internationally (Puddephatt, 2006). Post-Cold War US military experience shows that military commanders benefit from controlling the media and shaping its narrative (Payne, 2005). Russia and Ukraine have been using technology and social media to influence public opinion domestically and globally (Bond, 2023). Russian social media spreads narratives supporting the war, while Ukrainian social media seeks external support from Western countries (Dastgeer & Thapaliya, 2023). Social media platforms have become hotspots for information and discussion about the war in Ukraine

(Lakhatwala, 2022). Technology has allowed users to capture and share real-time images and videos, making Ukraine feel less distant as a victim. Popular platforms such as X (formerly known as Twitter), and Facebook have become vital in modern culture because they enable the exchange of information and the discussion of common issues. These tools paved the way for research into many social issues in a variety of scientific fields (Posegga & Jungherr, 2019).

Framing, Conflict, and Digital Media

Framing initially focuses on studying how the media portrays specific issues, but this has expanded with the introduction of digital platforms (CH, 2019). This has increased the number of actors who can now share their version of social reality with a larger audience. Digital platforms undermine mainstream actors' control on articulating critical social concerns, allowing more diverse perspectives from a variety of actors (Ahmed S, 2019). Framing paradigms are widely acknowledged as essential for adapting to the digital media ecology (Paul D'Angelo, 2019). However, studies have revealed that framing is defined inconsistently and overlaps with other communication concepts, demanding a detailed investigation of these interlinked concepts such as agenda setting and priming (Cacciatore MA, 2016). Framing is one of the popular mass communication theories in recent academia that is increasingly being employed by political conflict researchers to investigate the mediated narratives of war (Bryant & Miron, 2004). Framing is an organizational principle that provides meaning to both media content and reality (Scheufele, 2006). In political debates, media frames may favor specific definitions and interpretations of political issues while omitting other aspects of reality. This enables socially shared media frames that are constant over time (Shah, Watts, Domke, & Fan, 2002). Media frames significantly impact audience perceptions of events, particularly when it comes to conflict

(Iyengar, 1991). One of the new and most important areas in framing is conflict framing in digital media because it substantially impacts the general understanding of the causes and prospects of conflict (Bolognesi, 2020). Traditionally, research regarding armed conflict has been focused on the journalistic media (Nygren, et al, 2018). Social media platforms, on the other hand, have changed framing into an involved process in which users may alter and modify material, transforming viewers into active contributors and commentators (Banks, Calvo, Karol, & Telhami, 2021). Most studies on conflict and war depictions have been on English-language media, with few cross-national and even fewer cross-language comparisons. (Kolmer & Semetko, 2009) Studies on depictions of the Iraq war in Al Jazeera on television news programs and Arabic-language channels are notable exceptions. Most of the existing literature on framing examines how Western media portray foreign conflicts, ignoring how those conflicts are framed in domestic and non-Western backgrounds (Vladislavljević, 2015). The 2014 hybrid war piqued the researchers' curiosity because it was Europe's largest military conflict in two decades. This was a move toward the mediatization of "arrested war" because of the emergence of online platforms and the mainstream media's adoption of new reporting dynamics (Hoskins, 2015). This shift has had a significant impact on how the war is portrayed in Ukraine, as well as how people throughout the world engage with it (Urman & Makhortykh, 2022).

Most of the research has been on the journalistic coverage of the Ukrainian war. According to (Ojala, M., K., & Kangas, 2017), Western European journalists prioritized humanitarian issues and Russian political leaders' responsibility toward war. (Nygren, et al., 2018) Examined the content of television programs and publications in Ukraine, Russia, and other countries and discovered region-specific inclination and differences of favoring

neutrality over bias. (Iram, Saleha, 2024), The digital environment is intensely politicized and frequently utilized to explain historical and ongoing disputes in post-socialist nations such as Ukraine and Russia, where social media plays a crucial role in defining conflicts (E & V, 2013). With this backdrop of conflict and online atmosphere, existing literature has two significant gaps regarding this conflict. For starters, few studies have investigated how MFA uses social media to create and distribute frames. So far, research indicates that governments and institutions are efficiently communicating on a worldwide scale through social media. However, little research has been conducted on the framing strategies they employ to communicate their opinions.

The Role of Twitter in Russia's War Against Ukraine

Popular platforms such as Twitter and Facebook have become vital in modern culture because they enable the exchange of information and the discussion of common issues. These tools paved the way for research into many social issues in a variety of scientific fields (Posegga & Jungherr, 2019). X (formerly known as Twitter) has developed from a text-based service to a visual medium with integrated photos and videos. These features enhance the representation, engagement, and 'shareability' of news organizations and individual journalists (Chen, Tao, Lu, Kan, & Cui., 2013). X (formerly known as Twitter) is used for political crisis analysis and online communication (Jungherr, 2015). On February 24, 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine, exploding international public opinion and social media debate making it the world's first-ever "Tik Tok" war (Sessa, 2022). X (formerly known as Twitter), Facebook, and Vontae had already played important roles in the Ukrainian protests that preceded Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2014 about Russian involvement in Ukraine, but they were vastly different in terms of technological advances (Gruzd, 2015). Both protests were influenced by the

participation of pro- and anti-Maidan groups on social media during the events (Joshua A. Tucker, 2015). VKontakte, due to the reason of being closely monitored by the Russian government has led to the creation of additional platforms like as Facebook and X (formerly known as Twitter) (Menn, 2022). During the Maidan protests, these sites were utilized to organize anti-government protests and draw international attention (Anatoliy Gruz, 2015). The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 reinforced this course, with X (formerly known as Twitter) being used to distribute information, influence campaigns, and mobilize resistance (Chen E. a., 2022). X (formerly known as Twitter)'s role in the Russian War has been explored by researchers, with an emphasis on conflict communications and hybrid warfare (Nikolayenko, 2019). According to a study, the Russian Internet Research Service performed continuously below average in its attempts to influence international political agendas from 2014 to 2018 (Linvill & Warren, 2022). Pro-Russian imagery on X (formerly known as Twitter) corresponds to the role of Western democracies in politics, implying an intentionally anti-Western tone (Zannettou, et al., 2020). According to Russia, NATO is an indirect player in Russia's assault on Ukraine, which may continue (Tsygankov, 2018). Over the last decade, the growing trend of foreign ministers and diplomats on social media sites has evolved into the practice known as digital diplomacy (M B. C., 2015). As an example, during the Arab Spring, citizen journalism played a part in disseminating the frame to a global audience via social media (PN & Howard, 2013). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs can now arrange foreign policy events and directly transmit these agendas to domestic and international audiences (P, 2012). Multiple actors fight for attention, and the frames of one MFA may be hindered by the frames of another MFA (J & I, 2016). Mediatization of MFAs has evolved from the 1990s broadcast

era, where they worked with media to broadcast messages, to the 21st-century network model of real-time framing on social media (Bjola & Jiang, 2015). Social media has diversified the audiences, speed, actors, and tools used to frame events, reducing diplomats' dependence on traditional media to transmit frames to domestic and foreign populations. This hybrid media system allows MFAs to influence online audiences using media tools, transforming the mediation of crises (BJOLA & MANOR, 2022).

Analysis and Discussion

Entman (1993) defined framing as the process of choosing the relevant features of reality across media messages and presenting them in such a way as to make an influence on the audience. This study investigates four diagnostic frames: Problem definition, Causal interpretation Moral Evaluation, and Treatment recommendation. The analysis sheds light on framing tactics that may be used in the communication on the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The least used frame was Problem Definition, although an important frame in data; tweets addressed the invasion's background, hardships that civilians endured, and the loss of infrastructure *for example*.



The MFA in the tweet stated that Russia's atrocities in Ukraine are growing by the day, and the only way to describe them is a gross violation of international law, humanitarian law, and its standards, and they are continuing their aggression with no regard for the world.



In the above-mentioned tweet, the Russians have destroyed the Scythian tombs Kherson region. This is a historical site dating back to the 3 - 4 century and the Russians destroyed this in their attack by arranging the firing positions on them. As the tweet suggests it is being reported to the concerned authority, but the heritage has been destroyed. As Ukrainians claim, Russians destroyed their cities' infrastructure, leaving catastrophe in their wake. Causal Interpretation/Diagnose Causes was analyzed and tweets focused on the fundamentals of aggression and the repercussions of the conflict, Ukraine's justification of the use of force, and Russia's military action on Ukraine for instance.



The MFA is indicating that Russians are destroying fields and stealing crops, causing global hunger because the grain meant to be exported will not be there when the time comes, and because fields are being destroyed, they may not be able to grow crops again, leaving the world to starve as Ukraine is one of the world's largest exporters of grain. As shown in the tweet below, the MFA has shared an image of the Ukrainian army and told the world that the conflict in Ukraine was started by Russia and that they do not want it to end

until they obtain what they want. They are stating clearly that Ukrainians will protect their territory, sovereignty, and above all peace. Others see it as a 21st-century problem, but it has always been a reality for them.



The most often employed frame was Moral Evaluation/Make Moral Judgments in which Russia was portrayed as an invader with the Ukrainians fighting bravely and people suffering from the impacts of war often sharing personal stories.



As in the tweet, Ukraine has put only one phrase in the tweet, but it is a very striking one: Russian soldier = war crime. According to the Ukrainian claim, they perpetrated genocide in Buccha.



For instance, another tweet, The story of a 7-year-old boy who was severely burned in the Russian attack is depicted in the tweet below. As seen in the image below, the young boy's condition with shrapnel in his brain, a broken

hand, and other injuries. Not only that but according to the tweet, his mother died and can only be identified by DNA examination.

The treatment Recommendation outlined recommendations and singled out the necessity of calling for assistance to Ukraine and imposing restrictions on Russia. In the tweet as an example, Ukraine cites a historical



example of how the Allies coordinated and stopped a Nazi aggressor. They indicate that is what Ukraine requires, and Ukraine should get military, humanitarian, and financial assistance. Only then will they be able to defeat Putin and the Russian state? Addressing RQ2 the most dominant type of framing employed by the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs was Moral Evaluation framing, which was intended to appeal to the viewer's emotions through the presentation of victims and positioning of Russia as an aggressor. The second most used was the Treatment Recommendation frame suggesting military assistance and disciplinary measures. The third most used frame was the Causal interpretation frame which looks at the cause and consequences of the war, and the least used frame was the Problem definition where tweets focused on Russia's invasion and the consequence of the war in terms of civilian losses and property damage.

Conclusion

Entman's framing analysis categorizes the Ukraine-Russia conflict into four frames: ethical judgment, treatment plan, explanation of causation of the event, and diagnosis of issues. The analysis showed that the tweets were specifically concerned with the moral evaluation and narrating of victims' stories to paint Russia in the worst possible light. Treatment Recommendations were raising

military assistance and imposing sanctions. Explanatory meaning focused on the consequences of the war and spheres which proved that Ukraine has the right to defend itself. Although used the least, and related to problem identification, civilians and destruction were the focuses of the frame. By March 2022, the invasion intensified, the Ukrainian MFA on X (formerly known as Twitter) noted the violent nature of Russia's aggression and urged that it is necessary to strengthen the defense of Ukraine, impose sanctions against Russia, and bring it to the International Criminal Court.

Recommendation

Recognizing limitations is vital for maintaining the research's integrity. Future research attempts can aim to improve the knowledge landscape by accumulating vast data from a variety of sources, including social media, news, official declarations, and academic debate, to gain a comprehensive understanding of ongoing conflicts and evaluate the influence of framing at various stages (Ellyatt, 2023). These studies may employ qualitative and quantitative methodologies to investigate how framing strategies affect beliefs and collective knowledge. This will aid in understanding how communication and perception interact in conflict situations. Furthermore, (Ivanova, 2023) points out, that the rebranding and renaming of the "Twitter" platform to "X" under new ownership poses an interesting challenge to academia. It could either displace current research paradigms or present new opportunities, potentially ushering in a new age. Russia is still at war with Ukraine to promote its regime's interests (Charushin, 2023). As time passes, it becomes increasingly difficult to predict Russia's efforts in this protracted conflict, making it impossible to predict the main participants and the war's outcome (Witte, 2023). Notably, the framing of disputes on social media remains a challenge. The international English-speaking

readership of the X (formerly known as Twitter) account @MFA_Ukraine is the topic of this investigation.

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