Comparing coverage of the Ukrainian-Russian conflict in the BBC, the Guardian, Al Jazeera and the New York Times online news press, with reference to framing theory: Feb-April 2022

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Abstract

Focusing on media bias and the portrayal of victims, this dissertation examines how news coverage of the Ukrainian-Russian conflict differentiates in American, British and Middle Eastern online publications during February-April 2022. This dissertation focuses on Al Jazeera, the New York Times, BBC, and the Guardian, exploring how they frame the conflict and any potentially reasoning for this, and what effect this has on the audience. It uses rhetorical analysis to examine the language used and the reasoning behind this, aiming to establish how the different media present the conflict to its audience.

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1. Introduction

The conflict between Ukraine and Russia has an ongoing history which first began in 1991, when Ukraine won independence against Russia that year (Reuters, 2022). Since then, tensions have been prevalent, with it finally coming to a head in 2022, with Russia launching attacks against Ukraine in February that year.

With the outbreak of the war came a range of coverage across the world, much of it reliant on alliances and political stances. Naturally, Russia and Ukraine portrayed the events in a completely different manner to each other to frame a particular narrative. In March 2022, the BBC noted that Russia’s portrayal of the events was inherently different to the BBC’s own, stating that vital information had been omitted from their coverage; ‘there is no mention of reports of the ominous miles-long military convoy snaking its way from Belarus in the north to Ukraine’s capital Kyiv, which, in the UK, leads the BBC Radio 4 news bulletin half-an-hour later’ (BBC, 2022 c).

However, with the majority of the Western world not being in alliance with Russia, it can be assumed that the coverage produced by these countries’ news outlets would not be siding with Russia. However, that is not to say that the news media of the Western world would not individually differ in its approach to covering the conflict. To fully understand perceptions of the Ukraine-Russia conflict in the news-sphere, this dissertation analyses four reputable news outlets with Western audiences; The Guardian, The BBC, The New York Times and Al Jazeera. All of these outlets differ stylistically, but have similar, global audiences and similar political leanings. Al Jazeera has been chosen as, while being based in Qatar, it’s not a Western outlet, but has a wide Western audience. Al Jazeera will also be observed in reference to the Al Jazeera effect, which aims to move attention away from the West, providing alternative views on reporting. Seib states that the ‘media can be tools of conflict and instruments of peace’ (Seib, 2008).

Despite social media playing a heavy role in society’s consumption of news, studies have found that UK and US audiences are still going to online news platforms for news on the Ukraine-Russia conflict, making it a reputable choice for study (Statista, 2022 A). In addition, as of February 2022, when the conflict between Russia and Ukraine broke out, a further study found declining trust in online news media. The lowest in the study, only 26% of Americans trust their news, with Britain not far behind at 34% (Statista, 2022 B). This decline in trust in online news sources since the outbreak of the Ukraine-Russia conflict suggests that reporting has not been as reliable or unbiased as it seems, providing grounds for this dissertation to explore.
While these news publications may not have differing political ideologies to frame, this is not to say that they are all the same in their approach to covering the conflict and frame the conflict in the same manner. This may not be intentional and may be down to a variety of cultural and social factors. In her paper which examines the portrayal of war victims in Russian, Ukranian and UK television news, Haywood outlines how cultural differences can alter the perception said of conflict, saying ‘attempts [in the TV news] to unite the victim and viewer in a universal humanity, in which both are fellow citizens of the same world and in which the viewer is morally challenged to come to the aid of the victim, only serve to accentuate cultural differences between the Palestinians and the reporting countries, and the remote sufferer remains a cultural other’ (Haywood, 2014). Furthermore, Poepsel states that ‘Individuals and groups in society influence what mass media organizations produce through their creativity on the input side and their consumption habits on the output side’ (Poepsel, 2018), suggesting that the mass media is heavily influenced by external factors. Poepsel then goes on to claim that ‘products in the mass media that fail to resonate with audiences do not last long, even if they seem in tune with current tastes and trends’ (Poepsel, 2018). Thus, positioning and framing is inherently important for news media for them to resonate with their audience and their audience’s cultural, environmental and social beliefs.

This dissertation uses research to conduct its findings, looking at three news articles from four reputable online news publications, and will back up its findings through relevant theories, focussing on Goffman’s framing theory. In framing theory, Goffman identifies two ‘classes of primary frameworks’: social and natural (Goffman, 1986). Natural frameworks are ‘unguided’ (Goffman, 2018) and unmanipulated by external factors or actors, whereas social frameworks are motivated by the goals, aims and ideals of those behind it. Social framing can influence society, affecting laws or social change. Goffman’s underlying theory is that these frameworks are present in daily society, whether the purveyor is aware of it or not (Goffman, 1986). This dissertation will put Goffman’s theory of framing into the context of the Ukraine-Russia conflict within UK, US and Middle Eastern online press to understand how framing can affect perceptions of conflict.

The aim of this dissertation is not to analyse the political leanings of news outlets and thus how this influences their style of reporting, but instead to understand how three different countries document a growing issue in separate ways. This uncovers, by using framing theory, if three Western news outlets and one Middle Eastern news outlet depict the same conflict differently. The main questions it seeks to solve are:

1. How do the news publications of this study frame the Ukraine-Russia conflict to its audience?
2. Why to the chosen publications frame the conflict in this way?
3. *Is there any bias within the framing of the conflict in the chosen publications?*
4. *How do the publications differ in their approach to framing the conflict?*

This research aims to fill a gap in common research by looking at a currently active issue and understanding how it is presented in these four news outlets, which will aid in future analysis of conflict coverage.

In this dissertation, chapter two provides a comprehensive view of existing research, including theories and how the media has portrayed conflict previously. Chapter three provides a detailed look at the methods used within this dissertation and why, including how data has been collected and why and what research methods have been utilised. Chapter four uses rhetoric analysis and framing theory to analyse news items on the Russia-Ukraine conflict of the four chosen publications. Chapter five provides concludes and discusses the findings from the research of this dissertation.
2. Literature Review

2.1 Framing Theory

Framing theory ‘describes the practice of thinking about news items and story content within familiar context’ (Arowolo, 2017), and presents the idea that the mode in which information is presented to the reader dictates how the audience perceives information. The basis of a framing theory analysis highlights how ‘the media focuses attention on certain events and then places them within a field of meaning’ (Arowolo, 2017).

Framing theory has been likened to agenda-setting theory, which dictates how news is selected and why (Smith & Higgins, 2013). But while agenda-setting theory dictates what messages are conveyed to an audience, framing theory is more concerned with how the message is interpreted. Agenda-setting in news media ‘refers to the idea that there is a strong correlation between the emphasis that mass media place on certain issues and the importance attributed to these issues by mass audiences’ (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2006), while framing, comparatively, ‘is based on the assumption that how an issue is characterized in news reports can have an influence on how it is understood by audiences’ (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2006).

For instance, a newspaper only reporting on the negative acts of one party and failing to report on those of the other is a level of agenda-setting theory and shows inherent bias. Meanwhile, a newspaper reporting on both, but using linguistic, rhetoric and stylistic choices to favour one is a level of framing theory. Here, the audience has an unbiased, full view of the events, but a particular narrative is subtly woven into the news to create a particular view. As such, it’s particularly difficult to detect narrative frames within news media.

Thus, in order to understand how and when a frame is being presented in a news narrative, it’s vital to compare different news articles on the same subject. Often, audiences will have subconsciously accepted a narrative, without realising it had been framed, making the act of deciphering it somewhat complex. Arowolo (2017) paraphrases Entman’s ideas on framing theory, stating that ‘unless the narratives are compared, frames are difficult to detect fully and reliably, because many of the framing devices can appear as “natural,” unremarkable choices of words or images’ (Arowolo, 2017). As a result, this highlights a need to compare and analyse multiple sources in order to fully evaluate the frame.
2.2 Rhetoric Analysis

Rhetorical analysis is the act of analysing a text in terms of rhetoric, this being the choice of language and linguistic devices, the context of the piece and the authors choice of quotes and sources. Ultimately, the ‘goal of a rhetorical analysis is to explain what is happening in the text, why the author might have chosen to use a particular move or set of rhetorical moves, and how those choices might affect the audience’ (Gagich & Zickel, 2018). Rhetoric analysis is typically more concerned with literary texts, however, the fact that rhetoric analysis looks at the word choices and how they suit the authors agenda (Gagich & Zickel, 2018) make it an interesting and viable tool in non-fiction work, such as news media.

Previous rhetorical analysis of news media has highlighted the presence and importance of rhetorical devices within the text, including ‘persuasion’, ‘emphasis’ and the ‘arrangement of text’ (Madon et al., 2021). In their research on portrayals of working from home in the news, Madon et al (2021) used such rhetoric devices to conclude their research, thus highlighting the usefulness of rhetoric analysis.

There are limitations to rhetoric analysis in that it is often down to personal interpretation of rhetoric devices and thus does not provide a concrete conclusion. However, through rhetoric analysis of multiple texts, we can see trends that can’t be denied, making it a viable tool for this dissertation. Furthermore, Madon et al., (2021) argue that ‘using rhetoric elements as an analytical tool implies the definition of the characteristics, rules and goals of a text in order to identify and analyse them in a text’ (Madon et al., 2021).

2.3 Conflict and News Framing

As framing plays a huge role in how news media is perceived by its audience, there has been numerous literatures published that investigates the issue, particularly in regard to framing within conflict. Framing theory has been used by Lichenstein et al. (2018) to establish how the Ukranian and Russian conflict is presented differently in Russia and Germany, highlighting a media bias and agenda for each country. Through framing theory, they concluded that ‘identified frames highlight similarities and differences between the countries’ perspectives on the crisis that help to explain conflicts on the international level between Russia and the West’ (Lichenstein et al., 2018), suggesting that there is indeed media bias within the portrayal of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and ultimate framing can help detect it. Meanwhile, Schwalbe and Dougherty (2015) use framing theory when analysing the coverage of the Lebanon war in 2006 and conclude through framing theory that ‘military conflict and human-interest frames dominated visual coverage’ (Schwalbe and Dougherty,
2015), again highlighting a bias of reporting style within the media. Thus, this provides grounds for further research to further establish if this is the case within all news media.

When using framing theory to analyse the reporting of conflict, particular research methods have been used. Lichenstein et al., (2018) use qualitative content analysis to conduct their study and findings. Here, Lichenstein et al., (2018) use this method of data collection to sample various media and apply them to the theory of framing. The article is detailed in its approach to analysis, looking at 10 different Russian and 10 different German shows in order to gain an accurate consensus, highlighting the importance of comparison within analysis of the news media. Similarly to Lichenstein et al., Schwalbe and Dougherty (2015) use content analysis to draw its conclusions.

With the current state of literature on news framing within conflict reporting, there are certain limitations of what has been published. Lichtenstein et al., (2018) solely focuses on talk show media, which provides limitations that this dissertation fills. Talk shows are not typically seen as reliable new sources, while news publications are consumed by people who are expecting to receive an unbiased and in-depth view of an incident or event, making these an important item to analyse. Furthermore, Schwalbe and Dougherty (2015) only look at US articles which, while provides a detailed examination on the state and bias of US media, does not look at the coverage outside of the US, providing a gap the dissertation will fill. Schwalbe and Dougherty (2015) also look at the state of news coverage 10 years on, which provides a vast array of resources to examine, including both news and additional research. In contrast, this dissertation looks at a conflict that is ongoing. This means the amount of research done on this topic is limited, creating a gap for this dissertation to fill. It also allows for a real-time assessment of how the news can affect society, which cannot be said for Schwalbe and Dougherty’s work. On the contrary, it does not allow for a lot of external resources and analysis on the subject matter to back up this study and does not allow to reflect on the events of the conflict in their entirety, as Schwalbe and Dougherty are able to do by looking at the event 10 years on.

2.4 News Coverage and Analysis of Conflict

As well as framing theory, there has been numerous literature that uses different theories, but still equally draws conclusions and analysis of portrayals of conflict within the media. Heywood (2014), when looking at Russian, French and UK TV news portrayals of the casualties of war found that all three media outlets used different methods to portray victims, with the UK using “personalised reporting from the correspondent”, and France avoiding the subject of “human suffering” entirely (Heywood 2014). While this analysis is different to the one conducted in this dissertation, Heywood’s findings provide grounds for
further research to uncover whether her conclusions are applicable to online news reporting as well.

Furthermore, Eddy and Fletcher (2022) conducted a study via surveys on perceptions of Ukraine across the world, in order to compare how media coverage is different in countries that are different societally, culturally and geographically. Through their survey, they found that less than half of Britons and Americans believed the media was adequately reporting on alternative views of the conflict (Eddy and Fletcher 2022). As a result, this dissertation establishes whether these views have merit.

Of course, with the current state of analysis of media coverage of conflict, there are still limitations. It could be argued that Heywood’s (2014) paper only looks at the Western world, all of which could have similar agendas and ideals, highlighting a gap in the paper. Thus, this dissertation looks at three regions in the same manner that Heywood does but will look at how the conflict is presented in the Middle East, as these will have different values and agendas, and thus this dissertation analyses how these are presented in their media coverage.

Furthermore, while Eddy and Fletcher (2022) conclude some interesting data, they don’t go into detail on theories for why this is, instead merely presenting the statistics that have been found through their study, without analysing how the publications present the view that they do not provide ‘alternative views’ (Eddy and Fletcher 2022) on the Ukraine crisis, highlighting a gap in their research. Thus, this dissertation analyses the rhetoric used by publications to further establish how this view has been achieved.
3. Methods

This dissertation aims to understand how the Russia-Ukraine conflict has been covered and portrayed in the mass media, to gauge how media outlets individually frame conflicts. The aim of this dissertation is to understand whether news outlets have been providing a full, objective depiction of the events.

It’s vital to understand this as news can drastically change and influence our views and opinions. With most people not visiting warzones, they rely on news to fully understand our world. As Entman found in his research, the ‘media make a significant contribution to what people think – to their political preferences and evaluations –precisely by affecting what they think about’ (Entman, 1989). While media has changed dramatically in the years since Entman’s work, we can still argue that the media heavily influences the public. Concepts such as misinformation or news framing can even lead to things such as mass ‘moral panic’, where the media creates an enemy (Frothingham 2021).

The Ukraine-Russia conflict has been chosen as the topic for this study for several reasons: it has dominated news platforms and the mass media, is (at the time this dissertation is being conducted) currently still ongoing on and has had a significant effect on the rest of the world. According to Cordesman, ‘the war has also evolved into a major political and economic conflict between the West and Russia’ (Cordesman, 2022). Furthermore, while the Ukraine-Russia conflict has dominated the news, studies have found that UK and US audiences believe the general media failed to provide alternate perspectives on the current conflict (Eddy and Fletcher, 2022), making it the perfect basis for conducting a dissertation that analyses the news coverage.

The dissertation looks at three articles from four news outlets: Al Jazeera, BBC, the New York Times and the Guardian. These have been chosen as they have similarities in their political stances, readership and reporting, language, meaning they may be read by a similar demographic. However, they all differ in their style of reporting and how they choose to publish news. The dissertation may draw upon other news publications to highlight its findings, but these four will make up most of the research. Tabloids have been omitted as, whilst these may have made for a stronger comparison, they often exaggerate news or focus on celebrity culture as opposed to news. The four news outlets that have been chosen all seem to have similar leanings politically, which would assume that news is portrayed in a similar format. The dissertation has omitted Russian or Ukranian press, as these likely have an obvious bias. The aim of the dissertation was to understand how publications that are similar in their stance can portray the conflict in diverse ways, and what this means.
For this dissertation, multi-stage sampling was used, which ‘is a process of moving from a broad to a narrow sample, using a step-by-step process’ (Taherdoost, 2016), by picking three events in the first 100 days around three weeks apart in occurrence. From this, judgmental sampling was then used, which sees items ‘selected deliberately to provide valuable information that cannot be obtained from other choices’ (Taherdoost, 2016). Simply, the event and news source were entered into a Google search, and the first item that produced the most relevance and closest publishing date to the date of the event was selected. As Taherdoost notes, judgmental sampling can lead to ‘generalisation’ and can often be subjective (2016). However, it allows for the most relevant articles for comparison to be selected for study and thus gives this dissertation more credibility.

Where possible, the same publication dates for each event have been chosen, or as close as possible, because news is published immediately as it happens, this will allow each news source the opportunity to publish the same news or updates related to the conflict and thus provide more of a fair comparison. It should be noted that Rahman states that ‘in terms of research method, smaller sample size raises the issue of generalizability to the whole population of the research’ (Rahman, 2016). A larger sample size of analysed articles per publication would increase the reliability of this dissertation, however, three articles per publication will provide enough of an insight and analysis to find themes.

This dissertation uses rhetorical analysis to conduct its findings. Rhetoric analysis will be used in this dissertation by analysing multiple online news articles from BBC, the New York Times, the Guardian, and Al Jazeera. Each sample has been analysed in terms of its rhetoric and what frame this creates. Rhetoric analysis has been used as it will allow an understanding of how online news can use language to frame a certain subject and influence its audience to feel a certain way. Rhetorical analysis will be used whilst also analysing what information has been omitted and how stories have been framed.

This dissertation uses qualitative research to collect its data, which will be done through examining multiple news articles. In the case of this dissertation, primary qualitative research has been used, which is concerned with revolves around ‘naturally occurring repository of information’, including media content and articles (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). Comparatively, secondary qualitative research is more concerned with interviews and focus groups, (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015) which is not viable in for this dissertation.

Qualitative research has been chosen as, as Rahman states, quantitative research ‘fails to ascertain deeper underlying meanings and explanations’ (Rahman, 2016). The aim of this dissertation is to understand why the news has been framed in a certain way. As a result, the findings of this research may be less conclusive than that of a quantitative study but will provide more context and understanding of how the media is framed.
Qualitative research has been defined by as research that is ‘interested in analysing subjective meaning or the social production of issues, events, or practices by collecting non-standardised data and analysing texts and images rather than number and statistics’ (Rahman, 2016). However, it is important to note that qualitative data yields subjective results according to this definition, which may make the results of this study open to some interpretation. To counter this, this dissertation will use relevant theories to back up its arguments and ideas.

However, to further back up the dissertation, it may have been beneficial to use qualitative data by surveying how the news articles changed readers opinion or swayed their opinions or views on certain matters within the Russian/Ukranian conflict. However, this would have been most useful if readers were asked their opinions before learning any other facts of the news piece, and they had been sampled as soon as the news first came to be, to not taint their views through external factors. Furthermore, quantitative data would not have been deemed as credible for this dissertation, as it relies on the opinions of news articles, rather than the news articles themselves. For this dissertation, analysing various sources through quantitative research will allow for a deeper understanding and comparison of how the Russian-Ukranian conflict has been presented in different news publications.
4. Findings and Analysis

4.1 Coverage of the Initial Russian Invasion of Ukraine, 24th February 2022

When Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24th 2022, it dominated news headlines across the world. BBC News, The Guardian, The New York Times all published varying news articles on the invasion which framed the conflict in varying ways. Al Jazeera ‘prides itself on being the voice of the Middle East, the southern hemisphere, and the most impoverished regions on earth (Zingarelli, 2010). As a result, Al Jazeera uses language that creates sympathy of Ukraine and the victims of the conflict. The article opening with the following paragraph:

*Russia has launched an all-out invasion of Ukraine by land, air and sea, the biggest attack by one state against another in Europe since World War II and confirmation of the worst fears of the West.*

*The attacks began on Thursday after Russian President Vladimir Putin said in a televised address that he had approved a “special military operation”. The move came after Moscow earlier recognised rebel-held territories in Luhansk and Donetsk and said they had asked for its “help’. ‘* (Al Jazeera, 2022)

Despite Al Jazeera being a Middle Eastern publication, this article suggests a frame that the Ukraine-Russia conflict is more of an atrocity than other prominent conflicts, describing it as the ‘biggest attack’ and relating it directly back to the West through relation to WW2. However, through the Al Jazeera effect, it’s widely discussed that Al Jazeera favours non-western groups as opposed to western (Seib, 2008), and there is underlying language in Al Jazeera’s report that present this. The use of ‘worst fears of the West’ strengthens the divide between non-Western and western audiences, and distances non-western audiences from the conflict.

While the WW2 reference relates heavily to a western audience, to a non-western audience it has the potential to highlight the vulnerability of the non-west during this time, and the invasion of the west onto the Middle East during WW2. Bearing in mind Al Jazeera’s own agenda as well as the choice of language, Al Jazeera is using the Russia-Ukraine conflict to create a frame that highlights the atrocities of the west and makes the non-west look more favourable, creating a further divide between west and non-west.

Furthermore, throughout the outbreak of the Ukraine-Russia crisis, Al Jazeera has put prominent focus on the conflict over any other wars. Despite Al Jazeera being a Middle Eastern publication, it has put significant focus on Ukraine-Russia over crisis in Syria and Iraq, despite being geographically and culturally similar. While this may appear as
favouritism towards Western conflict, through the Al Jazeera effect it could be argued that Al Jazeera is doing so to emphasise how bad the west is in general.

BBC News’ coverage of the invasion aims to place sympathy on the Ukrainian refugees, as can be seen with its opening paragraph:

‘Ukraine’s neighbours are preparing for an influx of refugees fleeing Russia’s invasion of the country.

As Russian air strikes hit overnight, many packed up and left Kyiv for the countryside or the border with the European Union.

Traffic jams clogged the roads out of some cities, and some walked on foot into Poland and Hungary.

The UN refugee chief warned that the humanitarian impact will be “devastating”.

"We are particularly worried about displacement - about people on the move," Filippo Grandi told the BBC's Lyse Doucet, who is in Kyiv.’ (BBC, 2022)

Through framing, it creates a narrative of ‘human interest’ (Entman, 1991) using phrases such as ‘fleeing’, ‘refuge’, ‘wounded’ ‘evacuate’ and ‘humanitarian’, to create sympathy for the Ukrainian refugees and place them of high importance. Furthermore, the choice of language used by the BBC in this article likens the conflict to that of WW2, using imagery often associated with the war such as ‘air strikes’ and noting a move to the ‘countryside’, which again reiterates Entman’s framework of ‘human interest’. By relating the conflict to WW2, the reader can relate to the story, which is backed up by McKane who notes that readers are more receptive to news when it has ‘relevance to their own lives’ (McKane, 2014).

Additionally, the BBC has previously framed issues of refugees in a less positive manner, likening them to illegal immigrants, as can be seen in a news piece in 2015; ‘The number of migrants reaching Europe illegally rises dramatically. More than 40,000 have made the journey so far this year, often using people smugglers.’ (Berry et al., 2015). Here, it is evident that some form of Western bias is apparent within the BBC. Furthermore, there have been reports that the Ukraine-Russia conflict highlighted Western bias. As Raydan reports, Ukrainian journalist Anastasia Lapatina said, ‘I am utterly appalled at some individuals who dare to call themselves reporters referring to refugees from the Middle East as ‘uncivilised’ as opposed to Ukrainians who are fleeing’ (Raydan, 2022). Additionally, in this article, the BBC uses language that will enable the reader to relate to the victims and doesn’t portray them negatively. One source included states: ‘We are particularly worried about displacement - about people on the move (BBC, 2022).’ The choice of language of ‘displacement’ and ‘people on the move’ is neutral and non-violent compared to the
language choice of the BBC of non-western refugees. Furthermore, they are referred to as ‘refugees’ instead of illegal migrants, as the BBC news piece from 2015 refers to non-western refugees (Berry et al., 2015). The language choice here is not dissimilar to the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As Smith & Higgins state, ‘certain linguistic choices of words or phrases or grammatical structure can reveal points of view’ (Smith & Higgins, 2013). They point out that news reporting of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was ‘articulated as Israel invading Ghana’, which affected mass opinion (Smith & Higgins, 2013). Therefore, it can be argued that the BBC is framing Ukrainian victims of the conflict as more important than the sufferers of non-western conflicts.

Compared to the BBC and Al Jazeera, the Guardian has shown more neutrality over how it frames the conflict and has previously shown sympathy for both western and non-western conflicts. In an article from 2011, it used the term ‘refugees’ and used powerful descriptive language to describe the situation in Syria, (Ho, 2011). Furthermore, while the Ukraine-Russia war is still dominating headlines, The Guardian is still ensuring to give the non-west exposure and uses similar framing techniques. In an article from 2022, The Guardian likened the conflict to that of Russia, saying: ‘Before Ukraine there was Syria, a war so vicious and consuming that it was once considered to be the most consequential conflict of the last 50 years’ (Chulov, 2022). Here, the use of terms such as ‘vicious’ and ‘consequential conflict’ highlight the importance of the conflict and reduce the divide between western and non-western conflicts.

Thus, it appears that the framing of the Ukraine-Russia conflict is not being used benefit the west or non-west in particular. While this may put The Guardian in an initial position of neutrality, it is argued that framing is always present within the media. Brüggemann (2014) makes the point that news frames will always exist, no matter how seemingly neutral a news item is, or unbiased a publication is, though this will not always be larger, overpowering frames. He argues that ‘it is impossible that human beings make sense of the world without drawing on the structures that are cognitively available and accessible to them for interpreting a certain phenomenon’ (Brüggemann, 2014). Brüggemann (2014) makes the suggestion that, if a journalist agrees with a certain event or view and doesn’t investigate all sides, they are an actor in framing a narrative.

The Guardian’s initial news report started with the following introduction:

‘After weeks of threats and failed attempts at diplomacy, Vladimir Putin launched a broad Russian military offensive targeting Ukraine at around 5am Ukrainian time today. World leaders warn this invasion could spark the largest war in Europe since 1945.'
Though Putin said that Russia did not intend to occupy Ukraine, he added a chilling warning to other nations in his address: “To anyone who would consider interfering from the outside: if you do, you will face consequences greater than any you have faced in history. All relevant decisions have been taken. I hope you hear me,” he said’ (Ho, 2022).

The use of language frames the article as siding with Ukraine: ‘chilling’, ‘failed’, ‘threats’ creates a negative image of Russia and instils fear in the reader. Additionally, the use of Putin’s quote invokes fear in not only those in Ukraine, but in the rest of the world. While the Guardian is merely reporting the direct quote from Putin, it’s important to analyse the inclusion of this quote over other items. The Guardian has chosen to include this quote but has failed to detail any background information into why Russia invaded, and thus, by solely reading that article, the reader would not be aware of the circumstances surrounding Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Newman & Tiegreen (2008) refer to this as ‘episodic framing’, whereby news is presented as a single entity without the surrounding context. As a result, episodic framing can lead to the misinterpretation of events, due to the audience not having all the necessary background information.

In the article, the Guardian uses a rhetoric device of likening the invasion to second world war. In doing so, the Guardian is using framing to explain the gravity of the situation. Fairhurst notes that metaphors and comparison are a tool used within framing to create a narrative (Fairhurst, 2005). As Ardevol-Abreu notes; ‘Entman also acknowledges that a little phrase at the end of a text can determine the interpretation of a message with more intensity than all of the other resources used to explain the issue or problem.’ (Ardèvol-Abreu, 2015) Here, the Guardian is using a well-known reference to relate to its audiences in order to create a particular narrative that emphasises the extremity of the crisis and frames it to relate to a global audience. A matter which is vital considering data shows that ‘78% of the Guardian’s online readers are from outside Britain’ (Haider, 2017). Furthermore, McKane notes that publics are more receptive to journalism if it holds some ‘relevance to their own lives’ (McKane, 2014). By using the comparison to WW2, the Guardian (as well as the BBC, who also utilised the metaphor) the Guardian is making a comparison to a well-known, horrific event in history, and thus instilling fear of Russia into the audience.

As a result, this article suggests the Guardian is using episodic framing, as well as rhetoric devices that negatively portray Russia so create the frame that Russia/Putin is the villain and Ukraine is the victim.

While the Guardian’s article engages in episodic framing and frame setting, the New York Times’ approach to the initial invasion is much more neutral, but still, as Brüggemann (2014) notes, neutral framing does not exist within the media. Further, Smith & Higgins (2013)
claim that journalism is never entirely neutral, as the language always contains ‘layers of meaning’ that ultimately dictate the narrative and audience’s perception. The article begins with the following paragraph:

‘After months of troop and tank buildups, of grim warnings of violence and vague assurances of peace, and of efforts at diplomacy in Washington, the halls of the United Nations and the capitals of Europe, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine began early Thursday morning, with shelling and rocket attacks on several major cities including the capital, Kyiv, and dozens of deaths’ (Ramzy, 2022).

Similarly to the Guardian, rhetoric analysis shows that the New York Times is engaging in frame setting. The language chosen evokes a dark, violent and fearful image of Russia, with phrases such as ‘grim warnings’, ‘violence, ‘dozens of deaths’ (Ramzy, 2022). In turn, this creates fear, creates a deeper divide between Russia and the rest of the world, and ultimately frames Russia/Putin as villains.

The New York Times, comparatively to the Guardian, is concerned with ‘thematic framing’ which presents the context and history behind an event (Newman & Tiegreen, 2008). Throughout the article, the New York Times provides an explanation and background as to why Russia invaded Ukraine and how the situation came to be. However, it still engages in frame setting, by focussing on certain items over others through rhetoric devices. The article goes on to quote Ukraine’s ambassador to the United States, who said that ‘40 Ukrainian soldiers were killed’ as well as ‘dozens of civilians’ (Ramzy, 2022). The use of this source is an example of frame setting, as it’s consistent with the frame the New York Times wants to portray – that Russia/Putin is the villain. As, frame setting implies that journalists mostly frame their coverage in line with their personal interpretations of what is at issue. Through frame setting, journalists will often not talk to sources that will provide an ‘alternative view’ to their own (Brüggemann, 2014). The New York Times is likely aware that the Ukraine ambassador to the US will have a biased view on the situation, but still chooses to include it, showing that the New York Times is reiterating the frame that Russia/Putin is the villain.

Further, while the New York Times is depicting Russia as the villain and Ukraine as the victim, it uses certain rhetoric devices that positively frames the US and puts it above other nations in dealing with the conflict. When discussing opposition to the conflict, the New York Times states that ‘Ukraine, the United States and others have condemned Russia’s aggression and dismissed Mr. Putin’s justifications’ (Ramzy, 2022). The use of ‘others’ allows the US to be at the centre, and seemingly an important player in quashing the conflict. Another example of this is through the statement that ‘Both America and Europe promised far tougher measures if Russia went as far as a full invasion of Ukraine’ (Ramzy, 2022). Through referring to America, the country, and Europe, the continent, the US giving itself greater importance by not naming specific countries. Furthermore, the New York Times
utilises three direct quotes from the US within its article, and only one from Ukraine, again framing the US as more important and powerful, which could even be a tactic to scare Russia or instil faith into its audience and avoid mass hysteria. Ultimately, in the initial article, the New York Times is creating a frame that both villainises Russia, victimises Ukraine, and gives the US more importance and power.

4.2 Coverage of Mariupol Theatre Bombing, 17 March 2022

On the 16th March, 2022, Russia bombed the Mariupol theatre in Mariupol, Ukraine. Naturally, this appeared in widespread news as the conflict continued. The initial analysis of the first event and article found that the BBC is framing Ukrainian victims of the conflict as more important than the sufferers of non-western conflicts. The next article follows the similar frame and relates victims as much as possible to a western audience in order to generate sympathy.

In a randomly selected article on a bombing in Syria in 2019, the BBC creates the frame that the west is of more importance than the non-west, leading with the item that ‘two British soldiers were injured’ (BBC, 2019). In the article, the BBC uses episodic framing by failing to divulge any external context to the situation and uses frame setting by failing to provide any non-western sources or insight onto Syrian’s who may have also been injured by the bombing, ultimately implying importance of the west over the non-west. Furthermore, Berry et al., notes how the BBC consistently referred to Afghan refugees as ‘illegal immigrants’ (2015).

Through analysing this older article, we are allowed a greater understanding of if the BBC does indeed prioritize the west over the non-west, and how this is presented in the framing of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The BBC’s article on the Mariupol bombing, comparatively, creates greater sympathy for the victims of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, describing the victims as ‘civilians’ (BBC, 2022 a) which creates a stronger connection between the audience and the Ukrainian victims. Furthermore, the BBC uses the rhetoric device of a personal story, in order to gauge an emotional response from the reader and create deeper sympathy with the following quote:

‘For 10 days, that basement was a refuge for Kate, a 38-year-old Mariupol native, and her son, who is 17. Their own home, like many others in the besieged city, had been destroyed by Russian attacks, and they thought the Donetsk Regional Theatre of Drama was a place where they would be relatively safe’ (BBC, 2022 a).

The rhetoric choice to detail the story of a mother with a typically ‘western’ name allows the reader to build a stronger connection with the victim of the conflict. This idea is continued with the following passage:
'Mother and son squeezed in the building's dark rooms, corridors and halls with dozens of other families. Some women, Kate said, carried babies that were just four or five months old' (BBC, 2022 a).

While this passage is not overtly descriptive, the rhetorical use of some description adds to the frame that western victims are seen as of high importance, with the use of ‘dark’, ‘squeezed’ and ‘dozens’ evoking a powerful, scary image that generates sympathy from the reader. Furthermore, the use of a personalised story provides an ‘emotional angle’ and can make the crisis seem more ‘serious, urgent or dangerous’ (Cho et al., 2006). Cho et al. conclude that such human-interest angles influence emotional response in the consumer (Cho et al., 2006). As McKane notes (2014), descriptive language and the overuse of adjectives and adverbs can lead to differing interpretations and is often not used within news journalism. Thus, the choice to incorporate it into this passage is used to highlight how dire the situation is and evoke greater sympathy.

Furthermore, this particular article shows rhetoric devices being used to villainise Russia as much as possible. Adjectives such as ‘relentless’ highlight that Russia is attacking in an extreme manner. This is further backed up by the phrase that Russia ‘has attacked the city almost non-stop since it invaded Ukraine’ (BBC, 2022 a). Despite using the phrase ‘non-stop’, the article provides no evidence to back up this comment. As we, from reading this singular article, do not know whether this is indeed true, we can label this as hyperbole which acts to emphasise the extremity of the situation in Ukraine, create further sympathy for Ukraine, and ultimately villainising Russia. The BBC’s lack of additional context puts it within episodic framing, as it focuses on the single event and little background information, as a result, the facts of the event can be misinterpreted by the audience (Newman & Tiegreen, 2008). Furthermore, the BBC refers to Russia as a singular entity, as opposed to the addition of army or troops: ‘90% of the city’s buildings have either been damaged or destroyed by Russia’ (BBC, 2022 a). This creates a frame that villainises Russia as a whole, as opposed to merely those partaking in the war.

As discussed, the BBC and the Guardian have both overtly villainised Russia/Putin and sympathised with Ukraine. However, while the BBC used rhetoric devices, such as hyperbole and overt descriptions to amplify the effects of the conflict, the Guardian doesn’t utilise heavily descriptive sentences. Instead, The Guardian’s framing of the conflict lies heavily in its choice of quotes and sources.

Similarly to the BBC, the Guardian chooses to use first-hand quotes from victims, putting emphasis on the fact that one is a ‘PE school teacher’ (Tondo & Henley, 2022), which makes the victim more humanised and relatable to the audience. As McKane (2014) notes, the use of ‘ordinary people’ within news journalism often make the story more relevant to the audience and can even aid in establishing who the target audience of a publication is
(McKane, 2014). Here, the Guardian is describing a lower-middle class professional. Thus, the choice to emphasise on this highlights that the Guardian is framing the Russia-Ukraine conflict to relate to similar people, creating greater sympathy for the Ukraine victims.

As the article continues, the use of language that denotes violent imagery becomes more prominent. In the sentence ‘the city has never known such nightmarish, colossal losses and destruction’ (Tondo & Henley, 2022), the use of ‘nightmarish’, ‘colossal’ and ‘destruction’ in one short sentence emphasise the level of the violence, thus creating more sympathy for Ukraine and instilling fear into the audience. As Mckane (2014) notes, overtly descriptive language within news journalism is not common, as journalists need to relay the information as briefly as possible. Thus, when it is used, it has a clear purpose and agenda. In this case, it’s to widen the divide between Russia and the rest of the world, creating sympathy for Ukraine and hostility toward Russia.

Throughout the Guardian’s article, it uses quotes from both Russian and Ukraine figures, suggesting a degree of neutrality and objectivity. However, as Brüggemann (2014) argues, there is no such thing as a neutral frame. In this case, the Guardian has used a quote from a Russian foreign ministry spokesperson, which provides an alternative view that the Russia did not conduct the bombing, however this singular quote is almost lost between numerous quotes from Ukrainians, which ultimately implies preposterousness of the statement, thus creating further sympathy for Ukraine, while appearing seemingly impartial.

In the previous article, the New York Times engaged in thematic framing whilst also creating a frame that emphasised the plight of Ukrainian victims, villainising Russia and positively portraying the US. When reporting on the Mariupol bombing, the New York Times uses a present-tense account of the aftermath of an on-the-scene reporter. It should be noted that this article was originally published in the Associated Press, but the fact that it has been used by The New York Times makes it applicable to this analysis. The article leads with the following introduction:

‘The bodies of the children all lie here, dumped into this narrow trench hastily dug into the frozen earth of Mariupol to the constant drumbeat of shelling. There’s 18-month-old Kirill, whose shrapnel wound to the head proved too much for his little toddler’s body.

There’s 16-year-old Iliya, whose legs were blown up in an explosion during a soccer game at a school field. There’s the girl no older than 6 who wore the pajamas with cartoon unicorns...’ (Leonhardt, 2022)

The use of present tense creates a sense of urgency, reiterating the point that these events are happening in real time. As Eekhof et al., (2018) discuss, the use of present tense ‘marks the immediacy of what is described, bringing the events closer to the reader’. As a result,
the New York Times’ use of the present tense supports the frame that it is trying to increase sympathy for Ukrainian victims as much as possible.

Similarly to the Guardian and the BBC, the New York Times uses detailed accounts of victims to emphasise its frame. The seemingly minute detail of the ‘pajamas with cartoon unicorns’ works to enhance sympathy for the victims. If the journalist had chosen to omit this detail, it wouldn’t have any effect on the telling of the news. However, as Smith & Higgins (2013) note, the language of journalists always contains ‘layers of meaning’ that ultimately dictate the narrative and audience’s perception. As Hennessy notes, the use of description within journalism has the ‘ability to transport the reader and fill their mind with imagery’ (Hennessy, 2013). In this case, the detailed description of the child has been used to further create sympathy from the audience by providing them means to picture the situation as clearly as possible. The detail of the ‘cartoon unicorns’ emphasises the fact that the victim is a young child and ultimately, creates a vivid image that puts the reader in the centre of the conflict. As a result, the New York Times is creating a frame enhances the violence of the conflict and causes the audience to be sympathetic for Ukraine.

Furthermore, the initial article put the US within the narrative of the conflict, yet this article forgoes any mention of the US, which goes against the frame of the previous article that the New York Times is using the conflict to enhance the power of the US.

Comparitively, Al Jazeera’s coverage lead with the following:

‘Rescuers are continuing work to extract survivors from a three-story theatre in the besieged city of Mariupol, following what Ukrainian officials say was a Russian air raid.

“The building withstood the impact of a high-powered air bomb and protected the lives of people hiding in the bomb shelter,” Ukraine’s ombudswoman Ludmyla Denisova said...’ (Al Jazeera, 2022 a)

In its opening paragraph, Al Jazeera plainly states facts and avoids descriptive and graphic language like the BBC, the Guardian and the New York Times, despite all being published on the same day. Al Jazeera does not attempt to put on more sympathy on the victims than it sees necessary, which could potentially be because it’s a Middle Eastern news outlet, and thus its priorities lie elsewhere. In support of this, the Al Jazeera effect is a phenomenon that involves media outlets focussing the news on groups that are generally underrepresented in the news (Seib, 2008).

Seib (2008) recognises the importance of the news in framing the middle east, and quotes Al Jazeera former managing director Ali who stated, ‘democracy is coming to the middle east because of the communication revolution’ (Seib, 2008). Seib (2008) also discusses how a ‘fatigue’ has developed of Western news and Al Jazeera has been critiqued for favouring
non-western and Middle Eastern news. Satybayeva (2020) in their own study notes that Al Jazeera contained bias over Middle Eastern victims, and demonized Americans. As a result, Al Jazeera is framing the conflict to appear less bad (or equal to) non-western conflicts by using more positive language, such as ‘rescuers’, ‘survivors’, ‘protected the lives’, ‘people are coming out alive’ (Al Jazeera, 2022 a).

4.3 Coverage of the Bucha Massacre, April 1 2022

On April 1, 2022, footage was revealed of a massacre in the town of Bucha, which caused mass uproar across the media. The BBC reported on the incident on April 2. Previous research of the BBC’s coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict showed that it framed the conflict in a way that demonised Russia as a whole and created increased sympathy for Ukraine, all while suggesting importance of the West over the non-west.

The article starts with the following sentence: ‘journalists entering a Ukrainian town which saw fierce fighting with Russian forces have found dead bodies of men in civilian clothes strewn on a street’ (BBC, 2022 b). The mention of ‘civilian clothes’ further promotes the narrative that the BBC is framing the west as more important than non-west in the conflict, as not only does it allow the reader to relate to the victims more, being a ‘civilian’ themselves, but it is also a direct juxtaposition of how the BBC referred to Middle Eastern victims of conflict as ‘uncivilised’ (Raydan, 2022).

The BBC includes a quote made by Putin which attempted to justify the take, as he deemed Ukraine a ‘constant threat and Russia could not feel "safe, develop and exist"’ (BBC, 2022 b). However, the journalist makes the decision to follow this quote with a vivid description of the aftermath of the attack, saying ‘in Bucha, where a photographer for Reuters news agency also recorded dead bodies, holes gaped from apartment blocks hit by shelling and crushed cars littered the streets’ (BBC, 2022 b). The incorporation of Putin’s rationale may seem like the BBC is giving equal agency to both sides, however the order of the phrases plays a big part in meaning. Here, the BBC is directly juxtaposing Putin’s argument with what it deems as proof (through having a photographer capture the incident) of Ukraine’s knowledge of the incident. In doing so, the BBC creates a greater contrast between Putin’s view of events and Ukraine’s, ultimately making Putin’s statement appear untrustworthy and unreliable, particularly as Putin’s quote is woven into a narrative that emphasises the horror of the situation in Ukraine.

Furthermore, this article fails to provide any backstory or context to the event, and so is another example of ‘episodic framing’ (Newman & Tiegreen, 2008)) which, as previously discussed, encourages the reader to look at the event as one single entity, which is therefore emphasised. Ultimately, this article reiterates the fact that the BBC is negatively portraying Russia and encouraging extreme sympathy for Ukraine.
Comparatively, the Guardian’s coverage of the Bucha massacre, which was published on April 3, 2022, is much more extreme through its rhetoric devices in gaining sympathy for Ukraine. The article begins by referring to the victims of the Bucha massacre as ‘unarmed’ victims (The Guardian, 2022), which creates an image of peace and neutrality of Ukrainians, thus highlighting the aggression of the Russian army. The journalist of the piece then goes on to describe the massacre as ‘terrible war crimes’ (The Guardian, 2022) which again highlights the gravity of the situation whilst vilifying Russia. The article then uses a simile from one of its sources which highlights the depravity of the situation: “squashed by tanks ... like animal skin rugs” (The Guardian, 2022). While this language is not directly from the Guardian journalist, its choice to be included over other quotes has been a conscious one. Here, the comparison to ‘animal skin rugs’ shows how Ukraine is being dehumanised and thus evokes greater sympathy for Ukraine over Russia, and implies that Russia dominant.

Similarly to the BBC article, the Guardian’s coverage of events attempts to show Putin’s side of the events, showing seemingly neutral framing of the event. However, The Guardian shuts down this reasoning by weaving the phrase ‘without proof’ into the sentence:

‘Russia has repeatedly claimed, without proof, that Ukraine has staged such atrocities’ (The Guardian, 2022).

The use of ‘claimed’ within this passage implies that Russia has no proof for its argument, however the Guardian journalist has chosen to add this into the narrative regardless. As a result, it creates a frame that depicts Russia as untrustworthy and unreliable, creating more sympathy for Ukraine. This is further backed up by the fact that the article mainly engages in episodic framing, by only focussing on the particular issue at hand and providing no external context.

Previous articles of the New York Times have created the frame that villainises Russia and victimises Ukraine, with one particular article framing the US as powerful. However, in its coverage of the Bucha massacre on April 3, the New York Times again omits the US from the narrative suggesting that the frame of US power is not one of dominance in the New York Times coverage of the Russia-Ukraine conflict (Browne et al., 2022).

Similarly to its previous reporting, however, the New York Times uses violent, descriptive language to illustrate its point, such as ‘The Times discovered the body of a man with a gunshot wound to his head lying beside a bicycle’ (Browne et al., 2022). As Smith & Higgins (2013) denote, the use of overt description has can affect meaning, and can even put the reader into the situation on a more personal level by allowing them to imagine the situation.
in a clearer way. In this extract, the New York Times has used the addition of ‘lying beside a bicycle’ to create an image of an average person, not dissimilar to that of the New York Time’s audience who has suffered a violent fate. This is again used in the article with ‘six dead men lying together in the rear of an office building’ (Browne et al., 2022) which again normalises the victims and allows the audience to visualise and personally relate to them on a deeper level. As a result, the reader can connect to the victim, thus creating more sympathy for Ukraine.

Again, in this article, the journalist uses episodic framing by only focussing on the Bucha massacre, and not the context surrounding it, which works to emphasise the horror of the event. The New York Times also uses frame sending to further its frame that negatively portrays Russia and promotes sympathy for Ukraine. Similarly, to the previous articles on the Bucha massacre, The New York Times includes Putin’s side of the incident, but unlike the Guardian and the BBC, it directly shuts it down:

‘Russia claimed that the images were “another hoax” and called for an emergency U.N. Security Council meeting on what it called “provocations of Ukrainian radicals” in Bucha.

But a review of videos and satellite imagery by The Times shows that many of the civilians were killed more than three weeks ago, when Russia’s military was in control of the town’ (Browne et al., 2022).

Here, the New York Times is using evidence to discredit the Russian argument. The choice to include the Russian perspective when it is immediately disregarded and thus has no substance works to frame Russia as untrustworthy and unreliable, ultimately demonizing Russia and creating more sympathy for Ukraine.

Comparatively, previous rhetoric analysis of articles by Al Jazeera on the Russia-Ukraine conflict demonstrated the frame that Al Jazeera was favouring non-western conflicts, but similarly to the other publications, was also highlighting Ukraine as victims and Russia as villains. On April 2, it published an article on the Bucha massacre, which creates a similar frame (Al Jazeera, 2022 b).

While the New York Times, BBC and The Guardian all use heavy, personable and sometimes graphic language and descriptions to allow the reader to interpret the event, Al Jazeera’s choice of language appears to be much more neutral and diluted. Where the Guardian referred to the victims as ‘unarmed civilians’ (The Guardian, 2022), Al Jazeera refers to them simply as ‘civilians’, using no additional adjectives to create more sympathy for the victims. Additionally, while the BBC discusses that Bucha ‘had buried 280 people in mass graves as a result of the Russian invasion’ (BBC, 2022 b), Al Jazeera uses more dehumanising language, such as ‘corpses’, ‘bodies’ and ‘dead people’ (Al Jazeera, 2022 b). While Al Jazeera
is still presenting a frame that marks Russia as villains and Ukraine as victims, it does not, through language and rhetoric devices, aim to emphasise the plight of Ukrainians as much as the other publications. This can largely be put down to the fact that it is the only non-western news publication out of the four. This argument is backed up by the Al Jazeera effect (Seib, 2008) which argues that publications such as Al Jazeera will always frame a narrative that is more favourable and relatable to non-western audiences.

While this is the case, Al Jazeera still uses rhetoric devices to villainise Russia. While it may not be as detailed as the BBC, the Guardian and the New York Times’ coverage of victims, Al Jazeera still uses shock value to demonstrate the extremity of the events by focussing child victims of the massacre (Al Jazeera, 2022 b), as well as using terms such as ‘deliberate killing of civilians’ (Al Jazeera, 2022 b) to invoke fear.

Furthermore, the article includes various excerpts from Ukrainian victims, with no quotes from Russia, unlike the rest of the articles in this dissertation. In doing so, Al Jazeera is putting all the focus on Ukraine and the victims, ultimately creating an episodic frame that, while acts as a mode of emphasising the fact that Ukraine as victims, highlights a potential bias and can discredit the reporting. Arguably, however, by not including quotes from Russia, Al Jazeera has nothing to compare the quotes from Ukrainians against which, as has been seen in other articles, creates a juxtaposition and has been used to frame Russia as unreliable and untrustworthy. Ultimately, however, Al Jazeera through its coverage of the Bucha massacre has still created sympathy for Ukraine and villainise Russia but framing the non-west as more important than the west.
Conclusion and Discussion

Through rhetorical analysis and framing theory, this dissertation aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. *How do the news publications of this study frame the Ukraine-Russia conflict to its audience?*
2. *Why do the chosen publications frame the conflict in this way?*
3. *Is there any bias within the framing of the conflict in the chosen publications?*
4. *How do the publications differ in their approach to framing the conflict?*

It used rhetorical analysis to examine the language used and the reasoning behind this, ultimately aiming to establish how the different media present the conflict to its audience.

This dissertation found that all of the publications in this study showed evidence of bias in favour of Ukraine, which was not a particularly surprising conclusion. The results of this dissertation found that the publications used the villainization of Russia to highlight the plight of Ukraine, creating sympathy for Ukraine whilst also invoking fear into the audiences. However, it also found that the New York Times was the least bias, engaging often in both episodic and thematic framing, whilst the other publications only engaged in episodic framing. Compared to thematic framing, episodic framing can often misinterpret the facts, and as a result present a different narrative to the audience (Newman & Tiegreen, 2008).

Furthermore, the New York Times and Guardian commonly used multiple journalists to write its articles, with the others commonly using one journalist. The use of multiple authors allows multiple perspectives and viewpoints, which tones down its bias, however, we must also consider the fact that these journalists may have similar views and agendas as are writing for the same publication.

In addition, this dissertation found frames that highlighted a divide between the west and non-west within the BBC and Al Jazeera. The BBC used language that emphasised the plight of Ukrainian victims, whilst previous articles have shown the BBC to negatively portray victims of non-western conflicts. Furthermore, this has been backed up by a report which emphasised the fact that the BBC saw western victims as more important. The report showed that, in a TV news report by the BBC, the following language was used: “It’s very emotional for me because I see European people with blonde hair and blue eyes being killed every day with Putin’s missiles and his helicopters and his rockets,” Sakvarelidze said. The BBC presenter responded: “I understand and of course respect the emotion” (Al Jazeera, 2022 c), thus signifying a bias for typically western features, and ultimately people. Meanwhile, Al Jazeera which, in line with the Al Jazeera effect (Seib, 2008) which denotes
the fact that Al Jazeera favours non-western countries and those that are minorities, used language and rhetoric that promoted the frame that non-western countries are important than western countries.

There are numerous reasons that the conflict has been presented to frame Russia as extremely villainous, and Ukraine as non-violent victims. Journalists have an obligation to be objective and non-bias in their reporting. As Smith & Higgins notes, journalistic codes ‘demand impartiality and fairness’ (Smith & Higgins, 2013), which is why it would appear, without analysis of rhetoric or news framing, that in these articles tend to show both sides of the story equally.

However, Smith & Higgins also argue that newsworthiness plays a factor in news reporting. Conflict is deemed more newsworthy as it creates ‘binary oppositions, such as ‘us and them’, West and East’ (Smith & Higgins, 2013). With this idea, we can assume that journalists use this as a way to frame news, heightening the conflict and increasing the divide between groups. By using rhetoric that villainises Russia and thus deepens the divide between Russia and the rest of the world, journalists are able to construct a more engaging narrative.

Furthermore, while the content of an article may show objectivity, Smith & Higgins notes that language and rhetoric contains ‘layers of meaning’ which can dictate the narrative and framing of an article. Thus, the implied objectivity of a news article is not always actual objectivity.

There are certain limitations within this dissertation that should be addressed. As the dissertation only analysed three articles from each publication, it can be argued that the dissertation did not analyse enough news items in order to draw a valid conclusion. One analysis of the New York Times found a frame of US power and influence, yet this frame was not found in the other two articles. To understand whether or not this frame exists, further analysis of additional articles would need to be conducted.

Furthermore, it would be useful to conduct a content analysis of articles written by the publications of this dissertation in order to further back up the argument that it has outlined. Further research should also look at publications on a wider global scale to fully gauge an understanding of how the conflict is being presented worldwide.

With the fact that (at the time of this paper being written), the Russia-Ukraine conflict is ongoing, there is plenty of scope for further research to be conducted. As more events and subsequent news stories occur, the divide between Russia and the rest of the world may grow even stronger in news coverage, making it an importance topic for continued research.
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