

Article

**Framing Russia-Ukraine War and Vladimir Putin's Image: A Content Analysis of *New York Times* Online Commentary Articles**

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**Abstract:** The news of Russia launching a full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 shocked the world. However, the media has different interpretations of this invasion. Ukrainian and Western media use the term “war,” whereas the Russian media call it a “special military operation”. Storylines or frames provided by mass media greatly influence public perception of the situation. Once a frame has become extensive in media discourse, it raises the public’s expectation of the political legitimization actions by discussing the possible consequences of the crisis. From that perspective, this study examines the framing of the Russia-Ukraine war and Russian President Vladimir Putin’s image in one renowned America-based media, *The New York Times Online*. A qualitative content analysis of commentary articles under the “Opinion” column was performed. Two hundred twenty-nine commentary articles were content analysed from 24 February 2022 to 24 December 2022. The qualitative content analysis enables the study to scrutinise the framed content of the war and the constructive and destructive character of Putin’s image portrayal. Agenda setting and framing theory were used as the theoretical framework. The analysis inductively generates thematic frames by systemising the content of the articles. The findings reveal that Russia was framed as an unprovoked invader who has unmercifully onslaught Ukraine while Ukraine strives to put up an inspiring defence of its sovereignty. The image of Vladimir Putin carries a destructive character where the portrayal is conspiratorial and seclusive.

**Keywords:** Ukraine-Russia war; Vladimir Putin’s image; media framing; agenda setting; content analysis

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## Introduction

On 24 February 2022, Russia launched an all-out invasion of Ukraine, which shocked the world. The war was rooted in the ongoing conflict between the two countries since 2014, after Russia annexed Crimea and the Ukrainian Revolution. The intense relationship between the two countries carried multifaceted historical and geopolitical perspectives. Over the decades, Russia has faced security threats from the West due to the ex-aligned Soviet Union states joining NATO. The invasion of Ukraine was said to have to do with Ukraine’s growing cooperation with the E.U. and its bid to join NATO (Eddy & Fletcher, 2022; Oleinik, 2022; Helleberg, 2021).

Ukrainians and the West have perceived Russia’s invasion as belligerence against Ukraine’s sovereignty. Still, Russia sees it as a “special military operation” seeking “demilitarisation” and “denazification” of Ukraine, as well as protecting Russia’s interest in the region. The war, which the West described as an “unprovoked brutal” and “humanitarian crisis”, left extensive political and economic effects. The international relations between Russia and the West have been worsening and intense, especially with the

European countries. Inflation was rising, and the West faced a great-scale economic crisis due to the economic sanctions and trade restrictions imposed on Russia. On top of that, the war caused thousands of deaths, a massive number of displacements, and the destruction of infrastructure which widely affected millions of people's life (Eddy & Fletcher, 2022; Lichtenstein et al., 2019; Telhami, 2022).

Media organisations from different countries presented different perspectives and opinions on the war, reflecting their ideological, political, and economic interest in the news coverage where interpretations were provided. Western media highlighted Russia's aggression and brutality side of the story. They were generally critical of the action taken by Russia. At times, the scales of the war were exaggerated to gain global support (Eddy & Fletcher, 2022; Fedor, 2015). On the other hand, Russian media painted the picture that military action is necessary to protect Russia's ethnic group in Eastern Ukraine. The media, especially social media, has been seen as an effective tool used by the Russian government to distribute fake information about the war to the world and downplay its scale (Law, 2022; Zakem, Saunders, Hashimova & Hammerberg, 2018).

The media portrayal of the Ukraine-Russia war was inseparable from Russia's strong leader, Vladimir Putin. Generally, the Ukrainian and the Western media called the war "Putin's war", where Putin was seen as a dictator who was not only initiated the war by aggression with a dream of expanding Russia's territory but also a political maniac who sought to strengthen his status quo in the country. On the other hand, the media in Russia portrayed Putin in a different light - a national defender who strives to protect his ethnic group in eastern Ukraine and to secure his country against Western brutality (Seliverstova, Levitskaya & Seliverstov, 2022; Liu, 2019). Therefore, how the media frame the image of Putin is worth studying. If the media frame the war as a civil war and Putin is merely a defender of his country's interests. In that case, the international public may empathise with Russia and ask for a more diplomatic solution to the conflict. On the opposite, if Putin is portrayed as an unprovoked invader who poses a threat to regional security, the international public may appeal for more decisive political actions against Russia's brutality (Seliverstova, Levitskaya & Seliverstov, 2022; Law, 2022; Telhami, 2022; Saifee Islam, 2022).

Therefore, probing into media framing of the War and Vladimir Putin's image is crucial to recognise how the Ukraine-Russia war is being presented, portrayed, and perceived in opinion-based commentaries. It helps to reveal the potential bias in the media text, which shapes public perception of the war and the political leader involved in it. How people perceived the causes, consequences, and possible solutions of the war and their perceptions towards the key leader engaged in it could then affect the public policy made by the authorities and the international bodies. This public policy includes military intervention.

In this study, the main objective is to determine the dominant frames, the frequency, and the intensity of the frames used by *The New York Times Online* in covering the Ukraine-Russia War. It also aims to ascertain the types of frames used, be constructive or destructive, in portraying Vladimir Putin's image in the Ukraine-Russia War. This study looks into *The New York Times*, an America-based media organisation renowned for its extensive coverage of international news, especially in the analysis of conflict news. Also, *The New York Times* was chosen as it is known to be critical to both governments involved in the Ukraine-Russia war, particularly to the Russian government, which has different ideological perspectives from the West (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2023). As the Ukraine-Russia war involves multifaced views and complex context, opinion-based commentaries, instead of news reporting, were taken as the sample of analysis to develop a nuanced understanding of this contextualised complex event and the critical political leader involved in the War - Vladimir Putin.

Guided by the principles that media do carefully constructing and presenting some particular pieces of information in a noticeable way in swaying audiences' understanding of an issue, this study poses the following research questions:

RQ1: How did *The New York Times* frame the Ukraine-Russia War?

RQ2: To what extent are constructive and destructive frames used in portraying Vladimir Putin's image in the Ukraine-Russia War?

## Review of Literature

The Ukraine-Russia war, known as the most significant after the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, has been closely followed by global audiences. In the wake of thousands of dead and millions of displacements, Russia was widely blamed by the international public as an aggressive invader who mercilessly violated human rights (Helleberg, 2021; Lichtenstein et al., 2019). With a long-term perception of Russia as a totalitarian country, it was not surprising that its President Vladimir Putin has been openly named a “dictator” or “oppressor” who over sided the democratic practices in the civilised world. While the world is divided into the “right” democracy and the “evil” “autocracy”, Russia was designated by the West as the chaos maker who poses threats to the world, weaving the enemy’s image of Putin to the international community where they need to fight on (Eddy & Fletcher, 2022; Ognyanova, 2010; Lichtenstein et al., 2019).

In a study of media representation of the image of the Russian political leader in Western online media, Seliverstova, Levitskaya & Seliverstov (2022, p.396) argued that “Western online media deliberately form a predominantly negative media image of the Russian president thereby manipulating the opinion of the German-speaking and English-speaking people”. In a context where anti-Russia propaganda has always existed in the West, Russophobia has become part of global politics. Zakem, Saunders, Hashimova, and Hammerberg (2018) claimed that Russia’s main objective is to discredit Western institutions and foundational elements of Western democracy. Therefore, Putin is portrayed as the predominant figure, along with his inner circle, who plays a significant role in shaping domestic and foreign policy. Putin’s involvement and visibility always appear correlated to Russia’s decisions. He is depicted as an oligarch who strives to reduce social cohesion and promote Russia’s role in the international system. In a study on perceptions of media coverage of the War in Ukraine among five countries: Brazil, Germany, Poland, the U.K., and the U.S., Eddy & Fletcher (2022) concluded that news on Russia-Ukraine War is without contextualisation or clear explanation where a different range of perspectives on the conflict are absent. As online news constructs the ideas and values about the objects of reality, they form the images of nations, states, and their leaders and a piece of a world picture on the whole. When fixed on people’s minds, it impacts their attitudes and social behaviours.

On the contrary, the Russian media depicted Vladimir Putin much more positively. Magdalena Kaltseis (2019), in her study on the visual portrayal of Vladimir Putin on Russian television, concluded that the image of Putin is either a superhuman hero or a human. He is tough, strong, masculine, resilient, and unapproachable. He is omnipresent in the country, a statesman, a nonstop working man, and yet a caring human being. The study reveals that this duality could be due to Putin’s role as a politician, where the votes from his people are still crucial. Therefore, his image of humans and accessibility can make him a likeable person among the Russians. Russian media was accused of controlling the Internet in the country by restricting access to undesirable information. The Russian government was deemed to use social media well to distort the truth and spread false information (Helleberg, 2021; Sussman, 2000; Panfilov, 2005).

Posternyak & Boeva-Omelechko (2018) articulated that British mass media strongly personified the policy of Russia with its President Vladimir Putin by emphasising the word groups such as “Putin’s Russia”. The reporting surfaced the nuclear power concept, threatening the international world order. The British political mass media discourse portrayed Russia as a dangerous state which is hostile, brutal, uncivilised, and disrupted to the democratic principle. The negative connotations of the British media have extensively represented Russia as a very aggressive state trying to suppress the neighbouring countries in pursuing its dream of becoming a superpower. Therefore, Putin did not deserve respect because his actions were perceived as incomprehensive and foolish, eventually leading him to lose in international politics.

While media from the West are widely being criticised as negatively portraying the image of Putin, some scholars (Fossato, 2006; Ognyanova, 2010) did argue that Putin is a great propagandist on social media, where news is politically filtered under his autocratic regime. He was an unknown figure until he was elected President in 1999. Thanks to the overwhelming coverage on traditional media, especially state TV, Putin was portrayed as a strong man with strong leadership. Most of the tools used to control objectionable materials on the Russian Web are an extension of the censorship mechanisms used in traditional media (Ognyanova, 2010). Journalists in Russia interpreted Putin’s messages as a reminder of their loyalty to Putin personally and to fully consent to the policies under his approval. This portrayal has left an impact on all those who are part of

the virtual family of Russian television. Putin has been accused of restricting the information flow in the country. Its power over online content is derived from framing Internet materials from the West as biased and corrupted, and from there, it shapes the public's opinion and attitudes in upholding its hegemony in the country (Gorny, 2006; Freedom House, 2009).

The representation of Putin was essentially on visual emphasis where he was framed as "the other" individual who has an opposition voice, especially on the issue of joining NATO by its neighbouring countries, whereas the European media is viewed as having a pro-Western position and having the focus of the coverage on the historical context (Panfilov, 2005; Ojala & Pantti 2017). The negative representation of Putin can be explained through the widely-reported aggression towards Ukraine. He was seen as the dominant actor in the development of the event. Ojala & Pantti (2017) argued that the Western media provide narratives from the deeply implanted Western viewpoints that Russia's intervention would be blamed. Therefore legitimate actions were taken by the West against Russia. Under the wide political and cultural context of the Western public spheres, the European media governed the entire reporting of the war by putting Russia and Russia's President as the "culprit" of the conflict (Fengler et al., 2020; Helleberg, 2021).

Although local analysis could be good in interpreting, Western media has been the definitive standard in the news reporting through its media monopoly power. It highlighted its Western thought, which carries Western political and social ideologies, in the news coverage and successfully grabbed the attention of the global audience. By presenting the war as a brutal attack on the civilised world, accusing Vladimir Putin as the dominant antagonist in the event, and featuring Russia's human rights violations, Western media has successfully influenced a large segmentation of the community in its one-sided story (Dhanesh and Rahman, 2021; McCrow-Young and Mortensen, 2021). By keeping the crisis alive and delivering the casualties as the most featured part in the news coverage, Western media almost successfully narrated the war as a threat to global security and achieved international sympathy. By picturing Russia as an anti-democratic belligerent state, the Western media garnered support from the democratic world. Besides, the Western world was urged to take unified action against Russia, which has posed a massive security threat to world peace. That was clearly shown as a divider between "democratic" vs "undemocratic", "civilised", and "uncivilised" between Russia and the Western countries (Hedling et al., 2022; Crilley and ChatterjeDoody, 2020).

## Theoretical Framework

### 1. Agenda Setting and Framing as a Theory

This study took agenda-setting and framing as the pillars of the study. It employed agenda-setting and framing theories to investigate the perspectives the media depict of the Ukraine-Russia war and its leading actor. It also examines what has been put in the "limelight", how the story was narrated, and what has been excluded from the media coverage.

Agenda setting is an eminent concept in political and social sciences. Since the 1970s, several researchers have studied agenda-setting from different perspectives (McCombs and Shaw, 1972).. McCombs & Valenzuela (2021, pp.8 & 9) defined agenda-setting as "the process by which elements (e.g., issues, public figures, companies, or government institutions) that are deemed relevant by the news media, as well as the attributes used to describe these elements, often become relevant to public opinion". He further argued that the media agenda eventually became the public agenda by creating prominence in the reported issue, thus grabbing the public's attention. The problem then becomes a topic of discussion. This process is the initial stage where public opinion is formed. While the media positions specific issues to be most significant to the public, it plays a crucial role in constructing consensus about the prominence of a problem requiring more attention than the others (Pantti, 2016; Jones et al., 2007). In this study, by deciding how and which subject to be covered, the media influence how the public interprets and comprehends the war. The perception of the cause, the leading actor involved, and even the actions taken are incredibly constructed through the way the news media give focus and prominence to the war.

Entman's framing approach was used to explain in what manners the media highlight and select particular issues and draw connections to promote a specific interpretation (Entman, 2004). Frames are a

mechanism to organise journalistic practices of reality interpretations which serves as a guide to the general public. Framing emphasises one aspect of reality and eliminates the others to direct how the audience should make sense of the world, where the responsibility is, and who are the main actors (Entman, 1993; Gitlin, 1980; Ojala & Pantti, 2017). Journalists are framers by profession where media play a performative and constitutive role in crisis reporting (Brüggemann, 2014; Reese, 2010; Cottle, 2006). Entman (1993, p.52) pointed out four frame elements in a thematic frame: problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation. How the media define a problem pre-determines other frame elements such as the actors, the causes, the role of the actors, the promotion of the interpretation like the moral judgment, and the suggestive solutions.

In news reporting, framing is construed as a purposeful selection of “an issue, object, or situation, which guides interpreters to construct specific frames that coherently organise the foregrounded information and render it meaningful” (Baden 2020: p. 232). How the war is mediated and its choice of information carries presumed effects on public opinion, which is widely recognised by the members of the society (Hjarvard et al., 2015; Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999; Stromback & Esser, 2014). Once a frame has been dominant in media discourse, it could garner public support and encourage politicians to solve or combat the problems by considering the specific media logic (Reuben, 2009; Devreese, 2014; Olsson et al., 2015).

Generally, there are two qualities of frames – constructive and destructive. Constructive frames emphasise “situational causal interpretation and focus on problem treatments that enable de-escalation and crisis reconciliation.” In contrast, destructive frames highlight “personal causal interpretations and either provide no ideas for problem treatments or support confrontational treatments” (Lichtenstein et al., 2019, p.74). Constructive frames, in the political context, provide solutions for identified problems rather than putting the blame on one involved party and addressing the root causes of conflicts. Contrarily, destructive frames prevail and legitimate aggressive pomposity and actions (Nitsch and Lichtenstein, 2013; Pantti, 2016; Lichtenstein et al., 2019).

### Research Methodology

This study employed quantitative and qualitative content analysis of commentary articles (under the column of ‘Opinion’) in *New York Times Online* to answer the research questions. It aims to reveal the frames that construct the Russia-Ukraine War and to examine how the image of Vladimir Putin was depicted in the commentary articles. Both frequency and the nuances of frames were explored. This study analysed all the commentary articles based on the search results from the keywords “Russia Ukraine War”, “Russia War”, “Invasion of Ukraine”, and “Vladimir Putin”.

It is worth mentioning that *New York Times* was taken as the sample of the study due to its position as one of the renowned America-based online media, which perfectly fits into our study’s aims in examining Western media representation of the war and the image of Vladimir Putin. Commentaries were chosen as the study’s sample over the news article because commentary articles allow the researcher to look into how the agenda is being set in *New York Times Online* by investigating “which commentaries with what perspectives” are chosen over the others. Although the columnists’ views do not constitute the stand of the *New York Times*, it is worth noting that by publishing a particular piece of commentary article, *New York Times* holds the power to influence the importance attached to the coverage with the exclusion of others.

24 February 2022 marked the beginning of the war. This study took the samples of 10-month commentary articles from 24 February 2022 to 24 December 2022 to thoroughly examine the media representation of the war and the image of Vladimir Putin alongside the war progress. The unit of analysis includes headlines and text. Paragraph by paragraph was coded in search for the key terms which form the connotative themes. Photos and captions were excluded in this study as the main focus is on the commentaries’ text content. To seize the narrative articulated in a frame and its constructive or destructive character, this study looks into key terms used by media agenda-setters. Frames found from the coded text can then be categorised as constructive or destructive.

The constructive and destructive frames derived from Entman’s thematic frames are being integrated into the methodology. In war reporting, a constructive frame focuses on problem-solving without attributing

blame to any parties. In contrast, a destructive frame is directed at seeking culpability, which leads to an escalated aggressive reaction. This reaction includes political legitimization actions or economic sanctions. The portrayal of Vladimir Putin is also inductively content analysed by systematically categorised the key terms used in describing his image in the text. Constructive frames interpret the actions of Putin by addressing the situational causal take, while destructive frames blame Putin for the war without explaining the cause of his actions.

### Research Finding

A total of 205 and 178 commentary articles were content analysed for examining media framing on Russia-Ukraine War and Vladimir Putin's image, respectively. *Table 1* shows that in reviewing the media framing of the war, 21 themes were found in the analysis, with 19 destructive (98.05%, N=19) and 2 constructive frames (1.95%, N=4). Of 205 articles, Russia was generally depicted as the unprovoked invader/brutal/suppressor (25.37%, N=52) who was ambitiously searching for greater power in the region. Russia was regarded as the chaos maker (11.71%, N= 24), which posed a high threat to the neighbouring countries and global security. It was portrayed as a state threatening the world with nuclear power. Russia's action attracted numerous criticisms from anti-war groups in which the war consequences were extensively highlighted (9.27%, N=19). These groups urged for political change to escalate world economic recovery. Voices appealing for economic sanctions against Russia were emphasised in the commentaries (6.34%, N=13). The sanctions were necessary to stop Russia's brutal action against Ukraine.

Ukraine was constantly portrayed as the victim of the war (6.34%, N=13). Ukrainians are weak, and many fled from their country during the war. These refugees should be sympathised with and need help from international bodies. The poor administration of Ukraine was seen as one of the causes of the issue, as the Ukrainian government could not protect its people. Extensively, it brought a moral crisis where Russia, as the invader, was greatly condemned for being inhuman to the innocent people of Ukraine. As a country that holds the ideology of Communism, Russia was blamed for being anti-democratic (4.39%, N=9) and against democracy – a doctrine of the West. The United States of America was responsible for failing to stop Russia's aggressive behaviour, devoted to Biden's poor administration and U.S. weak hegemony (3.9%, N=8). The invasion of Russia has been represented as a "war crime" (3.41%, N=7) uncivilised and has hugely disrupted the world's order. Therefore, the West is urged to be united, and U.S. hegemony needs to be strengthened (3.41%, N=7) to combat the "evil" Russia. In this context, the world has been split into two main groups – the democratic West and autocratic Russia with similar-ideology cronies.

On the other hand, Ukraine has been portrayed as a brave nation that never surrendered itself to belligerent Russia (3.41%, N=7). The world is watching for the success of Ukraine in this war, where the success of Ukraine is the success of democracy and liberalism. Russia was depicted as a nation that should be ashamed of its viciousness (2.93%, N=6). It was criticised as a nation that failed to control its corruption in the state and greedily expanded its power in the region. Russia upholds Fascism and acts as a genocide that mercilessly kills the innocents (2.93%, N=6). Russia's action is labelled as Putin's decision (2.93%, N=6). The war is widely called "Putin's War". Putin was blamed for the war and was portrayed as demonstrating poor leadership (2.93%, N=6) and having his inner circle. Putin was generally weak but wanted to show his greatness to the world through the war. Russia has been seen as an autocratic media blocker that constantly disseminates misinformation or disinformation on the media, especially on social media. Therefore, Western media coverage also regarded the War between Russia and Ukraine as a cyber war.

While the U.S. was portrayed as the saver and peacemaker in this war (1.95%, N=4), Russia took its destiny as a loser (2.44%, N=5). However, there are also voices arguing that the U.S. should remain neutral where it has no obligations to help Ukraine (1.95%, N=4). Many Russians, too, are the victims of political propaganda (1.95%, N=4), where they have no idea how badly Russia goes against Ukraine and its neighbouring countries. A few commentaries emphasised Russia's stout hegemony, where it reportedly won the war (1.46%, N=3). Russia was involved in the fight merely to defend the country from the intervention of the West. Therefore it serves as a peacemaker (0.49%, N=1) to prevent a further split from the West hostile

political involvement. A very minority of the commentaries urged Russian women to go for revolution and halted Russia's government invasion of its neighbouring countries (0.49%, N=1).

Table 1. Themes found in Russia-Ukraine war commentary articles in *New York Times Online*

Themes	N	%
Russia as invader / brutal / suppressor	52	25.37
Russia as chaos maker / Russia as a threat	24	11.71
War Consequences / Anti-war / political change / Economy	19	9.27
Sanctions on Russia	13	6.34
Ukraine as victim / Weak Ukrainians / Poor administration of Ukraine / Moral crisis / Refugee	13	6.34
Blame on Russia / Undemocratic Russia / Blame on Communism	9	4.39
U.S. weak hegemony / Biden's poor administration	8	3.90
War crime	7	3.41
U.S. strong hegemony / United West	7	3.41
Brave Ukraine / Success of democracy / Liberalism	7	3.41
Weak Russia / Ashamed Russia / Corrupted Russia	6	2.93
Russia as genocide / Fascist	6	2.93
Putin's poor administration / Weak Putin / Blame on Putin	6	2.93
Media blocker / Misinformation / Disinformation / Cyberwar	6	2.93
Russia is a loser	5	2.44
U.S. as a saver / Peacemaker	4	1.95
U.S. remains neutral / U.S. has no moral obligation to help Ukraine	4	1.95
Russians as victims of political propaganda	4	1.95
Russia's strong hegemony / Russia as the winner	3	1.46
Russia as a peacemaker / Russia as a country defender	1	0.49
Russian women should go for a revolution	1	0.49
<b>Total</b>	<b>205</b>	<b>100</b>

As for the representation of Vladimir Putin's image in the *New York Times Online*, Table 2 shows that a total of 178 commentary articles were analysed. There were 10 themes found in the analysis. 2 of the 10 themes were categorised under the constructive frame (97.19%, N=173), whereas eight fell under destructive frames (2.81%, N=5). Vladimir Putin was dominantly described as a dictator who was not only irrational but also a person who goes against West democracy. He was portrayed as anti-modernisation, immoral, and clashed with civilisation by invading Ukraine even though he was "unprovoked" (30.34%, N=54). He was aggressively intruding into Ukraine's sovereignty (29.78%, N=53) and was seriously described as a genocide that killed numerous innocent people in the neighbouring country. His decision has also brought substantial military casualties to his own country. Putin demonstrated the quality of a Fascist and a political perpetrator who threatened the world with his nuclear power (19.10%, N=34).

Since being the chaos maker, he has been blamed as the main antagonist who brought war and enormous death and destruction to Ukraine (7.3%, N=13). Some commentaries depicted Putin as a wounded person who is weak but trying to show the world that he is strong through the war (6.18%, N=11). Even though he will be the loser, he still voraciously pursues his ambitious dream of expanding power. Since the war has impacted energy and food prices globally and threatened global security, Putin was seen as a fool who should be ashamed of his action and decision (1.69%, N=3). A few commentaries reviewed Putin as the one who made Russia weak. His "foolish" behaviour allowed the U.S. to grow even more robust by getting support from other countries (0.56%, N=1). However, he was represented as a conspirator and campaigner who was good at disseminating misinformation or disinformation, especially on social media. He was also portrayed as a country defender (1.12%, N=2). When the West and Ukraine provoked Russia by intending to join NATO, he just had to stop it by force. He is a strategist (1.69%, N=3) who knows how to use social media to gain support and eventually win the war by getting consensus and sympathy from global audiences.

Table 2. Themes found in Vladimir Putin's commentary articles in *New York Times Online*

Themes	N	%
Dictator /Irrational / Person who goes against West democracy / Anti-modernisation / Civilisation clashes / Immoral	54	30.34
An invader / Aggressor against Ukraine's sovereignty	53	29.78
Genocide / Political perpetrator / A figure who threatens the world / Fascist	34	19.10
Chaos maker / A figure to be blamed	13	7.30
Loser / Wounded person / Weaker	11	6.18
Conspirator / Misinformation Campaigner / Disinformation Campaigner	4	2.25
Fool / Ashamed	3	1.69
Winner / Strategist	3	1.69
Defender	2	1.12
Weak Russia vs. Strong U.S.	1	0.56
<b>Total</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>100.00</b>

## Discussion

The agenda-setting process shows that the media can determine what issues are given the most attention, directing people on what to think about the issue (Cohen, 1963). Since Russia-Ukraine War was launched in February 2023, the War and Vladimir Putin have been given great coverage in the commentaries. The number of commentary articles about the war peaked in March 2022 and received massive attention throughout the year. These commentaries divert people on how the war should be perceived. In scrutinising the media representation of the Ukraine-Russia War and Vladimir Putin, this study found, in general, both the image of Russia and Vladimir Putin was in the destructive frame where most of the discussion on them is negative and unfavourable.

The problem identification element in thematic framing is vital because it attributes who should be blamed for bringing the problem to the involved parties (Entman, 2004). Explicitly, in this context, the problem is on Russia, where Russia is described as an unprovoked invader, suppressor, and aggressor which brings chaos and threatens global security. By upholding Fascism, Russia's action was regarded as a war crime where it played the role of the slaughterer. It was depicted as a media blocker whom it manipulates the narratives of the war, favourable on its side, on social media. However, the media failed to interpret the war in its historical and political context. Putin's and Biden's poor administrations were construed as the war's dominant causes without presenting the crisis's complexity from historical, political, and economic perspectives. Since the problem definition and causal interpretations placed Russia in a negative light, Russia was severely condemned for its intrusion into Ukraine. A constant moral evaluation was seen in the commentaries where criticism against war was found in the coverage, pointing to Russia as the culprit for the world's economy and energy crisis. Russia was seen to practice Communism, and therefore it acted against democracy. Refugees were flooded in Europe, and again, Russia is reflected as the only party to be blamed. Russia was said to have manipulated what its people should have known by disseminating information favourable to the state. As such, the media provided a potent treatment or recommendation - economic sanction. Economy sanction on Russia is deemed necessary and legitimate to stop Russia's brutality against Ukraine. Thus, all the countries that support democracy and humanitarianism should do as the West did. The U.S. should strengthen its power as the world peacemaker and saver to ensure global social order is in a place where no nations are threatened by nuclear power. The West was urged to be united against this "Putin's war".

Vladimir Putin is represented as a dictator, invader, killer, and political perpetrator who disorders the world and is anti-modernisation. He upholds Fascism and wants to become great again even though he is a wounded fool and weaker. With his irrationality and immorality, Putin clashed civilisation and conflicted with the West democracy. He could sometimes be a strategist and conspirator good at campaigning information

favouring himself and the state. In the name of “defending” the country, he is seen to be in his interest of expanding his power, pushing the dream of a great leader in the region.

Generally, Vladimir Putin’s image is in the destructive frame where the commentaries largely support aggressive treatment without addressing the real causes of the war. There is a lack of discussion on the crisis from the historical and political context. There is also a lack of solutions to the problem treatment but just putting a one-sided bias towards Russia. The commentaries largely blamed Putin for his aggression, claiming that Ukraine was under attack even though it never provoked Russia. Therefore, the action taken against Russia, such as economic sanctions, is legitimate and should be well supported globally. The sanction seems necessary as it is the most effective way to stop Russia’s brutality.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, Western media has put Russia in a very negative light in its coverage of the Russia-Ukraine War. Russia was depicted as the culprit and should be fully responsible for the war, which caused massive casualties and infrastructure damage. Under the leadership of its President, Vladimir Putin, Russia was an “unprovoked” genocide that not only took away the lives of the innocents but also against democracy, civilisation, and modernisation. Vladimir Putin is a dictator and international political killer who is irrational and foolish. He keeps pushing his unrealistic dreams of expanding regional power by invading the neighbouring country’s sovereignty. He is a significant threat to world peace and security, threatening the West and the world with his nuclear capability. Therefore, he should be given “punishment”, e.g. economic sanction, to stop his brutality. This “punishment”, given all the adverse reporting about him, is legitimate and is given consent by the global citizens.

On the other hand, Ukraine is depicted as a victim that has done nothing wrong. Since it has been intruded on by Russia in a ruthless manner, the people and its “innocent” government should be protected by the U.S. and all the countries of the world. Overall, there is minimal historical and political context in analysing why and how the war happened in the commentaries. It also lacks perspectives on how the Western countries, especially the U.S., have played a crucial role in the war.

This study reveals that agenda-setting and media framing do alive in conflict reporting. It helps to extend the understanding that media, especially the Western media, in its political-economy context, is not open up to more different discourse perspectives. However, this study is only focused on Western media. It is suggested that a comparative analysis of the war could be carried out on media that operate under the countries that hold different ideologies, e.g. media in Russia, China, and North Korea, to examine if biases exist in their media coverage. Also, in future research, it is worthwhile to scrutinise the effect of this predisposed and one-sided reporting on their readers, to understand whether the reporting dramatically impacts the perception shift towards the occupied countries.

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