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Framing the Russian-Ukrainian War in Moldovan Media: A Quantitative Content Analysis

On 24 February 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine following eight years of the ongoing conflict, which began in 2014 with the annexation of Crimea (Urman & Makhortykh, 2022). The war has provoked profound international concern, eliciting a range of diverse media portrayals. As the war continues to affect the geopolitical landscape of Europe and especially Eastern Europe, understanding the media coverage of the war becomes essential in unravelling the dynamics of public opinion and political discourse.

Moldova, a small Eastern European nation situated between Romania and Ukraine, finds itself in a unique position due to its historical ties with both Russia and the European Union (King, 2003; Rumer, 2017). Moldova's Soviet past has significantly shaped its current political, social and cultural landscape (Korosteleva, 2010). As a former Soviet republic, Moldova has experienced a complex process of nation-building and political transformation since gaining independence in 1991 (Roper, 2008). This process has been marked by persistent tensions between pro-European and pro-Russian political powers (Baar & Jakubek, 2017). The Moldovan population remains divided between those who identify with European values and those who maintain strong ties to Russia (Baar & Jakubek, 2017). This divide is also manifested in the Moldovan media landscape, characterised by its diverse and polarised nature, which features a wide number of media outlets with different political orientations and editorial stances (Thomson Reuters Foundation, 2018). Some media advocate for closer ties with the European Union and NATO, while others maintain a pro-Russian stance, promoting closer relations with Moscow and the Eurasian Economic Union. As a result, the Moldovan media landscape is characterised by a rich plurality of voices, which offers an interesting case study to analyse the framing of the Russian-Ukrainian War.

As a country neighbouring the conflict, Moldova is directly affected by the war. Since late February 2022, the country has received over 750,000 refugees fleeing from Ukraine, and 107,000 have decided to stay there (UNHCR, n.d.), placing a substantial strain on the country's social infrastructure and economic stability. Moldova's energy dependence on Russia is another critical aspect that complicates the country's position in the Russian-Ukrainian war. The nation relies heavily on Russian gas supplies to meet its energy needs, making it vulnerable to political and economic pressure from Moscow (Gromadzki & Konol, 2008). This dependence can be leveraged by Russia to influence Moldova's foreign policy, particularly in its pursuit of closer ties with the European Union (Saverio et al., 2016). The unresolved conflict in the breakaway region of Transnistria further complicates Moldova's position in the conflict. With Russian troops stationed in Transnistria, Moldova faces potential security threats and risks of escalating tensions in the region, which adds another layer of vulnerability to Moldova (Beyer & Wolff, 2016), as it remains susceptible to Russian influence and potential destabilisation efforts.

Given Moldova's unique political and historical context, it is important to investigate how Moldovan media frame the Russian-Ukrainian war. Using quantitative content analysis of online news media outlets, this research aims to contribute to the broader literature on media framing of conflicts and provide valuable insights into the complex interplay between media, public opinion, and geopolitics in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war and its effects on Moldova.

Literature Review

Framing Theory and Political Communication

Media research scholars agree that the media substantially influences public, interpersonal, and individual attitudes and behaviours by determining the issues people focus

on and their perspectives on these issues (Entman, 1993; McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Scheufele, 1999). Framing has become an important concept in mass communication; however, no universally agreed-upon definition of framing exists (D'Angelo & Kuypers, 2010; Matthes, 2009). The most frequently addressed definition of framing comes from Entman (1993, p. 52), who describes it as the process of “select[ing] some aspects of a perceived reality and mak[ing] them more salient in a communicating text in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation.”

Framing effects, in their essence, can be explained following Entman's definition, which means that the emphasis on certain aspects of reality while omitting or neglecting the others can shape the recipients' perception of issues, events, and actors through news frames (Entman, Matthes, & Pellicano, 2009). Reese (2007) views the concept of frames not as a sender-receiver paradigm but as a synthesis between cognitive, constructivist, and critical approaches. He identifies them as organising principles that are socially shared and operate symbolically to provide meaningful structure to the social world (Reese, 2007). Some researchers (Cacciatore, Scheufele & Iyengar, 2016; Scheufele, 1999), though, provide a perspective on framing analysis that draws the line between the framing and agenda setting and priming effects. This approach highlights the equivalence framing and the relevance of pre-existing schemas rooted in cultural contexts (Cacciatore, Scheufele & Iyengar, 2016). In this paper, for the analysis, we adopt Entman's (1993) conceptualisation of frames as salient structural indicators that perform at least one of the four frame elements contained in his seminal definition.

Various approaches and typologies exist to conceptualise frames. Scheufele (1999) distinguishes between media and individual frames. The difference between media and individual frames lies in their roles in the framing process: media frames dictate how news

content is structured and presented in media, whereas individual frames govern the cognitive processing and interpretation of the content by audiences (Scheufele, 1999). Empirical studies have discovered that news messages significantly influence readers when media frames align with individuals' schemas (Shen, 2004).

Within the media frames, a typology of issue-specific and generic frames is proposed (de Vreese, 2005; Iyengar, 1994). Issue-specific frames are reduced to specific topics and events (de Vreese, 2005). Whereas generic frames “transcend thematic limitations and can be identified in relation to different topics, some even over time and in different cultural contexts” (de Vreese, 2005, p. 54). According to Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), the media's most prevalent generic frames are conflict, attribution of responsibility, human interests, economic consequences and morality. When covering war and conflicts, the media often use a combination of issue-specific and generic frames to present information to the public (Dimitrova, 2006).

Independently of their perspective, researchers, however, agree that framing theory is highly relevant to political communication. Frames can be shaped by media and political actors or be present in the larger cultural context (Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2008; Matthes, 2012), thus being incorporated into public discourse (Benford & Snow, 2000). Which can influence citizens' perceptions and social judgments (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). For example, frames can contribute to whom readers find responsible for a social problem or issue (de Vreese, 2005; Iyengar, 1996).

Framing the War

In periods of war and conflict, the role of media grows significantly as people rely on it more than during other periods (Kolmer & Semetko, 2009). Amidst the era of globalisation and advanced communication technologies, the mass media has evolved into a significant component of modern warfare (Hiebert, 1995), as it can use “non-military means to achieve

military goals” (Watanabe, 2017a). Therefore, the issue of framing becomes particularly vital in war reporting (Al Nahed & Hammond, 2018).

Framing of war is a multidimensional issue, and scholars have employed diverse methodologies and perspectives in their studies, asserting that the differences in framing an identical issue are significant across national media (Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2005).

For instance, Yang (2003) conducted a study on the NATO air strikes in the former Yugoslavia and discovered that mainstream US media characterised the strikes as 'humanitarian aid' for Kosovo Albanians “to stop the ethnic cleansing initiated by Serbians” (Yang, 2003, p. 231), while the two leading Chinese newspapers portrayed the event as an 'intervention' infringing upon Yugoslavia's sovereignty. The research concluded that government policy and national political interests significantly impacted media coverage (Yang, 2003).

Ryan (2004) used framing analysis to examine editorials from the top 10 US newspapers following the September 11 attacks and observed that the framing of the editorials also supports the government's official stance by constructing a unified narrative surrounding the ‘war on terror’. This narrative rationalised the bombing of Afghanistan as an appropriate reaction to the September 11 terrorist attacks (Ryan, 2004).

Another cross-cultural quantitative content analysis study (Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2005) explored the framing of the 2003 Iraq War in the Swedish and American elite media outlets. The results showed significant differences in framing: the US war coverage predominantly featured the military conflict frame, whereas the Swedish war reporting was more inclined towards responsibility and anti-war protest frames (Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2005). The differences in how the media framed the war aligned with the features of the national political background in Sweden and the US and their positions on foreign policy (Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2005).

In addition to cross-national research, scholars have also examined the framing of war within individual countries. For example, a recent study by Papanikos (2022) attempted to explore the Greek media's coverage of the early phase of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The qualitative content analysis of the three Greek newspapers representing different political stances has found that although Greece has close historical, economic, and cultural ties with Russia, the Greek media strongly opposed the Russian invasion (Papanikos, 2022).

Framing theory was employed to examine the discourse surrounding the Russian invasion of Ukraine in the Russian media. McGlynn (2018) analysed the use of the historical frame in six Russian state-backed print and TV media outlets during the Ukrainian crisis in 2014, using a qualitative content analysis study based on Cacciatore, Scheufele, and Iyengar's (2016) perspective on framing. The study revealed that historical framing played a significant role in the coverage, particularly through the conflation of the Great Patriotic War with the crisis (McGlynn, 2020). The events in Ukraine were presented as an assault on Russia's cultural legacy and used to justify Russia's government involvement in the crisis (McGlynn, 2020).

Thus, despite the different approaches and perspectives, these studies highlight the significant role that framing plays in shaping media depictions of war and conflict and how framing can be used in attempts to influence public perceptions and attitudes towards the events in question.

Attribution of Responsibility Frame

Attribution of responsibility is one of the most prevalent generic frames (Matthes, 2009). Since the studies in social psychology suggest that people's beliefs about the responsibility for political issues and events can vary based on the presented information (Iyengar, 1994), the attribution of responsibility frame is highly relevant for our research.

According to Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), the attribution of responsibility frame refers to the act of assigning responsibility for a cause or solution to either a government, an individual, or a group. Based on the national print and television news analysis, the study found that serious newspapers predominantly used the attribution of responsibility frame (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000).

Iyengar (1994, 1996), who is often credited as the pioneer of attribution responsibility frame research, defines two principal types of attributions: causal and treatment responsibility. The first deals with the source of a problem, while the latter emphasises the who or what can resolve it (Iyengar, 1996). Both forms of attributions are particularly significant when it comes to analysing the political context (Abramowitz, Lanoue, & Ramesh, 1988; Iyengar, 1996).

In the context of the coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian war, it's important to examine how the media in Moldova frames the causal attribution of responsibility. This can provide insights into the role of Moldovan media in shaping public opinion and the potential impact on political decision-making.

Episodic and Thematic Frames

Iyengar (1994, 1996) suggested that news coverage adopts two types of frames – episodic and thematic. Episodic frames focus on specific events or cases, presenting concrete and isolated issues, and "tend to be more drama-oriented and visually compelling" (Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2008, p. 66). In contrast, thematic frames report more abstractly and place issues within a broader interpretation or an "appropriate context – historical, geographical, or otherwise" (Iyengar, 1996, p. 62; Scheufele, 1999). Thematic frames are also less descriptive and more analytical (Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2008).

News coverage tends to be biased towards episodic framing, as norms and standards within news organisations reinforce episodic framing (Iyengar, 1994) to humanise broader issues (Boukes, 2022). Episodic frames are believed to be "more compelling, emotionally engaging, and likely to draw the reader or viewer into the story" (Gross, 2008, p. 171). Although thematic frames were found to have a stronger influence on the audience's opinions, specifically in situations where no emotional reaction is evoked, episodic frames are generally more persuasive (Aarøe, 2011). However, from the perspective of competitive democracy, which emphasises informed citizenship, episodic framing might be undesirable, as it could hinder citizens' ability to understand the relationships between abstract political topics (Boukes, 2022; Iyengar, 1994), especially war and conflicts.

Media coverage of military conflicts typically employs more episodic than thematic framing (Dimitrova, 2006). Dimitrova's study (2006) of the Iraq war coverage demonstrated that episodic framing was clearly dominant in the early news reporting of the war. Since episodic framing reduces the complexity of social problems, it is more likely to elicit support for governmental policies (v, 2011), which is highly desirable by political actors in times of conflict. Following these findings, we can expect the media outlets in Moldova to be prevalently using episodic frame to report the Russian-Ukrainian war.

Sensationalism and Dramatic Framing

Research suggests that the effectiveness of framing can vary based on several factors, including emotional appeals (Chong & Druckman, 2007; Matthes, 2012). The tendency of media messages to present information in a way that provokes public interest, excitement, or emotional responses has been studied under the terms 'sensationalism' (Arbaoui et al., 2020), 'dramatisation' (Boykoff & Boykoff, 2007; Wilkins & Patterson, 1987), and news' 'emotive linguistic characteristics' (Lee & Maslog, 2005; Maslog et al., 2006). Arbaoui and colleagues (2020) define sensationalism as a feature of news messages that "arouses audiences

emotionally" (p. 302). Referring to dramatic messages, Wilkins and Patterson (1987) argue that such news often neglects in-depth and thorough examination of issues and problems, instead focusing on the sensational aspects visible on the surface of events. The presentation of news in a dramatic or sensationalised form is found to be prevalent in journalistic practice (Boykoff & Boykoff, 2007), with media content dealing with violence particularly expected to exhibit a high degree of sensationalism (Arbaoui et al., 2020).

Numerous studies on framing war and conflicts (Eckler & Kalyango, 2012; García-Perdomo, Harlow, & Brown, 2022; Gouse et al., 2019; Lee & Maslog, 2005; Maslog, Lee, & Kim, 2006) have adopted Galtung's (1986) principles of war and peace journalism, which he views as two competing frames (war and peace) in the coverage of war and conflict. Within these frames, war-framed language is assessed based on three indicators: demonising, victimising, and emotive (García-Perdomo, Harlow, & Brown, 2022; Lee & Maslog, 2005; Maslog, Lee, & Kim, 2006). The presence of these three indicators was used as predictors of war framing in the research examining the framing of the Colombian peace process (García-Perdomo, Harlow, & Brown, 2022) as well as in the studies analysing the coverage of the Iraq war (Lee & Maslog, 2005; Maslog, Lee, & Kim, 2006). Both studies have found that the framing was prevalently characterised by using war frames with indicators of the war language.

In our study, we adopt the use of victimising, demonising, and emotive language as indicators of the presence of sensationalism and dramatic frame in the coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian war by Moldovan media.

Media Bias in Actors' Framing

When news exhibits an evident slant, it politically empowers the actors it favours while simultaneously weakening and liming those who are negatively framed (Entman, 2007). News frames with an inherent valence can influence public support for policies,

highlighting the positive or negative aspects of an issue/actor (de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2003). Highlighting the importance of political actors' strategic communicative action, it was found that the success of frame-setting is especially determined by the power of political actors (Gerth & Siegert, 2012). Dimitrova and Strömbäck (2008) suggest that political elites impact media framing, who "presumably care about what people think because they want them to behave in certain ways, supporting or at least tolerating elite activities" (Entman, 2007, p. 165). The position of the government and political elites is especially prevalent in the media coverage of the war, which tends to be one-sided (Boys-Barrett, 2004) and reflects mainly foreign policy interests (Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2008).

The concept of media bias has been applied to research focusing on war and crisis coverage (Aday, 2010; Adegbola, Gearhart, & Cho, 2022; Dickson, 1994; Pfau et al., 2004; Watanabe, 2017a). Yet there is little consensus on how to define or measure news bias (Watanabe, 2017a). Media bias definitions are often grounded in media effects theories, such as priming and framing theories, which suggest that news reporting focusing on negative or positive aspects of events, issues, and actors significantly influences audience attitudes towards them (Entman, 1993; Iyengar & Simon, 1993; McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

Some scholars, such as Hahn and colleagues (2016), define bias as any deviation from the objective representation of reality. However, Entman (2007) suggests that bias is an inherent aspect of reporting and proposes to focus on achieving balanced coverage of events, issues or groups. Within Entman's paradigm, there can be distinguished decision-making bias, which stems from the motivations and mindsets of journalists, and content bias – defined as "consistent patterns in the framing of mediated communication that promote the influence of one side of the conflicts over the use of government power" (2007, p. 166). Content bias appears when news consistently leans towards particular opinions and

perspectives and falls into recurring patterns that “mobilise bias” within the political system, making some actors regularly prevail over others (Entman, 2007; Schattschneider, 1960).

In this study, we adopt the concept of content bias to analyse actors’ valence of framing as it can provide insights into how different parties are portrayed, potentially influencing public perception and opinion on the conflict.

Moldovan Political and Media Landscape

The historical background of Moldova, which has experienced multiple periods of annexation and rule by different powers, has significantly shaped the country's national identity and contributed to its ongoing political and societal divisions (Baar & Jakubek, 2017; Wolfschwenger & Saxinger, 2020). Moldova was a part of Tsarist Russia as Bessarabia, followed by a period of unification with Romania and later becoming a Soviet Republic (Way, 2003). Each period left distinct cultural, political, and social influences on the region (Baar & Jakubek, 2017). The Soviet regime attempted to suppress Moldovan-Romanian nationalism and to create a distinct Soviet-Moldavian identity (Roper, 2008).

The political situation in Moldova has been marked by frequent changes in government, accusations of corruption and abuse of power (Baar & Jakubek, 2017; Rumer, 2017). Since gaining independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, the Moldovan political landscape has been extremely unstable, with a continuous “geopolitical tug-of-war” (Rumer, 2017, p. 1) between pro-European and pro-Russian factions. Pro-European parties advocate for EU integration, while pro-Russian parties favour closer relations with Russia and the Commonwealth of the Independent States (CIS). The unresolved issue of Transnistria, a breakaway region which stations Russian troops, further complicates the nation's political dynamics (Beyer & Wolff, 2016). Besides, Moldova is dependent on electricity produced in Transnistria (Sánchez, 2022). This divide has been further intensified by the ongoing

Russian-Ukrainian war, which creates significant challenges and dilemmas for Moldova's foreign policy and security (Locoman, 2023; Makhanov, n.d.).

Amidst the Russian-Ukrainian war, Moldova finds itself in an increasingly vulnerable position. The country has accepted a significant number of refugees fleeing the war (UNHCR, n.d.), which is putting a strain on its resources and infrastructure (Savelyeva, 2023). Besides, Moldova's dependence on Russian gas supplies continues to be a potential pressure point, which Moscow leverages to influence Moldova's foreign policy decisions (Sánchez, 2022; Rumer, 2017). Current president Maia Sandu's administration, elected in late 2020, has shown clear pro-European inclinations, striving to strengthen relations with the West and move away from Russian influence (European Parliament, 2022). However, achieving this is challenging given the nation's deep-seated economic and energy dependencies on Russia (Saverio et al., 2016).

Moldova's political background significantly impacts the country's media landscape, as the government and political elites often exert influence over media outlets. For example, a fugitive pro-Russian oligarch Vladimir Plahotniuc has founded two media companies which own influential TV channels: Publika TV, Prime TV, Canal 2 and Canal 3 (Point.md, 2015). Because of the mix of local and foreign ownership, the media represent contrasted stances towards Moldova's geopolitical orientation. The media environment has been influenced by external forces, particularly Russian and Romanian media outlets. Thus, for example, the Romanian Foreign Ministry funds the print and online newspaper Ziarul de Gardă (Ava.md, 2011), and print and online media outlets Komsomoliskaya Pravda and Sputnik are funded by Russia (Anticoruptie.md, 2018).

The ownership transparency, financial viability, and political influence often affect the objectivity and balance of news reporting, leading to biased coverage of domestic and international events, including the Russian-Ukrainian war. Moldova's complex political

background, characterised by divisions between pro-European and pro-Russian factions, the enduring influence of its Soviet past, and the challenges posed by the Transnistrian conflict and energy dependencies, all contribute to the way the Russian-Ukrainian war is framed in the Moldovan media landscape.

Russian Foreign Propaganda and its Narratives

Russian Propaganda in Moldova

It has been widely acknowledged that the Russian government is engaged in international propaganda to influence foreign public opinion (Watanabe, 2018). Researchers of the early phases of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict argue that Russian information warfare has impacted neighbouring countries, including Moldova (Şaran, 2016). Since the full-scale invasion, Russian narratives about the war have significantly affected Moldova's social cohesion and political stability. Amidst the Russian-Ukrainian war, the country faces internal destabilisation efforts, undergoing a wave of disinformation and anti-Western propaganda, largely spread by pro-Russian media outlets and political parties (Locoman, 2013). Such narratives fuel pro-Russian parties' support and ferment mistrust towards the government in parts of the population, and create a false reality of the war in Ukraine. According to an opinion poll by WatchDog (2023) published in April 2023, 56% of respondents from Moldova do not consider the war an unprovoked act of Russian aggression, and of those respondents, 22% agree that "Russia is defending the Donbas People's Republic from Ukrainian attacks" (p. 29), and 17% agree that what is happening in Ukraine is "an operation to liberate Ukraine from Nazism" (p. 29).

Additionally, the direct threats against Moldova in the narratives of the Russian government have intensified (Calugareanu & Schwartz, 2023). In his speech, Sergey Lavrov – the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, warned that Moldova could meet the same fate as Ukraine (Calugareanu & Schwartz, 2023) if they do not consider the interests of the Russian-

speaking population (Calugareanu, & Pozdniakova, 2022). Similar narratives were used by the Russian media to justify the Russian military intervention in Ukraine (Watanabe, 2018).

In late 2022, after the beginning of the war, protests demanding the resignation of the country's pro-Western government were held in the capital city of Chişinău (Radio Free Europe, 2023). The protests were allegedly supported by the pro-Russian 'ŞOR' party, which is sponsored by fugitive oligarch Ilan Shor (Euronews, 2023). Who is reputed to have close ties to the Kremlin and is accused of receiving funding from Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB), which has vested interests in instigating turmoil in Moldova (Wesolowsky, 2022). Additionally, Russia was accused of attempting to destabilise Moldova and overthrow its current pro-Western government (Euronews, 2022), which aims to move away from Russian political and economic influence. Such destabilisation efforts are largely spread through pro-Russian media outlets, which promote select narratives about the war in Ukraine.

Russian Narratives About the War in Ukraine

Since the start of the invasion of Ukraine, Russian authorities have consistently referred to it as a "special military operation" rather than characterising it as a war (Urman & Makhortykh, 2022). In the official announcement Vladimir Putin, the president of Russia, stated that the goal of the invasion is to "strive for the demilitarisation and denazification of Ukraine" (RIA Novosti, 2022). The Russian media's language about invasion has been especially dominated by the word Nazi (Troianovski, 2022). Hanley, Kumar, and Durumeric (2022) used topic modelling to analyse narratives about the war and revealed that the Russian state media widely reported and referenced the disinformation narratives. According to their study, the prevailing narratives were about 'neo-Nazis' and 'bioweapons' in Ukraine as well as the ones about the West (Hanley, Kumar, & Durumeric, 2022).

Another widely referred narrative used by Russia to justify its military intervention in Ukraine in 2014 is the protection of the Russian-speaking minority in Donbas and Luhansk,

which is claimed to be under threat from the new Ukrainian government (Watanabe, 2017a). A content analysis study on pro-Russian media outlet Sputnik in Sweden demonstrates that apart from spreading disinformation narratives, Russian media repeatedly project exclusively positive images of Russia while emphasising the weaknesses of Western countries and their aggression toward non-western countries (Kragh & Åsberg, 2017). Especially under Putin's leadership, Russia has applied informational means to influence the foreign public, among which is a continuous spread of the West's corrupt or barbaric image (Watanabe, 2018). Politicians and media in Russia not only portray the West negatively but also blame it for the war in Ukraine (Urman & Makhortykh, 2022). These anti-Western narratives have their roots in the metanarrative of Russian propaganda, drawing a line between 'us' and 'others' (Yablokov, 2015).

Besides, historical framing was found to be used in the Russian media coverage of the war as a part of memory politics, which serves to reinforce Russia's perspective by drawing parallels to past conflicts and invoking collective memories (Fedor, Lewis, & Zhurzhenko, 2017; McGlynn, 2020; Urman & Makhortykh, 2022). The media tends to utilise references to earlier armed conflicts, especially WWII, which is called the 'Great Patriotic War' in Russia (Urman & Makhortykh, 2022). The narratives "weaponising" memories of war not only blend the past into the present but also blur the lines between political loyalty and national identity (McGlynn, 2020). Analysing historical framing in media coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian war (prior to the full-scale invasion), McGlynn (2020) discovered that the past was a crucial part of the narrative and transformed it into a central aspect of the crisis.

Research Gap, Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research on war and conflict framing is highly developed (Aday, 2010; An & Gower, 2009; Dickson, 1994; Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2005; Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2008; García-Perdomo, 2022; Iyengar & Simon, 1993; Kolmer & Semetko, 2009; Maslog, Lee, & Kim,

2006; Ryan, 2004; Yang, 2003). The existing literature has extensively examined the coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian war, primarily focusing on events before the 2022 escalation (Fengler et al., 2020; McGlynn, 2020; Nygren et al., 2018; Watanabe, 2017a; Watanabe, 2018; Roman et al., 2017; Springer et al., 2022). Only a limited number of studies have looked at the first month of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine (Hanley, Kumar, & Durumeric, 2022; Papanikos, 2022; Urman & Makhortykh, 2022; Yarchi, 2022; Zheng, 2022). Even fewer studies have paid attention to the war coverage in the countries of the former Soviet Union (Atanesyan, 2020; Eckler & Kalyango, 2012; Heinrich & Tanaev, 2009; Şaran, 2016). However, a noticeable research gap exists in understanding how the Russian-Ukrainian war is framed in Moldovan media. Considering the unique political landscape, historical ties, and societal divisions, it is of significant research interest to explore the framing of the Russian-Ukrainian war in Moldova's media landscape.

The research questions and hypotheses were formulated based on the provided literature review and research interest.

RQ1: How do Moldovan media frame the Russian-Ukrainian war, and to what extent does the political orientation of Moldovan media outlets affect their coverage?

Based on previous research suggesting that war reporting is generally characterised by the prevalent use of episodic over thematic framing (Dimitrova, 2006), a high degree of sensationalism (Arbaoui et al., 2020) and the use of emotive language (Lee & Maslog, 2005; Maslog, Lee, & Kim, 2006), we come up with H1:

H1: The use of the episodic frame, compared to the thematic frame (a), and sensationalism/dramatic frame, compared to the neutral frame (b), is more prevalent across all media outlets.

Iyengar's research on the attribution of responsibility demonstrates that media widely employ attributions of responsibility for problems covered in political contexts, which can

vary based on the presented information (Iyengar, 1994, 1996). Additionally, framing research indicates that political elites often influence framing (Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2008; Entman, 2007), with war framing particularly reflecting the positions of the government. Media ownership and media bias concepts also offer insights into differences in how media with different political slants attribute responsibility for the war. Media ownership structures can affect content, as owners tend to promote their political, economic, and social interests through the media they control (Dunaway, 2013). Consequently, the geopolitical orientation of media owners plays a crucial role in how the responsibility for the war is covered. Based on these theoretical foundations, we propose H2 and H3.

H2: Pro-European and independent media attribute responsibility for the conflict to Russian actors (a) more than pro-Russian media, while pro-Russian media attributes responsibility to Western and/or Ukrainian actors more than independent and pro-European media (b).

H3: Independent and pro-European media frame the war predominantly as an act of aggression by Russia against Ukraine (a), while pro-Russian media portrays the war mostly as necessary (b).

Drawing on the research on memory politics and historical narratives in Russian media coverage (Fedor, Lewis, & Zhurzhenko, 2017), particularly in relation to the coverage of the Ukrainian-Russian war (McGlynn, 2020), it is evident that the Russian government predominantly employs these narratives in its communication. Studies examining the pre-2022 phase of the Russian-Ukrainian war have identified the use of historical framing to justify military intervention in Ukraine (McGlynn, 2020). This finding, in conjunction with the concept of attribution of responsibility and the literature suggesting the predominant use of foreign Russian propaganda, provides the basis for H4:

H4: Pro-Russian media mentions historical factors as a cause of the war more frequently than pro-European and/or independent media.

Considering the evidence from the research on biased actor framing (Griffin, 2004; Nygren et al., 2018), media ownership (Dunaway, 2013), and Russian foreign propaganda (Watanabe, 2017b, 2018), it becomes clear that the portrayal of actors in the media is heavily influenced by the media's political orientation and external influences. Pro-European and independent media in Moldova are more likely to align with Western perspectives and thus expected to present Ukrainian and Western actors in a positive light while criticising Russian actors. Consequently, pro-Russian media outlets influenced by Russia which broadcast the Kremlin's position tend to favour Russian actors and are more likely to criticise Ukrainian and Western actors. Based on this, we propose the H5a and H5b:

H5a: Pro-European and/or independent media are more positive towards Ukrainian and Western actors and more negative towards pro-Russian actors compared to pro-Russian media.

H5b: Pro-Russian media is more positive towards Russian actors and negative towards Ukrainian and Western actors than pro-Western and independent media.

RQ2: How do Moldovan media portray domestic actors and the effects of the Russian-Ukrainian war on Moldova, and do the outlets differ in coverage?

Given Moldova's current government's pro-Western perspectives and alignment with pro-European interests (European Parliament, 2022), it is reasonable to expect that the pro-Russian media in Moldova may portray Moldovan actors more negatively compared to pro-European and independent media. According to studies on media ownership (Dunaway, 2013) and the concept of content bias (Entman, 2007), the interests and perspectives of media owners can significantly influence news coverage. As the Russian government is highly

critical of the West (Locoman, 2013) and the current government in Moldova (TASS, 2023), pro-Russian media outlets in Moldova are likely to reflect this criticism in their coverage of Moldovan actors. In contrast, pro-European and independent media outlets are likely to provide more favourable coverage of Moldovan actors, reflecting their stances on Moldova's political landscape and its relationship with the European Union. Thus, H6 suggests:

H6: The pro-Russian media portrays Moldovan actors more negatively compared to the pro-European and independent media.

In line with the framing theory stating that media outlets select and emphasise specific aspects of an issue, shaping public perception (Entman, 1993), pro-European and independent media in Moldova, influenced by Western values and concerns, are more likely to underscore the war's potential risks to Moldova's security. This framing serves to raise awareness of the danger and may encourage public support for policies that align with European security initiatives. Conversely, pro-Russian media in Moldova, guided by Moscow's perspective, downplay these threats and present alternative framing that emphasises Russia's role as a stabilising force in the region. This framing strategy aims to reduce the perceived threat to Moldova's security and promote closer ties with Russia. Thus, H7a and H7b suggest:

H7a: Independent and pro-European media provide more coverage of the war's negative effects on Moldova than pro-Russian media.

H7b: Pro-European and independent media mention the threat of war (negative effects on security) in Moldova more frequently than pro-Russian media.

Methodology

Content Analysis

Quantitative content analysis was selected as a method in this study, which has also been applied in previous studies on framing wars and conflicts (e.g., Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2008; García-Perdomo et al., 2022; Lee & Maslog, 2005; Maslog, Lee & Kim, 2006). According to Krippendorff (1980), content analysis aims to make replicable and valid inferences from data to their context. As conceptualised by Kerlinger (1986), content analysis is a method which allows a systematic, objective, and quantitative analysis of communication with the purpose of measuring variables. Thus, to answer the stated research questions and to test the hypotheses posed in this study, it is appropriate to use content analysis.

Sampling Strategy

The present study employed a purposive sampling strategy to select three online media outlets as sampling units for quantitative content analysis. The outlets were chosen based on their distinct political standing, with the intent to capture a diverse range of perspectives on the Russian-Ukrainian war. *Ziarul de Gardă*, a highly visited online news website with a pro-European stance, was selected as the first sampling unit. The second sampling unit was *Newsmaker*, an independent online newspaper that has both identical Russian and Romanian versions of the website. The third media outlet was *Sputnik Moldova*, with the main home page in Russian – an online news agency funded by the Russian government with a pro-Russian editorial stance. On 26th of February 2022, the news website was officially blocked in Moldova. Still, in a short time, an identical website was launched by the agency, and became available in Moldova until the 26th of March 2023 when the Security and Intelligence Service of Moldova blocked it again (Media Azi, 2022).

To investigate the agenda-setting and framing of the conflict, news articles from each website's dedicated section on the Russian-Ukrainian war were selected as primary content units for coding and analysis. The data collection period was between February 24, 2022, the start of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, and March 24, 2023, to capture the full extent of the following conflict. The data was collected using a Python script utilising the *requests* and *lxml* libraries to scrape the news articles from the war sections of the websites. The *XPath* function was used to extract the relevant data from the HTML code, which was then uploaded to an Excel file. A total of 4,625 news articles were gathered from three media outlets, including 472 articles from *Sputnik Moldova*, 2,196 articles from *Ziarul de Gardă*, and 1,957 articles from *Newsmaker*.

A random sample of 120 articles was selected from each online news outlet for further analysis. This resulted in a final sample size of $n=360$ items, with each media outlet contributing an equal number of articles to the sample. Random sampling was employed to ensure a representative selection of news articles from each news media, reducing potential bias in the analysis.

Coding Procedure

The primary step in the process involved the development of a comprehensive codebook based on Krippendorff's (1980) recommendations. The categories included a wide range of elements, from the frames present to the valence of the actors mentioned (for the instructions and the codebook, see Appendix B). Only the textual content of the articles was coded. Video, images or other visual elements were ignored. This decision was taken to ensure a rigorous and unbiased analysis. Since the main coder (the author of the study) is fluent in Russian and Romanian, the original texts of the articles were coded without translation.

Pre-test and Intercode Reliability

Before the actual coding process, several drafts of the codebook were tested on random samples of articles from each media outlet. To ensure that categories capture the necessary aspects, each round of pre-test was conducted on a different set of randomly chosen items.

Intercode reliability was measured to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. The second coder – a communication science master's student fluent in Russian, was introduced to the process and has been explicitly instructed to conduct the coding. A 10% ($n = 36$) random selection of all articles was assigned for intercode reliability assessment. Several meetings were conducted with the second coder to coordinate the process and tackle inconsistencies. The areas of disagreement were discussed, and the ambiguities in the categories were refined. To quantitatively assess the intercode reliability, we utilised Krippendorff's Alpha, an accepted statistical measure for this procedure (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007). The KALPHA macro with 10,000 bootstraps for SPSS was employed to compute the alpha values (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007). The results of the reliability test yielded alpha (α) values that ranged between .66 and 1, thereby indicating a satisfactory level of agreement between the coders (for a comprehensive list of alpha values, please refer to Appendix A).

Coding Operationalisation

Sources

The sources were distinguished between *Moldovan, Transnistrian, Ukrainian, Russian, Western and International organisations* (e.g. UN). Political actors, media, and organisations cited, paraphrased, or mentioned as a source of information were coded as present (1) or not present (0). The intercode agreement rate reached Krippendorff's alpha values between .8 and 1 (see Appendix A).

Sensationalism and Dramatic Framing

To identify if the item contained a sensationalism/dramatic frame, three indicators of war language frame were adopted from the war and peace framing studies of conflicts (García-Perdomo et al., 2022; Lee & Maslog, 2005; Maslog, Lee & Kim, 2006). These indicators, originally based on Galtung's (1986) principles of war and peace journalism, included *Demonising*, *Victimising*, and *Emotive* language. Each indicator was coded as a nominal variable, present (1) or absent (0). If one or more indicators were mentioned, the sensationalism/dramatic frame was considered present (1). Conversely, if none of the indicators was present, the item was coded as neutral (0). For a detailed description of each indicator, see the codebook (Appendix B). Krippendorff's alpha values of intercoder reliability ranged between .72 and .89 for these categories (see each variable's alpha values in Appendix A).

Episodic and Thematic Frames

The presence of episodic and thematic frames was coded as nominal variables based on the frame's presence (1) or absence (0). The definitions of frames were derived from Iyengar (1994, 1996). During the pre-test, the coders agreed to code the frames as mutually not exclusive. Since the full texts of articles (with a maximum length of 2420 words, $M = 372.17$, $SD = 365.8$) were coded, it was problematic to identify the prevalence of either episodic or thematic frames in the items containing both episodic and thematic frames. The final Krippendorff's alpha values were .715 for the episodic frame and .68 for the thematic frame.

Attribution of Responsibility Frame

Adopting Iyengar's concept of the attribution of responsibility frame (1994, 1996), two dimensions were developed: *Actors responsible* for the war and the *Causal responsibility* for the war. It was identified whether one or more of the following categories of actors were

framed as responsible for the war: *Russian, Ukrainian, Western, or other* actors. The categories were coded as nominal variables on a presence (1) or absence (0) basis.

Krippendorff's alpha values ranged between .7 to 1 (see Appendix A).

The attribution of causal responsibility was coded based on categories developed from the reviewed literature and using qualitative content analysis methods during the pre-test procedure. The following categories were coded as nominal variables (1 – present / not present – 0): '*Russian aggression*', '*Political interference*', '*Economic factors/interests*', '*Protection of population in Ukraine*', '*Historical factors*' or '*Other factors*'. Krippendorff's alpha values resulted in a range between .72 and 1 (see Appendix A).

Actors' Valence

The presence (1) or absence (0) of Ukrainian, Russian, Western, Moldovan (including Transnistrian) and other (e.g., Belarusian, Turkish, Chinese, or others not falling into the four categories) actors in the item was coded. Under the actors were understood political personalities, parties or organisations and activists/media personalities related to war. For the mentioned actors, the valence of framing was identified. If the item mentioned more than one category of actors, the valence was coded separately for each category of actors. Four types of valences were distinguished: positive, negative, neutral, and ambivalent (neither clearly positive nor negative valence / or when both positive and negative valence of the actor's framing was present, e.g., in different paragraphs of the news items). The neutral and ambivalent categories were further merged into one for analysis purposes. This approach of merging ambivalent and neutral tones was earlier applied in the previous content analysis studies: Dimitrova and Strömbäck (2008) and Zeng, Go and Kolmer (2011). Krippendorff's alpha values for these categories ranged between .66 to 1 (see each variable's alpha values in Appendix A).

Effects of The War on Moldova

To identify the coverage of the effects of the war in Moldova, the following categories of effects were formulated during the pre-test using qualitative content analysis methods: *Political effects, Social effects, Economic effects, Security effects, and Effects on international relations*. Detailed descriptions of each effect and instructions for coding can be found in Appendix B. The categories are not mutually exclusive and were coded as nominal variables – mentioned (1) or not (0). The intercoder reliability demonstrated Krippendorff's alpha values from .87 to 1 (see Appendix A).

War-related Themes and Events

The war-related themes and events categories were developed similarly during the pre-test using qualitative analysis methods and coded as nominal variables (1 – if present, 0 – if not present): *Military actions/attacks, Economic/infrastructure impact, Cultural impact, Victims/casualties reports, Human interest stories, Humanitarian efforts, Political statements, Public response, Diplomatic negotiations, International policies/sanctions*. The categories are not mutually exclusive and were coded as nominal variables (1 – if mentioned, 0 – if not mentioned). Krippendorff's alpha values for the categories ranged between .67 to 1 (see Appendix A).

Results

Following the procedures described above, a total of $n = 360$ articles from online media outlets in Moldova were analysed. Out of them, 317 (88.1%) are news reports, 7 (1.9%) are editorials, 24 (6.7%) are opinion pieces, 6 (1.7%) are photo reports, and 6 (1.7%) are interviews. The average length of items in words is $M = 372.17$ ($SD = 365.8$). The independent outlet has the lowest mean length of articles ($M = 241.23$, $SD = 284.21$), while the pro-European outlet has the highest ($M = 491.13$, $SD = 443.94$). The pro-Russian outlet has an average length of $M = 384.13$, $SD = 306.84$. The Russian sources are

mentioned/paraphrased by 180 (50%) items, Ukrainian – by 131 (36.4%), Western – by 33.1 (119), and Moldovan – by 56 items (15.6%); for more details, see Table 1.

Table 1

Percentages and frequency of sources used across media outlets (n = 360).

Sources	Media outlets			Total ¹
	Independent % (n = 120)	Pro-Russian % (n = 120)	Pro-EU % (n = 120)	
Moldovan	15.8 (19)	0.8 (1)	30 (36)	15.6 (56)
Transnistrian	1.7 (3)	0 (0)	3.3 (4)	1.7 (6)
Ukrainian	51.7 (62)	10 (12)	47.5 (57)	36.4 (131)
Russian	34.2 (41)	90 (108)	25.8 (31)	50 (180)
Western	28.3 (34)	20.8 (25)	50 (60)	33.1 (119)
International organisations	12.5 (15)	4.2 (5)	9.2 (11)	8.6 (31)
Other	7.5 (9)	7.5 (9)	10.8 (13)	8.6 (31)

Note. ¹ ‘Total’ shows the percentages and count of the specific source used across all three media outlets.

RQ1: How do Moldovan media frame the Russian-Ukrainian war, and to what extent does the political orientation of Moldovan media outlets affect their coverage?

H1: The use of the episodic frame, compared to the thematic frame (a), and sensationalism/dramatic frame, compared to the neutral frame (b), is more prevalent across all media outlets.

Chi-Square test was conducted to test H1a, which postulates that the use of the episodic frame is more prevalent across all media outlets (see Table 2). The test shows that there is a significant association between the political slant of media outlet and the use of episodic/thematic frames [$X^2 = 10.100$, $df = 4$, $p = .039$]. Although 30.6% ($n = 110$) of the

items analysed use both thematic and episodic framing, to interpret the results, we look at the use of exclusively episodic or thematic frames (see columns ‘Only episodic’ and ‘Only thematic’, see Table 2). The results show that independent media uses episodic frame (42.5% $n = 51$) more compared to thematic frame (29.2%, $n = 35$). Similarly, pro-European media resorts to episodic framing (35% $n = 42$) more than to thematic framing (32.5% $n = 117$). However, pro-Russian media uses thematic framing (41.7% $n = 50$) more than episodic framing (33.3% $n = 40$). Thus, H1a is only partly supported for independent and pro-European media outlets, and not for the pro-Russian media outlet.

Table 2

Comparing political slant of media outlet by episodic/thematic frames.

	Frames used			Total
	Only episodic	Only thematic	Both ¹	
Media Outlets	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)
Independent	42.5 (51)	29.2 (35)	28.3 (34)	100 (120)
Pro-Russian	33.3 (40)	41.7 (50)	25.0 (30)	100 (120)
Pro-EU	35.0 (42)	26.7 (32)	38.3 (46)	100 (120)
Total	36.9 (133)	32.5 (117)	30.6 (110)	100 (360)

Note. $X^2 = 10.100$, $df = 4$, $p = .039$. ¹ ‘Both’ indicates the percentage and count of items which used both episodic and thematic frames.

To test H1b, which states that sensationalism/dramatic frame is prevalent over the neutral frame in media outlets, we performed the Chi-square test (see Table 3). Chi-square test shows significant differences in the use of dramatic/neutral frames. Results indicate that overall, dramatic frame (68.6% $n = 247$) is used significantly more than neutral across all three outlets (31.4% $n = 113$) [$X^2 = 12.408$, $df = 2$, $p = .002$]. Each analysed media outlet uses dramatic frame significantly more than neutral: independent media (40.8%, $n = 49$), pro-

European media (80% n = 96), pro-Russian media (66.7% n = 80). Thus, H1b is fully accepted.

Table 3

Comparing political slant of media outlet by neutral/sensationalism frames.

	Frames used		Total
	Neutral	Sensationalism	
Media Outlets	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)
Independent	40.8 (49)	59.2 (71)	100 (120)
Pro-Russian	33.3 (40)	66.7 (80)	100 (120)
Pro-EU	20.0 (24)	80.0 (96)	100 (120)
Total	31.4 (113)	68.6 (247)	100 (360)

Note. $X^2 = 12.408$, $df = 2$, $p = .002$

Additionally, in the scope of explanatory analysis, we performed Chi-square tests to investigate the frequency and percentage of use of the different language indicators of the dramatic frame across media outlets. Results show there are significant differences in the use of demonising [$X^2 = 16.206$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$] and emotive [$X^2 = 22.346$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$] language indicators. The tests show that pro-Russian outlet uses demonising language significantly more (44.2% n = 53) than the independent (25.8% n = 31) and pro-European outlets (21.7% n = 26). In contrast, pro-European outlet uses emotive language significantly more (80% n = 96) than pro-Russian (53.3% n = 64) and independent outlets (55.8% n = 67). For details, see Table 4.

Table 4

Frequency and percentages of language indicators of sensationalism/dramatic frame used across different outlets (n = 360).

Use of indicators	Media outlets			Total ¹	Chi-Square
	Independent	Pro-Russian	Pro-EU		
	% (n = 120)	% (n = 120)	% (n = 120)	% (n = 360)	
Victimising	6.7 (8)	15.0 (18)	8.3 (10)	10.0 (36)	$X^2(2) = 5.185$
Demonising	25.8 (31)	44.2 (53)	21.7 (26)	30.6 (110)	$X^2(2) = 16.206^{**}$
Emotive	55.8 (67)	53.3 (64)	80.0 (96)	63.1 (227)	$X^2(2) = 22.346^{**}$

Note. ¹ 'Total' shows the percentage and count of use of specific language indicators across all three outlets. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$

H2: Pro-European and independent media attribute responsibility for the conflict to Russian actors (a) more than pro-Russian media, while pro-Russian media attributes responsibility to Western and/or Ukrainian actors more than independent and pro-European media (b).

To test H2a and H2b, several Chi-square tests were computed (see Table 5). The results reveal that there are significant differences to whom the three media outlets attribute responsibility. The Chi-square tests indicate significant associations between the political orientation of the media outlet and the attribution of responsibility to Russian actors [$X^2 = 144.272$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$], to Ukrainian actors [$X^2 = 44.040$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$], and to Western actors [$X^2 = 24.694$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$]. Russian actors are mentioned as responsible for the war in pro-European media (77.5% $n = 93$) and independent media (50% $n = 60$) more than in pro-Russian media (1.7% $n = 2$). Ukrainian actors are mentioned as responsible for the war in the pro-Russian media outlet (35% $n = 42$) more than in independent (9.2% $n = 11$) and pro-European (5.8% $n = 7$) media outlets. Similarly, Western actors are mentioned as responsible

more in Russian media (22.5% n = 27) compared to independent (7.5% n = 9) and pro-European media (3.3% n = 4). Thus, these findings fully support H2a and H2b.

Table 5

Frequency and percentages of actors mentioned as responsible for the war across different outlets (n = 360).

Responsibility is attributed to (actors)	Media outlets			Total ¹	Chi-Square
	Independent % (n = 120)	Pro-Russian % (n = 120)	Pro-EU % (n = 120)		
Russian	50.0 (60)	1.7 (2)	77.5 (93)	43.1 (155)	$X^2(2) = 144.272^*$
Ukrainian	9.2 (11)	35 (42)	5.8 (7)	16.7 (60)	$X^2(2) = 44.040^*$
Western	7.5 (9)	22.5 (27)	3.3 (4)	11.1 (40)	$X^2(2) = 24.694^*$
Other ^a	0 (0)	.8 (0)	0 (0)	.3 (1)	

Note. ¹ 'Total' shows the percentages and count of actors mentioned responsible across all three media outlets. ^a Requirements for conducting Chi-square test are not met (more than 20% of cells have expected count less than 5). * $p < .001$.

H3: Independent and pro-European media frame the war predominantly as an act of aggression by Russia against Ukraine (a), while pro-Russian media portrays the war mostly as necessary (b).

To test H3a and H3b, Chi-square tests were conducted (see Table 5). Results demonstrate significant differences in framing causal responsibility across outlets. There is a significant association between framing the cause of the war and the political orientation of media outlet in the case of 'Russian aggression' [$X^2 = 89.256$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$] and 'protection of the Ukrainian population' [$X^2 = 37.654$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$] frames. Independent (34.2% n = 41) and pro-European (56.7% n = 68) outlets predominantly frame causal responsibility for the war as Russian aggression, whereas only 1 item (.8%) in the pro-Russian outlet mentions Russian aggression as the cause of the war. In contrast, the pro-

Russian media outlet frames the cause/reason for the war mostly as the necessary protection of the population in Ukraine (24.2% $n = 29$). Only 4 (3.3%) items of independent media and 4 (3.3%) items of pro-European media mention the protection of the Ukrainian population as a cause/reason for the war. Thus, these findings support H3a and H3b.

H4: Pro-Russian media mentions historical factors as a cause of the war more frequently than pro-European and/or independent media.

A Chi-square test was computed to test H4 (see Table 6). The test demonstrates significant differences across three outlets in terms of framing causal responsibility for the war through historical factors [$X^2 = 13.474$, $df = 2$, $p = .001$]. According to the results, historical factors are mentioned as causes of the war by pro-Russian media outlet (10% $n = 12$) more compared to independent (2.5% $n = 3$) and pro-European (.8% $n = 1$) media outlets. Thus, H4 is supported.

Table 6

Frequency and percentages of causal responsibility factors mentioned across different media outlets ($n = 360$).

Causal attribution of responsibility	Media outlets			Total ¹ % ($n=360$)	Chi-Square
	Independent % ($n=120$)	Pro-Russia % ($n=120$)	Pro-EU % ($n=120$)		
Russian aggression	34.2 (41)	.8 (1)	56.7 (68)	30.6 (110)	$X^2(2) = 89.256^{**}$
Protection of the Ukrainian population	3.3 (4)	24.2 (29)	3.3 (4)	10.3 (37)	$X^2(2) = 37.654^{**}$
Historical factors	2.5 (3)	10 (12)	.8 (1)	4.4 (16)	$X^2(2) = 13.474^*$
Political factors ^a	2.5 (3)	3.3 (4)	0 (0)	1.9 (7)	
Economic factors ^a	0 (0)	.8 (1)	0 (0)	.3 (1)	
Other	0 (0)	15.8 (19)	2.5 (3)	6.1 (22)	$X^2(2) = 30.307^{**}$

Note. ¹ ‘Total’ shows the percentages and count of causal responsibility factors mentioned across all three media outlets. ^a Requirements for conducting Chi-square test are not met (more than 20% of cells have expected count less than 5). ** $p < .001$, * $p < .05$

H5a: Pro-European and/or independent media are more positive towards Ukrainian and Western actors and more negative towards pro-Russian actors compared to pro-Russian media.

H5b: Pro-Russian media is more positive towards Russian actors and negative towards Ukrainian and Western actors than pro-Western and independent media.

ANOVA tests were conducted to test H5a and H5b (see Table 7). Results demonstrate that the political slant of the media outlet has a significant effect on the valence of framing of Ukrainian actors ($F(2,281) = 204.95, p < .001$). 59% of the variance of the Ukrainian actors’ valence of framing can be explained by the media outlet’s political slant. Post-hoc test with Bonferroni corrections shows that the valence of framing of the Ukrainian actors is significantly more positive in the pro-European ($M = 1.51, SD = .50, p < .001$) and in the independent ($M = 1.19, SD = .52, p < .001$) media outlets compared to pro-Russian media ($M = .18, SD = .38$).

Similarly, the political orientation of media outlets significantly affects the valence of the framing of the Russian actors ($F(2,310) = 311.3, p < .001$), with 66.5% of the variance of the Russian actors’ valence of framing explained by the political slant of the outlet. Post-hoc test with Bonferroni corrections shows that the valence of framing of the Russian actors is significantly more positive in the pro-Russian media outlet ($M = 1.68, SD = .46$) compared to independent ($M = .59, SD = .56, p < .001$) and to pro-European media outlets ($M = .12, SD = .41, p < .001$).

Likewise, the political standing of media outlet has a significant effect on the valence of Western actors' framing ($F(2,169) = 66.91, p < .001$). 43.5% of the variance of the Western actors' valence of framing can be explained by the political slant of the media outlet. Post-hoc with Bonferroni corrections indicates that there is a significant difference in the valence of framing of Western actors across all outlets. Thus, the Western actors are framed more positively in both independent ($M = 1.10, SD = .62, p < .001$) and pro-European ($M = 1.46, SD = .58, p < .001$) media compared to pro-Russian media ($M = .30, SD = .46$). Thus, H5a and H5b are fully supported.

Table 7

Comparison of mean differences of actors' valence by media outlet.

	Media outlets			F value
	Independent	Pro-Russian	Pro-EU	
Actors	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	
Ukrainian	1.19 (.52) ^a	.18 (.38) ^b	1.51 (.50) ^c	204.95 **
Russian	.59 (.56) ^a	1.68 (.46) ^b	.12 (.41) ^c	311.3 **
Western	1.10 (.62) ^a	.30 (.46) ^b	1.46 (.58) ^c	66.9 **
Moldovan	1.28 (.53) ^a	.66 (.57) ^a	1.44 (.55) ^a	3.17 *
International organisations	1 (0) ^a	1 (.48) ^a	1.6 (.51) ^b	8.08 *
Other actors	.80 (.41) ^a	1.40 (.50) ^b	.5 (.67) ^a	12.43 **

Note. Higher means represent a more positive valence of framing. Standard deviations are indicated in parentheses. Superscripts (a, b, c) show statistically significant differences in post-hoc tests, and differences in means with the same superscript are not statistically significant. $n = 360$. ** $p < .001$; * $p < .05$

RQ2: How do Moldovan media portray domestic actors and the effects of the Russian-Ukrainian war on Moldova, and do the outlets differ in coverage?

H6: The pro-Russian media portrays Moldovan actors more negatively compared to the pro-European and independent media.

An ANOVA test was performed to test H6 (see Table 7). The test shows that the effect of the media outlet's political slant on the valence of Moldovan actors' framing is significant ($F(2,71) = 3.17, p = .48$), with 5.6% of the variance of Moldovan actors' framing valence explained by the political orientation of media outlet. However, Levene's test shows the variances are not homogenous ($p > .05$), and post-hoc test with Dunnett T3 corrections indicates that there are no significant differences in the valence of framing across the independent ($M = 1.28, SD = .53, n = 28$), pro-European ($M = 1.44, SD = .55, n = 43$) and pro-Russian ($M = .66, SD = .57, n = 3$) media outlets. Thus, H6 is not supported.

H7a: Independent and pro-European media provide more coverage of the war's negative effects on Moldova than pro-Russian media.

To test H7a, a Chi-square test was computed to investigate whether different media outlets differed significantly in their coverage of the effects of the war on Moldova (see Table 8). The results revealed a significant association between the political slant of media outlet and the coverage of the effects of war on Moldova (see 'Overall effects' in Table 8) [$X^2 = 46.505, df = 2, p < .001$]. The test shows that the effects of the war are covered more in independent (15% $n = 18$) and pro-European (33.3% $n = 40$) media outlets compared to pro-Russian (16.4 $n = 59$). Thus, H7a is fully supported.

H7b: Pro-European and independent media mention the threat of war (negative effects on security) in Moldova more frequently than pro-Russian media.

A Chi-Square test was conducted to test the H7b. The result demonstrates a significant association between the political slant of media outlet and the coverage of the effects of war on security in Moldova [$X^2 = 25.479, df = 2, p < .001$]. Chi-square test reveals that independent media (10% $n = 12$) and pro-European media (20.8% $n = 25$) mention the

security effects of the war in Moldova more than pro-Russian media (.8% n = 1). Thus, H7b is accepted.

Additionally, a Chi-square test shows (see Table 8) that similarly to security effects, social effects of the war on Moldova were covered significantly more in independent (3.3% n = 4) and pro-European (10.8% n = 13) media outlets compared to pro-Russian (n = 0) [$X^2 = 16.423$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$].

Table 8

Frequency and percentage of negative effects of the war on Moldova mentioned across different outlets (n = 360).

Effects mentioned	Media outlets			Total ¹ % (n = 360)	Chi-Square
	Independent % (n = 120)	Pro-Russian % (n = 120)	Pro-EU % (n = 120)		
Overall effects ²	15 (18)	.8 (1)	33.3 (40)	16.4 (59)	$X^2(2) = 46.503$ *
Political ^a	4.2 (5)	0 (0)	3.7 (6)	3.1 (11)	$X^2(2) = 16.423$ *
Social	3.3 (4)	0 (0)	10.8 (13)	4.7 (17)	
Economic ^a	3.3 (4)	0 (0)	8.3 (10)	3.9 (14)	$X^2(2) = 25.479$ *
Security	10 (12)	.8 (1)	20.8 (25)	10.6 (38)	
International relations ^a	1.7 (2)	0 (0)	4.2 (5)	1.9 (7)	

Note. ¹ 'Total' shows the percentage and count of mentions of the specific effects across all three outlets. ² All mentioned (specified and not specified) negative effects of the war. ^a Requirements for conducting Chi-square test are not met (more than 20% of cells have expected count less than 5). * $p < .001$.

Additionally, within explanatory analysis, Chi-square tests were computed to analyse the themes/dimensions mentioned across all outlets (see Table 9). The results demonstrate that the most covered themes across all three outlets were military actions/attacks (58.3% n =

210), political statements (44.2% n = 159), victims/casualties (30% n = 108), and infrastructure/economic impacts (28.9% n = 104). There were significant differences in the amount of coverage of the themes across different outlets, particularly – military actions/attacks [$X^2 = 6.240$, df = 2, p = .044], political statements [$X^2 = 20.344$, df = 2, p < .001], diplomatic negotiations [$X^2 = 10.588$, df = 2, p = .005], infrastructure/economic impacts [$X^2 = 15.604$, df = 2, p < .001], victims/casualties [$X^2 = 28.889$, df = 2, p < .001] and international policies/sanctions [$X^2 = 27.073$, df = 2, p < .001]. The coverage of these dimensions has significant associations with the political orientation of the media outlet.

The notable finding is that pro-Russian outlet covers the themes regarding the negative impacts of war less than independent and pro-European outlets. Thus, there is less coverage of casualties in the pro-Russian outlet (15% n = 18) than in the independent (28.3% n = 34) and the pro-European (46.7% n = 56) outlets. Similarly, the pro-Russian outlet (19.2% n = 23) covers less infrastructure/economic impacts (damage) than the independent (25.8% n = 31) and the pro-European outlets (41.7% n = 50). The same tendency is seen with the coverage of political statements and policies/sanctions – these two themes were mentioned more in pro-European (political statements: 51.7% n = 62; policies/sanctions: 30% n = 36) and independent media (political statements: 53.3% n = 64; policies/sanctions: 18.3% n = 22) than in the pro-Russian outlet (political statements: 27.5% n = 33; policies/sanctions: 5% n = 6). For more details on the themes and dimensions covered, see Table 9.

Table 9

Frequency and percentage of dimensions mentioned across media outlets (n = 360).

Dimensions / themes	Media outlets			Total ¹ % (n = 360)	Chi-Square
	Independent % (n = 120)	Pro-Russian % (n = 120)	Pro-EU % (n = 120)		
Human interest	7.5 (9)	5 (6)	10 (12)	7.5 (27)	$X^2(2) = 2.162$
Military actions/attacks	49.2 (59)	63.3 (76)	62.5 (75)	58.3 (210)	$X^2(2) = 6.240^*$
Humanitarian efforts	13.3 (16)	8.3 (10)	15.8 (19)	12.5 (45)	$X^2(2) = 3.200$
Political statements	53.3 (64)	27.5 (33)	51.7 (62)	44.2 (159)	$X^2(2) = 20.344^{**}$
Public response	8.3 (10)	7.5 (9)	6.7 (8)	7.5 (27)	$X^2(2) = .240$
Diplomatic negotiations	13.3 (16)	15 (18)	28.3 (34)	18.9 (68)	$X^2(2) = 10.588^*$
Infrastructure / economic impacts	25.8 (31)	19.2 (23)	41.7 (50)	28.9 (104)	$X^2(2) = 15.604^{**}$
Cultural impacts ^a	1.7 (2)	.8 (1)	1.7 (2)	1.4 (5)	
Victims / casualties	28.3 (34)	15 (18)	46.7 (56)	30 (108)	$X^2(2) = 28.889^{**}$
International policies / sanctions	18.3 (22)	5 (6)	30.8 (37)	18.1 (65)	$X^2(2) = 27.073^{**}$
Other	27.5 (33)	40.8 (49)	30.0 (36)	32.8 (118)	$X^2(2) = 5.471$

Note. ¹ 'Total' shows the percentage and count of mentions of a specific dimension across all three

outlets. ^a Requirements for conducting Chi-square test are not met (more than 20% of cells have

expected count less than 5). $^{**} p < .001$, $^* p < .05$

Discussion

This study analysed how the Russian-Ukrainian war and its effects on Moldova were framed in three Moldovan media outlets with independent, pro-European, or pro-Russian political stances. The findings revealed significant and interesting differences in framing across the media outlets, overall supporting most of the hypotheses of the study.

Contrary to H1b, pro-Russian media surprisingly employed a prevalent use of thematic framing compared to independent and pro-European media. Previous research suggests that war and conflicts are usually framed episodically (Dimitrova, 2006). Furthermore, pro-Russian media provided less coverage of war-related impacts and victims and attributed responsibility for the war to historical factors. Historical frames and narratives, which are part of Russian memory politics, are also used in the war context (Fedor, Lewis, & Zhurzhenko, 2017; McGlynn, 2020). This indicates pro-Russian media's tendency to utilise global contexts while neglecting episodic details for propagandistic purposes in promoting their perspectives on the war to the Moldovan audience.

As expected, sensationalism and dramatic framing were more prevalent than neutral framing across all three media outlets. However, significant differences were observed in the presence of three frame indicators. Firstly, the use of emotive language was prominent in all media outlets, with pro-European media displaying the highest presence. This could be attributed to the use of episodic framing in their coverage, as episodic framing “tends to be drama-oriented” (Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2008). Additionally, it aligns with the prevalent depiction of war damages, casualties, and human-interest stories. A similar emphasis on the human cost of war has been observed in the coverage of the Iraq war (Fahmy & Kim, 2008) and the Georgian-Russian war in the Romanian and Bulgarian media (Eckler & Kalyango, 2012). Secondly, pro-Russian media prominently employed demonising language. This finding aligns with the previous research indicating the tendency of Russian

media to increasingly portray the opposing side using aggressive language (Tagliavini, 2011), along with narratives about ‘Nazis’ in Ukraine and promoting a barbaric image of the West (Urman & Makhortykh, 2022).

The study also revealed significant biases in framing the war aligned with the political orientation of the media outlets. Independent and pro-European media outlets demonstrated a significantly more favourable framing of Western and Ukrainian actors while portraying Russian actors negatively. Conversely, pro-Russian media outlets portrayed Russian actors more favourably but depicted Ukrainian and Western actors in a negative light. These findings support previous research indicating that political elites significantly influence media framing, particularly in times of war, reflecting their political interests (Boyd-Barrett, 2004; Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2008). Furthermore, the analysis of responsible actors' framing exhibited a similar biased coverage tendency. Independent and pro-European media predominantly framed the war as an act of Russian aggression, whereas pro-Russian media framed it as a necessary endeavour to protect the Russian-speaking population in Ukraine. This narrative is one of the most common disinformation strategies employed by Russian propaganda since the beginning of the conflict in 2014 to justify military intervention (Urman & Makhortykh, 2022).

Contrary to H6, there were no significant differences in the framing of Moldovan actors across the outlets. This can be attributed to all Moldovan actors being coded as a single category, as their mentions were relatively infrequent. However, future research could explore the framing differences by categorising actors based on their political orientations, potentially revealing significant variations across outlets.

Furthermore, unlike most studies on war coverage, our study focused specifically on the war-related sections of the media outlets, allowing for an examination of agenda-setting effects across different outlets. This approach provided valuable insights into the coverage of

the war's effects on Moldova. Notably, pro-Russian media exhibited a lack of coverage of the war's impact, aligning with the political interests of the Russian government in Moldova.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of the study. Firstly, quantitative content analysis, as a method, has inherent limitations, including a focus on manifest content rather than underlying meanings and subjectivity in the development of codebook and category definitions (Prasad, 2018). Additionally, the measure of actors' framing valence combined neutral and ambivalent categories into one for analysis, potentially overlooking important differences.

Future research could address these limitations by analysing paragraphs as individual units of analysis to assess the prevalence of different frames within the coverage. Furthermore, future studies could investigate the perspectives of more diverse media outlets, such as Transnistrian and Gagauz media. Additionally, conducting longitudinal studies would provide a deeper insight into the changing nature of framing over time, capturing the media discourse during different phases of the conflict.

Despite its limitations, the study offers a unique comparative analysis of the framing of the Russian-Ukrainian war in Moldova's diverse media landscape and political environment. It contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of framing in war coverage.

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Appendix A

Krippendorff's alpha values

Category	Krippendorff's alpha values
(2.) Sources used	1
(2.1.) Domestic (Moldovan sources)	.874
(2.2.) Domestic (Transnistrian sources)	1
(2.3.) Ukrainian sources	.801
(2.4.) Russian sources	.890
(2.5.) Western sources	.8011
(2.6.) International organisations (sources)	.844
(3.1.) Episodic frame	.715
(3.2.) Thematic frame	.682
(4.) War related events and themes mentioned	.788
(4.1.) Human interest stories	.844
(4.2.) Military	.788
(4.3.) Humanitarian efforts	.907
(4.4.) Political statements	.67
(4.5.) Public response	1
(4.6.) Diplomatic negotiations	.707
(4.7.) Infrastructure / economic destructions	.722
(4.8.) Cultural impact	1
(4.9.) Victims/casualties report	1
(4.10.) International policies/sanctions	.771
(5.) Attribution of responsibility frame used	.778

(5.1.) Attribution of responsibility to actors	.671
(5.1.1.) Russian actors	.707
(5.1.2.) Ukrainian actors	.771
(5.1.3.) Western actors	1
(5.2.) Causal factors mentioned	.78
(5.2.1.) Russian aggression	.726
(5.2.2.) Political interference	.8748
(5.2.3.) Economic factors	1
(5.2.4.) Protection of population in Ukraine	1
(5.2.5.) Historical factors	1
(6.) Effects of the war on Moldova mentioned	.894
(6.1.) Political effects	1
(6.2.) Social effects	1
(6.3.) Economic effects	1
(6.4.) Security effects	.874
(6.5.) Effects on international relations	1
(7.) Sensationalism / dramatic frame used	.724
(7.1.) Demonising language indicators	.894
(7.2.) Victimising language indicators	.844
(7.3.) Emotive language indicators	.774
(8.) Actors mentioned	1
(8.1) Ukrainian actors	.722
(8.1.1.) Ukrainian actors' valence	.677
(8.2.) Russian actors	.722

(8.2.1.) Russian actors' valence	.812
(8.3.) Western actors	.661
(8.3.1.) Western actors' valence	.729
(8.4.) International organisations	.907
(8.4.1.) International organisations' valence	.80
(8.5.) Moldovan actors	.894
(8.5.1.) Moldovan actors' valence	1

Note. The numbering of parameters is maintained the same as in the codebook

Appendix B

Codebook

1. General Information

- 1.1. Coder number
- 1.2. URL
- 1.3. Date of posting
- 1.4. Article heading
- 1.5. Article type
 - 1. *News report*
 - 2. *Editorial*
 - 3. *Opinion piece*
 - 4. *Photo report*
 - 5. *Interview*
 - 6. *Other*
- 1.5 Media outlet
 - 1. *Ziarul de Gardă*
 - 2. *Newsmaker*
 - 3. *Sputnik Moldova*
- 1.6. Political standing of the media outlet
 - 1. *Pro-EU*
 - 2. *Pro-Russian*
 - 3. *Independent*
- 1.7. Language of the media outlet
 - 1. *Romanian*
 - 2. *Russian*
 - 3. *Available both in Romanian and Russian*
- 1.8. Length of the article (Indicate the length of the article in words without heading)

2. Use of Sources

(2.) Does the item use sources?

- 1 – Yes
- 0 – No

Which of the following sources were quoted / paraphrased?

	yes	no
2.1. <i>Domestic (Moldovan)</i>	1	0
2.2. <i>Domestic (Transnistrian)</i>	1	0
2.3. <i>Ukrainian</i>	1	0
2.4. <i>Russian</i>	1	0
2.5. <i>Western (European / British / American / NATO etc)</i>	1	0
2.6. <i>International organisations, e.g., UN</i>	1	0
2.7. <i>Other international (specify)</i>	1	0

3. Episodic / Thematic Framing

(3.) Does the item imply one (both) of the following frames?

3.1. Episodic:

Does the item involve focusing on individual stories or events rather than providing a broader societal or contextual analysis / highlighting personal experiences, emotions and individual narratives of those affected by the conflict, emphasising the human impact and individual stories of suffering or heroism / emphasising specific incidents or individuals without necessarily addressing the underlying systemic issues or larger patterns related to the conflict?

1 – Yes

0 – No

3.2. Thematic:

Does the item involve emphasising the broader context of the war and underlying issues that caused the conflict / focusing on causes, consequences, and impacts of the war on society, politics, and the economy / analytical and objective perspective / does it present the war as a complex phenomenon that is influenced by various factors and actors?

1 – Yes

0 – No

4. War-related Events and Themes

(4.) Does the item mention war-related events and themes?

1 – Yes

0 – No

Identify which of the following events and impacts are mentioned in the article (the categories are not mutually exclusive):

	yes	no
4.1. Human interest stories of individuals affected by the war	1	0

4.2. Military actions / activities / attacks / incidents / armament supply / prisoner exchange / recruiting	1	0
4.3. Humanitarian aid efforts	1	0
4.4. Political statements / decisions or speeches related to the conflict, peace talks, anti-war statements of political actors	1	0
4.5. Public response: reactions or personal opinions of population, non-political actors involved, anti-war protests	1	0
4.6. Diplomatic negotiations	1	0
4.7. War-related economic impacts, e.g., destruction of infrastructure	1	0
4.8. War-related cultural impacts, e.g., destruction of cultural monuments	1	0
4.9. Report on victims / casualties	1	0
4.10. International policies, sanctions	1	0
4.11. Other (specify)	1	0

5. Attribution of Responsibility Frame

(5.) Is there any discussion of / reference to the reasons or causes (attribution of responsibility) for the war mentioned in the item?

1 – Yes
0 – No

5.1. If 5. is Yes, then code:

Does the item assign responsibility for the war to any specific actors, if Yes, specify to which one(s)?

1 – Yes
0 – No

	yes	no
5.1.1. Russian actors	1	0
5.1.2. Ukrainian actors	1	0
5.1.3. Western actors (NATO is classified as Western actor in this study)	1	0
5.1.4. Other (specify)	1	0

5.2. Causal factors attributed as a cause of the war:

Does the item mention factors that are attributed as a cause of the war, if Yes, specify which one(s)?

1 – Yes
0 – No

	yes	no
5.2.1. Russian invasion / military interference / aggression	1	0

5.2.2. Political interference	1	0
5.2.3. Economic factors / interests	1	0
5.2.4. Protection of population in Ukraine / DNR, LNR, ‘denazification’, ‘demilitarization’ of Ukraine, war crimes against civilians in Ukraine	1	0
5.2.5. Historical factors, which include: historical grievances and conflicts, long-standing political and economic relationship between actors, past diplomatic efforts and agreements, etc.	1	0
5.2.6. Other factors (specify)		

6. Effects of the War for Moldova

(6.) Does the item mention the effects of the war for Moldova?

1 – Yes

0 – No

Which of the following consequences / effects / impacts of the war for Moldova mentions the item?

	yes	no
6.1. Political effects, which include: impacts on political stability, changes in political attitudes/propaganda, shifts in political power, protests, etc.	1	0
6.2. Social effects: poverty / lowering living standards, unemployment, refugee issues/migration crisis, ethnic conflicts, language issues, etc.	1	0
6.3. Economic effects: energy/gas supplies problems, economic development of Moldova, etc.	1	0
6.4. Security effects: changes in national security policies, threats for national security/safety of Moldovan population, threat of war/conflict, Transnistrian conflict escalation, etc.	1	0
6.5. Effects on international relations: foreign policy and cooperation, Moldova’s relationship with other countries, etc.	1	0

7. Sensationalism / Dramatic Frame

(7.) Does the item resorts to using sensationalism / dramatic frame?

1 – Yes

0 – No

If the *sensationalism / dramatic frame* is present, then specify which indicators of the frame are used (categories adopted from Maslog, Lee & Kim, 2006):

	yes	no
7.1. Demonising language – portrays a person or a group as evil, immoral, or dangerous, often involves exaggeration, extreme or dehumanising language, e.g., <i>'evil'</i> , <i>'barbaric'</i> , <i>'savage'</i> , <i>'inhuman'</i> , <i>'terrorist'</i> , <i>'Nazi'</i> etc.	1	0
7.2. Victimising language – evokes sympathy for a person or group that has been harmed, often involves highlighting the suffering or injustice that they have experienced, e.g., <i>'innocent'</i> , <i>'helpless'</i> , <i>'suffering'</i> , <i>'tragic'</i> , <i>'devastated'</i> , <i>'vulnerable'</i> , etc.	1	0
7.3. Emotive language – involves the use of emotional adjectives to create an emotional response. To distinguish it from the victimising and demonising language, we will define it as one that is unrelated to dehumanising or victimising a group or an individual, e.g., <i>'shocking'</i> , <i>'devastating'</i> , <i>'tragic'</i> , <i>'terrifying'</i> , <i>'captivating'</i> , etc.	1	0

8. Analysis of Potential Bias in the Framing of Actors

(8.) Does the item mention any political (or activists/media personalities) mentioned?

1 – Yes

0 – No

	yes	no
8.1. Ukrainian	1	0
8.2. Russian	1	0
8.3. Western (NATO is classified as Western actor in this paper)	1	0
8.4. International organisations, or actors presenting the organisations, e.g., UN, IAEA	1	0
8.5. Moldovan actors	1	0
8.6. Other (specify)	1	0

Actor's valence (is coded separately for each category of actors mentioned in the news item)

1. Positive
2. Negative
3. Ambivalent
4. Neutral

Abstract

This study analyses the framing of the Russian-Ukrainian war in Moldovan media during a one-year period from February 24, 2022 – the day of the full-scale invasion – to March 2023. Three news media outlets with either independent, pro-European or pro-Russian political orientations, Newsmaker, Ziarul de Gardă and Sputnik Moldova, were analysed. Employing framing theory, a quantitative content analysis of 360 news articles was conducted, focusing on the attribution of responsibility, episodic/thematic, and sensationalism frames. Additionally, the valence of actors' framing and the coverage of the war's effects on Moldova were analysed. The findings reveal a distinct bias in framing actors aligned with each media outlet's political orientation. Independent and pro-European media outlets demonstrate a significantly more favourable framing of Western and Ukrainian actors, while pro-Russian media portrays Russian actors more favourably. Independent and pro-European media tend to frame war as an act of Russian aggression. In contrast, pro-Russian media attributes responsibility to Ukrainian and Western actors and frames the war as necessary. Notably, pro-Russian media neglects covering the war's effects on Moldova. This study offers a unique comparative analysis of the framing of the Russian-Ukrainian war in Moldova's diverse media landscape and political environment. It contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of framing in war coverage.

Keywords: war framing, Russian-Ukrainian war, Moldovan media, attribution of responsibility frame, framing of actors

Zusammenfassung

In dieser Studie wird das Framing des russisch-ukrainischen Krieges in den moldawischen Medien über einen Zeitraum von einem Jahr, vom 24. Februar 2022 - dem Tag der vollständigen Invasion - bis März 2023, analysiert. Es wurden drei Nachrichtenmedien mit entweder unabhängiger, pro-europäischer oder pro-russischer politischer Ausrichtung, Newsmaker, Ziarul de Gardă, und Sputnik Moldova, analysiert. Unter Anwendung der Framing-Theorie wurde eine quantitative Inhaltsanalyse von 360 Nachrichtenartikeln durchgeführt, wobei der Schwerpunkt auf der Zuschreibung von Verantwortung, episodischen/thematischen und sensationalistischen Framings lag. Darüber hinaus wurde die Darstellung der Akteure durch das Framing, sowie die Berichterstattung über die Auswirkungen des Krieges auf Moldawien analysiert. Die Ergebnisse zeigen eine deutliche Verzerrung bei der Darstellung von Akteuren, die mit der politischen Ausrichtung der einzelnen Medienunternehmen übereinstimmt. Unabhängige und pro-europäische Medien zeigen ein deutlich positiveres Framing westlicher und ukrainischer Akteure, während pro-russische Medien russische Akteure positiver darstellen. Unabhängige und pro-europäische Medien neigen dazu, den Krieg als einen Akt russischer Aggression darzustellen. Die pro-russischen Medien hingegen schreiben die Verantwortung ukrainischen und westlichen Akteuren zu und stellen den Krieg als eine Notwendigkeit dar. Auffällig an dieser Stelle ist, dass die pro-russischen Medien die Berichterstattung über die Auswirkungen des Krieges auf Moldawien vernachlässigen. Diese Studie leistet eine bislang noch fehlende vergleichende Analyse des Framings des russisch-ukrainischen Krieges in der vielfältigen Medienlandschaft und im politischen Umfeld Moldawiens. Die Studie dient einem erweiterten Verständnis über die Rolle des Framings in der Kriegsberichterstattung.

Schlüsselwörter: Framing des Krieges, russisch-ukrainischer Krieg, moldawische Medien, Verantwortungs-Framing, Darstellung der Akteure