Analysis of *The Guardian* online newspaper framing of the Russian-Ukraine war

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the framing of Russian-Ukraine war on the Nigerian Guardian newspaper by identifying the most dominant frame and slant used in the coverage of the war. The Framing theory served as theoretical framework. Content analysis was the adopted research design and 8 issue specific frame categories were implemented in the study. Three categories were also developed for the news slant, and the researcher discovered that the most dominantly used frame was politicisation frame, while the war news were majorly slanted to be unfavourable to the war. The researchers recommended that the media should use more of anti-war protest to report the war in order to trigger a major call for an end to the war.

KEY WORDS: Russia, Ukraine, War, Framing, war reporting.

INTRODUCTION

The Russian-Ukraine war has been ongoing for almost a year, since 24th of February 2022 and has led to the destruction of infrastructures, and the loss of a large number of lives. Cenciarini (2020) noted that the war between the two countries was provoked by differences in their national ideologies, political influences, complex historical background, political power structure, as well as their national identities, which had existed for several years before the ongoing war.

Fengler (2020) opined that tension has existed between the two countries since Ukraine gained independence in 1991, even though Ukraine used to be one of the Russia's most powerful satellite republics in the past. Ukraine's politics, oligarchs and companies were heavily affected by Russian institutions in the past until Ukraine started institutionalizing its democracy in later years with movements like the 2004/2005 *Orange revolution* that took place in Kyiv in order to oppose the influence of Russian politics on the country (Fengler 2020).

Another point of tension between the two countries emanated in 2013 because the then President of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovych, was stopped from getting into an alliance agreement with the European Union (Higgins, 2014). However, the Russian military involvement in the 2014 annexation of crimea ignited the rift between both countries at the global stage (Pifer, 2016). Splidsboel (2015) added that the annexation of Crimea, which was made official through a referendum led to the beginning of a full blown conflict between the two countries. Clapp (2022) also noted from the beginning of 2021, Russia began to move troops, heavy weaponry, armours,

missiles and other military equipment near Ukraine's border before it finally invaded Ukraine in the later part of February, 2022.

Tarakeswara & Madhu (2017) argues that media reportage of war is basically grounded on the notion that the society sees conflict as a news value, and the media had been covering the war since it began about eleven months ago as part of their role as news source. Asemah et al. (2022) also noted that the media, through the use of frame report events or societal issues to the public by using certain pictures, words, headlines, or tones over others, so as to highlight certain aspects the issue and obscuring other parts.

Framing of the war by the media in recent times, particularly by *The Guardian* (Nigeria) online newspaper is not yet ascertained, and framing affects the way the public interpret reported events. Therefore, the researcher aims at examining framing of the Russian-Ukraine war on *The Guardian* (online) in order to find out the most dominant frame and slant used in the coverage of the war.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The way the media reports certain information have great influence on people's perception and attitude to such messages (Nwaoboli, 2021, 2022; Nwaoboli and Asemah, 2021) and newspaper framing of war is no different. There have been several media reports on the Russian Ukraine war since it started early last year, and the media has been using frames in their reportage of the war. Media frames have been widely seen to be a tool that shapes the public opinion about reported issues, and so it is important to examine the framing of the war by the media. Researchers like Nazie (2022), Asemah-Ibrahim, Nwaoboli & Asemah (2022a; 2022b) have also carried out academic research on the ongoing war, however, no academic research has been carried out to ascertain the framing of the war by *The Guardian* (online) newspaper. This study would thus be used to fill this research gap.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Ascertain the most dominant frame used by *The Guardian* in the coverage of Russian-Ukraine war
2. Determine the most dominant slant used by *The Guardian* in the coverage of Russian-Ukraine war

LITERATURE REVIEW

Framing refers to the way the media arranges and make sense of events, and it is considered a relevant tool for comprehending media play in the political and socio-economic life of people. Media frames are either generic or issue-specific in form (Khaldrova, 2016)

Crawford & Olsen (2017) argue that the public perspectives are changed and shaped by media news as a result of the frames used in the reportage. Media framing help mold audience perception of reported issues and assist in the description and resolution of reported issues. The mass media frame reported news in order to trigger an expected emotional response from their listeners or viewers.

Lynch (2012) notes that media framing provides a fundamental principle that bond a series of unfolding news events, and in the case of war issues, the media produce interpretive schemas to report war stories and thereby influence the public's decision to respond to the war positively or negatively. Media framing is thus the tool that causes difference between a positive attitude and negative public emotions to reported news (Khaldrova, 2016).

Zaliska et al. (2022) note that since the Russian-Ukraine war started, each day has brought tragic human suffering, loss of lives, destruction of infrastructures, injuries, negative health and financial impacts, and casualties. De Witte (2022) also noted that Russia invasion into the Ukraine territory early last year is being seen as an affront to the world peace. The war has also caused a great humanitarian crisis with large casualties and displacement records (Feldscher, 2022).

Various media organisations have also reported that the war has led to a high number of displacements, the collapse of health care services, traumatic injuries, economic melt-down, as well as damage in several sectors of the countries, particularly Ukraine. As a result of the invasion, western powers have launched an economic war against Russia that isolated them economically through sanctions, because they could not assist Ukraine with their military in order to prevent a third nuclear world war as threatened by Russia's president (Gumede, 2022)

According to Gumede (2022, p. 1), " Putin appears to be seeing his invasion of Ukraine as a mission to reposition Russia as a global power by taking the mantle from the old USSR, and integrating parts of the old USSR into Russia in order to become powerful and re-engage in cold war allies of the cold war." Tank & Ospanova (2022) argue that the Russian-Ukraine war has harmed the growth of the global economy and placed an upward pressure on global inflation. For instance, Russia's economy has been pummeled by western sanctions like the freezing of their central bank assets, and restrictions to their SWIFT payment system.

Newsweek (2023) also reports that Russia has lost about 140, 000 soldiers in the war, and Tan (2022) added that the war has worsened shipping snarls, pushed up freight rates and inflated oil prices. In all, it can be said that the Russian-Ukraine war has caused more harm to both countries.

Theoretical Review

Media Framing Theory

Media framing is backed up by the framing theory, and this study is anchored on the theory. Comninis (2013) notes that framing theory depict mass media portrayal of news or messages through the use of frames which in turn affect the perception, interpretation and opinion of the public on the information. The framing theory also describes media framing as the spatial or temporal bounding of sets of interactive messages which serve as a form of meta-communication (Asemah., Nwammuo & Nkwam-Uwaoma, 2017).

Asemah., Nwammuo & Nkwam-Uwaoma (2022) also argue that Erving Goffman developing the concept of framing as well as the theories that accompany it for the academic field of sociology in 1974, in order to explain how the mass media shape the public' opinion through the use of frames that are usually present in their reported messages. Frames are mental schema that enables individuals to better organise the experiences they have had, and they are sets of theoretical perspectives on the manner individuals or societies organise, understand, or communicate about reality.

Furthermore, the framing theory reveals that the mass media disseminate news and other information to the public in ways that is predetermined or shaped by them (Asemah et al., 2017). Frames according to the theory, are abstractions that contribute to the enhancement of a message's meaning or their interpretation, and they are used for facilitating the elucidation of media communications and to portray media's stand on the reported information.

Therefore, frames can either influence the public opinion on an issue positively or negatively, and this is why it is important to study how the mass media have been reporting the Russian-Ukraine war in recent times.

Empirical Review

Several studies have been carried out on the Russian-Ukraine war and part of it includes Nazie (2022) study titled "the framing of the 2022 Russian-Ukraine war on Aljazeera. The aim of the research was to identify the most dominantly used tone, frame, and topic choice of Aljazeera in the coverage of Russian-Ukraine war. The researcher adopted the use of content analysis as the research design, and developed research instruments to analyse 145 Aljazeera's news report on the war. The researcher found out that the negative tone was dominantly used by Aljazeera to report the war, and that majority of Aljazeera's reports were projected under the attribution of responsibility frame, and 'causalities summary' topic choice. . The researcher then recommended media organisations should make more use of the violence of war frame, which highlights the negative effects of war in their coverage of the ongoing war.

Asemah-Ibrahim., Nwaoboli, &Asemah (2022a) study titled "corporate social responsibility in war ridden-zones of Russia-Ukraine from February to July 2022" was used to evaluate the use of CSR by multinational companies in the Russian-Ukraine war. Stakeholder's theory was used and the library research method was adopted. The researchers discovered that several multinational companies have carried out CSR work in support of Ukraine against Russia. The then recommended that companies should educate their staffs on the use of CSR during period of wars.

Szwed (2016) looked at how the conflict between Ukraine and Russia is framed in internet and social media. The study's goals included explaining and reconstructing the online information campaign run by Russia and pro-Russian activists, as well as reconstructing frames and representations of the Ukrainian-Russian conflict seen in online discussion forums and social media postings. The techniques and tactics employed by pro-Kremlin commentators to produce representations of the annexation of Crimea and the war between Ukraine and Russia were shown via textual and visual studies. The study focuses on the framing of the Ukraine-Russian war through web portals (DELFI, korrespondent.net, pravda.com.ua, kyivpost.com, and onet.pl) and social media between 1 April and 31 December 2014. (Facebook, Vkontakte). According to the research, pictures of the opposing sides are constantly being formed and that comments made on articles have a substantial impact on their substance. Russia, for instance, is seen as a powerhouse that can achieve its objectives via both political and military means. This nation resists aggressive Western objectives and is peaceful. The fascist nation of Ukraine is lost and unable to live on its own. It was advised that the command structures of NATO and its allies should routinely monitor and thoroughly examine Russia's use of social media for military purposes. It was also advised that it is crucial to use network analysis and assess the effects of various pieces of information on the audiences that are being targeted in order to gauge the influence and efficacy of Russia's propaganda activities on social media.

The Framing the Ukraine crisis: A comparison between talk show arguments on Russian and German television was explored by Lichtenstein et al. (2019). The study's goal was to determine how the framing of the Ukraine issue employed both productive and detrimental frameworks. Twenty editions were analysed using a qualitative content analysis study approach, and the results revealed that constructive rather than destructive frames were more often utilised in television programmes. This suggested that television networks in Russia and Germany mostly covered the Ukraine War in ways that prevented the War from escalating rather than deescalating. Therefore, it was advised that the media continue to cover the situation in a helpful manner if they were to help stop the Russian-Ukrainian War.

The above studies are related to the study because they are both carried out in relations to the ongoing Russian-Ukraine war. However, none was used to analyse the framing of war reports on *The Guardian*, and this study would be used to fill this gap.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Content analysis was adopted as the paper's research design, and two months was chosen as the periodic scope of the study (November 1, 2022 – December 31, 2022). Census was adopted as the sampling technique and this made the total population of the study to be the same with the sampling technique, thereby making a total of 49 news reports. A codebook and code sheet was designed for the analysis, and 8 frame categories were picked for the analysis. The frames include: politicisation frame, human interest frame, attribution of responsibility frame, economic impact frame, violence of war frame, anti-protest frame, diagnostic frame, and conflict frame.

The politicisation frame covered the war news that focused on the political aspect of the war, the human interest frame captured war news that gave a human face to the war, the attribution of responsibility frame covered news that blamed a thing or group for the war, the economic impact frame covered war news that highlighted the economic implication of the war, the violence of war frame captured news that focused on the negative effects of the war, the conflict frame covered news on conflicts amongst individuals in relations to the war, anti-protest frame captured news that called for an end to the war, while the diagnostic frame covered news that focused on the cause of the war.

In addition, the researcher had three categories for the news slant and they are favourable slant, neutral slant, and unfavourable slant. The favourable slant captured news that supported the war and its continuation, the neutral slant captured news that were on the fence in regards to supporting and opposing the war, while the negative slant covered news that opposed the war and its continuation.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Categorisation of news items according to its frames

FRAME CATEGORIES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Economic impact	2	4
Human interest	6	12
Attribution of responsibility	5	10
Violence of war	14	29

Anti-war protest	4	8
Diagnostic	1	2
Millitary conflict	2	4
Politicisation	15	31
Total	**49**	**100**

This table depicts that *The Guardian* framed majorly of its report on the Russian-Ukraine war using the politicisation frame, and had the lowest amount of their reports under the diagnostic frame.

Table 2 showing the categorisation of news items according to its slant

SLANTS CATEGORIES	FREQUENCY	PECENTAGE
Favourable	0	0
Neutral	15	31
Unfavourable	34	69
Total	**49**	**100**

This table depicts that majority of *The Guardian* newspaper reports about the Russian-Ukraine war were slanted to be unfavourable to the war, while no report was slanted to favour the war continuation.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study was aimed at confirming the most dominantly used frame and slant used by *The Guardian* (Nigeria) in the reportage of Russian-Ukraine war between November and December 2022, and the researcher discovered that *The Guardian* (online) majorly presented the Russian-Ukraine war news using the politicisation frame as it accounted for 31% of the analysed reports. This findings thus reveal the fact that *The Guardian* (online) reportage of the war focused more on issues like the support Ukraine or Russia are getting from other countries, the political effect of the war on the countries and the world as a whole, the effect of the war on the membership of the countries in international bodies, as well as the visit of the presidents of either of the presidents to other countries because of the war.

In addition, reports with the violence of war frame were high as it accounted for 29% of the analysed reports. This result shows that *The Guardian* also paid major attention to the destructions and casualties caused by the war in its reportage. War news with the human interest frame follows with 12%, and these news reports focused on some individuals who have been specifically affected by the war in negative ways. The attribution of responsibility frame news accounted for 10% of the analysed news and the news were used to majorly blame Russia for starting the war. News under the economic impact frame and conflict frame both accounted for 4% of the analysed reports, and the former highlighted the funding used for the war or lost during the war, while the later focused on the military men activities.

The anti-war protest frame accounted for just 2% of the analysed news, and the news were shaped to depict the sanctions being placed on Russia in order to end the war, the meetings done by international bodies to end the war, and oppositions being made to stop the war from continuing.

For the slant, the researcher found out that no report was slanted by *The Guardian* to be favourable to the war. In addition, 31% were slanted to be neutral, while 69% were slanted to be unfavourable to the war. News reports under the neutral slant neither focused on continuing or stopping the war, rather, it was used to talk about new developments in the war, the defeat or wins experienced, and the activities taking place during the war. News reports under the unfavourable slant were used to discourage the continuation of the war, and bring about peace between the affected countries.

The researcher also found out that the focus of media reportage has shifted from the use of diagnostic frame and anti-war frame as depicted in Nazie (2022) research work, to the use of politicisation frame. The implication of this finding is that the media is no longer talking majorly about the reasons of the war, or majorly protesting against it. The media has been seen to have shifted its attention to their reportage to the new developments of the war, and the survival strategies of both countries.

In all, the researcher confirmed that framing does truly exist in media texts just like Khaldrova (2016) noted, and that the framing theory which Asemah et al (2022) describes as the use of news frames to trigger certain thoughts or emotions from people through the use of interpretive schemas.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

With reference to this study's objectives, which were to determine the most dominant frame and slant used by *The Guardian* (Nigeria) in the reportage of the Russian-Ukraine war between November and December 2022. Content analysis was used by the researcher to examine 49 news items that were published during the periodic scope of the study, and a code book and sheet was developed to aid the analysis. A review of related literature on news framing and its effect on the public, an exploration into the Russian-Ukraine war, and framing theory was done, and a review of empirical studies was also done.

The study's findings showed that politicisation frame and the unfavourable slant were dominantly used by *The Guardian* (Nigeria) in the reportage of the war. The researcher also confirmed the validity of framing theory and the presence of frames in the media texts. Therefore, the researcher concludes that the media has shifted focus from the issues surrounding the cause of the war or a call to end the war, and has now focused more on the activities of the war, and the developments happening in the ongoing war.

Finally, the researcher recommends that the media should use more of anti-war protest to report the war in order to trigger a major call for an end to the war. In addition, the media should only use the unfavourable slant to report the war rather than being neutral about it.

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APPENDIX

Code sheet

#	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N
1	On the theme of a new world order – Part 2	01 Nov,	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
2	Thousands more to be evacuated from Ukraine's Kherson	01 Nov,	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
3	Why Africa must remain non-aligned	04 Nov,	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
4	Iran admits sending Russia drones	05 Nov,	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
5	Taiwanese man dies fighting in Ukraine war	06 Nov,	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
6	Putin will not go to G20 summit in Bali	10 Nov,	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
7	Russian retreat from Kherson: what's next	10 Nov,	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
8	Zelensky proclaims strategic Kherson 'ours', as US hails Ukraine's victory	12 Nov,	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
9	Tears of happiness': Ukrainians rejoice after liberation from Russians	13 Nov,	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
10	Biden to seek red lines in talks with Xi	13 Nov,	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
11	Biden to set 'guardrails' in Xi superpower summit	14 Nov,	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
12	Zelensky visits Ukraine's Kherson after Russian retreat	14 Nov,	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
13	CIA chief meeting Russia counterpart to warn against nuclear use	14 Nov,	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
14	Ukraine's Zelensky hails Kherson capture as 'beginning of end of war'	15 Nov,	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
15	Zelensky tells G20 leaders 'terrorist state among you	16 Nov,	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
16	Poland says blast likely caused by Ukraine missile in accident	16 Nov,	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
17	Erdogan says confident US, Russia won't use nukes	17 Nov,	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
18	Trial of Kremlin critic Yashin starts in Russia	23 Nov,	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
19	Zelensky to address US, as Russian strikes batter Ukraine power grid	23 Nov,	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
20	Zelensky calls into question Russia's OSCE membership	24 Nov,	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
21	Russian shelling kills 15 in Kherson as Ukraine battles to restore power	26 Nov,	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
22	OPEC set to stick or cut more amid plan to cap Russian oil price	2 Dec,	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
23	Scholz urges Putin to withdraw troops for 'diplomatic' end to war	2 Dec,	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
24	More than 500 Ukrainian localities without power	4 Dec,	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
25	Zelensky's Time award 'Russophobic,' says Kremlin	8 Dec,	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
26	French tanks join NATO defensive line in Romania	9 Dec,	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
27	Nobel Peace Prize ceremony, a call to arms for Ukraine	10 Dec,	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
28	Ukrainian strike hits Russian-occupied Melitopol	11 Dec,	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
29	Biden underscores support for Ukraine in call with Zelensky	12 Dec,	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0

#	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N
28	Ukrainian strike hits Russian-occupied Melitopol	11 Dec,	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
29	Biden underscores support for Ukraine in call with Zelensky	12 Dec,	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
30	Heavy losses': Ukraine soldiers count war's cost away from front	16 Dec,	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
31	Russia insists will not use biological weapons	16 Dec,	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
32	Kyiv warns of long cuts after Russian missiles batter grid	17 Dec,	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
33	Putin meets top military brass to discuss Ukraine strategy: Kremlin	17 Dec,	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
34	EU, Azerbaijan launch Black Sea electricity link	17 Dec,	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
35	Putin's invasion of Ukraine opened 'gates of hell': Anglican leader	18 Dec,	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
36	Drones attack Kyiv as Ukraine watches Belarus border	19 Dec,	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
37	Ukraine's Zelensky visits frontline city of Bakhmut	20 Dec,	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
38	IMF approves program to help Ukraine secure donor funding	20 Dec,	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
39	Biden, Zelenskyy meet in Washington	22 Dec,	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
40	Lawmaker attacks Putin for Ukraine 'war' reference	23 Dec,	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
41	Zelensky blasts Russian 'terror' after Kherson city shelled	24 Dec,	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
42	Putin says West wants to 'tear apart' Russia	26 Dec,	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
43	Indian police probe deaths of Russian lawmaker, companion	27 Dec,	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
44	'Not a traitor': The Russians fighting alongside Ukraine's forces	28 Dec,	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
45	Only a few civilians' left in Ukraine's Bakhmut: Zelensky	28 Dec,	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
46	2022 Year in Review: Amid global turmoil, United Nations (UN) doggedly pursues international climat	28 Dec,	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
47	Person of the Year 2022: Victims of Russia-Ukraine war – For the courage to endure world economic	29 Dec,	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
48	Person of the Year 2022: Russo-Ukrainian War: We are all victims	29 Dec,	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
49	2022 Year In Review: As conflicts rage, international dialogue remains 'the only hope' for peace	29 Dec,	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
	TOTAL		2	6	5	14	4	1	2	15	0	15	34

Codebook

The Guardian news reports' features	V.1 Title of news item
	V.2 Date of publication
Frame categories	V.3 Economic impact
	V. 4 Human interest
	V.5 Attribution of responsibility
	V.6 Violence of war
	V.7 Anti-war protest
	V.8 Diagnostic
	V.9 Military conflict frame
	V.10 Politicization
Slant categories	V.11 Favourable
	V.12 Neutral
	V.13 Unfavourable