

The Language of Politics

Katarzyna Molek-Kozakowska
Simina-Maria Terian *Editors*

Mediated Discourses of Conflict across Languages and Genres

Coverage and Reception of the War
in Ukraine

OPEN ACCESS

 Springer

The Language of Politics

Series Editor

Ofer Feldman , Doshisha University, Kyoto, Japan

Editorial Board Members

Benedetta Baldi, Department of Humanities and Philosophy, University of Florence, Florence, Italy

Christ'l De Landtsheer, University of Antwerp, Antwerp, Belgium

Marianthi Georgalidou, Department of Mediterranean Studies, University of the Aegean, Rhodes, Greece

Augusto Gnisci, University of Campania "Luigi Vanvitelli", Caserta, Italy

Ken Kinoshita , Faculty of Socio-Environmental Studies, Fukuoka Institute of Technology, Fukuoka, Japan

Isabel Íñigo-Mora, Facultad de Filología, University of Sevilla, Sevilla, Spain

Michael Alan Krasner, City University of New York, New York, USA

Sam Lehman-Wilzig, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan, Israel

Katarzyna Molek-Kozakowska, University of Opole, Opole, Poland

Gene Segarra Navera, National University of Singapore, Singapore, Singapore

Michael Phillips-Anderson, Department of Communication, Monmouth University, West Long Branch, NJ, USA

Kurt Sengul, Macquarie University, Sydney, NSW, Australia

Debbita Ai Lin Tan, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia

Milica Vuković-Stamatović, Univerzitet Crne Gore, Podgorica, Montenegro

Annemarie Walter, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, UK

Ruth Wodak, Lancaster University, Lancaster, UK

Sonja Zmerli, Sciences Po Grenoble, St. Martin d'Hères, France

The Language of Politics series is an interdisciplinary, critical, and analytical forum for the publication of cutting-edge research regarding the way language is used by political officials. It focuses mainly on empirically-based research aiming to analyze and discuss the role, function, and effects of the vocabulary used by politicians and other officials in Western and non-Western societies. Such language can be broadcast live in venues such as parliamentary debates and deliberations, election campaign assemblies, political party conventions, press conferences, media interviews, and even non-broadcast (but later reported) speeches in front of support groups or during international negotiations – in traditional as well as social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter). It can include polite, respectful, and deferential public speaking, or conversely, impolite verbal discourse, debasing and derisive comments, and the use of crude, vulgar, or abusive terms – including curses and obscenities – through irony, sarcasm, cynicism, ridicule, and mockery, to demean, degrade, humiliate, and insult individuals, the political opposition, or groups in society.

The series is located at the intersection of several social science disciplines including communication, linguistics, discourse studies, political sociology, political science, and political psychology. It aims to bring together multiple political and social theories and concepts; qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methodological approaches; and in-depth, empirical, communication- and language-oriented analyses. By addressing critical issues such as the use of words, terms, and expressions in parliamentary debate and political negotiations, and their effect from novel perspectives, it can expose the weaknesses of existing discourse analysis concepts and arguments, or reassess the topic in other ways through the introduction of different ideas, the integration of perspectives from disparate sub-fields or even disciplines. By challenging existing paradigms, authored books in the series will enrich current debates surrounding several complex, discourse relationships: between politicians' and citizens; between decision-makers and their colleagues; and in general, the way language shapes political culture in an increasingly globalized world. All proposals and books in this series are peer-reviewed by international experts in the aforementioned fields.

Katarzyna Molek-Kozakowska
Simina-Maria Terian
Editors

Mediated Discourses of Conflict across Languages and Genres

Coverage and Reception of the War
in Ukraine

 Springer

Editors

Katarzyna Molek-Kozakowska
Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu
Sibiu, Romania

Simina-Maria Terian
Lucian Blaga University
Sibu, Romania

University of Opole
Opole, Poland



ISSN 2731-7617

ISSN 2731-7625 (electronic)

The Language of Politics

ISBN 978-981-95-6991-5

ISBN 978-981-95-6992-2 (eBook)

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-95-6992-2>

This work was supported by Universitatea Lucian Blaga din Sibiu (Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu).

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s) 2026. This book is an open access publication.

Open Access This book is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if you modified the licensed material. You do not have permission under this license to share adapted material derived from this book or parts of it.

The images or other third party material in this book are included in the book's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the book's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

This work is subject to copyright. All commercial rights are reserved by the author(s), whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed. Regarding these commercial rights a non-exclusive license has been granted to the publisher.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use.

The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

This Springer imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd.

The registered company address is: 152 Beach Road, #21-01/04 Gateway East, Singapore 189721, Singapore

If disposing of this product, please recycle the paper.

Preface

As the studies included in this volume demonstrate, the war in Ukraine is already perceived as one of the major events of the twenty-first century, and its consequences, though not yet fully foreseeable, are difficult to overestimate. Not only has the Russian-Ukrainian conflict profoundly disrupted established geopolitical alliances and global supply chains, but it has also triggered deep transformations across various sectors of human life, from the ways in which armed conflicts are fought and the security of citizens is ensured to how cyber propaganda and disinformation techniques are refined. Therefore, from any angle that one might examine it, the conflict cannot remain a purely academic matter; it is a challenge that entails numerous political, philosophical, and ethical choices.

This is all the more evident in the case of states, cultures, and societies that border the conflict zone and for which the implications of the war in Ukraine are not merely theoretical, but existential. This is also true for the sixteen authors who contributed to the present volume and who are primarily affiliated with institutions in Romania and Poland. Naturally, the principal aim of *Mediated Discourses of Conflict Across Languages and Genres: Coverage and Reception of the War in Ukraine* is an academic one, as explained in detail in the *Introduction* to this book. But beyond this, the volume also reflects an institutional story that we briefly recount here.

The publication of *Mediated Discourses of Conflict Across Languages and Genres* was financially supported through the project “The coverage and reception of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in Polish, Romanian, and English-language media: A comparative critical discourse study with recommendations for journalism training” (CORECON), funded by the Romanian Ministry of Research, Innovation, and Digitalization (MCID) via the National Plan of Recovery and Resilience (code PNRR-III-C9-I8-2023-025), coordinated by professor Katarzyna Molek-Kozakowska and implemented at Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu (ULBS). CORECON brings together an international team of nineteen researchers (both experienced and early career) who set out to examine the coverage and reception of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in three linguistic environments and to disseminate their findings through academic publications and events, as well as through other

forms of civic awareness, especially regarding recommendations for trainee journalists (<https://grants.ulbsibiu.ro/corecon>).

ULBS's status as the host institution for CORECON is far from accidental: the university has been one of the most active higher education organizations in Central and Eastern Europe in terms of its academic and social engagement with understanding the impact of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and mitigating its consequences. It should be noted that CORECON is not the first project through which ULBS has encouraged in-depth study of the war in Ukraine and its repercussions. The university has also supported a team of Romanian and Ukrainian researchers whose results were collected in a volume edited by Silviu Nate and likewise published with Springer: *Ukraine's Journey to Recovery, Reform and Post-War Reconstruction. A Blueprint for Security, Resilience and Development* (2025). ULBS has also hosted Ukrainian refugees on its campus and later offered them free Romanian-language courses and other facilities to support their integration into Romanian society.

The editors wish to thank several institutions and individuals who contributed, directly or indirectly, to the publication of this volume. First, we are grateful for the support received from the Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, in its managerial capacity and also on the administrative side, for implementing the CORECON project within which our book was published. Next, we would like to thank the individual authors for designing and presenting insightful analyses and offering diverse yet complementary perspectives, and for supporting one another by discussing the drafts during CORECON meetings. Special thanks go to Professor Valentyna Ushchyna from the Department of English Philology at Lesya Ukrainka Volyn National University of Lutsk, Professor Alin Coman from the Department of Psychology at Princeton University, and Major-General (ret.) Constantin Spînu, PhD, formerly Head of Information and Public Relations Directorate of Romanian Ministry of National Defense in Bucharest for their inspiring and encouraging feedback.

We express our thanks to Professor Ofer Feldman, the editor of the Springer book series *The Language of Politics*, whose edited volumes and interdisciplinary projects inspired our collection and set a high bar for the academic quality of this endeavor. We are grateful to Professor Sam Lehman-Wilzig, who provided critical reading and advice how to make our texts accessible to varied audiences. We would also like to acknowledge the support of Juno Kawakami, our editor at Springer, for facilitating the publication processes and being attentive to our editorial needs.

The Editors

Opole, Poland
Sibu, Romania

Katarzyna Molek-Kozakowska
Simina-Maria Terian

Contents

1	Introduction: Conflict Discourses in the Media	1
	Katarzyna Molek-Kozakowska and Simina-Maria Terian	
Part I Comparative and/or Corpus-Assisted Studies of Mediated War Coverage		
2	Empire, the Media, and Peace: A Corpus- and AI-Assisted Analysis of Stances on Peace in Polish, Romanian, and English Coverage of the Russia-Ukraine War	17
	Bogdan Vătavu	
3	Comparative Analysis of International Legal Terminology in Polish and Romanian Media Discourse: The Case of the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict	33
	Rafał Krzysztof Matusiak	
4	Framing the Past, Shaping the Present: The Weaponization of Historical Narratives in News on the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict?	49
	Ecaterina Iliș	
5	What's in a "War"? A Corpus-Assisted Comparative Study on (De)legitimizing Linguistic Labels of the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict in Romanian and English-Language Media	69
	David Morariu	
Part II Qualitative and/or Critical Case Studies of Language Used in Conflict Reporting		
6	Discursive Framing of National Security Concerns in Romanian Media's Coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict	87
	Isabela Dragomir and Valerica Sporiș	

7	Discourse Representations of Ukrainian Refugees in Romanian Online News	109
	Radu Drăgulescu	
8	Visual News Values: Mapping the Construction of Newsworthiness and Ideology in Romanian Media Imagery	127
	Denisa-Maria Bâlc	
9	From Fact to Opinion and Back Again: A Case Study of Marcin Ogdowski's Facebook War Reporting	145
	Przemysław Wilk	
10	Media Narratives Regarding Refugees from Ukraine in Selected Polish Opinion Weeklies	161
	Julia Kaproń	
 Part III Studies of Journalistic Strategies and Receptions of Conflict Representations		
11	Marginal Narratives in Romanian Media Coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict	183
	Monica Borș	
12	Military Conflicts in the Post-Truth Era: An Analysis of the Russian-Ukrainian War in a Romanian Newspaper	199
	Iulia-Maria Ticăreanu	
13	Media Emotionscape: Fear Narratives and the Romanian Elections in Times of War	213
	Minodora Sălcudean	
14	How Amateur War Tourist Accounts Position Themselves against Mainstream Media Representations of the Russian-Ukrainian War ...	229
	Corina Selejan	
	Index	247

About the Editors and Contributors

About the Editors

Katarzyna Molek-Kozakowska is Associate Professor of linguistics and communication and Head of the Department of English at the University of Opole, Poland, senior research fellow at Vilnius Gediminas Technical University, Lithuania, and the leader of the CORECON project at Lucian Blaga University, Sibiu, Romania. With a background in English language and literature, she has specialized in political discourse analysis, policy and science communication, multimodality studies, as well as popular media and journalism studies. Since 2014 she has co-edited *Res Rhetorica*, an international open-access quarterly journal focused on rhetoric and linguistics, published by the Polish Rhetoric Society. Apart from an extensive publishing record embedded in both (critical) discourse studies and media and communication studies, she has successfully managed international research collaborations that resulted in several co-edited volumes with Polish and international publishers and thematic issues of *Res Rhetorica*. She serves on the board of several journals and book series, including Springer Nature's series "The Language of Politics."

Simina-Maria Terian is Associate Professor with the Department of Romance Studies at the Faculty of Letters and Arts, Lucian Blaga University, Sibiu, Romania where she specializes in Romanian Syntax, Pragmatics, Digital Tools in Romanian Language Learning, and Romanian as a Foreign Language. She has published three books on discourse analysis, grammar theory and analysis, and a cognitive analysis of Romanian idiomatic expressions. She has been a member of several national research and institutional development projects, including *The Fake News Phenomenon in Romanian. A Discursive-Computational Approach* (FAKEROM), an interdisciplinary humanities and computer science project surveying a large-sized corpus and classifying news reports; and *The Preservation, Transformation and Study of Romanian Linguistic Heritage in the Context of Globalization* (PATLIRO), a research grant focusing on the use of digital tools in the study of Romanian as a foreign language.

Contributors

Denisa-Maria Bâlc Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Sibiu, Romania

Monica Borș Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Sibiu, Romania

Isabela Dragomir Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Sibiu, Romania

Nicolae Bălcescu Land Forces Academy of Sibiu, Sibiu, Romania

Radu Drăgulescu Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Sibiu, Romania

Ecaterina Iliș Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Sibiu, Romania

Julia Kaproń Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Lublin, Poland

Rafał Krzysztof Matusiak Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Sibiu, Romania

University of Opole, Opole, Poland

Katarzyna Molek-Kozakowska Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Sibiu, Romania

University of Opole, Opole, Poland

David Morariu Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Sibiu, Romania

Minodora Sălcudean Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Sibiu, Romania

Corina Selejan Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Sibiu, Romania

Valerica Sporiș Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Sibiu, Romania

Simina-Maria Terian Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Sibiu, Romania

Iulia-Maria Ticăreanu Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Sibiu, Romania

Bogdan Vătavu Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Sibiu, Romania

Przemysław Wilk Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Sibiu, Romania

University of Opole, Opole, Poland

Chapter 1

Introduction: Conflict Discourses in the Media



Katarzyna Molek-Kozakowska and Simina-Maria Terian

Abstract This introductory chapter outlines the rationale and contents of the present collection by first explaining the choice and definitions of key terms used here, particularly those pertaining to conflict and war, as well as to media discourse. Second, it discusses how the comparative, quantitative and qualitative studies undertaken in the CORECON project (the acronym stands for the COverage and REception of Russian-Ukrainian CONflict) were first ideated and then executed. This chapter also outlines the dynamic political and journalistic contexts that pose multiple challenges to cross-linguistic, discourse-oriented research, while at the same time making such research needed and relevant. Third, it takes stock of the methodological perspectives guiding the studies included in this book and previews the contents of individual contributions.

1.1 Key Terminology

This volume brings together multiple researchers who aim to explore the characteristics of conflict discourse in the media, focusing on the war in the Ukraine across several languages and genres; thus, this introduction will first clarify the key terminology. The phrase “war in Ukraine” refers to the full-scale invasion by the Russian Federation of Ukraine’s territory commencing on February 24th, 2022, synonymous with the phrase “Russian-Ukrainian conflict” used throughout the volume, without the intention of euphemizing it. While the Russian-Ukrainian conflict predates the full-scale invasion, we focus here on recent years of this geopolitical story in its

K. Molek-Kozakowska (✉)
Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Sibiu, Romania

University of Opole, Opole, Poland
e-mail: molekk@uni.opole.pl

S.-M. Terian
Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Sibiu, Romania
e-mail: simina.terian@ulbsibiu.ro

European and global scope rather than “just” its regional scope. Interestingly, many scholars of international law, as well as peace researchers, avoid using the term “war” and prefer to speak of “armed conflict,” stressing the hybrid nature of all contemporary international confrontations (Galtung, 1996).

The terminological and geopolitical indeterminacy of contemporary armed conflicts coincides with the gradual change in the traditional role of the media, particularly war reporting or war coverage, as war correspondents are less able to report on war activities or interview witnesses because the militarized zones and conflict-related actions are largely inaccessible (Limor & Nossek, 2006). At the same time, states, the military, and even militia organizations involved in armed conflict tend to use communication specialists and develop communication strategies akin to public relations. They rival the established media organizations in producing and disseminating their own publicity materials, sometimes imitating journalistic styles that cover up their propagandistic nature.

The current notion of “fake news,” for example, rests on the similarity between some misleading communications and professional journalism (cf. Busioc et al., 2022). Identified as a threat to democracy and a major societal challenge by many European Union institutions, think-tanks and governments, fake news as a form of disinformation is a growing area of impactful research in communication studies, political science, and linguistics. Indeed, the notion of disinformation looms large in the discussions regarding the coverage and reception of the Ukraine war. Disinformation is a research problem that can be addressed comparatively from various points of view: its content and structure (cf. VoxUkraine, 2022), its propagation strategies (Watanabe, 2017), or the various ways of exposing and combating it (Mahl et al., 2024). A perspective this collection champions is that of linguistic characteristics and patterning, with exemplifications of editorial practices that allow the publics to better identify strategic narratives, deliberate polarization, and misrepresentation.

Despite the challenges of access and representation during wars and violent conflicts, media outlets continue to be an important source of information: they provide needed warnings, timely reporting, and succinct analysis. How conflict is covered in the news is important because it is consequential for citizens and policymakers—inside and outside conflict areas—and particularly for long-term political risk-related decisions such as national security, mobilization around social values, or even post-war reconciliation (Bleiker & Hutchison, 2008). However, war coverage, as any other, is often driven by selection criteria (news values) that are tied to media companies’ profit orientation (or clickthrough rates), which is not always congruent with the interests of society (Bednarek & Caple, 2017; Harcup & O’Neill, 2016).

As a result, a question that is also addressed here is whether media outlets functioning under the pressures of “attention economy” (Lanham, 2006) make adequate selection decisions that improve the understanding of armed conflict in a specific country or for a given audience. Unfortunately, previous research so far has found that “conflict reporting is continually accused of having, in large part, an escalation-oriented and pro-conflict perspective” (Fröhlich, 2018, p. 2). This tendency has a significant bearing on the construction of respective storylines and

narratives or the building of public agendas that we are exploring here though the example of mediated political discourse in countries neighboring Ukraine—Poland and Romania—analyzed against the backdrop of English-language reporting of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

Social psychologists point to injustice, vulnerability, distrust, superiority, and helplessness as the motivations that propel social groups towards conflict (Eidelson & Eidelson, 2003). While chapters in this collection acknowledge the underlying historical, political, and social roots of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, they focus on multiple and competing mediated representations of that conflict, trying to identify and explain the dominant narratives and frames that media editors deploy to structure their war coverage. Frames can be defined as generally available and relatively structured symbolic (linguistic) resources that help communicators express conflict-related meanings through dynamic discursive encounters and help the publics to access and understand the mediated information efficiently (Dewulf et al., 2009; Gamson, 1995). Narratives, in a likewise manner, are overarching meaning structures, populated by social actors, and constrained by circumstances and activities.

1.2 The Media Context of the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict

The war in Ukraine has had a significant impact on many societies worldwide, but it is especially pertinent to countries in Eastern and Central Europe. The Russian--Ukrainian conflict is a major event of our times, one that threatens the eight-decade--old order of international relations, with consequences in the region for decades to come. The war has shifted public debates towards basic issues of survival and security, and polarized political discourse around a massive influx of war refugees. In addition, the economic, academic, and mediated discourses have sometimes been influenced by Cold War rhetoric, particularly given the disinformation campaigns staged by Russia in its hybrid war. For many, media coverage of the Ukraine war has brought a renewed sense of insecurity and catalyzed stark emotional responses. The conflict coverage has ranged from featuring the outpouring of expressions of solidarity, to incisive political analysis, to ethical dilemmas related to supporting a military conflict that causes further loss of life (Silverstone, 2006). According to Reinke de Buitrago:

With the images showing the extent and ruthlessness of Russian aggression so close to the European Union, not responding seems a non-option. Acting against Russian aggression to uphold international norms is naturally right from a perspective of rule-of-law, sovereignty and national self-determination. Involvement of additional states can, however, intensify the war and present an escalation. Thus, while Ukrainians and other smaller states are reassured and aided in feelings of security for not being left alone in the face of such aggression, potential escalation can strengthen feelings of insecurity. Additionally, representations of Russia add to feelings of insecurity regarding anything Russian. (2022, p. 5)

Systematic research on the early phases of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict has already been undertaken, building on the studies of the 2014 Crimea annexation

literature (e.g., Knoblock, 2020; Norström, 2019), and relying on analyses provided by The Institute for the Study of War,¹ a non-profit public policy research organization in Washington, DC. Across disciplinary scholarship, experts have also explored the significant consequences of the conflict on the world economy (Liadze et al., 2022), global food supply chains (Jagtap et al., 2022), energy markets (Nerlinger & Utz, 2022), and the green transition (Umar et al., 2022), to name just a few.

However, it is an illusion to think that topics of public debate regarding the Russian-Ukrainian conflict are not influenced by culturally entrenched, stereotypical, war-related representations and dominant frames that normalize armed conflict. It remains to be studied how the strategic narratives, frames, and discursive strategies are deployed in an ongoing dynamic for the sake of political capital in populist politics (Wodak, 2015), or for other socio-economically and culturally relevant causes, some of which are tackled in this volume.

Even when previous scholars have paid attention to the variety of media representations of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict (Alyukov, 2022; Koval et al., 2022; Yekelchik, 2022), their interest has often been on the narratives propagated by the parties directly involved in the conflict or, at most, on how these discourses have been received in third-party countries. Such approaches, although useful, can contribute only in a very partial way to the adequate understanding of the conflict situation, given that most of the time the perceptions of the parties involved in the conflict are characterized by propaganda and their own journalistic agenda setting (Zachara-Szymańska, 2023). It needs to be further explored how media systems, editorial practices and journalistic texts determine the ways to document the dynamic nature of war coverage, given a variety of patterns of conflict discourse reception by diverse audiences.

1.3 The Origin of the CORECON Project

To address the informational challenges in the conflict-ridden public spheres in Europe, research should go beyond the Ukrainian or Russian perspectives where propaganda reigns, and focus on the analysis of the variety of mediated discourses developed in response to the conflict. For these reasons, the international team of researchers in the project CORECON (2024–2026), an acronym for “The COverage and REception of the Russian-Ukrainian CONflict in Polish, Romanian, and English-language media: A comparative critical discourse study with recommendations for journalism training,” has been exploring the evolving coverage of the conflict, together with its social, economic and political implications, by analyzing the dominant patterns of reporting and the changing perceptions of the unfolding events across languages, genres, and media outlets.

In addition to the English-language media functioning as a benchmark and global reference, we have chosen within the CORECON project to explore the Polish and

¹ Available at <https://www.understandingwar.org/>.

Romanian-language media, mainstream and amateur. In 2022, Poland and Romania expressed solidarity with Ukraine, given that they are both NATO member countries with strong undercurrents of Russophobia (Anton, 2011). However, the situation is much more complex, as the two countries have certain historical resentments not only regarding Russia but also towards Ukraine that inherited most of the territories that Romania and Poland had to cede to the Soviet Union following the Second World War. Therefore, the reception by Poland and Romania of the Russian--Ukrainian conflict is—at least at the level of public debates, even if not necessarily at that of state policies—rather polarized, as shown by the 2024–2025 presidential elections in both countries.

The public, mediated, and individual expressions of stance and ideology can vary in the way language resources are recruited to express identification or emotion (De Fina, 1995). Also, the editorial practices and rhetorical strategies of war-themed media in Eastern Europe can be captured better by looking at how the English-language media in western countries respond to Russian threats or express alignment with Ukrainians. In crisis situations, solidarity and threat discourses, as well as alignment and “othering” strategies can be present in public discourse and can be exploited for political advantage or commercial gain (cf. Chovanec & Molek-Kozakowska, 2017). The working objective of the CORECON project has been to trace and interrogate media representations of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and above all to map the complexity of mediated war discourse across media outlets, languages, and genres (Biber & Conrad, 2009). The results have so far been obtained by analyzing the discourse of mainstream and tabloid newspapers, opinion outlets, television stations, and online portals, as well as prominent social media channels.²

In addition, there are indications that Central and Eastern European countries suffer from a deficit of social capital and media literacy that in other countries is accrued from a long-lasting tradition of media pluralism. An inherited general distrust of state-owned outlets, low support for independent media, and lack of interest in a fact checking culture (Cap, 2021; Molek-Kozakowska, 2015) cannot be reversed in one generation. Additionally, the development of a media-savvy, civic society is hampered by rapid and intense mediatization and marketization of the public sphere in which political coverage is becoming more spectacular, targeted, and persuasive (Molek-Kozakowska & Kampka, 2021a, 2021b). However, far from treating such features as a disadvantage in the context of war reporting, CORECON considers them as an imperative to translate research findings into recommendations for journalism training and critical media literacy.

Hopefully, this volume will contribute to a better understanding of contemporary conflict discourse, attempting to assist in the interpretation and evaluation of current war coverage, acknowledging that it is not impervious to content developed or manipulated with AI technologies and chatbots. There is a historical urgency to understand the politics of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict adequately, given the ways and degrees in which mediated perceptions inform public opinion, especially in our

² Available at <https://grants.ulbsibiu.ro/corecon/>.

“post-truth era” (Molek-Kozakowska, 2013). Therefore, this volume has immediate academic relevance as well as impacting our understanding of evolving media technologies and professional journalistic practices that shape discourses of war, along with citizen media literacies needed to confront them. After all, the ultimate aim is to raise public awareness of the extent, techniques, and implications of mediated discourse regarding the Russian-Ukrainian conflict that constitute a necessary premise for preserving the democratic character of the societies in which we live.

1.4 This Volume

This volume offers a range of studies on conflict coverage that focus on some sort of polarization, shift, spectrum, or dichotomy that is further specified, operationalized, and investigated in each study (Prior, 2013). It presents the work of CORECON participants—senior and junior researchers—as well as of invited authors. These contrastive, complementary, or shifting war-related representations and stories and the accompanying discursive strategies is what brings together the volume’s varied, interesting, and inspiring explorations. If the core of the given study is a perceptible contrast or shift in war reporting practices or representations, the studies either garner this from literature in a top-down manner or illustrate it with CORECON data in bottom-up induction, often across languages, genres, outlets. For example, the individual studies in this collection explore conflict discourses based on questions of official or informal terminology and labelling, the (mis)uses of historical references, strategic and marginal narratives, or polarization and solidarity frames. Some studies trace the varying levels of emotional engagement and focus on modality, persuasive rhetoric, or legitimization of political stances in which they draw on modern understandings of rhetorical action (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1991).

The volume is divided into three major sections that group the studies into: (1) comparative and/or corpus-assisted studies of mediated war coverage that offer insights transcending the characteristics of individual media outlets and highlighting differences and similarities that can only be evidenced through a comparative perspective across languages and cultures; (2) qualitative and/or critical case studies of language used in conflict reporting that offer a specific, theoretically grounded and methodologically delimited entry point to a salient linguistic phenomenon in a particular text type, medium, or genre in a particular language, be it Romanian or Polish; (3) studies of journalistic strategies and receptions of conflict representations that offer a perspective drawn from journalism studies and focus on the contexts of production and reception of war reporting as much as on its representation, often championing an evaluation from the point of view of journalistic standards.

As a result, one will not find a unitary methodological approach explained here because the varied qualitative and quantitative methods of discourse studies, corpus studies, media studies, and cultural studies are addressed separately in each of the chapters. In this non-paradigmatic approach, datasets are selected and protocols for analysis are developed to match a research problem or a set of research questions

(Taylor & Marchi, 2018). The collection aims for the analyses to be primarily empirical and data-driven, even though the theoretical frameworks within which these empirical analyses are embedded sometimes merit a more detailed elaboration, as provided in some chapters. Consequently, the chapters are structured to allow individual authors to present the historical, social, and communicational context of their inquiry into the Russian-Ukrainian conflict as they see fit, so that their specific angles, definitions, orientations, and framings of the data and concepts become highlighted.

The representativeness of the variety of journalistic genres as well as textual and narrative characteristics is evident in the multidimensional nature of the datasets used for analysis. Triangulated datasets and calibrated methodologies are well recognized in Critical Discourse Studies where the toolkits consisting of various established concepts, analytic categories, and protocols are drawn from to answer specific research questions adequately (Fairclough, 1995; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; Richardson, 2007; Wodak & Meyer, 2001). While the corpus-assisted studies in this volume aim to numerically capture lexical frequency, keyness, and topicality, or at least relatively to other prominent characteristics of war journalism, interpretative case studies are driven by the need to understand the underlying mechanisms of meaning-making—for example in politicized representation of social actors involved in conflict. Additionally, comparative analyses sensitive to representational differences and similarities may reveal mechanisms behind discursive salience and/or silence, especially if some outlets, genres, or texts are shown to be systematically designed to favor or foreground certain faces of conflict at the expense of others.

Following this introduction, **Part One** opens with a comparative study of peace-related coverage in **Chap. 2** by Bogdan Vătavu, entitled “Empire, the Media, and Peace: A Corpus- and AI-Assisted Analysis of Stances on Peace in Polish, Romanian, and English Coverage of the Russia-Ukraine War.” After defining and operationalizing major concepts of peace (e.g., positive peace, negative peace, realist-pragmatic peace), the author reports on an AI-enhanced analysis of textual stances on peace as found in the three CORECON sub-corpora. The contribution aims at comparing the frequencies and distributions of various meanings of peace in the coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict to see how commercial media practices and dominant western ideologies of peace are reflected. It confirms that despite national specificities, war journalism tends to replicate the larger systemic framework delimiting ways of knowing and discussing international conflicts called “the empire.”

In **Chap. 3**, Rafał Krzysztof Matusiak provides us with a comprehensive overview and comparison of definitions of terms related to “armed conflict” and their subsequent implementations in war coverage. His analysis in “Comparative Analysis of International Legal Terminology in Polish and Romanian Media Discourse: The Case of the Ukrainian-Russian Conflict” refers to history, philosophy and international law as foundations for the common understandings of conditions of just war and armed conflict. Then it draws on the CORECON corpus to document how journalists in Eastern Europe use various related terms and synonyms, including “war,” “armed invasion,” “hostilities,” “military operations,” “aggression,” “martial law,” and “war crime,” to offer a moral rather than a legal framing of the covered conflict.

Ecaterina Iliș's **Chap. 4** on "Framing the Past, Shaping the Present: The Weaponization of Historical Narratives in News on the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict?" examines how news coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict harks back to the past by examining the linguistic and argumentative deployments of historical references. By compiling a representative dataset of historical references in the Romanian and English datasets of the CORECON project and analyzing them with the categories adapted from the discourse-historical approach, she is able to assess the level of strategic instrumentalization (even weaponization) of historical references. They are shown, for example, to mobilize collective action through focusing on national identity and framing the conflict as a security issue. The chapter concludes with important observations on how journalistic narratives in Eastern Europe tend to be shaped by distinct geopolitical "memoryscapes" marked by unresolved struggles over history, and an ongoing effort to be recognized as European.

Chapter 5 in Part One, devoted to comparative or corpus-assisted studies of war reporting, is authored by David Morariu, who looks at "What's in a 'War'? A Corpus-Assisted Comparative Study on (De)legitimizing Linguistic Labels of the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict in the Romanian and English-Language Media." Through another cross-linguistic comparison based on the CORECON corpus, the author maps the characteristic repertoires of editorializing in Ukraine's war coverage, quantifying such terms related to armed conflict as "war," "conflict," "invasion," "aggression," "military operation," "demilitarization," and "denazification," and explaining their role in delegitimization through evaluation. The study demonstrates the ideological implications of the use of certain labels as an index of Romanian and English media outlets' pro-Ukrainian and pro-European perspective.

Part Two features five chapters that report on qualitative or critical case studies of linguistic patterns or discursive strategies that characterize specific domains of coverage of the war in Ukraine. In **Chap. 6** "Discursive Framing of National Security Concerns in Romanian Media's Coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict" Isabela Dragomir and Valerica Sporiș examine articles from the three most read news websites in Romania to identify dominant framings of top security concerns. By analyzing the collocates of such keywords as "threat," "fear," or "instability," they document the range of Romanian journalists' rhetorical and informational strategies. They illustrate how historical fears, regional cooperation, and security guarantees are represented, and how key players such as Russia, Ukraine, NATO, or EU, are positioned in terms of power to either threaten or enhance Romanian security. The meticulous exemplification of discursive patterns within this thematically delineated and corpus-driven case study proves that threats to national security are central to journalistic accounts of war in Romanian online news.

In **Chap. 7** Radu Drăgulescu provides an overview of "Discourse Representations of Ukrainian Refugees in Romanian Online News." The study draws on a corpus-assisted, collocation analysis of such keywords as refugee, immigrant, emigrant, and migrant, together with related verbs and modifiers to establish the naming preferences, but also implicit sentiments and ideological framings that are used by Romanian online news outlets in the context of Ukrainian forced displacement. It

appears that Ukrainians are explicitly represented as “deserving migrants” due to their suffering and victimhood, but they are also seen as actors and cultural neighbors. The analysis also reveals how political biases might introduce competing evaluations and frames, and how the portrayal of refugees shifted in time to be used in election propaganda.

In **Chap. 8** Denisa-Maria Bâlc analyzes “Visual News Values: Mapping the Construction of Newsworthiness and Ideology in Romanian Media Imagery,” paying particular attention to the representation of social actors, the underlying power relations encoded in the images, and the reproduction of dominant political positions. Her analysis of 256 news items with collage-type images illustrates how Romanian news media outlets constructed the Russian-Ukrainian conflict throughout 2022–2024, mainly through visual proximity, prominence, negativity, and personalization. Symbolic meanings, ethnic stereotypes, and ideological dichotomies that appealed to Romanian media consumers were deployed to increase newsworthiness and emotional engagement.

Chapter 9 by Przemysław Wilk focuses on social media (for a change) as a venue of war reporting. He takes a prominent Polish-language correspondent’s Facebook account as an example of the current version of hybrid journalism. In “From Fact to Opinion and Back Again: A Case Study of Marcin Ogdowski’s Facebook War Reporting,” the author first explains the difference between heritage and online journalism in terms of values and style. Then he demonstrates the intersection between Ogdowski’s fact-based reporting based on data and statistics and his opinion-driven posts that are highly loaded in tone. He makes a point of showing how the two approaches converge in the legitimization of Ukraine’s defensive actions and the delegitimization of Russia’s invasion. The study offers a fine-grained typology of discursive strategies of (de)legitimization that can be re-used to detect journalistic maneuvers in the hybrid discourses of online reporting.

Another Polish-language case study is offered by Julia Kaproń in **Chap. 10** that discusses “Media Narratives Regarding Refugees from Ukraine in Selected Polish Opinion Weeklies.” As Polish journalists started covering the experience of Ukrainian refugees in early 2022, they aimed to depict the unstable and anxiety-ridden political and social reality of the invasion. In the process, they introduced a variety of media frames and discursive strategies that constructed and evaluated migration experiences in the context of war. This case study compares two Polish weeklies with differing political orientations and identifies dominant terminology, topoi, and metaphors used to account for the consequences of the massive influx of refugees to Poland, pointing out how these journalistic resources can be used to express pro- or anti-Ukrainian stances subtly or explicitly.

In **Part Three**, devoted to studies of journalistic strategies and receptions of conflict representations, there are four chapters that, while presenting specific practices and examples from Romanian (and occasionally English) media, refer to larger mediated phenomena: polarization, post-truth, extreme affectivity, or vlogging, all of which can represent the war in a distinctive, sometimes distorted, manner.

Chapter 11 by Monica Borș is about “Marginal Narratives in Romanian Media Coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict” complementing the grand narratives of

the war by spotlighting routine aspects of lifestyle and cultural dimensions that often go underreported in political coverage. By choosing to analyze and interpret a dozen soft news stories featured in the Romanian coverage, the author illustrates the claim that articles about leaders' clothing choices, small business establishments, advertising campaigns, sporting events, or ordinary immigrants' lives, can serve to entrench a sense of solidarity and resilience, or of national identity. The analysis focuses on linguistic, stylistic, and visual aspects of the coverage, and is contextualized within the anthropological approach to marginal narratives being reflective of the mechanisms of social relations based on implicit cultural codes and value orientations.

As Iulia-Maria Ticărau writes in **Chap. 12** "Military Conflicts in the Post-Truth Era: An Analysis of the Russian-Ukrainian War in a Romanian Newspaper," media-tization of political discourse has contributed to the spread of post-truth. This chapter uses epistemic analysis to identify the degree of affiliative and affective rhetoric that displaces accuracy and veracity in the mediated discourse of two Romanian right-wing politicians—Diana Șoșoacă and George Simion. It shows how the disregard for truth is used to score political capital, even in the face of the military conflict and national security concerns, much like in the case of the "Trump effect."

Chapter 13 by Minodora Sălcudean is entitled "Media Emotionscape: Fear Narratives and the Romanian Elections in Times of War." It examines the Romanian mainstream and social media during 2024–2025 presidential elections to map how emotion-related narratives pertaining, for example, to nuclear threats, possible Russian aggression, and Romanian forced involvement in the conflict in Ukraine, were spread and exploited strategically by politicians. The findings reveal an ambivalent media environment in which alarmist and speculative reporting coexists with fact-checking and debunking efforts, enabling some emotional narratives to gain high visibility leading to tangible electoral consequences. These insights underscore the need for responsible journalism on emotion-inducing issues.

In **Chap. 14** Corina Selejan looks at the outputs of YouTube influencers that travel to Ukraine offering alternative accounts of the conflict. Her "How Amateur War Tourist Accounts Position Themselves against Mainstream Media Representations of the Russian-Ukrainian War" traces the levels and types of misalignments between journalistic representations and styles while vlogging in travels around Ukraine. Foregrounding the witness persona, self-oriented commentary, flashy titling or thumbnail design, war vloggers present an alternative vision of the war experience that can possibly complement official accounts but that requires critical reading/viewing strategies to approach.

Focusing on the diversity of representations, media channels, and ideological attitudes toward the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, this volume provides its readers (academic and non-academic alike) not only with new information and contexts alerting them to the complexity of the implications of conflict representation and mediation, but also with a set of tools that enable autonomous and unbiased reflection in a space that is increasingly saturated with propaganda.

Acknowledgement This work was funded by the EU's NextGenerationEU instrument through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan of Romania—Pillar III-C9-I8, managed by the Ministry

of Research, Innovation and Digitalization, within the project entitled *The coverage and reception of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in Polish, Romanian and English-language media: A comparative critical discourse study with recommendations for journalism training (CORECON)*, contract no. 760244/28.12.2023, code CF 25/27.07.2023.

References

- Alyukov, M. (2022). Making sense of the news in an authoritarian regime: Russian television viewers' reception of the Russia–Ukraine conflict. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 74(3), 337–359. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2021.2016633>
- Anton, M. (2011). On Russians and Russophobia in Romania during the 1940's. *Arhivele Totalitarismului*, 19(3–4), 111–119.
- Bednarek, M., & Caple, H. (2017). *The discourse of news values. How news organizations create newsworthiness*. Oxford University Press.
- Biber, D., & Conrad, S. (2009). *Register, genre, and style*. Cambridge University Press.
- Bleiker, R., & Hutchison, E. (2008). Fear no more: Emotions and world politics. *Review of International Studies*, 34, 115–135. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210508007821>
- Busioc, C., Dumitru, V., Ruseti, S., Terian-Dan, S., Dascalu, M., & Rebedea, T. (2022). What are the latest fake news in Romanian Politics? An automated analysis based on BERT language models. In Ó. Mealha, M. Rehm & T. Rebedea (Eds.), *Ludic, co-design and tools supporting smart learning ecosystems and smart education* (pp. 201–212). Springer Singapore.
- Cap, P. (2021). *The discourse of conflict and crisis: Poland's political rhetoric in the European perspective*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Chovanec, J., & Molek-Kozakowska, K. (Eds.). (2017). *Representing the other in European media discourses*. John Benjamins.
- De Fina, A. (1995). Pronominal choice, identity and solidarity in political discourse. *Text—Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of Discourse*, 5, 379–410. <https://doi.org/10.1515/text.1.1995.15.3.379>
- Dewulf, A., Gray, B., Putnam, L., Lewicki, R., Aarts, N., Bouwen, R., & van Woerkum, C. (2009). Disentangling approaches to framing in conflict and negotiation research: A meta-paradigmatic perspective. *Human Relations*, 62(2), 155–193. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726708100356>
- Eidelson, R. J., & Eidelson, J. I. (2003). Dangerous ideas. Five beliefs that propel groups toward conflict. *American Psychologist*, 58(3), 182–192. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066x.58.3.182>
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical discourse analysis*. Longman.
- Fröhlich, R. (2018). Introduction: Media's role in the creation of knowledge and images of wars: More relevant and more complicated than ever. In R. Fröhlich (Ed.), *Media in war and armed conflict: The dynamics of conflict news production and dissemination* (pp. 2–20). Routledge.
- Galtung, J. (1996). *Peace by peaceful means: Peace and conflict, development and civilization*. Sage.
- Gamson, W. A. (1995). *Talking politics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Harcup, T., & O'Neill, D. (2016). What is news? News values revisited (again). *Journalism Studies*, 18(12), 1470–1488. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2016.1150193>
- Jagtap, S., Trollman, H., Trollman, F., Garcia-Garcia, G., Parra-López, C., Duong, L. et al. (2022). The Russia-Ukraine conflict: Its implications for the global food supply chains. *Foods*, 11(14), 2098. <https://doi.org/10.3390/foods11142098>
- Knoblock, N. (Ed.) (2020). *Language of conflict: Discourses of the Ukrainian crisis*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Koval, N., Kulyk, V., Riabchuk, M., Zarembo, K., & Fakhurdinova, M. (2022). Morphological analysis of narratives of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in Western academia and think-tank community. *Problems of Post-Communism*, 69(2), 166–178. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2021.2009348>

- Kress, G., & van Leeuwen, T. (2001). *Multimodal discourse: The modes and media of contemporary communication*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Lanham, R. (2006). *The economics of attention: Style and substance in the age of information*. University of Chicago Press.
- Liadze, I., Macchiarelli, C., Mortimer-Lee, P., & Juanino, P. S. (2022). The economic costs of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. *NIESR Policy Paper*, 32.
- Limor, Y., & Nossek, H. (2006). The military and the media in the twenty-first century: Towards a new model of relations. *Israel Affairs*, 12(3), 484–510. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13537120600745054>
- Mahl, D., Zeng, J., Schäfer, M. S., Egert, F. A., & Oliveira, T. (2024). “We follow the disinformation”: Conceptualizing and analyzing fact-checking cultures across countries. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/19401612241270004>
- Molek-Kozakowska, K. (2013). Towards a pragma-linguistic framework for the study of sensationalism in news headlines. *Discourse and Communication*, 7(2), 173–197.
- Molek-Kozakowska, K. (2015). Revising the traditional model of journalism in the context of digital media. In G. Czemieli, J. Galant, A. Kędra-Kardela, A. Kędzińska & M. Komsta (Eds.), *Visions and revisions: Studies in literature and culture* (pp. 299–306). Peter Lang.
- Molek-Kozakowska, K., & Kampka, A. (2021a). Creative reconstructions of political imagery in an Instagram-based election campaign: Implications for visual rhetorical literacy. *Creativity Studies*, 14(2), 307–322.
- Molek-Kozakowska, K., & Kampka, A. (2021b). Talking politics: The influence of historical and cultural transformations on Polish political rhetoric. In O. Feldman (Ed.), *When politicians talk: The cultural dynamics of public speaking* (pp. 111–127). Springer Singapore.
- Nerlinger, M., & Utz, S. (2022). The impact of the Russia-Ukraine conflict on energy firms: A capital market perspective. *Finance Research Letters*, 50, 103243.
- Norström R. (2019). *The coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict by the Polish media (2014–2015)*. Peter Lang.
- Perelman, C., & Olbrechts-Tyteca, L. (1991). *The new rhetoric. A treatise on argumentation*. Notre Dame Press.
- Prior, M. (2013). Media and political polarization. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 16, 101–127.
- Reinke de Buitrago, S. (2022). Visual framings of the war in Ukraine: Evoking emotions and mobilization. *DiscourseNet Collaborative Working Paper Series*, 8(5). <https://discourseanalysis.net/dncwps>.
- Richardson, J. (2007). *Analyzing newspapers. An approach from critical discourse analysis*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Silverstone, R. (2006). *Media and morality. On the rise of the mediapolis*. Polity Press.
- Taylor, C., & Marchi, A. (Eds.) (2018). *Corpus approaches to discourse: A critical review*. Routledge.
- Umar, M., Riaz, Y., & Yousaf, I. (2022). Impact of Russian-Ukraine war on clean energy, conventional energy, and metal markets: Evidence from event study approach. *Resources Policy*, 79, 102966.
- VoxUkraine (2022). *Propaganda Diary*. <https://russiandisinfo.voxukraine.org/en>
- Watanabe, K. (2017). The spread of the Kremlin’s narratives by a western news agency during the Ukraine crisis. *The Journal of International Communication*, 23(1), 138–158. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13216597.2017.1287750>
- Wodak, R. (2015). *The politics of fear: What right-wing populist discourses mean*. Sage.
- Wodak, R., & Meyer, M. (2001). *Methods of critical discourse analysis*. Sage
- Yekelchik, S. (2022). Naming the war: Russian aggression in Ukrainian official discourse and mass culture. *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, 64(2–3), 232–246. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00085006.2022.2106688>
- Zachara-Szymańska, M. (2023). The return of the hero-leader? Volodymyr Zelensky’s international image and the global response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. *Leadership*, 19(3), 196–209. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1742715023115982>

Katarzyna Molek-Kozakowska is Associate Professor of linguistics and communication and Head of the Department of English at the University of Opole, Poland, senior research fellow at Vilnius Gediminas Technical University, Lithuania, and Director of Research (PI) of the CORECON project at Lucian Blaga University, Sibiu, Romania. With a background in English language and literature, she specializes in political discourse analysis, policy and science communication, multimodality studies, as well as popular media and journalism studies. Since 2014 she co-edits *Res Rhetorica*, an international open-access quarterly journal focused on rhetoric and linguistics, published by the Polish Rhetoric Society. Since 2019 she has been involved with European University Alliance FORTHEM as a mission board member and leading researcher at Multilingualism in the School and Higher Education Lab.

Simina-Maria Terian is Associate Professor with the Department of Romance Studies at the Faculty of Letters and Arts, Lucian Blaga University, Sibiu, Romania where she specializes in Romanian Syntax, Pragmatics, Digital Tools in Romanian Language Learning, and Romanian as a Foreign Language. She has published three books on discourse analysis, grammar theory and analysis, and a cognitive analysis of Romanian idiomatic expressions. She has been a member of several national research and institutional development projects, including *The Fake News Phenomenon in Romanian. A Discursive-Computational Approach* (FAKEROM), an interdisciplinary humanities and computer science project surveying a large-sized corpus and classifying news reports; *The Preservation, Transformation and Study of Romanian Linguistic Heritage in the Context of Globalization* (PATLIRO), a research grant focusing on the use of digital tools in the study of Romanian as a foreign language.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if you modified the licensed material. You do not have permission under this license to share adapted material derived from this chapter or parts of it.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.



Part I
Comparative and/or Corpus-Assisted
Studies of Mediated War Coverage

Chapter 2

Empire, the Media, and Peace: A Corpus- and AI-Assisted Analysis of Stances on Peace in Polish, Romanian, and English Coverage of the Russia-Ukraine War



Bogdan Vătavu

Abstract This chapter provides a quantitative analysis of the discourse of peace in Polish, Romanian, and English media coverage of the Russia-Ukraine war. It uses a multilingual corpus of online news items covering the first 2 years of the war, and artificial intelligence (AI) to perform text classification on three subsets of the data. The results show that despite the support for peace on Ukrainian terms that the media generally projects, a more pragmatic and concessions-based approach to ending the conflict is popular in all the examined media landscapes. The prevalence of this stance on peace is explained with the help of Hardt and Negri's totalizing concept of Empire, a new form of global sovereignty characterized, among other things, by a perpetual state of war as well as a general drive towards peace. Russia's aggression against Ukraine is interpreted here as a paradoxical disruption of war-making typical to this new stage of history, with a concessions-oriented peace agreement as a more tenable solution to the war.

2.1 Introduction

"Although the practice of Empire is continually bathed in blood, the concept of Empire is always dedicated to peace—a perpetual and universal peace outside of history" (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p. xv).

The opening quote of this chapter is taken from a now classic critical theory text published in 2000 by Hardt and Negri. It outlines one of the four dimensions that define the world order following the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Hardt and Negri call this new order *Empire*, which they describe as a

B. Vătavu (✉)

Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Sibiu, Romania

e-mail: bogdan.vatavu@ulbsibiu.ro

© The Author(s) 2026

K. Molek-Kozakowska, S.-M. Terian (eds.), *Mediated Discourses of Conflict across Languages and Genres*, The Language of Politics,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-95-6992-2_2

new form of global sovereignty, different from imperialism and colonialism that it supplants, along with previous forms of national sovereignty:

It is a *decentered* and *de-territorializing* apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers. Empire manages hybrid identities, flexible hierarchies, and plural exchanges through modulating networks of command. The distinct national colors of the imperialist map of the world have merged and blended in the imperial global rainbow. [italics in original] (Hardt & Negri, 2000, pp. xii–xiii)

Peace is identified as one of the pillars in this new stage of history. But as the authors warn, there is a contradiction at the heart of the “perpetual and universal peace” promoted by Empire, as war and bloodshed are not abandoned but rather amplified.

Since the publication of their seminal book at the turn of the century, Hardt & Negri’s assessment has been confirmed many times over. Despite the advance of globalization and growth in international trade, the incidence of war has not diminished, as the Western world expected. The global War on Terror (with its corollaries the war in Afghanistan and the Iraq war), civil wars in Syria, Yemen and Sudan, and more recently the Russia-Ukraine war and the Gaza war, all attest to the fact that globalization and the push for liberal democracy do not in fact deter war from happening. In a recent publication regarding the current war in Ukraine, Leist and Zimmermann (2024, pp. 20–34) even dared to call all these expectations, usually harbored by Western democracies, as “the perpetual peace delusion.”

I would argue that this “delusion” mainly stems from a very narrow definition of peace as merely the absence of war. A better understanding of the concept might have concluded that the more appropriate word in this context is in fact “ignorance.” Galtung’s (1969, 1996, 2011) extensive research on the matter makes it ideal as the theoretical backbone of the present study. Placing violence at the center of the explanation of peace, Galtung distinguishes between *negative peace* and *positive peace*. The former is the common understanding of the word peace, namely the absence of inter-personal *direct violence*, or the kind of violence that is typical in wars. The latter is more ambitious in scope and refers to the absence of *indirect forms of violence*—such as structural and cultural violence—that can be associated with the many forms of inequality that plague our world (economic, gender, racial, etc.). When discussing military conflicts, *negative peace* is therefore just the temporary suspension of war, but its understanding should not be limited to that of cease-fire or cessation of hostilities. The absence of war, Galtung argues, does not automatically bring peaceful coexistence. Only the removal of all forms of violence can produce actual, *positive peace* and prevent war from happening again.

However, this chapter does not address peacemaking efforts in the Russia-Ukraine war (already in its third year at the time of writing), which should rather be the focus of international relations studies. Instead, by employing the same theoretical framework, it examines how peace is generally reported in Romanian, Polish and English-language media regarding that conflict. It therefore deals with the language surrounding peace which, as Gay (2008, p. 1123) asserts, “like the condition of peace, can be negative or positive.” And while the contours of positive peace are

rather universal and difficult to associate with a particular conflict, negative peace, especially with respect to the war examined here, tends to have its own geopolitical nuances, addressed in the present study. I would also contend that although there are significant differences between the three media landscapes examined (Boshnakova & Dankova, 2023), they can safely be classified as Western in terms of their (geo) political outlook, therefore enabling some degree of generalization. The core argument of this chapter is that despite the widespread sympathy for Ukraine's plight in Western societies, Western media outlets generally favor a pragmatic and concessions-oriented approach to resolving the conflict. This, I argue, is due to the paradoxical disruption that the Russia-Ukraine war brings to the larger picture of war-making in the age of Empire. Because Empire needs to be restored and a restoration through Ukrainian victory is less plausible, the more tenable solution in this case is a concessions-based peace deal.

Methodologically, this study builds on Corpus Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS) (Baker, 2023) by integrating elements of stance detection (ALDayel & Magdy, 2021; Burnham, 2024) into the analytical framework. In its initial stages, this research sought to conduct a quantitative analysis of the attitude towards peace in three different language corpora of online news items: English, Romanian, and Polish. However, as the research progressed, particularly at the conceptual level, the definition of stance as employed in discourse studies (i.e., the position that a piece of text expresses toward a specific topic or claim) proved to be limiting. Determining whether a specific text was favorable or not towards the peaceful resolution of the Ukraine war fails to account *on whose terms* peace should ultimately be achieved. Therefore, the study shifted methodologically into the realm of framing analysis (Pan & Kosicki, 1993; Winslow, 2017), aiming to categorize and quantify the media's perspectives on peace. In this context, the term "stance" should be understood more in its dictionary meaning of viewpoint, rather than its usage in linguistics.

The three aforementioned language corpora that were employed in this chapter were collected through manual and automated collection techniques, each containing around 2000 online news items covering the Russia-Ukraine war during the conflict's first 2 years. The media outlets that originated these items were carefully chosen to represent the diverse array of formats, including newspapers, periodicals, TV stations, and tabloids, as well as the varying ideologies, such as right, center, and left. To undertake the analysis, the three corpora were preprocessed with the help of a programming language script, and the results were analyzed with a locally installed large language model (LLM).

The chapter is structured as follows. First, it provides an overview of the debates concerning potential peace scenarios related to the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict. The perspectives identified serve as the foundation for the stance classification process, which is detailed in the following section. The results are then presented and discussed to lay out the main argument, before the summary is offered in the final section.

2.2 Arguing About Peace Regarding the Russia-Ukraine War

Besides being a rather difficult notion to grasp—especially when factoring in cultural and structural violence—peace is also a “tainted” word, at least in the West. For example, Kühn (2012, p. 396) argued that despite the general positive connotations that this word holds, its meaning has become ambiguous, as “peace [has] become instrumental for legitimizing international interventions, violent politics including bullying of allies and increasing disregard of sovereignty.” If he were not writing in 2012 and referring to “the states of the Western security community,” one could easily apply the same phrase to Vladimir Putin’s Russia. Because of this legacy of ambiguity and instrumentality, discussing peace is particularly challenging today.

In relation to the Russia-Ukraine War, even broaching the topic is particularly sensitive. In an essay introducing a special issue dedicated to the matter of peace in Ukraine, Kyselova and Landau (2025a, pp. 2–3) assert that this war “has thrown parts of the professional community of peacebuilders and their supporters into something akin to an existential crisis.” They notice how the usual tendency in the field to favor compromise and an end to violence was being questioned when discussing the war in Ukraine, with the established frameworks being poorly adapted to “Ukraine’s legitimate right to self-defense.” In the same special issue, Daniels and Polegkyi (2025, pp. 43–44) report that during interviews with peace activists from Ukraine some respondents felt that mentioning efforts of peacebuilding felt like “surrender,” or even treason. Meanwhile, a Chatham House report from 2023 drafted by Ash et al. (2023a, 2023b, p. 12) identified “calls by Western experts and politicians to reach a settlement of Russia’s war against Ukraine” as one of the nine “fallacies” that hinder a just resolution to the conflict. More alarmingly, Leist and Zimmermann (2024, p. 2) state that “the ambiguous pacifist outcry against the Western military and in favor of ‘peace’ negotiations at Ukraine’s expense” actually resonates with Russian disinformation within Western democracies. As can be seen, merely addressing the topic of peace in connection with the ongoing conflict in Ukraine is problematic, a fact that became blatantly evident following Donald Trump’s election to the White House and the subsequent breakdown of the Western consensus regarding the resolution of the conflict.

Despite this reticence to discuss peace, a considerable amount of literature has nevertheless been produced on the matter. Hedberg (2024) has summarized most peace proposals and identified two major categories: “advocacy for unconditional victory” and “calls for negotiated settlements.”

The first category generally draws from President Zelensky’s “peace formula” that he presented on October 11, 2022, at the G20 summit.¹ The plan demands “the restoration of Ukraine’s territorial integrity,” the withdrawal of the Russian troops, the prosecution of war crimes, security guaranties, along with food, environment and energy security. Hedberg qualifies this and other similar plans—which differ

¹The official text can be found at: <https://war.ukraine.ua/faq/zelenskys-10-point-peace-plan/>.

very little in their demands—as “maximalist,” showing no room for negotiations or compromise (Ash et al., 2023a, 2023b). Interestingly enough, this perspective on ending the war seems to be favored by both Ukrainians (Kyselova & Landau, 2025b), and the general Western public, which was found in a report from 2023 to support the war effort “even if it means a longer war or more Ukrainians being killed and displaced” (Ash et al., 2023b). However, the same report found that individuals in non-Western countries are less favorable to such a scenario.

As for the second category, the range of proposals is much more diverse. Some “peace through strength” plans, while emphasizing an intense Western commitment to Ukraine, view this projection of strength as a tool for future negotiations with Vladimir Putin. Other proposals are permutations generated by the level of compromise towards the aggressor regarding such elements as Ukraine’s EU accession and NATO membership, territorial concessions, security guaranties for the Russian Federation, and freezing vs. ending the conflict (see Hedberg, 2024 for an overview).

Russia’s concrete peace plans are harder to pin down, as there are not too many official documents and positions on this matter that reached the Western public, with few exceptions (Surnacheva & Systema, 2024; Troianovski et al., 2024). Nevertheless, the general outline of Russia’s propositions can be inferred from Vladimir Putin’s speeches and the Kremlin’s public communiqués. It mainly includes the shrinking of Ukraine’s standing army, the renouncement of any aspirations to joining NATO, lifting the sanctions against the Russian Federation, the formal recognition of the annexed regions, and making Russian an official language in Ukraine. In essence, Russia’s peace proposals amount to Ukraine’s surrender.

To put things into Galtung’s broader framework of peace, regardless of Hedberg’s typology, the peace plans outlined here all fall under the category of negative peace. The “peace through victory” plan that both Ukrainians and Westerners favor, although it emphasizes justice for Ukraine (one of the major aspects of positive peace) does not actually qualify as positive peace. The plan does not imply the “negation of war,” as it envisions the continuation of the conflict until Ukraine’s conditions are met, nor can it be described as “peace by peaceful means” in Galtung’s (1996) terms. Positive peace is therefore generally absent from the major discussions about the resolution of the war in Ukraine. This is certainly not unexpected, as “the complexities represented by the notion of positive peace are more elusive” than the common understanding of peace as the absence of war (Wenden, 2005, p. 14). For Wenden (2005), organizations like the Nobel Foundation tend to award the peace prize to efforts that promote negative peace, and even in works such as the 1986 edition of the *World Encyclopedia for Peace* that she analyzed, negative peace seems to be the preferred definition. As we shall see, the quasi-absence of positive peace is also something that will be evidenced in the media coverage studied here.

All the formulations of peace regarding the Russia-Ukraine war discussed above are largely geo-political intellectual creations of an elite. At the grassroots level, as Daniels and Polegkyi (2025) have demonstrated in their work with Ukrainian respondents, there are numerous nuances one can add to the idea of peace that are very often personal. The authors have observed that in the surveys they conducted, when negotiations are brought up, the public’s perception of peace tends to shift

from more “personal and emotional” interpretations to definitions that favor peace through military victory. What this demonstrates is that discourse is therefore crucial in shaping perspectives on peace and garnering support for a particular proposition, underscoring the significance of the research conducted here.

2.3 Methodology: Classifying Stances with the Help of AI

As mentioned in the introduction, the present study relies heavily on AI as the primary tool for analyzing the three previously mentioned corpora. This is not necessarily new, as the use of AI in CADS analyses is well documented (Curry et al., 2024), nor is stance analysis regarding the media coverage of the Russia-Ukraine war (Jiang, 2024). However, academic investigations on the media’s portrayal of peace in Ukraine are relatively rare, and to my knowledge none of them utilize AI in the process.

In broader terms, the method employed here is called “text classification” and it includes such applications as sentiment analysis, topic modelling, or stance detection. There are multiple approaches to text classification when using LLMs: supervised training (training models for a specific labeling task), few-shot classification (providing the model with some examples of correct labeling), zero-shot classification (the model labels documents without prior training), etc. (Burnham, 2024). For the present study, the former approach, which might initially appear less reliable, is the one employed. However, given recent advancements in the field, zero-shot classification is beginning to show very good performance, even with smaller models like the one used here (Lepagnol et al., 2024).

To conduct this study, I first created data subsets for the corpora; all the entries in each corpus were scanned for the word “peace” (in all its forms in the three different languages), and the sentences containing the term were segmented and extracted to create three distinct sub-corpora. The sentence was therefore chosen as the unit of analysis (Burnham, 2024, p. 5). Counting these sentences for each of the three media landscapes yields the following numbers: 532 for Romanian, 380 for English, and 187 for Polish.

Going forward, these sentences were piped into a distilled, 14 billion parameters, locally installed version of DeepSeek-R1,² which performed the classification. Additionally, the model was provided with the titles of the articles from which the

²There are good reasons behind the decision of choosing a distilled version of DeepSeek, instead of other competing AI tools. DeepSeek is a reasoning LLM, this type being associated with better performance in certain classification tasks (Burnham, 2024, p. 13). It also outputs its reasoning in textual form, which is another advantage for providing transparency. As an open-source model, DeepSeek can be easily distilled and run locally, reducing the operational costs. Moreover, this model stands out from others I tested for this research in that it does not censor itself when asked questions related to political issues.

sentences originated, to provide it with more context and improve accuracy (Burnham, 2024). A list of categories was inductively compounded based on the already commented literature regarding the plans for peace in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war and also on ChatGPT’s Deep Research capabilities. The result was a series of five labels, detailed in Table 2.1, along with their definitions, also supplied to DeepSeek as context. The first three categories, *Ukrainian aligned peace*, *Russian aligned peace*, *Realist-pragmatic peace* were designed to accommodate the above identified propositions for peace. The remaining stances were added: *Positive peace* to account for Galtung’s (1969, 1996) theoretical framework, putting all previously mentioned labels under the larger category of *Negative peace*; and *Incidental* to include all the mentions where a position regarding peace is not expressed.

Table 2.1 The list of stances used to identify the types of peace in the corpus

Ukrainian aligned peace	The text maintains that peace can only be achieved through the clear defeat of Russia. This perspective claims that this is the only way to obtain a lasting peace. According to this perspective, any premature negotiation or territorial concession would be the equivalent of a false peace that would allow Russia to regroup for future aggressions. This perspective promotes a “just peace” through victory, insisting on maximal conditions: the complete withdrawal of Russian troops, the restoration of Ukraine’s borders (including Crimea), and holding Russia accountable for war crimes.
Russian aligned peace	The text implies that Ukraine must accept Russia’s conditions that include: Renouncing NATO membership aspirations, “demilitarization” (severely limiting the Ukrainian army), political regime change in Ukraine, and the de facto annexation of occupied territories, including recognition of the annexation of Crimea and other occupied regions. Peace on such terms is often equated with Ukraine’s capitulation.
Realist-pragmatic peace	The text emphasizes negotiations and mutual compromise, highlighting the diplomatic urgency to avoid escalation and further loss of human lives. Dialogue and negotiation are seen as the only viable solutions. This perspective calls for the rapid resumption of direct discussions between Moscow and Kyiv and seeks a diplomatically negotiated solution instead of continuing the fight until victory. In practice, this peace could translate at the end of the conflict into Ukraine’s temporary or permanent neutrality (excluding or postponing Ukraine’s NATO membership), some possible territorial concessions, an armistice or peace treaty, and strong security guarantees offered to Ukraine.
Positive peace	The text promotes a form of peace grounded in the elimination of all forms of direct, structural, and cultural violence. It emphasizes that true peace is not merely the absence of war, but the presence of justice, equity, human rights, and harmonious coexistence. From this perspective, peace requires addressing root causes such as militarism, social inequality, nationalism, or authoritarianism. The text calls for an immediate ceasefire and a transformation of social and political systems to enable lasting peace. Peace is framed as a long-term, systemic goal rather than a short-term military or diplomatic outcome.
Incidental	The text mentions peace, but it does not elaborate, comment, or take a stance on the topic. The mentions are isolated or incidental and peace is not qualified or discussed in any way.

2.4 Findings

The results obtained are interesting from various points of view. What is immediately apparent is the strikingly similar percentage that each of the five labels receives in DeepSeek’s evaluation (see Table 2.2). First, this attests to the model’s consistency and reliability in its labeling performance, with accuracy being certainly more difficult to assess,³ as Burnham (2024, p. 3) points out. Second, similar percentages were expected, given that the three corpora, although originating from different linguistic contexts, are quite similar in composition and belong to the same generally Western geo-political background. What seems to be the most striking result is the high frequency of the *Realist-pragmatic peace* stance. Incidental mentions of peace rank first, as expected, but *Realist-pragmatic* is a very close second, while *Ukrainian aligned peace* only follows in the third place. This contrasts with the prevailing perspective in Western countries, where there is a broad support for Ukraine’s efforts to obtain an uncompromising peace deal. The remaining stances, *Russian aligned peace* and *Positive peace*, are less prominent, which was anticipated considering the Western-oriented nature of the analyzed media landscapes.

When plotted on a time series (Fig. 2.1), the stances obtained exhibit some similarities and differences. The latter can be attributed to the particularities of the three mediascapes. In contrast, I would argue that the similarities between the three

Table 2.2 Stance counts in the English, Polish, and Romanian sub-corpora (Absolute values and percent of total)

Corpus	Ukrainian aligned peace	Russian aligned peace	Realist-pragmatic peace	Positive peace	Incidental
English	68 (17.89%)	15 (3.95%)	130 (34.21%)	18 (4.74%)	149 (39.21%)
Polish	31 (16.58%)	9 (4.81%)	60 (32.09%)	9 (4.81%)	78 (41.71%)
Romanian	81 (15.23%)	35 (6.58%)	198 (37.22%)	19 (3.57%)	199 (37.41%)

³To evaluate the model’s performance, I provided samples of the data to human annotators who applied the same labeling scheme. I randomly selected 10% of the data from each of the three datasets and had it labeled by two reviewers each. The comparison shows that there is high variation both between DeepSeek’s and the human raters’ answers, but also between the human annotators themselves. Cohen’s kappa was used to assess the reliability of DeepSeek. Romanian yielded the highest score ($\kappa \approx 0.46$ – 0.44), while Polish ($\kappa \approx 0.48$ – 0.22) and English ($\kappa \approx 0.17$ – 0.35) performed poorly. Interestingly, human disagreement was also higher in Polish ($\kappa \approx 0.45$) and English ($\kappa \approx 0.44$) compared to Romanian ($\kappa \approx 0.62$). This could be attributed to varying interpretations of the sentences or of the labeling scheme itself. Because the stances employed here are not so clear-cut (say, as “pro-peace”, “anti-peace”, “neutral”), this level of variation among human annotators is to be expected, and with significant differences between human raters, the AI’s score is also affected. Considering the scope of the study, I would conclude that DeepSeek’s responses are more consistent compared to those provided by humans; however, it is crucial to exercise caution when drawing conclusions based solely on these responses.

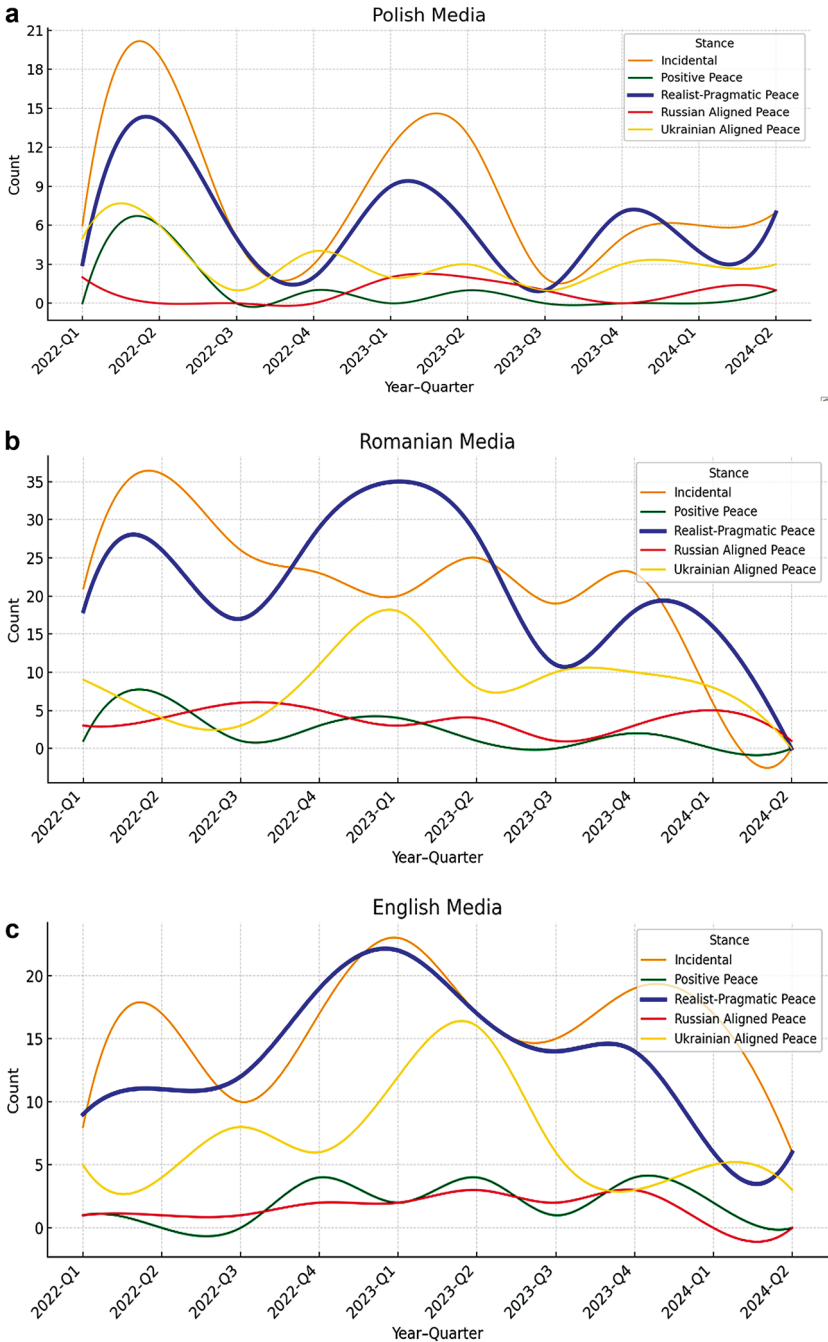


Fig. 2.1 Trends in the stances regarding peace during the first 2 years of the Russia-Ukraine war, as observed in the: (a) Polish, (b) Romanian, and (c) English-language online news media; *Realist-pragmatic peace* emphasized

linguistic spaces are a result of the general progress of the war and the shared Western cultural and geopolitical background among media outlets in these spaces.

The *Realist-pragmatic peace* stance again emerges as more intriguing, as the trends in the three graphs are more aligned in this case compared to the others (and was consequently graphically emphasized). The curve generally follows that of the *Incidental* mentions of peace, marking three high points during the first 2 years of the war when peace was generally brought up in the media's discourse: at the beginning of the war (the Istanbul peace talks), in the first quarter of the year 2023 (China's peace plan and Western responses to it), and towards the end of that same year (the Malta peace talks and Putin's response). *Russian aligned* and *Positive* stances on peace largely flatline at the bottom of all the three charts, as anticipated. The former's low incidence can be attributed to the overall pro-Ukrainian outlook in the three cultural spaces. Conversely, the latter's absence can be attributed to the previously discussed general lack of positive peace discourse in the West. The incidence of the *Ukrainian aligned peace* is where expectations were definitely higher. However, as the graphs illustrate, almost never during the first 2 years of the war (with modest exceptions in the Polish and English media charts) does the stance surpass the two leading stances. Nevertheless, as the English and Romanian cases demonstrate more clearly, the *Ukrainian aligned peace* stance tends to follow the curve described by *Realist-pragmatic peace* that exhibits some degree of polarization in the media when discussions of peace become more prominent.

The present analysis also facilitates the assessment of the degree to which audiences of the media outlets under scrutiny were exposed to certain perspectives on peace. Since the Polish corpus contained fewer occurrences of the term "peace" compared to the other two cases, spread across many more media outlets, it is safer to exclude it from the ensuing discussion. However, the English and Romanian datasets are suitable enough and the results seem to reinforce what has already been stressed here.

Although throughout our analysis *Incidental* is overall the more popular stance, in the Romanian-language media in five out of the seven outlets analyzed the *Realist-pragmatic peace* stance holds the most prominent place (namely in *Adevărul*, *Digi24*, *Hot News*, *România TV*, *stirileprotv.ro*, *Știripesurse*). This explains the significant increase in the prominence of *Realist-pragmatic peace* compared to other stances between the end of 2022 and the first two quarters of 2023 (as depicted in Fig. 2.1b). In the English-language dataset the same is observed with regard to *CBS News*, *The Telegraph*, and *The Washington Post*. This indicates that in the case of the cited media outlets *Realist-pragmatic peace* is in fact the stance that their audiences are exposed to the most, in some cases by slightly more than 12 percentage points compared to *Incidental*.

Other than this, the stances are similarly distributed among the analyzed media outlets, with only *Ukrainian aligned peace* showing some variations worth mentioning. For instance, in *The Telegraph*, this stance is better represented than *Incidental* (but still second to *Realist-pragmatic*), and there are other outlets where the pro-Ukrainian stance amounts to almost a quarter of the total, namely *The Guardian* and *Digi24*.

2.5 Discussion: The Naturalness of Realist-Pragmatic Peacemaking

The results obtained here can be contested in many ways. Given the extensive media discourse on this war, some sentences that aren't directly related to peacebuilding in Ukraine but rather to other historical or parallel events inadvertently found their way into the datasets. This could lead some to argue for their removal, so that they do not distort the outcome. Nonetheless, the news pieces they belong to are related to the current events in Ukraine, and therefore the sentences do index certain stances or opinions regarding the war in Ukraine, despite not being specifically about this war. One can also argue that the accuracy of the LLM employed here (or any other LLM, for that matter) is low. Or even that geo-political bias is baked into these models, as Salnikov et al. (2025) demonstrate.

Despite these concerns, I believe the results presented here align with Hardt and Negri's analytical framework for understanding war and peace in today's world (for other similar views, see Dodge, 2013; Kühn, 2012). The argument here is that for all the prevailing pro-Ukrainian sentiment and the relentless voices in the West calling for no compromise towards Putin, the global international order—or Empire, as Hardt and Negri (2000) call it—is inherently predisposed to a realist-pragmatic approach to resolving the Russia-Ukraine war. This is because this particular war hinders the globalizing tendencies of Empire, paradoxically disrupting “the global state of war” that this new international order has instituted. The option of “peace through victory,” while publicly touted in the West and possibly better serving the needs of Empire, is nevertheless a low statistical probability. As Kreutz's (2010) comprehensive study on conflict termination spanning the period 1946–2005 revealed, “only a fifth of interstate conflicts end with a victory.” The majority of these conflicts end with ceasefires, peace agreements, or simply without any formal agreement. As for positive peace, pursuing such an agenda would mean a greater threat to the functioning of Empire, because it presupposes the elimination of the structural violence that underpins the current global order. Thus, realist-pragmatic peace becomes the default natural approach to peace.

The results show that the media generally follow this logic, although not necessarily in an explicit, manipulative manner. Hardt and Negri do speak about “*media manipulation* of public opinion and political action,” but add that they “do not mean to suggest that there is a little man behind the curtain” as “[t]here is no single locus of control that dictates the spectacle. The spectacle, however, generally functions *as if* there were such a point of central control [*italics in original*]” (Hardt & Negri, 2000, pp. 323–324). Leaving Debord's metaphor of the spectacle aside—which requires a separate discussion—what the two authors hint at is that mainstream media outlets, although benefiting from certain ideological leeway, are constrained overall to function within the bounds set by Empire.

At its most neutral, journalism simply reports the facts. Therefore, when this is the case the discourse of peace in the Russia-Ukraine war merely mirrors geo-political discourses. On the other hand, if the media also provide commentary, then

media discourse adopts the ideologies of geo-political discourse or even attempts to steer it. In our case, this could only be determined through more in-depth, qualitative research. However, the quantitative analysis conducted here that does have its limitations and pitfalls (Baker, 2023, pp. 81–105), reveals that audiences across the three examined media landscapes are more exposed to the realist-pragmatic approach to peace in Ukraine compared to other perspectives on peace.

If this is the Empire's "natural" approach to peace, how can one reconcile its predominance with the perpetual global state of war that Hardt and Negri speak of in their seminal book from 2000, and in its sequel *Multitude* (2004)? Moreover, how does this particular conflict differ from other longer, decades spanning wars, like the ones in Iraq and Afghanistan, where efforts towards peace took the very different route of liberalization through intervention (Dodge, 2013)? I believe that both these questions can only be answered in a satisfactory manner if we qualify the Russia-Ukraine war as a paradoxical disruption of Empire's "business as usual."

Although the current war in Ukraine is apparently attuned to today's "permanent state of exception," in which "wartime becomes an interminable condition," it differs from the major wars of recent times, as it cannot qualify as a just war. Even though this notion has received a new meaning—no longer seen as an activity of defense, but "an activity that is justified in itself" (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p. 13), the Russia-Ukraine conflict has never been reframed and acknowledged as such (except maybe by the Russian Federation itself), despite the similarities with the Iraq war (Bachman & Brito Ruiz, 2025). Second, if we again apply Hardt and Negri's reading of war in the time of Empire, the one initiated by Russia against Ukraine appears like a relic of the past (Leist & Zimmermann, 2024, pp. 4–20): a war between two nation-states in an age where national sovereignties have been supplanted by what the authors call a global imperial sovereignty. Russia's aggression questioned U.S. exceptionalism and burst on the international scene seemingly from a different era, pursuing territorial conquest similar to colonial powers of the past, and fundamentally challenging the playbook of the current global state of war. If "war is no longer an exceptional condition"—Hardt and Negri argue—"but the normal state of affairs," and if "we have now entered a perpetual state of war, then it becomes necessary that war not be a threat to the existing structure of power, not a destabilizing force, but rather, on the contrary, an active mechanism that constantly creates and reinforces the present global order" (Hardt & Negri, 2004, p. 21). Russia's war against Ukraine does not qualify as such a war, one indicator being the abundant calls for concessions as a way to end it, as observed in the data from the three media landscapes examined here.

However, the effects of such concessions-prone discourse on the broader public can only be speculated. Calls for swift realist-pragmatic peace talks do align with the anti-Ukrainian sentiment peddled, for example, by some far-right groups in Poland (Deutschmann & Olejniczak, 2025; Molek-Kozakowska & Paszczyński, 2025). In Romania, where a surreal electoral drama recently unfolded, fueled by what Baghiu (2025) calls "loony platform politics," reaching a quick and pragmatic peace deal in Ukraine did resonate with the electorate of the surprise far-right frontrunner. Given the high level of "political parallelism" and the media's instrumentalization, as observed

by media specialists in Eastern Europe (Boshnakova & Dankova, 2023, pp. 177–183; Botan, 2024, more so in Romania, than in Poland), one would anticipate that calls for pragmatism in relation to the Ukraine would be more vociferously and visibly expressed in the media if the political landscape leans to the right.

2.6 Conclusions

In her study of the language surrounding war, Lukin (2019, p. 104) observes that the terms “war” and “peace” tend to counterintuitively collocate more often than “war” and “violence.” War is paradoxically identified in various historical and modern discourses as one of the main instruments for achieving peace. Indeed, as most of the scholarship cited here concurs, the international order established after the end of the Cold War witnessed a proliferation of instances where peace was invoked as a justification for war. Mainstream media contributed to spreading and often formulating these justifications (Bachman & Brito Ruiz, 2025). In contrast to other recent wars, the issue of peace in Ukraine is a sensitive and polarizing topic that necessitates utmost caution from the media when discussing it. On the surface, mainstream media outlets in the West generally project a pro-Ukrainian vision of peace. However, when we broaden our scope, as we did in this chapter, we see that other than incidental mentions of peace what gets mentioned the most are the concessions-prone, realist-pragmatic propositions. Additionally, the results obtained here show that this dominant viewpoint is almost evenly spread across the three mediascapes analyzed.

I argue on the basis of Hardt and Negri’s (2000) totalizing concept of Empire that the explanation for this is that the media are constrained to reflect Empire’s need for restoration after the paradoxical disruption of war-making that the Russia-Ukraine war produced. I contend that the war waged by Russia against its neighbor, by harking back to obsolete notions of national sovereignty, imperialism, and colonialism, can hardly be justified in terms of the legitimate violence that propels Empire. And since the “peace through victory” scenario—although taking center stage in mainstream media discourse—is a rare phenomenon in recent geopolitical history, the more tenable solution promoted by the media that can restore Empire is a pragmatic, concessions-oriented agreement. Ultimately, regardless of the course of present and future negotiations, it now seems that the prospects of a genuine positive peace remain distant. In contrast, Empire’s “perpetual and universal peace outside of history” is poised for a swift resurgence after the hiatus imposed by Russia’s aggression towards Ukraine.

Acknowledgement This work was funded by the EU’s NextGenerationEU instrument through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan of Romania—Pillar III-C9-I8, managed by the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalization, within the project entitled *The Coverage and Reception of the Russian–Ukrainian Conflict in Polish, Romanian and English-language Media: A Comparative Critical Discourse Study with Recommendations for Journalism Training (CORECON)*, contract no. 760244/28.12.2023, code CF 25/27.07.2023.

References

- ALDayel, A., & Magdy, W. (2021). Stance detection on social media: State of the art and trends. *Information Processing & Management*, 58(4), 102597. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ipm.2021.102597>
- Ash, T., Bohr, A., Busol, K., Giles, K., Lough, J., Lutsevych, O., Nixey, J., Sherr, J., Smith, S., & Wolczuk, K. (2023a). *How to end Russia's war on Ukraine: Safeguarding Europe's future, and the dangers of a false peace*. Royal Institute of International Affairs. <https://doi.org/10.55317/9781784135782>
- Ash, T. G., Krastev, I., & Leonard, M. (2023b). *United West, divided from the rest: Global public opinion one year into Russia's war on Ukraine* [Policy Brief]. European Council on Foreign Relations. <https://ecfr.eu/publication/united-west-divided-from-the-rest-global-public-opinion-one-year-into-russias-war-on-ukraine/>
- Bachman, J. S., & Brito Ruiz, E. (2025). The politics of war and aggression: Scholarly biases in public discourse on the invasions of Iraq and Ukraine. *Critical Studies on Security*, 1–28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21624887.2025.2503574>
- Baghiu, S. (2025). Loony platform politics: The Romanian far-right performance and the digital dystopia of 2024. *Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe*, 33(1), 235–249. <https://doi.org/10.1080/25739638.2025.2482400>
- Baker, P. (2023). *Using corpora in discourse analysis*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Boshnakova, D., & Dankova, D. (2023). The media in Eastern Europe. In S. Papathanassopoulos & A. Miconi (Eds.), *The media systems in Europe: Continuities and discontinuities* (pp. 163–190). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-32216-7_7
- Botan, M. (2024). The Romanian media system: Dynamics, challenges, and implications for democracy. *Media and Communication*, 12, 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.7847>
- Burnham, M. (2024). Stance detection: A practical guide to classifying political beliefs in text. *Political Science Research and Methods*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1017/psrm.2024.35>
- Curry, N., Baker, P., & Brookes, G. (2024). Generative AI for corpus approaches to discourse studies: A critical evaluation of ChatGPT. *Applied Corpus Linguistics*, 4(1), 100082. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acorp.2023.100082>
- Daniels, L.-A., & Polegkyi, O. (2025). Perceptions of peace in times of war: Public opinion evidence from Ukraine. *International Negotiation*, 30(1), 43–71. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718069-bja10119>
- Deutschmann, M., & Olejniczak, J. (2025). Unwanted encounters: Anti-Ukrainian rhetoric in the social media reception of migrants by the Polish far-right. *Res Rhetorica*, 12(2), 74–94. <https://doi.org/10.29107/rr2025.2.4>
- Dodge, T. (2013). Intervention and dreams of exogenous statebuilding: The application of liberal peacebuilding in Afghanistan and Iraq. *Review of International Studies*, 39(5), 1189–1212.
- Galtung, J. (1969). Violence, peace, and peace research. *Journal of Peace Research*, 6(3), 167–191. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002234336900600301>
- Galtung, J. (1996). *Peace by peaceful means: Peace and conflict, development and civilization*. International Peace Research Institute.
- Galtung, J. (2011). Peace, positive and negative. In D. J. Christie (Ed.), *The encyclopedia of peace psychology* (1st ed.). Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470672532.wbep189>
- Gay, W. C. (2008). The language of war and peace. In L. R. Kurtz (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of violence, peace, & conflict* (pp. 1115–1127). Academic. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-820195-4.00029-7>
- Hardt, M., & Negri, A. (2000). *Empire*. Harvard University Press.
- Hardt, M., & Negri, A. (2004). *Multitude: War and democracy in the age of Empire*. Penguin.
- Hedberg, M. (2024, August 30). Comparing pathways to peace in Ukraine. *Russia matters*. <https://www.russiamatters.org/analysis/comparing-pathways-peace-ukraine>

- Jiang, Z. (2024). Mining themes, emotions, and stance in the news coverage of the Russia–Ukraine war from Reuters and Xinhua. *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities*, 39(2), 609–624. <https://doi.org/10.1093/dlsc/fqae015>
- Kreutz, J. (2010). How and when armed conflicts end: Introducing the UCDP conflict termination dataset. *Journal of Peace Research*, 47(2), 243–250.
- Kühn, F. P. (2012). The peace prefix: Ambiguities of the word “peace.” *International Peacekeeping*, 19(4), 396–409. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13533312.2012.709785>
- Kyselova, T., & Landau, D. M. (2025a). Rethinking peace and victory in light of Russian aggression in Ukraine. *International Negotiation*, 30(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718069-bja10125>
- Kyselova, T., & Landau, D. M. (2025b). Ukrainian visions of peace: (Re-)shaping peace through victory. *International Negotiation*, 30(1), 13–42. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718069-bja10111>
- Leist, A., & Zimmermann, R. (2024). Still in the face of war: On framing political realities anew. In A. Leist & R. Zimmermann (Eds.) *After the war? How the Ukraine war challenges political theories* (pp. 1–52). de Gruyter.
- Lepagnol, P., Gerald, T., Ghannay, S., Servan, C., & Rosset, S. (2024). Small language models are good too: An empirical study of zero-shot classification (No. arXiv:2404.11122; Version 1). *arXiv*. <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2404.11122>
- Lukin, A. (2019). *War and its ideologies: A social-semiotic theory and description*. Springer.
- Molek-Kozakowska, K., & Paszczyński, J. (2025). Rhetorical and linguistic devices in the argumentation against supporting Ukraine in the radicalized Polish media sphere. *Res Rhetorica*, 12(2), 47–73. <https://doi.org/10.29107/r2025.2.3>
- Pan, Z., & Kosicki, G. (1993). Framing analysis: An approach to news discourse. *Political Communication*, 10(1), 55–75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.1993.9962963>
- Salnikov, M., Korzh, D., Lazichny, I., Karimov, E., Iudin, A., Oseledets, I., Rogov, O. Y., Loukachevitch, N., Panchenko, A., & Tutubalina, E. (2025). Geopolitical biases in LLMs: What are the “good” and the “bad” countries according to contemporary language models. *arXiv*. <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2506.06751>
- Surnacheva, Y., & Systema. (2024, November 4). Early peace plan shows Russia’s intent to neutralize Ukraine. *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*. <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-ukraine-peace-deal-putin-draft-treaty/33183664.html>
- Troianovski, A., Entous, A., & Schwirtz, M. (2024, June 15). Ukraine-Russia peace is as elusive as ever. But in 2022 they were talking. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2024/06/15/world/europe/ukraine-russia-ceasefire-deal.html>
- Wenden, A. L. (2005). Defining peace: Perspectives from peace research. In A. L. Wenden & C. Schäffner (Eds.), *Language & Peace* (pp. 3–15). Taylor and Francis.
- Winslow, L. (2017). Frame Analysis. In M. Allen (Ed.), *The SAGE encyclopedia of communication research methods* (pp. 583–586). SAGE.

Bogdan Vătavu is assistant professor at Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Romania, where he teaches various disciplines in the field of Library and Information Science. He is a graduate in history at Babeș-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca, Romania, where he also obtained his PhD in 2019. His academic interests run from social history, through library and information science, to digital humanities. His work is generally focused on the history of crime in Romania and its representations in popular culture, as well as on critical information literacy issues and the state of librarianship in Romania. More recently, his interests have also expanded to include the digital humanities and computational linguistics.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if you modified the licensed material. You do not have permission under this license to share adapted material derived from this chapter or parts of it.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.



Chapter 3

Comparative Analysis of International Legal Terminology in Polish and Romanian Media Discourse: The Case of the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict



Rafal Krzysztof Matusiak

Abstract This chapter examines how international legal terminology is mobilized in Polish and Romanian online news during the Russian-Ukrainian conflict due to the normative force of such labels such “war,” “aggression,” and “war crime” that classify events, attribute responsibility, and invoke international legal regimes. A corpus-assisted, cross-linguistic approach was used for a dataset of opinion-forming outlets from Poland and Romania between 2022 and 2024. Quantitative findings show a shared salient labelling of the conflict as “war” (“wojna” in Polish, and “război” in Romanian), together with other labels that consistently mark attribution of responsibility. Accountability terms for crime and technical military descriptors remain peripheral, with a slightly larger footprint in Romanian, whereas references to martial law are more visible in the Polish coverage. The euphemistic Russian formula “special military operation” is rare. Both media systems align with NATO/UN/EU-compatible legal nomenclature, indicating convergence with international law and the active diffusion of related norms. The study underscores how national media stabilize legal-normative interpretations across languages and genres.

3.1 Introduction

Imagine the navigation of a battlefield not through conventional means such as maps and drones, but rather through the intricate utilization of language. Each term is a coordinate within the complex moral and legal landscape of conflict. In contemporary geopolitical contexts, the declaration of war transcends traditional methods involving artillery and formal state communications; it is increasingly constructed, framed, and executed through a sophisticated interplay of terminology (van Creveld,

R. K. Matusiak (✉)
Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Sibiu, Romania
University of Opole, Opole, Poland
e-mail: rafal.matusiak@uni.opole.pl

1991). Terms such as “aggression,” “invasion,” “armed conflict,” or “war” perform functions beyond mere description; they categorize events, allocate responsibility, and initiate legal ramifications (Crawford, 2013, p. 12). Consequently, language operates as a cartographer of conflict, delineating the nuanced distinctions between justification and condemnation, and lawful defense and criminal offence (European Court of Human Rights, 2022).

This metaphor is salient in the context of the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian conflict, wherein competing narratives are mobilized across diverse international media and legal domains. Scholars have posited that discourse surrounding warfare mirrors national interests and also encapsulates prevailing legal ideologies and normative frameworks (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, pp. 7–10; van Dijk, 2009, pp. 191–196). Hakimi (2006, p. 2) describes the media as “the nerves of the international system” that perform “critical functions in the international legal process” in democratic societies where media coverage is a principal conduit for the propagation and contextualization of international legal norms (Alter, 2014, p. 113). The selection of such terms as “wojna” (Polish for “war”) versus “działania wojenne” (Polish for “hostilities”) or “agresiune” (Romanian for “aggression”) versus “operațiuni militare” (Romanian for “military operations”) is inherently non-neutral, as it conveys both epistemological and ideological commitments.

Through a corpus-assisted methodology and a cross-linguistic comparative approach, this study examines the way legal terminologies are integrated within distinct national discursive frameworks, serving either to reinforce or challenge the prevailing international legal consensus (Oppenheim, 1952). In this regard, it enhances the comprehension of the dynamics of legal discourse across national boundaries by incorporating formal treaties and judicial proceedings alongside informal avenues, including news headlines, editorial commentary, and public narratives (Bhatia, 2005, p. 141).

3.2 An Overview of Legal Terminology in *Casus Belli*

The legal interpretation of war constitutes a fundamental aspect within the broader frameworks of *casus belli* and *ius ad bellum*.¹ International law does not provide a singular, universally recognized definition of war; instead, it addresses the concept through a comprehensive amalgamation of treaties, customary international law, and established legal principles. Apart from its philosophical, moral, and strategic implications (Arendt, 1969; Clausewitz, 1984), the notion of war is delimited by international legal norms, through principles that effectively proscribe the resort to force. Specifically, article 2(4) of the United Nations Charter (1945) articulates that the “threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence

¹ *Casus belli* is a narrative or rationale for war, whereas *ius ad bellum* is the legal framework that judges whether such a resort to war is lawful or unlawful (e.g., Walzer, 1977).

of any state” is subject to significant restriction. This provision has acquired the status of a peremptory norm of international law, or *ius cogens*, embodying the international community’s overarching commitment to the preservation of international peace and security (Strachan, 2013).

Another war-related term is “hostilities,” which is a more “dynamic” equivalent of “armed conflict,” referring to acts of violence between the belligerent parties. Hostilities are understood to encompass both offensive and defensive actions during an armed conflict. The term “hostilities” may be explained *a contrario* when juxtaposed with armistice, which reads as a suspension of military operations agreed upon by both sides involved in the conflict (art. 36 of Hague Convention IV). Further articles explicate that “hostilities are suspended immediately after the notification [of an armistice]” (International Committee of the Red Cross, 1907). Meanwhile, the word “aggression” is the most overarching and encompassing concept in the present analysis, as it embraces pre-war actions and underscores the personal accountability of the commanding leaders. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998) reads “the planning, preparation, initiation or execution, by a person in a position effectively to exercise control over or to direct the political or military action of a State, of an act of aggression” that constitutes a manifest violation of the Art. 8 bis of UN Charter and Kampala Amendments (Assembly of States Parties to the Rome Statute, 2010). The acts qualifying as aggression include invasion, blockade, bombardment, and the use of armed force without the authorization of the Security Council. This definition builds on the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution 3314 (1974), which provides a detailed list of acts constituting aggression that key international cases further clarified in scope.

According to the Kampala Amendments of 2010, the concept of aggression is an overarching term that includes acts of invasion (Assembly of States Parties to the Rome Statute, 2010). The notion of “armed invasion” constitutes *a prima facie* violation of article 2(4) of the UN Charter, prohibiting the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state. The definition of “aggression” adopted by the UNGA (1974) lists invasion among the most serious manifestations of aggression: “the invasion or attack by the armed forces of a State of the territory of another State, or any military occupation” is included in article 3(a) of Resolution 3314. The legal consequence of armed invasion may trigger the right to self-defense under article 51 of the UN Charter. It can also engage the applicability of international humanitarian law (IHL) (see e.g., International Committee of the Red Cross, 2022), particularly the Geneva Conventions (International Committee of the Red Cross, 1949). As a result, the legal terms used to describe wartime situations differ in the point at which legal frameworks become operative, turning political or military acts into legally regulated events under international law and its thresholds (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1 Comparison of war-related terms in international law. Own source

Term	Legal domain	Specificity	Short description	Primary legal framework	Example use
Armed aggression	<i>Jus ad bellum</i>	Instantaneous	Focuses on initiation of war (a grave, unlawful use of force by one state against another)	UN Charter (art. 51), UNGA Res. 3314	Full-scale invasion of Ukraine (2022)
Armed conflict	<i>Jus in bello</i>	Continuing	Focuses on conduct of war (sustained armed violence between parties)	Geneva conventions, ICTY	Syrian Civil War, Russia-Ukraine conflict
Armed invasion	<i>Jus ad bellum</i>	Initiatory	Violation of sovereignty	UN Charter (art. 2(4)), UNGA Res. 3314	Russia entering Crimea (2014)
Hostilities	<i>Jus in bello</i>	Episodic	Broad combat activities, signaling the start or existence of armed conflict	Geneva conventions	From cyberattacks to artillery exchanges
Martial law	Domestic	Emergency	Domestic emergency and suspension of civil law	National laws	Ukraine's declaration after 2022 invasion
Military operations	<i>Jus in bello</i>	Strategic	Types of tactical maneuvers	Geneva conventions, IHL	Airstrikes, sieges, military deployments, cross-border skirmishes, shelling
War	<i>Jus ad bellum</i>	Declarative	Requires formal declaration of the state	Customary international law, Hague conventions	WWII, Iran-Iraq War

3.3 Data and Methods

The aim of this study is to conduct a comparative analysis of the public adoption of international legal terminology within Polish and Romanian media discourse regarding the Ukrainian-Russian conflict. It focuses on nominal expressions situated within the semantic domain of warfare and conflict, namely such terms as “war” (Pol. “wojna,” Rom. “război”), “armed conflict” (Pol. “konflikt zbrojny,” Rom. “conflict armat”), “armed invasion” (Pol. “zbrojna inwazja,” Rom. “invazie armată”), “hostilities” (Pol. “działania zbrojne,” Rom. “ostilități”), “military operations” (Pol. “operacje wojskowe,” Rom. “operațiuni militare”), “aggression” (Pol.

“agresja,” Rom. “agresiune”), “martial law” (Pol. “stan wojenny,” Rom. “legea marțială”), “war crime” (Pol. “zbrodnia wojenna,” Rom. “crime de război”).

The choice to delimit the scope of analysis to eight specific war-related legal terms is not arbitrary but rather grounded in both legal doctrine and discursive practice. This terminological constellation encompasses the core categories through which international law regulates the use of force and delineates the boundaries between lawful and unlawful conduct during armed conflict. Taken together, these terms represent the minimum necessary conceptual toolkit for analyzing how media discourse labels and frames armed conflict within the matrix of international law. They capture the continuum from initiation (aggression, invasion) to conduct (hostilities, military operations) to consequence (war crimes, martial law), thereby offering a lens through which media representation can be evaluated comprehensively. By narrowing the focus to these categories the analysis remains aligned with established international legal frameworks, while also being sensitive to how language is mobilized in public discourse to construct legitimacy, responsibility, and urgency.

Additionally, through comparative analysis it is possible to elucidate how these legal terminologies are used in different national contexts, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of media drawing on international legal principles during times of conflict (Dinstein, 2011). The following research questions explore critical aspects of use of international legal terminology:

1. How do media institutions in Poland and Romania use key international legal terms within their coverage?
2. What similarities and differences can be captured in the editorial treatment of international legal terminology across Polish and Romanian media outlets?
3. What might be the broader implications of terminological choices for public perception and compliance with international legal standards?
4. What impact does the employment of legal terminology have on the criminalization or normalization of the actions taken by various entities involved in the conflict?

The data for this study encompasses articles from opinion-forming online news outlets in Poland and Romania, specifically published between February 24, 2022, and March 31, 2024. This temporal scope allows for an in-depth analysis of the evolving discourse within these media landscapes during each phase of the protracted conflict. A comprehensive explanation of the reasoning and methods behind the creation of the corpus is available in a blog post on the official CORECON program website.²

Sketch Engine has been used to process and analyze the textual data, as it allows for the examination of large corpora and provides features for identifying collocations, concordances, and semantic frames. The analysis follows a structured approach that begins with the identification of key international legal terms within

²See <https://grants.ulbsibiu.ro/corecon/corpus-compilation-and-data-annotation-protocols-in-corecon/>.

the corpus. A frequency analysis determines how often these terms appear in each language and a collocation analysis is conducted to identify words that commonly occur alongside the legal terms, shedding light on typical usage patterns. To deepen the understanding of these terms, a semantic frame analysis is carried out to explore their contextual meanings. As Sketch Engine cannot fully capture the contextual nuances of usage, genre-specific variation, or the emotive and rhetorical functions of terms, the corpus-assisted analyses were complemented by close manual analysis.

3.4 Corpus-Assisted Insights into Polish Media Discourse

3.4.1 *Frequency Analysis and Contextual Framing*

The quantitative analysis of the corpus demonstrates an uneven distribution of key international legal terms. The lexeme “wojna” (“war”) exhibits a dominant presence, occurring 5187 times and constituting over 90% of all war-related legal terminology within the dataset. In contrast, “agresja” (“aggression”) appears 454 times, representing approximately 8% of the total. Terms such as “stan wojenny” (“martial law”) are noted 21 times, while “konflikt zbrojny” (“armed conflict”), and “zbrodnia wojenna” (“war crime”) occur 29 and 58 times, respectively. Other expressions, including “zbrojna inwazja” (“armed invasion,” 6 occurrences), “działania zbrojne” (“hostilities,” 9 occurrences), and “operacje wojskowe” (“military operations,” 29 occurrences), are markedly less frequent, suggesting their marginal contribution to the overarching narrative of the conflict.

This frequency indicates that Polish media discourse tends to gravitate toward a dominant representation of the Ukrainian-Russian conflict as a full-scale war. A deeper examination of collocational patterns for each of the eight key legal terms highlights the rhetorical strategies embedded in the Polish media’s representation of the conflict. The term “wojna” (“war”) is intensified through modifiers such as “brutalna” (“brutal”), “pełnoskalowa” (“full-scale”), and “totalna” (“total”). It frequently co-occurs with action verbs such as “rozpocząć” (“to start”), “trwać” (“to continue”), and “wygrać” (“to win”). Temporal references like “pierwszy dzień wojny” (“the first day of the war”) and “rok wojny” (“year of war”) situate the conflict within a sustained temporal arc, implying longevity and escalation. These patterns construct war not just as a factual description, but as an ongoing, existential threat embedded in historical continuity.

The term “wojna” is not only the most frequent but also the most salient, appearing consistently in headlines, article introductions, and summaries. Its rhetorical function is not descriptive but affective and mobilizing. Examples drawn from the corpus illustrate this trend: “Wojna na Ukrainie trwa już ponad rok i nie widać końca walk” [The war in Ukraine has been going on for over a year now, and there is no end in sight to the fighting], and “To brutalna wojna, której celem jest

zniszczenie państwowości Ukrainy” [It is a brutal war aimed at destroying the statehood of Ukraine].

By contrast, terms such as “konflikt zbrojny” and “operacje wojskowe” are situated within more formalized and bureaucratic registers, appearing in reports by international institutions or in analytical commentary. For example, “Eksperci ONZ podkreślają, że mamy do czynienia z konfliktem zbrojnym o charakterze międzynarodowym” [UN experts emphasize that we are dealing with an international armed conflict], or “Operacje wojskowe prowadzone przez armię rosyjską obejmują wiele regionów Ukrainy” [Military operations conducted by the Russian army cover many regions of Ukraine]. These terms underline the legal classification of the situation under international humanitarian law and function more frequently in discussions of international legality than in headline coverage.

“Stan wojenny” (“martial law”) is discussed regarding either Ukraine’s domestic legal mechanisms or speculations about its imposition in Poland. It is often embedded in governmental and legislative discourse, highlighting legal preparedness and constitutional implications. Examples include references to the formal declaration of martial law and its administrative ramifications e.g., “Prezydent Zełenski ogłosił stan wojenny na całym terytorium kraju” [President Zelensky has declared martial law throughout the country]. “Zbrodnia wojenna” (“war crime”) is often found in contexts describing civilian casualties and the destruction of infrastructure, often alongside references to the International Criminal Court, the Hague, and to “odpowiedzialność karna” (“criminal liability”), as in “Zbrodnie wojenne popełnione w Buczy będą rozpatrywane przez Międzynarodowy Trybunał Karny” [War crimes committed in Bucha will be tried by the International Criminal Court]. These co-occurrences emphasize accountability and foreground the normative framework of international criminal law.

“Agresja” (“aggression”) frequently collocates with “Rosja” (“Russia”) or “rosyjska” (“Russian”), reinforcing its role in attributing blame and legal responsibility. This linguistic linkage aligns with international legal definitions under the UN Charter and serves descriptive as well as accusatory functions, e.g., “Rosyjska agresja wobec Ukrainy nie pozostawia złudzeń co do intencji Kremla” [Russian aggression against Ukraine leaves no illusions about the Kremlin’s intentions]. Meanwhile, the term “zbrojna inwazja” (“armed invasion”), despite its legal precision, appears only six times in the corpus, a surprisingly low count given the nature of the conflict. This indicates a potential lexical substitution in favor of ideologically potent terms related to war and aggression, or an editorial preference for more emotionally and legally charged vocabulary. This lacuna is notable given its prevalence in international diplomatic discourse.

“Działania zbrojne” (“hostilities”) and “operacje wojskowe” (“military operations”) are used in a more neutral, technical manner e.g., “Działania zbrojne objęły wschodnią i południową część kraju” [Military operations covered the eastern and southern parts of the country], “Rosyjskie operacje wojskowe miały na celu zdobycie Charkowa i Mariupola” [Russian military operations aimed to capture Kharkov

and Mariupol]. Their use is constrained largely to factual summaries rather than editorial framing.

Taken together, the predominance of “wojna” and the relative marginality of more technical or euphemistic alternatives point to a consistent editorial strategy. Polish media appear to favor a lexicon that underscores the existential, aggressive, and unlawful nature of the conflict, reinforcing legal and moral evaluations over detached military analysis. This lexical patterning, grounded in both frequency and framing, reveals a communicative alignment with international legal norms, but also a rejection of sanitized or ambiguous descriptors characteristic of authoritarian propagandas.

3.4.2 Editorial Variation and Alignment with International Legal Discourse

The distribution and rhetorical function of international legal terminology across the corpus also display marked genre-specific variation. In straightforward news reporting, brief updates, and factual wire-service content, we observe a notable, though secondary, presence of more neutral or technocratic expressions such as “działania zbrojne” (“hostilities”) and “operacje wojskowe” (“military operations”). These terms tend to appear in low-emotion contexts such as reports on troop movements or military logistics and adopt the passive voice, contributing to the impression of impartiality. Similarly, legalistic or expert-driven articles more regularly employ the term “konflikt zbrojny” (“armed conflict”), often in conjunction with references to international law or humanitarian frameworks, positioning it as a neutral descriptor of the situation’s legal status. While emotionally charged alternatives outnumber these usages, their consistent presence in analytical and institutional discourse suggests a functional, though limited, role in shaping conflict perception.

By contrast, opinion columns, editorials, investigative features, and long-form political commentaries employ emotionally and normatively saturated terminology. In these genres, “wojna” (“war”), “agresja” (“aggression”), and “zbrodnia wojenna” (“war crime”) function not only as descriptors but as deliberate framing devices that amplify moral urgency and condemnation. These terms are often linked with broader rhetorical strategies such as metaphor, historical analogy, or appeals to international solidarity. The term “stan wojenny” (“martial law”) occasionally surfaces in speculative contexts, in articles examining Poland’s own preparedness, or Ukraine’s domestic responses (Zelensky, 2022), linking legal discourse to national security imaginaries. Mentions of “zbrojna inwazja” (“armed invasion”) and “konflikt zbrojny” (“armed conflict”) are more likely to occur in early-phase reporting or legal-expert analyses, reflecting terminological precision before more ideologically potent terms became dominant.

Interestingly, despite the vast array of media types and political affiliations, the convergence around specific emotionally charged and normatively loaded terms

suggests a broader discursive alignment. Both left- and right-leaning outlets regularly employ “wojna” (“war”) and “agresja” (“aggression”) as central labels, and both invoke “zbrodnia wojenna” (“war crime”) in their coverage of atrocities. This indicates that these terms have become part of an intersubjectively shared linguistic repertoire—one that transcends ideological divides and reflects a national consensus around the conflict’s legal and moral framing. More neutral terms such as “operacje wojskowe” (“military operations”) or “działania zbrojne” (“hostilities”) appear only peripherally, though more frequently than initially assumed, reinforcing the Polish media’s active reproduction of international legal-normative discourse. The dominant patterns indicate a media landscape that is not only aligned with Western strategic narratives but also contributes to their local diffusion and normalization.

Although the Polish corpus largely avoids euphemistic expressions typical of Russian state media, such as “specjalna operacja wojskowa” (“special military operation”) that does appear, albeit infrequently. When all inflectional forms are taken into account, this newspeak term occurs 42 times across the corpus. These instances are used in quotation marks as ironic references, or in the context of critically reporting Russian rhetoric (Molek-Kozakowska & Dragomir, 2025). This limited and contextually distanced use contrasts sharply with Russian state-aligned discourse, where the phrase is the principal designation of the invasion. In contrast, Polish media discourse demonstrates a strong alignment with the legal frameworks and terminologies endorsed by international bodies such as NATO, the United Nations, and the European Union. The term “wojna” (“war”) is central in this alignment, serving not as a descriptive label but as a legally and morally charged term that connotes an unlawful breach of peace and invokes the regulatory apparatus of international humanitarian law. By choosing war terminology instead of less loaded alternatives, Polish media endorse the view of the conflict as a full-scale, unprovoked act of aggression against a sovereign state.

Closely related is the term “agresja” (“aggression”) that directly echoes article 2(4) of the UN Charter and the definition of aggression under UNGA Resolution 3314 (1974), while its collocations attribute legal and moral responsibility to the Russian Federation. This usage mirrors the terminology employed in proceedings before international legal bodies such as the International Court of Justice and the European Court of Human Rights, where Russia’s actions have been labelled as aggression. “Zbrodnia wojenna” (“war crime”) further situates Polish media language within the domain of international criminal accountability by signaling violations of the Geneva Conventions and implicitly supporting prosecution for breaches of *jus in bello* principles. Editors often highlight the humanitarian dimensions by focusing on civilian harm, killing and atrocities, and the pursuit of accountability (Grossman, 1995).

The terms “konflikt zbrojny” (“armed conflict”), “działania zbrojne” (“hostilities”), and “operacje wojskowe” (“military operations”), although more neutral and technical in tone, are nonetheless present in reports that reference international legal standards, often in connection with United Nations or OSCE communications. These terms also conform to the definitions employed by the Geneva Conventions and international tribunals. Though less emotive, they help delineate the legal

threshold at which international humanitarian law becomes applicable. Meanwhile, “*stan wojenny*” (“martial law”), as discussed in Ukrainian domestic contexts, also reflects international legal expectations. Its coverage in Polish media mirrors human rights protocols and emergency frameworks of the European Court of Human Rights (2022). The term signals a suspension of certain civil liberties under legally sanctioned conditions, a topic closely linked to international oversight (International Commission of Jurists, 1983). Interestingly, “*zbrojna inwazja*” (“armed invasion”), although legally precise, is relatively rare in the corpus, suggesting an editorial preference for more resonant terms that carry heavier rhetorical and moral connotations and have gained greater traction in both legal and media discourses.

Altogether, these terminological choices reflect a media discourse that is not only consistent with international legal definitions but also strategically framed to support a narrative of legal clarity and moral urgency. The Polish media’s adoption of international legal nomenclature goes beyond reportage; it plays an active role in norm diffusion, shaping public understanding in a way that upholds and amplifies the standards of global humanitarian law. This ties in well with Sadat’s (2013, p. 336) argument about the evolving role and need for robust frameworks in responding to crimes against humanity.

3.5 Corpus-Assisted Insights into Romanian Media Discourse

3.5.1 *Frequency Analysis and Contextual Framing*

A quantitative analysis of the Romanian corpus indicates an uneven distribution of key international-legal terms analogous to the Polish set. The lexeme “*război*” (“war”) dominates, with 3184 occurrences across 1712 documents, far outpacing more technical or legal alternatives. In contrast, “*agresiune*” (“aggression”) appears 203 times in 172 documents, holding a notable but secondary position. Terms such as “*crimă(e) de război*” (“war crime[s]”) are recorded 88 times in 71 documents, whereas “*conflict armat*” (“armed conflict”) occurs 61 times in 53 documents. “*Operațiuni militare*” (“military operations”) and “*ostilități*” (“hostilities”) appear 37 and 19 times, respectively, with “*operațiuni militare*” found in 29 documents and “*ostilități*” in 17. “*Lege marțială*” (“martial law”) is used 12 times in 11 documents, and “*invazie armată*” (“armed invasion”) is the least frequent, with only 7 occurrences in 7 documents. This frequency profile mirrors the Polish pattern: a concentrated lexical field that gravitates towards a salient framing of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict as a full-scale war rather than an “armed conflict” or a set of “operations.”

Beyond raw counts, collocational analysis demonstrates how “*război*” operates rhetorically. The term frequently co-occurs with verbs of inception and duration: “*a începe*” (“to start”), “*a continua*” (“to continue”), and verbs tied to outcomes and escalation: “*a câștiga*” (“to win”), “*a pierde*” (“to lose”), “*a escalada*” (“to

escalate”). Modifiers referring to brutal, total, and unprovoked nature of the war intensify its evaluative load, whereas temporal anchoring situates the conflict within an extended arc: “Un an de război a schimbat fundamental relațiile internaționale” [A year of war has fundamentally changed international relations], or “Războiul a început pe 24 februarie 2022 și nu s-a încheiat” [The war began on February 24, 2022 and has not ended]. Again, such collocations construct “război” not as a descriptor but as an ongoing existential condition.

War terminology is prominent in headlines and summaries, underscoring its significance in editorial framing. Typical formulations include “Războiul din Ucraina continuă fără perspectivă de încetare a focului” [The war in Ukraine continues with no prospect of a ceasefire] or “Acest război brutal are ca scop distrugerea identității ucrainene” [This brutal war aims at destroying Ukrainian identity]. By contrast, “conflict armat” and “operațiuni militare” appear in formalized or bureaucratic registers: institutional briefings, legal-expert commentary, and wire-style updates about troop movements. Representative examples include “Experții ONU au confirmat existența unui conflict armat internațional” [UN experts confirmed the existence of an international armed conflict], and “Operațiunile militare rusești au vizat Harkiv și Mariupol” [Russian military operations targeted Kharkiv and Mariupol]. Here, the function is classification under international humanitarian law, not emotive mobilization.

“Lege marțială” (“martial law”) appears mainly in the context of Ukrainian domestic law or speculative Romanian debate. Articles report, for instance: “Președintele Zelenski a introdus legea marțială pe întreg teritoriul Ucrainei” [President Zelensky instituted martial law across the entire territory], highlighting legal preparedness and restrictions on civil liberties. “Crimă de război” (“war crime”) is used in reporting on atrocities against civilians and infrastructure, often linked to accountability structures: “Crimele de război de la Bucea vor fi investigate la Haga” [The war crimes in Bucha will be investigated at the Hague], or “Atacurile asupra spitalelor pot constitui crime de război” [Attacks on hospitals may constitute war crimes]. These contexts foreground criminal liability and the role of international tribunals. “Agresiune” (“aggression”) regularly collocates with “rusă” or “Rusiei,” functioning as an accusatory and legally precise term: “Agresiunea rusă împotriva Ucrainei nu lasă loc de echivoc” [Russian aggression against Ukraine leaves no room for ambiguity], or “Statele UE au condamnat agresiunea militară declanșată de Rusia” [EU states condemned the military aggression launched by Russia]. This usage aligns closely with the definition of aggression in UNGA Resolution 3314 (1974).

Despite its legal precision, “invazie armată” (“armed invasion”) is rare, surfacing only in isolated contexts such as “Invazia armată a Rusiei a fost condamnată la nivel global” [Russia’s armed invasion was condemned globally]. Its marginality suggests substitution in favor of “război” and “agresiune,” which are both rhetorically stronger. Finally, “ostilități” and “operațiuni militare” are used in (NATO) technical descriptions and remain affectively neutral: “Ostilitățile s-au extins în sudul și estul Ucrainei” [Hostilities expanded in southern and eastern Ukraine], “Ostilitățile

armate au cauzat noi victime civile” [Armed hostilities caused new civilian casualties].

Taken together, the lexical distribution shows that Romanian media, like Polish media, favor a lexicon that foregrounds the existential and unlawful nature of the conflict, thereby marginalizing more neutral, bureaucratic alternatives. The phrase “operațiune militară specială” (“special military operation”) appears only 44 times and almost always in quotation marks, as a distancing or ironic device. Examples include “Rusia numește invazia ‘operațiune militară specială’, dar presa folosește termenul de război” [Russia calls the invasion a “special military operation,” but the press uses the term war] and “Declarațiile Kremlinului despre ‘operațiunea militară specială’ au fost citate ironic” [The Kremlin’s statements about the “special military operation” were cited ironically]. This marks a clear contrast to Russian state media, where Putin’s speech (2022) and its phraseology is normalized.

3.5.2 *Editorial Variation and Alignment with International Legal Discourse*

The distribution and rhetorical function of international legal terminology across the Romanian corpus also display marked genre-specific variation. In straightforward news reporting, brief updates, and factual wire-service content, a notable albeit secondary presence of more neutral or technocratic expressions can be observed, such as “ostilități” (“hostilities”) and “operațiuni militare” (“military operations”). These terms tend to appear in low-emotion contexts, often regarding troop movements or military logistics, and adopt a passive or agent-backgrounding voice, contributing to the impression of impartiality e.g., “Raportul ONU documentează operațiunile militare în regiunea Donbas” [The UN report documents military operations in the Donbas region], or “Ostilitățile au continuat în ciuda negocierilor” [Hostilities continued despite negotiations]. Similarly, legalistic or expert-driven articles more regularly employ “conflict armat” (“armed conflict”), often in conjunction with references to international law or humanitarian frameworks, positioning the term as a neutral descriptor of the situation’s legal status. While emotionally charged alternatives outnumber these usages, their consistent presence in analytical and institutional discourse suggests a functional role in shaping conflict perception.

By contrast, opinion columns, editorials, investigative features, and long-form political commentaries, overwhelmingly employ emotionally and normatively saturated terminology. In these genres, the frequent use of “război” (“war”), “agresiune” (“aggression”), and “crime de război” (“war crime”) functions not only as a descriptor but as a deliberate framing device that amplifies moral urgency and legal condemnation. Examples from the corpus include: “România a sprijinit sancțiunile ca răspuns la ‘agresiune’ a rusă” [Romania supported sanctions in response to Russian aggression], and “Curtea Penală Internațională examinează acuzațiile de crime de război” [The International Criminal Court examines accusations of war crimes].

These choices are frequently embedded in broader rhetorical strategies such as historical analogy, metaphorical comparisons, and appeals to European and NATO solidarity, thereby reinforcing normative alignment.

The term “*lege marțială*” (“martial law”) occasionally surfaces in both factual and speculative contexts. In reporting on Ukraine, it appears as a legal measure of emergency governance e.g., “*Parlamentul a aprobat prelungirea legii marțiale*” [“Parliament approved the extension of martial law”], whereas in Romanian commentary it functions speculatively, linked to debates over national preparedness and constitutional implications. In this way, “*lege marțială*” situates domestic concerns within the broader frameworks of international emergency law (European Court of Human Rights, 2022; International Commission of Jurists, 1983), reflecting intersections between domestic governance and international oversight.

Mentions of “*invazie armată*” (“armed invasion”) are rare and primarily confined to factual reports in the early phase of coverage, such as “*Invazia armată a Rusiei a fost condamnată la nivel global*” [“Russia’s armed invasion was condemned globally”]. Its marginality suggests an editorial preference for more resonant terms like “*război*” and “*agresiune*” that carry greater moral weight. This parallels the Polish corpus pattern, where technically precise but less rhetorically potent terms recede over time in favor of discursively stronger alternatives.

Interestingly, despite the vast array of genres and outlets, the Romanian corpus demonstrates a broad discursive convergence around the same emotionally charged and normatively loaded terms. Both mainstream and niche publications consistently mobilize “*război*” and “*agresiune*” as central labels, and both invoke “*crime de război*” in coverage of atrocities. This indicates that these terms transcend editorial and ideological divides to reflect a national consensus around the conflict’s legal and moral framing. By contrast, neutral descriptors such as “*conflict armat*,” “*operațiuni militare*,” and “*ostilități*,” appear only peripherally, although their consistent use in institutional reporting underscores their role as markers of legal precision. The euphemistic expression “*operațiune militară specială*” (“special military operation”), a staple of Russian state discourse, appears in the Romanian corpus only 41 times across 38 documents, almost exclusively in quotation marks. Its presence is thus limited by editors and exposed as a discursive foil rather than an adopted frame.

In alignment with international legal discourse, Romanian media exhibit a strong convergence with NATO, United Nations, and EU terminology. The term “*război*” is central, functioning not only descriptively but also as a legally and morally charged concept denoting an unlawful breach of peace. “*Agresiune*” directly echoes article 2(4) of the UN Charter and the definition under UNGA Resolution 3314 (1974) and attributes legal responsibility to the Russian Federation. “*Crime de război*” consistently links to the ICC in the Hague, foregrounding accountability and violations of *jus in bello*. Meanwhile, “*conflict armat*,” “*ostilități*,” and “*operațiuni militare*,” conform to the Geneva Conventions definitions. “*Lege marțială*” is covered in ways that reflect international human rights expectations under international law’s derogation clauses (European Court of Human Rights, 2022).

Altogether, these terminological patterns reflect a Romanian media discourse that is consistent with international legal definitions but strategically framed to

reinforce a narrative of legal clarity and moral urgency (Kaldor, 1999). The adoption of international-legal nomenclature in reporting goes beyond descriptive reportage; it constitutes an act of norm diffusion, shaping public understanding of the conflict in ways that align with global humanitarian standards. As in the case of Poland, this finding resonates with Sadat's (2013, p. 336) argument on the importance of using international law in covering armed conflicts and ensuring accountability.

3.6 Conclusion

In both corpora, the conflict is predominantly labelled as war: Polish outlets use "wojna" 5187 times (approximately 90% of the war-related lexicon), while Romanian outlets use "război" 3184 times across 1712 documents. The news headline labels often co-occur with verbs of inception and duration and with escalatory modifiers, indicating a stable, full-scale framing. The counts and their immediate contexts are sufficient to establish this shared baseline. Secondary labels appear but remain proportionate to their frequencies. "Agresja"/"agresiune" is much less frequent (Pol. 454; Rom. 203) yet functions consistently to allocate responsibility. Accountability terms surface episodically but meaningfully (Pol. "zbrodnia wojenna" 58; Rom. "crime de război" 88), in atrocity and tribunal coverage. Legal-technical descriptors are peripheral in both corpora; they occur somewhat more in Romanian ("conflict armat" 61; "operațiuni militare" 37; "ostilități" 19) than in Polish ("konflikt zbrojny" 29; "operacje wojskowe" 29; "działania zbrojne" 9), whereas references to martial-law regimes appear slightly more in Polish (21 vs. 12). These differences are modest and consistent with routine editorial variation.

Genre variation explains much of the patterning. Neutral, legal-technical terms cluster in news reports and institutional briefs; evaluative labels ("wojna"/"război"; "agresja"/"agresiune") dominate opinion and long-form formats. The legally precise label for an armed invasion is rare in both corpora (Pol. 6; Rom. 7), aligning with editorial substitution by higher-salience labels. Both corpora quarantine the euphemistic Russian formula "special military operation" (Putin, 2022) in scare-quoted or debunking contexts. Both converge on NATO/UN/EU-compatible terminology that indicates alignment with an international-law framing and a rejection of a rival naming regime (Mearsheimer, 2001).

The evidence is lexical and distributional; it supports inferences about newsroom framing, not about persuasion or public opinion. This study's coverage spans opinion-forming online outlets from February 2022 to March 2024, with counts sensitive to genre mix, house style, and event-driven spikes (e.g., tribunal announcements, major offensives). Two non-trivial extensions can follow: (1) aligning time-series of labels with exogenous events (court filings, ceasefire talks, battlefield turns) to test whether legal-term uptake is reactive, anticipatory, or agenda-setting; (2) separating the editorial voice from the quoted voice to measure how much responsibility-attribution travels via sourcing rather than editorial stance. Additional follow-ups include headline-vs-body differentials (to identify where framing is

strongest), counterfactual wording experiments (does substituting “armed conflict” for “war” measurably change readers’ inferences about applicable law or responsibility?), and comparisons with languages that encode international-law categories differently. These steps could further clarify when and how legal terminology shapes public perception, rather than merely confirming its appearance.

Acknowledgement This work was funded by the EU’s NextGenerationEU instrument through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan of Romania—Pillar III-C9-I8, managed by the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalization, within the project entitled *The Coverage and Reception of the Russian–Ukrainian Conflict in Polish, Romanian and English-language Media: A Comparative Critical Discourse Study with Recommendations for Journalism Training (CORECON)*, contract no. 760244/28.12.2023, code CF 25/27.07.2023.

References

- Alter, K. J. (2014). *The new terrain of international law: Courts, politics, rights*. Princeton University Press.
- Arendt, H. (1969). *On violence*. Harcourt, Brace & World.
- Assembly of States Parties to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. (2010). *Amendments to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (Kampala amendments)*. International Criminal Court. <https://asp.icc-cpi.int/RomeStatute>
- Bhatia, V. K. (2005). *Analysing genre: Language use in professional settings*. Routledge.
- Chouliaraki, L., & Fairclough, N. (1999). *Discourse in late modernity: Rethinking critical discourse analysis*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Clausewitz, C. von. (1984). *On war* (M. Howard & P. Paret, Trans.). Princeton University Press. (Original work published 1832)
- Crawford, J. (2013). *State responsibility: The general part*. Cambridge University Press.
- Dinstein, Y. (2011). *War, aggression and self-defence*. Cambridge University Press.
- European Court of Human Rights. (2022). *Measures changed in respect of cases in which Ukraine is a respondent or an applicant government* [Press release]. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/kyiv/-/measures-changed-in-respect-of-cases-in-which-ukraine-is-a-respondent-or-an-applicant-government>
- Grossman, D. (1995). *On killing: The psychological cost of learning to kill in war and society*. Little, Brown and Company.
- Hakimi, M. (2006). The media as participants in the international legal process. *Duke Journal of Comparative & International Law*, 16(1), 1–34.
- International Commission of Jurists. (1983). *States of emergency: Their impact on human rights*. <https://www.icj.org/wp-content/uploads/1983/01/states-of-emergency-human-rights-publication-1983-eng.pdf>
- International Committee of the Red Cross. (1907). *Hague Convention (IV) respecting the laws and customs of war on land*. <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/hague-conv-iv-1907>
- International Committee of the Red Cross. (1949). *Geneva Conventions I–IV relative to the protection of victims of war*. <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/historical-treaties-and-documents>
- International Committee of the Red Cross. (2022). *Ukraine: ICRC concerned about lack of respect for international humanitarian law*. <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/false-information-about-icrc-ukraine>
- Kaldor, M. (1999). *New and old wars: Organized violence in a global era*. Stanford University Press.
- Mearsheimer, J. J. (2001). *The tragedy of great power politics*. Norton.

- Molek-Kozakowska, K., & Dragomir, I.-A. (2025). Demystifying, delegitimizing, debunking: Discursive editorial strategies of neutralizing the rationales for Russia's intervention in Ukraine. *Media, War & Conflict*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17506352251314876>
- Oppenheim, L. (1952). *International law: A treatise* (H. Lauterpacht, Ed.; 8th ed., Vol. 2). Longman.
- Putin, V. (2022). *Address on the launch of the special military operation in Ukraine* [Speech transcript]. <https://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>
- Sadat, L. N. (2013). Crimes against humanity in the modern age. *American Journal of International Law*, 107(2), 334–377. <https://doi.org/10.5305/amerjintelaw.107.2.0334>
- Strachan, H. (2013). *The direction of war: Contemporary strategy in historical perspective*. Cambridge University Press.
- United Nations. (1945). *Charter of the United Nations*. <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter>
- United Nations. (1998). *Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court*. <https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/RS-Eng.pdf>
- United Nations General Assembly. (1974). *Resolution 3314: Definition of aggression (A/RES/3314)*. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/218660?v=pdf>
- van Creveld, M. (1991). *The transformation of war*. Free Press.
- van Dijk, T. A. (2009). News, discourse and ideology. In K. Wahl-Jorgensen & T. Hanitzsch (Eds.), *The handbook of journalism studies* (pp. 191–205). Routledge.
- Walzer, M. (1977). *Just and unjust wars: A moral argument with historical illustrations*. Basic Books.
- Zelensky, V. (2022). *Decree on the imposition of martial law in Ukraine*. <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/pro-vvedennya-voyennogo-stanu-v-ukrayini-7322>

Rafał Krzysztof Matusiak is Assistant Professor at the Institute of Linguistics, University of Opole, Poland. He studied Economics (2024) at the University of Economics in Katowice, and Law (2017), English Philology (2014), Spanish Philology (2011), Bulgarian Philology (2010), and Russian Philology (2009) at the University of Silesia in Katowice, where he also obtained a doctoral degree in linguistics (2020). His research interests include the language of law and economics, conflict management and alternative dispute resolution, language, and eristics. He is the author of several publications, e.g. *Linguistic Indeterminacy in the Criminal Law* (2021), and “Linguistic and cultural identity of the Ukrainian diaspora in Poland” (2023).

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if you modified the licensed material. You do not have permission under this license to share adapted material derived from this chapter or parts of it.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.



Chapter 4

Framing the Past, Shaping the Present: The Weaponization of Historical Narratives in News on the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict?



Ecaterina Iliș

Abstract This chapter examines how historical narratives are framed in news coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, focusing on their linguistic and argumentative deployment. Through a comparative analysis of selected Romanian- and English-language media sources, the study explores how history is invoked to construct ideological positions and reinforce national identities. Applying the Discourse--Historical Approach (DHA), it investigates how historical references and contested past events are incorporated into media discourse. By analyzing linguistic framing, predication strategies, and argumentation techniques, the study identifies some patterns in the representation of Ukraine's historical relationship with Russia across different media landscapes. The findings contribute to an understanding how historical discourse is adapted to fit contemporary political and ideological narratives, offering insights into the broader role of media in shaping public debates on national identity and international relations.

4.1 Introduction

Historical narratives are not neutral accounts of the past, but socially constructed representations that serve to shape collective identities and legitimize political action (Halbwachs, 1992; Olick & Robbins, 1998). This dynamic is particularly visible in the Russian-Ukrainian war, where history has become a central tool for legitimizing actions and mobilizing national identities. This study investigates how these narratives are framed in news discourse, focusing on the Romanian and English-language media landscapes.

E. Iliș (✉)

Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Sibiu, Romania

e-mail: ecaterina.ilis@ulbsibiu.ro

© The Author(s) 2026

K. Molek-Kozakowska, S.-M. Terian (eds.), *Mediated Discourses of Conflict across Languages and Genres*, The Language of Politics,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-95-6992-2_4

The instrumentalization (or, at times, weaponization) of the past is neither incidental nor confined to elite political rhetoric. In post-Soviet contexts, historical memory is central to national identity reconstruction, particularly for states navigating the dual legacies of Soviet domination and European integration (Mälksoo, 2009). Traumatic events such as the Holocaust and Holodomor (a massive, man-made famine in Soviet Ukraine from 1932 to 1933 that killed millions of Ukrainians) can be co-opted to create moral hierarchies and reinforce nationalist ideologies (Subotić, 2019). These historical references permeate public discourse primarily through media that function not merely as a transmitter of information but as an active constructor of ideology (Wodak, 2015b). Media employ such discursive strategies as selective emphasis, analogical reasoning, and predication, to transform historical references into rhetorical instruments. Political narratives, particularly in news discourse, often simplify complex histories, highlight polarized identities, and construct symbolic struggles, thereby shaping public understanding and sometimes legitimizing exclusionary or expansionist agendas under the guise of historical continuity (Entman, 1993; Wodak, 2015b).

The Russian-Ukrainian conflict reveals these mechanisms at work on a transnational scale. Russian media frames NATO's expansion as a betrayal of post-Cold War assurances and portrays the Soviet collapse as a trauma necessitating redress (Locoman & Lau, 2024). In contrast, Ukrainian and Western narratives emphasize the Holodomor as a precedent of genocidal violence, positioning contemporary Russian armed invasion as a continuation of imperialist abuses (Kuzio, 2022; Snyder, 2010). While much research has focused on Russian and Ukrainian memory politics, comparatively little attention has been paid to how third-party media—especially in semi-peripheral contexts like Romania—mediate these historical narratives. Romanian media discourse reflects a hybrid national identity, shaped by the lingering influence of post-communist memory cultures and aspirations toward Euro-Atlantic integration. This ambivalence is evident in the treatment of historical narratives, where gestures of Western solidarity coexist with regionally inflected caution and elements of nationalist framing (Cârstocea, 2021). Conversely, English-language media, particularly from liberal democracies, tend to frame Ukraine's struggle within broader narratives of democracy, freedom, and international law. These universalist framings reflect an ideological alignment common in Western media discourse during international conflicts (Chaban & Zhabotynska, 2024; Siddi, 2022).

This tendency also illustrates Entman's (1993) broader theory of framing, where media highlight specific aspects of reality to promote particular interpretations and moral evaluations. Such variability offers fertile ground for examining how historical discourse is adapted across national and linguistic contexts to produce contrasting ideological effects. To contribute to the relatively limited comparative, cross-linguistic research on how media discourses engage with history, this study applies the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) to a curated bilingual corpus of Romanian- and English-language news articles, examining how historical references are discursively shaped to influence public perceptions of the conflict.

This study is guided by three core research questions. First, it examines how Romanian- and English-language media use discursive strategies, such as victimization, delegitimization, heroization, and recontextualization, to frame the conflict through historical references. Second, it analyzes which argumentative *topoi* and historical events (e.g., the Holodomor, Soviet collapse, NATO expansion) and figures (e.g., Stalin, Bandera, Mazepa) are invoked to construct moral judgments, identity narratives, and geopolitical alignments. Third, it explores how cross-cultural and linguistic contexts shape historical discourse, leading to contrasting ideological framings in Romanian and Anglo-Western media. This comparative lens highlights how national positioning and language influence the mediation of contested histories.

4.2 Historical Narratives, Conflict, and the Politics of Memory

Historical narratives are not static records of the past; they are dynamic discursive resources sometimes instrumentalized to shape contemporary political realities. In conflict contexts, history becomes a battleground, mobilized to justify actions, construct collective identities, and delegitimize adversaries (Kuzio, 2022; Malinova, 2021). The Russian-Ukrainian war exemplifies this phenomenon, with both sides engaging in a symbolic contest over historical memory. Key events such as the Soviet Union's collapse, the Holodomor, and NATO expansion, are strategically invoked to support competing claims of legitimacy, victimhood, and sovereignty (Plokhyy, 2023).

Media play a pivotal role in this mnemonic struggle, serving not as neutral conveyors of information but as active constructors of memory regimes (Hoskins & O'Loughlin, 2010). Through discursive framing, media embed ideological perspectives into public narratives, shaping how historical events are understood and interpreted. For instance, Etkind's (2013) analysis of Russia's "war on memory" highlights how WWII narratives are rearticulated to frame Russia's military actions as acts of civilizational defense rather than aggression. By invoking symbols of historical victimhood and antifascist struggle, the Russian state constructs a moral justification for contemporary foreign policy interventions. Mälksoo (2009) demonstrated how post-Soviet states navigate memory politics as a tool of security imaginaries, revealing how the selective mobilization of WWII legacies serves domestic identity consolidation as well as international legitimation efforts. Similarly, Snyder (2010) cautions that the selective remobilization of historical traumas, such as the Holodomor or Stalinist repressions, can facilitate new forms of symbolic violence under the guise of historical justice.

In post-Soviet contexts, history is deeply entwined with national identity reconstruction. The collapse of Soviet grand narratives created a discursive vacuum that national elites, publics, and media seek to fill through selective memory work

(Subotić, 2019). Hutchings and Szostek (2015) argued that such dominant meta-narratives as the West's betrayal or Russia's protective mission can provide cognitive schemas through which complex geopolitical conflicts are rendered intelligible for both domestic and international audiences. In contrast, English-language media, particularly in liberal democracies, tend to universalize narratives of democracy, freedom, and international law. Ukraine's struggle is often framed within a broader Western ideological framework that positions Russia as an existential threat to the liberal international order (Siddi, 2022).

Rudling (2024) provides further insight into the strategic use of historical figures in nation-building discourses. His analysis of the rehabilitation of Stepan Bandera and other nationalist figures illustrates how state and diaspora actors institutionalize selective historical legacies to construct an "edifying past." These symbolic figures are discursively reframed through official rhetoric, commemorative practices, and media coverage, embodying ideals of sacrifice, resistance, and moral clarity. Such processes of memory politics are not merely retrospective but serve as instruments of political legitimation and identity consolidation.

4.3 Research Design

4.3.1 *The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) as Analytical Framework*

To systematically analyze how historical narratives are constructed and mobilized in media discourse, this study employs the DHA. Developed by Reisigl and Wodak (2001), DHA helps to examine how discourses about the past are articulated in relation to present ideological functions. DHA identifies five interrelated discursive strategies:

- Nomination (how social actors, events, and phenomena are named),
- Predication (how they are characterized),
- Argumentation (how claims are justified through *topoi*),
- Perspectivization (how viewpoints are positioned), and
- Intensification/Mitigation (how involvement or certainty is modulated) (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009).

While DHA has been extensively applied to analyze elite political discourse and populist rhetoric (Wodak, 2015a), its application to comparative, multilingual media corpora remains limited. Siddi (2022) demonstrated how narratives of historical betrayal shape EU foreign policy discourse, yet his focus is limited to institutional contexts. This study extends DHA's application to the domain of journalistic discourse, offering a comparative analysis of Romanian and English-language media coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. It examines how historical events, figures, and narratives are represented, contested, and legitimized across different

media landscapes. The focus on cross-linguistic and cross-cultural dimensions provides new insights into the discursive construction of memory and identity in the context of geopolitical conflict.

4.3.2 Data Collection and Corpus Filtering

The study combines digital filtering with manual qualitative coding to examine how historical narratives are invoked in Romanian- and English-language media coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. To identify discourse segments referencing historical narratives, a targeted keyword schema was developed, informed by key literature on post-Soviet identity politics (Mälksoo, 2009), memory regimes (Subotić, 2019), and the discursive mobilization of traumatic pasts (Snyder, 2010). Keywords were thematically organized into five conceptual domains:

- Soviet legacy & historical memory (e.g., Russification, Holodomor, Soviet nostalgia),
- Politically charged historical figures (e.g., Stalin, Bandera, Mazepa),
- Major historical events (e.g., Euromaidan [2013 protests], NATO expansion, USSR collapse),
- Ideological constructs (e.g., denazification, collective memory, historical revisionism),
- Civilizational narratives (e.g., Russian imperialism, pan-Slavism, Russophobia),

To ensure cross-linguistic consistency, a parallel Romanian keyword list was created (e.g., foametea ucraineană, URSS, denazificare), maintaining semantic equivalence across corpora.

4.3.3 Corpus Size, Filtering, and Sampling

The initial digital corpus consisted of approximately 126,000 English-language headlines and 1993 Romanian-language articles. Filtering and preprocessing were conducted in RStudio (v4.3.3) using regular expressions based on the full keyword schema. Articles were retained if they contained at least one target keyword, yielding a filtered set of 375 English and 14 Romanian articles. The discrepancy in corpus size reflects not only media volume differences but also editorial norms and ideological framing practices distinctive to Romanian and Western media ecosystems.

A stratified random sampling procedure was employed to ensure representativeness and comparability. For each validated keyword (i.e., keywords that yielded the 14 articles in the Romanian corpus), up to three English-language articles were randomly selected (set.seed(42) for reproducibility). The sampling adhered to three principles:

- Representativeness: all keywords represented in both corpora,
- Proportionality: term frequency reflected in article distribution,
- Balance: a cap of three articles per keyword to avoid thematic overrepresentation.

Manual validation eliminated false positives (e.g., filtering out matches like “Beria” misclassified under “Siberia”), resulting in a final analytical corpus of 11 Romanian and 16 English-language articles.¹

4.3.4 *Qualitative DHA Coding and Analysis*

Each selected article was subjected to close reading and manual coding using a custom schema informed by the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA). The analysis focused on six interrelated dimensions: discursive strategies, argumentative *topoi*, actor representations, framing of historical events, linguistic features, and ideological functions. These categories were chosen for their theoretical grounding in DHA and their utility in revealing how historical narratives are mobilized to serve present ideological objectives. While the dimensions are drawn directly from established DHA typologies, the analysis also remained open to emergent patterns inductively identified through systematic corpus engagement.

Discursive strategies formed the first dimension, guided by DHA categories such as victimization, delegitimization, heroization, and recontextualization (Wodak, 2015a). These provided a starting framework, but the coding also accounted for novel discursive patterns that surfaced in the data. This dimension illuminates how agency, blame, and historical meaning are distributed and contested in media narratives.

The second dimension, argumentative *topoi*, focused on culturally embedded reasoning patterns that link premises to conclusions (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, 2009). The analysis drew on established *topoi* such as threat, historical justice, betrayal, and victimhood, while also inductively identifying context-specific patterns like imperial nostalgia and cultural authenticity.

Actor representations, the third dimension, examined how key entities—such as Russia, Ukraine, NATO, or historical figures—are discursively constructed. In line with DHA’s focus on nomination and predication strategies, this analysis explored how actors are named, characterized, and positioned within broader narrative frames (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001), revealing how media construct in-groups and out-groups through historically resonant imagery.

¹ The English-language articles were drawn from outlets including TASS, *National Post*, *Euronews*, *Newsweek*, *Daily Mail*, *The Standard*, *News24*, *Indian Express*, *The Guardian*, *Toronto Sun*, and *The Frontier Post*. The Romanian-language sources included *Știrile ProTV*, *Știripesurse*, *Digi24.ro*, *Libertatea*, *România TV online*, and *Adevărul*.

The fourth dimension, framing of historical events, addressed how episodes like the Holodomor, the Soviet collapse, or the annexation of Crimea are invoked, contextualized, and reinterpreted. This dimension is central to DHA's emphasis on historical embeddedness (Wodak, 2015a), highlighting how selective reconstruction of the past shapes present meaning-making.

The fifth dimension considered linguistic features—including metaphor, modality, evaluative language, and syntactic emphasis—as elements that informed the interpretation of discursive strategies and ideological functions. These micro-level elements influence how narratives are emotionally charged and epistemically positioned, amplifying ideological content through rhetorical techniques (Wodak, 2009).

Finally, the dimension of ideological functions tied together the previous layers by identifying the broader purposes that these discursive practices serve—such as moral legitimization, identity reinforcement, and blame allocation. This meta-analysis clarifies how historical discourse is instrumentalized to advance specific ideological projects (Wodak, 2015a). All annotations were systematically documented in Excel matrices for both Romanian- and English-language corpora, enabling structured cross-linguistic comparison and the identification of convergent and divergent discursive patterns across media systems.

4.4 Results

The following section presents the findings of a bilingual comparative analysis of Romanian- and English-language media discourse, focusing on how historical narratives are mobilized to shape ideological perspectives on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. The thematic clusters detailed below emerged inductively from the qualitative DHA coding and reflect broader regional and epistemic dynamics. Specifically, they capture how historical references are used not just to legitimize national identity or condemn aggression, but also to manage geopolitical anxieties, assert cultural belonging, and contest moral hierarchies (Mälksoo, 2009; Subotić, 2019).

4.4.1 *Victimization and Genocide Memory*

One of the most prominent thematic clusters across the English- and Romanian-language media is Victimization and Genocide Memory. This cluster is shaped by the recurrent use of the *topoi* of victimhood, historical injustice, and existential threat. These are reinforced by discursive strategies such as victim framing, moral legitimization, and emotive amplification (Van Leeuwen, 2008; Wodak, 2015b). The Holodomor plays a central role as a symbol of historical trauma and moral legitimization for Ukraine's contemporary struggle, increasingly framed as genocide in both political and media discourse (Marples, 2007; Shevel, 2011).

In the English-language media corpus, references to the Holodomor play a central role in framing Ukraine as a historical and moral victim. A 2022 article published by the Russian state news agency TASS quotes UK Parliamentary Under Secretary of State David Rutley, who reaffirmed the government's position that genocide recognition lies within the jurisdiction of competent courts rather than political institutions. At the same time, he emphasized that "our position in no way detracts from our recognition of the Holodomor as an appalling tragedy and its importance in the history of Ukraine or Europe" (TASS, 2022). This discursive position performs moral legitimation by acknowledging Ukraine's suffering while strategically avoiding the legal consequences of genocide recognition, a rhetorical balancing act common in liberal democracies (Cohen, 2001).

In contrast, other English-language media highlight symbolic acts of recognition by parliaments across Europe. A 2023 Euronews article noted that "Slovenia, France, Belgium and the UK are just some European countries whose parliaments have declared the Holodomor [...] a genocide." This symbolic recognition is amplified by emotionally resonant quotes from MPs such as Jani Prednik who described the Holodomor as "one of the biggest humanitarian catastrophes and crimes against humanity of the 20th century," and UK Conservative MP Pauline Latham, who linked past atrocities to Russia's present-day aggression by noting that "Russia seizes Ukrainian grain on occupied Ukrainian soil" (Euronews, 2023). Such statements act as emotive intensifiers, invoking the *topos* of history as a teacher, where past events—such as Stalinist policies—are framed as instructive parallels for understanding or warning against current geopolitical violence. This reflects DHA's view that historical references are often mobilized to legitimize present concerns by drawing predictive or moral lessons from the past (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001).

The article also introduced a meta-reflection on the difference between legal and symbolic recognition. Historian Iva Vukušić underscored that "any resolution passed by a parliament is a political and symbolic act of recognizing events like the Holodomor, the Armenian Genocide and other historical injustices," but that they "are not based on the same process and do not involve the same kind of in-depth investigation of evidence that a court would be engaging in" (Euronews, 2023). This tension between juridical caution and parliamentary solidarity illustrates a broader discourse of moral alignment without legal finality, suggesting that recognition itself becomes a performative political gesture within international memory politics.

Taken together, these sources illustrate how the Holodomor is a symbol of Ukraine's long-standing victimhood and as a rhetorical resource for reinforcing contemporary geopolitical alliances. The dual framing, strategically cautious in official government statements, but more emotively assertive in parliamentary discourse, reveals the interplay between legal formalism and symbolic memory, highlighting the ideological function of history in liberal democracies.

In the Romanian-language corpus, the theme of external validation plays a central role in reinforcing Ukraine's victimhood and historical legitimacy. In the article "Germania califică foametea ucraineană, cunoscută ca Holodomor, drept genocid" [Germany recognizes the Ukrainian famine, known as the Holodomor, as genocide] (ProTV, 2022), the German Parliament's recognition of the Holodomor is reported

in unequivocal terms: “Parlamentul Germaniei a declarat drept genocid foametea organizată din anii 1932–1933 din Ucraina.” [The German Parliament declared the organized famine of 1932–1933 in Ukraine to be genocide]. This direct invocation of genocide by a powerful Western institution enacts the *topos* of historical justice, offering Ukraine international symbolic recognition and reinforcing its moral position in the contemporary conflict. The article further amplified affective framing through a quote from President Zelensky, who emphasized national resilience while commemorating past suffering: “‘Nu putem fi înfrânți’, a scris Zelenski pe Telegram, atașând imagini de la comemorarea victimelor.” [“We cannot be defeated,” Zelensky wrote on Telegram, attaching images from the commemoration of the victims].

This statement exemplifies emotive amplification and aligns with a victim framing strategy, interweaving collective trauma with geopolitical resolve. The syntactic structure foregrounds agency and resistance while drawing visual attention to Ukrainian suffering through commemorative imagery. As Chouliaraki (2006) argued, such discursive constructions transform distant suffering into morally charged narratives by combining visual symbolism with affective language, thereby inviting spectators to identify with the victim’s struggle.

Across these examples, Romanian coverage tends to outsource moral validation to Western institutions while expressing solidarity through mediated emotional appeals. This strategic reliance on external recognition and commemorative symbolism reflects patterns in the analyzed texts, where Romania positions itself in relation to past marginalization within the Soviet sphere and seeks to assert its European alignment and legitimacy.

4.4.2 *Heroization and National Identity Construction*

The thematic cluster of Heroization and National Identity Construction is structured around the *topoi* of history as a teacher, resistance, and cultural authenticity. While history as a teacher is explicitly codified within the Discourse-Historical Approach (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001), the *topoi* of resistance and cultural authenticity emerge inductively from the corpus but are well established in research on nationalism and collective memory (Billig, 1995; Zienkowski & Breeze, 2019). In both the English- and Romanian-language corpora, these *topoi* are enacted through positive predication, hero framing, and the recontextualization of historical figures.

In the English-language corpus, heroization emerges prominently in narratives that depict historical memory as a foundation for contemporary resistance and moral alignment. For instance, the article “Putin evokes Stalingrad to predict victory over the West” (News24, 2023) draws on Soviet-era heroic tropes to frame Russia’s present war effort as a continuation of antifascist struggle: “It’s incredible but it’s a fact: we are again being threatened by German Leopard tanks.” This analogy activates the *topos* of history as a teacher, using WWII symbolism to present the current conflict as morally equivalent to past battles against fascism. By invoking

such parallels, the narrative seeks to draw lessons from history that justify current political and military actions.

A more nuanced and ideologically layered example appears in the article “Stepan Bandera: Ukrainian hero or Nazi collaborator?” published by DW that explores the contested memory of one of Ukraine’s most polarizing nationalist figures. The article opens with a striking scene of present-day heroization: “‘Bandera is our father, Ukraine is the mother. We will fight for Ukraine!’ sings a young woman in camouflage uniform, carrying a machine gun [...] in a bunker at the Azovstal Steelworks.” This moment fuses cultural myth with armed resistance, deploying Bandera’s legacy as a symbolic rallying point for national defiance. Such recontextualization illustrates the strategy of positive predication in which past figures are aligned with present valor and legitimacy.

At the same time, the article acknowledges the complexity and divisiveness of Bandera’s image. While he is revered in parts of Ukrainian society (commemorated through statues, street names, and presidential honors), he remains deeply controversial due to his ties to ultranationalist ideologies and historical associations with ethnic violence. Quoting historian Andreas Umland, the article underscores this duality: “Bandera was not a ‘Nazi’, but a ‘Ukrainian ultranationalist’,” while others like Grzegorz Rossolinski-Liebe contend that “Bandera can be called a radical nationalist, a fascist.” These competing assessments highlight how historical figures are discursively reconstructed to serve contemporary political and identity narratives, a key concern in DHA’s attention to perspectivization and contestation. The text also emphasizes that Bandera’s symbolism is geopolitically consequential. Umland warns that “honoring Bandera damages Ukraine’s image because it strains the relationship with Poland and Israel.” This reflects a broader discursive tension between national heroization and transnational solidarity, complicating the ideological simplicity of resistance narratives and positioning Bandera as a unifying and a polarizing figure in the symbolic landscape of Ukrainian identity.

In the Romanian-language corpus, heroization is shaped by cultural mediation and geopolitical sensitivity. Rather than emphasizing militaristic resistance, Romanian media frame Ukrainian figures through historical and diplomatic narratives. This is evident in Digi24’s article “Cine a fost cazacul Ivan Mazepa...” [Who was the Cossack Ivan Mazepa...] (2022), underscoring Mazepa’s symbolic importance as a national hero buried in Romania. Historian Theodor Paleologu linked him to the Cossack tradition, describing it as “un stil de viață – libertate, democratism, un spirit foarte chefliu” [a way of life—freedom, democracy, and a festive spirit]. The article situates Mazepa within a shared regional heritage, noting that other Cossack figures, such as Filip Orlik, are also buried on Romanian soil. This framing reinforces the *topos* of cultural authenticity and highlights Romania’s historical ties to Ukraine’s pursuit of sovereignty. These references embed Ukrainian historical figures within a pan-European cultural canon, enacting a form of symbolic heroization that bridges literary memory with contemporary geopolitics. The strategy reflects Romania’s tendency to validate Ukrainian resistance through aestheticized, historicized narratives rather than direct military glorification.

A more ambivalent discursive position emerges in the treatment of Stepan Bandera. In the article “Polonia critică omagiul adus de Ucraina lui Stepan Bandera, văzut drept responsabil de genocid împotriva polonezilor” [Poland criticizes Ukraine’s tribute to Stepan Bandera, seen as responsible for genocide against Poles] (Agerpres, 2023), Romanian media foreground the Polish government’s condemnation of Ukrainian commemorations: “Pentru Polonia este inacceptabil să fie onorat Stepan Bandera [...] care au asasinat zeci de mii de polonezi la Volânia.” [For Poland, it is unacceptable to honor Stepan Bandera [...] who murdered tens of thousands of Poles in Volhynia]. This narrative highlights regional memory conflicts and repositions the figure of Bandera from hero to source of geopolitical friction. By amplifying Polish diplomatic concerns, Romanian media implicitly distance itself from unconditional nationalistic celebration and foregrounds the importance of historical accountability in regional solidarity.

These examples reveal how Romanian media navigate heroization through a blend of cultural reverence and diplomatic caution. While Cossack figures like Mazepa are elevated through shared historical narratives and literary mythology, contentious figures such as Bandera are framed through the lens of regional sensitivity and moral ambivalence. This dual strategy underscores Romania’s semi-peripheral identity, positioned between affirmation of Ukraine’s sovereignty and careful management of Eastern European memory politics.

4.4.3 *Delegitimation and Blame Allocation*

This thematic cluster examines how blame is assigned and legitimacy challenged through adversarial framing and historical analogy. In both the English- and Romanian-language corpora, delegitimization is constructed through the *topoi* of external threat, revisionism, and moral inversion. While the *topos* of external threat is firmly established within the Discourse-Historical Approach (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001), revisionism and moral inversion emerged inductively from the corpus and are supported by broader research on authoritarian rhetoric and memory politics. The *topos* of revisionism functions by discrediting actors who distort or erase historical facts, particularly through references to falsified textbooks or denial of national histories, echoing broader discourse strategies observed in post-socialist contexts (Shevel, 2011). The *topos* of moral inversion operates by exposing how aggressors adopt the rhetorical posture of victims to justify violence, as seen in the reframing of the invasion as “denazification”; this mirrors argumentation schemes analyzed in studies of propaganda and disinformation (Krishnan, 2019). These *topoi* are enacted through adversarial predication and comparisons to totalitarian regimes—especially Stalinist repression and Nazism—providing culturally resonant frameworks for discrediting Russian narratives.

In the English-language corpus, delegitimization discourse often combines explicit historical analogy with the ascription of ideological deviance. The article “Putin’s Stalinist deportation plan for 2MILLION Ukrainians” (Daily Mail, 2022)

draws direct lines between contemporary Russian tactics and Soviet-era atrocities. The use of “filtration camps,” forced labor, and mass deportation is framed as a continuation of “the Soviet Union’s darkest days,” while comparisons to the Holocaust—“It is exactly like Hitler’s atrocities”—amplify moral condemnation. These analogies recast Russia not merely as an aggressor, but as a resurrected totalitarian force. A counterpoint appears in “Putin evokes Stalingrad to predict victory over ‘new Nazism’ in Ukraine” (News24, 2023), where the Kremlin frames its invasion as a defense against fascism. However, this logic is critically reframed by English-language media as revisionist and manipulative. Ukraine’s own WWII suffering is evoked to discredit the “denazification” narrative as a cynical appropriation of memory in service of imperial conquest.

Delegitimization also emerges through ambivalent or contested blame attribution. In “Rand Paul says Biden pushed Putin into attacking ‘Soviet Union’ countries” (Newsweek, 2022), Senator Paul’s suggestion that NATO expansion provoked the invasion introduces a rhetoric of partial justification—“There are reasons for the invasion”—without endorsing it. This ambivalence generates internal discursive fractures in the Western liberal consensus, while commentators accuse Paul of “sowing the seeds for Putin apologetism.”

In the Romanian-language corpus, delegitimization is constructed through a combination of historical denial exposure and analogies to past authoritarian brutality. The article “Putin, în timp ce se uita la o hartă a Imperiului Rus...” [Putin, while looking at a map of the Russian Empire...] (Digi24.ro, 2023) highlights Putin’s claim that “there was no Ukraine in the history of mankind” as an erasure of Ukrainian nationhood, embedded in a broader campaign of epistemic repression. References to revised textbooks and state-endorsed historical amnesia reinforce the image of ideological warfare via historical falsification.

A more visceral strategy of delegitimization appears in “Batalioanele de carne...” [The cannon fodder...] (HotNews.ro, 2023), where Russia’s use of penal units—described as cannon fodder—is likened to Stalinist *ștrafbat* units. Phrases such as “luptătorii din aceste unități de asalt sunt pur și simplu carne” [the fighters from these assault units are simply meat] invoke the *topos* of expendability, framing Russian military practice as inhumane and archaic. This analogy reinforces a vision of the Russian state as both morally bankrupt and strategically reckless, reviving memories of Soviet terror.

A particularly salient discursive thread across both corpora is the invocation—and at times, strategic abandonment—of “denazification.” Initially framed as a central justification for the invasion, the term served as ideological cover for aggression. In the article “Volodin: Denazification of Ukraine necessary for both countries” (TASS, 2023), State Duma Speaker Vyacheslav Volodin claims Ukraine has been “culturally obliterated” and morally corrupted, asserting that “denazification is necessary not only for Ukraine, but also for Russia.” However, its absence from a 2022 draft ceasefire agreement—reported in “Ukraine ceasefire draft omitted key Russian demands” (Agerpres, 2022)—reveals the term’s instrumental nature. The draft made no mention of “denazification,” “demilitarization,” or protections for the Russian language, suggesting that these ideological claims were negotiable and not central to Russia’s actual diplomatic position.

In “Russia warns NATO countries might also need denazification” (The Frontier Post, 2022), the narrative is further expanded into a vehicle for existential threat projection. The article quotes a Russian lawmaker warning that if NATO continues to support Ukraine, “Russia will be forced to denazify not only Ukraine, but also NATO states,” illustrating the frame’s inflation into a justification for broad coercive ambition. Together, these examples reveal “denazification” as a rhetorical device—invoked to reverse moral culpability and legitimize aggression, then quietly dropped when diplomatically inconvenient. Its elastic application underscores how authoritarian regimes deploy ideological language strategically, using it to perform legitimacy in public discourse while pursuing pragmatic goals in private negotiations (Krishnan, 2019; Zavershinskaia, 2024).

Romanian media recognize and critique Russian posturing, underscoring how Putin’s historical revisionism and tactics of coercive militarism revive Soviet-style authoritarianism. Through moral condemnation and symbolic analogy, Romanian outlets align public discourse with a European memory regime that rejects Stalinist, imperial, and neo-totalitarian practices. In doing so, they reaffirm Romania’s alignment with liberal-democratic norms and Euro-Atlantic identity.

4.4.4 Recontextualization and Strategic Framing

This final thematic cluster explores how historical narratives are strategically reframed to legitimize contemporary geopolitical aims. In English-language media, this involves invoking imperial memory, reviving Soviet-era symbols, and constructing ideological binaries. These practices reflect the *topoi* of imperial legacy and epistemic revisionism—emergent in the corpus and consistent with broader patterns of authoritarian legitimation (Todorova, 2009; Zienkowski & Breeze, 2019). Here, history functions not merely as memory, but as a rhetorical tool for reasserting authority and shaping regional identity.

In “Back in the USSR: Lenin statues and Soviet flags reappear in Russian-controlled cities” (The Guardian, 2023), the reinstallation of Soviet symbols in occupied Ukraine is portrayed not merely as an act of political theatre, but as part of a larger imperial restoration project. The report narrates the symbolic resurrection of Lenin in Henichesk on his 152nd birthday, alongside Soviet and Russian flags: “Henichesk... also has new imperial masters: Russians. They arrived from Crimea on 24 February... A statue of the Bolshevik leader had been erected outside the town’s main council building.” The symbolic violence here lies in the re-inscription of historical memory, aligning Russia’s contemporary occupation with a return to Soviet order and power. By casting these acts as “forced recommunization,” the article frames Russia’s ideological project as anachronistic and illegitimate.

This discursive framing is reinforced by expert commentary. Historian Anne Applebaum is quoted as saying that Russia is “replicating what Soviet forces did in occupied Poland, the Baltic states and the rest of central Europe,” thus anchoring current Russian practices within a lineage of authoritarian occupation. A variant of

the *topos* of history as teacher is activated, emphasizing cyclical violence: what occurred in 1939 is seen as repeating in 2022, reinforcing the narrative of persistent imperial logic through symbolic continuity. Simultaneously, the article critiques the instrumentalization of nostalgia. Russian propagandists are portrayed as “parasitizing on nostalgic sentiments” despite little genuine Soviet longing among the occupied Ukrainian population. This evokes the *topos* of manipulation, in which symbolic gestures—such as parades or the reinstallation of Lenin statues—are portrayed as insincere attempts to manufacture legitimacy through nostalgia, ultimately exposing the performative and coercive nature of the ideological project.

In another article, “Competition between Russia and Ukraine inevitable after breakup of USSR” (TASS, 2023), Putin is cited as describing Ukraine as a geopolitical aberration—created by Soviet authorities and manipulated into becoming an “anti-Russia.” This statement functions as an epistemic reframing of Ukrainian sovereignty, portraying Ukraine’s westward orientation not as democratic self-determination, but as civilizational betrayal. “It was inevitable after the breakup of the USSR that there would be a kind of competition... Ukraine... started turning the country into ‘anti-Russia’.” Through this lens, English-language media expose the recontextualization of Ukrainian identity as an object of imperial revisionism. The accusation of “anti-Russia” becomes a euphemism for non-allegiance, a rhetorical mechanism for justifying intervention.

In the Romanian-language corpus, the *topos* of imperial nostalgia critiques Russian expansionism by linking it to an idealized and selectively remembered past. This emerges in both direct and indirect evaluations of the Kremlin’s symbolic revivalism. A striking example appears in *Adevărul* (2023), where Jacob Jugashvili, Stalin’s great-grandson, denounces Putin’s efforts to restore Soviet influence: “Războiul din Ucraina e ilegal pentru că poporul rus nu a dat, direct sau prin autoritățile statului, permisiunea trupelor pentru a invada Ucraina” [The war in Ukraine is illegal because the Russian people did not give, directly or through state authorities, permission for the troops to invade Ukraine]. His critique undermines the Kremlin’s attempt to justify the invasion through appeals to historical continuity, exposing this rhetoric as detached from both democratic legitimacy and contemporary geopolitical norms. The article thereby activates the *topos* of imperial nostalgia in reverse and highlights the instrumentalization of past imperial grandeur as a rhetorical cover for present illegality.

The framing of the interview also highlights discursive irony: a descendant of Stalin, the architect of Soviet totalitarianism, advocating for democratic accountability and denouncing authoritarian aggression. Interestingly, when asked about Stalin’s crimes, Jugashvili avoids condemnation, stating instead: “Spălarea pe creier anti-Stalin continuă. Cineva vrea să împiedice lumea să afle adevărul.” [The anti-Stalin brainwashing continues. Someone wants to prevent the world from learning the truth] (*Adevărul*, 2023). This ambiguous positioning highlights broader tensions in Eastern European memory politics, where critiques of current regimes can sometimes coexist with selective, generational nostalgia for aspects of the communist era. Such nostalgia, however, often reflects not a political desire to rehabilitate

authoritarian regimes, but rather a psychological pattern: for many older individuals, the communist period is remembered as a time of youth, social belonging, and possibility, with personal memories softening or filtering out the structural constraints of the system (Todorova et al., 2014). In this context, Romanian media subtly expose the selective memory strategies employed within and beyond Russia, where historical revisionism coexists with gestures toward liberal critique.

4.5 Comparative Insights and Conclusion

This study set out to examine how historical narratives are strategically mobilized in media discourse surrounding the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, focusing on Romanian- and English-language news coverage. Rather than treating history as a static background, both media ecosystems deploy historical references as flexible rhetorical resources to advance geopolitical agendas and construct collective identities. However, their modes of deployment diverge significantly, reflecting distinct cultural, political, and historical contexts.

In the English-language corpus, history is primarily reframed through universalist narratives of democracy, sovereignty, and moral resistance. References to the Holodomor, for instance, are consistently linked to contemporary themes of victimhood and existential threat, positioning Ukraine as a frontline defender of liberal democratic values. This discursive strategy corresponds with Entman's (1993) notion of "frame alignment," where historical grievances are strategically synchronized with prevailing international norms to garner broader solidarity. Furthermore, it exemplifies Hoskins and O'Loughlin's (2010) analysis of how Western media construct simplified binaries—democracy versus authoritarianism—when narrating international conflicts.

Conversely, Romanian media exhibit a more ambivalent engagement with historical narratives. While broadly aligning with Euro-Atlantic discourses of Ukrainian sovereignty, Romanian outlets must also contend with their own post-Soviet memory entanglements. The selective framing of controversial figures like Stepan Bandera—often accompanied by mitigative qualifiers acknowledging his contested legacy—reveals a strategic negotiation of regional historical sensitivities. As Zhurzhenko (2010) argued, both Ukraine and Romania occupy a "borderland of memory," where imperial legacies and national narratives clash, overlap, and compete for discursive primacy. This condition aligns with Subotić's (2019) notion of "memory entrepreneurs" in post-communist societies, wherein historical narratives are mobilized not only for external legitimation but also for internal identity calibration. Romania's semi-peripheral positioning thus manifests in discursive oscillations: affirming Western-aligned values while cautiously navigating unresolved historical affiliations.

4.5.1 *Media as Agents of Ideological Framing and Identity Construction*

Beyond reporting, media discourses actively participate in the ideological labor of identity construction. This is evident in how both corpora employ discursive strategies—victimization, heroization, delegitimization, and strategic recontextualization—not as isolated moves but as interconnected practices that structure collective self-understanding and othering processes.

For instance, the heroization of figures like Bandera and Mazepa in Ukrainian narratives serves a dual function: rehabilitating contested pasts and reinforcing national identity in opposition to Russian aggression. This corresponds with Rudling’s (2024) analysis of how post-Soviet states instrumentalize “edifying pasts” to legitimize contemporary political projects. Simultaneously, Russian media’s deployment of WWII analogies to justify current military actions—critically analyzed in English and Romanian outlets—illustrates Wodak’s (2015b) argument that historical memory is routinely reactivated as a populist discursive resource.

Romanian media’s cautious engagement with these dynamics reflects their complex identity negotiations. The selective embrace of anti-communist and anti-imperialist *topoi* indicates an effort to reconcile national memory with Western geopolitical alignments. Such discursive ambivalence aligns with Zhurzhenko’s (2010) conceptualization of post-Soviet borderlands as ideological arenas where competing memory regimes intersect.

Importantly, these findings also underscore the role of media as ideological institutions rather than neutral observers. Journalistic practice—even in democracies—is shaped by historical memory cultures, institutional norms, and geopolitical orientation. For researchers and practitioners in journalism and political communication, understanding these dynamics is crucial for navigating the ethical and epistemic implications of conflict coverage.

4.5.2 *Geopolitical Narratives in Semi-Peripheral Media*

The comparative insights from this study underscore the importance of media as active agents in the construction of geopolitical imaginaries. English-language media’s coherent alignment with liberal democratic narratives reinforces a normative framework where historical injustices are mobilized to legitimize present interventions. Romanian media, meanwhile, illustrate how semi-peripheral actors navigate dual pressures: aligning with Western discourses while managing the lingering influence of regional historical narratives. This duality highlights the necessity of context-sensitive analyses in discourse studies. Semi-peripheral media do not simply mimic core geopolitical narratives; they engage in selective adaptations, negotiating their unique historical and cultural positions within broader ideological frameworks. These findings support Subotić’s (2019) argument that memory

politics in transitional societies is not merely derivative of global narratives but involves active, localized meaning-making processes.

The ambivalence observed in the Romanian media reflects a broader regional dynamic described by Mäklsoo (2009), wherein formerly communist states like Poland and the Baltics engage in “memory politics” as a strategy of “becoming European.” This process involves a discursive struggle to be recognized as fully European, challenging long-standing Western designations of Eastern Europe as “Europe but not quite Europe.” Romania navigates its liminal position by seeking recognition of its historical experiences within the broader European memoscape—an effort that reflects the discursive ambiguities that Todorova (2009) identified in Balkan identity narratives. In this light, Romanian media’s selective engagement with memory politics reflects not only geopolitical alignment but also a deeper struggle for epistemic recognition within Europe.

From a practical standpoint, this analysis suggests that journalists, media educators, and policymakers should be attentive to how memory cultures shape reporting practices. Building critical media literacy—especially in semi-peripheral contexts—requires an awareness of how history is embedded in contemporary narratives of conflict, security, and identity.

Although the study offers relevant insights, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The relatively small size of the Romanian corpus, compared to the English-language sample, might affect the generalizability of the findings. The focus on textual analysis excludes visual and multimodal dimensions of media discourse that are increasingly relevant in the digital age. Future research could expand the scope to include social media platforms, explore audience reception studies, and incorporate comparative analyses with other semi-peripheral media systems. Longitudinal studies tracing discursive shifts over time would also enrich our understanding of how historical narratives evolve in response to changing geopolitical dynamics.

Acknowledgement This work was partly funded by the EU’s NextGenerationEU instrument through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan of Romania—Pillar III-C9-I8, managed by the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalization, within the project entitled *The coverage and reception of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in Polish, Romanian and English-language media: A comparative critical discourse study with recommendations for journalism training (CORECON)*, contract no. 760244/28.12.2023, code CF 25/27.07.2023.

References

- Billig, M. (1995). *Banal nationalism*. Sage.
- Cârstocea, R. (2021). Between Europeanisation and local legacies: Holocaust memory and contemporary anti-Semitism in Romania. *East European Politics and Societies*, 35(2), 313–335. <https://mural.maynoothuniversity.ie/id/eprint/17808/1/RaulCarstoceaLocal2021.pdf>
- Chaban, N., & Zhabotynska, S. (2024). Narratives of Ukraine on the information battlefields of global media. In C. Wiesner & M. Knodt (Eds.), *The war against Ukraine and the EU: Facing new realities*. Springer Nature Switzerland.

- Chouliaraki, L. (2006). *The spectatorship of suffering*. Sage.
- Cohen, S. (2001). *States of denial: Knowing about atrocities and suffering*. Polity Press.
- Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51–58. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304>
- Etkind, A. (2013). *Warped mourning: Stories of the undead in the land of the unburied*. Stanford University Press.
- Halbwachs, M. (1992). *On collective memory*. University of Chicago Press.
- Hoskins, A., & O'Loughlin, B. (2010). *War and media: The emergence of diffused war*. Polity Press.
- Hutchings, S., & Szostek, J. (2015). Dominant narratives in Russian political and media discourse during the Ukraine crisis. *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society*, 1(1), 13–50.
- Korablyova, V. (2021). Contemporary Ukraine: Borderland-bloodland-neverland? *Cultural Change in East-Central European and Eurasian Spaces*, 27–43. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-63197-0_2
- Krishnan, A. (2019). The neglected dimension of ideology in Russia's political warfare against the West. *Global Security and Intelligence Studies*, 4(2), 25–39.
- Kuzio, T. (2022). *Russian nationalism and the Russian-Ukrainian war: Autocracy-orthodoxy-nationality*. Routledge.
- Locoman, E., & Lau, R. R. (2024). Narratives of conflict: Russian media's evolving treatment of Ukraine (2013–2022). *Media, War & Conflict*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17506352241257053>
- Malinova, O. (2021). Politics of memory and nationalism. *Nationalities Papers*, 49(6), 997–1007. <https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2020.87>
- Mälksoo, M. (2009). The memory politics of becoming European: The East European subalterns and the collective memory of Europe. *European Journal of International Relations*, 15(4), 653–680. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066109345049>
- Marples, D. R. (2007). *Heroes and villains: Creating national history in contemporary Ukraine*. Central European University Press.
- Olick, J. K., & Robbins, J. (1998). Social memory studies: From “collective memory” to the historical sociology of mnemonic practices. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24, 105–140. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.24.1.105>
- Plokhy, S. (2023). *The Russo-Ukrainian war: The return of history*. W.W. Norton.
- Reisigl, M., & Wodak, R. (2001). *Discourse and discrimination: Rhetorics of racism and anti-semitism*. Routledge.
- Reisigl, M., & Wodak, R. (2009). The discourse-historical approach. In R. Wodak & M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods for Critical Discourse Analysis*. Sage.
- Rudling, P. A. (2024). Repatriating an edifying past: The diaspora Ukrainian authoritarian right and power over memory, 1991–2021. *Nationalities Papers*. <https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2024.47>
- Shevel, O. (2011). The politics of memory in a divided society: A comparison of post-Franco Spain and post-Soviet Ukraine. *Slavic Review*, 70(1), 137–164. <https://doi.org/10.5612/slavicreview.70.1.0137>
- Siddi, M. (2022). *European identities and foreign policy discourses on Russia: From the Ukraine to the Syrian crisis*. Routledge.
- Snyder, T. (2010). *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin*. Basic Books.
- Subotic, J. (2019). *Yellow star, red star: Holocaust remembrance after communism*. Cornell University Press.
- Todorova, M. (2009). *Imagining the Balkans*. Oxford University Press.
- Todorova, M. N., Dimou, A., & Troebst, S. (Eds.). (2014). *Remembering communism: Private and public recollections of lived experience in Southeast Europe*. Central European University Press.
- van Leeuwen, T. (2008). *Discourse and practice: New tools for Critical Discourse Analysis*. Oxford University Press.
- Wodak, R. (2009). The semiotics of racism: A critical discourse-historical analysis. In J. Renkema (Ed.), *Discourse, of course: An overview of research in discourse studies*. John Benjamins.

- Wodak, R. (2015a). Critical discourse analysis, discourse-historical approach. In K. Tracy, C. Ilie & T. Sandel (Eds.), *The international encyclopedia of language and social interaction*. Wiley Blackwell.
- Wodak, R. (2015b). *The politics of fear: What right-wing populist discourses mean*. Sage.
- Wodak, R., de Cillia, R., Reisigl, M., & Liebhart, K. (2009). *The discursive construction of national identity*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Zavershinskaia, P. (2024). State's legitimisation of violence through strategic narration: How the Kremlin justified the Russian invasion of Ukraine. *The International Spectator*, 59(1), 45–65. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2024.2327492>
- Zavershinskaia, P. (2025). The mobilization of “a difficult past” in narrating the Russian invasion of Ukraine by the German and Italian backlash. *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*, 13, 403–432. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41290-024-00237-5>
- Zhurzhenko, T. (2010). *Borderlands into bordered lands: Geopolitics of identity in post-Soviet Ukraine*. Columbia University Press.
- Zienkowski, J., & Breeze, R. (Eds.). (2019). *Imagining the peoples of Europe: Populist discourses across the political spectrum*. John Benjamins.

Ecaterina Iliș’s primary research interest centers on discourse studies, with a particular focus on fake news. Her doctoral project, undertaken at the Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Romania, examined discourse patterns and strategies used to spread misinformation, exploring how such narratives influence public perception and amplify societal issues. She studies the mechanisms of disinformation to understand the psychological and cognitive biases that make individuals vulnerable to these messages and to develop effective tools to counter misinformation and guide audiences toward credible sources of information.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if you modified the licensed material. You do not have permission under this license to share adapted material derived from this chapter or parts of it.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.



Chapter 5

What's in a “War”? A Corpus-Assisted Comparative Study on (De)legitimizing Linguistic Labels of the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict in Romanian and English-Language Media



David Morariu

Abstract This chapter explores Romanian and English-language media coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict between 2022 and 2024 in order to establish and compare the inventory of uses of such terms as “war,” “conflict,” “invasion,” “aggression,” “military operation,” “demilitarization,” and “denazification” together with their frequencies and contextual distributions. By drawing on the notions of (de)legitimization through evaluation (as well as proximization), the study expands on quantitative and collocational analyses by noting the main similarities, differences, and temporal trends in the use of selected linguistic labels. It also discusses the ideological implications of the uses of certain linguistic labels in the explicit or implicit indexing of Romanian and English-language media outlets’ pro-Ukrainian and pro-European stances. In this, the chapter develops the model of (de)legitimization by drawing attention to the lexical level of recontextualization.

5.1 Introduction

One of the earliest peculiarities of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, as reflected in its media representation, emerged from the pluralism of linguistic labels applied to it. It is well known that in the early days of the conflict the Kremlin reacted by banning the terms “war,” “invasion,” and “assault” in Russian media, and threatening to block and fine outlets for spreading fake news. The ban of these linguistic labels served to justify the aggression in Ukraine as a “special military operation” aimed at “denazifying” and “demilitarizing” the country. Against this backdrop, in a paradoxical twist, the war in Ukraine was to become an unnamable conflict, continuing

D. Morariu (✉)
Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Sibiu, Romania
e-mail: david.morariu@ulbsibiu.ro

Russia's tradition of legitimizing strategies for an "unnamed war," a pattern that predates even the 2022 full-scale invasion (Arel & Driscoll, 2023).

Consequently, the measures targeting the labelling of this conflict have turned such terms as "war" into implicit tools for signaling stance, reducing the need for additional explicit argumentation strategies of (de)legitimization. The linguistic labels used in the earliest media reports on Russia's invasion functioned as ideological markers that underscored the significance of textual choices for rendering an "ideological worldview" on war (Jeffries, 2019). In addition, they functioned as "linguistic metarepresentations" (Wilson, 2000), and as mechanisms for neutralizing the self-legitimizing lexical choices promoted by Russia (Molek-Kozakowska & Dragomir, 2025). In short, any use of the "forbidden" terms by European media, specifically Romanian and English-language outlets in the present case, signaled a pro-European and pro-Ukraine stance.

This study aims to contribute to recent research investigating the language of conflict and the rhetoric of war, with a particular focus on some lexical choices and representations in media coverage of the conflict in Ukraine (Chiluwa, 2024; Chiluwa & Ruzaitė, 2024). By investigating Romanian- and English-language media, the study complements recent research by Molek-Kozakowska and Dragomir (2025), who examine discursive strategies and linguistic patterns for "demystification," "delegitimization," and "debunking" of Russian narratives in the Polish media. To that end, this chapter examines a media corpus comprising 2160 English-language texts and 2013 Romanian-language texts, all published between February 2022 and April 2024. Considering the period covered and consequently the representativeness of the corpus for the inventory of linguistic labels attributed to the early stages of war in Ukraine, the terms "război/war," "agresiune/aggression," "invazie/invasion," as well as "operațiune (militară) specială/special (military) operation," "denazificare/denazification," and "demilitarizare/demilitarization" were selected as keywords for examining frequency, lexical contexts, and concordance lines.

5.2 Theoretical Framework

5.2.1 *Media Representations of Conflict and Discursive Strategies of (De)legitimization*

Theoretical discussions on media representations of conflicts have taken into account the issues around the concept of "neutrality." In fact, there is an inherent incompatibility between representation and neutrality, since the former is a practice already grounded in particular social, political, and cultural structures and perspectives (Cotter, 2015; Fowler, 1991; see also Wilk, Chap. 9 in this volume). Thus, whether in media texts or in other multimodal representations of conflicts, the influence of subjective factors remains inevitable (Griffin, 2010). In examining the role

of language in representations of conflict, differences in perspective are also evident at the micro-level of linguistic expression. As has been shown, especially in studies on corpus analysis (Barrett, 2007), "choices of vocabulary" (Chiluwa, 2022) constitute one of the strategies through which the version of representation in media discourse can be revealed, while simultaneously functioning as delegitimizing labels with a polarizing role.

Applied to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, debates on the "politics of representation" (Holquist, 1983), with a focus on (de)legitimization strategies, are typically divided into analyses examining the discursive strategies employed by President Vladimir Putin and President Volodymyr Zelensky (Chiluwa & Ruzaitė, 2024), case studies of strategic narratives propagated in Russian media (Brusylovska & Maksymenko, 2023), and Russian television propaganda (Kaltseis, 2024). One of the recurring findings in these contributions highlights the links between President Putin's rhetoric of war, characterized as "defensive" and "vindictive" (Chiluwa & Ruzaitė, 2024, p. 490), and the most widely propagated legitimizing narratives used to justify the invasion in Ukraine. The terminology of these narratives includes references to "the special operation," "the West versus Russia," or "provocative Western weapons" (Brusylovska & Maksymenko, 2023, p. 226). In fact, such narratives can be examined within the framework of legitimization as examples of the uses of legitimizing strategies (Reyes, 2011; van Leeuwen, 2007), particularly "moral evaluation/altruism" and "hypothetical future" that emerged in Putin's speeches immediately following the invasion of Ukraine, and were adapted by the media (Kaltseis, 2024).

5.2.2 *Linguistic Labels and Metarepresentations as Implicit Delegitimization Strategies*

Framing Russia's narratives within the categories of legitimizing strategies proposed by van Leeuwen and Reyes requires, therefore, a discursive analysis that takes into consideration the full thematic context. However, this study is based on a corpus of the linguistic labels attributed to the conflict in Ukraine in Romanian- and English-language media. Given Russia's metalinguistic strategies of banning certain terms and propagating others, these labels become implicit lexical strategies of delegitimization.

Hence, this study draws on van Leeuwen's notion of recontextualization (2008) and incorporates Wilson's notion of linguistic metarepresentations and the attributive and echoic uses of language (2000). Regarding the "transformations" involved in recontextualization, van Leeuwen discusses "legitimations" and "evaluations," highlighting a subtle distinction between them. While the former include "reasons that either the whole of a social practice or some part of it must take place, or must take place in the way that it does" (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 20), the latter do not imply legitimization, but "are ultimately always connected with legitimations," as

some evaluations can be “legitimized by the practice itself” (p. 21). In this sense, the practice of using terms already considered illegitimate by Russia in Romanian and English media articles constitutes a pro-Ukrainian legitimizing strategy.

Similarly, the qualified use of propaganda labels imposed by the Kremlin constitutes a practice of implicit delegitimizing evaluation. In this case, terms such as “special (military) operation,” “denazification,” and “demilitarization,” circulated by media outside Russia, such as the Polish media (Molek-Kozakowska & Dragomir, 2025), function as linguistic metarepresentations whose implicit delegitimizing character emerges from their “echoic” and attributive use (Wilson, 2000). According to relevance theory, the ironic attitude toward the attributed linguistic content often signals disapproval toward “the opinion echoed” (Sperber & Wilson, 1996).

5.3 Methodology: Data Collection and KWIC Analysis

This study is based on two methodologically comparable subcorpora, drawn from Romanian- and English-language media. The Romanian subcorpus contains 2013 entries, consisting of articles published between February 2022 and April 2024—selected from seven top Romanian outlets, amounting to a total word count of more than 53,600. Drawing on the *Digital News Report* (Radu, 2023), the outlets were chosen based on their weekly online reach: *Pro TV News online*, *Digi24 online*, *Stiripesurse.ro*, *Libertatea online*, *Adevărul online*, *România TV online*, and *HotNews*. Regarding the entries, 10 to 13 news articles were manually selected for each month throughout 2022–2024. The English subcorpus contains 2160 entries, with a word count of more than 31,800. The articles, published during the same period, were drawn from the following seven outlets: *BBC*, *CBS News*, *Daily Mail*, *Euronews*, *The Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, and *The Washington Post*.

All the lexical searches were conducted using the KWIC tool in *LanCSBox X* (Brezina & Platt, 2025), with the context size set to 10 words to the left and 10 words to the right, therefore yielding concordance lines of 21 words. Notably, in the case of the lexical searches conducted in the Romanian-language subcorpus, all forms of each lemma were included. Subsequently, the results were manually verified to identify linguistic patterns and lexical clusters that would reinforce the role of these linguistic labels as implicit strategies of delegitimization. This manual verification aimed, on the one hand, to account for all modifiers of the keywords that could implicitly or explicitly denote a stance toward the conflict, and on the other hand, to include all the lexical and grammatical selections relevant to the analysis of agentivity. Last but not least, this verification also aimed to thematically classify all lexical contexts in which the selected linguistic labels occur, particularly the most general terms such as “war,” to determine the extent to which they exhibit a delegitimizing function.

5.4 Results

5.4.1 *Quantitative Analysis and Trends Across the Two Subcorpora*

Quantitatively, the lexical searches in both subcorpora revealed the values and hierarchical ranking of the keywords. As expected, the pair of terms “război” [war] (n = 5718) and “war” (n = 4221) ranks highest among the labels in both languages (see also Matusiak, Chap. 3 in this volume). Moreover, the finding that “invasion” (n = 1396) and “invazie” [invasion] (n = 1169) quantitatively exceeds such neutral terms as “conflict” (RO, n = 958; EN, n = 592) further indicates the pro-Ukraine stance of the Romanian- and English-language media.

Comparatively, the Romanian-language subcorpus shows a clear downward trend in the use of “invasion” terminology, with 86 occurrences in the first four months of 2024. This decline makes it impossible to reach the total values recorded in 2022 (n = 629) and 2023 (n = 454), respectively, based on monthly counts. By contrast, the quantitative analysis of the English-language subcorpus indicates 200 occurrences in the first four months of 2024, only slightly different from the first four months of the war (n = 254) and the first four months of 2023 (n = 202). This consistency therefore indicates that the use of this label did not emerge solely as a reaction to the euphemisms employed by Russia at the beginning of the war. Journalistic discourse thus appears to rely on the fact that, even when considered literally outside a lexical context, the term “invasion” remains the most explicit delegitimizing label applied to Russia.

Although less frequently employed, labels such as “agresiune” [aggression] (n = 331) and “aggression” (n = 187), “operațiune militară specială” [special military operation] (n = 120) and “special military operation” (n = 67), or “operațiune specială” [special operation] (n = 81) and “special operation” (n = 20), raise equally relevant points for discussion in the comparative analysis. More specifically, focusing on the Kremlin’s propaganda euphemisms, another discrepancy can be observed as reflected in their frequency. The linguistic labels that could be highlighted through their echoic, and consequently ironic, uses are notably less frequent in the seven outlets comprising the English subcorpus. This observation is further supported by the almost negligible frequencies of the nouns “denazification” (n = 3) and “demilitarization” (n = 2), that in contrast occur substantially in the Romanian-language subcorpus as “denazificare” [denazification] (n = 61) and “demilitarizare” [demilitarization] (n = 23). However, a thematic and cluster analysis, as well as an examination of punctuation that may suggest attributive uses, is required to further examine the specific discursive functions of these linguistic labels according to each subcorpus.

5.4.2 “War” and Blame Agency

The analysis of concordance lines for the pair of terms “război/war” highlights a series of lexical patterns that can be classified as implicit “blame occurrences” (Friedman & Herfroy-Mischler, 2020). In the English-language subcorpus, these patterns specifically draw attention to Putin’s and Russia’s responsibility for the war in Ukraine, as “Russia” (n = 262), “Putin” (n = 83), “Moscow” (n = 26), and “Kremlin” (n = 5) function as collocates identifying Russia as the agent that triggered the conflict. What is noteworthy in this context is the dichotomy between “Putin,” as in “Putin’s war,” on the one hand, and “Russia/Moscow/the Kremlin’s,” on the other. This personalization serves to highlight the criticisms expressed by some Russians against the invasion of Ukraine, as illustrated in example (1):

- (1) This is the moment one of Russia’s most distinguished human rights campaigners is handcuffed and forced to the cells for daring to criticize Vladimir Putin’s war. (*Daily Mail*, 27 February 2024)

In English, “war” is modified by adjectives such as “illegal” (n = 16), “full-scale” (n = 12), “brutal” (n = 11), “unprovoked” (n = 5), “unjustifiable” (n = 4), “barbaric/barbarous” (n = 4), and “devastating” (n = 4), or by prepositional phrases such as “of aggression” (n = 20), with the agent consistently lexicalized either through one of the above proper nouns or through the use of the possessive pronouns “his/its.”

As can be seen from a ranking of these modifiers, there is a clear tendency to invoke terms that emphasize a juridical framing, namely “illegal” and “of aggression,” thereby underscoring the legal aspect of the delegitimization of war. In addition, by circulating statements made by Western leaders, the English-language media provide instances where these modifiers co-occur (2):

- (2) We, the Leaders of the G7, reaffirmed our commitment to stand together against Russia’s illegal, unjustifiable, and unprovoked war of aggression against Ukraine. (*CBS news*, 19 May 2023)

The phrase “war crime(s)” is also among the most frequently occurring lexical associations in the English subcorpus (n = 254). In this case, the accusation against the Kremlin or Putin is made explicit using adjectival phrases such as “responsible for” (n = 4) or verbs such as “to commit” (n = 23).

In the Romanian-language subcorpus, there are fewer examples of agency representations comparable to those in English. Parallel phrases such as “Russia/Putin’s war” account for far fewer occurrences (n = 65/16). However, the tendency to treat responsibility and blame separately persists, with examples highlighting the impact of Putin’s harmful strategies even on his country (3) or by insisting on his policy of imposition (4):

- (3) Acesta a fost momentul în care realitatea războiului lui Putin din Ucraina a lovit gospodăriile din toată Rusia. Aproximativ un milion de bărbați și-au făcut bagajele și au fugit. [This was the moment when the reality of Putin’s war in

Ukraine struck households across Russia. Approximately one million men packed they bags and fled.] (*Adevărul*, 27 February 2023)

- (4) Războiul lui Putin a costat Rusia cel puțin 100 de miliarde de euro. [...], Rusia pare să-și accepte supusă destinul impus de Vladimir Putin. [Putin's war has cost Russia at least 100 billion euros. [...]] Russia seems to submissively accept the fate imposed by Vladimir Putin] (*stirileprotv.ro*, 23 February 2023)

Moreover, Romanian outlets reinforce the implicit delegitimizing function of "war" through a series of passive constructions, such as "războiul declanșat/pornit/purtat de Rusia" [the war launched/started/waged by Russia] (n = 61) or "de Putin" [by Putin] (n = 12), where the pro-Ukraine stance is further strengthened by the participles "launched," "started," and "waged." In addition to modifiers such as "de agresiune" [of aggression] (n = 29), "la scară largă" [full-scale] (n = 14), "ilegal" [illegal] (n = 11), and "neprovocat" [unprovoked] (n = 10), there is also "total" (n = 10). The latter illustrates the intersection between legitimization and proximization (Cap. 2008), as it places greater emphasis on Russia's threats against NATO and the escalation of the war (5):

- (5) Dintre toate reacțiile care au venit de acolo [Moscova], [...] Dmitri Medvedev [...] are o reacție care sună mai degrabă a amenințare. Vorbește despre război total între Rusia și NATO, care va fi nuclear. [Among all the reactions that came from there [Moscow], (...) Dmitry Medvedev (...) issued one that sounded more like a threat. He spoke of a total war between Russia and NATO which could be nuclear.] (*Digi24.ro*, 17 May 2022)

Even an analysis of phrases such as "Ukraine's war" or "the Ukrainian war" reveals similar strategies, this time aimed at highlighting solidarity policies and war efforts. The association between "Ukraine's war" and "effort(s)" and references to Western aid occurs in both English (n = 23) and Romanian (n = 6) subcorpora. In addition, the occurrence of the phrases "război rus/rusesesc" (n = 12) and "Russian war" (n = 1) reinforces the discursive strategies that construct Russia as the exclusive agent of conflict. A similar effect can be observed in the Romanian media, where journalists frame the conflict through Putin's perspective. For example, the only instance of the phrase "Putin's Ukrainian war" (*hotnews*, 30 June 2022) in the Romanian-language subcorpus results from a literal translation of the English phrase "Putin's Ukraine war" (*Atlantic Council*, 31 August 2021).

Finally, the frequency distribution of "war against" reveals a discursive dynamic aimed at emphasizing Russia's responsibility for triggering the conflict, as well as the joint effort of NATO and the West to support Ukraine. "Russia" and "Ukraine" are the terms that most frequently complete this phrase. In the Romanian media, "război împotriva Ucrainei" [war against Ukraine] occurs no fewer than 34 times, compared to only 16 instances of "război împotriva Rusiei" [war against Russia], highlighting a clear asymmetry between attacker and defender. Supporting this observation are the other lexical constructions identified in the concordance lines for "war against" (n = 50). These include more or less explicit labels such as "război împotriva invadatorului rus" [war against the Russian invader], "împotriva

agresiunii ruse/agresorului rus” [against Russian aggression/the Russian aggressor], “împotriva atacului rus” [against the Russian attack], or “împotriva unei țări cu o populație de trei ori mai numeroasă” [against a country with a population three times larger], that consistently suggest Ukraine’s defensive policy. Discursive solidarity in the fight against Moscow is evident in the recurrence of agents such as “US,” “Occidental” [the West], “voluntari” [volunteers], and “aliații occidentali” [Western allies], as well as in verbs such as “a susține” [to support], “a se alătura” [to join], “a ajuta” [to help].

At the opposite end of the spectrum are instances where Russia is constructed as an explicit agent. Its agency is conveyed through lexical recurrences such as “declanșarea” [triggering], “declararea” [declaring] or verbs like “a continua” [to continue]. In such cases, the war is no longer described as being solely against Ukraine, but rather through the discursive strategies of axiological proximization (Cap, 2006), as well as “împotriva noastră” [against us], “împotriva (statelor) NATO” [against NATO (states)], “împotriva valorilor europene” [against European values], and “împotriva Occidentului” [against the West].

The English-language media outlets employ similar (de)legitimizing structures, albeit in different proportions. The phrase “the war against Ukraine” ($n = 31$) recurs at a frequency close to that of “the war against Russia” ($n = 27$). Yet, the delegitimization of the Russian initiative is also evident in occurrences such as “to accuse,” “to denounce,” and “to condemn.” Moreover, the lexical context of the phrase describing Ukraine’s war “against Russia” includes terms such as “unity,” “support,” “to secure,” “to halt assistance,” “to fund,” and “to suffer.” On the same principle of revealing solidarity and legitimizing Ukraine’s war efforts at the discursive level, the conflict is no longer framed solely as one between the two opponents, but rather as a war against “all of free Europe,” “all 30 NATO states,” “democracy,” or against “basic human rights.”

5.4.3 *“Invasion” as a Temporally Framed Label*

The term “invasion,” together with the lexical clusters to which it belongs, perpetuates as well as reinforces the pro-European stance of Romanian- and English-language media discourse. The same pattern continues in the persistence of lexical and grammatical structures that foreground the agent of the aggression rather than the victim, thereby reinforcing the same agency-centered framing. Thus, out of the total occurrences of this keyword in the Romanian subcorpus ($n = 1169$), a substantial subset ($n = 509$) co-occurs with “rusă/rusească/a Rusiei” [Russian’s/Russia’s], while a significantly smaller number ($n = 128$) occurs in noun phrases such as “invazia Ucrainei/în Ucraina” [invasion of Ukraine/in Ukraine]. The emphasis on the invader rather than on the invaded is further reflected in the variety of phrases such as “invazia lui Putin” [Putin’s invasion] ($n = 12$) or “invazia Moscovei” [Moscow’s invasion].

Similar trends are observable in the English-language media, where "Russia's" and "Russian's" rank at the top of the hierarchy ($n = 545$), ahead of the phrases "of Ukraine/into Ukraine" ($n = 487$) or "Ukraine(s) invasion" ($n = 14$). In addition, the English-language subcorpus also features the use of "Moscow's invasion" ($n = 27$) and the individualization of the agent through references to "Putin's invasion" ($n = 33$). The peculiarity of this linguistic label stems, however, from its prevalence within certain lexical proximities; the frequency of other keywords in the concordance lines retrieved for "invasion" highlights another discursive pattern. A significant number of lexical choices denoting the initiation or outbreak of war constitute a common feature in both subcorpora. Thus, the use of the term "invasion" appears to depend on the temporal context described, functioning primarily as a label associated with the outbreak of war, as in example (6):

- (6) On 24 February, Moscow launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, using Crimea as a springboard to move Russian troops deeper inside Ukraine. (*BBC*, 9 August 2022)

In such cases, revisiting the start of the war using this linguistic label constitutes a firm stance against President Putin's decision to attack Ukraine. Furthermore, similar to the term "war," the delegitimizing dimension is reinforced by modifiers such as "la scară largă/full-scale" ($n = 23/169$), "ilegală/illegal" ($n = 5/11$), or "neprovocată/unprovoked" ($n = 7/11$), whose discursive function becomes even more evident given the concreteness implied by the moment of the invasion's military launch. The specificity of this label is even more evident in contexts where media discourse relies on temporally framed delegitimization. In other words, recalling the "anniversary" ($n = 3/29$) of the Russian invasion (7) provides an opportunity to expose Russia's intentions and to discursively juxtapose the initially unnamed "invasion" with the ongoing consequences of "war":

- (7) Actualizarea CSIS cu privire la numărul victimelor de război vine la doar câteva zile după prima aniversare a invaziei rusești. Când a început invazia rusă din Ucraina, la sfârșitul lunii februarie 2022, Vladimir Putin a crezut inițial, în mod eronat, că va cuceri rapid Kievul și că războiul nu va fi unul atât de lung și de costisitor. [The CSIS update regarding the number of war casualties comes only a few days after the first anniversary of the Russian invasion. When the Russian invasion of Ukraine began in late February 2022, Vladimir Putin initially, and erroneously, believed that he would rapidly capture Kyiv and that the war would not prove to be so protracted and costly.] (*stirileprotv*, 1 March 2023)

5.4.4 “Aggression”: Legal and Metaphorical Dimensions of Delegitimization

Of all the lexical labels discussed in this chapter, “aggression” stands out as the one with the strongest legal grounding. In other words, phrases such as “war of aggression” (n = 28/20) and “crime of aggression” (n = 5/9) belong to legal jargon and can be analyzed as delegitimizing labels discursively anchored in legal terminology. Furthermore, the addition of modifiers such as “illegal” results in the apparently pleonastic expression “illegal (war of) aggression” (n = 10/5), since this keyword already implies a violation of international law (Kwiecień, 2022), drawing attention to the reinforced delegitimization. However, even given its strictly legal uses, “aggression,” unlike “war” and “invasion,” is also employed as metaphors and in rhetorical lexical contexts. This is why the term has been used repeatedly in Zelensky’s speeches, as reported by the media, and has even been proposed by him as an antonym of “peace” (8). It has also been reported in the speeches of other officials who have associated it with the impact of the war on the international community (9).

- (8) sărbătorile sunt momentul în care oamenii normali se gândesc la pace, nu la agresiune. Îi propun Rusiei să încerce măcar să demonstreze că este capabilă să renunțe la agresiune. [Holidays are a time when ordinary people think about peace, not about aggression. I propose that Russia at least try to demonstrate that is capable of giving up aggression.] (*Adevărul*, 15 December 2022)
- (9) People are suffering because of aggression of Putin into Ukraine. (*BBC*, 11 November 2022)

The lexical-semantic scope of this label is also evidenced by statements that discuss alternative possibilities of manifestations of Russia’s aggression (10) or that reveal its ideological dimension by evoking nouns such as “theses” (11). Finally, abstract and principled statements on freedom also make use of the same linguistic label (12).

- (10) Chiar dacă cele două tabere vor ajunge la un moment dat la o înțelegere, agresiunea lui Putin îndreptată împotriva Ucrainei ar putea continua pe alte căi. [Even if the two sides eventually reach an agreement, Putin’s aggression against Ukraine could continue in other forms.] (*Digi24.ro*, 28 December 2022)
- (11) Una dintre tezele agresiunii ordonate de Vladimir Putin în Ucraina este aceea că regimul de la Kiev este “moștenitorul fascist” al lui Stepan Bandera. [One of the theses of the aggression ordered by Vladimir Putin in Ukraine is that the regime in Kyiv is the “fascist heir” of Stepan Bandera.] (*Libertatea*, 15 April 2022)
- (12) fiecare dintre pierderile Rusiei și fiecare dintre înfrângerile Rusiei învață Rusia și orice alt inamic al Europei și al lumii libere în general că agresiunea nu dă și nu poate da rezultate. [Each of Russia’s losses and each of Russia’s defeats teaches Russia, as well as other enemies of Europe and of the free world in

general that aggression does not and cannot yield results.] (*România TV online*, 27 February 2024).

Finally, the analogies that portray Ukraine and Zelensky as both “the target” (*hot-news.ro*, 25 February 2022) and “as a protective shield for NATO’s eastern European members” (*The Guardian*, 28 June 2023) against Russian aggression, together with the specific contexts in which this linguistic label refers to civilian victims of Russian military aggression, support the argument that both Romanian- and English-language media draw on the broad semantic scope of the term, as well as on the metaphorical uses that construct a delegitimizing discourse against Russia’s war of aggression.

5.4.5 “*Special (Military) Operation*,” “*Denazification*,” and “*Demilitarization*”: Linguistic Metarepresentations and Echoic Delegitimization

The use of the very labels employed by Russia to justify its invasion of Ukraine as delegitimizing labels results from a recontextualization that neutralizes the propagandistic motivation invoked by the aggressor (Molek-Kozakowska & Dragomir, 2025). Similar to the discursive practices observed in pro-Ukrainian Polish outlets, Romanian- and English-language media have strategically capitalized on the potential of this delegitimizing strategy, performing a deliberate distancing from specific lexical choices through the echoic and attributive uses of language.

In discussing the explicit and implicit linguistic metarepresentations, Wilson (2000, pp. 429–430) identifies several “quotative devices” that implicitly signal the attributive status of certain utterances. Whether through adjectives such as “so-called,” quotation marks, parentheticals, or noun phrases, most of the devices enumerated by Wilson can be identified in both the Romanian and the English subcorpora. The attributive intention is evident primarily from the use of quotation marks in most cases where such linguistic labels are employed. Of the occurrences of “special (military) operation” in the Romanian-language media ($n = 201$), this keyword is attested to in quotation marks 86 times. Similarly, in English-language outlets, the label is placed in quotation marks in most cases ($n = 56$) out of a total of 87 occurrences.

The delegitimizing effect, however, derives from the lexical choices and parenthetical structures that index polarizing language and convert these labels into linguistic metarepresentations through the addition of their echoic function. The verbs “a numi/to call,” “a descrie/to describe,” “a se referi (la)/to refer (to)” that predominantly occur with lexicalized agents such as “Putin,” “Russia,” “Moscow,” or “the Kremlin” ($n = 16/26$), represent a primary means of distancing and implicitly signaling disapproval of the way in which Russia has endowed this label with a propagandistic function. Furthermore, ironic distancing is particularly evident in examples where the coercive force is conveyed by the modal verb “must.” The media coverage

of Chechen fighters' refusal to conform to the labels imposed by Russian propaganda, that in fact serve to conceal the "carnage" (13), together with Muratov's incisive and revealing statements (14), reflect ironic distancing from Russia's euphemistic label.

- (13) Unlike Russians, the Chechen troops (...) call the conflict a war—ignoring the Kremlin's propaganda ruling that the carnage must be called a "special operation." (*The Guardian*, 22 March 2022)
- (14) Dmitry Muratov: The current, as we must call it "special military operation," has no sense and will have the same outcome for a whole generation. (*The Guardian*, 20 August 2023)

When modified by the adjective "aşa-numita/aşa-zisa/so-called" ($n = 15/2$), this delegitimizing label also occurs in lexical contexts that explicitly reveal Russia's intentions, as the media consistently combine it from the outset with terms such as "long war," "propaganda," or even "alleged (success)," as illustrated in example (15):

- (15) În acelaşi timp, propagandiştii ruşi au început să pregătească populaţia Federaţiei Ruse pentru un război lung. Canalele oficiale de comunicare răspund propagandă despre presupusul succes al aşa-numite "operaţiuni militare speciale." [At the same time, Russian propagandists began preparing the population of the Russian Federation for a long war. Official communication channels disseminate propaganda concerning the alleged success of the so-called "special military operation."] (*hotnews.ro*, 20 March 2022)

The Romanian-language subcorpus also attests to two instances in which the label is recontextualized and referred to as the "Kremlin's preferred euphemism" (16) or "official euphemism" (17), while other occurrences in both subcorpora mark the presence of adverbs and adverbial phrases such as "instead," "in fact," or "in reality," which serve to grammatically undermine the propagandistic discourse and explicitly convey the ironic stance accompanying the echoic use of Russia's legitimizing label.

- (16) Instanţele ruseşti au folosit această legislaţie pentru a împărţi amenzi şi pedepse cu închisoarea criticilor opoziţiei, inclusiv celor care descriu invazia completă a Moscovei în Ucraina ca fiind un război, în loc să folosească eufemismul preferat de Kremlin, "operaţiune militară specială." [Russian courts have employed this legislation to impose fines and prison sentences on opposition critics, including those who describe Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine as a war rather than using the Kremlin's preferred euphemism, "special military operation."] (*stiripesurse*, 17 October 2023)
- (17) Kremlinul reprimă de doi ani prin amenzi şi închisoare folosirea cuvântului război, impunând eufemismul oficial "operaţiune militară specială." [For two years, the Kremlin has repressed the use of the word war through fines and imprisonment, imposing the official euphemism "special military operation."] (*România TV online*, 22 March 2024)

Finally, explanatory sentences such as “how Russia formally refers to it,” “as Moscow/Russia calls the invasion,” or “as the Kremlin likes to call it” complement these attributive instances through which journalists ridicule Russia’s efforts to impose this label. Furthermore, the noun phrase “special military operation” is sometimes supplemented with “of denazification” or “of demilitarization” ($n = 9$), thereby incorporating Russia’s stated objective for initiating this war against Ukraine. In such cases, media discourse neutralizes the entire legitimizing narrative through an extended linguistic label. The echoic uses are very clear in this case as well, particularly through modifiers such as “alleged” and through their contrast with terms like “occupation,” which is explicitly denied by Russia. Even with respect to the verbs “to demilitarize” and “to denazify,” the contrast with lexical choices such as “baseless pretext” or “brutal campaign” follows the same pattern of delegitimization and exposure of the Kremlin’s intentions.

5.5 Conclusion

The analysis of the most representative linguistic labels describing Russia’s offensive in Ukraine revealed some of lexical and grammatical strategies that Romanian- and English-language media employed to delegitimize Russia’s narratives. This language-oriented approach reveals how (de)legitimization strategies employed in war media can also be examined at the micro level of language, namely through lexical choices that implicitly convey stance in media representations of conflict. Furthermore, an analysis of the labels banned and disseminated by the Russian regime shows that the pro-European and pro-Ukrainian stance of the outlets surveyed emerges not only through macro-discursive strategies of delegitimization. It is also evident in the exploitation of the implicit values of linguistic labels and the lexical context in which they occur. As a result, this study did not explore legitimization strategies already established in Critical Discourse Analysis, but rather drew on van Leeuwen’s theory of recontextualization to focus on (de)legitimizing “evaluation” as one of the key transformations on which recontextualization relies.

This chapter demonstrates, therefore, that the use of linguistic labels that expose Russia’s intentions, emphasizing agency and responsibility in the case of “war,” the temporal representation implied by “invasion,” the legal and the metaphorical nature of “aggression,” all amount to a strategic (implicit) delegitimizing evaluation. Moreover, it shows that the echoic use of linguistic labels constructed by Russia as euphemisms for war also functions as delegitimizing evaluation, since media discourse adds an ironic and critical perspective in relation to these propagandistic labels.

By adopting a lexical approach to document some of the strategies employed by Romanian- and English-language media through the terms used to describe the Russian-Ukrainian war, this study cannot claim representativeness. Its conclusions do not extend to all discursive devices rooted in the theory of recontextualization. Furthermore, adding representative data from the second half of 2024 and from

2025 to the English- and Romanian-language subcorpora would provide a fuller picture of the quantitative trends in the keywords referring to Russia's offensive in Ukraine.

Acknowledgement This work was funded by the EU's NextGenerationEU instrument through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan of Romania—Pillar III-C9-I8, managed by the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalization, within the project entitled *The Coverage and Reception of the Russian–Ukrainian Conflict in Polish, Romanian and English-language Media: A Comparative Critical Discourse Study with Recommendations for Journalism Training (CORECON)*, contract no. 760244/28.12.2023, code CF 25/27.07.2023.

References

- Arel, D., & Driscoll, J. (2023). *Ukraine's unnamed war: Before the Russian invasion of 2022*. Cambridge University Press.
- Barrett, D. (2007). "War on terror": An intentional choice of words? A corpus analysis of war on and war against." In *Proceedings of the Corpus Linguistics Conference (CL2007)*, University of Birmingham, July 27–30.
- Brezina, V., & Platt, W. (2025) #LancsBox X [software], Lancaster University, <http://lancsbox.lancs.ac.uk>
- Brusylovska, O., & Maksymenko, I. (2023). Analysis of the media discourse on the 2022 war in Ukraine: The case of Russia. *Regional Science Policy & Practice*, 15(1), 222–236. <https://doi.org/10.1111/rsp3.12579>
- Cap, P. (2006). *Legitimization in political discourse: A cross-disciplinary perspective on the modern US war rhetoric*. Cambridge Scholars Press.
- Cap, P. (2008). Towards the proximization model of the analysis of legitimization in political discourse. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 40(1), 17–41. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2007.10.002>
- Chiluwa, I. (2022). Introduction: Media, conflict, and peace-building. In I. Chiluwa (Ed.), *Discourse, media and conflict: Examining war and resolution in the news* (pp. 1–16). Cambridge University Press.
- Chiluwa, I. (2024). Investigating the language of conflict and peace in critical discourse studies. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 22(5), 471–476. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2024.233116>
- Chiluwa, I., & Ruzaitė, J. (2024). Analyzing the language of political conflict: A study of war rhetoric of Vladimir Putin and Volodymyr Zelensky. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 22(5), 477–493. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2024.2331186>
- Cotter, C. (2015). Discourse and media. In D. Tannen, H. E. Hamilton & D. Schiffrin (Eds.), *The handbook of discourse analysis* (2nd ed., pp. 795–821). Wiley.
- Fowler, R. (1991). *Language in the news: Discourse and ideology in the press*. Routledge.
- Friedman, E., & Herfroy-Mischler, A. (2020). The media framing of blame agency in asymmetric conflict: Who is blaming whom for the 2014 Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations failure? *Journalism Studies*, 21(13), 1873–1892. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2020.1797526>
- Griffin, M. (2010). Media images of war. *Media, War & Conflict*, 3(1), 7–41. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750635210356813>
- Holquist, M. (1983). The politics of representation. *Quarterly Newsletter of the Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition*, 5(1), 2–9.
- Jeffries, L. (2019). Introduction: Textual choice and communication in conflict. In M. Evans, L. Jeffries & J. O'Driscoll (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of language in conflict* (pp. 13–24). Routledge.

- Kaltseis, M. (2024). (De)legitimization strategies of Russia's war against Ukraine: A case study of Russian television programs. *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, 66(3–4), 368–388. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00085006.2024.242166>
- Kwiecień, R. (2022). Aggression and responsibility under international law: A case of the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine. *Osteuropa Recht*, 68(2), 201–213. <https://doi.org/10.5771/0030-6444-2022-2-201>
- Molek-Kozakowska, K., & Dragomir, I.-A. (2025). Demystifying, delegitimizing, debunking: Discursive editorial strategies of neutralizing the rationales for Russia's intervention in Ukraine. *Media, War and Conflict*, 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17506352251314876>
- Radu, R.-N. (2023). *Digital News Report 2023: Romania*. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2023/romania>
- Reyes, A. (2011). Strategies of legitimization in political discourse: From words to actions. *Discourse & Society*, 22(6), 781–807. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926511419927>
- Sperber, D., & Wilson, D. (1996). *Relevance: Communication and cognition* (2nd ed.). Blackwell.
- Van Leeuwen, T. (2007). Legitimation in discourse and communication. *Discourse and Communication*, 1(1), 91–112. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750481307071986>
- Van Leeuwen, T. (2008). *Discourse and practice: New tools for critical discourse analysis*. Oxford University Press.
- Wilson, D. (2000). Metarepresentation in linguistic communication. In D. Sperber (Ed.), *Metarepresentations: A multidisciplinary perspective* (pp. 411–448). Oxford University Press.

David Morariu is a PhD candidate in philology and a teaching assistant of Romanian with the Department of Romance Studies at the Faculty of Letters and Arts, Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Romania. His research interests include corpus linguistics, online pragmatics, digital humanities, neurolinguistics and language impairments. He assisted in several research projects, e.g., DMRN (*The Digital Museum of the Romanian Novel: 1845–1947*) and FAKEROM (*Fake News in Romanian: A Joint Discursive and Computational Approach*), where he specialized in corpus-based analysis and media discourse. He is currently focusing on a neurodidactic approach to learning Romanian as a foreign language using digital tools in PATLIRO (*Preserving, Transforming and Studying the Romanian Linguistic Heritage in the Context of Globalization*).

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if you modified the licensed material. You do not have permission under this license to share adapted material derived from this chapter or parts of it.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.



Part II
Qualitative and/or Critical Case Studies of
Language Used in Conflict Reporting

Chapter 6

Discursive Framing of National Security Concerns in Romanian Media's Coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict



Isabela Dragomir and Valerica Sporiş

Abstract This chapter examines narrative strategies that frame national security concerns in the Romanian media's reporting on the Ukraine-Russia war (2022–2024). With both automated and manual methods of Critical Discourse Analysis, the study examines articles from the three most read news websites in Romania to spotlight dominant framing strategies that represent top security concerns at the national level. By analyzing the collocates of such keywords as “threat,” “fear,” or “instability,” the study catalogues a range of media narratives and thematic domains, documenting the characteristic rhetorical and informational strategies of war reporting. It illustrates how the main national concerns generated by the Russian-Ukrainian conflict (security threats, historical fears, regional instability) are represented, and how key actors (Russia, Ukraine, NATO, EU) are positioned in terms of power and threat. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of how news discourse framing strategies shape public perception of conflicts.

6.1 Introduction

The role of discursive strategies in the media has become a focal point of research across a range of domains, aiming at an understanding of their effectiveness in modeling public perception through social narratives. All forms of media use various rhetorical means and framing techniques not only to inform but also to influence ideologies and beliefs. Against this background, the present study aims to examine the discursive mechanisms by which Romanian media reporting on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict frame the main national security concerns. The study was

I. Dragomir (✉)

Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Sibiu, Romania

Nicolae Bălcescu Land Forces Academy of Sibiu, Sibiu, Romania

V. Sporiş

Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Sibiu, Romania

e-mail: valerica.sporis@ulbsibiu.ro

© The Author(s) 2026

K. Molek-Kozakowska, S.-M. Terian (eds.), *Mediated Discourses of Conflict across Languages and Genres*, The Language of Politics,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-95-6992-2_6

conducted on an aggregated dataset of news from the top three most read online newspapers in Romania: *Libertatea*, *Adevarul*, and *Stiripesurse* published between February 2022 and February 2024, to identify, locate, and explain the framing strategies that package the main security concerns at national level. Of the Romanian-language dataset, amounting to 1994 texts (1,298,671 tokens), a total of 851 texts (579,894 tokens) have been selected as a representative sample.

The study draws on the frequency and use of the selected keywords to identify the contexts that surround national security concerns, and the most salient discursive strategies employed by Romanian online mass media to frame them. These keywords are selected to illustrate the diversity of perspectives within Romania's media in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war and include the Romanian equivalents of: "threat," "anxiety," "fear," "horror," "insecurity," "instability or destabilization," "intimidation," "concern/worry," "unrest," "uncertainty," "panic," "fright," "scare," "stress," and "terror."

Using automated and manual methods of analyzing contexts containing these keywords, a range of media narratives has been classified into thematic domains, identifying the discursive strategies employed in reporting conflict-related news. The study also documents the manner in which national concerns generated by the Russian-Ukrainian conflict—historical fears (Topic 1/T1), security threats (Topic 2/T2), regional instabilities (Topic 3/T3), nuclear threats (Topic 4/T4)—shape public perception, and how key entities e.g., Russia, Ukraine, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the European Union (EU), are positioned in terms of power and influence. Hence, it identifies the most used discursive strategies in the Romanian mass media to frame conflict-induced domestic apprehensions.

Discursive framing techniques are fundamental for the formation of meaning in public journalistic discourse. Specific linguistic choices in communicating timely, complex, and intertwined issues (e.g., political polarization, economic crises, environmental concerns, ongoing conflicts or wars, social pressure, cyber insecurity) serve as strategic devices for constructing socio-political narratives. Effective social and political communication depends on the media's ability to align messages with the existing knowledge and emotions of the public. In this, media discourse emerges as a powerful vehicle for the construction of social identities and for the legitimization of particular viewpoints.

Various studies have stressed how ideological foundations influence the representation of this conflict in different national contexts (Brusylowska & Maksymenko, 2023; Gökhan, 2024; Obaidullah & Shaikh, 2024; Billah & Biswas, 2024). The diversity of these perspectives reveals a landscape in which discursive strategies used for framing can influence the public perception of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. As framing is used not only to report on war reality but also to shape identity, the mapping of specific linguistic choices confirms the essential role of discourse in the mobilization of public feeling and political agendas for the nations involved in conflict and the international community, including Romania, a country bordering on Ukraine.

6.2 Romania's Security Concerns in the Context of the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict

The Russian-Ukrainian conflict that became amplified in 2014 with the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation and intensified in 2022 after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, fundamentally altered the security landscape of Eastern Europe. The invasion not only directly threatens Ukraine's sovereignty but also throws a long shadow on the defense policies of neighboring states, particularly those located along the eastern flank of NATO. In fact, Romania had to undertake a critical assessment of its security strategy, military readiness, and regional stability prospects. Romania's official position in relation to the ongoing conflict is based on the notions of national sovereignty, military might, and the exploration of diplomatic alternatives (*Agreement on security cooperation between Romania and Ukraine*, 11 July 2024).

According to Catrina (2024), the Romanian government perceives a direct threat to its security emanating from the conflict, causing a reassessment of its priorities. The anxiety surrounding security has been particularly pronounced, given Romania's geopolitical position, its historical struggles for sovereignty, and integration through European and international alliances. In addition, the mediated narratives of war are oriented towards invoking strong emotional responses, touching on a Romanian sense of threat, national identity, and collective memory that is not free from controversy, as illustrated below with respect to four dominant topics.

6.2.1 Historical Fears (T1)

The Russian-Ukrainian conflict not only reformulated the political future of Europe but also rekindled the historical fears of renewed regional threats. Romania's geographical position required a robust understanding of the complexities of Eastern Europe's politics, the dynamics of Russian expansionism, and the responses of international organizations such as NATO and the EU. Historically, Romania faced existential threats from powerful neighbors, particularly Russia and later the Soviet Union. The expansion of the Russian Empire to the Black Sea region and its subsequent involvement in the Balkans triggered a deep fear of Russian military aggression, a feeling that was resurrected by the present conflict in Ukraine. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the military support provided by Russia to separatist regions in eastern Ukraine intensified these fears, reinforcing the belief that Romania could also be subject to external aggression.

The memory of previous conflicts, such as World War I and World War II, and the Soviet occupation, further informs the current perceptions of Russian actions as not only opportunistic, but as a threat to Romanian sovereignty and territorial integrity (Moga et al., 2021). Romanian citizens usually harbor a combination of fear and skepticism in relation to Russian intentions, complicating the national approach to

security and cooperation. Cultural narratives also play a crucial role in invoking Romania's determination in relation to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, based on historical memory of traumatic invasions and occupations. As with many Eastern European societies, Romanians are influenced by historical narratives that portray Russia as a lasting threat that needs to be confronted (Jureńczyk, 2023). The anxiety surrounding sovereignty has been particularly pronounced, given Romania's geopolitical position and the security of its borders. Historically, the struggles for sovereignty and territorial integrity invoke strong emotional responses as they touch Romanian national identity and collective memory that is not free from controversy (see Iliş, Chap. 4 in this volume).

6.2.2 *NATO and EU Security Guarantees (T2)*

The continuous geopolitical tensions generated by the Russian-Ukrainian conflict has affected public security perceptions, with the Romanian population increasingly resorting to NATO and the EU as sources of security guarantees. Romania's strategic location in the Black Sea region makes it historically susceptible to external threats, leading the country to seek integration into NATO (2004) and the EU (2007) for national security.

The war in Ukraine caused renewed debates about the concept of collective defense, placing Romania under pressure to contribute to regional security architectures. Since the beginning of the conflict in 2014 and after 2022, Romania has underlined its loyalty to NATO as a fundamental pillar of its security strategy. The principle of collective defense of the Alliance, enshrined in article 5 of the *North Atlantic Treaty*, becomes increasingly relevant to Romania, as a state that borders Ukraine. In this context, Romania has constantly advocated for a more robust presence of NATO in Eastern Europe and the Black Sea region, such as deployments of multinational troops and joint military exercises for deterrence as well as improved interoperability between allied forces (Popovici, 2022, pp. 2–3).

Romania's relationship with the EU has also evolved in light of the conflict, since the EU is an integral part of the security framework that Romania seeks to consolidate. The interface between EU's military and political cohesion has acquired a new urgency, as the war in Ukraine exposes the vulnerabilities of external EU border policies. Consequently, Romania has become a vocal advocate of a stronger and more unified EU security policy although a higher risk of military commitment exacerbates public anxiety, limiting Romania's ability to project confidence in NATO and EU security guarantees. That is why, according to Thomson et al. (2023), although a considerable part of the European public supports Ukraine, opinions on the future role of NATO are more divided.

This ambivalence is also echoed in Romanian public discourse, where mixed opinions about the reliability of NATO's and EU's security guarantees arise. For example, although a majority support NATO initiatives to improve its military presence in Eastern Europe, some believe that the organization might not properly

protect Romania against possible Russian aggression (INSCOP Survey Report, 2025). In this context, it is essential that the Romanian media frame security stories effectively, promoting a positive attitude deeply integrated into collective efficacy instead of apprehension. And yet, a case-study conducted in 2021 by Calistru and Burtan for GLOBSEC investigated the anti-Western narratives that circulate in Romania, often representing Western powers as passive or antagonistic participants in the ongoing crisis, undermining Romania's position within EU and NATO, portraying it as a "second-tier state" (2021, p. 4). This narrative could cultivate a sense of skepticism among the Romanian population towards alliances with the West and amplify local anxieties about external influence, mobilizing nationalist feelings.

6.2.3 Regional Instabilities (T3)

The current Russian-Ukrainian conflict has large-scale implications for Romania, in particular regarding its political, economic, and social stability. The war has catalyzed a considerable change in foreign policy and defense strategies among NATO member states, with Romania actively contributing to collective security measures. Russian military activity, including troop movements near the Romanian border, sparked a re-evaluation of national defense policies (Golop, 2024) and regional alliances, within a landscape marked by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (Tudorache & Constantinescu, 2024).

The need for regional stability has emerged as a primary concern of Romanian political leaders who recognize that a safe and stable neighborhood is essential for national security. The proximity of the conflict has led Romania to adopt a more proactive diplomatic position, advocating greater military collaboration within the Black Sea region (Popa, 2023). In this context, Capati (2025) has found that the armed invasion catalyzed a shift in media coverage of international relations. Romanian media have started to advocate for European unity in view of external threats, not just as a political decision but as a necessary response to security and resistance. The media have generally emphasized solidarity with Ukraine while reinforcing Romania's key role within the European framework. This type of narrative construction validates Romania's national aspirations of belonging to the EU also downplays historical ties with Russia.

6.2.4 Nuclear Threats (T4)

As the Russian-Ukrainian conflict develops, the escalating tensions in Romania's geographical proximity have caused a greater awareness of nuclear threat vulnerabilities that influence public perception of nuclear risk and state responses. In response to the dynamics of the nuclear threat introduced by the conflict, Romania has adopted a series of diplomatic measures aimed at strengthening regional

security and cooperation with neighboring states, such as Bulgaria and Poland (Catrina, 2024). The operational impact of the nearby Ukrainian nuclear energy facilities situated close to Romania generates additional risks. A study by Pavelescu et al. (2023) discussed possible areas of nuclear fallout in Romania derived from the nuclear incidents at the facilities of Ukraine, requiring urgent planning and contingency measures by the Romanian authorities. Such threats spark concerns of nuclear escalation not only among country leaders but also among the population (Statista, 2024), possibly related to how this threat is covered by the media. For example, Marinescu et al. (2024) reveal the sensationalist tone of Romanian outlets discussing the possibilities of nuclear escalation. The framing of such existential threats draws on alarmist language that often distorts public understanding of the situation's complexities by creating an amplified state of concern, even panic. Such coverage is a tactic to attract audiences, but it rarely represents the actual analytical assessment of the threat in Romanian public discourse.

6.3 Discursive Strategies in Conflict-Reporting Media

As shown above, the most prevalent topics of security concerns are related to historical fears, issues of sovereignty, security guarantees, regional instability, and nuclear threats. As Romanian media continue to adapt their stories in response to the evolving geopolitical circumstances, an examination of the discursive framing of these concerns can shed light on the implications of language in constructing and understanding a nationally accepted reality of the conflict.

In the analysis of conflict-reporting media, discursive and rhetorical strategies refer to the specific ways in which language is used to construct, frame, and influence public perception of conflict. These strategies are grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and framing theory¹ that examine how language, power, and ideology intersect in news narratives. The basis of framing theory is that the media focus attention on certain events and then place them within a field of meaning, typified by predefined and narrow contextualization. Frames can be designed to enhance understanding or are used as cognitive shortcuts to link stories to the bigger picture, with media actively selecting and emphasizing aspects of an event to guide audience understanding (Entman, 1993). In the context of war, this often involves organizing ideas or themes, linking stories together historically and building up narratives over time and across political spaces. The “shared view” of an issue or its “framing” ultimately emerges from the deployment of a discursive strategy—or the systematic strategy of language use—supported by purposefully employed linguistic devices (Kwon et al., 2014).

¹ See e.g., Mass Communication Theory (2017). <https://masscommtheory.com/theory-overviews/framing-theory/>

Based on Molek-Kozakowska and Dragomir (2025), a series of strategies have been selected: rhetorical (explanation, exemplification, questioning, rationale/arguing, ridiculing, speculating, manipulating) and informative/factual (documenting, exposing, exploring, covering, analyzing) strategies, treating them as analytic categories that allow mapping the meaning and intention of a particular message, with a focus on their potential for strategic framing and audience engagement.

Explanation is a rhetorical strategy in persuasive writing used to clarify complex ideas and arguments. By breaking intricate concepts into digestible components writers facilitate understanding, not only involving readers but also reinforcing their credibility, sometimes leading to changing perspectives and galvanizing support for the idea or argument.

Exemplification is a rhetorical strategy that involves the use of specific examples to illustrate broader issues, rendering them more understandable or relatable to the public. Exemplification can also evoke emotional responses and promote identification; examples clarify complex ideas, enabling the public to place an abstract argument in a tangible context.

Questioning acts as a catalyst for audience's critical thinking and reflection. By embedding questions in their discourse journalists not only challenge previous assumptions but also encourage interactive dialogue with the audience, turning questioning into a powerful tool for persuasion. By inserting questions or opening the ground for exploration, a participatory environment is created, promoting the public's engagement and investment.

Providing a rationale i.e., argumentation, is the use of logical reasoning and structured claims to support a particular viewpoint, thesis, or conclusion and to justify positive or negative attributions (Reisigl, 2017). Its purpose in discourse is to persuade the audience through evidence, logic, and coherence, and to build credibility by presenting well-founded arguments.

Ridiculing, although often considered a more controversial rhetorical strategy, can also be effective in journalism. It involves the use of irony or mockery to reduce the credibility of opposing points of view, or to highlight nonsense. However, excessive ridicule can alienate the public and reduce the author's credibility. The effectiveness of ridicule depends mainly on contextual factors, including the public's values and expectations.

Speculation influences the effectiveness of arguments in journalistic discourse when it is used as a cognitive strategy for interpreting information to draw possible conclusions within the limits of a certain scenario or premise (Roine, 2020). Journalists often resort to speculating to influence public perception and encourage "contemplation of multiple assumptions and uncertainties" (Alias, 2024, p. 1623). However, unchecked speculation can deceive the inattentive public and distort arguments, particularly in contexts where accuracy is critical. The ethics of speculative rhetoric require careful consideration, as it balances the art of persuasion with responsibility, given that some uses of speculation can simultaneously enrich discourse and undermine credibility.

Manipulation is a rhetorical strategy that uses emotionally charged language, exaggeration, or framing to influence the audience's perception, using cognitive

biases with “purposeful use of language tools and features of phrase constructions that contribute to the emergence of illusions and delusions” (Semeniako, 2025, p. 16). It often provokes fear, anger, or allegiance, and is instrumental in steering (unreflective) public opinion toward a specific agenda.

Documenting consists of presenting factual, verifiable information—such as official data, statistics, reports, eyewitness accounts, or recorded events—to establish an argument’s credibility and legitimacy. It appeals to the audience’s trust in evidence. In journalism, documenting is especially effective to support claims, reinforce transparency, and signal journalistic integrity.

Exposing refers to revealing suppressed or underreported facts or motives, illustrating contradictions or identifying misinformation. It is used to undermine the authority of, or trust in, the reported source or to counter a claim.

Exploring is a strategy that refers to investigating a topic from multiple angles without necessarily reaching a definitive conclusion. Exploring different perspectives of an issue broadens understanding and adds nuance to the narrative.

Covering is used when reporting or summarizing events, statements, or developments in a neutral or factual tone. It is aimed at informing the audience of current events or official positions while providing a broader context and background to the story being reported.

Analyzing means breaking down complex events or issues to explain causes, implications, and relationships. It often involves interpretation, expert input, or historical context, and is employed to guide the public’s understanding of underlying dynamics and to highlight broader significance.

While these strategies often overlap in quality journalism, their integration and effectiveness is a mark of contemporary media discourse, particularly in cases of strategic political coverage. By using a mixture of analysis, exemplification, explanation, questioning, and speculation, journalists can address complex topics and engage various demographics to generate understanding and public debate. From a critical perspective, analyzing how rhetorical strategies are used to frame arguments is essential to improving conflict-related media communication and prevent public misperceptions.

6.4 Research Design and Dataset Characteristics

This analysis is supported by a dataset of news items about the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, excerpted from the top three most read online newspapers in Romania: Libertatea.ro, Adevarul.ro, and Stiripesurse.ro, which, according to the *Digital News Report* (Reuters, 2024, p. 101), enjoy a degree of citizen trust ranging between 49% and 51%. This dataset is part of the Romanian language corpus of the CORECON project that includes texts compiled from the Romanian mass media, published between February 24, 2022 (the outbreak of the full-scale war) and February 28, 2024.

6.4.1 *Keyword Catalogue*

In this study of framing national security concerns, a list of lexemes (nouns) has been identified together with the respective word families that semantically refer to the state of being concerned or that designate affects or emotional reactions related to fear, grouping them into three categories, based on their ascending intensity.

The first group includes “neliniște” [unrest] (a general feeling of discomfort, worry, or anxiety, often stemming from a sense of something being wrong or uncertain) and “îngrijorare” [worry+concern] (a state of unease about potential problems, differing in their intensity and focus). Whereas *worrying* is characterized by anxious, repetitive thoughts about negative outcomes, sometimes leading to feelings of fear or panic, especially when the situation is beyond one's control, *concern* is a more measured state of mind involving a focus on a problem with the intention of taking precautions. “Sperietură” [scare] is a state of being scared based on something sudden and unexpected. The middle category bridges “frică” and “teamă” [fear] (a state of being troubled, generated by a real or imaginary danger, an evil that is predicted and likely to happen, also defined as a lack of courage). The last group consists of “spaimă” [fright] (a powerful and violent emotional state of being frightened, induced by something unpredictable, dangerous, menacing), “groază” [horror] (terrible fright generated by a huge danger perceived as horrifying), “teroare” [terror] (intentionally-provoked fear, through threats/intimidating means), “panică” [panic] (unexplained fear, of an individual or group), “stres” [stress] (persistent anxiety with a detrimental effect on the body, often based on environmental factors or a shock), and “anxietate” [anxiety] (a pathological state of restlessness, fear).

Whereas the first category includes the semantic field relating to a “rational” sense of fear, the second group includes states that can trigger fear in a generic sense, and the third includes lexemes that designate the manifestation of the intention to induce fear. All the listed states of emotion can lead to other types of affect: “nesiguranță” [uncertainty] (lack of safety, insecurity or anxiety regarding a material future in particular) and “instabilitate” [instability] (lack of stability/balance). Generically, the state of fear can be the consequence of actions against someone: “întimidare” [intimidation] (instilling feelings of fear in someone, causing them to lose their self-confidence) or “amenințare” [threat] (manifesting the intention to harm someone, in order to intimidate them or to obtain something from them).

6.4.2 *Quantitative and Qualitative Analytic Protocols*

To carry out the quantitative analysis we used the digital tool *LancsBox* on an annotated dataset, processing a relatively large number of journalistic texts covering the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, increasing the validity and reliability as well as efficiency of the analysis. The KWIC tool (KeyWord in Context) generated the list of all occurrences of the lexemes selected for search in the form of concordance lines.

To check the meaning and reference of the keywords, a context of 10 tokens left and right of the term were analyzed. The analyzed examples were selected based on relevance to the four thematic categories of national security concerns, known here to be generated by the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

The qualitative analysis was informed by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), employed not as a specific method but rather as a critical attitude towards the use of discourse practices to maintain existing power relationships. CDA is “a critical perspective that may be found in all areas of discourse studies [...] CDA is discourse study *with an attitude*” (van Dijk, 2015, p. 466). Mainly interested in and motivated by pressing social issues, this approach is employed to better understand the world through an analysis of language structure and function, a complementarity that typifies discourse in terms of the social conditions of text production and interpretation. The point here is that journalistic discourse is a product of the social context it illustrates, functioning in that environment through the process of interaction and semantic choice. Using CDA in this study was instrumental in discovering how mediated discourse is shaped by a specific context and how it can further shape the general public’s perception.

6.5 Results: Framing National Security Concerns

Using LancsBox software, 851 texts were identified in our dataset, and the range of frequencies of our keywords was subsequently calculated (Fig. 6.1).

The word “ameninţare” [threat] (n = 248) is the most frequent, far above “îngrijorare” [concern+worry] (n = 118) and “teamă” [fear] (n = 75). This downgrades the Romanian hypernym “frică” [fear] to the fourth position (n = 44). The least common terms are “spaimă” [fright] (n = 6), “nesiguranţă” [uncertainty] (n = 6), and “anxietate” [anxiety] (n = 5). The fact that “insecuritate” [insecurity] does not appear in our dataset indicates journalistic preference for the common term “nesiguranţă” [uncertainty], with a more extended meaning.

Regarding the contexts in which the keywords appear, a representative sample of article fragments was selected within the topical areas (T1–T4) that have been translated and analyzed to identify the framing strategies they illustrate.

The word “ameninţare” [threat] refers to ways of attack (aerial bombs, maritime, nuclear, cyber) and frames collective security, inter-state relations, geopolitics, migration, economy, commerce, or tourism:

T1

- (1) “The Ukronazism represents no less, but a greater *threat* to the world and Russia than German Nazism of the Hitlerite version.” (*Adevărul*, 4 April 2022)

T2

- (2) “In this situation, Russia may pose a major conventional military *threat* to NATO for the first time since the collapse of the Soviet Union.” (*Adevărul*, 17 December 2023)

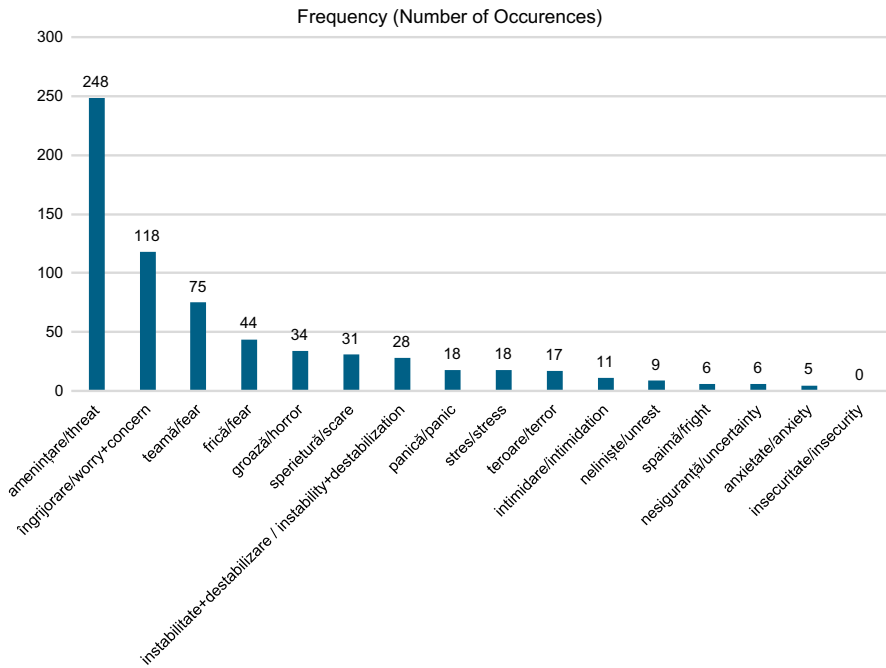


Fig. 6.1 Frequency of keywords related to national security concerns

- (3) “Because Russia *threatens* the entire civilized world—the fight is now going to NATO’s border.” (*Libertatea*, 11 May 2022)
- (4) “Changes in the Baltics, the EU, and NATO are reshaping the Russian *threat*. Putin’s invasion of Ukraine has prompted NATO to launch a huge strategic review.” (*stiripesurse.ro*, 29 September 2023)

T3

- (5) “Russia *threatens* Romania: If F-16 planes used by Ukraine take off from Romanian territory, Moscow [...] will take measures.” (*Adevărul*, 15 December 2023)
- (6) “Although *the threat* remains relatively remote, countries bordering Russia have nevertheless begun to raise their level of preparedness.” (*stiripesurse.ro*, 7 February 2024)

T4

- (7) “Putin’s *threat* to resort to nuclear weapons ‘is something we should take very seriously’.” (*Adevărul*, 21 September 2022)
- (8) “Putin’s nuclear bomb *threats* worry the world the most.” (*Libertatea*, 25 May 2022)
- (9) “[Putin] *threatens* world peace and *threatens* genocide, the use of nuclear weapons.” (*stiripesurse.ro*, 28 February 2022)

The word “îngrijorare” [worry+concern], sometimes collocates with adjectives such as “crazy and terrifying” war, and “electronic” war, often referring to nuclear threats, immigration, poverty, bombings, elections abroad, economy and finance.

T1

- (10) “The pressure of the moment that marks the exact historical landmark in which the great Soviet army witnessed the surrender of the Nazis before him may force Putin to follow his calling as a great leader and create, in turn, a historical moment [...]. What *is worrying* is that a campaign has already begun on official Russian media channels through which the idea of creating a historical moment in the near future is being subtly propagated among the population, [...]. What will Romania do to defend its territorial integrity in a possible scenario of redrawing the borders in the area?” (stiripesurse.ro, 8 May 2022)

T2

- (11) “...an unnamed head of state who reportedly expressed *concern* that NATO was ‘barking at Russia’s gates’ in a way that could lead to war.” (Adevărul, 30 November 2022)

T3

- (12) “In fact, an analysis by the Euro-Atlantic Resilience Center (E-ARC) shows that Russia’s rapprochement with Romania *should concern us* for at least four reasons.” (Adevărul, 25 May 2022)

T4

- (13) “Putin’s threats with the nuclear bomb *worry* the world the most» says researcher George Epurescu.” (Libertatea, 25 May 2022)

The term “teamă” [fear] often concerns repercussions, nuclear threats, and references death:

T1

- (14) “I *fear* the approach of May 9, the date on which Victory Day is celebrated in Russia, a moment that would create the perfect opportunity for Putin to launch such a decisive move that would decide the fate of the war.” (stiripesurse.ro, 8 May 2022)
- (15) “Does Vladimir Putin *fear* a direct war with NATO or is he looking for this war? [...] If NATO enters the war, we are talking about a world war.” (Libertatea, 20 June 2022)

T3

- (16) “I *fear* the approach of May 9, the date on which Victory Day is celebrated in Russia [...] What will Romania do to defend its territorial integrity in a possible scenario of redrawing the borders in the area?” (stiripesurse.ro, 8 May 2022)

T4

- (17) “Romania is conducting atomic physics research near Moscow, together with the Russians. [...] At Dubna, the profile is nuclear research and hence comes a greater *fear* of continuing the collaborations.” (*Libertatea*, 25 May 2022)

The word “*frică*” [fear] concerns Russian propaganda and occupation, as well as military framings of conscription/war/outbreak of World War III, or domestic fears of poverty, death.

T1

- (18) “*The fear* of Russians is understandable perhaps for historical reasons, but today it is not justified.” (*Adevărul*, 13 July 2023)

The word “*groază*” [horror] is found in phraseology related to conscription/war, death, or in the general framings of the future.

T2

- (19) “German Chancellor Olaf Scholz [...], speaking of a ‘*horrible* day for Ukraine’ and ‘a black day for Europe’. [...] He also said that Berlin would consult with its G7, NATO and EU partners.” (*Adevărul*, 24 February 2022)

“*Sperietură*” [scare] is a word that relates to conscription and recruitment as well as Ukraine bombings:

T2

- (20) “...the current vice-chairman of the Security Council in Moscow accuses that Western generals are trying ‘once again *to scare*’ Russia. Then he threatens a ‘big war’ between Russia and NATO” (*Adevărul*, 4 February 2024)

There is a difference in the frames “*instabilitate*” [instability] that is mainly political, social, economic-financial, and “*destabilizare*” [destabilization] that is likely to collocate with the borders.

T2

- (21) “Any irretrievably lost territory to the aggressor [...] offers the Kremlin both time to rebuild its arsenal and the prospect of unrepentantly considering various other scenarios designed *to destabilize* NATO’s eastern flank.” (*Libertatea*, 11 December 2023)

T4

- (22) “These types of threats are compounded by *the instability* created around the Zaporozhye nuclear power plant, Ukraine” (*Adevărul*, 29 August 2022)

The term “*panică*” [panic] points to behavior related to war and bombings, but also to financial issues and nuclear threats.

T3

- (23) “Tax consultant Emilian Duca says that Romania is currently facing the effects of *panic* on the financial markets.” (*Libertatea*, 25 February 2022)

T4

- (24) "...in the spring *the panic* over a possible nuclear accident had also gripped Romanians, who were desperately looking for any medicine with iodine in pharmacies." (*Adevărul*, 1 September 2022)

"Teroare" [terror] is usually political and military whereas "intimidare" [intimidation] concerns humans: priests, Christians, soldiers, civilians.

T2

- (25) "Russia is causing a new wave of migration of Ukrainians to the countries of the European Union [...] Russian *terror* against our energy facilities aims to cause as many problems as possible with electricity and heating for the Ukrainian population" (*Adevărul*, 23 October 2022)

T3

- (26) "The fact that Ukraine continues to fight does not just save Ukraine; it is an assurance that Russia does not have the power *to intimidate* (or worse) the Baltic states, Moldova, Romania, and other neighbors." (*Adevărul*, 9 March 2023)

T4

- (27) "...this is a conventional, quasi-nuclear, large-scale, *intimidation* regional war. Why is it a quasi-nuclear *intimidation* war?" (*Adevărul*, 10 February 2023)

Whereas "nelinişte" [unrest] is generated by nuclear threats, bombings, or fake news, "nesiguranţă" [uncertainty] pertains to communication, and "spaimă" [fright] is experienced by Russia's Eastern neighbors.

T2

- (28) "If this buffer zone disappears, the relative calm of NATO allies in the East could turn into total *unrest*." (*Adevărul*, 17 December 2023)

T4

- (29) "Russian President Vladimir Putin's threats of possible use of nuclear weapons against any state that might interfere with Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine have raised new questions and *unrest* about the dangers of nuclear war." (*Adevărul*, 29 August 2022)

T2

- (30) "...the pro-Kremlin disinformation apparatus supported by exploiting fears and *uncertainty* must continue to condemn 'Western expansionism' and prolong the sense of threat regarding the encirclement of Russia." (*Adevărul*, 10 July 2022)

T3

- (31) “A Russian victory would *frighten* Russia’s European neighbors, possibly leading to a collapse of European collective security” (*Adevărul*, 24 December 2023)

The results of the qualitative analysis show that journalists from the three online newspapers use various discursive strategies to express concern about political and military actions, social, economic, and financial issues generated by the war. After analyzing the selected examples against the discursive strategies mentioned and defined in the first section, these were grouped according to identified commonalities (Table 6.1).

The context-sensitive analysis of terms associated with the notion of concern and its manifestations (fright, horror, anxiety, worry, stress, panic) or roots (insecurity, instability, threat, intimidation) foregrounds the issues of national security, in which NATO and the EU play an important role. *LancsBox* helped us extract some general patterns regarding the way in which certain “affective” lexemes are used in Romania’s online media. The selected keywords thus designate emotional states or reactions to existential uncertainties caused by war-induced threats. By deploying different degrees of affective states (levels of “fear,” the semantic differentiation between “worry” and “concern”), journalists are framing national security issues strategically depending on political-military and socio-economic contexts related to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

By cataloguing and comparing the identified discursive strategies, one can see that questioning and speculating are the most utilized in all three sources because of their role in shaping public perception by subtly guiding interpretation, implying motives, and casting doubt or legitimacy on actions and actors. Questioning introduces uncertainty or suspicion without making direct accusations, aligning with Entman’s (1993) notion of framing through which making certain aspects of reality more salient helps promote a particular interpretation. Speculation fills informational gaps with possibility rather than fact, and presents situations as hypothetical but plausible, thereby amplifying the perception of threat by framing the conflict as part of a larger ideological or historical struggle. Questioning and speculating are not neutral; they are rhetorical tools that shape how threats are perceived, who is seen as legitimate, and what actions are justified. In the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, they are central to the battle for narrative dominance.

Despite the journalistic context, manipulation has also been spotted to frame threat during the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. It involves the deliberate use of words and narrative structures to influence public perception, justify actions, and delegitimize the opponent. Given that framing emphasizes certain aspects of reality while omitting others, overemphasizing threat is a manipulative strategy that provokes emotional responses and legitimizes defense. In the context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, manipulation is a strategic weapon to decide who is seen as aggressor or victim, and what actions are deemed justifiable. Understanding these discursive tactics is essential for resisting propaganda and fostering informed public discourse.

Table 6.1 Discursive strategies collected from the three outlets with references to examples they list

Discursive strategies	<i>Adevărul</i>	<i>Libertatea</i>	<i>Știripesurse</i>
Explanation	(26) illustrates the broader significance of Ukraine's defense	(8), (13) emphasize the global anxiety caused by nuclear threats rhetoric	(9) emphasize the global anxiety caused by nuclear threats rhetoric
Exemplification	(5) highlights direct threats to Romania, by exemplifying with the help of a hypothetical (24) provides a concrete example of public fear		
Questioning	(7) raises concerns about the credibility and implications of nuclear threats (11) challenges the dominant narrative by introducing alternative viewpoints (29) encourages reflection on the implications of nuclear threats	(15) invites the audience to consider both possibilities without providing a definitive answer; it encourages speculation and reflection on Putin's intentions	(10) invites elaboration on Romania's response to the threat regarding its territorial integrity (14) the final question is not necessarily seeking an answer but is used to provoke thought and stir public discourse; it challenges the audience (and possibly policymakers) to consider Romania's strategic posture
Rationale/ Argumentation	(1) attempts to build a logical comparison between historical Nazism and current Ukrainian nationalism (18) offers a reasoned perspective to counter prevailing fears (26) justifies continued resistance as a deterrent	(21) argues that appeasement emboldens aggression	
Ridiculing	(1) labels Ukraine as "Ukronazism", implicitly mocking the idea of Ukraine as a democratic state by labelling it with an extreme term (20) mocks Western concerns as fearmongering		

(continued)

Table 6.1 (continued)

Discursive strategies	<i>Adevărul</i>	<i>Libertatea</i>	<i>Știripesurse</i>
Speculating	(2) suggests a hypothetical future threat without concrete evidence—Russia's potential threat to NATO (5) implies potential escalation based on hypothetical military actions; suggests a possible escalation involving Romania (28) predicts the consequences of losing strategic territory (31) speculates on the consequences of Russian victory	(15) introduces a hypothetical and dramatic escalation; it suggests a possible but uncertain outcome, heightening the stakes (17) raises concerns about the implications of continued cooperation	(10) imagines Putin's motivations and possible actions (16) frames the situation as hypothetical but plausible inviting the audience to consider worst-case scenarios without asserting them as facts
Manipulation	(1) equates Ukraine with Nazism to provoke emotional reactions and justify aggression	(3) uses emotionally charged language ("entire civilized world") to polarize the audience (8), (13) use fear to reinforce the urgency of the situation	(10) suggests a mythologized view of leadership to justify aggression
Documenting	(7) cites expert opinion to support the seriousness of the threat (12) cites a credible source to support claims (22) refers to specific locations and events (25) cites observable effects like migration and infrastructure damage	(19) quotes a political leader to validate the illegality of the invasion (23) uses expert commentary to support the claim	(4) refers to NATO's strategic review as evidence of the seriousness of the threat
Exposing	(22) highlights the danger of nuclear facilities in conflict zones (25) reveals the humanitarian consequences of the conflict	(3) reveals the perceived scale of the threat (17) reveals sensitive scientific collaboration; nuclear plant instability	(10) reveals the narrative being pushed by Russian media

(continued)

Table 6.1 (continued)

Discursive strategies	<i>Adevărul</i>	<i>Libertatea</i>	<i>Știripesurse</i>
Exploring	(11) mentions pope's remarks about the causes of the conflict (18) considers historical context versus current realities (24) investigates societal reactions to nuclear threats		(6) investigates regional responses to the threat; explores the need for military preparedness
Covering	(29) summarizes international diplomatic concerns	(19) reports on international reactions	
Analyzing	(2) places the current situation in historical context to assess potential outcomes; examines the threat to NATO (12) breaks down the threat into economic, military, geopolitical, and diplomatic dimensions (27) defines the nature of the conflict	(21) evaluates the strategic consequences of territorial losses	(4) evaluates geopolitical shifts and their implications; strategic review

The most salient informative/factual strategy in our analysis is documenting. It is instrumental in framing concerns by providing a veneer of objectivity, legitimacy, and credibility. Unlike manipulation or speculation, documenting relies on evidence—quotes, testimonies, and statistics—to construct persuasive accounts of aggression, victimhood, and justification. Documenting is a powerful discursive strategy that frames the concerns, not just by showing what happened but by shaping how it should be interpreted. It mobilizes support and influences immediate reactions as well as long-term historical narratives.

6.6 Conclusion

This study has aimed at providing a discourse analysis of how Romanian media narratives frame the threats to national security in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. By examining discursive patterns across three leading news platforms over a two-year period, the recurring themes and strategies in media discourse have been identified, and the semantic mechanisms employed in the portrayal of fear, concern, instability, and perceived threats have been documented,

underscoring the complex interplay between editorial practice, audience targeting, national context, and the collective perception.

Beyond mapping linguistic choices and thematic domains, the findings highlight the broader implications of media framing on public perception, especially in times of geopolitical tensions, as the case of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. The study demonstrates how Romanian media construct and amplify war-related threats through narrative framing and selective emphasis, contributing to a deeper understanding of current news reporting and offering insights for strengthening media literacy and ethical reporting practices, particularly in journalism education. Cases of Romanian online media resorting to questioning, speculating, manipulating, and documenting were discussed as discursive strategies to overwhelmingly frame the security concerns generated by the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

New avenues for research could be explored by conducting a comparative study of framing strategies employed by news media in other countries, with the overall aim of deepening the understanding of various media cultures. Such a comparison would offer cross-linguistic insights, and reveal how different institutional, political, and historical contexts shape media narratives, particularly in relation to sensitive topics of military conflicts, migration, or security. Furthermore, it would identify the national biases rooted in national interests, ideological leanings, or citizens' expectations. Further qualitative, critical, and comparative analyses could contribute to improved media literacy, helping the public recognize manipulation or emphasis patterns and foster critical thinking across linguistic and cultural boundaries. The findings could acquaint policymakers, journalists, and educators with transnational communication trends, improving crisis communication and international coverage. Last but not least, contextualizing the narratives surrounding the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and comparing media from frontline and global contexts and perspectives would illustrate ways in which geographic proximity influences urgency, narrative framing, emotional intensity, and ultimately, perception of reality (see also Matusiak, Chap. 3 in this volume).

Acknowledgement This work was funded by the EU's NextGenerationEU instrument through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan of Romania—Pillar III-C9–I8, managed by the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalization, within the project entitled *The coverage and reception of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in Polish, Romanian and English-language media: A comparative critical discourse study with recommendations for journalism training (CORECON)*, contract no. 760244/28.12.2023, code CF 25/27.07.2023.

References

- Agreement on security cooperation between Romania and Ukraine (2024). <https://www.presidency.ro/en/media/agreement-on-security-cooperation-between-romania-and-ukraine1720707048>
- Alias, A. (2024). Deciphering speculative discourse in MH370 news coverage: A corpus-based critical discourse study of selected local and foreign news outlets. *International Journal of*

- Multidisciplinary Research and Analysis*, 7(4), 1623–1635. <https://doi.org/10.47191/ijmra/v7-i04-23>
- Billah, M., & Biswas, A. (2024). Media representation of the Russia-Ukraine war: A comparative discourse analysis of Reuters and TASS. *South Asian Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities*, 5(5), 150–175. <https://doi.org/10.48165/sajssh.2024.5508>
- Brusylowska, O., & Maksymenko, I. (2023). Analysis of the media discourse on the 2022 war in Ukraine: The case of Russia. *Regional Science Policy & Practice*, 15(1), 222–236. <https://doi.org/10.1111/rsp3.12579>
- Calistru, E., & Burtan, L. (2021). *Anti-Western narratives in Romania*, GLOBSEC. <https://www.globsec.org/what-we-do/publications/anti-western-narratives-romania>
- Capati, A. (2025). The discursive framing of European integration in EU-wide media: Actors, narratives and policies following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. *Comparative European Politics*, 23, 271–299. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41295-024-00397-1>
- Catrina, C. S. (2024). The influence of the Ukrainian conflict on Romanian, Polish and Bulgarian security and defence policies. *Political Perspectives*, 17(1–2), 29–48. <https://doi.org/10.25019/perspol/24.17.3> (in Romanian).
- Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51–58. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x>
- Gökhan, M. (2024). An analysis of discursive strategies in political discourse: The case of Russian–Ukrainian war. *NOVA Language Journal*, 1(1), 47–57. <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/nova/issue/88602/1572589>
- Golop, V. C. (2024). Dynamics of the Russian-Ukrainian war. An analysis of the impact on future security and defence policy. *Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference Strategies XXI: The complex and dynamic nature of the security environment*, 1, 5–14. <https://doi.org/10.53477/3045-2309-23-01>
- INSCOP Survey Report. (2025). <https://www.inscop.ro/24-iunie-2025-rfi-sondaj-inscop-pest-70-dintre-romani-au-incredere-in-nato-iar-pest-60-in-uniunea-europeana/>
- Jureńczyk, L. (2023). The policy of the United States towards Russia after the aggression in Ukraine—Striving for permanent weakening or readiness to rebuild cooperation? *Studia Polityczne*, 51(2), 127–149. <https://doi.org/10.35757/STP.2023.51.2.04>
- Kwon, W., Clarke, I., & Wodak, R. (2014). Micro-Level discursive strategies for constructing shared views around strategic issues in team meetings. *Journal of Management Studies*, 51(2), 265–290. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12036>
- Marinescu, V., Fox, B., Rodideal, A. A., & Marinache, R. (2024). Media representations of nuclear threats during the Russian invasion of Ukraine. *Horyzonty Polityki*, 15(51), 61–80. <https://doi.org/10.35765/hp.2492>
- Moga, T. L., Bureiko, N., & Simionov, L. M. (2021). Constructing Romania's foreign policy and security role in its eastern neighborhood: The cases of Moldova and Ukraine. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 21(4), 615–631. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2021.1960692>
- Molek-Kozakowska, K., & Dragomir, I. (2025). Demystifying, delegitimizing, debunking: Discursive editorial strategies of neutralizing the rationales for Russia's intervention in Ukraine. *Media, War & Conflict*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17506352251314876>
- Obaidullah, M., & Shaikh, H. (2024). Unmasking media narratives through comparative corpus linguistic analysis: A study of Russia-Ukraine conflict. *Linguistics, Literature and English Teaching Journal*, 14(1), 47–76. <https://doi.org/10.18592/let.v14i1.12737>
- Pavelescu, A. O., Acasandrei, V. T., Vamanu, B. I., Vamanu, D. V., & Pavelescu, M. (2023). Determination of potential areas of influence on the Romanian territory of Ukrainian nuclear power plants in the context of the crisis generated by the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. *Annals of the Academy of Romanian Scientists*, 8(1), 26–45. <https://doi.org/10.56082/annalsarsciophyschem.2023.1.26>
- Popa, A. (2023). Geopolitical and geostrategic challenges in the Black Sea region. *Geopolitics* <https://www.geopolitic.ro/2023/05/geopolitical-geostrategic-challenges-black-sea-region/> (in Romanian).

- Popovici, O.C. (2022). Romania external relations briefing: Facing the conflict in Ukraine: Romania's position. *Weekly Briefing*, 48(4), 1–4. https://china-cee.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/2022er02_Romania.pdf
- Reisigl, M. (2017). The discourse-historical approach (DHA). In J. Flowerdew, & J. E. Richardson (Eds.), *Critical discourse analysis and politics. The Routledge Handbook of Critical Discourse Studies* (pp. 52–61). Routledge.
- Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. (2024). *Digital News Report*. <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2024>
- Roine, H. R. (2020). On speculation as a strategy. *Fafnir—Nordic Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy Research*, 7(2), 8–15. <https://journal.finfar.org/articles/on-speculation-as-a-strategy/>
- Semeniako, I. (2025). Manipulation strategy in political discourse within the framework of ESP teaching at higher military education institutions. *Political Science and Security Studies Journal*, 6(2), 14–19. <https://doi.org/10.33445/psssj.2025.6.2.2>
- Statista (2024). *What are your biggest concerns in regards to the war in Ukraine?* <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1314918/romania-concerns-in-regards-to-the-war-in-ukraine/>
- Thomson, C., Mader, M., Münchow, F., Reifler, J., & Schoen, H. (2023). European public opinion: United in supporting Ukraine, divided on the future of NATO. *International Affairs*, 99(6), 2485–2500. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iad241>
- Tudorache, P., & Constantinescu, M. (2024). Enhancing decision-making resilience through mission command: The particular case of Ukraine. *Czech Military Review*, 4(33), 20–36. <https://doi.org/10.3849/2336-2995.33.2024.04.020-036>
- van Dijk, T.A. (2015). Critical discourse analysis. In D. Tannen, H. E. Hamilton & D. Schiffrin (Eds.), *The Handbook of discourse analysis* (pp. 466–485). John Wiley & Sons.

Isabela Dragomir is an Associate Professor and Vice-Rector for International Relations, Nicolae Bălcescu Land Forces Academy of Sibiu, Romania. Her fields of research include EFL, ESP, gender mainstreaming, and intercultural communication. She is a beneficiary of a Fulbright scholarship at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California, USA, serves as a language expert in several international and national projects and has coordinated public diplomacy and educational projects under the aegis of NATO PDD. Her publications explore methodologies of English language teaching, online teaching and evaluation, developing English language skills and critical thinking, English in military higher education and communication, gender studies, and critical discourse analysis.

Valerica Sporiș is an Associate Professor in the Department of Romance Studies at Lucian Blaga University, Sibiu, Romania, teaching and researching stylistics, normative and expressive grammar, language and communication, and Romanian as a foreign language. She has published books and articles in the field of Romanian Linguistics and has used a corpus of Romanian media in several articles on lexical creativity and conceptual metaphor. She is a researcher in CORECON and PATLIRO (*Preservation, Transformation and Study of Romanian Linguistic Heritage in the Context of Globalization*).

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if you modified the licensed material. You do not have permission under this license to share adapted material derived from this chapter or parts of it.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.



Chapter 7

Discourse Representations of Ukrainian Refugees in Romanian Online News



Radu Drăgulescu

Abstract This chapter examines the discursive representation of Ukrainian refugees in Romanian online news outlets between the beginning of the war in February 2022 and April 2024. Romania received millions of transitory refugees and issued nearly 180,000 temporary protection permits. Drawing on a Romanian-language corpus of 248 articles retrieved through a keyword search, the study investigates how media coverage categorized displaced Ukrainians through migration-oriented terminology that turns out to be ideology-laden. The media framing of Ukrainian refugees is subsequently approached through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Findings show that the refugee position central to the dataset collocates with humanitarian and solidarity themes, but is also associated with securitization, pressure, and threat, despite the fact that the term *emigrant* remains largely neutral. Six frames emerge from this distribution: solidarity and humanitarian support, integration, economic impact, security anxieties, geopolitical positioning, and political polarization. The analysis reveals that the studied Romanian media mainly construct Ukrainians as victims and symbolic cultural neighbors.

7.1 Introduction

The escalation of the war in Ukraine in 2022 led to one of the largest refugee movements in Europe since the Second World War. By the end of the critical year 2022, Ukraine registered around 17 million displacements cases, representing approximately 40% of the country's population (Wildemann et al., 2023). As the end of 2024 approached, about 8 million Ukrainian refugees were displaced in European

R. Drăgulescu (✉)
Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Sibiu, Romania
e-mail: radu.dragulescu@ulbsibiu.ro

countries. At first, the targeted countries were those that bordered Ukraine, such as Poland (with an influx of approximately 1.5 million refugees; Fusiek, 2022), Slovakia, Romania, Hungary or Moldova. Since the beginning of the war, over 3.7 million refugees have passed through Romania (UNHCR, 2023). By the end of 2024, it has been estimated that Romania had issued nearly 180,000 temporary protection permits (AIDA RO, 2025). In this context, the study aims to investigate how Ukrainian refugees have been represented in Romanian online news discourse between 2022 and 2024 and what these representations reveal about broader societal ideologies. Drawing on several Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) frameworks, the objective is to uncover the implicit inequalities that underlie seemingly neutral media language.

Discourse representations of Ukrainian refugees in Romanian online news have been influenced by various political, social, and economic factors. From a political perspective, the way Ukrainian refugees are portrayed in Romanian media can be linked to the country's policies, its geopolitical stance, and its domestic political climate. The patterns of Romanian media coverage regarding Ukrainian immigrants, particularly in the context of the ongoing war in Ukraine, can be broadly categorized by several trends, with variations depending on the political, social, and historical context. These patterns are based on official and mediated naming practices, in particular the distinctions between “refugiat” [refugee], “migrant” [migrant], “imigrant” [immigrant], and “emigrant” [emigrant]. The broader frames of interpretation that structured reporting on Ukrainian displacement can be considered at the textual level (collocational patterns), the discursive level (topical relations to solidarity, integration, security, economy), and the sociocultural level, assessing Romania's position in European identity politics (Fairclough, 2003).

7.2 Media Reframing of Ukrainian Forced Emigration

Forced displacement—also known as forced migration and forced relocation—has been defined by Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, [n.d.](#)) as “a result of persecution, conflict, generalized violence or human rights violations.” For this chapter, the use of the term of “forced emigration” will be continuous, since the primary objective is to analyze the media representation of Ukrainian refugees in Romania. A population's views on forced emigration resulting from armed conflict can differ drastically from their perspectives on economic migration, for example. Discursively speaking, terminological choices significantly influence the understanding and evaluation of the phenomenon, as the term “migrant” acts in a different ideological frame than the term “refugee.” According to migration studies, leaving their country is a deliberate choice for migrants that is economically influenced, whereas a refugee is “[is a person] forced to flee their own country and seek safety in another country. They are unable to return to their own country because of feared persecution because of who they are, what they believe in or say, or because of armed conflict, violence or serious public disorder” (UNHCR,

n.d.). Therefore, displacement comes as a forced and involuntary reaction to a restrictive context that creates a different reaction to the act of migration itself.

These paradigms function in “deserving refugees” solidarity discourses that stigmatize “undeserving migrants” through the act of othering, as they are viewed as threats to national integrity. De Coninck (2019) expands on the refugee vs migrant perception before the Ukrainian refugee crisis:

When we look at the way refugees and migrants are framed in the context of the refugee crisis, we note four main differences. First, the media’s coverage of refugees is episodic, while migration is covered thematically over longer periods of time. [...] Second, refugees are traditionally framed by media and public discourse as passive and deprived of agency by the dire situation which forced them to flee. In the years following the refugee crisis, they are increasingly portrayed as threatening the European way of life, and as an economic burden to European welfare states [...] The picture on migrant framing is somewhat different, as they have long since been portrayed as opportunists, seeking to benefit from a country’s welfare arrangements—but not as intensely as refugees since they arrive more incrementally [...] This economic dimension is the third key difference in the framing of refugees and migrants, and has been used to delegitimize refugee claims by categorizing them as “economic migrants.” There are also some similarities in the framing of immigrants and refugees: both are linked to criminal activities and portrayed as intruders, particularly by mass media and politicians. (p. 4)

He stressed three categories where attitudes towards refugees and migrants begin to diverge: ethnicity, economic situation (often rooted in economic stigmatization based on ethnicity), and region of origin:

Immigrants and refugees with the same ethnicity as most of the population are preferred to immigrants and refugees with a different ethnicity than most of the population. This can be framed within social identity theory as those with a similar ethnicity to the native population of a country may be perceived as less threatening than those with a different ethnicity, because they likely originate from countries with similar value systems to the four countries in this study – in other words, feelings of symbolic threat towards this group will be lower. (De Coninck, 2019, p. 13)

The war in Ukraine and its consequent massive surge of refugees produced a noticeable shift in the understanding of a refugee crisis (Wildemann et al., 2023):

The conflict in Ukraine and the resulting migration received a lot of attention in media and social media. At the same time, there seems to be a more positive framing of migration, at least towards refugees from Ukraine. Before the escalation of the conflict, media coverage and government policies on migration were mainly focused on other groups coming from conflict zones, such as Syria, Ethiopia, or Afghanistan. However, they are often covered in connection to both economic and security threats. [...] In contrast, in 2022, the humanitarian crisis at the EU border resulting from Ukrainians fleeing the war prompted a massive reaction of support by the western media and a great display of solidarity from the European public in particular. (p. 2754–2755)

Wildemann et al. (2023) identified three primary reasons for this positive reframing of the refugee status in the media that will be repositioned for the objectives of the present chapter: (1) the cultural similarity of the Ukrainian refugees; (2) the demographics of the migrant population (primarily women and children, who garner more empathetic responses from the public); (3) the impact and mediatization of the war.

The key terms here are proximity, vulnerability, and visibility. Proximity and visibility are interconnected notions; the closer a subject is to the space of analysis, the more visibility it has. However, in this case, proximity functions in a dual semantic sense—of geopolitical proximity doubled by a cultural proximity. Ukrainians are treated as more acceptable than non-European refugees because they are usually white, Christian, and neighbors, thereby decreasing the feeling of national symbolic threat that, in De Coninck's (2019) words, respects the principles of ethnicity, economic situation, and region of origin. However, this raises concerns about racialized humanitarianism, especially by placing "acceptable" migrants against minor communities with limited visibility (cf. van Dijk, 1991).

Previous analyses of the discourse centered on Ukrainian refugees reiterated these main points. For example, Dück et al. (2024) continue to elaborate on the systems recognizing cultural proximity, gendered vulnerability, and geopolitical framing that once again stress the fact that solidarity discourses are constructed on proximity, identity, and geopolitics in media. Chendei (2025) adds important discursive positionings by including Ukrainian perspectives in her study analyzing patterns of representation based on authorship. The Ukrainian authors' stance is subjective and assertive, whereas the Europeans' stances are neutralized in trying to establish a fine line between discourses surrounding refugees and migrants.

This selective solidarity is a consequence of a triple system of the humanitarian politics of life (Fassin, 2007), distinguishing between:

- Lives that might be at risk (humanitarian agents) vs lives that can only be sacrificed (the populations among whom they intervene)
- Lives with higher value (expatriate humanitarian workers) vs those that are accorded only limited protection (national staff)
- Lives that can be narrated in the first person (those who intervene) vs lives that are recounted only in the third person (the voiceless in the name of whom intervention is undertaken).

While such usage is functionalized in Westernized Middle East contexts of crisis, this frame can also be applied to the displacement of Ukrainians. Due to a process of outer-identification Romanians are more prone to see themselves in similar subjects found in crisis, especially as the Russian-Ukrainian war turned into a predominant anxiety in Romanian public discourse. For Romania, Ukrainian refugees are lives with higher value—as are Romanians—and lives that can be narrated in the first person, for these narrations can become their own and function by raising the positive image of the nation.

This framing of the shifting representations of Ukrainian refugees not only benefits their vulnerable positions but also offers Romania a path to reestablish its protective position in the resistance of oppressive forces. It has been acknowledged that Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries have long battled a process of brain drain and economic migration. By 2022 about 8 million Romanians had left the country mainly to West European destinations, primarily in search of economic prosperity. Thus, for Ukrainians, CEE is not only made of transit "only" countries,

but becomes a migration destination in crisis, when the priority is not money but rather safety. The Russian-Ukrainian war, and the influx of Ukrainian refugees in countries historically considered only transitory, has also led to the discursive reframing of these countries (Panzaru & Harding, 2025). Romania has made use of this newly acquired reputation to stabilize its positive placement in the response to the humanitarian crisis. These conditions have facilitated a sense of selective humanitarianism whereby Ukrainian refugees are symbolically and materially integrated into a European ideological framework.

7.3 Dataset and Methodological Orientation

This chapter draws on a CDA and computational corpus-assisted approach to examine the discursive representation of Ukrainian refugees in Romanian media in a representative period. The analyzed dataset consists of a Romanian-language corpus of 248 articles published between February 2022 and April 2024, drawn from seven top Romanian outlets: *Digi24.ro*, *Adevărul*, *Libertatea*, *stirileprotv.ro*, *hot-news.ro*, *România TV online*, *stiripesurse*. This dataset represents 12.31% of the total corpus previously gathered on the coverage of the Ukraine war in the Romanian media—a total of 2,013 articles. The 248 articles were compiled through a terminology-driven selection process with the assistance of linguistic analysis software *#LancsBox X* (Brezina & Platt, 2025). The selected lemmas are central to discourses concerning forced emigration and include:

- Naming practices and sociocultural classification: “refugiat” [refugee], “migrant” [migrant], “emigrant” [emigrant], “imigrant” [immigrant];
- Action lemmas, such as “refugia” [to seek shelter], “migra” [to migrate], “emigra” [to emigrate], “imigra” [to immigrate];
- Process lemmas: “refugiere” [to find shelter], “emigrare” [emigration], “migrare” [migration], “imigrare” [immigration];
- Destination: “refugiu” [refuge].

LancsBox X was used to extract occurrences, keyword-in-context (KWIC), and collocates. The CDA frameworks from which conceptual categories for the analysis of the dataset were selected center on van Dijk’s socio-cognitive approach (1998), van Leeuwen’s socio-semantic model (1996), and Fairclough’s three-dimensional model of CDA (1995, 2003). The primary points of concern are: (1) referential strategies that help identify the ideologies behind the act of naming the displaced subjects (e.g., How are Ukrainians classified and labelled?); (2) grammatical agency i.e., activation vs passivity (e.g., Are Ukrainian subjects active agents or passive receivers?); (3) personalization vs impersonalization (e.g., Are Ukrainians shown as humanized families or dehumanized masses?); (4) individualization vs assimilation (Are Ukrainians shown through individual stories or anonymized accounts?); (5) foregrounding vs backgrounding (e.g., Who speaks, who is silenced?).

7.4 Analysis of the Discursive Positioning of Displaced Ukrainians in Romanian News Outlets

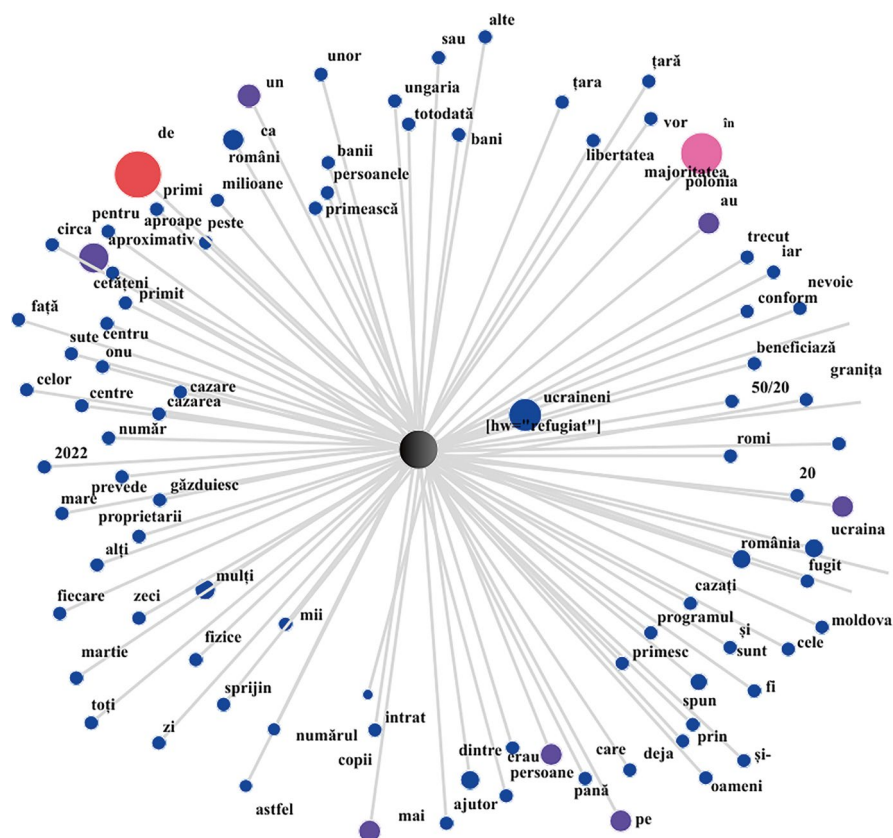
The results of the terminological search concerning naming practices and sociocultural classification were as follows: 511 mentions in 164 distinct contexts. The action inquiry gathered 71 mentions in 58 distinct texts, and the process one gathered 17 cases in 10 contexts. Destination lemma “refugiū” had 18 mentions spread throughout 16 distinct texts.

This terminological distribution shows that Romanian media construct Ukrainian displacement primarily as a matter of identity politics through a process of labelling and categorization. The results confirm the construction of a dichotomy between the “refugee” vs the “migrant”/“emigrant”/“immigrant” that pervades general discourse, reflecting the ideological struggle over classification. The numerical distribution of the terminological appearances is the following: 481 mentions of the term “refugiat” [refugee], 15 for “imigrant” [immigrant], 11 for “migrant” [migrant], and only 4 for “emigrant” [emigrant]. The primacy of the use of “refugee” is evident, so that Ukrainians are discursively located closer to the category of “refugee” than “migrant,” signaling higher legitimacy for their protection.

This argument is supported by the semantic fields and discursive frames these terms appear in collocations with. On a scale from positive to negative contextualization, the order of the four terms would be the following: (1) “refugiat”—positive; “emigrant”—neutral; “migrant”—ambivalent; “imigrant”—negative.

Additionally, the classes of collocates for “refugiat” (Fig. 7.1) overall foreground generic and impersonal categories—“persoane” [people], “oameni” [humans], or ethnic and national markers—“ucraineni” [Ukrainian], “romi” [Roma], followed by quantifiers such as “milion” [million], “mii” [thousands], “sute” [hundreds], “zeci” [tens] that function with degree modifiers—“aproape” [almost], “aproximativ” [approximately], stressing the impossibility of fully establishing the influx of refugees in real-time. There are also collocates for generic, displaced and vulnerable groups, as in children and families—in reference to mothers, children, grandparents. Other important classes of collocates refer to humanitarian needs and aid: “cazare” [housing], “adăpost” [shelter], “sprijin” [support], “centru” [center], “ONU” [UN], “program” [agenda], “guvern” [government], “român” [Romanian], “România” [Romania], “Polonia” [Poland], “Moldova” [Moldova]. Importantly, Romanian media outlets do not frame aid to refugees as a systematic burden but rather as a necessary action for “our” neighbors and cultural “brethren,” as illustrated in examples (1) and (2):

- (1) Mii de refugiați trec granița zilnic, așteptând zeci de ore să iasă din Ucraina, formând cozi interminabile de mașini. [...]. De la izbucnirea războiului din Ucraina, România s-a dovedit a fi un mare prieten, nu doar vecin. [Thousands of refugees cross the border daily, waiting for dozens of hours to leave Ukraine and forming endless queues of cars. [...] Since the outbreak of the war in



Ukraine, Romania has proven to be not only a neighbor, but also a true friend.]
(*Adevărul*, 27 February 2022)

- (2) Theodor Paleologu [Fost Ministru al Culturii din România]: „Pentru că România este unul dintre vecinii cei mai importanți ai Ucrainei. [...]. În plus de asta, România și Ucraina au foarte multe în comun. Au o istorie comună, au asemănări de mentalitate, de cultură, de religie.” [Theodor Paleologu (Former Romanian Minister of Culture): “Because Romania is one of Ukraine’s most important neighbors. [...]. Moreover, Romania and Ukraine share many similarities: a common history, as well as similarities in mentality, culture and religion.”] (*stirileprotv.ro*, 22 December 2022)

Emigrants, on the other hand, are contextualized through neutral and administrative terms (Fig. 7.2). As actors of the transit migration from Central and Eastern European countries, they had previously crossed these borders, as shown through collocates such as “tranzit” [transit], “țară” [country], “teritoriu” [territory]. However, the word “migrant” occupies a more ambivalent position (Fig. 7.3). On

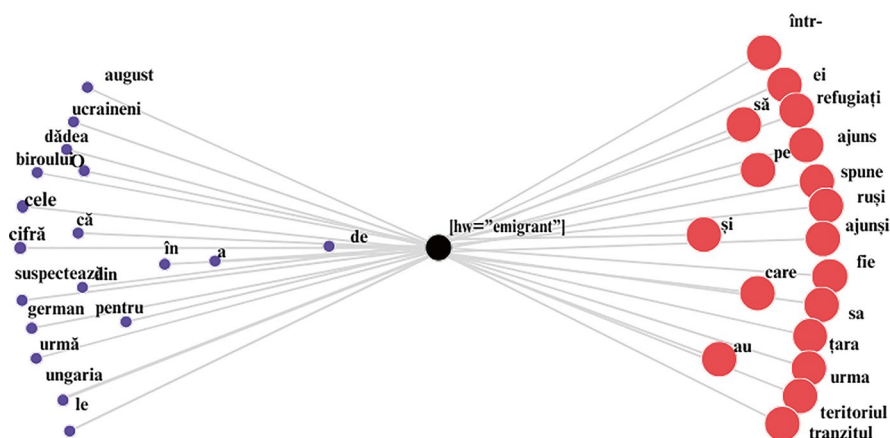


Fig. 7.2 Collocates of the lemma “emigrant” in Romanian

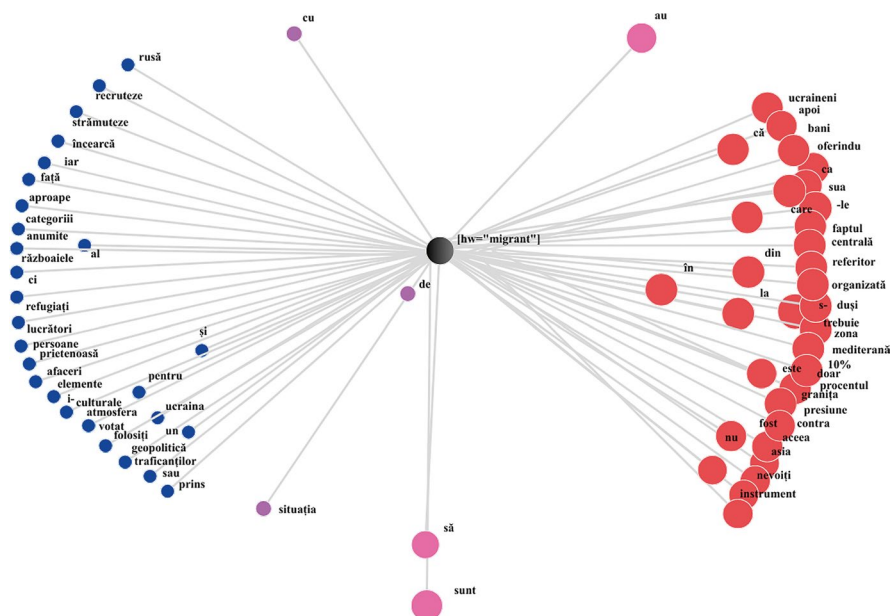


Fig. 7.3 Collocates of the lemma “migrant” in Romanian

the one hand, collocates such as “presiune” [pressure] and “graniță” [border] construct migrants as part of the crisis. On the other, terms like “afacere” [business] situate them within contexts of integration and contribution. This mixed pattern suggests that “migrant” is a flexible category, oscillating between securitization and normalization.

The term “imigrant” is marked by a consistently securitized and negative frame, as its collocates include “amenințare” [threat], “mobilizare” [mobilization], “graniță” [border], “aflux” [influx], “val” [wave], “economic” [economy], “Rusia” [Russia], “negative” [negative], etc. (Fig. 7.4). This semantic field ties immigrants to threats and economic or political pressures.

On an agency level, terminology used in reference to refugees represented them in subject positions, also by stressing the position of Romania as a place of refuge. Only at times was the refugee an object in discourses about humanitarian aid. Ukrainian refugees, therefore, become active agents in the process of escaping the war. The term “refugiat” was personalized by stressing the arrival of displaced children and families, and also being impersonalized in numbers-oriented reports. “Refugee” was also most connected to individual stories of Ukrainian displaced subjects being portrayed in Romania in narratives that highlight how welcoming Romania and its citizens were, the Ukrainians given the possibility of sharing their respective experiences. However, it is important to mention that the plural form of the term outnumbered the singular, with over 438 mentions.

Regarding the other three counterparts of reference in the process of migration, none of these terms signal agency, and individualization categories rarely appear. Migrants, emigrants, and immigrants are mostly impersonalized, collectivized, assimilated, and silenced, even though they were still given some form of discursive

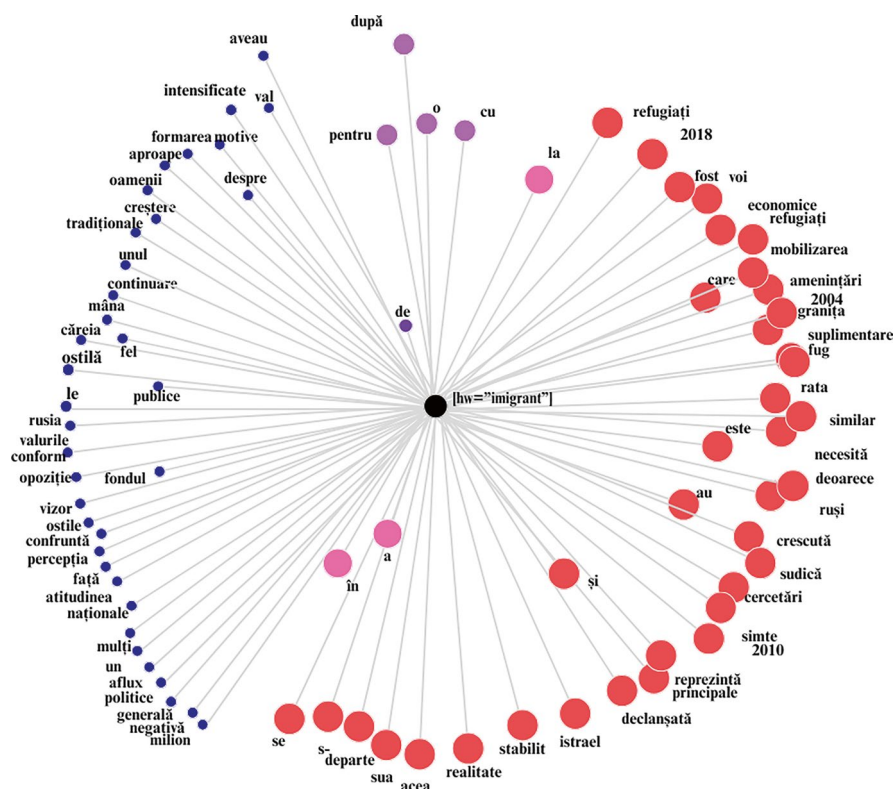


Fig. 7.4 Collocates of the lemma “imigrant” [immigrant] in Romanian

agency. Those terms never appear in the singular form, once again showcasing the more positive reception of refugees as opposed to other migrant categories that are “othered,” their presence being mediated by Romanian or European actors.

A particular collocate that appeared in reference to “refugiat” was “rom” [Roma], with 7 mentions. It has been noted in reports that “[t]he lack of knowledge about Roma refugees from Ukraine is just one aspect of the challenges that they experience. From the moment they have crossed a border, they have faced difficulties in all essential aspects of protection” (Eredics, 2023). These systemic difficulties stem from the historical understanding of the Roma minority, with discourses constructing Roma as both threats and underserving beneficiaries of resources provided by the Romanian government, and with the issue of Roma slavery not being fully addressed in the public sphere. However, by integrating the Roma community in the discourse of the Russian-Ukrainian war and forced emigration, the news outlet addressed the issue in a neutral manner and through references to Roma communities from other neighboring countries.

7.4.1 Solidarity, Sympathy, and Humanitarian Support

Discursively speaking, the patterns of Romanian media coverage regarding Ukrainian immigrants, particularly in the context of the ongoing war in Ukraine, can be broadly categorized into several trends, with variations depending on the political, social, and historical context, with a largely positive framing. Namely, the Romanian media outlets highlight Romania’s role as a key support and transit hub for Ukrainian refugees fleeing the war.

The coverage often focuses on the humanitarian aid provided, Romania’s open borders, and everybody’s (the government and civil society) efforts to accommodate displaced people. There is extensive reporting on governmental and grassroots initiatives to help Ukrainian refugees. This includes donations, housing, medical care, and volunteer organizations assisting displaced Ukrainians. The coverage emphasizes Romania’s solidarity with Ukraine and depicts Ukrainians as victims of a gruesome attack. Early reports, especially in the initial stages of the Ukrainian refugee crisis immediately after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, often highlighted humanitarian aspects, focusing on the suffering of Ukrainian civilians, particularly women, children, and the elderly. News outlets commonly framed the situation as a humanitarian catastrophe, emphasizing Romania’s role as a haven for refugees (3):

- (3) “România este un ‘spațiu de siguranță și liniște’ pentru refugiații ucraineni, spunea premierul [Nicolae] Ciucă în ianuarie 2023, la prezentarea raportului privind eforturile depuse în 2022 de țara noastră în domeniul asistenței umanitare a refugiaților.” [“Romania is a ‘space of safety and peace’ for Ukrainian refugees,” stated Prime Minister [Nicolae] Ciucă in January 2023, during the

presentation of the report on the efforts undertaken in 2022 by Romania in the field of humanitarian assistance for refugees.] (*stirileprotv.ro*, 24 February 2023)

A predominant theme was the portrayal of Ukrainian refugees as victims of the war, often focusing on the trauma of displacement, loss, and fear. Stories of resilience and strength also emerged, highlighting the courage of refugees who had fled their homes and started new lives in Romania. The coverage went on to include other positive portrayals of Ukrainian refugees, such as contributing to local economies, opening businesses, or participating in cultural activities—presenting them as not only recipients of aid but also as active agents within Romanian society (4):

- (4) Julia Osipishyna, psihologă și mamă din Ucraina, face terapie pro bono cu cinci copii din țara natală care au tulburări din spectrul autist. Dar cunoaște numai în București peste 30 de copii cu acest diagnostic, refugiați din cauza războiului. Își dorește să ajute mai mulți și să găsească un sponsor care să le susțină terapia, astfel încât să aibă și un venit de pe urma muncii ei. [Julia Osipishyna, a psychologist and mother from Ukraine, provides pro bono therapy to five children from her home country who are diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders. However, in Bucharest alone she knows more than 30 children with this diagnosis, refugees displaced by the war. She wishes to assist more of them and to find a sponsor to support their therapy, thereby also securing an income from her professional work.] (*Libertatea*, 25 October 2022)

In more recent articles, discussions have shifted toward long-term integration strategies, including how to incorporate refugees into Romania's education system, labor market, and local communities. Some coverage explored the challenges faced by Ukrainian children in schools and the need for language integration programs. Looking ahead, there have also been debates about Romania's role in post-war Ukraine, particularly regarding the eventual return of refugees and rebuilding efforts. These discussions often pointed to Romania's future involvement in the reconstruction of Ukraine and maintaining strong bilateral relations (5):

- (5) Comunitatea ucraineană din România a jucat un rol important în gestiunea crizei refugiaților, precum și modul în care această criză poate fi transformată, printr-un efort bilateral, în piatra de temelie pentru o nouă eră de aprofundare a relațiilor româno-ucrainene. [The Ukrainian community in Romania has played an important role in managing the refugee crisis, as well as in shaping the way this crisis may be transformed, through a bilateral effort, into the cornerstone of a new era of deepening Romanian-Ukrainian relations.] (*Adevărul*, 2 September 2022)

In brief, Romanian news often emphasizes the country's role in supporting Ukrainian refugees as part of its broader foreign policy, displaying alignment with Western countries in opposing Russia's aggression. The portrayal of refugees tends to be one of humanitarian aid, whereby Romania is seen as fulfilling its moral duty to provide safety and shelter to those fleeing the war. In the analyzed corpus, most

of the news showcased solidarity, focusing on the Romanian population's response by highlighting local volunteer efforts, donations, and support initiatives.

7.4.2 *Concerns Over Integration*

Although much of the coverage emphasizes Romania's welcoming stance, there are also a few discussions around the challenges of integrating refugees, mostly in terms of employment, language barriers, housing, and sometimes cultural differences. Some media outlets have reported mixed public opinion regarding the long-term presence of Ukrainian refugees in Romania. These opinions might reflect concerns about economic pressures, unrealistic increase of rent fees, pressure on social services, and competition for jobs, particularly in areas with large refugee populations—thereby leading to perceptions of refugees not necessarily as an “opportunity” for Romania, as reflected in examples (6) and (7):

- (6) Programul prin care statul plătește cazarea refugiaților ucraineni a influențat piața chirilor în unele orașe, în dezavantajul chiriașilor români. Pentru că o familie care cazează 3 ucraineni primește în jur de 900 de euro de la autorități, unii proprietari au mărit tarifele chiar și de 3 ori. [The program through which the state covers the accommodation costs of Ukrainian refugees has affected the rental market in some cities, to the disadvantage of Romanian tenants. Since a family hosting three Ukrainians receives around 900 euros from the authorities, some property owners have increased rental prices by up to three times.] (*stirileprotv.ro*, 12 October 2022)
- (7) Doar 13% din românii intervievați pentru sondajul ECFR au răspuns că refugiații ucraineni reprezintă o oportunitate, cel mai mic procent din cele 12 țări care au luat parte la sondaj. [Only 13% of Romanians surveyed by the ECFR considered Ukrainian refugees as an opportunity, the lowest percentage among the 12 countries that took part in the survey.] (*hotnews.ro*, 21 February 2024)

In the early stages of the Ukrainian refugee influx, Romanian media often emphasized the “European” nature of the refugees, many times highlighting their perceived proximity to Romanian culture, language, and traditions due to their shared Slavic roots and historical connections. The portrayal of Ukrainian refugees as “deserving” of help (resulting from their victimhood in the war) was sometimes juxtaposed with negative narratives of other refugee groups from the Middle East or Africa who were seen as “undeserving” or more difficult to integrate. Initially, this distinction was scarcely used, but soon it created a racialized dimension in the discourse, rising up later on, especially before and during the 2024 election campaign with higher impact anti-Ukrainian propaganda.

The coverage also often discusses the economic impact of Ukrainian immigration, highlighting positive aspects (e.g., filling labor shortages, stimulating local

businesses, and the influx of EU funds) as well as concerns (e.g., additional strain on public services and welfare systems). There is some media focus on Ukrainian refugees as a workforce, particularly how Ukrainian refugees have been integrated into Romania's labor market, often filling jobs in agriculture, construction, and services. The media might present refugees as an important labor force. Some reports shifted focus toward the challenges posed by the sudden influx of refugees, highlighting the strain on Romania's social services, housing, health care, education, and employment markets. This was a discourse regarding the pressure that hosting refugees placed on Romania's economy and its institutions, as well as the competition with the local population for resources or even as being a burden on Romania's infrastructure. Over time, this created a more mixed representation of the refugee issue, encompassing debates on their integration, the financial assistance they were granted, and the requirement of employment as a condition for its continuation, as shown in examples (8) and (9):

- (8) La începutul anului, premierul [Nicolae] Ciucă a declarat că țara noastră [România] sprijină în continuare Ucraina și refugiații, dar a subliniat că autoritățile de la București trebuie să găsească soluții de integrare a acestora pentru a scădea costurile suportate de bugetul României. [At the beginning of the year, Prime Minister [Nicolae] Ciucă stated that our country [Romania] continues to support Ukraine and the refugees, but emphasized that the authorities in Bucharest must find solutions for their integration in order to reduce the costs borne by Romania's national budget] (*Libertatea*, 9 April 2023)
- (9) Refugiații din Ucraina vor beneficia de o singură sumă de bani, pentru cel mult patru luni. Ei pot primi bani pentru cazare și după această perioadă, până la finalul anului, dacă se angajează. [Ukrainian refugees will receive a single payment for up to four months. They can continue to receive support for accommodation after this period, until the end of the year, if they get a job.] (*hotnews.ro*, 12 April 2023)

7.4.3 Security Concerns and Xenophobia

A small but notable portion of the media highlight concerns about security, with some focusing on potential criminal activity or the risk of violence (mostly in news alarming readers about Ukrainians bringing the guns handed out by their government into Romania). This is usually more typical of more conservative or sensationalist outlets. In some cases, a minority of media outlets have raised fears about the integration of refugees and their perceived differences from the local population, particularly regarding the potential for social unrest. They revisit historical debates regarding the interdiction for the Romanian ethnic minority in Ukraine to teach Romanian at schools, or to use the Romanian language in administration.

Some texts also included security concerns, linking the refugee crisis with broader geopolitical dynamics (see Dragomir and Sporiș, Chap. 6 in this volume).

There were occasional references to potential security risks, suggesting that some Ukrainian refugees might have ties to Russian-backed groups or posed risks related to espionage. However, such discourse was relatively marginal and often counter-balanced by reassurances from the authorities, as well as by more prominent narratives of support and solidarity. But this sort of claim will become a leitmotif later to be used in electoral propaganda in late 2024.

7.4.4 *Geopolitical and Historical Context*

Media often highlight the historical, geographical, and cultural relations between Romania and Ukraine, helping to frame the reception of Ukrainian refugees as part of a broader political and diplomatic context. For example, Romania's position as a member of the EU and NATO often shapes the coverage, emphasizing Romania's responsibility as a European ally to support Ukraine. Some coverage discussed Romania's leading position on European security and its role in the broader EU refugee response. Discussions also touched on the role of international organizations in managing the crisis and ensuring adequate support.

Romania's history of cultural and ethnic ties with Ukraine (especially in regions like Bukovina and Transcarpathia) was often cited. Ukrainian refugees are not only viewed as victims of war but also as part of a broader regional political context. This discourse tapped into national pride and solidarity, underscoring the historical connection between Romanians and Ukrainians. News media sometimes used the refugee crisis to reinforce national identity, portraying Romania as a protector of its neighbors in times of crisis. This contributed to positive representations of Romania, as illustrated in example (10), on the international stage and its role in confronting Russia in shaping the refugee crisis and the broader geopolitical consequences of the war. Overall, the coverage highlights Romania's condemnation of Russian aggression and its support for Ukraine's sovereignty.

- (10) În acest sens, este mereu reamintit angajamentul solemn al ministrului român al apărării care, în 22 februarie, anunța întreaga lume că țara noastră este gata să găzduiască jumătate de milion de refugiați în cazul unei invazii rusești [...] în aplauzele celor de la Bruxelles. [In this regard, the solemn commitment of the Romanian Minister of Defense is constantly recalled, who on February 22 announced to the entire world that Romania was ready to host half a million refugees in the event of a Russian invasion [...] to the applause of those in Brussels.] (*Adevărul*, 23 October 2022)

7.4.5 Media Bias and Political Polarization

As in many countries, the portrayal of Ukrainian refugees in Romania can be influenced by political leanings. More liberal or left-wing outlets emphasized humanitarian aid and solidarity, whereas far right-wing or nationalist media focused on economic concerns (especially regarding the importation of Ukrainian grain) or the integration of refugees. The portrayal of Ukrainian refugees strongly differed based on Romania's domestic political climate, with pro-European outlets presenting Ukraine's fight as part of a larger European struggle, whereas nationalist or anti-EU voices questioned Romania's role and highlighted the costs of immigration. Politicians from the center-right and pro-Western factions have used refugees to assert Romania's importance in the broader European and international framework of support for Ukraine. There is a tendency in the discourse to highlight Romania's role as "a bridge" between the EU and Ukraine, with emphasis on policies that aid refugees. More progressive outlets stressed human rights, social responsibility, and Romania's duty to stand with Ukrainians against aggression.

In border regions of Romania, where there was direct interaction with Ukrainian refugees, the focus was on immediate logistical concerns and the local economic and social implications of the influx. At the same time, in urban centers there was often greater emphasis on integration challenges, whereas in rural areas the focus was on the practical assistance and immediate support being provided to Ukrainian families. Some more conservative or nationalist outlets, on the other hand, questioned the long-term sustainability of refugee support, framing their presence as a challenge that Romania might not be fully prepared for, warning of potential cultural clashes or the "erosion" of Romanian values. The narrative of the refugee crisis as a burden was also sometimes exacerbated by concerns about illegal immigration and security, particularly regarding the possibility of Russian operatives or spies blending in with refugees, even though this was rarely substantiated.

The political context also highlights the tensions within the EU, especially in terms of Romania's positioning on migration issues. The framing of Ukrainian refugees as "Europe's fight" to push back against Russian influence and imperialism dovetails with Romania's historical nationalistic rhetoric of protecting European values and sovereignty. At the same time, some Romanian political elites might occasionally draw attention to the contrast between their treatment of Ukrainian refugees and the EU's perceived lack of support for Romania in addressing other immigration challenges. These discourses can sometimes reflect the frustrations of Romanians with EU policies or reflect national pride in managing the crisis independently.

In more populist and anti-establishment rhetoric, Ukrainian refugees are sometimes used to criticize Romania's ruling class. Populist politicians may argue that the government's focus on helping Ukrainian refugees detracts from resources needed for Romanian citizens, particularly vulnerable populations such as the elderly, low-income individuals, or ethnic minorities. This narrative can be seen in media outlets that align with populist or nationalist parties, where the discourse

often includes concerns about “foreign priorities” undermining the national interest, with refugees being portrayed as pawns in broader geopolitical struggles that the Romanian people should not bear the cost of.

7.5 Conclusion

This analysis of the present Romanian dataset reveals a discursive hierarchy in the representation of displaced persons. Romanian media discourses construct Ukrainian refugees as victims of war in need of immediate aid and as agents of resilience, thereby integrating them into a narrative of regional solidarity. The findings suggest that this media discourse operates within a matrix of humanitarian values, national interests, and geopolitical alignment. It reproduces a selective empathy that aligns with EU narratives and domestic political concerns.

The discourse is predominantly shaped by naming practices that construct hierarchies of legitimacy. Ukrainians are generally referred to as “refugiați,” a term that collocates with humanitarian needs, solidarity, and familial imagery, positioning them as deserving victims of war. By contrast, terms for migrants that do not stress the crisis dimension occur less frequently and within more negative semantic fields. These terminological choices align with broader discursive frames identified in the dataset that shape public perceptions of forced migration. The Romanian media’s portrayal of Ukrainian immigrants is characterized by a mix of solidarity and humanitarianism, tempered by concerns about integration and economic impact. The coverage is also shaped by Romania’s political stance, historical ties with Ukraine, and public opinion, and it reflects both positive and negative aspects of the refugee experience. While the media are largely focused on the crisis from a humanitarian angle, attention is also paid to the potential long-term effects on Romanian society and economy. However, as shown, the overall tendency has been one of sympathy and support, reflecting Romania’s historical and geographical proximity to Ukraine and its position in the European context. The portrayal of refugees has been nuanced, with ongoing discussions about their future in Romania and the long-term implications of the war.

Future research could explore how these discourses evolve over time—by employing a Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA)—and compare them with representations of other refugee groups, as well as examining multimodal data. The limitations of this research are due to the selected space of analysis—Romania—as well as regarding the terminology-based corpus. By focusing on national online media coverage, this chapter excludes other important types of discourse that might better shape the reception of the displaced Ukrainians, such as social media, political speeches, or local community reporting. The focus on selected keywords excludes a number of articles that approach the issue of forced emigration from a different perspective. Possible extensions would allow for a more comprehensive and necessary account on migration discourse studies and European identity debates.

Acknowledgement This work was funded by the EU's NextGenerationEU instrument through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan of Romania—Pillar III-C9-I8, managed by the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalization, within the project entitled *The Coverage and Reception of the Russian–Ukrainian Conflict in Polish, Romanian and English-language Media: A Comparative Critical Discourse Study with Recommendations for Journalism Training (CORECON)*, contract no. 760244/28.12.2023, code CF 25/27.07.2023.

References

- AIDA RO—Asylum Information Database Romania (2025). Temporary Protection 2024. https://asylumineurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/AIDA-RO_Temporary-Protection_2024.pdf
- Brezina, V., & Platt, W. (2025). *#LancsBox X* [software]. Lancaster University. <http://lancsbox.lancs.ac.uk>
- Chendei, N. (2025). Epistemic stance in Ukrainian newspaper discourse on migration and refugees: Ukrainian versus European perspectives. In H. Shumytska & A. Krouglov (Eds.), *Languages and cultures in times of war: Collective monograph* (pp. 174–190). <https://doi.org/10.14324/000.ch.10206640>
- De Coninck, D. (2019). Migrant categorizations and European public opinion: Diverging attitudes towards immigrants and refugees. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 46(9), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2019.1694406>
- Dück, E., Weisner, Z., & Thevenin, E. (2024). Female, deserving, and European? The changing EUropean migration discourse in the face of the Russia-Ukraine war. *Polit Vierteljahresschr*, 66(1), 101–124. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11615-024-00573-8>
- Eredics, L. (2023). *The marginalization of Roma refugees from Ukraine*. The German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMFUS). <https://www.gmfus.org>
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. Longman.
- Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analysing discourse: Textual analysis for social research*. Routledge.
- Fassin, D. (2007). Humanitarianism as a politics of life. *Public Culture*, 19(3), 499–520. <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-2007-007>
- Fusiek, D. A. (2022, November 28). The needs of refugees. *European Investment Bank*. <https://www.eib.org/en/stories/ukrainian-poland-infrastructure-refugees>
- Panzaru, C., & Harding, L. (2025). How transit countries become refugee destinations: Insights from Central and Eastern Europe. *International Migration*, 63(4), e70066. <https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.70066>
- UNHCR (n.d.). *What is forced displacement?* United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees website. <https://www.unhcr.org>
- UNHCR (2023, June). Inter-agency operational update: Romania update. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/102040>
- van Dijk, T. A. (1991). *Racism and the press*. Routledge.
- van Dijk, T. A. (1998). *Ideology: A multidisciplinary approach*. Sage.
- van Leeuwen, T. (1996). The representation of social actors. In C. R. Caldas-Coulthard & M. Coulthard (Eds.), *Texts and practices: Readings in critical discourse analysis* (pp. 32–70). Routledge.
- Wildemann, S., Niederée, C., & Elejalde, E. (2023). Migration reframed? A multilingual analysis on the stance shift in Europe during the Ukrainian crisis. *WWW '23: Proceedings of the ACM Web Conference 2023*. 2754–2764. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3543507.3583442>

Radu Drăgulescu is a professor and Head of the Department of Romance Studies of the Faculty of Letters and Arts, Lucian Blaga University, Sibiu, Romania, with special interest in General and Applied Linguistics, History of Romanian Literary Language, Phytonymy, and Critical Discourse Analysis. Since 2022 he has been a member of FORTHEM Lab Multilingualism in School and Higher Education, PATLIRO (*Preserving, Transforming and Studying the Romanian Linguistic Heritage in the Context of Globalization*) and the project *Support for institutional development and increasing the involvement and VISIBILITY of UManist research at Lucian Blaga University in Sibiu*.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if you modified the licensed material. You do not have permission under this license to share adapted material derived from this chapter or parts of it.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.



Chapter 8

Visual News Values: Mapping the Construction of Newsworthiness and Ideology in Romanian Media Imagery



Denisa-Maria Bâlc

Abstract Using the notion of news value as a guiding framework, the present study analyzes the manner in which Romanian news media outlets visually and discursively constructed the Russian-Ukrainian conflict throughout 2022–2024, with particular attention to the representation of social actors, the underlying power relations encoded in the images, and the reproduction of dominant political positions. The analysis of 256 news items with collage-type images illustrates the main patterns of visualizing in war-related coverage through news values of proximity and timeliness, prominence, consonance, negativity/positivity, impact and superlativeness, novelty, and (de)personalization. The results are interpreted in the context of salience and meaning of symbolic representations, audience preferences, political implications and constraints and requirements of Romanian media culture.

8.1 Introduction: Journalistic Discourse and News Values

News media outlets have to select topics for coverage that attract the public and boost the outlet's visibility. This has led to journalism scholars and practitioners attempting to identify what enhances a news story's visibility and impact and ensures that it reaches as many news consumers as possible. Galtung and Ruge's (1965) seminal work addressed the question of how political events become news by identifying twelve news values that determine a story's prominence: frequency, threshold, unambiguity, meaningfulness, consonance, unexpectedness, continuity, composition, reference to elite nations, reference to elite people, reference to persons, and reference to something negative. While their pioneering study had a significant impact on subsequent media analyses, it also generated numerous controversies among researchers, who in turn proposed alternative categories that they considered more effective in assessing "newsworthiness." Notable among

D.-M. Bâlc (✉)
Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Sibiu, Romania
e-mail: denisa.frategan@ulbsibiu.ro

these critics are Harcup and O'Neill (2001), who offered counterarguments to the earlier framework and proposed ten alternative news values: the power élite, celebrity, entertainment, surprise, bad news, good news, magnitude, relevance, follow-up, and newspaper agenda. Numerous other scholars have contributed to delimiting the notion of news values in the context of various journalistic genres and against the backdrop of changing mediation technologies. Their theories were later synthesized by Brighton and Foy (2007) in their work, where they define the concept of news values as “a set of rules – often intangible, informal, almost unconscious elements – by which to work, from which to plan and execute the content of a publication or a broadcast” (Brighton & Foy, 2007, p. 1).

Regardless of the perspective from which these news values have been defined, and regardless of the categories included or excluded from the typologies, journalism scholars have consistently underscored the capacity of the mass media to influence public opinion. This is achieved precisely through the selection of certain subjects over others, and the coverage of certain social actors over others. This process, in turn, creates a subjective environment for representing the socio-political context and results in limitations to the access to facts, as emphasized by Fowler: “What events are reported is most a reflection of the intrinsic importance of those events, but reveals the operation of a complex and artificial set of criteria for selection” (Fowler, 1991, p. 2).

Meanwhile from the perspective of linguistics and discourse analysis, Bednarek and Caple (2012a, 2012b, 2014) and Bednarek (2016) suggested a set of nine news values: negativity/positivity, timeliness, proximity, prominence/eliteness, consonance, impact, novelty, superlativeness, and personalization, that are not intrinsic to the events selected to be covered but that can be “constructed as newsworthy” through textual and visual resources that editors and journalists use to present a given news story. Thus, the influence of mass media can be noticed both in the verbal communication and in non-verbal characteristics, including text layout, pictures, sounds, or music (van Dijk, 2006, p. 372). The graphic elements are often utilized for ideological purposes, depending on the underlying interests of the actors involved in producing and distributing the news. As emphasized by Fetzer: “Messages can never be neutral because they are mediated, and it is the mediation through visual and verbal codes, which provides a frame of reference, signifying preferred interpretations in accordance with the contextual constraints and requirements of culture” (Fetzer, 2014, p. 369).

Using the notion of news value as a guiding framework, the present study analyzes how Romanian mass media outlets visually and discursively construct the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, with particular attention paid to the representation of social actors, the underlying power relations encoded in the images, and the reproduction of dominant ideologies. For this purpose, we will consider a subcorpus of 246 news items extracted from the full Romanian language corpus created within the CORECON project, with these news items sharing the common element of collage-type images used as visual support in transmitting the message. In the critical analysis of the media discourse, we will primarily utilize visual content analysis, multimodal critical discourse analysis, and social actor theory.

8.2 Methods and Indicators

Bell viewed (visual) content analysis as: “a systematic observational method used for testing hypotheses about the way in which the media represent people, events, situations, and so on. It allows quantification of samples of observable content classified into distinct categories” (Bell, 2008, p. 14). Thus, in this study we divide the selected collages based on the visual elements represented and the symbols attached to the background images, in order to subsequently analyze them through an in-depth multimodal analysis, building upon the categories proposed by Ledin and Machin (2020), and Bednarek and Caple (2012a), respectively.

Multimodal critical discourse analysis is used “to show how discourses seek to control and shape social practices in the interests of dominant ideology” (Machin, 2016, p. 331), helping to demonstrate in this study how the manipulation of visual elements is realized within the selected corpus. Specifically, we use the categories for representing *participants* (individual/groups, distance, categorization, anonymization, non-representation) and for the representation of *actions in image* (emotional, mental, verbal, and material process) (Ledin & Machin, 2020). These categories enable us to capture the visual representation of social actors in the analysis of collages that also contain human subjects. For the relationship established between the viewer and the image, van Leeuwen (2008) suggested three variables: social distance, social relation, and social interaction. Furthermore, for the representation of human figures in images, he considered five other categories, partially overlapping with those later proposed by Ledin and Machin (2020): exclusion, roles, specific and generic, individuals and groups, and categorization. All these variables can be integrated into the analysis of the types of news values proposed by Bednarek and Caple, as they are reflected in the subcorpus of collage-type images that we have selected.

In their numerous works on the Discursive News Value Analysis, Bednarek and Caple (2012a, 2012b, 2014) not only categorize and define news values but also establish specific indicators through which these values are realized at the textual and visual levels. Regarding images, as they represent the central focus of the current analysis, news values can be realized through a number of graphic elements (Table 8.1).

In the context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, the division of political and social camps has significantly affected representations in the Romanian mass media, and the consequences are felt by the media users due to the uncertainty created both by the alarmist messaging found in news stories and by the images circulated in the press. In the case of collages, news consumers’ anxiety can be further amplified by the unexpected associations of people, symbols, and military insignia that would not naturally be combined. The motivation for the widespread use of the montage technique is the need to intensify the newsworthiness of the conveyed message, to create sensationalism through the associated elements, and to incite viewers’ emotions.

Table 8.1 Constructing news values in discourse (adapted from Bednarek & Caple, 2012a, pp. 63–80)

Timeliness	• Season-related cues • Objects or artefacts tied to cultural traditions
Proximity	• Well-known landmarks or monuments • Distinctive natural settings • Recognizable cultural emblems
Prominence	• Public figures or personalities that are easily identified visually • Uniforms or official representatives • Symbols of authority, regalia • Impromptu press conferences • Institutional or professional settings • Low-angle camera perspective
Consonance	• Typical or clichéd visual depictions of an event • Stereotyped portrayals of individuals
Negativity	• Imagery of negative events and their consequences • People showing negative emotions • High-angle shots • Blurred or shaky camera movement
Impact	• Depictions of aftermath or consequences of events • Image sequences that suggest cause-and-effect links
Novelty	• Placing contrasting elements together within the frame • Facial expressions showing surprise or shock
Superlativeness	• Repetition of visual elements in the shot • Intensely displayed emotions • Use of wide-angle lens
Personalization	• Focusing on a single individual and their emotions • Close-up framing

Unlike a classic image, where the manipulation of perspective is achieved only through the angle from which it is taken, the distance to the represented subjects, and the colors utilized, the process of creating montages involves a subjective vision of the reality intended to be illustrated. Montages take frames from the ground and combine them with various graphic elements, at which point a third reality is created: while the actual reality is what is happening on the ground, the second reality is the captured images in press photography, and the third reality is the recreation of the elements of the second reality through montage and added framing. By moving away from the actual source of the news, the reality is diluted, and the results can range from comic to tragic, depending on the intended objective. In the following section, we analyze the 246 collages collected in order to observe the most common indicators used in shaping news values and their effects.

8.3 Results

8.3.1 *Visual Representations of Proximity and Timeliness*

Defined as “the geographical and/or cultural nearness of the event” (Bednarek & Caple, 2012a, p. 42), proximity represents a technique frequently used in the current press regarding the imminence of the Russian attacks escalating toward territories other than Ukraine. All of these instances in the corpus may create a sense of panic among the population and are aimed to legitimize the actions of state leaders, along with the measures they take to protect countries potentially targeted by Russia. Given the topicality of the events presented, proximity integrates effectively with timeliness, which is defined as “the relevance of the event in terms of time” (Bednarek & Caple, 2012a, p. 42). As indicators, Bednarek and Caple mention “well-known landmarks or monuments,” “distinctive natural settings,” and “season-related cues,” but in our case the most illustrative examples of proximity are the collages featuring maps or flags of Romania and the Republic of Moldova.

Also, by creating collages with Vladimir Putin in the foreground and the map of Romania in the background, or a map of Europe highlighting Romania or Moldova, the creators of the visual montages intend to emphasize that this war is not an isolated conflict that is limited to the territories of Ukraine and Russia, but could easily spill over other regions at any time. Through proximity, even an attack on the Republic of Moldova could be presented as a threat to Romanian national security (see Appendix A for a list of collages featuring proximity).

In most situations where the collages include maps, they foreground President Vladimir Putin who is pictured as performing an agitated verbal process, with his gestures conveying a sense of threat and appearing to suggest the ways in which he intends to conquer the territories in the montage’s background. As Ushchyna explained: “Framing of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict through non-verbal signs of different nature can be very potential in modern multidimensional discursive environments, as they activate different ways of information transmission and information perception” (2022, p. 134). The non-verbal language of Putin, such as the scenes where he gesticulates with his hands—a sign of emphasizing the ideas being presented – or the scene where he raises his hand to his ear in defiance of President Klaus Iohannis, is suggestive of his aggressive domestic and foreign policy and transmits a clear message about Russian intentions. The news headlines accompanying these images reinforce the idea conveyed by the collages, utilizing negative emotivity (*unfriendly, expelled, tense, warning, terrible, danger, attack, threatened*), reliability (*already*), and intensification/quantification (*increasingly tense, 10 diplomats*), as in the following translated examples:

- “Russia has expanded the list of ‘unfriendly countries’ which already includes Romania” (romaniatv.net)
- “Moscow has expelled 10 diplomats from the Romanian Embassy. Relations are increasingly tense between Romania and Russia” (romaniatv.net)

- “Vladimir Putin, a warning for Ukraine’s neighbors: ‘I would advise them not to escalate the situation’” (romaniatv.net)
- “Terrible warning for Romania in case Russia defeats Ukraine: ‘It would be in danger of a Russian ground attack’” (romaniatv.net)
- “Vladimir Putin threatened the ‘unfriendly’ countries again. Romania is also targeted” (romaniatv.net)
- “Pravda: ‘Poland and Romania are first on the list of those looking for trouble’” (romaniatv.net)

The use of toponyms and directive performative verbs such as “to threaten,” “to warn,” and “to advise,” in this case creates the calling for an imminent need for action and for establishing a protection system against possible military invasions. This is because “directive illocutionary acts with a determined, prompt mode of realization demand to be heeded and executed” (Botnaru, 2007, p. 113). The illocution is strengthened because proximity and timeliness are both realized through the non-verbal language of the political actors represented in the collages and reinforced through the suggestive news headlines.

8.3.2 *Prominence of Social Actors*

The presence of elites represents a constant in the concerns of mass media, as “power, status and celebrity are monopolies in the institutional life of our society,” and *élite persons* and *élite nations* are “naturally newsworthy” (Hall, 1981, p. 236). This is also reflected in the Romanian language corpus compiled within the CORECON project, where elites hold a representative proportion. Out of a total of approximately 2000 collected news items, approximately 615 items visually depict political actors, and the celebrities from Romanian or international high society, while approximately 600 news items represent non-elites, predominantly Ukrainian refugees, military personnel, war victims, local officials, civilians, or various persons directly or indirectly involved in the military conflict. The remaining news items contain diverse images or representations without people, featuring elements distinctive to the economic sphere (e.g., wheat fields or provisions), war-related infrastructure, or urban infrastructure destroyed as a result of combat or air raids, as well as numerous maps and diagrams of military strategy.

Thus, a considerable proportion (31% of images) is dedicated to elites, perhaps the most unified and prominent class of visual representations. Among the political elites, Vladimir Putin and Volodymyr Zelensky occupy the largest visual prominence, together comprising half the number of all representations featuring elites, followed at a considerable distance by Klaus Iohannis, Diana Șoșoacă (a Romanian deputy), Jens Stoltenberg, and Joe Biden (Fig. 8.1). Approximately the same ratio of representativeness among political actors is found in the foreign coverage, where a quantitative study established that President of the U.S., Joe Biden, Russia’s

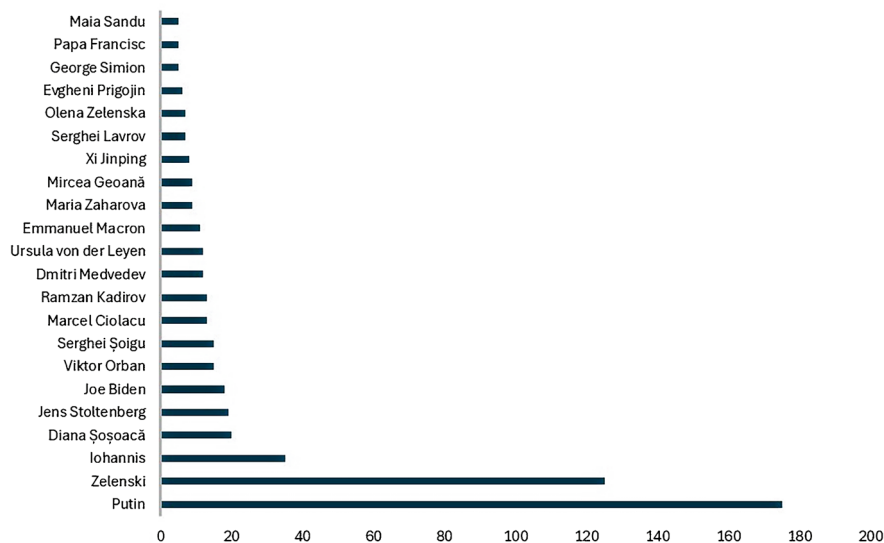


Fig. 8.1 The visual representation of political elites within the Romanian-language corpus of coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict 2022–2024

Vladimir Putin, and President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky, were at the center of the news (Kang et al., 2024, p. 36).

In approximately half of the images, Vladimir Putin is represented alone, using close-up shots or medium shots, while in the other representations he most frequently appears alongside Sergey Shoigu, Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, Dmitry Medvedev, Deputy Chairman of the Security Council of Russia, and Xi Jinping, President of China. In contrast to Putin, Zelensky is most often represented alongside Klaus Iohannis, Joe Biden, and his family. This implicitly highlights Romania's positioning regarding the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, the Americans as one of the main supporters of the Ukrainian cause, and the desire to emphasize the human nature of the Ukrainian President by using photos with his wife, Olena Zelenska, and their children.

These quantitative results bring to the surface the central concern in the Romanian mass media with the military and diplomatic strategies of Russia and Ukraine within the conflict, and the power relations exercised globally. As Chouliaraki and Fairclough emphasized: "power relations are relations of struggle – that power is not simply exercised, it is also fought over, and fought over in discourse, and that the interdiscursive articulation of different genres and discourses is (amongst other things) a strategy of power struggle – a way in which power struggle is internalized in discourse" (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p. 62). Thus, influence and political power can be observed from the number of visual representations in the media, from the diplomatic relations implied by collective images, and from the strong textual reinforcement of the news value of prominence.

Relative to the entire corpus, the proportions change in the subcorpus of collages, as here the representations containing elites hold the largest share. Out of a total of 246 collages, 110 contain representations of elites, 76 are general representations that do not feature people, and 60 news items have human figures in their composition. With 51 representations, Vladimir Putin remains the central figure in these montages, followed by Zelensky with 24 images. It is interesting that although the two presidents around whom the entire rhetoric of the conflict has been shaped are only represented together in photographs on two occasions during a meeting with several diplomats in Paris, we identified nine collages where the two were montaged together, usually in different frames that accentuate the conflict between them and the opposition of interests.

In most collage settings, Zelensky is represented as performing a verbal process, while a mental process dominates in the case of Putin, once again demonstrating a distinct framing of their personas. For the Ukrainian president, communication is the key to resolving the conflict; for the Russian leader, it is military action, with collages featuring battle scenes in the background. The projected mediators of the interaction between the two in two collages are Joe Biden and Viktor Orban, often positioned in the foreground of the frames, an idea that suggests a possible diplomatic mediation from the European and American spheres of influence, respectively (see Appendix B for a list of collages featuring prominence).

In addition to the two presidents, other political figures represented in the collage corpus include:

- Jens Stoltenberg, in images with fighter jets or the flag of Ukraine in the background, performing a mental or verbal process, suggestive of the factual state of affairs and Ukraine's desire to join NATO;
- Maia Sandu, who although in a different frame, shakes hands with the President of Romania, Klaus Iohannis, suggesting a potential political and military alliance between the two neighboring countries;
- Diana Șoșoacă, often represented alongside Putin in collages, indicating sympathy towards his policies, unlike other Romanian politicians such as Marcel Ciolacu, who is predominantly represented next to Zelensky;
- The historical figure of Nicolae Ceaușescu, placed in parallel with Putin and Viktor Orban, suggesting a possible connection between the behavior and actions of authoritarian leaders;
- A series of Romanian ministers, such as the Minister of Defense, the Minister of Agriculture, and the Minister of Finance, represented in collages with symbols that define their specialization and that present the main themes of concern for Romania regarding the continuation of the war: the financial and military crisis;
- Several figures from public life, such as the gymnast Alina Kabaeva, described as Putin's partner, the singer Sofia Rotaru, whose house was nationalized by the Russians due to her sympathy for Ukraine, or Andra Măruță, represented in a collage with a Golden Buzz and the insignia of the *Romanians Got Talent* show, with the body text explaining that two Ukrainians were the recipients of the

Romanian singer's praise, another form of support and sympathy for the Ukrainian people.

Analyzing all the representations of political or public elites, it can be concluded that these are not objective representations but rather that they implicitly illustrate the existing power relations between countries. They deepen the stereotypes already circulated in the press regarding the two presidents in conflict and visualize an entire conflict narrative through adjacent themes and motives belonging to the world of celebrities.

8.3.3 *Consonance of Dichotomies*

Consonance refers to “the stereotypical imagery of an event/person” (Bednarek & Caple, 2012a, p. 67), and in the present corpus this is primarily observed through the oppositional representation of political actors. Since the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, news stories have appeared comparing Volodymyr Zelensky and Vladimir Putin in terms of their clothing (see also Bors, Chap. 11 this volume). While the Ukrainian President appears in the press as a symbol of modesty, aligning with the needs of his people, the Russian President is consistently portrayed wearing expensive clothes and elegant suits that define his high status and importance. These already stereotypical representations regarding the two leaders are also found in the collages under study, where in five cases the collages feature parallel images of the two presidents: Zelensky wears khaki T-shirts or shirts, while Putin wears a navy-blue or black suit. The same stereotypical images regarding the appearance of the state leaders are maintained in the other individual collages that consolidates the mental representations concerning the leaders and justifies the collective perception: one is devoted to the people, is modest, and ready to join with those suffering to defend the country, whereas the other only issues directives, maintaining his distant authority status.

Furthermore, consonance is also observed in images that confirm the typical representations of Russia as an expansionist power, an aggressive country with a ruthless populace, compared to Ukraine that is predominantly viewed as a victim of Russian attacks but continues to resist and fight for freedom and democracy. This strong-weak, aggressor-victim dichotomy supports the existing convictions regarding the two countries involved in the war and is illustrated through images where the maps of the two countries are placed in parallel or by images of Russian soldiers displaying a cynical and cold smile.

8.3.4 *Negativity and Its Symbolic Indicators*

First and foremost, negativity is illustrated in our corpus through the so-called “atrocities photos” (Zelizer, 1998)—images presenting war scenes, devastated cities, the consequences of military attacks, soldiers, weaponry, various military or Nazi insignias, as well as other symbolically connoted elements such as the shadow, the beetle, the mourning ribbon, the Trojan horse, the dice, barbed wire, the Matryoshka doll, or the turned off light bulb. While the former elements are common to all war images that have circulated in the press over time, the latter demonstrate their originality through adaptation to the specific characteristics of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and the perceptions of the Romanian population. Thus, Table 8.2 focuses on these elements, drawing a parallel between the symbols attached in the collages and the news headlines and their symbolic meaning.

Secondly, negativity within the collage subcorpus is achieved through very close shots, amplifying the negative emotions and states transmitted by the represented objects or individuals. Perhaps even more so than the high-angle shots that Bednarek and Caple (2012a) noted as indicators for the realization of the news value of negativity, close shots have the potential to create a direct link between the viewer and the image, transferring all the negative tension onto the former: “close shots can also suggest claustrophobia or a threat if the kinds of people represented are otherwise of a sort that we might not welcome. [...] This takes us too close to the energy of the moment, suggesting the need to pull back from the madness of the situation” (Ledin & Machin, 2020, p. 51).

The most typical examples found in our corpus depict Vladimir Putin performing an emotional process, represented by cynical smiles, grimaces, and frowns that express his rage and desire to continue the war. When combined with nuclear explosions, missiles, or various pieces of armament in the background, the collages become highly expressive in shaping negativity, particularly as they are supported by the textual level of news stories that alarm the population regarding the perpetuation of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, the expansion of the attack area, and even the possible outbreak of the Third World War (see Appendix C for a list of collages featuring negativity through such close-ups).

If the representations of Vladimir Putin in close-up shots evoke fears and anxiety, the representations of Volodymyr Zelensky fall under a complex combination of negativity and positivity, particularly in the case of the most distributed news value on social media (Bednarek, 2016). Represented in frames alongside children who are war victims, with political allies from whom he seeks material and military support, and having a somber appearance—visibly saddened by the state of his people for whom he is fighting—he becomes the symbol of resilience, national dignity, and the “father of the nation,” viewed in a positive light precisely because he is close to those suffering (see Appendix D for a list of collages featuring the combination of negativity and positivity). The dichotomy between the two political actors thus becomes visible and represents another indicator of the ideologies that are perpetuated through mass media. The polarization of good-evil, maleficent-beneficent, and

Table 8.2 Negative symbols in the corpus with explanations and source headlines

The shadow	“The Russia-Ukraine War: Everything you need to know right now, in brief” (hotnews.ro). The collage illustrates, in two different frames, the shadows of soldiers: on one side, a soldier with weapons who has the Russian flag in the background, and on the other side, kneeling soldiers who have the Ukrainian flag behind them. The shadow thus becomes a symbol of political maneuvering, because the elites are the visible figures who are carefully represented in the news, while the soldiers are the ones bearing the brunt of the fight, behind the political curtain. The news title and the illustrative collage also reflect the Russia as the aggressor.
The beetle	“Romania and four other states in the region asked the European Commission to ban grain imports from Ukraine until the end of 2023” (romaniatv.net). The various types of beetles superimposed on the image of Ursula von der Leyen amplify the negative character of her actions from the perspective of local farmers, who perceive imports from Ukraine as a threat to national well-being and the local economy. The resulting revolts would subsequently be reflected in news about farmer protests in several regions and countries, which underscores a simmering aversion toward Ukrainians and European policies.
The mourning ribbon	“Police chief killed by Ukrainian driver who fell asleep at the wheel. The policeman’s daughter and wife are injured” (romaniatv.net). In the collage featuring an overturned and destroyed truck, a photo of the policeman, and the mourning ribbon, the latter becomes a negative symbol through the adverse feelings it conveys, namely profound regret and sorrow. As a narrative adjacent to news about the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, this implicitly presents the negative consequences of opening the borders to Ukrainian refugees. By producing casualties among Romanians, news of this nature sows a feeling of resistance and amplifies the desire to end agreements in support of Ukrainians.
The Trojan horse	“Viktor Orbán has chosen the East. The relationship between Hungary and Ukraine through the lens of Sino-Russian interests” (Adevărul). The political and diplomatic actions of Viktor Orbán are metaphorically illustrated by an image of the Trojan Horse, which is placed by a “puppeteer’s” hand in the eastern part of the world, connected to the west by a thin bridge. Defined as a “ferry-type country,” Hungary’s policy maintains a negative representation in this news story due to the unpredictability it demonstrates.
The dice	“RIA Novosti: Hallucinatory article on the ‘denazification’ of Ukraine under the title: ‘What should Russia do with Ukraine?’” (Adevărul). Since antiquity, stemming from Julius Caesar’s famous saying, “<i>alea iacta est</i>” (the die is cast), the dice symbol has acquired a negative connotation, indexing a desire for revenge and conquest that was at the root of the start of the Roman Civil War, and subsequently the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Through a collage featuring the maps of the two countries involved in the war and two dice—one small in the colors of the Ukrainian flag, one large in the colors of the Russian flag—the idea is conveyed of the imminent conquest of Ukraine by the Russian invaders, spreading panic among those over whom “the die has been cast.”
The barbed wire	“Russia, a danger to Europe should it win in Ukraine: Which troops could attack Romania” (Adevărul). With an alarmist title and a collage composed of the flags of the two countries involved in the conflict, strategically delimited by the symbol of barbed wire, and several tanks in the background, the news story conveys the existing military tensions and aims at mobilizing the population to take protective measures in the event of an attack extended toward the European zone.

(continued)

Table 8.2 (continued)

The Matryoshka doll	“The unseen face of the war in Ukraine: The proximity of Russian-Ukrainian oligarchs to Romania” (stiripesurse.ro). Essentially a beloved Russian cultural symbol, the Matryoshka doll acquires negative connotations when associated with a world map and an arrow pointing towards Ukraine. This is because it might suggest hidden Russian strategies whose impact is magnified precisely by their unpredictability.
The turned off light bulb	“Romania prepares for blackout. Survival guide for three days without electricity and gas” (romaniatv.net). The monochrome collage featuring the map of Romania in the background and several extinguished light bulbs in the foreground accentuates citizens’ anxiety regarding a possible shortage of electricity, natural gas, and food should the Russian-Ukrainian conflict continue.

aggressor-victim serves to reinforce the existing social structure and social order at the local level, but also to problematize Romania’s policy of unconditional support granted to Ukrainians.

8.3.5 *Visualizations of Impact and Superlativeness*

Visually, the news value of impact in the study’s war coverage is created especially through the idea of number or magnitude, thus combining with superlativeness:

- The pile of cash in news stories discussing the massive losses of local producers affected by the war;
- Heaps of corn and wheat in news about the halt of goods imports from Ukraine;
- Masses of people gathered at protests or in cemeteries to mourn their loved ones who perished in the war;
- Rows of soldiers ready to fight for the homeland or being mobilized by presidents;
- Piles of weapons, which indicate the military support offered to Ukraine by Romania or other countries;
- Images of entire devastated, smoking blocks and cities, indicating recent bombardment and the destructive impact of the war on urban infrastructure.

In addition to this, the news stories that have a major impact on the viewer are those that present strong emotions, predominantly negative, and when these emotions come from young children, they become even more compelling. Illustrative is the image of a small child with a toy in his arms, a bandaged hand, and a face covered in soot, placed in a collage against an atrocious background that suggests bombings and fires caused by the war (see Appendix D for collages featuring impact and/or superlativeness). This creates a strong feeling of hatred, repulsion, and a desire for revenge on the part of the viewers, who most often empathize with the plight of children. By using images of people from vulnerable categories, the decisions and emotions of the viewers are manipulated, as they are sensitized by the presented images.

8.3.6 *Novelty of Paradoxical Collage Associations*

The novelty of imagery in this corpus lies precisely in the unusual associations of images and symbols within the photo montages – the way in which the creators of the images have managed to metaphorically reinterpret the realities of war and convey a message about its destructive force, social inequalities, pain, losses, and conflict. Examples include the association of Putin with Nicolae Ceaușescu or images of Nostradamus in news about the Russian-Ukrainian war, the stately representation of Putin with a toilet brush in his hand, or of Sadhguru, considered a moral spiritual leader, with war in the background of the picture and the statement “Without war, many people cannot survive” (romaniatv.net) in the news headline.

The paradoxical elements brought together in the collages ensure that these news stories are accessed and read by a large number of readers trying to disambiguate the association. The more unusual a news story, or the more shocking an image, the more often it will be consumed by the public, especially since “images provide interpretations, ideologically colors angles, and they do so not explicitly, but by suggestion, by connotation, by appealing to barely conscious, half-forgotten knowledge” (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 136). Through the unusual associations and novelty, the collages that deviate from the standard pattern of war photography succeed in transmitting a subsidiary message about political relations, threats, and opportunities, all filtered through a subjective editorial lens.

8.3.7 *Personalization and Depersonalization in Visualizations*

In the entire Romanian-language corpus, the news items featuring personalization as the dominant news value are approximately equal in number to those depicting eliteness. Personalization is understood as “the isolation of the person from his relevant social and institutional context, or the constitution of a personal subject as exclusively the motor force of history, which is under consideration here” (Hall, 1981, pp. 236–237). The individuals primarily represented in the news are: military personnel, refugees, war victims, civilians, journalists, priests, authorities, protesters, and volunteers, alongside various other social categories. These categories are also represented in the current subcorpus, where images of military forces, war victims, and civilians dominate. Personalization is supported in the selected images through social interaction, where the depicted persons make eye contact with the viewer so that the latter understands their intentions and empathizes with their situation: “If they do look at us, if they do address us directly with their look, the picture articulates a kind of visual ‘you,’ a symbolic demand. The people in the picture want something from us – and what that something is, is then signified by other elements of the picture: by facial expressions, by gestures, and also by angles” (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 141).

Interestingly, in these collages, most non-elite individuals who make eye contact with the viewer do not elicit pity or compassion; rather, their gaze inspires power, courage, determination, and even national pride. This is the case with a small boy who looks directly at the camera with sheer delight, proud of his new haircut that suggests support for the Russian army: “A mother in Russia gave her son a haircut in the shape of the letter Z, the symbol of Putin’s offensive in Ukraine” (libertatea.ro), or a female soldier represented with a wide smile and a well-groomed expression, in opposition to the other images in the collage showing bombings and military attacks: “The wife of Ukraine’s Deputy Prime Minister went to war. Her gesture went around the world!” (romaniatv.net). These personalized photos contrast with stereotypical representations of war scenes, promoting an ideology of social activism in favor of one’s military faction.

Another technique for constructing personalization is the emotional process where the represented individuals are shown as experiencing suffering, but also joy and relief, evident on their faces following the survival of military attacks. A concrete case is the collage from the news story “The woman injured in Ukraine, who Sputnik and a Radio China journalist said did not exist, spoke to *Libertatea*: ‘I was the victim of a missile attack’” (libertatea.ro). The woman, despite being almost mutilated from the impact she suffered, manages to display a peaceful smile on her face, speaking to the resilience of the Ukrainian people.

On the other hand, instances of depersonalization or anonymization can also be identified in this set of images. Depersonalization can be achieved through images with, among others, faces cropped/covered, no eye contact made, long shots that visualize entire silhouettes, or close-ups for selected body parts like fingers and hands (Molek-Kozakowska, 2018, pp. 6–7). Anonymization, meanwhile, involves masking a person’s distinctive features, representing them as generic individuals, part of a group, and unindividualized. Perhaps the most suggestive cases are those of the “shadow-soldiers,” represented in images only by their silhouettes, or the “ghost-soldiers” (libertatea.ro), whose faces are completely covered or who are photographed from behind. Their identity in the collage is indexed only through the symbols on their military clothing, that indicate who they are and which side of the war they are involved with. Depersonalization through identity masking is further reinforced by images where individuals are presented via a long shot, making them merely prototypes of the categories they represent.

8.4 Conclusion

The analysis of news values in the Romanian mass media regarding the Russian-Ukrainian conflict justifies the argument that “the aspects of wars and conflicts that the news media cover can influence audience responses and evaluations. [...] In other words, the influence of war news framing can lead to severe consequences by forming the audience’s perceptions, appraisals, and actions toward the countries” (Kang, Park & Valdez, 2024, p. 25). The emphasis placed on political elites and the negative elements accompanying this conflict, their mode of representation, and the

way in which images and symbols are combined in the analyzed collages, shows how they shape readers' perceptions of the conflict. Through the skillful manipulation of visual perception, it is possible to intensify the sense of sympathy, moral outrage or panic (Cohen, 2011; Garland, 2008, Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994).

The photo montages used as visual support in the analyzed Romanian mass media news do not remain mere journalistic tools; rather, due to their impact, they become primary means of increasing the journalistic outlet's visibility among readers and alarming the population about the possible consequences of the war, the punitive nature of the Russian president, or the risk of the war extending to Romania's borders. Prominence, negativity, proximity, and personalization remain the most representative news values at the level of the entire corpus analyzed.

These news values are realized through indicators related to the image itself, focal distance, layout, and – when discussing the representation of persons – even social interaction with the public or with other human figures in the image. Journalistic discourse thus becomes a means of controlling public opinion through the combination of newsworthiness of the written message with the visual one, and the blending of objective reporting of facts with their subjective rendering through the creation of collages. Kress and van Leeuwen have also emphasized (2001, pp. 4–5) that discourse about war has a dual nature: the reality, meaning the pulse of events on the ground, and their more or less distorted rendering through news and images.

Acknowledgement This work was funded by the EU's NextGenerationEU instrument through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan of Romania – Pillar III-C9-I8, managed by the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalization, within the project entitled *The Coverage and Reception of the Russian–Ukrainian Conflict in Polish, Romanian and English-language Media: A Comparative Critical Discourse Study with Recommendations for Journalism Training (CORECON)*, contract no. 760244/28.12.2023, code CF 25/27.07.2023.

Selection of Collages Representative for the Illustration of Proximity/Timeliness:

- https://www.romaniatv.net/rusia-a-extins-lista-cu-tarile-neprietenose-pe-care-se-afla-deja-si-romania_6687578.html
- https://www.romaniatv.net/moscova-a-expulzat-10-diplomati-de-la-ambasada-romaniei-relatii-tot-mai-tensionate-intre-romania-si-rusia_6481518.html
- https://www.romaniatv.net/vladimir-putin-avertisment-pentru-vecinii-ucrainei-i-as-sfatui-si-pe-ei-sa-nu-escaladeze-situatia_6297538.html
- https://www.romaniatv.net/vladimir-putin-romania-si-ungaria-ar-putea-revendica-teritorii-din-ucraina_8118457.html
- https://www.romaniatv.net/vladimir-putin-a-amenintat-din-nou-tarile-neprietenose-este-vizata-si-romania_6353283.html
- https://www.romaniatv.net/pravda-polonia-si-romania-sunt-primele-pe-lista-celor-care-o-cauta-cu-lumanarea_6440328.html

Selection of Collages Representative for Political Elites: Vladimir Putin vs Volodymyr Zelensky:

- https://www.romaniatv.net/rasturnare-de-situatie-intre-putin-si-zelenski-anuntul-care-schimba-soarta-razboiului_6482723.html
- https://www.romaniatv.net/se-schimba-harta-europei-lovitura-grea-pentru-zelenski-pregatita-de-putin_6474308.html
- https://www.romaniatv.net/lovitura-grea-pentru-zelenski-republicanii-au-blocat-legea-de-finantare-care-inclusea-ajutoare-pentru-ucraina-si-israel_7944881.html
- https://www.romaniatv.net/intalnire-putin-zelenski-in-cadrul-unui-summit-de-pace-organizat-in-ungaria-viktor-orban-putin-a-acceptat-dar-a-pus-unele-conditii_6429823.html

Selection of Collages Which Illustrate the Negativity Through Close-Up Shots with Vladimir Putin:

- https://www.romaniatv.net/putin-avanseaza-in-ucraina-politicienii-de-la-kiev-transmit-noi-mesaje-disperate-belarus-intervine-in-razboi_6749581.html
- https://www.romaniatv.net/rusia-vrea-sa-discute-despre-prevenirea-celui-de-al-treilea-razboi-mondial_6543193.html
- https://www.romaniatv.net/ce-fel-de-arme-nucleare-are-rusia-o-racheta-poate-ajunge-la-londra-in-20-de-minute_6835031.html

Selection of Collages Which Illustrate the Positivity Through Close-Up Shots with Volodymyr Zelensky:

- https://www.romaniatv.net/razboi-in-ucraina-lovitura-sub-centura-pentru-zelenski-venita-din-rusia_6444558.html
- https://www.romaniatv.net/ce-a-discutat-klaus-iohannis-la-telefon-cu-volodimir-zelenski-ce-se-intampla-cu-securitatea-din-ucraina-si-la-marea-neagra_8034241.html
- https://www.romaniatv.net/volodimir-zelenski-bilant-sumbru-in-ucraina-cel-putin-500-de-copii-au-fost-ucisi-in-timpul-razboiului_7517351.html

References

- Bednarek, M. (2016). Investigating evaluation and news values in news items that are shared through social media. *Corpora*, 11(2), 227–257. <https://doi.org/10.3366/cor.2016.0093>
- Bednarek, M., & Caple, H. (2012a). *News discourse*. Continuum.
- Bednarek, M., & Caple, H. (2012b). “Value added”: Language, image and news values. *Discourse, Context & Media*, 1, 103–113.
- Bednarek, M., & Caple, H. (2014). Why do news values matter? Towards a new methodological framework for analyzing news discourse in Critical Discourse Analysis and beyond. *Discourse & Society*, 25(2), 135–158. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926513516041>
- Bell, P. (2008). Content analysis of visual images. In T. van Leeuwen & C. Jewitt (Eds.), *Handbook of visual analysis* (pp. 10–34). Sage.
- Botnaru, O. (2007). *Performative verbs in the Romanian language. Doctoral dissertation in Philology*. Chişinău. (in Romanian).
- Brighton, P., & Foy, D. (2007). *News values*. Sage.
- Chouliaraki, L., & Fairclough, N. (1999). *Discourse in late modernity. Rethinking Critical Discourse Analysis*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Cohen, S. (2011). *Folk devils and moral panics. The creation of the mods and rockers*. Routledge Classics.
- Fetzer, A. (2014). Media discourse in context. In C. Hart & P. Cap (Eds.), *Contemporary critical discourse studies*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Fowler, R. (1991). *Language in the news. Discourse and ideology in the press*. Routledge.
- Galtung, J., & Ruge, M. (1965). The structure of foreign news: The presentation of the Congo, Cuba and Cyprus crises in four Norwegian newspapers. *Journal of International Peace Research*, 1, 64–91.
- Garland, D. (2008). On the concept of moral panic. *Crime, Media, Culture*, 4(1), 9–30. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741659007087270>
- Goode, E., & Ben-Yehuda, N. (1994). *Moral panic: The social construction of deviance*. Blackwell.
- Hall, S. (1981). The determinations of news photographs. In S. Cohen & J. Young (Eds.), *The manufacture of news: Deviance, social problems and the mass media* (2nd ed) (pp. 226–243). Constable.
- Harcup, T., & O'Neill, D. (2001). What is news? Galtung and Ruge revisited *Journalism Studies*, 2(2), 261–280. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616700118449>
- Kang, S., Park, Y., & Valdez, C. (2024). Framing of Russia-Ukraine war: Comparisons of global news. *Journal of Media Research*, 17(2 (49)), 24–43. <https://doi.org/10.24193/jmr.49.3>
- Kress, G., & van Leeuwen, T. (2001). *Multimodal discourse. The modes and media of contemporary communication*. Arnold & Oxford University Press.
- Ledin, P., & Machin, D. (2020). *Introduction to multimodal analysis*. (2nd ed.). Bloomsbury Academic.
- Machin, D. (2016). The need for a social and affordance-driven multimodal critical discourse studies. *Discourse & Society*, 27(3), 322–334. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926516630903>
- Molek-Kozakowska, K. (2018). Making biosciences visible for popular consumption: Approaching image-text relations in newscientist.com through a critical multimodal analysis. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 25(4), 379–392. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800418790296>
- Ushchyna, V. (2022). From conflict of discourses to military conflict: Multimodality of identity construction in Russo-Ukrainian war discourse. *East European Journal of Psycholinguistics*, 9(2), 130–143.
- van Dijk, T. A. (2006). Discourse and manipulation. *Discourse & Society*, 17(3), 359–383. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926506060250>
- van Leeuwen, T. (2008). *Discourse and practice: New tools for Critical Discourse Analysis*. Oxford University Press.
- Zelizer, B. (1998). *Remembering to forget: Holocaust memory through the camera's eye*. University of Chicago Press.

Denisa-Maria Bâlc is a doctoral student in the field of philology and a teaching assistant at the Faculty of Letters and Arts, Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Romania. Her main fields of interest are: discourse analysis, language studies, Romanian as a foreign language, and Romanian grammar. She has published several articles and studies in these areas of interest and took part in several research projects, such as: FAKEROM (*Fake News in Romanian: A Joint Discursive and Computational Approach*); and TEHNE (*The Development of New and Emerging Technologies in the Context of Stimulating Research Excellence at LBUS*).

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if you modified the licensed material. You do not have permission under this license to share adapted material derived from this chapter or parts of it.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.



Chapter 9

From Fact to Opinion and Back Again: A Case Study of Marcin Ogdowski's Facebook War Reporting



Przemysław Wilk

Abstract This chapter is a pragma-linguistic case study of (de)legitimization in social media journalism. It focuses on popular Polish writer and correspondent Marcin Ogdowski's Facebook reporting of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, where fact and opinion merge and intertwine to reflect the journalist's straightforward, lucid, and outspoken attitude. Based on a corpus of Facebook posts gathered between 22 February 2022 and 30 June 2024 (approximately 90,000 words), the article documents discursive and linguistic strategies aimed at condemning Russia and praising Ukraine. The findings demonstrate how Ogdowski's fact-based reporting (e.g., war-related figures and statistics) on the one hand, and opinion-driven accounts (e.g., highly loaded language and tone) on the other hand, converge in the warfare legitimization of Ukraine and delegitimization of Russia.

9.1 Introduction

In the rapidly evolving landscape of digital communication, social media have emerged as a transformative force in contemporary journalism. Platforms such as Facebook or X have not only altered the mechanisms of news dissemination but also reshaped journalistic norms, genres, and practices. These digital environments offer greater narrative freedom, less strict professional regulations, and more interactive audience engagement than traditional media outlets, thus blurring the lines between institutional journalism, personal commentary, and public advocacy (Smith, 2021; Visnovsky & Radosinska, 2018).

This study contributes to this growing field by examining the Facebook activity of the Polish war journalist Marcin Ogdowski, who uses his personal profile to document and comment on the Russian-Ukrainian war. Ogdowski's Facebook posts

P. Wilk (✉)

Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Sibiu, Romania

University of Opole, Opole, Poland

e-mail: pwilk@uni.opole.pl

© The Author(s) 2026

K. Molek-Kozakowska, S.-M. Terian (eds.), *Mediated Discourses of Conflict across Languages and Genres*, The Language of Politics,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-95-6992-2_9

145

serve as a representative case of how journalistic discourse adapts to digital platforms, particularly regarding genre hybridity and the strategic and creative use of language forms. His posts demonstrate a complex interplay of fact and opinion, analytic commentary, and emotional expression. Positioned at the intersection of objective, interpretative, and advocacy journalism, Ogdowski's posts challenge the genre boundaries that have traditionally structured journalistic outputs.

Central to this investigation is the concept of (de)legitimization in discourse, especially as theorized by van Leeuwen (2007) and Reyes (2011). By analyzing how Ogdowski employs such strategies as authorization, moral evaluation, rationalization, emotional appeal, and projection of hypothetical futures, this chapter sheds light on the linguistic and discursive mechanisms that construct legitimacy in digitally mediated war reporting. Particular attention is given to Ogdowski's informal and conversational language, including his use of personal voice, colloquialisms, orthographic deviations, and emotionally charged vocabulary. These stylistic features not only enhance the accessibility and affective appeal of his posts but also serve to position him as a credible witness and a morally engaged commentator.

9.2 Genre Hybridity of Social Media Posts: The Case of Marcin Ogdowski

Platforms such as Facebook facilitate the creation and exchange of diverse content, enabling users to publicly express opinions and interact globally in real time. As stated by Liaropoulos (2023), such a participatory media environment has blurred the lines between traditional journalism and user-generated content, empowering individuals to contribute to a continuous, near real-time stream of information. This, in turn, has elevated the potential of social media for shaping political narratives and mobilizing collective action. By expanding the dissemination of information and the diversity of voices in public discourse, social media platforms offer interactive and participatory mechanisms that can catalyze political debates, social movements, or even conflicts.

Given such a vast potential of social media, prominent figures such as politicians, intellectuals, commentators, or journalists use platforms to enable their voices to be heard. Importantly, the nature of social media communication, collapsing the distinctions between personal and professional, public and private, or producer and consumer, brings new affordances for "how" news can be presented with respect to language and style. The blurred distinctions between otherwise clearly demarcated categories of journalistic practices are evidenced in the very hybridity of the post as a genre (Giltrow & Stein, 2009).

The post reflects a fusion of multiple forms, modes, and discourses that defy traditional boundaries of genre classification. Posts can simultaneously function as personal expression, public commentary, promotional material, or as is the case here, journalistic reporting. This genre-bending is amplified by the multimodal

nature of posts, often combining text, images, emojis, hyperlinks, audio, and video, thus creating a multi-layered communicative experience. The post's genre hybridity also emerges from its flexibility: it adapts its tone, content, and structure based not only on the platform's affordances, but more importantly, in relation to the users' expectations and practices. Last but not least, posts are dialogic in nature as they are embedded in a network of intertextual references, hashtags, comments, and shares that continually reshape their meaning (Colussi & Rocha, 2020). Through posting, social media platforms provide journalists with a greater flexibility in the presentation and dissemination of content when set beside traditional, and thus more formally regulated, journalistic genres.

The present study examines the case of Polish war reporter, writer, and blogger Marcin Ogdowski's Facebook account, where he regularly publishes content related to the Russian-Ukrainian war. Ogdowski gained recognition as Poland's first war blogger, pioneering independent, online war reporting in Polish. His blog *Bez Kamouflażu* [Without Camouflage] became a platform for frontline accounts and analyses of the conflict. He has authored several books, including the 2024 *Zabić Ukrainę. Alfabet rosyjskiej agresji* [To Kill Ukraine: The Alphabet of Russian Aggression] dedicated to the Russian-Ukrainian war. He is considered an independent voice outside mainstream editorial structures and his Facebook presence with approximately 20k followers makes him one of the most renowned Polish independent war correspondents. Ogdowski publishes new posts multiple times per week and sometimes even daily during intense periods. With an average of 47 comments and 60 reactions per post, his Facebook statistics suggest high ongoing interaction with his followers.

Since 2014, he has regularly covered the Donbas war. After Russia's invasion in February 2022, Ogdowski began making regular trips to Ukraine, often entering active frontline areas. He posts field notes, photos, and short videos directly from attacked cities of Kyiv, Kharkiv, and Kherson. He also reports on war crimes, including notable posts from Bucha, highlighting its symbolic role for the global understanding of Russian atrocities. His Facebook account became a primary platform of reference for quick and digestible updates for many Polish commentators and readers on the Russian-Ukrainian war.

When it comes to Ogdowski's reporting style, his posts are characterized by hybridity: they are simultaneously highly opinionated and emotionally charged, while also rich in factual and well-researched information, including statistics and analytical commentary. To articulate his moral stance on the conflict explicitly, Ogdowski consistently blends fact and opinion, thereby operating at the intersection of factual and interpretative journalism. The former has been grounded in the principle of neutrality: it emphasizes fact-driven reporting that avoids bias, personal opinion, or speculative interpretation (Anonymous, n.d.). Its goal is to present verified information clearly and concisely, leaving readers to form their own conclusions. It typically adheres to the traditional "inverted pyramid" structure and emphasizing the 5W scheme: who, what, when, where, and how (Keeble, 2006). In contrast to this, as stated by Esser and Umbricht (2014), interpretive journalism acknowledges that facts do not exist in a vacuum; hence, it seeks to explain the

“why” behind the news. It intertwines factual reporting with informed commentary, drawing on historical context, expert opinion, and analytical insight to provide a more comprehensive understanding of complex issues or events (Zelizer, 2004). This approach also introduces a degree of subjectivity, as the selection and framing of information are influenced by the journalist’s interpretive lens.

While certain features typical of both objective and interpretative journalism serve as a foundational framework of Ogdowski’s posts, it is the linguistic choices and stylistic strategies he employs, as well as his overtly outspoken and opinionated point of view, that extend beyond the conventional boundaries of journalistic outputs. This aligns his writing more with so-called advocacy journalism (Bekken, 2022), or rather the advocacy continuum in journalistic practice (Fisher, 2016). Advocacy journalism openly adopts a non-neutral stance on topical issues, with the explicit goal of promoting a particular cause or perspective. Unlike traditional factual or interpretative journalism, advocacy journalism acknowledges its bias and aims to influence public opinion by highlighting a specific stance or recommending a specific course of action.

Even without in-depth analysis, it is easy to notice that Ogdowski’s style is marked by high informality, manifested in a truly conversational language that mirrors to some extent the cadence and spontaneity of everyday conversation, making his posts accessible and relatable to readers (Pournelle, 2004). There are several key features that distinguish a conversational style (Joshi & Lal, 2024; Perez-Llantada, 2021); yet, in the case of Ogdowski’s posts the most outstanding are (1) the use of first-person perspective and audience-inclusive language, (2) the use of colloquial terms, and (3) an intentional breach of orthographic rules—that enable him not only to build a more intimate relationship with his audience but also to emphasize his emotional stance towards the conflict. Ogdowski’s informal style and language are an affordance of the post as a hybrid genre. As claimed in this study, high hybridity of the genre facilitates openly expressing his stance and opinion on the Russian-Ukrainian war that in turn constitutes the subjective line of (de)legitimizing the parties involved in the conflict.

9.3 (De)legitimization in Discourse

Legitimization strategies in discourse encompass various ways in which speakers or writers attempt to justify or rationalize their statements, actions, or positions to garner acceptance and credibility from their audience. Scholars have approached legitimization and its linguistic representations in discourses from many perspectives, most often studying political discourse (del Saz-Rubio, 2024; Hansson, 2023; Rivers & Ross, 2020), immigration discourse (Rojo & van Dijk, 1997; van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999) or, particularly relevant here, military discourse (Simonsen, 2019; van Dijk, 2005). Moreover, as the present study focuses on social media communication, it is important to mention contextual dynamics of legitimization strategies as manifest in online media. For instance, Ravazzani and Maier (2017) discussed how

digital platforms necessitate a more nuanced approach to legitimization due to their polyphonic nature. The rise of social media has led communicators to adopt strategic discursive practices that account for diverse public perceptions and reactions that are central to maintaining legitimacy in an increasingly complex informational landscape. Overall, the understanding of legitimization strategies in discourse is essential for comprehending how journalistic credibility is constructed in these dynamic contexts.

One of the most significant contributions to mapping (de)legitimization has been offered by van Leeuwen (2007) (see also van Leeuwen 1996). He developed a comprehensive framework for understanding how communicating social actors justify their actions and narratives in various domains, ranging from politics to daily interactions. His framework categorizes the mechanisms through which legitimacy is constructed in discourse into four types: authorization, moral evaluation, rationalization, and mythopoesis.

Authorization involves legitimating actions or claims by referencing authority figures, traditions, or formal norms. Van Leeuwen (2007, p. 94) outlined how speakers can invoke established authorities or cultural norms to bolster their arguments or actions. This is evident in political or media discourses, where leaders and journalists often justify decisions by citing established legal frameworks or traditional practices. In moral evaluation, legitimizations are achieved through reference to ethical standards or collective values. This involves aligning actions with commonly accepted norms, thereby framing them as socially beneficial or justifiable. Within the strategy of rationalization, actions and decisions are justified through logical reasoning and the presentation of their intended outcomes or benefits. It focuses on the functionality of actions, suggesting that they serve a necessary purpose. Van Leeuwen (2007, p. 104) emphasized that rationalizations often make use of empirical data or expert opinions to enhance credibility. Finally, mythopoesis involves the use of narratives and myths to create a compelling collective identity or shared vision. Engaging in storytelling can evoke emotional responses, framing actors' actions not just as rational but as part of a larger narrative that conveys purpose and shared goals. It effectively helps to foster a sense of belonging and identity within a specific group.

From the perspective of this study, an important elaboration on van Leeuwen's (2007) proposal is Reyes' (2011) framework of legitimization strategies in political discourse. He identified five strategies of legitimization that indicate how actors justify their positions within public discourse, namely via (1) legitimization through emotions, (2) legitimization through a hypothetical future, (3) legitimization through rationality, (4) voices of expertise, and (5) altruism.

For Reyes (2011), the first strategy employs emotional appeal, particularly fear, outrage, or sympathy, to create a compelling justification for an action or policy. By invoking emotions, communicators can connect with their audience on a fundamental level, thereby enhancing their persuasive power. A hypothetical future involves the projection of potential or desirable outcomes, emphasizing what might occur if a certain course of action is taken (or avoided). This kind of envisioning helps actors contextualize their actions within a framework of optimism or urgency, suggesting

that the acceptance of a solution to a problem leads to better scenarios. Frequently, the strategy manifests in showcasing ensuing negative consequences unless some actions are taken to prevent them. Legitimization through rationality is grounded in logic and evidence. This strategy calls on facts, statistics, and rational discourse to support claims, aiming for a consensus based on common sense or empirical validation. By appealing to logic, speakers seek to bolster their credibility. Drawing on authoritative figures or specialized knowledge, the strategy of voices of expertise consists in referencing individuals or institutions that the audience trusts. This technique effectively shifts the burden of justification onto established authorities or recognized bodies of knowledge, lending additional credibility to the claims being made by journalists. Finally, altruism emphasizes selflessness or the greater good as a basis for legitimization. By framing actions as altruistic or beneficial to a larger community, actors can justify certain behaviors as necessary for societal welfare, thus appealing to collective values and principles.

As can be seen from the presentation of both frameworks, although there are some overlaps between the legitimization strategies articulated by van Leeuwen (2007) and Reyes (2011), the latter introduced strategies that are not so conspicuous in the former's framework. The three major categories that feature prominently in both paradigms are rationalization, authorization, and value-based moral evaluation. As far as points of divergence are concerned, Reyes (2011) additionally emphasized the role of emotions, altruism, and hypothetical futures in legitimizing action and events. Given the focus of the present study on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, and the nature of the social media posts under analysis, I find a fusion of the two frameworks particularly relevant. This is because an appeal to emotions and the projection of possible (yet evidently undesirable) scenarios of how the conflict might unfold feature extensively in Ogdowski's Facebook reports. He employs these legitimization strategies to foster acceptance and support among the audience, the ultimate goal of enacting credibility and engagement through discourse.

9.4 Data and Analysis

The dataset for the study comprises a collection of Marcin Ogdowski's Facebook posts gathered between February 24, 2022 marking the onset of a full-scale Russian invasion on Ukraine, and June 30, 2024. The procedure for collecting the data consisted in applying a principled protocol developed within the CORECON project (an overview of the procedure is available at <https://grants.ulbsibiu.ro/corecon/corpus-compilation-and-data-annotation-protocols-in-corecon>). The sample consists of 159 posts whose length varies between approximately 570 words to over 3,000 words in some cases, and amounts to over 90,000 words in total.

To identify (de)legitimization strategies, the sample has been close-read multiple times. Having established general tendencies and themes in Ogdowski's texts, the AI-enhanced version of Atlas.ti software was used to identify any instances of

legitimization of Ukraine and delegitimization of Russia.¹ The results of both close reading and AI-powered analysis generally overlapped and provided a set of major (de)legitimizing strategies used in Marcin Ogdowski's Facebook reporting of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Importantly, although the Atlas.ti algorithm having been cued for evaluative language did point out emotional appeal as a strategy, it was not very successful at detecting Ogdowski's highly emotional tone and language. AI's positive identification of emotional appeals hinged on such adjectives as *tragic*, but the sarcastic nature of Ogdowski's commentaries was missed by the AI tool and was only revealed during the sample's close reading.

The sections below offer an illustration of the five major types of legitimizing Ukrainian and delegitimizing Russian actors (authorization, rationalization, moral evaluation, emotional appeal and hypothetical futures), drawing on the set of van Leeuwen's (2007) and Reyes' (2011) (de)legitimization strategies. While the strategies are catalogued and discussed separately, they frequently overlap with one another, as is the case for example with Ogdowski providing statistics and analyses (rationalization) by different political bodies (authorization) in order to prove the inhumane conduct of the Russian army (moral evaluation).

9.4.1 Authorization

Both van Leeuwen (2007) and Reyes (2011) emphasize the importance of authority in legitimizing actions. The former refers to legitimization through traditional or institutional authority, whereas the latter references *voices of expertise* as a means of establishing credibility through recognized authorities or experts. In his posts, Ogdowski incorporates various voices of expertise, such as military experts, human rights advocates, or defense analysts. These deliberately selected voices align with Ogdowski's outspoken criticism of the Russian invasion. What is symptomatic of the Facebook posts analyzed in the study is the fact that Ogdowski does not quote his sources directly but uses indirect speech as a linguistic means of source incorporation.²

Notwithstanding that, there is a difference in terms of language formality and tone between his referring to outside sources whose aim is to validate and support his stance, and his personal, opinionated statements. Interestingly, authorization is predominantly used by Ogdowski to delegitimize Russian armed actions but not to legitimize Ukrainian involvement in the war. It can be claimed that delegitimizing one side of the conflict by default legitimizes the other, yet in the present study the aim is to identify the range and typology of legitimization or delegitimization

¹An overview of how qualitative text analysis can benefit from AI-enhanced software application can be found in a CORECON blog post available at <https://grants.ulbsibiu.ro/corecon/using-ai-in-qualitative-research-insights-from-corecon-piloted-analytic-protocols>.

²See Molek-Kozakowska (2026), for a discussion of the use of expert voices in conflict media coverage.

strategies of Ukraine or Russia. Hence, I make a principled distinction between legitimization and delegitimization strategies, acknowledging but not assuming their dialectical relationship.

86 percent of war prisoners who came back from Russian captivity have confirmed to have suffered direct physical violence – said [Dmytro Lubinec] during a broadcast in the Ukrainska Pravda portal. A video material revealed a few days ago, portraying a decapitation of an unarmed Ukrainian prisoner, is not, unfortunately, an isolated case. We have at our disposal a few dozen videos depicting decapitation as well as cutting of limbs, sex organs, nose, ears, or fingers, among others.

This excerpt³ is an example of a statement from the Ukrainian human rights official Dmytro Lubinec, who provides evidence of the brutality faced by Ukrainian prisoners of war. His insights serve to highlight the human rights violations occurring during the conflict and the moral responsibilities of the international community to put such cruelty to an end. In this sense, by emphasizing the barbaric demeanor of the Russian army violating human rights and warfare conduct, Ogdowski employs authorization to delegitimize Russia.

The strategy of authorization is also evident in referencing various institutional bodies via their representatives, such as NATO (e.g., NATO secretary-general Jens Stoltenberg) or United Nations (e.g., Head of the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine Matilda Bogner) or simply in referring to these organizations metonymically (e.g., *UN acknowledged...*, *NATO uses...*) in order to background any fine-grained agency. Moreover, Ogdowski also references these organizations when providing data or statistics that is, however, an instantiation of the strategy of rationalization discussed in the following section. Generally, Ogdowski's using outside sources boosts his coverage's factuality by providing authoritative insights and analyses regarding different aspects of the conflict.

9.4.2 Rationalization

This strategy involves the use of logical reasoning and empirical data to justify actions or policy decisions. Both van Leeuwen (2007) and Reyes (2011) categorize it as one of the main types of legitimization strategies in their frameworks. In this study, rationalization is a major strategy to provide factual data and hence amplify the objectivity of the coverage. Ogdowski references different statistics and data analyses either of his own or provided by official institutional bodies (e.g., *official UN data claim...*, *a Human Rights Watch report*, *UN World Population Prospects report*), or more generally attributed to Ukrainian sources (e.g., *Kiev's report*, *Ukrainians report that...*).

³ Due to space constraints, all Polish examples quoted here have been translated into English with utmost care taken to reflect Ogdowski's sarcastic and axiologically marked comments where applicable. This especially concerns the lack of capitalization of proper names relating to Russia and its representatives.

Referring to factual reports accompanies principally the reporting of Russia's breach of international laws and regulations with respect to the use of prohibited types of ammunition or maltreating and torturing war prisoners:

Allegedly, FSS [Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation] is "working on" five hundred captive Ukrainians, whose public humiliation would serve to prove the "special operation" successful. Exploiting the war prisoners in such a way clearly would constitute a breach of the Geneva Conventions, yet moscow does have quite an experience in that matter.

This post continues to compare the current Ukrainian situation with the July 17, 1944, humiliating march of Nazi war prisoners along the main streets of the Soviet Moscow. The prisoners were intentionally kept dirty so that the Soviets could symbolically claim to have washed away the Nazi dirt from the streets of their capital. It cannot go unnoticed that there is a strong emotional load in the passage, instantiating the strategy of emotional appeal. At the same time, contextualizing Russia's violation of human rights with reference to international laws and acts (here the Geneva Conventions of 1949) provides an additional rationale based on a commonly accepted ethical premises for the illegitimacy of such actions.

In his coverage of the conflict, Ogdowski oftentimes employs rationalization as a strategy to legitimize Ukrainian defense-oriented actions undertaken as a response to Russian aggression. He provides rational grounds for the military and economic support of Ukraine by emphasizing the necessity of constant military equipment delivery and continuous strengthening of western sanctions aimed at Russia:

Fierce resistance of AFU [Armed Forces of Ukraine] (but also russian bestiality, for example) have redefined the meaning of "victory" in NATO's terms. It has now become – to quote Jens Stoltenberg, NATO secretary-general – a "complete victory," that is, going back to Ukrainian borders from before 2014, which h-a-s to be accompanied by the longest-possible-lasting reduction of russia's military capacity.

The support given to Ukraine is labeled by Ogdowski as an *ethical imperative* (see below for discussion of the strategy of moral evaluation), with the international community recognizing Ukraine's right to defend itself, and providing assistance to uphold this right. An important aspect of rationalization of the Western support for Ukraine is based on a strategy of building hypothetical future scenarios indicating that if Russia is not stopped and Ukraine is not able to sustain its sovereignty and territorial integrity, the conflict could spill over to NATO countries, thereby legitimizing any measures to manage the conflict in the Ukrainian territory.

9.4.3 Moral Evaluation

Moral evaluation of actions is a fundamental aspect in van Leeuwen's (2007) and Reyes' (2011) frameworks. Both explicitly state that appealing to shared moral grounds can reinforce legitimacy by positioning actions as aligned with broader social norms and ethics. Throughout his reporting of the war Ogdowski emphasizes

the importance of human life and the moral obligation to protect civilians during warfare. He contrasts the humanitarian approach of Ukrainian forces attempting to create humanitarian corridors for civilians or treat war prisoners with due respect, for example, with the overall disregard for civilian life shown by Russian forces:

There are no grounds for advocating russian bestiality; it is not possible to justify the orcs' racism and nationalism. There is no morally sound reason to support their plans of exterminating the Ukrainian nation... From this perspective, it is a moral imperative to hunt, persecute, and make the propagandists' lives harder by any means available; a part of *raison d'état*.

This excerpt is part of the post criticizing Russians who spread propaganda, especially in social media. It pinpoints moral implications of aggression, portraying Russia's actions as barbaric and frames the conflict as a struggle between good (Ukraine) and evil (Russia), reinforcing the idea that aggressive actions will ultimately lead to moral and ethical condemnation.

As is also illustrated in the previous example above, Ogdowski repeatedly calls for a moral imperative for the international community to support Ukraine in its struggle against aggression. It frames this support as not only a political necessity but also a moral obligation to uphold justice and protect the innocent. He also frequently critiques attempts to draw moral equivalence between the actions of Ukraine and Russia, for example with reference to the treatment of war prisoners or the civilians killed in the acts of bombing, arguing that such comparisons mitigate the unique moral failings of the aggressor and distract from the ethical responsibilities of the international community to support the victim of aggression.

9.4.4 Emotional Appeal

Reyes (2011) strongly emphasized the use of emotion as a vital strategic tool for legitimization. It highlights a more emotive and psychological dimension that goes beyond traditional rational justifications. Evaluation- and emotion-driven language is a highly conspicuous aspect of Ogdowski's coverage of the conflict: he uses a vast repertoire of linguistic means to mark his undeniably condemning attitude and unequivocally negative stance towards Russia with the intention to delegitimize its involvement in the conflict.

One such strategy is a breach of the Polish language's orthographic rules. Ogdowski intentionally disregards the orthographic rules pertaining to the capitalization of proper names. He refuses to capitalize proper names referring to Russia (e.g., *rosja* [russia], *rosjanie* [russians], the metonymic *moskwa* [moscow], etc.) and Russian officials (*putin*, *lawrow* [lavrov], *surowikin* [surovikin], etc.). Interestingly, Ogdowski himself admits that he uses this strategy intentionally, for example when he reports on the actions of pro-Ukrainian Russian militias, and refers to them as Russians, claiming that "these [citizens of Russia] indeed deserve to be referred to with a capital letter."

Another type of emotional appeal employed by Ogdowski is reflected in the naming strategies he applies to refer to Russia and its army. In addition to a more standard strategy of attribution, that is pre- and/or post-modifying a noun with a value- and emotion-laden term, sometimes additionally enclosed in inverted commas to indicate sarcasm (e.g., “*niezwykczona armia*” [“the invincible army”] or “*druga armia świata*” [“the second army in the world”]), Ogdowski also uses a creative technique of lexical blending, where two different words are amalgamated in order to obtain a new lexical item (cf. Fauconnier & Turner, 2003). Ogdowski demonstrates a considerable linguistic skill in using creative blends, particularly (a) *raszysci*, (b) *Putlerowcy*, or (c) *ruSS-armia*, all imbued with the emotional sentiment of historically uneasy Polish-German relations. In the case of the neologism *raszysci*, two collective nouns—Russians and fascists—were blended. *Putlerowcy* is a noun denoting Russian army soldiers derived from a lexical blend of Putin and Hitler. As far as *ruSS-armia* is concerned, the noun *army* is pre-modified with a creative adjective blend consisting of the adjective *Russian* with the *SS* symbol of the Nazi special forces. All the three blends aim at equating the contemporary Russian-Ukrainian war with WWII and the Nazi army in order to emphasize the inhumane cruelty of Russian warfare. Given the fact that Ogdowski consequently highlights the need to protect Ukrainian civilians, the intention of choosing Nazi analogies can arguably serve to evoke associations with the extermination of the Jews to even further delegitimize Russia.

Additionally, Ogdowski employs metaphors to construe the Russian army as *orcs*. This metaphorical construal embedded in the context of war quite effectively activates Tolkien's popular culture concept of a deformed, evil creature devoid of any reason or emotion, whose only duty was to blindly obey its master and to mercilessly kill the enemies. Such a depiction of the Russian army is highly pejorative and serves to delegitimize Russian warfare by once again emphasizing the inhumane bestiality of the invader. Along the same lines, Putin is metaphorically referred to as *the orcs' leader*.

Apart from the distinctive strategies discussed above, Ogdowski's reports of the war are marked with emotional and evaluative language that hinges on sarcasm and invective:

Yes, dear readers, they [Russian generals] rushed navy sailors of different specialties together and sent them as regular infantry into battle; indeed, a truly effective tactic ... to get rid of specialists. Way to go, comrades.

Nearly three months after the beginning of the “special operations” in Ukraine, the russian president can celebrate... the conquest of Mariupol, a mid-size town on the Sea of Azov. F...ing congratulations.

He adds ironic commentaries to both factual data and his personal opinions using politically incorrect language, including swearwords and slurs, to clearly elucidate his stance and attitude towards the Russian-Ukrainian war and the parties involved. Ridiculing various aspects of Russian warfare, Ogdowski expresses his condemnation of, and indignation towards, Russia. Importantly, what allows him to openly frame his voice as subjective and to express a personal stance is the use of

first-person perspective and audience-inclusive language. Signaling to the readers that the text, far from constituting neutral reporting, fosters a sense of intimacy and familiarity, giving it a more relatable feeling.

9.4.5 *Hypothetical Future*

Reyes (2011) identified the strategy of projecting future scenarios as crucial for legitimization, enabling arguments to present themselves as essential for positive outcomes or as prevention against negative outcomes. This strategy employs a temporal dimension that helps mobilize support and action through promises of better future. It has been shown above that Ogdowski resorts to conjecturing a scenario in which the war spreads westward, to NATO countries, that functions as a strategy of legitimizing Ukraine's resistance against the aggressor. A discursively constructed future where the now relatively safe Europe is swamped in a global conflict acts as a trigger for taking measures to prevent it from happening and hence functions as a strong legitimation for continuous assistance lent to Ukraine.

Another technique of creating a hypothetical future is the use of analogy.⁴ Invoking analogies draws on temporal associations linking a past reference point with the present event or occurrence, in this way creating a possible hypothetical scenario. Ogdowski uses analogies in the context of the Russian army's inhumane brutality. He refers not only to the current Russian war-crime-level massacres committed in Bucha, Irpin, or Izium but also to more distant Soviet 1944 crimes in Nemmersdorf, as in the following examples:

There still are people in Poland who have personally experienced Soviet bestiality characteristic of the Red Army's advancement to the west. Their memories are passed down to next generations – rooted at the deepest psychological level, that was the reason of our fear of the USSR and later Russia. Today, these anxieties are fed by the images of the liberated Ukrainian territories. They will stay in our minds for years, serving as an incentive to mobilization, if necessary. After all, we don't want to have another Bucha or Nemmersdorf at our place.

Especially that Russia has been a hostile country – for centuries – and for months now fueled by vengeance for supporting Ukraine. If it was not for NATO protection and fierce Ukrainian defense, we would be fighting the Russians at our place.

The first of these excerpts is situated in the context of the Soviet crime in Nemmersdorf to draw parallels between past atrocities, still alive in the collective memory of Polish society, and current Russian actions, as well as to illustrate how historical events can shape contemporary attitudes towards the conflict. The last sentence projects a hypothetical future where under certain conditions it would be possible for past atrocities to be repeated during this conflict. Importantly, the future

⁴See Wilk & Selejan (2026), for a discussion of analogy as a means of realizing temporal proximization in war discourse.

scenarios in these examples serve to delegitimize Russian actions and also to legitimize the support of Ukraine in fighting for its sovereignty and territorial integrity in order to not allow the Russian army to invade Poland, a country with a particularly troubled history of relations with the Soviet Union, now Russia.

9.5 Conclusions

In his Facebook posts, Ogdowski primarily uses (de)legitimization strategies to portray Russia as the clear aggressor, violating international laws, moral norms, and human rights. Strategies such as authorization and rationalization serve to highlight Russia's breaches through expert voices and factual data. Meanwhile, moral evaluation and emotional appeal are used to underscore the ethical and human cost of Russian aggression, framing it as inhumane, unjustified, and historically congruent with past atrocities.

While delegitimization of Russia dominates, Ukrainian actions are legitimized mainly through rationalization (e.g., the necessity of military support) and moral evaluation (e.g., a duty to protect civilians and the country's sovereignty). The portrayal of Ukraine is consistently tied to ethical imperatives, reinforcing the notion that international support is both morally justified and geopolitically prudent. A conspicuous characteristic of Ogdowski's reporting is that his posts are marked by a highly emotional and expressive style that departs from traditional journalistic neutrality. Through sarcasm, irony, creative blends, and historical analogies, he incorporates into his posts a powerful affective load that resonates with the Polish audience's shared cultural references and collective memory.

In general, Ogdowski's posts construct a highly polarized and morally framed narrative of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Through a skillful orchestration of (de)legitimization strategies, he reinforces Ukraine's right to defend itself and portrays Russia's actions as ethically indefensible and historically resonant with past atrocities. The range and types of legitimization strategies in posts exemplify how social media enables a form of conflict communication that is deeply rhetorical, affective, and ideologically engaged.

Acknowledgement This work was funded by the EU's NextGenerationEU instrument through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan of Romania - Pillar III-C9-I8, managed by the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalization, within the project entitled *The coverage and reception of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in Polish, Romanian and English-language media: A comparative critical discourse study with recommendations for journalism training (CORECON)*, contract no. 760244/28.12.2023, code CF 25/27.07.2023.

References

- Anonymous. (n.d.) *Understanding media and culture: An introduction to mass communication*. University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing eLearning Support Initiative. <https://open.lib.umn.edu/mediaandculture>
- Bekken, J. (2022). Advocacy journalism. In *The SAGE encyclopedia of journalism*. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781544391199.n14>
- Colussi, J., & Rocha, P. M. (2020). Examining the journalistic genres hybridization in content published by newspapers on Facebook Live. *Journal of International Communication*, 26(1), 20–35.
- del Saz-Rubio, M. M. (2024). Delineating the discursive (de)legitimation strategies outlined by Spanish politicians in their no-confidence motion speeches. *Discourse & Communication*, 19(2), 280–314.
- Esser, F., & Umbricht, A. (2014). The evolution of objective and interpretative journalism in the western press. Comparing six news systems since the 1960s. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 91(2), 229–249.
- Fauconnier, G., & Turner, M. (2003). *The way we think: Conceptual blending and the mind's hidden complexities*. Basic Books.
- Fisher, C. (2016). The advocacy continuum: Towards a theory of advocacy in journalism. *Journalism*, 17(6), 711–726.
- Giltrow, J., & Stein, D. (2009). Genres in the internet: Innovation, evolution, and genre theory. In J. Giltrow & D. Stein (Eds.), *Genres in the internet* (pp. 1–26). John Benjamins.
- Hansson, S. P. (2023). Legitimation in government social media communication: The case of the Brexit department. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 20(4), 361–378.
- Joshi, R., & Lal, P. (2024). Peculiarities of phrasal verbs in the English language (by the example of newspaper materials). *Bulletin of Language and Literature Studies*, 1(1). <https://doi.org/10.59652/bls.v1i1.388>
- Keeble, R. (2006). *The newspapers handbook* (4th ed.). Routledge.
- Liaropoulos, A. N. (2023). Victory and virality: War in the age of social media. *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, 24(2), 198–203.
- Molek-Kozakowska, K. (2026). Meet the experts on the war in Ukraine: Discursive strategies of representing competent sources and their voices in opinion-making news outlets. *English Text Construction*.
- Perez-Llantada, C. (2021). Grammar features and discourse style in digital genres: The case of science-focused crowdfunding projects. *Revista Signos*, 54(105), 73–96. <https://doi.org/10.4067/s0718-09342021000100073>
- Pournelle, J. (2004). A quick guide to writing online English. In *1001 computer words you need to know*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780195167757.003.0021>
- Ravazzani, S., & Maier, C. D. (2017). Strategic organizational discourse and framing in hypermodal spaces. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 22(4), 507–522. <https://doi.org/10.1108/CCIJ-06-2017-0063>
- Reyes, A. (2011). Strategies of legitimization in political discourse: From words to actions. *Discourse & Society*, 22(6), 781–807.
- Rivers, D., & Ross, A. (2020). Authority (de)legitimation in the border wall Twitter discourse of President Trump. *Journal of Language and Politics*, 19(5), 831–856.
- Rojo, L.M., & van Dijk, T.A. (1997). There was a problem, and it was solved! Legitimizing the expulsion of “illegal” immigrants in Spanish parliamentary discourse. *Discourse & Society*, 8(4), 523–567.
- Simonsen, S. (2019). Discursive legitimization strategies: The evolving legitimization of war in Israeli public diplomacy. *Discourse & Society*, 30(5), 503–520.
- Smith, J. (2021). The power of social media: Opportunities and challenges. *Journal of Communication Studies*, 34(2), 145–162.

- van Dijk, T.A. (2005). War rhetoric of a little ally: Political implicatures and Aznar's legitimization of the war in Iraq. *Journal of Language and Politics*, 4(1), 65–92.
- van Leeuwen, T. (1996). *The grammar of legitimation*. London School of Printing.
- van Leeuwen, T. (2007). Legitimation in discourse and communication. *Discourse & Communication*, 1(1), 91–112.
- van Leeuwen T., & Wodak, R. (1999). Legitimizing immigration control: A discourse-historical analysis. *Discourse Studies*, 1(1), 83–118.
- Visnovsky, J., & Radosinska, J. (Eds.). (2018). *Social media and journalism: Trends, connections, implications*. IntechOpen. <https://www.intechopen.com/books/6822>
- Wilk, P., & Selejan, C. (2026). A threat at your doorstep: The media coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian war. *International Review of Pragmatics* 18(2).
- Zelizer, B. (2004). *Taking journalism seriously: News and the academy*. Sage.

Przemysław Wilk is Senior Lecturer with a PhD in linguistics at the University of Opole, Poland. He specializes in media discourses from a cognitive and critical perspective, particularly the construal of ethnic groups and the representations of Europe. He has worked extensively on figurative mechanisms of creating meaning (metaphor, metonymy, blending, multimodality) and the rhetoric of political discourse. He has participated in FORTHEM Lab Multilingualism in School and Higher Education.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if you modified the licensed material. You do not have permission under this license to share adapted material derived from this chapter or parts of it.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.



Chapter 10

Media Narratives Regarding Refugees from Ukraine in Selected Polish Opinion Weeklies



Julia Kaproń

Abstract This study presents an analysis of the media narratives featured in two Polish opinion weeklies, *Polityka* and *Do Rzeczy*, that have different ideological affiliations but similar high readership regarding Ukrainian refugees who arrived in Poland since February 24, 2022, after the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation. The study aims to illustrate and compare two dominant narratives—“exclusionary” and “solidarity”—that were used to shape the public perception of people fleeing the war. It also captures the process of narrative evolution in the different phases of the “refugee crisis,” taking into account the ideological differences between the two weeklies. Through a multi-faceted approach based on qualitative analysis of terms, metaphors, and topoi, the chapter identifies diverse pro- and anti-Ukrainian framings that could provoke conflicting audience reactions, thus contributing to the polarization of Polish society.

10.1 Introduction

“As a refugee, you have limited choices – you can either be a victim or a threat. But I am myself,” said Feras Daboul from Syria, who arrived in Poland in 2012. These words perfectly illustrate the two main frames used in public discourse regarding refugees and migrations. Sociologist and philosopher Zygmunt Bauman, in his book *Wasted Lives* (2003), pointed out that in the past the image of a “refugee seeking asylum” provoked reactions of solidarity. However, in recent decades this perception of refugees has been evolving to the extent that providing aid to migrants has apparently ceased to be seen as a source of pride. Instead, in some cases it has

J. Kaproń (✉)

Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Lublin, Poland

© The Author(s) 2026

K. Molek-Kozakowska, S.-M. Terian (eds.), *Mediated Discourses of Conflict across Languages and Genres*, The Language of Politics,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-95-6992-2_10

161

been portrayed as naivety at best and even weaponized as potentially leading to unforeseeable complications.

The discourse on broadly understood migration, including from the Middle East and Africa, has been regularly featured in Polish informational broadcasts at the local and national levels for over a decade. However, narratives concerning individuals fleeing the military actions in Ukraine in 2022 were extensively covered by Polish media due to the scale of refugee movement described and the shift in the nature of migration from this country. Since Ukraine declared independence in 1991 and signed the relevant agreements, there has been a notable interest in emigration by its citizens to Western Europe. For some of them, the destination of choice was Poland due to its geographical and cultural proximity. Before 2022, Ukrainian migration to Poland tended to be focused on taking up (temporary) employment or obtaining a higher education degree (Warsaw Enterprise Institute, 2022). In contrast, the main motivation of those arriving in EU member states after 24 February 2022 was to find refuge from a potential threat (Narodowy Bank Polski, 2022). Polish journalists have started covering the experience of refugees extensively when trying to depict the complex political and social reality after the invasion. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to explore what media narratives, media frames, and discursive strategies that construct them have been used by Polish editors and broadcasters to represent Ukrainian refugees.

Media messages construct an image of reality in the minds of the public to the point that some people might be unable to distinguish between their own judgments and those expressed through the media. This study is guided by the principle “the medium is the message” (McLuhan, 1964, p. 1), as the form of the medium, particularly the language used by print media, embeds itself in the message, creating a symbiotic relationship through which the medium influences the perception of the message. In effect, recipients do not interact with the raw transmission of reality, but with its discursive representation that provides selective and constructed imagery, depending on the technology and affordances with which it was produced.

The analysis conducted in this study covers the period between February 24, 2022, when the Russian Federation launched a full-scale invasion against Ukraine, until February 24, 2024. This event changed the dynamics of international relations and the agenda hierarchy in the media space that had previously been dominated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The argument in favor of stopping at the two-year mark is the fact that there was a decline in the public’s interest in the fighting in Ukraine (“topic fatigue”) and a reduction in migration caused by the war (CBOS, 2024). Also, the escalation of the conflict between Israel and Palestine in the fall of 2023, the unstable geopolitical situation between the United States and China, as well as the election campaigns and reforms triggered by changes in various levels of government due to parliamentary and local elections held in 2023 and 2024 in Poland, all displaced the news related to Ukraine and its refugees.

The objective of the study is a detailed analysis of various types of media narratives established in opinion pieces published in selected Polish weekly magazines. The analyzed outlets are *Polityka* and *Do Rzeczy*, representing two distinct ideological positions with high readership of their online editions in recent years

(Zdzieborska, 2024). This enables identification of the narratives that draw on diverse and sometimes conflicting interpretative frames of the issue within a polarized society. However, it should be noted that by design pro- or anti-Ukrainian narratives in Polish media are shaped in reference to long-standing national stereotypes, well known historical events, and the current socio-political relations between Poland and Ukraine (Molek-Kozakowska & Paszczyński, 2025). In this chapter, I also aim to capture the discursive strategies, such as terminological choices, conceptual metaphors, and topoi that were used by the editors to construct the pro- and anti-refugee frames that became the building blocks of Polish media narratives of Ukrainian migrants.

10.2 Delimiting and Operationalizing the Notions of “Refugee” and “Narrative”

The migration of people from the Middle East and Africa, first through the Mediterranean and then by way of the Balkan route that in 2015 came to be referred to as the “refugee crisis,” influenced the nature of Polish media discourse. The growing interest in this topic among broadcasters and the audience contributed to the surfacing of various terms derived from different political interpretations and legal paradigms of the migration issue. Therefore, due to the media attention surrounding the concept of “refugee,” it is essential to explain the meaning of this term in a comprehensive and holistic manner. From an etymological point of view, the word “refugee” is related to the term “refuge,” with many dictionaries defining as either a permanent or temporary stay outside of the borders of one’s native country, caused by harsh conditions of economic, political, or religious nature.

The displacements following World War II forced both national authorities and international bodies to regulate the status of (non)citizens through legal acts. According to Article 1 of the 1951 UN Convention on the Status of Refugees and the 1967 New York Protocol, the status of a refugee can be attributed to an individual who “due to a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinions, is outside the country of nationality and is unable or unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country due to these fears” (United Nations, 2023). In Poland, the status of a refugee is defined by the Act of June 13, 2003, granting protection to foreigners in the territory of the Republic of Poland (Kancelaria Sejmu RP, 2003). It is important to note that for a foreigner to obtain this form of protection they must go through the appropriate procedure.

However, in media discourse the term “migrant” is often used interchangeably with the term “refugee” as described above. However, the term “migrant” does not have a well-established legal definition but rather is commonly understood as a person who changes their country of residence, regardless of the reason for migration or legal status. Essentially, short-term or temporary migration, lasting from

three to 12 months, is distinguished from long-term or permanent migration that extends over that period. From this definition it can be inferred that every refugee is a migrant, but not everyone who decides to change their place of residence or work can be considered a refugee. As experts from UNHCR Polska (2023) warn, blurring the lines between these concepts can lead to social conflicts, weaken grassroots support movements, and divert attention from the unique legal protection that individuals with refugee status require.

The genre of narratives has been considered an element of rhetorical and communicative effectiveness since the time of Aristotle, and the narrative's main goal of persuasion is achieved by using a variety of discursive strategies, at the verbal and non-verbal levels. According to Walter Fisher, "human beings are embedded in a narrative paradigm," meaning that narratives can provide a conceptual framework based on certain points of reference. These symbolic referents, in turn, determine how the messages are given their meaning (Fisher, 1989, pp. 55–58). Following the constructivist perspective proposed by some theorists, it should be considered that a narrative is a cognitive representation based on a specific interpretation of reality, rather than an objective depiction. Yet, in the mind of the audience members the world is often regarded as relatively independent, inescapable, or "objective." Opinion-forming media might represent various ideologies and therefore present different, often contradictory, images of the world in their publications, while keeping the audience convinced of the "truthfulness" of the ideas they present. This can cause a clash of alternative media "truths" put forward in the ongoing media debate, serving as a battleground for gaining the audience's support for an issue (Pstrag, 2022, pp. 63–65), as will be illustrated below with pro- and anti-refugee positions.

Narrative genres, including journalistic genres, can be considered as clusters of narrative patterns based on accepted cultural conventions of storytelling. Due to the underlying accepted framework and background knowledge, generic conventions determine the construction and coherence of a given message. Journalistic narrative genres delimit the choices of composition and layout used, the way in which the subject is presented, the sender's role and manner of participation, or the linguistic style used by the sender (Wasilewski, 2012). Journalistic genres also contain contractual narrative world orders, differing both in their informative or persuasive intention, often determined by the audience expectations and routines (e.g., the difference between reportage and commentary).

One of the common elements influencing the dynamics of a given narrative is the presence of the protagonist, their specific intentions, and the role they play in the given story (DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1996). Media narratives present the actions of various social groups, creating their stereotyped representations, and based on them form expectations regarding specific behavior patterns among the members of these groups, enabling the simplified but efficient understanding and interpretation of social reality (Moscovici, 1984). It is important to note, however, that the simplified media discourse operates with standardized and simple "figures of imagination" that refer to generalized "images" of people, objects, or phenomena.

The content of narratives in everyday use is usually subordinated to the interests of the entity sending the message. However, in the case of a media context, it is not only intrapersonal goals that count but also the need for some interaction with the audience. For this reason, the way in which narratives are constructed in the media is not free from the need to create engagement through attention-grabbing content (McManus, 1994). All this is done to keep the audience engaged for as long as possible, as faced with the multitude of available media options for obtaining information about the world around them they can switch to any other medium at any time. In this way, elements of drama are strategically and routinely incorporated into the narrative genre. One of such discursive strategies is foregrounding a conflict involving at least two sides with opposing views. This is used to provoke emotions, disagreement, and societal division that are emphasized based on identification through the inclusive “we” and the labeling of “them” (van Dijk, 1998).

Another discursive strategy to engage the audience is personalization or giving “a human face” to the issue. The journalists might adopt a perspective of an individual trying to cope with a particular matter in a situation where abstract forces or structures are at play, driven solely by their own interests rather than the public good (Bielecka-Prus, 2018). Another device is to draw on implicit moral norms and represent an action as either unquestionably heroic or as a complete departure from accepted social norms, such as the emergence of pathology or some form of deviation. Qualifiers (e.g., no one, everyone, as if, supposedly, without exception) can be used, as well as verbal attacks, invectives, or labeling to magnify the discrepancy between “us” and “them.” Finally, catchy narratives can be based on disrupting predictable scenarios through the occurrence of certain plot twists (Wasilewski, 2012).

Due to their status in the societies they join, refugees are often deprived of the opportunity to construct their own subjectivity and image and are “spoken for” by the media and public opinion leaders. For this reason, the narrative figure of the refugee is correlated with the construct of the “other” and the “foreigner,” enabling the audience to become better aware of their own “self” (Assman & Saryusz-Wolska, 2013, p. 48). However, figures perceived as “others” are not placed outside the boundaries of society, as they play an important role in how we perceive ourselves. The figure of the “foreigner” is closely linked to the narrative of ineffective integration of certain individuals into the host society. Some audiences might see this phenomenon as the ill will of the newcomers, forgetting that the process of assimilation is bilateral. Incidentally, as soon as a refugee crosses the border the procedure of verifying their identity and submitting necessary documents begins. Depending on the circumstances, these individuals could be placed in special facilities to await decisions from the authorities. Regardless of the type of center they end up in, they form a group that is separated from the rest of society. In this way, the “otherness” of people fleeing their previous places of residence is transformed into “foreignness” (Bomastyk, 2020, pp. 116–124).

10.3 Data and Methods

Contemporary mass media play a crucial role in the information society, where data is viewed as a commodity and the process of mediatization—the mediation of the world through the logics and affordances of digital media—is ubiquitous. One of the most important roles of the media is the transmission of information and shaping public opinion, as audiences often adopt the views presented in the media as their own. However, thanks to the plurality of opinion-shaping media representing various perspectives, a space for debate and confrontation of various views and ideologies is created, a desirable element of a democratic society.

Among the several socio-political and economic opinion weeklies available on the Polish market, I selected two titles for analysis: *Polityka* and *Do Rzeczy*. The criteria for this choice were their nationwide reach, high sales of digital editions, large readership, and focus on socio-political issues. An important factor in the selection for the study was that these publications represent different worldviews—left-liberal and conservative, respectively—also the two main ideological positions shaping the current political scene in Poland.

Polityka is one of the longest-running nationwide opinion weeklies in Poland, with its origins dating back to 1957. It currently promotes European integration, minority rights, and support for groups in difficult situations. Many respected journalists have contributed to its publications, and according to official data 103 authors have published their work there. The main target audience is the urban middle class that emerged after 1989, who are said to be committed to liberal and progressive values. The weekly emphasizes socially engaged narratives, drawing attention to the situation of those in more challenging circumstances. A significant portion of its readership consists of entrepreneurs, suggesting that *Polityka* targets elites who influence the shaping of public opinion (Struck-Peregończyk & Kurek-Ochman, 2018).

Do Rzeczy is a conservative-liberal opinion weekly, founded in 2013 that has since become an important voice in Poland's public debate. It offers analyses, interviews, and reports on domestic and international events, focusing on politics, economics, culture, and social issues. The magazine promotes conservative values, patriotism based on a strong connection with the Catholic Church, and the traditional family model. It opposes feminist movements and gender ideology. Its content is aimed at readers with similar views, and the weekly is considered a competitor to *Polityka*, standing out for its level of political journalism among more conservative tabloid media (Kalbarczyk, 2015).

This study covers all issues of the weeklies *Polityka* and *Do Rzeczy* published between the outbreak of the full-scale war in Ukraine (February 24, 2022) and its second anniversary (February 24, 2024). Only materials that included the Polish equivalents of the word “refugee,” in singular and plural forms, as well as commonly used synonyms such as “asylum seeker,” “migrant,” “expellee,” or “fleeing person,” were analyzed. During the period under study, both weeklies published 101 issues each. *Polityka* featured 267 articles on Ukrainian refugees, written by 96

authors. In contrast, *Do Rzeczy* addressed the refugee issue 322 times, with 58 journalists commenting on the topic. The primary sources in the appendix include selected articles that were used for exemplification in the analysis below (Table 10.4 for *Polityka*, Table 10.5 for *Do Rzeczy*).

10.4 Discursive Strategies of Representing Refugees: From “The Refugee Wave” to “The Solidarity Narrative”

As some linguists point out, the term “refugee” has started to accrue negative connotations after 2015 when the so-called “refugee crisis” occurred and refugees began to be portrayed as a kind of monolithic group, acting according to their adopted patterns of attitudes and behavior that often result from cultural or religious difference (Różalska, 2020). In addition, refugees tend to be ascribed such characteristics as otherness, cynicism, aggressiveness, lack of education, and poverty, thus constituting the stereotypical image that many Polish media consumers have been repeatedly exposed to. Such imagery fostered the segregation of the population into two opposition groups: those counted as “us” and those identified as unspecified “others,” in line with the accepted rhetoric in public discourse of the conservative populist Law and Justice party that held power in Poland between 2015 and 2023. A similar anti-immigrant narrative has been promoted by far-right circles in other European countries such as the Czech Republic, Hungary, the Netherlands, Italy, and Germany (cf. Chovanec & Molek-Kozakowska, 2017).

The two conceptual metaphors most frequently used in Polish weekly opinion magazines (irrespective of the editorial line adopted) are related to WAR and WATER domains. Based on the semantic concept of war, the communicator implies that the public is faced with some kind of enemy who should be restrained or avoided at all costs. In addition, the metaphor reinforces existing prejudices (activating memory of historical animosities and previous military confrontations) and might also create a sense of omnipresent threat. Typical terms embedded in narratives comparing mass migration to armed conflict include “invaders,” “colonizers,” “invasion,” “assault,” “conquest,” “tactics,” or “penetration” (Cieślowska, 2016, p. 6). Metaphors are built on the sense of threat of destruction and are attention-grabbing due to the emotional stimulation of fear (Bielecka-Prus, 2018, pp. 11–13). Likewise, in the Ukraine context, similar expressions were invoked by prominent authors or editors responsible for making the copy sufficiently dramatic (Table 10.1).

An additional effect is achieved by creating a negative image of immigrants as “them,” an outgroup that, for example, is alluded to commit crimes, cause destabilization, or introduce unspecified chaos. A technique that aims to reinforce these fears is proximation, a process that relies on linguistic means to build tension or emotional involvement by emphasizing the actual or imagined proximity of a threat or conflict (Cap, 2016). Linguistic choices are also able to create resentment between

Table 10.1 Examples of the use of war metaphors in materials relating to Ukrainian refugees

War-related terms	Examples
conquered	“Poland great or conquered” (Ziemkiewicz, 2022);
fortress	“Fortress of the west” (Gromadzki, 2023);
invader	“Refugees or invaders” (Pieczyński, 2023);
tactic	“Tactics, not populism” (<i>Do Rzeczy</i> , 2023);
operation	“Special anti-Polish operation” (Pieczyński, 2024);
weapon	“Language is a weapon” (Chutnik & Plebanek, 2022);
front	“Rzeszów: a frontline city, the world’s gateway to Ukraine. Feel the atmosphere” (Wilczak, 2023);
invasion	“We will not make the mistakes of the West in accepting and normalizing the invasion of illegal immigrants” (<i>Do Rzeczy</i> , 2023);

Source: Own elaboration. All translations from Polish by the author

the local population and migrants by frequently highlighting racial, physical, and cultural differences rather than similarities. This, together with depersonalizing migrants or refugees into aggregated masses or presenting them through synecdoche makes it hard to evoke empathy in the recipients of anti-immigrant rhetoric (Bielecka-Prus, 2018, pp. 11–13).

The WATER metaphors resonated much more strongly in the media, as they refer to any association of naturally occurring extreme phenomena or natural disasters that cannot be stopped in any way, and which are associated with the natural element of water. By using them to refer to refugees, the editors draw the audience’s attention to the possible uncontrollable dangers that their presence in society might pose. This is because it suggests an inevitable interference with the reality that they find themselves in, as well as the possibility of triggering situations that endanger the life and health of the representatives of a given community. To depict the risks involved as vividly as possible the following phrases are used: “deluge,” “wave,” “influx” or “tsunami” (Table 10.2).

Although metaphors referring to water are also used to describe other groups of people, as in the case of tourists, special care must be taken regarding minorities subjected to discrimination, as such linguistic devices could intensify negative associations and perpetuate negative emotions. However, whatever the intention of the media or public opinion leaders using them in the messages they formulate, the metaphors indicated above bear the hallmarks of dehumanization. This dehumanizing process enables politicians or decision-makers to pursue an often ethically dubious migration policy with majority public support. Instead, social perception is reinforced by the image of an undefined “wave” or “mass” of people trying to reach Poland, whose presence is identified with an unspecified crisis and a set of threats (economics: it costs too much, we cannot afford it; security: they do not respect our laws and are not averse to acts of aggression; health: they will bring new or long-extinct diseases to a hitherto safe area). However, with the intensification of refugee

Table 10.2 Examples of the use of water metaphors in materials relating to refugees

Water-related terms	Examples
wave	“Meanwhile, without a second refugee wave” (Semka, 2022); “More wave of refugees from Ukraine expected in autumn, says Health Minister Adam Niedzielski” (<i>Do Rzeczy</i> , 2022); “This is the largest wave of emigration since World War II” (<i>Do Rzeczy</i> , 2023);
tsunami	“The credit-strapped, or the nightmare of millions. Poles have been hit by a price tsunami” (Cieśla, 2022);
influx	“Belarusians are coming to Poland in waves. They are afraid of Lukashenko's long arms” (Medvedev, 2023); “An influx of immigrants will increase crime rates? Poles have spoken” (<i>Do Rzeczy</i> , 2023); “Russian invasion of Ukraine caused massive influx of refugees to Poland” (Cieśla, 2022); “Admittedly, there is a figure of a Redemptorist from Toruń lurking in the background: in keeping with Russian propaganda, he warns Poles against an influx of non-Ukrainian migrants” (Medvedev, 2023);
spill/pour	“If the war continues and spills over into other areas of Ukraine, we are facing another wave of refugees, including not only women but men as well” (Cieśla, 2022); “Poland may be flooded with extradition requests” (<i>Do Rzeczy</i> , 2023).

Source: Own elaboration. All translations from Polish by the author

migration following the outbreak of the full-scale war in Ukraine in February 2024 (many of whom were women and children), Polish media editors had to start avoiding linguistic labels and attributions that reinforced negative attitudes towards them.

In the face of the Ukrainian nation’s resistance to the Russian aggressor, Western media and governments increasingly incorporated solidarity and humanitarian narratives into their messaging. In this context, “solidarity” should be understood as a political stance towards the ongoing war in Ukraine and the related international tensions shaping current geopolitics. This narrative serves as an extension of military, diplomatic, and humanitarian support. Not only Polish opinion leaders but also other actors participating in and influencing the public debate were forced to modify the normalized narrative on refugees. Opinion weeklies representing values from different sides of the political scene presented the topic of the war in Ukraine as a kind of “other crisis” and thus postulated the need for separate solutions in terms of legal regulations, for example. Already at the outset, it should be emphasized that such appeals came not only from the media but also were also reflected in initiatives taken by public institutions. This has fostered the gradual formation of an unequal standard in the protection of refugees coming from different parts of the world (Middle East vs. Ukraine) and the privileges available to them. Indeed, the “policy of openness” adopted by state authorities contrasts strongly with the previously established restrictive policy towards refugees (Mazurczyk, 2022). The reason for

this can be traced to geographical, ethnic, cultural, and/or historical proximity of Ukraine and the largely Russophobic attitudes of Polish publics.

A demographic stereotype has distinguished refugees from Ukraine from other countries' migrants since 2015, becoming the focus of interest for the public and media actors in 2022. The war coverage tended to draw on two specific categories: one rooted in the actual "war frame" (distinct from WAR metaphor) that portrayed refugees primarily as victims, and the "gender frame" that relied on the values assigned to each gender in a specific culture. According to data published by the Border Guard (Warsaw Enterprise Institute, 2022), in 2022 the Ukrainian border was crossed mainly by women accompanied by children and elderly people. This was a result of the decree 69/2022 by the Ukrainian authorities issued in February 2022 in which President Zelensky called for the military mobilization of men from 18 to 60 years of age, thus preventing them from leaving the country under penalty of criminal liability. For this reason, refugees crossing the Polish-Ukrainian border were seen as "women with children." Here are some examples:

- "I urgently need a place for a family of immigrants from Ukraine. The family speaks some Polish, consisting of two women and children aged 2, 4, 5, and 13 years" (Kaczorowska, 2022a);
- "Almost all women with children, a few elderly and disabled individuals. They had one or two suitcases with them, didn't know what awaited them, and perhaps didn't believe that we wanted to help them, and for free" (Borek, 2023);
- "Ukrainian women with children fight for meaning every day" (Mazuś, 2022);
- "The vast majority are women, specifically mothers with their children" (*Do Rzeczy*, 2022);
- "There at the center, countless women wait in line, holding children in their arms" (*Do Rzeczy*, 2023).

The female gender was generally linked to vulnerability, fear, inability to defend oneself, or inability to cope with crisis situations: "These are mostly women with children. If one of them says she can't pay because she doesn't have any money, should I throw her out onto the street?" (Kaczorowska, 2023); "But most of them are women who have nothing – no savings, no profession, they don't speak any languages other than Ukrainian and Russian, and on top of that, they have small children" (Kaczorowska, 2022b); "Women are more victims than agents responsible for their migratory fate" (*Do Rzeczy*, 2023).

The media narratives also referred to children themselves as a distinct social group in need of assistance. Their fate was presented in the context of the loss of part of their childhood, the traumas they had undergone, as well as their every material and psychological need. Although the possibility for men to leave Ukraine was restricted, some were able to take advantage of this opportunity legally. This included those over 60, single fathers, guardians of at least three children under the age of 18 or foreign university students. In the materials analyzed, their presence in this "mass of refugees" was only exposed in the statistics made available. If they did appear in the annotations, they were presented in a positive light to praise Polish

people's collective effort to accommodate large numbers of victimized refugees (Zboralski, 2022).

Another group in need of care, besides women or children, were Ukrainian seniors, sometimes without relatives, who chose to leave their homes in the autumn of their lives for fear of danger. The narratives highlighted that these were often people who were ill, required constant medical care and felt disoriented in their new situation. Siedlecka (2022) mentioned low benefits and the lack of prospects for any form of additional funding, limiting the possibility of their renting accommodations in the future. The journalist also pointed out that the state had decided not to adopt a Senate amendment to subsidize "local governments for the care of independent refugees from Ukraine." These realities are also pointed out by the anonymous author of *Do Rzeczy*, who saw beyond the layer of material support the spiritual one as well. He observed that some Ukrainian pensioners who had lost their life's possessions were at the same time deprived of some kind of sense of their existence (*Do Rzeczy*, 2023).

According to a 2022 report published by the National Bank of Poland, refugees arriving in Poland came from various regions of Ukraine. However, relatively more people chose to leave from areas where fighting was taking place and oblasts that were particularly well connected to Poland. However, this issue was highlighted sporadically, in texts showing the story of specific individuals in order to detail the situational context. The media reported more extensively on refugees' education and occupations prior to their departure from their previous place of residence. This is because such information provided an impetus to consider their qualifications for particular jobs. However, several challenges were perceived in this respect: the problematic combination of professional duties with often single parenthood abroad (Ćwieluch, 2022) and the possibility of various types of labor market discrimination (*Do Rzeczy*, 2024). All this has shaken the image of the "real refugee" and consequently the established narrative focusing on the omnipresent "threat" to Polish society. The reinterpretation within these categories describing "refugees," and the anchoring of this image in the minds of the recipients, undoubtedly translated into a form in which assistance was offered to them, the extent to which it covered and, moreover, the attitude with which support was approached.

Polityka and *Do Rzeczy* represent two polarized representations regarding pro-refugee and anti-refugee discourses, respectively. Nevertheless, both magazines draw on three fundamental topoi that inform the discourse on immigration: security, cultural threat, and the use of available resources. These are so well established that they have provided significant interpretative framing to the coverage of the Ukraine refugees.

The most salient interpretative frame that initially emerged in the Polish media was the one based on security issues. Particularly in the early phase of the intense migration, often labelled as a crisis, journalists from both weeklies reverted to a pro-refugee discourse. At that time, refugees were portrayed as "wards," with their presence emphasized in the context of the humanitarian obligations of the host countries, focusing on the protection of their rights and the provision of badly needed assistance. The media emphasized the need for state structures and grassroots social

initiatives to provide basic necessities such as shelter, food, and healthcare. The issue of institutional funding for their stay in Poland was also raised.

The debate on refugees' needs became a tool for promoting the established ideologies of the left and the right. An example is the article by Szczerbiak and Żelazińska (2022) in *Polityka*, raising the issue of obstacles faced by Ukrainian women residing on Poland. The authors highlighted Ukrainian women's surprise at Poland's restrictive abortion and contraception laws. They also endorsed ongoing pro-choice initiatives undertaken by activists and social movements that emphasized security guarantees which did not collide with human rights. In *Do Rzeczy*, Dzierżawski argued that abortion "killed" more Ukrainians than war and the Holodomor, and that organizations assisting Ukrainian women in accessing abortion are harming their country. The debate surrounding female refugees has thus become part of a broader ideological controversy. Portraying Ukrainian refugees as "war victims" can evoke sympathy and a willingness to help. However, in the long run this narrative can also lead to framing them as passive, as the prolonged perception of refugees solely as recipients of aid can contribute to their marginalization and a limited view of their ability to integrate and contribute to the host country.

On the other hand, media broadcasters tapped into fears and concerns about the influx of refugees, often framing them as a threat to social order. Depending on the chosen narrative, refugees could be depicted as a "wave," "invaders," or "criminals," positioning them as a source of economic problems, social destabilization, or even tipping the existing moral and cultural balance. Potential threats included concerns about public health, rising crime rates, and a perceived decline in the "quality of life" for the host society.

One of the first threats highlighted in the media space was related to health concerns. Fears were raised about the potential emergence of local outbreaks of infectious diseases due to the lack of proper documentation for the "wave" of newly arrived individuals, their presence in crowded places (such as train stations, temporary centers, and government offices), and their use of public transportation during migration. Solska from *Polityka* addressed these issues in her publication titled "Viruses Are Lurking. What About Refugees' Access to Healthcare?" (2022). She emphasized the need for regular, free vaccinations for all those interested in preventing a potential pandemic to avoid a situation similar to that of 2020. She also pointed out numerous regulatory flaws that limit refugees' access to consistent medical care for chronic diseases, as well as the lack of provisions enabling them to fill prescriptions for essential medications.

In *Do Rzeczy*, refugees were used to support previously prepared narratives, which through deliberate distortion of facts, exhibited characteristics of conscious disinformation. An example of this tactic is the article "The Dark Side of Immigration. Ukrainians Commit the Most Crime," (*Do Rzeczy*, 2023) that does not include the author's name. Only the source from which the information was taken is mentioned. Comparing both texts, one notices discrepancies in the conclusions drawn after reading the materials. In the original article from *Rzeczpospolita* (2023), the reader learns that statistically Ukrainians indeed commit the most crimes among all national minorities residing in Poland. However, the original text includes a sentence explaining that "the scale of their presence in Poland is difficult to compare

with newcomers from other countries.” This means that the data provided about Ukrainian refugees is not comparable to that of other foreigners and may lead to incorrect conclusions. *Do Rzeczy* omits this additional note about the disputability of the comparison between the mentioned groups. Thus, the data is presented in a way that aligns with the previously established narrative. Such portrayals can evoke strong fear and resistance among citizens, making national security concerns a dominant response. This, in turn, may contribute to growing xenophobia and the rise of radical attitudes toward migrants.

A distinctive topos is the one centered on cultural threats, within which the figure of the “refugee-neighbor” emerges. Depending on the chosen narrative strategy, either differences or similarities between the host community and asylum seekers are emphasized. In narratives highlighting differences, refugees are portrayed as outsiders who might threaten the cultural, social, or religious integrity of the receiving country. Conversely, in narratives emphasizing similarities, refugees are depicted as “neighbors” who share common values and traditions. Their integration is framed as an opportunity to enrich the host society, contributing to its diversity and development. The editorial team of *Polityka* attempted to present refugees as an integral part of society, individuals who bring a certain added value through their presence, enriching local communities.

This narrative was alluded to by Kaczorowska (2022c) in the article “Your language is not that difficult, you just have to listen. Ukrainians are learning Polish” – emphasizing that learning the Polish language is a key tool supporting the integration of Ukrainian refugees. Although many arrive with war trauma and a sense of uncertainty, language courses enable them to gradually regain a sense of agency and normality. The stories presented by the author show that by learning Polish, refugees not only gain a chance for a better professional life but also build social connections, an important step in integrating into Polish society.

In the case of conservative audiences, to which the journalists of *Do Rzeczy* direct their content, the emphasis was on “foreignness” and “otherness,” as well as concerns related to potential threats to the safety, culture, and national traditions of the host country. This vision was reflected, among others, in Warzecha’s (2022) article “Ukrainians – Only Conditionally,” where he suggested that many Ukrainian refugees have shown little willingness to fully integrate into Polish society. Their low employment activity (only 29% of refugees are of working age), and their limited interest in taking advantage of educational opportunities, are presented as signs of disengagement from adaptation processes. The article concluded that the failure to take effective action regarding integration and employment could lead to serious difficulties, especially in the weakening of the labor market.

The final contextual frame in which refugees are placed revolves around the use of available resources. Within this perspective, several representations emerge: the “competitor,” the “entitled outsider,” and the “opportunity for Poland’s development.” In narratives portraying refugees on the job market, they are seen as individuals competing for limited resources such as good jobs, public services, and housing, potentially causing tensions among the host country’s citizens. In the “entitled outsider” narrative, refugees are depicted as individuals seeking financial or social assistance while contributing little to the country’s development, potentially straining social welfare systems.

Table 10.3 Summary of distinct constructions/figures of the “Refugee”

	Anti-refugee discourse	Pro-refugee discourse
Topos of security	a wave, aggressors, criminals	dependents
Topos of cultural threat/proximity	neighbors (a figure based on emphasizing national and cultural differences)	neighbors (a figure based on emphasizing national and cultural similarities)
Topos of available resources	competitors, entitled outsiders	an opportunity for Poland’s development

Journalists from *Do Rzeczy* took a keen interest in financial matters. The salaries of Ukrainians became the focus of the article “How Much Do Ukrainians Earn in Poland?” (*Do Rzeczy* 2023). The author emphasized that Ukrainians in Poland earn significantly more than in their homeland, where the minimum wage is only around 800 PLN, while in Poland it exceeds 3000 PLN gross. Furthermore, the article highlighted that the cost of living is lower due to benefit packages offered by employers and the state, given the ongoing war beyond Poland’s eastern border. It was also noted that more than half of Ukrainians working in Poland do not financially support their families back home. This suggests that many migrants see Poland as a source of income rather than a place for long-term settlement.

Conversely, the liberal press presented migrants as a valuable workforce that could boost economic growth by filling labor market gaps, particularly in sectors experiencing worker shortages. In this narrative, refugees are seen as individuals who can contribute to society, supporting the country’s demographic and economic growth. The financial resourcefulness of refugees was highlighted in the pages of *Polityka*. The authors emphasized that through careful financial management they were able to build a stable material situation, thus breaking away from the typical image of a “war refugee” reliant solely on external aid for survival in a foreign country. In an interview conducted by Ćwieluch (2022) with economist Paweł Strzelecki, it was noted that the presence of refugees positively impacts the Polish economy. Some of them have joined the labor market, already experiencing the effects of unfavorable demographic changes, and they also contribute to the Social Insurance Fund.

Regardless of the chosen narrative strategy, the views articulated in the publications are based on the generalization and stereotyping of refugees. Furthermore, journalists, when formulating their thoughts, regardless of their underlying intention, inherently rely on a specific asymmetry in the relationship between “immigrants” and the host society. In doing so, they maintain the existing societal divide between “us” and “them” (Table 10.3).

10.5 Conclusion

Media-induced polarization in the perception of reality results in divisions at social, economic and political level that might be conducive to destabilization, the propagation of false generalizations and stereotypes and, in the long run, the

radicalization of social attitudes on the basis of existing conflicts. At the same time, opinion-forming media that by definition create messages for strictly defined target recipients, characterized by their education, profession or residence, have to cater to their ideological preferences so as not to alienate them. Thus, it can be argued that the journalistic media foster the formation of information bubbles because as an audience most people want to receive confirmation of their own opinions and are inclined to avoid dissonance (van Dijk, 1998).

According to the nature of the media market, one of the objectives of editorial work is to generate revenue from its activities, acquired through advertising and high sales (McManus, 1994). Therefore, by definition, the media will base their messages on narratives that become visible in society, in line with the preferences of an established target group in order to maintain a steady audience that has a certain outlook on migration (Chovanec & Molek-Kozakowska, 2017). This study illustrated how this is expressed regarding Ukrainian people fleeing their homeland from danger, according to pro- and anti-refugee metaphors, frames, and narratives.

These two images of the refugee are based on strong emotions, cognitive schemas, and differing moral values. In solidarity narratives directed at those welcoming migrants into their country, the issue of the inalienability of human rights and the associated humanitarian responsibility, international solidarity, contractual obligations, or the possible positive contribution to the host country through the presence of refugees willing to integrate is raised relatively frequently. In contrast, anti-refugee narratives are dominated by messages based on demonizing refugees, xenophobia, and foregrounding of dangers and challenges that realistically affect the lives of individuals from the host society.

Based on previous and current studies, it seems that arguments in favor of accepting migrants from Ukraine, as well as from other cultural backgrounds, would be applied by left-wing media, whereas those against their reception would be seen in right-wing ones. However, at the beginning of the war in Ukraine *Polityka* as well as *Do Rzeczy* pointed to the need to welcome refugees in Poland, offer them assistance, and organize systemic solutions to improve their stay. In addition, irrespective of the ideologies adopted by the editorial boards, journalists writing for their respective outlets discussed the future challenges resulting from the arrival of people of a different nationality. In the later stages, differences appeared, mainly with right-wing *Do Rzeczy* emphasizing dangers that were often not based on rational arguments, but rather on resentments i.e., references to historical events over the centuries, conspiracy theories, or accusations of extremism directed at Ukrainians. As migration processes continue to intensify in the coming years, the polarization in the media's discourse will grow, perhaps leading to greater social tensions triggering increasing conflict. It remains to be hoped, therefore, that with proper education in a multicultural society, it will be possible to avoid the emergence of so-called parallel societies in Poland.

Appendix

Table 10.4 Primary sources cited from *Polityka* (in alphabetical order)

Author, date	Original title	Source
Borek, Z. 2023	Lęk bezdomny. Stracili domy w Ukrainie, mogą stracić dach nad głową w Polsce.”	https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/spoleczenstwo/2216336,1,lek-bezdomny-stracili-domy-w-ukrainie-moga-stracic-dach-nad-glowa-w-polsce.read
Chutnik, S., & Plebanek, G. 2022	Język to broń	https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kraj/2158277,1,jezyk-to-bron.read
Cieśla, J. 2022	Zakredytowani, czyli koszmar milionów.	https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/rynek/2165947,1,zakredytowani-czyli-koszmar-milionow-w-polakow-uderzylo-cenowe-tsunami.read
Ćwieluch, J. 2022	Ukraińcy czasem kłują Polaków w oczy.	https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/spoleczenstwo/2179204,1,ukraincy-czasem-kluja-polakow-w-oczy-aktorzy-wyszli-z-rol.read
Kaczorowska, K. 2022a	A jeśli uchodźcy się nie wyprowadzą?	https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kraj/2160833,1,a-jesli-uchodzczy-sie-nie-wyprowadza-wchodzimy-w-trudny-etap-pomocy.read
Kaczorowska, K. 2022b	Już blisko 30 tysięcy Ukraińców uciekło do Polski	https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/spoleczenstwo/2156277,1,juz-blisko-30-tysiecy-ukraincow-ucieklo-do-polski.read
Kaczorowska, K. 2022c	„Wasz język nie jest taki trudny, tylko słuchać trzeba”. Ukraińcy uczą się polskiego”.	https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/spoleczenstwo/2170057,1,wasz-jezyk-nie-jest-taki-trudny-tylko-sluchac-trzeba-ukraincy-ucza-sie-polskiego.read
Kaczorowska, K. 2023	Uciekinierzy z Ukrainy w Polsce. Zryw był niezwykle, dziś to ekstremalna sytuacja	https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kraj/2202302,1,uciekinierzy-z-ukrainy-w-polsce-zryw-byl-niezwykly-dzis-to-ekstremalna-sytuacja.read
Mazurczyk, A. 2022	Polacy pomagają Ukraińcom. Ale co robić, żeby nie zgasił zapał?	https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/spoleczenstwo/2159959,1,polacy-pomagaja-ukraincom-ale-co-robic-zeby-nie-zgasl-zapal.read
Mazuś, M. 2022	Samotność i wojna Ukrainek w Polsce. Najgorsze jest to czekanie	https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/spoleczenstwo/2172009,1,samotnosc-i-wojna-ukrainek-w-polsce-najgorsze-jest-to-czekanie.read
Medvedev, E. 2023	Białorusini napływają do Polski falami. Boją się długich rąk Łukaszenki	https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/spoleczenstwo/2225924,1,bialorusini-naplywaja-do-polski-falami-boja-sie-dlugich-rak-lukaszenki.read
Siedlecka, E. 2024	Rząd się lansuje, samorząd haruje	https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kraj/2160635,1,rzad-sie-lansuje-samorzad-haruje.read

(continued)

Table 10.4 (continued)

Author, date	Original title	Source
Solska, J. 2022	Wirusy się przyczaiły. Co z dostępem uchodźców do ochrony zdrowia?	https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/rynek/2158677,1,wirusy-sie-przyczaiły-co-z-dostępem-uchodzców-do-ochrony-zdrowia.read
Szczerbiak A., & Żelazińska, A. 2022	Same zakazy. Ukraińki już się zderzają z polskimi restrykcjami	https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/spoleczenstwo/2160839,1,same-zakazy-ukrainki-juz-sie-zderzaja-z-polskimi-restrykcjami.read
Wilczak, J. 2023	Rzeszów: miasto przyfrontowe, światowa brama do Ukrainy. Czuć ten klimat	https://www.polityka.pl/fotoreportaze/2211358,1,rzeszow-miasto-przyfrontowe-swiatowa-brama-do-ukrainy-czuc-ten-klimat.read

Table 10.5 Primary sources cited from *Do Rzeczy* (in alphabetical order)

Author, date	Original title	Source
Do Rzeczy 2022a	Kościół nie pomaga uchodźcom? Oto, jak sprawa naprawdę wygląda	https://dorzeczy.pl/kraj/295168/o-tych-ktorzy-nie-chca-pomagac-ukrainie-reportaz.html
Do Rzeczy 2022b	Niedzielski: Będziemy opiekowali się uchodźcami. Jesienią może być ich więcej	https://dorzeczy.pl/obserwator-mediow/343066/niedzielski-bedziemy-opiekowali-sie-uchodzcami.html
Do Rzeczy 2022c	Samotność i wojna Ukrainek w Polsce. Najgorsze jest to czekanie	https://dorzeczy.pl/opinie/288331/bakiewicz-celem-polski-musi-byc-wspieranie-obrony-ukrainy.html
Do Rzeczy 2023a	Ciemna strona imigracji. Najwięcej przestępstw popełniają Ukraińcy	https://dorzeczy.pl/kraj/461706/media-najwiecej-przestepstw-w-polsce-popełniaja-ukraincy.html
Do Rzeczy 2023b	Chruszcz: Nie ustąpimy w walce o suwerenność Polski i jej granic	https://dorzeczy.pl/opinie/491691/chruszcz-nie-ustapimy-w-walce-o-suwerennosc-polski-i-jej-granic.html
Do Rzeczy 2023c	Często słyszę słowa: „po co mam żyć?”	https://dorzeczy.pl/swiat/412708/dramatyczna-sytuacja-ukrainskich-uchodzców.html
Do Rzeczy 2023d	Dziesiąty rekord z rządu	https://dorzeczy.pl/swiat/484593/opublikowano-nowy-raport-na-temat-migrantow-rekordowe-liczby.html
Do Rzeczy 2023e	Ile zarabiają Ukraińcy w Polsce?	https://dorzeczy.pl/ekonomia/429400/ile-zarabiaja-ukraincy-w-polsce-nowe-dane.html
Do Rzeczy 2023f	Napływ imigrantów zwiększy poziom przestępczości?	https://dorzeczy.pl/sondaz/456702/naplyw-imigrantow-a-przestepczosc-polacy-zabrali-glos.html
Do Rzeczy 2023g	Nasila się narracja proimigracyjna	https://dorzeczy.pl/opinie/485004/nasila-sie-narracja-proimigracyjna-papiez-o-goscinnosci.html

(continued)

Table 10.5 (continued)

Author, date	Original title	Source
Do Rzeczy 2023h	Taktyka nie populizm	https://dorzeczy.pl/opinie/492360/plaza-taktyka-nie-populizm.html
Do Rzeczy 2024	Jak Ukraińcy są traktowani na polskim rynku pracy	https://dorzeczy.pl/kraj/544320/pie-uchodzczy-ukraincy-czasami-doswiadczajaj-nierownego-traktowania-na-rynku-pracy.html
Dzierżawski, M. 2023	Kto chce zniszczyć Ukrainę?	https://dorzeczy.pl/opinie/440727/wojna-na-ukrainie-kto-chce-zniszczyc-ukraine.html
Gromadzki, R. 2023	Polską racją stanu jest maksymalne osłabienie i wykrwawienie Rosji	https://dorzeczy.pl/opinie/406429/forteca-zachodu.html
Pieczynski, M. 2023	Uchodźcy czy najeźdźcy	https://dorzeczy.pl/opinie/417979/pieczynski-uchodzczy-czy-najezdzczy.html
Pieczynski, M. 2024	Specjalna operacja antypolska	https://dorzeczy.pl/kraj/539910/pieczynski-specjalna-operacja-antypolska.html
Semka, P. 2022	Tymczasem bez drugiej uchodźczej fali	https://dorzeczy.pl/opinie/376627/wojna-semka-tymczasem-bez-drugiej-uchodzczej-fali.html
Warzecha, Ł. 2022	Uchodźcy – tylko warunkowo	https://dorzeczy.pl/opinie/317173/warzecha-uchodzczy-tylko-warunkowo.html
Zboralski, Ł. 2022	Pospolite ruszenie	https://dorzeczy.pl/opinie/271555/uchodzczy-z-ukrainy-jak-pomoc-ukraincom-pospolite-ruszenie.html
Ziemkiewicz, R.A. 2022a	Polska wielka albo podbita	https://dorzeczy.pl/opinie/274834/polska-wielka-albo-podbita.html
Ziemkiewicz, R.A. 2022b	Upadek rodu Stuhrow	https://dorzeczy.pl/opinie/373912/ziemkiewicz-upadek-rodu-stuhrow.html

References

- Assman, A., & Saryusz-Wolska, M. (2013). *Between history and memory*. Warsaw University Press. (in Polish).
- Bauman, Z. (2003). *Wasted lives: Modernity and its outcasts*. Polity Press.
- Bielecka-Prus, J. (2018). The rhetoric of fear of the stranger in the Polish press discourse. *Colloquium*, 10(1), 5–34. (in Polish).
- Bomastyk, M. (2020). Otherness and strangeness. A philosophical analysis of the figure of the refugee. *Etyka*, 59(1), 116–124. (in Polish).
- Cap, P. (2016). *The language of fear: Communicating threat in public discourse*. Springer.
- CBOS. (2024). *Poles' attitudes towards Ukrainian refugees – September 2024*. Accessed April 2, 2025. https://www.cbos.pl/PL/publikacje/public_opinion/2024/10_2024.pdf (in Polish).
- Chovanec, J., & Molek-Kozakowska, K. (2017). *Representing the other in European media discourses*. John Benjamins.
- Cieślowska, D. (2016). *How to talk about refugees: Comments to lesson scenarios by Center of Civic Education*. Accessed April 2, 2025. https://angazuj.ceo.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2021/09/uch_2_mat-metodyczny_1_1.pdf (in Polish).

- DeFleur, M. L., & Ball-Rokeach, S. (1996). *Theories of mass communication* (5th ed.). Longman.
- Fisher, W. R. (1989). Clarifying the narrative paradigm. *Communication Monographs* 59, 55–58.
- Kalbarczyk, M. (2015). From a successful weekly to a niche monthly: The history of *Uważam Rze. Acta Universitatis Lodzianis: Folia Litteraria Polonica*, 28(2), 194–220. (in Polish).
- Kancelaria Sejmu RP (2003). Act of June 13, 2003, on granting protection to foreigners on the territory of the Republic of Poland (Dz.U. z 2003 r. Nr 128, poz. 1176). (in Polish).
- McLuhan, M. (1964). *Understanding media: The extensions of man*. MIT Press.
- McManus, J. H. (1994). *Market-driven journalism*. Sage.
- Molek-Kozakowska, K., & Paszczyński, J. (2025). Rhetorical and linguistic devices in the argumentation against supporting Ukraine in the radicalized Polish media sphere. *Res Rhetorica*, 12(2), 47–73. <https://doi.org/10.29107/r2025.2.3>
- Moscovici, S. (1984). The phenomenon of social representations. In R. Farr, & S. Moscovici (Eds.), *Social Representations*. Cambridge University Press.
- Narodowy Bank Polski (2022). Life and the economic situation of Ukrainian refugees in Poland. Accessed March 28, 2024. <https://nbp.pl/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/sytuacja-uchodzcow-z-ukrainy-w-polsce.pdf> (in Polish)
- Pstrąg, J. (2022). Different faces of a refugee: Rhetorical strategies of crisis management on the example of “children from Michałowo.” *Res Rhetorica*, 9(3), 63–79. <https://doi.org/10.29107/r2022.3.4> (in Polish).
- Różalska, A. (2020). Refugees as the “Other”: The media discourse of the 2015–2018 migration crisis in Poland. *Historia i Polityka*, 34(41), 59–73. <https://apcz.umk.pl/HiP/article/view/HiP.2020.042>
- Rzeczpospolita* (2023). Among foreigners, most crimes in Poland are committed by Ukrainians. Accessed March 24, 2024. <https://www.rp.pl/przestepczosc/art38743941-sposrod-cudzoziemcow-najwiecej-przestepstw-popelniaja-w-polsce-ukraincy> (in Polish).
- Struck-Peregończyk, M., & Kurek-Ochman, O. (2018). The image of people with disabilities in the Polish press, based on *Polityka* weekly 1997–2016. *Przegląd Socjologii Jakościowej*, 14(3), 48–71. <https://doi.org/10.18778/1733-8069.14.3.04> (in Polish).
- United Nations (2023). Refugees and migrants. <https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/definitions>.
- UNHCR Polska (2023). Refugee or migrant? Explaining the difference. Accessed April 2, 2025. <https://www.unhcr.org/pl/365-plwiadomosci2016uchodzca-czy-migrant-tlumaczmy-roznice-i-wyjasniamy-ich-sens-html.html> (in Polish).
- Van Dijk, T. (1998). *Ideology. A multidisciplinary approach*. Sage.
- Warsaw Enterprise Institute (2022). *Ukrainian refugees in Poland: Demographics and the labor market*. Accessed March 16, 2024. <https://wei.org.pl/2022/kwerenda/demografia-kwerenda/s--bojarczukwei-org-pl/uchodzczy-z-ukrainy-w-polsce-analiza-demograficzna-i-rynku-pracy/> (in Polish).
- Wasilewski, J. (2012). *The story about Poland: Rhetoric of narration*. Headmade. (in Polish).
- Zdzieborska, M. (2024). *Polityka* tops Polish opinion market in 2024. *Press*. Accessed April 2, 2025. https://www.press.pl/tresc/81873,_newsweek_-_sieci_-_do-rzeczy_-i-_gazeta-polska,_poprawily-wyniki-sprzedazy-w-pierwszym-kwartale (in Polish).

Julia Kaproń is a graduate of Maria Curie-Skłodowska University (UMCS) in Lublin, Poland, with a Masters of Social Communication and Media Studies with honors based on the thesis *The Figure of the Ukrainian Refugee in Selected Polish Opinion Weeklies*. For this thesis, she was awarded the best diploma recognition in the field of refugee and displacement studies, organized by the Field Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Lublin. She is a laureate of national fact-checking competitions organized by the Demagog Association, “Detektor” (2023) and “Weryfikator” (2024). She is currently a PhD student at the Doctoral School of Social Sciences at UMCS, specializing in Social Communication and Media Studies. Her research interests focus on disinformation, fact-checking, and the role of media in shaping public opinion. She is also the head of the news and culture editorial team at Academic Radio Centrum.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if you modified the licensed material. You do not have permission under this license to share adapted material derived from this chapter or parts of it.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.



Part III
Studies of Journalistic Strategies and
Receptions of Conflict Representations

Chapter 11

Marginal Narratives in Romanian Media Coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict



Monica Bors

Abstract This chapter analyzes marginal narratives (soft-news articles that feature mundane, or historically insignificant, events) selected from the corpus of Romanian media discourse in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war. The qualitative, close-reading analysis of a dozen news stories identifies the discursive strategies that confer newsworthiness and explores the connection between their visual and textual semiotic resources. By investigating the ideological embeddings of marginal narratives, and the means through which they are realized, the study seeks to examine how these narratives contribute to influencing public opinion regarding the conflict. Marginal narratives seemingly concern irrelevant incidents or negligible participants and are related as in this case to clothing choices, advertising campaigns, small business establishments, sporting events, or ordinary immigrants' lives, but cumulatively they may entrench the sense of solidarity and resilience that questions the major narratives of official sources.

11.1 Introduction: Marginal vs. Major Narratives

The definition of “marginal narratives” used in the present analysis has been inspired by Chris Ballard in his work “Marginal History” (2022), regarding the concept of the marginal. Borrowing, as he acknowledges, from Klaus Neumann’s (1992) critical approach to Pacific history, he attends to “the irrelevant, the insignificant, the marginal and the negligible,” “the blind alleys, the lost causes,” “what eludes [the] forms of historical discourse [that] we are usually looking for,” found in “instants, images flitting past, unspectacular moments of history” (Ballard, 2022, p. 87). Situated at the intersection of several fields—anthropology, oral history, postcolonial politics, and epistemological critique—Neumann analyzes narratives as versions of the past from the perspective of the individuals involved in encounters

M. Bors (✉)
Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Sibiu, Romania
e-mail: monica.bors@ulbsibiu.ro

between the Tolai people of Papua New Guinea and the colonizers. Focusing on examples of juxtaposition of Tolai oral sources with historical German archives captures the process of negotiation of memory, history, and collective identity through diverse narratives.

Starting from the definition of the marginal as existing only in relation to what is considered central, Ballard's (2022) research does not privilege one or the other of the two opposing types but rather highlights the dialectic relationship between oral histories and the work of historians. Ballard also shifts the focus to specific cases and micro-analyses, to the "exceptional typical," arguing that events viewed at the specific level illuminate processes and suggest divergences that do not appear within the central frame. This approach is also exemplified in the works of Clifford Geertz, who documented marginal rituals and playful entertainment, such as cockfighting in Bali in 1973, and discovered its symbolic structure, "a kind of moral autocosm," a metaphor for status hierarchy and self-regard (Geertz, 2005, pp. 84–85) that is reflective of the dominant mechanisms of power in social relations.

Within the fragmented field of narrative studies, linguistics delineates narrative as a text type that includes describing participants, actions, and events linked by causality, and arranged in a specific sequential order (de Beaugrande & Dressler, 1981). Narratives are thus the staple text type of modern journalism, including conflict coverage. In the context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, the distinction between central and marginal can be used to characterize types of narratives that shape patterns of war-related public perceptions. Major narratives have an official nature and dominant linearity, dismissing alternative versions (considered myths or folklore) to present the only legitimate history, often within an ideological framework of such concepts as nation, sovereignty, or liberty.

The official narrative according to which the Kremlin says it wages a continuous "defensive war against foreign aggressions" is endorsed by the Russian Patriarchate. On its website, for example, Patriarch Kirill describes Russia's invasion of Ukraine as a "holy war" (as presented in *Order of the 25th World Russian People's Council "The Present and Future of the Russian World"*). It hails the armed conflict as a stage of the "national liberation struggle of the Russian people against the criminal regime in Kyiv and the collective West behind it, taking place on the lands of Southwestern Russia since 2014." The rhetoric is one of defense: Russia claims to guard "life, freedom, statehood, civilizational, religious, national, and cultural identity," as well as the right to live on its own land within the borders of a single Russian state. Russia assumes a providential missionary status as defender against the "attack of globalism" and against a degenerate and decadent West, fallen under the influence of demonic forces that have destroyed traditional values. In *My Russia*, Mikhail Shishkin (2024) exposes this dangerous ideological narrative designed to legitimize authoritarianism, namely the Russkiy Mir myth underpinning the 2022 "special military operation" that the Kremlin supposedly undertook to unite the nations and make them stronger.

Meanwhile, minor narratives sometimes manage to problematize the ideology of official narratives understood as a source of legitimization of collective national identity, unity, and directionality. For example, political discourse analysts look at

the mediatized representations of propagandistic narrative patterns, showing how it is in Russia's interests to present the armed invasion as a "local conflict reality narrative" (Cap, 2023). This is exposed as a mere rhetorical pattern, involving conceptual metaphors and discursive ploys, to mainstream the understanding that major world powers should not be obliged to see the war in Ukraine as anything beyond a regional border dispute.

In addition, marginal narratives render the banal and the unspectacular, equating marginal and marginalized, as these narratives represent not only the voices of the marginalized (e.g., refugees, recruits, volunteers, small entrepreneurs) but also are based on the marginal "residues" of everyday war experiences that are montaged or juxtaposed and woven into a narrative. Compared to major narratives drawn from history and heavily propagandized, marginal narratives are characterized by the fragmentariness of unusual, often discontinuous episodes (Ballard, 2022, p. 88). They focus on local contexts and details, and prioritize emotional value, individual memory, direct experience, and the human consequences of armed conflict. It is relatively easy to follow such narratives, as the story is given a "human" face through references to ordinary individuals and their experiences (Bednarek & Caple, 2014, p. 9).

This study identifies minor narratives and explores their discursive strategies in a dataset selected from the corpus of Romanian media discourse in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war. Discursive strategies are realized as textual representations of participants and their attributes, culture-related evaluations of actions and relations, as well as the construction of newsworthiness. In line with the definition of marginality, the selected analyzed narratives seemingly concern irrelevant incidents or negligible participants, as they are related to stories on clothing choices, advertising campaigns, small business establishments, sporting events or ordinary immigrants' lives that cumulatively entrench the sense of solidarity and resilience, possibly complementing or questioning the major narratives of official sources.

11.2 Data and Methods

The study is based on a corpus of news articles from top Romanian media outlets, compiled within the CORECON project between February 2022 and April 2024. Given the selection procedure, consisting in identifying the five most popular articles a month for each of the Romanian outlets, one can assume that the research material in the corpus meets the criteria of relevance and newsworthiness. Out of this large dataset of news media articles, headlines were screened to select those articles that could be classified as marginal narratives. Despite being about the banal, unspectacular, local, and personal experiences related to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, these stories resonated with Romanian audiences because they were consonant with editorial lines, expressing values and attitudes of the society, particularly regarding the sense of solidarity with Ukraine and the condemnation of

Russia as both a brutal invader and an aggressive propagator of its major narrative of defense.

Methodologically, this study is a qualitative, close-reading analysis of a dozen Romanian media texts that include marginal narratives, carried out from the perspective of the discursive strategies that confer newsworthiness (Bednarek & Caple, 2014), and of the linguistic strategies identified in the course of analysis via the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) (Wodak & Reisigl, 2016). These strategies are captured through the lens of textual representations of participants (political leaders, social actors) and their attributes, as well as through evaluations of their actions and relations in the context of the cultural significance of resilience in crisis or moral appropriateness of solidarity. In some cases where an image is present alongside the text, a connection is made between the visual and textual semiotic resources (Jäger & Maier, 2016) to demonstrate how these visuals strategically draw attention to framing, complementing, or countering verbal messages, to render the narrative's message stronger, more persuasive, and to enhance its credibility (Jancsary, Höllerer & Meyer, 2016, p. 194).

According to the constructivist, discursive approach to news, realized in the attention to how texts construct "newsworthiness" through multimodal resources, with news values, such as superlativeness, proximity, negativity, timeliness, personalization, impact, and novelty, being encoded in journalistic reporting and enhanced by accompanying visual elements. Also, marginal stories can be enhanced rhetorically to become resonant, for example through metaphors, comparisons, argumentation structures of mitigation and intensification, and *topoi* that make certain meanings salient. Thus, according to Bednarek and Caple (2014):

An analysis of how news values are discursively constructed in texts should be both "manual" and "multimodal." Only through close analysis of texts can we find out what values are emphasized (foregrounded), rare or absent (backgrounded). And only through multimodal analysis can we investigate how semiotic systems other than language construct news values and how they interact with linguistic resources. (p. 6)

The following sections present case studies of marginal narratives grouped into thematic clusters about clothing, marketing, and entrepreneurial activities, as well as smaller acts of solidarity or resistance. The analysis aims to identify characteristic linguistic and sometimes visual and rhetorical devices, particularly *topoi* (Wodak & Reisigl, 2016) that were employed to make the coverage of minor issues resonant and newsworthy. In order not to infringe on intellectual property rights of the authors and image creators of these media materials, the original texts subjected to analysis are hyperlinked in footnotes.

11.3 Results

11.3.1 *Clothing as an Index of Leadership and Resistance*

In the narratives where war is an overarching theme, the motif of politicians' clothing intersects with other discursive elements, particularly more universal, moral, or emotional meanings (Jäger & Maier, 2016). Thus, in the case of Putin's clothing style, the stories allude to authoritarianism, populism, socio-economic inequality, and manipulation, whereas in the case of Zelensky's style, to responsibility and authenticity. The latter is also associated with the theme of national resistance, branding trends, and even international solidarity.

One of the early reports¹ on war leaders sets Putin and Zelensky in opposition regarding their distinct outfits and does so right from the headline, through the phrase "by comparison." This phrase indicates two types of contrasts: the first between the essence and appearance in Putin's case (Putin's distant opulence vis-à-vis the image of a leader close to his people that he seeks to cultivate); the second, between the two leaders themselves. Thus, Putin's clothing is described through references to the salary of an ordinary Russian ("Putin's jacket costs more than two years of a Russian's salary") and through large quantifiers ("the 1.5 million ruble coat," "the 12,000-euro luxury jacket"). This is accompanied by negative evaluations: in a logic of performative spectacle, the Kremlin leader "showed off" (a verb that denotes ostentation) "in front of tens of thousands of supporters of his war in Ukraine with a Loro Piana jacket that can be purchased in Russia for 1.5 million rubles." The imagery, which is reminiscent of a celebrity on stage, performing before tens of thousands of fans with a microphone in hand, is lexicalized by using such verbs as "drew attention" or "showed off." This is reinforced by the quantifier conveying grand scale ("tens of thousands of people") and the mention of Loro Piana design, considered by *Vogue* to be a luxury brand ("The quiet luxury brand that's suddenly very loud"). Meanwhile, Zelensky's descriptions create the image of a leader that is close in the pricing of his clothing to ordinary people: "Zelensky wears clothes and shoes for which he paid no more than 100 pounds. Thus, the hoodie would be 10 pounds, the trousers 26 pounds, the T-shirt 5 pounds, and the shoes 51 pounds. The total would be 92 pounds, approximately 110 euros or 550 lei."

The contrasting clothing elements—the modest sportswear of Zelensky and Putin's luxury jacket—are each accompanied by a possessive adjective but with different values: Zelensky is linked to the agency and identification with "his country," but in Putin's case, the deictic is linked to "his war." The vocabulary aligns with the images: the use of space and Putin's positioning relative to other participants at the event celebrating eight years since the annexation of Crimea, fix the image of a strong leader. The foreground image is focused on Putin standing in the center of Moscow's Luzhniki Stadium arena, with the crowd and Russian flags in the

¹ <https://stirileprotv.ro/stiri/international/hainele-pe-care-le-poarta-zelenski-costa-110-de-euro-in-comparatie-doar-geaca-lui-putin-e-12-000-de-euro.html>.

background. The dominant color scheme is that of the Russian flag that is also found in the clothing of the crowd and of Putin. The blurring of human figures aims to turn Putin into a symbolic, mythical figure: he is the leader, standing out at the expense of the crowd, yet appearing among his followers. The persuasive meaning is constructed through multiple semiotic devices: framing that suggests power, visual symbols (flags), and the luxury jacket that connotes authority.

The contrastive portrayal of the two leaders is also evident in the article about Ukrainian clothing brands that Zelensky has made famous since the beginning of the war,² with an underlying message about “relevance and support for Ukrainians”: the popularity of Ukraine’s president leads people to order minimalist-style T-shirts like those worn by him. The banal details are foregrounded in the strategy of nomination of the affordable Ukrainian and American brands that make up Zelensky’s wardrobe (e.g., New Balance, Saucony, M-TAC, KateLab, and Creative Depo), and Yuliia Savostina, a stylist and founder of the “In Search of Made in Ukraine” brand festival, is questioned. Through patterns of predication, Zelensky appears as a “national trendsetter: everything he wears becomes fashionable.” The positive predications also concern what he wears: “comfortable khaki outfits, casual, with patriotic prints, almost exclusively from Ukrainian producers.” All this is implicitly contrasted with major narratives about political figures, who in the case of Putin’s designer suits and jackets, accrue negative associations.

The *topoi* used in the argumentation are those of utility (“such clothes are the most comfortable and also practical during the war”), as well as solidarity (T-shirts laced with the inscription “I’M UKRAINIAN”) that build identification (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). Additionally, intensification is achieved through temporal deictics expressed in iterative temporal phrases such as “every day” or through the universal quantifiers “everything he wears becomes fashionable,” “everything has changed with regard to the leader’s outfits.” Indicators of novelty are foregrounded as Zelensky “has launched a global trend for comfortable khaki outfits.” Meanwhile, the news value of superlativeness (Bednarek & Caple, 2014) is constructed through the repeated emphatic structure “not only... but also” (“copied not only by almost the entire Ukrainian leadership and many ordinary Ukrainians, but also by foreigners,” “not only because of his very high popularity rating but also because such clothes are the most comfortable and practical”), as well as adverbial structures that contain numerals (“since then, designers have begun to receive a hundred orders a day”), and adjectives of degree (“very high”).

The narratives of clothing are revisited in the coverage of the recent White House meeting of Zelensky and Trump, showing that the focus on outfits can be used to either legitimize or critique a leader, especially where it intersects with diplomatic protocol. Zelensky’s clothing, a symbol of solidarity with the people suffering from the war, is now reinterpreted as a breach of the dignity of office, serving as a pretext for the outburst of existing diplomatic tensions through personal attacks (*ad*

² <https://www.libertatea.ro/stiri/volodimir-zelenski-se-imbraca-aproape-exclusiv-cu-marci-de-haine-ucrainene-pe-care-le-a-facut-celebre-de-cand-a-inceput-razboiul-cu-rusia-4367777>.

hominem). From a diachronic perspective of the discursive threads (Jäger & Maier, 2016), the continuity of Zelensky's dress code can be understood as a political and symbolic instrument. Also, clothing narratives mirror the shift from a socio-cultural coding (modesty vs. elitism) to a national identity coding (resistance), ending with a politicized pretext for a diplomatic attack.

11.3.2 *Marketing Narratives*

Although major narratives can aggrandize leaders by reinforcing the sense of their authority and control over decision-making, minor narratives may resort to caricatures and devaluation through humor and sarcasm. There are some examples of this strategy, particularly likely to be deployed for marketing purposes that are based on appealing to consumers' sense of politically conscious purchasing choices. For example, *Putin is a D**khead Beer* is an ironic example of a branding narrative³ showing how a commonplace product like beer acquires political meaning and is weaponized (more on the strategies of weaponizing cultural and historical references in Iliș, Chap. 4 in this volume).

Amid the mentions of politically engaged brewery industry representatives (Ornery Beer Company, Winchester Brew Works, Lake Anne Brew House, Fair Winds Brewing, Caboose Brewing, Pravda Brewery), Putin is presented through negative predications: "above a river of blood, holding a bomb in one hand." "It is not a very flattering caricature" is a euphemistic evaluation alternating with intensification through vulgar language, namely the attribution "d**khead" (Wodak & Reisigl, 2016, p. 47). Negativity is also constructed through "disaster vocabulary" by means of "emotional inferencing" (e.g., river of blood, bomb, atrocities) (Ungerer, 1997, p. 314). International solidarity, expressed by the call to buy more beer from breweries that oppose Putin's regime, is rendered by quantifiers (3000 cans, 20,000 dollars) and repetitions (everyone, the whole world). The minor narrative that politicizes beer drinking is constructed not only through the unusual juxtaposition of geopolitics and consumption but also through explicit branding markers ("Pravda Brewery gained international attention for the first time"). The *topoi* employed are also those of solidarity ("the whole world unites around Ukraine") and charity ("the beer community is a large community, they always want to help, we are a very charitable group"). Personal appeal is constructed with the inclusive first-person pronoun "we" ("we are a very charitable group"), and with the third-person pronoun ("they always want to help"). In this context, "they" and "we" are not opposed but affiliated around the same ideological stance endorsing Ukraine in its fight against the Kremlin.

³ <https://stirileprotv.ro/stiri/international/o-companie-a-scos-la-vanzare-berea-cu-numele-putin-este-un-nemernic-pentru-a-strange-bani-pentru-ucraina.html>.

There are two images that accompany this narrative: a background image of a young woman offering the beer, and another, loaded with meanings and symbols encoded in the label of Pravda Beer Theatre beer, where Putin is depicted on a throne in the posture of a modern tsar. His desire for grandeur contrasts with the ridiculousness of his nudity, which calls into question his authoritarian and intimidating position. The label's design is that of a central character playing with several toys: in his arms there is a child-toy that closely resembles Dmitry Medvedev, former president of Russia controlled by Putin, an allusion to a child's obedience. To Putin's right is an iconic hero from Russian cartoons, Cheburashka, created by writer Eduard Uspensky, that became popular through animation films and the commercialization of its image in toys and sweets. In the figure with big ears and brown fur one can see the face of Viktor Yanukovich (former president of Ukraine, who fled during the EuroMaidan protests), considered as a result of his actions to be Putin's puppet. The character's servility and lack of personality are emphasized by the placard he holds that translates into "I am illegitimately alive," satirizing his immoral relationship with Russia, that "keeps him alive."

As discourse analysis can also be utilized to reveal issues of presence and absence (Jäger & Maier, 2016, p. 187), the central absence in the picture (and in the verbal text) is the tsar's subjects. Without them, Putin looks merely as someone posing in a studio set, a child surrounded by toys. His throne is exaggerated, theatrical, with infantilized male figures (the child-toy and the cartoon character), and surrounded by some oil rigs and gas pipelines that are visual metaphors of Putin's geopolitical power, enabling him to "act as a tsar." The ad seems to illustrate the idea expressed by Shishkin (2024) that Putin no longer appears as the strong, genuine tsar, echoing the disappointment that deepens the identity crisis within Russkiy Mir. The placement of a church dome on one of the rigs may signify the close relationship between church and state, and the use of religion as a propaganda tool. The color code of the image is dominated by red, the color of war. The iconicity remains dominant while the verbal mode has a supporting function, reinforcing the alliance of the two semi-otic systems in unmasking Putin's autocracy.

11.3.3 Narratives of (Ukrainian) Entrepreneurship

Another set of minor narratives spotlights the experiences of civilians and Ukrainians who are reported to have overcome personal and collective struggles and who, for example, decided to start businesses or radically change their professional paths due to war. These stories implicitly acknowledge solidarity with deserving individuals, legitimize the support of Ukrainian resistance, and reinforce the universalized moral code that calls for siding with the victim rather than the aggressor.

In a narrative about a group of three Ukrainian refugees in Iași, cooking has been transformed into a small business selling traditional food,⁴ thus becoming a reassuring and hospitable *topos*, one that is recurrent in other narratives about cooking. The basic strategy is personalization—first because the news story features ordinary individuals as social actors, namely three housewives from Ukraine who “started” (three occurrences of the verb) small businesses selling traditional food; second, because it uses quotes from these ordinary people (from the host, from Olyia explaining how the business began, and from the other woman who explains how she makes pancakes). Predications are positive, with respect to the three housewives and mothers (nomination strategy based on familiar identities), and to the dishes: “a lot of goodies,” “according to the home recipe,” “modest prices,” “fresh ingredients.” There are also positive predications about the host who advises, encourages, and promotes the business through Facebook. The *topoi* of autonomy and integration appear both in the host’s account (intensification “it’s so good”) and in indirect speech acts (questions instead of assertions: “why not sell them too?”), as well as in the laudatory tone of the journalistic account, with action verbs (go, cook, pack, deliver) to describe the enterprise of the three women.

The cooking motif is also present as a discourse fragment (in the sense used by Jäger & Maier, 2016, p. 122) in the narrative about Olga Kopylova, a Ukrainian refugee in Moldova who managed during the war to expand her chain of fish restaurants from Ukraine into Romania, in Constanța.⁵ Her slogan is: “We are ready to fry fish for the whole world, so that Ukraine wins.”

The main identity-building strategy in the entrepreneurship narratives is personalization, including accounts of several social actors including Olga Kopylova, Anastasia Surai, and Ivan, each with an impressive personal history. Active identity construction and negotiation through storytelling (de Fina, 2003) is achieved through textual self-identification markers i.e., first-person verbs in the refugees’ accounts (“I was shocked,” “I found a job and found myself here,” “I was terrified,” “I left,” “I sing the anthem”), alternating with the journalist’s indirect style of using indicative verbs (a mood expressing real, certain actions), the perfect tense (an absolute tense in Romanian, indicating a past completed action), and verbs expressing mental processes (“focused on,” “spotted”) or actions (“started from scratch,” “worked,” “drove thousands of kilometers”). Positive predications highlight the protagonists’ determined, dynamic character, individually and also when characterized together with Ivan (“Olga and Ivan are dedicated”).

The *topos* of the power of personal example is conveyed through agentive action verbs (van Leeuwen, 2016, p. 152). The impact value of her hard work is built through a verbal phrase with a superlative adverb: “the business developed with great intensity.” The narrative ends with a strongly persuasive sentence: “People

⁴ <https://stirileprotv.ro/divers/gospodinele-din-ucraina-au-inceput-mici-afaceri-cu-mancare-traditionala-in-romania-ce-pret-au-preparatele.html>.

⁵ <https://www.libertatea.ro/stiri/in-plin-razboi-o-refugiata-si-a-extins-restaurantele-in-moldova-si-romania-suntem-gata-sa-prajim-pestele-pentru-intreaga-lume-ca-ucraina-sa-castige-4255598>.

support us because they want to help Ukraine.” The intensifying value is reinforced with two synonymous verbs (*to support* and *to help*) and a positive generalization (“people,” “the whole world”). In Ivan’s life story, personalization is associated with emotions (“shocked,” “terrified,” “cries”), as all of his actions are sanctioned by war (“he ran a printing house in Donetsk, but then the fighting began in eastern Ukraine,” “he wanted to get his family out of the country, but the bridge they were about to cross blew up in front of them”). Emotional engagement is thus also built through disaster vocabulary and counter-expectation (“women giving birth in the corridors,” “Russian tanks using the hospital as a shield”) (Bednarek & Caple, 2014, p. 10). However, the *topos* of security is realized by locating the story in Chernomorka, linguistically expressed through a diminutive (“little piece [of home]”) and in the theme park at Pohrebea near Chişinău: (“it is like a country inside a country”). These are spaces for the reconstruction of Ukraine and a space where refugees can rediscover or rebuild their home/homeland. The *topos* of autonomy appears in the voices of the story’s characters and that of the reporter.

Yet another marginal story centers on tourism in the Danube Delta in the context of the war.⁶ Social actors are discursively constructed through proper names (protagonist Ludmila), professional designations (the cook, the hotel manager, the guesthouse administrator, the mayor of the village), and ethnic anthroponyms (Romanians, Ukrainian woman, Lipovan woman). The reference to a routine activity such as cooking connects this narrative to others and builds personalization, alongside references to affects (“with great emotions”). The story unites the actors through nouns denoting different national identities: “In the middle of the water expanse, a Lipovan woman and a Ukrainian woman are rolling cabbage rolls.” The deliberate choice to avoid proper names and to use nomination through reference to ethnic identity builds the metaphor-symbol of transnational solidarity. Regarding the argumentative strategy, the *topoi* used here relate to fear (foreign tourists cancel reservations due to proximity to war zones) and adaptation (Romanian tourists are getting used to the idea of war). Intensification is achieved through hyperbole and repetition: “Foreigners have erased us, for the moment, from the list,” “they have erased Romania from the map, completely,” and through descriptions of significant present consequences.

In the above news item the voices of social actors intertwine with that of the reporter. For example, the hotel manager’s statement uses personal and spatial deixis (*we* vs. *they*, *far* vs. *near*) for opposition: “We, who live here, feel that the war seems far away; they, when they look at the map, feel it is very close.” This leads to the reporter’s conclusion: “Thus, Romanians who love the Delta seem to be saving this season.” Positive predication referring to Romanians (“love the Delta,” “save the season”) is preceded by the discourse marker with an argumentative conclusion function: “thus.” Meanwhile, quantifiers regarding vacation cancellations by tourists (“90% are foreigners”) and the superlatives in Ludmila’s invitation to the Delta

⁶ <https://stirileprotv.ro/stiri/actualitate/pastele-in-delta-este-preferat-de-romani-strainii-au-anulat-rezervarile-de-frica-razboiului-din-ucraina.html>.

(“it is very beautiful”) are followed by the journalist’s assessment of guesthouses’ recovery from the crisis situation (100% occupancy rate in guesthouses).

The narrative about the “famous pottery fair *Cucuteni 5000*”⁷ develops the *topos* of tradition alongside that of identity, as it brings together artisans from Romania, Moldova, and Ukraine. The linguistic tools that materialize these *topoi* are the connector *alături de* (“together with”), expressing solidarity in its basic sense, and the verb from the same lexical family *s-au alăturat* (“joined”): “the event brought together potters from well-known pottery centers in the country, as well as from the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.” Proximity and salience are combined in the title completing the general picture. The protagonist is nominated only as “a Ukrainian craftsman from the Chernivtsi area,” who “because he wants to stand by those fighting in the war” “donates half his pottery earnings to soldiers, including the proceeds from the Iași fair.” The craftsman’s life story is told in free indirect style: “Pottery was, for him, as he says, a refuge to keep his mind clear while Ukraine was under attack.” Absolute superlatives (“the most appreciated,” “superb”), or words whose meaning expresses positive evaluation (“words of praise,” “bags full,” “beautiful plates”), create a positive frame into which the predications about the Ukrainian craftsman’s humane gesture are introduced.

In another article, the protagonist Viktoria Apanasenko is introduced as a civic volunteer who was chosen to represent Ukraine in the Miss Universe 2022 pageant.⁸ In the report, she is described through positive predications: “she cooks for soldiers and for the elderly caught in the claws of war.” In a sentence “Viktoria fights actively for Ukraine’s victory,” the wordplay exploits the semantics of the protagonist’s name and its iconic function. In Romanian, it activates the denotative meaning of the word *victory* within the proper name, thus creating an analogy between the name and what it designates, giving it the character of a motivated linguistic sign and a strong connotation of resistance in the story’s context.

11.3.4 Narratives Featuring Pro-Ukrainian Sentiments

A few examples in the dataset of minor narratives bring pro-Ukrainian sentiments to the fore by reporting on unexpected and emotion-laden events or sensationalized popular culture and media reports. For example, in the collection of minor narratives that foreground unwanted war consequences, there is a news story that peeks into the ordinary Russian side of the conflict. It reports on Russians searching on Google “how to break your arm at home” right after Putin announced mobilization,⁹ reflecting the refusal of ordinary people to participate in the war. Salience is

⁷ <https://stirileprotv.ro/divers/targul-de-ceramica-zcucuteni-5000-mestieri-din-romania-ucraina-si-republica-moldova-si-au-expus-lucrarile-la-iasi.html>.

⁸ https://www.stiripesurse.ro/viktoria-apanasenko-miss-univers_2434185.html.

⁹ <https://stirileprotv.ro/stiri/actualitate/rusii-au-cautat-pe-google-zcum-sa-ti-rupi-o-mana-acasa-imediat-ce-putin-a-anuntat-mobilizarea-la-razboi.html>.

conveyed by references to Kremlin officials (immediately after the announcement of partial mobilization) and through intensified lexis and quantifiers: “the search index rose to 38 out of 100, showing a dramatic increase in searches for the given phrase,” “shortly after,” “searches exploded.” From a perspective of news representations and normalization, “discourse adds another quality to communication by making particular interests seem ‘natural,’ ‘objective,’ and ‘fact-like’” (Jancsary, Höllerer, & Meyer, 2016, p. 185). Thus, the foregrounding of a soldier’s hands, with the face not shown, suggests depersonalization, implying that anyone can see themselves in this picture i.e., anyone can project their own identity onto it. The image indexes the ordinary person who refuses to enter a war that is not theirs. The emotional effect is all the stronger because the hands are visibly those of a laborer, someone who earns his living through physical work.

Another pro-Ukrainian marginal narrative is reproduced in a report about a football fan who during the Portugal-Uruguay match, entered the field carrying an LGBT flag and wearing a T-shirt with “Save Ukraine” and “Respect for Iranian women” printed on it.¹⁰ In a performance space of a football match, such an event becomes a political act, and the inscriptions on the T-shirt become semiotic vehicles for the foregrounding of salient global tensions. The report highlights three themes of universal rights, contextualizing them within a single act of protest: the *topos* of equality (referring to the LGBT minority), the *topos* of solidarity (with Ukraine, the victim of aggression), and the *topos* of freedom (referring to the tragic case of Mahsa Amini, a victim of violence against women). Bringing these three issues together has a strong impact—even in the absence of explicit intensified lexis—because the three political messages are no longer seen in isolation but addressed together to the international community. Although the reports’ general tone is neutral, the only textual clue suggesting a critical perspective is the action attributed to the World Cup: “The display of the rainbow flag, a symbol appropriated by the LGBT rights movement, is prohibited at the World Cup.” However, the choice of the neutral term “fan” rather than “protester” suggests a mitigation strategy, so that the dimension of the act of political demonstration is backgrounded.

A story about Canal 5 TV station (“the oldest news channel in Ukraine”) formerly owned by former president Petro Poroshenko reports on another unusual event: when the TV presenters wanted to raise money to buy walkie-talkie radio sets for the army by posing nude.¹¹ The story explains that “the women are naked, their intimate parts covered by weapons, and their faces are not visible.” While personal perspective is constructed through references to ordinary people (“the boys on the front line”) and direct quotes from them, the consequence of carrying out the project has a polarizing effect. On the one hand, those who support the front-line soldiers approve of it; on the other hand, the media register a critical reaction of progressive movements (“the NGO *Women in the Media* published an open letter signed by

¹⁰ https://www.stiripesurse.ro/foto-incident-la-cupa-mondiala-un-fan-a-intrat-pe-teren-cu-un-steag-lgbt-la-meciul-portugalia-uruguay_2678335.html.

¹¹ <https://www.libertatea.ro/stiri/jurnalistele-unui-post-tv-ucrainean-au-pozat-nud-pentru-a-strange-fonduri-pentru-armata-4376031>.

well-known female journalists, human rights defenders, and representatives of feminist movements”) who considered the initiative “discriminatory and sexist,” merging emotional reactions of solidarity with disapproval about the means it was achieved.

11.4 Conclusion

The concept of marginal narratives can be used to understand what kind of relevance, resonance, and newsworthiness is exemplified in the media’s reporting of a fan-related incident on the football pitch, about a project in which journalists raise money by posing nude, in descriptions of a president’s clothing style, or of housewives who start a small business. Beyond the intention of being used to emotionally balance coverage for an audience fatigued and desensitized by too many reports of war and death (Carruthers, 2000, p. 18), these stories manage to have an impact on the audience because they involve discovering larger cultural meanings, or being complicit in meaning-making through accessible means such as visual metaphors (*Putin is a D**khead beer*) or comparisons (Putin’s coat vs. Zelensky’s hoodie). In the logic of the media, minor narratives tend to be more attractive, easier to read, and not as emotionally overwhelming or exhausting as major war narratives.

Despite their apparent banality, marginal narratives in soft news articles related to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict contribute to reshaping the public perception of international politics by building a sense of solidarity and moral code camouflaged within insignificant actions or common events. They are newsworthy and engaging by constructing simple identities for the audience and presenting *topoi* with symbolic value, such as paradise-like spaces (the theme park, the water expanse Chernomorka, beauty pageants). The examples of minor stories analyzed here demonstrate that what is seen as “the irrelevant, the insignificant, the marginal and the negligible” contains subtle indications nudging audiences towards constructing solidarity that may call into question the central narrative such as Putin’s grand narrative of defense or the myth of the Russkiy Mir.

As is often the case with soft news articles, the most common personalization strategy in marginal narratives is realized through references to ordinary people who become symbolic heroes of resilience, even though proper names are not always used and left as open social categories (“a craftsman,” “a fan,” “a Ukrainian woman,” “a housewife”). At other times, there are impactful names with symbolic surplus meaning (“Viktoria fights actively for victory”). In pro-Ukrainian storylines, predications are usually evaluated as positive, the Ukrainian refugee status is heroized through active work, and their condition of sole victimhood is rejected for the sake of resilient action. Narratives about cooking, for example, are success stories that can reassure the Romanian audience frightened by the influx of refugees that these Ukrainians fight, work, and integrate. Personalization is also implicitly manifested in references to the “ordinary” reference frames of lived experience

(“Putin’s coat costs as much as an ordinary Russian’s salary,” “Zelensky’s clothes are those worn by ordinary people”).

In the realm of argumentative strategies, marginal narratives are most likely to draw on the *topoi* that foreground equality, cooperation, resilience, and adaptation, with an overarching theme of solidarity. Solidarity with those at the front may take controversial forms of manifestation, thereby increasing newsworthiness such as posing nude to buy walkie-talkie radio sets for the army or acts of defiance of stadium rules in the fan’s supportive gesture at the Portugal-Uruguay match. The emotionally resonant tone of the reporting of minor stories is also reflected in the journalistic style, particularly where the journalist’s voice blends with that of the protagonist, and free indirect speech is used, sometimes with elements of vulgarity or clearly expressed sentiment. Although they seemingly address themes that appear insignificant, minor narratives systematically display cracks in official propaganda and mythologies, by re-signifying Ukrainian identity, and building alternative collective identity for the Romanian audiences that are positioned to enact (or at least consume) solidarity.

Acknowledgement This work was funded by the EU’s NextGenerationEU instrument through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan of Romania – Pillar III-C9-I8, managed by the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalization, within the project entitled *The Coverage and Reception of the Russian–Ukrainian Conflict in Polish, Romanian and English-language Media: A Comparative Critical Discourse Study with Recommendations for Journalism Training (CORECON)*, contract no. 760244/28.12.2023, code CF 25/27.07.2023.

References

- Ballard, C. (2022). Marginal history. *History and Anthropology*, 33(1), 86–103. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02757206.2019.1607733>
- Bednarek, M., & Caple, H. (2014). Why do news values matter? Towards a new methodological framework for analyzing news discourse in Critical Discourse Analysis and beyond. *Discourse & Society*, 25(2), 135–158. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926513516041>
- Carruthers, S. L. (2000). *The media at war: Communication and conflict in the twentieth century*. St. Martin’s Press.
- Cap, P. (2023). Narratives of geopolitical representation in the discourse of the Russia-Ukraine war. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 218, 133–143.
- De Beaugrande, R., & Dressler, W. (1981). *Introduction to text linguistics*. Longman.
- de Fina, A. (2003). *Identity in narrative. A study of immigrant discourse*. John Benjamins.
- Geertz, C. (2005). Deep play: Notes on the Balinese cockfight. *Daedalus*, 134(4), 56–86.
- Jäger, S., & Maier, F. (2016). Analyzing discourses and dispositives: A Foucauldian approach to theory and methodology. In R. Wodak & M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of critical discourse studies* (3rd edition, pp. 34–61). Sage.
- Jancsary, D., Höllerer, M. A., & Meyer, R. E. (2016). Critical analysis of visual and multimodal texts. In R. Wodak & M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of critical discourse studies* (3rd edition, pp. 180–204). Sage.
- Neumann, K. (1992). *Not the way it really was: Constructing the Tolai past*. University of Hawaii Press.
- Shishkin, M. (2024). *My Russia: War or peace*. Quercus.

- Ungerer, F. (1997). Emotions and emotional language in English and German news stories. In S. Niemeier & R. Dirven (Eds.), *The language of emotions: Conceptualization, expression, and theoretical foundation* (pp. 307–329). John Benjamins.
- van Leeuwen, T. (2016). Discourse as the recontextualization of social practice – A guide. In R. Wodak & M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of critical discourse studies* (3rd edition, pp. 137–154). Sage.
- Wodak, R., & Meyer, M. (2016). Critical discourse studies: History, agenda, theory and methodology. In R. Wodak & M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of critical discourse studies* (3rd edition, pp. 1–22). Sage.
- Wodak, R., & Reisigl, M. (2016). The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA). In R. Wodak & M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of critical discourse studies* (3rd edition, pp. 87–121). Sage.

Monica Bors is Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Letters and Arts, Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Romania. Her areas of expertise include semantics, phonetics, morphology, lexicology, and Romanian as a foreign language. Her PhD thesis investigated the motivation of the linguistic sign in the proper names of the characters in Mircea Eliade's work with mythological linguistics, language poetics, and interpretative semantics. Most of her articles analyze the dynamics of contemporary Romanian language change, e.g., in cartoons, print media, and on social networks, by looking at how lexical coinages, semantic mutations, or hybrid constructions are used by speakers and recorded in dictionaries.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if you modified the licensed material. You do not have permission under this license to share adapted material derived from this chapter or parts of it.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.



Chapter 12

Military Conflicts in the Post-Truth Era: An Analysis of the Russian-Ukrainian War in a Romanian Newspaper



Iulia-Maria Ticărașu

Abstract The two sides of truthfulness: sincerity and accuracy are reversed in the post-truth era where the emphasis is increasingly on appearance of sincerity at the expense of factual accuracy. This chapter discusses the concepts of post-truth and strategic epistemology towards media before attempting to answer the following questions: How are military conflicts represented in the post-truth era? How do politicians construct their post-truth rhetoric? How do media users relate to this political construction of reality? To answer these questions, this chapter analyzes how post-truth discourses on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict by such politicians as Diana Șoșoacă and George Simion are mediated in the Romanian newspaper *Libertatea* in its coverage from February 2022 to February 2024. The results highlight affiliative and affective rhetoric that appeals to the Romanian audience with its aspiring character that offers coping mechanisms, much like in the case of the “Trump effect.”

12.1 Introduction

Today, as individuals construct both their identities and their realities using social media and virtual environments, the concept of truth is shifting from its immutable nature to multiple truths constructed through emotion and subjectivity. Therefore, the concept of post-truth accurately reflects the realities of our time. In November 2016, *Oxford Dictionaries* announced “post-truth” as its word of the year, defining the term as an adjective “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief” (McComiskey, 2017, p. 5). The characteristic of post-truth appeals not only to emotions but also to individualism, with the definition highlighting its ability to influence the audience addressed. The choice made by *Oxford Dictionaries* to flag it as significant is explained as follows: “Post-truth has gone from being a

I.-M. Ticărașu (✉)

Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Sibiu, Romania

e-mail: iulia.deaconu@ulbsibiu.ro

© The Author(s) 2026

K. Molek-Kozakowska, S.-M. Terian (eds.), *Mediated Discourses of Conflict across Languages and Genres*, The Language of Politics,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-95-6992-2_12

199

peripheral term to being a mainstay in political commentary, now being used by major publications without the need for clarification or definition in their headlines” (McComiskey, 2017, pp. 5–6). The popularity and/or popularization of this concept is largely due to well-known media publications that have used it in relation to the political environment.

This article aims to analyze the representations of military conflicts in the media, using rhetorical analysis supplemented with content and epistemic analysis, to identify the characteristics of post-truth discourses in the case of selected Romanian politicians who promote nationalist ideology, even right-wing extremism (e.g., Diana Șoșoacă and George Simion). More precisely, this study seeks to document the full scope and specific mechanisms of mediated post-truth strategies used by Romanian politicians in connection with the war in Ukraine. The analysis focuses on how these political figures evade veracity by referring to the rhetorical features that can be identified in political discourse as instantiations of post-truth. The findings aim to address the fact that the post-truth era has changed the way military conflicts are viewed; and yet, the media plays an important role that must be reasserted in attempting to expose post-truth strategies that can have devastating consequences for democracy.

Based on Waisbord’s (2018) article “Truth is What Happens to News,” the argument highlights the fact that military conflicts provide the optimal environment for the growth of post-truth. Waisbord (2018) emphasizes the tendency toward epistemological fragmentation (truth is viewed differently depending on the group to which one belongs). Moreover, truth acquires a new meaning in the relationship between journalism and the audience, because the way the public interprets the news becomes the truth, having a greater weight than the version of events that appears in the press.

To that end, this study uses epistemic analysis to identify the degree of truthfulness in the discourse of the politicians analyzed, as revealed by their use of grammatical and lexical choices, such as verbal modes, modal verbs (*must*, *can*), adverbs and adverbial phrases expressing uncertainty and certainty (*maybe*, *probably*, *of course*, *most likely*, etc.), modal particles (*really*, *seriously*), free constructions containing lexemes with epistemic meaning (*to know*, *to believe*, *possibility*, etc.) (Pană-Dindelegan, 2023, p. 248). By identifying the degree of subjectivity and objectivity, it will be possible to specify the factuality of what is reported in the selected texts from the corpus extracted from the newspaper *Libertatea* on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict (for the interfaces between subjectivity and objectivity in journalism see also Wilk, Chap. 9 in this volume). Since “post-truth thrives on polarization and exaggerated difference. White versus black. Us against them. True versus false” (Lockie, 2017, p. 3), the analysis also focuses on linguistic polarization and its affiliative, affective and rhetorical nature.

12.2 The Rise of Affiliative, Affective and Rhetorical Truths

Although the concept of post-truth is the subject of many studies, Lockie (2017) pointed out that it is discussed in relation to political discourse only in a small number of specialized works. There, the profile of the politician in the post-truth era is constructed in the following way:

The post-truth politician does not simply pick-and-choose among relevant facts, offer questionable interpretations or avoid inconvenient questions. The post-truth politician manufactures his or her own facts. The post-truth politician asserts whatever they believe to be in their own interest and they continue to press those same claims, regardless of the evidence amassed against them. (Lockie, 2017, p. 1)

In other words, the politician in the post-truth era is a creation or re-creation of their own actions, invented according to the goal they are aiming for and the audience they want to influence. Accordingly, “although political lies, spin, and propaganda are nothing new, public figures now seem less ashamed of being proven bullshitters or liars” (Hannon, 2023, p. 5). For this reason, Blackburn (2019) suggested that “post-shame” and “post-trust” may actually be better descriptors for post-truth politics. While post-shame is a moral problem and post-trust is an epistemic problem, they are intertwined: if public figures are no longer ashamed of dishonesty, they will continue to lie. The present concern about the profile of post-truth politicians, however, does not stem from the fact that they are proven liars, but rather from the fact that they can be politically extreme (Lockie, 2017, p. 3).

Post-truth discourse is closely associated with “bullshit” discourse in that it uses language to achieve a specific goal, as “bullshit is pure strategic communication with no reference to reality or truth” (McComiskey, 2017, p. 10). In the political context, McComiskey noted a continued disregard for facts and truth in bullshit: “one thing that has not changed in post-truth bullshit is the lack of any relationship to facts, realities, and truths among political rhetors and their rhetorical performances” (p. 12). Yet, the active complicity of the public is what characterizes political bullshit now, considered by many to be the norm. Thus “in post-truth bullshit, even the audiences have no concern for facts, realities, or truths, thus relieving speakers from the need to conceal their manipulative intent” with post-truth audiences being largely “disassociated from the epistemological continuum” (McComiskey, 2017, p. 12). The audience does not question the veracity of the facts presented by the speakers, because they distrust knowledge as the pillar of reality and forego verification, not being interested in factual accuracy as long as their views are confirmed.

Mediated political discourses often multiply these visions dissociated from facts that feed on assumptions and leave no room for interpretation. Affective and affiliative bonds sustain adherence to a “certain” truth, or rather a micro-truth, developed within and for a specific target group, transforming the truth of our days into a trend that some people follow and consider appropriate, based on desires. In other words:

Post-truth [is] co-created fiction in which the distinction between truth and falsehood has become irrelevant, the latter being replaced by affective investment in aspirational

narratives. In this environment, statements become true if audiences desire them to be such. That leads to creation of affiliative truths – ways of knowing, capable of mobilising audiences. (Kalpokas, 2019, p. 9)

In this way, multiple sets of truths that have a much greater impact on the target audiences are constructed through media's stimulating power. As a result, "the stark definitiveness of the post-truth idea needs to be exchanged for more flexible thinking... about the pressures on different kinds of truth" (Corner, 2017, p. 1107). This means that definitions, evaluations, practices, and uses of public discourse need to be considered within comparative frameworks of rhetorical affiliations and emotions.

12.2.1 *Emo-Truth and the Trump Effect*

Due to the emphasis on emotion, post-truth is sometimes reinterpreted as emo-truth. In the article "Post-truth right-wing populism: Emo-truth from the French anti-gender theory movement to Trump," Harsin (2018) listed five characteristics that he considered essential to the concept of emo-truth that he applies in his analysis of the *La Manif Pour* movement on Facebook: fake people, active distrust, emotion, rumor bombs and backlashes. The author notes that "emo-truth encapsulates the relationship of emotion and popular truth" (Harsin, 2018, p. 17), where emotion serves as inference from prime (indexical) sign to affective (often unconscious) response. This "truth" is thus felt or experienced, not "accompanied by long temporal reasoning" (Harsin, 2018, p.17).

In terms of how it is produced and received, three features can be identified: controversial topics, content that is highly aggressive, and the style in which the information is delivered. In other words, emo-truth represents an exchange of negative emotions: aggression, disgust, indignation that are transferred through a channel from the sender to the audience overwhelming this type of news. For Harsin (2018), "the degree to which something is true is in proportion to the degree of intensity by which it is angrily felt and perceptibly expressed," yielding situations where "symbolic violence may mix with or help produce physical violence" (p. 19). Thus, the scholars of emo-truth highlight its tendency for audiences to be manipulated into acting, not just expressing but channelling negative emotions from the subconscious to the level where they are realized, while at the same time sounding the alarm about this public phenomenon.

A representative exponent of post-truth that is constantly brought up is Donald Trump. Hence the "Trump effect" has been defined in relation to both "the material and social results of successful post-truth rhetoric" (McComiskey, 2017, p. 33). To accomplish this effect, it has been shown that throughout his speeches Trump uses at least three rhetorical strategies that draw on emotionality for persuasion: name-calling, hyperbole, and metaphor (McComiskey, 2017, p. 29), for example when calling Mexicans "rapists" or "drug dealers," demeaning all opposition politicians

as “losers,” or comparing trade negotiations to a football game or for that matter equating himself with Moses and God’s messenger (McComiskey, 2017, pp. 31–33). Additionally, the “Trump effect,” as many post-truth extremist political phenomena, draws on xenophobia, inciting anger and fear to channel them against an imagined enemy that will be also evident in the present study of Romanian examples.

12.2.2 Strategic Epistemology of Mediated Post-Truth

The increasingly immersive media technologies play an important part in creating opinions and shaping public perception. In the post-truth era with its increased social tensions and global crises, “immersive media combine analytical and emotional approaches to understanding the world, making it a valuable tool in maintaining trust” (Zinovieva, 2024, p. 88). With media logics now governing political communication, societal affairs, and institutional discourses, mediatization provides the perfect environment for post-truth to grow and spread (Kalpokas, 2019, p. 50). After all, any social groups “that have been created through adherence to a narrative of a particular kind must have meaningful boundaries and such boundaries are currently created through mediated communication” (Couldry & Hepp, 2017, pp. 169–170).

In this mediatized environment, politics itself becomes associated and rendered visible through immersive media coverage, especially social media with their fragmentation, personal preferences, and extremely pervasive branding. Mediatization enables political actors to reach out to mobilize support directly “without the intervention from formal structures, organisational resources that had previously been necessary for campaigning” (Kalpokas, 2019, p. 58). Politics is no longer seen as an inaccessible field with high standards but rather is “taken to the streets,” becoming a commodity to be consumed according to subjective criteria. Since post-truth arises from mediatization, Angwald and Wagnsson (2024) develop the concept of strategic epistemology for the mass media and journalists to facilitate a critical interpretation of political actors who aim to influence.

For a better understanding of the concept of strategic epistemology and its use in the media, Angwald and Wagnsson (2024) point out norms of knowing that “are learned, culturally embedded and linked to group membership” (p. 1528). Epistemological analysis of the media thus requires the user “to interpret media information as produced by self-interested actors – whether journalists, politicians or individuals posting on social media – to achieve strategic social goals” (p. 1528). By using this analysis, one can find rhetorical aspects that help identify and recognize manufactured news items or information intended to disinform (post-truth) and, at the same time, propose or highlight the principles to follow when transmitting inaccurate content. Thus, “analysis is epistemological in that it comes with consequential judgments about not only what type of information can be trusted, but also about what epistemological norms one is obliged to follow when transmitting knowledge” (Angwald & Wagnsson, 2024, p. 1530).

Angwald and Wagnsson (2024) also connect the concept of strategic epistemology of media to that of post-truth in acknowledging the idea that the media “have entered a specific cultural moment of disregard for the truth, a moment in which subjective opinions matter more than objective truth” (p. 1530), with post-truth spreading through a “trickle-down” effect, propagating from the political class to media audiences. Likewise, this study also aims to document the range and specifics of post-truth devices deployed by Romanian, extremist right-wing politicians in relation to the topic of the Ukraine war and the rhetorical investments of politicians in a media context marked by strategic epistemology (Chiluwa & Ruzaitė, 2024).

12.3 Romanian Political Context in View of the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict

To analyze how military conflicts are strategically touched by post-truth, the study explores selected media reports on speeches by two right-wing Romanian politicians, Diana Șoșoacă and George Simion, regarding the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The online news channel under consideration is *Libertatea*, and the timeframe discussed spans from the beginning of the conflict in February 2022 to February 2024. As post-truth politics is being shaped into a spectacle by figures such as Diana Șoșoacă or George Simion, media serve as the primary stage of a political game that continuously redefines and influences how Romanians interact with and interpret the political system (Baghiu, 2025, pp. 1–2).

In Romania, political parties function as a system of exchanges and conventions designed to secure control over the state bureaucracy (Buti & Radu, 2014, p. 49). Furthermore, “the principle of the separation of powers within the state possesses only a formal dimension, being supplanted in political practice by the distribution of power” (Buti & Radu, 2014, p. 54). In “Reflections on the Political Regime of Romania,” Radu (2022) questioned the type of political regime: “according to the Constitution, Romania is unequivocally a parliamentary republic. The fundamental law requires the president, once elected, to become politically neutral and to assume the role of mediator between the powers and institutions of the state (art. 80–2)” (p. 45).

However, starting with the 1992 elections and surveying the evolution of Romania’s political regime, one can observe a pendulum swing between a presidential-type regime and a parliamentary one (Radu, 2022, p. 46). Although Romania’s Constitution is ostensibly modeled on the French system, no effective solution has yet been found to reconcile the power relations held by the president and the prime minister (parliament). This, in turn, only generates disruptions in the functioning of state institutions (Radu, 2022, p. 48). Moreover, two major phenomena can be observed in the Romanian political system: the politicization of the state sector, and the rule of law being diminished and discredited, with citizens’ rights and freedoms no longer effectively guaranteed (Dragoman, 2023, p. 269).

In the era of globalization and military conflicts, the issue of national identity is once again becoming a thorny matter and is used as a tool for manipulation and for attracting supporters and votes. This is why in Romania the “sovereigntist” parties have re-emerged and posed a threat to traditional parties, often because they employ post-truth techniques. Romania’s *Alliance for the Union of Romanians* (AUR), *S.O.S Romania*, and *the Party of Young People* “have a sovereigntist and conservative agenda, aiming to protect traditional values and unite Romanians from the diaspora and at home. In the case of AUR, the main mission is to unify Romania with the Republic of Moldova” (Pantea, 2024, p. 440).

Diana Șoșoacă is a Romanian lawyer, senator, member of the European Parliament, and president of the *S.O.S. Romania* party. She caught the media’s attention for her outrageous behavior, most famously when she wore a muzzle in the European Parliament to protest imaginary pharmaceutical conspiracies. She also made fanciful claims that Chinese President Xi Jinping’s knowledge was shaped by the Romanian academic system, and no less seriously, accused George Simion of having a romantic relationship with his male driver (Baghiu, 2025, p. 7). Regarding the evolution of her political career, Diana Șoșoacă became the president of *S.O.S Romania* in 2021, after being expelled from the AUR, and managed to secure a seat in the European Parliament, claiming to speak on behalf of the sovereign Romanian nation (Pantea, 2024, p. 436). In addition to the campaign against vaccination during the pandemic, Șoșoacă openly supported Putin, joining Russian diplomats at public events in Bucharest, criticizing Ukraine and the West in over 20 public statements (Pantea, 2024, p. 437). Regarding the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, Diana Șoșoacă has supported Putin’s statements since the invasion (Pantea, 2024, p. 441).

George Simion is another prominent Romanian politician who supports the nationalist and sovereigntist ideology. Relying on populist narratives and high-visibility actions, George Simion currently serves as the leader of the AUR (*Alliance for the Union of Romanians*). He was previously an ally of Diana Șoșoacă and first gained prominence in the 2000s through the “Bessarabia is Romanian land” campaign, graffiti that appeared on roads and highways across Romania (Baghiu, 2025, p. 8). Since the beginning of his political career, Simion has exploited the fact that political institutions fail to engage with civil society, positioning himself as the only actor addressing the concerns of a disillusioned public (Baghiu, 2025, p. 9). Addressing people disappointed with Romania’s political class, George Simion applies post-truth by replacing *I* with *we*, with the aim of creating the illusion of joint action to “make Romania great,” thus fostering affiliations that people embrace because they recognize their own truth in them.

While the Romanian government consistently adopted a position of solidarity toward Ukraine in response to Russian threats, provided assistance in the form of military equipment, as well as essential supplies including food, water, and medical provisions, the sovereigntist parties have criticized this. Furthermore, the Romanian state has implemented a comprehensive set of measures to support Ukrainian refugees, facilitating access to education, social services, shelter, and employment opportunities – here too condemned by the nationalists (Case & Hines, 2024).

12.3.1 Diana Șoșoacă

This analysis approaches media reports on Șoșoacă's speeches from a post-truth perspective, using features identified as the "Trump effect," highlighting the fact that in the Romanian political landscape this represents a concrete manifestation of the phenomenon. For example, in the *Libertatea* article "Ukraine announces sanctions against Diana Șoșoacă after the senator called for the annexation of Ukrainian territories,"¹ published on 24 March 2023, Șoșoacă is quoted as asking a few rhetorical questions having a distinctly post-truth character:

How can Ukraine threaten a Romanian senator for a legislative proposal? Since when does Ukraine decide what happens in the Romanian Parliament? Is Romania a state occupied by Ukraine and we didn't know about it? Yes, it is true that Ukraine occupies Romanian territories, which I am fighting to bring back to the motherland, but since when does Kiev have a veto over Romania's politics?

In this statement, Șoșoacă uses emotional appeals, invoking the desire to reunite Romania's territory, using alternative geopolitical facts that also validates the fact that post-truth rhetoric is built on an imagined enemy and polarization through xenophobia as a form of patriotism (McComiskey, 2017, p. 33). Also, Șoșoacă uses a rhetorical question to highlight the fact that Ukraine is an invader of Romania and where she (personally) becomes an exponent of the Romanian community fighting the "enemy" to recover lost territories.

The emphasis on the rhetoric of *pathos*, which replaces *logos*, is evident in her statements about how Kyiv representatives reacted to her proposal to annex Ukrainian territories, whose policy she calls Nazi, just like Russian officials:

This threat from Ukraine against me shows this state's intention to physically eliminate those who oppose Kiev's Nazi policies. The Ukrainian Foreign Affairs Ministry's statement makes it clear that I have become the number one target of Ukrainian criminals. But this only confirms the fairness of my legislative proposal to return to Romania the territories abusively held by Ukraine.

In the same news article, drawing upon a fallacious argument that being attacked is equivalent to being right, Șoșoacă uses name-calling—criminals, casting a negative light on the neighbouring country.

Another feature that can be found in her speech is metaphor (reproduced in "Facebook warning, following a post by Senator Diana Șoșoacă: 'The publisher may be partially or entirely under the editorial control of the Russian government'";² published on 14 March 2022). In her statement on taking an official position regarding Romania's non-involvement in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, Diana Șoșoacă announces in her post that she is "the only senator who has taken a firm

¹ <https://www.libertatea.ro/stiri/ucraina-sanctionare-diana-sosoaca-cerut-anexare-teritorii-ucraina-apartinut-romania-4490885> (fragments in quotes translated by author).

² <https://www.libertatea.ro/stiri/avertismentul-facebook-dupa-o-postare-a-senatoarei-diana-sosoaca-editorul-poate-fi-partial-sau-integral-sub-controlul-editorial-al-guvernului-rus-4032446> (fragments in quotes translated by author).

stance against Romania's involvement in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.” The use of the nominal structure (the only senator) emphasizes the fact that she is Romania's protector and the only politician who has the courage to fight for the safety of the Romanian people. This messianic aura is reinforced by such statements as “Rogozin says that Șoșoacă asked Russian politicians to promote her message about Transnistria: ‘She asked us to publish her statement made in the Romanian Senate’,”³ from 6 March 2024):

I have been fighting diplomatically for two years to keep Romania out of the war, and I went to the Russian Embassy many times to stop you from committing the insane act of killing the Romanian people. If it is necessary to defend this people from the suicidal act you are committing, I shall go to Moscow, with all the dangers and dire consequences for me. Yes, we know, the West and the US, as well as NATO, will fight until the last Romanian to defend Ukraine! We are not stupid, and please do not insult our intelligence!

Creating imaginary fears and presenting a situation without concrete evidence are manifestations of post-truth, with subjectivity and emotional appeals being tools used by Diana Șoșoacă to gain followers by presenting fear and anxiety as emotions that Romanians should feel regarding Romania's involvement in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Therefore, it is not veracity, but emotions that the head of *S.O.S. Romania* relies on when she brings up the repercussions on our country caused by the conflict in the neighbouring country.

The following statement operates simultaneously as an attack framed as a defense against ignorance and as a rhetorical device through which she constructs an image of herself as a defender (reproduced in “Diana Șoșoacă has links to the Russian military secret services, according to experts at the Robert Lansing Institute,”⁴ published on 25 March 2023):

I don't know what GRU means, and I have no connection with Russia or any state services, but looking at those who work at the Robert Lansing Institute, I saw that there are several former Western secret service agents there. So, I think you should ask them what services they work for when they launch such absurdities and misinformation.

Epistemic modality in Șoșoacă's discourse is manifested through the use of the modal verb “should,” that in this context indicates the authorities' obligation to verify the truthfulness of the accusations. It is also expressed through the verb “to know,” employed by the senator to underscore the purported objectivity of her assertions. By doing so, Diana Șoșoacă directs the audience's attention to the statement, shifting her role from a victim to a savior who exposes high-level corruption.

In the following statement (reproduced in “Diana Șoșoacă left the room when Zelensky began his speech: Normally, you would be obliged to invite Putin as

³ <https://www.libertatea.ro/stiri/fostul-vicepremier-rus-rogozin-a-publicat-mesajul-senatoarei-sos-oaca-despre-transnistria-la-solicitarea-acesteia-duc-o-lupta-diplomatica-pentru-a-tine-romania-departe-de-razboi-4820378> (fragments in quotes translated by author).

⁴ <https://www.libertatea.ro/stiri/diana-sosoaca-are-legaturi-cu-serviciile-secrete-militare-rus-esti-4492247> (fragments in quotes translated by author).

well,”⁵ published on 4 April 2022), Diana Șoșoacă employs emotion to validate her public statements, emphasizing the primacy of subjective perception over objective evidence. She argues that the factors perpetuating the Russian-Ukrainian conflict are self-evident, as according to her Zelensky did not invite Putin to attend the meeting:

“I left the room. I can’t listen to the filth in the room because it’s a recording. All the rules of international law were violated, because no one comes to sit and watch a recording. That recording is an act of betrayal by these elected officials towards the Romanian people and shows Ukraine’s lack of common sense with its borders not declared to the UN. How can Marcel Ciolacu say ‘glory to our neighbours’? I can’t watch this,” said the senator in a live Facebook video.

Moreover, through these statements, Diana Șoșoacă strengthens her political position and gains supporters using the same rhetorical strategies Donald Trump used to win the election, particularly “alt-right fake news, vague social media posts, policy reversals, denials of meaning, attacks on media credibility, name-calling” (McComiskey, 2017, p. 3).

12.3.2 *George Simion*

The ideology promoted by George Simion has unionism as its central idea: AUR’s goal is to unite Romanians worldwide, with a particular focus on the unification of Romania and the Republic of Moldova. Its unionist agenda has played a key role in the party’s recent success in legislative elections. Moreover, AUR seeks to revive national faith and a sense of communal identity, participates in religious events in collaboration with the Orthodox Church, and organizes demonstrations against public health measures accompanied by patriotic songs (Pantea, 2024, p. 434). The masses are drawn to the ideology promoted by AUR due to its emphasis on the religious component, but also through the direct involvement of the party’s supporters, achieved by organizing meetings to which they are invited to participate and thus no longer feeling marginalized but rather an active part of politics.

In the context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, George Simion’s image is presented and discussed through the accusations made against him regarding alleged meetings between him and members of the Russian Federation’s secret service. Simion responded to these accusations of collaboration with the Russian Federal Security Service as follows (reproduced in “Ukrainian media: George Simion banned from Ukraine since 2021. Former Ukrainian spy confirms meetings between AUR leader and FSB representatives. What Simion says,”⁶ published on 6 April 2023):

⁵ <https://www.libertatea.ro/stiri/diana-sosoaca-a-iesit-din-sala-cand-a-inceput-discursul-lui-zelenski-4069310> (fragments in quotes translated by author).

⁶ <https://www.libertatea.ro/stiri/fost-sef-securitate-ucraina-george-simion-intalniti-fsb-serviciu-secret-rusia-reactie-simion-libertatea-4505674> (fragments in quotes translated by author).

Regardless of what an obscure intelligence officer from a country that has never been among Romania's top 2,000 friends says today. What I have done, what has been written about me, what I have said for almost 20 years has kept alive the flame of unionism in the two Romanian states on the banks of the Prut River.

George Simion also uses features of the "Trump effect" in his speech, shifting his discourse from responding to this accusation to the unionist achievements he made in strengthening relations between Romania and the Republic of Moldova. To this end, he employs language for strategic purposes.

While Eduard Raul Hellvig (director of the Romanian Intelligence Service from March 2015 to July 2023) was being questioned in the Parliament about Romania's security since the start of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, George Simion used this important event to find out why Florian Coldea (former director of the same service) was against his party (reproduced in "SRI director questioned in Parliament about tensions between Russia and Ukraine. George Simion tried to enter the room,"⁷ published on 25 February 2022):

I asked the committee to tell us exactly whether Mr. Coldea is still an active officer. And if he is no longer an active officer, what does Mr. Coldea have to do with the AUR party? And let Mr. Hellvig say what he knows about Mr. Coldea.

George Simion is using an important event to highlight himself and his party, turning politics into entertainment, a defining feature of post-truth (Kalpokas, 2019, p. 6). While occasionally cited as a defining feature of the post-truth era, it is at most of merely incidental relevance in defining it. From the analysis conducted, both Diana Șoșoacă's and George Simion's speeches reveal features of post-truth, highlighted by the Trump effect and reaching the general public through online platforms, emphasizing that people are not indifferent to post-truth reality, but rather contribute to its growth.

12.4 Conclusion: Rhetoric in the Post-Truth Era

In a post-truth era, truth takes on new meanings due to content created by artificial intelligence and people's continuous exposure to connected groups that are capable of mobilization. The mass media become a vehicle for perpetuating post-truth, and in the case of military conflicts the polarization between the two sides in conflict increases. The purpose of this study was to analyze the post-truth perspective in the Romanian media's coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, via an analysis of how Romanian politicians through their speeches use affiliative and affective rhetoric to create their own truth and attract the public to their side. The results of this analysis highlight the features in the speeches of Romanian politicians that are

⁷<https://www.libertatea.ro/stiri/directorul-sri-eduard-hellvig-chemat-marti-in-parlament-pentru-discutii-privind-tensiunile-dintre-rusia-si-ucraina-george-simion-vrut-intre-sala-comisie-sri-3990823/attachment/3992282> (fragments in quotes translated by author).

comparable to the “Trump effect,” and illustrate the scope and specifics of political rhetoric used to mobilize extremist ideologies.

In the post-truth era, military conflicts are used and reinterpreted through an appeal to affectivity, with *pathos* replacing *logos*. Like in bullshit, assertions made without evidence, and the creation of agitation and fear, are key elements that politicians employ in their discourse when addressing thorny issues around military conflicts. In the post-truth era, military conflicts are used and discussed through the lens of populist subjectivity and strategic affectivity, focusing primarily on negative emotions such as aggressiveness and indignation. The media report on politicians building their discourse through strategic communication, setting aside facts or truth, while the public no longer places emphasis on knowledge, instead accepting the facts presented without verifying their accuracy. The “Trump effect” is also visible in the discourse of Romanian politicians reproduced in online media, thus creating a favorable environment for the flourishing of extremist nationalism.

Mediatization, seen as a context for post-truth, turns politics into a product that people consume depending on the group they perceive as being closest to their own truth. This is why greater attention is needed regarding post-truth and the spread of manufactured content, especially since online and social media platforms actively involve people in the political sphere, fundamentally transforming the concept of power. Despite the negative emotions present in politicians’ statements, targeted audiences might, however, identify with post-truth claims and follow the ideology presented, because through its aspirational nature such rhetoric offers them a life-line and gives them the illusion of being part of something better where they do no longer feel marginalized.

Acknowledgement This work was funded by the EU’s NextGenerationEU instrument through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan of Romania – Pillar III-C9-I8, managed by the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalization, within the project entitled *The Coverage and Reception of the Russian–Ukrainian Conflict in Polish, Romanian and English-language Media: A Comparative Critical Discourse Study with Recommendations for Journalism Training (CORECON)*, contract no. 760244/28.12.2023, code CF 25/27.07.2023.

References

- Angwald, A., & Wagnsson, C. (2024). Disinformation and strategic frames: Introducing the concept of a strategic epistemology towards media. *Media, Culture & Society*, 46(7), 1527–1538. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01634437241265045>
- Baghiu, S. (2025). Loony platform politics: The Romanian far-right performance and the digital dystopia of 2024. *Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/025739638.2025.2482400>
- Buti, D., & Radu, A. (2014). The Romanian post-communist political system: From the separation of powers to power sharing. *Sfera Politicii*, 177(1), 48–54. (in Romanian).
- Case, J., & Hines, N. (2024). Analyzing political rhetoric during war: A case study of the conflict in Ukraine. *London School of Economics Undergraduate Political Review*, 7(1), 24–38.

- Chiluwa, I., & Ruzaite, J. (2024). Analysing the language of political conflict: A study of war rhetoric of Vladimir Putin and Volodymyr Zelensky. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 22(5), 477–493. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2024.2331186>
- Corner, J. (2017). Fake news, post-truth and media–political change. *Media, Culture & Society*, 39(7), 1100–1107. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443717726743>
- Couldry, N., & Hepp, A. (2017). *The mediated construction of reality*. Polity Press.
- Dragoman, D. (2023). The accelerated democratic decline in Romania: The rebirth of the single party. *Polis: Journal of Political Science*, 40(2), 257–273. (in Romanian).
- Hannon, M. (2023). The politics of post-truth: Critical review. *A Journal of Politics and Society*, 35(1), 40–62. <https://philarchive.org/rec/HANTPO-58>
- Harsin, J. (2018). Post-truth right-wing populism: Emo-truth from the French anti-gender theory movement to Trump. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322787080_Post-truth_Right-Wing_Populism_Emo-truth_from_the_French_Anti-gender_Theory_Movement_to_Trump
- Kalpokas, I. (2019). *A political theory of post-truth*. Palgrave.
- Lockie, S. (2017). Post-truth politics and the social sciences. *Environmental Sociology*, 3(1), 1–5.
- McComiskey, B. (2017). *Post-truth rhetoric and composition*. Utah State University Press.
- Pană-Dindelegan, G. (Ed.) (2023). *Dictionary of grammatical terms and associated linguistic concepts*. Univers Enciclopedic Gold. (in Romanian)
- Pantea, A. G. (2024). Sovereigntist parties in Romania during the 2024 elections. *Studia Universitatis Babes-Bolyai – Studia Europaea*, 2, 429–446.
- Radu, L. (2022). Reflections on the political regime in Romania. *Revista Transilvană de Științe Administrative*, 24(51), 34–49. (in Romanian)
- Waisbord, S. (2018). Truth is what happens to news. *Journalism Studies*, 19(13), 1866–1878. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2018.1492881>
- Zinovieva, T. (2024). Immersive journalism: Trust issues in the post-truth era and war. *Rhetoric and Communications*, 60, 87–117.

Iulia-Maria Ticăreanu is a doctoral candidate and a teaching assistant at Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Romania. She teaches Romanian language courses in normative grammar, and language and communication, as well as Romanian as a foreign language. She has been involved in research projects CORECON and PATLIRO (*Preservation, Transformation and Study of the Romanian Linguistic Patrimony in the Context of Globalization*).

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if you modified the licensed material. You do not have permission under this license to share adapted material derived from this chapter or parts of it.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.



Chapter 13

Media Emotionscape: Fear Narratives and the Romanian Elections in Times of War



Minodora Sălcudean

Abstract This chapter examines how Romanian mainstream and social media constructed a “media emotionscape” of fear during the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and the 2024–2025 presidential elections. Through qualitative thematic content analysis of 30 news reports and viral posts, six recurring fear narratives were identified: (1) nuclear war outbreak, (2) Romania sending troops to Ukraine, (3) a Russian invasion of Romania, (4) mobilization of reservists, (5) forced deployment of Romanian youth, and (6) Romania’s imminent entry into the war. While the nuclear threat frame has persisted since 2022, the other narratives intensified during the electoral campaign, particularly on TikTok where they amplified collective anxiety. The findings reveal an ambivalent media environment in which alarmist and speculative reporting coexist with fact-checking and debunking efforts, enabling fear narratives to gain high visibility. This study argues that the concept of emotionscape helps explain how strategically framed war scenarios, amplified by algorithmic platforms, evolve into affective currents with tangible electoral consequences. These insights underscore the need for responsible journalism on emotion-instigating issues.

13.1 Introduction

In times of crisis or when major events occur, news flows are not only sources of information but also vectors for shaping an emotional landscape (henceforth emotionscape: a socio-discursive construct, shaped also by non-discursive parameters such as the nature of interactions in the digital environment; Çınarlı & Nguyen, 2020). The media emotionscape is built on at least four interdependent dimensions: (1) a pre-existing dimension that van Dijk (2013) called social cognition that includes mentalities, attitudes, opinions, convictions, beliefs, feelings, predispositions, and collective representations; (2) a geopolitically-determined communicational dimension, in

M. Sălcudean (✉)
Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Sibiu, Romania
e-mail: minodora.salcudean@ulbsibiu.ro

which the actors originate from mainstream or social media organizations; (3) a technological dimension, inextricably linked to the previous one, that is decisive for how the actual processes of configuring the media emotionscape take place. For example, emerging technologies and social platforms make multidirectional communication potentially instantaneous, viral, emotional, susceptible to algorithmic manipulation, and generating informational disruptions, especially under the impact of AI. Finally, there is (4) a multimodal, mediated discursive dimension. These considerations start from the premise that in the affective economy of the media emotionscape, news as multimodal discourse plays a central role, especially if it relates to war narratives.

Therefore, media emotionscape is a contextual socio-cultural construct that refers to discursively constructed and politically instrumentalized emotions, as was the case during the presidential elections in Romania between November 2024 and May 2025. One of the candidates, Călin Georgescu, was considered pro-Russian (Harward, 2024; Momoc, 2025, p. 95), and was later excluded from the race based on several allegations of fraud (Iancu, 2025). He repeatedly used ethnocentric, sovereigntist, and fascist narratives, plagiarizing sequences from *The Lord of the Rings* (Baghiu, 2025), thus appealing to the emotions of the electorate and using the algorithmic characteristics of the TikTok network (Newman et al., 2025, p. 102). In his public interventions, this candidate exploited, among other emotional triggers, Romanians' fear of war (Marincea, 2025), shaping his media image as a peace-maker. In fact, "peace" represented one of the most important talking points in Georgescu's rhetoric. This candidate was virtually unknown until the 2024 elections when he suddenly entered the public eye and the media spotlight (Cornea, 2024). With a campaign solely on TikTok, he convinced two million voters and advanced to the second round of the presidential elections (Gross & Schultz, 2025; Harward, 2024; Momoc, 2025). However, the result was subsequently contested and annulled by the Constitutional Court of Romania. (Newman et al., 2025, p. 102).

This chapter explores the construction of the media emotionscape, in which the fear of war was intensely exploited in mainstream media and on social networks during the Romanian election campaign. Six media narratives were identified: (1) a nuclear war breaks out, (2) Romanian troops are sent to Ukraine, (3) Russia invades or attacks Romania, (4) reservists are mobilized in preparation for an imminent war, (5) young Romanians are forcibly deployed to fight on the Ukrainian side, and (6) Romania enters the war in September 2025. The electoral context contributed to the formation of opinions and attitudes based on the fear of war as an unprecedentedly intense, transgenerational, collective emotion. Between October 2024 and May 2025, public discourse on TikTok was largely shaped by this emotional trigger, with emotional intensity increasing progressively and reaching a peak when the first elections were canceled and the entire electoral process was restarted (Voinea & Ioniță, 2024b).

13.2 Context

The invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 attracted significant attention from the national and global media, all of which provided extensive coverage of this geopolitical and humanitarian crisis during the first months of the conflict. Romanians consumed much information about the war, particularly its initial stages, given the war's geographical proximity, the refugee crisis, Romania's historical status as a former satellite country of the USSR, and the collective memory of the Russian occupation (Deletant, 2012; Hitchins, 2013; see also Iliş, Chap. 4 in this volume). These factors increased tension and concern in Romania regarding the country's possible direct involvement in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict (henceforth RUC). At the same time, these sentiments have been intensely exploited on social media, particularly on TikTok, a network that has seen spectacular growth in popularity in recent years according to the Digital News Report (2023, pp. 11–13). This platform also enabled the spread of anti-NATO, anti-EU, and anti-Ukraine narratives, additionally amplifying social tensions and concerns during the 2024–2025 election period (Cartes-Barroso et al., 2025).

Romanian mainstream media, especially television news channels, either adopted and exploited these narratives or conversely debunked the plans of an extended war involving Romanian troops. However, the subject has been covered in an alarmist, speculative, biased, and superficial manner. Even when denying narratives about Romania being drawn into RUC, the mainstream media often used ambiguous, interrogative headlines and a tone of panic, thus potentially amplifying emotion and social anxiety.

A report by the Expert Forum analyzing the Romanian online environment and the exploitation of narratives related to the conflict finds that even “centrist” TV news stations do not provide sufficient context and “create fertile ground for misinformation” (Voinea & Ioniță, 2024a, pp. 9–10) that contributes to the state of confusion and concern. As election tensions intensified, stories about Romania being drawn into RUC took various forms, including texts, fake documents, photos, videos, and live streams, circulating on social networks such as Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok, as well as on the instant messaging platform WhatsApp, all of which are widely used in Romania (Newman et al., 2025, p. 103). The Telegram platform, owned by a Russian businessman, also played a significant role in disseminating pro-Russian narratives about Romania's role in RUC (Momoc, 2025, p. 96).

In an electoral context, media consumption increases directly with societal tensions, leading to extreme polarization through excessive use of social platforms designed to generate, maintain, and amplify emotions (Papacharissi, 2015), predominantly nationalist ones (Doroshenko & Tu, 2022). Research on the discourse of fear in crisis contexts (e.g., health, geopolitical) helps one understand how news and narratives in the media amplify the perception of risk and danger (Altheide, 2002; Furedi, 2006; Ventsel et al., 2019). Recent studies on the effects of media coverage of armed conflicts have demonstrated that consuming both traditional news media

and various social media content can increase collective anxiety and affect mental health (Malecki et al., 2023).

In hybrid warfare, where phenomena such as disinformation, manipulation, and propaganda disrupt the media landscape, digital platforms have become ideal spaces for a “participatory war” (Merrin, 2019). The platforms have diverse frameworks that shape media narratives according to the political interests of dominant actors (Ptaszek et al., 2024). In this fragile and uncertain emotionscape, alarmist war news not only triggers emotions but also spreads powerful currents of opinion that can reactivate latent collective emotions and idiosyncrasies. As a result, the mystical and spiritual rhetoric of candidate Călin Georgescu made him into a providential savior if elected the political leader, so that affective engagement was substantial and tangible online and at the polls.

Presidential elections provide a context for studying how fear of war can be exploited, shaping a media emotionscape in which algorithmically amplified narratives reach an impressive number of voters (Voinea & Ioniță, 2024b), generating various emotional reactions—from text posts and videos on TikTok to protests and street movements. For a country that endured a totalitarian regime for nearly five decades and was deeply scarred by the devastating consequences of WWII and the specter of imperialist Soviet Russia, the viral spread of such narratives had visible, destabilizing effects. These effects included polarization on social media, extreme social division, the rise of far-right extremism, and the artificial promotion of a candidate dubbed the “Messiah of TikTok” by the Romanian media (Istodor, 2025).

13.3 Shaping the Emotionscape: News, Media Narratives, and Fear

When viewed as an autonomous and specific discourse inseparable from the political sphere, as well as a social institution, news plays a decisive role in “how we see the world, how we act in it, and how we behave toward others” (Hartley, 2013, p. 10). From a constructivist perspective, news discourse focuses on the framing process (Pan & Kosicki, 1993), interpreting reality through an ideological lens dependent on the macro-context (e.g., history, political regime, and local culture) and the micro-context (e.g., the media outlet’s orientation and the journalist’s bias). During crises, news serves an essential guiding function (van Aelst et al., 2021) by quickly transmitting accurate information based on facts, data, and credible or official sources. From a pragmatic point of view, professional and responsible journalism practiced in the public interest constructs news according to criteria such as relevance, proximity, scope, and impact, using stylistic neutrality. Furthermore, news headlines play an essential role in understanding and shaping public discourse (Barclay & Jan, 2023) and in emotionally engaging readers in stories that reconstruct reality (Ifantidou, 2023). Therefore, clickbait, considered unethical in professional journalism (Vemuri & Kaushal, 2021), is a deceptive practice (Scott, 2023)

that intentionally relies on readers' emotions without offering additional information. However, this normative vision of journalism is now displaced by social media that monetize emotion, not information.

For this chapter, the concept of emotionscape signifies that emotions are not isolated experiences but rather are deeply rooted in and shaped by their cultural, social, and technological contexts. Additionally, collective experiences of crises tend to oversimplify emotional language through repetitive, concentrated narratives that have a significant impact on the media. Although the concept of emotionscape was previously used in diplomacy and geopolitical negotiations (Jones, 2021, 2024), it can also be applied to the media, particularly when viewed through the concept of a "force field" in a complex space of social practice (Couldry, 2008).

The reference to the complex emotional landscape generated by the media is inspired by the performative approach to emotions, involving speech acts correlated with a collective history (Ahmed, 2013). Mapping the changing dynamics and performance of emotions by communicators and audiences helps explain how emotions shape network communication, interactions, and digital behaviors, particularly in contexts susceptible to extreme tensions, such as RUC. The performativity of the emotional landscape lies in the way in which language used in public debate shapes and maintains, through discursive repetition, the intensity of the emotional engagements in the processes that constitute network communication: transmission/action and reception/interaction, with the entire interpretative dynamic shaped by both psycho-social and technological factors. In this chapter, the performativity of emotional language is contextualized within such non-discursive parameters as digital consumption habits, transmission media, algorithmic influence, or media authority.

When viewed as ideological "macro-propositions" (van Dijk, 2013, p. 182), war media narratives appear in their dual capacity. On the one hand, they are discursive structures that give meaning to reality (Silverstone, 1999). On the other hand, they are interpretive frameworks that influence people's understanding of reality (Gamson et al., 1992). Therefore, it is imperative to correlate them with emotional, digital behavior and interaction. Shaping the media emotionscape in relation to RUC involves digital platforms with algorithmic characteristics likely to increase risk perception, such as echo chambers, filter bubbles, and TikTok's "For You" feed. The same applies to online groups or communities created and maintained for various purposes. These groups are not so much spaces for debate as they are environments of belonging, comprised of members who share similar interests and beliefs. Thus, the viral spread of narratives about Romania's entry into the war was made possible by the affordances of social networks. These include content personalization, rewarding posts with emotional potential and visibility that "increases the likelihood of engaging with affective, and often acerbic, content" (Walsh, 2020, p. 845) to the detriment of neutral ones. In consequence, the more emotional the tone, the stronger the effects, such as fragmentation and polarization of various categories of users, or activation of psychological mechanisms such as confirmation bias and hate speech.

In an electoral context, media narratives about RUC were more than just persuasive statements that generated collective emotions. Once released into the public

sphere, these discursive items have immediate psychosocial effects that are visible and quantifiable. Examples include real engagement, emotional reactions, reposts, political statements, protests, and social movements. However, they also have less perceptible consequences, such as the sedimentation of fear, the induction of collective anxiety, contagion, and social mimicry. According to Walsh (2020), social networks intensify panic by generating feelings of danger, insecurity, and threat. They “favor content likely to generate significant emotion and outrage.” By promoting communications based on predicted popularity, they prioritize and reward virality and the intensity of reaction rather than veracity or public interest” (Walsh, 2020, p. 845).

To better understand the media emotionscape as a socio-discursive construct, it is necessary to distinguish between disinformation and misinformation. The distinction is based on the criterion of intentionality (French et al., 2023), indicating that media emotionscape can be determined intentionally and unintentionally. Intentionality involves the strategic construction and deliberate dissemination of fear-based narratives, whereas non-intentionality is rooted in emotional engagement and social mimicry (French et al., 2023). From this angle, the intentionality of any strategic communication act (including propaganda) involves the planned construction and dissemination of targeted messages using different types of narratives (historical, symbolic, and cultural), as well as the anticipation and measurable evaluation of their impact. This deliberate process can be summarized by the metaphorical expression “weaponizing narratives,” through association with what Khislavski (2022) calls “weaponizing history” (see also Iliș, Chap. 4 in this volume). Meanwhile, non-intentionality is a dimension of digital behavior through which ordinary users (both consumers and producers of digital content) contribute to the amplifying of the information disorder by interacting with highly emotional content. The media emotionscape takes shape in a field of forces with vectors of influence and emotional stimuli, with the essential performative element being the affective reaction of users.

13.4 Methodology

This chapter is based on a qualitative case study analyzing how narratives about Romania’s participation in RUC circulated in mainstream and social media. These narratives significantly configured a media emotionscape of the recent presidential elections in Romania. The analyzed corpus consists of 30 representative units, including TV tickers, posts, headlines, and news excerpts from various media outlets, such as mainstream news sites (e.g., *Digi24*, *Adevărul*, and DW), independent news sites (Hotnews and Spotmedia), local sites (*Ziarul de Iași/Iași Newspaper*), and journalistic websites specializing in pre-debunking and fact-checking (Pagina de Media, Context, Veridica, and Factual). Military news websites (DefenseRomânia) and websites claiming to be journalistic but uncertain in terms of credibility (Unimenia and Activenews) were also included. Cross-referenced data collection

was carried out using the Google News advanced search method and the artificial intelligence tool Perplexity.ai, which collects data from news sites by keyword (e.g., “Romania’s entry into the war”).

The study sample was collected through monitoring the above media and social media sites and by selecting only the texts with narratives about Romania’s entry into RUC published between October 2024 and June 2025. The exploratory research combined media analysis (evaluating and selecting media sites and social networks, especially TikTok) with thematic content analysis of the selected corpus (Altheide & Schneider, 2012). The inductive approach to organizing, coding, and interpreting the dataset produced the following: (1) identifying and categorizing recurring narratives related to Romania’s participation in RUC; (2) coding for the style: either alarmist, speculative, and ambiguous or neutral, relevantly informative, and responsible; (3) interpreting for media performance strategy and impact: either clickbait and ratings-oriented, or fact-checking and debunking-oriented. The criteria used to differentiate between media styles and approaches are derived from the conceptualization of quality in journalism (Arnold, 2015). The criteria applied to news primarily address the accuracy and veracity of information, the distinction between facts and opinions, the attribution and credibility of information, and the tone and language appropriate for impartial news coverage. From the perspective of quality and responsible journalism, impartiality involves avoiding speculative explanations and explicit evaluations and striking a balance when covering controversial topics (Arnold, 2015, p. 555).

13.5 Media Scenarios About Romania’s Entry into the War: Results and Interpretation

From 2022 to the present, media narratives referring to Romania’s potential involvement in RUC can be classified into six categories, as shown in Table 13.1. The first category evokes the fear of nuclear war, largely associated with the Chernobyl incident that in the Romanian collective memory is seen as a significant social threat that resulted in the deaths of thousands due to radiation exposure. The remaining categories relate RUC to the results of the presidential elections and reveal an ideologically amplified emotionscape with major repercussions on voting decisions.

As shown in Table 13.1, narrative 1 circulated in the mainstream press in Romania as a powerful emotional trigger, amplified by social media, and it went unchallenged by responsible editors or fact-checking media platforms. Narratives 2, 3, and 4 appeared in an electoral context in both mainstream and social media, circulating under different approaches. For instance, media outlets associated with quality journalism refuted these narratives, treating them as disinformation and arguing that they lacked credibility. They distinguish between facts and opinions and evaluated sources to counteract their spread. Other mainstream newsrooms exploited these narratives’ emotional potential by questioning them (two of the examples presented

Table 13.1 Six top narratives identified and examples of their use in Romanian news

Narrative	Illustrative Examples	Timeframe & Context	Style/Approach in Romanian media	Performativity / Impact
1. Nuclear war outbreak	“First signs that Putin is preparing a nuclear attack” (România TV)	Since 2022–present, Ukraine invasion	Predominantly speculative & alarmist	Emotional clickbait, rating-driven
2. Romania is sending troops	“Will Romania send troops to Ukraine?” (Adevărul)	Oct. 2024–May 2025, electoral context	Mostly responsible, rarely alarmist	Fact-checking vs. emotional clickbait
3. Russia invading Romania	“Are the Russians coming?” (Ziarul de Iași)	Oct. 2024–May 2025, electoral context	Speculative & alarmist vs. neutral	Emotional clickbait vs. debunking
4. Mobilization of reservists	“MoD warns against mobilization disinfo” (ProTV)	Oct. 2024–May 2025, electoral context	Predominantly responsible, neutral tone	Fact-checking vs. emotional clickbait
5. Forced deployment of youth	“Romanian children forced to fight in Ukraine” (Observator News)	Oct. 2024–May 2025, electoral context	Responsible, neutral tone	Fact-checking & debunking
6. Romania’s entry into war (fake news)	“Fake video of Romania’s entry into war” (HotNews)	After May 2025, post-election	Responsible, neutral tone	Fact-checking & debunking

here have interrogative titles), and cultivating speculation and ambiguity, even when the news content seems to refute the narratives. While this approach might attract a larger, more curious audience, its performative effect amplifies uncertainty and intensifies fears. In contrast, the Romanian mainstream media took a responsible approach in the case of narratives 5 and 6, initially penetrating social networks. They verified the facts and refuted them through authoritative and official sources. This prompt, neutral, and impartial approach tempered the emotional response, causing the intensity on social media to fade much more quickly.

The threat of nuclear war underpinned fear narratives right from the start of the invasion (Hoban & Rister, 2024; Marinescu et al., 2024) and has remained prevalent in mainstream media, especially commercial television, where ratings are paramount. Stations such as România TV that frequently used the theme of nuclear war in the first months of the conflict, are at the top of the ratings (Newman et al., 2023, p. 95). Alarmist messages ran on tickers, such as “First signs that Putin is preparing a nuclear attack,” “All iodine pills kept for a nuclear attack,” and “Announcement about Putin’s nuclear attack” (Obae, 2022). These messages were also topics exploited by tabloids in the TV station’s talk shows. The TV station was one of the most financially penalized by the CNA for media misconduct and disinformation. Even credible and quality news sites in Romania (e.g., Hotnews, Spotmedia, DW) addressed the nuclear threat issue using speculative and alarmist headlines such as:

“What will happen if Putin launches a nuclear attack?” (Isailă, 2022); “The atomic bomb and the psychology of a totalitarian criminal” (Iancu, 2022); and “Vladimir Putin threatens a nuclear response” (Coșlea, 2024).

While the media heavily exploited the topic of nuclear war in the first months of the invasion (Marinescu et al., 2024, p. 77), narratives regarding Romania’s RUC participation with military troops intensified in the traditional and social media during and after the presidential election campaign, particularly between October 2024 and June 2025. This is significant because media news is often based on social media trends. During the emotional period of the elections, this interference was especially noticeable when Călin Georgescu advanced to the second round following a controversial campaign conducted solely on TikTok.

The way some mainstream Romanian news outlets approached narratives 1–4 reveals several discursive characteristics that will be highlighted here.

In creating emotional landscapes, speculation and ambiguity are complementary features present in the news media and social media. During the election campaign, a huge amount of highly engaging digital content was posted and reposted on TikTok from real or fictitious accounts. This content is often purely speculative with unsupported references and correlations but conveys alleged information about Romania’s imminent involvement in RUC. A viral video with the text “Nothing is random” is representative of this mix of features of viral posts during the presidential election. Such posts offered no context, made unsubstantiated claims, and were usually refuted by official institutions (e.g., the Ministry of National Defense) or quality journalism websites focused on debunking and fact-checking (e.g., Factual, Veridica, and Context).

There are examples of both explicit or implicit language referring to war hostilities and threats around combat, intensifying the emotionality. Among the emotionally charged terms extracted from the analyzed press headlines are “attack” (nuclear, hybrid, Russian), “extreme danger,” “blew up” (the negotiations), “mobilization” (for armed intervention with troops), and the war has entered its “most dangerous phase.” These words attract more attention when used in headlines, which are the most widely read part of a news story. Most media consumers limit themselves to reading the headline and sharing the content on social media without verifying the contents.

Simulation of information to resemble a news story on supposedly journalistic sites is also commonly used to engage emotions. This content appears to convey information of public interest using a specific structure (title, lead, and paragraphs that develop the informative discourse) but does not provide credible sources. Instead, the items use clickbait headlines to attract users and often rely on controversial statements by political leaders to frame the topic of war as an imminent threat. This strategy is widespread on unreliable news sites and deceives well-meaning people by using seemingly informative language. Simulating journalistic discourse in the news is a tactic for disseminating digital disinformation in Russia’s hybrid warfare.

The direct address and familiar tone used in live streams and video content on social media (especially TikTok) are rhetorical and performative strategies that increase familiarity and emotionality, generating feelings of belonging. Influential people in the digital environment, such as nationalist and/or extremist micro-influencers, use terms like “dear friends,” “brothers,” “good people,” and “Romanian brothers” in filmed interventions with tens of thousands of followers and a high level of emotional engagement during election campaigns. Currently, news stories are often constructed using controversial content from social media selected based on emotionality. The more attention a piece of content receives, the more likely it is to be picked up by the news.

Although responsible journalists and fact-checking websites in Romania often debunk alarmist news stories and social media posts with clickbait headlines (e.g., narratives 5 and 6), this analysis focuses less on the distinction between truth and falsehood than on the performativity of this type of media discourse. The framing of news sometimes generates panic, which can produce potentially destabilizing social and political effects. This type of content creates a plausible scenario by invoking false authority and fabricated expertise and frequently borrows the neutral tone and seemingly objective style of professional journalism. Unlike earlier forms of sensationalism, which relied on stylistic exaggeration or overtly emotional rhetoric, this pseudo-informative discourse uses statements, assertions, and arguments that appear veracious. This mechanism is particularly relevant to understanding the emotionscape because it operates through accumulation. In this framework, formal elements, such as headline construction or imitation of news formats, are not used to provide accurate information, but to create engagement through emotions to spread disinformation.

13.6 Discussion, Conclusion and Implications

Data and research on media consumption show that news consumption increases exponentially during times of crisis (van Aelst et al., 2021). Similarly, people consume digital content, especially short videos on social media platforms, fervently and compulsively. This increase directly influences immediate digital behavior, intensifying emotional engagement and leading to the sociality of emotions. This phenomenon is described as the reverse dynamic of emotional activation, from the outside in (Ahmed, 2013, p. 9) and results in polarization of opinions, intensification of hate speech, and amplification of misinformation. In recent decades, emotionscapes of media narratives have been increasingly researched in the context of armed conflicts (Nagar et al., 2016; Quelle et al., 2024; Selimi & Zejnullahu, 2023; Shaikh & Obaidullah, 2024), especially in their capacity as performative weapons that not only influence public opinion but also act as triggers of immediate, destabilizing reactions.

Following the invasion of Ukraine and the ensuing conflict, Romanian media outlets provided extensive coverage, primarily through news feeds and breaking

news updates, detailing the progression of events. Over time, media coverage continued but decreased in intensity. However, media attention periodically returned to attacks and tragic events. Throughout this time, the Romanian media covered topics associated with RUC, such as the refugee crisis (Stoica & Voina, 2023, p. 35) and farmers' protests over the grain scandal in Ukraine (Sălcudean, 2025)—an important source of Euroscepticism.

Paradoxically, a linguistic study published a year before the invasion of Ukraine (Larina & Ozymenko, 2021) argued that Western media have created a negative image of Russia, portraying it as a threat to other states and a source of fear. The authors show that this excessive emotionalization serves a persuasive and manipulative purpose, shaping public opinion and legitimizing certain political actions. The study employed critical discourse analysis to examine linguistic and discursive strategies, such as exaggeration, repetition, presupposition, and proximation. In retrospect, Russia's invasion of Ukraine a year later only confirmed the fears, concerns, and warnings in the Western news coverage. In other words, Russia did not become an aggressor because it was portrayed as such by the English-language media, but was already an invading state, and the professional international media did nothing more than correctly signal this through factual coverage of the conflict. This implies that not all uses of emotion in media coverage are by definition manipulative.

Through repetitive dissemination of narratives of fear and danger, politicians and the media often construct crisis scenarios (Altheide, 2002) that legitimize collective action by mobilizing moral outrage or emotional stimulation. Like other countries, Romania struggles to counter digital disinformation and its disastrous consequences on democracy. Disruptive phenomena associated with emerging technologies, such as deepfakes, fake accounts, engagement bots, and irresponsible use of artificial intelligence, are likely to contribute to the formation of emotional landscapes during future crises.

This is why responsible journalism, grounded in values, norms, and ethical principles, is crucial. It verifies, filters, and contextualizes information, counteracting biased, alarming, or false media narratives. Quality journalism considers the public interest, providing citizens with relevant and useful information and counteracting panic (Mureșan, 2021, p. 78). Furthermore, proactive strategies employed by professional journalists, such as prebunking, can prepare the public "in advance by exposing the rhetorical and emotional tactics likely to be used in disinformation campaigns" (Gross & Schultz, 2025, p. 200). Extensive research is still very much needed to combine quantitative and qualitative analyses of the complexity of the current information digital ecosystem and the approach to war topics in the media.

This chapter can serve as a foundation for developing a set of guidelines for professional journalists reporting on issues that are particularly prone to generating public panic, such as armed conflicts. General recommendations emphasize the importance of maintaining a balanced narrative and neutral tone, while also showing respect for victims, survivors, and their families, and avoiding depersonalization as well as language that could induce fear or confusion.

Responsible journalism seeks to determine the relevance of a subject to the public interest. Therefore, narratives whose sole purpose is to generate fear should be refuted with evidence-based explanations of the situation at hand. Other recommendations for news discourse include avoiding speculation in the absence of facts or irrefutable evidence. News headlines about armed conflicts should temper the emotional landscape of the media, rather than contribute to informational chaos through ambiguous rhetoric and interrogative titles. Neutrality and accessibility in tone and language contribute to the rapid dissemination of accurate information. In contrast, the use of emotionally charged words or war metaphors generates anxiety and fear. For example, some Romanian TV stations use the term “bomb news” or “nuclear” to convey the idea of breaking news.

In the current media landscape, the role of professional journalism extends beyond reporting events to actively countering false narratives and disinformation, achieved through careful filtering, cross-checking, and proactive contextualization of information. High-quality professional outlets supplement the news cycle with in-depth analyses, thematically focused articles, and expert interviews. These practices offer media consumers perspectives grounded primarily in factual evidence and scientifically validated expertise.

Acknowledgement This work was funded by the EU’s NextGenerationEU instrument through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan of Romania – Pillar III-C9-I8, managed by the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalization, within the project entitled *The Coverage and Reception of the Russian–Ukrainian Conflict in Polish, Romanian and English-language Media: A Comparative Critical Discourse Study with Recommendations for Journalism Training (CORECON)*, contract no. 760244/28.12.2023, code CF 25/27.07.2023.

References

- Ahmed, S. (2013). *The cultural politics of emotion*. Routledge.
- Altheide, D. L. (2002). *Creating fear: News and the construction of crisis*. Routledge.
- Altheide, D. L., & Schneider, C. J. (2012). *Qualitative media analysis*. Sage Publications.
- Arnold, K. (2015). Qualität des Journalismus. In *Handbuch Journalismustheorien* (pp. 551–563). Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden. (in German).
- Baghiu, S. (2025). Loony platform politics: The Romanian far-right performance and the digital dystopia of 2024. *Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe*, 33(1), 235–249. <https://doi.org/10.1080/25739638.2025.2482400>
- Barclay, F., & Jan, S. (2023). Conflict and conflicting news discourses: An analysis of newspaper coverage of Pulwama attack. *Journalism Practice*, 19, 1091–1109. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2023.2218338>
- Cartes-Barroso, M., García-Estévez, N., & Méndez-Muros, S. (2025). Attracting the vote on TikTok: Far-right parties’ emotional communication strategies in the 2024 European elections. *Journalism and Media*. <https://doi.org/10.3390/journalmedia6010033>
- Çınarlı, İ., & Nguyen, S. (2020). Mediating fear by breaking news: A case study of CNN Türk and NTV. In D. Nguyen, I. Dekker & S. Nguyen (Eds.), *Understanding media and society in the age of digitalization* (pp. 135–150). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-38577-4_7

- Cornea, O. (2024, November 28). Political program or hypnosis? The “keys” to Călin Georgescu’s speech, from the Romanian people and dignity to family, peace, and God. *Europa Liberă*. <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/calin-georgescu-alegeri-prezidentiale-discurs-analiza/33217601.html> (in Romanian).
- Coșlea, A. (2024, November 19). Vladimir Putin threatens nuclear response if Russia is targeted by conventional attack. *HotNews.ro*. <https://hotnews.ro/vladimir-putin-ameninta-cu-un-raspuns--nuclear-daca-rusia-va-fi-tinta-unui-atac-conventional-1838780> (in Romanian).
- Couldry, N. (2008). Media and the problem of voice. In N. Carpentier & B. De Cleen (Eds.), *Participation and media production: Critical reflections on content creation* (pp. 15–26). Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Deletant, D. (2012). *Romania under the communist regime*. Fundația Academia Civică. (in Romanian).
- Doroshenko, L., & Tu, F. (2022). Like, share, comment, and repeat: Far-right messages, emotions, and amplification in social media. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, 20(3), 286–302. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19331681.2022.2097358>
- French, A., Wallace, L., & Storey, V. (2023). A typology of disinformation intentionality and impact. *Information Systems Journal*, 34, 1324–1354. <https://doi.org/10.1111/isj.12495>
- Furedi, F. (2006). *Culture of fear: Risk-taking and the morality of low expectation*. Continuum.
- Gamson, W. A., Croteau, D., Hoynes, W., & Sasson, T. (1992). Media images and the social construction of reality. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 18, 373–393. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.so.18.080192.002105>
- Gross, E.-C., & Schultz, T. (2025). Social media dynamics in the 2024–2025 Romanian presidential election campaign: TikTok’s disruptive role and the enduring importance of journalism and legacy media. *Journalism Research*, 8(2), 188–206. <https://doi.org/10.1453/2569-152X-22025-15338-en>
- Hartley, J. (2013). *Understanding news*. Routledge.
- Harward, C. (2024, December 6). *Likely Kremlin-backed election interference against Romania threatens Bucharest’s continued support for Ukraine and NATO*. Institute for the Study of War.
- Hitchins, K. (2013). *România 1866–1947*. Humanitas.
- Hoban, I., & Rister, A. (2024). Nuclear anxiety as an instrument of war: The use of news media to shape and respond to the disinformation campaign surrounding the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant. *Media, War & Conflict*, 18, 140–158. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17506352241256575>
- Iancu, B. (2025). Militant democracy and rule of law in three paradoxes: The annulment of the Romanian presidential elections. *Hague Journal on the Rule of Law*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40803-025-00245-8>
- Iancu, P. M. (2022, March 3). The atomic bomb and the psychology of a totalitarian criminal. *Deutsche Welle*. <https://www.dw.com/ro/a-opta-zi-de-r%C4%83zboi-bomba-atomic%C4%83-%C8%99i-psihologia-unui-criminal-totalitar/a-60999980> (in Romanian).
- Ifantidou, Elly. (2023). “Newspaper Headlines, Relevance and Emotive Effects.” *Journal of Pragmatics* 218 (2023): 17–30. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2023.09.013>
- Isailă, E. (2022, May 5). What will happen if Putin launches a nuclear attack? *Spotmedia*. <https://spotmedia.ro/stiri/opinii-si-analize/ce-se-va-intampla-daca-putin-declanseaza-un-atac--nuclear#> (in Romanian).
- Istodor, E. (2025). *The Messiah is Romanian: About the effect of TikTok “Călin Georgescu” in the presidential elections*. Paideia. (in Romanian).
- Jones, A. (2021). Emotionscapes of geopolitics: Interpreting in the United Nations Security Council. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/TRAN.12452>
- Jones, A. (2024). Waging word wars: The “emotionscape” of the United Nations Security Council and the Russian war in Ukraine. *Political Geography*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2023.103032>
- Khislavski, G. (2022). Weaponizing history: Russia’s war in Ukraine and the role of historical narratives. *Journal of Applied History*, 4, 102–125. <https://doi.org/10.1163/25895893-bja10029>

- Larina, T., & Ozymenko, V. (2021). Threat and fear: Pragmatic purposes of emotionalization in media discourse. *Russian Journal of Linguistics*, 25(3), 746–766. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2687-0088-2021-25-3-746-766>
- Malecki, W. P., Bilandzic, H., Kowal, M., & Sorokowski, P. (2023). Media experiences during Ukraine war and their relationships with distress, anxiety, and resilience. *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, 165, 273–281.
- Marincea, A. (2025). Romania's 2024 election crisis: Neo-legionarism's revival of the "Judeo--Bolshevism" myth and the jouissance of punishment. *Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe*, 33(1), 201–209. <https://doi.org/10.1080/25739638.2025.2482396>
- Marinescu, V., Fox, B., Rodideal, A., & Marinache, R. (2024). Media representations of nuclear threats during the Russian invasion of Ukraine. *Horyzonty Polityki*. <https://doi.org/10.35765/hp.2492>
- Merrin, W. (2019). *Digital war: A critical introduction*. Routledge.
- Momoc, A. (2025). The crisis of confidence in political leadership and the media: Populism and polarization in digital communication during the 2024 presidential elections. *Revista POLIS*, 13(1), 87–114. (in Romanian).
- Mureșan, R. (2021). The interplay between social movements and media: From creative ways to grab media attention to spreading fake news. *Transilvania*, 3, 76–82. <https://doi.org/10.51391/trva.2021.03.11>
- Nagar, R., Hanitzsch, T., & Tenenboim-Weinblatt, K. (2016). Reclassifying conflict-ing narratives in the Israeli news media. *Journal of Peace Research*, 53(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343315609091>
- Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Eddy, K., Robertson, C. T., & Nielsen, R. K. (2023, June). *Digital news report 2023*. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.
- Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Eddy, K., Robertson, C. T., & Nielsen, R. K. (2025, June). *Digital news report 2025*. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.
- Obae, P. (2022, March 2). Panicky headlines on Romania TV, linked to Putin and nuclear war. *Pagina de Media*. <https://www.paginademedias.ro/derapaj/burtiere-razboi-nuclear-ucraina--romania-tv-20623024> (in Romanian).
- Pan, Z., & Kosicki, G. M. (1993). Framing analysis: An approach to news discourse. *Political Communication*, 10(1), 55–75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.1993.9962963>
- Papacharissi, Z. (2015). *Affective publics*. Oxford University Press.
- Plaszek, G., Yuskiv, B., & Khomych, S. (2024). War on frames: Text mining of conflict in Russian and Ukrainian news agency coverage on Telegram during the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. *Media, War & Conflict*, 17(1), 41–61.
- Quelle, D., Haque, M., Elswah, M., & Bradshaw, S. (2024). Strategic narrative: Russian state--backed media coverage of the war in Ukraine in the context of media actions. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijpor/edae028> (in Romanian).
- Sălcudean, M. (2025). Farmers' protests in Romania's mainstream media: Predominant themes, narratives, and framing. *Revista Transilvania*, 3. (in Romanian).
- Scott, K. (2023). "Deceptive" clickbait headlines: Relevance, intentions, and lies. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 218, 71–82. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2023.10.004>
- Selimi, F., & Zejnullahu, S. (2023). The narrative, discourse and terminology of the Western Balkans online media reporting on the Russia-Ukraine war. *Studies in Media and Communication*, 11(6), 90–100. <https://doi.org/10.11114/smc.v11i6.6019>
- Shaikh, H., & Obaidullah, M. (2024). Unmasking media narratives through comparative corpus linguistic analysis: A study of Russia-Ukraine conflict. *LET: Linguistics, Literature and English Teaching Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.18592/let.v14i1.12737>
- Silverstone, R. (1999). *Why study the media?* Sage.
- Stoica, M., & Voina, A. (2023). Measuring receptivity to Eurosceptic media discourses in the vicinity of war: Evidence from Romania. *Media and Communication*, 11(4), 34–46. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v11i4.7122>

- van Aelst, P., Toth, F., Castro, L., Štětka, V., de Vreese, C., Aalberg, T., Theocharis, Y. (2021). Does a crisis change news habits? A comparative study of the effects of COVID-19 on news media use in 17 European countries. *Digital Journalism*, 9(9), 1208–1238. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2021.1943481>
- van Dijk, T. A. (2013). Ideology and discourse. In *The Oxford handbook of political ideologies* (pp. 175–196). Oxford University Press.
- Vemuri, K., & Kaushal, V. (2021). Clickbait: Trust and credibility of digital news. *IEEE Transactions on Technology and Society*, 2, 146–154. <https://doi.org/10.1109/TTS.2021.3073464>
- Ventsel, A., Hansson, S., Madisson, M.-L., & Sazonov, V. (2019). Discourse of fear in strategic narratives: The case of Russia's Zapad war games. *Media, War & Conflict*, 14(1), 21–39. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750635219856552>
- Voinea, M. E., & Ioniță, S. (2024a). The architecture of disinformation. [Online Monitoring Report]. Expert Forum. <https://expertforum.ro/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Arhitectura--dezinformarii-formatat-1.pdf> (in Romanian).
- Voinea, M. E., & Ioniță, S. (2024b). TikTok in times of crisis. Episode II. What we can observe in Romania's case [Policy brief]. Expert Forum. https://expertforum.ro/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Policy-Brief-194-TIKTOK-IN-TIMP-DE-CRIZA.-Episodul-II-_RO-1--compressed.pdf (in Romanian).
- Walsh, J. (2020). Social media and moral panics: Assessing the effects of technological change on societal reaction. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877920912257>

Minadora Sălcudean is Full Professor at Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Romania, and a researcher in Communication Sciences, with a particular interest in the study of phenomena associated with mass communication, journalism and the (social) media. She has been a member of international project teams such as SDGs Journalism Reporting and InMedia (2023), and an associate researcher within ECOJUST and CORECON (2024–2026). She is an author of scientific articles on the undermining of journalism within social networks, the role and responsibilities of journalists during crisis, or aspects of hate speech in the Romanian media.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if you modified the licensed material. You do not have permission under this license to share adapted material derived from this chapter or parts of it.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.



Chapter 14

How Amateur War Tourist Accounts Position Themselves against Mainstream Media Representations of the Russian-Ukrainian War



Corina Selejan

Abstract This chapter examines 15 English- and Romanian-language YouTube videos of so-called hot war tourism filmed in Ukraine and Russia since the beginning of the latest conflict between the two countries on 24 February 2022. Its aim is to assess these videos' contribution to the representation of the Russian-Ukrainian war against the background of mainstream media representations and in particular the ways in which amateur war tourists explicitly or implicitly set themselves apart from (do not align with) mainstream media narratives, styles, or ideologies. Ultimately, the analysis aims to reveal the mechanisms behind the erosion of the boundary between mainstream and alternative media, contributing to the discussion on the politics of visibility involved in posting user-generated content on YouTube.

14.1 Introduction

This chapter tackles English- and Romanian-language media of war tourism in Ukraine, variously labelled as dark tourism, thanatourism, solidarity tourism, or even humanitarian tourism. The analysis operates within what Piekarz (2007) defines as “hot war tourism” i.e., travel to locations of conflict and violence, or places recovering from such events. The studied data consist of videos made by various influencers or amateur war tourists that in some dimension of content, ideology, or style question the mainstream media's representations of the war, sometimes even positioning themselves as counter-narratives to the “official story” of the war. Through personal and eyewitness accounts, these vlogs foreground the unapologetic subjectivity of citizen journalism and the sense of authority and credibility engendered by direct contact with Ukrainians (or Russians).

C. Selejan (✉)
Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Sibiu, Romania
e-mail: corina.selejan@ulbsibiu.ro

The dataset comprises 15 videos posted by nine British, American, and Romanian YouTubers. The criteria for their selection relate to diversity in terms of the following: video's number of views (ranging from 2k to 8.5M), YouTube channel's number of subscribers (from 6.8k to 5.78M), travel vloggers vs. content creators with other interests, video length (ranging from 10:10 minutes to 1:09:07 hours), recency of posting (from 2 August 2022 to 21 June 2025), degree of formality in speech and behavior, degree of video editing, political stance, presence of advocacy, or size of production team. Mainstream press and televised war-related newscasts are taken as a generalized backdrop in this analysis; it is the vloggers' own perceived distance from mainstream media, particularly their ideological and reporting conventions and their (meta-)language that informs this inquiry.

The chapter starts with a brief theoretical section in which the key concepts of hot war tourism, alternative media, and mainstream media are defined and delimited, and categories for the analysis of the videos are operationalized. The analysis proper comprises two parts: an overview of the dataset including a preliminary analysis of the videos in terms of the types of (dis)aligning strategies with mainstream media and a detailed reading of the videos, their tiles and thumbnails.

14.2 Definitions, Delimitations and Operationalizations

14.2.1 *Hot War Tourism*

It is significant that Piekarz, when coining the term “hot war tourism” started his chapter in a tourism-related research volume with a reference to the mediated aspect of the phenomenon: “The media enjoy using the juxtaposition of holidays and war” (2007, p. 153). Piekarz's chapter argued that hot war tourism is neither new nor marginal and makes a point of defining each of the three words that make up the term. For the purposes of this chapter the definition of “hot” and the two aspects it evinces are most relevant: one relates to the type of war being waged (where “cold war” lacks actual violence) and the other to “hot cognition and dissonance” (Piekarz, 2007, p. 155). Hot cognition involves (mostly negative) affect and powerful emotional experiences as enabling and intensifying learning. These affective states are triggered by the war sites themselves as well as the risks involved in visiting them.

The degree of hot cognition is also determined by what Piekarz called “the rawness of the visual aesthetic in the aftermath of battles” (2007, p. 156), that is, the extent to which the sites have not been altered, reconstructed, or commodified as memorials after the end of the conflict. The more commodified the battlefield, the more appropriate it is for “less adventurous, more mainstream visitors” (2007, p. 156). Regarding tourism, he referred not only to recreational, but also “business-related travel” (2007, p. 154), particularly germane to this study as the line between recreation and business is blurred in the case of the content creators to be discussed. For Piekarz, business-related travel includes remunerated work as well as voluntary

aid, NGO, and military staff activities. Thus, Piekarz's term emerges as inclusive, covering the meaning of all the following terms, some of which Piekarz listed himself: dark tourism, thanatourism, testosterone tourism, danger zone tourism, reality tourism, solidarity tourism, donation tourism, humanitarian tourism, and volunteering tourism.

14.2.2 *Alternative and Mainstream Media*

Although the title and beginning of this chapter seemingly endorse the binary opposition, and therefore clear demarcation, between alternative and mainstream media, the convergence of the media has been a recurrent argument in recent media studies. While Jenkins and Deuze saw the convergence of contemporary media as "both a top-down corporate-driven process and a bottom-up consumer-driven process" (2008, p. 6), Kenix viewed media as a continuum or spectrum (2010, pp. 17, 19) and postulated a "collapse of alternative and mainstream distinctions" (2015, p. 66), mainly in view of the commercial interest in the audience now evinced by both types of media. Kenix (2010, p. 3) and Atton (2015, p. 9) were wary of providing definitive definitions of either media type, given the accelerated, largely technology-driven changes in media ecologies. However, Kenix's tentative distinctions are useful for the purposes of this chapter:

Alternative media have historically been defined by their ideological difference from the mainstream, their relatively limited scale of influence in society, their reliance on citizen reporting and their connections with social movements. Mainstream media have been defined in contrast to these points of demarcation: they are situated completely within (and concomitantly co-creating) the ideological norms of society, enjoy a widespread scale of influence, rely on professionalized reporters and are heavily connected with other corporate and governmental entities. (2010, p. 3)

From these definitions ideology emerges as paramount. Kenix made an inventory of other labels used by various scholars instead of "alternative" to characterize this type of media: independent, radical, activist, tactical, autonomous, participatory, community, and citizen's media; most of these foreground social critique (2010, p. 18). Atton's assertion "[t]o study alternative media is to consider how the world might be represented differently" (2015, p. 2) might serve as a motto for this chapter, with the word "war" substituted for "world." Kenix, on the other hand, considered the frequently heard argument that "alternative media publish information generally not seen in the mainstream media, from a perspective generally not accepted within the mainstream press, in a way generally not found in mainstream content" to be reductive (2010, p. 2). Nonetheless, the very perspectives she mentioned are employed by several of the vloggers analyzed here themselves.

As a platform that employs algorithms to curate the content it recommends to its viewers, YouTube has a two-decade history of refining its criteria for promoting certain videos over others, including more recently valued watch time and satisfaction metrics (Beason, 2025) that are mostly compounded based on implicit

feedback signals e.g., viewers' completing watching a video, rewatch rates, and post-watch behavior such as (dis)likes. The personalization inherent in the latest algorithmic model is achieved in two stages: (1) candidate generation—a stage during which millions of videos are filtered down to hundreds based on the viewer's watch history and filtering, and (2) ranking of videos that further reduces the list of hundreds of videos to a few dozen recommendations based on metadata and content, freshness and diversity, user satisfaction, and predicted engagement (Covington et al., 2016, pp. 192, 195; Murrell, 2025). During this second stage, borderline or sensitive content is flagged and demoted. Conversely, videos by authoritative sources are boosted based on source whitelisting, context-specific ranking overrides, and policy-driven adjustments during high-stake moments (Murrell, 2025).

Given the criticism that YouTube algorithms received for their tendency to produce filter bubbles and echo chambers, a phenomenon that mainly pertains to the candidate generation stage, the searches that were conducted for this study were performed with the watch history turned off, and consequently with a so-called cold-start user for each search session. However, given that incremental changes to the algorithms are performed daily, (Beason, 2025), full transparency with regard to YouTube algorithms is impossible.

14.2.3 Research Design: A Typology of YouTube Video Strategies (Dis)Aligning with Mainstream Media

The variety of the videos in the dataset render their placement within a mainstream-alternative media spectrum challenging, as the vlogs employ a plethora of strategies in aligning themselves with, or disaligning from, mainstream media. In order to do justice to the diversity of materials, several categories have been identified: (1) prioritizing eyewitness accounts and personal stories (over factual journalistic representations); (2) focusing on the ordinary rather than the extraordinary (a core of journalistic newsworthiness); (3) challenging official political and ideological stances in representing Ukrainians/Russians (or following them); (4) using stylistic deviations from journalistic register and diction e.g., colloquial, poetic, affective, (non)polarizing language; (5) self-consciousness and explicit self-reflexivity, primarily regarding the motivations for reporting but also foregrounding novelty, originality, or exclusivity of content; (6) elements of advocacy, ranging from raising awareness of the war and mitigating news fatigue to asking for donations.

14.3 The Discourse of Hot War Tourism Vlogs

14.3.1 Dataset Overview

The dataset under scrutiny comprises seven videos in Romanian (RO) and eight videos in English (EN); the number of content creators is less balanced, as there are three Romanian vloggers and six English-language (four American and two British) ones. Table 1 provides an overview of the dataset that includes a preliminary analysis of (dis)alignment characteristics. The number of views was chosen as a measure of the video's popularity, as the watch time is not available to YouTube viewers and the number of likes, comments, and channel subscribers, that are available, have been shown to be less indicative of real engagement and popularity in surveys conducted by YouTube (Beason, 2025). All the videos in this dataset prioritize eyewitness and personal accounts over impersonal media representations that they associate with mainstream media; therefore, this category is not mentioned in Table 14.1, but will be analyzed in detail in the next section.

One observation needs to be made here: most vloggers under scrutiny express surprise at what can be described as “Ukrainians going about their routine daily lives,” contrasting with their expectations of encountering a much grimmer reality of war. Thus, normality is a recurring theme in their discourse, although this normality is always qualified and relativized. As mainstream TV news tend to foreground the extraordinary and drastic facets of conflict and avoid “the normal,” many of the vloggers imply that the destructiveness of the war is exaggerated by mainstream media.

14.3.2 Dataset Analysis in Line with Operationalized Categories

A cursory glance at Table 14.1 reveals major differences between Romanian and English video titles in terms of capitalization, punctuation, and length. Romanian headlines are long, emphatically punctuated (e.g., exclamation marks) and heavily capitalized. Travel vlogger Cosmin Avram, who spent one month in Ukraine and one in Russia in 2023 and early 2024, followed by another month in Ukraine later in 2024, created more than thirty vlogs on the Ukraine and Russia. Of the four videos included in this sample, two explicitly challenge television (and, by extension, mainstream media) representations in their headlines. If possible, the text in the thumbnails amplifies the sense of doubt, as the exclamations in the titles are partly replaced by questions: “RAZBOI IN UCRAINA! MINCIUNA SAU ADEVAR?” [WAR IN UKRAINE! LIE OR TRUTH?] (2023a); “ODESA BOMBARDATA? ADEVARUL DIN TEREN” [ODESSA BOMBARDED? THE TRUTH ON THE GROUND] (2023b); “Realitatea din RUSIA ‘COMUNISTA’: CE NU VOR SA VEZI. Cad CASELE PE OAMENI” [The Reality of ‘COMMUNIST’ RUSSIA:

Table 14.1 Overview of YouTube videos used in this study

Vlogger/ channel	Language (RO/EN)	Number of video views	Video title (EN translation for RO vlogs)	Main aspect(s) of (dis)alignment with mainstream coverage
Avram, C./ Cosmin Avram	RO	849,042	This is what the WAR in UKRAINE looks like— NOT what the TELEVISION presents to you!	focus on the ordinary; non-polarizing language
Avram, C./ Cosmin Avram	RO	361,050	This is what ODESSA looks like in times of WAR—Many LIES in Romania! (The reality in 2023)	focus on the ordinary; non-polarizing language
Avram, C./ Cosmin Avram	RO	385,194	THE REAL RUSSIA: What NOBODY is showing— Some TELEVISION STATIONS DON'T WANT to show this!	focus on the ordinary; non-polarizing language
Avram, C./ Cosmin Avram	RO	575,100	This is how MONEY IS LAUNDERED in UKRAINE – EUROPEAN MONEY !My conclusion after 30 days here	challenges official political stances; non-polarizing language
Stănciulescu, C./ BackpackYourLife	RO	171,916	I HAVE ARRIVED ON THE EASTERN UKRAINE FRONTLINE, where THE RUSSIANS BOMBARD DAILY (Kharkiv)	follows official political stances; highly colloquial language
Stănciulescu, C./ BackpackYourLife	RO	168,310	Caught in THE RUSSIANS' BOMBARDMENTS. on the brink of DEATH in EASTERN UKRAINE	follows official political stances; highly colloquial language
Craiu, A./ NuVreiAici	RO	2,008	The Russians want to butcher Kyiv. The Ukrainians keep their ground	follows official political stances; self-reflexivity
Rich, B./ bald and bankrupt	EN	4,557,332	Solo on Ukraine's Eastern Front	focus on the ordinary; non--polarizing language
Binsky, D./Drew Binsky	EN	2,819,458	Visiting Ukraine During a War. What's it Like?	advocacy; affective language
Iwueze, E./Emeka Iwueze	EN	576,895	Don't TRUST the Media: I Went to Ukraine UA	focus on the ordinary
Iwueze, E./Emeka Iwueze	EN	300,677	Everyone Told Me Kyiv was Dangerous, but... UA	focus on the ordinary

(continued)

Table 14.1 (continued)

Vlogger/ channel	Language (RO/EN)	Number of video views	Video title (EN translation for RO vlogs)	Main aspect(s) of (dis)alignment with mainstream coverage
Jeremy/ JeremyXplores	EN	1,063,858	I Went To Ukraine... With NO Plan	self-reflexivity; poetic language
Jeremy/ JeremyXplores	EN	366,321	I Went To The Towns Russia Tried To Erase	challenges official political stances; poetic language
Fry, S./Planet Fry	EN	328,817	Stephen Fry into Ukraine	prioritizes the extraordinary (elites); follows official political stances; polarizing and colloquial language; advocacy
Cappy, C./Task & Purpose	EN	8,657,779	I went to the Frontline of Ukraine's Invasion into Russia	self-reflexivity; advocacy

WHAT THEY DON'T WANT YOU TO SEE. HOUSES collapsing ON PEOPLE] (2024a); SOLDATI REVOLTATI IN UCRAINA [INDIGNANT SOLDIERS IN UKRAINE] (2024b). The clickbait, hyped style and questioning rhetoric are designed to attract viewers, as the very existence of the war is ostensibly questioned in the first two thumbnails, promising a truth that by impicature might be different from that presented by mainstream media.

The first two thumbnails (Ukraine 2023 vlogs) display collages of images from mainstream media, that is, images of destruction upon which figures of human actors (some appearing in the vlogs themselves) have been superimposed, metaphorically and visually rendering the contrast between the background of mainstream media and Avram's own representations of people he met in Ukraine. The contrast between the vlogs and mainstream media is made explicit in the vlog "This is what the WAR in UKRAINE looks like...", as Avram says: "...today I want to speak about the consequences, about what is not seen, because images of destroyed buildings and of soldiers in action are everywhere, the internet is full of them, so that's not what you'll see here today; furthermore, I haven't found anything like that in Kyiv so far" (Avram, 2023a, July 22, 2:00–2:18). A few seconds later, he invites his viewers to perform a mental exercise and imagine a person instead of each of the thousands of small Ukrainian flags behind him, as he is in front of the memorial in Maidan Square. Almost in the same breath, Avram claims that he only presents what he sees and finds, namely normal life, and that he draws exclusively on "official sources" (Avram, 2023a, July 22, 3:49) for the information he presents in his videos. This somewhat subverts the claims he makes in his headlines. The vlogs themselves contest neither the existence nor the destructiveness of the war in Ukraine, as some of his headlines might suggest. Instead, they purport to show an unseen, more

mundane side of the war and to bring a sense of nuance to the images normally shown on mainstream TV. While his 2023 Ukraine vlogs are mostly filmed away from the frontlines, the 2024 videos are filmed in places like Zaporizhzhia, Kherson, and Kharkiv.

Avram refers to himself neither as a journalist nor as a tourist (a label he explicitly rejects), but as a “simple traveler” (Avram, 2024b, 21:41). Nonetheless, he enjoys some degree of attention from mainstream media. Prima News TV channel dedicated a little over an hour to him, in an edition of the show *La Final* [In the end], entitled “Vlogger-ul care a demontat propaganda - Cosmin Avram - #LaFinal” [The vlogger who has debunked propaganda – Cosmin Avram - #LaFinal] (Prima News, 2024, March 4). The show’s host Ionuț Cristache represents mainstream journalism and congratulates Avram on evincing the kind of critical thinking that is expected of mainstream media that he strongly criticizes: “we were saying one thing on TV, the official narrative served by Kyiv, without ever questioning it – and I include myself here – while you arrived there and found things to be in a somewhat different dimension...” (Prima News, 2024, March 4, 2:23–2:37).

On the show as well as in his vlogs, Avram states that he had not heard any air raid alarms for thirty days (while seeing them represented in Romanian news as happening in Kyiv, where he was at the time), until he got to Odessa, but that even there people were going about their lives, paying no heed to the alarms. He then qualifies his claims and states that two days after he left Kyiv, a building he had filmed was bombed. Avram criticizes mainstream media for not being more specific when they speak about locations and for conflating places inside Kyiv Oblast with the city itself. He also asserts that he did see fear on Ukrainian people’s faces, but that his interviewees most often claimed they had gotten used to the air raid alarms and the war. Avram self-consciously distances himself as much as he can from mainstream media, saying he is not interested in politics but rather in what ordinary people say. His visit to Russia—that he deemed the “right” thing to do (Prima News, 2024, March 4, 32:20), since he had visited Ukraine during the war—revealed, by comparison, a people much more reluctant to speak about politics, about their president, or about Russia’s “special operation” in Ukraine. In his twenty-nine days in Russia, he never heard the word “war” uttered by a Russian citizen, since many were said to have been imprisoned for using it at the beginning of the conflict (Prima News, 2024, March 4, 39:48).

Avram is credited with debunking a fake news item claiming that the conflict is a hushed-up affair in Russia by filming billboards devoted to the fallen soldiers (similar to, though fewer than, those he had found in Ukraine) and by filming the ubiquitous military checkpoints, especially in Moscow. Avram also accuses various TV stations of appropriating his footage without giving him credit, and of “putting words into [his] mouth” (Prima News, 2024, March 4, 50:16). Thus, Avram’s anti-mainstream attitude is mainly rooted in the differences of representation, or in other words, in the fact that his representation is meant to be literally an alternative to mainstream media, qualifying its claims, avoiding international politics and grand narratives, and staying close to the average citizen. His argument illustrates what has been termed *sousveillance* or “watching from below” (Allan & Hintz, 2020,

p. 443), in marked contrast to mainstream surveillance. Avram's stance also stems from his content being appropriated and/or misrepresented by mainstream media, a fact he resents. What is noteworthy about Avram's style is its successful avoidance of polarizing language and content, which is why he claims he was allowed to enter Russia and spend a month there at all. In his vlogs, he attempts to keep his distance from both Ukrainian and Russian politics and he explicitly (and naively) claims to be "neutral" (Avram, 2024b, September 14, 28:40), shortly after stating that from the information he has gathered it seems that "Russia is the main culprit," that is, the invader (Avram, 2024b, September 14, 28:30). He counterbalances this statement by criticizing Ukraine for discriminating against black students during evacuations from the country. This kind of apparent balancing act will also be found in Chris Cappy's Task & Purpose vlog.

Romanian travel vlogger Cătălin Stănciulescu, who runs the BackpackYourLife channel on YouTube, has created the earliest vlogs in this sample. His titles also exhibit excessive capitalization, but they are meant to signal extreme danger in adrenaline-inducing situations: "AM AJUNS PE FRONTUL DE EST AL UCRAINEI, acolo unde RUSII BOMBARDEAZA ZILNIC (Harkov)" [I HAVE ARRIVED ON THE EASTERN UKRAINE FRONTLINE, where THE RUSSIANS BOMBARD DAILY (Kharkiv)] (2022, August 2), "prins in BOMBARDAMENTELE RUSILOR. la un pas de MOARTE in ESTUL UCRAINEI" [caught in THE RUSSIANS' BOMBARDMENTS. on the brink of DEATH in EASTERN UKRAINE] (2022, August 3). The spatial metaphor and more specific geographic locations in the headlines are complemented by thumbnails showing Stănciulescu alone or in the company of Orest Zub, a Ukrainian vlogger acting as his guide, against the background of the conflict's aftermath (destroyed building and bombed asphalt, respectively). Since he needs to accommodate the Ukrainian guide's presence in his vlogs, Stănciulescu's speech is a mixture of Romanian and English. He expresses his fear in very colorful language, for instance "I shat myself, bro" (BackPackYourLife, 2022b, August 3, 0:29). Unlike Avram, Stănciulescu, who visited Ukraine only five months into the conflict, focused on the effects of war, which is why his main filming location is Kharkiv. Stănciulescu's stated purpose was "combating pro-Russian propaganda by showing you exactly what things are like" (BackPackYourLife, 2022a, August 2, 5:28–5:33). As he introduced himself, Zub also mentioned he is taking risks "in order to deliver the truth to you guys" (BackPackYourLife, 2022a, August 2, 10:18).

Stănciulescu addresses the already waning interest in the war coverage on social media and states that his activity is meant to counter this trend, an idea expressed by other Ukrainian guides as well. Thus, vlogging is posited as an antidote to news fatigue. Stănciulescu's videos feature various humanitarian undertakings conducted by Croatian, Swedish, and British volunteers who are guided by Zub into the Kharkiv area. The main thrust of the discourse and audio-visual content is raising awareness of the ongoing conflict (a nearby explosion is heard at one point), showing the degree of destruction in Kharkiv and underscoring the resilience of the population (e.g., parks are still being tended to in order to boost morale, according to Zub). Although Stănciulescu accepts this explanation and his discourse in general is

ideologically aligned with mainstream media, Avram claims in one of his vlogs that after spending a month in cities close to the Ukrainian frontline the prevalent perception of the locals he has met is that the maintenance of parks located 15–20 km from an advancing frontline represents money laundering. Although Avram emphatically says “no, this is not Russian propaganda” (2024, September 14, 20:27) and posts some images of a Ukrainian soldier who had made the same claim on another platform, he voices his worries about losing YouTube monetization for posting such sensitive material – an issue also referenced by “bald and bankrupt” (see below).

Alex Craiu, a Romanian war vlogger and war correspondent whose YouTube channel is called *NuVreiAici* [YouDon'tWantToBeHere], explicitly comments on stylistic differences between speech in vlogs and in TV news. He moved to Ukraine in autumn 2023 to document the war through vlogs, but was often featured on various Romanian TV news channels as well (e.g., Euronews Romania, TVR Info, Digi 24, Kanal D). His title “Rușii vor să măcelărească Kievul. Ucrainenii rezistă” [The Russians want to butcher Kyiv. The Ukrainians keep their ground] (*NuVreiAici*, 2025, July 22) evinces neither capitalization nor hysterical punctuation, yet it is still longer than the lengthiest English title in this dataset. Craiu states that he presents the same information in TV news and in his vlogs, but in the former his style is “a little more formal, more adapted to TV” (*NuVreiAici*, 2025, July 22, 9:27), whereas in the latter he wants to show viewers “what it’s like to feel these places [he] visit[s]...here on YouTube, the perspective is rawer, less processed” (*NuVreiAici*, 2025, July 22, 9:37–9:52). As a Romanian who has moved to Ukraine, avowedly out of a sense of responsibility, Craiu claims a unique position for himself and repeatedly draws attention to the fact that he shows his viewers “deep Ukraine” and that no one else does that in Romanian, not even Romanian national television. Craiu’s work epitomizes the liquid, volatile boundaries between alternative and mainstream media. Ideologically, his vlogs are entirely aligned with mainstream media.

British vlogger Benjamin Rich (bald and bankrupt) exhibits a thumbnail featuring himself against the background of burning buildings, but the flames are recognizably photoshopped into the image. He thereby claims an immediacy that is not confirmed by the vlog itself, as he is not caught in the conflict but only witnesses its aftermath. Rich makes some grand claims at the beginning of his vlog: “You are about to see what no other YouTuber has shown you until now” (bald and bankrupt, 2025, April 17, 1:55). Surprisingly, in some ways he delivers on his promise. He is the only vlogger in this sample to speak fluent Russian and to make himself understood by elderly Ukrainians or, as he calls them, “babushkas and dedushkas” (bald and bankrupt, 2025, April 17, 54:25). He employs no guide either, so that his experience is neither mediated nor ideologically influenced by a Ukrainian’s perspective. Nonetheless, Rich is the most controversial vlogger discussed here (being accused, among other things, of sex tourism by other vloggers). He is an aficionado of all things Soviet and has spent very long stretches of time in Russia as well as Ukraine since 2019: Donbas (March 2021), Kyiv (February 24, 2022), Russia (2022, though not vlogging about the war). In August 2022, he was arrested for saying Putin was crazy, and his interrogation by the Russian authorities was released to the public by the latter. During the interrogation, he claimed to have received an email from

YouTube, as did every other YouTuber, saying they were only allowed to “talk about the situation of Ukraine from the side of the Ukrainians” if they wanted to still monetize (Australian in Belarus, 2022, September 5, 3:43), a claim that can hardly be credited, given the circumstances in which it was made, but which is redolent of Avram’s statement. He was then banned from Russia and resurfaced in Ukraine in April 2025 as a self-proclaimed war correspondent.

Rich covers Kyiv, Chernihiv, Kryvyi Rih, Sumy, and Trostyanets, in his footage, after which he was asked to leave the armed conflict zone. Normal(ity) is mentioned seven times in his vlog (once without reference to life during war), but it is qualified by the adverb “almost” and the phrase “some kind of.” Rich underscores the resilience of East Ukrainian people (although only mentioning it once as such): “even in wartime, the Ukrainian people still keep their sense of humor and their jolliness”; “fortunately, it seems they’re still in good spirits, despite everything” (bald and bankrupt, 2025, April 17, 12:45; 59:12). He is not treated with suspicion by the Ukrainians he speaks Russian to, of which he interviews more than twenty. Rich asks them about their war and occupation experiences, about living in fear and about their reasons for not leaving the country or their hometowns. He focuses on sites of destruction and tragedy (e.g., the bombed children’s playground in Kryvyi Rih, the then recently bombed shopping center in Sumy) and on the drab, difficult life of the survivors. Towards the end of the vlog, Rich encounters the statue of Tchaikovsky in Trostyanets and asks a local woman whether the people of Trostyanets still respect the Russian composer, even though he was Russian. The woman replies: “So what? He was Russian but he was talented. Not all Russians are enemies” (bald and bankrupt, 2025, April 17, 59:40). In an editorializing move, he compares the attitude of some Ukrainians who have suffered in the war with that of some “elements in Europe” that at the beginning of the war “lost their minds.” He refers to the universities that cancelled Russian programs, theaters that cancelled Chekhov, and libraries that discontinued stocking Tolstoy, concluding that “there’s a lesson in that [the woman’s attitude]” (bald and bankrupt, 2025, April 17, 59:47–1:00:30).

Like Rich’s, Drew Binsky’s thumbnail also contains fake fire superimposed on the destroyed buildings in the background. At the beginning, he presents his lofty aims (spoken in voiceover and therefore most probably recorded after filming was concluded): “My mission is simple: I’m going to Ukraine to share stories of resilience and give a voice to the forty million locals who dream of peace in their homeland [...] I hope to replace narratives of destruction with ones of solidarity. This journey will forever change how you see Ukraine” (Binsky, 2025, January 25, 0:18–0:58). Binsky films in Lviv, Kyiv, and Kharkiv. In Kharkiv, he films a ballroom dancing contest for children in a mall, and in Lviv he attends a rock concert; both events are interpreted as signs of Ukrainian resilience. Apart from his guide Markiyan (whom he dubs his “local friend” in a title card), he interviews eleven people, most of whom speak English. Throughout the vlog, “normal(cy)” is used 22 times (only once with reference to something else than life during war) and “resilient”/“resilience” occurs six times. The particular brand of normality that can be spoken of regarding life in Ukraine during the war is qualified by the

interviewees in various ways. For instance, Markiyan explains that the war has been ongoing for the last ten years and that young Ukrainian children have therefore never known anything else. An interviewed woman confirms that “in Kharkiv, normal becomes something strange” (Binsky, 2025, January 25, 55:23). Throughout, Binsky pleads for peace; “war is no good for anyone” is a phrase he repeats three times. Emotional language is also prevalent in the vlog, not least because he repeatedly asks his wife how the things they see make her feel. At the end, Binsky describes his Ukraine trip as an “emotional roller coaster: for every moment of joy and connection [...], there were twice as many moments of heartbreak and fear” (Binsky, 2025, January 25, 1:05:45).

Emeka Iwueze is an American travel vlogger who explicitly voices disalignment with mainstream media in his titles that read: “Don’t TRUST the Media: I Went to Ukraine” (2024, September 23) and “Everyone Told Me Kyiv was Dangerous, but...” (2024b, September 26), thereby implying the normality of life in Ukraine. It is noteworthy that the former video was filmed in Lviv, a city in western Ukraine that has been virtually untouched by Russian bombs since the beginning of the war. The thumbnails show Iwueze with his arm around a Ukrainian man making the “victory” sign with his fingers and respectively, Iwueze looking at a destroyed power generator exhibited in Kyiv. Iwueze does not explicitly follow up on the headlines in his vlogs, but he focuses on ordinary life: food and drink, street sports, street art, and nightlife. The only exception is the following excerpt, in which he alludes to the war that he is not able or willing to explicitly verbalize: “it’s been lovely here, man. You...you hear stories of stuff that have...uh...that happened, but I haven’t seen anything and people are just living and just going on with their lives *normally*; like, again, being here, you wouldn’t even think that there’s anything going on...uh...you know what I’m talking about” (Iwueze, 2024a, September 23, 0:46-1:03).

Like Stănciulescu and Binsky, Jeremy (JeremyXplores) employs a local guide, the Ukrainian professional Chernobyl guide Natalya. Employing a local guide unavoidably affects the content and arguably also influences the ideological stance of a vlog. This is most visible when Jeremy’s and Natalya’s political and ideological stances collide: as he questions Ukraine’s “pushing out the Russian language from public life and even banning Russian music” (JeremyXplores, 2025b, June 21, 18:15), Natalya replies “if it’s going to be like this, let it be like this” (JeremyXplores, 2025b, June 21, 19:09). A discussion on freedom and on the overreach of government control ensues. Like Zub in Stănciulescu’s video, Natalya also explains the careful maintenance of city parks and the building of a new pedestrian bridge in terms of raising the morale of Ukrainian citizens (JeremyXplores, 2025a, March 10, 44:48).

Jeremy’s vlogs are dappled with philosophical and historical considerations as well as poetic language and stylistic devices, rhetorical questions, metaphors, personifications, and similes e.g., “The neighborhood is quiet. Not peaceful, just hollow, like the air itself is still holding its breath” (JeremyXplores, 2025a, March 10, 49:16). His is a niche channel, as he specializes in visiting deserted castles, mansions, and other historical monuments. At the beginning of his first Ukraine vlog, he

makes the grassroots, bottom-up argument similar to those of other vloggers, distancing his work from mainstream media: “sometimes the only way to really understand something is to see it with your own eyes. I didn’t just want headlines and news clips; I wanted to see faces, stories and truth that didn’t make it into the broadcasts” (JeremyXplores, 2025a, March 10, 1:30). In this vlog, he repeats the word “normal” five times in reference to life during war, but the adjective is qualified by the adverb “oddly” or the phrase “in its own way” or the verb “to seem.” The sites that he films are mostly memorial sites: the Palace of Culture and the bridge in Irpin, an open-air graffiti exhibition in Borodyanka that also features a Banksy mural (of which three are shown in total), and car cemeteries that testify to the targeting of civilians by Russian troops. His brand of war tourism is colder than that of most vloggers in the sense that it prioritizes curated, commodified sites, providing him with the opportunity to evoke stories of solidarity and resilience.

The thumbnail of British actor and comedian Stephen Fry’s documentary “Stephen Fry into Ukraine” (Planet Fry, 2024, July 31) features a smiling Fry sitting on the stairs of the presidential palace in Kyiv. The preposition “into” in the title signals Fry’s attachment to Ukraine. Due to his personal history with bipolar disorder, the actor was invited by Ukrainian First Lady Olena Zelenska to co-host a conference on mental health in a country at war. Fry interviews her, President Volodymyr Zelenski, French philosopher Bernard-Henri Levy, artist Nikita Titov, actor Nazar Grabar, but also survivors of the Azov brigade, relatives of fallen soldiers, doctors, and injured combatants. By contrast with travel vlogs, however, his encounters with his interviewees feel staged and the sense of immediacy created by some of the settings (on the train, in the air raid shelter) is counterbalanced by the fact that Fry is always filmed by one of the two cameramen accompanying him and never films himself (as a vlogger would). As this is an advocacy documentary labeled “Fundraiser” on YouTube, it is perhaps not surprising that it should feature some of the most polarizing language of all the videos in this sample. Fry repeatedly asks moralistically charged questions like “will you ever forgive the Russians for what they’ve done?” (Planet Fry, 2024, July 31, 24:19), inevitably eliciting vitriolic replies. Fry himself uses expletives regarding Russia in general, and Putin and Medvedev in particular, about whom he tells an offensive joke to Volodymyr Zelensky.

By contrast, Chris Cappy—an American who explicitly refers to himself as a journalist in his vlog, posted by Task & Purpose, a niche YouTube channel specializing in military news—employs a much more formal register. The headline “I went to the Frontline of Ukraine’s Invasion into Russia” (Task & Purpose, 2024, December 12) is complemented by the voiceover at the beginning of the video, stating that Cappy is indeed on Russian territory in the Kursk region where Ukrainian forces have made a “surprise invasion” (Task & Purpose, 2024, December 12, 0:34) in August 2024. Cappy’s stated mission is “to speak directly with Ukrainian soldiers, to find out what it’s really like to operate deep inside military territory, to interview Russian civilians who are now grappling with the shocking reality of the conflict arriving at their own doorstep [...] to find out with [his] own two eyes what’s really happening on the ground” (Task & Purpose, 2024, December 12, 1:03–1:34). The

video thumbnail shows Cappy interviewing a Ukrainian soldier and sports an all-caps upper title card stating: “WHAT ITS [sic] REALLY LIKE.” As with the other vloggers, credibility is derived from physical presence and personal experience. Cappy also interviews Mykhailo Podolyak, “a high-ranking Ukrainian government official about the geopolitics of the war” (Task & Purpose, 2024, December 12, 1:25).

Cappy’s interest in war and warfare is essential. As a former infantryman in the Iraq war, Cappy self-reflexively asserts his attempt at finding closure with his “own complicated relationship with war, which left [him] questioning [his] role in the conflict” (Task & Purpose, 2024, December 12, 1:56). He is embedded with the Ukrainian artillery, and his focus is military strategy and equipment, but he also investigates various other issues such as rumors regarding a Ukrainian-operated concentration camp in the Kursk region. His interviews with Russian civilians are mediated by Ukrainian military staff, so the interviewees may not be entirely candid out of fear. Cappy concludes that the Russian civilians who remained in the Kursk region had “no real accurate understanding of the war in Ukraine” (2024, December 12, 45:35), and that some were only aware of the existence of a conflict since August 2024. In a voiceover, he explains that the argument Ukrainian officials are making that Russia indiscriminately bombs their own towns does not “resonate” with him because he had “been on other parts of the front line and seen Ukrainian artillery and drones destroy their own homes, Ukrainian homes, in territory occupied by Russia” (Task & Purpose, 2024, December 12, 9:32–9:43).

Cappy relies on mainstream media for several of his arguments. The poverty of Russian civilians is supported by a Reuters headline shown in a title card that reads: “Almost half of Russians say salary does not cover basic spending – survey” (2024, December 12, 38:16). The headcount of Russian losses is taken from Mediazona’s count (2022), done in collaboration with the BBC News Russian Service. Cappy claims that “more soldiers have died from the poorest regions of Russia than anywhere else according to stats compiled by Mediazona” (2024, December 12, 38:24–38:34). Mediazona indeed conducted an investigation published on April 26, 2022 that supports Cappy’s claim, further reinforced by Mykhailo Podolyak, the Ukrainian official Cappy interviews. Podolyak goes on to equate poverty with immorality by saying that Russian soldiers from poorer regions then “kill, rape and pillage” in Ukraine (Task & Purpose, 2024, December 12, 38:55). Cappy concludes his vlogumentary with a long voiceover in which he advocates for full military support for Ukraine from the West, as he contrastingly compares the Iraq war that was “not what people really wanted” (2024, December 12, 58:14) to the Ukraine war that is a “justified cause” (2024, December 12, 49:30), as the Ukrainian people “want the help, they want their sovereignty from Russia” (2024, December 12, 58:50). As the vlogumentary draws to an end, Cappy’s speech becomes increasingly slower and more declamatory: “Personally – and this is just my personal thoughts – I believe we [the West/the U.S.?] should give them [Ukraine] what they require now, to stop Russia [...], to stop the suffering, to stop the dying, and to start the process of rebuilding” (2024, December 12, 1:00:06–1:00:32).

14.4 Conclusions

From the videos, documentaries, travel vlogs and vlogumentaries discussed above, a more nuanced view of the Russian-Ukrainian war than that presented in mainstream TV news inevitably emerges. The grassroots quality of most of these videos ensures a diversity of perspectives and ideologies within, as well as between, the individual videos. As most of them prioritize eyewitness and personal accounts, the daily life of average Ukrainian citizens and the vloggers' own experiences and difficulties encountered in a country at war are their main focus. Notwithstanding the diversity of perspectives, a sense of interconnectedness between the vloggers (and therefore of a small world) also emerges: Orest Zub, who acts as Stănciulescu's guide (BackPackYourLife), also has his own YouTube channel, which Stănciulescu promotes; Natalya, Jeremy's guide, references her own TikTok channel and also features in a Chernobyl-related video by channel Dare to Ukraine.

Informality (including occasional offensiveness) and affect are salient features of the language employed by the vloggers and the other actants (guides, interviewees, accompanying partners, etc.) and this is one way in which they deliberately distance their work from mainstream media. Openly questioning and casting doubt on mainstream war representations is another. This materializes in assertions of the (mostly qualified) normality of life in Ukraine, but also in references to the fact that mainstream media employ polarized language and are ideologically monolithic. As is the case with a conflict in progress covered in the post-truth age, while no definitive claims can ever be made, there is nonetheless a great value in the opportunity for debate and dialog facilitated by the access to these videos. Moreover, they have the potential to counteract current news fatigue by re-sensitizing audiences—through personalization, affective language, breaking the fourth wall and directly addressing the viewers to elicit reactions, etc.

Acknowledgement This work was funded by the EU's NextGenerationEU instrument through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan of Romania - Pillar III-C9-I8, managed by the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalization, within the project entitled *The coverage and reception of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in Polish, Romanian and English-language media: A comparative critical discourse study with recommendations for journalism training* (CORECON), contract no. 760244/28.12.2023, code CF 25/27.07.2023.

References

- Allan, S., & Hintz, A. (2020). Citizen journalism and participation. In K. Wahl-Jorgensen & T. Hanitzsch (Eds.), *The handbook of journalism studies* 2nd ed pp. 435-451). Routledge.
- Atton, C. (2015). Introduction. In C. Atton (Ed.), *The Routledge companion to alternative and community media* (pp. 1-18). Routledge.
- Australian in Belarus. (2022, September 5). Bald and bankrupt RUSSIAN INTERROGATION arrested in Russia [Video]. *YouTube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bKsjLlVpMLA>

- Avram, C. (2023a, July 22). This is what the WAR in UKRAINE looks like – NOT what the TELEVISION presents to you! [Video]. *YouTube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vL3f5bAsi0I>
- Avram, C. (2023b, July 29). This is what ODESSA looks like in times of WAR – Many LIES in Romania! (The reality in 2023) [Video]. *YouTube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CxLS7cN9IYQ>
- Avram, C. (2024a, January 27). THE REAL RUSSIA: What NOBODY is showing – Some TELEVISION STATIONS DON'T WANT to show this! [Video]. *YouTube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BsWBjpHvCCo>
- Avram, C. (2024b, September 14). This is how MONEY IS LAUNDERED in UKRAINE – EUROPEAN MONEY My conclusion after 30 days here [Video]. *YouTube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PiWvdDBZciU>
- BackPackYourLife. (2022a, August 2). I HAVE ARRIVED ON THE EASTERN UKRAINE FRONTLINE, where THE RUSSIANS BOMBARD DAILY (Kharkiv) [Video]. *YouTube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IqerryIEFQQ>
- BackPackYourLife. (2022b, August 3). caught in THE RUSSIANS' BOMBARDMENTS. on the brink of DEATH in EASTERN UKRAINE [Video]. *YouTube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TmTUOYGLLvI>
- bald and bankrupt. (2025, April 17). Solo on Ukraine's Eastern Front [Video]. *YouTube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O3HRnwC6pso>
- Beason, J. (2025, July 20). YOUTUBE INSIDER exposes how the algorithm ACTUALLY works! (How to grow on YouTube 2025) [Video]. *YouTube*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=61DH_Eq0In8
- Binsky, D. (2025, January 25). Visiting Ukraine during a war. What's it like? [Video]. *YouTube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=letUlhrWvFg>
- Covington, P., Adams, J., & Sargin, E. (2016). Deep neural networks for YouTube recommendations. *RecSys '16: Proceedings of the 10th ACM Conference on Recommender Systems* (pp. 191-198). Association for Computing Machinery. <https://doi.org/10.1145/2959100.2959190>
- Iwueze, E. (2024a, September 23). Don't TRUST the media: I went to Ukraine UA [Video]. *YouTube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eI3lbSsDmqQ>
- Iwueze, E. (2024b, September 26). Everyone told Me Kyiv was dangerous, but... UA [Video]. *YouTube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oerOLOuY8Tg>
- Jenkins, H. & Deuze, M. (2008). Editorial: Convergence culture. *Convergence*, 14(5), 5-12. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856507084415>
- JeremyXplores. (2025a, March 10). I went to Ukraine... with NO plan [Video]. *YouTube*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XiINJqDL_to
- JeremyXplores. (2025b, June 21). I went to the towns Russia tried to erase [Video]. *YouTube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gsw8Th7TfM0>
- Kenix, L. J. (2015). Commercialism and the deconstruction of alternative and mainstream media. In C. Atton (Ed.), *The Routledge companion to alternative and community media* (pp. 66-76). Routledge.
- Kenix, L. J. (2010). *Alternative and mainstream media: The converging spectrum*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Mediazona. (2022, April 26). Russian casualties in Ukraine. Mediazona investigation. *Mediazona*. https://en.zona.media/article/2022/04/25/bodycount_eng-trl
- Murrell, T. (2025, June 19). How YouTube's algorithm works: A guide to recommendations. *Shaped*. <https://www.shaped.ai/blog/how-youtubes-algorithm-works>
- NuVreiAici. (2025, July 22). The Russians want to butcher Kyiv. The Ukrainians keep their ground [Video]. *YouTube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Tq2J9CqYvU>
- Piekarz, M. (2007). Hot war tourism: The live battlefield and the ultimate adventure holiday. In C. Ryan (Ed.), *Battlefield tourism: History, place and interpretation* (pp. 153-169). Elsevier.
- Planet Fry. (2024, July 31). Stephen Fry into Ukraine [Video]. *YouTube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0FO6ZJL26eM>

Prima News. (2024, March 4). The vlogger who has debunked propaganda – Cosmin Avram – #LaFinal [Video]. *YouTube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sn5GSVEDVfs>

Task & Purpose. (2024, December 12). I went to the frontline of Ukraine's invasion into Russia. *YouTube*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ox9_V-APOGg

Corina Selejan is Assistant Professor with the Department of Anglo-American and German Studies at Lucian Blaga University, Sibiu, Romania, where she specializes in contemporary Anglo-American literature. She has co-edited special issues of *American, British and Canadian Studies* and *East-West Cultural Passage*. Her publications include “The Vividness of Hunger in Jesmyn Ward’s *Sing, Unburied, Sing* and Herta Müller’s *Atemschaukel*: A Cognitivist Reading” and “For the Love of Words: On Language and Cinematography in Academic Novels and Films.” She has taken part in INTELLIT, a project related to the preservation of Romanian literary heritage and the use of digital solutions for extracting and systematizing knowledge.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if you modified the licensed material. You do not have permission under this license to share adapted material derived from this chapter or parts of it.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.



Index

A

Action

lemmas, 113

verbs, 38

Adevărul, 26, 54, 62, 72, 75, 78, 96–102, 113, 115, 119, 122, 137, 218, 220

Advocacy, 20, 145, 146, 148, 230, 232, 234, 235, 241

Affiliative rhetoric, 10

Agency, 54, 56, 57, 74–76, 81, 111, 113, 117, 118, 152, 173, 187

Alternative media, 164, 230, 231

Argumentation (or argument, argumentative), 8, 19, 27, 42, 46, 51, 52, 54, 59, 64, 70, 79, 93, 94, 102, 114, 140, 149, 156, 162, 175, 186, 188, 192, 196, 200, 206, 222, 231, 236, 241, 242

Armed

conflict, v, 2, 4, 7, 8, 34–44, 46, 47, 110
invasion, 7, 35, 36, 38–40, 42, 43, 45, 46, 50, 91

Artificial Intelligence (or AI)

DeepSeek, 22, 24

large language model (LLM), 22

text classification, 22

Authorization, 35, 146, 149–152, 157

B

Bandera, Stepan, 51–53, 58, 59, 63, 64, 78

Border (or borderland), v, 63, 90, 91, 97, 111, 114, 116–118, 123, 165, 170, 174, 185

Brand (or branding), 187–189, 203, 240, 241

Bullshit, 201, 210

C

Casus belli, 34–36

ChatGPT, 23

Collage-type images (or collages), 9, 128–132, 134–136, 138–141, 235

Corpus Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS), 19, 22

Counter

arguments, 128

messages, 186

narratives, 122, 229

Coverage, v, 2–8, 10, 17–29, 34, 37, 39, 41, 42, 45, 46, 52, 53, 57, 63, 64, 70, 79, 87–105, 110, 111, 113, 118–120, 122, 124, 127, 128, 132, 133, 138, 152–154, 170, 171, 183–196, 203, 209, 215, 219, 222, 223, 234, 237

Critical discourse analysis (CDA), 81, 92, 96, 110, 113, 128, 129, 223

D

Delegitimization

strategies, 9, 54, 60, 64, 70–72, 81, 151

Denazification, 8, 53, 59–61, 70, 72, 73, 79–81, 137

Destination

of migration, 113

Digital content, 218, 221, 222

Discourse-historical approach (DHA)

intensification, 52, 131, 186, 188, 191, 192
mitigation (mitigative), 52

nomination, 54

predication, 54, 57

Discursive News Value Analysis, 129
 Disinformation, v, 2, 3, 20, 59, 100, 172,
 216, 218–224
Do Rzeczy, 162, 166–175, 177–178

E

Echoic (or echoing), 59, 71–73, 79–81, 190
 Election campaigns, 120, 162, 214, 221, 222
 Emotional
 appeal, 57, 146, 149, 151, 153–157
 landscape (or emotionscape), 10, 213–224
 trigger, 214, 219
 truth (or emo-truth), 202–203
 Empire, 7, 17–29, 60, 89
 Epistemic
 analysis, 10
 modality, 207
Euronews, 56, 72, 238
 European Court of Human Rights, 34,
 41, 42, 45
 European Union (EU), 2, 3, 8, 21, 29, 41, 43,
 45, 52, 88–91, 97, 99–101, 111,
 121–124, 162

F

Facebook, 9, 145–157, 191, 202, 206,
 208, 215
 Fears
 of war, 214, 216
 Forced emigration, 110–113, 118, 124
 Frame (or framing), 7, 8, 19, 38–46, 49–65,
 71, 74–76, 87–105, 110–112, 114,
 117, 118, 122, 123, 128, 130, 131,
 134, 140, 148–150, 155, 157,
 170–173, 184, 186, 188, 193, 216,
 221, 222

G

Galtung, Johan, 2, 18, 21, 23, 127
 Geneva Conventions, 35, 36, 41, 45, 153
 Genre hybridity, 146–148
 Georgescu, Călin, 214, 216, 221

H

Heroization, 51, 54, 57–59, 64
 Historical references, 6, 8, 50, 51, 55,
 56, 63, 189
 Holodomor, 50, 51, 53, 55, 56, 63, 172
 Hostilities, 7, 18, 34–44, 221

Humanitarian

 aid, 117–119, 123
 law, 39, 41–43
 Hypothetical futures, 71, 103, 146, 149–151,
 153, 156–157

I

Identity construction, 57–59, 64, 191
 Imperial nostalgia, 54, 62
 International Court of Justice, 41
 International Criminal Court, 35, 39, 44
 Iohannis, Klaus, 131–134

J

Jus ad bellum, 36
Jus in bello, 36, 41, 45

K

Kampala Amendments, 35

L

Label (or labelling), 6, 41, 46, 70, 73, 76–81,
 102, 114, 190, 236
LancsBox, 72, 95, 96, 101, 113
 Legitimizations, 6, 9, 70–71, 75, 81, 88, 146,
 148–152, 154, 156, 157, 184
 Lenin statues, 61, 62
 Lexical
 blend, 155
 choices, 70, 77, 79, 81
 context, 70, 72, 73, 76, 78, 80, 81
 searches, 72, 73
Libertatea, 54, 72, 78, 88, 94, 97–100, 102,
 113, 119, 121, 140, 194, 200,
 204, 206–209

M

Mainstream media, 10, 27, 29, 214, 215,
 220, 229–243
 Martial law, 7, 36–40, 42, 43, 45, 46
 Mazepa, Ivan, 51, 53, 58, 59, 64
 Media narratives, 9, 54, 88, 104, 105,
 161–175, 214, 216–219, 222, 223
 Memory politics, 50–52, 56, 59, 62, 64–65
 Metaphors, 9, 27, 34, 40, 55, 78, 155, 163,
 167–170, 175, 184–186, 190, 195,
 202, 206, 224, 237, 240
 Metarepresentations, 70–72, 79–81

Mnemonic, 51

Montage technique, 129

Moral

evaluation, 40, 50, 71, 146, 149–151, 153–154, 157

inversion, 59

legitimation, 55, 56

urgency, 40, 42, 44, 46

Mythopoesis, 149

N

Narrative

major, 184–186, 188, 189

marginal, 6, 10

minor, 184, 185, 189, 190, 193, 195, 196

Russian, 59, 70

solidarity, 167–175

strategic, 2, 4, 41, 71

Ukrainian, 64

National

identity, 8, 10, 49–51, 55, 57–59, 64, 89, 90, 122

security concerns, 10, 87–105

Neutrality, 23, 70, 147, 157, 216, 224

News

discourse, 49, 50, 110

fatigue, 232, 237, 243

headline, 34, 46, 131, 132, 136, 139

stories, 10, 127–129, 135–140

News value

consonance, 127, 128

impact, 127, 128, 130, 138, 140, 141

negativity, 9, 127, 128, 130, 136–138, 141

novelty, 128, 130, 139

personalization, 9, 127, 128, 139, 141

positivity, 128, 136

prominence, 9, 127, 128, 130, 132–135, 141

proximity, 9, 128, 130–132, 138, 141

superlativeness, 128, 130, 138

timeliness, 128, 130–132

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), 5,

8, 21, 23, 41, 43, 45, 46, 50, 51, 53,

54, 60, 61, 75, 76, 79, 88–91,

97–101, 103, 104, 122, 134, 152,

153, 156, 207

Nuclear threats, 10, 88, 91, 92, 98–100, 102, 104, 220

O

Ogdowski, Marcin, 9, 156–157

P

Peace

negative, 7, 18, 19, 21, 23

positive, 7, 18, 21, 23, 24, 26, 27, 29

realist-pragmatic, 7, 23–29

Russian aligned, 23, 24

Ukrainian aligned, 23, 24, 26

Polarizing language, 79, 232, 237, 241

Polityka, 162, 166, 167, 171–177

Populism, 168, 187, 202

Post-truth, 6, 9, 10, 199–210, 243

Process lemmas, 113

Proper names, 154, 192, 193, 195

Proximity, 75, 76, 156

Public perceptions, 37, 47, 50, 87, 88,

91–93, 101, 105, 124, 149,

184, 195, 203

Putin, Vladimir, 20, 21, 26, 27, 44, 46, 57,

59–62, 71, 74–79, 97, 98, 100, 102,

103, 131–136, 139, 140, 154, 155

R

Rationalizations, 146, 149–153, 157

Recontextualization, 51, 54, 57, 58, 61–64,

71, 79, 81

Refugee crisis, 111, 118, 119, 121–123, 163, 167, 215, 223

Regional instabilities, 88, 91, 92

Resilience, v, vi, 10, 29, 57, 98, 119, 124, 136, 140, 185, 186, 195, 196,

237, 239–241

Right-wing, 10, 123, 175, 200, 202, 204

România TV, 26, 54, 72, 79, 80, 113, 220

S

Security guarantees, 8, 23, 90–92, 172

Simion, George, 10

Social media

network, 214, 215, 217, 219, 220

post, 146–148, 150, 154, 157

Solidarity, 3, 5, 6, 10, 40, 45, 50, 56–59, 63,

75, 76, 91, 110–112, 118–120,

122–124, 161, 169, 175, 185–190,

192–196, 205, 229, 231, 239, 241

Șoșoacă, Diana, 10, 132, 134

Special military operation, 41, 44–46, 69, 73, 80, 81, 184

Stance, 5–7, 9, 17–29, 46, 70, 72, 73, 75–77, 80, 81, 110, 112, 120, 124, 147,

148, 151, 154, 155, 169, 189, 206,

230, 232, 234, 235, 237, 240

Stereotype (or stereotypical), 4, 135, 140, 167, 170
 Stiripesurse, 54, 72, 80, 88, 94, 97–99, 113, 138, 193, 194

T

TASS, 56, 60, 62
 Thumbnails, 10, 230, 233, 235, 237–242
 TikTok, 214–217, 219, 221, 222, 243
Topos (or *topoi*)
 available resources, 174
 cultural threat, 173, 174
 equality, 194, 196
 freedom, 194
 history, 56, 57, 62
 the power of personal example, 191
 security, 174, 192
 utility, 188
 Trump, Donald, 10, 20
 Trump effect, 10, 202, 203, 206, 209, 210

U

Ukrainian refugees, vi, 8, 9, 109–124, 132, 137, 162, 166, 168, 172, 173, 191, 195, 205

United Nations (UN), 34–36, 39, 41, 43–46, 110, 114, 152, 163, 208
 User-generated, 146

V

Victimhood, 9, 51, 54–56, 63, 104, 120, 195
 Victimization, 51, 54–57, 64
 Visual elements, 129, 130, 186
 Vlog (or vlogger), 233–241

W

War crime, 7, 20, 23, 37–44, 74, 147
 War tourism, 229, 230, 233–242

Y

YouTube, 10, 215, 230–235, 237–239, 241, 243

Z

Zelensky, Volodymyr, 20, 39, 40, 43, 57, 71, 78, 79, 132–136