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Visualising War / Peace Photographs: A Comparative Analysis of Selected Asian News Sites' Coverage of the 2022 Russian-Ukrainian Conflict

This study analyses the visual coverage of the 2022 Russian-Ukrainian conflict on Asian news sites, utilising the frameworks of war and peace journalism. Conducting a content analysis of 397 images from seven leading Asian news sites, we contribute to the literature on visual coverage, particularly from online platforms. Our analysis identifies the predominant visual narratives employed by these news sites and offers insights into variations in coverage intensity, regional and ethnic focuses, portrayal of age groups, and depiction of harm. The study extends the understanding of framing theory by analysing visual frames, providing valuable implications for future visual studies and contributing to a deeper understanding of conflict portrayal in online news media.

Keywords: Russian-Ukrainian conflict, media representation, Asian news sites, visual coverage, war journalism, peace journalism, conflict coverage.

Vizualizacija vojne in mirovne fotografije: primerjalna analiza pokritosti rusko-ukrajinskega konflikta v letu 2022 na izbranih azijskih novičarskih spletnih straneh

Študija analizira vizualno pokritost rusko-ukrajinskega konflikta v letu 2022 na azijskih novičarskih spletnih straneh v okviru vojnega in mirovnega novinarstva. Z vsebinsko analizo 397 slik s sedmih vodilnih azijskih novičarskih spletnih strani dopolnjuje literaturo o vizualni pokritosti, zlasti na spletnih platformah. Analiza opredeljuje vizualno naracijo, ki prevladuje na omenjenih spletnih straneh, ter ponuja vpogled v razlike v intenzivnosti pokrivanja, regionalnih in etničnih usmeritvah, prikazovanju starostnih skupin in prikazovanju škode. Študija širi razumevanje teorije uokvirjanja z analizo vizualnih okvirov, zagotavlja dragoceno podlago za prihodnje vizualne študije in prispeva k globljemu razumevanju prikazovanja konfliktov v spletnih novičarskih medijih.

Ključne besede: *rusko-ukrajinski konflikt, medijska reprezentacija, azijske novičarske spletne strani, vizualna pokritost, vojno novinarstvo, mirovno novinarstvo, pokrivanje konfliktov.*

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1. Background

The Russian-Ukrainian war that began in February 2022 was not the first in the history of conflict between the two countries (Papanikos 2022b; Quintanal et al. 2023; Tamilina 2022). It is a complex and ongoing geopolitical dispute rooted in historical, cultural, and political factors. The current conflict dates back to 2014, when Russia took control of the Crimean Peninsula after carrying out a number of Russian military operations in Ukrainian territory (Papanikos 2022a). Although Ukraine gained independence in 1991, Russia views Ukraine as part of its logistical and strategic sphere of influence (Götz & Staun 2022). As a result, conflicts arose between the two nations in 2014, 2016, 2018, and 2022. These tensions stem from Ukraine's expressed interest in joining NATO, which is perceived as a threat to Russia's territorial integrity and regional security (Elayah & Al Majdhoub 2022; Mudrov 2022; Papanikos 2022b). Additionally, this conflict has led to humanitarian crises, displacing populations and causing economic hardships that impact millions in the area.

On 24 February 2022, Russia launched an air attack on Ukraine's military facilities and called it a special military operation. The Russian ground forces advanced into Ukraine from three different directions (East, South, and North). The military intervention led to fierce battles and intense fighting in various regions of Ukraine. Cities and towns were hit by heavy bombardment, causing significant casualties among civilians and soldiers and leading to a mass exodus of refugees seeking safety in neighbouring countries. The conflict quickly drew international attention and condemnation, with calls for an immediate ceasefire and diplomatic resolution echoing from global leaders and international organisations. This has led many countries in Europe and globally to support Ukraine politically and socially. For example, sanctions against Russia were combined with increased arms supply to Ukraine. Ukraine's neighbouring countries provided full support to all Ukrainians (Mudrov 2022). Although it is unclear how the war will end, its global impact has been observed, and it has deepened the humanitarian crisis, causing widespread devastation and leaving a lasting impact on the geopolitical landscape of Eastern Europe.

In the past, traditional media held the forefront in news reporting, e.g., the Iraqi 2003 war, with satellite broadcasting services such as Al Jazeera TV, BBC TV and CNN TV standing out as prominent examples. However, the landscape has evolved with the rise of online news sites (including social media), which have become increasingly influential platforms in disseminating / breaking news. This shift is especially notable in wars and conflicts (Elareshi et al. 2023), e.g., the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (in Gaza) and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Western and non-Western online news sites have actively covered this conflict, showcasing diverse perspectives and approaches. While journalists may not directly resolve conflicts, their role in raising awareness and promoting peace is

crucial. As Neumann and Fahmy (2012, 170) indicate, journalists possess the power to deepen global understanding of regional conflicts, contributing to peace-building. Galtung's (1986) concept of war and peace journalism provides a framework for examining how conflicts are portrayed in the media. This is particularly relevant, as online news sites in Asia, such as China Daily, Dawn, The Times of India, Inquirer, The Japan Times, Khaleej Times, and Malaysiakini, offer unique perspectives shaped by their respective cultural frameworks and editorial policies (Hunter 2022). Understanding how these news sites report on war and conflict is essential for contemporary media research. However, there is dearth research on this matter, e.g., the perceptions of online news framing the war; their trends; and their strategies to support their news frame. Therefore, this article examines war and peace journalism to understand certain leading Asian news sites' perceptions of the 2022 Russia-Ukraine war (from 24 February to 26 June 2022) and their news frames, focusing only on the visual frames (photography analysis frames) through a quantitative content analysis of photographs using MAXQDA software. Theoretically, photographs serve as visual documentation of events, capturing moments, actions, and emotions that may not be fully conveyed through text alone (see, e.g., Fahmy & Neumann 2012). This is also a crucial aspect for contemporary media research and the public for several reasons. These frames would have: (1) the ability to capture attention and engage audiences more effectively than text alone, (2) the capacity to evoke strong emotions and empathy in viewers, (3) the ability to go beyond language barriers and cross-cultural understanding, and (4) the capacity to provide critical analysis of media representations and narratives.

Going beyond previous research, our intention is to provide an opportunity for cross-national comparative analysis. Yet, we do not claim the universality of our findings or that they are applicable to other media systems. Instead, our data can be extrapolated to provide insightful analyses of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. This article contributes to the existing literature by identifying aspects that shed light on how peace and war are perceived and framed by online news sites. The following section reviews the literature on the peace and war journalism, the visual media representation of the military and armed conflict, the Russia-Ukraine war, and online news and the dissemination of news photographs, followed by the research questions. This is followed by the methodology section, which presents the data collection, coding items, and coder reliability. Next, we disclose our findings concerning the frameworks of war and peace journalism with eight categories as shown in the coding section. Finally, we provide a discussion and conclusion.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Peace and War Journalism

The term peace and war journalism is used by existing research that deals with how news stories are framed by the media (Ha et al. 2020; Perez de Fransius 2014). It was developed as a response to traditional conflict-oriented reporting, which often emphasised the dramatic aspects of conflicts, such as violence and confrontation, and tended to perpetuate and escalate conflicts (Gouse et al. 2019). It also seeks to provide a more nuanced and constructive approach to reporting on conflicts. It is based on two key principles: war journalism and peace journalism (Hussain 2020; Perez de Fransius 2014). While the former focuses on emphasising the dramatic and violent aspects of conflicts (Fahmy & Neumann 2012), e.g., the immediate events and confrontations and the escalation of conflicts by sensationalising violence, it highlights divisions and differences between parties involved in the conflict and may overlook potential solutions or paths to peace. The latter aims to provide a more balanced and constructive view of conflicts, e.g., focusing on the underlying causes and potential solutions, highlighting the human cost, emphasising the suffering of civilians, promoting dialogue, reconciliation, and conflict resolution, and encouraging journalists to be critical of official narratives and to question the motives and actions of all parties involved in the conflict. Peace journalism also seeks to create a more informed public by presenting a broader perspective on conflicts (Ha et al. 2020), giving a voice to marginalised or underrepresented groups, and promoting understanding and empathy (Shin & Biocca 2018). It does not mean avoiding reporting on conflict, but rather reporting on conflicts in a way that helps reduce violence and contributes to peacebuilding efforts (Neumann & Fahmy 2012).

Overall, the model provides a framework for journalists and media to consider the ethical and social implications of their reporting on conflicts and to strive for a more responsible and peace-oriented approach to journalism (Gouse et al. 2019). It also recognises that the way conflicts are portrayed in the media can have a significant impact on public perception and the course of the conflict itself. For example, Perez de Fransius (2014) used the US media coverage of the Iraq war as a case study and tested Galtung's (1986) peace and security discourses model. The conflict was framed as the US versus Iraq, so it is likely that the US media used a war frame, and, in addition, they tended to dehumanise their coverage when describing Iraqis as insurgents and terrorists. Anti-war protestors and peace voices were not given much coverage. Also, they focused on American suffering and American parents' losses, while they did not pay much attention to the Iraqis' suffering.

In their study, Neumann and Fahmy (2012) linked the visual coverage of three Western news wires on the Sri Lankan civil war, using the war and peace journalism frameworks. They revealed that the Western newswires served different purposes, e.g., while AP and AFP focused on external events, highlighting a peace journalism

165

frame orientation, Reuters focused on internal events, preferring a war journalism frame. Furthermore, the findings indicated differences in visual representation of physical harm between the two parties. For example, Tamil people's photographs focused on their losses, while Sinhalese civilians' photographs showed their daily lives without damage. Tamils were also presented emotionally and negatively, through sadness, grieving and frustration, while Sinhalese were presented with optimism and expressing the feeling of hope and confidence.

2.2 Visual Media Representation of the Military and Armed Conflict

Visual media representation refers to how the conflict is portrayed, depicted, or conveyed through visual means using photography, video, art, and other visual media forms (Makhortykh & Sydorova 2017). This representation can greatly influence public perception and understanding of the conflict, as well as shape opinions and emotions related to it (Fahmy & Neumann 2012). It may include news photographs and videos, since news organisations often use photographs and videos to cover conflicts (Neumann & Fahmy 2012). These photographs can capture dramatic moments, such as protests, battles, or the aftermath of an event. Their aim is to inform the public about the situation. News organisations may also use documentary films that can provide an in-depth and often critical analysis of conflicts. They can explore the root causes, consequences, and human stories behind the conflict. For example, Ojala et al. (2017) analysed 402 photographs from four national daily newspapers (from the UK, Germany, Sweden and Finland) on the Ukraine conflict. The Ukrainians were the most frequently depicted in visual coverage of the conflict in all newspapers. They were positively represented compared to non-Ukrainian civilians. In addition, to show the human cost of the war, the visual analysis focused on photographs of material destruction. The Russian intervention and the Ukrainian victimhood frameworks were most often emphasised in media coverage to represent the negative Russian intervention in other affairs and tended to equate Russia with the former Soviet Union and describe it as an aggressor.

Al-Hadi (2022) analysed 281 posts on Arabic-language accounts on Instagram about the Russian-Ukrainian crisis (Russia Today Arabic, Alhurra News Channel, al-Arabiya Channel). The results indicated that for visual analysis, the news websites focused on photos accompanied with a comment, followed by videos. Personal photos were the most widely circulated, followed by news photos. Most of these posts included only one photo (90%), and the rest have two photos in the same post. The case-specific frame was the most used frame, followed by the conflict frame, then the economic one; however, the negotiation and the ethical frames were the least used.

Furthermore, addressing the military and armed conflict within the context of media representation, particularly within the journalistic landscapes of Aisa,

is essential. The media representation of war, especially in digital journalism, requires understanding how the military and armed conflict are presented and portrayed in the media. The existing research emphasises heroic narratives, victimisation, protest, demonisation of enemies, etc. (Desa et al. 2022). For example, Schwalbe and Dougherty (2015) explored how major US news magazines visually presented the 2006 Lebanon war, analysing 186 photos published in three US news magazines. Human interest and military frames (e.g., heroic narratives) were found to have appeared most frequently. The protest frame was the least prominent in their coverage. The three magazines published almost twice as many photographs of Lebanese civilians as they did Israeli civilians, and this is because the greatest damage occurred on the Lebanese side. The images of Hezbollah fighters and the injured and dead received little attention from the visuals, and children and women were prominently featured in these photos.

Makhortykh and Sydorova (2017) examined visual framing of the conflict in eastern Ukraine in pro-Ukrainian and pro-Russian online users/communities. The findings indicated that there was a profound difference in the framing of the conflict between the two groups in Eastern Ukraine. The pro-Ukrainian users tended to present the conflict as a small military action against local rebels, while the pro-Russian users interpreted the conflict as an all-out war against Russian land and its people. The pro-Ukrainian users used the photographs to emphasise the patriotic view of the conflict. Thus, they focused on sharing photographs of military machines, combatants, and captured trophies; additionally, the pro-Ukrainian users did not focus on photographs that showed destruction or civilians. In contrast, pro-Russian users tended to select photographs to show the destruction and suffering of civilians to highlight the humanitarian crisis for which the Ukrainian government was responsible. Furthermore, Bhandari et al. (2023) studied how both Ukraine and Russia employed text-enhanced photographs on social media platforms during the 2022 conflict. The analysis included 4,723 text-embedded photographs. The findings indicated that both sides used text-embedded photographs extensively to spread hate speech, extremist ideologies, and propaganda. The analysis revealed that more than half (56.43%) were labelled as hate, while fewer (43.57%) of these photographs were labelled as containing no hate.

El-Khouly (2022) analysed 618 journalistic articles from four American, Russian, Egyptian, and Saudi Arabian newspapers using the war in a military frame, then in a political and humanitarian frame. More than half of the coverage (55%) focused on logical appeals and then emotional appeals. More than two-thirds (67%) included news photos of the event, and more than a quarter (28%) used personal photos in the news stories. Most of these photos were related to military strikes and attacks launched by the Russian army in Ukraine. Musa and Mansoori (2023) examined how the Arab Gulf press presented the Russia-Ukraine conflict through content analysis of four Arabic-language newspapers

from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Kuwait, using a systematic random sample of 328 news stories. They found that most of the Gulf newspapers focused on the political framework of the conflict, while only Al Qabas, the Kuwaiti newspaper, framed the conflict in a military perspective and framed Ukrainians as a victim and Russia as an aggressive state. Interestingly, it appeared that while Saudi and Kuwaiti newspapers were pro-Ukrainian in their coverage, Qatari and Emirati newspapers were more pro-Russian.

Moreover, Omoera and Nwaoboli (2023) analysed 428 news stories published in two African daily online newspapers covering the Russian-Ukrainian war (The Sahara Reporters and Premium Times). The effect frame was the most used (44%), followed by the economic frame (20%), and the diplomatic frame was the least present in the African media coverage (7%). Overall, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine was covered in a negative way. Abdul Latif (2023) analysed 5,180 news stories that had been published on three international websites, directed in Arabic. The results showed that the military conflict frame dominated news coverage, e.g., where the parties to the conflict and Russian military progress in Ukraine were monitored. This was followed by the political frame. The economic consequences frame came in third place, and the humanitarian frame came last, as the state of suffering of Ukrainian civilians and the state of asylum and flight to neighbouring countries in Europe, America and others were monitored. Regarding visual elements, videos were the most prominent materials accompanying the news (52%), followed by photographs (32%).

2.3 Online News and the Dissemination of News Photographs and Images

The role of online news platforms in disseminating news photographs/images has revolutionised the way stories are presented and consumed (Mortensen 2011). In the digital age, these platforms serve as the primary gateway for audiences to access breaking news and visual narratives. Through mobile devices, online news portals deliver news almost instantaneously, making them an integral part of storytelling (Carcamo Ulloa et al. 2015). This immediacy allows global audiences to witness events unfolding, offering a first-hand visual perspective that transcends geographical boundaries. With just one click, audiences can immerse themselves in the visual documentation of events/news and connect to the stories.

Online news platforms provide journalists with a broad platform to exhibit their work. Within these platforms, they, subject to their editorial policies, have the opportunity to share their visual narratives with a wide audience, thereby magnifying the influence of their storytelling (Neumann & Fahmy 2012). These online news sites have reinforced prevailing social relations. Furthermore, the instantaneous nature of online news facilitates the viral spread of powerful and

impactful images. Compelling photographs/images shared through online news portals have the potential to become iconic representations of significant moments in history (Brennen & Brennen 2017). These images often transcend language barriers, evoking universal emotions and sparking discussions on social, political, and humanitarian issues. In other words, whether documenting a crisis, celebrating a triumph, or portraying the everyday lives of people around the world, news photographs disseminated via online platforms have the power to shape perceptions, mobilise action, and foster a collective global consciousness (Lough & Mortensen 2023).

3. Research Questions

Based on the above discussion on how selected Asian online news sites (China Daily (China), Dawn (Pakistan), The Times of India (India), Inquirer (the Philippines), The Japan Times (Japan), Khaleej Times (UAE), Malaysiakini (Malaysia)) cover the Russian-Ukrainian war and their perceptions, we aim to address the following key questions: How do the selected news sites differ in their use of visual (image) coverage of the 2022 Russian-Ukrainian conflict? Based on the war and peace journalism concept, what so these photographs/images emphasise?

4. Methods

4.1 Data Collection

This study analyses visual frames (photography) found in seven leading Asian news site outlets (named in Table 1) that covered the Russian-Ukrainian war of 2022, using the content analysis method (Hansen et al. 1998) and following the conceptual framework of war and peace journalism (Fahmy & Neumann 2012; Galtung 1986; Neumann & Fahmy 2012). Data were collected from stories (news) published on the selected news sites between May and July 2022. These news sites were selected based on their number of website visits to provide news for their readers in the region (including Arabs). These news sites proved to be an appropriate subject for examining the Russia-Ukraine war. The data were collected mainly during a five-month period (24 February – 26 June 2022) (from the fourth day after news breaking about the conflict to the date of the G7 Summit in Germany). This timeframe was chosen for several reasons: (1) it captures a critical phase of the conflict (the initial days following a significant event often witness heightened public engagement), (2) starting from the fourth day, it would ensure that the data encompass initial reactions and media narratives as the situation unfolds, (3) its contextual relevance to significant international event (G7 Summit). In addition, within this period, most news agencies had reported on the topic and had fostered intense online discussions.

RAZPRAVE IN GRADIVO REVIJA ZA NARODNOSTNA VPRAŠANJA 92 / 2024
M. ELARESHI, A. ZIANI, H. ALSRIDI, K. TAHAT Vizualizacija vojne in mirovne fotografije: primerjalna ...
DOI:10.2478/tdjes-2024-0009

Table 1: The news sites' sample sizes

News site	Country	Founded	Visits	No. of photographs	%
japantimes.co.jp	Japan	1897	3.3M	116	29.2
khaleejtimes.com	UAE	1978	14.7M	107	27.0
indiatimes.com	India	1999	265.4M	70	17.6
malaysiakini.com	Malaysia	1999	16.9M	37	9.3
inquirer.net	Philippine	-	13.5M	24	6.0
dawn.com	Pakistan	-	13.3M	23	5.8
chinadaily.com.cn	China	1981	4.6M	20	5.0
Total				397	100.0

Source: Own data.

In selecting the visuals, we used the respective search engines provided by each news site; we used the English language and searched for keywords, such as Russia-Ukraine war, Russian-Ukrainian war, Russian-Ukraine conflict, Russian-Ukrainian conflict, while focusing on editorial news content only. The search results from all news sites combined let to the retrieval of more than 1,529 news photographs/images. For transparency, we removed images that were related to other subjects, e.g., business, travel, etc. We selected visuals that had been created/posted within the above-mentioned timeframe. We further filtered the selection with criteria that excluded cartoons, graphics, repeated images, and we randomly chose image No. 1 for each news story. For example, some news sites use one image to accompany a story (the news), while others use more than one image or a repeated image for the same news story. On this basis, the main photo (photo 1) was chosen for each news story where more than one image was used. Here we must note that while identifying and processing the photographs/ images, some were unreadable by the MAXQDA software, as some news sites used an unusual type of image file to share their photographs. We used a third image processing programme (Adobe Photoshop) to convert them to readable files by data analysis software, resulting in a total of 397 photographs/images that were ultimately analysed.

4.2 Coding Items

To code the data (photos) from the selected news sites, the study devised a coding system and list of categories that allowed us to track how these news sites visualised the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. We used a single photograph as a unit of analysis, following Fahmy and Neumann's approach (2012) with certain modifications reflecting our specific aims. The approach was ideal for journalism research, as it revealed the visual representation of war and conflict on the news sites. Following this approach, each image was coded according to the following

categories:

- **News source:** refers to the source of the image from the news sites.

170

- **Regional (geographical) focus:** refers to the location in which the event took place. Subcategories include photographs visualised as occurring on Ukrainian territory (cities or geographic sphere), Russian territory (cities or geographic sphere), or elsewhere abroad (e.g., humanitarian conferences in countries of the world, or journalism conferences in the capitals of the world).
- **Ethnic focus:** refers to the focus of the action in the photo: the Russian minority in Ukraine (e.g., civilians and militants), Muslims (e.g., military, civilians) or other ethnic groups (e.g., volunteer foreign leaders).
- **Date:** tracks the development of the war during the entire time frame for a period of 5 months. This category was divided into five variables. Each represents a full month of news coverage, with the exception of February (21–28 February 2022) and June (1–26 June 2022).
- **Roles:** Based on the actions shown in the pictures, this category is divided into four different roles played by individuals: victim, warrior, negotiator, or protester (Neumann & Fahmy 2012).
  - Firstly, an example of victims would be refugees or displaced persons. This also includes photographs depicting subjects of destruction (e.g., aerial views of abandoned cities or ruined lands). Although these do not usually depict humans (performing certain 'roles'), we nonetheless considered them appropriate and worthy of analysis and categorise them as depictions of victimization.
  - Secondly, the warrior is defined as an individual who engages in violence and is therefore not likely to be seen as contributing to peace by a larger audience (e.g., volunteers on both sides, military leaders on both sides, pro-war protesters, or throwing stones at embassies).
  - Thirdly, negotiators are political and organisational leaders (potentially mediators) from countries other than Russia and Ukraine (e.g., UN Secretary-General, European, Arab, Chinese leaders, and any political figures). In cases where foreign leaders were in discussion with one of the parties to the conflict, we decided to identify them as negotiators because attempts at negotiation were present (e.g., a meeting between President Putin and French President Macron).
  - Finally, protesters were coded in situations where people protested peacefully against the war without harming bystanders or security forces (e.g., protesters in Europe, Asia). Based on these roles, we created two specific indices related to war journalism (victims and warriors) and peace journalism (protestors and negotiators). Note that each type consists of one frame aimed at the elite and one aimed at the people.
- **Age:** photographs were only considered for analysis when people appeared in them (thus excluding photographs that only showed destroyed infra-

structure or clouds of smoke, e.g., objective photographs). We specified the age group that dominated the event in the visual frame: children/ teens or adults. For example, if a group of Ukrainian refugees were photographed including children, we coded the photograph as focusing primarily on children (regardless of quantity or proportion of minors and adults).

- **Physical harm:** evaluates the extent to which the person(s) shown in the photo had been exposed to any physical harm. This was divided into three subcategories: not severe, severe, and most severe. The photographs were tagged as not severe when there was no apparent physical harm (e.g., people demonstrating against war). Photographs were marked as severe in cases where people had been hurt or seriously injured (for example, people with cuts, bleeding, or those who had suffered the loss of a limb). Finally, the most severe cases showed the dead or dead bodies being transported in body bags (e.g., at funerals or among rubble).

- **Emotional harm:** assesses the degree to which the person(s) in the photo shows any emotion by focusing only on the instances where emotion is intentionally minimised. Angle (close-ups, in particular) again helped define the type of emotion, for example, negative and positive emotions. Examples of negative emotions are anger, frustration, despair, sadness, etc.

4.3. Coder Reliability

In measuring reliability, two coders, one author and an academic researcher, were asked to check intercoder reliability, using a randomly selected sample size (N = 50) of the pictures and using Krippendorff's alpha (2019) for measurement. For all items, the rate of agreement ranged between α = 1.0 and 0.78 with an average reliability of 0.898 between variables, achieving acceptable reliability scores consistent with early studies (Table 2).

Table 2: Reliability alpha analysis results

Item	Alpha
News source	1.0
Regional focus	1.0
Ethnic focus	0.86
Date	1.0
Roles	0.85
Age	0.80
Physical harm	0.89
Emotional harm	0.78

Source: Own data.

5. Findings

5.1 The Frameworks of War and Peace Journalism

To begin with, the following images are examples representing the framework of war journalism and peace journalism (Figure 1). In selecting these images, we aimed to showcase contrasting narratives commonly associated with these journalistic frames. These specific images were chosen based on their alignment with the thematic elements, as mentioned in our broader analysis. In Photo 1, Ukrainian service members fire a howitzer M119 at a front line near the city of Bakhmut, Ukraine – the photograph portrays military action, conflict escalation, and armed forces engaged in combat.

Figure 1: War journalism vs. peace journalism framework

Photo 1 – An example of a war journalism frame.

Source: japantimes.co.jp, dated: 14-03-2022. Note: In this image, Ukrainian service members fire a howitzer M119 at a front line near the city of Bakhmut, Ukraine on Friday. © REUTERS.

Photo 2 – An example of a peace journalism frame.

Source: parties.chinadaily.com.cn 03-03-2022. Note: Photo shows a view of the talks between the Ukrainian and Russian delegations held in the Gomel region in Belarus on 28 Feb 2022. © Photo/ Xinhua.

Photo 2 is an example of peace journalism. In this picture, the Russian delegation and the Ukrainian delegation meet in the city of Minsk in the Republic of Belarus to negotiate an end to the conflict/war between the two. Furthermore, an analysis of the photographs published by the selected news sites revealed how they used photographs to visualise, present, and frame the war/conflict.

Table 3: Frequency of images of the Russian-Ukrainian war on Asian news sites

Category	China	Dawn	India	Inquirer	Japan	Khaleej	Malay	Total	%
Time frame									
February	3	4	34	0	10	19	5	75	18.9
March	11	9	29	6	29	32	16	132	33.2
April	3	5	7	3	28	23	6	75	18.9
May	1	3	0	4	27	18	3	56	14.1
June	2	2	0	11	22	15	7	59	14.9
Regional focus									
Ukrainian territory	12	20	64	23	102	94	34	349	87.9
Russian territory	2	0	0	0	1	2	1	6	1.5
Elsewhere	4	2	2	0	7	10	1	26	6.5
Ethnic focus									
Ukrainian civilians	6	4	29	0	30	36	12	117	46.1
Ukrainian military	1	3	16	9	30	25	9	93	42.1
Russian military	1	0	4	0	11	6	8	30	21.4
Foreign students	0	0	1	0	0	3	0	4	13.8
Russian minorities in Ukraine	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	4	57.1
Russian-Ukrainian delegation	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	3	0.8
Foreign volunteers for Ukraine	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1.5
Russian civilians	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	2.3
Turkish delegation	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0.9
Foreign volunteers for Russian	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0
Roles									
Victims	13	17	41	12	58	62	18	221	55.7
Warriors	4	5	22	11	46	34	18	140	35.2
Protestors	1	0	7	1	12	8	0	29	7.3
Negotiators	2	1	0	0	0	3	1	7	1.8
Age									
Adults	4	1	17	0	11	26	9	68	17.13
Children/Teens	2	2	10	0	12	14	3	43	10.8
Physical harm									
Not severe/no physical damage	6	3	25	0	21	36	5	96	86.5
Severe	0	0	2	0	5	3	3	13	11.7
Most severe	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	1.8
Emotional harm									
Negative	5	2	26	0	20	39	11	103	86.6
Positive	2	1	0	0	5	6	2	16	13.4

Source: Own data.

5.2 Time Frame

174

The results showed (Table 3) that the two news sites (The Japan Times and Khaleej Times) were the news sites most interested in covering the conflict during the analysed period, and the ones most closely tracking the development of the conflict (29.22% and 26.95%, respectively). The rate was followed by The Times of India (17.6%), while the coverage rate was proportional to the rest. In February, The Times of India and Khaleej Times dominated the war coverage (49%) compared to the other news sites. In fact, the Inquirer did not contain news of the conflict. March (33.2%) saw the highest coverage rate compared to other months.

The Times of India and Khaleej Times did so in February, and Khaleej Times, The Japan Times, and The Times of India dominated the coverage in March, while The Japan Times and Khaleej Times dominated in April. The China Daily, Malaysiakini and Dawn sites were dominant in covering the war, while the others were less interested in such coverage. This could be explained by the fact that this war was a surprise, and its results were unknown at the beginning.

Furthermore, the coverage rate decreased in subsequent periods (April to May) for almost all news sites, except The Japan Times and Dawn (in April), and The Japan Times and Inquirer (in May) compared to other news sites. What was striking was that The Times of India did not publish a single picture to do with the war in May and June. This decrease in visual coverage could have been caused by the news about the end of the student and foreign student crisis in Ukraine.

5.3 Regional Focus

Most of the photos analysed appeared to focus on Ukrainian territory (87%, n = 349), which shows a focus on the development of the war at the place of its occurrence. This increased the percentage of the war frame shown in visual coverage. The other news sites did not care about other places, for example, Russian territory (1.5%, n = 6) as a geographical framework, except China Daily, which devoted 10% of its visual coverage. It also showed a different geographical war framework, for example, elsewhere (6.5%, n = 26) most of them showed pictures of the negotiation sessions between the Russian and Ukrainian sides in Minsk city (Belarus) (Figure 1, Photo 2). The same goes for Khaleej Times, which allocated a few pictures as a framework for peace. It used photographs of Russian-Ukrainian negotiation sessions, as well as a few pictures of demonstrations against the war. China Daily also seemed to be slightly interested in showing Russian territory within the framework of peace, as it included pictures of Russian military and civilians helping Ukrainian refugees.

5.4 Ethnic Focus

The analysis indicated that this category mainly included Ukrainian military personnel and Ukrainian civilians. This confirms the interest of the analysed news sites in focusing on war events in the place where it occurred. The Japan Times, Khaleej Times, and The Times of India were among those who showed these two elements. In contrast, the Russian military was shown subtly by The Japan Times. There was no clear interest in showing other categories, such as foreign volunteers for Ukraine and foreign volunteers for Russia, despite the interest of international news sites and media in general in the participation of foreign volunteers.

175

5.5 Roles According to Press Coverage

It seems (Table 3) that the selected news sites curated an imbalanced visual coverage of the war frame (in total 90.9%) compared to peace frame (9.1%). For example, the role of warrior (55.7%, n = 221) and victim (35.2%, 140) were the dominant roles in the analysed images. Khaleej Times (n = 66), The Japan Times (n = 58), and The Times of India (n = 41) focused on victimised people, which represented the war frame. However, The Japan Times (n = 12) and Khaleej Times (n = 8) covered more protestors, which emphasised the peace frame. Khaleej Times (n = 3) also allocated some images to negotiations between Russia and Ukraine, whether these were held, within multiple rounds, in the city of Minsk (Belarus) or the Turkish city of Istanbul. Let us note that The Times of India, Inquirer, and The Japan Times, did not publish any images of the negotiations. This could deepen the war frame that emerged through their visual coverage.

5.6 The Age Category

Adults (61.3%) appeared most frequently in visual coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian war. This category was more prominent in Khaleej Times' and The Times of India' visual coverage (n = 26 and n = 17, respectively). Meanwhile, Khaleej Times (n = 14) and The Japan Times (n = 11) had the most visual coverage of children/teens. Interestingly, the Inquirer did not use any pictures of adults or children.

5.7 Physical Harm

The results showed that most of the visual coverage focused on this category was not severe and did not involve physical harm (24.2%). Khaleej Times (n = 36), The Times of India (n = 25), and The Japan Times (n = 21) used this category the most. Malaysiakini and Khaleej Times made more use of serious physical harm, which included pictures of dead people and bodies, compared to others.

5.8 Emotional Harm

176

In this category, we attempted to assess the extent to which the person(s) in the image showed any emotion (positive vs. negative), especially in those rare cases where emotion was clearly emphasised. For example, we looked at the image to determine the type of emotion (negative emotions could include anger, desperation, frustration, fear, etc., while positive emotions could include hope, happiness, confidence etc.). The analysis indicated that negative emotions (86.6%, n = 103) were dominant in almost all news sites except the Inquirer. In comparison to the other news sites, Khaleej Times (n = 39), The Times of India (n = 26), and The Japan Times (n = 20) were the ones that provided the most coverage of negative emotions surrounding the conflict.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

This study analyses the visual coverage of the 2022 Russian-Ukrainian conflict, focusing on Asian news sites (China Daily (China), Dawn (Pakistan), The Times of India (India), Inquirer (Philippines), The Japan Times (Japan), Khaleej Time (UAE), Malaysiakini (Malaysia)) and relying on the war and peace journalism frameworks (Fahmy and Neumann, 2012; Gouse et al., 2019; Neumann and Fahmy, 2012). We conducted a content analysis of images (n = 397) from seven leading Asian news sites. It offered a vital contribution to the literature on the visual coverage of topics, which so far has been little researched, especially on online news sites. Our main contribution lies in the analysis of images in terms of war and peace journalism frames, using the unique MAXQDA software. From a theoretical perspective, we expanded the understanding of framing theory by analysing visual frames. In this sense, we identified the visual narratives employed by these Asian news sites in covering a specific period in a conflict. We hope our findings will be adaptable for future visual studies.

In response to **RQ1**, which explored the variation in visual coverage over five months to understand whether the conflict was primarily characterised by war or peace journalism frames, the analysis indicated a difference in the degree of interest in war, whether in the amount of news published or even in the level of regularity of publishing news related to the event (as detailed in Table 3). In terms of time frame, the analysis revealed that the coverage of the war was most intense in March, with interest gradually declining in the subsequent months. This was likely due to the uncertainty and high-level developments that occurred in the early days of the war. The coverage decreased as the situation stabilised and became less volatile. This pattern is common in media coverage of conflicts, with initial intense interest followed by a decline as the situation unfolds.

For the regional focus of the war, most of the photographs focused on Ukrainian territories, indicating a strong emphasis on the geographical context of the conflict (**RQ2**). This aligns with the idea that the media often concentrate on

the location of the conflict itself (Gunter & Harrison 1998). Interestingly, some news sites included photographs of negotiation sessions in a different geographic context (Ryan 1973), suggesting a focus on peace efforts (Neumann & Fahmy 2012).

The ethnic focus of the analysed data revealed that Ukrainian civilians and military personnel were prominently featured in the photographs, highlighting the focus on those directly impacted by the war (Al-Rawi 2019). Russian military personnel received less attention, reflecting a tendency to highlight the plight of Ukrainians. This may be due to international sentiment favouring Ukraine in this conflict. The roles according to this coverage indicated a prevalence of the warrior and victim roles, which aligns with the war journalism framework (Oots & Wiegele 1986). This is consistent with the way conflicts are often depicted; with an emphasis on the military and the suffering of civilians (Papanikos 2022b; Quintanal et al. 2023; Tamilina 2022). The negotiator and protester roles, associated with peace journalism, received less coverage, reflecting a greater focus on the conflict itself than on peace. This could be linked to news sites tending to prioritise the sensational or dramatic aspects of a story (Arbaoui et al. 2020), or it could be that negotiation processes often occur behind closed doors with limited media access and visibility (Kew & John 2008).

In terms of age, most of the visual coverage emphasised adults, possibly due to the prevalence of adult civilians and military personnel in conflict zones. Children/teens were less highlighted compared to adults, suggesting variations in the portrayal of different age groups on news sites. Visual coverage focused on the category of adults as part of its interest in the suffering of civilians and the category of Ukrainian civilians and military personnel (Fahmy & Kim 2008). This could be because adults may be more actively involved in various aspects of conflict. The availability of images featuring adults vs. children may also play a role in shaping visual coverage. For example, it may be easier for journalists to access and capture images of adults and military personnel in conflict settings (Makhortykh & Sydorova 2017).

The parameter of physical harm indicated that most photographs depicted physical harm that was not severe, which often included scenes of civilians affected by the conflict (Dawkins 2006). Photographs of more severe physical harm, such as casualties and deaths, were less common. This aligns with the typical focus of the media on human suffering associated with conflicts, which can evoke strong emotional responses. Negative emotions were depicted more frequently, highlighting the distress and anguish associated with the conflict. This is in line with how media coverage often highlights the emotional toll of war on civilians and soldiers (Neumann & Fahmy 2012).

The analysis also revealed that The Japan Times, Khaleej Times, and The Times of India tended to curate their visual coverage within the framework of war journalism, while China Daily, Inquirer, and Malaysiakini tended to veer their visual coverage towards the peace journalism framework.

178

The comprehensive analysis of the visual representation of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict on leading Asian news sites contributes significantly to understanding conflict portrayal through the lenses of war and peace journalism. However, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations to the analysis. First, the research focused mainly on the content analysis of seven Asian news sites during a specific period in the conflict. Although this approach provides valuable information on the perspectives of war and peace journalism, it does not consider potential shifts in news priorities or editorial decisions that might affect coverage intensity or frame choices over time. Second, the study highlights the predominance of war journalism frames across the examined news sites, focusing on aspects such as geographical emphasis, ethnic portrayal, and role characterisation. However, the analysis does not thoroughly investigate the nuanced cultural or political factors that could influence editorial decisions in diverse Asian regions, which could impact frame choices. Third, the study's emphasis on age groups and harm depiction offers insight into how conflict is visually represented. However, it lacks a thorough exploration of the ethical implications of portraying harm in media and the potential impact on audience perceptions and their emotional responses. Finally, while identifying the prevalence of war journalism, the study's assessment of elements of peace journalism is limited. A more comprehensive analysis could reveal the reasons behind the prominence or lack of elements of peace journalism and their potential influence on the reader's perspective. The scope and analysis approach of the study could benefit from a deeper exploration of nuanced regional influences, ethical considerations in conflict portrayal, and a more comprehensive evaluation of the elements of peace journalism.

In conclusion, this study presented a quantitative contribution to visual communication research into coverage of conflicts, particularly in the context of war and peace journalism. Using the unique MAXQD software, it measured how certain leading news sites in Asia (China Daily (China), Dawn (Pakistan), The Times of India (India), Inquirer (Philippines), The Japan Times (Japan), Khaleej Times (UAE), and Malaysiakini (Malaysia)) visualise and represent the 2022 Russian-Ukrainian conflict, with a focus on the geographical location of the conflict, the ethnic groups affected, and the roles of warriors and victims. One of key gaps in existing research is the limited discussion on visual coverage from online news sites, especially based in Asia. As such, our study fills this gap using visual narratives employed by these news sites.

Furthermore, using the MAXQDA software for content analysis allowed us to examine 397 images in detail, providing insight into the perspective on the portrayal of the conflict by Asian news sites. It also shed light on several aspects of visual coverage, including variations in coverage intensity over time and regional and ethic focuses. For example, we noted a decline in coverage intensity as the conflict progressed. Thirdly, our study identified variations in the portrayal of different age groups, with adults prominently featured compared to children, suggesting potential biases among the analysed news sites. Further-

more, the coverage emphasised the negative emotional and physical aspects of the conflict. Although some news sites included elements of peace journalism, it was less prominent. These findings reflect common patterns in media coverage of conflicts and the diverse approaches used by different news outlets to portray such events.

179

This study offers several implications from its findings. Theoretically, our work extends the understanding of framing used by online news sites using images only to identify visual narratives employed by Asian news sites in covering a specific period of conflict. This provides new insights into the framing of conflicts by these news sites and contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of online news sites in shaping the public perception of conflicts.

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180

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Acknowledgements