

## Media Framing Of the Russia-Ukraine War by Tass and Ukrinform during the First Month of the Invasion

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### Abstract

When two countries go to war, the media in these countries also go to war through the use of framing in content production. This study focuses on the media framing of the Russia-Ukraine war by the TASS and Ukrinform during the first month of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. A descriptive content analysis guided by framing and political economy theories was used. A coding sheet was used as the instrument of data. A total of 1929 reports were identified during the first month of the invasion. Findings revealed that the Russian News Agency framed the conflict in Ukraine as a 'special military operation,' but did not make the 'operation' a media agenda. This was reflected in the low Average Daily Frequency (ADF) of 9 reports. On the other hand, the Ukrainian News Agency, Ukrinform framed the operation as a 'war' or 'invasion' of Ukraine. The Ukrainian News Agency made the operation a media agenda, this was reflected in the high Average Daily Frequency (ADF) of 53 reports. Further findings revealed that the dominant frame employed by the TASS and Ukrinform News Agencies is the attacks on civilians, residential areas and casualties. This was to expose the atrocities committed by the enemy (Russian or Ukrainian government) to either win sympathy or condemnation among supporters. Based on these findings, this study recommends media independence during wars. This will give even the state-owned news agencies the right to employ realist frames which could help save lives during wars and not political economy frames.

**Keywords:** Media framing, Russia-Ukraine war, TASS, Ukrinform, conflict, Media war

### 1. Introduction

Framing is an important media tool in shaping audience perception of societal realities, especially when there is a direct enemy. As a powerful media tool, framing can be used by the media during war or conflict situations to achieve certain motivated behaviours. Noted that the media during conflict situations is either initiating and escalating conflict, or de-escalating conflict [1]. The media achieves this through the use of powerful concepts and constructs during media production such as the angle of the report employed, the headline construction, word formation, choice of pictures, and even the prominence and frequency given to conflict issues. While these elements during the First World War (WW1, 1914-1919) and the Second World War, (WW2, 1939-1945) were direct tools of propaganda against either the Western bloc or the Eastern – Warsaw bloc, the creation of the League of Nations which later crystallised into the United Nations (UN) played a crucial role in restoring global peace. During the world wars including the Cold War (CW, 1949-1991), the media was an active weapon in the hands of its owners.

Interestingly, for decades, the Russian-dominated Eastern bloc

(Soviet Union) grew into one of the world's most powerful and influential states in terms of technology, military might and the media even after the Soviet Union dissolved following the collapse of the communist government in 1991. noted that since the collapse of the communist government with Russia as the strongest elder brother, countries such as the **Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Lithuania, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Albania, Croatia, Montenegro and North Macedonia have joint the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to the detriment of Russia [2]. And Russia under the control of President Vladimir Putin Knows the strategic position Ukraine stands in its national security and as such, it has battled to keep Ukraine, its beloved and prodigal brother from what President Putin sees as the evil of NATO. Putin had stressed Russia's position on Ukraine joining NATO in a televised speech, "If Ukraine was to join NATO it would serve as a direct threat to the security of Russia".**

A few days later, 24<sup>th</sup> of February, to be precise, **President Putin in a pre-dawn TV address declared Russia could not feel**

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safe with the development of modern Ukraine. Noted that immediately, airports and military headquarters were attacked, and then tanks and troops rolled in from Russia, Russia-annexed Crimea and its ally Belarus [3]. The devastating attack on Ukraine, a democracy with 44 million people continues with the southern port city, Kherson, already under the control of the Russian government. From when the first invasion speech was made by Putin and the devastating attacks that followed on air, land and sea, the Russian and Ukrainian media were busy watching, framing and reporting issues on the Russia-Ukraine war as events unfold.

The Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson, Maria Zakharova in an interview with a Sky News reporter, concurred when she stressed that the media employs different frames in reporting the Russia-Ukraine war. She had refused to accept the publication on the Russian missile attacks on Freedom Square in Kharkiv that the published reports were by Ukrainian fighters. Waghorn further posits that there is a variation between what 'we' see and what is on Russian official state media. This study explores the Media framing of the Russia-Ukraine War by the Russian News Agency, *Telegrafnoye Agentstvo Sovetskogo* (TASS) and Ukrainian News Agency, (*Ukrinform*) during the first month of the invasion. Anchoring on the framing theory, this study examines the kinds of frames used, the dominant frames used and the implications of using such frames during the first month of the invasion. This is to bring into empirical limelight through content analysis the framing of the Russia-Ukraine war from two perspectives; the Russian media which is communist in nature, and the Ukrainian media which is democratic in nature.

### Statement of the Problem

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has passed through a filter of media propaganda. The Russian government has taken extraordinary measures by stemming social media and threatening to shut down independent media houses. The media has been told to use only government sources and to avoid certain words to describe the conflict in their reports. Noted that such measures are an opportunity for the Russian Government to control the picture of the war in the minds of its citizens [4]. Both the Russian and Ukrainian media are responsible for the production of public opinion, the contribution of propaganda, and the maintenance of antagonism via psychological warfare through the use of different concepts and constructs. This study identified a knowledge gap in previous research on Media framing of the Russian-Ukrainian War by TASS (*Telegrafnoye Agentstvo Sovetskogo*) and *Ukrinform* (Ukrainian National News Agency). Previous studies have addressed the issues of the media as a tool for either escalating or deescalating conflict the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, the role of the media in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, and the economic impact of the conflict on Ukraine, – an indication of knowledge a gap on media framing of the current February 2022, Russia-Ukraine invasion by the two leading media agencies in Russia (*TASS*) and Ukraine (*Ukrinform*) [1, 5-7]. This study is crucial to provide an understanding of the role of the media in reporting war especially when the war is between two governments or nations of the reporting media agencies.

### Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the differences in frames used during the Russian-Ukrainian War by *TASS* and *Ukrinform* during the first month of the invasion.
2. To examine the dominant frames used during the Russian-Ukrainian War by *TASS* and *Ukrinform* during the first month of the invasion.
3. To discuss the implication of the use of these frames during the Russian-Ukrainian War by *TASS* and *Ukrinform* during the first month of the invasion.

### Literature Review

The media has become an integral part of all human activities including war. The power of the media to use different frames – concepts and constructs in information communication has placed the media as an information oracle that reflects and shapes a given society. Sees the media as a mirror of events in society and the world [8]. He added that although the media faithfully reflects society, the angle and direction of the mirror are decided by others. And posit that the media achieves this through the use of different content frames to reflect societal events [9, 10]. Noted that framing is an important element in organising media contents through selection, emphasis, exclusion, and collaboration in order to provide desired context so as to achieve a desired public behaviour [11]. Further added: Framing essentially involves selection and salience [12]. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described (p. 52).

Media framing does not exist in a void but in a given society. It gives room for societal events and issues to be framed by journalists in order to achieve certain desired behaviours from the public. One important societal event that has relegated even the deadly novel coronavirus pandemic is the 2022 full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. Although history has it that the Russo-Ukraine war started in 2014 between Russia and Ukraine over the status of Crimea and parts of Donbas, internationally recognised as part of Ukraine, the media especially the Russian and the Ukrainian media have also been the frontline of framing and reporting the Russian annexation of Crimean, and the war in Donbas. The media has also been active in reporting the naval incidents, the cyber-warfare and the political tension between these soviet brothers turned frenemies after the collapse of the Soviet government in 1991. From late 2021 following the Russo-military build-up on the Russo-Ukraine border and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24th, 2022 saw both government-owned media in Russia and Ukraine taking sides. The Russo-Ukrainian 2022 invasion has not only repeated history but has gone beyond the media war of the WWI, WWII and the Cold War by being one of the modern wars to have received global attention on real-time analysis, accompanied by the use of drone journalism, satellite journalism and citizen journalism. While an ideal media is guided by the principle of objectivity, fairness and balance, the canons suffer under media ownership and control.

Marxism argued that those who own the media also control in-

formation production. That is, media owners or the bourgeois instruct editors and journalists to frame issues and put across messages to the public. The same techniques of media propaganda were used as direct tools among the enemies at war. noted that during conflict situations, for instance, the world wars (WWI and II), the Cold War and presently the Russo-Ukrainian war, the media has and is, playing two key roles [13]. The media may decide to take an active part in the conflict resulting in an increase in the conflict or staying independent and contributing to the resolution of the conflict. During the Soviet-NATO wars in the past, the media was seen as a tool of war. State-censored Soviet media such as Radio Moscow, TASS, etc. like the West also were propaganda tools engaging in antagonistic psychological warfare between their enemies.

After more than thirty years of the collapse of the Soviet government followed by the advancement in formation and communication technology (ICT) of the 21st century, media audiences across the world have become more active players in information production and sharing. While this is true in most democracies including Ukraine, its elder brother and neighbour has continued to gag its media, especially information on the 2022 Russia-Ukraine war. noted that the federal organization (Roskomnadzor) which is responsible for the control and censoring of Russian media issued a statement informing the Russian media that “they are obliged to only use information and data they have received from official Russian sources” [14]. Further added that independent UN experts posit that on March 11, 2022, Russia’s implementation of a “punitive ‘fake war news’ law is an alarming move by the government to gag and blindfold an entire population” from the realities of the war [15]. The Russian government went ahead to block Facebook and other websites and passed a law that imposed a prison term of up to 15 years for spreading fake news about the military. The Russian media gag saw the Russian government using frames such as, “military operation” rather than a “war” or “invasion,” as used by most western media including Ukrainian media. Law and Bergengruen further added that in some cases, the Russian news reports have distorted what is happening on the ground in Ukraine. For instance, they noted that the Russian Defence Ministry’s claims that any statements that Russian aircraft, helicopters, and armoured vehicles have been lost are “complete lies,” contrary to international reports. These are clear indications that the picture and narrative of the war by the government-owned Russian and Ukrainian media are different.

### Empirical Review

Several studies have been conducted on media and conflict, the Russian-Ukrainian tension and media framing of conflict situations of 2014 but, a dearth of know knowledge exist on how government-owned media agencies in Russia (TASS) and Ukraine (Ukrinform) framed the 2022 Russian-Ukrainian war. Conducted a study framing the Ukraine crisis: A comparison between talk show debates on Russian and German television [16]. The aim is to examine how Russian and German shows framed the Ukraine conflict and to what extent constructive and destructive frames were employed. Qualitative content analysis was used to collect and analysed 20 shows (10 Russian and 10 German) from 2013 to 2015. The finding from the study revealed that both

Russia and Germany used different frames on both the situation in Ukraine and the international tensions between Russia and the West. Furthermore, the research revealed that a large part of the debates is destructive in nature with more constructive frames employed by the Russian and German media.

Similar, conducted a study on agenda divergence in a developing conflict: Quantitative evidence from Ukrainian and Russian TV newsfeeds [17]. The researchers introduced quantitative evidence of agenda divergence between the Russian and Ukrainian media in the course of the Ukrainian conflict from 2013 to 2014. 45,000 messages were collected and analysed from online newsfeeds from one Russian and one Ukrainian TV channel. The study revealed that both media (Russian and Ukrainian) performed topic modelling, qualitative analysis, salience assessment, and mapped the evolution of attention on media topics. Furthermore, findings revealed that the two selected media channels produced different agenda sequences.

Carried out a study related to visual coverage of the Ukraine crisis on Twitter [18]. The aim of the study was to examine how three Moscow-based journalists, Shaun Walker and Alec Luhn, and a photojournalist, Paul Hansen employed professionalism and personalisation in presenting different visual narratives on the conflict in Ukraine on their Twitter handles. Content analysis was used to gather and analyse data from 1 July to 31 August 2014 after an International passenger plane MH17 was shot down in Donetsk. A total of 2,345 tweets containing a visual image, such as a photograph, cartoon or screenshot were analysed. Findings revealed, personalised reporting that allowed for more opinion and displays of emotion than are typically acceptable in traditional news reporting. Further findings revealed the coexistence of the traditional media’s visualisation of conflict driven by social media logic. One of the loopholes in the study is the absence of a theoretical framework. With a lot of media theories at the disposal of the researchers, anchoring this study on one would have given the study more empirical flesh.

Similarly, in their study on naturalising the New Cold War: The geopolitics of framing the Ukrainian conflict in four European newspapers focused on the role of the news media in the conflict by examining the visual and textual frames [19]. The sample units used for the study were *Die Welt*, *Dagens Nyheter*, *Helsingin Sanomat* and *The Guardian* between February 2014 and February 2015. The finding from the study revealed that frames were employed to contribute to the legitimization of European Union policies, which are premised upon supporting the Ukrainian government in its military campaign in eastern Ukraine and placing responsibility for the conflict onto Russia. Furthermore, the researcher argued that the news framing eventually contributed to the naturalisation of the ‘new cold war’ as geopolitical rationality, orienting and legitimising foreign policy in Europe.

Conducted a study on the Crimea and the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict. The main aim of the study is to examine the historic, demographic, legal, political and military-strategic background, its similarities and differences from other *frozen* conflicts on the periphery of the former Soviet Union, the roles of the Rus-

sian Federation, the Republic of Ukraine, and the Republic of Crimea. Although Bebler tried to give some key issues in the Crimea and Russian-Ukrainian conflict, a well-structured research would have helped to pass the research message easily. This study would have gained more academic flesh if the researcher had added research methodology and maybe a theoretical framework.

Focusing on news media, conducted a study on Russian and the news media in Ukraine: A case of ‘soft power’ [20]. Quantitative and qualitative research approaches were used to collect and analysed 14 print media in 2010 and 28 editorial staff in Moscow and Kyiv in 2011. Finding from the study indicated that news providers in Ukraine with Russian shareholders or partners tend to be soft in their criticism of Russia comparable to news providers without ties with Moscow. Further findings revealed diversity in the Russian news production structure. While some are pro-Kremlin, others were commercially driven. While Szostek has done good bidding in addressing the research problem. A well-defined methodology would have taken care of the unit of analysis, content category, method of data collection and analysis and justifications for using the research approaches. [6]. Carried out a related study on the non-state actors in the Russian-Ukrainian war of 2014. Document analysis was used to bring into empirical limelight the role of non-state actors in the Russian-Ukrainian war. Findings from the study indicated complexity in the Russian-Ukrainian war which is characterized by the active participation of non-state actors, creating a hotbed for hate and deadly struggle over geostrategic, economic and security interests. The study concluded on the ground that both Russia and Ukraine should capitalize on the influence of non-state actors such as the media, academia, religious groups, organized crime, war militias, NGOs and GONGOs, and the Ukrainian diaspora to end the war. Although the study is more of a concept paper, the researcher should have provided justification for the study. This would have trickled down to the entire framework of the study including the method of data collection and analysis. Furthermore, media framing can appear in different forms.; also presented different perspectives on media coverage of the 2014 Ukraine war, fake news, media framing and the Russian media coverage of the war in Ukraine with a knowledge gap on 2022 Russia-Ukraine war [22-25]..

### Theoretical Framework

When two countries go to war, the government-owned media of the two countries also go to war with each other through the

kind of frames they employ. This study is theoretically woven with the political economy theory of the media and the framing theory. The political economy theory of the media justifies that media ‘ownership and control’ are strong tools in shaping media production of contents, while the framing theory justifies the selection of specific ‘concepts and constructs’ by media practitioners to achieve certain desired behaviours. The news media or the cultural or creative industry occupies a central role in the society it stands on. Posits that to understand the media’s role in society, it is essential to understand the relationships between media power and state power, as well as the media’s relationships with other economic sectors [26]. In light of the Russian-Ukrainian war, *TASS* and *Ukrinform* are media agencies of the two countries at war, Russian and Ukraine. One of the core tenets of the theory is, ‘he who pays the piper, dictates the tone’ that is, since *TASS* and *Ukrinform* are owned and controlled by the two countries at war, these media organisations are ideological states apparatuses that have the powers to construct conflict realities for public consumption. And one of the ways they achieve this is through framing. Noted that framing gives media staff for instance, *TASS* and *Ukrinform* the opportunity to select some aspects of a perceived reality on the war and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation for the item described [13]. This could be achieved not only by selecting and placing importance on the realities of the war as it unfolds but, how words are used in their reportage of the war.

### 2. Methodology

This study employed a descriptive research approach. A purposive research technique was used to sample two government-owned news agencies, *TASS* and *Ukrinform*. Since the war is between Russia and Ukraine, the choice of the Russian *TASS* and the Ukrainian *Ukrinform* was based on the fact that they are owned and controlled by the government and they are also active players in reporting the conflict. Quantitative content analysis was used through a carefully designed coding sheet by the researchers to collect data on the media framing of the Russian-Ukrainian war by *TASS* and I during the first month of the invasion, 24 February to 23 March 2022. The Unit of analysis of the study is straight news. Data for the study were collected through ‘keyword(s)’ search on the google search engine and the website archives of *TASS* and *Ukrinform*. The sourced reports were PDFed and save in two folders titled, the *TASS* data folder and the *Ukrinform* data folder.

SN	Frame categories	Conceptualisation
1	Humanitarian oriented frames	These are reports that centred on the vulnerable people in the war. they are reports that are oriented towards providing assistance to civilians population suffering from the war such as food, water shelter, health care and fleeing for safety.
2	Attacks on civilians, residential areas and causalities frames	These are reports that showed attacks on civilians, and residential or non-military facilities such as residential houses, schools, hospitals, and civic areas. These are reports also on dead, wounded and victims.
3	Attacks on military facilities	These are reports that are centred on attacks on military facilities such as military personnel, military dwellings, barracks, and weaponry

4	Negotiations/talks oriented frames	These are reports that focused on achieving agreement through discussion/talk to end the war.
5	Solidarity oriented frames	These are reports that focused on individuals, groups, organisations or countries identifying with either Russia or Ukraine. These reports also showed material, and non-material support – donation of weapons, and other supplies.
6	Sanction oriented frames	These are reports that centred on penalizing any of the parties in the war. These reports fall under, economic, diplomatic, military, sports, organisation and individual sanctions.
7	Law and policy-oriented frames	These are principles of behaviour, conduct and law enacted by any of the governments regarding the war. They include reports on curfews and forced conscription.
8	Success-oriented frames	These are reports that narrate the successes of either Russia or Ukraine during the war.
9	Economic impact frames	These are reports that focused on the economic impact of the war among the war parties, including the global communities.
10	Call-for-help oriented frames	These are reports calling for individuals, organisations and countries to help any of the parties in the war (Russia or Ukraine).
11	NATO oriented frames	These are reports that focused on NATO membership, preparedness and drills to support and protect member countries from external attack.
12	Surrender oriented frames	These are reports that calling on any of the parties in the war to surrender or show people surrendering.
13	No flight zone oriented frames	These are reports calling for a no flight zone in Ukraine and reports generally on issues relating to no flight zone.
14	Human rights violations	These are reports that talk about human rights, human rights violations and investigations in the war - hostage taking, human shields, kidnapping, and war crime investigation.
15	Evacuation/migration oriented frames	These are reports on movement/relocation of people from one place to another due to the war – movement to safer grounds.
16	Weapons of mass destruction	These are reports that showed the use or possibility of using nuclear, biological or chemical weapons.
17	Fake news/call for media coverage of the war	These are reports denouncing claims, reports and statements, false reports and calling on the media to cover the war with professionalism.
18	Cyberspace attack frames	These are reports on attempts by hackers, governments or organisations to damage or destroy a computer network or system.
19	Condemnation and blame oriented frames	These are reports that express strong disapproval, accusation and criticism of an individual, organisation, or government during the war.
20	EU membership frames	These are reports on EU membership – how to become a member, application for membership, and general knowledge on the operations.
21	Withdrawal frames	These are reports showing any of the parties in the war redrawing from the war, or a call for any of the parties to withdraw from the war.
22	Advancement oriented frames	These are reports showing progress/gaining grounds by either Russian or the Ukrainian military.
23	Dependency on Russia energy	These are reports that focused on the dependency on Russian energy.
24	Looting frames	These are reports that showed the military or civilians stealing/breaking into stores for supplies.
25	Prisoners of war frames	These are reports of either Russian or Ukrainian combatants/military that have been captured by either Russian or Ukrainian governments.
26	Release from captivity oriented frames	These are reports that showed the release of hostages, or prisoners of war either by either the Russian or Ukrainian governments.
27	Rally/protest oriented frames	These are reports showing mass movements of people on the streets or communities condemning or supporting either the Russian or Ukrainian governments during the war.

28	Mercenaries oriented frames	These are reports showing the involvements or recruitments of individuals – private military contractors by either of by the Russian or Ukrainian governments for personal gains.
29	State award frames	These are reports that showed individuals or organisations being bestowed with gifts, medals, and decorations specially on the basis merit or need due their special contributions during the war.
30	Revealing military strategies	These are reports that showed individuals or organisations exposing or collaborating with the enemy.
31	Reconstruction/rebuilding oriented frames	These are reports focused on plans and measured for rebuilding of countries affected during the war.
32	Ceasefire oriented frames	These are reports to stop the fighting or order to allow discussions/talks on peace.
33	Justification of the invasion	These are reports on indicating the reasons for the war either by the Russian or Ukrainian governments.
34	Disposal of corpses	These are reports on dead bodies and burial rites during the war.
35	Asylum oriented frames	These are reports on asylum, individuals seek for refuge and the discourses around asylum.
36	Defending mother land frames	These are reports showing individual, and organisations sacrificing their lives or resources to defend their lands from enemies.
37	Others	These are reports that did not fall into any of the above mentioned categories.

**Table 1: Conceptualisation of Frame Categories**

Frame categories for the study were carefully designed by the researchers to answer the research objectives of the study. The content categories for the study were predefined while some frame

variables were modified after reading reports on the war from the two selected news agencies. This is to ensure reliability in the instrument of data collection.

### Presentation of the Findings

S/N	Frame Categories	TASS (%)	ADF	Ukrinform (%)	ADF	Total (%)
1	Humanitarian oriented frames	13(0.67)	9	64(3.31)	53	77(3.99)
2	Attacks on civilians, residential areas and casualties frames	48(2.48)		481(24.98)		529(27.42)
3	Attacks on military facilities	11(0.57)		199(10.31)		210(10.88)
4	Negotiations/talks oriented frames	47(2.43)		78(4.04)		125(6.48)
5	Solidarity oriented frames	25(1.29)		115(5.96)		140(7.25)
6	Sanction oriented frames	5(0.25)		77(3.99)		82(4.25)
7	Law and Policy-oriented frames	13(0.67)		18(0.93)		31(1.60)
8	Success-oriented frames	8(0.41)		125(6.48)		133(6.89)
9	Economic impact frames	0(0)		16(0.82)		16(0.82)
10	Call-for-help oriented frames	0(0)		23(1.19)		23(1.19)
11	NATO oriented frames	13(0.67)		14(0.72)		27(1.39)
12	Surrender oriented frames	0(0)		6(0.31)		6(0.31)
13	No flight zone oriented frames	0(0)		44(2.28)		44(2.28)
14	Human rights violations	26(1.34)		77(3.99)		103(5.33)
15	Evacuation/migration oriented frames	31(1.60)		70(3.62)		101(5.23)
16	Weapons of mass destruction	13(0.67)		62(3.21)		75(3.88)
17	Fake news/call for media coverage of the war	1(0.05)		7(0.36)		8(0.41)
18	Cyberspace attacks frames	1(0.05)		7(0.36)		8(0.41)

19	Condemnation and blame oriented frames	4(0.20)	19(0.98)	23(1.19)
20	EU membership frames	3(0.15)	11(0.57)	14(0.72)
21	Withdrawal frames	0(0)	14(0.72)	14(0.72)
22	Advancement oriented frames	0(0)	38(1.96)	38(1.96)
23	Dependency on Russia energy	0(0)	1(0.05)	1(0.05)
24	Looting frames	0(0)	2(0.10)	2(0.10)
25	Prisoner of war frames	0(0)	7(0.36)	7(0.36)
26	Release from captivity oriented frames	0(0)	4(0.20)	4(0.20)
27	Rally/protest oriented frames	0(0)	15(0.77)	15(0.77)
28	Mercenaries oriented frames	0(0)	9(0.46)	9(0.46)
29	State award frames	0(0)	3(0.15)	3(0.15)
30	Revealing military strategies	0(0)	6(0.31)	6(0.31)
31	Reconstruction/rebuilding oriented frames	0(0)	5(0.25)	5(0.25)
32	Ceasefire frames	0(0)	1(0.05)	1(0.05)
33	Justification of the invasion	0(0)	1(0.05)	1(0.05)
34	Disposition of corpses	0(0)	1(0.05)	1(0.05)
35	Asylum oriented frames	0(0)	1(0.05)	1(0.05)
36	Defending mother land frames	0(0)	8(0.41)	8(0.41)
37	Others	10(0.51)	28(1.45)	38(1.96)
<b>Total</b>		<b>272(14.1)</b>	<b>1657(85.8)</b>	<b>1929(100)</b>

Source: Content analysis 2022

**Table 2: The Different Frames Used by TASS and Ukrinform**

Table two above shows the different types of frames used in by the TASS and Ukrinform during the invasion. Table two revealed a total of 1929(100%) reports were identified from both news agencies. The Ukrinform had more reports on the invasion which stood at 1657(85.9%) while TASS had 272(14.1%) reports. The table also revealed that Average Daily Frequency (ADF) of reports for Ukrinform stood at 53 while TASS had 9 ADF of reports. Furthermore, the table also revealed that 36 media frames were employed by the Ukrinform while TASS employed 16 frames during the war. However, while most of the frames employed by both media agencies were similar, Ukrinform employed additional 20 unique frames in the coverage of

the war which were the economic impact frame 16(0.82%), call-for-help frame 23(1.19%), surrender oriented frame 6(0.31%), no flight zone oriented frame 44(2.28%), withdrawal frame 14(0.72%), advancement oriented frame 38(1.96%), dependency on Russian energy 1(0.05%), looting frame 2(0.10%), prisoners of war 7(0.36%), releases from captivity oriented frame, 4(0.20%), rally/protest oriented frame 15(0.77%), mercenaries oriented frame 9(0.46%), state award frame 3(0.15%), revealing military strategies 6(0.31%), reconstruction/rebuilding oriented frame, 5(0.25%), ceasefire frame 1(0.05%), justification of the invasion 1(0.05%), disposition of corpses 1(0.05%), asylum oriented frame 1(0.05%), and defending mother land 8(0.41%).

S/N	Frame Categories	TASS (%)
1	Attacks on civilians/residential areas and casualties frames	48(2.5)
2	Negotiations/talks oriented frames	47(2.4)
3	Solidarity oriented frames	25(1.3)
<b>Total</b>		<b>120(6.2)</b>
		<i>Ukrinform (%)</i>
1	Attacks on civilians/residential areas and casualties frames	481(24.9)
2	Attacks on military facilities	199(10.3)
3	Success oriented frames	125(6.5)
<b>Total</b>		<b>805(41.7)</b>

Source: Content analysis 2022

**Table 3: The Dominant Frames**

Table three above shows the dominant frames employed by the TASS and Ukrinform news agencies during the war. Table revealed that the Ukrainian News Agency, Ukrinform had the highest number of dominant frames which stood at 805 (41.7%) while the Russian News Agency had 120 (6.2%) reports on the war. Attacks on civilians, residential areas and casualties frames were the dominant frame in both the Ukrinform and TASS news

agencies which stood at 481(24.9%) and 48(2.5%) respectively followed by the attacks on military facilities 199(10.3%) on Ukrinform and negotiations/talks oriented frames 47(2.4%) on TASS. The table also revealed success oriented frames having 125(6.5%) on Ukrinform and solidarity oriented frames having 25(1.3%) on the TASS news agency.

S/N	Frame Categories	TASS (%)	Implication
1	Attacks on civilians, residential areas and casualties frames	48(2.5)	To show the atrocity committed by the Ukrainian government.
2	Negotiation/talks oriented frames	48(2.5)	To show the desire for mutual agreement to end the war.
3	Solidarity oriented frames	25(1.3)	To identify the enemies and friends or enemies of the Russian government.
		Ukrinform (%)	Implication
1	Attacks on civilians, residential areas and casualties frames	481(24.9)	To show the atrocity committed by the Russian government.
2	Attack on military facilities	199(10.3)	To warn the Russian government of the capabilities of the Ukrainian military.
3	Success oriented frames	125(6.5)	To show the Russian government that Ukrainian government is winning the war.

Source: Content analysis 2022

**Table 4: The Implication of Dominant Frames**

Table four above shows the implications of the dominant frames employed by the Ukrinform and TASS news agencies. The implications of employing the attacks on civilians, residential areas and casualties frames as the dominant frames by the Ukrinform and TASS is to show the atrocity committed by the Ukrainian or Russian government on civilians, residential areas and the casualties to the world. The use of attack on military facilities frames used by the Ukrinform is to warn the Russian government of the capabilities of the Ukrainian military to defend their lands and the success oriented frame is to show the Russian government that the Ukrainian government is really winning the war. The use of the negotiation/talks oriented frames by the TASS news agency implies the desire for mutual agreement to end the war while the solidarity oriented frame is to reveal the enemies and friends/enemies of the Russian government.

### 3. Discussion of Findings

#### *The Different Frames Used by the TASS and Ukrinform*

Similarities and differences exist in frames employed by TASS and Ukrinform news agencies. The study revealed that the frequency of reports on the war by TASS is low compared to that of Ukrinform which was very high. The different frames and frequency use is embedded in the argument of the framing theory. Argued that the framing theory gives media the editorial independence to organise media content through the election, emphasis, exclusion and collaboration in order to provide desired context so as to shape public opinion [12, 13]. The Kremlin choice of the omnipresence frame, ‘special military operation’ in Ukraine, the prohibition of independent media organisations and online social media like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram from framing it as ‘war’ in Ukraine and the Kremlin government passed a law under which publishing “false information” about

the Russian operation is punishable by up to 15 years. These indicators are meant even though the Russian government argued that were to demilitarise, de-Nazify and ensure Ukraine’s neutral status, these indicators clearly concurred with the position of Marxism that those who own the media also control information production. In the same light, although Ukrinform, Ukraine’s news agency framed the Russian campaign as ‘war, or invasion’, Ukrinform, was also a tool in the hands of the Ukrainian government.

Although the media propaganda in the Russia-Ukraine war which was more obvious mostly by the TASS news agency, it was not as intense as during WWI and II because of democratisation in information production and dissemination. The media audience is no longer a sitting duck; they are active participants in the information communication chain. This is possible due to internet-propelled technologies. The use of ‘special military operation’ and choice of certain frames and the low-frequency reports technique employed by the TASS was to avoid compromise of national security, operational security, and the deterioration of public trust and confidence [27]. The use of ‘war or invasion’ frame and the high frequency of reports as seen in Ukrinform was aimed at showcasing atrocities and freedom of the Ukraine’s media.

#### *The Dominant Frames Used by the TASS and Ukrinform*

The media plays an ever-increasing role in shaping public opinion and thus influencing how conflicts and wars are perceived by its audience. The news media has a great deal of impact on the news decision-making process on public issues. The media framing of war has a way of making the populace support a country at war or see it as the enemy. The use of different



frames, the frequency and consistency in the use of a specific frame has a way of altering and reconstructing the desired reality in the minds of the media audience. The dominant frames employed by the TASS and Ukrinform news agencies were to achieve certain objectives. The dominant frame employed by the TASS and Ukrinform news agencies is the attacks on civilians, residential areas, and casualties frame. In the first month of the Russia-Ukraine war, the TASS had more reports on attacks on civilians, residential areas and casualties. The attacks were mostly reported to have been carried out by the Ukrainian military in the territories annexed by Russia such as Donetsk, Donbass, Crimea etc. and Ukraine controlled regions such as Mykolayiv region, Luhansk region, Kharkiv region, Donetsk region, Mariupol, Odesa region, Kyiv, Lviv, Zaporizhzhia, Kherson, etc. In recent times, wars have become increasingly deadly for civilians and residential areas. Modern war like what we see in Russia-Ukraine has further shown the shift of war from remote battlefields to densely populated cities exposing civilians and residential areas to greater risk.

The militants were pushing more than 150 civilians ahead of them, using them as human shields.... Upon detecting fighters of the DPR people's militia, the Ukrainian nationalists opened fire from behind civilians. As a result of the fire, the Ukrainian nationalists killed four and wounded five civilians, the spokesman said [28].

A different report from Ukrinform quoting the Minister of Health in Ukraine, Viktor Liashko stressed the negative impact of war on civilians and residential areas:

"The enemy has already shelled 139 hospitals; 10 hospitals have been completely destroyed, healthcare service can no longer be provided there.... As of March 21, six Ukrainian were killed and 16 others were injured" [29].

These findings showed how both parties in the Russia-Ukraine war have violated numerous international conventions. Both the Russian and the Ukrainian governments under the international humanitarian law or the laws of war, including the Geneva Convention of 1949, the First Additional Protocol of the Geneva Convention and customary international laws have mandated the parties to obey the laws of war which prohibit the wilful killing, torture, sexual violence and inhuman treatment of capture combatant and civilians. Other major frames employed by TASS are: the negotiation/talk and the solidarity frames. While the Russian media was active in framing the atrocities committed by the Ukrainian military, the government was strategic in its use of the negotiation/talk frame. The use of the negotiation/talk and followed by the solidarity frame was to show the world that Russia is not as tough as perceived by the western democracies – it is open for negotiations and talk as a means of finding a lasting solution to what is called 'special military operation' in Ukraine. Just four days after the invasion, on 28 February 2022, the first round of Russian-Ukrainian talks to place in the Gomel region and more face-to-face and online meetings were also organised. Among the three dominant frames employed by Russian News Agency, TASS is the solitary frame. The Russian media which is a government-owned media tool employed this frame to highlight the countries, organisations or individuals that stood by it during the war.

Further findings indicated that aside from attacks on civilians, residential areas and casualties being the dominant frame in the Ukrainian News Agency, Ukrinform, the attacks on military facilities followed. The Ukrainian government is fully aware that Russia is the world's second-largest arms exporter behind the United States. Russia exports arms to over 45 countries. The imbalance between the military capabilities of Russia and Ukraine is very obvious. Russia has 900,000 active personnel and 2 million in reserve compared to Ukraine's 196,000 active personnel and 900, 00 reservists. Land forces alone, Russia has a twofold advantage, with 280,000 troops to Ukraine's 125,600. And its air force is nearly five times as strong, with 165,000 to Ukraine's 35, 00 [30]. Dewan summarised Ukraine and Russia's militaries as David and Goliath. Volodymyr Zelensky, the President of Ukraine knows the incapability of the Ukrainian military to stand against the Russian Goliath military might hence, he decided to call for military aid across the world to enable them to protect their sovereignty. According to a report by Brown that Ukraine has been provided with military equipment by more than 30 countries [31]. The United States is the highest donor with \$8.79bn followed by Poland with \$1.83bn and the United Kingdom with \$1.36bn. These military aids; supplies, training and Intel on military operations helped the Ukrainian military in counterattacks against the powerful Russian military. This support is giving the Ukrainian military an edge over the Russian military and the success it is recording in the counterattacks.

#### **The Implication of Dominant Frame Used by the TASS and Ukrinform**

In the framing of the war in Ukraine by the TASS and Ukrinform news agencies, the dominant frame is the attacks on civilians, residential areas and casualties. Several international human rights conventions kick against the violation of rights during wars. During wars and most violent conflicts, civilians are the primary victims. This finding supports which stressed that civilians especially women and children are the most vulnerable during violent conflicts and they are affected directly or indirectly during violent conflicts [32]. The implication of the use of the dominant frame by TASS and Ukrinform news agencies was to showcase the atrocities and human rights violations committed by both the Russian and Ukrainian governments. Both countries fully know the legal implication of human rights violations. And neither the Russian nor the Ukrainian government will want to be called 'the human rights violator' and whose sins will be paid in full after an independent investigation. Although the Russian government in February decided to carry out a special military operation to demilitarise de-Nazify and to ensure Ukraine's neutral status. The framing of what the Russian Government calls a special military operation in Ukraine is framed as an invasion or war by the Ukrainian government. To further detail the military operation as war or an invasion, the Ukrainian media has to ensure frequency and consistency of reports on attacks on civilians, residential areas and casualties. While most of the attacks took place in Ukraine, the reports from TASS on the dominant frame were carried out in the Russian-annexed regions during the first month of the invasion.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This study examines the media framing of the Russia-Ukraine

war during the first month of the invasion by state-owned news agencies, *TASS* (Russia) and *Ukrinform* (Ukraine). The following conclusions have been drawn first, the Russian News Agency, TASS sees the exercise in Ukraine as a ‘special military operation’ and as such did not make it a media agenda. This could be seen in the low frequency of the use of media frames. On the other hand, the Ukrainian News Agency, *Ukrinform* saw the exercise in Ukraine as a ‘war’ or ‘invasion’ and it made it a media agenda. This could be seen in the frequency in the use of frames. Second, the study argues that the dominant frame employed by the TASS and *Ukrinform* news agencies is the attacks on civilians, residential areas and casualties, and the implication of the use of this frame was to portray the atrocities of the enemy to the world. Although this study has provided an empirical exposition of the media framing of the Russia-Ukraine war by two government-owned news agencies (TASS and *Ukrinform*) the study only focused on the manifest level of the framing theory limits the generalisation of this study. This study recommends media independence during wars so as to give the media the opportunity to use realist frames that could save lives. Hence, this study suggests further studies to explore the latent level of framing in the Russia-Ukraine war.

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