

# A public (dis)service: Exploring BBC Online as propaganda when framing the Russia-Ukraine war

A master's thesis presented to  
The School of Media and Communication  
of  
The Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Cultures  
University of Leeds



In part fulfilment for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
in  
Political Communication

by  
Charles Michael Williams

this twenty-ninth day of August, two thousand and twenty-four

Supervised by

Word count: 12,478

“He who controls the media, controls the public mind”

- unattributed

## Abstract

This paper applies a qualitative framing approach to critically assess how BBC Online reported the Russo-Ukrainian war – post-2022 invasion – through four key events: the invasion itself, Nord Stream pipeline sabotages, Russia’s formal annexation of Ukraine’s eastern regions, and the attacks on Crimea bridge. Its approach is original in that it applies recognised event framing methods to construct new themes in which to interpret news text, contending that war journalism at the BBC is skewed in favour of elite discourses. It examines BBC Online content over a fixed period between 24 February 2022 and the date of collection on 1 July 2024. This paper synthesises seminal bodies of literature on war reporting, normative roles of news media, and propaganda, alongside forthcoming scholarship of the Russia-Ukraine war, to base a novel critique of BBC Online coverage that contests its mode is propagandist when narrating the conflict. Its investigation finds that not all news text merited a claim of propaganda yet advances a BBC failing to comply with its statutory obligation to report with “due impartiality”. To this end, it also explores relevance of the impartiality norm when reporting war but does not seek to progress a claim that public service broadcasting congenitally follows an elite-driven model of presentation. In particular, this study attempts to rejuvenate traditional propaganda scholarship when investigating BBC war journalism and its relationship with Western diplomatic agendas.

**Keywords:** BBC; framing; propaganda; Russia-Ukraine; war reporting; impartiality.

## Contents

<b>List of figures</b> .....	6
<b>Introduction</b> .....	7
<b>Literature review</b> .....	10
War and the media .....	10
An emerging view .....	13
Trust, power and the corporation .....	14
Propaganda and information warfare .....	18
<b>Methodology</b> .....	22
Research questions, aims and objectives.....	22
Framing .....	23
Methods and approach .....	23
<b>Findings &amp; discussion</b> .....	29
Results .....	29
Discussion .....	31
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	45
<b>References</b> .....	48
<b>Appendix (A): BBC Online articles</b> .....	58
<b>Appendix (B): Coding scheme</b> .....	62
<b>Appendix (C): Additional tables</b> .....	67
<b>Appendix (D): Ethical review form</b> .....	69

## List of figures

<b>TABLE 1.</b> TOTAL PRIMARY FRAMES.....	29
<b>TABLE 2.</b> TOTAL SECONDARY FRAMES.....	30
<b>TABLE 3.</b> PRIMARY FRAMES IN BBC ONLINE REPORTING THE INVASION.....	67
<b>TABLE 4.</b> PRIMARY FRAMES IN BBC ONLINE REPORTING NORD STREAM 1&2 ATTACKS .....	67
<b>TABLE 5.</b> PRIMARY FRAMES IN BBC ONLINE COVERING ANNEXATION OF EAST UKRAINE .....	67
<b>TABLE 6.</b> PRIMARY FRAMES IN BBC ONLINE ARTICLES COVERING CRIMEA BRIDGE ATTACKS .....	68

## Introduction

*“[The war in Ukraine] is not merely about the black soil of the Donbas, nor the re-establishment of a Russian empire, it's about defeating our system and way of life politically, psychologically, and symbolically. How we respond as the pre-war generation will reverberate through history. Ukrainian bravery is buying time, for now.” – (Former Chief of the General Staff, General Sir Patrick Sanders, cited in Brown, 2024)*

*“We should try to avoid using “our” when we mean British. We are not Britain; we are the BBC.” – (BBC guidelines provided to its journalists during the Falklands War, cited in Rowley, 2015)*

*“The principles of reporting are put to a severe test when your nation goes to war. To whom are you true? To the principles of abstract truth, or to those running the war machine [...]. Let me put the question with stark simplicity: when does a reporter sacrifice the principle of the whole truth to the need to win the war?” – (BBC war correspondent Katie Adie, cited in Allen & Zelizer, 2004, p.1).*

On 24 February 2022, around two hundred thousand Russian troops entered Ukraine's eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk in a “special military operation” claimed to protect civilians of these newly recognised states from “genocide” and to “demilitarise and de-Nazify Ukraine” (Mills, 2024b). This renewed assault was an escalation of the Russo-Ukrainian crisis that began with the toppling of Ukraine's pro-Moscow president Viktor Yanukovich and the Russian annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014 (Mills, 2024b). In late 2023, the Donbas offensive reached a stalemate but has now since intensified with Ukraine pushing 30 kilometres north into Russian territory; the first major invasion of the country since Wehrmacht boots crossed the border in 1941 (Campbell, 2024). President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin initially expected to speedily collapse the Ukrainian government and yet presently finds his war aims unsatisfied, receiving international condemnation and huge financial sanctions in the

process (BBC, 2024). The invasion swiftly prompted global wall-to-wall media attention eager to report the conflict for distant publics and has precipitated worldwide price shocks in food and consumer energy due to their combined position as major exporters of grain, oil and natural gas (Mottaleb et al., 2022; Reuters, 2024). The potential for nuclear escalation is pertinent here too, and since the UK government has thus far pledged £12.5billion to the Ukrainian cause, it should be expected that news media performs its normative ‘watchdog’ and institutional role to hold power to account and question justifications for military action (Shipman, 2024; Mills, 2024a).

This paper assumes the BBC should adhere its duty of impartiality to report accurately and fairly so that publics can obtain reliable information about a war that could mark an epochal shift in global power dynamics. The corporation is the world’s oldest and foremost national broadcaster, enjoying much reverence as the exemplar of democratic journalism (BBC, 2020b, 2020c). Indeed, according to the BBC’s own mission statement, the brand aspires to be “the world’s most trusted news organisation: accurate, impartial and independent” (BBC Charter, 2006, p.47). The BBC dwarfs its competitors in reach and output (Reuters, 2023), while BBC Online remains the most viewed digital news platform in the UK (Ofcom, 2023). Building and maintaining trust in news is as imperative a task for media systems more generally, not least the corporation as its very survival rests upon public approval (Mills & Sinclair, 2017).

To date, scholarly investigation into media framing of the war is somewhat limited. Several researchers point to coverage that omits salient context (Boyd-Barrett, 2017a); others suggest a domination of official sources help to skew narratives toward Western military industrial complexes (Bjørge & Kalnes, 2021; Claessen, 2023); while some show media systems follow an elite-driven model of framing sympathetic to bourgeois interests (Ononiwu, 2023). Though these are yet still emerging and remain incomplete, the developing picture supports the notion that news media in liberal democracies, at present, mostly reflect dominant

governmental frames and fail to accommodate competing narratives. Here then lies the conundrum: current literature that seeks to identify and investigate framing techniques has heretofore discovered an ecology wanting in a normative expectation to inform citizens and which promotes conflict narratives via habitual schemas. These omissions of sincere news product then inform performance, – but no exclusive analysis of BBC output has until now been investigated, raising the question: how has the public service broadcaster framed the war, and does its reportage contravene statutory obligations?

This study critically interrogates BBC Online coverage through key conflict events and assesses how news is presented to publics through an interpretation of framing themes. Applying an original coding scheme, it deciphers article text that covered the invasion; sabotages on Nord Stream pipelines; annexation of the Donbas; and attacks on Kerch Strait Bridge to identify any omission of context; elevation of elitist voices above non-; qualification of dissenting voices; and which meets specific criteria to designate content that is propaganda, according to Florian Zollmann's (2019) definition (see: pp.18-22, 'a definition'). It hopes to both contribute to broader understandings of how the conflict has been framed, and build foundations to clarify the way in which the BBC complies with the impartiality norm when it reports war, not least advance a rejuvenation of propaganda inquiry when public service broadcasting is studied; after all, as Stafford Beer, "there is no point in claiming that the purpose of a system is to do what it constantly fails to do" (cited in Benjamin & Komlos, 2021).



## **Literature review**

The study of war reporting and its influence on broader media ecology cannot be understated; publics are shaped by the media they consume, and so responsibility is duly placed on these systems to act in accordance with democratic norms (Christians, 2009). Below seeks to provide theoretical context in media scholarship while aiming to position propaganda as the natural progression of this complex story.

### **War and the media**

Normative assumptions dictate the role of news media, when performing a democratic function, is to inform the public – in good faith – so that citizens can make reasoned political judgements (Weinberger, 2009). To fulfil these roles, professionalised journalism has affixed the ideals of detachment, impartiality and objectivity to its *raison d'être* so as to enhance the quality of debate in the public sphere and demonstrate a legitimate claim as gatekeepers of information (Dahlberg, 2005). However, critics often point to a neglect, or even a transmutation, of these values when media reports war due to disagreement on the specific duties of conflict journalism at home and abroad (Allan & Zelizer, 2004).

### **A contested model?**

When reporting militarised conflict, much research suggests mass media serve several functions which may be wholly separate to their actualised performance in wartime (Choi & James, 2007). To this, Daniel Hallin (1986, pp.116-118) developed a model of three spheres where he argued news media acts to either reflect accepted societal discourse; present a negotiated interpretation of reality; or as challenge to mainstream thought. This framework is often cited in media theory for its usefulness in conceptualising news performance at times of war. Robert Entman's (2003) 'cascading model of effects' also provides contextualisation,

arguing that elite narratives filter through the news top-down. Journalistic values are generally abided similarly throughout the world (Martin & Chaudhary, 1983), yet remain influenced by the economic and political interests of their nations through a process known as ‘domestication,’ i.e., a British and American journalist may adhere to an entirely distinct criteria of newsgathering, but their justification remains the same: the pursuit of ‘truth’ (Merrill, 1983; Maras, 2013).

For Piers Robinson et al. (2010), Hallin’s (1986) ‘sphere of consensus,’ as an elite-driven model, is favoured for thus explaining the apparent perpetuation of hegemonic dogma in wartime news. To this view, we can see an overreliance of official knowledge streams through a process of ‘indexing,’ where newsroom constraints inadvertently privilege viewpoints of elite institutions by way of fact-checking or framing debate within an elitist polarity (Bennett, 1990). This, then, empowers a state-dominated narrative to trickle down through everyday reportage. These official sources have also been shown to shape both the news agenda and perceptions of conflict in the public mind in cases where media narratives focus a patriotic frame, or in the ‘othering’ and cognitive stereotyping of enemied belligerents (Mueller, 1973; Schlesinger & Tumber, 1994). This would undoubtedly narrow the scope of public debate when reporting war and holds significant power to restrict publics on matters constrained by elite actors.

Conversely, we see that for James Walker (2005), media is instead oppositional to elite narratives, performing a ‘watchdog’ role to offer alternatives to dominant discourse. Under this framework, coverage may emphasise the “negative humanitarian impact” of war, alongside a challenge of governmental justifications (Robinson et al., 2010, pp.47-50). An oppositional media should naturally seek to challenge official sources of information in the public interest, but an abandonment of deference, according to Robinson et al. (2010), exists only when dissensus occurs in power elite circles – for example, congressional debate on defence policy with the so-called ‘hawks’ and ‘doves’ in America. Regardless, political discourse in this

scenario is usually framed around questions of *how much* war, rather than interrogating the *purpose* of war itself. To this, a mode of ‘peace journalism’ has emerged where media tasks itself with an active role in conflict to promote public conversation and correct a mainstream bias towards war (Galtung, 2011). This genre, however, remains unambiguously non-objective since its pursuit is mired in the subjective interpretation of the newsgatherer and so relinquishes its journalistic claim of emotionally detached reporting. Endeavouring to follow such ideals of objectivity in wartime has ironically been argued to even perpetuate conflict, since deference to official knowledge streams enables political actors to gain special access to media and therefore allows their unique agenda to pervade mainstream dialogue (Hallin, 1986).

### **Performance**

In the case of the 2003 coalition-led invasion of Iraq, international digital news sites of supporting countries overwhelmingly presented a ‘positive’ frame for citizens, i.e., the subtext depicted a righteous war centred on liberating a population from the grip of a brutal dictator poised to act against the West (Dimitrova et al., 2005). Additionally, a study by Tumber and Palmer (2004) quantified frames which took either ‘positive’ or ‘negative’ stance to the invasion and found 60 per cent of BBC coverage presented ‘bad news,’ showing that coalition sources were most often present throughout reports. These two instances thereby support claims of the elite-driven mode of war reporting. However, Ravi (2005) and Schechter (2003) found BBC output over the same period “maintained an equilibrium” of both ‘negative’ and ‘positive’ positions on the war – more so than similar broadcasters in Germany and the US – with American newscasts providing no such deliberative discourse in coverage (Mock & Rettich, 2003). Similarly, a 2010 study also found that among American broadcast news providers, wartime justifications offered by the Bush administration were exemplified and repeated uncritically, with reports simply mimicking White House talking points (Hayes &

Guardino, 2010). This is not to say oppositional voices were entirely absent from coverage, but that offered debate remained fixated on topics already dictated by elite sources.

With respect to the consequent ‘war on terror,’ several scholars have claimed modern conflicts executed in its name take a distinctly humanitarian frame in media text with the aim of pushing the cultural myth of the West as global liberators (Chomsky, 1997; Hammond, 2007). The above theorists describe this warring epoch as the ‘new-Cold War consensus’ where humanitarianism is merely the liberal façade of preserving a military industrial complex, especially when no clear ‘defensive’ objective is innately present. Hammond (2007, p.41) argues this shift underscores modern warfare actioned for its “propaganda value,” rather than any material strategic goal; while Keeble (2000) likewise asserts a humanitarian war is instead a war of ‘media spectacle’. In one sense, these scholars naively assume the purpose of conflict today is to demand viewership of events as they unfold. Although analysing conflict through its media consumption to assess effects on citizens is a worthwhile endeavour, ascribing these ex post facto only serves to diminish the discernible influence of global capital over geopolitics.

### **An emerging view**

When narrating the conflict for British, American and German publics, Zollmann (forthcoming) contends notable context of the invasion is abandoned in favour of discourse which is dismissive of competing voices that challenge a military industrial complex. In his view, country-specific ideology is found to dominate frames for public service broadcasters thereby distorting communal knowledge of the conflict, i.e., expansionist NATO policies and a complete account of Ukraine’s political history is ill-provided by mass media. Ononiwu (2023) also describes how nationalist and militarist rhetoric commands the discourse of both state-owned news agencies of Russia and Ukraine, arguing a distortion of public knowledge in each nation. Further still, looking to a Norwegian media system, Bjørge and Kalnes (2021) found outlets framed the war through typical ‘common enemy’ lines – or the so-called ‘rally

around the flag effect’ – where popular mood swings in approval of political leaders at a time of crisis. To contrast, these findings are not entirely consistent for commercial media, where infotainment formats have been shown to challenge official discourse presented by public service providers (Lichtenstein & Koerth, 2022; Chernov, 2023). The use of strategic narratives to shape the behaviour of actors may also play an integral role to how the prior crisis has been contextualised over time, with an ‘othering’ of the EU bloc as an imperialist entity in the Russian mythologised construction of reality, forcing a polarity of public perception in national media that is entirely divorced from observable geopolitical fact (Claessen, 2023).

The above research, though scant and not UK specific, lends considerable favour to functional theories of media performance which, during periods of conflict, suggests symbolism and ideology invade the public sphere to serve as an instrument of war (see: Payne, 2005; Liu, 2023). What can be drawn from these developing analyses is the indication that Western media systems – as opposed to those sympathetic to the Russian Federation – function through an elite-driven model of dissemination, primarily operationalised through omission of context, domination of official knowledge streams and pro-governmental frames (Bjørge & Kalnes, 2021).

## **Trust, power and the corporation**

The BBC’s guiding moral philosophy can be found within the motto: “Nation shall speak peace unto nation” (Medhurst, 2022), and the inaugural ‘Reithian principles’ to “inform, educate and entertain” (BBC Charter 2016). Although formally answerable to the Crown through its unique incorporation by Royal Charter, the BBC is considered ‘operationally independent’ of government and generally enjoys significant editorial freedom (Mills, 2016; Blumler, 2016). The corporation is bound by the statutory regulator Ofcom to act with “due impartiality and due accuracy” in the public interest; with its mission to reflect the UK’s “culture and values to the world” in the production of distinctive output “to the highest editorial standards” (Ofcom,

2019 [2005], pp.28-32; BBC Charter 2016). Nonetheless, three main criticisms emerge which contests such ‘myth’ of independence from political machinations, proffering instead that the BBC is, rather crudely, a conduit for bourgeois rhetoric: (1) its dependence on government for finance and right to broadcast leaves it vulnerable to political influence (Mills, 2015, 2016; Waterson, 2023); (2) ‘political appointees’ control the editorial direction of output and appoint its director-general (Barker et al., 2021; Rusbridger, 2024); (3) journalists are often drawn from the petite bourgeoisie (or the managerial classes) which, apparently, allows for institutional culture to inadvertently “lean to the right” (Lewis, 2014, p.114; Mills, 2015, 2016).

In 2020, The Reuters Institute identified bias and a diverse media environment were the key challenges facing the brand in recent years (Nielsen et al., 2023). Building and maintaining trust, then, remains the most salient task for obeying its charter responsibilities. On the view the corporation bows to political pressure of the ruling government (Mills, 2019), former *Panorama* producer Meirion Jones claimed the BBC’s “fundamental corporate bias is pro-government, regardless of party [...] not every story will be pro-government, but the overwhelming narrative will be” (Jones, 2016). Erstwhile economics editor Robert Peston too asserted the BBC, “quite often veers in what you might call a very pro-establishment, rather right-wing direction” (Sommers, 2014). However, as Born (2016, pp.68-69) explains, the BBC institutionally reflects a “soft liberal or progressive but broadly establishment opinion,” adding this “institutional worldview sometimes appears to shape coverage,” in an attack against ideological bias that, in his mind, does not make it by virtue inherently neutral.

Under increasing scrutiny in recent years is also ‘political appointees’ to the executive BBC Board which controls overall editorial direction (Waterson, 2023; Pike, 2023). The corporation is again routinely criticised for its “groupthink” on culture, with Tom Mills (2016, p.127) arguing, “Although its journalists and editors are not consciously bias, they accept certain taken-for-granted assumptions”. Alongside this, the brand holds an appearance of

exclusively representing white, middle-class and London-oriented principles (Ofcom, 2019; Schulz et al., 2019). Nevertheless, it is worthy to note the difference between bias that deviates from an objective truth, and assumed bias that simply diverges from a popular viewpoint, since meriting these examples as evidence of impropriety unequivocally over-intellectualizes incidental linkages with the legitimate functions of journalistic endeavour. Even so, it demonstrates that meagre exposure to power holds potential for its manipulation by malign actors to direct output.

A further pertinent critique is the view that the corporation “see[s] the press as a key source of news stories and a bellwether of public debate,” – due to a lack of original reporting – in a process known as intermedia agenda-setting (Lewis & Cushion, 2019, p.481). Since BBC coverage dominates the British media landscape, chasing the print media allows for a majority right-wing press to have their agendas saturate public debate despite their own fall in audience engagement (Ofcom, 2023). If print media was regulated comparably to broadcast it may not pose issue, but due to its freedom to print beyond the confines of impartiality this affair naturally shapes the way in which news is presented to publics. In a study comparing the above process during the 2015 UK general election, broadcaster coverage was found to majorly emanate from right-wing newspapers; while another study of the same election found the BBC “echoed press accounts,” rather than “challenging them or providing an alternative perspective” (Cushion et al., 2018; Banducci et al., 2018, pp.283-286). As Lewis and Cushion (2019, p.481) argue, the agenda-setting potential of print media “runs the risk of broadcasters assuming a centre of gravity that reflects the partisan press landscape”.

### **“Due impartiality”**

In 2022, Ofcom found respondents rated the corporation highly on values of trust and accuracy, but “consistently less favourably on impartiality” (Ofcom, 2023). A critique most often presented to the BBC is its perceived inclination to produce content that merely provides equal

weight to debates in the national conversation, leading to accusations of reducing important topics to simple ‘both-sides-ism’ presentation (Barker, 2022). Impartiality does not simply mean balance – although it does for ‘matters of political or industrial controversy’ (Ofcom, 2017) – it is “the attempt to regard different ideas, opinions, interests or individuals with detachment,” and yet the former remains exactly how the corporation has performed its duty in recent years (Cox, 2007, cited in Sambrook, 2012, p.5). According to Wahl-Jorgensen et al. (2017, p.782), in a content analysis of output in 2007 and 2012, coverage simply led to “juxtaposing the positions of the two main political parties – Conservative and Labour” in a behaviour that these scholars describe as the “paradigm of impartiality-as-balance”. Here, it is convincingly argued much-needed context is abandoned in favour of confining debate within establishment discourse, outlining a paradigm in three parts: (1) domination of elite voices; (2) a consequential restriction of public debate; and (3) privileged Conservative views, exacerbated further by its political vulnerability (Wahl-Jorgensen et al., 2017). This compliments previous studies of newsroom analyses which have shown an “institutionalised preference for official and elite sources,” with economic and social elites more commonly cited in text than ordinary citizens, such as victims of violence (Gans, 1979, cited in Wahl-Jorgensen et al., 2017, p.786). This may demonstrate a fundamental misunderstanding of editorial staff as to what exactly constitutes impartiality, or perhaps it may support Bennett’s (1990) earlier theory of indexing. Regardless, these suppose an unsophisticated interpretation of the intellectual capacity of BBC staff to desire impartial newsgathering, and instead focusses investigations on their performance thereby neglecting a sincere desire to act with “due impartiality”.

The misnomer of impartiality as an expected and achievable behaviour exists throughout the BBC’s codified mission, despite scholarly debate on its elusive nature. As Lewis and Cushion (2019, p.482) suggest, “There is a lack of clarity about what constitutes accuracy or impartiality, when these ideas should be put into practice or how they should be measured”. In



2007, the BBC commissioned the Bridcut Review to reexamine its response to impartiality, recommending a move away from what it described as a ‘seesaw’ model of representing simple polarity of opinion, to a ‘wagon wheel’ where the broadest range of views are considered (BBC, 2007). According to Cushion (2011, p.33), impartiality is heavily related to the ideal of objectivity, but remains an entirely separate concept that integrates open-mindedness and balance. Interestingly, this would demand journalists to play an active role in the construction of news since newsgathering is in and of itself guided by opinion and professional judgement. For Charles Hendy (2013, p.30), being “detached avoids overt partisanship; but it can also end up with a narrow range of voices conveying establishment values,” therewith disproportionately flooding public debate with elite views which contravenes the BBC’s mission to reflect the culture and ideology of the nation. Of course, journalists should not be expected to emotionally detach themselves from the likes of human suffering, or indeed the rise of authoritarianism, but that requires a newspaperman to hold and express opinion, which according to the criteria for impartiality, is strictly forbidden.

## **Propaganda and information warfare**

In contemporary scholarship, ‘propaganda’ is an almost abandoned and unwelcome term to describe the act of political persuasion once revered for its perceived paternalistic qualities (Jarlbrink & Norén, 2022). Many intelligentsic circles now prefer modern terminology to refer to the same or similar processes: mis/disinformation and ‘fake news’. The study of insincere news product – or pernicious communication – as marker of a defunct media system failing to serve publics is nevertheless wholly enmeshed with the seminal investigation of propaganda (Anderson, 2021a). For one of its founding proponents, Harold Lasswell (1927), the information publics receive frames how they form political knowledge. Propaganda is understood to serve an ideological function through the “manipulation of significant symbols” (Lasswell, 1927, p.627); as an “attempt to exercise influence” usually to “spread and confirm

doctrine” (Hyzen, 2021, p.3482); or as the use of communication instruments to “form, control, or alter the attitudes of other groups” (Qualter, 1997, p.27). Where a propagandising act may illicit benefit is the apparent consent obtained by the masses through cultural text (media is the most natural climate for such action) that is disseminated by elite forces in society. According to thinkers such as Noam Chomsky (1997) and Stuart Hall (1997), these societal forces are invariably the forces of capital, and thus remains pertinent that disseminators of propaganda are usually those most likely to benefit from maintaining the status quo.

These views support the well-studied ‘hypodermic needle theory’ (see: Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955) which posits citizens, in this case, are not only dispossessed of agency but are gullible sponges assuming their position in society as cattle to the slaughter, or indeed moth to the unassuming lamp. Much research does point to publics as a ‘bewildered herd’ (e.g., Servaes, 2001), but nevertheless does not hold true for when dissensus already occurs in the public sphere (e.g., Entman, 2003). For Kellner (2005), citizens are no longer the *active* democratic participants of the past but are now mere *consumers* of news. Objective realities and social ills do not possess meaning in and of themselves, but meaning is rather drawn from the signs with which they are attached, and by whom it serves an ideological function to attach such meaning (Blumer, 1971). Since, of course, the procurement of knowledge is entirely woven around one’s own belief systems which challenges the notion of objective reporting as “free from bias” (Koch, 1990, p.20); hence supporting textual meaning as that of negotiated cultural symbolism (Foucault, 1972). Sourcing can also affect media both positively through an adversarial function, and negatively in a quid pro quo exchange of information between the newsman and the czar (Bennett, 1990). Herman and Chomsky (1988) argue that official sources dominate media landscapes because holding an official line is more beneficial to the journalist than a dissenting one, due to various factors such as flak and access. So, drawing on these assumptions which dictate that “all text is bias” (Boyd-Barrett, 2017b, p.6), and that journalistic

objectivity – or endeavours of impartiality – is a misnomer (Tuchman, 1972), we can begin to theorise news which possess and seek to disseminate an agenda.

### **A definition**

This leads us to view propaganda then, as a “purveyor of ideology” (Jowett & O’Donnell, 2006, p.1); “a device to manufacture social coherence” (Bussemer, 2005, p.34); as a means to control “public opinion” (Moravčíková, 2020, p.25); and as “any attempt to persuade anyone to a belief or to a form of action” (Hummel & Huntress, 1949, p.2). One noteworthy contradiction in the literature, however, is a lack of uniformity to its definition and criteria: namely the *intention* to act. For Herman and Chomsky (1988), propaganda need not be overt since groupthink and self-censorship in the newsroom conditions an environment in which ideology is a regular feature of media text. But for Philip Taylor (1995), propaganda can only exist with an intention to act since, after all, the study of (mis)information would better clarify the position of a non-active participant. Speaking to this view, Bussemer (2005, p.28) believes propaganda to be the “intentional manipulation of public opinion,” supporting Pratkanis and Aronson’s (1992, p.190) claim of “communication that intentionally deceives its receivers”. If these are accurate representations of the practise of propaganda, then it should surely follow that not only advertising, public health messaging, sponsored newspaper features and political campaigns are innately propagandist, but also that the very transfer of information – since objective reality is “epistemologically impossible” (Gans, 1979, p.315) – should too be considered as such. Of course, these notions diverge from the important and necessary investigation of media functions in democratic society, yet in the very least discredits the idea that for propaganda to surely exist, one must in the first instance seek to spread falsehoods for political, social or economic gain which is simply juvenile in its presumption.

On the other hand, it is obviously reductionist to believe purely for the fact of communicating an ideology or opinion, one *must* therefore be accused of propaganda, yet at a

minimum this conception should demand an intelligentsia to cease dismissing propaganda as the illegitimate umbrella term which constitutes varied forms of political and social persuasion. Speaking to this view, Zollmann (2019) urges a criterion to be agreed upon to fully discover its impact on democratic institutions. Here, it is argued a propagandising text must (1) manifest in both the symbolic and physical realms, and (2) is aimed at influencing behaviour or opinion; but crucially, opinion does not need to be changed for an influence to occur (2019, pp.335-336). By this, he is suggesting one may be heavily and consistently laboured to believe the sky is green, and may yet still believe the sky is, in fact, blue – but that is not to say propaganda *never* occurred. To test this in a content analysis, indicators of ideological persuasion will usually favour state-corporate actors alongside omission of differing perspectives, in addition to a weaponisation of choice words which are entangled in cultural or social myth. As Herman and Chomsky (1988, pp.29-33) propose, “atrocities and nefarious actions by so-called ‘enemy’ states of Western governments are focused and/or exaggerated” for strategic purposes, or when language suggests a conclusive nature to an event but is instead complicated by contradicting information. And so, propaganda, for this scholar, can be thus understood as: “The forming of texts and opinions in support of particular interests and through media and non-media mediated means with the intention to produce public support and/or relevant action” (Zollmann, 2019, p.335).

## **Methodology**

### **Research questions, aims and objectives**

#### **Primary research question:**

RQ(1): How does BBC Online report the Russo-Ukrainian conflict?

#### **Research sub-questions:**

RQ(2): What frames dominate BBC Online coverage when making sense of the military action in Ukraine?

RQ(3): Does BBC Online coverage of the war align with its missions and values?

RQ(4): To what extent can coverage be considered propaganda, according to Zollmann's (2019, p.335) definition?

#### **Research aims**

This research aims to:

1. Investigate a potential propagandising function of the BBC when it reports the Russo-Ukrainian conflict post-2022;
2. Encourage further inquiry into the role of public service broadcasting when war reporting.

#### **Research objectives**

Identify dominant themes of conflict frames to demonstrate:

- i) how blame is ascribed;
- ii) where ideology is naturalised;
- iii) where, or if, dissent is afforded; and
- iv) any omission of context audiences should reasonably expect to be provided.

## **Framing**

According to Nelson, Clawson and Oxley (1997, p.567), framing in news media is a process where organisations “define and construct a political issue or public controversy”. This is achieved primarily through salience and selection; not reportage in and of itself, but rather the manner by which reality, sources, and events are presented to publics. Although framing is requisite to professionalised journalism, news media is widely understood to shape both the acquisition of public knowledge and, by extension, the formation of opinion (Entman, 1989). Robert Entman’s (1993) adaptation of framing analysis for mass media inquiry has now grown to be an important methodological approach for research into the production of news in commercialised society. This communicative process should, in Entman’s view, demonstrate ideological assumptions of the communicator while reinforcing a particular judgement within the text; the receiver should be influenced, and its discourse informed by existing belief systems (Entman, 1993, p.52-53). Framing is the offered interpretation of an event or issue that may produce effects in rational-critical debate (Iyengar & Simon, 1994; Linström & Marais, 2012). While attitudinal effects on publics and their media remain contingent on schema, audience characteristics and prejudices, framing analysis is most beneficial when demonstrating journalistic practises which “provide meaning to an unfolding strip of events” (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987, p.143; McQuail, 2005), therefore helping to “define problems, to diagnose courses, to make value judgments, and to suggest remedies” (Entman, 1993, p.52).

## **Methods and approach**

This research follows a qualitative methodological approach which adapts established models to design a bespoke investigation. To ensure scholarly validity and authenticity, the following imitates its method, data collection and frames found in de Vreese (2005), alongside Vliegenthart and Schröder’s (2009) design so to draw from an existing study of war framing in

newspaper text. In order to achieve a replicable investigation of news content, the below step-by-step method was also followed:

- 1) Choose a medium;
- 2) Determine a timeframe;
- 3) Draw a sample;
- 4) Identify a unit of analysis;
- 5) Selection of a frame typology;
- 6) Operational definitions; and,
- 7) Identify news frames (Linström & Marais, 2012).

### **A typology**

Since Goffman (1974) first formulated frame analysis as a method with which “to uncover hegemonic structures of meaning” (Koenig, 2006, p.62), a range of unique paradigms have emerged that are seldom compatible with one another; thus, this procedure remains undefined. “Researchers are not limited in their creativity to uncover frames” (Koenig, 2006, p.64), but a growing body of research now aims to limit frame typologies to avoid “researcher fiat” (Tankard, 1997, p.98). By way of limiting a subjective frame taxonomy, de Vreese (2005) suggests the creation of frames which focus on the content of dominant discourses in media, i.e., ‘human interest’, ‘economic consequences’ and ‘conflict’. Human interest frames strike an emotive tone that stresses the lived experiences of individuals in conflict. Frames of economic consequence literally concern the consequence of actions to the purse of a state or individual. While conflict frames illustrate contestation between individuals and groups. Despite the efficacy of these ‘master frames’ to investigate multigenre reportage, they neglect important nuances to war reporting that is not always present in normal journalistic product, and so adapting frames for war reporting is particularly pertinent to this paper’s aims and objectives.

Vliegenthart and Schröder (2009) identified four frames in British, American, German and Dutch media covering the 2003 invasion of Iraq; these were: ‘legitimisation’, ‘intervention’, ‘consequences’, and ‘protest’. Each focusses a problem, its causes, motivation and possible outcomes. Here, we see frames that cover dominant discourses when reporting conflict and is yet too married to the specific military operation in Iraq. This intervention frame would prove inappropriate for conceptualising the Russia-Ukraine conflict since interference in by NATO countries has, up until the time of writing, remained consigned to lethal and strategic aid (Gov.uk, 2024).

Given the above, it is then necessary to adapt these types to create three distinct frames that will offer an accurate illustration of BBC Online content. These are:

- i. **Consequence**: coverage depicts the possible consequences of the conflict for an individual, group, organisation, state or entity.
- ii. **Responsibility**: coverage attributes the potential (or actual) cause or fault of an event during the conflict to an individual, state, organisation or entity.
- iii. **Human interest**: coverage brings an emotive response to the presentation of events or emphasises human life during the conflict.

A random sample of articles was first analysed to ensure the validity of these frame types beyond preliminary readings, and to ascertain the existence of any additional themes (see: coding scheme for further clarification).

Since frames construct assumptions and interests, while too offering solutions to perceived issues, the above provides the most appropriate breadth of frame types when undertaking research into public service broadcasting and war reporting (Fiss & Hirsch, 2005). While this project aims to critically analyse discourse found within journalistic text so as to investigate trends and assumptions concerning editorial decision making of the BBC when reporting the war, it too desires to question the corporation’s standing on its duty of impartiality



which may give rise to an interpretation of reportage that is propagandist in nature. By observing articles to align with these frames, we can see an ordering between causality and direct effects of an event within the text; aligning with Zollmann's (2019, p.335) criteria for propaganda where media is aimed at shaping opinion in symbolic communication and which integrates a legitimisation of state actors, combined with an omission of substantial criticism and contestation reported as 'truth' and 'fact'. Where frames will act as an indicator of propaganda is the propensity of linguistic choices neglecting an impartial narration of events, or as a process to naturalise ruling class ideologies.

### **Approach**

Due to sprawling coverage of the Russia-Ukraine war in BBC Online, it would be impractical to measure frames across the conflict in its entirety. Nonetheless, gathering trends and assumptions need not be confined to numerical depth; a healthy body of framing research now examines text which covers a particular date or event to make an in-focus reasoned judgement. According to Koenig (2006, pp.64-65), the process of frame identification and interpretive detection must be transparent to ensure accurate measurements and replicable findings. To operationalise these as a product of robust research, frames must: conceptually and linguistically possess identifiable characteristics; be commonly observed in news media; be distinguishable to other frames; and be recognisable to others (Cappella & Jamieson, 1996, pp.47, 89). This study draws a corpus of articles around key dates of the war published by BBC Online between the day of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 and the day of data collection on 1 July 2024. Articles were also coded for their primary and secondary frame. They include articles published on the day of happening and ex post facto reportage. These were located via the Google 'advanced search tool' option and are as follows (see: coding scheme):

i. **Russia's invasion of Ukraine** (24 February 2022).

Following many days of speculation, Russia's 'special military operation' began in early 2022 and marked an end to the European "peace dividend", with total domination of the story across the BBC News website (Rogoff, 2022).

ii. **Nord Stream pipeline leak** (26 September 2022 to 1 July 2024).

Nord Stream 1 and 2 are extremely important energy infrastructure in Europe. Initially, their sabotage was reported by the BBC as an act ordered by the Kremlin, but a prolonged investigation found evidence for Ukraine's culpability (Chazan, 2024).

iii. **Russia's annexation of Ukraine's eastern regions** of Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia, from the day of Putin's announcement to its formal signing (30 September 2022 to 5 October 2022).

This act was met with rounded condemnation by international leaders and a recommitment of lethal and financial aid to the Zelenskyy regime (Mills, 2024b).

iv. **Kerch Strait Bridge attacks**, respectively occurring on 8 October 2022 and 17 July 2023 (8 October 2022 to 1 July 2024).

The Kerch Strait Bridge is a strategically important land bridge connecting Russia to Crimea. Its total destruction would prove difficult for the Kremlin to annex Ukraine's eastern regions entire and whole. Initially, these sabotages were also incorrectly reported as an act of Russian aggression (Bubalo & Goksedef, 2023).

To improve trustworthiness, articles were studied comprehensively to limit interpretative bias and make certain content has been roundly familiarised for identification of recurrent themes. This "prolonged engagement" then enhances research credibility (Nowell et al., 2017, p.3). To locate news frames, content was read thrice, as per Emmanuel Alozie (2005, p.66), who suggests a method in three parts: (1) general reading of content while note-taking; (2) a second reading to identify and verify recurring themes; and (3) an in-depth interpretation. Framing

devices (either rhetorical or technical) within the text was too named and later discussed, which helped to interpret findings in line with research questions. Interpretative bias remains the most pertinent limitation of this methodology, together with an inconsistent measurement across research due to the absence of an intercoder reliability test. However, the articles were studied meticulously for a long period of time to ensure robustness. As yet, this process remains a most useful tool for investigating how discourse is naturalised and debated in mass media (Fox, 1997).

## Findings & discussion

### Results

A corpus of 60 BBC Online news articles were analysed for content to examine frames. In total, the search located 23 articles that covered Russia's invasion of Ukraine specifically; 14 articles reporting the Nord Stream pipeline leaks and subsequent governmental investigations; 7 articles that concerned the annexation of Ukraine's eastern regions; and 16 articles reporting the attacks on Kerch Strait Bridge and later analysis.

*Table 1. Total primary frames found in BBC Online articles covering the Russia-Ukraine war*

<b>Frames</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Consequence	21	35
Responsibility	28	46.70
Human interest	11	18.30
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>

*Table 1* shows the total frequency of primary frames. It found of the three themes examined, 28 demonstrated a primary 'responsibility' frame (46.7%, N=28); 21 with a primary 'consequence' frame (35%, N=21); and 11 showing a dominant 'human interest' frame (18.3%, N=11). *Table 2* depicts the total frequency of secondary frames found within the same corpus: 36 show a passive 'consequence' frame (60%, N=36), 23 with a 'responsibility' frame (38.33%, N=23), and 1 article with a secondary 'human interest' frame (1.67%, N=1).

In these, Russia was overwhelmingly portrayed as the primary aggressor, with a direct causal link described to audiences of its actions prompting negative reverberations for both the local region and European Plain (e.g., BBC4a, BBC8a; BBC20a) while Russia strong-arms for greater power and influence (BBC1a; BBC3a). Where responsibility for events took precedence, most displayed a secondary 'consequence' frame, again depicting a brutal invader

prompting serious economic and security implications for British citizens. Interestingly, very few articles suggested a ‘human interest’ frame – either primary or secondary – and instead presented events predominantly via economic and political concerns.

*Table 2. Total secondary frames found in BBC Online articles covering the Russia-Ukraine war*

<b>Frames</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Consequence	36	60
Responsibility	23	38.33
Human interest	1	1.67
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>

When looking to coverage published on the day of Ukraine’s invasion, *Table 3* (see: appendix) shows a ‘consequence’ theme was most dominant with 9 articles (39.13%, N=9). To add, 7 articles attributed a ‘responsibility’ and ‘human interest’ frame respectively (30.435%, N=7). On the Nord Stream pipeline sabotages, as depicted in *Table 4* (see: appendix), ‘responsibility’ was overwhelmingly dominant at 10 stories (71.43%, N=10), with 4 articles demonstrating a ‘consequence’ theme (28.57%, N=4). Zero articles covering Nord Stream possessed a ‘human interest’ frame. *Table 5* (see: appendix) demonstrates ‘responsibility’ was again the dominant frame at 3 articles (42.86%, N=3), while both the ‘consequence’ and ‘human interest’ frames saw 2 stories each (28.57%, N=2). When articles reporting the attacks on Kerch Strait Bridge were examined, *Table 6* (see: appendix) shows the ‘responsibility’ frame at the highest frequency with 8 articles (50%, N=8). The ‘consequence’ frame saw 6 stories (37.5%, N=6), and ‘human interest’ was suggested in 2 stories (12.5%, N=2).

These individual events, interpreted in conjunction, makes for a representation of Ukraine as the faultless victim of an unprovoked and aggressive war beyond mere territorial expansionism; Ukraine is seen to fly the flag of Western democracy and its victory in the Donbas imperative to preserving a Western way of life (see: BBC3c; BBC5c; BBC1a).

However, this narrative is constructed without due contextualisation of the conflict in relation to its causes, overview of the prior crisis, and disputes regarding event culpability (see: discussion). Further, in these examined articles, Russia was portrayed as undisputed perpetrators of the attacks on both Nord Stream and Crimea bridge despite scant prima facie evidence to suggest so at the time. In later stories, Ukraine's admission of culpability was then framed as a justified moral act conducted in the fog of war, with an almost complete dismissal of human fatalities (BBC16d). Important to note here is the virtually non-existent 'human interest' frame throughout the examined corpus that is so frequently employed across Western media systems during NATO-led militarised conflict (Zollmann, forthcoming). Instead, there was a high frequency of primary and secondary 'consequence' frames, utilising emotive language to depict scared and displaced peoples (BBC6a; BBC18a). Where the above may prove insufficient in its study of framing is demonstrating how these can form a solid critique of poor editorial judgment at BBC Online when it reports the conflict, since one salient limitation is the absence of multiple researchers studying output in its entirety. And so, meriting scholarly critiques based on a relatively small corpus remains foundational to further comprehensive inquiry.

## **Discussion**

To reiterate, examining the role of BBC Online when it frames the Russo-Ukrainian war is incumbent to the study of war journalism and public service broadcasting due to its potential to shape an active and informed citizenry, while also contributing to understandings of how the BBC delivers on its duty of impartiality. Below will seek to interpret these findings to discuss the corporation's performance when reporting the conflict and explore possible contributing factors – such as proximity to power – that may yet remain latent in scholarly literature, and which is thus underexplored in relation to contemporary interpretations of propaganda.

### **‘Twas ever thus?**

When looking to the operationalisation of propaganda we can begin to see a theme emerge which suggests much criteria has been met to justify an interpretation of content that is as above. For Zollmann (2019) and many others (e.g., Boyd-Barrett, 2019; Anderson, 2021b), propaganda that materialises in modern media systems mostly functions through a process of ‘bias by omission,’ exclusion of competing narratives (intentional or otherwise), lack of suitable or appropriate context, and text which exhibits an inherent establishment-oriented point of view (Grayson, 2022). Also of this opinion is investigative journalist Matt Kennard who describes ‘liberal media’ in the UK (e.g., *The Guardian* and BBC) that is fixated on *artificial* discourse generation that subdues a left-wing interpretation of history – or solutions to deliver a more democratic media ecology – believing instead these media naturalise elite views through a passive ‘liberal’ lens (Media Reform Coalition, 2024). The above would suggest a BBC now entirely detached from the publics it is duty-bound to serve – but, if a citizenry conforms to specific opinions en masse, is the BBC then obliged to still represent the broadest possible range of views, even if abstract and extreme in nature? Surely the corporation must, in effect, blow *with* the wind?

Therefore, it is worthwhile to briefly note how scholars have sought to define and measure impartiality in news, particularly through empirical study of media that delivers ‘public value,’ i.e., producing an active and informed citizenry (Cushion, 2013, p.52). When assessing this across the BBC’s current affairs output, a collaborative BBC Trust and Cardiff University report found ‘public value’ was not always present in coverage, but crucially more so than commercial competitors (Cushion, 2013, p.62). To add, even though the BBC demonstrated “how public media can operate independently from the state in times of war and conflict” when it scrutinised justifications for the Iraq invasion, public service broadcasting was “not sufficiently impartial” since it accepted “Western perspectives” and failed to

“challenge the presence of WMD [weapons of mass destruction] only until after military action had commenced,” thus aligning with the elite-driven model as previously mentioned (Cushion, 2013, pp.61, 62). For Marsh (2013, p.221), “No journalist can claim truly to be impartial if he or she is pressured to tell the story in a particular way, or include speakers selected by someone else, usually by power”. Since news media remains exposed to political and economic influence, where elites hold power to manipulate public knowledge (Herman & Chomsky, 1988), we can begin to navigate an examination of performance.

### **Public broadcasting as a (dis)service**

As Luengo and Gil-López (2024, p.3) explain, the *due* in “due impartiality” should be “adequate or appropriate to the broader context” of the story; not least, impartiality as a norm is most often associated with the detached, or “non-interventionist,” institutional role of the journalist (Hanitzsch et al., 2011, p.275). Here we will look to BBC Online articles that follow both these scholar’s interpretation of text that is detached and involves itself with broader context beyond a simple balance of polarities. The extracts below are taken from articles which featured a primary ‘responsibility’ frame.

Kyiv and its Western allies have repeatedly rejected as absurd Mr Putin's claims that Ukraine was being run by neo-Nazis, instead pointing out that Ukraine was now a nation with growing democratic institutions, unlike an authoritarian Russia. [...]. Mr Putin has repeatedly accused the US and its allies of ignoring Russia's demands to prevent Ukraine from joining the Nato military alliance and offer Moscow security guarantees (BBC5a).

Ukrainian presidential adviser Mykhaylo Podolyak said the damage to Nord Stream 1 and 2 was "an act of aggression" towards the EU. He added that Russia wanted to cause pre-winter panic and urged the EU to increase military support for Ukraine (BBC2b).



What struck me most about President Putin's annexation speech was just how full it was of anti-Western bile. The Russian president seems set on whipping up nationalistic, anti-Western sentiment in the country (BBC3c).

We can immediately see that for BBC5a, the Kremlin's justifications for military conflict were discredited as promptly as it was introduced, thereby forcing the receiver to perceive these premises for war as bogus and invalid for their absurdity. Firstly, by comparing a Russian organisation of state as the antithesis of honourable liberal capitalist models – ergo inherently bad – produces not only the inference that Ukraine's iteration of democracy is naturally positive, but more importantly moralises the war through a restrictive 'good versus evil' binary: a common critique of war journalism (Heinrich & Cheruiyot, 2024). Needless, the Russian Federation is clearly the aggressor in this conflict and blame is correctly ascribed for the invasion, but these are viscerally obvious through coverage which needs not a repetition of habitual schemas that classify Russia as the pariah of an imagined utopianistic Eurasian Plate (Zollmann, forthcoming). Continuing, although patently a hyperbolic and propagandist charge of the Zelenskyy regime, to denounce claims of neo-Nazism present in modern-day Ukraine omits context to its history at best and fabricates reality at worst. If only brief, a *Panorama* documentary in 2020 investigated a global neo-Nazi ring that, it claims, was recruiting individuals from the UK with a base of operations located in Ukraine (BBC, 2020a). Not least, some of these individuals were later absorbed into Ukraine's standing army; a similar story for the well-reported far-right Azov regiment now also incorporated into volunteer army battalions (Ripp, 2022; Al Jazeera, 2022). These are not to say, as Putin falsely claims, ideology of the Ukrainian government is neo-Nazi, but more so that citizens should expect these accounts of history to be made available in news text so to clarify and redress misinformation. An omission of context in this scenario is the assertive voice that informs readers that justifications for the war offered by Russia should be dismissed from the offset, rather than journalism that takes an impartial role as emotionally detached to inform – not assert – why scepticism would be wise.

Similarly, BBC2b again ascribes blame to Russia for the attacks on gas infrastructure Nord Stream 1 and 2, despite a lack of clear evidence or impartial sources to suggest otherwise, relying on guilt a priori through the line: “The EU has previously accused Russia of using a reduction in gas supplies as an economic weapon, in response to European sanctions imposed because of Russia's invasion of Ukraine”. At the time of publication, facts were unclear and so positioning an official Ukrainian spokesman – backed and armed by NATO – ‘above the fold’ (favoured coverage by weighting and placement) before explaining known information first, is a clear indication of bias sympathetic to Ukraine, even though it is a country with only tentative links to the infrastructure. It has since later transpired that Ukrainian citizens carried out the explosion on Zelenskyy’s orders (Chazan, 2024), and was yet not qualified by the BBC in any of the articles. Naturally, news media can generally only report on the information with which they receive, but because this article is solely based on conjecture and speculation, it lacks a basic journalistic curiosity that would merit good faith coverage. The connotation for the receiver is this event forms part of the conflict matrix: *au contraire*, it is woven around fears of Putin using “every means at his disposal” (BBC21a) to act against the West. This undue prominence afforded to the Ukrainian source describing gas infrastructure as a tool of war also connotes common enemy justifications since the article was published during a cost-of-living crisis in the UK, eliciting an emotional response from audiences.

Linguistic and stylistic choices (cf. BBC3c) signify that Russia, as a natural enemy of the state, seeks to dismantle living conditions currently enjoyed in the Global North. The phrase “anti-Western bile” not only demonstrates this but follows a critique of Western media systems that congenitally take an ‘anti’-Russia stance in reportage as emblematic of Cold War rhetorical baggage (Boyd-Barrett, 2022). By connoting Russia as the common enemy (explored through the ‘propaganda model’s’ fifth filter, Herman & Chomsky, 1988), it demands an inference to understand the war through a patriotic frame that may well contribute to the ‘rally around the

flag' effect. Although an opinion piece, it was authored by the BBC's Russian editor and therefore confirms the editorial opinion of the corporation by extension. The BBC maintains that opinion is necessary to its explainer and feature coverage, but the very existence of this journalistic genre precipitates content masquerading as impartial. It remains to be seen how assertive language could ever be described as impartial and emotionally detached, not least permit an active and informed citizenry, but does demonstrate a propensity in BBC war coverage to converge around elite-driven models of journalism and therefore activate some propaganda criteria. However, when we look to similar articles also framed for 'responsibility,' a more nuanced picture emerges that better orientates itself to this norm.

The EU has said leaks in two major gas pipelines from Russia to Europe were caused by sabotage - but stopped short of directly accusing Russia (BBC3b).

Russian President Vladimir Putin has accused Ukraine of attacking the bridge to Russian-annexed Crimea, saying that it was an "act of terrorism" (BBC4d).

The above topline shows this paper's findings are not entirely consistent throughout. Both BBC3b and BBC4d describe a Russian-oriented version of events and offers due prominence to this view with its placement at the beginning of the story, thereby framing the information as worthy of consideration. Communication scholarship tells us that it is not just the manner in which information is presented in media text that affects the way it is received, but is the syntax and presentational style (such like placement of competing voices) that shapes its meaning (Milburn & McGrail, 1992). Furthermore, these extracts are later qualified as legitimate concerns of the Russian state – a far cry from earlier examples noted – and shows that bias is not always present when BBC Online reports the conflict; sometimes even producing output much becoming of a public service broadcaster. Nevertheless, it remains clear that linguistic choices offered by the corporation display a clear desire to infer Russian culpability early on within the text – for example, in BBC3b "Russia" is mentioned twice, first for context and

second to dismiss claims it was behind the sabotage. However much the newsman is attempting to contextualise the story here, it nevertheless manufactures an *ad hominem* pretext as Russia potentially at fault.

Language is also an extremely important aspect to delivering news impartially where, especially in wartime, research has found word choices establish context of policy into the first-person plural of ‘we,’ or object pronouns of ‘us’ and ‘them,’ which are shown to signify exclusion from society as a form of political persuasion or equivocation (Mitchell & Stewart, 2017, pp.418-420). Indeed, as Philo and Berry (2004, p.173) note, word choices can “obscure the proper considerations of causes and possible solutions” of conflicts. The BBC’s editorial guidelines on language says: “We should not adopt other people’s language as our own; our responsibility is to remain objective and report in ways that enable our audiences to make their own assessments about who is doing what to whom” (BBC, 2017, 11.3.6). Sources of information should also be made available “particularly when there are conflicting claims” (BBC, 2017, 11.3.1). If the BBC was unbiased in its framing but failed to provide alternative views, then as Hafez (2003, p.5) suggests, “it can be as dangerous to leave aside vital information and central frames [...] as it is to be patriotic or to commit other violations of professional standards of impartiality”.

### **Media as a weapon of war**

Looking now to articles that were framed as ‘consequence’ and ‘human interest’, we can see coverage that aligns with elite narratives and elevates a Western-backed Ukrainian account of the conflict.

It might sound absurd given the apocalyptic backdrop of fighting near Chernobyl. But it really does matter, and could very plausibly herald a 1970s style energy shock. It will be felt in households up and down the country and across the continent (BBC20a).

President Putin has already threatened to use every means at his disposal to protect Russian territory, including nuclear weapons. "This is not a bluff," he said. And his defence minister says Russia is fighting the West even more than Ukraine (BBC21a).

In these two instances, BBC Online seeks to chronicle information through the prism of economic and social ill for domestic and international audiences. Through the assertive voice of “1970s style energy shock”, “apocalyptic backdrop” and “nuclear weapons”, a position is manufactured for distant and eager publics between the binary of ‘good versus evil,’ resulting in a clear obfuscation of the conflict as part of the ‘new-Cold War consensus’ (Brands & Gaddis, 2021). Reference to BBC20a’s implication of nuclear apocalypse, together with the source claim in BBC21a that “Russia is fighting the West even more than Ukraine,” simply reinforces a common critique of developed media systems that anti-Russian sentiment is rife within news for historic geopolitical logic, i.e., assumed Western consensus maintains the USA as the “sole superpower in a unipolar world” (Zollmann, forthcoming).

Why is this important and can it ever be measured? Reese (1990) suggests elite voices disproportionality influence the news agenda due to their overreliance by journalists who seek to frame public debate between status quo and rebel opinion. This power structure, as Wahl-Jorgensen et al. (2017) describe, assembles dissenting voices as that of seeking to respond to established discourse, rather than extending to news product shaped by elites as an instrument of war through its ‘soft power’ function (Payne, 2005). In essence, this suggests that due to the clear interdependence of government and media in terms of access, a narrative can be constructed around information sanctioned only by elites. Dependence on official (or ‘credible’) sources during wartime can lead to domination of official narratives (Doucet, 2018; Boyd-Barrett, 2019) which then helps to perpetuate an elite consensus: viz., “we [NATO] are always trying to persuade audiences to see the world as we do” (Fry, 2022, p.179).

When we look to BBC coverage of the Falklands War, Morrison and Tumber (1988, p.189) argue that “the public’s right to know must be weighed against the government’s responsibility for the handling of a military conflict”. Clearly, at times of crisis it would be unrealistic for media to report on all military action due to national security concerns, but this cannot be said for Ukraine since the UK has no direct defensive purposes in Eastern Europe other than through NATO itself (Gov.uk, 2024). In this sense, government-fed information filtered through news directs an agenda sympathetic to their causes, but here we see that in the age of mediatised conflict there is no similar dependency for official sources to provide accurate accounts of news, and is thus a weak interpretation of the indexing hypothesis. If we look to a comparative study of Al-Jazeera (adopting morally informed objectivity) and the BBC (performing impartiality through decontextualised balance) during the 2008 Gaza war where Britain too had no direct military aims, we see how the inferior warring faction (Palestine) was depoliticised and disembodied of its history, with a clear elevation of Israeli war justifications despite an asymmetric nature of the conflict (Zghoul, 2022). This is similar to how the Russia-Ukraine war has been hitherto framed, where like Israel, Ukraine enjoys moral and political backing of the West, which then filters a simplistic rhetoric through coverage.

If “propaganda needs to be based on a relatively fair and factual portrayal of events” (Chomsky, 1989, p.151), and that it is “an integral part of human discourse in peace as well as in war” (Taylor, 1995, pp.x-xi), how then can providing meaning to an unfolding strip of events service the power elite? Mainstream scholastic concern contends that publics are ill-equipped and ill-informed to direct policy decisions in their best interests, and so opposition to military involvement directed via the mediated public sphere is as such a normative position (Holsti, 1992). However, particularly in foreign affairs reportage, the primary prediction of performance in wartime remains evident through an elite-driven model (Robinson et al., 2010).

On the border with Hungary, two members of the ethnic Hungarian minority in western Ukraine told Reuters news agency that they feared being drafted into Ukraine's military to aid the defence. "No one wants to get conscripted, no one wants to die," said Tamas Bodnar, who was crossing with his brother Csaba. "It's clear that those who can, they flee" (BBC6a).

Major Western nations have reacted with outrage at Russia's invasion of Ukraine, accusing it of bringing war back to Europe. France's Emmanuel Macron said this was a "turning point in the history of Europe" (BBC4a).

Moscow's move to annex parts of Ukraine has sent a new Iron Curtain down across a vast swathe of territory - cutting off an unknown number of people from their own country (BBC7c).

Ukraine is exploding with excitement this morning. Videos of the damaged Crimean bridge have spread like wildfire on social media; this is already being compared to the sinking of the Russian warship Moskva in April (BBC2d).

Above reveal a primary 'human interest' and a secondary 'consequence' frame. In both BBC4a and BBC7c, we can again see a hang on of Cold War rhetoric which places a hierarchy of nations below that of the Western consensus. BBC4a exploits emotive language which signifies for the layman a Europe unbothered by conflict since the defeat of Nazism in 1945; this is false and was yet unqualified. Political spin such as this claim rarely occurred when Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, neither during the Russo-Georgian war in 2008, or the Chechen-Russia conflicts of the 1990s (see: Liu, 2019). Engineering an incorrect narrative devoid of the histories undoubtedly underscores a common critique of BBC performance; context is omitted for audiences who now enjoy alternative and retrievable news in mediatised spaces. To permit political actors to obscure events in living memory can only be described as ideological in nature. This is also true for BBC7c where language of a "new Iron Curtain" situates a Russia as the authoritarian imperialist power primarily through the habitual schema of Russia, ergo USSR. Not least, heuristic cues in BBC2d conditions 'human interest' framing in news text

that simply reports curious Ukrainian nationals celebrating the destruction of key infrastructure, alongside a clear assertive voice that suggests this act should also be celebrated by domestic audiences (BBC2d). This follows a similar pattern of war journalism that contends a pro-war bias, especially through ‘media spectacles’, and is yet unbecoming of BBC editorial standards (BBC, 2017, 11.3.6).

### **A contested paradigm?**

We now see a convincing picture emerge that contends as such that BBC Online does not report the Russo-Ukrainian war through the normative position of impartiality as ‘wagon wheel’, and consequently produces product that is bias in nature – but when is it propaganda? Looking to coverage of the invasion, most articles demonstrated a dominant ‘consequence’ frame that understandably positioned events through possible impacts of the war for citizens. Interestingly, ‘human interest’ was framed far fewer than initially expected since this is most often the case when framing militarised conflict in West Asia: guises of humanitarian intervention and civilising the developing world are frequently apparent (Hammond, 2000). These framing techniques conform to cultural mythologies and discourses that proffers an Anglo-America not only legitimate in policing the world, but as liberators of evil (Nazism, communism etc.), and therefore justified to act militarily. Perhaps this reveals a BBC steadfast in its statutory requirement to reflect the country’s “culture and values to the world” (BBC Charter 2016), but more confidently shows a corporation willing to transmute notions of impartiality when conflict is initiated by states hostile to NATO interventionism, such as during the Iraq war.

When we look to framing of the Nord Stream attacks, we see as one would expect, the ‘responsibility’ frame was most prominent. Initially, this event was characterised as an act of Russian aggression hellbent on bringing the hitherto distant war to the home front. These positions were later clarified in coverage that followed an international investigation but failed



to fully acquit the Federation of the charge, instead framing the attacks as a direct causal link of Ukraine's invasion and therefore as part of its defensive – not offensive – strategy. This picture however becomes murky when BBC Online framed Ukraine's annexation which appealed to emotive human consequences. It cannot be argued news text was bias here since the information remained consistent for previous BBC war reporting, in addition to angles fixated around simple facticity and qualification of dubious Kremlin claims of defending Russian citizens. When the Crimea bridge sabotages are examined, we can see a similar pattern to Nord Stream coverage where despite scant evidence to suggest Russian involvement, inferences and assertions of culpability was grossly apparent, even though its destruction would ultimately compound Putin's war aims. However, when Ukrainian officials later claimed the attacks for themselves, rather than presenting any negative implications, Ukraine was bestowed an assumption of honourability in war which naturally only elicits criticism for obvious newsgatherer insincerity.

Some scholars argue media performs an “inflammatory role” during conflict, where news is hyperbolised and framed in line with a national identity or story (Ozohu-Suleiman, 2014, p.85), while others proffer that media in wartime is yet a sinister tool of government weaponised to destabilise enemy combatants with the spread of disinformation and to corral plebeians against a common foe (Miazhevich, 2016). Where media as an instrument of war is concerned, and therefore analyses of a propaganda at play – that is to shape political outcomes of conflicts (Payne, 2005) – is the argument news agendas maintain an uncritical presentation of Western imperial objectives, not least a failure to draw comparisons with armed conflicts instigated and commanded by liberal democracies (Zollmann, 2017; Schiffer, 2022). Framing of international conflict may well “constitute a vital soft power tool” in the manufacturing of popular consent when attributing blame and responsibility, or even when advising who or what the enemy is (Liu, 2023; Boyd-Barrett, 2017a). These inquiries follow a deterministic model of

the fourth estate that predominately interrogates the ideological positioning of news text in public spheres but is yet so readily muddled in assumptions that contemporary media remains monolithic, which is obviously no longer the case. The elite-driven model of media performance will show that during conflict, “criticism of government and military is minimal, with little attention given to wider political and historical contexts” (Robinson et al., 2010, p.39). Taken together, it is easy to note much criteria has been met to merit BBC Online coverage through these four important events as biased in the first instance, and as propaganda when reviewed in conjunction.

It is clear to see omission of salient context when we look to events which were reported without due qualification and presented as fact despite significant contestation. This *parti pris* hierarchises top-down sources and dismisses dissenting or competing narratives that a ‘wagon wheel’ mode of impartiality should employ. This is not always true as Russian sources were at times elevated above NATO-backed sources, but this was only evident through text which featured both direct Russian and Ukrainian voices, and so was not routinely or consistently followed. In the inferred and proclaimed narrative posited in a number of articles that employed habitual schemas to suggest Russia as an extension of the former Soviet Republics, audiences were not offered appropriate or suitable scepticism which would ordinarily be demanded of an impartial broadcaster. As previously mentioned, for propaganda to occur it need not necessarily materialise intentionally since when crudely intellectualised, it may be performed unbeknownst to media agents due to self-censorship or because of an assimilated culture conformist to establishment dogma; moreover, propagandist material is not directly measured via its media effects (Mattingly & Yao, 2022). Since it is the BBC’s duty to act with both accuracy and impartiality, it would be remiss to ascribe the examined performance as misinformation or simple errors of editorial judgment. The corporation has a moral duty to report news that informs citizens and allows for a creation of nationhood that is active and well-versed in the

democratic process (BBC Charter 2016). Further study is best poised to clarify this position by assessing BBC product covering the war in its entirety so as to discover which popular formats comply most to the impartiality norm in letter and in spirit. In the context of war framing, Tankard (1997) argues mass media possess immense power to introduce negative and positive spins in line with elite interests for nations categorised as ‘aggressor’ or ‘aggrieved’. The manner in which professional journalists source news and define newsworthiness undoubtedly shapes how news retrieved, presented and communicated; and yet these processes endure a persistent vulnerability to manipulation by malign actors to obfuscate accurate representations of conflict (Maltby, 2007, p.5). From the above, we can clearly tell journalistic norms are often ill-complied or loosely observed when media reports war: – nevertheless, as Entman (2003, p.415) explains, “media are not [always] entirely passive receptacles for government propaganda.”

## Conclusion

This research has shown that when BBC Online reports the Russo-Ukrainian war, scholarly concern which contends coverage is biased – or uncompliant of impartiality norms – is duly warranted. In fact, when framing the conflict, BBC Online comfortably satisfies ample criteria to merit output that is, by definition, propaganda. Although not routinely activated, this study observed frames that favoured elitist views, omitted historical context and clearly pushed an emotional agenda which masqueraded as objective hard news coverage. These results, however, did not consistently find BBC Online published biased content: ‘human interest’ articles mostly adhered to editorial standards congruent of a public service broadcaster. Nevertheless, this study advances the BBC’s impartiality norm was not typically followed when it reported the war, and instead gravitated around established discourse thereby failing in its statutory duty to serve citizens and promote healthy and informed debate. Coverage was judged to regularly diverge from the impartiality norm and relied almost exclusively on presenting the war through a reductionistic ‘good versus evil’ binary. Overall, this research compliments current literature that finds mass media, and public service broadcasting in particular, follows an elite-driven mode of journalism that is devoid of broader debate beyond elite dissensus. Many aggravating factors may contribute to this measured biased performance – for example, difficulties regarding access; necessity to report accurately which inadvertently prioritises governmental sources; and habitual schemas present in newsgatherers that produce copy sympathetic of elite discourse. Where these findings fall short in asserting with confidence a BBC ill-equipped to serve publics, is that no media effects research was undertaken. It is therefore imperative that future study measures if, and by how much, knowledge and opinion is shaped by BBC product which is itself extolled as the exemplar of impartial and independent journalism.

Language choice and presentational style is also of significance when assessing BBC Online coverage, and so it is in my view the following recommendations be adopted: editorial impartiality ought to be more substantially codified so that coverage can be better assessed and critiqued; if the BBC maintains itself as an impartial provider, it should also follow that at times of war it remains as such without a false pretence of reflecting the broadest possible range of views in public debate; and most importantly, space should be afforded to the BBC via the removal of political appointees to its highest offices so that it is free from governmental influence and interference. Voluminous scholarship exists which demonstrate a BBC incapable of producing copy to its lofty standards at times of war; if it fails in its reconceptualization of impartiality when reporting war, a further divide of its publics and a growth of news avoidance will surely threaten its existence when the licence fee and charter is up for review in 2027.

Current literature on disruptive media practises is mostly devoid of context or reference pertaining to the large and seminal body of propaganda research that captures political persuasion in its most crude form as news text. It is hoped that by positioning an exploration of propaganda alongside an examination of BBC output, it is re-welcomed into scholarship as a worthy and applicable genre of news investigation that is emblematic of a defunct media system chiefly critiqued for its perceived failure to serve publics. It is not the view of this paper to advance a diminished media ecology, or that public service broadcasting is naturally pro-elite, but rather it calls on the BBC and fourth estate more generally to accept impartiality as an elusive ideal which, especially in wartime, citizens should not expect to be consistently employed.

This research is original in its method and approach, particularly in exploring frames present in BBC coverage of the Russia-Ukraine war, and most clearly in its drive to assess performance against an understanding of propaganda in contemporary scholarship. However, its overarching findings are not new, and instead follow previous studies which broadly agree

with these results (Claessen, 2023; Ononiwu, 2023). Crucially, however, this research lacks in a systematic review of editorial output across BBC product in its entirety; nathless, future study is best poised to begin here. What remains abundantly clear throughout the literature is (1) the fraught requirement to define “due impartiality” in far more precise terms than currently realised; and (2) BBC product, as yet, follows a mode of propaganda which is at odds with its values, missions and purpose as an institution to serve citizens for the betterment of communal knowledge. And so, as Stafford Beer, “there is no point in claiming that the purpose of a system is to do what it constantly fails to do” (cited in Benjamin & Komlos, 2021).

## References

- Al-Jazeera. 2024. *Profile: who are Ukraine's far-right Azov regiment?* [Online]. 1 March. [Accessed 14 August 2024]. Available from: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/1/who-are-the-azov-regiment>
- Allan, S. and Zelizer, B. 2004. *Reporting war: journalism in wartime*. New York: Routledge.
- Alozie, E. 2005. Sudan and South Africa: a framing analysis of Mail & Guardian Online's coverage of Darfur. *Ecquid Novi*. **26**(1), pp.63-84.
- Anderson, C.W. 2021a. Propaganda, misinformation, and histories of media techniques. *Misinformation Review*. **2**(2), pp.1-7.
- Anderson, C.W. 2021b. Fake news is not a virus: on platforms and their effects. *Communication Theory*. **31**(1), pp.42-61.
- Banducci, S., Cioroianu, I., Coan, T., Katz, G. and Stevens, D. 2018. Intermedia agenda setting in personalized campaigns: how news media influence the importance of leaders. *Electoral Studies*. **54**, pp.281-288.
- Barker, A. 2022. *BBC defends impartiality after Maitlis accuses it of 'both-sides-ism'*. *Financial Times*. [Online]. 25 August. [Accessed 10 August 2024]. Available from: <https://www.ft.com/content/802f0ad0-2ef9-43ae-bcd4-fe7b7ab59535>
- Barker, A., Bond, D. and Parker, G. 2021. BBC director sought to block senior editorial appointment. *Financial Times*. [Online]. 9 July. [Accessed 19 February 2024]. Available from: <https://www.ft.com/content/82a54037-501d-457b-b8f4-35744c85ec9b>
- BBC Charter. 2016. *Mission, values and public purposes*. [Online]. [Accessed 14 February 2014]. Available from: <https://www.bbc.com/aboutthebbc/governance/mission>
- BBC. 2007. *From seesaw to wagon wheel: safeguarding impartiality in the 21st century*. [Online]. [Accessed 11 August 2024]. Available from: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/18\\_06\\_07impartialitybbc.pdf](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/18_06_07impartialitybbc.pdf)
- BBC. 2017. *Editorial standards*. [Online]. [Accessed 18 August 2024]. Available from: <https://downloads.bbc.co.uk/guidelines/editorialguidelines/pdfs/bbc-editorial-guidelines-whole-document.pdf>
- BBC. 2020a. *Inside the global network of Neo-Nazis recruiting in the UK*. [Online]. [Accessed 12 August 2024]. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5pbP5e5YyW4>
- BBC. 2020b. *New data shows BBC is the world's most visited news site*. [Online]. [Accessed 11 August 2024]. Available from: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/worldnews/2020/worlds-most-visited-news-site>
- BBC. 2020c. *Reuters Institute study finds BBC News is America's most trusted news brand*. [Online]. [Accessed 11 August 2024]. Available from: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/worldnews/2020/reuters-institute-study-finds-bbc-news-is-americas-most-trusted-news-brand>

- BBC. 2024. What are the sanctions on Russia and have they affected its economy? *BBC Online*. [Online]. 23 February. [Accessed 1 August 2024]. Available from: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-60125659>
- Benjamin, D. and Komlos, D. 2024. The purpose of a system is what it does, not what it claims to do. *Forbes*. [Online]. 13 September. [Accessed 20 August 2024]. Available from: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/benjaminkomlos/2021/09/13/the-purpose-of-a-system-is-what-it-does-not-what-it-claims-to-do/>
- Bennett, W.L. 1990. Toward a theory of press-state relations in the United States. *Journal of Communication*. **40**(2), pp.103-27.
- Bjørge, N.M. and Kalnes, O. 2021. Cultures of anarchy: images of Russia in the narrative of Norwegian mainstream news media during the Ukraine crisis 2014. *Media, War & Conflict*. **14**(2), pp.150-173.
- Blumer, H. 1971. Social problems as collective behavior. *Social Problems*. **18**(3), pp.298-306.
- Blumler, J.G. 2016. To be independent or not to be independent, that is the question. *Publizistik*. **61**, pp.305-320.
- Born, G. 2005. *Uncertain vision: Birt, Dyke and the reinvention of the BBC*. New York: Vintage.
- Boyd-Barrett, O. 2017a. *Western mainstream media and the Ukraine crisis: a study in conflict propaganda*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Boyd-Barrett, O. 2017b. Ukraine, mainstream media and conflict propaganda. *Journalism Studies*. **18**(8), pp.1016-1034.
- Boyd-Barrett, O. 2019. Fake news and 'RussiaGate' discourses: propaganda in the post-truth era. *Journalism*. **20**(1), pp.87-91.
- Boyd-Barrett, O. 2022. *Conflict propaganda in Syria: narrative battles*. London: Routledge.
- Brands, H. and Gaddis, J. 2021. The new cold war: America, China, and the echoes of history. *Foreign Affairs*. **100**(6), pp.10-21.
- Brown, F. 2024. British citizens should be 'trained and equipped' to fight in a potential war with Russia, military chief says. *Sky News*. [Online]. 24 January. [Accessed 10 August 2024]. Available from: <https://news.sky.com/story/british-citizens-should-be-trained-and-equipped-to-fight-in-a-potential-war-with-russia-military-chief-says-13055161>
- Bubalo, M. and Goksedef, E. 2023. Ukraine says it launched July attack on bridge to Crimea. *BBC Online*. [Online]. 3 August. [Accessed 6 July 2024]. Available from: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-66397227>
- Bussemer, T. 2005. *Propaganda: konzepte und theorien*. Mit einem Vorwort von Peter Glotz, Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften (translated).
- Campbell, M. 2024. Despite Ukraine's Kursk invasion gamble, Russia is closing in on a big victory. *The Times*. [Online]. 24 August. [Accessed 20 August 2024]. Available from: <https://www.thetimes.com/world/russia-ukraine-war/article/ukraine-kursk-incursion-russia-invasion-gamble-gvqvsmpkg>



- Cappella, J. and Jamieson, K. 1996. News frames, political cynicism, and media cynicism. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. **546**, pp.71–84.
- Chazan, G. 2024. The competing theories of the Nord Stream explosions. *Financial Times*. [Online]. 14 August. [Accessed 19 August 2024]. Available from: <https://www.ft.com/content/120d3b78-68b4-4b42-9e65-c55e8fd77fd0>
- Chernov, G. 2023. The Russian-Ukrainian War: persistence of frames and the media issue-cycles. *Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications*. **9**, pp.1-13.
- Choi, S.W. and James, P. 2007. Media openness, democracy and militarized interstate disputes. *British Journal of Political Science*. **37**(1), pp.23–46.
- Chomsky, N. 1989. *Necessary illusions: thought control in democratic societies*. London: Pluto.
- Chomsky, N. 1997. *Media control: the spectacular achievements of propaganda*. New York: Seven Stories Press.
- Christians, C. 2009. *Normative theories of the media: journalism in democratic societies*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Claessen, E. 2023. The making of a narrative: the use of geopolitical othering in Russian strategic narratives during the Ukraine crisis. *Media, War & Conflict*. **16**(1), pp.82-99.
- Cushion, S. 2011. *Television Journalism*. London: Sage.
- Cushion, S. 2013. Assessing, measuring and applying ‘public value tests’ beyond new media: interpreting impartiality and plurality in debates about journalism standards. In: Barkho, L., Thomas, E., Eckhardt, M. and Mitchell, T. eds. *From theory to practice: how to assess and apply impartiality in news and current affairs*. Bristol: Intellect, pp.49-67.
- Cushion, S., Kilby, A., Thomas, R., Morani, M. and Sambrook, R. 2018. Newspapers, impartiality and television news. *Journalism Studies*. **19**(2), pp.162-181.
- Dahlberg, L. 2005. The Habermasian public sphere: taking difference seriously? *Theory and Society*. **34**(2), pp.111-136.
- de Vreese, C.H. 2005. News framing: theory and typology. *Information Design Journal and Document Design*. **13**(1), pp.51-62.
- Dimitrova, D.V., Kaid, L.L., Williams, A.P. and Trammell, K.D. 2005. War on the web: the immediate news framing of Gulf War II. *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*. **10**(1), pp.22–44.
- Doucet, L. 2018. Syria and the CNN effect: what role does the media play in policy-making? *Daedalus*. **147**(1), pp.141-157.
- Entman, R.M. 1989. How the media affect what people think: an information processing approach. *The Journal of Politics*. **51**(2), pp.347-370.
- Entman, R.M. 1993. Framing: towards clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication Studies*. **43**(3), pp.51-58.
- Entman, R.M. 2003. Cascading activation: contesting the White House’s frame after 9/11. *Political Communication*. **20**(4), pp.415–32.

- Fiss, P. and Hirsch, P. 2005. The discourse of globalization: framing and sensemaking of an emerging concept. *American Sociological Review*. **70**(1), pp.29–52.
- Foucault, M. 1972. *The archaeology of knowledge*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Fox, N. 1997. Is there life after Foucault?: texts, frames and differends. In: Bunton, R. and Peterson, A. eds. *Foucault, health and medicine*. London: Routledge, pp.31-50.
- Freedman, D. and Thussu, D. 2003. *War and the media: reporting conflict 24/7*. London: Sage.
- Fry, E. 2022. Persuasion not propaganda: overcoming controversies of domestic influence in NATO military strategic communications. *Defence Strategic Communications*. **11**, pp.177-213.
- Galtung, J. 2011. Preface. In: Lynch, J., Shaw, S. and Hackett, R. eds. *Expanding peace journalism: comparative and critical approaches*. Sydney: Sydney University Press.
- Gamson, W.A. and Modigliani, A. 1987. Media discourse and public opinion on nuclear power: a constructionist approach. *American Journal of Sociology*. **95**(1), pp.1-37.
- Gans, H. 1979. *Deciding what's news: a study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek and Time*. New York: Pantheon.
- Goffman, E. 1974. *Frame analysis: an essay on the organization of experience*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.
- Gov.uk. 2024. *UK to stand with Ukraine for as long as it takes, PM to tell NATO*. [Press release]. [Accessed 15 July 2024]. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-to-stand-with-ukraine-for-as-long-as-it-takes-pm-to-tell-nato>
- Grayson, D. 2022. The UK government is right, the BBC is broken. Here's how we fix it. *Open Democracy*. [Online]. 26 January. [Accessed 19 August 2024]. Available from: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/opendemocracyuk/bbc-tv-licence-fee-freeze-uk-government-nations-regions/>
- Hafez, K. 2003. *The Iraq war 2003 in Western media and public opinion: a case study of the effects of military (non-) involvement in conflict perception*. Paper presented at the second metu conference on international relations. Middle East Technical University: Ankara.
- Hall, S. 1997. *Representation: cultural representations and signifying practices*. London: Sage.
- Hallin, D.C. 1986. *The uncensored war: the media and Vietnam*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hammond, P. 2000. Reporting "humanitarian" warfare: propaganda, moralism and NATO's Kosovo war. *Journalism Studies*. **1**(3), pp.365-386.
- Hammond, P. 2007. *Media, war and postmodernity*. London: Routledge.
- Hanitzsch, T., Hanusch, F., Mellado, C., Anikina, M., Berganza, R., Cangoz, I., Wang, K. and Yuen, E. 2010. Mapping journalism cultures across nations: a comparative study of 18 countries. *Journalism Studies*. **12**(3), pp.273-293.

- Hayes, D. and Guardino, M. 2010. Whose views made the news?: media coverage and the march to war in Iraq. *Political Communication*. **27**(1), pp.59-87.
- Heinrich, A. and Cheruiyot, D. 2024. [Forthcoming]. *Deconstructing or reinforcing binaries?: how scholars position non-journalists in global conflict reporting*. [Online]. [Accessed 19 August 2024]. Available from: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/21670811.2024.2314583>
- Hendy, C. 2013. *Public service broadcasting*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Herman, E.S. and Chomsky, N. 1988. *Manufacturing consent: the political economy of the mass media*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Holsti, R. 1992. Public opinion and foreign policy: challenges to the Almond-Lippmann consensus. *International Studies Quarterly*. **36**, pp.439-4.
- Hummel, W.C. and Huntress, K.G. 1949. *The analysis of propaganda*. New York: Sloane.
- Hyzen, A. 2021. Revisiting the theoretical foundations of propaganda. *International Journal of Communication*. **15**, pp.3479-3496.
- Iyengar, S. and Simon, A. 1994. News coverage of the Gulf Crisis and public opinion: a study of agenda-setting, priming and framing. In: Bennett, W.L. and Paletz, D.L. eds. *Taken by storm: the media, public opinion, and U.S. foreign policy in the Gulf war*. London: The University of Chicago Press, pp.167-186.
- Jarlbrink, J. and Norén, F. 2022. The rise and fall of 'propaganda' as a positive concept: a digital reading of Swedish parliamentary records, 1867–2019. *Scandinavian Journal of History*. **48**(3), pp.379–399.
- Jones, M. 2016. The BBC, Savile and investigations. *Open Democracy*. [Online]. 22 January. [Accessed 19 February 2024]. Available from: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/ourbeeb/bbc-savile-and-investigations/>
- Jowett, G. and O'Donnell, V. 2006. *Propaganda and persuasion*. 4th ed. London: Sage.
- Katz, E. and Lazarsfeld, P. 1955. Images of the mass communications process. In: Katz, E. and Lazarsfeld P. eds. *Personal influence: the part played by people in the flow of communication*. New York: Free Press, pp.15–42.
- Keeble, R. 2000. New militarism and the manufacture of warfare. In: Hammond, P. and Herman, E.S. eds. *Degraded capability: the media and the Kosovo crisis*. London: Pluto Press, pp.59-69.
- Kellner, D. 2005. *Media spectacle and the crisis of democracy: terrorism, war, and election battles*. Boulder: Paradigm.
- Koch, T. 1990. *The news as myth: fact and context in journalism*. New York: Greenwood Press.
- Koenig, T. 2006. Compounding mixed-methods problems in frame analysis through comparative research. *Qualitative Research*. **6**(1), pp.61-76.
- Lasswell, H.D. 1927. The theory of political propaganda. *The American Political Science Review*. **21**(3), pp.627-631.

- Lewis, J. 2014. How the BBC leans to the right. In: Mair, J., Tait, R. and Keeble, R.L. eds. *Is the BBC in crisis?* Bury St Edmunds: Abramis, pp.114-121.
- Lewis, J. and Cushion, S. 2019. Think tanks, television news and impartiality. *Journalism Studies*. **20**(4), pp.480-499.
- Lichtenstein, D. and Koerth, K. 2022. Different shows, different stories: how German TV formats challenged the government's framing of the Ukraine crisis. *Media, War & Conflict*. **15**(2), pp.125-145.
- Linström, M. and Marais, W. 2012. Qualitative news frame analysis: a methodology. *Communitas*. **17**, pp.21-38.
- Liu, Z. 2019. News framing of the Ukraine crisis in the Russian and British media: comparing The Moscow Times and The Guardian. *Networking Knowledge: Journal of the MeCCSA Postgraduate Network*. **12**(1), pp.4–22.
- Liu, Z. 2023. News framing of the 2014-15 Ukraine conflict by the BBC and RT. *International Communication Gazette*. [Online]. [Accessed 24 February 2024]. Available from: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/17480485231158904>
- Luengo, M., and Gil-López, T. 2024. [Forthcoming]. *Breaching BBC impartiality rules: journalism identity, institutional networks and social media*. [Online]. [Accessed 10 August 2024]. Available from: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/14648849241266097>
- Maltby, S. 2007. Communicating war: strategies and implications. In: Maltby, S. and Keeble, R. eds. *Communicating war: memory, media and military*. Bury St. Edmunds: Arima.
- Maras, S. 2013. *Objectivity in journalism*. Cambridge: Malden.
- Marsh, K. 2013. Issues of impartiality in news and current affairs – some practical considerations. In: Barkho, L., Thomas, E., Eckhardt, M. and Mitchell, T. eds. *From theory to practice: how to assess and apply impartiality in news and current affairs*. Bristol: Intellect, pp.211-222.
- Martin, J. and Chaudhary, A.G. 1983. *Comparative mass media systems*. New York: Longman.
- Mattingly, D. and Yao, E. 2022. How soft propaganda persuades. *Comparative Political Studies*. **55**(9), pp.1569-1594.
- McQuail, D. 2005. *Mass Communication Theory*. 5<sup>th</sup> ed. London: Sage.
- Medhurst, J. 2022. 'Nation shall speak peace unto nation?': the BBC and the nations. *Critical Studies in Television*. **17**(1), pp.8-23.
- Media Reform Coalition. 2024. *Matt Kennard on 'mainstream' journalism & the security state - Media Democracy Festival 2024*. [Online]. [Accessed 10 August 2024]. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2nv3OnYDNIY>
- Merrill, J. 1983. *Global journalism: a survey of the world's mass media*. New York: Longman.
- Miazhevich, G. 2016. International broadcasting and the conflict-related national media events: the framing of Euromaidan by the BBC and RT. In: Mitu, B. and Poulakidakos, S. eds. *Media events*. London: Palgrave.

- Milburn, M. and McGrail, A. 1992. The dramatic presentation of news and its effects on cognitive complexity. *Political Psychology*. **13**(4), pp.613–632.
- Mills, C. 2024a. *Military assistance to Ukraine since the Russian invasion*. [Online]. London: House of Commons Library. [Accessed 10 August 2024]. Available from: <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9477/CBP-9477.pdf>
- Mills, C. 2024b. *Ukraine conflict: an overview*. [Online]. London: House of Commons Library. [Accessed 10 August 2024]. Available from: <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9723/CBP-9723.pdf>
- Mills, T. 2015. *The end of social democracy and the rise of neoliberalism at the BBC*. Ph.D. thesis, University of Bath.
- Mills, T. 2016. *The BBC: myth of a public service*. London: Verso.
- Mills, T. and Sinclair, I. 2017. The BBC is neither independent or impartial: interview with Tom Mills. *Open Democracy*. [Online]. 25 January. [Accessed 10 August 2024]. Available from: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/ourbeeb/bbc-is-neither-independent-or-impartial-interview-with-tom-mills/>
- Mitchell, P. and Stewart, J. 2017. Who are we?: language and impartiality in BBC radio journalism. *Journalism Practice*. **11**(4), pp.417–437.
- Mock, R. and Rettich, M. 2003. The war against Iraq on television: a split reality. In: Schechter, D. ed. *Embedded: weapons of mass deception: how the media failed to cover the war on Iraq*. New York: Prometheus Books.
- Moravčíková, E. 2020. Media manipulation and propaganda in the post-truth era. *Media Literacy and Academic Research*. **3**(2), pp.23–37.
- Morrison, D. and Tumber, H. 1988. *Journalists at war: the dynamics of news reporting during the Falklands conflict*. London: Sage.
- Mottaleb, K., Kruseman, G. and Snapp, S. 2022. Potential impacts of Ukraine-Russia armed conflict on global wheat food security: a quantitative exploration. *Global Food Security*. **35**(100659), pp.1–12.
- Mueller, J.E. 1973. *War, presidents and public opinion*. New York: John Wiley.
- Nelson, T.E., Clawson, R.A., and Oxley, Z.M. 1997. Media framing of a civil liberties conflict and its effect on tolerance. *The American Political Science Review*. **91**(3), pp.567–583.
- Nielsen, R.K., Schulz, A., Fletcher, R. and Robertson, C.T. 2023. The BBC is under scrutiny, here's what research tells about its role in the UK. *Reuters Institute*. [Online]. 17 August. [Accessed 17 February 2024]. Available from: <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/news/bbc-under-scrutiny-heres-what-research-tells-about-its-role-uk>
- Nowell, L.S., Norris, J.M., White, D.E., Moules, N.J. 2017. Thematic analysis: striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*. **16**(1), pp.1–13.
- Ofcom. 2017. *Guidance notes - section five: due impartiality and due accuracy and undue prominence of views and opinions*. [Online]. [Accessed 11 August 2024]. Available from: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/tv-radio-and-on->



- [demand/broadcast-codes/code---march/april-2017/broadcast-code-guidance-section-5-march-2017.pdf?v=335875](https://www.ofcom.gov.uk/consult/condocs/broadcast/broadcast_codes/code---march/april-2017/broadcast-code-guidance-section-5-march-2017.pdf?v=335875)
- Ofcom. 2019. *Review of BBC news and current affairs*. [Online]. [Accessed 20 February 2024]. Available from: [https://www.ofcom.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0025/173734/bbc-news-review.pdf](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0025/173734/bbc-news-review.pdf)
- Ofcom. 2023. *BBC audiences review: understanding what factors may drive lower satisfaction levels among D and E socio-economic groups*. [Online]. [Accessed 11 August 2024]. Available from: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/tv-radio-and-on-demand/bbc/bbc-audience-review/bbc-audiences-review/?v=330487>
- Ononiwu, C. 2023. Ideology and cognitive stereotypes in media representation of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. *Media, War & Conflict*. [Online]. [Accessed 24 February 2024]. Available from: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/17506352231201743>
- Ozohu-Suleiman, Y. 2014. War journalism on Israel/Palestine: does contra-flow really make a difference? *Media, War & Conflict*. 7(1), pp.85-103.
- Payne, K. 2005. The media as an instrument of war. *Parameters*. 35(1), pp.81-93.
- Philo, G. and Berry, M. 2004. *Bad news from Israel*. London: Pluto Press.
- Pike, J. 2023. Gary Lineker row: the role of BBC director general has always been a tricky balancing act - and it's not getting any easier. *Sky News*. [Online]. 12 March. [Accessed 20 February 2024]. Available from: <https://news.sky.com/story/gary-lineker-row-the-role-of-bbc-director-general-has-always-been-a-tricky-balancing-act-and-its-not-getting-any-easier-12831778>
- Pratkanis, A.R. and Aronson, E. 1992. *Age of propaganda: the everyday use and abuse of persuasion*. New York: Henry Holt & Co.
- Qualter, T.H. 1997. The social role of advertising. In: O'Sullivan, T. and Jewkes, Y. eds. *The media studies reader*. London: Arnold, pp.154-64.
- Ravi, N. 2005. Looking beyond flawed journalism: how national interests, patriotism, and cultural values shaped the coverage of the Iraq war. *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*. 10(1), pp.45-62.
- Reese, S. 1990. Prologue--framing public life: a bridging model for media research. In: Reese, S., Gandy, O. and Grant, A. 1990. *Framing public life: perspectives on media and our understanding of the social world*. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Reuters. 2023. *Reuters Institute digital news report*. [Online]. [Accessed 11 August 2024]. Available from: <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2023>
- Reuters. 2024. *How Russia exports gas to Europe via Ukraine?* [Online]. 8 August. [Accessed 20 August 2024]. Available from: [https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/how-russia-exports-gas-europe-via-ukraine-2024-08-08/#:~:text=Aug%20%20\(Reuters\)%20%2D%20About,day%20to%20Europe%20via%20Ukraine.](https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/how-russia-exports-gas-europe-via-ukraine-2024-08-08/#:~:text=Aug%20%20(Reuters)%20%2D%20About,day%20to%20Europe%20via%20Ukraine.)
- Ripp, A. 2022. Ukraine's Nazi problem is real, even if Putin's 'denazification' claim isn't. *NBC*. [Online]. 5 March. [Accessed 14 August 2024]. Available from:

- <https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/ukraine-has-nazi-problem-vladimir-putin-s-denazification-claim-war-ncna1290946>
- Robinson, P., Goddard, P., Parry, K., Murray, C. and Taylor, P.M. 2010. *Pockets of resistance: British news media, war and theory in the 2003 invasion of Iraq*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Rogoff, K. 2022. Putin's invasion of Ukraine suggests the 'peace dividend' is fading. *The Guardian*. [Online]. 3 March. [Accessed 17 July 2024]. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/mar/03/putin-invasion-ukraine-peace-dividend-russia>
- Rowley, T. 2015. Margaret Thatcher papers: BBC 'assisted the enemy during the Falklands War'. *The Telegraph*. [Online]. 18 June. [Accessed 10 August 2024]. Available from: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/margaret-thatcher/11684868/Margaret-Thatcher-papers-BBC-assisted-the-enemy-during-the-Falklands-War.html>
- Rusbridger, A. 2024. How the government captured the BBC. *Prospect*. [Online]. 24 January. [Accessed 20 February 2024]. Available from: <https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/ideas/media/64534/how-the-government-captured-the-bbc>
- Sambrook, R. 2012. *Delivering trust: impartiality and objectivity in the digital age*. Oxon: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, University of Oxford.
- Schechter, D. 2003. *Embedded: weapons of mass deception: how the media failed to cover the war on Iraq*. New York: Prometheus Books.
- Schiffer, S. 2022. On myths of solidarity and the logic of war. *Journalism Research*. 5(2), pp.183-192.
- Schlesinger, P. and Tumber, H. 1994. *Reporting crime: the media politics of criminal justice*. Oxon: Oxford University Press.
- Schulz, A., Levy, D.A. and Nielsen, R.K. 2019. *Old, educated, and politically diverse: the audience of public service news*. [Online]. Oxon: Reuters Institute. [Accessed 20 February 2024]. Available from: [https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2019-09/The audience of public service news FINAL.pdf](https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2019-09/The%20audience%20of%20public%20service%20news_FINAL.pdf)
- Servaes, J. 2001. Participatory communication (research) for social change: old and new challenges. *The Journal of International Communication*. 7(2), pp.5-13.
- Shipman, T. 2024. The world has seen our tanks rolling into Russia. Now the stakes have risen. *The Times*. 18 August, pp.4-5.
- Sommers, J. 2014. Robert Peston claims BBC is 'obsessed' with covering same stories as Daily Mail. [Online]. 6 June. [Accessed 17 February 2024]. Available from: [https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2014/06/06/robert-peston-says-bbc-leftwing-bias-bollocks\\_n\\_5458619.html?utm\\_hp\\_ref=uk](https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2014/06/06/robert-peston-says-bbc-leftwing-bias-bollocks_n_5458619.html?utm_hp_ref=uk)
- Tankard, J.W. 1997. *PR goes to war: the effects of public relations campaigns on media framing of the Kuwaiti and Bosnian crises*. Chicago: Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication.

- Taylor, P.M. 1995. *Munitions of the mind: a history of propaganda from the ancient world to the present day*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Tuchman, G. 1972. Objectivity as a strategic ritual: an examination of newsmen's notion of objectivity. *American Journal of Sociology*. **77**(4), pp.660-679.
- Tumber, H. and Palmer, J. 2004. *Media at war: the Iraq crisis*. London: Sage.
- Vliegenthart, R. and Schröder, H. 2009. Framing the Iraq war: a cross-national comparison of newspaper framing in four western countries. *Journalistica*. **4**(1), pp.60-137.
- Wahl-Jorgensen, K., Berry, M., Garcia-Blanco, I., Bennett, L. and Cable, J. 2017. Rethinking balance and impartiality in journalism?: how the BBC attempted and failed to change the paradigm. *Journalism*. **18**(7), pp.781-800.
- Walker, J. 2005. Neutrality versus objectivity. *Press Ethic*. [Online]. [Accessed 27 December 2023]. Available from: <https://nyujournalismprojects.org/pressethic/node/382>
- Waterson, J. 2023. Richard Sharp resigns as BBC chair after failing to declare link to Boris Johnson loan. *The Guardian*. [Online]. 28 April. [Accessed 20 February 2024]. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2023/apr/28/richard-sharp-resigns-as-bbc-chair-after-months-of-mounting-pressure>
- Weinberger, D. 2009. *Transparency: the new objectivity*. [Online]. [Accessed 29 December 2023]. Available from: <https://www.kmworld.com/Articles/Column/DavidWeinberger/Transparency-the-new-objectivity-55785.aspx>
- Zghoul, L. 2022. Al-Jazeera English and BBC News coverage of the Gaza War 2008-9: a comparative examination. P.h.D. thesis, Cardiff University.
- Zollmann, F. 2024. [Forthcoming]. A war foretold: how Western mainstream news media omitted NATO eastward expansion as a contributing factor to Russia's 2022 invasion of the Ukraine. *Media, War & Conflict*. [Online]. [Accessed 24 February 2024]. Available from: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/epub/10.1177/17506352231216908>
- Zollmann, F. 2017. *Media, propaganda and the politics of intervention*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Zollmann, F. 2019. Bringing propaganda back into news media studies. *Critical Sociology*. **45**(3), pp.329-345.



## Appendix (A): BBC Online articles

List of BBC Online articles analysed in this study and organised by event.

No.	Event	Date	Headline and link	Code name
1.	Invasion	24/2/2022	Ukraine invasion: Is this a new Cold War, asks John Simpson <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-60515342">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-60515342</a>	BBC1a
2.	Invasion	24/2/2022	Ukraine conflict: What we know about the invasion <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-60504334">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-60504334</a>	BBC2a
3.	Invasion	24/2/2022	Ukraine conflict: Your guide to understanding the story <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-60513807">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-60513807</a>	BBC3a
4.	Invasion	24/2/2022	Ukraine conflict world reaction: Sanctions, refugees and fears of war <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-60507016">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-60507016</a>	BBC4a
5.	Invasion	24/2/2022	Ukraine conflict: Russian forces attack from three sides <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-60503037">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-60503037</a>	BBC5a
6.	Invasion	24/2/2022	Ukraine-Russia invasion: Europe prepares for wave of refugees <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-60510551">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-60510551</a>	BBC6a
7.	Invasion	24/2/2022	Ukraine conflict: President Zelensky warns Russia: We will defend ourselves <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-60497510">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-60497510</a>	BBC7a
8.	Invasion	24/2/2022	Ukraine crisis and Africa: The effects on oil, students and bread <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-60507209">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-60507209</a>	BBC8a
9.	Invasion	24/2/2022	Ukraine conflict: Many misleading images have been shared online <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/60513452">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/60513452</a>	BBC9a
10.	Invasion	24/2/2022	How hard will it be to defend Ukraine from Russian invasion? <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-60492860">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-60492860</a>	BBC10a
11.	Invasion	24/2/2022	Invasion provokes fear and anger for Ukrainians in UK <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-60512869">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-60512869</a>	BBC11a
12.	Invasion	24/2/2022	Ukraine invasion: Kyiv residents seek shelter as blasts hit <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-60506712">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-60506712</a>	BBC12a
13.	Invasion	24/2/2022	Russia attack on Ukraine catastrophe for Europe, say Boris Johnson <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-60504204">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-60504204</a>	BBC13a
14.	Invasion	24/2/2022	UK will not look away from Russia invasion in Ukraine – PM <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-60508671">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-60508671</a>	BBC14a
15.	Invasion	24/2/2022	Ukraine conflict: UK sanctions target Russian banks and oligarchs <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-60515626">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-60515626</a>	BBC15a
16.	Invasion	24/2/2022	Newspaper headlines: 'Putin declares war' and missiles hit Kyiv <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-the-papers-60501637">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-the-papers-60501637</a>	BBC16a
17.	Invasion	24/2/2022	BBC Ukraine editor: There is no safe place any more <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-60509493">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-60509493</a>	BBC17a
18.	Invasion	24/2/2022	Irish in Ukraine advised to shelter in place after Russian invasion <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-60509603">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-60509603</a>	BBC18a

19.	Invasion	24/2/2022	Eurovision: Russia can compete despite invasion of Ukraine <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-60514388">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-60514388</a>	BBC19a
20.	Invasion	24/2/2022	Putin's energy shock: The economic realities of invasion <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-60515415">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-60515415</a>	BBC20a
21.	Invasion	24/2/2022	Oil hits seven-year high but shares rebound on Russian war <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-60502451">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-60502451</a>	BBC21a
22.	Invasion	24/2/2022	Ukraine crisis: 'Wiper' discovered in latest cyber-attacks <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-60500618">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-60500618</a>	BBC22a
23.	Invasion	24/2/2022	Roman Abramovich: Labour MP urges government to seize Russian billionaire's assets <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-60506563">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-60506563</a>	BBC23a
24.	Pipeline	26/9/2022	Russia's gas pipeline leaking into Baltic Sea – Denmark <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-63040500">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-63040500</a>	BBC1b
25.	Pipeline	27/9/2022	Nord Stream: Ukraine accuses Russia of pipeline terror attack <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-63044747">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-63044747</a>	BBC2b
26.	Pipeline	28/9/2022	Nord Stream leaks: Sabotage to blame, says EU <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-63057966">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-63057966</a>	BBC3b
27.	Pipeline	28/9/2022	Nord Stream leak: West shores up pipeline security, blaming 'sabotage' <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-63065943">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-63065943</a>	BBC4b
28.	Pipeline	29/9/2022	Nord Stream 1: How Russia is cutting gas supplies to Europe <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-60131520">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-60131520</a>	BBC5b
29.	Pipeline	30/9/2022	US suggests Russia could be behind Nord Stream gas leaks <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-63084613">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-63084613</a>	BBC6b
30.	Pipeline	5/10/2022	Navy steps up North Sea energy patrols <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-63152268">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-63152268</a>	BBC7b
31.	Pipeline	13/10/2022	France sends Germany gas for first time amid Russia energy crisis <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-63246369">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-63246369</a>	BBC8b
32.	Pipeline	18/10/2022	Nord Stream blast 'blew away 50 metres of pipe' <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-63297085">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-63297085</a>	BBC9b
33.	Pipeline	18/11/2022	A journey to the site of the Nord Stream explosions <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-63636181">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-63636181</a>	BBC10b
34.	Pipeline	8/2/2023	Ukraine denies involvement in Nord Stream pipeline blasts <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-64877979">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-64877979</a>	BBC11b
35.	Pipeline	3/5/2023	Nord Stream: Report puts Russian navy ships near pipeline blast site <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-65461401">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-65461401</a>	BBC12b
36.	Pipeline	7/2/2024	Sweden shuts down Nord Stream blasts inquiry <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-68225599">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-68225599</a>	BBC13b
37.	Pipeline	26/2/2024	Nord Stream: Denmark closes investigation into pipeline blast <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-68401870">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-68401870</a>	BBC14b
38.	Annex	30/9/2022	What Russian annexation means for Ukraine's regions <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-63086767">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-63086767</a>	BBC1c
39.	Annex	30/9/2022	Putin declares four areas of Ukraine as Russian <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/live/world-63077272">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/live/world-63077272</a>	BBC2c

40.	Annex	30/9/2022	Ukraine war: Putin raises stakes in speech full of anti-Western bile <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-63094561">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-63094561</a>	BBC3c
41.	Annex	30/9/2022	Ukraine round-up: Putin claims parts of Ukraine and horror as rocket strike kills dozens <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-63090578">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-63090578</a>	BBC4c
42.	Annex	30/9/2022	Ukraine war: US will never recognise Russia's annexation attempts, Biden vows <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-63084286">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-63084286</a>	BBC5c
43.	Annex	2/10/2022	Ukraine war: Putin's annexation will fail, say Ukrainians at eastern front <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-63089367">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-63089367</a>	BBC6c
44.	Annex	4/10/2022	Ukraine war: The families who made it through the new Iron Curtain <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-63137511">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-63137511</a>	BBC7c
45.	Bridge	8/10/2022	Crimea bridge partly reopens after huge blast, Russia says <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/live/world-63183783">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/live/world-63183783</a>	BBC1d
46.	Bridge	8/10/2022	Crimean bridge: Excitement and fear in Ukraine after bridge blast <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-63183409">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-63183409</a>	BBC2d
47.	Bridge	8/10/2022	Crimea bridge partly reopens after huge explosion – Russia <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-63183404">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-63183404</a>	BBC3d
48.	Bridge	9/10/2022	Crimea bridge: Putin accuses Ukraine of 'terrorism' <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-63195504">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-63195504</a>	BBC4d
49.	Bridge	9/10/2022	Crimean bridge: Who - or what - caused the explosion? <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-63192757">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-63192757</a>	BBC5d
50.	Bridge	9/10/2022	Crimea bridge: Russia ramps up security after blast <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-63189627">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-63189627</a>	BBC6d
51.	Bridge	12/10/2022	Ukraine war round-up: Inside Putin's head and Crimea bridge arrests <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-63230338">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-63230338</a>	BBC7d
52.	Bridge	14/10/2022	Crimea bridge: Russia 'to repair blast damage by July 2023' <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-63255611">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-63255611</a>	BBC8d
53.	Bridge	7/12/2022	Crimea bridge: How Russia is rebuilding its vital link <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/explainers-63872209">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/explainers-63872209</a>	BBC9d
54.	Bridge	17/7/2023	Ukraine war: Vladimir Putin vows response after 'terrorist' attack on Crimea bridge <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-66218869">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-66218869</a>	BBC10d
55.	Bridge	17/7/2023	Kerch bridge is hated symbol of Russian occupation <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-66221252">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-66221252</a>	BBC11d
56.	Bridge	18/7/2023	Ukraine war: Russia says Crimean bridge partially open to cars again <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-66229533">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-66229533</a>	BBC12d
57.	Bridge	22/7/2023	Crimea bridge closed after fuel depot hit – Russia <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-66276788">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-66276788</a>	BBC13d
58.	Bridge	3/8/2023	Ukraine says it launched July attack on bridge to Crimea <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-66397227">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-66397227</a>	BBC14d
59.	Bridge	12/8/2023	Ukraine war: Crimea bridge targeted by missiles, Russia says <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-66484640">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-66484640</a>	BBC15d

60.	Bridge	16/9/2023	Ukraine's Crimea attacks seen as key to counter-offensive against Russia <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-66829826">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-66829826</a>	BBC16d
-----	--------	-----------	---	--------

## **Appendix (B): Coding scheme**

Three original and distinct frame types were devised for this study in order to determine an accurate illustration of BBC Online content when reporting the Russo-Ukrainian war. Below will define each frame concept, criteria for frames, method of identification and provide examples.

### **FRAMES**

A ‘consequence’ frame is coverage that depicts the possible outcomes and impacts of the conflict; ‘responsibility’ refers to coverage that attributes cause or blame to a state or individual during the conflict; and a ‘human interest’ frame concerns coverage that brings an emotive response to the presentation of events or emphasises human life during the conflict.

### **SAMPLE**

The unit of analysis is BBC Online articles that covered the most important events of the war, these were, as of 1 July 2024:

- 1) The day of the Russian invasion of Ukraine
- 2) Nord Stream gas pipeline leak
- 3) The Russian annexation of Ukraine’s eastern regions of Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia
- 4) The attacks on Kerch Strait Bridge

Due to coverage that reports on these events, but which are published post factum, it would be remiss to only collect articles that have been published on the day of happening since much framing would be neglected, thereby producing an inaccurate and incomplete research design. For example, only one article reports the Nord Stream pipeline leak on the day it took place, and so its storytelling for audiences is instead framed from later analysis published as and when new information is released for public viewing. Similarly, when measuring for frames that concerned the annexation of Ukraine’s eastern regions, again the majority of coverage was published between Putin’s announcement and its formal signing.

## COLLECTION

Google's search engine proved necessary to locate a corpus of articles because the [bbc.co.uk/news](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news) domain restricts mass searches for publications older than six months. The Google advanced search tool was operated which allowed a keyword search for publications between a specific date window. These articles were collected in whole for dates between 24 February 2022 and date of collection on 1 July 2024. Articles were collected from these which included keywords in either the headline, topline or search engine optimisation (SEO) headline and their search codes are expressed below:

- 1) **Invasion** (search date: 24 February 2022):
  - i. "Ukraine OR Russia OR invasion OR war OR refugee OR Putin OR Zelensky site:bbc.co.uk/news".
- 2) **Nord Stream leak** on 26 September 2022 (search date: 26 September 2022 to 1 July 2024):
  - i. "'Nord stream" "pipeline" Ukraine OR Russia OR leak OR explosion OR blast OR invasion OR war OR refugee OR Putin OR Zelensky site:bbc.co.uk/news".
- 3) **Annexation**, from announcement to formal signing (search date: 30 September to 5 October 2022):
  - i. "'Annex" Ukraine OR Russia OR invasion OR war OR refugee OR Putin OR Zelensky site:bbc.co.uk/news".
- 4) **Kerch Strait Bridge attacks** on both 8 October 2022 and 17 July 2023 (search date: 8 October 2022 to 1 July 2024):
  - i. "'Crimea" "bridge" Ukraine OR Russia OR invasion OR war OR refugee OR Putin OR Zelensky site:bbc.co.uk/news".

Articles were excluded from collection if they signposted readers to view other BBC products, such as links to BBC Sounds or BBC iPlayer, local news services and video packages, to ensure all those examined were text-based and similar in nature and style. This created a total corpus of 60 articles: 23 were recovered which concerned the invasion, 14 for the Nord Stream pipeline

leak, 7 stories on annexation (this included a live feed), and 16 for the Kerch Strait Bridge attacks.

## **IDENTIFICATION**

A small sample from the above corpus was tested before the investigation took place to ensure validity of these frames beyond preliminary readings, and to ascertain the existence of any additional themes. A further ‘legitimisation’ frame which justified military aid and chastised Russian ‘aggression’ was discovered but this remained inconsistent, and its parameters often fell into the responsibility frame criteria.

Articles were reviewed to identify a dominant (primary) and supplementary (secondary) frame due to text which exhibits more than one frame type. For example, the article BBC3a framed the war for readers through the prism of lost Ukrainian sovereignty as its primary mode of communication. Nevertheless, a secondary responsibility frame was also evident through its purpose of making audiences aware these were hostile actions taken by the Russian Federation, with little or no allusion to the complexity of the conflict and contested causes. Similarly, BBC12a demonstrates a clear human interest frame, stressing the horrors of war for human life, but again, a theme of Russian hostility contextualised the story. Deciding, then, which frame was most clearly obvious in each article proved a difficult task. In light of this, framing which aligned most closely with the criteria, in letter and in spirit, was categorised.

This investigation lacks an intercoder reliability test for reasons of time constraints, researcher proficiency and nature of analysis. However, each article was studied for a prolonged period of time, at approximately 15 minutes for each. The entire text of each article was interpreted, including the headline, but not any imagery. This began as a general reading to discover themes, a second reading to verify frames, and lastly an in-depth interpretation. To decide each frame, articles were chosen which most matched their criteria and definition.

Examples of how frames were categorised is outlined in the text box below, with three examples for each.

Category	Definition	Example
Consequence	Coverage depicts the possible consequences of the conflict for an individual, state, group, organisation or entity.	<p>“Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a "catastrophe for our continent", Prime Minister Boris Johnson has said,” (BBC13a).</p> <p>“"In Germany," says Ms Nakhle, "people are buying wood stoves and installing solar panels to reduce gas usage,” (BBC5b).</p> <p>“President Putin has already threatened to use every means at his disposal to protect Russian territory, including nuclear weapons. "This is not a bluff," he said. And his defence minister says Russia is fighting the West even more than Ukraine,” (BBC1c).</p>
Responsibility	Coverage that attributes the potential (or actual) cause or fault of an event during the conflict to an individual, state, organisation or entity.	<p>“The fact that Ukraine, once a key part of the USSR, broke away from the Russian Federation was an insult to everything Putin believed in,” (BBC1a).</p> <p>“Ukraine has accused Russia of causing leaks in two major gas pipelines to Europe in what it described as a "terrorist attack",” (BBC2b).</p> <p>“Kyiv called Russia's investigation "nonsense". Days earlier, the head of President Zelensky's office suggested the explosion was the result of infighting between different parts of Russia's security establishment,” (BBC7d).</p>



Human interest	Coverage brings an emotive response to the presentation of events or emphasises human life during the conflict.	<p>“Moscow's move to annex parts of Ukraine has sent a new Iron Curtain down across a vast swathe of territory - cutting off an unknown number of people from their own country,” (BBC7c).</p> <p>“"Hands off Ukraine," and "Stop Putin. Stop the war," were the rhythmic chants that rang out down Whitehall as hundreds of pro-Ukraine supporters gathered opposite Downing Street,” (BBC11a).</p> <p>“The biggest fear for ordinary people here is running out of electricity and the internet not working - then we would be really isolated,” (BBC17a).</p>
----------------	---	--

## Appendix (C): Additional tables

*Table 3. Primary frames in BBC Online articles reporting the invasion on 24 February 2022*

<b>Frames</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Consequence	9	39.130
Responsibility	7	30.435
Human interest	7	30.435
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>100</b>

*Table 4. Primary frames in BBC Online reporting Nord Stream 1&2 attacks from 26 September 2022 to 1 July 2024*

<b>Frames</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Consequence	4	28.57
Responsibility	10	71.43
Human interest	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>100</b>

*Table 5. Primary frames in BBC Online covering Russia's annexation of eastern Ukraine between 30 September 2022 and 5 October 2022*

<b>Frames</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Consequence	2	28.57
Responsibility	3	42.86
Human interest	2	28.57
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>100</b>

*Table 6. Primary frames in BBC Online articles covering the Crimea bridge attacks between 8 October 2022 and 1 July 2024*

<b>Frames</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Consequence	6	37.50
Responsibility	8	50
Human interest	2	12.50
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>100</b>