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FRAMING THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR IN POLISH MEDIA: SHAPING PUBLIC OPINION

Today's media serve not only as communication channels but also as platforms for reflecting and shaping public opinion. Amidst the Russian-Ukrainian war, examining the vectorization of public opinion helps to grasp the overall perception of events and the level of support for Ukraine. Employing statistical analysis methods (using Python), anchored in framing theories (E. Hoffman) and agenda-setting (M. McCombs, D. Shaw), the author delves into the nuances of how perceptions of the Russian-Ukrainian war are shaped. This involves analyzing various approaches to interpreting events and conceptualizing reality based on political agendas and historical biases. Notably, emphasis is placed on the construction of a semantic field around key terms ("war," "death," "victory," "fear," etc.), which reveals the emotional tone of messages and the development of an algorithm guiding the audience's interpretation of reported events. Focus is given to the utilization of meta-tags as a strategy for responding to audience queries and search engine algorithms (specifically, Google), which essentially reflect the keywords used by the audience in their search queries. The term "war" entered meta-tags post-2015, but textually emerged in 2021. Analysis of statistical data provided by the State Statistical Service of Poland, coupled with an examination of the media and political literacy levels of the Polish populace (via surveys and subsequent data analysis), helps uncover the correlation between audience media literacy levels and the popularity of specific thematic areas within the "War in Ukraine" category. Notably, there's a surge in the popularity of the Polish Anti-War Movement group on Facebook, underscoring unresolved historical conflicts between Ukraine and Poland, such as the Volyn tragedy.
Ключові слова: war, media, public opinion, statistical analysis, influence

Ukraine is currently embroiled in a war that extends far beyond its physical borders. This conflict has drawn the attention of the global community, as warfare has evolved to encompass the realm of consciousness. The media, traditionally a conduit of information, has become a weapon wielded with the same potency as military force, shaping public perception and legitimizing occupation policies.

In their book "Metaphors We Live By," authors Lakoff and Johnson assert that our conceptual framework is inherently metaphorical, influencing how we perceive and interact with the world. The media, both domestic and international, play a crucial role in framing events in Ukraine, not only informing their audiences but also molding their attitudes and opinions. Through the use of imagery and conceptual metaphors, the media construct narratives that influence public discourse and shape the collective understanding of reality. In the digital age, these narratives are reinforced through meta-tags and keywords, guiding online search algorithms and determining the news agenda.

Given Poland's geographical proximity to Ukraine and its strategic significance, particularly in light of Russia's imperial ambitions, understanding the media's role in shaping public sentiment is paramount. This is especially pertinent in the context of Poland's upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections, which serve as indicators of the country's future trajectory. The Polish media's portrayal of the Ukrainian conflict not only reflects the "friend-enemy" dichotomy but also serves as a strategic tool for political actors seeking to mobilize the electorate. Through the metaphorical language of war, concepts like the "economic battlefield", "cultural battlefield", and "humanitarian battlefield " are employed to frame societal issues and rally public support.

The aim of the research is to examine the particularities of war framing in the Polish media, using "Gazeta Wyborcza" as a case study, within the context of influencing public opinion. To achieve this goal, the following objectives have been outlined: identify the primary frames by analyzing the semantic fields associated with the core lexeme "guilt"; explore the subframes within the metaphorical model of "War," which manifests through the development of branches stemming from the semantic field of "war".

The study is grounded on an analysis of materials extracted from Gazeta Wyborcza publications and the Polish segment of Facebook spanning from 2014 to December 2023. The commencement of this timeframe is set by the onset of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, encompassing events such as the annexation of Crimea, the occupation of parts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, and the self-declaration of the so-called "DNR" and "LNR" republics. Utilizing Python software, publications containing the keywords "war" and "Ukraine" in their meta-tags were identified.

Subsequently, the study delved into the contextual usage and emotional connotations associated with these concepts. Furthermore, the research established semantic relationships among lexemes and examined the emotional contexts in which they were employed.

Ukrainian conflict commenced in 2014 following the departure of then-President Viktor Yanukovych to Russia. The Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance dates the war's onset as follows: "Ten years ago, in February 2014, the Russian Federation initiated hostilities against Ukraine. The adversary seized control of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, Sevastopol, and certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Until February 24, 2022, the primary events of the Russian-Ukrainian war, with varying intensities of hostilities, primarily occurred in the eastern part of our country. However, resistance against Russian hybrid aggression and influence transpired not only on the front lines but across the entirety of Ukraine's territory" [4].

The response of the global community to events in Ukraine serves as a significant barometer for discerning international political trends and gauging the probable level of support for Ukraine. In presenting news, media outlets structure key issues, emphasize salient points, tailor news for social media dissemination, elucidate (or shape) context, and algorithmically streamline decision-making processes, collectively creating a particular perspective through which audiences perceive the events unfolding in their surroundings.

Given that journalism primarily serves as a verbal and symbolic reflection of the world, frame theory emerges as a crucial tool in the study of social communications. Describing frames, Hoffman characterizes them as "sequences of actions delineating the creative or functional aspects of a subject" [1, p. 42]. Thus, a frame encapsulates certain knowledge representing stereotypical situations. Given that frames are not explicitly identified within texts (utterances), they typically go unnoticed by audiences (interlocutors).

In general, when analyzing framing as a series of actions, researchers typically begin with the functional aspects of frames, which include: organizing the surrounding world, identifying actions, interpretation, and fabrication [6, p. 130]. Essentially, frames are cognitive mechanisms that regulate perception and thinking processes by utilizing stored data structures in memory. These structures enable individuals to comprehend visual images (visual frames), understand words (semantic frames), reason, perform actions (scenario frames), and make statements [3, p. 83]. Researchers analyzing frames often identify subframes, which consist of specific slots (corresponding thematic groups) filled with linguistic elements that execute them [3, p. 83]. These elements facilitate decision-making processes, ensuring the continuity of conflict and threat analysis. Daniel Kahneman's book "Thinking, Fast and Slow" (2017) underscores the importance of two types of decision-making: fast and slow [Pochapska]. Framing initially influences slow decision-making and subsequently automates fast decision-making, potentially resulting in both a sense of security and panicked decision-making leading to adverse outcomes.

During the analyzed period, a total of 13,787 articles with the meta-tags "war" and "Ukraine" were published in "Gazeta Wyborcza". The distribution of publications by year is as follows: 2015 – 1 publication; 2016 – 5 publications; 2017 – 5 publications; 2018 – 17 publications; 2019 – 7 publications; 2020 – 3 publications; 2021 – 10 publications; 2022 – 2814 publications; 2023 – 10,925 publications (see Diagram 1).
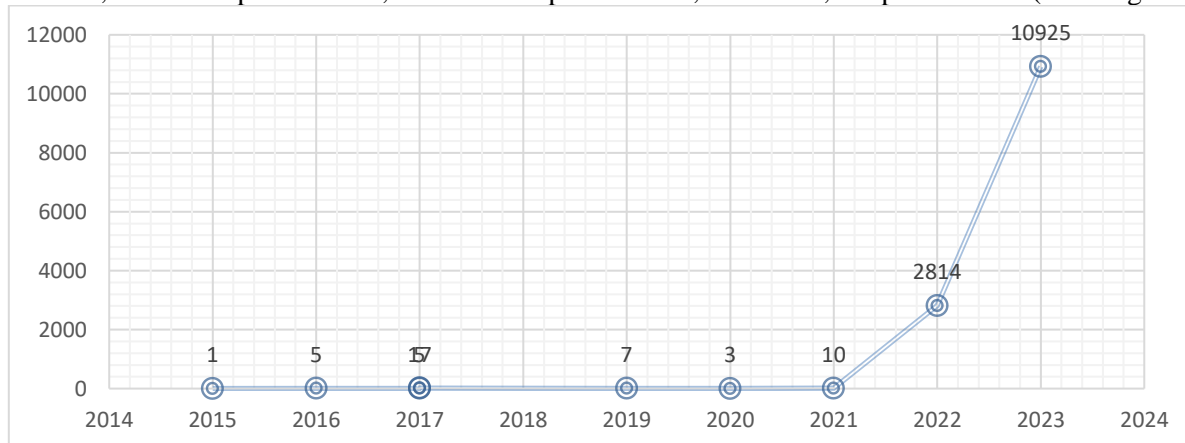

Diagram 1 - Distribution of the number of publications by year (2015-2023)

It is noteworthy that a manual review of publications from 2014 to 2021 reveals a significant number of articles dedicated to events in Ukraine, Russia's armed aggression, the annexation of Crimea, and the occupation of territories. However, the terms "war" and "Ukraine" were not included as meta-tags during this period. This suggests that the events in Ukraine were not initially classified as a war but rather perceived as a conflict between two neighboring states over disputed territories, a narrative reinforced by the content of the analyzed publications.

This perception was often aligned with the main narrative of Russian propaganda, which portrayed the situation as a language conflict in border territories. However, starting from 2015, there was a growing awareness in the media of the need to support Ukraine as a party defending itself against Russian aggression. Additionally, in 2015, a publication was tagged with "war," effectively legitimizing the concept of war in relation to the anti-terrorist operation officially declared by Ukraine: «Kiedy śmierć patrzy w oczy, a ty nie odwracasz wzroku. Portrety ukraińskich żolnierzy» (06.07.2015) [9].

Publications from 2016 to 2021 exhibited uncertainty regarding the classification of Russia's aggression as a war. There was also analysis of events in neighboring countries, particularly Belarus, and its potential involvement. Given Belarus's direct border with Poland, there were concerns about the security of Polish citizens: «Łukashenka chce wysłać białoruske wojsko do Donbasu» (15.11.2017) [9].

By 2017, publications began to use the term "war" instead of the accepted name "Operation of the United Forces (OOS)": «Uciekli fo Gdańska przed wojną. Straż graniczna nakazała im powrot na Ukrainę» (04.12.2017) [9]; «Ukraina wchodzi w 2018 rok z trwającą wciąż wojną. Niedawna wymiana jeńców nie przybliża zakoncznia konfliktu w Donbasie» (29.12.2017) [9].

From 2018 onward, publications started to refer to the conflict as a "war," and they also conveyed the perspectives of prominent figures from Poland and other countries regarding the events in Ukraine to the Polish reader: «„Szron”. Vanessa Paradis: Wojna na Ukrainie to element naszego świata [Rozmowa]» (17.02.2018) [9]; «To Rosjanie zastrzelili malezyjski Samolot. Ale będą temu zaprzeczać – to rosyjska tradycja. Komentarz Wacława Radziwiniwicza» (24.05.2018) [9]; «Wojna Putina przekształca Ukrainę» (25.09.2018) [9].

Alongside the clear categorization of the events in Ukraine as a war, the Polish media allocate media space to representatives of Russia: «Rosyjski dziennikarz: Ukraina znowy widzi w Rosji Imperium. I nie potrzebuje naszej liberalnej arogancji» (05.01.2018) [9].

By 2018, opinions emerged suggesting that Russia, through its actions in Ukraine, was posing a threat to Western European countries: «Po rosyjskiej napaści na okręty Ukraińskie. Jak Zachód może obronić Ukrainę przed Rosją» (26.11.2018) [9]; «Ostatni atak Rosji na Ukraińców to ostrzeżenie dla Zachodu» (27.11.2018) [9].

In 2019 and 2020, publications both underscored the peril Russia's actions posed to Western European countries and periodically revisited the border conflict related to the Volyn tragedy. This serves to sustain and reinforce the conflict's narrative. Moreover, the emotional presentation of information in this context suggests its intended impact on the audience: «Gdy ludzi słuszą, że zaprosiła do siebie rodzinę z Ukrainy, mówią, żeby pamiętała o Wołyniu» (11.08.2018) [9]; «Wołyń. Nie ma już u nas Po;aków» (08.10.2018) [9]; «Jurij Szuchewycz: Wołyń ludobójstwem? Ile wam Kreml zapłacił» (27.08.2016) [9].

These emotions are further amplified and reinforced through social networks. For instance, the group "Polski Ruch Antywojennyj" disseminates content on platforms like Facebook and YouTube, often featuring slogans like "Na banderowskij ryj zawsza musi być kyj". Such slogans are easily memorable and, in the context of sensational reporting akin to that of Russian propagandist Volodymyr Solovyov, they garner attention and prompt users to share this information with heightened emotionality.

Considering the findings of research on the media literacy of the Polish population in 2018 and 2019, which indicated that 60% of Poles are familiar with the concept of "fake news" and 80% have encountered such news personally, yet do not take action to verify or refute it, the spread of fake information is highly probable. It may be perceived as normal background information that the brain processes and accepts without scrutiny.

Since 2022, the "war" meta-tag has been consistently added to all publications related to Ukraine, increasing their visibility in users' search engines. The growing number of publications indicates ongoing interest in the topic and the unfolding events that periodically capture public attention (refer to Diagram 2).

In fact, the peaks in the number of publications coincide with periods of significant events or critical junctures in the Russian-Ukrainian war. Moreover, these waves of information can generate noise, either to highlight or conceal an event.
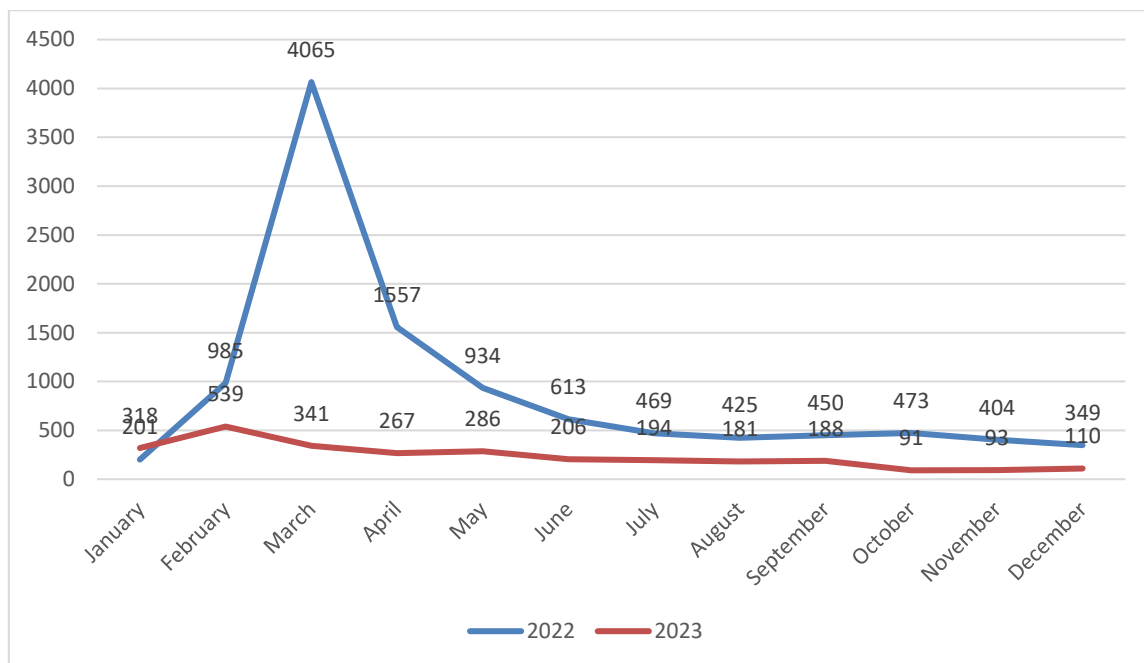
Diagram 2 - Number of publications for 2022-2023 (by month)

According to framing theory (E. Hoffman, 1974), the media offer a platform to construct algorithms that shape the audience's perception of reality based on existing beliefs or biases. Framing primarily occurs through conceptualizing concepts and creating specific semantic fields, thereby establishing a framework for perceiving and understanding the depicted reality.

Through software analysis, it was determined that the most frequently used words include "war," "army," "refugees," and "victory." Consequently, these words become fundamental in the audience's understanding of the concept of "war" in Gazeta Wyborcza. They are organized into frames, within which subframes and slots are developed.

Analyzing the textual content of Gazeta Wyborcza enabled the construction of a framework through which the Polish audience perceives the course of the war in Ukraine and is programmed to react to these events. The following subframes and slots emerged within the conceptual framework of "war":

• Participants in the war: the Armed Forces, refugees, Zelensky, Zaluzhny, Putin, the Russian military, propagandists.

• Arenas of war: physical war (demarcation lines, captured territories, etc.), psychological warfare, external aid. Within this subframe, slots akin to "fronts" (volunteer, cultural, educational, diplomatic, etc.) were formed, offering opportunities for individual resistance, alleviation of guilt, affirmation of significance, etc.

• Casualties: Ukrainian soldiers' deaths, statistics of deceased Russian soldiers, civilian casualties, destruction of cultural heritage, commemorations.

• Refugees: Internally displaced persons, refugees, loss, and danger.

• Victories: ZSU, Zaluzhny, dog Patron, Arestovich, NATO, Zelensky, Ghost of Kyiv, weapons, collapse of Russia.

Analysis of the emotional context of information presentation provides insight into the overall pattern of perception programming. J. Lakoff in the book "Don't Think of an Elephant! Know Your Values and Frame the Debate" indicates that frames are activated in the brain as soon as any stimulus appears, which can be essentially any word. "As the title of this book demonstrates, if I tell you, 'Don't think about the elephant!' - you will think of an elephant... Denying the frame does not just activate it: with each activation it becomes stronger" [11].

An example of emotional framing is the conceptualization of the semantic field "refugees", which encompasses various concepts ranging from neutral ("persons under temporary protection") to strongly negative ("persons maintained by Poles at their own expense") or strongly positive ("thanks to Ukrainian refugees, Poland's GDP increased in 2023").

If Gazeta Wyborcza emphasizes such emotional framing through a specific set of arguments and facts, social networks amplify the emotional and evaluative tone of these materials, ensuring clickability and increasing the number of views, thus expanding the audience with formed cognitive biases within a specific frame.

Considering the hierarchical structure of frames and analyzing the structure of emotional frames found in Gazeta Wyborcza publications, we can discuss their two-level structure. The fixed components are the subject and the object, while the tone and emotion are variable, forming the overall perception of the proposed concept.

For instance, let's consider the subject "refugees" as a base. The predicate will entail certain actions of the subject, and only then will the context and lexemes describing the specified actions gain significance: "Gdy ludzi słuszą, że zaroziła do siebie rodzińę z Ukrainy, vożyć, ebę pámutała o Wołyniu" (11.08.2018) [9]. In this case, the subject "refugees" is presented through the phrase "family from Ukraine", which is emotionally neutral. However, the predicate gains strength due to an unresolved historical border situation - the Volyn tragedy, referred to as the "Volyn conflict" in Polish historical discourse. Hence, the negative historical context forms the foundation of the frame. Although the tone is neutral, contextual negativism shapes a semantic correlation, expanding the semantic field to include "Ukrainians can be enemies", as the phrase "Volyn difference" is ingrained in collective memory.

Given that such information is emotionally amplified on social networks, the results of a study conducted by "Personnel Service" are quite natural in this context, where it is stated that the attitude of Poles towards Ukrainians, albeit insignificantly, has worsened: "the study shows that 26% of respondents changed their attitude towards Ukrainians for the worse. Most of them are individuals aged 24-25 (33% of respondents), followed by those aged 18-24 and 25-44 (30% of respondents).

Therefore, analyzing the specificity of framing in the Russian-Ukrainian war in Polish media, using publications in the "Gazeta Wyborcza" as an example, leads to the conclusion that framing enables the manipulation of public opinion by providing certain cause-and-effect algorithms of movement.

Further analysis will facilitate the study of audience reactions to specific media influences, comparing them with technologies used during the Second World War, and developing effective mechanisms for enhancing media literacy and information hygiene among the population to guard against information attacks.

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Почапська О. І. Фреймування російсько-української війни у польських медіа: векторизація громадської думки

Медіа сьогодні є не лише каналами комунікації, але й засобами віддзеркалення й формування суспільної думки. В умовах російсько-української війни, дослідження напрямку векторування суспільної думки дає можливість зрозуміти загальний вектор сприйняття подій і рівня підтримки України. Використовуючи програмні методи статистичного аналізу (Python), відштовхуючись від теорій фреймінгу (Е. Гофман) і порядку денного (М. Мак-Комбс, Д. Шоу), авторка досліджує особливості формування фектору сприйняття подій в російсько-української війни, аналізує підходи до розуміння ситуації й концептуалізації дійсності відповідно до політичних пріоритетів й історичних упереджень. Зокрема, звертається увага на формування сематичного поля навколо ключових лексем («війна», «смерть», «перемога», «страх» та ін.), що дає змогу простежити емоційне забарвлення повідомлення, а також формування певного алгоритму, за яким повинні сприйматися описувані у матеріалі події. Особлива увага була приділена використанню мета-тегів як стратегії відповіді на запити аудиторії й алгоритмам пошукових систем (зокрема, Google), які, по суті, є віддзеркаленням ключових слів відповідно до яких аудиторія здійснювала пошукові запити. Аналіз статистичних даних, наданих Державною службою статистики Польщі, дослідження рівня медіа- і політичної грамотності польського населення (аналіз опитувань і обробка отриманих результатів) дав можливість простежити залежність між рівнем інфомедійної грамотності аудиторії й популярністю певних тематичних напрямків в межах категорії «Війна в Україні». Зокрема, мова йде про зріст популярності у соціальній мережі Facebook групи «Польський рух антивоєнний», який підкреслює, що Україна і Польща мають історичне пограниччя (Волинська трагедія), в межах якого все ще залишається недокіня вирішеним конфлікт.

Ключові слова: *війна, медіа, громадська думка, статистичний аналіз, вплив*