The image of Russia's aggression against Ukraine on the front pages of "Rzeczpospolita" and "Gazeta Wyborcza" – an analysis of the framing of war photographs

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to illustrate the initial weeks of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, as well as the preceding period, through press photography displayed on the front pages of two influential Polish daily newspapers, "Gazeta Wyborcza" and "Rzeczpospolita", from February 1 to March 31, 2022. **Research method:** The study utilizes visual framing theory, a less commonly applied approach in visual research compared to classical framing analysis and not as extensively discussed in media studies. **Results:** The investigation reveals that "Gazeta Wyborcza" and "Rzeczpospolita" did not significantly differ in their daily visual representation of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Both newspapers predominantly featured photographs highlighting the conflict frame. Frames focusing on political leadership and military aspects were less prominent. High saturation of photography with the frame of human interest was revealed. **Originality/ Cognitive value:** This article contributes to the understanding of how Russia's invasion of Ukraine is depicted in the non-verbal content of leading Polish dailies.

KEYWORDS

Russian aggression in Ukraine, "Gazeta Wyborcza", press photography, "Rzeczpospolita", visual framing

The Russian Federation's full-scale aggression against Ukraine, initiated on February 24, 2022, resulted not only in thousands of casualties and substantial damage to Ukraine's infrastructure but also significantly impacted the global geopolitical landscape. Prior to the invasion, Polish media, particularly influential dailies, frequently highlighted the escalating tensions between Moscow and Kiev, foreshadowing the imminent onset of a tangible armed

conflict. Over a year later, the reverberations of the war in Eastern Europe persist, with a deluge of images portraying destruction, the profound human suffering, and the valor of Ukrainian soldiers continuing to circulate globally. Furthermore, experts have noted that:

"The war instigated by the Russian invasion of Ukraine represents a historically unique 'conventional' (interstate) conflict, unfolding within the modern information era, predominantly shaped by the internet and social media. These platforms played a critical role in strategic communication from Ukrainian authorities, aiming not just to boost public morale and gather international support, but also, leveraging widespread mobile devices with internet access, even in combat zones. This allowed for the global dissemination of information about the battlefield, including live updates on conflicts and war crimes, and offered a means to continually counter Russian propaganda narratives" (Kuźniar et al., 2021/2022, p. 61).

Photography as an independent journalistic expression

Visual communication, a significant aspect of media communication, gained academic attention following the pictorial turn in the latter half of the 20th century (Boehm & Mitchell, 2012; Ratajczak-Parzyńska, 2015; Kawka, 2015; Łosiewicz, 2009; Furman, Snopek, Groń & Wolny-Zmorzyński, 2013; Francuz, 2012; Kociuba, 2010). This shift led to extensive scholarly analysis and the integration of visual communication into academic curriculum. Walery Pisarek, in his "Dictionary of Media Terminology" (2006), observed:

"Due to the directions of media content evolution, it can be assumed that the emphases of media content analysis will shift from strictly textual components of messages to accompanying visual and sound planes of expressing content and, above all, the relationships between them: intertextuality, multimodality" (p. 8).

Notably, at the time of this publication, 'visual communication' was not yet a listed term in the Dictionary, nor was it included in the earlier "Popular Encyclopedia of Mass Media" (Skrzypczak, 1999).

In shaping media discourse, the media employ not just words, but also, and perhaps more significantly, images: infographics, drawings, posters, memes, and photographs. Each type of imagery carries its own purpose and specific function (Wolny-Zmorzyński, 2016, 2018; Dubiel & Kamiński, 1965; Smolińska, 1972; Toczyński, 2002; Sekula, 2010). Some images stand alone, while others combine with text to form a cohesive visual-verbal message that aligns with the communicator's objectives and intentions.

Recognized as a distinct journalistic genre, press photography has been extensively covered in literature. The study of photography in Poland has been enriched by translations of international works (Sontag, 1986, 2010; Barthes, 1996; Berger, 1999; Pontremoli, 2006; Rouillé, 2007; Soulages, 2007; Belting, 2007). Currently, press photography research in Poland spans various fields, including but not limited to media studies, art, cultural studies, sociology, and anthropology, leading to diverse and insightful publications (e.g., Hopfinger, 1997; Olechnicki, 2003, 2005, 2009; Ruta, 2009; Szylko-Kwas, 2011, 2017a, 2017b, 2018, 2019a, 2019b; Masłowska-Taffel, 2014; Ochnio, 2014; Uchańska, 2015; Stępień, 2018; Wolny-Zmorzyński & Doktorowicz, 2021). Although there are numerous studies on the history of photography, they fall the scope of this article.

In contemporary Polish media studies, the most extensive analysis of press photography is provided by Kazimierz Wolny-Zmorzyński (2007, 2014, 2016, 2018). Notably, this scholar often employs the term 'journalistic photography' (2007, 2014, 2016) in discussing journalistic genres,

perceiving photography as a form of journalistic expression, not merely as press photography. For him, the concept of journalistic photography encompasses a broader scope than that of press photography, which typically appears in print media. Katarzyna Kobylarczyk (2005) views press photography as a tool for reporting current events (p. 79). Marcin Krzanicki (2013) highlights the absence of directorial manipulation in depicting 'the course of events and the state of objects' in press photography (p. 30). Joanna Szylko-Kwas (2017b) defines it as:

> "a type of photograph primarily aimed at conveying information to the viewer. The content of a photograph can stand as an independent statement, augmented only by a caption or title, or it can complement written journalistic material. Press photography is created to document events of broad public interest or to portray individuals who are central to a newspaper article" (p. 71).

Zbigniew Treppa (2012) describes photography as "more or less a kind of translation of reality into the language of the image" (p. 24). Conversely, Roman Burzyński (1958) highlighted that "photography serves as press material as much as the written word does" (p. 70). Maria A. Potocka (2010) asserts that in press photography, "the valuing distinction is not the photographic quality, but the spectacularity of the message" (p. 136). According to Wolny-Zmorzyński (2010), "photography, as an image, has evolved into a means of information across all fields of knowledge, serving as documentation of incidents, wars, and court evidence, as well as a form of entertainment" (p. 8).

Methodology

This study aimed to ascertain, through the application of the visual framing method and within a specific interpretative framework, the portrayal of the war in Ukraine as depicted in press photographs featured on the front pages of "Rzeczpospolita" ("Rz") and "Gazeta Wyborcza" ("GW") between 1 February and 31 March 2022. Additionally, the study sought to determine the extent to which the photographic narrative was infused with this interpretative framework.

"Gazeta Wyborcza" and "Rzeczpospolita" have consistently led the rankings of the Institute of Media Monitoring for years. In the Top 15 General Ranking of the most influential media, compiled in September 2023, "Gazeta Wyborcza" secured the top position, surpassing Onet. pl and "Rzeczpospolita". It also ranked first in the Top 10 list of press titles, with "Rz" closely following in second place (IMM, 2023, 31 October). Despite experiencing a dip in sales during the subsequent quarters of 2023, both "GW" and "Rz" remain among the most widely read daily newspapers ("Ogólnopolskie badania…", n.d.). Given their significant market presence, the substantial value of their content, and their extensive readership, these newspapers present a rich resource for research material, especially from a media studies comparative perspective. The juxtaposition of content from both newspapers, along with the analysis of their nuanced media discourse, yields insightful findings across multiple research domains. Comparative studies focusing on Ukrainian issues and photography in these two dailies have also been conducted (cf. Rozbicka, 2014; Stopa, 2017; Zych, 2007/2008; Szylko-Kwas, 2011).

In her recent book, "The View of Other People's Suffering" (2010), Susan Sontag addresses the depiction of suffering in war photography and its impact on shaping collective memory and attitudes towards history. She focuses on the experience of the viewer, whom she regards as complicit (like the photographer) in observing suffering, driven by sensationalism and simple curiosity. However, the study presented here does not pursue sensation-seeking. Rather, it examines how the image of aggression in photography can become a tool for shaping collective memory, particularly in the context of a war occurring just across the Polish border. In seeking to understand the portrayal of aggression against Ukraine as it emerges from the press photography

of selected newspapers, this study maintains the point of view of the sender, without personal interpretation. Yet, it is important to recognize that the researcher, while analyzing the photographs, also becomes their recipient, detached from the emotions they might invoke. The photographs analyzed will be treated as independent war documents, irrespective of the press context in which they appear.

Only photographs published on the front pages of "GW" and "Rz" were selected for analysis, under the assumption that photo editors prioritize images they deem particularly significant for the timeliness of events. "The front page in the press plays a very important role, as it is designed to attract the reader with its attractiveness, sensationalism, and topicality" (Bartosiewicz, Gnacy & Haber, 2010, p. 93; see also Król & Król, 2005). The content on the front page, especially press photographs, entices readers to pick up the publication; research suggests that news consumers focus more on front-page stories than those in other sections of the newspaper (Kim & Chung, 2017, p. 950). Furthermore, the front pages of a daily newspaper "present the news priorities and the editorial stance on current issues" (Tejedor, Cervi, Tusa, Portales & Zabotina, 2020, p. [2]), summarize the most significant events of the previous day, and give the publication a "distinctive personality" (Paul, 2023). The material featured there sets the agenda for discourse, indicating what the editors consider most important and giving the newspaper its "tone and spirit" (Sen, 2018, p. 3). This is because publishers understand that layout, use of space, image quality, and headlines are decisive factors in attracting readers. "At the moment of first contact with a newspaper, usually at the point of purchase, what surprises and interests—the images, headlines, and overall composition of the front page—take precedence over the text itself" (Bartosiewicz, Gnacy & Haber 2010, p. 94). Srijan Sen also notes that front pages are subject to constant evolution, driven by technological advances, competitive pressures, and rising journalistic professionalism. A notable trend is the reduction of journalistic material on front pages, sometimes even limiting them to full-column illustrations or photographs, as seen in the weekend editions of "GW". In summary, following Kamilla Biskupska (2012), it can be said that:

> "The first page (cover) of any magazine plays an important role in defining the framework of the world presented by a given broadcaster. The front page can thus be seen as the ideological 'business card' of the broadcaster. The selection and structure of information on the front page, akin to the selection and sequence of news in television broadcasts, precisely indicates which aspects of the surrounding world and their portrayal are important to the broadcaster. This is particularly crucial for the largest and most influential broadcasters, shaping the structures of the dominant discourse. Despite ideological differences among broadcasters, the world picture they present is quite consistent and convincing […]. Consequently, the media selected by an individual provides them with a map of the social world. The broadcasters assist in reading this map with a ready-made interpretative framework, 'smuggled' into the complex (verbal-visual) messages accompanying the textual message" (p. 249).

The research material comprised photographs selected from editions of both dailies, "GW" and "Rz", published from 1 February to 31 March 2022. The review included 279 texts from "Rz" and 377 from "GW". Not every textual piece was accompanied by a photograph, and some photographs appeared independently of any text. The final sample size for the study was N=66, consisting of 36 photographs from "GW" and 30 from "Rz". The study did not analyze the relationship between the press photograph and its accompanying text, although examining their compatibility or determining the function of the photograph in relation to the text would likely be a valuable addition to the research. Likewise, an analysis of the verbal elements accompanying

individual photographs (such as headlines or captions) could also be beneficial.

The framing analysis methodology applied to the visual materials in this study, as described by Karol Franczak (2017), is:

> "a synthetic term for a diverse research orientation that merges theoretical inspirations from media studies, political science, and sociology. This approach emerges from a keen interest in examining patterns of interpretation found, firstly, in media messages, journalistic endeavors, and various collective actions, and secondly, in the reception process among the recipients of these intricate contents – observers of the public sphere, media consumers, and supporters or detractors of social movements" (p. 145).

Framing analysis, as a method for examining media studies content, is extensively discussed in literature by numerous authors (Goffman, 1974; Gitlin, 1980; Entman, 1991, 1993, 2007; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000; Iyengar & McGrady, 2007). It intersects with agenda-setting, and as Franczak (2017) notes, it is subject to 'terminological confusion.' There is no universally accepted definition, and ongoing methodological discussions highlight its interdisciplinary nature. Scholars continually introduce new concepts and research proposals (Pluwak, 2009; Palczewski, 2011; Rodriguez & Dimitrova 2011; Chyliński, 2013; Olczyk, 2013; Franczak, 2014; Niesłony, 2016; Wasilewski, 2018; D'Angelo, Lule, Neuman, Rodriguez, Dimitrova & Carragee, 2019; Maćkiewicz, 2020). However, less attention has been given to the framing of visual materials in research and theory. As noted by Amores, Calderón, and Stanek (2019), 'this gap seems to be due to some ambiguity in the conceptualisation of visual frames' (p. 149). Rodriguez and Dimitrova (2011) assess that:

> "Images are powerful framing tools because they are less intrusive than words and as such require less cognitive load. As such, peripheral rather than central processing may be activated and audiences may be more likely to accept the visual frame without question. In fact, there is evidence to suggest that when there is conflict between textual and visual framing, visual frames often win" (p. 50).

According to Entman (2003), framing involves 'selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution' (p. 417). The sender selects and highlights certain events, prioritizing some while omitting others, thus organizing public discourse and creating meaning. A frame serves to guide the recipient's thinking, acting as 'a specific narrative scheme used to narrate events or tell the story of these events, employed by the main actors involved' (Brylska, Gackowski & Wasilewski, 2014, p. 810). Framing leads to the recipient receiving not only information but also a perspective for perceiving and interpreting it. Interpretative schemas aid in message reading, classification, comprehension, and memorization. Coombs (2016) notes that the way information about events is framed can limit audience interpretation, but framing is also 'a necessary tool used to reduce the complexity of content' (para. 10); as Goffman (1986) argued, 'individuals cannot fully understand the world and are constantly seeking to interpret their life experiences and make sense of the world around them' (cited in Stave, 2019, p. 8). However, it's crucial to recognize that the frames created by the sender may not align with those formed in the mind/eye of the receiver (Maćkiewicz, 2020; Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011).

As Powell and colleagues (2015) observe, visualizing and appropriately framing images of war is more likely to decrease support for war (and, in the aggressor's country, may increase the number of supporters) compared to text.

Framing analysis and visual framing have been previously applied in studies focusing on the 2014 war in Ukraine (e.g., "The NATO…", 2016; Grigor [Khaldarova] & Mervi, 2021;

Kazakov & Shestov, 2016; Lichtenstein, Esau, Pavlova, Osipov & Argylov, 2019; Makhortykh & Sydorova, 2017; Massaka, 2016; Norström, 2019; Ojala & Pantti, 2017; Ojala, Pantti & Kangas, 2017). The first scholarly publications addressing press coverage following Russia's invasion in 2022 have also been published (e.g., Pavlik, 2022; Selimi, 2023), including those focusing on framing its image (e.g., Adisti, Charima & Cahyono, 2022; Müller & Christ, 2023; Primig, Szabó & Lacasa, 2023; Reinke de Buitrago, 2022; Selvarajah & Fiorito, 2023; Wilson, Moses & Umar, 2023).

The research objectives were addressed through the following questions:

– P1. Was the visual message contained in the "GW" press photograph consistent with the analogous message contained in the "Rz"?
– P3. Have differences become apparent in the framing method used by the two diaries?
– P2. What was the saturation of the interpretive framework in the press material studied?

The study employed a deductive approach, using three of the five general frameworks most commonly identified in media messages by Holli A. Semetko and Patti M. Valkenburg (2000), despite Franczak's (2017, pp. 163–164) concerns regarding the framework identification process. These frameworks included the conflict frame, the human interest (human focus) frame, and the economic consequences (economics) frame. Given the focus on armed conflict in the material under study, the presence of two additional frames, political leadership and military leadership, was presupposed.

To discern the presence of these frameworks in the empirical material, criteria were established in the form of questions to categorize the photographs. The study also recognized that the analyzed photographs could embody more than one frame simultaneously.

The conflict frame was understood by direct reference to warfare. The following questions helped to identify it:

– P1. Did the photograph depict sites associated with warfare, e.g. post-combat landscape, bomb explosions, trenches, entrenchments, destruction of infrastructure and civilian facilities?
– P2. Did it show victims of the armed conflict, e.g. wounded and killed soldiers, as well as places and events clearly linked to the conflict in Ukraine, e.g. rallies, protests by civilians in countries not directly involved in the war?
– P3. Were there any symbols, emblems associated with this aggression, e.g. the letter Z, the national flag, the national emblem, depicted in an undignified or insulting manner to one of the parties?

The frame of human interest included images from the sites of aggression, whose foreground protagonists were the civilian population. It also included those images that showed how the ongoing war affected the fate of other people not directly involved in it. In order to identify this framework, the following questions were posed:

– P1. Did the photograph depict civilian victims of war, e.g. wounded, people in shelters, fleeing bombing, in hospitals, etc.?
– P2. Was the photograph published with a view to its possible impact on a specific person – a Russian citizen, a citizen of the European Union, e.g. showing pacified civilians in the streets of Russia, protesters in various countries at rallies in front of Russian embassies?
– P3. Did it refer to personalisation processes, i.e. an individual perspective, or did it have a personal dimension, showing, for example, specific athletes who could not participate in competitions, people living in mixed (Ukrainian-Russian) relationships, directors, writers, etc.?

In order to test whether there was **an economic frame** in the research material, the following questions were formulated:

– P1. Did the photograph depict Russia's invasion of Ukraine in economic terms (e.g. people queuing at shops, banks or petrol stations, decision-makers meeting on economic issues, images of strategic industrial facilities for the economy, etc.)?
– P2. Did it contain information related to the balance of gains and losses in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war?
– P3. Did it refer to economic issues in the global world, the impact of the war on the world economy or the economic situation of those directly or indirectly involved in the conflict?

Questions defining **the political leadership framework** included the following:

– P1. Did the photograph depict the image of any of the leaders of the states parties to the conflict?
– P2. Did it show the leaders of the European Union in power in each country?
– P3. Did it present leaders of other countries involved in any way in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict?

The questions to establish the presence of **a military frame** were formulated as follows:

– P1. Does the photograph depict a commander, soldier, persons belonging to a territorial unit of a country of either of the parties to the conflict?
– P2. Did it display items of weaponry, military equipment or any militaria?
– P3. Was war infrastructure visible on it, places directly related to military activities?

Results of the analysis

The empirical material was analyzed using specific questions tailored to each of the predetermined frames. The frequency of affirmative responses is detailed in Tables 1 to 5. The data from these tables were then utilized to calculate the frame saturation indexes for the press photographs featured on the front pages of both newspapers, as presented in Table 6.

Table 1. Conflict frame

Questions/answers	"Rz" ($N_1 = 30$)		"GW" ($N_1 = 36$)	
	Number of photographs	%	Number of photographs	%
Question 1	8	26.7	18	50
Question 2	4	13.3	18	50
Question 3	2	6.7	4	11.1

Source: own study.

Photographs saturated with the conflict frame typically showcased war imagery, featuring people and places marked by distinctive elements of warfare such as entanglements, trenches, or barricades (photos 1–2). Commonly, they included Ukrainian flags, Ukrainian soldiers, specific conflict sites, and bombed civilian structures. The photos often depicted cities targeted by Russian forces, such as Kyiv, Mariupol, and Kharkiv. Understandably, such photographs were absent in the titles analyzed before Russia's aggression against Ukraine and only began to appear following the onset of the Russian military invasion. Prior to February 24, 2022, the newspapers predominantly featured images of anti-war rallies occurring in Poland or Ukraine and of the Ukrainian populace and military preparing for national defense.

Photo 1. "GW" No. 62, 16 March 2022, Scott Peterson/Getty Images.

Photo 2. "Rz" No. 54, 7 March 2022, AFP.

Table 2. The human interest frame

Questions/answers	"Rz" ($N_1 = 30$)		"GW" ($N_1 = 36$)	
	Number of photographs	%	Number of photographs	%
Question 1	10	33.3	14	38.9
Question 2	1	3.3	12	33.3
Question 3	1	3.3	1	2.8

Source: own study.

The human interest frame was distinctly evident in photographs that captured the human tragedy of war. These images portrayed the dead, the wounded, and people in despair due to the loss of loved ones or their homes, often fleeing from the conflict. They encapsulated moments of despair and human suffering, highlighting the tragedy experienced by individuals or families. Notably, one photograph that first appeared in "GW" and was later featured in "Rz" (photo 3), captured at the onset of the aggression, is particularly impactful. This image shows Olena Kurylova, a teacher wounded in a Russian military strike on a residential area in Chugayev, Kharkiv region. The photograph is compelling in its appeal to human emotions and starkly portrays the enormity of the tragedy.

Photo 3. "Rz" No. 46, 25 February 2022; "GW" No. 46, 25 March 2022; Anadolu Agency, Wolfgang Schwan, Getty Images.

Table 3. The economic frame

Questions/answers	"Rz" (N_1 = 30)		"GW" (N_1 = 36)	
	Number of photographs	%	Number of photographs	%
Question 1	0	0	0	0
Question 2	0	0	0	0
Question 3	0	0	0	0

Source: own study.

The study revealed that the hypothesized economic frame was not present in the photographs on the front pages of either daily. However, it did feature in the subsequent pages, predominantly within infographics.

Table 4. The political leadership frame

Questions/answers	"Rz" (N_1 = 30)		"GW" (N_1 = 36)	
	Number of photographs	%	Number of photographs	%
Question 1	3	10	6	16.7
Question 2	6	20	3	8.3
Question 3	3	10	6	16.7

Source: own study.

The political leadership frame, as discerned through the posed questions, predominantly featured Volodymyr Zelensky and Joe Biden (photos 4–5). The Ukrainian President was frequently depicted as a national hero, often dressed in military attire. This portrayal aligns with Zelensky's public appearances since the Russian invasion, where he has rarely been seen in attire other than military garb (photo 5). In contrast, photographs of Vladimir Putin, the leader of the aggressor nation, were less frequent. Politicians from the European Union and its Member States also appeared, but only marginally.
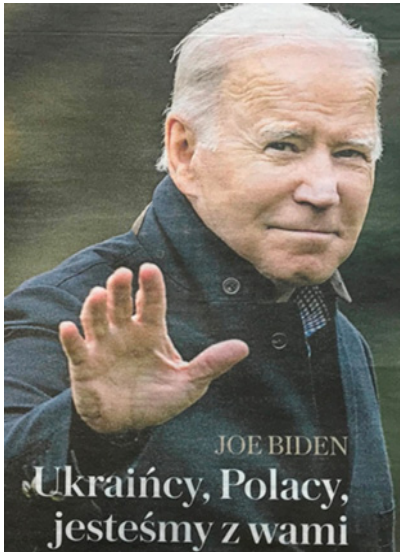

Photo 4. "GW" No. 71, 26–27 March 2022, Samuel Corum/Getty Images.
Photo 5. "Rz" No. 48, 28 February 2022, AFP.

Table 5. Military frame

Questions/answers	"Rz" (N$_1$ = 30)		"GW" (N$_1$ = 36)	
	Number of photographs	%	Number of photographs	%
Question 1	2	6.7	9	25
Question 2	3	10	7	14.4
Question 3	2	6.7	5	13.9

Source: own study.

The military frame was more prevalently featured in both newspapers following the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine, as previously noted. The press photographs categorized within this frame predominantly showcased Ukrainian soldiers and members of military territorial defense units, often depicted with elements of weaponry and military equipment. These images varied from battlefield scenes to instances where military personnel were assisting wounded civilians (photos 6–7).

Photo 6. "GW" No. 75, 31 March 2022, Efrem Lukatsky/AP.

Photo 7. "Rz" No. 56, 9 March 2022, AP.

To determine which frames predominated in the empirical material, the saturation degree of each frame in the photographs from each daily was examined. This involved calculating the percentage of all possible affirmative responses ("Rz" – $N_2 = 90$, "GW" – $N_2 = 108$) represented by the sum of positive answers to each of the three questions formulated for identifying each frame (as presented in Tables 1–5). Essentially, this measured the frequency with which the surveyed photographs affirmed the study's proposed questions. The calculations revealed that the most prevalent frame in both "Rz" and "GW" was that of conflict, with respective saturation rates of 15.56% and 37.04%. The human affairs frame followed, with 13.33% in "Rz" and 25% in "GW". Notably, neither "Rz" nor "GW" featured an economic frame on their front pages, suggesting that the primary focus in press photography was not economic issues but rather the tragedy and societal impact of the armed conflict. This could imply that, amidst human tragedy,

photojournalists in Ukraine did not prioritize the economic aspects of the Russian invasion. However, it is important to note that this absence of an economic frame is specific to the front-page photographs analyzed in this study. A separate study I conducted indicates that an economic frame was indeed present in photographs on the back pages of both dailies (Stępniak, 2023).

Table 6. Framing saturation rate of press photographs (per cent)

Frame	Positive responses in total		Degree of frame saturation	
	"Rz"	"GW"	"Rz" ($N_2 = 90$)	"GW" ($N_2 = 108$)
Conflict frame	14	40	15.56	37.04
The frame of human interest	12	27	13.33	25
Economy frame	0	0	0	0
Political leadership frame	12	15	13.33	13.89
Military frame	7	21	7.78	19.44

Source: own study.

Despite the prevalence of war imagery in both newspapers, the military frame was less prominent in "Rz" (7.78%) compared to "GW" (19.44%). This relatively modest presence of the military frame, along with the similarly low occurrence of political leadership frames in both dailies, is noteworthy. This finding is somewhat unexpected considering the significance of the personalization of politics in shaping both the political and media agenda, as highlighted by Hartliński (2012). In this context, it is relevant to refer to empirical studies based on information value theory. These studies underscore the importance of combining negativism and personalization in forming the media agenda within political communication research (Strömbäck, Maier & Kaid, 2016; Leśniczak, 2022).

Conclusions

The study validated the presence of four framing categories in photographs depicting the escalating conflict between Russia and Ukraine, culminating in Russia's invasion of the independent Ukrainian state, as featured on the front pages of "GW" and "Rz". In "GW", the conflict frame was most dominant, followed by significant utilization of the human interest and military frames; the political leadership frame was used the least. Conversely, in the visual material of "Rz", the conflict, human interest, and political leadership frames were employed to nearly the same degree, with the military frame being notably less prevalent.

The front pages of both newspapers conveyed a similar message, visually depicting Russia's aggression in Ukraine. The photographs portrayed the brutality of the Russian army, confirming the unfortunate reality that every armed conflict affects innocent civilians, including children and families, leaving their homes in ruins and rubble. Notably, women and children comprised the majority of refugees, with most of them seeking refuge in Poland. While the examined photographs effectively captured the tragic plight of the civilian population, they did so without resorting to overly dramatic scenes. It appears that the photojournalists or photo editors aimed to convey the suffering and pain caused by the war in a subtle yet highly expressive manner. Additionally, the photographs occasionally included political leaders, such as the presidents of the United States and Ukraine. In "Rz," Joe Biden, as the leader of a superpower, often took center stage, playing a key role in discussions about military aid and sanctions against the aggressor. In contrast, both newspapers rarely featured photographs of Polish government representatives, EU

politicians, or the leader of the aggressor. Notably, "GW" had a significantly higher saturation of photographs depicting the conflict and military aspects compared to "Rz." Economic themes were notably absent from the analyzed photographs.

The portrayal of war through media images plays a significant role in shaping our understanding of conflicts and the roles played by key actors in international relations (Ojala, Pantti & Kangas, 2017). Therefore, it is essential to further investigate the visual aspects of media messages and their interplay with verbal content (Powell, Boomgaarden, De Swert & de Vreese, 2015). However, it is crucial to acknowledge the limitations of multimodal message framing research, as highlighted by Jolanta Maćkiewicz (2020), particularly its ability "to simultaneously encode verbal and non-verbal elements and, more importantly, to demonstrate how they interact in constructing the frame" (p. 625).

Regarding visual materials, existing literature underscores that:

"frequently images are used to frame more efficiently, given that the iconic, symbolic and expressive weight of images is much greater than any written text, especially photographs […] when there is a confrontation between a photograph and text, the image usually wins, since it almost always seems nearer the truth. Given the iconic nature of photography, spectators tend to ignore the possibility that the photograph can also be an artificial construction that emphasizes certain elements over others, by using multiple formal and rhetorical resources, such as the framing of the photograph, its selection, cropping, staging or digital retouching, all of which imbue the image with a symbolic and ideological character […]. In addition, photographs possess other qualities that can make them more persuasive than text when trying to influence audiences. […] images attract more attention, are easier to interpret and more accessible and enjoyable for the public than discourse, which make them the ideal tool for framing and transmitting ideas and perceptions to a spectator" (Amores, Calderón & Stanek, 2019, pp. 148-149).

In dire circumstances, such as times of war, the adage that "a picture is worth a thousand words" holds even greater significance. Photographs capturing the realities of war have a profound impact on human emotions. Depending on how they are framed by the sender, these images can serve as a persuasive tool, used for propaganda purposes, or as a medium to convey a more soothing tone, alleviating fear and the overwhelming sense of horror that accompanies such events. However, there is also the hope that ultimately, the image that most closely reflects the truth will prevail.

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