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Conflict Framing: Content Analysis of Peace and War Journalism in Coverage of the Russia-Ukraine War

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ABSTRACT

In February 2022, a significant escalation of the Russia-Ukraine War occurred in the form of a full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. This event was widely covered by all major national media outlets in the United States. In addition to television broadcasts and online live website feeds, media outlets also posted videos on YouTube analyzing the conflict. With these analyses came the proliferation of both peace journalism and war journalism, terms coined by Johan Galtung to separate language that promotes de-escalatory and humanizing approaches to the conflict, which is peace journalism, and language that promotes violence and further escalation, which is war journalism. In this study, a content analysis was performed on YouTube videos posted by the three American national media outlets with the most YouTube subscribers (CNN, Fox News, and ABC News). These videos were coded for instances of peace journalism and war journalism, as well as subcategories of both, with these instances being totaled for each media outlet being analyzed. It was determined that war journalism was used to a significant extent more often than peace journalism, though different media outlets don't have a significant difference in usage of peace and war journalism compared to each other. These findings indicate that, while war journalism is more prevalent than peace journalism in American national media outlets, the media outlets themselves don't have significant differences in reporting between each other.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Russia-Ukraine War began in 2014 with the Russian annexation of Crimea, but the most recent phase of the Russia-Ukraine War began on 24 February 2022, when Russia began military operations within Ukraine. This sparked intense media coverage by Western media outlets, especially within the United States, far more than other recent conflicts (Gharib, 2022). The intense scrutiny paid by Western media to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine and the relative lack of interest in conflicts in other parts of the world has been pointed out by many analysts and journalists, characterizing the difference as a double standard (Allsop, 2022). This greater media attention to the conflict suggests that most Western individuals are far more exposed to coverage of the Russia-Ukraine war in comparison to other conflicts.

This is important as Western media has been more inclined to condemn the actions of Russia and place their support behind Ukraine (Krauss, 2022). By contrast, Russian media coverage has been far more favorable for Russia and accusatory of the Ukrainian government (Vorobyov, 2022).

Media coverage of interstate conflicts is vital to the understanding and interpretation of these conflicts. One method of covering such conflicts is utilizing peace journalism, which is journalism concentrated on ending the conflict and mitigating violence as opposed to victory and hatred of the enemy (Ottosen, 2010). This peace journalism model was developed by Johan Galtung, who spearheaded the creation of peace studies in the 1950s, founding the International Peace Research Institute in Oslo in 1959 (Galtung, 2015). This model consists of several criteria to identify peace and war journalism which can be used to analyze any piece of text to determine which of the two types of journalism it may fall under. The model created by Galtung has been used or modified for various peace journalism research projects in several conflicts across the world.

One such conflict is the animosity between India and Pakistan, analyzed by Yousaf et al. in 2018. Yousaf et al. performed a quantitative content analysis of four news outlets, two each from India and Pakistan. Using a self-developed measure of peace and war journalism, specifically for India and Pakistan, the study found that media outlets in both countries tended to use war journalism to a greater extent than peace journalism (Yousaf et al., 2018). Given India and Pakistan's status as conflicting nations, the findings of Yousaf et al. provide the hypothesis that any two rival nations will utilize war journalism to a greater extent than peace journalism in media coverage, a hypothesis that will be maintained in this study.

A similar study was done by Iqbal and Hussain in 2017 in an analysis of peace and war journalism sentiments in Pakistani news channels. While Iqbal and Hussain did have their own list of codes for their research process, they did base this list on a previous, western-oriented peace journalism framework created by Johan Galtung (Iqbal and Hussain, 2017). This is unlike Yousaf et al., who created an entirely unique framework for peace journalism and war journalism. Iqbal and Hussain's methodology is similar to what will occur in this research project, in which a peace journalism framework developed by Ottosen will be used to perform content analysis. In addition, this research will modify the framework from Ottosen, as Iqbal and Hussain did with Galtung's framework.

This Ottosen framework was developed in 2010, based on Galtung's model from 2002. Ottosen demonstrated the use of the framework in a brief content analysis of Norwegian news headlines about the conflict in Afghanistan (Ottosen, 2010). The model, which will be displayed in the methodology section, uses multiple subcategories under both peace journalism and war journalism to code for instances of either form of journalism.

While there has been previous research utilizing the peace journalism framework, Tenenboim-Weinblatt et al. demonstrated the limitations of this framework in their study of Israeli-Arab conflicts, describing the model as utilizing over simplistic assumptions and ignoring constraints journalists must follow. Instead of the standard dualistic approach of peace journalism, Tenenboim-Weinblatt et al. developed a different approach, identifying four characteristic types in coverage of the conflict.

In addition to the limitations of only two sides in the peace journalism/war journalism framework, it has been determined that news stories that utilize peace journalism don't sell as well and don't receive as much attention (Joseph, 2014). These findings would indicate that utilizing peace journalism would negatively impact the revenue of media companies, as they would have less incentive to produce pieces of media that pertain to peace journalism given the fewer clicks/reads they garner.

On top of this, a study done in 2016 determined that increasing news coverage of a crisis, even while using some elements of peace journalism, would likely lead to further escalation (Miller &Bokemper, 2016). Rather than the perspective of the news coverage companies, these findings produce a negative outlook on the impact and effectiveness of peace journalism as a method of coverage to reduce violence. The results from Miller and Bokemper indicate that peace journalism alone is not effective in de-escalating a conflict. Indeed, utilizing too much coverage, even including peace journalism, could cause a conflict to escalate in intensity, potentially pointing to peace journalism as an ineffective strategy for covering conflicts.

Finally, the main argument against peace journalism can be best characterized by a special essay by David Loyn.

Loyn argues that peace journalism misinterprets the actual purpose of journalism, which he says is objective reporting of real events (Loyn, 2007). Trying to resolve conflicts is a job that Loyn says is not something that lies with journalists and trying to make it so will only undermine the credibility of journalists. Loyn explains that the only role journalists should play in conflicts is an observer, not an active participant, and peace journalism requires journalists to make the choice to try and prevent and push against conflict, thereby inherently becoming a participant in the conflict.

Despite these negative sentiments about peace journalism, however, these pushbacks lack context. Lynch says that Loyn and other critics of peace journalism underestimate the ability of governments to push propaganda within the media, and thus peace journalism is a way of covering aspects of a conflict that government propaganda would not. Peace journalism isn't necessarily seeking to intervene and prevent violence, but rather shed light on different perspectives of the conflict that are being overlooked by conventional journalism (Lynch, 2007).

Supporting this, most sources within peace journalism literature have concluded that increasing usage of peace journalism when covering conflicts would be beneficial, primarily thanks to the increased human empathy that is generated by peace journalism, as well as the increased awareness of nonviolent means to ending the conflict which can increase public and international pressure towards a peaceful resolution (Bläsi, 2004; Galtung, 2015; Joseph, 2014). Joseph's findings, especially, indicate that news companies certainly may suffer a hit to revenue, but the switch over to peace journalism would still have an impact on the readers, allowing them to feel more empathy with those suffering within the conflict and place pressure on a nonviolent end, which could certainly justify a loss in revenue. As for Miller and Bokemper's findings, while increasing any form of coverage risks escalating a crisis, peace journalism would at least allow for greater public knowledge and awareness of the situation, allowing for a more informed populace that can place pressure on world leaders to make the right decisions, even if it means escalation in the short term (Joseph, 2014).

As such, peace journalism has become an increasingly notable player in media coverage of conflicts, especially interstate conflicts. This explains the prevalence of research in peace journalism which is present in the existing literature of content analyses of media coverage of conflicts. However, a notable gap exists in coverage of more recent conflicts, especially the Russian-Ukraine War. This would be the first major conflict that would be analyzed using the peace journalism methodology within the European continent, as well as the conflict involving the greatest amount of Western investment, both in media coverage and financial investment. In addition, while this war has been ongoing since 2014, it saw a major increase in both intensity and global attention with a full-scale Russian invasion in 2022 (Gharib, 2022). However, due to the relative recency of this increase in intensity, there has been little peace journalism

research into the conflict, being limited to a study by Nguyen in 2023. Nguyen's study is limited, however, as it is focused on peace journalism within international news headlines, comparing the prevalence of peace journalism between two Western-based news agencies and two non-Western-based news agencies (Nguyen, 2023). Meanwhile, this research will be analyzing peace journalism trends within American news agencies specifically, rather than those outside of the United States, and this will be tracked via videos that are posted on YouTube. Therefore, this research into the use of peace journalism, as well as war journalism, within media coverage of the war in Ukraine would be a useful contributor to the existing literature by analyzing how peace journalism is used in covering this ongoing conflict and how increased Western investment in the conflict might affect it.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted utilizing a directed content analysis of various YouTube videos from three different American national news outlets: CNN, ABC News, and Fox News. These outlets were chosen because they are the outlets with the greatest number of subscribers among the most credible nationally broadcast American news outlets on YouTube (Statista, 2023). There were six videos collected in total, two from each YouTube channel. These videos were searched for with the prompt: "[insert news channel name] Russo-Ukrainian War February 2022", with the first video in the search feed selected for inclusion that is five minutes or greater in length and was uploaded on 24 February 2022.

These videos were then analyzed using a list of criteria

for peace and war journalism that was collected by Rune Ottosen based on a chapter written by Johan Galtung (Galtung, 2002; Ottosen, 2010). The video was watched until a specific timestamp was determined to fulfill one or more of the subcategories or characteristics under either peace journalism or war journalism, after which it was coded as such. Peace journalism has four subcategories: Peace/conflict-oriented (which will henceforth be referred to as conflict-oriented to prevent confusion with peace journalism itself), truth-oriented, people-oriented, and solution-oriented. Conflict-oriented peace journalism is mostly concerned with humanizing all participants in the conflict, as well as focusing on conflict background and prevention, truth-oriented peace journalism is concerned with exposing misinformation on both sides of the conflict, people-oriented peace journalism is focused on showing suffering on all sides and highlighting grassroots peacemaking efforts, and solution-oriented peace journalism is concentrated on resolving the conflict through peaceful means. War journalism, similarly, has four subcategories: War/violence-oriented (which will henceforth be referred to as violence-oriented to prevent confusion with war journalism itself), propaganda-oriented, elite-oriented, and victory oriented. Violence-oriented war journalism is focused on dehumanizing the rival in a conflict and blaming them as being the problem, propaganda-oriented war journalism is focused on exposing misinformation by a rival without acknowledging misinformation by one's own side, elite-oriented war journalism mainly involves on focus on efforts made by elite peacemakers, and victory-oriented war journalism revolves around rebuking any peace process, but rather seeking victory.

Peace Journalism/War Journalism Framework

Table 1. This chart describes the framework for the directed content analysis performed in this study, taken from Ottosen, 2010 and derived from Galtung, 2002. Slight modifications were made by the researcher.

Peace Journalism	Peace-oriented	• Explores conflict formation • Open space, open time, causes and outcomes anywhere • Making conflicts transparent; recognizes fog of war • Giving voice to all parties; empathy and understanding • See conflict/war as a problem • Humanization of all sides • Proactive; prevention before any violence/war occurs • Focus on invisible effects of violence (trauma and glory, damage to structure/culture)
	Truth-oriented	• Expose untruths on all sides • Uncover all cover-ups
	People-oriented	• Focus on suffering all over; on women, the aged, children, giving voice to the voiceless • Give name to all evil-doers • Focus on people peacemakers • Focus on refugees
	Solution-oriented	• Peace = nonviolence + creativity • Highlight peace initiatives, also to prevent more war • Focus on structure, culture, the peaceful society • Aftermath: resolution, reconstruction, reconciliation

War Journalism	Violence-oriented	• Focus on conflict arena, 2 parties, 1 goal (win) • Closed space, closed time, causes and exits in arena, who threw the first stone • "Us-them" journalism, propaganda, voice, for "us" • See "them" as the problem, focus on who prevails in war • Dehumanization of "them" • Reactive: waiting for violence before reporting • Focus only on visible effects of violence (killed, wounded and material damage) • Mentions possibility for future conflict without denouncing
	Propaganda-oriented	• Expose "their" untruths • Help "our" cover-ups/lies • Uses fear mongering to justify escalation
	Elite-oriented	• Focus on our suffering; on able-bodied elite males, being their mouthpiece • Give name to their evil-doers • Focus on elite peacemakers
	Victory-oriented	• Peace = victory + ceasefire • Conceal peace initiatives, before victory is at hand • Focus on treaty, institution, the controlled society

This directed content analysis aligns with the research that is being conducted because peace journalism is a field of research that is dominated by content analyses, especially directed analyses. This is because a directed content analysis allows the researcher to utilize a pre-built framework, such as the one built by Galtung and Ottosen, to identify specific codes within samples and whether they are peace journalism or war journalism, like was done in the studies by Yousaf et al. and Iqbal and Hussain. In addition, like in Iqbal and Hussain's content analysis with Galtung's model, the model from Ottosen was modified, though not significantly. After performing one round of content analysis, the researcher chose to add codes of "mentions possibility of future conflict without denouncing" to violence-oriented war journalism and "Focus on refugees" to people-oriented peace journalism after determining that these criteria did fit under peace journalism and war journalism and were present in the videos being analyzed, but were not present in Ottosen's framework.

RESULTS

Following the quantitative content analysis, CNN and ABC News were found to have the same ratio of war journalism to peace journalism, with approximately 1.44 war journalism codes for every peace journalism code, with 23 total war journalism codes and 16 total peace journalism codes each. This ratio is far below that of Fox News, which used about 2.55 war journalism codes in the same context, with a total of 28 war journalism codes and 11 peace journalism codes. It happened to be, though this was not the intention of the researcher, that the total codes of each media outlet was the same across all three outlets.

What is notable about this data is that, while ABC News and CNN have the same ratio of peace journalism/war

journalism codes, they also have the exact same number of total codes, even as ABC News has a far longer runtime of 37 minutes and 9 seconds compared to CNN's 14 minutes and 46 seconds. This indicates that CNN utilized war journalism more often in its analyses than ABC News, while the latter lacked significant analysis of events, but rather preferred to directly state the occurrences and quote other sources. Fox News, meanwhile, which had a total runtime of 21 minutes and 21 seconds, took the lead in terms of war journalism mainly due to its intense focus on the battlefield tactics and occurrences as well as focus on Putin's role as the aggressor.
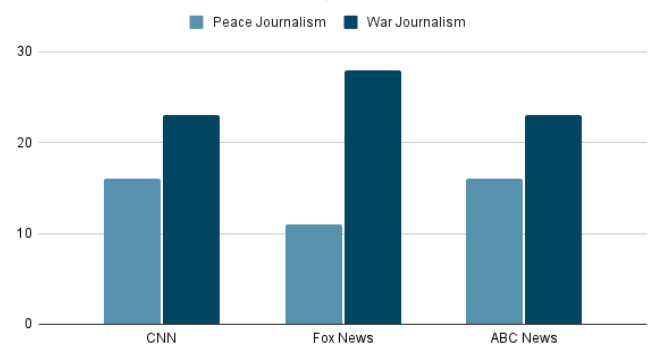
Figure 1. A bar chart of the instances of peace journalism and war journalism codes within each news media outlet.

Peace Journalism

When broken down into different categories, it can be observed that peace journalism was overwhelmingly used in a conflict-oriented fashion. This manifests for the most part via highlighting and denouncing potential conflict escalation, describing the conflict as a problem, and covering the background surrounding the conflict in addition to the conflict itself. The latter was mostly done by explaining the events leading up to the major escalation on February 24th

and the efforts made by the United States and other countries and organizations to prevent the conflict. People-oriented, truth-oriented, and solution-oriented peace journalism were all comparatively not very used.
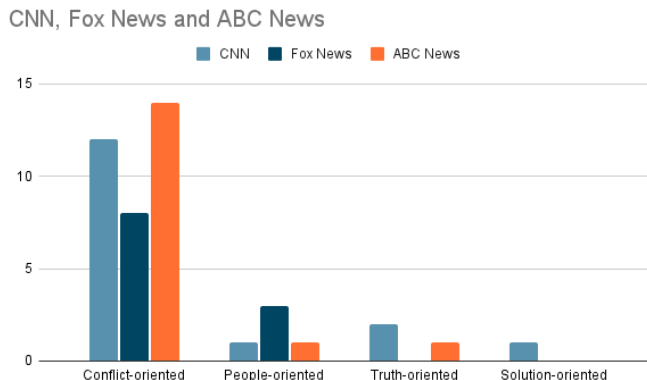
CNN, Fox News and ABC News

Figure 2. A bar chart of the subcategories of peace journalism and the prevalence of each within each media outlet.

War Journalism

The war journalism codes, meanwhile, were far more varied. While there was a great prevalence of violence-oriented war journalism, there was also a substantial amount of elite-oriented and propaganda-oriented journalism. Fox News is by far the news outlet that utilizes the most violence-oriented journalism by mainly focusing on Vladimir Putin as the aggressor and the battle tactics occurring on the ground. CNN also uses a substantial amount of violence-oriented journalism. Elite-oriented war journalism also stood out, representing instances when outlets reported on high-level "peacemakers" like politicians, while propaganda-oriented journalism, also relatively prevalent, reflects instances when outlets expose the falsehoods of Russian authorities without referencing the falsehoods of Western institutions. War journalism on ABC News, notably, was more spread out across different categories, lacking the significant emphasis on violence-oriented journalism given by CNN and Fox News.
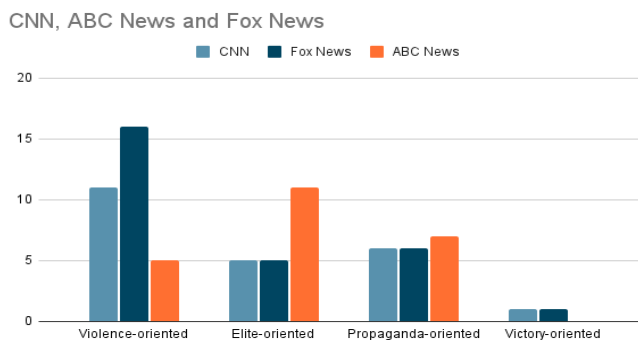
CNN, ABC News and Fox News

Figure 3. A bar chart of the subcategories of war journalism and the prevalence of each within each media outlet.

DISCUSSION

Following the gathering of data, two chi-square tests and two single factor ANOVA tests were conducted to verify the statistical significance of the results. A chi-square test was conducted to determine the statistical significance of the difference in war journalism and peace journalism between media outlets, with a second chi-square test being conducted in the same manner, except looking at the difference in subcategories across media outlets. The first chi-square test found a p-value of 0.398, indicating the difference in peace journalism to war journalism ratio between Fox News and CNN and ABC News is not significant. The second chi-square test was also determined to not be statistically significant, with a p-value of 0.234. This indicates that neither the differences in war journalism and peace journalism between media outlets was significant, nor the differences in the subcategories of war and peace journalism.

The ANOVA tests produced different results, however. The first ANOVA test was to determine the significance of the findings that war journalism was used more frequently than peace journalism in every media outlet. This test found a p-value of 0.012, which, given it is lower than p=0.05, is statistically significant. This indicates that war journalism, across all three media outlets analyzed, was used significantly more than peace journalism.

Anova: Single Factor						
SUMMARY						
Groups	*Count*	*Sum*	*Average*	*Variance*		
War Journalism	3	74	24.66666667	8.333333333		
Peace Journalism	3	43	14.33333333	8.333333333		
ANOVA						
Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	160.1666667	1	160.1666667	19.22	0.0118373132	7.708647384
Within Groups	33.33333333	4	8.333333333			
Total	193.5	5				

Figure 4. Single factor ANOVA test for the relationship between peace journalism and war journalism across all three media outlets.

The second ANOVA test that was conducted, much like the second chi-square test, moved from war journalism and peace journalism as a whole to the separate subcategories of each, analyzing the significance of the differences between each subcategory across all three news outlets. This ANOVA test produced a p-value of <0.001, indicating that the findings that certain subcategories were more prevalent than others were indeed significant. These categories were found to be conflict-oriented and violence-oriented journalism, under peace and war journalism respectively, with propaganda-oriented journalism and elite-oriented journalism also appearing moderately often.

Anova: Single Factor						
SUMMARY						
Groups	*Count*	*Sum*	*Average*	*Variance*		
Conflict	3	34	11.33333333	9.333333333		
Truth	3	3	1	1		
People	3	5	1.666666667	1.333333333		
Solution	3	1	0.3333333333	0.3333333333		
Violence	3	32	10.66666667	30.33333333		
Propaganda	3	19	6.333333333	0.3333333333		
Elite	3	21	7	12		
Victory	3	2	0.6666666667	0.3333333333		
ANOVA						
Source of Variati	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*P-value*	*F crit*
Between Groups	436.625	7	62.375	9.072727273	0.00014607062₄	2.6571966
Within Groups	110	16	6.875			
Total	546.625	23				

Figure 5. Single factor ANOVA test for the relationship between subcategories of peace journalism and war journalism across all three media outlets.

As found by Yousaf et al., war journalism is more likely to be used in general when covering foreign conflicts compared to peace journalism. This finding is supported by the results from this research, which found that every single one of the media outlets that were analyzed used war journalism more than peace journalism, with this difference between the two being supported with statistical significance.

Of course though, this must be paired with the findings from Nguyen, who found that among international news agencies, the US news agency that was analyzed tended to use the most war journalism against Russia. However, they still used peace journalism more often, at a rate of 188 peace journalism instances versus 72 war journalism instances. This discrepancy could be associated with two factors: 1) Nguyen analyzed news headlines whereas this study analyzed videos, or 2) there is a difference in media representation of the Russia-Ukraine War between the US media outlet Nguyen analyzed, AP, and those that this study did. While it is still very preliminary, the findings that there was no significant difference between US media outlets from this study could possibly indicate that the second factor isn't very applicable. As a result, it is possible to conclude from this study that videos from news outlets have a tendency to use more war journalism than in headlines from the same outlets.

In addition, the findings that war journalism is more prevalent than peace journalism indicates that there is likely a lack of public pressure by followers of US media outlets on the government to approach the Russia-Ukraine war using non-escalatory and peaceful measures (Galtung, 2015).

Indeed, the United States has continued to fund Ukraine in the war, with Congress having passed a bill that allows for an additional $61 billion in funding for Ukraine's war effort (Zengerle & Cowan).

CONCLUSION

As mentioned in the literature review, this is only one of two studies that has been conducted on the coverage of the Russia-Ukraine war, with the other being Nguyen 2023. However, this study is different because it is focusing on American national media outlets specifically, as well as looking at online videos on YouTube. Given nearly all previous peace journalism studies have been conducted by using live broadcasts or news headlines as sample mediums of communication, this research is introducing a new medium of communication that can be analyzed using a peace journalism framework, especially when considering the significant growth in YouTube's reach over the last few years.

Given the results of the above research, it can be concluded that all the American media outlets analyzed used war journalism more than peace journalism when covering the Russia-Ukraine war on YouTube, with there being no significant difference between media outlets. This is important, as this indicates that viewers who are watching videos about the Russia-Ukraine war will generally be more exposed to sentiments that promote escalation and focus on the violence of the conflict, rather than sentiments that may highlight the human suffering that is occurring as a result of the conflict and the best ways to resolve it. Having the knowledge that the information in these videos are skewed in this way could inform viewers to be aware of how the

coverage is trying to be presented by the media outlet and assist in improving media literacy.

While this study does draw new results in the field of peace journalism, especially in terms of the war in Ukraine, there are limitations. The main limitations are, firstly, the fact that all the videos analyzed were from February 2022, when the war began, and secondly, the fact that the medium analyzed is videos, and therefore this can't necessarily be applied to other mediums of communication. Since all the samples that were analyzed were from February 2022, this study only draws conclusions about peace journalism/war journalism sentiments at the beginning of the conflict and does not provide insights to how sentiments may have changed over the course of the war. In addition to this, the fact that only YouTube videos were analyzed limits the impact of this study to the medium of edited video communication. Since the processes for producing an article is different from that of a video, it could be the case that there is a more rigorous process for determining bias, or the lack of thereof, in one or the other. As such, the results that are derived from this study may not be applicable to the articles about the war in Ukraine.

An additional limitation is that the sample size is rather limited. This is mainly due to the lack of Fox News videos that fit the criteria that was outlined in the methodology section, with there being only two Fox News videos that could be analyzed according to the criteria that were determined. Since the researcher did not want to skew the results by including more videos from the two other news outlets, the limit to the number of videos for every news outlet was set to two. However, this does limit the sample size substantially. In addition, this study is only limited to three news outlets, while there are still many more within the United States that could possibly be analyzed. The study outlined above is only reflective of the news outlets that were analyzed.

In terms of paths that future researchers could explore, one could possibly be attempting to validate the work of Iqbal and Hussain, who determined with their peace journalism content analysis of media outlets in Pakistan that conflicts that were more vital to national security were covered more using peace journalism, while conflicts that were farther away from the country and did not pose such a threat to security were covered more using war journalism. Given the Russia-Ukraine war is a conflict that is ongoing in another country and does not directly affect the national security of the United States, it would make sense to place the conflict in the latter category. While these findings determined the prevalence of peace journalism and war journalism within American media outlets, it did not determine the same for European media outlets. European countries, which would be closer to the area of conflict, could possibly see the Russia-Ukraine war as a conflict that poses a threat to national security, and therefore could be more inclined to pressure media outlets to utilize peace journalism more in comparison

to war journalism. A study that performs a peace journalism framework content analysis on European media outlets in a similar fashion to this research study could provide results that, when compared to these results, indicate whether Iqbal and Hussain's hypothesis was accurate or inaccurate.

In addition, future researchers could also perform research that is similar to the one conducted in this paper, but on a greater scale. Given limitations in time, as well as the lack of viable Fox News videos on YouTube that fulfilled the necessary criteria, a content analysis was only able to be performed on two videos for CNN, Fox News, and ABC News each. However, future researchers could expand on the criteria that was used, possibly looking at different dates, and analyze more videos to expand the sample size.

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