



RESEARCH ARTICLE

The faces of war – the human interest frame in onet.pl and wp.pl's materials reporting on the war in Ukraine during the first year of the conflict

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Abstract

When analyzing current international relations, it is necessary to move beyond the frames of the central state, as non-state agents, including the media, may have a significant influence in this area. These factors influence political decision makers through their influence on international and national public opinion.

This article presents the results of a frame analysis of how the war in Ukraine was reported on horizontal news websites in Poland, onet.pl and wp.pl, during the first year of the conflict. The goal of the present research was to define the presence and method of using the frame of human interest. When analyzing the journalistic material, we used a quantitative, but above all, a qualitative analysis of the content. The study sample included 1,200 items.

According to these assumptions, the newsrooms of both news services most often employed the conflict frame, and their second most frequently employed frame was human interest. This was constructed by invoking the experiences of the units or groups. The websites' materials containing the human interest frame saw the presence of personalization, dramatization, and emotionalization. In wp.pl's and onet.pl's texts containing the human interest frame and related to the war in Ukraine, we identified three categories of hero: victim, enemy, and hero. Both outlets were most frequently reported by the victims. The means of using the category of hero in press materials were similar, as were the differentiation of the categories of actors in the texts.

Keywords

framing, human affairs framework, war in Ukraine, Onet.pl, wp.pl

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Introduction

Russia's attack on Ukraine in February 2022 was a significant event on an international scale, and the geographical proximity and potential geopolitical consequences of the conflict bore an influence on the large interest it had in the Polish media. As a result, since February 2022, the war in Ukraine has been a permanent topic in Polish media and relevant research literature. The analyses conducted concern different types of media: magazines, dailies, and radio, and have focused on selected aspects such as the subject matter of press materials, the selection and hierarchization of information, the analysis of the narrative or headlines, and visual analysis (Białek-Szwed & Wójciszyn-Wasil, 2024; Demel, 2022; Kwiatkowska & Solarz, 2022; Leśniczak, 2023; Przybysz-Stawska, 2022; Rudyk, 2025; Stępniaik, 2023). The way of reporting on the war and how media reports influence the international environment are presented in articles published in the "Media, War & Conflict" magazine. For example, it has published analyses on how the media reports on the war in Ukraine, including in the context of the activity of international organizations (Papale & Solaroli, 2025; Zollmann, 2023). Comparative studies were also conducted covering several countries or broadcasters addressing their message to the international community (Breeze & Novoa-Jaso, 2025; Novoa-Jaso & Breeze, 2024; Ptaszek *et al.*, 2023); and for the 2014 conflict (Nygren *et al.*, 2018).

The present article complements previous works on how the war in Ukraine is reported. The present research supplements previous analyses of the importance of media in international relations. This direction of research is exemplified well in Martin Shaw's "Civil Society and Media in Global Crises" publication, in which it is observed that the media influences international relations and the decision-making process, it forms public opinion and also mobilizes or discourages society, governments and international actors from taking action (Shaw, 1996). Another example may be found in publications discussing the so-called CNN effect, that is, the instantaneous influence of media reports on political decisions concerning the launch or abandonment of military interventions and international public opinion (Robinson, 2005). It is worth noting that consideration of the importance of the media in international relations encourages researchers to recognize its importance in the analysis of the conditions of political decisions (Gilboa, 2005).

It should not be forgotten that "media representations probably influence reader opinion over time, triggering cycles of reproductionso that a notion that enters the public awareness and is repeated with a certain frequency gradually sediments in the collective mind and becomes part of the shared common-sense understanding" (Breeze & Novoa-Jaso, 2025, 183).

In line with Alexander Wendt's concept, the media is an essential element of international relations. This researcher assessed that the significance of the media is not limited to conveying information. The media determines relations between countries at a crucial level. They are intermediaries in how the identity of countries is formed (and in a later stage, the friend-foe relation), in the axiological dimension of relations between states by conferring meaning on values, and in the political agenda (Wendt, 1999). This view justifies the use of framing theory in the analysis. It has the following three functions: 1. diagnostic – based on defining the problem, establishing its causes and attribution, meaning assigning responsibility; 2. prognostic, linked to moral assessment and a proposal for solving the problem; 3. motivational – urging action (Benford & Snow, 2000: 616; Entman, 1993: 52). Another argument in favour of using frame analysis is that analyses conducted with its use are grounded in constructivist theory, which also became central to Wendt's analysis.

The article presents the results of the frame analysis on how the war in Ukraine is reported on Polish horizontal news websites onet.pl and wp.pl. In doing so, it focuses on an evaluation of how the "frame of human interest" is used in media reports. The presented research results are part of a broader analysis covering the framing process in the indicated portals.

This frame was selected because researchers on how media reports conflicts are currently focused on a holistic frame analysis or on the frame of the conflict. The use of a qualitative analysis of how the human interest frame is used allows us to grasp the complexities in reporting on the subject of the war in Ukraine, which is, of course, not confined to portraying conflict. The image of the war in the media remains complex, and the presentation of individual stories of people affected by or involved in the war plays a crucial role, as does the portrayal of the emotions of the heroes of media materials. After all, journalism is about telling other people's stories. As Jeremy Rifkin points out, empathy and 'empathic civilisation' are important „one of the finest social critics of our era, is the best model for international relations and global survival in the early 21st century" (Rifkin, 2010).

Frame analysis in research into how events are reported

We may cite Robert Entman that "To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (Entman, 1993, 52). A frame is applied to communicating acts (Goffman, 2010), including those present in media messages.

As Claes de Vreese, Jochen Peter, and Holli A. Semetko observed, research into the frames employed in media messages “has focused primarily on how issues are presented and covered in the news” (de Vreese *et al.*, 2001, 107). Using frames in journalistic materials ensures that recipients can interpret reality and orientation and shape political, social, and economic debates (Turhan & Bozdag, 2016, 99–100).

Sumaya Al Nahed and Philip Hammond determined that “In the intervening quarter century, framing analysis has been widely taken up as a key method for investigating news coverage of war and conflict ...” (Al Nahed & Hammond, 2018, 365).

In line with the findings of research into materials devoted to presenting information on political conflicts (Albæk *et al.*, 2014; de Vreese *et al.*, 2001), as well as war and conflicts, journalists most often use the frame of conflict (Ajibulu & Nwaoboli, 2023; Dimitrova, 2006; Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2005; Iyengar & Simon, 1993; Lichtenstein *et al.*, 2019; Miller-Carpenter, 2007; Szwed, 2016). The rectitude of this may result in part from the frames representing a kind of “support of or opposition to the sides in a political conflict” (Entman, 2003, 417). It should be noted here that some researchers identify a different frame as dominant. For instance, in their analysis of reporting by China’s CGTN English-language website, Ruth Breeze and Maria Novoa-Jaso identified the diplomatic frame as dominant and the conflict frame as secondary (Breeze & Novoa-Jaso, 2025; Novoa-Jaso & Breeze, 2024). This difference can be explained by the researchers’ use of a different catalogue of frames in their analysis, the specific nature of the Chinese media landscape, and international differences in the use of frames.

The second most frequently used frame in the media is the human interest frame. In academic works it is most often defined by referring to the recommendations of Holli Semetko i Patti Valkenburg who defined it as “a human face or an emotional angle to the presentation of an event, issue, or problem” (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, 96). In other words, it is applied to show that “individual lives are featured to personalize the story, with affective dimensions accentuated” (Luther & Zhou, 2005, 859860). The use of this frame is dictated by the fact that the personalization, dramatization, and emotionalization of the news facilitates the acquisition of recipients and maintains their interest (Oschatz *et al.*, 2019; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, 96), which enables a narrative construction and the relation of the event (Boukes *et al.*, 2015). Furthermore, according to Zillmann and Brosius (2000), the use of exemplification, referring to the fate of specific people or recalling experiences, causes the information to affect the recipient to a greater extent.

Using the human interest frame to present events increases empathy for heroes of journalistic materials (Seung & Gower, 2006) and also causes recipients to approach the presented issues more emotionally, seeking personal implications (Valkenburg *et al.*, 1999). It is also worth emphasizing that, according to the research referred to in materials of personal experiences and testimony, which draw attention to individual fates, it leads

to an increase in the recipients’ political knowledge. In particular, this concerns recipients who are not interested in political issues (Albæk *et al.*, 2014). Empathetic media coverage can shape the collective memory of an ongoing war, bearing witness to the human tragedy that its perpetrators would like to hide or ignore. However, according to Susan D. Moeller, an excess of empathetic media coverage can cause compassion fatigue, leading to audience indifference and weakening their ethical sensitivity (Moeller, 1998). Nevertheless, Patti M. Valkenburg; Holli A. Semetko and Claes H. de Vreese’s research (1999), using the human interest frame may negatively impact the memorization of information about the event itself.

Wp.pl and Onet.pl – the characteristics of Polish news websites

We analyzed the content published on two horizontal news websites that are popular in Poland. Horizontal websites offer users developed news services “along with a host of stored services on various topics or targeted... Alongside news functions which render the websites similar to traditional newspapers, they usually offer a package of additional services: a catalogue of Internet pages and a search option and services which often require the users to log in, such as email or paid web hosting” (Andrusiewicz, 2017, p. 392). The position of news websites is exceptional in the Polish media market. This is because of their great popularity. The president of Wirtualne Media Holding, Jacek Świderski evaluated this situation as follows: “Poland is a phenomenon on the global scale because we have as many as five horizontal news websites. I do not know of other countries like this. Poland has sustained as many as five news websites, which only show how ready Poles are to use this service. The foundation here is the delivery of reliable, verified information about what is happening in the world” (Wp.pl, 2020). The data on reach and references to horizontal news websites confirms this opinion.

Since 2015, websites, along with television, have been the main news source for Poles. In 2024, 80% of Internet users and 62% of those surveyed declared that they will use them (CBOS, 2024, 12–13). When selecting websites for analysis, we were guided not only by their reach but also by their position in the ranking of the most influential media outlets in Poland prepared by the Institute of Media Monitoring (IMM). On the IMM’s ranking summarizing the decade 2014–2023, Onet was the leader, with 236,600 citations. WP.pl, with 191,700 citations, was in fourth place and was the second horizontal news website in terms of public debate in Poland (IMM, 2024).

It should be noted that WP.pl was founded in 1995 and is a catalog of Internet pages in its initial phase of activity. Over time, the website made new functionality available, such as the Jabber communication protocol, which transformed the catalogue of pages into a general information service with sections including news, sports, business, and celebrities. The Wirtualna Polska holding is the owner of the website, and is a company that is publicly traded. Świderski, Barański, and

Krzysztof Sierota hold shares (totalling approximately 38% of the capital and 55% of the votes) ([wp.pl, 2025](#)). onet.pl developed in a manner similar to wp.pl. First, it was a catalogue of Internet pages launched in 1996 called Optimus.net. In 1997, it began to transform into an information service, and over the years, it provided its recipients with varied content topics and offered new functionality, such as email. The year 2012 was a crucial date on the history of this website. This was when the German-Swiss Ringer-Axel Springer multimedia corporation acquired almost 76% of its shares in Onet Holding. In 2017, it became the owner of 100% of shares ([Onet.pl, 2025](#)).

Methodological assumptions

The aim of the present research was to define the presence and manner in which the human interest frame was used in onet.pl and wp.pl's journalistic materials reporting on the war in Ukraine during the first year of the conflict. The main research questions were formulated as follows:

- What frames were used in published materials on the websites being analyzed?
- How often were the particular frames used in the published materials on the websites being analyzed?
- How was the human interest frame constructed in the published materials on the websites being analyzed?
- Which categories of people appear in the published materials on the websites being analysed?

Responses to the research questions were sought by applying framing analysis. The frames used in the texts were sought for using the deductive method - "investigates frames that are defined and operationalized prior to the investigation"

([de Vreese, 2005](#)). We used the generic frames proposed by Holli A. Semetko and Patti M. Valkenburg: conflict (C), responsibility (O), economic consequences (E), morality (M), and human interest (H) ([Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000](#), 95–96). In the analysis, iconic materials and elements (images, maps, illustrations, and video materials) were omitted.

During the coding process, answers were provided to the individual frames of the questions which had been assigned ([Table 1](#)). A response affirming at least one question allowed the identification of the frames presented in the article. Thus, each journalistic material contains one or many identifiable frames. For the conflict frame, the following questions were asked: 1. Does journalistic material contain content on the impact of war on a specific person or group of people? Two Does journalistic material contain content from the individual perspective of a specific person? Three Does journalistic material contain content on the privacy of specific people?

In the analysis of journalistic materials, we used quantitative and qualitative analysis of the content. The research corpus comprised journalistic materials published on the general information services of two countrywide Internet websites: Onet ([wiadomosci.onet.pl](#)) and Wirtualna Polska ([wiadomosci.wp.pl](#)). Journalistic material was used as the unit of analysis. All of them were drawn from a period of 14 days, which were chosen based on a random layered sample from the first year of the conflict, that is, from February 24, 2022, to February 23, 2023. They were selected using the concept of a composed week that assumes the random choice of particular days of the week from all those identified in the research period ([Riffe et al., 1993](#), 134). Randomization was performed on each day of the week, and every week was included only once.

Table 1. Human interest frame in journalistic materials from news websites from 24 February 2022–23 February 2023 (chronological view).

Frames	Type and number of applications of frame on particular days:																	
	24 Feb Thurs	13 Mar Sun	21 Mar Mon	16 Apr Sat	26 Apr Tues	23 May Mon	15 Jun Weds	25 Jun Sat	13 Jul Weds	22 Jul Fri	28 Aug Sun	20 Sep Tues	13 Oct Thurs	16 Dec Fri	26 Jan 2023	total		
Onet																		
Human interest	56	37	35	20	10	26	10	1	13	10	6	7	10	5	7	253		
Wirtualna Polska																		
Human	22	11	16	11	11	15	5	3	3	5	4	3	1	6	4	120		

Source: authors' own research.

Due to the significance of the topic of analysis, we supplemented the sample by the first day of armed conflict.

We analyzed all the materials on the armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine from 15 days, its causes, consequences, and the reactions it caused in the international arena. We omitted those that concerned domestic policy and third countries (including Poland), except where they referred to activities related to refugees from the Ukraine. Journalistic materials were selected from archived pages: <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/archive> and <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/mapa-servisu>. Materials qualifying for analysis were analyzed quantitatively, and texts in which the human interest frame was used were analyzed qualitatively. Qualitative analysis programmes such as Atlas.ti and Maxqda were not used. This approach was intentional and dictated by the specific nature of the subject matter and the Polish language, particularly its complexity and emotional nuances.

The research material was coded by the authors of the text. Each author coded materials from one portal. In cases where there were issues identifying the frames or other research categories, the researchers collectively classified the texts.

Research sample

The research sample included 1,200 journalistic materials, including 592 from Wirtualna Polska and 608 from Onet. An analysis of the content revealed the presence of interpretive frames in 1,170 journalistic materials, including 563 from WP and 607 from Onet. In all 1,170 materials, the interpretive frame

was applied 778 and 746 times in Onet and WP, respectively. The shares of frame in the materials are presented in [Chart 1](#) and [Chart 2](#).

The newsrooms of both services most often used the conflict frame, which is unsurprising when reporting on a war (onet.pl 261, wp.pl -458). The second most frequently used frame was human interest. Onet used it 253 times, and wp.pl 120 times ([Table 1](#)).

In the analyzed research material, besides the presence of the human interest frame, we identified categories of actors used in its construction. These were the hero, enemy, and victim. The categories of actors were identified once the authors had familiarised themselves with the research material. During this process, they identified all the categories of actors that appeared. Then, guided by the principle of not creating unnecessary entities, they limited the number of categories to three. The inspiration for limiting the categories of actors to three came from two theoretical constructs: Adam Smith's 'model of compassion', presented in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Smith, 1790), featuring the persecutor, the victim, and the benefactor; and Stephen Karpman's drama triangle (Karpman, 1968), identifying three basic patterns of human interaction: Persecutor, Rescuer and Victim. These categories were adapted and modified for analysing the roles of characters in press publications. The operationalization of the categories of actors is presented in [Table 2](#). In the individual materials using the human interest frame, we were able to find either one category or actor, a few of them, or all of them.

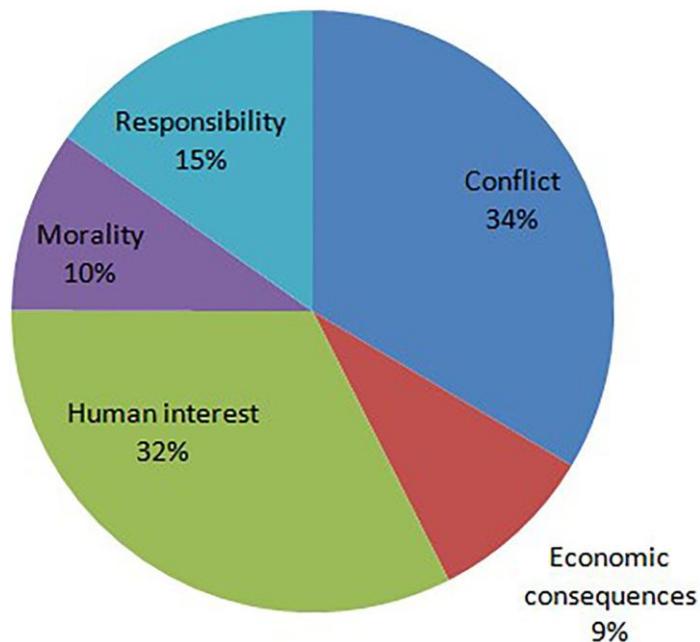


Chart 1. Frames in onet.pl's journalistic materials from 24 February 2022 – 23 February 2023 (authors' work). [Responsibility, Conflict, Economic consequences, Human interest, Morality].

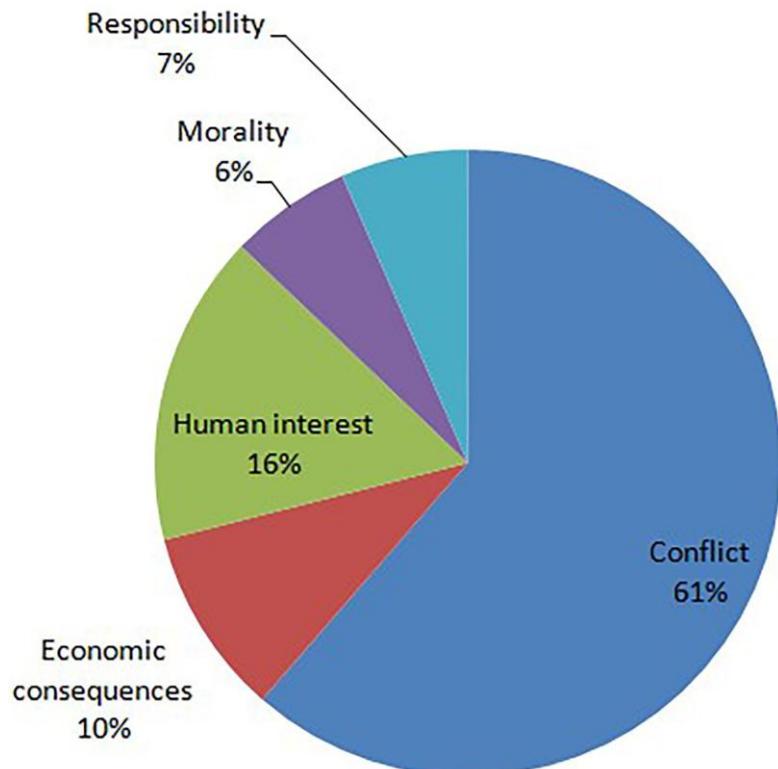


Chart 2. Frames in wp.pl's journalistic materials from 24 February 2022 – 23 February 2023 (authors' work). [Responsibility, Conflict, Economic consequences, Human interest, Morality].

Table 2. Operationalisation of category of actors used in the human interest frame on the wp.pl and onet.pl horizontal news websites, 22 February 2022–23 February 2023.

Category of actor	Operationalisation of category	WP.PL	ONET.PL
hero	A person who takes actions or decision requiring them to risk their own life or to sacrifice their property, health etc. in order to protect another cause, perceived as higher	20	36
victim	A person affected by armed or military actions, these effects may be of a health, psychological, economic, social etc. Nature	80	138
enemy	A person with a negative stance towards people or groups of people who takes disadvantageous actions which are hostile to them or are intended to harm them or who decides to cooperate with the enemy when this cooperation may affect military, economic, social etc. issues and may be linked to negative consequences for the group which has been betrayed.	53	116

Source: Authors' own work.

The greatest limitation in the coding and analysis of the research material, particularly with regard to the actors, was the heterogeneity of the identified categories. These categories were often complex. For instance, Russian soldiers within the same text could be portrayed as both enemies, engaging in

negative and hostile actions, and victims, experiencing the adverse effects of Russia's aggression against Ukraine and the regime's instrumental treatment. Any ambiguities were indicated in the section presenting the results of the qualitative analysis for the different character categories.

Victim, hero and enemy – the discussion of the actors in the human interest frame on news websites

Victim

In materials on the websites reporting the war in Ukraine, three ways of presenting the category of "victim" can be identified. The first was information about the group fatalities from military activities. In this case, the newsrooms decided to provide the number of victims and information on the circumstances of their deaths. Information on child victims was emphasized in the texts; for example, they were separated from the general numbers of people who were killed or injured; they were indicated as rape or sexual assault victims (e.g., MRM, [wp.pl](#), April 16, 2022c; Nowicki, [wp.pl](#), April 26, 2022; Onet, February 24, 2022; Ossowski, [wp.pl](#), May 23, 2022a).

Drawing attention to the causes of death, indicating suffering, was also characteristic (e.g., Durman, [wp.pl](#) April 26, 2022; PAP, [Reuters](#), Onet, February 24, 2022). This way of presenting information is demonstrated by the following quotes: "In Izyum 146 bodies have already been exhumed, mainly civilians from a mass grave site found in a liberated town – Oleh Synyehubov, the governor of the oblast announced. Two of the children were exhumed. Injuries from explosions, shrapnel, stab wounds and cuts were visible on the bodies" (Mrowicki, [wp.pl](#), 20 September 2022) and "Men who only wanted to get a bit of bread. A family with three children seeking shelter in a cell. Women hiding in their homes. Now they are dead. It appears that Russian soldiers murdered them in the cold blood of Bucha. The mayor of this municipality to the northwest of Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, spoke of 403 killed people. Some victims showed signs of torture. Many women were raped" (Hackensberger, [wiadomosci.onet.pl](#), April 16, 2022). Reports containing information about the victims also concerned places about international public opinion in the context of mass graves being discovered, for example, municipalities around Mariupol (WJR, [wp.pl](#), April 26, 2022), Izyum (Gdaniec, [wiadomosci.onet.pl](#), September 20, 2022), Bucha (Durman, [wp.pl](#), April 26, 2022), and Kherson (KTS, [wp.pl](#) April 16, 2022). Accounts from witnesses of the tragic events were also reported: "Three days ago an acquaintance of his older cousin came to us and said that there'd been a direct hit on the fire station. The firefighters were killed. One woman had arms, legs, and head blown off. I hope that my body parts remain in place, even after an explosion of aerial bombardment, writes Nadia (Olejarczyk, [wiadomosci.onet.pl](#), March 21, 2022).

The second way of using the category of victim in the texts involves invoking the specific fates of individual people, indicating their full name or, more rarely, anonymously. The people mentioned in this way are varied. They include: a shot disabled person and former soldier – Aleksander Kononov; an American journalist who was shot while reporting the events in Irpin – Brent Renaud (Onet.pl, March 13 2022a; Ossowski, [wp.pl](#), March 13 2022b; PAP, March 13, 2022); a 96-year-old former prisoner of the Buchenwald concentration camp – Borys Romanchenko (Frackiewicz, [wiadomosci.onet.pl](#), March 21, 2022; Ossowski, [wp.pl](#), March 21 2022c); and an anonymous

woman: "We don't want to be part of Russia or any other country – said the young woman with tears in her eyes. – I cannot believe this is really happening – she confided" (Zawiślińska, [wiadomosci.onet.pl](#), February 24, 2022). In the materials, journalists attempt to invoke emotive information, drawing attention to what people did when they were alive. They also indicate the characteristics or activity of people who are meant to evoke sympathy, for example, they emphasize that the victim was disabled (Kuczera, [wp.pl](#), March 13, 2022). One of the most emotional reports on victims was a text with testimonies from the mothers of the two sons. In these cases, the use of the human interest frame was linked to emotionalizing the content by providing details or in their way of creating the narrative – short sentences that are repeated. The following excerpt is an example:

"They were tortured. It was terrible torture; no body part was spared: the fingers, shoulders, legs... It's hard to say it, but I will say this: they killed (Pavel) with a shot in the mouth. From a rifle. His brain was in the hood of his coat. It is hard, very hard, and said 48-year-old Tetiana Kholodenko.

Olena Balay, Victor's mother. - My son did not make it to his 29th birthday. The bastard had killed him. The fascist then tortured him. What for? What had he done? He's not guilty, he's only a boy. My son is dead. My little boy is gone, my child – she said, squeezing a picture of her only child" (KBN, [wp.pl](#), April 16, 2022; PAP, [wiadomosci.onet.pl](#), April 16, 2022).

The soldiers who died during the war were presented in a similar manner. The reports mention statements of their relatives, usually their parents, but also happy memories from their pre-war lives, e.g. "I catch myself constantly waiting for him to call. Sometimes I will close my eyes, and it seems like Tomek is still with us. He is sitting at the table in his favorite black shirt. I cannot accept that my son is gone" (MRM, [wp.pl](#), April 16, 2022b). Collecting positive warm descriptions with the painful statements of relatives has a strong emotional effect.

The above quote confirms that the victims in press materials were not only people who died, but also those who coped with other negative consequences of the armed conflict. The situation of Ukrainians on Russian-occupied territory is presented, about the filtration camps and forced entry into the Russian Army (e.g. Mikołajczyk, [wp.pl](#), April 16, 2022; Onet, March 13, 2022; Zaręba, [wp.pl](#), March 21, 2022c). They were the mothers losing their sons, people who had lost acquaintances or friends, or those who have lost their livelihoods, remaining in their place of residence or forced to deal with the tragic consequences of that (Zaręba, [wp.pl](#), March 21, 2022c). One of these consequences was the need to find shelter from air raids or bombardment in cellars (Dziubka, [wiadomosci.onet.pl](#), February 24, 2022; Ossowski, [wp.pl](#), February 24 2022e) or in the metro: "Clouds of smoke, ruins and injured people... Ukrainians try to escape and gather at the metro and train stations. Some did not manage to escape the strikes and their wounded faces and lost homes are immortalized in pictures which the world sees" (PAP, AFP, Getty Images, February 24, 2022).

Another consequence was the diametrical change of lifestyle, e.g. in Kyiv: “Only yesterday Khreshchatyk, Kyiv’s main avenue, was completely gridlocked. Then, it is empty. Kyiv’s mayor Vitali Klitschko called on people to remain in their homes. The schools are also closed today. When, after an intensive day, we wanted to buy something to eat, it turned out that all shops were closed. Maidan, meaning the soul of Kyiv, is completely dead – related Marcin Wyrwal” (Onet, February 24 2022b), or in Lviv (Posander, wiadomosci.onet.pl, February 24, 2022) or Kharkiv (Onet, February 24 2022c). The readiness of Ukrainians to self-organize and offer each other help was presented: “My husband and I decided not to leave Kyiv. We have stayed to help as volunteers. We asked the driver to bring us to the field kitchen to help us. Then, we made an announcement that we also needed products, and people began bringing it. Next we asked for physical help, simply people’s work and again, people volunteered – a Kyiv resident told us” (Wyrwal, Onet, March 21, 2022a). There is also a moving report of the owner of an animal shelter: “Over 600 dogs and cats find care in Hostomel, near Kyiv, in a shelter run by 77-year-old Asya Serpinska. Risking her life, she did not abandon the animals even during the bloody Russian occupation... Russian vehicles stopped outside our fences. Some soldiers came to the property. Dogs are dogs; therefore, they start to bark. They then shot them from the automatic rifles. Do you understand that? I screamed, ‘do not shoot!’ but it was too late – she told us with a trembling voice” (PAP/Onet, May 23, 2022; also see: Ossowski, wp.pl, May 23, 2022f).

Another consequence is the need for a verification process in filtration camps. This procedure involved checking documents, taking fingerprints, confiscating telephones, beatings, humiliating identity checks, brutal interrogation, and obligatory strips (DSZ, sp, wiadomosci.onet.pl, May 23, 2022; Ossowski, wp.pl, 23 May 2022g). The resettlements were another consequence of military activity which Ukrainians dealt with which were described in the materials of both websites: “The Russians want to ‘clear’ the occupied territories of all politically incorrect people, so those openly opposing the Russian occupation. Large-scale resettlement serves this purpose, so whole families are torn from their place of abode and end up in remote corners of the Russian Federation, including on an island close to Japan in the Pacific” (JHZ, wp.pl, May 23, 2022).

In addition, in the category of those killed, special attention is paid to materials that draw attention to children’s fate. One of the texts presents the fate of 12-year-old Kira Obedynska, who returned to her grandfather after her parents died and she was transported to Russia. Her story was described more broadly, and it was indicated in it that hers was not an individual fate and that many Ukrainian children had been transported from Ukraine to Russia; it was also stressed that information about them was used in Russian propaganda materials (Ossowski, wp.pl, April 26 2022d). Some of the transported children had problems returning home due to the state of emergency that the Russians declared in the occupied territories (kf, wiadomosci.onet.pl, December 16, 2022).

Journalists kidnapped by the Russian occupiers and coerced into cooperation were also victims (Onet/PAP, March 21, 2022), as were those fleeing from an invader displeased with the reporting of actions bearing the hallmarks of genocide, such as documenting the unsuccessful resuscitation of a six-year-old girl from Mariupol or extracting pregnant women from under the rubble of a bombed maternity hospital (Onet/Associated Press, March 21, 2022).

Refugees had a particular category of victims in the texts. The news websites studied presented the fates of people fleeing the war. Around seven million Ukrainians left their country (Długosz *et al.*, 2022, 3). The images of refugees in the materials of both websites were created in two ways. The first was to report on the exodus of Ukrainian citizens. In this case, their motives for taking the decision to flee were described, and information was provided on the difficulties connected with leaving Ukraine. In those reports, uncertainty about the life situation, difficulties resulting from the large scale of the event, and situations at the reception points in Poland were emphasized. The escapes of individuals were presented, such as the reports of 15-year-old Anna escaping with her mother from bombarded Kharkiv, Olena, who left Zhytomyr and travelled with her 18-month-old daughter for three days (Śmigulec, wp.pl, 13.03.2022). Individual perceptions of war were presented. The trauma and psychological effects of the military actions were described as fear of loud noises, a missing sense of security, alienation, and helplessness caused by a difficult situation (Faron, wp.pl, March 22, 2022).

The scale of this phenomenon caught the interest of the Polish media. It is worth noting that, according to the Border Guard, from the first day of the armed conflict until the end of May 2022, 3.659 million people crossed the Polish-Ukrainian border (Długosz *et al.*, 2022, 8). This was not only a challenge for refugees but also for the country receiving them. The news websites reported spontaneous material and logistical support provided by Poland and the Poles (Białach, wiadomosci.onet.pl, February 24, 2022; Reuters/NOIZZ/Onet, wiadomosci.onet.pl, February 24, 2022). The methods of support for Ukraine and its residents were reported and subsequently developed (Bielska, wiadomosci.onet.pl, March 21, 2022).

The second way of presenting refugees was to describe how they were integrated into a new foreign environment (Kałach, wiadomosci.onet.pl, April 16, 2022). This partial “normalisation” of life conditions is linked to the reference in the materials of both websites to information about the organization and challenges associated with educating Ukrainian child refugees, but also the social consequences associated with exile (Durman, wp.pl, March 21, 2022).

One category of victims warrants separate attention: Russians and Belarusians, occasionally dissidents, or those who have fled fearing military conscription. In this case, the websites did not emotionally present their fates. These were news texts, where the fates of individuals represent an example of the fates

of the whole group (e.g., Druten, [wiadomosci.onet.pl](#), March 21, 2022; Kwiatkowska, [wp.pl](#), April 27, 2022; Latypova, [wiadomosci.onet.pl](#), July 13, 2022; Uzi, [wiadomosci.onet.pl](#), July 22, 2022).

Enemy

The category of the enemy in the publication of news websites is complex. Among them were the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, Russian soldiers, and collaborators and traitors.

The journalists in the materials present information that explains the motivations and goals of the Russian president. In doing so, they analyzed his personality. In an interview with sociologist Sergei Erofeev, we learn that Putin is a genuine social actor and not an imagined evil genius, the great and terrible Wizard in Emerald City. In his opinion, "Putin is not 'great and terrible.' He is also far from the greatest thinker at all times. He has certain communicative gifts, a lot of luck to a certain time and a brotherhood of the mafia – that is almost everything he has, besides power and money" ([Isajew, wp.pl, December 18, 2022](#)). The sociologist denies that he can be treated as a madman, for him his is a specific deviant – "He is a specific, rational, calculating terrorist." "he is not a 'fan' of accidental crimes in order to survive, but is a professional in his field" ([Isajew, wp.pl, December 18, 2022](#)).

Referring to the rational grounds for Putin's actions explains his main goal of Russia's importance in the international arena. In this context the "special military operation" serves to maintain, to strengthen his power in Russia, and the secondary goal – to increase the importance of Ukraine in Russia's sphere of influence and to halt the process of NATO and EU enlargement ([Koziński, wp.pl, February 24, 2022](#)). The texts referring to analogies and comparisons with WWII and Putin himself were put alongside Adolf Hitler, with some newsrooms opting to put an equal sign between them, indicating the similarity in behavior, the apparatus of power, and the created repression. The "mafia" structure of the state and rationality of Putin's actions in the websites' texts was also explained by the potential consequences he would face if he loses power (e.g. [Henszerhorn wiadomości.onet.pl, February 24, 2022](#); [Isajew, wp.pl, December 18, 2022](#); [Koziński, wp.pl, February 24, 2022](#); [Wyżga & Dolak, wp.pl, December 16, 2022](#)).

Rationalizing Putin's actions was not the only way to explain his behavior. The texts also referred to statements recognizing that it was caused by his psychological problems, for example, the quoted statement of General Roman Polko: "This criminal attack from Putin. What he had done was madness. I do not know where his frustration originates. He either has such large internal problems in Russia or he has just gone mad" ([Ruszkiewicz, wp.pl, February 24, 2022](#); [Stankiewicz, wiadomosci.onet.pl, February 24, 2022](#)). In an interview for Onet the sociologist and journalist Grzegorz Lindenberg diagnosed Vladimir Putin's psychological state in this way: "He is a dictator and a psychopath for sure, but rather not a person with both feet firmly on the ground. I think he already

has paranoia, and that he lives in a reality that he and his associates create, which shows him a skewed reality. He does not use the Internet or look for information to create a reasonably objective picture of the world. The effect of this is his conviction that Ukraine is being ruled by fascist drug addicts." ([Kawalas, wiadomosci.onet.pl, 13 March 2022](#)).

Other plots in the materials using the human interest frame presenting Putin refer to his wealth or health ([Onet, May 23, 2022d](#); [Ossowski, wp.pl, 23 May 2022h](#)) and considerations over a potential assassination attempt or losing power in a revolution. In the latter of these contexts, the materials contained references to Putin's personal experience that he was afraid of his own services, precisely because he hails from them. He knows what kind of people they are, that they can deprive him of his power ([Ruszkiewicz, wp.pl, March 21, 2022](#)).

Belarus's President Aleksandr Lukashenka is another anti-hero in the text. He is presented as a supporter of Putin, dependent on him, and repeating the "Kremlin's propaganda" ([Czmiel, wp.pl, February 24, 2022](#)). With both Putin and Lukashenka, their negative image and criticism of their behavior are constructed by applying loaded words or phrases to describe their behavior, which are grouped with statements with information on the number of injured and killed, and the sites of massacres of civilians due to Russia's military actions.

What are the soldiers of the Russian Army? This is another question that journalists from both websites wanted to find an answer by using the human interest frame. The texts mention that the soldiers are recruited from a very wide range of backgrounds, some of them have a non-Russian nationality – Chechens, Belarusians, and North Korean citizens fight in the ranks of the Russian Army ([Kwiatkowska, wp.pl, January 26, 2023](#); [Latypova, wiadomosci.onet.pl, May 23, 2022](#)). The operation commander of conquering Mariupol was Adam Delimkhanov, a member of the Russian State Duma, suspected of carrying out assassinations on orders from Ramzan Kadyrov, the leader of Chechnya ([Onet/Medusa, wiadomosci.onet.pl, 26 April 2022](#)). There were suggestions that 17-year-olds from the Yunarmiya may be used in military activity ([Onet, March 21 2022a](#); [Zaręba, wp.pl, March 21 2022b](#)). The image of Russian soldiers presented in the texts is dichotomous; on the one hand it presents them as a kind of "unwilling enemy" but on the other as ruthless opponents. In both the first and second cases, journalists from both the studied news websites used emotional argumentation, but the vector of emotion changed from neutral-negative to unambiguously negative.

The Russian soldiers presented in the texts are untrained, have no military experience, lack their own equipment, and are confused and stunned. The following fragment may confirm this: "We arrive and the first day – we'd still never shot even once – they sent us to a storm group, as cannon fodder, with two grenades. To find out how to use them, I read the instructions written on them" ([KBN, wp.pl, October 13, 2022](#)). Forced to fight Ukrainians both by repressions and purges in the Russian Army conducted by intelligence services and

“participants in the “special military operation” special military operation’(ed. this is the propaganda term used by the Russian government for its aggression against Ukraine) were considered as traitors if they had Ukrainian roots” (Zaręba, [wp.pl](#), June 15, 2022a). „We were dirty and tired. People are dying around us. I did not want to feel that I was a part of all of it, but I was a part – a young Russian officer who resigned from participation in the war told CNN” ([Onet](#), May 23, 2022e). Russian decision makers are not interested in the fates of “normal” Russian soldiers ([Gostkiewicz](#), 26.04.2022a). [Onet](#), referencing Ukrainian General Ihor Romanenko, wrote that Vladimir Putin is thought to have stated that “there is no need to spare soldiers” ([onet](#), April 16, 2022). Even opposition Chechen activists were forcibly mobilized from prison ([Gostkiewicz](#), [wp.pl](#), April 26, 2022b).

One of the groups that stood out in terms of cruelty was the Wagner Group’s soldiers. The texts explained that their cruelty was not only directed at Ukrainians: “Among the mercenaries it is thought that there is a separate unit responsible for watching deserters. - They are tasked with “zeroing”. “Taking these men and killing them. Sometimes in public, sometimes” ([Kuczera](#), [wp.pl](#), December 16, 2022). The description of the cruelty of Russian soldiers also appears in reports on camps for Ukrainian civilians and soldiers ([Ossowski](#), [wp.pl](#), April 26, 2022i). Their behavior in the occupied territories was described negatively, with their theft indicated: “their soldier, while retreating, takes a television set but leaves behind a huge amount of untouched, valuable ammunition. Their priority is televisions and fridges, and ammunition seems to be unimportant” ([Bogda ska](#), [wp.pl](#), January 26, 2023); “they loot shops and cash machines... they rob private homes, they take people’s cars.” ([Onet](#) March 21, 2022b). The commit crimes against the civilian population – they rape, children too ([Onet](#), 23 May 2022c), murder ([Trepczy ska](#), [wiadomosci.onet.pl](#), May 23, 2022; [WJR](#), [wp.pl](#), May 23, 2022a), and shoot into crowds ([Onet/White](#), [wiadomosci.onet.pl](#), March 21, 2022).

The third sub-category used in the website texts was traitors. One of these was Viktor Medvedchuk, a pro-Russian Ukrainian politician accused of high treason and supporting the activity of a terrorist organization. The texts provide information on how Ukrainian services thwarted his escape. Information on his wealth – which he attempted to illegally take out of Ukraine – plays a major role in the description ([MRM](#), [wp.pl](#), April 16, 2022a; [Onet](#), [SBU](#), May 23, 2022; [Ossowski](#), [wp.pl](#), July 22, 2022j). Issues related to finances were also stressed in the description of the thwarted attempt of the wife of pro-Russian deputy Kotvitsky to take money out of the country ([Gostkiewicz](#), [wp.pl](#), 21 March 2022c). [Onet](#) published a list of nine traitors who are members of the local Mariupol Party Opposition Platform – For Life, this city is a symbol of Ukraine’s heroism and sacrifice ([Onet](#), May 23, 2022a).

The collaborators also included people who ruled the Russian-occupied territories, including Kherson, Melitopol ([Cieśla](#), [wiadomosci.onet.pl](#), March 21, 2022), and Enerhodar ([Stocker & Ulrich](#), [wiadomosci.onet.pl](#), May 23, 2022). They

were portrayed as people who accept or propagate the actions of the Russian government, introducing a “new order” and restricting the rights of the Ukrainian population living there. There was “Kirill Stremousov, who is named the deputy of the head of the military-civilian administration of Kherson Oblast’ and is completely opposed to any kind of democracy on the Russian-occupied territories” ([JHZ](#), [wp.pl](#), May 23, 2022). The reports also mention people who took subversive action ([Onet](#), May 23, 2022b; [Ossowski](#), [wp.pl](#), July 13, 2022k) or committed crimes such as counterfeiting military cards ([WJR](#), [wp.pl](#), July 13, 2022). In this case too, emphasis was laid on the material advantages that these people are thought to have gained. In the texts on traitors, their actions were evaluated. It was not directly expressed, but via the use of negatively tainted words: “collaborator”, “gang”, “criminal group”, “procedure”. This also explains the motivations behind their behavior in financial terms.

Texts using the human interest frame, “ordinary Russians” were also enemies. Attention was drawn to their indifference to the fate of Ukraine and its inhabitants and even their support for Vladimir Putin’s policies. They lead normal lives, go on holidays to European countries, and rationalize or explain information about the war in Ukraine along Kremlin’s lines. Such as 44-year-old Svetlana “Asked about the bombardment of civilians or the Bucha massacres, she responds ‘It’s all fake. It’s staged. The Ukrainians did it themselves’ ([KBŃ](#), [wp.pl](#), August 28, 2022). The statements quoted by journalists contain criticisms, Ukraine, and Western media. The negative image of this group results from grouping their statements, which are often offensive about Ukrainians, alongside the number of Ukrainian victims.

Hero

In the news websites’ materials, a hero is a soldier, a defender of civilians, a child, farmers, or their tractors hauling captured Russian tanks away ([Onet](#), July 13, 2022c), and even dogs working in the Ukrainian Army. Sometimes groups of people are recognized as heroes in the texts – doctors ([Tsipitsiura](#), [wiadomosci.onet.pl](#), July 13, 2022), fire fighters, municipal workers ([Wyrwał a](#), [wiadomosci.onet.pl](#), March 21, 2022) or the residents of Ukrainian towns who are keeping up their spirits despite Russian bombardment, the residents of the annexed territories who oppose the Russian authorities and also the soldiers. In the latter case, the defenders of Mariupol are recognized as heroes. For texts that present collective actors, it was characteristic that their evaluation was made by way of statements from, for example, politicians. One example of this is the statement of Ukraine’s Minister of Defence Oleksii Reznikov: “The heroic defenders of Mariupol played a big role in thwarting the enemy plans, and our defence became more active. Thanks to their devotion and superhuman courage, tens of thousands of people were saved from death in Ukraine. Today, Mariupol is saving Kyiv, Dnipro, and Odesa’ ([AJK](#), [wp.pl](#), March 22, 2022). Another example is from Polish President Andrzej Duda: “I address your soldiers. Ukrainian soldiers fighting in the armed forces of Ukraine, the National Guard, the territorial defence units, the heroic defenders of Mariupol,

and those currently in Russian captivity, and those who are offering fierce resistance to the invaders across the entire front line – you are heroes of Ukraine, but you are also heroes of Poland, Europe, and the whole world. We wholeheartedly thank you" (Bagińska, *wp.pl*, June 15, 2022). Engineers of the tank battalion outside Bakhmut, who repaired many tanks, armored transporters, and trucks under time pressure, were presented as heroes (Induchowa, *wiadomosci.onet.pl*, January 26, 2023). Specific soldiers were also soldiers, such as the celebrated "legendary soldier and defender of Ukraine" Roman Hrybov, the defender of Snake Island known for the oft-quoted response he gave to the Russian warship (Szefer, *wp.pl*, May 23, 2022). Fallen soldiers and reserves were also presented as heroes (e.g., Hackensberger, *wiadomosci.onet.pl*, March 21, 2022), as were those who voluntarily enlisted to the army because of the need to defend their homeland, such as Viktor Polonskiy, an amateur footballer in the Etnoliga who had been living in Poland for several years (Onet, April 26, 2022).

Soldiers of other nationalities also fought the ranks of the Ukrainian Army. In the materials on both websites, they were also presented as heroes. In this case, individual people were referred to with their full names or pseudonyms used. Information about them appeared in connection with their deaths or when they were taken into Russian captivity as well as the service they performed. Their motives for becoming involved in the war on the Ukrainian side are strongly emphasized. In line with the words of "Cicero," the spokesperson of the International Legion "although the motivations differ, all the members of the Legion repeat that they can't look on passively at the war crimes committed against Ukrainian civilians" – People from Poland also stress that they are here to defend Ukraine but also their own homeland. They say that if Putin is not stopped here, in Ukraine, he will go further and attack Poland (MRM, *wp.pl*, April 16, 2022b). In the case of information on the involvement of foreigners in the war, their positive image is mainly constructed on the indicated motivation that appealed to European values, moral evaluations, and also to the human reflex to provide assistance: "He said he was fighting for Europe and the free world. I am incredibly proud of my son. I raised him to be a good person" (MRM, *wp.pl*, April 16, 2022b). The 6-year-old Solomia Reut, who played a flute and rapped to raise money for humanitarian and military aid, was presented as a hero (ft, *wiadomosci.onet.pl*, June 15, 2022).

In the texts of both websites, there was a special category of hero for Russians and Belarusians who, despite the dangerous consequences, chose to act to convince the Russian Army or publicly expressed negative opinions about Vladimir Putin's policies. For example, Boris Bondarev, a Russian diplomat working in the UN in Geneva, was explicitly called a hero when he publicly condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine (WJR, *wp.pl*, May 23, 2022b), as was the Russian activist Aleksandr Nizamov, who put an anti-war poster on a tower of the Kremlin (Ossowski, *wp.pl*, July 22, 2022l). The authors of the texts created positive assessments of the actions of specific people by referring to the statements of other

people, but also by referring to the potential negative consequences of the actions they undertook. Also in this case, collective entities were found among the heroes: "Belarus is a country of partisans. Our heroes stopped Russian trains, destroyed Russian equipment, and distributed leaflets to prevent Belarusian soldiers from entering Ukraine. Ukraine will survive. Belarus will also be liberated" – Viačorka wrote on Twitter" (Zubel, *wp.pl*, March 21, 2022).

However, people are not only heroes, but also animals. Although it may sound paradoxical, the human interest frame is also used in the materials discussing them. An example of this usage may be found in the text presenting Patron – a dog helping the Ukrainian Army find explosives: "the dog 'is the talisman of our pyrotechnicians. He accompanies them constantly and everywhere. Incidentally, he really likes cheese, so our boys sometimes spoil him with something delicious" (Gostkiewicz, *wp.pl*, March 21 2022d). There is a dog-sapper called Maks, a three-year-old Belgian shepherd abandoned by Russians (Onet/Daily Mail, *wiadomosci.onet.pl*, May 23, 2022). In these cases, the image of a hero is constructed by emphasizing that the dog's work saves human lives, and also by invoking the positive statements of the people caring for the animal and Internet users evaluating its work. In May 2022, Patron was decorated by President Volodymyr Zelensky for his dedicated service.

Discussion and summary

This article presents the results of an analysis of the presence and use of the human interest frame in journalistic materials published on two horizontal portals during the first year of the war in Ukraine.

In search of answers to the first research question concerning the interpretative frames used in these materials, it was found that both portals employed the generic frames suggested by Holly A. Semetko and Patti M. Valkenburg: conflict, responsibility, economic consequences, morals, and human interests. This finding is consistent with earlier research. For instance, Al Nahed, Sumaja and Philip Hammond (2018, 365) confirmed that the media use frames when reporting on conflicts and wars.

Regarding the second research question, which concerned the frequency of frame use, it was found that journalists most often resorted to the conflict frame, followed by the human interest frame. These findings are consistent with those of previous studies. For instance, Shanto Iyengar and Adam Simon discovered that the American ABC network's coverage of the Gulf War crisis was dominated by the military frame. Reports on current military operations were also predominant. It is worth noting that the cited authors use different frame names to those used in our analysis – they use 'special issue' frames, whereas we use 'generic' frames. It should be emphasised that the dominant frame in reports may differ even when reporting on the same event. Daniela Dimitrova and Jasper Strömbäck found that the conflict frame dominated in the American media during the 2003 war in Iraq, while the responsibility frame was

used more frequently in the Swedish media (2005). International differences in reporting are also evident in the case of the war in Ukraine. According to our findings, the dominant frame in Polish media outlets was the conflict frame. On the other hand, Ruth Breeze and María Novoa-Jaso found that new global news networks established in the 1990s, such as Al Jazeera, Euronews, and CGTN, most often used a diplomatic frame (Breeze & Novoa-Jaso, 2025; Novoa-Jaso & Breeze, 2024). Their research attempts to answer the question of how such networks can influence global public opinion's assessment of a crisis. Our research, on the other hand, determines the possible impact on Polish public opinion.

These differences can be explained by editorial policies, the type of media outlets, the influence of the international environment, or in the case of our research, the significance of the event for the media resulting from geographical proximity to the conflict.

When seeking an answer to the third research question — how the human interest frame was constructed in the analysed materials — it was found that the human interest frame was constructed by invoking the experiences of individuals and groups. In the materials of both news websites that contain the human interest frame, personalization, dramatization, and emotionalization were present. They were manifested in the descriptions of individual stories, quoted statements from the people the materials concerned, the use of statements of other people containing an evaluation of the attitude of the heroes of the texts, reporting events that had tragic, negative consequences, using exemplification, the presence of information about children, the use of phrases with a negative or positive connotation, the use of stark comparisons, and the valuation of behavior or attitudes. As researchers have proven, the construction of media narratives using the stories of heroes, victims and enemies has a significant impact on audiences (Bouke *et al.*, 2015; Semetko & Valkenberg, 2000).

Several interesting issues arose in the case of the last research question, which was to identify the categories of people appearing in materials published on wp.pl and Onet.pl. Firstly, three categories of characters were identified. These were: victim, enemy, and hero. It is also worth noting the possibility of categorising the analysis of the human interest frame differently, for example using Kenneth Burke's dramatic pentad (Burke, 1969), which focuses more on motivation or persuasion. Another approach to the human interest frame is presented by Luc Boltanski in his work *Distant Suffering: Morality, Media, and Politics*, which analyses possible audience reactions to mediated images of suffering (Boltanski, 1999). This study used a classification system based on the actors of events.

In the analyzed materials of wp.pl and Onet.pl, we identified three categories of heroes: victim, enemy, and hero. The method of using the categories of heroes in journalistic materials is similar. Both newsrooms were most often reported to

victims. This category varied and included people with battle experiences. Refugees, people who died, and their families. It is important to note that the victims were portrayed in an unambiguously positive light, which prompted viewers to feel sympathy for them. The second most common category in the websites' materials was the enemy. In addition, the category has many aspects, including politicians (Putin and Lukashenka), Russian soldiers, collaborators, and traitors. The 'enemy' category was one of the most challenging to analyse due to the nuanced nature of the editorial team's assessments. It may be surprising that the evaluation of enemies was not clearly cut in the materials, which was most clearly perceived in the case of references to Russian soldiers - sometimes they were enemies (the most common form), sometimes cannon fodder and sometimes even enemy victims. Further qualitative and quantitative analyses would complement our study, for example, semiotic analysis and the methodology of corpus-assisted discourse studies. The least common category of actors in the text is the hero. In this case, the catalogue of people recognized as heroes was very developed, ranging from soldiers and civilians to doctors and firefighters. In the hero category, it was possible to observe unanimity in the evaluation included in the texts. An important issue in the context of the 'hero' category is that editors use it less frequently. When reporting on conflict- or war-related events, journalists seem particularly attracted to the hero category, as it enables them to describe heroic or spectacular deeds and evoke strong emotions. The reasons for its rarer use can be found in either the fact that the conflict took place outside Poland, or the rarity of heroic deeds. However, the most important factor appears to be the nature of war itself, including its dynamics and the significant impact of its effects on the civilian population — the victims of the conflict — who seem to be of greater interest to the media.

The study's main limitation was the heterogeneity of the categories of actors referred to in the texts, particularly the concept of 'the enemy'. Further research is needed on the frame of human interest, particularly of a qualitative nature, as well as research combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. Combining these methods would enable us to capture the nuances within the identified categories. Another limitation of the study is that it focuses on two Polish news portals only. This means that it constitutes an analysis of two cases that does not allow for generalisations. It would be interesting to learn about the audience's perspective or the broadcasters' intentions and compare them with our results, as well as analyse media from other countries or those with an international reach.

The research we have conducted enables us to understand how editorial offices use the human interest frame. More importantly, from the perspective of international relations, it reveals the potential impact on societies and even on relations between countries.

The frequency of using the human interest frame, and above all its appearance in the individual categories of actors and the most frequent use of the category of victim in texts containing

the human interest frame, makes it possible to evaluate whether both news websites are positively disposed to Ukrainians and unambiguously negatively evaluate Russia's aggression in Ukraine. Therefore, it should be noted that the human interest frame in journalistic materials may occasionally be useful for newsrooms to evaluate and interpret events.

Ethics statement

The article presents the results of the media content analysis. The research was not conducted on human subjects, nor on samples of human origin or personal data. The subjects of the analysis were articles published on internet portals. The

research could not and did not need the approval of the Human Research Ethics Committee.

Data availability

University of Warsaw Research Data Repository: Framing the war. onet.pl and wp.pl's coverage of the war in Ukraine in the first year of the conflict, <https://doi.org/10.5813/YC2YU8> (Jas-Koziarkiewicz & Stasiak-Jazukiewicz, 2025)

Data are available under CC BY - Creative Commons 4.0 license.

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