

Research Article

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Narratives on Digital Frontline: Analyzing Visual Media on Twitter of the Ukraine Conflict 2022

Errum Ahmad ¹ Shazia Hashmat ² Sumera Gulzar ³



Abstract: This research aims to gain insight into the communication methods the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) used on its official X (formerly known as Twitter) account to handle the conflict between Russia and Ukraine that started in early 2022. The study focuses on the MFA's visual framing strategies throughout this period. The method used for the study is based on qualitative discourse analysis, with tweets collected using skip-interval sampling. Categorization schemes were created from identified frames in the data for further analysis. The study's primary focus was on the frequent visual frames used in the Ukrainian MFA's communication methods. The findings show that the MFA mostly uses two frames in its tweets: the global facet frame, emphasizing gaining international support, and the second conflict frame, highlighting Russia's misdeeds in Ukraine. These findings provide important insights into the existing research on frame analysis.

Key Words: Conflict, MFA, Russia-Ukraine, Digital Communication, Visual Framing

Introduction

The collaboration between digital diplomacy and visual framing with conflict communication methods has become an active area of academic interest in modern times, especially when studying hybrid warfare alongside information warfare (Bjola & Manor, 2022). The digital age requires states to operate as battlefield forces and information disseminators across extensive communication spheres that depend on images, along with stories and symbols, to create perceptions and shape them on a global level (Pukallus & Arthur, 2024). State actors utilize social media platforms like X (formerly Twitter) through visual content to communicate with audiences internationally and create politically advantageous narratives concerning conflicts, as well as exercise soft power when crises emerge (Saliu, 2023).

Visual framing serves as a primary focus among scholars who investigate conflict communication tactics (Oehmer-Pedrazzi et al., 2023). The process of framing, defined by (Entman, 1993), involves picking out several elements from reality, after which they obtain increased prominence to create a specific understanding. When conflict situations occur, frames such as “conflict” and “human interest”, together with “responsibility”, operate as simplifications used to assign blame, evoke empathy, or generate emotional connections to the situation (Kempf, 2003). The communication of visual frames, as demonstrated by (Powell et al., 2015) and (Coleman, 2010), sometimes bypasses textual explanations as they reinforce emotional responses and create victimhood aggression and resilience narratives. The effectiveness of these visual frames grows significantly during crises because they immediately influence the public and diplomatic best practices.

The Russian military started its eastern Ukraine invasion on February 24th, 2022, as tensions between Russia and Ukraine reached their peak after eight years. Russia conducted an invasion of Ukraine to

¹ M.Phil. Scholar, Department of Communication and Media Studies, Fatima Jinnah Women University, Rawalpindi, Punjab, Pakistan. ✉ errumahmed24@gmail.com

² Assistant Professor, Department of Communication and Media Studies, Fatima Jinnah Women University, Rawalpindi, Punjab, Pakistan. ✉ shazia.hashmat@fjwu.edu.pk

³ Lecturer, Institute of Visual Art and Design, Fatima Jinnah Women University, Rawalpindi, Punjab, Pakistan. ✉ sumeragulzar@fjwu.edu.pk

• **Corresponding Author:** Sumera Gulzar (✉ sumeragulzar@fjwu.edu.pk)

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overthrow the pro-Western leadership of Volodymyr Zelensky (AFP, [2022](#)). Thousands of casualties displaced individuals, and injured people have befallen across the region since the invasion. Russia succeeded in seizing several cities during ongoing diplomatic talks, yet caused significant destruction across the territory (Dastgeer & Thapaliya, [2023](#))

More than 9,000 civilians and 25,000 Russian soldiers lost their lives alongside 9,000 Ukrainian soldiers in this battle, according to (Rauhala et al., [2022](#)), who stated that if the battle persists, this will increase. This forced population immigration of Ukrainian people has become the fastest-growing refugee crisis since World War II, according to (Yuhas, [2022](#)). Multiple global crises, including economic sanctions against Russia along with food supply disruptions, affect the world (Jagtap et al., [2022](#)).

Global attention continues to focus on the ongoing battle because experts and journalists have provided detailed coverage through print and television media outlets (Landler, [2022](#)). People worldwide use social media platforms as significant news sources to gain information about Russia's attack on Ukraine (Snowden, [2022](#)). Global media have referred to the Russian invasion of Ukraine as both the "First TikTok war" and the "Most online war of all time," per the (DRI, [2022](#)), which has sparked widespread interest and debate online.

The analysis shows that states have maintained traditional methods of social media usage for a long ago. Governments now understand social media platforms as tools for digital diplomacy since representatives, as well as governments and diplomats, use these tools to share information around the world when war or conflict occurs (Collins & Bekenova, [2019](#)). Research conducted by (Ittefaq, [2019](#)) shows how governments, together with their officials, maintain direct relations with worldwide audiences through digital communication channels. The adoption of social media strategies for digital diplomacy by ministries of Foreign Affairs has intensified during the last few years, (Manor & Crilley, [2018](#)). Diplomatic institutions made this move deliberately to utilize Internet media as an instrument for their diplomatic efforts.

Through X, politicians now bypass mainstream media intermediaries to exert direct influence on public perspectives and actions, while this platform stands as an essential instrument for such purposes (Hemphill et al., [2013](#)). The platform X formerly Twitter allows users to exchange texts of 280 characters instantly and gain quick feedback. Governments, together with states, currently discuss key issues using this widely popular platform. Such events exposed to public broadcasts experience distinctive levels of audience analysis, which makes them stand out from other forms of communication (Duncombe, [2017](#)).

The research explores Ukraine's Ministry of Foreign Affairs visual framing strategies during the Ukraine-Russia conflict that started when Russia launched its military invasion against Ukraine in 2022. Through their Twitter platform X (formerly Twitter) the Ukrainian state and government transmit their messages to international viewers. The essential component of this research deals with visual frame evaluation coupled with an analysis of methodologies for developing and strengthening worldwide viewpoints.

Social media development revolutionized how people communicate by creating easier access to and participation from internet viewers. Public and government institutions and states, as well as political and non-political entities, use framing strategies mainly composed of visual elements across X (formerly Twitter) to pursue their goals while safeguarding their interests during the modern digital era. Digital diplomacy assumes critical significance for creating results, particularly during periods of conflict and war. The combination of customer expression and political actor advocacy through these platforms happens through visual framing approaches as an effective communication tool to explain positions on governmental subjects. This research seeks to analyze the visual framing methods deployed by the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs MFA through its X (Twitter) official profile during the Ukraine-Russia crisis throughout 2022. In common practice, MFA stands as an abbreviation for the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This research addresses the escalation of the Russia-Ukraine war, particularly in 2022.

Research question

RQ1: What specific visual framing strategies did the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) formulate on their X (formerly known as Twitter) handle during the Ukraine-Russia conflict in 2022?



RQ2: Which visual framing strategies were most commonly employed by the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) on X (formerly known as Twitter) during the Ukraine–Russia conflict in 2022?

Literature Review

Russian efforts to start the war emerged in the spring of 2014 when pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich lost power due to the Euromaidan demonstrations, according to (Fisher, [2014](#)). The Ukrainian government lost its credibility while the military establishment weakened, thus leading to a reduction of opposition to the annexation. The Strelkov Group joined other Russian militias to occupy administrative buildings within eastern Ukraine before establishing the People's Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk (Palko, [2017](#)). The Ukrainian military conducted fierce counterattacks that resulted in the territorial loss of Mariupol alongside other strategic towns in southern Ukraine (Brand Ukraine, [2025](#)).

This political takeover occurred because Russia could intervene because of the Black Sea treaty that was signed by both parties in 2014 (Harasymiw, [2025](#)). According to (Torbakov, [2022](#)), the present-day Russian force employs Ukrainian aggression through its former imperial history because its old borders were permeable, which shaped Russian territorial organization.

Through his support for an expanded Russian state, Putin challenges Ukrainian sovereignty and claims that Ukraine had an independent past, independent from Russian rule (Torbakov, [2022](#)). According to (Mankoff, [2022](#)), the primary issue emerges from the fact that Russian historical interpretations promote unified narratives while Ukrainian narratives stress independence from Russian control. Ukraine and Russia both claim dominance over the roots of “Kyivan Rus”.

The Russian occupation of Ukraine during its preceding period is considered by historians to have repressed Ukrainian culture as well as language, and national identity. The Russian version disputes Ukrainian independence and reshapes its basic state structure according to (Polovyi, [2021](#)). Experts argue that, according to Russian perception, Ukraine became part of Russia during the 17th century through myths that present both states as unified by history and emphasize that Ukraine exists artificially as a state (Grabowicz et al., [2016](#)).

The Russian invasion starting in February 2022 marked a fresh phase in the ongoing Russo–Ukrainian war as it produced extensive damage and conflicts beyond eastern Ukraine (Think tank, [2024](#)). The world's attention is focused on the worst European war since World War II because of Russia's February 2022 invasion, according to (Chudzicka-Czupala et al., [2023](#)).

The Role of Media in Russia's War Against Ukraine

Over the past twenty years, communication technology developments have remade the nature of warfare by permitting countries and people to fight in innovative ways (Hoskins & Loughlin, [2013](#)). Through social media networks, people can speak their minds while linking with multiple others to construct and expand their worldwide network connections (Gu, [2022](#)). The improved connectivity between people allows the global distribution of war and violent imagery through photographs and stories (Botes, [2007](#)). According to (Castells, [2011](#)), global networks use customized cottages to shape local public opinion as a result of media networking in such networks.

Media independence has vanished completely since Russia launched its offensive, while Russian authorities have selected historical dissents and fabricated reports as their official broadcasting materials (Mintz, [2024](#)). According to (Polovyi, [2021](#)), the destructive propaganda mechanism in Russia transmits artificial information through state-managed media outlets and Russian online platform bloggers to achieve its goals.

Modern culture depends on popular digital platforms, including Facebook and X, since these systems allow users to exchange information about common issues. The tools enabled various scientific fields to research social issues and thus contributed to new scientific discoveries (Posegga & Jungherr, [2019](#)).

Social media platforms distributed false information about the Russia–Ukraine war right after the invasion when people started sharing videos of military exercises as Ukrainian conflict footage (Holroyd, [2022](#)). Various reports indicate the war remains a hoax, even though images and videos of Ukrainian

civilian deaths are supposedly fabricated (Suciu, [2022](#)). Various reports indicate the war remains a hoax, even though images and videos of Ukrainian civilian deaths are supposedly fabricated (Ciuriak, [2022](#)). Reports of both factual and non-factual information regarding the Ukraine war have increased concerns about misinformation distribution along with disinformation in the struggling online media ecosystem (Abbruzzese, [2022](#)).

Russia employs fabricated information to refute war atrocity charges, while some users broadcast false reports that Volodymyr Zelenskyy has abandoned Ukraine (Holroyd, [2022](#)). The misinformation about Ukraine has spread false stories that combine a claim of biological weapons development along with a fictional surrender from President Zelensky and legends about a Ukrainian pilot who bagged multiple Russian planes and perished (Smart et al., [2022](#)).

Framing, Conflict, and Digital Media

The academic discipline now recognizes framing as a standard mass communication principle, so political conflict experts adopt it to study media narratives during wars (Bryant & Miron, [2004](#)). According to Scheufele ([1999](#)), framing establishes meaning in both media materials and genuine events (Scheufele, [1999](#)). During political debates, the media establishes certain preferred understandings of political matters by selecting particular interpretations that dismiss additional aspects of political reality. Socially shared media frames stay consistent across periods because of this system (Shah et al., [2002](#)).

Active conflict has been the main focus of research regarding journalistic media sources, according to (Nygren et al., [2018](#)). Social media gadgets transformed framing processes into interactive activities because users can now change content which converts observers into active participants (Banks et al., [2021](#)).

Surveys analyzing conflict representation mostly draw from English-language sources, while almost no research exists about multinational and multilingual comparisons. (Kolmer & Semetko, [2009](#)) Present noteworthy examples of Iraq War coverage in Al Jazeera television news broadcasts and Arabic-language television channels. A majority of current literature about framing dedicates its attention to Western media coverage of foreign conflicts while neglecting explanations of these conflicts within domestic and non-Western contexts (Vladislavljević, [2015](#)).

Literature about how social media depicts the Ukraine War 2022 is currently limited. However, research conducted by (Makhortykh & Sydorova, [2017](#)) uncovered significant contrasting representations of the conflict between Ukrainian and Russian social media platforms since Ukrainian users depicted events positively but Russians adopted a human-led perspective. According to (Gaufman, [2015](#)), Russian frame construction applies war-related vocabulary to negatively portray both Ukraine and Western parts of the world.

Social media plays a pivotal role in Ukraine and Russia, where it shapes current political discussions on historical conflicts in these former socialist countries, according to (Rutten et al., [2013](#)). The current scholarly research about this particular conflict in a conflict zone reveals two essential knowledge gaps that need further investigation. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) stands as an underexplored subject when it comes to the way it uses social media platforms for developing and disseminating content. Social media keeps governments and organizations capable of global communication, according to past research, but no research exists about how they precisely employ framing methods to express their points of view. The recent development of this conflict makes it both active for researchers and an ongoing research topic exclusively in this geographic region. Our research addresses available literature gaps by delivering a critical understanding of the existing body of work.

Methodology

This research applies qualitative analytical research that conducts a discourse analysis based on depth to investigate the tweets released by the MFA X account (former Twitter) during the 2022 Ukraine-Russia crisis. The data was gathered during peak escalation periods within the crisis between February 26, 2022, and August 31, 2022. Therefore, it retrieved 2,511 tweets containing 1,295 images and 289 tweets with videos.



For the visual analysis, a skip interval random sampling technique was used to ensure that the video and image content selected was representative. For the video category, in 50% of the data, with a skip interval of one tweet. The same technique was applied to the image-based tweets. From the image-based tweets, approximately 25% of the dataset was chosen using a skip interval of six tweets. By using this method, researchers obtained a well-represented number of items that supported a focused analysis of imagery without reduced scope.

Real-time frame analysis conducted according to systematic methods resulted in built categorization schemes for both textual and visual image divisions (Manor & Crilley, 2018). Analysis of the dataset allowed the researchers to derive their categorization schemes before grouping notable patterns into main themes supported by sub-themes and accompanying codes. This structural method allowed researchers to study multiple frames that appeared in MFA tweets in real-time and keep a systematic approach for interpreting the visual and written stories behind their tweets.

Analysis and Discussion

Addressing RQ1, the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs uses the "conflict frame" as its predominant frame in its tweets that show both images and videos. The visual evidence and explanatory text used together in this frame directly show the violent characteristics of Russia's invasion and its damaging consequences, which affected the entire region of Ukraine. For example, the official Twitter account of the MFA presents both destructive war machines and funeral scenes, and destroyed urban areas, as well as abandoned public spaces, in images and video posts. Through visual media, the MFA shows first-hand confirmation that Russian forces continue to occupy Ukrainian land while illustrating the emotional scars Ukrainian civilians suffer.

Through the conflict frame, multiple purposes are achieved, allowing documentation of aggression during the conflict as well as the development of a framework for portraying human suffering and acts of resistance. The MFA uses a dual method that combines harsh visual evidence with powerful language in the X posts to document Russian crimes of war while displaying Ukrainian military resilience. Military personnel prove the strength of national resolve by appearing in bombed-out locations captured by photographers.

Another main element of the MFA's strategy is the "Global Facet" frame that strongly appears in visual content. The MFA employs this frame to develop connections between Ukrainian broader international norms, values, and systems of justice. By exhibiting photos of international delegates and worldwide demonstrators with Ukrainian flags and diplomatic leaders supporting Ukraine, the MFA appeals to both domestic and foreign institutions. Such visual elements appear in posts that urge continued Russian sanctions and resulting international juridical authority, as well as political and substantial NATO, EU, and UN backing.

The larger geopolitical and ethical context serves as the main purpose of this Global Facet frame because it presents Ukraine as an essential force in the worldwide struggle between democratic systems and authoritarian systems. The narrative pushes for transnational solidarity because it uses the shared democratic values of countries while demonstrating Russia's threat to Ukraine, as well as global peace and democratic institutions.

Through the "Humanitarian Conflict" frame, the narrative expands its emotional appeal by showing the stories of people directly affected by the war. The MFA regularly shows children taking shelter in bunkers while showing elderly refugees making border crossings and funerals of grieving families. The testimonials delivered emotional connections, which gave a face to the war, thus building worldwide audience interest. Both international empathy and action need to respond to the refugee crisis, as well as family separation and brutal, traumatic testimonies that stem from war. Through a humanitarian approach, political discourse becomes a human tragedy that inspires viewers to feel both sympathy and indignation (Bywater, 2021).

Defining the current invasion through "Spin Frame", which explains the Ukrainian territory invasion through the lens of extensive oppression throughout history. Through this frame, the MFA implicitly shows Russia as an enduring enemy by referring to past confrontations, along with Soviet rule and previous

Russian territorial violations in Ukrainian land. Through this method, the MFA establishes a sustained victimized past while condensing Ukrainian sovereignty and justice claims into a continuous historical narrative.

Video content mostly employs a specific visual approach named the “Graphic Frame” that stands out from other strategies. The unedited dissemination of violent, disturbing material includes live bombing recordings combined with civilian injuries and hospital destruction, as well as images of panic and death moments. Shows of graphic material hold moral significance to enable viewers to understand the severity of Ukraine's crisis correctly. The Communication style applies direct raw content while avoiding debates to forge strong emotional and moral impacts, which make the audience fully understand Ukraine's dire condition.

The MFA utilizes the five strategies of Conflict, Global Facet, Humanitarian, Spin, and Graphic to share its message in a sophisticated manner. Every tweet released by the MFA contains messages that are meant to create global unrest and construct an international framework for their diplomatic stance during war discourse and change public opinion. The visual and written content collaborate in an innovative narrative framing technique, which adds real information into moving stories to enhance Ukraine's worldwide outreach.

As for RQ2, the analysis of MFA tweets containing Ukrainian visual content reveals the sequence of visual frames that affects foreign public sentiment and generates worldwide backing. These images display the Conflict Frame as the most commonly used frame because it dominates among the presented visual frames. Through the Conflict Frame, the visual presentation shows broken infrastructure and cities destroyed by war activities and military interventions. Through these images. The Global Facet Frame follows the Conflict Frame to escalate conflict relevance from local to worldwide scales. The transnational diplomatic interference alongside foreign backing and sanction demands a reshaping of the invasion into an act that violates democratic systems and international equilibrium.

The Humanitarian Conflict Frame stands as the third most frequently used visual framework to show pictures depicting both the challenges faced by refugees alongside the sorrow of homeless children. The emotional contents within these pictures trigger sympathy that results in receiving humanitarian aid and international support. The Spin Frame functions as an important link that shows that present Russian aggression against Ukraine extends from its history of Russian-backed oppression and conflict. Through this placement of historical context, the campaign establishes that Ukraine's fight for independence continues a historic fight for sovereignty and self-rule. Due to ethical and platform constraints, the Graphic Frame exists only rarely with its contents of raw, violent, and death imagery. It appears in the least number of instances but functions as the most emotionally devastating sequence intended to induce outrage in audiences worldwide.

The visual campaign combines different framing methods, which produce an effective communication strategy that joins emotional storytelling alongside historical references with political declarations.

Conclusion

Although the primary purpose of research is to investigate discourse frames, there is a significant knowledge gap regarding the target audience's perception of these frames, which should be considered while assessing the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' communication strategy. Thus, these limitations should be overcome in future research to better understand framing methods and audience responses, which will give greater insight into conflict dynamics. Future studies may, therefore, adopt an integrated approach to gather comprehensive data from social media, news channels, official declarations, and academic discourse to improve the knowledge landscape. This will give a more vivid image of the current ongoing conflicts and evaluate the effect of framing at different stages (Ellyatt, [2023](#)). Using qualitative and quantitative approaches, these studies can determine how framing strategies affect beliefs and collective knowledge, this research approach gives people deeper insights about how communication systems interact with perception during conflict situations. The renaming process of "X (formerly known as Twitter)" to "X" constitutes a rebranding initiative. Ivanova underlined that 2023 sets an exciting



challenge to academics, with probable implications either for the existing paradigms of research or maybe for the new era.

Despite the dynamic nature of the conflict, with Russia continuing hostilities against Ukraine to advance its regime's interests (Charushin, [2023](#)), the dynamic nature of this protracted conflict makes it increasingly difficult to predict the course of the conflict over time, which impedes accurate forecasts about the principal participants and the outcome of the war (Witte, [2023](#)). Disputes continue to persist as an active problem on social media platforms. This study focuses on the international English-speaking readership of the X (formerly known as the X (formerly known as Twitter) account @MFA_Ukraine, analyzing data from a single account that represents only a percentage of the total network information due to time constraints. Future studies may fill knowledge gaps in using multiple social media platforms and languages to obtain a better understanding of the overall communication methods during conflicts.

Recommendation

Recognizing limitations is vital for maintaining the research's integrity. Future research attempts can aim to improve the knowledge landscape by accumulating vast data from multiple sources, including social media, news, official declarations, and academic debate, to gain a comprehensive understanding of ongoing conflicts and evaluate the influence of framing at various stages (Ellyatt, [2023](#)). These researchers may use qualitative and quantitative methods to understand how framing strategies impact beliefs and collective knowledge. This will help us understand how communication and perception are interrelated in conflict situations. In addition, according to (Ivanova, [2023](#)), the new branding and renaming of the "Twitter" platform into "X" by the new owner is a challenging one for academia. It might either replace the existing research paradigms or open up new opportunities, potentially ushering in a new age. Russia is still at war with Ukraine to promote its regime's interests (Charushin, [2023](#)). With time, it becomes increasingly challenging to forecast Russia's efforts in this long war, making it impossible to predict the main participants and the outcome of the war (Witte, [2023](#)). What's more noteworthy is that this framing of social media issues is difficult to change. This investigation centers on the international English-speaking readership of the X account @MFA_Ukraine.

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