

The natural framing of military conflict news. The 2008 war in Georgia in *Resonance*, *Izvestia* and *The New York Times*



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ABSTRACT: Historically, news organizations located in the heart of conflict zones have been an important player in informing the public and shaping its understanding of particular issues. To advance research relating to international conflict coverage the current study analyzed how Georgian, Russian, and American media framed the 2008 war in Georgia. By examining coverage in *Izvestia* and *Resonance* as well as *The New York Times* — which is an important example of how the conflict was presented to the American public — this paper elucidates likely determinants of the type of news and events that are prioritized by media producers proximal to the region of conflict. We find the similarities in conflict reporting are as interesting as their differences.

KEYWORDS: content analysis, media coverage, conflict, Russia, Georgia, newspapers



INTRODUCTION

On August 7, 2008, Georgian troops entered the breakaway region of South Ossetia. Shortly thereafter, Russia responded by sending its own troops into Georgian Territory, and on August 9, 2008, Russian jets started bombing Georgian military targets. The Georgian leadership described the air strikes as a full-scale military invasion. Subsequently, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili stated that Russia was at war with his country (for a detailed overview, see Basilaia, 2009). At the same time, he called on Georgian troops to withdraw from the conflict zone of South Ossetia and announced a ceasefire. By August 10, 2008, the Russian army had advanced to take complete control of South Ossetia's capital of Tskhinvali. On August 11 and 12,

Russian tanks and troops advanced deeper into the country and started moving towards the capital of Georgia, Tbilisi. On behalf of the European Union (EU), French President Nicolas Sarkozy initiated diplomatic negotiations to help Georgia and Russia resolve the crisis. Sarkozy put forth a peace agreement that both sides signed on August 15. On August 17, 2008, Russia officially pledged to start withdrawing forces from Georgian territory in keeping with the agreement. However, the withdrawal did not start until August 22. By August 24, Russian troops left part of the Georgian territories, but they remained in the city of Poti — Georgia's main port — as well as in the breakaway de facto republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. During Russia's operation for peace enforcement that lasted for five days, 15 Georgian cities were bombed. The bombing killed 238 people, including Georgian soldiers, and some 192,000 civilians were displaced. This study examined how a sample of Georgian, Russian, and American media framed the war in Georgia. Informed by conceptually related scholarly examinations of war reporting (e.g., Shaw & Martin, 1993) we argue that there are predictable patterns in news coverage of military conflict, at least in the early coverage, and that these patterns can be elucidated through examination of the frames used by news media in the coverage of war.

Noted media effects scholars have long contended the media serve as socializing agents involved in cultivating and perpetuating beliefs about the issues covered in media (e.g., Gerbner et al., 2002). In a world of continuously changing political, economic and social environments, the audience depends heavily on information in the news media (Basilaia, 2008). The mass media present a variety of frames to make sense of world affairs, particularly during times of crisis and civil unrest.

For example, Allen et al.'s (1994) examination of media coverage of the Gulf War found that the media's extensive attention and coverage of U.S. technology and weaponry affected public opinion by reassuring the public of the military's capability for accomplishing the mission and framed the evaluation of the war's success. For these reasons, scholars such as Callahan, Dubrick and Olsfski (2006) suggest that war is as much a cultural endeavor as it is a military undertaking and that the role of narratives during times of war is crucial in shaping public opinion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Framing theory

Goffman's (1974) framing theory posits that any event can be described in terms of a focus that includes a wide meaning or a narrow one. To frame means to organize one's individual experience. In his explication of the issue, Goffman (1974) likened this process to "stripping" the issue, which involves referring to any element of activity, including imaginary happenings seen from the perspective of those who are involved in them. He explained: "Observers actively project their frames of reference into the world immediately around them" (p. 39). Integral to this paradigm

is the assertion that framing allows information to be discernible, recognizable, and comprehensible for the audience, thus constructing the reality itself, rather than a picture of reality (Tuchman, 1978). Furthermore, framing researchers often contend that these effects on audiences are quite powerful (e.g., Edelman 1993; Gitlin, 1980). Both Gitlin (1980) and Edelman (1993) argue that framing shapes what people know about the nature of the social world and that knowledge depends on how people frame and interpret the cues they receive about the world. In the absence of frames, the signals, or “cues” that serve as the bases for everyday judgmental orientation, it becomes difficult to discern which topics are meaningful. As Murray Edelman (1993) writes:

Those cues would be very confusing if our minds did not give them particular meanings by focusing on a few and ignoring most and by placing those that receive attention into specific categories. (p. 231)

Following this logic, journalists have the ability to give salience/emphasis on particular events and information through inclusion (or exclusion) of certain topics (Entman, 1991; 1993). Through the use of various language and discourse devices, the information becomes memorable, thus affecting the awareness of the audience regarding particular issues (Entman, 1993; Pan & Kosicki, 1993; 2001). By using these techniques, journalists can frame issues either to enlarge the significance of an event or to shrink an event (Entman, 1993; 2004). Goffman (1974) and Entman also (1993; 1991; 2004) discussed the significance of text and its attributes (key words, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information and sentences) in construction of news frames. Evidence of this has been demonstrated in several studies that have found frequent repetition and redundancy to increase the probability that citizens use particular information delivered to them (Entman, 1991; 1993; 2004).

Framing conflict

Much like the framing of other news and events, during coverage of international conflict, the use of frames may also affect perceptions about the military actions (Gans, 1979). Furthermore, if media framing affects public opinion as powerfully as scholars like Gitlin suggest, then research examining wartime media is of particular interest to the scholarly community. Frames are principles of selection, emphasis and presentation about what exists and news may manage the symbolic arena of life by not only including certain messages, but also keeping others out (Gans, 1979).

Previous framing studies of conflicts and wars have shown that the press puts greater emphasis on the military portion of the conflict (Dimitrova et al., 2005; Strömbäck & Dimitrova, 2011) and that press coverage during wartime is typically uncritical and often patriotic when the media’s home government is involved (Aday et al., 2005). This can lead to coverage that is sanitized and that presents a conflict

in narrow frames, not allowing citizens to evaluate military actions from balanced information (Allen et al., 1994; McQuail, 2005).

Dimitrova and Strömbäck (2005) wrote that the press shies away from issues that it does not consider newsworthy and which do not provide the audience with an alternative interpretation of events. In another study, Yoon and Gwangho (2002) observed that the media give preference to particular frames and avoid using some others, especially when they report on a conflict in which national interests are involved. This was also found in Kolmer and Semetko's (2009) study of the coverage of the Iraq war in American, British, Czech, German, South African and Al-Jazeera TV news. They found major lines of cross-national differences in the subtopics emphasized in the coverage. Framing researchers often attribute these major lines of cross-national differences in the coverage of these types of events to cultural and journalistic values (Schaefer, 2003). However, of particular interest to the current study is the evidence linking sources of attribution to the presence, as well as the types of frames that emerge in conflict coverage (Yoon & Gwangho, 2002).

For example, Yoon and Gwangho (2002) found that a major contributing factor to the use and avoidance of particular war-related frames occurs when the information cited by the newspaper comes from official sources. The examination of this relationship is a dimension of framing in need of further development, as modern communication technologies make official sources in areas of conflict increasingly accessible to foreign journalists. By looking at how the use of particular official sources, whose primary job is to promote the news frame that suits their nations' foreign policy interests, relates to frames across international papers, the current work may inform the direction of future framing research, by offering evidence of factors that may be affecting cross-national differences other than journalistic values.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Guided by the theoretical tenants of framing theory (Entman, 1991; 1993), as well as evidence from past research which has suggested the press puts greater emphasis on the military during times of conflict (e.g., Strömbäck & Dimitrova, 2011) this study examines news coverage of the war in Georgia through a study of a sample of Georgian, American and Russian media, in order to address five research questions. First,

RQ1: What frames were dominant in the coverage of the 2008 war in Georgia by *Resonance*, *Izvestia*, and *The New York Times*?

Because earlier studies on the framing of conflicts have found that the press generally tends to put greater emphasis on the military portion of the conflicts (e.g., Dimitrova, et al., 2005; Strömbäck & Dimitrova, 2011), we predicted:

H1: War Frames will be used most often in coverage of the Russian-Georgian conflict.

In addition, this study seeks to examine differences in the frames prioritized by each of the three sources. Prior researchers have observed cross-national differences in the frames emphasized by media during conflict coverage (e.g., Kolmer & Semetko, 2009). This is particularly evident when national interests are involved (Yoon & Gwangho, 2002). Based on these prior studies, we also anticipate that the reporting of the war between Russia and Georgia was likely influenced by the national and international contexts in which the news was produced. First though:

RQ2: Will *Resonance*, *Izvestia*, and *The New York Times* differ significantly in the types of frames used in covering the Russian-Georgian conflict?

Then, more generally:

RQ3: How do differences in the use of frames relate to the newspapers covering the Russian-Georgian conflict (*Resonance*, *Izvestia*, and *The New York Times*)?

The study is also interested in the use of official sources in conflict coverage. The construction of particular meanings can occur through the exclusion of sources that would introduce perspectives that are inconsistent with the way the media chooses to present the events to the audience. Yoon and Gwangho's (2002) study of conflict coverage found that national media tend to carry stories that supported the official positions of their home governments and reflected their foreign policies. Thus, we pose the following research question and subsequent hypotheses:

RQ4: What sources did *Resonance*, *Izvestia*, and *The New York Times* use in their coverage of the Russian-Georgian conflict?

H2a: The official sources cited in *Resonance* will be predominantly Georgian.

H2b: The official sources cited in *Izvestia* will be predominantly Russian.

Finally, as discussed in the review of literature, when news coverage is influenced by strong cultural traditions, particularly the relationship between the authorities and the media, the tendency for sanitized press coverage may also correspond with the selection of specific government sources. However, the technological affordances of the web have made the reach of media less bound by physical proximity, and in turn, news organizations have increased access to resources closer to the source of conflicts. Furthermore, research suggests sources contribute to the framing of these

issues, since a large portion of the information about a conflict comes from official sources, whose primary job is to promote the news frame that suits their nations' foreign policy interests (Yoon & Gwangho, 2002). Thus, the final research question asks:

RQ5: What is the relationship between attribution of sources and types of frames?

METHOD

This study uses content analysis, a systematic method for assigning communication content to categories based on operational definitions (Riffe et al., 2005). Content analysis has been a valuable tool for researchers seeking to draw inferences from antecedent or subsequent conditions (Fico et al., 2008), and provides a means for examining the values and norms that guide the production of message content in numerous formats, such as print, film and electronic media (e.g. Holton et al., 2011; McKeever, 2011; Riffe et al., 2005). Thus, quantitative content analysis is an appropriate method for examining the framing of the 2008 war in Georgia in the newspaper coverage of *Resonance*, *Izvestia*, and *The New York Times*.

Data analysis

The coded data from this study were analyzed using IBM® SPSS® statistical computing software (Version 19.0). Certain analyses were also performed using R (Version 2.13.1) statistical computing software (R Development Core Team, 2010). Coder reliability estimates were calculated and nonparametric tests were used to examine the research questions posed for this study and test related hypotheses about the categorical variables included in this research. These predicted differences among coded categories were tested in two stages. Chi-square tests for equality of proportions were first used to determine if the distribution among categories was not equal, thus rejecting the null hypothesis of equal distribution of the categorical variable being examined.

When evidence of a significant difference among the population proportions was found, pairwise differences were examined using Marascuilo contrasts (Glass & Hopkins, 1996; Zwick & Marascuilo, 1984) in order to detect which differences reached statistical significance, while controlling for the effects of multiple comparisons using an adjusted alpha (Marascuilo, 1966). For this analysis, absolute differences in sample proportions and their corresponding critical ranges for the Marascuilo procedure were computed using the following formula;

$$\text{Critical range (Marascuilo)} = \sqrt{X_U^2} \sqrt{\frac{p_j(1-p_j)}{n_j} + \frac{p_{j'}(1-p_{j'})}{n_{j'}}$$

Absolute proportion differences greater than their corresponding critical range values were declared statistically significant at $\alpha < .05$.

Sample

Three newspapers, Georgia’s *Resonance* ($n = 275$), Russia’s *Izvestia* ($n = 189$), and America’s *The New York Times* ($n = 100$) were analyzed for this study. In total, 564 articles containing 6,687 paragraphs were selected from August 8, 2008 through October 8, 2008 to include coverage beginning with the onset of the war and concluding with the withdrawal of Russian troops from Georgian-controlled territories.

All articles about the Georgian conflict were used in all three newspapers selected. Extensive searches were performed using the online databases of *The New York Times* and *Izvestia* to collect every news article within the specified time period. The sample was sorted into 100 online articles from *The New York Times*, 189 online articles from *Izvestia*, and 275 articles from the printed version of *Resonance*. A preliminary sample of unrelated articles from each source indicated that the number of paragraphs in the news stories in *The New York Times* was significantly larger than in *Resonance* and *Izvestia*. Thus both *Resonance* and *Izvestia* were oversampled in an effort to correct for this disparity and produce relatively equal numbers of paragraphs across each newspaper. The sample characteristics are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Sample characteristics

Newspaper	<i>Resonance</i>	<i>Izvestia</i>	<i>New York Times</i>
Articles sampled (% of total)	275 (48.8)	189 (33.5)	100 (17.7)
Number of paragraphs (% of total)	3035 (45.5)	1312 (19.6)	2340 (35.0)

Note. Discrepancies in total articles from each source reflect intentional oversampling of *Resonance* and *Izvestia* in an effort to correct for anticipated discrepancies in paragraph totals.

Coding

All the articles about the war in Georgia falling under the time frame (August 8 through October 8, 2008) were coded, except for the articles that mentioned only the event or the country. The unit of analysis for the dependent variables was the article. The frames were coded on the basis of presence in each story. Types of articles that were coded were hard news, including news stories, news briefs, news analysis, and news features. All relevant articles were coded for the presence and type of frames as well as the source of the story. A source of attribution was defined as a name of a person or an organization associated with direct quotes or reported speech in a story. The types of sources of interest in the current work were governmental officials from Georgia, Russia, Europe and the United States. Three dominant frames (War, Causality, and Political) were developed by collapsing eight subframes from the initial protocol. The reason for merging the frames was to build frames that were

predominant in the three newspapers and feasible for statistical analysis. Because dominant frames were found to occur more frequently in the longer publications, they were transformed into dichotomous measures after the data were collected and coder reliability estimates were calculated. This was done to avoid bias in the tests of significance,¹ which may have resulted from disproportionate paragraph totals among the three newspapers.

Intercoder reliability

The coding was done by a trained coder with 20% of the stories double coded by second and third coders to ensure the reliability of the frames. The second coder coded a sample of 10% of the American and 10% of the Russian news stories (28 stories altogether). The third coder coded a sample of 10% or 27 of the Georgian news stories. Scott's pi (π) formula was used to determine intercoder reliability and overall reliability was 98% across all categories, ranging from 90% to 100%.²

Operationalization

Sources of Attribution. A source of attribution was defined as a name of a person or an organization associated with direct quotes or reported speech in a story. The types of sources examined for this study were the following government officials and leaders: European Leaders (Scott's $\pi = 95\%$), Russia's president and governmental officials (Scott's $\pi = 100\%$), Georgia's President and politicians (Scott's $\pi = 100\%$) and the U.S. President and political leaders (Scott's $\pi = 100\%$).

War frames. War frames were operationalized by collapsing three subframes from the initial coding protocol: the military conflict frame, rationalization of war

¹ Because we were unable to attain comparable paragraph totals through oversampling, variables that were measured using paragraphs as the unit of analysis were transformed into dichotomous outcomes at the level of the article in order to reduce inflated values in newspapers containing disproportionately large numbers of paragraphs. This data transformation did not bias results to favor the support of hypotheses presented in this study, as statistically significant relationships reported within this manuscript were also significant (and often inflated) when pairwise comparisons were conducted with the paragraph as a single datum. The differences among the three newspapers in their use of war frames ($F = 37.706$, $p < .005$, $\eta^2 = 0.1184$), political frames ($F = 72.912$, $p < .005$, $\eta^2 = 0.206$) and causality frames ($F = 10.031$, $p < .005$, $\eta^2 = 0.035$) were all significant when frames were recorded by the paragraph, and post-hoc comparisons (Tukey's HSD) found pairwise comparisons (in addition to those presented in our findings) to be statistically significant. Copies of the complete coding protocol are available upon request.

² Scott's π reliability was calculated using intercoder agreement based on the coding of the variables as they were originally measured, which was based on a coding protocol designed to measure multiple occurrences of certain variables within articles. Reliability estimates from the original coding was reported to prevent the inflation of interrater agreement by the combination of categories that include disagreement in one or more of the judgments.

3. The political actors' frame included any discussion of specific political actors (e.g., President Saakashvili, Prime Minister Putin, France's President Sarkozy, and Russian President Medvedev).

RESULTS

The first research question asked which types of frames were dominant in the news coverage of the Russian-Georgian conflict. At the aggregate level, 43.9% (305) of the stories from all three newspapers contained war frames. Meanwhile, political frames were found in 30.9% (215) of stories and 25.2% (175) contained causality frames. These values are shown below in Table 2.

Table 2. Frames by story

	Type of Frame			
	War Frames	Political Frames	Causality Frames	Total
N	305a	215b	175b	695
(%)	(43.88%)	(30.94%)	(25.18%)	
Overall $\chi^2 = 57.4101$, $df = 2$, $\alpha = <0.0001$				

Note. Pairwise comparisons between dominant frames were conducted via Marascuilo contrasts. Pairwise comparisons were not conducted on models in which the omnibus χ^2 was not statistically significant. Cells that do not share a letter in their subscripts differ at $p < .05$. Comparisons between frames, specified by lowercase subscripts, are horizontal only.

After performing an initial analysis using a Chi-Square test to confirm significant differences among the three frames ($\chi^2 = 57.4101$, $df = 2$, $p < .005$), Post hoc analysis was conducted to examine the nature of the observed differences. Results from this analysis confirmed the prediction in H1, revealing war frames were used more than political frames (difference = 12.95%, $\alpha < .05$) and causality frames (difference = 18.71%, $\alpha < .05$). An interesting finding was that political frames were also present in significantly more stories than causality frames ($\alpha < .05$).

Next, RQ2 asked if there will be differences among *Resonance*, *Izvestia*, and in *The New York Times* in the use of frames. Table 3 presents the findings of dominant frames as well as the proportions of subframes present in *Resonance*, *Izvestia*, and in *The New York Times*.

Table 3. Number and percentage of frames by newspaper story

Frames	Newspaper		
	<i>Resonance</i>	<i>Izvestia</i>	<i>NYT</i>
War	131 (47.6) a	94 (49.7) a	80 (80.0) b
Military	36.4	29.1	67.0
Rationalization of war	4.4	15.9	31.0

Portrayal of combatants	12.4	18.0	33.0
Overall $\chi^2 = 33.10, p < .005$			
Political	79 (28.7) a	62 (32.8) a	74 (74.0) b
General political	24.7	24.9	66.0
Political actors	1.1	4.8	13.0
Attribution of Responsibility	4.4	6.3	15.0
Overall $\chi^2 = 67.1249, p < .005$			
Causality	62 (22.2) a, b	26 (13.8) a, b	29 (29.0) a
Prognostic	18.5	8.5	29.0
Diagnostic	6.9	5.8	20.0
Overall $\chi^2 = 9.2862, p = .009$			

Note. The percentages are based on the total number of stories that contained content categorized as fitting into (1) the three overall dominant frame categories and (2) each of the subframes listed under the dominant frames. Pairwise comparisons between dominant frames were conducted via Marascuilo contrasts and only conducted when the omnibus χ^2 was statistically significant. Comparisons between frames, specified by lowercase subscripts, are horizontal only. Cells that do not share a letter in their subscripts differ at $p < .05$.

RQ3 sought to determine if statistically significant differences existed in the presence of the dominant frames among the three newspapers. Further analysis confirmed differences among the newspapers in their use of each of the dominant frames were statistically significant. After confirming the omnibus χ^2 test was significant for war frames ($\chi^2 = 33.10, p < .005$). Post hoc analyses showed there were significantly more war frames in *The New York Times* when compared to *Izvestia* (difference = 30.3%, $\alpha < .05$) and *Resonance* (difference = 33.4%, $\alpha < .05$). This same pattern in differences also emerged in political frames (Overall $\chi^2 = 67.1249, \alpha < .05$), with *The New York Times* containing significantly more than both *Izvestia* (difference = 45.3%, $\alpha < .05$) and *Resonance* (difference = 41.2%, $\alpha < .05$). For causality frames (Overall $\chi^2 = 9.2862, \alpha < .05$), which occurred the least for all three papers, *Izvestia* contained a significantly smaller proportion than *The New York Times* (difference = 15.2%, $\alpha < .05$). Of course, *The New York Times* articles often contained more than one dominant frame.

RQ4 asked what sources were cited by the newspapers during the conflict coverage. As shown in Table 4, the most quoted sources for *Resonance*, *Izvestia*, and *The New York Times* were government and military officials from Georgia and Russia.

Table 4. Sources used by newspaper

Sources	Newspaper		
	<i>Resonance</i>	<i>Izvestia</i>	<i>NYT</i>
Georgian Officials	33.5%a	18.0%b	48.0%a
U.S. Officials	8.4%a	7.4%a	42.0%b

European Officials	8.4%a	9.0%a	25.0%b
Russian Officials	18.2%a	49.2%b	62.0%c

Note. The percentages are based on the total number of stories that cited each of the official sources. Pairwise comparisons between sources were conducted via Marascuilo contrasts. Cells that do not share a letter in their subscripts differ at $p < .05$

In *Resonance*, Georgian officials appeared in 33.5% of the stories, followed by Russian officials (18.2%). In *Izvestia*, Russian officials were in 49.2% of the stories, followed by the Georgian leaders (18%). Russian leaders were also the most prominent source in *The New York Times* (62%) followed by Georgian leaders (48%). The U.S. officials and European leaders were the least utilized sources in all three newspapers. These differences were statistically significant for each source type cited by the three papers.

H2a and H2b, which predicted *Izvestia* and *Resonance* would favor the use of internal sources, were both supported in post hoc analyses. In fact, both *The New York Times* and *Izvestia* quoted Russian officials significantly more than did *Resonance* (Overall $\chi^2 = 82.6729$, $p < .005$, Post hoc differences significant at 95% confidence). As predicted, *Resonance* quoted Georgian officials significantly more than *Izvestia* though surprisingly less than *The New York Times* (Overall $\chi^2 = 29.6507$, $p < .005$, Post hoc differences = 95% confidence). From these figures, it appears that both the Georgian and Russian newspapers in this study favor the use of internal sources in stories pertaining to the war, while the Times heavily utilized all sources of attribution, using external (Russian and Georgian) sources more frequently than U.S. officials.

RQ5 looked at the relationship between sources and frames. Next, Table 5 reports a series of logistic regression analyses — for each frame (War, Causality and Political Frames) in all of the newspapers — regressing the presence of each frame on the official sources used.

Table 5. Logistic regressions predicting frames by official source of attribution

	Frame Type					
	Political Frame		Causal Frame		War Frame	
	Odds		Odds		Odds	
Sources	β	Ratio	β	Ratio	β	Ratio
Georgian	0.71***	2.02	0.61***	1.83	0.96***	2.61
Russian	0.73***	2.06	0.35	1.41	0.37*	1.44
European	1.92***	6.84	0.56	0.30	-0.46	0.63
U.S.	1.21***	3.34	1.17***	0.26	-0.14	0.97
Nagelkerke R-square	0.202		0.103		0.072	
% correctly classified	71.1		79.6		62.4	

For the regression analysis, all of the official sources were entered as predictors of each frame, and all three regression models were statistically significant. For the political frame, $\chi^2(4, N = 564) = 91.349, p < .005$, the sources cited by the papers “explained” 15% (Cox & Snell R Square) to 22.2% (Nagelkerke R Square) of the variance in political frames observed, and the model correctly classified 70.1% of cases. The results of this model also indicated that official sources from Georgia, Russia, Europe and the U.S. were all significant predictors of the use of political frames in the news coverage of the conflict.

When the same predictors were entered for causal frame, the model was also significant, $\chi^2(4, N = 564) = 39.182, p < .005$, classifying 79.6% of the cases with causal frames and explaining 6.7% (Cox & Snell R Square) to 10.3% (Nagelkerke R Square) of the variance in the use of causal frames among the three news sources. However, only Georgian and U.S. official sources were predictive of causal frames at a level of statistical significance.

These source variables were then tested in relation to presence of the war frame in the articles, $\chi^2(4, N = 564) = 30.791, p < .005$, revealing that official sources were less predictive than the other two models, accounting for just 5.3% (Cox & Snell R Square) to 7.2% (Nagelkerke R Square) of war frame variance, and classifying only 62.4% of cases. Based on this model, the two sources that were significantly predictive of war frames were officials representing those involved in the conflict.

Discussion

The findings of this research add to the body of literature on framing, particularly in relation to the presence and prioritization of particular issues and frames in news coverage during conflict (Entman, 1993; Gans, 1979). As predicted, war frames were prioritized by all three newspapers in coverage of the invasion. Also, in this study, frames were constructed in a predictable way, with both Russian and Georgian media turning to local government officials as sources in their construction of frames.

One might speculate on similarities not differences. It seems logical that one would focus on the conflict at first, and then the political context related to the conflict and finally, the cause of the conflict. Perhaps more intriguing than the phases of the coverage found in the current study, is the fact that they appear to occur similarly in news coverage by papers on both sides of the conflict as well as in the presumably neutral coverage published in *The New York Times*. As shown in Figure 1, when the same data are visualized, based on how much each frame occurs in the papers sampled for this study and when viewed in light of the total number of frames used within each of those newspapers during their coverage of the conflict, all three publications were remarkably similar in respect to the way they balanced their use of frames.

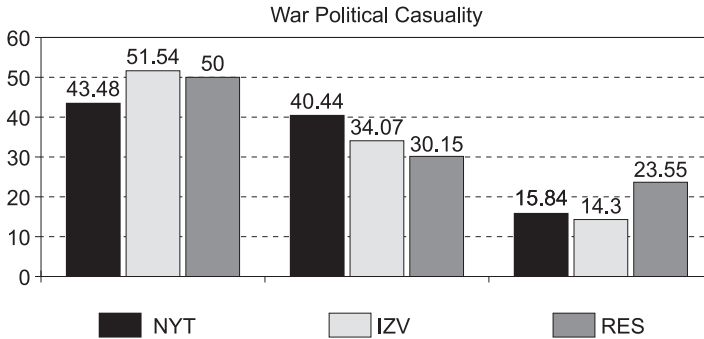


Figure 1. Proportion of Total Frames in Each Paper Coded as War, Political or Causal

$\chi^2 = 2.316$ $\chi^2 = 4.882^\dagger$ $\chi^2 = 7.4672^*$
 Note: $^\dagger \alpha < 0.10$. $^* \alpha < 0.05$.

Note that comparing the three papers in such a way does not entirely erase the differences in frames among the news coverage sampled. A difference still exists in the proportion of causality frames in *Resonance* when compared to *Izvestia* (difference = 0.093 $\chi^2 = 6.3166$, $\alpha < 0.05$), which, though marginal, was still statistically significant. However, the pairwise differences that remain involve causality frames, which were the least prominent in all three newspapers, representing just 25.18% of the dominant frames found in the study. The strong similarity among all three in the amount of the total frames devoted to the most prominent frames in the study, the war and political frames, seems to indicate the strong likelihood that the shared patterns, rather than the observed differences, may be the most valuable finding within this study.

For these reasons, it remains unclear whether the differences found in the present work definitively add to the corpus of literature in support of Entman's framing, and if so, what it suggests about the motivating factors driving journalistic tendencies to frame certain subject matter, such as the events or details surrounding military conflict. Past scholars have discussed tendencies in the framing of war as outcomes related to biases, such as the shared interests between media organizations and governments, particularly when national interests are involved (e.g., Kolmer & Semetko, 2009). However, the commonalities that emerged in the current study suggest that a more nuanced explanation may be necessary in order to discern the underlying processes affecting these seemingly inevitable phases of war reporting, which manifest in the media conflict coverage from all newspapers sampled in this study.

The observed differences in the prominence and presence of these frames found in the current work may support the notion that journalists frame issues to enlarge or shrink the significance of an event, though the predictable patterns witnessed here and in past studies (e.g., Shaw & Martin, 1994), may reveal potential habits in

framing that are generalizable beyond the current, exploratory work. Alternatively, might the findings in the current study be attributed to structural discrepancies such as disparities in the sheer number of opportunities to incorporate frames in news coverage, which may be moderated by factors such as article length? If so, then the disproportionately large number of paragraphs published in *The New York Times* articles — as opposed to those published in both *Izvestia* and *Resonance* — may be more responsible than the motivations of the journalist, for the observed variance in the use and selection of frames among the papers sampled. Moreover, the similarities that emerged when the frames were re-examined, after taking into account the actual number of frames that were found within each of the three papers, certainly seem to support this interpretation.

Eschewing any further ambitious discussion of these findings as evidence that similar framing patterns are likely to occur in news coverage of other military conflicts, we return to the promising findings within the scope of the current research, which is certainly a compelling argument for further development within this program of research. Numerous opportunities exist for researchers to empirically test whether similar relationships occur within wartime coverage in other media, and if these patterns emerge during military conflicts, researchers can extend the work to examine if this remains the case when the aggressors are disliked in the international sphere, or in nations with high levels of media censorship from government or as a function of different journalistic norms.

LIMITATIONS

As is typical of all research, this study has a number of limitations. First, while content analysis offers many advantages in terms of quantifying communication content, only inferences can be made about how the content affects outcomes. Thus, this study provides guidance for future research examining the types of coverage characteristics and frames that may exert effects on audience perceptions.

Earlier we also discussed the inevitability of war frames, however, in the current study, which sampled a relatively small window of newspaper coverage, it is not entirely clear if such a temporal precedence exists. Furthermore, one might also argue that the military frames and political frames actually appear side by side, mirroring the logical flow of information in an age of diplomacy. While it is evident from the observable coverage tendencies discovered in the current study that the three sampled newspapers were similar in their use of three frames during conflict coverage, the potential generalizability of these patterns beyond the topic and media coverage in the current work remains unclear. In each of the sampled newspapers, a clear pattern emerged in their predominant use of war frames, which was followed in prevalence by political frames and finally, the use of causality frames.

From a methodological perspective, note that the current study analysed frames at the level of the article, though this is only one approach to coding frames. Future

research should also explore questions such as those posed in the current study, as well as other pertinent topics in the study of framing, using different units of analysis, such as images, sentences and even single words, to name a few. By approaching the study of frames based on alternative conceptualizations of frames, future research may advance current scholarly knowledge about the way frames are used in media coverage of certain events, while also informing the academic community about possible differences between findings based on the analysis of smaller story elements and those derived from approaches such as the one used in the current work, which examined frames using the entire story as the unit of analysis. Further study of these issues may assist communication scholars in discerning the appropriate unit of analysis for unpacking the fundamental language of frames, and elucidate possible patterns in the presence of particular frames as they relate to conflict coverage.

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