Media Coverage of Sexual Violence Cases in the Russia-Ukraine War

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Abstract
The purpose of this research is to examine how international news sources have narrated the sexual violence issues during the recent Russia-Ukrainian conflict. This research used the Narrative Policy Framework to analyze not only the function of news narratives but also the elements (such as characters) portrayed in rape cases (criminals, heroes, and victims). Furthermore, NVivo Pro was used to process the research data qualitatively. According to the findings, international news sources like The Guardian, CNN, and Al Jazeera have largely reported on the claim that sexual violence, especially rape, has been used as a 'weapon' by the Russian military in its attacks on Ukraine. Ukrainian women, men, children, girls, and boys make up the vast majority of the victims here. Meanwhile, the Russian government and army are presented as villains in the narrative. Different narratives emerge when the three media outlets discuss actors in terms of heroic roles, as shown by this research. There are signs that the media has its objectives, particularly in the context of the Ukraine-Russia war, based on the disparities between the narratives given to the hero characters by the media.

Keywords: News media, Narrative Policy Framework, Sexual violence, Russia-Ukraine war

Abstrak

Kata Kunci: Media berita, Kerangka Kebijakan Naratif, Kekerasan seksual, Perang Rusia-Ukraina
Introduction

The media have both a duty and an obligation to distribute accurate scientific information to the general public, in addition to shaping stories that present contrasting points of view regarding a particular occurrence (Shanahan et al., 2011). According to Shanahan et al. (2008), the media can be seen as a way for communities and groups to express their support for an issue so that policy can be implemented. The way in which controversial issues are covered in the media presents multiple perspectives, each of which has the potential to either reinforce or shift an individual's existing beliefs (Shanahan et al., 2011). The ability of the media to shape public perceptions of an issue by communicating particular narrative frames is what media theorists call "framing" (Shanahan et al., 2011).

This research will discuss further the narrative given by the media towards the Russian-Ukrainian war. Numerous investigations into the ways in which the conflict between Russia and Ukraine should be framed have been carried out. For instance, research carried out by Hergianasari et al. (2022) demonstrates that media coverage of the Russia-Ukrainian conflict that brings up humanitarian issues has the potential to be both an agent of change and a new public space that can compose an effective narrative. Media coverage is true not only for political purposes but also for humanitarian diplomatic purposes (Hergianasari et al., 2022).

In addition, a comparative analysis of the framing of the Russo-Ukrainian war by the news media has been conducted (Gafar, 2022; Opsal, 2022). For instance, research that was carried out by J. Opsal (2022) discovered that there were significant differences between how the news media in the United States, United Kingdom, and Russia described the situation regarding the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. The conflict has been described as a war and an invasion by Western media, and Putin has been referred to as the "mastermind" behind this conflict. However, in Russia, this incident is being described as a "Special Military Operation" for Ukraine (Opsal, 2022). In contrast to other studies, this one aim to shed light on how sexual violence during the Russia–Ukraine conflict was covered in the news.

Since November 2021, reports of Russia's impending attack on Ukraine have been making the rounds. The crisis began in 2014 and then grew wider; the climax was when several media mentioned that since late 2021, Russia had moved its troops to the Ukrainian border by bringing approximately 100,000 military troops and their military equipment to the Ukrainian border (CNBC Indonesia, 2022). In addition to this, it has been reported that Russia is conducting extensive military drills.

The attack then took place on February 21, 2022, when President Vladimir Putin of Russia acknowledged the independence of the Donbas militia, the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR), and the Luhansk People's Republic (LPR). Then, on the third day after that, Vladimir Putin led a military operation that he referred to as a "special military operation" and attacked several major cities in Ukraine (CNBC Indonesia, 2022; Martz, 2022).

This unexpected attack most certainly caused a crisis that had not been anticipated. According to data, a significant population movement is taking place from Ukraine to the countries that are located nearby. It is estimated that approximately 50,000 people fled the country of Ukraine on the day after the invasion took place, and this number increased to 870,000 on the seventh day of the war (Psaropoulos, 2022). Because Poland is located directly to the west of Ukraine, it has become the most popular destination for refugees fleeing the conflict in Ukraine.

The Russian invasion not only resulted in a significant increase in the number of people fleeing Ukraine, but it also resulted in a few different humanitarian crises for the victims. As a result of armed conflict, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has confirmed in an official document that human rights have been violated for both civilians and military forces, including the right to life, the right to freedom, and the right to security. In connection with the invasion of Ukraine, UNHCR discovered evidence of multiple cases of sexual violence, torture,
arbitrary imprisonment, and disappearances (OHCHR, 2022). More than 90% of those forced to leave their homes are women and children, and they are in danger of experiencing sexual violence, rape, and trafficking during displacement (Stark et al., 2022). Furthermore, Russia is accused of employing sexual violence as a weapon of war against Ukraine (Al Oraimi & Antwi-Boateng, 2023).

In addition to this, there were reports of sexual assault, some of which included rape committed by Russian military personnel. As of June 3, 2022, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Human Rights Monitoring Team had received reports of a total of 124 cases of alleged sexual violence related to the crisis in Ukraine (United Nations, 2022). Reports of rapes committed against Ukrainian citizens were documented with the assistance of a number of other international organizations, such as Human Rights Watch (Human Right Watch, 2022) and La Strada Ukraine (EUAM Ukraine, 2022). The same effect was produced by coverage in international media. This study will center its attention on the narratives presented in global media outlets such as The Guardian, CNN, and Al Jazeera) reports concerning this topic.

Theoretical Framework and Research Method

According to the data provided by Scopus, there are at least 1176 documents that discuss the war in Ukraine from 2014 until 2022. This research makes use of the application VOSViewer to examine patterns discovered by previous research, particularly in regard to the conflict in Ukraine. VOSviewer's primary objective is to offer a structured representation of the constantly shifting landscape of research problems. (Hanief, 2021). This analytical mapping is also meant to help researchers discover new concepts and emerging trends in certain fields according to the research topic that they have selected for their research (Assyakur & Rosa, 2022).
involve an analysis of the characters (criminals, heroes, and victims) that are raised by the media when reporting on the issue of sexual violence. Specifically, this research will investigate how the media portrays these characters. In their study analyzing media coverage from the perspective of the NFP, Blair, and McCormack (2016) stated that the most important components of a narrative, as defined by the NPF, are the setting or context of the story, the plot of the story, the characters, and the moral of the story (Blair & McCormack, 2016). According to Blair and McCormack, figuring out who the villains, heroes, and victims are in the story is an important part of character development.

Reports of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine have taken up a significant amount of attention in the news in recent days. In addition, the matter of rape that took place during the conflict is still another significant subject that needs to be discussed. It is one of the issues that absolutely must be addressed. Since most people receive their information from the media, it is essential to look into the way in which various news sources report on the growth of the rape issue. According to the results of this research, the issue of sexual assault, particularly rape, is the most serious matter that must be addressed. According to the findings of this research, the sexual violence, especially rape issue is the most pressing concern (the setting). Once a problem has been identified, various characters, including villains, heroes, and victims, can be shown to be connected to the problem (Blair & McCormack, 2016).

The sexual violence that happened to Ukrainian men, women, and children that took place in the immediate aftermath of the Russian invasion inspired this line of inquiry and investigation. This study examines how various news outlets, specifically The Guardian, CNN, and Al Jazeera, covered topics and actors related to sexual violence that have occurred at least since the invasion took place, specifically from February 2022 to October 2022. The time covered by this study is February 2022 to October 2022.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media</th>
<th>Number of Articles in Three Media (February – October 2022)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Guardian</td>
<td>&gt;100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al Jazeera</td>
<td>&gt;100</td>
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Table 1. Number of Articles in Three Media on Rape Issues in the Russia-Ukraine War
Source: Processed by Researcher

During this research, The Guardian, CNN, and Al Jazeera were chosen to participate for a number of different reasons. The Guardian was selected to serve as the representative for European media. After that, Al Jazeera was chosen to represent media outlets from the Middle East, and CNN was selected to represent the United States while also maintaining its status as a "neutral" media outlet. CNN's reporting on the issue of the Russia-Ukraine war stated that Western media are often biased, which led to this decision being made based on that reporting (Al Lawati & Ebrahim, 2022). In addition, a variety of media are chosen to work with in order to achieve a wider range of outcomes.

This research employed the phrase "rape cases in the Ukraine war" related to sexual violence that happened in Russia – Ukraine war. The results, as shown above, reveal the number of articles. After that, the total number of articles considered for each of the three was 45 news articles to filter the number of stories based on the relevance of those stories to the issues that are brought up in this study.

In this study, a qualitative analysis method is utilized, and NVivo Pro is the software that is used to process the research data. The following is a list of the stages that are involved in the process of processing data using NVivo: (1) selecting files to be reviewed, (2) coding, and (3) running queries and visualizations. (Suryani & Zakaria, 2020).

NCapture, a product by NVivo, was used to modify the articles under review for this research. A coding procedure is then applied to the article, transforming it into a database of research information. The research coding
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Procedure is an artifact created to symbolize the essence of the data for the sake of pattern recognition, classification, theoretical building, and analytic explorations (Suryani & Zakaria, 2020). Afterward, crosstab analysis will be used to present and examine the coding outcomes.

Result and explanation

Computer-assisted analysis used NVivo Pro.

Figure 3. Characters

Individuals, organizations, and groups (public and private) that perform actions and reactions are called "characters" in fiction (Shanahan et al., 2018). In order to solve issues, heroes are problem solvers. Harmful actors are referred to as criminals or villains. Last but not least, victims are individuals whom criminals have harmed (Shanahan et al., 2018). As this research shows, the villain typically enters the story not long after the victim or problem is introduced. Especially when coverage of the rape includes concern for the victim or an explanation of what led to the crime, then when the media recounts the rape case in the Russia-Ukraine war and the solution that has been, is being, or will be carried out by certain parties, the figure of a hero appears.

Figure 1 shows that out of all news outlets, Al Jazeera focuses on the most heroic characters (38.71%), followed by the most villainous (37.10%), and finally the most helpless (24.19%). At number two, CNN, we hear about fewer protagonists (19.23%), villains (40.38%), and victims (40.38%). Last but not least, the Guardian tells the stories of heroes (42.31 percent), victims (32.31%), and villains (25.38%).

This study found in three media, namely Al Jazeera, CNN, and The Guardian, that Russian soldiers, along with the Russian government, are always portrayed as villains. Al Jazeera put the Russian army in the top position, followed by the Russian government. CNN also puts Russian soldiers in first place as perpetrators of rape, then the Russian government in second. It can be said clearly that the Russian army became the biggest actor causing many rape victims in the Russia-Ukraine war.

The narration that The Guardian provides contains a variety of different things. The Ukrainian soldiers are named as additional perpetrators of rape in The Guardian, in contrast to the previous two media outlets. The previous two media outlets either did not list Ukrainian soldiers as criminals or did not portray them as criminals in their coverage of the conflict.

Figure 4. Villains

In addition, the actors who narrated their own experiences as victims were found to be more diverse in this study. At least seven different people are being portrayed as victims by the three different media outlets. The majority of the time, Al Jazeera presents men, women, and even boys as rape victims. In a different position, children, civilians, as well as women are described as having been victims of rape committed by the villains.

CNN narrates the civilians as the actor with the most rape victims. The civilians were followed by boys, men, and then women as
victims. The study found that CNN explored less actor rape. On the other side, The Guardian describes in great detail the rapes that were committed against multiple actors. Older people became new actors as well as the most narrated victims in the news that The Guardian published. Older people are in the last place, followed by boys, then girls, then men, then women, then children, and finally, the civilians as a whole.

Figure 6. Heroes

Heroes are the entities with the most varied actors in this study. There are at least ten actors narrated as heroes. These ten actors are also entities that solve or provide solutions to the issue of rape that occurred in the Russia-Ukraine war. In all three media, heroes are mostly narrated after victims and villains are discussed. Al Jazeera narrates a lot about the Center for Civil Liberties (CCL), a humanitarian organization, and Germany as heroes. Other actors who are also narrated as heroes by Al Jazeera are the European Union, France, the United Nations, the United States, NGOs, the United Kingdom, and the last one is the Ukraine officials.

CNN only lists a few actors as heroes. The United States occupies the most positions, followed by the European Union, the Ukrainian government, the United Kingdom, and the United Nations. On the other hand, The Guardian narrates seven actors as heroes. The International Criminal Court (ICC) and the Netherlands occupy the top positions, followed by the government of Ukraine, the UK, NGOs, the United Nations, France, the European Union, and lastly, the United States.

The entities that were responsible for the rape problem and the resulting high number of victims have been identified as the villains (who were raped). In this instance, they are perpetrators of rape. The rapists in this study are cast in the role of villains in any narrative that is produced by the media about their actions. The term "villain" refers to a person or entity that is responsible for causing problems.

In this particular instance, Russian soldiers committed illegal acts during the war. There were allegations of rape committed by Russian troops in Ukraine one month after Russia invaded that country. It is also believed that women and children from Ukraine were victims of the rape. In March of 2022, this was confirmed by Dmytro Kuleba, who was serving as the Minister of Foreign Affairs for Ukraine (Insecurity Insight, 2022; Reuters, 2022)

A form of a war crime is rape, also known as a war crime. In the context of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, the three major news outlets frequently reported in their articles that, not long after the Russian government's invasion, there were numerous reports and discoveries of rape victims. Many people were raped and murdered in the territories that were occupied or controlled by the Russian army. This situation provides a sufficient explanation for why all of the media reports included in this study list Russian soldiers as villains. In addition to committing rape, it is alleged that Russian soldiers also engaged in acts of violence and torture against the victim, which ultimately led to the victim's death.

The Russian government, which planned and executed the invasion, was dubbed a criminal organization by all three news outlets for its direct or indirect involvement in the commission of war crimes. Unquestionably, the orders of the Russian government are the driving force behind whether Russian troops are present in controlled areas of conflict zones. In the most fundamental sense, the Ukrainian army itself is described as one of the perpetrators of rape as well. There is just one media outlet that portrays Ukrainian soldiers as the villains. However, the Ukrainian, Russian, and Russian government soldiers themselves are portrayed as criminals, primarily due to testimonies, reports, and investigations that heroes provided to the three different media outlets.

History also shows that Russia was sexually attacked more than once during the war. In
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three of the seven years since the conflict in eastern Ukraine began in 2014 (Cohen & Nordås, 2014; OHCHR, 2016), Russian soldiers have been sexually assaulted (Cohen & Nordås, 2014; OHCHR, 2016). Also, Russian soldiers are said to have raped people in Chechnya for seven years straight, both those who were in jail and those who were not (Human Rights Watch, 2000; The Washington Post, 2022b).

From February to April 2022, at least there were 29 reports of rapes against women and children, according to data from the group Insecurity Insight, which works in the humanitarian field (Insecurity Insight, 2022). Not only did these rapes happen in places where Russian soldiers were stationed, but also in places where Ukrainian refugees had gone, like Germany and Poland (Insecurity Insight, 2022). The data also shows that most of the violent and sexual acts were done by Russian soldiers.

Furthermore, a recent report from the United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry said that since February 24, 2022, there have been war crimes, human rights violations, and violations of international humanitarian law in Ukraine. Most of these crimes were committed by Russian military forces (Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, 2022). The report also says that war crimes have been committed by Ukraine (Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, 2022). The report matches the results of this study, which found that Ukrainian soldiers were only a small part of the villains.

During the Russia-Ukraine war, this is almost certainly one of the reasons why there were so many rapes. As Cohen argues, one of the reasons why rape could occur during wartime is the weak bonding between the soldiers. In line with this, since the start of the invasion, there have been reports that ties within the Russian army are weak and that Russian soldiers are unhappy with their role in Ukraine, which has led to confusion (Insecurity Insight, 2022; The Washington Post, 2022a). This makes sense, and it fits with the different reports that say how many gang rapes were done by Russian soldiers.

During times of conflict, victims have reported being subjected to a bewildering variety of violent sexual acts, including but not limited to sexual slavery, sexual mutilation, forced sterilization, and forced abortion (Cohen, 2018). Sexual violence itself has a various definition. United Nations defines sexual violence as consisting of a range of sexual acts against a child, including but not limited to child sexual abuse, incest, rape, sexual violence in the context of dating/intimate relationships, sexual exploitation, online sexual abuse, and non-contact sexual abuse (Santos Pais, 2015).

Another explanation by Elisabeth Jean Wood (2006) states that rape, forced undress, and other forms of sexual assault like genital mutilation all fall under the umbrella term "sexual violence" (Wood, 2006). Another scholar, such as Dara Kay Cohen, began a study on rape as a weapon of war. In her book called Rape During Civil War, she argues that there are both male and female victims and perpetrators of rape, and gang rape is the form of rape that is most commonly reported during times of war. Cohen also states that there is a likelihood that the rate of rape will increase during times of war.

Cohen argues that rape that occurs during war can cause people to leave their homes or territories, which can weaken the opponent’s position (Cohen, 2016). Cohen also said that soldiers use gang rape, which is the most common way to commit rape, as a way to strengthen bonds between each other during war. She argues that people who just joined up as soldiers are often random, from other countries, or even kidnapped. Cohen says that raping new members not only makes the bonds between members stronger but also serves to control the group and talk about the rules of masculinity, power, and masculinity (Cohen, 2018).

The study found that all three news outlets always talked about men and "civilians" as victims of rape, even when they were not women or children. It will make it clearer that rape does not happen to one group of people or
one community but can happen to anyone. Cohen (2016) found that rape cases happen a lot during wartime. Men, as well as women, are victims. He says that men who are raped not only have their bodies violated but are also "tortured" (Cohen, 2018). A report from the Independent International Commission of Inquiry backs up the research results by saying that rape victims range in age from four to more than eighty years old and that men and women are both victims of rape. In most of the cases, the three news outlets also said that the victims and their families had been tortured in different ways and treated in an inhumane way.

This study shows that at least five people are always told to be heroes in the Russia-Ukraine war rape case by all three news outlets. There are five actors: the United Nations, the Ukrainian government, the United States, Britain, and the European Union. People often say that the United Nations is a hero for taking the initiative to look into rape in more depth. The fact that this is being looked into is shown by the fact that an Independent International Commission of Inquiry has been set up, and in October 2022, it started its investigation report.

The Ukrainian government helps deal with and looks into problems that happen to its citizens. The Ukrainian government has talked about the progress of rape cases in international forums, and some of these cases have also been handled legally. The process has become harder because most of the people who did it are said to be Russian soldiers. In this case, the Ukrainian government is trying to get the International Criminal Court to handle this case.

The media talked about the United States as heroes because of how openly the government talked about rapes that happened during the Russia-Ukraine war. In addition to speaking out, the US government also looked into the case in a lot of different ways. Both the UK and the EU have done the same thing.

In general, The Guardian's news has the most stories about heroes. Most of the stories are about the International Criminal Court and the Netherlands. The International Criminal Court is said to be the highest institution that can legally try the criminal. The Netherlands is the country most often talked about as a hero because it helped look into rapes that happened during the Russia-Ukraine war. Interestingly, The Guardian puts more emphasis on the help from European countries than on the help from the United States. The author says that this may be because of how The Guardian, which is from the UK, feels about it. And the United States is at least portrayed as a hero in the results of this study.

CNN doesn't talk about many heroes in its news stories. CNN only talks about five actors and the United States is mentioned most often as a hero. CNN, which comes from the United States, maybe a factor in this dominance. CNN also says that the European Union, the Ukrainian government, the United Kingdom, and the UN are heroes. All of CNN's stories about rape talk about how everyone involved is trying to find out as much as they can about what happened. CNN, like the other two news outlets, doesn't talk about investigations done by other groups, like NGOs.

Al Jazeera talks about the Center for Civil Liberties (CCL), a humanitarian group, and Germany the most. Then, the European Union, France, the United Nations, the United States, NGOs, Britain, and the Ukrainian government are all told to be heroes. Compared to CNN and The Guardian, Al Jazeera pays more attention to the investigations done by people who haven't been talked about or even mentioned by the media before. Also, The Guardian and CNN are not the same in terms of who narrates the most. Three news outlets have different ideas about who the villains, victims, and heroes are when it comes to rapes that happened during the Russia-Ukraine war.

Conclusion

This study concludes that there are differences in the narrative in the analysis of characters (villains, victims, and heroes) conducted by The Guardian, CNN, and Al Jazeera, on the topic of rape in the Russia-Ukraine war. The framework for this study is the Narrative Framing Policy, which was used to conduct the research. In general, the narrative that prevails in the media is that rape is a type of weapon (rape as a weapon) that
villains commit. In this specific instance, the villains are primarily understood to be the Russian army and the Russian government. In most cases, the narratives of victims are provided by women and men equally. This study is unique in that it discovers differences in the narratives that are given to heroes by the three different types of media.

The origins of the three different media may influence the outcomes of the differences that take place—considering that The Guardian, CNN, and Al Jazeera do not originate from the same location. In addition, there is a possibility that each actor will bring their interests to the table, which will then be narrated by the media. Undoubtedly, additional study is required to discover this.

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Journal


Thesis


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