

‘THEY STARTED IT’: LEGITIMATION OF WAR IN RUSSIAN TELEVISED NEWS

By
Aktin Akishev

Submitted to
Central European University
Department of Political Science

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in
Political Science

Supervisor: Professor Robert Sata

Vienna, Austria
(2023)

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, Aktin Akishev, candidate for the MA degree in Political Science declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Vienna, June 7, 2023

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several vertical strokes and a horizontal line, positioned above a horizontal line.

Signature

Abstract: This thesis explores the social construction of reality occurring in Russian television when covering the Ukrainian conflict. It is puzzling how the public remained unaffected by the sudden change of coverage that switched from active denial that the intervention is planned to covering the actual invasion as natural and necessary. To explore the appeal of the official narrative, the thesis traces discursive changes in Russian television before and after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Relying on critical discourse analysis literature, a joint legitimation framework combining van Leeuwen's (2007) legitimation strategies and Machin and Mayr's multimodal discourse analysis (2012) is applied to a sample of 14 news episodes broadcasted between November 2021 and April 2022. The analysis reveals a preponderance of rationalizing legitimation frames before and moralizing language after the invasion to justify military intervention. At the same time, no other changes are registered either visually or narratively

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Einstein once said: “A hundred times a day, I remind myself that my inner and outer lives are based on the labors of other people, living and dead, and that I must exert myself in order to give in the same measure as I have received.” With this in mind, I cannot but claim that this work is collective labor. Particularly the labor of those who vested their belief in me, guided, taught, and cheered when needed. I would like to thank everyone who accompanied me both mentally and physically.

I am grateful to Dr. Robert Sata for supervising this piece and believing me when I assured him that it was going to be finished in time. Your understanding and guidance helped me see past my own boundaries.

In the same vein, I am appreciative of the inspiration that Dr. Bourdais Park has given me. You showed me what a scholar should look like. Your words steered the light on my path.

I am forever indebted to my family, whose collective effort and ever-lasting support brought me here and whose calls and messages reminded me that I am not alone.

I am thankful to all of my friends back home who have never ceased to text me and ask when I am going back. My heart has never left you.

And lastly, I would like to thank people who, in such a short time that we spent together at the Central European University and beyond, became dear to me: Vlad Siyutkin, Anuar Satmurzin, Olesya Dovgalyuk, Svyatoslav Naumov, Yuliya Turba and Hanna Savaryn. Your time, energy, and support in academic affairs and private life were a light in the darkness.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE: SOCIAL REALITY, DISCOURSE, AND LEGITIMATION.....	4
<i>2.1 Social Reality and Information Management</i>	4
<i>2.2 The World Outside: News, Discourse, and Power</i>	5
<i>2.3 The Pictures on the Screen and in Our Heads: News, Visual Discourse, and Power</i> ..	8
<i>2.4 Legitimation</i>	10
<i>2.5 Multimodal Legitimation</i>	14
CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY.....	20
<i>3.1. Context</i>	20
<i>3.2 Data Collection</i>	20
<i>3.3 Data Analysis Tools</i>	22
CHAPTER THREE: TO INVADE OR NOT TO INVADE?	25
<i>4.1 Pre-Invasion Coverage: War Hysteria and Enforcement of Peace</i>	26
<i>4.2 Post-Invasion Coverage: “Our Cause Is Just.”</i>	38
CONCLUSION.....	51
REFERENCES.....	53

LIST OF FIGURES

Table 1: Joint Legitimation Framework	18
Figure 1: Differences in the use of legitimation strategies	25
Figure 2: Pre-invasion legitimation	28
Figure 3: Visual representations of pre-invasion legitimation.....	29
Figure 4: Post-invasion legitimation	38
Figure 5: Visual representation of post-invasion legitimation.....	39

And yet, television, as it delivers daily the spectre of endless terror and violence from places far and near, also rescues us from the brink of chaos. The unimaginable is rendered familiar and terror is harnessed in the frames, rituals, and routines of the major medium of our age.

Andrew Hoskins and Ben O'Loughlin (2007).

INTRODUCTION

News is the prime medium through which one experiences and understands the world outside one's reach. Not only does it display events for its spectators, but it also interprets these events for them. As a displayer, news has long been a subject of study of public opinion and political behavior in light of its agenda-setting and framing capabilities. Indeed, as the main medium of political information, journalistic coverage contributes to the formation or change in attitudes of the general public. Yet, as an interpreter, news plays a more discrete role by constructing and transmitting meanings, narratives, and discourses that constitute reality.

Naturally, for any modern autocratic regime in the disposal of control over information, framing social reality serves its best interest (e.g., Guriev and Treisman 2015). Perhaps not as extensively and exclusively as one might think, Russian propaganda machinery is still exceedingly reliant on news coverage in presenting reality in its own desirable to the regime way. The Russian invasion in February 2022 is not the first instance of using news in the promotion of state interests. The literature clearly shows that discourse manipulation has been an active tool for the Russian government (e.g., Koltsova 2006; Hutchings and Szostek 2015; Pasitselska 2017; Semykina 2021; Nicolosi 2022). Interestingly, the coverage of the events preceding the invasion and the intervention itself is hardly narratively consistent. In other words, while the news coverage prior to the invasion discredited any implications pointing to the possibility of military engagement, the one after clearly legitimizes the use of military force on the territory of Ukraine. Surprisingly, this sudden shift was not reflected in the decrease in viewership or any criticism. No decrease in ratings was registered among the most viewed analytical news programs (Mediascope n.d.). At the very least, ordinary citizens seem to be

content with the war narrative, in general, and its changes, in particular (see Levada Center 2022b).

Of course, news coverage in Russia is by no means limited to a single medium, yet television persists as the principal source of information for the population in total (Levada Center 2022a). The popularity of television news is especially pronounced among the age groups of 40-54 and 55 and older, who further tend to express more trust towards that source in contrast to younger generations (Levada Center 2022a) and account for roughly half of the total population ('Russian Federation. Demographic Changes' n.d.). Equally to the effects of exposure to television in Russia, the medium's meaning-creating capacity is seriously under-researched. This thesis analyses the discursive practices in reporting on the invasion of Ukraine. In doing so, it attempts to understand what messages are transmitted to the public, what discursive strategies are used in the television news, and how the invasion altered these discursive approaches in the coverage of the war in Ukraine.

Chapter One opens a discussion on the literature on news as discourse. Considering propagating nature of the Russian news mediums, the literature on legitimization presents the most suitable ground for further exploration. Still, simple textual discourse analysis is insufficient for the task at hand, taking into account the multimodality of the televised discourse. At the end of the chapter, a new approach to the discursive study of televised news reporting is proposed. The second chapter introduces the methodological tools and sample techniques employed in this work. Particularly, the rationale for choosing a quantifiable qualitative approach together with critical discourse analysis is established there. It further outlines the context in which the research operates. Findings and analysis of the data are presented in the third chapter, where two designated periods of coverage are contrasted using the instruments discussed earlier. After summarizing the main tendencies in coverage ex-ante and ex-post, legitimating and visual techniques of each period are examined in detail. Lastly, the progress

of this work is registered and concluded in the fourth and final chapter. Limitations of the research and suggestions for future studies are mentioned.

CHAPTER ONE: SOCIAL REALITY, DISCOURSE, AND LEGITIMATION

2.1 Social Reality and Information Management

The relationship between social reality and its inhabitants is complex. As Berger and Luckmann (1966) declare, the reality is constructed. Caught in the complex interactions of multiple subjective experiences of real, societies sustain common and objective reality through institutionalization, which structures perpetuate the process of externalization and internalization of knowledge across generations (Berger and Luckmann 1966). Discourses, as systems of linguistic and social practices, shape the way we produce knowledge (Foucault 2013). The way we speak about things “typifies our experiences” (Berger and Luckmann 1966, 53), and the way we practice the production of knowledge dictates the way we speak. The media play a crucial role in the process of reality construction (McQuail 1979). The real, immense as it is, cannot be observed directly and is grasped by the traces coded in the knowledge. In a daily reporting of the news, the media produces and transmits knowledge about the world beyond one’s reach and comprehension. Through the management of information, the media constructs meanings, propagates messages, broadcasts a modified culture and reality, and persuades the public (Michael DeLuca and Peeples 2002; Siegel 2005; Poulakidakos, Veneti, and Fangonikolopoulos 2018). Surely, the constructive power of the media cannot be separated from the influence it exerts on the social and political processes. Its effects are vast and range from impact on political discussions to violence (Perse and Lambe 2016; Valkenburg, Peter, and Walther 2016; Bryant and Finklea 2022).

There are discourses that in themselves are social practices, and there are those which serve as means of speaking and making sense of the practices one adheres to (van Leeuwen 1993, 193). The media discourse operates in both dimensions. While news media is a set of distinct social conventions in and of itself, it is simultaneously a producer and transmitter of a discourse that constitutes the social reality and invites the spectators to make sense of the world

with the semantic toolkit given to them. Televised media can operate through a distinct medium, yet journalistic practices behind news production remain the same. News on the vision follows the logic and the norms the printed press or digital editorials adhere to. The literature on the media discourse, thus, rarely, if never, distinguishes between different modes of professional news production and, subsequently, their discourses. The sole difference between these news mediums lies in the strong reliance of television on dynamic visual elements. Following the literature on multimodal discourse analysis (van Leeuwen and Jewitt 2001; van Leeuwen 2007; Machin and Mayr 2012; 2013), one cannot ignore the importance of imagery in the translation of meanings. Evaluation of legitimization on television requires a review of the literature on news as linguistic and visual discourse.

The chapter first situates the news in the studies of public opinion and critical discourse literature, with a special focus on the media's powers. The next section is concerned with visual discourse and the power of the image presented to the audience. Finally, the following section proceeds to the discussion of legitimization.

2.2 The World Outside: News, Discourse, and Power

Objectivity has long been a troublesome category in the study of mass media (Groeling 2013). The sole task of imagining objective reporting is inconceivable; defining it is impossible. Indeed, the production of the news is invariably a value-laden process (Nišić and Plavšić 2017). The myth of media objectivity is largely sustained by the practices and routines of journalism. On par with scientific knowledge, information is newsworthy to the extent to which professionally accepted practices are employed in its production. The production of news reports is largely dictated by the norms of what professional journalism is *supposed to be*. News discourse is ruled by “norms about what counts as news” (Hoskins and O’Loughlin 2007, 10). The idea of newsworthiness is sustained through practices such as data verification (see Hermida 2012; Brandtzaeg et al. 2016), objectivity and impartiality in reporting (see Eldridge

1993), and stylistic and presentational conventions (van Dijk 1983; 1993; 2009; van Leeuwen 2008). The practices are mostly maintained by administrative and editorial hierarchies that process reports and confirm their newsworthiness (Bell 1995). The professional conventions extend over visual journalism as well, and photo reporting in particular (Perlmutter 2005; Griffin 2010, 8)

In practice, however, the image of the world is inevitably tailored, and the knowledge about it is pseudo-objective. Borrowing from Lippmann (2004), “the facts about modern life do not spontaneously take shape in which they can be known”; they are “given shape by somebody” (345). Over and above, the news is a product of careful selection and presentation (Lippmann 2004, 354). The studies of public opinion have significantly extended the literature on the agenda-setting and framing capacity of the media (e.g., Scheufele 2000; McCombs 2005; Scheufele and Tewksbury 2007; Coleman et al. 2009; Moy, Tewksbury, and Rinke 2016). With limited space and time, news agencies concentrate their efforts on a few issues, thus effectively managing the audience’s attention (Coleman et al. 2009). Objective reporting indeed becomes a problematic category, considering that choices on agenda and manner of presentation of the information are not value-free. As Coleman et al. (2009) note, the public’s attention is directed to the topics deemed as the most significant. Yet the way this decision is made inescapably remains fundamentally normative and, subsequently, value-based. The question is what these values are, which goal they are made to pursue, and who pursues them.

As a set of professional conventions, the news genre dictates what and how is to be presented. Yet, on a deeper level, news constitutes and maintains particular relationships within a discourse it propagates (van Leeuwen 2008, 346). Viewed as the Fourth Estate, news media are part of larger institutional structures tasked to uncover and translate the truth about the surrounding social and political environment. In the Foucauldian sense, the journalistic paradigm functions as a “science-like model” where knowledge is aggregated and processed by an

authoritative social body in a presumably objective manner (Reyes 2011, 593). Borrowing from McCoy's (1988) discussion of Foucault's ideas and media, the latter generally

perform functions that alter our conceptions of knowledge and truth. ... truth is largely articulated through media. The media take and resonate conceptions of justice, fairness and credibility. The media structure the public discourse by creating forms of truth telling, e.g., television promotes image and instance that shape perception and knowledge (84)

Indeed, the power of the media is concealed in the practices news outlets adhere to; practices which bestow a mark of credibility and truthfulness on the messages it translates. Irrespective of the content of the messages, news media discourse has an inalienable capacity to constitute relations of power and authority. Van Dijk (1993; 2009) points out the journalistic power of the presentation of Us versus Them, persisting in the rhetoric, style, and descriptions that media professionals employ. In the same vein, Fowler (1991) speaks of the constructive power of the media, arguing that "any aspect of linguistic structure...can carry ideological significance" (67). Assuming that any form of linguistic expression is intentional, he views the news as the deliberate representation or construction of reality through the non-value-free language medium. Language, for Fowler (1991), "is a semiotic code" which imposes ideological values and which "constructively patterns that of which it speaks" within every discourse (4). This view intersects with Fairclough's (1989) ideas. Building on Foucault's works, Fairclough treats language as a discursive manifestation of social order. For him, discourses reflect the relations of power present in a society, perpetuated by social semiotic codes. Messages of the media spread beyond communities and borders. It is only natural that the media discourse – constitutive of the reality it speaks about – has a detrimental potential for those who are exposed to it and those who are spoken of.

Internalization of the knowledge (and the discourse), in this regard, signifies this potential. Surely, the power of the media is not only confined to the externalization of knowledge but also touches upon the subjective internalization processes. Of particular interest

here are the modeling and manipulative capacities news mediums exercise over the cognition of the masses (van Dijk 1995). By all means, exposure to news coverage is meaningless without understanding the reported knowledge. News exposure is invariably linked to the construction of an internal map of social reality – a ‘preferred model’ as van Dijk (1995, 14; 2015, 367) denotes it – which makes up the core for the persuasion of individuals and misinformation. Agenda-setting and framing serve as one of the numerous ways news media influences how and out of what information the model is built.

The power of the news, thus, resides within the discourse it transmits. Discourse that constitutes a specific picture of reality, and through this constitution, constructs the cognitive maps of the world on which people rely in their evaluations. These maps, nonetheless, are not only a product of linguistic discourse. Discourses are multimodal and signal meanings in a variety of ways that are complementary to language. Image, particularly, is one of the prime mediums used in contemporary mediatized society. Televised news is far from obsolete. Even in the presence of highly digital mediums of news production and sharing, like internet platforms, their dominance still persists. Integrating new internet platforms into themselves, mainstream media in general and television in particular still operate as “a mass vehicle for and organizer of the millions of messages thrown out by the new digital and diffused media” (Hoskins and O’Loughlin 2007, 16).

2.3 The Pictures on the Screen and in Our Heads: News, Visual Discourse, and Power

In its operation, journalistic discourse is not restricted solely to linguistic constitutions. Today, the news is as much visual as it is textual. Linguistically, the news genre is in possession of the power to appear accurate and reliable while simultaneously constructing the reality it presents. Visually, it enjoys the same capability. Since the audience is limited in its ability to observe reality directly, an image appears to be the closest one can get to experiencing political

events occurring beyond one's reach. Van Leeuwen and Jewitt (2001), for instance, assert that images function as traces of reality by bringing transparency to the table.

There are numerous studies indicating the effects and relevance of including visual materials in the reporting (Perlmutter 2005; Fahmy and Wanta 2007; Fahmy and Kim 2008; Dobernig and Lobinger 2010; Griffin 2010). Visuals are powerful in displaying the reality behind the text, being "a piece of objective, factual information, ... an eyewitness" (Konstantinidou 2008, 151) to incidents that require no prior interpretation by media professionals. The inclusion of visual materials enhances the credibility of the claims made. Further, they might cause a greater affective response among the audience by translating suffering (Konstantinidou 2008), strengthening the positive perception of the news event (Fahmy and Kim 2008), or "increasing levels of concern with issues covered" (Fahmy and Wanta 2007, 445). Alternatively, visual discourse is regarded as an image event that is meant to dramatize, shock, and invite the public or transform their vision of reality (Michael DeLuca and Peeples 2002).

Apart from triggering an affective response or boosting the reliability and newsworthiness of the story, visuals play a crucial role in depicting actors and parties involved in the report. In the study on migrants' depiction in the news, Smrdelj and Vogrinc (2020), for instance, address the objectification of migrants that results from particular modes of visual representation, where they are silenced and visually deprived of their agency, becoming a "passive object of control and care" (287). Machin and Mayr (2013), on the other hand, demonstrate how visual support helps linguistic discourse in the personalization of crime. Visual discourse, thus, is not only a part of the journalistic practice yet also a powerful presenter of something that "could not be reasonably expressed linguistically" (Machin and Mayr 2013, 370).

With considerable reliance on visual elements, televised news produces and translates a discourse that is innately multimodal, combining linguistic materials and imagery. Examination of one dimension of such discourse is at risk of missing a parallel narrative that reinforces another. A comprehensive inspection of the television news requires the deconstruction of both.

2.4 Legitimation

No linguistic element is ideologically value-free (Fowler 1991). Despite the practices designed to facilitate objectivity, no news production, let alone reporting, is completely immune to the effects that meanings and social semiotic codes exert through the language used in the media. Setting agendas and framing topics via certain phrasing, news seeks to drive our attention to certain subjects. Legitimation is a regular companion of this process. Berger and Luckmann (1966) define legitimation as something which

provides the ‘explanations’ and justifications of the salient elements of the institutional tradition. (It) ‘explains’ the institutional order by ascribing cognitive validity to its objectivated meanings and (...) justifies the institutional order by giving a normative dignity to its practical imperatives (111).

All in all, there is little difference between democracies and autocracies when it comes to legitimation through the media. Both influence and leverage the media coverage for political gains (Jones-Rooy 2012, 176). All governments seek to legitimize their own policy choices and to de-legitimize opposition. The only difference between the two lies in the extent to which the regime is in control of the media and, subsequently, the degree to which the media environment becomes dominated by one opinion. Naturally, media freedom is considerably higher in democracies compared to autocracies (Stier 2015). The democratic state, however, is not as distant from the media as it is thought to be, even with the latter being uncooperative at times (Entman 2004).

When it comes to war and conflict, all governments try to portray their engagement in a favorable light, justifying it through different discursive strategies. Griffin (2010) is right in

commenting that “public perceptions and public support are never left to chance” when it comes to war (8). The deployment of the military force in Iraq in 2003 was heavily accompanied by media coverage that propagated fear (Calabrese 2005), transmitted Pentagon’s agenda (Kellner 2004), and misinformed the public (Kull, Ramsay, and Lewis 2003) to justify the preventive war. Similarly, Russian involvement in the Ukrainian crisis of 2013 was followed by extensive television coverage that created and sustained an ideological polarization between the two sides of the conflict (Pasitselska 2017; Nygren et al. 2018; Semykina 2021).

Legitimation, both in text and image, is constantly happening in the news media, even beyond the control of parties involved in the political conflict. Polarization and legitimization dynamics could be found in the Gaza War of 2014 between Israel and Palestine, where British and South African reporting on the conflict was committed to the linguistic and visual delegitimation of Palestinians (Tasseron 2021). The same happens in the case of Polish coverage of the 2013 Ukrainian crisis (Nygren et al. 2018). However, whilst biased and excusing reporting might be partially associated with the failure of the free media agencies to challenge the state narrative based on spurious information (Kumar 2006), there are instances where legitimation is deliberate, as in Russia, where mass communication is viewed “as a crucial arena of global politics” (Hutchings and Szostek 2015, 184) which sustains patriotic rhetoric and demonizes opponents of the war policies (Koltsova 2006).

As a discourse, the news serves multiple practical goals and is influenced by various considerations of the political and socio-economic context. The content of journalistic mediums within a relatively free environment is largely determined by market forces (Gentzkow and Shapiro 2008) or influenced by elite discourse (Zaller 1992). On the contrary, in authoritarian regimes with vast control over means of information, the content is mainly and almost exclusively dependent on the interests of the regime and the elites in power. Legitimation is extremely important for the survival of autocratic regimes (Gerschewski 2013), which seek to

perpetuate their existence beyond mandated time. In a world where brute force is difficult to justify, extensive control over media becomes critical. In the economic analysis of autocratic regimes, Guriev and Treisman (2015) underline the importance that power over the production and dissemination of information has for the dictator's survival. Particularly, dictators sustain the regime by convincing the public of their competence instead of relying on physical power. Just like any government, authoritarian regimes are constantly engaged in the process of legitimation of their activity. There is, however, a significant difference in the extent they manipulate information (see Stier 2015; Dukalskis and Patane 2019). Understandably, such governments do not try to exert complete control over the agenda but to balance between sustaining some degree of credibility of the media and attempts to legitimize themselves (Jones-Rooy 2012)

Irrespective of the intention, legitimation occurs through a single set of discursive strategies. Based on the work of Berger and Luckmann (1966), van Leeuwen (2007) distinguishes four categories of legitimation: authorization, moral evaluation, rationalization, and mythopoesis.

Authorization, as a legitimation that occurs through reference to some authority, personal or impersonal, operates on the notion that an act is mandated by something or someone "in whom institutionalized authority is vested" (van Leeuwen and Wodak 1999, 104). Authority might be *personal*, as when the act is empowered by an individual actor (expert, role model, or person), or *impersonal*, with general reference to the institution, legislation, tradition, or notion of conformity. Of particular interest is the authority based on tradition or conformity, considering that authority there lies outside institutional structures like law and agencies. Instead, it originates from commonly accepted customs, practices, habits, or simply the quantity of people performing an action or its frequency.

Moral evaluation is the legitimation that refers to moral values. As van Leeuwen (2007) remarks, this type of legitimation could be both denoted through simple moral characterization ('bad' or 'good') or "only hinted at" through linkage to "specific discourses of moral value" (97). He further distinguishes three types of moral legitimation: *evaluation*, *abstraction*, and *analogy*. *Evaluations* are typically made by using adjectives that assign particular characteristics and relate them to certain values (98), whereas *abstractions* are referrals to practices that moralize and justify specific behavior. Resembling abstractions in marrying practices with morality, *analogies* draw parallels between several practices, praising them by equalizing to already moralized ones.

Legitimization through rationalization mainly concerns "the goals and uses of institutionalized social action, and...the knowledge society has constructed to endow them with cognitive validity" (van Leeuwen 2007, 92). This kind of legitimation is manifested in two types. The first type, *instrumental rationalization*, is tightly associated with the process of the action. Here, legitimation would be grounded in the purpose of the action – its means, goals, and effects (101). Notably, for the purpose to be legitimizing, it "must contain an element of moralization" (van Leeuwen 2007, 101). The second type, *theoretical rationalization*, is embedded into the state of action or object, some form of the truth that explicitly reveals why something is the way it is. *Definition*, its first form, is constitutive of the activity in relation to another one, both of which are linked by attribution (something is) or signification (something means). The definition is typically presented in objectivised and generalized form. The second form, *explanation*, is constitutive of the activity in relation to the general practice or nature of the activity in which one is engaged. Here, for instance, legitimation would be based on the idea that the activity is "appropriate to the nature" of the actors (van Leeuwen 2007, 104). The third and final form, *prediction*, is a scientifically or expertly defined pragmatic scheme related

to the practice. Generally, these are based on assertions that are explicit and debatable which differentiates them from moral evaluations.

Finally, mythopoesis is a legitimation that happens in the form of storytelling. Punishment and reward are the cornerstones of a story. The former legitimizes practice by narrating how deviant practice leads to undesirable ends (a *cautionary tale*). The latter, on the other hand, justifies the practice by showing how the protagonist's dedication to socially accepted activity is rewarded (a *moral tale*).

2.5 Multimodal Legitimation

Although van Leeuwen (2007) touches upon the multimodality of legitimation, his legitimation strategies do not reasonably capture a visual representation of transitivity – a depiction of what people are doing or not doing (Machin and Mayr 2012, 104). Legitimation, in general, is predominantly constituted by processes rather than states of being. Authorization, for instance, is largely a process of someone or something mandating and justifying the activity. Even in the case of tradition or conformity, the reference is made to what people do and how they do it. Legitimation, thus, is predominantly a dynamic category. Whether negative or positive in effects, its dynamism is constitutive of some action which, importantly, is not always performed by a well-defined agent; sometimes, the agency might as well be visually obscured, though reported linguistically.

Despite the fact that visuals are employed to buttress linguistic discourse, their use in media is not straightforward and repetitive of linguistic legitimations. Visual manipulations consistently take place, and, at times, imagery in news coverage is used to convey a subtext message that objectifies agents (Breazu and Machin 2018) and marginalizes them (End 2019). Legitimation can be portrayed visually, yet such depiction would mainly take the shape of explicitly crafted visual panels that clearly translate the meanings. Otherwise, they risk being misunderstood and irrelevant to the message. The issue at hand is the explicitness precisely.

News visuals are a powerful yet discreet tool. Propagation, particularly, cannot always show what it argues for. Instead, it visually crafts circumstantial evidence by displaying numerous tiny traces of propagated reality, designed in such a way as to conceal the political messages meant for the public by implying and signaling meanings. A general grasp of legitimation strategies is unable to catch intricate details and meanings hidden in the visuals. Each strategy can be visually represented in numerous ways. Deconstruction of multimodal discourse requires a more sophisticated and precise tool that would complement legitimation in the visual domain.

Machin and Mayr's (2012) framework for multimodal discourse analysis is a suitable tool for this task. Taking Halliday's (1978) verb processes as a basis, their analysis scheme extends process types to the visual representation of transitivity and, thus, conveniently presents additional dimensions for visual deconstruction. Six processes are distinguished:

Material – which relates to the processes of doing. Typically, doing is regarded as an act of consequence, positive or negative. Material act results in something beneficial or detrimental to someone or something, as in “the parliament ratified the convention,” where the parliament as an agent is occupied in the act of ratification. Linguistically, an active and passive agency in such a process might be crucial, as the same actor might be depicted differently, depending on the context. Van Dijk (as quoted in Machin and Mayr 2012, 106), for example, exhibits how ethnic minorities are only depicted as active agents in performing negative actions and as passive ones when the negative action is performed onto them.

Mental – which relates to the process of sensing (understanding, feeling, and perceiving). Mental processes allow getting an internal view of the agent, demonstrating one's preoccupation with personal worries, thoughts, or reactions. This type is closely associated with humanization as the affective side of one's being is emphasized. At the same time, mental processes are closely tied to passivity as mental action is not translated into a physical one.

Behavioral – which relates to the process of psychological and physical behavior. This process is individual and non-transitive, meaning that it is experienced by one individual, whilst the act does not produce some tangible impact. Consequently, the behavioral process would not naturally suggest that “the actor has a particularly strong agency” nor that the action has a goal or beneficiary (Machin and Mayr 2012, 109)

Verbal – which relates to the process of expression and its many forms. Looking back at Machin and Mayr (2012), we deal with a *sayer*, *receiver*, and *verbiage*. The sayer is typically the one who actively engages in the act of expression by verbally articulating some idea. The receiver, on the contrary, is a passive agent to whom the act is projected. Finally, the verbiage is a “nominalised statement of the verbal process” as in the phrases such as “detailed account” or “short report.”

Relational – which relates to the state of existing in relation to another thing. Linguistically, the relation is signified through the use of “to be” and related words. Possession (“have”) is an additional relational process.

Existential – which is related to the process of existing or happening. Linguistically, this process type impersonalizes the action by substituting the agent with “there is” and “there are” and, thus, “obscuring agency and responsibility” (Machin and Mayr 2012, 110). Visually, displaying inanimate objects on the screen might be regarded as an existential depiction.

In marrying these two frameworks, it is essential to attribute these process types to each legitimization strategy. By doing so, the composite multimodal framework would allow one to register intricate and subtle differences in the legitimation of various practices and agencies in the visual domain. The attribution has to revolve around the primacy of the linguistic element. As asserted previously, the image by and of itself is considered to be an objective medium, a visual trace of reality, which exists outside of the frames of interpretation. When an interpretation is not provided to the viewer, it becomes his task to make sense of the image

placed before his eyes. Images, thus, are complementary to linguistic discourse and cannot bear meaning outside of it. Correspondingly, six process types must be subjected to legitimation strategies.

Each legitimation strategy is assigned the same set of process types (see Table 1). Considering that sub-categories of each strategy are linguistically distinct from each other, each subcategory has to be treated in its own right, although visually, there could be no differences in depiction approaches. This is done to evaluate the frequency of specific depiction approaches usage in relation to certain legitimation strategies. For the sake of practicality and similarities of strategies, authorization is re-grouped into three pillars: personal authority (personal, expert, and role model), impersonal institutional authority (institutions, laws, rules, and regulations), and impersonal social authority (tradition and conformity). As for the visual representations, the relational process is not included as it is visually troublesome to deal with. Defining a relation in visual terms is problematic as everything on the screen is interlinked and is constitutive of a relation. On the other hand, identifying a relationship requires a deeper analysis and interpretation of each visual frame which slows down the process.

Table 1: Joint Legitimation Framework

Legitimation strategy		Visual representation of transitivity	Description	Code
Primary Node	Derivative Node	Secondary Node		
Authorization	Personal	Material	An authorized individual is depicted performing a transitive action that has tangible consequences.	AuthPers Mat
		Mental	An authorized individual is depicted as processing information or experiencing emotions.	AuthPers Ment
		Behavioural	An authorized individual is depicted performing non-transitive physical movements.	AuthPers Behav
		Verbal	An authorized individual is depicted engaging in a speech act / Verbiage is displayed on the screen.	AuthPers Verb
		Existential	An individual is not depicted. Instead, visuals display an environment relevant to the subject of authorization.	AuthPers Exist
	Impersonal institutional	Material	A representative of an institution is depicted performing a transitive action that has tangible consequences.	AuthInst Mat
		Mental	A representative of an institution is depicted processing information or experiencing emotions.	AuthInst Ment
		Behavioural	A representative of an institution is depicted performing non-transitive physical movements.	AuthInst Behav
		Verbal	A representative of an institution is depicted expressing an institutional position / Verbiage is displayed on the screen.	AuthInst Verb
		Existential	The physical manifestation of an institution is depicted or the environment relevant to the subject of authorization.	AuthInst Exist
	Impersonal social (conformity and tradition)	Material	A group of individuals is depicted performing a transitive action that has tangible consequences.	AuthSoc Mat
		Mental	A group of individuals is depicted processing information or experiencing emotions.	AuthSoc Ment
		Behavioural	A group of individuals is depicted performing non-transitive physical movements.	AuthSoc Behav
		Verbal	A group of individuals is depicted engaging in a speech act / Individual arguing for tradition or conformity is depicted.	AuthSoc Verb
		Existential	An environment or attributes relevant to the subject are displayed.	AuthSoc Exist
Moral evaluation	Abstractions	Material	Individuals depicted performing a transitive action that has tangible consequences.	Abst Mat
		Mental	Individuals depicted experiencing emotions.	Abst Ment
		Behavioural	Individuals depicted performing the action of behavioral nature.	Abst Behav
		Verbal	Individuals depicted engaging in speech act / Verbiage is displayed on the screen.	Abst Verb
		Existential	Environment, its attributes, or actions with no apparent agent are depicted.	Abst Exist
	Analogies	Material	Individuals depicted performing a transitive action that has tangible consequences.	Analogy Mat
		Mental	Individuals depicted experiencing emotions.	Analogy Ment
		Behavioural	Individuals depicted performing non-transitive physical movements.	Analogy Behav
		Verbal	Individuals depicted engaging in speech act / Verbiage is displayed on the screen.	Analogy Verb
		Existential	Environment, its attributes, or actions with no apparent agent are depicted.	Eval Exist
	Evaluations	Material	Individuals depicted performing a transitive action that has tangible consequences.	Eval Mat
		Mental	Individuals depicted experiencing emotions.	Eval Ment
		Behavioural	Individuals depicted performing non-transitive physical movements.	Eval Behav
		Verbal	Individuals depicted engaging in speech act / Verbiage is displayed on the screen.	Eval Verb
		Existential	Environment, its attributes, or actions with no apparent agent are depicted.	Eval Exist
Rationalization	Instrumental	Material	Individuals depicted performing a transitive action that has tangible consequences.	InstRat Mat
		Mental	Individuals depicted processing information or experiencing emotions.	InstRat Ment
		Behavioural	Individuals depicted performing non-transitive physical movements.	InstRat Behav

		Verbal	Individuals depicted engaging in speech act / Verbiage is displayed on the screen.	InstRat Verb
		Existential	Graphical depiction of data / Environment, its attributes or actions with no apparent agent are depicted.	InstRat Exist
	Theoretical	Material	Individuals depicted performing a transitive action that has tangible consequences.	TheoryRat Mat
		Mental	Individuals depicted processing information or experiencing emotions.	TheoryRat Ment
		Behavioural	Individuals depicted performing non-transitive physical movements.	TheoryRat Behav
		Verbal	Individuals depicted engaging in speech act / Verbiage is displayed on the screen.	TheoryRat Verb
		Existential	Graphical depiction of data / Environment, its attributes or actions with no apparent agent are depicted.	TheoryRat Exist
Mythopoesis	-	Material	Individuals depicted performing a transitive action that has tangible consequences.	Myth Mat
		Mental	Individuals depicted processing information or experiencing emotions.	Myth Ment
		Behavioural	Individuals depicted performing non-transitive physical movements.	Myth Behav
		Verbal	Individuals depicted engaging in speech act / Verbiage is displayed on the screen.	Myth Verb
		Existential	A historical chronicle is displayed / Environment, its attributes or actions with no apparent agent are depicted.	Myth Exist

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

3.1. Context

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 takes its root in the events of the Ukrainian crisis of 2013, which was caused by the question of defining a European trajectory of Ukrainian foreign policy. The public unrest was triggered by the refusal of President Yanukovich to commit to the integration process into the European Union and the expectation that Ukraine was going to pursue closer integration with Russia. In the wake of protests, an upheaval occurred in the autonomous republic of Crimea that was reportedly conducted by Russian military personnel (Ray n.d.). A new government in Crimea was instated, and the peninsula was annexed by Russia through a widely criticized referendum. The pro-Russian separatist movement soon solidified in South-Eastern Ukraine in Donbas, where two regions pronounced people's republics of Donetsk and Luhansk. A ceasefire between the newly pronounced republics and Ukrainian governmental forces was set after the conclusion of the Minsk Agreement of 2015. In 2021, Russia began to actively station its military forces along the border with Ukraine and held several joint military exercises with Belarus. At the same time, the Russian government addressed demands on security guarantees to NATO, insisting on containment of its expansion and reinstating its 1997 configuration. After the failure of negotiations with the U.S. and other NATO member-states, the Russian government recognized two people's republics on February 21, 2022. On February 24, a so-called special military operation was announced, which aimed at demilitarization and denazification of Ukraine.

3.2 Data Collection

Not any televised news program should be subject to scrutiny. The social construction of 'objective' reality, important as it is, takes effect when a message is translated to the wider public. Some news outlets are preferred to others. Preferences of Russian viewership are not constant and have been subject to change since before the invasion. This study samples stories

from the weekly analytical news program called Vesti Nedeli (translated as Weekly News), which airs every Sunday on Rossiya 1 federal channel. The choice of the program is attributed to three reasons. First, Vesti Nedeli shares the rank of the highest viewed program in the information-analytical segment on television with “Itogi Nedeli s Iradoiy Zeinalovoi” (“The results of the week with Irada Zeinalova”) on NTV channel (Mediascope n.d.); it is the second most viewed program on Rossiya 1 channel after the local newscasts, which diverge across subjects of the federation; and it is consistently in the top ten viewed programs across all TV channels in general (Mediascope n.d.). Airing since 2016, Itogi Nedeli with Irada Zeinalova rather quickly became one of the most viewed analytical news programs. Nonetheless, Vesti Nedeli enjoys a longer presence on television, being broadcasted for over two decades since 2001. Throughout the years, it has built a consistent viewership and has become a brand. At the very least, the program has been reporting on Ukraine since the inception of the crisis in 2013. Second, Vesti Nedeli is also broadcasted by Rossiya 24 (another channel owned by the same federal company), which widens its coverage. Third, given that Vesti Nedeli is a carefully compiled recap of the week’s most meaningful events, its contents should generally reflect the preferred narrative to be shown to the Russian public.

The sample consists of five months of coverage from November 2021 to April 2022, with two full months prior to the invasion and two months after. As the invasion happened in February, three episodes in that month aired before the invasion and one after. The average timing of the programs accounts for almost two hours of coverage. Importantly, this timing increased to three hours after February 24 – the day of the invasion. Correspondingly, any differences in the number of news programs before and after can be balanced by the one-hour increase that occurred after the deployment of the Russian military. An important note should be made regarding the number of episodes in December and January. Vesti Nedeli was not broadcasted for four weeks in total throughout December and January due to the new year

holidays. One episode is missing in March 2022 from the online archives for reasons unknown. To roughly even the number of episodes, one newscast from the end of November 2021 is included in the sample.

The total of 14 newscasts is derived from the Smotrim online television platform, which keeps an archive of every program airing on major Russian television channels. The sample, thus, amounts to roughly 2040 minutes of news in total which includes reporting on themes other than Ukraine. The platform does not supply downloading options, yet provides the content free of charge. Considering this, news reports were recorded and then automatically transcribed by online software. With minor structural and grammatical mistakes, the corpus of newscasts was acquired. News reports not related to the subject in question were not recorded, while the episodes in their entirety were screened.

Based on own calculus of recorded material length, coverage related to Ukraine makes up somewhere around 835 minutes, with about 335 minutes of news reports before and 500 minutes after February 24. All in all, 14 episodes of *Vesti Nedeli* should suffice in adequately representing the contents of the program. Preoccupied with the question of how many episodes are enough for an accurate assessment of a show's content, Manganello et al. (2008) exhibit statistically that five randomly selected episodes, on average, provide researchers with a representative sample. Sample of 14 episodes, thus, is an exhaustive collection of data.

3.3 Data Analysis Tools

This study follows the logic based on the synthesis of critical discourse analysis and coding analysis of legitimation strategies, similar to that exemplified in Simonsen's (2019) study of war discourse. Critical discourse analysis is central to the examination of the ways Russian television news constructs the reality and narratives within it. The in-depth contextual approach of discourse analysis allows one to grasp the very nature of these constructions. At the same time, however, it cannot effectively trace the changes occurring throughout time.

Changes are essential as they tell a lot about how narratives develop, as well as how producers of discourse want the public to perceive reality in particular times and circumstances. To register these changes, the study relies on coding analysis as a qualitative tool that delivers quantifiable results.

The data analysis, thus, proceeds in a two-step approach. First, the accumulated corpus is coded according to the joint framework of legitimization strategies and visual process types. Linguistic narration remains the main point of reference as we primarily look at legitimization. As soon as the legitimization strategy is identified, the corresponding visual representation is specified. Textual item, thus, is coded in a way to indicate both type of legitimization and its representation on the screen. Naturally, an item is assigned with a code only when legitimization there is present. Item is treated as a single semantic element. In other words, the researcher does not code by sentence but by articulation of a single idea. Code, thus, might be assigned to several sentences or limited to one. In cases when a single legitimization extends over passages, as in mythopoesis, coding treats elements separately when visual representations diverge.

The second step of analysis is a closer qualitative examination of the strategies themselves. With coded data acquired, the practice of televised reporting is evaluated against specificities and dominant visual representations. The second feature is central to this part of the analysis: linguistic legitimization may be accompanied by several video representations, and thus, the predominant visual frame should be registered.

Though the project seeks to explore how coverage changes, it realizes that not every item in the corpus can be coded. Legitimation is a highly specific framework that predominantly recognizes structures that are sequential and relational: with minor exceptions, legitimization unfolds itself through referencing where elements are presented in a sequence and where one mandates another. As the initial screening of the materials has shown, news coverage frequently uses constructions that are constitutive of reality yet are not legitimizing in van Leeuwen's

sense. Still, there are plenty of elements that could be regarded as legitimizing but are not recognized by the framework used in this research. This limitation is further addressed in the following sections.

CHAPTER THREE: TO INVADE OR NOT TO INVADE?

The analysis reveals interesting results which suggest the change in tone and modes of presentations employed in the designated period. The general look at the referencing tendencies suggests that pre-invasion coverage was heavily accompanied by rationalization frames, in contrast to the predominance of authorizations and moralizations in post-invasion reporting (Figure 1).

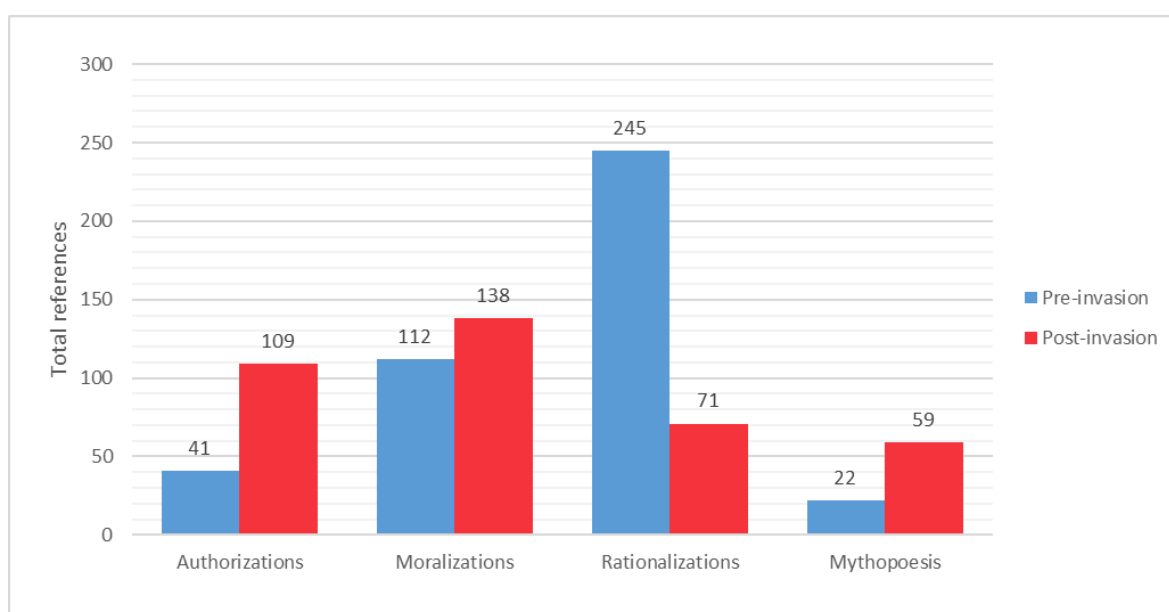


Figure 1: Differences in the use of legitimization strategies

The total number of coded references before the invasion amounts to 420 items, whereas only 377 items were coded after, notwithstanding the increased time of broadcasting from two to three and a half or almost four hours. The inclusion of lengthy field reports from Ukraine devoid of legitimizing language is the main reason for this.

Out of 420 references registered prior to February 24, more than half (245) are coded as rationalizations, with 108 of them being instrumental and 137 theoretical. The picture is drastically different after February 24: out of 377 references, rationalizations amount to only 71 items, whereas 138 referrals are moralizing and 109 are authoritative. Interestingly, the use

of mythopoetic elements has doubled in post-invasion reporting. These differences, as well as visual representations, are discussed in the following sub-sections.

One of the reasons for the divergence in legitimization strategies could be attributed to the main subjects covered in the broadcasts. Pre-invasion coverage was mainly focused on diplomatic efforts and interstate negotiations, while post-invasion – on warfare and interpretations of and responses to foreign reactions to the war. As, mainly, events on the state executive level were reported in the former; the rationalizations largely served to interpret and explain what is concealed behind these and what consequences this or that action is likely to cause. In the meantime, the latter coverage concentrated on the invasion itself, which necessitated authorizations of military actions by the executives and which was accompanied by reports by experts and institutions. Moralized elements fulfilled various purposes: starting from buttressing the image of the Russian military as the force that brings justice and ending with stigmatizing actors opposed to the war through moralized language.

4.1 Pre-Invasion Coverage: War Hysteria and Enforcement of Peace

The topic of Ukraine was steadily covered in all news episodes since November 28 and up to the start of the invasion, with time dedicated to the subject growing each month. This way, November and December episodes together spent 80 minutes in total, reporting on the crisis around the Russian military movements, whereas similar reporting amounted to 255 minutes in January and February.

Throughout the months, the themes and topics remained unchanged. One way or another, all newscasts would cover the following interrelated subjects: NATO expansion in Ukraine, European collective security architecture, the humanitarian crisis in Donbas, and rumors of a possible Russian invasion.



On the screen: "Donbas: Getting hotter." 16.01.2022

Rumors of invasion, particularly, were consistently attributed to the mass hysteria in the Western hemisphere.

Citing the possibility of such a catastrophic scenario, the American side requested today's telephone contact with the presidents, although it was planned to have this conversation early next week, on Monday. Similar requests for urgent telephone calls were made by other members of the administration, who spoke with many Russian colleagues yesterday and today. That is, the tension around the invasion was coordinated, and the hysteria reached its apogee ('Vesti Nedeli. 13/02/2022' 2022).

The hysteria was largely rationalized to be a concealed effort of the NATO block in general, and the US in particular, to shift the attention from the Russian suggestions on the new arrangements of collective security. Thematically, NATO politics is married to the Ukrainian question as well as U.S. politics. The United States, in particular, is consistently portrayed as the actor which advances its self-interests both directly through its foreign policy and indirectly through NATO and its European counterparts. Coverage of Ukraine is, thus, virtually indivisible from that of U.S. politics and politics of European states that happen to be members of NATO. In this regard, the tone of reporting on Ukraine has not changed from what it has been a decade ago. Narratives of the 2013 crisis were dominated by similar themes (Hutchings and Szostek 2015).

The coding analysis has shown that the coverage was significantly dominated by rationalization frames (Figure 2). The rationalization strategy was used 245 times in aggregate, in contrast to moralizations which were employed twice as low, with 113 coded references. Authorizing and mythopoetic elements are the least frequent, with 41 and 22 references, respectively.

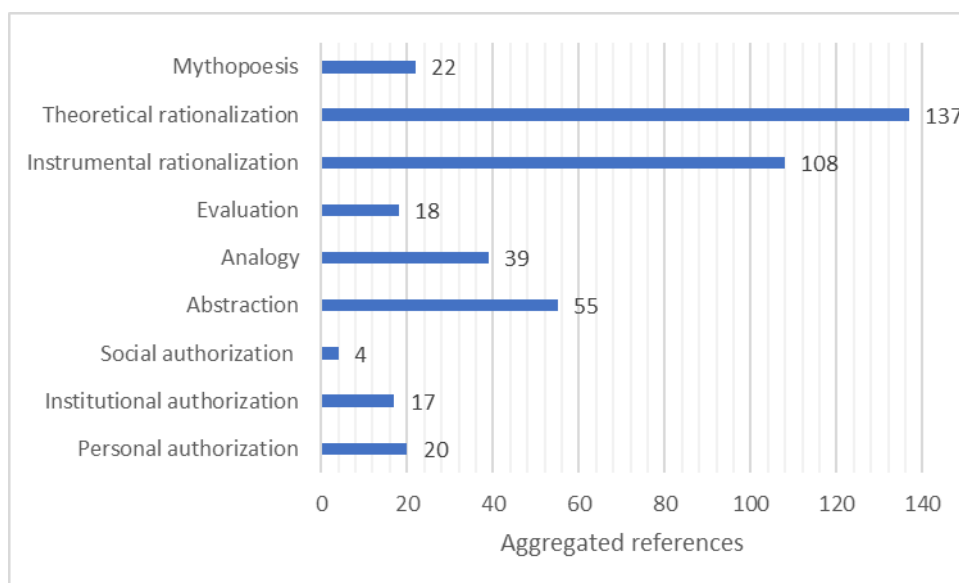


Figure 2: Pre-invasion legitimization

Yet again, given the robust focus on bilateral interactions between Russia and the U.S. or Russian and European states, theoretical rationalizations appear to be a suitable choice for coverage. Theorizations are not instantly associated with something which draws the wide support of the public – moralizations, in this sense, are far more effective. In matters of highly technical high-level negotiations, public support is rarely required. At the same time, however, the producer of discourse is expected to explain what drives a particular behavior of the state executives. All in all, pre-invasion politics is interpreted through the prism of national interests, and thus, the behavior of all actors is rationalized in one way or another.

One of the points is very simple; we talked about it yesterday too. Of course, every country has the right to choose the most appropriate way to ensure its security, but this should be done in a way that does not violate the interests of other countries and does not undermine the security of other countries, Russia in this case ('Vesti Nedeli. 12/12/2021' 2021).

The language of President Putin himself perfectly illustrates the major differences between the two periods. All statements made by Putin before February 24 are rationalizing – no matter what he speaks of, he provides lengthy explanations which at times incorporate technical references:

It is, above all, a threat to us that may emanate from that territory. If the infrastructure expands further... I will repeat again if there are any complexes on the territory of Ukraine, then the impact flight time to Moscow will be seven, ten, and, in the case of the placement of hypersonic weapons, five minutes ('Vesti Nedeli. 05/12/2021' 2021).

In a sense, the rhetoric of other officials and the news program itself takes over Putin's tone. Explanations, definitions, and especially predictions, thus, become the main mode of interpreting the events.

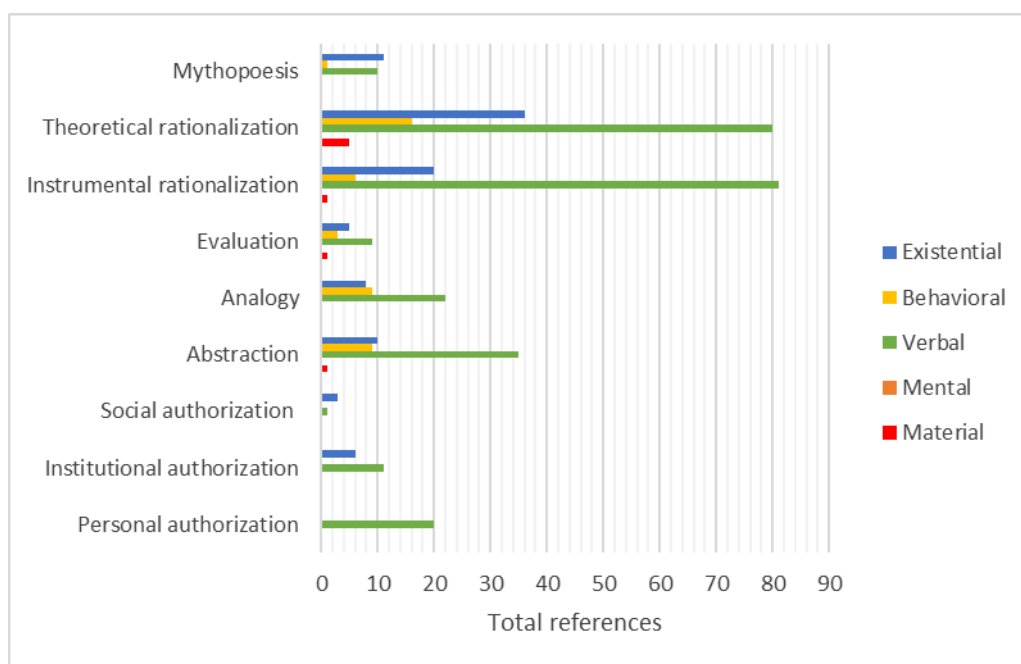
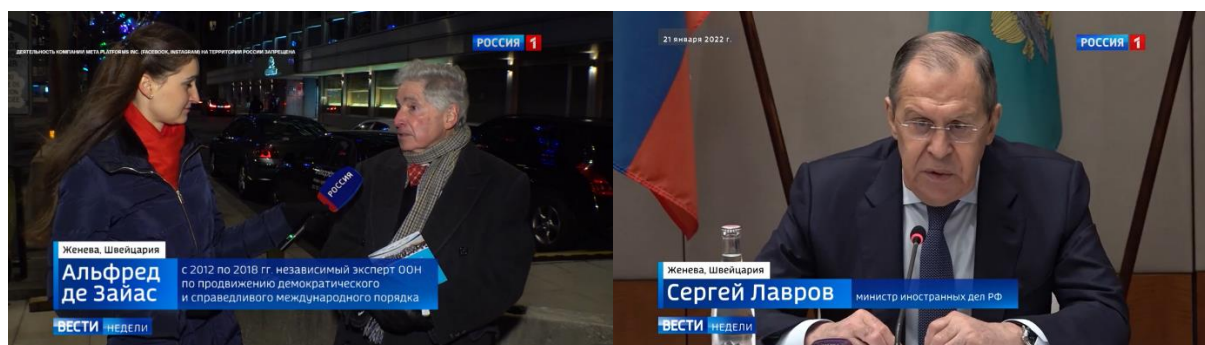


Figure 3: Visual representations of pre-invasion legitimization

Interestingly, verbal, existential, and behavioral are the predominant modes of visual representation of legitimization across all categories (Figure 3). This could be attributed to the fact that the pre-invasion news largely reported on diplomatic interactions, opinion exchanges, and statements that presupposed the preponderance of verbal acts. Material, mental and

relational representations are hardly employed. Notably, that does not mean that the latter are not depicted altogether but rather that they are used in news items that are not legitimizing. These items can be informational and constitutional yet do not fit into any of the legitimization strategies.

Verbal processes and verbiages are by far the most frequently used ones. These extend to commentaries made by the news host, experts, soldiers, and civilians in Donbas, speeches of the government officials, and excerpts from reports, articles, and posts displayed on a screen. Rationalization, whether theoretical or instrumental, is heavily reliant on the display of expertise, predictions, and explanations that are visually and linguistically articulated. As van Leeuwen (2007) notes, rationalizations include some sort of expertise, yet they do not directly refer to one. Similarly, a viewer might see visual indicators of one's expert authority in the form of a footnote with the name and qualification of the speaker or the venue, which signals affiliation of the speaker with a structure of authority, but at the end of the day, it is the argumentation and reasoning which matters in such commentaries. Verbal representations are important in the sense that they make statements believable when one sees visual evidence of someone actually performing a speech act and articulating the rational frame. In this sense, they are a reinforcement of linguistic legitimization.



[On the left]: Alfred de Zayas, a former United Nations independent expert on the Promotion of a Democratic and Equitable International Order from 2012 to 2018, explaining the rationale behind Russia-NATO tensions to Vesti Nedeli reporter. [On the right]: Minister of foreign affairs Sergey Lavrov, the main commentator on foreign policy interactions who often explicates the nature and meaning of foreign activities

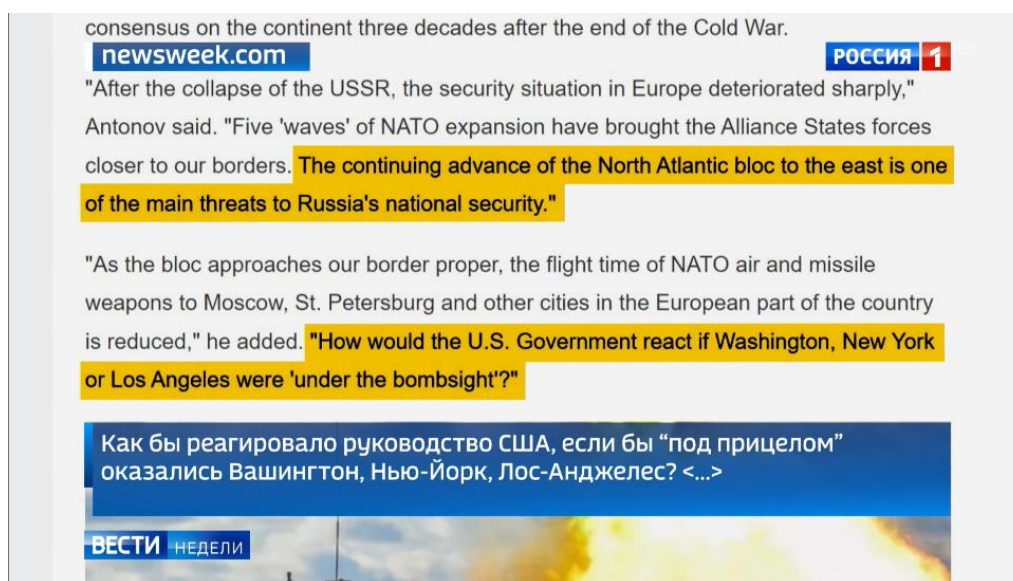
Commentaries vary in frequency with which particular types of actors express them. Typically, every news story is preceded by a lengthy introduction and followed by comments made by the host of the program, Dmitri Kisilev. Following the conventions of the genre, Kisilev puts forward a message and sets the tone of the story. Nonetheless, his remarks are by no means central to the whole rationalizing effort, though complementary to it. The lion's share of rationalizations is put forward by the government officials who explain the nature or the consequences of the political actions. Generally, these are Russian executives like President Putin, minister of foreign affairs Lavrov, and lower-ranked officials like deputy ministers, ambassadors, and generals who define actions and explicate the purpose behind them. Although such explanations could be perceived as authorizing acts, they lack any reference to the authority and opt for presenting a chain of reasoning and thus cannot be effectively recognized as authorizations.

Secondary to rationalizations are the interview commentaries, often provided by seemingly independent observers, as well as the comments by Kisilev himself. These are generally supplementary to primary rationalization actors. Opinions of the foreign press are also often incorporated into broadcasting to add weight to a message. Vesti Nedeli especially favors the American Fox News channel, which repeatedly criticized the US involvement in the Ukrainian question. CNN is usually the second choice of referrals. Naturally, the inclusion of foreign press serves to support the rationalizations invoked by the Russian narrative, taking into account that clips from the former complement arguments made by the latter. Russian television news masterfully crafts the illusion that its narrative and vision of reality are not only rationally sound but are also shared by those who live on the other side of the Atlantic.



Incorporated excerpts from foreign television newscasts

Direct speech acts are periodically substituted with verbiage, which serves as evidence displayed to the public. Reports, articles, and leaked papers are exhibited on the screen, highlighting specific bits that support the claims made by the anchors, reporters, and other speakers. Verbiages, thus, are frequently used in tandem with rationalizations.



A typical format of verbiage in Vesti Nedeli

The second in frequency, existential representations are mainly presented in two ways. In the first one, linguistic discourse is simply followed by still-life clips of infrastructure: venues where negotiations take place, headquarters of international institutions, destroyed buildings, shattered glass, and trenches. For the last one, such depictions are effective in both rationalization and moralization efforts. In rationalization that, for instance, said attacks in Donbas take place, a trace of the constituted reality is immediately displayed on the screen, supporting the claim. On the other hand, existential visual elements submerge the viewer into the environment in which a reporter is speaking, providing a richer ground for an affective response. The second way in which an existential visual item is depicted is through graphical data. Naturally, these are part of the explanatory parts of the discourse.



Graphical representation of the data: The map of NATO military stationed in Europe

Watching the news, an average spectator is presented with a highly rationalized picture of the world uncovered by the anchor, reporters, and state officials. Kisilev himself often suggests sorting things out. That is precisely what happens in the eyes of the viewer, who is given an interpretation of the reality out there, an interpretation that is supposed to become a model for the understanding of the world beyond. Content-wise, rationalizations are hardly

diverse. Phrasing varies, yet the messages largely repeat the same ideas. One of the major reoccurring themes is the Western states' interest in the warfare on the territory of Ukraine:

Deliveries to Ukraine of helicopters and unmanned aerial vehicles and aircraft are pushing the Ukrainian authorities to rare and dangerous steps. Kyiv does not comply with the Minsk agreement; the Ukrainian armed forces announced the beginning of the use of anti-tank-guided Javelin missiles, which were supplied by the United States...As a result, the already tense situation in the east of the country is worsening ('Vesti Nedeli. 12/12/2021' 2021)

The same message is communicated throughout the whole sampled period and articulated in a plethora of ways by numerous speakers across several stories. Russia is actively negating its interest in the war and relates these intentions to other actors.

You know that Western partners in violation of the Minsk agreements pump Kyiv with weapons and by no means defensive. So what our American colleagues want to achieve is difficult to say. But I said during the address that the impression is that you're making these speeches... this meeting... you're provoking things that shouldn't happen ('Vesti Nedeli. 06/02/2022' 2022)

Blame-shifting and uncovering of the true intentions go beyond the simple foreign activity of Western partners. In the realpolitik picture of the world, foreign interests of the states also take root in domestic hardships. A conclusive rationale presented to the viewer, thus, explains why the prime minister of Great Britain or the president of Turkey is interested in war:

Boris Johnson's British cabinet is voluptuously waiting for this war because it also shifts attention from the internal crisis government to the already programmed Russian invasion ('Vesti Nedeli. 20/02/2022' 2022).

Similar interests are attributed to Ukrainian officials:

Fuelling such sentiments is very beneficial for Ukrainian. It is easier to earn electoral points on deception and intimidation of the population ('Vesti Nedeli. 06/02/2022' 2022)

By telling and displaying this discourse, the news producers cement the thesis that Russian executives "enforce peace" by urging their counterparts to negotiate a new security structure ('Vesti Nedeli. 20/02/2022' 2022). The rationalized repetition effectively constructs a vivid image of reality in mind, a model by which other stories are evaluated. These frames

are consistently used in every episode of the program, where at least three news reports directly cover domestic and foreign politics of other nations like the U.S., Ukraine, and Germany.

In contrast to rationalization, moral evaluations are diversified and by no means aligned. Abstractions and analogies are commonly used – sometimes as satirical instruments and sometimes as ridicule. Both come up in the discourse of journalists and executives that legitimize their stance by de-legitimizing the actions of others. Bilateral negotiations that Russia conducted are equated to ‘chewing’ of the official position to the Western partners implying a poor ability of the latter to understand and accept a point of view distinct from its own (‘Vesti Nedeli. 16/01/2022’ 2022). A meeting between foreign ministries of the United Kingdom and Russia concerning Ukraine is described as “a talk between the mute and the deaf” (‘Vesti Nedeli. 13/02/2022’ 2022) where Liz Trass, then-minister of foreign affairs, is subsequently ridiculed by being both. Mocking of foreign leadership is not new to the discourse, as the same techniques were used in the 2013 crisis (Hutchings and Szostek 2015).

Satire, irony, and sarcasm are used pretty much in every news story. However, not every belittling element is recognized by legitimization strategies. Sarcastic commentaries, for instance, virtually never fall under conventional legitimization. Meanwhile, such subtle ridicule serves legitimization as much as other strategies, legitimizing the practices of one by de-legitimizing that of another one. The same is true for a pronounced mockery. President Zelensky, personally, was honored by four separate news stories dedicated to his comedic career. By drawing parallels between his past and present, the anchor and news stories question the professionalism of the Ukrainian president. Citing the incident at the 2022 Munich security conference when Zelensky’s headset stopped working, the reporter, for example, says:

The situation is catastrophic, but the clown tries to laugh under any circumstances. His headphones are broken (‘Vesti Nedeli. 20/02/2022’ 2022)

At least twice, different news episodes broadcasted a comedic performance where Zelensky plays Ukraine's anthem on the piano with his reproductive organ. He was further compared to other famous comedians. Such depictions, both linguistic and visual, are hardly grasped by legitimization strategies. In the meantime, legitimization there happens by juxtaposing Russian and Ukrainian practices through the prism of past expertise. By showing clips of the Ukrainian president in his past comedic role at the beginning of the news story, the anchor and the reporters imply the analogy without properly articulating it.



Analogies to the character of Zelensky

Bizarrely, analogies are also drawn by reference to popular culture. Nonetheless, here they take the shape of mythopoetic structures, particularly the narrative of a motion picture. In an attempt to de-legitimize the current American administration, the anchor equates it to the one depicted in Adam McKay's "Don't Look Up" feature film. A loose interpretation of the picture – that is commonly recognized as a statement about inaction against climate change – serves a different purpose. Namely, a retelling of the film narrative here strives to produce a

cautionary tale by portraying the U.S. presidential administration as a self-interested entity devoid of any moral compass.



Title of the news story: "When Everything is at Stake"

By referring to mythopoetic items in pop culture and reinterpreting them, the anchor implies that the things of which he talks about are obvious to the extent that they are coded into popular Hollywood production. Clearly, the mythopoetic element there echoes and reinforces the preceding rationalizing frames where the inclusion of Ukraine in NATO and subsequent warfare for the Crimean Peninsula are claimed to bear an existential threat to humanity.

By and large, pre-invasion reporting constructs a highly rationalized image of the world where inter-state interactions are a question of interests. The model of this reality is actively built through never-ending speech acts and communicative exchanges happening in bilateral negotiations with NATO members and in public addresses. These rationalized constructs are then solidified through graphical depictions of the data and its interpretation. Although the preponderance of rational frames over others is evident, messages concealed both behind the legitimization and simple constitutive statements have not changed. Just like in 2013, the coverage of Ukraine employs the same themes in reporting even a decade later since the beginning of the crisis. The themes of the U.S. and NATO interference, the former's desire for

global dominance, and mockery of foreign actors – all serve as a reliable tool in Russian construction and rationalization of reality.

4.2 Post-Invasion Coverage: “Our Cause Is Just.”

Naturally, Ukraine and the warfare in Donbas account for almost the entirety of each episode since the invasion. Although the running time of the program almost doubled, the total number of legitimization items has not increased. On the contrary, registered legitimations decreased in quantity by about 70 items. The reason behind this is the inclusion of numerous field reports by war journalists of Rossiya 1 that communicate advancements of the Russian military to the public as well as share the stories about the experiences and lifestyles of soldiers and civilians in Donbas.

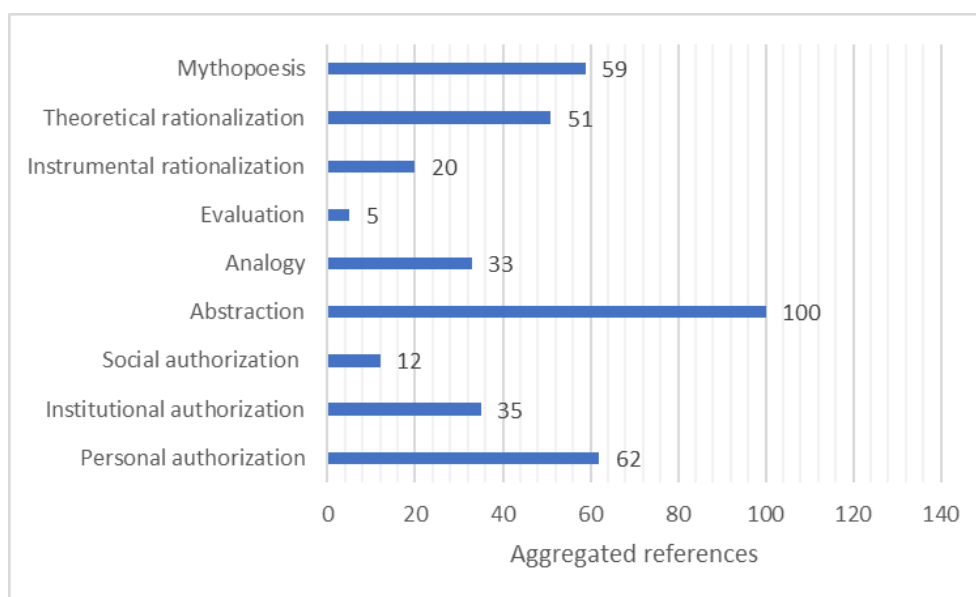


Figure 4: Post-invasion legitimization

Compared to tendencies before February 2022, the coding analysis of coverage ex-post invasion reveals an opposite dynamic. As seen in Figure 4, moralizing language makes up the lion’s share of all employed strategies. Abstractions are by far the most frequently used mode of legitimization. The use of evaluations decreased, whereas analogies remained roughly the same. The coding analysis shows the dynamic opposite to the one registered before the invasion. Particularly, whereas rationalizations were twice as high in frequency ex-ante the invasion, ex-

post, they are twice as low. Interestingly, the use of authorizations expanded substantially. Personal authorizations, for instance, tripled (62 references) compared to the pre-invasion coverage (20 references). The same is true for social authorizations that mandate activities by referring to traditions and conformity. Institutional authorizations doubled in use. Importantly, there is a substantial increase in mythopoetic legitimations, which incorporates moralized messages as well. In this way, post-invasion coverage is clearly dominated by moral messages. This might suggest that the justificatory campaign largely relied on triggering an affective response from the audience. Whereas pre-invasion discourse sought to explain and rationalize why the invasion is not going to happen, this discourse strives to show why it was a just and morally required act.

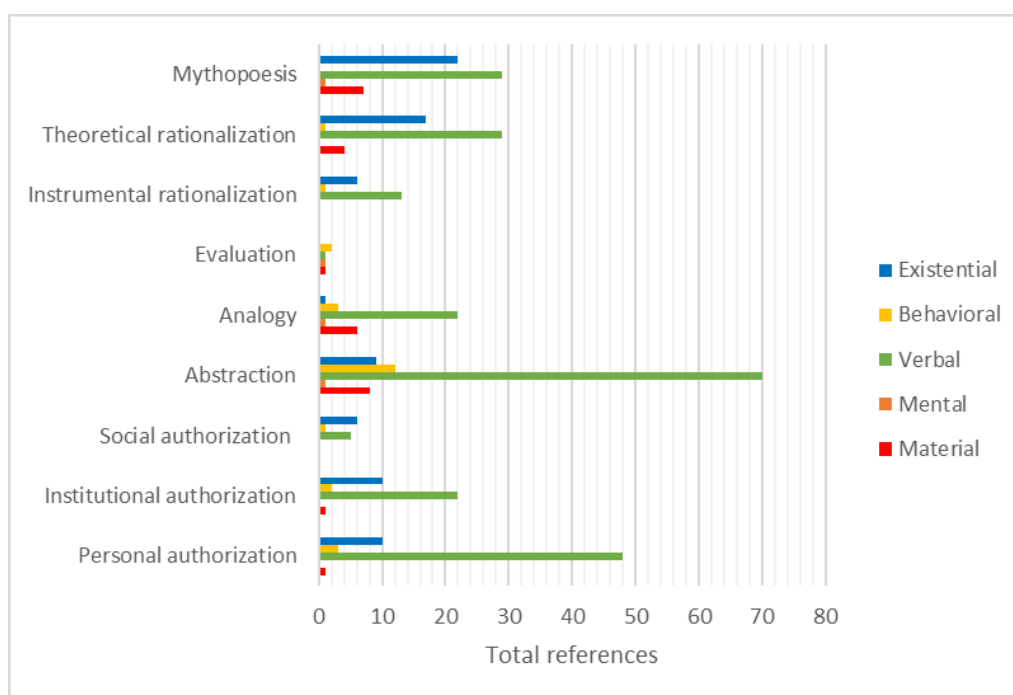


Figure 5: Visual representation of post-invasion legitimization

Visually, verbal processes still remain the dominant form of representation, followed by existential ones. The supposed advantages of the use of these visual process types are the same as were in the previous period of the coverage. Speech acts and verbiages are once again included to support the authenticity of the statements made. Material processes are far more

frequent across the strategies. They were hardly used in the preceding period. Their increase is not entirely surprising as the program began to report on warfare which contains video images of battles and other transitive acts. Still, verbal processes persist as the dominant form of representation since, even during warfare, news stories illustrate the reality of the war through first-hand tales of soldiers and civilians. Existential representations once again are used to immerse the viewer into the reality of the war: these are usually illustrations of the destruction and damage done to the people of Donbas.



Typical existential depictions of war

Narratively, the preceding set of messages does not change. The U.S. and NATO members, for instance, are still vilified in the eyes of the viewer. But instead of rationalized accounts, the same message is delivered in moral terms:

Attempting to abolish Russia, the West has stripped itself of all masks of decency, has acted in a rude way, has demonstrated its true nature ('Vesti Nedeli. 20/03/2022' 2022).

Previously rationalized messages of NATO interference in Ukraine find their evidence in the field of battle where American weaponry is abandoned by Ukrainian forces. The previously rationalized interest of Western and Ukrainian governments in the war is confirmed too. However, these discoveries are articulated in a moral language full of abstractions. Subsequently, rationalized mental maps formed before the invasion are reinforced and complemented by moralizations that seek to vocalize what is at stake now.

Yes, Ukraine is a painful moment, but, after all, everything was explained to everyone for a long time, a lot was not pronounced not to annoy or to scratch, to give a chance for

a peaceful reunification of the people. But no, the West had to come here with the wrong aims ('Vesti Nedeli. 27/03/2022' 2022).

The post-invasion reporting clearly seeks to justify the military operation by authoritative and moral referrals. On the Ukrainian land, the Russian military finds physical evidence of Western interference in the conflict, while intelligence officers retrieve secret documents that point to Ukrainian plans to attack Donbas. The narrative thus reconstructs the so-called special military operation as preventive, while it was initially claimed to be salvaging:

In these circumstances, having exhausted all negotiating possibilities, Russia was obliged to stand up for millions of Russians who were simply threatened with physical destruction and genocide. That is our moral obligation, and that is justice ('Vesti Nedeli. 13/03/2022' 2022)

News coverage mainly touches upon refugees fleeing to Russia, high politics overviews, battlefield notes of the reporters, stories about biological labs in Ukraine, fake news production, and mythopoetic stories. Surprisingly, battlefield reports are the last type of stories in which any legitimization can be found. These are the news stories that continuously and extensively show the pain and suffering of the people on Donbas but seldom use any legitimizing language while doing so. In contrast, the rest of the aforementioned stories actively employ it.

Authorizations became apparent in this period of coverage. They were mainly used in two cases: when the authenticity of the information was to be supported or the moral point was to be proved, and when orders by the executives were given.

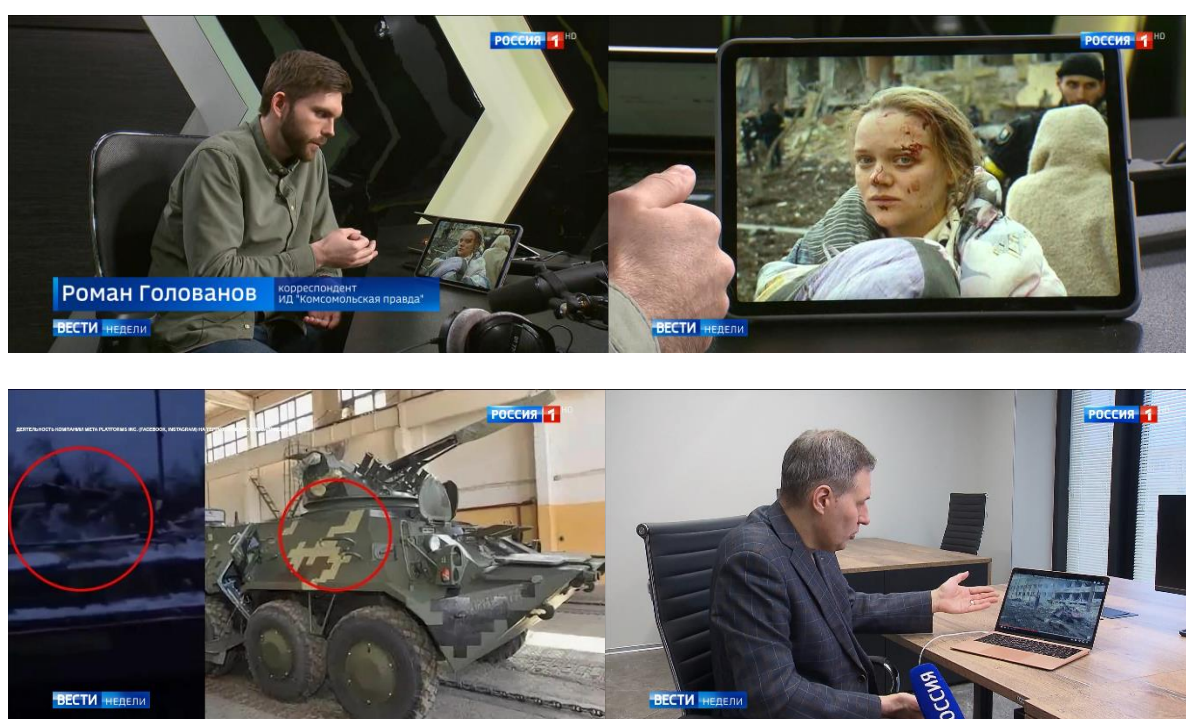
In the wake of both physical and informational warfare, Vesti Nedeli started to report on fake news disseminated by outlets outside of Russia. These stories consistently and explicitly refer to the personal expertise of the agents that disconfirm the messages transmitted by the foreign press. The content of this story is highly technical as the viewer is lectured about different types of rockets or the processes of body decomposition. In a sense, the chain of arguments put forward by the experts is secondary to the narrative, though important in its own

right. What matters first is the qualifications or past experience and conclusions at the end of the report, which are accentuated every time.

[1] Experts say there's no impact damage inside the buildings, just displaced furniture. At the same time, almost all tabloids used footage of the same injured girl-blogger... [Media expert]: And it's striking. Of course, this girl here... as people of television, people working with images, we immediately understand what catches an eye. Here you can see that a professional photographer works with a professional model. I have no answer to the question of whether this girl was knowingly involved in the provocation or was forced to. We have no right to give these assessments. People are at the mercy of militants ('Vesti Nedeli. 13/03/2022' 2022).

[2] Commentary of our war reporter Yevgeny Poddubny who accompanied the Russian military in the Kyiv region in these days:

[Poddubny]: the organizers of the bloody scene in Butcha, of course, did not consider everything. Civilians who were near Russian troops wore white bandages specifically to identify themselves. The Russian military did not perceive these people as enemies. Moreover, I will tell you the mood among the troops is such that people, on liberated from the Kyiv regime territory, are to be protected ('Vesti Nedeli. 10/04/2022' 2022).



Supposed media and war experts disconfirming the visual evidence found in the foreign press

The struggle for authenticity is happening in other stories as well. Since March 2022, Vesti Nedeli has started to report heavily on biological labs on the territory of Ukraine that were supposedly financed by the United States. Coverage of the labs was done in every episode. At

some point, the stories related to the labs reached the point of absurd: reporters claimed that biological weaponry designed by the U.S. specifically for Russian genes was meant to be carried on Russian territory through the seasonal migration of ducks. The secret documents confirming this were retrieved by the chief of biological defense and displayed on the screen.



[On the left] Title: “Bio-military projects on the territory of Ukraine”; [On the right]: Igor Kirillov demonstrating secret documents



Unlike authorizations, abstractions are by no means uniform in their use. Moralizing language is scattered across all news stories – from high-level politics to refugee reports – and used in a plethora of ways that are both legitimizing Russian actions and de-legitimizing adversaries. The most typical way of legitimizing the war through moralization is to speak of the subject through the prism of the battle against Nazism and the suffering of the Russian-speaking population in Donbas.

[1] In fact, it has begun, and once again, Russia is taking the burden to drive Nazism out of Europe. Unfortunately, without help. But we’ll manage (‘Vesti Nedeli. 27/02/2022’ 2022)

[2] ...our citizens are responding to the need for help the people call for speaks volumes. This shows that, in general, people support our actions and that we are right to support the Donbas ('Vesti Nedeli. 13/03/2022' 2022).

Similar to the preceding period, abstractions and analogies once again reinforce the mockery of political actors. The presidents of Ukraine and the United States are frequently mentioned in this light. President Zelensky is sometimes referred to as president-actor and president-blogger. As in the coverage before the invasion, the abstract constructions and analogies are meant to de-legitimize the president by building associations between his past and present – effectively implying that President Zelensky is not qualified to lead the country, let alone express an opinion different from that of his 'western masters.'

Meanwhile, the president-actor established authority in Kyiv, and many of his assistants are also from this profession. The West is fine with such controlled people. They literally play their roles as they should and have remained at the level of 'cabbage' culture, where the best quality is to jest and tease. They wanted to turn the whole of Ukraine into this 'cabbage' while giving it to the military mastery of NATO ('Vesti Nedeli. 10/04/2022' 2022)

The entire news report was dedicated to the frequent video addresses recorded by Zelensky. There, the behavior and tone of some of the addresses were compared to that of a video blogger under chemical influence. Overall, every mention of President Zelensky is invariably married to the association of his persona with the media industry, implying that his presidency is largely a media project rather than proper leadership.

Of great interest are the mythopoetic tendencies. Moralizing messages concealed in the lengthy narratives are unveiled in two ways: through analogies with feature films and by drawing parallels in the history section.

In the weeks following the invasion, Vesti Nedeli used motion pictures in its storytelling. In response to the statement of the British military officer that the success of the British army against the Russian military in the Crimean War in the 19th century could be repeated, the anchor, Dmitri Kisilev, interpreted and retold the events of the Crimean War,

using the footage of 1968 feature film ‘The Charge of the Light Brigade’ which depicted the battle of Balaklava of 1854. By implying catastrophic consequences for the British forces, Kisilev basically produced a cautionary tale that de-legitimized offensive military engagement against Russia and reproduced the legend of Russian military might.



Text: Images from the film “The Charge of the Light Brigade” (1968), director Tony Richardson

The cautionary tale is also told using the film adaptation of Nikolai Gogol’s novel Taras Bulba. Kisilev draws parallels between Andriy – Bulba’s son who betrayed the Cossacks and joined foreign forces out of love to a Polish princess – and Russians who ‘betrayed’ their home country by opposing the war and standing on the side of the collective West. The idea of the exceptional character of Russia’s national spirit is brought up along the way:

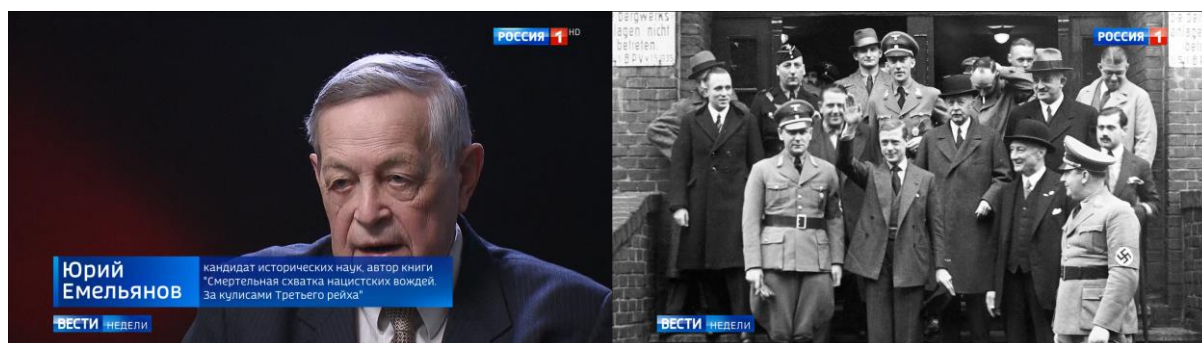
Gogol gets everything in its place: The Cossacks as an extraordinary phenomenon of Russian power that originated when neither Ukrainians as a people nor Ukrainian as a language existed.

[Film scene]: Bulba was scared. It was one of those characters that could only have appeared only in the difficult 16th century when the Cossacks emerged - a wide and rampant swing of Russian nature. It was an extraordinary manifestation of Russian power; it was knocked out of the nation’s chest by a fire of trouble (‘Vesti Nedeli. 10/04/2022’ 2022).

Parallels with historical events are also drawn in news reports that cover topics like the German Olympics of 1936, NATO training in Baltic states, and the history of Ukrainian

statehood and the Donbas region. Each and every story presents a single historical narrative that is unfolded through the main storytelling line and a few additions by the history experts. These stories are exclusively designed to de-legitimize Western actors by recalling their ties with the Nazi regime, pointing to the similarities between past NATO expansion practices and present developments in Ukraine, and legitimizing Russian advancements by illustrating how Ukrainian statehood originated within the Soviet Union, where historical Russian territories were given to soviet republics. The structure of these reports is straightforward: chronologically organized events and their explication are concluded in a single thesis that serves to buttress the claims of the present.

That is, once again, it was Lenin who became the founder of the Soviet Ukraine state. This same Soviet Ukraine became a co-founder of the Soviet Union at the signing of the Union Treaty in 1920. Historical Russia has thus been reduced in size by Soviet Ukraine. Generous. In this sense, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, as head of the Soviet government, is the creator of the first viable Ukrainian state ('Vesti Nedeli. 27/03/2022' 2022).



Typical visual representations of mythopoetic storytelling. News report on 1936 Olympics.

Strangely, legitimations are hardly present in the reports from the battlefield in Ukraine, although that is arguably a site where first-hand experience and information are acquired from. The language in these reports is concise and dry, devoid of any proper legitimizing evaluations. These are the stories where supposedly hard facts are presented, personal tales are told, and life during the war is depicted. Still, the communication lacks any evaluations besides brief nominalizations such as 'Nazis' and 'nationalists.' Legitimation and de-legitimation alike are anything but apparent and explicit. The field reports cannot be recognized as mythopoetic

linguistically as no moral of the story is evident. If anything, the stories holistically are an act of legitimization that can only be processed in their entirety by pertaining to the experiences of people depicted in them. Unlike historical reports, narrators who are aware of the fact that they are telling the tale that legitimizes or negates a practice and do so linguistically, war reporters do not tell stories – their coverage of causally unrelated events combined happens to be a mythopoetic story, yet one that is recognized not by discursive strategies but human cognition.

The depiction of that reality, unstructured and devoid of any particular message, is legitimizing in its translation of the suffering and pain of the people, the dedication of the Russian military, and the regrets of captured Ukrainian soldiers.



War-time tales and commentaries told by soldiers

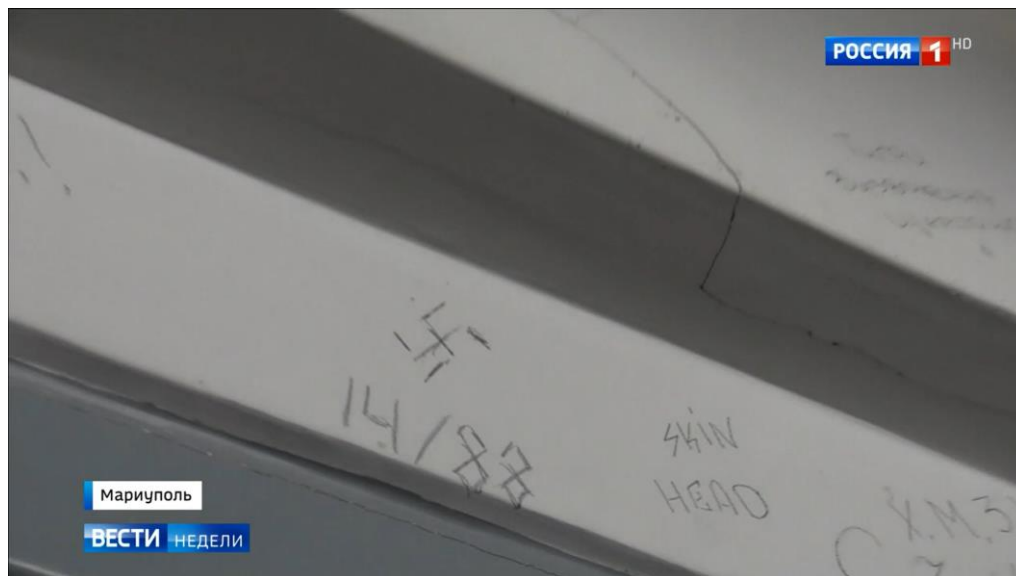
This contention can be supported by the fact that battlefield reports prepared by Evgeny Poddybny and Alexander Sladkov, two of the three main Vesti Nedeli war reporters, closely resemble the format of ‘vlogs’ that are designed to show life in Donbas as it is from the point-of-view perspective, through the eyes of the journalist. In other words, in contrast to journalistic conventions, the reporter is both cameraman and narrator who records every minute of his experience, unstructured, unplanned, and full of unsubstantial details and personal interactions.

The border between the reporting and personal experience wears away, and, as a result, the viewer witnesses a slice-of-life stories that lack any deliberate and explicitly states conclusion.



Point-of-view mode of coverage where the reporter is both cameraman and narrator

This mode of reporting effectively immerses viewers in the experience of the war. The direct spectatorship and humanization of soldiers through the portrayal of their daily routine only support the image of the soldier-savior. Commentaries given by civilians, which are often seen thanking the Russian military, reinforce this effect. On the contrary, the agency of Ukrainian soldiers is mainly obscured. Oftentimes, they are judged by the traces of their presence left on the battlefield. The reporter, thus, might display abandoned military equipment and vehicles. Only once in the sampled period, Ukrainian soldiers were shown in the flesh in one of these reports – in the instance when they were surrendering.



Supposed visual traces of Ukrainian soldiers in one of the field reports

Overall, while the Russian military is continuously humanized and its agency is apparent to the viewer, the same is hardly true for the Ukrainian army, which is virtually absent if not taken in captivity as war prisoners.

All in all, moralizations and authorizations operate in rationalized reality constructed prior to the invasion. With the stage previously set and largely rationalized, post-invasion discourse tries to justify Russian military offense by pushing forward affective messages. Reality nor the content of these messages do not change: de-legitimized actors in the pre-invasion period remain such, the West and Ukrainian government are vilified and interested in war, and Russia is still glorified. It is the tone of the presentation which changed from highly rationalized rhetoric to predominantly moralized language. The anchor, reporters, and state officials – all in one – make it clear that their previous rationalizations still hold, yet the time is to act and act based on one's conscience. Rationalizations are reinforced by sudden orchestrated discoveries in the field of battle, such as secret documents and registered human experiences. But they are not rationalized further. Instead, they are developed, deepened, and expanded in moral terms. Verbal and existential representations are once again frequently employed. The

former vests credibility to the messages when practice is authorized and clearly displays actors who use moral frames. The latter immerses the viewer in the reality built by the discourse.

CONCLUSION

The present thesis explores Russian television's social construction of reality. By focusing on the televised reporting of the Ukrainian crisis that intensified in the second half of 2021 and reached its apogee in February 2022, the thesis explores what messages dominated the narrative, what legitimation strategies were used, and how the start of invasion has altered their use. Realizing the multimodal nature of the televised discourse, which relies on both linguistic and visual discourse, analysis complemented van Leeuwen's (2007) predominantly linguistic framework of legitimation with visual process types exemplified by Machin and Mayr (2012). Legitimation strategies – authorization, rationalization, moralization, and mythopoesis – were accordingly assigned with a similar set of visual representation types within a joint legitimation framework.

A textual corpus was derived from Vesti Nedeli analytical news program that is broadcasted weekly on Rossiya 1 channel. The sampled period amounted to five months of coverage, from November 2021 to April 2022. The analysis concentrated on the changes in legitimation strategies. The pre-invasion coverage is heavily accompanied by rationalization frames that constructed a sensible picture of reality where interactions between actors are interpreted through the prism of interests and intended consequences. On the other hand, post-invasion reporting exhibits a preponderance of moralized constructions over rational frames, which justify the Russian military intervention. At the same time, the invasion did not alter the dominant messages and narratives. On the contrary, post-invasion coverage effectively builds on mental models constructed before February 24 and which take their root in reporting the 2013 Ukrainian crisis. Particularly, the model where Russia is presented as defending its interests and its people against the U.S. dominated Western world that supports an illegitimate regime in Ukraine. It is the mode and tone with which messages are presented to the viewer that changed. Indeed, even though the official stance of the Russian state towards the invasion

switched from denial to advocacy, like its use of legitimation strategies, the general narrative remained the same – only means of presentation transformed. The picture drawn for the viewer is simple: the Russian state tried to peacefully come to a rational resolution to the crisis, but since its concerns and concerns of the people of Donbas were largely ignored, it is its moral duty to protect those whom western powers or Ukraine are unwilling to defend.

Crucially, the research identified a limitation in the legitimation framework that should be taken into account in future inquiries. Particularly, the conventional legitimation strategies do not always recognize ridicule, mockery, satire, and sarcasm as important instances of legitimation and de-legitimation alike. Even though these are vested with de-rationalizing capacity and largely exhibit actors as unreasonable and unprofessional agents, it lacks argumentative character and a logical chain of reasoning. Analogies, and less frequently abstractions, are able to register a minor portion of elements of this outside-of-genre language, yet satire and sarcasm are hardly recognized by any strategy. An additional category to incorporate these elements could be created to address this. Language of the news transforms and embraces new forms of linguistic presentation. Ridicule is not authentic to the genre of news, yet it is deeply embedded into contemporary reporting on Russian television. Future research on the subject might consider making additions to the legitimation framework for a deeper understanding of the media discourse. There is still room for improvement. After all, these legitimation strategies are the instruments used on television to constitute the reality that serves the interests of the discourse producers and constructs the models on which one bases his understanding and judgment of the world.

REFERENCES

- Bell, Allan. 1995. 'Language and the Media'. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, no. 15: 23–41.
- Berger, Peter L., and Thomas Luckmann. 1966. 'The Social Construction of Reality. A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge'. The Penguin Group Penguin Books Ltd.
- Brandtzaeg, Petter Bae, Marika Lüders, Jochen Spangenberg, Linda Rath-Wiggins, and Asbjørn Følstad. 2016. 'Emerging Journalistic Verification Practices Concerning Social Media'. *Journalism Practice* 10 (3): 323–42. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2015.1020331>.
- Breazu, Petre, and David Machin. 2018. 'A Critical Multimodal Analysis of the Romanian Press Coverage of Camp Evictions and Deportations of the Roma Migrants from France'. *Discourse & Communication* 12 (4): 339–56. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750481318757774>.
- Bryant, Jennings, and Bruce W. Finklea. 2022. *Fundamentals of Media Effects: Third Edition*. Waveland Press.
- Calabrese, Andrew. 2005. 'Casus Belli: U.S. Media and the Justification of the Iraq War'. *Television & New Media* 6 (2): 153–75. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476404273952>.
- Coleman, Renita, Maxwell McCombs, Donald Shaw, and David Weaver. 2009. 'Agenda Setting'. In *The Handbook of Journalism Studies*, edited by Karin Wahl-Jorgensen and Thomas Hanitzsch, 147–60. International Communication Association (ICA) Handbook Series. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Dijk, Teun A. van. 1983. 'Discourse Analysis: Its Development and Application to the Structure of News'. *Journal of Communication* 33 (2): 20–43. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1983.tb02386.x>.
- . 1993. 'Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis'. *Discourse & Society* 4 (2): 249–83. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42888777>.
- . 1995. 'Power and the News Media'. In *Political Communication and Action*, edited by David Paletz, 9–36. Hampton Press, Incorporated.
- . 2009. 'News, Discourse, and Ideology'. In *The Handbook of Journalism Studies*, edited by Karin Wahl-Jorgensen and Thomas Hanitzsch. International Communication Association (ICA) Handbook Series. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Dobernig, Karin, and Katharina Lobinger. 2010. 'Covering Conflict: Differences in Visual and Verbal News Coverage of the Gaza Crisis 2009 in Four Weekly News Media'. *Journal of Visual Literacy* 29 (1): 88–105. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23796529.2010.11674675>.
- Dukalskis, Alexander, and Christopher Patane. 2019. 'Justifying Power: When Autocracies Talk about Themselves and Their Opponents'. *Contemporary Politics* 25 (4): 457–78. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569775.2019.1570424>.
- Eldridge, John. 1993. 'News, Truth and Power'. In *Getting the Message. News, Truth and Power*, edited by John Eldridge, 3–29. Routledge.
- End, Markus. 2019. 'Subtle Images of Antigypsyism. An Analysis of the Visual Perception of "Roma"'. In *Dimensions of Antigypsyism in Europe*, edited by Ismael Cortés Gómez and Markus End, 44–67. ENAR Anti-Racism in Focus 3. Brüssel: European Network Against Racism.
- Entman, Robert M. 2004. *Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy*. University of Chicago Press.

- Fahmy, Shahira, and Daekyung Kim. 2008. 'Picturing the Iraq War: Constructing the Image of War in the British and US Press'. *International Communication Gazette* 70 (6): 443–62. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1748048508096142>.
- Fahmy, Shahira, and Wayne Wanta. 2007. 'What Visual Journalists Think Others Think The Perceived Impact of News Photographs on Public Opinion Formation'. *Visual Communication Quarterly* 14 (1): 16–31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15551390701361632>.
- Fairclough, Norman. 1989. *Language and Power*. Edinburgh Gate, Harlow, Essex CM202JE, England: Addison Wesley Longman Limited.
- Foucault, Michel. 2013. *Archaeology of Knowledge*. 0 ed. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203604168>.
- Fowler, Roger. 1991. *Language in the News: Discourse and Ideology in the Press*. London ; New York: Routledge.
- Gentzkow, Matthew, and Jesse M Shapiro. 2008. 'Competition and Truth in the Market for News'. *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 22 (2): 133–54.
- Gerschewski, Johannes. 2013. 'The Three Pillars of Stability: Legitimation, Repression, and Co-Optation in Autocratic Regimes'. *Democratization* 20 (1): 13–38. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2013.738860>.
- Griffin, Michael. 2010. 'Media Images of War'. *Media, War & Conflict* 3 (1): 7–41. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750635210356813>.
- Groeling, Tim. 2013. 'Media Bias by the Numbers: Challenges and Opportunities in the Empirical Study of Partisan News'. *Annual Review of Political Science* 16 (1): 129–51. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-040811-115123>.
- Guriev, Sergei, and Daniel Treisman. 2015. 'How Modern Dictators Survive: An Informational Theory of the New Authoritarianism'. w21136. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research. <https://doi.org/10.3386/w21136>.
- Halliday, Michael A. K. 1978. *Language as Social Semiotic : The Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Hermida, Alfred. 2012. 'TWEETS AND TRUTH: Journalism as a Discipline of Collaborative Verification'. *Journalism Practice* 6 (5–6): 659–68. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2012.667269>.
- Hoskins, Andrew, and Ben O'Loughlin. 2007. *Television and Terror : Conflicting Times and the Crisis of News Discourse*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hutchings, Stephen, and Joanna Szostek. 2015. 'Dominant Narratives in Russian Political and Media Discourse during the Ukraine Crisis'. In *Ukraine and Russia: People, Politics, Propaganda and Perspectives*, edited by Agnieszka Pikulicka-Wilczewska and Richard Sakwa. Bristol, UK: E-international Relations.
- Jones-Rooy, Andrea E. 2012. 'Communication and Commitment: The Strategic Use of the Media in China and Other Autocracies'. University of Michigan.
- Kellner, Douglas. 2004. 'Media Propaganda and Spectacle in the War on Iraq: A Critique of U.S. Broadcasting Networks'. *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 4 (3): 329–38. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532708603262723>.
- Koltsova, Olessia. 2006. *News Media and Power in Russia*. BASEES/Routledge Series on Russian and East European Studies. Routledge.
- Konstantinidou, Christina. 2008. 'The Spectacle of Suffering and Death: The Photographic Representation of War in Greek Newspapers'. *Visual Communication* 7 (2): 143–69. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470357208088756>.

- Kull, Steven, Clay Ramsay, and Evan Lewis. 2003. 'Misperceptions, the Media, and the Iraq War'. *Political Science Quarterly* 118 (4): 569–98. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30035697>.
- Kumar, Deepa. 2006. 'Media, War, and Propaganda: Strategies of Information Management During the 2003 Iraq War'. *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 3 (1): 48–69. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14791420500505650>.
- Leeuwen, Theo van. 1993. 'Genre and Field in Critical Discourse Analysis: A Synopsis'. *Discourse & Society* 4 (2): 193–223. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42888775>.
- . 2007. 'Legitimation in Discourse and Communication'. *Discourse & Communication* 1 (1): 91–112. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750481307071986>.
- . 2008. 'News Genres'. In *Handbook of Communication in the Public Sphere*, edited by Ruth Wodak and Veronica Koller, 343–63. Berlin, Germany: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Leeuwen, Theo van, and Carey Jewitt, eds. 2001. *Handbook of Visual Analysis*. London ; Thousand Oaks [Calif.]: SAGE.
- Leeuwen, Theo van, and Ruth Wodak. 1999. 'Legitimizing Immigration Control: A Discourse-Historical Analysis'. *Discourse Studies* 1 (1): 83–118. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461445699001001005>.
- Levada Center. 2022a. 'The Main Sources of Information of Russians'. Levada Center. 10 November 2022. <https://www.levada.ru/en/2022/11/10/the-main-sources-of-information-of-russians/>.
- . 2022b. 'Conflict with Ukraine: November 2022'. Levada Center. 12 December 2022. <https://www.levada.ru/en/2022/12/12/conflict-with-ukraine-november-2022/>.
- Lippmann, Walter. 2004. *Public Opinion*. Transaction Publishers.
- Machin, David, and Andrea Mayr. 2012. *How to Do Critical Discourse Analysis: A Multimodal Introduction*. Los Angeles: SAGE.
- . 2013. 'Personalising Crime and Crime-Fighting in Factual Television: An Analysis of Social Actors and Transitivity in Language and Images'. *Critical Discourse Studies* 10 (4): 356–72. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2013.813771>.
- Manganello, Jennifer, Amy Franzini, and Amy Jordan. 2008. 'Sampling Television Programs for Content Analysis of Sex on TV: How Many Episodes Are Enough?' *The Journal of Sex Research* 45 (1): 9–16. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20620334>.
- McCombs, Maxwell. 2005. 'The Agenda-Setting Function of the Press'. In *The Press*, edited by Geneva Overholser and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, 156–68. Oxford University Press.
- McQuail, Denis. 1979. 'The Influence and Effects of Mass Media'. In *Mass Communication and Society*, edited by J. Curran, M. Gurevitch, and J. Woolacott, 70–93. Sage Publications, Inc. <http://bitly.ws/FRXx>.
- Mediascope. n.d. 'Ratings'. Mediascope. Accessed 2 March 2023. <https://mediascope.net/data/>.
- Michael DeLuca, Kevin, and Jennifer Peeples. 2002. 'From Public Sphere to Public Screen: Democracy, Activism, and the "Violence" of Seattle'. *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 19 (2): 125–51. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07393180216559>.
- Moy, Patricia, David Tewksbury, and Eike Mark Rinke. 2016. 'Agenda-Setting, Priming, and Framing'. In *The International Encyclopedia of Communication Theory and Philosophy*, edited by Klaus Bruhn Jensen, Eric W. Rothenbuhler, Jefferson D. Pooley, and Robert T. Craig, 1st ed., 1–13. Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118766804.wbiect266>.

- Nicolosi, Riccardo. 2022. 'Paranoia, Resentment, and Reenactment: The Russian Political Discourse on the War in Ukraine'. *Ab Imperio* 2022 (3): 247–61. <https://doi.org/10.1353/imp.2022.0066>.
- Nišić, Vanja, and Divna Plavšić. 2017. 'The Role of Media in the Construction of Social Reality'. *Social Discourse* 4 (7): 73–81. <https://doi.org/10.7251/SOCEN1407073N>.
- Nygren, Gunnar, Michal Glowacki, Jöran Hök, Ilya Kiria, Dariya Orlova, and Daria Taradai. 2018. 'Journalism in the Crossfire: Media Coverage of the War in Ukraine in 2014'. *Journalism Studies* 19 (7): 1059–78. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2016.1251332>.
- Pasitselska, Olga. 2017. 'Ukrainian Crisis through the Lens of Russian Media: Construction of Ideological Discourse'. *Discourse & Communication* 11 (6): 591–609. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750481317714127>.
- Perlmutter, David D. 2005. 'Photojournalism and Foreign Affairs'. *Orbis* 49 (1): 109–22. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orbis.2004.10.009>.
- Perse, Elizabeth M., and Jennifer Lambe. 2016. *Media Effects and Society*. Routledge.
- Poulakidakos, Stamatis, Anastasia Veneti, and Christos Fangonikolopoulos. 2018. 'Post-Truth, Propaganda and the Transformation of the Spiral of Silence'. *International Journal of Media & Cultural Politics* 14 (3): 367–82. https://doi.org/10.1386/macp.14.3.367_1.
- Ray, Michael. n.d. 'Russia-Ukraine War. Casualties, Map, Causes, & Significance'. Britannica. Accessed 4 June 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/event/2022-Russian-invasion-of-Ukraine>.
- Reyes, Antonio. 2011. 'Strategies of Legitimization in Political Discourse: From Words to Actions'. *Discourse & Society* 22 (6): 781–807. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926511419927>.
- 'Russian Federation. Demographic Changes'. n.d. United Nations ESCAP. Accessed 5 June 2023. <https://www.population-trends-asiapacific.org/data/RUS>.
- Scheufele, Dietram A. 2000. 'Agenda-Setting, Priming, and Framing Revisited: Another Look at Cognitive Effects of Political Communication'. *Mass Communication and Society* 3 (2–3): 297–316. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327825MCS0323_07.
- Scheufele, Dietram A., and David Tewksbury. 2007. 'Framing, Agenda Setting, and Priming: The Evolution of Three Media Effects Models: Models of Media Effects'. *Journal of Communication* 57 (1): 9–20. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0021-9916.2007.00326.x>.
- Semykina, Kseniia. 2021. 'The Crimean Conflict on Russian and Ukrainian TV', no. 6.
- Siegel, Pascale Combelles. 2005. 'Perception Management: IO's Stepchild?' *Low Intensity Conflict & Law Enforcement* 13 (2): 117–34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09662840500347314>.
- Simonsen, Sandra. 2019. 'Discursive Legitimation Strategies: The Evolving Legitimation of War in Israeli Public Diplomacy'. *Discourse & Society* 30 (5): 503–20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926519855786>.
- Smrdelj, Rok, and Jože Vogrinc. 2020. 'Migrant Objectification in Television News Discourse in the Context of Criminalisation: An Example Concerning Slovenian Public Television Broadcast News'. In *Causes and Consequences of Migrant Criminalization*, edited by Neža Kogovšek Šalamon, 81:287–304. Ius Gentium: Comparative Perspectives on Law and Justice. Cham: Springer International Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-43732-9>.
- Stier, Sebastian. 2015. 'Democracy, Autocracy and the News: The Impact of Regime Type on Media Freedom'. *Democratization* 22 (7): 1273–95. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2014.964643>.

- Tasseron, Michael. 2021. 'The Semiotics of Visual and Textual Legitimacy in the 2014 Gaza War'. *Social Semiotics* 0 (0): 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2021.1903307>.
- Valkenburg, Patti M., Jochen Peter, and Joseph B. Walther. 2016. 'Media Effects: Theory and Research'. *Annual Review of Psychology* 67 (1): 315–38. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-122414-033608>.
- 'Vesti Nedeli. 05/12/2021'. 2021. *Vesti Nedeli*. <https://smotrim.ru/video/2364043>.
- 'Vesti Nedeli. 06/02/2022'. 2022. *Vesti Nedeli*. <https://smotrim.ru/video/2381439>.
- 'Vesti Nedeli. 10/04/2022'. 2022. *Vesti Nedeli*. <https://smotrim.ru/brand/5206>.
- 'Vesti Nedeli. 12/12/2021'. 2021. *Vesti Nedeli*. <https://smotrim.ru/video/2366237>.
- 'Vesti Nedeli. 13/02/2022'. 2022. *Vesti Nedeli*. <https://smotrim.ru/video/2383714>.
- 'Vesti Nedeli. 13/03/2022'. 2022. *Vesti Nedeli*. <https://smotrim.ru/brand/5206>.
- 'Vesti Nedeli. 16/01/2022'. 2022. *Vesti Nedeli*. <https://smotrim.ru/video/2375491>.
- 'Vesti Nedeli. 20/02/2022'. 2022. *Vesti Nedeli*. <https://smotrim.ru/video/2386141>.
- 'Vesti Nedeli. 20/03/2022'. 2022. *Vesti Nedeli*. <https://smotrim.ru/video/2393639>.
- 'Vesti Nedeli. 27/02/2022'. 2022. *Vesti Nedeli*. <https://smotrim.ru/brand/5206>.
- 'Vesti Nedeli. 27/03/2022'. 2022. *Vesti Nedeli*. <https://smotrim.ru/brand/5206>.
- Zaller, John R. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Cambridge university press.