

The golden mouthpiece: A textual analysis of propaganda sources in U.S. newspaper coverage of
the Russia–Ukraine conflict

by

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Abstract

This study employs a textual analysis with a structured coding framework, to examine newspaper coverage of the Russia–Ukraine conflict in two major U.S. news outlets: *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*. The study investigates how propaganda devices appear in combat media coverage and where such content originates, with particular attention to distinctions between journalist-driven narratives and quoted sources. Definitions of propaganda devices are adapted from the Institute for Propaganda Analysis.

Using purposive sampling, the study selects articles published between February 2022 and December 2025 to capture reporting across multiple phases of the conflict. A sample of twenty articles per outlet is analyzed to identify patterns in framing, sourcing, and narrative construction.

The textual analysis focuses on the use of propaganda devices within coverage, examining both their frequency and contextual function. By comparing the two outlets, the study assesses similarities and differences in how the Russia – Ukraine conflict is presented to American audiences. Findings indicate that propagandistic elements are present in a majority of articles. The textual analysis suggests that political leaders are the primary sources of these devices, often appearing within quoted material to shape messaging and evoke emotional responses. Coding indicates that glittering generalities and testimonials are the most frequently occurring propaganda devices. Together, these findings highlight the influential role of quoted sources in shaping narratives and underscore the continued relevance of propaganda frameworks in contemporary journalism.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to those who believed in me before I believed in myself: the professor who gave me the confidence to apply for graduate school, Dr. Greg Paul, the professor who encouraged my ambitions, Dr. Colene Lind, the professor who encouraged me to follow my career dreams, Dr. Sunha Yeo, and my husband, Chad Williamson, whose unwavering support made this journey possible. Their encouragement gave me the confidence and determination to see this work through.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

Media Environment & Information Framing

Contemporary news discourse operates within an increasingly complex and contested information environment, where narrative construction plays a central role in shaping public understanding of global (Castells, 2009; Entman, 2004). At the same time, public trust in media institutions has declined, driven in part by growing concerns surrounding misinformation, disinformation, propaganda, and the manipulation of information (Brenan, 2025; Lazer, et al., 2018). As audiences navigate a media landscape characterized by highly polarized content, a 24-hour news cycle, and the rapid dissemination of digital information, questions have emerged not only about the accuracy of information, but also about how and why it is presented. This shift has contributed to a broader sense of uncertainty, where audiences are no longer passive consumers of information but are instead actively questioning the credibility, intent, and construction of the content they encounter (Cappella & Tsfat, 2003).

This evolving media environment is increasingly shaped by what has been described as information or cognitive warfare, where information itself is used as a strategic tool to influence public perception and shape narratives. The concept has been articulated through frameworks such as the People's Liberation Army's "Three Warfares," which include psychological warfare, legal warfare, and media warfare, all aimed at achieving strategic objectives without direct military confrontation (Velchev, 2025). In the current media landscape, technological advancements have enabled conflict to extend into an "invisible" digital battlefield, where influence is exercised through communication rather than physical force. Instead of relying

solely on traditional forms of warfare, actors increasingly compete in the court of public opinion through information and media strategies.

As technology has advanced, warfare has increasingly shifted toward this digital battlefield, where public opinion becomes a central site of contestation. Media warfare operates through both traditional news outlets and digital platforms, utilizing tactics such as propaganda, disinformation, misinformation, and narrative control to shape how events are understood (Nikoula & McMahon, 2024). These strategies are not limited to fringe or alternative media environments but are embedded within broader communication systems that influence how information circulates and is interpreted. Contemporary conflicts, including the Russia–Ukraine war, demonstrate how information is strategically constructed and disseminated to influence both domestic and international audiences.

Within this context, journalism continues to play a critical role in shaping public perception through decisions related to sourcing, framing, and narrative structure. These choices influence which perspectives are amplified, which are suppressed, and how events are interpreted by audiences (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). Theoretical frameworks such as indexing theory suggest that news coverage often reflects a limited range of viewpoints tied to institutional or elite sources, raising concerns about the selective presentation of information through major media outlets (Bennett W. , 1990). As a result, journalistic content does not simply reflect reality but actively participates in constructing it. Recent global events have intensified scrutiny of these processes, as audiences increasingly question both the content of news coverage and the motivations underlying its construction.

Within this broader environment, propaganda should not be understood as an anomaly, but as a strategic and intentional form of communication embedded within modern information systems. Propaganda is not neutral; it is designed to shape perception, evoke emotional responses, and influence public attitudes toward events, actors, or policies (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2006). These persuasive effects are often embedded within narrative structures, sourcing decisions, and framing techniques, where they may function subtly or overtly. In many cases, propaganda does not rely on false information, but instead operates through the selective presentation, emphasis, and contextualization of information to guide audience interpretation (Entman, 1993). As a result, the distinction between objective reporting and persuasive messaging has become increasingly difficult for audiences to discern.

In response to these challenges, this study draws inspiration from the Institute for Propaganda Analysis by seeking to provide a systematic approach to identifying propaganda techniques within news content. In doing so, it addresses a critical issue in the current media landscape: the growing difficulty audiences face in distinguishing between information and persuasion.

Propaganda Devices in Journalism

While existing scholarship examined media influence, framing, indexing, and disinformation within the context of modern conflict journalism, less attention has been given to how persuasive messaging operates at the textual level within mainstream news reporting. Much of the current research focuses on large-scale patterns in digital media environments or analyzes framing and narrative construction as separate analytical dimensions. As a result, these approaches often overlook the specific mechanisms through which persuasive meaning is constructed within individual news articles.

Limited research has systematically examined the presence and function of classical propaganda devices within contemporary American newspaper coverage, as much of the existing literature has focused more broadly on framing, media effects, or political communication processes (Corner, 2007). While foundational work has identified and categorized propaganda techniques (Anderson, 2021), these devices are rarely applied systematically to modern journalistic content. Additionally, the interaction between propaganda techniques, emotionally loaded language, and source attribution within news narratives remains underexplored. These elements are often studied independently, even though they operate simultaneously within news articles to shape interpretation, guide audience perception, and reinforce particular understandings of events.

This distinction is important because persuasive messaging in news content does not emerge from a single element in isolation, but from the interaction of multiple rhetorical and structural features. For example, emotionally loaded language may reinforce the framing of an event, while the credibility of attributed sources may legitimize or amplify that framing. When combined, these elements function as subtle yet influential mechanisms that shape how audiences interpret information. However, without examining these features together, it becomes difficult to fully understand how persuasive meaning is constructed within journalistic narratives.

Prior research in this area has examined how media shape public opinion and function as political instruments, with particular emphasis on digital propaganda, computational manipulation, and the psychological effects of media on audiences (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008; Woolley & Howard, 2018). These studies often rely on quantitative approaches that measure the frequency of specific techniques or analyze patterns across large datasets. While valuable, these approaches may overlook the contextual and interpretive dimensions of how propaganda

operates within individual texts. As a result, there remains a need for research that examines how propaganda devices function within narrative structures and attributed sources in a more integrated and context-sensitive way.

Scholars agree that propaganda exists within American media systems, often operating structurally through sourcing practices, framing, and agenda-setting, particularly during periods of conflict (Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Bennett, 1990). At the same time, contemporary research frequently reframes propaganda in terms of disinformation, media bias, or narrative construction. This study departs from that perspective by conceptualizing propaganda not as a function of falsity, but as the intentional structuring of information whether accurate or misleading to shape audience perception and meaning. This distinction allows for a more complex analysis of how persuasive strategies operate within mainstream journalism without reducing propaganda solely to inaccurate or misleading content.

While substantial research exists on propaganda theory, war coverage, disinformation, and computational propaganda particularly in digital environments (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2019; Hoskins & O'Loughlin, 2010; Woolley & Howard, 2018), there remains a gap in device-level analysis of propaganda within mainstream American newspaper coverage. Specifically, limited research has examined how classical propaganda devices function textually within U.S. news reporting on the Russia–Ukraine conflict. This study addresses that gap by analyzing how propaganda techniques, emotionally loaded language, atrocity-related content, and source attribution interact within news narratives from an American perspective.

The significance of this topic is further underscored by growing international concern regarding information warfare practices in contemporary media environments. Organizations

such as the United Nations (UN), UNESCO, and NATO have identified misinformation, disinformation, and information manipulation as emerging challenges in modern conflict and democratic societies (NATO, 2025). In response, these organizations have promoted media literacy education initiatives aimed at strengthening individuals' ability to critically evaluate information and engage in informed decision-making. This broader context highlights the importance of examining how persuasive messaging operates within established news media systems.

Within this context, a more focused examination of how these persuasive dynamics operate at the textual level in mainstream journalism is necessary. This study analyzes coverage of the Russia–Ukraine conflict to examine how persuasive content is embedded within mainstream news reporting. Specifically, the purpose of this study is to examine how propaganda devices are embedded within coverage published by *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*. Using a qualitative textual analysis design, this study explores the relationship between propaganda devices, emotionally loaded language, atrocity-related content, and framing strategies. In addition, the study examines the origin of persuasive elements, distinguishing between those embedded within journalistic narration and those introduced through attributed sources. This distinction allows for a more precise analysis of how persuasive messaging is constructed and presented within news content.

Significance of the Study

Theoretical significance

This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of propaganda by revisiting classical propaganda devices and applying them within a contemporary media context. Rather

than attempting to force these devices into rigid or outdated definitions, this research positions them as flexible analytical tools that remain relevant in modern journalism and media systems. By drawing on the Institute for Propaganda Analysis' device framework, this study demonstrates how propaganda devices conceptualized in the 1930s continue to operate within current news environments, particularly through narrative construction, sourcing practices, and framing strategies.

This study examines how propaganda devices are embedded within news content through both journalistic narration and attributed sources. The findings suggest that persuasive elements are not limited to quoted material or external voices but may also emerge within the journalist's own narrative construction. This challenges traditional assumptions of objectivity associated with "newspaper of record" institutions and highlights the complexity of maintaining clear boundaries between reporting and persuasion in contemporary journalism.

In this way, the study contributes to a broader theoretical conversation by illustrating how propaganda operates within a hybrid media environment, where the lines between information and persuasion are increasingly blurred. Rather than viewing propaganda as separate from journalism, this research suggests that persuasive techniques can be embedded within routine journalistic practices through language, tone, and source selection. This perspective extends existing propaganda theory by situating it within modern media systems, where influence is often subtle, normalized, and not explicitly labeled as persuasive content.

Additionally, this study contributes to theoretical discussions surrounding framing, indexing theory, and agenda-setting by demonstrating their relationship with propaganda devices. The findings indicate that propaganda techniques do not function independently but

rather operate through established media processes that shape how issues are presented and interpreted. Through language choices, narrative emphasis, and source attribution, journalists play a role in constructing meaning and guiding audience interpretation. As a result, propaganda can be understood not only as a set of discrete techniques, but as a mechanism that operates in conjunction with broader communicative frameworks.

Overall, this study advances a more nuanced understanding of propaganda by emphasizing that it is not solely defined by false or misleading information, but by the strategic structuring of content to influence perception. By applying classical propaganda frameworks to contemporary news coverage, this research contributes to bridging the gap between historical propaganda theory and modern media analysis.

Methodological significance

This study contributes methodologically by advancing the analysis of propaganda beyond traditional approaches that focus primarily on framing, bias, or sentiment. While prior research often examines these elements separately, this study employs a device-level analytical framework through a structured codebook to systematically identify and interpret classical propaganda techniques within modern news texts. By focusing on the presence and function of specific propaganda devices, this approach allows for a more detailed and targeted examination of persuasive strategies embedded within journalistic narratives.

Additionally, this study integrates multiple analytical dimensions—propaganda devices, emotionally loaded language, and source attribution—within a single framework. Rather than treating these elements as separate or independent variables, this approach examines how they interact within news content to shape meaning and influence audience interpretation. This

integrated perspective provides a more comprehensive understanding of how persuasive messaging operates within journalism.

Methodologically, this study also reflects a shift from structured quantitative content analysis to qualitative textual analysis. Due to limitations in achieving consistent intercoder reliability, the research adopts an interpretive approach that emphasizes contextual analysis and the relationships between analytical categories within individual texts. This shift allows for a more nuanced and context-sensitive examination of narrative structure and the interaction of rhetorical elements, which may not be fully captured through strictly quantitative methods.

Finally, this research extends the application of propaganda analysis to mainstream American newspaper coverage, demonstrating how classical propaganda frameworks can be effectively applied within contemporary journalistic contexts.

Practical significance

In today's media environment, characterized by a 24-hour news cycle and the constant flow of information, audiences are exposed to an overwhelming volume of content across both traditional and digital platforms. Within this environment, it can be difficult for individuals to distinguish between information that is intended to inform and content that is designed to persuade or attract attention. As a result, there is a growing need for tools and frameworks that help individuals critically engage with news content and recognize the presence of persuasive messaging.

This study contributes to that need by building on the foundational work of the Institute for Propaganda Analysis, which aimed to provide accessible tools for identifying propaganda techniques in media. By applying these concepts to modern journalism, this research offers a

framework that helps individuals recognize how persuasive strategies operate within contemporary news reporting. In doing so, the study supports broader efforts to improve media and information literacy by encouraging a more critical and reflective approach to consuming news.

Media and information literacy play a critical role in addressing the challenges posed by misinformation, disinformation, and propaganda. As defined by the Council of Europe, media literacy involves the development of cognitive, technical, and social skills that enable individuals to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media content in an informed and responsible way (Bezkorovayna, 2025). This study contributes to these efforts by highlighting how persuasive techniques are embedded within news narratives, providing practical insight into how individuals can better identify and interpret these strategies.

Furthermore, research has shown that media literacy education can significantly improve individuals' ability to recognize and critically evaluate information. Individuals who receive media literacy training are more likely to identify misleading or persuasive content, verify information sources, and understand the broader implications of information within social and political contexts (Limberg, Olof, & Sanna, 2010; Voitovych, Kitsa, & Mudra, 2025). These findings reinforce the importance of integrating media literacy into educational frameworks.

The growing global emphasis on media literacy further underscores the practical relevance of this study. International organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and UNESCO have identified media literacy as a critical component of democratic participation and informed decision-making. By providing a clearer understanding of how persuasive messaging operates

within mainstream journalism, this study contributes to broader efforts to enhance public awareness and resilience in the face of information manipulation.

Overall, this research has practical implications for educators, media consumers, diplomats, and researchers by offering a framework for identifying and understanding persuasive strategies within news content.

Chapter Overview

Prior to the main chapters, this thesis includes a title page, copyright page, abstract, table of contents, acknowledgements, and dedication. The overall layout and formatting of this document follow the requirements of the Kansas State University EDTR template.

Chapter 1 introduces the problem addressed in this study and provides a broader context for the research. It also serves as an overview of the study's purpose, significance, and organization.

Chapter 2 presents the literature review, outlining the key theoretical frameworks that support the research questions. This chapter also examines relevant academic studies that inform the topic under investigation.

Chapter 3 provides the topical background for the study. Given the complexity of the subject, this chapter includes a historical overview of the Russia–Ukraine conflict to contextualize the material being analyzed. It also presents background information on *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*, including the types of content each publication produces.

Additionally, this chapter explains the concept of a “newspaper of record,” which informs the selection of these two media outlets.

Chapter 4 outlines the research methodology. This chapter includes a study overview, research design, and data collection procedures. It also provides detailed information on the sampling criteria, analytical framework, and codebook used for the textual analysis. Because this study relies on qualitative textual analysis, a researcher positionality statement and a discussion of study limitations are included to ensure transparency.

Chapter 5 presents the textual analysis of the 42 selected news articles. This chapter details the coding process and analytical approach, including how the codebook—developed using the Institute for Propaganda Analysis’ seven devices, along with categories for loaded language, atrocity-related content, and framing strategies—was applied. It also provides additional context for the coding categories and procedures used during the analysis.

Chapter 6 presents the findings of the study. In this chapter, patterns, frequencies (where applicable), themes, relationships, and key observations derived from the data are analyzed and interpreted.

Chapter 7 discusses the implications of the findings. This includes consideration of the study’s relevance to mass communication, political communication, international relations, and diplomatic contexts. This chapter also outlines opportunities for future research to further expand understanding of the topic.

Chapter 8 provides a summary of the study, reinforcing the key concepts, findings, and contributions prior to the conclusion.

Chapter 9 concludes the thesis by synthesizing the overall findings and contributions of the study. References for all sources cited are provided following the conclusion.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Foundations of Propaganda

Propaganda

Propaganda can be defined as the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist, differing from persuasion in its frequent reliance on selective, biased, or strategically framed messages rather than balanced and transparent argumentation (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2006). While contemporary definitions of propaganda emphasize its strategic and often manipulative qualities, the term has not always carried these negative implications and instead originated with a neutral, even administrative, meaning.

In the beginning, the word propaganda did not describe an inherently evil or negative practice. In fact, it had a neutral meaning. The origins of the word propaganda date back to the early 1600s where the word came into common use in Europe from the Catholic Church. Pope Gregory XV created the *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*, the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (Casey, 1944). This was a commission of cardinals who were charged with spreading the religion and regulating church affairs in foreign lands. In this case, propaganda meant “to propagate” or to spread ideas (religious doctrine). This commission was not seen in a negative light; it simply was the act of spreading information about the Catholic Church.

In modern contexts, however, the meaning of propaganda evolved significantly. Harold Lasswell formalized the study of propaganda by redefining it as a strategic process of managing collective attitudes through the manipulation of symbols. He defined propaganda as “the management of collective attitudes through the manipulation of significant symbols” (Lasswell H. , 1927). This reconceptualization marked a critical shift: propaganda moved from a neutral act

of dissemination to an intentional and strategic effort to influence public perception in ways that benefit the propagandist. This shift underscores the transition from unintentional communication to deliberate, goal-oriented strategic communication.

Propaganda vs. Persuasion

Persuasion provides a critical foundation for understanding propaganda, as both involve intentional efforts to influence attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. At its core, persuasion is typically understood as a process of communication that seeks to shape opinions through argument, reasoning, and the presentation of evidence (Perloff, 2017). However, propaganda extends beyond conventional persuasion by prioritizing strategic outcomes over balanced discourse, often employing selective information, emotional appeals, and framing techniques to guide audience interpretation (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2006). While persuasion assumes a degree of openness between communicator and audience, propaganda is more explicitly goal-oriented and may obscure intent in order to achieve a desired response.

Looking at the definitions of propaganda and persuasion, it seems the act of persuasion is very similar to the theory of propaganda. Garth Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell wrote *Propaganda and Persuasion*, a study on the differences between the two (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2006).. According to Jowett and O'Donnell, "Propaganda is a form of communication that attempts to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist". Whereas persuasion is defined as "Persuasion is interactive and attempts to satisfy the needs of both persuader and persuadee" (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2006)). The authors note that propaganda and persuasion are different types of communication, even though they have been used interchangeably throughout the years.

Propaganda is a form of communication where the sender intentionally shapes information to influence an audience in support of their own objectives. In propaganda, the sender's goals are prioritized over balanced or mutual understanding. Persuasion simply is trying to convince someone of something. The communicator can be honest and fair, present multiple sides of the argument and does only care about their self-interests. While persuasion involves attempting to influence attitudes or behaviors, propaganda is a more strategic and often one-sided form of communication that prioritizes the sender's objectives and may employ manipulative techniques to shape perception (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2006).

Ryan Jenkins, who also did a study on propaganda vs. persuasion stated, "Propaganda is seen as a more deliberate attempt to influence and mold one's ideologies to further the goals of the propagandist" (Jenkins, 2005). In regard to persuasion Jenkins said, "Persuasion, is understood as an open communication practice with people wanting to have their wants and needs satisfied by the persuader" (Jenkins, 2005). In his study, he supports Jowett and O'Donnell that propaganda the difference between propaganda and persuasion is intent. Propaganda aims to control perception in service of a person, cause or agenda, persuasion only aims to influence.

Propaganda as Strategic Communication

Building on this foundation, Christopher Paul defines strategic communication as "the coordinated use of messaging, actions, and other signals to inform, influence, or persuade selected audiences in support of objectives" (Paul, 2011). This definition emphasizes that communication must be coordinated, audience-focused, and goal-driven, and that it can operate across multiple forms and channels. Strategic communication is therefore inherently planned rather than accidental, reinforcing its alignment with propagandistic practices.

Strategic communication often incorporates practices such as “spin” and news management, in which actors selectively present and coordinate information to shape media narratives and minimize unfavorable coverage. “Spin” refers to the framing of information in a way that promotes a favorable interpretation, while news management involves controlling what information is released, when it is released, and how it is presented. Together, these practices function as tools for constructing propagandistic messaging before they reach journalistic channels (Quinn, 1999).

Beyond these practices, the literature identifies several core components that distinguish strategic communication from general information dissemination. First, strategic communication is inherently intentional. Messages are deliberately crafted to align with broader political or organizational goals rather than emerging spontaneously. This intentionality reflects Lasswell’s emphasis on the management of attitudes and highlights the controlled nature of propagandistic messaging.

Second, strategic communication is goal oriented. Communication efforts are designed to achieve specific outcomes, such as shaping public perception, legitimizing actions, or mobilizing support (Paul, 2011; Fawell, 2012) This instrumental focus differentiates strategic communication from general persuasion by emphasizing measurable or desired effects.

Third, strategic communication is audience centered. Messages are tailored to specific audiences based on their beliefs, values, and identities. This targeted approach increases the likelihood that messages will resonate and influence interpretation. Rather than employing uniform messaging, strategic communication adapts content to different groups, reinforcing its calculated and adaptive nature (Suarez, 2020).

Fourth, message construction plays a central role. Strategic communication relies on framing, narrative development, symbolism, and emotional appeals to shape how information is interpreted. As Jowett and O'Donnell (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2006) argue, propagandistic messages are structured in ways that guide audience perception and reinforce particular interpretations of events. Techniques such as propaganda devices function within this broader system as specific forms of message framing.

Finally, strategic communication depends on the effective use of channels and dissemination strategies. Messages are distributed through media systems, institutional platforms, and digital networks, all of which influence reach and reception. The selection of channels, timing, and repetition of messages are critical factors in ensuring that communication achieves its intended effect (Suarez, 2020). Use of propaganda devices in large national newspapers such as the New York Times or the Wall Street Journal, which this study focuses on, has the potential to reach a wide audience.

Taken together, these components illustrate that propaganda as a form of strategic communication is not merely a collection of isolated techniques, but rather a systematic and strategic form of communication. By situating propaganda devices within this broader framework, it becomes clear that such tactics operate as part of a coordinated effort to influence audiences and achieve specific communicative objectives.

Institute for Propaganda Analysis (IPA)

This study examines research on propaganda devices created by the Institute for Propaganda Analysis' seven propaganda devices as well as on atrocity propaganda and emotionally charged/loading language. The Institute for Propaganda Analysis' seven propaganda devices are used in this content analysis to determine if the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York*

Times are utilizing propaganda devices in their reporting of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. In the late 1930s, American journalist Clyde Miller and a group of prominent sociologists founded the Institute for Propaganda Analysis to promote media literacy education (Schiffrin, 2022).

The Institute for Propaganda Analysis postulated that the best response to propaganda content was for the people consuming the content to use critical thinking and to learn to identify propaganda techniques being used by the mainstream media outlets. The group also thought that the best weapon against propaganda was education, which is why they formed the Institute for Propaganda Analysis. The institute published pamphlets and books for five years before the group ran out of funding.

This issue the IPA ran into was that the average citizen did not think like a scholar. Many readers did not understand the complex ideas that that IPA presented, so the group simplified complicated subjects by creating the seven propaganda devices. The “Seven common propaganda devices” was published in 1937 as a taxonomy of techniques that were used to spread propaganda (Schiffrin, 2022). These devices are:

1. *Bandwagon*: This technique is used to persuade the audience to follow the crowd to develop widespread support for the propagandist (Schiffrin, 2018).
2. *Card Stacking*: When the propagandist stacks all the “cards” against the truth by making the best case for their side and the worst for the opposing viewpoint.
3. *Glittering Generalities*: Using words that stir up our emotions to make us accept and approve without examining the evidence.
4. *Name Calling*: Using negative words (bad names) to create hatred or an unfavorable opinion against ideas, beliefs, groups or institution.

5. *Plain Folks*: A technique to convince the audience that the spokesperson is from humble origins and of the people. This spokesperson is supposed to be able to reach the audience and identify with their point of view.
6. *Testimonial*: A technique used to associate a respected person, or someone experienced to endorse a product or cause associated with the propagandist. Hoping the audience will follow the lead of the person.
7. *Transfer*: A technique used to carry over the approval and the authority of something citizens respect and revere for something the propagandist needs the citizens to accept.

It has been argued by the IPA that propaganda was intended to appeal to emotions and get the audience to not think critically (Bauer, 2024). These devices helped audiences become active readers who questioned the content they read and analyzed their reactions to the content. IPA used these taxonomies to analyze political speeches, broadcasts and contemporary events.

In practice, the Institute demonstrated the application of these devices across multiple forms of public communication. Analyses of political speeches illustrated how techniques such as name-calling, glittering generalities, and transfer were embedded in rhetorical appeals to influence audiences (Sproule, 2001). Similarly, the IPA extended this framework to broadcast media, particularly radio, identifying how repetition, emotional framing, and perceived authority functioned within mass-mediated persuasion (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2019). Beyond individual texts, the Institute's *Propaganda Analysis* bulletins applied the seven devices to contemporary events, systematically interpreting ongoing political and social developments and demonstrating how propaganda operated within real-time public discourse (Schiffrin, 2022).

Throughout the IPA's tenure, it addressed propaganda issues in different governments and attacked the Methodist Federation for Social Action. The IPA was eventually investigated by the Dies Committee, which analyzed communist and fascist activities in the United States. The criticism from the committee led to the IPA running out of funds and them stopping publishing their journals (Sproule, 2001).

Several recent studies have applied the Institute for Propaganda Analysis' framework to analyze how news and entertainment media employ propaganda (Bauer, 2024; Conway & Grabe, 2007). The issue with this framework is that it assumes that the average citizen is not able to critically think about the content they consume. The flaw in this line of reasoning lies in the assumption that the average audience lacks the ability to think critically about the content they consume. The issue is not whether audiences possess the capacity for critical reflection, but rather whether they are able to separate their evaluative judgments from the emotional responses that media content evokes. This limitation becomes especially evident when examining forms of propaganda that rely heavily on emotional arousal, such as atrocity propaganda, which is notably absent from the IPA framework.

The limitation of the IPA framework lies in its implicit assumption that audiences are largely incapable of critically evaluating media content, positioning them as passive recipients of persuasive messages. This thesis addresses that limitation by shifting the focus from the capacity for critical thinking to the conditions under which it is constrained, arguing that audiences may possess evaluative abilities but struggle to separate those judgments from emotionally charged responses. In doing so, this research reframes audience vulnerability not as a deficit of cognition, but as a function of how emotional framing and narrative intensity shape the interpretation of information.

A propaganda device not included in IPA's framework is atrocity propaganda. Defined as "is a form of psychological warfare that spreads "information about the crimes committed by an enemy, especially deliberate fabrications or exaggerations"" (Turfah, 2024) This type of propaganda emphasizes images and descriptions of the horrors happening during any conflict. According to Paul Morrow, atrocity propaganda consists of "reports of cruel or shocking acts, circulated widely, and intended to produce an inappropriate martial response" (Morrow, 2018). The issue is that both false and true reports can be considered atrocity propaganda. But this is only if the purpose of publishing the content is to provoke an inappropriate military response that is excessive, unjustified or not suitable for the situation.

However, a 2011 study indicates that atrocity-related messaging can also operate in ways that extend beyond efforts to generate support for war or mobilize populations. The study examined fifty Reuters news articles related to the Middle East conflict. These articles were published across a three-month study window on the Reuters website (Silverman, 2011).

According to Silverman, Reuters utilized atrocity propaganda by publishing stories that were exaggerated or misrepresented the impact of Israeli actions on Palestinians. They often used emotionally charged language and omitted balance facts. Reuters also used loaded terms and presented casualty figures in ways that emphasized Palestinian suffering while minimizing or omitting the casualties from the Israeli side. The result of utilizing this technique meant that audience sympathy and support was significantly shifted towards the Arabs/Palestinians.

Silverman suggests that Reuters' coverage reflected a consistent use of atrocity-related framing alongside other forms of potentially biased reporting, which may have influenced audience sympathies toward Arab/Palestinian perspectives. The frequency and pattern of such framing led the author to question whether these elements were incidental or indicative of a more

systematic approach. Once again Silverman notes that, although the intent behind propagandistic messaging is often not explicitly stated, the repeated presence of these techniques and their observed effects on survey participants may point to patterns consistent with intentional bias. In this context, the use of atrocity-related framing raises concerns regarding its potential to shape reader interpretation, which could be seen as in tension with Reuters stated ethical guidelines and Trust Principles, and may complicate its designation as a “source of record.”

Atrocity Propaganda

Atrocity propaganda has long been used as a way to demonize opposing groups by emphasizing or exaggerating acts of violence. One of the earliest empirical studies examined the Irish Rebellion and found that atrocity stories were circulated to portray opponents as violent and uncivilized, which helped justify political repression and shape public opinion (Read, 1938). Similar patterns appeared during World War I, where widely distributed claims about German soldiers committing extreme acts of brutality were used to construct the enemy as morally corrupt and inhumane. Marlin explains that these types of narratives are effective because they create a clear moral divide, positioning one side as civilized and the other as barbaric (Marlin, 2002). Together, these cases show that atrocity propaganda is a deliberate strategy used to influence how audiences perceive conflict.

More recent research shows that this pattern continues in modern conflicts. Çetinkaya states in a study of the Balkan Wars, found that media coverage focused heavily on graphic accounts of violence against in group populations in order to generate fear, anger, and support for nationalist efforts (Cetinkaya, 2014). This type of coverage worked to further demonize the opposing side by highlighting their brutality. Morrow builds on this by arguing that atrocity propaganda relies on emotionally charged narratives that simplify conflicts into clear good

versus evil frameworks (Morrow, 2018). By doing so, these messages make it easier for audiences to assign blame and support particular actions. Across these studies, atrocity propaganda consistently functions as a tool that shapes public understanding by emphasizing violence in ways that delegitimize the enemy and justify one's own position.

Although atrocity propaganda is often examined as a propaganda tactic characterized by emotional appeals and moral framing, its effectiveness underscores a larger dynamic at play. Specifically, it demonstrates how propagandistic messages are carefully constructed to achieve strategic objectives, influence perception, and guide audience behavior. In this study, atrocity propaganda is treated as a distinct analytical category because a substantial portion of the content examined could not be adequately classified using the seven devices outlined by the Institute for Propaganda Analysis yet clearly aligned with the defining characteristics of atrocity-based messaging.

The addition of this category therefore addresses a gap in the existing framework and allows for a more precise classification of emotionally charged content. Rather than viewing atrocity propaganda in isolation, it is more analytically useful to situate it within the broader theory of propaganda as strategic communication. This perspective highlights intentionality, message design, and audience targeting as central components of propagandistic practice.

Transmission of Propaganda through Media Systems

Indexing, Gatekeeping, and Framing Practices in Journalism

Unfortunately, journalism is a non-neutral system. Journalists often rely on elite sources which shape the range of perspective that is presented in news coverage, but it is not guaranteed that the sources that are presented in articles are unbiased. The theoretical framework that supports this opinion is the indexing theory that was proposed by W. Lance Bennett in 1990

(Bennett L. W., 2016). This theory suggests that news coverage tends to reflect the range of viewpoints expressed by political elites, with journalists “indexing” their reporting to these sources. Indexing sources mean that journalists base their coverage on the range of viewpoints expressed by powerful or official sources.

In simple terms, indexing suggests that news coverage reflects the perspectives of those in positions of power. However, this relationship is not always consistent. In contemporary media environments characterized by polarization and fragmentation, the indexing process may be more complex and uneven. As a result, variation emerges in how different outlets represent elite perspectives within American media. A case study by Steven Livingston (Livingston, 2016) illustrates this dynamic, noting that “as oppositional voices are silenced by political pressure campaigns of various types, oppositional frames in news content will diminish. As controversy among officials expands, so, too, will controversy in the news.

While the indexing theory provides insight into what sources journalists are more prone to use in their reporting, it can’t fully account for the other frameworks that influence journalistic practices when it comes to propaganda. Classical models of journalism offer a more comprehensive understanding of how news is constructed, highlighting the professional norms and functions that guide decisions about what information is included, emphasized, or excluded.

Journalism’s classical model views news as a one-way transmission of information from sources to audiences, mediated by gatekeepers (The Comm Spot, 2025; Lasswell, 2024). The gatekeeping theory was first introduced in the mid-20th century to describe the decision-making process within news (White, 1950). Gatekeeping is defined as “the process of selecting, writing, editing, positioning, scheduling, repeating and otherwise massaging information to become news” (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014, p. 73). Gatekeepers (editors and newsmakers) control the

flow of information, which means that a group of people choose what information is released to the public. If a certain group or company has a specific set of ideals or cause they want to promote, the gatekeepers could choose to only publish information that helps their cause.

Over time, the theory expanded to include all forms of information control in mass media, organizations and digital platforms. The theory was also expanded to include the idea of gatekeeping being executed by algorithms instead of humans (Wallace, 2018). While gatekeeping theory explains how journalists and editors filter and select information for dissemination, it does not fully account for the broader societal consequences of these decisions. Agenda-setting theory builds on this foundation by demonstrating how patterns of selection shape public perceptions of issue importance, effectively transferring salience from media agendas to public agendas.

The idea behind the agenda setting theory can be traced back to the 1920s when Walter Lippman argued that “People were not capable of directly experiencing the bigger world, thus had to rely on the images and messages constructed by news media to form perceptions” (Science Direct, 2026). Lippman’s thoughts on what the public was able to handle was very similar to how the *Institute for Propaganda Analysis* suggested that the public was too emotional to critically think through the information given to them. The understanding of the agenda setting theory evolved in 1972 when McCombs and Shaw proposed that media doesn’t dictate what to think but what to think about (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Other scholars like Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky suggest that the media serves as a conduit for propaganda (Herman & Chomsky, 1988) . While the agenda setting theory is not a formalized tool of propaganda, it is a formalized tool of journalism.

Although agenda-setting theory demonstrates how media prioritize certain issues, it does not explain how those issues are constructed in ways that may influence interpretation. Framing theory becomes particularly relevant in this context, as it examines how language, narrative structure, and emphasis shape meaning, an essential mechanism through which propaganda operates within news coverage.

The framing theory originates from Erving Goffman and suggests that “media and communicators shape public perception by selecting, organizing, and presenting information in specific ways. By highlighting certain aspects of reality while excluding others, frames define problems, diagnose causes, and suggest solutions, thereby influencing how audiences understand and interpret complex issues” (Mass Communication Theory, 2026, pp. 10-11). Even though the agenda setting theory and the framing theory seem very similar, they are different. While the agenda setting theory determines which issues are deemed salient by audiences based on being to those issues in the news, framing determines how those issues are perceived and understood by the audience.

Framing theory posits that the way information is presented to an audience shape how that information is interpreted and processed. Journalists employ a range of techniques to construct these frames. These include narrative structures and storytelling devices such as conflict, human interest, economic consequences, and attribution of responsibility, which can direct audience attention toward particular aspects of an issue (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). Framing is also seen in practices of selection and exclusion, the use of episodic versus thematic framing, and strategic lexical choices.

A growing body of research has examined how these framing practices intersect with propaganda across different media contexts. Building on this foundation, a substantial body of

research has explicitly examined the intersection of framing and propaganda across different media contexts, demonstrating how framing devices can function as mechanisms of persuasive and, at times, propagandistic communication. Hiebert (2003), in a preliminary review of public relations practices during the Iraq War, illustrates how strategic framing was used to shape public understanding of the conflict. His analysis shows that government and military communicators worked in tandem with media systems to construct narratives that emphasized justification, legitimacy, and national interest, thereby aligning framing practices with broader propagandistic objectives.

Similarly, Good applies Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model to the framing of climate change in Canadian, American, and international newspapers, revealing systematic patterns in how environmental issues are presented (Good, 2008). The study finds that economic and political interests influence which aspects of climate change are emphasized or downplayed, resulting in frames that can marginalize scientific consensus or prioritize elite viewpoints. This demonstrates that framing is not only a journalistic tool but also a structural mechanism through which ideological and institutional biases are reproduced.

In the context of war journalism, Cozma examines the relationship between sourcing, framing, and propaganda by analyzing coverage associated with the "Murrow Boys" (Cozma, 2015). The study highlights how reliance on official sources contributes to frames that may implicitly support wartime narratives, reinforcing the idea that sourcing practices are integral to how propaganda operates within news framing. This connection underscores how frames are constructed not only through language and narrative, but also through the selection of voices deemed credible or authoritative.

Expanding beyond traditional media, Seo and Ebrahim analyze visual propaganda on Facebook during the Syrian conflict, demonstrating how imagery functions as a powerful framing device in digital environments (Ebrahim & Seo, 2016). Their comparative analysis shows that visual content—such as images of violence, victimhood, or military strength—can frame conflicts in ways that evoke emotional responses and shape audience interpretation, often bypassing more deliberative forms of processing. This highlights the evolving nature of propaganda, where framing extends beyond textual narratives into multimodal and platform-specific forms of communication.

Together, these elements influence how meaning is constructed and, in some cases, can align with propagandistic intent. This framework is illustrated by a comparative analysis of CNN and CCTV that was published in 2022. The case study used framing analysis to examine the narratives in reporting on politics and explore the influence on readers (Wang, Sannusi, & Kadir, 2024). It applied the framing theory and peace journalism model to content broadcasted by CNN for America and CCTV for China. These findings illustrate how framing functions as a mechanism through which ideological narratives are constructed and conveyed in conflict coverage.

By prioritizing humanitarian consequences and civilian suffering, CNN focused on a moral and human-centered interpretation of the conflict, while its reliance on Ukrainian and international sources reinforced a perspective aligned with Western geopolitical positions. In contrast, CCTV's emphasis on military strategy and political responses, combined with greater reliance on Russian-affiliated sources, directs the audience's attention toward state-centric interpretations of the conflict.

Although both outlets employed elements of war journalism, the variation in thematic emphasis, source selection, and the relative presence of peace journalism frames demonstrates how news narratives are selectively structured. These patterns suggest that framing is not merely a neutral journalistic practice but can operate as a vehicle through which particular viewpoints are elevated, others are marginalized, and audience perceptions are shaped in ways that align with broader ideological interests. These are hallmarks of propagandistic communication within contemporary media systems.

Propaganda operates most visibly at the level of framing, but it is enabled by earlier stages of the news production process, including indexing (sourcing) and gatekeeping. When journalism functions as a transmission system, these stages become particularly susceptible to external influence. Scholars such as Noam Chomsky argue that media systems often reproduce elite perspectives, highlighting the role of external actors in shaping news content (Chomsky, 1988). This highlights the importance of examining how propaganda can enter news coverage through sources themselves.

Source-Based Propaganda in News Content

This study moves beyond examining propaganda solely through the lenses of framing by focusing on its point of origin within news content. Specifically, it analyzes whether propagandistic elements emerge from the journalist's narrative voice or are introduced through attributed sources.

Previous studies examining how American news media cover conflicts revealed that news production is heavily reliant on institutional sources (government officials, military leaders and established organizations) to provide reliable and consistent content within the news articles (Cozma, 2015; Cozma & Kozman, 2015). This reliance on institutional sources creates an often-

biased news cycle that tends to amplify elite voices, often setting the agenda based on the information provided by the elites. This creates a news cycle that is shaped by political, economic, and institutional power and furthers their agendas.

Building on this reliance, journalism scholarship conceptualizes news production as a source-driven process in which journalists depend on external actors to construct news content. Foundational research on sourcing practices demonstrates a consistent privileging of official and institutional voices, reflecting broader power structures within society. Bennett's indexing theory suggests that news coverage tends to mirror the range of debate among political elites, while Gans and Tuchman argue that professional norms such as objectivity and efficiency reinforce journalists' dependence on authoritative sources (Bennett, 2016; Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1978).

Within this framework, journalists function less as independent producers of information and more as intermediaries who select and transmit source-provided material. Simply stated, journalists can create the structure of the article, but do not always originate everything. The sources provide the raw narrative, building blocks of information that can be used for propaganda (Teneboim-Weinblatt & Baden, 2018).

Recent research extends this perspective by emphasizing the role of sources as active contributors to the construction of news narratives, rather than passive providers of information (Gans, 1979; Sigal, 1986). Scholars have shown that sources not only supply the raw material of news but also influence which issues are covered and how they are interpreted, operating within a dynamic power relationship with journalists. Furthermore, the dominance of institutional and elite sources has been found to shape the boundaries of public discourse, reinforcing the idea that

news narratives are co-produced through interactions between journalists and strategically positioned actors (Reese et al., 1994; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996).

These dynamics are particularly important for understanding how propaganda may enter news coverage. If sources contribute pre-framed and strategically constructed messages, propagandistic elements may originate within attributed content rather than solely within the journalist's narrative voice. This reinforces the need to examine sourcing practices not only as a routine aspect of journalism, but as a potential entry point for propaganda within objective reporting. This case study shows that propaganda often enters journalism through sources rather than originating in journalist's narratives.

Within news coverage, propaganda is not typically presented in the articles as propaganda. It is instead embedded through established journalistic conventions to make the reader come to the intended conclusion on their own. The framing theory provides a useful lens for understanding how certain aspects of an issue are emphasized, while others are minimized or excluded. By selecting specific angles, such as conflict, responsibility, or human-interest journalists and sources shape how audiences interpret events. In the context of conflict reporting, these frames often highlight violence, assign blame, use emotionally charged language, report on atrocity content, or construct moral evaluations, which can align with propagandistic objectives.

In addition to framing, emotional framing play a significant role in the communication of propaganda within news content. The use of emotionally charged language, particularly in descriptions of violence, suffering, or moral outrage, can influence audience perception by eliciting strong affective responses. This is especially evident in coverage of the Russia–Ukraine conflict, where reports frequently include descriptions of atrocities, civilian harm, and

humanitarian crises. Such language can function to reinforce specific interpretations of the conflict, particularly when aligned with broader strategic narratives provided by sources.

A study conducted in 2023 demonstrates how content creators intentionally embed emotional cues in social media content to influence audience behavior (Hosseini & Staab, 2023). The findings show that creators tailor their messaging based on the topic in order to evoke specific responses, using targeted emotional appeals to incite engagement. Notably, the study found that negative emotional framing like appeals to anger, fear, and sadness resulted in higher levels of interaction on the posts, especially in the context of false claims.

Emotional appeals was shown to be particularly effective across issue areas such as politics, health, the Syrian war, and COVID-19. While this research focuses on misinformation in social media, the underlying mechanisms are transferable to journalism. If emotional framing can increase engagement and interaction in social media contexts, it can be argued that similar strategies in news content may also enhance persuasion, audience engagement, and message diffusion, even if the intent between these forms of media differs (Hosseini & Staab, 2023).

In news articles, narrative structures further contribute to the delivery of propagandistic content by organizing events into coherent and compelling storylines that evoke emotions. News narratives often rely on familiar structures, such as victim–perpetrator dichotomies, heroism, or moral struggle, which simplify complex geopolitical events into more accessible forms. These narrative conventions can amplify propagandistic elements by reinforcing clear distinctions between “good” and “bad” actors, particularly in wartime reporting.

Taken together, framing, emotional appeals, and narrative structures serve as key mechanisms through which propagandistic messages are embedded within news coverage. This

study builds on these theoretical foundations by examining how such techniques appear in reporting on the Russia–Ukraine conflict and whether they are more frequently associated with the journalist’s narrative voice or with attributed sources in the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*.

Propaganda in Conflict Coverage

Conflict coverage refers to how media report on and frame ongoing conflicts, shaping public understanding of the actors, causes, and consequences involved. Rather than functioning as a neutral transmission of information, coverage of conflict is inherently selective and constructed, often reflecting the range of perspectives presented by political elites and privileging authoritative sources (Bennett, 1990; Entman, 2004). In this way, conflict coverage becomes a key site where persuasion and propaganda intersect, as strategic actors use media to shape narratives, influence public opinion, and legitimize particular actions. This is especially evident in contemporary information environments, where media systems are increasingly leveraged as tools of strategic communication and influence (Prier, 2017). This strategic use of media in conflict is not incidental but increasingly formalized within state-level doctrine.

In 2003, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) in China formalized the concept of the “Three Warfare’s” (Halper, 2013). This concept is a political warfare strategy that uses three tactics to advance its national interest, without having to engage in direct armed conflict (European Parliament, 2025; Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, 2022). The three warfare’s include psychological warfare, legal warfare and media warfare. Media warfare is a form of information warfare that uses media (traditional media outlets and social media outlets) to manipulate public perceptions, emotions and behaviors (Prier, 2017). Tactics include

disinformation and misinformation, cyber warfare, social media manipulation, propaganda and narrative control.

Throughout history, propaganda has played a crucial role in shaping public opinion and mobilizing support for war. Governments and media outlets utilize propaganda to help frame their actions as morally justified or necessary. During the U.S. invasion of Iraq, propaganda was used to blend national identity, promote patriotism and claim moral authority. This made it easy for leaders to gain support for a war that would take us to Iraq.

The attack of 9/11 was the first time since the attack on Pearl Harbor that America had been attacked on their home soil. The American public was already emotional, so the government used propaganda to promote patriotism, blend national identity and claim moral authority. The propaganda was so effective after the attack on Pearl Harbor, that it became one of the largest surges in military recruitment in American History. 134,000 Americans enlisted into the military within thirty days of the Pearl Harbor attack and over 181,000 Americans enlisted for active duty within the year after the 9/11 attack in 2001 (Nielsen, 2008).

There are case studies that show that propaganda is not always effective during a conflict (Sugitani, 2025). During the Cold War, propaganda was prevalent in both the United States and Russia. The United States used radio broadcasts, films, leaflets and cultural exchange programs to promote democratic values. Whereas Russia used domestic and international propaganda to glorify communism through print, radio, film and imagery. The goal of propaganda for both sides was to win the hearts and minds of the audience worldwide (Aden, 2012).

What made it so that the propaganda utilized in these countries didn't lead to war came down to one thing, mutually assured destruction. Mutually assured destruction, also known as MAD, meant that if one side fired a nuclear missile, the other would do the same and both

countries would be destroyed. MAD was a popular theory during the Cold War. The promise of nuclear warfare discouraged the escalation from propaganda to full out war (Shelling, 1966)

One of the first studies that was completed in regard to propaganda in conflict coverage happened in 1927 by Harold Lasswell in his book “Propaganda Technique in World War I”. This study helped shape the framework of what we know as modern propaganda theory. Lasswell introduced the framework that “propaganda is “direct use of suggestion” and introduced the following techniques. He introduced the ideas of Emotional Appeals, Wartime “lies,” The “War Aim” Catalyst, The “Magic Bullet” Theory and Totalitarian Potential. (Lasswell H. , 1927)

Emotional Appeals- Using patriotic symbols, mythology and horrific depictions of the enemy to stir public emotions.

Wartime “lies”- deliberate, systematic manipulation of symbols, words, pictures, songs and statutes to manage public’s attitude and to control communication during a conflict.

The “War Aim” Catalyst- How war aims (value demands) served as a catalyst of transnational political action.

The “Magic Bullet” Theory- The theory that the media could directly influence or “inject” ideas into a passive audience.

Totalitarian Potential- The management of collective attitudes by the manipulation of significant symbols.

Through these theories and his analysis, Lasswell demonstrated the central role of propaganda as a tool of information warfare during periods of conflict. His framework, which focuses on who communicates a message, what is communicated, through which channels, to whom, and with what effects, provides a foundational structure for understanding how persuasive communication operates within mass media systems. This model is particularly

relevant to the present study because it offers a conceptual basis for examining how propaganda is constructed and transmitted through identifiable message strategies.

Subsequent research has applied and extended Lasswell's framework in ways that align with the use of discrete persuasive techniques. Jowett and O'Donnell emphasize the relationship between source credibility, message construction, and audience effects, which parallels the use of devices such as testimonial and transfer (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2019). Taylor similarly demonstrates how state-sponsored communication relies on structured rhetorical strategies to shape public opinion, reinforcing the idea that propaganda operates through recurring and identifiable patterns (Taylor, 2003). Ellul expands this perspective by situating propaganda within broader communication systems, arguing that persuasive techniques are embedded within routine media practices rather than isolated instances of influence (Ellul, 1965).

Together, these studies support the analytical approach used in this research, where propaganda is examined through specific devices such as testimonial, card stacking, and glittering generalities. These devices can be understood as the mechanisms through which Lasswell's broader model operates in practice. In this sense, the propaganda device framework employed in this study translates Lasswell's theoretical model into a systematic method for identifying how persuasive messages are constructed, conveyed, and interpreted within contemporary news coverage.

Although Lasswell's framework remains highly relevant, case studies suggest that the delivery and structure of propaganda messaging have evolved over time (Damiano, 2018). During World War II, propaganda increasingly reflected the forms later codified by the Institute for Propaganda Analysis, emphasizing recognizable techniques and appeals that could be

systematically identified and analyzed. This shift illustrates how foundational theories such as Lasswell's continue to inform contemporary understandings of propaganda, even as the mechanisms and media through which it is delivered have changed.

Propaganda as Narrative Systems in Conflict Coverage

This literature review has established what propaganda is, how it has historically functioned, and how it operates within contemporary news coverage of conflict. It has examined key mechanisms including framing, gatekeeping, indexing, and emotional appeals and how they shape public perception and influence how events and actors are understood. However, these mechanisms do not operate independently, and they alone cannot be considered propaganda messaging. Rather, they function in coordination within broader narrative systems that organize and structure meaning across news content.

Narrative systems enable the development of consistent and repetitive messaging patterns, which are essential for the effective dissemination of propaganda. Through these systems, individual mechanisms interact and reinforce one another, producing coherent interpretations of conflict that appear stable and credible over time. In this way, propaganda is not the result of isolated or incidental language choices, but a systematic and structured process embedded within media practices.

Walter Fisher's narrative paradigm theory can be used as a methodological tool to analyze propaganda by uncovering the underlying narratives that were embedded within the content (Fisher, 2019). According to the Fisher's paradigm, messages are persuasive as long as they are coherent and align with audience values which show that propaganda has to be intentional.

Moreover, the power of propaganda lies in its normalization. As narratives are repeated and reinforced across coverage, they become naturalized within public discourse, making them more difficult to identify and challenge. This normalization enhances the effectiveness of propaganda by obscuring its constructed nature, allowing it to shape perception in ways that feel intuitive or self-evident. Propaganda does not become normalized overnight; there is a strategy in place to reshape language and messaging so that previous ideas that are extreme become normal (Krzyzanowski, 2020).

While the literature establishes a strong theoretical foundation for understanding these processes, it is necessary to examine how they function within a specific empirical context. Identifying propaganda in news coverage requires attention not only to abstract mechanisms, but also to the political, historical, and media conditions in which such messaging is produced and circulated. The following section therefore outlines the background of the Russia–Ukraine conflict and introduces the newspapers included in this study, providing essential context for the analysis that follows.

Research Questions

This literature review includes the foundation and academic background for the following research questions that will be addressed in this study.

1. How are propaganda devices presented in news coverage of the Russia–Ukraine war in selected U.S. newspapers?
2. How are propaganda devices embedded within journalists’ narratives compared to attributed quotations?
3. How are different types of sources associated with the use of propaganda devices within quoted material?
4. How do propaganda devices within quoted statements function as emotional and persuasive appeals?

Chapter 3: Content Background

The Russia-Ukraine Conflict

In 1991, Ukraine declared its independence following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, marking the beginning of its transition to a sovereign state. Ukraine is the second-largest country in Europe by landmass and, in the early 1990s, inherited the third-largest nuclear arsenal in the world. In exchange for relinquishing these weapons, Ukraine received security assurances from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Russia under the 1994 Budapest Memorandum (Mearsheimer, 1993). Although intended to guarantee Ukraine's territorial integrity, the agreement did not include strong enforcement mechanisms. In the years that followed, Ukraine increasingly moved toward Western political and economic alignment, particularly after the 2004 Orange Revolution, which brought a more pro-Western leadership to power (Davis Jr. & Fitzgerald, 2025).

From the Russian perspective, Ukraine occupies a critical position both historically and strategically. Russian leadership has consistently framed Ukraine as part of its historical sphere of influence and has expressed concern over NATO expansion into Eastern Europe. From this viewpoint, Ukraine's alignment with Western institutions is interpreted as a direct threat to Russian national security (Putin, 2021). Russia has justified its actions, including the 2014 annexation of Crimea, as necessary to protect Russian-speaking populations and secure strategic military interests, particularly access to the Black Sea (Allison, 2014). This perspective often frames the conflict as defensive, positioning Russia as responding to external pressure rather than initiating aggression.

In contrast, the Ukrainian perspective emphasizes sovereignty, territorial integrity, and resistance to external interference. Ukraine has consistently framed Russia's actions as violations of international law and acts of unprovoked aggression (Ploky, 2023). Ukrainian leadership has emphasized national identity, democratic governance, and the right to self-determination. This perspective is frequently communicated through appeals that highlight civilian suffering, national resilience, and moral legitimacy, reinforcing a narrative of defense against invasion.

The American perspective reflects a combination of strategic and ideological considerations. The United States has framed the conflict as part of a broader effort to defend democratic values and maintain a rules-based international order (Blinken, 2022). At the same time, U.S. engagement is shaped by geopolitical interests, including limiting Russian influence and maintaining stability in Europe. American media coverage often reflects these priorities, emphasizing themes such as democracy, human rights, and humanitarian impact, which can shape how audiences interpret the conflict.

In 2014, Russia seized Crimea, a Ukrainian peninsula, prompting widespread international condemnation from organizations such as the United Nations and the European Union. In late 2021, Russia began building military forces along Ukraine's borders, escalating tensions. On February 24, 2022, Russia formally launched a full-scale military invasion of Ukraine (Davis Jr. & Fitzgerald, 2025). As of 2025, the conflict remains ongoing, with continued military engagement and increasing complexity due to international involvement.

The Russia–Ukraine conflict is particularly important to study because it is ongoing, allowing researchers to analyze how narratives are constructed and disseminated in real time. The presence of competing national perspectives creates an environment where framing,

sourcing, and emotional appeals play a central role in shaping public understanding. These conditions make the conflict a relevant case for examining how propaganda devices operate within contemporary news coverage. This study analyzes coverage from *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times* to identify how these persuasive strategies are embedded within reporting on foreign conflict.

Newspaper of Record

Originally, the term “newspaper of record” was created as a part of a marketing plan to distinguish the *New York Times* from their rivals. Little did they know that they had created a term that would become aspirational to many publications across the country (Caulfield, 2017) . The term “newspaper of record” is a major national newspaper with “large circulation whose editorial and news-gathering functions are considered authoritative and independent; they are thus, “newspapers of record by reputation” (Martin & Kathleen, 1998). Newspapers that use this moniker include some of the oldest and most respected newspapers in the world. They are also widely recognized for their longstanding reputations in historical documentation, archival recordkeeping, and credible reporting.

According to Caulfield, “National newspapers of record” are distinguished in two ways. The first way is that the paper is “rigorous, showing attention to detail and having accountability in their editorial processes” (Caulfield, 2017). The second way is for the paper to have a “ truly national view and attempt to be the best possible record of what happened in the nation (not just a region) on a given day” (Caulfield, 2017).

In the context of the United States, these defining characteristics are most clearly embodied by a small number of prominent publications. The primary newspapers of record include *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Washington Post*. *The New York*

Times is widely recognized for its comprehensive news coverage, extensive archival record, and numerous Pulitzer Prize awards, which underscore its prominence within U.S. journalism (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.; The Pulitzer Prizes, n.d.). Similarly, *The Wall Street Journal* is regarded as a leading publication in business, financial, and U.S. economic reporting, reflecting its specialized focus and influence within the financial news sector (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.).

Both newspapers that have been chosen to be used in research are considered “newspaper of record.” The *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York times* are two of the most well-known and respected media outlets in the United States. Through this research, the content analysis aims to determine if two highly regarded institutions will utilize propaganda devices while reporting on the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Because *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* are positioned as “newspapers of record,” they are considered authoritative sources. The coverage the newspapers provide plays a critical role in shaping public understanding of international issues, like the Russia Ukraine Conflict. The following section provides an in-depth background on *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*, which provides the content for the propaganda device analysis.

Wall Street Journal and New York Times Background

The American media outlets that will have content collected from for analysis will be the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times*. The *New York Times* was established in 1851 and originally was named the *New York Daily Times*. Henry Jarvis Raymond and George Jones founded the paper. In 1896, Adolph Simon Ochs bought the publication. Ochs established the motto “All the news that’s fit to print,” which is when the newspaper start grew into what it is known as today (Grant, 2025). It is thought that the *New York Times* has a “left-leaning” or “left-

center” media bias in its news coverage. The *New York Times* has been thought to have a stronger left media bias (AllSides, 2025). It is one of the most analyzed newspapers in the United States, given its status of “newspaper of record” and its documented role in setting both the national and the international news agenda (Golan, 2006).

The *Wall Street Journal* was founded by Charles Dow, Edward Jones and Charles Bergstresser in 1889. The initial purpose of the outlet was to provide news on business and finance but grew to incorporate all types of content in the late 1950’s under managing editor Warren H. Phillips (Historic Newspapers, 2021). It is widely believed that the *Wall Street Journal* has a center-to-lean right media bias in its news reporting. But the opinion and editorial pages are thought to have a right leaning bias (AllSides, 2025). The *Wall Street Journal* is also considered a “newspaper of record.” It provides market insights and data alongside extensive general news, making it essential for leaders, professionals, and anyone wanting a comprehensive, reliable view of a complex world. (Arrendale Library, 2025)

Chapter 4: Research Methods

Study Overview

This study employs a qualitative textual analysis with structured coding to examine newspaper coverage of the Russia–Ukraine conflict in two major U.S. news outlets: *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*. The analysis focuses on identifying the use of the IPA’s propaganda devices and emotionally charged language to understand patterns in framing and narrative paradigm theory. A comparative design is used to assess similarities and differences between the two outlets, particularly in how propaganda originates (journalistic narrative vs. attributed sources) and how the conflict is presented to American audiences.

Research Design and Methods

This study utilizes a qualitative textual analysis with a directed (theory-driven) approach. Textual analysis is a qualitative research method used to interpret and make meaning from texts by examining how they are constructed, what meanings they convey, and how those meanings are produced within particular cultural and social contexts (McKee, 2003). The original study utilized a content analysis approach with a structured codebook and a secondary coder. While a content analysis approach is an ideal method to categorize and quantify patterns in communication, a textual analysis approach focuses on how meaning is constructed within the texts. The Institute for Propaganda Analysis created definitions that have been updated through modern academic studies, but applying those definitions to fit modern journalism was not feasible (Jowett & O’Donnell, 2006 ; McKee, 2003). By utilizing a textual analysis, the researcher was able to look at the relationship between propaganda content, emotional appeals and framing to see where propaganda originated.

The analysis is guided by established frameworks, including the Institute for Propaganda Analysis (IPA) propaganda techniques and atrocity propaganda. A structured coding system is applied to systematically identify and categorize instances of propaganda and emotionally charged language within news coverage. A comparative design is employed to evaluate differences and similarities across the two selected newspapers.

Data Collection and Sampling

This study uses purposive, criterion-based sampling to select relevant newspaper articles from *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* archival databases. *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* were selected due to their national prominence, high circulation rates and differing editorial orientations. Because *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* are widely regarded as newspapers of record, they are considered authoritative sources. Their coverage plays a significant role in shaping public understanding of international issues, including the Russia–Ukraine conflict.

Sampling Criteria

Newspapers: *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*

Date Range: February 2022 – December 2025

Inclusion Criteria:

- Articles must focus on the Russia–Ukraine conflict
- Articles must be classified as news reports (excluding opinion or editorial content)

Exclusion Criteria:

- Duplicate articles
- Opinion, editorial, or non-news content

- Non-textual media (audio, video, images)

A sample of 42 articles with 22 articles from the *Wall Street Journal* and 20 articles from the *New York Times*. With between 5 and 6 articles selected per year to ensure coverage across multiple phases of the conflict.

Each article was assigned a unique identification code (e.g., NYT2201) and stored in PDF format within a secure online database to ensure systematic organization and traceability throughout the study and analysis.

Unit of Analysis:

The unit of analysis is the individual newspaper article, including the headline, body text, and quoted material. Photographs and captions are excluded.

Propaganda devices are identified at the sentence or quote level; however, article-level coding reflects whether at least one clearly identifiable propaganda device is present.

Analytical Framework and Coding Scheme

Conceptual Framework

The analysis is guided by a structured codebook based on the Institute for Propaganda Analysis (IPA) framework, loaded language and atrocity propaganda concepts. The codebook defines each propaganda device and provides operational criteria for identification.

The primary categories include:

- Bandwagon
- Card Stacking
- Glittering Generalities
- Name-Calling
- Plain Folks

- Testimonial
- Transfer
- Atrocity Propaganda
- Emotionally Charged Language

In addition to identifying propaganda devices, the coding scheme includes **source**

attribution, requiring classification of whether content originates from:

- Journalistic narrative (reporter voice), or
- Attributed sources (e.g., quoted individuals). In the data analysis, there is a categorization of the type of attributed sources categorized by the following roles: civilian, government official, military leader, political leader, and other.

To enhance analytical clarity, the codebook includes both examples and non-examples, distinguishing propaganda from neutral or descriptive reporting.

Definitions of Key Categories

Please note that the first definition of the seven propaganda devices come from the Institute for Propaganda Analysis. For the modern definitions, the author utilized Baran & Davis' *Mass Communication Theory: Foundations, ferment, and future* to modernize the original operational definitions.

Propaganda Device Criteria:

1. Bandwagon (Newspaper Context)

Code Name: Bandwagon

IPA Definition: Associating an idea with public opinion, something everyone believes (Steinfatt, 2018).

Modern Definition: Appeals that suggest an idea, behavior, or position is widely accepted or popular, encouraging individuals to adopt it to align with the majority (Baran & Davis, 2021).

Example: “America’s favorite cookie.” (Oreo Cookie).

Inclusion Criteria

Code as Bandwagon if the article:

- States or implies that “most people,” “the public,” or “voters” support a position without presenting evidence.
- Frames an issue as inevitable due to widespread adoption or consensus.
- Emphasizes social pressure or majority opinion as justification.

Exclusion Criteria

Do not code as Bandwagon if the article:

- Reports poll results or survey data neutrally with sourcing.
- Describes public opinion trends without persuasive framing.
- Attributes bandwagon language to a source and critically contextualizes it.

2. Card Stacking (Newspaper Context)

Code Name: Card Stacking

IPA Definition: Selection and possible fabrication of evidence (Steinfatt, 2018).

Modern Definition: The selective presentation of information that highlights favorable evidence while omitting or downplaying contradictory facts to shape audience perception (Baran & Davis, 2021).

Example: A cereal box might say “made with real fruit” and has “whole grains”. But ignores how it contains more sugar than a candy bar.

Inclusion Criteria

Code as Card Stacking if the article:

- Presents only one perspective on a controversial issue without acknowledging alternatives.
- Highlights facts that support one position while omitting relevant counterpoints.

- Uses selective statistics or expert opinions to reinforce a single narrative.

Exclusion Criteria

Do not code as Card Stacking if the article:

- Includes multiple perspectives or counterarguments.
- Clearly labels content as an opinion or editorial (unless you are coding those separately).
- Lacks sufficient information to determine whether omission is intentional.

3. Glittering Generalities (Newspaper Context)

Code Name: Glittering Generalities

IPA Definition: Associating an idea with a good label (Steinfatt, 2018).

Modern Definition: The use of vague, emotionally appealing, and positively valued language (e.g., “freedom,” “democracy”) that lacks specific evidence but promotes favorable associations (Baran & Davis, 2021).

Examples: Obama’s hope poster.

Inclusion Criteria

Code as Glittering Generalities if the article:

- Uses vague value-laden terms (e.g., “freedom,” “innovation,” “prosperity,” “security”) without definition.
- Frames policies or actions as inherently virtuous or beneficial.
- Avoids a concrete explanation of how outcomes will be achieved.

Exclusion Criteria

Do not code as Glittering Generalities if the article:

- Defines abstract terms with specific examples or evidence.
- Uses value language in a neutral or descriptive manner.
- Attributes the language to a source and provides critical context.

4. Name-Calling (Newspaper Context)

Code Name: Name Calling

IPA Definition: Associating an idea with a bad label (Steinfatt, 2018).

Modern Definition: The use of negative labels or terms to discredit an individual, group, or idea without providing substantive evidence (Baran & Davis, 2021).

Examples: Snowflake, Extremist, Terrorist, Tree-Hugger, Nazi

Inclusion Criteria

Code as Name-Calling if the article:

- Applies derogatory or emotionally charged labels without evidence.
- Repeats stigmatizing language in headlines or leads.
- Uses labels that substitute for argument or explanation.

Exclusion Criteria

Do not code as Name-Calling if the article:

- Uses factual descriptors (e.g., legal, political, or cultural classifications).
- Quotes name-calling language but counters or contextualizes it.
- Reports on accusations without adopting the language.

5. Plain Folks (Newspaper Context)

Code Name: Plain Folks

IPA Definition: Associating an idea with beliefs or actions of common people (Steinfatt, 2018).

Modern Definition: A strategy in which the speaker presents themselves as an ordinary, relatable person to build trust and credibility with the audience (Baran & Davis, 2021).

Example: Jared from Subway

Inclusion Criteria

Code as Plain Folks if the article:

- Emphasizes ordinariness or “everyday” identity as a persuasive element.

- Highlights shared experiences with “regular people” to justify positions.
- Downplays institutional power or elite status.

Exclusion Criteria

Do not code as Plain Folks if the article:

- Describes individuals’ backgrounds factually.
- Mentions ordinary experiences without persuasive framing.
- Focuses on expertise, authority, or professional credentials.

6. Testimonial (Newspaper Context)

Code Name: Testimonial

IPA Definition: Source credibility, positive or negative, attached to an idea (Steinfatt, 2018).

Modern Definition: The use of endorsements or statements from authority figures, celebrities, or perceived credible individuals to support a claim or position (Baran & Davis, 2021).

Example: Influencer marketing, Ryan Reynolds for Mint Mobile, Beyonce and Pepsi.

Inclusion Criteria

Code as Testimonial if the article:

- Relies heavily on praise or endorsement from a named individual.
- Uses authority figures to legitimize claims.
- Highlights personal experience as evidence of validity.

Exclusion Criteria

Do not code as Testimonial if the article:

- Uses multiple sources to report facts neutrally.
- Attributes statements without endorsement framing.
- Includes expert commentary as part of balanced reporting.

7. Transfer (Newspaper Context)

Code Name: Transfer

IPA Definition: **Attaching** the authority of a respected institution to an idea (Steinfatt, 2018).

Modern Definition: Associating a message, idea, or individual with a respected (or disrespected) symbol, value, or institution to transfer its positive or negative connotations (Baran & Davis, 2021).

Example: A politician speaking in front of the American flag or using the Statue of Liberty to transfer feelings of patriotism and authority to their campaign platform.

Inclusion Criteria

Code as Transfer if the article:

- Connects issues to national symbols, tradition, religion, or scientific authority symbolically.
- Invokes patriotism, fear, or moral authority without direct argument.
- Uses symbolic framing to imply legitimacy or threat.

Exclusion Criteria

Do not code as Transfer if the article:

- References symbols descriptively or historically.
- Analyzes or critiques the use of symbols.
- Provides explicit reasoning independent of symbolism.

Coding Note: Not all political and persuasive language can be categorized as propaganda devices. Propaganda requires:

- Intentional persuasion
- Use of a recognizable device
- Lack of substantive support

Atrocity Content

Code Name: Atrocity Content or Atrocity Claim

Definition: Reports of cruel or shocking acts, circulated widely, and intended to produce an inappropriate martial response (Morrow, 2018).

Example: Descriptions of mass violence, human rights violations, war crimes, etc.

Inclusion Criteria

- Describes or references extreme violence, war crimes, or human suffering (e.g., torture, massacre, civilian targeting)
- Uses emotionally intensified or morally charged framing to emphasize brutality (e.g., “barbaric,” “inhumane,” “systematic slaughter”)
- Frames the act in a way that amplifies moral outrage or demonizes an actor
- Highlights intentional harm against vulnerable groups (e.g., civilians, children)
- Uses graphic or evocative descriptions that go beyond neutral reporting

Exclusion Criteria

- The content is purely factual and descriptive without emotional amplification
- Violence is reported in neutral, journalistic language (e.g., “X people were killed in an attack”)
- The statement is attributed and presented without evaluative framing
- The description is contextual or analytical, not persuasive
- The coder must infer emotional intent

Loaded Language

Code Name: Emotionally Charged Language, Loaded Language

Definition: An umbrella term for words, phrases, and overall rhetorical strategies that have strong emotional implications and intent to sway others. (Klein & Hendler, 2022)

Example: Freedom Fighter, Regime, War Crimes, Unprovoked Aggression, etc.

Inclusion Criteria

- Uses strong emotional appeals (fear, anger, outrage, sympathy)
- Includes intensifiers or exaggerated descriptors (e.g., “devastating,” “horrific,” “shocking”)
- Frames actors or events in morally loaded or value-laden terms
- Moves beyond neutral reporting into evaluative or persuasive tone
- Is likely to influence audience perception emotionally rather than inform neutrally

Exclusion Criteria

- Language is standard journalistic phrasing (e.g., “conflict,” “attack,” “tensions”)
- Emotional tone is mild or implicit, not clearly amplified
- The wording is necessary for accurate reporting (e.g., “deadly attack” when factual)
- The statement is balanced with neutral context or evidence
- The coder must interpret tone subjectively

Coding Note: Emotionally charged language and atrocity propaganda were coded only when emotional amplification was clear, explicit, and exceeded standard journalistic description.

Coding Rules and Decision Criteria

Primary Rule for Coding

Propaganda is coded only when a clear, explicit, and unambiguous device consistent with IPA definitions is present. Emotional tone or persuasive language alone does not qualify as propaganda.

Operational Coding Rules

- Only explicitly identifiable propaganda devices are coded
- Devices may appear in headlines, leads, body text, or quoted material
- Each instance must directly match operational definitions

- Multiple instances of the same device are counted separately
- Coder must identify:
 - Device type
 - Source of device (name and role)
 - Source category (e.g., government, civilian, military)
 - Supporting textual example

Emotionally charged language is coded when language demonstrates clear emotional amplification beyond neutral reporting (e.g., heightened fear, moral outrage, or sensational framing).

Decision Threshold and Exclusion Criteria

Content must meet the following criteria to be coded as propaganda:

- A specific sentence or quote can be identified
- The device is clearly recognizable without inference
- The classification can be justified using the codebook definition

Content is **not coded** as propaganda if:

- It reflects neutral or factual reporting
- It contains standard political rhetoric without a clear device
- It presents balanced or evidence-supported claims
- The coder must infer intent

When uncertainty exists, the content is coded as **no propaganda**.

Coding Procedure

All articles were printed and manually coded using a structured color-coding system aligned with predefined categories. Annotations were recorded directly on the documents to capture patterns, contextual observations, and coding justifications. Coding decisions were

applied consistently across all articles using the predefined codebook to support intra-coder reliability.

Coding was conducted iteratively, with the codebook guiding all decisions throughout the process. All coded materials were retained to ensure transparency and auditability.

Data Recording and Variables

Each article was assigned a unique identifier and coded for the following metadata:

- Newspaper source
- Publication date
- Article title
- Author(s)

For each propaganda category, the following were recorded:

- Instance count
- Textual examples
- Source attribution (name and role)

Additional variables included:

- Atrocity propaganda instances
- Emotionally charged language instances
- Analytical notes

Researcher Positionality Statement

As this study employs textual analysis to examine propaganda and emotionally charged language, the researcher acknowledges that interpretation may be influenced by their academic background in communication sciences and World War II military history, as well as prior exposure to scholarship and discourse on propaganda and conflict coverage. Additionally, the researcher's professional experience in military history education, including the use of World War II and Cold War contexts as comparative frameworks, may shape how contemporary media narratives are interpreted.

The researcher's perspective as a military spouse during the early stages of the Russia–Ukraine conflict may also inform sensitivity to conflict-related coverage. These experiences may influence engagement with atrocity-related content, potentially reducing responsiveness due to prior exposure, while simultaneously heightening sensitivity to persuasive or emotionally framed language.

To mitigate potential bias, a structured coding framework was developed prior to analysis. This framework includes clearly defined categories and operational definitions for each propaganda device, allowing for consistent application across all texts. All content was analyzed using standardized coding criteria to support systematic and transparent interpretation. Coding documentation (i.e., the codebook) and original coded materials will be retained to support transparency and auditability.

Chapter 5: Research Findings

General Findings

This study analyzed a total of 42 news articles, including 22 from *The Wall Street Journal* and 20 from *The New York Times*, published between February 2022 and December 2025. The sample was designed to capture coverage across different phases of the Russia–Ukraine war, with approximately five to six articles per year per outlet.

Across these 42 articles, a total of **278 propaganda device instances** were identified (see Table 1). This count does not include emotionally charged language or atrocity content, as those were analyzed separately from the Institute for Propaganda Analysis framework. *The New York Times* accounted for **156 instances (57.4%)**, while *The Wall Street Journal* accounted for **116 instances (42.6%)**.

Figure 1

Propaganda Instances by News Outlet

News Outlet	Instances (n)	Percentage (%)
The New York Times	156	56.1%
The Wall Street Journal	116	41.7%
Total	272	97.8%

Findings by Research Questions

The first research question (RQ1) for this study was, how are propaganda devices presented in news coverage of the Russia-Ukraine war in selected U.S. newspapers. To answer RQ1, the analysis focused on the frequency of each propaganda device. A clear pattern emerged in the distribution of propaganda devices across the dataset, particularly in terms of which techniques were used most frequently. **Testimonial** was by far the most common device, with

120 instances (43.2%), making it the dominant form of propaganda identified in this study.

Examples of testimonial include when Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy stated to the United Nations Security Council that “It is difficult to find a war crime that the occupiers (Russia) have not committed,” (Mauldin & Chernova, 2022). Zelenskyy’s speech came at the U.S. and EU were preparing to impose broad new packages of sanctions on Russia. Russian President Vladimir Putin also utilized the device testimonials while he filmed a New Year’s Eve speech on a military base. He told the families of the soldiers killed in the fighting, “I share your pain with all my heart. (Bigg, Kurmanaev, & Pérez-Peña, 2023)”

Testimonies appeared nearly twice as often as **transfer (24.5%)** and more than three times as often as **glittering generalities (13.7%)**. For example, multiple authors assigned negative feelings with transfer devices. Phrases like, “American-Provided”, “Iranian-made”, “US Supplied” to provide negative framing to imply that foreign powers shouldn’t be providing military equipment to this conflict (Coles, 2023 ; Bigg, Kurmanaev, & Pérez-Peña , 2023). While the glittering generalities device was utilized with general, positive phrases in different articles. An example comes from President Zelenskyy’s New Year’s Eve address where he stated that 2023 was the “Year of Ukraine. Year of the Ukrainians” to bring hope to the Ukrainian public in the middle of this conflict (MacDonald, 2023).

On the other hand, other devices appeared at much lower frequencies. **Name-calling** accounted for **8.6%** of instances while **card stacking** accounted for **6.5%**. An example of card stacking occurred in a New York Times article and stated, “In Ukraine, the Russian invasion has caused civilian suffering on a much larger scale, with strikes on residential buildings, hospitals, churches and an array of energy facilities” (Meheut & Shyvala, 2025). In 2023, the *Wall Street*

Journal published an article that used the device name-calling in an interesting way. The author stated, “so-called denazification of Ukraine, which is code for the destruction of Ukraine’s political and intellectual elites (Ploky, 2023).” This is an interesting example because the author explains the meaning behind the name-calling.

The least frequently used devices were **bandwagon** and **plain folks**, each making up only **1.8%** of the total. Which is interesting because the bandwagon device and plain folks device can be utilized to show the public that everyone is approving of this war and that even the “normal” person could help. But those devices were only utilized 1.*% of the time, which limited the amount of examples that could be provided for analysis. In a New York Times article by Andrew E. Kramer, the bandwagon device was used to talk about how the Ukrainians felt overall when the Russians started losing during the conflict. The quote stated, “The Ukrainians, he said were motivated to take the fight into Russia. “To be honest, we all have joy in our hearts”” (Kramer, 2024). The plain folks device was not utilized as much as it could have, but when it was used, it was effective. In 2022, a *Wall Street Journal* article utilized the plain folks device in the article’s title. The article’s title was “Ordinary Ukrainians Rally to Defend Homeland from Russia. (Marson & Hinshaw, 2022)”. This title, makes it seem heroic what the Ukrainians citizens are doing to defend their homeland against Russia. But the actual article dives into the nightly addresses that Zelenskyy had broadcasted throughout the country.

Together, these results demonstrate a clear concentration around a small number of dominant techniques, with testimonial standing out as the most consistently used device across the dataset. (See Table 2.)

Figure 2*Distribution of Propaganda Devices*

Propaganda Device	Instances (n)	Percentage (%)
Testimonial	120	43.2%
Transfer	68	24.5%
Glittering Generalities	38	13.7%
Name Calling	24	8.6%
Card Stacking	18	6.5%
Band Wagon	5	1.8%
Plain Folks	5	1.8%
Total	278	100%

When comparing propaganda device usage across news outlets, *The New York Times* contributed a larger share of total propaganda instances, accounting for **57.4%**, while *The Wall Street Journal* accounted for **42.6%**. However, this difference was not static across the sample period. The gap between outlets was most pronounced in 2022 and gradually narrowed over time, reaching near parity by 2025. (See Table 3.)

Figure 3*Attributed Sources by Year*

Year	Instances (n)	Percentage (%)
2022	34	17.8%
2023	57	29.8%
2024	48	25.1%
2025	51	26.7%
Total	191	100%

The second research question (RQ2) for this study asked, how are propaganda devices embedded within journalists' narratives compared to attributed quotations? Which asks if the

propaganda originated from the journalists themselves or were introduced in stories via quoted material from sources.

Beyond overall frequency, differences emerged in how propaganda devices were embedded within articles. Propaganda appeared in both **journalist-written narration** and **quoted material**, but these contexts were associated with different types of devices. Overall, **attributed sources accounted for the majority of propaganda instances (66.2%)**, compared to **33.8% in journalist narratives**, indicating that persuasive content was more often conveyed through sourced material (See Table 4).

Figure 4

Source Attribution of Propaganda Devices

Source Type	Instances (n)	Percentage (%)
Journalist Narratives	94	33.8%
Attributed Sources	191	66.2%
Total	278	100%

A related but distinct pattern emerges in the use of **emotionally charged language and atrocity content (ECAC)**. While *The New York Times* produced more propaganda devices overall, *The Wall Street Journal* exhibited a slightly higher use of ECAC across the dataset (**129 instances compared to 122**). This suggests that the two outlets relied on different persuasive strategies, with *The New York Times* emphasizing structured propaganda devices and *The Wall Street Journal* relying more heavily on affective and emotionally driven framing.

Finally, the dataset reveals a notable distinction between **emotionally charged language** and **atrocity content**. Across the sample, there were **253 combined instances of ECAC**, indicating that affective framing was used at a level comparable to structured propaganda

devices. Emotional language frequently appeared alongside testimonial and transfer, particularly in quoted material, amplifying the persuasive impact of source-based messaging.

Atrocity content, while less dominant than emotional language overall, appeared across both outlets and was typically conveyed through vivid or descriptive language. Unlike testimonial, which was concentrated among elite actors, atrocity-related content more often incorporated **civilian perspectives**, contributing to its emotional intensity and narrative impact.

The third research question (RQ3) asks, how are different types of sources associated with the use of propaganda devices within quoted material? **Testimonial and transfer** were most often found in quoted material, where statements were attributed to identifiable sources such as political leaders, government officials, diplomats, and military personnel. Civilians were also included as sources, though they appeared more frequently in connection with atrocity-related content.

In contrast, **card stacking and glittering generalities** appeared more frequently within the journalist's own narrative, where reporters shaped the framing and description of events. Although these devices occurred less often overall, they were more concentrated in sections where journalists constructed interpretive or descriptive context.

These patterns are further reflected in the types of sources associated with propaganda use. Testimonial usage was strongly connected to **elite and institutional actors**, including political leaders, government officials, and military representatives. Among individual sources, **Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy** appeared most frequently in connection with testimonial devices (**36 instances**). Other recurring sources included **Vladimir Putin**, U.S. and NATO officials, Ukrainian government representatives, and members of the Russian military.

While testimonial was distributed across multiple sources, it was most concentrated among these high-level actors. (See Table 5.)

Figure 5

Distribution of Attributed Sources

Source Type	Instances (n)	Percentage (%)
Volodymyr Zelenskyy	36	18.8%
Civilians	29	15.2%
Russian Government	22	11.5%
Ukraine Government	22	11.5%
Vladimir Putin	18	9.4%
Russian Military	13	6.8%
Consultants/Think Tanks	12	6.3%
Ukraine Military	10	5.2%
NATO	5	2.6%
UN	3	1.6%
British Government	3	1.6%
Donald Trump	3	1.6%
Russian officials	2	1%
Russian Bloggers	2	1%
World Leaders	1	.5%
Russian Billionaires	1	.5%
Total	191	100%

Source Patterns in Propaganda Usage

These patterns are further reflected in the types of sources associated with propaganda use. **Testimonial usage was strongly connected to elite and institutional actors**, including political leaders, government officials, and military representatives.

Among individual sources, **Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy** appeared most frequently in connection with testimonial devices (**36 instances**). Other prominent sources included **civilians (29 instances)**, **Russian and Ukrainian government officials (22 instances each)**, **Vladimir Putin (18 instances)**, and members of the **Russian and Ukrainian military**. Additional sources included consultants, think tanks, NATO officials, and other international actors, though these appeared less frequently.

While propaganda devices were distributed across a range of sources, they were most concentrated among **high-level political and institutional figures**, reinforcing the role of authority and credibility in propagandistic messaging.

Emotional and Atrocity-Based Content

Finally, the fourth research question (RQ4) asked how propaganda devices within quoted statements function as emotional and persuasive appeals. Textual analysis revealed a distinction between emotionally charged language and atrocity content, both of which frequently appeared within attributed speech rather than the journalist's own voice. Across all articles, there were 253 combined instances of emotionally charged and atrocity content (ECAC), compared to 278 propaganda device instances, indicating that both forms of persuasive content were used at comparable levels (see Table 6). These devices most often functioned as fear appeals, shaping audience perception by emphasizing threat, violence, and moral urgency while maintaining the appearance of journalistic objectivity through attribution.

For example, the *New York Times* published an article titled "At least 437 children have been killed in the war since February, Ukraine Says," in which claims that Russian forces planted mines in kindergarten beds were presented through sourced statements. This was coded

as atrocity propaganda due to the severity of the allegation and lack of substantiated evidence (Bigg, 2022). By embedding such claims within quoted speech, the article introduces emotionally powerful content while distancing the journalist from direct verification. Similarly, emotionally charged or loaded language functioned as a persuasive device when attributed to sources. In coverage of alleged biological weapons, Mauldin included references to “nuclear” and “biological” weapons terms that carry strong historical and emotional connotations (Mauldin, 2022). When presented through sources, these phrases heighten fear and memorability without requiring explicit endorsement by the journalist.

Together, these findings suggest that propaganda devices within quoted statements operate by channeling emotional intensity through attribution, allowing news coverage to incorporate persuasive and affective appeals while preserving norms of neutrality and credibility.

Figure 6

Distribution of Emotionally Charged Language and Atrocity Content

Content Type	Instances (n)	Percentage (%)
Emotionally Charged Language (Loaded Language)	196	74.5%
Atrocity Content	67	25.5%
Total	263	100%

However, their distribution differed across outlets and contexts. **Emotionally charged language frequently appeared alongside testimonial and transfer**, particularly within attributed quotations, enhancing the persuasive impact of source-driven narratives.

Atrocity content, while less dominant than emotional language overall, appeared consistently across both outlets and was typically conveyed through vivid, descriptive accounts of violence or suffering. Unlike testimonial, which was concentrated among elite actors, atrocity-

related content more frequently incorporated **civilian perspectives**, contributing to its emotional resonance and narrative impact.

Chapter 6: Discussion and Implications

Prevalence of Propaganda in Coverage

Through the textual analysis of content published by *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times*, this study sought to examine whether propaganda devices and persuasive framing techniques were present in coverage of the Russia–Ukraine war. The findings indicate that **propaganda is present across the dataset**, with a total of **278 identified instances**, the majority of which were **testimonial based**.

Propaganda as Source-Driven Communication

A key pattern that emerged from these findings is that propaganda techniques are **primarily embedded within attributed sources rather than originating in the journalist's own narrative voice**. In other words, journalists are not typically the ones directly expressing propagandistic claims; instead, these claims are introduced through **quoted material from political leaders, government officials, and other institutional actors**. This pattern aligns with **indexing theory**, which suggests that news content tends to reflect the perspectives of those in positions of power. In this case, elite and institutional sources play a central role in shaping the range and tone of perspectives presented in war coverage.

The Role of Journalistic Framing in Shaping Interpretation

At the same time, the findings show that **framing is still present within journalistic narration**, particularly through devices such as card stacking and glittering generalities. While less frequent than testimonial, these devices show that journalists still contribute to how events are interpreted, even if they are not the primary source of overtly persuasive claims. Together,

these patterns point to a **layered structure of persuasion**, where sources provide direct persuasive content, and journalists shape the broader narrative context.

These results also lend support to longstanding concerns raised by the **Institute for Propaganda Analysis**, particularly the idea that propaganda is not always obvious, and that audiences require a certain level of **media literacy** to recognize it. The presence of propaganda devices, especially in subtle, source-driven forms, reinforce the argument that media consumers must be equipped to critically evaluate both **who is speaking and how information is being presented**. In this sense, the findings align with broader concerns raised by organizations such as the **United Nations and NATO**, which have identified misinformation and persuasive media as growing challenges. One practical implication of this is the increasing importance of **media literacy education**, particularly in helping audiences navigate complex and emotionally charged reporting.

Dominance of Testimonial as a Propaganda Device

In terms of specific findings, several key patterns stand out. Testimonial emerged as the most dominant propaganda device, with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy appearing as the most frequent individual source associated with this technique. In contrast, atrocity content appeared less frequently than expected, while emotionally charged language was widely present across the dataset.

The prevalence of emotionally charged language is a very important finding. While some uses of persuasive language may be intentional, it is also important to recognize the **human element of journalism**, particularly in the context of war reporting. Coverage of conflict often involves exposure to highly distressing situations, including harm to civilians, families, and

communities. As a result, some emotionally descriptive language may reflect the reality of what journalists are witnessing rather than a deliberate attempt to persuade. In this sense, emotional framing may not always function as propaganda, but rather as a byproduct of reporting on events that are inherently human and difficult to describe in neutral terms.

At the same time, this does not diminish the role that emotionally charged language can play in shaping audience perception. Even when unintentional, vivid descriptions and emotionally resonant language can contribute to how events are understood and interpreted. This further reinforces the need to consider both **intentional and unintentional forms of persuasion** within news coverage.

Overall, the findings suggest that propaganda in contemporary war reporting is **not typically overt or centralized within journalistic voice**, but instead operates through a combination of **source attribution, narrative framing, and emotional language**. This highlights the complexity of modern media environments, where persuasion is often embedded within standard reporting practices rather than presented as explicit or easily identifiable for messaging.

The manner in which propaganda devices are presented is particularly noteworthy, especially given the researcher's initial assumption that such devices might be outdated in contemporary war coverage. However, the textual analysis revealed the opposite. Propaganda devices are not only present, but are primarily conveyed through sourced quotations, embedded framing, and subtle linguistic choices rather than overt messaging.

Testimonial emerged as the dominant device, accounting for nearly half of all identified instances. It was used approximately twice as often as the second most frequent device and three

times as often as the third. In this context, testimonials primarily took the form of quoted statements from political leaders, military officials, and other authoritative figures. This indicates that propaganda is most often presented through attributed speech, where sources themselves deliver persuasive messaging (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2006).

This indicates that propaganda is most often presented through attributed speech, where sources themselves deliver persuasive messaging. This pattern is consistent with prior research on war coverage, which demonstrates that news narratives are frequently structured around statements from political and military elites. Studies of Vietnam War coverage show that reporting largely “indexed” the range of debate expressed by U.S. government officials, meaning that journalists relied heavily on official sources and reproduced their perspectives through attributed statements (Hallin, 1986; Bennett, 1990). Under this indexing process, news coverage tended to reflect the boundaries of elite consensus, with critical or alternative viewpoints appearing primarily when divisions emerged among political actors. As a result, much of the reporting during the Vietnam War was constructed through quotes, briefings, and official accounts, reinforcing the central role of authoritative voices in shaping public understanding of the conflict. Similar patterns have been observed in later conflicts, including the Gulf War and Iraq War, where coverage relied extensively on attributed statements from military and political authorities to construct dominant narratives (Kellner, 1992; Entman, 2004; Tumber & Webster, 2006).

Importantly, while journalists select which quotes to include, they do not directly control the content of those statements. In many cases, journalists solicit comments from high-ranking or authoritative sources and are constrained in their ability to exclude or substantially alter those

remarks, particularly when they carry institutional or political significance. As a result, the persuasive force of testimonial often originates from the source rather than the journalist, even though its inclusion remains a deliberate editorial choice. This demonstrates that propaganda is presented through a combination of source selection and strategic quotation.

Beyond testimonial, transfer and glittering generalities functioned as secondary but still significant devices. Glittering generalities frequently appeared in abstract or symbolic language, where entities such as “Ukraine” were framed not merely as geographic locations but as ideals, invoking notions of resilience, unity, or hope (e.g., phrases suggesting that Ukraine cannot be “broken”). These constructions extend meaning beyond literal definitions, encouraging audiences to interpret the conflict through a value-laden lens. Here, propaganda is presented through linguistic abstraction and symbolic framing.

Transfer, on the other hand, was often embedded in associative framing, sometimes in ways that were not overtly negative but still carried strong connotative weight. References to historical or militaristic terms such as “neo-Nazis” or “kamikaze” illustrate how meaning is transferred from one context to another. In some cases, journalists appeared to reshape or complicate existing associations. For example, the term “Russian exile,” which might typically carry a sympathetic connotation, was at times framed in a way that implied betrayal or disloyalty. Similarly, when discussing weapons and military technologies, articles frequently identified their countries of origin (e.g., U.S.-made HIMARS systems, Iranian drones, or North Korean personnel), implicitly broadening the scope of the conflict and raising questions about international involvement. In these cases, propaganda is presented through association and contextual framing.

In addition to these patterns, Andrew E. Kramer from the New York Times demonstrated the highest overall use of propaganda devices in the dataset, indicating a comparatively greater reliance on persuasive framing techniques than other authors. His articles most frequently employed transfer, fear, and name-calling, often working in combination to shape audience interpretation. Transfer appeared through consistent associations between actors and broader ideological or historical narratives, while fear was invoked through emphasis on escalation, threat, and instability within the conflict. Name-calling further reinforced these frames by attaching negative labels that delegitimized certain actors. Rather than functioning independently, these devices were often layered, producing a cumulative effect that guided readers toward particular interpretations of events. This concentration and pattern of usage suggest that Kramer's reporting relied more heavily on structured persuasive strategies, making his work a prominent example of how propaganda devices can be embedded within contemporary news coverage.

Taken together, these patterns underscore that the influence of propaganda in news coverage is not primarily a function of overt persuasion, but of how frequently and systematically such devices are embedded within reporting. Kramer's comparatively high usage illustrates how these techniques can be integrated into routine journalistic practices, shaping interpretation without disrupting the appearance of objectivity. This shifts the analytical focus from identifying isolated instances of bias to recognizing how cumulative, patterned use of these devices can structure audience understanding over time. In this way, the significance of propaganda lies less in its visibility and more in its consistency and subtlety within the broader narrative framework.

Subtle and Embedded Nature of Contemporary Propaganda

A key finding is that these propaganda devices are rarely overt. Instead, they are subtle and embedded within narrative structure and linguistic framing. Without a critical or trained perspective, these persuasive elements may go largely unnoticed, as their influence operates through implication rather than explicit assertion.

Overall, the data indicate that propaganda devices are presented through a combination of reliance on credible elite voices, the strategic use of quoted material, and embedded narrative framing. There is a heavy reliance on political leaders such as Putin and Zelenskyy, alongside a consistent use of associative framing through transfer. In contrast, more traditional propaganda devices, such as bandwagon and plain folks appeals, were notably less present. This suggests that contemporary war coverage relies less on overt mass persuasion and more on subtle, source-driven, and embedded forms of propaganda.

Out of the 278 instances of identified propaganda, 68.7% (191) originated from attributed sources, while only 31.3% (87) were embedded within the journalists' narrative. This directly answers RQ2, indicating that propaganda techniques are far more likely to originate from quoted sources than from the journalist's own voice. These findings strongly support the hypothesis that persuasive devices such as emotionally charged language and atrocity references primarily come from external voices rather than being constructed within journalistic framing.

Year by year, attributed source propaganda accounted for 18.3% of instances in 2022, 29.8% in 2023, 25.1% in 2024, and 26.7% in 2025. Notably, even as coverage shifted toward peace talks in 2025, the level of propaganda remained relatively high. This suggests that source-

driven persuasive messaging persists regardless of whether the conflict is framed around escalation or de-escalation.

A distinct division emerges between narrative and quoted material in the origin of propaganda techniques. Testimonials are predominantly found in direct quotations, which align with their function, as they rely on sources to deliver persuasive appeals. In contrast, devices such as card stacking and glittering generalities are more often embedded within the journalist's narrative, where selection, emphasis, and framing shape interpretation.

These findings point to a clear division of persuasive labor within news coverage. Journalists are responsible for constructing the narrative framework deciding which sources to include and how to present them while sources themselves generate much of the explicit persuasive content. A prominent example of this dynamic can be seen in the coverage of Zelenskyy's regular addresses, where the rhetoric is strategically crafted by the source, and the journalist's role is to contextualize and present those statements to the audience.

Overall, the data indicate that propaganda techniques in this coverage are primarily source-driven, with journalists playing a secondary but still important role in shaping how those messages are framed and interpreted.

Rather than focusing solely on where propaganda originates, it is equally important to examine which actors are most frequently associated with these techniques when they appear in quoted material. The findings reveal that propaganda is not evenly distributed across sources but is instead concentrated among a specific set of actors.

Of the total 278 instances of propaganda identified, 191 (68.7%) originated from attributed sources, while only 87 (31.3%) were embedded within the journalists' narrative. This distribution supports the initial prediction that propaganda devices including emotionally charged language and atrocity-related content are more likely to come from external sources than from the journalist's own voice.

When examined over the pre-determined data collection time frame, source-attributed propaganda accounted for 18.3% of instances in 2022, 29.8% in 2023, 25.1% in 2024, and 26.7% in 2025. While there is an observable increase from 2022 to 2023, what is particularly notable is that propaganda does not decline in later years, even as coverage begins to shift toward peace talks and potential resolutions in 2025. This suggests that strategic messaging remains consistent regardless of whether the conflict is being framed around escalation or de-escalation.

A clear division appears between the use of narrative voice and quoted material in the deployment of propaganda devices. Testimonials are predominantly conveyed through direct quotations, which align with their function: they rely on individuals "testifying" in order to persuade audiences or shape interpretation. The prevalence of testimonial within quoted speech reinforces the role of sources as the primary conveyors of explicit persuasive appeals.

In contrast, devices such as card stacking and glittering generalities are more commonly embedded within the journalist's narrative voice. These devices operate through selection, emphasis, and framing, allowing journalists to shape the broader interpretive context in which information is presented. Together, these patterns point to a division of persuasive labor within news coverage. Journalists are responsible for framing sources selecting which voices to include, how to contextualize them, and how to structure the narrative while sources themselves

contribute persuasive content through their statements. This dynamic allows persuasion to function on multiple levels simultaneously, with explicit appeals attributed to sources and more implicit framing embedded within journalistic narration.

One example of this dynamic can be seen in the coverage of recurring public addresses, such as President Zelenskyy's nightly speeches. In these instances, the source provides highly intentional, rhetorically crafted messages, while the journalist's role is to contextualize, frame, and selectively present those statements to the audience. This further demonstrates how persuasive influence is distributed across both quoted and narrative elements of reporting.

Concentration of Propaganda Among Elite Sources

A central finding of this study is that propaganda is concentrated within elite sources, specifically government officials, military actors, and institutional voices. The majority of the content being disseminated is driven by these actors, meaning that what is ultimately published is heavily influenced by the perspectives and priorities of those in positions of power. This directly supports indexing theory, which suggests that media coverage tends to reflect the range of debate among political and institutional elites rather than introducing entirely independent perspectives.

A more detailed breakdown of attributed sources further clarifies which actors are most frequently associated with propaganda within quotations. Zelenskyy accounted for the largest share of attributed propaganda (18.8%), followed by civilians (15.2%). The Ukrainian and Russian governments were tied, each contributing 11.5% of instances. Putin accounted for 9.4%, followed by the Russian military (6.8%), consultants (6.3%), and the Ukrainian military (5.2%). NATO contributed 2.6% of instances, while the United Nations, British government, U.S. government, and Trump each accounted for approximately 1.6%. Russian officials and Russian

bloggers each represented 1.0%, and categories such as world leaders and Russian billionaires accounted for only 0.5%. The propensity of elite sources supports the literature on indexing.

This distribution demonstrates that propaganda within quoted material is not evenly distributed across actors but is instead concentrated among a relatively small group of highly visible and authoritative voices. Political leaders and government institutions particularly those directly involved in the conflict are the most frequent contributors, while actors with broader global influence appear far less often.

What is particularly interesting in the context of the Russia-Ukraine conflict is the dominance of voices from the two primary actors involved namely Zelenskyy, Putin, and their respective governments and military institutions. These sources account for a substantial portion of the attributed propaganda, reinforcing the idea that those directly engaged in the conflict are also those most actively shaping its narrative.

But there is a notable absence of a strong American narrative, even though the analyzed content originates from U.S.-based newspapers. While American institutions and political figures are present, they appear far less frequently and contribute comparatively little to the overall volume of attributed propaganda. This suggests that even within American media, the framing of the conflict is largely driven by foreign elite sources rather than domestically constructed narratives.

At the same time, this pattern may also reflect broader geopolitical alignments, as U.S. news coverage has historically tended to portray allied nations more favorably during times of conflict. In this context, the prominence of Ukrainian sources particularly Zelenskyy and Ukrainian government voices may not only be a function of source availability, but also of

alignment with U.S. foreign policy interests. Together, these dynamics indicate that both source accessibility and geopolitical positioning shape which voices are amplified in coverage and how the conflict is ultimately framed for American audiences.

Taken together, these findings indicate that propaganda within this coverage is not only source-driven but also structurally concentrated among a relatively small group of elite actors. This concentration raises important implications for how public understanding of the conflict is shaped, as the range of perspectives available to audiences is closely tied to the voices that are most frequently quoted and amplified.

Emotional Language and Persuasive Amplification

When propaganda devices appear in quoted statements, they function primarily through emotional appeals that are reinforced by source credibility. The findings indicate that testimonial, the most frequently occurring propaganda device, serves as the primary vehicle through which emotional language and atrocity-related content are communicated. In this context, propaganda is not simply embedded in what is being said, but in who is saying it.

Emotional language and atrocity content consistently co-occur with testimonial, proving that persuasion is often achieved by pairing affective intensity with authoritative voices. Political leaders, government officials, military actors, and other institutional figures are not only providing information but also shape interpretation through emotionally charged statements. These sources frequently employ language that evokes fear, sympathy, outrage, or urgency, which amplifies the persuasive impact of their messages. As a result, propaganda operates through a dual mechanism: emotional resonance and perceived credibility.

This dynamic can be understood as a form of emotional amplification. When emotionally charged content is delivered by a high-status or authoritative source, its impact is heightened, making the message more compelling and more difficult to dismiss. The credibility of the speaker legitimizes the emotional appeal, allowing it to function as a more effective persuasive strategy. In this way, testimonial does not merely present a perspective; it strengthens that perspective by attaching it to a trusted or powerful voice.

In addition to emotional amplification, these quoted statements frequently engage in moral framing. Sources often construct conflict in terms of broader moral narratives, such as good versus evil, justice versus injustice, or resilience versus aggression. This framing extends beyond descriptive reporting and instead encourages audiences to interpret events through a normative lens. By embedding emotional appeals within these moral frameworks, sources are able to guide audience interpretation while simultaneously reinforcing particular ideological positions.

Together, these findings suggest that propaganda within quoted material is highly strategic. It relies on the convergence of emotional language, atrocity content, and credible sources to maximize persuasive impact. Therefore, testimonial is not only the most prevalent device but also the most effective mechanism through which propaganda operates, as it combines emotional appeal with authority-driven legitimacy.

Theoretical Implications

The findings of this study contribute to a broader understanding of how propaganda operates within contemporary news coverage, particularly in relation to propaganda theory, framing theory, and agenda-setting.

First, in relation to propaganda theory, the results support a shift from overt propaganda usage to more subtle and embedded forms of propaganda. Rather than appearing as explicit or easily identifiable messaging, propaganda in this context is largely integrated into routine, normalized journalistic practices, especially through the use of testimonial and sourced quotations. These devices do not present themselves as propaganda in a traditional sense; instead, they are embedded within seemingly credible and informative reporting. This shift makes propaganda less visible but more effective, as it operates through implication, emotional resonance, and source of authority rather than direct persuasion.

A key theoretical contribution of this study is its extension of the Institute for Propaganda Analysis (IPA) framework through the incorporation of atrocity propaganda into the coding scheme. While the original IPA model did not explicitly account for atrocity-based appeals, the findings demonstrate that such content functions as a central mechanism of contemporary persuasion, particularly when paired with testimonial and emotionally charged language. By integrating atrocity propaganda into the analytical framework, this study addresses a limitation of the traditional IPA model and offers a more comprehensive approach to identifying how modern propaganda operates within conflict coverage.

Second, the findings strongly align with framing theory, particularly in how journalists construct meaning through selection, emphasis, framing, and source inclusion. Journalists are not

acting as neutral transmitters of information; rather, they are actively shaping narratives by deciding which sources to include, which quotes to highlight, and how to contextualize those statements within the broader story. The reliance on elite sources such as political leaders, military officials, and institutional actors demonstrates how framing is structured through source selection. At the same time, the use of devices like card stacking and glittering generalities within the narrative voice reflects how emphasis and linguistic choices further guide audience interpretation.

Through the frequent pairing of testimonial with emotionally charged language and atrocity content, news coverage not only highlights the conflict but also attaches specific emotional and moral interpretations to it. Taken together, these theoretical connections reinforce the central argument of this study: propaganda in modern war reporting is not overt or isolated but is instead embedded within the structural and rhetorical practices of journalism. It operates through credible sources, strategic framing, and emotional appeals, making it both pervasive and difficult to detect without systematic analysis.

Methodological Implications

This study highlights the value of content analysis as a methodological approach for identifying and examining propaganda in contemporary news coverage. Given that much of the propaganda observed in this analysis is subtle, embedded, and often indistinguishable from standard journalistic practices, content analysis provides a systematic and replicable way to detect patterns that may not be immediately visible to the untrained reader. By operationalizing propaganda devices and applying consistent coding procedures, this method allows for the identification of recurring persuasive strategies across a large sample of texts.

At the same time, this approach is not without its challenges. One of the primary limitations is the inherent subjectivity involved in identifying and categorizing propaganda devices. Despite the use of defined coding criteria, interpretation is still required when determining whether a particular phrase, quote, or framing device constitutes propaganda. This is especially true for more nuanced devices, such as glittering generalities or transfer, which often rely on contextual meaning rather than explicit language. As a result, coder judgment plays a significant role in the analytical process, which may introduce variability.

Additionally, the interpretation of emotional language and atrocity content presents its own set of challenges. These elements are often deeply tied to context, tone, and audience perception, making it difficult to standardize across all instances. What may be coded as an emotional appeal in one context could be interpreted as descriptive reporting in another, further complicating the coding process.

Despite these limitations, this study makes a methodological contribution by developing and applying a structured coding framework capable of capturing both overt and subtle forms of propaganda. By integrating traditional propaganda devices with categories such as emotional language and atrocity content, the framework expands the analytical tools available for studying modern media environments. This approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of how propaganda operates within journalistic content, particularly in cases where it is embedded within credible sources and routine reporting practices.

Overall, this methodology demonstrates that while identifying propaganda in contemporary media is complex and at times subjective, a systematic and theory-informed

coding approach can provide meaningful insights into patterns of persuasion that would otherwise remain difficult to detect.

Practical Implications

The findings of this study carry important implications for journalism, media consumers, international relations, and future research. For journalism, the results underscore the need for greater awareness of source reliance and emotional framing in news production. The heavy dependence on elite sources, particularly government officials, military actors, and institutional voices, demonstrates how easily journalistic content can become shaped by those in positions of power. While sourcing credible voices is a foundational practice in journalism, this study shows that such reliance can also facilitate the unintentional transmission of persuasive or propagandistic messaging. Additionally, the integration of emotional language and moral framing within sourced material highlights the importance of critically evaluating not just what sources say, but how those statements are presented and contextualized. Greater reflexivity in sourcing and framing decisions may help journalists mitigate the amplification of embedded propaganda.

For media consumers, these findings point to a clear need for stronger media literacy and more critical engagement with news content. Because much of the propaganda identified in this study is subtle and embedded often appearing through credible sources and emotionally resonant language, it is unlikely to be recognized without deliberate scrutiny. Audiences must therefore move beyond surface-level reading and develop the ability to question source credibility, identify persuasive intent, and recognize how emotional framing may shape interpretation. This is

particularly important in the context of conflict reporting, where narratives are often highly contested and strategically constructed.

For international relations and diplomacy, the findings highlight how media coverage functions as an extension of strategic communication. The concentration of propaganda within elite sources, particularly leaders and officials directly involved in the conflict, suggests that news media can serve as a conduit for diplomatic messaging, signaling, and narrative positioning. Statements made by political leaders and institutional actors are not only directed at domestic audiences but also at international stakeholders, shaping global perceptions of legitimacy, responsibility, and moral authority. The dominance of Ukrainian and Russian elite voices in U.S. media coverage further indicates that international narratives can be driven by foreign actors, even within domestic news environments. This has implications for how states engage in soft power, information warfare, and public diplomacy, as controlling the narrative becomes a key component of influence in the international arena.

Study Limitations

This study employs a single-coder textual analysis approach, which introduces limitations related to subjectivity and replicability. Unlike multi-coder content analysis, this design does not include intercoder reliability testing, which limits the ability to assess consistency across coders. However, this approach is consistent with qualitative textual analysis, which prioritizes interpretive depth and contextual understanding over statistical generalizability.

The study was initially designed as a two-coder content analysis with a structured quantitative approach to measure the frequency of propaganda devices. During preliminary coding, challenges in achieving acceptable intercoder agreement highlighted the interpretive

complexity of identifying propaganda and distinguishing it from emotionally charged but non-propagandistic language. As a result, the research design was refined to a qualitative textual analysis, which is better suited to examining nuanced relationships between propaganda devices, journalistic narratives, attributed sources, and framing. This refinement reflects an adaptive research design responsive to the analytical demands of the study.

To enhance analytical rigor and consistency, a structured codebook with clearly defined categories, operational definitions, and inclusion and exclusion criteria was developed and applied systematically across all texts. Coding was conducted systematically, allowing for continuous refinement and consistent application of criteria throughout the analysis. All coding decisions were documented, and annotated materials were retained to provide a transparent audit trail. This documentation supports the credibility and dependability of the findings despite the absence of intercoder reliability testing.

Additionally, the shift from a content analysis design to a textual analysis approach limits the transferability of the findings. A textual analysis allows for deeper interpretive insight into propaganda, loaded language, and their relationship to media framing. But the results are not intended to be statistically representative and should instead be understood as context-specific and analytically interpretive.

The study is also limited by the scope of its sample, which may not capture the full range of media representations across outlets, time periods, or linguistic contexts. As a result, the dataset may overrepresent particular narratives, perspectives, or authors. Accordingly, the findings should be interpreted within the specific context of the selected texts rather than as a comprehensive account of media coverage.

Finally, this study analyzes media content rather than audience reception or effects. It focuses on messaging published by *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* and does not examine how audiences interpret or respond to that content. Therefore, any discussion of impact such as the influence of propaganda or emotional framing is inferred rather than empirically measured.

Future Research

Future research should build on the framework developed in this study by extending its application beyond the Russia–Ukraine conflict. The coding scheme and analytical approach can be applied to other geopolitical contexts, enabling comparative analyses that examine how propaganda devices and framing strategies vary across conflicts, regions, and political systems. Such comparisons would help determine whether the patterns identified in this study particularly the dominance of testimonial and the reliance on elite sources—are consistent features of contemporary war reporting or context-specific phenomena.

In addition, future studies should expand this framework across different media environments, including broadcast news, digital-native journalism, and social media platforms. These spaces operate under distinct production norms and audience dynamics, which may influence how propaganda is constructed, distributed, and received. For example, visual content, algorithmic amplification, and user-generated material may introduce new forms of persuasive communication that are not fully captured within traditional text-based analysis.

Further research could also refine and extend the coding scheme itself, particularly by examining the role of emotional language and atrocity content as evolving forms of propaganda.

As media ecosystems continue to shift, developing more nuanced tools for identifying both overt and embedded persuasive strategies will be essential for understanding how propaganda adapts within increasingly complex and fragmented communication environments.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The central aim of this study was to examine whether propaganda devices were utilized within war and conflict reporting by newspapers of record, specifically *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*. This research sought to determine whether these outlets produced unbiased coverage and to identify whether propaganda originated from the journalist's narrative or from attributed sources.

A sample of 42 articles published between 2022 and 2025 was analyzed. Across these articles, a total of 278 instances of propaganda devices were identified. The most frequently used device was testimonial, followed by transfer and glittering generalities, with a substantial gap between these and other devices. A clear pattern emerged in which propaganda was often embedded within attributed sources rather than originating directly from journalists. Of the 278 instances, 191 were derived from attributed sources, indicating that the majority of persuasive messaging came from external voices rather than from the journalist's own narrative.

Among these sources, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy accounted for the highest number of instances at 36, followed by civilians with 29 instances. The Russian government and Ukrainian government each accounted for 22 instances. These findings suggest that propaganda within war reporting is largely driven by key actors involved in the conflict. At the same time, journalists play a critical role in selecting, framing, and presenting these voices. While the persuasive content may originate from sources, journalists are responsible for determining which perspectives are included and how they are contextualized.

Propaganda was present throughout the dataset, with testimonial-based appeals dominating the findings. A key pattern indicates that contemporary propaganda operates in a

more subtle manner than traditionally understood. Rather than overt messaging, persuasive techniques are embedded within credible and authoritative sources, making them appear informative and objective. Journalistic framing further amplifies these effects by shaping how audiences interpret the information. This demonstrates that while journalists may not be the primary originators of propaganda, they are not neutral actors in its dissemination.

The interpretation of these findings highlights the strategic use of communication by conflict actors. For example, President Zelenskyy's frequent use of emotional appeals and testimonial rhetoric aligns with his role in addressing both domestic and international audiences to secure support. Civilian accounts, while often not intended to persuade, are framed in ways that heighten emotional impact and reinforce particular narratives. Instances where unverified claims were included in reporting further illustrate how framing choices can contribute to persuasive outcomes. Additionally, the relatively low use of bandwagon and plain folks devices suggest a shift away from overt collective appeals toward more individualized and emotionally driven messaging.

The findings contribute to a broader understanding of propaganda within contemporary media by engaging with propaganda theory, framing theory, agenda-setting, and indexing theory. This study demonstrates that traditional propaganda devices remain relevant, but their application has evolved. Modern propaganda is less explicit and more integrated into routine journalistic practices. The reliance on elite sources supports indexing theory, as journalists privilege voices from political leaders, military officials, and institutional actors. In doing so, media coverage reflects and reinforces existing power structures while shaping public perception.

Methodologically, this study highlights the value of textual analysis in examining propaganda. Unlike traditional content analysis approaches, this method allowed for a more nuanced examination of how classical propaganda devices interact with emotional appeals such as loaded language and atrocity content. By expanding the analytical framework beyond classical definitions, this research provides a more comprehensive understanding of how persuasion operates in modern conflict reporting.

The practical implications of this study are significant for journalism, media consumers, and international relations. For journalists, the findings raise important questions about source selection, framing, and the ethical responsibilities associated with amplifying persuasive narratives. For media consumers, the results underscore the need for stronger media literacy and critical engagement with news content. Audiences must move beyond surface-level interpretation and critically evaluate the credibility and intent of the information presented. In the context of international relations, this study demonstrates how news media functions as an extension of strategic communication. Media coverage can serve as a conduit for diplomatic messaging, narrative positioning, and information warfare, reinforcing the role of soft power in modern conflict.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. This study was originally designed as a content analysis with structured coding and inter-coder reliability. However, due to challenges in achieving consistent agreement on the classification of propaganda devices, a textual analysis approach was adopted. While this allowed for deeper interpretation and contextual understanding, it also reflects the complexity and subjectivity inherent in identifying propaganda. Additionally, the sample was limited to two newspapers and a specific timeframe, which may

affect the generalizability of the findings. Future studies could use a larger, more generalizable sample and examine use of propaganda devices across other types of news, such as network or cable news or perhaps international news agencies, which are more likely to have resources to cover a complex story like the war in Ukraine. Future research could expand this framework to include additional international perspectives and other geopolitical conflicts. Comparative analyses could further illuminate how propaganda adapts across different contexts and media systems. This framework may also be applied as a tool for assessing bias in news reporting, contributing to ongoing discussions surrounding media accountability and transparency.

There is a 19th century proverb coined by Edward Bulwer-Lytton that states that the pen is mightier than the sword. This study demonstrates that in the context of modern conflict, that statement remains highly relevant. The battlefield is no longer limited to physical spaces, but extends into the digital and informational domain, where media serves as a powerful instrument of influence. Propaganda is no longer presented in overt and obvious forms, but is subtly embedded within credible sources, emotional appeals, and strategic framing.

In this sense, the media functions as a golden mouthpiece through which messages are communicated, amplified, and legitimized. Journalists and elite sources are positioned with the ability to shape narratives, influence public perception, and contribute to broader geopolitical dynamics. The findings of this study reinforce that the pen is indeed mightier than the sword. With this power comes a significant responsibility. Journalists must remain critically aware of the role they play in shaping narratives and ensure that their practices uphold the standards of accuracy, transparency, and ethical reporting.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Partial Dataset (Spread Sheet)

First four columns of the data set are included within the document due to size limitations. The complete dataset is available upon request.

Story ID	Newspaper Outlet	Article Publishing Date	Article Title
WSJ220	WSJ	Feb. 26, 2022	Ordinary Ukrainians Rally to Defend Homeland from Russia
WSJ2202	WSJ	Feb. 24, 2022	U.S., Allies Poised to Hit Russia with Broad Sanctions for Ukraine Invasion
WSJ2203	WSJ	Feb. 25, 2022	Ukraine War Shifts Balance of Power—Among Airlines
WSJ2204	WSJ	April 5, 2022	Ukraine’s Zelensky Calls for Removing Russia from U.N. Security Council After Alleged War Crimes
WSJ2205	WSJ	March 10, 2022	Unfounded Russian Claims of Biological Weapons Research in Ukraine Stir Fears of Wider Risk
WSJ2206	WSJ	Aug. 12, 2022	Ukraine Scrapes to Pay Its Soldiers as Western Funds Slow to Arrive
NYT2201	NYT	March 18 2022	As Diplomacy drags on, peace seems far off in Ukraine
NYT22022	NYT	November 20 2022	At least 437 children have been killed in the war since February, Ukraine Says
NYT2203	NYT	December 17 2022	Eight Takeaways from the times investigation into Putin’s war
NYT2204	NYT	October 05 2022	In Retreat at the Front, Russia Strikes Deep into Ukraine
NYT2205	NYT	May 12 2022	Life in a Ukraine Unit: Diving for Cover, Waiting for Western Weapons
WSJ2301	WSJ	Jan. 13, 2023	The War in Ukraine Will Be Long. Is the West Ready?
WSJ2302	WSJ	Jan. 1, 2023	Ukraine Rings in New Year with Hopes of Russia’s Defeat

WSJ2303	WSJ	Nov. 12, 2023	Ukraine War Slips Toward Violent Stalemate
WSJ2304	WSJ	Dec. 12, 2023	The War That Neither Ukraine nor the West Can Afford to Lose
WSJ2305	WSJ	Jan. 1, 2023	Ukraine Begins 2023 Under Attack from Russian Drone Swarm
NYT2301	NYT	October 29 2023	As Fighting Rages, Ukraine Takes Its Battle to the Diplomatic Arena
NYT2302	NYT	January 14 2023	As Russians Steal Ukraine's Art, They Attack Its Identity, too
NYT2303	NYT	January 02 2023	Deadly Strike on Russians in Ukraine Exposes Moscow's Military Failings
NYT2304	NYT	May 07 2023	Ukrainians Return Home, Renewed and Resigned
NYT2305	NYT	March 22 2023	Zelensky Makes Morale-Boosting Trip to Bakhmut
NYT2401	NYT	Aug. 8, 2024	Ukraine's Push into Russia Is a Surprising Turn in the War
NYT2402	NYT	May 11 2024	Russian Attacks Open a New Front in Ukraine
NYT2403	NYT	January 14 2024	The front line in Ukraine is largely peopled by the elderly these days. some can't afford to get out. others say they won't abandon their home
NYT2404	NYT	March 16 2024	Rebellious Russians Stage daring Attacks from Ukraine on Russian Soil
NYT2405	NYT	March 15 2024	As Putin Pitches His Vision, Voters Avert Their Gaze from the War
WSJ2401	WSJ	Aug. 10, 2024	As Ukrainian Forces Grab Russian Territory, the Kremlin Maintains It's No Big Deal
WSJ2402	WSJ	November 11 2024	The Russia- Ukraine War Intensifies, With Drone Attacks, Foreign Troops and Record Losses
WSJ2403	WSJ	Aug. 14, 2024	On Russia's Border, Fear and Defiance: 'No One Will Chase Us Out of Here'
WSJ2404	WSJ	Sept. 17, 2024	One Million Are Now Dead or Injured in the Russia-Ukraine War
WSJ2405	WSJ	Nov. 29, 2024	Russia-Ukraine Standoff Over POWs Leaves Thousands Stuck in 'Gray Zone'

WSJ2501	WSJ	April 17, 2025	A Guide to the Five Regions of Ukraine at the Center of U.S.-Russia Talks
WSJ2502	WSJ	Dec. 19, 2025	Five Potential Obstacles to Peace Between Russia and Ukraine
WSJ2503	WSJ	Feb. 8, 2026	Ukraine Seeks a War Plan Beyond Killing as Many Russian Soldiers as Possible
WSJ22504	WSJ	March 15, 2025	Russia Overpowers Bold Ukrainian Military Venture in Kursk
WSJ2505	WSJ	Nov. 25, 2025	Ukrainians Resist Pressure from Russia—and Trump
WSJ2506	WSJ	March 12, 2025	Ukraine Turns Tables with Cease-Fire Proposal, but Putin Has Little Incentive to Sign
NYT2501	NYT	August 04 2025	Russia Says It Will Stop Abiding by Missile Treaty
NYT2502	NYT	April 04 2025	Russia Executes P.O.W.s Without Caring Who Watches, Ukraine says
NYT2503	NYT	January 01 2025	Zelensky Expresses Hope for 2025, but Russia Presses on with Attacks
NYT2504	NYT	November 13 2025	Ukraine's Dilemma as a City Teeters: save Lives or keep holding on
NYT2505	NYT	February 12 2025	Russian soldiers are locked in a fierce battle to reclaim all of the Kursk region from the Ukrainian army

Appendix B: Code Book

This codebook outlines the categories and definitions used to systematically identify and analyze propaganda devices and persuasive framing techniques within the selected news coverage. It served as the primary instrument guiding the coding process and was developed to ensure consistency and clarity in how each variable was interpreted and applied throughout the analysis.

The categories included in this codebook are informed by established literature on propaganda and media framing, including classifications derived from the Institute for Propaganda Analysis. Each category is accompanied by an operational definition and, where applicable, examples to illustrate how the coding criteria were applied to the articles examined in this study.

During the coding process, each article was reviewed in its entirety, and instances of propaganda devices were identified and recorded according to the definitions provided in this codebook. Coding decisions were based on the presence of explicit textual indicators, including language, sourcing, and narrative framing. This structured approach allowed for a systematic comparison across articles, sources, and time periods.

The purpose of including this codebook is to provide transparency in the research process and to allow for the replication or extension of this analysis in future studies. By clearly defining each category and its application, this appendix supports the validity and reliability of the findings presented in this thesis.

Code Book-Williamson Thesis

Study Overview:

This study employs a qualitative textual analysis with structured coding to examine newspaper coverage of the Russian Ukrainian conflict in two major U.S. news outlets: *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*. Using purposive sampling, articles directly related to the conflict will be selected from each outlet's archival database. The study will analyze coverage published between **2022 and 2025**, capturing reporting across multiple phases of the conflict.

A sample of **20–40 articles per outlet** will be collected, with a sample of **5-10 articles** will be saved per year of the date range (2022, 2023, 2024, 2025) Each article will be assigned a unique identification code and saved in PDF format to ensure systematic organization and traceability throughout the coding process.

The analysis will focus on two primary variables: **propaganda devices** (e.g. the seven propaganda devices of the Institute for Propaganda Analysis and atrocity propaganda) utilized within the coverage and the presence of **emotionally charged language** within the articles. These variables will be examined to identify patterns in framing and narrative construction across the two outlets. By comparing coverage from *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*, a comparative study design will be used to assess similarities and differences in where the propaganda originates within the conflict coverage (journalist narratives vs. sources) and how the Russian- Ukrainian conflict is presented to U.S. audiences.

Purpose of Study:

The study will compare how the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal employ propaganda devices and emotionally charged language in their news reporting of the Russian-Ukraine conflict. A comparative design will be used to examine the differences and similarities between the two outlets.

Codebook Overview:

This codebook was developed to analyze how two newspapers (the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times*) portray the Russia – Ukraine conflict, with particular attention to how the newspapers utilize the Institute for Propaganda Analysis' service propaganda devices, atrocity propaganda, emotionally charged language and framing.

Sampling Information:

- **Newspapers:** *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal*
- **Date Range:** January 2022- December 2025
- **Inclusion Criteria:** Articles must have the subject Russia-Ukraine conflict.
- **Exclusion Criteria:** Articles will not be duplicates or opinion articles.
- **Content analyzed will only be the written aspect of the articles and will not be audio recordings, video recordings or images.**

Unit of Analysis:

The unit of analysis is the individual newspaper article, including the headline, body text, and quotes within the articles. Photographs and captions are excluded unless explicitly stated otherwise. Propaganda devices are identified at the sentence or quote level. Article-level coding should reflect ONLY whether at least one clearly identifiable device is present.

Primary Rule for Coding (Non-negotiable)

Propaganda should only be coded when a clear, explicit, and unambiguous propaganda device (as defined by the IPA framework) is present. General political language, emotional tone, or persuasive content alone does NOT qualify as propaganda.

General Coding Rules for Newspaper Articles:

1. Code only **explicit propaganda devices** (Bandwagon, Card Stacking, Glittering Generalities, Name-Calling, Plain Folks, Testimonial and Transfer) present in the article text.
2. If atrocity propaganda devices appear within the articles, they may be coded as such.
3. Emotionally charged language may be coded as such.
4. A device may only be coded if the example clearly and unambiguously fits the operational definition and inclusion criteria. If the match is uncertain, indirect, or requires interpretation beyond the definition, it must be coded as **NO PROPAGANDA**.
5. Propaganda devices may appear in:
 - Headlines
 - Leads
 - Quoted Material
 - Editorial Framing
 - Body of Text

Coding Protocol

1. Access PDF articles via One Drive Link
2. Access coding sheet via Qualtrics Link.
3. Use Qualtrics form to analyze articles that are accessed through the provided one drive link.
4. Contracted coder will be provided between 4-8 articles to analyze according to coding book requirements.
5. Email researcher when analysis is complete.

Propaganda Coding Rules:

- All device definitions must be **operationalized in the codebook**
- For every coded instance the coder must identify
 - Device Type
 - Device Source

-Source Categorization (Government Official, Civilian, Military, Other, etc.)

-Quote Example if applicable

- Repeated use of the **same device** counts as separate points
- Coders should **not subjectively label intensity**.
- Coders will count how many instances of the variables are used within one article and notate it.

Step 1: Propaganda detection rule

Coders must ask:

Does this article contain at least one statement that clearly matches a defined propaganda device?

Code YES only if:

- A **specific sentence or quote** can be identified
- The device is **clearly recognizable without interpretation**
- The example **directly matches inclusion criteria**

Code NO if:

- Language is emotional but **common in journalism**
- Content is **factual, even if negative or positive**
- A device **cannot be confidently identified**
- The coder is **unsure**
- The statement is **factual, even if negative or positive**
- The language is **common journalistic phrasing** (e.g., “threat,” “concern,” “conflict”)
- The quote reflects **standard political rhetoric without a clear device**
- The article presents **multiple perspectives**
- The statement becomes **supported by evidence later in the article**
- The coder must **infer intent**

When in doubt, code NO.

A “yes” decision must be defensible to a third-party reviewer using only the provided quote and codebook definition. If the justification would not convince an independent reader, the content must be coded as “no.”

Hard Threshold Test

Before coding “YES,” the content must pass this test.

- Can you **highlight the exact sentence**?
- Can you **name the device**?
- Can you **justify it using the definition**?

If there is any answer = no → **DO NOT CODE**

Step 2: Source Attribution Rule

Once propaganda is confirmed:

Where does the propaganda originate?

Journalist Narrative

- Written in reporter's voice
- Not inside quotation marks
- In the body of the article or title

Quoted Source

- Direct quotes
- Attributed statements

Critical Exclusion Rules

Do NOT code as propaganda if:

- It is a **direct quote reported neutrally**
- Numbers or parts of the article are **backed up by a report or source**
- It is **standard political rhetoric without a clear device**
- It includes **balance or opposing viewpoints**
- It is **descriptive war reporting** (even if negative)
- It contains **general value terms** (freedom, democracy) **WITHOUT** persuasive framing

Article Identification Variables (Metadata):

Coder ID:

1. Kate Williamson
2. Madison Neal

Data Criteria

1. Story ID (will be located on the article sent via pdf):
2. Newspaper:
1: New York Times 2: Wall Street Journal
3. Publishing Date:
4. Article Title:
5. Author Name:

If there are more than one author, please enter authors as follows:

Author 1, Author 2, Author 3

If the author is a corporate author, please enter author as follows:

Corporate Author: Newspaper Name

6. Bandwagon Device Instance Count
7. Examples
8. Source of Device (include name and role)
9. Card Stacking Device Instance Count
10. Examples
11. Source of Device (include name and role)
12. Glittering Generalities Device Instance Count
13. Examples
14. Source of Device (include name and role)
15. Name Calling Device Instance Count
16. Examples
17. Source of Device (include name and role)
18. Plain Folks Device Instance Count
19. Examples
20. Source of Device (include name and role)
21. Testimonial Device Instance Count
22. Examples
23. Source of Device (include name and role)
24. Device Instance Count
25. Examples
26. Source of Device (include name and role)
27. Transfer Device Instance Count
28. Examples
29. Source of Device (include name and role)
30. Atrocity Propaganda Instance Count
31. Examples
32. Source of propaganda (include name and role)
33. Emotionally Charged Language Instance Count
34. Examples
35. Source of content (including name and role)
36. Notes on article

Propaganda Device Criteria:

1. Bandwagon (Newspaper Context)

Code Name: Bandwagon

Definition:

An appeal suggesting that a position is correct or inevitable because it is widely supported. The theme “Everybody is doing it” is supported by the content.

Example: “America’s favorite cookie.” (Oreo Cookie).

Inclusion Criteria

Code as **Bandwagon** if the article:

- States or implies that “most people,” “the public,” or “voters” support a position without presenting evidence.
- Frames an issue as inevitable due to widespread adoption or consensus.
- Emphasizes social pressure or majority opinion as justification.

Exclusion Criteria

Do **not** code as Bandwagon if the article:

- Reports poll results or survey data neutrally with sourcing.
- Describes public opinion trends without persuasive framing.
- Attributes bandwagon language to a source and critically contextualizes it.

2. Card Stacking (Newspaper Context)

Code Name: Card Stacking

Definition:

Selective presentation of facts that favor one side while minimizing or omitting opposing viewpoints.

Example: A cereal box might say “made with real fruit” and has “whole grains”. But ignores how it contains more sugar than a candy bar.

Inclusion Criteria

Code as **Card Stacking** if the article:

- Presents only one perspective on a controversial issue without acknowledging alternatives.
- Highlights facts that support one position while omitting relevant counterpoints.
- Uses selective statistics or expert opinions to reinforce a single narrative.

Exclusion Criteria

Do **not** code as Card Stacking if the article:

- Includes multiple perspectives or counterarguments.
- Clearly labels content as an opinion or editorial (unless you are coding those separately).
- Lacks sufficient information to determine whether omission is intentional.

3. **Glittering Generalities (Newspaper Context)**

Code Name: Glittering Generalities

Definition:

Use of vague, emotionally positive language tied to abstract values to promote an idea.

Examples: Obama's hope poster.

Inclusion Criteria

Code as **Glittering Generalities** if the article:

- Uses vague value-laden terms (e.g., “freedom,” “innovation,” “prosperity,” “security”) without definition.
- Frames policies or actions as inherently virtuous or beneficial.
- Avoids a concrete explanation of how outcomes will be achieved.

Exclusion Criteria

Do **not** code as Glittering Generalities if the article:

- Defines abstract terms with specific examples or evidence.
- Uses value language in a neutral or descriptive manner.
- Attributes the language to a source and provides critical context.

4. **Name-Calling (Newspaper Context)**

Code Name: Name Calling

Definition:

Use of negative labels to discredit individuals, ideas, or groups.

Examples: Snowflake, Extremist, Terrorist, Tree-Hugger, Nazi

Inclusion Criteria

Code as **Name-Calling** if the article:

- Applies derogatory or emotionally charged labels without evidence.
- Repeats stigmatizing language in headlines or leads.
- Uses labels that substitute for argument or explanation.

Exclusion Criteria

Do **not** code as Name-Calling if the article:

- Uses factual descriptors (e.g., legal, political, or cultural classifications).
- Quotes name-calling language but counters or contextualizes it.
- Reports on accusations without adopting the language.

5. Plain Folks (Newspaper Context)

Code Name: Plain Folks

Definition:

Portrayal of individuals or ideas as aligned with everyday people to build trust or legitimacy.

Example: Jared from Subway

Inclusion Criteria

Code as **Plain Folks** if the article:

- Emphasizes ordinariness or “everyday” identity as a persuasive element.
- Highlights shared experiences with “regular people” to justify positions.
- Downplays institutional power or elite status.

Exclusion Criteria

Do **not** code as Plain Folks if the article:

- Describes individuals’ backgrounds factually.
- Mentions ordinary experiences without persuasive framing.
- Focuses on expertise, authority, or professional credentials.

6. Testimonial (Newspaper Context)

Code Name: Testimonial

Definition:

Use of endorsements or statements from identifiable individuals to support a position.

Example: Influencer marketing, Ryan Reynolds for Mint Mobile, Beyonce and Pepsi.

Inclusion Criteria

Code as **Testimonial** if the article:

- Relies heavily on praise or endorsement from a named individual.
- Uses authority figures to legitimize claims.
- Highlights personal experience as evidence of validity.

Exclusion Criteria

Do **not** code as Testimonial if the article:

- Uses multiple sources to report facts neutrally.
- Attributes statements without endorsement framing.
- Includes expert commentary as part of balanced reporting.

7. Transfer (Newspaper Context)

Code Name: Transfer

Definition:

Association of an idea with symbolic concepts to shape perception.

Example: A politician speaking in front of the American flag or using the Statue of Liberty to transfer feelings of patriotism and authority to their campaign platform.

Inclusion Criteria

Code as **Transfer** if the article:

- Connects issues to national symbols, tradition, religion, or scientific authority symbolically.
- Invokes patriotism, fear, or moral authority without direct argument.
- Uses symbolic framing to imply legitimacy or threat.

Exclusion Criteria

Do **not** code as Transfer if the article:

- References symbols descriptively or historically.
- Analyzes or critiques the use of symbols.
- Provides explicit reasoning independent of symbolism.

Atrocity Content

Code Name: Atrocity Content or Atrocity Claim

Definition: Reports of cruel or shocking acts, circulated widely, and intended to produce an inappropriate martial response (Morrow, 2018).

Example: Descriptions of mass violence, human rights violations, war crimes, etc.

Inclusion Criteria

- Describes or references extreme violence, war crimes, or human suffering (e.g., torture, massacre, civilian targeting)
- Uses emotionally intensified or morally charged framing to emphasize brutality (e.g., “barbaric,” “inhumane,” “systematic slaughter”)
- Frames the act in a way that amplifies moral outrage or demonizes an actor
- Highlights intentional harm against vulnerable groups (e.g., civilians, children)
- Uses graphic or evocative descriptions that go beyond neutral reporting

Exclusion Criteria

- The content is purely factual and descriptive without emotional amplification
- Violence is reported in neutral, journalistic language (e.g., “X people were killed in an attack”)
- The statement is attributed and presented without evaluative framing
- The description is contextual or analytical, not persuasive
- The coder must infer emotional intent

Loaded Language

Code Name: Emotionally Charged Language, Loaded Language

Definition: An umbrella term for words, phrases, and overall rhetorical strategies that have strong emotional implications and intent to sway others. (Klein & Hendler, 2022)

Example: Freedom Fighter, Regime, War Crimes, Unprovoked Aggression, etc.

Inclusion Criteria

- Uses strong emotional appeals (fear, anger, outrage, sympathy)
- Includes intensifiers or exaggerated descriptors (e.g., “devastating,” “horrific,” “shocking”)
- Frames actors or events in morally loaded or value-laden terms
- Moves beyond neutral reporting into evaluative or persuasive tone
- Is likely to influence audience perception emotionally rather than inform neutrally

Exclusion Criteria

- Language is standard journalistic phrasing (e.g., “conflict,” “attack,” “tensions”)
- Emotional tone is mild or implicit, not clearly amplified
- The wording is necessary for accurate reporting (e.g., “deadly attack” when factual)
- The statement is balanced with neutral context or evidence
- The coder must interpret tone subjectively

Coding Note: Emotionally charged language and atrocity propaganda were coded only when emotional amplification was clear, explicit, and exceeded standard journalistic description.

Coding Note: Not all political and persuasive language can be categorized as propaganda devices. Propaganda requires:

- Intentional persuasion
- Use of a recognizable device
- Lack of substantive support

Coding Revisions after first content analysis:

Originally, the purpose of the study was to analyze how two newspapers (the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times*) portray the Russia – Ukraine conflict, with particular attention to how the newspapers utilized the Institute for Propaganda Analysis' service propaganda devices and subject role portrayal.

The original research questions included,

1. What propaganda techniques from the IPA framework did the two newspapers use in their news coverage of the Russia-Ukraine conflict?
2. Where does the use of the propaganda techniques come from, the reporters directly or the quoted sources?
3. How were the two sides (Russia and Ukraine) portrayed?
4. How were the two sides portrayed (villain, hero, neutral) and did that portrayal vary across outlets?

While the original research questions informed the design of the coding sheet and book, preliminary coding between the researcher and the contracted coder revealed challenges in achieving consistent interpretation between coders. When the coding scores were analyzed, it fell within the problematic reliability statistic. Following the original code book's guidance, due to

the score of the first round of analysis the coding framework was revised, and the analysis was approached from a modified perspective that allowed clearer operational definitions and greater agreement between coders. The data that was collected will be used in the new coding framework and will utilize the same “Story ID.”

Coding Framework Revisions-

The research questions have been changed to limit the scope of research. Through the first round of coding, the researcher found a trend where most of the propaganda techniques were identified within quoted statements and relied on emotional appeals. Due to this discovery, the original research questions regarding role portrayal have been removed. The researcher found that the role portrayal did not align with the current research questions and allowed the author to research why and how propaganda devices were used on a deeper level. The research questions have been updated to the following.

Revised Coding Questionnaire-

Coder ID:

1. Kate Williamson
2. Madison Neal

Article and publisher information:

1. Story ID (will be located on the article sent via pdf):
2. Newspaper:
1: New York Times 2: Wall Street Journal
3. Publishing Date:
4. Article Title:
5. Author Name:

If there are more than one author, please enter authors as follows:

Author 1, Author 2, Author 3

If the author is a corporate author, please enter author as follows:

Corporate Author: Newspaper Name

6. Are any of the Institute for Propaganda Analysis' seven devices present in the article?
Yes or No

7. If there are propaganda devices, which ones are present in the article?

(Bandwagon, card stacking, glittering generalities, name calling, plain folks, testimonial, and/or transfer.)

8. When propaganda techniques appear in news articles, do they originate from journalist's narrative (body of the article) or from quoted sources?

Body of article or Quoted Sources or Both

9. If propaganda techniques appear in the news article from a quote, what is the source type?

Political Leader, Government Official, Diplomat, Other

10. If propaganda techniques appear in quoted statements, what propaganda techniques are used?

(Bandwagon, card stacking, glittering generalities, name calling, plain folks, testimonial, and/or transfer.)

2nd Round Coding Notes:

While coding the second round of data, the researcher and contracted coder noticed there was propaganda messaging in both the body of the article and in the quoted sources. But this propaganda did not fit any of the devices that was being coded for. Also, the device of atrocity propaganda was used in a way that could not be ignored.

Round 3 of Coding Revisions:

During the second round of data analysis and coding, there was still disagreement on what could be considered propaganda. The researcher and coder had an 89.89% agreement on whether or not propaganda was present in the article. But the researcher and the coder could not agree on the source of the propaganda that was in the article.

One of the issues with the second version of the code book is that the study did not offer a clear definition of propaganda and its devices. This resulted in category stretching, over-application of the term propaganda and inflated “YES” and “BOTH” rates. To combat the over-detection that has been seen in this study so far, the researcher added a non-example requirement to the code book. By adding the non-example requirement to the code book, it forces the researcher and coder to use contrastive reasoning. This allows the coders to analyze the content and explain whether it is or is not propaganda. The non-example requirement will reduce false positives because the coders will have to explain the reasoning behind their decisions and will make sure the coders understand the definitions of propaganda and how to apply it to modern media content.

The also researcher updated the research questions to accommodate a study that would have intercoder reliability. In the updated code book, the code sheet has questions that separate detection from classification. The researcher and coder will now be able to detect propaganda and its sources easier through the articles. A new primary rule was added. “Propaganda should only be coded when a clear, explicit and unambiguous propaganda device (as defined by the IPA framework) is present. General political language, emotional tone, or persuasive content alone does not qualify as propaganda.”

In addition to the primary rule, propaganda detection rules and a hard threshold test were added to the code book. By adding the rules and threshold, it makes the researcher and coder have to justify why this content is propaganda and takes the guess work out of the analysis portion of this coding.

In addition to creating a third version of the code book and changing the research questions, the researcher created a pre-coding agreement anchor document. This creates a shared baseline that the researcher and coder can refer back to when making decisions. The pre-coding agreement anchors will consist of two articles. One article will be published by the *Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times* that was published during the data collection range. These articles will be given to the coder as a reference document for the third round of coding analysis.

Coding Definitions According to Thesis References:

Propaganda- expression of opinion or action by individuals or groups deliberately designed to influence opinions or actions of other individuals or groups with reference to predetermined ends.” Propaganda is intentionally designed to trigger specific and predetermined responses.

7 Devices of Propaganda: Definitions have been taken from the Institute for Propaganda Analysis (Propaganda- Institute for Propaganda Analysis , 2026)

Bandwagon- "Has as its theme 'everybody - at least all of us - is doing it!' and thereby tries to convince the members of a group that their peers are accepting the program and that we should all jump on the bandwagon rather than be left out." "Everybody is doing this." You've heard that before. The idea here is to convey the notion that if you don't get aboard, you will be left out. This can also appear as news organizations jump on a "story" so as not to be left out

Card Stacking- "Involves the selection and use of facts or falsehoods, illustrations or distractions,

and logical or illogical statements to give the best or the worst possible case for an idea, program, person, or product."

Glittering Generalities- "Associating something with a 'virtue word' and creating acceptance and approval without examination of the evidence." These are vague, broad statements that will connect with the audience's beliefs and values. They really don't say anything substantive. Slogans make great examples. Vagueness means that the implications, though varying for different people, are always favorable.

Note: If a vague term is discovered and the questions "How", "With What" or "By what means" cannot be answered, it can be considered a glittering generality.

Name-Calling- "Giving an idea a bad label and therefore rejecting and condemning it without examining the evidence." This is the use of negative words or labels to create prejudice against some person, group or idea.

Plain Folks- "The method by which a speaker attempts to convince the audience that he or she and his or her ideas are good because they are 'of the people,' the 'plain folks.'" The person speaking will adopt a demeanor that makes them look like "everyman." They will appear to connect with the audience and their point of view. Careful choice of clothing, vocabulary, and mannerisms is necessary to make the identity connection.

Testimonial- "Consists in having some respected or hated person say that a given idea or program or product is good or bad." This technique has a well-known someone endorse, recommend or approve of a product, cause or program.

Transfer- "Carries the respect and authority of something respected to something else to make the latter accepted. Also works with something that is disrespected to make the latter rejected." This is an effort to transfer your approval of something you respect and approve of to another something that the propagandist wants you to approve of.

Atrocity Propaganda- "reports of cruel or shocking acts, circulated widely, and intended to produce an inappropriate martial response (Morrow, 2018)".

Emotionally Charged Language/ (Loaded Language)- "An umbrella term for words, phrases, and overall rhetorical strategies that have strong emotional implications and intent to sway others. (Klein & Hendler, 2022)"

Appendix C.: Article Sample

This appendix provides an example of a coded article used in the analysis. The annotations reflect the application of the codebook categories described in Appendix A, including instances of testimonial, transfer, and emotionally charged language. This example illustrates how propaganda devices were identified and categorized during the coding process.

As diplomacy drags on, peace seems far off in Ukraine.

Western officials have little optimism that talks between Russia and Ukraine have reached a serious stage or have even confronted the most difficult issues.



By Steven Erlanger and Patrick Kingsley

March 18, 2022

Test = 6
GG = 2
EC = 5
CS = 1
AC = 1
NC = 2
Transfer = 1

BRUSSELS — Ukraine and Russia are engaged in intermittent negotiations to end a brutal war now in its third week. But despite signs of progress, Western officials have little optimism that the talks have reached a serious stage or even confronted the most difficult issues.

The president of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky, has raised hopes with recent statements that seem to accept that his country will not be a part of NATO, despite the alliance's promise in 2008 to accept it one day and even though the Ukrainian constitution was amended three years ago to make membership in both NATO and the European Union national goals.

A form of neutrality for Ukraine without NATO membership would seem to satisfy a key Russian demand, though only one of them. And any form of neutrality must come with security guarantees against further Russian aggression, the Ukrainians say. But who would provide such guarantees, and, if some guarantors are NATO members, how that would be fundamentally different from actual membership in the alliance, are only some of the fundamental questions outstanding.

On Wednesday, Mr. Zelensky said neutrality must include reliable guarantees that protect Ukraine from future threats. "We can and must defend our state, our life, our Ukrainian life," he said. "We can and must negotiate a just but fair peace for

Ukraine, real security guarantees that will work. Patience is needed.”

But Moscow has also demanded that Ukraine accept the loss of Crimea, annexed by Russia in 2014, and accept that a large chunk of the country in the east — the entire regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, parts of which are occupied by Russian-backed separatists — become independent republics, as Vladimir V. Putin, the Russian president, has decreed.



A burned-out building in Volnovakha, in the Donetsk region this week. The Kremlin has made independence of the separatist regions of the Donbass one of its demands. Alexander Ermochenko/Reuters

Ukraine rejects such a dismembering of its country, so it is difficult for now to see where a compromise might be found. *emotionally loaded language. Framing Bias* ²⁵

Want to stay updated on what's happening in Russia and Ukraine? Sign up for Your Places: Global Update, and we'll send our latest coverage to your inbox.

^{ANVM}
As a senior NATO official suggested, negotiations only work, as they finally did in Bosnia, when a conflict reaches a stalemate or one side wins. Neither Russia nor Ukraine is yet ready to stop fighting — Russia in its quest to seize Ukraine's seacoast, main cities and the capital, Kyiv; or Ukraine to resist. Even if Russia's advances have slowed, Mr. Putin gives no indication that his military or political goals have changed.

Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken said Thursday that the United States saw no sign that Mr. Putin was prepared to stop his military efforts.

"From where I sit, diplomacy obviously requires both sides engaging in good faith to de-escalate," he said. "The actions that we're seeing Russia take every single day, virtually every minute of every day, are in total contrast to any serious diplomatic effort to end the war."

Various countries are making efforts to mediate between Russia and Ukraine, most notably Turkey and Israel, which are generally seen as having less fraught ties to both countries than Germany and France, which have also tried to make overtures to Mr. Putin. But efforts at basic and temporary cease-fires for civilians to escape the fighting around cities like Kharkiv and Mariupol have been difficult to achieve.

³
On Friday, it was Mr. Putin who complained in a call with the German chancellor, Olaf Scholz, that Ukraine was "trying to drag out the negotiation process by putting forward new unrealistic proposals" and accused Ukraine of war crimes. 1 2

Framing!

Atrocity claim

Attribution
Bias



Smoke rising over Kharkiv on Thursday. Attempts at creating corridors to allow civilians to safely evacuate areas of heavy fighting have had varying levels of SUCCESS. Oleksandr Lapshyn/Reuters

Mr. Putin said Russia was “ready to propose a search for solutions in line with its well-known principled approaches” in a fourth round of talks. But even a negotiated cease-fire seems a distant prospect, let alone a lasting peace. 2

So far, according to a senior Ukrainian official, Russia’s demands are mostly unacceptable.

In essence, he said, Russia is demanding that the Ukrainian Parliament vote to enshrine the country’s neutrality, downgrade its army to 50,000 troops or fewer, pledge not to host any foreign military bases, and accept Russian sovereignty in Crimea and the independence of the entire Donbass region, which includes Donetsk and Luhansk. 4 3

Only then, the official said, would Russia agree to withdraw from other territory it has already occupied.

Ukraine, the official said, won't agree to anything unless Russia first withdraws its forces, or to a military that small, which is less than a quarter of its prewar standing force. But it is willing to accept some form of demilitarized zone of some 50 to 100 kilometers on either side of the border, the official said.

The Ukrainians also want an international peacekeeping force in Ukraine, with its sovereignty guaranteed — and not simply “assured,” as in the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, in which the country agreed to give up its nuclear weapons inherited from the Soviet Union. And they want those security guarantees signed by the permanent members of the U.N. Security Council — the United States, Britain, China, France and Russia — plus Turkey and Germany.

That would commit the key members of NATO to fight for Ukraine should Russia (or any other country) invade. Given that NATO is unwilling to fight Russian troops in Ukraine now, or even to create a no-fly zone over Ukraine for risk of combat with Russia, it is hard to imagine that such guarantees could be agreed upon, the senior NATO official said.

Even on the issue of neutrality, there are complications enough, beyond the idea of altering the constitution. The Russian presidential spokesman Dmitry Peskov has suggested Austria as a model for Ukrainian neutrality. And Austrian officials have briefed Ukrainian officials, according to a senior Western diplomat. But given that Austria has no limits on the size of its own military forces, it is unlikely that its model will be acceptable to Russia.



A crater from a Russian strike on a residential complex in Kyiv on Friday. Lynsey Addario for The New York Times

Turkey is making its own mediating efforts. Turkey's foreign minister, Mevlut Cavusoglu, traveled from Moscow to Lviv for separate talks with the Russian and Ukrainian foreign ministers this week. He expressed hopes for progress on a cease-fire, and set up a telephone conversation Thursday between Mr. Putin and the Turkish president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Another view of Russia's demands emerged from that conversation. According to Mr. Erdogan's senior aide and spokesman, Ibrahim Kalin, who was on the call, Mr. Putin is also insisting on Russian again becoming an official language in Ukraine and on what he terms the "de-Nazification" of the country. *name-calling, transfer*

Mr. Kalin told the BBC that however offensive that last demand might be to Mr. Zelensky, who is Jewish and lost family in the Holocaust, it might be enough for Ukraine to pledge to condemn neo-Nazis and crack down on some of its far-right nationalist groups to fulfill it. *↑ emotional appeal. Emotionally charged language*

4 name calling (but not an insult so not propaganda)

Mr. Kalin said a second category of demands was more difficult for Ukraine, involving territorial compromise, but he did not specify them.

The head of the Russian delegation, Vladimir Medinsky, said in Moscow on Friday that on the issue of demilitarization, the two sides are “somewhere halfway,” but did not disclose details.

A senior Western diplomat, briefed on the talks, suggested that neutrality and giving up Crimea would be easier for Ukraine than Russia’s other demands, like a further eastern partition and demilitarization. The diplomat confirmed that Mr. Putin appeared willing to talk to Mr. Zelensky, who seems to be trying to prepare Ukrainians for an eventual deal.

If accurate, Mr. Putin’s willingness to talk to Mr. Zelensky, whose ouster he originally demanded, is a form of progress. That is also an acknowledgment that the current Russian team negotiating with Ukraine is low-ranking and has little authority to settle the most difficult issues. So peace appears a very long way away.

Steven Erlanger reported from Brussels and Patrick Kingsley from Tbilisi, Georgia. Safak Timur contributed reporting from Istanbul.

Steven Erlanger is the chief diplomatic correspondent in Europe, based in Brussels. He previously reported from London, Paris, Jerusalem, Berlin, Prague, Moscow and Bangkok.

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