

A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE NUMBER OF RUSSIA-UKRAINE AND ISRAEL-HAMAS CONFLICT NEWS IN THE INTERNATIONAL MEDIA

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Abstract

The mediatization of conflicts is essential; without it, the public would be left uninformed and unaware of the dire circumstances faced by those affected. Besides, it is thought that Western geopolitical and economic interests influence the coverage of international conflicts by the international media. In this study, it is aimed to show the imbalance in the coverage of international conflicts by comparing the article quantities regarding the Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Hamas conflicts on the New York Times website. The result of the analysis, consistent with previous studies, indicated that the conflict was initially covered at the highest level, followed by a steady decline in the number of news stories on the issue. The number of news about the Israel - Hamas conflict is almost half that of the Russia - Ukraine conflict compared to a similar period. It is obvious that the news outlet attaches more importance to the news of the Russia-Ukraine conflict in terms of quantity. There is no credible solution to this structural problem caused by power relations in the media in the short term. However, it is considered that the networked nature of today's global media environment may enable disadvantaged groups to challenge existing power holders in the mediatization of the conflict.

Keywords: International News, Conflict News, News Values, Media Role in Conflicts.

RUSYA-UKRAYNA VE İSRAİL-HAMAS ÇATIŞMA HABERLERİNİN ULUSLARARASI MEDYADAKİ MİKTARI ÜZERİNE NİCEL BİR ANALİZ

Öz

Çatışmaların medyatize edilmesi oldukça önemlidir, aksi takdirde kamuoyu çatışma ve bundan etkilenenlerin vahim durumu hakkında habersiz kalacaktır. Bunun yanı sıra, Batı'nın jeopolitik ve ekonomik çıkarlarının uluslararası medya tarafından sunulan uluslararası çatışma haberlerinin kapsamını ve miktarını etkilediği düşünülmektedir. Bu kapsamda yapılan çalışmada, New York Times'ın internet sitesinde yer alan Rusya-Ukrayna ve İsrail-Hamas çatışmalarına ilişkin haber sayılarının karşılaştırılarak uluslararası çatışmaların haberleştirilmesindeki sayısal dengesizliğin ortaya konulması amaçlanmıştır. Analiz sonucu, daha önceki çalışmalarla uyumlu olarak, çatışmanın başlangıçta en yüksek düzeyde haberleştirildiğini, müteakiben konu ile ilgili haber sayılarında tutarlı bir düşüş olduğunu göstermiştir. İsrail - Hamas çatışmasına ilişkin haber sayısı, benzer döneme göre Rusya - Ukrayna çatışmasının neredeyse yarısı kadardır. Haber mecrasının nicelik olarak Rusya-Ukrayna çatışması haberlerine daha fazla önem verdiği açıkça görülmektedir. Medyadaki güç ilişkilerinin neden olduğu bu yapısal sorunun çözümü yakın vadede bulunmamaktadır. Ancak günümüzün küresel medya ortamının ağ bağlantılı yapısının çatışmanın medyatize edilmesinde dezavantajlı grupların mevcut güç sahiplerine meydan okumasına olanak sağlayabileceği değerlendirilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Uluslararası Haberler, Çatışma Haberleri, Haber Değeri, Çatışmalarda Medyanın Rolü

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INTRODUCTION

Conflicts are of high importance in terms of news value and, therefore, coverage as news. Considering the number of conflicts that have occurred until recently, it is evaluated that news mediums do not have difficulty in finding and reporting news. In the last decade, some of the conflicts on the agenda started to occur in the form of proxy wars, such as in Syria or Yemen. Besides, recent high-intensity conflicts such as the Russia - Ukraine and Israel - Palestine conflicts brought the information struggle to the forefront.

Nevertheless, we hear almost nothing about the vast majority of the armed conflicts since the media report on very few. In a conflict, media are an essential source of information; they provide early warnings, intelligence, and succinct analysis or choose not to do so. The coverage of conflict is crucial since it is consequential for citizens and policymakers in conflict areas regarding escalation or reconciliation. Journalists use unique criteria particular to their profession when deciding which conflicts they will report on and which not, as mentioned by O'Neill & Harcup (2009). These criteria do not always agree with those typical recipients or political decision-makers who would use them to make their selections. The question of whether mass media make relevant selection decisions when reporting on armed conflicts could, therefore, be discussed controversially by the audience depending on their specific expectations. This also applies to selection of decisions that affect specific individual events (Fröhlich, 2018).

According to Hoskins and O'Loughlin (2013), "diffused war" refers to the amplification and spread of conflict through various media channels. As the media landscape has become more complex, it has had a significant impact on conflicts. With the rise of digital media and social networks, the Russian-Ukrainian war has become one of the most heavily mediated conflicts. Digital media has created a fragmented conflict environment where it is increasingly difficult to differentiate between combatants and non-combatants. According to a

comment of the New York Times (2024a), the Russia-Ukraine war has devastated Ukraine, isolated Russia from the West, and economic insecurity has intensified globally. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights verified a total of 10.582 civilian death casualties during Russia's invasion of Ukraine as of February 15, 2024 (Statista, 2024). There has been considerable physical support for Ukraine by Western countries for two years from the onset of the conflict. Since 2022, the United States has committed nearly forty billion dollars in assistance to Ukraine (CFR, 2024). Physical assistance can be measured in terms of money, weapons, or other assets donated, whereas psychological assistance cannot be easily measured. However, we can perceive the news covered by the prominent news media on the relevant conflict since the international media is under the hegemony of US-oriented corporations (Hallin, 1994; Thussu, 2007). A journalist from Reuters, Timour Azhari, has observed a disparity in news coverage. He noted that there are many journalists embedded with Ukrainian troops, either from Ukraine, the U.S., or Europe, and they tend to be very sympathetic towards them. However, he questions why there are not any journalists of Hamas fighting against Israeli occupation. Azhari considers both situations identical, raising some critical questions (Gregory, 2023). In a study across five countries about perceptions of media coverage of the war in Ukraine, most respondents stated that they are following the conflict at least closely. According to the report, as the conflict persists, newsrooms will need to refocus efforts on explaining its broader implications (Eddy, 2022).

Newspapers noticeably communicate salience through the amount of space allotted to a topic, its page placement, or its headline size. Agenda-setting outlines the connection between the news media's emphases, the news coverage period, and the perceived importance of these topics to the news audience. The period over which media cover an issue is another important aspect for determining its place on the public's agenda. For instance, the

agenda-setting effect of civil rights stories in The New York Times was greatest after about one month of coverage, and it did not increase as stories accumulated over time (Eyal & Winter, 2016, p.19).

Another distinctive conflict covering the pages of newspapers, their websites, or apps nowadays is the Israel - Palestine conflict, specifically the Israel – Hamas war. Since October 7th, 2023, there has been an armed conflict between Israel and Hamas. The conflict has been concentrated in the Gaza Strip, which started when Hamas launched an unexpected attack on southern Israel from the Gaza Strip. As a response, the Israeli military carried out an extensive aerial bombardment of the Gaza Strip. The Israeli forces then proceeded to conduct a large-scale ground invasion, which began on October 27th. A dire situation has arisen in the Gaza Strip, leading to a severe humanitarian crisis. Tragically, the ongoing conflict has resulted in the death of over 30,000 Palestinians in Gaza, including children. Nearly all of the 2.3 million population of Gaza have been forced to leave their homes due to the conflict, making them internally displaced (The Associated Press, 2024).

A nonprofit organization, Reporters Without Borders, has accused Israel of "suffocating journalism in Gaza." For the International Federation of Journalists, this has forced reporters to rely heavily on "official" sources without being able to verify their claims. According to them, *"Confusing haste with speed, many media have published false information and images that have not been contextualized, verified or presented as reliable."* A remarkable sample was the claim that Hamas militants had beheaded babies, which were widely picked up in the media, including in a live report on CNN, without having been confirmed. Then, the CNN anchor stated that she was sorry about her words. Global News Director at Agence France-Press stated that their teams in Gaza are cut off from the rest of the world this time. Lack of foreign media access to Gaza, with both the Israeli and Egyptian access points closed, is adding to reporting difficulties the likes of which journalists

say they had rarely seen before. Moreover, the chief executive of BBC News stated in an online post that this war is one of the most complex and polarizing stories they had to cover (AFP, 2023).

According to some of the assessments, remarkable news outlets did not pay attention to this calamity as deserved. For instance, a quantitative analysis displays significant newspapers, including The New York Times, Washington Post, and Los Angeles Times, twisted their coverage toward Israeli narratives in the first six weeks of the assault on Gaza. According to the study, for every two Palestinian deaths, Palestinians are mentioned once. For every Israeli death, Israelis are mentioned eight times more than Palestinians (Johnson, 2024). According to Khamis (2023), while the Western media has severely framed October 7 as a "terrorist attack," they have portrayed the Israeli's overwhelming assault on Gaza as an act of "self-defense." Hsu (2024) asserts that the disinformation of news can be challenging to remain neutral in a region where political and religious differences have been contentious for generations, particularly during a deeply polarizing war.

The Western media has a significant influence on how people around the world perceive and understand international conflicts. Many countries and regions still rely on Western media outlets as their primary source of information. Hence, it is crucial to understand the Western mainstream media's role in covering international conflicts, specifically the Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Hamas conflicts, which are crucial topics on the news agenda.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. News Values and Framing the News

Communication scholars have described news production as a passive process that follows strict and regulated procedures to select information from limited sources (Golding & Elliott, 1979, p. 114). However, this process has changed considerably over time. For McQuail (2010), news is a social construction that provides a mediated

reality of events and issues selected, framed, and presented by news media professionals. In the last decade, it has been a form of communication that informs the public of current events, issues, and societal trends (Croteau & Hoynes, 2014). We can assume from these definitions that the news plays a crucial role in informing and educating society about local, national, and global events that affect people's lives. Moreover, there is a subjective side of the news in its selection process. As for Zelizer (1993), it is a process of selecting, processing, and disseminating information about events, issues, and people that journalists consider newsworthy.

Journalists may find themselves at odds between their perception of what is newsworthy and what the audience prefers to read or share (Strömbäck et al., 2012). How journalists think and perceive things is influenced by various factors. These include the frames present in their cultural and professional environment, norms and beliefs within the field of journalism, as well as their personal experiences and beliefs (Brüggemann, 2014). The process of judging is based on an understanding of news values taught and learned by new generations of journalists through training and socialization (Harrison, 2006, p. 153). It is essential to understand that news reporting is not the same as a scientific process because the selection of news is subjective, and subjectivity is present throughout journalism. News selection is not based simply on intrinsic aspects of events but also on functions external to these events. These occasions comprise occupational routines, constraints, and ideological issues as a construction of reality (Staab, 1990, p. 428). Van Dijk (1988, p. vii) argued that news should be examined in its relevant context since it is a significant form of public discourse. He asserted that news discourse was explicitly related to social practices and ideologies of newsmaking and, indirectly, to the institutional and macro-sociological contexts of the news media. The most recent and complete study on news selection criteria was conducted by Harcup & O'Neill (2001; 2017), emphasizing the conflict as the stories including controversies. Therefore, being

a "conflicting issue" might be a vital prerequisite for becoming newsworthy for scholars.

Another essential term in communication literature related to the news value is agenda setting. According to the theory, people's attention may vary according to his or her education, culture, religion, political beliefs, or interests. Mass media directs public attention, shapes political figures' images, and influences individuals' thoughts, knowledge, and emotions. Thus, the mass media's role is essential in that it can change the views of the social reality of its audience members by indicating which issues are being discussed (McLeod, 2016). Besides setting the agenda, the mass media frames the events for the benefit of several factors.

According to Lecheler and Vreese (2018), different frames on news stories can significantly impact recipients' perceptions of controversial topics. Entman (1993, p. 417) notes that framing is "*the central process by which government officials and journalists exercise political influence over each other and the public.*" Therefore, frames are rhetorical weapons. Kinder and Sanders (1996, p. 164) argue that frames can be powerful rhetorical tools. Frames are cognitive structures that allow individuals to better understand complex issues. When a frame presented in communication alters an individual's thought process, it is known as a framing effect. Therefore, journalists and news rooms use frames to cover the international events effectively.

1.2. Coverage of International News

The demand for the new World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) emerged from a series of meetings of the Non-Aligned Movement. NWICO protagonists consistently claimed that the countries of the South were heavily dependent on the North for both software and hardware in the information sector, which caused the continuity of inequality in development. The Third World leaders asserted that the Western media gave an exploitative and distorted view of their countries to the rest of the world through their control of major international information channels (Nordenstreng, 2011, p.80). Masmoudi (1979, p.172) asserted that

transnational media impose their perspective on developing countries by transmitting only processed news, which is filtered, cut, and distorted. The MacBride Report was the first international document to provide a global view of the world's communication problems. The report pointed out that some of the most vital transnational corporations were reluctant to open up flows to share scientific and technological information, though enthusiastic about freedom of knowledge. The antagonists of NWICO claimed that the demand for NWICO was a ground for the dictators to repress media freedom and keep away foreign journalists. The Western news organizations resisted any change in the old information order. They asserted that their intention was only to report the reality of life, including political instability, economic backwardness, and natural disasters in the Third World, which was disapproved of by the governments in the South (Thussu, 2018).

News agencies play a crucial role in providing news to newspapers, magazines, and broadcasters worldwide, which helps set the global news agenda. Additionally, it has been asserted that news agencies have played a significant role in the globalization and commercialization of international news (Boyd-Barrett & Rantanen, 1998). News agencies traditionally used to sell news reports and still photographs. They have expanded their services to include video news feeds and financial information for broadcasters, online news portals, and other non-news clients. National news agencies exist in most countries, often state-owned or a government monopoly. There are only a few transnational news agencies such as the Associated Press, Thomson Reuters, Agence France-Presse, and United Press International. Besides, there are significant national agencies with at most a regional impact, such as TASS - Russia, Xinhua - China, Kyodo - Japan, ABN News - Brazil, PTI - India, Fars - Iran, and Anadolu Agency - Türkiye. These news agencies continue to be the primary news source for the newspapers depending on their resources (reporters, budget, staff, etc.), thus playing a central role in setting the international news agenda.

The coverage of international news is influenced by geopolitical factors, emphasizing certain regions and stories with broad appeal since the West might have geopolitical and economic interests (Robertson, 2015). The conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo since 1996 is an evident sample of limited coverage in mainstream international media. Whereas when it comes to the interests of the developed countries, the news coverage is almost wall-to-wall to influence their audience on their decisions, such as invading Iraq and Afghanistan or carrying out "preemptive strikes" in Libya and Syria in order to defend their citizens at home by the so-called rhetoric of "global war on terror" or save the so-called failed state's citizens from the dictatorships. We can see similar reporting patterns in different contexts, especially in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, and Syria (Robinson et al., 2010; DiMaggio, 2015). Nevertheless, in the absence of a credible alternative media system, the influence of Western media has become the dominant position on the economy, trade, security, international relations, human rights, and international law. However, in the digitized communication universe of the twenty-first century, this domination is being challenged by the growth of alternative narratives and by the digital disruption that has transformed global journalism.

The Western monopoly dominates the global newspaper market as well. The Anglo-American press has global reach; therefore, their influence outweighs the others. However, according to the report World Press Trends in 2016, three American newspapers recorded among the world's top twenty paid daily newspapers in terms of circulation; the Japanese, Indian, or Chinese newspapers that dominate the list are rarely read outside their countries of origin (Peyregne et al., 2016). When looking at the recent top news websites in the world, the situation is vice versa, and BBC, MSN, NYTimes, and CNN rank in the top, totaling 2.9 billion visits to news websites and apps in January 2024 (Majid, 2024).

1.3. Conflict and News

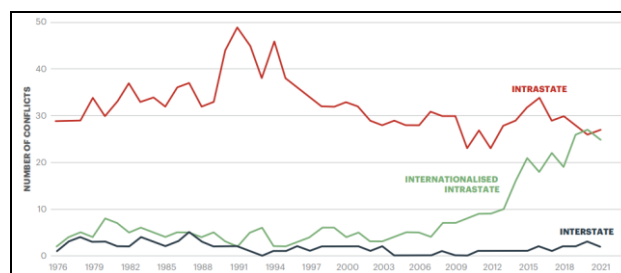
Connected issues in communication, politics, and international relations have changed the roles of mass communication in present international conflicts. Especially the progress in communication and information technologies, the ability to broadcast globally, the expansion of e-communication, the Internet, social media, substantial growth in networks, and the evolution in the nature of international conflicts are the leading causes of the changes. The actors involved in international conflicts have also changed. Most international conflicts occurred between and among states until the end of the Cold War. Afterward, it shifted to the intrastate or global levels. Ethnic and civil wars erupted in Yugoslavia and the former Soviet Union and also exploded in Africa in places such as Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, and Liberia. Civil wars in the Balkans and Africa created humanitarian disasters. The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and, as a consequence, the U.S.-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, represent international conflict at the global level. Besides, during the 2000s, there were severe conflicts, some of which at the local, mostly at the global levels, in different parts of the world such as Lebanon, Sri Lanka, Gaza, Niger, Syria, Libya, Crimea, Yemen, and Ukraine.

The relationship between media and its coverage of conflict has become more critical as the number of conflicts worldwide has increased during the last decade. According to the International Crisis Group (ICG, 2023), Ukraine, Armenia and Azerbaijan, Iran, Yemen, Ethiopia, The Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes, The Sahel, Haiti, Pakistan, and Taiwan are the "ten conflicts" to watch in 2023. However, the year has not ended, and an unexpected frozen conflict came to the scene instantly with the surprising attack of Hamas.

According to Crisis Group Global Review, thirteen deteriorations in existing crises around the world, including Ukraine, Mozambique, Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea, Senegal, Haiti, Chad, South Sudan, Israel/Palestine, Lebanon, Pakistan,

Papua New Guinea, and Burkina Faso, occurred only in February 2024 (ICG, 2024). The conflicts around us affect us in multiple ways, depending on how information is processed and consumed.

Chart 1. Number of conflicts per year by type of conflict, 1976–2021.



Source: IEP (2023, p.52). Derived from UCDP-PRIO.

According to the Global Peace Index 2023 (IEP, 2023), presented in Chart 1, internationalized intrastate conflicts are now as common as intrastate conflicts, which occur between the government of a state and one or more internal opposition groups with intervention from other states on one or both sides. In the last 15 years, the world has become less peaceful, with the average country score declining by 5 percent. Of the 163 countries analyzed in the Global Peace Index, 95 countries recorded a decline in score, whereas 66 countries recorded an improvement.

The media is the primary source of information for most people around the world regarding the annihilation of human dignity caused by major conflicts covered by national and international news outlets. Without news media coverage, the public would be left uninformed and unaware of the dire circumstances faced by those affected by the devastating consequences of the conflicts. "Mediatization" of conflicts significantly affects how media audiences and policymakers react to such events (Cottle, 2006). Most media display selective articulation, prioritizing specific dimensions and parties in conflicts due to their embeddedness, risks, access, or resources. According to Hackett and Schroeder (2008, p. 26), "*Conventional news routines and news values tend toward conflict escalation.*" Therefore, conflict news often lacks sociopolitical context and historical perspective, and

presenting a biased narrative. The “media logic” often focuses on incidents, emphasizing the sensational and dramatizing social reality while ignoring the context of developments. This logic is mainly responsible for the prevailing format of conflict reporting, which tends to focus on violence, its visible effects, and the winners. This kind of reporting often portrays the other side as the root of the problem (Shinar, 2008, p. 9). However, because of the media logic, reporters are pressured to fulfill the requirements of the news values. These tasks usually demand extra time, additional research, and greater caution.

In the first Gulf War, journalists worldwide propagated false myths without conducting any critical analysis. The picture of the dying cormorant obstructed by an oil slick that Iraq had released from Kuwait illustrated Saddam Hussein as an environmental terrorist. Nevertheless, the story was false and a clever part of the propaganda. Actually, the oil slick was caused by Americans who had bombed an Iraqi tanker (Hamelink, 2015). Another false myth was the reason for the invasion of Iraq during the second Gulf War. The U.S. Secretary of State made a presentation to the United Nations Security Council, claiming Saddam Hussein was developing weapons of mass destruction. He asserted that the biological weapon anthrax could be delivered against Iraq's neighbors or the U.S. by unmanned aerial vehicles by showing a small glass vial as proof. The media had covered this claim on the agenda until none was found after the invasion by the U.S. military. Years later, he was forced to admit that his CIA-prepared presentation was wrong (Roberts, 2021).

Wanta and Hu's (1993) study examined the agenda-setting impact of international news. According to the research, the way international news is presented in news reports can affect how important it seems. The study identified international conflicts, terrorism, crime and drugs, and military and nuclear weapons as the news coverage that has the greatest impact on what people consider important. Besides, stories with

high degrees of conflict and concrete presentations have the most substantial agenda-setting impact.

Newsmakers report events by framing them, casting conflicts within a specific definitional frame, such as liberation struggles, insurgencies, civil wars, or terrorism. According to Pruitt and Kim (2004, p. 202), each side has its narrative in conflicts, and the two opponents decode the same events radically differently. Accordingly, Israelis justify their military campaigns against Palestinians by talking about the Holocaust. On the other side, Palestinians justify their assaults against Israel by talking about Israel's steady encroachment on their territory and freedoms. The media in conflict-ridden countries often use oppositional metaphors to create and promote factors that facilitate or trigger internal and external conflicts (Van Dijk, 1988).

Most studies focus on the media's negative role in conflict escalation and violence (Hume, 1997), with few examining its potential for conflict resolution and reconciliation (Gilboa, 2009). The media's role in conflict resolution is more complex than that of perpetuating violence since resolving the conflict is complicated. Although media outlets are often motivated by profit, journalists need to prioritize balanced reporting to prevent the escalation of conflicts. Balanced reporting can be achieved by providing comprehensive coverage of peace initiatives alongside any renewed escalations. Additionally, journalists should aim to combat hate speech to reduce the negative impact of media in conflict situations.

International conflict news reporting is a part of the global news flow that Western news agencies dominate. These agencies are expected to perform within the limits of news ethics and values; nevertheless, it is a part of the economy, and these corporations think of news as revenue where the limits can be stretched in a liberal market. The current international economic and security system, the ownership of the mediums, and national interests also affect the reporting and coverage of international conflicts by these mediums. The coverage of conflicts by Western media agencies should be analyzed in this sense.

2. AIM, SCOPE AND SIGNIFICANCE

The main aim of this study is to determine whether the prominent news outlets cover some of the international conflict reports more than the others. A secondary aim is to find out the difference in the coverage quantities by comparing two recent conflicts on the agenda. Therefore, two asymmetric internationally reported conflicts have been chosen to be analyzed. The analysis is limited to the Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Hamas conflict news, which was covered by a prominent news outlet, The New York Times. The newspaper is selected as the research universe since it has over ten million individual subscribers in more than 200 countries and 31 Bureaus worldwide. Besides, the staff won the Pulitzer Prize for International Reporting, for unflinching coverage of Russia's invasion of Ukraine (NYT, 2024). The sample news is selected from the onset of the conflict to the present day. This study will contribute a level of analysis to comprehend the Western mainstream media's gravity in global information dissemination of conflict news.

3. METHOD OF ANALYSIS

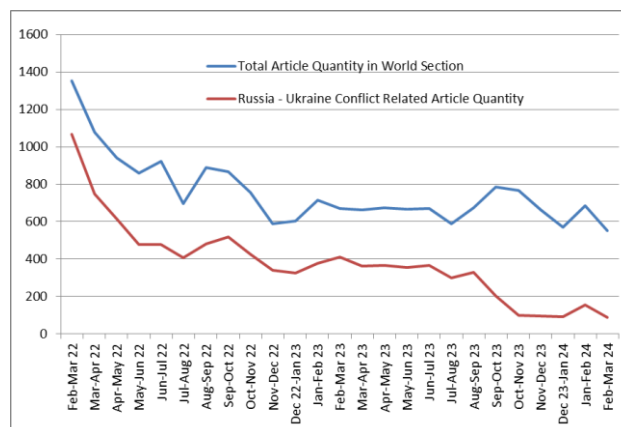
Within the scope of the study, the research question is, "Does the international news media cover some of the international conflicts more than the others?" As defined in the introduction, the Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Hamas conflicts were selected for the coverage. A quantitative analysis method is used to find an answer to the research question. The media coverage of the conflicts was searched from the New York Times website search engine (NYT, 2024b) with the query terms "Ukraine," "Russia," "Hamas," "Israel," "War," and "Conflict." The query was conducted in the NYT World section. The type of news material was selected as the articles. Then, the query was made according to the starting date of the conflicts until today: for the Russia-Ukraine conflict, 25 months, and the Hamas conflict, 5 months duration of time. It is essential to emphasize that not all the articles are mainly concerned with the conflict in the query results. However, according to the query terms, the

articles relate to the subject in a sentence or part of the article. The query results were counted per month period. Then, the total article quantity in the world section was compared with the conflict-related article quantity to determine the percentage and its inclination regarding the coverage in time. Besides, the quantity of coverage of the two conflicts has been compared to deduce a meaningful inference.

4. COVERAGE QUANTITY OF CONFLICT NEWS

In this part, as explained above methodology, the coverage quantity of conflict news in numbers is converted from tables to charts, which is easier to interpret. The charts are described in terms of the aim and within the limitation of the study, which leads us to some findings in the next part by their interpretation in the light of salient literature.

Chart 2. Total Articles vs. Russia - Ukraine Conflict Related Articles (Quantity in Numbers per month)

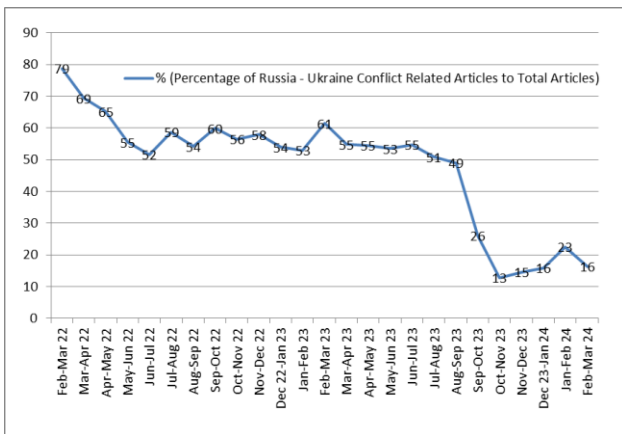


Source: By the Author.

The above chart demonstrates the number of total articles in the World section and the number of articles related to the Russia - Ukraine conflict per month from the onset of the conflict in the New York Times website archives. There is a consistent decline in both parts' article quantities. For instance, between 24 February - 23 March 2022, in one month, the total number of articles in the World section is 1.353, and the number of articles related to the Russia - Ukraine conflict is 1066. When we look at the latest date of the quantity, which is between 24 February - 23 March 2024, the

total number of articles in the World section is 550, and the number of articles related to the Russia - Ukraine conflict is 90. In some parts of the chart, there are some peaks that may not be in the expected inclination. Therefore, these parts should be inspected to determine whether a prominent event is on the agenda.

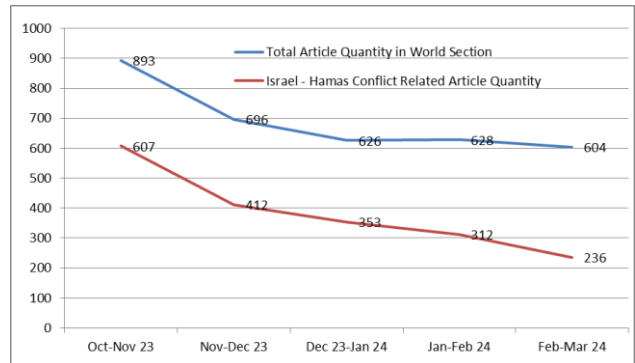
Chart 3. The Ratio of Russia - Ukraine Conflict Related Articles to Total Articles (% per month)



Source: By the Author.

The third chart demonstrates the ratio of Russia - Ukraine conflict-related articles to total articles by percentage. This chart aims to show the ratio of conflict-related article numbers in total since total article numbers may vary according to other news values and factors. At the beginning of the conflict, the ratio peaked at 79 percent, whereas at the latest date, it was 16 percent; on average, over the two years, it took place as 50 percent of the total articles. There are significant peaks in specific months, such as Sep-Oct 22, Feb-Mar 22, and Jan-Feb 24.

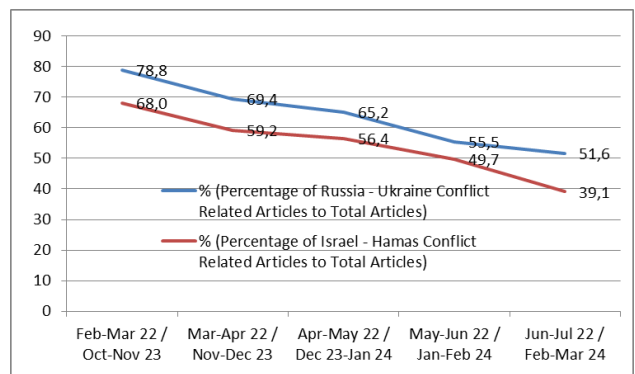
Chart 4. Total Articles vs. Israel - Hamas Conflict Related Articles (Quantity in Numbers per month)



Source: By the Author.

The fourth chart exhibits the number of total articles in the World section and the number of articles related to the Israel - Hamas conflict per month from the onset of the conflict in the New York Times website archives. There is a consistent decline in both parts' article quantities. The chart shows information regarding the article numbers from the first five months of the conflict. At the beginning of conflict, between 07 October and 06 November 2023, in one month, the total number of articles in the World section is 893, and the number of articles related to the Israel - Hamas conflict is 607. When we look at the latest date of the quantity, which is between 07 February - 07 March 2024, the total number of articles in the World section is 604, and the number of articles related to the conflict is 236.

Chart 5. The Ratio of Russia - Ukraine and Israel - Hamas Conflict Related Articles to Total Articles (% per month)



Source: By the Author.

The fifth chart illustrates the ratio of Russia - Ukraine and Israel - Hamas conflict-related articles

to total articles by percentage in the relevant five months. This chart aims to show the ratio of conflict-related article numbers in total and compare the ratios since different conflict coverage may differ according to the news values and factors. At the beginning of the conflict, the ratio difference was 11 percent, and in the fifth month, the difference was 12 percent; on the average of the five months, the difference between the two conflicts occurred at 9 percent.

5. FINDINGS

In the analysis, the articles containing the specific terms regarding the Russia - Ukraine and Israel - Hamas conflicts have been queried and counted from the onset of the conflict on the New York Times website. These numbers are compared with all the article numbers in the World section of the website. Besides, the article numbers of the two conflicts have been compared within the same period.

From the onset of the invasion of Ukraine by Russian forces up to now, there has been a consistent decline in article quantities, which confirms the research (Eyal & Winter, 2016) results about the decline of news quantity over time. However, the conflict news contributed to total article numbers as the total article numbers remained over one thousand during the first two months, which is, on average, 756. Although the heat of the conflict has not died away, the audience's appetite for consuming conflict news has waned in two years, or there are more hotspots to be covered on the agenda within a limited web space. Therefore, as the conflict persists, it will be essential for newsrooms to refocus their efforts on explaining the conflict's broader implications according to the level of its audience.

The significant peaks in the specific months regarding the ratio of conflict-related articles to total articles, such as in Sep-Oct 22, Feb-Mar 22, and Jan-Feb 24, are inspected by the news outlet since there ought to be an event that fits in terms of news values. Concerning a slight rise in the article numbers in Sep-Oct 22, some articles are about the

international condemnation of Russia for the declaration of the annexation of partially occupied regions. Regarding the articles in Feb-Mar 22, some of them are mainly about Russia's inconclusive offensives in the Donbas. Moreover, during the Jan-Feb 24 period, Russia started another offensive, which was covered by some of the articles.

The coverage quantity of Israel – Hamas conflict news is less than the Russia – Ukraine conflict compared to the same period as the first five months, which is 57 percent of the latter. The difference between the two conflicts occurred at 9 percent regarding the ratio of conflict-related articles to total by percentage in the similar timeline. It can be assumed from these percentages that the NYT covers the Ukraine conflict significantly more than the other and thus pays more attention to the news of the Ukraine conflict. The coverage quantity of Israel – Hamas conflict news decreased by 56 percent from the onset of the conflict, which confirms the news appeal in a limited time according to the agenda of the news outlet and its limited space for international news.

CONCLUSION

The importance of news media coverage of conflict should not be understated since it serves as the primary source of information for the public regarding the victims of devastating destruction and aggression in various parts of the world. Without it, the public would be left uninformed and unaware of the dire circumstances faced by those affected. The international media is an essential source of information, providing early warnings, intelligence, and concise analysis of conflict situations for all parties. News coverage by prominent news media might be meaningful for citizens and policymakers regarding mobilization, polarization, or reconciliation decisions in conflict areas. According to Hoskins & O'Loughlin (2013), the "mediatization" of war is essential because perceptions are vital to war. These perceptions comprise those of a public who can support a war, a government trying to justify a war, and those in the military themselves

trying to perceive and understand precisely what is happening.

Journalists use unique criteria particular to their profession when deciding which conflicts they will report on and which not (O'Neill & Harcup, 2009). These criteria do not always agree with those typical recipients or political decision-makers who would use them to make their selections. The nature of conflict reporting is continually changing, but it is asserted that it is escalation-oriented and pro-conflict. The conditions of war reporting have changed, and the actors capable of conducting war have augmented. With the development of the internet and social media, the media landscape and process of public opinion-forming have also changed. Although the efficiency of Western media in global news has decreased, it still has agenda-setting power, and this efficiency can be traced to international conflict news. Western news organizations resisted changes in the old information order, significantly influencing the news flow. Many countries and regions still rely on Western media outlets as their primary source of information. The coverage of international conflict news is mainly influenced by Western geopolitical and economic interests. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the Western mainstream media's role in covering international conflicts, specifically the Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Hamas conflicts, which are crucial topics on the news agenda.

The invasion of Ukraine by Russia is a high-intensity conflict where interstate wars primarily characterize violence. The war has become a tragic result of the long-lasting tensions between Russia and Ukraine. The long-lasting war in the East of Ukraine, territorial disputes, unwillingness to find a compromise, and failure of diplomacy led to a humanitarian disaster during the two years. The war led to widespread destruction of civil infrastructure and the displacement of millions, leading to a severe refugee crisis. However, the West has given substantial assistance to Ukraine in terms of public opinion. This war has become one of the most heavily mediated and visible conflicts until recently.

In this study, the significant peaks in the charts for specific months regarding the ratio of conflict-related articles to total articles were inspected by the news outlet to determine whether the event's existence fits in terms of news values. From the search of events, it was found that prominent developments in the Russia - Ukraine conflict had an impact on the coverage quantity of the medium.

The conflict in Gaza between Israel and Hamas has raised the heat in the Middle East and caused widespread anger among the conscientious public opinion. Israelis are of the opinion that Hamas must be defeated as they are traumatized by the attacks on 7 October. Dehumanizing language has become a part of the daily political discourse. Therefore, they seem to show no mercy for the suffering of Palestinians in Gaza. In this dire situation, the need for aid in Gaza is high, but the amount permitted to enter the region is considerably low. Israel also limits the entrance of journalists to Gaza and imposes the flow of information over the embedded ones. Besides, it is iterated (Johnson, 2004) that the mainstream news media covered the conflict quantitatively more than the other news at the national and international levels in favor of Israel.

This study aims to determine whether the NYT, as a sample universe, covers Russia-Ukraine conflict reports more than the Israel-Hamas conflict and find out the difference by quantity to show the imbalance in the coverage of international conflict news.

The articles containing specific expressions regarding the conflicts have been queried, counted, and compared from the onset of the conflict on the NYT website. The analysis results demonstrate a consistent decline in article quantities, which aligns with the previous studies. The appetite for consuming conflict news by the audience has decreased for both conflicts with the onset of the conflict, or there has to be different news to be covered on the agenda within a limited web space of the medium according to the agenda of the news outlet. Therefore, as the conflict persists, it will be crucial for newsrooms to refocus their efforts on

explaining the conflict's broader implications according to the level of its audience.

According to the study, the coverage quantity of the Israel - Hamas conflict is less than the Russia - Ukraine conflict compared to the same period of the first five months, approximately half of the latter one. Moreover, the difference between the two conflicts regarding the ratio of conflict-related articles to total articles is nine percent. From these differences, it can be assumed that the NYT covers the Russia-Ukraine conflict significantly more than the Israel-Hamas conflict and thus pays more attention to the news of the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

In times of conflict, media serves not only as a source of information but also as an effective propaganda tool. Western media have been broadly criticized during the conflict for echoing the propaganda. The significant difference in the coverage of different conflicts explicitly demonstrates this echo. It should also be considered that the consequences of the relevant conflicts might not be the same in the eyes of the power holders. The Russia-Ukraine war has serious effects on Western security considerations and might lead to a severe escalation that would confront the nuclear powers. Besides, it is hard to overcome the imbalance in the global flow of information, as stated in the McBride Report. Therefore, major international news agencies continue to be the primary news source for the newspapers. However, regional news agencies such as TASS, Xinhua, Kyodo, ABN News, PTI, Fars, and Anadolu Agency are on track to get more shares from the pie in setting the international news agenda. Besides, the networked nature of today's global media environment may enable disadvantaged groups to challenge existing power holders despite their initial structural disadvantage during a conflict. Actors of the conflict may have different communicative resources, but media systems are intertwined with the existing power structures. Therefore, these power structures' relationships with alternative media need to be further questioned to reveal their harmful effects on public discourse.

Ethics Committee Permission

This article is not included in a study group that requires ethics committee permission.

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