Episodic and Thematic media framing of Ukraine crisis: an analysis of two Bangladeshi newspapers

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Abstract

This research article examines the framing strategies employed by Bangladeshi newspapers to report on the Ukraine crisis, aiming to shape audience perception. The article sought to identify the categories of news presentation and analyze the emphasis placed on the reports from two national dailies, focusing on thematic and episodic aspects. The findings indicate that each newspaper adopted a distinct approach to conveying the crisis to its audience, highlighting differences in thematic and episodic news framing. Three specific frames were identified for episodic and thematic news after analyzing 294 news reports. The thematic frameworks included Political, Economic, and Humanitarian, while the episodic frames comprised Human Interest, Violence, and Military and Arms. The research also found that the newspapers predominantly relied on agency sources for their reporting.

Keywords: Episodic & Thematic Framing, Crisis frames, Ukraine crisis, Bangladeshi Newspapers

Introduction

Ukraine's crisis, ignited by Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and escalated by its full-scale invasion in 2022, has profoundly affected global politics and economy. Global media coverage has been focused on this conflict because of its complex geopolitical implications (Vrba,2022). It is crucial to frame international crises in a way that influences public perception, particularly in the presentation of those crises to local audiences. In Entman's (1993) view, framing is a process that emphasizes certain aspects of reality and affects how public perception of issues develops.

International crises are often framed in a manner that reflects the political, economic, and ideological perspectives of the media organizations they represent and the countries they represent (Lui,2017). Russia has generally been depicted in a negative light by Western media, focusing on its role in manufacturing chaos

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in Ukraine (Saunders,2014), whereas Russian media has consistently denied these accusations, presenting a divergent view (Myers & Thompson,2022). Consequently, such disparities illustrate how internal ideologies are influenced by external forces, such as government influences or advertising interests (Sparrow,1999).

Considering Bangladesh's political and cultural context, media coverage of the Ukraine crisis offers a unique perspective. Through episodic and thematic lens analysis, this study examines how two Bangladeshi newspapers frame the Ukraine conflict. This study analyzes the narrative strategies employed by these newspapers to understand how they interpret and present international crises, contributing to the global discourse on media framing.

The findings of this research contribute to the broader discourse on media framing in international conflicts, highlighting the media's role in constructing narratives that either support or challenge dominant geopolitical discourses. By focusing on Bangladeshi media, this study also sheds light on the unique perspectives of non-Western media in covering global crises, thereby enriching the global understanding of media framing dynamics.

Objectives

The study's primary objective is to determine how newspapers in Bangladesh frame the Ukraine crisis. The specific objectives of the study are to

- Find out the texts/phrases used in the frames.
- Find out the sources used by the newspaper to cover the crisis.

Research Questions

This paper particularly poses one research question to analyze the media framing of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The research question is,

RQ1: How do Bangladeshi newspapers frame the Ukraine conflict?

Literature Review

Media framing and war

Media has played an essential role during war and other major historical events. Phillip Knightley highlights the ongoing tension between journalistic standards and national/military goals in policing information flows and disseminating the "right" information in his famous work The First Casualty (Knightley, 2004). When public relations firms helped the media generate public opinion before the Gulf War in 1991–1992, the press had a significant role in this opinion-

generating process, widely known as "psychological warfare"(Jowett and O'Donnell, 2012).

After a close examination of Western media portraying violent conflicts and analyzing the vocabulary of war, many studies have pointed to stereotyped and marginalized reporting patterns in the coverage of conflicts that occur in non-Western countries. When examining how the Western media covered violent conflicts in Africa, Patrick (2016) and Gruley and Duvall (2012) observed that Western newspapers often adopt a conventional war structure. This framing approach tends to simplify complex African conflicts, presenting them through a Western lens that usually fails to capture the nuanced realities on the ground. The Rwandan genocide (1994) was widely covered in American and British newspapers, but Patrick (2016) examined those publications and found that there was relatively little coverage of Rwanda and that it was based on stereotypes about Africa. Although there was evidence of purposeful torture from reliable (but unofficial) sources, according to a study of how the mainstream media in the United States reported on severe abuses of hostages at the prison in Abu Ghraib, which was run by the military, the media adopted the official sources' framing of the story as "mistreatment" and "abuse" at a large scale by military personnel with a lower rank (Rothe, 2006).

In different journalistic cultures and nations, reporting on the emergency may differ because of the constant conflict between journalistic professionalism and the control of information that many agencies require, as it did earlier in the Ukraine crisis (Nygren et al., 2018). Symbols, use of words, images, and viewpoints of previous conflicts, and the dehumanization of the opponent covered in media reports hugely affect each ongoing conflict (Altheide, 1995). To illustrate, recently, terms like "neighbor," "European," and "like us" have been used to define Ukraine (Mäenpää, 2022). A strike on Ukraine is seen as an attack on democracy and freedom, ensuring a significant amount of media coverage in Western capitals (keir,2016). The non-Cyrillic letter Z painted on invading trucks in the Russia-Ukraine conflict of 2022 inadvertently became a crucial symbol for Russian soldiers and the operation. In all of Russia, the Z symbol came to stand in solidarity with the reported campaign to "liberate" Russian citizens in Eastern Ukraine. Additionally, it supports denazification attempts, the liberation idea, and other propaganda assertions (Courter, 2022).

Ukraine conflict and media

Several studies on the influence of the media in this escalating crisis in Ukraine with severe humanitarian damage have recently been published. Some studies have examined how news narratives favoring some perspectives on reality over others may justify specific political actions in a conflict. To portray that every state has a particular journalistic culture that plays an influential role in conflict reporting examined how the war in Ukraine was covered in various mainstream media outlets and various national cultures; they observed "substantial differences in the framing of the conflict, portrayal of actors engaged, and word choice (Milenkovic, 2023)." The researcher concluded that "each country's unique journalistic culture, self-censorship, and degree of journalistic activism play an outstanding role in the war reporting of the media under study (Milenkovic, 2023)."

In 2014 and the following years, the Ukrainian conflict dominated international news coverage. The news coverage in many European nations with differing historical backgrounds is an essential area of research, indicating a conflict like an East-West confrontation unseen since the end of the Cold War. Analysis of international media coverage of the Ukraine war has included European nations. During violent events, Ojala and Pantti (2017) examined German, British, Swedish, and Finnish newspapers and studied how the textual and visual framing of conflict coverage influenced the audience. According to their analysis, the media contributed to the credibility of European Union policies that support the Ukrainian government's military operation in Eastern Ukraine and attributed blame for the crisis to Russia by promoting specific news frames. The authors have chosen visual and textual analysis because pictures play a crucial role, as photographs frequently shape how news stories are interpreted (Brantner et al., 2011). However, this research wants to analyze Ukrainian conflict frames textually to find the frames from the selected newspaper. Another study was done by Fengler et al. (2020). It includes the results of a content analysis that examined how the conflict was covered in newspapers from a diverse group of 13 European nations during the first half of 2014. The findings show significant regional differences in media coverage of the war, which may be attributed to various levels of geographic and cultural connection, institutionalization, and economic interchange combined with insufficient editorial resources, prominently in Eastern Europe.

In former socialist nations like Ukraine and Russia, social media is essential for framing conflicts where the local digital landscape is heavily politicized and frequently used to represent past and recent crises (Rutten & Zvereva, 2013).

Makhortykh and Sydorova (2017) examined how various groups on the social media platform visually portrayed the crisis in Eastern Ukraine to investigate how social media frames public unrest and armed conflict. The results show that the war is framed by internet communities that support Ukraine and Russia in quite diverse ways. While the pro-Russian group saw the conflict as a war with maximum force against the Russian people of Eastern Ukraine, another group preferred to see it as a restricted military operation against local militants. The paper argues that using social media to frame the conflict made it easier for opposing viewpoints to spread and helped Russia and Ukraine develop different expectations for how the Donbas war would turn out. Social media is another method of doing content analysis, and sites like Facebook and Twitter may give us access to valuable data. However, numerous factors frequently make social media analysis tricky, and the overall outcome may be biased.

Researchers examined how framing works in German and Russian television political talk shows regarding the Ukraine crisis (Lichtenstein et al.,2019). Their study revealed that while the German shows discuss various Western policy objectives in dealing with the crisis and consider Russia's behavior as an aggression as well as a reaction to Western politics, the Russian shows are more focused on Russia's ability to endure the international crisis and the necessity to safeguard Russian minorities in Ukraine. To understand Western and Western media propaganda, Barret (2017) examined mainstream journalistic narratives and frames of the Ukraine crisis and the tensions it has brought about between the Kyiv government and separatist movement leaders in Russia, Ukraine, the European Union, and the United States. The research showed the underlying arguments, preconceptions, and objectives of propaganda as they reflect the interest of Western power based on a literal analysis of the press and nontraditional media sources and how Western mainstream media represent them. Coverage of conflicts by Western media and purposeful propaganda underline that their nations are either engaged in the conflict or may have initiated it. It recommends that news consumers pay attention to a much wider variety of informed opinions than usually are supplied by agencies, whose commercial strategies and political allegiances prevent them from going beyond a limited spectrum of speech.

Another study by Roman et al. (2017) found quite exciting frames from the point of view of American media. The authors studied the Russian Federation, Ukraine, and the United States media outlets. They compared media strategy to the ongoing war between 2013 and 2015 while concentrating on newscasts. NBC, the chosen media outlet for the United States, used many neutral terms such as 'crisis,' 'conflict,' and 'war. 'The study's key finding is that the

government's perspective on the war was strongly reflected in the coverage of the conflict.

Based on how many news networks from non-western countries reported the invasion of Ukraine, the conflict's media coverage has become a divisive issue. Taradai studied the impact of private television news channels on public discourse on the Russia-Ukrainian War. They analyzed Indian TV news media coverage of the war, focusing on a few traditional channels, using the theoretical framework of Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional approach for critical discourse analysis (Taradai, 2013).

Research gap

Despite the abundant literature on crisis framing, there is a lack of studies on how Bangladeshi media present their news on the Russia-Ukraine crisis to their audience. Additionally, the researchers could not find any paper that comprehensively analyzes the crisis frames used in the newspapers in Bangladesh to cover the Russia-Ukraine crisis. As a result, this paper focuses on presenting the crisis in Bangladeshi newspapers to shape the audience's perspective and examine the crisis frames employed in the news.

Theoretical framework

This study will follow a framing analysis to determine the representations. In 1974, Goffman introduced the idea of using framing analysis in various studies. Because of its comprehensive character and wide range of research applications, framing analysis has gained significant traction in recent decades. Entman (1993) explained that the media uses frames to simplify complicated events and information. The way that events are framed in the media has a substantial impact on how viewers perceive and understand the material (Entman, 2007).

Researchers explained how Frames work as strategies that dictate which information is chosen, how it is presented, and how much emphasis is placed on it. The language used by media organizations inherently creates the narrative surrounding individuals, groups, events, processes, or other issues included in newspaper articles; it is imperative that these organizations skillfully frame their news (Richardson, 2007). These framing techniques are based on implicit assumptions about reality, events, and importance. A problem's core is clarified by effective framing, which also establishes how it should be viewed and comprehended (Nelson & Kinder, 1996).

Iyengar (1991) identified two broad categories of framing in news coverage: episodic and thematic framing, which have distinct effects on how audiences

interpret and attribute responsibility for issues. Episodic framing focuses on specific events or individual cases, presenting information through a narrow lens emphasizing personal stories and isolated incidents. In contrast, thematic framing applies a wider perspective, focusing on broader trends, patterns, and contexts, often encouraging more analytical thinking about issues. Iyengar found that episodic framing tends to attribute responsibility to individuals rather than societal factors. In contrast, thematic framing is more likely to result in the attribution of responsibility to political actors and institutions. According to Zillmann, episodic news framing typically focuses on single cases or topics to arouse viewer emotions, whereas thematic framing frequently targets important policy-related issues (Zillmann, 2002).

Semetko & Valkenburg (2000) identified the five most frequently used news frames while reporting crises. These include economic consequences, conflict, human interest, morals, and responsibility. The economic repercussions focus on an event or institution. Conflict frames highlight conflicts between people or groups. The human-interest approach aims to make news more relatable by showing how an event or issue affects individuals personally and emotionally. The responsibility frame assigns responsibility for an event or issue to the government or an individual. Lastly, the moral frame places an event or issue within the context of religious or moral values (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000).

The study uses Iyengars' (1991) framing model to explain how newspapers present the crisis in episodic and thematic terms to influence the audience. Later, the study will follow the five media frames described by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) to determine the crisis frames.

Sampling and Method

This study chose the top two circulated newspapers according to the Department of Films and Publication Bangladesh (2022) to examine the frames employed in the Ukraine crisis reporting. One English newspaper, The Daily Star, and one Bengali newspaper, The Bangladesh Pratidin, were selected for this study. The six-month time frame was chosen from February 25, 2022, the day after the invasion, to August 24, 2022.

Two hundred ninety-four news reports were collected from the mentioned newspapers' online "E-Paper" version. Since The Bangladesh Pratidin is a Bangla language newspaper, its contents were later translated into English and proceeded to analysis. Editorial and opinion articles were excluded because of the news objectiveness.

The study aims to conduct a qualitative content analysis method to map out the framings adopted by the newspapers. Because content analysis is not confined by

the variables used, it can provide a conclusion of the investigation and define any message (Neuendorf, 2002). After finding the episodic and thematic pattern, the study conducted another framing analysis to interpret the thematic and episodic news reports and identified crisis frames in the light of five crisis frames introduced by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000).

Data presentation

Newspaper: The Daily Star

Table 1: Number of episodic and thematic framing with the source of six months

month	Source		Total news	episodic	Percentage of total news	thematic	Percentage of total news
	Correspondent	agencies					
February	10	5	15	6	40%	9	60%
March	5	21	26	11	42.31%	15	57.69%
April	0	23	23	10	43.48%	13	56.52%
May	0	19	19	7	36.95%	12	63.05%
June	0	19	19	6	31.68%	13	68.32%
July	0	23	23	11	47.83%	12	52.17%
August	0	26	26	9	34.72%	17	65.28%
	n=15	n=136	n=151	n=60	39.74%	n= 91	60.26%

Table 2: Texts and phrases used under episodic and thematic frames.

Episodic frames	Text/phrases used	Thematic frames	Text/phrases used
Human interest	Fleeing, moving, relocating, displaced, migration, frightened, refugees, sheltered, stranded, rescued, survivors, humanitarian corridor, terrified, civilians, help, defending, desperate.	Political	Putin's aggression, western condemnation, US foreign policy, sanctions, NATO, sanctions, diplomatic efforts, deterring Putin, border issues, emergency summit, diplomatic isolation, delegations, negotiation, EU coordination, Temporary Protection Directive, World War Three, diplomatic solution, multiple donor countries, worrying pact with China, The annual summit, the international community, Russia and Bangladesh, transactions, Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant, Curtail operations, mutual trust, Ukraine's draft peace agreement. Peace talks. China's position
Violence	Explosion, wreckage, Russian invasion, damaged street, shattered, full-scale invasion, killed, injured, Russian attack, warning, knocking out state	Economic	infrastructure destroyed, stocks plunging, oil prices soaring, export controls against Russia, gas pipeline, oil depot, Russia's rouble currency,

	broadcasting, citizen killed, war-hit-Ukraine soldiers killed, devastated, damaged,		dollar, economic sanctions, civilian infrastructure, access to basic services, school damaged, education facilities damaged, buying oil, Russian oil, a shift in energy supplies, impact on economies, upgrade oil infrastructure
Military and arm	military assault, Russian force, Missile strikes, heavy missile bombardments heavy armor, air barrages, Russian massive invasion force, Russian paratroopers, mass shelling, artillery, armored cars, Russian air raids, ceasefire, Russian missile artillery, tactics, Russian incursions, fierce bombardments. Tactical nuclear weapons, arms supplies, longer-range weapons, intense shelling	Humanitarian	resident injured and killed by a loud explosion. refugees, displaced, massive inflow, migration, human rights, death, suffering, warnings, protection, and defense, destructions, civilian deaths, humanitarian crisis displaced, childhood trauma, forced to flee.

Newspaper: Bangladesh Pratidin

Table 3: Number of episodic and thematic framing with the source of six months

month	Source		Total news	Episodic	Percentage of news	thematic	Percentage of news
	Correspondent	agencies					
February	6	10	16	9	56.25%	7	43.75%
March	7	17	24	12	50%	12	50%
April	0	22	22	13	59.09%	9	40.91%
May	0	16	16	9	56.25%	7	43.75%
June	0	18	18	8	44.44%	10	55.56%
July	0	20	20	12	60%	8	40%
August	0	27	27	14	51.85%	13	48.15%
	n=13	n=130	n=143	n= 77	53.85%	n= 66	46.15%

Table 4: Texts and phrases used under episodic and thematic frames.

Episodic frames	Text/phrases used	Thematic frames	Text/phrases used
Human interest	Fleeing, numerous dead bodies, mass graves, dead bodies lined up, fear, panic, fleeing, moving. anxious, terrified helping, commitment, assistance, aid helpless, frightened, migrated, displaced, refugees	Political	Ceasefire, weapon supply, humanitarian and military assistance, face-to-face discussion, declaration of independence, Putin's confidence, Russian threat of attack, success of Ukraine, nuclear attack, western military alliance, Putin's warning, diplomatic note, NATO territory, conflicting situation, Putin's threat, collapse, fall, negotiations, declaration of war, Nato, aid, motto, unarmed, possession, sanctions, diplomatic efforts, deter Putin, border issues, emergency summit, diplomatic isolation,

			Putin's aggression, full-scale invasion, led by America, planned Russian strategy, Putin invading Ukraine, diplomatic assistance
Violence	Massive war, killed, injured, war of resistance, destruction of property, enormous attack, fierce attack, explosion, siren, Russian attack killed, injured, warning, infrastructure destroyed, devastated, demolishing, casualty, terrible war, fierce fighting	Economic	occupying nuclear power plants, sale agreements, financial assistance, purchasing weapons, restriction on investment, economic loss, Russian reserve, accumulating foreign currency, gas line shut off, gas supply, financial aid, sanction on the economy,
Military and arm	Regained control, Putin's army, sustainable resistance, heavy weapon support, providing weapons, Russian missiles, British soldiers arrested, secret military aid, Russian force, military assault, Russian force Missile strikes, heavy missiles, bombardments, missile attacks, ceasefires, air attacks air strikes, nuclear attacks, captured, massive weapon attacks, weapon destruction, military equipment, missile hit, shipment of arms, US-weapon-package, hypersonic missiles, the occupying Russian forces,	Humanitarian	Sheltered, fleeing, forced to flee, refugee, displaced. , resident injured, killed, loud explosion, terrified, Filled with fear.

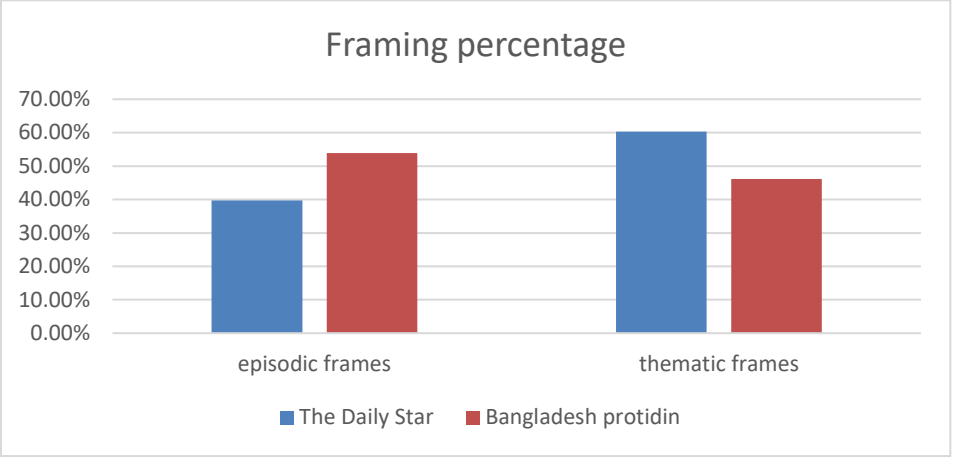


Figure 1. Percentage of episodic and thematic framing of the two newspapers

Discussion

Iyengar (1991) conducted an analysis discerning the disparities between thematic and episodic news coverage, elucidating how each category of framing lens portrays issues differently. Episodic framing primarily critiques the circumstances of specific actors, whereas thematic news stories scrutinize systemic issues more prominently. The findings of this study offer valuable insights into how two prominent Bangladeshi newspapers, The Daily Star and Bangladesh Pratidin, frame their coverage of the Ukraine conflict. Both newspapers employ thematic and episodic approaches to convey crisis events to their audience. Figure 1 illustrates that The Daily Star predominantly publishes news within a thematic framework, while Bangladesh Pratidin tends towards episodic framing.

The Daily Star prioritizes providing a broader contextual understanding of the crisis, whereas Bangladesh Pratidin focuses more on narrating specific events or individual stories. This study introduces three redefined crisis frames using the thematic approach. Within the political frame, texts or phrases utilized by The Daily Star depict the intricate relationships among European countries, emphasizing elements such as "peace talks," "diplomatic solutions," and "mutual trust." Conversely, Bangladesh Pratidin's thematic news reports emphasize the role of Russian President Putin, employing phrases like "Putin's confidence," "Putin's warning," and "Putin's threat" to delineate the conflict between Ukraine and Russia. Both newspapers employ texts and phrases under the economic frame to convey strained trade relations and tensions in the oil and gas market. Notably, The Daily Star incorporates more texts and phrases to present

humanitarian frames, indicating a preference for political and economic framing by Bangladesh Pratidin over humanitarian framing.

The episodic framing utilized by Bangladesh Pratidin indicates a concentrated focus on specific events or experiences related to the crisis. Three separate crisis frames have been identified in their episodic reports. Within the human-interest frame, Bangladesh Pratidin emphasizes the emotional toll and devastating effects of the crisis on individuals, families, and communities, using phrases such as "numerous dead bodies" and "mass grave" to highlight these impacts. The Daily Star uses terms like "fleeing," "moving," and "sheltered" to suggest violations of human rights within episodic news reports. Both newspapers adopt a violence frame to illustrate the destructive circumstances and the severe consequences of the crisis on infrastructure and communities. In episodic news reports, Bangladesh Pratidin draws attention to issues such as weapon supply and US involvement, indicating a significant connection to the crisis under a military and arms frame.

A noteworthy finding is the heavy reliance of both newspapers on external sources, particularly agencies, for information about the crisis. This media dependency constrains the newspapers' ability to frame news stories independently. The research question aimed to explore how Bangladeshi newspapers frame the Ukraine conflict, primarily examining the framing structures of The Daily Star and Bangladesh Pratidin. The results align with Iyengar's media framing analysis, suggesting that news media frequently employ thematic or episodic framing. Moreover, the study identifies three distinct crisis frames for episodic and thematic frameworks, underscoring the significance of news framing in shaping readers' perceptions of crisis events.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights into how two prominent Bangladeshi newspapers, The Daily Star and Bangladesh Pratidin, frame their coverage of the Ukraine conflict, illuminating their respective thematic and episodic approaches. The findings reveal a notable disparity in framing strategies - The Daily Star predominantly adopts a thematic approach that provides a broader contextual understanding of the crisis, whereas Bangladesh Pratidin focuses more on specific events or individual narratives through episodic framing. Both newspapers address fundamental elements such as political dynamics, economic implications, and humanitarian concerns through thematic framing, though to varying degrees. Additionally, the study identifies three distinct crisis frames—Political, Economic, and Humanitarian—for thematic news, Human Interest, Violence, and Military and Arms for episodic news

illustrating how each newspaper prioritizes different aspects of the crisis in its reporting. Furthermore, the heavy reliance on external sources, particularly news agencies, highlights the media dependency that may constrain the newspapers' ability to frame stories independently. Overall, this research enhances our understanding of media framing and its influence on shaping audience perceptions of complex international crises, such as the Ukraine conflict, within the context of Bangladeshi newspapers.

Limitation and recommendation

Only two newspapers in Bangladesh were the subject of the current research, limiting the applicability of the findings to other publications. Additionally, the study only paid attention to the qualitative analysis of the news frames, which might not have given participants an extensive understanding of how newspapers covered the crisis. Future studies can include a broader sample of newspapers to provide an expanded understanding of crisis coverage in Bangladesh. The research can also be extended to examine other crises and conflicts to determine whether the identified frames apply. A mixed-method approach that combines quantitative and qualitative analysis can also be used in future research to provide a more thorough knowledge of the crisis frames used in newspapers.

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