

The Russian Invasion of Ukraine from the Infotainment Perspective: Analysis of the Coverage by Spanish Television

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This study examines the role of public television in the news coverage of armed conflicts and its possible relationship with infotainment. The research involved a content analysis of news broadcasts aired by La 1 of Televisión Española (TVE) during the first year of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, considering variables such as the type of appeal (emotional or rational), information sources, spectacularization techniques, and on-screen captions, among others. Although the news largely maintained an informational focus and a rational appeal consistent with hard news—providing context and explaining the causes and/or consequences of the conflict—it also borrowed certain technical elements from infotainment, primarily applied to visuals and language. The findings of this study suggest that La 1 should avoid the use of spectacularization as a strategy to maintain audience interest, as well as biased propagandistic framing, in order to present socially relevant issues from a deontological perspective and in adherence to the principles of

El estudio aborda el papel que juega la televisión pública en la cobertura informativa de los conflictos bélicos y su posible relación con el infoentretenimiento. Para la investigación se realizó un análisis de contenido de las noticias que La 1 de Televisión Española (TVE) emitió durante el primer año de la invasión rusa de Ucrania, en el que se consideraron variables como: la apelación (emocional o racional), las fuentes informativas, los recursos de espectacularización y los rótulos, entre otras. Si bien las noticias conservan un enfoque prioritariamente informativo y con apelación racional conforme a las hard news, contextualizan y exponen las causas y/o las consecuencias del conflicto, éstas toman prestados algunos recursos técnicos del infoentretenimiento aplicados principalmente a las imágenes y al lenguaje. Los hallazgos de esta investigación permiten concluir que La 1 debe evitar el uso de la espectacularización como estrategia para mantener el interés del público, así como el tratamiento propagandístico sesgado de la información, a fin de pre-



journalistic quality. This aligns with one of the essential functions of public media: to uphold the constitutional right to information.

Keywords: *public television, armed conflict, news, infotainment, spectacularization.*

sentar los asuntos relevantes que afectan a la sociedad desde una vertiente deontológica y apegada a los principios de calidad periodística, siendo una de las funciones esenciales de los medios públicos el satisfacer el derecho constitucional a la información.

Palabras clave: *televisión pública, conflicto bélico, noticias, infoentretenimiento, espectacularización.*

Russia's aggression against Ukraine, which began on February 24, 2022, has all the necessary informational components to attract the interest of the media and different audiences in Europe and around the world. It is the first war on European territory since the end of World War II (Corral, 2022), and it is also the first time that nuclear power plants have been located in combat areas, along with the extensive use of drones for reconnaissance and attack. Furthermore, the involvement of major powers such as the United States and its NATO allies, Russia, the United Kingdom, the European Union, and China, along with the imminent threat of an escalation that could spread the conflict to neighbouring countries, has increased its international relevance. In addition, the conflicts surrounding the Chernobyl and Zaporizhia nuclear plants are added, elements that contribute to understanding the considerable media coverage that the conflict has had worldwide.

In these situations, television serves a crucial function in news reporting, particularly in crises, because it offers the public timely updates about the incident (Eddy and Fletcher, 2022) and acts as an important medium for expressing public dialogue. For national public media organizations like Televisión Española, reporting on a military conflict with worldwide economic and social impacts carries a considerable social obligation and requires a thorough journalistic methodology. The reason is that the information delivered can significantly influence public perception and the formation of stereotypes and collective views about international reality (Hackett, 2007).

It is important to recall that one of the essential functions of public media is to guarantee citizens' constitutional right to receive information —a fundamental pillar of any democracy. This entails fulfilling their role as a public service by providing access to relevant and socially significant information. To achieve this, it is imperative that news production be guided by professional standards and deontological principles, thereby ensuring its rigor and quality. In this regard, a

publicly funded media organization is obligated to place quality at the core of its journalistic work (Viuda Pereda *et al.*, 2012).

Regarding the mission of the public broadcaster RTVE, it should be oriented toward the delivery of rigorous, truthful, pluralistic, and independent information, with the clear objective of establishing itself as the leading television medium for the Spanish audience. Likewise, its news programming must maintain a position of leadership and both political and economic independence from private television operators, so that society perceives RTVE as a trustworthy and credible source, capable of accurately reflecting social reality (Muñoz, 2021).

Although there are multiple television networks in Spain that covered the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the choice of Televisión Española (TVE) as the subject of this study is based on its status as a public service funded by the state, which entails a higher level of social and journalistic responsibility in the presentation of facts. Unlike private networks such as Antena 3 or Telecinco, whose business models are driven by commercial and audience-based logics, TVE is required to ensure informational quality and uphold the constitutional right to information. This study, therefore, assesses the extent to which TVE's coverage adheres to these principles and whether it has incorporated elements of infotainment, which tend to be more prominent in commercial television.

INFOTAINMENT IN TELEVISION NEWSCASTS

Infotainment, a term used since 1988 (Krüger, 1988, pp. 637-664), refers to the media's tendency to present information as spectacle, with the primary aim of capturing and maintaining audience attention (Thomas, 1990). Since then, the purpose of audiovisual information has evolved from a strictly informative approach to one that also seeks to elicit emotional responses from the audience (Uribe and Gunter, 2007), resulting in an increase in viewership ratings.

From this perspective, various authors have analysed the distinctive features of infotainment in the construction of television discourse (Gómez-Mompart, 2009; Humanes *et al.*, 2009; Ortells, 2011; Berrocal *et al.*, 2014; Carrillo, 2013). In thematic terms, although infotainment tends to favour soft news—such as stories related to popular culture (film, music, video games), current events, natural disasters, human-interest stories, anecdotes, and celebrity life—it also encompasses hard news, including political, economic, or international events. However, these are often presented with a dramatic, parodic, or humorous approach (Berrocal *et al.*, 2014). In this regard, previous studies have demonstrated the presence of this trend even in the coverage of public interest news on European newscasts (García-Avilés, 2007).

In the television sphere, emotional appeal—primarily associated with soft news—constitutes a key strategy for maintaining viewer attention. Through the use of images, sounds, and narratives designed to evoke strong emotions, an affective connection is created that can influence public perception and attitudes (Gerbner *et al.*, 1986). In contrast, rational appeals and hard news are grounded

in the presentation of logical arguments and concrete data, providing structured information to facilitate informed decision-making (Livingstone, 1998).

Within this phenomenon, some authors place greater emphasis on the formal elements of infotainment —such as narration, visuals, presentation techniques, and the humanized framing of events— than on the thematic content itself. Ortells (2011) identifies specific technical features associated with the spectacularization of television discourse, including the dramatization of news treatment, the use of music to intensify rhythm and emotional impact, and the incorporation of post-production effects, ambient sound editing, and music video-style montage to produce visually more dynamic and appealing segments (Rodríguez-Pastoriza, 2003). Along these lines, Carrillo (2013) emphasizes that audience impact is achieved not only through names, figures, or high-quality content, but also through drama, emotion, and elements of fiction.

Discursive spectacularization refers to the process by which the media transform everyday events into highly dramatized and emotionally charged content. Among its consequences are the reduction of in-depth analysis, the generation of emotional effects on the audience, and a significant impact on the social perception of events (Serrano and Solano, 2021). Moreover, this trend can lead to media coverage that prioritizes sensationalism over accurate and contextualized information (Grabe *et al.*, 2001).

From a narrative standpoint, infotainment is characterized by fragmentation and superficiality in news treatment, which is reflected in the decontextualization of events: stories focus on the immediate and specific, with little or no reference to background or context (Lozano-Rendón, 2004). Additionally, there is a tendency to personalize issues through citizen testimony, which fosters audience identification with the victims or protagonists of the news, promoting an emotional connection with the story (Ortells, 2009). In this narrative model, the most human side of reality is emphasized, prioritizing emotional appeal over the structural analysis of events (Berrocal *et al.*, 2014).

Despite the numerous studies on infotainment from various theoretical perspectives (Labio-Bernal, 2008; Marín, 2012; Berrocal *et al.*, 2014; Valhondo and Berrocal, 2020), specific analyses of television news coverage from this approach remain limited (Graber, 1994; Patterson, 2000; Baum, 2003; Monclús and Mariño, 2009; Anderson, 2004), particularly with regard to empirical studies (Pellisser-Rossell and Pineda, 2014; García-Avilés, 2007; Ortells, 2011; Lozano-Rendón, 2004).

TELEVISION NEWSCASTS

Most research on the newscasts of major national generalist television networks has focused on analysing the quality of information based on two main parameters: the degree of pluralism, the formal treatment of information (Sotelo *et al.*, 2025), and its potential manipulation (Díaz-Arias *et al.*, 2015). Pluralism encompasses the diversity of informational actors and topics, while formal treatment refers to the use of sources, informational balance, genres and

formats, and the inclusion of hard or soft news (Sparks and Tulloch, 2000; Dader, 2007). Discourse analysis and content analysis have traditionally been the most frequently used methodologies for such studies.

In 2005, Soengas (2005) observed a high degree of homogenization in the news content of various generalist television networks, with a predominance of governmental and institutional sources. A year later, the same author confirmed the informational imbalance in favour of centers of power and argued that crime, violence, and spectacle overshadowed more relevant events (Soengas, 2007). A study conducted by the team coordinated by Fernández del Moral (2007) highlighted that the agenda of television newscasts is dominated by three major macro-themes: sports, disasters and violent events, and political information. Likewise, in 2012, one of the first systematic studies on television news was carried out, focusing primarily on news values (status, valence, relevance, identification, consonance, and dynamism) (Humanes, 2012).

Also noteworthy among the background literature are the reports produced by the Aideka group on the news coverage of the Iraq War (Aideka, 2003) and the European elections (Aideka, 2004). Other studies examining the degree of pluralism, the fulfilment of the public service mission, and the characterization of the informational ecosystem (Núñez Ladevéze and Callejo Gallego, 2008) conclude that 63.7% of TVE's programming meets the public service mission. Similarly, another team of researchers (Humanes *et al.*, 2013) found that the Spanish television model is a hybrid, with varying degrees of internal and external pluralism depending on the network, with public television newscasts displaying the highest levels of internal pluralism.

Also noteworthy are the studies conducted by the Audiovisual Council of Catalonia (CAC) and the Audiovisual Council of Andalusia (CAA), both of which maintain a permanent system for assessing the degree of respect for political pluralism within their respective regions, making them an essential point of reference for any study on the quality of information.

With regard to the journalistic treatment by Televisión Española, previous studies (Humanes, 2012) indicate a clear tendency toward providing relatively low-complexity coverage for almost all content blocks, with the exception of conflicts and health-related issues, in which cases the news is contextualized and the consequences of the events are explained. Moreover, an analysis of the information sources used in the coverage of the Iraq War reveals that TVE was not impartial in its portrayal of events (Paz-Rebollo and García-Avilés, 2012; Aideka, 2003). Nevertheless, other studies confirm that La 1 stands out for the predominance of a distinctly informational tone in its news coverage (Sotelo *et al.*, 2025; Díaz-Arias, 2008).

With regard to analyses conducted on other European public broadcasters concerning the war in Ukraine, studies on BBC News likewise highlight its lack of impartiality in taking a position in favour of Ukraine (Cook, 2022; Lara-Aguilar *et al.*, 2023).

In this context, the present study is relevant both for examining the news coverage of an event of public interest and international impact —namely, the Russian invasion of Ukraine (2022), a phenomenon that has thus far received

limited analysis in national mainstream public television (La 1)— and for its contribution to the line of empirical studies on infotainment, initiated in Spain by Salomé Berrocal *et al.* (2001), as well as to the aforementioned research on news quality in public television.

OBJECTIVES

The objective of this study is to analyse the news coverage provided by Telediario on La 1 (TVE) during the first year of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, with the aim of identifying the presence of thematic and stylistic features characteristic of infotainment within the news content of Spanish public television. Specifically, the study seeks to determine the use of spectacularization resources in the treatment of news, the emotional or rational appeal employed in the construction of the media narrative, and the distribution of information sources used. Additionally, it aims to assess the extent to which the selection of images, audiovisual effects, and the use of value-laden captions contribute to the creation of a narrative that may promote dramatization or decontextualization of the conflict. Based on these findings, the study intends to reflect on the impact of such practices on the journalistic quality of public television and its alignment with the principles of objectivity, truthfulness, and public service that should characterize state-owned media in the coverage of international crises.

Based on the general objective of the study—which aims to analyse the news coverage of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on La 1 (TVE) and its possible relationship with infotainment—the following research questions are proposed:

- RQ1. How is the audiovisual narrative constructed in TVE's coverage of the Russian invasion of Ukraine?
- RQ2. What type of appeal predominates in the news coverage: emotional or rational?
- RQ3. To what extent are spectacularization resources used in the news content?
- RQ4. What role do information sources play in the coverage of the conflict, and how do they affect the impartiality of the narrative?

METHODOLOGY

In order to address these questions, a content analysis was designed, encompassing the entire universe of news items ($n = 1,117$) broadcast on La 1 and available on RTVE's official website. A total of 245 complete evening newscasts (aired at 9:00 p.m.) were reviewed, covering broadcasts from Monday to Sunday, as this edition includes the most important news of the day (Marín, 2017). The news report was analysed because it is the most commonly used genre in television newscasts (Sotelo *et al.*, 2025).

The main public television network in Spain was selected as the case study because, in the context of socially relevant news, it is the medium that generates the highest level of trust when audiences seek reliable content (Sádaba and Salaverría, 2022). Moreover, public media outlets tend to demonstrate a higher degree of professionalism (Sehl, 2020). Additionally, this network ranks as the leading public television option in terms of audience ratings in Spain (Barlovento Comunicación, 2025).

The analysis of newscasts from Antena 3 TV and Telecinco was excluded from this study, as “both networks are those most inclined toward infotainment” (Sotelo *et al.*, 2025, p. 20).

The analysis covered the period from February 24, 2022—the day Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered the invasion of eastern Ukraine—through the completion of its first year (February 24, 2023).

In order to provide the most comprehensive characterization possible of the thematic and stylistic features of infotainment as applied to television news, the selection of analysis categories was based on previous studies by various authors referenced in the theoretical framework.

For the analysis of discursive spectacularization, several of the strategies outlined by Gingras (1998) were also taken as reference: dramatization (emphasis on conflict and alarmism), fragmentation (explaining the isolated event rather than the broader process—omitting causes and consequences), and personalization (reducing information to a particular case). Additionally, in a dichotomous manner, the analysis measured whether the news focused on the visible effects of the war through image analysis—a situation that refers to the emphasis on personal stories and observable human suffering, generating empathy and emotional connection with the audience (Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000).

The thematic orientation of news stories toward war, violence, or drama was analysed based on the definition by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), who state that such orientation involves media coverage that emphasizes violence, dramatic elements, and war-related events, thereby increasing the sense of conflict and urgency. The emotional, rational, or indeterminate appeal of the news was analysed according to the contributions made by López-Rabadán and Doménech-Fabregat (2018).

For the analysis of captions (*rótulos*) (n = 2,584), Krippendorff's (2018) methodology was followed to systematically identify thematic and discursive patterns. The classification was carried out using an inductive categorization approach (Mayring, 2014) and the open coding method proposed by Strauss and Corbin (2002), ensuring validity through intercoder triangulation with an agreement level above 80% (Krippendorff, 2018). To analyse the use of evaluative adjectives, Entman's (1993) framing approach and Dijk's (1997) lexical analysis were employed, categorizing adjectives according to their semantic charge (Leeuwen, 2008). Reliability was ensured through double coding, frequency and lexical co-occurrence analysis, and a pilot test, following Neuendorf's (2017) guidelines. These procedures enabled the identification of discursive strategies in the construction of media narratives about conflicts and crises.

Finally, the study conducted an analysis of the information sources present in the television news reports, which were categorized as follows: official sources (authorities) (Bennett, 1990), testimonial sources (citizens, victims) (Tumber and Webster, 2006), documentary sources (archives, media) (Schudson, 2001), aid sources (NGOs) (Cottle, 2006), observer sources (experts) (Entman, 2004), and no sources.

The analysis was conducted quarterly to identify possible variations over time. This approach allowed us to observe how news coverage developed as the conflict progressed, highlighting changes in the frequency and type of narrative resources used, as well as in the selection of topics and news sources. Comparing the data from each quarter revealed patterns of evolution in journalistic coverage and presentation strategies, providing a more dynamic view of the media phenomenon studied.

For this study, a double-coding procedure was implemented for the data. One of the authors conducted an analysis on a randomly selected 20% sample of the units ($n = 223$) to estimate the reliability of the coding process (intercoder reliability). The average agreement percentage obtained (using Holsti's formula) was 84.78%, indicating an acceptable level of reliability. To measure intercoder consistency, Cohen's kappa coefficient was used (Cohen, 1960), which adjusts the degree of agreement according to the guidelines established by Landis and Koch (1977). The kappa coefficient is interpreted as follows: 0.01-0.20 as slight; 0.21-0.40 as fair; 0.41-0.60 as moderate; 0.61-0.80 as substantial; and 0.81-1.00 as almost perfect. The results of the analysis conducted by the coders yielded values ranging from 0.80 to 0.93, with a total of 0.865, demonstrating that intercoder reliability was adequate. During this process, consensus-based negotiations were employed to resolve differences among the coders; preliminary results were discussed, and any doubts regarding the analysis criteria were addressed. Variables were processed using Microsoft Office Excel, and frequency and contingency tables were generated with the collected data, which were then analysed using SPSS Statistics 25.0. Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were conducted using the quantitative data obtained. To evaluate distributions, a test of homogeneity of proportions (Chi-square) was applied. Likewise, a Chi-square test of independence was carried out to examine potential relationships between variables.

RESULTS

AUDIOVISUAL NARRATIVE

The Image: Visible Effects of the War

In the first quarter of the conflict (February-April 2022), the initial offensive was marked by simultaneous attacks from Crimea, Donbas, and Belarus; high-intensity fighting in Mariupol; assaults around the Chernobyl and Zaporizhzhia nuclear plants; and the unexpected Ukrainian resistance. International coverage peaked with the discovery of civilian massacres in Bucha, the sinking of the

Moskva —the flagship of the Russian Black Sea Fleet— and the surrender of the defenders of the Azovstal steel plant. This extreme wartime scenario encouraged the abundant use of high-impact imagery —explosions, mass displacements, and bombed cities— with events such as Bucha, the sinking of the *Moskva*, and the resistance in Azovstal further amplifying the spectacularization of news coverage.

Table 1. Distribution of news items by visible effects of the war and thematic orientation of the coverage

Visible effects of the war		First quarter	Second quarter	Third quarter	Fourth quarter	Annual Total
Focus exclusively on visible effects of the war	Yes	46.1 %	11.2%	20.7%	19.3%	97.3%
	No	0.9%	0.8%	0.8%	0.2%	2.7%
Thematic orientation toward war, violence, or drama	Yes	28%	9.5%	13.9%	12.9%	64.3%
	No	19.1%	2.5%	7.6%	6.5%	35.7%

Source: Own elaboration.

In the second quarter, as the war entered a phase of relative stabilization with fighting concentrated in the Donbas and a growing impact of the energy crisis in Europe, the proportion of visible effects of the war decreased significantly. The news agenda diversified with events such as the extreme heatwave in Europe, which reached 45 °C in some areas; the resignation of British Prime Minister Boris Johnson; and the assassination of former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe.

The third quarter was defined by the Ukrainian counteroffensive in Kharkiv, the illegal referendums in Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia, the mobilization of 300,000 Russian reservists, the attack on the Kerch Bridge —a key link to Crimea— and the Russian withdrawal from Kherson. However, coverage of these milestones was overshadowed by the death of Queen Elizabeth II and the 25th anniversary of the death of Princess Diana of Wales.

Finally, the fourth quarter and the beginning of 2023 included the fall of Soledar to Russian forces, the announcement of Western tank deliveries, and the surprise visit of Joe Biden to Kyiv. These developments competed for media attention with the FIFA World Cup in Qatar, the deaths of Pelé and Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, and the resignation of New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern.

In sum, during the second and third quarters, the decrease in large-scale offensives and the emergence of other international events reduced the intensity of visual coverage, although milestones such as the counteroffensive in Kharkiv or the attack on the Kerch Bridge temporarily reignited media attention.

Music and Post-Production Effects

Spectacularization resources have a significant presence in news coverage, as dramatic music accompanies 40.3% of the reports, and post-production effects —such as accelerated editing, music video— style montage, ambient sound

enhancement, and chromatic or contrast adjustments to intensify visual impact—are present in more than half of the news items (52.5%).

As Mateos-Pérez (2009) notes, following the emergence of private television in Spain and the coexistence of public broadcasting with commercial channels in the audiovisual sector, the way information was presented had to adapt to new audience preferences. The use of elements such as sensationalism, morbidity, and spectacle led to formal approaches that brought news content closer to entertainment.

General Appeal of the News Items

The results of the Chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 112.537$, $df = 9$, $p = 0.000$) indicate a significant association between the general appeal of the news item and the primary source used. In rational appeals, official sources (authorities) predominate, accounting for 34.6%, whereas citizen and victim testimonies are less common within this category (3.9%).

In emotional appeals, the specific distribution of primary sources used in the news items shows that testimonial sources (citizens, victims) account for 8.7%. This reflects the importance of personal voices and direct experiences in eliciting an emotional response from the audience.

In the case of indeterminate appeals, there is a high frequency of citizen and victim testimonies, accounting for 10.6%, which underscores the importance of these testimonies across various forms of coverage.

Table 2. Distribution of news items by general appeal and primary source

General appeal of the news item	Primary source					
	Official (Authority)	Testimonial (citizens, victims)	Documentary (archives, media)	Aid (NGOs)	Observer (Expert)	No Sources
Rational appeal	34.6%	3.9%	1.5%	0.9%	5.1%	16.6%
Emotional appeal	2.5%	8.7%	0.2%	0.7%	1.6%	1%
Indeterminate appeal	6.5%	10.6%	0.8%	0.7%	2%	2.1%

Source: Own elaboration.

SPECTACULARIZATION RESOURCES

Contextualization / Decontextualization and Themes

The chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 38.022$, $df = 6$, $p = 0.000$) indicates a significant association between the contextualization and decontextualization of news stories and the quarter, with the presentation of causes and/or consequences prevailing throughout the entire period analysed. The leads include phrases such as: “The Russian offensive in Mariupol has left thousands of civilians trapped without access to food or medicine. Experts warn that this tactic seeks to destabilize

the country and consolidate control over strategic regions” or “The increase in gas and oil prices has triggered an energy crisis in Europe. Analysts point out that economic sanctions on Russia and the disruption of supplies are affecting millions of households and businesses”.

Contextualization was more frequent in the first quarter, when the historical causes of the conflict and Russia’s strategy for a rapid offensive to seize Kyiv were explained. This approach was linked to the need for the audience to understand the magnitude and unprecedented nature of the first large-scale armed conflict in Europe since 1945. As the war dragged on, contextualization was limited to specific milestones such as the illegal referendums in occupied territories, the mobilization of 300,000 Russian reservists, or the attack on the Kerch Bridge, competing with coverage of political and social crises in other countries.

Table 3. Distribution of news items by suppression or presentation of causes and consequences

Suppression or presentation of causes and consequences	First quarter	Second quarter	Third quarter	Fourth quarter	Annual Total
Suppression of causes and consequences; emphasis on visual elements (locations, characters, spaces, etc.)	3.7%	0.4%	0.8%	1.2%	6.1%
Presentation of causes and/or consequences	40.4%	9.6%	19.2%	18.1%	87.3%
Other	3%	2%	1.5%	0.1%	6.6%

Source: Own elaboration.

Additionally, the analysis shows that topics related to politics, society, migration, the economy, and historical events are the ones most frequently associated with the presentation of causes and/or consequences in the news coverage.

This suggests that these topics require and receive a more detailed and contextualized journalistic treatment, which is essential for a full understanding of the events and their implications. In contrast, topics such as culture, sports, gender/LGBTQ+, environment, judicial matters, and social protests show a lower frequency of cause and/or consequence presentation, indicating a potentially more superficial approach in the news coverage of these issues.

On-screen Text

The process consisted of identifying the most recurring themes conveyed through the captions, based exclusively on their textual content. From this analysis, six categories were identified according to the main focus of the information, allowing for a structured organization of the content and highlighting the most relevant aspects.

Table 4. Most relevant themes in news captions

Themes	Percentage
Russian military control and strategy	51.66%
War crimes and human rights	16.68%
Economic and energy impact	15.02%
Humanitarian crisis and displaced people	6.66%
Sanctions and international pressure	4.99%
Diplomacy and international relations	4.99%

Source: Own elaboration.

The most predominant theme was “Russian military control and strategy” (51.66%), reflecting the strong presence of news reports on troop advances, bombings, and territorial occupation. This is followed by “War crimes and human rights” (16.68%), indicating a strong emphasis on human rights violations and attacks on civilians. Likewise, “Economic and energy impact” (15.02%) highlights concerns about the consequences of the conflict on global markets, oil and gas prices, and economic sanctions. On the other hand, “Humanitarian crisis and displaced people” (6.66%) reveals the focus on the refugee situation and international aid. The categories of “Sanctions and international pressure” (4.99%) and “Diplomacy and international relations” (4.99%) show that the measures taken by international bodies, as well as negotiations between countries, also played a role in the news narrative.

Table 5. Use of evaluative adjectives in news captions

Use of evaluative adjectives	Percentage	
	Yes	No
First quarter	27.98%	24.69%
Second quarter	7.23%	3.30%
Third quarter	11.65%	9.52%
Fourth quarter	9.75%	5.88%

Source: Own elaboration.

The use of evaluative adjectives in news captions is a key indicator of the subjective or value-laden nature of information presentation. The first quarter stands out with the highest proportion of captions containing adjectives (27.98%), indicating a tendency during the early months of the year to use more emphatic or evaluative language. This high presence of adjectives may be attributed to high-impact events that required greater characterization of the facts or key actors.

The most frequently used adjectives —such as “more”, “greater”, “harsh”, and “military”, among others— suggest an emphatic and dramatic tone. They are employed to describe extreme situations, conflicts, and political measures, indicating a discourse oriented toward emphasizing the severity of the events reported.

The presence of terms such as “forceful”, “devastating”, “critical”, and “economic” reinforces the notion that the text is analysing a wartime or crisis context, highlighting the severity of the conflict. This suggests a focus on the consequences of the war, sanctions, and their political, social, and economic impact.

The selected adjectives can influence how events are perceived; terms such as “strategic”, “significant”, “international”, and “alarming” may be aimed at constructing a narrative of urgency and justifying certain political or economic positions.

The repeated use of adjectives such as “more”, “greater”, “worse”, “urgent”, and “necessary” demonstrates an emphasis on the magnitude of the events described. This indicates that the text seeks to highlight contrasts and dramatize the situation.

INFORMATION SOURCES IN NEWS COVERAGE

The results of the Chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 47.417$, $df = 15$, $p = 0.000$) indicate a significant association between the primary source and the quarter.

In the initial phase, the presence of official Ukrainian sources, war correspondents, and international leaders was prioritized, consistent with the intensity of the fighting and the need for real-time, verified information. In subsequent quarters, coverage incorporated analytical sources and civilian testimonies in key episodes such as the fall of Soledar or the delivery of Western tanks, but their frequency declined as the conflict ceased to be the world’s leading news story. Headlines such as “Injured in Dnipro: Civilian Testimonies” and “Prisoners of War: Images and Testimonies” reflected a focus on personal experiences and the human impact of the war in Ukraine.

Table 6. Distribution of news items by type of primary source

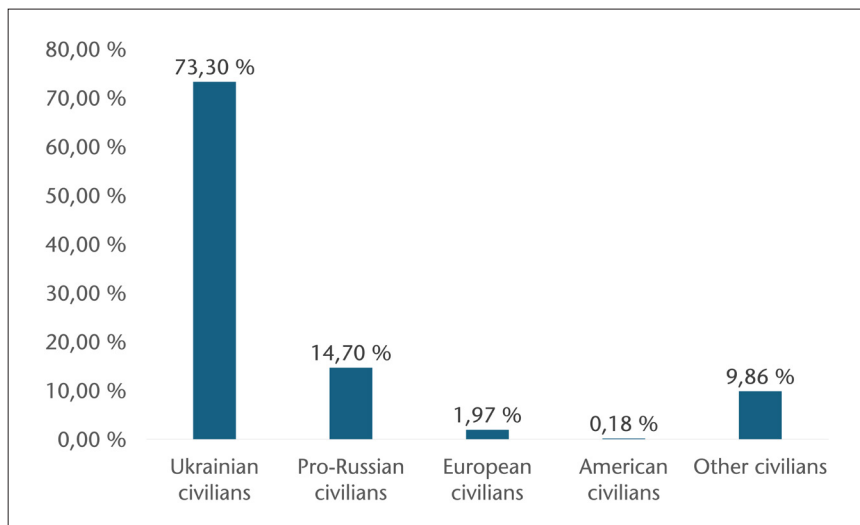
Primary source	First quarter	Second quarter	Third quarter	Fourth quarter	Annual Total
Official (authority)	17.6%	6.4%	10.4%	9.3%	43.7%
Testimonial	11.8%	2.4%	5.1%	3.9%	23.2%
Documentary (archives, media)	1.7%	0.1%	0.3%	0.4%	2.5%
Aid (NGOs)	1.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.8%	2.4%
Observer (Expert)	6.2%	0.4%	1.1%	1.0%	8.7%
No Sources	8.6%	2.4%	4.5%	4.0%	19.5%

Source: Own elaboration.

Additionally, the percentage distribution of the different groups of civilians shows that Ukrainian citizens constitute the majority, followed by pro-Russian civilians.

By way of example, the media highlighted testimonies such as that of Viktoria, a 26-year-old teacher and prisoner of war in Russia, who stated: “I suffered physical and psychological torture”. News reports also included testimonies like Anna’s, who visited the school where her father died in a bombing, saying: “We had to flee, leaving behind both the living and the dead”. Another testimony came from a woman in Kherson who declared: “I don’t want to go on living like this”, reflecting the devastation of loneliness and old age among surviving women. These examples underscore the human suffering and personal stories that emerge in times of war, offering an intimate and emotional perspective on the crisis in Ukraine.

Figure 1. Distribution of news items by testimonial sources



Source: Own elaboration.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In line with the first research question (RQ1) concerning audiovisual narrative, the analysis of *La 1* (TVE)’s coverage of the Russian invasion of Ukraine reveals a recurrent use of technical resources aimed at the spectacularization of images (dramatic music and post-production effects), a deliberate strategy to capture audience interest and emphasize the gravity of the conflict. This tendency, linked to dramatization and spectacularization, should be avoided by TVE in order to prioritize news quality. To better highlight the context and social relevance of the conflict, it is recommended to reduce the emotional and visual impact of news

items and exercise greater caution in the use of language in on-screen captions, as these factors may hinder a deeper understanding of the event.

The study also reveals a clear orientation toward a spectacularized approach in news coverage, centered on war, violence, and drama. This trend is reflected in the recurrent use of striking images, a focus on human-interest stories, and the use of value-laden captions—particularly during the first quarter of the invasion, when the novelty and significance of the event were most heavily emphasized.

In this regard, an alternative to improving news treatment would be to replace explicit images of violence with more analytical approaches supported by expert voices. This would enhance journalistic quality and help prevent the emotional manipulation of audiences, given that high-impact images can alter attention levels and the comprehension of the message (Benaissa, 2013).

With regard to the type of appeal in the news (RQ2), the analysis results reveal a predominant tendency toward rational appeal in news coverage, which facilitates the contextualization of stories through the presentation of background information and the causes of the conflict. While these findings are consistent with previous studies (Sotelo *et al.*, 2025; Díaz-Arias, 2008) that identified a predominance of an informational tone in *La 1*'s news reports, they also suggest that, albeit to a moderate extent, the content remains permeable to infotainment strategies. According to Benaissa (2016), this type of specialized news constitutes an intermediate category between hard news—which maintain an interpretative and informational approach grounded in rationality—and soft news, which incorporate visually appealing resources such as high-impact images, dramatic music, post-production effects, and value-laden captions that introduce subjectivity.

As Fairclough (2003) and Charaudeau (2011) warn, language not only informs but also shapes public perception of events; therefore, the use of such resources may alter the media construction of reality. In this sense, one of the fundamental principles of public television is to guarantee citizens access to information that adheres to deontological standards and journalistic quality. The prevalence of infotainment in the coverage of large-scale international conflicts, such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine, compromises society's ability to remain well-informed, thus affecting public opinion formation and citizens' decision-making processes.

With regard to the spectacularization resources in the news (RQ3), the findings of this research—in line with previous studies (Humanes, 2012)—point to the contextualization of news in TVE's coverage of armed conflicts, in which reports predominantly present the causes and/or consequences of events.

Another key aspect in TVE's news coverage concerns the use of sources (RQ4). The analysis reveals a predominance of testimonies from Ukrainian citizens over other voices, such as Russian civilians or international actors, indicating a narrative inclination that favours a partial perspective of the conflict. Given that a public broadcaster has the responsibility to ensure equitable access to information and to provide the most comprehensive and balanced view possible, it is essential to diversify the sources consulted. This not only aligns with objectivity criteria but also reinforces the citizens' right to plural and impartial information (Entman, 2004).

The informational bias identified in this study is consistent with the coverage of the Iraq War by the *Segunda Edición* of TVE's *Telediario* (Aideka, 2003), which found that the airtime allocated to statements from social groups supporting the war was more than three times greater than the time given to statements from groups opposing it. This finding is corroborated by another study (Paz-Rebollo and García-Avilés, 2012), which noted that TVE's reporting was favourable toward the Anglo-American forces. The lack of impartiality is not exclusive to Spanish public television, as previous research has also documented the positioning of the British public broadcaster (BBC) in favour of Ukraine (Cook, 2022; Lara-Aguiar *et al.*, 2023).

In this regard, and in order to enhance the quality of television news coverage of international conflicts, it is essential to strengthen journalists' training in conflict reporting, human rights, and journalistic ethics, thereby ensuring a responsible and critical approach to events. In this context, the News Council of Radio Televisión Española plays a key role in overseeing independence, pluralism, and news quality, promoting a model of self-regulation aligned with the principles set out in its style guide and in the objectives of RTVE's *Mandato-Marco*.

Likewise, a system of ongoing monitoring and evaluation of RTVE's fulfilment of its public service mission is needed. For this, it is essential to establish a follow-up commission that includes not only representatives from parliamentary parties, but also educators, journalists, academics, labour unions, business leaders, and viewers, thereby ensuring a participatory governance model oriented toward the common good (Viuda Pereda *et al.*, 2012).

Furthermore, La 1 (TVE) should focus its efforts on encouraging public reflection and fostering informed debate on issues that affect society, rather than prioritizing strategies aimed at entertaining the audience. In this context, reducing the presence of explicit images of pain and death —particularly in a prolonged conflict— would be a key measure to strengthen analysis and contextualization as central pillars of news coverage, thus minimizing the impact of infotainment in the construction of journalistic narratives.

This study presents certain limitations. First, the analysis focuses exclusively on the behaviour of the national mainstream public broadcaster (La 1), so expanding the research to include news programs from regional public broadcasters would allow for comparisons and an assessment of possible differences in the approaches adopted at the regional level.

In addition, although this article contributes to the study of infotainment and informational quality on television, it is necessary to continue exploring this line of research through in-depth analyses of complete news programs, which would allow for a more detailed evaluation of the narrative and visual mechanisms used in the coverage of international conflicts.

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