



The **C**overage and **R**eception of
the Russian-Ukrainian **C**onflict

**RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR JOURNALISM TRAINING
AND CRITICAL MEDIA LITERACY:
BASED ON CORECON PROJECT
(2024-2026)**

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INTRODUCTION

CORECON is an acronym for “The COverage and REception of the Russian-Ukrainian CONflict in Polish, Romanian, and English-language media: A comparative critical discourse study with recommendations for journalism training.” It is a research project lasting between 2024–2026, funded by the Romanian Ministry of Research, Innovation, and Digitalization (MCID) via the National Plan of Recovery and Resilience (code PNRR-III-C9-I8-2023-025), coordinated by Katarzyna Molek-Kozakowska and implemented at Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu in cooperation with academics from University of Opole, Poland.

By early 2026, the project had spawned over two dozen studies – some comparative and based on the three language-specific media coverage corpora, some more interpretative and critical smaller-scale studies of specific journalistic genres or political discourses, which can be traced in the project website <https://grants.ulbsibiu.ro/corecon/>

With this report of recommendations, the CORECON project team members and authors of these varied analyses and studies aim to contribute to the improvement of responsible and ethical journalism in war and conflict coverage as well as to the enhancement and evolution of quality journalistic education. CORECON’s reports, events, blogposts, and academic publications have been designed to have multiple implications for practice, including language awareness interventions and further development of assistance or advice for journalistic training and ethical audience engagement strategies.

Broadly, this work contributes to improving strategic communication in the field of international conflict representation, media coverage, and resolution. The findings and conclusions of the critical studies are also meant to spotlight effectively the problematic journalistic practices or latest systemic developments in the area of coverage of war and armed conflicts, and to champion the need for de-amplification, de-sensationalization, or de-stereotyping in conflict coverage.

Ideally, this work also offers inspiration for workshops and interventions, of which some examples conducted with the youth within CORECON are given. It gives advice to professionals and amateurs using social media for communicating conflict in a manner suitable for mediation and dialogue. This report can serve as self-study material or an evidence-based guide to building resilience against misinformation

Enjoy the read!

Katarzyna Molek-Kozakowska

CORECON project director,
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1. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ETHICAL COVERAGE OF INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT

The terminology or phrases used to name or label the developments in a military context or in international politics should be precise and adequate, as is recommended in “Comparative Analysis of International Legal Terminology in Polish and Romanian Media Discourse: The Case of the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict” by **Rafał K. Matusiak** (a chapter published in the collection *Mediated Discourses of Conflict*). He suggests that editors should:

- **treat legal terminology as a framing tool, not a neutral label.** Terms such as war, aggression, or war crime do more than describe events – they assign responsibility, signal legality or illegality, and activate international legal frameworks.
- **avoid euphemisms** that obscure responsibility. Expressions such as “special military operation” should be clearly marked as quoted, ironic, or propagandistic, and not adopted as neutral journalistic language.
- **match terminology to the purpose and genre.** Technical legal terms (armed conflict, hostilities) may be appropriate in expert analysis or institutional reporting, while opinion and explanatory journalism should clarify their meaning and implications for audiences.
- **not avoid legal language out of fear of complexity.** Audiences can understand legal concepts when they are explained clearly, and avoiding them can weaken public understanding of rights, duties, and violations.

BY USING SPECIFIC LEGAL LABELS RESPONSIBLY, JOURNALISTS ACTIVELY CONTRIBUTE TO PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE OF INTERNATIONAL LAW AND TO THE NORMALIZATION OF ACCOUNTABILITY STANDARDS.

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In another comparative study on the use of terminology “What’s in a ‘War’? A Corpus-Assisted Comparative Study on (De)legitimizing Linguistic Labels of the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict in Romanian and English-Language Media” (a chapter published in the collection *Mediated Discourses of Conflict*) **David Morariu** has the following advice for editors:

- carefully consider the semantic and discursive **nuances of each term** used to label the conflict, particularly when translating from other languages;
- rely on **specialized legal, juridical and military terminology** to accurately capture the nature of the conflict developments, rather than on vague generic terms;
- provide explicit definitions and **document the source of all linguistic labels** used to describe the conflict, and flag those that might be propagandistic;

- ensure terminological precision and **avoid switching between labels** that presuppose divergent ideological stances unless the polarizing intent is explicitly stated;
- pay close attention to punctuation, such as quotation marks, and introductory phrases that can be effectively used to **signal distancing** from problematic labels.



How to refer to history and collective memory ethically and without distortion? Based on “Framing the Past, Shaping the Present: The Weaponization of Historical Narratives in News on the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict?” (a chapter published in the collection *Mediated Discourses of Conflict*) by **Ecaterina Iliş**, CORECON offers the following observations:

- Historical references in conflict reporting should be treated as **framing devices rather than neutral background information**. When a past event, figure, or analogy is invoked, journalists should reflect on why it is needed and what interpretation of the present it encourages.
- The use of powerful historical labels and analogies requires **careful contextualization**. Terms such as genocide, Nazism, Stalinism, or imperial legacy carry strong moral and emotional weight and should not be used as shortcuts. Their contested interpretations should be explained to avoid oversimplification.
- Journalists should **avoid reducing complex historical narratives to moral binaries**. Framing conflicts through **heroes and villains** based solely on selective readings of history risks erasing ambiguity, internal disagreements, and competing memories that are essential for informed public understanding.
- While acknowledging historical **suffering** is necessary, excessive reliance on victimhood-**based framing can turn history into a moral weapon** and limit critical reflection or the range of perspectives available to audiences.
- Narratives built on **nostalgia of imperial memory should be questioned**. References to former empires, lost greatness, or “historical correction” often function to legitimize power claims and territorial ambitions and should be treated as tools of strategic narratives.



What can editors do when they need to report on highly propagandistic stories and stances that one side of the conflict is actively pushing? Can they neutralize this propaganda somehow? **Katarzyna Molek-Kozakowska** and **Isabela-Anda Dragomir** look at this problem in “Demystifying, Delegitimizing, Debunking: Discursive Editorial Strategies of Neutralizing the Rationales for Russia’s Intervention in Ukraine” (*Media, War & Conflict*). They make the following recommendations:

- explain the mitigatory or **euphemistic nature** of some expressions that obscure the actual nature of military attack (intervention, operation, campaign);
- **specify the origin** of the covered statements, releases and opinions and articulate explicitly the political stances and intentions behind them;
- verify stories or pieces of information and **debunk the falsehoods** by explicitly referring to them as lies, myths, conspiracy theories, narratives when appropriate;
- analyze how the **propaganda arguments** are constructed and weigh the soundness of the assumptions behind them;
- consider adding **rhetorical flair** to neutralization: analogies and metaphors, sarcasm and absurd, rhetorical questions and emotional or moral appeals.
- refer to **contexts and use comparisons**, be they historical, legal, cultural, in order to embed editorial voices and strengthen the weight of the neutralizing technique.



CORECON research yields some recommendations on using sources and representing their voices in the coverage of conflict, based on “Meet the Experts on the War in Ukraine. Language and Style in Representing Sources and their Voices in Opinion-making News Outlets” (*English Text Construction*) by **Katarzyna Molek-Kozakowska**. Editors and reporters should:

- reflect on and make the best use of **expert diversity** and the scope of points of view in the broad range of areas – military, diplomatic, political, economic, social;
- monitor the ratio of sources from different countries, organizations, interest groups; highlight the **details about the source** that could testify to their stake or ideology in what is reported;
- avoid the temptation to simplify the views of experts to two opposite sides; bring different perspectives **without unduly polarizing** them;
- explain the source’s **credentials** without overemphasizing their elite status; limit the reliance on some expert(s), organization(s), area(s) of expertise only because they are **available**, or because they are **stereotypically trustworthy or newsworthy** (e.g., women can be experts too!)
- watch how opinions may become **distorted** in free indirect discourse (when you paraphrase, synthesize or summarize them) and avoid using expert opinions to underpin a preconceived idea;

- watch for the “verbs of speaking” you use to introduce your quotations with opinions from sources so as not to impose an understanding of the type of statement the source is making.

OVERALL, EDITORS SHOULD DEVELOP A TRANSPARENT SOURCING POLICY AND MONITOR WHO IS HEARD TALKING ABOUT THE CONFLICT AND LIMIT THE NUMBER OF UNIDENTIFIABLE SOURCES THAT COULD BE PUSHING PROPAGANDA.

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At a time of conflict, political communicators tend to use pre-existing fears, anxieties and resentments related to war or migration to garner political capital. There are some observations from online political debates during an election campaign where populists and nationalists tried to capitalize on war-related issues, based on “Symbolic Boundaries in the Polish Far-Right Social World Online in the Presidential Campaign 2025” by **Marcin Deutschmann** and **Jedrzej Olejniczak** (a chapter submitted to *Intercultural Encounters in Complex Societies: Connecting People across Super-diversities*).

- **When reporting on migration-related issues**, do not use metaphors connected to the military world (e.g., invasion, attack) or natural catastrophes (e.g., wave, flood, storm). This might amplify anxiety and boost anti-migrant narratives.
- **When interviewing political figures or opinion leaders**, aim for fact-based justifications of claims. When someone builds an argument on vague, emotional or judgmental statements, ask additional questions about definitions, facts, details, and concrete examples. This might prevent building a distorted and politicized narrative.
- **Recognize exclusionary rhetoric**, which is based on negative emotions and strong identity. Identify nationalist claims that delegitimize the presence of others only because they are others. Show how they are formulated for affective polarization and political benefit.
- **Do not give space to those who promote extreme views** and call for violence. Even when you debunk their claims, they are heard by the audience and might be potentially proliferated by extreme movements, letting them grow.
- **Be cautious referring to the “people vs. elites” distinction.** Populist and anti-establishment politicians might present elites (including you and the media where you work!) as untrustworthy and corrupt. This is a strategy to build credibility within their own information bubble.

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2. INCLUSIVE JOURNALISM ON SENSITIVE SOCIAL ISSUES

THE MEDIA CAN INADVERTENTLY REPRODUCE STEREOTYPES AND PREJUDICES, SO JOURNALISTS SHOULD BE SENSITIVE TO CONVENTIONAL PATTERNS OF REPRESENTATION AND AWARE OF THE WAYS TO AVOID BIAS BOTH IN THE USE OF LANGUAGE AND VISUALS.

One area to look at to enhance responsible conflict coverage is gender stereotyping in the context of war, with some recommendations based on “Conflict Representations: Analyzing the Polarization of Men's and Women's Images in Romanian Media Coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian War” by **Denisa-Maria Bâlc** and **Iulia-Maria Ticărau** (*Transilvania*). They observe that:

- Stereotypes of women on the front persist in conflict coverage and caution is needed not to reproduce them. In the case of **female combatants** in the army, the coverage should not focus on their exceptionality, on their low numbers, on their roles as military nurses and supporting personnel, implying their limited significance for war logistics and strategy.
- To achieve higher clickability, some outlets foreground and **exaggerate the invaders' atrocities**. One of the typical ways to attract attention is to focus on women and children as victims, representing **women as passive**, and incapable of self-defense.
- Failing to focus on how women refugees have productively organized their and their families' lives in a new place **misrepresents female resilience** and breeds resentments.
- Apart from objectifying and sexualizing women, focusing on women's age and appearance, even in passing, rather than their skills or achievements, perpetuates the **stereotypical thinking** that a woman's value is in her attractiveness and availability to men.
- Using polarization and extrapolating the **antagonistic relationships between genders** and sexes in war time leads to simplifying the complex realities of war.

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Iulia-Maria Ticărau and Denisa-Maria Bâlc also have recommendations on visualizing victims in war coverage, based on “Women and Visual Rhetorical Strategies in Media Coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian War” (*Analele Universitatii Ovidius Constanta*). They suggest that journalists:

- Cultivate visual and multimodal literacies in the service of ethical war reporting by developing skills how to **responsibly adopt visual framing techniques** (individualization, collectivization, anonymization and non-representation).

- Set clear **ethical criteria for the selection of images** in order to prevent aestheticization or ideological oversimplification of military conflicts.
- Encourage more equitable storytelling to **balance out gender stereotyping** and excessive exposure (e.g., avoid victimization or sexualization of women and acknowledge the diversity of female agency).
- Deal responsibly with **emotional stories** so as not to contribute to emotional manipulation and audience radicalization.
- Establish privacy protections (e.g., blurred backgrounds, contrasting bright or pale tones) and **use informed close-up or distant shots**, as they can suggest either intimacy or detachment from the horrors of war.

IMAGERY SHOULD NOT REINFORCE TRADITIONAL STEREOTYPES ABOUT THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN PUBLIC LIFE OR GENDER INEQUALITY, AND WAR COVERAGE IMAGES SHOULD NOT SUPPORT STEREOTYPES THAT ASSOCIATE WOMEN WITH PASSIVITY AND VICTIMHOOD ONLY.

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Another area for sensitivity is related to refugee- and migrant-scapegoating in the context of coverage of war, as was studied in “Unwanted Encounters: Anti-Ukrainian Rhetoric in the Social Media Reception of Migrants by Polish Far-right by **Marcin Deutschmann** and **Jedrzej Olejniczak** (*Res Rhetorica*). To avoid breeding resentment against refugees, it is important to acknowledge the following findings:

- When talking about migrants, acknowledge their presence and do not reduce the reporting to **one-dimensional stories** about us/them: “bad migrants” or “good hosts.” Show the reality of intercultural encounters with their positives, negatives, and complexity.
- Verify and debunk fake narratives about “privileged” refugees when they appear, in the news. The narrative of “refugees’ privileges” is **a manipulation strategy** that focuses on ill-willed refugees exploiting assistance and benefits while muting the facts how they were forced to leave and experienced loss.
- Do not avoid talking about difficulties connected to migration – there are real problems and fears connected to the increased presence of migrants – but show **possible solutions** before the issue is used for radical or extreme rhetoric.
- React when somebody uses **historical generalizations** and inaccuracies, e.g., in Poland that could involve comparing all contemporary Ukrainians to 20th century Banderites, who killed Poles; acknowledge Ukraine’s right as an independent state to determine its own policy on history.

- Be cautious about suggestions that incoming migrants mean to remove the host country's **native identity**. Presenting refugees as cultural invaders creates moral panic.

BEFORE COVERING THE STORY ON REFUGEES, VERIFY AND COLLECT VARIOUS PERSPECTIVES AND CHECK WHO MIGHT BENEFIT FROM PROLIFERATING ANTI-MIGRANT NARRATIVES. IF THE NEWS OR CLAIMS ALIGN WITH RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA, CONSIDER NOT SHARING IT FURTHER.

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Based on “Discourse Representations of Ukrainian Refugees in Romania Online News” a (chapter published in the collection *Mediated Discourses of Conflict*), **Rădu Dragulescu** offers **advice for more humanitarian framing and empathy-driven narratives of migrants, and against institutional focus, gendered portrayals, othering or problem-oriented discourse**, specifically:

- **prevent compassion fatigue** by avoiding sensationalism, emotionality and pity and highlighting instead refugees’ agency, skills and productive contributions;
- cover **long-term integration processes**, not only emergency or problematic situations and include diverse migrant voices embedded in individualistic and humanitarian contexts;
- use language responsibly with **careful terminological distinctions** between migrants, refugees, displaced or travelling people, without opposition between us/them or hosts/guests and without flashy headlines or drastic visuals that erode empathy.

BY INTEGRATING THESE RECOMMENDATIONS INTO JOURNALISM TRAINING, MEDIA PROFESSIONALS CAN BUILD ON EXISTING EMPATHETIC TENDENCIES WHILE ADDRESSING SHORTCOMINGS RELATED TO STEREOTYPING, IMBALANCE, AND EXCLUSION. SUCH TRAINING IS IMPORTANT FOR FOSTERING INFORMED PUBLIC DEBATE, AND SUPPORTING SOCIAL COHESION IN CONTEXTS OF FORCED MIGRATION.

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3. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BUSINESS COVERAGE IN CONFLICT OR CRISIS SITUATIONS

Media specializing in economy-related coverage often collect more attention when international conflicts are announced, especially when they can influence economic prospects, business investments, savings and risk. It is important that business pages keep responding to this demand without dramatizing the issue.

There are some insights regarding responsible wartime business coverage based on “Framing of wartime economic situation in Polish business journalism during the Russian-Ukrainian conflict” by **Rafał K. Matusiak** and **Robert Radziej** (*Media, War & Conflict*), such as:

- **avoid treating war-related economic news as purely “good” or “bad”.** Wartime economies are complex and often involve trade-offs. Journalists should be trained to recognize when ambivalent or mixed framing is more accurate than clear-cut positive or negative evaluations;
- **use ambivalence deliberately, not accidentally.** Headlines that combine opportunity and risk (e.g., “growth, but at a cost”) help audiences navigate uncertainty rather than pushing them toward panic or false optimism;
- **explain economic consequences over time, not only at moments of disruption.** Audiences benefit from seeing how economies adapt, stabilize, or reconfigure during prolonged conflict, not just from short-term crisis snapshots;
- **make economic policy decisions understandable without oversimplifying them.** Interest rate hikes, subsidies, trade restrictions, and energy diversification should be explained in clear language while showing who benefits and who bears the costs;
- **be transparent about conflicts of interest.** When reporting on issues such as grain imports, energy security, or refugee labor, show how different groups (farmers, consumers, governments, businesses) are affected;
- **balance human-interest angles with systemic analysis.** Personal stories help readers engage, but they should not replace explanations of broader economic mechanisms and long-term implications;
- **do not equate neutrality with objectivity.** A neutral tone can obscure important tensions. Responsible journalism sometimes requires showing competing values and unresolved dilemmas rather than flattening them.

ECONOMIC REPORTING DURING WAR SHAPES PUBLIC EXPECTATIONS, CONSUMER BEHAVIOR, AND TRUST IN INSTITUTIONS; JOURNALISTS SHOULD BE TRAINED TO RECOGNIZE THIS RESPONSIBILITY. TREAT BUSINESS JOURNALISM AS PART OF CRISIS COMMUNICATION.

Business pages are known for using metaphorical frames and expressions to represent abstract issues of the economy in a more approachable way; however, some metaphors could distort the perception of complex phenomena. Here are some recommendations based on “The Creative Design of Economic War Metaphors” by **Rafał K. Matusiak** (submitted to *Creativity Studies*):

- **Be aware that metaphors actively shape public emotions and judgments.** War metaphors do not merely explain economic processes; they mobilize fear, urgency, blame, and solidarity. Journalists should reflect on the emotional and moral effects of their metaphor choices.
- **Avoid over-militarizing economic reporting.** Framing markets, inflation, or institutions exclusively as battlefields, enemies, or weapons can exaggerate threat perceptions and normalize crisis thinking.
- **Do not personify abstract economic processes without explanation.** Presenting inflation, volatility, or markets as hostile agents (“attacking,” “bombarding,” “wounding”) should be accompanied by clear factual context to prevent misattribution of blame.
- **Recognize cultural differences in metaphor use.** Journalists should be sensitive to how metaphors resonate differently across national and cultural contexts, particularly in cross-border reporting.

4. MANAGING AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT RESPONSIBLY

Managing emotions in media coverage is a responsible task. Based on “Media Emotionscape: Fear Narratives and the Romanian Elections in Times of War” by **Minodora Sălcudean**, we revisit some golden rules of harmonizing the substance of conflict coverage with generating moral and emotional reactions to it. Journalists should remember to:

- constantly **assess the relevance** of information to the public interest. Responsible journalism involves selecting topics and angles of approach according to real public interest, not their potential to generate panic;
- **address fear-inducing narratives** to clarify them, not to amplify them. Alarmist or anxiety-inducing narratives may be included in the news cycle only for the purpose of being explained, contextualized and, where appropriate, refuted on the basis of available evidence;
- use **headlines that reduce emotional tension**. Headlines about armed conflicts should contribute to clarity and understanding, avoiding ambiguous rhetoric, interrogative headlines, or formulations designed to collect clicks;
- **avoid speculation** in the absence of verifiable facts. Journalists should refrain from speculative formulations when there is no clear evidence or multiple confirmations, especially in contexts of armed conflict;
- adopt **accessible and neutral language**. Using clear and moderate language facilitates the dissemination of accurate information while war metaphors and alarmist expressions generate unnecessary fear and lower trust in media;
- avoid using **alarmist labels** and expressions to signal urgency. Terms such as “bomb” or “nuclear” can induce panic and should be avoided in the absence of solid context;
- supplement news with **data-driven analysis and expert insights**. Media organizations should support the short news cycle with in-depth feature articles, and expert interviews, providing perspectives based on factual evidence and scientific knowledge.

EDITORS SHOULD BE PROACTIVE IN VERIFYING COUNTERING UNSUBSTANTIATED NARRATIVES. WHILE SOCIAL MEDIA IS A SPACE THAT GENERATES AND AMPLIFIES EMOTION, PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM HAS A ROLE TO PLAY IN PRIORITIZING INFORMATION AND DIMINISHING THE VOLUME OF BIASED NARRATIVES.



There are some recommendations on how to attract audience attention to important issues of public concern based on “A Threat at Your Doorstep: The Media Coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian War” by **Przemysław Wilk** and **Corina Selejan** (*International Review of Pragmatics*).

Language is a powerful tool of representing reality of war of conflict, but readers should not be overwhelmed or fatigued by linguistic formulae. It is important to use structure and style to proportionally represent the threat or to engage public opinion, for example:

- to attract more readerships attention of conflict coverage, use proximization strategies, which construe a conflict as **closer** (less distant, even if happening in a geographically distant locations) and thus more **relevant and potentially impactful**;
- **spatial and temporal** proximization seem to resonate well with readership closer to the conflict zone; for more distant audiences, **axiological** proximization seems to be well-suited;
- to realize spatial proximization, represent the readers (us) as the center, **build sense of community** and shared predicament with the use of pronouns (e.g., our) and establish spatial context (e.g., *territory, country* etc.); use a range of naming strategies to designate the entities outside (e.g., them, invaders, etc.);
- to realize temporal proximization, use a range of time indicators that locate the action (e.g., now, soon etc.), **project immediacy** of the conflict, or use well-known historical analogies to draw a comparison between the current and a previous conflict;
- to realize axiological proximization, **evoke values** dear to your audience (e.g., liberty, peace, integrity) and show in what ways they are jeopardized by the conflict.

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Which headline styles and rhetorical devices to use to introduce conflict and war coverage to the public? There are some recommendations from two experts on the topic: **Isabela-Anda Dragomir** and **Valerica Sporiş** in their “Rhetoric of Headlines in Romanian and English Language Media Covering the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict. Insights for Journalism Literacy” (*Knowledge-based organization*), and “The Headlines in Romanian and English Language Media Covering the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict. A Comparative Stylistic Analysis” (submitted to *Defence & Strategy*).

- Carefully weigh the use of sensational elements in news about war or armed conflict. **Excessive dramatization** can generate “strong emotional reactions at a collective level,” amplifying fear, anxiety, or polarization, and may hinder the public’s ability to process information critically.
- **Emphasizing certain aspects of an event while omitting others** – whether intentionally or unintentionally – can significantly affect how messages are understood. A comprehensive approach is essential to avoid distortion or misinterpretation.

- Headlines must **accurately reflect the content** of the news to avoid undermining credibility and contributing to misinformation, even when the body of the article is accurate.
- **Use short, precise titles** that reflect the substance of the news to accurately shape readers' expectations and perceptions before engagement with the full article and avoid exaggeration or implicit bias.
- Consider carefully whether to use **modal verbs**, as these can suggest possibility, uncertainty or recommendation and influence public interpretation of events, especially in sensitive contexts of war or crises.
- **Conditional-optative constructions** can convey speculation, attitude or implied judgments, so their use should be deliberate and contextually or factually justified.
- Prioritize **unambiguous syntactic structures** that ensure objectivity and avoid phrasing that could lead to multiple interpretations or misrepresentation of facts.
- **Adjectives and adverbs** – especially those expressing reinforcement or exception – should be chosen with caution. Beyond describing facts, they may introduce evaluation or subjectivity and should be avoided in strictly informational reporting.

**BROAD, UNSUBSTANTIATED CLAIMS AND OVERGENERALIZATION IN REFERRING
TO SOCIAL GROUPS OR NATIONAL COMMUNITIES CAN DISTORT REALITY
AND REINFORCE STEREOTYPES.**



CORECON research also explains how audiences are engaged through storytelling and how journalistic narratives may reinforce or amend the reception of conflict. Based on **Monica Borș's** "Marginal Narratives in Romanian Media's Coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict" (a chapter published in a collection *Mediated Discourses of Conflict*), here are some useful guidelines:

- Avoid using **simplistic narrative templates** with a reduced number and recurrence of certain characters and narrative functions as relying on schemes may obscure complex realities.
- Remember that in refugee stories the use of such **positive topoi** as solidarity, integration, autonomy should be **balanced** by mentions of e.g., integration difficulties, unequal access to resources, the limits of systemic realities, the persistence of trauma, etc.
- Use with caution formulations that rely on intensifying metaphors (e.g., "wiping off the map"), intensified lexicon ("dramatic increase," "searches exploded"), and, in general, **narrative dramatization strategies that may induce panic.**

- Be mindful of how **solidarity built by marginal narratives can be distorted** into media spectacle, or used as a branding tool.
- Use free indirect discourse with caution. The juxtaposition of social actors' voices with that of the reporter may reduce the **critical distance**.

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5. ETHICS OF MAKING PUBLIC POLITICAL STATEMENTS ON CONFLICT

Beyond reporting, public figures should be able to express a strong commitment against unjust war and support the oppressed, which has been analyzed in "From Fact to Opinion and Back Again: A Case Study of Marcin Ogdowski's Facebook War Reporting" by **Przemysław Wilk** (a chapter published in a collection *Mediated Discourses of Conflict*).

Based on a close analysis of a blogger and reporter Marcin Ogdowski's texts, there are the following recommendations:

- use (de)legitimization strategies to **express your stance** towards the sides of a conflict;
- use the strategy of **authorization** (e.g., reference experts and professionals, etc.) to establish strong credentials and add merit and expertise to your argument;
- use the strategy of **rationalization** (e.g., provide statistics and analyses, reference official reports, etc.) to amplify the objectivity of your coverage;
- use the strategies of **moral evaluation** (e.g., recall morality, social norms and, etc. ethics) to underscore the ethical and human cost a conflict;
- use the strategy of **hypothetical futures** (i.e., project possible future scenarios or draw analogies to previous conflicts) to show potential impact of the conflict on your audience;
- use the strategy of **emotional appeal** (i.e., add emotions to your coverage) to increase your audience's engagement with the coverage.

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There are also some insights as to how political actors could use language to build support and solidarity, based on "Constructing Solidarity in Discourse: A Pragma-linguistic Analysis of Selected Speeches by President Zelensky Addressed to International Community" by **Przemysław Wilk** and **Katarzyna Molek-Kozakowska** (*Przegląd Wschodnioeuropejski*).

- to garner support in times of crisis use rhetoric to create a **symbolic common space of experience** and to foster a sense of togetherness and common purpose (rather than vilification only);

- to build solidarity make use of **personal pronouns** (i.e., the inclusive we/our as opposed to them) to create a sense of collective identity;
- make use of **negative and distancing strategies** (i.e., construct a conflict as imminent and spatially close to your audience) or **positive proximization strategies** (i.e., project common values onto your audience as a clash against hostile values of the enemy).



What if the public statements are channeled to collecting political capital based on resentment and fear? For example, regarding the debate whether Polish people should support Ukrainians in their fight against Russia, **Katarzyna Molek-Kozakowska** and Jan Paszczyński point to various manipulations employed there in their study on “Rhetorical and Linguistic Devices in the Argumentation against Supporting Ukraine in the Radicalized Polish Media Sphere” (*Res Rhetorica*). Through argumentative analysis and a review of rhetorical and linguistic devices, the study spotlights how:

- claims against helping refugees, migrants or generally the country that was invaded are often based **on dichotomous or false assumptions** that helping “them” diminishes “us” and is not in “our” interest, or that “we” cannot help unless “our citizens’ needs” are met first;
- invoking visions of **national purity, past grievances** against of the country that needs assistance and **negative stereotypes** of migrants and refugees and “invaders” or “burden,” rather than integrated and contributing citizens, breeds resentment;
- **exaggerated claims** that criticize or even call for rebellion against a “tyrannical” government that provides assistance by “irrationally” spending “our tax money” foster a sense of injustice.

ENCOUNTERING CERTAIN FALLACIOUS ARGUMENTS ONLINE WHEN SCROLLING TWEETS OR VIEWING VIDEOS RECREATIONALLY MAY NOT BE CONDUCIVE TO APPLYING RIGOROUS RHETORICAL SCRUTINY AND CRITICAL THINKING, AND, AS A RESULT, MAY LEAD TO DISTORTION AND MANIPULATION.



6. RESPONSIBLE USE OF VISUAL RHETORIC AND AI TECHNOLOGIES

How conflict coverage is supplanted with images is likely to have an influence on its public perception. There are some recommendations based on “Visual News Values: Mapping the Construction of Newsworthiness and Ideology in Romanian Media Imagery” (a chapter published in a collection *Mediated Discourses of Conflict*) by **Denisa-Maria Bâlc**:

- avoid using images that foreground **emotional expressions or traumatic symbolism** solely to attract attention, because visual material should reflect events objectively rather than dramatize their human consequences;
- use **historical comparisons** in visuals with caution. Comparisons should not be employed to evoke fear or to associate current events with past atrocities embedded in collective memory, but should reflect the specificity of the present moment;
- ensure that negative elements depicted in images (symbols, emotions, people, destruction) **correspond to real and verifiable situations**, and avoid collages that combine fabricated or unrelated elements with authentic images to create shock effects;
- ensure that **photographs reflect realities** on the ground by focusing on central and contextually relevant elements; avoid emphasizing secondary, marginal, or visually intriguing details in ways that make them appear representative or emblematic of broader trends;
- apply **photographic techniques** (such as framing, angles, foregrounding or backgrounding, and distance) responsibly, using them for clarity and accuracy rather than to guide interpretation or draw undue attention to specific aspects of the scene.

IMAGES SHOULD AIM TO REPRESENT EVENTS ACCURATELY RATHER THAN MANIPULATE PUBLIC PERCEPTION. EXAGGERATED VISUAL INTENSIFICATION OR PHOTOGRAPHIC MONTAGES IN NEWS IMAGES MAY AMPLIFY EMOTIONAL IMPACT BEYOND WHAT IS WARRANTED BY THE CONTENT.

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While AI developers focus on commercial uses of chatbots, they are backgrounding the public service function that these tools could potentially be used for. In CORECON we found that pro-Russian and pro-Ukrainian users, or pacifists and militarists, or politicized or depoliticized individuals would get different AI-generated answers to questions of war complicity, motivations or optimized conflict solutions, as based on “Challenges to Epistemic Rights in the Era of AI: (Re)mediation(s) of Russian-Ukrainian War” by **Katarzyna Molek-Kozakowska** (a chapter in *A Worrying Present and an Uncertain Future. Challenges for Security in Central and Eastern Europe Region*).

- **Chatbot outputs are biased:** ChatGPT is likely to phrase contentious information related to political and military conflicts to match users' views and preferences rather than factual knowledge.
- **Chatbot outputs are customized and personalized:** ChatGPT does not present the same information to every user, but bases on previous queries and inputs to modify facts and detect opinions, which may lead to audience fragmentation and lack of consensus about basic facts.
- **Chatbot outputs naturalize informational bubbles:** ChatGPT is likely to perpetuate or extrapolate the ideological leanings signaled by users.



7. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CRITICAL MEDIA LITERACY

Tabloid outlets are very popular with audiences, but they may misrepresent the nature of reality of an international conflict. Here are some issues to be wary of when drawing on tabloids to understand the war in Ukraine, based on "Social Actors and Storylines in the Coverage of Russian-Ukrainian War in English and Polish Language Tabloids" by **Katarzyna Molek-Kozakowska** (*Journalism Studies*).

- Tabloids tend to **simplify complex issues of war**, particularly the agency of key war-related social actors and the narratives around them. This simplistic version may let media users accept a given representation of war or political conflict.
- As tabloid journalism becomes a form of **infotainment**, there are possible negative consequences for democratic deliberation because of audience inattentiveness and/or shifting sentiment (fear, anger, outrage).
- Due to the **clipped version of tabloid headlines** (clickbait with fear appeals), war-related headlines pressure the audience to follow the article to find out what exactly was done or meant, as well as what the further negative consequences of that might be.
- Tabloid storylines **attribute causal relations** to social participants, objects, actions and circumstances, often with negativity and sensationalizing; they use stereotypes for national identification (study shows references to war antagonists outnumbering other social actors).
- The tabloid **personalization of conflict** is evident particularly at the level of the headlines, where the warring leaders—Putin and Zelensky—are blamed or praised, respectively: Putin primarily for attacking Ukraine and (to a lesser degree) Zelensky defending it, by what he says to international leaders and Ukrainians.

- Polarization (binary oppositions) superimposed on social actors is rarely neutral, either in terms of emotionality or moral evaluation. **Social actors are usually marked with opposite polarity** (if one is a hero, the other must be a villain).

WHILE ENABLING A MORAL CONNECTION WITH VARIOUS DIMENSIONS OF WAR, THE TABLOIDS ENTRENCH SOCIAL ACTOR HIERARCHIES AND DIVISIONS THAT ARE HARD TO SHED IN THE CONTEXT OF ANY FUTURE ATTEMPTS AT POST-WAR RECONCILIATION, WHICH LEADS TO SOCIETAL DIVISIONISM.

...

Post-truth and fake news have been recently invading the media sphere. Based on “Military Conflicts in the Post-Truth Era: An Analysis of the Russian-Ukrainian War in a Romanian Newspaper” (a chapter published in a collection *Mediated Discourses of Conflict*) by **Iulia-Maria Ticărașu**, journalists and social media users of political content should make certain precautions.

- Avoid reproducing politicians’ post-truth **emotional strategies** in conflict reporting: recognize political rhetoric that replaces facts with emotional appeal, fear, or nationalist sentiment, to prevent uncritical mediation of post-truth related to war coverage.
- Build critical competence in detecting **epistemic manipulation**, e.g., how to identify epistemic markers of uncertainty or false certainty, and strategic ambiguity in political discourse, in order to assess factual reliability.
- Pay close attention to **post-truth dynamics and fabricated content**, especially in online and social media environments, where the algorithmic and influencer involvement in politics may powerfully disturb public opinion.
- Critically interrogate and **contextualize** mediated political discourses, as they often amplify narratives based on assumptions and leave little or no room for interpretation.

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When mainstream media lose public trust, incorporating the insights of alternative media may be worthwhile, as they may ensure a more nuanced view of conflicts. The characteristics of alternative media, particularly **YouTube channels** are explored in “How Amateur War Tourist Accounts Position Themselves against Mainstream Media Representations of the Russian-Ukrainian War” (a chapter published in a collection *Mediated Discourses of Conflict*) by **Corina Selejan**, who observes that:

- alternative media prioritize **eyewitness accounts and personal stories** over factual journalistic representations, and thereby mitigate news fatigue and are often perceived as being more trustworthy;

- alternative media **focus on the ordinary** rather than the extraordinary (a core of journalistic newsworthiness) and are thereby more relatable to audiences;
- alternative media often **challenge official political and ideological stances** in representing the two parties of the conflict and raise questions related to the professionalism, accuracy and objectivity of reporting of mainstream media;
- alternative media use **stylistic deviations** from journalistic diction and are colloquial, poetic, or affective and thereby contrast with the conventions audiences come to associate with news language;
- alternative media involve **explicit self-reflexivity**, primarily regarding the motivations for reporting, and foreground novelty, originality, or exclusivity of content, thereby **stimulating audiences towards using their own critical thinking** about what they hear or see;
- alternative media often contain elements of overt advocacy, ranging from raising awareness of the war to asking for donations



8. EDUCATING THE YOUTH

As evidenced above, in CORECON we note **the importance to keep educating the public about how to avoid being exposed to disinformation about the war and conflict and how to build resilience and critical thinking**. For example, **Ecaterina Iliș** has worked with Romanian youth and has written on this topic extensively in her report “Adolescents’ Perception of the War in Ukraine on Social Media: A Romanian Experiment.” She has the following recommendations for educators and media literacy practitioners

- Many students already have a **basic sense of what sounds believable** and what does not, even when news appears in their social media feeds. Teaching works best when it builds on this starting point, instead of treating adolescents as completely defenseless or easily manipulated.
- Emotions matter a lot in how students react to online news. Posts that create fear or anger tend to push students to share or comment quickly, often before thinking things through. Helping **students notice their emotional reactions** and pause before responding is an important part of media education.
- **Small pauses can make a real difference**. Simply asking students to stop and think, “How likely is this to be true?” before reacting or sharing can reduce the impact of false information without making them overly skeptical. This kind of pause is easy to include in everyday classroom activities.

- Checking information should feel doable, not overwhelming. Teaching students to quickly open another source, see what else is being said, and then return to the original post works better than teaching long or complex checking rules.
- Finally, students need to understand that reacting to content is not the same as believing it. They may engage with posts because they are emotional, dramatic, or socially rewarding. Talking openly about **when it is better not to share or comment helps students develop more responsible online habits.**



CORECON inspired spinoff projects, such as DisInfoResist that aimed to empower young people to consume conflict-related news in a competent manner, by being able to successfully spot and identify fake news about the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and develop a capacity of remaining alert to possible war-related manipulations. In her article “Enhancing Resilience Against War-Related Disinformation: Insights from Diagnostic Studies and Interventions at Polish Schools” (*Transilvania*), **Katarzyna Molek-Kozakowska** has the following recommendations for those who would like to replicate or adapt such intervention in their own location:

- Start with **diagnostic actions** to map thoroughly your target teenagers’ media usage patterns regarding war-related content, such as retention of salient war imagery and information, awareness of journalistic practices in conflict coverage, techniques of coping with unverified information, and self-monitoring of emotions and attitudes developed as a result of exposure to conflict coverage.
- Use the method of **written oral history** and co-create or check your diagnostic tools with school teachers.
- Code data received during the diagnosis to systematize insights that could be transferred into **scenarios for specific interventions.**
- Develop targeted workshops, games, multimodal presentations and test them at a partner school.
- Acknowledge the **variety of media use patterns** among students, with some interested in politics and the media, but others oblivious to many key mechanisms.
- Given the unequal level of teenagers’ media literacy, use varied interventions to bring language awareness, analytic skills, and knowledge of media practices.
- Instruct the teenagers how they can be responsible for resisting the spreading of disinformation.



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