



Monitoring of the daily printed newspapers of the Western Balkans for the coverage of the events in the Russia-Ukraine war with special emphasis on their cover page

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ABSTRACT

The coverage of the war in Ukraine has become an important aspect in understanding global politics and the new world order. Given the heightened interest in coverage among regions directly affected by this war, this paper offers a regional overview of events in the Russia-Ukraine war over a four-month period. The paper examines daily printed newspapers in the Western Balkans, providing a comprehensive analysis of the geographic landscape. The data was collected from equivalent functional media through a strict and systematic selection of news related to the war in Ukraine. Media sources were selected using the snowball sampling method, beginning with Albanian newspapers and expanding to include all the Western Balkans countries. The study analyzed cover page headlines from two daily print newspapers in five Western Balkans countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia. In these newspapers, the headlines were analyzed in terms of the space they occupied, their objectivity, subjectivity, and bias toward one of the parties in war. The main findings of this paper reveal that a significant number of news headlines are presented in a sensational manner. In terms of objectivity and subjectivity, five newspapers published objective headlines while the other five published subjective ones. However, the percentage of objectivity and subjectivity varies from country to country and from newspaper to newspaper. As for bias, the majority of newspapers lean towards Ukraine. Our findings are comparable and can be proven at any time.

Keywords: cover pages, headlines, daily print newspaper, information, Russia-Ukraine war, Western Balkans

INTRODUCTION

In the Western Balkans, various ethnic groups and cultures coexist in countries such as Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia. Although these countries are diverse, they share a common experience of being under one-party government for more than 50 years. Despite their aspirations to join the European Union, it appears that they have yet to meet all the required standards, including freedom of information. Following the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the late 1980s and the collapse of the communist system in Albania, opportunities arose for the Europeanization of these countries and their citizens, and information began to flow more freely. Consequently, numerous daily newspapers were established, with 18 newspapers in Albania, eight in Bosnia and Herzegovina, four in Montenegro, six in North Macedonia, and 27 printed daily newspapers in Serbia. Given the history of these countries being under the pressure of the communist party for half a century and the global trend emphasizing the significance of information, readers rightly demand fair and impartial reporting.

Journalism plays a crucial role during wars by reporting firsthand experiences of conflicts to distant audiences. However, the journalism of the Western Balkans has a unique history, emerging from a communist

past. The communist past significantly influenced the current media model and the development of journalism in the region (Andresen et al., 2017) The region has undergone significant changes in recent history and the media has transformed along with the political system. However, the media in the region still faces challenges in finding a stable path for development. By examining the headlines on the cover pages of newspapers, we direct our focus on information about the Russia-Ukraine war. Based on the simple definition given by Jespersen (2013) for headlines, when he says: "Headlines ... are sentences, they move, so to speak, at the limits of ordinary grammar" and given that freedom of expression and freedom of the press are fundamental rights that support the free flow of ideas, journalists and everyone else have the right to access fair and objective information. Based on an article by Pressman (2018), which said journalistic objectivity evolved the way it did for a reason, browsing newspapers in the Western Balkans we see that they do not emphasize their objectivity enough. They do not provide enough information and there is misinformation (Benegal & Motta, 2022). Newspapers worldwide have a responsibility to adhere to the information laws of their respective countries, as well as to serve the public and reflect public opinion. Regarding to this, Dor (2003) says that "some headlines highlight a single detail extracted out of the story, and others contain a quotation, which the editor decided should be promoted to the foreground ... that this theoretical move becomes possible once we couch the functional analysis of headlines within the framework of Wilson and Sperber and Wilson's (1986) theory of relevance" that is a cognitive psychological theory. In particular, it treats utterance interpretation as a cognitive process (Wilson & Sperber, 2004). In this way they are devoting themselves to the truth, as the first principle of journalism and accuracy of news. Whereas audiences tend to perceive newspapers as authoritative sources of news and accept that many of them have political/philosophical leanings, which can sometimes seem to test impartiality. Also based on the fact that in the countries of the Western Balkans live people of different nations, ethnicities, religions, cultures and civilizations, information is provided on the basis of the language of the nations or ethnicities living in these countries. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia, the predominant ethnic group and religion are Orthodox and Serbian, respectively, which is reflected in the predominance of Serbian-language information. In North Macedonia, Macedonians and Albanians are the predominant ethnic groups, with Macedonians being primarily Orthodox and Albanians being primarily Muslim. In Albania, the Albanian population is primarily divided into three religions: Islam, Orthodoxy, and Catholicism. Therefore, this study focuses on the objectivity, subjectivity, and bias of headlines in daily newspapers from states with ethnic and religious diversity, regarding the events in Ukraine. We used the snowball method to collect materials and analyzed them, as described in the methodology section. The titles were gathered from February 24, 2022, to the end of June of the same year. In July, the titles were categorized. In August and September, they were reviewed and analyzed. Finally, in November and December, the paper was compiled. In the literature review section, various authors have been cited and paraphrased to supplement the theoretical framework, guide the approach, and provide meaning to the paper. The results section presents the relevant data in the appropriate tables, and the examples of the published news articles are analyzed. The aim of this study was to demonstrate the objectivity and subjectivity of news coverage of the war, as well as the positioning and impartiality of the newspapers in question. Through our research questions, 'What space was devoted to the war between Russia and Ukraine on the cover pages of newspapers?' and 'Were the headlines of the articles informative and objective or did they express bias towards any party involved in this war?', we found that the vast majority of headlines in these daily newspapers were informative and objective, with a few exceptions that were sensational, based or positioned from one side. These exceptions are presented in the tables in the result section and analyzed and discussed in the relevant sections. In the last section, some general conclusions for editorial policy, historical, emotional, national or religious opinions between Russia-Ukraine war, given by the Western Balkans media are outlined.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concepts War Journalism and Peace Journalism were first introduced by Galtung (1986). He focused on the role of violence and propaganda in shaping public perceptions of conflict, highlighting the perspectives promoted by the elite and establishment, and reducing the reality construction of the conflict in terms of its victory and defeat orientation (Galtung & Ruge, 1965). In a later article he concludes: "of course, nobody would assume that the media are the causes of war and peace ... Consequently, they have it in their power to

contribute shaping images, and however skeptical people may be of media, they are generally more influenced by them than they themselves would care to admit" (Galtung, 1986). Later studies such as Lee and Maslog (2005) and Maslog et al. (2007) have used framing analysis to study conflicts. Additionally, the concept "spreading enlightenment and democracy", has been used by (Loyn, 2021) always taking into consideration for various attacks: "on government buildings across the center of the city, parliament, the 400-bed hospital, and a siege at the American University" from Taliban in Kabul over the years 2016-2018. For the past 40 years, UNESCO's international program for the development of communication (IPDC) has focused on targeting the most pressing issues concerning communication development around the world (UNESCO, 2022). It helps to keep journalists safe, supports the development of media in countries, where it is most needed and promotes freedom of expression and public access to information (UNESCO, 2022). According to Bartholomé et al. (2018), "two aspects of interventionism are of importance for conflict framing. firstly, interventionism determines the degree to which journalists are visible in a news item, secondly, journalists can perform their watchdog role and evaluate or attack politicians themselves." But one should not underestimate the articles of newspapers that inform about any conflict away from their country, although according to the findings of Galtung and Ruge's (1965) classic study in which they demonstrated that 'news' is traditionally focused upon problems, rather than solutions. It is of general interest for readers to be informed about the latest happenings in the world, especially where there is a war. Information depends on the objectivity of newspaper articles and headlines. The influence of such coverage on the conflict itself cannot be underestimated because we are dealing with a coverage or information from a place where fighting is taking place (Galtung, 1998). It is important how the audience's informed and how the events unfold. Therefore, it is also important how the states of the Western Balkans inform about the Russia-Ukraine war. According to Abunales (2016), "objective reporting of the region is possible" or if we look through articles in the "of conflict framing we can see the level in which the journalistic voice is visible in conflict frames" (Guus, 2017).

In a globalized world, the importance and relevance of journalism during war (Galtung, 2006) and conflict has not changed, but demand objective and verifiable information about the nature of the conflict. "The news coverage of conflict, including the reporting about war, is grounded in the notion of conflict as a news value." The headlines are "the causa finalist Aristotle's" or image of what the editor want to communicate (Galtung & Fischer, 2013). According to Knightley (2000), war journalism is characterized by an identification with one side or with the home side of the war, whereas Zelizer (2017) sees the enthusiasts and the naysayers. Front-pages, headlines, and objectivity (Isani, 2011) of published news are very important in media. Headlines attract attention (Dor, 2003) while objectivity (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007) increases credibility (Amerikan Press, 2022). Objectivity by Rogers (2019) means that when covering hard news, reporters do not convey their own feelings, biases, or prejudices in their stories. They do this by writing stories using neutral language and by avoiding characterizing people or institutions either positively or negatively" (Rogers, 2019). So, headlines are important for a newspaper article. They are selected by newspaper editors or people designated for their writing alone (Dor, 2003). There are cases when they tried to use alliteration in editorial headlines (White, 2011) and "testimonial, using the words of a famous, or influential person" (Bonyadi & Samuel, 2013). In the sales and marketing context, the studies of Chetioui et al. (2020), applied, among others, attractiveness (Wiedmann & von Mettenheim, 2021) as a component of source credibility (AlFarraj et al., 2021) in order to examine how audience (follower) purchase intention is influenced by influencer credibility dimensions. In this case, the cover pages of newspapers, and especially the headlines, are the ones that raise the attractiveness and influence for buying newspapers. Headlines summarize news stories, direct reader's attention to certain facts over others, and help news users decide on which stories to read (Bonyadi & Samuel, 2013). The right headline can help people learn from the news (Isani, 2011). Zelizer (2017) on the other hand doubts the democratization of the media. Therefore, he asks: "Does media reform promote democratization or is the existence of healthy and independent media merely a consequence or sign of a society that is already on the way toward greater democratic practice?" (Zelizer, 2017). Popper (2003) contradicts the law of physics that says, "under similar conditions similar things happens", because, according to him, such a law does not apply in social sciences. Galtung and Fischer (2013) supports this Popper's (2003) statement, by arguing "because different kind of democracies develop different kind of journalisms, and they in turn produce different kinds of links between the two institutions." But he still claims that "the result is a causal chain, often referred to as a 'mechanism', from physical sciences and their application in engineering, to understand 'how it works'.

Taking into the account the conclusion that “according to the structure of the newspaper headlines there are some differences” (Bunyarat, 2020) the way journalists and media reflect in their headlines differs from others and from online media (Sacco, 2016). Based on the simple definition given by Jespersen (2013) for headlines, when he says: “Headlines ... are sentences, they move, so to speak, at the limits of ordinary grammar” and when it is said that freedom of expression and freedom of the press are fundamental rights and the free flow of ideas, then it can be said that everyone, especially journalists, has the right to fair and objective information. A research on the informative and pragmatic function of headlines was conducted by Develotte and Rechniewski (2001), and they express that it is not completely clear which function is informative and which is pragmatic.

Through this, it becomes clear that “connections than news outlets traditionally have provided” (Wall & El Zahed, 2015). It should be noted here that, “while the fundamental contours of these challenges are pertinent to war journalism, their subtler form varies along particular times and places” (Vandevoordt, 2017). Meanwhile, Tumber (2006) has researched the dangers encountered by foreign correspondents, which, although not as severe as those faced by local journalists, are still significant. Tumber’s (2006) research focuses on “witnessing” in the changed circumstances of war and how it affects journalists and journalism” (Anderson, 2015; Tumber, 2006). However, the framework of peace journalism has also been criticized for its simplistic epistemological assumptions, gross dualism, advocacy orientation, normative grounding, and insufficient attention to the various constraints that shape the reality of news production (Hanitzsch, 2007; Loyn, 2007; Wolfsfeld, 2004). Indeed, when discussing the coverage of the Western Balkans newspapers regarding the Russia-Ukraine war, it is about war journalism, as conceptualized by Galtung (2006), which distinguishes between two distinct modes of conflict reporting: war/violence journalism and peace journalism. War/violence journalism treats conflict as a zero-sum game and is propaganda-oriented, elite oriented, and victory oriented. However, this study focuses on the headlines in the Western Balkans newspapers that report on the conflict from a distance, and for their audience that is far from the war.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, the headlines of the Western Balkans newspapers that covered war between Russia and Ukraine were examined. Daily newspapers printed in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia were analyzed. The material for analysis was obtained from two sources: archives and the internet. Two Albanian newspapers were obtained from the Durres City Archive, the Montenegrin newspaper “Dan” from the Cetinje Archive, and the Macedonian newspaper “Koha” from the archive of this newspaper in Skopje. Meanwhile, two Serbian newspapers, two from Bosnia and Herzegovina, one from Montenegro, and one from North Macedonia were obtained through their websites. The analyzed material covers a four-month period, from March 2022 to June of the same year. Samples were selected two days a week, respectively, the newspaper published on Monday and the newspaper published on Friday. This means that the headlines of the thirty-three numbers of the newspapers of the five Western Balkans states were monitored, which were a total of 135 headlines. The analysis focused on the space given to the event and the positioning of the headlines. The selection of newspapers was based on their editorial policy agenda and their reliability in the countries, where they are published. The newspapers selected were “Večernje Novosti” and “Danas” in Serbia, “Dnevni Avaz” and “Dnevni List” in Bosnia and Herzegovina, “Pobjeda” and “Dan” in Montenegro, “Večer” in Macedonian language and “Koha” in Albanian language in North Macedonia. The reason why we chose one daily newspaper in North Macedonia published in the Macedonian language and the other in the Albanian language is because, in North Macedonia, around 30% or about 620,000 of the population are ethnic Albanians, they are constitutive and have two daily newspapers printed in their language.

In Albania, the newspapers “Gazeta Shqiptare” and “Panorama” were selected for analysis. The research utilized a quantitative content analysis method, measuring the number of headlines dedicated to the war and comparing the newspapers among themselves. Additionally, a framing analysis was used to analyze the position and perspective of the headlines, and to compare the monitored newspapers among themselves. The grammatical structure of the sentence was not considered during the analysis of the headlines, but only the meaning or positioning of them. The criteria for determining objectivity, subjectivity, and bias relied on the wording of the headlines. Headlines that exhibited bias were considered subjective, and depending on

Table 1. Monitored newspapers of the Western Balkans

No	Media	Timeframe	Number of headlines	Orientation of newspaper-web page (supporting government-opposition or any other information)
1	Večernje Novosti	2 Mart-30 June	16	Supporting government
2	Danas	2 Mart-30 June	16	Opposition
3	Dnevni Avaz	2 Mart-30 June	17	Supporting government
4	Dnevni List	2 Mart-30 June	9	Opposition
5	Pobjeda	2 Mart-30 June	10	Supporting government
6	Dan	2 Mart-30 June	6	Opposition
7	Vecer	2 Mart-30 June	10	Supporting government
8	Koha	2 Mart-30 June	27	Opposition
9	Gazeta Shqiptare	2 Mart-30 June	17	Supporting government
10	Panorama	2 Mart-30 June	7	Opposition
Total			135	

which side they supported, were seen as taking a particular position. The findings are interesting and exceeded our expectations and can be verified at any time. However, our study is not without limitations. First, complexity is an inherent feature of this classification framework. Second, a quantitative approach cannot fully account for several important components of the presentation of conflict on the front pages of the Western Balkans newspapers, especially when those states have historical ties to each other. Third, despite the relatively broad parameters of the study, our empirical investigation is limited by its focus on the print newspapers of five Western Balkans countries on two days of the week, Monday and Friday, for a specific period of four months of the champion. Consequently, the space and headlines we have identified may not match reality, because on other days there may have been more space for this war. So, the exploratory technique inevitably leads to solutions that depend on the empirical material studied.

Table 1 shows the monitored newspapers of the Western Balkans.

The research questions were, as follows:

1. RQ1. What space was devoted to the war between Russia and Ukraine on the cover pages of newspapers?
2. RQ2. Were the headlines of the articles objective or did they express subjectivity bias towards any party involved in this war?

Hypothesis

The first hypothesis was that Serbian newspapers and Macedonian newspapers would provide more coverage for the Russia-Ukraine war than the newspapers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albanian newspapers in North Macedonia and in Albania and the second hypothesis is Serbian newspapers and Macedonian newspapers would provide information in a subjective manner and the positioning would be in favor of Russia. While the newspapers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, those of Montenegro, Albanian newspaper in Macedonia and newspapers published in Albania would be more objective and would be positioned towards Ukraine.

RESULTS

Based on an article by Pressman (2018), which stated that journalistic objectivity evolved the way it did for a reason, when examining newspapers in the Western Balkans, it can be observed that they do not place enough emphasis on their objectivity. In the Western Balkans, there are six countries, but in Serbia, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in Montenegro, in Macedonia, and Albania still have printed newspapers in circulation, while in Kosovo, as of 2020, there are no longer any printed newspapers. Therefore, this research will focus on the daily print newspapers of only five states that still have such newspapers. The cover page headlines of these monitored newspapers reveal their editorial policy. As Develotte and Rechniewski (2001) has stated: "it is difficult to draw a clear line between an informational headline and one, which has a pragmatic function since much depends on the context and the readership". Because it is really difficult to separate that thin line that separates these two types of headlines. Although it may seem informative on the surface, it turns out to be pragmatic. As if although it may seem informative, it turns out to be biased-subjective.

Table 2. Number & percentage of headlines in cover of Serbian's daily print newspapers "Večernje Novosti" & "Danas"

Month	Večernje Novosti: Number of headlines	%	Danas: Number of headlines	%
Mart	5	31.0	8	50.0
April	3	19.0	3	19.0
May	5	31.0	2	12.0
June	3	19.0	3	19.0
Total	16	100.0	16	100.0

Table 3. Presentation of headlines in cover of Serbian's daily print newspapers "Večernje Novosti" & "Danas"

Presentation	Večernje Novosti: Number of headlines	%	Danas: Number of headlines	%
Objective	6	37.5	8	50.0
Subjective	10	62.5	8	50.0

Table 4. Positioning of headlines in cover of Serbian's daily print newspapers "Večernje Novosti" & "Danas"

Positioning	Večernje Novosti: Number of headlines	%	Danas: Number of headlines	%
Pro-Russian	10	100.0	3	37.5
Pro-Ukrainian	0	0.0	5	62.5

Based on the characteristics that justify the attention of the headlines, some headlines on the cover page of the daily Western Balkans newspaper are less informative and more subjective. This depends on the relations those countries have with the two countries at war. The way newspapers present events of the war, their coverage and its emphasis will be different depending on relations of country with the countries at war.

As seen from **Table 2**, "Večernje Novosti", one of the oldest newspapers in Serbia, has paid a lot of attention to Russia's war with Ukraine. Of the 33 numbers monitored, it has placed 16 headlines on its cover. The other newspaper "Danas" has put the same number of headlines or 50% of its cover space. But the number changes from month to month in each of them. While "Danas" had eight headlines in March on its cover or 50%. "Večernje Novosti" had five headlines or 31%. While in May, "Večernje Novosti" had five headlines or 31% of cover space, "Danas" only two headlines or 12%. In April and June both newspapers have paid equal attention to the information from this war, placing three headlines on its cover or 19%. It should be noted that "Večernje Novosti" during the months of March and May has featured five headlines or 31 on its front page, while in the months of April and June three headlines or 19%. While "Danas" has published eight headlines in March, three in April, two in May and three in June or 50% in Mart, 19% in April, 12% in May, and 19% in June.

As can be seen from **Table 3**, in the two Serbian printed daily newspapers, cover page headlines were published for four months, March, April, May, and June, 33 issues of both newspapers were monitored, both "Večernje Novosti" and "Danas" interest in placing headlines on their cover pages is fading. From 31% that was at "Večernje Novosti" in March, it drops to 19% in June. Accordingly, from the 50% that was at "Danas" in March, it fell to 19% in June.

Based on the structure, context, presentation, and positioning of the headlines as well as their function, the definition given by Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007) that the headlines in a journalistic article should be short, clear, accurate and objective, (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007) and based on Dor's (2003) definition of their function", "Večernje Novosti" daily printed newspaper published in Belgrade, from 16 headlines it has published on its website within the thirty three numbers monitored, 37.5% of them are objective, 62.5% are subjective, even the "Danas" newspaper, which is also published in Belgrade, has devoted a lot of space to information about this conflict. Compared to "Večernje Novosti", this newspaper has other headlines that are more objective. This newspaper published eight objective headlines or 50% and eight headlines or 50% subjective. In fact, "Danas" informs the public more accurately than any other newspaper in Belgrade. This newspaper has published 50% pro-Ukrainian headlines and 50% of them are pro-Russian.

As seen from **Table 4**, "Večernje Novosti" daily printed newspaper published in Belgrade, from 16 headlines it has published on its website within 33 numbers monitored, 100% of them are pro-Russian and zero headlines are pro-Ukrainian. "Danas" informs the public more accurately than any other newspaper in

Table 5. Number & percentage of headlines in cover of Bosnian and Herzegovina's daily print newspapers "Dnevni Avaz" & "Dnevni List"

Month	Dnevni Avaz: Number of headlines	%	Dnevni List: Number of headlines	%
Mart	10	58.0	4	45.0
April	3	18.0	3	33.0
May	3	18.0	1	11.0
June	1	6.0	1	11.0
Total	17	100.0	9	100.0

Table 6. Presentation of headlines in cover of Bosnian and Herzegovina's daily print newspapers "Dnevni Avaz" & "Dnevni List"

Presentation	Dnevni Avaz: Number of headlines	%	Dnevni List: Number of headlines	%
Objective	9	53.0	3	33.0
Subjective	8	47.0	6	67.0

Table 7. Positioning of headlines in cover of Bosnian and Herzegovina's daily print newspapers "Dnevni Avaz" & "Dnevni List"

Positioning	Dnevni Avaz: Number of headlines	%	Dnevni List: Number of headlines	%
Pro-Russian	0	0.0	2	33.0
Pro-Ukrainian	8	100.0	4	67.0

Belgrade. But about this war, this newspaper has published three headlines or 37.5% pro-Russian and five headlines or 62.5% pro-Ukrainian

As seen from **Table 5**, the two monitored newspapers from Bosnia and Herzegovina, "Dnevni Avaz" and "Dnevni List" also have divergences in the presentation of headlines on their cover as well as in the total number of headlines. "Dnevni Avaz" has placed seventeen headlines while "Dnevni List" nine headlines. Only in March "Dnevni Avaz" decided more than "Dnevni List" for four months, which means that "Dnevni Avaz" paid more attention to information about this war than "Dnevni List". Looking at the headlines by month, only in March it can be seen that in "Dnevni Avaz" were seven headlines about the Russia-Ukraine war, which means 58% of its space was covered with these headlines. But in June the number of headlines drops to one, which means only about 6%. Meanwhile, the newspaper "Dnevni List" in March publishes four headlines about this war on its cover page, which means that out of the total nine headlines it publishes within these 33 monitored issues of this newspaper, or about 45% of its cover space. While in June it publishes only one headline or 11% of the cover space.

Based objective information and misinformation (Benegal & Motta, 2022), these two printed daily newspapers of Bosnia and Herzegovina in terms of the objectivity of the articles and especially the headlines, in these monitored numbers, appear as follows: "Dnevni Avaz" has 53% headlines that are objective-informative, 47% of them are subjective. Whereas in the newspaper "Dnevni List" 33% headlines are objectivity, and 67% subjective (**Table 6**).

As seen from **Table 7**, the newspaper "Dnevni Avaz" has no pro-Russian headlines, while all eight headlines, or 100%, are pro-Ukraine. The other daily newspaper "Dnevni List" has two pro-Russian headlines, or 33%, while it has four pro-Ukraine headlines, or 67%.

Based on the number of headlines dedicated to the Russia-Ukraine war, it appears that the two newspapers printed in Montenegro also covered this war. Thus, "Pobjeda" has had ten headlines for four months on certain days. While the other printed newspaper "Dan" for this event for four months has allocated space on the cover page for only six headlines. While "Pobjeda" in March had seven headlines out of the eight days that were monitored. "Dan" has had only four titles. In April, "Pobjeda" has placed only one headlines out of eight possible titles, while "Dan" has placed two headlines. In the month of May, neither of these two newspapers placed headlines on their cover pages, while in June, "Pobjeda" placed two headlines and "Dan" placed only one headline, while "Dan" placed two headlines. From this it can be concluded that "Pobjeda" out of 33 numbers monitored has ten headlines on the cover page, while "Dan" has only six headlines (**Table 8**).

Based on the research of Isani (2011) on newspaper headlines and the objectivity of their reporting, as well as an article in Amerikan Press (2022) discussing the lost meaning of 'objectivity' and as seen from **Table**

Table 8. Number & percentage of headlines in cover of Montenegro's daily print newspapers "Pobjeda" & "Dan"

Month	Pobjeda: Number of headlines	%	Dan: Number of headlines	%
Mart	7	70.0	4	67.0
April	1	10.0	2	33.0
May	0	0.0	0	0.0
June	2	20.0	0	0.0
Total	10	100.0	6	100.0

Table 9. Presentation of headlines in cover of Montenegro's daily print newspapers "Pobjeda" & "Dan"

Presentation	Pobjeda: Number of headlines	%	Dan: Number of headlines	%
Objective	7	70.0	2	33.0
Subjective	3	30.0	4	67.0

Table 10. Positioning of headlines in cover of Montenegro's daily print newspapers "Pobjeda" & "Dan"

Positioning	Pobjeda: Number of headlines	%	Dan: Number of headlines	%
Pro-Russian	1	33.0	2	50.0
Pro-Ukrainian	2	67.0	2	50.0

Table 11. Number & percentage of headlines in cover of North Macedonian's daily print newspapers "Večer" & "Koha"

Month	Večer: Number of headlines	%	Koha: Number of headlines	%
Mart	6	60.0	8	30.0
April	1	10.0	5	18.5
May	1	10.0	9	33.0
June	2	20.0	5	18.5
Total	10	100.0	27	100.0

Table 12. Presentation of headlines in cover of North Macedonian's daily print newspapers "Večer" & "Koha"

Presentation	Večer: Number of headlines	%	Koha: Number of headlines	%
Objective	7	70.0	18	67.0
Subjective	3	30.0	9	33.0

9, it can be noted that "Pobjeda" has seven or 70% impartial-objective headlines, and 3 headlines subjective, or 30%. However, the newspaper, "Dan", from the six headlines it has within these four months, seems to have divided 33% are objective and 67% subjective.

As seen from **Table 10**, the newspaper "Pobjeda" has one headline or 33% is pro-Ukrainian and two headlines, or 67% pro-Russian. While the newspaper "Dan" has 50% pro-Ukrainian and 50% pro-Russian.

Two newspapers were monitored in North Macedonia: "Večer" and "Koha", one published in Macedonian and the other in Albanian. The "Vecer" newspaper, which is published in the Macedonian language, out of the thirty-three numbers monitored, has placed only 10 headlines about the Russia-Ukraine war. While the newspaper "Koha", which is published in Albanian, during these four months has placed twenty-seven headlines on its cover page. "Večer" has shared space on its cover page for six headlines in March alone. While in April and May one each, and in June two headlines. While "Koha" has allocated space for eight headlines in March, five headlines in April, nine headlines in May and five headlines in June (**Table 11**).

Based on the definition by Rogers (2019), objectivity in journalism "means that when covering hard news, reporters do not convey their own feelings, biases or prejudices in their stories. They do this by writing stories using neutral language and by avoiding characterizing people or institutions either positively or negatively" (Rogers, 2019). "Večer" out of 10 headlines it has placed on its cover page, 70% of them are informative-impartial-objective, while there is 30% subjective. As for the newspaper "Koha" that has the most headlines on the cover page, out of the thirty-three numbers monitored, there are twenty-seven headlines. Of them, 67% are impartial-objective, and 33% subjective (**Table 12**).

As seen from **Table 13**, newspaper "Večer" are 67% headlines pro-Russian and 33% pro-Ukrainian. While newspaper "Koha" has two headlines pro-Russian or 22% and seven headlines or 78% pro-Ukrainian.

Table 13. Positioning of headlines in cover of North Macedonian's daily print newspapers "Večer" & "Koha"

Positioning	Večer: Number of headlines	%	Koha: Number of headlines	%
Pro-Russian	2	67	2	22
Pro-Ukrainian	1	33	7	78

Table 14. Number & percentage of headlines in cover of Albanian's daily print newspapers "Panorama" & "Gazeta Shqiptare"

Month	Panorama: Number of headlines	%	Gazeta Shqiptare: Number of headlines	%
Mart	5	71.0	7	41.0
April	0	0.0	4	24.0
May	2	29.0	2	11.0
June	0	0.0	4	24.0
Total	7	100.0	17	100.0

Table 15. Presentation of headlines in cover of Albanian's daily print newspapers "Panorama" & "Gazeta Shqiptare"

Presentation	Panorama: Number of headlines	%	Gazeta Shqiptare: Number of headlines	%
Objective	5	71.0	5	29.0
Subjective	2	29.0	12	71.0

Table 16. Positioning of headlines in cover of Albanian's daily print newspapers "Panorama" & "Gazeta Shqiptare"

Positioning	Panorama: Number of headlines	%	Gazeta Shqiptare: Number of headlines	%
Pro-Russian	0	0.0	2	17.0
Pro-Ukrainian	2	100.0	10	83.0

As seen from **Table 14**, even among the daily newspapers published in Albania: newspapers "Panorama" and "Gazeta Shqiptare", there is a difference in the level of interest in placing the headlines on their cover pages. While "Panorama" placed only seven headlines out of 33 days monitored, "Gazeta Shqiptare" placed seventeen headlines. "Panorama" placed five headlines in March and two in May but did not place any headlines on its cover page in April and June. On the other hand, "Gazeta Shqiptare" only reduced the number of headlines placed on its cover page in May to two. While in March, "Gazeta Shqiptare" placed seven headlines, and in April and June it placed four headlines each.

As seen from **Table 15**, "Panorama" of the seven headlines it has placed on its cover page, were found five of them are informative-unbiased-objective and two of them are subjective. As for the newspaper "Panorama", which has the most headlines on the cover page, out of the thirty-three numbers monitored, there are twenty-seven headlines or 71% of headlines are for that war. Of them, 71% subjective, 29% impartial-objective. "Gazeta Shqiptare" out of 17 headlines, five are unbiased-objective, and 12 others are subjective.

As seen from **Table 16**, newspaper "Panorama" are not any headlines pro-Russian and has two headlines pro-Ukrainian, while "Gazeta Shqiptare" has two headlines pro-Russian and ten headlines pro-Ukrainian.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this paper was to present the coverage and positioning of the Western Balkans newspapers for the Russia-Ukraine war. First, it offers an approach to representing war actors and events, which escapes the dualistic nature of peace journalism indicators. Second, it provides a more contextual approach—within the individual dimensions concerned with newspaper positioning vis-à-vis the war. Third, the paper does not suggest that any of the headlines are necessarily more valid, truer or more propagandistic than others. At the empirical level, we find that the editorial policy of the newspaper dictates the headlines presented on their front pages, and this seems more complex than usual (Galtung, 2006). This phenomenon is observed in every newspaper. For example, the headline of a news article published in Vecernje Novosti on May 30, 2022: "Mein Kampf is now beeing conducted against Russians" (original title: "Mein Kamph se sada sprovodi nad rusima") is a highly subjective and biased headline that reflects the editorial policy of the newspaper, which is similar to the policy of the state, where the newspaper operates, towards Russia.

How could be written a "Mein Kampf" against the Russians, when the Russians have invaded Ukraine and the war is taking place in Ukraine land. Similarly the headline of the newspaper "Pobjeda" in Montenegro dated June 6, 2022: "War will last as long as Putin is in Power" (original title: "Rat ce trajati sve dok je Putin na vlasti") also reflects its editorial policy similar to the state where the newspaper operates towards Russia. The above mentioned headline is prejudicial, from my point of view. There are other headlines that demonstrate this closeness or bias towards the parties in war, but due to the nature of the work, I will not quote other headlines. I deliberately took examples of two newspapers from two countries that have different policies and different relationships with the parties in the conflict, to show their subjectivity or bias in formulating headlines and publishing news. By comparing the number of headlines by month and the number of headlines according to the presentation and positioning that the newspapers of these countries have towards the warring parties, then it can be said that the space given to the headlines about this war on the cover pages does not correspond to the presentation and positioning of them to the warring parties. Because there is a big discrepancy. As in the case of Serbian newspapers, particularly Vecernje Novosti there is not a clear indication of: "the more critical approach to the War" (Anderson, 2015). According to Benegal and Motta's (2022) opinion, misinformation is prevalent, and it is difficult to say that anything can be done to change that judgment. Benegal and Motta (2022), speaking of racial prejudice says that "... racial prejudice may both contribute to misinformation ... and also make such misinformation more difficult to correct given the deep-rooted nature of such prejudices". This opinion of his is reasonable and can be supported by the argument that newspapers are also institutions, namely part of a state that presents and sometimes even represents the policies of that state, whether those newspapers are financially independent from the states and the current powers, however they have a legal and public dependency. So, even newspapers can be influenced by state policies and public opinion. Therefore, the functioning of newspapers and freedom of expression and thought depends on the willingness of states to help newspapers to be objective (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007) and impartial. Based on the data extracted from this research, Serbian newspapers for thirty-three days on their cover pages masterfully gave 49% space to the headlines about the war between Russia and Ukraine, those of North Macedonia surpassed Serbia with 54%. While in Bosnia and Herzegovina they gave 39%. In Albania 36% and the least in Montenegro, only 24%.

Out of the 135 analyzed headlines in the front pages of the Western Balkans newspapers, the Serbian newspapers "Vecernje Novosti" and "Danas" each had 16 headlines. The daily newspapers of Bosnia and Herzegovina: "Dnevni Avaz" had 17 headlines and "Dnevni List" had nine headlines. Together, they had 26 headlines. "Pobjeda" had 10 headlines and "Dan" had six headlines. Together, they had 16 headlines on their front pages. The newspapers of North Macedonia together had 37 headlines. Among them, "Vecer" had ten headlines and "Koha" had 27 headlines. Albanian newspapers published a total of 24 headlines of which 17 were published in "Gazeta Shqiptare" and seven in "Panorama". When it comes to objectivity, "Panorama" leads with 71%, followed by "Vecer" and "Pobjeda" with 70% each. Then comes "Dnevni Avaz" of Bosnia and Herzegovina with 53% and "Danas" from Serbia with 50%. Regarding positioning, "Vecernje Novosti" had 100% pro-Russia headlines, "Dnevni Avaz" of Bosnia and Herzegovina and "Panorama" of Albania had 100% headlines positioned towards Ukraine, followed by "Gazeta Shqiptare" and "Koha" with 83% and 71%, respectively. "Dnevni List" and "Pobjeda" had 67% and "Danas" had 62.5%. During this period, these newspapers had a total of 70 objective and 65 subjective headlines, 24 of which were pro-Russia and 43 were pro-Ukraine. In terms of war coverage time, it is clearly seen that during the March 2022, there was more news. In that period, there were 64 headlines on the cover pages of these newspapers. Whereas, in April and May 2022, have been approximately 25 headlines, as well as on June 2022 were 21 headlines. It means that while war was moving on, the interests of daily printed journals in the Western Balkans to inform the public for war state has been decreased approximately 85%. Another fact the prove the mentioned fact is that the cover page of these daily newspapers have dedicated just 15% of their content for the Russia-Ukraine war.

Considering the approach and methodology of the present research, as well as the analyzed samples, our study does not claim to be conclusive. It serves as a starting point for other researchers who wish to conduct a new investigation using a different methodology and techniques. Therefore, future studies should focus on whether newspapers in the Western Balkans promote or prevent potential war. A longitudinal content analysis could be conducted to examine news coverage in relation to actual developments in the war.

CONCLUSIONS

The coverage of the Russia-Ukraine war in the Western Balkans media varies depending on the editorial policy, rather than any historical, emotional, national, or religious connections to the parties in the war. This finding is based on the fact that the Albanian language newspaper “Koha” in Macedonia, whose investors, publishers, and readers are of Islamic religious affiliation, devoted 80% of its cover page space to the war, while Macedonian and Montenegrin newspapers, whose readers are Slavic and Orthodox, gave less coverage. The coverage of the Russia-Ukraine war in the newspapers of the Western Balkans varied in the amount of space devoted to it on their cover pages. For example, “Večer”, a North Macedonian newspaper in Macedonian language, and “Pobjeda”, which is published in Montenegro in the Serbian language, devoted only 30% of their cover page space to the war. “Dan”, another Montenegrin newspaper, devoted 18%. Similarly, in Albania, “Panorama” gave 21% coverage while “Gazeta Shqiptare” gave 52% coverage. Interestingly, both monitored Serbian newspapers had the same coverage percentage of 48%. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, newspapers published in Serbian language varied on the percentage of coverage from 51% in “Dnevni Avaz” to 27% in “Dnevni list”. Our findings suggest that the coverage of the Russia-Ukraine war in the Western Balkans media varies depending on the editorial policy, complicating arguments about balance in coverage of war and relations between states. Notably, Serbian newspapers in the region had a clear bias towards Russia in their coverage, despite devoting less space to it on their cover pages compared to Albanian newspapers in North Macedonia and Albania. There is a considerable number of news headlines presented as sensational, and regarding objectivity and subjectivity, five of the newspapers have published objective headlines, while the other five have subjective ones, but the percentage of objectivity and subjectivity varies from country to country and from newspaper to newspaper. As for bias, in the vast majority of newspapers, the bias is towards Ukraine. Our findings are comparable and can be proven at any time.

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