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Authorship in the coverage of the war in Ukraine: Newsroom work takes precedence over correspondents' dispatches

Autoría en la cobertura de la guerra en Ucrania: El trabajo de redacción prima sobre las crónicas de corresponsales

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ABSTRACT: The war in Ukraine has grabbed headlines around the world. This analysis asks who is covering it and what this says about war reporting. The advent of the Web and the subsequent polarization of the media pits the constant demand for information against the journalistic expectation of calm analysis. While traditional media seem to guarantee credibility, more and more people are turning to alternative information providers. To explore these changes' repercussions on war correspondents, this study analyzes 11,268 bylines of the news on Ukraine published digitally by the most widely read newspapers in Spain (*El País*, *El Mundo*, *El Correo*, and *La Vanguardia*) and the USA (*The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *USA Today* and *New York Post*), during the first week of the conflict, from February 24 to March 2, 2022. Through these, the authors' working relationship with each newspaper is investigated, employing LinkedIn or Twitter when necessary. While relevant literature suggests that freelancers and agencies dominate international news, this analysis concludes that most of the war coverage (65,64%) has been generated in newsrooms, away from the frontline. While confirming the significant contribution of agencies and a decreasing presence of freelancers, it also confirms the survival of foreign bureaus.

Keywords: authorship; war coverage; invasion of Ukraine; war journalism; war correspondents.

RESUMEN: La guerra en Ucrania ha acaparado los titulares de todo el mundo. Este análisis pregunta quién la está cubriendo y qué dice esto sobre los reportajes de guerra. El advenimiento de la Web y la subsiguiente polarización de los medios contraponen la demanda constante de información con la expectativa periodística de un análisis sosegado. Mientras que los medios tradicionales siguen garantizando credibilidad, cada vez más personas acuden a proveedores de información alternativos. Para explorar las repercusiones de estos cambios en el periodismo de guerra, este estudio analiza 11.268 bylines en las noticias sobre Ucrania publicadas digitalmente por los diarios más leídos en España (*El País*, *El Mundo*, *El Correo* y *La Vanguardia*) y EE. UU. (*The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *USA Today* y *New York Post*), durante la primera semana del conflicto, del 24 de febrero al 2 de marzo de 2022. A través de ellos, se establece la relación laboral de los autores con cada diario, empleando LinkedIn o Twitter cuando resulta necesario. Si bien la literatura relevante sugiere que freelancers y agencias dominan las noticias internacionales, este análisis concluye que la mayor parte de la cobertura de la guerra (65, 64%) se ha generado en las salas de redacción, lejos de la primera línea. Al tiempo que confirma una contribución significativa de las agencias y una presencia decreciente de freelancers, constata la supervivencia de las oficinas extranjeras.

Palabras clave: autoría; cobertura de guerra; invasión de Ucrania; periodismo de guerra; corresponsales.

1. Introduction

In the first weeks of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, newspapers registered record readership levels (Pavlik, 2022). The Times, for example, gained 1,000 daily subscribers in the first two weeks, one of its highest growth rates; likewise, The Guardian announced February 2022 as its fifth most successful month in page views (Kersley, 2022). Although attention waned later, the conflict's geostrategic, economic, and humanitarian implications generated significant interest. However, little attention has been paid to what happens behind the scenes of the media coverage. This analysis asks who is covering the war in Ukraine, what this says about war reporting, and what it implies for journalists. Ultimately, this article explains the role of war correspondents in the platform era.

This issue is relevant. A Reuters Institute survey showed that audiences in four countries followed the war closely; Germany stood out, followed by Brazil, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The survey results also showed a public demand for the media to focus on the broader implications of the conflict (Eddy & Fletcher, 2022).

War coverage is as old as armed conflicts, given that, since its beginnings, war journalism has been part of the armed forces. The first unarmed civilian sent to the front with a reporting mission was William Howard Russell, who covered the Crimean War of 1854 for the British newspaper *The Times* (Sánchez Gómez, 2018, p.6).

The emergence of 24/7 television news in the 1980s meant that journalists were required to constantly update audiences, especially in times of war (Sambrook, 2010). But the advent of the Web and, later, social platforms, coupled with the ideological polarization of media and public opinion (Makhortykh & Bastian, 2022) and cutbacks in foreign correspondents and bureaus (Sambrook, 2010) posed a significant challenge for international coverage. While brands can build trust (Sambrook, 2010), today, more people are turning to alternative providers, such as blogs and platforms, which typically do not verify or edit information (Information Agency, 2021). For example, 40% of Americans said they are finding out about the war online, 31% from television, 5% from radio, and 3% from newspapers (Eddy & Fletcher, 2022). Although most news organizations are on the Web, this tension indicates that less conventional ways of getting information are gaining space.

This article explores who covered the Ukraine invasion to investigate new war coverage patterns. The invasion of Ukraine has been chosen because of its hybrid character, as disinformation plays an important role (Pavlik, 2022). We first review the role of foreign correspondents and the evolution of war coverage in Spain and the USA, where the chosen newspapers are based.

2. Reference framework

2.1. The role of correspondents

Foreign correspondents are crucial for several reasons. One is the simplified and antagonistic versions of events generated by the Ukrainian and Russian blocs (Makhortykh & Bastian, 2022, p.28) typical of wartime. In these two countries, the media have become the loudspeakers of each government (Pavlik, 2022, p.10), amplifying messages that reinforce one's own side and harm the other (Martínez Domínguez, 2022, p.20).

Another is that the ideological bubbles generated by the platforms contribute to polarization (Rivas-de-Roca & García-Gordillo, 2023), facilitating monologues (Pariser, 2011). By enclosing people in ideological bubbles, platforms prevent the crossover of ideas and debates desirable during hostilities (Urman and Makhortykh, 2022). Moreover, people generally forget that platforms' content hides an agenda and do not question their relationship to reality (Pavlik, 2022).

However, digital platforms can facilitate the publication of information. With the subsequent fading of the *gatekeeper* role of publishers and editors (Cozma & Chen, 2013), digital technology has increased the presence of alternative perspectives in the public debate. In other words, journalistic organizations no longer determine what is on the table (Sambrook, 2010). Digital technology facilitates freelancers' work and generates citizen journalism (Milán and Gutiérrez, 2017). One of the first examples of democratization of news production was the 2011 coverage of the Syrian war (Serrat Alvarado, 2017), which was covered by citizens and activists (BBC, 2012). However, a challenge is the excess of images, propaganda, information, and disinformation presented similarly simultaneously and in real-time.

As a result of these transformations, war coverage has undergone profound structural changes. Before, correspondents were the ones who first broke the news; now, their editors learn the facts from their desks before those who now, from the field, verify them (Sánchez González, 2019). War reporters were previously guided by smell, color, and taste; now, their job is to prioritize, confirm and contextualize (Sánchez González, 2019). The closure of foreign bureaus (Reynolds, 2010) leads some journalists to cover conflicts about which they may not know much or to resort to freelancers (Molina, 2012b). Technological advances, censorship mechanisms in conflict countries, readership fluctuations, and security have forced journalists to adapt constantly. Foreign correspondents have gone from being witnesses to uncomfortable guests (Tejedor et al., 2022).

However, when impartiality and pluralism have disappeared, and there is a lot of noise on the platforms, correspondents often offer independent points of view (Molina, 2012a).

2.2. The news of the war in Ukraine

Several factors have made this war newsworthy. First, the economic impacts of the war in Ukraine were felt on a global scale (Kammer et al., 2022), due to the blockage of an indispensable entry point for energy reserves and primary goods (Bernabé-Crespo, 2020, p.267). Secondly, in Europe, the proximity of Ukraine fostered identification with the affected population (Cucarella, 2022). In addition, the Ukrainian government has provided access to images and texts presenting the human side of the war (Edelson, 2022). Coverage is facilitated by the freedom to move around the country and relatively low prices for transportation and accommodation. Third, geopolitics also plays a role. The news media have portrayed the conflict as a European proxy war (Bermudez, 2022; Doyle, 2023; Al Jazeera and News Agencies, 2022), feeding Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's narrative of a *defense of civilization* (Ege, 2022). Fourth, easy-to-digest narratives lead to more coverage (Cucarella, 2022). Russian President Vladimir Putin says the invasion is a counteroffensive against the NATO threat (Bernabé-Crespo,

2020, p.280); meanwhile, Ukraine interprets the conflict as Russian aggression (Bernabé-Crespo, 2020). Fifth, the number of refugees amounts to nearly eight million, according to Amnesty International, giving rise to a humanitarian crisis (Martínez Domínguez, 2022). On the other hand, the possibility of nuclear war has loomed over the conflict (Bailey, 2022). And finally, digital technologies open the door to the multiplication of communication actors. The conventional battlefield is now intertwined with linguistics, economics, propaganda, platforms, and media (Donofrio et al., 2022).

In short, the Ukrainian war is one of the most covered conflicts in history (Prieto, 2022). Ukraine has become a global platform trend, combining content published by journalists, YouTubers, TikTokers, and others (Carrión, 2022).

2.3. International news does not sell

International coverage in Spain and the U.S. is different for at least three reasons: the power inequalities between Spain and the U.S., the evolution of war journalism in each, and their diverse audiences. Given the newsworthiness of the war and proximity, Spanish newspapers and their audiences have been interested in Ukrainian news (Alvarez, 2023). Likewise, in the U.S., which still aspires to be a superpower, its media and audiences have also become involved (Kelly & Chalfant, 2022; Maher & Turvill, 2022). However, international news is rarely popular in both countries, and their respective audiences are drawn to follow domestic issues, soft news, and entertainment (Wu & Hamilton, 2004).

A comparison between Spain and the USA reveals two different models of international news coverage and various professional opportunities and economic resources for journalists. The availability of resources may condition the time spent in the field, the level of security, equipment, and access to the war zone (Prieto, 2022). According to Spanish correspondent Anna Bosh, the Spanish model focuses on current information and on obtaining the maximum number of news stories (MM, 2012). Meanwhile, U.S. journalists tend to provide their own analysis, so it takes them longer to produce breaking news, which is left to international agencies (MM, 2012). U.S. journalism has more financial support than Spanish journalism; for example, U.S. media organizations tend to send more reporters and protect them better. The lack of resources in Spain could be explained by a more significant drop in media profits than in other countries (Varela, 2004). In Spain, the average profitability of newspapers is close to 10%, while in the U.S., it ranges between 20% and 35% (Varela, 2004). Emerging consumer trends and low-profit margins determined the massive closure of Spanish foreign offices, which accelerated after the 2008 crisis (Reynolds, 2010). For their part, large teams have been sent from the U.S. with protection; some, such as CNN, hired local drivers and interpreters (Maher & Turvill, 2022), something unimaginable for many Spanish freelance journalists who pay their own expenses.

Spain has never been a country with an outward outlook (Barreira, 2022). The Franco regime isolated the country and reduced the activity of correspondents. This situation continued until the beginning of the democratic opening at the end of the 1970s. One of the highlights of Spanish news abroad was the coverage of the Iraq war in 2003 (Sahagún, 2004). It was the most covered event by the number of journalists; still, no reporters remained on Iraqi soil after the initial shock and death of two Spanish journalists, José Couso and Julio Anguita Parrado (Thorn, 2003).

After the 2008 economic crisis, Spanish correspondents abroad were suffocated by the lack of resources, the scarce editorial support, and their replacement by other less expensive sources of information. This replacement is not exclusive to Spain; however, the realities of correspondents are as diverse as the types of media for which they work, contracts through which they formalize their employment relationship, and countries from which they broadcast (Brüggemann et al.,

2016). Therefore, to speak of foreign correspondents as endangered is to ignore their diversity and peculiarities. In the Spanish panorama, this figure also presents particularities. Still, the few who remain in their profession are especially concentrated in covering Europe, America and, to a lesser extent, the Middle East. At the same time, less attention is paid to Asia and Africa (Sánchez Gómez, 2018).

Despite not being a usual hot spot, Ukraine has gained prominence after Russia's invasion, presenting itself as an exceptional situation that has increased the sense of insecurity (Villaplana Jiménez & Megías Collado, 2022). The demand for information on the evolution of the war has been constant. For 34% of the people surveyed in the Barometer of the Real Instituto Elcano, Russia was the main threat to Spain's security (Villaplana Jiménez and Megías Collado, 2022, p. 272). The commitment of the Spanish media to the war in Ukraine has been firm (Núñez, 2022). But this has not always translated into a commitment to the safety of reporters. According to Reporters Without Borders, half of the Spanish journalists covering the Ukrainian conflict are freelancers, around 30% do not have adequate protection, up to 16% claim that they are not paid more than 50 euros per piece, and 38.5% have no experience in covering conflicts (Etura & Martín Sánchez, 2022). The lack of specific knowledge is not as worrying as failures in security, training, or equipment, which threaten the physical integrity and the quality of the work of Spanish professionals in Ukraine (UNESCO & Reporters without Borders, 2017). Spain is an example of how the economic situation and society's demands at home affect journalism's prospects and working conditions (Brüggemann et al., 2016).

Founder of war reporting, American conflict journalism began with the conflagration of 1898 (Maxwell & Jenner, 2004). After a period of isolationism, the advent of the two world wars revived American foreign journalism (Startt, 2010). The Vietnam War (1955-1975) expanded U.S. media coverage. But after Vietnam, the focus remained domestic (Sahagún, 2014) until the end of the Cold War, when the country became the world's hegemonic power and realized its global economic and cultural weight. The new international relations required eyes and ears in every corner of the world (Wu & Hamilton, 2004). Therefore, the United States strengthened its international journalism and deployed correspondents everywhere to anticipate global trends (Sambrook, 2010).

However, U.S. journalists failed to anticipate shocks such as the invasion of Iraq or the war in Afghanistan (Wu & Hamilton, 2004). In Iraq, the media not only did not know enough about the country but also accepted falsehoods fed by the U.S. government about Iraq's involvement in the 2001 attacks on the U.S. (Lewis & Reading-Smith, 2008).

Attention to international news has declined in recent years in the U.S. In the 1970s, 35% of news broadcasting was international; by the 2000s, only 12-15% had international coverage (Sambrook, 2010). The number of permanent correspondents in the last decade has also decreased by 25% (Pérez de Armiñán, 2015). The geographic distribution of U.S. correspondents favors the United Kingdom, Europe, and Mexico (Wu & Hamilton, 2004). Only 3% of U.S. correspondents remain overseas, producing mostly breaking news (Wu & Hamilton, 2004).

Few major U.S. media players had staff on the ground before the invasion of Ukraine; only two claimed to have correspondents *on the ground* before the offensive. *The Washington Post* reports that it sent a team to Ukraine a month earlier; A.P. had a full-time bureau in Kyiv. With nine correspondents dispatched in March 2022, *The Washington Post* had more people covering a single conflict than ever since the Arab Spring (Maher & Turvill, 2022). A.P., with two dozen people in Ukraine, supplemented other media elsewhere. In March 2022, CNN had 75 people deployed in Ukraine, including local drivers and interpreters. *WSJ* and *NYT*, with teams of fewer than ten people, relied on newsroom-based coverage (Maher & Turvill, 2022). Most media outlets produced news from their newsrooms, sent reporters, or published stories from news agencies and freelancers.

In short, the United States has been more open to the outside world than Spain. Even when both suffered the crisis and the decrease in demand for international news, the U.S. continued to cover more events abroad and in a better way. The size has to do with that since the U.S. is home to hundreds of newspapers, compared to dozens in Spain.

3. Methodology

The research questions are: Who is covering the war in Ukraine, and whether major newspapers in Spain and the U.S. rely more on war correspondents, freelancers, news agencies, newsroom stories, or other types of authorship. The objective is to elucidate the relevance of war correspondents. We have conducted a text analysis of 11,268 bylines or signatures to respond to the questions.

Concretely, the analysis investigates how some of the most widely read newspapers in Spain (*El País*, *El Mundo*, *El Correo*, and *La Vanguardia*) and the U.S. (*The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *USA Today* and *New York Post*) reported on the war. The bylines were a) published during the first week of the war (February 24 to March 2, 2022); b) extracted from the newspapers' digital archives; c) filtered using Google's search engine, using keywords such as "war," "invasion," "Ukraine," or "Russia;" or c) manually selected to detect headlines without relevant terms. Some headlines may not have been detected due to human error. The Google search was done using terms that do not reflect the point of view of pro-Russian media who may use the terminology offered by the Russian regime, calling the war "an operation." However, it is difficult to state that this would influence the research results.

The bylines are used to track the authors of the articles, their names, and their working relationship with the newspaper. This relationship has been established through descriptions provided by the organization or by examining the correspondents' personal accounts on platforms such as Twitter or LinkedIn. According to their employment relationship, the authors have been classified into six categories and three subcategories.

Only reporters who report from outside the country where their newspaper is based have been considered international correspondents. For this study, reporters from different U.S. states or Spanish provinces presented by their organizations as correspondents have been registered as part of the editorial staff. In cases where a byline combined different authors, the category with the least representation in the sample was prioritized to offer a broader picture. For example, a byline signed by an international correspondent and another reporter from the newsroom were counted as an international correspondent.

We use "byline" as a synonym for "news story" since we only consider one byline per news item. For this analysis, the typology of Table 1 has been considered to code the news. Elaborated by the authors based on Sánchez Gómez (2021), A.P. (2021), and Encyclopedia Britannica (2023).

Some authors' labor relationship with the newspaper is unclear without access to their contracts. All newspapers, except *USA Today*, provide information about their bylines, but it is difficult to assess their employment status even when they do. Sometimes, the information provided only includes journalists' previous jobs without specifying their current assignments. Meanwhile, the "about the firm" section of *El País* and *La Vanguardia* does not identify whether special correspondents have been sent to cover the war, although it does specify the news source. In others, such as *WSJ* and *NYT*, it is more difficult to determine whether reporters assigned to cover the war were sent to the battlefield. Both provide summaries of their reporters' portfolios but lack information on where they are located. One example is Valerie Hopkins, presented by *NYT* as "an international correspondent covering the war in Ukraine, as well as in Russia and the countries of the former Soviet Union." The description leaves room to classify her as an international correspondent in Ukraine, Russia, or neighboring countries. Going to her LinkedIn

page, she appears to be a *NYT* correspondent in Moscow; still, we have coded her byline as an international correspondent in Ukraine, as another article places her there during the first week of the invasion (Maher & Turvill, 2022).

Table 1. Coding system

Tip	Role	Code	Meaning
International Correspondent	A journalist employed to report abroad for a newspaper or broadcasting organization.	I.C.	The news is written by newspaper journalists or media organizations, without necessarily coming from the countries in conflict, Russia and Ukraine.
Special Correspondent	A journalist employed to report abroad for a newspaper or broadcasting organization for a limited time.	S.C.	The article is written by newspaper or media journalists who are deployed for a specific assignment and do not remain in the field for an extended period.
Freelancer	A freelance journalist working for a newspaper or broadcasting organization.	F.R.	News is bought by newspapers or media organizations from time to time from freelancers, not necessarily from on-site.
On site	Journalists in one of the above categories who reported directly from Ukraine or Russia.	ICU ICR SCU SCR FRU FRR	Subcategories of the above categories. Each figure has been set up to study the bulk of the news coming directly from the battlefield; they have been coded, adding a U for Ukraine or an R for Russia to the original codes.
Newsroom	The editorial staff of a newspaper or broadcasting organization, including its different sections (international, economy and business, culture, opinion).	N	News items are written by newspaper or media journalists from different sections (e.g., international, sports, culture) and are published with or without identifying the author(s); also included are editorials, collaborations, and infographic content without bylines. A particular subcategory for collaborations, coded with a "C" has been registered to gather pieces written by people with expertise in a field (e.g., professors, historians, politicians) who are not part of the newspaper staff but contribute to it.
News Agency	A news organization that sells stories to other news organizations.	A	The news is published by international news agencies that do not identify the author(s).
Agency Correspondent	A news organization that sells stories to other news organizations.	A.C.	A.C. includes news published by international news agencies that do identify the author; their presence in the study has been limited to some articles from A.P. for USA Today, which only offers bylines on text news stories to photographers, television reporters and video journalists who provide information without which there would be no news.
Other media	A journalistic organization different from the one analyzed, often within the same business group, that provides news to other journalistic organizations.	AM	Stories published by a newspaper or broadcasting organization other than the one under analysis.

Source: own elaboration based on Sánchez Gómez (2021), AP (2021) and Encyclopedia Britannica (2023).

Another challenge has been to detect independent workers, as few newspapers are transparent about their contributions (Argiz, 2006). However, some working relationships are long-lasting (Gutiérrez Cuesta, 2021). As a result, they are often presented as part of their staff. For example, Mikel Ayestarán, who defines himself as a freelancer on his website, is portrayed by *El Correo* as its correspondent in the Middle East. For this reason, his articles have been assigned to the freelancer category. Also, *NYP* refrains from providing information about his freelancers. We

identified Hollie McKay and Vladislav Davidzon, who reported from Ukraine and contributed to *NYP*, as freelancers after reviewing their Twitter and LinkedIn accounts.

While the agencies are always credited, their correspondents receive little credit. Only a few A.P. correspondents are identified by name in a series of *USA Today* articles. Anonymity conveys the idea that news stories are of equal quality, which is common in agency news (Murray, 2023). However, the absence of bylines is uncommon in magazines; even so, some media, such as *The Economist* (three of whose articles were published in *La Vanguardia*), also defend anonymity as a way of empowering a single collective voice (*The Economist*, 2013).

A small percentage of the articles observed come from other media of the same group. This is the case of articles from *The Topeka Capital-Journal*, *Florida Today*, and others published by *USA Today*; all belong to Gannet (Gannet Co., 2023). Finally, the contributions of experts who are not part of a newspaper are challenging to identify and required verifications. Such were the cases of historian José María Faraldo, Professor Clara Portela, and analyst Javier Solana, writing for *El País*.

We converted the absolute numbers into percentages by dividing the amount of news found per category by the total amount of war news in each category and multiplying the number obtained by one hundred. The formula was applied first to each newspaper, then to all Spanish and U.S. newspapers, and finally to all media. The numbers in the subcategories are also included in their respective categories.

4. Results

The first result of this analysis is that international news agencies have made a remarkable, although not massive, contribution (12.46% of total coverage). U.S. newspapers outnumber Spanish newspapers, with 14.94% of their stories from agencies, compared to 10.11% in the Spanish media. The most significant variations are observed between newspapers. *El Correo* published no agency content, and *El País* published a tiny percentage (1.75%) from OTR PRESS and other unspecified agencies. Meanwhile, 11.38% of what *La Vanguardia* published were reports from the EFE agency and others from unidentified agencies, which specify the origin of their news stories from Kyiv, Moscow, Beijing, Berlin, Brussels, or Geneva. Likewise, *El Mundo*, with more than a fifth of its content coming from news agencies (24.36%), is the Spanish newspaper with the most agency content (from Europa Press, EFE, AFP, AP, Tresb, Servimedia, and GTRES). However, *USA Today* is ahead, with 38.94% of its content coming from a single agency, AP. AP's contributions to *USA Today* are mostly audiovisual content. The presence of agency content in the rest of the American newspapers is anecdotal, with 5.18% and 4.75%, respectively; *NYT* and *NYP* only included news from A.P. and Reuters, a British agency, while *WSJ* did not publish agency content (see Table 1).

The second result is that the presence of freelancers was generally low (2.03% of the total). U.S. dailies also outperformed Spanish dailies, with 2.57% of the coverage signed by freelancers compared to 1.52%. The low presence of freelancers covering this war from the major dailies stands out. According to the data, their contributions have been more of an exception than the rule. *El Correo* and *El País* are the two Spanish media with more *freelance* content, with 2.80% and 2.05%, respectively; in them, Mikel Ayestarán from Kyiv and Lviv, Miguel Gutiérrez Garitano from Odesa and Jorge Said from Zaporizhzhya stand out. It is also worth mentioning the publications of Hollie McKay and Vladislav Davidzon from Ukraine for *NYP*, making it the newspaper with the highest percentage of *freelance* content (6.01%). Meanwhile, Marchichka Varenikova, a freelance journalist and producer based in Kyiv, and Masha Froliak, a journalist and audiovisual content producer, for *NYT*, accounted for 1.62% of the coverage by freelancers (Table 2).

Thirdly, the study indicates that, perhaps because of Ukraine's geographical proximity and its emphasis on quantity of production, the Spanish media offered more international news than the American newspapers —9.25% versus 4.25%, respectively— (Table 1). In Spain, all newspapers used a single correspondent to cover the Russian side of the border: Gonzalo Aragonés, from *La Vanguardia*, Javier G. Cuesta, from *El País*, Xavier Colás, from *El Mundo*, and Rafael M. Mañueco, from *El Correo*, based in Moscow. Special envoys covered the Ukrainian side to the main cities where the war front was advancing (Lviv, Zhytomyr, Avdiivka, Sloviansk, Vuhlevar, Dnipro, Medikam, and Zaporizhya), as well as to Poland, the leading country receiving refugees (DatosRTVE, 2023). Few journalists were sent to Ukraine. In *El País*, the bylines are by Pilar Bonet, María R. Sahuquillo, and Luis de Vega, with the support of Cristian Segura from Poland. *El Mundo* had two special correspondents, Javier Espinosa and Alberto Rojas. *La Vanguardia* deployed Félix Flores and Plàcid García Planas, with the support of María-Paz Flores, the international correspondent in Berlin, temporarily sent to Poland. *El Correo* only sent Álvaro Ybarra Zavala (Table 2).

In the U.S., a different picture is found, as some media had bureaus in those countries and sent larger teams. A fourth result indicates that bylines were recurring, implying a limited number of journalists writing from the heart of the war. For example, *WSJ* and *NYT* followed the same pattern, covering the Russian side from their permanent bureaus there and the Ukrainian side from their bureaus and with special envoys. According to *WSJ*, its Ukraine coverage was led by James Marson, a journalist covering the country for 15 years. As of January 2022, his team included Yaroslav Trofimov, chief international affairs correspondent, who had already covered the 2014 Maidan revolution, and special envoy Brett Forrest, the first reporter to gain access to the Kyiv suburb of Bucha after the withdrawal of Russian troops. On the Russian side, this newspaper relied on contributions from Ann M. Simmons, the Moscow bureau chief, Alan Cullison, a reporter in the area since 1999, and Evan Gershkovich, detained on espionage charges since March 29, 2022. Also, the *NYT* relied on information from its Moscow bureau chief, Anton Troianovsky, and Valerie Hopkins, a Moscow correspondent relocated to Ukraine (See Table 2). In addition, the newspaper included two articles written by Andriy Yermak, head of the Ukrainian presidential bureau and a contribution by Ukrainian journalist Veronika Melkozerova. As for *NYP* and *USA Today*, bylines from the field were scarcer. *NYP* had one reporter focused on war coverage, Evan Simko- Bednarki, whose presence on site could not be determined. Meanwhile, *USA Today* had Katelyn Ferral in Ukraine, Anna Nemtsova, East Asia correspondent for *The Daily Beast*, and a *USA Today* contributor in Moscow. This newspaper also published Gabriela Miranda, a reporter assigned to the war in Ukraine (Table 2). The latter was forced to resign after an investigation proved irregularities in her use of sources and lack of transparency (Gordon, 2022). In short, Russia was covered by regular correspondents already in the country, while Ukraine left room for more special envoys.

In the face of the Russian blockade, one might have expected that Ukrainian openness to international media would have favored sending more correspondents to Ukraine and limited coverage from Russian soil (Corral, 2022). However, a fifth finding is that greater access to Ukrainian terrain and sources did not translate into greater coverage. The data indicate that only 3.48% of the news came from Ukraine, while another 3.36% came from Russia (Table 1). This result points to the fact that, in general, the dispatch of reporters to Ukraine is matched by the presence of bureaus in Russia. Despite their costly maintenance (Sambrook, 2010), maintaining foreign bureaus proved their relevance in a context of closure.

We have also analyzed part of the health status of foreign bureaus and correspondents. International correspondents were responsible for 15.23% of the news, thus surpassing the percentage of coverage from news agencies and freelancers. The USA, with 12.37% of the total number of international correspondents, loses out to Spain (with 17.93%) due to the non-existence of correspondents in *USA Today* and *NYP*. However, *WSJ* and *NYT* had the most extensive and solid network of foreign correspondents. The *NYT*, the newspaper with the

highest percentage, 31.82%, of its total war stories written by correspondents, claims to have 31 bureaus outside the U.S. In the sample, *NYT* correspondents reported from Berlin, Brussels, Rome, Geneva, London, and Paris, coinciding with the traditional U.S. interest in the U.K. and Europe. The sample also included articles from many other cities. At *WSJ*, which shows a high percentage of international correspondents (responsible for 24.77% of its coverage), authors were based in Frankfurt, Berlin, Europe, Paris, London, and Brussels. The sample also included bylines from North Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East. However, the sixth finding is that most newspapers relied on newsroom reports, accounting for 65.64% of all war news. This work has been enriched with experts from outside the staff of the newspapers, whose knowledge of history, geopolitics, or economics was essential to provide the keys to the conflict. In *El País*, these collaborations accounted for 11.40% of the coverage (Table 1).

Finally, a seventh finding is that most of the headlines belonged to male reporters, while a small percentage, 18.45% of the coverage, was signed by women. In most cases, the female headlines were signed by a small group of women reporting from the Ukrainian side. Only Ann M. Simmons, *WSJ* Moscow bureau chief, and Anna Nemtsova, special Moscow correspondent for *USA Today*, sent their articles from Russia. In the U.S., freelancer Hollie McKay at *NYP* reduced women's fieldwork to pieces. At *WSJ*, apart from Simmons, only freelancer Natalia Ojewska was broadcasting from somewhere near Warsaw. At *USA Today*, Nemtsova's work was enriched by Katelyn Ferral from Ukraine and a single contribution from Ukrainian journalist Nastia Gospinchenk. The *NYT* had the most significant number of female headlines in the U.S. (10), signed by international correspondents in Ukraine, Valerie Hopkins and Lara Jakes. The work of photojournalist Lynsey Addario was recognized in Andrew E. Kramer's bylines and, in this analysis, her contribution was taken into account as a woman working from the front. Correspondent Carlota Gall and Kyiv-based freelancer Marichka Varenikova also worked for the *NYT* from Ukraine, as did Ukrainian contributor Veronika Melkozerova.

Table 2. Percentage of signatures by newspaper and country

	MEDIA	SPAIN					US				BOTH	
		El País	El Mundo	El Correo	La Vanguardia	Total Spanish media	WSJ	NYP	NYT	USA Today	Total US media	TOTAL MEDIA
	Total news Ukraine/total news published	342/ 1206 = 28,36%	312/ 1157 = 28,97%	214/ 1557 = 13,74%	448/ 2292 = 19,55%	1316/ 6212 = 21,18%	222/ 680 = 32,65%	316/ 1276 = 24,76%	309/ 971 = 31,82%	398/ 2129 = 18,69%	1245/ 5056 = 24,62%	2561/ 11268 = 22,72%
	IC	68 = 19,88%	52 = 16,67%	53 = 24,77%	63 = 14,06%	236 = 17,93%	55 = 24,77%	-----	98 = 31,72%	1 = 0,25%	154 = 12,37%	390 = 15,23%
	SC	24 = 7,02%	4 = 1,28%	1 = 0,47%	30 = 6,70%	59 = 4,48%	14 = 6,31%	-----	-----	2 = 0,5%	16 = 1,29%	75 = 2,93%
	FR	7 = 2,05%	3 = 0,96%	6 = 2,80%	4 = 0,89%	20 = 1,52%	4 = 1,80%	19 = 6,01%	5 = 1,62%	4 = 1,01%	32 = 2,57%	52 = 2,03%
AGENTS / SOURCES OF I NFORMATION	ICU	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	11 = 3,56%	-----	11 = 0,88%	11 = 0,43%
	ICR	11 = 3,22%	17 = 5,45%	19 = 8,88%	19 = 4,24%	66 = 5,02%	10 = 0,45%	-----	9 = 2,91%	-----	19 = 1,53%	85 = 3,32%
	SCU	20 = 5,85%	4 = 1,28%	1 = 0,47%	24 = 5,36%	49 = 3,72%	14 = 6,31%	-----	-----	1 = 0,25%	15 = 1,20%	64 = 2,50%
	SCR	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	1 = 0,25%	1 = 0,08%	1 = 0,04%
	FRU	2 = 0,58%	-----	5 = 2,34%	-----	7 = 0,53%	-----	6 = 1,90%	1 = 0,32%	-----	7 = 0,56%	14 = 0,55%
	FRR	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

	N	237 = 69,30%	169 = 54,17%	151 = 70,56%	297 = 66,29%	854 = 64,89%	149 = 67,11%	266 = 84,18% ***	190 = 61,49%	230 = 57,79%	827 = 66,43%	1681 = 65,64%
	C	39 = 11,40%	9 = 2,88%	12 = 5,61%	37 = 8,26%	97 = 7,37%	10 = 4,5%	18 = 5,70%	13 = 4,21%	4 = 1,01%	45 = 3,61%	142 = 5,54%
	A	6 = 1,75%	76 = 24,36%	-----	51 = 11,38%	133 = 10,11%	-----	15 = 4,75%	16 = 5,18%	155 = 38,94%	186 = 14,94%	319 = 12,46%
	AC	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	13 = 3,27%	13 = 1,04%	13 = 0,51%
	AM	-----	8 = 2,56%	3 = 1,40%	3 = 0,67%	14 = 1,06%	-----	16 = 5,06%	-----	6 = 1,5%	22 = 1,77%	36 = 1,41%
The table represents the total number of articles registered for each category and their resulting percentages (after applying the formula: (selected category/total number of news about Ukraine in the chosen sample] x 100). In the first row, the percentages represent the volume of news about Ukraine relative to the total of stories published in the paper(s). Figures with decimal places have been rounded to the next higher decimal place (e.g., 26, 96629 = 26, 97). Empty boxes symbolize that no author was recognized within that category. Color codes: yellow (total Spanish media data), green (total U.S. media data), orange (total analyzed media data), and blue (subcategory data). ***At NYP, eight bylines correspond to a reporter focused on Ukraine (Evan Simko-Bednarski), whose presence on the ground could not be confirmed. His bylines stand out due to his paper's lack of international and special correspondents.												

Source: Own elaboration.

Meanwhile, in Spain, only *El País* had two women on the ground, María R. Sahuquillo and Pilar Bonet. María Paz-López, reporting from Poland for *La Vanguardia*, was close to the battlefield.

Table 3. Journalists and agencies

	IC	ICU	ICR	SCU	FR	FRU	N	C	Agencies
El País			Javier G. Cuesta	Pilar Bonet, María R. Sahuquillo, Luis de Vega		Jorge Said		José María Faraldo (historiador), Clara Portela (profesora), Javier Solana (analista)	
El Mundo			Xavier Colás	Javier Espinosa, Alberto Rojas					Europa Press EFE AFP AP Tresb, Servimedia GTRES
El Correo			Rafael M. Mañeco	Álvaro Ybarra Zabala		Mikel Ayestarán, Miguel Gutiérrez Garitano			OTR PRESS y otras
La Vanguardia	María-Paz López (Polonia)		Gonzalo Aragónés	Félix Flores, Plàcid García Planas					EFE y otras
WSJ			Ann M. Simmons Alan Cullison Evan Gershkovich	Yaroslav Trofimov James Marson, Brett Forest	Natalia Ojewska (freelancer Varsovia)				
NYT		Valerie Hopkins Andrew E.Kramme	Anton Troianovski	Carlota Gall Lynsey Addario (fotoperiodista)		Marchchka Varenikova Masha Froliak		Andriy Yermak (jefe oficina presidencial Ucrania) Veronika Melkozerova (periodista ucraniana)	AP Reuters
USA Today		Katelyn Ferral	Anna Nemtsova				Gabriela Miranda	Nastia Gospinchev	AP
NYP						Hollie McKay Vladislav Davidzon	Evan Simko- Bednarski		AP Reuters

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 2 shows the results obtained, providing a framework for comparing countries and newspapers.

Table 3 lists the names of the journalists and agencies mentioned to make it easier to match their work with their media and country of origin.

Finally, Table 4 summarizes the results to provide a clear and concise picture before discussing the results and conclusions.

Table 4. Summary of results

Result	What it means
The agencies made an essential contribution to the coverage of the invasion of Ukraine by eight of the most important Spanish and U.S. newspapers (12.46%).	Shows that newspapers rely significantly on content from other news organizations with international reach.
The presence of freelancers in bylines was low (2.03%).	Indicates decreasing reliance on unaffiliated freelance journalists.
Spanish media offered more coverage from the site, measured in bylines, than American newspapers.	The Spanish teams on the ground signed more bylines than the U.S. teams, whose data was hampered by the shortage of correspondents and special envoys at USA Today and NYP.
In general, a limited number of journalists were writing from the heart of the war.	The absence of newspapers' own sources on the ground means greater reliance on other news sources (such as platforms, blogs, open-source intelligence, citizen journalism, and the like).
Increased access to Ukrainian terrain and sources did not translate into increased coverage.	It implies that the Russian blockade of international media did not prevent coverage (because several media outlets had bureaus of their own); while the Ukrainian opening allowed more coverage by special envoys.
There was a significant reliance on newsroom reporting, as 65.64% of the stories were generated in newsrooms.	It involves outsourcing war coverage; war is increasingly being covered by less personnel deployed in the field and more from newsrooms.
Most of the bylines belonged to male reporters.	Although many women are now involved in covering the war, their contribution is still far less than that of men.

Source: own elaboration

As seen in Table 4, the results show a reliance on international news agencies for war news, while the number of unaffiliated freelance journalists. The analysis shows a difference between the Spanish and the American newspapers, which published relatively less news from the ground than their European counterparts. Alternative sources, such as platforms, blogs, or citizen journalism, filled this gap. Also, the analysis of the bylines shows that the Russian blockade did not prevent the overall coverage, although the Ukrainian openness facilitated a more direct coverage from the ground. Crucially, the war was mostly covered from the security of newsrooms, while most of the bylines were by male reporters.

5. Discussion and conclusions

The results do not match the initial assumptions. Based on Molina (2012b), it was expected that most of the international news would be covered by agencies and freelancers. Considering the international perspective of U.S. media and more significant resources than Spanish media (Brüggemann et al., 2016), the former was expected to deploy more journalists. The better access granted by Ukraine to the war zone (Prieto, 2022) also led to expect a more prominent presence of foreign journalists there than in Russia. Finally, because of the availability of online

information and the costly maintenance of international bureaus abroad (Sambrook, 2010), it was to be expected that they would not play a decisive role.

The data analysis contradicts the notion that news agencies and freelancers led the way in war coverage. Economic pressures and media corporatization have been blamed for prioritizing profits and exclusives over news quality (Sambrook, 2010). As a result, it has been said that on-site coverage has been replaced by content generated by news agencies and precarious freelancers (Brüggemann et al., 2016). This study contradicts this idea, although its limitations prevent generalization. Probably the conclusions would have been different if the object of study had been independent newspapers with fewer resources instead of eight large-circulation dailies belonging to conglomerates. Membership in these groups allows newspapers to operate beyond profitability. The *NYP* was not profitable until 2022 (Turvill, 2021) but could operate because of funding from the company to which it belongs, News Corp. This corporation, owned by tycoon Rupert Murdoch (News Corp., 2022), also absorbed *WSJ* publisher Dow Jones and Company (Maher, 2022). Another corporate giant, Gannet, owns *USA Today* and 109 other media outlets (Bomey, 2019). The Sulzberger family has controlled the *NYT* since 1896 (Villalonga & Hartman, 2007). As for Spanish newspapers, all of them are part of large media groups. *El País* belongs to the most prominent Spanish media group, PRISA (Dircomfidencial, 2023); *La Vanguardia* is part of Grupo Godó (Cuesta & Planas, 2023); *El Correo* belongs to Grupo Vocento (Sousa et al., 2023), and *El Mundo* is part of Unidad Editorial (Unidad Editorial, 2023).

Coverage of the conflict has been affected by the poor health of the media in their home countries. Shorter war stories and an audience focused on national news might have meant that the Spanish deployment on the ground was smaller than the U.S. one. However, the data collected show that the Spanish field teams, with 9.27% of the total Spanish media coverage, outnumbered the U.S. teams, which did not exceed 5% of the total U.S. coverage of the war. However, although the percentages indicate that there has been a more significant Spanish on-site deployment, the reality is that the U.S. media continue to have a greater overall international deployment. This is evidenced by the higher percentage of international correspondent bylines in two U.S. newspapers and the greater global reach of U.S. foreign bureaus. Spanish media bylines' recurrence and origin indicate that they tend to have single-person bureaus and a smaller geographic spread. Thus, thanks to the larger size of their media and better financial support, the U.S. continues to provide better coverage of events from abroad.

The percentages extracted cannot reflect the disappearance and reduction of bureaus abroad (Gray, 2017; Molina, 2012) since the analysis is limited to exploring the current media situation and does not compare it with previous scenarios. Even so, the closure of bureaus is a widespread reality that began in the U.S. Without going any further, the *WSJ* has closed its bureaus in Budapest, Madrid, and Riyadh and has reduced those in Moscow, India, Scandinavia, and Berlin (Gray, 2017). In Spain, newspapers limit their foreign coverage to major European cities and the largest American cities and have little presence in Latin America and the Middle East. *El Correo* has the highest percentage, 24.77%, of international correspondent firms, but, about its websites, *El País* stands out as the Spanish medium with the greatest international projection. Its presence extends to 45 countries (EdP, 2023). Despite the scope of its foreign bureaus, most of them cannot compete with the North American ones' size, staff, and equipment.

Usually, the outbreak of war produces the largest deployment of media on the ground. This is common; when a country goes to war, so does its media. However, the bylines in both countries were recurrent, and only 6.84% came from the war zone. Due to the study's time frame, only the work of journalists whose names appeared in the bylines was considered, without considering other professionals sent afterward. Despite this, it was possible to see how much media space was reserved for the war. Ukraine occupied almost one-fifth, 22.72%, of the total coverage of the analyzed media. It seems contradictory that, with so much media attention, the content of

each media outlet from the war zone has been so scarce. This has to do with the transformation of journalists from witnesses to part of the conflict (Greste, 2017), as, for example, happened in the coverage of the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. President George Bush used the media to support the false idea that Iraq was behind the September 11, 2001 attacks and was hiding nuclear weapons (Merchant, 2023).

The Russian blockade of international media limited coverage on Russian soil (Corral, 2022), while Ukrainian openness allowed special correspondents to be sent to its territory. While the increased access to Ukrainian terrain has favored benevolent coverage by Western media (Makhortykh & Bastian, 2022), it has not translated into more coverage.

Both countries included the media in their military strategies, which led them to control their access to sensitive areas to prevent the dissemination of uncomfortable information. Russia forced the closure of media outlets and attacked journalists on Ukrainian soil (Corral, 2022). This did not prevent veteran correspondents based in the country from broadcasting news, mainly from Moscow. The productivity of correspondents stationed in Russia has meant that, despite being fewer than those sent to Ukraine, they have produced practically the same number of news stories. On the other hand, Ukraine offered greater access to sources and territory. (Prieto, 2022). In this country, platforms such as Telegram, Viber, and Twitter have played a key role, offering the possibility of citizen journalism and open-source intelligence (OSINT). A survey by Research and Branding Group found that, in 2021, Ukrainians chose the Internet as their primary source of news over traditional television (Information Agency, 2021). Perhaps the greater availability of these sources meant that correspondents' and special envoys' bylines were less prominent.

The analysis concluded that the newsroom dominated the coverage of the war, occupying 65.64% of the total number of bylines. Consequently, most of the news content was produced thousands of kilometers away from the war scenes. However, face-to-face coverage continues to be valued. Thus, the digitization and outsourcing of war coverage have compensated for the lack of resources and reduced access to war zones. Not much remains of the great international newsrooms of the 20th century. Today, one-person bureaus covering large regions are common, and correspondents are sent around the world to perform different assignments. However, Ukraine demonstrates that correspondents are still useful, although most international sections are written from newsrooms.

Many women are now involved in war journalism, but their contribution is still less than that of men. A small percentage of bylines (18.45%) belonged to women, mostly writing from Ukraine. Only Simmons of *The WSJ* and Nemtsova of *USA Today* wrote from Russia. In Spain, only *El País* had two women in the field, Sahuquillo and Bonet. This confirms that war journalism is still a field where equality does not occur (Unda- Endemaño et al., 2022). The reasons go beyond the scope of this study.

The challenges facing the media are evident in war journalism. Those who cover wars must deal with precariousness, increased competition and shrinking audiences and face inaccessible scenarios, biased sources, and censorship. Digital technology has confronted the media with the rupture of time and space, giving rise to journalism's worst and best moments. Today, anyone can transmit information instantly from anywhere. The digitization of information has democratized it, but it has also corrupted and devalued it (Sánchez Gómez, 2018). If before it was an elite of foreign correspondents who offered exclusive information from abroad, now the latest news reaches the newsrooms in advance. Faced with the impossibility of restricting the circulation of information and disinformation, governments resort to blocking digital platforms and launching hoaxes; this is amplified in times of war. Conflicts incorporate powerful emotions into coverage, and the information field interferes with the battlefield, giving rise to hybrid conflicts (Nazaruk, 2022). Many journalists are no longer subject to protection and are exposed to imprisonment, censorship, attack, or assassination (Springer et al. 2022). The audience, with more prominence than ever before, is increasingly turning to online sources of information.

This analysis suggests that the newsrooms themselves mainly cover the war in Ukraine. Although the media rely significantly on agency content, the study detected a downward trend in the contribution of freelancers. The most prominent international correspondents were already based in Russia, and the analysis documents the advantage of having foreign bureaus already in place. Meanwhile, the coverage from Ukraine was mainly in the hands of special envoys.

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