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Editorial: The Russian invasion of Ukraine in modern information environments: content, consumers, and consequences of digital conflict communication

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Editorial on the Research Topic

[The Russian invasion of Ukraine in modern information environments: content, consumers, and consequences of digital conflict communication](#)

Russia's invasion of Ukraine fundamentally and enduringly changed the current world order in many ways. From a perspective of political communication, the invasion highlights the transformative impact of digitalization on conflict communication and its reception. In this regard, the invasion demonstrates that, similar to past advances of new technologies, the development and diffusion of digital communication technologies have altered the nature of modern war (Hoskins and O'Loughlin, 2015). Today, digital media is not only a major venue for conflict information, it is also an integral part of warfare itself, for example, through the spread of disinformation (Kragh and Åsberg, 2017; Golovchenko et al., 2018). Conflict parties make use of digital communication for means of strategic communication (Jungblut, 2020). In turn, citizens both actively use the web to seek information and are incidentally exposed to conflict communication by browsing social media platforms or using messaging apps. Therein, social media platform affordances shape the way in which citizens can engage with conflict information (Kümpel, 2022).

Conflict research thus needs to reflect these fundamental changes in modern conflict information environments. To be able to do so, research needs to focus on emerging themes of conflict communication. In this regard, conflict research includes *how conflict is communicated on social media platforms*. Here, platform affordances and their impact on the perception of conflict have emerged as a new and relevant research objective. As established roles (communicators vs. recipients) have been fundamentally blurred through these platforms, research needs to focus on how citizens, journalists, influencers, and other alternative sources for conflict information report on the on-going conflict and how this portrayal affects the audience, online debates, or news coverage in traditional mass media (Golovchenko et al., 2018; Neuberger et al., 2023). In addition, conflict communication as well as digital communication

is increasingly *visual or multi-modal* (Jungblut and Zakareviciute, 2019). Accordingly, research should focus on how conflict is depicted online, where those visuals stem from, how truthful they are and how these depictions affect the perceptions of violent conflicts. Similarly, recipients also encounter the conflict through video-centered platforms such as TikTok or YouTube. As such, research needs to focus on the production, characteristics, and reception of videos that depict violent conflicts.

This article collection offers a first step for addressing these issues. It presents empirical insights into the role of digital media technologies during the Russian invasion of Ukraine and thus helps to unravel how digital information environments shape conflict communication and the perception of conflict.

Udris et al. analyze the sourcing practices in Swiss online coverage of the Russian invasion. The study shows that different types of online media (advertising-based and public service media) refer to different types of sources when covering the conflict. In this, social media turns out to be a relevant source of conflict information, as 16% of news items on Ukraine refer to online sources. Moreover, social media is especially important for advertising-based media as 23% of news items use it as a source. The study thus helps to gather first insights into how conflict is communicated online and into how social media posts can impact mass media coverage.

Kobilke et al. investigate how language-specific Twitter communities (English, German, and Russian) frame NATO's role in Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The study develops an innovative framework to analyze conflict framing with the help of interpretive repertoires. It thereby demonstrates that online discourses in social media differ vastly between language-communities, emphasizing the role of ethnocentrism for interpreting conflict information.

Müller and Christ's study focuses on the second emerging theme of conflict communication: visual information. With the help of an innovative Q-Sort study of press photography, the authors analyze how recipients react to press photos. In doing so, the study identifies different patterns of empathetic reactions created by different types of visual representation of conflict. It thus extends existing insights into audience reactions to visual war communication and offers valuable ideas for future research.

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Primig et al. investigate how the Russian invasion is portrayed in TikTok videos. Based on a qualitative content analysis, they show that videos differ between professional and amateur communicators and that this difference can be found in the video production but also in the style in which information is presented. The study offers a first glimpse into how visual social media platforms communicate about conflicts, thus providing a gateway for future research on TikTok as a source of conflict information.

Overall, these four articles offer a novel perspective on emerging themes in conflict research by using innovative research designs. By doing so, they broaden our perspectives on the role of media within the current world order and set a foundation for future research in this highly important research area of modern conflict information environments.

Author contributions

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

Conflict of interest

TW is employed by RTL Data (RTL Deutschland GmbH).

The remaining authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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