



The Content Analysis of BBC Live News Reports of the Russia-Ukraine War

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Abstract. The Russia-Ukraine War, which is called a “special military operation” by the Russian Federal Government, has been a very important international event attracting worldwide spotlights since February 24th 2022. British Broadcasting Corporation, a famous broadcasting company that offers service almost all over the world, conducts live news reports on the event. According to traditional communication theories, mass media has strong influence on audiences. However, during an era when media technology is evolving rapidly, the traditional media like the British Broadcasting Corporation has attempted to shift its news broadcasting platform online. The author conducted a content analysis of the British Broadcasting Corporation Live news reports of the Russia-Ukraine War during a certain time period so as to analyse topic tendency and potential influence of these news reports, and to explore some special reporting modes about the war. To be specific, four general aspects, including the change of battlefield situations, the reactions and measures carried out by the governments of other countries, the reactions of international organizations and the interviews with local people in Ukraine were included in the content analysis of BBC Live news reports. The study explored the potential influence of BBC Live news reports, including encouraging Ukrainian people and Ukrainian army, arousing sympathy of most people around the world, and even the indirect influence such as all kinds of aids.

Keywords: Content analysis · BBC · Russia-Ukraine War

1 Introduction

British Broadcasting Corporation is a major public news media in the United Kingdom, and it is an influential media among most citizens in western countries. The main income of the news media comes from the annual television license fees from most households, companies and organizations who use any kinds of electronic equipment to receive or record live television programs. With the development of science and technology, it has not only offered news through radio and television as traditional media, but also disseminated news information by some types of new media such as the Internet, the application on mobile devices. Although BBC broadcasts via a variety of media, this paper will focus on the news coverage of the conflicts between Russia and Ukraine from

March 2nd to March 29th 2022, under the column of War in Ukraine on the official website of BBC NEWS.

With the dissolution of Soviet Union on December 25th, 1991, both Russia and Ukraine have declared themselves as a sovereign country. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine has been hybrid warfare since February 2014. From February 22nd to March 18th 2014, the masked soldiers in unmarked green army uniforms with modern military weapons and equipment controlled the Crimea and called for a referendum to try to legalize Crimea becoming a part of Russia Federation. However, it is not recognized by the United Nations and most countries in the world. Later, the anti-government separatists in Donetsk and Luhansk armed with Russian weapons started a conflict against Ukraine government forces and declared the Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic. Later Ukraine and Russia signed Minsk Protocol and Minsk agreements to try to achieve a ceasefire. However, Minsk Protocol and Minsk agreements have never been effectively enforced. The low-intensity conflicts in a small scale continuously happened in Donetsk and Luhansk.

What's more, many Central and Eastern European countries including Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Albania, Croatia, Montenegro and North Macedonia joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization since the Collapse of Soviet Union and the end of cold war. Russia federal government led by President Vladimir Putin considered the expansion of North Atlantic Treaty Organization as a threat to Russia. However, the prospect of joining NATO is enshrined in the Ukraine Constitution by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine in 2019.

In 2022, Russian Federation Council authorized Russian President to use force abroad after Russia's recognition of the Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic. After that, President Putin announced a "special military operation" in Ukraine based on the main reasons of protecting the Russian-speaking people in Donetsk and Luhansk and making Ukraine demilitarization and denazification.

The Russia-Ukraine War caused serious damage and humanitarian crisis to Ukraine and negative economic influence on Ukraine, Russia and even the whole world. Most western countries imposed serious sanctions on Russia. On the other hand, Russia had a blockade of Ukraine's black seacoast. The sanctions seriously limited the foreign trade of Russia, while the blockade seriously limited the foreign trade of Ukraine. As two countries which produced much food every year, it caused serious food crisis around the world. In addition, more than 10000000 Ukrainian people have fled from their homeland to some other European countries. As a result, it also caused refugee crisis in Europe.

This paper will focus on the BBC Live news report of the Russia-Ukraine War including the change of battlefield situations, the reactions of other countries and some international organizations such as the United Nations, its influence on Ukraine. The paper will conduct content analysis of BBC Live news reports during the period from March 2nd to March 29th in 2022.

2 Literature Review

According to agenda setting theory, mass media are able to set the agenda of contents of news reports. The perceptions of importance of news reports of an event will continuously

increase with the news reports of the event continuously appearing on mass media [1]. Some studies found that the media selected and emphasized certain issues to frame news event, so it symbolized that the news content was not independent from social, political and ideological issues [2, 3]. Therefore, that BBC continuously reports the news related to the Russia-Ukraine War and especially the development of battlefield situations plays an important role in promoting audiences to continuously pay attention to the Russia-Ukraine War.

On the other hand, as for the tendency of news reports in the war, the earlier study indicated that the white house and its allies in the congress and society would have more opportunities to gain access and affect the news agenda in wartime [4]. Moreover, Rachlin's research showed that the international events were always reported in the way consistent with the interests of the news media's host country and its political and/or cultural perspectives [5]. Another study suggested that many journalists would become nationalists when reporting the news about the international conflicts which their own countries are involved [6]. In addition, some scholars found that the press had a tendency to support their governments during the period of the conflicts, especially the early period [7, 8].

The contemporary war includes not only using military weapons to fight in the battles, but also using words and images as weapons to fight for a visually mediated war. Thus, the mass media have become an important part of contemporary warfare [9]. The social media, especially some short-form video platforms such as Tik Tok, also plays a vital role in the contemporary war including the Russia-Ukraine War as well. The photographic messages especially the news images which are widely used as an iconic material for a visually mediated war may have powerful influence in the aspect of shaping public opinion on the war [10]. Sometimes audiences are less possible to be aware of visual framing because of the 'the true-to-life quality of photographs [11].

Actually, the mode of reporting news about the war has been deeply changed since the Iraq War in 2003. The media and many journalists have unprecedented access to military actions in the Iraq War according to the embed program which offered opportunities for journalists to accompany military personnel to have a closer perspective to the war [12, 13].

Despite the abundance of wartime report researches, analyses of BBC Live news reports of the Russia-Ukraine War are rarely seen. Due to the advancement in internet and technology, the increasing widespread on-site battleground video, depicted every corner in the regions involved in the war from a first angel of view, overwhelmed the social media platforms and attracted millions of audiences. The monopoly status of the traditional media giants is once again challenged now, in a novel realm of real-time war reporting. As a result, the influence of traditional mass media such as BBC were weakened. From the perspective of audiences' activity, audiences could select and distinguish the news to receive [14]. However, sometimes audiences will doubt the reliability of the news information on social media, so they may look for the news on traditional mass media such as BBC. The editors of BBC are able to verify the source of what happened in the war before reporting the news [15]. Therefore, it's very significant

to conduct the research of content analysis of BBC Live news reports of the Russia-Ukraine War to make people know about the special modes of reporting war, potential influence and topic tendency of the news reports.

3 Methodology

The BBC Live news reports from March 2nd to March 29th in 2022 were selected as the subjects for content analysis. March 2nd was chosen as the start time point, because it was the date when the United Nations General Assembly adopted a solution that demanded Russia “immediately, completely and unconditionally withdraw all of its military force from the territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders”. And the reason why March 29th was chosen as the end time point was that the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation announced that they would “drastically reduce military activity” on the fronts of Kyiv and Chernihiv through Telegram channel on that day.

4 Results and Discussion

According to the content analysis of the BBC Live news reports of the Russia-Ukraine War from March 2nd to March 29th in 2022, this research found that BBC reported the news from many different aspects such as the change of the battlefield situations in Ukraine, the reactions of other countries to the Russia-Ukraine War, the reactions of international organizations to the Russia-Ukraine War, the interviews with some citizens in Ukraine about the change of their lives and so forth.

First of all, since Russia started the “special military operation” on February 24th, the battlefield situation in Ukraine has been continuously changing, so it’s very important to ensure the timeliness of the news reports of the change of battlefield situations. Although there were some journalists stationed in Ukraine by BBC, they were still unable to cover what happened in every front-line area of the battlefield. Most of these journalists stayed in the important cities of Ukraine such as Kyiv, Kharkiv, Lviv and such. On the other hand, most people in front-line areas of Ukraine could record videos depicting every corner in the regions from a first angel of view and submit these videos to social media platforms such as Twitter. Sometimes the tweets were cited by Live news reports of BBC. As a result, it could help BBC Live news reports of change of the battlefield situations in Ukraine try to cover a wider area in a more specific way. Moreover, BBC paid more attention to shaping the image of Ukrainian army bravely fighting against Russian army. It’s helpful to make people around the world have more confidence for Ukrainian army and indirectly promoted the governments of western countries to send more military weapon assistance to Ukraine to help Ukrainian army resist Russian army.

Secondly, BBC reported the reactions and measures which the governments of other countries carried out. For example, since the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine War, the United States of America, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, Japan, most countries of European Union and some other countries around the world provided all kinds of aids with Ukraine including military aids, humanitarian aids and financial aids. From the perspective of the author, BBC paid more attention to reporting the foreign assistance to

Ukraine. Maybe it was a symbol of sympathy of BBC to Ukraine, especially to Ukrainian people, Ukrainian army and Ukrainian government led by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. A message that many countries around the world supported Ukraine was conveyed through BBC Live news reports of the Russia-Ukraine War. Moreover, BBC Live news reports especially emphasized on lethal military weapon assistance such as anti-tank weapons and portable air defence missiles, and non-lethal weapon assistance such as helmets and body armours, to Ukraine offered by the western countries especially by the countries belonging to North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Maybe it was a symbol of encouraging the Ukrainian people and Ukrainian army who were in trouble to defend their countries, through focusing on reporting the news of foreign assistance especially military aids. Besides, the sanctions launched by many countries especially the United States of America, Canada, the United Kingdom, most countries in European Union, Japan, Australia and New Zealand were included in BBC Live news reports of the Russia-Ukraine War. Many countries launched sanctions of different aspects on Russia so as to hold Russia accountable for the war and try to urge Russia to avoid further damage to Ukraine. Although BBC tried to analyse the influence caused by the sanctions, it still focused more on the negative influence of the sanctions on Russia especially the serious influence on Russian economy. The sanctions were also considered as a symbol of strong support for Ukraine from most western countries and strong condemn for Russian invading Ukraine. In addition, when BBC reported the news of the reactions of the leaders of other countries to the Russia-Ukraine War, sometimes the pictures of the leaders of those countries were cited from other media such as Reuter and Getty Images.

Thirdly, there were many reactions from international organizations to the Russia-Ukraine War included in BBC Live news reports. For instance, BBC reported the UN General Assembly voted in favour of a solution that demanded Russia “immediately, completely and unconditionally withdraw all of its military force from the territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders” on March 2nd, 2022. It emphasized that “the solution was supported by 141 of the body’s 193 members at a rare emergency” and five countries voted against the solution, but it almost didn’t mention the countries abstained in the UN vote. Moreover, BBC reported that International Criminal Court took measures to “open an investigation into potential war crimes by Russia during its invasion of Ukraine” on March 2nd, 2022. It especially mentioned that “Karim Khan wrote that in a ‘preliminary examination of the Situation in Ukraine, my Office had already found a reasonable basis to believe crimes within the jurisdiction of the Court had been committed, and had identified potential cases that would be admissible’”. Through BBC reporting the news of the reactions from international organizations, Ukrainian people and Ukrainian army would receive a clear message that the international organizations and most countries around the world strongly support them. On the other hand, BBC Live news reports of the reactions from the international organizations brought much pressure on Russian people, Russian government and Russian army in Ukraine, which urged them to end the “special military operation” and try to avoid committing any crimes related to crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and crimes of aggression.

Fourthly, BBC journalists conducted some interviews with the local citizens in Ukraine. Due to the missile attack from the air, many Ukrainian people had to stay

in underground air defence facilities. BBC journalists headed into the underground air defence facilities to report what happened there and interviewed some local people about how the war influenced their lives. The daily life of ordinary Ukrainian people has been seriously destroyed. Moreover, when the Russian army approached some cities, the mayors of those cities announced the curfews in effect, which also caused serious negative influence on local people in those cities. The troubles that the Ukrainian people suffered were reported by BBC and communicated almost all over the world through the wide global influence of BBC. It promoted to arouse the sympathy to Ukrainian people around the world especially in western countries. As a result, the sympathy of the people in western countries for Ukrainian people brought more pressure to the governments of western countries and indirectly promoted the governments of western countries and some international organizations to send more assistance to Ukraine.

Although BBC Live news reports of the Russia-Ukraine War included some other related aspects as well, the paper would only focus on the four aspects of BBC Live news reports mentioned above, the news reports of some other aspects related to the Russia-Ukraine War were not conducted content analysis in the paper.

5 Conclusion

This study focused on the BBC Live news reports on the Russia-Ukraine War from March 2nd to March 29th. A content analysis was conducted to explore the topic tendency and potential influence of the news reports and some special news reporting modes. The study conducted in-depth analysis about how BBC encouraged the Ukraine people, Ukraine army and Ukraine government in dilemma, aroused the sympathy of many people all over the world through Live news reports of the Russia-Ukraine war. Firstly, BBC reported the instant news of the change of battlefield situations not only depending on the journalists stationed in important cities of Ukraine by BBC, but also relying on the videos submitted by the people in front-line area to social media platforms. That BBC paid more attention to reporting Ukrainian army bravely resisting Russian army brought more confidence for Ukraine. Secondly, all kinds of aids of other countries to Ukraine and the sanctions imposed on Russia by other countries especially western countries were included in BBC Live news reports. It showed that the other countries tried to hold Russia accountable and pay the cost for the war. Thirdly, the reactions of international organizations to the war were included in BBC Live news reports, which brought more pressure on Russian government and Russian army. It showed that the international organizations and most countries around the world strongly supported Ukraine. Fourthly, the journalists of BBC interviewed with many Ukrainian citizens to show how their lives were destroyed by the war to arouse sympathy of many people all over the world. However, there were some limitations of the research. Firstly, the BBC Live news reports which were analyzed were limited to four general aspects mentioned above. Secondly, since the Russia-Ukraine War has been still continuing, the study only chose the BBC Live news reports during a time period of the war to conduct content analysis. Thirdly, due to complexity of the content analysis, the research didn't visualize the results. In the author's humble opinion, content analysis focused on relevant news reports by various mass media from both sides should be conducted, as the situations in

Ukraine further evolve. In-depth, more comprehensive analysis with visualized tool will provide a better view on the influence, duty and responsibility of mass media during a war time.

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