

Review Article

The Influence of Media as a Non-state Actor in International Relations – Syrian and Ukrainian refugees’ crisis- case study

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**ABSTRACT**

In any country, the role of media is vital as it is a medium to keep the people informed on the latest developments in the country and elsewhere. Due to this assumed role of the press, media outlets are expected to remain objective, honest, and free from biases. Furthermore, media outlets were more localized traditionally. However, this media aspect has changed extensively in recent decades, most notably with the rise of the internet. Today, many prominent media outlets are either inclined toward a fixed political ideology or are owned by large media conglomerates with their corporate interests to look out for. This report aims to identify the role of media as a non-state actor in international relations. This is an important study to conduct in an era when media outlets are no longer limited to just their domestic market but instead have a truly global reach. Using a case study analysis method of data collection with a qualitative methodology, this study analyzes two prominent recent international events, the Syrian refugee crisis, and the Ukrainian refugee crisis. From the case study analysis, this study has established that the media now has the power of public diplomacy to influence policies in international relations as well.

1. INTRODUCTION

Media has always been one of the core pillars of any democratic society. While traditionally, media has primarily remained domestic, in the age of the internet and social media, the reach of media has expanded to a truly global scale. With the international press being able to inform domestic and foreign audiences, their role in international relations has likely become expansively important as well. Today, some of the most prominent media outlets have their reach and following in a genuinely global manner and can create narratives that go well beyond just the domestic market of the media corporation. Moreover, politicians and policymakers live in a world where the media's response often drives their actions. Afterward and therefore, any increased influence of media, domestically and internationally, can mean an abrupt change in the balance between different pillars of a democratic nation.

The proposed research study examines the extent to which the media, as a non-state actor, influences international relations and public diplomacy. In this process, data collection methods can be used to identify the influence of media as a non-state actor exclusively in the context of international events and international relations.

1.1 Research aims and objectives

This research study aims to assess the media's influence in the modern day in the context of international relations as a non-state actor. In pursuing this aim, the research study will focus on attaining the following research objectives:

- To assess whether traditional media outlets pursue the goal of influencing international relations.
- To identify the level of influence that media has in international relations.
- To recognize the key mechanism that is available to media to use its influence in international relations policies.

1.2 Significance of the study

Over the recent few decades, there has been a fundamental change in how the media operates globally, driven by many key factors. First and foremost, the media outlet's reach has reached a truly global audience in the age of international syndication of media, social media, and streaming services. In addition to this, corporate conglomerates are at the helm of

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some of the biggest media companies in the world, creating a conflict of interest for these media outlets to either serve their corporate interests or to inform the public in a completely unbiased manner. Therefore, there is a potential for media outlets to use their agendas and interests to influence international relations through the coverage of international incidents in media broadcast to millions of people. With the large scale of viewership of the media outlets and the high level of influence that the media has, it becomes necessary to conduct a study to understand better the extent to which media has an influence in international relations as a non-state actor; whether the media has already been making use of this influence. With the findings of this study, a broader literature can be developed to comprehensively understand the intricate nature of international relations policies and the influence that media coverage can provide on specific policies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent decades, the rise of internet technology and the growing trend of globalization have extensively changed the way media operates and the audience that media reaches out to. The coverage of media outlets no longer remains bound to the domestic nation only, and it is also notable that many of the major media outlets are now owned by conglomerates. Many scholars have examined this changed aspect of the media in the context of international relations.

One of the core parts of the media is the imagery and visual communication, which has proven throughout history to be very effective in having a global reach. Kirkpatrick (2015) examined how visuality and photography in media have a vital role in international relations. According to their research, while the role of media is often discussed among scholars for its influence on international relations, there is an apparent need to examine further and study the role of visual and photographic media. He further states that this media coverage instantly can spread worldwide without the language barrier and communicate the core theme of the media coverage immediately and with evidence [1]. For instance, the role of visual news media is given in the form of the representation of war by news through war photography, which shows the extent of damages and the atrocities caused by the war. In such cases, the media can protect international relations as any war crimes can be represented by the media and gain international attention. Similarly, these media visuals can result in giving bargaining power to countries.

2.1 The CNN effects

The media has become pivotal in many regional conflicts and in reporting on significant issues of international interest. The term “CNN effect” has been coined in global political avenues because global media networks have a significant role in determining actions and policy decisions by government officials and policymakers [9]. While the CNN effect is a concept derived in the 20th century, its relevance is still discussed by many scholars in the era of social media, web 2.0, and the internet being used to spread media globally [7]. Doucet (2018) evaluates the existence of a potential CNN effect in the case of the Syrian crisis to identify if the coverage of the issue by the media impacted the policy-making decisions. According to the findings, while media did not shift the policy strategy but had a significant role in the policy implementation and actions decided. The media coverage during the Syrian crisis and the narrative that Western countries were not helping in this devastation is described by Doucet (2018) as a “constant pressure” on policymakers to respond. Hence, it is apparent that, at least subtly and indirectly, media has a significant impact on policies in international relations. Lusk (2019) examines the CNN effect in the modern media context as the popularity of news media has changed since the inception of the internet [2]. Lusk (2019) argues that while the CNN effect is still visible, media outlets have moved past that in many cases and actively use their influence to argue for a policy as an independent non-state actor rather than a neutral actor [8].

This phenomenon became prominent in an era when major international media had a significant viewership across the world and had immense legitimacy, which means that coverage by news agencies like BBC and CNN would form the public opinion on crucial issues. Coban (2016) assessed the role that media plays in international relations, and for this purpose, he focused on the so-called “Al-Jazeera effect” and “CNN effect.” According to him, global media has created a system where information reaches all over the world rapidly and more conveniently, and it is this access to information that has been changing the power politics between countries in international relations. With media being able to control and influence the narrative surrounding an international incident, media has inherently become an essential part of the international power struggle. In this process, media is no longer an independent pillar of democracy as is present in the case of state-sponsored media and media is often exploited by the governments for their gain in international relations [3]. An example of this approach can be found in the Iraq war by the United States, in which the Bush administration used the domestic media to sell the war to the people and international communities [4].

2.2 Public Diplomacy

Public diplomacy refers to the practice of government using its resources and efforts to communicate directly with the public in a foreign nation. It is a soft power approach in international relations to develop support in the foreign public for its objectives. While the government and its agencies do most of the public diplomacy, the increasing media reach makes it possible for governments to have a new resource for public diplomacy. Trajkovski and Trajkov (2015) conducted their

research to explicitly identify public diplomacy's influence on the visibility of different states in the international relations realm. Their research argues that countries engage in the practice of public diplomacy for three key reasons:

- To reduce the impact of or to completely get rid of the negative image of the state for past events
- To cause disruption and decline in the values held by the public of a foreign government and disrupt their model of governing
- To use public diplomacy as a tool to develop comparative trade and economic advantages.

Trajkovski and Trajkov (2015) identify that the tools and instruments governments use to expand their public diplomacy have changed in recent decades [5]. While these activities used to take place in secret through government agencies, governments in many countries are now using media for public diplomacy in foreign countries for better international relations. Yarchi et al. (2013) examine the role of media in presenting terrorism with a specific focus on major international news agencies. They argue that when news media turns international, it becomes difficult not to associate the media's reporting with the act of public diplomacy. The act of terrorism is among the most heinous and universally despised acts. However, the coverage of different types of terrorist attacks and incidents occurs in different ways in the international news media. It tends to occur because different state and non-state actors have their own perspectives on terrorism, which influences the way the international news media represent terrorism. In this manner, in many cases, international news media directly engages in public diplomacy by creating antagonists [6]. This approach can be seen from the example of the 9/11 attacks in the United States. Despite the attackers belonging to Saudi Arabia, the international news media was less critical of Saudi Arabia and more critical of Iraq. The most common association between this approach and of softer presentation of Saudi Arabia by the international media likely comes from good trade and economic deals of Saudi Arabia with western countries and investors [7].

Many media used for public diplomacy have been concerned with the United States. Metzger (2012) assessed the case of public diplomacy in the United States in relation to Iran to identify if the media is being treated as a medium for information sharing or if the media itself is the message. At this time, the United States had no formal official diplomatic relations with the Iranian government for three decades. Metzger describes the engagement achieved by Americans with the Iranian people through media outlets and social media as a 21st-century version of statecraft, dubbing the phenomenon "public diplomacy 2.0". Therefore, it is well-established in the existing literature that, either willingly or unknowingly, media is used prominently for public diplomacy purposes in international media.

2.3 New media and influence on international relations

With the rise of the internet, many industries have undergone significant changes in recent decades. The news media is among these industries that have been impacted heavily by the popularity of Web 2.0. Media now encompasses platforms that are starkly different from traditional media sources and heavily focus on user-generated content and news reporting. According to Carpenter and Entman (2010) [8], the media landscape has been changing rapidly due to web 2.0, and the same has also changed the relationship between news producers and the consumers of information available on the internet. In addition, this approach helps news media in international relations as their coverage gains direct engagement on social media platforms for weeks, perpetuating their narrative further and internationally.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Methodology

This research study aims to investigate the role that media as a non-state actor plays in the modern world economy and politics to understand how media impacts international relations. By the very nature of international relations, there are key attributes of international relations that are highly complex, filled with secrecy, and ambiguity that is difficult to quantify in any meaningful manner [9]. It is for this reason that this research study adopts a qualitative methodology. This methodology will comprise collecting non-numerical data with the ability to gather nuanced subjective data.

3.2 Research Philosophy

Within the context of a research study, research philosophy refers to the researcher's belief about the way that data should be collected and the right way of examining a phenomenon [10]. In common practice, the research philosophies used most often include positivism, realism, interpretivism and pragmatism. As this research study tries to identify the role and influence of media in international relations, the appropriate research philosophy chosen is realism. Realism philosophy presents a view of scientific realism, i.e., that a phenomenon or entity exists in the real world independently regardless of the perception or theories. The issue of media playing a role in international relations can be studied in this manner to stay clear of subjective opinions about media and focus on more factual details.

3.3 Research approach

The research approach in a research study refers to the procedure that is used to reach the research design phase to the findings, effectively defining the key assumptions made during the research planning stage. The two fundamental types of

research approaches commonly used include inductive and deductive research approaches. In the case of the inductive research approach, a researcher does not start with a thesis statement or theory at the start of the study but instead forms a theory based on the findings of the data collection process [11]. In contrast, the deductive research approach involves starting with a research theory and thesis that is then tested for validity through data collection [23]. This study adopts the inductive research approach as it would allow a more explorative direction to the research and cover all key attributes of media's role in international relations from different contexts [12].

3.4 Research method

To collect data, the research study will rely on the method of case study analysis. For this purpose, numerous prominent international relations events, conflicts, and phenomena will be examined to understand the impact and role of media as a non-state actor in international relations for each case study selected. To ensure that the case studies are selected without bias and to reflect on the modern state of media, a case study will be selected from this century only that are prominent in scale with high implications for international relations.

3.5 Data collection

For each case study selected, data must be collected to assess the case study further. For this purpose, the data collected must be taken from reliable sources. For this purpose, the data collection method will take information from secondary sources. News and official government reports will be taken for contextual information, while peer-reviewed sources will be used to gather information about the implications of media coverage in international relations for each case study. Through a collective of these data collection methods, it would be possible to ensure that different case studies are analyzed thoroughly for a more comprehensive understanding of the media's role in international relations in the contemporary world.

3.6 Data analysis

The data collection method will gather data in qualitative form through several case studies selected for analysis. To analyze the chosen case studies, the data will be analyzed using a thematic analysis process to find the most common themes of the case studies. Using thematic analysis, it is possible to examine the key aspects of a case study, including the main ideas present and the patterns that are identified in the qualitative data [13]. This method of data analysis is suitable for the qualitative case study examination method of data collection for this study as it ensures evaluate of data in the correct pattern.

3.7 Ethical considerations

In conducting a research study, some ethical considerations must be followed to ensure that the data collected is reliable and the findings are credible. While there is no primary data collection method in this study, some ethical principles must be adhered to. First and foremost, the case studies must be selected in an unbiased manner rather than cherry-picking the case studies for a more comprehensive and honest view of the media's influence on international relations. Furthermore, to give more credibility to the data collection process, the case study analysis will include only peer-reviewed scholarly sources for fairness.

4.0 Data Collection and Analysis
For data collection, the selected method is the case study analysis method. However, as the form of media has been changing rapidly in recent decades, primarily driven by the invention of the internet, it is essential to ensure that the case studies selected are more representative of the modern world with the current state of the media. Due to this reason, this research study will primarily focus on the case studies that have taken place within the last ten years for concurrency. In addition, combining multiple will further help ensure that multiple data points are accessed to avoid basing the findings on an anomaly rather than a natural phenomenon.

4. SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS

In the recent history of the world, a prominent issue has been refugee crises that most prominently started with Syrian refugees and, more recently, Ukrainian and Afghani refugees. All three of these events have been covered extensively by the media, so assessing how the media has portrayed the crisis is helpful. Sunata and Yildiz (2018) assess the representation of Syrian refugees in the Turkish media, a nearby country in Syria where the crisis was taking place. The implications of the refugee crisis were very significant for Turkey as it was a pivotal destination to get settled in for many Syrian refugees, and for an even more significant number of refugees, Turkey was a country they had to transit through. By collecting a wide variety of media articles from three primary print media sources in Turkey, these researchers found that the media in Turkey was using an objective lens in representing the Syrian refugees by describing them as victims of war in need of help and survival support. Furthermore, the tone of messaging about the Syrian refugees in Turkish media was human, even while talking about migration policies and humanitarian aid factors.

While the Syrian refugees sought refuge in their nearby countries to some degree, for a more significant number of refugees, getting refuge required them to reach even further to the Western Hemisphere. Tyska et al. (2018) found in their research

study that the portrayal of Syrian refugees in Canada by prominent media outlets lacked an adequate degree of humanity or equality as there were consistent themes of neo-colonialism and orientalism rather than seeing the refugees as victims. Effectively, there were also elements of neoliberalism in the media portrayal of the crisis, which meant that the crisis was discussed for its economic aspects more than the humane aspects, turning the crisis into a discussion of whether accepting refugees in Canada will cost significant money or if it is even good to integrate Syrian refugees in Canadian society (Tyyska et al., 2018). In this manner, the Canadian media outlet consistently treated the Syrian refugees as second-rate citizens compared to the Canadians. It examined the proposal of giving refuge to Syrian people from the perspective of the economic sense of the policy more than helping human beings. Wallace (2018) focused her study on the portrayal of Syrian refugees in Canadian print media and found that print media still performs an essential task of contextualizing an international issue to the domestic residents. She further argues that the federal election cycle in Canada marked a conflicting view of the crisis presented by the print media, one from a humanitarian side and another from an administrative policy perspective. Hence, it is apparent that the news media in the Canadian print media industry used its coverage of the crisis partisanly [14].

The Syrian refugee crisis was among the most significant humanitarian crises in recent history; however, it is noteworthy for the lack of support and aid that the refugees received in the western world [15]. examined this case of marginalization of the refugees by focusing first on the issue of invisibility of Syrian refugee women in both mainstream online activism and global media. According to their research, the "Arab Springs" showed the sheer power that social media channels have in giving power back to the people against an oppressive government. However, during the Syrian refugee crisis, the feminist activism campaigns that were prominent in the mainstream online communities had a stark difference between the shown support in the media and the ground reality of the support offered to the Syrian refugee women. In addition to this, by performing an ethnographic assessment of global media coverage of the Syrian refugee crisis [16], further found that both in online activist campaigns and in mainstream media, the western media is more focused on reinforcing the hegemonic orientalist mentality and representation of Syrian women. With this treatment by the media, the marginalization of these women and other refugees becomes more prevalent rather than mitigated at a time of need.

This difference in the way the Syrian refugees were portrayed by the media in different cultures, despite it being an international event, was further examined by Dimitrova et al. (2018) [17]. The latter performed a comparative cultural assessment between Turkey, a Middle Eastern country, and Bulgaria, a European country, to assess the difference in cultural perspectives on the crisis. According to their research study, the Turkish media had presented the refugee crisis issue in a much more personalized manner and emphasized the victims of the crisis, which were the refugees. In this manner, these findings of Turkish media portrayal align with that of Sunata and Yildiz (2018) [18]. On the other hand, Dimitrova et al. (2018) argue that the coverage of Syrian refugees by Bulgarian media was not very personalized and featured a theme that represented the administrative and policy perspective more than instead of focusing on the victims. Hence, there is a pattern recognized in the western media outlets using a perceptive of the crisis that does not put the victims at the center of the issue and focuses more on the issue's politics, policies, and economic aspects. This comparison appears starkly different from the Asian media coverage, which uses a more objective and humane approach to covering the news of the Syrian refugee crisis.

5. RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE

On February 24, 2022, Russia started its invasion of Ukraine in one of the most significant escalations of the Russia-Ukraine war that had first begun in 2014 [19]. As a result, these two neighboring countries suddenly moved to the extent of entering a full-scale war, creating one of the most notable refugee crises in Europe since the conclusion of World War II [2]. According to a rough estimate, nearly 12 million Ukrainians were displaced during the war and fled the country in search of a refugee in a safer place [20]. While the incident is relatively recent, the occurrence of war and a refugee crisis in Europe immediately caught the attention of global media and scholars.

As the crisis grew further in Ukraine after the invasion by Russia, the migration of Ukrainians fleeing their homes began immediately. Details about the war and the crisis of refugees were covered extensively by news media across Europe with great interest. Zawadzka-Palucka (2022) performed a comprehensive assessment of how Ukrainian refugees were represented in the Polish press. Their study found that the key attributes of the Polish media coverage included an emphasis on referring to them as war refugees and their reception in Poland. However, the researcher also states that the people's attitude about the refugees and reception of accepting refugees can significantly be changed by the media coverage and the context created through narrative. Therefore, it is recognized by Zawadzka-Palucka (2022) that the media has an important role in international relations that even as a non-state actor [21].

On the coverage of the refugees from Ukraine, Roman et al. (2020) assessed the coverage of these refugees in media across the U.K., U.K., Ukraine, and Russian media. More prominently, the English-language newspapers focused on more statistics. However, a common theme was present in the coverage of the crisis in the U.S. and the U.K. to present the refugees as the victim of the war, and another critical attribute was that in the coverage of Ukrainian refugees, terms like "security threat" and "crime" were virtually absent from the media outlets [22]. This was an important finding about the

media's role in international relations because prior to this, these were the terms that were extensively linked to refugee crises for decades.

6. DISCUSSION

The two case studies collected and examined in this research study are focused on refugee crises originating from a war scenario and people fleeing for the safety of their lives. Due to the nature of a refugee crisis, both case studies are examples of international incidents and thus represent some of the policy decisions made by policymakers in the realm of international relations. Therefore, the two case studies are also comparable with each other due to the similarity of the underlying issue. From a review of the case, it is apparent that despite the similarities between the condition and the victimhood of the refugees in the Syrian refugee crisis and the Ukrainian refugee crisis, there was a wide degree of difference in the treatment of these refugees by the media, most notably the western media. From the very start of the refugee crisis, it was a notable factor that the narrative formed around the Syrian refugees was surrounding the notion that any country that would give refuge to them would face security risks and a likely rise in the crime rate due to the sheer act of allowing the refugees to stay in the nation even with proper due diligence. In heavy contrast to this, in the matter of the Ukrainian refugee crisis, there was an absence of these threats and fearmongering from the Western media outlets, which indicates that even with both cases being similar from a humanitarian perspective, the media treated the two cases entirely differently in the western hemisphere. For instance, Zawadzka-Palucka (2022) suggests that the sheer difference in the portrayal of refugees was evident in the racism that was a systemic problem in the behavior and reporting of the Western media [23].

The issue of Western media treating the Syrian refugees differently and beneath the Ukrainian refugees would not have been such a big issue if its impact had remained limited to just the reporting of the refugee crisis. However, as an example of public diplomacy, the portrayal and contextualization of the crises by the Western media have a direct impact on the people of these European and North American communities, who now perceive the Ukrainian refugees with a positive attitude, believing them to be victims. On the other hand, the very same communities focused on treating the Syrian refugees with disdain and suspicion, leaving them to their fate. Media influence goes even further from the formation and manipulation of people's attitudes toward refugees as the policymakers also acted similarly with better and faster refugee support services across Europe for the Ukrainian refugees. In contrast, Syrian refugees were often refused entry or given minimal facilities [24]. As argued by Rosstalnyj (2022), the differences in the depiction of the Ukrainian refugees from the Middle Eastern refugees in the media effectively resulted in the identification of one group of refugees as deserving of refuge while the other group was deemed as undeserving of support or refuge. A similar sentiment is also raised by Kauppila (2022) [25], who argues that across these two refugee crises, it is the media that has been able to define one group of refugees as victims whereas defining another group of refugees to get identified by the masses as a threat to their safety. Hence, it is apparent that in these international relations incidents, the coverage of the issue by the media can carry or prevent public support formation, which is often linked to the political will to act [26].

Overall, this can be argued from a review of the two case studies that there is a high degree of influence that the media has now in international relations, and the most prominent mechanism that the media uses to obtain this influence is public diplomacy [27]. The media is inherently more audience-oriented, designed to ensure that it serves its role of keeping people informed. However, when the media outlets have their agendas or partisan interests, they can push the public for their own interests; hence, this influence ability gives the media too much power in the international relations realm [28].

7. CONCLUSION

Despite its changing nature in the 21st century, media is a compelling force that can inform and influence people. The power of media to influence people has always been true; however, in a more traditional case, it was assumed that a credible and good media source would always offer more objective and fair news story coverage without bias. With the rise of the internet and various international media empires, the reach of media outlets has grown exponentially to include foreigners in different parts of the world. This attribute of getting viewership in other countries also allows media outlets to influence an international audience, making it possible for media to play an essential role in international events and international relations. However, in doing so, it is noteworthy that the media, in most cases, is a non-state actor and is expected to represent the unbiased coverage of every key issue of international importance. However, from an analysis of the phenomenon in this study, it has become apparent that the influence of the media has evolved extensively in recent decades, from the CNN effect to the direct and deliberate attempt by media outlets to influence policy decisions and even take partisan sides. From the case studies of the Syrian and the Ukrainian refugee crises, it is observed that the factor that changed the perception of the refugees the most, despite both refugee groups being war refugees, the one group that was treated more humanely and sympathetically by the western media was able to get more welcoming reception from the people and received refuge relatively quickly.

In contrast to this, the Syrian refugees were portrayed by the media in a policy and economic sense with identifiers like "potential security threat" and "crime rate rise," leading to poor reception of the Syrian refugees by the people in Western countries, leading to unfavourable policies for these refugees. In this manner, it is more than apparent that the media in

modern times has an incredible amount of influence and power to support or oppose policies in international relations. Most notably, this influence is achieved by media in international relations through public diplomacy and contextualizing events.

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