
Journal of Public and Nonprofit Affairs

Vol. 11, No. 2

Ukrainian News Media Representations and Framing of NGOs

Asya Cooley - Oklahoma State University

Shahariar Khan Nobel - University of Maryland

This study examines how Ukrainian news media portray and frame nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) from 2019 to 2024 using quantitative content analysis. Despite NGOs' crucial role in Ukrainian society, they face low public trust, political instability, and a lack of research on their media representations. Findings from 306 news articles reveal that NGOs received positive coverage, focusing on their activities and role as information sources. However, episodic framing and portrayal as story attributes rather than primary subjects dominated, potentially limiting public understanding of their broader impact. The study suggests that NGOs should engage proactively with media to promote thematic framing and showcase their work, while journalists should consider the implications of their framing choices. This research contributes insights for stakeholders working to strengthen civil society in Ukraine and highlights the importance of strategic communication for NGOs in challenging environments.

Keywords: NGOs, Ukraine, Media framing, News coverage, Nonprofit sector

Introduction

News media play a crucial role in shaping public perceptions and bringing attention to issues that benefit society. One such area is the coverage of the nonprofit sector, which includes nonprofit and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that provide essential services and advocate for various causes. Media publicity is vital for NGOs to meet their organizational goals, such as shaping public opinion and advocating for their causes (Akboga & Arik, 2019). However, limited research has explored media representations of NGOs, especially across cultural contexts outside of Western media (Cooley, 2020). This study aims to fill this gap by examining how Ukrainian media portrays and frames NGOs in its coverage, guided by the framing communication theory.

NGOs operating in Ukraine face distinct challenges that provide a strong rationale for this media analysis. Scholars have described the Ukrainian nonprofit sector as "weak" with "low civic engagement" (Gatskova & Gatskov, 2016), operating in a highly unstable and, at times, antagonistic political environment (Krasynska, 2015). Moreover, public trust in nonprofits is worryingly low (Krasynska, 2015). The recent war has brought over \$1.7 billion in new international aid to Ukrainian nonprofits (*Philanthropic Response to the War in Ukraine*, n.d.), indicating a massive influx of resources requiring more oversight and public accountability.

Cooley, A. & Nobel, S. K. (2025). Ukrainian News Media Representations and Framing of NGOs. *Journal of Public and Nonprofit Affairs*, 11(2), 168 – 184.

<https://doi.org/10.20899/jpna.k18pfh33>

Despite this growth in funding, no known research has specifically analyzed Ukrainian media portrayals of NGOs until now.

This study has several practical implications. It aims to inform discussions among media professionals, nonprofit leaders, policymakers, and scholars regarding strategies for strengthening the role, impacts, and capacity building of NGOs operating in Ukraine. By elucidating how Ukrainian news media frames NGOs in its coverage, this project provides insights to support Ukraine's NGO organizations amidst its volatility and lack of public confidence. The project also applies communication theory to an understudied cultural context, helping fill gaps in research on media portrayals of NGOs. Its analysis aims to both build theoretical understanding and inform practical strategies for supporting Ukrainian civil society, given the dependence of NGOs on media publicity. The project has significant implications amidst the distinct challenges facing Ukraine today.

This project is guided by a large research question: How do Ukrainian news media portray and frame NGOs in their coverage. By examining the framing, valence, and roles of NGOs in media coverage, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the media landscape surrounding Ukraine's nonprofit sector. The findings will contribute to the limited body of research on media representations of NGOs in non-Western contexts and offer valuable insights for media professionals and policymakers working to strengthen civil society in Ukraine.

Literature Review

NGOs operate independently from the government and work towards the betterment of society by advocating for various causes, providing services, and promoting social change. Studying NGOs operating in Ukraine is crucial due to their significant role in addressing social, economic, and humanitarian issues, their resilience in the face of political instability and legislative challenges, and their ability to rapidly respond to the needs of recipients, especially in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war, which has led to an influx of aid money requiring oversight and accountability from these organizations. This literature review begins by providing an overview of the Ukrainian nonprofit sector more broadly. Then, this review discusses media portrayals of the NGOs with particular focus on the Ukrainian context. Subsequently, this review introduces the theoretical framework that will guide this study as well as the research questions and hypotheses posed.

The Ukrainian Nonprofit Sector and NGOs

The Ukrainian nonprofit sector plays a crucial role in the country's social and economic landscape. Research indicates that Ukraine's nonprofit sector has been influenced by various factors such as political instability, legislative challenges, and the impact of geopolitical conflicts. The sector has shown resilience in the face of political turbulence and legislative changes (Krasynska, 2015). Despite increased civil liberties, voluntary work rates in Ukraine have declined, highlighting a complex relationship between civil liberties and volunteering (Kamerāde et al., 2016).

The emergence of the nonprofit sector in the early 1990s (after the fall of the Soviet Union) as a realm of citizens' initiatives financially supported by supranational development agencies underscores its importance in Ukraine (Gressgård & Husakouskaya, 2020). Furthermore, the sector faces challenges such as a decrease in charitable activities despite an increase in the number of nonprofit organizations (Novikov, 2021). The author characterizes Ukraine as having inadequate institutional frameworks, insufficient financial mechanisms, and limited statistical

oversight. Additionally, he suggests that there are gaps in regulatory systems and the need for more effective state involvement in nonprofit management through improved financial reporting, greater transparency, and reformed tax policies (Novikov, 2021).

One scholar suggested that while Ukraine has developed a conducive regime and legal framework for nonprofits, resulting in approximately 17.6 NGOs per 10,000 inhabitants, the sector still faces significant challenges such as corruption, limited governmental support, and heavy reliance on international funding (Bidenko, 2018). The study indicates that about 45% of Ukrainian NGOs' funding comes from international grants, with only 8-10% from state and local budgets. Furthermore, while Ukraine has seen growth in registered organizations, many exist only on paper, with estimates suggesting only 10% of registered NGOs are fully active. The sector is characterized by small organizational capacity, with most NGOs having just two to five full-time employees, and facing challenges in sustainable funding, professional development, and effective public engagement (Bidenko, 2018).

The importance of charitable organizations in Ukraine is evident in their rapid response to the needs of recipients through small charitable projects, highlighting their significance in the nonprofit sector (Vysochan & Hyk, 2021). Moreover, the impact of the Russia-Ukraine war on Ukrainian nonprofits has been studied, with evidence suggesting transformations in the nonprofit sector due to cryptoaltruism, a movement where distributed ledger technologies, such as blockchains, are changing the nature of the sector (Chen, 2024). NGO involvement in humanitarian responses during conflicts has been noted, emphasizing the role of grassroots associations in providing aid and developing organizational processes (Konrad, 2023).

NGOs have adapted their operations in response to the evolving needs of the population during wartime. They have become "first responders," leveraging their established networks to provide immediate assistance and support to those affected by the conflict (Lazarus et al., 2024). This includes not only health services but also humanitarian aid, such as food, shelter, and psychosocial support for displaced individuals and families (Reis, 2024; Shablysty et al., 2023). The resilience of NGOs in Ukraine has been highlighted as a key factor in promoting social cohesion and justice amid the crisis, showcasing their ability to mobilize resources and community efforts effectively (Reis, 2024).

In recent years, the number of NGOs in Ukraine has grown significantly, highlighting their importance in the country's civil society landscape (Palyvoda & Golota, 2013). We will further review available literature on media representations of the nonprofit sector in general and NGOs in particular, with a focus on the Ukrainian context.

Media Portrayals of NGOs

The representation of the nonprofit sector in news media plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions and influencing various aspects of nonprofit organizations. Several scholars highlight the impact of media coverage on how nonprofits are perceived by the public and policymakers, affecting their ability to raise funds and mobilize resources (Hale, 2007; Krlev & Lund, 2020). Kensicki (2004) delves into how nonprofit organizations and individual actions are portrayed in newspaper coverage of social issues, shedding light on the importance of media representation in shaping narratives around societal problems and potential solutions.

Nonprofit organizations heavily rely on the media to promote their causes due to limited communication budgets, as indicated by Liu (2012). Effective communication with stakeholders is pivotal for nonprofits to maintain a positive reputation, secure financial resources, and advance

their missions, as emphasized in the study by Suh et al. (2021). Some scholars explore the role of nonprofit organizations in influencing public policy through lobbying, underscoring the importance of nonprofit interest group representation in shaping public policy (Nyland, 1995). Additionally, the evolving definition and classification of the nonprofit sector, as discussed by Barman (2013), have implications for how these organizations are perceived structurally and normatively in society.

In the context of communication strategies, Yue et al. (2023) highlight the importance of nonprofit leaders engaging with the media to drive attention, build partnerships, and advocate for their missions. Another study suggests establishing models linking media publicity to fundraising success and the image of nonprofit organizations to enhance their impact (Helmig et al., 2012).

Some scholars characterized the relationship between NGOs and media by a complex interplay of trust and credibility. Lee et al. (2010) emphasize that media serves as a critical platform for NGOs to build public trust and accountability. However, the reliance on media also poses challenges, as NGOs must navigate the potential for misrepresentation or oversimplification of their messages in the pursuit of broader media coverage (Powers, 2016).

Overall, the literature underscores the significant role of news media representations in shaping perceptions of NGOs influencing fundraising efforts, public engagement, and policy advocacy. The current body of research on media representations of NGOs is somewhat limited, with a notable lack of studies focusing on cultural contexts outside Western media, and no known research specifically addressing Ukrainian media portrayals of these organizations. We now turn our focus to the theoretical framework that will guide our study.

Theoretical Framework: Framing Theory

Framing theory in news media coverage is a significant approach that helps in understanding how media shapes public perception by presenting information in a particular way. Framing involves selecting and highlighting certain aspects of an issue while downplaying others, thus influencing how audiences interpret the news (Jakopovic, 2017). It is through framing that the news media can set the agenda and tell the audience not just what to think about but also how to think about various issues (Ashwell & Murray, 2020). This theory highlights the role of framing in presenting news stories by emphasizing specific aspects, which can impact how individuals cognitively process and interpret the information presented (Hale, 2007). Framing involves various processes such as frame building, frame setting, individual-level processes of framing, and feedback loops from audiences to journalists (Scheufele, 1999). It is through these processes that media outlets construct narratives that guide the audience's understanding and emotional responses to the news (Kepplinger et al., 2012).

In the context of how media portrays NGOs, the framing theory has been a useful approach to study the representation of nonprofits in the media (Cooley, 2020, 2022; Hale, 2007). These studies aim to understand how nonprofits are depicted in news coverage and how this portrayal influences public perception of the sector. Hale (2007) recognizes that the story setting is significant for the coverage of the nonprofit sector. The story setting denotes the geographical context in which the story unfolds. Prior studies indicate that news articles about nonprofits tend to focus more on local level in some countries (Gould et al., 2003; Hale, 2007; Kensicki, 2004b; Martens, 1996) and national level in other countries (Cooley, 2020).

Framing theory suggests that media outlets select and emphasize certain aspects of reality while downplaying others, based on what they consider most salient or relevant to their audience

(Entman, 1993). When covering organizations, media framing tends to highlight the geographic scope and scale at which these organizations primarily operate (Cooley, 2020; Hale, 2007). NGOs, by their very nature, often operate transnationally, maintain international funding relationships, implement global standards, and address cross-border issues (Martens, 2002; Reimann, 2006). This inherent international orientation distinguishes them from many domestic nonprofits or locally-focused charitable organizations. Based on this characteristic and framing theory's emphasis on highlighting salient organizational attributes, we would expect media coverage to reflect this international dimension. Therefore, while previous studies found that nonprofit coverage in some countries emphasizes local contexts (Gould et al., 2003; Hale, 2007) and national contexts in others (Cooley, 2020), we hypothesize that the international character of NGOs will influence Ukrainian media to prioritize international framing in their coverage:

H1: Ukrainian news media will prioritize coverage of NGOs at the international level rather than local and national levels.

Cognitive and affective framing

Cognitive attributes and affective attributes are two significant components in news media coverage, influencing the presentation and perception of information by the audience. Cognitive attributes encompass the intellectual aspects of news content, focusing on the substantive information provided and its role in shaping the audience's comprehension of events or issues (Kioussis, 2004). On the other hand, affective attributes involve the emotional elements embedded in news stories, which can elicit feelings, attitudes, and responses from the audience (Kioussis, 2004).

Affective attributes in news media coverage concentrate on the emotional impact of the information presented. They encompass elements that trigger emotions such as empathy, sympathy, anger, or joy among the audience (Kioussis, 2004). Affective attributes are designed to establish an emotional connection with the audience, influencing their emotional responses and engagement with the news content (Bowe et al., 2013). By incorporating affective elements, news media can evoke specific emotional reactions from the audience, shaping their overall experience and perception of the news (Moreno et al., 2019). Affective attributes have been previously explored by researchers in the context of nonprofit organizations (Cooley, 2020, 2022; Hale, 2007), but not in the context of NGOs.

The types of nonprofit organizations that receive the most favorable media coverage can vary based on several factors. Research suggests that larger nonprofit organizations tend to receive more media publicity as they have the capacity to professionalize their public relations efforts (Brown, 2014). Additionally, nonprofits that are more highly institutionalized, with ample resources and full-time paid staff, tend to adopt social media quickly, which can positively impact their media coverage (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). Nonprofits that strategically use social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter for stakeholder communication may enhance their capacity for positive media relations (Svensson et al., 2020). Furthermore, the nature of the nonprofit organization itself can influence media coverage. For instance, research indicates that some agencies, like executive and regulatory bodies (i.e. Charity Navigator, The Nonprofit Technology Enterprise Network (NTEN), Common Knowledge and Blackbaud) receive more media attention compared to other types of nonprofits (Kim et al., 2014)

We do not know from extant literature what types of nonprofit organizations (based on service areas) receive most favorable coverage, and therefore, the next research question emerges:

RQ1: What types of NGOs receive most favorable coverage in Ukrainian news media?

Cognitive attributes is another fruitful area to explore. Cognitive attributes are linked to the substantive aspects of the news, including the topics discussed, the facts presented, and the overall framing of the story (Graf-Vlachy et al., 2019). These attributes aim to inform the audience, offer context, and mold their cognitive understanding of the subject matter (Kioussis, 2004). Cognitive attributes assist in structuring information, directing the audience's interpretation, and influencing their opinions and attitudes towards the news content (Golan & Wanta, 2001). Nonprofit organization cognitive attributes have been previously explored by researchers (Cooley, 2020, 2022; Hale, 2007), but have not been applied specifically to NGOs. This project poses the following question:

RQ2: What NGO cognitive attributes are most prominent in Ukrainian news media?

Existing research does not look at the intersectionality of affective and cognitive attributes within the context of NGOs, and this project attempts to fill this gap with the following research question:

RQ3: What NGO cognitive attributes are associated with favorable coverage in Ukrainian news media?

Episodic and thematic cognitive framing

While further exploring cognitive framing, we learn that there is a distinction between episodic and thematic cognitive framing. While *episodic framing* involves presenting news stories in an event-centered manner, focusing on specific events or individuals, *thematic framing* contextualizes events within a broader perspective, incorporating analysis, expert opinions, and statistical data to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the issue (Foster et al., 2014; Ödmark, 2018; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000; Zhang et al., 2014).

Studies have shown that episodic framing tends to lead to individualistic attributes, emphasizing personal stories detached from the broader context, while thematic framing encourages societal attributions by highlighting how issues are influenced by governmental policies or broader societal factors (Lee et al., 2014). Episodic framing often involves storytelling and focusing on the personal or human aspects of an issue, aiming to attract the audience's attention and serve the commercial interests of media organizations (Ödmark, 2018; Zhang et al., 2014).

Furthermore, the shift from episodic to thematic framing in news coverage can contribute to public awareness by presenting issues within a wider social context, fostering a deeper understanding of societal problems (Sela-Shayovitz, 2018). Research has indicated that episodic framing is more common in media coverage, with a tendency to focus on specific events or individuals rather than placing stories in a broader social, economic, or political context (Baum, 2004).

When looking at the nonprofit context, researchers argue that episodic frames tend to focus on specific events or stories within an organization, potentially leading to a more favorable portrayal. Conversely, thematic framing may result in more critical coverage, highlighting broader issues and systemic challenges faced by nonprofits (Hale, 2007). Media coverage in the nonprofit sector often adopts episodic framing when reporting on individual organizations rather than the sector as a whole (Cooley, 2020), therefore our next hypothesis emerges:

H2: NGOs will be more likely to be episodically than thematically framed in Ukrainian news media.

Relevant to the discussion of episodic and thematic framing is the idea of the role that nonprofits play within the news story. In other words, who is the main actor within the news story, and who drives the coverage. We hypothesize that the news media will be more likely to portray NGOs as supporting actors (story attributes) rather than the primary media object, and the following hypothesis emerges:

H3: NGOs will be more likely to be story attributes rather than primary media objects in Ukrainian news media.

Finally, we seek to determine the relationship between cognitive framing and the role that nonprofits play within the news story. Previous research found that news stories that provide context for the issue and place it within a larger cultural and social narrative (thematic stories) are more likely to feature nonprofits as primary subjects within the story; while stories that zoom in on individual, isolated episodes (episodic stories) are more likely to include nonprofits in a supporting role. This project aims to test these hypotheses within NGO context in Ukraine. We propose the following two hypotheses:

H4a: Thematic stories will be more likely to cover NGOs as primary media objects in Ukrainian news media.

H4b: Episodic stories will be more likely to cover NGOs as story attributes in Ukrainian news media.

Methods

Data Collection

Sample selection was conducted using the Factiva online database, which aggregates and stores international news media articles. A keyword search was performed for "nongovernment organization" (Неурядові організації) or "NGO" (НГО) to retrieve all stories published in the Ukrainian language. The unit of analysis was an individual news article. The search covered a five-year period from January 24, 2019, to January 24, 2024, yielding a total of 818 publications (see Table 1). A random sampling technique was employed to select the sample. After excluding duplicate articles and those not relevant to the study (e.g., obituaries and wedding announcements), the final sample consisted of 306 articles. This sample size meets the requirement of a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error, where a minimum of 260 articles was needed. All articles were translated into English using Google translate.

Channel 24 is a news television channel based in Lviv that broadcasts primarily in Ukrainian, known for its extensive coverage of current events and political news. With an average daily viewership of 4.2 million, it maintains a comprehensive news website reaching approximately 12 million unique visitors monthly. *ICTV TV Channel* is one of Ukraine's major nationwide television networks owned by StarLightMedia group, reaching an audience of approximately 9 million viewers daily and offering a mix of news, entertainment programs, and original content since 1992. Similar to Channel 24, it maintains a website with news stories averaging 8 million monthly visitors. *Golos Ukrainy* is the official newspaper of the Verkhovna Rada (Ukrainian Parliament), with a daily print circulation of 170,000 copies, publishing legislative acts, parliamentary news,

and official government communications. *Delo.ua* is a leading Ukrainian business news website that focuses on economics, finance, and business developments, reaching over 3 million unique visitors monthly and providing analysis and reporting on both national and international business trends. *Marketing Media Review* is a specialized Ukrainian media outlet focused on marketing, advertising, and media industry news, reaching approximately 100,000 industry professionals monthly. Finally, *Energobusiness Monitoring* is a specialized business publication focused on Ukraine's energy sector, serving roughly 50,000 subscribers and providing industry analysis, market data, and news coverage of the country's power, oil, gas, and renewable energy markets. These sources were selected due to their availability on Factiva.

Table 1. News stories by Ukrainian news media outlets

Source	Population	Sample
<i>Channel 24</i>	369	138
<i>ICTV TV Channel</i>	122	41
<i>Golos Ukrainy</i>	120	45
<i>Delo.ua</i>	103	27
<i>Marketing Media Review</i>	29	16
<i>Energobusiness Monitoring</i>	27	6
<i>Other*</i>	48	33
Total	818	306

* Publications with fewer than two articles selected in the final sample were classified as "other."

Coding Guide

A deductive coding guide was developed based on the frameworks proposed by Hale (2007) and Cooley (2022). Specifically, Hale's (2007) framework contributed the structural elements for analyzing media portrayal, including the focus and framing categories, while Cooley's (2022) work informed the development of the cognitive attributes section, particularly the categorization of NGO activities and roles in public discourse. The initial coding categories were pretested through the intercoder reliability analysis with three rounds of pilot testing. The coding guide included the following sections: General Information, NGO Media Portrayal, NGO Category and Valence, and NGO Cognitive Attributes.

The General Information section covered the title of the article, date of publication, name of the publication, article length (word count), relevance (binary measure indicating whether the article was relevant to the study), and setting (local, national, international, or multiple settings). The NGO Media Portrayal section recorded the focus (whether the NGO was the primary subject or an attribute of the story) and frame (episodic or thematic).

The NGO Category and Valence section recorded the category of the first mentioned NGO (1 = culture and recreation, 2 = education and research, 3 = health, 4 = social services, 5 = environment, 6 = development and housing, 7 = law, advocacy, politics, 8 = philanthropic intermediaries, 9 = international, 10 = religion, 11 = business and professional associations, unions, 12 = other, 99 = unable to determine). Also, this section recorded the valence of NGOs (1 = favorable, 0 = neutral, -1 = unfavorable, 99 = unable to determine).

Finally, the NGO Cognitive Attributes section captured the presence (1) or absence (0) of the following attributes: NGOs are engaged in fundraising, NGOs are involved in various activities (e.g., providing humanitarian aid, conducting research and policy analysis, organizing educational programs and workshops, environmental conservation and cleanup efforts, advocating for human rights, delivering healthcare services, supporting refugees and displaced persons, etc.), NGOs acting in court proceedings, NGOs attacking an issue or group, NGOs as an information source, and NGOs releasing a report.

Coding Process

The coding team comprised a Ukrainian speaker and two coders who received training on the coding instrument. To ensure inter-coder reliability, the team conducted three rounds of pilot coding. After each round, the coding instrument was adjusted to improve inter-coder reliability. The final inter-coder reliability assessment yielded an average Cohen's kappa of 0.94, with individual measures ranging from 0.57 (the lowest agreement) to 1.00 (perfect agreement).

Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 29. Initially, the dataset was cleaned, and descriptive statistics were computed to identify outliers, handle missing data, and address Research Question 2. To test Hypotheses 1, 2 and 3, a series of chi-square goodness-of-fit tests were performed. These single-sample nonparametric tests are commonly employed to determine whether the distribution of cases in a single categorical variable follows a known or hypothesized distribution. The regression analyses were conducted to address Research Questions 1 and 3. The last two hypotheses, H4a and H4b, were tested by conducting the chi-square tests of independence. These are nonparametric tests that determine whether there is an association between categorical variables.

Results

Descriptives

News media articles varied in length from the shortest (53 words) to the longest (5,344 words). The average article length was 543 words (mean). Stories about NGOs were set within international context ($n = 147$), national context ($n = 102$), and local context ($n = 35$). Most stories were thematically framed ($n = 192$), compared to episodic framing ($n = 98$). Overall, NGOs received very positive media coverage, $M = .65$, $SD = .578$. NGOs appeared as story attributes ($n = 189$) and as primary media objects ($n = 108$).

H1: Ukrainian news media will prioritize coverage of NGOs at the international level rather than local and national levels.

To test H1, a chi-square goodness-of-fit test was conducted. Data showed that there are statistically significant differences in the distribution of story settings within the data, $\chi^2(3) = 134.8$, $p < .001$. Ukrainian news media clearly prioritized international news settings ($n = 147$), compared national ($n = 102$) and local stories ($n = 35$). Therefore, H1 was supported.

RQ1: What types of NGOs receive most favorable coverage in Ukrainian news media?

To answer this research question, a regression analysis was conducted with NGO valence as a dependent variable and types of NGO as independent variables. The regression model was not significant, and therefore, the data cannot explain positive media coverage of NGOs by the types of NGOs covered by the media.

RQ2: What NGO cognitive attributes are most prominent in Ukrainian news media?

The second research question focused on the cognitive attributes of NGOs. A series of frequency tests were conducted to determine which NGO cognitive attributes are most prevalent within the new media coverage. NGOs involved in activities ($n = 156$) and acting as information sources ($n = 59$) were the two highest categories. Ukrainian news media almost never reported on NGOs acting in the courts ($n = 7$). See Table 2 for more details.

Table 2. *NGO cognitive attributes presented by Ukrainian news media*

Cognitive attributes	All stories (N = 306)	Percentage of all stories
<i>NGOs are raising money</i>	32	11%
<i>NGOs are involved in activities</i>	156	51%
<i>NGOs acting in the courts</i>	7	2%
<i>NGOs attacking an issue or group</i>	21	7%
<i>NGOs are an information source</i>	59	19%
<i>NGOs release a report</i>	14	5%

RQ3: What NGO cognitive attributes are associated with favorable coverage in Ukrainian news media?

To answer RQ3, we ran a regression model with NGO valence as a dependent variable and a series of dummy variables for NGO cognitive attributes. A significant regression was found, $F(6, 216) = 6.241, p < .001$. There are statistically significant differences in the positive coverage of NGOs involved in activities ($\beta = .258, p < .001$) and NGOs raising money ($\beta = .298, p < .01$). NGOs attacking an issue or a group were associated with more negative portrayals in the news media ($\beta = -.561, p < .001$).

H2: NGOs will be more likely to be episodically than thematically framed in Ukrainian news media.

To test H2, we ran the chi-square goodness-of-fit test and found that there are statistically significant differences how Ukrainian news media framed NGOs, $\chi^2(1) = 30.47, p < .001$. Ukrainian news media clearly prioritized thematic framing of NGOs ($n = 192$), compared to episodic framing ($n = 98$). H2 was supported by the data.

H3: NGOs will be more likely to be story attributes rather than primary media objects in Ukrainian news media.

Similarly, to test H3, we ran the chi-square goodness-of-fit test and found that there are statistically significant differences in how Ukrainian news media portrayed NGOs, $\chi^2(1) = 26.47, p < .001$. Ukrainian news media clearly treated NGOs as story attributes ($n = 198$), rather than a primary media object ($n = 108$). H3 was also supported by the data analysis.

H4a: Thematic stories will be more likely to cover NGOs as primary media objects in Ukrainian news media.

H4b: Episodic stories will be more likely to cover NGOs as story attributes in Ukrainian news media.

The last two hypotheses were tested by conducting the chi-square tests of independence. This test is useful to determine statistical independence or association between two categorical variables, in our case episodic/thematic framing and story attribute/primary media object. We found no significant association between episodic/thematic framing and story attribute/primary media object, $\chi^2(2) = 4.97, p > .05$. Therefore, H4a and H4b were not supported.

Discussion

This study offers several important insights into how Ukrainian news media portrays NGOs. First, the findings indicate that NGOs generally receive very positive coverage when they are featured in the news. The media tends to focus on NGOs' involvement in various activities and their role as information sources. Specifically, coverage of NGOs engaged in activities and raising money is associated with more favorable portrayals, while attacking issues or groups leads to more negative coverage. This aligns with previous research showing that nonprofit actions and fundraising efforts predict positive media coverage (Cooley, 2020). For NGOs seeking to cultivate a positive public image and build trust, these results suggest they should prioritize publicizing their activities and fundraising work, while avoiding combative stances that could paint them in a negative light.

Second, this study found that Ukrainian media situates NGOs primarily within an international context, rather than national or local settings. This contrasts with prior research on nonprofit organizations, which has indicated nonprofits receive more local coverage in the U.S. (Gould et al., 2003; Hale, 2007; Kensicki, 2004b) and national coverage in Russia (Cooley, 2020). The greater emphasis on NGOs' international scope in Ukraine may reflect the influx of foreign aid and the global interconnectedness of the humanitarian issues these organizations address. However, this international focus could potentially distance NGOs from local stakeholders. NGOs operating in Ukraine may need to balance highlighting their international relevance with demonstrating their local impact and connection to communities.

Third, this study found that Ukrainian news media were more likely to use episodic framing than thematic framing when covering NGOs. This aligns with previous research suggesting that episodic framing is more common in general news coverage, with a tendency to focus on specific events or individuals rather than placing stories in a broader social, economic, or political context (Baum, 2004). The predominance of episodic framing in NGO coverage suggests that Ukrainian media tends to present these organizations through the lens of isolated cases or incidents, rather than exploring their systemic impacts or contextualizing their work within larger societal issues.

This finding has important implications for public understanding of NGOs and the issues they address. Research has shown that a shift towards thematic framing can contribute to increased public awareness by presenting issues within a wider social context, fostering a deeper understanding of societal problems (Sela-Shayovitz, 2018). However, the prevalence of episodic framing in Ukrainian media coverage of NGOs suggests that audiences may be receiving a more fragmented and case-specific portrayal of these organizations, potentially limiting their ability to comprehend the full scope and significance of NGOs' work.

To counter this trend and promote a more comprehensive public understanding of their efforts, NGOs in Ukraine may need to work proactively with journalists to encourage thematic framing in coverage of their organizations. This could involve providing reporters with background information, data, and expert analysis that situates specific events or programs within a larger context. Alternatively, NGOs could invite journalists to accompany their teams in the field for longer durations. This approach could be particularly valuable in conflict zones, where NGOs can facilitate access to areas that would otherwise be challenging for journalists to reach safely. Thus, by helping media outlets connect the dots between individual cases and broader patterns, NGOs can foster more substantive and informative coverage that enhances public awareness of the issues they address.

Moreover, NGOs may benefit from developing their own communications strategies that emphasize thematic narratives, highlighting the systemic nature of the problems they confront and the wide-ranging impact of their interventions. By consistently framing their work in terms of broader societal challenges and solutions, NGOs can help shape public discourse and understanding, even if episodic framing persists in media coverage.

Conclusions

In summary, this study provides valuable insights into how Ukrainian news media portrays NGOs, offering a nuanced understanding of the framing, valence, and roles these organizations play in media coverage. The findings highlight several key patterns, including the generally positive tone of NGO coverage, the emphasis on international contexts, the prevalence of episodic framing, and the tendency for NGOs to serve as story attributes rather than primary subjects.

This study makes several important theoretical contributions to both framing theory and nonprofit media research. First, the research advances our understanding of the relationship between cognitive attributes and media valence in NGO news media coverage, revealing that certain attributes (such as involvement in activities and fundraising) consistently predict positive coverage while others (such as attacking issues) predict negative coverage. Second, this study challenges existing assumptions about the relationship between episodic/thematic framing and story roles, finding no significant association between these variables in the Ukrainian context, contrary to previous findings. Finally, by examining NGO media representations during a period of significant societal transformation (as in the case in Ukraine), this research contributes to our understanding of how framing theory operates in dynamic, crisis-affected environments, providing a theoretical foundation for future studies of media framing during periods of social and political turmoil.

These findings have important implications for both NGOs and media professionals in Ukraine. For NGOs, the results suggest that proactively engaging with journalists to showcase their activities, fundraising efforts, and thematic narratives may be an effective strategy for garnering positive coverage and raising public awareness of their work. By providing compelling examples, data, and spokespeople, NGOs can help shift coverage from cursory mentions to more substantive explorations of their impact.

For journalists and media outlets, this study underscores the importance of considering how framing choices and story roles shape public understanding of NGOs and the issues they address. By incorporating more thematic framing and positioning NGOs as central actors in relevant stories, media professionals can provide audiences with a more comprehensive and contextual understanding of these organizations' efforts.

Ultimately, fostering more nuanced and informative media coverage of NGOs in Ukraine has the potential to enhance public trust, engagement, and support for these organizations. As NGOs continue to play a vital role in addressing societal challenges and promoting social change, it is crucial that media representations effectively convey the scope and significance of their work.

Limitations

While this study offers valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. First, the sample was limited to a specific time frame and set of media outlets available through Factiva, which may not fully represent the broader landscape of Ukrainian news coverage of NGOs. This analysis also only focused on NGOs operating in Ukraine, not a broader nonprofit sector. The study's search strategy may not have captured the full range of terminology that Ukrainians use to name organizations operating within the nonprofit sector, and future research could employ additional search terms to potentially identify a broader array of stories. Future research could also expand the scope of analysis to include a wider range of media sources and time periods, providing a more comprehensive understanding of coverage patterns over time.

Second, this study focused primarily on quantitative content analysis, which, while valuable for identifying broad patterns, may not fully capture the nuances and complexities of NGO representations in the media. Future research could employ qualitative methods, such as discourse analysis or in-depth interviews with journalists and NGO representatives, to gain a more granular understanding of the factors shaping media coverage and the strategies NGOs employ to influence their media narratives.

Third, while this study provides insights into the content of NGO coverage in Ukrainian media, it does not directly assess the impact of this coverage on public perceptions, attitudes, or behaviors. Future research could employ survey or experimental methods to examine how different framing and story role choices in NGO coverage influence audience responses and engagement.

Additionally, it is important to note that this paper represents the first part of a larger study. While this research focuses on the general patterns of NGO media coverage, the second paper specifically examines the transformative impact of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on media coverage of NGOs, comparing pre-war and post-war periods. The war's significant influence on media coverage patterns, content and frequency is comprehensively addressed in the subsequent paper, which provides detailed comparative analysis of how media portrayal of NGOs evolved during these distinct periods.

Finally, it is important to note that the media landscape and sociopolitical context in Ukraine are dynamic and evolving, particularly in light of ongoing geopolitical tensions and war as well as the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, the patterns and implications identified in this study may not necessarily reflect future trends or developments in NGO media coverage. Ongoing research will be necessary to track how representations of NGOs in Ukrainian media continue to evolve in response to changing circumstances and events.

Despite these limitations, this study provides a valuable foundation for understanding the current state of NGO media coverage in Ukraine and identifies key areas for future research and practical interventions. By building on these findings and addressing the limitations outlined above, researchers, NGOs, and media professionals can work together to foster more informed, nuanced, and impactful media representations of these vital organizations.

Disclosure Statement

The author(s) declare that there are no conflicts of interest that relate to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

References

- Akboga, S., & Arik, E. (2019). The Ideological Convergence of Civil Society Organizations and Newspapers in Turkey. *Voluntas*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-019-00144-1>
- Ashwell, D., & Murray, N. (2020). When Being Positive Might Be Negative: An Analysis of Australian and New Zealand Newspaper Framing of Vaccination Post Australia's No Jab No Pay Legislation. In *Vaccine*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.vaccine.2020.06.070>
- Barman, E. (2013). Classificatory Struggles in the Nonprofit Sector. *Social Science History*. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0145553200010580>
- Baum, M. (2004). Circling the Wagons: Soft News and Isolationism in American Public Opinion. *International Studies Quarterly*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0020-8833.2004.00303.x>
- Bidenko, Y. (2018). (De)Structuring of Civil Society: The Political Process in Ukraine and Belarus. *The Nonprofit Sector in Eastern Europe, Russia, and Central Asia*, 29–55. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004380622_002
- Bowe, B. J., Fahmy, S., & Wanta, W. (2013). Missing Religion. *International Communication Gazette*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1748048513482544>
- Bronstein, C. (2006). *Responsible Advocacy for Nonprofit Organizations*. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452204208.n5>
- Brown, T. (2014). Negotiating the NGO/Social Movement Dichotomy: Evidence from Punjab, India. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 25(1), 46–66. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42630956>
- Chen, W. D. (2024). Is Cryptoaltruism Transforming the Nonprofit Sector? Lessons From the Ukrainian Nonprofits During the Russia-Ukraine War. *Chinese Public Administration Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15396754231222575>
- Cooley, A. (2020). Russian news media as a public service actor: exploring the coverage of nonprofit organizations. *Russian Journal of Communication*, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19409419.2020.1777189>
- Cooley, A. (2022). The Role of the Nonprofit Sector within the Climate Change Discourse: The View Through Russian News Media. *Nonprofit Policy Forum*, 0(0), 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1515/NPF-2022-0002>
- Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51–58. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x>
- Foster, C., Tanner, A., Kim, S., & Kim, S. Y. (2014). National Conversations About the Costs of U.S. Health Care. *Science Communication*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1075547014536882>
- Gatskova, K., & Gatskov, M. (2016). Third sector in Ukraine: Civic engagement before and after the “Euromaidan.” *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 27, 673–694.
- Golan, G. J., & Wanta, W. (2001). Second-Level Agenda Setting in the New Hampshire Primary: A Comparison of Coverage in Three Newspapers and Public Perceptions of Candidates. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107769900107800203>
- Gould, D., Lewis, S., Zamora, I., & Cesarano, J. (2003). *Truth on the sidelines: Philanthropy and foundations in the media*.

- Graf-Vlachy, L., Oliver, A. G., Banfield, R., König, A., & Bundy, J. (2019). Media Coverage of Firms: Background, Integration, and Directions for Future Research. *Journal of Management*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206319864155>
- Gressgård, R., & Husakouskaya, N. (2020). Europeanization as Civilizational Transition From East to West. *Intersections*. <https://doi.org/10.17356/ieejsp.v6i3.634>
- Hale, M. (2007). Superficial friends: A content analysis of nonprofit and philanthropy coverage in nine major newspapers. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 36(3), 465–486. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764006296849>
- Helmig, B., Spraul, K., & Tremp, K. (2012). Replication Studies in Nonprofit Research: A Generalization and Extension of Findings Regarding the Media Publicity of Nonprofit Organizations. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 41(3), 360–385. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764011404081>
- Hrycak, A. (2006). Foundation Feminism and the Articulation of Hybrid Feminisms in Post-Socialist Ukraine. *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325405284249>
- Jakopovic, H. (2017). Predicting the Strength of Online News Frames. *Interdisciplinary Description of Complex Systems*, 15(3), 209–221. <https://doi.org/10.7906/indec.15.3.5>
- Kameråde, D., Crotty, J., & Ljubownikow, S. (2016). Civil Liberties and Volunteering in Six Former Soviet Union Countries. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764016649689>
- Kensicki, L. J. (2004a). No cure for what ails us: The media-constructed disconnect between societal problem and possible solutions. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 81(1), 53–73. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107769900408100105>
- Kensicki, L. J. (2004b). No Cure for What Ails US: The Media-Constructed Disconnect Between Societal Problems and Possible Solutions. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107769900408100105>
- Kepplinger, H. M., Geiß, S., & Siebert, S. (2012). Framing Scandals: Cognitive and Emotional Media Effects. In *Journal of Communication*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2012.01653.x>
- Kim, D., Chun, H., Kwak, Y., & Nam, Y. (2014). The Employment of Dialogic Principles in Website, Facebook, and Twitter Platforms of Environmental Nonprofit Organizations. *Social Science Computer Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0894439314525752>
- Kiousis, S. (2004). Explicating Media Salience: A Factor Analysis of New York Times Issue Coverage During the 2000 U.S. Presidential Election. *Journal of Communication*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2004.tb02614.x>
- Konrad, R. (2023). Humanitarian Response by Grassroots Associations During a Military Conflict. *Journal of Humanitarian Logistics and Supply Chain Management*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jhlscm-06-2022-0075>
- Krasynska, S. (2015). Contra Spem Spero: The Third Sector's Resilience in the Face of Political Turbulence and Legislative Change in Ukraine. *Nonprofit Policy Forum*, 6(2), 167–186. <https://doi.org/doi:10.1515/npf-2014-0003>
- Krlev, G., & Lund, A. B. (2020). Social Innovation Ignored: Framing Nonprofit Activities in European News Media. *Voluntas International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-020-00224-7>
- Lazarus, L., McClarty, L. M., Herpai, N., Pavlova, D., Tarasova, T., Gnatenko, A., Bondar, T., Lorway, R., & Becker, M. L. (2024). "...because the social work never ends": A qualitative study exploring how NGOs responded to emerging needs while upholding responsibility to HIV prevention and treatment during the war in Ukraine. *Journal of the International AIDS Society*, 27(Suppl 3), e26309. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jia2.26309>

- Lee, S., Kim, S., & Love, A. (2014). Coverage of the Gay Games From 1980–2012 in U.S. Newspapers: An Analysis of Newspaper Article Framing. *Journal of Sport Management*. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.2012-0243>
- Lee, T., Johnson, E., & Prakash, A. (2010). Media Independence and Trust in NGOs. *Http://Dx.Doi.Org/10.1177/0899764010384444*, 41(1), 8–35. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764010384444>
- Liu, L. (2012). Discourse and manipulation: stories about China in the New York Times. *Language & Communication*, 32(3), 249–256.
- Lovejoy, K., & Saxton, G. D. (2012). Information, Community, and Action: How Nonprofit Organizations Use Social Media*. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2012.01576.x>
- Martens, T. A. (1996). The news value of nonprofit organizations and issues. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 7(2), 181–192. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nml.4130070207>
- Moreno, M. A., Gower, A. D., Brittain, H., & Vaillancourt, T. (2019). Applying Natural Language Processing to Evaluate News Media Coverage of Bullying and Cyberbullying. *Prevention Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s1121-019-01029-x>
- Novikov, V. M. (2021). Social Potential of Non-Profit Organizations. *Demography and Social Economy*. <https://doi.org/10.15407/dse2021.01.080>
- Nyland, J. (1995). Issue Networks and Nonprofit Organizations. *Review of Policy Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1541-1338.1995.tb00632.x>
- Ödmark, S. (2018). Making News Funny: Differences in News Framing Between Journalists and Comedians. *Journalism*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884918820432>
- Palyvoda, L., & Golota, S. (2013). *Civil Society Organizations in Ukraine: The State and Dynamics*. *Philanthropic response to the war in Ukraine*. (n.d.). Retrieved August 14, 2023, from <https://topics.candid.org/issue-pages/ukraine/#tab-nav>
- Powers, M. (2016). NGO Publicity and Reinforcing Path Dependencies. *Http://Dx.Doi.Org/10.1177/1940161216658373*, 21(4), 490–507. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161216658373>
- Reimann, K. D. (2006). A View from the Top: International Politics, Norms and the Worldwide Growth of NGOs. *International Studies Quarterly*, 50(1), 45–67. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2478.2006.00392.x>
- Reis, J. C. G. dos. (2024). The quest for social justice amid war: exploring the role of civil society resilience in Ukraine's social justice and cohesion. *Safer Communities*, 24(1), 58–71. <https://doi.org/10.1108/SC-07-2024-0039/FULL/PDF>
- Scheufele, D. A. (1999). Framing as a Theory of Media Effects. In *Journal of Communication*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1999.tb02784.x>
- Sela-Shayovitz, R. (2018). 'She Knew He Would Murder Her'. *Journal of Comparative Social Work*. <https://doi.org/10.31265/jcsw.v13i1.157>
- Semetko, H. A., & Valkenburg, P. M. (2000). Framing European Politics: A Content Analysis of Press and Television News. *Journal of Communication*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2000.tb02843.x>
- Shabllysty, V. V., Kosiachenko, K. E., Berezniak, V. S., Katorkin, R. A., & Konopelskyi, V. Y. (2023). Activities of international, medical and humanitarian NGOs in Ukraine under martial law. *Christian Journal for Global Health*, 10(1), 33–42. <https://doi.org/10.15566/CJGH.V10I1.749>

- Suh, J., Hoang, T. C., & Hijal-Moghrabi, I. (2021). Nonprofit External Communications: General Management, Public Relations, or Fundraising Tool? *Journal of Public and Nonprofit Affairs*. <https://doi.org/10.20899/jpna.7.2.220-239>
- Svensson, P. G., Andersson, F. O., & Faulk, L. (2020). Organizational capacity and entrepreneurial behavior. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 30(4), 693–707. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nml.21407>
- Vysochan, O., & Hyk, V. (2021). Cluster Analysis of Charitable Organizations of Ukraine Using K-Means Technology. *Administrative Science Management Public*. <https://doi.org/10.24818/amp/2021.37-08>
- Yue, C. A., Men, L. R., & Hart, E. B. (2023). “Chief Engagement Officers?” a Comparative Study Between U.S. Corporate and Nonprofit Executive Leaders’ Social Media Communication Strategies. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nml.21551>
- Zhang, Y., Jin, Y., & Tang, Y. (2014). Framing Depression. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077699014558553>

Author Biographies

Asya Cooley

Asya Cooley, Ph.D. is an associate professor of strategic communication and graduate coordinator at Oklahoma State University School of Media and Strategic Communication and lead researcher with the Media Ecology and Strategic Analysis (MESA) Group. Her scholarship focuses on the intersection of communication and nonprofit work. With over six years of nonprofit sector experience, she brings firsthand knowledge of the communication challenges facing nonprofit organizations to both her research and teaching. Her recent scholarship has addressed nonprofit accountability, strategic narratives, and organizational communication. She is an active member of major academic nonprofit organizations, such as the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA), International Society for Third-Sector Research (ISTR), and European Research Network On Philanthropy, as well as communication scholarship organizations including the National Communication Association (NCA) and International Communication Association (ICA). She serves as a reviewer for *Nonprofit Management & Leadership*, *International Journal of Communication*, *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, and *Journal of Media and Communication Studies*.

Shahariar Khan Nobel

Shahariar Khan Nobel is an MS graduate of Mass Communication from Oklahoma State University and is doing his PhD in Journalism at the University of Maryland. Before that, he worked as a reporter and a newsroom editor at multiple media platforms in Bangladesh. In journalism, Shahariar experienced the communication interaction and interdependency between journalism and the non-profit world and has been scholarly interested in studying this interaction. He is enthusiastic about content analysis and survey methods. His research focuses on journalism and political communication, with an emphasis on misinformation, media trust, information seeking, and source credibility. His recent scholarship examines journalists' safety and self-censorship, misinformation in journalism, election framing by influencers, and public attitudes toward AI-created political advertisements. He is also an active member of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC).