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**CRISIS COMMUNICATION IN THE UKRAINE-RUSSIA CONFLICT:  
USE OF FACEBOOK BY UN HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATIONS**

Rubaiya Zannat

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CRISIS COMMUNICATION IN THE UKRAINE-RUSSIA CONFLICT: USE OF  
FACEBOOK BY UN HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATIONS

by

Rubaiya Zannat

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate School,  
the College of Arts and Sciences  
and the School of Media and Communication  
at The University of Southern Mississippi  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts

Approved by:

Dr. Brent Hale, Committee Chair

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## ABSTRACT

The proliferation of social media has made it incredibly simple to quickly disseminate valuable information to a large audience. Thus, numerous organizations are now heavily leveraging these social networking platforms as a means for managing their crisis responses. Through a content analysis of 355 posts concerning the Ukraine-Russia conflict made by five large UN humanitarian organizations between February and May, 2022, on their official Facebook pages, this study investigated organizational crisis communication patterns. Findings suggest that UN humanitarian organizations extensively used "threat" and "need for change" as crisis characteristics to delineate the Ukraine-Russia situation, whereas "protection of safety and security," "medical assistance," and "fundraising" appeared as prevailing crisis response themes. Furthermore, "like," "care," and other reactions skewed toward posts that called for a "peaceful resolution" of the war. Finally, this study recommends creating war-crisis messages using defensive framing, and fortifying negative sentiment.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Last but not the least, I would be remiss in not mentioning my friend, Zahed Arman. Through our numerous intellectual conversations, I was able to gain clarity on my research topic, technical issues and to formulate a workable strategy to get this work done within the deadline. Thanks for his enormous support.

## DEDICATION

This project is devoted to the people of Ukraine, who have been suffering from the terrible circumstances of war. The only thing I wish for them is "Peace."

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## CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

Russian President Vladimir Putin began an invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022 (Chen & Ferrara, 2022; Haq et al., 2022), and there have been numerous verified claims that Russian military forces have attacked Ukraine's major cities (BBC, 2022; Cave & Isai, 2022; Timsit et al., 2022). As a result of this attack on the Ukrainians, more than 10 million people have been forced to leave their homes, many cities and towns have been besieged and bombarded, and hundreds of innocent people have been killed (Psaropoulos, 2022). The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) stated that 1,563 civilians have died in Ukraine as a result of the fighting as of April 5, 2022 (Statista, 2022). The fighting has also forced millions of Ukrainians to flee to the western regions of their country and even beyond. Ukrainian refugees who fled to Poland constituted the largest proportion of all migrants as of August 1, 2022, with over 5 million in total. They were followed by Romanian, Moldovan, and Hungarian refugees (“Poland records”, 2022). This crisis has been characterized as the largest war against a European state since World War II (Psaropoulos, 2020).

The confrontation between these two combatant governments has deteriorated since February 2022, but tensions between Ukraine and Russia have been on the rise for several decades. Ukrainian independence was declared in 1991, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and the country has maintained a contentious relationship with Moscow ever since (Chen & Ferrara, 2022; Sullivan 2022). During the 2004 presidential election campaign, Viktor Yanukovich, a pro-Russian candidate, was accused of election

rigging (Khan, 2022)—an incident that served as the fuel for the Orange Revolution. A year after Yanukovich was elected president of Ukraine, his government chose to renegotiate the country's economic connections with Russia, resulting in a series of protests in the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv (Reuters, 2022). Following his failure to comply with the terms of a contract with the European Union (EU), he was expelled from the parliament in 2014 (Khan, 2022). The agreement was supposed to have advanced Ukraine closer to EU membership while also promoting partnership with Russia, among other things (Chen & Ferrara, 2022). Within days of Yanukovich's removal from power, Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine and raised the Russian flag over the territory, which eventually exacerbated the situation and increased the confrontation between the two nations (Reuters, 2022). Donetsk and Luhansk, two pro-Russian separatist organizations in eastern Ukraine's Donbas region, declared independence from Ukraine on April 14, 2014, and immediately began waging war against the country (Haq et al., 2022). Over 15,000 Ukrainian military and civilians were killed and injured as a result of the battle (Bigg, 2022).

After the signing of several cease-fire agreements, collectively known as the Minsk Accords, by Russia, Ukraine, France, and Germany during 2014 and 2015, an effort was made to bring the war to a conclusion. However, no efforts have been worked out so far to fix the current combating situation (Chen & Ferrara, 2022). As stated by Sullivan (2022), "from 2014 to the present, more than 14,000 people have died, tens of thousands have been injured, and more than a million have been displaced" (para. 34). Russia has continued to wage cyber strikes against the Ukrainian government in addition

to the ongoing conflict in the Donbas. In 2016, they targeted the electricity grid in Kyiv, causing a catastrophic outage that left thousands of people without power. Furthermore, a massive cyber-attack severely harmed the National Bank of Ukraine, and the country's electrical infrastructure in 2017 (Sullivan, 2022).

In the midst of this, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, a former comedian, was elected as Ukraine's new President in April 2019. During his campaign, Zelenskyy pledged to strive for peace between Ukraine and Russia as well as the restoration of Donbas in Ukraine (Pereira & Reeve, 2022). But Russia, on the other hand, had an entirely different plan. They began to send about 100,000 troops to Ukraine's borders in April 2021. As claimed by Russia, this force was deployed for military exercises (Sullivan, 2022). Meanwhile, sensing the fact that an invasion was impending, Zelenskyy appealed to the U.S. president Joe Biden to let Ukraine join NATO, but Russia submitted security demands which included a block for Ukraine from joining. Donetsk, and Luhansk gained their independence from Ukraine on February 21, 2022, when Russia officially designated them as independent states (Bloomberg 2022; Chen & Ferrara, 2022; Sullivan 2022). And finally, on February 24, 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin launched special military actions in Ukraine. Russian forces have launched a barrage of missile and artillery fire into Ukraine, which has had a considerable impact on the country's major cities (Reuters, 2022; Sullivan, 2022).

Many humanitarian groups affiliated with the United Nations have participated in peace-building operations throughout the world during the past several decades, and this practice has grown in scope, and significance in recent years (Novelli & Smith, 2011).

For example, “The most comprehensive humanitarian relief and emergency responses of the UN system are centered on the Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)” (Jeong & Yeo, 2018, p. 3). Relatedly, Mills (2005) says, “UNHCR or another UN agency generally acts as the main coordinator for humanitarian operations amid conflict” (Mills, 2005, p. 165). When these groups have intervened in a number of crisis circumstances, they have taken steps to assuage the suffering of those who have been affected by war. Therefore, it is believed that a concentrated effort by humanitarian organizations could make a noteworthy difference in alleviating the situation in Ukraine. According to Semenenko et al. (2019), “The UN Office in Ukraine focuses on support to peace-building and transformation in the country” (p. 24). Likewise, for this ongoing crisis in Ukraine, it is indispensable for other international humanitarian organizations to come forward and ensure the supply of humanitarian commodities to support this war-torn country. And thus, these organizations also seek to contribute meaningfully to the process of peace-building. But in order to make this peace-building process possible, these groups must be given the freedom to connect with people without hindrance (Chumachenko & Chumachenko, 2022).

As a new dimension of communication, social media is gradually becoming the primary means of instantaneous global reach (McCafferty, 2011). Organizations that use social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and other comparable platforms can better engage with their publics than those who rely solely on legacy media. Several studies have proved the value of social media platforms in crisis-prone locations, for raising awareness, soliciting funds, emergency managements, and

accelerating recovery efforts, among other things (Cooley & Jones, 2013; Crowe. 2011; Vieweg et al., 2014). These social networks have evolved into indispensable tools for the humanitarian agencies of United Nations as well. Because of the interactive nature of virtual media, strategies of connecting with clients and followers of those organizations have changed significantly (Castilho, 2010). These networks support the UN organizations' efforts to gain assistance, establish accountability and openness in their operations, and obtain credit for the job that they perform through the use of internet-based networks and services. For example, during the three-week emergency period following the Haitian earthquake in 2020, 110 emergency medical response teams and organizations communicated using Twitter extensively to support and improve medical response during the crisis period (Sarcevic et al., 2012).

In recent years, social media has rapidly evolved into a crucial instrument for people around the world to interact, and express their demands during times of crisis. For instance, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and other social media sites were used extensively during the 2013-14 Euro-Maidan protests in Ukraine (Onuch, 2015). People nowadays also consider themselves as a part of humanitarian organizations, and are highly concerned about the activities and initiatives these organizations employ to address and solve numerous crises. Moreover, those invested in these organizations frequently follow their movements through their social media handles. These social media platforms, therefore, assist humanitarian organizations like those housed within the United Nations in growing their collaborations, dialogues, and interactions with a diverse range of stakeholders (Panyam, 2014).

Building upon previous crisis communication and social media literature, the current study aimed at determining the patterns of crisis communication used by humanitarian organizations affiliated with the United Nations in the Ukraine-Russia conflict. In addition, the study looked into the emergent themes that were prevalent on the UN humanitarian organizations' Facebook pages. Analyzing the official Facebook pages of these organizations, this study explained how they framed the Ukraine-Russia issue, and the kind of strategic messages they employed in order to mitigate the crisis or alleviate potential negative consequences. The sentiment of the posts created by the UN organizations on their Facebook pages regarding the Ukraine-Russia conflict was also analyzed. And, finally, this study looked at how followers of the UN humanitarian organizations' Facebook pages responded to posts connected to this crisis. Number of likes, comments, shares, and the use of other emoticons on each post have been taken into consideration while investigating audience engagement towards the conflict.

For the purpose of achieving these objectives and developing a better understanding of the organizational use of Facebook in crisis communication, this study evaluated the posts on the official Facebook pages of five United Nations humanitarian organizations: UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund), the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations. This study is believed to have significant ramifications for crisis communication scholarship, specifically through the analysis of crisis characteristics, and emergent themes used by the United Nations humanitarian

agencies in their social media posts during the Ukraine-Russia crisis. Moreover, findings of this research regarding people's reactions towards organizations' message framing could open up a new research dimension for future crisis communication academics and researchers.



## CHAPTER II – REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### Understanding Crisis and Crisis Response

In the last few decades, a slew of academic research has concentrated on crises and crisis communication (Cheng, 2018; Houston et al., 2015). A large number of these studies defined the term "crisis" from communication perspectives (Benoit, 1995; Coombs, 2011; Hermann, 1972; Mitroff, 2006; Sohn & Lariscy, 2014). In addition, other experts provided knowledge of the strategies that different organizations employ when dealing with crisis situations (Benoit, 1995; Coombs, 2007; Hale et al., 2005; Roshan et al., 2016; Sturges, 1994). Despite this large body of literature, there remains a great deal of disagreement among scholars about defining a *crisis*. Although Robinson (1972) argued that "occasions for decision" are created during a crisis, it is frequently observed that a crisis is concerned not only with the decision-making process, but also with a wide variety of management concerns and factors that are relevant to a specific circumstance.

However, the term, *crisis* has been used to refer to a number of distinct issues. When attempting to define a crisis, academics often do so by pointing out a wide range of its characteristics. Several crisis scholars agree that *surprise* is one of the most essential aspects of a crisis. This is "a consequence of being suddenly confronted with circumstances seen as unlikely and inconsistent with routine, familiar activities" (Seeger et al., 1998, p. 235). Scholars have a tendency to refer to a situation as a crisis whenever it involves an event that is unexpected, unanticipated, unforeseen, or unpredictable, and which deviates from the typical pattern that is followed (Barton, 1993; Coombs, 2021; Hermann, 1972; Rosenthal & Kouzmin, 1997; Seeger et al., 1998, 2003; Sellnow & Seeger, 2021). In the case of Ukraine-Russia, it is seen that Russian troops carried out a

number of sudden attacks in different locations of Ukraine, which is contributing evidence that the conflict between Ukraine and Russia has reached a crisis point.

*Threat* is another important aspect of the crisis definition. Barton (1993) considered a crisis as a phenomenon that poses risks to an individual or an organization. Seeger et al. (2003) defined the term as “an unusual event of overwhelmingly negative significance that carries a high level of risk, harm, and opportunity for further loss” (p. 4). Again considering the Ukraine-Russia conflict, Ukrainians have been going through an acute shortage of transportation. Food delivery networks are being adversely affected in different sections of the country (Lang & McKee, 2022); civilians are running out of food and water – which is a blatant violation of the Geneva Convention. According to the Geneva Convention, “starving civilians is a prohibited method of warfare” (ICRC, 2022). In addition, crises can contribute to economic downfall, as seen in the case of Ukraine. Although Ukraine has been commonly known as “Europe's Breadbasket” because of its abundance of grain (Lang & McKee, 2022, p. 1), the war with Russia has created a substantially negative impact on this country’s economy. It is estimated by the International Trade Center that around 25 percent of wheat and 43 percent of corn cultivated during the most recent harvest season have not yet been exported (Patterson, 2022).

Sellnow and Seeger (2021) suggest that a crisis can cause massive, large-scale, and long-term systematic instability, and often time a situation is distinguished as crisis by the fact that it necessitates prompt action or response on the part of government agencies and other organizations to minimize damage or control harm. Hermann (1972) viewed crisis as “a situation that threatens high priority goals of the decision making unit,

restricts the amount of time available for response before the decision is transformed and surprises the members of the decision-making unit by its occurrence" (p. 13). Through these definitions, these researchers indicate another significant feature of crisis, *short response time*. Researchers opine that crises often require taking immediate action and making resources accessible to tackle or mitigate the situation (Sellnow & Seeger, 2021). As an example, in the recent and ongoing Ukraine-Russia dispute, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Ukraine has been working in partnership with Ukraine's Ministry of Health to ensure that supplies are accessible to meet the demands of emergency medical response as part of a coordinated United Nations response to the crisis. This organization is also supplying support and necessary tools to test donated blood (UNDP, 2022a) which is another noteworthy example of short response time. Additionally, Venette et al. (2003) emphasized *need for change* while describing a crisis, as "crisis is a process of transformation in which the old system can no longer be maintained" (Venette et al., 2003, p. 224). According to the definitions provided by crisis theorists, crisis refers to a process of transition that calls for certain revolutionary acts rather than merely relieving tensions and problems (Hay, 1996). Because of this, academics are of the opinion that the organization must go through some sort of transformation or change in order to continue existing and making further progress (Hay, 1996; Venette et al., 2003).

In recent years, the term, *crisis* has gained tremendous traction in the discussion of social, cultural, political, environmental, and other issues of public importance. Crisis situations, now, are not only seen as responsible for reputational harm or lack of resources but are also accountable for adverse mental, physical or financial

consequences. When faced with a crisis situation, both mental and physical health often suffer significantly. It is asserted by Mitroff (2006) that a crisis can be a potentially life-threatening circumstance, and that it can jeopardize the survival of an individual or an organization. According to his study, crisis causes considerable losses, such as deaths, wounds, and money expenditures, as well as permanent harm to one's personal and professional reputation, among other things. As an example, 18 percent of Iranians, and 11.5 percent of Afghanistan military veterans have been identified with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Hoge et al., 2004), and 26 percent of the total Gaza population had been diagnosed with the same problem after the war situation ended in their locality (Hall et al., 2008). During the two years following the end of the conflict in Kosovo, 7.4 percent of emergency department patients reported having undergone traumatic incidents (Ahern, 2004). Similarly, the confrontation between Ukraine and Russia is projected to have severe repercussions for the Ukrainian healthcare industry. Given the present political unrest, it has become increasingly difficult to get healthcare service in Ukraine, and the healthcare system is now geared toward providing assistance to those who have been injured by artillery fire, and bombarding. According to a tweet by the World Health Organization (WHO), within the first 25 days, there had been 52 attacks on healthcare – approximately two attacks per day in this sector (WHO Twitter, 2022). Johnson (2022) claimed that emergency medical vehicle service had been struck 43 times and 117 medical institutions were demolished by March 20, 2022. Pregnant women have been forced to give birth in hospital basements since no healthcare group can provide them with emergency assistance (Chumachenko & Chumachenko, 2022).

Furthermore, children have been identified as a particularly vulnerable group by researchers (Chumachenko & Chumachenko, 2022; de Alencar Rodrigues, 2022; Júnior et al., 2022), and they have been subjected to substantial negative consequences. According to Júnior et al. (2022), Ukrainian children's lives and well-being are in peril as a result of the intensifying violence in their country, which is home to approximately 7.5 million children. According to the UN, one million people have already fled Ukraine, with over 400,000 of them likely to be children (Save the Children, 2022). The significant trauma that has resulted from this conflict is causing detrimental ramifications on their mental, physical, and social well-being. "There are physical risks for children that live in war zones, such as breathing in smoke, and ash from fires, and blasts that can affect the nose and lungs" (de Alencar Rodrigues et al., 2022, p. 1). Children are also losing their parents, friends, and other important people in their lives; they are being evacuated; schools, and other educational programs are being phased out or discontinued. Children may suffer long-term and irreversible consequences due to these traumatic experiences, which may have a negative impact on their future well-being. It should be noted that some scholars do not define war or any international disputes between countries as crises, considering the fact that "War most typically is the outcome of some extended conflict, and as such is not surprising in the same way as most crises" (Sellnow & Seeger, 2021, p. 5). In contrast, natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, cyclones, and other similar events often result in crises, and additionally some scholars consider man-made crises that arise from technological failures or human blunders (Rosenthal & Kouzmin, 1997). As reviewed, the current humanitarian situation in the Ukrainian conflict seems to meet most definitions of a crisis. It supports many characteristics of

crisis, for example, the conflict was surprising and unforeseen, the invasion was a life-threatening and purposeful attack, and the war in Ukraine has emerged as a cause of significant physical, mental, financial, and reputational harm.

Altogether, Russia's aggression toward Ukraine, including the negative impacts of this conflict for the country and its citizens, fits with most crisis definitions. Beyond the hundreds of Ukrainians killed, it is evident that Ukrainians are encountering widespread infrastructure damage as a result of Russia's invasion. Critical infrastructure in Ukrainian cities, including the water supply, power grid, and heating systems have been severely damaged and the devastation has become increasingly problematic. More than 1,000 structures have been demolished; 700 of them were multi-storied residential buildings, and none of them are currently livable (Chumachenko & Chumachenko, 2022). The devastating annihilation in different parts of Ukraine has compelled many locals to escape to the western Ukraine or other neighboring countries. Although it is nearly impossible to determine the exact number, the Operational Data Portal (2022) provides a rough estimation of more than 4.3 million people who have left Ukraine. Moreover, nearly 6.48 million people have been displaced in Ukraine as a consequence of the fighting, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM). IOM's data indicates that 13.5 percent of persons who were recently displaced had previously experienced displacement in 2014-2015 (IOM, 2022). It is also predicted that an additional seven million Ukrainians may find themselves without a home (McKee & Murphy, 2022).

Altogether, this current study extends four fundamental crisis characteristics that have been definitionally ubiquitous: *surprise*, *threat*, *short response time*, and the *need*

*for change.* These four characteristics encompass a variety of ideas that are frequently associated with a crisis. One purpose of this research is to investigate the degree to which these crisis characteristics were reflected in Facebook posts created by the five UN humanitarian organizations regarding the ongoing war between Ukraine and Russia.

#### *Crisis Response by UN Humanitarian Organizations*

During recent years, a burgeoning trend of studying crisis communication has emerged, which examines how organizations respond after a crisis occurs. As a crisis can negatively damage the performance of an organization, or it can threaten the stakeholders' interest and expectations, scholars suggest organizations should manage crises in a proper way (Coombs & Holladay, 2011; Heath & Millar, 2004). One of the major crisis management strategies is to develop and employ communication messages in times of crisis. These messages are known as crisis responses (Hale et al., 2005; Roshan et al., 2016). It is a critical component of crisis communication since it has the capacity to either enhance or tarnish a reputation of an organization. Moreover, it has the potential to either reduce or worsen undesirable consequences. Crisis responses adopted by organizations help them to meet the needs of their members and clients in accordance with prevailing social norms and expectations (Coombs & Holladay, 1996).

Relatedly, crisis communication definitions have been categorized into two main streams. According to Jaques (2009), crisis has been defined either as an event or as a process, and emergency response and containment is given considerable attention in the author's explication of the crisis management concept. Examples include concentrating on the facts of what should be done when a crisis happens and some basic preparedness, both of which have been demonstrated to be important components of the early phase in

crisis management. Although many studies on crisis communication tend to focus upon pre-crisis suggestions for preparation rather than on the actual event, other research indicates how organizations should work effectively to deal with the situation while they are in the midst of a crisis. Among several significant aspects of crisis communication studies, scholarship concerning strategies for restoring organizational image after the crisis is over and post-crisis renewal are most prevalent (Omilion-Hodges & McClain, 2016). Crisis situations, according to Cheng (2018), could be broken down into three stages: first, organizations must work on detection, prevention, and preparation in the pre-crisis stage. Second, during the crisis event phase, organizations should be concerned with recognizing and containing the situation. Finally, in the post-crisis phase, organizations evaluate the incident, learn from it, and continue to follow up the situation (Cheng, 2018).

Intervention via humanitarian services provided by the United Nations is frequently required to alleviate the suffering of those who have been affected by a crisis situation. For instance, a massive humanitarian response was initiated by World Health Organization (WHO), and Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) in Haiti following the earthquake in 2010. In addition to establishing the Health Cluster, they were also responsible for supervising the national emergency medical response. They established 17 field hospitals, as well as two ship-based hospitals, provided emergency medical supplies, among other things, as part of the emergency medical response (Sarcevic et al., 2012). Additionally, a coordinated effort by humanitarian organizations affiliated with the United Nations can be beneficial in alleviating the present situation of Ukraine. Accordingly, this study has focused on five major UN humanitarian agencies,



and their crisis management activities conducted via social media in regard to the recent Ukraine crisis.

*Five UN Humanitarian Organizations*

*United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)*. The United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF) is a global organization with more than 190 member countries, and territories, making it the world's largest humanitarian organization (UNICEF website). Humanitarian, and development support for children in developing nations falls under UNICEF's purview (Novelli & Smith, 2011). Following World War II, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) was established with the mission of providing humanitarian assistance to children in war-torn regions. Although this organization still primarily focuses on providing safety, it now also works to lessen the suffering of those affected by armed conflict, political instability, and natural disasters both during and after their occurrence (Jeong & Yeo, 2018). Nearly 1.4 million people in eastern Ukraine have no access to running water, and another concern is the loss of pipe water service to 4.6 million people in Ukraine (UNICEF, 2022). Importantly, safe drinking water supplies are a priority for UNICEF's recent lifesaving initiatives for children. The organization is working closely with other organizations in this area to transport and distribute clean water (UNICEF website, n. d.). With the help of the UNHCR and other partners, they established "Blue Dot Hubs" to assist migrants of Ukraine with crucial information, identification of unaccompanied, and separated children, as well as to ensure safety (UNICEF website).

Social media has emerged as a critical tool for UNICEF in order to maintain a dynamic dialogue with its constituents and donors. Their internet communication

platforms frequently outperform the constraints of face-to-face engagement. This group maintains a presence on a number of social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, and YouTube, among others. UNICEF's official Facebook page has 29,934,070 followers as of April 6, 2022 (UNICEF Facebook page). This Facebook page is used to enlighten people all over the world about a variety of concerns pertaining to children's health, nutrition, education, security, and other related issues. They spend the majority of their time generating awareness, pushing people to participate in volunteer activities, and raising funds (Pearce, 2014). They frequently express their interest in and enthusiasm for making a difference in the lives of afflicted children and adolescents through the use of this social media platform. Currently, using Facebook and other social media platforms, UNICEF sought to raise US\$ 948.9 million for life-saving support towards Ukrainian children and their families, which includes US\$ 624.2 million to respond to Ukraine's vital needs, and US\$ 324.7 million to respond to the refugee crisis (UNICEF Facebook page).

*World Health Organization (WHO)*. Concerning public health situations, the World Health Organization (WHO) is considered to be one of the most important organizations in the world. The organization was founded in 1948 with an objective of bringing people together to enhance health, safeguard the world, and assist those who are in vulnerable health situations (WHO official website).

WHO maintains an official Facebook page, with 38,447,964 followers (WHO Facebook page), as well as a number of other social media profiles. It uses the Facebook page to coordinate multiple emergency response efforts. Whenever there is an ongoing health crisis or disaster, such as COVID-19, Swine Flu, Anthrax, or other diseases, their

posts are updated with the most up-to-date information on those diseases and conditions. This organization announced the novel coronavirus disease as COVID-19 in January 2020, and they also forecasted that there was a high likelihood that COVID-19 would spread to other countries in the near future. On March 11, 2020, WHO declared COVID-19 to be a pandemic (AJMC, 2021). Since the beginning of COVID-19, the Facebook page of this group has been updating its followers on the ailment, and its symptoms. A number of warnings, reaction instructions, and vaccine information are also posted on a regular basis on the organization's Facebook page.

With a view to better informing the public about COVID-19, in April, 2020, WHO established a Facebook Messenger version of its WHO Health Alert platform. Their aim was to provide real-time and reliable information about COVID-19 through Facebook's worldwide reach. More than 12 million people signed up for the WHO Health Alert service by April 2020, and the organization predicted that the service has the potential to reach as many as 4.2 billion people. Overall, with this modern technological assistance, the World Health Organization works to protect individuals from any type of morbid condition, mitigate the risks of spreading diseases, and clarify various aspects of disease control (WHO, 2022a).

According to the official website of WHO, a health emergency has been generated by the ongoing conflict in Ukraine and the organization is working closely with its offices in Ukraine and neighboring countries as well as with partners to ensure that crucial health-care services are not disrupted. WHO has also pledged for a health emergency appeal for Ukraine from their official website and social media networks. In response to that the Novo Nordisk Foundation has donated 25 million Danish kroner

(approximately \$25 million) to support the World Health Organization's efforts in Ukraine and the countries that are hosting Ukrainian refugees (WHO, 2022b).

*United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)*. People who have been displaced from their homes because of war, civil unrest, or persecution, as well as those who are stateless and those who have been forcefully relocated—are all served by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), a global agency. The group is dedicated to defending these people's rights, and ensuring that they have a better quality of life (UNHCR website). This organization was founded in 1950 to ensure that everyone has the right to seek asylum, and safe haven in other countries or regions. They also care about people's ability to safely return to their homes. Refugees are provided with basic necessities including food, water, sanitation, and medical care by this organization (Jeong, & Yeo, 2018). In the event of a disaster or other emergency, this UN agency is also responsible for mobilizing its highly trained members. For instance, UNHCR has been operating in Ukraine for the past 30 years. During the Ukraine crisis of 2022, the UNHCR is collaborating with other UN organizations to assist the Ukrainian government. Their support includes giving housing, cash assistance, basic relief goods, sleeping mats, and other necessities to refugees fleeing from Ukraine (UNHCR, 2022).

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, and TikTok are the six social media sites where this humanitarian group has a presence. From these online sites, the organization learns about the issues that people are interested in debating. They also investigate how online dialogues can have an impact, and how UNHCR can address social media protection concerns regarding refugees (Ayala lacucci, 2021). They also believe that civil society organizations such as local non-governmental organizations

(NGOs), women's rights groups, and human rights organizations will use these pages, support UNHCR's work, and assist them to achieve their goals (Ayala lacucci, 2021).

Among the other social media sites, UNHCR uses Facebook as a key means of interacting with their consumers and other constituents. There are 4,271,813 individuals who follow this page as of April 2022 (UNHCR Facebook page). This portal acts as a one-stop service for information to refugees around the world. Apart from promoting awareness, and generating funds for a wide range of refugee groups around the globe, posts on this platform are also being used to spread information on how to get in touch with UNHCR services and other resources. On their Facebook page, they frequently ask for donations. As an example, donors were invited to help displaced Somalis through a Facebook-based “Gimme Shelter” Campaign in October 2009. This campaign was founded by American actor Ben Affleck and rock band–The Rolling Stones. More than 135,000 members contributed in less than six months, bringing the total amount donated to nearly \$60,000 (Bogen, 2009). There have been numerous articles published by this group since the commencement of the Ukraine-Russia War about the plight of those fleeing the war-torn country. In addition, they disseminate tales, firsthand accounts, and other information in an effort to motivate people around the world to assist Ukraine (UNHCR Facebook page).

*United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).* The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) prioritizes the well-being of people and nation-building as its primary priorities (UNDP website). Projects funded by the UNDP aim to increase resilience in the face of war and environmental disasters. Other UN humanitarian organizations have shorter-term development objectives, but the United

Nations Development Program (UNDP) has longer-term development objectives. They assist governments in the prevention of violence, the mitigation of the impact of natural disasters, as well as the reconstruction of communities following natural disasters (Jeong & Yeo, 2018). It not only addresses the core causes of violence but also empowers local communities to rebuild infrastructure after humanitarian crises. Recently, Ukraine's crisis response and coordination are being bolstered by a new project launched by the UNDP, named National Recovery and Resilience Building Plan (NRRP) of Ukraine. UNDP's evidence-based research and analysis is making this project highly effective (UNDP, 2022b).

This organization maintains communication with a variety of stakeholders through the usage of five social media platforms, including Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn. UNDP actively use their Facebook page. More than one million people follow the official Facebook page of this agency (UNDP Facebook page), and this website is primarily utilized to learn more about the people they deal with and to reply to their questions, and concerns. The site is also used to receive questions, comments, suggestions, and ideas from the general public. Donors, and contributors often investigate how this organization is doing, and whether they are making a difference in their communities. In addition to that they track the progress of projects, and initiatives of this agency through its Facebook activities. Six million people in Ukraine will need lifesaving help and protection in the next three months (UNDP, 2022c). This organization has already agreed to help with the food chain, community and, social cohesion, and emergency response in the country as part of the humanitarian Flash Appeal, which calls for a total of \$1.1 billion in aid and protection for those in need (UNDP, 2022c). Post

regarding this humanitarian Flash Appeal are often shared by this organization in their official Facebook handle (UNDP Facebook page).

*UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO)*. There are international efforts to eliminate hunger that are monitored by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Risk assessment, risk reduction, emergency response, and rehabilitation programs, among other things, are the agency's most important tools for lowering people's susceptibility to danger (Jeong & Yeo, 2018). The FAO's operations assist in the recovery and repair of resources. Long-term activities, like those of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), constitute an important aspect of the FAO's work. In order to achieve its objectives, FAO employs a variety of strategies, including disaster response and recovery operations following natural disasters or other man-made crises.

It is estimated that 240,000 of the most vulnerable rural men and women (from over 100,000 households) would require emergency help, including internally displaced persons who have been affected by the Ukraine crisis, and FAO will require \$50 million over the next three months in order to meet this demand. Because of the rapidly deteriorating situation across the country, the response plan of FAO highlights the most urgent emergency agriculture activities and swift financial transfers that may be done to assist in the preservation of lives and agricultural livelihoods (FAO, 2022).

A total of ten different social media platforms are now available for stakeholders, partners, members, and the general public to connect with the FAO. This UN agency is strongly encouraged to use their social media platforms to advocate for and promote their work, with the goal of raising global awareness of their activities (FAO, 2022a).

Accordingly, there are thousands of fans from all around the world who follow the FAO's *fan page*, which is a dynamic and constantly changing social media platform. 1,949,584 people are following the Facebook page of FAO (one of the top five most popular United Nations social media pages). Although the major goal of this Facebook page is to communicate with the general public, FAO also uses it to publicize initiatives, emphasize its mandate, and highlight their statements on any specific issue. Through the use of this online platform, they also promote and support young people in their efforts to make the world a more food secure place (FAO, 2022 b).

From this review of crisis characteristics, the nature of crisis communication and the role of these five UN humanitarian organizations in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict, the current study seeks to examine its first research question:

Research Question 1a: To what extent did these UN humanitarian organizations (UNHCR, UNICEF, UNDP, WHO, FAO) define the Ukraine-Russia issue as a crisis in their official Facebook posts?

Research Question 1b: What crisis characteristics (i.e., surprise, threat, short response time, and need for change) were most prominent in the posts of these UN humanitarian organizations' official Facebook pages regarding the Ukraine-Russia conflict?

### Role of UN Humanitarian Organizations in Crisis Situations

Natural disasters such as hurricanes and earthquakes, as well as a wide range of contagious diseases like COVID-19, are all characterized as crises. However, when countries are at war with one another, the most catastrophic crisis scenarios emerge. In these types of crisis situations, it is impossible to deny the importance of crisis



management, and emergency preparedness measures. As the situation worsens, efforts of different government, and non-government organizations to alleviate the crisis become increasingly vital. Especially, ensuring, and providing safety to civilians in such crisis situations becomes the first duty of the state (Anttila, 2014). Therefore, different state bodies, such as the police, army, fire department, emergency responders, and other governmental agencies are often seen working together to coordinate emergency response actions to control the situation. For example, when an organized terrorist assault took place on September 11, 2001, in which the United States was the target, a coordinated response manifested from a wide range of organizations, especially since this terrorist assault had the potential to trigger several aggravated disasters. Immediately following the tragedy, the federal and state governments began a swift response, supporting survivors, cleaning up the debris, and launching an anti-terrorist campaign in a relatively short period of time after the incident happened (Horsley & Barker, 2002).

However, when a nation is unable to provide for civilian protection, it is the obligation of the international community to ensure that civilian security is guaranteed. It is imperative that the international community respond when there is a threat of widespread violence in order to prevent genocide or other forms of social unrest from occurring. As an example, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is continuing to provide assistance, and support to refugees who have been forced to evacuate their homes or flee Ukraine. This organization is distributing essential assistance materials such as blankets, sleeping mats, and emergency shelters. As part of this effort, they are also providing specialized protection services to identify those who

require specific support, such as children traveling alone or people with physical limitations (UNHCR, 2022).

UNICEF has placed orders totaling over \$41.3 million in products since February 24th to satisfy the needs of more than 6.2 million people in Ukraine, including 1.1 million children. As of March 16, 2022, the delivery of life-saving equipment and first aid kits to 14 hospitals in various cities across Ukraine benefited roughly 4,000 pregnant women and babies, as well as 200,000 citizens. The first shipment of goods arrived in Lviv, with 34 trucks transporting critical medicines and medical equipment, cleanliness and sanitation kits, Early Child Development (ECD) kits, adolescent kits, and children's winter apparel. The materials were subsequently distributed to partners for further distribution (UNICEF, 2022).

Additionally, different teams or agencies are appointed by these organizations, and they are given proper training on how to deal with current or prospective crises, as well as how to prepare for action before taking any direct action (Horsley & Barker, 2002). As an example, after the break-up of Yugoslavia, the region descended into a bloody civil war. During that emergent crisis the United Nations (UN) intervened. Their goal was to establish "the conditions of peace and security required for the negotiation of an overall settlement of the Yugoslav crisis" (Thomas, 1995, p.445). As part of the UN crisis management efforts, the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) kept a close eye on the combating parties involved in the Bosnia-Herzegovina war. They were attempting to protect innocent citizens at the time, and as a result, they constructed safe zones to facilitate this process. Emergency missions conducted by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) staff totaled 441 in 2014 (Jeong & Yeo, 2018). In

recent days, Project HOPE is collaborating with a non-governmental group in Ukraine to purchase drugs and medical supplies and transport them throughout the country. On April 5, 2022, Project HOPE committed to transport 100 pallets of drugs and supplies to Ukraine (Project HOPE, 2022).

Furthermore, humanitarian assistance has been provided to people who have been impacted by the crisis. In a fighting region, one of the most important goals of crisis management interventions is to bring a peaceful settlement. And it is highly necessary for civilian and military troops from areas other than the war zone to work together to accomplish their goals (Anttila, 2014). There are numerous instances where UN humanitarian organizations have carried out various efforts around the world to facilitate a war-torn people. A pilot program for displaced Syrian children in Lebanon was launched in the 2016-2017 school year by UNICEF, the World Food Program (WFP), and Lebanon's Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE). Children and teenagers affected by the Syrian conflict were supported by that project, known as "No Lost Generation" (Morey et al., 2018). Funding was solicited in December 2020 by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) for sexual and reproductive health including gender-based violence services for the more than 11 million Syrians who remain in the nation and the 5.7 million individuals who have fled the country. The funds were requested by the organization to operate reproductive health and GBV programs, as well as to provide essential supplies (UN, 2020a). UNICEF, on the other hand, has launched an emergency fundraising campaign to raise a total of \$6.4 billion for the 190 million children who have been affected by the coronavirus epidemic (UN, 2020b). Recovery and Peace-building Programme (RPP) was one of the projects of UNDP for Ukraine's

Luhansk region's sustainable development. The goal of that project was, "promoting reconciliation and restoration of governance in conflict-affected areas; reorganization of local government, restoration of basic services for the population; ensuring human rights, gender equality; improving social cohesion of population; promoting decentralization" (Semenenko et al., 2019, p. 26).

The role of NGOs in the formation of peace, and in dialogues about peace is highly appreciated in today's crisis management actions. There are various national and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) working in humanitarian missions in addition to governments and the UN bodies. The involvement these non-governmental organizations in war, and conflict situations all around the world has been well-documented. Besides the UN organizations, some international organizations have allocated funds for Ukraine's sustainable development, especially in the Luhansk region. Among those organizations, the role of USAID's projects to enhance support for "agricultural, and rural development, humanitarian assistance programs, assistance to displaced higher education institutions, development of dual education system, promotion of civic engagement, entrepreneurship development and job creation, economic growth," and more are noteworthy (Semenenko et al., 2019, p. 28).

The likelihood of developing mental health problems increases for people who have been through traumatic events like war and violence in their lives.

Death, injury, sexual violence, malnutrition, illness and disability are examples of the most dramatic physical consequences, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression and anxiety are some of the effects of emotional disorders.

War also contributes to disrupting the normal course of family and social life,

causing suffering to people, which is very characteristic of the course of hostilities. (Pacek & Truszczyński, 2020, p. 23)

Therefore, researchers suggest that aiding victims of conflict requires a non-judgmental and cooperative approach in order to assist those who are caught up in a war situation (Pham et al., 2004; Shimelash Yasegnal, 2022). During and after the crisis, health, and social workers from a range of organizations provide help to those who have been adversely affected by war, and are in need of aid. It has become extremely significant for organizations to work in post-war, and current circumstances. These organizations pay close attention, and take action to extend psychosocial support as part of their assistance programs. Handicap International (HI) is a Bangladeshi NGO that has been providing humanitarian support to Rohingya people who have fled from Myanmar to Cox's Bazar as a result of military oppression since 2006 (Ozen & Ziveri, 2019). To provide help to people with mental, and physical disabilities during the Rohingya crisis, the humanitarian organization developed interdisciplinary teams consisting of nurses, rehabilitation programs, protection, and health and social care agents (Ozen & Ziveri, 2019; WHO, 2013). Concerning Ukraine, UNICEF has established and outfitted psychosocial support areas in 29 metro stations, providing learning resources for art, play, reading, and emotional support. The areas were located in areas where children could get emotional support, play, and learn about other cultures (UNICEF, 2022). Moreover, during the time of conflict, the First Geneva Convention offers protection for hospitals and health-care personnel. Failure to comply with this agreement can be interpreted as a war crime (Ahsan, 2022). Russian military, for instance, has violated this international humanitarian law as their fighter planes bombed hospitals in Syria (Ahsan, 2022), which can certainly

cause a severe reputational harm of this organization if proper strategic actions to restore their image have not been taken early.

Only in recent years has social media usage acquired traction in contemporary battle settings. However, its combat applications have become increasingly widespread, effectively transforming it into a strong force multiplier in contemporary conflict (Chen et al., 2022). According to Onuch (2015), “Social media were and will continue to be a component of the Ukrainian protesters” toolkit (p. 181). Using social media to facilitate crisis communication has shown to be extremely beneficial for UN humanitarian organizations, as it provides a platform through which timely, and exact information can be disseminated to the target audiences, and stakeholders of the organizations in the most efficient manner. On Facebook, UNICEF delivers regular updates on their crisis management efforts related to several social programs, such as "Blue Dot Hubs," and other services they are delivering to different locations of Ukraine (UNICEF Facebook page). An Oxford University survey done in 2019 revealed that "more than 56 countries engage [in] cyber military actions on Facebook” (Chen et al., 2022, p. 2). Organizations can use Facebook accounts to disseminate political news and information, political propaganda, and develop groups and subjects for specific discussions during wartime. Facebook accounts can also be widely used as a social network weapon, and as a result, it can have an impact on the digital information ecosystem in the long run (Chen et al., 2022). Overall, based on the reviewed crisis communication literature focusing on war or conflict situations, the second research question of the current study follows:

Research Question 2: What emergent themes (i.e., fundraising, protection of safety and security, peaceful settlement, service and resource distribution, medical

assistance, social programs) appeared most frequently in the messages that were disseminated by the UN humanitarian agencies on their Facebook pages during the Ukraine-Russia conflict period?

#### Framing Crisis Response Strategies: Offensive vs. Defensive

A situation without crises would be ideal for individuals and organizations (Cheng, 2018). However, if a crisis arises, it is indispensable for organizations to determine the kinds of crisis management strategies they will implement to confront the problem. There have been many studies conducted on the nature of crisis response (e.g., Benoit, 1997; Bradford & Garrett, 1995; Coombs, 2007; Sturges, 1994), and crisis communication scholars have propounded several theories which examine different techniques for dealing with a crisis. Moreover, various crisis communication tactics, according to Huang et al. (2016), are frequently used by organizations to address and explain a crisis, and these tactics can be both verbal and nonverbal.

Sturges (1994) suggests three crisis communication tactics that can be employed by organizations dealing with a crisis situation (Cheng, 2018; Huang et al. 2016; Roshan et al., 2016). The first tactic is providing instructing information, which allows the stakeholders to protect themselves from the crisis. To cope psychologically, expressing sympathy or explaining the crisis through adjusting information can be another strategy, and the third strategy is internalizing information, which according to Sturges (1994), can be adopted to “formulate an image about the organization” in the mind of the organization’s stakeholders (p. 308). Considering another widely used framework in crisis communication, Benoit’s image restoration theory suggests that organizations can help preserve their good name during a crisis using five key approaches – denial, evasion

of responsibility, reducing the offensiveness of an event, corrective action, and mortification (Benoit, 1995; Cheng, 2018; Huang et. al, 2016).

Among the other crisis researchers, Coombs (2006, 2007, 2011 & 2021) has explored crisis response techniques through a number of studies. Coombs (2011) characterized an effective crisis response strategy as “the way crisis communication is used to achieve certain outcomes” (p. 130), and his Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) emerged as a complete framework for responding to crises in an efficient manner. This theory was developed as an empirically-validated technique for selecting crisis response strategies in a wide range of settings and conditions (Coombs, 2006). SCCT is mainly “concerned with the public’s perception and, ultimately, approval of an organization following crises or controversy” (Sellnow & Seeger, 2021, p. 91). This theory can be used efficaciously to assist organizations in selecting the most effective crisis response approaches in a given crisis situation. The theory can also help to minimize the reputational risk associated with crises (Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 2002). Importantly for this study, SCCT also has the ability to help scholars gain a better grasp of how social media is used in organizational crisis management.

SCCT includes three key components - the crisis situation, crisis response strategies, and a process for matching the crisis situation with crisis response tactics (Coombs, 2006, p. 243). Coombs (2011) says, primarily, crisis response strategies can be divided into four clusters - denial, diminishment, rebuilding, and bolstering. Using denial strategies (i.e., attacking, denial and scapegoating), an organization tries to demonstrate that it is not responsible for the crisis that has occurred, and even sometimes the organization rejects an incident to be a crisis. Diminishment strategies (i.e., excuse and



justification) are intended to reduce the perception of control over the crisis or the negative consequences of the crisis. Rebuilding strategies attempt to expand or increase the reputation of the organization by compensating and apologizing, and the goal of bolstering strategies (i.e., reminding, ingratiation and victimage) is to establish a positive relationship between the organization and its stakeholders (Cheng, 2018; Roshan et al., 2016). This theory also states that an organization should give instructing information as well as adjusting information before adopting a crisis response strategy (Sellnow & Seegar, 2021).

In discussions on the implications of the SCCT framework, a number of scholars have concluded that this theory could be utilized successfully to study how organizations employ crisis response tactics during or after a crisis develops. A meta-analysis conducted by An and Cheng (2010) over a 30-year period reveals that SCCT is “at the top of the list of the most frequently cited theories in [the] crisis communication area” (Roshan et al., 2016, p. 351). According to Sisco et al. (2009), SCCT was the most appropriate theoretical framework for their investigation on a case study about how the American Red Cross implemented crisis response strategies (Sellnow & Seegar, 2021). This theory can serve as a useful framework for organizations to identify the most effective response tactics for lessening the effects of a crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). Despite the fact that SCCT was developed long before the widespread usage of social media, scholars are confident that this theory has great promise for characterizing, and assessing the use of social media for organizational crisis response (Roshan et al., 2016).

Concentrating on several scholars' (Bradford & Garrett, 1995; Benoit, 1997; Coombs, 2007; Sturges, 1994) crisis response strategies, and adding up some new, Huang et al. (2016) proposed a framework. This framework enlists eight major strategies to deal with a crisis, organizations can adopt denial, evasion of responsibility, justification, apology, concession, information providing, showing sympathy, and building a new agenda. It is assumed that these tactics (based in theories, and models for crisis management) can be useful for organizations in avoiding or reducing the harm caused by crises. Therefore, the current study examined the strategies that the UN humanitarian organizations adopted in alleviating the negative impact of the Ukraine crisis on their Facebook platform, specifically considering the grouping of these strategies into overarching offensive and defensive frames.

Research conducted in the field of communication over the past few decades has made extensive use of framing (Dalla-Pria & Rodríguez-de-Dios, 2022; Darmon, 2008; Faisal & Zannat, 2014; Goodman, 2016; GÜRAN & ÖZARSLAN, 2022; Kim & Cameron, 2011; Kuan et al, 2021; Makhareh, 2018). The act of framing is “selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution” (Entman, 2004, p. 5). It refers to a process that makes a concept more significant and meaningful. Framing helps to “promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (Entman, 1993, p. 52). When confronted with a crisis, organizations typically strategically develop a message and communicate with the various stakeholders of their organization. During the process of producing crisis response messages, organizations use a variety of different frames to present their

information. Messages delivered in response to a crisis are frequently worded in such a way as to ensure that particular aspects of the situation are understood or prioritized by the various stakeholders of an organization.

In most cases, episodic and thematic framing are employed during crisis communication (Goodman, 2016; Kuntzman & Drake, 2016). Importantly, when a conflict arises, frames take on an especially significant role because they determine how the root of the conflict is interpreted and what should be the most befitting response toward the crisis (Hammond, 2007). According to Makhortykh and Sydorova (2017), due to “its potency, however, the use of frames can have a profound impact on the course of conflict” (p. 363).

However, reactive crisis management strategies are employed for situations in which there is already an ongoing crisis (e.g., the Ukraine-Russia war). These kinds of strategies are helpful in mitigating the detrimental effects that a crisis has already exerted (Waller et al., 2014), and are often framed as *offensive*, and *defensive*. These offensive, and defensive strategies are linked to the primary tactics presented in a number of crisis management theories. For example, attacking and scapegoating in SCCT as proposed by Coombs (2006), instructing and adjusting information in the information strategy proposed by Sturges (1994), and blaming in the image restoration theory proposed by Benoit (1997).

The terms offensive and defensive have been defined in a number of different ways. According to Gartzke and Lindsay (2015), the term defense refers to the tactics used to diminish the impact of an attack. According to Baker (1980), “a defensive attitude occurs within people when they encounter communication situations with which they feel

uncomfortable or will not tolerate” (p.33). Many academics (e.g., Coombs, 2014; Goodman, 2016; Marcus & Goodman 1991) consider denial to be a sort of defensive strategy, whereas offensive crisis response is tied to the act of undertaking an attack (Benoit, 1995; Gartzke & Lindsay, 2015; Goodman, 2016; Mozes-Sadeh & Avraham, 2014). Goodman (2016) used the tactic of "redefinition or dissociation" as a defensive strategy (p. 17), whereas Van Evera (1998) considered defensive techniques to be a passive form of responding to a crisis, explaining that utilizing a defensive strategy is pointless whenever there is a more powerful form of attack (such as war). According to Cheng (2018), if “attributions of crisis responsibility to an organization decreased”, then defensive crisis response tactics would be the most appropriate” (p. 60). Coombs (2007) proposes providing people with knowledge that is instructive and adjusting, as well as exhibiting sympathy to the sufferers, which is another form of protective response.

While dealing with political crises, Mozes-Sadeh and Avraham (2014), pointed out that offensive crisis response strategies “concentrate on the damage to competitors” (p. 10). Martens et al. (2016) brought attention to an advantage that can be gained by responding to a crisis with offensive measures, emphasizing that offensive strategies have the potential to eradicate the root of the issue and lessen its adverse effects. However, researchers reckon that “an accurate preparation is crucial for the success of an offensive strategy” (p. 92).

Conversely, organizations can use defensive management tactics to either assert that there is no problem within the organization or take efforts to quickly restart regular operations, according to Marcus & Goodman (1991). By employing defensive measures, it is possible for the organization to delineate how they want to deal or cope with the crisis.

In addition, organizations can inform their stakeholders (and opponents) about their readiness to deal with the current crisis. Organizations with a strong defensive response may be seen as more trustworthy because they demonstrate high standards of ethics, morality, and fair play while handling a crisis (Basoglu and Hess, 2014). Therefore, some scholars (Martens et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2021) prefer to apply defensive strategies over offensive strategies while dealing with a crisis. Additionally, it is common for defensive response strategies to be embedded in emotional frames, which can result in a more favorable response from the people who are being targeted (Wang et al., 2021). Because people have a negative attitude toward offensive announcements during times of public health crisis, for example, Wang et al. (2021) revealed that implementing a defensive approach with an emotional focus can have a positive impact on people's beliefs. Therefore, previous researchers have proposed that while designing response strategies to deal with a crisis, one should consider transitioning from a "traditional offensive and rational" approach to a more "defensive and emotional" approach (Wang et al., p. 1198).

Stemming from the offensive and defensive crisis response strategies detailed by previous researchers, this study investigated the ways UN organizations adopted offensive, and defensive framing in their Facebook posts related to the Ukraine crisis. Accordingly, the following research question was asked:

Research Question 3: In what ways did the UN agencies use offensive, and defensive framing in their Facebook posts regarding the Ukraine-Russia crisis?

## Use of Social Media for Crisis Communication

Organizations all over the world are finding that social media platforms are effective tools for crisis communication. Because of recent technological advancements, crisis management professionals and scholars are reinventing the ways they connect with affected communities and convey messages relevant to a crisis (Roy et al., 2020). Twelve best practices for risk and crisis communication via social media were outlined by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Among them, initiatives to enhance public awareness of risks and emergencies, as well as attempts to monitor situational awareness, and identify survivors and victims are worth mentioning (Eriksson, 2018; Wendling et al., 2013).

Before a crisis happens, an organization should have policies and practices in place for how it would communicate via social media in the event of a crisis. Social media is already being used by many crisis communicators as a means of conveying organizational messages, such as risk warnings, to their audiences. As an example, Twitter was used in the Red River disaster of 2009 to organize aid for victims (Starbird & Palen, 2010). Humanitarian organizations, and volunteers have established web-based manual crisis mapping sites in response to natural disasters such as the Haiti 2010 earthquake, the Russian wildfire, Hurricane Sandy in New York, and the Oklahoma tornado in 2013 (Saroj & pal, 2020.) In addition to informing the public about their activities and perspectives toward a crisis situation, social media sites can assist organizations in communicating and interacting with their donors and volunteers (Waters, 2010).

When used as an interactive medium, social media pages for various organizations frequently demonstrate their understanding and involvement in crisis management efforts. Members of these organizations' fan pages have the ability to identify themselves as supporters of an organization on social media. According to Venette et al. (2003), it is critical to view an organization's response to a crisis as a collection of conflicting narratives told both by the media and by the institution itself, because organizational narratives presented through the media, and by the institution can frequently influence public opinion on a particular crisis issue. Moreover, because of the public nature of interactions on a social media fan page, organizations can easily learn about the perspectives of the public and how they are involved in crisis situations (Goolsby, 2009; Mirbabaie & Zapatka, 2017). The ability for organizations to evaluate how the general public interacts with them through social media is particularly valuable for gaining a clear understanding of the effectiveness of the crisis mitigation strategies that they are implementing, in addition to the advantages of entering dialogues with users.

However, because of the proliferation of modern communication technologies, users are now able to more freely express themselves through the utilization of reaction buttons such as share, comment, like, love, haha, wow, sad, and angry. These buttons are one example of how users on social media platforms can present themselves in their own unique ways. These reactions are being utilized by the users in an ever-increasing breadth and scope. Over the course of the past few years, more than ten billion unique emojis have been used on Twitter as a means of expressing oneself in messages or demonstrating one's reaction to a post. Emojis have become increasingly popular as a means of

instantaneously conveying a range of emotions (Novak Kralj et al., 2015). After conducting an analysis of 21,000 Facebook posts, which included 57 million reactions and 8 million comments from public media pages located in four different countries, Tian et al., (2017) came to the conclusion that reactions and emojis on a Facebook page can indicate an overall sentiment of a post given in this platform.

Overall, the primary goal of social media platforms is to increase user engagement, which is one of the primary reasons why these platforms have proven to be such an effective tool for bringing people together. The use of social media is regarded as having a significant advantage for those who respond to emergencies compared to efforts made in the past (Syn, 2021). Those in positions of authority have the responsibility, during times of emergency, to communicate information in a manner that is both clear, and concise. However, social media platforms, such as Facebook, are valuable crisis communication tools in situations where important messages must be disseminated to the greatest number of people possible. Altogether, considering the importance of user engagement within social media platforms, this study sought to identify user reactions to the UN humanitarian organizations' Facebook posts. Accordingly, the fourth research question is extended.

Research Question 4: To what extent did the followers of the five UN humanitarian organizations' Facebook pages respond to posts regarding Ukraine crisis?

#### *Connecting Message Sentiment to User Engagement*

In addition to reactions, post sentiment (e.g., positive, negative, neutral) is vital for social media crisis communication. Several studies have investigated the sentiment of social media posts and comments, and found that their sentiment influences users'



beliefs, attitudes and actions (Barclay et al., 2014; Caetano et al., 2018; Jayawickrama et al., 2021; Rudkowsky et al., 2018; Sandoval-Almazan, & Valle-Cruz, D., 2020). For examples, using positive, neutral and negative scores in sentiment analysis, Barclay et al. (2014) claim that sentiments are the mirrors of general public's mood and feelings, Whereas Sandoval-Almazan and Valle-Cruz (2020) suggest researchers to consider emotions of people expressed via social media, as a means of examining voter's behavior. Rudkowsky et al. (2018) and Caetano et al. (2018) conducted sentiment studies to understand the political preferences of people. Therefore, this current study additionally sought to identify the sentiment of Facebook posts generated by the UN humanitarian organizations, understanding that sentiment could have important implications for user reactions and behavior (e.g., sharing posts or donating toward the cause).

Research Question 5: To what extent were the five UN humanitarian organizations' Facebook post sentiments positive, negative or neutral?

## CHAPTER III– METHODOLOGY

A content analysis has been conducted to understand the overall crisis communication pattern of the five largest UN humanitarian organizations in the Ukraine-Russia conflict (UNHCR, UNICEF, UNDP, WHO, FAO), including the thematic orientation (e.g., fundraising, peaceful settlement, medical assistance) of their Facebook posts, the crisis characteristics disclosed (e.g., threat, surprise, short response time), and the offensive-defensive positioning of the language used. Toward this aim, the present study examined all the Facebook posts made by these organizations regarding the Ukraine-Russia issue, from the very beginning of the conflict, starting from February 24, 2022 to May 24, 2022. In total, 355 Facebook posts have been evaluated to determine the extent to which those organizations defined the Ukraine-Russia conflict as a crisis, including the predominant crisis characteristics addressed by their Facebook posts. These crisis characteristics, “surprise,” “threat,” “short response time,” and “need for change,” were derived from the previously reviewed definitions of crisis communication.

Furthermore, this content analysis looked upon six emergent themes in the crisis communication messages on the UN organizations’ Facebook pages, each developed on the basis of previous literature: “fundraising,” “protection of safety and security,” “peaceful settlement,” “service and resource distribution,” “medical assistance,” and “social programs.” This analysis also provided insight into the frames (i.e., offensive or defensive) used by the UN organizations on their Facebook pages regarding the crisis between Ukraine and Russia. Finally, post sentiments (i.e., positive, negative or neutral) were investigated through the content analysis. In addition to these content categories, the current study provided insight into how followers of the five UN humanitarian

organizations' Facebook pages expressed their responses toward the organizations' positions by measuring social media interactions (e.g., reactions, comments, and shares), as recorded during data collection. The method section outlines the sampling strategy, coding procedure, and provides descriptions of the measures that have been used for analysis.

### Unit of Analysis

Because the current study was primarily concerned with the pattern of organizational crisis communication on Facebook pages, each unique post related to the Ukraine-Russia conflict on the official Facebook pages of the five United Nations humanitarian organizations (UNHCR, UNICEF, WHO, UNDP, and FAO) was treated as a single unit of analysis. In relation to the post content (e.g., emergent themes, and crisis characteristics), this study also examined the elements of user engagement directly connected to the collected posts. To gain an understanding of followers' participation, each interaction (i.e., “like,” “share,” “love,” “wow,” “haha,” “sad,” “angry,” and “care” reaction, plus the number of responding comments and shares) on each *Facebook* post has been considered as part of the post unit. Measuring and evaluating these interactions helps gain a comprehensive understanding of how followers of these UN humanitarian organizations' Facebook pages react to and engage with the conversations related to the Ukraine-Russia conflict.

### Sampling

To assess the characteristics of crisis communication distributed via social media by the UN humanitarian organizations, this study has specifically targeted the Facebook platform. This site was chosen because, despite a plethora of alternatives, Facebook is the

world's most popular social networking site. With 2.912 billion monthly active users in January 2022, Facebook is ranked as world's most active social media platform (Datareportal, 2022). There were 2.89 billion monthly active users in 2021, with a year-over-year increase of 6.89 percent in daily active users (Statista, 2021). Facebook is used by a wide range of people as well as organizations, as this platform is designed to facilitate user engagement and connect users from around the globe (Cho & Schweickart, 2014). Five large UN organizations (UNHCR, UNICEF, WHO, UNDP, and FAO) were also selected for this content analysis. Each of these organizations has official Facebook pages with a large number of followers. Specifically, the number of followers of the selected organizations' Facebook pages are: WHO (38,447,964), UNICEF (29,934,070), UNDP (1,700,000), UNHCR (4,271,813), and FAO (1,949,584).

The data for this study were extracted by using CrowdTangle – a public insights tool that automates monitoring of Facebook, and is owned and operated by the company (Bleakley, 2022). This tool has been used in a number of previous studies to extract Facebook data (Boberg et al., 2020; Jernigan & Rushman, 2014; Rogers, 2018). For example, Jernigan and Rushman (2014) used the CrowdTangle tool to “track and measure both brand activity in terms of posts to their pages, and user engagement in the forms of posting, liking, and sharing done by users of these brand pages” (p. 95). With the CrowdTangle search option, this study searched and, extracted the UN humanitarian organization's posts by selecting Facebook, Facebook Pages, Custom Timeline, English language posts, and Page Admin Country-United States of America. Apart from these, all other options remained at their default settings.

Searching by one keyword – *Ukraine* a total of 355 posts were captured. These posts were created by the UN humanitarian organizations’ official Facebook pages between February 24, 2022 and May 24, 2022. The timeline for collecting data was set to begin on February 24, 2022 as on this date Russia launched the full-scale assault on Ukraine and the Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy ordered a general mobilization (Psaropoulos, 2022). Data collection concluded on May 24, 2022 as a three month window was deemed sufficient to capture and document the initial crisis communication generated in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Followers’ engagements through a range of reactions towards sampled posts were also captured during this collection, totaling 3,795,272 interactions, including 22,65215 likes, 19,8908 shares, 12,7608 comments, and 20,5193 “love,” 4,562 “wow,” 10,605 “haha,” 62,9487 “sad,” 6,270 “angry,” and 34,7424 “care” reactions.

#### Coding Procedure

A codebook was constructed to capture crisis characteristics (i.e., surprise, threat, short response time and, need for change), emergent themes of the crisis communication messages (i.e., fundraising, protection of safety and security, peaceful settlement, service and resource distribution, medical assistance and, social programs), post frames (i.e., offensive, and defensive), and post sentiment (i.e., positive, negative and, neutral). See Appendix A for the full codebook. This coding scheme was iteratively redesigned throughout coder training to improve accuracy and facilitate intercoder reliability.

Two graduate students familiar with Facebook worked as coders for this study. Coders were given extensive training on the coding procedure using this codebook, with a total of 80 posts (22.53% of the sample) randomly selected and used in coder training.

After completing coder training, 45 posts (12.68%) were used to calculate Krippendorff's alpha (overall  $\alpha = 0.87$ ). Alphas for individual categories are reported in the next section. The initial training subsample of 45 posts (12.68%) were not used to calculate Krippendorff's alpha but were instead used to orient coders to the codebook, redefine the categories (as necessary), discuss discrepancies and overall increase reliability (this subsample was recoded after completing of the training set, however). Having achieved acceptable intercoder reliability, the full sample set of 355 posts was divided between the two coders. The first coder coded 178 posts and the second coder coded the remaining 177 posts. During the coding process, Facebook posts were accessed via an Excel file and categorized. Problem cases were flagged and collectively discussed by the coders, as needed.

### Measures

A full codebook is provided in Appendix A. Within this codebook, each post has been attributed to one of the five Facebook pages: "UNICEF," "UNHCR," "WHO," "UNDP," or "FAO."

#### *Crisis Characteristics*

The first section of the codebook included the four basic crisis characteristics categories: "surprise" ( $\alpha = 0.84$ ), "threat" ( $\alpha = 0.923$ ), "short response time" ( $\alpha = 0.802$ ), and "need for change" ( $\alpha = 1$ ). Sampled posts were coded under these four categories, which were not mutually exclusive, to measure crisis characteristics derived from previous crisis definitions (e.g., Coombs, 2021; Mitroff, 2006; Rosenthal & Kouzmin, 1997; Sellnow & Seegar, 2021; Venette et al., 2003). These categories also

delineated how these organizations defined the ongoing Ukraine-Russia conflict on their official Facebook pages.

Posts that defined the Ukraine-Russia conflict and/or related issues as an unanticipated, unknown, or unforeseen incidents were coded as “surprise.” For instance, “Russian troops made a sudden attack in the Kharkiv city of Ukraine” and “this unexpected devastation of Ukrainian hospitals has drastically reduced the access to medical care.” Next, any post that included information about economic downfall (e.g., recession, monetary loss, unemployment, lack of resources, revenue loss, lack of funds), adverse physical harm (e.g., death, injury, mortality, casualty), negative mental consequences (e.g., PTSD, stress, depression) and/or damage to resources (e.g., demolition of bridges, hospitals, residential or commercial buildings), was coded as “threat.” For example, “Ukraine is having severe economic loss this year,” “the GDP of Ukraine is going down,” “the rising violence in Ukraine threatens the lives and well-being of 7.5 million adolescents,” “one in every four children in eastern Ukraine is traumatized,” and “more than 1000 structures including 700 multi-storied residential buildings have been demolished so far.”

“Short response time” was categorized for posts that discussed quickly responding to a medical emergency, immediately reassuring civilians about safe migration procedures, presenting an immediate reaction to the media (e.g., causes and losses), disseminating fundraising information to stakeholders within a short period of time, and/or outlining the steps that have been taken to mitigate the effects of the crisis by decision makers. As examples, “After a recent hospital bombing, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, UNICEF’s Catherine Russell, UNFPA’s Natalia Kanem call for an

immediate cessation of all attacks on health care in Ukraine,” “In response to the attack in Kharkiv, UNHCR redoubles its aid inside Ukraine and the region” and “UNDP and EU have provided equipment and tools to emergency services in the Luhansk & Donetsk regions as an emergency response.”

Finally, when posts aimed to bring change in the socio-economic and/or humanitarian status of the war-affected area and people of Ukraine, signposting the initiatives taken by the UN humanitarian organizations to bring change, such as reuniting internally displaced Ukrainian communities, rebuilding damaged medical infrastructures, ensuring social rehabilitation and reintegration of veterans with disabilities, re-installing water, electricity and gas supply systems, and repairing dilapidated roads and highways, they were coded as “need for change.” As examples, “UNDP is sending over 250 staff to provide support in building temporary shelters for the homeless Ukrainians after the sudden attack at the residential buildings in different cities of Ukraine,” “WHO is preparing a document outlining the principles to support the Ukrainian government in preparation for post-war recovery and rebuilding the country,” and “UNDP is helping over 10,000 Ukrainian local business owners transform their operations and start recovery.”

### *Emergent Themes*

The second segment of the codebook included another set of six categories: “fundraising” ( $\alpha = 1$ ), “protection of safety and security” ( $\alpha = 0.943$ ), “peaceful settlement” ( $\alpha = 1$ ), “service and resource distribution” ( $\alpha = 1$ ), “medical assistance” ( $\alpha = 0.941$ ), and “social programs” ( $\alpha = 1$ ). These categories assessed the emergent themes that were present in messages disseminated by the UN humanitarian agencies and were



built upon previous literature detailing common UN humanitarian procedures and activities (Anttila, 2014; Jeong & Yeo, 2018; Semenenko et al., 2019; Thomas, 1995).

These categories were not mutually exclusive.

Information about raising funds or any other monetary assistance from the government, donors, other humanitarian groups, followers, or the general public to assist the war victims of Ukraine (e.g., “Stand Up for Ukraine raised 9.1 billion Euro for Ukrainian refugees,” “donations to UNHCR's Ukraine emergency response exceed \$200 million,” and “WHO plead for supporting Ukrainians with emergency medical supplies”) was coded as “fundraising.” If the post shared information about ensuring safety and security of the war-affected regions/people in Ukraine (e.g., “UNFAO is sending 200 volunteers in the border area of Ukraine to ensure food security and nutrition of the homeless people,” “UNHCR set up Specialist protection services to identify people in need of particular assistance, such as children travelling alone and people with disabilities,” and “UNDP has worked with partners providing emergency shelter, to ensure those fleeing the violence also have access to much needed food and hygiene products”) this was coded for “protection of safety and security.” Coders considered a post having “peaceful settlement” when it promoted information about achieving peace and unity between the two opposing states and eliminating deadly conflict (e.g., “UN organizations are now focusing on mitigating this crisis through bi-lateral agreements and discussions”).

Information about sustaining public services and supporting infrastructure rebuilding in areas damaged by the violence (e.g., “UNDP plans to assist Ukrainian authorities in establishing mobile and remote satellite internet access as well as other

inclusive digital services,” “WHO ordered 20 ambulances to hand over to the Ministry of Health,” and “UNICEF and the Ministry of Education have agreed to rebuild schools in war-affected zones”) was included as “service and resource distribution.” Additionally, information about medical supplies (e.g., “WHO delivered 130,000 COVID-19 rapid antigen tests”), support to the healthcare system (e.g., “more than 50 Emergency Medical Teams (EMTs) supported or supervised by WHO in Ukraine and refugee-hosting countries have provided direct surgical support and mobile basic health care for refugees”), including financial help (e.g., “Direct Relief has made a \$10 million financial donation to help Ukrainian refugees in Poland to afford the drugs they need”) was categorized as “medical assistance.” Lastly, coders coded “social programs” for posts that featured how organizations supported social programs for war-affected Ukrainians (e.g., “the Social Policy Program of UNICEF works to maintain children at the forefront of the National Poverty Reduction Strategy and to promote family policies that are centered on children,” and “UNICEF is assisting in the development of 500 Inclusive Resource Centers (IRC) nationally to assist educators”).

#### *Offensive/Defensive Framing*

Posts were also categorized within two frames: “offensive” ( $\alpha = 0.77$ ) and “defensive” ( $\alpha = 0.869$ ). These two categories were used to understand the message framing strategy used by the UN organizations while addressing the Ukraine-Russia issue. These were coded independently. In some posts, organizations adopted offensive strategies for crisis management, where they did not aim at resolving the situation, but instead signaled an intent to fight back. Such offensive strategies were: blaming, attacking, scapegoating, and/or recommending positive actions. As a few examples,

“Russia is entirely responsible for this crisis” (blaming), “the ministry of health in Ukraine is not responsible enough to ensure emergency medical supplies” (scapegoating), and “violent acts against innocent Ukrainians held by Russian forces should be investigated as war crimes” (attacking). On the other hand, defensive framing was considered present in posts where the organizations adopted defensive strategies to prevent a negative action. Denying the responsibility for a crisis, recommending preventive actions, and providing instructing and/or adjusting information were examples of defensive crisis management strategies. As examples, “Ukraine is not responsible for this crisis in any way” (denying), “UNDP have arranged a training program for the IT officials of the Kharkiv region to prevent future cyber-attacks” (preventive action), “UNICEF urges/encourages Ukrainian school teachers and educators to register for the online ‘Shared’ Library” (instructing information), and “UNICEF will provide school materials to those children who are unable to come back to the school due to mass destruction in Ukraine” (adjusting information).

### *Sentiment*

Furthermore, post sentiments ( $\alpha = 0.85$ ) were coded as “positive,” “negative,” or “neutral”. Positive sentiment was coded for posts where the Ukraine-Russia crisis and related issues were portrayed positively (e.g., “We will ensure peace for Ukraine”). Posts were coded as having negative sentiment when the Ukraine-Russia crisis and related issues were presented negatively (e.g., “Reena lost her father during the attack”). Finally, if the positive and negative tone emerged equivalently (or not at all) in a post then sentiment was coded as neutral (e.g., “Children are playing with toys in the shelter

center”). Sentiments captured the overall tone of a post given by the humanitarian organizations and were mutually exclusive.

### Data Analysis Procedure

To analyze the data, a range of statistical tests were used to answer this study’s research questions. Primarily for all the research questions, descriptive statistics were used to identify how often the categories emerged in the posts of the UN humanitarian organizations’ Facebook pages. However, it should be noted that no posts were found within the timeframe of this study from the Facebook page of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Thus, this organization is not included in any analysis.

The first and second research questions were concerned with crisis characteristics and emergent themes of crisis communication messages. For these two research questions, chi-squared tests were used to examine how frequently the crisis characteristics and emergent themes were used by the UN organizations in their Facebook posts. To understand the relation between offensive and defensive framing (RQ3), a correlation test was conducted, followed by a series of chi-squared tests examining the relationship between the crisis characteristics and emergent themes with the frames (offensive and defensive). To answer the fourth research question, concerning users’ responses, a number of T-tests were used to compare the number of like, care, and sad reactions between the presence/absence of the offensive, and defensive framing. Furthermore, a series of ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models were constructed to identify which variables would predict user engagement. For the last research question, a one-way ANOVA test was performed to compare differences among post sentiments

(i.e., positive, negative, neutral) between the UN humanitarian organizations. All statistical tests were run using the R software.

## CHAPTER IV – RESULTS

### RQ1

To begin, RQ1a asked: To what extent did these UN humanitarian organizations (UNHCR, UNICEF, UNDP, WHO, and FAO) define the Ukraine-Russia issue as a crisis in their official Facebook posts? From the descriptive analysis, it is evident that a majority of posts portrayed the conflict as a “threat,” with 165 posts (46.48%) displaying a clear emphasis on this crisis characteristic (see Table 1). Thus, nearly half of posts focused on the threats to Ukraine and Ukrainian citizens, including economic downfall, adverse physical harm, negative mental consequences, and damage to resources. “Need for change” was given a secondary level of attention in these posts, with 59 posts (16.62%) concentrated on highlighting this crisis characteristic, describing the initiatives taken by the UN humanitarian organizations to overcome a systemic breakdown. The degree of using “surprise,” and “short response time” was similar across posts, with 43 posts (12.11%) categorized as “surprise,” indicating that they believed the ongoing incidences in Ukraine are unknown, unforeseen, and unanticipated. “Short response time” (i.e., a short response time is required to mitigate the negative consequences of the Ukraine-Russia war) emerged in only 40 posts (11.27%).

Descriptives show that, 219 posts (61.69%) included at least one of the four crisis characteristics. UNHCR used at least one of these features in 61 Facebook posts (41.78%), UNICEF used these characteristics in 126 posts (72.83%), UNDP in 8 posts (80%), and WHO in 24 (92.31%). A chi-square test was performed to examine the relation between the presence of crisis characteristics and the UN organizations. Results indicate that the difference was statistically significant,  $X^2(3, N=355) = 45.31, p < .001$ ,

meaning that there are significant differences between the organizations in how frequently they used the crisis characteristics. Thus, some of these organizations portrayed the situation between Ukraine and Russia as a crisis most prevalently than others on their official Facebook pages.

Table 1 *Crisis characteristics used by the UN organizations' Facebook posts*

Crisis Characteristics	UNICEF <i>N (%)</i>	UNHCR <i>N (%)</i>	WHO <i>N (%)</i>	UNDP <i>N (%)</i>	Total <i>N (%)</i>
Surprise	20 (5.63%)	13 (3.66%)	7 (1.97%)	3 (0.85%)	43 (12.11%)
Threat	100 (28.16%)	38 (10.70%)	24 (6.76%)	3 (0.85%)	165 (46.48%)
Short response time	22 (6.19%)	9 (2.5%)	8 (2.25%)	1 (0.28%)	40 (11.27%)
Need for change	34 (9.58%)	16 (4.51%)	3 (0.85%)	6 (1.70%)	59 (16.62%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>176</b> <b>(49.58%)</b>	<b>76</b> <b>(21.41%)</b>	<b>42</b> <b>(11.83%)</b>	<b>13</b> <b>(3.66%)</b>	

RQ1b asked: What crisis characteristics (i.e., surprise, threat, short response time, and need for change) were most prominent in the posts of these UN humanitarian organizations' official Facebook pages regarding the Ukraine-Russia conflict? According to the descriptives, "threat" emerged as the most prevalent crisis characteristics across the sampled *Facebook* posts. Considering each UN humanitarian organization specifically,

WHO had the highest use of this characteristic (92.31%), followed by UNICEF (42.19%), UNDP (30%), and UNHCR (26.02%). This difference was significant,  $X^2(3, N=355) = 56.51, p < .001$ . “Surprise” was mostly used by UNDP (30%), followed by WHO (26.92%), UNICEF (11.56%), and UNHCR (8.9%), and this finding is also significant,  $X^2(3, N=355) = 9.82, p = .02$ . Compared to other UN organizations, WHO used “short response time” most frequently on their Facebook posts (30.77%), while UNICEF used this characteristic in 12.72% of posts, UNDP in 10% of posts, followed lastly by UNHCR (6.16%). This difference was also significant,  $X^2(3, N=355) = 14.07, p < .01$ . Lastly, “need for change” was particularly present in the posts of UNDP (60%). In comparison, 19.65% of UNICEF posts used this characteristic, followed by WHO (11.54%), and UNHR (10.96%). This finding was also statistically significant,  $X^2(3, N=355) = 18.59, p < .001$ .

Overall, when defining the current situation between the two combating states, the UN organizations used these crisis characteristics in a majority of their Facebook posts ( $N = 219; 61.69\%$ ). In particular, WHO ( $N = 24; 92.31\%$ ), and UNDP ( $N = 8; 80\%$ ) had the greatest percentage employing at least one of the four crisis characteristics, followed by UNICEF ( $N = 126; 72.83\%$ ), and UNHCR ( $N = 61; 41.78\%$ ). Moreover, a majority of Facebook posts heavily focused on the “threat” category ( $N = 165; 46.48\%$ ) out of the four characteristics of crisis. Posts from WHO used this characteristic most prevalently ( $N = 24; 92.31\%$ ), while UNHCR used it the least ( $N = 38; 26.02\%$ ). Conversely, the “short response time” category received the least attention ( $N = 40; 11.27\%$ ) in the sampled posts, with WHO using it in most of their posts ( $N = 8; 30.77\%$ ), and UNHCR used it the least ( $N = 9; 6.16\%$ ). These findings suggest that the posts created by the UN



humanitarian organizations emphasized the crisis nature of the Ukraine-Russia war, with a specific emphasis on threat, while deemphasizing the short response time needed to confront the emerging crisis.

## RQ2

The second research question of this study was to determine: What emergent themes (i.e., fundraising, protection of safety and security, peaceful settlement, service and resource distribution, medical assistance, and social programs) appeared most frequently in the messages that were disseminated by the UN humanitarian agencies on their Facebook pages during the Ukraine-Russia conflict period? Based on the descriptives (see Table 2), “protection of safety and security” emerged as the most prevalent theme ( $N = 170$ ; 47.89%). “Medical assistance” was used by to provide information about medical supplies and financial and infrastructural support to the health sector in 125 posts (35.21%). “Fundraising” was present as an emergent theme in 87 posts (24.51%), highlighting the initiatives taken by the UN organizations to collect monetary assistance from governments, donors, other humanitarian groups, followers, or general people to assist the war victims of Ukraine. A similar emphasis was given towards using “peaceful settlement,” as this theme was present in 76 posts (21.41%). “Social programs” ( $N = 39$ ; 10.99%), and “service and resource distribution” ( $N = 18$ ; 5.07%) appeared less frequently compared to the other themes in the posts of the five UN organizations’ Facebook pages.

Table 2 *Prevalence of the emergent themes used by the UN organizations' Facebook posts*

Emergent Themes	UNICEF <i>N (%)</i>	UNHCR <i>N (%)</i>	WHO <i>N (%)</i>	UNDP <i>N (%)</i>	Total <i>N (%)</i>
Protection of safety and security	90 (25.35%)	64 (18.03%)	9 (2.54%)	7 (1.97%)	170 (47.89%)
Medical assistance	84 (23.66%)	19 (5.35%)	20 (5.63%)	2 (0.56%)	125 (35.21%)
Fundraising	65 (18.31%)	22 (6.20%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	87 (24.51%)
Peaceful settlement	55 (15.49%)	15 (4.23%)	4 (1.13%)	2 (0.56%)	76 (21.41%)
Social programs	23 (6.47%)	14 (3.94%)	0 (0%)	2 (0.56%)	39 (10.99%)
Service and resource distribution	14 (3.94%)	2 (0.56%)	0 (0%)	2 (0.56%)	18 (5.07%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>331</b> <b>(93.24%)</b>	<b>136</b> <b>(38.31%)</b>	<b>33</b> <b>(9.30%)</b>	<b>15</b> <b>(4.23%)</b>	

Some of the emergent themes, including “fundraising” ( $X^2(3, N = 355) = 34.68, p < .001$ ), “peaceful settlement” ( $X^2(3, N = 355) = 22.42, p < .001$ ), “service and resource distribution” ( $X^2(3, N = 355) = 13.46, p < .01$ ), and “medical assistance” ( $X^2(3, N = 355) = 13.46, p < .001$ ), had statistically significant relationships with the UN organizations.

Specifically, UNICEF used “fundraising” the most ( $N = 65$ ; 37.57%) on their *Facebook* page, followed by UNHCR ( $N = 22$ ; 15.07%). This theme was entirely missing in the posts made by UNDP, and WHO. “Peaceful settlement” was highly prevalent in the posts of WHO ( $N = 22$ ; 84.61%). This theme emerged in 55 posts (31.79%) on UNICEF’s Facebook page, whereas UNHCR used it in 15 posts (10.27%) and UNDP made the least use of this theme ( $N = 2$ ; 20%). “Service and resource distribution” did not appear frequently across any of the Facebook pages, though UNDP had the highest percentage of posts using this theme ( $N = 2$ ; 20%), followed by UNICEF ( $N = 14$ ; 8.09%), and UNHCR ( $N = 2$ ; 1.37%). WHO made no posts using this theme. “Medical assistance” was vastly used by WHO ( $N = 20$ ; 76.92%), followed by UNICEF ( $N = 84$ ; 48.55%). Similar emphasis was given by UNDP ( $N = 2$ ; 20%), and UNHCR ( $N = 19$ ; 13.01%). Additionally, this analysis indicated that “protection of safety and security” was highly present as an emergent theme across all the UN humanitarian organizations’ Facebook posts ( $N = 170$ ; 47.89%), but the usage of this theme was not significantly different between the organizations,  $X^2(3, N = 355) = 5.9408, p = .11$ .

Overall, “protection of safety and security,” “medical assistance,” “fundraising,” and “peaceful settlement” each emerged as important emergent themes in this sample, suggesting that these UN humanitarian organizations prioritized information related to these topics. Moreover, while four of the themes differed significantly in usage between these organizations, “protection of safety and security” was frequently used across them all.

### RQ3

Research question 3 aimed to determine: In what ways did the UN agencies use offensive and defensive framing in their *Facebook* posts regarding the Ukraine-Russia crisis? Overall, the defensive position prevailed in the sampled posts ( $N = 179$ ; 50.42%) compared to the number of posts that used an offensive frame ( $N = 28$ ; 7.89%), and these frames were negatively correlated,  $r(353) = -2.02, p = .04$ . Significant differences were found in the use of defensive and offensive framing compared to the crisis characteristics (i.e., surprise, threat, short response time, and need for change). Defensive framing significantly co-occurred alongside “short response time” in 17.32% of posts ( $\chi^2(1, N = 355) = 12.03, p < .001$ ), and “need for change” in 26.26% of cases ( $\chi^2(1, N = 355) = 22.82, p < .001$ ). On the other hand, “threat” emerged significantly in 82.14% of posts that used offensive framing, ( $\chi^2(1, N = 355) = 14.03, p < .001$ ). Moreover, several relationships were found between framing (offensive/ defensive), and emergent themes (i.e., fundraising, protection of safety and security, medical assistance, service and resource distribution, peaceful settlement, and social programs). Defensive framing significantly co-occurred alongside several emergent themes, including its emergence in 33.51% of posts categorized as “fundraising” ( $\chi^2(1, N = 355) = 14.88, p < .001$ ), 63.13% of posts with “protection of safety and security” ( $\chi^2(1, N = 355) = 32.387, p < .001$ ), 54.75% of posts related to “medical assistance” ( $\chi^2(1, N = 355) = 58.696, p < .001$ ), 15.08% of posts with “social programs” ( $\chi^2(1, N = 355) = 5.3836, p = .02$ ) and 8.38% posts having “service and resource distribution” ( $\chi^2(1, N = 355) = 6.8873, p < .01$ ). On the contrary, the offensive frame only emerged significantly alongside “peaceful settlement” (39.29%),  $\chi^2(1, N = 355) = 4.6781, p = .03$ . Overall, these UN organizations

demonstrated a general defensive tone instead of an offensive one in a majority of their Facebook posts, which denotes that the UN humanitarian organizations were inclined towards adopting defensive strategies while dealing with the Ukraine-Russia crisis.

#### RQ4

The fourth research question investigated the following: To what extent did the followers of the five UN humanitarian organizations' Facebook pages respond to posts regarding Ukraine crisis? Table 3 illustrates user engagement for the sampled posts related to the Ukraine crisis. Descriptives show a high degree of user engagement via liking ( $M = 6381$ ,  $SD = 25051.63$ ), followed by sad ( $M = 1773$ ,  $SD = 12113$ ), care ( $M = 978.7$ ,  $SD = 4202.164$ ), and love ( $M = 578$ ,  $SD = 2171.909$ ). Comments ( $M = 560.3$ ,  $SD = 1900.976$ ) and shares ( $M = 359.5$ ,  $SD = 1278.733$ ) were also frequently used while reacting to the posts of the UN humanitarian organizations. Concerning the number of haha ( $M = 29.87$ ,  $SD = 80.76025$ ), angry ( $M = 17.66$ ,  $SD = 56.64483$ ), and wow ( $M = 12.85$ ,  $SD = 40.32849$ ) reactions, it was evident that these emoticons received the least attention from followers compared to the other reactions.

Table 3 *Follower's response toward the Facebook posts of the UN organizations*

Type of reaction	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Likes	6381	25051.63
Sad	1773	12113
Care	978.7	4202.164
Love	578	2171.909

Table 3 (continued).

Shares	560.3	1900.976
Comments	359.5	1278.733
Haha	29.87	80.76025
Angry	17.66	56.64483
Wow	12.85	40.32849

However, this study observed that post frames (offensive or defensive) often determine the extent of post reactions (e.g., likes, care, sad) to the UN organizations' Facebook posts. T-test results indicate that posts with defensive framing ( $M = 9905.078$ ) received significantly more likes than posts not having a defensive framing ( $M = 2796.625$ ),  $t(212.1) = -2.71, p < .01$ . Conversely, on an average posts using an offensive frame received fewer likes ( $M = 3705$ ) compared to posts which did not use this frame ( $M = 6610.02$ ), though this result was not significant,  $t(137.5) = -2.23, p = .12$ . Similarly, the number of care reactions was significantly higher for posts using defensive framing ( $M = 1465.095$ ) compared to the posts that did not use defensive framing ( $M = 483.9318$ ),  $t(215.38) = -4.39, p = .03$ . Posts without offensive framing received more care reactions ( $M = 1007.10$ ) than posts that included offensive framing ( $M = 646.54$ ), although this was also not statistically significant,  $t(95.75) = 1.04, p = .3$ . Moreover, offensive and defensive framing significantly influenced the number of sad reactions. Findings show that on an average, posts received more sad reactions when defensive framing was present ( $M = 2930.52$ ), compared to the posts that did not have defensive message ( $M = 596.16$ ), though this was not significant,  $t(184.18) = -1.84, p = .06$ . Results also

demonstrate lower numbers of sad reaction when posts used offensive framing ( $M = 1173.29$ ) and higher number of sad reactions toward posts without an offensive framing; again, this was not significant,  $t(102.89) = 0.67, p = .5$ .

A majority of the followers of these UN organizations' Facebook pages demonstrated their engagement towards posts related to the Ukraine-Russia crisis using three kinds of reactions: likes, care, and sad. Frequent use of these emoticons, particularly in the posts with defensive framing, suggests that the followers held empathy for the war-affected Ukrainians and seemingly supported the UN organizations' defensive attitude (e.g., preventing suffering and establishing peace in Ukraine).

In addition, a series of ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models were constructed to identify which variables would predict user engagement. First, to predict likes, a model was assembled where likes were regressed onto offensive-defensive framings and the six emergent themes (i.e., fundraising, protection of safety and security, peaceful settlement, service and resource distribution, medical assistance and social programs). This model was statistically significant,  $F = 4.02, df = 8, 346, R^2 = .08, p < .01$ . This model indicated that defensive framing ( $\beta = 5857.85, t = 2, p < .05$ ) significantly predicted likes, whereas offensive framing was not a significant predictor ( $\beta = -2987.65, t = -.62, p = 0.54$ ). Two out of the six emergent themes, fundraising ( $\beta = 9601.15, t = 3.03, p < .01$ ) and peaceful settlement ( $\beta = 10433.75, t = 3.2, p < .01$ ) were also significant predictors of increased liking. Of additional note, another model was constructed that included the crisis characteristics (i.e., surprise, threat, short response time, and need for change), but that model was not significant ( $F = .80, df = 4, 350, R^2 = .009, p > .05$ ).

Two similar models were constructed to predict care, and sad, with both types of reactions regressed onto offensive, defensive, fundraising, protection of safety and security, peaceful settlement, service and resource distribution, medical assistance, and social programs. Findings show, the model for care ( $F = 3.11$ ,  $df = 8$ ,  $346$ ,  $R^2 = .07$ ,  $p < .01$ ) was significant but the model for sad ( $F = 1.83$ ,  $df = 8$ ,  $346$ ,  $R^2 = .04$ ,  $p = .07$ ) was not statistically significant. However, for both of these models, peaceful settlement was the only factor that significantly predicted these reactions: for care,  $\beta = 1951.56$ ,  $t = 3.55$ ,  $p < .001$ , and for sad,  $\beta = 4686.6$ ,  $t = 2.915$ ,  $p < .01$ ). With the same variables, two additional models were created to predict user engagement in terms of comments and shares, and both models were significant: comment ( $F = 3.40$ ,  $df = 8$ ,  $346$ ,  $R^2 = .07$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and share ( $F = 3.83$ ,  $df = 8$ ,  $346$ ,  $R^2 = .08$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Peaceful settlement alone significantly predicted both comments ( $\beta = 650.72$ ,  $t = 3.9$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and shares ( $\beta = 988.86$ ,  $t = 4.0$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

Threat was added as an additional variable to predict angry. Therefore, angry was regressed onto offensive, defensive, fundraising, protection of safety and security, peaceful settlement, service and resource distribution, medical assistance, social programs, and threat. This model was also significant ( $F = 3.94$ ,  $df = 9$ ,  $345$ ,  $R^2 = .09$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Findings indicated that threat ( $\beta = 16.73$ ,  $t = 2.71$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and peaceful settlement ( $\beta = 20.42$ ,  $t = 2.75$ ,  $p < .01$ ) emerged as two significant factors for determining the number of angry reactions.

Overall, these findings indicate that peaceful settlement was a common factor in predicting multiple forms of user engagement (i.e., like, sad, angry, care, comment, share), suggesting that people's engagement on those posts heavily depended on



establishing reconciliation between the two conflicting countries. However, threat, defensive framing, and fundraising also significantly predicted certain reactions toward posts created by these UN humanitarian organizations, suggesting a similar level of positivity towards ending the war.

#### RQ5

The fifth research question sought to know: To what extent were the five UN humanitarian organizations' Facebook posts sentiments positive, negative or neutral? Concerning sentiment, posts were coded as either positive, negative or neutral. Overall, the majority of posts were categorized as negative ( $N = 176$ ; 49.58%), while posts also included some instances of positive sentiment ( $N = 121$ ; 34.08%) and fewer neutral ( $N = 58$ ; 16.34%).

Although there were relatively more occurrences of positive sentiment than neutral, the sample as a whole held a negative sentiment ( $M = -0.15$ ,  $SD = 0.90$ ). Differences in post sentiments among the UN humanitarian organizations was also seen from during analysis. For instance, an overall negative post sentiment was found in the posts of UNHCR ( $M = -0.15$ ), UNICEF ( $M = -0.17$ ), and WHO ( $M = -0.31$ ), while in contrast UNDP exhibited a largely positive sentiment ( $M = 0.5$ ) in their Facebook posts related to this crisis. A one-way ANOVA was performed to examine this further, finding that the difference was not statistically significant ( $F(3,351) = 2.05$ ,  $p = .11$ ).

## CHAPTER V – DISCUSSION

The overarching goal of crisis management is to save human life, private property, and the natural environment (Immonen, 2009; Kreiner et al., 2013; Wendling et al., 2013). As the UN's crisis management system prioritizes humanitarian emergencies (Jeong & Yeo; 2018), the five largest UN humanitarian organizations are taking an active role in mitigating the ongoing crisis between Ukraine and Russia. As part of their crisis management efforts, these organizations are implementing several social programs, beseeching donations, and working for the safety and security of the war affected people. When people are confronted with a crisis situation (e.g., natural disaster, war), their urge to acquire information to better understand the situation intensifies. This is because people desire awareness of what is happening in their surroundings and what steps they need to take to effectively respond to the emergency situation (Kozman et al., 2021; Lachlan et al., 2019). Due to the proliferation of new means of communication, many social media platforms are being used during times of crisis “both as a source of data for situational awareness, cognitive empowerment, and decision support and as a distribution channel of official authorities, media, and laypeople” (Kreiner et al., 2013, p. 105). This can be seen in the recent Ukraine-Russia crisis, where the UN organizations are embracing Facebook’s potential as a means of disseminating information and raising awareness for their followers and other stakeholders in the conflict.

A number of studies have emphasized how different organizations used social media sites for communication during crises (Bird et al., 2012; Hjorth & Kim, 2011; Padhee et al., 2020; Ramluckan, 2016; Shemberger, 2017; Singh et al., 2019; Wendling, 2013). However, there has been little research that takes a meticulous look at how UN

humanitarian organizations use social media (e.g., Facebook), especially for mitigating the crisis in Ukraine, despite Facebook's unique popularity and its potential utility as a source of information. In addressing this research gap, the current study investigated how five UN humanitarian organizations (UNICEF, UNDP, WHO, UNHCR, FAO) utilized their Facebook accounts toward handling the crisis, how different types of communication messages were harnessed during this emergency, as well as the responses these organizations received from their followers (e.g., emotive reactions, comments, and shares).

Accordingly, by conducting a content analysis of 355 Facebook posts created by these UN humanitarian organizations connected to the Ukraine-Russia conflict this work examined four crisis characteristics (i.e., surprise, threat, short response time, need for change). The analysis also categorized six emergent themes (i.e., fundraising, protection and safety and security, peaceful settlement, medical assistance, service and resource distribution, and social program) that were prevalent in these posts, which helped the organizations provide clarity regarding their strategies and initiatives implemented throughout the initial period of the crisis. In addition, posts would be categorized for their sentiment and the frames employed by the organizations (i.e., offensive and defensive). Lastly, audience responses, including likes, shares, comments and other emotive icons (e.g., love, care, sad, haha, wow) were analyzed in this study.

As a whole, the findings of this study suggest that UN humanitarian organizations described the current situation between Ukraine and Russia as a crisis. As a response to this crisis, these organizations emphasized the ensuring the protection of safety and security, followed by the provision of medical assistance and fundraising efforts. Crisis

messages were generally designed and articulated using defensive framing, which fortified an unsurprising negative sentiment throughout the posts. Likes, shares, and other forms of emoticons emerged most frequently in response to posts that called for a peaceful resolution of the conflict, suggesting that such tone and framing of crisis messages influenced user reactions.

This study, overall, shed light on the communication used by the major UN humanitarian organizations regarding the conflict in Ukraine and Russia. This work also advances our knowledge of the patterns of crisis communication message construction during times of war and reveals strategies that humanitarian organizations might employ during humanitarian emergencies when creating social media messages. In addition, these findings add to the ever-growing body of research that demonstrates the potential application of social media platforms during times of crisis by highlighting the role that Facebook plays in the curation and propagation of information, as well as the engagement of audiences during times of crisis (i.e., war), and strategies that may be used to elicit greater responses from social media audiences.

The first research question sought to determine the extent to which the five UN humanitarian organizations employed each of the crisis characteristics on their official Facebook pages, as well as the characteristics were most prevalent across all posts related to the Ukraine-Russia issue. Findings show that a majority of posts, which accounted for nearly 60 percent of the total, emphasized at least one crisis characteristic.

The trend of employing "threat," which is the most negative type of crisis characteristic, was notably consistent in all of the organizations' Facebook posts. The use of this characteristic in approximately half of the sampled posts demonstrates how these

organizations viewed the Ukraine-Russia conflict as a form of potential risk and danger, having a menacing intention to inflict death (e.g., "shelling killed Milana's mother"), pain (e.g., "in freezing conditions, families wait to board an evacuation train to Poland at Lviv"), injury (e.g., "7-year-old Diana, lost her leg due to the brutal bombardments"), damage (e.g., "hospitals and maternity wards are being destroyed"), and further adverse consequence for Ukrainians. However, despite the fact that these humanitarian organizations regarded the current situation as a dangerous crisis, they have shown that there is a glimmer of hope by employing the "need for change" characteristic (especially UNICEF). These UN organizations offered a way to understand the measures that need to be undertaken to overcome ongoing breakdowns in systemic operations as a result of the war ("UNDP is sending over 250 staff to provide support in building temporary shelters for the homeless Ukrainians after the sudden attack at the residential buildings in different cities of Ukraine"). The presence of this characteristic also makes clear the determination to achieve a specific goal of the United Nations: to re-establish damaged systems in the crisis-affected areas of Ukraine and bring attention to necessities (e.g., "UNDP is preparing a document outlining the principles to support the Ukrainian government in preparation for post-war recovery and rebuilding the country").

When compared to the other UN organizations, UNICEF used each of the four crisis features the most (49.58 % of the total posts), while UNDP used them the least (3.66%) (see Table 1). This suggests that, of the selected organizations, UNICEF was most concerned about the crisis nature of Ukraine's ongoing situation. Due to their concern for the afflicted Ukrainians, this organization prioritized integrating "threat" indicators in most of their posts, which supports previous claims that UNICEF's

humanitarian programs go beyond delivering emergency relief to save lives but also focus on combating the core causes of catastrophes, instabilities, and warfare (Jeong & Yeo, 2018; Villani, 2021). UNDP, on the other hand, emphasized the "need for change" most prominently in their messages, which makes sense given that UNDP focuses on longer-term development goals like post-crisis community revitalization, reforming governance and rule of law, providing support for livelihoods, and giving locals the tools and other assistance needed to repair infrastructure (Jeong & Yeo, 2018; Rukambe, 2010; UNDP, 2022b). Taken together, these findings indicate that "threat" and "need for change" were the most prevalent crisis characteristics, and all of the selected UN humanitarian organizations signaled the crisis nature of the ongoing situation between Ukraine and Russia. It should also be noted that the other two characteristics – “surprise” and “short response time” – were less prominent, meaning that they were deprioritized by these organizations.

The second research intended to identify which primary themes emerged most frequently in the posts of the five UN organizations' Facebook pages. The emergent themes were used in varying proportions across the posts, depending on the preferences of the various organizations. However, when evaluated holistically, "protection of safety and security," "medical assistance," and "fundraising" were given the highest priority, resulting the largest presence. Conversely, "service and resource distribution" was not a priority for the organizations and, as a result, received the least amount of attention and incorporation in their posts (see Table 2). This research examined the earliest stage of the conflict between Ukraine and Russia (i.e., the first 3 months), which is why concerns regarding safety and protection (e.g., “UNHCR, together with partners, are setting up

centers to provide crucial support for mothers and children”), monetary help (e.g., “children and their families need lifesaving supplies and services. Donate today”), and physical and mental support (e.g., “WHO is on the ground supporting families fleeing conflict in Ukraine with emergency medical supplies and psychological support”) came to the fore repeatedly. On the contrary, the absence of "service and resource distribution" as a theme can be attributed to the fact that during the initial period of war, priority is often placed on providing humanitarian response to war-affected people rather than reforming infrastructures or rebuilding a society (e.g., “UNDP plans to work with local partners to improve accessibility of social services and well-being of vulnerable communities, elderly, and people with disabilities”). Similarly, "protection of safety and security," "medical help," and "fundraising" were all found to be utilized more frequently than "social programs" (e.g., “UNICEF is also ramping up support services for refugees at 'Blue Dot' centers in neighboring countries”), perhaps because social programs and activities were all adopted by UN entities later in the conflict rather than at the onset of the war. Of additional note, UNICEF used each of the themes across a vast majority of their Facebook posts (93.24%), which is the largest percentage of any sampled organization. This group in particular was found to have frequently utilized "protection of safety and security," which is consistent with the posts of other groups with a similar focus. In keeping with its mission as a health-oriented humanitarian organization, WHO focused mostly on providing "medical assistance." Although “fundraising” emerged as an important theme, it was surprising to note that WHO and UNDP made no post requesting contributions or financial aid.

Considering the second research question overall, this study denotes that at the beginning of the conflict between Ukraine and Russia, the UN organizations were specifically concerned with their inability to reach Ukrainians living in regions where the Ukrainian government had no control, the security of women, children, and families traveling to neighboring countries, and the availability of urgent humanitarian support, as seen in the various news articles published in the first three months of this crisis (Akbarzai, 2022; “UN and partners”, 2022; Wertheimer, 2022). As a consequence, posts that were made on their Facebook accounts were mostly focused on ensuring safety, security, funding, and medical aid for the war-affected Ukrainians.

The third research question asked about the prevalence of offensive and defensive framing in the Facebook posts of the five UN organizations regarding the Ukraine-Russia conflict. Put differently, one of the goals of this current study was to expatiate in which way offensive and/or defensive messages were constructed by the UN organizations in their Facebook posts over the course of the first three months. Given that numerous studies claim that framing can significantly influence beliefs, emotions, and actions (Hale et al., 2022; Maaravi et al., 2021; Viswanath et al., 2015), it was anticipated that organizations would frame their messages to fit their own perspective.

It was evident that defensive framing outperformed offensive framing, as defensive framing was used in more than half of the total posts, whereas offensive framing was used in less than ten percent of the total posts (see Table 3). This study suggests that the United Nations organizations leaned towards building messages that were protective, supportive, and informational in reaction to the assaults Russia was making throughout Ukraine. This is similar to the argument made by Makhortykh and



Sydorova (2017), which states that frames have the capacity to “influence not only the ways in which information is presented, but also how it is comprehended” (p. 362).

Most of the posts collected for this study took a defensive stance by blaming outside forces (“We are innocent, victim of the war”), suggesting preventative measures (“UNDP have arranged a training program for the IT officials of the Kharkiv region to prevent future cyber-attacks”), and providing instruction (e.g., “UNHCR encourages the displaced people to register for the “Cash Assistance” program to have access to money”) and/or adjusting information (e.g., “UNICEF provides a safe zone to play with a lot toys for the Ukrainian refugee children as they are far from their own house”). Thus, the defensive framing was adapted on the basis of positive emotions in an effort to raise awareness and advise others about the solutions available to alleviate suffering. On the other hand, when offensive framing was used, the UN organizations did not attempt to find a solution to the problem. Rather, they focused on establishing a negative outlook by employing strategies such as blaming (e.g., “this war is an act of unconscionable cruelty”), attacking (e.g., “The war in Ukraine is a growing threat to the lives and wellbeing of 7.5 million children... we won't tolerate”), and being aggressive (e.g., "we won't stop"). By using an offensive stance (though this was infrequent), these organizations produced a negative, aggravating, and displeasing meaning to the war, with an aim to influence people's attitudes and emotions regarding the adverse effects of the conflict.

It is important to note that frames used in wartime can have a significant impact in determining how people should act. As Bratic (2008) argued, using a positive frame during times of war can help encourage good (such as donating to causes or helping those

in need). Messages containing information that promotes reconciliation or offers the diminution of violence can be constructed to fit such framings. In times of conflict, some academics have claimed that negative frames can cause people to act inappropriately (such as violating human rights, propagating rumors or misinformation) during wartime (Hamelink, 2008; Makhortykh & Sydorova, 2017).

Thus, this study provides insight into ways framing theory could be interlinked with crisis communication theories (e.g., SCCT, image restoration and frameworks for dealing with crisis situations) and helps organizations determine whether priorities should be given to some topics while ignoring others. This study indicates that UN humanitarian organizations applied offensive and defensive tones in their posts to promote their own view of the Ukraine-Russia conflict and encouraged their followers to respond in the same way. According to Makharesh (2018) the primary idea behind framing theory is to analyze the effects of messages, conveyed through various forms of media content. Although Goffman (1974) noted that sometimes the process of framing can be vague and debatable, other researchers have found it useful to “connect the different meanings in the mind of the reader through using different elements of media content. This process can be done by stimulating certain features and stored in the reader's memory” (Makharesh, 2018, p. 33). In this present study, it has been observed that the UN organizations used frames as a tactic to create certain meanings, emphasizing specific crisis characteristics and emergent themes. This research also adds to the existing body of literature by identifying significant correlations between defensive framing and the presence of positive themes (i.e., "fundraising," "protection of safety and security," "medical help," and "social program"). It is also clear from these findings that UN organizations did not

use offensive framing alongside any of these themes. However, all posts including information about "threat" to the Ukrainians were packaged within offensive framing. Perhaps this was a deliberate attempt by UN entities to foster a feeling of wrongdoing, shame and guilt for the miscreants. In addition, posts that included information about the "need for change," and "short response time" were more likely to use defensive framings, which makes it clear that these UN organizations were particularly prone to promote humanitarian support and bring positive outcomes.

The fourth research question sought to investigate the extent to which followers of the Facebook pages of the five UN organizations responded to posts about the Ukraine-Russia conflict. In other words, this study sought to determine what differences appeared in user engagement (i.e., like, share, comment, love, care, angry, sad, haha, and wow) in response to the Facebook posts. According to this study's findings, the user reactions of "like," "sad," and "care" emerged at significantly higher levels than "haha," "wow," and "angry." Moreover, defensive framing, peaceful settlement, and fundraising emerged as significant predictors for increased number of likes, care, and sad reactions. This perhaps suggests feelings of empathy that users had toward war-affected Ukrainians as well as a support toward the defensive approach that UN organizations were taking in dealing with this crisis. In addition, posts that included "threat" received a significantly greater number of "angry" responses from users.

In the past, researchers have found that individuals are more likely to react to a post by clicking the "Like" button as opposed to the more recently introduced "Love," "Haha," "Wow," "Sad," and "Angry" options (Larsson, 2018). This was in line with the findings of the current study, which showed that the majority of posts made by the UN

agencies received the highest number of reactions in the form of "likes." However, some academics have speculated that the function of the "like" button is vague (Al-Zaman and Ahona, 2022; Geboers et al., 2020; Jost et al., 2020), largely because clicking the "like" button can mean a variety of emotions, including "happiness, sadness, fear, disgust, anger, positivity, and negativity" (Al-Zaman and Ahone, 2022, p.54). As a consequence of this, sampled posts received a number of additional reactions, potentially as a way of expressing more nuanced feelings towards the information shared by the organizations. When people responded to a post with the emotion "sad," it could have indicated that they were experiencing "empathy, grief, tragedy, support, misery, remorse, and depression" (Al-Zaman and Ahone, 2022. p. 57) in response to the horrific events that were occurring in Ukraine. In a similar way, users potentially sought to reinforce a feeling of "disdain, dislike, disturbance, unrest, and anguish" (Al-Zaman and Ahone, 2022, p. 57) against the accused individual or nation for any unpleasant consequence by hitting "angry" buttons on the platform. Notwithstanding, these findings suggest that through the number of likes, care, angry, and sad reactions, Facebook followers of these UN humanitarian organizations expressed their support toward the victim and their antipathy toward those who invaded Ukraine.

In addition, this study offered several models to identify which variables would function collectively to predict a certain reaction (e.g., like, care, sad). For example, according to the findings, the number of likes increased when a post included defensive framing, along with information about fundraising and peaceful settlement. Interestingly, peaceful settlement emerged as a significant predictor for comments, shares, care, and sad reactions. On the other hand, threat and peaceful settlement predicted the number of

angry reactions. These findings are particularly important for strategic communicators, as these findings suggest possible organizing frameworks for creating messages (especially related to war crises) for social media to achieve desired audience engagement

The fifth research question aimed to understand of the sentiment of posts related to the crisis in Ukraine that were disseminated by the five UN humanitarian organizations on their Facebook pages. According to the results, almost half of the messages had a negative tone, which is clear in terms of the presence of the “threat” characteristic in a majority of posts. In addition, users' reactions to posts depicting "threat" were more likely to receive a "sad" reaction. Overall, the tone of the posts made by these five UN humanitarian agencies remained generally negative, possibly because the crisis in Ukraine was having predominately adverse consequences, and also because people across the world were outraged by the invasion. On the contrary, emergence of the "peaceful settlement" theme in posts was predictive of a greater number of positive responses (e.g., likes and cares).

Overall, this research sheds light on humanitarian responses to an emerging conflict, including the critical role that emotional framing (i.e., using the offensive and defensive approach) and prevalent themes played in the process of developing crisis messages. People's feelings tend to become more negative during times of crisis, such as war. Accordingly, message producers may signify a negative attitude toward a war among their followers on social media platforms. Coombs (2007) believes that emotional framing may be a successful crisis communication approach, and therefore adopting negative frames during a war could be compelling to audiences. In addition, the models specified here for predicting audience reactions could be utilized by organizations in their

Facebook posts for marketing, public relations, advertising, and other similar purposes. The reaction predictor models presented in this study may be especially useful for creating messages during complex crisis situations such as war. Despite the fact that crises are, by definition, uncertain, unknown, and unpredictable, reaction predictor models would be helpful in not only in raising the level of user interaction, but also predicting the potential impact of a message before publication. Strategic communicators may find these models beneficial in mind-mapping posts or crisis messages and developing them in an effective manner. With prior knowledge of how to enhance the number of likes, care, or sad reactions, social media and public relations practitioners will be able to craft their messages to improve message quality and predict user engagement. These models could also be beneficial for minimizing the likelihood of a disagreement or argument occurring after the crisis message has been communicated. Therefore, the use of framing and reaction predictor models could improve organizations' ability to emphasize their strategic message outcomes as well as to create effective communication strategies that the followers would support or accept.

#### Limitations and Future Directions

Although this study provided insights into the organizational use of Facebook during a crisis, advancing a more comprehensive understanding of how crisis messages could be framed by incorporating appropriate crisis features and themes, a few limitations and recommendations should be addressed here. First, the sample collected for this study only allowed the researcher to examine the pattern of crisis communication by the UN humanitarian organizations between February 24, 2022 and May 24, 2022. Although this timeframe was valuable for understanding how the organizations identified the problem

and considered the incident as a crisis (e.g., “the horrific attacks on healthcare in Ukraine are killing and causing serious injuries to patients and health workers”), analyzed the negative consequences of the crisis (e.g., “more than one million people have now fled Ukraine to seek safety”), set up positive or negative tone for a crisis message (e.g., “to attack the most vulnerable groups – is an act of unconscionable cruelty” versus “a peaceful resolution to end the war in Ukraine is possible”) and implemented strategic actions to resolve problems (e.g., “UNICEF, UNFPA, and WHO are working with partners to scale up life-saving services and support to meet urgent health needs”) in the initial period of the war, this study cannot address posts made on the Facebook pages after May 24, 2022. Future studies could look into how these organizations helped to alleviate the crisis further into the conflict and how successful their strategic initiatives implemented at the beginning of this crisis were in later months. Furthermore, additional research could be carried out to explore whether and how users' responses to posts changed over the course of time.

Second, as the researcher sought to comprehend the UN bodies' perspectives and strategies in dealing with Ukraine's crisis situation, this content analysis was limited to only the Facebook posts of the five UN humanitarian organizations. Future research could include comments in addition to posts to offer additional nuance to our understanding of how followers assessed the organizations' perspectives and strategies adopted in this war.

Third, as the research specifically sampled only posts on Facebook, findings may be specialized to the Facebook platform. According to Hale and Grabe (2018), the design of social media platforms varies significantly. For example, Reddit allows its users to

organize content by topic in subreddits, while Imgur facilitates engagement using a centralized structure. In addition to structural differences, user demographics can also vary greatly in terms of gender, age, and geographic location. Therefore, subsequent research could benefit from taking a broader look at various social media platforms, as each of these may present a relatively unique set of findings in terms of crisis communication patterns.

Finally, the reliability for offensive framing ( $\alpha = 0.77$ ) was slightly below the threshold proposed by Krippendorff (2013). In order to compensate for this lowered reliability, coders were advised to flag ambiguous or ambivalent cases. These cases were then collaboratively reviewed and coded accordingly. This was done as Krippendorff (2013) suggests that categories scored between 0.667 and 0.80 may be used for drawing tentative results. However, there is some disagreement about alpha acceptability, as Lacy et al. (2015) recommends 0.7 as a more reasonable threshold. It is perhaps worth noting that the total alpha value was within the advocated range ( $\alpha = 0.87$ ), suggesting that, on average, coders were competent in assessing all of the categories for this study.

### Conclusion

This current study provided insights regarding the nature of crisis communication created by five United Nations humanitarian organizations (UNICEF, UNDP, WHO, UNHCR, FAO) using their official Facebook pages. It highlighted the use of crisis characteristics, emergent themes, message frames, and sentiments. In light of the fact that "social media is an essential recent addition to organizational crisis communication tools" (Roshan et al., 2016, p. 350), this study intended to investigate the various ways in which organizations used the Facebook platform during the Ukraine-Russia crisis. Drawing



upon previous literatures on crisis communication, this study presented a detailed analysis indicating that "threat" and "need for change" defined the nature of the Ukraine crisis most relevantly. It also suggested that during a war crisis, providing information that emphasizes protection, security, peace, and monetary assistance could be vital for organizations to outline the measures they have implemented as a part of the crisis response. In addition, research has shown that people are more likely to respond positively (through using "like," and "care" reactions) to crisis messages that highlight an organization's positive measures or concerns toward slackening the impact of a war. Accordingly, the findings of this study suggest that defensive framing could be more advantageous compared to offensive framing when it comes to the dissemination of information and the creation of messages concerning a war crisis, as well as to attract attention from followers in the form of likes, shares, comments and other reactions.

Findings of this study will not only add scholarship to the growing body of literature on crisis communication but also contribute to the arena of contemporary social media research. Having approximately 3 billion active users every month, Facebook easily takes the crown as the most popular and widespread social networking site worldwide (Mejia, 2022). Users can share their experiences, offer each other support, and have in-depth discussions about a wide range of global concerns on this site. Therefore, the present study employed data from Facebook for the content analysis and revealed this platform's feasibility and efficacy for studying crisis communication. This research will also have practical significance beyond the realm of academia. Since the findings explain how certain crisis characteristics, themes, defensive framing, and sentiments can assist in boosting user engagement toward social media messages related to war, this

research will be of particular use to strategic communicators (e.g., communication officers, social media content creators, and public relations practitioners).

## APPENDIX A – Coding Instrument

### *General Instructions for Coders*

Categories are labeled according to their corresponding column in the Excel spreadsheet (e.g., coder number is labeled “1” in accordance with its position in the spreadsheet). Coders should categorize crisis characteristics first, then primary themes second. After that, coders should categorize position frames and post sentiment.

Previously entered data should not be altered.

1. Please enter your coder number. Before coding, please record your coder number in each row of the excel file.

Coder = 1

Coder = 2

### *Crisis Characteristics*

Posts may be accessed by the recorded URL (i.e., the link provided in the “Link” column in the Excel file). The following 4 categories address crisis characteristics. Each post can be coded for multiple crisis characteristics (i.e., these categories are not mutually exclusive). These categories require an assessment of latent features.

2. Surprise. The post defines the Ukraine-Russia conflict and/or related issues as a surprising incident (i.e., unanticipated, unforeseen). As a few examples, “Russian troops made a sudden attack in the Kharkiv city of Ukraine” and “this unexpected devastation of Ukrainian hospitals has drastically reduced the access to medical care.” This should be coded as “1” if present. Otherwise, code “0.”

3. Threat. The post depicts the Ukraine-Russia conflict and/or related issues as threats, including economic downfall (e.g., recession, monetary loss, unemployment, lack

of resources, revenue loss, lack of funds), adverse physical harm (e.g., death, injury, mortality, casualty), negative mental consequences (e.g., PTSD, stress, depression) and damage to resources (e.g., demolition of bridges, hospitals, residential or commercial buildings). For example, “Ukraine is having severe economic loss this year,” “the GDP of Ukraine is going down,” “the rising violence in Ukraine threatens the lives and well-being of 7.5 million adolescents,” “one in every four children in eastern Ukraine is traumatized,” and “more than 1000 structures including 700 multi-storied residential buildings have been demolished so far.” This should be coded as “1” if present. Otherwise, code “0.”

4. Short response time. The post references the short response time required to mitigate the negative consequences of the Ukraine-Russia war. It can include information about quickly responding to a medical emergency, immediately reassuring civilians about safe migration procedures, presenting an immediate reaction to the media (e.g., causes and losses), disseminating fundraising information to stakeholders within a short period of time, and outlining the steps that have been taken to mitigate the effects of the crisis by decision makers. As examples, “After a recent hospital bombing, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, UNICEF’s Catherine Russell, UNFPA’s Natalia Kanem call for an immediate cessation of all attacks on health care in Ukraine,” “In response to the attack in Kharkiv, UNHCR redoubles its aid inside Ukraine and the region” and “UNDP and EU have provided equipment and tools to emergency services in the Luhansk & Donetsk regions as an emergency response.” This should be coded as “1” if present. Otherwise, code “0.”

5. Need for change. The post describes an immediate response of the organizations, after the system fails. The aim of the post is to bring change in the socio-economic and/or humanitarian status of the war-affected area and people of Ukraine. It signposts the initiatives taken by the UN humanitarian organizations to bring change, such as, reuniting internally displaced Ukrainian communities, rebuilding damaged medical infrastructures, ensuring social rehabilitation and reintegration of veterans with disabilities, re-installing water, electricity and gas supply systems, and repairing dilapidated roads and highways. As examples, “UNDP is sending over 250 staff to provide support in building temporary shelters for the homeless Ukrainians after the sudden attack at the residential buildings in different cities of Ukraine,” “WHO is preparing a document outlining the principles to support the Ukrainian government in preparation for post-war recovery and rebuilding the country,” and “UNDP is helping over 10,000 Ukrainian local business owners transform their operations and start recovery.” This should be coded as “1” if present. Otherwise, code “0.”

#### *Emergent themes*

The following categories concern primary themes connected to the function of UN humanitarian organizations in response to crises. Multiple themes may be present in an individual post, and thus each should be coded independently. If a theme does not clearly manifest (i.e., the coder is not entirely sure that the theme is present), this theme should not be coded. For each present theme, code “1.” Otherwise, code “0.”

6. Fundraising. Information about raising funds or any other monetary assistance from the government, donors, other humanitarian groups, followers or general people to assist the war victims of Ukraine (e.g., “Stand Up for Ukraine raised 9.1 billion Euro for

Ukrainian refugees,” “donations to UNHCR's Ukraine emergency response exceed \$200 million,” and “WHO plead for supporting Ukrainians with emergency medical supplies”).

7. Protection of safety and security. Information about ensuring safety and security of the war-affected regions/people in Ukraine (e.g., “UNFAO is sending 200 volunteers in the border area of Ukraine to ensure food security and nutrition of the homeless people,” “UNHCR set up Specialist protection services to identify people in need of particular assistance, such as children travelling alone and people with disabilities,” and “UNDP has worked with partners providing emergency shelter, to ensure those fleeing the violence also have access to much needed food and hygiene products”).

8. Peaceful settlement. The post promotes information about achieving peace and unity between the two opposing states and eliminating deadly conflict (e.g., “UN organizations are now focusing on mitigating this crisis through bi-lateral agreements and discussions”).

9. Service and resource distribution. Information about sustaining public services and supporting infrastructure rebuilding in areas damaged by the violence (e.g., “UNDP plans to assist Ukrainian authorities in establishing mobile and remote satellite internet access as well as other inclusive digital services,” “WHO ordered 20 ambulances to hand over to the Ministry of Health,” and “UNICEF and the Ministry of Education have agreed to rebuild schools in war-affected zones”).

10. Medical assistance. Information about medical supplies (e.g., “WHO delivered 130,000 COVID-19 rapid antigen tests”), support to the healthcare system (e.g., “more than 50 Emergency Medical Teams (EMTs) supported or supervised by WHO in

Ukraine and refugee-hosting countries have provided direct surgical support and mobile basic health care for refugees”), including financial help (e.g., “Direct Relief has made a \$10 million financial donation to help Ukrainian refugees in Poland to afford the drugs they need”).

11. Social programs: The post features how organizations support social programs for war-affected Ukrainians (e.g., “the Social Policy Program of UNICEF works to maintain children at the forefront of the National Poverty Reduction Strategy and to promote family policies that are centered on children,” and “UNICEF is assisting in the development of 500 Inclusive Resource Centers (IRC) nationally to assist educators”).

#### *Position Frames*

The following categories address the position that posts take toward the Ukraine-Russia crisis and/or related issues. Both frames may be present in an individual post, and thus each should be coded independently. If a frame does not clearly manifest (i.e., the coder is not entirely sure that the frame is present), this frame should not be coded. For each present frame, code “1.” Otherwise, code “0.” These categories require an assessment of latent features.

12. Offensive. The post frames the position of a UN organization regarding the Ukraine-Russia crisis and related issues as offensive. Generally, when an organization adopts offensive strategies for crisis management, they do not aim to resolve the situation, but instead intend to fight back. Such offensive strategies could be: blaming, attacking, scapegoating and/or recommending positive actions. As a few examples, “Russia is entirely responsible for this crisis,” (blaming) “the ministry of health in Ukraine is not responsible enough to ensure emergency medical supplies,” (scapegoating)

and “violent acts against innocent Ukrainians held by Russian forces should be investigated as war crimes” (attacking). This should be coded as “1” if present. Otherwise, code “0.”

13. Defensive. The post frames the position of a UN organization regarding the Ukraine-Russia crisis and related issues as defensive. Organizations adopt defensive strategies in crisis situations to prevent a negative action. Denying the responsibility for a crisis, recommending preventive actions, and providing instructing and/or adjusting information could be examples of defensive crisis management strategies. First, an example of denying could be “Ukraine is not responsible for this crisis in any way.” Preventive actions would include the actions taken by the organization to eliminate the cause(s) of a potentially undesirable situation; as an example, “UNDP have arranged a training program for the IT officials of the Kharkiv region to prevent future cyber-attacks.” Instructing information are given to tell people how to physically react to the crisis (e.g., “UNICEF urges/encourages Ukrainian school teachers and educators to register for the online ‘Shared’ Library”) and adjusting information are provided to help people emotionally cope with the crisis (e.g., “UNICEF will provide school materials to those children who are unable to come back to the school due to mass destruction in Ukraine”).

#### *Post Sentiment*

14. Sentiment. This category should capture the overall sentiment of the post (i.e., the valence of the language used by the poster). Select from the following:

1. Positive. The post portrays the Ukraine-Russia crisis and related issues positively. As examples, “UNICEF ensures that every school is safe for students. Only then will they be



able to learn and unlock their potential, even in war,” “UNDP Ukraine opens registration for a series of energy management webinars!,” “UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador Priyanka Chopra thanks all the caring people around the world who have stood by the problems of children in Ukraine” and “WHO supports the Ukrainian government in preparation for post-war recovery and rebuilding the country.”

2. Negative. The post portrays the Ukraine-Russia crisis and related issues negatively. As examples, “Thousands of structures have been demolished in Ukraine; several multi-storied residential buildings are currently not livable,” “according to UNHCR, 4.3 million people have left Ukraine and about 6.48 million people have been displaced as a consequence of this crisis” and “within the first 25 days, there had been 52 attacks on healthcare, WHO reports.”

3. Neutral. The post portrays the Ukraine-Russia crisis and related issues as neutral if positive and negative tone emerge equivalently (or not at all). For an example, “the Ukraine crisis should not affect their agricultural sector.

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