



Article

Red Cross Presence and Prominence in Spanish Headlines during the First 100 Days of War in Ukraine

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Abstract: This research seeks to find out to what extent the Spanish press reflects the role played by the Red Cross during the first 100 days of the war in Ukraine. It aims to identify the main characteristics of the information in which the organization has taken a leading role in the press. The theoretical framework includes a literature review on the strategic relationship between the press and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for the benefit of their reputation, as well as the role of the Red Cross in armed conflicts, and the link between the third sector and geopolitics. In order to examine how different media treated the Red Cross as the protagonist of the news, articles published in the written press that included “Red Cross” as keywords in the headline were selected through the Onclusive platform (formerly Kantar Media). The period of analysis covered the first 100 days of war in Ukraine, from 24 February to 3 June 2022. The methodology used was developed in two phases: the first based on content analysis, and the second focused on the description and interpretation of the informative development of the sample. The results reveal that the role of the Red Cross in the conflict is not the focus of media attention and that its name has become a lure for political communication, for social events or for the publicity of the more traditional corporate social responsibility (CSR) of companies. We can say that the relationship between the Red Cross and the written press has not contributed to explaining or clearly expressing the institution’s task or mission in a war. This is why it can be deduced that the articles analyzed do not improve the brand value and its positioning among readers.

Keywords: communication; Red Cross; press; reputation; stakeholders; Ukraine; war



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1. Introduction

The outbreak of the war in Ukraine in February 2022 resulted in thousands of civilian casualties, as well as the destruction of much essential infrastructure. The tragic situation forced parts of the Ukrainian population to leave their homes in search of safety, help and welfare (UNHCR 2022). During the first weeks of the Russian invasion, more than four million Ukrainian refugees (WHO 2022) were displaced to neighboring countries, resulting in a situation considered to be at the highest level of emergency (UNHCR 2022). In this context, many non-profit organizations deployed all their resources and went to the field to help, including the Red Cross¹ and Red Crescent, together with the International Committee of the Red Cross² (ICRC).

The onset of the conflict and the humanitarian situation were the focus of media coverage, and Spanish society’s interest in the implications was reflected in an increase in information consumption figures (ComScore 2022). In the face of social injustices, the public service function that defines journalism (Sánchez-García et al. 2015), as well as the media’s capacity to create currents of opinion, are essential to put social problems into the media spotlight and bring them to the attention of citizens (San Felipe and Mariño 2016). The Third Sector of Social Action Organizations (TSSAOs) perceive the media as essential channels for transmitting their messages and making the problems they face visible, as well

as a fundamental tool for creating social awareness (Castillo-Esparcia 2007; San Felipe and Mariño 2016; González-Cabrera 2017).

However, the relationship of NGOs with the press goes beyond awareness-raising. The relationship of non-profit organizations with the media is a strategic task so that the content generated also feeds brand value. “NGOs are aware that they must communicate their principles and actions, although they are not always able to express their values through their brand image” (Moriano 2023, p. 216). Under a new paradigm of managerial intelligence, humanitarian diplomacy is not at odds with corporate diplomacy. NGOs must be able to combine political, communication and digital strategies with their own social action, and at the same time, interact with authorities and administrations (Saz 2018).

In this context, the main objective of this research is to comprehend the presence and relevance of the Red Cross in the Spanish press during the first 100 days of the war in Ukraine. This article aims to uncover the situations of imbalance and/or inconsistencies that occur when the principles and identity values of the Red Cross, such as humanity, impartiality, neutrality or universality (CRE n.d.), are not perceived or manifested in the content of the articles and, moreover, represent a barrier in its press relationship that can influence the image that society perceives of the organization. Moreover, those situations can create a barrier between the Red Cross and the press which can negatively impact on the image that society has of the organization.

An organization such as the Red Cross faces the difficult balancing act of aligning its international strategic positions, its organizational structure, its mission and purpose, and its fundraising tactics with all its stakeholders. Accordingly, the first question that needs to be brought to the table is whether, when the Red Cross is at the center of the news, the content published about its activity *does* actually support and reaffirm its identity, or whether, on the contrary, it can produce certain inconsistencies. A possible lack of coherence may pose a moral hazard by not contributing positively to or even damaging the organization’s image and thus affecting its reputation.

Bearing this in mind, the current study intends to ascertain the presence and prominence given by the media to the Red Cross, as a protagonist of the news, at a time of international war when its mission is especially relevant.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Third Sector of Social Action and the Media

In order to understand the relationship between Third Sector of Social Action Organizations (TSSAOs) and the media, and their potential and limitations, we should focus our attention on the communication strategies carried out by these organizations. Above all, these organizations are oriented towards their purposes, which are mainly based on the defense of human rights, a community approach and mutual solidarity: in other words, those strategies that are characterized by focusing on the problems of the most disadvantaged in order to “make invisible people visible” (EAPN-ES and Plataforma del Voluntariado de España 2019, p. 66).

Research analyzing the relationship between human rights NGOs and the media shares a definition of the media “as key gatekeepers that decide, according to established news norms, which of the seemingly endless human rights issues can occupy a part of the news agenda” (Powers 2016; López 2020, p. 316). In other words, this research shows that the media are not only strategic allies of NGOs, but also become active mediators with the capacity to enable human rights complaints to circulate and resonate (López 2020).

According to López (2020), this mediation is analyzed from different perspectives: firstly, those who study how actors construct “the credibility” of the information and drama they report, favoring “conflict and spectacle” (Fenton 2010; Powers 2016; Waisbord 2011). A second perspective is from those who use the development of strategies of “narrative and reportage of pain” (Dogra 2014; Orgad 2013). A final perspective is from those who consider that information policy is shaped by organizations’ “media marketing strategies”,

i.e., the way in which certain NGOs position their “brand” in the media and legitimize their prestige (Bob 2005, 2010).

However, as a result of the progressive professionalization of TSSA, the organizational identity of NGOs and their management of intangibles imply relationships with the media that are far from those mentioned by López (2020) that are directly linked to the purpose of TSSA organizations.

NGOs are aware that their principles and actions must be communicated effectively (González-Cabrera 2017) to strengthen their connection to their stakeholders (Arévalo-Martínez and Ortiz 2018, p. 87) and even “invite and encourage them to become activists” (Almansa-Martínez et al. 2023, p. 353). According to González (2006) in (Gómez-Nieto et al. 2018), this task leaves behind the widespread and erroneous practice of providing journalists with dramatic and virulent images in order to maintain interest. On the other hand, it favors the creation of discourses that positively influence the ideas, values and behaviors of citizenship in terms of collective responsibility, solidarity and political awareness (Nos-Aldás 2019).

2.2. The Media as TSSA Stakeholders

From a corporate and public relations point of view, dialogue plays an important role in the relationship between organizations and their stakeholders. It is essential that TSSAOs “design a communication system capable of encouraging dialogic interaction, collective action and social participation” (Durán-Bravo 2023, p. 123). In this sense, the media have the capacity to shape opinion on certain issues, while providing users with the resources and arguments to encourage active participation (Castillo-Díaz and Castillo-Esparcia 2018). Thus, given their characteristics and potential, the media are considered a key stakeholder for many organizations (Castillo-Esparcia 2007; Capriotti 2012; Paricio et al. 2023).

The media have the capacity to give visibility to certain topics and issues that, regardless of their relevance, are positioned on the public agenda. Similarly, the amount of information that appears in the media about an organization also influences its visibility (Castillo-Esparcia 2007; Sales Piñeiro and Capriotti 2022). All of this is reflected in the public’s assessment of organizations and, furthermore, contributes to the configuration of their corporate reputation (Capriotti 2012). The media, therefore, become potential creators of any organization’s public reputation (Noelle-Neuman 1973; Sales Piñeiro and Capriotti 2022). In this way, the media, due to their capacity to influence audiences and the public agenda (Castillo-Esparcia 2007; Capriotti 2012), become participants in the formation of the corporate reputation of organizations (Capriotti 2012; Fombrun and Van Riel 2003).

Traditionally, the media have played a fundamental role as proven mobilizers of solidarity and, aware of their power of influence and credibility, TSSAOs have made the most of the opportunity to place and maintain their causes on the public agenda (Castillo-Esparcia 2007; Paricio et al. 2023). The media have contributed to determining the collective imaginary regarding NGOs, but for decades this relationship has only favored the communicative model described by Barbero as “media-centric, unidirectional and instrumental; subordinated to fundraising” (Barbero 2002; cited by Santolino 2010, p. 228).

The media have provided TSSAOs with press coverage realized in most cases through their presence in humanitarian disasters and investment in publicity linked to fundraising campaigns (Castillo-Esparcia 2007). This relationship has been determined by the erroneous identification of concepts such as publicity and communication, as well as by the lack of strategic communication plans that give way to the establishment of new dialogues (Pallarés-Renau 2021). For Moriano (2023), this situation is a clear reflection of the fact that “the brand identity management and the communication of intangibles are still incipient actions, and the planning of corporate reputation is not included in the strategic plans of NGOs” (Moriano 2023, p. 218).

The strategic point of view of communication implies that the selection of media by NGOs should be based on the identification of their stakeholders and not on the benefits associated with renown and visibility. An inadequate selection of the media can damage

the image of the organization, and its own social work, and even increase the risk of being exploited by the media (Araque and Montero 2006).

2.3. *The Role of Corporate Diplomacy in NGOs Operating in Armed Conflicts*

For Manfredi-Sánchez (2018), corporate diplomacy “is the instrumental development of the strategy of organizations in their relationship with public and private powers in the face of strategic changes. Its aim is the generation of trust, the enhancement of reputation and the management of political and social influence” (p. 202). According to Manfredi, “corporate diplomacy” helps to identify the axes of an organization’s strategy, as well as to determine how and why value is created there. In the author’s words, corporate diplomacy “lubricates the relationship between corporate values, mission, vision and goals” (Manfredi-Sánchez 2018, p. 111). L’Etang (2008) also links the activity of corporate diplomacy with public relations. He states that both “generate spaces for dialogue with stakeholders, give credibility to organizations and handle the tools of negotiation and conflict management” (p. 239).

In conflicts of war and geopolitical crises, the alignment of TSSAOs with the written press becomes an opportunity and a fundamental issue for the exercise of Humanitarian Diplomacy. In this sense, the Red Cross aims to combine and balance the strength of its brand to advocate for fair policies with strict compliance with neutrality in geopolitical conflicts, as reflected in Articles 4 and 5 of the Statutes of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC 2013). It is in this balance where communication and information relations become strategic levers for the ethical exercise of effective humanitarian diplomacy in terms of influence. It is worth noting that, in a war, “an NGO is, in essence, a diplomatic agent that must direct and execute international relations between countries, linking with various actors that have the capacity to act in the international arena” (Manfredi-Sánchez 2018, p. 53).

The essence of geopolitics is to assume the link between political events and their consequences in the space in which they occur. This implies understanding geopolitics as the link between political power and the physical (geographical) space that determines that power. From this understanding, the Red Cross and the ICRC become agents that participate in geopolitics in the territories in which they operate. Both exert a specific weight in geopolitical crises in the territories, as their activity is fundamental when international law or human rights are violated (ICRC 2014).

The continuous references to the places where the Red Cross operate, or to the geographical origin of the beneficiaries and/or users of this activity, reveal the international projection of this organization as an intrinsic attribute of its identity (Pallarés-Renau 2021). This circumstance reaffirms the fact that TSSAOs in general, and the Red Cross in particular, are considered powerful geopolitical agents in today’s global world.

Among the principles that provide an ethical, operational and institutional framework for the work of the International Red Cross Movement are neutrality, impartiality, independence and humanity (CRE n.d.). These principles are aligned with the definition of the TS proposed by Merle (1986). This author defines TSSAOs as entities, associations or movements constituted on a lasting basis outside the action of governments.

In this context, an organization such as the Red Cross becomes an international catalyst that observes, verifies and calibrates, from neutrality, whether the bases of geopolitics are effective and balanced for the benefit of international law. This role is accentuated throughout war conflicts where the Red Cross follows the guidelines of the International Committee of the Red Cross, ICRC.

2.4. *The Red Cross, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Role of the Press in Armed Conflicts*

Although the activity of an NGO is not born with a lobbying vocation, inevitably, associationism favors them (Maracuello and Maracuello 2000). Their existence and activity can generate a high degree of political influence. Their actions are indirectly aimed at

changing laws and policies that guarantee social cohesion. According to [Abril \(2018\)](#), the main political incidences that the TSSAOs can and should provoke are: emphasizing the absence of policies that are adequate to the reality in which they operate; denouncing unethical legal practices; and reporting the non-compliance or poor application of existing policies.

Thanks to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Red Cross assumes that humanitarian diplomacy, especially in armed conflicts, is exercised through communication with a wide range of stakeholders to whom the Committee explains its position on issues of humanitarian interest ([ICRC n.d.](#)). The organization is aware that there is a need to multiply the contacts necessary to raise awareness of the needs of those affected by armed conflict and situations of violence. With this in mind, alignment with the written press becomes an opportunity and a fundamental issue for the exercise of Humanitarian Diplomacy that moves away from military or political ends ([Rey 2022](#)).

Under this premise, the Red Cross, in particular, combines and balances the strength of its brand to influence fair policies, with the ironclad fulfilment of neutrality in geopolitical conflicts. Furthermore, it is in this balance where communication and information relations become strategic levers for the ethical exercise of effective humanitarian diplomacy in its influence.

The ICRC recognizes that the role of the written media, through editorials, reports and news, has been fundamental for its work to be understood in international conflicts as polarized as the peace process with the FARC in Colombia or the war in Syria ([Rey 2022](#)). There are two types of objectives for the communication strategies of this committee; the first refers to those established according to the circumstances of the different territories in the world, and the second refers to the major global concerns that threaten International Humanitarian Law such as nuclear weapons and the rise of non-state armed groups ([Rey 2022](#)).

The meeting point between the ICRC and the press lies in the ethical sense of verifying information; thus, once again, the Red Cross becomes a positive reputational shield that acts as a neutral information agency to corroborate or deny news ([Miquel-Segarra et al. 2021](#)). Another key aspect is the ICRC's respect for the different editorial lines of the international press, especially with regard to the diversity of cultures and religions in the world ([Rey 2022](#)). Without such respect for international diversity, humanitarian diplomacy could not develop. In this sense, it is important to remember that, after the universal ratification of International Humanitarian Law in the so-called "four Geneva Conventions", the Red Cross is the only non-governmental institution that plays an active and leading role in the signing of international treaties.

In order to set out the research objectives, it seems timely to ask whether knowledge of the relationship between the TSSAOs and the press can be used to determine the extent to which this relationship favors the NGO's purpose in the conflict, helps to build democracy and strengthens the geopolitical role of the NGO under study.

3. Objectives

The aim of this research is to check the extent to which the press reflects the role played by the Red Cross organization during the first 100 days of the war in Ukraine.

Our aim is to identify the main characteristics of the information in which the Red Cross has played a leading role in the Spanish press at the beginning of the war and to examine the treatment that the different media have given to this information.

In this sense, the following objectives are proposed:

- To identify the thematic axes in which the Red Cross appears linked to the war in Ukraine and to analyze the media in which the news articles were published.
- To analyze the information in order to verify the reasons why the Red Cross makes headlines. Specifically, several issues will be analyzed:
 - Themes of the news articles.
 - Focus and central idea of the news development.
 - Main actors and protagonists.

4. Materials and Methods

The methodology used to achieve the objectives set out above was developed in two phases. The first phase was based on content analysis, a technique that makes it possible to examine messages, identify specific aspects of the content of a text and quantify their frequency (Piñuel 2002).

The second phase involved the application of a qualitative methodology, whose essential objective is the description and interpretation of the qualities of any phenomenon of social relationships and cultural content, in the texts and discourses where they are being used, integrating them into a coherent and explanatory narrative in order to decipher the causes and consequences of the phenomenon (Fernández-Riquelme 2017).

In order to achieve “inferences about the sender and receivers, as well as the latent content or meaning of the message” (Colle 2011, p. 5), the technique of content analysis is used to try to “test or measure, first, to what degree a certain quality is found in a given event, and at the same time to discover as many qualities as possible to broaden the panorama of study” (Fernández-Riquelme 2017, p. 7).

4.1. Sample

For configuration of the sample, the news articles published in the written press that included “Red Cross” as keywords were selected. The selection was made through Onclusive (formerly Kantar Media) (source, media outlet, national press including Headline, AVE, Author, OJD). The period of analysis was set between 24 February 2022 and 3 June of the same year, coinciding with the first 100 days of the war in Ukraine. In total, 702 news reports were initially downloaded. After the elimination of duplicates, 677 were obtained from 61 media outlets. After analyzing the data, those publications in which only one or two articles appeared were excluded (n = 322). The result limits the sample to 355 news reports that were published in 13 media sources, as detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of news articles extracted from the main media.

Source/Media	Publications (n)
ABC	59
El Periódico de Catalunya	56
La Vanguardia	45
La Vanguardia Vivir	29
El País	43
El Periódico de España	32
La Razón	38
Pronto	15
Expansión	13
Sport	8
Mundo Deportivo	8
Acofar	4
La Razón Especial	3
Total	322

Source: Own elaboration.

Subsequently, only reports that included the words “Red Cross” in the headline were selected, reducing the number of articles analyzed in the qualitative phase to 32.

4.2. Procedure

In order to carry out this research, a content analysis was conducted in two phases:

Phase 1. Content analysis was carried out on the headlines of the 677 news reports that included the words “Red Cross” in the headline and/or body of the news item. All of these were coded according to two thematic axes.

Each of these axes included a series of terms drawn from the categorization of the core values of the Red Cross (humanity, impartiality, neutrality, universality, unity, independence and voluntary nature) and the area of action directly linked to the Ukrainian conflict, that of International Cooperation. Within this area, RC deals with humanitarian aid and development cooperation. The first of the axes identified was “solidarity”, and the words “aid”, “refugees” and “solidarity” were included in this axis. The second axis was categorized on the basis of the theme of “war”, and the words “Russia”, “Ukraine”, “war”, “conflict” and “soldiers” were included in the analysis.

Phase 2. In the second phase, news that included the keywords “Red Cross” in the headline were selected. These articles were analyzed in depth and a thematic content analysis was applied to their texts. From this point, the following units of observation were established: the subject of the headline (1); the analysis of the focus and central theme of the informative development (2); and, finally, the actors involved in the content of the information (3).

5. Results

5.1. Thematic Axes and Media Linking the Red Cross to the War in Ukraine

The first part of the analysis identified the thematic axes in which the Red Cross was linked to the conflict in Ukraine (Table 2). The first axis was “solidarity”, and the results revealed that 8 per cent of the texts referred to refugees, and only 4 per cent included the term “solidarity”. On the other hand, within the second axis, the term “war”, the most repeated keyword was “Ukraine”, at 19%, as opposed to “Russia”, at only 7%. It is worth noting that the keyword “aid” does not appear in any cases and the term “war” only appears in 6% of the news reports analyzed (n = 677).

Table 2. Thematic axes of the news articles published in the press that contain the term Red Cross.

Themes	Terms	n	%
Solidarity	refugees	51	8%
	solidarity	30	4%
	aid	0	0%
	Total	81	12%
War	Russia	46	7%
	Ukraine	126	19%
	war	38	6%
	conflict	0	0%
	soldiers	3	0%
	Total	213	31%
Publications		677	100%

Source: Own elaboration.

On the other hand, as can be seen in Table 3, when we analyze the thematic axis “solidarity”, the main media sources that most frequently refer to the term “refugees” are La Vanguardia and El Periódico de Catalunya, both general daily press and from the same geographical coverage, Catalonia.

Table 3. Main media that include the keyword “refugees” in their news.

Source/Media	Refugees	% s/Ref.	% Ref. s/Total
La Vanguardia	12	23.5%	1.8%
El Periódico de Catalunya	8	15.7%	1.2%
El Periódico de España	4	7.8%	0.6%
La Razón	5	9.8%	0.7%
El País	3	5.9%	0.4%
ABC	3	5.9%	0.4%
Total	35	69%	5%

Source: Own elaboration.

These media sources include 69% of the appearances of the term “refugees”, although they represent only 7.5% of the articles in the sample (n = 677).

On the other hand, as shown in Table 4, the term “solidarity” appears in only 4% of the reports. The frequency is very low and is centered on the following newspapers: ABC, La Razón and La Vanguardia.

Table 4. Main media sources that include the keyword “solidarity” in their news.

Source/Media	Solidarity	% s/Solid.	% Solid. s/Total
ABC	4	13.33%	0.59%
La Razón	4	13.33%	0.59%
La Vanguardia	3	10.00%	0.45%
Mundo Deportivo	2	6.67%	0.30%
El Periódico de Catalunya	2	6.67%	0.30%
Sport	2	6.67%	0.30%
El Economista	2	6.67%	0.30%
Total	19	56.67%	2.52%

These media include 63.4% of the appearances of the keyword “solidarity”. However, they account for no more than 2.8% of the total. In other words, only 2.8% of the news reports include Red Cross and solidarity in the headline.

When analyzing the terms of the thematic axis of “war”, we observe that the most used term is “Ukraine”, with a total of 126 appearances. In second place comes “Russia” with 46 appearances and, finally, the term “war”, which, as mentioned above, only appears on 38 occasions.

If we analyze the publications in which the terms of the thematic axis “war” appear the most, we observe that El Periódico de Cataluña, ABC and La Vanguardia together with El País, that is to say, the main national and Catalan media, are the newspapers that offer the larger coverage of news related to the Red Cross (Figure 1).

From these results, we can say that, when the Red Cross is mentioned in any of the articles in the sample, terms related to the purpose and/or actions of the organization are very infrequently used by the main media in the country. Even with very low numbers, the focus is on a group of people affected by the conflict and the main beneficiaries of the Red Cross—the refugees. On the other hand, it is noticeable that the term “Ukraine” is the focus of much of the news referring to the war or conflict. Moreover, media coverage is very low. The national general and daily press is predominant, but the Catalan media sources stand out above all for being the ones that most frequently deal with the cases analyzed.

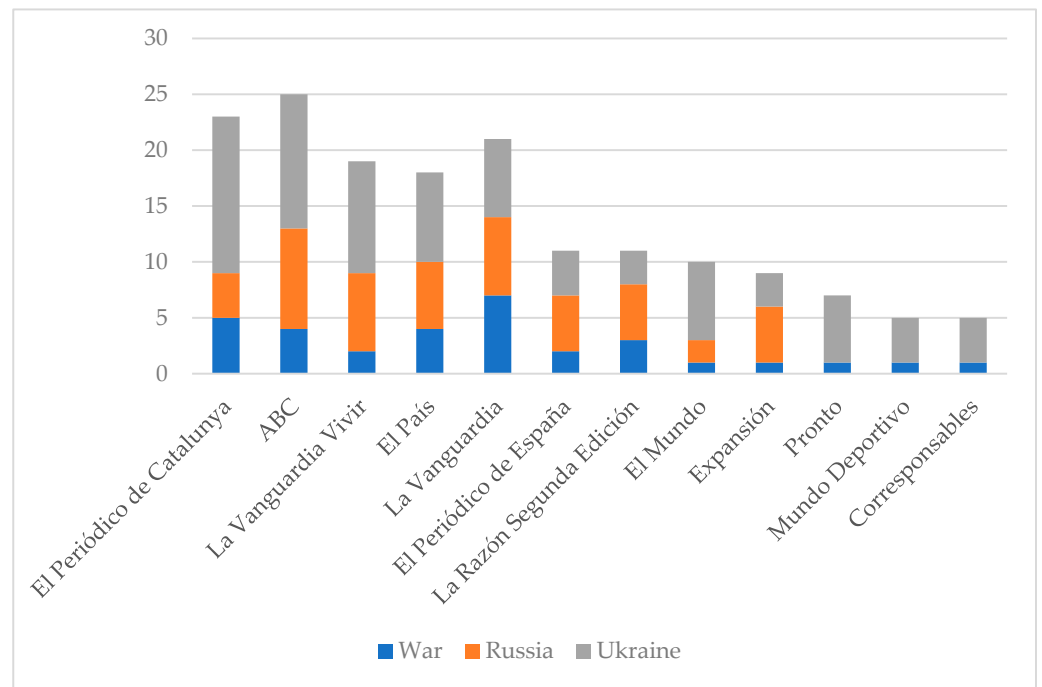


Figure 1. Appearances of the key terms of the thematic axis “war” in the different headlines. Source: Own elaboration.

5.2. Reasons Why the Red Cross Makes Headlines

5.2.1. Subject Matter

After an in-depth review of the 32 news reports in which the Red Cross appears in the headlines, a thematic categorization of the content was carried out, which resulted in four main thematic categories that are summarized and described in Table 5.

Table 5. Main categories detected to characterize the units of analysis.

Themes	Description	n
Collaborations and awards	The signing of agreements between the Red Cross and other entities (TSAS organizations, governments, private companies. . .) stand out.	13
Recognitions and celebrations	They refer to galas and anniversaries of the Red Cross, as well as projects or programs of the organization.	3
Conflict in Ukraine	They allude explicitly to the conflict of the Ukraine–Russia war.	14
Others	They provide general attention to the state of the Third Sector of Social Action and the work of the Red Cross.	2

Source: Own elaboration.

Of the 32 texts in which the Red Cross appears in the headline, we observe that almost half of the articles (14) refer to the Ukrainian conflict. Half of them include the term “Ukraine” or “Ukrainian”, and in the other half, the term “refugee” appears explicitly or includes references to aspects related to their reception and evacuation. In addition, it is noteworthy that among the 14 news reports that refer to the Ukrainian conflict, two refer to negative issues in which the organization has been involved. One of them refers to the attempted kidnapping by individuals falsely claiming to be members of the Red Cross and the other to the boycott that the organization has suffered from the Ukrainian government’s related media. Additionally, the visit of the King and Queen of Spain to the cells set up

by the Red Cross also takes on a certain prominence in the news, occupying four of the headlines.

The topic categorized as collaborations or awards includes thirteen texts, although only three of them refer to Ukraine as the destination of the funds or aid.

On the other hand, there are three texts that refer to the celebration of galas to award or receive recognition from the Red Cross, as well as to highlight milestones or anniversaries of the organization's projects or programs.

Finally, two other news sources deal in a general way with the state of the TSSAOs and the general work of the Red Cross.

Despite dealing with the first 100 days of war, the headlines in which the Red Cross is alluded to and linked to the war do not reach even 50% of the cases analyzed. It is evident that the role of the Red Cross in the conflict is not the focus of attention. In this period, a similar level of information is maintained with regard to the signing of agreements between the Red Cross and other entities.

5.2.2. Focus and Central Idea of the Informative Development—Body of Text

The categorization of the informative focus and development allows us to identify five aspects (Table 6) that, to a greater or lesser extent, influence and define the development of the Red Cross as an organization.

Table 6. Approaches from which the news item is developed.

Approach	Central Idea of Informative Development	n
Action	Information associated with the organization's programs and lines of action.	16
Financing	Information related to obtaining monetary resources and their destination by the organization.	7
Donation	Information related to obtaining resources in kind and their destination by the organization.	2
Communication	Information related to milestones of the organization, and recognitions obtained and granted by it.	6
Promotion	Campaign associated with a specific product or activity.	2

Source: Own elaboration.

Actions, funding and donations occupy the informative development of 23 of the news items analyzed. In 14 texts, the predominant focus is on the organization's lines of action. In ten of them, the focus is on work associated with the armed conflict (humanitarian aid, protection, shelter, denunciation, etc.); two of them highlight the awarding of the contract to the Red Cross for the management of the suicide hotline in Spain and, therefore, for prevention and mental health; one refers to a collaboration agreement for the benefit of training and environmental improvement; and another focuses on collaboration to reduce food waste.

In two texts, the main idea focuses on donations: one concerns the work of the Red Cross during the COVID-19 pandemic and the other on the La Palma volcanic eruption. Additionally, in the case of funding, the information reveals how the organization obtains monetary resources: of the seven news items, one of them deals with the percentage that the Red Cross absorbs in the sector and the rest of the information specifies the origin, amount and destination of these resources. Interestingly, only three of the seven texts include aid to the Ukrainian conflict as a destination of the funds.

It is worth noting that, in two news articles, action is combined with funding and donation. Equal informative weight is given to clarifying the source of donations and to developing the line of action through which the Red Cross will distribute both funds and in-kind donations.

Generally associated with celebratory or collaborative headlines, eight of the texts show a focus closely linked to publicity. Six of them respond to the media impact of the celebrations and the attendance of celebrities, reinforcing public visibility with information generated by the Red Cross for communication in the media. Additionally, two of the news reports have a clearly promotional focus, associating the collaboration of the Red Cross, in this case with shopping centers and communication consultancies, for the organization of the Gold Draw.

5.2.3. Stakeholders Involved

Finally, after analyzing the actors included in the information, there are six groups that are mainly identified as the main subjects, as shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Actors involved in the information content.

Groups	Definition	n
Red Cross	Red Cross, referring to the organization Red Cross and Red Crescent, referring to movement Red Cross + territory to refer to the delegations	9
CICR	ICRC, International Committee of the Red Cross. Its mission is exclusively humanitarian (to protect and assist victims of war and internal violence).	2
Government and authorities	Political representatives and the head of state. State security bodies and forces.	5
TSAS sector	Set of entities that dedicate their activity to assisting and helping unprotected groups.	2
Partners	Partners, donors and collaborators for the development of Red Cross initiatives and activities.	12
Collective beneficiaries	Those affected by the causes in which the organization intervenes and to whom it allocates its support.	2

Source: Own elaboration.

The nine texts that place the Red Cross at the center of the news do so for a variety of reasons. Four of them reflect the organization's aid to Ukraine, one refers to the development of the organization's activity in Spain during its anniversary, another praises the work of a hospital unit managed by the Red Cross in Spain and two refer to the specific action in Catalonia.

It should be noted that Catalonia is the only autonomous community to receive a specific mention in the headlines (2). In them, reference is made to its activity in hosting refugees. The ICRC appears in two news items, both linked to the controversy raised by Peter Maurer's meeting with Russian leaders. In both cases, it is *El Periódico de Catalunya* and *La Vanguardia* that place special emphasis on the ICRC's territoriality and role.

In one of them, the appearance of the Red Cross in the headline serves as a lure, but the informative development focuses on the state and evolution of the TSSAOs, and in the other, despite awarding the Red Cross prize, the news focuses on the work of the prize-winning foundation and the importance of this for the sector.

Interestingly, five of the headlines incorporating the term "Red Cross" allude to the monarchy. The support and recognition of the Red Cross' work with refugees given by the King and Queen occupies four headlines, and praise from the Queen occupies one headline. In addition, in two of the four news items reporting on the visit of the King and Queen of Spain to the cells set up by the Red Cross, the King and Queen and/or the authorities become the main subjects of the information ahead of the work carried out by the organization in Ukraine.

Despite the fact that their assistance is the *raison d'être* of the Red Cross, the beneficiaries of such assistance occupy the one role only in the development of two news items.

Therefore, responding to our aim to discover the reasons why the Red Cross makes the headlines, we found that the Ukrainian conflict shares the limelight with information related to RC collaborations and awards. On the other hand, we find that half of the texts focus on the organization's lines of action and include information related to its programs, while, to a lesser extent, questions about the organization's funding are addressed.

Finally, as far as the main actors in the news are concerned, the Red Cross is presented as a lever to promote the leading role of government initiatives, the commitment of the monarchy to its work or the involvement of companies with the civil society through CSR actions. It is worth noting that, although the ICRC's role in armed conflicts is decisive, it does not play a central role in the Spanish press. Reference to the ICRC is testimonial and only appears when its intermediary management is questioned.

6. Conclusions and Discussion

Despite the fact that the Red Cross is very active in the war in Ukraine, the Spanish written press has not devoted much news coverage to the Red Cross brand or to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in the news items analyzed. When these have been mentioned in the headlines, the news does not focus on the direct interests of the NGOs in question. Moriano's (2023) assertion that NGOs are not always able to convey their brand values seems to be true. It is evident that the Red Cross is, literally, a "good" claim in politics, in events, in more traditional marketing and in the CSR of companies. In addition, the results confirm a high content of articles referring to fundraising (Castillo-Esparcia 2007).

As an answer to the research question that motivated this paper, we can say that the relationship between the Red Cross and the written press has been, in terms of reputation, not very favorable for the organization. This relationship has not served to explain the work of the institution in a war, nor to emphasize its differential values or those of the ICRC. Although authors such as Castillo-Esparcia (2007), San Felipe and Mariño (2016) and González-Cabrera (2017) consider the media to be an essential and indispensable audience for transmitting the work of these organizations, this potential has not been exploited. When we see that their role in the war in Ukraine does not even reach 50% of the information and that most of the content is linked to the national government, the monarchy, companies and events, the possible risk that the information analyzed generates a cliché of the Red Cross that does not correspond to reality is worth highlighting. In that vein, this is a missed opportunity for the Red Cross, as the basic positive incidences of NGOs do not appear in the mass media. In this sense, the influence on the absence of policies in conflict territories, on unethical legal practices or on non-compliance with laws is not reflected (Abril 2018).

The international Red Cross must understand that its work is criticized for not explaining effectively, and even creatively, the need to comply with the principle of impartiality (one of its main identity values) when trying to meet both the needs and demands of the Ukrainian Red Cross (in the face of the humanitarian corridors, for example) and the request for help (from the families of Russian soldiers, as another example) by the Russian Red Cross. The media and journalists should be strategic allies and active mediators, as López (2020) points out, and encourage correct explanations of how the Red Cross acts in these seemingly contradictory situations, always with a compass of impartiality and outside of any political agenda.

Perhaps an excessive sense of confidentiality as part of the corporate culture of the Red Cross brand, and especially of the ICRC, clashes head-on with journalistic and political reality. In the words of Rey (2022), "there is a stubborn reality that forces us to observe how other international actors instrumentalize our work by not communicating our actions and our positioning in conflicts".

Both neutrality and independence are key to carrying out its important relief work. However, this important independent and neutral role, which leads the organization to abstain from taking part in hostilities and political, racial, religious and ideological

controversies, is diluted in the Spanish media. The relief and assistance offered by the Red Cross in the Ukrainian conflict share headlines with celebrations and awards, rather than being projected as a central part of the work of the Red Cross. This is a fact that could be attributed to the information policies marked by the media marketing strategies defined by Bob (2005, 2010).

We observe how geopolitics necessarily involves a cascade of communication decisions that, if not planned and foreseen in advance, can disrupt the development of the decisions taken. What may be a solution for one territory may be perceived as a threat in another, and this issue can only be solved by strategic planning of the communication of that solution. The conflict in Ukraine is the perfect example of the global tension between various affected territories beyond the Ukraine–Russia tandem; any Red Cross decision taken in the Ukrainian war must be measured and planned in terms of communication and perception in other parts of the world.

We conclude by setting out possible challenges for the future of international Red Cross communication, such as:

- Trying to counteract disinformation in the face of delegitimization campaigns that may even come from governments' own political agendas, and monitor and deal with fake news with technical and technological capacity. The Red Cross monitors the impact of its media appearances through specialized consultancies, and the interpretation of this monitoring should lead to the generation of more strategic, transmedia and creative content that would combat the influence of fake or distorted news.
- Better managing the transition from a culture anchored in the confidentiality of the action, to a new management of the transparency of that action from humanitarian and corporate diplomacy, so as not to run the risk of a negative moral impact on the recipients of news that use the name of the Red Cross in an imprecise, diluted way or that is distant from the exact purpose and concrete activity of the organization.
- Rethinking the role that the ICRC has and takes in communicating the laws of war. The citizenship is unaware that there is international legislation on armed conflict with which countries must comply and which directly affects the safeguarding of international humanitarian law.
- To curb the polarization of public opinion in the face of conflicts in order to ensure that neutrality prevails in the interpretations of interest groups, and communicating the Red Cross identity as a movement that wants to reclaim new generations that currently have no Red Cross presence.

The great communication challenge in the Ukrainian war for the Red Cross brand lies in taking communication risks, and to postulate itself without shyness as the great defender of International Humanitarian Law, seeking a communication system that encourages dialogue and positively influences social participation and political awareness following the precepts of Durán-Bravo (2023) and Nos-Aldás (2019). The Red Cross must be aware of the political weight of Eastern countries such as Russia and China in the world in the midst of the battle to manage the influence of global geopolitics. To this end, it is necessary to combine informative relations with high humanitarian diplomacy of the governments involved.

The ICRC, and thus the Red Cross brand, does not communicate its activity, value and influence in the conflicts in which it operates (such as the war in Ukraine) with sufficient power and "pride". This leads to the assumption that, in conflicts that threaten democracy, the worst failure is the expulsion of the organization by a government, leaving the victims stranded.

Limitations. The first limitation of this research is the size of the sample, limited to the first months of the conflict and with an in-depth analysis only of the articles in which the Red Cross appears in the headlines. It would be interesting to analyze in detail the context in which the Red Cross is referred to in the remainder of the news stories.

Secondly, it would be useful to discern from the sample which headlines come from Red Cross media relations (publicity), which headlines are the direct work of war correspon-

dents or news agencies, and which headlines refer to opinion articles. These data would broaden the conclusions and enrich the discussion on the performance and improvement of the Red Cross' relationship with the media, which could be a future line of research.

Nobody doubts that, since the origin of the communication strategies of TSSAOs in defense of their purposes, there has been a close link between NGOs and the media. However, the current reality, full of technological advances that enable bidirectionality and interaction, makes it necessary to broaden the focus of the research to media and social networks.

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Notes

- ¹ The Spanish Red Cross is a centenary NGO of Swiss origin founded by Henry Dunant that defines itself as a “world humanitarian movement”. In Spain, the Red Cross began in the 18th century with the Count of Ripalda, Joaquín Agulló, and it was in 1970 when the Red Cross extended its scope of aid beyond war conflicts. It belongs to the entities of the Third Sector of Social Action, and in Spain it is one of the most recognized NGOs according to the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation and Development (*Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional y Desarrollo*). The Red Cross is currently organized around the world through “National Red Cross or Red Crescent Societies” located in different countries.
- ² The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), founded in 1863, works around the world to provide humanitarian aid to people affected by conflict and armed violence, to try to protect their lives and dignity, to assist them and to promote laws protecting victims of war. It acts to respond to emergencies while promoting respect for international humanitarian law and its implementation in national legislation. It is an independent and neutral institution whose mandate derives from the Geneva Conventions of 1949. It is based in Geneva, Switzerland. It employs 20,000 staff in 100 countries and is funded by donations from governments and National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

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