



FRAMING THEORY AND COMPOSITE FRAMING ANALYSIS MODEL: TOWARDS A HOLISTIC VIEW OF FRAMES IN THE NEWS

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ABSTRACT

The paper reviewed framing theory and presents grounds for news framing analysis using a composite framing model approach to remedy the inherent weaknesses of employment of issue specific frames or singled-out generic framing indicator(s) in news framing analysis which is problematic to the extent that it gives a limited, rather than multi-dimensional view of the frames in a news. Secondly, the instruments are not applicable across board. Thirdly, the results are not generalizable across board. Yet the possibility of a multifaceted framing analysis does exist. This multi-dimensional approach, enabled by the combination of a select number of generalizable framing schemes makes a composite view of frames in the news possible. By proposing this multi-dimensional framing analysis scheme this study addresses the problem captured in the question, “what is the

nature of the composite view of the framing of the news? The paper demonstrates the form by combining extant generalizable frames in literature in a model by the triangulation of framing schemes. The paper shows the fit of the approach within an integrated communication process model of framing. This lays foundation for a more robust investigation of news frames in future studies. The paper argues that the composite framing approach will, first, yield results that are generalizable across news topics. Secondly, the results will also have cross media comparability as well as cross national, sub-regional, or regional comparability.

Introduction

Theoretical framework refers the undergirding principles upon which a scholarly research work is founded. These are principles that have been empirically tested over time and found to be resilient and relevant in addressing research questions and are therefore constituted into a body of knowledge or paradigms that became part of a research tradition and culture known as theory. Theories are important in research because they help define the boundaries of a research field and keep a research focused in the essential elements of what is demanded in the research instead of wandering afar of and getting lost in the forest of bodies of knowledge. In the field of communication studies, one key theory is framing theory.

Framing research however has its strength and weaknesses. Its strength like that of Agenda-setting research also lies in predictive strength of its triangulated methodologies which involve content analysis and survey and in some situations experiment. Its presumed weakness has prompted some scholars to advocate for its abandonment. Part of the concern revolves around conceptualization of the concepts framing and frame. The problem may arise from the multidisciplinary utility of the concept which allows scholars of different disciplines to conceptualize framing differently. Even though Borah, (2011) admits that lack of clear conceptualization and operationalization have led framing research to be used synonymously with research approaches that are distinctively different, she asserts that its multidisciplinary diversity which allows for “creativity and pragmatic approaches provides a comprehensive view of framing process”. D’Angelo, (2019), agrees, saying, the “fractured” nature of framing research is its strength.” (p.14). Borah, (2011) however notes the fear raised by Hertog & McLeod, (2001, p.153) that “lack of disciplined approach” in studying consistent set of frames could lead researchers to “find what they are looking for.”

Hence the debate over researching consistent set of frames versus researching unique frames. Both certainly have their place and values in the framing research scheme. The consistent frame is the same as generic frames while the unique frames are issue specific frames. (Vreese, 2005).

While issue specific frames provides fine detail of particular events- generic frames places issues within the larger context of journalistic conventions. As a result, the combination of a select set of framing schemes that have generic bearing, in studies could lead to a more robust research approach that provide a more comprehensive insights that could offer new directions for the development of the framing theory. This leads to need for composite framing analysis model that can be replicated across issues, news topics, and locations.

Framing Theory

Framing theory is a mass communication research tool that is predicated on the assumption that the media gives spotlight view of specific aspects of reality that direct audience attention to those aspects by promoting specific definitions, descriptions and, or analysis which capture the imagination and form the mental films by which media consumers cognitively respond to issues and events distilled from the world by the media. The implication is that the media creates the frames by which raw information is filtered and presented to the public with the purpose of focusing their attention on considered angles of the issue or event.

Framing is therefore a system of information processing and presentation whose structure enables the magnification of particular facets of an event or story by elucidating on the import and cause of event, issue or story while identifying the relevant actors including their roles and whom or what should be held accountable.

Framing theory seeks to identify and explain frames; how they are developed, their sources and their effect. Generally however, frames function as highlighters or moderators of key points about specific information subset. As moderators, they play down certain features of an issue which may be equally relevant but for one reason or the other are considered dispensable. But as highlighters they magnify dimensions that are, also for one reason are the other considered indispensable. Baresch, Hsu and Reese (2012) notes that frames do this “often with the effect of supporting a certain way of looking at the world...lay foundation on which we citizens build our collective understanding of our world. They further cited Goffaman (1974) as defining frame to be a “schema of interpretation” that allows people to locate, perceive, identify and label a seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences defined in its limits (p. 637 & p.638).

The essence of framing research as an endeavour to comprehend audience reliance on preconceived notions in interpretation of reality dove tails with Lippmann’s (1921) proposition of “pictures in our head.” It squares with comprehending how those expectations are formed and how they are used by people to interpret

happening in their daily interactions in their social milieu. Hence, in summary, framing research considers how frames are constructed, how they are disseminated and how they are consumed by the audience. It also considers the dynamics that influence audience interpretation of received frames. The foregoing ties frame(ing) and media together. The media is implicated in development and transmission of frame. Baresch, Hsu and Reese (op cit) note that, “the news media are no doubt the most important actors in the framing process: they are frame generators, organizers and transmitters, linking social structures and the individual (p.638).

According to Igboeli, Ikegbunam, Ikinimoreh and Nwanolue (2017), the basis of framing theory is that the media focus attention on certain events and then place them within a context that can impact on beliefs, attitudes and behaviours of recipients. This view of framing as dealing with how the media places certain aspects of an event within a field of meaning agrees with Chilisa’s (2012) assertion that “framing refers to how messages are encoded with meaning so that they can be efficiently interpreted in relationship to existing beliefs and ideas.” (cited in Nwafor, Nwasum and Nkwuda, 2017).

The above definitions highlight salient points about framing. First is the effect capacity of frames. Frames can have effect on individuals, at least at cognitive level. Whether or not it affects attitude and behaviour are still subject of inquiry that require empirically incontrovertible evidence. Second is that frames are effective when they are contextualized within prevailing socio-cultural schemata. This is in line with the position of McQuail (2005, p. 555) cited in Nwafor et al, (2017, p.209) that framing explains “the way in which news content is typically shaped and contextualized by journalists”.

Adisa, Ahmad, Ahmed, Shuhairimi, Udende, Nor’izah, Abubakar, Maskor and Ahmad (2018) referencing Nisbet (2009) and Nisbet and Scheufele (2009) note that frames are “interpretative story lines that set a specific sequence of thought in motion, communicate why an issue or decision matters, who or what might be the cause, and which political actors should be held responsible”(p.72). The import of Adisa et al’s submission is that frames are not neutral or mere narration of bare facts but are rather deductions emanating from journalist’s observation of the event instead of the event itself. Gitlin (1980) quoted in Adisa et al underscored the interpretative function of frame but adds that “they are persistent patterns of cognition”... meaning that they are modes that are used by media handlers message production.

An analysis of Giltins statement concerning frames is warranted here. He said that frames are “persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation and presentation, of selection, emphasis and exchange by which symbol handlers routinely organize discourse, whether verbal or visual, (Adisa et al, p. 72, 2018). The phrase “persistent pattern” calls attention to the pervasiveness of frame in the communication process. It continuously shapes what the journalist sees and how he interprets and presents it. Of course it determine what he selects, emphasises and what he deletes. The phrase “routinely organize” suggests that frames are templates that set the boundaries within which journalistic constructions take place. Frames also serve as the mode from which the products of such constructions, whether they are words or pictures (both motion and still), emerge.

Vreese, (2005) observed the need for studies to coalesce different framing topologies in framing analysis that provide “finer details” about the news subject or object. Therefore in an attempt to get the “*finer and diverse details*” of the framing of a news item (emphasis add), all the generalizable news frames schemes need to be put into consideration.

Summarily, Vreese (2002), Vreese and Boomgaaden, (2003), and Chyi and McCombs (2004) have proposed three generalized frames which have been independently used in separate studies. The results of those studies, depending on which of the three framing schemes is employed in the examination provide a one-framing-scheme-dimension in view of the frames in the news studies. The employment of issue or subject specific frames or solo-generic framing scheme in news framing analysis is problematic to the extent the instruments are not applicable across board and the result, first, is not cross generalizable and second, robs us of a multi-dimensional framing-view of the news story under investigation. Yet the possibility of a multi-generic framing scheme analysis does exist due to the generalizability of the three generic framing schemes described above. Hence also there exists the possibility of a multi-dimensional framing-view of news frames in news framing analysis. This multi-dimensional approach, enabled by the combination of the three generalizable framing schemes in the study of news frames enables a composite model view of news framing. This approach to the study of news framing seeks to address the identified problem in news framing analysis thereby filling the observed gap. By adopting this multi-dimensional framing scheme perspective this study addresses the problem captured in the question, “what is the nature of the composite view of the framing of the news of African Sub-regions on mobile posts?”

By employing the three generalizable framing schemes (op. cit), a more comprehensive detail of news framing, which we here call composite framing scheme is proposed. By way of definition, a composite framing scheme can be described as any holistic combination of the indicators of two or more generalizable framing schemes. To demonstrate possibilities of this triangulated framing scheme we refer to as composite framing model see (Fig 2.1), this study combined generalizable frames identified by Vreese (2005); Vreese and Boomgaaden (2003) and Chyi and McCombs (2004) for illustration. These frames will enable researchers to identify the generalizable frames used by the media in covering any news story.

The composite framing scheme for this study is an integration of three generalizable framing schemes gleaned the works of preeminent framing researcher scholars cited above. This composite framing is first and foremost generalizable across news topics. Second, it has cross media comparability. Thirdly it has cross national, sub-regional, or regional comparability. The composite news framing model is depicted below:

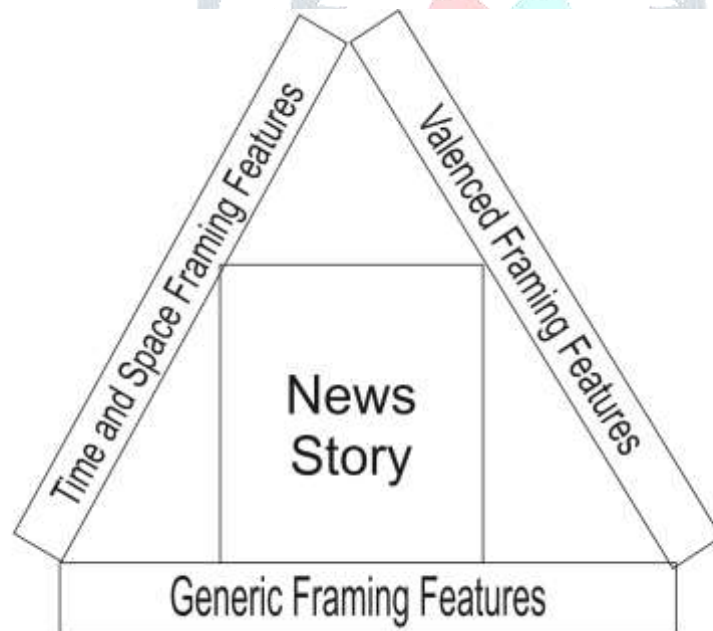


Fig 1 Composite news framing analysis model (Obi, 2021)

The composite news framing model contends, based on literature evidence, that the generalizable features of generic news frame, space and time dimensions of framing as well as the valenced features of framing schemes can be combined to give a more comprehensive framing analysis of news. Thus, researchers will have a more comprehensive view of news framing when analysis takes into account the triangulation of framing

schemes. Every news embodies the triangulated framing model because they are inherent in the basic 5Ws and H elements in the definition of news.

News frames broadly fall into two categories. There are frames that are customized or tailor made. Such frames address particular issues and cannot be used to examine any other issue aside the one they were designed for in an investigation. Such frames are usually context-and-time bound. They cannot be replicated neither can they be used to make generalizations that apply to other issues irrespective of how similar they may seem. On the other hand, there are generalizable frames. Generalizable frames are frames that are neither time, topic nor context bound. They are applicable across board. While for instance, the former cannot be applicable across different news topics, the later can. The former is usually developed and operationalized in order to evaluate, diagnose the problem and make recommendations concerning the issue at hand. Hence such frames can be described as narrow, limited, or constricted frames. The broad or unlimited frames would then be those that have applicability across the vertical and horizontal news frame spectrum. Vreese (2005) refers to them as “generic frames” and labelled the constrained frames as “issue-specific frames.” He specifically notes that:

certain frames are pertinent onto specific topics or events. Such frames may be labelled ‘issue – specific frames’. Other frames transcend the thematic limitations and can be identified in relation to different topics, some even over time and in different cultural contexts. These can be labelled generic frames (Vreese, 2002, p.54).

Issue – specific frames are numerous, infract, they can be as numerous as the number

of news worthy issues and events there are in a given social context. Because of this, it will suffice to give on example of an issue specific frame in the news media. In 2015, General Muhammadu Buhari won election to become Nigeria’s president. The news media framing of his 4 years in office can be investigated using specific issue frames of his presidency in news media, for in instance, in terms of “good leadership” and “bad leadership.” In this case, good leadership and bad leadership will be operationalized so that they can be captured in analysis of news items that relate to Buhari’s leadership as president. Study examples of the issue – specific frames would include, Media Images of Pakistan’s Hostility toward India: A Study of Four Newspapers during 2001-2002 (Singh, 2016), Arab spring Partisanship in the News Stories (Shin and Ha, 2016), CNN and Aljazeera framing of the Boko Haram conflicts in Nigeria (January – December 2014)¶. Vreese, (2005) observes that the drawback of issue–centered news frames is that they limit generalization, comparison and usefulness as empirical evidence for theory building (p.55).

But studies have been done in attempt to identify comprehensive news frames which are used by the news media. These generic–frames are have their root in the fundamentals of journalistic practices, values and structures. Pew Research Center (1988) study Project for Excellence in Journalism examined the framing of

news with a view to distilling the prevalent and predominant news frames used by journalists across various news topics. They identified thirteen news frames that are pervasive in the news media to include: straight news account, conflict, consensus, conjecture, story, outlook, horse race, trend, policy explored, reaction, reality check, wrongdoing exposed and personality profile. Of these, the single most commonly employed frame was found to be the straight news account which articulates the core facts of the news story without allowing any particular news “packaging” tool to dominate the story.

Vreese’s (2005) generic news frame and typology shows scholars to have identified the following news frames; politically strategic news frame, or horse race; episodic and thematic news frame; human impact, powerlessness, economics, moral values and conflict news frames; human interest, attribution of responsibility, and economic consequences.(p.56). It is necessary to observe that he further notes that the conflict frame may be inherent in the ‘journalistic practice of clashing interpretation’ or it could be “an emphasis on conflict between individual, groups, institutions or countries.’ (p.56).

Pew Research Center (1988) study presented a set of generalizable news frames some of which are similar with those already mentioned while some are different from those typified by Vreese(2005). Eliminating duplications, the combination of both taxonomies yields a more comprehensive taxonomy of generic news frames, namely: horse-race, episodic, thematic, human impact/human interest, powerlessness, economics/economic consequences, moral values, conflict, attribution of responsibility, conjecture/outlook, consensus, trend, reality check, wrong doing exposed, policy explained, personality profile and reaction.

Chyi and McComb (2004) advanced a longitudinal and vertical news framing model with which they measured the changing news frames employed by the media over a period of time to keep the news fresh in their coverage of a significant event in society. Longitudinally, they conceptualized news frames with a time spectrum indicating the past, the present and the future. They referred to this as time framing. Vertically lies the space frame continuum that includes, the individual, the community, region, society and international. At the intersection of the space and time spectrums lies the present. This framework came about as a result of seeking a framing model that would advance framing research beyond episodic and thematic framing postulations.

Chyi and McComb’s; (2004) effort sought for a model that would ‘capture the diversity and finer details of news frames needed to investigate the role of framing in building object salience on the media agenda’ (p.24)

giving rise to the development of the time and space news framing scheme. The argument being that, inherent in the basic definition of news is the elements of time and space which are two of the five elements of the 5Ws and H. In the time and space framing of news, a two dimensional approach, each dimension is a continuum of various levels.

In the time dimension news can therefore be organized with the idea highlighting the past, the now or the future as they relate to the object or issue in the news. This is applicable because framing is noted to diagnose problems, moral evaluations and recommendations. This may require the framing of a news item from a historical perspective which gives background or the correlation of the present to a past occurrence. The news may focus on the present impact and immediate consequences of the issue or event. Finally in the time spectrum, the news may be framed with the future implications of a current event or issue as an organizing idea in which case the news may focus on the mid to long term effects of the object, issue or event captured in the news.

On the vertical spectrum, the space scheme is indicative of news frames at five distinct levels, each of which reflects on the central (space)organizing idea or focus of the news story. Within a national context, news about an event, issue, or object may focus at the individual, community, regional, societal and international level. Chyi and McComb(2004) tested their model by examining the media coverage and framing of a single event- the Columbine school shooting. Looking at the changing frames adopted by the news media to keep the news fresh through the course of its life span, their scheme provided result that is generalizable across issues.

Moral evaluation which in one of the key functions of news framing implies a dichotomy between right and wrong. Often, by implicit or explicit condemnation or praise, news frames differentiate between valencies - the good and the bad or distinguish the positive from the negative. Valence is a well-known term in the field of science where elements are valenced. From the field of psychology, the term refers to the assignment of a positive, neutral or negative value to an object, issue, situation or state. With respect news "frames are indicative of bad and good and implicitly carry positive and negative elements (Vreese and Boomgaarden, 2003, p. 363). The implication is that a news frame can be manifestly positive, neutral or negative. Most studies about the framing of African countries in the western media suggest that the image of Africa is predominantly negative (Okon, 2013, Ekeanyanwu, 2008) across different news categories but not across the frames.

Entman (1993) notes four locations of frames, namely the communicator, the text, the receiver and the culture. Frames are therefore domiciled in every segment and context of the communication process. Thus, it has a place in the source, the channel, the receiver as well as the communication environment. According to Vreese (2005) these locations correspond to four identifiable levels in the process of framing, vis – a-vis, ‘framing – building’ and ‘frame – setting’ as well as ‘individual and societal level consequences of framing.’ These are captured in his integrated process model of framing in fig.2.5

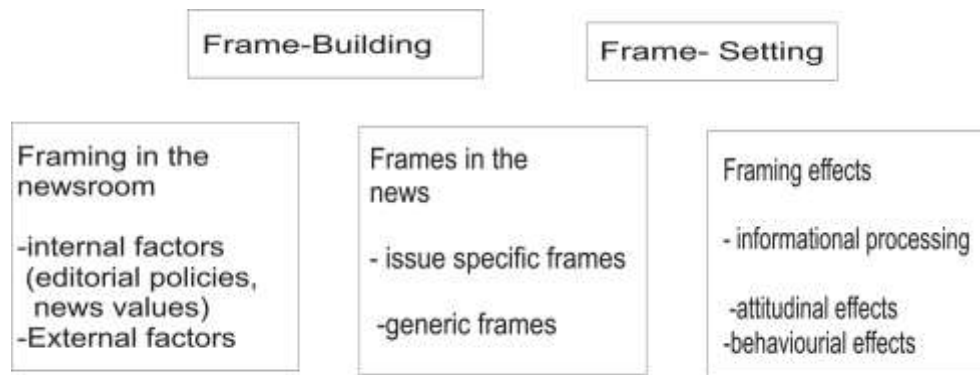


Fig. 2.5 Integrated process model of framing (Vreese, 2005)

News framing can then be seen as the process of production, interpretation delivery and interpreted response to news stories. As a progression it captures the interaction of all the elements in the communication situation with the news item, starting from the source through the channel to the receiver. The model establishes, for instance, a premise on which research can link or correlate the frame and framing features of two or more elements in a communication circumstance. Source factors, can be related with channel features alongside receiver effects. It is believed that this is needed to check a rise in research that investigate frames that may have considerable appeal given the ‘layman’ nature of the frame, but that do not provide evidence in the practical use of frame in news production and consumption (Vreese 2005, p.52). The situation of the composite framing analysis model within the intergrated model of framing therefore enables research that provide evidence in the practical use of frame both in news production and consumption.

In conclusion, we note that theories give rise to models which are pictorial representations of the kernels of theoretical submissions. The composite news framing model generated in this study from can be situated

within the integrated process model of framing developed by Vreese, (2005), thereby enabling the investigation of framing relations across the communication process. This is illustrated by the diagram shown below:

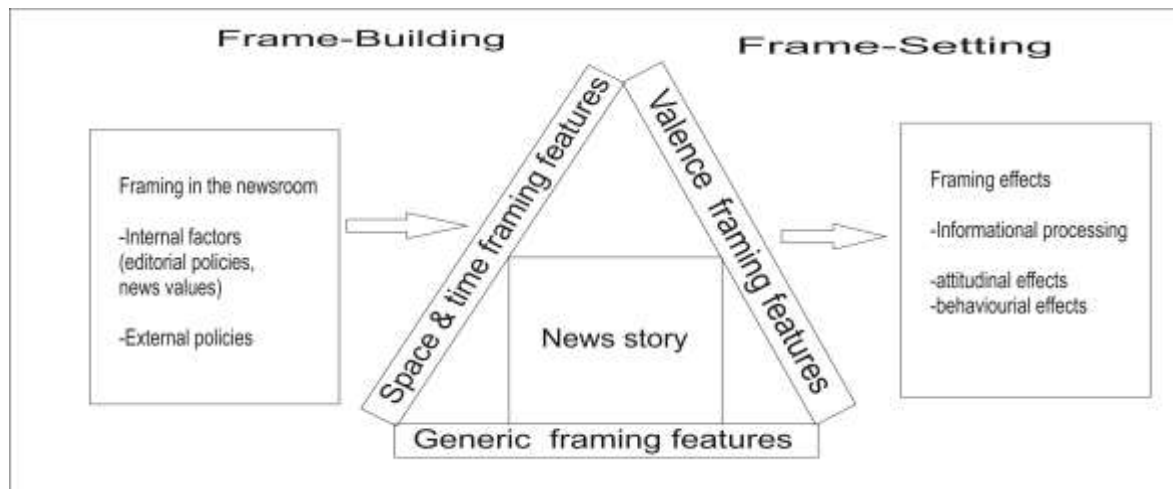


Fig. 2 Composite news framing scheme (Obi, 2021) within integrated process model of framing (Vreese, 2005)

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