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**Exploring Media Framing and Audience Framing**

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**Abstract:**

Media framing as theory is used for examining how media influence their audiences in perceiving events, issues, and problems. The current study has focused on the meta analysis of already published research work on media framing and audience framing. The present research has qualitatively evaluated the studies regarding media frames and audience frames. Various studies have been undertaken to understand how media frame the issues, and how audience frames the issues. This study investigated different factors that influence the media framing and audience framing of the same issues. The study of media framing and audience framing has become key focus in mass communication research. Advancement in communication technologies has facilitated individuals to verify the mediated world. Media users cannot be ignored in the field of communication research. It is evident that many factors influence the audience framing of issues. Audience level factors include pre-existing knowledge, personal experiences, and political affiliation. While reviewing the existing literature regarding media frames and audience frames, the present research focuses on media frames and audience frames.

**Keywords:** Media, audience framing, public discourse, communication, frame setting, information

**INTRODUCTION**

Framing effects studies have become the core focus of social sciences scholars in media and communication. Framing approach in communication research has been elaborated and conceptualized with different angles in the light of available literature. Researchers have evaluated the concept of framing as frames in communication and frames in thoughts (Chong & Druckman 2007-a, 100; Scheufele, 1999). Communication frame named as media frame refers to the presentation style of mass media while presenting the information regarding different social and political issues to audience members. Communication frame provides direction to audience members to understand the issue and to formulate the opinion. A frame in thought is denoted as an audience frame which refers to audience member's mental elaboration and evaluation of mediated world of communication (Chong & Druckman, 2007). The audience frame also describes how the audience perceives and evaluates the issues and information presented by mass media (Entman, 1993; Scheufele, 1999). When individuals evaluate the issue the framing effect is observed.

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Audience framing research observes whether, how, under what conditions, and which frames in communication influence people's perceptions of certain issues.

To comprehend how media framing of issues influences the audience framing of the same issues, a bird eye view of Walter Lippmann's prominent work on media effects can be taken. According to Lippmann (2010), media present the pseudo reality and public react to that pseudo reality. Overall, in a globalized world, individuals have dependency on different channels of communication to gain information regarding different world happenings. Many issues are more complicated for the people to understand them directly. Media frames help people understand the nature of issues by stressing on specific elements or features of the broader controversy, reducing a usually complex issue down to one or two central aspects (Nelson, Clawson, & Oxley 1997, 568). Media frames highlight the particular angles of an issue and promote the specific interpretation of issues to influence public opinion (Entman, 1993; Scheufele, 1999). Framing researchers such as Nelson, Clawson and Oxley (1997) have indicated how media frames affect people's willingness to allow Ku Klux Klan groups to conduct a rally. The researchers conducted two experiments to dig out the framing in news contents of TV and Print media framing. The findings of the study indicated that media frames were more powerful to influence the audience framing of an issue. Media frames have the power to make and break the people's opinions regarding different social and political issues in broader perspectives. According to Aalberg, Stromback, and De-Vreese (2011, 163) the framing of politics as a strategic game is characterized by focused questions on who is winning and losing, the performances of politicians and parties, and on campaign strategies and tactics.

Research findings regarding framing have indicated the effect of strategic news frames on politics and dimensions of political democracy. A core justification of strategy framing is that, it produces the diverse effect based on self-interest motives of political leaders (Aalberg, Stromback, & De-Vreese, 2011). De-Vreese (2004) analyzed the news contents of TV and its effects on individuals, while findings indicated that strategy framing creates doubt and distrust in respondents' minds. When individuals were exposed to news frames one week later, the research findings indicated no differences in political cynicism among participants exposed to news framed in terms of strategy and participants exposed to issue-based news.

### **Frame Building and Frame Setting**

Many external and internal factors play their role regarding frame building in communication contents and these factors also influence the framing process of media contents (De-Vreese, 2005). According to Scheufele (1999), some internal factors that influence the framing of media contents include information perceived by the journalists, the political affiliation of a media organization, and organizational retune of media outlets. Internal factors also decide how the news contents will be presented and reported. Social/ professional relationship/ among media workers, organization management, political interference and social pressure also work as an external factor while framing the communication contents (De-Vreese, 2005). During frame building process, framed media contents reflect the journalists and guide the target respondents to evaluate the mediated communication (Scheufele, 1999).

The above mentioned factors play their central role during frame building process to construct reality (De-Vreese, 2005). Journalists have a key position while framing in communication contents.

While constructing the communication frame, journalists apply different attributes to grab the attention of target individuals. Based on allocated attributes, framing is perceived as impact oriented (Stromback, 2004). Scheufele (1999) argued that frame producers have limited cognition and are influenced by their own frames. Professional norms also directly influence on the frame building process and one time produced frame may be repeated. Scholars have investigated that media professionals are also influenced by some external factors such as social elites, interest groups, and frames applied by some other sources of news (Scheufele, 1999). De-Vreese (2005) also argued that frame building is correlated with frame setting in communication contents.

Frame setting refers to the characterization of issues that project the second level agenda setting since it influences the cognitive aspects of an attribute. Focusing on particular dimensions of reality and providing them more resonance frames make them more attention compared to other information. Scheufele (1999) stated that mediated and framed communication would reinforce the individuals to elaborate the reality according to mediated reality.

### **Psychological Process in Framing Effects**

Framing influence studies have indicated three basic processes vital in inducing the media frames such as accessibility change, belief importance change, and belief content change (Chong and Druckman 2007-b; De-Vreese & Lecheler, 2012; Slothuus, 2008). According to accessibility change model, while framing the issues, media concentrate on specific dimensions of issues that are more accessible and, therefore, more likely to be used (De-Vreese & Lecheler 2012, 297). In this way, when audiences elaborate and make their own opinion regarding mediated issues, some of the realty dimensions are ignored (Slothuus 2008, 4). Change in belief is commonly elaborated as the most significant mediator of framing effects (De-Vreese & Lecheler 2012, 298) and is the core focus of empirical work. According to this, frame influences perception and views by changing the perceived relative importance of already accessible considerations (Slothuus, 2008). Particularly, the justification is that media frames have power to influence public opinion by making certain considerations which seem more important than others; these considerations, in turn, carry greater weight for the final attitude (Nelson, Clawson, & Oxley 1997, 569). The content change model argues that frames in communication might put forward some new arguments or information that the citizens had not previously thought about and, thereby, deliver a new consideration—a reason to favor or oppose the issues (Slothuus 2008, 5). Hence, the frames in communication or media frames may influence the frames in thought or audience frames by altering their perception and opinion regarding mediated issues (Slothuus, 2008).

Chong and Druckman (2007) have worked on the psychological process in framing effects. As these researchers elaborated, individuals can apply and make use of available, accessible, and applicable mixing of insights to formulate attitude and persuasion. As Chong and Druckman (2007) have elaborated a combined dimension regarding psychological procedure effects of framing. As the researchers elaborated, people can use available, accessible, and applicable situations while decision-making and opinion building (Chong & Druckman, 2007-b). According to Chong and Druckman (2007-b) consideration must be stored in memory in order to be available for retrieval and inclusion in opinion formation if a framing effect is to be observed (p. 108)

According to Chong and Druckman (2007), mass media frames are developed on the basis of available situations to mold the public opinions and thoughts. Another dimension regarding consideration requires easy availability and exposure to media contents in which media frames can increase the accessibility. Individuals who have personal motivation or individuals who perform the function of stimulating competitive communication evaluate the mediated communication according to their own opinion by assessing the issues carefully. After the evaluation of any issue, they make their own opinion regarding mediated world of communication. Chong and Druckman (2007) have summarized that framing can work on all three levels (p. 111).

By understating the key role of some emotional factors regarding political communication and its influences, many studies have focused on the congestive process regarding psychological process in terms of framing effects (De-Vreese & Lecheler, 2012). Limited literature is available on emotions and consequences of framing but most of the studies have investigated that emotions and frames are interlinked and frames have power to influence the emotions of individuals. Research findings regarding neurobiological basis and effects of framing have supported the emotional process (De-Martino et al., 2006). Many research scholars have started to investigate the emotions in terms of mediators regarding framing effects. Hence, it is a requirement and dire need to develop an empirical mechanism to understand the inter-link between the framing process and emotions (De-Vreese & Lecheler, 2012). According to De-Vreese and Lecheler (2012, 299), future research projects must investigate the role of emotion for specific issues of different political contexts, for political participation and action, and disentangle the differences between discrete emotions that play a role in the framing process.

### **The Limits to Audience Framing**

Initial studies on framing have emphasized whether media frames can influence audience perceptions and opinions regarding different social and political issues. Later research on framing has focused on conditions which play a core role in influencing audience framing of issues and effects of framing. Recent research indicates that individual variation in terms of their individual differences and contextual factors perform the function of moderator and moderate framing effect.

### **Contextual Factors in Framing Effects**

It is most important to understand the contextual factors in framing effects (Sniderman & Theriault, 2004). Research findings have investigated many contextual factors that play their role in the process of framing effects. Frame always has a specific source as news frames, political party and political leadership. Properties of source play a core role in framing effects. According to Druckman (2001) framing effects are dependent on source credibility because credible sources oriented frames influence the audience more. Framing effects are also dependent on the characteristics of issues that are being framed. Similarly, characteristics of individuals have power to limit the effects and influences of framing.

Druckman and Nelson (2003) investigated that conflict oriented situations have the ability to decrease the influences and effects of framing. Framing effects are also dependent on access to information sources and broader information environment. Sniderman and Theriault (2004) have indicated that when people are exposed to alternative modes of communication, their opinion is no more influenced by mediated communication because they have sources to verify the information

and make their opinion on different social and political issues. In short, being exposed to opposing sides of an argument increases consistency among decisions taken on specific policies (p. 147). By combining intellectual findings in the light of existing research studies on the role of contextual factors in moderating the effects of framing, elite political opinion influences the decision-making ability of individuals regarding different social and political issues in the community. Druckman (2001, p. 1045) stated that several contextual factors affect susceptibility to framing effects and can increase selectivity in responsiveness among audience members.

### **Individual Differences and Framing Effects**

According to Chong and Druckman (2007-b, p. 111), perhaps the clearest limitation to framing effects is provided by individual predispositions. Individual affiliation with any political party is perceived as a vital factor in the individual framing of issues after exposure to mass media (Zaller, 1992). Audience socialization is also perceived as a core factor in the audience framing of issues that are presented by mass media. Various studies have indicated that political affiliation, audience socialization, and access to other forms of communication play a vital role in the audience framing of issues, developing opinion and decision making.

Shen and Edwards (2005) conducted an experimental study and investigated that individual level factors play a core role in the audience framing of issues and decision making regarding different issues. Likewise, Schemer, Wirth and Matthes (2012) indicated strong evidences regarding value resonance hypothesis that is, value-laden frames are most persuasive when they match the value orientations of the audience members. Different studies on political communication and political awareness have indicated that the effects of framing may depend on the extent to which an individual pays attention to politics and understands what he or she has encountered (Zaller, 1992, p. 21). However, empirical results on the moderating effects of political awareness and related concepts such as political sophistication and political knowledge are mixed. Some studies have investigated that the less politically aware individuals are most influenced by mediated political communication, while well politically aware are not most influenced by mediated political communication because they carefully process the information and then show their reaction (Chong & Druckman 2007b, 112).

Political sophistication and audience susceptibility have been indicated in different studies to understand the effects and influences of framing on individuals. Many scholars have investigated that our level of information about different political issues is influenced mainly by the frames developed by different political elites and remain limited. The investigation and inferences regarding audience variation and differences to moderate the effects of framing elaborated that segmentation of individuals differ from individual to individual. Each individual has their own thinking patterns and political predisposition, including preexisting values, motivations, knowledge, and beliefs upon which people accept and reject frames.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Number of studies have been conducted on framing effects during 1990s and 2000s but many questions are still unanswered, one of them is the conceptualization of framing. According to the available literature on political communication, framing is differentiated from priming, agenda setting and persuasion (De-Vreese & Lecheler, 2012). The clear distinction is not developed

between these concepts. The focus on conceptual difference of framing from other media effects is unsolved (Chong & Druckman, 2011). De-Vreese and Lecheler (2012) urge that a clear terminology must be found, especially because framing scholars allude to news framing's persuasive power. Some of the media effects researchers are in favour of a more fine-grained conceptualization, but others supported a more inclusive conceptualization which enables a frame to cause an array of different effects (p. 299).

According to media effects studies, frames have the power to influence opinion, decision making, and emotions. Studies have indicated that some frames are more influential as compared to others. However, in framing effect literature, it is a vital question that what are the factors that make a frame more powerful. Chong and Druckman (2011) stated that it is not encouraging as it appears individuals often ignore criteria seen as normatively desirable (e.g., logic, facts) while focusing on factors that are more difficult to justify (p. 180). Druckman and Bolsen (2011) investigated that factual information is of limited utility. It adds little power to newly provided arguments/frames (e.g., compared to arguments lacking facts) (p. 659). Arceneaux (2012) argued that cognitive biases are factors that influence the frame strength. He further stated that emotional reaction to frames provides an indirect indicator of bias activation and finds that anxiety caused people to view the loss-framed arguments as more persuasive than gain-framed arguments (p. 281). Some other research studies have probed the role of emotions regarding frame strength. Our perception and understanding of what factors make a frame strong is still limited (Chong & Druckman, 2011).

The specific time period of framing effects, is also considered one of the key dimensions for upcoming research on framing as some have conducted and mixed the results (De-Vreese & Lecheler, 2012). De-Vreese (2004) has investigated the in-time effects of framing as exposure to media but no effects of framing is observed after 14 days of exposure. Similarly, Druckman and Nelson (2003) investigated that the elite framing effect disappeared after ten days even in the virtual absence of other elite information (p. 741). As Tewksbury et al. (2000) investigated, framing effects have been observed after exposure to mass media. According to Druckman et al. (2010), effects of framing in terms of their consistency are dependent on individual differences regarding evaluation and elaboration of information. After a couple of weeks of exposure to frame, researchers investigated that the initially significant framing effects sustain for online processors but not for memory based processors (p. 143).

Framing in media communication has become the core and growing research areas (Chong & Druckman, 2010; Lecheler and de Vreese, 2013; Lecheler et al., 2015). Lecheler et al. (2015) have investigated that when individuals are repeatedly exposed from media frames, it imposed long-lasting influences on individuals. Chong and Druckman (2010) investigated that individuals form significantly different opinions when they receive competing messages over time than when they receive the same messages simultaneously (p. 663).

A number of research efforts have indicated that the effects of framing in communication depend on timing and audience information processing modes. According to an experimental study conducted by Chong and Druckman (2013), among people who engage in online-based processing, quick repetition of the counter frame is less effective than exposure to one delayed counter-frame later in time. In contrast, among memory-based processors waiting to counter frame makes little difference as it will be effective in most cases (Chong & Druckman 2013, 8). Hence new forms of

media and communication have also influenced the framing effect and have introduced a new area of research. Social media has become the alternative mode of information and communication from which people can share and verify the mediated reality of issues. Now social media has become the core focus of each field of life, such as politics and business, to promote their interests (Otterbacher, Shapiro, & Hemphill, 2013). One of the most important reasons for the effects of new communication forms on framing is that due to the availability of alternative means of communication, individuals can express their views and discuss the issues according to their own elaboration. By evaluating the research literature regarding the effects of framing, it can be documented that a new form of media such as social media plays a key role in imposing framing effects at the end of the audience.

## CONCLUSION

Finally, it can be concluded that due to easy access to social media, now individuals are capable of influencing the process of frame building and broader public discourse. According to above discussions it is documented that individuals who have access to alternative communication channels can influence the traditional media process of frame building. Studies regarding interlink between social media and political communication are under discussion, to investigate how political priming influence the audience framing of political issues and knowledge.

The recent era requires to elaborate and develop logical theoretical and methodological interlink between framing and modern forms of information and communication. In this way, researchers should investigate the types of frames which are applied in new forms of communication such as social media to help understand how social media can impose the framing effects.

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