

A Concept of Mediator and Moderator on News Frame Setting in Communication

Julia Wirza Mohd Zawawi^{1,2} & Chang Peng Kee³

¹Institute for Social Science Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 Serdang, Selangor,

²Department of Communication, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication,
Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 Serdang, Selangor, ³Centre For Research in Media and
Communication, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43000 Bangi, Selangor

Email: wirza@upm.edu.my, chang@ukm.edu.my

To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v10-i15/8221>

DOI:10.6007/IJARBS/v10-i15/8221

Published Date: 23 November 2020

Abstract

Disclosure of news information from the mass media now is undeniably has a dominant impact on individual either in positive or negative form. The transformation from mass media to new technologies such as social media shows that individuals are now becoming too smart to choose their own media content. This concept paper conducted through meta-analysis has three main objectives, among them are to psychologically explains the adaptation process and reception of information by individuals, to identify the relationship between the reception of information with the recall process in psychology and to identify the factors that influence media effects namely the reception of information by individuals' schemata. These factors are divided into two sections, internal factors and external factors. Internal factors are identified as individuals' level of knowledge, belief importance, belief content and emotion. Meanwhile, external factors are namely frame repetition, frame competition, types of frames (thematic and generic frames). This article will explain in detail the concept of framing effect, psychology elements as the basis to the news frame effect, and mediator and moderator in the study of framing effect.

Keywords: Frame Setting, Framing, Psychology, Mass Media, Communication, Cognitive

Introduction

When we talk about something related to cognition, it is certainly related to psychology. According to Treholm and Jensen (1992) in their book explaining the meaning of cognition is how an individual receives information and message content as part of an internal process, and more importantly in the field of communication psychology. He also explains how the element from psychology has a close connection with communication field especially in interpersonal communication. It is not about how we receive the message, the type of action that we think suitable and how are we able to control the communication form

ourselves, but it is more to the way we categorized individual and context that can change when communicating with other people especially in certain issues.

Based on the explanations from these scholars it illustrates the relationship between media and communication field with cognition. The society receives the content of message and information through the medium of media. The information received then will go through a process call information processing. The information is processed through human schemata in which it could only be explained in detail via psychology concept as explained in Reed Model, 1988. After it went through information process, it brings to an action of how the society expresses their action to other people.

The context discussed here is the reality of the framing theory carried out by many scholars which also includes the communication field. This framing selected based on the concept discussed from psychologist, sociologist and communication scholars regarding on issues highlighted on media. Nilson and Enander (2019) see framing as a continuity from the previous framing studies from Entman, de Vreese and others. He explains that media framing refers to media communication as an effort to present and define an issue. It creates some elements and makes it a reality, organizes them into stories, highlights relationships between them and promotes certain interpretations. The same situation explained by Entman (2007) which the framing process involved creation, content and uses various perspectives. Riebling and der Wense (2019) explain that there is a study that studies the usage of words in reporting can give major impact to individuals. This effectiveness shows that a frame can be used as a strategy. For example, politicians usually use and deliver information using specific frame. This is a way to attract audiences' attention.

Recall in Cognitive Psychology

Treholm and Jensen (1992) explain that every observation made by an individual is actually depends on the reference frame. This refers to mental, past experiences and others. The frame references influence many messages in the environment that individual's mind can pay attention to. Individual cognition system is usually easily influence by the issues in the newspapers or from existing resources that are communicating with them. Shrum (2009) later explains the relationship between cognitive system and media effect. He explains human cognitive system as an orientation towards a cognitive process that happens in a social situation. In a clearer explanation, cognitive process is defined as an attempt to open the black box that operates between information and feedback. Social cognition not only can be seen in psychology field, but other fields such as marketing communication and political communication.

Some important principles in the cognition system are heuristic that pays attention on the information received to form a consideration. This principle explains when an individual builds a consideration which he usually does not use the whole memory, but only a part of existing information. Therefore, adequate information to build consideration and to identify the relationship with the information processing ability. The second principle is by explaining information accessibility concept to build a consideration. The most accessible information facilitates an individual's acceptance of the information and thus, makes it easier for the individual to consider it. This concept is known as recall.

Recall is one of the important elements in information processing process. Some of the information people received is stored, and subsequently used. This process is called recall

(Reed, 1988). In this situation, we can see the function played by the media to deliver information to the society and at the same time the information is used daily.

The Recall Factors

However, the individual's accessibility in getting and using the information delivered by media is influenced by various factors. As introduced by Shrum (2009), he explains that there are many factors that can influence readers' recall on the issues displayed by the media. Among them is the latest information activation frequency. The frequency of human mind in receiving information causing it to be easily accepted and also in giving consideration. Similarly, in receiving latest information, human mind will activate it, process and accept the information.

According to Shrum (2009), other than that, clarity also plays a factor to reader's recall. The clearer the issue is received, the easier the recall is activated from memory, for example brawl issue, conflict kind of issue, natural hazard and others. Clarity usually plays its role in news report, and news report usually reports information in a form of case study to ensure human mind can receive information that it delivers. As explained before, accessibility increase the existing construct relationship, and this concept is still relevant as one of the ways to spread the memory model activation in cognitive psychology, and at the same time creates knowledge relationship. This model supports the construct stored in memory and connected with the existing memory nodes. When this nodes is activated, other constructs are also activated.

This proves that the accessibility relationship through human mind has a significant relationship with media effect study. For example, if the media promotes and exposes issue of violence, it may provoke reactions or feelings of aggression and anger. In conclusion, it is either frequency, latest issue or the content exposed that may cause the accessibility to construct information received. Other than factors by Shrum (2009), Treholm and Jensen (1992) also explain that individual's recall depends on reference frame of each situation. He also explains that every action process made is based on one's perception. The production of the content in the message which is thought suitable is based on the situation seen, who is involved, what is our main goal and so forth. The relation between social cognition process and communication is not only in one way. Just like a reference frame, cognition can be seen to influence how an individual send and receives message, can also influence an individual's expression towards an information received.

Frame Setting Factors (Moderator and Mediator)

There are many studies done by overseas scholars on frame setting effect. Recent studies show many researches done by the scholars on frame setting effect. Through different news issues, the researchers looked at the application of framing theory and its effect to the society. The research on frame setting effect revolution is soon develop until it involves multiple improvements.

As such, some elements have been identified in frame setting effect study and this is known as mediator and moderator. Among the factors identified are individual's knowledge level, usability level, reliability level, frame repetition, frame competition and others.

Based on the past study collections, the researchers are able to identify moderator and mediator to the frame setting which actually divided into two sections. First is the internal aspect and second is the external aspect. Internal aspect consists of psychology and individual internal. External aspect consists of other factors besides internal factors such as from news

(media) frame. The internal and external factors that have been classified by the researchers from past studies are as follow.

Internal Factors

Knowledge Level

Media is the most powerful medium in delivering information to the audience. One of the dominant roles played by the media is giving knowledge to the audience. Together with the evolution of communication technology development, the audience have more options to access knowledge not only from the mass media but also from online media. Audience nowadays contributes to the more various knowledge resources to be explored with the unlimited access own by the audience. Therefore, this situation becomes one of the unachievable reason by the scholar to study media effectiveness on an issue because of the cognitive elaboration level (knowledge level) on certain issue is different from one another.

Individual's knowledge level is among the factors usually discussed by the scholars that become the factor of frame setting. Among the scholars who discuss this are Lecheler and de Vresse (2012); Druckman and Nelson (2003); Lecheler and de Vresse (2012) and many more. Discussion by Lecheler et al. (2012) explains that knowledge level on political issue is the most dominant and used in framing studies. These scholars initially predict that there is a relationship between readers' knowledge level with frame determinant effect. However, through study findings he found that frame setting effect only happened in certain situation, which is an individual who has high knowledge, are easily exposed to media effect through content interest only.

A study done by de Vreese et al. (2011) assumes that most audience or society receives messages from media, and each effect received by every individual is different from one another. The differences received are because of the level of political stability that an individual has. Individuals who have high political knowledge are also seen as easily influenced through positive form of news frame. This is because those who have high knowledge level have enough mental storage system to understand and process the news, while individuals who have low knowledge is easily influenced through negative form of frame. This happens because in their opinion, individuals with low knowledge level are more exposed with media effect due to their inability to analyse the news received.

This study finding is also supported by studies from Shiv, Edell and Payne (1997) who think that a few discoveries have been identified that are related to positive and negative frame effectiveness as persuasive messages. His study findings are clear and in accordance with study by Lecheler et al. (2012) which negative frame is more effective than positive frame when the knowledge is at low level, and vice versa. This is because when the level of the individual's knowledge is low, the heuristic related to framing cannot be accessed. Thus, the processing focus will be more to the message demand only. If the message demand focuses on only negative frame, the negative frame will be more convincing than the positive frame.

This situation is proven by an opinion from Druckman and Nelson (2003) that an individual with low political knowledge is more influenced with framing effect. This is because only individuals with high knowledge have enough mental storage system to process the frame compare to the individuals with low knowledge level where their mental storage level are limited and cause the framing effect are to be less effective to them.

A study done by Lecheler et al. (2012) are among studies to see how far the usability and accessibility influence the message delivery to the audience. The European Union issue

was used as their study issue, and explored the relationship of these elements in frame determinant effect study.

Accessibility effect refers to a function that enables individual to make consideration to more prominent issue in the mind to form an opinion. Basically accessibility is actually not to change the content in individual's mind but giving emphasis to the existing belief. However, Lecheler et al. (2012) opinion on accessibility is opposed by Scheufele (2004). He explains that framing actually influence the audience's thought about an issue and not make the aspect of the issue to be more prominent, but by requesting interpreting schema to influence information interpretation that comes in human schemata (Scheufele, 2004).

D'Angelo and Lombard (2008) explain the main factor that contributes to the accessibility is past knowledge and high knowledge level can help produce news frame channel in individuals' thought. The process that uses accessibility effect through framing effect is able to change individuals' thought and change their beliefs.

Besides accessibility, one of the factors that become the determinant to frame setting is usability. Usability is closely related to; it refers to the highlighted information through mass media. It will then cause the information more dominant and activated by individuals' schemata. However, the usability effect creates question whether the activation is caused by news frame or stimulus stimuli.

Exposure to the news frame causing the readers' schemata to increase compares to existing knowledge. To ensure the usability element in readers' cognitive schemata system, the researcher explains that the existing knowledge consist a few elements. The elements are (i) object or knowledge criteria concept, (ii) goals, value and motivation, and (iii) affective and emotional level. Readers usually use the existing knowledge to categorise, interpret and evaluate new information. When schemata or previous knowledge gone through individual procedure based on the news frame, the usability effect will activate existing thought inside the knowledge storage.

Belief Importance and Content

Belief importance is a mediator characteristic to the framing effect. It focuses on how society thinks about political issue. Belief importance also refers to a framing that can change consideration content inside individuals' thought. Therefore, news frame does not cause some beliefs are more prominent but increase their level of belief. The news issues display by the media do not activate existing knowledge in the thought but increase their beliefs and finally influence individuals' consideration towards a decision.

Next is belief content. Belief content effect model refers to the additional of existing beliefs, and this situation creates new individuals' thought. Nelson, Oxley and Clawson (1997) explain that the frame operates by activating existing information in receiver's regulation which is stored in long-term memory. Belief content also gives effect that is finally gives more important consideration than others.

Initially, belief content change does not have any relation with framing effect. This is due to belief content is opposite with framing context that is activated by existing content in human schemata and stored for a long time (Lecheler and de Vresse, 2012).

Individual Feeling Factor

Other than mechanisms that are related with psychology and mind, individual feeling factor is also becomes the stimulus to frame setting. Study done by Lecheler, Schuck and de Vrees (2013) see how feeling factor becomes news frame setting effectiveness. They

emphasise that frame setting effect studies are related to psychological process. Through the study conducted, they tested two positive emotions (spirit and satisfaction) and negative emotions (anger and fear). The study finding shows that spirit and anger are the factors to frame setting, and not satisfaction and anger that do not affect them. The findings prove that feelings and emotions contribute to framing effect.

Arguments by Lecheler et al. (2013) are then supported by the continuity from his study. The study conducted by Lecheler et al. (2013) is a continuity from the previous study. He wants to prove that emotions also contribute to news effectiveness. He then tries to frame illegal migrant issue in a different form which is as a threat and culture assimilation. Emotional element can be brought up by media practitioners by providing various different news considerations.

Emotions as mediator – psychological process fundamental that explains why and how framing effect takes place and always neglected in most of framing effect cognitive processing theory. Most of the studies are idea based, and framing effect is influenced by many mediators, namely accessibility, usability and belief content changes. However, emotion is an important action to psychological mechanism.

For example, Brader et al. (2008) shows anxiety becomes the immigrant mediator effect to the anti-immigrant. Verkuyten (2004) found that there are a few immigrant frames that cause, which includes empathy or anger, and effect towards the immigrant policy support. Framing through group such as immigrant also shows that strong emotion feedback in a study that focuses emotions between groups. Next, this study also identifies emotion as mediator to policy opinion effect. Most framing and communication political study focus on the negative emotion, such as fear and anxiety.

External Factors

Frame Repetition

If the internal factors discuss in detail on individuals' psychological and mental elements, external factors are seen as stimulus factor to frame setting. This is because the external factors are from the individual's psychological himself which one of them are from the media. Shrum (2009) explains that through previous discussions, frequency is one of the factors that stimulate frame determinant effect. The more the individual receives information from the media, the faster the information to enter the memory schemata and increases their memory.

Norris et al. (1980) also states that media repetitive exposure influences individuals' value and opinion in a socialisation process which involve family members and friends. This statement is supported by a study done by Lecheler and de Vreese (2012) who see how frame repetition influence whole media effect. According to him, repetition on of news frame exposure creates stronger effect. This is because the information channelled by the media will be received by individuals' schemata repeatedly and individuals' schemata will indirectly process it repeatedly. However, frame repetition happens in a different situation, in an opposite flow form. This situation stirs a question whether this matter creates strong effect or creates conflict towards frame setting.

Before we discuss in detail on frame competition, the term frame competition is closely related to democracy. Druckman (2014) explains that the concept democracy is a form of political system competition that competes to get alternatives about general opinion. This is an effort to involve the society in a decision-making process. This competition process can be depicted in current situation where political elite will compete against each other to give

their opinions and comments when it involves a political issue. Every opinion and comment by these political elites indirectly influences news through the media. The diversity of the news displayed in the media whether it is repetitive or different opinions between one another indirectly give options for them to accept it or not (Willis, 2007).

Study done by Lecheler and de Vreese (2012) using frame competition in frame setting, prove that frame exposure which are positive and negative eliminate media effect. This is because the effect between each other is automatically eliminated when a conflict occurs. This statement is also supported by a study done by Chong and Druckman (2012). He sees strong competition between two news frames at a time as an example of freedom of speech frame and public safety frame. When both frames are competing between each other in one period, those frames tend to eliminate and do not create any effect. He also emphasis that frame competition does not occur in the same time but repetitively. In a more dynamic context, the exposure on frame and frame repetitive on both campaigns may influence on how individuals process and evaluate frame competition.

It is different with a study by Sniderman and Theriault (2004) who viewed that media effect occurs when two types of conflicting frames are used in one period of time. He added, frame competition increases influence to personal belief and at the same time decrease media framing effect. This is different from the study by Sniderman and Theriault (2004) who viewed that media effect occurs when two types of conflicting frames are used in one period of time. He added, frame competition increases influence to personal belief and at the same time decrease media framing effect.

Generic and Thematic Frames

Other than frame repetition and competition, generic and thematic frame usage also becomes the factor to the effectiveness of the news. How the message delivered will gives influence to individual's reaction. Riebling and der Wense (2019) through their study explain that every word aired on the mass media determine individual acceptance. This is in accordance to a study by Pieri (2019) who identifies frame form whether it is specific or generic to determine Ebola epidemic through media in the Europe and how the policy feedback through the framing theory. He sees his study as a future preparation to face an epidemic in a country. He, Zhang & Chen (2020) see an issue that are important and critical will give bigger impact to an individual. An individual will see a critical issue as dominant and indirectly influence their thoughts to perceive the information more.

Future Perspective of News Frame Setting in Communication

The study of framing is relevant given the importance of media nowadays as a major power. Information aired by the media is seen as an influence that is able to give impact to the society. Behind the delivery of a news story, framing is seen exploiting the factors behind the delivery of information to ensure the delivery of information needs to go through a transparent process and procedures without any influence.

The study of framing effect is seen as one of the dominant studies especially with the media technology development. Not only that, the study of media effect can also be seen as one of the approaches to identify the effectiveness of the implementation of a policy by the government or an organisation. The discussion related to media effect is very subjective and involves individuals cognitive. Emphasis in the study of media effect will be widespread and in-depth when elements of psychology are also being discussed. Recall in a short and long

term, cognitive psychology process and information processing elements are the key discussion in the study of media effect that is less discussed in communication field.

Positive and negative frames are often associated when discussing about the study of media effect. However, a few things may need to be considered; positive or negative news does not promise any effect to an individual. The alternative media that delivers news also does not promise any effectiveness towards the delivery of information. A study carried out by Ahmed and Jaidka (2018) explain that the effectiveness of news acceptance and delivery by the traditional and modern media are not parallel. It is based on the individual's level of knowledge towards an issue. If the information delivered is new, then an individual's cognitive schemata cannot analyse the information received. Failure to present the information will lead to the failure of information processing and finally will not give any effect.

As D'Angelo and Lambard (2008) put it, an individual will usually use the amount of his existing knowledge in his thinking to categorise, interpret and evaluate new information received. If an individual's schemata do not have any information regarding the information received, then the acceptance and the effect of news display by the media are also seen to be affected. The scope related to psychology is no longer an issue to be discussed separately but is also closely related with communication field especially in the study of media effect.

Conclusion

There are many discussions on frame setting studies in communication field. The theory of frame setting focuses more on the individual effect and opens many opportunities for the scholars to discuss it. Overall, this article is a trial to analytically discussed factors that can be considered as the factors to frame setting. Media displays content as information to the audience, and its effectiveness is determined by various factors and finally it brings to the original function of the mass media which is to deliver information to the society.

References

- Ahmed, S., & Jaidka, K. (2018). Framing social conflict in news coverage and social media: A multicountry comparative study. *The International Communication Gazette*, 0(0), 1-26.
- Brader, T., Valentino, N. A., & Suhay, E. (2008). What triggers public opposition to immigration? Anxiety, group cues and immigration threat. *American Journal of Political Science*, 52(4), 959-978.
- Chong, D., & Druckman, J. M. (2012). Counter-Framing effect. *Journal of Politics*, 75(1), 1-16.
- D'Angelo, P., & Lambard, M. (2008). The power of the press: The effect of press frames in political campaign news in media perception. *Atlantic Journal of Communication*, 16, 1-32.
- Druckman, N. J. (2014). Pathologies of studying public opinion, political communication and democratic responsiveness. *Political Communication*, 31, 467-492.
- He, Y., Zhang, G., & Chen, L. (2020). Analysis of news coverage of haze in China in the context of sustainable development: The case of China Daily. *Sustainability*, 12, 386-401.
- Lecheler, S., & De Vreese. (2012). What is difference a day makes? The effects of repetitive and competitive news framing over time. *Communication Research*, 40(2), 147-175.
- Lecheler, S., & Schuck, A. R. T., de Vreese, C. H. (2013). Dealing with the feeling: Positive and negative discrete emotions as mediators of news framing effects. *Communication*, 38(2), 189-209.

- Nelson, T. E., Oxley, Z. M., & Clawson, R. A. (1997). Toward a psychology of framing effects. *Political Behaviour*, 19(3), 221-246.
- Nilsson, S., & Enander, A. (2019). "Damned if you do, damned if you don't": Medi frames of responsibility and accountability in handling a wildfire. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, 28, 69-82.
- Norris, M. (1980). *Local Government in Peninsular Malaysia*. Australia: Farnborough, Eng.
- Reed, S. K. (1988). *Cognition, Theory and Applications*. California: Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data.
- Riebling, J. R., & der Wense, I. V. (2019). Framing the mass media: Exploring "fake news" as a frame embedded in political discourse. *Journal of Alternative and Community Media*, 4, 57-76.
- Shiv, B., Edell, J. A., & Payne, J. W. (1997). Factors affecting the impact of negatively and positively framed ad messages. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 24(3), 285-294.
- Shrum, L. J. (2009). Media consumption and perception of social reality. In Brynt, J., & Oliver, M.B. (ed). *Media Effects Advances in Theory and Research*, 50-73. New York: Taylor and Francis Group.
- Scheufele, B. (2004). Framing effects approach: A theoretical and methodological critique. *Communication*, 29, 401-428.
- Sniderman, P. M., & Theriault, S. M. (2004). The dynamics of political argument and the logic of issue framing. In W. E. Saris, & P. Sniderman, P. (Eds.), *The Issue of belief: Essays in the intersection of non-attitudes and attitude change*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Trenholm, S., & Jensen, A. (1992). *Interpersonal Communication*. California: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Willis, J. (2007). *The Media Effects: How the News Influences Politics and Government*. London: Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication.
- Verkuyten, M. (2004). *The Social Psychology of Ethnic Identity*. New York: Psychology Press.