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Framing Theory Analysis in Media Articles

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Abstract. Framing theory is a highly influential approach in communication and media studies because of its key role in shaping how the public understands and interprets events and issues. This study examines framing theory as a major approach in media and communication by exploring its theoretical foundations, types, and applications in media discourse, while also tracing its historical development and reviewing previous studies that contributed to the growth of framing research in the field. It explains the main types of framing, including media and individual frames, strong and weak frames, and generic and specific frames, and shows how each type organizes information and highlights certain aspects of reality to influence audience perceptions and attitudes. The study also discusses the relationship between framing theory and other media theories such as agenda-setting and priming, and identifies its main characteristics. Furthermore, it illustrates how framing shapes audience interpretation of news, political events, and social issues through the use of specific words, images, symbols, and narrative structures, emphasizing the role of media institutions and journalists in constructing frames that influence public opinion and social reality. Overall, by reviewing key scholarly works and applying framing analysis to media discourse, the study highlights the importance of framing theory as a powerful tool for understanding how media messages are constructed and interpreted in contemporary communication studies.

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Keywords: Framing theory, media discourse, media framing,

المستخلص. تُعدّ نظرية التأطير من أهم الاتجاهات في دراسات الإعلام والاتصال، لما لها من دور بارز في تشكيل فهم الجمهور للأحداث والقضايا وتفسيرها. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل نظرية التأطير بوصفها أحد المداخل النظرية الرئيسة في الدراسات الإعلامية، من خلال استعراض أسسها النظرية، وتطورها التاريخي، وأنواعها المختلفة، إضافة إلى تطبيقاتها في الخطاب الإعلامي. كما تتناول الدراسة أهم أنواع التأطير مثل الإطارات الإعلامية والإطارات الفردية، والإطارات القوية والضعيفة، والإطارات العامة والخاصة، مع توضيح كيفية إسهام كل نوع في تنظيم المعلومات وإبراز جوانب معينة من الواقع والتأثير في إدراك الجمهور. وتبحث الدراسة كذلك في خصائص نظرية التأطير وعلاقتها بنظريات إعلامية أخرى مثل نظرية ترتيب الأولويات والتهيئه. وتوضح أن الإعلام لا يقتصر على نقل المعلومات فقط، بل يقوم بانتقاء عناصر محددة من الواقع وإعادة تقديمها ضمن أطر معينة تؤثر في فهم الجمهور واتجاهاته. وفي الجانب التطبيقي، تقوم الدراسة بتحليل مقال إعلامي يتعلق بمشكلة البطالة والفقر بين الشباب في العراق، حيث تكشف النتائج أن الخطاب الإعلامي استخدم عدة أطر مثل إطار المسؤولية، والإطار الإنساني، وإطار الصراع، والإطار الاقتصادي، مما ساهم في تشكيل تصور الجمهور للقضية باعتبارها أزمة اجتماعية واقتصادية حادة. وتلخص الدراسة إلى أن نظرية التأطير تُعد أداة تحليلية مهمة لفهم كيفية بناء المعنى في الإعلام، وكيفية تأثيره في تشكيل الرأي العام وإدراك الواقع الاجتماعي.

1. Literature Review

Entman (1993: 51) alluded to framing as “a scattered conceptualization”, With previous studies missing simple philosophical concepts and focusing on context-specific rather than universally applicable conceptualizations. Brosius and Eps (1995) went deeper, arguing that framing is not a term that is simply explained and universally applicable, but rather a metaphor that cannot be interpreted explicitly into research questions (ibid).

The word framing has been used repeatedly, partially because of these vague conceptualizations, to mark identical but completely different approaches (Scheufele, 1999: 103). Wicks (1992 cited in Scheufele), for instance, described subtle but independent variations between different cognitive categorization definitions. Only a terminological distinction between

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terms such as frame, script, or schema was seen by Hamill and Lodge (1986) and Lodge & Hamill (1986) (ibid).

At almost the same time, experimental studies combined with other principles such as agenda setting or priming have operationalized framing (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987 cited in Scheufele, 1999: 103). McCombs, Shaw, and Weaver (1997 cited in Scheufele, 1999: 103) have more recently proposed "that not only are agenda setting and framing effects related, framing is, in fact, an extension of agenda setting. They used the term second-level agenda-setting to describe the impact of the salience of characteristics of media coverage on audiences' interpretation of these news stories" (ibid).

Numerous studies on this theory have been carried out. The frame was described by Tuchman (1978: 1) as "principles of organization that govern events and their subjective context". For his part, Gamson (1989 cited in Oller, Alonso, 2014: 44) indicated that frame was just an idea to send or downplay such incidents to general institutions, stating what is newsworthy and what is not. So, the concept was used as a synonym for range, focus and exclusion by Gitlin (1980 cited in Oller, Alonso, 2014: 44).

2. Definitions

Gregory Bateson first posited the notion of framing in 1972. As a psychological system, he described it as a "spatial and temporary bounding of set of interactive messages" (Bateson, 1972: 197). This acts as a meta-communication method. Framing explains the practice within the familiar context of thinking about news stories and narrative content (ibid).

The fundamental principle of the concept of framing is that an issue should be presented from a number of viewpoints and perceived as having consequences for different principles or factors (Chong & Druckman, 2007: 104). Framing refers to the mechanism by which individuals create a clear conceptualization of a problem or reorient their thoughts about a major issue. Clearly, one's frame of mind may have a profound influence on one's overall view (ibid).

Communication scholars and political scientists generally use the term ''frame'' in two ways (Chong & Druckman, 2007: 101). First,"a frame in communication or a media frame refers to the words, images, phrases, and presentation styles that a speaker (e.g., a politician, a media outlet) uses when relaying information about an issue or event to an audience". The frame selected shows what the speaker sees as important to the issue at hand. In the Brooklyn Museum case, for example, the city's lawyer concentrated on the

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government's prerogative to withhold funds on the grounds of artistic content: ‘‘The city’s view of art is that it’s totally inappropriate, because of the nature of the art itself. the actual upsetting, violent, disgusting view of some of these paintings, they shouldn’t be supported by taxpayer money’’ (ibid).

Gamson and Modigliani (1987: 143) conceptually defined a media frame as “a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events . . The frame suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue”. Tuchman (1978: 193) gave a similar concept for media frames by interpreting media or news frames as required to turn irrelevant and non-recognizable happenings into a discernible event: “The news frame organizes everyday reality and the news frame is part and parcel of everyday reality . . . [it] is an essential feature of news”. Moreover, “Media frames also serve as working routines for journalists that allow the journalists to quickly identify and classify information and to package it for efficient relay to their audiences” (Gitlin, 1980: 7).

3. Types of Frames

3.1. Media Frames and Individual Frames

It may speak about media frames or frames in communication and frames in thinking or personal frames, depending on their location. Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007: 14) describe “the frames used by the media as macro-constructs, necessary to reduce the complexity of the issues and to adapt it to the needs and constraints of the media and the audiences, as well as to the interpretive schemas they were used to”. Frames become micro-constructions while in the minds of individuals who allow viewers to use the knowledge obtained to form their own perceptions and images of the world. News frames are features of the news itself, while facts and cognitive schemas are individual frames. (ibid)

Media frames are designed to arrange the narrated story with the use of the media's own instruments (written or spoken word, still or moving pictures, sounds and visual components of all sorts, etc.) in such a manner that it encourages, promotes, as Entman (1993: 53 cited in Ardèvol-Abreu, 2015: 431) points out, “a definition of the problem, an interpretation of the causes, a moral assessment and a recommended treatment”. In the other hand, the frames of people are frames of perception of fact and schemes in which new knowledge is introduced, meaning that they do not have a tangible manifestation (as do media frames), but may have an effect on individuals'

attitudes and actions. There are psychological phenomena shaped by influences such as cultures that are sociological (ibid).

3.2. Strong Frames and Weak Frames

A distinction between strong frames and weak frames has been suggested in answer to the convincing power of frames (Chong and Druckman, 2007: 104). They argue that "if one accepts that there are different types of frames, one cannot refuse the idea that frames are not all are equal in strength". A frame's power can be equated with the frame's attractiveness to the user or to the public and its potential for persuasion against an alternative frame. The power of the frame is difficult to calculate, however, as Chong and Druckman agree. The instruments, most widely used to calculate this intensity, are perception questionnaires and subjective scales, but they are not free from problems, particularly with regard to the precision of the measurement. (ibid)

A frame's relative intensity depends on a number of variables, such as frequency, usability and significance (Chong & Druckman, 2007: 104). Frequency is defined as the number of times and the number of media companies in which a frame repeats itself: the higher the frequency, the greater the influence. When it relies on considerations that are open to people who have already been introduced to the frame and have grasped it previously, the power of a frame appears to be higher. In contrast, accessibility and repetition are highly imprecated, since with repetition, the accessibility of a message increases.

3.3. Specific and Generic Frames

Framing literature also differentiates between general and individual frames (Ardèvol-Abreu, 2015: 432). Individual frames can only be extended to a specific subject or occurrence, while generalized frames can be applied to various events, and even to different physical, temporal, and cultural environments, with greater consistency. "The use of generic frames facilitates the comparison of the results of different research works carried out in different places and on different topics. Generic frames allow for the generalization needed to thicken the theoretical body of the framing". This work is complicated by the quest for clear frames, but in exchange it provides specific findings to analyze objectively the media treatment (and its reflection on the public) of a particular subject (ibid).

4. Characteristics of Framing Theory

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The method would be performed in a step-manner way from a theoretical point of view and would be exposed to conditioning influences and variables that could maximize or moderate the receiver effects, in the manner that arises with the transition of salience in the agenda-setting (Rhee, 1997: 37). For him, "framing is a socio-cognitive process that would develop in three steps":

1) The recognition of the comprehensive message; (ibid)

2) Integrating knowledge and comprehension and memorizing part of the interpreted content, in which not only the features of the language, but also the information implied by the interpreters, by their social knowledge and previous interactions, would play an important role; (ibid)

3) The creation of a discursive model, or the conceptual image of the characters, the actions done by or about them, the situations and the implications of a situation that can be then used to explain other related events. (ibid)

In the one side, only the manifest content of the message can be evaluated and one can attempt to understand the methods provided in the information's visual and verbal components (Ghanem 1997: 156). So, he "distinguishes four dimensions in the frames of the media: news subtopics, mechanisms that frame (size and location), cognitive attributes and affective attributes. The cognitive dimensions are tools that help to identify the significance of the issues, while the affective dimension focuses on the tone of the story and its narrative structure" (ibid). Studying the framing of a newspaper or a single article as a consequence, according to Dusaillant (2004: 54), "authors will find items that can each be classified in the various dimensions mentioned, which shows the almost infinite variety of ways in which the media can frame a piece of information".

The media is not meant to change how people think, nor what they think (Cohen, 1963: 13). Two stages are defined by recent research on agenda-setting (e. g., McCombs and Ghanem, 2001). Agenda-setting is associated with objects at a first stage (i.e., issues and candidates). Agenda-setting affects emotional and affective qualities on a second stage. Two distinct effects are thus mentioned: (Bertram Scheufele, 2004: 407)

Agenda-setting effect. The media decides whether recipients consider this object as important or not when highlighting an object (issue, candidate). (ibid)

Attribute-setting effect. The media influences the relevance of these characteristics for recipients by highlighting certain attributes of an object. (ibid)

From this point of view, "the media do not only determine what we think, but also how we think (Bertram Scheufele, 2004: 407). Frames are considered attributes of objects, and framing itself as the selection of attributes". In addition, framing is not only a function of the objects' characteristics (standards), but also a function of the objects themselves (ibid).

In the first stage, "the frame activates in the mind of the receivers an interpretive schema of the event they are trying to understand" (Ardèvol-Abreu, 2015: 435). The frame leads the user to a set of implicit content by a concept, a metaphor, an example, a definition, a statement, an image or a logic that does not need to be replicated in the text since, as described above, the frame feeds on the community and expresses itself in all sorts of social discourses. The substantive avalanche used to describe immigrants' arrival thus applies to a context in which immigrants are viewed as a challenge and a danger to the local population (ibid).

For both persons, activation is not the same since the concept of the issue proposed, the attributed source, the moral judgment or the suggestion made regarding the action to be followed can be taken into account or not by two individuals subjected to the same knowledge (Ardèvol-Abreu, 2015: 436). For this explanation, Van Gorp (2007: 65) notes that the frame is not in the text: the interaction with the frame relies on the significance assigned to what they have read, seen or learned by individuals.

However, "the text encourages the reader to go along a path of reasoning, of interpretation, based on the aforementioned framing devices, which would work as 'triggers' that would activate the frame in the decoding of the information" (Ardèvol-Abreu, 2015: 437). For instance, we're talking about choosing words, metaphors, instances, definitions, claims, and pictures (ibid).

Therefore, the acceptance of the frame is a dynamic process since there is no clear assumption by people and the public of the media frames: in addition to the multiple means of exposure to frames, moral boundaries and personal convictions play a part in the choosing and combination of media frames to establish the frame of the individual. For example, It indicates that the acceptance of frames is affected by such socio-demographic features (such as social status, political ideas or belonging to an ethnic minority) (ibid).

5. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive-analytical approach based on framing theory in media and communication studies. It applies framing theory to analyze a media article discussing youth unemployment and poverty in Iraq.

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The analysis focuses on identifying framing devices such as lexical choices, emotional language, source selection, repetition, narrative structure, and responsibility attribution. In addition, it examines the different types of frames presented in the article, including human-interest, conflict, responsibility, and economic consequence frames, in order to explain how media discourse shapes audience interpretation and public understanding of social issues. The study also investigates how these framing devices influence audience perception and interpretation of the issue.

6. Framing Analysis of a Media Article

6.1. Introduction

To demonstrate the practical application of framing theory, this section analyzes a media article discussing the issue of youth unemployment and poverty in Iraq. The article reflects one of the major social problems affecting Iraqi society and illustrates how media organizations frame social issues in ways that shape public understanding and audience interpretation. Through lexical choices, source selection, emotional narratives, and the presentation of social realities, the article employs several framing devices that influence readers' perceptions and attitudes toward the issue. This practical analysis applies the theoretical concepts of framing discussed previously in order to explain how media discourse constructs meaning and directs audience attention toward particular aspects of social reality.

6.2. Media Article Text

The following text is a constructed sample article designed for academic analysis purposes.

"Baghdad — Economic experts and social activists have expressed concern over the increasing rates of unemployment and poverty among Iraqi youth, warning that the crisis may lead to serious social and economic consequences in the future."

According to recent reports on youth unemployment and poverty in Iraq, thousands of university graduates remain unemployed despite completing their academic studies. Many young people stated that they struggle to find stable job opportunities because of weak investment projects, economic instability, and limited government support.

One unemployed graduate explained, "We spent years studying at university, but after graduation we cannot find jobs that match our qualifications. Many young people are losing hope about their future."

Social organizations have also emphasized that poverty levels are increasing in several Iraqi provinces due to rising living costs and limited employment opportunities. Some families are unable to provide basic daily needs, including healthcare and education.

Economic analysts believe that the government should introduce long-term development plans to support youth employment and encourage private-sector investment. However, critics argue that official responses remain slow and ineffective in dealing with the crisis.

Meanwhile, several demonstrations have taken place in Baghdad and other cities, where young protesters demanded job opportunities, economic reforms, and improved living conditions. Protesters carried banners calling for social justice and equal opportunities for all citizens.

Observers note that unemployment and poverty not only affect the economic situation of individuals, but also contribute to psychological pressure, social instability, and increased migration among young people seeking better opportunities abroad.

6.3. Analysis of Framing Devices

The article employs several framing devices that shape audience understanding of the issue. First, the headline emphasizes the seriousness of unemployment and poverty through the use of emotionally powerful expressions such as “continue to rise” and “crisis.” These lexical choices create a sense of urgency and encourage readers to perceive the issue as a serious national problem.

In addition, the article repeatedly focuses on economic instability, weak government support, and social suffering. Such repetition increases the salience of these aspects and directs audience attention toward the negative consequences of unemployment and poverty. The article also relies on emotional narratives by presenting the personal experience of an unemployed university graduate. This human dimension encourages sympathy and emotional engagement from readers.

Furthermore, the article highlights demonstrations and public protests, which reinforces the perception of social dissatisfaction and conflict between citizens and governmental institutions. The inclusion of protesters’ demands for social justice and economic reform strengthens the critical tone of the article toward official authorities.

Another important framing device appears in the selection of sources. The article gives greater attention to the perspectives of unemployed youth, social

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activists, and critics, while official governmental viewpoints are presented less prominently. This imbalance influences readers to interpret the government as partly responsible for the continuation of the crisis.

The article also uses descriptive vocabulary related to suffering and instability, such as "losing hope," "economic difficulties," and "social instability." These expressions increase the emotional impact of the article and shape the audience's interpretation of the issue from a humanitarian perspective.

Table 1. Framing Devices Used in the Article

Framing Device	Example from the Article	Intended Effect on Audience
Emotional Language	"losing hope", "social instability"	Creates sympathy and emotional engagement
Responsibility Frame	"weak government support"	Encourages readers to blame authorities
Conflict Frame	"demonstrations", "protesters demanded"	Highlights social tension and dissatisfaction
Human-Interest Frame	quotation from unemployed graduate	Personalizes the issue and increases empathy
Economic Consequences Frame	"rising living costs", "poverty levels"	Emphasizes the seriousness of the economic crisis
Repetition	repeated references to unemployment and poverty	Increases salience and audience attention

6.4. Types of Frames in the Article

Several types of frames can be identified in the article. The most noticeable frame is the human-interest frame, since the article focuses on personal experiences and emotional suffering faced by unemployed youth and poor families. By emphasizing human stories, the article seeks to create sympathy and emotional involvement among readers.

The responsibility frame is also clearly visible throughout the article. The media text repeatedly refers to weak government support, ineffective official responses, and economic policies as major causes of unemployment and poverty. As a result, responsibility for the crisis is indirectly attributed to governmental institutions.

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In addition, the conflict frame appears through the discussion of demonstrations and disagreements between citizens and authorities regarding economic conditions and social reforms. The article presents social protests as evidence of dissatisfaction and tension within society.

Moreover, the economic consequences frame is strongly represented because the article continuously highlights the financial effects of unemployment, rising living costs, and economic instability on individuals and families. This frame encourages readers to view the issue mainly from an economic perspective.

6.5. Audience Interpretation and Effects

According to framing theory, media frames influence how audiences understand and interpret events and social issues. In this article, the repeated focus on suffering, poverty, unemployment, and governmental failure may lead readers to perceive the issue as an urgent social and economic crisis requiring immediate solutions.

The use of emotional language and personal stories encourages readers to sympathize with unemployed youth and affected families. At the same time, the emphasis on governmental weakness may shape negative public attitudes toward official institutions and increase demands for reform and economic development.

Furthermore, the article guides the audience toward interpreting unemployment not only as an economic issue, but also as a social and psychological problem affecting stability, hope, and future opportunities among young people. This supports Entman's (1993) argument that framing works through selecting certain aspects of reality and making them more prominent in communication.

6.6. Conclusion

The practical analysis shows that framing theory is useful for understanding how media presents social issues. The article on unemployment and poverty in Iraq uses different frames, such as human-interest, responsibility, conflict, and economic consequences, to highlight the seriousness of the problem. It focuses on unemployment, social suffering, weak government support, and protests, which leads readers to see the issue as an urgent national problem. The use of emotional language and personal experiences increases sympathy toward affected groups and may also influence critical views of official institutions. Overall, the study confirms that media

does not only report events but also shapes audience understanding by selecting and emphasizing certain aspects of reality.

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