

## **Interrogating the Nexus between Framing and News Writing in Journalism Practice**

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### **Abstract**

Millions of curious citizens turn to the mass media daily to feed their inquisitive minds about current events. It is an established fact that the news media not only provide one of the major means of perceiving reality, but they have become the arena for the battle of ideas in the society (Agee, Ault & Emery, 2002; Devito, 2001; Baran & Davies, 2007). One influential way that the media may shape public opinion is by framing occurrences and issues in particular ways. Frames in the news may affect learning, interpretation and evaluation of affairs and happenings (Entman, 1991). Accordingly, framing has a significant impact on news content and the perception and understanding of matters by readers, viewers and listeners. Consequently, it has important implications for the balance of public opinion. Additionally, the subtle, often non-conscious nature of frames to direct for many citizens what set of beliefs or information is cued for subsequent evaluations is an immense power. Thus, frames are fundamental aspects of human consciousness and shape people's attitudes towards the world and each other. Therefore, taking into cognizance the definitional and descriptive roles of framing on political, economic and social issues, it is necessary to give an incisive and insightful analysis of the concept, as it cannot be ignored in the practice of Journalism.

**Key concepts:** Framing, News, Journalism, Agenda Setting, Priming

### **Introduction**

As established by Chong & Druckman (2007) in Rabiou (2018), frames in communication matter – that is, they affect the attitudes and behaviours of their audiences. Framing is a media skill that profoundly affects how members of the society understand and respond to the world in which they live. The vast universe is out of reach. Therefore, when connecting with the world outside our family, neighbourhood and workplace, we deal with second-hand reality created by journalists and their media organisations, the major painters and projectors of social reality. They determine how events and matters are perceived on the national and international scenes.

A basic premise of framing is selection; some things are chosen and others are rejected. Framing expert, Entman (1991) sees the essence of framing as sizing – magnifying or shrinking elements of the depicted reality to make them more or less salient (pronounced). Emphasising the importance of framing, Entman (1993, p. 86) argues that “When the media highlight a certain piece of information about the topic of a news story, they raise the salience of the issue”. Torwel (2015) further affirms that framing is the selective representation of reality.

Framing is based on the assumption that the way an issue is characterised or described in news reports can have an influence on how it is understood by audiences. Reporters use words, and words are powerful raw materials for bringing about realities. Therefore, headlines and storylines are clear tools of framing and agenda setting. Thus, framing is about the selection, emphasis and presentation of issues in the mass media. It answers the question: What details were chosen, stressed and projected? Frames in the news can be examined and identified by the presence or absence of certain key words, stock phrases,

stereotype images, sources of information (attribution), sentences that provide thematically reinforcing cluster of facts or judgments. Tankard (2001) cited in de Vreese (2003) suggests a list of eleven framing mechanisms or focal points for identifying and measuring news frames: Headlines, Sub-heads, Photos, Captions, Leads, Source selection, Quote selection, Full quotes, Logos, Statistics and charts, Concluding statements and paragraphs.

Therefore, framing provides illumination on how the news media direct for many citizens what set of beliefs or information is cued for subsequent evaluation which leads to decision making. The significance of framing is emphasized by Epkins (2011) cited in Obaje (2016) when he notes that framing describes the process of content selection and exclusion, highlighting certain aspects over others to communicate a particular point of view. Accordingly, the basic characteristic of framing is choice of details to prioritise some facts, images or developments over others, thereby promoting one particular interpretation of events. As a result, the concept of framing consistently offers a way to describe the power of a communicating text.

## **B. Conceptual Clarification: Framing; News; News Writing; News Reporting**

### **1, Framing:**

According to de Vreese (2005), framing involves a communication source presenting and defining an issue. Thus, frames can be defined as patterns of interpretation that is used to classify information and process it efficiently (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2012). In this way, frames stress certain aspects of reality (elaborate) and push others into the background (exclude). Therefore, they have a selective function. Hence, certain attributes, judgments and decisions are suggested. In support of this definition, Mcleod & Shah (2008) add that framing is a cognitive process in which the message affects how individuals weigh existing considerations (i.e political or other orientations, and relevant attitudes and beliefs) to make a judgment. Therefore, framing involves knowledge activation and use in the reasoning process.

Obaje (2016), who evaluated newspaper coverage of Boko Haram attacks in Nigeria, identified the following ten patterns of frames used by newspapers:

- a) **Response Frame:** Stories on Boko Haram that dwell on the response from government.
- b) **Powerless Frame:** Stories on Boko Haram showing that the sect members were more powerful, and security agencies could not do anything.
- c) **Political Frame:** Stories on Boko Haram that connect the attacks to politics in the country.
  - a. **Human Interest:** Stories on Boko Haram that show the human interest angle, more than anything else.
- d) **Conspiracy Frame:** Stories on Boko Haram showing that certain persons are behind the attacks.
- e) **Attribution of Responsibility Frame:** Stories on Boko Haram that lay blame on certain people, organisations or government for the act.
- f) **Ethnicity Frame:** Stories that relate Boko Haram act to ethnicity.
- g) **Religious Frame:** Stories that relate Boko Haram acts to religious practices.
- h) **Economic Frame:** Stories on Boko Haram that show economic effects of the attacks.
- i) **Labeling Frame:** Stories on Boko Haram that refer to the sect with names like terrorists, an Islamic sect, an evil group, religious fundamentalists, a militant group, etc.

However, in his assessment of newspaper framing of the April 16, 2011 Presidential Elections in Nigeria, Rabi (2018) recognised the following four frames discerned by Porto (2001) as applied by Brazilian journalists in the coverage of the Year 2000 US Presidential Elections:

1. **Thematic Frame:** This refers to interpretative patterns that focus on candidates' issue positions and proposals. The emphasis of news stories adopting this frame work is on the platforms and programmes represented by the different candidates.
2. **Horse-race Frame:** This focuses on the evolution of the campaign as a race among candidates. The emphasis is on who is advancing and who is falling behind, and, therefore, on polling numbers and on campaign strategies of the candidates.
3. **Personality-centered Frame:** This is the tendency of the media to give preference to individual actors and to adopt human interest angles in events, while downplaying institutional and political considerations. It describes news stories that focus on the personal characteristics of the candidates and other major actors, including explanations of their abilities and qualities and voters' responses to them as persons.
4. **Episodic Frame:** In this type of coverage, journalists basically report current campaign events and the beliefs of actors, usually limiting themselves to quoting their statements. It is an event-centered news story that reports the facts or actors' statements, adopting a more descriptive mode of coverage.

Fountaine and McGregor (1999) cited in Degarr and Okpeh (2016) provide us with two relevant common sense understanding of what it means to "frame". First, the media can be said to frame events and issues in the same way as a photographer frames a photograph, choosing what parts to leave out. Media framing can also be linked to the frame of a house providing the structure around which everything else fits, and influencing overall style of construction.

Metaphorically, framing can be additionally compared with a window frame: We cannot all see the same news the same way from the same news window. When four reporters look outward from the same window of news, the first may see a gutter or a crime scene, the second may see people fighting or people actively engaged in various businesses, the third may see a celebrity singing or a soccer scene and the forth may see a clear, blue sky or a cloudy and stormy horizon.....different kaleidoscope, different angles of vision (perspectives). Therefore, what a news gatherer sees and reports depends on where the editorial policy of his media organisation stands.

## 2, News

News is one of the most influential public spheres of contemporary society, perceived as opening trustworthy and accurate stories about the world, its events and people. Thus, it is something people cannot stop talking about because it concerns them or they are interested in it. Rivers (2004) notes that man has always had the "appetite" for news, and his "hunger" for it has increased through the years. Accordingly, Journalism seeks to feed and satisfy man's curiosity about his neighbours, other people on his street, in his town, in his city, in his state, in his country, in his continent and ultimately, in the entire world that he shares with others. Along this line, Stovall (2005, p. 2) asserts that "News is the major product of Journalism".

News must be current, compelling and correct. It must also mean something to people. As defined by Fuller (2006, p. 6) in Rabiou (2018, p. 210), "News is a report of what a news organisation has recently learnt about matters of some significance or interest to the specific community that news organisation serves". According to Rivers (2004), news is a timely report of significant events, facts and opinions that are of interest to a large number of people. To Shrivastava (2003), news is an account of a recent event or opinion which is important and interesting.

In the eyes of Mencher (1993), news has three basic determinants: impact, unusualness and prominence. Similarly, many other journalism scholars (Neal & Brown, 2006; Overbeck & Pasqua, 2003; Ogunsiji, 1999; Padhye, 1991; Folarin, 1996; Itule & Anderson, 2007; Harcup, 2012 etc) point out that prominence, among other factors (e.g timeliness, proximity, unusualness, impact, human interest etc.) influence whether a story should be done or not. Accordingly, journalists identify, select and produce news items according to occupational norms, including the concept of what will interest a particular audience. Therefore, news is a social construct because reporters, as gatekeepers, admit or exclude events. Andrew (2010) further explains that the concept of news is anchored on three legs:

- a. **Event:** Something that has happened, is happening or will happen. Before a reporter can ever talk of news, there must be an event.
- b. **Report:** The reporter selects what goes into the newspaper/broadcast station, taking into cognizance news values, editorial policy and imperatives of space (for newspaper) and time (for radio and television).
- c. **Audience:** These are the targets of news reports. There are three different kinds of audiences, according to Andrew (2010):
  1. The serious-minded, sophisticated and intelligent people who go for serious stories and articles about the economy, politics and also editorials etc. These are members of the high society, also known as the elites or The Establishment.
  2. The less sophisticated, gross people or chattering masses who are only interested in scandalous stories, news stories and gossips about celebrities, and other light-hearted materials like entertainment, cartoons, word games, pools betting etc.
  3. The specialised audiences who go for business stories, sports stories etc.

In the words of Stovall (2005, p. 2), "News is one of the main ways in which a society examines itself". That examination provides an important means by which the society can find solutions to its problems. It helps individuals in society make decisions about their lives and actions.

### 3, News Writing

Journalism is concerned with news writing and reporting as practised in the print (newspapers and magazines) and broadcast media (radio and television). The Internet, through which non-specialists practise citizen journalism (also known as participatory journalism) bridges or interconnects the print and the broadcast media. In this connection, Dodge and Viner (2006) say that whether it is in radio, television or newspaper, the news writer is to find the news and pass it on. In carrying out this task, Four Cs (4Cs) are involved, according to Rich (2010): Conceive (the story idea), Collect the facts, Construct the story and Correct the story: the reporter reviews and re-writes his story, as the first editor over his copy). Crump (2004) notes that although journalistic writing uses the fine points common to all English usage, it is a particular type of writing. Journalistic writing, according to him, is a form of expression that seeks to interpret a group of facts, frequently highly technical or confusing, for the understanding of the reading audience. Therefore, readers should not have to strain or struggle to understand what is written.

As further explained by Harcup (2012), the starting point of journalism is that the news story should answer the 5Ws & H in the opening paragraph, called the lead. This is because news should be specific, not general; clear, not vague. Consequently, telling the 5Ws & H is one way of achieving this. Furthermore, news is written in a simple declarative sentence (Subject-Verb-Object) that states the doer of the action (the subject of the story: a person, an institution a concept etc.), what he did (the action, expressed in an active verb: news is about actions and

activities) and the receiver of that action (object of the sentence). Example: The president, Muhammadu Buhari, launched his 2019 presidential re-election campaigns yesterday in Daura, Katsina State.

News is constructed in active and concise language with emphasis on short sentences and short paragraphs. In this regard, Rich (2010) emphasises that in writing the news, the reporter must KISS (KeeP It Short and Simple) and tell his story.

Also Lea (2007) amplifies the point that reporters ought to show the ability to write clearly, crisply and concisely. For example, newspapers provide for those readers who want detailed information on a wide range of news and current affairs. The information is presented in the historical “Inverted Pyramid Formula” that directly reports Who did What, Where, When, Why and How. These are called the 5Ws & H of news writing or the Six Serving Servants of the reporter. The facts are given in a descending order of importance, from the first paragraph, carrying the most important news point, to the last paragraph, which reports the least important point.

Significantly, news writing is a test of professional competence. “Professional”, here, means the reporter has something to say about his field (of journalism) and the field of news gathering and reporting that this fellow professionals and members of the mass audience would want to listen to, watch or read.

#### **4, News Reporting**

According to Dodge and Viner (2006), to report the news is to say what is happening (current events), what has happened (in the recent past) or what will happen (scheduled or predictable events such as meetings, convocation ceremonies, political parties’ conventions, football matches etc). To Nwabueze (2009), news reporting is the process of giving account of news events through a medium to a mass audience. He further describes reporters as news hunters. They can also be described as content providers. Similarly, Agee, Ault and Emery (2002) comment that the reporter generates reports on local, national or international events. He or she combines writing with news gathering and interpretation.

Notably, man does not live on bread alone. His other necessity is communication. In this connection, Journalism performs an explanatory function to the society (Rabiu, 2007). It is into exposition. What happened? To whom? Where? When? Why? How? These are the questions lying at the heart of the study and functions of journalism. The occupation of journalism is news, news and news all the time. It must seek it, pursue it and ensure it through the channels of mass communication (newspapers, magazines, radio, television and the social media). Essentially, Journalism has forever watchful eyes.

Therefore, the essential act of journalism is gathering information; and this is done by reporters. Accordingly, they are the starting point of Journalism. They are the ones who begin the process before many other people in the chain – editors at various levels – who contribute to the news that we read, watch and hear every day. Thus, without them, journalism could not be practised. From the points so far, it is clear that reporters are society’s memory and what they record helps write the history of the future. In this connection, Stovall (2005) states that journalists tell us about ourselves, and in doing so, they perform a role that is not just important but vital for our society. The information they provide gives us a context for our personal world view and a connection to a larger environment. In this regard, journalists supply information that helps us weave together what we hear from friends, family and read from bulletin boards etc. Thus, directly or indirectly, journalism touches every part of our lives. And not only does it affect



us personally, it also has a profound effect on the society that we live in. This effect takes form at many levels – political, economic, and social. As a result, Rabi (2013) observes that journalism is a form of cartography. In consequence, it creates a map for citizens to navigate the society, and so, the map should be reliable. Journalism is a job for every day, every week, every month and every year. It is enduring, everlasting and endless.

### **C. Theoretical Underpinning**

This exploration is primarily grounded in framing analysis. The manner in which media messages are framed influence how people understand and interpret the world. The research on framing has a history in both sociology and psychology (Reese, 2001) cited in Alawode and Fatonji (2018). Furthermore, research has shown that how information is framed can lead to reversal of preferences. The twin acts of selection and salience are key in Entman's (1993) definition of framing. In the process of communication, Entman explains that some bits of information can be highlighted through "placement or repetition" (p. 53) and thus made to achieve greater salience (prominence) for receivers/audiences. The importance of repetition, emphasis or stress in media framing is also something that Nelson, Clawson and Oxley (1997) in Rabi (2018) agree with when they suggest that "media frames influence opinions by stressing specific values, facts or considerations endowing them with greater apparent relevance to the issue than they might appear to have under an alternative frame" (p. 569). At the same time as frames include and stress, they also exclude or de-emphasise some other things. Entman (1993) in Alawode and Fatonji (2018, p. 100) observes:

Most frames are defined by what they omit as well as include, and the omission of potential problem definitions, explanations, evaluations and recommendations might be as critical as inclusions in guiding the audience".

As Galadima and Soola (2012) in Rabi (2018, p. 133) explain, "News framing is a theory that emerged from the agenda setting functions of the mass media which states that themes of life covered by the media are regarded as worthy of attention by readers and audiences". Thus, the media decide their priorities. Hence, the notion that those aspects of public affairs that are outstanding in the news become prominent among members of the public. Therefore, there is a transfer of salience (significance) from the media agenda to the public agenda. It is assumed that the more the media attention given to a topic, the greater is the importance attributed to it by the news audience or readers.

Therefore, according to Galadima and Soola (2012) in Rabi (2018, p. 133), "Framing theory refers to a central organising idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion and elaboration". In other words, framing is done when the news media select certain aspects of events, emphasise such aspects to the exclusive of others and continuously elaborate it. This explains why Baran and Davies (2007) point out that while agenda setting supported Cohen's (1963) position that the media do tell us "What to think about", framing tells us "How to think about" issues in the news. In telling us how to think about issues, news frame adopts different devices such as metaphors, catchy phrases, depiction, visual images and appeals to principles.

In the understanding of Galadima and Soola (2012) in Rabi (2018), news frames have shaped public perception of political issues and institutions because of two factors:

1. News frames are always couched in such a way that the readers/audiences may not easily detect their bias. This is because subtle changes in the wording or description of situations might affect how readers/audiences interpret such situations.
2. Frames are sometimes defined by those in power and are then picked up and used by the news media. This is so because journalists reflect the norms and values of the cultural context in which they work and thus draw on the tools provided by the hegemonic ideology when constructing news frames.

As noted by Okoro and Nwafor (2018), framing theory has attracted extensive literature (Norris, 2015; Entman, 2013; Callaghan, 2015; Chong, 2017; McCombs, 2014; Knypers, 2017). According to communication and media scholars, framing was viewed from the point of either theory or approach of analyzing media content and messages (Entman, 2012, Druckman, 2017 and Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2017) in Okoro and Nwafor (2018). Thus, McQuail (2015) looks at framing theory as a philosophical postulation that explains the way in which news content is typically shaped and contextualized by journalists. This explains that journalists deliberately create, select and shape news stories in particular frames to reflect the reality they wish to form or create. Entman (2003) agrees that framing involves selection and salience, which means a certain aspect of issues is constructed to appear as perceived reality and made more conspicuous in a communication text in a way that “promotes a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and or treatment recommendations for the item described” (Entman, 2013, p. 52) cited in Okoro and Nwafor, 2018, p. 172). However, Entman argues that a frame must provoke existing elements for it to be successful.

At the same time, Okoro and Nwafor (2018) observe that despite the justification of framing theory, the theory has come under criticism. Thus McCombs (2004) in Okoro and Nwafor (2018) argues that framing is not strong enough to be seen as a theory but, rather a part or sub-set of agenda setting theory. Nevertheless, some media scholars raise a counterpoint against McComb’s criticism of framing theory. In their view, there exists a meeting and difference point among framing, agenda setting and priming (Lee, 2010; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007 & Weaver, 2007). The suitability of this theory to the investigation derives from the Nwafor, Odoemelan and Duru (2013) argument which suggests that while agenda setting and priming deal with “which” issue received media prominence, frequency and what effect on readers, framing deals with “how” such are constructed in the media.

Framing theory calls attention to Frank Luntz’s mantra – “It’s not what is said that is important; it is what people hear” (Fayoyin, 2016, p. 13) – which shows the importance of how messages are packaged. Clearly, it offers some insights into the fact that information packaging is critical when seeking to attract attention to issues. Its essence is how issues are depicted and coded rather than which issues or objects are more or less reported. Primarily, it deals with how symbols and images are used to evoke specific action from the audience. Although as a theory of media effect, news framing has been criticised on a number of fronts, including theoretic vagueness, incomparable methods, fractured paradigm, scattered conceptualisation, weak definition and deficient industrialisation (Weaver, 2017; Entman, 1992) in Fayoyin (2016), its principles are relevant to how development agencies (e.g United Nations Development Programme, UNDP, and United Nations International Children’s Education Fund, UNICEF), journalists and other writers try to influence the mind set of various decision makers through the strategic manipulations of symbols.

According to Ikuomola and Ikuomola (2011) cited in Degarr and Okpeh (2016, p. 62), “Framing theory is a new research tool to analyse the study of media and how they report

events". Since its adoption, it has provided a useful conceptual tool to examine, among others, how political events are covered. It is relevant to the contemporary study of politics because it suggests how the news media cover events and issues and how individuals make sense of these events. Media framing is based on the assumption that how an issue is presented in news reports can have an influence on how it is understood by audiences. Put in other words, framing theory and the concept of framing bias suggest that the way a report is constructed (the "frame") influences the choices people make. This idea is important because it is contrary to the central concept of rational choice theory, which says people always strive to make the most cogent choices possible. Thus, rational choosers should always make the same decision when given the same data.

#### **D. The Inevitability of Framing in Journalistic Practice**

One influential way the print and broadcast media may shape public opinion is by framing (selecting, emphasising and presenting) an issue. According to Severin and Tankard (2001) in Rabi'u (2018), a frame is the emphasis placed on the salience of different aspects a topic. Thus it is evident that news framing by the news media organises everyday reality for readers and audiences, and leads them to accept one meaning over another. Therefore, the essence of framing is choice of details to prioritise some facts, images or development over others, thereby promoting one particular interpretation of events. Severin and Tankard (2001) in Rabi'u (2018) explain that the basis of framing theory is that the news media focus attention on certain events and then place them within a field of meaning. According to them, the theory explains how the print and electronic media cover various events, determine what is included and excluded, what kind of language, tones or details are used, and also the effects of all these decisions on readers and audiences. In the news room, gatekeepers provide not just mere facts but also meaning. However, just as, for example, the newspaper publishing house makes selections about what to publish and how to publish it, readers, too, select which newspaper to read and what contents, in their selected newspaper, they pay attention to. Therefore, selection is a fundamental part of journalism practice. For that reason, Baran and Davies (2009) point out that the basis of the framing theory is that the media focus attention on certain events and then place them within a field of meaning. And this field of meaning can have effect on the readers' or audiences' beliefs and attitudes by connecting a particular meaning or interpretation on an issue. For example, when a reporter selects a topic that he is going to write about, he is, inevitably, drawing the readers' or audiences' attention to a particular topic, which is the original concept behind the agenda setting theory. However, the way or frame in which the information is presented to the readers or audiences is also decided by the reporter and the gatekeepers in the newsroom.

Accordingly, the framing theory refers to, not only how the readers or audiences are affected and interpret what is presented to them by the news media (Micro Framing), but also refers to the news media's ability to persuade their readers or audiences to accept one meaning of a concept over another (Macro Framing). Thus, the print and broadcast media are major painters and projectors of social reality. Trench (2003) points out that the mass media give perspectives to our understanding of the social world. Thus, they frame public life and learning. And the public uses these frames to interpret social reality. Among other things, they tell stories that shape the political world. In line with this function in the United States, the mass media are often called the Fourth Branch of Government or the Fourth Estate. That is because they monitor the political process in order to ensure that political players do not abuse the democratic process. Others call the media the Fourth Branch of Government because they play such an important role in the fortunes of political candidates and issues. And this is where the role of the media can become

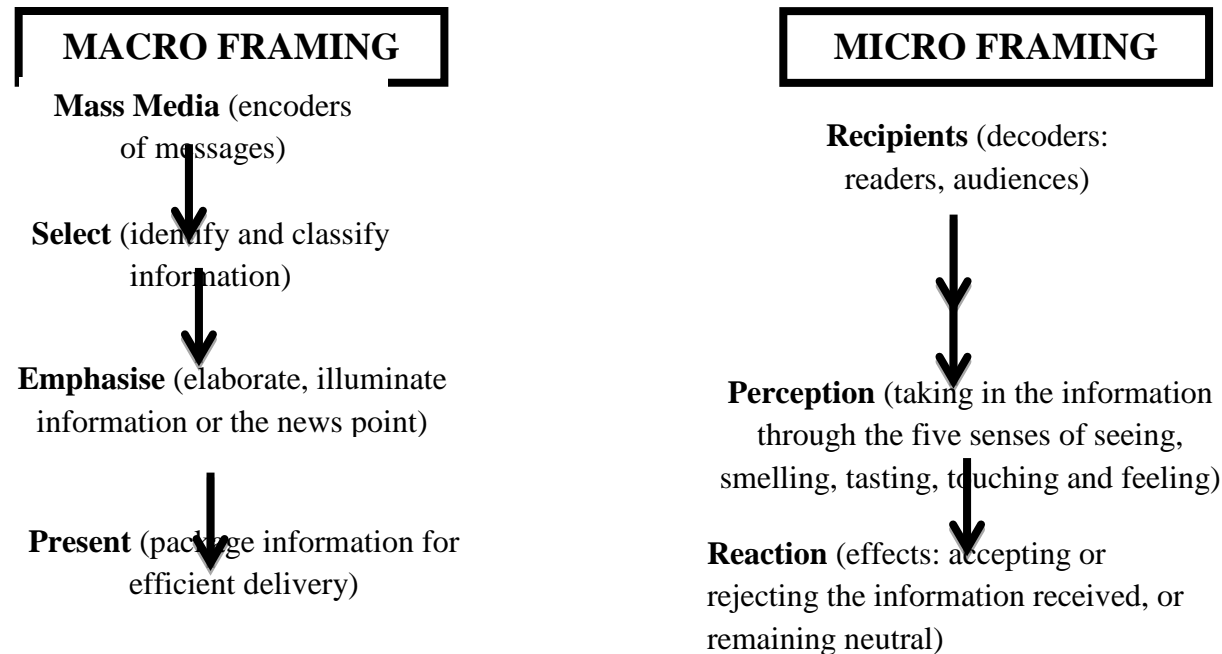


controversial. News reporting is supposed to be objective but journalists are people with feelings, opinions and preconceived ideas all of which guide how they frame their stories.

Goffman (1974) remarks that daily life involves countless shifts in frames (reframing), and these shifts are negotiated using social cues (information).

#### E. Framing at Macro and Micro Levels

From the discussion so far, it is clear that framing explains the functions that the mass media have on the definition and description of reality. In consequence, framing can be seen and addressed from content creation by the media (macro framing) and audience reception (micro framing) by the individual recipient of the messages from the mass media. These ideas are illustrated below:



#### F. Framing, Agenda Setting and Priming

Framing relates to agenda setting and readers or audiences, and thus they belong to (2007).

Devito (2001) defines agenda setting as issues are important in the society. Oboh (2014) comments that members of the public would not value upon. Thus, media sources influence perception of the day. The transmission of object salience, the level of agenda setting, where the news media set to do with the ability of the media to mentally or subjects in the news. In other words, agenda setting reported". Here, the news media raise issues about consider vital to the platform of public discourse cover some issues instead of others can influence Members of the public would normally place value essence, the more the media cover an issue, the more

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issue is for the public. Thus, the public learns the relative importance of issues from the mass media.

The transmission of attribute salience, both among the mass media and from the media to the public, is the second level, called framing (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007) in Rabi (2018). Attribute salience has to do with how the mass media define and describe issues in the news about people, personalities and institutions using words, phrases, sources, pictures etc.

Oboh (2014, p. 57), says in framing, “Journalists prioritise certain elements of an event and use them to form the report and its direction. According to him, this is done with the intention of persuading the readers/audiences to interpret the events in a manner in which they are written and presented by journalists. Thus, reporters determine the direction of news reports on public events and write their stories to elicit the kind of response they desire to get from their target readers or audiences. The media, having set agenda to discuss an issue that is of public importance, also ensure that they frame, or construct their stories on the issue to elicit the kind of response they desire to have from their target readers/audiences. As explained, this is the second phase of the agenda setting theory, where the media actually influence the members of the public to toe a particular line of action – to either support or oppose – an issue that is of public importance.

Of course, the significance of media framing lies in its ability to influence the way in which various readers, listeners and viewers come to gain an understanding of developing events. As Oboh (2014, p. 57) further explains, “The way journalists usually frame newspaper stories on government programmes of activities could influence the interpretations and meanings the members of the public would attach to the report of the media on the issue”.

As Gerald (2005) points out, nowhere in the world is the journalist free to write exactly as he wishes. Necessarily, he has to reckon with the editorial policy of the newspaper, which may be directed by the social, political or economic interest of the publisher. Oboh (2014) agrees with this view by adding that the editorial policy of a news media house normally determines its position on public issues. He further observes that the editorial mission of a newspaper usually determines the choice of words that the journalists working for the newspaper would use to frame their stories in order to convey the predetermined position of the media on the issue.

So far, it is obvious that framing is related to the agenda setting theory since both of them bring certain topics when news items occur. However, framing expands its context by focusing on the essence of the issue at hand rather than on a particular topic. It moves beyond what is on the agenda towards how the agenda is constructed. While agenda setting emphasises what stories are selected and which priorities guide the selection and placement of the news items, framing is concerned with the manner in which stories are built, how meaning is constructed. Therefore, news frames are embodied in the key words, metaphors, concepts, symbols and visual images emphasized in a news narrative.

The third concept related to framing, priming, is about elevating certain issues over others (Scheufele, 2000) in Rabi (2018). Therefore, selected stories are graded according to front page news (the most important), back page news (second most important) and inside page stories (least important). Even on the front page, the stories vary in significance as indicated by the varied sizes of the headlines – the boldest headline (the splash) indicates the most consequential story on that prime page. Gorp (2007) says priming demonstrates the influence of remarkable

media issues on the selection criteria that people use to evaluate political actors or our electoral voting behaviours.

Accordingly, framing, agenda setting and priming are the three models of media effects by which they can influence public attitudes and responses towards their messages, to ensure that the members of their target audience respond with the expected stimuli in line with the hope and expectations of the media sources. Gorp (2007, p. 8) asserts that “They contribute, each in its own right, to our understanding of the media and their impact”.

#### **G. Framing: Positive or Negative?**

According to McQuail (2000), framing can be understood in both positive and negative terms. Positively, it can be used as a learning process in which readers acquire communication beliefs and it has the capability to coordinate readers around serious social norms. Thus, individuals overcome collective action problems by developing shared frames (messages and meanings) about their predicaments and agreeing on the best course of action on the social level. Frames may contribute to shaping social level processes e.g. political socialisation, decision making and collective action. Negatively, it can be deployed as a potent strategy to manipulate and deliver readers or audiences, in the opinion of McQuail (2000) .

Framing works at three levels to make one issue more important than another:

1. By making new beliefs available about an issue.
2. By making certain available beliefs accessible.
3. By making beliefs applicable or strong in people’s evaluations.

A review of media effects research suggests that the concept of framing in mass communication research can be expressed using the following five sets of related propositions:

1. From the world of possible new events, journalists act as gatekeepers, selecting issues, topics and events to process and report “the news”.
2. Because of limited space, time and resources, however, many issues, topic and events are ignored and not published as news.
3. For these issues, topics and events that do become news, the same constraints – space, time and resources – prevent journalists from including all possible perspectives and therefore news stories, necessarily, emphasise only certain values, facts and other considerations.
4. Beyond attending to various prominence cues to inform their importance (this process is known as the agenda setting process), citizens who consume news content come to understand each news event using the limited spectrum of values, facts and other considerations included in the news story.
5. Therefore, by emphasizing specific values, facts and other considerations, news media frame all news, endowing those particular values, facts and other considerations with greater apparent applicability for making related judgment than they might otherwise have been given, promoting particular definitions, interpretations, evaluations and recommendations for the described items.

London (2005) points out that since its adoption by researchers, framing has provided a useful conceptual tool to explain, among others, how political events are covered. It is relevant to the contemporary study of politics because it suggests how the news media report events and issues and how individuals make sense of these events and issues.

#### **H. Conclusion:**

Many people depend on the news media not only for information about political and other events but also understanding and interpretation. And here lies the relevance and role of

framing in the practice of journalism. As Schneider and Theriault (2004) observe, the news media are recognised as framing or constructive forces that contribute to the production of social reality in general and to the understanding of the nature of specific social problems in particular. Therefore, while the news media reflect what goes on in a community, they also shape social phenomena in important ways. Much of this is done through framing or constructing people's collective knowledge and perceptions of reality about politics and conflicts etc., and subsequently their opinions and behaviours.

Thus, the world would look differently to different people for guidance, depending on the map that is drawn for them by the reporters, writers and editors of the various news media. By virtue of emphasising some elements of a topic above others, a frame provides a way of understanding an event or issue. It is a working routine that allows journalists to quickly identify and classify information, and to package it for efficient relay to their readers and audiences. Therefore, the way news events are presented has a tremendous influence on how such news events are perceived and therefore, affect the choices people make. Accordingly, framing says the media and their reporters and editors have a function of defining and describing reality, as issues can be arranged and presented in multiple fashions, and influence citizens' ensuing issue consideration and level of support. Significantly, what we see in the news media highly influences how we see others, ourselves and the world. As a result, an ability to analyse media depictions is a key element of being media literate. It is essential to understand many of the social issues and concerns that we face today as citizens. The mass media can empower or disempower, depending on what is included or excluded and how it is reported. For this reason, it has become relatively impossible for politicians and other seekers after publicity, to ignore the good will of reporters.

Consequently, framing shows that there is no neutral journalism anywhere in the world. Accordingly, every kind of journalism, globally, must stand for something. For example, a newspaper that stands for nothing is faceless and lacks backbone. Thus it is not likely to be recognised, read and respected by serious and sophisticated readers. Journalists shape stories using the tone and direction that suggest the angle from which the media want the target readers/audiences to evaluate the story. Thus, it is possible for two newspapers to have different versions of a news report regarding the same event, depending on how each of the journalists chooses to frame the direction of the news story. Conclusively, framing validates the point that various media sources tell different versions of the same reality. As the Greek proverb says, every tale can be told differently (Samovar & Porter, 2003).

## **I. Recommendations**

In the light of this discussion, the following three recommendations are hereby made:

- a) Since newsmen and editors can perform a key role in baring facts, shaping public opinion and generating political actions, they should use these powers to fulfill useful social missions. They should live and work so that citizens and communities may have fuller and richer lives. Reporters and editors should tell, as accurately as possible, the shared realities of their society or culture.
- b) Reporters need to continue efforts to include more points of views in their reporting. The society they cover is increasingly diverse not just ethnically but also in attitude and spirit. Those who continue to reflect the information and attitudes of traditional sources will miss a great deal of the stories they are asked to cover and more seriously, they will lose touch with their readers. Accordingly, news hunters should learn to reach beyond their own attitudes and experiences.
- c) News gatherers should inform and not inflame or inflate. Puffing up events for sensation, neglecting others, stereotyping or being disproportionately negative are not among the best journalistic tendencies. Keeping news in proportion and not leaving important things out are also

cornerstones of truthfulness. The news should include all newsworthy people. This is best achieved by newsrooms with a diversity of backgrounds and perspectives.

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