

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

## Between Frame Setting and Frame Sending: How Journalists Contribute to News Frames

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*Framing has grown into a thriving approach to analyze media content and effects. Research on frame building is less well developed. In particular, journalists' contributions to shaping the frames in the news deserve further analysis. This article conceptualizes these contributions to creating news frames: Journalistic framing practices are situated on a continuum between frame setting and frame sending. Journalists frame their articles more or less in line with their own interpretations. The challenge for research is to identify the conditions that determine the degree of journalistic frame setting. The article therefore identifies mechanisms and factors that play a role in determining to what degree journalistic frame enactment takes place.*

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Doing journalism is a process of public sense-making (Hartley, 1996). Journalism is about interpreting the world. This is why the framing approach is a powerful tool to analyze journalistic practices: It focuses on communication as a process of making sense of the world. Yet, within the wealth of framing research, journalists' contributions to shaping the frames in the news is an area that deserves further attention. Therefore, this article tackles the question of how to conceptualize and measure journalists' contribution to news frames.

Frames are *patterns of interpretation* rooted in culture and articulated by the individual (e.g., Entman, 1993; Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson, 1992, p. 384; Pan & Kosicki, 2003; Reese, 2007; van Gorp, 2007). Looking at journalistic practice through the lens of the framing approach is relevant for at least two reasons.

Firstly, the framing approach opens up a fruitful perspective on journalistic practices as it goes beyond and is able to integrate other views on journalism. The perspective opened up by the framing approach is different from studies of news values and gatekeeping that mainly see journalism as a process of *selecting* events for publication drawing on criteria of newsworthiness. Journalists do not only select topics and events for publication. The framing approach also goes beyond studying value judgments articulated in coverage, which is at the heart of studies

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of news bias. Journalists are involved in a wider process of *defining what is at issue* in public debates. This interpretive role of journalism integrates the other two perspectives: Professional criteria of newsworthiness as well as value judgments will play a role when journalists produce texts with certain news frames. The framing approach has therefore the potential to broaden our perspective on journalistic practice.

Secondly, framing is not only a useful perspective for understanding journalism, but focusing on journalistic practices is also a useful extension of current framing research. Within the framing approach, the question of how frames get into media content (*frame building*, Scheufele, 1999) is still a relatively neglected research area (Borah, 2011; de Vreese & Lecheler, 2012). Among studies of frame building, the role of journalists and newsrooms has not been sufficiently explored (Scheufele & Scheufele, 2010, p. 120; for an exception, see Scheufele, 2006). This neglect of journalistic framing practices is notable, as framing is what journalists do: “[...] journalists cannot not frame topics because they need sources’ frames to make news, inevitably adding or even superimposing their own frames in the process” (D’Angelo & Kuypers, 2010, p. 1). Highly relevant research questions follow from this observation: To what degree do journalists superimpose their own frames? How do they do so, and under which conditions do journalists draw on their own frames rather than just conveying the frames of relevant sources?

This article conceptualizes journalistic framing practices on a continuum between passively passing on interpretations provided by other actors (*frame sending*) and providing the audience with the journalist’s individual interpretations of a situation (*frame setting*). The key question, however, is not whether journalists pursue one or the other framing practice: Empirically, journalists will to some degree present the frames of other actors *and* rely on their own frames. Also, it would be wrong to speak of journalists as if they were a homogenous group with respect to framing practices. Inevitably, there will be differences between journalists working in different organizational and cultural contexts. The key challenge is therefore to explain under which conditions journalists are likely to pursue frame setting rather than frame sending. Therefore, the article identifies factors on different levels of influence as well as psychological mechanisms that play a relevant role in determining to what degree journalistic frame enactment takes place. Finally, the article discusses research designs able to measure journalistic framing practices, thereby presenting a framework that will hopefully inspire future conceptual thinking and empirical research on journalistic framing practices.

### What is in a frame?

In spite of being a fractured paradigm (Entman, 1993) or being multiparadigmatic (D’Angelo, 2002), some of the more general assumptions on framing are shared by many researchers today (see, e.g., the contributions in: *Journal of Communication* 1/2007; D’Angelo & Kuypers, 2010; Reese, Gandy, & Grant, 2003): Frames are patterns

of making sense of the world. The use of frames is called framing. Framing occurs in different locations (Entman, 1993): *Public actors* strategically send out messages with a frame. *Journalists* frame their news stories. *Media users* frame information received through the media.

Framing has been described as a “bridging concept” between cognition and culture (Gamson et al., 1992, p. 384). Frames work on the level of *individuals* who make sense of the world by drawing on sets of cognitive schemata (Scheufele, 2006). Frames represent cognitive structures, but also, they form an important element of public discourse. Frames provide the “central organizing idea[s]” of “interpretive packages” that help us make “sense of relevant events, suggesting what is at issue” (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989, p. 3). This mirrors the double origin of framing research in both psychology and sociology. Psychology focuses on cognitive schemes of interpretation of the individual (“frames in thought,” Chong & Druckman, 2007a), whereas sociology focuses on frames as part of discourse (“frames in communication,” Chong & Druckman, 2007a).

Frames structure both journalistic thinking (patterns of interpretation, Gitlin, 1980) and journalistic reporting (patterns of presentation). Consequently, one can distinguish *journalist frames* defined as cognitive patterns of interpretation of individual journalists from *news frames*: patterns of meaning articulated in news content (for a similar distinction, see Scheufele, 2006).<sup>1</sup> The focus of this article will be to conceptually grasp as to what degree and under which conditions *journalist frames* translate into *news frames*.

Besides journalist frames, there is another obvious source of news frames: advocacy frames (de Vreese, 2010). Public actors compete in framing contests as sponsors of certain frames (Benford & Snow, 2000) and depending on their power they will be able to shape news frames (Hänggli, 2012). Nevertheless, media content does not merely mirror public actors’ frames. As Callaghan and Schnell (2001) show for the issue of gun control, media content displays its unique blend of frames on each topic. Journalist frames may explain why advocacy frames do not always translate into news coverage.

Before we go deeper into the question of how and under which constraints journalists produce frames, it is important to note that framing studies differ widely in their operationalization of frames for empirical research (Matthes & Kohring, 2008). The main distinction runs between *generic* and *issue-specific frames* (de Vreese, 2002; de Vreese, 2005).

The first kind of frame is rather abstract and applies to a multitude of topics. Many of these frames reflect journalistic routines and have a conceptual overlap with lists of news factors as developed in the tradition of Galtung and Ruge (1965).<sup>2</sup> Examples of generic frames are *episodic* vs. *thematic* framing (Iyengar, 1991), the *strategic game* frame (Aalberg, Strömbäck, & de Vreese, 2012; Lawrence, 2000) and the *human interest, conflict, responsibility, morality, and economic consequences* frames (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000).

*Issue-specific frames* denote the more concrete interpretive frameworks established in debates on specific issues. Then, frames define problems, diagnose causes, evaluate,

and recommend remedies (Entman, 1993). Frames are then operationalized as specific combinations of four frame elements (problem definitions, causal interpretations, evaluations, treatment recommendations; Matthes & Kohring, 2008). This formula serves well for reconstructing public debates in content analysis and has been applied in a high number of studies (Matthes, 2009).

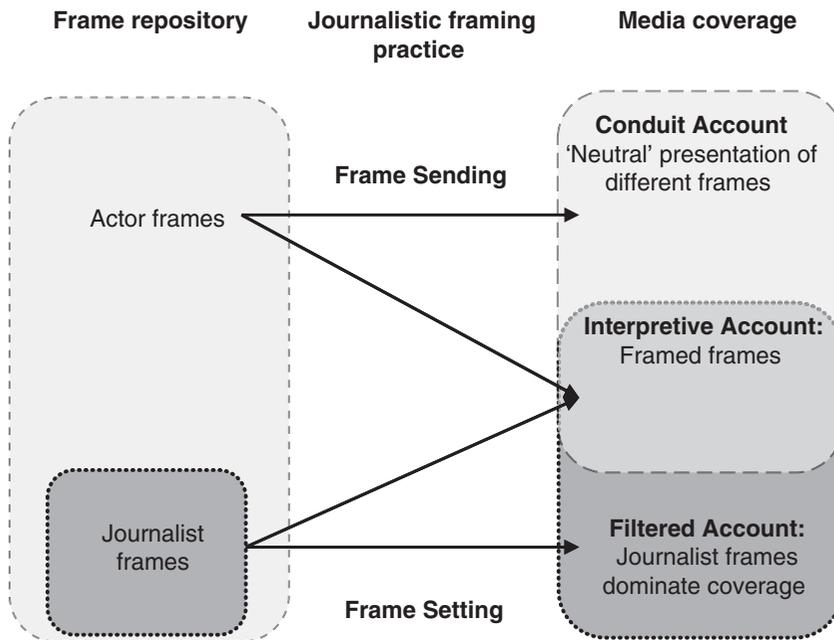
Studies of news framing often follow either the generic or the issue-specific frame conception. There are only very few studies that combine both, either conceptually or empirically (Borah, 2011). Baden (2010) sees generic frames as typical structures of issue-specific frames: “They occur within many frames, which remain issue-specific as well as culturally and situationally dependent, nevertheless” (p. 25). Thus, both types of frames may also be regarded as complementary layers of framing rather than just alternative exclusive framing concepts. If we follow a broad and integrative understanding of framing as presented above, it makes sense to look at journalistic framing practices by analyzing generic frames and issue-specific frames. Both types of frames may become the subject of an analysis of journalistic framing practices, and it is a relevant research question to analyze how certain generic frames relate to issue-specific frames (also see Vliegthart, 2012).

### Journalistic framing practices

*Journalistic framing practices* describe what journalists do when they produce media texts that include certain frames and neglect others. According to the model advanced here, journalistic framing practices lie on a continuum between *frame setting* and *frame sending*.<sup>3</sup> The terms are inspired by Semetko and Canel (1997) who distinguish between “agenda-setters” and “agenda-senders” with regard to the practices of two Spanish TV stations. While this distinction refers to the journalistic practice of actively setting the agenda of media coverage rather than sending the agenda provided by political actors, this article stresses another aspect of the media’s “discretionary power” (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995, p. 87): Journalists do not only influence the media agenda. They do not just write about given topics. Often, they also define what is at issue.

Both journalistic agenda setting and frame setting can be viewed as instances of strong media interventionism, understood as the different ways in which journalists—deliberately, or not—shape news content (Strömbäck & Esser, 2009). The kind of journalistic intervention may vary, so does the degree of intervention. One may, therefore, distinguish two extreme types of journalistic framing practice: *Frame setting* implies that journalists mostly frame their coverage in line with their personal interpretations of what is at issue. *Frame sending* denotes the practice of merely relaying the frames as presented by different public actors (see Figure 1).

The fact that journalists quote sources that provide statements with certain frames is not a sufficient condition for frame sending: Sources might be instrumentally used by the journalist as opportune witnesses who provide quotes representing his or



**Figure 1** Mapping journalistic framing practices.

her personal world view (Hagen, 1993; Kepplinger, Brosius, & Staab, 1991). By contrast, the prominent presence of frames in media content that are *not* in line with journalists' personal interpretations is a strong indicator of frame sending. For the distinction between frame setting and frame sending it does not matter whether framing is provided directly in statements made by the author of an article or indirectly via quotes made by external actors. The key question is whether or not the frames provided within a news story predominantly conflict or are in line with the journalist's personal interpretations about what is at issue.

Empirically, a mixture of frame sending and frame setting is what is plausible to occur. There will be no pure frame sending, as the journalistic production process will at the very least shorten the statements of actors and therefore select some aspects of "reality" and make them more salient for the audience. According to Entman (1993, p. 52), this is what framing is all about. Therefore, even the most "objective" or "neutral" journalism will inevitably contribute to the social construction of reality (Fishman, 1997; Tuchman, 1978). Furthermore, it is impossible that human beings make sense of the world without drawing on the structures that are cognitively available and accessible to them for interpreting a certain phenomenon (Chong & Druckman, 2007a). Thus, to a certain extent, journalistic products will always reflect the frames set by the author of a given news item.

Pure frame setting is also unlikely to happen. Journalism is not only the result of individual decision-making. It is the result of a process of collective sense-making within the newsroom and a negotiation of meaning between journalists and sources

(Cook, 1998; Gans, 1979). With this in mind, journalistic products will only partly reflect the frames of an individual author. Instead, journalists will always practice some degree of frame setting *and* frame sending when assembling bits of information into news stories.

As we can expect a mixture of frame sending and frame setting, the two types of framing practices should be regarded as the ends of a continuum. In the middle, a third category exists: It denotes the practice of sending frames by different actors *and* contextualizing their frames, thus providing the audience with indirect hints about which frames are more appropriate in the respective situation: “Journalistic framing is often more subtle, and rather than offering an alternative frame to one proposed by a political party or nongovernmental organization, journalistic framing is more apparent in the playing-up, neglecting, or juxtaposing advocacy frames” (de Vreese, 2012, p. 367). The coverage resulting from these three types of framing practices may be characterized as follows:

1. If the journalist mostly employs frames that are consonant with his or her own views (frame setting), this results in *filtered accounts* of a social problem. The journalist’s interpretations dominate the coverage.
2. A middle path would lead to an *interpretive account*: The journalist presents different ways of framing an issue, some of them in line and others in conflict with his or her own views. Then, the journalist *frames the frames* provided by external actors. Taking an example from the climate change debate: Journalists may quote actors who frame climate change as a hoax. If the journalist adheres to the scientific mainstream view on climate change, he or she may emphasize that the climate skeptic quoted has not published in peer reviewed journals. Finally, labels such as “contrarians” or “deniers” do already suffice to contextualize frames in a way that indicates the preferred reading of a debate and the evaluation of the respective actor as not warranting the readers’ trust.
3. If the journalist mostly practices frame-sending and refrains from the different ways of reframing advocacy frames, this leads to *conduit accounts*. This pattern of news making presents different frames on a given issue and does not provide cues as to which interpretations are more adequate. Looking again at the example of climate change, this kind of balanced reporting has been criticized: Balance leads to informational bias, if fringe scientists get more attention in the media than in the scientific community, thus providing a distorted picture of the debate (Boykoff & Boykoff, 2004).

Now, one might argue that the overlap between a frame that is advocated by an actor and its “neutral” coverage by a journalist who happens to agree with the respective framing of the issue at hand, cannot easily be grasped with the framework above. Let us consider another example from the climate debate: A retired TV weather forecast presenter has published a book claiming that scientists exaggerate the risks related to climate change and hide the uncertainties related to scientific forecasts. A

journalist writes a relatively “neutral” report about the book quoting the weather forecaster at length.

This is a clear-cut instance of frame sending *if* the journalist does *not* agree with the perspective taken in the book and still provides an account without any kind of explicit or implicit evaluation. However, if the journalist does agree with the book author, it is an instance of frame setting: In this case, the journalist propagates his or her frames, even if by merely selecting the news item as worthy of publication and by refraining from getting into any kind of investigation that sheds doubts on the appropriateness of the book’s perspective. The journalist acts by not investigating the scientific credentials of the book author and by not talking to sources that might provide an alternative framing of climate science.

Publishing statements of actors without further evaluation or contextualization already constitutes a journalistic act of legitimizing these statements as—somewhat—appropriate contributions to the public debate. It may represent either an act of frame sending or frame setting depending on the relationship between the journalist’s cognitive frames and the frames propagated by the external actor. So, as we will argue in the methodological reflections at the end of this article, only a combination of investigating both the journalists’ cognitive frames and the contents of coverage is able to reconstruct journalistic framing practices.

Do journalists predominantly provide filtered, interpretive or conduit accounts of reality? This question may actually lead research into a cul-de-sac because, implicitly, it assumes that there is a homogenous tendency of journalists towards frame setting or frame sending. This assumption of homogeneity is at odds with what we know about the different levels of influence determining journalistic practice (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). As contextual conditions at the level of the editorial office, the political and cultural contexts vary (see below), it is more plausible to start out from an assumption of heterogeneity: Journalists differ in their framing practices depending on the relevant contexts. Therefore, it seems more fruitful to measure the degree of variation on this variable and go deeper into the question of how this variance arises. This line of thinking provides a different direction for future research; instead of making universal claims about journalistic framing, it aspires to make claims about journalistic practices in specific contexts. Then, the most important question concerns those factors determining journalistic framing practices. Under which conditions do journalists pursue frame-setting or frame-sending practices?

### **A multilevel model for explaining journalistic framing**

Journalists’ cognitive frames should not be understood as individual in the way that they differ from the interpretations of everybody else. Journalists’ frames are not idiosyncratic (Scheufele, 2006, p. 66). Rather, the individual is always nested within different contexts. Frames are rooted in culture (van Gorp, 2007), which manifests itself at the individual, organizational, and social level.

When producing news frames, journalists draw on the *frame repository* in a given society. It represents the frames on a given issue that are culturally and cognitively available to a journalist. This concept implies that usually different frames are available to individuals who search for information on a given issue. In contrast to the standard experimental setting of framing effects research, frames occur in a competitive environment (Chong & Druckman, 2007a). Especially as journalists start to investigate an issue more closely, they will inevitably be confronted with different interpretations. Even if journalistic inquiry may remain fairly restricted, a simple Google search will confront them with a whole array of different positions on an issue as presented by different social actors.

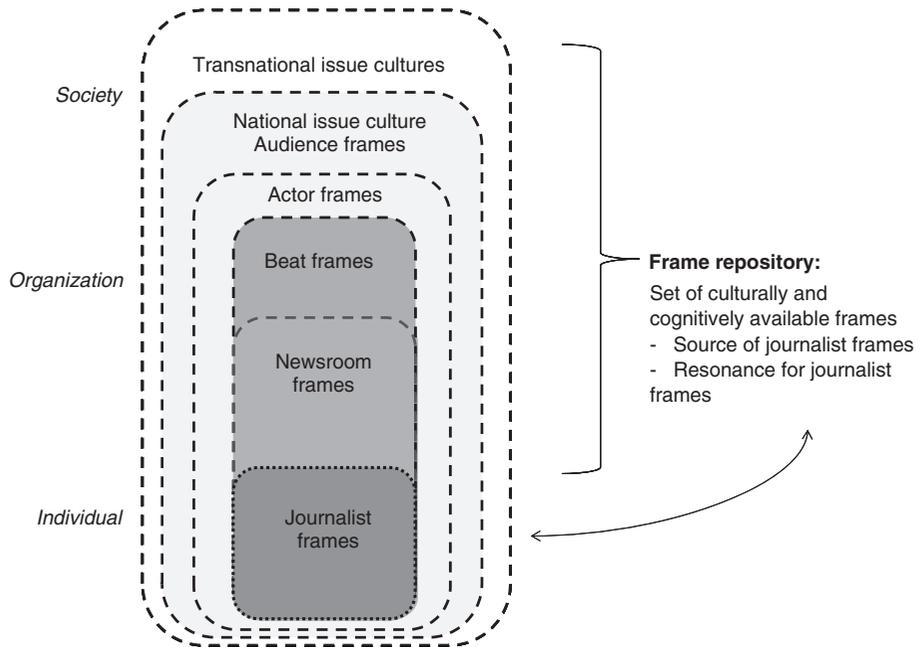
The idea to identify the set of frames that is culturally available goes back to Gamson and Modigliani's study from 1987. It looked at court proceedings and documents issued by different social actors to determine the set of frames that are culturally available. The criterion for a frame to be regarded as "culturally available" was met when there was an organization or advocacy network sponsoring the respective frame (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987, p. 144). Cultural availability could thus be pragmatically operationalized in research projects as availability gained by some basic form of research activity.

Availability also has a cognitive dimension: Journalists will only use a frame that is cognitively available. It needs to be stored in memory and be accessible at the particular moment of writing an article. Finally, and here the questions of different framing practices comes into play, journalists may or may not let their own judgment of the appropriateness of a certain frame guide their coverage (see Chong & Druckman, 2007a for the distinction between available, accessible and appropriate frames).

While the culturally and cognitively available frame repository is usually competitive, it consists of a limited number of frames that resonate well in a given cultural context. Journalists will draw on this repository of frames predefined by their editorial contexts and life worlds when making sense of events as issues for media coverage (see Figure 2).

When structuring the different relevant contexts that provide resonance for journalist frames, we draw on what has been called *media sociology*—the explanation of journalistic practices by looking at the social contexts of their work (Reese, 2001). Different levels of influence are considered relevant for explaining news making: the individual level, the news organization, professional routines, and the wider social, political, cultural context (Esser, 1998a; Hanitzsch et al., 2010; Reese, 2001; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). The top level included in these models for explaining news content is often the national level, but—especially when looking at coverage of international or global issues—there is an obvious need to add a transnational level to the model: Factors situated at the level of society are not necessarily restricted to national territories (Beck & Sznaider, 2006).

Adapting the idea of different levels of influence on journalistic content to framing leads us to distinguish the individual *journalist frames* (individual cognitive patterns of each journalist combining different schemata to obtain coherent structures of making



**Figure 2** Contextualizing journalist frames.

sense of the world) from *newsroom frames* representing the dominant editorial policy on a specific issue (Scheufele, 2006, p. 66).

We can then find frames among actors external to the media (*actor or advocacy frames*). Typically, some types of frames in media content are related to certain types of actors, journalists quote, for example, election campaign operatives framing coverage in the terms of a strategic game (Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2012). As certain news beats are associated with certain types of sources, they may also bring about a certain framing of public issues (*beat frames*): A journalist working for the business section is probably more prone to an economic framing of events than a journalist working for the political section of a paper. Long-standing source relationships may translate into *framing communities* who share a certain interpretation of events. Consequently, beat frames are likely to be linked to certain actor frames.

At the national level, there will be cultural resonance for certain frames depending on the *issue cultures* that have been established in past debates (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). Framing is therefore highly path-dependent. Countries may differ with respect to issue cultures, for example, the skeptics' framing of climate change has much higher resonance in the United States than in Sweden or Germany (Grundmann, 2007; Shehata & Hopmann, 2012). *Audience frames*, understood as the interpretations shared by many readers of a specific media outlet, may also coincide with national issue cultures, but in the case of specific audiences of special interest media or of media with a clear partisan bias they may not always reflect mainstream public opinion—as Baden (2010) demonstrates for the Dutch debate on the EU-constitution.

National units will not always determine the cultural resonance of certain frames. There may also be differing *transnational issue cultures*: The country differences on climate change mentioned above may in fact represent transnational patterns that differ between the Anglo-Saxon world and the Central European and Scandinavian framing of the issue.

Each journalist shares meaning with different interpretive or epistemic communities (Berkowitz & TerKeurst, 1999; Zelizer, 1993): in the newsroom, among journalists, and with certain sources. Different contexts exercise different degrees of social control. Therefore, it is not plausible to expect uniform frames among journalists. Research may identify the common frames of journalists, but it also has to be able to account for the systematic differences between journalists working in different environments.

There will be typical overlaps and mutual influences between the different levels of influence. The higher levels impact the lower levels and vice-versa. Cultural and political environments will influence editorial policy, and this will influence individual journalists. A sole journalist will not be able to frame an issue in public debate. Yet, senior journalists may shape the framing of an issue in their newsroom and, depending on the discursive power of the news outlet, this may contribute to define an issue. Dynamic, collective processes of framing cannot be controlled by individual actors, but individuals do contribute to the frames that arise from their interaction with other actors.

As influences are enacted at the lowest (individual) level, it is important to combine the *sociology of news* with a *psychology of news* (Donsbach, 2004). In the end, it is the individual reporter who drafts the story, and the individual columnist or editor who writes the commentary. Psychological mechanisms channel the influences streaming from different layers of social context.

Donsbach (2004) advances two psychological mechanisms that he perceives as particularly relevant in explaining journalistic behavior: (a) a need for social validation of perceptions and (b) a need to preserve one's existing predispositions. An increased need for validating one's judgments stems from the imperative to interpret reality in "undetermined situations," something typical for journalistic work (Donsbach, 2004, p. 138). The need to preserve one's predispositions does not seem to be a particular trait of journalists, but rather a general psychological trait of human beings that also applies to journalists. The strength of individual predispositions and values has been identified as an important moderator of framing effects (Chong & Druckman, 2007b). It can thus be argued that journalists are more likely to resist the frames sponsored by influential elites if they conflict with deeply rooted opinions and values. Also, one would assume that journalists prefer to process information consistent with their frames (Scheufele, 2006). Therefore, we have hypothesized above that frame sending, exclusively that of interpretations which are at odds with the journalist's point of view, is a rather unlikely scenario.

Combining the multilevel model of framing influences outlined above with ideas about the psychological background to news decisions allows us to formulate

hypotheses that predict in which situations journalists resort to frame setting rather than mere frame sending. Basically, we assume that journalists will predominantly rely on their own frames (frame setting) instead of merely reflecting the input from different actors (frame sending) when acting in an environment that they perceive as providing *consonant resonance* for their own frames. A frame repository that a journalist perceives as providing positive feedback will encourage him or her to pursue frame setting and let personal interpretations dominate coverage. This social-psychological mechanism is also part of the spiral-of-silence model that assumes that people are more likely to speak up in environments in which they perceive the majority opinion on their side (Noelle-Neumann, 1993).

Following these premises developed by the psychology of journalism and drawing on the broader literature on framing effects and on what influences journalistic behavior, a number of hypotheses can be formulated for different levels of influence (for a similar line of thought related to journalistic role enactment, see Esser & Wessler, 2002). So, the question is, which conditions or factors make *frame enactment* (understood as high levels of frame setting) more likely to occur?

### Factors at the individual level

1. **Interventionist role conceptions.** Frame setting may be the result of a specific definition of one's role as a journalist. Studies on journalistic role conceptions distinguish at least three dimensions (Hanitzsch, 2007): Interventionism (locating journalism between a more passive or active role), power distance (locating journalists between the poles of adversary and supporter of government), and market orientation (locating the journalist between pursuing primary commercial or public interest roles). Especially the interventionist journalistic role conceptions are likely to lead to frame setting, as this involves a more active role of the journalist: He or she does not only publish frames from other actors but determines which frame is appropriate for the issue at hand.
2. **Deeply rooted opinions and values.** Journalists may have strong opinions concerning topics if they are connected to important values: For example, a journalist who strongly identifies with environmental protection may also have deeper rooted opinions about fighting climate change. On this issue, the journalist may rather tend to pursue frame setting than to send the frames as provided by different political actors. This hypothesis is in line with findings on framing effects: Audience members with deeply held convictions are less influenced by news frames (Chong & Druckman, 2007b; Schuck & de Vreese, 2006).

### Factors on the organizational and professional level

3. **Consonant editorial line or high autonomy.** If the journalist's opinion is backed up by his colleagues in the newsroom, the journalist is more likely to advance his or her own framing of an issue. This hypothesis is again drawn from the

theoretical reasoning that journalists are in a particular need for social validation of their interpretations. Furthermore, editors have different degrees of autonomy depending on the newsroom structure (Esser, 1998b), editorial culture and their hierarchical position: Journalists with high editorial freedom will be more likely to follow frame-setting practices.

4. **Beat bias.** Journalists working on different beats will draw on different actors as sources and prefer a different framing of issues. Beat reporters focus on a limited range of topics for a long time. They are more likely to develop deeper knowledge and convictions about their topics than general news journalists. One can thus hypothesize (again following research on framing effects, see above) that beat journalists are more inclined to frame setting. This is all the more likely for reporters assigned to very specific beats: Exclusive expertise in their field of coverage will enhance the freedom to frame issues along their own frames with less intervention from the newsroom management.

#### Factors on the macrolevel

5. **Consonant national issue culture.** If there is national elite consensus on an issue (Robinson, 2001) *and* this consensus reflects the journalist's frames, then the journalist will resort to frame setting, blocking out alternative ways of framing an issue. If the journalist's interpretation of a topic is not widely shared, especially among the political elites (following the indexing hypothesis by Bennett, 1990), he or she will rather resort to a "neutral" stance of mainly sending the frames of different social actors. Journalists find out about a national issue culture just like any other member of the public, by looking at other media's coverage. If core media, as part of the political elite, agree on an issue, then this will be a very influential interpretation spreading into other media. Here, journalists should be viewed in their role as part of the audience (Scheufele, 1999).
6. **Polarized pluralist issue culture.** Some conflicts are very polarized such as the debate on climate change, abortion or gun control in the United States with deeply entrenched oppositional interpretations of the issue. In these cases, journalistic framing practices may depend on the journalism culture established in a specific media system. *Political parallelism* (journalists taking sides with certain world views and political parties) has been established as one of the important features distinguishing different media systems (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; van Kempen, 2007). Hallin and Mancini (2004) define their polarized pluralist model of a media system as being characterized by polarized conflict and high levels of political parallelism. Applied to journalistic framing practices, this implies: In situations of polarized conflict *and* high degrees of political parallelism, journalists are likely to practice frame setting. If there are low degrees of political parallelism, journalists will rather take a neutral stance in polarized conflicts. This mechanism may explain the balanced coverage on climate change in the United States (Boykoff & Boykoff, 2004): The debate is polarized, but journalists in the United

States—as the prototype of a liberal media system with low levels of political parallelism (Hallin & Mancini, 2004)—do not have the habit to clearly side with political actors. So they quote climate warners and deniers, no matter whether they would personally side with one or the other side's interpretation of climate change.

7. **Positive audience feedback.** Journalists try to serve their audiences. While this might have been no more than lip service in the past when an imagined audience used to be a symbolic reference point of journalistic work, in today's digital media environment journalists are confronted with constant reader feedback online. Journalists are more likely to advance their own frames at the expense of alternative views, if they are backed up by positive feedback from their audience. The online-sphere of links and commentary by readers and bloggers surrounding traditional news outlets is likely to affect the journalist's perception of the public resonance of his or her frames. Evidence of effects from online debates on media coverage is even discernible in China, albeit limited by government intervention (Zhou & Moy, 2007).

It is obvious that the factors mentioned above might interact in different ways: Their influence might add up if, for instance, the audience feedback and the elite consensus exert their influence into the same direction. However, if audience feedback, newsroom policies and elite policy positions contradict each other and thus exert cross-pressures, it might be safer for the journalist to hold back her/his own interpretations and provide balanced coverage, which would reflect all parties' frames thereby enabling the journalist to claim a neutral observer's position. Again, this assumption is based on the journalist's need for social validation of his or her interpretations.

Multilevel models of influences on framing practices still need to be complemented by a process perspective: New frames are expected to evolve and change in phases of crisis or after key events (Kepplinger & Habermeier, 1995). In contrast to routine times, journalists might be in specific need for orientation, and this might offer new advocacy frames the chance to get hold of news frames while journalists have not made up their minds yet.

Part of the process of frame building is also a reversed causality between the cognitive frames of the journalist and the frames in his or her coverage: Cognitive frames may be enacted through coverage, but the practice of writing articles which see events in a certain light and offer a specific interpretation, may also contribute to consolidate cognitive frames, thus turning them into more deeply entrenched convictions that make future frame-setting practices more likely.

This (certainly not complete) network of hypotheses shows that studies aiming to explain the differences in journalistic framing practices face a complex web of influences that has to be disentangled. The above formulated hypotheses draw on different strands of research, as multilevel models of influences on journalistic content alone do not generate hypotheses: They serve to structure our search for hypotheses.

## How to measure journalistic framing practices

Having developed a conceptual framework for analyzing journalistic framing practices, the article will now discuss how to measure frame setting. Most framing studies are based on the analysis of media content. This methodological choice rests upon the assumption that journalistic practices are inscribed in media content, readily available to the content analyst. Content analysis is only able, however, to draw *indirect* inferences on the practices and contexts relevant in shaping this content. The final journalistic product may be in fact less than transparent in displaying the factors that influenced its production. This is why research needs to combine content analysis with other methods to gather data on journalist frames and the different explanatory factors of journalistic framing practices.

The method advocated here consists of a combination of interviews with journalists and an analysis of their articles. The disadvantage of this approach is obvious: Firstly, it is very resource intensive and secondly, journalist surveys and interviews will always depend on the participants' (limited) willingness to fill out questionnaires or give interviews. This is probably one reason why researchers have resorted to comparing frames in editorials and commentary with frames in news coverage of the same news outlet (Scheufele, 2006). Similar frames would also suggest some degree of journalistic frame setting. Yet, we do not know whether the commentaries published in a paper represent editorial policy, a journalist's individual frames or the result from external pressures on the newsroom.

A better way to measure *journalist frames* is through observation, qualitative interviews, or surveys among journalists (Scheufele, 2006). Lewis and Reese (2009) have used qualitative interviews to gather journalists' views on the U.S.-government-sponsored frame of the "war-on-terror." Yet, with interviews alone we will not be able to verify whether individual world views and interpretations make it into the news.

Research on journalistic role enactment has recently advanced into the direction advocated in this article. Surveys among journalists (e.g., Weaver, Beam, & Brownlee, 2007) asked journalists for particularly good articles in order to check for role enactment. On the basis of newspaper content, Van Dalen (2011) compared survey data on journalistic role conceptions in four countries and found out that clear indications of role enactment only existed in some countries. While the study by van Dalen is the most comprehensive and systematic approach to combining content analysis and surveys among journalists, it runs nevertheless the risk of ecological fallacy. It measures correlations at the aggregate level between journalists' survey responses and news content, while the theory of role enactment applies at the individual level: It looks for connections between the role conceptions of the individual journalist and his or her articles. Recent studies on role enactment, which have linked journalists' survey responses to their articles, found a gap between role perceptions and role performance that can be explained by external influences preventing journalists from acting upon their role conceptions (see Mellado & van Dalen, 2013; Tandoc, Hellmueller, & Vos, 2012).

Following this template, a study of frame enactment would need to compare the journalist's frames as articulated in interviews with the frames included in the journalist's articles. The first indicator of frame setting is whether the frames favored by the journalist also prominently appear in the coverage and whether frames *not* in line with the journalist's interpretations occur in the coverage. The second indicator is, whether and how the different frames are reframed: Are they presented in a fairly neutral way or are they contextualized in a way that provides a judgment about the appropriateness of a certain frame?

Both, interviews and content analysis, may be conducted either qualitatively or in a standardized way. One could use qualitative interviews in combination with a qualitative content analysis in the context of a case study approach, but a standardized approach is also possible. A quantitative study would expose journalists to lists of frames or frame elements. Journalists would then be asked to rank their relevance for reporting about a given issue. Then, a content analysis would have to be conducted in order to see whether the journalist frames also figure prominently in their coverage. The subsequent data analysis could calculate correlations between the rank of the importance assigned to a frame by the respective journalists and the relative prominence of its presence in actual coverage. Strong correlations indicate frame setting. For each news item, frame enactment can thus be measured. Then, this should be aggregated for all articles written by a specific journalist, to come up with the degree of frame setting a journalist practiced during the time under investigation.

Journalist interviews as well as content analysis could either focus on frame elements or on frames. A *modular approach* would measure frame elements separately (problem definitions, evaluations, causal interpretations, treatment recommendations, Entman, 1993). Frames would be identified afterwards as the result of a cluster analysis of the frame elements (as advocated by Matthes & Kohring, 2008). A *holistic approach* would start with compiling a list of frames (not frame elements), drawn from previous studies or from a prior exploratory study. It would ask journalists for their assessment of those frames and then code their presence in news content. A *comprehensive analysis* could combine both approaches (Brüggemann & Engesser, 2013).

One challenge is to come up with a list of frames or frame elements for this kind of analysis. Such a list would represent what we call the *cultural* frame repository. A content analysis of documents obtained from different political actors could be used to reconstruct the cultural frame repository on a specific issue (see above the methodology of Gamson & Modigliani, 1987). Another way of identifying the cultural frame repository would be to conduct a systematic study of different web search engine outputs as a proxy for the frames that are easily available on a particular topic.

The *cultural* frame repository is not necessarily cognitively available to a journalist, especially if he or she is not a specialist on the topic at hand and also refrains from conducting some kind of basic research. Research might therefore also want to explore the gaps between cultural and cognitive availability of frames.

**Table 1** Gathering Data on Different Levels of Influence on Journalistic Framing Practices

Level	Selected Explanatory Factors	Method of Data Collection
Macro	National issue culture	Expert interviews, content analysis, (journalist interviews)
Meso	Editorial freedom	Newsroom observation, (journalist interviews)
Micro	Interventionist role conception	Journalist interviews
Cross-level links	Perceived consonance with the newsroom, the readers, etc.	Journalist interviews

The challenge of explaining journalistic framing practices should be tackled based on a comparative approach that systematically varies the contexts of journalistic work: It would include different kinds of news outlets in different countries in order to test the hypotheses related to the different levels of influence outlined above. Following a quasi-experimental logic, it is then possible to contrast journalists with much editorial freedom with journalists with less autonomy and use these contextual differences for explaining various degrees of frame setting. Table 1 takes up some of the explanatory factors outlined above and illustrates how they can be measured: For some indicators a variety of different ways of measurement are available. For many factors journalist interviews are either the most appropriate way of gathering data or at least may serve as a rough proxy for gathering the respective data (bracketed in Table 1): In order to explore the links across different levels of influence, journalists could be asked about whether they have received positive feedback from colleagues in the news room, from readers, or whether they feel in line with the national government's framing of a given issue. A suitable strategy for this is drawing on the journalists' own perceptions of their work's context as it is their perceptions of the audiences' preferences that matter for their articles—even if their perceptions may be factually wrong.

### Conclusion and outlook

This article started out with the observation that journalistic framing practices, that is, journalists' contributions to news frames, is a relatively underdeveloped yet highly relevant area of framing research. The article is based on a broad definition of frames as patterns of interpretation. Its premise is that cognitive journalist frames may influence news frames depending on a number of contextual factors. When producing news items with certain frames, journalists draw on the *frame repository* that is culturally and cognitively available in the respective situation. Journalists will agree with some of the frames offered by their peers and other actors, yet disagree with other frames. Coverage is likely to reflect both, frames that are consonant and dissonant with the journalist's personal views.

A journalist pursues frame setting if his or her articles primarily reflect personal interpretations of the issue at hand, possibly through the use of opportune witnesses

that are quoted with views that coincide with the journalists own convictions leading to *filtered accounts*. Frame sending would lead to coverage reflecting the different framing activities of different actors in a relatively neutral way—no matter whether the journalist finds these interpretations plausible or not (*conduit accounts*). In between, we expect to find framed frames (*interpretive accounts*). Explanations of journalistic framing practices will have to take into account a complex mix of influences at the individual, organizational, and macrolevel of society. As a general pattern, we expect journalists to follow a frame-setting approach when they receive consonant feedback from their peers, sources, and the audience.

Methodologically, the article has argued in favor of combining interviews with journalists with an analysis of their articles, thus being able to connect news frames and the situation they originated in. Furthermore, an empirical analysis of framing practices needs to be comparative: It should include diverse organizational and cultural contexts that can explain different patterns of journalistic framing practices.

Three challenges arise for future theoretical thinking and for empirical studies about journalism and framing. The first challenge concerns the connection of the framing approach with partly overlapping models like news value theory: How does research on journalistic routines relate to framing research? As a working hypothesis one might expect that journalists promote those frames that fit well with the professional criteria for journalistic selection and interpretation such as news factors like proximity or negativity.

The second, conceptual as well as empirical challenge is the changing news environment: Online journalists gain new forums for fairly unrestricted frame setting, in the form of blogs and more interpretive and subjective formats of journalism. At the same time the audience is empowered to actively challenge journalists' frames.

Thirdly, journalistic framing practices await a deeper normative discussion. Schudson (1995) observed that “journalists add something to every story they run” and that they even have a “professional obligation to frame the message” (Schudson, 1995, pp. 19–20). A more explicit discussion of the normative underpinnings of research on journalistic framing is desirable as it might inspire a rethinking of our implicit evaluations of interpretive practices in journalism.

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## Notes

- 1 Scheufele (2006) distinguishes “media frames” understood as frames in media content (what we call news frames as we perceive this as the term more commonly used in current research, see e.g., D’Angelo and Kuypers, 2010) and “journalist frames” that are expected to be heavily influenced by “news room frames” that evolve through discursive exchange

- within the newsroom. We do fully agree with the relevance of news room frames in shaping journalist frames, but at the same time they constitute only one of several important explanatory factors.
- 2 De Vreese (2012) also observes this affinity between generic frames and journalistic routines: He even labels the generic frames as “journalistic frames” as opposed to “advocacy frames” which are the rather issue-specific interpretations sponsored by political actors. Yet, journalists may also align with certain advocacy frames: Journalists may not only have a preference for talking about issues in terms of conflict or economic consequences (generic frames) but also for framing a specific issue in a certain way: e.g., blaming capitalism for the global financial crisis (issue-specific frame). All these kinds of interpretive preferences may be part of journalist frames, as conceptualized in this article.
  - 3 It should be noted that our distinction of frame sending vs. frame setting might be confounded with the distinction of frame building vs. frame setting that separates *influences on* media content from *effects of* media content (Scheufele, 1999). We focus on frame building and on the journalists’ contribution to this process.

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