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Framing theory in communication research. Origins, development and current situation in Spain

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Abstract

Framing theory has experienced a rapid development since the mid-1960s, when it emerged in the field of sociology. Framing has become a multidisciplinary paradigm that allows the holistic study of media effects on individuals and audiences. Far from being exclusively located in the sender of information, framing is located in four elements of the communication process: the sender, the receiver, the (informative) message and culture. This article, in the form of a state of the art review, examines the main developments made in framing theory since the 1950s to this day, as well as the development and current state of framing research in Spain.

Keywords

Framing; frames; Spain; frame building; frame setting.

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“It would not be impossible to prove with sufficient repetition and psychological understanding of the people concerned that a square is in fact a circle. They are mere words, and words can be moulded until they clothe ideas in disguise” (Goebbels, quoted in Pratkanis and Aronson, 1994: 77).

1. Framing in the communication processes: concept and origins

Any communicative text, either informative or persuasive, requires narrative structures to organise its discourse. In the case of the media, news stories appear to be systematised, based on narrative conventions that offer an explanation about who is doing what, and with what purpose. Tuchman (1978) describes news as a window whose frame limits the perception of reality, by limiting the perception of different realities and focusing on a specific piece of it. As a result of these processes, some aspects of the reality perceived through the news will be more prominent than others.

News messages, therefore, are textual and visual structures built around a central axis of thought, from a certain perspective, and by information professionals (but not only by them), who will provide an interpretive framework for the audiences exposed to the news messages.

From this approach, framing can be defined as a process in which some aspects of reality are selected, and given greater emphasis or importance, so that the problem is defined, its causes are diagnosed, moral judgments are suggested and appropriate solutions and actions are proposed (Entman, 1993).

Frames draw attention to some aspects of reality at the expense of others, so in order to define them we must take into account what is described and what is left out. Framing is, thus, present in the mind of the journalist who writes the news report, but also in the news report that he builds, reaching the reader through a decoding process that is necessary to understand the news report and the reality to which it refers.

One of the most productive researchers in framing theory, the American political scientist Robert Entman, warned in 1993 of the absence of a unified theory of framing capable of explaining how frames are constructed, how are they manifested in texts and how they influence the minds of the public. Entman considered that the lack of this theory complicated the solid and unified progress of the discipline. This heterogeneous conceptualisation has brought with it a very different methodological approach, both with regards to the identification of frames (media and audience frames and the socio-cultural environment) and the measuring of their effects on individuals and audiences [1].

Fourteen years later, Weaver (2007) highlighted once again that the term *frame* still lacked a clear conceptualisation and had become a *passé-partout* that encompassed the interpretive schemas of an event, the agenda of attributes of particular subjects or objects and the process whereby messages influence the perceptions, attitudes and behaviours of individuals and the public (Van Gorp, 2007, p.

60). Researchers delving into the study of frames have to confront a great disparity in the definitions of this concept, which sometimes results contradictory (McCombs, 2006).

However, not everyone has seen a weakness in the heterogeneity of approaches to framing. D'Angelo (2002) considers that the diversity of approaches to framing, through multiple disciplines and theoretical models, is possibly the only way to properly understand a phenomenon as complex as the effects of the media. In the same vein, Reese (2007) considers that the value of the theory of framing does not lie in its potential as a unified research paradigm as in the opportunity it provides to bring closer qualitative and quantitative, empirical and interpretive, psychological and sociological, and academic and professional research.

As “organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent”, frames are part of the symbolic universe and allow us to “meaningfully structure the social world” (Reese 2001: 11). In this context, the media would be part of the system of creation and transmission of frames, but would not necessarily occupy a central or prominent position in this system.

This is because, far from being exclusively located in the sender of the message, the frame is located both in the sender and the receiver, the (informative) text and culture. This is why the scientific literature often distinguishes between media frames and audience frames (e.g. Scheufele, 1999). Journalists, who have to tell an understandable and attractive story and are conditioned by news making routines and time and space limitations, start framing reality by deciding what will and what will not become news. The framing process continues when some aspects of the news event are selected and privileged over others, defining and assessing the problem, pointing out the causes and proposing solutions to the problem and, ultimately, building a frame (media frames), in an operation that has been called *frame building* due to its analogy with the better known process of *agenda building*. These frames that are built by the media can be defined as “a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events, weaving a connection among them” (Gamson and Modigliani, 1987: 143).

Subsequently, through a decoding process that is conditioned by elements present in the social environment, individuals and the communicative situation, receivers store their interpretation of the event in the form of a schema that may be used in the future to decode new information. But are these different manifestations of the same phenomenon or different but related phenomena? The answer is complex, and there is no consensus among framing theorists. However, it can be said that there are strong linkages between the frames of the sender, of the receiver, of the text and of culture: frames are “shared schemes [sic] underlying the attitudes of journalists, who organize the information; in the receptors, who are able to understand; in the texts that are hidden; and in the culture in which they are generated” (Sádaba-Garraza, 2001: 166).

At first glance, however, grouping the set of processes that have been described into a single concept -frame or framing- seems complex. Where do the process of framing start and end? Is agenda building the first step of frame building? What are the similarities between media frames and audience frames? Do the same message have the same effects on different individuals exposed to it? These are the questions that communication scholars have asked over the past three decades, and have gradually responded, at least partial, with empirical studies.

To try to find a common root capable of giving certain unity to the concept, Van Gorp (2007) has proposed to distance the concept as much as possible from individuals and to link it to the space from which all manifestations of the frame emerge: culture. This idea allows us to consider the different approaches to the study of framing as complementary, rather than as opposing or competitive, which to some extent involves a return to the origins of framing theory.

Already back in the 1950s, Bateson (1955/1972) highlighted the role of context and culture in the building of ‘frames’, although for him they were only psychological concepts. From this perspective, individuals and society as a whole would make use of the frames available in the culture at any given time. This idea limits the ability of news makers in the construction of media frames, because they would not build the frame, but would take one frame (or a set of frames) to make the news.

1.1. The tenuous border between framing and agenda-setting

Are agenda-setting and framing different modes of referring to the same theoretical model? Since the late 1990s, some authors, led by Maxwell McCombs, have argued that framing is equivalent to the second level of the agenda-setting theory, and have proposed the integration of both models. McCombs, Llamas, López-Escobar and Rey (1997) considered that framing is a natural extension of the agenda-setting model. According to this interpretation, frames would not be more than a special type of attributes –macro-attributes (second-level agenda setting theory) that due to their complexity allow us to define the problem, to interpret its causes and to propose a treatment (McCombs, 2006).

The view of framing as an expansion of the agenda-setting has received many criticisms. For Kim, Scheufele and Shanahan (2002), the attempts to combine framing, priming and agenda-setting into a single model may further complicate the distinction between loosely defined concepts (especially the first and the second). Kim *et al.* believe it is the terminological and semantic differences what build a particular frame, and not the prominence of some or other attributes. In other words, a single object (or a same attribute) can be described in different ways and lead to different interpretations in the public, and framing goes beyond presenting an object by highlighting some of its attributes. This idea is also supported by Price, Tewksbury and Powers, who consider that both models cannot be equated:

“Agenda setting [sic] looks on story selection as a determinant of public perceptions of issue importance and, indirectly through *priming*, evaluations of political leaders. Framing focuses not on which topics or issues are selected for coverage by the news media, but instead on the particular ways those issues are presented”. (1997: 184)

This criticism, however, focuses on the so called first level agenda setting. Nonetheless, when McCombs says that both theories are equivalent, he does not refer to this elemental level of the agenda, but to the second level. For McCombs, a frame is “a very special case of attributes” (2006, p. 173), as it would be made up of a set of micro-attributes which together form a macro-attribute. This macro-attribute, or a group of them, forms a dominant point of view on an object, influencing the public perception of this object and the understanding of the social world in general.

Today, there is a dominant school of thought among communication researchers who consider that both theories (framing and agenda-setting) are complementary but autonomous (see, for example, *Journal of Communication*, 2007, or, in Spanish, the most recent issue of *Disertaciones*, 2014). While agenda-setting researchers compare the relevance of certain topics in the media with the relevance perceived by the public, framing researchers compare media frames about a topic with the frames the public uses to interpret this topic (Zhou and Moy, 2007).

The effects of the agenda setting would be determined by *repetition* (in the media) and *accessibility* (in the psyche of the receiver). The more a topic is repeated in the media, the greater salience it will have in receivers' mind, and the greater the access to it (see, for example, Scheufele, 2000). The effects of framing, on the other hand, would not be so determined by *accessibility*, but by *applicability*, i.e. the ability to generate interpretive schemas that can be *applied* to many different situations.

For the agenda-setting theory, the central issue is not *the way* a particular event is reported, but the amount of attention given to the event or its attributes by the media and the time individuals have been exposed to the coverage of the event. For framing theory, on the other hand, the key aspect is the way the news topic or event is described, as well as the interpretive schema that has been activated to process it.

Framing is not focused, therefore, on accessibility, but on applicability, to the extent that the concepts connected in a message will also tend to connect with each other in the audience's mind during the process of opinion-formation, which will subsequently influence attitudes and behaviours (Zhou and Moy, 2007; Scheufele, 1999). Despite this theoretical distinction, applicability and accessibility are related and cannot be separated completely. Thus, the more accessible an applicable schema is, the greater its probability to be used. On the other hand, a diagram, no matter how accessible it is, will not be used if the individual considers it to be inapplicable (Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2007).

Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007) considered that the debate on whether framing and agenda-setting are different ways of referring to the same concept has been already closed, and that the current debate should focus on building a solid theory of the effects of the media that contains the contributions of the three perspectives (agenda-setting, *priming*, and framing). Only this way we will be able to investigate their interrelationships and understand how the attitudes and opinions of the public are shaped in the real world.

2. Origin and evolution of framing studies

The theoretical foundations that enabled the birth and development of the theory of framing are located in interpretive sociology, which considers that people's interpretation of reality and everyday life depends fundamentally on interaction and the definition of situations. This definition of the situation is mediated by intersubjective processes. In other words, people's approach to reality takes into account the contributions of others. The performance of people would be determined by this interpretation, and that is why the definition of the situation is linked with action and interaction (Sádaba-Garraza, 2001).

Despite these sociological foundations, Gregory Bateson (1955/1972) used the term *frame* with the current sense for the first time in an essay on the psychology of perception. Bateson pointed out

that *frame* is a psychological concept, but refers to the importance of messages as elements that condition their construction and definition: “Any message, which either explicitly or implicitly defines a frame, *ipso facto* gives the receiver instructions or aids in his attempt to understand the messages included within the frame” (Bateson, 1977/1972: 188).

Bateson defines the concept of frame by using two analogies: a picture frame and Venn diagrams, which are used in mathematical set theory. For Bateson, frame, as the diagram that includes the elements of a mathematical set, has a double function: to include elements within its borders and exclude those that are outside it. As a picture frame, a frame tries to organise people’s perception, by urging people to attend what is within it and to ignore what is outside of it. This approach to frame was so successful that Tuchman (1978), two decades later, would use the picture frame analogy to explain the concept.

This is very similar to the subsequent definition offered by Gitlin (1980), who argues that a frame is built through selection, emphasis, and exclusion. A particular frame makes people to focus their attention on some messages (those that are included in it) and to ignore some other messages (those that are excluded from it).

Bateson’s frames provide a set of keys to interpret reality, in the same way that the picture frame indicates its viewers that in order to translate what is inside it they cannot apply the same sort of thinking they apply to translate what is outside of it. In the analogy of set theory, messages enclosed in a single diagram share common features that provide clues to interpret them.

The frame, in short, facilitates the understanding of the messages it contains, by reminding viewers that the messages placed inside of it are relevant and are connected in some way, and that those messages that are outside of it must be ignored. This is a meta-communicative use of language, which allows the contextualisation of the messages that will be perceived, with the particularity (already noted by Bateson) that the vast majority of meta-communicative messages remain implicit, which will generate some operating problems in the empirical detection of frames, as we will see later.

The theoretical body of framing started to be developed from the 1970s, initially by the hands of cognitive psychology. The concept and theories of framing were recovered for the field of sociology by Erving Goffman (1974), and it was this renewed sociological perspective which was used in communication studies. Goffman refers to a frame as a social framework and as a mental schema that allows users to organise experiences.

The original meaning of frame expanded from the individual to the collective, from the psychological to the sociological realm, because for Goffman, frames are instruments of society that allow people to maintain a shared interpretation of reality. This expansion of the concept of frame became useful for the study of journalistic messages, when it was considered that the media have a great capacity to generate and modify the social frameworks of interpretation, by intervening in the creation of a shared social discourse.

The first communication research article that used the term framing was published in 1980 in *Journalism Quarterly*, and in the 2001-2005 period the number of articles indexed in *Communication Abstracts* reached 165 (Weaver, 2007). López-Rabadán and Vicente-Mariño (2009) proposed to differentiate the evolution of theories of framing in three major phases. The initial phase

would cover from 1974 to 1990, and was characterised by the beginning of the instrumental application based on the sociological definition of the term. It is at this stage when the theory begins to enter the field of communication.

The second phase, which would cover 1990s, corresponds to the definition of frame as a specialty of media studies, with an application in the analysis of media discourses, with a somewhat uncontrolled and dispersed methodology. During this period there was an intense theoretical debate between those who argue that framing is nothing more than an extension of the agenda setting and those who argue that it is a complementary but different theory. Finally, the phase of reorganisation and empirical development started at the turn of the 21st century and continues today. During this third stage there is an attempt to carry out a conceptual and methodological unification that allows a more solid and rapid development through research synergies.

3. How frames are built: frame building

Communication professionals in general and journalists in particular have to tell a story within certain time and space constraints, and make it accessible to a broad and often heterogeneous public. The only way to do this is by structuring the information, creating an interpretive framework that allows the comprehension of the message. In the making of texts, journalists use frames to give meaning to and simplify reality, in some way, and to maintain the interest of the public (Valkenburg, Semetko and De Vreese, 1999).

Framing theory adds a new perspective to the old debate on journalistic objectivity: is it possible that the journalist is a mere reflection of reality? Is it possible to scrupulously separate opinions from facts? Are facts sacred and comments free, as it has been repeated so often since C. P. Scott said it for the first time [2]? For Sádaba-Garraza (2001: 159), “the response offered by the theory of framing to objectivism is to deny its postulates, because when journalists narrate what happens they frame reality and give their point of view”.

When journalists make news, when they build the description of an aspect of reality with words and images, they select a frame. But they could have selected another frame, by selecting another aspect that is different from the topic that is being reported, by using other sources, other syntactic constructions, another vocabulary, by using other photographs, etc. The strategies used to give prominence to one piece of information to the detriment of others can be very varied. Omission is one of them, but not necessarily the most important. All news stories have omissions, deliberate or not, as it is impossible to approach a topic from all its perspectives, using all possible sources and explaining the role of all the actors directly and indirectly involved in the problem.

It is possible that the current possibilities offered by information technologies can partly resolve the traditional problems of space and time with such tools as the hypertext, but even in this case it would not be the same to place a new report in the initial node (the homepage of the online news outlet) than to ‘bury it’ in a fifth or sixth level of depth, with a certain picture and with certain statements from a certain source. And even if the information and the sources are the same, as mentioned, it is possible to frame the information differently: the order in which facts are exposed, the nouns and adjectives that are used, the chosen headline, etc., can condition very different frames.

For Entman (1993), repetition, the different location of information in the texts, and the association with certain social and cultural symbols, are the strategies employed by the media to give greater or

lesser emphasis to an aspect of reality. However, Entman also acknowledges that a little phrase at the end of a text can determine the interpretation of a message with more intensity than all of the other resources used to explain the issue or problem.

And on the contrary, an idea that is very emphasised in a news product can go unnoticed or be hardly remembered by the individual who has been in contact with this informative product when this idea does not match the schemas and belief system of the reader. There is a process of constant negotiation between the individual's social skills, attitudes, ideology, and the new information that comes through different news texts. But this does not mean that the importance of frames in this process can be obviated.

The concept of frame blends with the news values or criteria, which have a strong influence in the selection of events that will become news (agenda building), and in the decision on the aspects of the event on which the news will concentrate (frame building). Thus, narrative conventions applied to the drafting of a new piece include responding to the questions of who does what, and with what purpose. It suffices to remember the rules to write the summary lead, which involves answering the 5 Ws: *what, who, where, when, why*. The information provided in a news report is not the accumulation of raw data that can lead readers to make their own reflections: news messages build an interpretation of reality through narrative techniques that highlight the news story's agents (the main characters), the actions they carry out, the contextual elements and the possible implications, among others (Rhee, 1997).

So what role does a news media really play in the frame building process? And what about journalists? What other forces would come into play in the building of frames? It would be naïve, and unfair, to think that all framing work depends on journalist and the media. Entman uses a mathematical formula to summarise the influences which, in his view, play a role in the configuration of the news slant which, as mentioned, is not the same as frame, despite being a related concept. However, it can be considered that the influences or forces that determine the *slant* are the same affecting the process of framing. Entman's formula (2007, p. 167) is as follows [3]:

$$NS = PF + [A_{WH} \times (B_E + B_M + B_I)] - [A_O \times (B_E + B_M + B_I)] + C^1 \quad [4]$$

As shown in the formula, and contrary to what one might think, the ideology of the journalist plays a role on the news slant, as well as in the selection of the frame that will be used to build the news message. There are many actors who would try to make their framing prevail, as well as intangible pressures such as context, culture and production routines of the news media. Once transferred to the information piece, media frames will guide receivers' way of thinking, thus controlling their interpretation of the events/facts.

Frame is an invitation and an incentive to read a story in a certain way. This invitation is often overlooked, because framing is part of culture, so the construction process is hidden. This does not mean that there is only one way to explain things. On the contrary, there are in any given culture more frames than those selected to represent reality in the narrated story (Van Gorp, 2007).

4. Typology of frames

Without attempting to exhaust all the possible classifications of frames, or collect all the theoretical proposals in this regard, this section presents the types of frames used the most in the scientific literature.

4.1. Media frames and individual frames

According to their location, we can talk of media frame or frame in communication and frame in thought or individual frame. Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007) describe the frames used by the media as macro-constructs, necessary to reduce the complexity of the issues and to adapt it to the needs and constraints of the media and the audiences, as well as to the interpretive schemas they were used to. Once in the minds of individuals, frames become micro-constructs that allow audiences to use the received information to form their own impressions and images of the world.

Media frames are attributes of the news themselves, while individual frames are information and cognitive schemas. Media frames are built through the use of the media's own resources (written or spoken word, still or moving images, sounds and visual elements of all kinds, etc.) to organise the narrated story, in such a way that it promotes, as Entman (1993) points out, a definition of the problem, an interpretation of the causes, a moral assessment and a recommended treatment. The frames of individuals, on the other hand, are frames of interpretation of reality and schemas in which new information is integrated, so they do not have a physical manifestation (like media frames do), but can have influence on the attitudes and behaviour of individuals. These are psychological processes influenced by sociological factors such as culture.

4.2. Strong frames and weak frames

In response to the persuasive force of frames, a differentiation between strong frames and weak frames has been proposed. Chong and Druckman (2007) argue that if one accepts that there are different types of frames, one cannot refuse the idea that frames are not all equal in strength. The strength of a frame can be equated with the appeal of the frame for the individual or for the public, and its capacity of persuasion against an alternative frame. However, as Chong and Druckman (2007) recognise, the strength of the frame is difficult to measure. Questionnaires of perception and subjective scales are the instruments most commonly used to quantify this strength, although they are not free from problems, especially with regards to the accuracy of the measurement.

The relative strength of a frame depends on varied factors such as their *frequency*, *accessibility* and *relevance*. Frequency is defined as the number of times and number of media companies in which a frame is repeated: the greater the frequency, greater the force. The strength of a frame tends to be greater when it focuses on considerations that are *accessible* to individuals, who have already been exposed to the frame and have understood it beforehand. Accessibility and repetition are, in turn, strongly imbricated, because the accessibility of a message improves with repetition (Chong and Druckman, 2007). Another factor that is related to the strength of a frame is its *relevance*: a frame that speaks of the core of the matter will be stronger than those that speak of peripheral issues (Chong and Druckman, 2007).

4.3. Specific and generic frames

Literature on framing often distinguishes between generic and specific frames. The specific frames can only be applied to a specific topic or event, while generic frames can be applied with greater flexibility to different events, and sometimes even in different physical, temporal and cultural spaces.

The use of generic frames facilitates the comparison of the results of different research works carried out in different places and on different topics. Generic frames allow for the generalisation needed to thicken the theoretical body of the framing. The search for specific frames complicates this work, but in return it offers specific results to accurately examine the media treatment (and its reflection on the public) of a particular topic.

Neuman, Just and Crigler (1992) identified the most common generic frames used by both the media and the public: ‘human impact’, ‘powerlessness’, ‘economics’, ‘moral values’ and ‘conflict’. These generic frames, as formulated by Neuman *et al.*, and with slight modifications, have been reused in a number of subsequent studies on framing. A good example is the work by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), who employ most of the generic frames of Neuman *et al.* For their study, these researchers developed a scale to measure the frames known as ‘attribution of responsibility’, ‘conflict’, ‘human interest’, ‘morality’ and ‘economic consequences’.

Another type of generic frames that is widely used in the literature on political communication is the ‘strategy’ frame, proposed by Rhee (1997) in opposition to ‘issue’ frame. The strategy frame would be focused on aspects such as the style of political candidates, their personality, the tactics and development of the electoral campaign, etc. In this type of framing the language of war and game are frequently used (attack, battle, victory, defeat, etc.).

To capture the reader’s interest, news tend to highlight the human aspects of the campaign, and underrepresent the role of institutions or the underlying political discourse. Issue coverage, on the other hand, would focus on the bottom-line message, in the proposals to deal with social problems or the consequences of the policies carried out or suggested by the candidates. This type of coverage also highlights the role of institutions (parties, levels of government, etc.) against the role of individuals (Rhee, 2007).

Other works have also detected and measured the presence of specific frames that can only be applied to a particular issue or event or a set of similar events. Noakes and Wilkins (2002) studied the representation of Palestine’s demands based on a sample of news published by the *New York Times* and the Associated Press news agency, generating, via deductive procedures, seven specific frames, which were classified into ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ frames for the Palestinian interests. The negative frames for the Palestinian movement are those that presented Palestinian as ‘terrorists’, ‘violent’, ‘combatants’ and as the ‘cause of the problem’. The positive frames, on the other hand, presented Palestinians as ‘victims’, the movement as a ‘legitimate’, their struggle as ‘justified’ and their desire to have their own state as ‘legitimate’.

After the events of 9/11 in the United States of America and the subsequent war against Afghanistan, Edy and Meirick (2007) analysed the transfer of frames (from the media to the public), defining for this two specific frames linked to the legitimacy or illegitimacy of the invasion of Afghanistan by USA: ‘war’ and ‘crime’. The ‘war’ frame was linked to the construction of a reality in which the

fatal victims of the attacks were victims of war and, therefore, people responsible for their deaths should die on the battlefield. On the other hand, for the alternative ‘crime’ frame the dead were victims of a murder so that people responsible for this murder should stand trial.

In Spain, a good example of the research that identifies, via inductive methods, a set of specific media frames, is the one carried out by Igartua, Muñiz and Cheng (2005). These researchers found out that the representation of immigration in the Spanish press is carried out primarily through such frames as ‘irregular entrance of immigrants in boats’, ‘action over immigrant children’, ‘immigrants living in misery, suffering distress and need help’ and ‘immigrants as conflicting actors who participate in incidents, riots, attacks and leaks’.

5. Empirical identification of media frames

Most studies focused on the identification of media frames use news reports and, occasionally, their visual components as material of analysis. To identify these frames, communication researchers have traditionally used inductive and deductive methods. The deductive method is based on predefined frames, which are subsequently quantified in the sample of analysis. This method is more replicable and, therefore, can be used for comparative analyses (Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000). The inductive method, on the other hand, requires an open approach to the sample of analysis in order to detect the frames it contains.

There are no frames defined *a priori*, so that the identified frames will come exclusively from the sample, and not from frames used previously by other authors or from previous ideas proposed by researchers (Muñiz, 2007). The main drawback is that, generally, it is only applied on small samples because the detection process is arduous and hard to replicate.

5.1. The deductive method

The complexity of the studies based on an inductive approach has led most studies to use a deductive method (Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000). The content analysis carried out through this approach is easier to perform, can be applied to a large sample and is easily replicable. The main drawback of this approach is the loss of relevant information, since the frames that have not been defined *a priori* cannot be detected or measured (Igartua and Humanes, 2004). A usual strategy followed by deductive studies to carry out the previous selection of frames is to consider those frames that have been used successfully by other researchers, and which are applicable to the object of study in question.

As it has been shown, generic frames as defined by Neuman, Just, and Crigler (1992) have had wide repercussions in empirical research on framing. The adaptation carried out by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) in their classic work on European politics has also been employed by a multitude of researchers. This study proposed five frames. ‘Attribution of responsibility’ shows the problem or issue focusing on *who* caused a situation or *who* must solve it. The ‘conflict’ frame presents the issue from the perspective of polarisation and confrontation of individuals or social groups, sometimes using a language of war or games and competitions (Patterson, 1993; Valkenburg, Semetko and De Vreese, 1999; D’Haenens and De Lange, 2001). The ‘human interest’ frame is used to bring the issue or problem closer to any type of receiver, because the human emotion captivates everyone.

The issue is personalised, showing the human side, and can reach dramatization (D’Haenens and De Lange, 2001). The ‘economic consequences’ frame emphasises the economic impact that a particular

issue may have on citizens in general or on any particular group, making the public aware of a problem which, otherwise, might seem irrelevant (D’Haenens and Lange, 2001). The ‘morality’ frame gives prominence to the religious or moral implications of an issue or indicates a group or an individual how should behave. This framing is often camouflaged through the use of quotes, attributing the moral or religious recommendations or evaluations (D’Haenens and De Lange, 2001) to another actor (not the journalist or the news media company).

5.2. The inductive approach

Inductive approach allows the detection of frames through the immersion in the selected sample. Van Gorp (2007) has offered recommendations to carry out an inductive approach to frames, starting from the idea that in the text we cannot find explicit frames, but clues that lead to it. These clues, called framing *devices* or *reasoning devices*, are terms, metaphors, examples, descriptions, arguments, images and arguments, and they can may be explicit or implicit. Van Gorp advises us to begin with an analysis of certain strategically chosen news and to find elements that can operate as framing or reasoning strategies.

Afterwards, the researcher must find associations between those elements, because the latent content (the frame) would emerge from that association of images, metaphors and arguments, etc. Finally, Van Gorp warns about the complexity to name this association of elements, since naming a frame implies a frame decision in itself. The name must be abstract enough so that it can be applied in other situations, i.e., it must allow a certain degree of generalisation.

In Spain, Igartua *et al.* (2005) examined a sample of Spanish press articles from an inductive approach to detect media frames about immigration. Like Van Gorp, the Spanish authors considered that the frames are latent constructs that cannot be found directly in the text. In order for such latent constructs to manifest, we can use multivariate analysis techniques, based on a model called *frame mapping*.

6. Framing, from the media to individuals: frame setting

There are few studies in real contexts about how frame setting occurs or, in other words, about how media frames become public frames and influence the attitudes, opinions and behaviours of individuals and society (Edy and Meirick, 2007). Empirical research tends to analyse the presence of media frames, measure and compare them (e.g. Aruguete, 2010; D’Haenens and De Lange, 2001; Igartua *et al.*, 2005; Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000). Other studies measure, under experimental conditions, individuals’ responses to certain information pieces created especially for the study and framed in different terms (e.g. Price, Tewksbury and Powers, 1999; Valkenburg Semetko and De Vreese, 1999). There are, however, not sufficient experimental studies that characterise and define how media frames become public frames in natural environments.

From a theoretical perspective, the process would be conducted in a stepped manner, and would be subjected to conditioning influences and factors that might increase or moderate the effects in recipients, in the way it happens with the transfer of salience in the agenda-setting. For Rhee (1997), framing is a socio-cognitive process that would develop in three steps:

1) the reception of the informative message;

2) the integration of knowledge, and in which means understanding and memorising of part of the perceived information, in which an important role would be played not only the characteristics of the text but also by the information inferred by the interpreters, through their social knowledge and past experiences;

3) the construction of a discursive model, or a mental representation of the actors, the actions carried out by them or about them, the scenarios and the consequences of a situation, which can subsequently be *applied* in the interpretation of other similar events.

In the first stage, the frame activates in the mind of the receivers an interpretive schema of the event they are trying to understand. Through a term, a metaphor, an example, a description, an argument, a picture or a reasoning, the frame remits the receiver to a series of implicit contents that do not need to be repeated in the text, because, as mentioned above, the frame feeds on the culture and manifests itself in all types of social discourses. Thus, the substantive *avalanche*, used to characterise the arrival of immigrants (Rodríguez-Díaz and Mena-Montes, 2008), refers to a frame in which immigrants are perceived as a problem and a threat to the local population. Following the example of immigration, a photograph showing an immigrant being detained activates a schema of comprehension in which immigration is linked to crime, despite crime rates are generally similar between locals and immigrants (Ardévol-Abreu, 2008).

Activation is not the same for all individuals, because two people exposed to the same information can take or not in consideration the definition of the problem proposed, the attributed cause, the moral assessment or the recommendation made about the conduct to be followed. For this reason, Van Gorp (2007) states that the frame is not in the text: the connection with the *frame* will depend on the meaning attributed by individuals to what they have read, seen or heard.

However, the text encourages the reader to go along a path of reasoning, of interpretation, based on the aforementioned *framing devices*, which would work as ‘triggers’ that would activate the frame in the decoding of the information. We are talking about, for example, the choice of terms, the metaphors, examples, descriptions, arguments and images.

The adoption of the frame is, therefore, a complex phenomenon because there is no direct assumption of the media frames by individuals and the public: in addition to the different types of exposure to frames, the moral boundaries and personal convictions play a role in the selection and combination of media frames to generate the frame of the individual. Edy and Meirick (2007), for example, suggest that certain socio-demographic characteristics (such as social class, political ideas or belonging to an ethnic minority) influence the adoption of frames.

7. Framing effects on individuals and the public

Back in the 1970s, Goffman (1974), with little empirical support, predicted that through the selection and provision of salience, frames help the audiences to locate, perceive, identify, and label the flow of information that surrounds them. Through this process, frames determine the social environment, by influencing the thoughts, ideas, and attitudes of individuals and the public. The last steps of the study of the effects, still poorly developed, aims to go a step further to verify how frames affect behaviour.

The American political consultant Frank Luntz (cited by Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2007) was probably the first to use framing theory to design strategies that would enhance the persuasive power of political communication (and influence the behaviour of the public, primarily their voting behaviour). In 1997, and based on previous work in the fields of psychology, sociology, economics and communication, Luntz produced a report called the *Language of the 21st century*, which targeted Republican congressmen.

The document could be summarised in the following statement: “It is not what you say, but how you say it”. The report included terms and phrases that could influence the attitude of the public by ‘resonating’ with interpretive schemas of reality. Luntz’s strategy was quickly followed by the Democratic Party, with a document produced by Lakoff and titled *Don’t think of an elephant* (cited by Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2007). The effect of messages in election campaigns depended more on the mode of presentation than on the content itself.

Although research on the effects of messages on the public has often yielded contradictory results, current studies speak of ‘strong effects’ and ‘weak effects’. Individual and social perception can be affected greatly by the messages transmitted by the media, but this influence is moderated by the predisposition of individuals, their interpretive schemas and other characteristics of individuals and their social environment. This is according to Kinder (2007), who considers that the media appear to be influential enough to attract the attention of individuals and the public, but from there onwards the effects are highly variable.

On the one hand, many citizens do not consume current affairs news and simply miss the message. Part of the public is isolated in their private affairs and does not adequately perceive the message (Kinder, 2007). On the other hand, culture plays a central role in the processes of framing, acting as a ‘reservoir’ of frames, and simultaneously setting limits on what is socially acceptable or not: if the frames collide head-on with widely accepted cultural principles, it is unlikely that they will have major effects. Similarly, McCombs considers that, although most of the information acquired by the public about public affairs comes from the media, their effects are limited: “the public is not an automaton passively waiting to be programmed by the media” (2006, p. 186).

The interpretation of social facts and the development of a discursive model by the individual derive from a process of negotiation between prior social knowledge and new information to which the individual is exposed. Framing would act by reducing the role played by this prior knowledge in the construction of the interpretation and the attribution of meaning, but without managing to cancel it: individuals integrate and remember information better when it is consistent with their own knowledge and interpretive schemas (Rhee, 1997).

Large part of lab-based framing studies expose individuals to a single frame, which is very different from what happens in a natural environment, where there are alternative and even opposing frames for the same topic. It is perhaps for this reason, that the effects of framing in the public may have been magnified (Druckman, 2004). In a context of competition between frames, people seem to tend to offer ‘genuine’ opinions, which are independent of the frames to which they are exposed (Druckman, 2004). The natural exposure to the media is more prolonged and varied than the exposure that happens in a lab, as the former takes place gradually and during large periods of time (for most of the life of individuals) (Kinder, 2007).

8. Framing research in Spain

Despite the international advancement of the discipline, framing research in Spain is in an embryonic stage: it is dominated by individual efforts and there are no consolidated research teams (Vicente-Mariño and López-Rabadán, 2009). However, there is an exception to this statement: the Observatory of Audiovisual Contents (OCA according to its initials in Spanish) of the University of Salamanca, which under the direction of Juan José Igartua has proved to be the most productive research group to date.

Vicente-Mariño and López-Rabadán (2009) reviewed articles on framing that were published in source journals of communication [4] from 1997 to 2007. Only 14 studies [5] involving a total of ten researchers from Spanish centres were found. The most common authors are Juan José Igartua, Carlos Muñiz, María Luisa Humanes, Rosa Berganza, José Javier Sánchez Aranda and María José Canel. But what has happened in the following years? To diagnose the current state of framing research in Spain we conducted a similar study taking as a sample the source journals of communication [6] listed in the In-RECS database [7], which at the beginning of the period of analysis [8] were the following: *Anàlisi: Quaderns de Comunicació i Cultura*; *Comunicación y Sociedad*; *Comunicar: Revista de Medios de Comunicación y Educación*; *Estudios sobre el Mensaje Periodístico*; *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*; *Telos: Cuadernos de Comunicación e Innovación* and *Zer: Revista de Estudios de Comunicación*. The search for articles in the aforementioned journals was conducted through the bibliographic website Dialnet, using the keywords ‘framing’, ‘frames’ and ‘*encuadre*’. Results prior to 1 January, 2008 were excluded, as well as those that contained any of the keywords but did not correspond with framing theory, or had only named the keyword but had not used it in research. The results are shown in table 1.

From January 2008 to April 2015 the number of articles published in the source journals of communication (38) almost tripled the figure reached the previous decade, 1997-2007 (14). However, the study of Vicente-Mariño and López-Rabadán (2009) only analysed five source journals, two less than the number of journals considered in this study. For the 2008-2015 period, the average number of articles per year was 4.56, compared with the 1.4 reached in the analysis of the previous decade.

Table 1. *Studies employing framing theory in Spanish source journals of communication (1 January 2008-30 April 2015)*

Journal	Authors of articles about framing
<i>Anàlisi: Quaderns de Comunicació y Cultura</i>	- Muñiz, Igartua, De la Fuente & Otero (2008)
<i>Communication & Society / Comunicación y Sociedad</i>	- Ardèvol-Abreu (2015) - Azpíroz (2013) - Berganza Conde, De Miguel Pascual & Chaparro Domínguez (2011). - Cantrell Rosas-Moreno, Harp y Bachmann (2013) - Cheng y Palacios (2009) - Cmeciu, Cmeciu & Pătrut (2014)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gómez Calderón, Roses & Rivera (2014) - González Rodríguez & Novo (2011) - Sabre (2011)
<i>Comunicar</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Checa Olmos & Arjona Garrido (2011)
<i>Estudios sobre el Mensaje Periodístico</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Álvarez-Gálvez, Plaza, Muñiz & Lozano Delmar (2014) - Bartolomé Castro & Rodríguez Virgili (2012) - Cabalín (2013) - Camacho Marquina & Aiestaran Yarza (2013) - Carballa Rivas & García González (2014) - García López & Rodríguez Ruibal (2012) - León Romero (2012) - López Rabadán (2010) - Palau Sampio (2013)
<i>Revista Latina de Comunicación Social</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ardèvol-Abreu (2008) - Chavero, González, Bouza, Castromil & Rodríguez (2013) - Gómez Calderón, Paniagua Rojano & Farias Batlle (2013) - Igartua (2013) - Lorente, Antolín & Doblaz (2009) - Paricio-Esteban, Rodríguez-Luque & Rabadán-Zaragoza (2012) - Rodríguez Díaz & Mena Montes (2008) - Túñez & Guevara (2009) - Valera Ordaz & López García (2014)
<i>Telos: Cuadernos de Comunicación e Innovación</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rodríguez-Castromil & Rodríguez Díaz (2011)
<i>Zer. Revista de Estudios de Comunicación</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Berganza Conde (2008) - Caminos Marcet, Armentia Vizuete & Marín Murillo (2012) - Cheng, Igartua, Palacios, Acosta, Otero & Frutos (2009) - García Marín (2011) - Humanes (2009) - Miceviciute (2013) - Rodero, Pérez Maíllo & Tamarit (2009) - Rodríguez Díaz & Rodríguez-Castromil (2010) - Vicente Mariño & López Rabadán (2009)

Source: Authors' own creation

Table 2. Chapters on framing in collective works and books (1 Jan. 2008-30 April 2015)

Document type	Authors
	- Carratalá (2013)

Conference papers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cheng, Igartua, Palacios, Otero, Acosta & Frutos (2008) - Echart, Canel, García Gurrionero & Menéndez (2008) - Fuentes Fernández (2011) - García Hípola (2011) - Giansante (2009) - Humanes (2008) - Igartua, Otero, Muñiz, Cheng & Gómez (2009) - López Rabadán & Vicente Mariño (2008) - Merino Ribas & De Blas Mesón (2012) - Mondragón, Gil de Montes, Etxaide & Valencia (2014) - Muñiz y Romero (2012) - Paricio Esteban, Rodríguez Luque & Núñez-Romero Olmo (2011) - Pérez Díaz, Berná Sicilia & Arroyas Langa (2013) - Rodríguez Luque (2009) - Rodríguez Luque & Rabadán (2010) - Sánchez Castillo & Mercado Sáez (2013) - Saperas (2008)
Book chapters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Carballido González (2009) - Igartua, Otero, Muñiz, De la Fuente, Cheng, Gómez, Frutos & García (2008) - Sádaba, La Porte & Virgili (2008) - Sánchez Castillo (2011)
Books	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Giménez Armentia & Berganza Conde (2008)
Doctoral theses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ardèvol-Abreu (2013) - Carballido González (2010) - De la Puente Arranz, Y. (2013) - Escribano González (2014) - García Gurrionero (2010) - López Rabadán (2009) - Mena Montes (2010) - Rodríguez Luque (2009) - Sabre, (2010) - Verdú Cueco (2008) - Vicente Mariño (2009)

Chapters in collective works, books and dissertations are also relevant indicators to evaluate the scientific activity. A new search was conducted on Dialnet, using the same keywords and the same period of analysis used for journals, but now focused on this other kind of publications. For the identification of doctoral theses we used the Teseo database. After having reviewed the documents and deleted those publications that were published outside Spain or were not related to framing theory, we obtained the results that are summarised in table 2. The team led by Juan José

Igartua, and the Observatory of Audiovisual Contents (OCA), was once again the most active in the field [10], as shown in tables 1 and 2.

Despite these findings have to be taken with caution, as the method used to collect information does not allow us to obtain comprehensive data, it can be argued that communication research on framing carried out in Spain seems to continue in the same stadium described by Vicente-Mariño and López-Rabadán (2009: 29): “[...] It is foreseeable that it will be an fruitful [research] line in the future”. It seems that the start of this specialty has yet to happen and that the number of researchers is reduced and that a few authors are repeated in the scientific production. However, there has been some improvements over the previous decade, but for the size of the discipline in Spain it does not seem to be enough. One of the reasons for this delay with respect to other countries is perhaps the perception of framing as a complex model which requires the conduction of surveys, the development of lab-based experiments and quantitative content analyses with statistical tools. While this is partially true -large part of the international scientific production on the model is based on quantitative methods- framing also allows more theoretical and qualitative approaches, which might have greater presence among Spanish communication scholars.

9. Notes

[1] Although, as we shall see later, other authors consider that this is precisely their strong point.

[2] The editor of *The Guardian*, Charles P. Scott, wrote an essay in 1921 titled *A hundred years*, in which he coined the famous phrase: “Comment is free, but facts are sacred”.

[3] **NS**: News slant.

PF: Perceived facts.

A_{WH}: Ability of the White House. Refers to the ability of any level of government to place its own interpretation of the perceived facts, in order to introduce its own framing. Most of framing, priming and agenda-setting studies have focused on election campaigns or other aspects of political communication, so the White House can be replaced by any group of power.

B_E: Bias derived of the evaluation of the political game. Bias or general trend of the media. It is related to the editorial line of the news company.

B_M: Bias derived of the dynamics of the market and the competition between media companies.

B_I: Bias derived from the ideology of the journalist (decision-making bias).

A_O: Ability of the opposition to introduce their frames. As is the case of WHA, the opposition can be replaced by any group or individual who attempts to introduce alternative frames.

C: Context of the event and other causes of bias.

[4] The communication journal sources are those used by the EC³ (Evaluation of Science and Scientific Communication) research group to calculate the impact factor of Spanish journals of communication.

[5] Eight of them in *Comunicación y Sociedad*, three in *Zer* and one in each of the following journals: *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, *Anàlisi* and *Estudios sobre el Mensaje Periodístico*.

[6] The list of the source journals of communication was last updated in October 2008. On 20 January, 2014, the EC³ research group announced its inability to continue to updating the impact factors of the Spanish journals of legal, human and social sciences. The press release is available at: <http://ec3.ugr.es/in-recs/COMUNICADO.pdf>

[7] Impact factor of the Spanish journals of social sciences was retrieved from: <http://ec3.ugr.es/in-recs/>

[8] The period of analysis covered from 1 January, 2008, to 30 April, 2015.

[9] Search carried out on 2-4 may 2015 at <http://dialnet.unirioja.es/>. It is possible that some of the work on framing published in Spain from April 2007 to 2015 did not appear in the results because Dialnet collects a large portion of scientific publications, but not all of them. It is also possible that some articles used framing theory but did not mention the terms ‘framing’, ‘frames’ (or their equivalents in Spanish) in their title, abstract, or keywords. These cases were not include among the obtained results. This search, therefore, gives us a rough, non-exhaustive, idea of the amount of framing studies in Spain.

[10] Vicente Mariño and López Rabadán (2009) found that this group was the most active from 1997 to 2007.

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