

Between Silence and Salience:

A Multi-Method Model to Study Frame-Building from a Journalistic Perspective

Communication Methods and Measures

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This work was supported by FWO-Vlaanderen (Foundation for Scientific Research) under  
Grant G.0A35.12.

Disclosure statement: The authors of this manuscript have nothing to declare.

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**Abstract**

Research into frame-building, which aims to investigate the development of news framing in the journalistic realm, is on the rise. While most frame-building studies focus on the relative contribution of journalists or sources to news frames, this article presents and evaluates an integrated methodological model. The model is based on constructionist premises with the purpose of examining how frames are created *as part of the interaction* between reporters, editors and sources. Based on a review of the methodologies used in earlier frame-building studies, we propose an ethnographic four-phase model in which multiple methods are interwoven: newsroom observations, reconstruction interviews, frame analyses of news products (which illustrate what is made salient) as well as production documents (which also reveal what is silenced). The model is illustrated with two multi-sited studies in newspaper newsrooms: an interview-based study of the news reports of pre-selected journalists, and an observation-based study for which the news reports to be analyzed were selected based on their salience in newsroom meetings. Through this multi-method model, this paper offers some guidelines for the study of frame-building from a journalistic perspective.

*Keywords:* framing, frame-building, news frame analysis, news ethnography, reconstruction interviews, newsrooms

## Between Silence and Salience:

## A Four-Phase Multi-Method Model to Study Frame-Building from a Journalistic Perspective

This paper presents a methodology for studying frame-building in journalism practice. Most framing studies focus on the content of news stories or consider framing as a media effect on the receiver-side of communication. However, the research on frame-building (D. Scheufele, 1999), which investigates the production side of framing, gets considerably less attention (Borah, 2011; Matthes, 2009). Frame-building studies deal with questions about which *factors* influence the framing practices of journalists as well as about how these *processes* work (D. Scheufele, 1999: 108).

The analysis of frames in the news often implies a critique of the journalistic practice. For instance, journalists might employ stereotypical frames to depict protestors or minorities. However, content-only studies often overemphasize the determining agency of media professionals (Vliegenthart & Van Zoonen, 2011). A mere description of media frames “risks reifying them - locking them in place, as though they were not part of a larger conversation” (Reese, 2007: 149). Frames are not necessarily initiated by the authors of news reports. They may be the outcome of interactions with editors in the newsroom as well as with sources outside the newsroom, or they may be culturally shared by all of these actors. Therefore, from a scientific as well as a societal perspective, it is relevant to gain more insights into the processes of frame-building.

This paper follows Entman’s (1993: 52) definition of *to frame* as “to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communication text”. If framing is about selection and salience, it is also about excluding and repressing other aspects (Edelman, 1993; Gitlin, 1980). While content analysis of news reports is indispensable to

detect what is made salient, ethnographic research methods can shed light on what is being silenced.

Studying framing as an action assumes that a frame is present. Gamson & Modigliani (1987: 376) generally described a frame as “a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning” to events. Journalists are in the middle of this process of meaning construction. They create “interpretative packages” of the positions of various frame sponsors (D’Angelo, 2002; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Reese, 2010). Elaborating on this constructionist perspective, Van Gorp (2007, 2010) seeks to construct frames by linking framing devices (like metaphors, exemplars, and depictions, e.g. Gamson & Modigliani, 1989) with reasoning devices (definition of the issue, cause, consequences, solution, and moral evaluation, cf. Entman, 1993). Following this framing approach, the challenge for frame-building research is to determine where and in which circumstances framing and reasoning devices become embedded or ignored in news reports.

In theoretical approaches to frame-building, a distinction is often made between different types of frames according to their location, such as “journalist frames”, “newsroom frames” and “actor frames” (e.g., Brüggemann, 2014; B. Scheufele, 2006; D. Scheufele, 1999). Subsequently, empirical frame-building studies focus mainly on one of these locations (e.g., Engesser & Brüggemann, 2015; Hänggli, 2012). A constructionist approach to framing, however, is more interested in how these different levels interact to contribute to the framing of an issue rather than in distinguishing these locations as precisely as possible. Hence this paper’s focus is on journalistic routines rather than journalists’ mental maps, given that the former is usually considered a more powerful predictor of framing (Dunwoody, 1992).

This article is divided into the following sections. First, we review the methods used by earlier frame-building studies and we discuss the use of ethnographies in framing research. Second, we demonstrate our four-phase multiple-method model, which will subsequently be

implemented in two empirical studies. Then we discuss how the model functioned in these studies and present examples of our findings. In the final section, we discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the model, and suggest directions for further research.

### **Combining Content Analysis with Ethnography**

Constructionism emphasizes the integration of multiple methodologies to capture the range of meaning-constructing behavior (Neuman et al., 1993). Like earlier work within this paradigm that extends media content analysis with focus groups (Gamson, 1992) or in-depth interviews (Neuman et al., 1993) to study frame *effects*, our article suggests combining content analysis with ethnographic research methods to study frame-*building*.

On the one hand, although content analysis aims to make valid inferences from texts to contexts of use (Krippendorff, 2004), it is still bound by the “problem of inference” (Cottle, 2007). On the other hand, although news ethnography usually involves a kind of content analysis, the latter is seldom carried out as a contextualized framing approach.

Therefore, this article pleads for a multi-method approach in which the study of framing in news reports is interwoven with a study of framing in the prior production process. We suggest conducting observations and interviews *in context* of the analyzed news reports, in order to study “the immediate context of construction” (Hansen, 2006: 1064).

Content analysis of news reports, in which the frames applied to the news product are reconstructed, is by far the most popular method in framing research (Borah, 2011). For instance, by analyzing quotes in news reports it is possible to infer the extent to which journalists are influenced by official sources in their framing practices (e.g., Berbers et al., 2015). However, source information may be interwoven into the story without being explicitly referred to (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Tuchman, 1978). Moreover, it would be hard to explain why journalists are influenced to a certain extent by those sources. Some researchers try to grasp which factors influence news production more directly by extending

content analyses of news reports to journalistic editorials (B. Scheufele, 2006) and/or source documents (e.g., Callaghan & Schnell, 2001; Hänggli, 2012). While such input/output analyses may tell us a lot about the *influence* of journalists or sources separately, how they create meaning during interaction remains unclear. With comparative content analyses it may be possible to trace a news frame back to a particular source, but this fails to explain its salience in the news content. Have journalists functioned as a conduit for the source? Or was the source selected only because its frame matched a predefined journalistic frame?

To answer such questions, it is more appropriate to query journalists and/or sources themselves. Surveys have proven useful in detecting individual journalists' cognitive frames (Engesser & Brüggemann, 2015), for instance. Interviews have also been used to study how predefined frames are constructed by journalists (Bartholomé et al., 2015; Lewis & Reese, 2009) or to study the framing processes of journalists and/or sources (Castello & Montagut, 2011; Wallington et al., 2009). However, these studies insufficiently explain how the processes detected are translated into news content. The frame-building studies that combine in-depth interviews with news content analyses, in turn, consider the production context usually in function of the analyzed news reports (e.g., Borah, 2008; Kothari, 2010; Lazic, 2013; Pan et al., 1999): for instance via interviews, shedding light on journalists' reflections on the results of the content analysis.

Although observation has been regularly suggested as a possible research method for frame-building (e.g., Brüggemann, 2014; B. Scheufele, 2006), it has so far been rarely used in the field of framing. Yet, pioneering news production scholars Tuchman (1978) and Gitlin (1980) introduced framing as a concept into the study of news. Their long-term observations provide us with enduring insights about how framing is influenced by organizational routines, such as the division of news beats or the weight given to official sources. However, partly

because of their broader focus on news production in general (Scheufele, 1999), their content analyses were not as systematic as in studies solely dedicated to framing.

Despite their general revival in journalism studies (e.g., Patterson & Domingo, 2008), few of today's more narrowly designed news ethnographies focus on framing. Some of them make use of the framing concept but do not really adhere to the framing tradition (e.g., Silcock, 2002; Van Hout & MacGilchrist, 2010). However, we believe observation has a specific added value to framing research as an appropriate method through which one can "reveal the complex of forces, constraints and conventions that shape the selections and silences of media output" (Cottle, 2007: 5). Investigating the production process makes it possible to explore voices that were present during the news story construction, whether or not they have been marginalized or silenced in the finished products (Hansen, 2006).

Moreover, news ethnography has an important methodological value in itself because of its inherent multiple-method approach. In fact, it consists of several of the aforementioned methods: observing, interviewing and document gathering (Cottle, 2007). The multiple-method approach is not only a route to additional knowledge: its multipronged nature also functions as a validation strategy (Flick, 2004). While each one of the methods used may have its own weaknesses, combined they provide a stronger basis for the triangulation of evidence (Cottle, 2007).

However, while news reports are readily available to researchers, newsrooms can only be entered after negotiations for access have taken place (e.g., Ilan, 2014). Such negotiations can be even more problematic for framing research since journalists tend to associate the concept negatively with "spinning" and "manipulation" (see Boesman & Van Gorp, 2016). Moreover, ethnographic research is fraught with more generic problems: a time-consuming approach, it produces results that tend to be anecdotal with respect to the observed



newsroom(s) (Domingo, 2003). In light of this, the rise of “multi-sited” and “micro” ethnographies (Hannerz, 2003; Murphy, 2011) can be understood.

### **A Four-Phase Model for Studying Frame-Building**

The methodological contribution of this paper to the framing field lies in the interweaving of ethnographic methods with systematically conducted content frame analyses. A four-phase model of data collection and analysis (see Table 1) is proposed. First, observations are conducted in the newsroom(s), with a focus on story construction; second, news reports for which the production process was observed are analyzed; third, reconstruction interviews are carried out with the authors of these news reports. After completion of the fieldwork, all production documents are subject to a frame content analysis: i.e. the “data made” (field notes, interview transcripts) as well as the “data found” (newsroom, journalist, and source documents).

We suggest *immediate observation* of how news chiefs discuss specific news reports (phase 1) and *retrospective interviews* on how reporters developed these news reports (phase 3). News chiefs are more easily observed than reporters, because they spend relatively more time interacting with colleagues than working individually from behind the computer screen. Also, it is more difficult to interview them retrospectively about one specific story, because they work on about thirty stories a day, none of them in detail. To facilitate a coherent understanding, we propose the term “reporters” for the authors of news reports, “editors” for those who work behind the scenes on the news reports (copy editors, news chiefs, editors-in-chief), and “journalists” as the umbrella term.

\*\*\*TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE\*\*\*

#### **Phase 1: Newsroom observations**

The first phase investigates framing from a newsroom perspective, by means of newsroom observation. The aim is to observe journalistic interactions about story

construction: which angles are suggested, which framing devices are referred to, and how negotiations of newsworthiness lead to decisions of inclusion and exclusion (Clayman & Reisner, 1998; Cotter, 2010)?

During this phase, a bird's-eye-view is recommended. First, one observes all relevant story meetings with regard to the development of news reports. Second, during and/or after these meetings, 'story budgets' are usually collected, i.e. journalistic lingo for the list of news items reporters are working on, with information on how an event must be covered. Third, between the meetings, one follows how these story budgets, as the outcome of story meeting discussions, are implemented in practice. Finding a place where the interaction of news chiefs, reporters and editors can be closely followed—for instance a central news desk—is strongly recommended.

The researchers gather all relevant information with regard to the selection and framing of news reports, if possible in real time and discreetly, on a laptop. It is advised that field notes be properly recorded as soon as possible, for example, during quiet moments in the newsroom. While the newsrooms' story budgets (or similar documents) offer an overview of the *salience* of stories and angles, the researchers' field notes also include those stories and story angles that are being *silenced*. For example, in discussing a story about massive layoffs at a major bank, the economy editor wants to focus on the dismissed employees, but the editor-in-chief instructs to focus on the main cause of the layoffs—the rise of digital banking—and to frame the story as a “tsunami”. This shift has meaningful consequences, because it shifts the responsibility away from the bank to a natural disaster, which is impossible to stop.

## **Phase 2: News frame analysis**

In the second phase, the frame-building process is investigated through a framing analysis of published news reports. These may be reports of pre-selected journalists or news

beats, as well as reports that were prominently discussed during the preceding observations. The frame analysis starts from the idea that a frame can be split up into manifest framing devices (such as word choice, metaphors, and stereotypes, cf. Gamson & Modigliani, 1989) and manifest or latent reasoning devices (definition of the issue, cause, consequences, solution, and moral evaluation, cf. Entman, 1993). Such devices can be clustered into frame packages, i.e. an integrated structure of those devices that promote a particular interpretation of a topic (Van Gorp, 2010). However, because of the limited time available for frame analyses during fieldwork, it is advised to restrict frame analysis to a listing of *manifest* devices. The researchers indicate the main textual and visual elements that represent a journalistic choice and which impact the meaning of an issue (e.g., the phrase “dissertation factory” in a news report about the increase in the number of PhDs at universities). Also, because of the limited amount of data at this phase, we suggest postponing the clustering of devices into frame packages until the fourth phase. Of utmost importance in this phase is that the researchers sufficiently prepare for the reconstruction interview (phase 3), during which the author of the news report will be asked to explain why certain choices were made and which alternatives were available.

### **Phase 3: Reconstruction interviews**

In the third phase, framing is investigated from a reporter’s perspective, through semi-structured reconstruction interviews with the author(s) of the analyzed news reports. Reconstructing the “biographies” of news stories (Brüggemann, 2013) makes it possible to focus on recording actions “on specific stories rather than general estimations” (Reich, 2006: 501). While this methodology was originally developed to get around the limitations of content analysis and the difficulties of observation (Reich, 2006, 2008), this article argues that the latter has added value in that it combines and connects these methods.

Reconstruction interviews have been on the rise lately (for an overview, see Reich & Barnoy, 2016), although they have not been used previously for the study of framing. Most reconstruction studies use quantitative questionnaires (Reich & Barnoy, 2016). However, investigating how journalists add meaning to events may be difficult without including qualitative interview questions. Therefore, our interviews consisted of both a narrative and a focused-discourse section.

In the *biographical-narrative* interview section (Hopf, 2004), reporters are encouraged to retell the news report as it developed, as chronologically as possible. A typical opening question is: “Could you tell us how this story developed, from the beginning?” The interviewers only intervene to fill in gaps about the reporters’ interactions with colleagues and sources during the story’s construction. This section both aims to give interviewees an opportunity to mention points that had not been anticipated earlier and to collect a set of standardized data (e.g., the type of sources used).

In the *focused-discourse* interview section (Odell, Goswami & Herrington, 1983), the published news report serves as a guideline. The focus is on the origins of the framing devices identified by the researcher (see phase 2). Typical questions are: “Did you initiate use of this metaphor?” or “Were you consulted about the choice of this picture?” The point is to analyze the rhetorical choices as well as to shed light on the tacit ‘taken-for-granted’ choices.

While the latter interview section focuses on the framing and reasoning devices that survived the news production process, the first section also focuses on those devices that did *not* survive the final selection, such as alternative interpretations and rejected arguments. To continue with the example of the “dissertation factory” (see phase 2), we learned from the focused-discourse section that this phrase was used by the reporter rather than the sources and incorporated into the headline by the editors. From the biographical-narrative part, it became clear that the accompanying story was about “exclusive” news delivered by government

members who want universities to shift their focus from quantity to quality. The phrase “dissertation factory” was made salient by the journalists to turn the technical arguments of the sources into a powerful device that made the story more directly understandable for the audience. The exclusiveness of the news explains why the framing of the sources was followed and even strengthened.

A practical guideline related to the focused-discourse section is that the news report itself should ideally be shown during the interview. Although telephone interviews can be practical in a multi-site study, the interviewee’s memories may be more easily jogged if the interviewer directs attention to specific devices. Because it is essential that the reporters remember both the “silences” and the “salience” with the same frequency and clarity, a guideline for the narrative section is that the interviews ideally be conducted on the day of publication or broadcasting.

During the interview, the researcher asks for access to production documents which led to the final news report (such as press releases or email correspondence with sources). These documents are helpful for completing the reconstruction and/or to verify what the reporter related during the interview. Obtaining production documents is a matter of trust between researcher and journalist, but is equally often a matter of practicality. For instance, the longer the time lapse between the publication and the interview, the more difficult it may be for reporters to retrieve all related documents.

#### **Phase 4: Frame-building analysis**

In the fourth phase, after finishing the fieldwork, the quest for framing and reasoning devices is extended from the final news report to the prior production process, in order to obtain an overview of any frames that were available to a reporter during the story’s construction. The frame-building analysis consists of four steps for each reconstructed news report.

First, the researchers identify framing and reasoning devices in all production documents gathered in phase 1 (field notes, story budgets) and phase 3 (e.g., interview transcripts, journalists' drafts, press releases). Second, the researchers identify framing and reasoning devices again in the news reports. While in phase 2 this analysis was conducted to prepare for the interviews, in phase 4 there is time to extend the analysis from the manifest devices to the latent reasoning devices (e.g., the moral evaluation associated with a range of framing devices such as the "dissertation factory" is that universities are more concerned with profits and rankings than with fundamental research or service to the society). Third, the devices identified in the production documents are incorporated in the devices identified in the news reports and clustered into frame packages (cf. Van Gorp, 2010). This quest for an integrated structure corresponds with labeling of the frames. Fourth, the devices identified in phase 2 are relocated within these frame packages. By doing so, one can ascertain the extent to which some frames are made salient or silent. Fifth, the devices identified in all production documents are organized in a table. Any actions having led to the final news report are listed chronologically in the rows, while the columns contain the various actors (reporters, editors, sources) and their interactions. Researchers are thus able to pinpoint the moment in the process in which specific framing and reasoning devices were initiated, ignored, repressed, selected and/or emphasized.

For this kind of interpretative framing analysis, intercoder reliability may be hard to achieve. Often, one has to balance a concern for scientific accuracy and the need to 'read between the lines' to uncover the implicitly applied frames (Gitlin, 1980; Reese, 2001). Knowing that according to Tankard (2001) taking two frames into consideration is a prerequisite to arrive at an acceptable level of intercoder reliability, the assessment must be made if one still wants to work with a longer list of frames (there is always the risk that the subtlety of framing may be lost in reducing them). However, if there are many news reports

available for one event the inductive analysis of the news reports (see above) can quite easily be extended with a deductive phase (see Van Gorp, 2010) in which intercoder reliability becomes an attainable objective (see Berbers et al., 2015).

### **Methods**

The proposed multiple-method strategy is illustrated by two separated multiple-site studies (see Table 2), focused on newspaper journalists and newsrooms in Belgium and the Netherlands. One study is exemplary for having selected reporters and defined issues beforehand, and the other for having kept its options open at all times during fieldwork. The first study simultaneously follows reporters in four different newsrooms, while the second one observes two different newsrooms in succession. Both studies will be discussed in light of their selection of newsrooms, news reports and reporters, their strategies for gaining access to newsrooms (phase 1), the number of news frame analyses (phase 2) and reconstruction interviews (phase 3), and the frame-building analyses (phase 4).

\*\*\*TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE\*\*\*

#### **Study 1: Reconstructing news reports from pre-selected reporters**

In the first study, twenty domestic news reporters from four different newsrooms were followed in parallel. During a six-week period, each of their news reports was analyzed based on news content and the frame applied, and reconstructed through regular interviews. The content analyses and interviews were supplemented with observations. In the end, this study provided 680 reconstructed news reports (see Boesman et al., 2015b).

This study aimed to gain insight into how issues and frames were initiated in the interactions between sources, reporters, editors, and competitor media. Also, we wanted to understand how issues and frames relate to one another. After all, it is possible that the dominant *framing* of an issue in the news has an impact on the *selection* of issues. News that fits within an ongoing frame may have more chances of being selected. To investigate this,

we examined different frames from different reporters and different newsrooms on the same range of events. We selected the newsrooms of two Flemish media companies, namely the main two popular and quality newspapers in Flanders (i.e. the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium). Looking for a balance between representativeness and feasibility we selected five domestic news reporters in each newsroom. They all covered more or less the same topics, such as health and welfare, police and justice, education and research, and immigrants and minorities.

To gain access, we adopted a bottom-up strategy, in which the selected reporters were approached directly. Their willingness to participate facilitated the contacts and collaboration with editors-in-chief later on. Through the latter, we obtained access to the newsrooms, which was necessary for our observations.

In this study, the selection of reports-to-be-analyzed was clearly defined beforehand, namely *all* of the pre-selected reporters' news reports. In practice, this was about 18 to 19 news reports per day, including short news items.

Because the study design required a considerable investment of time on the journalists' part, the researchers had to be flexible with regard to interview settings and timing. Some reporters preferred a daily telephone interview about the news report from the previous day, while others preferred a longer, weekly face-to-face interview about the news reports of the preceding week. These interviews were conducted inside as well as outside the newsroom. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed.

Because this study provided a selection of standardized data about a relatively large number of news reports, all of them were coded in SPSS according to variables such as the trigger for the news report, the number of sources, and the autonomy of the reporter (see Boesman et al., 2015b). A selection of news reports and production documents about the same issue, in and between the different newsrooms, was selected for an in-depth frame-



building analysis, i.e. the departure of Belgian youth to war-torn Syria (see Boesman et al., 2015a). We conducted a manual frame analysis of these data, following the steps in phase 4 of the aforementioned model.

### **Study 2: Reconstructing prominently discussed news reports**

Instead of aiming for a comprehensive picture of *every* news report that a reporter works on over a certain period, the second study focused instead on the reconstruction of news reports which were the most significant object of attention in the newsrooms themselves. News reports which garnered more attention are assumed to contain a higher frequency of relevant interactions, for instance more consultation between reporters and editors.

Twenty full-time observation days were carried out in two newsrooms, which amounts to two consecutive weeks in each newsroom. These newsrooms were selected according to the criterion of observability, i.e. the possibility of observing interactions between different actors during the frame-building process. To this end, we conducted observations at two newsrooms with a “central news desk” (Boesman et al., 2015b; Vandendaele & Jacobs, 2014) from which it was possible to follow the interactions of editors and reporters. Both newsrooms belonged to quality newspapers with a progressive profile, and were owned by the same media company. The first newspaper caters for a Flemish audience, while the second is published in the Netherlands.

Because we did not select reporters beforehand, we gained access through “middle” contacts in the news organizations—in this case, a news chief and a senior journalist. These influential individuals were helpful in gaining the goodwill of the editors-in-chief and, through them, the cooperation of the reporters on the newsroom floor.

Each observation day, one or two main news items were selected for reconstruction, and reconstruction interviews were conducted with the reporters. Thus, instead of defining

criteria for the selection of *reporters*, this study needed selection criteria for *news reports*: they had to be discussed during the newsroom observations; they had to appear prominently in the newspaper (i.e. as a ‘main’ news story/headline, with prominent headings and pictures); and, as a practical requirement, the reporters had to be available in the newsroom for an interview. In total, twenty news reports were reconstructed, written by seventeen different reporters.

Because the number of reports-to-be-analyzed was more manageable in this study, it was possible to conduct a double frame analysis: one by a field researcher and the other by a desk researcher. The analyses of the latter reached the first “embedded” researcher before the start of the reconstruction interview, and were used as additional input for the interviews.

All interviews in this study were conducted in the newsroom, ideally in a separate room, but sometimes performed at the desk of the reporter or in the canteen during lunchtime. Through the reporter interviews, we obtained early versions of news reports (from rough drafts to final versions for copy editing) and/or source material (such as transcribed interviews and correspondence with sources, notes, and reports).

This study dealt with few news reports but provided a large amount of contextual data. To get an overview and to infer the first linkages, all data were stored in NVIVO. Ultimately, we conducted a manual frame analysis of these data, following the steps in phase 4 of the aforementioned model.

## **Findings**

This section illustrates the results of the multiple-method approach through one specific case study from each empirical study: a series of news reports begin part of a continuing news story (study 1), and an in-depth analysis of the development of one specific news report (study 2).

### **Studying frame-building *across* news reports (study 1): The Syria Fighters**

The design of the first study made it easier to focus on a specific issue, because it was plausible that domestic news reporters from different newsrooms would write about the same events. The most widely covered theme during the fieldwork was that of the Belgian so-called “Syria fighters” (see Boesman et al., 2015a), then a relatively new issue on the news agenda. We show how data were gathered according to the four-phase model, presenting some of the findings that emerged from this multiple-method strategy.

During the *newsroom observations* the issue popped up periodically. It was also discussed with news chiefs in the newsroom. However, the observation field notes about this issue were gathered sporadically rather than systematically. This was because observation could only be carried out if there was sufficient time between the daily reconstruction interviews, and because we obviously could not know then that this story would become the most important one during our research period. With regard to the *news frame analyses*, the issue was covered in 30 news reports (out of 680) from pre-selected reporters. These news reports were dealt with during the *reconstruction interviews* with reporters. Five pre-selected reporters from three different newsrooms covered the issue, some occasionally and others more frequently. The gathering of production documents was complicated because usually more news reports (about other issues) were reconstructed during the same interview. This often made it too time-consuming for reporters to retrieve information about all of these items. Finally, we conducted *frame-building analyses* on the basis of all news reports, interview transcripts, field notes, and production documents. To supplement this, all news reports about the Syria fighters written by non-selected reporters from the selected newspapers were included in the analysis.

Because we have different successive news reports from different newsrooms about the same issue, this study design resulted in three main findings that made it possible to

examine how frames were created “across stories, media, and time” (Reese, 2007: 150) on a micro-scale.

First, examining *across stories* made it possible to develop a more extensive inventory of framing and reasoning devices in comparison with issues which were only dealt with in one or a few news reports. Thus, four tightly delineated frames could be distinguished: in the ‘Arab Spring’ frame the actions of the young men were legitimized (e.g., by using the metaphor of “Spring” or by emphasizing values such as “freedom” and “autonomy”); in the ‘War on Terror’ frame their actions were problematized (e.g., by referring to the exemplar of “Al Qaeda”); in the ‘Missing Children’ frame the young men were viewed as victims of recruiters (e.g., by using images of their crying family members); and finally, in the ‘Pact with the Devil’ frame the good boys had morphed into extremist fighters (e.g., by using images to mark a contrast “before” and “after” their recruitment, for instance, the first showing one young man in a soccer outfit, and the second showing the same young man with a kalashnikov).<sup>1</sup>

Second, examining *across media* made it possible to identify influencing factors with regard to the news ecology in which the story took place. We found that the quality newspapers initially stayed close to the framing the authorities favoured (promoting the War on Terror frame); while the popular newspapers shifted focus more rapidly to the stories of the desperate parents of the departed young men (promoting the Missing Children frame). The reconstruction interviews revealed that the latter angle was the result of a purposeful quest for human interest stories.

Third, examining *across time* made it possible to sketch the emergence of the framing of a new issue on the news agenda. We found that reporters, at first instance, stayed close to the framing and reasoning devices initiated by their main sources. The more journalists

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<sup>1</sup> Source of quotations in this paragraph: news reports

became familiar with the issue, the more they began to initiate framing and reasoning devices themselves, in particular those leading to the Pact with the Devil frame.

### **Studying frame-building *within* news reports (study 2): The Dementia Story**

While the first study made it easier to detect frame shifts *across* different news reports, the second study made it easier to detect frame shifts *within* the construction of one specific news report. The total corpus of news reports was significantly less extensive in the second study, but the diversity of the internal data regarding a single news report was much greater. We will illustrate the added value of this data triangulation with a news feature about a project in which mildly demented people learn to live independently again in the neighborhood of a nursing home. For each phase of the model, examples will be given of what kind of data was found and made. It will then be shown how all the collected data comprehensively help explain the framing of this issue.

First, with regard to the *newsroom observations*: we made field notes of all the meetings in which the item was discussed, and we gathered story budgets with suggestions from the editors about how the issue ought to be covered. The first time the item showed up on the editors' table, the news chiefs were unanimously enthusiastic, because of the inherent counterintuitivity of the "living independently *again*" concept (since nursing homes are usually seen as a terminus), and because the project turned out to be cost-effective (which made the story relevant in the context of much needed healthcare savings). The item found itself on the table again during a midday meeting dedicated to the composition of reports in the newspaper. Being considered as a "good news" story, it was given a prominent place in the newspaper to achieve a balance with the overload of "serious" stories in that day's story budget.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Source of quotations in this paragraph: fieldnotes and/or story budgets

Second, in the *news frame analyses*, framing and reasoning devices were indicated by the field researcher as well as by the desk researcher. The thematic coding revealed, for instance, metaphors such as “regain control over your life” and the repeated use of the values “autonomy” and “self-reliance”. Both project and persons with dementia were positively portrayed in the news report.<sup>3</sup>

Third, the *reconstruction interviews* showed, for instance, that the reporter was instructed by a news chief to construct the news report around one of the five people with dementia who took part in the project. The person who was finally portrayed was selected because “she seemed very normal [...] It could have been my grandmother”. With regard to the interactions with sources, the reporter mentioned that the project’s communications officer succeeded at altering a few things in the version to be read in advance. Among other things, she was asked to delete the main cause of early dementia for the people involved in the project, namely “Korsakoff syndrome”, which results from excessive alcohol use.<sup>4</sup>

Fourth, regarding the *frame-building analysis*: we had one single news report, but an extensive selection of production documents (e.g., field notes, story budgets, interview notes and the reporter’s drafts, websites about the project visited, and email correspondence between reporter and sources). Because of the volume of documents, we were able to construct frame packages as well as a detailed chronological table (i.e. the last three steps of the 4<sup>th</sup> phase of the model). The dominant frame package in the news story was defined in terms of “forget dementia, remember the people” (see also Van Gorp & Vercruyse, 2012). However, if framing devices such as “Korsakoff” or “psychiatric and addiction problems” had been able to make it into the final news report, the news framing might have been contextualized instead as “people with dementia have nobody but themselves to blame for

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<sup>3</sup> Source of quotations in this paragraph: news reports

<sup>4</sup> Source of quotations in this paragraph: interview transcripts

their disorder” (*researchers’ interpretation*). The issue of alcohol was prominently discussed in the first interview with the project director, whose phrase “memory problems caused by alcohol addiction” survived in the version sent to the sources upon request. From the next email correspondence between the reporter and the communications officer, it appeared that the latter requested the deletion of the phrase, because it might be “stereotyping and irrelevant”. But the phrase had already been deleted in the version that was discussed during the editors’ meetings. Later on, it was decided that the item should be given a prominent place as a “positive story” for the newspaper’s front pages. Although the reporter also mentioned the interviewee’s request in the reconstruction interview, the production documents were needed to realize the salience of these framing devices.<sup>5</sup>

In conclusion, the framing of the news report in terms of “forget dementia, remember the people” (*researchers’ interpretation*) could be explained as a source-winning negotiation between the main source and the reporter, on the basis of story construction decisions (e.g., focusing on the most “normal” participant in the project), and following journalistic routines (such as the application of the news values “composition” and “good news”).<sup>6</sup>

### **Discussion & Conclusion**

Framing scholars have hesitantly (re)discovered the production side as a research area. Most frame-building studies focus on the relative contribution of certain actors or locations in the framing process, whether it be sources (e.g., Hänggli, 2012) or journalists’ cognitions (Engesser & Brüggemann, 2015). What remains under-researched, however, is how journalists construct frames in interaction with both sources and colleagues in the newsroom. Therefore, a constructionist approach to frame-building makes sense.

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<sup>5</sup> Source of quotations in this paragraph: journalist and source documents; fieldnotes

<sup>6</sup> Quotations in this paragraph are the researchers’ interpretations

Elaborating on frame-building work that *combines* multiple methods (e.g., Borah, 2008; Hänggli, 2012; Kothari 2010), this article *interweaves* multiple methods. Observations are focused on these news reports that will be analyzed and reconstructed afterwards. Reconstruction interviews are used to establish a connection between the observations and the content analyses. Therefore, the different methods are not conducted consecutively and separately from each other, as it usually is the case.

This article could also be considered as an attempt to bring ethnography back into framing research. An ethnographic methodology is well suited to shedding light on the interactional origin of frame-building and to explore the silences in the news production process (Cottle, 2007). While frame-building studies largely neglect the possibilities of observations, news ethnographies nowadays give limited attention to framing. Therefore, this article suggests to reassess the ethnographic methodologies of pioneering framing scholars (Gitlin, 1980; Tuchman, 1978), and to enrich them with the methodological toolkits for content frame analysis that scholars such as Gamson & Modigliani (1989) developed later on.

### **The two studies compared**

The four-phase model proposes interweaving observations, news frame analyses and reconstruction interviews. The model was exemplified by two different studies. The first study reconstructed the news reports of pre-selected reporters from four different newsrooms, who were simultaneously followed. In the second study, news reports observed in two different newsrooms were selected for reconstruction on the basis of how much attention they received during newsroom meetings.

The first study provided a relatively large number of reconstructed news reports. One of the strengths of this study was comparability between different newsrooms. Consequently, the *intermedia* dynamics of frame-building could be taken into account. However, observation field notes and production documents were gathered sporadically rather than



systematically. This was partly due to the simultaneous study design. The predominance of interviews over observations is almost inevitably the result of multi-site ethnographic research (Hannerz, 2003). Also, we underestimated the productivity of the selected reporters. Thus, the time for systematic observations was limited in addition to the time allotted to the analyses and interviews. Future studies working with a similar design could try to increase the volume of observations and production documents by extending the research capacity, selecting fewer reporters, or reconstructing fewer news reports.

The second study provided a relatively large number of production documents that corresponded with a relatively small number of reconstructed news reports. It appeared that the permanent presence of the researcher in the newsroom facilitated collection of these documents. Consequently, the *intramedia* dynamics of frame-building---i.e. the interactions between sources, reporters, news chiefs, and other functions in the newsroom---could be investigated with more precision. However, comparisons with the frame-building of similar news reports of competitor media were not feasible. Here, the studied frame-building was limited to the same newsroom. Again, the deployment of more researchers could be a solution for analyzing more news reports from different newsrooms. When planning a team's ethnographic research, however, it should be kept in mind that all researchers must be briefed regularly to ensure a similar research protocol.

With regard to the frame analyses it appeared easier in the first study to construct frame packages for some issues (and thus to fulfill steps 2 and 3 of the 4<sup>th</sup> phase of the model) as we had more news reports about a similar issue, resulting in a higher number of framing and reasoning devices. In the second study, due to the large number of production documents, it was easier to construct the chronology of one single news report (and thus to fulfill step 4 of the 4<sup>th</sup> phase of the model). In principle, it might also have been possible in this study to

follow the same news event across a longer stretch; however, we did not run across such an ongoing news story during the research period.

The key difference across both studies was the distinction between “preplanning” versus “keeping your options open”. Making arrangements in advance can bring more focus to observation and provide more assurance that news reports can actually be constructed afterwards. However, there remains a risk that observations become too narrowly focused, causing researchers to miss those issues that are prominently discussed during newsroom observations.

### **Limitations and suggestions for future research**

Apart from the comparative weaknesses of the study designs, a number of more general shortcomings should be mentioned. In relation to these limits, we will provide suggestions for further research.

A first limitation concerns the inherent subjectivity of qualitative approaches to framing. Although working with different ‘interpreters’ (in this study: the field researcher, a desk researcher, and the reporters themselves) may increase the reliability of the results, this is not the same as intercoder reliability. This warrants another study design. Future studies, for instance, can delineate an issue beforehand, depart from predefined frames in the literature, and work with a fixed set of variables to detect these frames.

Second, the role of sources is only taken into account second-hand. Even if the journalists are willing to provide source documents, it is only possible to make inferences about their role. Sources can be investigated more directly by interviewing them, by listening during interviews, or by accompanying journalists in the field.

Third, the question is left open as to whether or not this newspaper-based study could be generalized to other media platforms, such as audiovisual and online media. Almost all reconstructed news stories played out online as well, but debates about the distribution of

these stories was beyond the scope of this study. It might be asked, for instance, whether the influence of a news value such as “composition” is still relevant in a time in which news reports are increasingly spread by sharing them on social media. The observation that there was relatively less debate about online news items in the studied newsroom raised legitimate questions about the relationship between reporters’ autonomy and framing processes.

Fourth, findings may be specific to domestic news reporters (study 1), or to centralized organized newsrooms (study 2). For instance, news chiefs may be less influential in decentralized newsrooms (see Boesman et al., 2015b). Therefore, future studies could be extended to other news beats or differently organized newsrooms.

Fifth, although a recent Dutch study found that freelance journalists are highly dependent on the newsroom for story selection as well as story angles (Hermans, 2016), their increasing numbers raises the question as to whether the newsroom is still the place to be for a central ethnographic location (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2010). When one needs to follow reporters themselves, we think it is more convenient to shadow their screenwork with the help of specialized software (e.g., Van Hout & Macgilchrist, 2010).

Lastly, the question remains as to whether the frames identified by researchers and journalists are recognized as such by audiences. To build a comprehensive model of framing, effect studies could be conducted to integrally map the entire news and audience framing process.

### **Acknowledgments**

The authors would like to sincerely thank the three anonymous reviewers for their constructive suggestions on the manuscript.



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Table 1.

*The four-phase model*

<b>Method</b>	<b>Timing</b>	<b>Object</b>	<b>Made data</b>	<b>Found data</b>
<b>Observations</b>	Day 1	Editors/ newsroom	Fieldnotes	Story budgets
<b>News frame analysis</b>	Day 2	News reports	Manifest framing and reasoning devices	News reports
<b>Reconstruction interviews</b>	Day 2-5	Reporters	Interview transcripts	Journalist and source documents
<b>Frame building analysis</b>	After the fieldwork	News reports, fieldnotes, interview transcripts, production documents (story budgets, journalist and source documents)	Frame packages  Chronological reconstructions	

Table 2.

*Comparison of the two studies*

	<b>Study 1</b>	<b>Study 2</b>
<b>Research period</b>	6 weeks of data gathering (excl. introductory and follow-up visits)	2 x 2 weeks of data gathering (excl. introductory and follow-up visits)
<b>Selection of newsrooms</b>	4 newspapers belonging to 2 media companies, one country (Belgium) Quality and popular newspapers	2 quality newspapers belonging to one media company, 2 countries (Belgium, the Netherlands)
<b>Gaining Access</b>	Researching down (via reporters)	Middle-up-down (via middleman)
<b>Observing the newsroom</b>	Occasionally during 6 weeks (in-between the interviews)	Systematically during 4 weeks (including all relevant meetings)
<b>News frame analyses</b>	All news reports of pre-selected reporters (n = 680)	Main news reports selected during fieldwork (n = 20)
<b>Reconstruction interviews</b>	With 20 pre-selected reporters (about all their news reports)	With 17 reporters selected during the fieldwork (about 1 à 2 news reports)
<b>Frame-building analyses</b>	On the basis of news reports and interview transcripts; and limited field notes and production documents)	On the basis of news reports, interview transcripts; and extensive gathering of field notes and production documents