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DOI

[10.4324/9781315622286](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315622286)

Publication date

2017

Document Version

Final published version

Published in

Comparing Political Journalism

License

Article 25fa Dutch Copyright Act

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Reinemann, C., Scherr, S., Stanyer, J., Aalberg, T., Van Aelst, P., Berganza, R., Esser, F., Hopmann, D. N., Hubé, N., Legnante, G., Matthes, J., Papathanassopoulos, S., Salgado, S., Sheafer, T., Strömbäck, J., & de Vreese, C. (2017). Cross-conceptual architecture of news. In C. de Vreese, F. Esser, & D. Hopmann (Eds.), *Comparing Political Journalism* (pp. 150-167). (Communication and Society). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315622286>

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Cross-conceptual architecture of news

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Introduction

While the other chapters in this volume have treated each of the six key concepts in depth, it is important to consider the relationships between them and the extent to which they are interconnected. Indeed, some scholars have made connections, at least theoretically, between a number of different developments (e.g., Patterson 1993). Several advantages flow from such a cross-conceptual approach. Specific concepts can be related to each other, which gives readers some idea of how they may interact. For example, the degree of personalization and negativity in the news may be related but may also operate independently. Understanding these cross-concept relationships further can improve our insights into journalists' processes of news construction. It is highly likely that decisions about the selection and construction of news are based on a combination of content features rather than on individual features of events or topics. This line of reasoning was already a key idea in the early studies on news factors, which hypothesized that different content features would add up to the specific news value of an event (e.g., Galtung and Ruge 1965).

In addition, cross-conceptual analyses may also inspire future analysis of news *effects* on audiences. Indeed, it can be argued that news reception and effects may best be explained when individual content features are seen in combination. Scholars often include multiple content features such as visibility and the candidate evaluation in the news (Hopmann, Vliegenthart, de Vreese, and Albæk 2010). In our case, for example, the effects of game and strategy framing might well depend on whether the context of an article is positive or negative in tone, whether the news is hard or soft, and whether a story is balanced or one sided. Along these lines, cross-conceptual analyses may help establish more representative methods and more complex messages for experimental research, strengthening their ecological validity. In doing so, we get a step closer to understanding the contingencies of media effects.

Indeed, in recent years, some scholars have begun examining more closely how different content features interact, both on the level of individual news items and in the coverage of different news outlets, to better understand the complexity in journalists' work to which media audiences are exposed. Very few of these studies have been internationally comparative or included different kinds of media outlets (but see Esser and Umbricht 2013). In this cross-conceptual chapter, we show that political communication research and journalism studies can benefit from comparisons and cross-conceptual analyses of key concepts. In the end, this approach will improve our understanding of journalistic and political communication cultures across countries (see Hanitzsch and Mellado 2011; Pfetsch and Esser 2014). As we know little about how the key concepts investigated here interconnect in the news media of our 16 countries, we will take a look at how they occur in individual news items. Before that, we theorize about the possible connections between concepts, leading us to formulate several hypotheses. We then sketch out the methodological aspects of our analysis, present our results, conclude with a short discussion, and add suggestions for future research.

Interconnections between key concepts: theory and research question

The notion that, rather than the single characteristics of news reports, the specific *combination* of content features best serve to explain their selection by journalists and their effects on audiences is not new. For example, early theorizing on news factors explicitly postulated that the newsworthiness of events would be a result of the cumulation of news factors and that they could also complement each other (e.g., Galtung and Ruge 1965). More recent research has looked at the way various news factors are combined in individual news items to get a sense of their structure. Methodologically, this research has been based on, among other methods, factor analysis (e.g., Sommer et al. 2013). Moreover, the effects of the combination of news factors on news decisions have been investigated using both survey data (e.g., Kleinnijenhuis, van Hoof, Oegema, and de Ridder 2007) and experiments (e.g., Kepplinger and Ehmig 2006). Also, framing research has explicitly focused on the combination of content features. For example, researchers have investigated the structure of political coverage by measuring a number of frame elements and then clustering them to arrive at empirically constructed frames (e.g., Semetko and Valkenburg 2000; for an overview, see Matthes and Kohring 2008). However, the cross-concept approach has not generally been a common feature of the literature on the concepts that we are interested in here.

Several studies do provide some insight into a number of possible interconnections. For example, when discussing the attractiveness of game and strategy frames, Aalberg (2014) argues that those frames reflect journalism's focus on drama, conflict, negativity, elite individuals or political groups, and the tendency towards personalization. This reasoning would imply that negativity, game framing, and personalization might go together in news reports. Similarly, Brants and

van Praag (2006, p. 31) argue that an interpretive style in journalism should be characterized by a more critical outlook and less substance. This reasoning would mean that negativity should also go together with interpretation and soft news.

One of the few studies explicitly linking various concepts in a longitudinal and cross-national perspective has been conducted by Esser and Umbricht (Esser and Umbricht 2013, 2014; Umbricht and Esser 2013). They look at the combination of content features as indicators of specific national news cultures. In their study of political affairs coverage in British, French, German, Italian, Swiss, and US newspapers, they used objectivity, opinion orientation, negativity, scandalization, sensationalization, and emotionalization to characterize different styles of reporting – for example, a Swiss-Germanic, an Italian, and an American style. Interestingly, they found that those styles of reporting could not be easily integrated into existing media system typologies, which means that system differences do not seem to directly translate into differences of news content. Methodologically, in addition to analyzing the co-occurrence of news characteristics on the basis of overall percentages in the countries, they also applied correspondence analyses and identified two dimensions on which news coverage differed across countries. This chapter's logic is similar to Esser and Umbricht's approach. Our analysis broadens the scope in terms of countries, looks at individual items – both offline and online – and focuses, in part, on different concepts.

A key question arising from the cross-conceptual approach is why some characteristics of news should go together and others not? Certainly, some news report features have the same causes. For example, economic pressures and commercialization are argued to drive a softening of news and an increase in negativity and personalization since they are seen as strategies that attract audiences (e.g., Patterson 2000). Moreover, the rise of interpretive journalism, strategy framing, and negativity can be traced back to more proactive and professionalized political public relations activities, which are countered by political journalists who want to defend their autonomy (Aalberg 2014; Patterson 2000).

Assessing the relationship between the different concepts gives us a unique handle on news performance, not only in a cross-nationally comparative perspective, but in a theoretically novel and broader perspective. The underlying question (RQ1) for this chapter is how strategy/game framing, interpretive journalism, negativity, balance, personalization, and the hard/soft character of news interconnect in political coverage. We parcel out this inquiry by looking at how types of media (RQ2) and countries (RQ3) differ in the interconnections between strategy/game framing, interpretive journalism, negativity, balance, personalization, and the hard/soft character of news.

Method

To investigate to what extent the key concepts presented in this book show up and interact in the same news articles, media outlets, and countries we use a standardized version of the concepts analyzed in the preceding chapters. This approach not

only allows us to calculate comparable descriptive statistics reflecting the presence of each concept in the various types of media and nations but also to identify common structures and concept clusters for political media coverage across our 16 Western democracies. By standardizing the key concepts and by applying a comprehensive perspective, we are able to carve out the extent to which similar concept combinations are actively shaping political news across media outlets and countries. In addition, it will become obvious whether similar concept clusters are present in countries regarded as having similar types of media systems or journalistic cultures (Pfetsch and Esser 2014).

To address the earlier research questions, we rely on indicators that best represent each concept's basic idea. Once these indicators were identified, the six concepts were standardized. Values for each concept were recoded to values ranging from 0 ("concept is not present") to 1 ("concept is very much present"), so that descriptive comparisons and interactions across media types and countries, and between key concepts, can be made based upon individual news items ($N = 7,797$). We use simple correlations, factor analyses, and cluster analyses across all countries and for different types of media (commercial television and websites, public service television and websites, mass-market newspapers and websites, upmarket newspapers and websites) and single countries. For the sake of comparative analyses, we investigated similar correlation matrices and factor structures across countries. To our knowledge, this study is the first time that such an approach has been applied systematically in a cross-national study spanning several key concepts.

Game-strategy index

The measure for game/strategy framing is a mean index ranging from 0 ("no strategic game frame") to 1 ("strategic game frame"). The index is based upon five indicators of news stories that frame politics as a game, as a personality contest, as strategy, and as personal relationships between political actors not related to issue positions.

Interpretive journalism

The measure for interpretive journalism is a sum index of three indicators that show whether given political news items contain journalistic interpretations, explanations, or overt commentaries on political issues. It was crucial here that journalists themselves explicitly convey what they think.

Negativity

The measure for negativity is a mean index based upon four indicators of news stories that present politics in a negative tone. For the coding, the overall impression a news item conveyed was decisive (see also Chapter 6 on negativity).

Balance (neutrality)

Our measure of balance (neutrality) is based on the favorability coding for the first five actors appearing in a news story, reflecting the degree to which actors were depicted in either neutral or judgmental terms (for a discussion of balance and neutrality as dimensions of media impartiality, see Jandura and Friedrich 2014; see also Chapter 7 on balance).¹

Personalization

Personalization was measured as the ratio of human actors versus institutions mentioned in a news item.

Hard and soft news

The hard versus soft character of news items was measured as an additive index variable containing the political substance and the emotionality of reporting.

Results**Standardized key concepts in comparison**

Looking at the standardized values for the key concepts across countries, two basic findings stand out (see Table 10.1). First, the variance across countries differs considerably between concepts. It is smallest for negativity (with most values around 0); medium for personalization and game/strategy framing; and largest for interpretive journalism, balance, and hard/soft news.² This finding means that media coverage in our 16 Western democracies tends to be rather similar with respect to the way political actors and processes are evaluated but rather different with respect to the amount of political substance presented and the way it is emotionalized, interpreted, and evaluated. Second, most countries deviate from the overall means for not more than two concepts. Taking one standard deviation as the cutoff criterion, this conclusion is true for 13 of the 16 countries, with Norway and Switzerland being closest to the overall concept averages. Three countries stand out by being different from the others on three or more concepts. This conclusion is true for France, which deviates three times, and Portugal and Spain, deviating in four of the six concepts. France ranks above average when it comes to interpretive journalism and game/strategy framing but has a below-average value for hard news. Portugal stands out with an above-average rating in negativity and an above-average amount of hard news, while interpretive journalism and a balanced presentation of actors is much less common than in the other countries. This result might in part be due to the impact of the economic crisis. And finally, the Spanish media had less game/strategy coverage, less interpretation, and less personalization but a rather high amount of hard news. As the examples of these most deviating countries show, each country's media seem to be characterized by a specific pattern of

Table 10.1 Standardized key concepts in comparison – deviations from overall means

	Strategy/game ΔM	Interpretation ΔM	Negativity ΔM	Balance (neutrality) ΔM	Personalization ΔM	Hard news ΔM	Above-average means n	Below-average means n
Austria	+1.1	+0.4	+0.6	+0.2	-.05	+0.6	2	-
Belgium	-0.7	-1.3	-.02	+0.4	+0.1	+0.6	-	1
Denmark	-1.4	+0.1	-.01	+0.2	-.04	+0.5	-	1
France	+1.3	+1.5	+0.2	+0.3	+0.6	-1.1	2	1
Germany	+0.5	+0.2	-0.4	-.02	-.06	-.04	-	1
Greece	+1.1	+0.5	+0.1	-.03	+0.5	-1.3	1	1
Israel	-.04	+0.7	+0.0	-.07	+0.3	-1.5	-	1
Italy	-.07	-.08	-.01	+0.2	+1.2	-1.4	1	1
Netherlands	-.03	-.03	-.04	+1.3	-.02	-.01	1	-
Norway	-.05	-.09	+0.0	+0.3	+0.3	+0.9	-	-
Portugal	+0.2	-1.5	+0.5	-3.6	-.07	+1.4	2	2
Spain	-1.1	-1.9	-0.1	+0.8	-1.3	+2.1	1	3
Sweden	-.01	+1.8	+0.6	+0.2	+0.0	-.07	2	-
Switzerland	+0.3	+0.5	-.03	-.10	-.07	+0.8	-	-
UK	+0.0	-.04	+0.2	+1.7	+0.9	+0.6	2	-
US	+0.4	+1.9	-.05	+0.6	+0.5	-.10	1	-
M	.27	.36	.60	.71	.53	.63	-	-
SD	.27	.48	.20	.33	.22	.28	-	-

M, mean; SD, standard deviation.

a. Based on individual news items (N = 7,797).

b. Table entries are differences to overall concept mean values across countries.

c. Values printed bold indicate positive or negative differences larger than one standard deviation (based on country values).

Table 10.2 Standardized key concepts in comparison per media outlet type^{a,b,c}

Variables	Commercial television (television/web)		Public service television (television/web)		Mass-market newspaper (print/web)		Upmarket newspaper (print/web)	
	M (SD)		M (SD)		M (SD)		M (SD)	
Strategy/game frame	.25	(.27) ^x	.24	(.26) ^x	.25	(.26) ^x	.30	(.28) ^y
Interpretation	.33	(.47) ^y	.23	(.42) ^x	.38	(.49) ^z	.41	(.49) ^z
Negativity	.60	(.19) ^y	.58	(.20) ^x	.60	(.20) ^y	.61	(.20) ^y
Balance (neutrality)	.73	(.31) ^x	.75	(.31) ^x	.68	(.35) ^y	.70	(.33) ^y
Personalization	.55	(.22) ^y	.55	(.20) ^y	.55	(.20) ^y	.51	(.23) ^x
Hard news	.62	(.28) ^y	.67	(.25) ^z	.58	(.29) ^x	.64	(.29) ^y

M, mean; SD, standard deviation.

a Table entries are means of standardized concept values (with standard deviations in parentheses).

b Means with different superscripts (x, y, z) differ significantly ($p < .05$).

c Post-hoc test according to Duncan.

political coverage. Whether these findings also mean that the connections between concepts are different will be investigated in the following section (Table 10.2).

To get an idea of the differences between the various types of media, we compared the prevalence of our concepts in commercial and public service television newscasts and mass-market and upmarket newspapers (each including their respective websites). Clearly, public service television stands out as carrying a relatively low amount of interpretive journalism and negativity (although the latter difference to the other media is very small) while at the same time being more focused on hard news than the other media and more balanced than the newspapers. The upmarket newspapers, however, are characterized by an above-average level of strategy/game framing and interpretation, while being low on personalization. The mass-market newspapers carry an especially low amount of hard news, combined with a rather high degree of interpretation. And finally, commercial television's most noticeable characteristics are that it has less interpretation than newspapers but more than public service broadcasting (PSB) television and that its coverage is as balanced as PSB television's, which also means that commercial television is more balanced than political newspapers (Table 10.2).

Correlations between key concepts across countries and media

Calculating correlations between our six concepts gives a first impression of their relationships. Generally, we find a substantial number of highly significant positive and negative coefficients representing small to moderate correlations. Which

Table 10.3 Correlations between standardized key concepts across countries and media^{a,b}

Variables	Strategy/ game	Interpretation	Negativity	Balance (neutrality)	Personalization	Hard news
Strategy/game	–					
Interpretation	.27**	–				
Negativity	.23**	.15**	–			
Balance (neutrality)	-.14**	-.14**	-.12**	–		
Personalization	.05**	.01	-.02*	.00	–	
Hard news	-.10**	-.15**	-.04**	.13**	-.27**	–
M	.27	.36	.60	.71	.53	.63
SD	.27	.48	.20	.33	.22	.28

M, mean; SD, standard deviation.

a Intercorrelations for key concepts of political communication in a comparative sample of 16 countries are presented.

b $N = 7,746$ to $7,796$ articles; the number of articles varies due to the coding procedure.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$ (one-tailed).

concepts go together, and which ones do not? Leaving aside very small correlations ($< .10$), game and strategy-framed news items tend to be more interpretive and negative, rather unbalanced and softer (i.e., less substantial and more emotionalized). Similarly, interpretive items tend to be more negative and strategically framed, be less balanced, and carry less hard political information. In addition, negativity and balance are negatively correlated, which makes sense because we would expect a clear and unambiguous negative portrayal of actors to also be reflected in the overall negative tone of a story. And finally, personalization is negatively correlated to hard news, although one indicator of hard news is the presence of political actors. This finding means that personalized news items tend to have less political substance, whereas news items with more political substance tend to involve more institutional actors (Table 10.3).

These results show that the six key concepts investigated here are not independent from each other. In fact, their correlations are such that they do not represent distinct concepts. However, this finding does not supersede the analysis of their underlying structure. Therefore, we calculated a factor analysis (oblique rotation) of the concepts, which reveals two factors. The first factor represents the evaluative and interpretive character of news. It comprises of interpretive elements, game and strategy framing, negativity, and balance, with the latter concept being negatively related to this factor. This finding suggests that this first factor represents the extent to which journalists themselves come to the forefront of political coverage and present their own view of events. Moreover, it suggests that, if journalists are acting that way, they do so mostly in the context of rather negative and unbalanced stories. The second factor seems to represent the dichotomy of person versus substance. We find a high factor loading for personalization and for the

Table 10.4 Factor analysis of standardized key concepts across countries and media^{a,b,c}

Scale	Factor loadings		Communalities
	I	II	
Strategy/game frame	.70	-.09	.49
Interpretation	.65	-.15	.43
Negativity	.61	.13	.41
Balance (neutrality)	-.49	.11	.24
Personalization	-.04	-.80	.65
Hard news	-.24	.78	.63
Eigenvalues	1.63	1.22	
Percentage of variance	27%	20%	

a Factor loadings higher than .40 are in boldface.

b $N = 7,746$ to $7,797$ articles; the number of articles varies due to the coding procedure.

c Oblique rotation.

hard/soft character of the news items (Table 10.4). Analyzing the factor structures separately for PSB newscasts, commercial television, and upmarket and mass-market newspapers yields almost identical results.

All in all, across all countries and media, the six key concepts that we focus on in this analysis seem to represent two underlying dimensions that shape the way political news is presented in the media of Western democracies. One dimension represents the degree of evaluation and interpretation, and the other, the amount of political substance. These dimensions are obviously important in guiding journalists' construction of the political world and can therefore be assumed to also affect the way that audiences perceive political processes and the functioning of democracy. In the next step of our analysis, we will take a look at whether this structure is common to all the countries.

Interconnections of key concepts in country comparison

The relationships between the key concepts in individual news items represent the typical way in which political information is conveyed in news reporting. As stated earlier, these structures both represent common patterns of news construction by journalists and the typical mixture of content features that confront media audiences. Analyzing the factor structures in each country separately, however, also reveals some differences. First of all, there are only two countries in which, not two, but three factors were found: Israel and the United States. In the other 14 countries, the analyses resulted in two factors. However, correlations between concepts were not the same in all countries. Only six countries mirrored the pattern found in the overall cross-country analysis with strategy/game, interpretation, negativity, and

balance loading on the first factor and personalization and hard/soft characteristics loading on the second factor. This finding was true for Austria, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, and Sweden. Here, more strategy and game framing, more interpretation, and more negativity went together with less balance. In addition, substantial news indicators were negatively related to personalization. The pattern in France was similar. The only difference was that the hard/soft news indicators had a stronger link to the interpretive/evaluative factor than to the personality factor.

The second largest group of countries showing the same factor structure consists of Norway, Portugal, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Here, strategy/game, interpretation, and negativity made up for the first factor, with which they positively correlated. In contrast, balance, personalization, and hard news characteristics loaded on the second. In those countries, more political substance and more balance went together with less personalization, and vice versa. Denmark and Italy are the two remaining countries that are similar, with a two-factor concept structure. In both countries, strategy/game and personalization go together. However, the direction of the relationship is completely different. In Denmark, strategy/game correlates positively with the factor and negatively with personalization. This finding suggests that strategy and game frames coverage combines with a focus on institutions – mainly political parties. In contrast, in the Italian media, strategy and game framing goes together with a more personalized focus, probably indicating that individual actors play a stronger role in coverage here. The last two-factor country, Greece, shows a unique structure with strategy and game framing, negativity, and hard news indicators loading on the first factor, and interpretation, balance, and personalization loading on the second factor. Here, news items with game and strategy framing tend to be more negative and less substantial. In addition, more balanced news items appear to be more personalized and less interpretive. This pattern was not to be seen in any other included country (Table 10.5).

Finally, Israel and the United States are the only countries with a three-factor structure. In Israel, strategy and game framing, interpretation, and negativity relate to the first factor, and personalization and hard news characteristics, to the second factor. Balance established a factor of its own, again indicating a slightly different pattern of presenting political news. What about the benchmark nation of political communication research – the United States? Here, more interpretation and game and strategy framing were related to less balance. In addition, more political substance was connected to less personalization. And finally, negativity made up for another third factor. This pattern of results makes the United States the only country where negative reporting was not connected to any other key concepts or the respective factors (Table 10.5).

Clusters of news items

Up to this point, we have looked at the correlations between our key concepts. In this section, we use the factors found in the earlier analysis to answer the question, how many news items share a specific profile of those key concepts? We therefore

Table 10.5 Factor structures of standardized key concepts in country comparison^{abc}

	Strategy/game	Interpretation	Negativity	Balance (neutrality)	Personalization	Hard news	Explained variance (%)
2 Factors							
Austria	■	■	■	■	○	○	52
Belgium	■	■	■	■	○	○	47
Germany	■	■	■ ^d	■	○	○	50
Netherlands	■	■	■	■	○	○	45
Spain	■	■	■	■	○	○	48
Sweden	■	■	■ ^e	■	○	○	52
Norway	■	■	■	○	○ ^f	○	43
Portugal	■	■	■	○	○	○	48
Switzerland	■	■	■	○	○	○	50
UK	■	■	■	○	○ ^g	○	51
Denmark	■	○	○ ^h	○	■	○	53
Italy	■	○	○	○	■	○	53

France	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	54
Greece	■		■				○	■	44
3 Factors									
Israel	■	■	■	○					63
US	■	■	■	○		◆	◆	◆	63

- a. Factor analysis based on individual news items (N = 465–477 articles per country; oblique rotation).
- b. Identical symbols represent key concepts that commonly go together in news articles in Western democracies (based on oblique factor analysis).
- c. Equal symbols and shades of grey (■, ○, ◆) symbolize the same factors. For example, in Austria, two types of news items (depicted by two shades of grey and the two symbols ■, ○) explain 52% of the existing variance; these news items either contain strategy/game, interpretation, negativity, and balance (neutrality) elements or combine personalization and hard news. In the United States, on the contrary, we find three types of news items that explain 63% of the variance: the first type of news item (■) combines elements of strategy/game, interpretation, and balance; the second type of news item (○) contains mainly negativity; and the third type of news item (◆) combines personalization and hard news.
- d. In Germany, the factor loading for balance was rather small (-.365).
- e. In Sweden, negativity loaded quite high on the substance factor it was not assigned to (-.518).
- f. In Norway, personalization loaded quite high on the evaluative/interpretive factor it was not assigned to (-.462).
- g. In the UK, the personalization index also loaded quite high on the strategy/interpretation factor (.324).
- h. In Denmark, the negativity load was almost equally high on both factors (with a loading of .501 for the strategy/personalization factor it was not assigned to).⁷ In the US, game/strategy (.432) and personalization (.514) also loaded quite high on the third negativity factor it was not assigned to.
- i. In France, the hard news index also loaded quite high on the substance factor to which it was not assigned (.516).

performed a series of cluster analyses based on the factor loadings derived from the overall cross-country factor analysis. The number of clusters is determined on visual inspection (so-called elbow criterion). This procedure aims at selecting a cluster solution that is not too heterogeneous after another fusion of clusters. Based on the elbow criterion, it turned out that a four-cluster solution is most convincing. The individual clusters can be characterized by the prevalence of the key concepts, the types of news stories represented, the media in which the items were published, and the topics covered.

Cluster 1 comes to about one-third of all news items (30 percent of all items; $n = 3,337$). The stories in this cluster are more hard news-oriented and more balanced than the average news item but have less strategic framing, less interpretation, and less negativity. Almost nine out of ten of these news items are regular, fact-oriented news stories covering a wide range of issues, with an above-average share of 'hard topics,' such as macroeconomics (21 percent), social affairs (10 percent), and labor (7 percent). Reports on party politics and elections, the functioning of democracy (makes about 7 percent), and miscellaneous topics are underrepresented in this group of news reports. This cluster of news stories can therefore be labeled *issue-focused hard news coverage*.

The news items in cluster 2 (31 percent of all items; $n = 2,363$) have a profile very similar to Cluster 1 with respect to strategic framing, interpretation, negativity, and balance. Moreover, the overwhelming majority of these items consist of regular, fact-oriented news stories. In contrast to the first group of reports, however, Cluster 2 stories are much more personalized and include fewer indicators of political substance. Cluster 2 stories, although well represented in all types of media, are a bit more frequent on television and in the mass-market newspapers, and they tend to cover party politics, justice, and miscellaneous topics more often than the items of the issue-focused cluster. This cluster of news stories can therefore be labeled *actor-focused news coverage*.

The third cluster of news items accounts for 22 percent of all items ($n = 1,707$). In contrast to the first two clusters, Cluster 3 is characterized by an above-average amount of strategy framing, interpretation, and negativity. At the same time, the reports contain a lot of political substance (i.e., hard news indicators). Although the majority of these reports are regular news stories, a considerable portion consists of reportages and background stories (12 percent) and editorials or commentaries (19 percent). An above-average share of items in this cluster deals with the functioning of democracy, but the dominant topics are hard policy issues like macroeconomics (21 percent), social affairs (7 percent), and labor (7 percent). More than half of these stories were run in upmarket newspapers. This cluster can therefore be called *issue-focused interpretive coverage*.

Finally, the news reports included in the fourth cluster (17 percent; $n = 1,338$) are negative, interpretive, and personalized and show the most strategic framing. Regarding their journalistic genre, only half of these items are regular news stories, whereas 27 percent can be identified as editorials or commentaries and 20 percent as reportages and background reports. Almost half of them appeared in upmarket newspapers, but they are also frequent in mass-market newspapers. With respect to the topics covered, we find the highest shares taken by party politics and elections (39 percent)

and stories dealing with the functioning of democracy (13 percent). The items in this cluster seem to represent the kind of stories that scholars have in mind when they write about subjective, interpretive, and negative coverage with a potential negative effect on citizens' views of politics. We therefore label this group of news items *strategy-focused interpretive coverage* (Table 10.6).

Table 10.6 Characteristics of news item clusters based on key concept factor structure^a

	<i>Issue-focused hard news coverage Cluster 1 (N = 2,337)</i>	<i>Actor-focused news coverage Cluster 2 (N = 2,363)</i>	<i>Issue-focused interpretive coverage Cluster 3 (N = 1,707)</i>	<i>Strategy-focused interpretive coverage Cluster 4 (N = 1,338)</i>
Key concept values (ΔM)				
Strategy/game	.13	.15	.43	.51
Interpretation	.11	.18	.60	.79
Negativity	.54	.50	.74	.71
Balance	.84	.78	.57	.52
Personalization	.41	.67	.40	.69
Hard news	.85	.49	.75	.35
Media organization (%)^b				
Public broadcasting television	21	22	16	11
Commercial television	17	19	15	16
Upmarket newspaper	45	36	52	49
Mass-market newspaper	17	23	18	24
Type of news story (%)^c				
News story	89	83	64	47
Reportage/background	5	7	12	20
Editorial/column/commentary	2	4	19	27
Other	4	6	5	7
Topic (top 8 issues)^d				
Macroeconomics/taxes	20	12	21	9
Party politics/elections	4	16	11	39
Functioning of democracy	6	8	11	13
Justice	7	9	6	6
Social affairs	10	6	7	3
Other (disasters, sports, royals)	2	12	2	8
Foreign affairs	5	8	6	4
Labour	7	3	7	2

a Based on individual news items (N = 7,797).

b $\chi^2 = 180.26, p < .001$, Cramer's V = .088.

c $\chi^2 = 1197.21, p < .001$, Cramer's V = .227.

d $\chi^2 = 1636.98, p < .001$, Cramer's V = .265.

As the final step of our analysis, we compare the importance of the 4 clusters in our 16 countries. This analysis should give us a clear idea of how politics is typically presented in the different nations and thus of journalistic cultures regarding content production. Taking *issue-focused news coverage* first, journalists in France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Sweden, and the United States seem to include very little of this type of coverage in their media outlets. At the opposite end of the spectrum is Spain, with a hard news share way above the average. As we have seen, the economic situation of the Eurozone crisis may have contributed to this exceptional result. Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom use this kind of coverage in more than one-third of all news items.

In several countries, a low preference for issue-focused hard news coverage occurs with an above-average preference for *actor-focused news coverage*. This pattern is found, for example, in France, Greece, Israel, Sweden, the United States, and – most notably – Italy. It is the predominant type of reporting in these countries, with more than half of all the news items falling into this category. But it is especially uncommon in Portugal, Spain, and Switzerland. *Issue-focused interpretive coverage* is most common in Austria and Portugal (more than 40 percent of news items) and in Switzerland (more than one-third of stories). And finally, *strategy-focused interpretive coverage* is most common in France, Greece, the United States, Israel, and Italy, where between one-fourth and one-third of the news items belong to this category (Figure 10.1).

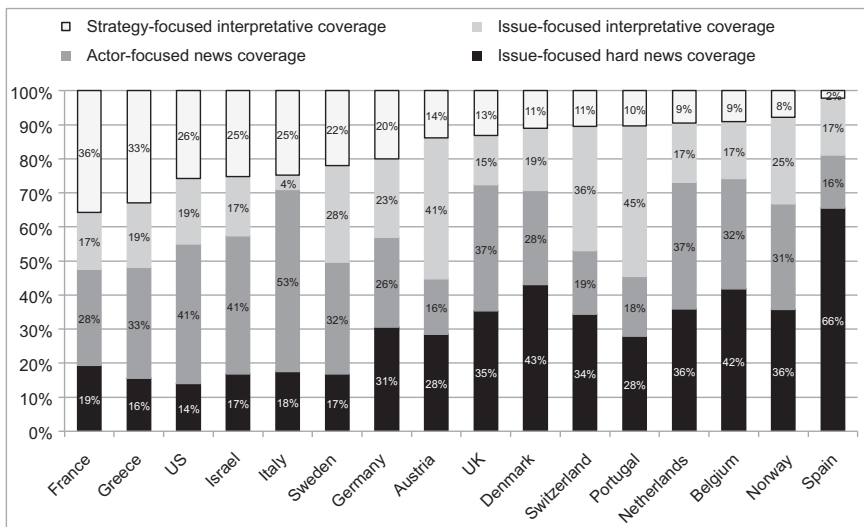


Figure 10.1 Size of news item clusters according to key concepts in country comparison. Clusters based on individual news items (N = 7,746).

Conclusion

Despite some attempts to explore how different key concepts of political communication interconnect in news coverage, the vast majority of existing studies tend to concentrate on single concepts, and in those cases where several are examined, concepts tend to be treated as if they were separate from one another. Existing cross-conceptual studies have been largely theoretical and certainly not internationally comparative, involving different media (for exceptions, see the work by Esser and Umbricht). By adopting a cross-conceptual approach, this chapter enriched our understanding of how different content features interact on the level of individual news items across 16 countries. The chapter showed that the six key concepts investigated in the book are not independent from each other. The underlying structure of their interrelationships is shown with a factor analysis revealing two factors. The first factor comprises interpretive and evaluative elements; the second largely represents the dichotomy of person versus substance. As we noted, these two factors can be regarded as important, deep structures that seem to guide journalists' construction of the political world. Based on this pattern of findings, we were able to run cluster analyses to determine how many news items share a specific profile of those key concepts, identifying four key cross concept clusters. The study found that 30 percent of all news items were dominated by *issue-focused hard news*, 31 percent by *actor-focused news*, 22 percent by *issue-focused interpretive coverage*, and 17 percent by *strategy-focused interpretive coverage*. We can see that issue-oriented coverage still makes up for the majority of political news coverage in Western democracies and that strategy-focused reports only represent a rather small part of overall political coverage. However, comparing the cluster patterns in the various countries also shows huge differences in the importance of the different types of coverage (see Figure 10.1).

One of the most remarkable findings is that Israel and the United States are unique in their composition of news clusters, with low shares of issue-oriented coverage and a huge amount of actor- and strategy-focused reports. Political coverage in most European countries differs from this news composition, especially with respect to issue-focused hard news, which plays a much bigger role. This outcome speaks against uncritically transferring results and the focus of research from the United States to Europe. Instead, future research on European media should put a stronger focus on the specific patterns important in the European and national contexts. Nonetheless, some European countries seem to have rather similar coverage to Israel and United States. Obviously, the picture is more complex than a simple Europe versus United States dichotomy. Future research will have to dig even deeper into the various reasons responsible for the differences and similarities between European countries.

Another important aspect that we want to point out is the context dependency of the global news media climate of 2012 that interacts with the theoretical concepts presented in this book. Contrary to Hallin and Mancini's (2004) pivotal research

on comparative political communication, our study showed that issues in the news are treated differently in different countries. At this time, we can only speculate about what influences journalistic coverage on politically relevant issues and what factors have been omitted so far in comparative research. A plausible explanation, for instance, would be changes in public opinion towards certain issues that influence journalists' news coverage. The salience of an issue may differ highly in different countries, depending on their political communication cultures, the state of public discussion, and the time that has elapsed since the issue was raised. For example, the economic crisis and the role of international institutions like the European Union, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund might have led to more (institutional) hard news coverage in some countries but at the same time – with an increasingly hostile public opinion – increased the amount of negativity in the news.

This chapter has provided an important first step to clarify the relationships between key concepts and to present empirical evidence of their prevalence in the political news coverage of 16 Western democracies. In the concluding chapter, we relate these findings to the book's overall endeavor – the quest for good news.

Notes

- 1 The measure of balance applied in this chapter does not refer to balanced reporting about one specific actor. Instead, a news item is judged as balanced when some actors are judged very favorable and others very unfavorable (see also the chapter on balance, Chapter 7, which applies a different measure of balance).
- 2 The distribution of the balance (neutrality) indicator shows one extreme outlier, which is Portugal. While the average cross-country measure is .71, Portugal only arrives at .34, indicating a comparatively high share of actors that were not presented in a neutral or ambivalent tone but in an evaluative tone. Leaving out Portugal reduces the standard deviation to .07, which would put Israel and Spain among the countries deviating considerably from the cross-country balance indicator.

Appendix

Game-strategy index. It was coded whether the story makes a reference to public opinion at least once (1) or not (0), whether the story makes a reference to politicians, parties, or other actors 'winning' or 'losing' (elections, debates, public opinion or in general) (1) or not (0), whether the story uses language of sports or war at least once (1) or not (0), whether the story makes references to politicians or parties strategies or tactics for legislative debates, governing negotiations, favorable news coverage, or elections for achieving other forms of political success (1) or not (0), and whether the story makes reference to how a political actor (a party, a politician, a candidate, a government, coalition, campaign) is performing, working, or doing its job (1) or not (0) (see also the chapter on game/strategy framing).

Interpretive journalism. The interpretive journalism index was recoded so that it only indicates whether (1) or not (0) these elements are present. More specifically, it was coded whether the news story includes journalistic explanations or

interpretations of the reasons behind events or actions (1) or not (0), whether the story includes journalistic speculations about future consequences of events (1) or not (0), and whether the journalist includes overt commentary when covering events and actions (1) or not (0) (see also the chapter on interpretive journalism).

Negativity. It was coded whether a news story as a whole conveys a primarily conflictual impression of politics, political records, conditions, and views (1) or not (0), whether a given news story as a whole primarily convey indications of incapability in politics (1) or not (0), and whether the overall tone of the story was negative (1) or not (0). Moreover, it was coded for the first five actors appearing in a news story, whether the report primarily conveys a negative impression of politics, political records, conditions or views (1) or not (0).

Balance (neutrality). It was coded whether a news story conveys a favorable, unfavorable, or neutral/ambivalent impression of an actor. To construct the balance measure, the favorability codings were condensed into a mean index that included the favorability of the first five actors for each news item coded so that it ranges from 0 “(positively or negatively) polarized news” to 1 “neutral or ambivalent news.” Higher values are then indicative of balanced (neutral) news.

Personalization. For the first five actors appearing in a news story, it was coded whether they were a specific person (1) or an institutional or organizational actor (0). To build a measure of personalization, first, a sum index for the number of specific persons as well as for the institutional or organizational actors was calculated for each news item. Second, both indices were transformed so that values near 0 are indicative of ‘no personalization’ and values near 1 are indicative of ‘personalization’ (see also the chapter on personalization).

Hard and soft news. It was coded whether political actors, decision-making-authorities, policy-plans, and groups affected were mentioned (1) in a given news item or not (0), whether an article was predominantly unemotional (1) or emotional (0). All indicators of a hard or soft news story were transformed into an additive index that was transformed so that it ranges from 0 “story contains no hard news indicators” to 1 “story contains all hard news indicators” (see also the chapter on hard/soft news).