

Challenging the Frame in the News

The Role of Issue Involvement, Attitude, and Competing Frames

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Abstract. The present study contributes to the external validity of the framing concept by studying the effects of frames actually utilized in newspaper articles. The study assesses the persuasive influence of such frames on the interpretation of news, and how issue involvement and attitude interfere in this process. A total of 282 participants were presented with one of three experimental versions of a newspaper article about asylum. In the first condition the asylum seekers were implicitly labeled as innocent victims, in the second as intruders. The third version is a mixed condition in which both competing frames were applied. In all three conditions an identical photograph was inserted. The findings indicate that the frame suggests how the photograph can be interpreted. However, no indications were found for a moderating role of the news readers' issue involvement or attitude.

Keywords: framing, news, attitude, issue involvement, frame competition

Introduction

Political parties, pressure groups, and elite groups have an interest in the promotion of interpretive frames in order to give meaning to political events and issues (Levin, 2005; Porto, 2007). Journalists routinely use these frames to turn complex occurrences into newsworthy events by selecting some aspect(s) of the observed reality and by organizing them into a comprehensible story format (Entman, 1993; Gitlin, 1980; Tuchman, 1978). Because selection implies leaving out some aspects, a frame sets limits to the interpretation of the news by the reader or viewer. Framing effects have been reported in the context of a broad spectrum of topics covered by the mass media, such as poverty (Iyengar, 1991), gay rights (Brewer, 2002), and European issues (Valkenburg, Semetko, & De Vreese, 1999).

According to a number of studies, the potential effect of frames largely depends on the degree of resonance between the frames applied in the news and particular schemas of the reader (e.g., Chong & Druckman, 2007; Hwang, Gottlieb, Nah, & McLeod, 2007; Nabi, 2003; Shen, 2004). This proposition is formulated from a perspective that regards memory as a collection of cognitive nodes, with thoughts, feelings, and experiences associatively organized in schemas (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Graber, 1988; Jo & Berkowitz, 1994; Shah, Kwak, Schmierbach, & Zubric, 2004). Once primed by a framing device, a schema becomes more easily accessible and influences subsequent message processing (Zaller, 1992; see Hansen, 2007).

Some authors (Nelson, Clawson, & Oxley, 1997; Nelson, Oxley, & Clawson, 1997; Price & Tewksbury, 1997) argue that, although a frame may temporarily increase the

accessibility of ideas, this in itself is not sufficient for a frame to influence the interpretation of a message. The primed schema also needs to be "applicable," that is, the interpretation suggested by the frame needs to be acceptable to the reader (see Higgins, 1996, p. 135). It is the frame, conceptualized as a latent meaning structure, that suggests to the receiver, first, which elements of the news deserve more attention and become thereby salient, and, second, which personal schema is activated in further processing and evaluation tasks. If the frame is considered not applicable, receivers are supposed to make use of their own preexisting thoughts.

Although numerous studies have demonstrated framing effects (e.g., Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Nelson, Clawson et al., 1997; Tewksbury, Jones, Peske, Raymond, & Vig, 2000), the concept of framing still faces some challenges. In this study, the focus is on two important challenges. The first is the external validity of the concept. Many experimental studies on framing effects involve several prototypical framing conditions to which subjects are randomly assigned (e.g., Druckman, 2004). Although framing effects have been demonstrated in these studies, one could question the relevance of these effects outside the laboratory, since the prototypical framing conditions being used in these experiments are not typical for everyday media texts. Content analytical studies on framing have shown that most media texts include elements of more than one frame (e.g., Edy & Meirick, 2007; Van Gorp, 2005). So what effects would occur if receivers are confronted with a media text that is ambiguously framed, for instance, a newspaper article that includes elements of competing frames? Druckman (2004) suggested that the co-occurrence of competing

frames prompts more deliberate processing, and that competing frames hence limit each other's effects. However, Hansen (2007, p. 393) provided an alternative interpretation of such a limited effect by suggesting that people simply follow their predispositions when confronted with competing frames. The present study aims at testing this alternative interpretation.

A second challenge to the framing concept is the issue of prior knowledge. In particular, this study is inspired by the results concerning the moderating impact of prior political knowledge on framing effects (see Chong & Druckman, 2007; Druckman, 2001). A number of scholars report stronger framing effects for receivers having less prior knowledge of the topic (e.g., Kinder & Sanders, 1990). Others demonstrate that more knowledgeable receivers are more susceptible because they possess more cognitive "hooks" to pick up the framed message (e.g., Rhee, 1997). Brewer (2003) demonstrated that citizens with more political knowledge are susceptible to framing, provided that the frames they receive are undisputed. In order to resolve the conflicting results concerning the impact of prior knowledge of political issues, Druckman and Nelson (2003) argued that it is not the knowledge as such that facilitates or hinders the impact of frames; rather, it is the need to evaluate, regardless of the level of prior knowledge, which incites persons to assign more weight to considerations that fit into the frame. The present paper builds on this line of argument by studying the possible moderating role of a variable that, from a theoretical point of view, is closely connected to the need to evaluate: the individuals' degree of issue involvement.

Framing the Asylum Seeker

In the present study we focus on the issue of asylum seekers, refugees, and undocumented immigrants (henceforth: asylum). The issue of asylum is of particular interest in a European context because it is defined as one of the principal policy domains in the European Union: In 2008 the number of asylum seekers in Europe was 290,000, an increase of 13% over 2007 (UNHCR, 2009). Besides conflicts, fear of persecution, and economic incentives, additional reasons for current asylum trends are the strength of asylum seeker networks, the expansion of information streams, and the sheer audacity of human smugglers (Hatton, 2004). Another reason to take asylum as a case in point lies in its polarizing character. Therefore, we expect to find variance in negative and positive attitudes and in levels of involvement among the participants. Finally, to form an opinion on the sensitive issue of asylum, people need to rely largely on the news media. Most people have little or no personal contact with asylum seekers, so they necessarily base their impressions on the portrayal of asylum in the media. We fix our attention on newspaper coverage because newspapers are thought to play a significant role in

the process of forming political opinion (Schoenbach & Lauf, 2002). The way the asylum issue is covered in the newspapers may lead citizens toward or, quite the reverse, away from support of policy measures.

When doing a study on framing effects, scholars most often make use of one specific text, which is then differently framed and used as a stimulus in an experimental setting. In these reception studies the origins and foundations of the predefined frames are not always explicitly touched upon. To overcome that limitation, we analyzed which specific frames are actually used in the newspaper coverage on asylum (Van Gorp, 2005).

One of these frames refers to the stereotype "all strangers are intruders," while the other refers to the archetypical role of "the innocent victim." Viewing the "other" as the evil forms a stereotype that regularly manifests itself in the media. This stereotype formulates the issue of asylum seekers in terms of national security and considers asylum seekers as a threat (Horsti, 2007; Huysmans, 2000). The main reasoning devices within this frame are that asylum seekers exploit the native population's achievements and social services; the origins of the problem are formed by the asylum seekers and a lax policy; the course of action consists of, first, trying to avoid people seeking asylum, and, second, if "pseudo"-asylum seekers do succeed in entering the country, sending them back to their homelands.

Victimizing people is a dramaturgical technique that journalists use to represent people who live in circumstances due to a force lying beyond their responsibility. It is a way to show that someone is worthy of help and can be absolved from responsibility for the underlying causes of his or her condition (Holstein & Miller, 1990). If one considers an asylum seeker as a vulnerable innocent victim, the issue is resolved by the awareness that these people are in need of help and protection. In an international context refugees are typically depicted as people walking along roads and living in crowded refugee camps, in which mothers and children are represented as "mute" and "helpless" victims who need to be rescued (Kozol, 2004; Rajaram, 2002). This position refers to the humanitarian stand on asylum policy (Harrell-Bond, 1999). Other reasoning devices connected with the frame package are that asylum seekers are forced to leave their country (see the intruder frame), and that the rich Western countries bear the responsibility for the issue.

Hypotheses

Drawing on the theory of framing as outlined in the introductory section, one may expect that framing has an effect on interpretations made by news readers. This is also the case with the news on asylum seekers. Both the archetype of the innocent victim and that of the intruder are used regularly in the media. Therefore, we presume that *all* people who share the same culture are familiar with both frames

(see Van Gorp, 2007). The frame suggests which of the accessible schemas carry the most weight in further message processing. Alternative perspectives are kept out of sight of the reader, and reasoning devices that are not explicitly incorporated in the message may be filled in on the basis of the activated schema (see Entman, 1991). Accordingly, the first hypothesis is:

H1: The interpretation of news on asylum varies from more negative to more positive depending on the frame applied, with the intruder frame on the negative end, the mixed frame in between, and the victim frame on the positive end.

The first research question formulated in the introductory section concerned the case in which elements of competing frames are present in one text. As already mentioned, Hansen (2007) suggested that people rely on their predispositions when confronted with competing frames. Yet, this hypothesis has not been explicitly tested. Some studies suggest that people's predispositions may have a somewhat moderating effect on framing effects. For instance, Brewer (2002) found that readers borrowed in the expression of their interpretations the value language provided by a frame, not only to formulate interpretations in accordance with the frame, but also to formulate interpretations that challenged the frame. Moreover, Edy and Meirick (2007) found that the respondents' political background affected which elements of the competing frames they adopted. Therefore, we formulate the following hypothesis:

H2: The relationship between the attitude toward asylum seekers and the interpretation of the news on asylum is stronger whenever a mixture of frames is applied as compared to a single frame (the intruder or the victim frame).

The second research question formulated in the introductory section concerned the possible moderating role of issue involvement. High-involvement messages may be defined as having greater personal relevance and consequences, or as eliciting more personal connections than low involvement messages (Petty, Cacioppo, & Schuman, 1983, p. 136). Issue involvement can be expected to make the mental schemas regarding the issue more complex, elaborated, and abstract, and it can be expected to facilitate the processing of news about the issue (see Fiske & Taylor, 1991). However, this does not imply that the reader becomes more susceptible to framing. In particular, Druckman (2004) and Hwang et al. (2007) argue that readers who are more involved would reflect more rationally on the provided framing devices and take up a critical position toward the news. As a result, they would be more in defiance of the frame. More involved individuals have a higher need to evaluate and make their judgment "on-line," spontaneously during the initial reading of the news story (see Hastie & Park, 1986; Matthes, 2007; Tormala & Petty, 2001).

They are likely to elaborate on the story and to make their own associations between schemas and issues. Less involved readers, in contrast, pass judgments afterward, based on the schema that is readily accessible from memory, that is, the schema primed by the frame in the news.

These ideas are in line with expectations that can be derived from a well-known model of persuasion, the elaboration likelihood model (ELM). According to this model, the likelihood that message receivers engage in thoughtful processing of the message ("elaboration" in ELM terminology) influences the nature of the persuasion process. Under conditions of high elaboration ("central processing" in ELM terminology), thoughtful examination of arguments largely determine the outcome of the persuasion process. Under conditions of low elaboration ("peripheral processing" in ELM terminology), peripheral cues largely determine the outcome of the persuasion process by eliciting cognitive shortcuts that serve as simple decision rules (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Starting from the ELM, framing devices may be considered as peripheral cues that indicate cognitive shortcuts to those receivers who hardly elaborate on the message. In addition, within the ELM framework, issue involvement is an important factor increasing active elaboration of the message (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty et al., 1983). Consequently, issue involvement may be expected to weaken the effect of framing devices on cognitive outcomes. Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H3: The effect of the applied frame on the interpretation of news on asylum is weaker in readers who are highly involved in the asylum issue than it is in readers who are less involved in the asylum issue.

Method

Overview

The effects of framing, attitude, and involvement were investigated in an experiment with three conditions that differed with respect to the type of frame in the news story: an intruder frame, a victim frame, or an ambiguous mix of both frames. The three versions of the news stories included the same photograph. Before reading one of the article versions, the participants filled out a pretest on their attitudes toward and their involvement with a diversity of political issues, among which the asylum issue. Afterwards they completed a posttest to assess their interpretation of the embedded photograph.

Stimulus Materials

In an analysis of 8 Belgian newspapers ($N = 1,489$) we reconstructed the frames used as "instruments of emotional

arousal" (Kinder, 2007, pp. 158–159) by the press to cover the issue of asylum in Belgium, the home country of the participants in our study. First, an inventory of frames was drawn up inductively on the basis of a qualitative analysis of media content, public discourse, and a literature review. Second, the inventory of framing devices was used for a quantitative framing analysis by measuring the extent to which the devices were present in the Belgian press. The inventory listed all verbal elements that may evoke the idea of victims or intruders in the reader's mind: metaphors, catchphrases, depictions, lines of reasoning and causal connections, lexical choices, and sources (see Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Kitlinger, 2007; Pan & Kosicki, 1993; Van Gorp, 2005). From a cluster analysis, we obtained a distinct set of manifest framing and reasoning devices by which two particular frames become embedded in news reports on asylum (see van Gorp, 2005).

Three versions of the same fictitious but realistically written newspaper story were produced. To manipulate the frames, we made use of the inventory of framing devices. The news issue, the core facts, and the intention of the article were the same in each version, namely, to sum up the merits of a policy proposal by the Belgian Prime Minister, who proposed to integrate the Belgian database of asylum seekers with comparable databases in other European countries in order to facilitate the evaluation of asylum requests. Further, the story versions were identical with respect to formal characteristics: story length, page layout, structure of the story, division into paragraphs, and complexity of sentences and paragraphs.

Two of the three story versions were written in order to represent either the victim frame or the intruder frame. In the victim frame, asylum seekers are innocent victims of human traffickers, whereas in the intruder frame they form a group of intruders and abusers. In order to contrast the two frames, various textual means were used, including the title, arguments, cited quotes, choice of words, definition of the problem, and assignment of causality and responsibility. The title of the victim version is "Stopping Human Traffickers Becomes Easier," whereas the intruder version is entitled "Unmasking Fake Asylum-Seekers Becomes Easier." In the victim version, asylum seekers are said to "make an appeal to our hospitality," because "human traffickers stimulate them to make use of the right to apply for asylum. Many try their luck, in search of a better life." In contrast, the intruder version describes the growth of asylum seekers as "explosive," and speaks of "massive abuse" of the asylum procedures by "strangers." The behavior of asylum seekers is characterized as "asylum shopping: If they do not succeed in one country, they simply cross the border and try again over there."

In addition to the two story versions produced to represent either the victim or the intruder frame, a third version was created by combining paragraphs from both the victim and the intruder versions. This mixed-frame version was provided with a neutral title: "Management of Asylum Applications Becomes Easier."

Each version was supplemented with the same picture. This picture depicted four undocumented immigrants from Kurdistan in a camp in the French seaside town of Sangatte (see Appendix A). This picture was deliberately selected because it carried different, even opposite meanings. The textual frame, however, would be able to limit its polysemous character by "selecting" one of the possible meanings as the preferred meaning of the journalist and implicitly ignoring the alternatives (see Barthes, 1977; Burgin, 1982; Hall, 1976). Therefore, the caption under the photograph also varied by version according to the applied frame: In the victim version "Fugitives Often End Up in Unworthy Circumstances"; in the intruder version: "Taking Fingerprints Will Nail Many Asylum Seekers"; and in the mixed-frames version: "The Year 2000 Showed an Increase of Asylum Requests in Belgium."

In a pilot study, 51 students unfamiliar with the study's purpose read one of the versions and indicated whether the asylum seekers were represented in a positive, a negative, or a neutral manner. As expected, 16 out of 16 respondents associated the victim version with a positive portrayal whereas 17 out of 19 respondents judged the portrayal in the intruder version to be negative (2 respondents called this portrayal "neutral"). The mixed-frame version yielded disagreement (1 out of 16 respondents indicated "positive," 4 "negative," 8 "neutral," and 3 noted the ambiguity of the story). In addition, the respondents were asked whether the news story they had just read could be taken from an actual newspaper. All participants responded affirmatively. In sum, we concluded that we had produced three credible versions that could serve as conditions for our study.

Participants and Procedure

The experiment was conducted at a Belgian university. All participants were of Belgian nationality. A total of 282 students participated in the experiment, between 17 and 24 years of age ($M = 18.75$; $SD = 1.28$), and 61% of them were female. The participants were randomly assigned to the three conditions with their respective story versions. The experiment was carried out in a classroom situation. The participants were told that the research project was about the reading of newspapers. They were asked to fill in a questionnaire used to measure their attitudes toward several issues, including asylum. Subsequently, the respondents were requested to put the first questionnaire into an envelope and to start reading the news story that was inside the envelope. Pilot studies had shown that the news story took up to 6 min to read. Having finished reading, the participants were then instructed to put the story into the envelope, so that they could not reread the article. Finally the participants were provided with a short questionnaire asking them to indicate their feelings with regard to the photograph they had seen while reading the news story.

Measurement

Attitude

Participants indicated whether they agreed with five statements about asylum seekers, e.g., "It is irresponsible to send asylum seekers back to their home countries because they may be killed or prosecuted" on 5-point-scales [1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*]. To distract the participants' attention away from the asylum case, we mixed the statements with 17 statements concerning a variety of other issues. Based on the five statements, a reliable scale could be constructed (Cronbach's $\alpha = .73$). To make the distribution of this scale less skewed, the scale was converted into three categories [1 = positive (33.0% of the participants), 2 = neutral (38.7%), 3 = negative (28.3%)].

Involvement

To measure the degree of involvement with the asylum issue in an unobtrusive way, participants were given five statements about the asylum issue, with each new statement representing a qualitatively different way of involvement with the asylum issue, that is, [1] "I'm not really interested," [2] "sometimes I read/see something about it in the newspaper/television news," [3] "I follow the issue in the newspaper or on television," [4] "I talk about it with my parents and friends," and [5] "I feel strongly involved in the issue." Next, they were asked to indicate which of the five statements best applied to them. Finally, to order these qualitatively different levels of involvement into quantitatively different degrees of involvement, a dichotomous variable was constructed. Positive reactions to statements referring to a lack of involvement (statement [1]) or to a rather passive way of involvement (statements [2] or [3]) were grouped into a category "low involvement" (58.2% of the participants). Positive reactions to the statements referring to an active way of involvement (statement [4]) or to a strong level of involvement (statement [5]) were grouped into a category "high involvement" (41.8%).

Interpretation of the Photograph

Generally, measuring the richness and complexity in interpretations of media messages is a complicated task. However, in this study we only focused on one dimension of interpretations, the degree of positivity or negativity. To measure positivity or negativity in an unobtrusive way, participants were presented with five possible interpretations of the photograph that accompanied the story versions, which are, [1] "I feel pity for the persons on the photograph," [2] "I do not trust the persons on the photograph," [3] "I feel depressed by the situation," [4] "I feel aversion and fear toward these persons," and [5] "I feel frustration toward a government being unable to deal with the situa-

tion." Next, the participants were asked to indicate which of the five interpretations applied best to them. In addition, they were allowed to write down their own interpretation, an option used by 5% of the participants. Finally, the answers were grouped into three categories. Interpretation [3] and [5] do not include an evaluation of the persons depicted in the photograph. Hence, agreement with these statements was labeled as "neutral" (64.5%). Agreement with interpretation [1] was labeled as "positive" (12.1% of the participants), and agreement with interpretation [2] or [4] was labeled as "negative" (23.4%). The interpretations that were written down by participants were carefully evaluated by the researchers, and subsequently assigned to one of the three categories.

Strictly speaking, the three levels of interpretation constitute an ordinal level variable. However, evaluating the grouping of statements into the three categories, we considered it reasonable to treat this variable as a quasi metric variable ($M = 2.11$, $SD = .59$), ranging from 1 (negative) to 3 (positive).

Results

In order to test the three hypotheses about the effects of condition, involvement, and attitude on the interpretation of the photograph, an ANOVA was carried out with Interpretation as the dependent variable, and three between-subject factors: Condition (victim frame, intruder frame, mixed frame), Involvement (high, low), and Attitude (positive, neutral, negative). This analysis reveals two main effects reaching statistical significance (see Appendix B). First, there was a main effect of Condition, $F(2, 264) = 7.28$, $p < .01$. This main effect was relatively weak ($\eta^2 = .05$).

From Figure 1, a more detailed insight into the direction of this main effect may be gained. In line with H1, the group exposed to the mixed frame ($M = 2.16$) interpreted the photograph in a more positive way than the group exposed to the intruder frame ($M = 1.92$). To test the significance of this difference, both the (more conservative) Bonferroni as well as the (more liberal) LSD method were used. These posthoc tests revealed that the difference in means was significant (LSD: $p < .01$; Bonferroni: $p < .05$). Also in line with H1, the group exposed to the victim frame ($M = 2.23$) seemed to have interpreted the photograph in a somewhat more positive way than the group exposed to the mixed frame ($M = 2.16$). However, both posthoc tests revealed that the difference between these means was non-significant (LSD: $p = .24$; Bonferroni: $p = .71$). Consequently, H1 receives mixed support.

The second main effect reaching statistical significance is the main effect of Attitude, $F(2, 264) = 7.37$, $p < .01$. As Figure 2 reveals, subjects who had a more positive attitude toward asylum seekers tended to interpret the photograph

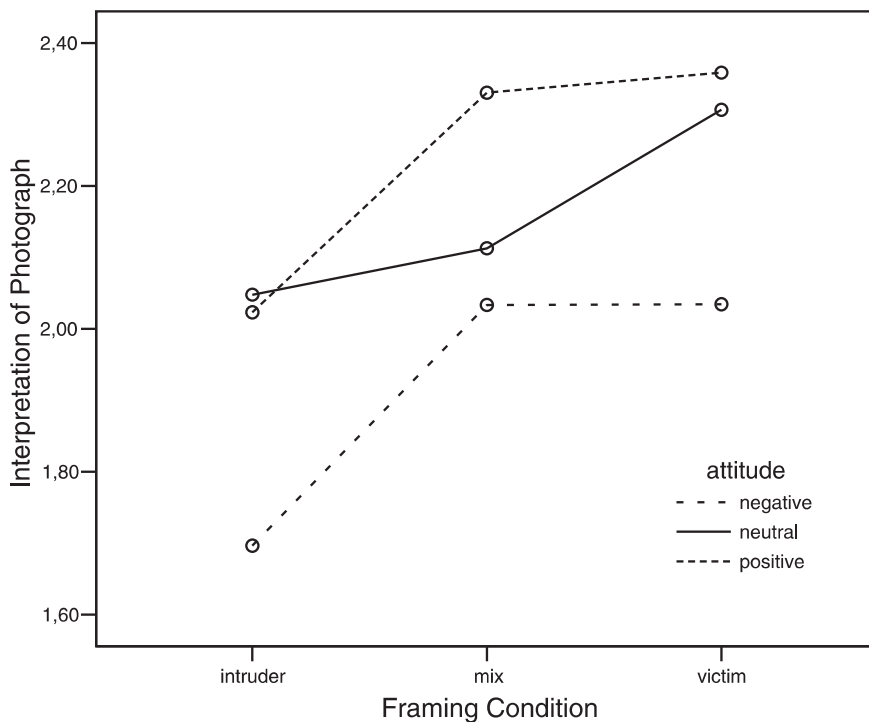


Figure 1. Mean interpretation of photograph for negative, neutral, and positive attitudes toward asylum seekers in intruder-frame, mixed-frame, and victim-frame conditions.

in a more positive way. The effect was relatively weak ($\eta^2 = .05$).

No interaction effects were observed. Because no significant interaction effect between condition and attitude was obtained ($p = .69$), no support was provided for H2, which stated that the relationship between the attitude toward asylum seekers and the interpretation of the news on asylum would be stronger in case a mixture of frames was applied than it would be in case the intruder frame or the victim frame was applied. Because no interaction effect was observed between Condition and Involvement ($p = .32$), no support was provided for H3, which stated that the effect of the applied frame on the interpretation of news on asylum would be weaker in readers who were highly involved in the asylum issue than it would be in readers who were less involved in the asylum issue.

Discussion

The results of this study are mixed. The expected main effect of framing condition was found with respect to the difference between the intruder frame and both other frames (Hypothesis 1). However, the expected weaker relationship between attitude and interpretation in case a single frame was applied as compared to a mixture of competing frames (Hypothesis 2) was not found. The expected interaction effect between framing condition and issue involvement (Hypothesis 3) was also not found.

This study adds to our knowledge of framing effects because it focuses on frames that appeared in a previous study

(Van Gorp, 2005) to actually be present in newspaper articles as clusters of related framing and reasoning devices, each of them referring to a cultural archetype. The framing effect found in the study thus contributes to the external validity of the framing concept. It appears that the frame, as an overarching idea, creates cohesion within a news story, and that readers use the central framing idea as a reference for interpreting the photograph. Although nowhere in the experimental conditions are asylum seekers explicitly labeled as innocent victims or intruders, the asylum seekers on the press photo evoke emotions in line with the applied frame in the text. This means that in this study the various interpretations are not the result of the topic of the news story or of the core news facts – Belgium's Prime Minister was willing to integrate the national asylum database in a European network – but of the unspoken idea that this is done to help innocent victims or to prevent intruders from coming to Belgium.

The present study also provides some unexpected findings. First, the effect size of framing that was found is relatively weak in comparison to effect sizes reported in other studies (see Shen, 2004; Valkenburg et al., 1999), and the difference in interpretations between the victim frame condition and the mixed-frame condition did not reach significance. These findings may be explained by the "naturalness" of the framing devices used in the study. As already described in the Method section, the manipulation of the frames in this study was based on an inventory of key sentences collected from Dutch-language Belgian newspapers. This approach culminated in the construction of a mixed-frame condition. Against this background, the weak effect sizes found in this study may be considered a quali-

fication of effect sizes found in studies applying more prototypical frames.

The second unexpected finding concerns the absence of the expected weaker relationship between attitude and interpretation in case a single frame was applied in comparison with a mixture of competing frames. An explanation of this result may be found in the relatedness of the competing frames included in the mixed-frame condition. In the Edy and Meirick (2007) study, respondents had been exposed to a mixture of frames unrelated to one another (a “crime” frame and a “war” frame): They were irrelevant to each other. This puts news readers in the difficult situation of having to sort out which elements to adopt from the competing frames. In this condition, the ideological background of the respondents may have been helpful by affecting which elements of the competing frames were adopted. In contrast, the victim frame and the intruder frame used in the present study may be considered as opposite frames, as they clearly promoted different interpretations of the news story representing opposite ends of one scale. Hence, news readers in the mixed-frame condition could deliberately have traded-off the implicit arguments provided by the opposing framing devices – and may have consequently ended up with an interpretation somewhere in the middle of the interpretation scale. The results are in line with the findings by Druckman (2004), who also studied competing frames that may be considered as opposite.

The relatedness of the victim frame and the intruder frame may also explain the third and final unexpected finding: the absence of the interaction effect between framing condition and issue involvement. The use of one of the two opposite frames is an implicit rejection of the other frame. This can be expected to stimulate thinking about the message, even in readers who are less involved with the issue. In other words, in this study exposure to a particular frame activated schemas related to this frame, which in turn may have activated schemas related to the opposite frame. As a result, cognitive elaboration on the message has been generally high, thus diminishing the role of involvement in eliciting cognitive elaboration.

This study also has some limitations. One lies in its restriction to just one issue and to just two frames. Findings from future studies on culturally embedded frames could help answer the question of the extent to which the findings from this study may be generalized. Regarding the posthoc explanations of unexpected findings in this study, future studies could particularly answer the question whether the findings from this study hold for culturally embedded frames that are irrelevant to each other.

However, the most important limitation of this study concerns the measurement of the variables. This study involved having participants read a newspaper article on asylum seekers that was framed in a positive, negative, or ambiguous way. It also involved measuring participants’ positive or negative interpretations of the asylum seekers depicted in the photograph, measuring their positive or negative attitudes toward asylum seekers, and measuring

their level of involvement with the asylum issue. In sum, the measurement involved many variables on a controversial issue. To guarantee the maximum external validity of the study, we did not opt for a straightforward measurement of each variable by means of Likert scales, but rather used somewhat less obtrusive measures, as we described in the method section of this article. Although this approach may have improved the external validity of the study, we did pay a price in terms of the quality of our measurements. This applied particularly to the measurement of interpretation, which was at best quasimetric, and the measurement of involvement, which was only a dichotomy.

The relative lack of differentiation in these measurements may provide an additional reason for the relatively weak framing effects found. Also, the limitations of the measurements imply that the failure to find the expected interaction effect between framing condition and attitude (Hypothesis 2), and the failure to find the expected interaction effect between framing condition and issue involvement (Hypothesis 3), do not provide definite proof to discard these hypotheses once and for all. Future studies may test these hypotheses again, using Likert scales. To prevent obtrusive measurements, an alternative design may be adopted. One possible approach would involve a time lag between measurements of attitude and involvement, on the one hand, and interpretation of the photograph, on the other hand. Another possible approach involves the experimental manipulation of the involvement variable (see Petty et al., 1983). Both approaches have the effect of making participants less suspicious about the purpose of the study. In turn, it would allow the researcher to apply more elaborate measurements, in particular reliable Likert scales. The combination of reality-based framing devices, high-quality scales, and unobtrusiveness may provide the best test of framing effects.

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Appendix A

Example of the Stimulus: The Intruder-Frame Condition (picture: © Reuters, used by permission)

BINNENLAND Dinsdag 24 september 2002

Adjunct-kabinetchef Verwilghen vertrekt

Eigen berichtgeving

Beleidscommissie... (text continues)

Premier Verhofstadt wil Belgische asielerdatabank integreren in Europees netwerk

'Pseudo-asielzoekers ontmaskeren wordt makkelijker'

BRUSSEL — Premier Verhofstadt wil dat voor het einde van volgend jaar alle EU-landen het een systeem van geïntegreerde asielerdatabank. Dit heeft hij in de Kamer bekend gemaakt. De asielerzoekers die nu worden in de lidstaten gangbaar zijn, verschillen sterk van elkaar. De premier wil die lijst van voortschrijdend spoed bij het op elkaar afstemmen van de regelgeving. Wie in een land geen werk vindt van de Europese Unie om arbeidsmarkt te laten, moet binnen de overige landen weten waar hij of zij aan toe is. Daarvoor moet er een Europees databank van alle lidstaten worden opgezet. Het is vooral de moeite waard te bedenken in landen die moeite hebben om de immigratie op te houden.

Eigen berichtgeving

Keur-Artis

Voorjaar 2001 was België het enige Europees land dat een asielerzoekers 'monster' of 'bank' van asielerzoekers, in het kader van de GEMEX-gedachte, heeft de invoering van de asielerzoekers in de lijst van landen. Volgens de Vlaamse Staat van de Vlaamse Staat om de lijst van landen van de Europese Unie te bevestigen. De asielerzoekers worden nu niet meer op de lijst van landen. De asielerzoekers worden nu niet meer op de lijst van landen. De asielerzoekers worden nu niet meer op de lijst van landen. De asielerzoekers worden nu niet meer op de lijst van landen.

'Ik wil absoluut een Europese databank met foto's, vingerafdrukken en paspoort van iedereen over de wereld'

... (text continues)

... (text continues)

Waalse regering bereidt griepvaccinatie voor

Appendix B

Analysis of Variance for Interpretation of Photograph

Source	df	F	η ²	p
Condition (C)	2	7.28*	.05	.00
Attitude (A)	2	7.37*	.05	.00
Involvement (I)	1	.63	.00	.43
C × A	4	.56	.01	.69
C × I	2	1.13	.01	.32
A × I	2	.64	.01	.53
C × A × I	4	.94	.01	.44
Error	264	(.32)		

Note. Value in parenthesis represents mean square error. *p < .01.