

(IN)FORMING CONFLICT PREVENTION,  
RESPONSE AND RESOLUTION:



THE ROLE OF MEDIA  
IN VIOLENT CONFLICT

# INFOCORE Definitions

## “Interpretative Frame”

© Christian Baden

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel

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### **Definition: “Interpretative Frame”**

A frame is a contextualization that situates a specific claim within a selective, coherent, purposeful interpretative context (Baden, 2010). Frames are selective in that they select specific aspects of complex reality as relevant for constructing the meaning of some information, and ignore others as ephemeral/irrelevant (Entman, 1993). They are coherent in the sense that they connect the selected aspects of reality and explain how these are relevant to one another (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987). They are purposeful because every frame implies specific interpretations, evaluations, or courses of action, such that different frames highlighting different aspects of the same reality inevitably lead to different conclusions (Benford & Snow, 1992). This purpose can be defined strategically (a frame is constructed in order to justify a specific conclusion) or constructively (an interpreter constructs a frame to make sense of something without a specific agenda, but the frame then suggests specific conclusions nevertheless).

A frame is thus always focused on the claim it frames. Frames define the situation that a specific piece of information must be understood against (“problem definition”, Entman, 1993). In addition, frames comprise one or multiple of the following other elements: They refer to selected antecedents and causes of the defined situation (“causal attribution”); they cast evaluative judgment by presenting the situation as more or less desirable (“moral evaluation”); and they raise possible courses of responding to or acting within the presented situation (“treatment recommendation”). Importantly, these elements form one coherent interpretative framework in the sense that changing any of the present elements results in the framed information acquiring different meaning. Frames can thus be summarized by a “central organizing idea” (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987) which expresses the logic by which the elements relate to one another. The central organizing idea abstracts from the very concrete instance of the frame, but remains concrete enough that the frame’s structure follows necessarily from the application of the idea to a given set of information. Manifest contextualizations derived from the same central organizing idea are said to use the same frame. A frame, consequently, is a semantic structure, a logical/interpretative construction that renders a set of information coherent and meaningful. Accordingly, frames are not “in” the text, but they are constructed from it during interpretation, or mobilized when producing a text; frames popularized in a society can become part of its cultural knowledge that is available to members socialized in that culture, which can be easily referred to in discourse texts (van Gorp, 2007). Frames are related to manifest contents in a text as latent logics suggested by specific framing devices (e.g., connoted expressions, metaphors, visuals, etc.) raised in the text. These devices have been embedded in a text by the author with the intention of referring to a specific central organizing idea, and can be recognized by a reader to reconstruct the intended interpretative context (Pan & Kosicki, 1993).

Frames, especially in the news, often (not necessarily) have a specific structure that is more general than concrete central organizing ideas. Many frames focus on the opposition of actors, ideas, interests, etc. (“conflict frames”); others revolve around personal views (“human interest”), or specific strategies/performances (“strategy frames”; Valkenburg, Semetko, de Vreese, 1999).<sup>1</sup> These are best

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<sup>1</sup> Other “generic” frames postulated include “consequence frames”, “responsibility frames”, or “morality frames”, however these are not informative: As stated above, the attribution of causes, consequences, and evaluations is endemic to frames, so these “types” merely emphasize one of the general frame functions.

understood as common structures that frames can use, but are not frames themselves. Likewise, frames must be distinguished from topics or themes that information is embedded within, which do not imply specific causes, evaluations, or treatments; Frames can be distinguished from attributes as discussed in 2<sup>nd</sup> level agenda setting using the coherence requirement: In a frame, different parts of the contextualization require one another, while attributes can be combined freely.

Frames build upon evidential beliefs/claims, for which they provide a coherent interpretative context that allows recognizing the significance of the claim/belief. Furthermore, frames justify agendas for action by presenting suggested treatments as coherent, logical consequences from a presented situation, its explanation and evaluation.

In INFOCORE, most WPs touch upon the concept of interpretative frames in one way or another. In the content analytic WPs, we investigate how frames are constructed by strategic communicators attempting to justify their specific purposes; we analyze how frames are transformed into interpretations that conform to certain professional standards and appear palatable (or even objective) to wide audiences; we analyze how frames are received in and shape political debates and decision making; and we trace how all that happens on social media. In the interviewing WPs, frames are not a core concern but may appear as specific interpretations advocated by certain actors, as interpretations derived from available discourse, as background assumptions shaping actors' strategies and evaluations, etc.

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