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THE TRIANGLE FORMED BY FRAMING, AGENDA-SETTING AND METACOVERAGE

EL TRIÁNGULO FORMADO POR EL FRAMING, LA AGENDA-SETTING Y LA METACOBERTURA

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RESUMEN

El estudio del *framing* es un proceso que tiene lugar en diferentes niveles; en la cultura, en la mente de las élites y en los profesionales de los medios; en el texto de la información y en la mente de los ciudadanos como individuos. Por lo tanto, el *framing* es un proceso psicológico individual, pero también organizacional, un producto y una herramienta estratégica. En este artículo el autor ha llevado a cabo una revisión de conceptos como los de *agenda-setting*, *metacobertura*, *gatekeeper* y *priming* que han ido evolucionando desde el estudio clásico del *framing*.

Palabras clave: *framing*; *frame*; *agenda-setting*; *metacobertura*; *gatekeeper*; *gatekeeping*; *priming*; *espiral de cinismo*; *media salacity*.

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ABSTRACT

The study of framing is a process that takes place at different levels; in the culture; in the minds of the elite and media professionals; in the text of the information; and, in the minds of citizens as individuals. Therefore, framing is an individual psychological process, but also an organizational process, a product and a tool of strategy. In this article the author have conducted a review of concepts such as agenda-setting, metacoverage, gatekeeper, or priming that are evolving from the classic study of framing.

Key words: Framing; frame, agenda-setting, metacoverage, gatekeeper, gatekeeping, priming, spiral of cynicism, media salacity.

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1. Introduction

This article based on *framing* contains a robust collection of different concepts, from which the authors seek to explain, amongst others, the integration between framing, gatekeeping and agenda-setting. The concept of *framing* in the current communication scene cannot be studied in isolation because it forms part of a process integrated within the communication system. This interaction with several actors produces a relationship of co-dependency that forms a hybrid model of information in which several actors interact. As affirmed by Jasperson et al. (1998) this hybrid model of agenda setting and framing can better illustrate the media's effect on public opinion. This affirmation leads us to treat the agenda setting and framing approaches not as competing theories but as complementary ones, as put forth theoretically in recent literature (McCombs & Bell, 1997; Ghanem, 1997; McCombs, 1994).

Our article serves as a theoretical test of framing linking with the first and second levels of agenda setting and metacoverage with the purpose of offering a richer understanding of how this relationship is determined. This integrated part of the theory of framing has been studied for a long time, but its connexion with the metacoverage has hardly been studied. Nevertheless, it gives coherence to the process of framing because it must be studied and explored within the real world of communication.

2. The theory of *Framing*

Academic research and journalistic practice of the 60s and 70s were dominated by an objectivist stream. But since the late seventies, and especially during the last two decades of the twentieth century, both academic research and journalistic practice have shown the doubtful nature of the maximum of objectivity (Canel, 1999). Researchers of the media have provided new insights into the relationship between facts and journalism, and, hence, on the communication process. Among these researchers are authors of the theory of framing that are radically separate from previous financial budgets Giménez & Berganza, 2009). The idea of *focus* or framing is linked with the theory of prototypes¹ of Kepplinger & Habermeier (1995)

¹ In the study of framing the analysis of the treatment of the information made by the gatekeeper is particularly important. A specific event can generate a new "prototype" of information as concerning the selection, journalistic criteria, and the informative treatment. Consolidating this phenomenon, certain differences favour the emergence of new issues and news. In other words, an event or a situation can cause the creation of a new approach or a new information framework in the narration of any informative episode (Kepplinger & Habermeier, 1995).

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and the theory of schemas² set by Bateson (1972) and applied by Goffman (1974) in the field of sociology (Berganza, 2003).

There have been numerous studies about this concept. Tuchman (1978, p. 1) defined *frame* as principles of organization that govern events and their subjective context. For his part, Gamson (1989) noted that frame was an idea of general organization giving or downplaying to certain events, suggesting what is newsworthy and what is not. So, Gitlin (1980) used the term as a synonym for selection, emphasis and exclusion. Recently, it has tried to clarify and further refine the different conceptualizations that are carried out. According to Entman, Matthes & Pellicano (2009), social scientists do not command a consensus among the meanings of frame and framing. There is a first group that defines framing in general terms. This is the case of Gamson & Modigliani (1987) who define it as “central idea of organization or story that provides meaning to an event or story” (p. 143). A second group opts for a more specific definition of frame that includes the definition of problems, development of moral judgments and the provision of resources.

De Vreese (2005) clarified the issue by suggesting distinguishing between frames of specific issues, suitable only for specific events or stories, and generic frames that transcend thematic limitations because these can be identified in different contexts. For this reason, frame can be considered an intuitive concept that includes many realities, because frame in news can be identified and used to understand the differences across countries when covering a story. Components that are integrated within the framing process are on different levels (de Vreese, 2005).

On one hand, one can measure only the manifest content of the message and try to recognize the approaches presented in the visual and verbal components of the information (Tankard et al., 1991). So, Ghanem (1997) distinguishes four dimensions in the frames of the media: news subtopics, mechanisms that frame (size and location), cognitive attributes and affective attributes. The cognitive dimensions are tools that help to identify the significance of the issues, while the affective dimension focuses on the tone of the story and its narrative structure. As a result, studying the framing of a newspaper or a particular story, according to Dusallant (2004), “authors will find items that can each be classified in the various

² The framing theory first appeared in the field of cognitive psychology (Bateson, 1972), which used it to explain how people, when they know something, highlight some specific aspects of reality and forget others. Thus, the author referred to frame figuratively, referring to a “framework” that allows distinguishing different realities. It was from this point that Goffman (1974) defined frame as a concept that forms part of the process by which societies produce different meanings. This sociologist argued that there are some “primary frameworks” that are socially constructed, concepts that people perceive as “natural” while others directly reflect physical experiences.

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dimensions mentioned, which shows the almost infinite variety of ways in which the media can frame a piece of information” (p. 54).

So, on the other hand, studying framing is essential to analyse the potential of the concept within the communication process because it should be considered the differentiation of concepts, as affirmed by Entman, Matthes & Pellicano (2009). This perspective shows a frame as a dynamic process that brings together the frame-building and the frame-setting (the interaction between media frames and the predispositions of the audience). At this point, according to Sábada (2001) frames are “shared schemes underlying attitudes of journalists, who organize the information; in the receptors, who are able to understand; in the texts that are hidden; and in the culture in which they are generated” (p. 166).

3. The framing in the relationship between issuer-receiver

The framing is an individual psychological process, but also an organizational process, a product and a tool of political strategy. It can have significant effects on how people make and formulate an opinion about an issue. This is essential to understanding the whole psychological process (Entman, Matthes & Pellicano, 2009).

Regarding to the receiver, the journalist can choose between two opposing positions. Firstly, is the monological relationship based on the objectivity that requires a distant voice, and secondly, the dialogic relationship that abandons this impartial position (Soffer, 2009). The weakening of the objective position has created an ideal atmosphere for the development of dialogue that provides an alternative meaning within the communication process. According to Lähteenmäki (1998), this situation leaves in the informative process a variety of subjective points of views that can only join with other subjective points of views in a dialogic process. Postmodern perception is based on the facts that people always have a subjective point of view of the world.

To better understand the relationship between objectivity and the conversation between the professional and his public, it is necessary to analyse the studies carried out by Buber (1955) and Bakhtin (1986). Both stressed the importance of dialogical components in human interaction. Buber (1955) specifically referred to technical dialogue. This was the type of understanding for the modern life driven solely by the desire for objective understanding. If this concept is moved to the media, evolution carried out in the twentieth century can be seen. From the complete acceptance of a monological perspective where the ideal of objectivity was a fundamental part of the relationship between knowledge and text that was transmitted to the public -this concept denied the possibility of a dialogical

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relationship between journalists and their audience. And from the dialogical perspective where the element, as affirmed by Horton (1956), takes the control even in electronic communications, despite being defined by these authors as a simulacrum of conversation, based on a para-social relationship. In the 80s they performed a so-called dialogic turn based on these electronic conversations and electronic media. This has continued in the last two decades during the postmodern and digital era (Soffer, 2009).

3.1 The visibility and thematization in the information

Human interactions are now increasingly mediated by the media, altering the conditions of the communication in our society. As stated by Thomson (2005), a transformation in visibility has taken place. In primitive societies, the visibility of individuals, actions and events was intrinsically linked to the sharing of a locality. Individuals shared the same spatiotemporal context. With the development of media, visibility is removed from this condition. Individuals are made visible although they are located in other distant and diverse contexts. The mediated visibility is quite different from the kind of visibility face-to-face. The development of mediated visibility produces a variety of new phenomena that are related with the manner that the information, images and other materials are visible to others. This causes that “the influence of the mass media varies considerably across issues” (Green-Pedersen & Stubager 2010; Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2011 p. 297).

When considering the news approaches or frames of information, one of the first elements to be taken into account is the visibility given to the subject of analysis by the media, due to that the concept of approach is closely linked to the idea of selection and of gatekeeper or the journalist selector of information (Berganza, 2008). Tankard et al. (1991) confirm this argument by stating that the approach suggests how an issue is selected, excluded and elaborated. This aspect is also highlighted by Entman, Matthes & Pellicano (1993) who affirms that to focus is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them stand out, so that is promoted a particular problem definition, an interpretation of its cause, a moral evaluation and/or recommendation of a solution. At the end, the thematization creates visible events that individuals recognise through the media and, in turn, emphasizes the importance of those events by the transmission by the media, and the hierarchy established between the different stories within the news discourse. To thematize is to incorporate the issue into the agenda of the media, but the cycle is closed when the issue turns to the agenda of the individual citizen and the sum of citizens as social collectivity (Túñez & Guevara, 2009).

The existence of the process of thematization in the communication, presupposes that this is conducted using those selection criteria defined by Luhmann (cited by

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Noelle-Neumann 2003) “rules of attention”³. The existence of these rules, prior to the thematization, suggests that individuals, despite their possible preferences can only choose between the thematic choices previously established by the mass media (Piñuel & Moya, 2010). So that, analysed from the internal perspective of the communication system, the thematization is an instrument of journalistic information that acts, at intervals, as a performer, counsellor of reality, and is a process that relies on editorial strategies, in political line, and the qualitative content of the media (Agostini & Badia, 1992).

Finally, in a broad sense, thematization is referring to what is disseminated in informative time and space from the media (Túñez & Guevara, 2009). As explained by Fontcuberta & Borrat (2006), the agenda is a polyphonic communication of media to their audience that must be understood as the result of “the ultimate authority, supreme, final, of this production process: where all newsworthy events become selected current issues narrated and commented and grouped by areas and sections; where each theme unfolds in a narrative or argumentative under its own theme” (pp. 56-57).

From the point of view of the media as selectors capable of giving visibility to the information and thematize the public opinion, these concepts correspond with the gatekeeping theories. As stated by Giménez & Berganza (2009), part of framing theory recognizes that one of the most important processes of framing is the selection.

³ There are kinds of mechanisms that make up the agenda in media. Luhmann (1971) analyses it from a systemic point of view. Normally, in politics, the public opinion is responsible for the importance and relevance of a topic. ‘Attention rules’ control the rise and fall of topics and each of them has its own ‘life story’. At first a topic remains in a latent phase where only adept and well-informed actors know about its relevancy. Some topics attract attention because of the commitment of engaged actors. If the topics reach the perception of the broad public it is able to structure the political communication. To reach this stage some unexpressed ‘attention rules’ work: maybe the topic is related to important values or to an important status of the sender. Or the topic can be related to an upcoming crisis or catastrophe, to very new information or to other mechanisms of sensitization and/or curiosity. If the topic comes into fashion it can influence decision making. A lot of actors jump on the bandwagon and its legitimacy is high. In this phase the topic should reach its goals or at least become permanently by institutionalisation because afterwards new topics define the political agenda. Every topic shows symptoms of fatigue after a while. Maybe it remains as a ceremonial element or even it sinks into oblivion. After this it is hardly possible to reactivate the topic in the same way. It remains again in the latent phase as described above and only the well-informed actors are working on it (Walser, 2006). As Luhmann (1971) states: “If a topic had not been able to solve its problem it must be reincarnated as a new one” (p. 11).

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3.2 The role of journalists as filters of informative communication (gatekeeper)

The overhead in the flow of information received by media today is not a new phenomenon. Lippman (1922) already talked about information overload and stressed that the world around people is too large to access first-hand information by their own means. This comment puts the media at the centre of the communication flow, and requires today's journalists to search, select, extract and transform the information. As expressed by Servan-Schreiber (1973), a journalist must construct an informative reality based on materials that in many cases have not been extracted by him, but are already in their newsroom.

The journalist as gatekeeper is based on a basic premise, considered by Ackoff & Emery (1972), which is filtering. So, according to these authors, the proficient journalist must eliminate useless information because "the individuality of a person or the culture of a group can be considered as an observable function that describes how a system becomes a choice situation in a relative value expected by himself". Thus, the operation carried out by the gatekeeper is the most creative because it brings together the dispersed information for relating this with the concomitant facts attendant in time, giving an explanation and finding a meaning to clarify the content of the news (Servan-Schreiber, 1973). So, the gatekeeper, in words of DeGeorge (1981), is

"the person or group in media that is responsible for selecting the news that appears in the media, judging them, determining the time, the space and the form; and imposing the journalistic genre to be treated. Thus, the journalist acts as sieve man that allows some information and mutes others" (pp. 219-220).

Finally, the journalists must consider, understand and establish the so-called forces at the gates, on the process of gatekeeping. As Lewin (1947) argued, these forces at the gates determine which process will become news and what not.

3.2.1 The treatment of information by the gatekeeper: the curve of absences and the news value

Like Noguera (2006), this paper finds it necessary to analyse some aspects such as: ways to visualize, find and define the appearance of the frames of reference in valid operational dimensions. People build schemes based on cognitive structures that allow them to represent their knowledge about certain concepts or types of stimuli (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). This induces that the concept of framing included many realities because from the first moment of preparation begins a process of

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limitation of reality that ends in the effects produced on the receiver. This partial reality has certain effects that play the role of frame.

Therefore, within the study of framing is particularly important to analyse the treatment of the information that the gatekeeper generates. From a specific event it is possible to generate a new prototype of information, resulting in a modification of the selection of the journalistic criteria, consolidating different informative treatments (process) and favouring the emergence of new issues and news. In other words, an event or a situation can cause the creation of a new approach or a new information framework in the narration of any informative episode (Kepplinger & Habermeier, 1995).

The main point in this theme is the heterogeneous nature of “connotation”. The choice of each word that shapes the text is established, and, therefore, its final construction contributes to news with different frames (Noguera, 2006) so that “the language used in the information varies so much from one medium to another that, in extreme cases, the public cannot identify the same event in two media that, in principle, issue the same subject” (Sábada, 2001, p. 159). In this regard, Berganza (2003) affirms that there are also affective connotations, symbolic and objective in the presentation and treatment of data. Translating this in terms of framing, it is possible to highlight that each medium shows its way of working in the development and creation of the information.

As Broersma (2010) stated: “in the treatment of information respect to his audience, the gatekeeper can approach the descriptive or performative speech (p. 21). Davies (2008) addresses the issue of descriptive discourse as a practice that has the ability to show a representation of reality that is true, that reflects what is happening in the real world. Furthermore, Broersman (2010) states that the point of view of performative discourse is associated with the power to persuade people to believe that their interpretation of the social world is legitimate. This occurs because as limited information processors, who are individuals, are not considered to know everything about an issue or event, allowing a space to persuade that occurs when the communicator alters the content according to their beliefs, obtaining new information (favourable or unfavourable) (Entman, Matthes and Pellicano, 2009).

In the production phase, both the media and the journalist have a definite role of gatekeeper because they select the information flow that will reach the audience in a way that determines three new kinds of reality, as noted by Túñez & Guevara (2009): published reality (transmitting), the excluded reality (the proposals news that the media know but not the audience because the information has a lower value) and the silenced reality (the contents that are newsworthy but the media intentionally hide in function of certain interests). Thus, it is possible to observe

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how gatekeepers decide what knowledge reaches society through their work of selection and discrimination.

The task of the gatekeeper is immersed in the control process performed by implementing the criteria of news/value, which include professional and organizational factors. The news/value is defined as the “set of elements that through the informative apparatus controls and manages the amount and type of events where selects news” (Wolf, 1985, p. 222). In practice, acting together through relationships and combinations determines, among the different news/values, those who recommend the selection of a fact (Wolf, 1985, p. 222). Some of these news/values, according Túnñez & Guevara (2009), are: (i) the hierarchical level of the involved persons, (ii) the number of people involved in the event, (iii) the projection and the consequences, novelty, (iv) present, relevance, frequency and (v) conflict.

Although, it is important to appreciate that the news/value is marked by several limiting factors. One particularly important at present is the chromonementality appointed by Schlesinger (1977).

This news selection should guarantee the appropriate supply of newsfeed with minimal investment of time, effort and money; or, what is the same, involving valid criteria for general information, economic, macro-sociological, and psychological. This is always from identifying the main elements existing within the framework (Van Dijk, 1980).

4. The framing and agenda-setting: the role of issuer in the informative communication

Within framing and agenda setting exist different ways of classification. In this theoretical proposition the author does not try to create a fusion or a new theory in which all these concepts have a place under the same significance. But rather, the author tries to analyse these independent theories and their relationship.

Because, in one way, Scheufele (1999) and Price & Tewksbury (1997) pose the theoretical framing independence and its complementarity with the tradition of the agenda (because, according to these authors, agenda-setting and priming are based on accessibility, and the framing on applicability); and, in another way, there are other authors (McCombs, 1994; McCombs & Ghanem, 2003) that add that the study of framing in media can be analysed from the second level of agenda-setting.

Therefore, when authors talk about agenda-setting, they refer to issues highlighted by the media and the transfer of the importance of these issues to the public.

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Within the theory of agenda-setting there are three types of agendas that are related and influenced by different factors involved in the communication process: 1) the media 2) the public and 3) politics.

Dearing & Rogers (1996) note that the process of agenda-setting begins when an item appears on the agenda of the media. The audience will give a general relevance to an issue in terms of the coverage that has been done in the media. Thus, the measurement or use of the most important problem as the initial question of the study of agenda-setting, must consider the relationship between the media-agenda and the public-agenda (Rodríguez, 2004).

Through the public-agenda the position of an issue respect to others can be seen. According to Rodríguez (2004), "the public agenda is the degree or hierarchy of importance that the public give certain news aspects over a period of time" (p. 20). McCombs & Shaw (1972), in the study that analysed the U.S. elections in 1968, discovered the relationship between certain issues on the agenda of the public and the coverage of the media. This relationship between the media-agenda and the public was confirmed in this study and has been confirmed in other subsequent studies⁴. The policy-agenda, as Dearing & Rogers note (1996), may also be called institutional-agenda because it represents "the master key of other agendas because it is responsible for generating new themes that will influence both the media-agenda and the public-agenda"⁵ (p. 72).

The first level of agenda-setting focuses on the influence of the media in establishing the themes that are the focus of public attention. However, the agenda-setting has gone beyond the first dimension. As McCombs & Evatt (1995) argue, agenda-setting refers not only to the issues on the agenda, but also includes images and prospects entering the subjective level and opinion. This level of study is called the second dimension of the agenda-setting (McCombs, 1994). The second level is based on how people understand things that catch their attention. Using Lippmann's phrase (1922) "pictures in our heads" (p. 3), the first level of agenda-setting is the image that exists on something; the second level speaks literally about this image. This level shapes subjective and affective elements of the image (Coleman et al., 2009). In addition to the agenda-setting,

⁴ Two-thirds of the studies reviewed about agenda-setting in a work realized in 1996 reveal a predominance of the influence of the media-agenda on the public-agenda, as noted by Rodríguez (2004).

⁵ "In the political-agenda measured the type of actions taken by governments, parliaments and various social institutions which form part later trigger discussions also included as issues highlighted in the media-agenda and the public-agenda" (Rodríguez, 2004, p. 21). Other focus in studies about agenda is linked to the process of how, who and what elements or factors contribute to the construction of the agenda (Rodríguez, 2004). The agenda-building studies the process by which a large numbers of social, as well as media influence, influence the construction of institutional agendas (Perloff, 1998).

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one can also note inter-media agenda-setting, showing how the media elite convey the important issues in their agenda to other media.

On the other hand, studies of agenda-setting have stimulated the debate on priming and framing. This fact has occurred when trying to explain these concepts from the effects of agenda-setting in them (Weaver, McCombs & Spellman, 1975; Coleman et al., 2009).

Regarding the priming effect, Iyengar, Peters & Kinder (1982) stated that is “media and gatekeepers or selectors have to decide what is publishable and what is not; how to do and style; determine a framework called priming or preparation of news effect that the audience will perceive” (p. 849). In the same sense and completing this, Robinson (1976) stressed that “the media, as well as determining the news agenda, also say, refine, include or exclude many aspects of the current information that will be perceived by the public as real or the most important” (p. 304). In this sense, media produce the so-called priming effect, preparing the audience on issues which they have selected.

As we have seen, the concepts of priming and framing are related to the second level of agenda-setting because although some concepts have already been developed in the last two decades of the last century by McCombs & Evatt (1995) and McCombs & Bell (1997), many current studies are found within these dimensions.

4.1 The convergence of agenda-setting and framing

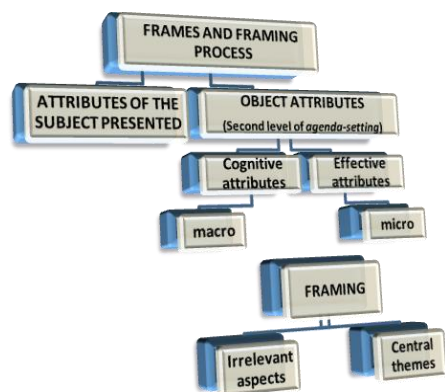
The theory of agenda-setting has maintained continuous growth for over 30 years thanks to its compatibility and parallels with other theories. It has incorporated concepts such as gatekeeping or completed conceptually including the theory based on public opinion of the spiral of silence. The convergence of the basic idea of agenda-setting and framing has been recognized by researchers for a long time in many fields, including the media. Attributes of agenda-setting are integrated into research about Framing theory. So that the agenda-setting makes the selection that determines about what to think, the framing establishes the mechanisms that make how to think and, as a result of the whole process, through priming acquired arguments to decide what to think (Weaver, 2007). These points of cohesion are the frames and framing processes, the effects of framing, the attributes of the agenda, the dynamics of the processes of agenda-setting, contingency conditions and influence of agenda-setting and its effects (McCombs & Ghanem, 2003). Entman et al. (1993) stated that “in the language of the agenda-setting, framing is the construction of an agenda with the selection of a limited number of issues in order to create a coherent picture of a particular object” (p. 51).

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Authors note that with respect to differences between both, some of the latest research⁶ (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; Van Gorp, 2007; Weaver, 2007) place them mainly in three parts of the communication process: basic concept, processing of the information and effects. As a result, agenda-setting and priming are based on accessibility, defined as the degree of accessibility to an issue in the memory depending on relevance (salience); framing is based on the concept of applicability, defined as the interpretive connection between two subjects. Put in another way, framing is based on the ability to generate recognizable interpretative schemas from significant changes in the speech (Vicente and López, 2009).

This relationship of continuity that links the two theories leads to the conclusion that using the theory of agenda-setting the nature of the frame can be explained. In an initial distinction that can be made between frames as attributes in the presentation of the communication and frames as attributes of the objects that are presented (McCombs & Ghanem, 2003). At a second level, on one hand we see the affective dimension of the framing that is composed of different elements related to the shape, proximity and human interest; and on the other, the cognitive dimension, which is referred to whether the media and the audience have the same perception about a particular issue (Rodríguez, 2004). This dichotomy is illustrated in the following figure produced by McCombs and Ghanem (2003) similar to that of Gamson & Modigliani's (1987): **Figure 1.** Dichotomy between agenda-setting and framing process



Source: Compiled by author from McCombs & Ghanem, (2003).

McCombs & Ghanem (2003) claimed that beyond the images that are created in our heads, frame predisposes the receiver of the message to maintain a line of

⁶ In relation to the overall volume, between 2001 and 2005 were recorded 165 researches on framing, compared with 43 on agenda-setting and 25 on priming over the same period (Weaver, 2007).

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reasoning. This irony has the consequence that both the framing and agenda-setting create a new standard for evaluating the influence of the media on public opinion and social attitudes of the mass.

4.2 Effects of framing and agenda-setting on the public opinion

With respect to the effects of framing and agenda-setting on public opinion, Entman, Matthes & Pellicano (2009) argue that elites often participate in a competition to shape the frame in the media and to influence perceptions of other elites and public opinion. This influence of the frame on the media occurs in three different ways.

Firstly, through the responses of citizens to the polls on an issue or situation in general. Secondly, through the use of the frame by elites directly on the information in order to have their own conclusions and, thereby, interfere in public opinion. Finally, through their own evolutions within this competition among elites.

Thus, authors see how the battle for the frame becomes a complicated game of chess whereby strategy becomes crucial. Of course, this means that the actor, who dominates the frame in the media, controls public opinion. Some studies, such as Chong and Druckman (2007), based on surveys about the framing effect confirming that many people have resistance to inconsistent information before integrating it into their thinking. Regardless of whether the framing really affects the majority of the opinion or not, is likely to have effects at the political level by “framing” the reality through social surveys and media (Entman, Matthes and Pellicano, 2009).

This shows that the relationship between public opinion and published opinion is very narrow. The importance attached to certain subjects by media or not -keep silence- creates a strong influence on the public opinion, on the relevance giving to certain issues, and the way in how they think about these issues (Giménez, 2006). Public opinion is subject at all times to evaluation, structuring and transmission of information among the general public, the media and the elites. This must not be confused with emotions, preferences and feelings of the general public that shape the public opinion with the official information exposed by journalists (Entman, 2010). As public narrative of collective social reality, news cannot claim any exclusive jurisdiction. In the democratic public sphere, media have no the right or ownership to consider having a territory or a plot of specific action. They cannot exempt the public domain of democratic power of interpretation of different perspectives (Kaplan, 2010).

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There arises the question whether the production of information from the media framework is oriented to the performance of the public opinion when selecting current issues under agenda forecasts (theory of Agenda-setting) and present it in accordance with an approach or perspectives of strategic interest to increase credibility of the speech of its actors (Framing theory) (Piñuel & Gaitán, 2010).

The constitution of the thematic agenda is based on the perception of the subject of the state of public opinion. As noted by Noelle-Newman (2003), what matters is the importance that the individual believes that others attribute to the issue, as they are afraid of isolation. Therefore, the effect of the spiral of silence, empirically tested by this author, confirms the centrality of the media in generating the consensus from socialization and the shared experience of currents of opinion that lead to the “doctrine of opinion” (Noelle-Newman, 2003, pp. 180-181).

Thus, systemising the role played by the media in the symbolic construction of the public opinion, based on the theories of Framing and Agenda-setting, could act with the intent to build consensus, identify issues of public discussion, determine the political debate within established limits and ensure their reproduction as public spokespersons of the public opinion (Garcés, 2007).

5. From framing to the metacoverage

Framing analysis can help unravel the meaning of metacoverage. Esser & D'Angelo (2006) argue that in the media coverage of the two main topics of the metacoverage (news and publicity) occurs a conjunction with other stories: political subjects, characteristic themes, elections, etcetera. The joint presence of news and advertising reflects a complete picture of events within the communication environment of media. Moreover, journalists add their interpretations (personal frame) in their informative work or advertising. This contribution of journalists within framing of the information or advertising resides in how to tell stories and for what purpose. All framing analysis involves analysing the frame from the structural principles of journalists as individuals (Reese, 2007). So after analysis, Esser & D'Angelo (2006) found at least three frames in the news and three frames in advertising (Conduit-frames, strategy-frames and accountability-frames).

In this sense, news represents the world according to how media professionals perceive it and rebuild. The metacoverage reflects the point of view of journalists covering a campaign (political or military) that make up the reality that cannot be seen in its entirety. This causes journalists to use all three types of frame, within their metacoverage and explain it through the concept of “professionalism in the media” coined by McQuail (1983), and Shoemaker & Reese (1991). Studies such as those carried out by de Vreese & Semetko (2002), or de Vreese (2005) who

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refers to the metacoverage, strategically framed or not, provides important information enlightening citizens about the nature of political communication within current media (de Vreese & Elenbaas, 2008). These alternative methods of assessing the relevance of news in terms of correspondence with empirical measures of audience interest imply a standard of “consumer sovereignty” which conflicts with some claims of journalistic professionalism, as well as with the “absolutist” or expert approaches discussed at the outset. Most evidence does confirm a mismatch between supplies and demand for serious and background news and analysis, reflecting the conflict between professional judgements of relevance and the apparent “immediate gratification-seeking” of news audiences (McQuail, 1992, p. 220; Levy, 1978).

Reflect aspects linked with the political cynicism that media have shown to highlight the distrust in the political elite and the strong distrust of people exposed to information from these. This is another example of how the theory of strategic metacoverage based on the theory of strategic metaframes, work based on the cognitive mechanisms involved in the information based in the political cynicism (de Vreese and Elenbaas, 2008). Thus, authors can see how metacoverage is the media coverage conducted from the perspective or framing of the media, which describes the role played in political campaigns or military events and in information produced by the media, public relations and political marketing.

For the reasons listed in the previous paragraph, the paper refers to the metacoverage from the perspective of developing the framing analysis, which allows both to carry out the description of messages and their characteristics, and to design experimental studies to evaluate the effects of this type of informative treatment (Humanes, 2009). The metacoverage in its two dimensions has been linked to the implementation of strategic communication characteristics of media policy and associated concept: news management (Zaller, 1999). According to Esser & Spanier (2005), the control of information about the candidate is done in three phases:

- The strategic agenda-setting, or promotion of political activities and events for publication in media.
- The strategic priming, or production of messages that focus on the themes advantageous for the candidate and thus influence the evaluation.
- The strategic framing, or structure of political discourse to find a definition in favor of the candidate.

Journalists react in this way producing their own news strategies through the metacoverage: 1) strategic press coverage, through which the journalist focuses on the antagonistic relations between media and politicians, and the significant role of

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media in the strategic game of politicians (Humanes, 2009); and 2) the strategic publicity coverage, which emphasizes calculated political strategies; artificial and manipulated advertising; and public relations efforts in their interactions with media; but in this case, without mentioning explicitly the role of media (de Vreese & Elenbaas, 2008).

The effects of this type of coverage on citizenship focus on the consolidation of the trend toward political disaffection and cynicism. In the minds of journalists the idea of combat “us versus them” is installed, in which the candidate is not reliable and journalists themselves are conceived defensively. The result is a treatment that emphasizes what motivates candidates to act, while excluding what the candidate does or says (Kerbel, 1999).

5.1 Effects of the relationship between framing and metacoverage: media cynicism and media salacity

Metacoverage refers to the use of some specific approaches (frames) that are used in election campaigns (although now these studies being carried out in the informative coverage of war campaigns) by media. These approaches highlight the communicative strategies of political teams conducting these campaigns. The abuse of these frames is what causes the effect known as the spiral of cynicism. This concept will facilitate the understanding of the interrelation between the frame and the metacoverage.

5.1.1 The hypothesis of the spiral of cynicism

According to Capella & Jamieson (1997) the hypothesis of the spiral of cynicism highlights the relationship between the increasing prevalence of “strategic approach” to political news, and the distrust and cynicism towards politicians and politics (cited by Berganza, 2008). This is structured around the idea that politics is a strategic game in which candidates compete. Aspects highlighted in the work “cycles of spin”⁷, where Sellers (2010) argues that strategic communication and agenda-setting should be studied together as both processes forms an integrated whole.

Similarly, Capella & Jamieson (1997) and Hibbing & Theiss-Moor (1995) link the coverage of media of public affairs, with the declining interest of citizenship by

⁷ Sellers (2010) examines strategic communication campaigns in the U.S. Congress. This author argues that these campaigns create cycles of spin: Leaders create messages, rank-and-file legislators decide whether to promote those messages, journalists decide whether to cover the messages, and any coverage feeds back to influence the policy process.

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political issues and with the lower participation in politics issues. Meanwhile, Esser & D'Angelo (2006) stated that journalism is subject to the characteristics of the culture of a country and its political strategy. Because of this, media systematically analyse and negotiate the news coverage with different powers based on a series of hierarchical decisions (Floss & Marcinkowski, 2008).

From this point, the spiral can be more or less strengthened by media based on journalistic frames and the strategy chosen for political campaigns. This strategic approach prevails not only at election time, but is also present in the usual coverage of political issues. Proof of this is the study conducted by Capella & Jamieson (1997) which shows that in the American case, the strategic approach or focus of the game has prevailed over the so-called thematic approach. The approach of issue or thematic coverage of political information would focus on the discussion of public issues, the problems, their causes, solutions and measures that can be taken. It would therefore be an informative approach. This is because news is mainly identified as strategic. In both approaches, the strategic and of game, play an important role the idea of conflict, in which there are two sides that generate a drama that will inevitably have winners and losers. In addition, the two approaches are considered as one of its characteristic elements in the presence of a horse race; ie the predominance of information based on surveys that highlight the different angles of the electoral race (Berganza, 2008). As Capella & Jamieson (1997) confirmed in their study in the United States and Berganza (2008) in Spain, the predominance of one or another strategy can have significant consequences for citizenship.

In short, the media are currently involved in this spiral of cynicism that is leading to a separation between the public and political powers. This statement is supported by an increasingly larger number of empirical studies such as those by Cappella & Jamieson (1997); Valentino, Beckmann, & Buhr (2001) or de Vreese (2005), who analyze the causal relationships between exposure by the news media and the political cynicism.

Therefore, as affirmed Brants et al. (2010), the most media-cynical politicians are the ones who believe the media do a poor job, are too agenda setting, and do not represent them well. If politicians are not in fact inflicting some of this coverage and subsequent cynical public attitudes, they at least seem to fuel the fire by displaying cynicism toward the media. It seems the media salacity of politicians is provoking the kind of journalism they detest, which directly or indirectly stimulates the media cynicism of politicians. This is the real spiral of cynicism.

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5.1.2 The symbiotic relationship between journalists and politicians: media salacity

This strategic relationship (Berganza, 2008) or symbiotic (Brants et. al, 2010) among journalists and politicians has been turning into mutual distrust. These changes in the relationship between both have created a market based on media cynicism. Where media decide the information they will offer its audience, based on the wishes of the public and not so much on what is needed or required as democratic citizens. This has led to political elites to develop a communicative position based on “audience democracy” (Manin, 1997, p. 223).

In modern democracies of Western countries, political parties are increasingly responsible for a lower rate of interest and participation in society. So in a democracy of audiences the electorate tend to see their politicians more as performance than for their real achievements. This situation could well explain what journalists call their media salacity, the politicians’ repeated attempts and ultimate drives to get the camera’s attention (Brants et al., 2010).

A political action denominated as relevant will be a mediated political action, based on the laws of the market. If it can reach a greater number of people, the most influence on public opinion will lead to a higher public interest. Under such circumstances, politicians have been forced to work in a cordial relationship with journalists and the media for greater attention to these and so get more and better coverage. This relationship is called as media salacity, which finally takes shape in a belief shared with journalists that politicians tend to believe as real.

These challenges of politicians and journalists roles produce challenges on the notion of political communication. Under these conditions, one could expect to find a political communication culture that has shifted from symbiosis to mistrust and in which media professional scepticism has turned sour, where, first, journalism is driven by political cynicism, by a lack of trust in the reliability and integrity of political actors and in their capacity to solve problems, and by a disdain of their media salacity (Brants et al., 2010).

6. Discussions

In this article the author have conducted an analysis from classic studies of framing to the current dynamic theory that studies framing as a process integrated within the communication system, interacting with different actors and informative processes. Such that the study about the effects of framing, agenda-setting or metacoverage, must be necessarily contextualized. This position shows a joint analysis of the different levels of analysis within the media (*micro*, *meso* and

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macro). Many authors (Cook, 2006; Sparrow, 2006; Hamilton, 2004; Patterson, 2000) focus their study on “*macro* factors” influencing: the economic pressures or political power, the media convergence or the globalization process. Other researchers have emphasized the analysis of cultural roles, values and norms.

Therefore, different influences from the context have produced positive and negative interaction between individual ideas of journalists and media. This aspect can be seen through the analyses of frame-setting⁸ and frame-building⁹, which explains the relationship between media-frames and audiences, and how journalists and news organizations determine the frame issues. The complexity of such relationships leads authors to try to analyse the links between conceptual levels that shape the media context and to obtain a better understanding of current communicative phenomena.

Therefore, within this system of “pure communication” (Luhmann, 1998, p. 43), all these factors work as a continuum, specially organized in inter/retro/action with all network systems surrounding media and other social systems: knowledge (awareness/psychic system) and live system (biological), that are environment and that operate recursively with the social system (communication).

Within this integrative communicative system, the role played by visibility given by media to certain issues produces the phenomena of thematization or selection that directly affects public opinion. Unmediatized issues will be not public issues. This labour of filtering shows two different realities: one, the published reality, and, another, the reality excluded. Within the silenced reality silent spiral play a major role. And there is a place for the informative perversion based on the metacoverage, spiral of cynicism or media salacity among others.

Within the informative perversion exists certain communicative limits that are broken through the relationship between the strategic informative coverage and the strategic publicity coverage. Where media act –or are used– as a publicity platform.

Finally, if the authors ask “what influence does the framing in the media?” the answer to this question depends on many factors that influence each other. Until relatively recently, studies on the phenomena of framing, agenda-setting or gatekeepers focused on decontextualized and individual analysis of these concepts. Today, as the authors have explained, this position has no reason to be because media designs and behaviours are in constant transition. This dynamic creates a communicative spiral in which all elements are interrelated and interact.

⁸ This analyses the relationship of media and audience.

⁹ This takes care of footprints that external factors of media left in the present frames in media messages.

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So, if the journalists have an approach, this is influenced by media agendas, public and policy. These agendas in turn, depend on the role played by media in respect to the information that they produce.

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