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CONCEPTUALIZING FRAMES FOR THE STUDIES OF RUSSIA'S STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION DURING THE FULL-SCALE RUSSO-UKRAINIAN WAR BASED ON THE CLASSICAL APPROACHES

КОНЦЕПТУАЛІЗАЦІЯ ФРЕЙМІВ ДЛЯ ДОСЛІДЖЕНЬ СТРАТЕГІЧНОЇ КОМУНІКАЦІЇ РОСІЇ ПІД ЧАС ПОВНОМАСШТАБНОЇ РОСІЙСЬКО-УКРАЇНСЬКОЇ ВІЙНИ НА ОСНОВІ КЛАСИЧНИХ ПІДХОДІВ

Abstract. While framing remains a popular theoretical direction in the media and communication studies, there is a lack of precision in terms of how frames are conceptualized in the context of Russia's strategic communication studies. The aim of this paper is to suggest an optimal, suitable conceptualization of frames based on the classical approaches for the context of studies of Russia's strategic communication in the full-scale Russo-Ukrainian war. The research provides an integrative review of classical approaches to conceptualization of frames by Goffman, Entman, Gamson, and other scholars of the media and communication field. The approaches are rated based on a system of three criterial estimates and thus the most applicable ones are defined among them. The recommendations regarding further practical conceptualization of frames in the context of Russia's strategic communication are then provided grounding on the integrative literature review and criterial evaluation. The paper thus promotes the further discussion concerning theoretical and methodological approaches to framing in the Russo-Ukrainian war.

Keywords: strategic narratives, strategic communication, framing, Russo-Ukrainian war, mass communications[1].

[1] Corrigendum: the author added the term "mass communications" to the list of keywords.

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Анотація. Хоча фреймінг залишається популярним теоретичним напрямком у студіях медіа та комунікацій, існує певний брак деталізації того, як концептуалізуються фрейми в контексті досліджень стратегічної комунікації Росії. Метою цієї статті є запропонувати оптимальну концептуалізацію фреймів на основі класичних підходів для контексту досліджень стратегічної комунікації РФ у повномасштабній Російсько-українській війні. Ця стаття містить інтегративний огляд класичних підходів до концептуалізації фреймів Ґоффмана, Ентмана, Ґемсона та інших дослідників у сфері медіа та комунікацій. Підходи оцінюються за системою трьох критеріальних показників, серед яких визначаються найбільш практичні для відповідного контексту. Далі на основі інтегративного огляду літератури та критеріального оцінювання надаються рекомендації щодо подальшої практичної концептуалізації фреймів у контексті стратегічної комунікації Росії. Відтак, стаття сприяє подальшій дискусії щодо теоретико-методологічних підходів до фреймінгу в російсько-українській війні.

Ключові слова: стратегічні наративи, стратегічна комунікація, фреймінг, російсько-українська війна, масові комунікації[1].

Introduction (relevance). This study grounds on a pre-assumption that Russia's strategic communication (including its strategic narratives) during the full-scale Russo-Ukrainian war aims to re-construct the social reality and legitimize, reinterpret the events that might damage Russia's image (war crimes, military defeats, strategic failures etc.) by specific framing (for the discussion, see Kuzmenko, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c). Framing and frames have been among the central, commonly used concepts within the field of media studies and other areas of social sciences. However, the researchers of Russia's strategic communication might have a practical need of conceptual and analytical clarity regarding how to treat frames in this context.

Literature review. Academic literature might suggest a vast number of framing definitions, approaches to their empirical indication, and respective empirical data collection methods. Scheufele (1999) summarized that frames may be viewed from various perspectives: frames as media frames and frames as audience/individual frames, frames as dependent and independent variables, processes of frame building, frame setting, individual-level effects of framing, and links between individual and media frames, as well as from other perspectives.

[1] Corrigendum: автором до переліку ключових слів додано термін «масові комунікації».

On the one hand, as Entman (1993) concluded, definitions of frames do not vary drastically between the publications and relate to the common phenomena (at least to a certain extent). On the other hand, even though framing has been mentioned in some publications in the context of Russia's strategic communication (Aspriadis, 2023; Chaban, Zhabotynska, & Knodt, 2023; Bradshaw, Elswah, Haque, Quelle, 2024; Kuzmenko, 2024a), there could be a certain lack of explicit argumentation for the selection of frames' conceptualization. Accordingly, approaches to the contextual conceptualization of frames should be revisited.

Scheufele's (1999) notions might be useful in terms of setting some basic theoretical boundaries of this research. Firstly, this study focuses on the frames that Russia enforced upon the public, which implies that the study mostly refers to media frames, opposite to individual frames. Secondly, the categorization of frames by dependent/independent variables is not fully applicable for this paper, while this study focuses on highlighting which frames were used by Russia rather than interrelations with factors or effects of such frames. Thirdly, from the four framing-related processes, the research corresponds mostly to what Scheufele (1999) calls frame setting.

Frame setting generally tackles this re-definition and sets certain understanding of the event, as implied by Scheufele (1999: 116) with Nelson, Clawson, & Oxley's (1997: 569) quote: „frames influence opinions by stressing specific values, facts, and other considerations, endowing them with greater apparent relevance to the issue than they might appear to have under an alternative frame". Hence, this is generally the focus of this research. On the contrary, this research does not focus on the insights on how Russian frames are constructed, what their perception in the public is, or other contexts of individual frames.

Research goal. The aim of this paper is to suggest an optimal, suitable conceptualization of frames based on the classical approaches for the context of studies of Russia's strategic communication in the full-scale Russo-Ukrainian war.

Methods. The research logic of this paper suggests that conceptualization of frames should be based on the most suitable classical theoretical approaches. Hence, the conceptualization process was divided into two steps. Within the first step, an integrative review of the classical frame concepts was conducted. Integrative review allows to „overview the knowledge base, to critically review and potentially re-conceptualize, and to

expand on the theoretical foundation of the specific topic as it develops" (Snyder, 2019: 336). While there are no strict procedures for the integrative review (Snyder, 2019; Whittemore & Knafl, 2005), the point is „to critically analyze and examine the literature and the main ideas and relationships of an issue" (Snyder, 2019: 336). Basically, the integrative review is the core element of this paper and the base for the conceptualization proposal. Accordingly, in the second step, the literature-based conceptualization of frames was suggested. This involved selecting the best-fitting concepts based on their applicability.

For the purpose of this paper, the scope of literature was limited to the three widely referred classical framing approaches, virtually categorized as follows:

– Goffman's classical approach.
– Gamson-Gitlin-Tuchman approach.
– Entman's approach.

The three theoretical approaches were developed between the later 1970s and the early 1990s, and they virtually represent three generations of framing studies. This does not necessarily mean that the approaches were drastically different in all features. On the other hand, conceptual evolution of frames is implied. Furthermore, it could be argued that the second and the third approaches are based on Goffman's studies to a certain extent.

Nevertheless, the reviewed concepts are evaluated and ranked by the applicability of the conceptualization for the research context. Therefore, the conceptualization had to match three key criteria (with consideration of some conceptual distinction lines that were drawn by Scheufele, 1999):

1. *Clear analytical definition*. The conceptualization should include a clear, direct definition of what a frame is. Furthermore, it should be a clear, analytically useful tool that might help explain how Russia's strategic communication works in the full-scale war.
2. *Frame as a media frame*. As it was discussed earlier, this study tackles the themes of frames that are imposed by Russia within their strategic communication. Hence, the more applicable conceptualizations should approach frames as media frames and not (at least not strictly) as individuals' frames and perceptions.
3. *Applicability to Russia's strategic communication actors (RSCAs)*. Within Russia's strategic communication, frames are treated as

those that are imposed foremost by Russian state actors, public officials etc. (see Kuzmenko, 2024b, 2024c for the discussion). The research tracks not the frames that are embedded strictly in journalists-produced news, but those that originate from Russia's state-controlled communication.

To structure the applicability ranking system, for every conceptualization, *criterial match estimate (CME)* would be introduced regarding each of the three criteria. In other words, CME would be understood as a representation of whether the concept meets the respective predefined criterion. For each criterion, CME would be operationalized and coded as:

1 = „criterion met",

0.5 = „criterion partly met",

or 0 = „criterion not met".

Thus, the CME score (CMEs sum) would represent how well the concept meets all the pre-defined criteria. As a result of this stage, conceptualizations would be generalized and ranked by applicability estimated in a table.

In the second step, the most suitable conceptualization of frames itself would be suggested for the context of Russia's wartime strategic communication.

Results. *Goffman's classical approach.* Goffman (1974/1986) treated frames as an element of both reality construction and reality understanding. Frames, by Goffman's definition (1974/1986: 10–11), are „principles of organization that govern events — at least social ones — and our subjective involvement in them". But, perhaps, a step back should be made to clarify the essence of this definition. For Goffman, frames are a mechanism that takes part in the constitution of making sense of social reality. Primarily, Goffman emphasizes that frames help to make sense of events. For Goffman's approach, it could be argued that a frame is an interpretation that shapes up in one's mind. Overall, Goffman's theory provides a broad description of frames and their analysis. On the other hand, such description, perhaps, could be too broad if one needs to answer the questions of „how should the frames that the state imposes within its strategic communication be treated?" and „how should these frames be detected?". Therefore, this conceptualization approach leans towards partially clear analytical definition in the context of Russia's strategic communication (0.5).

Goffman's classical approach does not strictly limit the frame to individual frames or media frames. Its broad definition of frames, logically, allows a broad usage of such conceptualization of frames. However, the approach does not have a direct focus on media frames as well. Hence, it corresponds to the media frame CME partly (0.5).

Nevertheless, Goffman (1974/1986) also suggested that frames might be constructed by external actors, so frames are transferred (at least, such attempt could be made) from actor A to actor B. Though, Goffman (1974/1986) does not rule out that the individual understanding of situations may vary. Furthermore, Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson (1992) seemed to have agreed with such a statement and conclude while discussing Goffman (1974/1986): „This underlines the usefulness of framing as a bridging concept between cognition and culture. A cultural level analysis tells us that our political world is framed, that reported events are pre-organized and do not come to us in raw form" (384). Accordingly, the approach meets the applicability to RSCAs (1.0).

Gamson-Gitlin-Tuchman approach. Gamson-Gitlin-Tuchman approach (GGT approach) refers rather to a set of theoretical implications of a group of authors whose ideas are closely associated. Some of the GGT approaches, noticeably, rely on Goffman's classical approach.

Gamson and Lasch (1980: 3) defined that „The frame suggests a central organizing idea for understanding events related to the issue in question". A common definition reappeared in further publications by Gamson and their contributors (for instance, Gamson & Modigliani, 1987, 1989). Moreover, Gamson & Modigliani (1989) appeal to Gitlin's (1980: 7) idea that media frames „largely unspoken and unacknowledged, organize the world both for journalists who report it and, in some important degree, for us who rely on their reports". Ontologically, Gamson and Lasch's approach suggest a definition that fits in the media frame category (1.0). While their discussion leans towards journalism-related issues, the general definition is broad enough not to contradict the context of the RSCAs (1.0). Finally, the definition is clear in terms of the language structures and communicates the general idea of a frame well. Nevertheless, it does not inform on the structure or components of a frame. Therefore, Gamson and Lasch's approach might be estimated at 0.5 in terms of clear analytical definition.

Gitlin's (1980) own ideas seemingly stem from Goffman's: „as Erving Goffman has amply demonstrated, we frame reality in order to negotiate

it, manage it, comprehend it, and choose appropriate repertories of cognition and action" (6–7). Gitlin (1980), though, provided a few more characteristics of frames. Firstly, there is a distinguishment between frames and media frames (hence, 1.0 for the media frame CME), which generally corresponds to Scheufele's (1999) individual/media frames opposition. Secondly, frames overall are defined as „principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters" (Gitlin, 1980: 6). Though, media frames are defined as „persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse, whether verbal or visual" (Gitlin, 1980: 7). On the one hand, this definition indicated non-contradiction with the context of the RSCAs (1.0). On the other hand, the definition includes several sub-elements that might puzzle the researcher in terms of how to analyze frames (0.5 estimate in terms of analytical clarity).

Tuchman's (1978) ideas, which are also referenced by Gitlin (1980), are another example of a Goffman-based approach. Tuchman does not provide a strict definition of a frame but relies mostly on Goffman's descriptions (inherently, 0.5 for clear analytical definition). Overall, Tuchman (1978) views frames mostly in the context of news frames: news frames organize occurrences into everyday reality and are a „part and parcel of everyday reality (193)" (media frames CME at 1.0). However, this approach does not provide ground to conceptualize frames confidently in terms of the RSCAs (0.0).

Entman's approach. Entman (1991, 1993) seemingly continued to build on the implications by Goffman's classical approach and the GGT approach. However, Entman (1993) suggests critique of framing theories, which relates the lack of integrity in the understanding of frames — mostly in the context of media and political communication. Entman (1993: 51) thus states that „Despite its omnipresence across the social sciences and humanities, nowhere is there a general statement of framing theory that shows exactly how frames become embedded within and make themselves manifest in a text, or how framing influences thinking".

As for the definition of frames and framing, Entman (1993: 52) theorizes: „Framing essentially involves selection and salience. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem

definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described". Basically, a certain definition of a problem, its causal interpretation, moral judgements, and/or treatment recommendations are the functional effects of framing, according to Entman (1993). Overall, frames promote a certain understanding of a situation and form „common sense" about the situation by stressing (or non-stressing) on certain aspects of a situation, repeating definite statements, key words, and other elements of the message (Entman, 1991, 1993). This notion seems to be useful for this research, as it is pre-assumed that Russian state actors — via framing within their strategic communications — make attempts to sustain a favorable „common sense" among the Russian and the international public regarding Russia's failures and crimes during the war. Furthermore, (Entman, 1991: 7) argues that „The frame does not eliminate all inconsistent information; texts inevitably contain some incongruent data. But through repetition, placement, and reinforcing associations with each other, the words and images that comprise the frame render one basic interpretation more readily discernible, comprehensible, and memorable than others".

Solution for the context of Russia's strategic communication. The CME scores (Table 1) put Entman's approach (3.0) in the first place. It is followed by Gamson and Lash's conceptualization and Gitlin's sub-approach, which both have a 2.5 CME score.

Table 1

CME scores

Approach	Source(s)	Clear analytical definition	Media frame	Applicability to RSCAs	CME score
Goffman's original approach	Goffman (1974/1986)	0.5	0.5	1.0	2.0
GTG approach	Gamson and Lasch (1980)	0.5	1.0	1.0	2.5
	Gitlin (1980)	0.5	1.0	1.0	2.5
	Tuchman (1978)	0.5	1.0	0.0	1.5
Entman's approach	Entman (1991, 1993)	1.0	1.0	1.0	3.0

Overall, Entman's approach seems to be the best fit for the context of this research, especially since it provides the most practical analytical instrument among the reviewed approaches. On the other hand, Entman (1991, 1993) theorized mostly about what frames do and how they work, also defining framing. So, one should derive the definition of a frame from the definition of the framing. Hence, in addition to Entman's (1991, 1993) notions, it might be relevant to apply Gamson and Lasch's (1980) definition of frames, which is both congruent with Entman's approach and is verbally neat. Also, it seems to be clearer compared to definitions in Goffman's classical approach as well as Gamson and Lasch's fellow scholars within the GGT approach.

Based on the integrative literature review and further evaluation, the recommendation would be to define a frame as „a central organizing idea for understanding events related to the issue in question" (Gamson and Lasch, 1980: 3). Framing is thus a process of frame promotion, or, generally speaking, selecting „some aspects of a perceived reality" and making them „more salient in a communicating text" (Entman, 1993: 52). Furthermore, the conceptualization should take four functions of a frame into account (Entman, 1993): the definition of a problem, the causal interpretation, the moral judgement, and the treatment recommendations.

Conclusions. Effective research that engages the framing theory in the studies of Russia's strategic communication during the full-scale war requires sufficient conceptualization of (media) frames. This paper suggested one possible approach to such conceptualization, which is based on classical framing approaches. This does not rule out that further development and re-conceptualization of frames may give even more analytical value to research on related topics.

The conceptualization of frames should be practical and clear enough to highlight the frames within Russia's strategic communication. From this perspective, Gamson and Lasch's (1980) conceptualization could provide a good baseline definition. Yet perhaps more importantly, conceptualization should provide tools for effective analysis of how those frames work and what they are aimed at. Hence, Entman's (1993) approach, which outlines the four framing functions, remains a useful tool for such purposes.

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