

Trends in Transmission and Reception Factors of Television News and Tabloid-Information Programs in Japan

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ABSTRACT:

This paper examines the factors involved in television news and tabloid-information program transmission and reception. The television news programming content of Japan has continued to change and the trend of television news in Japan has incorporated more entertainment aspects into many of their news broadcasts, especially in the news programs that were analyzed to be thematic news programming from previous study results. Furthermore, the distinction between traditional television news and tabloid-information programs is becoming less obvious than before. With the boundaries between television news and tabloid-information news becoming less evident, more problems arise for the television audience to make a distinction between tabloid-information and news. A criterion for making the distinction between news programs and tabloid-information programs was found necessary for further research in news effects in Japan. Although information about different topics can be attained through different information sources, the resonating effects of tabloid-information programs need to be considered for future research in television news effects. This paper concludes that due to the trends in transmission and reception factors of information gain through television news and tabloid-information programs, constructing an integrated social reality through broadcasted information is becoming increasingly difficult in Japan, and further study of news effects incorporating the effects of tabloid-information programs is necessary.

1. Transmission and Reception Factors of Television News

An extensive line of research exists on how the public gains information through the mass mediated news activities. Discussions of: 1) how the flow of news information is mediated by many social and psychological factors (DeFleur

& Larsen, 1958; Greenberg, 1964; Chaffee, 1975), 2) how the audiences seek to acquire information and gain gratifications (Blumler and Katz, 1974; Greenberg, 1974, Rubin & Perse, 1987), 3) how news agenda, framing and priming will influence public perception of the salience of news (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Iyengar, 1992) 4) how gaps exist among the people who are well informed through news coverage and those that are not well informed (Tichenor, Donohue, & Olien, 1970), 5) how social reality is constructed through the news (Adoni & Cohen, 1978; Adoni, Cohen & Mane, 1984), 6) how information of news is processed (Woodall, Davis, & Sahin, 1983; Gunter, 1987; Graber, 1988; Robinson & Davis, 1990) all deal with gaining information from news. These study results generally incline to either of the following conclusions: that depending on the many variables involved with the components of communication, people gain or do not gain information through news.

Still, some lines of communication research overlook other related study results in news research, especially in the research of agenda setting, framing and priming - where the main focus is heavily on political factors. This omission may cause failure to recognize other important consequences of news framing among the audience previously discussed. Much more broader investigation is necessary to avoid neglecting an important perspective of previous news communication research- why news and especially television news sometimes cannot construct an integrated picture of social reality among the audience. For example, past research about how social reality is constructed through news and other studies that investigate how the news is processed among the audience have been disconnected by the current evolving research on framing and priming.

However, these previous other areas of news research can actually be incorporated with agenda setting, framing, and priming and they can promote building a more comprehensive approach to news research. To reorganize the many effects involved in gaining information from television news, some of the concepts of framing and exposure of orientation involved in gaining information through television news to build a functional-analytic perspective of television news have been implemented (Kaigo, 1999).

Frames - which are the conceptual tools that news sources in result,

formulate to organize news content - originates from the concept of "framing" or "frame analysis" by Goffman (1974) that Tuchman (1978) adopted as news frames. The term "media" framing has evolved from a similar viewpoint and contributed to the conceptualization of media framing. Currently, a long line of framing research is still in development and due to this on-going process, the concept of framing is still not clearly distinguished from either being a transmitting or receiving constituent of communication. The construct of framing in communication research as both a transmitting and receiving factor causes confusion. The first step to avoid this can be to separate the term "frame" from constructs in other fields, such as cognitive science because the term "frame" can be interpreted to be analogous to a "chunk" of information. The construct "media frame" will facilitate this by restricting the meaning to a transmitting factor. Scheufele (1999) made an extensive analysis of current framing research and has also made a distinction between transmitting and receiving frames as media frames and audience frames. As stated in the typology of framing by Scheufele (1999), media frames should be isolated to mean that they are frames that are sent by the mass media. Among all the confusion concerning framing, this study will restrict use of the construct "media frame" as a transmitting factor, to make the distinction clear between receiving factors.

However, not much distinction has been made between the concept of frames and the concepts of cognitive science such as schema or scripts among the audience. Scheufele (1999) has used the construct of audience frames to label this, however no distinction between schema or scripts and audience frames were made. Therefore to clarify the confusion, one should be cognizant of this distinction and for utility, this paper will designate that the audience of a media frame is constructing a "schematic structure" or "social reality" based on the media frame that is transmitted. Moreover, the term "social reality" has been found to be either putting emphasis on "social" or on "reality" as McLeod and Chaffee (1972) have indicated. Furthermore, research on framing through the mass media has been intertwined with the studies concerning "social reality" and has turned this area of study a rather confusing one. Making a distinction between "media frames" and the cognitive structure of the receivers' schema or "social reality" can make conceptualization more viable. What the media frame

transmits is received and constructed as social reality in the cognitive structure of the news receiver.

Among many of the divergent studies concerning media frames, Iyengar (1991) deals with the concepts of episodic and thematic framing. Contrary to other research on framing, where many simply conduct content analyses, Iyengar (1991) introduces a research method that can potentially be applied to information gain through television news because it attempts to analyze television news to have either an episodic or thematic frame tendency where episodic frames can be defined to be concrete reports of specific events whereas thematic frames are more abstract information. This concept can become useful when conducting research of news and how the cognitive structure of social reality is constructed among the audience. Current human memory research has been inferred to be contrasted in terms of episodic memory and semantic memory (Tulving, 1972; Ota, 1988). When focusing on how information is gained through news, this way of dividing frames into episodic or thematic becomes convenient because one can determine if the socially constructed schematic representation will be integrated or fragmented depending on the frame. If news is received in episodic frames, the socially constructed schematic representation will be short-circuited or fragmented. If news is received in thematic frames, the socially constructed schematic representation will be instead integrated. In this way, the cognitive structure or social reality of the audience can be determined through the integrity or short-circuited condition (fragmentation) of a schemata or an associative-semantic network based on the elements transmitted by the media frame.

The difficulty remains when one attempts to restrict television news to be either solely episodic or thematic because neither exists independently in normal television news broadcasts. Takeshita (1998) and Scheufele (1999) have both indicated the problems of utilizing the constructs of episodic or thematic framing in research. To overcome this barrier, the constructs of episodic and thematic framing of Iyengar (1991) could be modified so that episodic media frames will be reports of different news issues lacking background context surrounding the issues whereas thematic media frames will be news with more background information or context. Therefore, episodic media frames and

thematic media frames could be systematically divided based on discourse analysis elements (Kaigo, 1999).

From the viewpoint of audience factors that can influence the receiving of media frames, some of the basic principles of reality orientation and fantasy orientation could also be considered as starting points that can involve the concepts of current cognitive science (Kaigo, 1999). These fundamental concepts are based on Freudian principles of psychology that Schramm et al. (1961) have used and explained where exposure orientation to mass media can be divided into being either reality oriented or fantasy oriented. Fundamentally, reality oriented exposure is based on having a delayed reward by behavior directed to enlightenment through cognitive activity and facing problems in reality. In contrast, fantasy oriented exposure is based on having an immediate reward by behavior directed to gaining pleasure by avoiding unpleasant tasks or pain. To elaborate reality and fantasy orientation further, the concepts of directed thought and fantasy thought of Lindolf (1980, 1982) include cognitive aspects to reality and fantasy oriented exposure by adding that directed thought uses both short and long-term memory storage bins, however that fantasy thought only uses long-term memory storage bins. By merging these studies, one can presently summarize that reality oriented exposure; is cognitive, faces problems in reality, is enlightening, uses both short and long-term memory storage bins and is attentive to the surrounding environment. In contrast, fantasy oriented exposure; is affective, escapes from reality, seeks pleasure, uses mainly long-term memory storage bins, and lacks attention to the surrounding environment.

The study findings of Kaigo (1999) found the correspondence of manifest and latent functions and dysfunctions of television news to the findings as follows: 1) A manifest function of television news is the construction of an integrated subjective social reality among those who have a higher degree of reality orientation toward television news than fantasy orientation and have more exposure to thematic framing than episodic framing of television news. 2) A latent function of television news is the processing of news as a topic conversation among those who have a higher degree of fantasy orientation toward television news than reality orientation and have more exposure to thematic framing than episodic framing of television news. 3) A latent dysfunction of

television news is the construction of short-circuited subjective social reality among those who have a higher degree of reality orientation toward television news than fantasy orientation and have more exposure to episodic framing than thematic framing of television news. 4) A latent nonfunction of television news is the processing of news as entertainment among those who have a higher degree of fantasy orientation toward television news than reality orientation and have more exposure to episodic framing than thematic framing of television news.

An explanation of news functions based on this new classification of media frames and orientation of exposure is as follows: 1) The manifest function of television news; transforms the environment and social situation into a presentation that can be cognitively processed by the audience. Therefore, daily information about the environment and everyday happenings are presented and received through the news. This manifest function of television news can be perceived as incorporating the consequences that can be identified with the construction of social reality of news and news processing. 2) As a latent function of television news; the most important agenda of the environment is focused on, and social agreement about the environment is attained. This latent function of television news can be characteristic of agenda setting and priming. 3) As a latent dysfunction of television news, one cannot assess how much of the environment is being represented truly and accurately. The environment that encompasses us - that has a complex structure - will exceed the capacity to be cognitively processed and will therefore be fragmented. Through this, a) only the opinions that present convenient circumstances will be adopted, b) anxiety will rise among those who receive information about danger, and c) passivity towards the environment will occur. The latent dysfunction of television news can be associated with the flow of information of news, gaps in knowledge, agenda setting and framing, construction of social reality and processing of the news. 4) As a latent nonfunction of television news; it is processed as entertainment and the audience will become apathetic - details about television news will become quickly oblivious. This latent nonfunction can be tied with the results of uses and gratifications research and news processing.

By allocating many of the results of information gain by television news to this framework, a sketchy but comprehensive overview of television news

functions becomes possible. The consequence of the manifest function of television news can be considered as an integrated schematic representation that is socially constructed by media framing. The latent function of television news is the agenda setting of news. The latent dysfunction, in contrast with the manifest function, of television news can be the short-circuited or fragmented schematic representation socially constructed by media framing. Finally the latent nonfunction of television news is entertainment.

2. New Trends of Television News and Tabloid-Information Programs

Presently, the actual television news programming content of Japan has continued to change and the trend of television news in Japan is beginning to resemble that of the United States. In other words, Japanese news media has incorporated more entertainment aspects into many of their broadcasted news, especially the programs that were analyzed to be thematic news programming according to previous study results. Program characteristics that were more aligned to entertainment programs have started "invading" some of the more popular thematic news programs to retain their share of viewers to maintain ratings. Furthermore, the distinction between traditional television news and tabloid-information programs (referred to as "wideshows" in Japan) is becoming less obvious than before. Many evening television news programs are competing with each other for ratings and therefore include "softer" topics such as good restaurants or information on different shops (Yokoyama, 2000). Due to this trend, one might predict less reality orientation of exposure to television news programs, and this will interfere with constructing an integrated social reality or cognitive structure.

With the boundaries between television news and tabloid-information news becoming less evident, more problems arise for the television audience to make a distinction between tabloid-information and news. Even television network producers do not have a clear standard in making a distinction between tabloid-information programs and news programs (Yokoyama, 2000). Many tabloid-information programs seem to include some of news issues in their programming that are in news television programs, however these programs put a lot more emphasis on sensational news, therefore omitting the information of

many important socio-economic and political issues provided through television news. This is especially evident during special news events that need constant coverage ("breaking news") and at these moments, news programming "breaks into" the tabloid-information programs (known as "wide shows" in Japanese). There is an increasing tendency for this to happen more often and can be one reason to explain why there seems to be a "blurring" between tabloid-information and news.

On the other hand, there are some time segments of tabloid-information programs that deal with non-sensational news briefly which can be labeled as the regular news segments of tabloid-information programs in this study. These segments are assumed to be generally overlapping with the content of normal television news, but in less time. Due to this time factor, these regular news segments can be assumed to be presenting news content through episodic media frames, which activities can as a consequence become dysfunctional or nonfunctional.

This study investigated whether regular news segments in tabloid-information programs are dominant with episodic media framing. An analysis of thematic framing among eleven tabloid information programs shown on weekdays in the Kanto area was conducted from August 20 to August 31, 2000. The analysis was conducted in order to determine two things: Find out 1) if regular news segments in tabloid-information programs are dominant with episodic media framing and 2) if a tabloid-information program is presenting a news issue as a main topic, will it be dominant with thematic framing. The list of the tabloid-information programs are indicated in Table 1.

Table 1 Tabloid Information Programs (Kanto area August, 2000)

Station	Programs		
Nihon TV	1) Zoom in Asa	2) Look	3) The Wide
TBS TV	4) Express	5) Just	
Fuji TV	6) Mezamashi TV	7) Tokudane	
TV Asahi	8) Yajiuma Wide	9) Morning	10) Scramble
TV Tokyo	11) Ladies 4		

Through the results, all eleven tabloid-information programs were found to have one or two regular news segments in their programming, and even though these regular news segments sometimes deal with socio-economic and political issues, the information procured was presented mainly utilizing episodic framing. In utilizing a classification criterion to determine media framing (Kaigo, 1999), the regular news segments in each of the tabloid-information programs were mostly presented with episodic media framing with a mean of less than 3.01 thematic frames in all segments as shown in Table 2. The content analysis results in Table 2 display that all news segments in the tabloid-information programs had an average of three or less thematic media frames in each program, constituting a dominance of episodic framing.

Table 2 Thematic Framing in News Segments

Station	Program	Mean	SD
Nihon TV	1) Zoom in Asa	2.78	.97
	2) Look	3.22	1.20
	3) The Wide	2.89	1.05
TBS TV	4) Express	3.00	1.00
	5) Just	2.67	1.00
Fuji TV	6) Mezamashi TV	2.78	.67
	7) Tokudane	2.67	1.00
TV Asahi	8) Yajiuma Wide	2.00	1.00
	9) Morning	2.11	.93
	10) Scramble	2.78	.67
TV Tokyo	11) Ladies 4	2.22	.83

One can observe the general trend that brief news spots or segments in tabloid-information programs generally have a low degree of thematic media framing in regular news spots. This indicates that the news segments of tabloid-information programs consist mainly of episodic media framing. In the case where the television audience utilizes these non-sensational news segments as their main information sources of socio-economic and political news, one can assume that these regular news segments in tabloid-information programs are

actually dysfunctional or nonfunctional because whether the audience has a reality or fantasy oriented exposure behavior, if the media frame is episodic, the consequence is either a) latently dysfunctional with a reality oriented exposure behavior because a short-circuited social reality is being constructed or b) nonfunctional with a fantasy oriented exposure behavior because the issues are being processed as entertainment.

Depending on the news issue, the visual information (video footage) of a particular television news issue is very similar and overlapping among different programs and networks when compared through content analyses, due to the similar styles of reporting among news sources and the growing tendency of acquiring news footage from services (Bennett, 1996). When gaining information from television, the visual information especially from television news is important. The visual pictorial information can be interpreted to be associated with the information of the semantic content which is more cognitive, not to imply that the visual pictorial information is less important or ineffective, but is more affective than cognitive. In other words, the textual information of broadcasted news can be determined to be of a more cognitive nature, due to the semantic information. The visual pictorial information will be initially stored in the iconic storage, however not totally processed as semantic information but will be stored through association. However, the same visual information can be displayed in an episodic or thematic media frame. Without thematic media framing, the reaction to the visual information might become short-circuited. However, more research of the cognitive effects on the audience of tabloid information programs needs to be probed for further discussion of this aspect of news reception.

Tabloid-information programs also have a tendency to overlap with main television news issues and the issue content of the programs is focused more on sensational news rather than socio-economic and political news. During the analysis period, two large news issues were observed to "break" into the normal tabloid-information programming through thematic media framing: 1) from August 21 to August 25, 2000 among all the tabloid-information programming, news surrounding a Russian Nuclear Submarine accident, and 2) from August 23 to August 30, 2000 news surrounding the volcanic activity of Miyake Island.

In comparison with normal television news of the same channels and

newspapers (Asahi, Yomiuri, Mainichi, Sankei, Tokyo) , both issues are highly salient news issues during the periods that the two issues broke into the tabloid-information programs. However, when you reverse the perspective of comparison, that is, the news issues that are of importance in television news or newspapers, on August 28 (Mitsubishi Motors concealing recall of defective products) or August 29 (Bankruptcy of Taisho Life Insurance) , are only briefly mentioned in the regular news segments of tabloid-information programs and such segments were analyzed to be mainly presented through episodic media framing.

Even though the observations are limited to this analysis period only, a trend seems to exist where main news issues, such as in this case, the Russian Nuclear Submarine accident or volcanic activity of Miyake Island, that are sensational, are highlighted or underscored through the tabloid-information programs as thematic media frames. Therefore the main problem lies in the aspect that not all main news issues are always highlighted in tabloid-information programs. Again, when the tabloid-information programs underscore certain news issues that are sensational, the same video footage of the news program is reused in a style that may be less in accord with traditional journalistic styles. These tabloid-information programs may be "amplifying" some of the more sensational news issues therefore, when analyzing news effects upon the audience, tabloid-information programs should also be taken into account especially when conducting agenda setting research in Japan. Because the distinction of television news and tabloid-information programs is becoming less evident, consideration must be made for the potentially strong agenda setting function of tabloid-information programs concerning sensational social issues. Another problem lies in the fact that solely through tabloid-information programs, the audience will not be able to construct an integrated social reality about regular news topics, especially about the socio-economic environment.

3. For Future Research

Most agenda-setting research has been focused primarily on traditional television news. Although political news and information is usually received through television news, information that is relevant to politics is also transmitted through other television programs. Due to the fact that information about

different topics may be sought through different sources, one should also consider the resonating effects of tabloid-information programs and also the so called "infotainment" or "information-entertainment" programs when conducting research on agenda-setting in Japan, along with news magazines. A criterion for making the distinction between television news programs and tabloid-information programs is necessary for further research of television news effects in Japan. This is due to the fact that such an established standard is necessary for determining differences in programming and the corresponding effect. Such a criterion to make a distinction between programs can help avoid neglecting any of the important aspects involved in agenda-setting of news issues in Japan.

Through discussing the possibility of tabloid information programs to be affecting how the public gains information, agenda setting, media framing and priming effects of these programs should also be conducted among the audience. At the same time, effects on the construction of social reality and the cognitive structure need to be re-examined with current television news programs, because more entertainment aspects are visible and may cause exposure of orientation to be more strongly aligned with fantasy oriented than reality oriented. In other words, one can infer through previous study results that constructing an integrated social reality through broadcasted information is becoming increasingly difficult in Japan.

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