



# Framing expertise: a cross-cultural analysis of success in framing contests

Viorela Dan and Øyvind Ihlen

*Department of Communication, Culture and Languages, Oslo, Norway*

368

Received December 2010

Revised May 2011

Accepted July 2011

## Abstract

**Purpose** – This article seeks to analyse the skills and knowledge that have a positive impact on the reproduction of the core frames of social actors in the mass media.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The theoretical discussion is accompanied by a cross-cultural case study of the debate surrounding the leaked e-mail correspondence between climate researchers at the University of East Anglia (UEA) in 2009. First, the authors analysed the framing work of the three main actors with their respective views, namely UEA and the blogs “Real climate”, “Climate audit” and “The air vent”. Second, they conducted an analysis of the media coverage of the issue in the UK, the USA, Germany and Norway, focusing on the importance of cultural factors, psychological biases and conformity to journalistic needs.

**Findings** – The literature review came to the conclusion that public relations practitioners stand good chances to succeed with their framing when they are able to conceive a message in a way that is resonant with the underlying culture; appeals to psychological biases; and conforms to journalistic needs. The authors use “framing expertise” as an umbrella term for the knowledge and the skills related to these aspects when designing and promoting frames. In the case study, these theoretical assumptions were tested. While three different frames dominated the discourse, no clear winner of the framing contest was observed. Though qualitative differences in their framing expertise were noted, the frames of all of the strategic actors were accepted in the media, perhaps due to the norms of journalistic balance.

**Research limitations** – As this study is based on a single case, more research is needed to back up the findings and elaborate on the knowledge and skills needed when framing an issue.

**Originality/value** – The article pulls together, discusses and elaborates on a body of literature that thus far has been scattered, and makes contributions towards a better understanding of what it is that public relations practitioners actually do.

**Keywords** Framing, Public relations, Climate change, Framing expertise, Communication, Information media, Mass media

**Paper type** Conceptual paper



Nearly all issues within a public debate in a democratic system are multifaceted, and as such there is no single “right” interpretation of such issues (Entman, 2007). According to the now widely accepted social constructionist paradigm (Berger and Luckmann, 1967), reality is largely constructed through communication, rather than being expressed through it. Out of the plethora of available interpretations of a certain issue or event, strategic actors are interested in ensuring that their own reading is accepted by the media, the general public and other social actors (Ihlen and Nitz, 2008). To this end, they often turn to public relations practitioners, as framing is one of their main tasks (e.g. Hallahan, 1999; Knight, 1999).

However, with just a few notable exceptions (e.g. Pan and Kosicki, 2001), very little research has focused on the skills of public relations practitioners in terms of drawing

---

up and sponsoring frames or on whether these skills influence media framing. Thus, in this project, we aim to contribute to bridging this gap in the literature relating to the genuine framing tasks performed by public relations practitioners, in order to develop the current understanding of framing contests in a public relations context. To this end, we pose the following research question:

*RQ.* What framing skills have a positive impact on the reproduction of the core frames of social actors in the mass media?

In order to answer our research question, we will use a particular case study: in November 2009, as a result of a security breach at the Climatic Research Unit (CRU) within the University of East Anglia (UEA), a great deal of e-mail correspondence between climate researchers, covering several years, was made public. This placed the science of global warming under intense scrutiny, as some of the e-mails were seized on by prominent sceptic bloggers as incriminating. This case illustrates a new type of contest over the correct interpretation of an issue, where public relations practitioners are competing against bloggers to influence the agenda of the media.

We will start by reviewing the literature on framing and especially on framing contests, the latter being defined as controversies over the “right” frame (Carragee and Roefs, 2004). We will then draw together and discuss this literature in order to clarify exactly what skills are beneficial when framing an issue. After presenting our methodology and the way we operationalized the expertise resulting from the employment of these skills, we will examine the public relations efforts of some of the strategic actors in the case study and then compare their frames with the ones found in the media coverage.

### 1. Theoretical background: the framing approach

While a clear-cut definition of the concept of framing remains a topic of discussion in the literature, scholars have drawn on the metaphor of a cropping frame around a picture: the border highlights and holds together certain aspects of reality, while marking off competing, distracting or contradictory elements. As such, a frame “simplifies and condenses the ‘world out there’” (Snow and Benford, 1988, p. 137) and functions as “a central organizing [sic] idea or story line” (Gamson and Modigliani, 1987, p. 143). A more specific definition is offered by Entman:

To frame is to *select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating context, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation* for the item described (Entman, 1993, p. 52, original emphasis).

The concept of framing has a long and multidisciplinary history, which has facilitated the emergence of a very open concept, as researchers from several academic fields have focused on different areas of research. In historical accounts of the framing concept, scholars often cite Lippmann (1922) in communication studies, Bateson (1972) in psychology and Goffman (1974) in sociology as the ones to have initiated and fuelled research on framing. Along the lines set by Bateson, studies from the frontiers of psychology focus on the cognitive underpinnings that influence the reception of certain interpretations of social reality (Bateson, 1972). Studies in sociology, following the tradition of Goffman (1974), investigate the way in which people make sense of daily experiences and engage in social interactions.

Due to its potential to connect news production and news consumption processes (Reese, 2001), framing has been widely used in communication studies (e.g. D'Angelo and Kuypers, 2010; Reese *et al.*, 2001). However, in spite of the wide reach of the framing concept, most communication scholars focus exclusively on news frames (see also Borah, 2011), ignoring their origins with strategic actors and the issue of competitions with other frames, known as "framing contests" (e.g. Pan and Kosicki, 2001). The results of research which ignores the source of news framing (i.e. strategic actors) may exaggerate not only journalistic autonomy, but also the framing effects, as some researchers have concluded that framing contests diminish the effects of framing on the audience (e.g. Carragee and Roefs, 2004; Entman *et al.*, 2008; Wise and Brewer, 2010).

In the late 1990s, some communication scholars looked closely at the potential of framing with regard to public relations (e.g. Hallahan, 1999; Knight, 1999). The high level of interest in framing in public relations studies can be explained by the aforementioned structured selection and emphasis of certain aspects over others (Zoch and Molleda, 2006). Public relations materials are not only intended to inform the target audience, but also to convince them to accept preferred interpretations (Pan and Kosicki, 1993). Setting up and sustaining common frames with regard to issues of mutual concern is crucial for effective relations between an organisation and its public (Hallahan, 1999).

The number of framing studies in public relations journals has been increasing consistently over the past two decades. These studies are mostly qualitative and are attempts to identify issue-specific frames in public relations documents or media texts (Lim and Jones, 2010). Only very few of them focus on the contest aspect, which will form the focal point of this study.

## **2. Framing contests and their importance for public relations**

News frames do not develop in a political or social vacuum (Reese, 2001), as there are an array of public relations departments and clients of public relations firms who pit their frames against each other. Social and political actors seeking to influence public opinion compete with each other to frame the issues of interest (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989). As Hallahan puts it: "Social problems and disputes can be explained in alternative terms by different parties who vie for their preferred definition of a problem or situation to prevail" (Hallahan, 1999, p. 210). In the framing contests (Pan and Kosicki, 2001) that emerge, each actor highlights his or her preferred interpretation of the issue at hand, hoping that the media will adopt that particular frame and that, in turn, it will be accepted by the audience (Gamson and Modigliani, 1987; Gamson and Modigliani, 1989). Thus, news stories become a platform for framing contests in which political actors compete by sponsoring their preferred frames (Carragee and Roefs, 2004).

However, not all of these social actors have an equal chance in framing contests. Entman (2003) has put forward what he calls the cascading activation model, in which he argues that frames flow from the top social actors (the administration, elites) to the bottom (the public). Thus, actors of a lower status are "definite underdogs" in framing contests, while top actors' frames "have ideological inertia on their side" (Ryan, 1991, p. 68).

The reasons why certain frames prevail over others in public discourse are very complex. Scholars often mention "framing power" or "framing potency" (Pan and Kosicki, 2001) as being responsible for success in framing contests. According to Gamson (1988), a great deal of this framing power is due to resources which are

---

cultivated strategically by actors, a process which has been termed “frame sponsorship.” Pan and Kosicki (2001) continue this line of reasoning and argue that reducing the cost of the information carrying the frames (during frame sponsorship) is a basic mechanism for enhancing framing potency. According to previous studies, framing power comprises not only actor-bound elements like status, resources (e.g. Carragee and Roefs, 2004; Entman, 2004; Sheafer and Gabay, 2009), individual/organisational strengths and vulnerabilities (Ryan, 1991) and strategic alliances (Pan and Kosicki, 2001; Ryan, 1991), but also a stock of knowledge and skills (Pan and Kosicki, 2001).

This stock of knowledge and skills which is necessary in frame sponsorship can be directly addressed by the public relations practitioner. This is the reason why we consider this particular element to be very interesting with regard to public relations practice and research. We use “framing expertise” as an umbrella term for this knowledge and these skills in designing and promoting frames.

Previous studies have shown that public relations practitioners are aware of the power of framing for conveying highly persuasive strategic messages (Zoch *et al.*, 2008). However, while several social actors have discovered the potential of framing – for example, as shown by Andsager and Smiley (1998) in a study of the controversy over silicone breast implants or by Nelson *et al.* (1997) when discussing civil liberties – some actors (especially those of a lower status) could still improve their use of framing (e.g. Barnett, 2005; Zoch *et al.*, 2008).

In order to decide exactly what skills are needed in order to craft a powerful message, the first step was to draw together the literature concerning frame sponsorship and framing contests. While most of the previous studies have suggested factors that could account for the varying degree of success that diverse strategic actors achieve in media-oriented framing contests (e.g. Carragee and Roefs, 2004; Fröhlich and Rüdiger, 2006; Ihlen and Nitz, 2008; Pan and Kosicki, 2001; Reese, 2001), only a few researchers have empirically tested their assumptions. In the following sections, we will discuss the three main groups of skills and knowledge proposed in the literature as having a positive impact in framing contests.

Previous studies suggest that frames that are “resonant with the underlying culture” – thus evoking widely accepted beliefs, codes, myths, stereotypes, values or norms – are considered to be relevant by the audience, and that people are therefore more willing to accept them as seemingly “logical” interpretations of an issue (Bennett, 1993; Entman, 2004; Gamson, 1984; Reese, 2001; Sheafer and Gabay, 2009). Such frames stand a better chance of being picked up by the media and can be used to explain complex issues in a way that is accessible to lay audiences (Reese, 2001; Sheafer, 2001). By appealing to a shared repertoire of cultural frames (Van Gorp, 2007), the interpretations proposed by practitioners can seem so natural that the framing process goes unnoticed, and this is a huge advantage for strategic actors. Against the background that “culture is the battleground” (Ryan, 1991, p. 79), Charlotte Ryan identifies three basic tactics in framing contests:

- (1) attack rival frames where their cultural resonances are weak;
- (2) avoid rival frames while stressing those cultural resonances that reinforce one’s own framing; and
- (3) absorb rival frames by piggybacking on the cultural resonances they use (Ryan, 1991).

For public relations practitioners, this translates into a need to connect their clients' readings of issues to wider cultural phenomena, thereby extending their appeal beyond single stories (Carragee and Roefs, 2004; Ihlen and Nitz, 2008).

According to the literature review, the use of psychological biases might also be responsible for success in framing contests. Journalists are – just like the members of their audience – susceptible to these biases. In fact, even our tendency to privilege culturally resonant frames can be the result of a psychological bias (Reese, 2001). By offering “contextual cues” for processing information, strategic frames bias cognitive processing and decision-making (Hallahan, 2008). Through these cues, messages activate particular schemas, a process termed “priming.” Therefore, strategic framing prompts people to think in certain ways about a topic and to use only a portion of their knowledge when evaluating it.

One of the most scrutinised psychological biases is the tendency to evaluate negative information more strictly than positive information. This is the main posit of prospect theory, proposed by Kahneman and Tversky (1979), which describes decision-making mechanisms and the way in which individuals evaluate potential losses and gains. Among many other disciplines, this assumption found endorsement in communication studies, where framing in terms of negative consequences appeared to be more persuasive than frames that emphasised positive consequences or gains (Hallahan, 1999; O'Keefe and Jensen, 2009). However, a study about support for European Union (EU) enlargement showed that this framing effect can be moderated by political knowledge: individuals with low levels of political knowledge were more susceptible to risk framing (Schuck and de Vreese, 2006).

Most researchers in the field of communication studies refer to the imperative to conform to journalistic needs when conceiving a message intended for media reproduction (Sheafer and Gabay, 2009). This increases not only media attention, but also the chances of favourable news framing (Carragee and Roefs, 2004). Due to economic imperatives, deadlines and constant competition with other media channels, journalists need interesting stories that might easily stand alone.

Conformity to news values and journalistic scripts seems to be among the most important aspects for the public relations practitioner: the more news values one can connect to an interpretation of an issue, the greater the chance that it will be published (Carragee and Roefs, 2004; Ihlen and Nitz, 2008; Sheafer and Gabay, 2009). First formulated by Galtung and Ruge (1981), these values include negativity, relevance for the audience, unexpectedness and consonance, among others. A public relations practitioner must also keep in mind journalistic scripts (aka “generic frames”) and make their clients' interpretations correspond to them (Ihlen and Nitz, 2008; Van Gorp, 2007). These scripts can be understood as story-types, i.e. “standardized [sic] information processing rules that journalists use in covering certain categories of events, actors, or issues” (Entman, 2004, p. 26).

Thus, drawing together the literature review above, we can see that public relations practitioners stand good chances to succeed with their framing when they are able to conceive a message in a way that:

- is resonant with the underlying culture;
- appeals to psychological biases; and
- conforms to journalistic needs.

---

These are the components of what we have termed “framing expertise.”

The discussion above leads to the conclusion that the selection of frames for certain issues has some deliberate elements, as professionals aim to ensure that issues are framed in the media in a manner which is consistent with the way in which their client wants their story told (e.g. Hallahan, 1999). These processes can be seen as strategic, in that “participants manoeuvre strategically to achieve their political and communicative objectives. Each actor needs to take strategic steps to ‘get messages across’ and win arguments” (Pan and Kosicki, 2001, p. 40). Nevertheless, we do acknowledge that framing expertise is not necessarily a deliberate process, meaning that it may sometimes be played out on an internal or subconscious level, with “no motive other than a conscientious effort to frame events in a way that the sponsor considers most meaningful” (Gamson, 1989, p. 158).

To be conscious of framing strategies (thus exhibiting framing expertise) is not manipulative, but rather an inevitable way for human actors to make sense of their experiences and engage in social interactions (e.g. Goffman, 1974; Ryan and Gamson, 2009). The social construction which is aimed for by public relations practitioners is the “very essence of communication,” and thus “neither inherently good nor bad” (Hallahan, 1999, pp. 206-207). However, as Gandy (2001) aptly states, this power to construct reality in a culturally resonant way does create a risk of manipulation. Framing is used manipulatively when it comprises deception and the concealment of evidence and when it is motivated solely by self-interest (Lakhani, 2005).

### 3. Methodology

In this qualitative study, we analysed the contest over the “right” framing of the online release of e-mails and documents from UEA. We carried out frame analyses of two sets of texts: first, the media coverage of the issue in seven news outlets in Germany, Norway, the USA and the UK: *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (SZ), *Aftenposten*, *Verdens Gang* (VG), *The New York Times*, *New York Post*, *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Sun*. We searched the Factiva database for combined occurrences of the word “climate” in each outlet’s respective language and one of the key institutions or persons involved, namely “Climatic Research Unit,” “UEA” or “Phil Jones.” After excluding duplicates and irrelevant hits, our sample included 54 newspaper articles from the period 18.11.2009-18.12.2009.

Second, we examined the way in which the issue was portrayed by four main strategic actors – as indicated by the media coverage – between 15.11.2009 and 15.12.2009. This period of analysis starts and ends three days earlier than the period of analysis for the media coverage (18.11.2009-18.12.2009). This three-day gap should allow all of the texts generated by the strategic actors to have been picked up by the media. Both “schools of thought” (“sceptics” and “scientists”) were mainly presented as collective actors in the media, but the most-frequently named actors were UEA, “Real climate” (a scientific blog), Climate audit (one of the most popular moderated sceptic-blogs) and The air vent (a more radical sceptic-blog, and the one where a link to the hacked e-mails and documents was first posted).

This second dataset encompassed 27 texts: seven from UEA, four from “Real climate”, seven from Climate audit and nine from The air vent. Of these, only UEA issued traditional public relations documents (e.g. press releases), while the other texts were blog entries. While we acknowledge that blogs are not primarily aimed at the media, we consider that they have emerged as a new venue for initiating and nurturing

relations with publics (Sung-Un and Joon Soo, 2009), mainly because they offer a non-mediated communication channel (Zoch *et al.*, 2008). The result is that bloggers' views contest with the views of established strategic actors and the media can easily pick up information from blogs as "information subsidies" (Gandy, 1982). Furthermore, the decision to analyse blog entries as a form of public relations strategy seemed necessary in order to investigate the views of the relatively small sceptic community, which is not organised in a conventional manner, with a public relations department/officer. Yet, since we have not examined the authors of the analysed texts closely, we do not know for sure that the bloggers were not public relations professionals after all; in fact, this remains unclear even for the people authoring the news releases.

We conducted a qualitative content analysis following the criteria developed by Mayring (2002). This type of analysis comprises qualitative and quantitative steps, and aims to achieve the openness of qualitative research together with the structure and transparency of quantitative research.

We began deductively by building a codebook (which can be obtained on request), starting from the theoretical concept of framing. Relying on Van Gorp (2007), we consider that frames are best understood as packages consisting not only of Entman's (1993) elements (hereafter "reasoning devices": problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and treatment recommendation), but also of framing devices such as catchphrases, depictions, metaphors, exemplars or visual images (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989).

These constituent elements (reasoning and framing devices) represented the main categories of our codebook. In order to translate the reasoning devices into categories with several variables, we inductively noted individual categories in great detail for each device, which we then condensed into larger ones. We subsequently added a string variable for framing devices after each reasoning device (with no categories to choose from, but space to note any eye-catching expressions). We looked for catchphrases, depictions, exemplars and tropes. Catchphrases may include keywords and stock phrases. Depictions are general descriptions, sometimes with the use of statistics or public opinion polls. Tropes include metaphors (implied comparisons) and analogies (obvious comparisons). The coding process consisted of deconstructing the research material into different elements and assigning numerical codes to each category.

The data were coded by the first author. Our test-unit was the frame, meaning that a single text could have several frames. While news stories usually present several interpretations of an issue, public relations documents are limited to one standpoint. Thus, we coded up to three frames per media text and just one per public relations document/blog entry.

We began by clustering any reasoning devices which appeared at least five times and were therefore relevant to the discourse in SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) 17.0. This allowed us to see how certain reasoning devices formed a pattern that could be identified across several texts in our sample. Rounded off with the respective framing devices, the recognised clusters can be interpreted as frames. Within the respective frames, we brought together different strategic actors who held similar interpretations (including journalists), thus building up a "discursive community" (Pan and Kosicki, 2001). We were also interested in journalistic trespassing on the original frames, and therefore on whether journalists presented the

---

frame and then infringed on it with critical comments, thus strengthening the counter-frame.

The next step was to analyse framing expertise, which entails conveying a message in a way that:

- resonates with the underlying culture;
- makes use of psychological biases; and
- conforms to journalistic needs.

We analysed the cultural resonance of the frames through the framing devices which were employed and the use of psychological biases through the reasoning device “moral evaluation,” coded in terms of risk or opportunity. With regard to conformity to journalistic needs, we analysed the clarity of the texts and their link to news values and journalistic scripts. The coding examples in the following section, translated into English, should help the reader to follow our analysis.

#### 4. Results

The view that human activities are significantly responsible for the increase in the global temperature since the 1800s (“global warming”) is shared by the vast majority of the scientific community (Doran and Zimmerman, 2009) and serves as the foundation of policy agreements like the Kyoto protocol (1997). Nevertheless, sceptical views with different nuances still exist, as the next section will show.

Before we move on to the description of the identified frames, we would like to remind the reader that we identified the frames after reading the sample and assigning codes in our codebook to what is known in the literature as “reasoning devices” (problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and treatment recommendation) and “framing devices” (e.g. metaphors, tropes, comparisons). We then used cluster analysis to identify patterns of combinations of reasoning devices in the analysed texts. Finally, we rounded off these patterns with the appendant framing devices in order to retrieve the frames.

##### *4.1 Frames in the public relations texts and blog entries*

There were three main different frames in the public relations texts and blog entries. These are presented below, and then summed up in Table I.

*4.1.1 UEA and RealClimate: “solid science”.* Throughout the analysed documents from UEA and the blog “Real climate” ( $n = 11$ ), one single frame emerged. According to this frame, the scientific evidence of climate change is solid, due to the “overwhelming scientific consensus,” the “scientific integrity” and the “peer-review system” (Davies, 2009). The hacking of the server as such is seen as an illegal act and a “criminal breach” (Davies, 2009), while the selective disclosure of stolen documents and their biased interpretation by sceptics “may be a concerted attempt to put a question mark over the science of climate change in the run-up to the Copenhagen talks” (Jones, 2009). Some of the e-mails (like the one discussing a “trick” to “hide the decline in temperature”) might not “read well,” but they were written “in the heat of the moment” (Jones, 2009). Although some of the exposed e-mails include ruthless criticism of sceptics, science does not function because people are “polite at all times” (Real climate, 2009). Only those who would be happy to have their private e-mails made public should “cast the first stone” (Real climate, 2009). The dominant treatment

**Table I.**  
Frames used by climate scientists and climate sceptics in public relations materials

	UEA/"Real climate": "Solid science" (n = 11)	"Climate audit": "No scientific integrity" (n = 7)	"The air vent": "Science is a hoax" (n = 9)
Reasoning devices	Science on climate change is solid due to the scientific consensus. The controversy should not influence the clear call for action and an investigation will show that sceptics' claims are unfunded. Not taking climate action poses risks for mankind	In the wake of the disclosure, sceptics bemoan the lack of scientific integrity among climate researchers and predict that this will affect their reputation. They call for changes in the way research is conducted	The disclosed documents are seen as the ultimate proof that science on man-made climate change is a hoax. The proponents of this view advise against using money to stop global warming
Catchphrases	Strong consensus, unequivocal warming; criminal activity, private	Climategate, circling the wagons; "trick", "hide the decline"	Unfunded heresy, kludged mess; climategate
Depictions	Trick = "way to deal with a problem"; decline "hidden in plain sight" ("Real climate", 2009)	Decline is "hidden" plain and simple ("Climate audit", 2009b)	"[D]on't you get your hopes up that it's only limited to these people" ("The air vent", 2009c)
Exemplars	Most data is "accessible through the Global Historical Climatology Network" (CRU, 2009)	Pressure for "a nice tidy story"; the decline was a "stone in IPCC's shoe" ("Climate audit", 2009a)	"[T]he math [for the hockey stick] would get a generous D- in class" ("The air vent", 2009e)
Tropes	"Gravity isn't a useful theory because Newton was a nice person" (Real climate, 2009)	"The first rule of the Freedom of Information act . . . nobody talks about [it]" ("Climate audit", 2009c)	"gorgeous shit", "horse crap", "junk", block FOIA ("The air vent", 2009a)

---

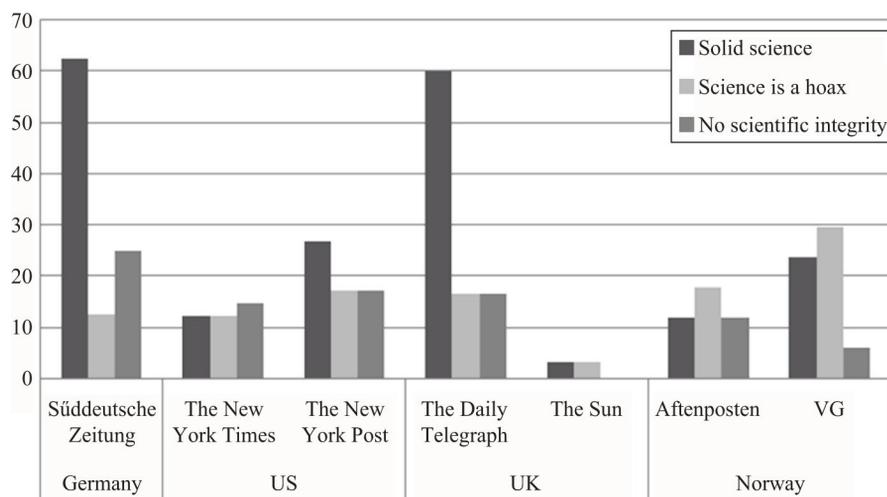
recommendation is action on climate change, and it is felt that sceptics' allegations should not distract from this goal, as "we face enormous challenges ahead if we are to continue to live on this planet" (Jones, 2009). Moreover, in this frame it is suggested that an investigation will clarify that the conspiracy-scenario is far-fetched.

4.1.2 *Climate audit: "no scientific integrity"*. At Climate audit, the issue was framed as grounds to question the integrity of the science regarding climate change ( $n = 7$ ). The controversy is termed "climategate," which is an allusion to the Watergate scandal, in which the disclosure of Nixon's recorded conversations led to his resignation as US President. The scandal is not about "scientists talking smack," but about the dishonest selection of data, manipulation in order to arrive at pre-determined conclusions, and especially the illegal evasion of legitimate requests for the "taxpayer founded raw data" needed to replicate a scientific study ("Climate audit", 2009a). Having been deemed unacceptable, scientists' behaviour is described in a very colourful manner, e.g. through an analogy to the book/film "Fight Club": "The first rule of the Freedom of Information Act. . . nobody talks about the Freedom of Information Act" ("Climate audit", 2009a). It is argued that science has been corrupted by the pressure to present "a nice tidy story," and that the registered decline in temperature was a "stone in [scientists'] shoe" ("Climate audit", 2009b). Scientists achieved a consensus because they did not share the data with "people who actually might take a critical look at it" ("Climate audit", 2009a). Analogies to previous events were used fairly often in order to show that this is not the first time that scientists had been caught cheating. Thus, frequent blog readers are used to "watching the pea under the thimble" ("Climate audit", 2009c). This is an allusion to the "shell game," a street game which abuses pedestrians' confidence in order to defraud them.

4.1.3 *The air vent: "science is a hoax"*. The air vent presents a more radical sceptical view ( $n = 9$ ) which, although resembling the previous one, differs in one crucial aspect: while the previous frame did not dismiss science in its entirety, e.g. "I'm just a guy trying to move science forwards" ("Climate audit", 2009a), The Air vent used more radical and highly derisive expressions to describe mainstream studies on climate change, e.g. "horse crap" ("The air vent", 2009a). Scientists are portrayed as "idiots" and corrupted manipulators who have a "castle mentality" and pervert the peer-review process, fake data and exaggerate their certitude due to their greed and the pressure to reach a consensus ("The air vent", 2009b, 2009c, 2009d). Although acknowledging global warming as such, the interpretation put forth is extremely critical of climate policies. They are seen as a risk to the economy, industry and ultimately to people due to the costs involved, as these policies may not have any effect on the climate. This scandal is expected to affect the credibility of science.

#### 4.2 *Frames in news coverage*

During the period 18.11.2009-18.12.2009, the newspapers included in this analysis ran a total of 54 news stories about the issue at hand. Figure 1 shows how the frames found in the news coverage were distributed among the four countries where the newspapers analysed are located. They conveyed three main frames which contested over the "right" interpretation of this issue (see Tables II and III). The media discourse also included other, less-frequently-used frames. However, as our goal is not to describe all of the competing views, but rather to understand why certain frames succeed over others, our analysis concentrated on the most successful frames.



**Figure 1.**  
Frame-distribution per  
country and publication

However, these data must be accepted with caution, as we observed that the most popular frame (“solid science”) was trespassed the most, mainly in the *New York Post* and the *New York Times*. This means that, although presenting the frame, journalists infringed on it with critical comments in order to strengthen the case for the counter-frame. The second and third frame (both emanating from the sceptics’ camp) were only trespassed on once each in the German *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. This is important, as competing news frames can neutralise one another (Matthes, 2008), or the counter-frame to the one which is trespassed on may become more conspicuous.

As the frames are very similar to the ones identified in the public relations material and the blog entries, we will only discuss additional features and cultural differences. The “solid science” frame ( $n = 46$ ) was put forward by climate scientists, journalists and policy makers (US, UK, UN) and is the most common interpretation in the news stories which we analysed from Germany, the USA and the UK. This interpretation is very similar to the scientists’ reading observed in the public relations material. With the help of framing devices, we observed cultural differences with regard to four aspects: the sceptics’ descriptions, the content of the purloined files, scientific consensus and the call for action.

While we found derisive adjectives for the sceptics in most of the news stories included in this frame, e.g. “flat-earthers” (Kirkup and Gray, 2009), one reading presented in the German press attempted to put things into perspective by arguing that the sceptics are mostly lay people without experience in climate research (Schrader, 2009a). Moreover, in the same article, the exchange of private e-mails is compared to a confidential discussion with an accountant with the aim of avoiding tax. In the UK, the e-mails were compared to a few stray sheep, aka black sheep, a minority with undesirable characteristics (Johnson, 2009). As far as the scientific consensus is concerned, the praising of science as “the correct knowledge standpoint” (Stang, 2009) or as coming from “mainstream scientists” (Schrader, 2009a) seemed to suffice in Norway and Germany, whereas numbers were used in the UK and the USA in order to strengthen the argument: 2,500 scientists belong to the consensus group (Earle and

	Solid science ( <i>n</i> = 46)	Science is a hoax ( <i>n</i> = 26)	No scientific integrity ( <i>n</i> = 23)
Reasoning devices	≈ 1 <sup>st</sup> public relations frame	≈ 3 <sup>rd</sup> public relations frame	≈ 2 <sup>nd</sup> public relations frame
Catch-phrases	Extra: risk for science and nature; opportunity for economy. Sceptics' work = "castle in the air falling to pieces" (Korseth, 2009, author's translation) Sceptics = "lay people" (Schrader, 2009a)	Extra: policy based on "climategate" science will fail Smoking e-mails; UN's climate-control confab	Extra: climate policy will fail, since expensive and likely ineffective Climate campaigners; climategate
Depictions		Proponents of global warming are blind believers in a "dogma" or "cult" (Peyser, 2009)	"scientific McCarthyism" (Earle, 2009); "cooking the books" (Peyser, 2009)
Exemplars	2,500 scientists belong to the consensus (Earle and Retter, 2009)	Previous controversies around Jones, CRU head, and the hockey-stick (e.g. Korseth, 2009; Schrader, 2009b).	Previous controversies, e.g. hockey-stick, Rio Conference (Gray, 2009a; Korseth, 2009)
Tropes	Inaction = "grossly irresponsible" (Gray, 2009b); can make life a living hell, "low-probability, high-impact" event, like terrorist threats (Friedman, 2009)	Climate policies are an overreaction, similar to locking up all young males to reduce crime; an inconvenient tax (analogy: "An Inconvenient Truth")	Scientists = "eggheads" (Fermino, 2009); policy "on life support" (Campanile, 2009). Demographers could say global population is highest ever when stopped rising (UK) (Gray, 2009a)

**Table II.**  
Frames used in news stories

Retter, 2009), while 1700 British scientists signed a statement declaring their “utmost confidence” in man-made global warming (Gray, 2009a). Finally, the clear call for action on climate change is expressed in the *New York Times* through a comparison to the War on Terror: both global warming and terrorist threats after 9/11 are “low-probability, high-impact” events which justify an aggressive response (Friedman, 2009). Although the need to act as a precaution is also mentioned in news stories from the UK, no comparison to the War on Terror emerges (Gray, 2009b).

The interpretations included in the “science is a hoax” frame ( $n = 26$ ) emanate from sceptics, journalists, Republicans in the US Congress and Saudi Arabian representatives, and resembles the interpretation from The air vent. One could argue that the reason why this is the most common interpretation in Norway is the journalistic interest in conflict, and also the ideal of giving all parties the chance to be heard.

The language employed in this frame is very prudential (e.g. the “alleged manipulation of data”) in the German press (where this frame is extremely atypical), more moderate in the UK (“scientific fraud,” “covering up” and “manipulation”) and very colourful in the US and the Norwegian (yellow) press. For example, scientists “monkey” around with numbers, “doctor” the data, make claims which are “no more provable than the earth is flat” (Earle and Retter, 2009; Peyser, 2009) or ignore facts (VG, 2009). One analogy refers to sororities, which are a popular phenomenon in US culture: scientists “behave like a crazed group of Delta girls engaged in a flame war to paint the Kappas as a bunch of nasty skanks” (Smith, 2009).

Within the “no scientific integrity” frame ( $n = 23$ ), climate sceptics and Republicans in the US Congress put forward a very similar reading to the one presented by “Climate audit”. This reading is very popular in the US press and is accompanied once again by very colourful framing devices. Scientists’ behaviour is termed “scientific McCarthyism” (Earle, 2009), an allusion to the actions of Republican Senator McCarthy, which nowadays stand for making accusations without proper evidence – a well-known case to many US citizens. Climate policy would limit personal freedoms, “such as flying home for Christmas” (Hurt, 2009).

#### 4.3 Framing expertise

Our first finding is that the strategic actors we analysed succeeded in ensuring that their frames were accepted by the media. At this point, we wanted to see if our theoretical assumptions about framing expertise were supported by the research

Newspapers	Number of stories
<i>Süddeutsche Zeitung</i>	3
<i>The New York Times</i>	8
<i>The New York Post</i>	15
<i>The Daily Telegraph</i>	17
<i>The Sun</i>	3
<i>Aftenposten</i>	2
VG	6
Total	54

**Table III.**

Newspaper articles 18  
November 2009-18  
December 2009

---

material. To this end, we examined the “original” frames one by one to see whether they:

- resonated with the underlying culture;
- appealed to psychological biases; and
- conformed to journalistic needs.

Although there is no definite causal link between framing expertise and media coverage, we have made some inferences based on a comparison of the frames that were applied by the strategic actors and the frames that appeared in the media.

The “solid science” frame, which emanated from UEA and “Real climate”, went further than simply resonating with the underlying culture. By indirectly appealing to the human right to privacy by stating that the leaked e-mails were the result of an illegal act (e.g. Davies, 2009; Real climate, 2009), they connected with widely-held values in the democratic world, going beyond the British and American cultures and the single issue at hand: “No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks on his honour and reputation” (UN, 1948, Art. 12). Moreover, on “Real climate” (2009), we also found appeals to widely-held religious values and norms in Western culture designed to strengthen the argument that nobody would be happy to have their private e-mails published: one should condemn a sinner only if they are without sin themselves.

Conveyed in terms of the risk to mankind (as opposed to as an opportunity), the predominant moral evaluation of the future was picked up by the media. However, some media reports also mentioned the fact that the controversy over the leaked e-mails might affect the reputation of the scientists involved, if not the credibility the science of climate change as a whole.

With regard to conformity to journalistic needs, the frames from both UEA and “Real climate” employ the journalistic script of human impact when arguing that the consequences of climate change will cause human suffering. Moreover, the news value of conflict emerges, as they argue that sceptics want to discredit scientists.

The frames of “no integrity,” emanating from “Climate audit”, and “science is a hoax,” from “The air vent”, accomplished an equal level of framing expertise. The main cultural appeal in both frames is the comparison to the aforementioned Watergate scandal. Although this may be known to many people outside the USA, we would claim that this is particularly resonant within the US culture.

Both frames evaluate the future in terms of risk, especially the risk to the reputation and credibility of the science of global warming and the economy if policies on climate change prevail. In addition to these evaluations, the reproduction of these frames in the media also included the risk to people and policy plans.

Regarding the targeted news values, we found the most hints at personalisation. The climatologists Phil Jones and Michael Mann, who are responsible for important studies on the trend of global warming, were showcased by sceptics bemoaning the lack of integrity in climate change research and/or the fact that it is nothing more than a hoax. In addition, the sceptics focused on the journalistic script of the economic consequences of policy plans.

The conclusion is that, consciously or unconsciously, both sceptics and scientists framed their messages in an efficient way, meaning that their frames appeared in the analysed media with little or no alteration. This confirms our theoretical understanding

of framing expertise. All of the strategic actors made use of the underlying culture, framed their information in terms of risk and made their readings correspond to journalistic scripts and news values.

Nevertheless, we observed some qualitative differences: bloggers in general and sceptical bloggers in particular seem to be less skilled in terms of framing. While both public relations practitioners and bloggers were savvy in making their frames correspond with journalistic scripts and news values, professionals were more clear and concise. Moreover, practitioners managed to connect their clients' views to the enduring values in Western society, thereby moving beyond a single issue and their own cultural borderlines.

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

Through this study, we aimed to contribute towards a better grasp of what skills public relations practitioners need when aspiring to win a framing contest over the media agenda for their clients.

We consider this to be a necessary task for two reasons: on the one hand, the skills and knowledge we consider to be useful for the ingenious selection and emphasis of certain aspects over others emanated from the theoretical discourse. Specifically, the fact that we have built on and tested an array of theoretical assumptions made by others (starting with Gamson, 1988) has allowed us to contribute to the further development of public relations theory.

On the other hand, the concept of "framing expertise" is relevant to public relations practitioners, as it offers possible courses of action which may improve a client's chances in framing contests. Savvy practitioners can employ framing in order to compensate for limited resources and/or the comparatively low status of their clients, as shown by our case study. When wanting to make a particular reading on an issue prevail, we believe that it helps to build up culturally resonant messages which appeal to psychological biases and at the same time conform to journalistic needs. These three criteria make up what we have termed "framing expertise." Although other studies have mentioned these as single factors, the emphasis on the importance of their combined action is the main contribution of this study. By analysing the public relations efforts of successful strategic actors, we have underpinned our theoretical notion of "framing expertise" by a case study.

To summarise the key points arising from our study of public relations practitioners, three lessons are suggested:

- (1) When framing an issue, it is advisable to tie the issue in with wider cultural phenomena, extending the appeal beyond single stories, e.g. by evoking widely accepted beliefs, values or norms that the practitioner and client share with the audience and journalists. In order to achieve this resonance, practitioners could use focus groups with members of the target audience to test out different words and phrases to be used/avoided when framing an issue. As language choices are often culture-laden and have positive or negative connotations (e.g. "capitalism" versus "free-market economy"), focus groups might be a way to cultivate "nuanced vocabularies" and "stockpiles of metaphors" (Weick, 1986), thereby creating a framing toolkit (Fairhurst, 2011) that includes terminology, metaphors, themes for stories and familiar arguments. For example, in the controversy over the leaked e-mails, we observed how the strategic actors resonated with the underlying culture by connecting their views

---

with religious values, human rights or the Watergate scandal. The strategic actors in this case employed different vocabularies which were representative of their particular milieu.

- (2) Framing issues in apocalyptic terms should be avoided, although attention should be paid to potential risks and ways to reduce this risk. When doing so, one should keep in mind that there is a difference between perceived risk and real risk (e.g. Schütz and Wiedemann, 2008). All of the strategic actors analysed in this study framed in terms of risk, probably as they were aware of how convincing this can be (e.g. Schuck and de Vreese, 2006). However, when it comes to climate change and other dramatic topics, people may be tired of apocalyptic scenarios and may want a message which emphasises opportunities (e.g. Johnson, 2009). Nonetheless, such a decision is two-edged, as optimistic framing when dealing with a very serious situation has damaged other organisations in the past (e.g. Murphree *et al.*, 2009).
- (3) In order to gain media interest, the issue needs to be framed in a way that satisfies news value (e.g. unexpectedness) and journalistic scripts, such as the aforementioned human-impact script. Practitioners need good writing skills, accurate information and a knowledge of storytelling and the social construction of reality. In our case study, we noted how the authors of the texts tried to conform to these requests, for example by using the techniques of personalisation or catchphrases.

In spite of all of the insights provided by our analysis, the need to improve our knowledge of the framing skills of public relations practitioners persists. The concept of “framing expertise” could be further developed: for example, the appeal to psychological biases could go beyond framing in terms of risk or opportunity. An extensive review of the literature on persuasion, framing effects and success in public relations in general could prove to be useful. Moreover, an improved way to empirically analyse the cultural resonance of strategic frames, beyond the use of particular framing devices, could benefit scholars and practitioners alike. In addition, the concept should be further supported by empirical data from classical and modern types of framing contests (competing public relations departments versus practitioners against bloggers). Moreover, interviews with practitioners and strategic actors and ethnographic fieldwork could further enrich the concept. As the ultimate goal of strategic framing is the acceptance of particular readings by the members of a target audience, the concept should be rounded off with insights into the framing effects of messages with different degrees of framing expertise.

Our analysis led to the conclusion that the public relations professionals working for UEA exhibited better framing expertise than (presumably amateur) sceptical bloggers. Thus, the question arises as to why the frames of both scientists and sceptics received approximately the same degree of prominence in the media coverage. A possible explanation is offered by the norms of journalistic balance (Gans, 1979) and the conflict orientation of the media. Together, this led to a manufactured controversy, though scientifically speaking none exists.

How can practitioners prevail over actors of a lower status who use their blogs as a public relations instrument? Although neither the aforementioned journalistic bias nor competing frames can be wiped out, conveying messages that exhibit framing expertise can increase their chance of media reproduction. In this way, an audience

which is exposed to alternative frames can (theoretically speaking) choose the one which is considered to be most suitable. Another possibility would be to build a discursive community with an alternate well-established blog, so that all competing frames are available on the blogosphere – in UEA’s case, this was “Real climate”. Future research could work towards additional ways for blogs to shape public relations practices.

In spite of the insights gained and the lack of alternative materials, the fact that we had to rely on blog entries as a source of strategic frames is the main limitation of this study: as several strategic actors were named collectively in the media and not directly, we cannot be sure that their framing expertise (and not somebody else’s) led to the subsequent positive media coverage.

### References

- Andsager, J. and Smiley, L. (1998), “Evaluating the public information: shaping news coverage of the silicone implant controversy”, *Public Relations Review*, Vol. 24 No. 2, pp. 183-201.
- Barnett, B. (2005), “Feminists shaping news: a framing analysis of news releases from the national organization for women”, *Journal of Public Relations Research*, Vol. 17 No. 4, pp. 341-62.
- Bateson, G. (1972), *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, Ballantine Books, New York, NY, (Original work published 1955).
- Bennett, W.L. (1993), “Constructing publics and their opinions”, *Political Communications*, Vol. 10, pp. 101-20.
- Berger, P.L. and Luckmann, T. (1967), *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, Penguin, London.
- Borah, P. (2011), “Conceptual issues in framing theory: a systematic examination of a decade’s literature”, *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 61 No. 2, pp. 246-63.
- Campanile, C. (2009), “Climate bill on thin ice”, *New York Post*, 25 November.
- Carragee, K.M. and Roefs, W. (2004), “The neglect of power in recent framing research”, *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 54 No. 2, pp. 214-33.
- Climate audit (2009a), Willis Eschenbach’s FOI request, available at: <http://climateaudit.org/2009/11/25/willis-eschenbachs-foi-request/> (accessed 19 May 2010).
- Climate audit (2009b), “IPCC and the ‘trick’”, available at: <http://climateaudit.org/2009/12/10/ipcc-and-the-trick/> (accessed 19 May 2010).
- Climate audit (2009c), “The trick”, available at: <http://climateaudit.org/2009/11/26/the-trick/> (accessed 19 May 2010).
- CRU (2009), “CRU climate data already ‘over 95%’” available at: [www.uea.ac.uk/mac/comm/media/press/2009/nov/CRUupdate](http://www.uea.ac.uk/mac/comm/media/press/2009/nov/CRUupdate) (accessed 20 October 2010).
- D’Angelo, P. and Kuypers, J.A. (Eds) (2010), *Doing News Framing Analysis: Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives*, Routledge, New York, NY.
- Davies, T. (2009), Statement from Professor Trevor Davies, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Research, available at: [www.uea.ac.uk/mac/comm/media/press/2009/nov/CRUupdate](http://www.uea.ac.uk/mac/comm/media/press/2009/nov/CRUupdate) (accessed 19 May 2010).
- Doran, P.T. and Zimmerman, M.K. (2009), “Examining the scientific consensus on climate change”, *EOS*, Vol. 90 No. 3, pp. 22-3.
- Earle, G. (2009), “GOP turning up heat over e-mail scandal”, *New York Post*, 3 December.

- 
- Earle, G. and Retter, D. (2009), "Heated words for O-GOP rips plan to visit climate summit", *New York Post*, 26 November.
- Entman, R.M. (1993), "Framing: toward clarification of a fractured paradigm", *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 43 No. 4, pp. 51-8.
- Entman, R.M. (2003), "Cascading activation: contesting the White House's frame after 9/11", *Political Communication*, Vol. 20 No. 4, pp. 415-32.
- Entman, R.M. (2004), *Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and US Foreign Policy*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL.
- Entman, R.M. (2007), "Framing bias: media in the distribution of power", *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 57 No. 1, pp. 163-73.
- Entman, R.M., Matthes, J. and Pellicano, L. (2008), "Nature, sources and effects of news framing", in Wahl-Jorgensen, K. and Hanitzsch, T. (Eds), *Handbook of Journalism Studies*, Erlbaum, Mahwah, NJ.
- Fairhurst, G.T. (2011), *The Power of Framing: Creating the Language of Leadership*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA.
- Fermino, J. (2009), "Iffy weather – new warming rules amid e-leak doubts", *New York Post*, 24 November.
- Friedman, T.L. (2009), "Going Cheney on climate", *The New York Times*, 9 December.
- Fröhlich, R. and Rüdiger, B. (2006), "Framing political public relations: measuring success of political communication strategies in Germany", *Public Relations Review*, Vol. 32 No. 1, pp. 18-25.
- Galtung, J. and Ruge, M.H. (1981), "Structuring and selecting news", in Cohen, S. and Young, J. (Eds), *The Manufacture of News: Social Problems, Deviance and the Mass Media*, rev. ed., Sage, Beverly Hills, CA.
- Gamson, W.A. (1984), *What's News? A Game Stimulation of TV News*, The Free Press, New York, NY.
- Gamson, W.A. (1988), "A constructionist approach to mass media and public opinion", *Symbolic Interaction*, Vol. 11, pp. 161-74.
- Gamson, W.A. (1989), "News as framing: comment on Graber", *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 33, pp. 157-61.
- Gamson, W.A. and Modigliani, A. (1987), "The changing culture of affirmative action", in Braungart, R.G. and Braungart, M.M. (Eds), *Research in Political Sociology*, Vol. 3, JAI Press, Greenwich, CT, pp. 137-77.
- Gamson, W.A. and Modigliani, A. (1989), "Media discourse and public opinion on nuclear power: a constructionist approach", *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 95, pp. 1-37.
- Gandy, O.H. (1982), *Beyond Agenda Setting: Information Subsidies and Public Policy*, Ablex, Norwood, NJ.
- Gandy, O.H. (2001), "Epilogue – framing at the horizon: a retrospective assessment", in Reese, S.D., Gandy, O.H. and Grant, A.E. (Eds), *Framing Public Life: Perspectives on Media and Our Understanding of the Social World*, Lawrence Erlbaum, Mahwah, NJ, pp. 355-78.
- Gans, H.J. (1979), *Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek, and Time*, Pantheon Books, New York, NY.
- Goffman, E. (1974), *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Gray, L. (2009a), "2010 forecast to be hottest year on record", *The Daily Telegraph*, 11 December.
- Gray, L. (2009b), "Deal is in danger, warns Miliband", *The Daily Telegraph*, 14 December.

- Hallahan, K. (1999), "Seven models of framing: implications for public relations", *Journal of Public Relations Research*, Vol. 11 No. 3, pp. 205-42.
- Hallahan, K. (2008), "Strategic framing", in Donsbach, W. (Ed.), *The International Encyclopedia of Communication*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford.
- Hurt, C. (2009), "A 'ban' on all dissent – UN big freezes out opposition", *New York Post*, 9 December.
- Ihlen, Ø. and Nitz, M. (2008), "Framing contests in environmental disputes: paying attention to media and cultural master frames", *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, Vol. 2 No. 1, pp. 1-18.
- Johnson, B. (2009), "How banks can help to save the planet – and make a profit", *The Daily Telegraph*, 14 December, p. 1.
- Jones, P. (2009), Statement from Professor Phil Jones, Head of the Climatic Research Unit, University of East Anglia, available at: [www.uea.ac.uk/mac/comm/media/press/2009/nov/CRUupdate](http://www.uea.ac.uk/mac/comm/media/press/2009/nov/CRUupdate) (accessed 19 May 2010).
- Kahneman, D. and Tversky, A. (1979), "Prospect theory: an analysis of decisions under risk", *Econometrica*, Vol. 47, pp. 313-27.
- Kirkup, J. and Gray, L. (2009), "Climate sceptics are flat-earthers says Brown Brown brands climate sceptics 'flat-earthers'", 5 December.
- Knight, M.G. (1999), "Getting past the impasse: framing as a tool for public relations", *Public Relations Review*, Vol. 25, pp. 381-98.
- Korseth, S. (2009), "Om moralsk opprustning (About moral rearmament)", *Verdens Gang*, 11 December.
- Lakhani, D. (2005), *Persuasion: the Art of Getting What You Want*, John Wiley & Sons, Hoboken, NJ.
- Lim, J. and Jones, L. (2010), "A baseline summary of framing research in public relations from 1990 to 2009", *Public Relations Review*, Vol. 36 No. 3, pp. 292-7.
- Lippmann, W. (1922), *Public Opinion*, Harcourt, Brace, New York, NY.
- Matthes, J. (2008), "Media frames and political judgments. exploring the boundaries of framing effects in a two-wave panel study", *Studies in Communication Sciences*, Vol. 8 No. 2, pp. 101-28.
- Mayring, P. (2002), *Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse. Grundlagen und Techniken*, 8th ed., (*Qualitative Content Analysis: Foundations and Techniques*), Beltz, Weinheim.
- Murphree, V., Reber, B.H. and Blevens, F. (2009), "Superhero, instructor, optimist: FEMA and the frames of disaster in Hurricanes Katrina and Rita", *Journal of Public Relations Research*, Vol. 21 No. 3, pp. 273-94.
- Nelson, T.E., Clawson, R.A. and Oxley, Z.M. (1997), "Media framing of a civil liberties conflict and its effect on tolerance", *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 91 No. 3, pp. 567-84.
- O'Keefe, D.J. and Jensen, J.D. (2009), "The relative persuasiveness of gain-framed and loss-framed messages for encouraging disease detection behaviors: a meta-analytic review", *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 59 No. 2, pp. 296-316.
- Pan, Z. and Kosicki, G. (1993), "Framing analysis: an approach to news discourse", *Political Communication*, Vol. 10 No. 1, pp. 55-75.
- Pan, Z. and Kosicki, G. (2001), "Framing as a strategic action in public deliberation", in Reese, S.D., Gandy, O.H. and Grant, A.E. (Eds), *Framing Public Life: Perspectives on Media and Our Understanding of the Social World*, Lawrence Erlbaum, Mahwah, NJ, pp. 35-65.
- Peysers, A. (2009), "Climate-cult con is hard to 'bear'", *New York Post*, 30 November.

- 
- Real climate (2009), "The CRU hack", available at: [www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2009/11/the-cru-hack/](http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2009/11/the-cru-hack/) (accessed 19 May 2010).
- Reese, S.D. (2001), "Prologue – framing public life: a bridging model for media research", in Reese, S.D., Gandy, O.H. and Grant, A.E. (Eds), *Framing Public Life: Perspectives on Media and Our Understanding of the Social World*, Lawrence Erlbaum, Mahwah, NJ.
- Reese, S.D., Gandy, O.H. and Grant, A.E. (Eds) (2001), *Framing Public Life: Perspectives on Media and Our Understanding of the Social World*, Lawrence Erlbaum, Mahwah, NJ.
- Ryan, C. (1991), *Prime Time Activism: Media Strategies for Grassroots Organization*, South End Press, Boston, MA.
- Ryan, C. and Gamson, W.A. (2009), "Are frames enough?", in Goodwin, J. and Jasper, J.M. (Eds), *The Social Movements Reader: Cases and Concepts*, Blackwell, Chichester, pp. 167-74.
- Schrader, C. (2009a), "Schlamm Schlacht um den Klimawandel [Mudslinging over climate change]", *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 3 December.
- Schrader, C. (2009b), "Illegale Einblicke [Illegal insights]", *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 24 November.
- Schuck, A.R.T. and de Vreese, C.H. (2006), "Between risk and opportunity: news framing and its effects on public support for EU enlargement", *European Journal of Communication*, Vol. 21 No. 1, pp. 5-32.
- Schütz, H. and Wiedemann, P.M. (2008), "Framing effects on risk perception of nanotechnology", *Public Understanding of Science*, Vol. 17, pp. 369-79.
- Sheafer, T. (2001), "Charismatic skill and media legitimacy: an actor-centered approach to understanding the political communication competition", *Communication Research*, Vol. 28 No. 6, pp. 711-36.
- Sheafer, T. and Gabay, I. (2009), "Mediated public diplomacy: a strategic contest over international agenda building and frame building", *Political Communication*, Vol. 26 No. 4, pp. 447-67.
- Smith, K. (2009), "An inconvenient tax – exposed global warming e-mails should end ridiculous Cap-and-trade scheme", *New York Post*, 29 November.
- Snow, D.A. and Benford, R.D. (1988), "Ideology, frame resonance and participant mobilization", in Klandermans, B., Kriesi, H. and Tarrow, S. (Eds), *From Structure to Action: Comparing Social Movements across Cultures*, Vol. 1, p. xii, 368.
- Stang, N. (2009), "Klimafesten er over Kalvig! [The climate party is over, Kalvig!]", *Verdens Gang*, 5 December.
- Sung-Un, Y. and Joon Soo, L. (2009), "The effects of blog-mediated public relations (BMPR) on relational trust", *Journal of Public Relations Research*, Vol. 21 No. 3, pp. 341-59.
- The air vent (2009a), "More context", available at: <http://noconsensus.wordpress.com/2009/12/03/more-context/> (accessed 20 October 2010).
- The air vent (2009b), "Conspiratology – the Russians are coming", available at: <http://noconsensus.wordpress.com/2009/12/12/conspiratology-the-russians-are-coming/> (accessed 19 May 2010).
- The air vent (2009c), "Context" available at: <http://noconsensus.wordpress.com/2009/11/28/context-2/> (accessed 19 May 2010).
- The air vent (2009d), "It is what it is – and the GOD of Physics will have it no other way!" available at: <http://noconsensus.wordpress.com/2009/12/05/it-is-what-it-is-and-the-god-of-physics-will-have-it-no-other-way/> (accessed 19 May 2010).
- The air vent (2009e), "Hidden in plain sight – a criticism of media coverage", available at: <http://noconsensus.wordpress.com/2009/11/25/hidden-in-plain-sight-a-criticism-of-media-coverage/> (accessed 19 May 2010).

- 
- United Nations (UN) (1948), Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- Van Gorp, B. (2007), "The constructionist approach to framing: bringing culture back in", *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 57 No. 1, pp. 60-78.
- VG (2009), "Fornuftig gransking [Reasonable Investigation]", *Verdens Gang*, 6 December.
- Weick, K. (1986), "The management of eloquence", in Hampton, D.R., Summer, C.E. and Webber, R.A. (Eds), *Organizational Behavior and the Practice of Management*, Scott, Foresman, Glenview, IL, pp. 581-6.
- Wise, D. and Brewer, P.R. (2010), "Competing frames for a public health issue and their effects on public opinion", *Mass Communication and Society*, Vol. 13 No. 4, pp. 435-57.
- Zoch, L.M., Collins, E.L., Sisco, H.F. and Supa, D.H. (2008), "Empowering the activist: using framing devices on activist organizations' web sites", *Public Relations Review*, Vol. 34 No. 4, pp. 351-8.
- Zoch, L.M. and Molleda, J.C. (2006), "Building a theoretical model of media relations using framing, information subsidies, and agenda-building", in Hazleton, V. and Botan, C.H. (Eds), *Public Relations Theory II*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Mahwah, NJ, pp. 279-309.

#### **About the authors**

Viorela Dan (media scholar, Technical University of Ilmenau) was Research Assistant at the BI Norwegian School of Management, where this piece of research was conducted. She is now a PhD Candidate at the Institute for Media and Communication Studies at the Free University of Berlin. Her research interest is framing theory with a specific focus on the combined value of verbal and visual elements in meaning-making. Viorela Dan is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: viorela.dan@gmx.de

Øyvind Ihlen (dr.art.) was Professor of Communication and Management at the Norwegian School of Management. He is now at the Department of Media and Communication at the University of Oslo. He has edited, written and co-written seven books, among them *Public Relations and Social Theory* and *Handbook of Communication and CSR*. His award winning research has appeared in numerous anthologies and in journals such as *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *Public Relations Review*, *Journal of Public Affairs*, *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, *Journal of Communication Management*, *Corporate Communications*, *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, *Environmental Communication*, and *Business Strategy and the Environment*.