

## **The impact of attitudes on gathering and selecting of the information**

Information gathering and selecting is a crucial step in the process of news production. Journalists are responsible for presenting an accurate representation of events and issues to their audience. However, the attitudes of journalists and news outlets can have a significant impact on the information that is gathered and selected. This lesson explores two theories in journalism and communication studies that define how journalists can shape public understanding and perceptions of issues: framing and hierarchy of influences. Attitudes are defined as the “mental states that organize and guide individuals’ responses to people, objects, and situations” (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). In the context of journalism, attitudes can refer to the beliefs, values, and biases of journalists and news outlets.

### **FRAMING THEORY**

Framing theory has become an increasingly influential concept in journalism studies, highlighting how news media can shape public understanding and perceptions of issues. According to Entman (1993), framing is "to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation" (p. 52).

Overall, framing theory has emerged as a powerful tool for understanding how news media can influence public opinion and shape social and political outcomes. As Entman (1993) argues, “Framing is no longer just an intellectual exercise or a mere heuristic for understanding news texts; it has become a politically and socially consequential aspect of media reality” (p. 52).

One of the most widely cited studies in the field is the work of Gamson and Modigliani (1989), who found that news frames can have a significant impact on public opinion. They conducted an experiment in which participants were presented with news articles about a protest movement, each of which framed the movement in a different way. They found that participants who read articles framing the movement as a threat to public order were more likely to oppose the movement, while those who read articles framing it as a legitimate expression of grievances were more likely to support it.

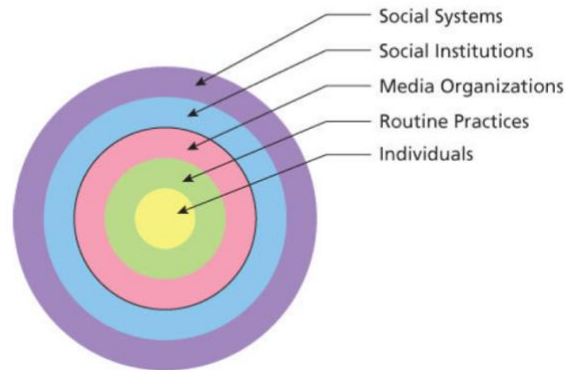
Other scholars have built on this work, exploring how framing can shape public perceptions of a wide range of issues, from climate change to immigration to terrorism. They argue that journalists play a crucial role in shaping public discourse, as their decisions about which stories to cover and how to frame them can have a profound impact on how people understand and respond to complex issues.

Framing can impact the accuracy and objectivity of news. Journalists who frame a story in a way that supports their views or agenda may present a biased or incomplete view of the issue. This can lead to a lack of context and information that could help the audience understand the issue more fully.

### **HIERARCHY OF INFLUENCES MODEL**

The Hierarchy of Influences Model was developed by Pamela Shoemaker and Stephen Reese, two prominent communication scholars. The model identifies five levels of influence: the individual level, the routine level, the organizational level, the social-institutional level, and the

social systems level. These levels are ordered from the micro to the macro, and the model presents them as a series of concentric circles:



**1. Individual Level.** The individual level refers to the biographical, psychological, and sociological characteristics of an individual social actor. This level recognizes that an individual journalist’s personal background, experiences, beliefs, values, and attitudes can significantly influence the news they produce. For example, a journalist’s age, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, and class status can all impact the news that person produces because previous life experiences associated with those attributes may color that person’s interpretation of an issue or what they choose to prioritize when covering it. Their personal values and beliefs (e.g., their religious beliefs or political attitudes) may similarly impact how they think about things. Even their role orientations, or what they think the purpose of journalism is and how journalism should be done, will impact how a journalist will seek to cover an issue.

**2. Routine Level.** The routine level refers to the patterned, repeated practices, forms, and rules that journalists use to do their jobs. This level recognizes that journalists work within a set of established norms, routines, and practices that shape their news products. For example, this may include news values, or the set of criteria journalists apply to determine the newsworthiness of information. News values can include factors such as impact, timeliness, proximity, conflict, and prominence, among others. If journalists deem controversy to be an important news value, then they are generally more likely to cover issues and events that are controversial. This is especially true when there is disagreement among institutional elites, such as political party leaders, regarding an issue. Other factors at the routine level include a preference for certain styles of presenting information to audiences, such as the inverted pyramid style of writing, and a tendency to offer “both sides” of an issue to appear balanced, even when one side is not supported by the evidence.

**3. Organizational Level.** The organizational level refers to the policies, unwritten rules, and economic imperatives within journalistic organizations or the entity a journalistic actor works for. This level recognizes that journalistic outlets must balance commercial concerns with professional ones. Media ownership, the primary medium associated with a journalistic outlet, and the geographic location where that organization is based can all impact how they present information. For example, media ownership can influence coverage priorities, with some owners

becoming directly involved in shaping the reporting of specific issues. The primary medium associated with a journalistic outlet can impact the types of content produced, with print-focused outlets less likely to invest in interactive data visualizations that only work online. The geographic location where an organization is based can also shape the social make-up of the journalists, which can impact the values and priorities reflected in their reporting.

**4. Social-Institutional Level.** The social-institutional level refers to the norms, individuals, and organizations that operate outside a given journalistic organization. This level recognizes that journalistic outlets are not isolated from the wider social world and are influenced by other actors in that world. Information sources, other journalistic organizations, advertisers, and media policy can all shape the news produced by journalistic outlets. Information sources can shape a news product by virtue of the words they choose to use and the information they choose to share, or by being willing or unwilling to talk to the journalist in the first place. Other journalistic organizations can influence coverage by serving as “pack leaders” that other outlets seek to follow or imitate, or by publishing stories that competing organizations may then choose to avoid. Advertisers can impact coverage by demanding that their ads only be shown alongside positive coverage

**5. Social system level.** The social systems level deals with societal norms, values, and beliefs. It is the most macro level and reflects the dominant ideas within a society. For example, in the United States, capitalism and democratic values are dominant, which affects how issues are framed. In less-capitalistic or autocratic social systems, issues may be framed differently and the role of journalists may also differ. The social systems level influences how society as a whole perceives and addresses social issues.

The hierarchy of influences model suggests that each of these levels of influence can impact journalists’ work and individuals’ media consumption choices and the way that they interpret media content. However, the model also recognizes that different individuals may be more or less influenced by different levels of influence, depending on their personal characteristics and experiences.

## **References:**

Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51-58.

Gamson, W. A., & Modigliani, A. (1989). Media discourse and public opinion on nuclear power: A constructionist approach. *American Journal of Sociology*, 95(1), 1-37.

Shoemaker, P., & Reese, S. D. (2014). *Mediating the message in the 21st century: A media sociology perspective*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Zamith, R. (2022). *The International Journalism Handbook: Concepts, Challenges, and Contexts*. UMass Amherst Libraries.